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Unlocking the Transformative Potential of Outdoor Office Work—A Constructivist Grounded Theory Study

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Abstract: White-collar workers around the world are reconfiguring their ways of working. Some have found their way out, performing office work outdoors, through walk-and-talks, outdoor meetings, or reading sessions. Working outdoors has proved both invigorating and challenging. This qualitative interview study aims to develop a conceptual framework concerning the implications of white-collar workers incorporating the outdoors into their everyday work life. Applying a constructivist grounded theory approach, 27 interviews with a total of 15 participants were systematically analyzed. Findings evolved around the following categories: practicing outdoor office work, challenging the taken-for-granted, enjoying freedom and disconnection, feeling connected and interdependent, promoting health and well-being, enhancing performance, and finally adding a dimension to work. These categories were worked into a conceptual model, building on the dynamic relationship between the practice of working outdoors on one hand, and how this challenges the system in which office work traditionally takes place on the other. Interviews reflected the profound learning process of the employees. Drawing on the concepts of free space and resonance, we demonstrate how performing office work outdoors may unlock a transformative potential by opening up connectedness and interdependence and contribute to a sustainable work life as well as overall sustainable development.

Keywords: sustainable work life; outdoor office work; nature contact; constructivist grounded theory; free space; resonance; health and well-being; inner development; sustainable development

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1. Introduction

Since the industrial revolution, it has been increasingly taken for granted that work should take place in certain designated spaces such as factories and offices. For a growing number of white-collar workers, this often means spending all day indoors at an office workplace. Combined with the digitalization of the last decades, employees have also become increasingly tied to working in front of their screens, sometimes to the extent where only digital activity counts as proper work. This situation, however, may be suboptimal for both employees and employers.

Goal 8 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) explicitly connects economic growth and decent work. Target 8.5 states that all signatories are supposed to "achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men" by 2030 [1]. While white-collar work may be challenging in other ways compared to manual labor, circumstances for billions of people working in the increasingly digitalized service sector are still problematic. Medical conditions related to a sedentary work life, such as obesity

and cardiovascular illness, as well as fatigue and stress-related diagnoses caused by cognitive overload, undermine a stable and sustainable work environment see e.g., [2,3]. For employers, offering too-taxing working conditions might be an increasing challenge to properly staffing their organizations, especially problematic due to a decreasing global population. Future shrinking generations may not be willing to sacrifice their mental and physical health working long hours bound to their desks and computers, and employers need to consider more adaptable and trust-based working conditions to hire competent personnel. Thus, conditions at work are challenges not only for the employees themselves, but also for a society aiming to create a socially and economically sustainable work life in accordance with the SDGs. Even though professional contexts constitute an arena where individuals may have more influence on a collective and systems level than in their private sphere, there is a scarcity of studies focusing on working environments in research about sustainable development [4].

Recently, the boundaries of work have become blurred. Knowledge intensification and digitalization have spurred new ways of organizing, enhancing employees' flexibility to choose where and when to work, to the extent that flexibility has become axiomatic in contemporary workplaces [5]. Opportunities and challenges related to this shift became a hot topic during the COVID-19 pandemic, as restrictions made remote work explode [6]. White-collar workers all over the world were commanded to stay within the realm of their homes [7]. In the aftermath of the pandemic, the spaces of work are about to be reconfigured. When it comes to the development of white-collar work, the main issue is the degree of flexibility—especially to what extent work should be conducted at home, at the office, or possibly in a co-working space [8]. To some white-collar workers, there is more at stake than the possibility of working from home a few days a week, when spatial flexibility is negotiated, as they have developed a habit of bringing work outdoors [9].

This qualitative interview study aims to develop a conceptual framework regarding what happens when white-collar workers integrate the outdoors into their everyday work life. Based on twenty-seven interviews with employees who regularly work outdoors, the current study investigates how a work life brought outdoors is perceived by white-collar workers, how they reflect and make sense of their experiences, and what challenges they meet in their everyday work situation. A constructivist grounded theory approach, alternating between the gathering of empirical material and analysis, was chosen as this area of research is still underexplored [10]. In other words, we need a new theoretical language to fully grasp the relatively new practice of taking office work outdoors.

This study reads as follows: In the next section, previous research on the growing field of outdoor office work is presented. In the following section, we account for the constructivist grounded theory approach and method. We then present the results in the form of seven categories corresponding to different aspects of the interviewees' experiences of outdoor office work. This amounts to a grounded conceptual model—the Lotus of Outdoor Office Work—introduced at the end of the results section. The succeeding discussion focuses on the model's implication for healthier and smarter ways of working, work life in general, and the transformative potential of outdoor office work. This article concludes that outdoor office work, if not just added as a sporadic extracurricular activity but instead integrated into everyday work life, has transformative potential for inner development and a sustainable work life.

2. Previous Research

Research within the wide field of human–environment studies is contributing to a growing body of knowledge about how contact with nature may promote human health and well-being in a multitude of ways [11–14]. The possible pathways are many [15,16], including a wide range of mechanisms, concerning what we see, hear, feel, breathe, and more, affecting everything from our mood [17], mental health and vitality [18], restoration [19], cognitive performance [20], and recovery from stress [21,22], in complex interre-

lations [14,15]. Further perspectives are relevant in the context of work life, not least the potential of the outdoors to foster creativity [23,24] and facilitate learning [25,26].

Furthermore, research about contact with nature at work has shown that living plants in the office, a nature view from one's window, or access to green surroundings close to one's workplace generate a more positive emotional state [27], reduce perceived stress and decrease health complaints [28,29], and increase job satisfaction [30] and well-being at work [31–33]. However, in these studies, 'nature' and 'the outdoors' have mainly been taken into consideration as benign add-ons to traditional office-bound work.

Rather than studying how the outdoors is accessed for breaks from the office, a sprouting research field focuses on what happens when work is brought outdoors. Already in the early nineties, Rachel Kaplan [34] pointed at the potential of direct contact with nature at the workplace. However, research about outdoor office work is still in its cradle. Yet, initial findings indicate that it has promising potential when it comes to both the well-being and productivity of employees [35–37]. Several scholars have argued for the integration of nature contact into everyday work; for example, based on an interview study with creative professionals, Plambech and Konijnendijk van den Bosch [38] suggested that access to natural environments should be an integral part of the creative process. Similarly, Rudokas et al. [39] developed a model for moving the execution of traditional administrative tasks to forest areas. A few research projects have also tried ways of working outdoors, such as Peterson Troije et al.'s [37] interactive research project together with a Swedish municipality (from 2017–2019), Javan Abraham et al.'s [40] feasibility study that suggested a reduction in subjective stress among office workers bringing work outdoors, Jansson et al.'s [41] explorative place-making process for the establishment of outdoor office places, for work and study, as well as Lygum et al.'s [35] organizational intervention project, exploring benefits and challenges related to outdoor office work. Outdoor office work does not necessarily have to be performed in green areas, according to Herneoja et al. [42], who highlight the potential of outdoor places connected to office buildings as well as roof terraces where microclimates can be created with the help of windbreaks, canopies, and other architectural solutions. In an exploratory study, Söderlund et al. [36] found that office workers had positive experiences from moving their work into a public outdoor space—a courtyard of a university campus.

The insights from human–environment studies into the benefits of nature contact, in combination with results from the burgeoning field of outdoor office work studies, show the promise of bringing work outdoors. However, the number of studies that specifically focus on office workers working outdoors regularly is still sparse, and are either quantitative, applying measurements of well-being and stress, or explorative, relying on a single implementation. In contrast, the current study develops a model that conceptualizes what happens when white-collar workers bring their work outdoors regularly, in their everyday work life. In the next section, the empirical study from which the theory emerged is described in more detail.

3. Materials and Methods

This is a qualitative study, based on a constructivist grounded theory approach, as proposed by Charmaz [10]. In constructivist grounded theory, the study of action and process is central, and the construction of theory is its defining purpose [43]. The constructivist version of grounded theory does not regard theorizing as built upon 'discoveries' in data, but instead emphasizes that it is constructed, just as the data themselves, in interactions between researcher(s) and participants [10]. Constructivist grounded theory may be described as both inductive and abductive. It is inductive in the sense that it takes its point of departure with an open mind, and continues by listening closely to the participants and materials, keeping preset assumptions aside, and abductive in that the presence and need of being inspired and informed by extant theories along the process of the study is acknowledged [10]. A grounded theory is thus generated through an iterative process

moving back and forth between the gathering of material and analysis—in the current case, a first round of qualitative interviews and a second round of follow-up interviews.

3.1. Participants and Selection

The group of participants consisted of twelve women and three men, between the ages of 37 and 60, working in both managerial and non-managerial roles. Two of them were managers, five had project and team leader roles, two were self-employed, while the rest held various (non-managerial) positions. They worked both within the private sector (N = 8), and the public sector (N = 7), representing eight different workplaces within five organizations. At the time when this study was initiated, conducting office work outdoors was not a widespread phenomenon, and therefore the challenge was rather to identify people with rich, as opposed to occasional, experiences. The participants were all bringing work outdoors, more or less frequently and in various ways. The most outdoor active participants stated that they spent between 40 and 50% of the work week outdoors, whereas those who engaged in outdoor office work more irregularly would take a walk-and-talk or sit outside for a while now and then. The expected possibility of participants contributing to 'intriguing and important variation in comparisons' [44] directed the selection, which was conducted through snowball sampling.

3.2. Interviews

Twenty-seven interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of a total of fifteen white-collar workers. The idea of intensive interviewing was applied using open-ended questions with the main purpose of exploring, in which the interviewer is open to new knowledge and ready to revise preconceptions, as opposed to interrogating, in which the interviewer looks for answers to predetermined questions [10]. This led to rich and lengthy conversations, often reaching up to one and a half hours. The first round of interviews (with fourteen individuals) was performed digitally in the summer and autumn of 2021, as it was deemed the wisest alternative in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants were returned to for a second round of interviews 18 months later, whereby thirteen interviews with twelve of the participants from the first round and one additional new participant were performed. These were conducted via Zoom, but also included a couple of live meetings in an outdoor environment, based on participants' preferences. An interval between the two rounds of interviews was important because the first interview led the participants to reflect on their succeeding outdoor office work practices—reflections that would mature over time and would lead to in-depth discussions during the follow-up interviews. Thus, the extended time period allowed for a reflexive and creative analysis with many iterations, over time. Consequently, there is a longitudinal dimension to the material gathered. This was also evident in the interviews, where participants both recognized themselves in the analysis and added reflections related to experiences during and after the pandemic. Several of the participants during the first round of interviews reported that their outdoor office practices had either commenced or intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic, so an advantage of the relatively long interval was that it was possible to ask the participants how their practices had been affected by their workplaces opening up again at the end of the pandemic, and to study which practices had been sustained over time. In the second round of interviews, the starting point was the preliminary analysis conducted on the data from the first round of interviews. Participants were asked to reflect on the themes identified in the data and to add further experiences and reflections.

3.3. The Coding Process

Several coding practices are suggested by the various schools of grounded theory. In constructivist grounded theory, Charmaz [10] promotes keeping coding simple and flexible, and suggests that steps of initial coding and focused coding can provide sufficient guidelines. The initial codes may illuminate the different paths possible to pursue, whereas the focused coding means concentrating on the ones considered most useful and significant,

while testing them against data. One characteristic of grounded theory is the constant comparison and simultaneous data-gathering and analysis [10]. In this study, this has meant an iterative process of interviewing, mind-mapping, transcribing, initial coding and, throughout the process, playing with possible focused codes and categories emerging; then returning to participants to verify and to further explore elements of theory under construction. The initial coding of interviews was performed 'line-by-line', staying close to data, including many in vivo codes and quotes. Gerunds, i.e., 'ing-verbs' (such as attempt*ing*) were used pervadingly, as promoted by Charmaz, for their beneficial way of capturing and keeping a sense of action and sequence in the codes and categories emerging [10]. The initial codes were printed and cut and then served as a creative jigsaw puzzle to be assembled, with thousands of pieces, as illustrated below (see Figure 1):

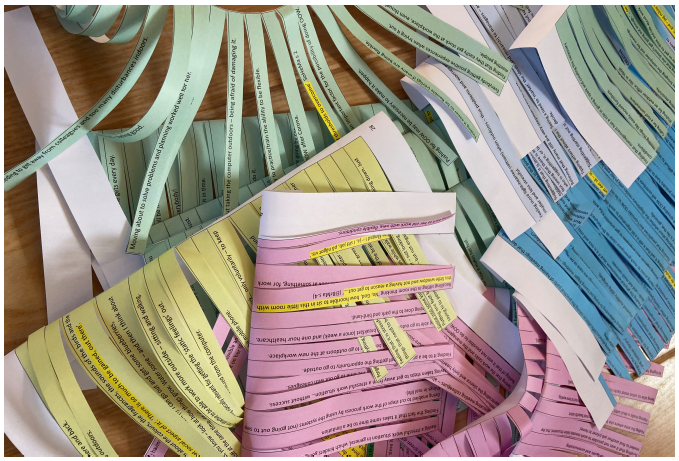

Figure 1. The initial codes serving as pieces of a creative jigsaw puzzle to be assembled.

The different colors represented different participants, which made it possible to trace each code back to individual participants, thus facilitating further contextualization and making it easier to assess the degree of diversity in each subcategory (which in this case equals focused codes). In the manuscript, the colors have been exchanged for letters, making it possible for the reader to separate quotes by different participants.

The initial analysis led to categories describing the process of bringing work outdoors in the form of different stages, such as 'starting out', 'making it work', 'overcoming barriers', etc. These categories included a number of subcategories that described each stage in more detail. For example, the category 'overcoming barriers' included the subcategories 'embracing, or adjusting to weather conditions', 'being supported by management', and 'dealing with feelings of guilt'. However, these initial, rather descriptive, categories were re-shaped during the process of the second round of interviewing, where the subcategories were re-grouped into more abstract categories, as they were further elucidated and elaborated upon. Even though participants recognized themselves in the 'process-model', against the backdrop of the pandemic, and how work was re-organized thereafter, it became clearer and clearer that there were some other, more fundamental relationships between the categories worth pursuing. This resulted in a re-configuration of the initial process-model into the more abstract categories of the Lotus-model, presented in the findings section.

Memos were written continuously during this process. First, memos took the form of various reflections, question-marks, and ideas, and eventually they turned into more theoretically informed notes. It was here that the concepts of free space [45] and resonance [46] first became relevant. Second, memos were also drawn in the shape of mind-maps and diagrams through which different relationships between concepts were explored. All along, the process of analysis meant a constant questioning of the subcategories and categories emerging, by exploring different constellations, and most importantly through the interviewing, where follow-up questions could be asked regarding the contexts and conditions for the various dimensions found.

Two criteria for completing a grounded theory are those of 'fit' and 'relevance': Your study fits the empirical world when you have constructed codes and developed them into categories that crystallize participants' experiences. Since the second round of interviews was conducted with essentially the same individuals as the first, these served the purpose of both deepening the understanding of what had been found and framed so far, and of member-checking the preliminary results. As mentioned earlier, the preliminary analysis was discussed, and participants recognized themselves in the results, thus indicating that the results fit their experiences. The fact that participants contributed additional nuances here, which were incorporated into the results, can be seen as another step in ensuring consistency between empirical data and results. According to Charmaz [10], the categories emerging from the analysis are 'saturated' when additional data do not add any new insights, nor any additional nuances to the theoretical conceptualization. Simply finding repetitions in data is not a sign of saturation—saturation refers to the constructed categories, not the data set. Therefore, we argue that the two-step process of interviews, where participants had the opportunity to reflect on the preliminary analysis themselves, can also be seen as a way to ensure saturation. In this case, participants' feedback and reflections confirmed that the focused codes and subcategories and categories were capturing and illuminating their experiences well; however, it was during that process of interviewing and analyzing that the categories were further abstracted. Here, they went from being descriptive of a process, to focusing more on the preconditions and contextual aspects which came forth more clearly, when participants reflected on their outdoor work habits and possibilities with changes related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Charmaz [10] claims that results have relevance when you offer an incisive analytic framework that is used to interpret what is happening and makes relationships between implicit processes and structures visible. In accordance with Charmaz's view, the analytic strategy was emergent and the categories and the focused codes that they are comprised of, as well as the probable links between them, reflect our way of making sense of data—not as mirroring an objective reality but as reflecting experiences of reality. We also argue that our description of the categories and how they collectively form the conceptual model contributes to making visible the relationships between implicit processes and structures, thus providing basis for relevance.

3.4. Ethical Statement

All interviewees were given thorough information about the research project before being interviewed, and they were given the chance to opt out of the study before, during, and after the interview. Given the particular context, we took into account confidentiality concerns in accordance with the guidelines for qualitative research with small, connected communities, as suggested by Damianakis and Woodford [47]. To minimize the possibility of identifying participants and attributing quotes to specific individuals, we have provided limited information about the participants collectively, rather than describing them on an individual basis. Quotes and examples were anonymized prior to publication; names and other identifying information were omitted and substituted with letters. This study has been approved by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority (dnr 2021-02672).

4. Results

With the spotlight on the participants' experiences, actions, processes, and the way they articulate and make sense of these, we unpack what is happening when white-collar work is taken outdoors. The conceptual model, which has evolved through the process presented above, is outlined in the following section in accordance with constructivist grounded theory. Each subtitle in the following section represents a main category found in the material, while the categories' features, corresponding to focused codes generated in the analysis, are *italicized* in each subsection. Findings evolved around the following categories: practicing outdoor work, challenging the taken-for-granted, enjoying freedom

and disconnection, feeling connected and interdependent, promoting health and well-being, enhancing performance, and finally, adding a dimension to work.

4.1. Practicing Outdoor Office Work

This first category frames the starting point of this study—the fact that participants are stepping outside while working. But what do they do, for what reasons, and with what consequences? Before looking closer into what happens 'out there', as we do through the upcoming categories, there are a few things going on, on the way out, central for the outdoor work activities to happen at all.

First of all, there needs to be some form of initiating spark. The participants were *getting the idea* from various sources, such as a colleague or manager introducing it; a few had earlier on been a part of a project exploring outdoor office work, a couple of them worked at a real estate company that had launched a concept of outdoor office spaces at some of their sites, while some of them referred to having heard about it in the media. Others recalled some special personal experience of walking, leading them to do it at work as well. The need for getting outdoors during the workday was on one hand seen as self-evident, and on the other, so far away:

> *"When you start thinking about this, it's like—why haven't we done this before—it seems really strange. If you think about it, if you're reasonably intelligent, all the health benefits of being outside, getting fresh air, sunlight, greenery. . ."* (C)

The participants were *doing this and that* outdoors. They were going out by themselves, maybe to sit down, with or without their laptop, or, more often, for a walk. They sometimes had their headphones on to tap into and listen to a meeting where active participation was not necessary, or to participate in a virtual walk-and-talk, and at other times they walked alone with their own thoughts. The outdoors was also used for physical meetings, for walking together two by two, in smaller groups, or just gathering somewhere outside for a regular team or department meeting. In a couple of examples, outdoor meetings were employed as a way of initiating new business relations.

Getting going with work activities outside, and involving others in doing the same, is *implicating a learning process* and grappling with the general challenges connected to *changing habits* and *making it work*, on both an individual and team level. On the more overt side of it, there are practical and technical issues and needs of everyday work and collaboration that require attention, learning, and communication among peers. At the outset, there were often insecurities and fears with regards to what would work and not. Two concerns stood out: the weather and computer dependency. Even though conditions like sunshine, temperature, wind, and rain continued to play an important role in making it more or less attractive and feasible to step outside, the weather eventually went from being seen as an obstacle to something that was embraced and merely something to which one adjusts.

When it comes to bringing a laptop outdoors, the risk of poor visibility of a screen in sunlight was perceived as a barrier. However, this went beyond the practical dimension and encompassed a feeling of being (unreasonably) tied to the computer. One participant described it as 'a magnet' that draws you back even when she clearly had set out to do something else. Another felt even more tied to it: ". . .it is as if there is an umbilical cord between me and my computer." (B)

Apart from the weather and computer dependency, it was mostly simple things that needed to be arranged. It may be about finding and clocking good routes for walking, or about alternative ways of taking (meeting) notes, when walking and/or being outdoors without the laptop, but also about wishing for outdoor furniture and facilities for meeting and sitting down, with some possibility for protection from sun, wind, and rain—and preferably offering Wi-Fi and proximity to coffee and restrooms. Stepping out at work both promotes and requires a learning process. On the one hand, the participants found it quite simple and 'natural' to bring certain activities outdoors and were confident that their colleagues and others would find it easier than they expect, if they just tried it: "We

have discovered that it works so much easier than what people think, and we have learnt a whole other kind of flexibility." (N)

> *"Think outside the box—that it will work. (. . .) put on a pair of comfortable shoes, and begin with walking meetings, I mean (. . .) don't make it such a big deal that you have to sit in a specific place and be on screen all the time, and many people turn off their screens anyway, so you too can do that."* (C)

On the other hand, as the quotes point out, barriers are not only practical, but also a matter of norms and expectations.

4.2. Challenging the Taken-for-Granted

In addition to the learning process framed above, where new ways of working are developed, bringing work outdoors comes along with *encountering barriers and resistance* of different sorts. For instance, participants' experiences of working indoors were juxtaposed with those of working outdoors. Throughout the analysis, but especially after the second round of interviews, participants articulated these experiences as dichotomies, *contrasting indoor and outdoor work* along the lines of formal versus informal, arranged versus spontaneous, professional versus frivolous, stressful versus restorative, controlled versus unexpected, exhausting versus energizing, dressed up versus casual, and in character versus authentic. Outdoor work, as opposed to indoor work, could even be perceived as "not-real work". However, this does not imply that outdoor work is invariably positive or that indoor work is inherently negative. Instead, these dichotomies should be seen as ideal types which, following Stapley et al. [48], are considered analytical tools that assist in comparing participants' experiences of working both indoors and outdoors. Recognizing such dichotomies aids in deeper learning, where underlying assumptions and beliefs are uncovered and questioned, and norms about work are made visible. It became clear that stepping out is far from mainstream in the wider context of their workplaces and organizations. This became particularly evident in the second round of interviews, as other people had returned to normalcy after the COVID-19 pandemic, and outdoor work was no longer a necessity. At the heart of participants' descriptions and reflections about bringing work activities outdoors lies an abundance of positive experiences. At the same time, however, it shows that stepping out means *standing out*. Working outdoors means doing something out of the ordinary, *challenging the status-quo*. In addition, this is done in a way that is visible and noticeable for others, as the outdoor office workers are *behaving differently* out in the open. Many of the references were to *getting reactions from others*, sometimes encouraging and positive, and sometimes surprised. One participant and her whole team developed a habit of holding walking meetings during the pandemic, and she referred to her partner's reaction like this: "And, where he works it's like—'But what, are you allowed to be outdoors?' I mean—are you allowed to be outdoors? Eh, that is just so strange." (C) Sometimes, comments from others sound like a questioning, even with a stroke of jealousy:

> *"It is more like—"Wow, what a luxury. You look like you're having a wonderful time!" But, I choose not to interpret it as—"Aha, here you are, basking in the sun" (. . .) but, absolutely—some probably have these thoughts and don't find it as quite as much work, to sit outdoors."* (O)

Feeling guilty is sometimes related to being factually privileged, in a way by no means afforded to everyone, but mostly the participants reflected upon implicit rules and taken-for-granted ideas connected to work and its whereabouts. Whether people comment or not, working outdoors comes with a feeling of guilt as it challenges the stereotypical image of diligent office workers bound to their desks.

> *"There is something telling me—and I think that many would agree—that it isn't really work when you're outside working. Somehow there is still this—and maybe that's just me, because I haven't heard anyone saying it, so maybe it's just in my head, but generally I think that there is a view that one should sit at the office in front of the computer."* (K)

> *"It feels a bit like—you know—when you're sitting indoors in cozy clothes (. . .) That it's a bit casual in a way. With all this in the background, when there's a breeze or the sun is shining so wonderfully, it makes me come across as if I'm not taking the meeting seriously enough, like I'm just slacking off a bit."* (H)

Furthermore, working from home *and* sitting outside could mean a double problem, as it then became too good to possibly be legitimate. "We can't have it that good. Hi, hi hi. But, eventually, I might get over that hang-up." [G] Even though every one of the participants valued outdoor work highly, and were explicit about *wanting more* of it regardless of how much they presently do it, they also expressed *needing support and encouragement*. When bringing work activities outdoors, taken-for-granted boundaries are being transgressed. Formal and structural matters related to rules, regulations, and policies, as well as management styles may both maintain and challenge the way outdoor work is regarded. It is obvious that leaders have an important role to play:

> *". . . if you are the only one stepping out, all the time, that will probably make one feel like they're sort of sneaking away from work, but (. . .) if you see that the boss does it, then it's kind of a completely different thing."* (O)

Not only are managers' attitudes and possible role-modelling of importance, but also colleagues', both from a normative and more practical perspective. Legitimacy and the feeling of how others regarded participants' practicing outdoor office work was a concern, which affected the extent to which they had been able to develop and uphold their outdoor habits. Furthermore, having a colleague who also wants to go outdoors can make the whole difference: "We've forced ourselves out, because we know we need it. And, we know that we're also working, you could say. So, it's been very positive and something I'm glad to have." (J)

The internal as well as the structural resistance appear to be about something more, and deeper, than just a question of usual resistance connected to change in general. Many statements highlight that it is a matter of how 'work' in general is seen, that is at stake. As one interviewee put it, regarding working outdoors: "You just don't do like that (. . .) that is not to work." (C)

As it turns out, participants do not only step out and stand out, but are also *standing up for themselves*, when insisting on their 'right' to work outdoors. They stand up for their possibility to take responsibility for their own work and health. Therefore, *fearing loss* and *encountering delimitations* of outdoor work possibilities was a prevalent concern. In the first round of interviews, there was mostly an open wonder about what would come after the pandemic. While, during the second round, their new conditions had become clear. Only a few of them experienced a positive change towards greater flexibility, where the needs of the individual were in focus. On the contrary, many participants witnessed how the post-pandemic opportunities of working outdoors had been delimited. Instead of having extended and/or continued with the flexibility to choose wherefrom to work, it was usually formalized into a workplace regulation: X number of days per week (usually 2–2½) should be spent working from home, and X (usually 2½–3) at the office. This formalization was perceived as *delimiting the possibility of stepping out* from the agreed-upon locations of work.

> *"The opportunities are there, and I do it sometimes. I just go out the door and I walk in the neighborhood of the head office, but the work life has changed since the pandemic in a way (. . .) we work fifty percent at home and fifty percent at the office, in my team. So, the fifty percent at the office, is also consciously and unconsciously chosen to be at the office, because we want to be together. So, if I then say—hey, I walk—then I don't live up to this new rule of being together."* (A)

However, no one expressed that it was impossible to continue the outdoor work practice, even though one participant reported a need for some civil disobedience to make it happen, as she went outdoors during work hours without asking for permission. To her, as well as to many of the others, this formalization of the expected place to work was seen as problematic.

Overall in the material, when outdoor work is not clearly sanctioned or allowed, it can have a very negative impact on the workers' feeling about the work situation as such. A couple of participants explicitly stated that they would not accept a new position, however fantastic career-wise, if it meant spending all day indoors: "I couldn't (. . .) I wouldn't have taken that job." (F)

The white-collar workers participating in this study are standing up for and *pioneering another kind of work life*. They are challenging the system through their practice, as they are pushing for necessary conditions for continuing and expanding it by doing it more themselves, as well as *involving others*. One of them talked about the many health benefits of being outside and concluded: ". . .so, I can actively feel that I will never again (. . .) we will never again work in the same way as we did before. Never." (C)

4.3. Enjoying Freedom and Disconnection

When asked to describe working outdoors with three words, almost every participant immediately associated it with 'free' or 'freedom'. This category highlights how going outdoors is associated with a sense of freedom to do and experience some things, as well as freedom *from* other things. *Having autonomy* and *feeling trusted by management* are important prerequisites for getting out. Furthermore, a sense of freedom is also a valued feeling, once out there. Participants enjoy the possibility of moving about outdoors, *being physically active*, and being able to choose based upon one's own needs, where to be and what to see. As participants step outside, they are simultaneously *disconnecting* from the present indoor environment. In addition to a general wish for variation, and the pull-factors of the outdoors, it was evident that there were factors inside pushing them out. During the first round of interviews, midway through the COVID-19 pandemic, the reasons for wanting out were often related to a need to deal with an unusual, physically isolated, and sedentary work situation, as most of them sat at home—in kitchens, closets, on sofas, etc. Still, many were also referring to how the situation was before the pandemic. Both during the first and second round of interviews, they expressed *needing to get away* from a busy and overstimulating environment indoors—and especially from an ever-attention-demanding screen.

The built in possibility of moving about is a crucial part of the attractiveness and positive experience of outdoor office work: "I simply have more energy when moving like this. And then, new ideas come to you." (K) For some participants, it was valued as a way of getting one's daily exercise, while others emphasized how getting up and going outdoors, even if only for finding a place to sit down, also meant an important chance for variation and bodily movement. As participants are *leaving constraints behind*, and moving about outside of the ordinary workspace, they are not only literally outside the box, but also mentally:

> *"And, also when you are outside, you are distant from the physical work—the frame of the physical work—the building and everything that is associated with that. When you leave that space you go into another space, where I feel you are a little distant from that. That might also be why you feel a bigger belonging because you are not constrained (. . .) So, when you are in a physical building your whole system is filled up with everything you have experienced in that building. For instance, with these people in these meeting rooms. When you're outside, you are out of that. So, you are more free."* (D)

Being outside and away from the ordinary workplace is perceived as a freedom *altering the perspective* of the individual as well as *affecting social interaction*. Yet, this freedom is not an escapism; as the interviewee pointed out, she felt a stronger sense of 'belonging' when she could get away from the everyday turmoil of the office to focus on the actual work tasks at hand. More than one participant expressed in similar ways that they felt like *getting out of a 'square' kind of thinking* and being, when bringing work activities outdoors: "It's still a bit freer thinking. You're not so constrained then (. . .) just breaking out of this squareness" (N). There are many ways of describing how relations were altered and experienced as more open and equal.

> *"There is something about not sitting in front of each other. When you are walking next to each other, then someone is coming up to you and then suddenly it is a new group talking and then behind yourself. . . so you are much more social and more diverse and more equal, I would say."* (D)

How bringing work outdoors affects relationships is a topic further covered by the next category.

4.4. Feeling Connected and Interdependent

This category is comprised of dimensions in the material, which at first may appear dispersed, but put together, all concern connectedness to self, others, and the environment. In relation to self, it involves feelings of *being present* and *feeling alive* here and now: "It is a kind of the same feeling that I get when I go to the woods. . . that it feels good for your soul, in some way." (C) Experiencing contact with nature was recalled in various statements. Participants were aware of and appreciated getting daylight, inhaling fresh air, seeing trees and water, hearing birdsong, feeling the sun on their cheeks, and even being exposed to wind or rain.

> *"Now, I look in front of me and I am seeing trees, trees, trees (. . .). So, in the parallel part of your system. . . that's just how it is for me—and then I feel. . . I get this humbleness. Being part of this bigger thing."* (D)

Connectedness to the environment was often mentioned as a main quality of being outdoors. However, it also meant *being exposed* and *becoming interdependent*, for better and for worse. Better, as it encompasses feeling alive and in contact with nature in all its splendor. Worse, or ambivalent, in the sense of *facing unpredictability* and *losing control*, which in the context of work may mean *risking to appear unprofessional*.

> *"Also, that's where the unpredictable aspect comes in. There's something about it. The unpredictability might be unwelcome in more formal meetings, but in more informal ones, it can be an advantage because then it becomes more relaxed. . . a cat comes running by, or it could still happen indoors, but I don't know—things happen, you know, that weren't always planned, and it's just a bit more lively."* (E)

The interviewees not only felt more connected to nature—they also felt closer to each other, or "more united", as one participant put it [D]. They especially felt that they listened better, more closely, and attentively:

> *"While, if I get to walk (. . .) I don't do twelve other things at the same time, so I listen—I mean, I listen hundred times better when I am outdoors having this meeting, because then it is just that."* (A)

4.5. Promoting Health and Well-Being

This category encompasses the promotion of both physical and mental health, the prevention and restoration from ill-health, and various aspects of well-being. The participants talked about *diminishing stress and rumination*, but also about *experiencing less pain* (from the neck, back, joints, etc.), *feeling happier*, and *finding calm and energy* outdoors. It encompasses *feeling* more generally *healthy* and in balance, getting the necessary exercise done, even improving weight management, and having more time and energy left at the end of the day for taking care of their private life. Many examples are given of how the outdoor work habit helped in *improving* their *work–life balance*:

> *"It feels (. . .) much better that work in a way is connected to your health (. . .) it means really a lot that you have felt that it is very connected to a healthier lifestyle that I get at work instead of having to take care of it outside of work, exclusively."* (O)

Many of the benefits are explicitly related to the experience of being outdoors, and in contact with nature, while others are more indirect, and connected to the variation (between indoors and outdoors), and not least to *being more physically active*, as the outdoor environment affords.

> *"Yeah, if you manage to combine this (working outdoors), then you have the peace after work, otherwise when you come home from work—no, now I have to go out, or get that part that's needed. Everyone needs to get out a bit, but then I've already had my exercise and I've already had my fresh air, so I don't need to rush out in the evening, so then I also have the peace to be at home and cook dinner and do whatever needs to be done. I get a completely different balance in my schedule throughout the day."* (L)

Furthermore, there are overall positive aspects related to the variation and possibility to get outside that 'spill over' into indoor work and the private life.

> *"... I suppose that it's both physical and psychological [...] and that is of course interrelated, but [...] I often find that it comes at the end of the day—I have a feeling in my body telling me 'how was this day?'—and, the more I have been moving about, been outdoors, seen different things—have had a kind of connection with something real—nature, or trees, or—you know—outdoors, with everything that is. Then, I can get this nice feeling. If it has been sunny and such—it can remain for a long time [...] it is a good feeling in the body. I feel that I have gotten sun. It may have been a little windy, but still it feels good, because—yeah, I feel more alive at the end of a day like that."* (E)

The possibility offered by outdoor work to take care of one's health, both as a way of *being fortified* and of handling and *recovering from ill health* while working, was a major takeaway for the participants and a main motif for wanting to do it more.

4.6. Enhancing Performance

This category is interrelated with the previous, as it concerns the well-being of the participants, but in contrast focuses upon their perceived ability to do a good job. Conducting work outdoors is related to thinking better and being more alert, focused, creative, reflexive, *experiencing enhanced problem-solving*, as well as *feeling efficient*. As one interviewee summarized it: "We feel so clever and we're thinking so darn well." (C) Another interviewee pointed out that these advantages are partly due to the fact that you are usually not expected to do several things at once when you are out walking: "I notice that I am *multi-tasking less*. I listen more. I am thinking better." (B). Still, it is evident that there are individual differences in preferences and possibly different types of focus: "If I need to concentrate and really produce something, then I probably have to be indoors and sit concentrated, and even by a desk." (N)

Also, the possibility of *seeing things in real life*, getting first-hand experiences, is mentioned as contributing to efficiency—and to the quality of work tasks and results performed.

> *"In one way it is more efficient, because you are solving your problems on site and that's much more telling than sitting indoors looking at a map. You sense the place in a different way. And, in that way it is more efficient to be outdoors—as you may get a quicker solution."* (I)

The perception of outdoor work as contributing to outputs of high quality is widely shared, while its efficiency is more situation specific, something often elaborated on by participants:

> *"... but, I can't say that it is so—oh, it is so much more efficient! But, in one way I would like to say that I feel that many meetings can be shortened (...) and in those walk-and-talks—I think that they are improving, in terms of quality, because we listen, so it feels as if we—so, we are much sharper when outdoors—walking and talking. They become more, I was about to say clinical, but I meant 'clean' (...) it is easier to stick to the subject. I also feel another thing being about memory-training, or to actually not needing to have everything on a Power Point, or a screen (...) that it's easier to—yes, that's right—this is what we are supposed to talk about."* (C)

It is seen as efficient, as many tasks may be solved easier and/or faster, yet there are also examples of when a well-planned outdoor meeting is more or less wasted, because of disturbances from gardening or construction machines.

The ability to perform and to be efficient when bringing work tasks outdoors is evidently dependent upon many things, as to whether it will be experienced as rewarding and well-functioning, or not. Still, when asked for problematic and negative examples of outdoor work experiences, they exist, but do not seem to be numerous, and the participants often found them hard to recollect. One dimension often pointed out by the participants regards their perception that outdoor work is contributing to inspiration and is *enhancing* their *creativity*, whether alone, or with the team.

> *"I feel creative when I walk here and look at the rowan-berries, the leaves, the yellow flowers—and I am thinking that—Wow, something really happens with my head when I get impressions like that. Then, I also think that there is something about the feet moving. I don't know what it is, but I feel as if it helps one's thoughts—that you get a certain pace in your flow of thoughts."* (A)

4.7. Adding a Dimension

Many interviewees expressed that bringing work outdoors is *adding a dimension* to work; that it means something different from regular work, and also something more: "You know, I feel like it adds a sort of positive dimension to it." (O) Another interviewee elaborated on this theme:

> *"Otherwise, when you're just sitting and working, it's just that you get out of what you're doing. That is, if I'm sitting and doing something, that's just it—there's nothing beyond that. But, if I'm sitting outside, it's like this: Yes, then it's what I accomplish, plus I get a bit of sun or whatever it may be, or just a bit of wind on my face [. . .] If I have just been sitting indoors, in a dark room—among a bunch of folders and such—it can feel very. . . I don't know—just very. . . It is hard to describe the feeling in your body. It is more a kind of nothing."* (E)

It may seem that this added dimension may be covered by the other categories, as several of them concern advantages of working outdoors. But what makes the added dimension into a separate category is this insistence, repeated in the material, that outdoor work is something qualitatively different from ordinary work practice. This added dimension also appears as an open element in the final grounded theory, which is presented next.

4.8. Framing the Findings

In constructivist grounded theory, the researcher has a choice as to whether the results should be presented in a visual model or remain an exclusively textual construction (Charmaz, 2014). We illustrate our results through 'The Lotus of Outdoor Office Work', which frames the categories and their relation to each other (see Figure 2).

At the bottom, the infinity-shaped sepals are visualizing a continuous learning process that integrates the practical outdoor office work experiences with critical reflections that challenge taken-for-granted indoor practices and underlying assumptions and norms about work. This learning cycle is essential for the success of outdoor office work and evolves through outdoor experiences. It also constitutes the basis of the other elements, which in turn form a web of complex interdependencies. The bottom left petal captures how practicing outdoor office work contributes to learning about relationships with oneself, others, and the environment, while highlighting feelings of connection and presence, but also acknowledging the unpredictability of nature and its impact on professionalism. However, being connected and interdependent is not equal to experiences of being restricted. Rather, as visualized in the bottom right petal, it is a matter of simultaneously enjoying the freedom and disconnection that come with outdoor office work. This freedom is not only cherished but also necessary, as autonomy and trust from management enable workers to venture outside. The ability to choose one's surroundings and move freely contributes to breaking sedentary habits and increasing physical activity. This sense of liberation also involves stepping away from the usual constraints and disconnecting from busy indoor environments and screens. Hence, as illustrated in the upper petals, experiences of health

and well-being as well as performance are enhanced. The health and well-being benefits of outdoor office work (upper left petal) include both recovery and prevention of ill-health by emphasizing the importance of exposure to natural elements like daylight and greenspaces, as well as the physical activity inherent in working outside. Experiences of health and well-being are also related to experiences of improvements in focus, efficiency, creativity, and problem-solving, summarized in terms of enhanced performance in the upper right petal. Finally, the blank top-middle petal indicates that outdoor work adds a new, distinct dimension to work life, suggesting a transformative potential that warrants further exploration and learning.

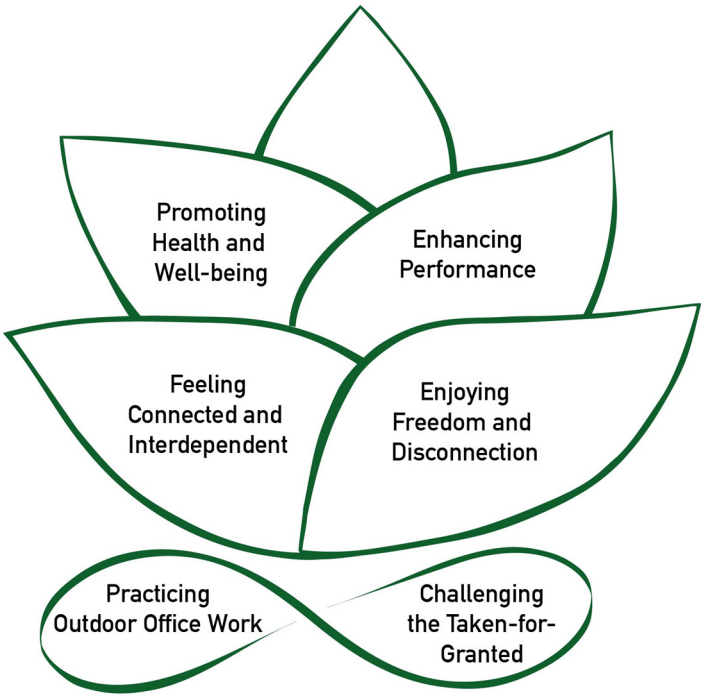

Figure 2. The Lotus of Outdoor Office Work.

All in all, even though the visual shape of the model could be interpreted as if the petals were paired, the model should be understood as three dimensional. In other words, all petals are connected to and support each other, as well as the learning process represented in the sepals. The Lotus of Outdoor Work should be understood as a framework for conceptualizing the transformative potential of outdoor office work, as well as its preconditions. However, it should also be acknowledged that the benefits of outdoor office work can vary with circumstances and that some tasks may still be better suited to an indoor office setting.

5. Discussion

In the following section, the categories of the presented conceptual framework (i.e., the elements of the model) are put into perspective. With support from previous research, we pin down what we find most interesting and relevant to acknowledge. Based upon our results, we focus on (1) the potential of outdoor office work to contribute to the development of a healthier as well as a smarter work life, and (2) the transformative potential of outdoor office work that may change the way we understand work and infuse sustainable values into work life—and society. As we have seen, these values both concern employees' inner development—their view of their own work as meaningful, as well as outer development—their connection to a nature that is otherwise disconnected from everyday office work.

5.1. Developing Healthier and Smarter Ways of Working

The fact that health and well-being is a major theme in our material and results does not come as a surprise, as health benefits of various kind are firmly rooted in research within the wide field of people–environment studies [11,14,15]. Previous research about outdoor office work similarly points out benefits for health and well-being [35–37]. However, it is important to not reduce health to absence of illness or a general sense of well-being. Rather, we need to reflect on it in relation to sustainability and inner development. In line with a life-world approach, we claim that (work life) health could be understood as experiences of being able to carry through one's smaller and bigger life projects and manage challenges encountered in the (working) life [49]. This perspective also provides the basis for an understanding of recovery as reclaiming one's (work) life [50]. Even though the latter concept has mainly been studied in a context of mental ill health, we assume that the conceptual attributes, the reawakening of hope, and reclaiming a positive self and meaning through personal growth [51] are essential also in a context of a demanding and stressful work life. In our study, this became evident in the categories forming the petals of the Lotus of Outdoor Office Work.

Although some scholars have pointed to the potential of bringing office work outdoors, and have suggested models for doing so [38,39,42] the number of empirical studies of people actually working outdoors is limited. Existing previous empirical research has mainly investigated this subject from angles other than work, and particularly from a recovery and restoration point of view, and is mainly based upon quantitative data, questionnaires, and visual simulations, often in experimental settings, although there are now a number of studies about outdoor office work based on participants' real-life experiences [35–37,40,41]. Thus, we do find it noteworthy that there are nowadays a number of studies showing that the positive relation between nature contact and health and well-being remain relevant in the context of conducting work activities, as opposed to leisure or breaks [52].

In the context of white-collar work, performance is closely connected to health and well-being. There are dimensions in our results that are of obvious importance for being able to handle the independent knowledge production and problem-solving which this involves, such as experiencing enhanced creativity, being more focused, and having better communication and relations with colleagues. In their 'nature-based biopsychosocial resilience theory', White et al. [14] integrate a multitude of previous research-based knowledge in the field. In line with this theory, participants in our study accentuate how their outdoor work supports them in building and maintaining biological, psychological, and social resilience, enhancing their ability to prevent, respond to, and recover from various stressors. When it comes to performance, it is yet to be further investigated if and how the quality and output of white-collar work have anything to gain, in economic terms, from being conducted outdoors. In Petersson Troije et al. [37], the potential of outdoor office work to contribute to performance was pointed out. This is well in line with our results, and we may also conclude that it seems valid even when studied outside of the context of a project dedicated to exploring outdoor office work with the possible risk of a Hawthorne-effect generated by such projects and interventions [53].

The results of our study point to the necessity of a learning process about work activities and their whereabouts, which can be described as a form of job-crafting taking place. Job-crafting may be defined as 'the physical and cognitive changes that individuals make in the task or relational boundaries of their work' [54]. Usually, this concept focuses on tasks and relationships at work, as well as job demands and resources. It may however also include contextual aspects, such as time and spatial dimensions [55]. For the outdoors to become an alternative workspace, employees' skills, knowledge, and abilities need to be developed to match locations to task and personal demands. As the participants in this study are going out of their ordinary ways of working, they are engaging in what we may call 'outdoor job-crafting', which acts as a foundation for enabling rewarding and well-functioning outdoor office work.

Furthermore, apart from learning aimed at making work function better, it is evident that there is learning on a deeper level going on, as participants are standing out, paving the way in the system, challenging policies, rules, and regulations, as well as taken-for-granted ideas and values about work. Thus, a kind of learning that may be called 'double-loop' [56], or 'transformative' [57], is fostered, going beyond the mere acquisition of knowledge, entailing a questioning of underlying assumptions.

5.2. Transforming Work Life

Drawing upon our results, there is something more to outdoor office work than just an opportunity to enhance ways of working by promoting health and well-being. Work, as our results show, is perceived as becoming somehow different. Something appears to be happening on a deeper level, which the results concerning connectedness and freedom especially highlight, as well as the added dimension, visualized as a blank leaf in the Lotus-model. When bringing work activities outdoors, the participants appear to access a 'natural' free space, as they are moving about outside of the physical, mental, and cultural constraints of the workplace.

The concept of free space is employed in multiple fields involved in the understanding of collective action [58]. In the meaning developed by Aagaard Nielsen and Nielsen [59] in connection to the approach of critical utopian action research, free space refers to the fostering of social arenas in people's everyday life where 'authoritarian social structures of reality-power that constrict people from thinking and speaking freely are delimited' [60]. The idea is to make space for everyday experiences, which are normally suppressed to be articulated and shared. The presence of free space can play a key role in making room for envisioning alternatives to that in people's everyday lives which is perceived as unsustainable. In our material, there are many stories about how outdoor office work enables a different kind of communication and relation to others—often colleagues or managers—and there are frequent references to perceiving them as more open and equal. It is important to point out that the idea is not that any space can be absolutely free; instead, it is about a space characterized by an increasing freedom of movement in a manifold sense [45,59]. Thus, in line with Fromm's [61] existentialist exploration of the concept of freedom, working outdoors is not simply a 'freedom from' constrains at work, but also a 'freedom to' find a deeper connection to nature, to colleagues, and to what actually matters in one's daily work.

This article has also shown how outdoor office work has the potential of unlocking an inner development as participants open up for connectedness and interdependence to become part of work life. Here, the German sociologist Hartmut Rosa's concept of *resonance* can be of help in understanding this potential transformation. In Rosa's [46] definition, 'resonance is a kind of responsive relationship to the world, formed through affection and emotion', where 'both sides speak with their own voice', and 'are mutually affected and transformed'. Resonance is an alternative mode of being in the world, which, instead of alienation, is marked by a subject that 'feels touched, moved or addressed by the people, places, objects, etc. he or she encounters', while alienation means a mode of relating to the world of things, to people, and to one's self in which there is no responsivity, i.e., no meaningful inner connection, a relationship to the world which is numb [62]. Colorful examples of resonance stand out in the material of this study, as the participants contrast the feeling of 'nothingness' when having spent all day indoors, and the 'somethingness' and the added dimension experienced when interacting in and with the outdoors. The participants express feeling more attuned to themselves and others, as they are disconnecting and breaking the quadratic, getting static feelings out. They feel present and alive, while faced with the unpredictability of nature—becoming humble and aware of the interdependence between themselves and the environment.

5.3. Methodological Considerations

Within constructivist grounded theory, there are four main criteria for assessing trustworthiness: credibility, resonance, originality, and usefulness [43]. Credibility is established by obtaining adequate and pertinent data that allow for asking insightful questions, conducting systematic comparisons throughout the research process, and crafting a comprehensive analysis. It could be argued that the number of participants was low. However, Charmaz [10] suggests that 25 interviews are often sufficient for a qualitative study relatively limited in scope. Brinkmann and Kvale [63] recommend that around 15 participants, give or take 10, is optimal for conducting an in-depth analysis of data. Considering these guidelines, in combination with the principle of saturation that underpins grounded theory, we maintain that the 15 participants and 27 interviews provided ample data. A potential weakness is the predominance of female participants. At the time of the study, the majority of volunteers were women, and there was no opportunity to include more men from the involved organizations as participation was based on voluntariness. No differences were observed between the responses of men and women during the analysis; however, due to the limited number of male participants, this could be coincidental and should be considered in future research. Despite this gender imbalance, the results contribute new insights, and the data were deemed sufficient. Therefore, while not claiming that the results are representative of all white-collar workers, they are transferable, as generalizations are made through abstraction to recognizable categories rather than by numerical representation.

Credibility also hinges on the researcher's perspectives and actions and calls for robust reflexivity throughout the research process [43,64]. In this study, this involved the first author, who conducted all the interviews, keeping a diary with notes, methodological reflections, preliminary sketches of conceptual models, and increasingly abstract memos, as the process unfolded. It also entailed all authors reflecting on the data and the potential ways to understand and categorize it. The diverse backgrounds of the researchers were essential to ensure that interpretations were not constrained by a pre-defined, rigid perspective. Instead, various possibilities for understanding the data were discussed, and these were also considered in the follow-up interviews where preliminary results were reflected on with the participants.

Resonance ensures that the concepts constructed by researchers not only represent the experiences of their research participants but also resonate with and provide insights to others. To achieve resonance, researchers must tailor their data collection strategies to effectively capture their participants' experiences [43]. On one level, there was an intertwining of the strategies previously described for credibility, as feedback from participants was sought during the second interview. This provided participants with an opportunity to see whether their own experiences were reflected in the initial analysis, but also to reflect on whether they could identify with the results as a whole. In doing so, they also had the chance to contribute new data based on the experiences they had had since the first interview. This could be expressed as the participants validating the initial analysis while simultaneously contributing new insights. The most noticeable difference between the two rounds of interviews was that the demands of the environment and the questioning of outdoor work had become more pronounced as the pandemic began to subside, which was also made evident by the participants recognizing themselves in the dichotomies that had served as an analytical tool during the initial stages of the process.

Following Charmaz and Thornberg [43], originality can manifest in various ways, such as offering new insights, providing a fresh conceptualization of a recognized problem, and highlighting the significance of the analysis. From this perspective, originality thus has clear connections to how the results have been illustrated through both categories and the conceptual framework developed in the study; in this case, 'The Lotus of Outdoor Office Work'. However, such reflection cannot be understood as separate from the perspective on theory. Charmaz [10] claims that a constructivist view theory emphasizes interpretation and assigns a higher priority to abstract understanding than to explanation. Theories of this nature seek to comprehend meanings and actions and the ways in which individuals

construct them. They 'bring in the subjectivity of the actor and may recognize the subjectivity of the researcher' [10]. As described by Fredriksson [65], the role of theory within an interpretive, human science should be viewed as a framework for interpretation. From this vantage point, a theory does not align with an external reality that can be confirmed or refuted. Instead, its purpose is to illuminate a segment of the world as experienced and acted on by individuals. Hence, they are contextualized within their social, historical, local, and interactional environments [43].

This also has implications for the final criterion described by Charmaz, which is usefulness [43,64]. The results of a study, and the conceptual framework developed, are rooted in a specific original context. However, the view of theory as something that, rather than explaining, can shed light on people's experiences and actions means that the conceptual framework can create a space for understanding that transcends the original situation. Hence, clarifying participants' experiences of bringing office work outside can provide groundwork for policy and practice applications, contributing to the generation of new lines of research, and also uncover presumably widespread norms about indoors versus outdoors office work.

As discussed above, the number of participants, and especially the high proportion of women, can be seen as limitations. We have also chosen to collect data during two temporally separate periods, which could be viewed as a potential weakness of the study, as it deviates from the typical emergent application of grounded theory. However, the analysis was conducted continuously during the process, and the two interview-phases each spanned over 3–5 months, thus enabling a pendulum between the analysis of the present material and further interviews. The fact that the first author conducted all interviews and kept an ongoing research diary contributed to an increased understanding of the research questions and thereby also to the development of nuances in the data through follow-up questions that emerged during the process. The intervals between the first and second rounds of interviews were in this case also an advantage compared to a continuous process, as they allowed for reflection on outdoor office work under different conditions (i.e., during and after the COVID-19 pandemic), which we believe has contributed to an understanding of outdoor office work in a broader context, not limited to the specific circumstances that prevailed during the pandemic.

That said, the conceptual framework, the Lotus of Outdoor Office Work, should be considered tentative. Further research in other settings is needed to confirm and, if necessary, refine it. However, we claim that the framework provides a possible way to understand what happens when white-collar workers integrate the outdoors into their everyday work life. As reflected in the discussion above, the categories that arose are in line with research related to the different concepts in the conceptual framework. The linking of these concepts to each other and to the specific context of outdoor office work contributes to the understanding of the potentials of outdoor office work based on the firsthand experience of fifteen white-collar workers. Thus, the qualitative design and its focus on people's experiences of outdoor office work can shed light on the potentials of outdoor office work from the perspective of those who experience it. This is in line with the understanding of the role of theory in human sciences as reflected above. Further quantitative surveys of the introduction of outdoor office work in the workplace could be fruitful in order to measure its impact on various dimensions of work life; however, based on the current study, quantitative surveys need to take into consideration that outdoor office work not only has easily measured effects on well-being, but may also transform work life in more fundamental ways.

6. Conclusions

As suggested in the title of this article, outdoor office work has a transformative potential. This potential lies in its possible contribution to a sustainable work life, and also as a possible means to inner development. For an overall sustainable development to be possible, the centrality of work life needs to be acknowledged, as a potential deep

leverage point for transformative efforts [4]. White-collar work includes many different professions and varying degrees of knowledge-intensity and autonomy. Among them, however, we find individuals who can potentially have a great influence on sustainability outcomes at the system level through their professional roles and work. Rosa's [46] concept of resonance is not only built upon experiences of being touched or affected, but also on what may be called self-efficacy, which in a social dimension is about realizing our capability of reaching out to others—and that they listen and answer in return. According to him, this possibility of active connection is exactly what has the potential of bringing about progressive transformation of both oneself, and the world [62]. Improving white-collar workers' health and well-being at work is an important contribution to the global sustainability goals, in and of itself. So is the enhanced performance via 'sharper thinking', collaboration, creativity, and perspective-taking that potentially comes with bringing office work outdoors. When outdoor office work is introduced, it not only gives employees an opportunity to exercise and experience the outdoors—it also opens up for possibilities of questioning taken-for-granted truths about how white-collar work should be organized and conducted. Thus, the transformative potential of outdoor office work is not only related to experiences of health and enhanced performance, but also to a profound sense of freedom and resonance in relations with others as well as nature, and can as such be seen as a promising path forward, for the promotion of overall sustainable development.

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