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**PARTICIPATORY ORIENTATION IN MAINTAINING ORGANIZATIONAL
ATMOSPHERE**

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this thesis was to gather information about the current orientation practices at Laavu Solutions Oy and their impact on the employees' start at the new job. Additionally, the link between orientation and organizational culture was studied. Information concerning this topic has not been researched before in the commissioning company and feedback concerning the current customs has not been systematically collected. Due to the fast and ongoing growth of the company, the topic of this thesis can be found important and valuable for the commissioner.

The objective of the thesis was to get an overall picture about the perceptions of the employees concerning orientation and to draw up an analysis that would be beneficial for the management of the company in the future planning of orientation.

The theory of this report consists of theory about orientation, orientation process and organizational culture and it has been constructed based on literature about each topic. Orientation varies greatly between different companies and it is recommendable to plan and tailor the orientation to meet the needs of each new employee. A well implemented orientation may enable several benefits both for the individual employee and the whole organization.

To get a comprehensive understanding about the current state and how it is perceived, one-to-one interviews were conducted with each of the employees in the commissioning company. The data enabled to draw up a comprehensive analysis and form suggestions for the future.

The main findings were that the orientation is perceived to be unorganized and unstructured, resulting in a slow start in the actual work. Even though the current organizational atmosphere was found pleasant, certain shortcomings in orientation were seen as potential future threats for the pleasant current state.

Based on the results and analysis derived from them, recommendations concerning the orientation has been given for the commissioning company. In addition to the written work, a detailed review has been presented for the management of the company. A comprehensive orientation guide will be conducted also in the company, but it was not included in the thesis because of its nature being more on the side of a project-based-thesis.

Keywords: orientation, orientation process, organizational culture

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1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to study how the current orientation customs are perceived among the employees of Laavu Solutions Oy, the commissioning company of this thesis. The aim is to find out what kind of impact the current orientation customs have had on the start of the employees' work at the new job. Additionally, the link between orientation and organizational culture is examined to see if the employees find the orientation customs to have impact on the organizational culture at the workplace. The chosen objectives mentioned above have been selected to get an overall insight and understanding covering both impacts on the individuals and the whole organization.

This topic has not been researched before in the commissioning company and no information concerning the employees' experiences about the orientation has been systematically gathered before. Because of this, the information received through this thesis is found to be needed and valuable in the commissioning company for the future planning of the orientation.

Due to organizations and jobs evolving into more complex entities, the need for a more extensive orientation has become increasingly important (Kupias & Peltola 2009, 13). Despite this fact, emphasis tends to be still placed on the occupational guidance, based on the historical viewpoint where orientation was mostly guidance to technical work (Kjelin & Kuusisto 2003, 36-37). In this thesis, the approach to orientation is wider. A wish from the commissioning company is to have an outcome that is not only focused on orientation, but gives also information concerning organizational culture and if the existing one could be maintained by certain orientation practices implemented in the future.

According to Kjelin & Kuusisto (2003, 164-165) companies can identify several target groups that require some orientation. Orientation is not only targeted to new people entering the company, but also for example to old employees returning the company after a long absence. Due to the framing of this thesis, the focus is only on the new employees that enter the company with no experience about the company before.

The content of this report starts with an introduction that gives a general idea on the topic, the commissioning company, research problem and research questions and shortly the methodology used in this research. The theoretical framework is constructed in three parts. The second chapter

introduces the concept of orientation and its aims and benefits. In the third chapter the orientation will be discussed as a process in more detail. The theoretical framework is concluded by studying organizational culture and its connection to orientation in chapter four. The fifth chapter covers methodology used in this thesis, introducing and justifying the use of the chosen research method and ways to gather and analyze the data. Chapter six present the results and the analysis conducted based on the results. Finally, a conclusion and discussion can be found at the end of this report.

1.1 The commissioner

The commissioning company of this thesis is Laavu Solutions Oy. The company was established in 2015 in Oulu, Finland and it operates fully on the IT-field having a focus on digitalization and customer tailored information management systems. As the company was established, it operated as a three-man business, before recruiting the first external employee to the company.

Laavu Solutions hired their 10th employee in January 2017 and the company aims at steady growth during the year 2017. As the company started growing from a three-man-business into a bigger organization, the need for a more extensive orientation was identified. As mentioned above, no information concerning the employees' perceptions about the orientation has been gathered before, which is why conducting a research on this topic was found useful in the commissioning company.

When the growth of a company is fast, the importance of good orientation practices is emphasized. Kjelin & Kuusisto (2003, 20) state that the more a company recruits in a short period of time, the more it has newcomers with several different backgrounds concerning work experience, processes and organizational cultures. This was noticed also in the commissioning company as it recruited a number of new people during the fall 2016, each having previous working experience gained in very different companies and organizations. Facing this situation and acknowledging this fact in the commissioning company has been one factor triggering this thesis project and conducting the information gathering.

Every new employee that enters the commissioning company is allocated to a real-life customer project as soon as possible, so there are currently no "practice projects" for the newcomers when

they start working at Laavu Solutions. This emphasizes the meaning of orientation, so that the risk of failures is minimized. In addition to this, the managers should be aware of the competencies of each new worker as soon as possible, so that everyone can be allocated to a suitable customer project in the earliest phase possible.

In addition to this, a few other reasons arose when having discussions concerning orientation at the commissioning and this upcoming thesis:

- As the company is growing, the opinions and feelings of current employees was wanted to be gathered to receive information, if the current processes should be somehow improved.
- Secondly, it has come up in internal discussions that employees at Laavu find the atmosphere in the work place satisfactory. This triggered the question on how the orientation of new employees should be implemented for the good atmosphere to stay as it is.

Taking all these aspects into account, the topic of this thesis was shaped to its final form. Even though the framing of the topic seems rather wide, the main hope from the company was to gain information that would be beneficial for the future planning of orientation.

1.2 Objective and research question

Based on the reasoning given in the previous chapter, the objective of this thesis is to study the current orientation practices of Laavu Solutions Oy; how the current orientation customs are perceived among the personnel of the commissioning company and what is their impact on the organization and its employees. The research problem of this thesis is: How the employees of Laavu Solutions find the current orientation customs and how they have affected on their start at the new job?

Based on the research problem and the objective of this thesis, the research questions of this thesis are divided as following:

- How have the current orientation customs affected on the start of employees' work?
- If the orientation has been found successful, what factors have affected on the success?

- Does orientation support to maintain the existing values and organizational culture at Laavu Solutions Oy? If yes, how?

The focus in the theoretical part of this thesis is on orientation and orientation processes in companies. Additionally, the link between values, organizational culture and orientation has been studied to find out if it is possible to support the existing values and the organizational atmosphere through specific actions or a certain approach in orientation.

2 ORIENTATION

Hiring a new and long-standing employee is comparable to a long-term investment (Viitala 2004, 243). Making incorrect recruitments or destroying a successful recruitment with poorly implemented orientation could be stated to cause remarkable expenses. That is why investing in orientation can be seen as a crucial element in the overall success of the recruitment process.

The nature of work is constantly changing and the shift from technical and machinery-driven work has rapidly shifted towards a more knowledge-oriented work in the past few decades. This has also had an impact on how orientation is implemented in organizations; orientation is seen today as a long and multidimensional process instead of sprints of few hours (Kjelin & Kuusisto 2003, 14). Juholin (2008, 234) states also that interactivity is one of the basic characteristics of today's orientation. Organizations and tasks become more and more complex meaning that the traditional way of implementing orientation is not sufficient and that it is vital for the employee to understand how the organization works and why it eventually exists. (Kupias & Peltola 2009, 13.)

Change in the nature of work has had an impact on the orientation, but that is not the only thing reshaping the orientation practices. Increase in educational level seems to reshape the expectations and demands that people have towards their job (Lämsä & Hautala 2004, 80). Employment is no more seen as a lifelong commitment to one organization, which leads to companies competing over talented workforce. Recruitment and orientation phases are seen particularly important in managing knowledge-oriented employees, minimizing the risk of an expensive failure. (Kjelin & Kuusisto 2003, 23-24.)

Orientation of a new employee is regulated in the Finnish law, and regulations on this topic can be found for example from Employment Contract Act and Occupational Health and Safety Act (Kupias & Peltola 2009, 20). Due to the framing of this topic and focus being on motivation and satisfaction of employees instead of technical matters, the legislation concerning orientation has been left out because of not being valid for the topic on hand.

In the following sub-chapters orientation will be further discussed; how orientation is defined, what is it aiming at and what are the benefits received when sufficiently implementing orientation in an organization.

2.1 Definition of orientation

According to Österberg (2014, 115) orientation is about all the actions that help the new employee to become a part of the organization and the community around him. Additionally, it means supporting the new comer until s/he is capable of taking charge of the new job (Viitala 2004, 259). Orientation is said to be understood as an important factor, but it is still one of the most disregarded processes in organizations (Kjelin & Kuusisto 2003, 14).

Attitudes and understanding the meaning of orientation seems to be depended on the nature of the work and the field that the organization is operating in. The importance of orientation is more easily understood in organizations where the work guidance is essential and where young employees are being recruited. Opposite to this, orientation tends to be left with minimal attention in knowledge-oriented jobs. (Kjelin & Kuusisto 2003,14-15.)

Knowledge-oriented organizations tend to rely on the idea that the professionals hired to a new job can enter the work with less orientation. Still, when entering to a new job, the organizational culture may be new and the processes unknown even for the experienced worker and the newcomer must interpret what these concepts mean in the new settings. Applying the already existing knowledge is bound on the situation and requires understanding the situation and the circumstances. (Kjelin & Kuusisto 2003, 15.)

2.2 Aims of orientation

According to Kjelin & Kuusisto (2003,15), orientation aims at the employee understanding the policies and the culture that takes places in the organization and the goal is to maintain the common customs at the workplace. They bring up also organizational culture when talking about the aims of the orientation. Organizational culture is shaped over a long period of time and the new employee is wanted to become a part of this existing culture (Kjelin & Kuusisto 2003, 15).

As mentioned previously in this report, there is a common understanding about the values of Laavu Solutions among the employees and internal discussions have brought up the satisfactory state employees have about the atmosphere at the workplace. Knowing now that organizational culture

and orientation can have a positive link, the questions used in the interviews target to gain information from this area as well.

In addition to what has been mentioned above, orientation can be seen to have few additional aims. Financially, it is a tool that helps to shape the new employee to become a profitable worker in as short time as possible, starting to cut down the costs arisen from the recruitment process (Kjelin & Kuusisto 2003,14). Additionally, orientation enables to minimize risk and the time used to fix them (Österberg, 2014, 115).

2.3 Benefits

It could be stated that what has been set as an aim can become a benefit when achieving the goal. At its simplest, orientation can be seen as a way to minimize mistakes in the organization (Kjelin & Kuusisto 2003, 20). As mentioned already above, orientation leads eventually to financial aspects, which is crucial in managing the business. A well implemented orientation process cuts down the costs as the new employee becomes productive and profitable in the shortest time possible. Additionally, good orientation could be seen to lead to a highly-motivated employee that is committed to the company and has less desire to switch to a new job. Poorly implemented orientation is one of the basic reasons for a high personnel turnover (Viitala, 2013, 88).

As mentioned already, in situations where a company is growing fast, the organization can get multiple new employees over a short period of time. All of them have work experience from different organizations that have different processes and systems. (Kjelin & Kuusisto 2003, 20.) Managing this situation through orientation is important so that the management has a good overall picture and understanding of the pool of skills that the workforce has. This could be seen to have an impact also to recruitment. Before starting external recruitment, the existing personnel and the competencies among it should be monitored. Some of the employees may have studied something beside the work and gain additional skills to transfer to more challenging tasks. (Österberg, 2014, 92-93.) Avoiding unnecessary recruitments can be again linked to financial issues and the expensive process of getting a new employee is this way avoided. As it can be seen from the above mentioned, investing in orientation could be seen to pay itself back relatively fast.

3 ORIENTATION PROCESS

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the nature of orientation has shifted towards a more process-oriented approach instead of being a nonrecurring action, where only the necessities are covered in order to the newcomer to be able to start his work.

The start of the orientation process includes many things that are not directly linked to improving the skills of the newcomer, but focus on practicalities that must be gone through even before the new employee enters the company (Kupias & Peltola 2009, 93). The focus of this thesis has been agreed to concern only the time after the employee has entered the work, so covering the preliminary work has been left out of this report, because of its invalidity to the topic on hand.

3.1 Recruitment

When looking at the literature concerning orientation, recruitment is often closely linked to the topic. Recruitment and orientation processes should be considered as coherent processes to some extent, and also as partially overlapping processes (Kjelin & Kuusisto 2003, 73). This report will not go into detail about recruitment, because of the before mentioned framing of the topic. However, the topic is still brought up, because it needs to be remembered that even a good recruitment can be ruined if the orientation is being implemented poorly (Kjelin & Kuusisto 2003, 73). Consequently, it could be stated that being aware of the relation between recruitment and orientation enables managers to understand the importance of the orientation and giving credit to it.

A well planned and organized orientation enables the management of the company to be also fully aware of the actual pool of skills that the organization has already, and no internal know-how will remain unknown (Kjelin & Kuusisto 2003, 73). As it was mentioned in the previous chapter, by implementing orientation properly, managers can avoid inaccurate recruitments in the future when being fully aware of the already existing internal competencies of the employees.

3.2 Planning the orientation

The aim of the orientation process is to give information about the organization, its business idea, personnel strategy and policies, work related goals, norms etc. (Heinonen & Järvinen 1997, 142). Orientation process may differ greatly in different companies, because the final content of the orientation process is affected by the organizational values, strategy, goals, tasks of the newcomer and the employee's previous experience (Kjelin & Kuusisto 2003, 199).

The figure below illustrates the four levels of orientation that Heinonen & Järvinen (1997, 142) have identified. The topic and focus of this research can be seen to be linked to the orientation of the job and the organization, leaving out the most inner and external parts in the picture.

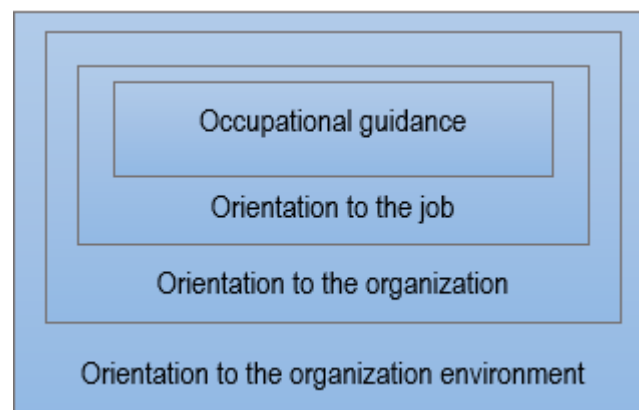


Figure 1 Levels of the orientation process after Heinonen & Järvinen (1997,142)

In addition to this division into different levels, orientation process can be also split up to time sections. Juholin (2008, 236) states that good orientation consists of three steps: time before entering the company, the entering phase and few months after the start. Kupias & Peltola (2009, 102-103) state that recruitment process is an extremely important phase in orientation, because all the special characteristics and demands concerning the work task, working community and organization are being communicated to the candidate in this phase. Despite the importance of this phase, the focus in this report is only in the later phases leaving out the examination of the recruitment process at Laavu Solutions.

3.3 Schedule of the orientation process

Orientation should have a preliminary plan that creates a frame, schedule and division of work for the orientation. Additionally, it is highly advisory to go through the plan with the newcomer in the beginning of the process to find out which parts are relevant. Some of the things in the plan may be familiar already for the newcomer and some things needed may not exist in the plan. (Kjelin & Kuusisto 2003, 198.)

During the first day at work the most acute matters are being covered while making sure that there is enough work for the employee without getting too much information that cannot be absorbed at once. Making a good impression during the first day is also important, because having a good start goes far and fixing a bad welcoming is hard later on. (Kupias & Peltola 2009, 103-105.) It could be stated that going through the plan as mentioned in the previous chapter has also an impact on the first impression received during the first day, since modifying it to suit the individual creates an impression of interest towards the new employee instead of going through some bulk process that is fully standardized.

Getting a good overall picture about the new job and getting to know with the new working community and organization is easier if the newcomer gets familiar with his work during the first week at the new place (Kupias & Peltola 2009, 105). Assumably, adapting quickly to the work community could create a sense of belonging and that way help maintaining the community solid and connected. Additionally, every new employee wants to feel to be beneficial at the new job and this is why getting in to “real work” should be done as soon as possible (Kupias & Peltola 2009, 105). Reaching this is also a goal at the commissioning, where all the new employees are allocated to real-life projects in the earliest phase possible.

In addition this this, according to Kupias & Peltola (2009, 105) the newcomer should be given a “first aid kit” during the first week to get a good start at his work. Implementing this kind of a “first aid kit” and a step-by-step orientation guide will be conducted also in the commissioning company later on based on this research, but because of the qualitative nature of this thesis, including these topics will be left out for their nature being more on the side of a project-based research.

Companies may have some general forms of orientation plans, but drawing up a personal plan based on discussion about the experiences and knowledge of the newcomer should be concluded

during the first week of work. This gives the newcomer an impression of what things s/he should get familiar with to manage doing the job independently enough (Kupias & Peltola 2009, 106). As mentioned before, it is also good to show an interest towards the newcomer as an individual, instead of treating the person as an “objective” going through a standardized and general system.

4 ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Culture itself is a rather challenging word to be described and it has been given multiple meanings and side meanings. Adding the word “organization” besides it makes the whole concept even more multidimensional. Even though it seems that there is a common acceptance on the existence of organizational culture, the meaning of the concept itself varies among the big audience, or it cannot be described in words. (Schein 1991, 23.)

Mäkisalo (2004, 74) defines organization as “consciously or unconsciously learned or agreed customs or agreements of the way of being, doing and developing the work together”. As seen from the definition, the idea of organizational culture is extremely complex. According to Schein (1991, 23-24), organizational culture is for example the *regular way of behaving* that can be observed when people are interacting among each other. Additionally, it can be the *norms* that evolve in active groups and the dominant *values* in a certain organization.

Schein states (1991,24) that these definitions *describe* the organizational culture, but neither of them alone is the most essential factor in organizational culture and that the term “culture” should be limited to concern only the most definite core of the believes and basic principles. This core level is also referred as the subconscious level, which defines the views that the organization has of itself and its surroundings.

4.1 Organizational culture and orientation

As it has been mentioned in the previous chapters, it has come up in internal discussions at the commissioning company that the organizational culture at the workplace is found satisfactory. As shown in the previous chapter, organizational culture includes factors such as norms and values, which have a high level of importance in the commissioning company.

According to Schein (1991,19), managers establish organizational cultures and creating, managing and even sometimes destroying one, can be one of the most important management tasks that there is. It was also mentioned in the chapter 3.2 that “*the orientation process is affected by the organizational values*” (Kjelin & Kuusisto 2003,199). Concerning both these given statements, it

could be stated that orientation and organizational culture have a link or at least they are closely connected with each other. For the commissioning company this emphasizes the importance of having a good orientation process and being aware of the how the current customs are perceived so that the goal of maintaining the organizational culture and atmosphere in the workplace as it is can be achieved.

4.2 Levels of culture

Edgar Schein (1991, 31-33) claims that (organizational) culture has three different levels, one of which being the above-mentioned core and the subconscious level, and the other two levels being the expressions of this core level. Schein (1991, 32-38) and Mäkisalo (2004, 75) describe that the levels are characterized as following:

1. *Artifacts* are the most visible thing in the organization meaning the physical and social environment that the people together have established. This includes things such as: facilities, written and spoken language, behavior of the group members that can be observed etc. (Schein 1991, 32.)
2. *Values* are the second level of the culture, which claim how things “should be” in comparison to what they currently are (Schein 1991, 33). Usually, many of the values are conscious and clearly expressed, because they lead the group to handle certain issues in a specific manner (Schein 1991, 34).
3. *Basic principles* is the most inner level of culture – the core of the culture. Perceptions about the surrounding environment, reality, relationship and the nature of interactions of people are some examples of these basic principles. These perceptions originate when some presumption starts to be seen as a truth in the organization. (Mäkisalo 2004,75.)

Defining the values and working according to them has been expressed to be an important matter at Laavu Solutions. The current value list has been established based on common discussions and a workshop organized for the personnel, where every employee has been given a chance to express his/her own thoughts. The aim is to find such organizational values that are not contradicting with the personal values of the employees.

The common endeavor is to maintain the values and the existing organizational cultures also when recruiting new people to the company. The current value base defines the daily work strongly and the circumstances are wanted to remain the same also in the future.

5 METHODOLOGY

Research is typically divided into quantitative and qualitative research based on the primary data gathering method used in the study. When starting to conduct a research, the research method should be chosen based on the purpose of the research. (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2007, 131.) It should be considered what is studied and what kind of research tools enable to gather the most valuable data concerning the topic on hand.

The primary research method of this thesis is qualitative research, which is defined to focus on a comprehensive information gathering, where the data is gathered in real-life settings that are reflecting natural and real situations (Hirsjärvi et al. 2008, 160). Since this thesis has a focus on people and phenomena, choosing the qualitative research method as a primary research method is natural.

Due to the target group of data gathering consisting of only six people, making decisions about the data gathering had to be done carefully to maintain the data comprehensive and reliable enough. It was agreed in the beginning of this process with the commissioning company that the data collection would be conducted by interviews in order to get as wide data as possible. This was seen to provide a more comprehensive outcome compared to having questionnaires as the primary data collection method. The following sub chapters introduce methods used in this thesis in more detail and decisions about the chosen methods will be justified in each section.

5.1 Qualitative research

In qualitative research the selection of the target group is based on choosing an appropriate group instead of randomly picking a sample (Hirsjärvi et al. 2008, 160). Having a selected group of people as the target group in this thesis is also supporting the decision of choosing the qualitative research method. The target group of this work consists of employees of Laavu Solutions with few exceptions. The managers of the company are not included in the target group because of them being in response of the orientation. Additionally, despite the author of this thesis being an employee of the commissioning company, the author has been decided to be excluded from the

data gathering, so that the data derived through interviews is maintained as authentic as possible, without anyone being affected by opinions of someone else.

When conducting a research about a real-life phenomenon, it is recommendable to use people and interviews as the primary source of data gathering (Hirsjärvi et al. 2008,160). The following chapter will explain in more detailed interview as the data gathering method and why conducting interviews has been chosen to be the primary data gathering method in this thesis.

5.2 Interview in data gathering

Despite interviews being the primary data collection method in qualitative research, using it should be still always justified (Hirsjärvi et al. 2008, 200). Because of the nature of this thesis, using interviews as the primary data collection method is the most likely to give the highest level of accuracy concerning the information, and due to this the interviews are chosen to be the primary data gathering method. Also, as mentioned before, it must be guaranteed that answers from each member in the target group are received because of the small size of the target group.

According to Hirsjärvi et al.s (2008, 200), interviews are recommendable when the subject of the research is a person and when there is a larger context into which the ideas of a person will be placed. Using interviews enables the researcher to gain additional information through expressions and gestures. In addition to this, questions used in the interview were open, enabling the interviewees express them freely and this way get as extensive data as possible.

Implementing interviews in this report is done by having individual one-to-one interviews with all the members of the target group. Doing this instead of choosing to have a group interview, is done to maintain a high level of accuracy with the answers with everyone and to receive information as widely as possible. In group interviews, there may be dominant persons that could set a direction to the conversation (Hirsjärvi et al. 2008, 206). Conducting individual interviews aims at guaranteeing that the voice of each interviewee will be better heard.

Interviewer needs to be prepared both for talkative and terse interviewees (Hirsjärvi et al. 2008, 206). Because of the small number of people in the target group, individual interviews are being chosen to be used to avoid the situation of someone staying silent if having a group interview. Due

to the small size of the group, answers from all the members of the group are vital to maintain the research wide enough.

5.3 Analyzing the data

According to Hirsjärvi et al. (2007, 216-217), drawing a conclusion from the gathered data is possible in most cases only after conducting some preliminary work. At first the data may have to be *checked* in case of major mistakes. Additionally, if conducting for example a survey through mail, it has to be examined if some forms must be rejected for not being reliable. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, 216.)

Because of the small number of interviewees in this report, the risk of rejected answers must be minimized in order to maintain the data large enough. This also justifies conducting the data gathering by having face to face interviews and this way minimizing the risk of failure in the data gathering.

The second step in the preliminary work is *completing the information*. Due to the qualitative nature of this report, this step is also unnecessary, because interviewing is already the primary and only method of the data gathering. The starting point in this report is the third step in the preliminary work which is *organizing the data*. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, 217.) After conducting all the interviews, the recordings will be transcribed into written form in order to examine the data more easily and to see what things are common and stand out frequently. This creates a base for drawing up the final comprehensive analysis to this work.

Analyzing the data can be divided into *explaining the data* or *understanding the data* (Hirsjärvi et al. 2007, 219). Because of using the qualitative research method, having the viewpoint of understanding is a logical choice in this report. Drawing up a plan concerning the development of orientation in the commissioning company is easier when there is a good understanding about the current circumstances and what has led to it.

6 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The following chapter will introduce the results received from the interviews and further analysis will be derived based on the results. After transcribing the data, the analysis has been started by processing the data and by compiling it into different themes. Themes arising from the data will be individually introduced, their expression in real settings will be described and analysis concerning the future development of orientation will be then given. As mentioned before, the data of this thesis was gathered by conducting individual interviews with the employees of the commissioning company.

As the data gathering process began, it was seen that the choices concerning the data gathering methods and questions used in the interview were successful. Answers were received from all the members in the target group and the final material was found to be wide, extensive and provide information for the research questions set in the beginning of the process. Questions used in the interview triggered the interviewees to express their experiences and thoughts in a diverse and thoughtful way, which created a good base for conducting a comprehensive analysis.

6.1 Perceptions about orientation

When organizing and interpreting the data, there were four strong themes that arose in the material. Figure 2 illustrates these findings and each of them will be explained in more detail in the following chapters below.

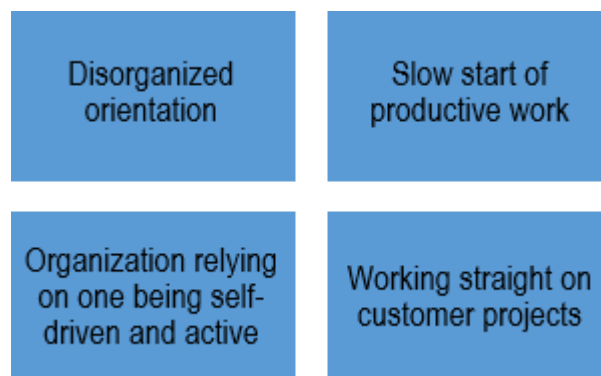


Figure 2 Main findings from the interviews

6.1.1 Disorganized orientation

The first part of the interview consisted of questions concerning orientation and orientation process. When asking about the perceptions about the current orientation customs, the response was nearly the same with all the respondents. The personnel expressed the orientation to be “disorganized, neglectful and even non-existent”. A common acceptance concerning the first day at work was found among the personnel; matters such as introducing the facilities and other basic customs were presented during the first day, but many of the respondents found that the sufficient part of the orientation ended at that.

After the first day, the orientation was said to be conducted by studying independently and orientation was implemented “on the fly” as some tasks required it. Self-studying was found frustrating as there was no idea about the schedule and what is going to happen next.

In order to avoid the frustration, a plan and schedule should be given to the newcomer, so that s/he is aware of the process and what is going to happen. Orientation should still not be implemented by going through a certain strict process, because people define a good orientation process differently and may expect different kind of actions in the orientation than others. The planning should be done in such way that it includes certain leeway for changes, based on what each individual needs. Additionally, even though drowning in information during the first days should be avoided, having a period during which basic tools, techniques and equipment are explained could help the newcomer at least to focus on the things s/he is not that familiar with. Things can be then revised later, if necessary.

People that were recruited to the company among the first external employees acknowledged that the orientation process had changed during their time at the company and discussion concerning improvements had been heard, but none of the interviewees had a clear idea of the “latest version” of the process and what it included. Some respondents brought up that they had heard certain process was created, but it was not sure if it had been actually implemented with the latest recruitments. A common understanding seemed to be that it would be useful to know how the current process looks like, so participating in the process would be easier if needed.

6.1.2 Slow start of the productive work

Another strong theme arising from the data was the slow start of the productive work, which was seen to be a result of lacking an efficient orientation process. One of the interviewees expressed being “not sure if it had any meaning if I was present or not at the office during the first weeks”, because of the lack of content during the start. Some of the respondents expressed also feeling outside from the group, since “all the colleagues were already focusing on work for customers and communicating about that with each other”. It could be also seen during the interviews that the perceptions about the company as an employer seemed to have momentarily declined, compared to what the perception had been during the recruitment process, as lacking the orientation seemed unprofessional.

It would be beneficial for the company to have a detailed understanding about the knowledge level already in the recruitment phase, so that allocation to a project would be easier. A checklist of things should be also given to the newcomer, where things that can and should be done individually would be easy to see. In addition to this, having a back-up in the form of a practice project would be recommendable. This could be one part of the “first-aid-kit” presented in chapter 3.3 in the theoretical framework. In case of delay in allocating to a real-life project, the newcomer would have an actual task on hand providing something to train with, while the management can gain additional time for organizing actual work for the newcomer. This could also minimize the feeling of being outside from the group, as the practice project could initiate the need for help from others and that way contribute to people getting to know each other earlier.

Taking these above-mentioned things into account would help to avoid a situation where the perception about the new job declines. Ending up to a situation where a newcomer doubts the employer and the new job, even for a short amount of time, can place a risk. First impressions tend to be strong and changing one can be hard. Companies compete more and more with the image they give and building such image usually starts from inside the company.

6.1.3 Relying on one being self-driven and active

A third theme arising is that the orientation at the commissioning company was described to rely on one being self-driven, independent and active. Some people found this way of acting suitable,

but most of the respondents expressed that orientation relies maybe too much on this kind of acting. Even though the atmosphere at the commissioning company was found to be friendly for the questions, some of the respondents expressed to be hesitant about making questions when colleagues seemed to be busy or concentrating on something. Additionally, some of the respondents felt that becoming aware of things well enough requires a lot of asking, which was found uncomfortable at some point. Also, this kind of method was found to be a “one-way-process” and lacking interaction when everything had to be asked and not much “was given at the start”.

Establishing this kind of friendly environment is definitely not a thing to be avoided, but relying only to this should be avoided for a few reasons. Firstly, the risk of employees making mistakes may increase if they end up doing something without asking first. Additionally, even if not making actual mistakes, proceeding with the task on hand may delay if moving further is depended on getting help from someone. Secondly, the system may work seamlessly when the personnel consists of outgoing people, but it should be considered that not everyone is that comfortable with making questions and some people may need more directed and instructional guidance and expect that from the management of the company. Problems may also arise if multiple people are recruited in the company during a short time, if the process relies only on people asking when needed. It should be considered how long the process can stay as it is and when this kind of process becomes too heavy to handle. Establishing a process and providing certain information as given could help, when becoming aware of things does not always require asking, but the information can be received from other sources as well.

6.1.4 Working straight on customer projects

Concerning orientation and the actual work, one more thing was found to stand out in the interviews. Working in a real-life customer project right in the beginning seems to divide the personnel in the commissioning company in half; some people find it perfectly suitable to step into working on a customer project straight away, but some of the respondents described to feel a little insecure and hesitant and getting a customer project right away felt like “jumping in the deep water”.

As mentioned before, establishing a certain practice project would be recommended and having one could have a positive impact on this aspect as well. Orientation could be tailored to suit each individual and the ones being ready to jump into a real-life project could do so, but people in the

need of practice could start with that. Additionally, most of the respondents expressed that they would have needed orientation concerning working with the client. It is acknowledged among the personnel that each customer is an individual, but the employees find that certain systematic things appear in each project and being aware of those things would make it easier to start working with the clients.

This is a valuable finding concerning practical advice for the future development of orientation. A roadmap or a process chart could be created and included in the orientation process, so that each new member in the company would have an idea what kind of phases and steps there will appear once the work with the client starts.

6.2 Success of the orientation

The second part of the interview concentrated more on the organizational culture and how the personnel perceives the working environment, atmosphere and the values in the work place. This part of the interview aimed at providing information for the second and third research question set for this thesis.

When asking if the orientation has been found successful and what things affected on the success, the answers were rather interesting. Orientation was not directly said to have failed, but some of the respondents said that it cannot be said to have succeeded either, since the perception was that an actual process for the orientation does not even exist. It was also said that the success of the orientation is depended on how self-driven and independent the individual is.

A common thought among the personnel seemed to be that the orientation did not fail because a lack of interest, but the whole process suffers from different things being poorly implemented. Things such as lack of schedule, structure and order were brought up. In addition to this, some of respondents said that once getting familiar with some tool or technique, they noticed it could have helped in the previous tasks if only the thing was presented and brought up already earlier.

To conclude from this, the orientation could not be stated to be successful and it seems that there are many things that require improvement. While making observations during the interviews, it seemed that none of the employees is waiting for a perfect process to appear, but the main hope

was that a process would at least be created and the whole personnel would be aware of the process so there would be a common understanding if the process was being implemented or not.

6.3 Perceptions about the organizational culture

When asking employees' perceptions about the working environment, atmosphere at work, values and the organizational culture, the responses were rather similar among all the employees. Everyone expressed the atmosphere at the workplace to be pleasant as well as the atmosphere among the personnel. The interviewees said that it feels good to come to work and being with colleagues in nice, because "people laugh at the same things", everyone respects each other and the ways people are most comfortable to do their work with.

Respecting others and everyone being on the same level was brought up when specifically asking about the values. It was brought up that the employees are happy with the values, because they are actually being seen in the real life; the managers of the company work among the same projects as the rest of the employees and despite the final decision-making-power the managers have, they are still seen to be equal with everyone else and not controlling things from "an ivory tower". Seeing the values in practice seemed to have a positive impact on the perceptions about the workplace.

In order to retain the situation as it is, it would be beneficial if the management of the company could keep up with being part of the daily work at the workplace. In case of strong growth, the role of the managers may change and shift towards focusing more on the managerial tasks may occur, but keeping the gap between the managers and the rest of the personnel as narrow as possible most probably has a positive impact in maintaining the perceptions as positive as they are now. Participating also in the orientation of new employees could communicate this idea further, when the orientation is not fully outsourced to the personnel itself, but the management shows also interest towards the newcomers.

Question concerning the organizational culture brought up also the issue of a flat organization. The commissioning company has set "maintaining the atmosphere of a small and flat organization" as their goal at the time of growth. This specific goal has been set to maintain the working environment pleasant for the personnel and to reflect the values of the company to others as well. Aiming at implementing the above-mentioned things could lead to achieving this goal as well.

The third research question concentrated on the link between orientation and organizational culture, asking if the current orientation customs support maintaining the current organizational culture. In this case as well, most of the respondents gave a denying answer, because of not seeing an actual process existing. The friendly environment for questions that was expressed earlier was seen simultaneously as an opportunity and a threat for the maintenance of the current atmosphere, which can be seen as one part of the organizational culture. It forces people to communicate with each other and asking help from others helps also getting to know with each other. At the same time, it was brought up that adapting to the environment in the current circumstances requires one to be outgoing and taking responsibility of his/her own learning. It was said that in case of for example younger people with less experience entering the company, the current practices may hinder the adapting since some people may need more instructed guidance.

As can be seen from all the above mentioned, the current practices seem to have room for improvements. To understand the current situation in a larger perspective, it should be also considered what has led to this situation and what has been the reason why this kind of orientation approach has been established. Additionally, it should be considered how the organizational culture has evolved to its current form and if the current orientation customs are a reflection of the culture.

6.4 Background to the current state

As it was mentioned in the theoretical framework (chapter 4.1), managers are the ones establishing organizational cultures in companies. What comes to the organizational culture in the commissioning company, it could be stated that the existing orientation culture is a result from a strong view that the founders of the company have had when establishing the company. It has come up in internal discussions that the managers of the commissioning company know what it is like to work in corporate world and hence, want to do things better with their own company and minimize the feeling of a corporate atmosphere. After being established, the company was running with small personnel for some time, where implementing the values in day-to-day life was easy. As the first external employees had long time to adapt to the new job and the values, they have been also able to contribute as more new people have entered the company after them, and this has created a positive circle strengthening the organizational culture.

Moving on to orientation, the current customs could be seen resulting from the existing organizational culture. It could be argued whether the current customs are a conscious choice of trusting the employees and giving them responsibility of their own learning, or if the process has been wanted to remain “free” to be aligned with the values of the company and the aim of everyone being able to do things the way that is best for each individual. Lastly, it could be stated that the current situation may have been created as the company was smaller and the management has not had enough time to react to changes caused by the growth of the personnel.

Based on the interviews, observations during them and the author’s own experience while working in the commissioning company, the current orientation practices can be said to result from the existing strong organization culture, which has created a base, on which the current practices have evolved. The culture has created and shaped the orientation to its current form, but due to fast growth, the process has not been updated to meet the changed needs in the organization.

The following chapter will summarize the main findings, evaluate how the goal set for this thesis has been achieved and present ideas concerning the further development of the orientation, so that the goal of maintaining the current atmosphere and organizational culture in general will be achieved.

7 CONCLUSION

The objective of this thesis was to study the current orientation customs at the commissioning company; how the current customs are perceived and what is their impact on the individuals and the whole organization. In addition to this report and the analysis presented in it, an internal review has been organized in the commissioning company, where the results have been expressed to the management of the company in more detail.

The most impactful things arising from the results are the general lack of order and structure in the orientation, which causes delay to actual work and secondly, the slow start of the actual work caused harmful feelings among the employees and it was seen to have an impact on adapting to the group. Even though the current orientation practices were not found to be purely bad or failed, noticeable successes were not found from the process either. Additionally, orientation was not found to provide any support to managing the current organizational culture as some of the respondents did not find an actual orientation to even exist.

Even though the current state of the organizational culture was found extremely pleasant and the employees expressed to be satisfied with the existing values and the atmosphere at the workplace, the weaknesses in the orientation process was found to be a possible threat in the future causing harm to the pleasant organizational atmosphere. The current customs may be harsh for a more reserved person, which may eventually lead to the personnel starting to split up into groups, which was seen unfortunate.

The aim for the company in the future is to establish a comprehensive process that can be tailored to some extent with each new employee entering the company. Having certain leeway in the process enables to tailor the process suitable for each person. The process would be recommendable to be planned by having all the current employees involved, so they can participate in the planning and have a comprehensive understanding about the process. Additionally, it is advisory to involve the personnel in general to the process, which creates communication between the current employees and the newcomer(s) and that way speeds up the process of getting to know with each other.

As it was mentioned in the previous chapter, the existing organizational culture has created and shaped the current orientation customs. As the goal for the commissioning company is to maintain the current atmosphere and organizational culture, the findings derived from this thesis should be turned vice versa in the future in order to achieve the goal. In other words, such orientation process should be planned and established that it starts creating a culture instead of being a result itself. Achieving this goal will require careful planning and the process will be started based on the results received from this thesis.

8 DISCUSSION

In this chapter the whole thesis process will be discussed and strengths and weaknesses of the process will be evaluated. As the process started, the topic of this thesis was seen valuable and there was an actual need for this kind of information, which would further on create a base for the development of the orientation. During this thesis project, the commissioning company has re-examined its strategy and orientation has been brought up as one element that will be emphasized in the future. Due to this, the management of the company expressed this thesis to be even more valuable and the timing for conducting this research was found extremely good. Conducting the research was interesting as the topic on hand can be seen to provide useful information for the commissioning company and that the results will be utilized and put into practice in the future.

The process was set a rather tight schedule, but it has been managed and no additional setbacks or delays appeared during the process. As a matter of fact, the final end date for the process turned out to be a little earlier as planned. Despite the tight schedule, the quality of the work was always a priority on this process and as the report is finalized, the goals set for the quality can be said to be achieved.

Despite the author of this thesis being an employee of the commissioning company, the outcome can be stated to be satisfyingly reliable. The questions used in the interview have been carefully based on the literature about orientation and organizational culture and the help of the tutor teacher has been additionally utilized to maintain the questions neutral. It has to be still considered that the analysis has been derived by a person that simultaneously works in the commissioning company and due to that, the interpretation may be affected by the author's own experiences in the commissioning company.

When evaluating the outcome of this report, the objective set for this thesis can be said to be achieved. The research provided the commissioning company with a comprehensive understanding about the perceptions about the current customs and specially their multidimensional impact in the organization. This above mentioned could be seen to be useful also for other organizations facing the similar situation. In addition, with the understanding gained through this research, the orientation process can be further developed and improved, so that the goal of maintaining the existing orientation culture can be achieved. Even though no practical

guidebook was established in this thesis process, the results received from this thesis have created a base for constructing an orientation booklet in the commissioning company. The upcoming process that will be established provides the commissioning company also with further research possibilities as the success of the new process could be researched by again gathering information about the perceptions of the newcomers.

The careful thinking concerning the overall data gathering methods lead to a success in the data gathering process and the information received through interviews was wide. In addition to this, the carefully planned questions for the interview provided valid information for the thesis. A comprehensive familiarization with the theories concerning orientation and organizational culture provided a good understanding to the topic and helped with framing of the question used in the interview as mentioned above.

As the time frame of this process was tight, managing my schedule was emphasized throughout the process. Avoiding setbacks and delays in the process is a proof that shows the meaning of careful planning. In addition to this, conducting this thesis has showed me my capabilities for critical thinking and triggered the interest towards research. It has also broadened my understanding concerning human resources in the business field, which I find valuable. All in all, the process of conducting this research has been educational and the satisfaction to the final outcome can be said to be mutual with the author and the commissioning company.

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