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# **WHAT ON EARTH ARE WE AIMING FOR?**

A qualitative study of goal setting in the Evangelical  
Lutheran Church of Finland

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# ABSTRACT

Ralf-Eerik Friman: What on Earth Are We Aiming For? A Qualitative Study of Goal Setting in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland

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This thesis examines goal-setting in Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF), a significant national institution facing heavy change pressure. The aim of the thesis is to shed light on goal-setting patterns, the nature of staff's personal goals, and staff's relationship with their goals.

To attain the aim, an instrumental case study is conducted in Harju ELCF parish in Tampere. The primary data, consisting of questionnaires, correspondence and an interview is analysed with thematic analysis methodology. The main theoretical framing used is goal-setting theory by Latham and Locke.

The findings demonstrate that there are different goal-setting processes on different levels. While many goal-setting processes are present, a notable gap in strategic medium- to long-term operational goal-setting is detected. The executive staff's role in parish's high-level goal-setting appears primary and the board's secondary.

Staff's personal work goals focus on basic job description and occupational well-being, with some emphasis on spiritual calling and personal growth. The staff are very committed to their goals, though goals are varyingly used as tools to guide operations. Teamwork is seen primarily as a strength in goal attainment. While the staff view the parishioners as central in goal-setting, the agency attributed to parishioners differs notably.

This study contributes to existing goal-setting research and adds a new context in which the premises of goal-setting theory are considered. For practitioners, the results provide insights for turning strategy into strategic goals and for clarifying the roles of decision-makers in goal-setting.

Keywords: goal-setting, strategic planning, goal alignment, Lutheran church, institutional change

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# TIIVISTELMÄ

Ralf-Eerik Friman: Mihin ihmeeseen tähtäämme? Kvalitatiivinen tutkimus tavoitteidenasettelusta Suomen evankelis-luterilaisessa kirkossa  
Pro gradu -tutkielma  
Tampereen yliopisto  
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Tämä tutkielma käsittelee tavoitteiden asettelua Suomen evankelis-luterilaisessa kirkossa. Suomen ev.-lut. kirkko on merkittävä kansallinen instituutio, johon kohdistuu suuria muospaineita. Tämän tutkielman tavoite on antaa tietoa tavoitteiden asettelun rakenteista, henkilökunnan henkilökohtaisista tavoitteista, ja henkilökunnan suhteesta tavoiteisiinsa.

Tutkielma toteutettiin suorittamalla instrumentaalinen tapaustutkimus Harjun seurakunnassa Tampereella. Pääasiallinen aineisto, joka koostuu kyselylomakkeista, sähköpostiviesteistä ja haastattelusta analysoitiin temaattisella analyysillä. Ensisijainen käytetty teoreettinen kehys on Locken ja Lathamien goal-setting theory.

Löydökseni osoittavat, että Harjun seurakunnassa on monta tavoitteidenasetteluprosessia eri tasoilla. Useista tavoitteidenasetteluprosesseista huolimatta strateginen keskipitkän- ja pitkän aikavälin toiminnallinen tavoitteidenasettelu on vähäistä. Johtavien työntekijöiden rooli koko seurakunnan tavoitteidenasettelussa näyttää ensisijaisena ja seurakuntaneuvoston rooli toissijaisena.

Henkilökunnan henkilökohtaiset tavoitteet keskittyvät perustoimenkuvaan ja työhyvinvointiin. Lisäksi jonkin verran painotusta hengelliseen kutsuun ja henkilökohtaiseen kasvuun oli havaittavissa. Henkilökunta on hyvin sitoutunut tavoiteisiinsa, vaikka tavoitteita käytetään vaihtelevasti työkaluina työn arjessa. Tiimityötä pidettiin vahvuutena tavoitteiden tavoittelussa. Vaikka työntekijät pitivät seurakuntalaisten roolia keskeisenä tavoitteidenasettelun kannalta, seurakuntalaisten hahmotetussa toimijuudessa oli suuria eroja.

Tämä tutkimus lisää tietoa tavoitteidenasettelusta ja tuo goal-setting theoryn harkittavaksi uuteen kontekstiin. Alan ammatinharjoittajille tutkimustulokset antavat näkökulmaa strategian muuntamiseksi strategisiksi tavoiteiksi ja roolien selkeyttämiseen tavoitteidenasetteluprosesseissa.

Asiasanat: tavoitteidenasettelu, strateginen suunnittelu, tavoitteiden samansuuntaisuus, ev. lut. kirkko, institutionaalinen muutos

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# 1 – Introduction

## 1.1 Research problem statement and research questions

### *Research problem statement*

Research and available statistics point towards a continuing decline in the membership of Nordic national churches such as the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF). As majority of ELCF's income comes through church tax from members, the notably declining resources challenge both the practical work of the church as well as its many nationally important functions such as maintaining a substantial part of Finland's historically significant building heritage, i.e., church buildings. Most local parishes have cut their costs by reducing buildings and staff yet hope to maintain the reach of their work with fewer resources. ELCF's "*Opening Doors*" strategy to 2026 points towards measures such as increasing the amount and role of parishioner volunteers, renewed approach of leadership, and cooperation with other actors to make this possible. Resource scarcity and demand for new work approaches challenge current leadership and staff alike and highlight the importance of strategic goal-setting. This study intends to shed light on the goal-setting practices of the staff in the ELCF.

### *Research questions*

1) How does the strategic work in terms of goal-setting proceed yearly, 2) what is the nature of staff's personal goals, and 3) what is their relationship with their personal and team goals?

## 1.2 The Research Context

### 1.2.1 *Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland*

As mentioned, this research takes place within the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. The ELCF is an important entity in Finland, given its still impressive membership rate (two thirds of Finns at the start of 2023) and its historical impact on Finnish society. On their website the ELCF describes their organization as follows: “The ELCF comprises nine dioceses, each led by a bishop. The Archdiocese of Turku is exceptional in that it has two bishops: the Archbishop, who leads the Church and the parishes in the deaneries of Turku and Naantali, and the bishop, who leads all the other parishes in the diocese. Each diocese is divided into parishes, of which there are currently 354. Parishes operate as independent units and can form parish unions in larger urban areas.” (ELCF, 2024a, 2024b) A ‘parishioner’ is a member of a local parish church.

Though the church and Finnish state separated in 1870, ELCF holds a status under public law and is still responsible for certain societal responsibilities in Finland such as keeping public records and maintaining the cemeteries. The peculiar position, history, and status of the church make it an interesting research context, not to mention its hybrid character that combines characteristics of public sector and religious organizations.

Despite its substantial legacy, ELCF is currently under multi-faceted stress given the strong process of change in modern society combined with the simultaneous reduction in church membership (Kirkon tulevaisuukomitea, 2016). For example, between 1975 and 1992 the number of ELCF’s staff almost doubled from 11 145 to 20 446. The number remained quite steady for two decades, having been 20 781 in 2012. (Yle, 2013) In the beginning of 2023 the number was about 15 800. (ELCF,

2023) The ELCF Committee for Future states that the tightened financial situation “has led to a decrease in the number of church employees... and this trend will continue for a long time to come”. (Kirkon tulevaisuuskomitea 2016, p. 180) They further note that “the tradition has been that paid professionals are responsible for the activities of the parish... the consequence of this has been that the parishes have become dependent, even excessively so, on their employees”. (Ibid.) The situation has several implications for the life of ELCF, but at least two are especially noteworthy for the purposes of this study. Firstly, since the ECLF is a religious community, the survival of the organization does not rely solely on having paid employees if a community remains. Many of the activities of a parish can be taken over by the parishioners themselves. One of the possible futures is that some local congregations may exist without a single paid staff member, having a volunteer/visiting priest conduct the matters that unordained parishioners cannot. The prerequisites of such a future do, however, include a conscious creation of culture that recruits and empowers the parishioners. Secondly, and inevitably, the situation will nevertheless force parishes to profoundly re-evaluate their activities and the role of their employees. As staff resources and budgets continue becoming scarcer, it is even more important to use them as effectively as possible from the standpoint of the organization’s strategic goals. If a parish is to retain or even increase the scope of its work, the role of an employee will most likely change towards being a coach and supporter of the volunteer parishioners in their work. This may require considerable changes in the thinking of the staff members, e.g., from “me doing most of the practical work” to “enabling volunteers to successfully do the practical work”.

### *1.2.2 Harju Parish*

More specifically this piece of research will take place in Harju parish in Tampere. By conducting an instrumental case study in a local parish this piece of research hopes to provide insight into the goal-setting practices of the staff of ELCF.

The Harju Parish became an independent parish in 1937, though it has functioned as part of a larger parish since 1639. Harju parish is in western Tampere, covering the city of Tampere from Pispala westwards. There are about 45 000 people living in the area of which about 31 000 are members of the Harju parish. Harju parish has three church buildings (Pispala, Tesoma, Lielähti) and some other premises in the area. In the end of October 2024 the parish employed 56 people.

Harju parish – and an increasing number of other parishes in ELCF – is a member of a parish union. Harju parish is a member of Tampere Evangelical Lutheran parish union (also referred to as Tampere parishes) which comprises five parishes. A parish union manages the finances of all its parish members and is served by joint councils and boards, while each parish in a union has its own board (ELCF, 2024c).

The supreme decision-making body in Tampere parishes is the joint church council. It makes decisions on central things like action plan and budget, processes the action report and confirms the financial statements. From its midst the joint church council selects the joint church board. The joint church board prepares the issues that joint church council decides on, supervises the execution of the decisions and leads the parish union's governance, finances, and property management.

## Tampere parish union decision-making and governing structure

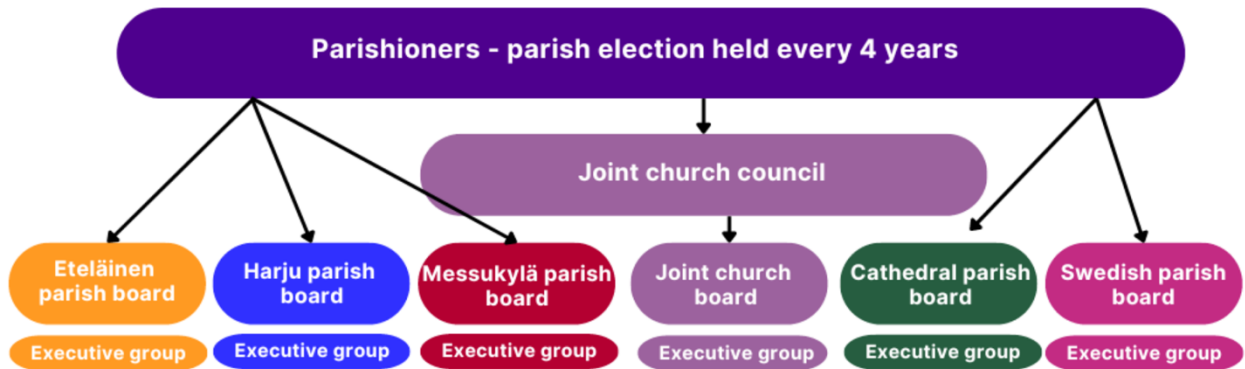


Figure 1. Tampere parish union structure. Made by the author.

A parish union typically has some joint operations or departments, for example human resources and record keeping. The joint operations and joint workers may occasionally operate in the geographical area of Harju parish; however, this study only focuses on the employees of Harju parish.

Harju parish was chosen as a desired research location for the following reasons: 1) the close physical proximity of the parish to the university of Tampere (where this thesis is produced) makes communication, data collection and the like easier. 2) Even though the number of parishioners in Harju is larger than ELCF average of about 10 000 per parish, the Harju parish is not exceedingly large within ELCF in terms of the number of parishioners and staff. This may provide data and results that are more generally comparable to other parishes. 3) I live in the geographical area of Harju parish and am also quite familiar with its operations due to personal volunteering and work history. While this may cause certain limitations, the insights and understanding that I have on the parish also assist me in understanding some of the specific challenges and opportunities that the parish has.

## Harju parish operational structure

The vicar leads the operations of Harju parish. The vicar is the foreperson of department leaders and the office staff. Vicar and department leaders (lead deacon etc.) together form the executive group for Harju parish. Department leaders are forepersons to the people in their team. Additionally, all staff members, except for the vicar, are members of the local church teams. These local church teams are led by the leader(s) of local church team and the work of such teams focuses on activities that take place at the physical church (Tesoma, Pispala, Lielähti) or in the surrounding area.

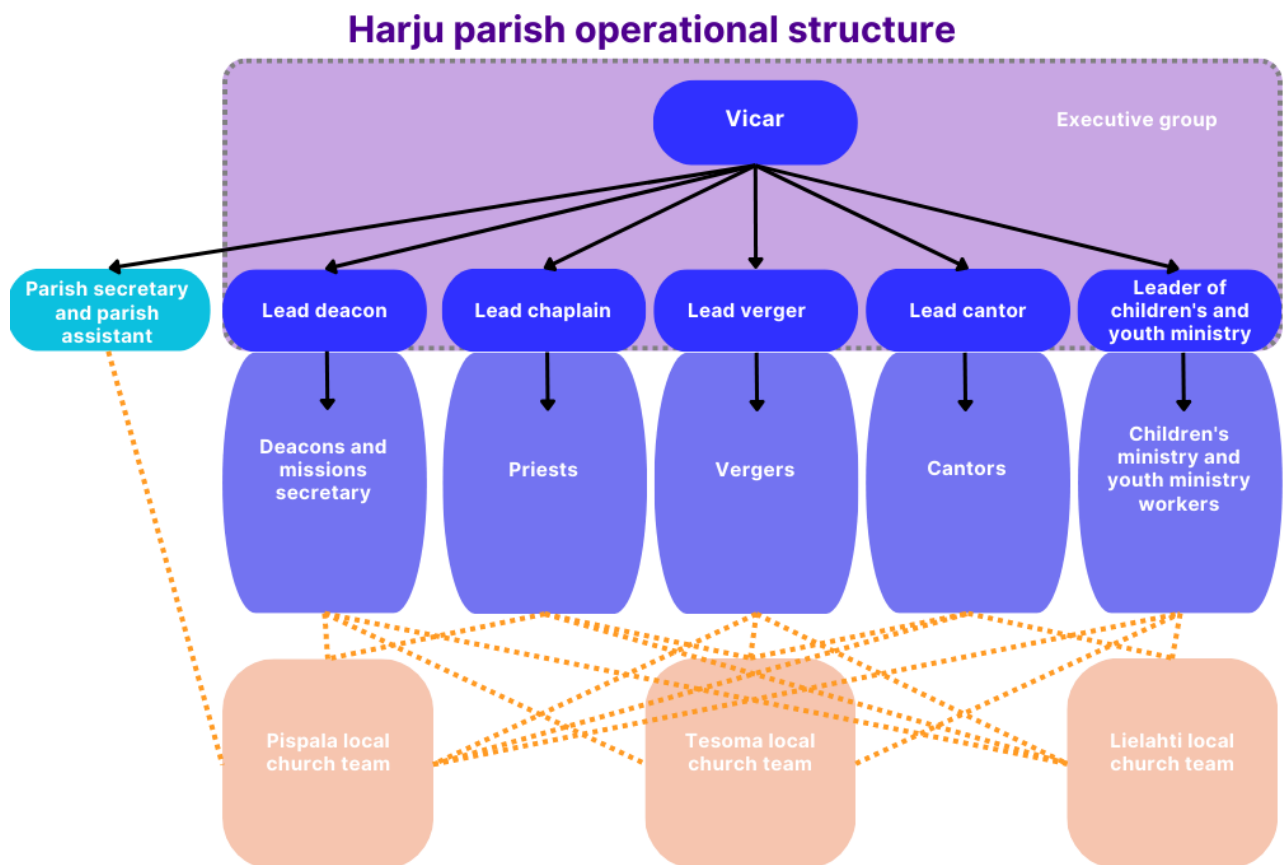


Figure 2. Harju parish operational structure. Made by the author.

The vicar is the main connection person between governance and the operations of the parish. As the vicar is both the chair of the parish board and the operational leader of the parish, a truly sizeable responsibility and opportunity to influence the

state of the parish lays in their hands.

### **1.3 The rationale and significance of the study**

#### *Why study governance of ELCF?*

The governance of ELCF has been a somewhat neglected area of research. Even though theology is taught in three universities in Finland and the research of the governance of religious communities falls under the branch of practical theology, such study has not been a major focus of the faculties. The study of governance and administration, on the other hand, utilizes its central theories and tools usually with national or local public organizations as its research context. Even though ELCF and its parishes operate as public corporations in Finland and from that standpoint could well be a research context within the field of governance, only few have conducted such studies. In addition, in the Finnish context leadership is often studied within the field of business management. Goal setting is a central leadership tool and a large body of research on goal setting exists within the field of business management. Therefore, my study is located at a meeting point of practical theology, administrative sciences, and business studies. I argue that this study could well be conducted within any of the mentioned fields. Regardless of the program within which a thesis on this subject matter is produced, it is bound to have at least some interdisciplinary features. But does the study of the governance of a religious organization differ from say the study of governance of a municipality? I argue that it does not: both have paid workers, leaders, networks, need to be governed, and so on. However, when the core mission of an organization is spiritual, it affects the organization deeply. Therefore, the leader of a parish (vicar) is not merely a CEO – he or she is a priest who acts as a spiritual leader, especially when leading worship, giving sacraments or

preaching. (Kopperi, 2019) The self-understanding of a Christian church is, for example, that it is transcendent, and that both the staff and parishioners in their own way represent God. On the other hand, spiritual activities such as preaching can be used as leadership tools; Arasalo's (2023) thesis revealed that Finnish Pentecostal pastors see preaching as something that advances the congregation's strategy in practice and can be used to promote change in community. It is anticipated that spirituality will be reflected in the data and findings of this study, too.

As mentioned earlier, the ELCF is under multi-faceted stress. The large challenges that the ELCF is facing have ramifications for the Finnish society at large. Firstly, the local parishes of ELCF provide several services that supplement the public services. Though the specific services vary slightly on the local level, the services often include after-school activities for primary school students, different kinds of meeting points for adults with small children, diaconal work assisting those who find it difficult to get the assistance they need from public services, food aid, and so on.

As the ELCF is the largest non-governmental, non-profit organization providing social services in Finland, the ongoing (and looming larger) scale-down of its services leaves many either out of the reach of these services or makes them reach out to the state's public services or to other actors. Given the ongoing deficit in financing the Finnish welfare system, the ageing population, and the need for structural changes, the public services are already under pressure and do benefit from the supplementary and at times compensatory services provided by other actors.

Secondly, almost three quarters of ELCF's ca. 800 churches are protection-marked by the Finnish Heritage Agency and are considered part of Finland's shared national heritage as architectural monuments. The Church Act contains regulations about the

protection of churches to make certain that church buildings are duly repaired and maintained. Even though the Finnish state grants some money to support the upkeep of such buildings, the grant only covers a few percent of the annual maintenance and reparation costs. As ELCF will be unable to maintain all the protected buildings, the future of such buildings remains uncertain as does the related national architectural heritage.

Many other ramifications also exist, for example some thousands of paid jobs disappearing. Therefore, the way in which ELCF is able to respond to challenges is interesting and has significance for the church organisation itself and also for the Finnish society. Analysing the workers' understanding of the future strategic goals becomes meaningful.

Strategic goals are “an organization’s measurable objectives that are indicative of its long-term vision” (Cote, 2020a). Characteristics of strategic goals include being 1) purpose-driven, meaning they align with organisation’s purpose and values, 2) long-term and forward-focused, i.e., have a forward-focused vision leading to challenging objectives that make a lasting impact, 3) actionable, so that the goals have clear, actionable steps to achieve them and 4), measurable, so that progress and success can be measured. (Ibid.) An ongoing strategic planning process can be used to “to prioritize efforts, effectively allocate resources, align shareholders and employees on the organization’s goals, and ensure those goals are backed by data and sound reasoning.” (Cote, 2020b)

### *Personal motivation*

My personal interest in this research topic arises from my work, study and research history. I have worked in a religious/church context for 15 years and volunteered for

an additional approximately 8 years. About half of this experience has been with the ELCF and I have been working as an ordained pastor within ELCF since 2016. As a practitioner I have seen first-hand some of the challenges facing ELCF as an institution, but I have also seen possibilities for new approaches. I have had opportunities to experiment and seek new approaches as a remedy to such challenges. Having completed a master's degree in theology and leadership studies I am also quite attuned to the theological thinking and organizational approaches on leadership within religious communities. While my history and interests motivate me to gain insight on the research topic, possible limitations and biases also arise due to the close connection to the research context.

## 2 - Theoretical framework

### 2.1 Reviewing previous studies relating to the subject

A sizable amount of research has been conducted on the ELCF, but less so on its organizational culture and practical leadership. Terhi Kaira (2019) used mainly approved strategy documents to analyse strategic thinking in the ELCF. According to her study the ELCF's strategic thinking is very goal orientated. The Union for Academically Educated Church Staff (AKI) conducts a member survey every four years. The survey maps well-being at work, supplemented with current relevant questions. The results are analysed and published by the Church Research Institute. The most recent publications (2018 & 2022) point out that most pastors and cantors possess a strong internal motivation towards work.

Several theses or dissertations relate to the topic in one way or another. Kesti (2010) looked at constructive change management inside congregation of ELCF. The core themes emerging from her phenomenographic study were spiritual leadership, vision, human knowledge and interaction ability, people, and relationship with God. Rotko's study (2020) focused on the balancing of spiritual leadership and governance in vicar's role. Her study pointed out that though church law and other documents frame the role of vicar as primarily spiritual leadership, the leadership training and practical duties of vicars are mostly related to governance and work as a supervisor. Friman (2015) concluded that a central reason for growth in growing Finnish church services has been leadership's purposefulness, leadership actions and goal orientation around growth.

Hauta-aho's thesis (2003) examined the applicability of goal-orientated leadership in Malmi parish. She concluded that a goal-orientated approach presents opportunities

for, e.g., focusing on the essential. However, she did not consider the benefit from goal-orientated leadership to be self-evident but rather dependent on a number of criteria. Westerholm (2005) studied the experiences of mid-level pastors who were appointed and responsible for the work of a local church within a parish. While they deemed their work rewarding, the study also portrayed the challenges with the matrix relationship between a local church team and a department, and the difficulties of delegating power and creating clear structures and goals enabling leadership on a localized level.

There has been little research internationally on goal-setting in church context. Pereyra (1980) studied renewal and improvement processes of two congregations. After a literature review and a time of self-assessment the congregations in question set goals to reform their inner life. The study focuses on the improvements that congregations would like to make but does not follow the whole process. Hartwig (2016) details a newly-formed church senior leadership team's process that aimed to facilitate the team's communication around the development of a strategic ministry plan. His study points out, amongst other things, that the role of the senior pastor in creating a sense of urgency and validity for senior leadership team's strategic planning is very important. If the leader is not deemed to "buy in" the planning, the team members find it difficult to take the process seriously.

## **2.2 A brief overview of literature on organizational goal setting**

Goal setting is a central leadership tool. A large body of literature exists on organizational goal setting, goal-based leadership, result-based leadership, and overall, on i. organizations, ii. goals (or targets or objectives or desired results), and iii. leadership/management.

Peter Drucker popularized the concept of management by objectives (MBO), which involves setting clear and specific objectives for individuals and teams within an organization. He believed that employees should have a clear understanding of their goals and how their work contributes to the overall objectives of the organization.

MBO emphasizes the importance of regular feedback and performance measurement to ensure alignment and accountability. (Drucker 1954, 1973).

While management by results (MBR) is not specifically associated with Peter Drucker, it aligns with his broader concept of "Management by Objectives" (MBO).

MBR is a management approach that focuses on achieving specific outcomes and results rather than solely on the activities or processes involved. MBR emphasizes setting clear and measurable goals, and then holding individuals and teams accountable for achieving those goals. Concepts such as performance management and results-based management (RBM) are also used alongside management by results (Kallio & Kallio 2014; Pellinen 2017).

Some have pursued a more comprehensive approach to goal setting. One of the best known such approaches is undoubtedly Balanced Scorecard by Kaplan and Norton (1992), which provided a scorecard that aimed at providing a holistic way to measure the performance of an organization. They suggested incorporating performance indicators across multiple dimensions, such as finances, customers, internal processes, and learning and growth.

Other influential examples of organizational goal setting approaches include OKR (Objectives and Key Results), SMART goals, BHAG, stretch goals, and WIG (as set out e.g., in Doerr, 2017; Doran, 1981; Collins & Porras, 1994; Collins, 2001; Locke, 1997; Covey, 1989).

## 2.3 Goal-setting theory

Edwin Locke and Gary Latham introduced their goal-setting theory in 1990. Goal-setting theory (later GST) is a theory of motivation that explains why some perform better on work-related tasks than others. It is anchored in industrial organizational psychology and was developed inductively from nearly 400 empirical studies. The two core findings that led to the development of GST were the following: 1) There is a linear relationship between performance and the degree of goal difficulty. This remains true until the participants reach the limit of their ability. 2) Specific and difficult goals lead to higher performance than no goals or vague, abstract goals such as “do your best”. (Locke & Latham, 1990)

### 2.3.1 Mechanisms of goal-setting theory

The theory argues that the mechanisms by which this happens are four-fold. Firstly, a high and specific goal focuses the attention and effort of an individual toward goal-relevant activities and away from those that the individual considers to be irrelevant. (Ibid.) In other words, such goal gives *direction*.

*Effort* is the second mechanism or mediator of the goal–performance relationship.

“Once an individual chooses a goal and chooses to act on it, effort and arousal vary with the demands of attaining it. In short, effort is mobilized and expended in proportion to the difficulty level of the goal” (Locke & Latham 2013, p. 6).

The third mechanism is time spent to attain a goal, in other words *persistence*. A high and specific goal leads people to work longer at a task than a goal that is vague or easy (Locke & Latham, 2013). However, should the goal be deemed unattainable, findings by Wrosch et al. (2003) and Hatzigeorgiadis (2006) suggest that performance may not increase over time and the risk of abandoning the goal may

increase.

Fourthly, when a task is complex, a “do your best” goal or a learning goal may work well until ability is gained (Locke and Latham, 2013). This is a *task strategy* for being able to reach the goal.

### 2.3.2 Moderators of goal-setting theory

There are a number of moderator variables in GST. One of them is *ability*, a moderator variable that influences the goal-performance relationship. Ability affects goal choice as people are unable to perform in accordance with a goal when they lack the skill and knowledge to obtain that level of performance. Furthermore, goal-setting has been shown to have a greater positive impact on the performance of people with high ability, in contrast to people with low ability. (Locke & Latham, 2013; Tammemagi et al., 2013)

Knowledge of results, i.e., *feedback* is another moderator of the goal–performance relationship. Goals regulate performance far better when feedback is present as opposed to absent (Locke & Latham, 2013). Feedback lets people decide if a different strategy or more effort is needed for goal attainment. Should performance feedback be withheld, goal setting is ineffective for increasing performance (Ibid.). The question is not whether the feedback itself is negative or positive; research suggests that negative feedback promotes persistence if interpreted with regard to lack of progress rather than lack of commitment (Fischback et al., 2009). On the other hand, positive feedback increases persistence if interpreted regarding goal commitment rather than as a sign that enough progress towards a goal has already been made (Fishback & Dhar, 2005).

The theory states, backed by empirical research, that goal setting is the mediating

variable that explains why feedback generates action (shown already in Locke, Cartledge, & Koeppel, 1968). If the feedback is ignored or does not result in goal setting, performance is not enhanced. (Locke & Latham, 2013).

A third variable moderating the goal-performance relationship is *commitment*. Klein et al. (2012) define commitment as a psychological bond that is volitional and speaks of dedication to, and responsibility for, a specific target. In the context of goal-setting, this definition can essentially be seen as pledging oneself to a goal. Locke and Latham (1990, p. 124) stated that “it is virtually axiomatic that a goal that a person is not really trying for is not really a goal and therefore cannot have much effect on subsequent action”. Uy et al. (2015) found that venture goal commitment moderates the progress variability and effort relationship. They reasoned that “entrepreneurs who are highly committed to their venture goals tend to be less discouraged by the irregularities in progress they experience while working on their startup ventures.” (Uy et al. 2015, p. 377).

What are the reasons for commitment? The factors fall into two categories. Firstly, goal attainment must be important and secondly, an individual needs confidence that the goal can indeed be attained. (Latham & Locke, 2013) Factors that have been discovered to influence an individual’s desire to attain a high and specific goal include instrumentality, peers, authority, incentives, internal rewards, and making the goal public. (Ibid.)

Expectancy of success and especially self-efficacy (an individual’s perception of how well they can carry out a given task) affects goal commitment. Though commitment declines with increasingly difficult goals (for example, Erez & Zidon, 1984), even impossible-to-attain goals motivate performance for some time (Locke & Latham, 2013). Self-efficacy can be seen as playing a major role here. High perceived self-

efficacy leads to a likelihood to embark on new business ventures (Markman & Baron, 2002; Chen et al., 1998).

Also, goal intensity, i.e., the amount of effort that is required to set a high, specific goal, influences commitment to it (Gollwitzer et al, 1990). Latham & Locke (2012, p. 8) reason that “this is likely due to the fact that such intense processing makes people more aware of how the goal might be attained, and thus leads to the formulation of well-thought-out plans that in turn increases self-efficacy for implementation and goal attainment.”

Finally, the *complexity of the task* affects the goal–performance relationship. Goal setting has a larger positive effect on tasks that are uncomplicated for people, tasks where the skills and knowledge to perform well are already possessed (Campbell, 1991). Also, it is clear goal attainment is hindered by situational constraints. Without the necessary resources goal-reaching is unlikely. (Latham & Locke, 2013)

### *2.3.3 High performance cycle*

GST may be visualized in a “high performance cycle” (Latham, Locke & Messina, 2002). Though GST is an open theory and a number of subsequent findings and additions have been made since 1990, the basic premises have continued to be applicable. Locke and Latham state that GST is not – and was not meant to be – a comprehensive theory of motivation, but they have made attempts to broaden it for example by creating the high performance cycle.

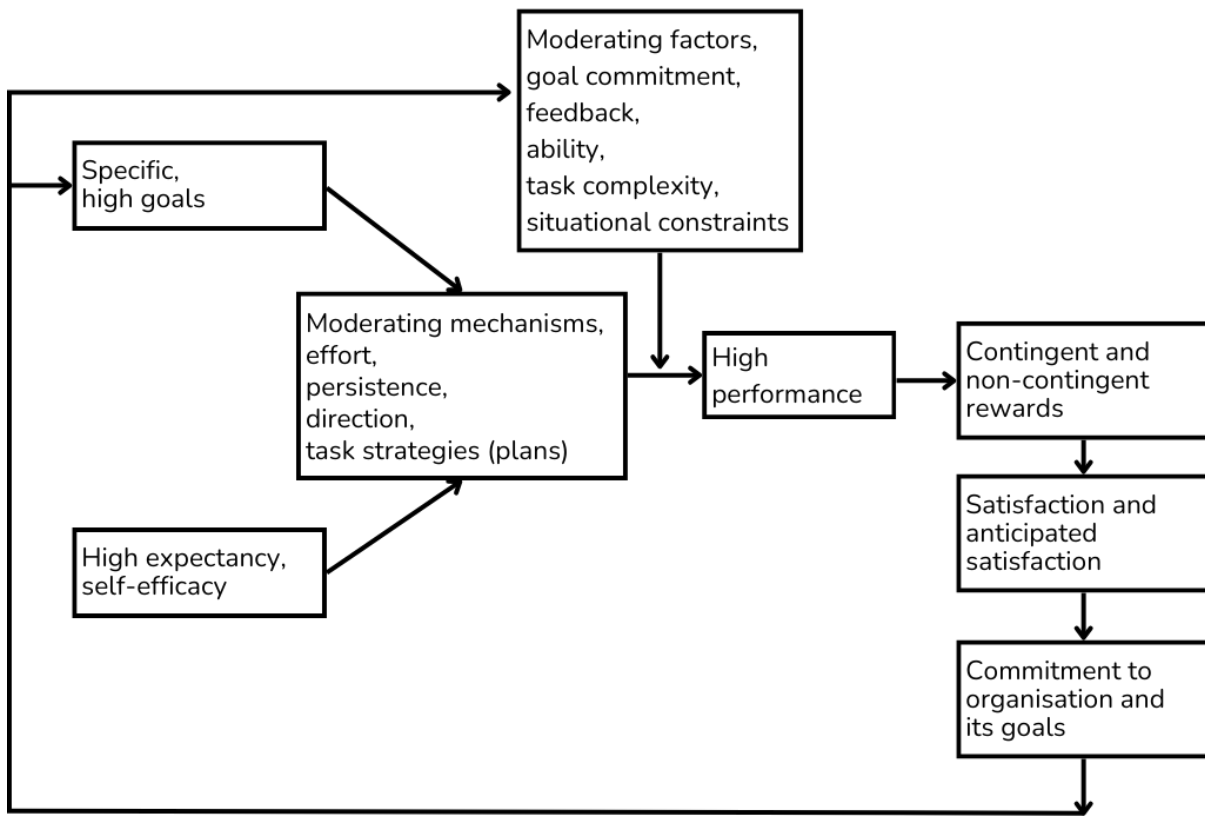


Figure 3. High performance cycle Adapted from Locke, Latham & Messina, 2002.

High performance cycle links goal setting to rewards, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment, integrating GST with other theories of work motivation. As my study looks at, among other things, the goal formulation amongst staff and goal performance in Harju parish, high performance cycle is used as a tool to discuss the linkage.

#### *2.3.4 Reasoning for the emphasis on goal-setting theory in this study*

As the main focus of this study is on the goals of the employees of Harju parish, goal-setting theory provides a solid starting point as it merges and utilizes a number of studies to build a vast theory on the topic. The many other concepts will be used for discussion, but GST and especially the high-performance cycle will be my central tools in structuring and understanding the themes of the data. Citizen participation will serve as a secondary core concept that will be integrated in the discussion later in this work. As the scope of this work is limited, the somewhat narrow but

simultaneously deep-digging theoretical approach is hoped to provide discussion and results that are both concise and of good quality.

## 2.4 Citizen participation

In this study, citizen participation will be considered as an additional viewpoint on the goal setting of ELCF's employees. Even though not all Finnish citizens are members of the ELCF nor are all members of ELCF Finnish citizens, the research on citizen participation will be utilized in applicable ways.

A definition for 'citizen' is a 'concentration of rights and duties in the person of an individual, within a constitutional state, under the rule of law, and within the hierarchy of laws and regulations' (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 1995, p. 6). A citizen is part of a 'social contract, whereas the client is part of the market contract' (Bovaird and Loeffler [eds.], 2015, p. 7). The meaning of participation is taking part in social processes and citizen participation can be defined as possibilities for citizens (who are not elected officials) to take part in processes of running common affairs (Anttiroiko, 2003; Birch, 2009).

Citizen participation has become normal practice in local democracy. Johar (2017) viewed citizen participation as a tool for citizens to contribute initiatives to local policies and projects and to realize their potential. Others see the value of citizen participation in establishing transparency in government management ventures and in strengthening democracy (Svaljek et al., 2019; Chirinje et al., 2013).

In the context of ELCF, citizen participation can be seen broadly taking place in the parish elections. Parish elections are held every four years, the next elections being held in 2026. All parishioners aged 16 or older are entitled to vote. In 2022 parish elections 12,7% of the parishioners voted. The parish council, the supreme decision-

making body in a local parish, is elected in the parish elections. The board, which is the highest executive body in a parish, is elected by the parish council. A parish union has a joint council and board.

While some other less-used avenues of administrative participation exist within ELCF, many parishioners participate in the operational life of the church as volunteers. As the ELCF Committee for the Future stated that the work in a parish is often centred on a paid employee, the opportunities available for even highly skilled volunteers may be quite limited due to the organizational culture.

# 3 - Data and methodology

## 3.1 Instrumental case study and ontology

This piece of research is an instrumental case study. Typically, a case study uses a holistic approach where all information and data relating to the case, especially the qualitative sort, is gathered in order to form a comprehensive image. A case study can be used in various frameworks and with several analytical tools. Therefore, it can be viewed as a research strategy rather than as an analytical framework of its own. (Van Thiel, 2014)

Instrumental case study is a case study that has an instrumental meaning, in other words it aims to refine a theory or provide insight into an issue in which the case itself may be secondary and possibly atypical of other cases. The case is interesting for its theoretical developments and general themes. (Eriksson & Koistinen, 2005). In this study the research into goal-setting practices of Harju parish is used as an instrument to gain insight into goal-setting practices and goal-setting landscape of the ELCF.

In terms of ontology this study assumes a position that can be summed up as a type of critical realism. Within philosophy of perception, the theory of critical realism states that an objectively knowable, mind- and consciousness-independent reality exists and that some sense-data can and do accurately represent this reality, while other sense-data do not. (New World Encyclopedia, 2024) Knowledge about the world is seen as socially constructed and not as a complete image of the real world.

However, with this understanding empirical material such as individual experiences and knowledge can be socially constructed around real-life events and objects under

study. (Page, 2003; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008; Easton, 2010) Patomäki and Wight state that for critical realists, “the underlying reality that makes experience possible and the course of events that is not experienced/spoken are reduced to what can be experienced or become an object of discourse.” (Patomaki & Wight 2000, p.224)

### **3.2 The types of data and data collection plan**

This study is using qualitative research strategy to conduct empirical research. These choices are based on the size of the case organization and the research questions. The size of the case organization’s staff is around 50 people and participation in the research was voluntary. A quantitative research design requires a sample that is appropriately large and representative (Heikkilä, 2017), making this study an ill-fitting one for quantitative research. Qualitative research, on the other hand, aims to understand the research object and to parse theoretically meaningful views (Eskola & Suoranta, 1998). Qualitative research can be described as “understanding” research referring to the mode of knowing: it seeks to understand the phenomenon instead of explaining it. On the other hand, understanding as a method of humanities is linked to the research object’s mental atmosphere, thoughts, emotions and motivations. It is, therefore, profoundly empirical in its nature. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018)

The empirical data of this study consists of four data sources, namely questionnaires, an interview, email correspondence and documents. The questionnaires, interview and email correspondence form the primary data sources for this study, while documents such as action plans form the secondary data

supporting the primary sources. The data was collected between April and September 2023 (See table below).

### Primary data collection timeline

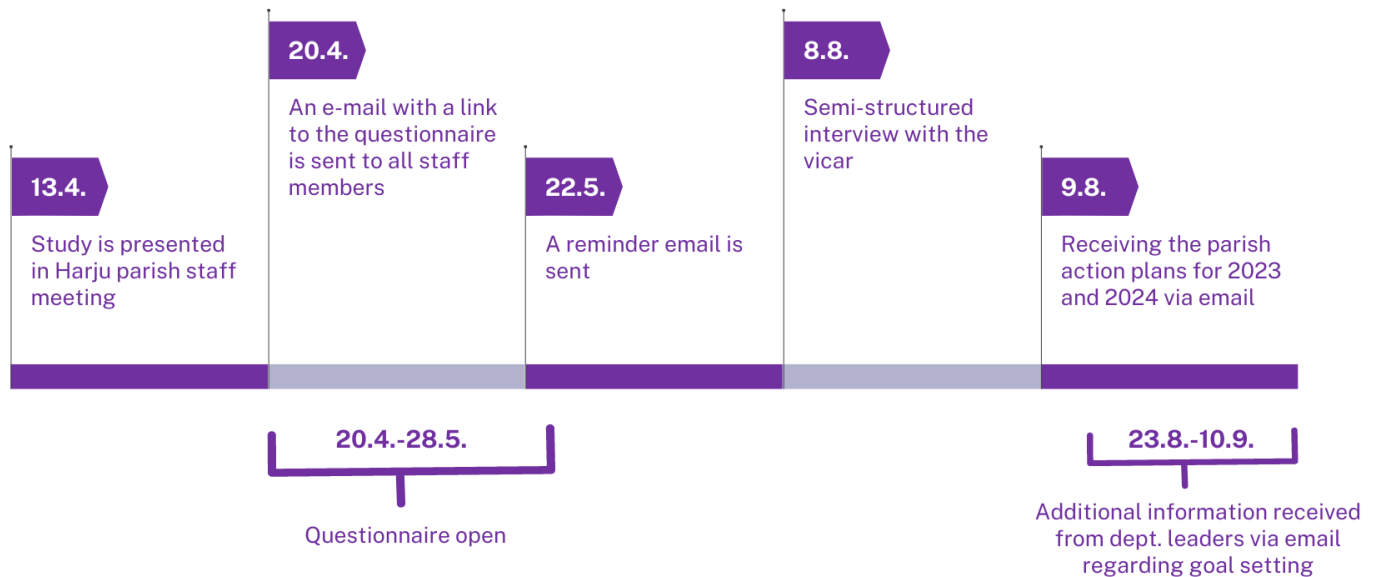


Figure 4. Primary data collection timeline. Made by author.

The study was introduced in Harju parish staff meeting on the 13<sup>th</sup> of April 2023 to those present. A week later, on the 20<sup>th</sup> of April, an email with a link to the questionnaire was sent to all staff members excluding the vicar. Since participation in the study was obligatory, using an online questionnaire seemed like a good option since it could be filled in anywhere and anytime within the set period. A reminder email was sent on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May. The language of the questionnaire was Finnish, and the answers were in Finnish. The answers were translated to English and compiled by the researcher. Thirteen staff members filled in the online questionnaire. A semi-structured interview with the vicar was conducted on the 8<sup>th</sup> of August. A semi-structured interview is focused while still gives the interviewer the autonomy to explore relevant ideas that may come up during an interview (Adeoye-Olatunde &

Olenik, 2021). The interview was recorded using two devices for security reasons. The language of the interview was Finnish, and the data has been transcribed and translated by the researcher.

During the preliminary research process, it became clear that departments and teams are central in the goal-setting of the parish; hence the receiving material from departmental and team leaders became more important than it initially was. The questionnaire data provided a limited view to the thinking of Harju parish forepersons (2 of 13 participants indicated that they are a foreperson), additional information and data was sought by email. Between the 23rd of August and the 10<sup>th</sup> of September additional three forepersons responded via email. Altogether the questionnaires, the interview data, and the email correspondence data form the primary data pool. The secondary data consists of different documents relating to the case, either publicly available or made available to me by the parish staff. The primary and secondary data is listed in the table below.

<b>Primary data</b>
Questionnaires
Email correspondence
Interview with the vicar
<b>Secondary data documents</b>
Harju parish action plan 2023-2025
Harju parish action plan 2023
Harju parish action plan 2024
Tampere parish union instructions for planning finances and action 2024-2026
“Open Doors” - ELCF’s strategy until 2026
Tampere parish union strategy picture
Tampere parish union’s Action and financial plans for 2023-2025

*Table 1. Sources of data. Made by author.*

Additional information about the process of forming the parish action plans as well as some clarifications were gained by email correspondence with the parish secretary between 9th of August and 22<sup>nd</sup> of September.

### 3.3 Data analysis

This piece of research utilizes qualitative thematic analysis as its main method of analysis. Thematic analysis is applied to primary data. As Braun & Clarke (2021, p. 31) describe it, “at a very basic level, TA (thematic analysis) is a method for developing, analysing and interpreting patterns across a qualitative dataset, which involves systematic processes of data coding to develop themes – themes are your ultimate analytic purpose.” The design is adapted from Vaismoradi et al. (2016). They suggest four phases of theme development: “initialization”, “construction”, “rectification” and “finalization”. Each phase consists of certain stages (see table below).

<b>Phases</b>	<b>Stages</b>
Initialization	Reading transcriptions and highlighting meaning units Coding and looking for abstractions in participants' accounts Writing reflective notes
Construction	Classifying Comparing Labelling Translating & transliterating Defining & describing
Rectification	Immersion and distancing Relating themes to established knowledge Stabilizing
Finalization	Developing the story line

*Table 2. Phases of thematic development (Vaismoradi et al., 2016).*

The first phase, initialization, involves transforming the data to textual form, then reading and rereading it several times to gain an overall understanding of the data and of the main issues. This is followed by coding and the writing of reflective notes. The second phase, construction, involves reflecting on the process of organizing codes and comparing them to assign each cluster of codes a place in relation to the research question. Here the diversity between codes in terms of meaning is discovered. Then a label is assigned to each cluster. Vaismoradi et al. (2016) note

that “the definition, translation and description of the label are cornerstones by which the level of abstraction of data analysis is improved and theme is created.” (p. 105). The third phase, rectification, may also be termed “verification”. Though the theme may appear to be near full development, this step is designed to ensure that sensitivity is increased, and incomplete or premature data analysis is halted. A key here is “distancing” oneself from the data and reappraisal of the analysis process. The fourth and final phase a narration is developed which describes and connects the various themes as well as answers the study question(s). The aim of the narration is to provide a holistic view of the study phenomenon. On the other hand, “creating a ‘story line’ provides an opportunity to review the whole process of data analysis, promotes further ideas and collects even more data to improve saturation of the theme”. (Vaismoradi et al. 2016, p. 107).

I followed this process with primary data. Secondary data, consisting of documents, was used “as is”, in other words, taken at face value and used to provide additional and contextual information. The quotes from respondents are italicised and typically followed by a number for a respondent. In order to not give a respondent’s identity away, the quotes are slightly modified and number changed to “X” when a team leader is quoted so that their leadership role is apparent. At times I have used X when personal health matters have been brought up, or to limit the number of people-specific information given per respondent to curb identification.

# 4 – Findings

## 4.1 How are the goals formed

This section deals with the research question “how does the strategic work in terms of goal-setting proceed yearly?”. First, I will present a description of the process of setting the goals in the parish. Then I will present the team and individual goal setting processes along with the themes relating to them. A timeline is presented in the figure below.

### Parish, team and individual goal-setting schedule in Harju parish in 2023

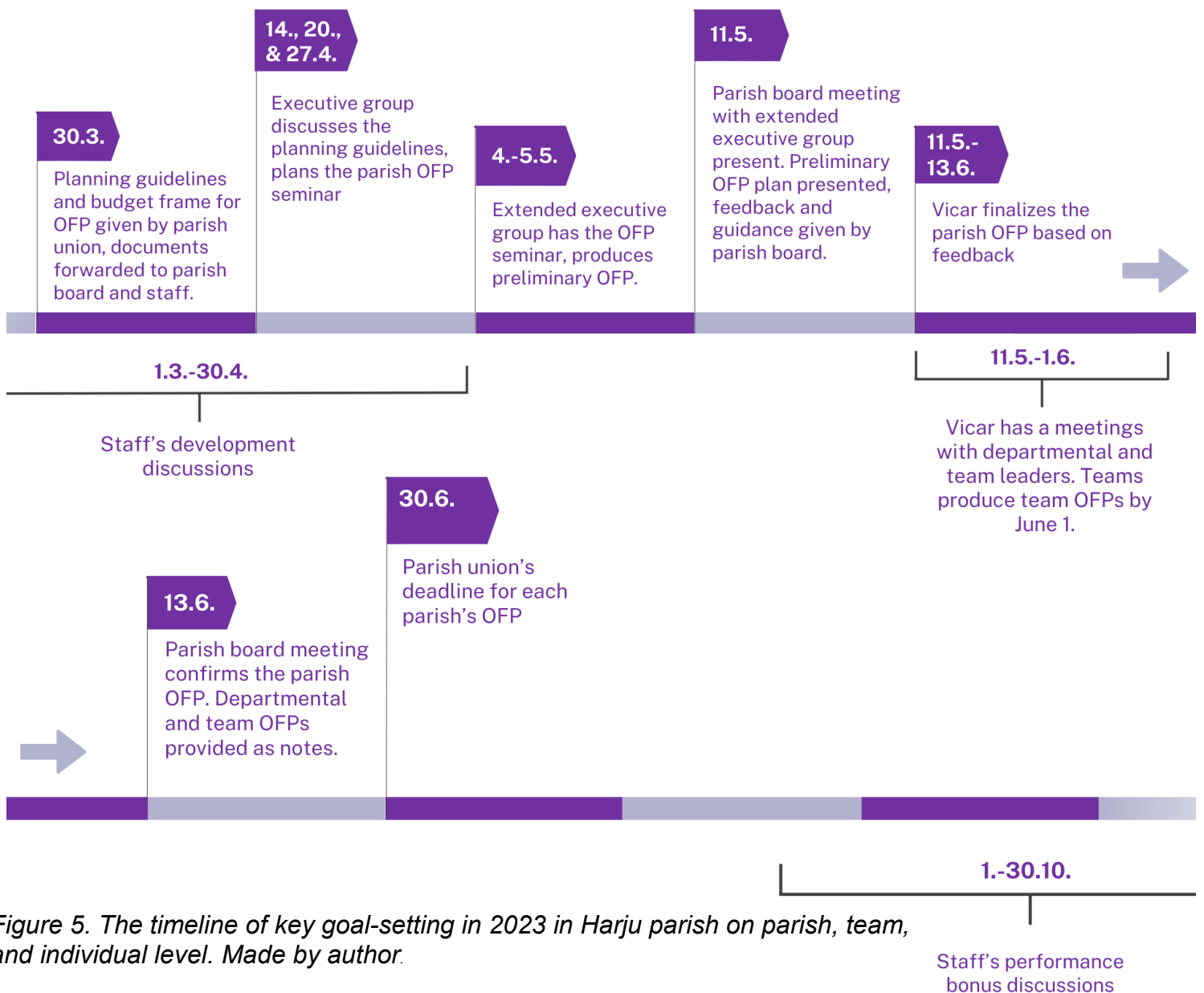


Figure 5. The timeline of key goal-setting in 2023 in Harju parish on parish, team, and individual level. Made by author.

#### 4.1.1 The formation of the parish operational and financial plan for 2024

##### *Overview*

The main actors in the formation of parish operational and financial plan (OFP; in Finnish, talous- ja toimintasuunnitelma, TTS) in Harju parish are parish board, the vicar, and extended executive group (consists of vicar, department leaders and leaders of local church teams). The parish board is stated to lead the operations of the parish, promote its spiritual life, and decide of the use of the funds allocated to it, whereas the vicar leads the spiritual life of the parish and acts as the staff's foreperson and as the chair of the council. The extended executive group are key staff responsible for organizing and conducting operations of the parish.

The standing rule for Harju parish board says: "The parish board is summoned yearly to free form negotiations with the executive group of the parish to evaluate and plan the finances and operations of the parish". (Harju parish's parish board standing rule, 6 §) This summoning is usually done by the vicar and the parish secretary.

The current parish board was elected in late 2022 and started their term in the beginning of 2023. In January they were summoned to an afternoon meeting with the agenda of the new board and executive group to get to know each other. These were seen as the "yearly free form negotiations" by the vicar and secretary. The free form negotiations regarding OFP did not take place in 2023.

The Tampere parishes' joint church council confirmed 2024's OFP planning guidelines and the budget frame on 30<sup>th</sup> of March 2023. These materials were immediately passed on to the Harju parish board.

The executive group of the parish discussed the planning guidelines for the first time in their meeting on the 14<sup>th</sup> of April. In the executive group's meetings on the 20<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> of April the OFP was discussed in a way: the OFP seminar was planned in those meetings.

The seminar was held from 4<sup>th</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> of May, and it was attended by the extended executive group. The vicar commented that *“during those days we pretty much do the operational and financial plan for the whole parish as a cooperative effort with the lead staff... and set goals as well. And that (material) should direct the making of departments' and local church teams' own action plans, so it's there as a basis.”*

The parish board had a meeting on the 11<sup>th</sup> of May. Invited were also the members of the extended executive group. A point on the agenda was discussing the operational and financial plan. The preliminary outline of the OFP, largely produced in the seminar, had been given to board members as an attachment prior to the meeting. The aim was to discuss the focus points and goals of the plan for 2024, and to give guiding feedback to follow-up work on the whole plan and to each department's and team's own OFP process. Based on this feedback, the parish OFP was finalized in May-June by the vicar.

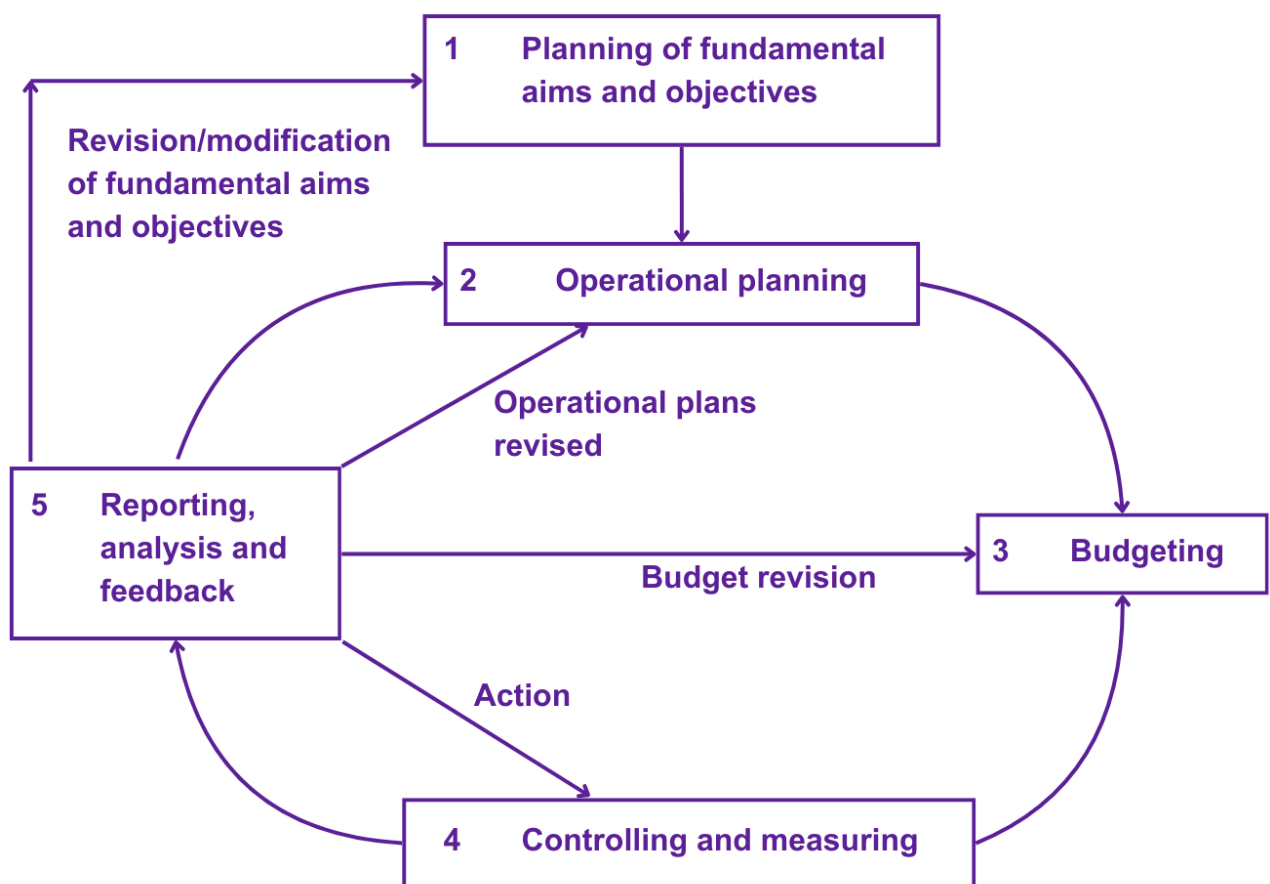
In their June meeting on the 13<sup>th</sup>, the board accepted the proposed parish OFP for 2024. The departmental and local church team OFPs were also provided as notices. The deadline for all Tampere parishes to turn in their accepted parish OFP was the 30<sup>th</sup> of June. This deadline was given by the parish union.

When reviewing the whole process, the backbone seems to be the parish union governance relating to OFP. A lot is dependent on and defined by the parish union: the guidelines for planning are provided by parish union's joint council in the end of

March and the parish union requires the approved plans and budgets to be entered into the systems by the end of June.

*Reflections*

In practical terms, the Tampere parish union implements a version of the typical financial management cycle in the public sector. While different variations of the cycle approach exist, the approach is about planning (budgets), implementation (monitoring, book-keeping, financial statements), and audit and control (evaluation, accountability). (Vakkuri, 2023)



*Figure 6. The managerial planning and control in the public sector. Adapted from personal communication, J. Vakkuri, 13 November, 2023. Made by author.*

The main agents in the formation of the parish OFP were the executive group, the extended executive group, and the vicar (also belonging to both of the aforementioned groups). The groups were the ones doing the background work, did

the preliminary plan, and the vicar finalized the preliminary version into the finalized proposal.

Despite stamping the plans, the role of the parish board was somewhat secondary. It appears that the role and content of the board's yearly free form negotiations about the OFP is central in terms of how the board is situated in the whole OFP process. I was told that these negotiations are generally held early in the year, but in 2023 they did not take place with OFP content. Having the actual OFP negotiations provides an opportunity to start the yearly OFP formation process early and enables the board to direct the plan- and goal-making from an earlier stage. In 2023 the board did not have a say about the general direction of OFP prior to a preliminary plan already having been assembled. While preliminary plans can be modified, it may be socially difficult or at least inconvenient to challenge the direction of a document that key staff has already used considerable time and effort to create. This is especially the case if the whole document needs to be reworked in a major way.

Some other challenges arise from the delayed input-giving by the board. For example, if a pattern of not necessarily having these negotiations is formed on the first year of the board's tenure, it may not be as easy for a board member to later demand having them; a culture of forming the OFP with a smaller participation from the board may be formed.

Another challenge is the timeline. If the proposed final version is not of the liking of the board and the parish union deadline for turning in the plan is two weeks away from the board meeting, the limitations with time are tangible. The vicar commented: *"In June's meeting (is) where our council got that plan of ours and then at that point, they can still give feedback. In principle they can "leave it on the table" (let it sit, take*

*time to reflect it). Then the problem is that because the schedule is quite tight here, that at that point there isn't much time to make changes anymore."*

A key part of leading is being involved in goal setting. As the parish board's official role is to lead the activities of the parish, I expected their role to be more central. In principle, the staff (including executive group) ought to be the ones carrying out the operations as directed by the board. Staff executes strategy and plans and makes decisions on how to best advance the strategy within the confines of their context, with the direction given to them. It can be argued that the board did give direction after seeing the preliminary plan and the OFP process was by no means devoid of the board's input. There is, however, a difference between either being the ones to set the general direction with strategic goals or tweaking plans already made by others. In order to better reflect the official role of the board, their involvement in goal-setting matters should be elevated, and the roles between board and lead staff clarified.

Obviously, boards are not expected to micro-manage. A suitable "flight height" needs to be found – what is a suitable magnitude and level of decisions that a board should assume? What kind of a role should boards take to benefit for their organization?

The answers to these questions are something that organizations and boards must determine for themselves.

The few staff comments in the data about being part of the formation of the parish action plan were positive, though someone commented that looking back at the document, it was not quite as good as they first thought.

*(OFP was formed) in May and in early June. I read this again now and I made the remark that this could have been more concrete. Painful is the right word. It is painful*

*in...how you dare to set sufficiently concrete, especially quantitative goals. We easily give in to these qualitative ones, which may at some points be quite good... Well for example we have one, “deeper connections to parishioners by listening to them, being interested in them, supporting them along the way” ... But in a way that, what is it in a more concrete way? And how that could be even quantitatively assessed, that’s challenging. (X)*

The vicar commented that the parish board members would like to see quantitative and more easily measurable goals. Overall, these and the related comments indicated a sense of wanting to develop the parish OFP process further. It would be interesting to compare the process in the coming years to the process of this given year.

#### **4.1.2 The formation of the team plans/goals**

The overall OFP process is connected to the formation of department and team operational plans. They are formed in sync and along the lines of the parish OFP. After both the OFP seminar and May parish board meeting were had, the vicar had a discussion in May with each lead worker about producing the final team/department OFPs for 2024. These discussions included going through the budget figures and the guidance provided by the parish board.

Each local church team had a meeting in May where OFP was on the agenda.

Based on the data, the departments also discussed the departmental OFP in their meeting(s). The 1<sup>st</sup> of June was the deadline for each department’s and local church team’s OFP for 2024 and all team and departmental plans were handed in in time.

The key theme here is *constrained yet varying process*, which the participants mentioned often. Some of the parameters of the process, especially timetable, are already mentioned in the previous sub-chapter. It seems that for some teams the lack of time has meant that the leader has prepared much of the plan by themselves

or that the time in the team meeting has not been deemed sufficient. Some team leaders have sought to alleviate time pressure by sending materials to the team beforehand.

*Foreperson brought an almost finished suggestion of the things, that are in line with Harju parish guidelines, which we edited to suit our own use. But as a team we weren't involved much in the formation process of the goals. (2)*

*I sent the planning guide to the staff beforehand (for them) to take a look at and asked them to write down and bring to the meeting the most important guidelines that affect the plan of action for our department. The goals were formed in a team meeting, but the process would have asked for even more time. (X1)*

*I hold a group development discussion for my team, for which I have given a pondering assignment beforehand and working hours to do the pondering... the team has together formed the shared goals, which everyone has approved and mentally signed. (X2)*

Despite the time constraints, most participants felt that they and their team was nevertheless involved in the making of the team plan. Some teams had dedicated more meetings to plan-making than others.

*We, together, gather thoughts to the action plan. It is possible to influence the content of work. (3)*

*The goals were formed as a result of several sessions. The voice of children and families was at the centre. First, we broadened the horizon and then crystallized. (14)*

*We wrote the goals down as pairs in the staff team and read them aloud. The team leader compiled the goals. (13)*

Notably there are differences in approaches, meaning the team leaders have significant autonomy as to how to proceed with the team's plan-making process. Interestingly, participant 14 mentions broadening and crystallizing, which are key concepts and tools in coaching. Leader X2 talks about using a group development discussion as a tool. Another participant (13) tells that the team was divided into pairs that formed the goals and that the leader compiled them.

Some respondents emphasized the fact that much of the goal setting is, at least in theory, done for them in higher layers of governance.

*The goals are affected by the parish's worship service plan, space reservations and budget as well as the number of substitutes (substitute workers). The goals are thought through in everyone's groups with volunteers and network partners. Some come from the yearly recurring activities. The team's common projects bring some.*

*Some are just unexpectedly and without asking ordered for us to do. (7)*

*Based on the goals for the whole parish, formed by the executive group, we came up with goals for our own team, which are more or less the same in the whole parish and in different teams. (8)*

*Some (goals) are national and (nationally) defined, some commonly agreed upon (in the team). (10)*

There is a similarity in form between the parish OFP and team OFPs. There are three categories in the parish operational plan: 1) connection to God, 2) connection to each other, and 3) connection to the created world. Most of the departments and teams followed the same structure and sought to use those three as goal categories for their goals.

There are many layers of government in the ELCF. National bodies such as the Church Council may publish guidelines and documents that, depending on the type of the document, should either direct the work or should be taken into account. On regional (diocese and parish union) levels, there may also be different kinds of documents informing and guiding the work of a staff member. Then there is the parish's own OFP process. Unless clearly instructed, it may be difficult to determine what material to incorporate in the department/team planning, perhaps more so in a parish union than in an independent parish.

The work of a team can be broadly categorized into "basic work" which does not change much from year to year (such as religious ceremonies or confirmation schools), and into new innovations or projects. Some of the respondent comments

here may reflect a notion that there is not that much room for team to make goals as the basic work and higher levels of government seem to make a lot of decisions on the team's behalf.

Respondent 7 is the only respondent to mention the involvement of non-staff groups (volunteers, networks) in team goal setting. He or she mentions that they have been consulted in this regard. Respondent 15 commented in another context:

*"We have not bothered volunteers with the official OFP process. Should we do so? Maybe to some extent, but maybe it is more so, that volunteering parishioners are the staff's partners in doing e.g., worship life. ...But it doesn't come across to them so, that we present them with a text, or have a lecture, that we have these goals but that somehow, we try to live them out with them in real life." (15)*

While the essence of parish life is communal and not bureaucratic, the question of parishioner involvement and agency is important. Neither of the attitudes (7, 15) towards parishioners and goal setting is negative, while the latter reflects a view that is concerned, perhaps overly so, of the parishioner seeing the OFP process as dull or uninspiring. While it may be such for some, others may find this kind of involvement touching and commitment-increasing.

#### **4.1.3 The formation of individual goals**

Like the process of forming team goals, the formation processes of individual goals were diverse in their own way. When talking about individual work goals, the goals were not limited to official goals or goals from a certain source. Rather, the respondents talked about the kind of goals that they had, whatever they were and however they had come about. While this means that the goals are heterogenous, they are also the ones that staff members had on top of their minds. As the goals differ, the formation processes are also different.

Several respondents highlighted the role of yearly development and performance bonus discussions in goal setting. Tampere parish union describes the development discussions in their intranet: “The purpose of development discussions is to guide the staff member’s development. The goal setting related to learning and monitoring development are the most important things in maintaining one’s ability to work.” One of the roles of the development discussions is to “ensure that the employee understands their role in the strategy of the employer.” (Ibid).

The performance bonus discussions, on the other hand, are used to evaluate whether an employee should be paid a set performance bonus the following year. The criteria categories are work performance and interaction. The categories have 12 and 20 sub-points, respectively, such as “efficiency”, “commitment to common goals”, and “creating and maintaining a respectful work atmosphere”. The purpose of development discussion differs from that of a performance bonus discussion, and one could expect the goals set in the two discussions to differ in kind, though I have grouped them together here.

*Development discussion brings up the things to improve on, we ponder about the goals with the foreperson. (8)*

*It feels like you are pondering the goals all the time:*

*the goals of the work (parishioners’ goals), the needs and goals of employees, your own goals, opportunities and competence (performance). In a concrete fashion they (goals) are formed in development and performance bonus discussions. Informal and constantly changing goals live alongside them. They rise out of current and long-term needs. You must look both near and far all the time. Far, moreso. (X)*

For about a third of the respondents the development and performance bonus discussions were either the primary context or one of the few that were mentioned where personal goals are set. All employees have both of those discussions yearly,

but two thirds did not mention these discussions when talking about how their personal goals come about.

A couple of respondents were quick to link the formation of their personal goals to the existing goals of their team, giving team goals a precedence. Once team goals are formed, individual goals follow.

*My other work team, not Harju, defines shared goals based on the vision and strategy. I define my personal goals based on them (shared goals). (X)*

Another pair of respondents answered in a way that emphasized their own internal processing and perhaps autonomy in forming their personal goals.

*The pondering of the work and surveying the (operational) environment, prayer and meeting people are part of the process. (3)*

Other individual comments about the formation process of personal goals talked about the goal-forming process “going nowhere unless I do something about it”, prioritising boundary-setting to protect one’s health, and not having formed goals due to being new to the job.

An employee is bound to have a number of goals, e.g., official and unofficial, recorded and unrecorded, short-term and long-term. The differences in described formation processes of goals do not necessarily mean that there is as much variation in the formation processes of goals that are of the same kind. The differences may in part be explained by the kind of goals that a respondent had as the precedent ones when answering the question. This discussion continues in the next sub-chapter.

## **4.2 The nature of staff’s personal goals**

The nature of staff’s personal work goals was explored by asking direct questions about the kind of official and unofficial goals the respondents had. This section is based on the data collected for the study, i.e. interviews, email correspondence and

questionnaire data. The parish's documents of staff's personal goals as formed in development and performance bonus discussions were not available. The answers were allocated to three groups based on the theme: 1) *core duties*, 2) *occupational well-being and coping strategies*, and 3) *personal growth and sense of calling*.

#### 4.2.1 Core duties

A key theme in answers relating to personal goals was what could be summarized as a core duty or the core of job description. Majority of these respondents worded their goals to be such as "*plan and implement the youth work of Harju parish*" (3) or "*diaconal family work and local community work*" (4). While this kind of answers are broad, in practical work they obviously include specific things like timetables, communications, people, and so on.

A few respondents brought up more specific core duty goal details, such as "... (*my personal goals*) are linked to the tasks that I have direct responsibility for, such as an *invitational event for those baptised within a year*" (14). The fact that only a few respondents had more specific core duty goals to give should not be overanalysed based on limited data, but there may be a link to goal clarity. If goals are not clear or particularly memorized, it is easier to state things stemming from recurring yearly activities or from job description. On the other hand, inertia bias cannot be ruled out, either.

Most of the respondent overseers seemed to include development, progress and leading in their key personal goals. They were the ones to emphasize progress and enabling their team members to do their job well, as exemplified below:

*My goal... I hope I will be able to do my job in such a way that in three years we see progress in (our department). Progress in terms of content and the big picture. (X1)*

*My most important personal goal is to live out my core mission well, meaning the provision of my team's overseeing and leadership services, and... to develop my skills as immediate supervisor and in leadership. (X2)*

Overseers are responsible for the performance and well-being of their team and the team may bear operational responsibility of a large section of parish work. As no one else has similar direct responsibility, it is natural for them to emphasize tasks within that frame.

Two out of 18 respondents brought up the notion that a goal of theirs is to raise up and support the agency of parishioners/volunteers, such as *“supporting the leadership of the young adults I am directing”* (14) and *“focusing on my area of expertise, which helps the volunteers in their activities, and communication”* (7).

These themes were also reflected elsewhere in the answers of these two respondents.

Thematically, most of the answers in the “core duty goals” category had either an internal focus (focus within staff, such as co-operating well with other staff, training other staff, building team spirit) or a focus on the respondent as an implementor of work (e.g., as an organizer of an event, as a provider of a service to a customer).

The wordings of the majority of answers to this question tend to focus on the agency of staff members, less so of parishioners or network actors. More discussion on this theme follows in subchapter 4.3.3 “Relationship with the parishioners”.

#### *4.2.2 Occupational well-being and coping strategies*

Almost half of respondents brought up occupational well-being and coping when asked about personal goals. A couple of them did not list any other goals than ones

relating to occupational well-being. For others, such goals were either one of a few set goals or a self-assigned/self-articulated goal relating to work. The tone varied.

*(My goal is) lightening my job description and improving my health. (X)*

*(My goal is) surviving and coping with work. (2)*

*In everyday life I try to do work well but not too well, since there is more work to do than I have capacity for. (13)*

It is not surprising that at least some respondents express challenges with occupational well-being. While about three quarters of working Finns do not have noticeable work burnout, about 16% have an elevated risk of burnout and 10% are experiencing a likely burnout (TTL, 2024). However, having no burnout does not mean that an employee does not experience tiredness, stress, or boredom at work. The AKI (the union of academically trained church staff) member survey, conducted in 2022 and published in 2023, showed that every third pastor felt mentally exhausted and 29% of cantors felt the same way. It ought to be noticed that the covid-19 pandemic had just had its most acute years prior to conducting the survey and it undoubtedly affects the results. Still, the trend after 2006 has been that the pastors and cantors are experiencing more and more exhaustion. In 2006 one in ten pastors felt exhausted, in 2018 it was one in five and 2022 one in three. The percentage of exhausted cantors, on the other hand, had risen from 13% (in 2006) to 29% (in 2022), though the steepest rise took place during the pandemic. (Tervo-Niemelä, 2023).

Based on these studies, one could expect that 25-30% of Harju parish staff are experiencing exhaustion or have an elevated risk of exhaustion, if the parish represents an average Finnish parish or workplace. Yet, having a personal goal relating to occupational well-being does not necessarily mean there is a related crisis

in a person's life. Occupational well-being is important and having a related goal may simply tell of proactive action to maintain a good work ability. Also, as this study was conducted at a certain time and is by no means longitudinal, it is beyond its scope to say whether the answers tell of something seasonal or something persevering. But it is note-worthy that almost every other respondent had a goal connected to occupational well-being. Is there an explanation? For example, is there something in the organizational culture that elevates the role of occupational well-being in the overall goal-setting of the staff? Or is forming such goal easier compared to other areas of work life?

#### *4.2.3 Personal growth and sense of calling*

A third group of personal goals had to do with personal (inner) growth or sense of calling. A few respondents articulated a clear spiritual calling or mission as a goal.

*“My clearest goal is to meet people as a representative of the message I represent. I can't make up the gospel myself or change it to suit the hearers. I hope that the encounters we have would always give people some bits of faith...”* (11)

*“(My goal is) the Great Commission.”* (3)

*“To grow in my priesthood.”* (X)

In Tervo-Niemelä's study (2023, p. 83-86) a third of priests and 20% of cantors chose the expression “work is a calling given to me by God” as the best description of the meaning of and relationship to work that they had. Other options included such as “I work foremost to make a living” or “it is important to me to progress in my career and get more responsibility”. Furthermore, 73% of priests and 58% of cantors totally agree or somewhat agree with the statement that “work is a calling given to me by God.” (Ibid.) While there is insufficient data available on this matter with

regards to other staff groups in ELCF, one could anticipate this kind of strong spiritual emphasis to be seen in the data, even though it was not directly asked about. On the other hand, a respondent wondered if they are “too spiritual” for their workplace, having felt tension between a strong personal internal spiritual motivation and surrounding team culture.

Some others mentioned personal growth as a goal. One respondent, for example, connected growth goal to a core duty as an overseer.

*“To get educated and maintaining professional skills.” (10)*

*“That I would find my best attributes. And that I would be better in encountering people.” (8)*

*“Change leadership and developing as a change leader.” (X)*

These statements voice a desire to grow in skills and as a person. The question queried work-related goals. Therefore, the assumption here is that while some wordings may sound like they relate to broader life context of a respondent (such as “to get educated”), they have primarily to do with growing as a person in work context. This can be seen as a sign of a high level of psychological ownership of the organization. Purposefully wanting to “grow”, “find”, “develop”, “get educated” and “to be better” for work purposes signal a readiness to do more than the required minimum and to bring the whole person to work. This appears as exercising self-leadership. As Laloux (2016, pp. 91) puts it, “...work can be a wonderful place to discover parts of ourselves we didn’t even know existed.” A disclaimer here is that the motivations behind these statements are not made evident in the data. So, for instance, whether wanting to get educated is driven by commitment to work and wanting to do it better or by gaining a position with a greater salary cannot be said with the limited information. I am not suggesting that being available for a position

with more responsibility and more pay is to be viewed negatively, either. This is simply to state that the data is limited in this regard.

### 4.3 The relationship with the goals

This section deals with the research question, what is ELCF staff's relationship with their goals. In this paper the 'relationship' is assumed to include attitudes towards, the practical usage of, thinking about of, and follow-up of goals. Through the chosen data analysis method, four themes were uncovered: 1) the dynamics of cooperation, 2) goals as a tool, 3) the relationship with the parishioners and 4) the inner life of a staff member.

#### 4.3.1 The dynamics of cooperation

The first theme could be described as "the dynamics of cooperation". After the goals are formed, life with them begins. Many personal goals and all team goals require staff to cooperate with others, whether it is the other staff or parishioners or volunteers. This section focuses on the cooperation within the staff.

The respondents expressed various views, feelings and opinions about responsibility and the distribution of responsibilities.

*"(What hinders the reaching of goals is) the ambiguity of the thinking about parish/local church, what (task) belongs to whom. It is easy for someone to shirk responsibility, appealing "it doesn't belong to me" or "it's the foreperson's job..." (1)*

Talking about ambiguity, respondent 1 refers to the type of matrix organization that Harju parish is. While all staff members belong to departments and their foreperson is the department leader, they are also members of local church (lähikirkko) teams. Potential conflict arises when the demands from department and local church team clash or when the commitment to one team is not seen quite as important as the commitment to the other team. Previous research shows that the leader of the local

church team in a matrix organization may end up between the rock and the hard place as they have the operational responsibility but no delegated authority (Westerholm, 2005). Clear communication about expectations, resources, and responsibility is typically needed to deal with the challenges of a matrix structure. There was variation as to who was seen as responsible for the team goals, though the majority viewed themselves/the whole team as responsible.

*The foreperson is responsible for his/her team working for the realization of the goals. (2)*

*All the team members (are responsible), ultimately foreperson, unless there is a specific set person responsible for the goal. (9)*

*We have defined the goals together and in the early childhood education team we have agreed on responsibilities, which are based on the goals. (14)*

Zaccaro et al. (2001) defined team leaders as those “individuals who are primarily responsible for defining team goals and for developing and structuring the team to accomplish these missions” (p. 452). Seen this way, the leader is responsible for getting the team to work in such a way that the clearly defined goals are accomplished. From a governance viewpoint, a foreperson is responsible for the overall performance of the team. The distribution of responsibility, however, is an integral part of teamwork, and seems to be working well in Harju parish based on the data. While many emphasized the role of the foreperson, almost everyone accepted that they are responsible, too.

Sometimes things outside of one’s own control affect the goal reaching process.

Talking about the effects that were related to other staff, but not one’s immediate team, participants expressed views of the following kind:

*So called “extra” work from top level hinders the reaching of goals sometimes. (1)*

*The fact that diaconal work’s certain goals are connected to parish’s and parish union’s common goals slows the process of reaching them – a big ship turns slowly.*

*But together as a large community it is very sensible to develop for example*

*“volunteer work”. Sometimes the cooperative expectations from other departments are difficult. It is important to work together, but the amount of work we have in our core duties is so large that it is difficult to add new tasks without axing the reaching of our own goals. (6)*

*Other staff members affect the realization of (our department’s) goals, and one department can’t cover if others don’t do their part. (7)*

Being part of a somewhat large organization (about 50 staff) and being connected to a parish union (over 400 staff) is bound to mean that sometimes the plans and work of a departmental team in a single parish will be affected by the rest of the organization. While the effect may be positive, negative, or neutral, the organizational environment makes a difference in the staff’s work. Overall, the sentiment towards the parish union and other departments was constructive. Teamwork was seen both as a strength and as a challenge. Clear cooperative strengths were articulated by many.

*Commitment and clear ground rules are enabling us to reach our goals. As well as teamwork and peace to work. (4)*  
*In the early childhood ed team we have shared responsibilities to match the interests and strengths of staff as much as possible. This motivates to strive for the realization of shared goals. (X)*

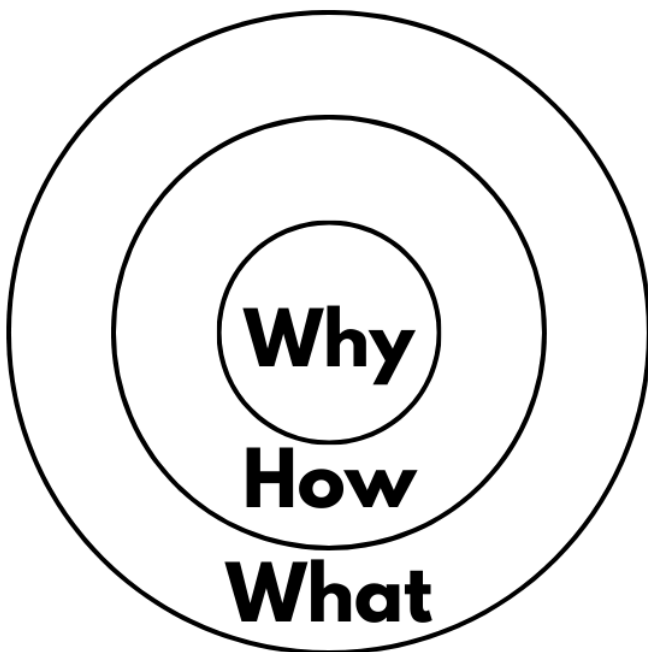
*My own foreperson’s (the vicar) support aids me. (X)*

The most often mentioned strengths were a sense of shared work, people being committed to their tasks (“carrying their own weight”) and reaching out assist others. Phrases such as “when needed,” “whenever possible,” and “as much as possible” were used to describe the orientation towards assisting others and towards organizing tasks – as much as others need and as much as the circumstances allow. These are clear, experienced strengths in some of the teams in Harju parish.

The term of “work vision” (in Finnish, ‘työnäky’) as well as concepts closely related to it were touched on. The term work vision means, especially in a religious context, an inspiring vision of the content and purpose of one’s own work.

*Our shared work vision is not clear enough for us to reach goals. (3)*  
*A shared work vision is important. What are we doing? Why are we doing (this)? (X<sup>1</sup>)*  
*In the --- team, we have had discussions about the changes in the nature of work. I think that these discussions have been good processing. Reaching goals is aided by the team seeing the same things as important and being ready to work for goals. If a goal is not seen as meaningful or it causes the employee something they don’t like (for example, unwanted working hours), it complicates goal reaching. (16)*

These comments (and many others in the data) deal with a shared understanding of the purpose of work. One way of viewing this is through the concept of the golden circle, popularized by author and consultant Simon Sinek. The golden circle (see picture) is a simple way of understanding inspiration and purpose. According to



Sinek, the thinking, acting, and communicating of most organizations is done from outside in, from *what* to *why*. “We say WHAT we do, sometimes say HOW we do it, but we rarely say WHY we do it. But WHY is the most crucial part of any endeavour or communication.” (Sinek, 2023) Sinek claims that very few people or organizations can clearly articulate *why* they do what they do. By *why* he means purpose, cause, or belief,

Figure 7. Golden circle (Sinek, 2023).  
Made by author.

<sup>1</sup> Due to the way the final “free word” section was organized in the questionnaire, it is not possible to know which participant wrote this comment.

or a reason for existence. *Hows* are actions that are taken when the individual or organization is at its natural best and is living out the *why*. These processes can typically be communicated clearly. “It’s HOW you bring your WHY to life that makes you and your company unique. As the result, the combination of your WHY and HOWs is like your organization’s fingerprint” (Ibid.). In terms of *what*, Sinek’s asserts that everyone knows *what* they do – it is the least complicated to explain and important to have, but less impactful than *why*. The call of Sinek for individuals and organizations is to think, act, and communicate from inside out, starting with *why*. (Ibid.)

The views expressed by participants can be seen as a longing for a shared “why” for work. The “why” can enable individuals and teams to evaluate the “how” and “what” based on core values and core cause. Therefore, shifting thoughts and discussion to deeper levels from simply “what” is being done provides an opportunity for deeper reflection. Moreover, the sense of shared purpose can form a sense of unity and can sustain individuals and teams through difficulties and transitions. Unwanted working hours may seem more acceptable when one is connected to the cause that is being advanced in those working hours.

The reasons for a staff member or a team operating and communicating extensively on the “what” level can be numerous. Hurry, for instance, is one.

*The occasional workload of staff is a hindrance, which decreases the opportunities for development. (6)*

*Too much work, too much record-keeping, meetings, too many things to do that I’m not really trained or originally hired to do. (7)*

While hurry is a real experience, it would be an oversimplification to say that reflection and development cannot take place because of busy nature of work. The question of the use of available working hours is a leadership issue. Is reflection,

deeper discussion, and goal evaluation, for example, something that is deemed worth using appropriate working hours to? If it is, then it is the leadership's role to decide what is done in working hours and what is not done or done differently to make room for such practices. It is another discussion altogether, of course, if deeper reflection is not seen as necessary.

The expressed challenges of working together were quite manifold. These are some illustrative comments:

*I feel like I can't influence things. (10)*

*What's stopping me and my team? Working on your own. Pushing it too much.*

*Differing spiritual emphases. Differing working hours. (8)*

*Wrongly allocated resources are a challenge, e.g., the lack of a colleague or the colleagues being temporary, the differences of opinion within the team, the increased workload vs. the working hours. (2)*

The label of aloneness was mentioned several times and in different forms in the data. Some of it is here described as "working on your own" and "lack of a colleague or the colleagues being temporary". Due to the nature of the work and resources it may not always be possible to work together with colleagues, but a sense of support, follow up and connection should be at minimum provided by the foreperson, and maybe is.

In the case of respondent 8, he or she indicates that they are part of a team yet sees working on one's own (and simultaneously pushing it too much?) as a danger that may stop them or their team from realizing their goals. They see differing working hours within the team as a challenge. I interpret that to mean that working together and organizing operations becomes difficult based on the different availabilities. Certain professions within ELCF are considered to not have set working hours (in Finnish, "työajaton") while other professions are considered to have set working

hours under the collective bargaining agreement of ELCF. This makes a difference in e.g., whether Sunday is considered a regular working day like others from pay/hour standpoint (as is with priests) or a day the work on which is worth double the pay compared to Monday-Friday (as is with early childhood educators). This may also result in somewhat different attitudes, expectations and flexibility as to when work is perceived to be done. While it was not the respondent's original point in bringing this up, the working hours situation may sometimes mean that a task is done alone simply due to differences in working hour categories.

Other named challenges with cooperation include the lack of internal cohesion or trust within teams, some of which is related to the work vision discussion earlier, employee turnover, and the spread of workload. The lack of freedom for trying new things was also brought up.

#### *4.3.2 The goals as a tool*

Most of the staff members expressed quite high commitment to both personal and team (team and department) goals, though commitment to personal goals was higher. Talking about the challenges of committing to team goals, the lack of goal clarity was brought up by some.

*The goals could be made clearer. The lack of motivation and unclear goals are hindering the reaching of goals... if goals are not clear, it decreases motivation. (3)*

*I am not sure what our team goals are. (9)*

*Are the goals clear? Yes... and no. (12)*

Since goals are the primary source of a person's motivation (Locke & Latham, 2012), the level of goal clarity understandably affects motivation. The perceived clarity of and therefore commitment to team goals was lower for some. When knowledge of team goals is missing, it can be argued that those staff members have *de facto* no team goals outside general knowledge of the job.

When I reviewed the team OFPs for 2023, the outlook of the OFPs varied greatly. All OFPs had the four parish focus points for 2023 present as well as goals, means, and metrics in some form, but the length, formulation and clarity per team/department varied greatly. For example, certain teams had a very formulated structure and/or a table with a rows and columns, other teams had very long and/or talkative OFPs. Certain teams had goal categories based on focus points, others had goals or goal categories based on team's specific field without much expressed action orientated to focus points. Many teams appeared to have clarity on goals and measures, but some teams had clear problems in producing articulated goals. For example, a team had as many as 16 intermixing goals and measures, many of which were left vague. All respondents had at least some work-related personal goals, whether they had had a discussion with a foreperson about personal goals or not. Even if official personal goals were missing for a participant, they had formed personal goals for themselves. This finding is in line with previous research (such as Bandura & Locke, 2003) showing that people voluntarily create goals. The humans' need for goal attainment can be seen as a requisite for life; this would logically apply to work life, too.

Based on the replies of the participants, there is a large range as to how much goals are used in the everyday life of a team.

*Seldom, maybe once every 6 months, we talk about them (goals). (2)*

*We have defined the metrics (for goals), but we don't use them much and as metrics they are not that well defined... we generally go through the old action plan when we create a new one. Gathering too little feedback and not reviewing the goals enough during the current term hinders us in terms of goal reaching. (5)*

*We don't regularly bring up goals in our meetings. On the other hand, some of the goals (=means) are in our team's year clock, through which the goals will come to pass. (6)*

*We regularly monitor the goals in the feedback part of our meetings. (7)*  
As a yearly action plan and action report are required of each team, they are documents that will need to be produced in any case. The use of the action plans (containing goals) is manifold. For some teams, the produced goals are systematically included in the team meetings or in calendar planning; in other teams the talk concerning goals is sporadic, even non-existent if either action plan or action report is not being prepared. A participant talked about the discrepancy between required document making and then again, the everyday life of the staff, with a bit of humour:

*In a way we have a kind of old governance tradition, that “we’ll just do these papers” and if I exaggerate a bit, we do papers and get them approved by council and then we do like we have always done. Being a bit self-ironic. (15)*

Based on the data, the state of true commitment to goals and change goals is not quite as bleak as the participant humorously states; however, in the case of some teams or staff members the approach to set goals seems to be somewhat cursory. Even though the follow up on progress with official goals may be slim with some teams/staff members, this does not mean that any reflection in general does not take place. Some answers demonstrated this, for instance *“in the team meetings we go through successes and failures” (1)*. Some participants reflected on how using goals might help orientate the everyday work.

*That our regular meetings wouldn’t just be going through practical challenges or issues, but that we could start from the goal. For example, with a larger event, where you need people from different departments to cooperate, I see that it would be like a good tool. To lean on the goals, so that in a way, “we have set this goal. Because of that, we need to act in this or that way in the event.” (15)*

The causes of goal commitment go into two broad categories: factors making an individual confident that the goal can be reached and factors that make goal attainment important (Locke & Latham, 2013). The participants expressed that they

consider team's goals important (in questionnaire, average of 4.62 on a scale from 1 – not at all important, 6 – very important). Though the number is not exceedingly high, it is well towards "important". In questionnaire data, the average of answers for "given the knowledge and experience of your team, how challenging do you think your team's goals are? (1 – very easy, 6 – very difficult)" was 3.25<sup>2</sup>. The average for likelihood of team reaching its goals was 4.31 (1 – not at all likely, 6 – highly likely). As goals are seen as important, difficulty of goals more easy than difficult, and the likelihood of reaching goals towards "likely", the irregularities in a team following up on goals do not seem to be explained with total indifference towards goals or by a sense that goal cannot be reached. Some potential explanations include the written/official goals being seen as disconnected with or secondary to the everyday, established work of the team, or the skills or systematicity of incorporating the goals being inadequate.

What happens if goals are or are not reached? The main message in the data was that if team goals are not reached, there is a need for reflection, and that reflection usually takes place.

*(Not reaching goals results in) discussion about what the causes the situation, we try again, what needs to be done differently. Was the goal the right one, has the need been misunderstood, should we hear (something), to rethink our goalsetting. (7)*  
*Not reaching goals would mean that we aren't paying attention to what we are doing in practice. (5)*

These two respondents as well as several others demonstrated an empowered, constructive reaction to not reaching goals. In their responses, not reaching goals did not mean that they were bad workers or that a collapse would take place as a result.

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<sup>2</sup> A participant commented on the perceived difficulty saying, "I think the goals may be put in concrete form to mean quite simple things, like having a devotional in every early education club." So the difficulty level may reflect the means more than the goal.

Their responses demonstrated an openness towards goals and towards the work that is being done and an attitude of genuinely wanting to reach meaningful goals. Therefore, open discussion was deemed necessary and was not seen as a threat. However, a few respondents were quick to link not reaching team/individual goals to a decrease in coping.

*(Not reaching goals results in) incoherency and disunity. (4)*

*Not reaching decreases work motivation, increases the feeling of fatigue and meaninglessness. (9)*

Goal setting's aim is to increase the motivation level of an individual. Perpetual failure may cause feelings of despair. Therefore, "goal setting can have precisely the opposite effect if it produces a yardstick that constantly makes the individual feel inadequate." (Locke & Latham 1984, p. 39) Whether the perception of what happens if goals are not reached was due to inadequate goals or e.g., to existing issues within a team or individual cannot be confirmed within the data and scope of this study. Regardless, the link between reaching goals and coping at work appears worth mentioning among the respondents.

On the other hand, the connection between reaching goals and increased work satisfaction came up several times. At least one team or team leader seems to also have used reaching team goals as a cause to celebrate and hence emphasize the value of goals and goal-oriented work.

*We have rejoiced when reaching the goals and we also have "celebrated" in a small way. (14)*

*Reaching goals results in... job satisfaction and an experience of work enjoyment. (6)*

*Reaching goals makes us smile. (8)*

There was also doubt or frustration concerning whether the reaching of goals actually results in anything. Couple of participants (2, 8) said that "nothing" happens

if goals are or are not reached, in other words there is no follow-up in the team or with the foreperson.

How are set personal goals used to reference and guide an individual's work? The data seems to suggest that similarly to team goals, there is notable variation in the experience of whether and how much an individual's progress with goals is monitored.

*In the development and performance bonus meetings, not otherwise. (2)*

*No. (8)*

*Partly. (4)*

*Yes, I personally monitor them, our team also, and the department leader monitors as well. (14)*

The forepersons have a yearly development discussion and a performance bonus discussion with each staff member in their team (two separate meetings). Some participants noted that in such discussions personal goals are discussed at least a bit and others felt that personal goals are in fact quite thoroughly discussed in those meetings. One department leader stated that "*those discussions are concrete tools for following up whether goals are reached or not*". That leader portrayed a clear purpose of discussing personal goals in the meetings with their team members.

Another participant voiced a wish regarding the performance bonus discussion:

*In any case we set personal goals in the performance bonus discussions... It would be excellent, if those (goals) would be connected to strategy and department's operational goals. This is the model I am used to from previous workplace. (16)*

The development discussion and performance bonus discussion were the primary personal goal follow-up contexts that were brought up. If a specific context for follow up was mentioned, it was either in the aforementioned discussions or in team meetings. As discussing personal goal progress in team context is not an obligation,

indication is that in that team/teams where such discussion takes place, both social cohesion and goal use are on a high enough level for such activity.

The situation with team goals and personal goals seems comparable. Both are conditioned by the required production of certain documents (departments: action plan and action report; individuals: development discussion and performance bonus discussion documents), and the way in which the required documents guide the everyday work varies. My interpretation is that the way staff, and especially forepersons, view the connection of required documents to everyday work life affects the goal orientation and goal use significantly.

The data seems to suggest that some staff view the formation of action plan and action report as well as development and performance bonus discussions as instances which produce goals that are not necessarily integrally connected to the everyday work. The other option seems to be that the methods of incorporating those goals to everyday work life are somewhat lacklustre. On the other hand, others view the same goal-producing process as something that informs, guides, and overall is more connected to everyday operations. Obviously, there is a spectrum in between these poles, but both ends seem to be represented in the data.

A longing for improvement in the integration and follow-up of goals was voiced several times, regarding both team and individual level.

*We don't really talk about goals between (the formation of) action plan and action report, but I would like to increase that talk now. (15)*

*Is me reaching or not reaching my goals monitored? I hope so. (12)*

*My performance and progress on goals is not being followed up on enough. (3)*

*At its best reaching goals turns into feedback. (11)*

A key aspect of follow up is feedback. Feedback has two roles in goal setting: "it stimulates performers to set goals for themselves, and those feedback-based goals subsequently help them to improve their performance; and it tells them how well they

are doing in relation to those goals, thereby strengthening the impact of goals on performance.” (Ashford & De Stobbeleir 2013, pp. 60) The reverse impact of no feedback would be lack of stimulation for goal setting, and no improvement on subsequent performance. Also, the lack of knowledge on how well one is doing in relation to goals stalls or weakens the impact of goals on performance.

Feedback is also a sign that a person is noticed. If feedback is not given, an employee cannot be certain whether he or she is doing the right things. They may also develop a sense that their work has no meaning, decreasing work morale and coping. (TTL, 2017)

The concept of accountability is commonplace in discussions about feedback and performance; it is also a concept in Christian spirituality. Merriam-Webster dictionary defines accountability as “the quality or state of being accountable. *Especially*: An obligation or willingness to accept responsibility or to account for one’s actions.” (Merriam-Webster, 2023) Georgia Murch (2019) states that “when no-one owns the responsibility, things are not moving forward. Accountability breeds responsibility.” (Ibid., chapter 10) Quoting Henry Cloud, she continues, “if you are building a culture where honest conversations are communicated and peer accountability is the norm, then the group will address poor performance and attitudes”. (Ibid.) Some of the participants’ comments clearly portrayed a willingness, even eagerness, to accept responsibility and account for one’s actions. Yet, what they are saying is that the craved analysis of their work and feedback is not present to the level that they would hope.

### 4.3.3 *The relationship with the parishioners*

As mentioned in the introduction, the declining resources of ELCF mean that if a large scope of operations is wanted in the future, it cannot rely on paid employees in the same way it does currently. Even though certain tasks can only be performed by ordained professionals (such as priest at a funeral), in theory there are not many tasks that a volunteer lay parishioner would not be allowed to do. This does not mean for example, that having a trained and paid early childhood education worker is a negative thing; training brings know-how and quality of work and being paid means availability due to remuneration. As the number of staff in ELCF's future is considerably smaller and the change in organizational operation environment is current, I find it especially interesting to see how the employees perceive their role (e.g., on a scale from service provider to volunteer enabler) and how they view parishioners. The ELCF's current strategy, "Opening Doors", poses the question of the identity of parishioners: "... mere target groups for our work, or active participants making the Church a vital aspect of life in their own area?". (Opening Doors, p. 1) Talking about their goals and parishioners, over half of the respondents saw the parishioners' role as central. Interestingly, as they explained the centrality, it became clear that the definitions of centrality differed.

*Parishioners and network partners are the input givers for our goals... I have suggested in our team that we would not do anything unless we have a parishioner or a network partner with us. (14)*

*My job would not exist without parishioners, people, who take part. Why would I have goals (without them) either? (11)*

*They are in the centre. Without them there wouldn't be any choir, band etc. The choir members and players communicate, commit, do things actively. In the ceremonies we listen very carefully to music wishes. (1)*

*The parishioners are the primary object of my work. (2)*

*Their role is very important. Volunteers are central to our operations; without them the activity would be low. (7)*

*Volunteer parishioners are the staff's partners in operations, for example in church services. (15)*

To paraphrase, at least the following wordings are used for the parishioners: “input giver”, “part-taker”, “partner”, “object of work” and “volunteer”. These wordings carry quite different meanings in many respects. When thinking about agency, “partner” is noticeably different to “object of work”. The former is seen on an equal footing; the latter receives the work or service from a staff member. Obviously, not all parishioners or others involved will want to become volunteers or partners, some are perfectly happy being recipients of a service. And “object of work” does not necessarily mean that object is not thought to have agency. But the wordings may denote deeper thinking about the perceived default roles between staff and parishioners.

In some cases, the people that a worker works with are not the ones that can be expected to take responsibility of the running of a whole activity, for instance elementary school kids in an after-school club. The nature of an activity, participants' age and other variables affect the level and nature of potential collaboration. But an after-school club could be operated by adult volunteers if suitable ones would be available, for example.

Others saw the role of parishioners less central to individual and/or group goals.

*They are not there (in the goals). (4)*

*It is small. Could be bigger. (8)*

*Their role is small, but not non-existent. They are the staff's (church service/mass) helpers. (9)*

*All help is welcome. (12)*

Some of those indicating that the role of parishioners is small also indicated that they would like to see it grow. At least for one participant this was connected to resources becoming scarcer.

*Volunteer workers are important and would be even more important in our work, because there aren't so many employees. (13)*

A few described the role of parishioners as “helpers” or “help”. While “helping” does not necessarily mean that the tasks are small or insignificant, it can be argued that one who is perceived to be a staff member’s “helper” is not seen to have the same ownership or responsibility of the work. In work or operational context help tends to come from outside in and in most cases assists the main agent in their work or provides substitute relief. It may be that for unknown reasons the staff members that viewed parishioners as “helpers” did not see them as having as much ownership of the work or did not consider such ownership possible.

Perhaps surprisingly, over half of respondents said that their team goals cannot be reached with Harju parish staff resources only. Many also said that the goals can be reached with staff resources only. Some respondents continued by saying that the planned activity does not take place if there are no participants. This may have been due to a poorly defined question from me. Most respondents were, however, discussing what I was trying to get at, that is: whether network actors, volunteers, or other people actually and instrumentally needed as workforce for staff’s team/departmental goals to be reached. The question was, “can the team goals be reached with Harju staff resources only? (e.g., without utilizing networks, volunteers, people other than Harju parish employees)”. The following excerpts demonstrate the replies.

*With these goals, yes. (4)*

*No. Overall, for the work of parish we need those people who come to activities. And other networks offer us better opportunities to provide varying services. (5)*

*It is not possible. Networks and volunteers are the basis for our operations. (7)*

*Partly yes, but the result is a lot better when volunteers and networks are involved.*

*(8)*

The comments reflect by large thinking in which other actors are seen either as necessary in or welcomed to the process of goal-reaching. There is no resentment to be seen: the attitudes are respectful though not everyone sees actors outside one's own team as crucial or necessary for goals to be achieved.

A few respondents talked about the positive personal effect that volunteers have had on them.

*The participation of volunteer or on call workers in our work has made a positive difference in work enjoyment and coping, based on my experience so far. (13)*

*I am excited and motivated in my work... (for) I have met new parishioners, who want to brainstorm and implement and together evaluate and direct our work. (14)*

The collaboration with parishioners and volunteers seems to provide opportunities for staff's invigoration, motivation and enjoyment when achieved. Certain teams or staff members expressed a longing for greater collaboration, some had included collaboration in their goals.

*The parishioners have a big role. One of our team goals is to provide opportunities to participate. (8)*

*(listing team goals) We note people's strengths and will to participate. We invite people to be and do together. We learn to enable participation in demanding tasks.*

*We are one of the actors developing a new volunteer program. (6)*

*More collaboration, e.g., them (parishioners) to plan events etc. (10)*

These comments make evident that there is some movement in Harju parish towards a more collaborative culture with parishioners. However, given that developing the culture of collaboration is one of six major emphasis areas in ELCF's current

strategy, I may have expected the theme to be even more present. The strategy document says: “Church work is collaborative. Its successful implementation relies on input from both Church employees and parishioners... Parish life will increasingly rely on parishioners’ initiative, abilities, and competence. We will nurture trust, community, and a culture of collaboration. The role of Church employees will shift toward that of facilitators and mentors.” (Opening doors, p. 3-4) There are some signs of this shift in the primary data, but so far it seems not to have permeated the staff culture.

#### *4.2.4 Inner life of the employee*

This section deals with the data that had to do with inner life of an employee. This includes attitudes, emotions, commitment, and self-efficacy. Questions about current level of commitment to team and personal goals yielded interesting results. Firstly, those who filled the questionnaire were very committed to their personal goals. On a scale from 1 to 6 (1 – not at all, 6 – fully committed) the average was 5.23. The average for commitment to team goals was 4.62. Describing the reasons for the level of commitment, one of the recurring themes was significance.

*Work feels important and there are development needs that I want to work on. (6)*  
*I am in a job that has a personal spiritual meaning also for myself. It's a calling. (8)*  
*Inner desire and will is to seek different ways to find good every-day life for children and families - (gospel into life in every-day living). The church has the best message ever – the team goals spread the good news further. (14)*

The sense of calling and spiritual purpose is an important source of occupational well-being and has been found to be connected to flow at work. The sense of calling is found to protect from becoming cynical; however, the same sense of calling may cause one to not have all agreed days off work. (Tervo-Niemelä, 2023)

A few said their commitment to goals was affected by their ability to influence the goals.

*(commitment has to do with that) I have influenced the goals. (6)*

*I don't feel like I can influence things in my team, it affects me. The high commitment to personal goals has to do with the fact that I can influence them. (10)*

*I haven't had ownership nor participation to create team's goals together with the team, so that's why I replied "2" to team goal commitment. I am more committed to personal goals since they are defined by me. (2)*

Studies show that when goal difficulty is constant, an assigned goal is as effective as participatively set if the logic or rationale for the goal is given. (Locke & Latham, 1990) It can be argued that one is more likely to internally understand the logic of a goal that one has set themselves than a goal set by others, especially if time available for processing is limited. This may be reflected in the comments.

Certain respondents mentioned professional know-how as a positive contributor to commitment.

*I am interested and specialized in operations that are connected to my personal goals. (5)*

*At the moment I feel that my place is here. I have the chance to do work that contains elements that I like. I can use all of my know-how and all the time I can/have to learn new things. The challenges and skills are in balance. (16)*

Here the commitment arises from being able to use considerable know-how and ability. The commitment does not arise because goals are easy, rather goal difficulty is seen as a motivating factor when the belief of goal reachability is present. As here, this is often connected to self-efficacy, i.e., one's own belief in being able to reach the goal. This is in line with the basic findings and assumptions of GST.

A few talked about the experience of large workload and stress. For some it was seasonal, but for others it seemed to be more constant.

*Too much work and lack of time are affecting my commitment. My personal goals are being overwhelmed by other tasks. The team does not see my workload. (7)*

*I am very or too work-orientated, which I am trying to unlearn. So I lowered the commitment rating from six to five. What I do, I want to do well. I don't like to bustle around without a goal. (11)*

~~12: I am aiming at lightening my job description. My goal is to improve my health.~~  
Other expressed negative emotions mainly arose from experiences of not reaching goals, not being seen, lack of feedback, lack of resources, and team dysfunction.

Here are some examples.

*When we haven't reached our goals, I have felt fatigue, the sense of sporadicity and meaninglessness. Frustration. (9)*

*I have felt envy. There isn't an opportunity to get a pay rise even though you may possess special skills that others do not. (10)*

*I currently feel like an outsider in my team. It has its roots in last year. I am unsure of the shared level of commitment since it is not talked about. (11)*

The experience of lack of resources is an interesting one. When compared to former resources of ELCF, there is a decline in finances. This is bound to be felt on national and parish level. If former reach is aimed at with former strategies yet with smaller resources, there is bound to be pressure. At the same time, ELCF is one of the wealthiest churches in the world, employing over 15 000 workers. Of course, much of the wealth is tied to church buildings and their upkeep is costly, and the resource situation varies between parishes and regions. But when compared to the majority of the churches around the world, ELCF has considerable resources. Some respondents said that what enables them to reach goals and work is, amongst other things, resources. Others said that lack of resources is limiting/hindering them. There may be variation in allocation of resources and in demands, but there may also be different points of view the same exact situation.

# 5 – Discussion

## 5.1 Theoretical considerations

### 5.1.1 Goal-setting theory and SMART goals

The data presents interesting findings through the lens of goal-setting theory (GST). A key tenet of GST is goal difficulty. The higher the goal, the better the performance, if a person does not reach the limit of their ability. In the case of Harju parish, on average the respondents deemed both their personal and team goals to be somewhat easy (avg. 3,31 and 3,25 on a scale 1 – very easy, 6 – very difficult). While performance was not measured in this study, should GST hold its ground, a way to upgrade the performance of staff in Harju parish would be to up the goal difficulty whilst making sure the staff have the ability to achieve those higher, specific goals. Effort is “mobilized and expanded in proportion to the difficulty level of the goal” (Locke & Latham 2013, p. 6).

Even if goals are somewhat easy, the respondents do not appear idle. Many respondents commented that they have a lot of work to do. Therefore, adding a high, specific goal on top of existing tasks will probably not work for most of them.

Simultaneously, about two thirds of respondent non-supervisors said that their team goals are not clear or that the goals should really be more condensed, memorable, and defined. These two aspects may be linked in the sense that according to GST, a specific and high goal orients an individual’s attention and effort toward goal-relevant activities and away from those that are deemed irrelevant. When a goal is not clear it becomes more difficult to define what activities are relevant and what are not. Having a high and specific goal may shield an individual or a team from undertaking too many secondary tasks that may risk success with the high and specific goal.

The reportedly undefined nature of team goals and/or their metrics is seen as an undesired state by most management literature. For example, Drucker (1954, 1973) was convinced that employees ought to have a clear understanding of what their goals are and how their work contributes to the organization's overall objectives. Management by results (MBR) emphasizes setting measurable and clear goals, followed by accountability for reaching those goals. Unclear goals and metrics do not direct the efforts in the best way possible and make it more difficult to both align work and hold individuals and teams accountable.

Like Drucker (Ibid.), GST stresses the role of feedback. Goals regulate performance better when feedback is present, feedback enables people to decide whether to increase effort or change strategy to reach a goal, and the lack of feedback makes goal setting ineffective for increasing performance. (Locke & Latham, 2013) I would personally add that feedback (or the lack of it) regarding a goal also speaks of the perceived importance of a goal. No feedback on how an individual or team is doing communicates indifference towards their progress with a goal; feedback and follow-up communicates that there is interest in how much progress towards a goal has been made, and that the goal is worth reaching. Dramatically scarce feedback on a goal may border the rejection of the said goal altogether.

The amount of goal-orientated feedback was one of the topics where most variation between respondents was seen. The differences were especially visible on the departmental level. One team monitors the goals regularly in the feedback section of meetings, other team talks about goals once every 6 months. While frequency of feedback on goals does not automatically equal quality, the approaches are vastly different. As feedback resulting in goal setting improves performance, performance

does not improve if feedback does not result in goal setting, if feedback is ignored, or if feedback is not really given.

The personal goals that the respondents said they have had broadly to do with basic job description (tasks), occupational well-being, and personal growth/inner calling.

The respondents expressed a high level of commitment to their goals, especially to their personal goals.

Based on the overall available material on goals (team OFPs, parish OFP, answers of respondents), many of the goals are formulated in a quite broad way to begin with, such as “encountering the sacred” or “plan and implement youth work”. In general, the broad aims in the team and parish OFPs are followed by measures to be taken (e.g., “in our communications we tell about encountering the sacred”) and then followed by metrics or analysis (e.g., “the number of followers and reactions on social media”). I did not come across expressed/written down numerical metrics for any of the goals either in OFPs or elsewhere in the data, though formulations like the example just before are present, just without actual numbers. Depending on the type of plan, the plans concern either a calendar year (team plans or parish’s year plan) or a three-year period (parish’s 3 year plan).

Overall, I found that in the data it was sometimes difficult to differentiate between mission statements, basic job descriptions, tasks, and goals. While all of these are somewhat related in an organization, a goal is “the object of a person’s ambition or effort; an aim or desired result” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2024). Sometimes when I asked about goals, what was brought up was tasks or job description, but not necessarily something that would answer the question “what are you trying to achieve?”.

Interesting findings come up when considering the SMART goals approach (“SMART” in SMART goals stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Time-Relevant, and Time-Bound) and the OFPs. While the other aspects can be found reasonably well in the parish OFP, the M for measurability is a challenge. For instance, one of the Harju parish operational goals for 2024 was named “Encountering the Sacred – connection with God. We invite and encourage our parishioners to encounter the sacred in their lives and in the church fellowship” (Harju Parish OFP for 2024). This flows from the mission statement: “Harju parish exists to be a place where the people of our area can encounter the sacred, the neighbour, and the created world” (Ibid.). From this formulation of the goal measures are derived, such as “we make sure that the churches and other parish buildings are clean and beautiful”. A metric for this is “the feedback of the cleanliness and usability of the premises”. The SMART approach (Doran, 1981) would insist that there needs to be a quantifying element, something that makes it easier to track progress and know when you’ve reached your goal for the time frame.

There are at least the following ways to add the measurability element to these goal-setting documents:

- 1) add a measurability element to the top-level goal. E.g., “...in 2024 we personally invite 500 parishioners to encounter the sacred...”. This changes the layout of the goal document formulation: “goal -> measures -> metrics” becomes “goal (including metrics) -> measures”.
- 2) Keep the top-level goal as it is, as a goal category. Then add measurability to all the measures that are planned. The measures then become a group of goals related to the top goal/category. For example, “we take good care of the communal worship services at local churches, *making sure the ratio of volunteers to staff members is at*

*least 2:1*". Here the formulation would be "goal category -> a number of subgoals (measures) with measurable metrics".

Of course, adding metrics is arbitrary if there is no information on where an organization currently is with e.g., the ratio of volunteers to staff. GST also acknowledges that sometimes a learning goal may be the best option when faced with complexity (Locke & Latham, 2013). While learning as a process should be understood as ongoing, a learning goal is set to understand locus and manage complexity. Once enough learning has taken place, high and specific goals can be set. From the standpoint of SMART goals, understanding locus and current ratios and the like makes it possible to set reachable goals as the starting point can be stated. Hence, a reachable goal from the starting point for a certain period can be set.

### *5.1.2 Citizen participation*

Considering citizen participation (what might be called 'parishioner participation' in this study), the results are somewhat mixed. Similarly to 'citizens' and 'state', a 'parish' is essentially made of 'parishioners'; the essence of parish and the essence of church is historically and theologically speaking a community. Pollitt and Bouckaert view a citizen as a concentration of rights and duties in the person of an individual, in the context of constitutional state, rule of law, and within the hierarchy of laws and regulations (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 1995). While citizens and parishioners make choices on what level of involvement they choose in the social contract of state and parish, those leading and working for the administration do well to understand the value of citizen/parishioner participation. The benefits are seen to include, but not limited to citizens being able to contribute and realize their potential, establishing

transparency, and strengthening democracy (Johar, 2017; Svaljek et al., 2019; Chirinje et al., 2013).

One of the important points would then be how the key people, especially staff, view the parishioners. While a high level of voluntary participation cannot be forced out of any citizen or parishioner, the staff's vision of what could become possible with a high level of citizen/parishioner participation makes a difference.

If participation has not been commonplace, should it be? Could it be? Will it be? This is the direction that ELCF's strategy is pointing the parishes to and in case of Harju parish some progress has clearly been made, but such an approach has not yet permeated the culture of the organization. While the respondents' approach toward parishioners was always respectful, the emphasis was mainly on the staff doing the work of the parish compared to, e.g., staff gathering and coordinating volunteer and network resources.

## **5.2 Harju parish and the state of goal-setting**

Overall, Harju parish seems to have a common goal-setting problem. Its operations span many sectors of life and many age groups. It is difficult (but possible?) to articulate a small number of goals that are defined and holistic enough but leading with a large number of goals is not easy. A single staff member usually has goals set by department, goals set by local church team, goals set in development discussions and goals set in performance bonus discussions. The appearance of these goals and the unity within them ranges. When asked about personal goals, I interpret some respondents' tendency to revert back to job description or to very basic well-being goals to be a way to bring personal clarity. The focus on basic settings, such as

“things we do (yearly) in any case” or “whatever happens, I’ll focus on my health”, provides a unifying factor and a framework.

In terms of timeframes, vast majority of planning and envisioning looks at 1-year horizon though there is some planning beyond that. The parish’s 3-year plan and HR (retirements, how many staff in the future etc.) and building plans have a longer scope. But in the course of this study, operational medium or long-term strategic goals or the desired future state of the parish (vision) did not come up. That may in part explain the tendency of different teams and individuals reaching out to additional sources for goal-setting guidance, on top of the yearly focus points. The different sources were the like of national mission statement for early childhood education, church law statutes referring to diaconal work, or established work patterns. In this study it remained unclear how and how closely aligned team OFPs and parish OFP are envisioned to be by the leadership.

A parish vision with clear, medium-term goals would be one way to bring focus to goal-setting. While parish union and ELCF have strategy documents, strategy documents are not goals. There appears to be a gap that would answer the question “what is the parish building towards?” or “what are the strategic goals of the parish?”. This may explain the lack of wordings such as “especially”, “strategic”, “we/I are building towards”, or “the most important” in goal talk in the data.

While Harju parish by no means seems to suffer of all of the performance measurement dysfunctions in Peter Smith’s characterisation (e.g. Vakkuri & Meklin, 2006), myopia, suboptimization and to some extent tunnel vision can be identified. *Myopia*, i.e. shortsightedness, means that performance measurement and goal-setting focuses on short-term, in this case on a 1-year period. Though long-term goals can and should be broken down into smaller portions, in this case the clear

long-term goals are unarticulated. Vakkuri & Virtanen (2016, pp. 568) state that “performance measurement system’s incentive... to review effectiveness only on short-term creates a problem of shortsightedness. Performance measurement skews the organization’s perception of time and creates an inaccurate picture of the timespan of organization’s or program’s impact.”

*Suboptimization* means that organizational units pursue goals that are different or contradictory to higher order goals (Vakkuri & Meklin, 2006). While in this case no clear contradiction can be identified, a lack of deeper congruence (harmony) within goals in the parish can be seen. The organisational units appear make goals that are good for them but are often disconnected from each other. Once again, this seems to be connected to the lack of clear, unifying strategic operational goals.

*Tunnel vision* refers to the measurement of the easy things when faced with complexity or aims that are in tension (Ibid.). In this case, some team or personal goals measure easy things, such as whether an event is arranged, or existing work is listed into new parish yearly focus categories to show that the foci have been seen. Listing existing work into new table does not necessarily mean the actual work has been modified. This is important, as metrics and quantification have a significant institutional effect. “The manner of assessment and measurement often starts to influence the understanding of the effectiveness of operations, even though the the manner of measurement is known to be based on a limited understanding of effectiveness” (Vakkuri & Virtanen 2016, p. 568).

## 6 – Conclusions

This study was intrigued by the goals and goal-setting practices of the staff at Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, an institutional organization under heavy change pressure. Analysis of the staff's responses, parish's operational and financial planning documents, and other relevant material shows that many different goal-setting processes exist in Harju parish. However, they lack an articulated unifying factor that would point them clearly to same future direction. Themes from both national and parish union strategies appear, but there seems to be a challenge in converting strategy into strategic parish goals spanning further than a year. As the strategic vision of parish's future is not yet well articulated, the yearly steps taken by different teams and individuals do not share a long-term strategic understanding. The backbone for current goal-making in the parish is the yearly structure and timeline provided by parish union. This governance frame is followed faithfully by Harju parish and produces its basic results: OFPs are made, staff discussions are had. Overall, the role of staff was primary and the role of parish board secondary in parish's strategic goal-setting. This study calls for rethink of the local parish OFP process and clarification of goal-setting roles between board and staff. Further research is needed to understand the reasons for current roles and agency in strategic planning. Considering the multiple layers of governance, for example, the effect of parish union as a perceived simplifier/complicator in parish goal-setting would be an interesting object of research.

The staff's personal work goals appeared to focus on core duties and occupational well-being, with some emphasis on spiritual calling and personal growth. Based on this study the staff at ELCF are very committed to their goals and to their work and

accept their share of responsibility for goals. High level of commitment was most often connected to work having personal significance, self-efficacy, and being able to influence goals.

The relationship with goals was affected by quality of teamwork and by how goals were used. The goal-related thinking towards parishioners was diverse. While parishioners were seen as central, their perceived agency by staff varied noticeably. Where collaboration between staff and parishioners was mentioned, the sense was positive and invigorating.

As a qualitative case study, this study has a local and restricted scope. For example, the respondents may not represent the staff of the parish or ELCF accurately. While the generalisability of this qualitative study is limited, this approach has provided new insight into goal content and goal-related thinking and practices in a nationally important religious organization. In terms of the future of ELCF this study highlights the importance of envisioning a preferred medium to long-term future that is actionable and measurable. The use of strategic goal-setting frameworks such as OKR or SMART may aid the practitioners. For large organisations, such as a parish union or ELCF at large, this study shows that merely creating strategy documents does not suffice. Support for implementation of the strategy and strategic planning is also needed on the local level.

This study confirms the basic assumptions of goal-setting theory and shows its usability in a religious organization. This study contributes to GST research body by a novel context and emphasizing the connection between feedback and goal importance.

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# 8 – Appendix

## Appendix 1. Questionnaire.

Kysely tavoitteiden asettelusta Harjun seurakunnan työntekijöille

31.10.2024 22.35

### Kysely tavoitteiden asettelusta Harjun seurakunnan työntekijöille

Kiitos kun klikkasit lomakkeen auki! Tässä kyselyssä kartoitetaan sitä, miten tavoitteita asetetaan Harjun seurakunnan työyhteisössä ja kuinka ne vaikuttavat työntekijöiden ja seurakunnan työhön. Vastauksia voi jättää 20.5.2023 asti. Vastaaminen vie keskimäärin 15-25 minuuttia.

Kysely on anonymi. Anonymiuden säilymiseen kiinnitetään erityistä huomiota. Julkaistavaan tutkimustuotokseen päätyvät vastaukset koodataan. Yksittäiseen henkilöön yhdistettävissä olevat tavoitteet tai yksityiskohdat otetaan pois. Taustatieto-osion tietoja ei yhdistetä henkilön muihin vastauksiin, vaan taustatietoja käytetään erikseen. Lomakkeita tarkastelee ainoastaan tutkimuksen toteuttaja.

Kyselyn lopussa on erillinen linkki, jonka kautta voit osallistua palkintoarvontaan jättämällä sähköpostiosoitteen. Arvontalinkin vastauksista on poistettu aikaleima, joten yhteystietoa ei voi liittää kyselylomakeeseen kellonajan perusteella. Yhteystietoja tarkastellaan arvontaa varten yhtenä joukkona ja vasta lomakkeen koko vastausajan päätyttyä. Arvonta suoritetaan vastausajan päätyttyä ja yhteystiedot tuhotaan heti arvonnin suorittamisen jälkeen.

Tutkimus toteutetaan Tampereen yliopiston hallintotieteiden oppialalla.

\* Pakollinen

#### Taustatietoja

1. Kuinka kauan olet ollut Harjun seurakunnan työntekijä? \*

- Alle 2 vuotta
- 2-5 vuotta
- Yli 5 vuotta

2. Työsuhteen tyyppi \*

- Vakituinen
- Määräaikainen

3. Toimitko esihenkilönä? \*

- Kyllä
- En

4. Millä tavalla olet johtanut tiimisi tavoitteiden asettamiseen? \*

5. Mitkä ovat ne perusteet ja taustatiedot, joiden pohjalta olet tehnyt tavoitetyöskentelyä? \*

6. Millä tavalla sinua on ohjattu, johdettu tai ohjeistettu tavoitteiden asettelun prosessissa? \*

## Tiimin tavoitteet

7. Mitkä ovat tiimisi tämän hetken tavoitteet pääpiirteittäin? Osaatko nimetä ne? \*

8. Kerro hieman lisää tiimisi tavoitteista. Ovatko ne kirjattuja? Onko niille asetettu mittareita ja jos on, niin millaisia? \*

9. Seuraatteko tiiminne kanssa tavoitteiden saavuttamista ja toteutumista? \*

10. Kuka vastaa tavoitteiden toteutumisesta? \*

11. Kuvaile tiimin tavoitteiden muodostusprosessia. Miten tiimin tavoitteet muodostettiin? Vaikutitko itse tavoitteiden sisältöön? \*

12. Ovatko tiimisi tavoitteet mielestäsi selkeitä? \*

13. Suhteessa tiimisi osaamiseen ja kokemukseen, kuinka haastavina pidät tiimisi tavoitteita? (1 - todella helppo, 6 - todella vaikea) \*

1	2	3	4	5	6
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14. Kuinka todennäköisenä pidät sitä, että tiimisi saavuttaa tavoitteensa? (1 - en lainkaan todennäköisenä, 6 - erittäin todennäköisenä) \*

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

15. Mitä ovat ne tekijät, joiden näet mahdollistavan tavoitteisiin pääsemistä kohdallanne? \*

16. Mitä ovat ne tekijät, joiden näet estävän tavoitteisiin pääsemistä kohdallanne? \*

17. Miten kuvaisit seurakuntalaisten roolia tavoitteissanne? \*

18. Mitä tavoitteisiin pääsemisestä tai pääsemättömyydestä seuraa tiimissä? \*

19. Voitko mielestäsi saavuttaa tiiminne tavoitteet pelkästään työntekijävoimin (ilman esim. verkostojen hyödyntämistä, vapaaehtoisia, muita kuin Harjun seurakunnan työntekijöitä)? \*

## Henkilökohtaiset tavoitteet

20. Onko sinulla kirjattuja henkilökohtaisia tavoitteita, jotka olet muodostanut yhdessä joko tiimin tai esihenkilön kanssa? \*

Kyllä

Ei

21. Onko sinulla itse muodostamiasi henk. koht. tavoitteita, jotka ohjaavat työtäsi? Jos on, niin millaisia ne ovat? \*

22. Mitä nämä henkilökohtaiset tavoitteet ovat pääpiirteissään? \*

23. Onko sinulla lisäksi itse muodostamiasi henk. koht. tavoitteita, jotka ohjaavat työtäsi? Jos on, niin millaisia? \*

24. Ovatko tavoitteesi mielestäsi selkeitä? \*

25. Millä tavalla koet henk. koht. tavoitteiden olevan yhteydessä tiimisi tavoitteisiin? \*

26. Kuinka vaikeina pidät henkilökohtaisia tavoitteitasi? (1 - todella helppoina, 6 - todella vaikeina) \*

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

27. Kuinka todennäköisenä pidät sitä, että saavutat henkilökohtaiset tavoitteesi? (1 - en lainkaan todennäköisenä, 6 - erittäin todennäköisenä) \*

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

28. Mitä ovat ne tekijät, joiden näet mahdollistavan tavoitteisiin pääsemistäsi? \*

29. Mitä ovat ne tekijät, joiden näet estävän tavoitteisiin pääsemistäsi? \*

30. Seurataanko sitä, että pääsetkö tavoitteisiisi? \*

31. Kuvaile lyhyesti henk. koht. tavoitteiden muodostusprosessia. Miten prosessi etenee, mikä on oma roolisi? \*

32. Mitä tavoitteisiin pääsemisestä/pääsemättömyydestä seuraa? \*

33. Miten kuvailisit seurakuntalaisten roolia tavoitteissasi? \*

## Tavoitteiden merkityksestä työntekijälle

34. Kuinka sitoutunut olet tiimisi tavoitteisiin? (1 - en lainkaan, 6 - täysin) \*

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

35. Mistä sitoutumisen tasosi tiimin tavoitteisiin johtuu? \*

36. Entä kuinka sitoutunut olet henkilökohtaisiin tavoitteisiisi? (1 - en lainkaan, 6 - täysin) \*

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

37. Mistä sitoutumisen tasosi henkilökohtaisiin tavoitteisiisi johtuu? \*

38. Kuinka hyvin koet tiimisi tavoitteiden edistävän seurakunnan strategisia tavoitteita? (1 - ei lainkaan, 6 - erittäin hyvin) \*

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

39. Entä kuinka hyvin koet henk. koht. tavoitteidesi edistävän seurakunnan strategisia tavoitteita? (1 - ei lainkaan, 6 - erittäin hyvin) \*

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

40. Kuinka tärkeinä pidät tiimisi tavoitteita? (1 - en lainkaan, 6 - erittäin tärkeinä) \*

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

41. Kuinka tärkeinä pidät henk. koht. tavoitteitasi? (1 - en lainkaan, 6 - erittäin tärkeinä) \*

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

42. Jos haluat lisätä jotakin aihepiiriin liittyvää, voit kirjoittaa sen tähän kohtaan.

### Arvontaan osallistuminen (vapaaehtoista)

Tämän linkin kautta pääset osallistumaan 2 x 20 € kahvilalahjakortin arvontaan: [REDACTED]

Osallistuit arvontaan tai et, niin suuri kiitos vastauksistasi!

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Tämä ei ole Microsoftin luomaa tai suosittelemaa sisältöä. Lähettämäsi tiedot lähetetään lomakkeen omistajalle.

 Microsoft Forms

*Appendix 2. The base questions of the semi-structured interview.*

**\* Harju parish OFP 2022-24 and the metrics mentioned in it**

Have the metrics remained in their current form or have they been edited?  
How have they been used? If they have been edited, how?

**\* OFP cycles.**

What do you think about the span of OFP planning (1-year and 3-year) as a vicar?  
Does Harju parish have plans and goals beyond current 3-year OFP?

**\* The relationship between Harju parish OFP work and national and parish union strategy work.**

How do you see the roles of ELCF strategy, Tampere parish guidelines and parish union shared planning in Harju parish's OFP and strategy work?

**\* Harju parish organisation and staff's goal-setting.**

How are the goals for teams and staff set? Does Harju parish have a process or guidelines for this? How big is the forepersons' / team autonomy in goal-setting? Are proposed goals accepted without editing? Who accepts the goals? How is goal progress followed? How is alignment between individual and team goals and the whole parish goals ensured?

**\* Goals in everyday life.**

What kind of goal-related discussions do you have with forepersons as you meet them? What metrics or goal progress is followed up on?

**\* System around work goal orientation.**

What kind of systems or structures do you have around work goal orientation?

**\* The challenges brought by changes in operational environment and projected future.**

How are future projections concerning changes in operational and attitudinal environments as well as in church's resources reflected in the goals of the whole parish, teams, and individual staff members?

**\* The level of goal challenge and clarity.**

How do you perceive the difficulty of Harju parish OFP? What about the clarity?

**\* The most central goal.** What is your most important goal at work? How do you form your goals and what are they like? Do you have a development discussion or other support for your position?

*Appendix 3. The questions sent to department leaders via email.*

1. How have you led your team in goal-setting?
2. What are the basis and background information that you have utilized in goal-setting work?
3. How have you been led and guided in goal-setting work?
4. Do you monitor goal progress and fulfilment with your team? Who is responsible for the realization of the goals?
5. What factors do you see enabling goal-reaching? What are the hindering factors?
6. How would you describe the role of parishioners in your goals?
7. What kind of personal goals do you have? How committed are you to your goals (1 – not at all, 6 – fully) and what is the reason for your level of commitment?