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Continuing Education and Development Services  
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Tarja Turunen

# **GOOD ATMOSPHERE IN AN INTERNATIONAL WORKING PLACE AND HOW IT IS CREATED**

Thesis 2010

## TIIVISTELMÄ

Tarja Turunen

Good Atmosphere in an International Working Place and How It Is Created:

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Ohjaaja, Kansainvälisen kaupan yliopettaja Kirsi Viskari

Tämä opinnäytetyö perehtyy suomalaiseen työhön ja työilmapiiriin. Maailmantalous on jatkuvassa muutoksessa, ja sen vaikutus ulottuu myös suomalaisten työpaikoille tuoden mukanaan monia haasteita. Suomalaista työtä on tutkittu yllättävän vähän. Tämä opinnäytetyö lähestyy aihetta kaakkoissuomalaisen huolintayrityksen työntekijöiden kautta. Huolintayritys, jonka nimi on Nurminen Logistics Oyj, tarjoaa hyvän tutkimuspohjan, koska sen työntekijät edustavat sekä suomalaista että venäläistä kulttuuritaustaa.

Tämän opinnäytetyön tuloksista saattaisi olla hyötyä henkilöstöjohtajille eri yrityksissä. Opinnäytetyö tarjoaa mahdollisuuden myös samaa aihetta käsitteleville opiskelijoille, jotka haluavat vaihtoehtoisen näkemyksen suomalaisen työn peruspilareihin. Henkilöstöjohtajat sekä opiskelijakollegat haluavat perehtyä kaikkiin mahdollisiin lähteisiin, joita heitä kiinnostavasta aiheesta on saatavilla. Tässä on yksi näkemys, joka esitetään monimuotoisena esseenä.

Mikä sisältö on sanoilla ”työn merkitys” tämän päivän suomalaiselle työntekijälle? Entä työntekijälle, joka tulee muunlaisesta taustasta, kuin se johon suomalaiset ovat tottuneet? Työelämän muutokset ja työn jatkuviin haasteisiin vastaaminen kuluttavat ihmisiä. Työelämän muutosten ymmärtäminen auttaa hyvän työpaikan luomisessa.

Tutkimus on luonteeltaan laadullinen. Nurminen Logisticsin työntekijät ovat tyytyväisiä työnantajansa yrityskuvaan sekä tapaan, jolla yritys palkitsee työntekijöitään. Parantamista on vielä tiedonkulun osalta sekä tiedon läpinäkyvyyden parantamisessa. Näiden tutkimustulosten saattamana opinnäyte liittyy niiden tutkimusten joukkoon, jotka jatkavat keskustelua tästä aiheesta.

## ABSTRACT

Tarja Turunen

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44 pages, 1 appendix

Saimaa University of Applied Sciences, Lappeenranta

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Leader, Kirsi Viskari, Principal Lecturer of International Business

This is a study about Finnish work places and the atmosphere of change in worldwide economy. There is a limited amount of scientific publications concerning Finnish working proceedings in different organizations. The research method is based on a qualitative approach. The procedure of seeking answers is a questionnaire for a selected group of workers in a South Finnish forwarding company. It is presenting the area's special characteristic features because the workers of the company are from both Finnish and Russian backgrounds.

The aim of this study is to provide useful information for managers who are in connection with human resources. Established information may also help such students who are writing thesis and are willing to give opportunity for alternative discussion. This study provides them with a view to themes in multicultural working lives and social performances in different corporations. Many topics are explained in order to deliver a homogenous essay whose profile is multifaceted.

The results of this study conclude to the point that working life is in an ongoing change in Finland and it is a challenge for the companies to maintain their position as employers of skilled and satisfied workers. This study aims also to present the research and the findings in an interesting way, so that the reader can easily follow the text and maintain interactive discussion with the given clauses. By that way the research is joining the group of previous researches of this field and participates in the scientific conversation.

# CONTENTS

1 A REVIEW TO THE HISTORY OF WORKING CIRCUMSTANCES IN FINLAND.....	5
1.1 Economic depression.....	6
1.2 The aim of the study.....	8
2 APPROACHES TO QUALITATIVE RESEARCH.....	9
2.1 Theoretical positions.....	9
2.2 Construction and understanding of texts.....	10
2.3 Representation.....	11
2.4 Formalization and generalization .....	11
3 FINNISH EMPLOYMENT LIFE AND WORKING ETHICS.....	12
3.1 The sense of work.....	13
3.2 Work time versus leisure time.....	14
3.3 The character of the work.....	16
4 CORPORATE GOVERNANCE.....	18
5 QUALITATIVE RESEACRH IN NURMINEN LOGISTICS PLC.....	19
5.1 The processing of the interview.....	20
5.2 Management.....	22
5.3 Contents and challenges of the responsibilities.....	24
5.4 Salary.....	25
5.5 Support of self-oriented development.....	26
5.6 Working climate and cooperation.....	27
5.7 Working conditions.....	29
5.8 Information flow.....	30
5.9 The image of the employer.....	31
5.10 Intention to change working place.....	32
5.11 Influence on the future.....	33
5.12 The impact of multiculturalism.....	34
5.13 Comparison of competing companies in the same business field (benchmarking).....	35
6 A SUMMARY OF RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS.....	36
FIGURES.....	37
CHARTS.....	37
ATTACHMENTS.....	37
REFERENCES.....	38

Introduction to the title

## **1 A REVIEW TO THE HISTORY OF WORKING CIRCUMSTANCES IN FINLAND**

The ideas of work and work place have changed rapidly in past the century in Finland. After the First and Second World Wars people had to earn their living in poor conditions. Work was hard and physical; men and women had to push their physical and mental efforts in factories and in industrial manufacturing plants.

After the war there was a lack of raw materials, energy, grown-up men and in some places even lack of food. The meaning of work was based on the need to get at least some money to buy oneself the daily bread. People spent long hours and long days in their work in order to see that working carries them forward in life. This generation also wanted to give for their children a better world to live in and easier conditions to make a living.

After the period of shortage of the war, the meaning of work has changed. In the 1970s and 1980s the world economy had reached a certain kind of stability and citizens were having a wider range of working varieties available around. It was possible to achieve higher level of education and therefore choose a physically lighter job at the same time with better salaries. University degree guaranteed young students a vision to welfare and future including also leisure time, hobbies and accommodation. It was not at all strange to wait for an opportunity for a proper and ideal working place to appear, while the social support for living was enough to carry over unemployment periods. (Stelzer, 2009.)

Proper work and ideal work place is taken into discussion in order to explain the behavior of a certain group of people. This group consists of people who have personal opinions strongly presented in their every day life. These kinds of

people have established their voice on child labor, animal rights and environmental protection. They are ready to bargain for their standard of living rather than have a job in industries like oil business or tobacco companies, if they think that these companies represent ethically unsustainable technologies.

This phenomenon is still visible yet today, and it has led to a situation where some groups have become socially inactive. The most anxious supporters of these ideologies have started to demand a certain basic income, a citizen salary. A basic income is a proposed system of social security. It provides periodically each citizen with a sum of money. Basic income allows the receiver to participate in society with human dignity. This income seems to be a result of thinking that the proposed income should be paid on the basis of existing in the world, not on the basis of working and doing something oneself. (Kantola, 2009)

## **1.1 Economic depression**

Hard recession hit Finland in the early 1990s - causing many people problems like unemployment and traps where they had debt of two apartments. Entrepreneurs struggled with foreign exchange loans. Finland joined the EMU, European Monetary Union, and changed her own currency mark to euro. Finland joined the European Union in 1995, after which the Finnish economy was growing and developing well towards the challenges of the new millennium.

When taking a look into some figures of OMX Helsinki stock exchange indexes from years 1998-2008, it can be easily discovered that people were very excited when they waited for the new millennium to start in 2000. Very many of those people who could afford themselves belongings and property, put their money into the overheated stock market. After all, though the stocks gained greater and greater records, scoring even the line of index points at 12000, the falling of indexes came soon after the records. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the bubble of information technology stocks was broken, and the figures and indexes came down. It was surprising for many people. However, the

excitement of the new era was having an effect on public economic movements and nobody named the situation a recession. (Kantola, 2009)

Finnish people started using the euro while shopkeepers and businessmen counted new prices in the brandnew currency. They took into consideration increased costs of materials, fuel, labour force etc. It was a great challenge for the whole European economic area, for nearly all EU nations accepted the new currency; only Great Britain, Denmark and Sweden wanted to keep their previous currency. In this context it is worth remembering that Switzerland, Iceland and Norway are not members of the EU or the European Monetary Union (EMU). (Aaltonen, 2009)

The rise of stock market figures could continue in the contribution of rising economy during 2000-2010. Finland was *richer than ever*, if counted with GNP. (Gross National Product). In November 2008, a large worldwide economic crisis surprised the financial and economic businesses with its totally unpredictable appearance. There were no visible signs of becoming financial instability, collapse of international banking giants or any kind of depression. Neither were there business gurus to forewarn about overheating. Industrial companies rapidly started to pay strict attention on payment terms and financing. Many companies were forced to accustom activities, many companies decided to decrease working labour quickly in order to adjust to the changed situation and many companies met bankruptcy because of totally stagnated business activities. (Aaltonen, 2009)

For ages, it had not been necessary for people to think of the value of their work or the meaning of work too accurately or too precisely. Everything was quite stabilized, working place was ensured as far as to retirement and people were mostly fighting about the benefits and salaries of their working input. It was, however, in some people's close memory that during the upswing, some companies still laid off their workers in order to make the market price of the company rise. This happened especially in listed companies which are relying on their value on the stock market and which keenly aim to provide shareholders with maximum profits. In the crisis, and also as a result of the recession, the question of good work and meaningful working place has come

up again. It gained more attention in newspapers and in public conversations. (Kantola, 2009)

Here are some questions that can be presented in the context of the discussion and from the basis of official releases:

Which group can collect revenues and benefits?

Is nothing enough for shareholders?

How should the employer ensure its ability to keep good workers?

What should be done before the next rise starts?

How will the economic field will be re-arranged in the near future?

What will happen when other nations and cultures want to reach similar material and welfare level with us?

## **1.2 The aim of the study**

This study is concentrating on people who meet these questions and situations in their everyday life and are trying to understand the phenomenon behind them. People are reacting differently to the presented questions, and their reactions are based on their social and cultural backgrounds. The attitude towards the changes in the labour market is also effecting the idea of meaningful work. How does the meaning of work look like today? How acceptable is it to sit in a sofa and watch TV instead of going to work, when social authorities are, however, responsible for taking care of one's welfare?

The aim of this study is to provide useful information for managers who are connected with human resources. The established information may also help such students who are writing their thesis and they are willing to give opportunity for alternative discussion. This study provides them with a view to approach themes in multicultural working lives and social performances in different corporations. Many topics are explained in order to deliver a



homogenous essay on the theme, whose profile is, however, multifaceted and versatile.

Work is something between the daily annoying thing that one has to stand before meriting the house, boat, wife-and-children (family), summer cottage, nice furniture, full-HD television, complete stereo system, sport utility vehicles etc., and a place where to spend time by working with colleagues and struggle with the challenges during the busiest hours of the day.

This study aims to present the research and the findings in a interesting way, so that the reader can easily follow the text and maintain interactive discussion with the text and given clauses.

## **2 APPROACHES TO QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

### **2.1 Theoretical positions**

Theoretical positions of qualitative research prefer their existence in the scientific discussion, when we are approaching suitable perspectives and viewpoints to a certain kind of study. This means that there are several ways of processing qualitative research. (Flick, 1998) Among these ways and perspectives, three main positions remain separate and identifiable:

#### **A .Tradition of symbolic interactionism**

This approach is studying the qualitative research by taking a look into subjective meanings. It concentrates on paying attention to an individual point of sense.

## B. Ethnomethodology

A qualitative research can be approached from the ethnomethodological side. Ethnomethodological approach opens the research by starting from everyday life and its interest is in the production of ordinary issues.

## C. Structuralist or psychoanalytic positions

Structuralist or psychoanalytic research in the field of qualitative research starts from processes of psychoanalytical or social unconsciousness.

In a research the meaning of subject's viewpoint is highlighted in a way which corresponds to the purposes of the research. It is possible to differentiate approaches according to the viewpoint. By that way it is possible to introduce strategies, which are interested in how social order is produced or oriented towards reconstructing deep structures that generate action and meaning. (Flick,1998)

## **2.2 Construction and understanding of texts**

Texts are not only the essential data on which findings are based. They are also basis for interpretations and a kind of medium value in presenting and communicating findings. For example interviews produce data which is transformed into transcripts, into texts. Text is the result of data, which is collected in interviews and conversations. Qualitative research relies on understanding social realities (through the interpretation of produced texts). In this case, the text is used as a substitute for reality. The produced text can be utilized in further work. (Flick, 1998)

Previously also biographies were studied. Nowadays interviews are producing the same narration which can be used for interpretation. The difference comes from the chosen method of transcription and it is based on things the researcher has found out personally. How much of the original interpretation can be brought into text in order to reflect the reality, it is the question that cannot have exact answer. The value of the text as a description of reality comes from the

point that during the research study, the description is easy to revert to the text. Not very often, almost never, does the researcher want to listen to the interview tapes again or hear the person again in order to make a new interpretation. (Flick, 1998) In this study, the topic is handled in the chapter 5.

### **2.3 Representation**

Research text should always describe reality as exactly, clearly and simply as possible. However, the problem of representation exists. The problem comes from the doubt, that social research could directly capture lived experience. This is argued to appear when a researcher writes the text. Many researchers, presented by Uwe Flick (1998), say that direct link between experience and text is quite problematic.

The question of representation is often discussed with another question, which is regularly involved in classical research environment and in its criterion. This is about legitimizing scientific knowledge and reject in general. The crucial point in these questions is how far we are still able to suppose a reality existing? We are however talking about outside subjective or socially shared viewpoints. There is also the question how we can ensure this representation in texts? (Flick, 1998) The answers are handled in the chapter 6.

### **2.4 Formalization and generalization**

Uwe Flick (1998) starts from the idea that there is a need to formulate the perception of reality. Realities are actively produced by the participants through the meanings described to certain events and objects. Social research, i.e. qualitative research, cannot escape these descriptions of meanings if it wants to tell something about social realities. These answers go further with the discussion how different realities and facts communicate which each other.

Formalization of the text exists in order to create “a version of the world”. Making the world is a simulation, mimesis, which is formulated for further use as an interpretation of reality. “A version of the world” draws the outer world after stepping out from inner world. This formalization should happen in a systematic way, so that the researcher is aware of the circumstances and conditions which might have an effect on the writing in the inner world. (Flick, 1998)

There are three steps to qualitative research and to producing text:

1 Transformation of experience into text.

Transformation of experience means human action. The passage of writing goes from preunderstanding across the text to interpretation as well as the act of understanding.

2 Interpretation of the text.

The researcher’s point of view is brought to text through interpretation. There is a process of construction which leads to deeper understanding.

3 Reading the presentation and findings.

The third step of qualitative research takes the reader into account. It is intended to the purpose of research and its meaning is that the reader understands the text similarly as the writer.

There are also other ways to present research construction and writing process. Some scientists say that research is not something found in the world but something built into a world. The arguments for this kind of conversation come from the following points: Knowledge is isolated. World does not exist outside codification systems. The idea of truth is correspondent between statements. Worlds are made from other worlds. (Flick, 1998) The reality of the existing situation in the case company is handled in the chapters 5 and 6.

### 3 FINNISH EMPLOYMENT LIFE AND WORKING ETHICS

In order to understand foreign cultures, it is recommendable to take a look into the finding concerning the facts which are typical for Finns. Finnish people have traditionally lived in society, which maintains the values of *paid employment*; the elements and signs of this living style are characteristic for contemporary thinking. The Finns structure their everyday life and social environments by taking a look into work place, profession, job, career and earnings. Paid employment defines the conditions of lifestyle in various ways. At the same time, working place, profession and salary are important indicators of human value and status. One example of this is also the fact, that the lack of working place, ie. unemployment, is considered a remarkable social problem. (Melin, Blom & Kiljunen, 2005)

The main discussion of work has been widely concentrated on paid employment. It is, however, worth remembering that paid employment has been dominant for Finnish lifestyle less than 50 years. Also, from the global point of view, paid employment does not have similar position as in Finland. In many African and Asian cultures, the vast majority of people make their living from fishing, handicraft, farming or nomadism. In the same countries, the majority of adult people is working only in home. (Melin, 2005)

Nowadays Finns are interested in work-related questions in general. In 2004 the research by Juha Siltala attracted public attention, because its theme was about how working life has become worse in the previous years. Also other researches gave new information about Finnish working environments and leadership in companies. There are differences between working places, and various practices reflect dissimilar authorities and relations. Some companies have adaptive and diplomatic arrangements, other companies manage the same things rigidly and bureaucratically. (Melin, 2005)

### **3.1 The sense of work**

Finnish people prefer to separate working hours and leisure time, it is kept as a good arrangement that these two differ from each other. There are many workers who think that real life starts after work time is over. Work is a necessary evil, which just has to be done. It is a sign of new thinking in the research of changes in working life. The beginning of paid employment and its generalization has meant a new way to understand time. Traditionally in agricultural society there was no difference between working time and leisure time. The nature of agricultural work has meant readiness to start working round the clock, day and night. (Melin, 2005)

Previous social discussion about work and its sense has raised arguments about leisure time. Work is more and more seen as an instrument, as a tool to use when a person is trying to reach something else. The researchers came into this result when they observed trade union activities. They notified that working people told they could put their attempts better in practice only outside the work. (Melin, 2005)

### **3.2 Work time versus leisure time**

At the beginning of the past century the length of the work hours were generally 12 hours. In the industrial field, the yearly working time was about 3000 hours per one worker. In the 1990s, industrial working hours had decreased to 1700 hours per worker. The main reasons to the decrease were the shift to a five-day working week in the early 1960s and changes in annual holidays. Despite these changes, working hours have decreased only a little. In comparison to the growth of productivity during the same period, it is rather realistic to speak about relative lengthening of working hours. (Melin, 2005)

If people could change their leisure time activities freely, they would spend less time on paid employment and increase the time to spend on leisure time hobbies. In addition to this they would spend a lot more time with their families and friends. The same people estimate that the time they use with housework would remain the same even if they had more leisure time. (Melin, 2005)

There are some differences between certain groups. Directors and information technology workers are ready to decrease the time they use in their work, unless it means they would earn less money. On the other hand, jobless, students and workers with low salaries would prefer to work more in their leisure time, if they could decide it freely. There are also differences between men and women as well as between old and young people. (Melin, 2005)

How to define leisure time and classify it? After a long work day watching TV on the sofa, is it a leisure hobby or just recovery from work? Sometimes it is difficult to separate hobbies and housework as well. Regular cleaning and renovation – is it a hobby or only housekeeping? Also some professions take more time than only working hours. Some researcher may read research books nearly all the time without feeling that he (or she) is having paid employment. There are two main approaches. Firstly, work can be seen as an instrument, which means that work is done only in order to make ones living, to get money. Secondly, work can be done because of work itself, when the interest is oriented towards works substance. (Melin, 2005) These approaches are presented in the table below. Approaches are from Melin, Blom and Kiljunen (2005)

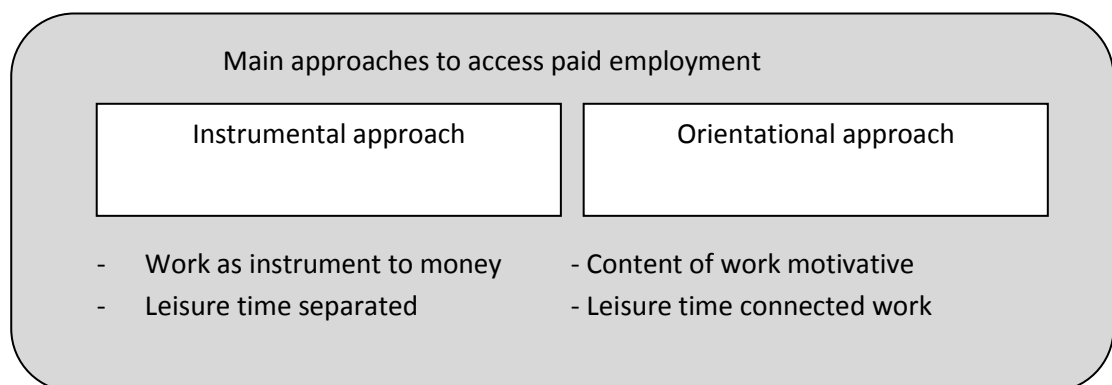


Figure 1. Theory of paid employment.

It is typical for a Finnish employee to maintain either the instrumental or the orientational mentality. To the content of work are mostly oriented academic people, managers and self-employed persons. Less oriented are unemployed people and also people with low education. This direction is seen also in a argument, that academic people, managers and self-employed persons have less instrumental approach to their work. The lowest instrumental interest is among the academically educated people. The most instrumental approach to work is among the unemployed people. They think working is just a way to earn money. Also in comparison between men and women, men are used to having much more instrumental approach to work than women. (Melin, 2005)

### **3.3 The character of the work**

Richard Sennett has lately published the book "The Culture of New Capitalism" (2006). Sennett has been lecturing in Yale University in Connecticut in the United States of America and he has based the book on his lectures. Sennett describes his perceptions about changes in working organizations, mostly in the USA and Great Britain, during the past ten years. Sennett's thoughts are comprehensive and they consider not only work but also professions, politics and consuming. According to Sennett's hypothesis, our working organizations have changed from hierarchical bureaucracies to adaptive organizations.

Sennett himself likes music a lot, and he has placed his thesis in the musical world. With musical terms the change has happened from symphony orchestra to digital audio player, better known as an MP3 player. A symphony orchestra can be characterized to hierarchic and bureaucratic. In the orchestra there is a distinct division of labor and certain relations to authority. It is based on handwork and the professional character. An orchestra has long time horizon and it works responsibly. Instead, an MP3 player is mostly interested in being good-looking and streamlined. The MP3 player makes nearly everything possible: fast movements from one style to another. Also short-tempered, ongoing change is typical for the MP3 player. (Sennett, 2006)



In the company organizations, transition from a symphony orchestra to an MP3 player means that the company has to be ready for changes all the time. Organizational stability is nearly more a weakness than a strength. At the same time, the change of organizational type describes the movement towards short-tempered capital. Short time horizon is specifying more and more the procedures of the companies. Revenues are prospected from stock markets, not so much from production any more. Companies are handled from the perspective of improved value of stock share and investors: the product itself is not very important. The solutions which the company has implemented are intended as signals for markets, not product markets but money market. For example Nokia is launching new mobile phones to prove its know-how to investors, not in order to answer consumer needs. (Sennett, 2006)

There is also change of ideal employee type, which is following the change of working organizations. Expertise, based on long experience or making things as well as possible, is no more valued. The new ideal employee type highlights youth, readiness to learn new all the time: live only this moment, forget failures, be ready for short-time perspectives and splintery. The new employee is as easy to replace as the MP3 player. (Sennett, 2006)

These changes have an effect on work places' social relations. It is obvious that there is danger of the institutional loyalty to decrease, the trust between workers to reduce and organizational information and know-how, gathered to a company, get thinner or disappears. Usually the effect of the MP3 player hits mostly middle-aged people. In Finland a clear change of managerial model and economic way to act has taken place in corporate giants. At the background of the phenomenon is at least tightened competition, strengthening of shareholder interests, managers own interests and lack of counterforce. (Melin, Blom, Kiljunen, 2005)

## 4 CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

Lack of preparation is every manager's nightmare. Many managers recognize the need of getting up and speed a particular topic in time for an important meeting. It is often connected to struggling and finding both the time and the patience to collect the most appropriate material. The concept of corporate governance provides managers and directors boards with assistance concerning these questions.

Corporate governance is a concept which has reached huge success and concentrated attention. According to the *Encyclopaedia of Corporate Governance*, (2004) the subject "has succeeded in attracting a good deal of public interest because of its apparent importance for the economic health of corporations and society in general". But governance manners and structures are not always simple or clear. It is worth taking a closer look into exact meaning of corporate governance.

Corporate governance has always existed in limited liabilities, from the beginning of the establishment of a company. Recent failures of a series of multinational corporations, beginning with Enron Corporation, continuing with dot.com type companies, have again gathered attention towards effective corporate governance. The question of the focus in corporate governance is mostly about the directors and their measurements about the output of the company, not forgetting that the management board practices and the effectiveness of activities should be measured as well. (Emerald, 2004)

The idea of corporate governance is based on the need to govern and control the corporation with rules that are commonly adjustable. A good director understands his/her personal limits and is ready to turn to expert advisers when the situation demands for special know-how. Directors and managers of the company are also in response for shareholders, for they are expected to fulfill their obligations. But how define "fulfilling of obligations?" (Emerald, 2004)

There are seven main goals that directors should follow:

- to maintain competitive markets via antitrust and fair trade laws
- to regulate non-competitive markets, such as utilities
- to maintain a balance between capital and labor
- to ensure orderly capital markets
- to protect consumers from unsafe products and fraud
- to ensure equal access to employment, education, housing and public accommodations
- to protect the environment (Emerald, 2004)

In addition to these rules there are laws and conventions which regulate and recommend the way how corporations should be governed. But the list above shows that there are many responsibilities the directors should take into consideration and a lot of companies and their employees' and shareholders' success is depending on the management skills of the directors. (Emerald, 2004)

Depending on the approach to corporate governance, different researchers prefer to present it from a good or bad point of view. Those who think that the worst has already happened, concentrate on examples about insufficiently managed companies, which have lead to the need of regulation of corporate rules. These researchers tend to show the unrealistic connection between wise leadership and maximum profit gaining. Different approaches, from the lighter side, focus on various regulations and protection of damages which occur in a clever way in their example companies. (Emerald, 2004)

## **5 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN NURMINEN LOGISTICS PLC**

It is typical for a qualitative research that the character of the research is getting clearer when the investigation proceeds. Qualitative research aims at the

understanding of the target, not to figure it with numbers or relations. (Flick, 2005)

In order to measure the atmosphere and working conditions, a confidential interview was arranged in the company Nurminen Logistics. Confidential in this context means that answers and respondents' names cannot be linked and no comment can be connected to any respondent.

A new way to describe a qualitative research is to include passive observation results into the final report. In the current case, the research writer is working at the same place as respondents and observation was possible without a certain separately reserved moment for an interview. For example lunch breaks were often used as a forum to handle topics of atmosphere and working climate.

The interview questions were delivered to the workers who work geographically in the same area and locate near each other. The number of potential interview respondents was 26, which is similar to printed answer sheets. In the given time, 11 answers were returned, which make the answering percent 42%.

The aim of choosing this particular interview type was to make it possible for a respondent to reserve the needed time and a peaceful place for answering the questions. The names of the respondents were not collected. Possibly it would have raised the amount of answers if, for example, a lottery or similar reward was arranged between the participants. By the chosen way, every respondent participated voluntarily and that increases the reliability of the final results.

## **5.1 The processing of the interview**

It was not an easy task to create an interview from zero level. A couple of questions were quickly written down, but soon there appeared a lack of knowledge concerning the variety of this topic. Assistance of literature reviews and how-to-make-a-research guides were very useful when deciding which topics belong to the title. The form and style of the questionnaire sheet had to be decided too. When a question was written down, it had to be put into test,

whether the answer gives useful information concerning the research question. However the researcher should not have an effect on final results by tempting respondents to answer in a certain way.

The questions were formulated so that every respondent could according to their opinions choose the best way to answer in a way which they feel of being most suitable for them. The interview sheet allowed answering in two ways, by giving a grade for a clause or by writing the answer with words.

The questionnaire form included terms like *corporate governance*, *social performance* and *benchmarking*. As the respondents of the questionnaire are working at the same place with the researcher, there were held several conversations concerning the meaning of these terms and how the meanings of terms seem to be put in practice in the case company. All respondents were not familiar with the used terms and they wanted to know more about the aims of the terms (for example about corporate governance) and reasons why they are included in the research.

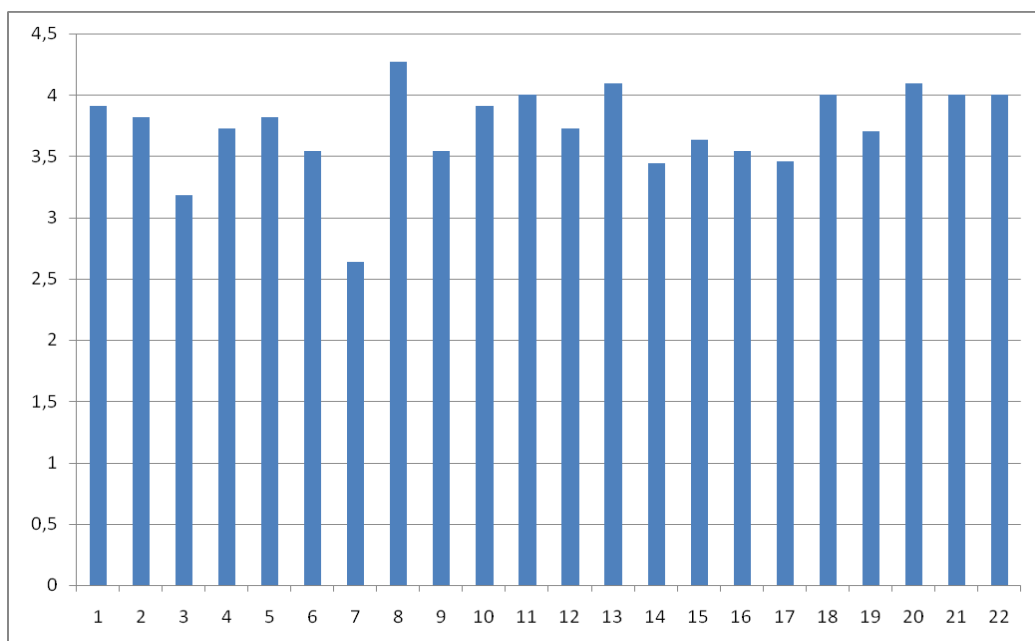


Chart 1. General overview on the results of interview questions.

In chart 1 is shown the general lines of the interview (see reference list at the end of the study). The highest single rate was achieved by the employer picture, image of the employer, from the worker's point of view. It means that from all

the topics this clause was ranked with the best scores. The lowest score is given for information flow. Many respondents agree that there is a point to develop the way how information is delivered and which information is essential concerning personal items of the work.

In the following part of the research, each topic is divided into smaller components. The results are given in the conclusions on the basis of the charts and in connection with previous theoretical viewpoints.

## **5.2. Management**

Confidence to a company's board is consequential for the image of the company and also meaningful for the workers. Confidence as a construct means a feeling or a certainty that somebody or something can be worth trusting. It also means that the object of the trust will not failure or cause a disappointment. Lack of confidence at the work place causes misunderstandings and complicates the progress of co-operation. (Österberg, 2005)

At the end of 2009, a worldwide lack of economical confidence caused an unexpected and sudden collapse in the financial markets. Companies could not trust on their partners' capability to pay, and it directed to the tightening of payment terms in the contracts.

Certain logic in the decisions and policies is welcomed in every company. It creates safety among the customers and cooperation partners, if they can foresee the main directions and lines of the company. Political, economical and social challenges meet the business every day, and there are many situations in which a positive certainty is needed.

There are some situations, which are quite difficult to deal with the social and juridical point of view. Most often these situations concern financial decisions, when a company needs to adapt into changed situation. These situations are, for example

- closing a company or a part of it
- disposition of a company
- creating a subsidiary company
- laying off or firing one or more employees
- essential conditions of employment and social actions of the company. (Österberg, 2005)

National laws and regulations determine how these situations have to be handled and which actions have to be taken when a company is going through them. It is not clear that all companies have time to concentrate on detailed instructions or manuals written about this topic. Usually they hire consultants or other know-how in order to handle the situation. But from the workers' point of view, the managers' way to process is very important. Workers need to have enough information concerning the situation and managers' duty is to maintain the confidence of their subordinates. (Österberg, 2005)

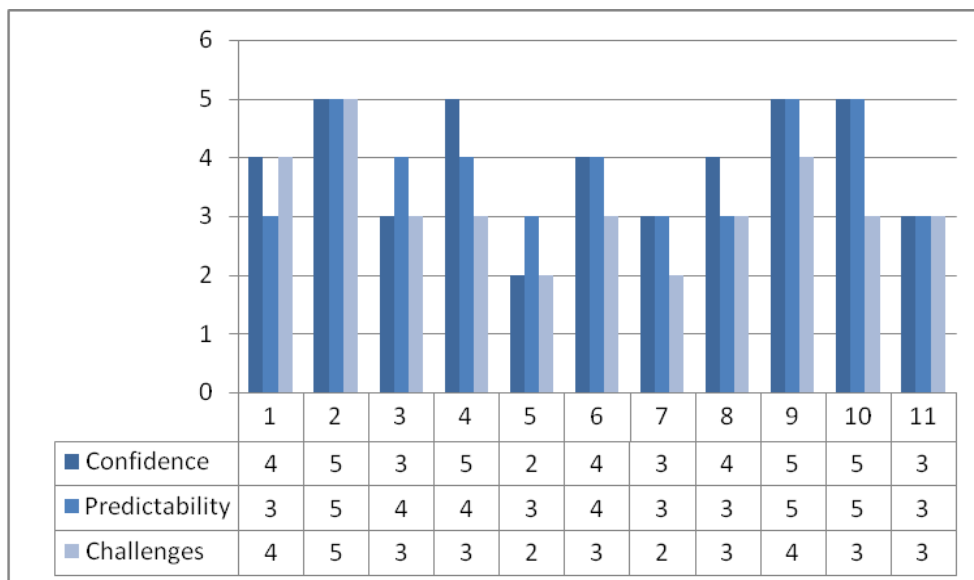


Chart 2. Management

According to chart 2, the workers of the company Nurminen Logistics are satisfied with the decisions of the managers. But as it is seen in the chart, some respondents think that managers are worth the highest scores (5) when other respondents are ready to criticise and they give a lower score (2). In free

comments there was a concern that due to lay-offs and dismissals, the big picture of the situation of the workers is no more clear for the managers.

### 5.3 Contents and challenges of the responsibilities

It is not only the salary that makes sense in a paid employment. Some people are ready to work a certain time period in highly demanding or unambitious working conditions, but when the question is about life-time working and personal development, there are other factors having an effect, too. Substantial is the personal way to feel about one's own work and its sense. People are of different personality types, and some people are more oriented to strictly ruled operations when others prefer unlimited and creative way of working. (Österberg, 2005)

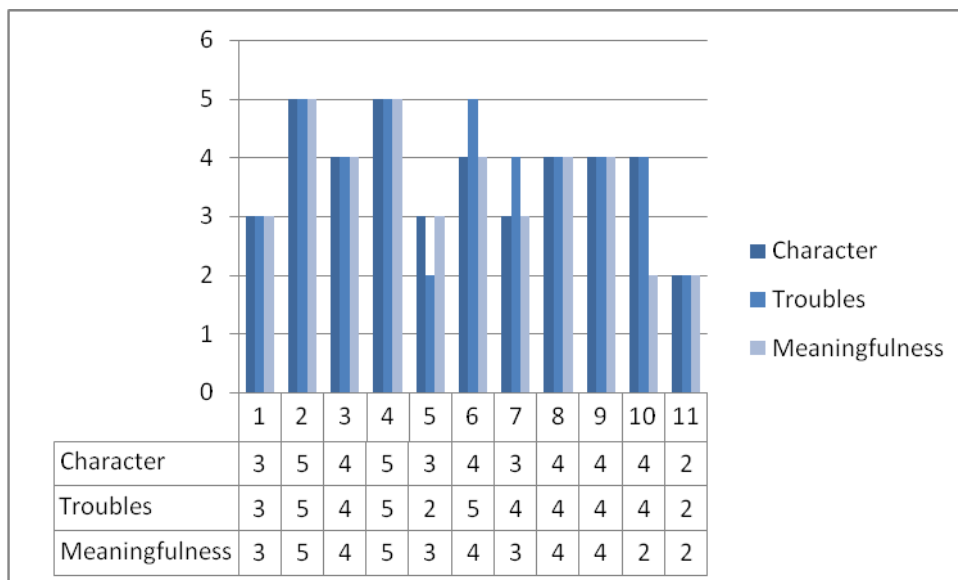


Chart 3 Contents and challenges of the responsibilities and the work

In chart 3 is presented the variety of answers from Nurminen Logistics. Character of the work tells how good one's own work is estimated. It is obvious, that some respondents consider their work excellent and some think it is not



praiseworthy. The title of troubles describes the way how challenging the work is felt and meaningfulness describes the sense of the work.

It is worth paying attention to the fact that those who give low estimation for meaningfulness of work, give low estimation for the character of the work, too. Those who appreciate their tasks and the contents of their work, consider their work also challenging.

In the comments was written that “it increases the challenging nature of the work that there are many actors cooperating with the company (customs, Finnish railways) and inside the company there are terminals, traffic department, sales etc.”

#### **5.4 Salary**

There are several ways to enjoy the benefits in connection with employment relationship, but easily money is the most important reason. However, the employer is providing workers with certain additional advantages, for example general health care and several insurances which are law-based but still provided by the employer: pension insurance, unemployment insurance, accident insurance and health insurance.

An employer can also offer benefits like company car, luncheon voucher, company flat, company mobile phone, Internet connection, personnel discount on company products, support for sports activities and culture events on leisure time, holiday resorts as well as seasonal parties and annual celebrations. Nurminen Logistics is providing its personnel with all the mentioned benefits, despite personnel discount. Sport activities like marathon and local ice hockey tournaments are very close to the company's leisure time interests. (Österberg, 2005)

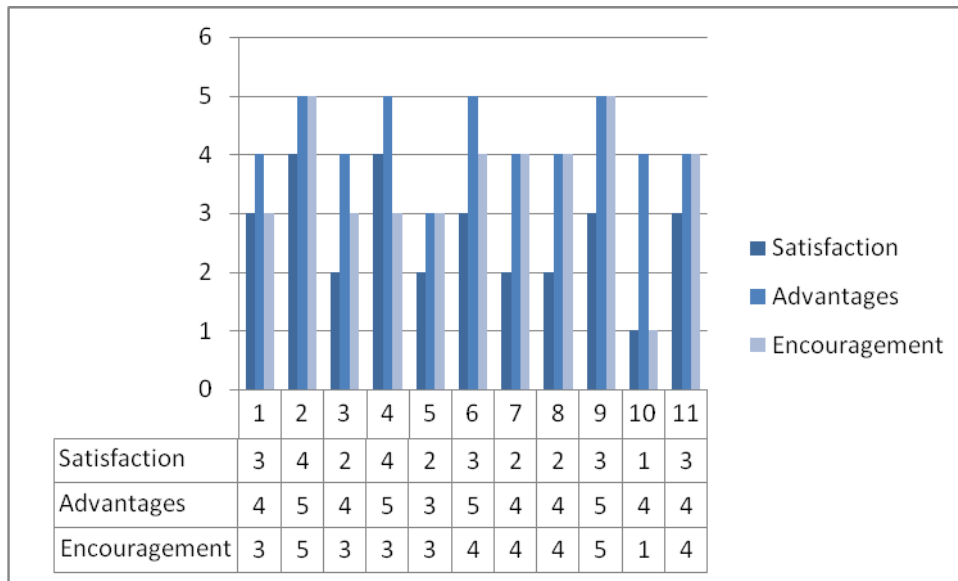


Chart 4 Salary

Seldom is a worker ready to admit of being fully satisfied with the salary. But as seen in chart 4, many workers at Nurminen Logistics are happy with the benefits and rewarding systems which they feel encouraging. It is presented in the numerical part of the chart, that there are no 5's in the answers of satisfaction part, and at the same time there is only one grade 1. In the box of advantages, the grade is rather high. The results lead to the conclusion that salary and the advantages together make the rewarding system satisfactory.

### 5.5 Support for self-oriented development

High-tech companies and organizations in connection with scientific work provide their employees with continuous opportunities to participate in educational occasions. At the operational level, for example in factories and production plants, employees may have less opening possibilities to enrol in educational programs. Often they also have shift work and timetables are difficult to change.

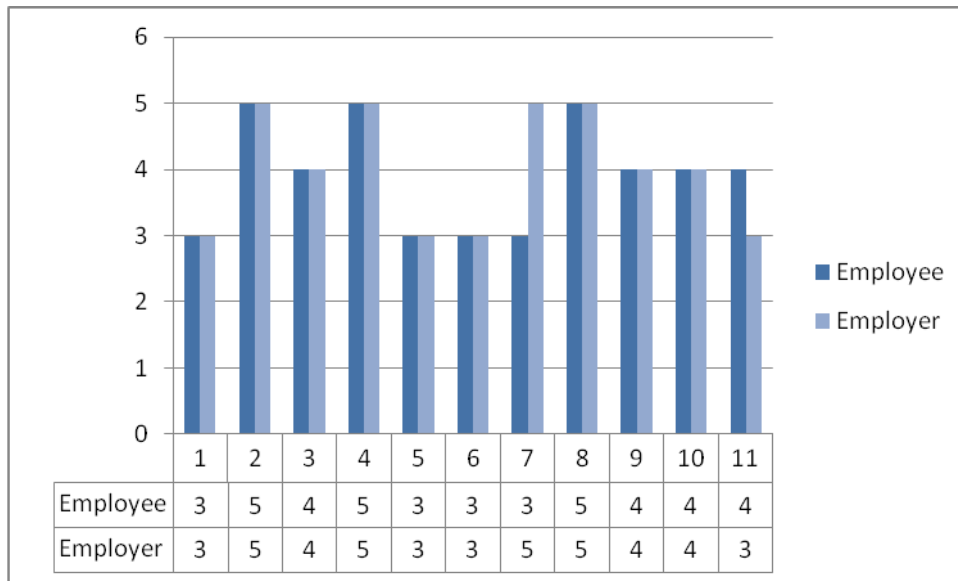


Chart 5 Support of development

According to the results of the interview, there are no differences when compared the workers' and the employers' attitudes to self-oriented development. The results are similar in connection to the fact that given grades are between 3 and 5, and only two respondents have given differing grades. In the commenting part of the interview sheet, there was written that some departments should utilize quiet, times for example by organizing IT-training at the work place. That means the company might pay more attention to educational issues and personal development of the workers.

## 5.6 Working climate and co-operation

Lately the national media and common knowledge has been concentrating more and more on general working climate and co-operation between different working groups in the organization. Many corporations and organizations have started to collect yearly information concerning working climate in their offices and operating places by ordering certain type of enquiries. These kinds of enquiries reflect the current situation and give a tool to estimate every day conditions.

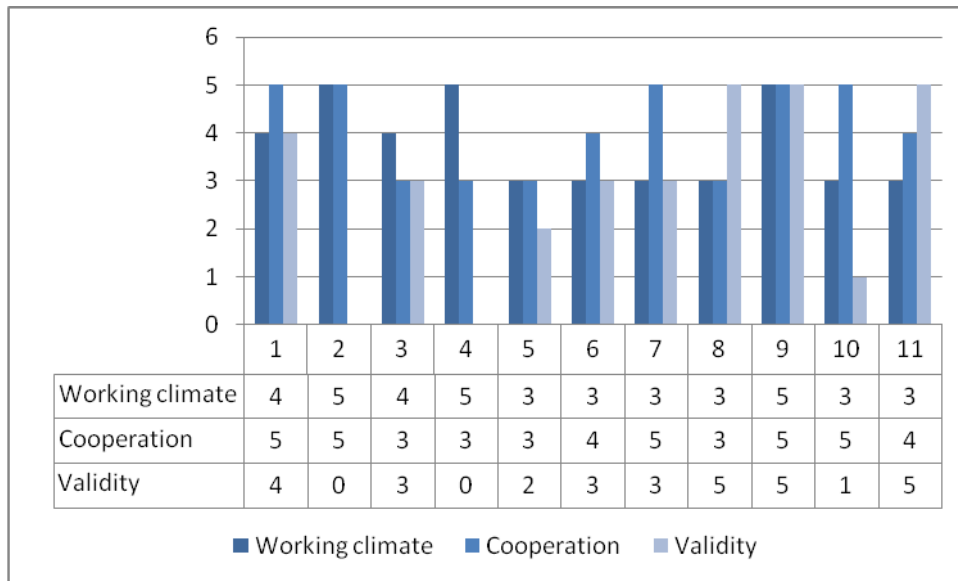


Chart6 Working climate

In this chart number 0 means that there is no answer.

According to the chart 6, the personnel can be divided into two groups. The first group consist of workers who believe that enquiries of working climate describe well the current situation in the company. The second group does not consider the enquiry results reliable due to their reasons to believe that they do not reflect the truth.

Comments on the situation: “There should be more courage to discuss things that are not working.” “The lay-off periods have had an effect on working climate.” “Working climate has not changed in comparison to the past year.” ”Enquiry results match real situation. There is a good enthusiastic atmosphere, workers are not afraid of work.” “Changes are in connection with the company’s saving program. Possibly working climate has worsened because of depression and unsteadiness that it has caused.”

It is worth paying attention to the fact that co-operation and helping colleagues have reached high grades. It is in connection with the idea of good working climate in the company.

## 5.7 Working conditions

Technical and ergonomic environment of the offices of Nurminen Logistics achieved high grades. The representative of the company's health care organizer has had a conversation with each worker in their working points and working positions and the settings of desks and computers have been placed so that working is easy and all equipment is available.

The employer provides workers with working tools and, for example the employer decides about the updates of computer programs. Sometimes companies which produce and maintain different computer software, develop their programs quickly from one version to another. It is expensive for a company to buy all the newest software and train the workers to use them. Only a minority of the companies is all the time working with the latest versions. Most companies are using the programs as long as possible, until they have no choice than to buy newer version licences. (Österberg, 2005)

At Nurminen Logistics, the respondents of the interview are satisfied with the present situation. Average grade for ergonomics is 3.64 and for tools and equipment 3.55.

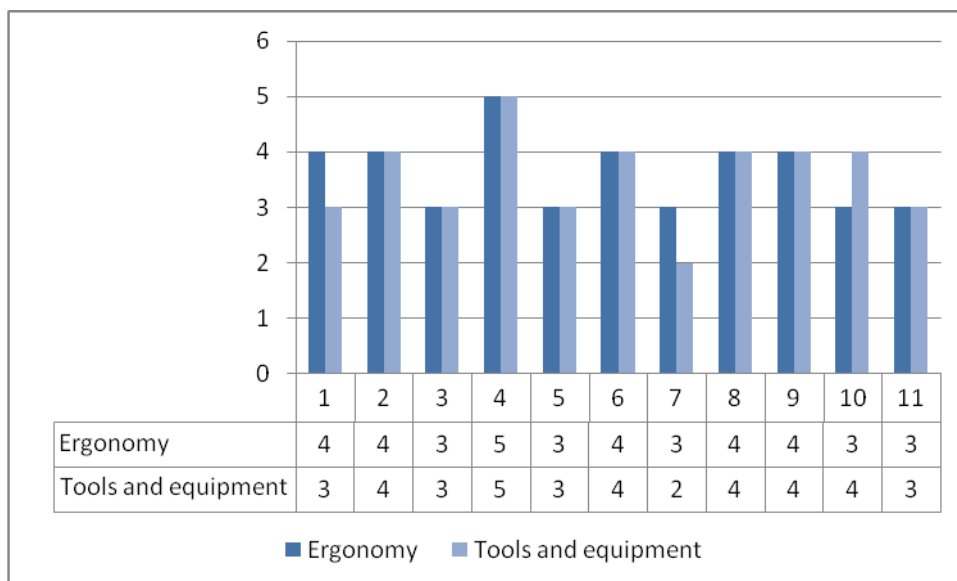


Chart 7. Ergonomy

In Chart 7 are presented the results. There are more respondents who have given grade 4 than grade 2. There are two respondents who have given grade 5, but no grades 1. The workers of the company think that there might be still something that could be done better. In the comments, a respondent wrote: “Disconnections in data communication connections irritates and consumes time.”

### 5.8 Information flow

Information flow is a part of company’s internal communication and interaction. It is a company’s duty to inform personnel about changes in the company, the financial situation of the company and the decision of the managers’ board. (Österberg, 2005)

In Chart 8 below, the results of the interview are presented. The first line describes the clearness of the delivered information. There are a little different opinions, some respondents say that the delivered information is clear and they give grades 4 and 5. Some respondents cannot agree, but they give grades 2 or 3.

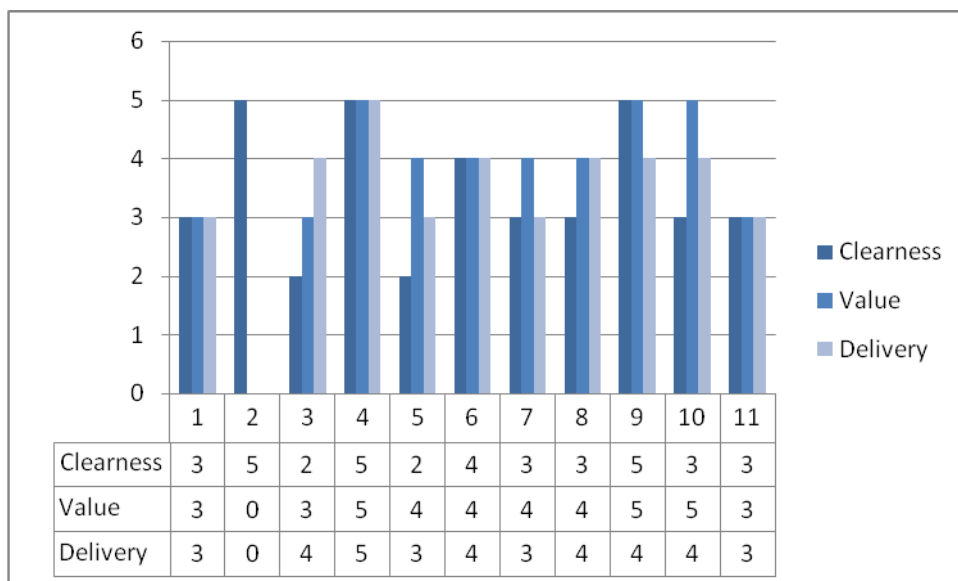


Chart 8. Information flow

Value of information means how useful the delivered information is for the worker. Some respondents did not answer this question, and it is marked with grade 0 on the chart. The last line is about how the information is delivered and if it is easy to deliver again. Most of the respondents say that there are no remarkable problems in the information flow. In the commenting part, the good Intranet was mentioned. It is an Internet based system of internal information sites.

## **5.9 The image of the employer**

Recently the companies have started to create a certain brand, an image, for their company. Not only the products but also companies are willing to give faces for their procedures and visions. In the announcements in newspapers, where they inform about open vacancies, they might say that the company is looking for a person to adapt into existing personnel or they prefer a type that is able to make similar decisions with them. Maybe this image creation is resulted by the phenomenon where companies meet changes. Newspapers seek for companies' representatives for interviews, because journalists no more have time to search the backgrounds themselves. (Koskinen, 1995)

Also a description of social performance has had an effect on companies' leaders. Social performance means the social responsibility that the company takes for its personnel and also the environment. The image of the company is created in the consumers mind and it is connected to the actions the company takes for the environment and how it treats its personnel. (Melin, 2005)

The general grade for company Nurminen Logistics was rather high. As seen in chart 9 below, from twelve respondents three gave grade 5 and six gave grade 4. The average grade was 4.09 to the image of Nurminen Logistics.

The social responsibility was also having been taken into account in the company. It achieves average grade 4.00. Administration and corporate governance was seen a non-common word and many respondents wanted to

know what these titles present. When the titles were presented, they still said that they do not think they can assess it with words or grades. That is why there are many noughts in the chart.

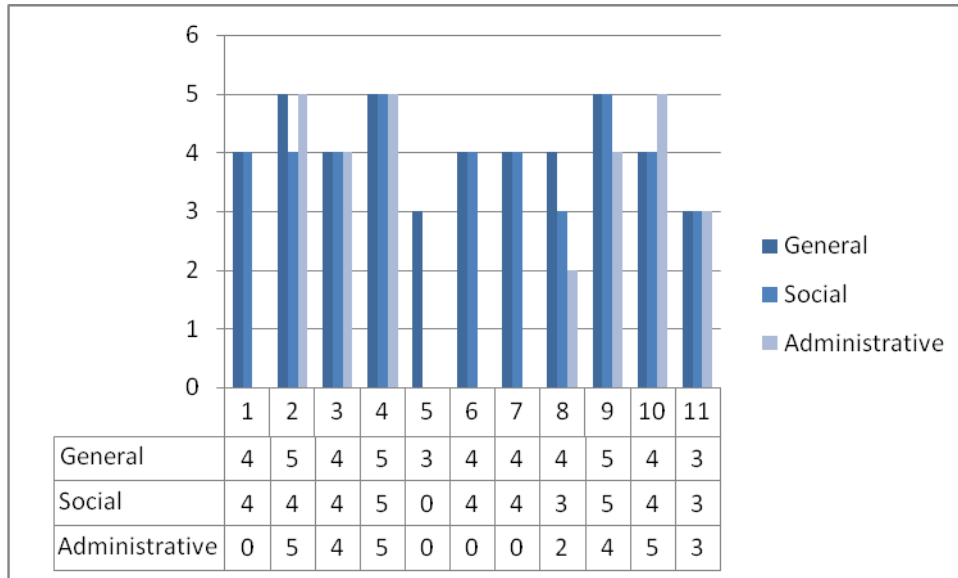


Chart 9. Employer image

Corporate governance is explained in more details in chapter 4. It is a description of how companies should take into account their position in economic environment and how to maintain the values of work in the presence of the market.

### 5.10 Intention to change working place

There are workers who are afraid of expressing their opinions, because they feel it is not taken into account. Possibly they do not think they are working in the right position or the work has changed too much that they could say it answers to their personal challenges.

In chart 10, the lines present the answers to the following questions:



1 Have you thought of changing employer in the period of one year?

2 Have you applied for another job?

1	KY	EI	KY	EI	KY	KY	EI	KY	EI	EI	KY
2	EI	EI	EI	EI	EI	EI	EI	EI	EI	EI	KY

Figure 2. Intention to change working place

The answers are qualified as follows: KY means yes, EI means no. Among the 11 respondents who gave answer to this question, six respondents have had thoughts of changing working place during the past year and one has made an application for another job.

### 5.11 Influence on the future

Workers feel more confidence in their daily routines when they have regularly had possibility affect the company's working methods. But, however, the effect of the workers is often a hidden piece in the decision making. (Koskinen, 1995)

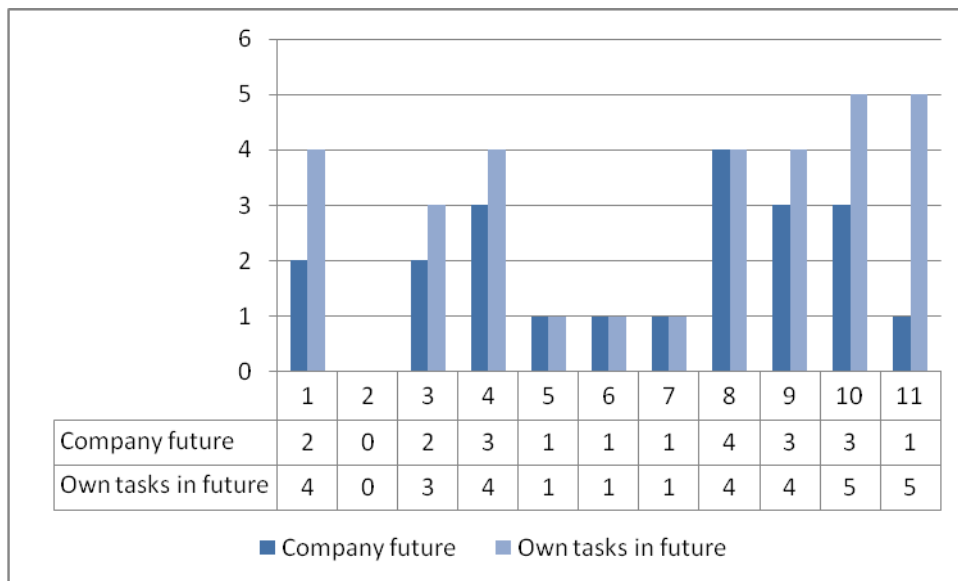


Chart 10. Influence on the future

In chart 10, the opinions of the respondents in Nurminen Logistics are presented according to interview results. The first line presents the answers to the question; how do the respondents see his/her own possibilities to affect the company's future. The second line presents the answers; how does the respondent see the possibilities to have an affect on his tasks in the future.

According to the chart, the workers of the Nurminen Logistics do not see many possibilities to make changes to the company's future. Concerning their own tasks in future, they see a bit more lightly. In the results the variation was high. Many respondents found it difficult to see further than the nearest future.

## **5.12 The impact of multiculturalism**

People come to work places from different cultural backgrounds. If there are people also from different countries in the work place, their cultural backgrounds are differing from the other workers backgrounds more. Teamwork can reach better results when the team members are collected from different personality types and from different cultural backgrounds as well. (Österberg, 2005)

In the Nurminen Logistics there are workers from Sweden, Estonia and Russia. In the target group of this research there are workers from Finland and Russia. The results represent answers from Finnish and Russian viewpoints. The question of multicultural cooperation is not estimated with numbers, but respondents had a possibility to comment freely. The presented questions were "how multiculturalism is present in the work place" and "is it easy to understand different cultural backgrounds and their impact in every-day situations".

According to the comments, some respondents do not usually recognize any certain cultural marks in their every day work. Some respondents also say that cultural differences are easy to understand. Cultural differences were not understood only as a way of working of a colleague, but the working of Russian authorities. Some official changes are announced quickly and surprisingly. By that way the Finnish and Russian way of doing things is different. Some

respondents had noticed that the company does not issue similar contracts between Finnish and Russian customers. Also in the Russian culture, the official holidays differ a lot from Finnish holidays.

A respondent said that the thing that looks natural in one culture may be totally bizarre in an other culture. It was also mentioned that from the Finnish point of view, Finnish and Russian way of doing things is different. In comparison the Finnish way of working was seen more efficient.

### **5.13 Comparison of competing enterprises in the same business field (benchmarking)**

Benchmarking means that a company is aware what the competitors in the same field are doing and is ready to change its own actions towards to better ones in the market field. A company which is benchmarking its competitors, often maintains a useful scope for ongoing development and secures a place among the winners. (Häyry & Häyry, 1997)

The respondents of the research were not well familiar with the term of benchmarking, but after making it clearer in a little discussion they were ready to make up their minds. At first, in a Finnish working place one must mainly obey Finnish working proceedings. But at the same time it is broadening to listen what other than Finnish people think about Finnish proceedings. Some of the respondents said that multiculturalism does not exist in the work place. Nurminen Logistics is considered more stabile than its competitors. Also it was said that the company is better than its competitors because of investments in wagon fleet. The company is decent and there is a lot of knowledge.

## **6 A SUMMARY OF RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS**

In a Finnish society the working proceedings and the meaning of work have changed a lot in the whirlpools of the national history. It is not easy to enter a Finnish working community if the habits and manners of the existing workers are not familiar for the newcomer.

In the target company of this research, the working conditions and the present atmosphere were divided into smaller parts in order to find answer to the question, what the level of worker satisfaction in the company is, which is sailing into headwind of economic challenges. The basis of the good atmosphere was created in the times when the company was family-owned. Recently the share of Nurminen Logistics was listed in the stock exchange in Helsinki and it may have had an effect to the working conditions in the company.

According to the results of this questionnaire, Nurminen Logistics has succeeded in the creation of the company image. From the workers point of view, the company has put resources on good PR and advertising and from the inside point the workers are satisfied with the good additional benefits which the company is providing.

The company could try to make information more transparent. The workers gave the lowest grades for the question of information flow. There are many aspects to develop the internal information channels and attempts to find out which information is considered essential.

## **FIGURES**

Figure 1. Theory of paid employment, page 17

Figure2. Intention to change working place, page 34

## **CHARTS**

Chart1. General overview on the results of interview questions, page 23

Chart2. Management, page 25

Chart3 Contents and challenges of the responsibilities and the work, page 26

Chart4 Salary, page 27

Chart5 Support of development, page 28

Chart6 Working climate, page 29

Chart7. Ergonomy, page 31

Chart8. Information flow, page 32

Chart9. Employer image, page 33

Chart10. Influence on the future, page 35

## **APPENDIX**

Questionnaire

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## ATTACHMENT 1

Hei,

Opiskelen Saimaan ammattikorkeakoulussa ylempää ammattikorkeakoulututkintoa, ja tavoitteenani on valmistua vuoden 2009 loppuun mennessä. Opinnot ovat koostuneet logistiikan, markkinoinnin, johtamisen ja hankintaketjujen hallinnan syventävistä opinnoista, joiden laajuus on yhteensä 90 opintopistettä. Nurminen Logistics Oyj:n liiketoiminta kamppailee erilaisten haasteiden ja mahdollisuuksien ristiaallokossa; nyt punnitaan sekä johdon että operatiivisen henkilöstön taitoja selvittää vallitsevasta markkinatilanteesta.

Kysymyksissäni keskityn työn eri osa-alueisiin, kuten henkilökohtaiseen sisältöön, palkkaukseen ja työsuhteen etuihin, työn arvostamiseen sekä työelämäsidonnaisen kehittymisen edistämiseen. Pyydän arvioimaan kutakin väittämää, ellei muuta mainita, asteikolla 1-5 tai sanallisesti. Kaikki vapaat kommentit ovat tervetulleita kysytyn asian selventämiseksi. Kaikkiin kysymyksiin ei ole pakko vastata.

Haastattelukysymysten tuloksia käsitellään luottamuksellisesti. Lopullinen opinnäyte on kuitenkin julkinen asiakirja, joka on yleisesti luettavissa mm. Saimaan ammattikorkeakoulun kirjastossa tekniikan ja liiketalouden yksikössä. Koulutusohjelma on englanninkielinen, joten myös lopullinen opinnäytetyö kirjoitetaan englanniksi.

Kiitos vastauksistasi!

terveisin Tarja Turunen



## 1. Johtaminen

- Luottamus siihen, että yhtiön johto tekee oikeat johtopäätökset?
- Johdon toimimistavan ennakoitavuus, esim. nykyisessä taloustilanteessa?
- Johdon kyky selvittää ongelma/haastetilanteet esim. lomautukset ja irtisanomiset?
- Vapaat kommentit?

## 2 Työn sisältö ja haasteellisuus

- Oman työnkuvan luonne?
- Työtehtävien haasteellisuus?
- Työn mielekkyys?
- Vapaat kommentit?

## 3 Palkkaus

- Kuinka tyytyväinen olet tällä hetkellä omaan palkkaasi?
- Entä työnantajan tarjoamiin työsuhde-etuihin, kuten liikuntaseteleihin ja esim. pikkujouluihin?
- Ovatko palkitsemisjärjestelmät oikeudenmukaisia?
- Vapaat kommentit?

## 4 Kehittymisen tuki

- Suhtautuminen itsesi kouluttamiseen?

- Työnantajan suhtautuminen itsesi kouluttamiseen?
- Vapaat kommentit?

## 5 Työilmapiiri ja yhteistyö

- Arvosana työilmapiirille?
- Onko työilmapiiri muuttunut esim. viime vuodesta? Jos on, niin miksi?
- Kuinka helposti sinua neuvotaan tai autetaan työssä?
- Kuvaavatko työilmapiirikyselyt todellista tilannetta?
- Vapaat kommentit?

## 6 Työolot

- Arvosana työn tekniselle ja ergonomiselle ympäristölle?
- Työvälineiden ajanmukaisuus, esim. tietokoneohjelmien?
- Vapaat kommentit?

## 7 Tiedon kulku

- Onko työpaikan tiedonvälitys selkeää?
- Saatko tiedonjakelukanavista tärkeää tietoa?
- Muistatko helposti mikä tieto pitää välittää kenellekin eteenpäin?
- Vapaat kommentit?

## 8 Työnantajakuva

- Yleisarvosana työnantajallesi?
- Kuinka työnantajan sosiaalinen vastuu (social performance) työntekijöistä toteutuu?
- Kuinka työnantaja soveltaa työelämän yleisiä lainalaisuuksia (corporate governance)?
- Vapaat kommentit?

#### 9 Aikomus vaihtaa työpaikkaa

- Olen harkinnut työpaikan vaihtoa edellisen vuoden aikana?
- Olen hakenut toiseen työpaikkaan kuluneen vuoden aikana?
- Vapaat kommentit?

#### 10 Vaikuttaminen

- Koen, että voin vaikuttaa työpaikkani tulevaisuuteen?
- Koen, että voin vaikuttaa omiin työtehtäviini?
- Vapaat kommentit?

#### 11 Monikulttuurisuuden vaikutus

- Miten monikulttuurisuus ilmenee työnteossa?
- Onko helppoa ymmärtää erilaisia kulttuuritaustoja ja niiden vaikutuksia?
- Vapaat kommentit?

#### 12 Vertailu samalla toimialalla kilpaileviin yrityksiin (benchmarking)?

- Onko työnantajasi mielestäsi kilpailijoitaan parempi jossakin?

- Vapaat kommentit?