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EVERYDAY SELF-REGULATION, RECOVERY, AND BOUNDARY MAINTENANCE AMONG CZECH MANAGERS: A QUALITATIVE DIARY-INFORMED INTERVIEW STUDY

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Summary. Managerial well-being has been studied predominantly through survey measures of burnout, strain, and engagement. Much less is known about how managers themselves organise everyday recovery, self-monitoring, and work-nonwork boundaries, especially when interview accounts are examined alongside behavioural traces of time use. To explore how three Czech private-sector managers described, justified, and organised everyday self-regulation and recovery, and to examine what became visible when those accounts were read alongside 14-day time-use diary records. Small-sample qualitative study using diary-informed semi-structured interviews and descriptive time-use diaries. Data was analysed with reflexive thematic analysis. Three purposively selected managers – pseudonyms David, Aleš, and Petra – representing variation in sex, age, managerial scope, and industry sector within the Czech private sector. Three themes were developed. First, participants differed in how readily they treated self-regulation as a legitimate topic of attention when prompted to discuss it. Second, all three described some form of self-monitoring, but monitoring did not reliably translate into sustained reorganisation of daily practice. Third, the most durable boundaries were secured by structural anchors – a formal working arrangement or an external fixed schedule – rather than by moment-to-moment willpower. The most analytically productive moments arose where diary summaries complicated interview narratives, including Aleš's claimed sense of balance despite diary evidence of long work hours and recurrent evening disturbance, and David's coherent self-management account despite diary evidence that his functioning was materially supported by external schedule constraints and unequal domestic coverage. The study makes a bounded substantive contribution by showing that managerial self-regulation is not simply an individual competence, but a situated accomplishment shaped by time structures, role arrangements, and relational support. Its methodological contribution is demonstrative rather than confirmatory: diary-informed interviewing proved useful for surfacing tensions between narrated balance and organised daily life. The findings are analytically specific, not generalisable, and are offered as hypotheses for further research.

Keywords: managerial well-being, self-regulation, recovery, boundary management, reflexive thematic analysis, time-use diary, Czech Republic.

1. Introduction

Managers work in conditions defined by sustained accountability for people, outputs, and uncertainty. Leadership research has therefore linked managerial roles with elevated strain exposure, emotional load, and burnout risk, while organisational health research has shown that high demands become especially consequential when recovery is thin and boundaries remain permeable (Harms et al., 2017; Maslach et al., 2001; Skakon et al., 2010; Sonnentag, 2012). Yet most of this literature relies on cross-sectional survey measurement. It is informative about levels of strain, but less informative about the mundane processes through which managers attempt to preserve functioning from day to day.

That gap matters. Self-regulation at work is not only an internal capacity. In practice it involves noticing depletion, deciding whether it deserves action, interrupting work routines, protecting non-work time, and negotiating the legitimacy of recovery against occupational and family demands. Boundary management research has shown that these processes are socially organised rather than purely volitional

(Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Kossek et al., 2012; Kreiner et al., 2006). Recovery research has likewise shown that psychological detachment and restoration depend partly on how time is structured, not simply on whether an individual endorses well-being in principle (Sonnentag, 2012; Sonnentag et al., 2010).

For managers specifically, however, we still know comparatively little about how these processes are narrated and enacted in everyday life. The problem is not only that manager-focused qualitative studies are less common than survey studies. It is also that interview-based work often cannot test its own narratives against organised traces of daily activity. A manager may describe balance, boundary discipline, or self-awareness quite coherently, while the temporal architecture of daily life tells a more complicated story.

This study addresses that gap through a small-sample qualitative design that combines semi-structured interviews with 14-day time-use diaries and a diary review conversation preceding the main interview. The analytic aim is deliberately modest. The article does not attempt to prevalence estimation, typology building, or causal inference. Instead, it asks what becomes visible when managers' spoken accounts of self-regulation and recovery are read together with a basic behavioural record of how their time was organised over two weeks.

The study was conducted in the Czech private sector. The Czech setting is used here not as a representative national case but as an under-examined Central European context in which managerial responsibilities, long-hours expectations, and limited formal infrastructures of psychological support can intersect in ways (EU-OSHA, 2022).

Three research questions guided the study. First, how did participating managers describe and make sense of everyday self-regulation and recovery when explicitly invited to reflect on them? Second, what tensions emerged between interview accounts and diary-recorded time organisation? Third, how were more stable recovery practices enabled or constrained by structural conditions such as work arrangements, external commitments, and household organisation?

2. Conceptual Framework

Three conceptual resources informed the analysis. They were selected for analytic usefulness rather than theoretical exhaustiveness. Together they offered a way to interpret strain management as simultaneously occupational, interactional, and temporal.

2.1 Job Demands, Resources, and Recovery Under Managerial Load

The Job Demands-Resources model provides a useful interpretive background for this study because it distinguishes between the energy-depleting effect of demands and the sustaining function of resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, 2017; Demerouti et al., 2001). In managerial roles, demands are not only quantitative. They include interpersonal accountability, decision pressure, availability expectations, and recurrent cognitive carry-over after formal work has ended.

For present purposes, the JD-R model is treated as contextual background rather than as a variable framework to be extended. It helps locate why recovery matters, but it does not by itself explain how managers recognise depletion, justify interruption, or stabilise non-work time. Those more processual questions require attention to interpretation and enactment.

2.2 Espoused Accounts and Enacted Routines

Argyris and Schön (1978) distinguished between what actors say guides their conduct and the patterns that can be inferred from what they do. Schön (1983) further showed that reflection does not automatically produce change. This distinction is particularly relevant for managerial self-regulation, because the topic is morally charged. Participants can usually articulate what balanced conduct ought to look like. The harder analytic question is whether narrated balance is materially enacted, and under what conditions reflection closes into altered routine rather than remaining at the level of recognition.

2.3 Boundary Management as Situated Enactment

Boundary management research helps specify where self-regulation becomes visible in everyday practice. Boundaries between work and non-work are not maintained only by preference; they are supported, undermined, and made negotiable by role expectations, organisational rules, temporal routines, and household arrangements (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Kossek et al., 2012; Kreiner et al., 2006).

This literature is central here because the data repeatedly showed that the durability of recovery-oriented practice depended less on internal endorsement than on whether participants had access to rule-bearing structures that protected non-work time. Boundary management is therefore treated not as a separate topic from self-regulation, but as one of its most concrete enactment sites.

3. Method

This section specifies the study design, sampling logic, data generation, analytic procedure, and reflexive safeguards. Because the evidential strength of a small qualitative comparison depends on transparency more than on procedural display, each subsection clarifies what the design was intended to do, and equally what it was not designed to claim.

3.1 Design

This is a small sample qualitative comparison using diary-informed semi-structured interviews. Interview material and diary records were generated from the same three participants and analysed through reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019, 2022). The design is exploratory and interpretive. It is not presented as a case study in the strict methodological sense, nor as triangulation between independent instruments that verify one another. Rather, diary data were used to inform later questioning, complicate first-person accounts, and provide a descriptive behavioural surface against which interview narratives could be read.

One interview prompt explicitly asked participants how they understood the Czech expression duševní hygiena, rendered here only approximately as a prompt about self-care or mental upkeep. This matters analytically. The first theme should not be read as evidence about participants' spontaneous everyday vocabulary, but as evidence about how readily they were able or willing to take up an invited concept of self-regulatory attention.

3.2 Participants

Participants were recruited through purposive sampling using maximum variation criteria (Patton, 2015) across sex, age, organisational position, sector, and the presence or absence of externally anchored non-work commitments. All worked in the Czech private sector. Three participants were selected not to represent Czech managers, but to create analytically contrasting configurations of managerial work, time structure, and recovery opportunity within a tightly bounded qualitative comparison. The sample is intentionally small and cannot support representative claims; its value lies in analytic contrast.

David is a male manager in his mid-thirties in a customer service leadership role at a multinational private company. He supervises a medium-sized team, lives with a partner and one child, and sustains a regular performing arts commitment outside work.

Aleš is a male manager in his early fifties who co-founded and continues to lead a technology firm. He carries combined strategic and operational responsibility and occupies an owner-manager position that blurs formal work boundaries.

Petra is a female manager in her mid-to-late forties leading a small marketing department within a private-sector organisation. She lives with a partner and two children and works under a formally negotiated flexible arrangement.

3.3 Data Collection

Data collection proceeded in two linked stages designed to capture both participants' narrated understandings of recovery and the temporal organisation of their everyday lives. First, semi-structured interviews elicited participants' retrospective accounts of work, self-regulation, fatigue, and boundary management. Second, 14-day time-use diaries generated a more fine-grained record of daily activity, perceived demand, and subjective energy across workdays and weekends. The two sources were not treated as methodologically equivalent or fully independent. Rather, the diary material served to extend, specify, and at times complicate the interview narratives by grounding them in temporally structured records of ordinary routine. This combination was intended to strengthen analytic depth in a small-sample design by bringing together articulated meaning and patterned daily practice.

3.3.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews were conducted in Czech by the researcher, audio-recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim. Each lasted approximately 90 minutes. The guide covered everyday recovery and self-regulation, self-monitoring habits, perceived limits, daily time organisation, and work-non-work boundaries. The guide was used flexibly and probed concrete situations rather than abstract opinions wherever possible.

Interview excerpts presented in this article were translated by the researcher and checked against the original Czech by a bilingual colleague not affiliated with the study. The translation process was reduced but could not entirely remove the possibility of nuance loss in psychologically loaded expressions.

3.3.2 Time-Use Diaries

Each participant completed a structured paper diary across 14 consecutive days, comprising 10 working days and 4 weekend days. The diary was divided into 30-minute intervals from 06:00 to 24:00. For each interval, participants recorded the primary activity and rated psychological demand and subjective energy on five-point scales. Instructions asked for near real-time completion where possible, while allowing retrospective reconstruction when necessary and requiring that retrospective entries be marked as such.

Compliance varied. David completed approximately 94% of intervals contemporaneously, with retrospective entries concentrated in late-evening intervals. Petra completed approximately 87% in real time, with flagged retrospective entries mainly on weekend mornings. Aleš completed several days retrospectively, including two occasions on which two preceding days were reconstructed at once. His diary is therefore treated as a broad indicative record, and his demand and energy ratings were not interpreted at interval level.

3.3.3 Diary Processing and Integration

After completion, all diary activity entries were coded by the researcher into the ten mutually exclusive categories shown in Table 1, namely sleep; work in the primary managerial role; second professional activity; family, childcare, and household; social contact; personal leisure and interests; physical activity and sport; commuting; meals; and personal care and others. The category set was developed inductively through repeated reading of all three diaries and then stabilized before aggregating weekly summaries were calculated. Where an interval contained more than one function, the participant's own designation of the primary activity was retained. Retrospectively completed intervals were included in the aggregates so that the weekly record remained intact, but they were flagged in a processing note and treated with explicit caution in interpretation.

Demand and energy ratings from David's and Petra's diaries were used descriptively rather than inferentially. These five-point self-rates were not analysed as an independent quantitative dataset. Instead, they were consulted during theme reviews only where they helped illuminate an emerging interpretation, for example when lower afternoon energy coincided with days lacking any reported restorative interruption. Aleš's scale data were not used in this way because retrospective completion reduced interval-level trustworthiness.

Before the main interview, each participant took part in a structured 30-minute diary review conversation in which aggregated patterns were shown back to them and they were invited to comment, correct, or contextualise them. Those conversations informed later interview probing. For that reason, the design is best understood as diary-informed interviewing rather than as a comparison between two fully separate data sources.

3.4 Analytic Procedure

Interview transcripts formed the primary analytic corpus. Reflexive thematic analysis followed the six phases described by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019): familiarisation, coding, development of candidate themes, theme review, definition and naming, and analytic writing. Coding was inductive. The conceptual resources in Section 2 were brought in during interpretation rather than used as a prior coding frame.

Reflexive memos were written from the first reading onward and documented uncertainties, competing interpretations, and places where diary material challenged an interview-led impression. Diary records

entered the analysis at the theme-review and writing stages as contextualising and destabilising material. Their role was to complicate, not to mechanically confirm, the interview account.

No claim of saturation is made. With three participants, saturation would be a misleading criterion. The article instead seeks analytic specificity, transparency about uncertainty, and disciplined handling of a small comparative dataset.

3.5 Reflexivity and Positionality

The researcher had professional familiarity with one organisation and professional acquaintance with two participants. This facilitated access but also created risks of sympathetic reading, social desirability in interview talk, and reliance on contextual knowledge not explicitly present in the data.

These risks were managed through ongoing memo-writing, deliberate search for disconfirming evidence, especially where diary summaries complicated interview narratives, and review of developing theme accounts by a colleague unfamiliar with the participants. Even so, positionality remains a genuine limitation. The analysis should therefore be read as a reflexively managed interpretation rather than as a view from nowhere.

4. Results

Three themes are reported. Table 1 presents the approximate weekly time distribution derived from the diaries, and Table 2 provides a restrained cross-case summary of analytically relevant indicators so that the comparative structure of the results remains visible in one place. The table is heuristic rather than classificatory and is included to aid navigation across the three themes.

Table 1

Approximate Weekly Time Distribution by Category (Mean Hours per Week Across Two Recorded Weeks, Rounded)

Category	David	Ales	Petra
Sleep	~49 h	~52 h	~49 h
Work – primary managerial role	~26 h	~52 h *	~33 h
Second professional activity (performing arts)	~17 h	–	–
Family, childcare, and household	~14 h	~10 h	~30 h
Social contact (friends, extended family)	~6 h	~2 h	~5 h
Personal leisure and interests	~6 h	~2 h	~6 h
Physical activity and sport	~2 h	<1 h	~2 h
Commuting	~14 h	~14 h	~11 h
Meals	~14 h	~17 h	~15 h
Personal care and other	~9 h	~7 h	~17 h

Note. Figures are rounded from diary records. Aleš completed several days retrospectively, so his aggregate figures should be read as indicative rather than precise. Total categories do not sum exactly to 168 because of rounding and uncoded intervals outside the diary recording range.

Theme 1. Readiness to Treat Self-Regulation as a Legitimate Object of Attention

The first cross-case difference did not concern whether participants engaged in any self-regulatory behaviour at all. It concerned how readily they treated self-regulation as something worth explicit attention once the interview invited reflection on it. Because the key term was prompted by the interview guide, this theme is interpreted cautiously. It reflects readiness to engage in an invited concept, not spontaneous possession of a stable everyday category.

David engaged that prompt most fluently. He described self-regulation as ordinary maintenance of internal order and linked it to both psychology training and performance practice.

"Mental hygiene for me means staying honest with yourself about what is happening inside. You must read your own signals. Theatre trained me in that too. You cannot perform well if you are in chaos inside".

The account is notable not because it proves superior literacy in any global sense, but because self-observation is treated as routine, legitimate, and already integrated into the language of daily functioning.

Petra also responded preventively, though with much less conceptual confidence. Her account traced current practices back to a concrete episode of anxiety when returning to work after maternity leave.

Table 2

Cross-Case Summary of Analytically Relevant Indicators

Indicator	David	Aleš	Petra
Readiness to engage self-regulation as an explicit concern	Spoke fluently about self-observation and routine maintenance; linked this to prior psychology training and performing arts discipline.	Could define the prompt when asked, but treated self-regulation as relevant mainly once problems became substantial.	Approached the issue preventively, though in practical rather than highly conceptual language; linked this to a prior period of overload during maternity leave.
Habitual monitoring pattern	Informal nightly review of conduct and internal state.	Periodic reflection, most visible when preparing major staff communication.	Body-oriented monitoring of early strain signals and irritability.
What followed monitoring	Monitoring was real but did not always lead to immediate behavioural reorganisation, especially in the domestic sphere.	Monitoring rarely translated into sustained change because organisational demands repeatedly re-took priority.	Monitoring supported small restorative interruptions, but not major structural redesign of the week.
Boundary anchor visible in the case	Fixed external performing-arts schedule that work could not easily absorb.	No stable external boundary anchor: ownership role was described as categorically open-ended.	Formally negotiated flexible working arrangements that organised weekday and weekend boundaries.
Weekend non-work protection in the diary	Limited weekend managerial work: non-work time was partly occupied by performing-arts commitments.	Managerial work appeared across both recorded weekends, accompanied by difficulty disengaging.	No weekend managerial work recorded except for the participant's stated crisis exception, which did not occur in the diary period.
Interview-diary relationship	Broadly coherent account, but the diary and follow-up discussion exposed reliance on relational support not foregrounded in the initial self-management narrative.	Strongest tension between stated balance and enacted temporal organisation.	Interview account was largely consistent with diary patterns, although the participant understated the stability of her enacted boundaries.
Sleep-related strain signals in diary	Rare and infrequent.	Repeated disturbance, often annotated in work-related terms.	Occasional disturbance, chiefly linked to family demands rather than managerial work alone.

Note. This table is a compact analytic summary intended to make the comparative structure of the three themes visible in one place. It should be read as a navigational aid rather than as a typology or scoring device. Aleš's diary contributes to the summary with greater caution because several days were completed retrospectively.

"I was afraid of going back – whether I could manage the job and still be a proper mother. A friend recommended some books. I read them. Some things are stuck. I still use some of those principles. Not systematically, but they are there".

What matters analytically is not polished vocabulary, but the fact that strain became thinkable before collapse. Petra had a recognisable repertoire of interruption and protection, even if she consistently presented it modestly.

Aleš engaged the prompt differently. He could define the concept when asked, but he located its relevance at the point of manifest difficulty rather than ordinary maintenance.

"I understand it as keeping your head clean, not letting things build up. But honestly, I have not paid attention to this as a concept. I have never had major psychological problems, so I have never had a reason to think about it".

"I do not think of it that way. I work a lot, yes, but I find meaning in it. The company is what I have built. It does not feel like something I need to be protected from".

This is not best read as simple ignorance. It is a coherent threshold logic in which self-regulatory attention becomes warranted only once work is already experienced as damage. Across the three accounts, the key difference therefore concerns when attention is licensed, not whether participants can talk about themselves at all.

Theme 2. Self-Monitoring Rarely Closed into Sustained Reorganization

All three participants described some form of monitoring. What differentiated them was not the mere presence of reflection, but whether reflection altered the temporal organisation of work, recovery, or responsibility in a durable way.

David described the most habitual monitoring practice: an informal nightly review of his own conduct.

"Every evening I go through the day. Not in writing, nothing methodical. But I ask myself where I got something wrong – where I was unfair, or hasty, or did not listen properly".

Yet David himself qualified the practical reach of that routine.

"It does not always change my behaviour immediately. Sometimes I can tell I am letting myself off too easily. But at least I have the conversation. Most people do not".

The diary-informed interview complicated David's otherwise coherent self-management narrative further. When asked about the relatively small amount of household and family time in his diary, he acknowledged that his arrangement depended on his partner carrying more domestic load.

"She carries a lot. I know that. We have talked about it. It works because she is willing to, and because I try to compensate at other times. But it is not an equal arrangement".

The point is not to record David as inauthentic. It is to show that monitoring can be real while remaining incomplete, especially where the costs of change would fall on relational arrangements that currently sustain the very functioning being described.

Petra's monitoring was less retrospective and more somatic. She described noticing depletion early and using small restorative interruptions to stop escalation.

"I notice when I am starting to run empty. My body tells me before my thinking does. I get more irritable; things take more effort. When that happens, I try to do something small – a bath, music, a walk. Not to solve anything. Just to interrupt the pattern".

Petra's monitoring therefore did close into action, but mainly at the level of local interruption. It did not lead to major structural redesign of work, and that absence should not be read too quickly as deficiency. Within her role configuration, small interventions may have been the realistic scale at which action was possible.

Aleš monitored himself more episodically and often in response to external occasions, especially when preparing a formal staff address.

"I think about myself mainly when I am preparing the quarterly staff address. I formulate what I want to change about how I work. But whether I implement those things... usually the company's priorities take over".

Here the monitoring loop remained weakest in translation. The account shows reflective capacity but not sustained reorganization. Across the three cases, the common pattern is therefore not absence of awareness. It is the fragility of the move from awareness to altered routine.

Theme 3. Durable Boundaries Relied on Structural Anchors, Not Willpower Alone

The third theme concerns the conditions under which recovery-oriented practice became durable rather than aspirational. The two participants with more stable non-work boundaries both relied on structures that made those boundaries harder to negotiate away.

In Petra's case, the relevant anchor was a formally negotiated flexible arrangement that organised the working week and made weekend non-work a rule rather than a hope.

"Monday, I plan and open the week. Friday, I close it. In between I work from home – I am there for the children in the morning and afternoon. Evenings are mostly mine. At weekends I do not work. That is a rule".

"If something comes up at the weekend, I will deal with it Monday. The only exception is a genuine crisis – something that cannot wait. In two years, I have applied the exception maybe four times".

The important feature here is not self-discipline in the abstract, but that the arrangement embeds boundary maintenance in an institutional routine that reduces repeated negotiation.

David's boundary rested on a different kind of anchor: a fixed performing arts schedule that work could not easily absorb.

"The rehearsal schedule is fixed. I cannot move it. That actually helps – it means there are times in my week that work simply cannot colonise, even if I wanted it to".

This makes David's case analytically valuable and analytically unstable at the same time. His functioning cannot be attributed solely to internal competence, because it depends materially on external time structures and on domestic arrangements that help make those structures workable.

Aleš had no equivalent anchor. In his owner-manager position, availability was interpreted as part of role identity itself.

"A company does not have office hours. I do not have office hours. If something needs attention at nine in the evening, it needs attention. That is what ownership means".

"I am not saying I enjoy working every evening. Sometimes I would rather stop earlier. But if I do not deal with something, it will be worse the next day. So, I will deal with it".

The contrast is instructive. Boundary failure here is not well captured as weak willpower. It is produced by a role configuration in which stopping work is construed as irresponsible. Across the three cases, durable recovery practices therefore appeared when boundaries were carried by rules, schedules, or role arrangements, not when they had to be reasserted anew at every moment.

5. Discussion

This discussion is organised to match the evidential limits of the study. It first states the bounded substantive contribution, then identifies what the diary-informed design added methodologically and finally locates the findings within their principal limits before drawing a restrained conclusion. The aim is interpretive clarification rather than interventionist overreach.

5.1 Substantive Contribution

The article offers three bounded substantive observations. First, participants differed in how readily they granted legitimacy to self-regulatory attention once it was explicitly invited. That finding should be interpreted carefully because the concept was prompted by the interview guide. Even so, the contrast remains analytically useful. It suggests that strain management is partly organised by threshold assumptions about when self-attention becomes warranted.

Second, the data suggests a recurring gap between monitoring and sustained reorganisation. All three participants could identify strain, reflect on conduct, or notice depletion. The difference lay in what followed. This complicates any simple assumption that reflective awareness is itself a sufficient resource. Reflection may close into local interruption, may remain morally acknowledged but behaviourally unresolved, or may be repeatedly displaced by higher-priority work demands.

Third, the most durable recovery practices in this small dataset depended on structural anchors. Petra's flexible arrangement and David's externally fixed schedule carried more explanatory weight than a generic language of self-discipline. This does not mean agency is irrelevant. It means that agency was exercised through, and limited by, temporal and relational arrangements that made some forms of recovery easier to protect than others.

A further observation, especially visible in David's case, is that seemingly individual self-regulation may be externally supported by unequal domestic arrangements. This point should not be over-generalised from a single case. It is best treated as an analytically suggestive reminder that individual well-being practices can rest on relational distributions of care and labour that first-person accounts easily naturalise.

5.2 Methodological Contribution

The most transportable contribution of the study is methodology. The value of the design did not lie in comparing two independent instruments, because the diary review conversation deliberately shaped later interview probing. Its value lay in creating a productive analytic surface on which narrated balance could be examined against organised time use and then discussed with participants in interviews.

This design made several tensions visible. Aleš could describe work as meaningful and not in need of protection, while the diary displayed a narrow non-work range and recurrent evening disturbance. David could describe himself as highly reflective, while the diary and follow-up questioning made the structural support of that functioning much harder to ignore. Petra could speak modestly about her practices, while diary patterns showed a more stable enacted boundary than her self-description implied. In each case, the gain came from the interaction between diary summary and interview, not from treating either as a privileged truth source.

For qualitative occupational health research, diary-informed interviewing may therefore be useful when the aim is not to validate self-report mechanically but to surface tensions between narrated identity, temporal organisation, and situated action.

5.3 Limitations

The study has clear limits. The sample consists of only three participants and supports neither generalisation nor typology construction. The claims offered here are analytic and exploratory.

A second limitation concerns prompting and design. Because the interview guide explicitly introduced the Czech term duševní hygiena, rendered only approximately as mental hygiene or self-care, Theme 1 cannot be read as evidence about naturally occurring vocabulary. It is better read as evidence about how participants responded to an invited frame of self-regulatory attention.

A third limitation concerns data quality. The diaries are descriptive rather than precise behavioural instruments, and Aleš's retrospective completion reduced the reliability of his record most substantially. His diary was therefore used cautiously and chiefly as an indicative pattern rather than a fine-grained measure.

A fourth limitation concerns positionality and translation. Prior professional familiarity improved access but may also have shaped candour, interpretation, and the salience of reading. Translation checking reduced, but could not fully eliminate, shifts in meaning across Czech and English formulations.

6. Conclusion

This article examined how three Czech managers described and organised everyday self-regulation, recovery, and work-non-work boundaries using a small-sample diary-informed qualitative design. The findings do not support broad claims about managers in general. They do, however, support a more specific conclusion: self-regulation in managerial life was not visible here as a stable inner trait but as a situated accomplishment whose viability depended on threshold assumptions, opportunities for action, and the presence or absence of structural anchors.

Read this way, the article's contribution is modest but concrete. It shows why narrated balance should not be taken at face value, why monitoring does not guarantee reorganisation, and why durable recovery practices often depend on arrangements outside the individual's will. These are bounded observations from a small exploratory study, but they identify mechanisms worth testing in broader and more diverse designs.

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