

# The common factors in the structure of fast-growers

A multiple case study on the organizational structure of fast-growers in The Netherlands



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## **ABSTRACT**

The current developments in IT and the emerging technologies triggered a new industrial revolution. Driven on these new technologies, fast growing companies are emerging in any sector and experience growth which was not considered possible before. The fast-growers are changing the status quo and have the potential to disrupt the market in any given sector. Since this is a relatively new trend, research on this topic is still limited. While some scholars have studied fast-growing companies, they tend to apply a descriptive approach towards the growth of these organizations. This study aimed to investigate the organizational structure of fast-growers by performing a multiple case study at four fast-growers in the Netherlands. Semi-structured interviews and document analysis led to the insight that fast-growers tend to have enlarged jobs, use multiple coordination mechanisms and tend to have decentralized decision making with a flat structure. These findings add to the small body of research that is currently available on fast-growers. Further research should focus on testing these findings, as well as investigating the actual effect of each character of the structure on the growth of fast-growers.

*Keywords:* Third industrial revolution, fast-growers, organizational structure

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## **1. Introduction**

An industrial revolution can, in short, be described as a period of rapid, widespread and dramatic change in methods used to produce goods and services (Fitzsimmons, 1994). The world is currently facing a third industrial revolution (TIR) which is fueled by new ways of using information and innovation in technology such as IT, big data, artificial intelligence, advanced robotics, advanced materials, or 3D-printing (Anderson, 2012; Manyika, Chui, Bughin, Dobbs, Bisson & Marrs, 2013). It is this use of information and technology which nowadays creates new opportunities for entrepreneurs, start-up companies, organizations and inventors. These new technologies make companies able to grow and generate revenue with a pace, which was never possible before. “We have entered the age of the billion-dollar (private) startup and soon, the trillion dollar corporation” (Ismail, Malone, & Van Geest, 2014, p. 15).

These days companies like Airbnb, Sendcloud, Uber, Spotify, Tesla, Travelbird, Quirky or Google Ventures are growing with an enormous speed to high valued organizations. Moreover, it is shown that the amount of those companies has been rising. The amount of startup companies which are valued \$1 billion and above have been rising worldwide with 125% over the last year to 153 and increases every day (Ismail et al., 2014). Next to that, the majority of these companies are no more than eight years old. In 2009, there were just 4 startup companies worth more than \$1 billion and their cumulative valuation ran to just a few billion dollars. To compare, the 153 startup companies now valued \$1 billion and above have a total cumulative valuation of \$535 billion (Ismail et al., 2014). Take, for example, a startup company like Airbnb. The company was founded in 2008 and has currently around 1,350 employees and operates over half a million listings in 33,000 cities. Even though Airbnb owns not a single physical asset, it is valued over \$25 billion. In the current growth pace, Airbnb will soon be the biggest hotelier (Ismail et al., 2014). This means that renowned hoteliers as The Hyatt, The Marriott and Hilton may lose this competition from a company which was founded only eight years ago. This is to illustrate the idea that fast-growers have the potential to disrupt a particular market.

## 1.1 Problem statement

The previous examples indicate that in the TIR companies may enjoy success to an extent, which was according, to Ismail et al. (2014, p. 15), “never considered possible before”. It is argued that in the TIR neither age, size, reputation, nor even current sales is an indication whether a company will be around tomorrow. This challenges traditional organizations to keep up with the developments in order to survive in the future (Diamandis & Kotler, 2012). The changing nature of products by using new technologies forces companies to reconsider nearly everything they do internally (Porter & Heppelmann, 2014). Therefore, leaders need to consider different scenarios and need to be able to change and look beyond long-established models in order to survive (Manyika et al., 2013). The accelerating growth of the (relative) young companies, which are called fast-growers in this study, may disrupt the market of the traditional organizations at a given time. “Not every emerging technology will alter the business or social landscape but some truly do have the potential to disrupt the status quo” (Manyike et al., 2013, p. 14). Whereas Airbnb disrupted the hotel sector, this disruption can occur in any economic sector. Even though these traditional organizations are in general vulnerable to change or disruption, they are able to adjust to the current developments (Manyika et al., 2013). This means that the traditional organizations need to have an insight in the way these fast-growers work in order to be able to adjust to these developments (Diamandis & Kotler, 2012). This research provides such an insight in one aspect of fast-growers, namely the organizational structure.

Fast-growers are characterized by their exceptional growth and by their use of information technology, use of data analysis, potential of scalability, and their distinct organizational structure. The structure of fast-growers is distinctive due to, for example, division of work in small and multi-disciplinary teams, and decentralized decision making (Ismail et al., 2014). Although, it is not the only aspect that makes a fast-growers so successful, the organizational structure is an element that makes the organization unique as a totality and is therefore important for the success of it (Beer & Nohria, 2000). This is enhanced by the idea that the organizational structure forms the central lever when change is needed. This means that if the more traditional organizations initiate change, the organizational structure would be the central element of this change program (Beer & Nohria, 2000). So when traditional organizations decide to adjust the way they work, it is important to be aware of the organizational structure of their

competitors (Beer & Nohria, 2000). A good example is the transition of ING to a completely reformed organizational structure. Several ING employed consultants visited the offices of the Uber and Spotify to gain insight in their structure. In order to survive, ING decided to adopt a structure that was similar to the one of Uber and Spotify, which formed the lever for changing the entire organization (De Kare-Silver, 2011).

Therefore, this research focuses on the organizational structure of fast-growers. The research aim is to get an insight in the organizational structure of fast-growers in order to make recommendations for traditional organizations. This leads to the following research question: what is the organizational structure of fast-growers in The Netherlands?

## **1.2 Scientific and practical relevance**

The rise of the fast-growers in the TIR is very recent, meaning that the scientific literature is still limited on this topic. This research contributes to the small body of research on fast-growers. Although past research has provided insight in the TIR, it has not provided adequate insight in the organizational structure of fast-growers and this research provides such an insight. The practical relevance can be found in the insights in fast-growers for the traditional organizations. As stated in the example of ING, a more comprehensive idea of the organizational structure of fast-growers led to relevant knowledge to adjust the organization. Therefore, the insights provided in this research can be adopted by more traditional organization to reconsider or even adjust their structure. In other words, the traditional organizations may elaborate their knowledge on the fast-growing companies which can help to reconsider or adapt structurally in order to survive. This research provides a contribution to the practical knowledge of traditional organizations and gives a recommendation to these traditional organizations.

## **1.3 Outline**

First, the introduction and problem statement are covered, which is followed by the scientific and practical relevance. The next part will form the theoretical background of this research. In this part the key concepts will be further explained based on the existing scientific literature. After the theoretical background, the methodology of this research is described. Next, the data analysis and its results are described. Finally, the conclusions are covered in this research.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

The theoretical framework consists of three parts. In the first part, the term fast-growers is further specified. In the second part, the organizational structure is addressed and split up in three dimensions. Finally, a conceptual model is provided.

### **2.1 Fast-growers**

As argued in the introduction we are currently facing a TIR. The TIR brings opportunities for relatively young companies to grow fast by making use of IT and new technologies (Ismail et al., 2014). These companies do not necessarily discover new products, but they redefine existing products or services and how these products or services are provided to the customers (Markides, 2006). The concept of fast growing organizations is defined in different studies; in different fields and can be termed as, ‘exponential organizations’, ‘high-growth firms’, ‘fast-growing firms’ ‘high-impact firms’, ‘gazelles’ or ‘fast-growing businesses’ (Acs, 2013; Almus, 2002; Birch, & Medoff, 1994; Brüderl, & Preseisendörfer, 2000; Hölzl, 2013; Ismail et al., 2014).

#### **2.1.1 Growth**

There are multiple ways of defining the fast growth of firms, creating ambiguity on which growth indicators should be used. So, before elaborating more on the term fast-growers, the indicators and measurements for growth should be established (Mogos, Davis, & Baptista, 2015). In scientific literature, growth of fast-growers is indicated by: employment and revenue (Acs, 2013; Audretsch, 2012; Birch, 1979; Birch, & Medoff, 1994; Brüderl, & Preseisendörfer, 2000; Hölzl, 2013; OECD, 2007). These two indicators are also adopted in this research to describe growth.

Hölzl (2013) defines, for example, high-growth firms as organizations that have “an annualized employment or revenue growth exceeding 20% during a 3-year period” (p. 204). Even though Hölzl (2013) provides a clear definition, the growth is only measured in a relative sense. This, according to Brüderl and Preseindörfer (2000) and Almus (2002), can create a bias towards smaller firms. Almus (2002) argues that whether growth in terms of employment is defined in a relative or absolute matter has a significant influence on the study. Therefore, relative and absolute growth should be combined in a research to avoid a bias towards larger or smaller firms (Almus, 2002; Brüderl, & Preseisendörfer, 2000). Accordingly, Almus (2002) describes growth

of employment as: “A firm is defined as fast growing if it has an employment growth of 20% and creates at least five additional jobs within 5 years” (p. 1498). This definition solves the bias issue for employment but does not provide an absolute measure for the growth of revenue. This absolute measure for revenue growth is provided by Birch (1979). Birch (1979) describes that the firm’s revenue should grow at least 20% yearly for at least 3 consecutive years, with a base year revenue of at least \$100,000 in order to be fast growing. Since employment and revenue are used as indicators, and both indicators will be in absolute and relative terms, these definitions were considered and combined. Therefore, in order to be identified as fast-growers, the following conditions must be met:

- An annualized revenue growth of at least 20% for at least 3 years starting from \$100.000 (Birch, 1979).
- An annualized employment growth of at least 20% for at least 3 years (Hölzl, 2013)
- Created five additional jobs within 5 years (Almus, 2002).

### **2.1.2 Technology**

In order to further define the term fast-grower, used in this research, another aspect is considered. Ismail et al. (2014) describe that, beside the fact that these firms are unique by their fast growth, they are “built upon information technologies that take what was once physical and dematerialize it into the digital, on demand world” (p. 18). These companies use new technologies as 3D printing, artificial intelligence, and new information technologies as a lever to support their business or perform their core tasks. So, in this research, besides the growth indicators, fast-growers are also identified by their use of technologies to support their business or perform their core tasks. Additionally, Markides (2006) stresses that fast-growers use these technologies in order to redefine existing products or services and how these products or services are provided to the customer. So, fast-growers use new technologies to support their business or perform their core tasks in order to redefine existing products or services and how these are provided to the customer (Ismail et al., 2014; Markides, 2006).

### **2.1.3 Definition fast-growers**

In order to provide a comprehensive definition as used in this research, the growth and technology mentioned above are used and combined. The definition of fast-growers in this research is as follows:

*Fast-growers are companies with an annualized revenue growth exceeding 20% for at least three years starting at \$100.000, that have an employment growth exceeding 20% for at least three year, create a minimum of five extra jobs within five years, and use information technology or new technologies as a lever to support their business or perform their core tasks in order to redefine existing products or services or how these products or services are provided to the customer (Almus, 2002; Birch, 1979; Hölzl, 2013; Ismail et al., 2014; Markides, 2006).*

## **2.2 Organizational structure**

As argued earlier, the organizational structure is one aspect that makes an organization unique. The organizational structure is a vital element of an organizations' business model (Foss & Saebi, 2015). This is also the case when considering fast-growers. In order to get a better understanding of fast-growers it is therefore important to have an idea about the organizational structure of fast-growers. Before the organizational structure can be studied, the concept of organizational structure must be theoretically elaborated. Therefore, this section of the theoretical framework will address the organizational structure.

Organizational structure is a widely researched concept and the definitions of organizational structure are numerous and vary from simple to complex (Beer & Nohria, 2000 Christensen, 2009; Johnson, Scholes, & Whittington, 2009; Mintzberg, 1979, 1989; Womack & Jones, 2003). Beer and Nohria (2000) simply define organizational structure as: “the formal elements of organization, the rules and procedures that are designed to guide or restrict the behavior of people in the organization” (p. 178). In other words, the purpose of the structure is to guide or restrict people in their behavior. However, some scholars argue that the organizational structure provides more than simply a framework to guide the behavior of organizational members (Johnson et al., 2009; Mintzberg, 1979, 1989). According to Johnson et al. (2009) the organizational structure is the division of labor in the organization and the coordination among

this division. This is in line with the definition of Mintzberg (1979): “the structure of an organization can be defined simply as the sum of total of the ways in which it divides its labor into distinct tasks and then achieves coordination among them” (p. 2). Mintzberg (1979) describes, in this specific definition, two elements of an organizational structure: the division of labor and the coordination of these tasks to accomplish a given activity. However, Mintzberg (1989) adds that another fundamental element of the organizational structure is the hierarchy of authority. Buelens, Sinding, Waldstrom, Kreitner, and Kinicki (2011) summarize in their book the definition of structure according to Mintzberg (1979, 1989): “The organizational structure is the division of labor, co-ordination of effort, and hierarchy of authority” (p. 435). Following this definitions, the organizational structure consists of three dimensions: the division of labor, the coordination of work, and hierarchy of authority. This leads to the definition of organizational structure in this research:

*The organizational structure is the division of labor, coordination, and hierarchy of authority among people in a given organization* (Buelens et al., 2011; Johnson et al., 2009; Mintzberg, 1979, 1989).

This research focuses on all three dimensions to provide a description of the organizational structure.

According to Mintzberg (1979) it is necessary to briefly describe the basic parts of an organization before elaborating on the structure. This is relevant when analyzing organizations and to compare between organizations. Organizations consist, according to Mintzberg (1979), of five basic parts. These parts all have to work on a common goal and need an organizational structure to make them able to reach this goal (Mintzberg, 1979). Since the organizational structure is already defined, it is necessary to consider the following five basic parts of an organization: the strategic apex, middle line, operation core, techno structure, and support staff (Mintzberg, 1979). *The strategic apex*, are the top-managers and directors at the very top of the hierarchy. This is the place where the whole system is overseen and strategic choices are made (Mintzberg, 1979). *The middle line* consists of middle managers who are between the strategic apex and the operating core in the chain of command. They have a direct line with the strategic apex and with the people that execute the core task of the organizations, the operating core. *The operating core*, are people responsible for the core task of the organization. This is the bottom of

the hierarchy and is associated with producing a product or service (Mintzberg, 1979). *The techno structure*, are people analyzing and taking care of administrative tasks concerned with the operating core. They are outside the operating work flow and they plan, change, design or train the people that execute the core tasks in the organization. This can involve people that provide training, do operational research or do the strategic planning. *The support staff* provides support for the operating core of the organization such as R&D, marketing, legal counsel, sometimes HR, cafeteria or communication. Similar to the techno structure, the support staff is outside the basic flow of operation and line of authority (Mintzberg, 1979).

These parts of the organization were used to analyze, describe, and compare the fast-growers in this research. In other words, a more profound description was provided by using the organizational parts in the analysis and comparison of fast-growers. Moreover, these parts of the organization are used to describe the hierarchy of authority. Before elaborating on the three dimension of the organizational structure, an important notion has to be considered. The theory of Mintzberg (1979, 1980, 1989) provides an extensive explanation of the organizational structure. However, his theory was formulated before fast-growers, as they are described in this research, became a phenomenon. Therefore, it is interpreted that the theory provided by Mintzberg (1979, 1980, 1989) concerns the more traditional organizations. Even though the structure concerns the more traditional organization, the theory of Mintzberg (1979, 1980, 1989) is considered relevant when studying organizational structure in this research.

### **2.2.1 Division of labor**

Division of labor means that the work is divided into jobs relative to the people working in the organization (Achterbergh & Vriens, 2010). This means, the extent to which each person has his or her own tasks and responsibilities within the organization. In other words, “The purpose of dividing labor into smaller components is to have people specialize in one or more well-defined tasks” (Buelens et al., 2011, p. 435). Specialization involves a horizontal and vertical dimension (Mintzberg 1979)

Horizontal specialization describes the variety of activities related to a single job. For example an assembly-line worker whom is solely responsible for putting a stamp on a product, only has one activity related to his job and as such has a horizontally specialized job. So, the less tasks related to a job the more horizontal specialized a job is. Repetition is also an indication of

horizontal specialization. When a job consists of much repetition, this indicates horizontal specialization (Mintzberg, 1979). On the other hand, vertical specialization determines the control and responsibilities a person has over a task (Mintzberg, 1980). It is argued that the narrower the task, which is the case with horizontal specialization, the less control a person has over its tasks. Therefore, Mintzberg (1979) describes that there is a strong positive relation between horizontal and vertical specialization.

When jobs in the organization are highly specialized it can lead to a complex network of very small and specific tasks. Such a network can potentially become a source for disturbances in the organizational structure (Achterbergh & Vriens, 2010). Therefore, specialization is opposed by the concept of job enlargement (Mintzberg, 1979). Job enlargement consists, similar to job specialization, of a horizontal and a vertical dimension. Horizontal job enlargement means that a worker is responsible for a high variety of tasks associated with a product or service. This would enable the people in the organization to see their tasks more as part of an integrated system instead of an isolated task (Mintzberg, 1979). Vertical job enlargement means that the workers is not only responsible for a wider variety of tasks, but that he or she gains control over them. So, the worker also has decision power over the process, has more responsibility and is able to control the process (Mintzberg, 1979).

The specialization or enlargement of jobs is used in this research to define and describe the division of labor at the fast-growers. Conclusions are drawn on the division of labor of fast-growers, in terms of the theory described.

### **2.2.2 Coordination**

Division of labor creates distinct tasks within an organization. These tasks need coordination in order to actually accomplish a goal set by the organization (Mintzberg, 1980). Mintzberg (1979, 1980, 1989) describes five fundamental mechanisms to coordinate the different tasks in the organization. The first coordination mechanism is *direct supervision*. With direct supervision an individual gives specific orders and takes responsibility for the work of others (Mintzberg, 1980). This includes instructing them and monitoring their actions. Using the second coordination mechanism, *mutual adjustment*, individuals coordinate their work by informal or unofficial communication among an uncharted route. This means that work is coordinated based on a spontaneous, flexible, informal, verbal and personal manner (Gargiulo & Sosa, 2016). Mintzberg

(1979) describes that informal communication is initiated when people work side-by-side in the organization. This can be using face-to-face communication to align the work with no predetermined standard or plan.

The third, fourth and fifth coordination mechanisms involve standardization. Standardization means that there is predetermined standard set for either the work process, the outcome of the process, or the skills of people working in the organization (Mintzberg, 1979). There are three basic ways to achieve standardization in organizations. The first is *standardization of work process*. This means that work is coordinated by the imposition of standards to guide the work in the operational core by making rules, work orders and regulations (Mintzberg, 1980). This is possible when the activities are routine and simple, such as tasks in an assembly line. *Standardization of output* means that the work is coordinated by creating standard performance measures based on the outcome of a task (Mintzberg, 1980). It does not focus on the process itself but on the outcome of it. The output for a specific task is standardized and used to communicate and coordinate the work. Finally, *standardization of skills* means that the work is coordinated by setting standards through individual skills. This is achieved by hiring a particular group of people with a specified and predetermined skill (Mintzberg, 1980). This can, for example, be based on a specific educational degree. Based on these skills the work is coordinated among the people in the organization.

The five coordination mechanisms are considered the most basic elements of an organizational structure, “it is the glue that holds the organization together” (Mintzberg, 1979, p. 3). Therefore, when studying the organizational structure of fast-growers these basic elements must be considered.

### **2.2.3 Hierarchy of authority**

Before addressing what hierarchy of authority entails, it is useful to illustrate this concept first. Consider an organization in the simplest way. The organization only needs an operating core to produce a product or service which is largely self-sufficient. The operating core can adjust the work by simply communicating with one another (Mintzberg, 1979). When an organization starts to grow and becomes more complex, such as more workers and more products, the division of labor becomes more complex as well. This means that there is need for a supervisor to coordinate the work. The manager who supervises and coordinates the work is the control part (Mintzberg,

1979). When an organization grows further and elaborates itself, there is an increasing need for supervisors. However, there is not only need for supervisors of operations but also need for managers that control the supervisors. This creates multiple levels in the organization (Mintzberg, 1979).

This way a hierarchy of authority is built in an organization and is generally illustrated in an organigram. However, Mintzberg (1979) argues that an organigram does not describe the communication patterns and the power relationships that really exist. Organizations with low hierarchy are characterized by a flat organizational structure whereas hierarchical organizations have a tall organizational structure. A flat structure has few levels in hierarchy with relatively large work groups at each level. A tall organizational structure has many levels in hierarchy and relatively small groups at each hierarchical level (Mintzberg, 1989).

Besides the formal hierarchy of the organization, the hierarchy of authority determines the decision making rights in an organization. “A decision signals an explicit intention to act” (Mintzberg, 1979, p. 58). Decision making power involves the power to make decision concerning controlling activities and performing tasks (Buelens et al., 2011). Moreover, decision making is concerned with the authority to make a decision. Decision making can be centralized or decentralized. Centralized decision making involves decision making high in the organization. In this case, decision making is done by the strategic apex and is centralized there. This means that decision making is only done by a few persons in the organization. These persons have full control and make decisions concerning the jobs of people in the operating core. However, it is argued that not all decisions can be made at one center or by one brain (Mintzberg, 1979). Therefore, decision making can also be decentralized. Decentralized decision making involves decision making low in the formal chain of authority. The authority in decision making is dispersed among the different individuals; among different levels in the organization (Mintzberg, 1979). This means that decision making power rests with the people who are actually executing the job.

The grouping in the organization is also a determinant for the hierarchy of authority. Mintzberg (1979) provides six bases for grouping. Organizations can be grouped by knowledge and skills, by work process and function, by time, by output, by client or by place. When work is grouped by knowledge and skills the positions are grouped by particular knowledge and skills that members bring to a job. Grouping by work process and function means that people are

grouped by function, for example: marketing, finance, operations, and so on. Grouping by time indicates that work is grouped according to when the work is done, for example, in different shifts at different times in an organization. Grouping by output indicates that groups are made considering a product they make or a service they render. People are for example grouped for each of the products an organization offers. Grouping by client means that different groups deal with different types of clients. Finally grouping by place means that groups are formed by the geographical regions in which the organization operates.

The hierarchy of authority is used as a guideline to describe the hierarchy at the fast-growers. This hierarchy provides an insight in the structure of organizations. The concepts of this section are used to study, analyze and describe the fast-growers.

### **2.3 Organization Types**

“Organization types are based on the composition of previously elaborated structural elements: division of labor, hierarchy of authority and co-ordination” (Buelens et al., 2011, p. 445). This means that the three dimensions elaborated above can characterize different organization types. Mintzberg (1989) argues that only a few dimensions of the organizational structure help to explain much about organizations.

Given these dimensions five organization types are distinguished. *Entrepreneurial organization* is an organizational type characterized by little or no techno structure; few support staffers and a loose division of labor. There is limited horizontal and vertical specialization. Coordination is effected by direct supervision and the decision making rights are centralized with the strategic apex of the organization (Mintzberg, 1989). *The machine organization* is typified by formalized procedures with a tall organizational structure. The division of labor is highly specialized and the operational core is large. The techno structure is key to provide analyses of the work in the operating core (Mintzberg, 1989). Emphasis is on standardization of work process and the structure is interlarded with rules and regulations. Decision making is centralized, which means that only at the level of the strategic apex decisions can be made. *The professional organization* is an organization with highly trained specialists at the operating core of the organization with autonomy over their work (Mintzberg, 1989). The operating units are large and decision making is decentralized since most of the formal and informal power is within the operating core. The coordination mechanism used is standardization of skills which allows

decentralization (Mintzberg, 1989). However, the organization is still characterized by strict rules and procedures developed by the professional itself to control the highly skilled tasks. *The diversified organization* arises when organizations tend to expand their business. This type of organization has a central headquarter overseeing different divisions, each serving their own market (Mintzberg, 1989). The headquarter uses standardization of output in order to coordinate the goals of the divisions and provide autonomy to the divisions. Decision making is decentralized among the division but, centralized in the headquarter. *The innovative organization* is characterized by an organic structure with project teams consisting of expert from different specialties. The teams have little formalization of behavior and limited rules and procedure. The teams work informal and are coordinated by mutual adjustment (Mintzberg, 1989). Decision making is decentralized and the division of work is horizontally specialized within the team. The open and decentralized decision making allows the organization to consider every idea from the teams and rely on innovation (Mintzberg, 1989). The innovative organization is mostly seen in young industries with a complex and dynamic environment. Moreover, this type of organization is able to innovation due to the absence of management layers. Therefore, the innovative organization cannot rely on standardization as coordination mechanism (Mintzberg, 1989). Finally, the innovative organization is not focused on efficiency but on creativity and innovation.

Given the different organization types, fast-growers are also seen as an organization type. In the conclusions of this research the fast-growers will be specified in terms of the division of labor, hierarchy of authority and co-ordination. This way the organization type ‘fast-grower’ is specified.

## **2.4 Conceptual model**

As stated earlier, the existing literature concerning the organizational structure of fast-growers is limited. Despite this limitation, assumptions on the structure of fast-growers are described in order to develop a conceptual model. These assumptions are based upon the theory of Ismail et al. (2014), since they provide some insights in the structure of fast growing organizations.

Ismail et al. (2014) describe that fast growing organizations do not have traditional departments in the organization with many line managers involved. Fast-growers have a large operating core with only few levels in their organizational structure. Therefore, it is assumed that fast-growers have a flat hierarchical structure with only a few levels in the structure and a large

work group per level. Besides the flat structure, fast-growers are assumed to distribute the control, authority, and decision making power to non-managers in the organization. In fact, Ismail et al. (2014) state that people are the highest authority in their own role. This helps people to have much control over their job and be able to relate their own goal to the overarching core goal of the organization (Ismail et al., 2014). Therefore, in this study it is assumed that fast-growers have an organizational structure that is characterized by vertical job enlargement.

Also, Ismail et al. (2014) state that the distribution of control, authority, and decision making power enables workers to have changing roles and activities. This assumes that workers experience little repetition in their tasks or job. Moreover, workers in fast growing organizations are constantly challenged by complicated and broad tasks. Thus, it can be assumed that the distribution of work, at fast-growers, is characterized by horizontal job enlargement. The distribution of control, authority, and decision making power in the organization, also implies decentralization. Decision making is placed at the operating core of the organization and people are authorized to make decisions. Therefore, it is assumed that the hierarchy of authority at fast-growers is characterized by decentralized decision making due to the distribution of authority and decision making power.

Finally, Ismail et al. (2014) state that the people working in fast growing organization work together in multidisciplinary teams on a specific output. The different jobs work together to create and develop a specific output in terms of a product or a service. This initiates grouping based on a certain output. Therefore, in this research, it is assumed that grouping at the fast-growers is done based on a specific output. Thereby, it is stated that fast-growers are highly information driven and use analytics to make decisions in business. Ismail et al. (2014) even stated that: “Information is your greatest asset” (p. 47). Following the importance of information for fast-growers, it is most likely that fast growers rely on the techno structure in order to make decisions based on information and analyses. Additionally, the output has to be specified or standardized to achieve coordination among the different jobs. In creating the output, the process itself is flexible and not a single way of working has to be adopted. It is, therefore, stated that the way to the goal is irrelevant but the goal itself is important (Ismail et al., 2014). This implies the use of standardization of output as a coordination mechanism. Hence, it is assumed that standardization of output is used to coordinate the work at the fast-growers. These assumptions lead to the following conceptual model for this research.

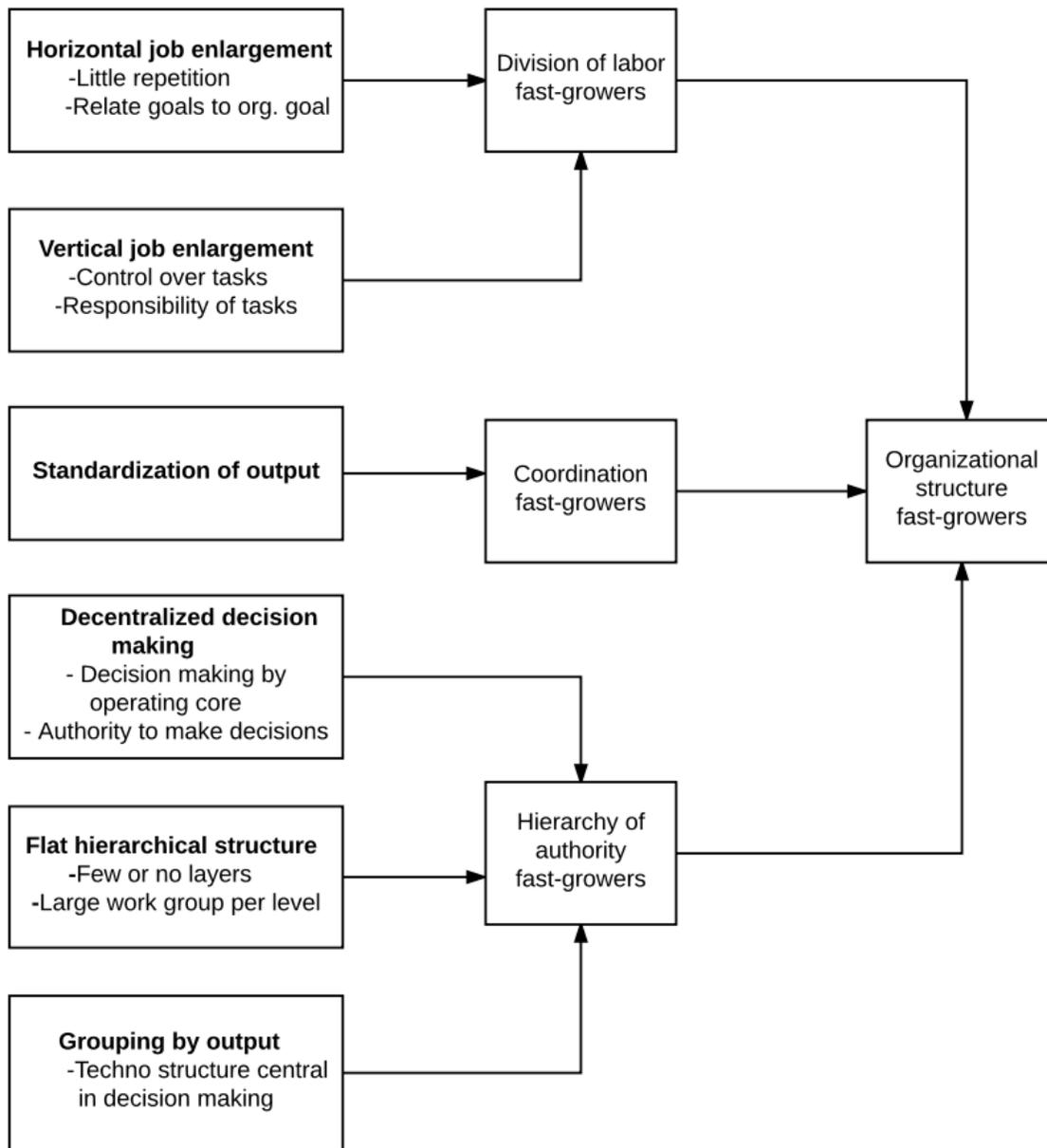


Figure 1. Conceptual model with assumptions on the organizational structure of fast-growers.

### **3. Methodology**

The methodology consists of nine parts. Firstly, the research type and the strategy of research is clarified. Secondly, sampling is discussed followed by a description of the different cases. Thereafter, the data collection techniques are specified and the data analysis techniques are discussed. Finally the validity, reliability, ethics, and operationalization of this research are described.

#### **3.1 Research type**

This research is a qualitative research. A qualitative research studies a phenomenon in depth and in the real-life context, where the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon (Golafshani, 2003, p. 598). The emphasis of qualitative research is not on the quantity of the data but on the quality of the data (Vennix, 2011).

This research conducts a multiple case study as research strategy. Before explaining what a multiple case study is and why it is chosen, it is important to understand what a case study is. Yin (1989) defines (as cited in Vennix, 2011) that “a case study is an empirical inquiry that: investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used” (p. 102). In this case, the organizational structure of fast-growers is empirically investigated and considered to be a contemporary phenomenon in a real-life context. Case studies can be separated in a single case study and a multiple case study (Baxter & Jacks, 2008). In a single case study the object is examined in one case only and in a multiple case study the object is studied in several cases (Campbell & Ahrens, 1998). This research investigates several cases of fast-growers and therefore uses a multiple case study. A multiple case study has a distinct advantage over a single case study. “The evidence from multiple cases is often considered more compelling, and the overall study is therefore regarded as being more robust” (Yin, 2009, p. 53). Thereby, a multiple case study allows exploring differences within and between cases and lead to general finding across cases (Baxter & Jacks, 2008). Therefore, a multiple case study is adopted in this research.

### **3.2 Sampling**

The sample technique used in this research is non-probability sampling. This means, that the selected cases are deliberate choices by the researcher (Symon & Cassell, 2012). Non-probability sampling is applicable in this research since it aims to garner new insights in a phenomenon. This phenomenon is the organizational structure of fast-growers. In this research, fast-growers in different sectors are studied to find a more general outcome concerning their organizational structure. These fast-growers execute their activity in different economic sectors. According to Symon and Cassell (2012) this is called a heterogeneous sampling technique. Such a sampling technique explores different or contrasting cases and aims to find any patterns among these different cases (Symon & Cassell, 2012). It is argued that a pattern found in a heterogeneous sample is more valuable to the scientific literature than in a homogeneous sample (Patton, 2002).

The sample size for non-probability sampling appears ambiguous and does not have a hard rule (Symon & Cassell, 2012). But, for the research design it is helpful to have an idea of the number of participants that should have been involved in this research (Symon & Cassell, 2012). For this, the guideline of Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) proved to be useful for this question. They argue that when the nature of the study involves interviews, the number of interviewees should range from five to twenty-five (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Research was conducted at four different fast-growers in which each two interviews are conducted. This means that a total amount of eight interviews are conducted, which meets the criteria of Kvale and Brinkmann (2009). So, in this research four organizations are studied that operate in different economic sectors. The goal was to find general aspects or patterns across the different cases to provide a more comprehensive insight in the organizational structure of fast-growers.

### **3.3 Cases**

Four different fast-growers are selected for this research. The selection is based on the type of organization: fast-growers. Since the definition of fast-growers in this research does not address size or age, this is not considered in selecting the fast-growers. In order to find as much fast-growers as possible, 25 were contacted; seven refused to cooperate; 14 failed to reply. Appendix 2, shows the contact letter that was used. The fast-growers varied in size from 15 to 500 employees and, interestingly, are no more than six years old. In other words, the fast-growers are

relative young companies with a variety in size in terms of employment. The fast-growers requested not to be named in the research since the data shared can contain sensitive information. Instead, a description is provided to illustrate the type of organization, the core activity of the organization, the growth of the organization, and general information. The fast-growers all meet the conditions of growth and technology described in section 2.1. The four selected fast-growers are: an e-learning company, a consultancy firm, a logistics company, and a travel agency.

### **3.3.1 The case company- e-learning company**

The first fast-grower is an e-learning company located in the center of Amsterdam. The company was founded in 2013; with the goal to make science accessible to the public. The idea was derived from the U.S. where many scientific lectures are accessible online. The motivation of the founders was based on the fact that, in The Netherlands, only a few thousand people had access to scientific lectures by being part of a university. Their idea was not only to make lectures accessible to a large crowd but also to create and produce the content (Van der Ploeg, 2012). Therefore, this fast-grower is specialized in creating, producing, and spreading scientific lectures presented by a professor in a given field from multiple universities in The Netherlands. The organization is involved in the thinking of, producing, and spreading the content on Youtube.com, NPO 2, in KLM flights, and different apps. This way, since the series started, the lectures have had over 11 million views. This means that a lecture, which is normally produced at a university and viewed by a couple of hundred students, can now reach a bigger and more diverse crowd. This fast-grower works with a relatively small core of full-time people and works with numerous freelancers. Moreover, the company is now going abroad to Belgium and just started employing people in Belgium. The company has grown from two people working there at the beginning in 2013 to 15 people working for the organization right now. The company is a non-profit organization that relies on sponsoring to create their turnover. Due to the increasing amount of viewers the company gained more sponsor earnings and increased her revenue by more than 160% this year and more than 20% the past two years with a base revenue over \$100.000. Access to this fast-grower was gained via my personal network, as the CEO of this company is one of my former colleagues. This way, I was able to have two interviews in the organization and to get access to different documents.

### **3.3.2 The case company- logistics company**

The second case is a logistics company located in Eindhoven. This fast-grower was founded in 2012 by three people. Their motivation was to ease the process of preparing and shipping of goods from small web shops. This fast-grower built an online software platform which connects web shops to carriers. Moreover, it automates the generation of track & trace labels. The software can be integrated in various CRM systems and enables organizations to send and ship their parcels more efficiently. Founded in 2012, this logistics organization was 14<sup>th</sup> on the list of the 30 fastest growing tech companies in Europe. This list shows that it is the Dutch second most fast growing company with a revenue growth of 1616% in 2015 (Nijhof, 2016) and more than 120% over the two previous years with a revenue base over \$100.000. Moreover, the organizations' employment grew from three founders at the start to more than 30 people in 2016. Access was gained by sending the contact letter to the COO of the company. He set up a meeting to have two interviews within the organization and provided access to different documents.

### **3.3.3 The case company- consultancy firm**

The third fast-grower is a consultancy firm located in Utrecht, which was founded in 2011 by three consultants. After writing a book together, they came up with the idea to start a consultancy firm by themselves. Their motivation is based on the fact that 83% of high educated students have the ambition to be an entrepreneur yet only 1% actually becomes an entrepreneur. This fast-grower uses entrepreneurial talents to come up with fresh and out of the box ideas for an organization. Moreover, people working in the organization undergo a training program of 3,5 years to be trained as an entrepreneur. This means that the people are trained during their employment and use this training and their creativity to consult other organizations. This fast-grower uses online tools as gamification and serious gaming to consult other organizations. Moreover, they use new technologies as virtual reality and augmented reality to design and implement changes in other organizations. The organization has grown in just over five years to an organization with more than 50 people working and maintained a revenue growth of more than 20% over the last three years (Frankenmolen, 2015). The company is currently expanding to a new location in Eindhoven and has just opened its doors in Vancouver. Access to this consultancy firm was gained by contacting a project manager through my personal network.

### **3.3.4 The case company- travel agency**

The fourth fast-grower is a travel agency located in the center of Amsterdam. The travel agency offers online packaged trips using an online searching tool and an online shop. This fast-grower developed a tool that matches the interest of a customer, based on the customer's searching history and previous purchases, to a packaged trip. The company was founded in 2010 and started with two founders and four employees. Within six years, this company grew to more than 500 employees. The revenue grew, over the past three years, by more than 20% with a revenue base over \$100.000. Access was gained by sending an email to the HR department. They set up two interviews and provided access to several documents.

### **3.4 Data collecting techniques**

As mentioned earlier, this research has a qualitative nature and uses a multiple case study strategy. The data is gathered by conducting interviews and collecting documents. Interviewing is a data collecting technique that gathers information from a small number of respondents to explore their ideas on processes, situations or programs in the organization (Symon & Cassell, 2012). Interviews are used to gain a detailed insight in a phenomenon studied. This research aims to provide a detailed insight in the organizational structure and therefore uses interviews as a data collection technique. However, Symon and Cassell (2012) argue that interviewing is a complex social activity that calls for reflection, which is preferably combined with another data collecting technique. Interviews can for example provide a biased idea of the studied phenomenon since the interviewees might provide social desirable answers to the questions (Symon & Cassell, 2012).

Using documents as a data source has the advantage of generating information about the organizational structure, which is not colored by those who are being interviewed. In this research, information is obtained from documents reflecting the structure of the organization such as the organigram, vacancies and internal documents. These documents can be labeled objective and therefore add value to the more subjective interviews (Pennings, 1973). However, it must be stated that the objectiveness of the documents does not imply that the data is more reliable or valid. Documents provided by an organization can be altered or selectively provided to the researcher. Moreover, a document can be outdated or can contain errors. Therefore, the documents should be used in combination with another data collection technique, which in this

case are the interviews (Symon & Cassell, 2012). The documents in this research had to be requested and provided by the fast-growers. Therefore, I had little control over the amount of documents provided and the content of the documents. Eventually, this led to a total of 16 documents provided by the fast-growers. These documents consist of four organigrams, ten job openings, two job descriptions, and one internal document.

The first type of document, the organigrams, was of particular importance for the current research. The organigram of the organization can determine the levels, the hierarchy, and provides a formal overview of the organizational structure (Mintzberg, 1989). As this research focuses on the organizational structure, the organigram provided valuable insights. The other documents, job openings, job descriptions and an internal document provided formal and explicit descriptions of particular jobs in the organization. These formal descriptions are used to enrich the understanding of task variety, repetition, responsibilities and control. Since the interviews already provided valuable insight in these aspects, the documents enriched this understanding.

### **3.4.1 The interviews**

The main source of information for this multiple case study was the interviews. This section elaborates on the process of selecting the interviewees and will shortly address the process of formulating the interview topics and questions. The group of interviewees consisted of people working at the fast-growers.

In the four cases it was relevant to speak to a director or a manager in the organization. Since these persons have a good overview of the organization it was assumed they have a good idea of the organizational structure (Symon & Cassell, 2012). Thereby, it was valuable to speak to employees who worked at the organization for a longer period of time since they are aware of the growth of the organization and the development of the organizational structure. Through consultation with all the fast-growers the employees were selected. For an anonymous overview of the interviewees, table 1 is provided.

Table 1

*Overview of interviewees*

<b>Company</b>	<b>Position in company</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Duration of interview</b>
<b>E-learning company</b>	CEO	23-6-2016	58:21
	Editor	30-6-2016	54:41
<b>Logistics company</b>	COO	13-7-2016	25:18
	CS & sales employee	13-7-2016	44:58
<b>Consultancy firm</b>	Project manager	9-8-2016	1:09:14
	Member internal team	12-8-2016	45:30
<b>Travel agency</b>	HR generalist	26-9-2016	51:11
	HR intern	26-9-2016	39:27

In Appendix 3 a brief description is provided of the employees and manager who were interviewed given their function in the organization. Note that the names of these employees are not mentioned to secure the privacy of these people.

To find the interviewees two steps had to be taken. The initial step was to find fast-growers meeting all the criteria set in the definition in this research. This led to a list of 25 companies of which four companies were willing to participate. Given these companies the second step was to get in touch with the interviewees. These were found using LinkedIn or my personal network. The candidates were approached by sending an email. Finally, it was important to acquire participants that were willing to share open and honestly their story (Creswell, 2007).

Because the context and the interaction with the participant was important, the interview adopted a semi-structured form. This means that here is a possibility for the researcher and the respondent to intervene during the interview, elaborate on a specific topic or a discussion can arise (Turner, 2010; Bryman, 2012). A general questionnaire was formulated with different topics and around 30 questions. Since the interviews were semi-structured, the questions were sometimes not asked literally or the topics were not discussed in a fixed sequence. The

questionnaire can be found in Appendix 4. The conceptual model and the operationalization served as a basis for the questionnaire. During the creation of the questionnaire the focus was on creating clear, open-ended, and neutral questions that covered the literature (Bryman, 2012). The questionnaire roughly consisted, as with the definition of organization structure, of three main parts. The first part addressed the division of labor in the organization, the second part the coordination, and the last part the hierarchy of authority. At the start, some general questions were asked, this to get an idea of organizational growth and to get the interview going. The interviews were, with permission of the interviewees, recorded using a recording device.

### **3.5 Data analyzing technique**

Besides the organigrams, all the documents and interviews were analyzed through ATLAS.ti, which is a software specialized in analyzing qualitative data. The transcripts were uploaded into this software, which allowed to easily assign codes to relevant quotes of the interviewees. ATLAS.ti supported the task of analysis and made quality control possible by ensuring that the analyzing process was documented and can be reproduced in detail (Flick, von Kardoff, & Steinke, 2004). Besides this, ATLAS.ti is easy to use, consisted of all basic methodological functions, and was free accessible for students of the Radboud University. After the data was collected, the interviews were transcribed by using Express Scribe software which reduced the speed of the audio record. The transcribed interviews can be found in Appendix 7. After transcribing the interviews, the data was coded in ATLAS.ti to determine the connection between the empirical data and the theory (Symon & Cassell, 2012). The actual analysis consisted of three steps. First of all the full transcripts were read in order to get an idea of the line of reasoning during the interview. Second, the interviews were coded based on the concepts described in the conceptual model. Third, the coded transcripts were reviewed and codes were added or deleted during the review. This, to ensure that the initial codes assigned were sufficient and correct (Flick, von Kardoff, & Steinke, 2004). The goal of coding was to investigate characteristics, patterns or combinations of the organizational structure at fast-growers (Vennix, 2011).

### 3.6 Validity

External validity describes the extent to which the results from a research can be generalized (Campbell & Ahrens, 1998). The external validity with respect to a case-study can be a central concern. However, in a case study the researcher relies on analytical generalization instead of statistical generalization. This means that the research strives to generalize the results to a broader theory (Yin, 2009). Since this research studies multiple fast-growers, it can identify patterns in the data. This means, when findings in one case also occur in other cases a pattern can be identified. Yin (2009) argues when findings are replicated in other cases this provides more generalizable results for a broader theory. Therefore, patterns in the data of this research can potentially be generalized to the theory of fast-growers and organizational structure. So, by studying multiple cases the external validity of this research was theoretically enhanced (Yin, 2009).

In this multiple case study, one of the goals was to find a general explanation that fits the individual cases (Yin, 2009). The objective was to create an overall explanation of findings from multiple cases. Explanation building is a special form of pattern matching, which compares an empirically based pattern with a predicted one. This enhances the internal validity of the research (Yin, 2009). The internal validity is concerned with the measurement instrument used and if it measures what the research wants to measure (Vennix, 2011). In the conceptual model, several predicted patterns were described which were, in the conclusions, compared to the empirically based patterns. If some patterns coincide, which is the case in this research, the internal validity is strengthened (Yin, 2009).

The construct validity is concerned with identifying the operational measures for the phenomenon being studied (Yin, 2009). In this research, comprehensive definitions were provided of the key concepts. These definitions were based on multiple sources in the existing literature. Moreover, the conceptual model provided the operational measures that study these concepts. The operational measures were fully based on the theory in order to enhance the validity (Yin, 2009).

### **3.7 Reliability**

Reliability refers to the consistency of the results. In order to ensure the reliability of the research, multiple sources and techniques were used to collect the data (Yin, 2009). The data was collected from two persons at each fast-grower. Moreover, multiple documents were collected to gain an unbiased idea of the organizational structure. When analyzing the data in this research, the information obtained from both interviews and documents were used. This will decrease the chances for random errors, which enhanced the reliability of the research (Vennix, 2011). Moreover, in every organization two interviews with two different persons were conducted. Since two persons were addressed, the data was not based on ideas of a single individual. This way a more comprehensive idea of the organizational structure was obtained and the reliability of the study was enhanced (Vennix, 2011).

### **3.8 Ethics**

Since this qualitative research focused on exploring and describing fast-growers in their natural environment, ethics was an important aspect to consider (Orb, Eisenhauer & Wynaden, 2001). This research took ethics into account in several ways. First of all, the participants in this research had the right to voluntarily accept or refuse to participate in this research. This means that it was the participants themselves who decided whether they wanted to participate or not. Moreover, the participants were provided with all the necessary information about the study in order to make this decision. The role of the researcher, the aim and purpose of the research was clearly communicated to the participants (Orb et al., 2001). Third, this research used interviews and documents to analyze the organizational structure. During interviews confidential and sensitive information was provided by the participants. This information was treated as such and was only used for the research itself. Finally, the participants were fully anonymous in this study. This means that no names were mentioned in this thesis and the reports provided to the organizations (Orb et al., 2001).

### **3.9 Operationalization**

This qualitative research adopts a deductive research approach. This means that research was done based upon a theoretical framework (Vennix, 2011). To ‘measure’ the theoretical concepts provided in the theoretical framework it was necessary to operationalize these concepts. Since a deductive approach was adopted, a research structure was provided with dimensions, variables, indicators, and items (Vennix, 2011). The items in the operationalization were used as a basis for the questions in the interviews. The operationalization structure with the items can be found in Appendix 1.

#### **3.9.1 Division of labor.**

As argued in the theoretical framework, one dimension of the organizational structure is the division of labor. The operational definition of division of labor is the following: the division of work into distinct jobs relative to the people working in a fast-grower. The variables that can be distinguished concerning this dimension are: horizontal specialization or job enlargement and vertical specialization or job enlargement. Whether the division of labor is characterized by horizontal specialization or job enlargement can be indicated by different aspects. First of all, the variety of tasks per job is relevant. When a job has many tasks with a high variety related to it, this suggests horizontal job enlargement. Second, the repetition of tasks is relevant to describe the structure of an organization. The repetition of tasks is an indicator of horizontal job specialization (Mintzberg, 1979). Repetition means that the task itself as well as the content of the task is the same. The more repetition the more horizontally specialized. Finally, the extent to which the goal of a single job is broad or narrow with respect to a final product or the organizational goal is an indicator (Mintzberg, 1989). When people have a narrowed perspective it is difficult for these persons to relate their work to the work of others and to the overall organization goal. This is an indication of a horizontal specialized structure.

The variable vertical specialization or job enlargement can be indicated by the control and responsibilities for the job people execute. When people in the organization have control over their job, the organizational structure is characterized by vertical job enlargement. Control means that a person has control over the decisions involved with their own job. Responsibility refers to the extent a person is made responsible for his/her job.

### **3.9.2 Coordination.**

The second dimension that characterizes an organizational structure is coordination. The coordination consists according to Mintzberg (1979, 1989) of five basic coordination mechanisms. These five mechanisms form the variables for coordination. Formalization and standardization are relevant indicators for the five coordination mechanisms. Formalization refers to the formalization of behavior in the organization concerning work processes. This involves job description, rules, regulations, and operating instructions. When behavior is formalized it is described what people should do and how people should do this (Mintzberg, 1979). A formalized work process indicates coordination by standardization of the work process. In this case the techno structure is an important part of the organizational structure. Moreover, when the behavior is not formalized an organization can still coordinate by standardization of output and skills (Mintzberg, 1989). When organizations coordinate by output there is a pre-determined goal which should be accomplished. The work process is irrelevant but the achievement of the goals is important.

If organizations coordinate by standardization of skills, they select people with similar skills and use these to coordinate the work. Moreover, organizations provide similar training to the people in the organization so that everybody has equal knowledge and skills (Mintzberg, 1989). Mutual adjustment is another coordination mechanism. This mechanism is used when coordination appears in an informal manner. Moreover, it can be indicated by ad hoc or unplanned coordination of work. This can be the case when people work in project teams or when there is little hierarchy in the organization. Finally, when only a single person is responsible for all the work done in the organization, the work is coordinated by direct supervision. This means that there is a direct connection between the strategic apex and the operating core. This type of coordination would not involve middle line managers between the supervisor and the operating core (Mintzberg, 1979).

### **3.9.3 Hierarchy of authority**

The third dimension is the hierarchy of authority. Hierarchy of authority can be separated in centralized or decentralized decision making, a flat or a tall organizational structure, and grouping. Decision making involves the degree to which the people in the organization

participate in decisions involving the tasks associated with their own position (Mintzberg, 1979).

First of all, centralized or decentralized decision making is indicated by the place of the decision making power in the organization. When the decision making power is located at the strategic apex of the organization, decision making tends to be centralized (Mintzberg, 1989). But, when decision making power is dispersed to more people and down the formal chain of line authority this indicates decentralized decision making. This means that decisions can be made by multiple people in the organization and can be concentrated at the operating core. Second, centralization or decentralization of decision making power is determined by the authority to make decisions in the organization. When people are fully authorized, they are the highest authority to make decisions concerning their own job, which suggests decentralized decision making. Moreover, whether the decisions in the organizations are monitored is an indicator of centralized or decentralized decision making. When people are monitored or have to ask permission to make a decision, the decision making power seems to be centralized.

The variable flat or tall organizational structure is indicated by the levels in the organizational structure and the size of the work groups. When there are many levels (more than three) with small work groups at each level, there is a tall organizational structure (Mintzberg, 1989). A tall organizational structure is generally related to a more bureaucratic organization and a flat organization structure is more related to an innovative organization or entrepreneurial organization. A flat organizational structure has few levels in the structure and large work groups at each level. Finally, grouping is addressed as indicator of the hierarchy of authority. As described in the theoretical framework, six bases are discussed for grouping. These six bases are grouping by: knowledge and skills, work process and function, time, output, client, or by space. These bases are used to provide an explanation of the grouping at the fast-growers.

Appendix 1 shows an overview of the basic concepts of the operationalization. The remaining of this research will discuss the research findings along with their conclusions.

## **4. Research findings**

The findings cover the analysis of the data provided by the fast-growers in terms of interviews and documents. This section starts with the justification of the analysis. After this, every dimension is separated in the variables and indicators and statements are made given these indicators.

### **4.1 Justification analysis**

The analysis of the data was based on the operationalization described in the methodology and Appendix 1. This means that the indicators provided in the operationalization were the codes used in the analysis. When coding, the quotations relevant to a certain indicator were selected and assigned to a given code. The same was done for the documents. Relevant phrases in the documents were selected and coded. The organigrams provided by the organization are not analyzed using ATLAS.ti, these organigrams can be found in Appendix 8. During the analysis the focus was on the quotation or phrase linked to a given code. This means that the groundedness of the codes was not a central element in analyzing the interviews and documents (Symon & Cassell, 2012). Even though it was attempted to assign codes to a quotation as consistently as possible, this was still subject to my own analytic rationale. When writing the analysis, the codes with assigned quotation were exported from ATLAS.ti.

The interviews provided most of the data and were leading in writing the analysis. The documents were used to complete the data analysis (Yin, 2009). This means that the statements in the analysis are based on the data retrieved from the interviews and the different documents provided by the organization. In the analysis, the names of the persons and fast-growers were left out. This to secure the privacy of the respondents and to keep the fast-growers anonymous. In the analysis, the organizations are referred to as: e-learning company (see section 3.4.1), logistics company (see section 3.4.2), consultancy firm (see section 3.4.3), and travel agency (see section 3.4.4). Moreover, the respondents are indicated by the job they perform at the organization (see table 1).

The data analysis start with the first dimension of organizational structure: division of labor. This dimension is analyzed given its variables and indicators, which is also applied to the other dimensions. An complete overview of the findings is provided in Appendix 5.

## **4.2 Division of labor**

The division of labor is the opening dimension of the organizational structure. As mentioned in the operationalization, the division of labor can be separated in job specialization or job enlargement on both a horizontal and a vertical dimension. Considering the data, job enlargement was found on the horizontal dimension as well as the vertical dimension.

### **4.2.1 Horizontal job specialization or job enlargement**

The variable horizontal job specialization or job enlargement was indicated by the variety of tasks, repetition of tasks and the broadness of goals. The fast-growers show a high variety of tasks, little repetition concerning the tasks, and broad goals, which suggests job enlargement on the horizontal dimension.

#### ***Variety of tasks***

As mentioned, the data indicate that there is a high variety of tasks at all four fast-growers. When analyzing the data, several factors arose.

First of all, a high variety of tasks is shown by jobs having multiple and broad tasks attached to it. The interviews and job descriptions illustrate that the jobs at the fast growers consist of many different tasks. In general, jobs have around five to 15 different tasks related to a single job. Moreover, the tasks attached to a job are considered to be broad. This is well illustrated by the CEO of the e-learning company: *“So my job only consists of five global tasks, but per task there is an enormous variety”*. At other fast-growers, the variety of tasks is stressed by the fact that people are involved in multiple departments. This illustrates broad tasks, since people deal with interests from different departments when executing a task.

Second of all, fast-growers use job rotation to stimulate working with a variety of tasks. This means that responsibilities for a specific task are, for example, weekly assigned to a different person. This is illustrated by the HR intern at the travel agency: *“I know they try to put as much variety in a week as possible. See one week you are responsible for the complaints and the other week you do something else or you are responsible for another project”*. This rotation is deliberately done at the fast-growers to keep jobs interesting and variously.

Even though jobs generally have different and broad tasks attached to it, the variety of tasks is different per job or project one is working on. The interviews show that jobs in, for example, the financial department have less variety than the jobs in the marketing department (logistics company). Moreover, the data indicate that the variety can also depend on the project somebody is working on, which is illustrated by the project manager of the consultancy firm: “*So it also depends on the project. At some projects people work for months on only one task*”. Therefore, it is stated that some projects are accompanied with a lower level of variety than other projects.

So, the different tasks, the broad tasks attached to a single job, and the stimulation of variety by job rotation makes that fast-growers have a high variety of tasks.

### ***Repetition of tasks***

Repetition of tasks indicates the amount of repetition people have concerning their job. As stated earlier, repetition means that the task itself as well as the content of the task is the same. Derived from the data, there is little repetition of tasks at the fast-growers, which suggests horizontal job enlargement. Considering this, several aspects arose concerning the repetition.

First, the interviewees state that, due to the variety of tasks given a job, there is little repetition. People indicate that every day is a different day since they have many different tasks. The project manager of the consultancy firm stresses: “*It has never occurred that I executed exactly the same tasks for two consecutive days*”. Tasks are, for example, executed in a different sequence and involve little repetition in the organization. In other words, since people are involved in many different activities and these activities are generally broad, the repetition of tasks is low. Second, for a significant part of the time, people perform new projects, new implementations, innovation, or change tasks. This renewal involves different activities in which previous activities are not repeated. The interviewees indicate that between 30 and 60 percent of the time, new activities are performed. Given this renewal, repetition of tasks is small. However, the tasks in the fast-growers do not only consist of renewal, and also involve routines. But, these routines do not necessarily imply repetition. The HR generalist of the travel agency illustrates this by saying: “*Maybe 40% is fixed and 60% varies, but fixed does not mean repetition. The content is mostly different*”. In other words, the task in itself or the mental process might be similar but the content of the task is often different. This means that even though there are similarities in tasks, there is little repetition given the content. Moreover, five interviewees stated that the

renewal in the organization is, among others, stimulated by the authority to make decisions and the little formalization of process. The editor of the e-learning company stresses: *“I am thereby authorized and free to renew some tasks or readjust some activities”*.

All in all, the repetition of tasks is low since a significant part of the job consists of renewal. Additionally, even though the majority of the work still consists of similar tasks, it is stated that in many cases the content of the tasks is different. In other words, the tasks or the activities are comparable but the content is different. Considering this, the repetition of tasks in the fast-growers is small.

### ***Broadness of goal***

The data suggest that people in the organization generally have a broad goal given their job. This is illustrated by the fact that people are able to relate their job-specific goals to the organizational goal. This is illustrated by the CS & Sales employee of the logistics company: *“Since I have an overview of the overall goal of the organization, I am able to relate my own targets to the organizational goals”*. In other words, people can relate the objective of their own job to the overarching objective of the organization. Take, for example, the travel agency where the overall goal is to enhance customer service. People perform their tasks with this overarching goal in mind and relate their own goals to this overall objective. This can, for instance, mean that a marketing employee uses social media not with the purpose to expand brand awareness, but instead to provide better information to the customer. In this case job-specific goals are related to the overall objective and decisions are made with overall the objective in mind. As a result, job-specific goals tend to be broad when they can be related to the overall goal of the organization, which is the case at the fast-growers.

### **4.2.2 Vertical specialization or job enlargement**

As described earlier, the dimension vertical specialization or job enlargement is indicated by: control over job and the responsibility over a job. The data indicate, that people have a lot of control and responsibility over their job.

### *Control over job*

The data indicate that the people working at the fast-growers have, in general, a lot of control over their job. This means that the majority of people at the fast-growers does not simply execute a specific task but also have control over decisions involved and the goals and standards guiding these decisions. This suggests vertically enlarged jobs. Accordingly, several aspects comply with the control over the job.

People working at the fast-growers have, to a certain extent, the power to set the goals concerning their tasks or activities they execute. This means that people can decide which goals to set and how these goals must be achieved. People do not only provide input for the goal to set, but also make the decisions. At the travel agency, the overarching organizational goals are determined by the strategic apex and delegated down to the operating core. People at this fast-grower can pick a specific part to focus on and can choose when to achieve which goal. In this case, a particular department gets an overall goal from the strategic apex. People working in this specific department can pick which part of the overall goal they want to focus on. They can adopt this goal in their tasks. The HR intern at the travel agency illustrates this by saying:

*We discuss the goals provided by the top managers in our department. Our team lead discusses his ideas and we can provide input. Then we simply pick what part of the overall goal you want to do and fit your current tasks the best.*

This is also found at the consultancy firm. Where there is an overall annual goal, set by the strategic apex, that everybody should be 60% of the time declarable. However people can choose to be, for instance, only 40% declarable in one month and 80% declarable in the other. This means that people can control the goals given their tasks or can control the goals to achieve within a given period of time.

Thereby, it is argued that once a goal is set, people are still able to change the goal. Given a previously set goal, people are able to influence a manager to alter the goal or are able to change the goal themselves. It is stated that a goal can be changed when the goal becomes irrelevant, unreachable or too easy to reach. In this case people are in control of the goals given their job and can influence a manager or can adjust the goal themselves.

So, people have control over their job since they are able to determine which goal they

want to pursue. Moreover, people are able to change goals once they are set by influencing the manager or by changing the goal themselves.

### ***Responsibility over job***

Given the data, people have responsibility over the job they execute. Furthermore, people even feel personally responsible for their job. This responsibility is manifested in several aspects.

First, fast-growers deliberately make people responsible for a job or tasks. This is illustrated by the HR generalist at the travel agency: *“Yes, this is [responsibility] also expected from you. People are made responsible and therefore feel responsible for their tasks”*. This means that the responsibility for a job does not rest with a manager in the organization but with the people who are actually executing the job. In fact, responsibility is stimulated by actively making people accountable for a specific job or task. At the e-learning company people are, for example, fully responsible for the performance of one’s department, which can be seen as one’s own little enterprise. Besides, when somebody is not able to finish the job it is up to this person to take responsibility and communicate this with the team leader. This is stressed by the CEO of the e-learning company: *“Imagine something goes completely wrong, it is still the responsibility of the editor, and she is responsible to communicate this with me, which is also expected from her”*. This means that it is allowed to make a mistake, not communicating it and not taking responsibility for it is unacceptable. This emphasize on responsibility, can also be found in the job descriptions where the focus is on self-working quality and responsibility over different tasks. It is stated that full responsibility is provided over a job but, taking responsibility is also expected from the employees.

Second, it is argued that high responsibility is manifested in the fact that people are fully responsible for their own projects. This makes people dedicated to a project and they feel personally responsible for the success and outcome of the process. The consultancy firm is an example where people are fully responsible for a project. The project managers are accountable for the acquisitions, planning, executing and delivering of the project to the customer. This is illustrated by the following quote of the project manager at the consultancy firm: *“I have the feeling if I stop working, nothing will happen. It is up to you as project manager to take care that a project is finished at the end of the planned period”*.

Third, it is argued that people feel personally responsible for their job. This is, according

to the respondents, embedded in different factors: being dedicated, feeling responsible for the growth, being determined to finish the job, willing to work overtime, being available at all times, and taking responsibility for failure. The respondents indicate that these factors are present in the organization and illustrate the personal responsibility. The CS & Sales employee of the logistics company states: *“Yes I know for sure people feel personal responsible for their tasks. People are very determined to make this a success and are willing to work hard, work overtime and are always available when necessary”*. When talking about responsibility, the respondents use these factors to illustrate how people feel personally responsible at the fast-growers.

All in all, responsibility is manifested in full responsibility over task, full responsibility for own projects and the fact that people feel personally responsible.

### **4.3 Coordination**

Coordination describes the communication and the alignment of work in the organization. Mintzberg (1979) described five coordination mechanisms, which form the variables for the dimension coordination. The data suggest that three coordination mechanisms are used by the fast-growers, namely: mutual adjustment, standardization of output, and standardization of skills. Moreover, the data suggest no use of the coordination mechanism direct supervision. Thereby, a pattern could not be discovered given the standardization of process.

#### **4.3.1 Mutual adjustment**

The coordination mechanism mutual adjustment is used by the fast-growers to coordinate a big part of the work. Central in this concept is the use of informal communication between the members in the organization. This is shown at the fast-growers, where informal communication is the center of coordination given the majority of the work. Mutual adjustment is illustrated by informal communication in two ways.

First, the fast-growers indicate that informal communication is used when meeting face-to-face. Face-to-face in this case means that people physically meet to coordinate the work. The CS & Sales employee of the logistics company says: *“[...] than I simply walk to marketing and say: “hey guys, could you send out this message?”” So you coordinate the work with them”*. In addition, the fast-growers indicate that working physically close to each other also enhances face-

to-face contact and helps informal communication. People often walk to a specific person to coordinate the work informally and this is supported by the short distance between the employees. The project manager of the consultancy firm stresses: “*because we all work together in one office, everybody is easy to reach and when somebody is reached the communication is informal*”. Second, communication is also informal when communication tools like phone calls, Slack, Skype, or WhatsApp are used to coordinate the work. The HR intern at the travel agency says: “*Other communication is used like Slack, but this is also very informal chatting*”. This means that besides face-to-face communication work is coordinated by using other communication forms where it is not necessary to physically meet.

Mutual adjustment is, next to informal communication, also illustrated by the fact that coordination paths are unplanned and ad hoc. The fast-growers illustrate that there is still much ad hoc adjustment and coordination with no standard or clear plan for every task. The interviews show that the fast-growers do not have a well-defined communication structure or a standardized process. Therefore, mutual adjustment is required to coordinate the work. The COO of the logistics company states:

*We discuss a lot of work informally. This because we have limited documented or communication standards, which can make it sometimes hard for new employees. We almost never have formal meetings, we just go to somebody’s desks if you want to discuss or execute a task.*

Even though some fast-growers are aiming to change this, still much coordination is unplanned and relies on mutual adjustment.

So, mutual adjustment is illustrated by the extensive use of informal communication (face-to-face and other communications tools), but can also be found in the fact that coordination is done in an ad hoc an unplanned manner.

#### **4.3.2 Standardization of output**

As stated, the fast-growers also use standardization of output to coordinate the work. Generally, this form of standardization is used in a very broad sense by the fast-growers, which is illustrated by three aspects.

First, general or organizational wide targets are used to coordinate the work in the

organization. These are, for example, annual (consultancy firm, e-learning company) or monthly targets (travel agency) which set a standard and coordinate the work. Emphasis is put on achieving the targets, not on the way they are achieved. However, these targets are applicable to the entire organization or department and do not set a standard for a specific job. For example, at the consultancy firm all project managers (there are over 30 of them) must achieve the same specified results, namely: being declarable for 60% of the time over an entire year. This is not specified per job but is applicable to the majority of the organizations. So, the goal is a broad goal that is applicable to more than 30 members in the organization and is used to coordinate the work. Moreover, it is not relevant how this goal is reached but reaching the goal itself is important.

Second, some work is coordinated by using rules of thumbs as a standard for the output. These rules are not very specific and are seen as general knowledge among the fast-growers. This is illustrated by the CEO of the e-learning company: “*We say, these are some general rules of thumb that you have to follow. Take for example typing errors, this is not accepted in the organization*”. Another example is the fact that the quality of the output should always be high (consultancy firm). These standards are more or less general notions, which should be considered when performing a task. Even though they are used to coordinate the output in the organization, these notions do not provide a highly specific standard for the output. But, since it provides a standard and these standards are used to coordinate the output, it can be seen as a way of coordinating by output. Third, work is coordinated by specifying the output in an implicit manner. This means that some standards of output are common in the organization but cannot be found on paper (consultancy firm, e-learning company). These implicit standards can be achieved when people work together for a long period of time. This is illustrated by the CEO of the e-learning company: “*the longer you work together, the more [the work] is standardized or formalized [but] without making it explicit but just by getting to know each other*”. As a result, less communication is required since people have an implicit standard for the output to expect from one another. This final notion is closely linked to the standardization of skills but in this case illustrates standardization of output. So, the fast-growers use standards for the output in a general sense to coordinate work. These standards for output can be found in terms of goals for the entire organizations, in some rules of thumb, and implicit standards. Moreover, the use of standardization of output as coordination mechanism enables the fast-growers to communicate

less with each other since people know what to expect from each other. Therefore, it is stated that fast-growers use standardization of output as a coordination mechanism.

### **4.3.3 Standardization of skills**

Fast-growers also use standardization of skills as a coordination mechanism. Central in the standardization of skills is the term predetermined skills. This involves a predetermined set of skills or requirements which somebody has to meet and which are used to coordinate the work. Different aspects arose given this standardization of skills.

First, the fast-growers indicate a set of predetermined skills in terms of characteristics for persons working in the organization. This means that there is some overlap present in the organizations in terms of characteristics. This is illustrated by the member of the internal team at the consultancy firm:

*There is a big overlap in the types of people. This has to do with entrepreneurship or in any case being entrepreneurial or having ambition to be one. This shows a certain amount of decisiveness, certain creativity, independency, taking responsibility, having a certain motivation, and having a lot of energy.*

Accordingly, the fast-growers provide a certain pattern of skills that are predetermined at all the fast-growers. These skills are: being entrepreneurial, willing to take responsibility, can work autonomously, able to handle change, and being creative. These skills are predetermined and used to select a specific type of person. Considering the latter, these predetermined skills are used to coordinate the work among each other. This means that people know what to expect from each other. It illustrates that these skills lower the need for communication and form a standard set of skills to coordinate the work. The editor of the e-learning company states: “*Yes I think we have the same drive. We coordinate quite some work because we have the same drive*”. This illustrates that, based on a given set of skills, the work is coordinated. Since the fast-growers envy these skills, the skills are predetermined to select people.

The second notion is concerned with training and education at the fast-growers. One of the fast-growers has a very clear training program for everybody in the organization. This means that everybody enjoys the same training for a specific period of time. At the end of the training it is assumed that everybody has a standardized set of skills and they use this to coordinate the

work. However, considering training and education, a pattern could not be found. Even though one fast-grower has a very advanced training program for everybody in the organization, the other fast-growers have no training or a different training program for each job. Therefore, concerning training and education there is no pattern found.

So, the fast-growers indicate a form of standardization of skills. There are some predetermined skills in terms of characteristics that are used to select people but more importantly, to coordinate the work. Given the training in the organization there is not a clear pattern, and therefore the fast-growers have a moderated form of standardization of skills.

#### **4.3.4 Direct supervision**

From the data provided, a pattern shows that direct supervision is not used as a coordination mechanism. This is illustrated by several factors.

First, it is indicated that the complexity of technology used by the fast-growers is impossible to be overseen by a single person. The knowledge given these technologies is decentralized and exists among many different people in the organization. This makes it unable to use direct supervision as a coordination mechanism. Second, the growth rate of the fast-growers makes it unable for a single person to oversee all the different processes and people present in the organization. This is illustrated by the COO of the logistics company:

*I really does not make any sense to try and do everything yourself. Because you are less skilled in many things or we did not have the time to look into it. So you have to make sure that everywhere you are lacking, someone smarter is appointed and this way you can build the organization.*

All the fast-growers employ many new people. It is argued that due to this growth of employment, it is impossible to be overseen by a single individual.

Finally, fast-growers can work with autonomous teams. As a result, direct supervision is not necessary since the teams are self-steering and coordination does not need to be performed by a single individual. These teams make their own decisions and coordinate their work within their team. This way a single person is not necessary to coordinate the work for all the different teams and therefore direct supervision is not used.

## **4.4 Hierarchy of authority**

The dimension hierarchy of authority is separated in three variables: centralized or decentralized decision making, a flat or a tall organizational structure, and grouping. In general the fast-growers show decentralized decision making and a flat organizational structure. Considering grouping a clear pattern could not be established. These statements are further specified in the following sections.

### **4.4.1 Centralized or decentralized**

Centralized or decentralized decision making is indicated by the place of decision making in the organization and the authority to make decisions given their own job. The information derived from the data suggests decentralized decision making in the fast-growers.

#### ***Place of decision making***

Whether decisions are made by the operating core, middle manager, strategic apex, support staff or techno structure is described by the place of decision making. The data suggest that decision making power is dispersed down the formal chain of authority. In fact, the fast-growers indicated that decision making power rested largely with the operating core. Accordingly, decision making power was placed at the person that executed a particular job. The HR intern at the travel agency stresses: *“the day to day decisions given your own job rest at the bottom of the organization”*. Thereby, it is expected that people at the operating core have adequate knowledge and make decisions associated with their position. This is illustrated by the CEO of the e-learning company: *“Most of the time I do not even know what is possible to achieve, while they know this very well by themselves”*. This means that it is assumed that the people at the operating core have the right knowledge to make a decision.

Second, it is argued that fast-growers aim to have quick and efficient decision making. To achieve this, decision making is placed at the operating core. This way time is saved when the operating core makes the decisions. When decisions are made by the strategic apex, the operating core and middle managers have to provide input before a decision can be made. According to the fast-growers, this is very time consuming and makes the decision making process less efficient.

This is illustrated by the HR generalist at the travel agency: “*No you have to be able to optimally do your job and to make fast and efficient decisions. Therefore, decision making is with the people that are directly in touch with the customer and you can take direct action*”. The fast-growers indicate that the organization type and market they operate in, requires them to innovate and to respond quickly and efficiently. As a result, quick decision making is illustrated by decision making by the operating core. This in order to support quick responding, and efficient decision making.

Third, the consultancy firm describes that the departments are for 90% autonomous teams. Within these teams activities like acquisition, HR, and project management are determined and executed within the teams. Decisions are made by the project managers, which forms the operating core of the organization. The decisions are always discussed with the customer but are not made by a middle manager or the strategic apex in the organization. This means, that the use of autonomous teams illustrates decision making of the operating core.

So, decision making power largely rests with the operating core of the fast-growers. This means that decisions are made by the people who are executing a task. This is illustrated by the fact that people at the operating core have the right knowledge to make decisions and that decision making is done quickly. Finally, the use of autonomous teams implies decision making by the operating core.

### ***Authority to make decisions***

Given the authority of decision making, the interviews showed that the people in the fast-growers where clearly authorized to make decision. This is closely related to the control people have over their jobs which is described in section 5.3. However, section 5.3 is devoted to the control people have given their goals, whereas this section describes the authority to make decisions given their job. Several aspects are established given the authority to make decisions.

First, authority can be found in the responsibility one has over its job. As stated earlier, people in the organization have much responsibility over their job. As a result, people make decisions by themselves. This means that people do not only have the authority to make decisions but, are in fact expected to make decisions concerning their job. In other words, people are the highest authority in their own role or given their own job. At the travel agency it is, for example, described that a marketing employee is responsible for the web care in the organization. Due to

this responsibility the fast-grower expects this person to make decisions to provide the best solution for the customer. Similarly, decision making is expected by the CEO of the e-learning company since people are fully responsible for their job and their part of the organization. He describes that the responsibility provided to the people embeds the authority to make decisions and without this authority people cannot be held accountable for their job and decisions. So the responsibility, which is high at the fast-growers, can only work if people are authorized to make decisions.

Second, authority to make decisions is stressed in the willingness to accept failure. In other words, part of the authority to make decisions is illustrated by the openness towards mistakes. When people are authorized to make decisions, failure is part of this process. The fast-growers see this as an inevitable part of decentralized decision making and therefore accept failure. This is, for example, stressed by the HR generalist at the travel agency: *“Yes, you are certainly allowed to make choices and also to make decisions which can result in mistakes. It is not wrong to make mistakes only if you learn from and do not do it again”*. The same HR generalist also states: *“When somebody provides a cash back which was not allowed, then we simply hope it will not happen again. This because the speed of decision making is much more important to us than the possibility of a mistake”*. Furthermore, at the e-learning company there is even a certain willingness for failure. In this fast-grower, there are special rewards for the biggest failure that delivered the greatest insight. They argue that the learning curve is much steeper when people fail and failure is even rewarded in the organization. The following quote by the CEO of the company illustrates this:

*Yes they do that fully by themselves [decision making]. And if it goes wrong then it is one's own responsibility and a lesson for the next time. It is even faster to let them make a mistake and learn it this way than go over the whole process in advance.*

This quote illustrates that the authority to make decisions is also embedded in the acceptance to failure at the fast-growers.

The third aspect is the lack of monitoring decisions. This means, that the authorization of decisions making is embedded in the fact that fast growers hardly ever monitor any decision. In fact, at none of the fast-growers decisions are actively monitored. Even though, there is a system that keeps logs of decisions, these logs are only used for analyzing purposes, not to monitor the

decisions of people. At the consultancy firm it is stated that a log is kept for every project in the organization and is accessible to the entire organization. However, the logs are only reviewed or monitored when something rare or exceptional has happened. Furthermore, it is stated that people share their decisions most of the time by themselves with a team leader, project leader or head of department. This means that information is provided by the employees instead of monitored by team or project leaders. The member of the internal team at the consultancy firm illustrates this by saying: *“The team lead should know about the decisions made and these are discussed during the meetings every two weeks. In this meeting people provide the information on what they are working and what decisions they took”*.

So, decisions are not monitored and information about decisions is even provided by the people. Moreover, people have authority concerning their own job and have full authority to make decisions. It is stated that this authority is also necessary to cope with the responsibility in the organizations. Therefore, it is indicated that people are authorized to make decisions.

#### **4.4.2 Flat or tall organizational structure**

Given the organigrams, the fast-growers have a minimum of three levels and a maximum of four levels in the organizational structure (e-learning company; three levels, consultancy firm; three levels, logistics company; three levels, and travel agency; four levels). This indicates that the organizational structure of these fast-growers have a somewhat tall structure. The levels in the structure can be seen in the organigrams added in Appendix 8. As the organigrams suggest a more or less tall organizational structure, the interviews suggested a flat structure. All in all, considering the arguments of the interviewees the structure is interpreted to be flat. The argumentation for this interpretation is elaborated in the following section.

First, the interviewees state that the organigram presents a more hierarchal idea of the organization than is actually the case. For example, at the consultancy firm where every team has a team leader. But, in reality this team lead works on the same level as the other persons in the teams: *“There is some natural hierarchy yes, but you will not be overruled by anyone. It really feels like everybody works together on the same level on a project”*. The other fast-growers indicate the same. It is stated that the organigram makes the organizational structure look taller than reality.

Second, the interviewee indicate that the structure feels like a flat organizational structure.

This is illustrated by the fact that everybody, from founder to intern, is easily accessible and works in the same physical environment. They state that there are no standardized communication patterns established. As a result, the feeling of levels in the structure is low since people from every level can discuss, communicate and work together on the same tasks. For example, the founder of the travel agency who founded a company that employs over 500 people, simply works next to a marketing intern and can discuss the latest developments in the market. Considering this, a tall structure might be present in the formal organigram but is flat in real life due to the working environment.

Third, it is indicated that the fast-growers have a relatively large work group at the operating core of the structure. This is indicated in the interviews. People work alongside each other in different roles but on the same hierarchical level.

#### **4.4.3 Grouping**

Grouping is indicated by the grouping of people to departments, the presence of a support staff and the presence of a techno structure. Considering the data, there is no clear pattern in the grouping of the four different fast-growers.

First, the four fast-growers used a different basis for grouping the work. The logistics and e-learning company grouped the units by business function. The logistics company has, for example, a: marketing department, development department, support and service department, and a sales department. This is a typical form of grouping by work process and function. The travel agency is grouped given the client they serve. People are generally grouped given certain clients per countries which indicate a given market. So, there is a cell that serves the client in The Netherlands and Belgium, a cell that serves Germany, Austria and Switzerland and so on. This indicates grouping based on the client (Mintzberg, 1979). Finally, the consultancy firm groups people given an output the organization offers. There is a department that delivers games, a department that delivers mobile apps, a department that delivers customized marketing advice and so on. This indicates grouping given the different products the organization offers and the output they have.

Second, the data indicate that there is no clear pattern in the use of support staff. Only two fast-growers have a clear and separated support staff. At the travel agency and at the consultancy firm there is the presence of a support staff. In the travel agency there is a department that

facilitates the restaurant and there is a separated HR department with 10 members. Relative to the organization, this support staff is a small but important department in the organization. At the consultancy firm the support staff consists of an internal team that is responsible for HR, legal issues and facilitating a student community. The latter is used for recruitment. The other two fast-growers do not clearly indicate the presence of a support staff.

Finally, no clear pattern could be found in the use of a techno structure. Only one fast-grower clearly indicated the presence of a techno structure. This was the case at the travel agency where there was a department of business intelligence and data analysts. These analysts are removed from the operating work flow and design, plan, or change the work or the strategic choices made. The analysts have some power in the organization by virtue of their influence on the decisions of others. This department analyzes the website, the use of apps and the initiated marketing projects. Based on the data provided the organization alters or makes decisions. The other fast-growers have no clear techno structure present in the organization. Therefore a pattern could not be discovered.

## 5. Conclusions

The assumptions made in the conceptual model are based on the current literature on fast-growers. However, the structure of the conceptual model was predominantly based on the theory of Mintzberg (1979, 1989), which was formulated well before fast-growers became a phenomenon. Therefore, the theory refers mostly to the structure of the more traditional organizations. In this concluding chapter, the findings of the research among fast-growers are shown and emphasis is put on specific aspects of their organizational structure. A comparison of the theory with the results shows the similarities and differences between the theory, the assumptions and the actual findings. Besides, it gives insight in those aspects of the organizational structure of fast-growers that most likely provide them with their success. The conclusions are described according to the three dimensions of organizational structure provided by the theory. In addition, the fast-growers are discussed as organization type and recommendations to the more traditional organizations are provided. Subsequent to this, the theoretical and practical implications will be addressed. Moreover, limitations will be discussed as a reflection on the research process. Finally, suggestions for further research are provided.

### 5.1 Overall conclusion

This research performed a multiple case study focused on the organizational structure of fast-growers. This research was guided by the following research question: *what is the organizational structure of fast-growers in The Netherlands?* The current research showed that the organizational structure of fast-growers is characterized by a division of labor with job enlargement on the horizontal and the vertical dimension; coordination by mutual adjustment, standardization of output and standardization of skills; and a hierarchy of authority with decentralized decision making and a flat organizational structure. Since these findings are only partly in line with the assumptions and the theory, the dimensions of the organizational structure are elaborated in separate section.

### **5.1.1 Division of labor**

The findings characterized division of labor by job enlargement on the horizontal and the vertical dimension. In line with the findings, the assumption was made that the fast-growers will have enlargement on both dimensions. In the case of fast-growers, people have a relatively broad goal because they are able to oversee the organizational goal and recognize the contribution of their job to the overarching organizational goal. Moreover, the findings show little repetition of tasks. Thereby, in line with the assumptions, vertical job enlargement is illustrated by the control and responsibility people have over their tasks. However additional to the assumptions, the findings also indicate a high a variety of tasks at the fast-growers. This is not assumed in the conceptual model, but was found in the data.

The theory of Mintzberg (1979) describes that the division of labor can, for the more traditional organizations, be separated in specialization and enlargement on a horizontal and a vertical dimension. However, the structure of fast-growers is only characterized by job enlargement. This means that there is a difference between the theory on traditional organizations and the findings given the fast-growers. Thereby, the fast-growers show that little repetition is indicated by the renewal of tasks. When introducing repetition, Mintzberg (1979) does not address renewal as indicator for repetition of tasks. However given the data, renewal seems a relevant aspect to consider. Moreover, the findings illustrate the feeling of personal responsibility as a form of responsibility at fast-growers. In this case, personal responsibility contributes to vertical job enlargement. Even though this is not mentioned in the theory, it is considered as a relevant aspect to describe the responsibility at fast-growers.

### **5.1.2 Coordination**

Given the findings, fast-growers rely on three coordination mechanisms: mutual adjustment, standardization of output and standardization of skills. It was assumed in the conceptual model that fast-growers adopt standardization of output as a coordination mechanism. As the findings indicate, the fast-growers use standards for the output in a general sense to coordinate the work. These standards for output can be found in terms of goals for the entire organization, rules of thumb, and implicit standards.

However in addition to the assumptions, the findings also indicate the use of

standardization of skills and mutual adjustment as coordination mechanisms. This was not assumed in the conceptual model but was found in the data. Mutual adjustment was illustrated by the extensive use of informal communication and the ad hoc and unplanned nature of coordination. Second, the findings show that there are predetermined skills in terms of characteristics that are used to select people but more importantly, to coordinate the work.

Given the theory of Mintzberg (1979) and the outcomes on fast-growers, some discrepancy emerged. First, in both the theory and the findings standardization of output is described but, is interpreted in a different way. The theory of Mintzberg (1979) describes task-specific standards for the output. However, the fast-growers illustrate organization-wide output standards. In other words, the standards are not set for a specific task but are set as organization-wide specifications of result. Second, the theory of Mintzberg (1979) describes that mutual adjustment is illustrated when people communicate informal by working side by side in the organization. This suggests informal communication by physically working close to one another. The findings indicate, in line with the theory, informal communication by face-to-face contact. However, the outcomes also illustrate informal communication by using communication tools like phone calls, Slack, Skype, or WhatsApp. In this case, it is not necessary to work side by side or meet physically in order to communicate informal. This is not mentioned in the theory but was found at the fast-growers.

Finally, the findings show that fast-growers use a moderate form of standardization of skills to coordinate the work. According to the theory of Mintzberg (1979), this mechanism is used when there is a standardized set of skills that coordinates the work. Where Mintzberg (1979) describes standard skills, the fast-growers use coordination by means of skills in terms of characteristics. Despite of the difference, both the theory and the fast-growers use this mechanism in the same way: “it controls and coordinates the work” (Mintzberg, 1979, p. 6). So, in addition to the more traditional theory, the fast-growers use standardization of skills embedded in certain characteristics.

### **5.1.3 Hierarchy of authority**

The findings illustrate decentralized decision making, a flat organizational structure, and no pattern concerning grouping. The assumption on decentralized decision making is in line with the findings. This because the findings also illustrate decision making at the operating core and show

that people are authorized to make decisions. However, the other two assumptions in the conceptual model are only partly in line with the research findings. Concerning the assumption on a flat organizational structure, the findings indicate a more balanced organizational structure. It is presented that the organizational structure of fast-growers is interpreted to be flat, but with a side note. This because, the organigrams indicate a somewhat tall organizational structure. Even though this is considered, the structure of fast-grower is interpreted as flat. Thereby, the findings illustrate that a pattern could not be discovered given grouping, which differs from the initial assumptions. The fact that a pattern could not be discovered can, however, be related to the limited number of cases studied.

Even though the theory of Mintzberg (1979) provides a good fit, a difference is established between the theory and the findings. In addition to the theory of Mintzberg (1979) the authority to make decisions is, at the fast-growers, illustrated by the acceptance of failure. This is not discussed in the theory by Mintzberg (1979) but is discovered in the research. Fast-growers see failure as an inevitable part of decentralized decision making and therefore are willing to accept this. Mintzberg (1979) tend to focus on the control to illustrate the authority to make decisions and does not address failure. However, given the data provided, failure is indeed a relevant aspect when characterizing the structure of fast-growers.

## **5.2 Organization types**

Given the findings, the structure of fast-growers shows similarities with the innovative organization. However, the innovative organization type (Mintzberg, 1989) does not provide a perfect fit with fast-growers. First of all, the innovative organization type is mainly focused on carrying out innovation projects. Given the fast-growers, innovation is only considered as part of the organization and does not have the main focus. Moreover, the innovative organization cannot rely on any form of standardization for coordination since it would limit innovation. The fast-growers show, on the other hand, that they do rely on standardization of output and standardization of skills. Thereby, the innovative organization is not focused on efficiency (Mintzberg, 1989). This is certainly not the case at fast-growers, where efficiency is required and the use of new technologies enables the fast-growers to be more efficient than the more traditional organizations.

The innovative organization shows similarities with fast-growers but does not provide a

perfect fit. This is considered logical since the theory on organization types was established well before fast-growers became a phenomenon. However, considering the current and potential impact of fast-growers, it is relevant to add fast-growers as an organization type. In this case, the findings in this research provide input for the fundamental characteristics of the structure of this organization type.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

This part is to provide insight in those aspects of the organizational structure of fast-growers that most likely provide them with their success. These aspects can be interpreted as recommendations to the more traditional organizations. These recommendations are built on the positive aspects that arise given the structural characteristics of fast-growers. First of all, fast-growers enjoy fast decision making due to few management layers and decentralization of decision making. Because decision making power rests with the operating core, decisions do not have to be discussed with managers which makes the decision making process more efficient. Moreover, people at the operating core can solve problems directly on behalf of its clients and do not need to discuss with other levels before making a decision. This helps fast-growers to make fast decisions and to be flexible towards their environment. Second, the acceptance of failure and the control over tasks enables fast-growers to experiment and innovate. People are not afraid to make mistakes and experiment on ideas, which in some cases provides valuable insight to the fast-growers. This way, people tend to be more innovative and dare to take some risk. Moreover when experiments fail, fast-growers argue this creates a steep learning curve. Therefore, at one fast-grower, failure is even rewarded. Third, the characteristics of the structure enables people to be creative in the organization. People are able to think out of the box and come up with new solutions to problems. This is stimulated by decentralization, absence of very specific standards and the control people have over their job. As a result, people at the fast-growers are working for a significant part of their time on renewal given their tasks.

### **5.4 Contributions**

Taken together, the findings contribute to the literature in several ways. First, it provides additional insights in the existing theory on organizational structure. Since the literature on

organizational structure was established well before fast-growers became a phenomenon, this research provides additional insights. This is related to the differences established between the theory, assumptions, and findings. Second, the findings add to the small body of research that is currently available on the organizational structure of fast-growers. This by characterizing the structure of fast-growers in terms of Mintzberg (1979) and by testing the assumptions from the conceptual model. It illustrates that the structural characteristics of fast-growers has not yet been extensively identified in the literature. Third, the definition of fast-growers in this research is developed by reviewing the literature and creating a synthesis between different studies. This adds to the literature on fast-growers since it provides a brief theoretical overview of the previous studies and describes a synthesized definition based on these studies.

### **5.5 Practical implications**

Next to the theoretical contributions of the current research, there are practical implications too. First, the current research provides organizations with additional knowledge on the organizational structure of fast-growers. The more traditional organization can compare themselves with the fast-growers in terms of the organizational structure, based on this research. As such, the more traditional organizations that aim to change their structure can use these insights to do so. Second, this research briefly addresses the aspects of the structure that most likely provide the fast-growers with their success, which can be considered as recommendations for the more traditional organizations. Traditional organization could adopt a flat organizational structure to achieve fast decision making, stimulate creativity, and renewal. Moreover, being open for mistakes would create a more innovative and risk taking environment. It is argued that in the current industrial revolution neither age, size, reputation, nor even current sales is an indication whether a company will be around tomorrow. This challenges more traditional organizations to be innovative and to keep up with the developments in order to survive in the future. It would, therefore, be valuable for these organizations to adopt several aspects of the structure of fast-growers. Third, this research addresses the potential impact of fast-growers in different economic sectors. By illustrating this, the more traditional organization should be aware of the potential impact of fast-growers in their own market. Therefore, this research could be used to prepare and mobilize the traditional organization to potentially deal with fast-growers in their market.

## **5.6 Limitations**

The limitations of this research are divided in methodological limitations and limitations of the researcher. The methodological limitations can be found in the fact that a multiple case study was conducted. Even though a multiple case study is argued to be more generalizable than a single case study, generalizability is still limited (Yin, 2009). This research aimed to minimize these limitations by using a thick description of the context, process and setting of the research. Thereby, the multiple case study strategy faces difficulties to be replicated. This because of the unstructured approach and the lack of transparency regarding the research process and data analysis. However, also in this manner, it is aimed to provide a comprehensive overview of this process in order to minimize this limitation. Third, there is a problem in sample size given the number of interviews. Even though the sample size for non-probability sampling appears ambiguous and does not have a hard rule (Symon & Cassell, 2012), the sample size was small with a total of eight interviews at four fast-growers. As a result, it was not possible to identify a pattern concerning some aspects of the organizational structure.

Besides the methodological limitations, there are also limitations of myself as a researcher. First, I was the only interviewer and the only coder in the process of data collection and analysis. Therefore, the process of collection and analysis could be biased by my own mental framework and assumptions. Moreover, I was relatively inexperienced in conducting qualitative research and interviews. Therefore, during the interviews I gained more experience and tried to improve my skills in conducting semi-structured interviews. Because this was a process, it could still have affected some of the interviews and therefore also the research findings.

## **5.7 Further research**

The current research provides a useful starting point for further research. First, more research could be conducted on the influence of the structure on the growth of fast-growers. Even though this research illustrate some aspects that most likely provide fast-growers with their success, it is unclear what the effect is. Further research could examine this influence and should determine which aspect leads to what success. This would be a valuable addition to this research since it could be used to prioritize the aspects of the organizational structure. I would suggest that the outcome of such a research will illustrate that a flat and decentralized structure would create a

more flexible organization that is able to innovate and make fast-decisions. Second, further research could focus on conducting quantitative research given the characteristics of the organizational structure of fast-growers. The findings presented in this research could be used to develop hypotheses concerning the organizational structure. Further research could statistically verify these hypotheses by collecting data from a large sample of fast-growers. Such a research could validate the findings in this research and provide a more robust overview of the structure of these fast-growers. Moreover, it could establish relations between specific characteristics of the fast-growers' structure. This could be valuable for scholars and managers to have a comprehensive understanding of the structure of fast-growers. Managers could use this knowledge when adjusting the organizational structure in their organization. Third, further research could focus on new aspects of the organizational structure that arose given the fast-growers. Aspects such as picking your own targets, acceptance of failure, and standardizing by characteristics can be considered as such. Since the current research illustrated some discrepancies between current theory and the findings, further research could focus on reviewing and updating the existing theory on organizational structure. Fourth, further research could focus on measuring the impact of fast-growers in different sectors. The current research states, based on the literature, that fast-growers have the potential to disrupt or influence any economic sector. Further research could focus on the magnitude of the impact and how it influences a given sector. This would be valuable to organizations to gain knowledge on the role of fast-growers in their sector and whether or not to take these fast-growers into account.

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## Appendix 1- Operationalization

Theoretical concept	Dimensions	Variables	Indicators	Items	
Organizational structure	Division of labor	Horizontal specialization or job enlargement	Variety of tasks	Does a single job has multiple tasks? Would you consider your job consisting of a wide variety of tasks? Would you consider the jobs of others consisting of a wide variety of tasks?	
			Repetition of tasks	How many times do you repeat a previous executed task? Is there a part of your job that consist of repetition?	
			Broadness of goal	Does in this company everybody has its own goals given a certain task? Is this goal a broad or a narrow goal in terms of the organizational goal? It is possible to relate your job to the job of others?	
		Vertical specialization or job enlargement	Control over job	Do people have the right to make decision concerning the goal of their tasks? Do people have the right to make decision concerning the quality of output of their tasks?	
			Responsibility over job	Do people have full responsibility for the tasks they execute? When you have responsibility do they also have control over the tasks?	
			Mutual adjustment	Informal communication	Is work coordinated by using informal communication? Is there face-to-face interaction when communicating informally?
Organizational structure	Coordination	Direct supervision	Only one person responsible	Is only one individual responsible for the work of others?	
			Standardization of work process	Behavior formalization	Is there more emphasis on the output or the process? Do people in the organization have a formal description of how they should execute a job? Is this formal job description used to regulate the people who are executing a job?
		Standardization of output	Specification of results	Is there a specified result per job in terms of targets? Is the output of work standardized in the organization?	
			Standardization of skills	Predetermined skill	Do people in the organization have the same skills? Are there similarities between people in the organization?
					Do people in the organization all enjoy the same training?

Theoretical concept	Dimension	Variables	Indicators	Items
		Centralized or decentralized	Place of decision making	Which part of the organization makes the decisions given particular tasks? Is the decision making power only present at managers in the organization? Is decision making power dispersed among a large number of individual in the organization?
			Authority to make decisions	Are people in the organization allowed to make decisions by themselves? To what extend are decisions monitored in the organization?
Organizational structure	Hierarchy of authority	Flat or tall structure	Levels in the structure Size of work group per level	How many levels are present in the organization? How many people work at every level in the structure? Does the structure feels like a flat or a tall organizational structure?
		Grouping	Grouping	Which departments are present in the organization? How are the departments structured in the organization? What tasks are assigned to a specific department?
			Presence of support staff	Is there a department which is outside the line of production that provides support? What is the influence of these persons on decisions making?
			Presence of techno structure	Is there a department of analysts present that operates outside the line of production? What is the influence of these persons on decisions making?

## Appendix 2- Contact letter

Dear..,

I found out about your company by an interesting article on the internet. I am currently working on my Master's thesis, which involves a project from the Radboud University. This project is focused on fast-growers in The Netherlands. For this project, I conduct qualitative research at multiple fast-growers focused on the organizational structure. It would be very interesting to add your organization to this project. For the research I conduct two short interviews and collect several documents, which can be fully anonymous if requested. Given these interviews and documents, I try to gain additional insights in the organizational structure of fast-growers. I provide the organization with a report or one pager, what consist of the following aspect:

- A description of the organizational structure.
- The organizational structure in comparison to the other participating fast-growers.
- An overview of the possible benefit for the organization concerning the organizational structure.

This project concerns my Master's and is therefore free of charge. I kindly request your company to have two interviews of an hour. Is it possible to elaborate on my project over a phone call?

Thank you in advance for your response.

Kind regards,

Joep Hendrick

E-mail: [joep.hendrick@student.ru.nl](mailto:joep.hendrick@student.ru.nl)

Tel.: +31 (0)6 173 755 80

### **Appendix 3- Description of respondents**

At the e-learning company the CEO and the editor were interviewed. The CEO works 1,5 years for the organization and is responsible for the overall strategy, the sponsor earnings, the HR, and the financial reporting. The editor works since May 2015 for the organization and is head-editor. She is responsible for a wide range of tasks from selecting the topics and selecting the professors, to meet the universities and buying footage to support the lectures.

At the logistics company, the COO and a CS & sales employee were interviewed. The COO is responsible for the operations in the organization and was one of the founders of the company. He has a comprehensive overview of the development of the organization and the organizational structure. CS & sales employee is responsible for the online service to the customers and provides support for the sales and marketing department at the organization. She works at the organization since September 2015.

At the consultancy firm a project manager and a member from the internal team were interviewed. The project manager works at the department 'born digital'. He started at the organization as a researcher and is now part of the team. He is responsible for the acquisition of the department and responsible for different projects. His departments focuses on new technologies as virtual reality and augmented reality. Since he started at the organization as a scientific researcher, he gained a comprehensive insight in the processes and the structure of the organization. The member of the internal team is an innovation and community manager and is not involved in any consulting activities. However, she is responsible for the HR and recruitment of the organization. She started working at the organization in November 2015. Since she is responsible for the HR and recruitment of people, she had sufficient knowledge about the different departments and the structure of the organization.

At the travel agency a HR generalist and a HR intern were interviewed. The HR generalist works at the organization for more than two years and is involved in many aspects of the HR department. She is now involved in the process of developing job descriptions, process descriptions and decision making structures. This is closely linked to the organizational structure and therefore she has sufficient knowledge of the organizational structure. The HR intern is responsible for the allocation and support of all the interns working in the organization (approximately 40). She works at the organization for a year and has started as a scientific

researcher. From her position in HR and her scientific research within the company, she gained knowledge from the organization and the organizational structure.

## Appendix 4- Interview guide

### *General*

1. Could you tell me something about the origin of the organization?
2. Could you elaborate on the growth of the organization in terms of revenue and employment?

### *Division of labor*

1. Could you tell me something about your job in the organization?
2. Which tasks are attached to your job?
3. Do people in the organization have variety concerning their tasks?
  - a. If so, how is this illustrated in the organization?
4. What part of your job consists of repetition?
  - a. Could you express this in percentages?
5. Do you execute tasks where the task itself as well as the content is the same?
6. Do people in the organization have a broad or narrow goal?
  - a. If people have a broad goal, how is this expressed in the organization?
7. Do people have full responsibility over the tasks they execute?
8. Do people have control over their goal given their job?
9. Do people feel personal responsible for their tasks?

### *Coordination*

1. Do people use informal communication to coordinate the work?
  - a. If so, how do they use informal communication?
  - b. If so, what part of the work is coordinated by informal communication?
2. Is there more emphasize on the process or on the output delivered?
3. Are there any standards in the organization?
  - a. If so, what standards?
4. Is there a formal description on how people should execute their work?
  - a. If so, is this formal description used to coordinate the work in the organization?
5. Is there a specific goal per job in terms of targets or KPI's?

6. Is the output in the organization standardized?
7. Do people have similarities in terms of skills in the organization?
  - a. If so, what similarities?
  - b. If so, are these similarities used to coordinate the work in the organization?
8. Do people enjoy the same training in the organization?
9. Is there a select group of people responsible for the work in the organization?

*Hierarchy of authority*

1. Are people authorized to make decisions concerning their own tasks?
  - a. If so, what decisions?
  - b. If so, is this applicable to everybody in the organization?
2. To what extend are decisions in the organization monitored?
  - a. If so, for what purpose?
3. Is decision making power placed at the top or at the bottom of the organization?
4. To what extend do people need to ask for permission when making decisions?
5. To what extend are managers able to overrule decisions made by the people?
6. How many levels are present in the organization?
7. How are the departments grouped in the organization?
8. Is there a presence of a support staff?
  - a. If so, what is their influence in the organization?
9. Is there a presence of a techno structure?
  - a. If so, what is their influence in the organization?
10. Does the organization feels like a hierarchical organization?
  - a. If so, how is this expressed?

This is the end of the interview. Thank you very much for participating and your answers. If you are interested in the research project, I can send you the findings.

For additional question, you can contact me on the following email address:

[joep.hendrick@student.ru.nl](mailto:joep.hendrick@student.ru.nl)

## Appendix 5 – Overview of results

This appendix provides an overview of the findings.



## Appendix 6 – Form of integrity

### Research Integrity Form - Master Thesis

To be submitted with the research proposal

Name: Joep Hendrick	Student number: S4162439
RU e-mail address: joep.hendrick@student.ru.nl	Master specialisation: OD&D

Thesis title: The common factors in the structure of fast-growers
Brief description of the study: A multiple case study on the organizational structure of fast-growers in The Netherlands

It is my responsibility to follow the university's code of academic integrity and any relevant academic or professional guidelines in the conduct of my study. This includes:

- providing original work or proper use of references;
- providing appropriate information to all involved in my study;
- requesting informed consent from participants;
- transparency in the way data is processed and represented;
- ensuring confidentiality in the storage and use of data;

If there is any significant change in the question, design or conduct over the course of the research, I will complete another Research Integrity Form.

Breaches of the code of conduct with respect to academic integrity (as described / referred to in the thesis handbook) should and will be forwarded to the examination board. Acting contrary to the code of conduct can result in declaring the thesis invalid

Student's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: 28-11-2016

To be signed by supervisor

I have instructed the student about ethical issues related to their specific study. I hereby declare that I will challenge him / her on ethical aspects through their investigation and to act on any violations that I may encounter.

Supervisor's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix 7 – Transcripts of interviews**

The following appendixes were all added to the e-mail that was sent to the supervisor and the second examiner:

**Appendix 7.1 CEO- E-learning Company**

**Appendix 7.2 Editor- E-learning Company**

**Appendix 7.3 Customer support/ Sales support- Logistics company**

**Appendix 7.4 COO- Logistics Company**

**Appendix 7.5 Project Manager- Consultancy firm**

**Appendix 7.6 Innovation & community manager- Consultancy firm**

**Appendix 7.7 HR generalist- Travel agency**

**Appendix 7.8 HR intern- Travel agency**

## **Appendix 8 – Organigrams of the fast-growers**

The following appendixes were all added to the e-mail that was sent to the supervisor and the second examiner:

**Appendix 8.1- Organigram E-learning company**

**Appendix 8.2- Organigram Consultancy firm**

**Appendix 8.3- Organigram Logistics company**

**Appendix 8.4- Organigram Travel Agency**