

# **Project Management for Online Visa Purchasing System SoloVisa for the Finnish Travel Agency Lähialuematkat**

Elena Ivankina

Bachelor's Thesis  
Degree Programme in Hotel,  
Restaurant and Tourism  
Management  
2016



<b>Author(s)</b> Elena Ivankina	
<b>Degree programme</b> Bachelor's Degree in Hotel, Restaurant and Tourism Management	
<b>Report/thesis title</b> Project Management for Online Visa Purchasing System SoloVisa for the Finnish Travel Agency Lähialuematkat.	<b>Number of pages and appendix pages</b> 56 + 7
<p>In the modern world where the business environment is changing constantly, in order to keep the leading position and not to lose the competitive advantage, companies have to implement some changes in their work almost all the time. Often it is required to launch a new project inside the company.</p> <p>So did the company Lähialuematkat. To stay ahead of the competition on the market, the management of the company made a decision to launch a new online system, where they would be able to sell visas all over the world.</p> <p>The goal of this product-oriented thesis is to create the online visa purchasing system Solo-Visa. The duties of the Project Manager working on the project team of SoloVisa will be described in this thesis. The scope of the thesis does not include the description of every feature that the system is able to do, but involves several problems, which are solved in this work. The solved issues include improving communication channels between the company and its customers, solving the issue of the storage of the information concerning the orders, improving the awareness of the staff about the documents location and creating the notification system for the external users.</p> <p>The information about how to create a project team, how to be a successful manager and also what specifics has the management of a virtual project team can be found in the theoretical framework. The actual solutions for the problems mentioned earlier in this abstract and the process of creating the end product of this thesis – SoloVisa, will be described in the empirical part.</p>	
<b>Keywords</b> Project management, project, project team	

## Table of contents

1	Introduction .....	1
2	Theoretical aspects of a project and project management .....	4
2.1	Organisational structure and its influence on the project structure .....	6
2.2	Role, responsibilities and competences of the project manager .....	9
2.3	Project management in the context of information technology.....	13
2.3.1	Creating a project team: roles and responsibilities.....	20
2.3.2	Managing the project team.....	23
3	Project management for the SoloVisa development.....	26
3.1	Company introduction .....	26
3.2	SoloVisa system description .....	30
3.3	SoloVisa project introduction .....	31
3.4	Roles and responsibilities of the project team members .....	33
3.5	Tools and techniques for management of SoloVisa project team .....	35
3.5.1	Solving the problem of the location of the documents.....	40
3.5.2	Improving the communication channels between Lähialuematkat and its customers .....	43
4	Results of the project .....	47
4.1	Implementing the change in Lähialuematkat.....	48
5	Discussion .....	51
5.1	Self-evaluation.....	52
5.2	Recommendations for the future research .....	53
	References .....	54
	Appendices.....	57
Appendix 1.	Organizational structure of Lähialuematkat .....	57
Appendix 2.	Structure of the SoloVisa project team .....	58
Appendix 3.	Notification emails from SoloVisa .....	59
Appendix 4.	Feedback from customers .....	62
Appendix 5.	Scheme of SoloVisa system .....	63

# 1 Introduction

Often when a company needs to implement some change in its everyday work routine in order to win a competitive advantage or to improve an overall performance, the most efficient and comfortable way to do so is to launch a new project inside the company. Chapter 2 of this thesis introduces the definitions of project and project management. Besides that, the same chapter explains how organisational structure influences the project management style, names the main characteristics of a successful project manager, explains how to create and manage a project team (especially taking into consideration that all the members are remote developers) and how to understand whether the project was successful in the end or not.

Chapter 3 introduces the main case of the thesis – creating an online visa purchasing system SoloVisa for the Finnish travel agency Lähialuematkat - a genuinely Finnish company, located in Helsinki, Finland. Lähialuematkat was established in 1991 and it is the biggest company in Finland specialized in tourism to Russia. It organizes tourist trips for both individuals and groups, and also assists its customers in the complicated process of obtaining a Russian visa.

The biggest department in Lähialuematkat is Visas department: the company helps its customers to obtain about 30 000 visas to Russia annually. Few years ago, besides Russian visas, the company started to provide a new service of obtaining visas to China, India, Kazakhstan, Belarus and some other countries. Nowadays Lähialuematkat assists its customers in applying for visas all over the world. A more detailed profile of the company is provided in chapter 3 of the thesis.

Since the number of visa orders is growing, the amount of work for the employees is increasing as well. This leads to some problems and mistakes in their everyday work life, causing problems not only for the company's internal processes, but also for the customer experience with Lähialuematkat. The scope of the thesis will be limited to three main problems explained below.

The first problem is caused by the fact that Lähialuematkat has two offices in Helsinki – at the Central Railway Station and on Vuorimiehenkatu 3. The visa application can be submitted at either of the offices, and the passports with ready visas can be picked up at either of those. In addition to walk-in customers, Lähialuematkat accepts visa applications also by post and courier services. The delivery also can be either by post, pick up at the office, courier delivery, airport delivery, etc. This can lead into situation where it might be

difficult to find out where the specific passport or specific application is located at the moment. If the employee is not able to provide the information about the order location right away, customer experience will be surely ruined.

The second problem is also connected with the communication channels between the company and the customers. Employees have to receive all the comments and requests of the customers via phone, email or in person. Most of the information is stored in paper format. Some of the comments can be written down into the sales system, but the space there is limited. So in order to write down any new information about the order, quite often the customer service specialist has to find the paper form of the order and make the corrections there. It takes time, decreases the efficiency of the worker and the customer satisfaction.

The last problem, which is going to be discussed in the thesis, is the lack of the customer's awareness about the visa application process. There was no way for a customer to follow up the status of the order. In order to find out any information about the order, the customer needs to call the office during the opening hours or write an email. The phone line might be busy and the email takes some time to be answered. Besides that, the questions about the state of the order generally disturb the staff. The staff have to spend their working time answering the easy questions instead of solving more complicated issues. As a result, customer service slows down.

Obviously, the problems mentioned above decrease the quality of the customer experience with Lähialuematkat. In order to improve the customer's path through ordering a visa product from the company, those three issues should be resolved. How they were resolved is described in chapter 3.

Few years ago the project of creating an online visa purchasing system was launched. The goal of the new project was to create a system that would be able to solve most of the operational issues of the company, including the three problems mentioned above.

The system was called SoloVisa and it has been developed until now. SoloVisa is designed to cover several business processes of Lähialuematkat:

- Allow the customers to choose and order the visa product online.
- Let them follow up the order after it has been created.
- Create a stable and easy communication channel with the customers.
- Provide the staff with the needed tools for processing the order, such as a billing system, payment status check.

- Store and organize the information about both private and corporate customers.

SoloVisa system is described in further detail in chapter 3.2.

In order to create such a system, the project team was established. There were two parties in this development project: Lähialuematkat and the Russian development company Daturum.

Daturum is a Russian development company, specialized in creating IT solutions for different kind of businesses. Their projects include systems and portals for banks, medical centres and travel agencies. Daturum was chosen because of the good reputation, good professional skills of its programmers, well-timed customer support and systematic approach in the IT solutions development process. Also a decision of hiring Russian programmers for this project is economically efficient for Lähialuematkat.

The structure and responsibilities of the SoloVisa project team is described in further detail in chapter 3. The theory concerning the establishment of the project team and organizing its work can be found in the same chapter. And chapter 4 sums up the results of the project.

The goal of the thesis is to show how the work of a project manager looks like in a real life by describing the main responsibilities of the author and some specific results that she got while performing her duties, and of course to create the product called SoloVisa in the end.

Discussion and recommendations for further research, and also the appendices, can be found at the end of the thesis.

## 2 Theoretical aspects of a project and project management

This chapter discusses the theoretical framework of the thesis. The definitions of the project and project management are explained, as well as responsibilities and competences of the project manager. This chapter also points out the specifics of the project management in information technology sphere and defines the tools.

Project management can be applied across many different industries: from implementing new software in a company to sending a satellite to Mars. It is a very wide discipline and very critical set of skills at the same time. (Heagney 2011, 2.)

One might think that project management is just one of the variants of general management, but that is not completely true. While general management is mostly about performing the everyday routine for a long period of time, project management is about managing only one unique project. Heagney (2011, 2) defines the project in a following way:

- A project always has a schedule, which makes the work much more intensive than the activities handled normally by the general management.
- The members of the team do not always report to the project manager the way they report to the general managers.
- A project is done only once; it is unique, it most likely will not repeat, while general managers usually have repetitive work responsibilities.
- A project has a defined budget; which regular company activities almost do not have.
- A project has defined start and end dates and, as was mentioned already earlier, it does not repeat. Project is always temporary.
- For a project the scope and the goal should always be defined. Without them it might be very difficult to measure the results of the project.

Juran (Heagney 2011, 2) described a project as a “problem scheduled for solution”. The word problem here does not necessarily have a negative meaning. For example, developing a new product can also be defined as a problem, but a positive one. (Heagney 2011, 2.)

Project Management Institute defines a project the following way: “A project is a temporary endeavour undertaken to create a unique product, service or result.” (Project Management Institute 2013.)

As it was mentioned before, every project has its beginning and end. The end can be reached in several ways:

- The goals were achieved
- The goals of the project cannot be achieved due to objective reasons

- The need for the project does not exist any more
  - The client wishes to terminate the project
- (Project Management Institute 2013.)

The duration of the project is not always short, even though it is limited. Moreover, the result of the project (product or service) might last unlimited time. For example, when the outcome of the project is a new national monument, the project can last for centuries.

(Project Management Institute 2013.)

Every project is unique: it creates unique service, product or other result, like improvements in some government institutions or social programs, for example. Some details in different projects might repeat, for example buildings can be constructed using the same or similar materials, and even the same group of builders can participate, but it does not change the fundamental unique nature of every individual project. (Project Management Institute 2013.)

As outcomes of the project can be named:

- A new product
  - A new service
  - An improvement in existing product or service
  - A document or research results
  - A new structure of a business or number of businesses, etc.
- (Project Management Institute 2013.)

After defining what the project itself is, it is easier now to find the definition for project management as well. As stated by the Project Management Institute (2015) on their website, "Project management, then, is the application of knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques to project activities to meet the project requirements".

Project management includes 47 management processes, which are grouped into five Process groups:

- Initiating
  - Planning
  - Executing
  - Monitoring and Controlling
  - Closing
- (Project Management Institute 2013.)



During the work on a project the project manager should identify the requirements, take into consideration and follow the various needs and expectations of the stakeholders and also organize and maintain communication between the members of the project. He/she should control and balance quality, schedule a budget, plan resources and predict risks of the project. (Project Management Institute 2013.)

Aforementioned factors influence each other. For example, when the schedule of the project changes, the budget most likely has to change too. Changes in timing and budget may cause additional risks and in the end influence the quality. (Project Management Institute 2013.)

Every project can change during its lifecycle, so the project management plan should be developed and adjusted at every stage. The more details added into the project plan, the more accurate the estimations become. "Progressive elaboration allows a project management team to define work and manage it to a greater level of detail as the project evolves". (Project Management Institute 2013.)

Projects do not exist separately from the organisations, where they were launched. How the structure of organisation influences its projects, their own structures and project management style is explained in the next chapter.

## **2.1 Organisational structure and its influence on the project structure**

The culture, type and structure of a company influence on how a project in this particular company is managed. Every organisation creates its own unique style, which depends greatly on what experience the members of the company have. People inside organisation have common experiences which include, for example, shared values, motivation system, tolerance toward risks and view on hierarchy. (Project Management Institute 2013.)

Probably one of the most decisive factors that might influence the project highly is communication style. The success of the whole work depends a lot on how communication is performed in the company. It is a task of the project manager to create a proper platform where all the members of the team will be able to contact each other easily and fast. (Project Management Institute 2013.)

There are several main organisational frameworks described in the business literature, three of which are described in this thesis and they are also the most commonly used.

The first one is a functional organisation. This type has a strong hierarchy and every employee has his/her own direct supervisor. All employees are grouped into departments depending on the speciality, for example, accounting, marketing, IT, etc. An example of the functional organisation is presented in Figure 1. Every project is managed separately in each department. The heads of departments are coordinators of the project and in every unit some staff members can participate to the project. In Figure 1 those staff members are marked with a dark colour. (Project Management Institute 2013.)

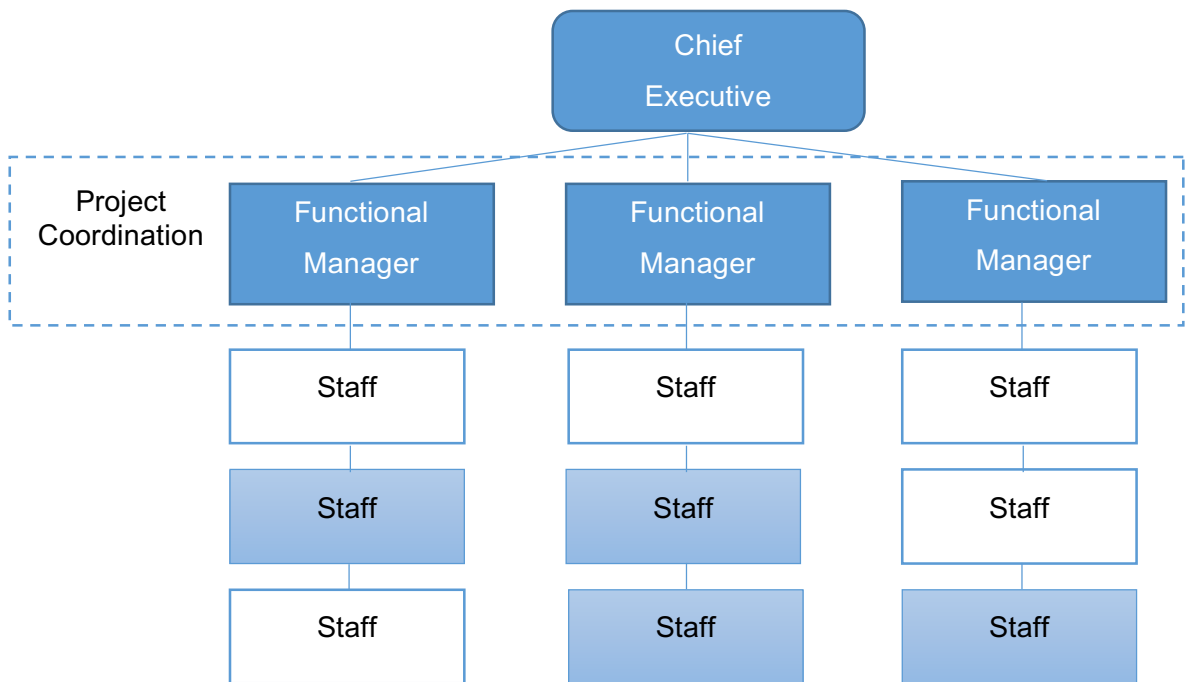


Figure 1. Functional structure of organisation (Project Management Institute 2013.)

The advantage of the functional organisation is that the managers of departments have to develop specialists' skills. Also the staff members of the departments have supervisors that understand their field of work and can provide relevant help. (Project Management Institute 2013.)

One of the problems with functional structures is that employees are not interested enough in the goals of the department and in the objectives of the whole company. One of the ways to manage this problem is to create a project, where different staff members across the departments could participate. In this case the structure of the project will include the project manager as a supervisor of the team, and different staff members from different departments as the team members. Such a structure is called "pure project structure" and an example of it is shown in Figure 2. Staff members come together only for the purpose of one concrete project and they return back to their departments as soon as the project is over. (Cadle & Yeates 2004, 52.)

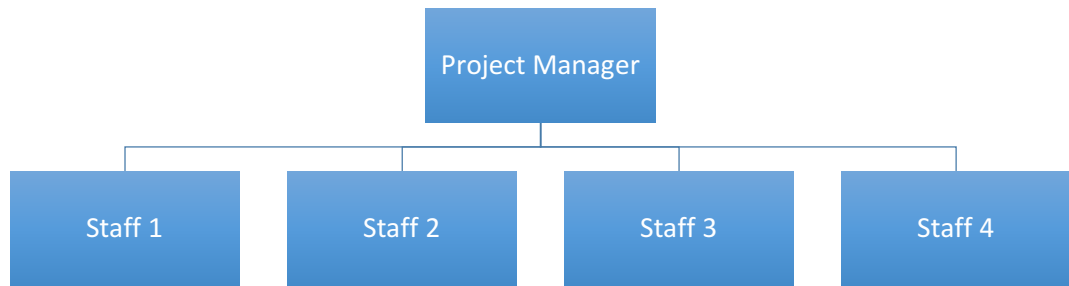


Figure 2. Pure project structure (Cadle & Yeates 2004, 52.)

Pure project structure makes employees more interested in their work as well as in the work of the whole company. Another benefit is that this type of structure allows employees to concentrate on one particular task without being distracted by the tasks of their “home departments”. (Cadle & Yeates 2004, 52.)

Probably the biggest disadvantage that might appear in pure project structure is the resources efficiency problem. For example, Staff 1 can be completely involved in the work process, while Staff 3 is not so much involved because his/her professional skill is not so much needed in this project. Hence a situation is created where some employees work full-time and some part-time, but the ones with the part-time occupation cannot take any other tasks. (Cadle & Yeates 2004, 53.)

The third structure that should be named is matrix organization, example of which is presented in Figure 3. In this structure it is possible to balance the advantages of the functional structure and pure project structure. People here have more than one supervisor. A member of the staff reports to the boss of the unit as well as to the project manager of the specific project he/she is involved into. For example, in Figure 3 it is shown that Staff 3 works full-time on the Project C and also part-time on the Projects A and B. (Cadle & Yeates 2004, 53.)

	Staff 1	Staff 2	Staff 3	Staff 4
Project A				
Project B				
Project C				

Figure 3. Matrix structure of Organisation (Cadle & Yeates 2004, 53.)

The main benefit of the Matrix structure is that resources can be used in the most efficient way. Though sometimes such a structure might create an issue, since employees have several bosses, whose interests might conflict with each other. They also have different deadlines for each project, that also can conflict with each other. (Cadle & Yeates 2004, 54.)

When starting a new project, the project manager should understand first within which organizational structure he/she is going to work. Is it possible to have a devoted project team, separate from the work of other departments like in pure project structure, or will the employees have other work to do within their own departments? Also how and where people are going to continue their work after the project is over? Answering all these questions can help a project manager to create an efficient project team and reach the final goals of the project. (Cadle & Yeates 2004, 54.)

Other responsibilities of the project manager will be discussed in the next subchapter. In addition, the competences making him/her successful are also reviewed.

## **2.2 Role, responsibilities and competences of the project manager**

“The project manager is a person assigned by the performing organization to lead the team that is responsible for achieving the project objectives” (Project Management Institute 2013).

The role of a project manager is very different from a functional manager or an operations manager. While a functional manager is providing oversight for a functional or business unit, and an operations manager ensures that all business operations are efficient, a project manager works closely with many roles in the organization, such as a business analyst, a quality manager and a portfolio manager. (Project Management Institute 2013.)

Generally speaking, the main responsibility of a project manager is to satisfy the needs of the team, individual employees, project, tasks, etc. A project manager is a link between the strategy of the company and the project team. Projects can help a company to grow and survive in the competitive business environment, since they create such business values as improved business processes, better and more developed or completely new products and services. Projects help a company to be more flexible and respond better to changes in unstable business environment and competitive market. (Project Management Institute 2013.)

Aside from any area-specific skills, appropriate for the exact project, a project manager needs to pose the following competencies:

- Knowledge – what knowledge a project manager has about managing projects
- Performance – besides the knowledge, what a project manager is able to do
- Personal – how the project manager behaves during the project activity, including personal characteristics, leadership and attitude.

(Project Management Institute 2013.)

Since the project manager coordinates the work between many members of the company, such as stakeholders, team members and others, in order to be effective he/she needs to find a balance between the technical, interpersonal and conceptual skills. The appropriate set of skills, and a good balance between them, helps the project manager to analyse situations and act appropriately. Project Management Institute (2013) gives the following list of interpersonal skills that are essential for a project manager: “Leadership, Team building, Motivation, Communication, Influencing, Decision making, Political and cultural awareness, Negotiation, Trust building, Conflict management”. (Project Management Institute 2013.) The details of each skill are given below.

**Leadership** is the ability of a manager to concentrate an effort of his/her team on one common goal. In other words, it is the ability to get things done through other members of the team (or company). Certainly it should be done with the respect and trust, and never with fear and submission. (Project Management Institute 2013.) The leader should be oriented to the result, not to the activity. A good leader would never do any useless job, that would not lead his/her towards the desired results. (Tracy 2014, 51.)

**Team building** is when a manager is able to help other individuals to work with each other as a team, communicate and collaborate with each other. In the end, leadership together with team building should create a teamwork. It is necessary for a project manager to build a team, in which would be supportive emotional climate (Dyer, Dyer & Dyer 2013, 210). Team building can include tasks like setting goals, defining roles, negotiating responsibilities and procedures, conflict management, motivation and leadership. It is a task of the Project Manager to create a proper team environment. Problems that occur during the project life should be discussed within the team without blaming individuals. Team building can be supported by the top management, also by encouraging team members with appropriate rewards, team member commitment endorsement, creating a team identity, efficient managing of conflicts and of course providing leadership. Team building is one of the biggest parts of the project and it is ongoing process, which should lead to bet-

ter decision making, information exchange and mutual trust. (Project Management Institute 2013.)

**Motivation** is a driving factor for a project team, since they are usually comprised from people with diverse backgrounds, different expectation and personal objectives. The success of the whole project depends a lot on the motivation of every member. Motivating in a project environment means providing people with the objectives that they value the most. It can include for example challenging work, different rewards, appreciation or financial compensation. (Project Management Institute,2013.) The person is considered as motivated if he/she has the energy and conviction to achieve goals. (Thomas 2004, 58.)

**Communication** is admitted to be one of the most common reasons for projects to succeed or to fail. Communication should be established efficiently between the project team, project manager, external stakeholders and other parties. The project manager, in order to succeed in building good communication channels within the team members, should be well informed about the communication style of different people and cultural nuances. Effective communication leads to better understanding for a project manager what information should be given to which member of the team, what information should be received. All together this knowledge leads to the successful team work. Listening is also essential part of communication. A good manager should be aware of different listening techniques – both active and passive. He/she also should be able to listen to the team members, understand their opinions and make a right decision in the end. (Project Management Institute 2013.)

**Influencing** is the way to encourage other people to cooperate towards the common goal by using power and interpersonal skills. Team members can be influenced by showing own example, clarifying the decision making process, adjusting interpersonal style to the audience and applying the power skilfully, while thinking about long-term collaboration. (Project Management Institute 2013.)

**Decision making** is usually presented in four different styles: coin flip (random), command, consensus and consultation. The decision style is determined by several factors, such as trust, time, quality and acceptance. Decision can be made either individually or within the team. Project Management Institute suggests for project teams and project managers to use the following six-phase decision making model (Figure 4). (Project Management Institute 2013.)

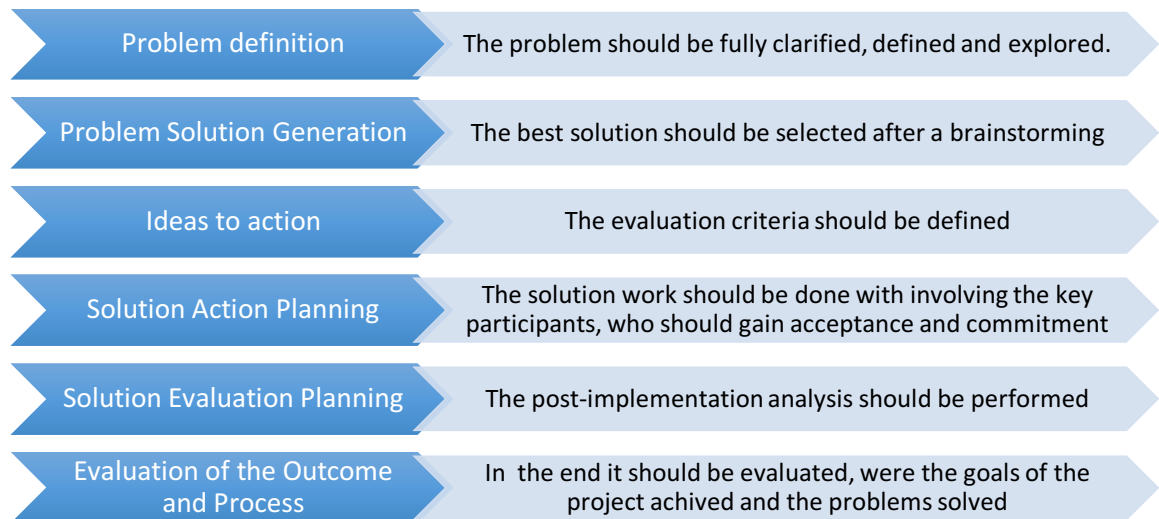


Figure 4. Six-phase decision model (Project Management Institute 2013.)

**Political and cultural awareness** is an influential competence for a Project manager. Skilfully applied organizational politics can help a manager to be successful, while ignoring political and cultural norms can cause problems for the whole team. Paying attention to cultural differences of the team members can benefit the project outcome, create mutual trust and a win-win situation. (Project Management Institute 2013.)

**Negotiation** is a process of discussing the problem with parties with either common or opposed interests and finding the compromise between them. It is one of the key competences of a good project manager. For successful negotiations several skills and actions might help, such as ability to analyse the current situation, to focus on interests and issues more than on attitude, to ask more and promise less in order to be realistic, to listen attentively and speak articulately. (Project Management Institute 2013.)

**Trust building** is vital part of a leadership. Trust will help a team to cooperate, will lead to information sharing and finding an effective problem solution. Without trust the collaboration becomes impossible. There are some actions, that can help a manager to build trust:

- Resolving problems by direct and open communication
  - Keeping the members of the team and the stakeholders informed
  - Being direct and accurate when explaining needs and expectations
  - Sharing the information even if there is a possibility that it is wrong.
  - Looking above own interests
- (Project Management Institute 2013.)

**Conflict management** is unavoidable in a project environment. There can be many sources of conflict, such as disruption in communication or lack of resources. Even though a conflict might become a crucial for a project, if effectively managed, it can actually help a

team to make a better solution in the end. Managing a conflict requires a manager to involve all his/her interpersonal skills. (Project Management Institute 2013.)

**Coaching** is a process of helping a project team to reach a higher level of competency and performance. Coaching can be performed in different ways, for example informal or formal training. This action can help a team member to improve the skills required for a successful completion of the task. Coaching is considered successful, when the employees' "can't do" turns into "can do". (Project Management Institute 2013.)

The success of the project manager is commonly measured by an assessment whether the desired results were delivered on time, on budget and with high quality or not (Roberts 2007, 48). A project manager plays a big role in the project structure. This is the person who collaborates with every team member, who sets the goals (usually together with a sponsor) for a project and who follows up the work process. Project manager is essential part of every project, no matter in what sphere of business project is launched. In this chapter the role of project manager in general was described, without relation to any concrete field. Other roles of the team may vary depending on business. The topic of the thesis is related exactly to information technology sphere, and more information about building project teams for IT projects will be in chapter 2.3.1.

### **2.3 Project management in the context of information technology**

While all the previous chapters of this thesis were describing the project management in general, all the following ones are dedicated to the information technology industry.

Quite often companies launch new projects in IT sphere because of the need to react quickly to the changes in a business environment and keep the leading position on the market or at least not to fall behind the competitors. In order to do so, a company needs to make a change in its structure or business processes, and it becomes a reason for investing in an information technology development project, such as a new information system. The term information system can be defined as "the total data processing system". (Panigrahy 2010, 189.)

The need for developing the information system never appears separately, but it is always built into specific business context. Usually there are four broad reasons for a company to invest into a new information system development project: "business survival, improved efficiency, potential competitive advantage and external factors, such as legislative change, privatization, merger and so on". (Cadle & Yeates 2004, 2.)



The best examples of **business survival** could be production automation systems and workflow systems. Time is the key factor in this case – the organization is trying to make the production process faster by implementing a new information system. Producing more goods in the same period of time gives a competitive advantage to a company. (Cadle & Yeates 2004, 2.)

In case of **improving the efficiency** the main factor is not to be faster, but to make better decisions. By using an information system, the management of the company is able to gather and analyse information, which in the end helps to make a decision, which would be the most suitable and efficient in this situation. Management information systems are an example of this case. (Cadle & Yeates 2004, 3.)

When the main reason for a change is **competitive advantage**, the goal of the project is to encourage innovation and new ideas. They are most commonly applied in the end-user solutions development. (Cadle & Yeates 2004, 3.)

And the last reason for a change in this list are **external factors**. Here the situation is not completely under control of the project team, because the specifications of the new information system are brought from outside. For example, the requirements for the new system can be offered by the stakeholders. In such situation it is very critical to keep all the parties informed on the progress of the development project. (Cadle & Yeates 2004, 3.)

No matter what was the reason for creating a new software, it is always a good idea to study first what competitors already have. This can help to find out what similar systems are there on the market and how can we differentiate our new product from them. The practice of comparing different companies, services or products to each other is called benchmarking. It is a very useful quality tool that helps a company to improve its performance by learning from others. (Patterson 1995, 4.)

Tuominen (2012, 35) suggests to follow 10 step model when doing benchmarking:

- determine what to benchmark – find out what issue, critical for the company success, is going to be benchmarked
- identify benchmark companies – find out what companies are significantly better in this issue
- measure performance gap – find out in which way a competing company is better
- identify enablers resulting in excellence – find out what exactly needs additional development in order to achieve better performance results
- learn how we do it – study of own processes
- learn how they do it – study of the competitors' processes
- establish performance goals – find the ideas to be implemented

- adapt and implement – prepare a plan and schedule to implement the ideas, found on the previous step
- continuous development to gain superiority – use a continuous measurement and make sure that all the goals were achieved
- start again with higher targets – set the long-term goal and start from the beginning (Tuominen 2012, 35.)

After the benchmarking is done, it is time to move forward and start a project. Starting a new project always means creating a change either in the organisational structure or just in the everyday routine of the employees. It is normal to feel stress during the changes. After implementing a new information system, the changes almost always face resistance from the people whose work is affected by this new system, if managers did not forecast the personal reactions and did not handle the change well. (Cadle & Yeates 2004, 5.)

Every change consists of two parts – threat and opportunity. Usually the project manager and other managers are the people, who see the opportunity in every change, but the people who are targets for a new system usually feel a threat. Those people can be regular employees, who will have to use a new system. (Cadle & Yeates 2004, 5.)

Resistance can be either passive or active. Active resistance is the visible one and can be expressed in, for example, sabotaging the project. Some employees decide to go on strike in order to stop the change. The passive resistance is not so obvious, but also can have a huge impact on the project. For example, in the meetings some of the staff can claim some requirements to the new system, and after those are created they can say that the system does not meet their requirements. (Cadle & Yeates 2004, 5.)

In order to deal with resistance, it is useful to understand the ups and downs that describe the behaviour during the lifecycle of the information technology project. The lifecycle is shown in Figure 5.

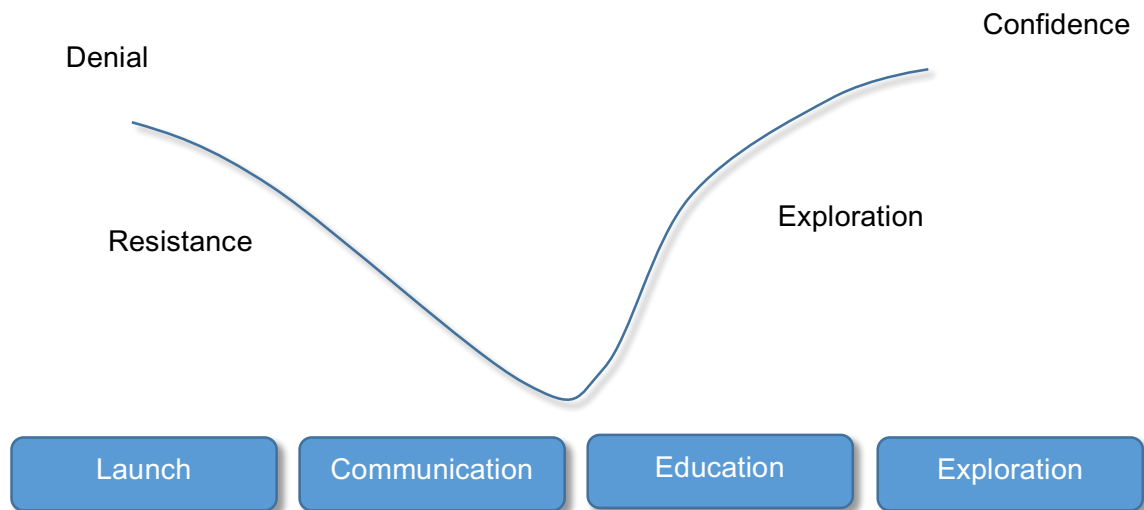


Figure 5. The phases of change (Cadle & Yeates 2004, 6).

The curve on the Figure 5 shows the *enthusiasm for change*. First it drops, but then people manage to increase their enthusiasm towards the end of the project. The manager is the one who should lead people along that curve. One important thing that managers should remember according to Cadle and Yeates (2004) is that “being right is not enough”. They also have to pay attention to every phase of the change implementation. (Cadle & Yeates 2004, 6.)

From Figure 5 the reader can see that the first reaction that people tend to have when reacting to a change is **denial**. They deny the whole need to change since they think that their current skills are applicable to the new situation. “No need for a new system” – they think. But after people gain some knowledge about the new system, their confidence starts to drop, because they realise that the amount of work is much bigger than they expected. They start to **resist** change. Slowly employees start to **explore** the new system and their confidence grows. They solve their problems by talking them through with co-workers or by learning on their mistakes. And after some time, people gain **confidence**. They feel proud after they have explored what benefits the new system can bring. They become more reactive, determined and self-assured. (Cadle & Yeates 2004, 6.)

The work of the project manager includes leading people through the change. In the first phase, launching a project, it is a good idea to get the help and support from different directions. Cadle and Yeates (2004) suggest to work in partnership with the sponsors on this stage. They also suggest to find the leaders in the company and get their support as well. In the future they can become the coaches for the new system. In order to give people some tangible results already from the beginning, the branding of the new system can

be created. For example, name and logo can bring the brand into existence. (Cadle & Yeates 2004, 5.)

The next but overlapping phase of change management is “winning people’s hearts and minds” (Cadle & Yeates 2004, 6). Here communication is the key. Trying to involve people into working on the project is a good strategy. For example, employees can be involved into brainstorming meetings or participate in creating the risk profile of the project.

Cadle and Yeates (2004) offer a very useful model which helps in winning people’s hearts and minds, which is called AABCC and looks the following way:

AA Identify audiences and the actions you want from them. *Audiences* and *actions*.

BB Identify the barriers which audiences might have that may prevent them from delivering those actions and tell them about the benefits that will come from the actions. *Barriers* and *benefits*.

CC Choose the communication channels to each audience and the controls and measures that you will use to check that the messages have been received and understood. *Communications* and *controls*.

(Cadle & Yeates 2004, 13.)

The third phase is educating the end users. The most efficient way of training is to make it work related. There is no point for the end users to learn separate menus and options of the system without relating them to their workflow. It is necessary to remember that the high quality training with high quality study materials will create high expectations for the end users from the system. (Cadle & Yeates 2004, 14.) Also educating the staff benefits the organisation because it creates a competitive advantage (Denton 2002, 197).

The last phase of the change is the “after go-live” (Cadle & Yeates 2004). When the system is launched, the work is not over yet. Work only begins now for the end users. On this stage the user support becomes imperative. Help desk should be organized and it should respond quickly to the requests users might have. (Cadle & Yeates 2004, 14.)

In order to implement the change successfully, the project manager should take a critical look at the people involved into the change process, classify them according to the matrix of change (Figure 6), and of course treat them differently, depending on to which group the users were classified. In every project the proponents and opponents exist. People with different levels of competence and commitment can bring different kinds of benefits to the project. The Figure 6 presents the matrix of change.

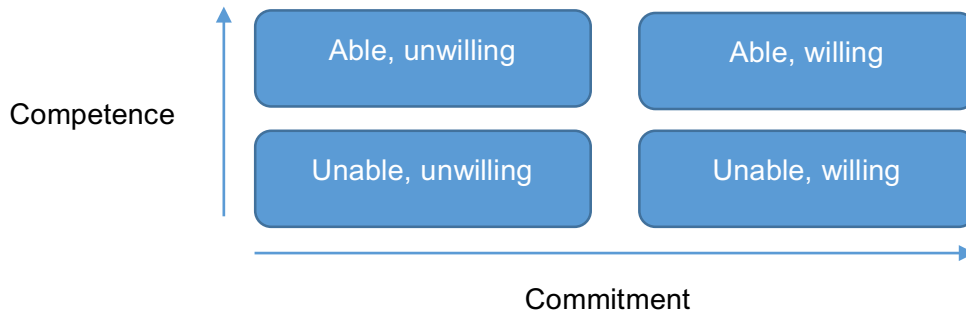


Figure 6. The change competence/commitment matrix (Cadle & Yeates 2004, 13.)

People, who are competent, but unwilling to participate in the change (top left corner on the Figure 6) probably feel insecure about some aspect of the project. This situation needs deeper analysis and the main concerns should be found and cleared up. People who are confident and willing to participate in the project (top right corner on the Figure 6) can become the leaders in the change project. It is a good idea to use their knowledge and support in order to help other users to succeed and fight their unsureness. Those people who are both unwilling and incompetent (bottom left corner of the Figure 6 should be either sooner or later moved to another side of the matrix or moved out of the project. People who are willing to change but not competent enough for that (bottom right corner of the Figure 6) need more training and support. After a proper training they are able to become valuable members of the team with the right attitude. (Cadle & Yeates 2004, 13-14.)

Figure 7 sums up the four-phase model: it shows the extended model, which describes user reaction to change and actions that take place on every phase. (Cadle & Yeates 2004, 15.)

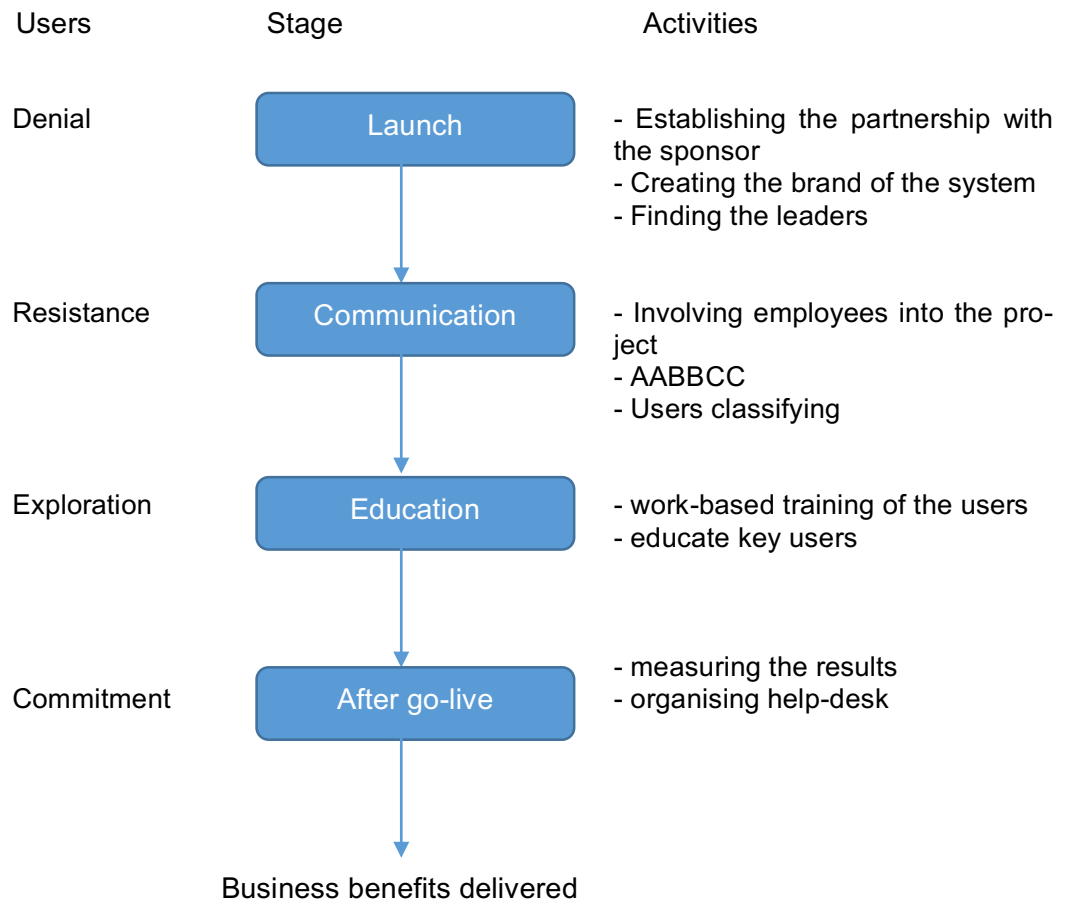


Figure 7. Extended four-phase model of managing business change (Cadle & Yeates 2004, 15.)

There is no only one ready decision about how to manage a business change. Every project manager has to find the best solution for every specific situation. But the key elements, such as proper planning, communication and education will always be helpful in every project. The changes can be applied to the everyday work life both while the project is still ongoing and when it is finished. (Cadle & Yeates 2004, 19.)

If the project was finished, it is time for the project manager to measure the results and make a conclusion, if it was successful or not. Every project has its objectives, and the project can be considered successful if it has reached its objectives. An objective is an endpoint of the project and it should be defined as the end result of some work, but not as a process. When manager defines the objectives of the project, words like increase, reduce, distribute, establish or design something should be used. These words describe the end result of the project. Such words as assist, compare and analyse should never be used. They describe endless process. If a project manager uses correct words for describ-

ing the end result, it will be easier to make a conclusion, if the project was successful or not. (Saladis & Kerzner 2011, 80-81.)

Great mechanism for establishing the objectives is SMART system. Abbreviation SMART stands for “specific, measurable, action-oriented, realistic and time-bound” (Saladis & Kerzner 2011, 82). Generally speaking, every project consists of some smaller problems, that should be solved, and every smaller problem has its own goal. In the end the whole project has the end goal that should be reached by solving those smaller issues. A goal should be defined clearly, be specific (S in SMART) and answer the questions “what, how and when” (Saladis & Kerzner 2011, 82). A goal should be measurable (M in SMART) in some specific amounts, for example in percentage on which sales increased or amount of people that were trained during the project. In a goal it should be stated clearly what actions should be performed in order to reach the goal (A in SMART). It also should be realistic so the team would believe in it and stay motivated (R in SMART). Time should be limited, so team members and a sponsors would know when to expect the results (T in SMART). (Saladis & Kerzner 2011, 82.) When the results of the project match the original objectives, the project can be considered successful.

If the project was related to improving some services for the end customers, for example, to improve customers’ satisfaction level with the company’s services, it is a good idea to evaluate the success of the project by collecting feedback. According to Scott (2000, 101-103), a proper feedback system should be continuing, precise, concentrated on the end user, focused on narrow number of indicators and visualised on a graph in the end.

So far the topic of project management and different aspects of it was discussed in this thesis. Nevertheless, the biggest and the most important part of every project is the project team. The team is responsible for the end result, and managing a team is a real challenge for the project manager and also one of his main responsibilities. Chapter 2.1 already mentioned different structures of project teams depending on the organisational structure of the company. The next subchapter explains in further detail, how the project team for information technology industry looks like.

### **2.3.1 Creating a project team: roles and responsibilities.**

After the structure of the organization is defined it is possible to create a proper project team within the company. How to define an organization structure and how does it influence the project structure was already described in chapter 2.1.

Cadle and Yeates (2004, 55) offer a standard model for an IT project structure, which is shown in Figure 8. This model is basic, and in reality in every organization some roles might be called differently and have different relations to each other. Also in smaller projects some roles might be combined.

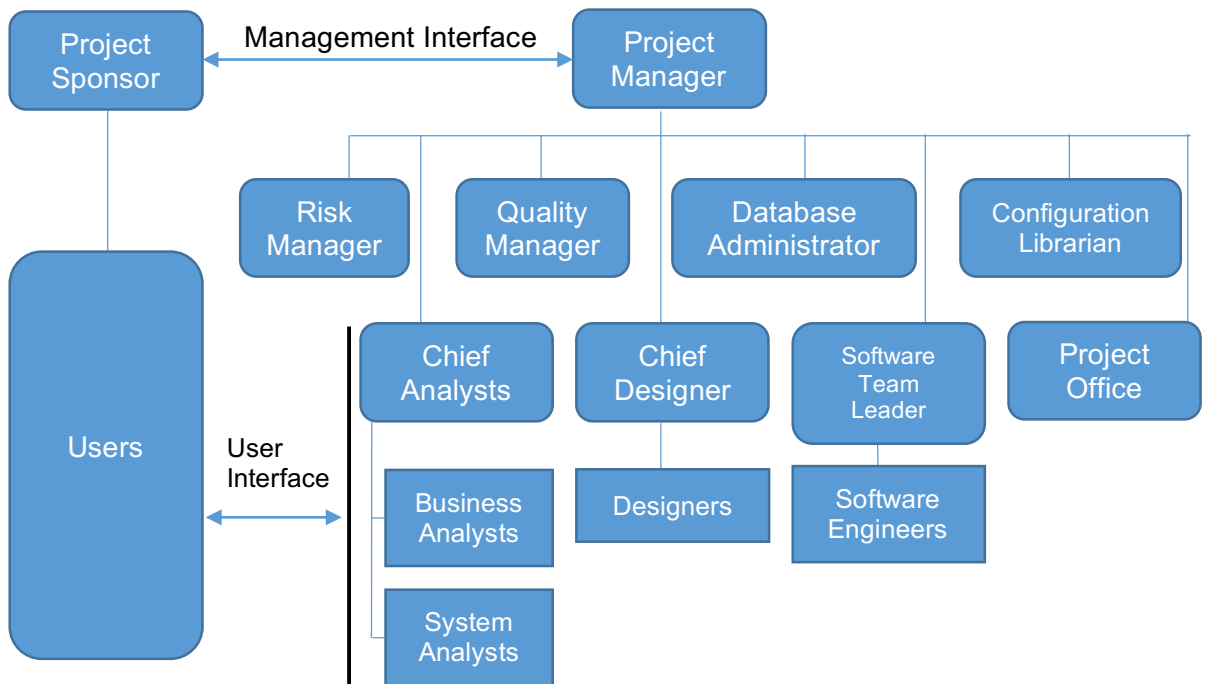


Figure 8. Generic project organisation and roles (Cadle & Yeates 2004, 55.)

The example represented in Figure 8 is related to a project, where the end product is going to be an information system. If the end result is going to be different, this model might not be applicable. Since the topic of the thesis is related to information technology, author considered this model to be the most suitable one.

Three basic roles that are present in every project are a sponsor, user and a project manager. No matter what is going to be the end product of the project, or what is the size of the company, these three roles are almost always applicable. (Cadle & Yeates 2004, 54-56.)

**A project sponsor** invests resources into the project. This member of the team is not necessarily the user of the future product which the project team should produce. It is even better if the sponsor is not going to use it, because in this case it is easier to make impartial decisions. Normally the sponsor is the initiator of the project and also defines the final goals and specifications of the future system. (Cadle & Yeates 2004, 54-55.)



**A user** will work with the future system and also define the requirements of it. In most cases a user is not only one person, but a group of employees. They all can have different opinions towards the final goal for the project, so for the developers it is always better to agree the final decisions with the sponsor. (Cadle & Yeates 2004, 55.)

**A project manager** is commonly chosen by the sponsor and is a person who is going to monitor the project team work on a daily basis, motivate the project team members, keep the sponsor informed about the work progress and help the whole team to achieve the project objectives. A more detailed description was given in chapter 2.2. (Cadle & Yeates 2004, 56.)

The three project roles explained above are essential and have to be present in every project team. Other roles may vary from one project to another, and additionally some of them can be combined depending on the size of the company and the final goals of every project. (Cadle & Yeates 2004, 54-56.) The roles, that can be changed or combined, are the following:

- A **risk manager** is usually present in very large projects. Big projects have many risks, and a project manager might not be able to monitor, identify, classify and reduce, so this function is delegated them to the Risk Manager.
- A **quality manager** also is present mostly in the big projects. This is the team member who makes a quality plan, checks whether all the parts of the future product follow the quality standards and provides a guidance to other team members on the topic of quality.
- A **chief analyst** usually performs business related tasks and analysis work. He/she is a person who understands the business field in which the project is functioning. Chief analyst is able to discuss business issues with the high level management of the organization and lead the team towards the business goals of the project.
- A **chief designer** controls both the work of the design team and the programmers. He/she can develop specific standards for the project and has to be experienced in the technology used in the project.
- A **database administrator** is a person who designs and supports a database. Working closely with the Chief Designer, this team member creates the standards for the items storage in the database, including naming and placement.
- A **configuration librarian** is usually present in big projects. This role refers to the quality management. Librarian should monitor the versions of the system, configurations of every version and keep the change history.
- A **team leader** is a manager of smaller group inside of the project. For example, he/she can be a team leader of programmers, designers or engineers. While the Project Manager works on the overall objectives of the project, smaller issues are delegated to the team leaders.
- A **project office** supports the project with administrative tasks, for example by organizing meetings and handling the written records. Often Project Office is involved in several projects at the same time.

(Cadle & Yeates 2004, 56-57.)

The roles inside every project team depend on the sphere of business, where this project was launched. The roles of an information technology project were listed above. As the author said earlier, only three roles here are essential (user, sponsor and project manager) and others may vary. Now when the roles are clear, it is time to find out the best practices of the actual project team management.

### 2.3.2 Managing the project team

After the project team is created, the Project Manager should develop and lead it towards the project objectives. Schwable (2006, 374) offers several techniques that should help manage a team.

The first technique is called **observation and conversation**. It is difficult to be aware about how the work in the team is going if the manager is not able to come to the employees and have a conversation. Manager has to be physically present and able to negotiate different work issues with the project team. (Schwable 2006, 374.)

The next technique is called **project performance appraisals**. Performance evaluation should be given by the Project Manager at least once during the project. The amount and frequency of feedback depends on the length of the project. If one of the team members was performing poorly, it is the job of the project manager to find out the reason and take the appropriate action. (Schwable 2006, 374.)

The third technique is **conflict management**. Conflicts might be crucial for the work of the whole team. It is very important for a project manager to learn how to manage them efficiently. Blake and Mouton (1994.) offer several ways to handle a conflict:

- *Confrontation* is when a Manager faces the conflict directly and solves it using the problem-solving approach. He/she forces the parties to work through their disagreements.
- *Compromise* is when a Manager makes the conflict parties to bargain and find a solution which will be appropriate for both of them and creates a win-win situation.
- *Smoothing* is when a Manager avoids the "sharp corners" and tries to concentrate more on the agreement points.
- *Forcing* is usually used by the autocratic Managers. This is the approach which creates a win-lose situation. One of the conflict parties has to agree with the other one.
- *Withdrawal* is when a Manager backs down. This is the worst possible option for managing a conflict and not recommended to use.

(Blake & Mouton 1994.)

The last technique that Schwable (2006, 375) offers for team management is an **issue log**. It is a document where the manager writes down the tasks for every team member

and which helps the project team to work effectively. A responsible team member should be assigned for each issue in the log. These team members will resolve the issues assigned for them. Also the desirable result should be described clearly in every task. The issue log is especially important in IT projects. (Schwable 2006, 375.)

Project team members are not always located at the same place. Sometimes members of the team can be in different offices or even different countries. Management of this kind of team is called “distance management” and it requires some certain approaches and tools. (Smith 2014, 5.)

Communication inside the distance team can be both asynchronous and synchronous. During the asynchronous communication every member of the team works on his/her own pace in front of personal working space. This might include communication via email, newsgroups or special software. Synchronous communication type includes collaboration via videoconferencing, conference calls or web conferencing. (Smith 2014, 5.)

For successful management of distance teams, Edwards & Wilson (2003) offer several guidelines, where they pay special attention, for example, to communication, reporting results and recording results.

Edwards and Wilson (2003, 153) claim that it is recommended to create user profiles for team members who work at distance. It helps them to get to know each other better and also to gain useful information about each other. Those can be, for example, profiles in some information system, or some special forms with profiles can be given to every team member electronically. The profile might include the name, address, phone number, email, role in the team, short personal story or professional skills description of the team member. The length, content and ways of distribution of the profiles vary from one team to another. In some companies, personal calls are organized so employees could talk to each other and get acknowledged. (Edwards & Wilson 2003, 153-154.)

Furthermore, it is critical to agree on the communication rules inside the team. Because of the inability of the team members to meet face-to-face, some misunderstandings may occur in people’s communication. The set of rules should describe the etiquette, channels, technology, timelines and form of the communication. (Patel 2008, 235.) The communication protocol, created by the team and project manager, should state, for example, how often employees should communicate with each other, in which way and for what purposes every communication channel should be used and can separate members communicate without letting the manager know. (Edwards & Wilson 2003, 153-154.)

Using only the asynchronous communication methods is not efficient enough. Sometimes the team needs to arrange a meeting. It is a good practice to agree on the technology and guidelines for them as well. Team members can meet by using, for example, video calls. The meetings should be scheduled beforehand, and for this purpose electronic calendars can be used. Before the meeting it is useful to make an agenda and handle it electronically to all the team members. After the meeting someone of the members should distribute the minutes of the meeting as well. (Edwards & Wilson 2003, 155-156.)

Guidelines for reporting should be set and be clear for all team members. It should be stated there in which form employees report about their work results, how often, what are the forms of the documents that they should fill out, etc. Edwards and Wilson (2003, 169-170.) also suggest to use a database-based website to store this kind of information.

The performance of every team member should be evaluated and rewarded. It does not have to be a money reward, but it can be, for example, internal recognition. When one of the team members shows outstanding performance, other team members can be informed about it. It is a difficult task for the team members to stay motivated when working distantly. The Project Manager should create a reward and recognition system, which would motivate the staff to work better. (Edwards & Wilson 2003, 173.)

Managing a project team is not an easy task, especially when the team members are not located together. This subchapter described the specifics of distance management, which include using a lot of technology, sets of rules and protocols. (Edwards & Wilson 2003.)

Virtual work can be either very successful or unsuccessful. In order to make it productive, the distance work should be planned very well beforehand, the employees' performance should be monitored by the project manager on a regular basis, the team members should report about their work on time and the good performance should be rewarded. (Edwards & Wilson 2003.)

Chapter 2 of the thesis introduced the reader to the theoretical aspects of the project management, including the projects in the field of information technology. The next chapters present how the theoretical knowledge can be applied in real life, exemplified by creation of a new information system for a Finnish company.

### **3 Project management for the SoloVisa development**

This chapter describes the practical application of the theoretical knowledge from chapter 2. The author of the thesis is employed in the company Lähialuematkat on the position of project manager. It was decided by the management of the company to launch a new project in order to create a new information system – SoloVisa.

The background of Lähialuematkat, the goals of the project and also introduction of the project team and project management tools used during the work can be found in this chapter. The system SoloVisa itself is also described in this chapter, with the special attention to three main issues: order statuses, communication channel and order location.

#### **3.1 Company introduction**

Travel agency Lähialuematkat is a genuinely Finnish company, which was established in 1991 in Helsinki, Finland. It has two main business activities: selling trips to Russia and processing visa applications both to Russia and other countries. According to these two activities, the company is divided into two departments: visa department and travel tours department. (Lähialuematkat Official Website 2016.)

Travel tours department sells individual and group tours to Russia. Customers can either buy a ready tour package or ask customer service specialist to create a tour to Russia according to the specific requirements. This includes, for example, booking a hotel, travel tickets, tour guides and transportation. (Lähialuematkat Official Website 2016.)

Visas department processes only visa applications. The application can come either from the travel tours department or straight from the customer. Before the year 2011 it used to process only visa applications to Russia, but later it was decided to include other destinations as well, such as China, India and others. (Lähialuematkat Official Website 2016.)

Headcount of the company was 18 people in 2014. The management of the company includes the CEO, Mr. Peter Holst and the Managing Director, Ms. Maria Mäki. (Viisumi- ja Matkapalvelu Lähialuematkat Russian Tours 2015.)

Since the main market for Lähialuematkat is inbound tourism in Russia, the financial success of the company depends a lot on the number of Finnish tourists going to Russia for leisure or business.

In the last two years the situation with the inbound tourism in Russia became tougher. Events in Ukraine resulted in some political restrictions and economic sanctions in Europe against Russia. Probably it became one of the reasons for the decrease in the inbound tourism in 2014, which is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Inbound tourism (Russia 2012 - 2014) (Russia Tourism Report, 16)

Arrivals	2012	2013	2014e
Total arrivals, '000	28,176.50	30,792.09	24,590.21
Total arrivals, '000, % y-o-y	13.00	9.30	-20.10
Arrivals by region, Europe, '000	6,527.44	7,060.03	5,672.73
Arrivals by region, Europe, % y-o-y	9.50	8.20	-19.70

This decrease in the number of tourists going to Russia immediately resulted in decrease of the company's financial results in 2014: the turnover of the company rapidly dropped on almost 30% in comparison with the year 2013 (Table 2).

Table 2. Financial ratio summary of Lähialuematkat Oy (Viisumi- ja Matkapalvelu, 2015)

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Turnover, '000€	1610	2601	2517	2881	2023
Turnover change, %	-4.10	61.60	-3.20	14.50	-29.80

According to the forecast of the total arrivals to Russia, the number will continue decreasing every year by 10% (Table 3). This is a very pessimistic trend for all the travel agencies whose main destination is Russia.

Table 3. Inbound tourism (Russia 2015-2019) (Russia Tourism Report, 16)

	2015f	2016f	2017f	2018f	2019f
Total arrivals, '000	22,224.44	19,996.37	17,951.21	16,527.18	14,736.60
Total arrivals, '000, % y-o-y	-9.60	-10.00	-10.20	-10.20	-10.80
Arrivals by region, Europe, '000	5,180.53	4,683.04	4,223.30	3,921.09	3,515.31
Arrivals by region, Europe, % y-o-y	-8.70	-9.60	-9.80	-7.20	-10.30

The management of the company made a decision to start increasing the number of trips to the countries other than Russia and of course extend the visa services as well.

Lähialuematkat started to process the visas all over the world.

It is a complicated process to make visas to every country of the world: a lot of information that should be stored somewhere, organized and presented to the customer in some easy and accessible way. Obviously an information system is needed to manage this significant amount of data.

One more reason for launching a new system was competitive advantage. Some of the company's competitors had already similar systems, so not having one was putting Lähialuematkat behind. As Cadle & Yeates (2004) suggests, when the reason of change is competitive advantage, it always actualizes into end-user solution, which in this case is an information system.

Also as the reader might remember from the previous chapters, Patterson (1995) suggests to do a benchmarking before launching a new project or product. And Tuominen (2012) offers a 10 step model for this purpose.

The company has already determined what to benchmark – the online systems for online visa purchasing among competitors. The next step is to find benchmark companies (Tuominen 2012), and there are several companies in Finland that provide visa services to corporate and private customers. From all the companies, presented on the visa services market, should be chosen the ones, that:

- Make visas to Russia and to the rest of the world
- Have their own information system, where customers can find out all the requirements for the concrete visa product (and maybe make an order)

Two companies in Finland fulfil the requirements, mentioned above: Company X and Company Y (the real names were removed before publication due to privacy reasons).

Company X is a big Nordic company with offices in Stockholm, Gothenburg, Copenhagen, Oslo and Helsinki. Besides assisting in visa applications processes, they also provide legalization and translation services in Nordic counties. Another company that can be considered as competitor of Lähialuematkat is Company Y. They have similar services as Company X and also offices in Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland.

The next step according to Tuominen (2012) is to measure the performance gap. Since this benchmarking study was done before developing SoloVisa, the main gap between Lähialuematkat and its competitors was that competitors had their systems already and Lähialuematkat did not have any. This is why the director of the company decided that it

would be beneficial for the image of the company to have an online system for their customers.

The theory always should be adjusted when it comes to the real project, so the next few steps, such as “identify enablers resulting in excellence, learn how we do it, learn how they do it, establish performance goals” (Tuominen 2012) the author decided to merge. The results can be found in Table 4.

Table 4. Benchmarking for SoloVisa

	Company X	Company Y	SoloVisa
Information about the visa products in several languages	Yes	Yes	Yes
Information about other services, such as legalization, translation, driving license application, notary public, etc.	Yes	Yes	Yes
Opportunity to add any destination into favourites	Yes	Yes	No
Individual link which leads customer to the order	Yes	No	Yes
Opportunity to email the visa requirements and other documents	Yes	No	Yes
Opportunity of feedback inside the system concerning the order	No	No	Yes
Opportunity to make an order right away inside the system	No	Yes	Yes
Obvious and easily accessible prices	No	No	Yes
Available for private customers (unregistered)	No	No	Yes
Possibility to follow up the history of the orders in the system	No	Yes	Yes
Possibility to save traveller data for the future orders	No	Yes	No

As can be seen from the Table 4, the management of Lähialuematkat had decided to include into SoloVisa most of the features that the competitors have and some more. It was only decided that the opportunity to add destinations to the favourites and to save traveller data for the future orders are not important at this point. Maybe they will be added into the system later. Other steps of Tuominen’s model are out of the scope of this thesis since it was not the aim for the author do describe the continuous measurements of the end results.

So in the end, all the features of the competitors’ systems were taken into consideration when developing SoloVisa. What was created as a result is explained in the next chapter, where the author introduces SoloVisa system and its features.



### 3.2 SoloVisa system description

This chapter introduces the SoloVisa system to the reader. The author decided to put the description of the system before the explanation of its development process, so it would be easier for the reader to imagine the areas of work, described in further chapters.

SoloVisa was created as a visa purchasing system for the customers of Finnish travel agency Lähialuematkat. The system is online based and it is free of charge for the users. (SoloVisa 2013.) Information about different visa products Lähialuematkat offers to its customer is presented on the website. The destination countries where the agency can make a visa application are displayed on the first page. The next steps offer the user to choose the purpose of the trip to the chosen country, the number of planned visits, preferable processing time and price (prices for different visa products vary a lot and depend on a wide range of characteristics). User can read the information about the product(s) he/she is interested in under the product names while making the choice. After the desired product is chosen the user can fill out the order form where he/she provides the contact information and the desired deliver and payment method. After order is completed, the user gets an email notification, which includes the summary of the order, application form, summary of the visa requirements and the further instructions on how to deliver documents for processing.

Both registered and unregistered users can make orders in SoloVisa and access the information about the visa requirements. If unregistered user wants to get an account in SoloVisa, he/she can contact the account manager (this role in SoloVisa project will be described in the further chapters) and sign a contract with Lähialuematkat. This feature is available only for corporate clients. Account manager creates a company profile in SoloVisa, and then sends a login and password to the new client. Corporate customers who have their own account have additional features available, such as ability to follow the order history and the messaging history for every order.

Staff of Lähialuematkat have special status in the system with extended rights. They can create, modify, delete orders, create new users, organisations, create invoices, etc.

The main functionality of SoloVisa is the following:

- Unregistered and registered users can create orders
- Staff of Lähialuematkat can create, change and delete orders
- The price of the order is calculated automatically based on the amount of applicants, price of the visa and additional products

- All users get automatic notifications about their orders, both when they were created and when something was changed
- Both users and staff can send messages through the system. Unregistered users can do it by answering the automatic email, and those who have an account can do it directly from the system and see the whole history of each order
- Every message and attachment are connected to the correct order inside the system
- Staff can create invoices and send them to the customers. Several orders can be connected into one invoice
- Ability to track the mail by using integration with posti.fi
- Invoices and receipts can be printed

The main entities of SoloVisa are: user, order, visa product, comments, status, invoice, people, organisation, country, dictionary, service, reference, payment, discount group, journal and new order link.

The scheme of SoloVisa, with the description of its entities, their relations and functions can be found in Appendix 5. It is not the scope of the current thesis to describe the whole system in details, but to describe the work of a project manager using the examples of developing several functions of SoloVisa. How the project team looks like, what tools and techniques are used by the team members and project manager for communication and for tracking the work progress and what new features were developed as a result is described in the further chapters of the thesis.

### **3.3 SoloVisa project introduction**

Now when it became more clear what SoloVisa actually is, the reader can be introduced to the process of developing the system.

The management of Lähialuematkat has made a decision to start building the system that is supposed to help in solving many company's problems, including the ones mentioned in the introduction to this work, and also to gain a competitive advantage.

The main goal of the project should be defined before starting it. What is going to be achieved in the end of the work? One of the most efficient ways to settle the goal is the SMART system (definition can be found in chapter 2.3). As it was mentioned earlier, the project has not only one global end result, but it also consists of smaller tasks, problems and issues with their own goals.

The following endpoints were established for SoloVisa project by the management of the company:

- To create an online visa purchasing system SoloVisa

- Replace with it old invoicing and customer relations system
- Move partly the communication between staff and customers to SoloVisa

Every of the three goals mentioned above consist of a huge amount of smaller tasks, but the scope of the thesis narrowed the number down to the three ones:

- To improve the awareness of the staff about the location of the documents by implementing the system of statuses and the journal
- To improve the awareness of the customers about the stage of their application process by implementing the automatic notification system
- To let the customers and the staff to communicate in a more organised way by implementing the messaging system inside SoloVisa

All the goals are specific, because the end result is written right in their descriptions. They are measurable, because users will be able to use the end results right away. Goals are action-oriented, since the needed actions are described as well. Also they are realistic and time bound, since the team members are professional enough to complete those tasks and the timing is usually discussed in the beginning of the work on every issue.

When it was time to start the project, first step was to create the project team for developing SoloVisa. Before describing the structure of the team, it is useful to first have a look at the structure of the company itself. Different structures of organizations were described in chapter 2.1. In reality the structure might not follow the template completely. The structure, work style and communication style of Lähialuematkat reminds mostly the matrix structure, but with some details of functional structure. The organisational structure of Lähialuematkat is presented in the Appendix 1.

As it was mentioned in the company introduction, Lähialuematkat is basically divided into two parts – visa department and travel department. The new system mostly aims to automate the visa part; this is the reason why the roles inside the travel department are not described in details.

On top of the structure is general manager, who is the owner of the company. The travel and visa departments have their own directors. Each person manages the work of the staff of the department. Besides these two departments, there is also own accounting division. The SoloVisa sales manager does not relate to any department and works only on getting new customers for SoloVisa and supporting the existing ones.

As it can be seen from the scheme in Appendix 1, even though the departments are separated according to their functions, which reminds a functional organisational structure,

some employees have several areas of responsibilities, which reminds matrix organization. For example, the director of travel department is also responsible for the marketing strategy of the whole company. The director of visa department is responsible as well for IT projects of the whole company and customer relations. Lately the customer relations were delegated to the SoloVisa sales manager, but not completely.

As the reader might remember from the theoretical part of the thesis, organisational structure defines the structure of the project team as well. The next chapter shows the team structure and roles and responsibilities of the team members.

### **3.4 Roles and responsibilities of the project team members**

The structure of the project team is presented on the figure in the Appendix 2. As it can be observed from that figure, the project team actually consists of employees from two different companies – Daturum and Lähialuematkat. In this project Lähialuematkat is a customer, who orders a system from the developer company Daturum. It was discussed already in the previous chapter that Lähialuematkat has the characteristics mostly of matrix organisational structure with some elements of functional structure as well. The structure of Daturum, which reminds “pure project structure”, is presented briefly in Appendix 2. (detailed description of different structures can be found in chapter 2.3).

The participants of the SoloVisa project are marked in figure with red borders. Those are: general manager of Lähialuematkat, general manager of Daturum, Director of visa department (who is also IT projects coordinator and customer relations manager) in Lähialuematkat, SoloVisa account manager in Lähialuematkat, SoloVisa project manager in Lähialuematkat (who is also a foreign visas specialist in the same company), and SoloVisa project manager from Daturum (who is also the senior developer there). As it was mentioned by Cadle and Yeates (2004), when the project is not too big, many roles of the project team can be combined. In case of SoloVisa project, many roles are combined as well, because Lähialuematkat is not a big company and SoloVisa is not too big project. But the main members, such as sponsor (general manager), users (staff) and project manager (two managers from two companies) do exist in this model.

The roles of every member in a typical project were described in chapter 2.3.1. In SoloVisa project team the roles and responsibilities do not differ too much from the model offered by Cadle and Yeates (2004).

The first role is **sponsor**. In this concrete project the sponsor is the general manager of Lähialuematkat. Other members of the team should report to the sponsor on a regular basis about the progress of the project. Sponsor is the person, who:

- initiated the project
- provides the financial resources for the project
- set the goals of the project
- registered SoloVisa trademark

In SoloVisa project one of the roles is called **account manager**. This role was not described by Cadle and Yeates in their example of the team structure, but this role basically combines the quality manager and risk manager roles (2004). In addition to quality and risk management, this person also manages users accounts in SoloVisa and customer relations with SoloVisa customers. The responsibilities of the account manager are the following:

- to find new customers for SoloVisa
- find out the opinions of the customers about SoloVisa
- monitor the quality of the information inside the system
- test the existing features in the system and suggest the new ones if needed

The director of visa department plays the role of **expert** in the team. This role is not included in the classic model, but in SoloVisa project it is necessary. The expert collaborates with the project managers from Lähialuematkat and Daturum. The main responsibilities are the following:

- to help designing the system by providing the answers about the business strategy of the company
- to suggest the new features for SoloVisa based on the customer's opinions and requirements
- to approve the models of the business processed, offered by project managers
- to participate in the regular conference calls
- provide the feedback on the work progress of the team

Another member on Lähialuematkat side is **project manager**. This person has to collaborate with all other members of the project from the both companies. The responsibilities are the following:

- To understand and describe the main business processes of the company. Description should be formalized for the further programming and designing. The important information for modelling can be obtained from the expert
- Divide all the work into separate tasks for the programmers from the developer's side
- Follow up the tasks and check after they are finished

- Collaborate with the project manager from Daturum, solve the current problems together
- Provide study materials for the employees of Lähialuematkat. On a regular basis support them in their experience of using SoloVisa
- Collect the system mistakes and bugs and report to Daturum by creating tasks in the tracker, which is described more accurately later

There is another **project manager** in SoloVisa project, but from Daturum. This person collaborates only with project manager from Lähialuematkat, expert from Lähialuematkat, general manager from Daturum and some junior programmers of Daturum and other specialists (for example usability specialists, web designers, HTML coders, etc.). His main responsibilities are the following:

- Solving the problems and tasks from the tracker
- Dividing all the work between other specialists in Daturum
- Programming
- Designing the internal structure of the system

**General manager** of Daturum controls many projects on their side. He is not too much involved into everyday work of SoloVisa project. The team has to report to this member as well. Sometimes he participates in the team meetings.

The project team of SoloVisa is international and located in two countries – Finland and Russia. Of course team members have to work distantly from each other. In order to do that, different communication and project management tools are used on a daily basis. The description of the concrete tools and how they are used by the project manager is provided in the next chapter.

### **3.5 Tools and techniques for management of SoloVisa project team**

The author of the thesis is employed as a project manager in Lähialuematkat. Even though there is another project manager in the team (from Daturum), his work is described in the thesis only briefly. All further descriptions refer to the work and experience of the author of the thesis.

As it was mentioned in the previous chapter, the SoloVisa team is international, which means that it is also a virtual team. The team members have to collaborate during their work by using both asynchronous and synchronous methods. The project manager is using several main virtual tools for managing the project team. Further in this chapter the author is going to both describe the tools itself and provide the examples of the work of the project manager with these tools. After finishing this part of the thesis, the reader

should have gained the understanding of the specifics of the work of the project manager on SoloVisa project.

SoloVisa system is supposed to solve a big number of problems that appear during the work of Lähialuematkat. This system involves many features and resolves many issues. The project is continuing already for several years, but the scope of the thesis makes the author to limit the amount of information about the SoloVisa project to several examples. In the introduction to this work three main problems were mentioned, and the process of solving them is described further in the thesis.

Before the description of solving the concrete problems, it is useful to have a look at the work of the Project Manager on the SoloVisa project in general and find out, what tools and techniques are used on a daily basis.

The first step of the Project Manager work is to analyse the required business process and find out its disadvantages. In order to do so, the process should be described first as it is. The process description can be in the form of a text or diagram. The form depends on the difficulty of the project and on the personality of the Project manager and other members of the team, their style of work and style of information perception.

On the first step of any problem analysis author usually uses observation. Schwable (2006) recommended it as one of the team management technique, but from the authors personal experience it was realized that this technique is as good also for business process analysis. Also the fact that the author started to work in Lähialuematkat as a visa assistant for Russian visas department helped a lot to understand the whole process and see the problems.

As a result of observation of the everyday work of the company, the author made a process description, which helped to understand every role and state. Here it should be mentioned, that on the first step of analysis the goal is not to describe the process in order to solve one single problem or task. The goal is to describe the work of the whole company in general, not including only those employees and actions that influence only one problem, but describe everything in detail. In this case some other issues might get visible, that were not seen before by the management. Sometimes the proper process description can even change the whole scope of the initial task.

From personal experience the author made a conclusion, that the visual presentation of the information works the best for most people. For this reason, the author usually makes

descriptions in the form of diagrams or presentations. One of the examples is when the author had to visualize the process where the customer brings the documents to the reception desk, and where his/her application is located after. One of the tools that helps to make visual presentations and the author personally finds very attractive for viewers is Prezi. The example of the process description made by the author for Lähialuematkat can be found on Prezi website (Ivankina 17 January 2014). The presentation is very interactive, it is highly recommended to follow the link and see the steps. This tool was chosen because of its usability, attractiveness, many interesting features and an affordable price. It is suitable not only for work within the virtual team, but for regular office presentations as well.

One might notice, that on this stage the job of the Project manager reminds the job of the Business analyst. This is partly true, because, as it was mentioned earlier in the thesis, in a small company and inside the small project some roles might be merged. So the business analysis in Lähialuematkat is also performed by the Project manager.

The next step, after the required business process was analysed and described, and after the project manager found out for herself the weak points of it, it is time to present the problem to the project team. Since the team is virtual and the members are located in different countries, the presentation is always virtual too. At this step the team had conference calls. The tool used to perform the call was Skype. This instrument allows the group calls, and also provides group chat and the ability to share the screen of one of the team members at a time.

The time of the call is arranged by the project manager using Google Calendar. This tool automatically considers the time difference and sends notifications to every member. Each group member can see the correct time for his/her own time zone. There are two options, when the member receives the invitation – to refuse or accept the invitation.

After the group call time is confirmed, the team members meet in Skype on the right time. The project manager presents the result of the analysis and her suggestions. Other members of the team make their suggestions too. The project manager keeps the meeting minutes. Google Docs is usually used for writing minutes because it is free of charge, it allows to save the documents in the cloud service and also to share the document with other members of the team. All members can edit one document at the same time. This is a great feature, because all the decisions made during the meeting can be written down, checked right away by other participants, commented and corrected if needed.



The team members, who are not able to participate in the meeting, or are not supposed to be present, but anyway want to stay up to date, receive an email with the meeting logs from the project manager. Later this function was moved to the Redmine platform, which will be described further.

After the meeting is finished and the future changes and additions for the system are agreed, the project manager should write a detailed task for the senior developer. Schwable (2006) used to call it the issue log. For keeping the issue log for SoloVisa project, the tool called Redmine is used. The example of the interface is shown on the Figure 9.

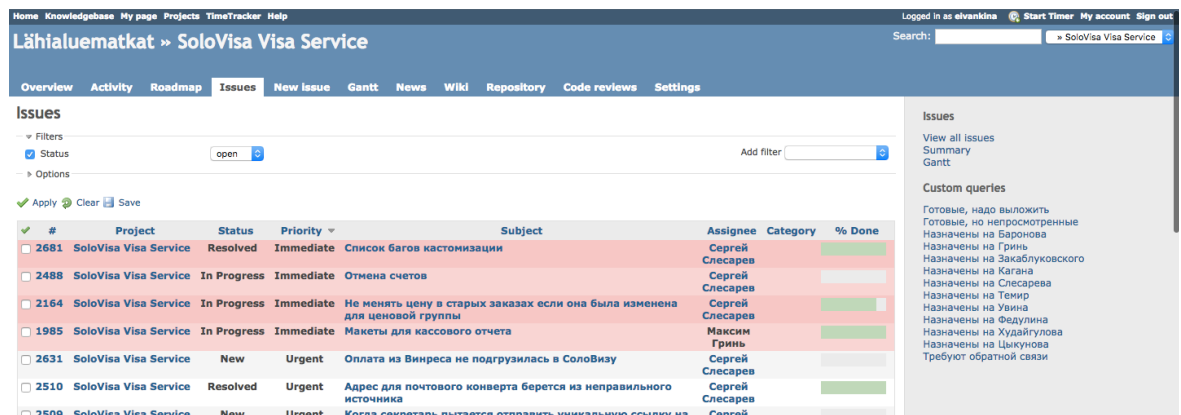


Figure 9. Example of the Redmine interface

Redmine is free of charge and highly adjustable tool for keeping the issue logs. It allows to create and follow several projects. The scope of this thesis is SoloVisa project, so the example above shows the page exactly for it. This tool is the core platform for communication of the whole team. The whole system development process is represented there. It also allows to create user profiles, so team members can easily access information about each other. This again corresponds with the approach of Schwable (2006) to the virtual team management.

Every issue has status, priority and assignee, deadline, etc. Project manager creates the issue, writes detailed description of the task, chooses the status, priority and assignee. Other fields are optional. The status of the issue is a very important field, as it makes the progress of the project very clear. The statuses existed in Redmine before, and their meanings for SoloVisa project were adjusted by the project manager in a following way:

- New – the initial status when the issue is created. Means that the work on this task has not started yet. It was just created by the Project Manager or other member of the team
- Rejected – the task is outdated or not needed any more and cancelled
- In progress – the assignee has started to work on the issue

- Feedback – the task is ready and was uploaded on the test server. Needs to be checked by the Project Manager as soon as possible.
- Resolved – Project Manager has checked the task, everything works as it is supposed to and now the changes can be uploaded to the main server
- Closed – the task was uploaded to the main server and can be used in the everyday work of the company

The development of SoloVisa, like any other software, takes place on two servers – test server and main server. The test server, as it can be understood from the name, is used for testing new features. And the main server stores the actual SoloVisa, which is used by the end users.

Another essential characteristic of the issue is priority. There are several levels:

- Low – the issue is not very valuable and the deadline is not chosen yet. Some possible changes for the future
- Normal – it is not necessary to solve the problem in the nearest time, but these changes should be done for sure in the future
- High – the issue should be solved within the week or two
- Urgent – the issue should be solved within two-three days
- Immediate – the issue should be solved within one day

When creating a new task, the project manager has to decide how urgent is it, and then control the realization of the issue.

Project manager needs to pay attention to each issue several times during their lifetime. Obviously writing the task description on Redmine is the first time. Then, if the assignee has any questions, he/she writes a comment under the task. Project Manager gets a notification about the new comments and should react accordingly. After the assignee has finished the task, he/she sets the status as “feedback”. Then the Project Manager has to check the required changes in the system on the test server. Sometimes testing is going on at the same time while talking on Skype with the assignee. This technique helps to solve the problems in real time. If any problems were found by the project manager while testing, or the changes were not applied correctly, the issue is returned back on the status “in progress”. If everything is fine and no problems were found, project manager switches the status on “resolved”. This is a signal to the Senior Developer that the changes can be uploaded to the work server. After the uploading is done, assignee changes the status of the issue on “closed”. At this stage Project Manager has to check the changes again, but this time on the work server.

Redmine allows also to write a news log, available for all the team members. As it was written before in the thesis, project manager has to send an email with the resolutions

about the last meeting to all the team members, who participated or did not participate in the meeting.

Some tasks are too big for the format of the Redmine issue. This kind of task needs to be commented and edited by several team members, which requires a more interactive interface. Also long descriptions are not suitable for the Redmine format. In this case Project manager uses Google Docs and puts the link to the Redmine issue. In Google Docs all the team members can edit the same document, can comment of it and get notifications on their emails.

This chapter introduced the reader to the most commonly used tools for managing Solo-Visa project team. The next several subchapters will describe how the previously mentioned tools were applied when solving several concrete problems by the team members.

### **3.5.1 Solving the problem of the location of the documents**

The first problem mentioned in the Introduction was the lack of synchronization between the offices of Lähialuematkat. Sometimes it was complicated to realize where the passport of the client or other documents were located.

As usual, the project manager started with creating the process description. The link to the presentation with the description was already given earlier in the thesis. This process description is used often by the project manager for the visual presentation of many problems.

As it can be seen from the presentation, when customer wants to bring the application, he/she has several options, including delivery to the office on the Helsinki Central railway station or to the one on Vuorimiehenkatu 3. Then the documents are delivered to the employee who is going to process it further and who is always located on Vuorimiehenkatu 3. If the documents were brought to the same address, then the employee might see them the same day. If it was the second office, then it will happen only on the next day. Some questions quite often appear at this step, and the customer service has to contact the customer again. Some of them get irritated by the fact that they need to, for example, provide more documents or they have some mistakes in the documents. When problems are solved, the application moves further to the consulate. After the consulate it returns back to the office, one of the employees checks the new visa for mistakes, and hands is over for delivery to one of the offices or directly to the customer by post, courier or other delivery services.

From the description it is quite obvious what are the weak points of the process and what features should be applied in order to improve it. The first weak point, and it corresponds with the problem mentioned in the introduction, is that the employees can never be sure where the application or the passport with the issued visa is located. The system that Lähialuematkat used had only following statuses: application was processed, visa was received from the consulate, order was paid. Obviously, this is not enough. The author came to the conclusion, that it was necessary to add more statuses. Moreover, it should be transparent, who put this status. Then it will be clear, where the documents are located and what is the stage of the application process it is going through.

Other presentation created by the project manager was related specifically to the problem of order statuses and the original of it can be found on Prezi website (Ivankina 7 May 2016). The copy of the diagram is shown on the Figure 10.

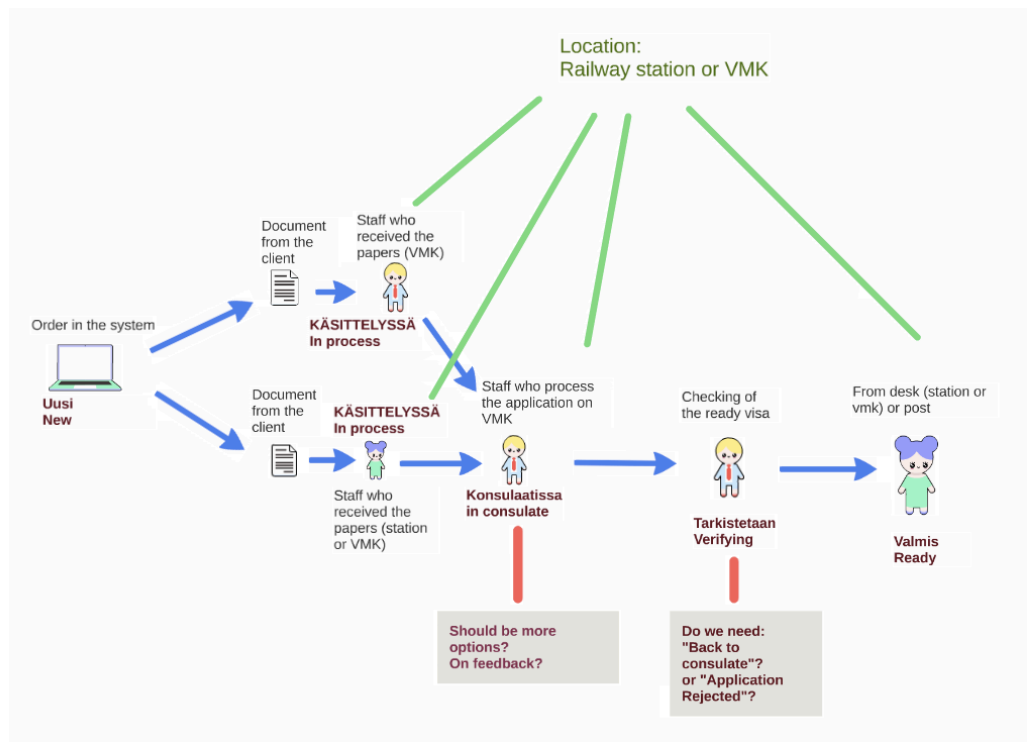


Figure 10. Diagram with the order statuses idea description

Project Manager arranged the meeting, during which the idea of the statuses was discussed. The idea of how the statuses should be called and when and by whom they should be changed was shown using the diagram in Figure 10. One of the team members also suggested the idea to make a special journal inside the system, where it would be possible to see, which user of the SoloVisa has changed the status of the order. Basically, most of the actions inside the system should be visible from the journal.

Few issues with descriptions of the task were created in Redmine by the project manager. From the personal professional experience author knows that it is better to divide big tasks into smaller subtasks in order to follow up the progress better.

After the tasks were created, the assignee started the work. The Project Manager checked the results first on the test server, suggested the corrections. After all the tasks were discussed and finished, the changes were uploaded on the work server. After a while one more status was suggested and applied – Cancelled. So in the end the statuses of the order looked the following way:

- New – is when the order was just created by the customer and the documents were not delivered to one of the offices yet
- In process – the documents were delivered the the visa application process has started
- In consulate – the application has reached the consulate
- Verifying – the passport has returned from the consulate and being checked by one of the employees
- Finished – the passport is ready for pick up
- Cancelled – the order was cancelled for some reason

The statuses of the order allow to see on what stage of the visa application process the documents are at the moment. The next step was to find out, in what office they are located. For example, if we can see on the order page that the status is “finished”, it is possible that visa is ready to pick up from the railway station office, from the main office or maybe it was sent by post. In order to find out it should be obvious where the person who changed the status was located.

Project Manager wrote a task in Redmine to create a log journal and to make it available for the administrators of the system. As usually, after testing the journal on the test server, it was uploaded to the work server and was ready to use. The appearance of the journal in SoloVisa can be seen in Figure 11.

The screenshot shows the SoloVisa Journal interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the SoloVisa logo and various menu items like 'Uutiset', 'Vinkkejä', 'Tilaukset', 'Kohdemaat', and 'Toiminnot'. Below the navigation bar, there is a search bar with the text 'Q: ID, Name, Email' and a 'Haku' button. The main content area is a table with the following columns: Object, Date of change, Type of change, User, Changes, and IP. The table contains several rows of data, including order numbers like 'Tilaus#4517', 'Tilaus#4611', 'Tilaus#4516', 'Tilaus#4792', 'LAM#4', and 'Tilaus#4919', along with their respective change dates, types, and users.

Object	Date of change	Type of change	User	Changes	IP
Tilaus#4517	06.05.2016 17:21	Update	[S] Inga	Tila : Tarkastettavana → Valmis	
Tilaus#4611	06.05.2016 17:21	Update	[S] Inga	Tila : Tarkastettavana → Valmis	
Tilaus#4516	06.05.2016 17:19	Update	[S] Inga	Tila : Tarkastettavana → Valmis	
Tilaus#4792	06.05.2016 17:11	Update	[S] Hanna-Mari	Tila : Tarkastettavana → Valmis	
LAM#4	06.05.2016 17:04	Update			
Tilaus#4919	06.05.2016 17:01	Update		Luvattu konsulaatista : → 2016-05-12	

Figure 11. Journal interface

From the journal it is possible to find out what changes happened to which order and who exactly made them. The administrator is able to find out the location of the editor from the IP address.

As a result of the implemented changes in SoloVisa, it became possible to:

- see the status of the order, from which the employee can make a conclusion about the stage of the visa processing
- see the location of the required documents from the journal
- improve the speed of processing of the inquiries (when customer calls in order to find out what is the situation with his/her application)

The implementation was declared successful, since it improved the quality of customer service and reduced the uncertainty among the staff of Lähialuematkat. The first problem from the thesis introduction can be considered as solved.

### 3.5.2 Improving the communication channels between Lähialuematkat and its customers

Another two problems that were named in the introduction of the thesis were related to the inefficient communication channels between Lähialuematkat and its customers. Quite often customers ask very simple questions, for example, when the visa will be ready, where to deliver documents or where to find the application form. Those questions distract customer service from solving more serious and complicated problems. There was also a problem with storing the information staff received from customers. There was no centralized place where the messaging history, comments, attachments and other information would be stored.

This problem was partially solved in the previous chapter by creating the mechanism of detailed statuses for the order. Those statuses are also visible for the clients. How clients can access this information will be described further.

So every order in SoloVisa has the mechanism of statuses, but this is not enough. It is logical that the next step would be to deliver this information directly to the customers. For this purpose, it was decided to create the system of automatic notifications in SoloVisa. Project manager had to create the task in Redmine with the description of the sequence of notifications and also write the content of the messages themselves.

Implementation of every new feature starts with the business process analysis and creating a visual or textual description. The description shown in Figure 10 then is also applicable here.

It was decided that the customer should receive notifications about the statuses:

- New – the customer receives the first notification email, which includes the description of the further actions and also attachments, such as application form and the summary of the order in PDF formats. Also the text includes a unique link, which the customer can use to access the order.
- In Process – customer gets notified that his/her documents had been received by us
- Finished – the visa is ready for pick up

However automatic statuses notifications are not the only communication needed between the company and its customers. Another significant feature in SoloVisa is the ability to send messages to the customer from the system. Corporate customers, who have their own accounts in SoloVisa, can access the message history for all their orders inside the system. The users who do not have own accounts can answer directly to the email notification and SoloVisa will automatically upload the message to the correct order. This kind of communication between the customer service and customers makes the whole work process much easier for both sides. Employees of the company do not have to search for the correct message in the company's email. There is also a huge probability not to find the correct one. The corporate clients who make many orders in SoloVisa on a weekly basis also do not have problems any more of looking for the correct emails in their inboxes. They can see the clear messaging history on the page of the needed order. The messaging interface inside SoloVisa is shown on the right side of Figure 12.

The messages that customers send to SoloVisa can include also files. The system will recognise them and attach to the correct order.

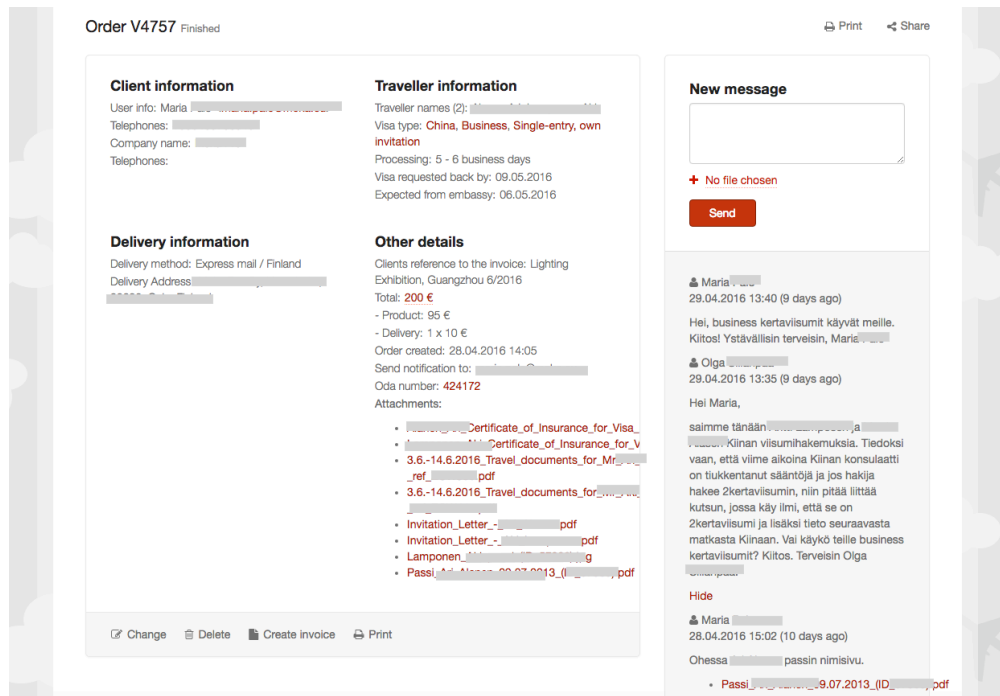


Figure 12. Messaging inside SoloVisa

The customers get an email notification about new messages too, so they don't miss any important information from SoloVisa.

For every automatic notification, both about status change and the new message in SoloVisa, project manager wrote the texts in English. After the English version was ready, it was sent to the account manager who translated them in Finnish. English version of the notification texts can be found in the Appendix 3 of this thesis. Every email sent to the customer includes the unique link to the order. Only by using this specific link someone can access this concrete order and see the updated information.

It is also possible to store internal information in every order by using the "hidden comment". It is visible only for internal users from Lähialuematkat and this comment section allows to store any kind of information about the order. External customers do not see those, so Lähialuematkat staff can make any kind of notes there.

As a result of the applied changes in SoloVisa, it became possible to:

- send the messages to the customers from the system
- store the messaging history for every separate order
- write the hidden comments for the order
- notify the customers about the new status of the order
- notify the customer about the new message in the system



Overall customer experience has improved after implementing SoloVisa in everyday work routine of Lähialuematkat. In the Appendix 4 of this thesis will be provided the feedback from the SoloVisa users and their opinions on how SoloVisa has changed their work style as well.

## 4 Results of the project

The implementation of several specific features of SoloVisa was described in the thesis. The scope of the thesis did not include the whole functionality of the system, so the results should be measured only for these few tasks, that are the part of the bigger project.

The objectives of the project that were included into the thesis are listed in the chapter 3.3.

As a result, it is possible to say that all the goals of the thesis were reached:

- Staff is better aware of the location of the documents and the status of visa processing, because detailed status is available for each order and location can be checked from the journal
- Customers have better awareness about their orders as well, because the notification system was implemented
- Communication channels between customers and staff were improved by launching the messaging system for every separate order

Putting everything together, it is possible to say, that overall the path through the order process became smoother for the customers. This statement can be also proven by the positive customer feedback on both Lähialuematkat and SoloVisa. The reader can get acknowledged with the results of the questionnaire in Appendix 4. The feedback should be ongoing, easy to fill out and ask about limited numbers of features. That is why the company from time to time sends a questionnaire to its customers. The questionnaire took place in 2015, it was sent to 2500 people and 190 of them answered, which is about 7,6 %. Correspondents had two weeks to answer the questionnaire. Unfortunately, since then the questionnaire was not sent again yet, but it is planned for the future.

Overall the results were positive. About 64% of customers would recommend others to use SoloVisa. One of the feedbacks says that at first it was difficult to use SoloVisa, but after a good advice this person managed. The new instructions that are under development now should solve this problem for all the customers. Information about customer instructions for SoloVisa in more detail can be found in chapter 4.1.

Besides answering the questionnaires, sometimes customers write directly to Lähialuematkat email because they want to express their opinion about the service of products. For example, here is the feedback that can show to the reader what benefits exactly customers got after the changes described in chapters 3.5.1 and 3.5.2 were implemented (translated from Finnish, original can be found from Appendix 4): “Until now I

have only applied for individual visas through SoloVisa, and everything has worked without problems, as there has been nothing special with the applications. Now I have a group visa application with a rather tough deadline, and I have gotten a real understanding of the tool - it is EXCELLENT! Messaging with them works fluently and things are progressing exactly as agreed. All the issues we find can be handled and fixed really quickly. Therefore, thank you, that we are able to use this tool."

This is opinion of one of the assistants in the company which is one of Lähialuematkat's biggest customers. They often have complicated orders and big group visas. The new messaging system allowed this person to follow all her orders successfully without getting confused by the amount of information about each application.

Overall, it can be concluded that the goals set in the beginning of this thesis were reached, and a customer experience with SoloVisa is objectively good.

New system is always a big change for the employees of the company. Even though the customers are satisfied with it, it does not mean that the internal staff has the same feelings. Here comes the stage of implementing a change inside the organisation, and the case of SoloVisa is described in the following chapter.

#### **4.1 Implementing the change in Lähialuematkat**

When the system is ready to use, it does not mean that the work is done. The hardest part of work of every project manager is to prepare people for a change in their work life. It is common for people to be afraid of changes and to see them not as opportunities, but as a threat to their peaceful everyday routine. Some people might be lazy to learn new things, some are just not educated enough to be able to start working with the new software on the spot.

Cadle & Yeates (2004) described several stages to avoid or at least manage the resistance of employees, and some of them project manager (author of this thesis) tried to apply in the real life.

The first and very important stage is to find the support from the top management of the company. With this author had no problem, because the project was initiated by the general manager and the managing director of the company. Especially the latter one was always helpful when it was needed to talk to employees and explain them why the change is necessary.

The next step which Cadle & Yeates called “winning hearts and minds” was also quite successful. The author started working on SoloVisa project a bit later than she started working in Lähialuematkat. Before she had different responsibilities, had a chance to work in almost every department of the company and established good relationships with the staff. Author was always trying to find out the difficulties that the staff had when working with SoloVisa, what are those barriers, and was always trying to be helpful.

But probably the most important part of the resistance management is education. In order to be happy with the new system employees should be able to work with it easily. They should have proper manuals and instructions. On a very early stage of creating SoloVisa, author created some video manuals about how to use SoloVisa. At the moment they are outdated, since the system has changed and improved a lot already, but as an example, one of the videos can be found on YouTube. (Ivankina 30 January 2014.)

As it was said already, the video in the example above is outdated. Since the author has not lately had enough time to create new instructions, she delegated this task. One of the ex-trainees of Lähialuematkat – Ekaterina Kamenskaia, student of Haaga-Helia UAS, is at the moment writing her bachelor thesis on the topic of “How to Improve Company Value Proposition Using SoloVisa System”, where she is creating the textual manuals for internal users, external users and also video manuals for both. Project manager organizes regular meetings with Ekaterina and the account manager of Lähialuematkat, where the main issues regarding manuals are discussed. While the manuals are not ready yet, the project manager educates the employees verbally.

Project Management Institute in their Handbook has described the personal characteristics and competences of a successful project manager. With no doubts those are useful for not only managing the project team itself, but for implementing the change as well and communicating to the end users.

Unfortunately, the author cannot say that she meets all the requirements of a perfect Project Manager, but she definitely has some positive characteristics, mentioned in this list. For example, trust building, coaching, conflict management, political and cultural awareness, motivation and decision making. Those positive sides of the character of the author help to communicate with people, to lead the team and to avoid the change resistance in the company. There are some characteristics, though, which author is better to improve in order to be more successful with her career in the future, such as leadership, team building and negotiating.

SoloVisa is still under development, but so far the implementation of the system into the employees' everyday life was quite successful and did not meet too strong resistance from the staff. Both internal and external users of the company use SoloVisa in their everyday work routine.

## 5 Discussion

Project management has its own specific characteristics in comparison with just regular management, since the project always has a limited time, specific goals and a separate project team. In case of Lähialuematkat the project team is virtual, which requires special tools and techniques in order to communicate efficiently. SoloVisa project team is relatively small, since the company itself is not too big, which means that some original project roles, described in the theory, were merged in a real life.

The author of the thesis is employed in Lähialuematkat as a Project Manager. The main characteristics of a successful project manager were listed in the theoretical part of this work. The author meets some of the requirements, which helped her in working on the project and also in implementing the changes in the company. Of course some competences still needed to be improved in order to become a better manager.

A benchmarking study was performed after management of the company decided to create a new system and before the actual development started. The project team took into consideration all the features that competitors had and tried to apply them into SoloVisa as well.

Originally, the reasons for launching a new project in Lähialuematkat were the competitive advantage and the wish to improve the customer experience. In order to achieve these goals, three main problems were solved: lack of communication channels between the customers and the company, the inability to store all the information about the order in one place and the lack of the awareness about the visa application process and the location of the documents. It was done by launching more detailed statuses of the orders, adding messaging module into every order, adding the hidden comment for the internal users and creating the automatic notification system of external users of SoloVisa.

The author described in this thesis how her project management work looks like in everyday life and what tools does she use in order to follow the work progress of her virtual project team.

The author gains the experience as a project manager at her workplace every day and improves her skills at this job. The goal of the thesis was to show the reader how the work of a project manager looks like in a real life by describing the authors responsibilities and some specific results that she got while performing her duties, and of course to create the

product called SoloVisa in the end. This goal was reached rather successfully, even though for sure there are still opportunities for improvement.

## 5.1 Self-evaluation

The process of writing this thesis helped the author to become more educated in the topic of project management. Even though a lot of knowledge come from own experience, knowing the theory of the topic helps to perform daily work responsibilities more efficiently. Especially the part about implementing the change in a company made the author to think about the importance of educating employees before adding any new features into SoloVisa. Adding new responsibilities for the staff was discussed with the management of Lähialuematkat and some adjustments were made to the process.

It was quite tough for the author to create this thesis since she has a full-time employment and has no chance to write at work due to other obligations. On the weekdays author managed to write around 2-3 hours per day and only on the weekends 8 hours. This is the reason why the whole writing process took longer than the author expected – more than 5 months.

While writing the thesis, there were some limitations with the sources as well. Author noticed that most of the books about project management refer to the same source – PMBOK guide (2013). They were either paraphrasing the original guide in their own way, or applying the knowledge from the guide to some concrete business field. Also Project Management Institute (2013) is a big educational organization which leads at the moment in the sphere of educating project managers. So the author decided that the most logical way would be to find the original source (which was bought in the format of Kindle book from online shop) and use it for her thesis. That is the reason why the reader might notice the repetition of the same source few times on some pages. Another book author used a lot was Cadle & Yeates (2004). This book is unique in the topic of the project managers' education specifically in the field of information technology. It provides a wide range of knowledge and can be applied as a guide by every manager who works on information technology projects. The information in Cadle & Yeates could not be found in other books author read, and therefore this book is referenced a lot in the part talking about project management in the context of information technology. But this book also was referring from time to time to another source - Blake & Mouton (1994), which seems to be quite old for the thesis written in 2016, but the author decided that it would be useful to mention the original in the references since Cadle & Yeates (2004) did so. Anyway, the management is such a field where a lot of classic authors and books exist, this is why many modern

authors still refer to them a lot. The same situation was with Patterson's book (1995) since it is a classic of benchmarking.

Overall, the author is glad that despite all the limitations she managed to complete such a big work and learn a lot of new and useful information at the same time. The author would like to thank her friends, family, colleagues and thesis supervisor who helped and supported her a lot during this process.

## **5.2 Recommendations for the future research**

The scope of the thesis was limited by the problems, listed in the Introduction of this work. Only few issues were discussed, such as improving of the communication channels between customers and staff and improving the awareness of the customers about the application process. There are many other problem solving work ongoing at the moment among the project team.

It would be interesting to describe such an example as creating a billing module in SoloVisa. The work went through many stages and also required a lot of work from the project manager side. But this problem is not completely solved yet and at the moment is going through the testing stage, so it would be unreasonable to include it in the current work, but for the future research it could be an appropriate topic.

Besides that, the author as a project manager would be interested to find out more information about the personal skills of the ideal project manager and go through some deeper analysis of herself from this point of view. Some personality tests could be applied in order to get more information about the author's skills and the results could be compared with the image of a perfect project manager, described in the related literature.

After the SoloVisa project will be considered finished, it would be very useful for a company to analyse the influence of the new system on the business results, such as income statements, number of new customers, level of customer satisfaction and also staff satisfaction. This would require to organise some questionnaires and further analyse them.

In her future academic works, the author is going to research the problems mentioned above.



## References

Blake, R. R. & Mouton, J.S. 1994. The Managerial Grid: Problems and Possibilities of Improving Production Through Participation of People. Gulf Publishing Company. Houston.

BMI Research 2015. Russia tourism report Q2 2015. London.

Cadle, O. & Yeates, D. 2004. Project Management for Information Systems. 4th ed. Pearson Education. Harlow.

Denton, J. 2002. Organisational Learning and Effectiveness. Routledge. London.

Dyer, W. Dyer, J. & Dyer W. 2013. Team Building: Proven Strategies for Improving Team Performance. 5th ed. Jossey-Bass. US.

Edwards, A. & Wilson, J.R. 2003. Implementing Virtual Teams. Gower Publishing Limited. Abingdon.

Ivankina, E. 17 January 2014. LAM --. Prezi presentation. URL: [http://prezi.com/moenpr9vqc5n/?utm\\_campaign=share&utm\\_medium=copy&rc=ex0share](http://prezi.com/moenpr9vqc5n/?utm_campaign=share&utm_medium=copy&rc=ex0share). Accessed: 20 May 2016.

Ivankina, E. 7 May 2016. Statuses --. Prezi presentation. URL: [http://prezi.com/kkcxfufvh7b/?utm\\_campaign=share&utm\\_medium=copy&rc=ex0share](http://prezi.com/kkcxfufvh7b/?utm_campaign=share&utm_medium=copy&rc=ex0share). Accessed: 20 May 2016.

Ivankina, E. 30 January 2014. How to Make a New Order --. YouTube post. URL: <https://youtu.be/f6-9q2lfcl4>. Accessed: 23 May 2016.

Heagney, J. 2011. Fundamentals of Project Management. 4th ed. AMACOM Books. New York.

Lähialuematkat Official Website 2016. URL: <http://www.lahialuematkat.fi/>. Accessed: 23 May 2016.

Panigrahy, R. L. 2010. Information Technology. 1st ed. Mangalam Publishers. Delhi.

Patel, V. 2008. Project Management. Oxford Book Co. Jaipur.

Patterson, J. 1995. Benchmarking Basics. Course Technology / Cengage Learning. Boston.

Project Management Institute 2015. What is Project Management? URL: <http://www.pmi.org/About-Us/About-Us-What-is-Project-Management.aspx> Accessed: 25 August 2015.

Project Management Institute 2013. A guide to the project management body of knowledge (PMBOK® guide) [Kindle book].5th ed. Project Management Institute, Inc. Newtown Square. URL: [https://read.amazon.com/kp/embed?asin=B00BR3P4IC&preview=newtab&linkCode=kpe&ref\\_=cm\\_sw\\_r\\_kb\\_dp\\_8wlcb0JZJHCG](https://read.amazon.com/kp/embed?asin=B00BR3P4IC&preview=newtab&linkCode=kpe&ref_=cm_sw_r_kb_dp_8wlcb0JZJHCG). Accessed: 27 January 2016.

Roberts, P. 2007. Guide to Project Management. Profile Books/The Economist. London.

Saladis, F. & Kerzner, H. 2011. Bringing the PMBOK Guide to Life: A Companion for the Practicing Project Manager. John Wiley & Sons Inc. US.

Schwalbe, K. 2006. Information Technology Project Management. 4th ed. Thomson Course Technology. Canada.

Scott, D. 2000. Customer Satisfaction. Course Technology / Cengage Learning. US.

Smith, C. J. M. 2014. Working at a Distance. Gower Publishing Limited. England.

SoloVisa 6 April 2016. SoloVisa --. YouTube post. URL: <https://youtu.be/RBeRMc7fVgk>. Accessed: 22 May 2016.

SoloVisa 2013. URL: <https://solovisa.fi/>. Accessed: 23 May 2016.

Thomas, N. 2004. Concise Adair on Teambuilding and Motivation. Thorogood Publishing. London.

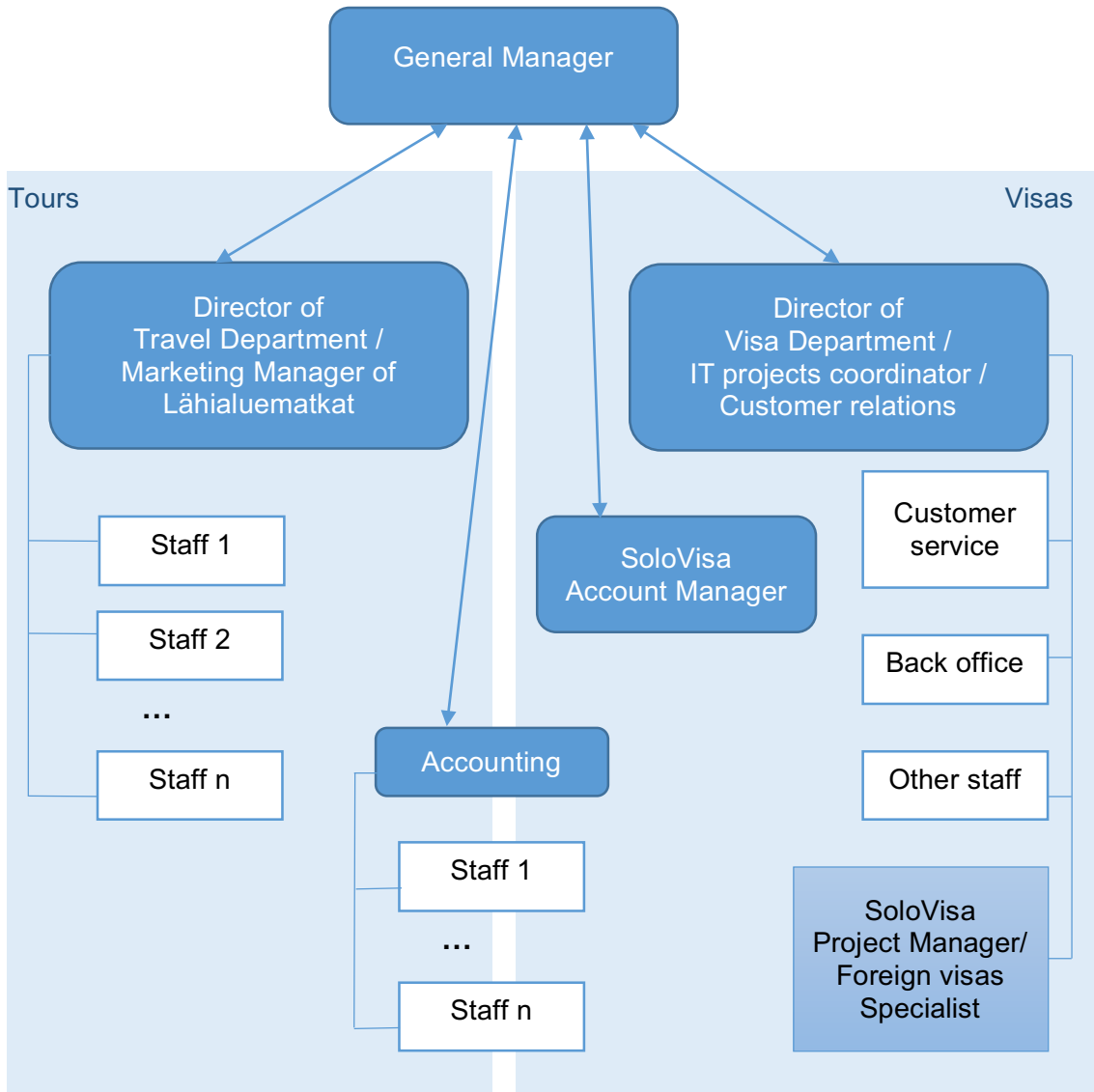
Tracy, B. 2014. Leadership. AMACOM Books. New York.

Tuominen, K. 2012. Development Models: Benchmarking in Practice. Change Manager Pro. Turku.

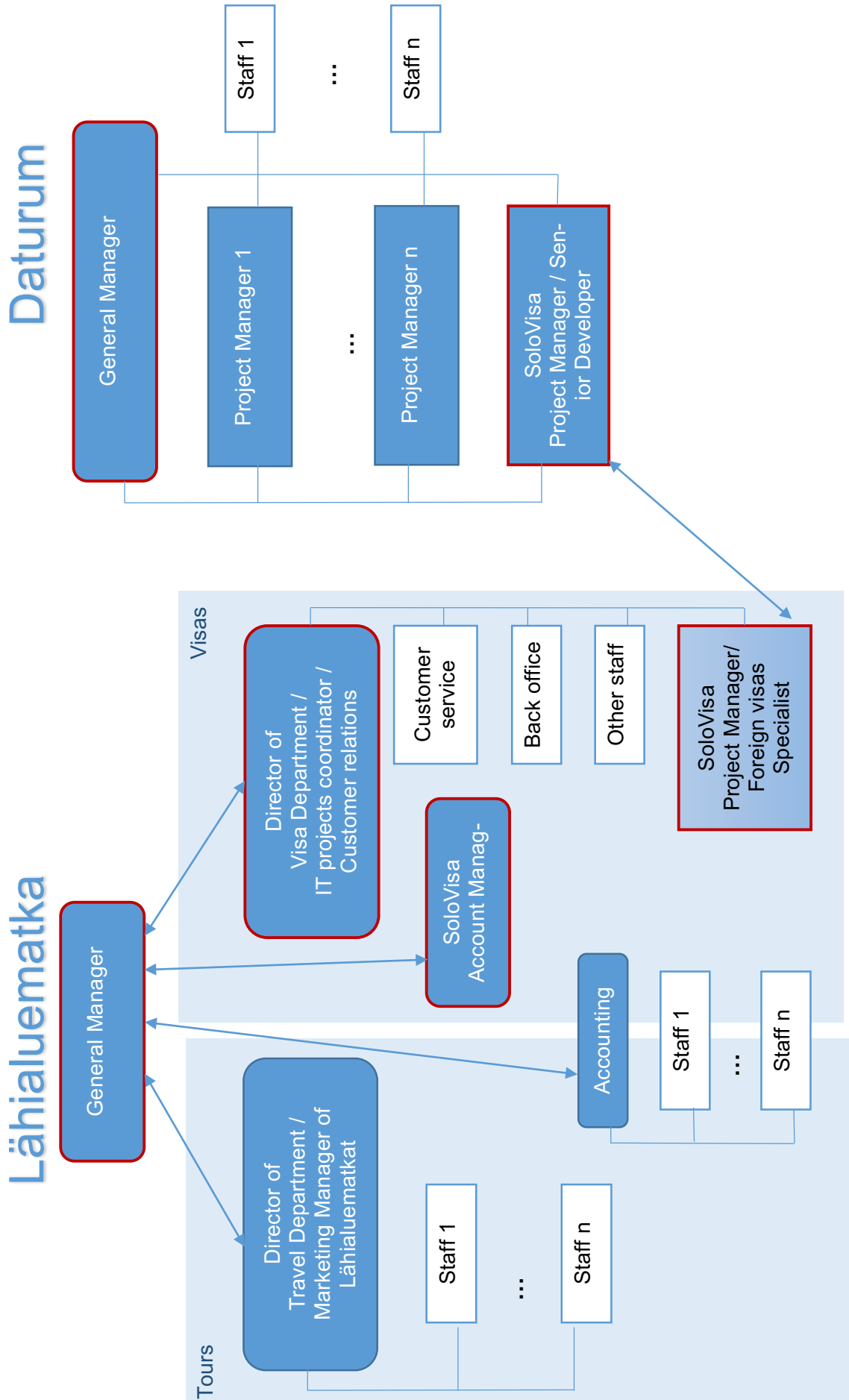
Viisumi- ja Matkapalvelu Lähialuematkat Russian Tours 2015. URL:  
[http://en.finder.fi/Matkatoimistoja/Viisumi-  
+ja+Matkapalvelu+L%C3%A4hialuematkat+Russian+Tours/HELSINKI/economy/154123](http://en.finder.fi/Matkatoimistoja/Viisumi-<br/>+ja+Matkapalvelu+L%C3%A4hialuematkat+Russian+Tours/HELSINKI/economy/154123)  
Accessed: 19 October 2015.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Organizational structure of Lähialuematkat



Appendix 2. Structure of the SoloVisa project team



## Appendix 3. Notification emails from SoloVisa

### When the new order was created (status “New”)

Dear customer,

We have now received your visa order. Thank you for using SoloVisa.

The order number V4928 is pending and will wait until we receive required documents and forms.

The order number will link you to your order page where you will be able to

- open the visa application link, fill and print the form. Please remember to sign the application.
- check the validity of your visa and print the order confirmation
- check all documents needed to be attached to visa application

Kindly print the order confirmation and deliver it together with other documents to one of our offices:

Lähialuematkat, Vuorimiehenkatu 3, 00140 Helsinki, Finland (in person, by post or courier)

or

Lähialuematkat, Helsinki Central Railway Station, next to VR ticket office (in person)

We will start processing your visa as soon as we receive your documents.

Order summary:

- **Traveller names:** Ivankina Elena
- **Visa type:** China, Tourism, Single-entry
- **Total:** 95 €

On the order page V4928 you can follow the status of your order.

Should you have any questions, please kindly reply to [this email](#).

Best Regards,  
SoloVisa's team.

+358 9 6689 5735

Vuorimiehenkatu 3, 00140 Helsinki Mon – Fri: 9 – 17

Helsinki Central Railway station office Mon – Fri: 10 – 18

[in the end two files are attached – visa requirements and application form]

### When the documents received (status “In process”)

Dear customer,

We have received the documents for your order number V4928. SoloVisa specialist will review them to ensure that the personal documents and forms will meet all the requirements needed and we will be able to proceed further. We will contact you if any additional information will be needed. Once our review is completed we will submit your documents to the appropriate government office.

- **Traveller names:** Ivankina Elena
- **Visa type:** China, Tourism, Single-entry
- **Total:** 95 €

On the order page V4928 you can follow the status of your order.

Should you have any questions, please kindly reply to [this email](#).

Best Regards,  
SoloVisa's team.

+358 9 6689 5735

Vuorimiehenkatu 3, 00140 Helsinki Mon – Fri: 9 – 17

Helsinki Central Railway station office Mon – Fri: 10 – 18

### **When the visa is ready (status “Finished”)**

Dear customer,

Your order V4928 is now completed and your new visa will be ready for delivery.

Your chosen delivery type is: Pick up from Vuorimiehenkatu 3. The passport can be picked up from Lähialuematkat office on Vuorimiehenkatu 3.

- **Traveller names:** Ivankina Elena
- **Visa type:** China, Tourism, Single-entry
- **Total:** 95 €

Our SoloVisa specialist has reviewed the visa, but we will recommend you to once more check it to make sure everything is correct and according to your order.

Should you have any questions or issues regarding your visa, kindly reply to [this email](#).

Thank you for using SoloVisa. We are looking forward to serve you again.

Best Regards,  
SoloVisa's team.

+358 9 6689 5735

Vuorimiehenkatu 3, 00140 Helsinki Mon – Fri: 9 – 17

Helsinki Central Railway station office Mon – Fri: 10 – 18

### **New message was sent to the customer**

Dear customer,

New comment was added to your order number V4928:

*Hello, This is a test message to the customer*

Should you have any further questions, please kindly use your order page V4928 message box or just reply to [this email](#).

Best Regards,  
SoloVisa's team.

+358 9 6689 5735

Vuorimiehenkatu 3, 00140 Helsinki Mon – Fri: 9 – 17

Helsinki Central Railway station office Mon – Fri: 10 – 18



#### **Appendix 4. Feedback from customers**

This information was removed before publication due to privacy reasons.

## **Appendix 5. Scheme of SoloVisa system**

This information was removed before publication due to privacy reasons.