

Creating an event warehouse logistics strategy plan for Nordic Business Forum

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<p>As time progresses, events have started to evolve and become an essential part of companies' products and services. This, in turn, has made the event industry develop far quicker than expected.</p> <p>Warehouse logistics is not necessarily an area prioritized in the event industry, as many events do not hold their warehouse within it. Many companies prefer to rent their products from rental companies as opposed to having their own, most likely to save space. This is not the case for Nordic Business Forum, who for the most part does rent larger products, but also decide to keep in their inventory the smallest items that can be used also throughout the year, and not only for their yearly event.</p> <p>The main objective for this bachelor's degree thesis is to create a strategy plan that could theoretically help the case company's event's warehouse department. This strategy plan will help the selected employees working in the area to know what steps to follow, as well as be able to include new phases in the guide to always keep it up-to-date and actual. It is a product-oriented thesis that will use the qualitative method, emphasized by the usage of interviews, observation, and experience. The research questions to be answered are what the necessary steps are to ensure having a successful event warehouse for the case company, and what is expected from the company to be able to achieve this.</p> <p>It is significant to give the warehouse department its deserved recognition, as any wrongdoing in this area can affect the event as a whole. Events consider marketing, ticketing, finance, catering, medical, amongst other operations priorities for event planning and management. The research done for this thesis is going to refute the idea of the warehouse not requiring to be a priority when it comes to the event production.</p>	
Keywords warehouse, logistics, event production, strategy	

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1 Introduction

While all events require work, not all of them consider the warehouse logistics part of it. The logistics area is always prioritized in the planning and execution of any event, but the warehouse area can often be overlooked. There are several reasons this can happen: a shortage of personnel, too few items to store, or even a lack of experience. By creating a strategy plan, a guide can be helpful for Nordic Business Forum, as well as to any potential event producers who seek it. If you have no previous knowledge, it is impossible to know what is required of you or what is missing from the process. The main challenge faced by the warehouse manager is acknowledging if they are the right person for the job (Richards, 2014).

This proposal can enable the case study's company, Nordic Business Forum (which will be described in section 1.2), to prioritize other areas and have an easier time developing the warehouse part of their production by following a checklist. This strategy plan will be arranged according to Nordic Business Forum's specifications, but it could easily be adapted to other cases as well. The things it will take into consideration are warehouse location and size, items in it, where they will be used throughout the event, amount of people in the team, who has access to the warehouse, who creates the inventory list and who edits it before, throughout and after the event.

In this chapter, I will look into the motivation behind my interest in this topic and the reason I decided to submerge myself into creating a plan that could potentially help out those in the production side of event logistics. I am hoping to acquire new points of view when it comes to event planning in general. On top of that, relating to warehouse logistics, I am hoping to have a better understanding of what a warehouse logistics process should be.

After working for three years in the same event's warehouse logistics role, I have been able to gain knowledge and experience. Therefore, these learnings will help create a guide on what the best solution is for an event's warehouse without a large, dedicated team with logistics experience to support it. The learnings obtained will focus on finding those key actions that will eventually, when put together, create the strategy plan.

1.1 Main objective

The main objective of this research is to create a plan that could, theoretically, build a system for the case being studied, Nordic Business Forum, whose warehouse does not constitute as a main priority. The plan will be made by researching and understanding the role of the warehouse in an event, what is expected of its execution, and the way professional warehouses work. While this is the main objective, another smaller objective within the same context is showcasing how important the warehouse for this particular event is. The warehouse is often a neglected area, and it is noticeable in the effort that is given to developing the warehouse's management, but, more often than not, those employees who have been promoted are not familiar with running warehouses (Morrell, 2009). If those employees who have to lead and take responsibility for it do not have any knowledge of what is expected of them as individuals and as a part of the team, there is a high risk of having a failed, unpromising warehouse.

As time progresses, events have started growing more rapidly than ever before. The event industry is having to do so to keep up with the constant change brought by businesses, with their products and services evolving constantly (Allen et al., 2011). Events are what hold this constant change in their hands, as it provides a channel to bring the products and services to the customer in different ways. This, in turn, has limited resources and planning on several aspects that are not necessarily faced by the customer, instead of giving priority to those which do. By working on this project and finding a solution for this problem, this guide can hopefully lead to a simpler approach concerning Nordic Business Forum, and possibly other companies which do not have many resources available for the warehouse logistics part of their events.

The main research questions, to which answers will be found throughout the process of researching and interviewing, are what the necessary steps are to ensure having a successful event warehouse for the case company, and what is expected from the company to be able to achieve this.

1.2 Case study (Nordic Business Forum)

The company that will be involved in this project as its case study is Nordic Business Forum.

Nordic Business Forum, originally *Finnish Community of Entrepreneurship*, was founded in 2008 in the city of Jyväskylä, Finland. Its first annual event was held in 2010 with 700 attendees, and by 2019 they had grown to 7,655 seminar guests and 21,500 live stream viewers, an alternative way to attend the event implemented in 2014 (nbforum.fi, 2020). Characterized by their annual business and leadership conference, their company mission is "*Building leaders who change the world*". Their values are delivering value, entrepreneurial mindset, fair deals, creating enriching interaction, and cross-generational thinking. They have had many high-profile speakers along the years, such as Sir Richard Branson, Daniel Pink, Arianna Huffington, Alex Osterwalder, Marcus Buckingham, Susan Cain, Carla Harris, amongst others, each speaking about their topic of profession and expertise. The company has been recruiting students since 2011, originally only from Jyväskylän ammattikorkeakoulu (JAMK – Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences) as their event was then held in the city of Jyväskylä.

In 2014, they held the event in Helsinki for the first time, recruiting students from all universities, but as of 2019 they have decided to focus solely on recruiting students from Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences, who in return obtain credits towards their degree.

The event's customer service staff carry a very important role throughout the process of the event. Every year a question asking to rate the customer service is part of the feedback form sent to the attendees, and the company has always received very high ratings. In the recent years, the ratings have been as follows: NBForum2017 received 5,47/6, NBForum2018 received 5,58/6, and NBForum2019 received 5,60/6.

The staff is primarily formed by those recruited students and their tasks vary in different functions, from Check-In to Cloakroom to First Class Services, and others. In 2017, my first year as part of their staff, for the first time in the event's history one of the functions included assisting in the warehouse within its tasks and since then the role has evolved every year.

1.3 Project tasks and method

The tasks involved for this project will include researching the problem, primarily by using my own experience I have had during my time as a student, then a student team leader, and finally in my internship in Nordic Business Forum, especially in their event warehouse. Besides researching the problem as such, another task is also diving deep into the execution that warehouse companies have implemented to have a successful logistic plan. While this specific research will focus on warehouse logistics in any company, these learnings will be refocused and narrowed down to event planning, especially Nordic Business Forum's. Besides these tasks, interviews will be held for those who are, in one way or another, involved in the process: event producers, warehouse and logistics experts, customer experience specialists.

This is a product-based thesis, which means it will work by creating a product or a service and discuss its elaboration. Together with researching and creating this product, it will use the qualitative research method, since it is not about numbers but instead about interviews, observation, and experience. Qualitative research is a technique that collects data which is then later used to explain behavior, helping us understand why, how, or in what way is a determined action done. It evaluates and interprets information gained from interviews, conversations, and other ways, to dig deeper into the meaning of the topic (Taylor et al., 2015). Some of the techniques that can be utilized for this method are interviews, observation, dialogue, etc. This method studies the actions, thoughts, and understanding of those involved in the topic at hand, ensuring all points are viewed and considered, to reach a middle point that benefits all of the ones involved. As I have had personal experience and have been involved in the process, the type of observation will be the 'participant observation', which is when the researcher has hands-on experience and gets to know the development through their action.

1.4 Demarcation

The demarcation, or project scope, for this specific project, will consist of a particular Finnish event company when it comes to the event logistics and production side, this being the case study of Nordic Business Forum. Then, when it comes to the logistics as such, I will maintain a broader scope and interview different people from the logistics warehouse area. It will remain focused on the main event to be considered, rather than expanding to

other events, to ensure the strategy plan will be one that accommodates all of Nordic Business Forum's needs.

The event that will be considered in this project will be an event that has had a maximum of 8000 guests, and although it is the same case study as it is for the same company, three different yearly events (2017, 2018 and 2019) will be taken into account. This will work as a parameter to only go to the extent of the abilities and knowledge I have.

2 Theory behind creating the event's warehouse strategy plan

The approach for this project will be evaluated and prepared through a series of research methods, utilizing prominent books and articles, as well as interviewing leading prospects in the area. These prominent books are directed towards logistics, warehouse management, and event planning/management. I tried searching for event planning/management which included a section for the warehouse logistics, but as I had expected from the start, I could not find any. It came to prove that warehouse logistics is not very common, or thought about, which in turn is giving me a blank slate to work on.

The main reasoning behind the idea of creating a strategy plan for an event's warehouse is the lack of certainty that goes into planning an event warehouse as such, as it is not (understandably) a priority for most event producers and especially as an unfamiliar area, unless you are a logistics expert.

Following the process of what planning for an event warehouse constitutes has many steps that must be taken into account. It is easy to lose track of what should be a priority, as everything in its own way must be considered as such.

It is the case that when marking down a to-do list for any type of event, it is very likely to place the warehouse lower on the list. Not because it is not important, but a common conception is that it does not require much time nor planning to keep it in order. This is an inaccurate approach to it, as it is an invisible part of events but needs to be treated as all other management areas. It is fundamentally the preparation, realization, and control of the storage and usage of all products, which means if done correctly it is unseen by customers, but if it goes wrong the customers will notice this management area that should go unnoticed.

2.1 Main sources

For this thesis, the different sources that will be used will be interviews with prominent people in the logistics industry, and event producers and customer experience specialists from the case company. For each area, there will be two people representing it. The logistics industry will be embodied by people working in a warehouse in the Dominican Republic, and another in the United States, while the ones who will be interviewed as the event producers and customer experience specialists are all from Nordic Business Forum. The

interviews will be based on questions relating to the interviewees' experience. The questions will be open questions, meaning their answers will be expected to be thorough, rather than "yes" or "no" answers – to ensure that a deeper understanding is obtained on the issue regarding the planning and execution of the event warehouse, and how to resolve it.

Besides these interviews, there will also be reading material concerning Logistics, Event Planning, Event Management, and Event Operations. They will all be referenced correctly throughout the project, and later on added to a reference list at the end.

Lastly, there will also be my observation in the event's warehouse for the case company. During my three years of studies, I was also part of Nordic Business Forum's student customer service staff. In my time spent in their events, I was able to learn more about the behind-the-scenes of the event production, primarily of the warehouse. This in turn made me interested in what it entails to take care of such a logical section of the production, later on understanding that it is not always prioritized in any type of event production. While reading some event planning and event production books, it came to my attention that none of their checklists or suggestions is an event warehouse ever mentioned, yet it is such a significant part for events that use their own inventory.

As more rental companies simplify event production's roles by allowing them to rent their products, events as such have started to lose the need to have their own inventory. Nowadays, everything can be obtained from third parties, meaning event companies do not require having their own storage.

2.2 Keywords

In this section, I will explain the main terms which are the basis of what this project will discuss and work for. They are the keywords that give a basic understanding of what's to come in later chapters, as well as understanding what the exact topic is. Although mainly unrelated, they will all connect when creating the strategy plan together with the findings and learnings obtained.

Warehouse: Location where to store items. Warehouses vary in size and usage – some warehouses are only visited a few times a year to stock up on many items at once, while

some others need to send out objects many times a day/week/month to ensure proper availability at all times for customers.

Logistics: The process of planning and executing the storing, taking care, and transporting of goods from their first location to their final destination.

Event production: The art of event production is everything involved in an event, from start to end. All of the details and areas, whether seen by customers or not, that must be planned and executed for a better event experience (this being before, during, and after it).

Strategy: A plan of action that must be carried out for something to work towards an individual goal, or a set of goals.

3 Research approach

The type of thesis work for this project will be the product-based approach. It signifies that the main purpose of this research work is to create a product or a service that is valuable to working life, is interesting, and is of contemporary importance. In this case, this product will be the creation of the strategy plan for the case study's event warehouse. Together with this product-based approach, there will be a research approach which is the qualitative method. This method is the way to find answers with quality and substance rather than by quantity or frequency. The interviews will collect data that falls into the knowledge perspective, ensuring the information obtained speaks from experience. For the topic of creating a strategy plan for the event's warehouse logistics, numerical data and statistical analysis are not the right approach as the plan should be based on experience as opposed to any type of quantities I could obtain. Meaningful data will still be collected, just through a different approach. It is based on people's ideas and reactions, and in this case the data will be collected through interviews and participant observation.

3.1 Observation

I have been able to be part of the case company's event, Nordic Business Forum, for three consecutive years. All years constituted different roles and responsibilities, yet a constant was always the warehouse. This was actually what has led to the process of creating this strategy plan, the journey during the time spent at the event's warehouse planning and execution. Due to my observation in the event for several years, I was able to incorporate it into my project as it is done through the observational method, a part of qualitative research. Qualitative observation is based on the recollection of information, which can be done via interviews, or through actually observing the process from start to finish, being present throughout it.

In my first year, in 2017, my main role was to be of support to the Warehouse Director, which means already back then my interest in the planning and execution of the warehouse skyrocketed. During this time, I was able to keep track of how the warehouse ran during the event, lending a hand to all the staff who would come to get items from there and ensuring it was registered properly in the inventory list. At the very start of my involvement, my tasks were keeping track of the event warehouse during the event days. I was partnered up with someone else, and we were able to become familiar with the items stored and understand the meaning of each item and its purpose through the event.

The following year, in 2018, I dove into an 11-month long Leadership Program, taking on the role of Team Leader, which meant I was part of a selected team who would help train the students for their customer service roles. One of my main responsibilities during 2018 was once again the warehouse, this time with the opportunity to give more input on how to manage things in this particular logistic area. I had been able to go to Jyväskylä, where the main warehouse is throughout the year, to see the inventory we had and which items from there would be coming to the Helsinki event. During the actual event, my tasks were the same as the previous year, but with more responsibilities. I was able to work closely with the employees involved in the production and to learn and observe from their actions what worked from my previous year when I was there, and what was improved for that year.

Before the event, an inventory list is created with all the items that are being stored in the event warehouse. Our main responsibility, besides ensuring that everything is running efficiently, is keeping track of the items and updating them on the inventory list as needed – this way there is a smoother process and smaller possibilities of items being lost.

Finally, in 2019 I did my internship with Nordic Business Forum, where one of my main tasks was being the Warehouse Director. In this role, I was able to plan and execute the warehouse from start to finish, which was the main inspiration to study and research to write the warehouse logistics strategy plan for Nordic Business Forum. My tasks started by meeting with the executive producer and discussing what worked previously in the warehouse, and what could be improved from my observation. As I had had been observing what others had done before my time as the Warehouse Director, I had been able to learn what could be considered again for this year, while also keeping an open mind on what could be improved.

I was given a blank slate where to begin my plans, allowing me to create from scratch what I thought needed to be done. I was able to once again go to Jyväskylä, where the main warehouse is located, to restructure the inventory list and see if we had stored all the items the staff would need to work in their respective areas throughout the event. After this first visit, I went back twice more to keep checking on the items and then to make a separate list with everything that needed to be taken to Helsinki for the actual event warehouse. Not every item that is in the Jyväskylä main warehouse is utilized during the event, so there has to be a clear idea of which are needed and which are not before starting to pack the items that are going to Helsinki.

After we had all the items arrive at the event location in Helsinki, we quickly realized the original plan we had for sorting them was ineffective, as it would not make sense logistically nor be a simpler approach for all others in the event production team.

Nordic Business Forum's customer service staff is divided into several functions, so the newer approach was reorganizing every item based on the functions. This way we were ensuring that when those functions would come to get their items, we would not rely on the inventory list but the logical planning of the location. Throughout the event, we maintained the items and the inventory list, making sure it was always updated and accurate.

The packing was also easier, as we had organized it by functions so when the staff would come to return the items, we would lead them to the right tables and later on reorganize things into their proper storage after receiving everything.

3.2 Interviews

For research purposes regarding creating a warehouse logistics strategy plan for Nordic Business Forum, interviews will be conducted with specific people as part of the necessary steps to obtain accurate information. Most interviewees' will be part of the case company's staff but will not be referred to by name but instead by their event role, and the interviews were done for warehouse logistics experts will not include name nor company, only the role.

The meaning of these interviews is to obtain answers that could lead to a more thorough strategy plan, tackling those issues Nordic Business Forum's event warehouse currently faces and ensuring solutions are found. Those interviewed will be people with significant roles and whose input could be of significance in creating the strategy plan.

Due to the limitations of not encountering events with their own warehouse, I decided to reach out to the event's prior executive producer and their current one, as well as to their customer experience staff, and warehouse logistics experts. By combining their answers, I am confident I will be able to create a keen solution.

There will be three types of interviews: ones for event producers, ones for warehouse logistics experts, and one for those involved with Customer Experience, another key part in the event who has close contact with their warehouse. The questions are not meant to

have “yes” or “no” answers, but instead answers with significance and value that can help understand different angles on how to approach the strategy plan.

3.2.1 Interview questions for event producers

For the event producers, the questions will be as follows:

- What does the term ‘event warehouse’ entail, in your own words?
- In your experience, what is required for an event warehouse to be successful?
- On a scale from 1-10, 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest, rate the priority of the warehouse concerning the event production, and why
- In case of delegation, what qualifications must the person meet to be able to lead the event warehouse?
- From your experience in past events, are there any improvements you would suggest on how to plan and execute the warehouse?

3.2.2 Interview questions for warehouse logistics experts

For the warehouse logistics experts, the questions will be as follows:

- How long have you been involved in warehouse logistics?
- In your experience, how should a warehouse inventory be divided?
- Do you usually limit your warehouse deliveries to a specific time of the day/shift, or allow them to come throughout the day?
- If many shipments must be carried out at the same time, do you do it in the order of who ordered first, or heavier/lighter items first? If neither, how?

3.2.3 Interview questions for the Customer Experience team

For the Customer Experience team, the questions will be as follows:

- Does the event warehouse affect your role during the event in any way? If yes, how?
- Throughout previous years’ events, have you needed to work alongside with the warehouse team? How?
- From your experience, is there anything in the way the warehouse has been managed that has worked?
- Adding to the last question, what about any improvements?

4 Strategy plan

The strategy plan consists of a guideline of steps to follow to plan and execute the case company's event's warehouse successfully. The steps to be represented have been determined after thorough research including interviews, reading, and visual material. Thanks to my own experience with Nordic Business Forum and its warehouse, all of the new findings and learnings will be able to be implemented in a way that I believe will be beneficial and, most importantly, completely feasible.

It will be done as a 'checklist', or a step-by-step guide, written in the order I believe will be most beneficial to follow, based on the research conducted and the findings obtained. In between each section and at the end of the plan, there will be some additional space for notes so in the case this plan is used, the person following it can edit and add notes as needed. This way, it can become a guide that is constantly being worked on, and always up-to-date based on the latest experience.

Over time, customer's expectations, needs, and wishes are becoming more and more demanding. Regardless of which type of business you are a part of, you find yourself working harder to create new and more creative solutions, ensuring you can make a long-lasting impression on the consumer.

As previously mentioned in chapter 1, section 1, events are growing far quicker than ever before, and frequently the actions used once might not work the following time. This, in turn, requires those working in the event business to make sure they are always catching up with the latest trends, and breaking through them to always be first. It is easy to forget all the work that happens backstage, everything that happens that the customer is not aware of, but those operations are more often than not the actions that are more valuable to the overall experience.

A constant thought during this process has been to ensure all, or at least many, of the steps to be included in the guide are controlled and protect the environment. Sustainability must be part of every thought and every action that will be incorporated in this guide, as it is very common for warehouses to generate a great amount of waste (Richards, 2014).

5 Results

The main objective of this project was to build a plan that could help out the case study company in their event warehouse planning, as it is a very necessary area to have functioning properly before, during, and after the event.

5.1 Interview answers

The decision to interview prominent people in different important areas was discussed previously in chapter 3.2, together with the people to be interviewed and their questions. The interviews were held mostly through email, except for one which was held via video call. The results for these interviews proved to be very beneficial in the understanding of why this strategy plan had to be created. Furthermore, from a logistics point of view, I was able to gain knowledge in this area and how to successfully implement them into the strategy plan.

The interviews were divided into three groups, each one representing a different group of people to be interviewed. Each group had two interviewees: two for executive producers of Nordic Business Forum, two for warehouse logistics experts, and two for the Customer Experience team. It was interesting to go through their answers, as many of them from both people per group would be similar. The learnings from these answers were able to mark a difference in how to tackle and write the guide.

The people interviewed for their executive producer role agreed that whoever would lead the warehouse, had to be organized, logical, and someone who could be trusted by the team. They also agreed on rating the warehouse as a 7 (on a scale from 1-10) concerning the priority it holds in the event production process. Something that was mentioned on their behalf for an improvement, would be to arrange the items logically before arriving at the event warehouse, when it leaves from the main warehouse.

The warehouse logistics experts had interesting answers, where I could see just how broad the warehouse industry is. They both worked in companies with very different processes and products to be distributed, so their answers helped me obtain an extensive view on different ways to make this work. One of the interviewees mentioned their warehouse system is 90% automatized, a process I was not familiar with. They also had very different ways to work throughout the day, with one staying strict with a specific time and day for deliveries, while the other expert explained because of the type of warehouse they

have, they have to be open and available as much as possible. The answers I got from these interviews helped me have a more comprehensive understanding of how exactly different warehouses work, and the different ways to make them successful.

Finally, the last group interviewed were some members from the company's Customer Experience team. They both agreed their roles are very much involved with the warehouse, as everything that is required for the customer service staff comes from there. They both mentioned how many things have worked, such as documentation, warehouse inventories, and the organization. In terms of improvement, they mentioned rethinking the resourcing process for the warehouse, as well as ensuring the ones responsible for it are aware of what exactly will be there.

These interviews led me to understand what I needed to focus on and what to research more on, to ensure I could obtain the right procedure for the creation of this guide. Something that everyone mentioned, in one way or another, was that whoever has to lead the warehouse must be someone very organized. The process of running the warehouse requires someone logical and methodical, as it is one of those areas that if not done successfully, many other areas will suffer as well.

5.2 Research answers

As stated in chapter 1, the main research questions were to find out the necessary steps to ensure having a successful event warehouse for the case company, and what is expected from the company to be able to achieve it. I will be answering both research questions separately, where I give my conclusion together with the information gathered to back it up.

What are the necessary steps to ensure having a successful event warehouse for the case company?

To be able to have a successful event warehouse, the main steps are just ensuring every step of the way is as clear and concise as possible. Besides this, it is also very necessary to give the warehouse the recognition and importance it deserves, as it can often be overlooked to give priority to other areas, but as interview number 5 stated, having a working and functional warehouse is crucial for the success of the event. The steps that needed to be taken by the warehouse team are described in the strategy plan, which hopefully gives an insight into what is most necessary to have an effective run.

What is expected from the company to be able to achieve it?

First of all, as mentioned in the previous answer, the warehouse must receive the importance it deserves and this can only begin if it comes from the company staff which will then translate to the rest of the staff. Without it obtaining the right acknowledgment and ensuring everyone is on the same page as to its importance, those who need items from the warehouse would not go through the right steps and process, and it could result in a chaos that could have been easily avoided, if given the right tools.

Furthermore, something else that is expected from the company is the correct training on who has been recruited for the temporary role in the warehouse team, so they know exactly what they are working for and what to do in different scenarios, by following the checklist. This list has been created by using the learnings from the research material, as well as from the interviews and my observation from the past three years.

5.3 Personal learnings

Researching and writing this guide has been an incredible experience, as it allowed me to bring to life something I had been thinking about for a while. Since my first year as customer service staff in Nordic Business Forum, I had been involved with the event warehouse and realized there was more to it than meets the eye. This interest led me to continue my path with Nordic Business Forum and its warehouse, directing me to write my thesis on it.

At the beginning of the process for this thesis, I was well aware that I was challenging myself in terms of time and resources, as I was having a very late start in the semester on my project. I had originally planned on creating a general strategy plan that could help any company, but then decided to narrow it down to the one I had experience with, as it would help me focus and it was, after all, the main reason I decided to work on this thesis topic. Not many of my classes had any learnings that I could incorporate into my project, but I went through past material and found some I could incorporate one way or another, which benefited the project result.

By using the qualitative method I was able to gain a better understanding of how to approach the topic and why this was a beneficial area to work on. It also helped me gain new skills that could help me in my working life, such as not being afraid to reach out to ask for interviews, asking if I could work for this specific company and having my project

be specifically for them. I have always been more understanding of letters than numbers or graphics, so it also was the correct choice for me based on my learning methods and personal proficiencies.

I am also very observant, so I was able to put this skill to work when it came to my time as customer service staff in Nordic Business Forum for three consecutive years. Throughout my years in the event's warehouse, I have been able to observe the process in a very objective manner as I have been able to involve myself in practice. I have been able to learn what has worked and what has not, collecting data that could help out in the future when doing this project. I can consider this as a project that has been on the works for the past three years, even if the actual writing and combining of the research has only been worked on the past few weeks.

Something I had thought of incorporating into this project was researching and finding a viable solution for the use of an inventory list software. I downloaded and tested some of the (free) versions I was able to find, but then I realized with the amount of time and the material I had available, I had given myself an almost impossible task as it would require to test others, most likely paid versions. This, instead, will be something I will propose to the case company and if they are interested, it could be developed on my own free time later on. I believe it is something that could be essential to the company's development in their warehouse, as this type of software could help the warehouse team as it is very likely to continue changing every year. The suggested software includes being able to incorporate pictures, location, different terminology, and other fields, which could help everyone be on track every year on being aware of what every item is like and what is its usage.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Interviews

1. Current Chairman of the board, prior Executive Producer; Nordic Business Forum
The interview was held via video call, and answers were transcribed from the conversation.
 - **What does the term 'event warehouse' entail, in your own words?**
Place within the event location where to store all small items, which are kept during the event, in an organized manner.
 - **In your experience, what is required for an event warehouse to be successful?**
For an event warehouse to be successful, it's required for it to be organized (in both senses of an organized inventory, but also organized in its execution), have a clear set of rules for its operations, and have a very well done preparation/planning prior, during, and after the event.
 - **On a scale from 1-10, 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest, rate the priority of the warehouse concerning the event production, and why.**
From 1-10, I'd rate it a 7. For Nordic Business Forum, the first year with our first event warehouse of the type we currently have was in 2016. It isn't rated higher because not having one before 2016 showed us that it is possible to have a grand scale event even without a warehouse, as everyone acknowledges and is responsible for their own items, as most of the time they are distributed to different areas.
 - **In case of delegation, what qualifications must the person meet to be able to lead the event warehouse?**
There are three qualifications they must meet: they must be well organized, have a logical mindset, and must be trustworthy for the event's crew.
 - **From your experience in past events, are there any improvements you would suggest on how to plan and execute the warehouse?**
We have every year before the event a moment to reorganize the warehouse, and something we need to improve on is organizing it already then in a logical order as to how it'd be in the event warehouse. Pre-planning everything before arriving to

the event set-up would help with the schedule, and figuring out a way to organize everything before leaving from the event to the Jyväskylä warehouse, requiring only a small inspection after arriving back to Jyväskylä, would save a lot of time and resources.

2. Current Executive Producer; Nordic Business Forum
The interview was done via e-mail.

- **What does the term 'event warehouse' entail, in your own words?**

In my own words the event warehouse is the on-site storage for necessary equipment, materials, and tools necessary for the organizing and execution of an event. This is the go-to place when you are looking for anything that the event-organizer owns and needs for fulfilling its purpose of organizing the event.

- **In your experience, what is required for an event warehouse to be successful?**

Good preparations, organization, and communication are the two keywords here. You need to have prepared before the event by creating an overview of what necessary equipment, materials and tools you have, and what should be brought to the event (and thereby the event warehouse). You need good organizing on-site to ensure that when things arrive, you know where to place them in order to keep control of everything during the event. And this is where the communication comes into play as well. The purpose of an event warehouse is that people know where to go to find things, but if people remove objects without communicating this to the person in charge of things, you will have challenges. Clear communication on what is removed and by whom is key to ensuring you know where things are during a big event.

- **On a scale from 1-10, 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest, rate the priority of the warehouse concerning the event production, and why.**

7 (depending on the size of the event). If you have no event warehouse, no designated space to keep things, there is a probability you are going to lose control of signage, design objects, registration equipment etc. By "event warehouse", this can mean everything from a corner of a meeting room where you keep all your stuff, to a built-up space with great structure.

- **In case of delegation, what qualifications must the person meet to be able to lead the event warehouse?**

This person must first and foremost be organized and structured. This is the one place where you really need someone who can keep track of many things, without being stressed out and manage to communicate properly.

- **From your experience in past events, are there any improvements you would suggest on how to plan and execute the warehouse?**

I've done a few events, and in Oslo Business Forum we have not had a large focus on on-site warehouse. So for that event, I think both planning, organizing, and communication can improve drastically, as these are aspects we haven't needed much. For Nordic Business Forum I see very little to improve, other than having the same person more closely involved throughout the process. From starting the planning in the spring, be part of the off-site warehouse organizing, before closely monitoring the on-site warehouse during the event. I dare to say Nordic Business Forum is amongst the very best in the business when it comes to on-site event warehouse organizing.

3. Purchasing manager; Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic
Originally, the interview was held in Spanish but later translated to English by myself – I am fluent in English and Spanish and have passed the required courses during my studies to prove my abilities in translating.

- **How long have you been involved in warehouse logistics?**

I have been involved in warehouse logistics for eight months.

- **In your experience, how should a warehouse inventory be divided?**

The organization of the inventory must be done by departments. Each product must be organized within a department that works with the same function, having the warehouse be organized in the same order. Moreover, in each department area, there must be some sort of order based on the type of product.

Let's use the example of having a product be a crystal glass. This glass must be stored in the glassware department, where the rest of the glass products are.

Within this same space for glassware, the glass must be kept together with other glasses, pitchers, or any type of product with the same purpose.

- **Do you usually limit your warehouse deliveries to a specific time of the day/shift, or allow them to be throughout the day?**

Items must be received within a specific time within a specific day. This allows the logistical process to be more organized and to run smoother. If it's expected at a specific time of the day, the staff is prepared to receive and store everything how it should be done, managing to avoid any type of setback or mishap that might occur.

- **If many shipments must be carried out at the same time, do you do it in the order of who ordered first, or heavier/lighter items first? If neither, how?**

We have within our company two different types of warehouses: first of all we have the storage facility that works as our distribution center, which is where we receive all the merchandise which is then distributed to all our stores. When we have retail in the distribution center that must be allocated to the stores, we must first establish a route on what makes most sense. It is not based on location or store size, but on stores meeting the most demand. As we have several stores not only within the same capital city but also around the country, we have to be smart and logical in the way we do it.

The other type of warehouse we have is the store's warehouse. When we have many shipments that must be carried out at the same time, we try to do everything at the same time. This applies not only for when we need to deliver items to our customers, but also for when we need to restock items within the store's exhibition aisles. Sometimes it implies that we must go back and forth several times, but to ensure we can be practical and fast, this is the solution that has benefited us the most.

4. Group warehouse leader; New Jersey, United States

Originally, the interview was held in Spanish but later translated to English by myself – I am fluent in English and Spanish and have passed the required courses during my studies to prove my abilities in translating.

- **How long have you been involved in warehouse logistics?**

I've been working in this company and this position for almost two years.

- **In your experience, how should a warehouse inventory be divided?**

Our inventory for our warehouse is almost fully automatized, around 90% of it is, but each week we have a member of our staff do cycle counting, which means they double-check what the system automatically issues every week. Every six months we create a new inventory from scratch with all the employees to ensure it is up-to-date.

This has always been a very accurate way to organize and divide our inventory, since it ensures that we have a precise number of items every week, and can keep track of what's needed/must be ordered, of what we have extras of, and what has yet to be delivered.

- **Do you usually limit your warehouse deliveries to a specific time of the day/shift, or allow them to be throughout the day?**

The company I work in is the second biggest edible oil producer in all of the United States. Our headquarters are in Portugal, so we receive our stock from them and then send them to all locations within the United States. The warehouse works 24 hours a day for the five weekdays of the week (Monday to Friday), and our normal deliveries are expected to arrive between 7 am and 3 pm (7 – 15). As we are a branch, then we have to also be prepared for deliveries of raw materials at any given time of our opening hours.

- **If many shipments must be carried out at the same time, do you do it in the order of who ordered first, or heavier/lighter items first? If neither, how?**

Our orders are shipped out in order of processing: our Customer Service department receives the orders, and depending on their contract and the company they use for transportation, we plan around what is more suitable for all the ones involved.

5. **Head of Customer Experience; Nordic Business Forum**

The interview was done via e-mail.

- **Does the event warehouse affect your role during the event in any way? If yes, how?**

As Head of Customer Experience at NBForum, I work very closely with everybody involved in the event production. Customer experience covers everything we do at the event, and the event warehouse is a central place where we store most of the

concrete items that help us execute the event. In that way, having a well-prepared, well-thought-through, and well-executed event warehouse is absolutely crucial in the success of the event. Whoever is in charge of the warehouse, I need to be able to trust is doing a great job with all those aspects, helping our core team and the temporary organization we've built to run the event do their jobs as well as possible.

- **Throughout previous years' events, have you needed to work alongside with the warehouse team? How?**

Yes I have. Primarily because my team (Customer Experience team) has been involved in resourcing the event warehouse team, either by recruiting people to help run it, or even by providing skilled staff to run the whole process, like at #NBForum2019. The extensive team that I run at NBForum events - the seminar customer service team - is also the team using the warehouse all the time during the event.

- **From your experience, is there anything in the way the warehouse has been managed that has worked?**

Absolutely. Many things have worked well, including warehouse inventories done in advance, packing lists done by each team lead or member responsible for their respective area at the event, the structure of the warehouse that has been improved year-on-year based on our observations and feedback on what has worked and what we could do better. Extraordinarily well-done documentation about the "dos and don'ts" and involving the staff who used the warehouse at the event to give feedback and wishes for what to improve has also been an excellent thing. Last year's special improvement, to organize the event warehouse by function of the items used for - was an excellent idea that I could see us using for all our future events, too.

- **Adding to the last question, what about any improvements?**

We've noticed that we need to re-think how to resource the warehouse process to ensure the people who are responsible for it can prepare well and have full ownership of the end-to-end process. While we've had extraordinarily skilled people involved in the process in the past years, many of them have also had many other key responsibility areas and tasks that they needed to look after simultaneously. The warehouse process is an extremely demanding responsibility area both in

terms of its significance to the success of the event, and timewise. We've learned that ideally, the person planning and running the warehouse should not have any other major responsibilities to take care of for the same event. Also, we've noticed that we need to allocate extra resources to the actual days when the event warehouse is set up and operational, as the operating hours are extremely long, from early morning hours to late evenings.

6. Customer Experience Specialist; Nordic Business Forum
The interview was done via e-mail.

- **Does the event warehouse affect your role during the event in any way? If yes, how?**

The event warehouse affects my role and our team in the event quite a lot as the Student Operations team and students need the warehouse constantly during the build-up days before the event, and also during the event days. Most of the student teams, if not all, need at least something from the event warehouse to succeed in their work and tasks during the event days. For the NBForum event Customer Care, everything for the Customer Care office comes from the warehouse. It is critical that the event warehouse is organized and built in a logical way as there are lots and lots of different things for all different departments. The warehouse is an important piece in the puzzle that is building up the whole event. If that piece does not work properly, it could cause many problems.

- **Throughout previous years' events, have you needed to work alongside with the warehouse team? How?**

I haven't worked very closely myself with the warehouse team, other than having followed closely how the packing lists have been done in the company beforehand and how the event warehouse has been built. I feel like the fact that I haven't been working that closely with the warehouse is a good sign that things have been very well managed and it has been easy for people with different responsibilities to concentrate on those.

- **From your experience, is there anything in the way the warehouse has been managed that has worked?**

In my opinion, the last two years the event warehouse has been working quite well.

All in all the idea that regarding the students and their teams and responsibilities, everything in the warehouse related to certain teams/responsibility areas should be organized, gathered and separated ready for them (as in things to Cloakrooms should be set aside with a note Cloakroom, or things related to the Seminar office would be organized in one place with the note "Seminar office") has been a huge improvement.

This might take some figuring out for the warehouse team, but it certainly has helped with a) figuring out what it actually is we need for each team/function and b) when the warehouse people know where e.g. the Cloakroom things are located and have separated them to be ready, the students can simply go to the warehouse and pick up the things for Cloakroom and that's that.

- **Adding to the last question, what about any improvements?**

It is also quite important that the person/people taking care of the warehouse know what is in the warehouse, and have the big picture in their minds. This is done by doing an inventory before the event to understand what we actually have and what might be needed for the event warehouse. It also makes a lot of sense to have the same professionals that have been helping out with the warehouse already for years to be helping out in the future as well as they seem to know things that even we don't know, e.g. which things our founder might keep at their house, etc.



Appendix 2

Strategy plan for Nordic Business Forum's event warehouse

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Bachelor's Thesis
Degree Programme in
Multilingual Management
Assistants
2020



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1. Purpose of this plan

This strategy plan has been written to facilitate the course of planning and execute Nordic Business Forum's event warehouse. It will take into account the process beginning with at least a full month before the start of the event, during the event, and up until the post-event feedback process.

To be able to create this strategy guide, interviews, observation, and experience have been taken into account to be able to consider all aspects into what may affect this area, positively or negatively. All these learnings have been compiled for a good understanding of how to work for this event area, and what are the most important things to consider. It is critical to have a successful run on the warehouse area for every event, as it is an important role for the event as such.

2. Before the event
(at least a full month before the event)

This is the time to recruit, train and familiarize the warehouse team with what exactly is expected of them, and how to achieve it.

Company staff:

- Recruit two members for the warehouse team who have the background and experience required (based in the same city as where the company's warehouse is located)
- Train the two members on what the company stands for, its beliefs and methodology
- Bring the warehouse team members to the warehouse location to familiarize themselves with the items
- Create a list of all items they would need for the event, per function/department
- Select one of the members as the direct contact for the deliveries to the event warehouse (chocolates, apples, battery packs, etc)

Additional notes:

Warehouse team:

- After familiarizing themselves with the items and obtaining the list per function/department, return to the warehouse to confirm all items are available and functional
- In the case that not all items are available and functional, decide on where to obtain the new items from and inform the executive producer
- Reconfirm with all functions/departments that those items will be used and nothing else will be required

- Get familiar with the inventory list, update it as necessary for easier comprehension

Additional notes:

3. Before the event

(at least a week before the event)

This is the time to organize and make sense of what is to come.

Warehouse team:

- Visit the NBForum office and obtain a list of the items that will be taken from there and where they will be used during the event

- Recruit company staff to help with the packing, and ask them to bring all the items from the office that will be taken to the event

- Decide on a packing plan: what has worked best has been organizing by customer service function

- There is a big number of cables that have to be transported for the event – ensure getting smaller plastic boxes and separating cables according to their use, updating the inventory list and marking those with the correct terminology

- Renumber boxes (using plastic pouches on the box as opposed to labeling tape) according to how they would go on the tables by functions – 1-100 for one function, 101-200 for the second function, etc.
One section should be dedicated to cables and miscellaneous items (scissors, markers, etc) that would not necessarily be needed for only one specific function, but most likely by all

- Ensure to book enough time once arriving at the venue for reordering boxes – boxes are not packed in numerical order within the trucks

- Inform the venue of different recycling trash bins, especially paper, should always be available in the warehouse

- Confirm having several empty plastic boxes for when the distribution of items happens before the event, the functions can take these boxes as opposed to the labeled boxes

Additional notes:

4. Start of the event week

From the whole process, the start of the event week and the packing at the end of the event are the most hectic. It is important to ensure being well-rested and hydrated before the start of the event week, as it can become very chaotic if the warehouse team has not been taking care of themselves before this.

Warehouse team (at the warehouse in Jyväskylä):

- Double-check the items, numbered boxes and inventory list, together with the list from each function/department to confirm everything is there

- Make sure to be present when all items are being packed into the trucks

Additional notes:

Warehouse team (at the event venue in Helsinki):

- Decide on how to organize the tables: what has worked best has been to organize them in rows, to have easy access from both ends of the table

- Designate a table for printed material where those coming to get it could have easy access to it. It should not be necessary to number the material in the inventory list, as most printed material will not make it back to the warehouse at the end of the event
- Designate a table for the bowls of apples and chocolates and its fillings, so there would be no need for the staff to walk across the warehouse to get them from a further location

- Designate an area for the chocolates and apples pallets, as well as the empty pallets: what has worked best is the area right behind the curtain division from the bathroom hallway, between the curtains and the emergency exit

- Label the tables with the correct function/department and which numbered boxes will be on each specific table

- Confirm the recycling trash bins have arrived and locate them within the space of the warehouse

- Once the trucks arrive, ask those helping (a part of the crew is always recruited for around an hour for this) to settle them in the correct tables, without having to put them in order

- After all boxes and items have been emptied from the truck, start arranging them by number (it might seem like extra work to do this after, but it has proven to be much simpler and faster to do so than by arranging them in numbers from the start). Area under the table should be used as well to ensure maximization of usage of the space

- Reconfirm all items are organized by function/department, and nothing is missing

- Settle the items per function/department into different plastic boxes, for when they come to pick their items up they are distributed correctly. Have these in different boxes as the labeled ones, as it is common to misplace those boxes and this way is the only way to ensure the labeled ones are there for packing the items back into after the event is over

- Instruct functions/departments to come at different times to pick up their inventory during the two days before the event (or as necessary), to ensure proper the operations of it run smoothly

Additional notes:

5. Event days

These days aren't very hectic in the warehouse area, which gives the team a break between the two fast-paced times for this area.

Warehouse team:

- Ensure the chocolates and apples are being spread out evenly throughout the two days, guaranteeing there will always be some available

- As battery packs, apples and chocolates start running out, make sure to throw away their boxes into the correct recycling container – the warehouse can and will generate a big amount of waste

- In the rare and unfortunate situation that a speaker would like to hand out printed material, this will be stored and then later on distributed from the warehouse. This will have to be planned out together with the Seminar Hall function to determine the best way to work with this situation

- Maintain communication with all staff throughout the whole event so there is no miscommunication about the items stored in the warehouse

- Halfway through the second and final event day, items will start returning. Make sure to be available and prepared to start organizing into their correct boxes

Additional notes:

6. End of final event day, packing

At the end of the final event day, all functions/departments will start bringing their items. It is easy to get flustered by all the activity happening and the items being returned, so make sure to prepare for this moment. Together with the start of the event week, this is the most chaotic moment of the whole process and needs to be as organized and smooth as possible of an experience.

Warehouse team:

- Ask those returning items to first organize them by item – in some cases, items are distributed to different locations and do not come back together. Ask the functions/departments to take care of this before arriving at the location, so all of the same items are already together as they arrive at the warehouse

- Rather than start organizing right away, have all the functions/departments put their boxes on their designated tables. This will make the actual packing process much easier

- Lanyards will be returned with the badges – ask for help from the functions/departments to start removing them, organizing the lanyards by color.
Badges have to be confidentially disposed of, so confirm with the event venue if they have a way to dispose of these. If not, ask from the company staff to see what alternative solution can be found

- After all items have been returned, ask once again for the head(s) of each function/departments to retrace their area's steps to make sure nothing is being left behind

- While this is being done, start arranging items into their original box and updating the inventory list. It proved to be easier doing this with only the two members of the warehouse team as they are familiar with the items and the numbered boxes in the inventory list, but if necessary there is also part of the staff available to help with this

- Try to pack everything, but keep in mind the trucks will not arrive until the following morning so it is possible to return the following day to continue packing. Try to leave the bare minimum for the next morning

Additional notes:

7. Day after the event

This day is used to finalize the packing that could not be done the previous night, and double-check all items have been returned. The trucks arrive to pick up the items and drive them back to the warehouse in Jyväskylä, where they then have to be unpacked.

Warehouse team (at the event venue in Helsinki):

- Finalize the packing of the items that could not be packed the previous night

- Be present while the items are packed

- Start heading back towards Jyväskylä, to the main warehouse

Additional notes:

Warehouse team (in Jyväskylä):

- Unpack all items/boxes and ensure they go back to their original place (whether it is the warehouse, the office, or any other location)

- If anything is missing or has been misplaced, inform the executive producer

Additional notes:

8. Post-event

The days immediately after the event should be used for rest and recovery after the hectic past week. Make sure to write down any feedback, whether positive or negative, so it is not forgotten.

Warehouse team and company staff:

- Obtain feedback from all others besides the warehouse team and company staff

- Arrange a feedback session as soon as possible between the warehouse team and company staff, to discuss own feedback and feedback gathered from others

Additional notes:
