



# Integrating Non-Native Speaking Workers into Logistics Roles at Valio

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### **Integrating Non-Native Speaking Workers into Logistics Roles at Valio**

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### **Abstract**

The target of the study was to research the challenges faced by non-native speakers in adapting to the work environment at Valio.

The desired result was to create recommendations that Valio can use in decision making while designing their orientation process for non-native speaking employees.

The data was collected through literature review as well as observations and analysis of Valio's warehouse infrastructure.

Many different aspects of Valio's warehouse situation were analysed. Recommendations were then made to Valio about how to proceed with implementing the upgraded voice-assisted warehousing system as well as language and communication in the warehouse.

### **Keywords/tags (subjects)**

Valio, Valio Logistics, Non-Native Language Speaker, Employee Orientation, Voice-Directed Warehousing System, Finnish Workplace Culture, Language and Communication in the Workplace, Employee Training Materials, Employee Well-Being, Voice Recognition.

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Subject Background

A high level of Finnish speaking ability is required to work in Valio's current warehouse infrastructure. This is mainly due to needing to speak Finnish into the voice-assisted warehouse system Valio uses. Because of planned upgrades to their voice-assisted warehouse infrastructure, Valio has a new opportunity to start hiring logistics workers who do not speak much Finnish. The new equipment will allow for operation in Finnish, English, and German. Voice recognition will also be greatly improved in the new system so that accents can be more reliably understood. The current system does not reliably recognize Finnish spoken with a foreign accent.

In 2022, people with a foreign background accounted for 9.1% of the total population in Finland (Statista, 2023). The immigrant population in Finland did not start to quickly increase until the 1990s. One of the most common difficulties expressed by immigrants in Finland is that it feels almost impossible to gain employment without having high levels of fluency with the Finnish language. Many international students in Finland move on to find work in other countries after obtaining their degrees. Steps are being taken by the Finnish government to improve the employment situation for people with foreign backgrounds. Lately, there has been focus placed on retaining international students with legislation being passed to relax residency and employment restrictions placed on international students. (YLE, 2022.)

## 1.2 Objectives

This thesis explores the potential obstacles to overcome when introducing non-native speakers into logistics roles at Valio. This thesis delves into these challenges, ranging from language barriers to cultural integration, and emphasizes the importance of a supportive work environment that fosters both professional and personal growth. The findings of this study are expected to shed light on the specific needs of non-native speaking employees, highlighting areas where they may require additional support, such as language training, understanding of industry-specific terminology, and acclimatization to the company's operational procedures.

Valio intends to develop an orientation program tailored to the unique requirements of non-native speakers, thereby facilitating a smoother transition into their roles, and promoting a more inclusive workplace culture. This thesis will create recommendations for Valio to enhance the onboarding experience for non-native speakers. The goal is to not only improve the efficiency of Valio's logistics operations but also to reinforce the company's commitment to employee well-being. The success of this endeavour could serve as a model for other organizations facing similar challenges, demonstrating the value of investing in a diverse workforce and the positive ripple effects it can have throughout a company.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

The research questions used in this thesis were formulated to explore and find solutions for the difficulties faced by non-native speaking workers when entering a new workplace. The three questions are as follows:

1. What kinds of policies and practices can support non-native speaking workers at Valio?
2. What kinds of support structures can assist non-native speakers in adapting to the company culture?
3. How can training materials be adapted to accommodate non-native speakers? This will include an analysis of the current training materials.

The first two questions are similar, but the first question is focused more on work performance, while the second question is meant to address employee well-being. The first question aims to identify areas of strength and opportunities for growth, ensuring that each team member is aligned with the organization's goals and is provided with the necessary resources and support to excel in their role. The second question is based around workplace culture, because the ability to assimilate and feel a sense of belonging is essential for an employee's job satisfaction and emotional well-being. A content and healthy workforce is integral to the sustained success of Valio, as well as any organization. The goal of the third question is to analyse Valio's current training materials and orientation process. This analysis is crucial to determine how these might support or impede the integration of non-native speaking employees. The findings from the other research questions will be used to identify aspects of the training materials that could benefit from modifications or additional support mechanisms to create a more inclusive and effective learning environment.

## 2 General Information

### 2.1 Valio

Valio is a Finnish dairy company with a rich history dating back over a century. Valio was founded by 17 dairy cooperatives in 1905 as a cooperative to improve the livelihoods of Finnish dairy farmers. Since its inception, Valio has been at the forefront of innovation and sustainable practices within the dairy industry. In its early years, Valio focused on producing high-quality butter and cheese. Over time, the company expanded its product range to include various dairy products like milk, yogurt, and spreads, catering to the evolving tastes and preferences of consumers. Throughout the decades, Valio continued to invest in research and development, leading to breakthroughs in dairy science and technology. The company's commitment to quality and sustainability has earned it numerous awards and certifications, including ISO 9001 and ISO 14001 standards. In recent years, Valio has embraced digitalization and leveraged advanced technologies to enhance its production processes and supply chain efficiency. Today, Valio remains a trusted household name in Finland. It is currently owned by 13 dairy cooperatives, which are comprised of approximately 4700 milk farmers. These cooperatives are the backbone of Valio, providing the milk that is essential for Valio's wide range of dairy products. The company still operates on a cooperative model, meaning that all operational profits are paid out to the farmers through these regional dairy cooperatives. This structure not only supports the livelihood of the farmers but also ensures that the quality of the product remains high, as the farmers themselves have a vested interest in the success of the company. Valio's diverse product portfolio reflects its dedication to meeting the diverse needs of consumers while upholding the highest standards of quality and integrity. As it continues to innovate and adapt to changing market dynamics, Valio remains committed to its founding principles of cooperation, sustainability, and excellence in dairy production. (Valio, n.d.)

### 2.2 Valio's Jyväskylä Dairy Plant

The Jyväskylä dairy plant started its operations in 1941 and was originally located in the city center. It was later moved to its current location in Seppälänkangas in 1980. Initially, the new plant in Seppäläkangas produced only six products: regular milk, low-fat milk, buttermilk, kefir, coffee cream, and whipping cream. Over time, Valio Jyväskylä expanded its product range, and today it produces over 70 different dairy products. Valio Jyväskylä specializes in producing high-quality dairy products, most notably, specialty milks, which are exported not only throughout Finland but

also to countries like Sweden, Poland, and Spain. The plant uses Extended Shelf Life processing, where dairy products are briefly heated to around 135°C for less than a second. This process extends the shelf life of the products while maintaining their fresh taste. There are currently around 300 employees at the Jyväskylä plant working together in a friendly and respectful atmosphere. Whether in production, laboratories, packaging, maintenance, or leadership roles, there are opportunities for professionals from various fields. (Valio, 2023.)

### **2.3 Valio Logistics**

As the country's largest producer of dairy products, Valio handles their own logistics within Finland. Valio's main warehouse is located in Helsinki, and the other distribution centers are located in Jyväskylä, Oulu, and Riihimäki. These distribution centers are among the most advanced in Finland and are being continuously developed. Automation has been introduced to Valio's distribution centers starting in the early 2000's. The use of robotics and complete automation of certain processes has significantly enhanced operational efficiency as well as led to a reduction in manual labour, cutting down the number of forklift operators and shifts required. Warehouse functions such as loading trucks and small, low volume item picking are still done manually in the Jyväskylä distribution center.

Valio's distribution fleet is another example of Valio's dedication to innovation. Valio's distribution trucks utilize bio-gas produced from waste generated in milk production, effectively recycling by-products into fuel. By leveraging renewable Finnish bio-gas, Valio is able to cut down up to 85% of fossil carbon dioxide emissions during the fuel's life cycle, aligning with both Finnish Government and EU goals for emissions reduction. (Valio, 2018.)

### **2.4 My Background and Experience as a Non-Native Speaking Logistics Worker at Valio**

I was born in San Pedro, California in 1999. My father's parents were farmers in Kuortane, Finland before moving to Los Angeles in the 1960s where my grandfather found work as a longshoreman in the Port of Los Angeles. My father is the youngest of his siblings and was the only one of his siblings to be born in California. My mother is from Jyväskylä and moved to America to attend college

in Georgia. She moved to California after her studies. I was raised in a household with strong Finnish values, and I was exposed to lots of Finnish culture growing up. I also visited Finland many times while growing up. My mother spoke Finnish to me when I was young but as I spent more time in the American school system, I stopped speaking Finnish. My parents still live in Los Angeles, but I moved to Jyväskylä in 2017 after I had graduated from high school in California.

My current level of Finnish is good, but not quite fluent yet. When I first moved to Finland, it took me a long time to start speaking more Finnish, because many Finns spoke better English than I did Finnish. For many years I practically spoke only English with my girlfriend and closest friends in Finland. Even in jobs I have worked, I do not feel like I have needed to speak much Finnish. In the last couple years, I have finally started to speak more Finnish, and now occasionally find myself thinking of and saying phrases in Finnish before English. My biggest exposures to the Finnish language have been family members who do not speak much English, Finnish classes taken at Alkio Opisto, my time spent in the Finnish Air Force, and now my time spent working at Valio.

Working at Valio has greatly benefitted my Finnish speaking ability. My Finnish was already good enough to get hired, but speaking Finnish into the voice-assisted warehouse system and focusing on pronunciation has greatly improved my confidence in speaking Finnish. I would say that my time spent at Valio has been the most beneficial during my time in Finland for developing my Finnish. This confidence I built up has led me to speak more Finnish with the people around me, which has further improved my Finnish abilities and confidence.

My job performance as a warehouse worker at Valio has not been significantly impacted by my Finnish skills. The job orientation and training procedures went smoothly, and I quickly learned the job with no confusion or uncertainty. Most importantly, the voice-assisted warehouse system understands my Finnish. Through observation and discussions with other workers, I have concluded that I am not needing to repeat commands into the headset more than what is considered normal based on native Finnish speaker's experiences.

The biggest obstacles I have encountered in my time at Valio have been related to socializing and communicating, but even this has not been a significant problem for me. I do feel that on average,

it takes longer for me to be understood, or rather the process of making sure that I have understood something or confirming that what I have communicated has been understood takes longer than two native speakers communicating with each other.

Feeling connected with other members of the workforce is very important to me for workplace well-being. For me, as well as many other Finnish workers, humour is a critical component of this. Unfortunately, language limitations can lead to awkward moments regarding humour. Some examples include simply not understanding a joke, not being completely sure if someone is trying to be funny, and even feeling unable to make jokes due to fear of being misunderstood. Native speakers can also experience these same feelings I have expressed, though language barriers definitely exacerbate them.

Language is a profound element of our identity and the medium through which we express our thoughts, feelings, and personality. I still feel like I cannot truly be myself when speaking Finnish, I need to be speaking English to feel like I convey my true self other people. The same feeling applies for many Finnish people when speaking English to me, the feeling of not being able to be one's true self when speaking in a second language. I sometimes have difficulties understanding very high-level Finnish, and because my English vocabulary is so advanced, I similarly cannot be sure of always being understood properly by non-native English speakers. I have accepted this fact and try to communicate and understand others to the best of my abilities, but not stress about it too much. Even native speakers experience misunderstandings.

Overall, I have had a great experience working at Valio. I think very highly of Valio and genuinely believe they produce the best dairy products in Finland. I am currently the only non-native Finnish speaker working in Valio's Jyväskylä warehouse. Valio is a caring employer and provides their employees with all kinds of benefits that add to the quality of life working there. I was partly attracted to the job because of some of these benefits such as the gym for Valio's staff and having a cafeteria with delicious food at the workplace. The Valio staff's gym is a good, functional gym with all the equipment you could ever need. It has served me very well during my time at Valio. The people at Valio are wonderful and the atmosphere is positive.

Operating a farm is a difficult lifestyle. My grandparents were farmers who raised cattle, and their lives as farmers were filled with hardships. I am appreciative of initiatives to improve the livelihoods of farmers. Valio has definitely succeeded in improving the livelihoods of Finnish farmers and also contributed great innovations with their research and development of dairy technology. Valio also incentivizes responsible and sustainable farming practices, which is a great thing for society.

## 3 Workplace Culture

### 3.1 Finnish Workplace Culture

Finnish workers are known for their strong work ethic and the country's work culture is highly regarded internationally. Finnish workplace culture is generally characterized by a low-hierarchy environment where employees are encouraged to express their views, regardless of their position or seniority. When trying to define a national Finnish workplace culture, it becomes clear that there are contrasting interpretations of the Finnish management style. (Raunio & Säävälä, 2017.)

Some experts believe that Finnish management practices exhibit a low "power distance," indicating minimal hierarchy, others argue that it is relatively high, suggesting a more pronounced level of authority. Similarly, opinions differ on the approach to uncertainty avoidance; some analysts suggest it is low, implying a greater tolerance for ambiguity and change, whereas others contend it is high, denoting a preference for structured environments and clear rules. (Tukiainen, 2010). As there are so many factors that affect variables in different organizations, there is no universal Finnish workplace culture that can be observed (Raunio & Säävälä, 2017).

When trying to gain a deeper understanding of work culture, it is more productive to avoid relying too much on attaching national culture to the work culture. A better starting point would be focusing on the working culture within a specific industry. This is illustrated by Gerhart and Fang (2005), who argue that organizational cultures and national economic factors play the biggest roles in shaping the behaviours deemed national culture in working life. Supporting this view, Raunio and Säävälä (2017) advocated for studying differences in values and work cultures based on organizational or occupational terms rather than national cultural differences.

### 3.2 National Culture's Effect on Workplace Culture

Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory (1980) was widely recognized as the most important framework regarding intercultural behaviour and communication. There are no other models that observe intercultural differences in such depth (Alzacar, 2013). The cultural dimensions model was very successful but still had its' limitations (McSweeney, 2002). Hofstede's book *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*, first published in 1993 and now on its third edition published in

2010, addresses some of these limitations and further refines Hofstede's cultural dimensions. This book extends decades of research conducted in more than seventy countries and offers an in-depth look at how culture influences human thinking, behaviour, and work patterns.

Hofstede's cultural dimensions model outlines six dimensions of culture that affect individuals' values and behaviours: Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Individualism vs. Collectivism, Masculinity vs. Femininity, Long Term Orientation vs. Short Term Orientation, and Indulgence vs. Restraint. These dimensions provide a framework for understanding the complex ways in which cultures differ and how these differences impact organizations and international cooperation. (Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G.J., Minkov, 2010.)

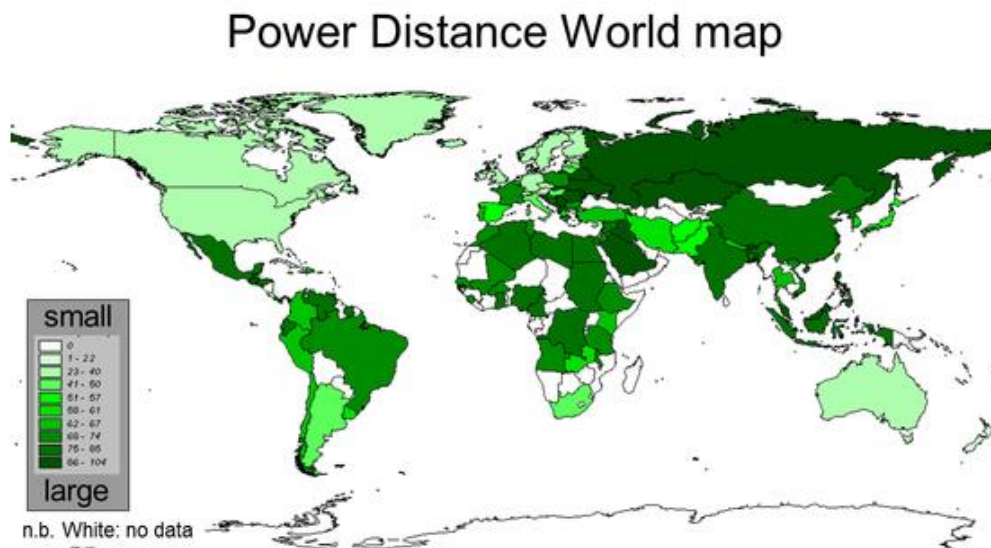


Figure 1. Power Distance World Map. (Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G.J., Minkov, 2010).

Power distance describes the acceptance of hierarchical order by those who have less power, or how much assumption there is that power distance is a natural state of affairs and is to be expected. It is a measure of how power differentiation is perceived and tolerated by the less dominant members of society. This dimension is reflected in the hierarchical structure of an organization and can influence managerial practices and employee behaviour. Figure 1 shows the average trends of perceived power distance in different countries. (Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G.J., Minkov,

2010.)

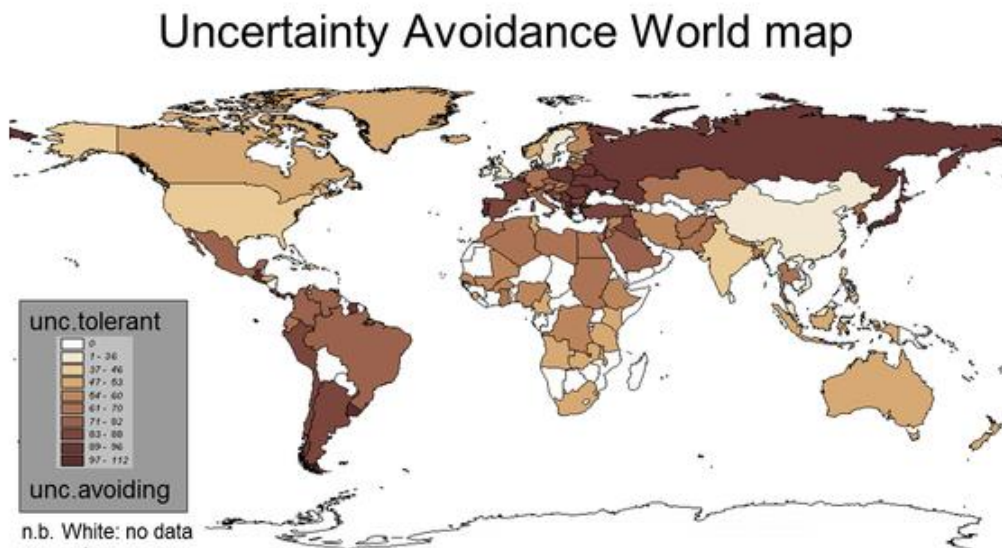


Figure 2. Uncertainty Avoidance World Map. (Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G.J., Minkov, 2010).

Uncertainty avoidance pertains to the degree of comfort a society has with uncertainty and ambiguity. It indicates the level to which a culture's individuals experience anxiety in face of unfamiliar or unpredictable circumstances. This dimension influences organizational practices such as rule setting, planning, and predictability. High uncertainty avoidance cultures may have more formal rules and be less tolerant of unconventional behaviour or ideas. Figure 2 shows the average trends of perceived uncertainty avoidance in different countries. (Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G.J., Minkov, 2010.)

### Collectivism – Individualism World map

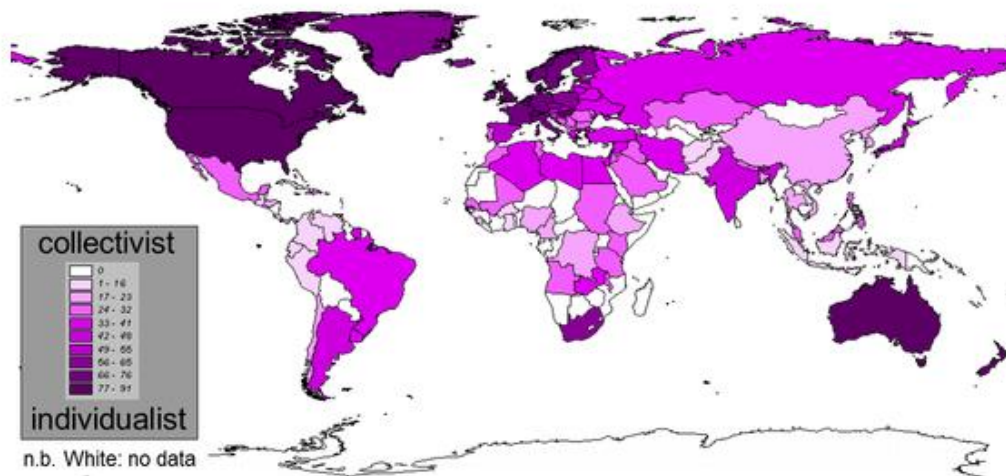


Figure 3. Collectivism - Individualism World Map. (Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G.J., Minkov, 2010).

Individualism versus collectivism is a measure of whether people's identities are defined more by their individual traits and achievements or by the characteristics and success of the groups to which they belong. In societies that value individualism, the connections among people are generally quite relaxed, with the expectation that individuals will be self-reliant and primarily responsible for themselves and their closest kin. In contrast, collectivism emphasizes tight social frameworks, loyalty, and strong relationships where people look after one another in exchange for loyalty. Figure 3 shows the average trends of perceived collectivism versus individualism in different countries. (Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G.J., Minkov, 2010.)

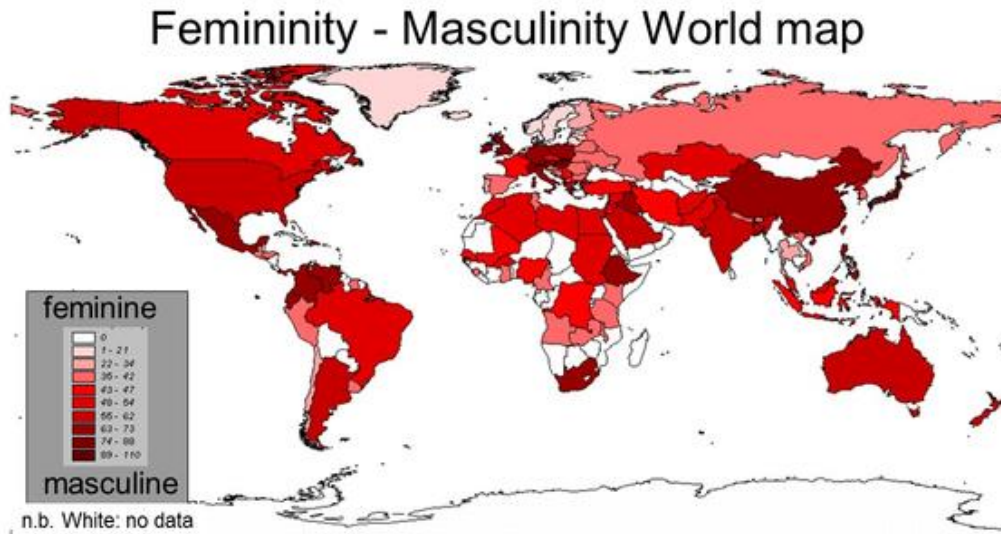


Figure 4. Femininity - Masculinity World Map. (Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G.J., Minkov, 2010).

Masculinity versus femininity explores how different cultures value and assign responsibilities, behaviours, and expectations to men and women, often leading to a spectrum of gender roles within any given community. In cultures considered to be more masculine, there is more regard for competition, displaying wealth, assertiveness, and personal ambition. On the other hand, cultures with a more feminine orientation prioritize the importance of interpersonal relationships, community, and the overall quality of life. These cultural values shape societal norms and individual priorities, reflecting different approaches to what is considered important in life. Figure 4 shows the average trends in perceived masculinity versus femininity in different countries. (Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G.J., Minkov, 2010.)

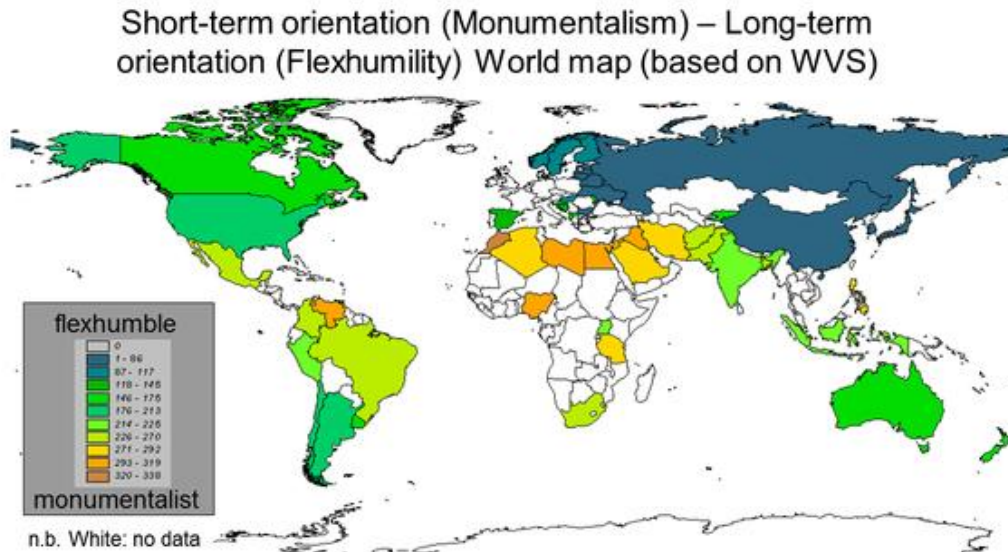


Figure 5. Short-term Orientation - Long-term Orientation World Map. (Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G.J., Minkov, 2010).

Long-term versus short-term orientation refers to where individuals direct their efforts and concerns: towards forthcoming prospects or immediate realities. Cultures with a long-term orientation prioritize behaviours and mindsets that have an impact on the future, such as persistence and frugality. Cultures with a short-term orientation value behaviours and mindsets influenced by the past and present, including traditions, social standings, and social responsibilities. Figure 5 shows the average trends in perceived long-term versus short-term orientation in different countries. (Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G.J., Minkov, 2010.)

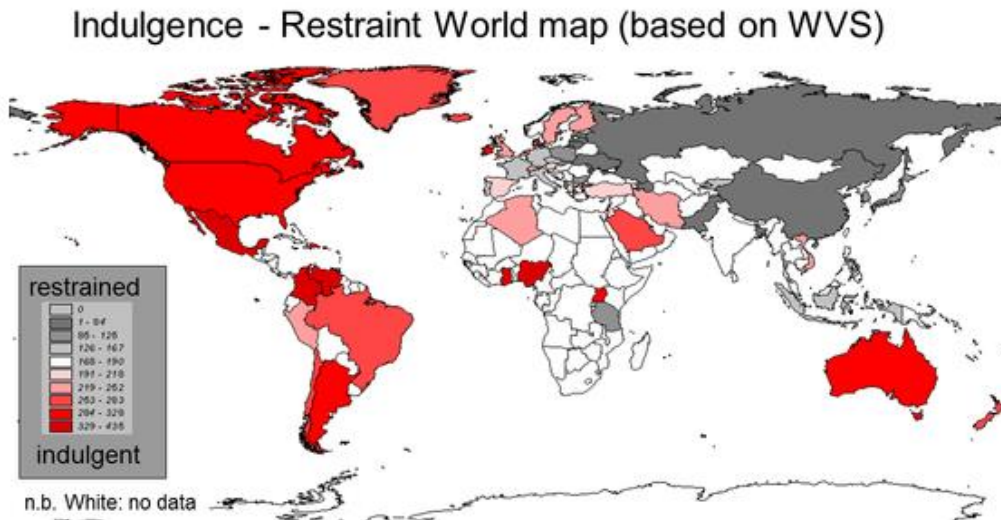


Figure 6. Indulgence - Restraint World Map. (Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G.J., Minkov, 2010).

Indulgence versus restraint is a measure of the extent to which societies permit the fulfilment of innate human urges that are associated with enjoying life and leisure activities. Societies characterized by high levels of indulgence generally support satisfaction of these desires and uphold a worldview that emphasizes positivity. A culture of restraint is one where the fulfilment of such needs is controlled through societal rules. Figure 6 shows the average trends in perceived indulgence versus restraint in different countries. (Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G.J., Minkov, 2010.)

Hofstede's cultural dimensions are an essential tool for understanding how workplace culture can be influenced by national culture. They help in understanding communication styles, leadership approaches, human resource management, organizational dynamics, and the negotiation process. These dimensions provide a context through which international communication can be analysed, and cross-cultural interactions can be more effectively managed. Understanding these differences is crucial for multinational companies operating across various cultures to ensure effective and efficient operations. National cultures have a profound impact on an individual's behaviour, values, and beliefs. These cultures are often ingrained from birth, shaped by language, religion, and societal norms. (Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G.J., Minkov, 2010.)

Organizational cultures are typically learned later in life and can be more fluid, influenced by the workplace environment and corporate policies. While both types of culture significantly affect how people interact and operate, national cultures have a more deeply rooted influence, affecting not just workplace behaviour but also personal life and identity. Understanding the depth and nuances of national cultures is crucial for effective cross-cultural communication and international relations. (Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G.J., Minkov, 2010.)

It is important to note that while Hofstede's research has been influential in the field of cross-cultural psychology, it has also faced criticism for potentially promoting cultural stereotypes (Witte, 2012). Hofstede himself warned against using his model to stereotype individuals, emphasizing that his dimensions are only meant to describe trends in national cultures, not to categorize individual people. The theory is a tool for comparative analysis and should be used with caution to avoid oversimplification of cultural traits. Understanding cultural dimensions can be valuable for international relations, business, and personal interactions, but it's crucial to remember the diversity and complexity within each culture. (Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G.J., Minkov, 2010.)

Geert Hofstede's closing remark in the third edition of *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* (2010) is "Peoples will differ, but they have to learn to coexist without wanting others to become just like them. Any other road is a dead end" (p.477). Hofstede's quote encapsulates the essence of cultural diversity and the importance of mutual respect in a globalized world. It suggests that while differences in beliefs, practices, and values are inherent among various peoples, the key to a harmonious coexistence lies in the acceptance of these differences. The desire to change others to fit one's own mold is not only impractical but also counterproductive. Hofstede emphasized that understanding diverse cultural dimensions can lead to more effective communication and relationships, both at an individual and collective level. His work reminds us that the richness of human society comes from its varied cultures, and that our shared future depends on our ability to navigate and enjoy this diversity. (Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G.J., Minkov, 2010.)

## 4 Language and Communication

### 4.1 Language and Communication in the Workplace

Language and communication are more than just tools that are used within organizations; organization could not exist without them. Through language, individuals convey their thoughts, intentions, and emotions, enabling an environment of understanding and collaboration. Employees may face difficulties in understanding each other due to language barriers, which can lead to misinterpretations, inefficiencies, and even conflicts. When an individual speaks with an accent, it inadvertently signals to others that they may not have mastery over the language, regardless of their actual linguistic capabilities. This perception can overshadow their true competence, leading to a biased assessment of their overall abilities. Research has shown that such biases can manifest in subtle discrimination, undervaluation of skills, and limited career progression for nonnative speakers, which, in turn, can have a detrimental effect on both individual careers and organizational outcomes. (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010.)

### 4.2 Non-Native Speakers

Common advice given to Non-native speakers is to essentially mimic native speakers, recommending regular practice to improve pronunciation and reduce accents. Language learning tools and resources, such as online courses, apps, and pronunciation guides, are extremely useful for learning new languages. However, when it comes to speaking English as a second language, the concept of 'bad English' is becoming obsolete. The unique takes on linguistics by non-native speakers should not only be embraced but celebrated. Accents and idiosyncratic expressions enrich the language, adding depth and color to the way we communicate. The notion that there is a single 'correct' way to speak English is an outdated paradigm that fails to recognize the dynamic and evolving nature of language. (McCusker & Cohen, 2021.)

A more holistic approach to language learning and communication recognizes the value in diversity. It shifts the focus from mere conformity to native-speaking standards to an appreciation of the individual's linguistic journey. This perspective fosters an environment where language is a tool for connection rather than a barrier to it. It encourages learners to develop their voice within the language, rather than merely imitating the voices of others. Language is, after all, a reflection of culture, and as cultures blend and interact, so should our understanding of what constitutes

'good' English. By moving away from rigid standards, all speakers can contribute to the evolution of the language. This inclusive approach not only benefits non-native speakers but also enriches the linguistic experience for native speakers by exposing them to new expressions and ways of thinking. (McCusker & Cohen, 2021.)

### **4.3 Native Speakers**

Leaders must not only be aware of the potential communication issues that may arise from language diversity but also be proactive in addressing them. They need to foster an environment where linguistic differences are respected and where clear, inclusive communication strategies are implemented. (Neely & Kaplan, 2014.)

Encouraging an inclusive environment where diversity is valued can make communication less daunting for non-native speakers. Native speakers can contribute to this by being patient, avoiding jargon, and using clear, simple language. (McCusker & Cohen, 2021.) Emphasizing the pronunciation of Ts and Rs helps can help non-native speakers understand English (Jenkins, 2002).

The studies conducted by Bradlow & Bent (2008) and Clarke & Garrett (2004) provide evidence supporting the notion that exposure to diverse accents can, over time, lead to improved understanding. This continuous interaction with foreign accents gradually builds a listener's ability to decipher and process varied phonetic nuances, thereby increasing linguistic adaptability and empathy.

## **5 New Employee Orientation and Training Materials**

### **5.1 Defining Orientation and Training**

Employee orientation, commonly referred to as onboarding, is designed to introduce new hires to the company culture, policies, and their new work environment. It's typically a short-term process that occurs at the beginning of employment, aiming to help individuals become familiar with their surroundings and colleagues. A well-structured orientation program can significantly impact employee retention and satisfaction, as it helps new hires feel valued and prepared for their roles from day one. (Acevedo & Yancey, 2011.)

Training, on the other hand, is a more detailed and ongoing process that equips employees with the specific skills and knowledge necessary to perform their job tasks effectively. The goal of employee training is a workforce that is competent, and aligned with the organization's objectives. Both orientation and training are essential for ensuring that employees feel integrated into the company and are prepared to contribute to its success. (Acevedo & Yancey, 2011.)

### **5.2 Warehouse Orientation**

Training new warehouse staff involves a combination of developing both hard and soft skills to ensure efficient and effective warehouse operations. Hard skills are the specific, teachable abilities that are required for a job, such as operating machinery, understanding inventory management systems, or being proficient in data entry and analysis. Soft skills, on the other hand, include interpersonal skills like communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and adaptability. (LinkedIn Learning, n.d.)

Evaluating the skills and knowledge of new warehouse staff is a good first step in developing an effective training program. Identifying the existing competencies of new staff can allow for the customization of training modules to address specific skill gaps and to categorize staff into appropriate training levels, ensuring a more targeted and efficient learning process. Orientation is crucial for new warehouse staff. It involves a comprehensive introduction to the warehouse's layout, equipment, tools, systems, policies, and procedures. Clear communication about roles, responsi-

bilities, and performance expectations are essential. This process can be effectively conducted using a mix of presentations, videos, tours, demonstrations, and handbooks to ensure a well-rounded understanding of the warehouse operations. (LinkedIn, n.d.)

### **5.3 Warehouse Training**

To effectively train new warehouse staff, incorporating various training methods is recommended. Classroom sessions can provide foundational knowledge, while online courses offer flexibility. On-the-job training allows for hands-on experience. Materials like manuals and checklists are useful for learning and retention of essential skills and knowledge. Observing performance and gathering feedback helps in recognizing competencies and areas for improvement, allowing for targeted support and acknowledgment of efforts. Effective evaluation ensures that the training is effective and that the staff are developing the necessary skills for their role. (LinkedIn, n.d.)

Safety is the most urgent component of orientation and training in a warehouse environment. Every employee should undergo a comprehensive orientation and training with a strong emphasis on safety protocols. This training should not only cover the correct operation of equipment but also instill a culture of safety that includes the proper handling of materials, awareness of one's surroundings, understanding of good ergonomics, and the importance of wearing personal protective equipment. (OSHA, n.d.)

## 6 Employee Well-Being

The concept of employee well-being covers a broad spectrum of an individual's health and contentment at work, spanning the physical, mental, emotional, social, and psychological aspects. It's about how employees feel about their work and the organization as a whole. When well-being is prioritized, employees tend to have higher engagement levels, increased productivity, and better overall health, which can lead to reduced absenteeism and healthcare costs. Moreover, a focus on well-being can enhance job satisfaction, foster a positive work environment, and improve retention rates. In the wake of the pandemic, organizations have recognized the importance of supporting their employees' well-being, not just for the individuals' benefit but also for the health of the organization. (Adams, 2019.)

LinkedIn's Employee Well-Being Report from May (2021) lists "opportunities to learn and grow" as the number one driver of employee well-being. This insight is drawn from a comprehensive analysis conducted by LinkedIn's People Science team, which delves into global employee engagement and workforce data quarterly. The report suggests that when employees feel they are advancing in their careers and acquiring new skills, their job satisfaction, motivation, and organizational pride increase, leading to a happier and more productive workforce. LinkedIn's Employee Well-Being Report from December (2021) includes insights from three experts: LinkedIn Asia-Pacific Head of People Science Michelle Hancic, LinkedIn People Science Expert Craig Ramsay, and LinkedIn Senior People Science Consultant Gogi Anand. All three experts cited the feeling of being cared for as one of the most important factors contributing to employee well-being. Anand especially stresses the importance of caring managers for employee well-being. A caring approach should be a part of managerial strategies to ensure a thriving workforce. (LinkedIn Business, 2021.)

## **7 Research Methodology**

### **7.1 Research Strategy**

The type of research used in this thesis was exclusively qualitative. Qualitative research focuses on understanding human behavior, beliefs, feelings, and experiences. It involves collecting and analyzing non-numerical data, such as text, video, or audio, to gain insights into various subjects. Unlike quantitative research, which seeks to quantify data and typically applies statistical analysis, qualitative research aims to provide a deeper understanding of the context and complexity of social phenomena. (Aspers & Corte, 2019.)

Literature review was the only research methodology used for the theoretical framework. The abundance of literature on the chosen topics provides a solid foundation for analysis and discussion. The topics researched were selected to create structured background information on different problem areas encountered by non-native speaking workers so they can be applied to Valio's situation and address the research questions.

### **7.2 Collection and Description of Data**

The process started with deciding the topics to be researched in the theoretical framework. Once the topics were established, relevant sources were collected and evaluated for each topic. Primary sources were used whenever possible, and then supplemented with secondary sources.

The research topics were decided based on the author's experiences as a non-native Finnish speaking worker at Valio. Sources used in the literature review were first collected from JAMK's Janet Finna, and then second from Research Gate. If relevant literature on a certain topic was not found through either research database, then a more free-form search was conducted through a standard browser search engine. The data collected on Valio was done through observation of warehouse processes and review of documents and training materials available from Valio.

### **7.3 Analysis of Data**

Each source used was analyzed and critically evaluated. Key concepts were then summarized to be utilized in the thesis. The next step was to implement the research findings into the structure of the theoretical framework. Once the theoretical framework had been developed, the analysis of the current state of Valio was created. The current state analysis was carried out by comparing the research from the theoretical framework with Valio's situation.

## 8 Current State Analysis

### 8.1 Valio's Workplace Culture

Valio as a brand is tied to a sense of national identity. Finnish farmers and Finnish innovation are cornerstones of Valio's identity. Valio's workforce in Finland is almost entirely Finnish. Therefore, a heavy presence of Finnish culture and social norms are present within Valio.

National cultural distinctions are often seen as outdated and messy, yet they do persist as a means of social categorization in the workplace. Despite rhetoric promoting transnationalism and multiculturalism, national stereotypes remain prevalent, influencing how individuals perceive themselves and others. The perception of national characteristics does shape behaviour and social interactions. When widely held beliefs about a nation's traits are accepted by its people, they manifest in real-world scenarios, influencing how individuals relate to one another. This phenomenon becomes particularly significant in the context of a multi-cultural workforce. (Raunio & Säävälä, 2017.)

Immigrants often encounter the concept of cultural specificity, which reveals their distinctiveness from the host community. While recognition of this diversity can in many ways enrich society, it also harbours the potential for negative outcomes. At its most detrimental, it can create a sense of dissimilarity that can escalate to social exclusion, creating barriers that hinder integration and mutual understanding. Thus, the beliefs and perceptions held by a society can have profound implications, not just for social dynamics but also for the inclusion of its members. (Raunio & Säävälä, 2017.)

Organizational culture can look very different when viewed from top management, middle management, or bottom employees. Valio's logistics department is structured vertically with levels of hierarchy between low level workers, foremen, and upper management. Finland has a very strong workforce culture, and this is also evident in Valio's facilities. Valio's Jyväskylä warehouse is staffed with hard working Finns who uplift each other in good working spirits. Some job tasks such as small item picking are independent and do not require much interaction with others, while other tasks such as loading are demanding of coordination with others.

A survey conducted in 2023 by the Finnish Business and Policy Forum (EVA) found that over half of the respondents supported the loosening of immigration laws. This statistic has been following a positive trend, as in 2016, a similar survey revealed that only one third of participants supported immigration laws being relaxed. However, the survey also revealed that just under 40% of respondents believed immigration is harmful to the Finnish economy and a majority of participants agreed that racism and xenophobia are commonplace in Finland. (YLE, 2023.)

Even if there is someone in Valio's staff who might hold some kind of negative feelings towards immigrants; it is important to not go on about pointing fingers and accusing people of racism as this only heightens tensions and further divides people (Mendoza-Denton, 2011). Of course, extreme cases must be dealt with, but it is very improbable that something like this would occur at Valio. Research suggests that as societies become more diverse, individuals tend to perceive social groups as more alike, rather than more distinct. Over time, positive interactions between different groups leads to greater understanding and acceptance. (Bai, Ramos, Finke, 2020.)

Valio can use Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions as a basis for discussion in order to create mutual understanding with workers from varying cultural backgrounds. As Hofstede warned, these cultural dimensions should not be used to categorize anyone. The cultural dimensions are merely talking points or tools for learning and bringing up discussions about cultural differences so that possible misunderstandings can be avoided. This approach gives people with foreign backgrounds a better chance to adapt to both work at Valio as well as Finnish society.

## **8.2 Language and Communication at Valio**

### **8.2.1 Valio's Voice Directed Warehousing System**

With regards to language skills, Valio's current warehouse infrastructure does not accommodate non-native Finnish speaking workers. The biggest reason for this is that the voice-directed warehousing system (VDWS) has been set up to be operated in Finnish only. Even if a non-native speaker speaks enough Finnish to attempt using the VDWS, the accent spoken with will cause problems and not be reliably recognized by the system. These limitations are symptoms of a now dated VDWS.

The VDWS used by Valio was set up in 2015. The VDWS consists of a small carry-able computer that connects to a headset. The carry-able computer communicates wirelessly with the database used by the warehouse. Although not as limited as the first VDWSs in the late 90s and those available throughout the 2000's, the VDWS set up by Valio still had data storage limitations compared to a new VDWS available today. Therefore, only one language could be set up for operation.

The carry-able computer is the bottleneck in this system. Thankfully, the computing power of small devices has increased exponentially since the last hardware upgrades of Valio's VDWS. There have been numerous breakthroughs in processing power and energy efficiency of microprocessors especially in the last 5 years. Microprocessors available today are simultaneously more powerful and more energy efficient, which means that a new VDWS available today will come equipped with an improved microprocessor that can handle more luxuries as well as more complex tasks.

In the time since Valio's adoption of their VDWS, significant advancements have occurred in speech recognition and associated technologies. The greatest development during this timeline has been deep learning, which allowed for the introduction and widespread adoption of phone-based voice assistants such as Apple's Siri, Amazon's Alexa and Google's Home. Deep learning has been so impactful because it is an algorithm that is constantly improving itself. Therefore, the widespread adoption of voice assistant services has been further improving deep learning. Because of this, word error rates of automatic speech recognition have become better than what can be achieved by a professional transcriber (Hannun, 2021).

With the combination of vastly improved VDWS hardware as well as voice recognition software, New VDWSs are so much more advanced than they were a decade ago. Today, new VDWSs' memory and data storage are plentiful enough to allow for operation in multiple languages. The new VDWS that will be taken into use by Valio will support operation in Finnish, English, and German. The voice recognition software is also much more reliable with non-native language speakers. This means the door will be open for non-native Finnish speakers to become logistics workers at Valio.

The new VDWS has already been tested briefly with a small number of Valio's staff. The overall reactions to the new system were extremely positive. Some comments included that it is quicker

and more responsive with much better voice recognition, as well as being able to speak much more relaxed and quietly into it while still being understood by the system.

### **8.2.2 Language and Communication in General at Valio**

When a workplace becomes a multilingual environment, questions arise such as: should everyone decide one language to become the official language spoken in the workplace. In some organizations, this would make sense. There are surprising upsides and downsides to both options, one language versus a multilingual workplace. However, when considering Valio's Jyväskylä warehouse situation, there may be more disadvantages than benefits when choosing one language to use within the organization. There is no strong evidence that having workers speaking their preferred language, whether it be Finnish or English, would cause any major conflicts in warehouse operations. This consideration, coupled with the personal benefits that one can gain from working in a multilingual environment, leads to the conclusion that it would be both more beneficial and less costly to allow Valio's warehouse workers to operate in their preferred language: Finnish, English, or German.

Valio should offer their employees language resources for both English and Finnish. These do not have to be mandatory, but should still be available for employees who are interested in learning and improving their language skills. Developing skills in a secondary language could become another benefit of working at Valio.

## **8.3 Analysis of Valio's Current Orientation Process**

Valio's current orientation process starts with introducing the different areas of the warehouse as well as the warehouse equipment. Job specific training starts on the first day under the supervision of a senior employee. A booklet is also given to each employee with useful information such as important safety protocols and a list of all the commands used when operating the VDWS. New employees will continue to be supervised until they have been exposed to enough unique situations that come up when performing the job. At this point the employee is ready to work alone, but it is still encouraged that they ask for assistance from other workers if necessary. After a couple weeks on the job, new employees are encouraged to complete online lectures available

through Valio's intranet. These lectures include topics such as Valio's history and the basics of cybersecurity.

This orientation procedure has proven itself to be a great balance of effectiveness and efficiency. The only change to this process that is necessary when introducing non-Finnish speaking workers to the warehouse is making sure that all the orientation and training materials are available in English. When a senior employee is assigned to teach a new employee a job, the language skills of both parties should be considered. If a new employee speaks more English than Finnish, then a senior worker with English language skills should be assigned to train that worker.

#### **8.4 Employee Well-Being at Valio**

Employee well-being is very good at Valio. Valio has established a commendable reputation for prioritizing employee well-being. This commitment is evident in their comprehensive health and wellness programs, which are designed to support not only the physical health of their employees but also their mental and emotional well-being. Valio's approach goes beyond the standard occupational health policies; they offer resources such as counselling services, stress management workshops, and fitness facilities.

Valio's is dedicated to creating a positive work environment. They understand that a supportive atmosphere contributes significantly to employee satisfaction and productivity. Regular team-building activities, open communication channels, and recognition of individual achievements are just a few of the initiatives that Valio has implemented to ensure that their employees feel valued and engaged.

The company also recognizes the importance of work-life balance and offers flexible working arrangements to accommodate the diverse needs of their workforce. Whether it's through adjustable hours, or generous parental leave policies, Valio strives to provide solutions that help employees manage their professional and personal responsibilities effectively.

Valio's investment in employee development further illustrates their care for their staff. They provide opportunities for professional growth, including training programs, mentorship, and career advancement paths. By investing in their employees' futures, Valio not only enhances individual

skill sets but also ensures a dynamic and innovative workplace. It's clear that Valio doesn't just see their employees as a workforce, but as a vital part of a community that thrives on mutual respect, support, and shared success.

## **9 Results and Recommendations**

### **9.1 What kinds of policies and practices can support non-native speaking workers at Valio?**

It is inevitable that there will be a transition period experienced in the warehouse when implementing the new VDWS. However, Valio's current infrastructure is well set up to receive and quickly adapt to the upgraded warehousing system. Once the new VDWS is in use and the existing workforce has gotten accustomed to the new VDWS, there should not be any major problems introducing workers who do not speak Finnish to the warehouse. The most pressing matter to address before Valio's warehouses starts employing non-Finnish speaking workers is making sure that all of the new employee orientation and training materials are available in English.

### **9.2 What kinds of support structures can assist non-native speakers in adapting to the company culture?**

Linguistic diversity should be embraced in Valio's warehouses as this is the solution that provides the most benefits and least disadvantages to both Valio and their staff. People with strong English language skills should be identified in Valio's existing staff. People who are comfortable with the English language can be utilized in assisting non-Finnish speaking workers in their development as workers at Valio. This is especially important in the early phases of Valio's workforce becoming multilingual. Valio's communication channels should also make important information available in Finnish and English.

### **9.3 How can training materials be adapted to accommodate non-native speakers? This will include an analysis of the current training materials.**

Valio can consider offering Finnish and English learning resources to their employees. That way if anyone in their workforce desires to improve their language skills, they can do that. It would be useful for Valio to provide their workers with materials to learn all of the basic warehouse terminologies in both Finnish and English.

## 10 Discussion

The greatest strength of this thesis is that the author's own experience as a non-native Finnish speaking logistics worker at Valio was used. However, this thesis is still purely speculative as the new VDWS has not yet been implemented. Another strength is the wide range of topics covered when considering Valio's situation. The reasons for potential problems are explained, and solutions are offered, though they are speculative.

The greatest strength of this thesis, the author's experience, is also a weakness as the perspective is overwhelmingly from the author's point of view. There is also no new information presented in this thesis outside of the author's experiences, although all of this information has not been compiled elsewhere. The thesis should at the very least be successful in serving as a basis for discussion to further explore and speculate on the considerations of introducing non-Finnish speaking workers to Valio.

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