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Change Process in a Forestry Association: Case Metsänhoitoyhdistys Etelä-Savo

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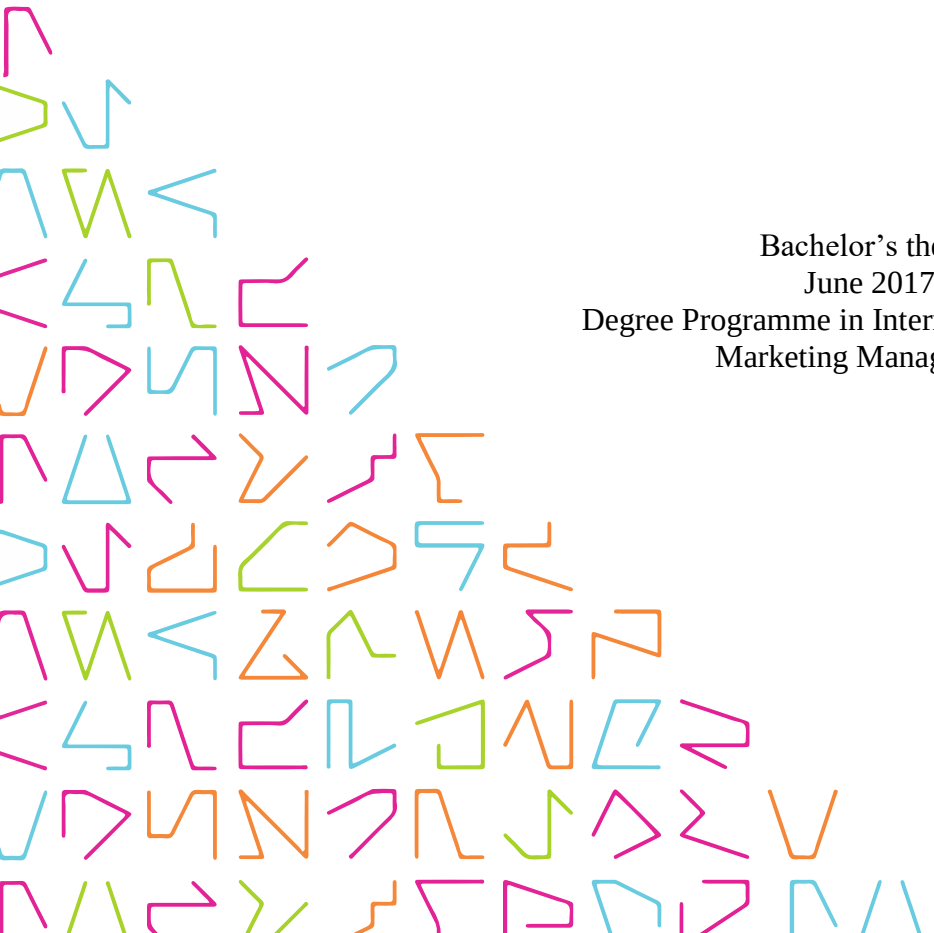

Bachelor's thesis
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ABSTRACT

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Metsänhoitoyhdistys is a country-wide forestry management association consisting of associations and interest groups that provide help and information for private land and forest owners on issues regarding maintaining, buying or selling land and forest. The company went through a fusion in 2015 where four forestry associations, Haukivuori, Itä-Savo, Järvi-Savo and Metsä-Savo, merged into one new one called Etelä-Savo. Metsänhoitoyhdistys Etelä-Savo is the case company for this thesis.

The purpose of this thesis was to gather information about the successfulness of the change process during the fusion of the case company and use that information to provide the case company's management with useful information that they can use when planning how to lead the organization and its employees in the future. In addition to studying the change process, this thesis will also walk through the aspect of leadership.

Primary data for this thesis was collected in two ways; by conducting a group interview with the management of the case company and by sending out a questionnaire to the employees of Metsänhoitoyhdistys Etelä-Savo. The data was treated as qualitative data and it was analyzed by categorizing, creating distributions, summarizing, finding similarities and differences as well as interpreting the answers.

The findings suggest that the biggest issue is the fact that the employees are spread on a vast region and they do not all know each other well enough to work in teams the best possible way. Other points that need to be paid more attention are allowing the employees to contribute more and ask for their opinions on specific matters, as well as to put more focus on the core business instead of placing emphasis on just profits. It was also mentioned that as the organization grew in size, it has also to some extent alienated from the customers.

Metsänhoitoyhdistys Etelä-Savo should invest in team activities that include members from all of the offices as well as to ponder how to learn better team working and dividing responsibilities. Focusing more on customer service can help the organization stay close to the forest owners and diminish the feeling of "profit only" thinking.

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change management, leading, managing, fusion

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION 5
1.1 The objective and purpose 5
1.2 Research question 5
1.3 Structure of the thesis 5
2 BACKGROUND 7
2.1 The company 7
2.2 The fusion 7
3 THEORETICL FRAMEWORK 9
3.1 Kotter's 8-step model for change 9
3.1.1 Sense of urgency 9
3.1.2 Guiding coalition 10
3.1.3 Developing a vision and strategy 10
3.1.4 Communicating the change vision 11
3.1.5 Empowering employees 11
3.1.6 Short-term wins 12
3.1.7 Consolidating gains 12
3.1.8 Anchoring new approaches 13
3.2 The most common reasons why change processes fail 13
3.3 Leading and managing 14
3.4 Changes in forestry associations 16
3.4.1 Characteristics of a successful forestry association 16
3.4.2 The role of stakeholders in defining the need for change 17
3.4.3 Risks of mergers in forestry associations 18
4 RESEARCH METHODS 19
4.1 The planned research implementation 19
4.2 Group interview 19
4.3 Employee surveys 20
4.4 Data analysis 20
4.5 Validity 21
5 INTERVIEW AND SURVEY RESULTS 22
5.1 Interviews and the implementation process 22
5.1.1 The financial aspect 23
5.1.2 Team working 24
5.1.3 Vision and strategy 24
5.1.4 Communication 25
5.1.5 Change resistance 26

5.1.6 Risks and challenges 27
5.2 Employee surveys and the implementation process 27
5.2.1 Sense of urgency 29
5.2.2 Guiding coalition 31
5.2.3 Vision 34
5.2.4 Communication during the change process 36
5.2.5 Empowering the employees 38
5.2.6 Short-term wins 40
5.2.7 Anchoring and consolidating the changes 41
5.2.8 Other 43
6 DISCUSSION 44
REFERENCES 45
APPENDICES 47
Appendix 1. The interview questions 47
Appendix 2. The employee survey 49

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The objective and purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to help the case company's management to gain better understanding about the change process in order to be able to plan how to lead the company and the employees in the future. This thesis seeks to gather information about the fusion of the case company; map the successes and failures that occurred, strong and weak points in the leading of the process as well as the reached and not-reached objectives. The emphasis is on the employees, but the change process was examined both from the management's and the employees' viewpoints.

The findings are then given to the case company. The ultimate objective and goal is to form a basis for the decision-making concerning the leading of the company and its employees by providing the case company with valid, relevant and objective information that the management of the company can base their decisions on.

1.2 Research question

Based on the purpose and objective of this thesis, a research question was formed as "how should Metsänhoitoyhdistys Etelä-Savo continue leading the company?" Since the researched change process is at its final stages, the work-life representative of the case company put weight on reflecting on the experience gotten from the process and using it in a forward-looking manner to plan their leading practices.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

Firstly, the thesis briefly introduces the case company and its core business as well as gives background information about the merger by briefly going through how the merger was implemented in practice by introducing the case company and its core business.

The thesis then moves on to explain the theoretical framework as well as some of the most used concepts of change management. John Kotter's 8-step model for leading change was the main theory that the surveys and group interview based on, and all its steps are explained in the theory part of this thesis. The theoretical framework also covers the concepts of leading and managing and the biggest downfalls of change processes backed up with tips on how they can be avoided.

The three last chapters are about the research methods and the empirical part. The chosen research method for conducting the surveys was qualitative research in form of a semi-structured group interview and an employee survey. The methodology part describes in detail the implementation and analysing methods and closes with justifying the validity of the research. Lastly, the results -chapter presents the findings of the surveys placing emphasis on the points that need improving. Improvement ideas and suggestions about how to continue are presented in the discussion part.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 The company

The main idea behind Metsänhoitoyhdistys forestry management association is that it is, in essence, financed, managed and voluntarily established by the forest owners. In 1950, the first Forest Management Act was set to ensure that forest owners have access to professional consulting and other services in any matters related to forestry. The underlying purpose of forming such association was to promote the viability and profitability of forestry, as well as to further the financial, ecological and socially sustainable use and management of forests (Kiviniemi, Toro, Juutinen & Sahi, 2001, 35). Metsänhoitoyhdistys is a national association that consists of several independent, smaller associations around Finland.

Metsänhoitoyhdistys Etelä-Savo offers various services in timber trade from making timber sales plans to comparing the buyers' offers to executing and finalizing the sale. On the side of forest management and maintenance they offer services in planting and fostering the seedlings and woodland. Other services include, for example, making forestry plans, land sales and assistance in forest taxation (Metsänhoitoyhdistys, 2017).

2.2 The fusion

The kick-off for the fusion took place in February 2014 when the initial discussions about it started among the chairpersons and the board of directors. At this point, some associations dropped out, others joined in and eventually the number of associations merging settled at four; Haukivuori, Itä-Savo, Järvi-Savo and Metsä-Savo. The first stages consisted of making reports about the advantages and disadvantages of the fusion, outlining a SWOT analysis and gathering financial statements. By summer 2014 when the reports were done, the case moved on to be processed by the board of directors. All four councils of the associations that were involved were in favour of the fusion. The final decision was made in September 2014 and the actual fusion was executed in 2015. The change process itself took three and a half months.

A variety of reasons determined the motivation for the fusion. Many of the advantages for the fusion derived from the fact that by merging four companies into one it would become a bigger player and hence able to improve its efficiency and competitiveness. More precisely, the reasons for the fusion included reduction in overlaps as the same things are done only once instead of four times, the new association can provide all services in forestry, improved specialization and sharing tasks and responsibilities among the employees. By being a bigger player they also increased the credibility in the eyes of the stakeholders, and can be more stable employer.

The fusion was expected to guarantee the versatility and availability of all the services for the forest owners. Also ability to respond to competition was estimated to increase. Even though higher profitability was not a priority nor amongst the main reasons for the fusion because the economic state of all the association was already at a satisfactory level, the financial performance was still estimated to improve.

3 THEORETICL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Kotter's 8-step model for change

8-step model for leading change is a methodology created by Harvard Business School professor John Kotter who first published the model in his book Leading Change in 1996. Kotter's 8-step model is considered to be pioneering methodology in the area of change management, and it is one of the most used and well-known methodologies in its field. The model identifies the factors that guide an organization to carry out any changes successfully. The eight steps comprise three different phases; the three first ones are about preparing a suitable atmosphere for change, following three focus on introducing new standards and getting the whole organization involved in the process and the last two are concerned with how to make the achieved changes permanent.

3.1.1 Sense of urgency

This step is one of the most vital ones for the success of the change process. Establishing a sense of urgency is necessary in order to get people to move together towards a common goal as being content with the current situation and not seeing problems or reasons to change often results in lack of interest to work with the change process. If the changes are seen as unnecessary actions, it becomes difficult to make the key people believe that it is worthwhile to sacrifice time to devise a change vision and to make sure it is communicated to all levels of the organization. However, getting only the key people to see the need for change is not enough since they alone cannot carry out the whole process, the majority of the people in the organization have to engage in the process. The ultimate reason for creating a sense of urgency is to make people realize and understand why the change is absolutely needed. (Kotter 1996, 31-32).

3.1.2 Guiding coalition

One person alone cannot bring about change which is why a team of motivated, trustworthy, knowledgeable people who have a common goal of carrying out the project at hand needs to be formed.

Kotter (1996) identifies four characteristics that every efficient team should include:

1. Power and status to make sure that no one outside the team cannot slow down the process.
2. Know-how to enable rational and reasoned decision-making.
3. Credibility to ensure that the team and its decisions are taken seriously.
4. Leadership and management skills to have someone with enough experience to steer the process.

Additionally, there are some traits that should be avoided when building a leading team. Two of the most harmful traits for the team are people who break the trust within the team by talking about other team members behind their back and overly confident top-level managers who do not have a realistic idea of their own weaknesses nor can they value the skills that the others in the team have, which makes cooperation with such people almost impossible. Even if the organization has key people who possess the know-how to help steer the project, they are more likely to complicate the process if the person is reluctant to join the team as they most probably are not interested in spending their time with the project (Kotter 1996, 45, 51, 52).

3.1.3 Developing a vision and strategy

Clear and appealing vision is the foundation of influential leadership. It paints a picture of the future, gives reasons why spend resources in changing the current situation and overall helps in the change process by catering to three functions; a good vision clarifies the direction of the change process, encourages people to make the right decisions even though they might feel difficult and contributes to the coordination of the actions of large groups of people (Kotter 1996, 60-62).

An efficient vision has six basic features. It should be imaginable and describe what is the organization's long-term goal. In other words, what the organization should be like in the future. It should also appeal to the stakeholders by catering to their interests and objectives and be feasible, too, as the purpose is to actually be able to reach a position that is in line with the vision. In order to keep the direction clear and motivate people to act, a vision needs to be defined precisely but still have room for flexibility which allows the people to take initiative. Finally, communicating the vision has to be so easy that it can be explained thoroughly in five minutes (Kotter 1996, 63).

3.1.4 Communicating the change vision

A vision becomes truly powerful when a large enough group of people understand and are committed to it, which then promotes the change process. The foundation of good communication consists of simplicity, using of metaphors and examples, utilizing multiple communication channels, setting an example, eliminating conflicts, enabling two-way communication and repeating the information often enough to make it stick in the minds of the employees. This way everything important gets communicated without overwhelming the receivers with excessive amount of information (Kotter 1996, 73, 76).

3.1.5 Empowering employees

Pushing through an organizational change successfully is rarely possible without the contribution of most of the employees within the organization. Gaining contribution and commitment from the employees, in turn, can be difficult if the employees feel like they are not given enough responsibilities and freedom to make decisions which is the reason why empowering the employees plays an important role in change processes (Kotter 1996, 87).

However, four barriers exist that inhibit dividing the responsibilities to a large group of people, therefore complicating the implementation of the changes. The first one, namely formal structures, hampers the collaboration between employees from different functions, or departments, because the organisational structure consists of silos that clearly separate the functions from each other. The second one is also connected to the organization's

infrastructure. Personnel and information systems that do not correspond with the new changes. The third barrier comes from the lack of sufficient know-how. The employees may get trained for new jobs but the training is not the kind that was needed, or there is no follow-up on the development of the employees to realize what they still need support with. Troublesome superiors whose old ways of leading are so deeply rooted in them that it makes obtaining any changes almost impossible form the last barrier. An honest conversation is often the best way to overcome this barrier. (Kotter 1996, 89, 92, 97, 95,)

3.1.6 Short-term wins

One big mistake an organization can make is to focus only on the future and forgetting about the present. Achieving goals on a short-term is important for gaining credibility and assurance that continuing the process is worthwhile. Following short-term wins helps notice quickly if the process is going to the right direction; if the goals are reached the direction is right, if the goals are not reached there is something wrong with the strategy. An adequate short-term win has at least three features. Firstly, it is concrete and a large group of people can easily see that it is not made up. Secondly, its existence is unquestioned and there is no possibility to argue otherwise. Lastly, the win is should also be closely related to the change process. Quickly generated wins further the change process in many ways by providing confirmation that it needs, granting reasons for small celebrations in midst of working hard, aiding the guiding coalition to test the vision in a real-life setting, undermining the doubts of the ones who are against the change and also guaranteeing the support of the management and finally creating much needed momentum. (Kotter 1996, 120,104,105, 106, 107).

3.1.7 Consolidating gains

Declaring that the change process was successful too early can invalidate all the work done so far since doing so will lose the process' sense of necessity. The achieved changes are rather fragile until they are embedded in the organizational culture, which can take surprisingly long time. By this step in the change process, some short-term wins are usually gained but the objective of the whole project is still miles away. That is why it is crucial that the leaders keep motivating the employees and the top management maintains

the goal of the whole process clear. The latest at this point the managers notice the dependency between different functions within the organization and they realize that making one change also requires changing multiple other things, resulting in increase in the amount of change projects instead of them decreasing (Kotter 1996, 116, 124).

3.1.8 Anchoring new approaches

The challenge of rooting the new changes into the company arises from the conflicts between the old company culture and norms and the new vision. Some rules and guidelines exist as to why and how new approaches permanently take their place in an organization. The new norms and values are the last things to change, so forcing it in the beginning slows down the whole process. One of the reasons why such things do not settle until the very end of the change process is that by then people will have noticed that the new ways work better than the previously used. Reaching a state where the new approaches are completely embedded in the organizational culture requires a tremendous amount of talk; the employees need verbal guidance and support. However, sometimes the only way to really anchor the new ways is to change people from the key positions and replace them with people who embrace the new approaches (Kotter 1996, 132, 137).

3.2 The most common reasons why change processes fail

Change efforts of different kinds are essential for companies if they want to survive since continuous improvement that often also includes some kind of changes are essential for them to survive and tackle the competition.

Kotter (1996) argues that the transformation projects yield disappointing results or fail entirely because of eight reasons, namely lack of a proficient team leading the project, complacency with the current situation, inadequate communication about the vision or completely underestimating the importance of vision, seeing barriers that block the implementation of the new vision but not removing them, not setting and reaching quick wins, declaring that the change process is over too soon and lastly not making sure that the changes are properly planted in the organizational culture. Kotter's 8-step model precisely focuses on avoiding these mistakes (Kotter 1996, 13).

A significant part of mergers, fusions and acquisitions fail and do not increase the profitability, productivity and sales as much as was hoped. Mattila (2007) claims that this is because of the differences in corporate cultures and the resistance from the management of the acquired organization which is in connection with the fear that the change will deteriorate their position and authority (Mattila 2007, 217).

Anderson (2016) names five most common reasons why organizational change fails. She argues that the first reason is the lack of proper planning due to leaders "diving" right into the process without enough upfront planning and clear plan of action to work with. The second reason, namely poor leadership and support, is caused by managers who are not actively involved with the process and focus on the technical details instead of leading by example, resulting in kind of forcing the change instead of inspiring it. The third reason seems obvious; lack of resources. However, many change leaders do not fully understand just how costly and time-consuming a change process can be. Focusing too much on systems and software builds the fourth obstacle for successful change. While it is important to have well-functioning systems, Anderson claims that it is the people who drive sustainable change. The fifth and last reason for change failure is poor change leadership skills. Change leadership skills are not quite the same as plain leadership skills in the sense that change cannot be lead the same way as organizations. This is where good leaders go wrong; they can lead organizations but not change processes (Anderson, 2016).

3.3 Leading and managing

Leading and managing are among the most essential concepts in change management and in short, it could be said that leading is about people and motivation and managing on the other hand is more concerned about things and order.

Leading has the primary purpose of establishing movement and change, whereas managing is concerned with building clear structures and consistency. As illustrated in Table 1., they both have three main sets of functions that define the fundamental differences in them; leading consist of functions that help reach changes in an organization and paint an appealing picture of the future whereas managing consists of functions that maintains order within the organization (Kotter 1996, 22-23).

TABLE 1. Differences in leading and managing.

LEADING	MANAGING
Establishing direction: creating a vision, explaining the big picture and setting strategies.	Planning and budgeting: setting agendas, timetables and allocating resources.
Aligning people: communicating the goals, pursuing commitment and establishing teams.	Organizing and staffing: setting procedures and rules, arranging job placements and providing structure
Motivating and inspiring: empowering employees, inspiring and energizing and satisfying needs.	Controlling and problem-solving: coming up with incentives, creative solutions and taking corrective action

Kotter (1996, 22)

Northouse (2010) stated that there is a significant difference between managing and leading as managing stands for accomplishing activities and knowing routines thoroughly and leading means striving to influencing people and building visions that motivate change. They summarized the distinction in their often quoted and famous sentence, “Managers are people who do things right and leaders are people who do the right thing” (Northouse 2010, 11). In other words, it could be said that managing excludes the people-oriented aspect that is characteristic for leading and replaces it with practical issues and leading on the contrary excludes the practical matters characteristic for managing and replaces it with the people-oriented aspect.

However, Northouse (2010, 9) also recognizes several similarities between leadership and management; they both encompass influence, they both have the aspect of working with people and they both include setting and reaching goals.

In his book Carnall introduces a study that Bennis conducted in 1984 of a group of exceptional leaders and found out that all shared four areas of competence where they excelled at. These competencies were managing attention, or be able to communicate objectives and directions clearly to others; managing meaning, or be able to create meaning, understanding, and awareness; managing trust, or be able to be consistent in complicated

situations enabling people to depend on them, and managing self, or knowing the weaknesses and strengths that oneself has (Carnall 2003, 146-147).

Simon Sinek goes deeper to explain good leadership. In his mind, good leadership is something that inspires action and the foundation for it is the reason *why* they do what they do. It simply means knowing the purpose behind the company and understanding why it exists and basing all the decision-making on it. This way the leaders are able to inspire better and motivate the employees. The kind of leaders who start with this question think in the complete opposite way from the rest who start with the question *what* they do, without having a clear motivation to do it. In between these two there is *how*, which is usually somewhat clear to all existing organizations (Sinek 2009).

3.4 Changes in forestry associations

Forestry associations differ from many other organizations in a few ways. Below, some of the main factors that should be considered when planning to undertake any changes are described from the point of view of forestry associations.

3.4.1 Characteristics of a successful forestry association

All development of forestry associations strives to protecting the stakeholders' interest. The association should have a good idea of the expectations and needs of the forest owners and be able to meet those needs and expectations. The personnel, on the other hand, needs to understand the forestry association's role when it comes to protecting the forest owners' interests and providing services which, in turn, also helps the members of the association to trust them. As in any company, the goods and services should be affordable and of high quality. From the board of directors' side, the decision-making and taking corrective actions is expected to be quick and efficient. Motivated and competent employees who enjoy their work also reflect on the successfulness of a forestry association. Lastly, the association has to have a clear direction that all of the employees are aware of as well as functional and active communications (Kiviniemi, Toro, Juutinen & Sahi, 2001, 159).

Forestry associations also play an important role in keeping the level and development of private forestry at a high level; without such associations it would be much lower than it is today (Viitala 2006, 106).

Rummukainen et al. (2006) argue that to respond better to competition, having more services under one organization is essential for success. Big organizations can more easily get bigger customers as it is easier for them to work with one big company that can provide all the services they need than several smaller ones that all specialize in only a few services (Markkola et al. 2008, 15).

3.4.2 The role of stakeholders in defining the need for change

Panth (2012) defines stakeholders as any groups or individuals that have any interest, demand or expectations towards an organization and its operations. Stakeholders can include, for example, employees, owners, consumers, communities, or governments (Panth 2012). Kiviniemi et al. (2001, 141-143) define four stakeholder groups that are especially important for forestry associations and should be considered when the needs for any kind of changes are planned.

In the case of a forestry association such as Metsänhoitoyhdistys, forest owners as a stakeholder group are different from other stakeholder groups in the sense that they are both customers and owners of the association. The expectations and needs are defined by what they want as the owners and what they need as the customers (Kiviniemi et al., 2001, 141).

Personnel's abilities, eagerness, and willingness to learn determines how well the tasks are managed which is why the association should invest in keeping and attracting skilful workers. Since they know the association's situation more closely, asking them for opinions would be smart even though their viewpoints are not necessarily coherent with the ones of the forest owners' (Kiviniemi et al., 2001, 141-142).

Timber buyers are the end-users of many of forestry association's services. Satisfying the timber buyers and meeting their expectations ensures the best possible price for the forest

owners. Knowing the needs of the timber buyers is important also because a significant part of the money for the forest management fees come from timber trade, albeit sometimes realized only after decades (Kiviniemi et al., 2001, 142).

The Forest Management Act is based on the idea that Metsänhoitoyhdistys forestry association has societal objectives related to promoting financially, ecologically, and socially sustainable management and use of forests, making also the society an important stakeholder group (Kiviniemi et al., 2001, 143).

3.4.3 Risks of mergers in forestry associations

Kukkeenmäki (2007) researched in his thesis the risks that can occur when forestry associations merge. The most common cause for concern was the forest owners' reaction to the merger and the fact that it could not be accurately estimated beforehand. Unsatisfactory financial results in the beginning of the fusion were mentioned to be a risk as unexpected expenditures could decrease the financial results significantly. However, since the financial outcome and expenditures can be forecasted somewhat accurately, it was said to be only a minor risk (Kukkeenmäki, 2007, 73, 92).

The risks in forestry associations can be divided into two groups; internal and external risks. Internal risks comprise skewed distribution of power, change resistance, lack of resources, know how, communication, marketing efforts or control and problems with well-being at work. External risks on the other hand often arise from changes in customer relationships, increased competition, changes in laws and regulations, bad debt risks and software and IT security risks (Hyvän hallinnon opas Metsänhoitoyhdistyksille Suomessa, 2016).

4 RESEARCH METHODS

4.1 The planned research implementation

The research for this thesis is conducted in two ways. First the management was interviewed to gain insight from the management's point of view and to get background information about the merger. After this, a survey was sent to the employees of the company in order to also understand how they felt about the merger.

4.2 Group interview

The management and was interviewed in a focus group. The focus group interview was carried out by conducting a qualitative research in the form of a semi-structured group interview and therefore all the questions were open-ended. The questions were based on Kotter's 8-step model for organizational change. Further, also questions about the background and reasons for the merger were asked.

Miles et al. (2005) explain that semi-structured interviews are interviews where the interviewer has come up with a set of questions based on what information is needed. The questions provide a framework for the interview itself and ensure that all the necessary topics are covered but the conversation is free to change. Semi-structured interviews are especially suitable when it is needed to find out *why* instead of figuring out, for example, *how many*, and are therefore often used when the research question is less straightforward, has more dimensions and multiple sub-questions that need to be answered too (Miles & Gilbert 2005, 65, 66).

According to Krueger (2002), an appropriate focus group session consists of 1 to 10 participants alike with the interview organized in a comfortable setting. The participants should feel comfortable with each other, which supports one of the distinct advantages of focus group interviews as people who feel at ease around each other are more willing to contribute to the discussion and share their opinions more openly (Rabiee 2004).

4.3 Employee surveys

The employees of Metsänhoitoyhdistys in all of the four participating offices were sent a survey that aimed at gathering data from the employees' perspective. Since the survey contained a lot of open-ended questions and the goal sample size was small, the data was considered as qualitative data. These questions were also based on Kotter's model, but additionally some of them were also derived from the interview results. The survey consisted of both open and closed-ended questions.

4.4 Data analysis

The results from the group interview were analysed by recognizing repeating themes among the answers. The themes were first mapped out by using inductive analysis, which simply means just uncovering themes, patterns and categories (Patton 2001, 453). The author identified six different themes, namely financial aspect, team working, vision and strategy, communication, change resistance and risks and challenges. The themes for the analysis do not always end up following the same themes that constructed the frame for the interview (KvaliMOTV), which was the case in this analysis as well.

The data from the surveys was analysed by using deductive analysis method. Deductive analysis means analysing the data by using an existing framework (Patton 2001, 453). In this case the framework was derived from Kotter's 8-step model for change and it was the framework for both the survey and the analysis. The data was gathered from four different offices, so responses from each were first analysed separately after which the results were briefly summarized. Counting was used to help in summarizing the results. According to Miles & Huberman (1994, 253), counting is a good way to ensure staying analytically honest, avoiding biases and verifying hypotheses.

4.5 Validity

In this research, using a semi-structured focus group interview was the most beneficial as it helps to gain a deeper understanding of the covered topics and suits well for exploring opinions. Such interview also allows the participants to share information that is important to them instead of forcing them to answer questions that may not be relevant at all. This method also allowed the interviewer to ask follow-up questions when needed and eliminated the possibility of getting contradictory data about the merger. Having a focus group also enhanced the quality of the data since the respondents were able to check information from one another, removing false information. As the fusion consisted of four offices merging, sending out surveys to each one was the only choice, considering that the initial situations in each of the offices differed. The survey results give only an overall picture of the opinions and stances about the fusion as not all of the employees answered the survey.

5 INTERVIEW AND SURVEY RESULTS

5.1 Interviews and the implementation process

The respondents for the interviews consisted of three of the key member of the managements who had been involved in the change process from the beginning to the end and had a comprehensive picture of the different stages and the management's point of view about the process. The sampling frame for the group interview was eight as it was the number of people in charge of the whole change process, and the realized sample size was three. The group interview took place in Metsänhoitoyhdistys Etelä-Savo's main office in Juva on March 10th. The respondents ended up consisting of two key account managers, one of whom is responsible of the west side and one of whom is responsible of the east side of the organization's operating area, and the executive director.

One of the interviewees acted as a liaison person and took care of scheduling the interview as well as figuring out who would have the most knowledge about the change process and be suitable to take part in the interview. The interviewees did not get the discussion topics in advance but they were explained the idea and reason for the interview first briefly by the executive director and the second time a bit more in detail in the beginning of the group interview session by the interviewer and author of this thesis.

The interview questions were planned in advance based on Kotter's change model. The topics were about the urgency of the fusion, the leading team, vision and strategy, communication, empowering employees, quickly gained wins, consolidating and anchoring the changes and lastly there was a chance to discuss anything else the interviewees thought would be essential to know or simply just so summarize their thoughts. The interviewer took notes during the session and later sorted them out more carefully and grouped the notes under the corresponding topics as the discussion was quite loosely structured to enable free discussion and sharing of opinions. The results of the group interview aimed mostly at summarizing the management's thoughts about the fusion to provide a second perspective.

Although the initial themes for the interview were Kotter's eight steps, the themes found ended up being the financial aspect, team working, vision and strategy, communication, change resistance and risks and challenges.

5.1.1 The financial aspect

The first theme that stood out was the financial reasons for the change and how they were used to plan the vision, strategy and justify the fusion. The management described that because the change was a "leap in the dark" reasons such as being able to be more competitive in the markets would be easier as a one big organization instead of trying to struggle as four independent ones. They explained that surviving financially would require bigger market shares and more versatile and specialized services, both of which are easier to reach through a fusion. When they were asked about any goals they might have set, the goals were all related to short-term financial plans that first outlined the goals for the whole organization which were then divided into smaller goals for the teams. More specifically, besides from expanding their market share, the goals were about increasing sales in almost all of their main services. The progress was monitored with quarterly reviews that tracked the profits which were then reported to the management.

One of Kotter's change model's steps was about vision and strategy. Here, too, the discussion revolved quite a bit around the finances. When the management was asked about how their new vision had been visible in their day-to-day work, the most noticeable things for the management were making a new operating plan every two years and, for example, setting goals for market shares every year. Consequently, as the short-term goals and vision were much about profits and market shares, the vision's reachability was judged by how well the market shares increased. The achieved market share fell short by 1 %, so the management thought that it can be said that the vision was reachable and realistic, but maybe not ambitious enough. According to the management, the vision and strategy that described the following year's plan also did help in decision-making as it is important to have clear lines as to where the company is headed to provide some guidance for the management and board of directors.

5.1.2 Team working

The second aspect that was repeatedly discussed during the interview was the fact that some of the offices shifted from individual working to team working style and the employees had to start cooperating more closely than they had used to. The job descriptions were renewed and the most significant change was that instead of one person being responsible for the whole process, sales and execution were separated from each other and the same person who handled the sales process was not responsible for the execution. However, this type of working model was already implemented earlier in some of the offices, Juva being one. For them, the team goals and sharing responsibility did not cause much trouble during the fusion as it was not anything new then anymore. For the other offices the shift to this kind of working style added some extra confusion during the change. In addition to setting financial goals based on the vision and the strategy, making the new team model work was also included in the goals. The management found it important to build trust among the teams in order to make the new model work fluently. They also mentioned that the team model divided opinions as working independently suited some employees better whereas some were more in favor of the new, clearer roles.

The management was then asked if they had encountered any surprising challenges and how they dealt with them. The rigid start with the team model was mentioned as one of them since in some of the teams letting go of the old working style was hard which caused overlaps in the responsibilities. It was also mentioned that the management was surprised also how fast some of the teams started working so here cannot be made any generalizations. It was also wondered if the new team model was the reason a couple of employees left the company.

5.1.3 Vision and strategy

The vision and strategy of the company was also discussed extensively, to some extent because one of Kotter's change model's steps is only about this topic, and is the third analysis theme. First question was about if the vision and strategy were re-defined during the process, which they did as all of the offices that were a part of the fusion had their own visions and strategies that understandably needed to be unified. The vision was about being the best partner for all of their stakeholders as well as to genuinely be on the forest

owner's side, and use that to differentiate from the competitors. A one-page-long strategy was also framed. It consisted of five main points that each had two or three sub-points. It was made to be very concrete and simple as everyone had to understand what it was about.

The most significant change in the strategy compared to the old one was that the new one took better into consideration all the threats and changes in the operating environment. The vision on the other hand moved the decision-making more to the field and it was changed to better suit the team working model by separating sales and execution as well as narrowing down the job descriptions. The vision was visible in the day-to-day work not only by setting tasks related to the follow-up of the financial results. One of the managers stated that the vision "increased the work load when the whole thing started working and there is more specialization. We deal with the internal issues more professionally than before when the executive director was everyone's superior so he had no time to deal with all the internal issues as much. Easier to focus on the employees' daily problems and respond better. Job control is also better and supporting the new employees and connecting with the older ones has increased".

It was also argued that the vision and strategy helped to make the organization's direction clearer by creating a common direction. The management discussed that the strategic goals were especially useful and that the vision was quite obvious and more in the background, guiding the actions more on a subconscious level. Similarly, they also helped with decision-making.

5.1.4 Communication

The fourth theme was communication which often is an integral part of any change process and has a major impact on its successfulness. The used communication channels included email, which was said to be the most common one, employee meetings, personal discussions and work control as well as text messages or WhatsApp. The interviewees felt that email was the best and easiest one, backed up with employee meetings. For more effective communication, personal discussions were said to be favorable. According to the results, the same information was communicated repeatedly and on frequent intervals. New information was released internally and externally as soon as it was confirmed. The management noticed that not everyone was happy getting the same information over and

over again and they got some complaints about it. They justified the fact that a few of the employees may have felt overwhelmed by the frequency in which they got information with the fact that they had to use multiple communication channels since “there is always someone who does not read the emails and someone who does not pay attention in a meeting”. The interviewees were asked if they asked feedback from the employees and if not, did they get feedback anyway. They had conducted a survey regarding well-being at work and things are discussed in meetings all the time. However, as they also said that even if they did not as for feedback they get some anyway. This shows that the communication in the work place is quite open and the employees feel comfortable expressing their honest opinions.

5.1.5 Change resistance

Not surprisingly, change resistance turned out to be one of the main issues and stimulated quite a bit of discussion and is the fifth theme of the group interview analysis. A direct question about change resistance among the employees was asked. The interviewees agreed that mostly the employees were in favor of the change but quite understandably there were a few individuals who disliked the fusion more than others and felt that the previous organization was better. The resistance was expressed at meetings but it was also noticeable as it was criticized at coffee breaks, for example. The management was okay with this kind of resistance since they understood that not everyone can be pleased. They imagined that the reason for resistance could be that people were scared of the future and losing the locality of the organization. The shift to team model also caused some conflicts and resistance, issues that had to be dealt with by going through the same reasons that were used to justify the fusion and by answering any questions that there may have been. “The issues were brought down to a human level when it did not anymore feel so…”, one interviewee explained.

Integrating four work cultures also brought about resistance, possibly due to having to learn new ways of working, getting used to the new organization, learning the new job description and getting a new superior, which can be an overwhelming amount of changes to cope with. One interviewee mentioned that there was “cliques who thought back on the old times”, “a little fear and processing the change” and things that in the resistant person’s opinion “should have been done like this instead of that and that instead of this”.

5.1.6 Risks and challenges

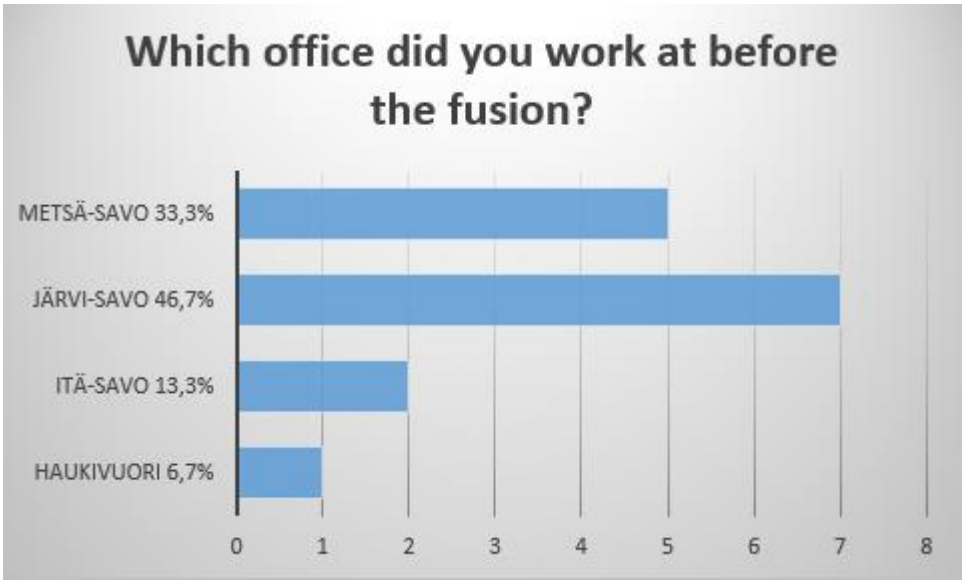
The sixth and last theme that the author recognized when analyzing the group interview results was the risks and changes. The management discussed different risks as well as challenges but mutually agreed that they were all quite well described already in the first phases of the fusion when SWOT analysis was plotted.

Some of the risks were related to the operating environment and therefore the guiding coalition had no impact on them whatsoever. Such risks included, for example, new Kemera legislation, which is an act set by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry concerning the content requirements of documents related to financing of sustainable forestry and standstill of the demand for energy wood, both of which built up some degree of nervousness and locally affected the working atmosphere. Other risks and challenges were about the financial management, its follow-up and tracking and tracing financial figures which caused a great deal of manual labor. Cohesive working methods and difficulties in giving up on the past posed also challenges as some employees did not quite fully stick to their new tasks and acted oppose to what was agreed to. On the execution part of the service process things did not always happens as promptly as should have, invoicing was delayed and the money from timber trade was not paid on time. The management had to step in in these cases and it took time from focusing on the core business. All of this created some tension within the personnel and possibly leading to resignations, which was one of the risks recognized beforehand. These issues were dealt with the same way as all the others; by having discussions with the employees and talking about what the problem was. Also the fact that it was decided to implement the whole fusion in three months was as risk that they identified but were still willing to take.

5.2 Employee surveys and the implementation process

The employees were sent an online survey through Google forms and both excel and Google forms' own graphs were used as supporting tools in analysing the results. The employees were given roughly two weeks, from March 24th to April 7th, to complete the survey and doing so was voluntary.

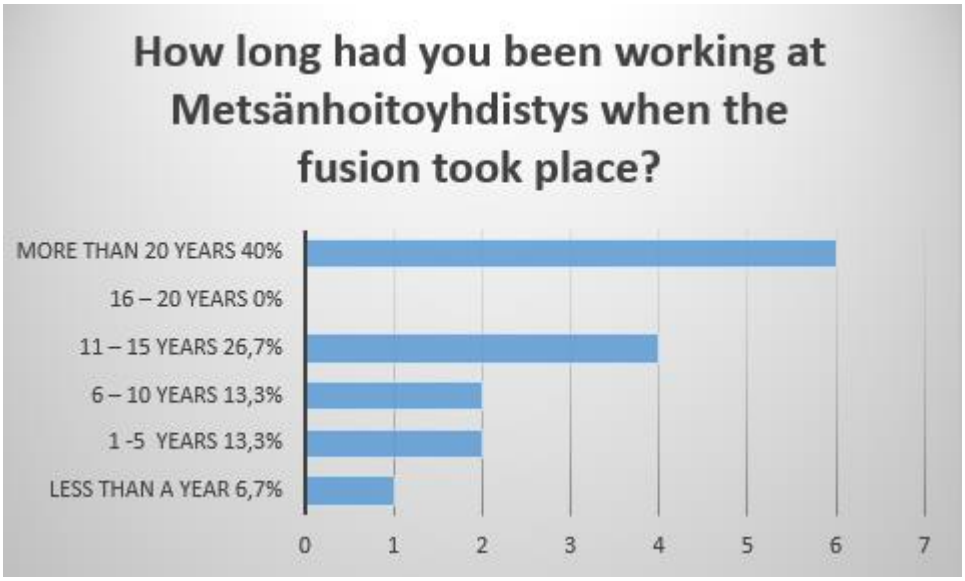
The sampling frame was 65 people and the goal sample was to get around two to four responses, 16 in total, from all four of the offices that were involved in the fusion to get a picture of the employees' opinions from each office since the starting points differed. The realized sample size totalled up to 15; one from Haukivuori, two from Itä-Savo, seven from Järvi-Savo and five from Metsä-Savo, as show in graph 1 below.



Graph 1. Distribution of responses by workplace

The executive director from Metsänhoitoyhdistys Etelä-Savo took care of distributing the link to the survey for the employees. The questions were again grouped according to Kotter's change model, which also formed the structure for analysing the results, and devised in a way that allowed the respondents to answer them without needing further explanations.

The respondents' careers at Metsänhoitoyhdistys had been rather long at the time of the fusion as 40 % had been working there for more than 20 years and 26,7 % from 11 to 15 years. Only 20 % had been working there for 5 years or less, as seen in graph 2.



Graph 2. Distribution of the length of careers at Metsänhoitoyhdistys

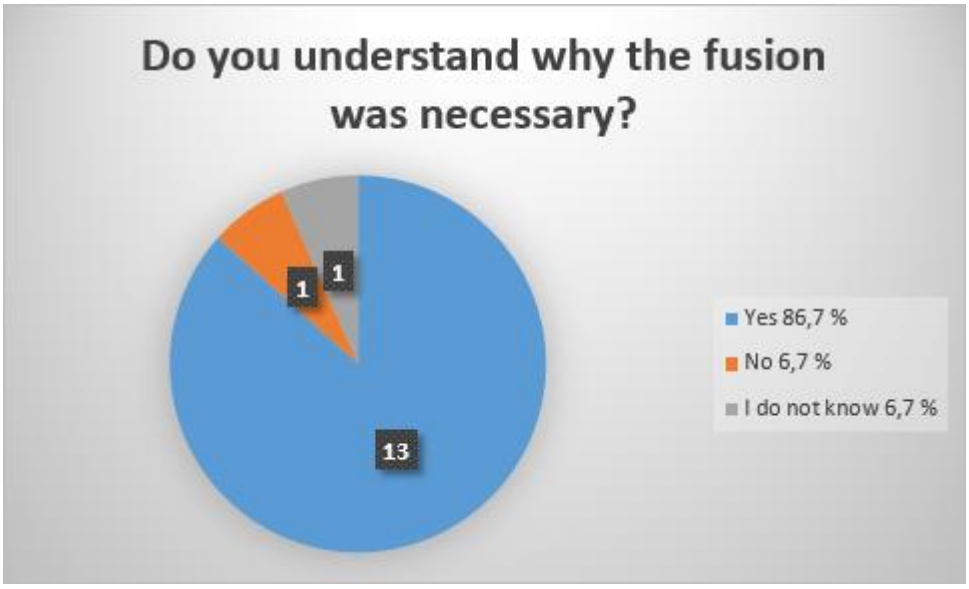
5.2.1 Sense of urgency

Here, the respondent from Haukivuori office stated that they did understand why the fusion was necessary and also that they noticed the need for the change themselves. The respondent thought that there was no need to justify or give any reasons for the fusion.

Itä-Savo office had a more negative standpoint towards the fusion in as one of the respondents did not understand why the fusion was necessary and the second one was not sure. When asked if they noticed the need for the change themselves the responses were the same; first one said no and the second one was not sure. For both, the fusion was justified by explaining that they would get better contracts and that as a large organization they would be able to join forces in order to offer more specialized services.

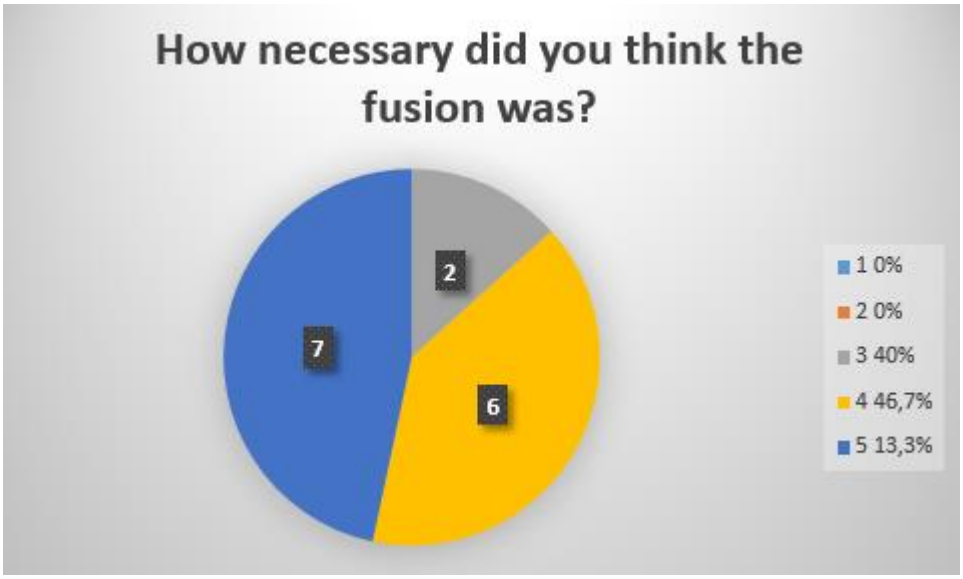
All of the respondents in Järvi-Savo office stated that they saw why the fusion was necessary but only four would have noticed it themselves. Three respondents were not sure. Here, too, the change was justified with a variety of advantages that would come with being a larger organization. In addition to the already mentioned more specialized service, it was mentioned that “something had to be done when the forest management fees were discharged”, meaning that new ways to make profit had to be found. Also, being a stronger player in the industry and more stable financial situation were mentioned. One respondent stated that they “simply got the news from the board of directors”.

Metsä-Savo office had quite similar thoughts as Järvi-Savo as to if they understood why this change needed to take place and if they saw the need for the change themselves. All of them answered yes to the first question and only one was not sure and one answered no to the second question. The arguments they were given to reason the change were also in line with the other offices; economies of scale, better specialization, being a stronger player by joining forces, better contracts and the change in forest management fees.



Graph 3. Total distribution of responses by amount and percentage

To summarize the responses, as seen in graph 3 nearly all, 86,7 % which is 13 respondents, understood why the fusion was absolutely necessary and only one did not. One respondent was not sure. The ones who did not completely see any reason for the fusion were both from the Itä-Savo office. When asked how necessary they felt the fusion was 46,7 % thought that it was fairly necessary and 40 % thought it was moderately necessary, as shown in graph 4. The scale was from one to five, one being not necessary at all and five being very necessary. Again, the respondents from Itä-Savo office had more negative answers to this question compared to the overall results.



Graph 4. Total distribution of responses by amount and percentage where 1 = not necessary at all, 5 = very necessary

When asked if the respondents saw the need for the change themselves 53,3 % of the respondents did the need for the fusion, 13,3 % did not and 33,3 % did not know. The most common explanation they were given as to why this fusion needed to happen can be clustered into two big and two smaller groups. The first big group was related to economies of scale and the ability to offer more specialized and extensive services to the customers by being a bigger player. The second big group was new ways to make profit to compensate for leaving out forest maintenance fees was mentioned. Each of the small groups represented only one respondent's opinion where other respondent said that the information was just given by the board of directors and the other said that there was no need to give reasons.

5.2.2 Guiding coalition

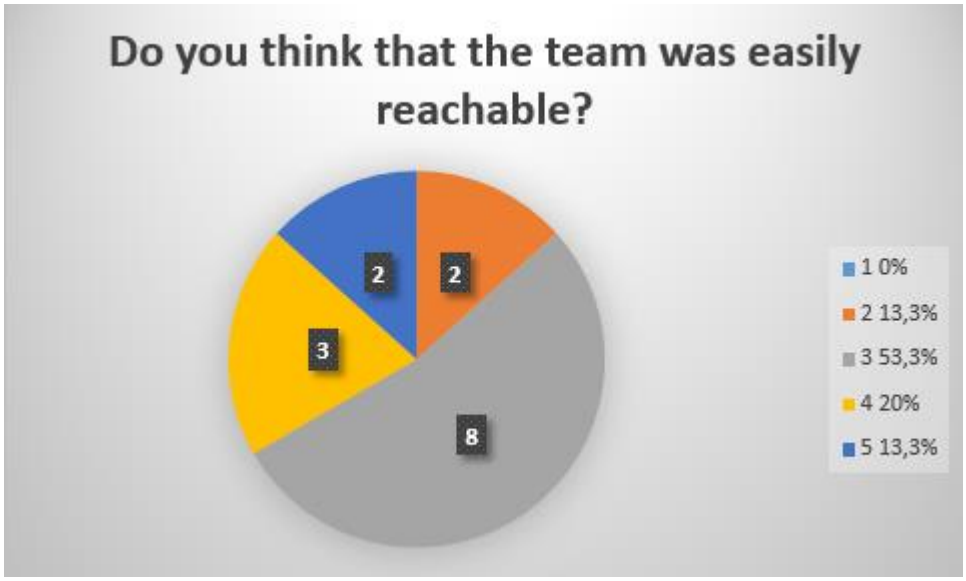
The respondent from Haukivuori could name the guiding coalition, strongly agreed that they were easy to reach but did not feel like he got enough support during the change process. However, the respondent did not feel like he would have needed anything more from the superiors, and they got enough intermediate information about the process.

Also Itä-Savo respondents could name the people responsible for leading the fusion and were more towards the feeling that they were easily reachable but did not strongly agree with this point. The intermediate information was sufficient and they did not think that they would have needed anything more from their superiors.

The responses from Järvi-Savo continue to go in line with the other offices, only one was not sure who were the guiding team but the rest could name them. Järvi-Savo was a little less content with the availability of the guiding team as they were available only on a satisfactory level, but the amount of intermediate information was above satisfactory. One did not think he got enough support during the fusion, the rest were happy with the support they got or did not think that they needed any. It was mentioned that in addition to superiors, also colleagues provided some supports. The majority did not need anything more from their superiors, exceptions being one respondent who wanted more transparency and one respondent who though they lacked instructions or the instructions were too all over the place and difficult to find.

The guiding team was known by everyone in Metsä-Savo, their reachability was above sufficient level and it was strongly agreed that they got enough intermediate information. Majority of the respondents got enough support during the process but also said that they did not require as much support since they had already adapted to the team working model before the fusion so the changes were not as big as in the other offices. Only one respondent was not completely happy here as there was “too much hurry, too many unfinished things and even all of the responsible persons were not up to date about their tasks”.

All except one respondent who was not sure could name the members of the guiding coalition. Graph 5 shows how reachable the guiding coalition was on a scale from one to five where one is not reachable at all and five very easy to reach. The reachability of the guiding coalition was somewhat on a satisfactory level as 86,6 % ranked it on the middle or top end of the scale and only 13,3 % or 2 respondents ranked it more on the negative side.



Graph 5. Total distribution of responses by amount and percentage where 1 = not reachable at all, 5 = very easy to reach

Clear majority, that is ten respondents, felt that they got adequate support during the change process but it was also mentioned by one respondent that it required some self-initiative. Employee meetings, getting support from the new management as well as colleagues, sufficient communication and getting support from the immediate supervisor whenever needed were mentioned as some of the reasons as to why the level of support was adequate. Five respondents did not feel like they got enough support. However, one of the five did not think he needed any support and one justified the lack of support with the fact that the job description itself did not change. One thought that there was too much rush and unprepared things and one thought that the transition phase lacked support. 13 out of 15 agreed that they got enough intermediate information during the change process, one said that he did get information but not enough and one that no information was given regarding the progress of the fusion. The last question about the guiding coalition asked if the respondents would have needed something more from their supervisors. Also here the majority, 10 respondents, were content and had nothing that they missed. The remaining part wanted more transparency and openness as the fusion concerned everybody, more even distribution of workload, more guidance and the few guidelines that they got were too scattered and hard to find.

5.2.3 Vision

Haukivuori was able to describe the vision and thought that it shows in the day-to-day work by guiding the activities in a business-oriented way. Knowing the vision was not seen as especially helpful as it did not make the fusion's direction clearer nor did it help to make decisions. However, it was seen as motivating and realistic. The new vision was communicated at employee meetings.

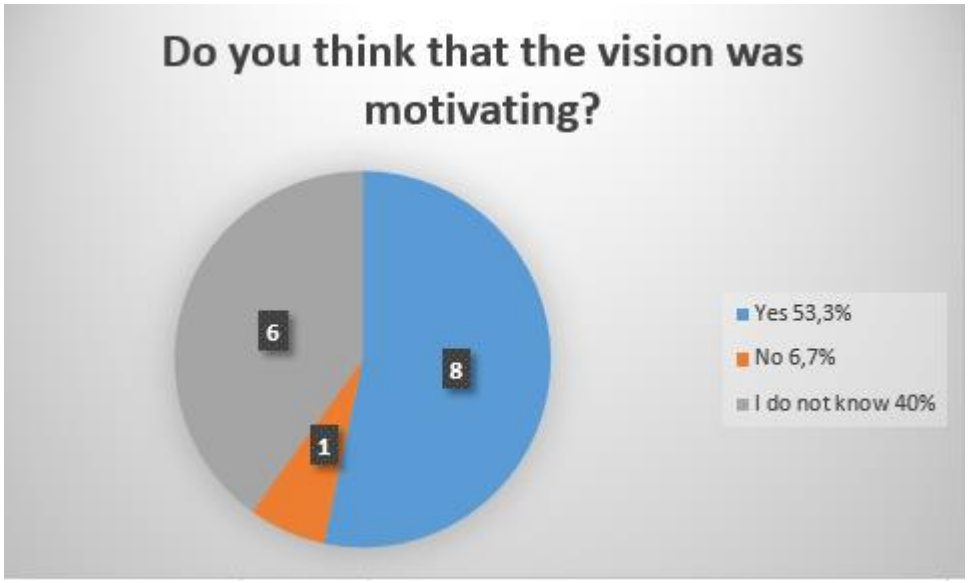
Itä-Savo indicated some uncertainty about the vision since one respondent was not completely sure what the vision was but did still take a guess which corresponded the actual vision. The other respondent could describe the vision but added in the end that "at least they try". Again, knowing the vision was not very helpful as it did not make the change process' direction clearer; one respondent stated that "nobody who is actually working thinks about things like this" and the other one was not directly told about the new vision. It did not help in decision-making either. The vision had been visible to them through trying to improve the services, putting more effort in marketing activities and talking about it at employee meetings. The respondent who had heard about the vision said that it was communicated at meetings and via email, and thought that it was motivating. The other respondent had no opinions here.

The vision was also well-known in Järvi-Savo where only one respondent could not describe it. Two of the respondents thought that it cleared the direction and that it helped in decision-making. The rest did not see it as helpful or had no opinion. Stronger marketing activities, clearer job descriptions, more cooperation with stakeholders and new information and support to working were the most visible effects of the new vision in the day-to-day activities. Email and employee meetings were again the most frequently used communication channels but two respondents also did not think that they were informed about it. The vision was seen as realistic and when asked if it was motivating, the responses divided in two; yes -answers and I do not know -answers. One respondent did not think it was motivating at all.

The good understanding of the vision still continues in Järvi-Savo where everyone could explain it. Knowing it was seen as a bit more beneficial as three out of five stated that it did help to make decisions and made the direction clearer. Again, the marketing activities and taking the stakeholder better into consideration were the most visible aspects that the

vision brought to the day-to-day work. It was mutually agreed that the vision was realistic and three out of five found it motivating, two did not know. The vision was communicated quite much the same way as in all of the other offices, via email and at meetings. One respondent was part of the team who designed the vision.

The employees were well aware of what the organization's vision is; only one could not describe it. The employees were asked to describe the vision if they can, and what was said was well in line with the management's statement of the vision. Here it can be noted that both the management and the employees worked towards a common goal and the communication in this area had worked well. When asked how the vision is visible in the organization's day-to-day activities, focusing more on marketing efforts came up the most often. Also cooperation with stakeholders was said to be paid more attention. Other observations included clearer job descriptions, taking better into consideration the customers' opinions as well as business-oriented and more efficient operations. For most, knowing the vision did not especially make the change process' direction clearer. A little less than half on the other hand did see how the vision gave a common goal for everyone, helped to understand why some things have to be done in a certain way and why the service processes had to be changed as well. The opinions towards using the vision in decision-making were in line with its usefulness in defining the overall direction; the ones who said that the vision made the change process' direction clearer also felt that it is easier to work towards well-defined goals and use the vision to justify decisions. The vision was realistic in nearly all of the respondents' opinions and they saw that the organization has the needed resources and has acted according the vision. One respondent pointed out that although the vision is realistic it is also challenging since the competitors are extremely strong and their services are simpler from the customers' point of view. Only two did not completely agree but neither disagreed with this point. The vision reached the employees most often through email and staff meetings, two said that it was not communicated at all and in one respondent's opinion too many emails were sent and as a result many of them were not paid attention. When asked if the vision was motivating 53,3 % answered yes, 40 % did not know and just one answered no.



Graph 6. Total distribution of responses by amount and percentage

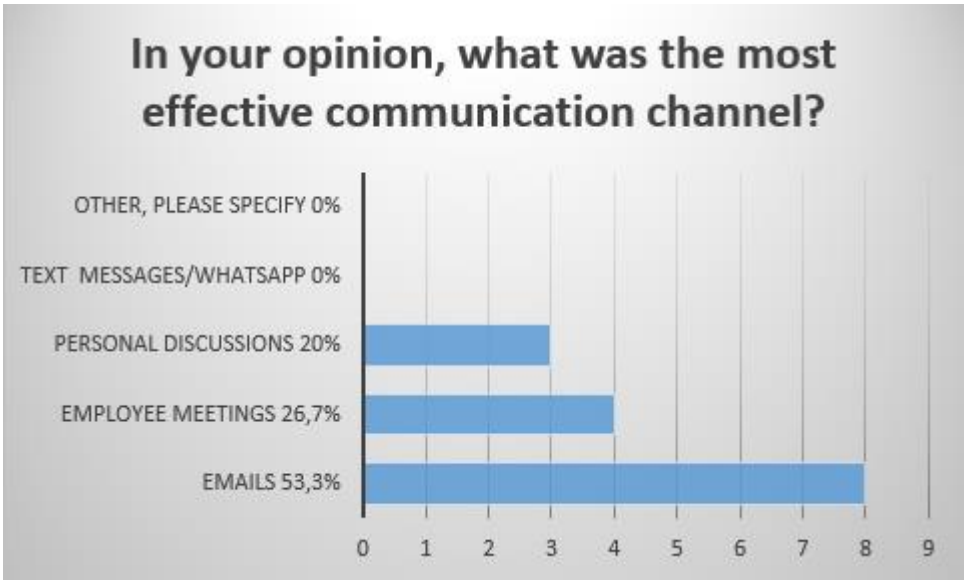
5.2.4 Communication during the change process

As far as communication during the fusion was concerned, the responses from Haukivuori suggested that employee meetings were the most efficient communication channel and the same information was communicated fairly often. The respondent stated that they were not directly asked to give any feedback about the process.

According to the results from Itä-Savo, they had a consensus in opinions regarding the most efficient communication channel, which was personal discussions, and the intervals in which the same information was repeated, which they said to be fairly frequent. Also they did not think they were asked to give feedback as the responses to the question "were you asked to give feedback during the change process?" were either no or I do not know.

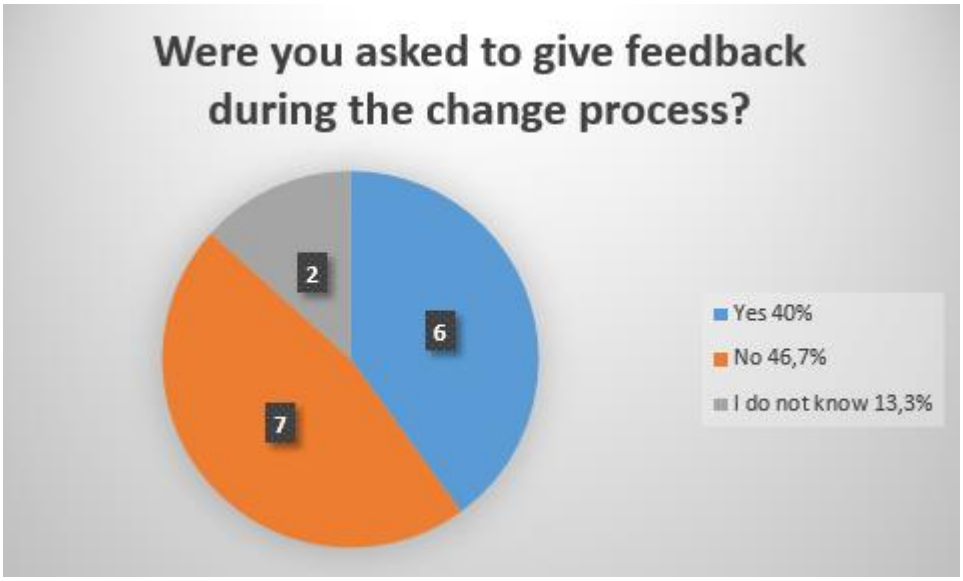
The results for Järvi-Savo differed quite a bit from the ones of Haukivuori and Itä-Savo since there the majority of respondents favoured email as the best communication channel, only one person choosing employee meetings and one person choosing personal discussions instead. The same information was communicated fairly often with only two responses stating that they were informed about a certain issue only once. The answers to the question about being asked to give feedback still fall in line with Haukivuori and Itä-Savo. Most responses, five in total, were given to no, I was not asked to give any feedback; one response for yes, I was asked to give and one for I do not know.

Emails were chosen by three and employee meetings by two as the most efficient communication channel. Three felt that they were told about the same things fairly frequently, one felt that it was repeatedly and one that the information was repeated only once. Contrariwise to the responses from the three other offices, the responses from Metsä-Savo mutually agreed that they were asked to give feedback during the fusion.



Graph 7. Total distribution of responses by amount and percentage

Graph 7 illustrates how the most effective way of communication divided the respondents into two groups; 53,3 % prefer email and 46,7 % Prefer face-to-face communication either through staff meetings or personal conversations. None of the respondents chose WhatsApp, text messages or other ways of communication as the most effective communication channel. The information reached the respondents well as 80 % agreed that the same information was repeated either very often or quite often. Only 20 %, or three respondents, said that the same information was communicated only once. As seen in graph 8 below, 46,7 % felt that they were not asked to give feedback whereas 40 % felt the opposite. 13,3 %, which totals up to two respondents, did not know.



Graph 8. Total distribution of responses by amount and percentage

5.2.5 Empowering the employees

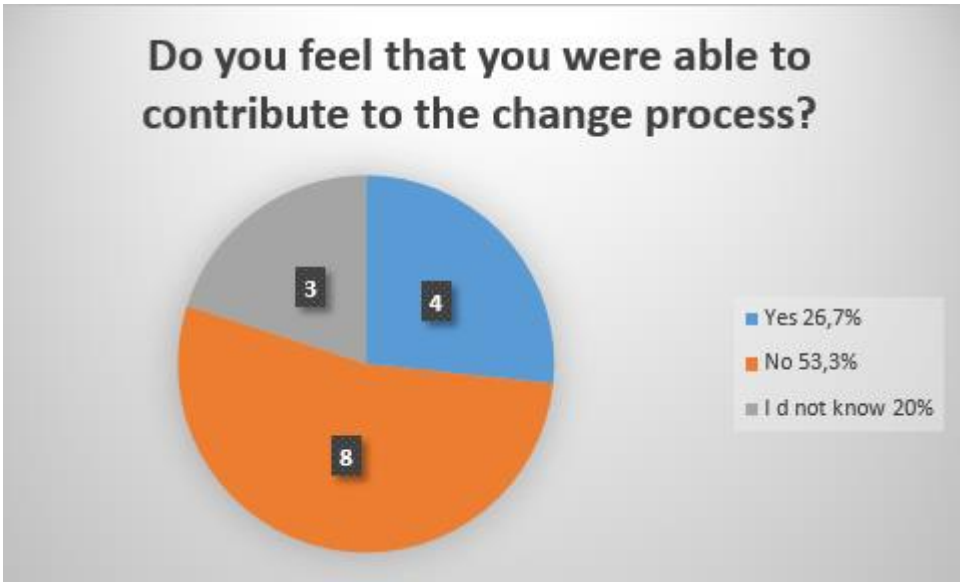
The first question about the empowerment of the employees was “did you get any training during the change process?” At Haukivuori the answer was “no, we got ‘crude’ instructions”. It was also not felt that they had the chance to contribute to the change process.

Itä-Savo did not get any actual training but they did mention being familiarized to the new ways of working and having had “some sort of common meeting, if that can be called training”. Both saw those as beneficial actions. One respondent did not feel like they were able to contribute to the change process and one was not sure.

Five out of seven responses from Järvi-Savo could mention some kind of training that they got. The trainings were about their new tasks, new ways of working or team training. Two respondents said that they did not get any training. out of the respondents who got training one said that it was not useful, the rest said that it was. The majority, five responses in total, expressed that they did not get the chance to contribute to the change process, one response was for yes, I had the chance and one for I do not know.

The somewhat inconsistent answers still continue as Metsä-Savo results show that three did not get any training, one did and one mentioned having attended meetings but was not sure if they count as training. Consequently, they were not sure if the training or the

meetings, were useful. On the contrary to the other offices, here the majority, three respondents, thought that they had the chance to contribute to the process, one thought that they were not and one was not sure.



Graph 9. Total distribution of responses by amount and percentage

Seven of the respondents did not get or were not able to take part in any kind of trainings during the change process, although one of them did mention having taken part in meetings but did not consider them to really be trainings. Out of these seven respondents, six also felt that they were not able to take contribute to the change process. Consequently, it can be assumed that providing training furthers the feeling of empowerment and being a part of the process. Eight of the respondents on the other hand said that they got training regarding their own job and the new common ways of working. Out of the respondents who had taken part in trainings one felt that it was not useful, one did not know and the remaining six felt that the training was useful. Contributing to the change process was not possible in the majority's opinion as 53,3 % of the respondents stated that they did not think they had the chance and 20 % did not know. Only 26,7 % or four respondent stated that they thought they had the possibility to contribute.

5.2.6 Short-term wins

Clear yearly objectives for sales were regarded as the only short-term goals at Haukivuori. Achieving these goals was visible through the investment of effort in the experts' way of selling. These goals were seen to be directly linked to the change process.

Still, the yearly objectives were mentioned first as the short-term goals, only it was specified that those goals were set both for the teams and the whole "house". Also invoicing and some practical issues were said to be changed quickly. One respondent did not really know how reaching these goals was visible and the other one simply mentioned tightened atmosphere and tiredness. Neither of the respondents was sure if the short-term objectives were directly related to the change process.

At Järvi-Savo, some goals were recognized. They were mostly related to financial goals. One respondent explained that the goals at that time were maybe more related to forming cohesive working methods. Three respondents said that there were no short-term goals. Reaching these goals was result from bargaining, comparing and hard work. They also had quarterly follow-ups and one respondent mentioned that reaching the goals became more concrete when the working started to be more fluent and the profits followed. Four responses suggested that the goals were directly related to the fusion and three were for I do not know.

At Metsä-Savo everyone could name some short-term objectives that were set. They were again about the financial goals, one exception being the cohesive ways of working and smooth processes. The ways in which the reached objectives were visible through follow-ups, increased motivation and noticing the working habits slowly become uniform. The question "were the short-term goals linked to the change process?" got three yes -answers, one no -answer and one I do not know.

The first question about short-term wins was if the management set any short-term objectives. Reflecting the management's statement about having two financial and psychological objectives, the responses were in line with this statement only partly. Two main groups can be recognized among the responses; the objectives were either related to financial results or there were no objectives. However, two of the respondents said that the

objectives included gaining cohesive working methods and processes in all of the teams, which was also what the management hoped to achieve. Reaching the objectives showed as increased efforts in sales and in financial results. Gradually reaching cohesive ways of working was also mentioned. Although only two out of fifteen respondents mentioned well-functioning teams and cooperation as a short-term goal, throughout the survey the importance of the teams and trust within the colleagues can be noticed and it can be interpreted that it was not consciously realized as something that can eventually have an impact on the operations nor was it seen as a priority when considering the aspects that need the most attentions or improvement. One respondent said that reaching the objectives increased the level of motivation. On the other end of the spectrum it was also mentioned that the objectives tightened the working atmosphere and made the employees more tired. More than half felt that the objectives were directly related to the fusion and 40 % did not know. 6,7 % or one respondent did not think that the objectives were related to the fusion.

5.2.7 Anchoring and consolidating the changes

The respondents were asked if they had noticed any changes in their working environment or culture, and if so, to briefly explain what. At Haukivuori, there had been some changes and they were described as follows; “four different working cultures were forces into one frame. It is stiff”. As to what good and what bad came with the change, the response was simply “the pros and cons of a ‘big house’”.

At Itä-Savo, the most noticeable changes were larger operating areas and that things were done with less precision. Pursuing bigger profits and emphasizing profitability were mentioned by both respondents. Both respondents also mentioned new colleagues as to what good came with the change but also fresh viewpoints were welcomed. The cons on the other hand were too much emphasis on marketing and that nothing really improved.

Interpersonal relationships and job description related issues were the two main themes among the answers gotten from Järvi-Savo. Changes that concerned the interpersonal relationships were the fact that east and west side do still not feel like they are the same group and the team working model puts stress on relationships as it has not suited everyone well. Job relates changes were more rush, stress, having to work harder but also

clearer division of tasks. Better leading was the single most significant change and with that also planning, follow-ups and strictness. Again, the clearer division of tasks, the fact that the organization is now more financially stable and has more versatile services were mentioned among the advantages. The bad that came was mostly due to the large size alienating the organization from the customers and colleagues from each other. One respondent did not like the fact that his tasks changed and one thought that the employment benefits weakened a bit.

Metsä-Savo had the most incohesive answers as far as the changes in the working environment and culture is concerned as basically each respondent had a different answer. The answers included the management moving further from the employees, more hurry and each team still having their own cultures, slowly getting used to the teams, strong commitment and "chopping off the weak branches". The changes were bigger in other offices according to one respondent. The answers about the good and bad that came with the change were, too, quite scattered. The pros included having own team and large own working area, being more influential in the markets, being able to specialize more and having strong faith in the future. The cons on the other hand were that it was "all downhill for the east side", rush and stress, temporary software problem and being less flexible as a big organization.

The most significant changes were related to the new team working model and more clear result orientation. The team working model does still not work as well as it should in the respondents' opinion as the teams were "forced" together and it creates tension between people since they are now a large group spread on a vast area which has made it challenging to get to know everyone and further establish trust that is needed for the team model to work best. On the other hand, the team model has cleared everyone's job descriptions and they now have specific roles within the teams. The result orientation shows as paying more attention to profit-making and having more precise targets and following how they are reached. Being busier and having to work harder repeatedly came up in the responses as well. Other things that were mentioned less frequently were that the distance between the management and the employees grew, the east and west side still compete with each other regardless of being a part of the same organization, strong commitment among the employees and that at the end of the day the employees are slowly starting to get used to the team model.

The respondents were asked to recognize what good and what bad came with the change. The good changed included most importantly getting new colleagues and better leading culture within the organization. The benefits that came with being a bigger player were being able to offer more versatile services, possibility for more specialization and having more influence in the markets and stability regarding finances of the organization. Further, new viewpoints as to how to work, strong faith in future, follow-ups and prompt planning and own team as well as own working area were among the pros of the new organization. Three categories, or themes, can be found from what the respondents stated as positive outcomes of the fusion; advantages economies of scale, improvements in job descriptions and psychological well-being due to changes in leading styles and colleagues.

The negative effects were still in line with what was already mentioned previously, that being the heavier work load and pressure. The respondents said that the bigger organization is less flexible in its operations than the old one, has alienated from the forest owners due to the large size and makes it harder to work towards common goals as a team. Here, too, the overall feeling seemed to be against the harsh profits first -thinking. The east side was clearly less happy with the changes as they seem to constantly get the "leftover" contracts, in practise nothing has changed and no competent employees have been hired.

5.2.8 Other

Lastly, the respondents were given a chance to comment on anything else regarding the fusion. The overall opinion seemed to be that even though there was quite a bit of change resistance in the beginning, things are gradually starting to work out. It was well understood that it takes time to adjust and permanent changes do not happen overnight. Many of the respondents also agreed that the fusion was necessary and as a smaller organization they could have not made it better than they do now. More emphasis on openness and taking into consideration the employees' opinions was also hoped. The heavier work load was not only temporary in one respondent's opinion. The east side was still unhappy with the east-west confrontation, low level of competence and resistance to collaborate as a team. To summarize the respondents' feelings, they seemed to be hopeful towards the future and understanding about why the fusion needed to happen.

6 DISCUSSION

The single most important aspect that Metsänhoitoyhdistys Etelä-Savo needs to focus more on was building trust among the employees in order to make the team working model work more fluently. Having a tight work community seemed to be important for the employees and to maintain that in a large organization requires paying more attention to team activities and making sure that all the employees know and are comfortable with each other. Furthermore, as the management mentioned, some of the employees had a hard time giving up on handling the whole customer assignment themselves instead of working according to the new model where the sales and implementation were separated from each other, resulting in overlaps. Even though this works better now, it can fully be eliminated when the employees trust that someone else will finalize the customer assignment professionally.

The overall results of the survey were mostly positive except for the answers about being able to contribute to the change process and being asked to give opinions. Kotter makes a good point arguing that significant permanent changes often cannot happen without the contribution of a large group of people. The people may not even be willing to contribute if they feel that their opinions are not heard which is why it is important to directly ask for feedback and show that the feedback is taken seriously.

A clear pattern of dissatisfaction can be noticed throughout all parts of the survey. This was that with the new organization came more profit-driven operations. Some of the respondents did not seem to respond well to this since they thought it created more stress and consequently led to some things being done “lighter, in other words with worse quality”. Perhaps a bit more emphasis should be put on good customer service instead and the profits will follow. This would also be in line with one respondent’s point about the organization becoming alienated from the forest owners, which often is a risk for large organizations.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. The interview questions

Background about the merger:
What were the reasons behind the fusion?
What were the steps / how was the fusion implemented?
What was expected to be achieved with the merger?
What were the objectives and goals?

Creating sense of urgency:
Why was the fusion absolutely necessary?
How did you justify the need for the change to the employees?

Guiding coalition:
Who were the people in charge of leading and managing the change process?
Why were these people selected?
How many members were there?
Did all the members of the team know each other beforehand?

Vision and strategy:
Was the vision and/or strategy re-defined during the change process?
If so, can you briefly explain the new vision/strategy?
Were the employees informed about the changes in the vision/strategy?
How has the vision been visible in your day-to-day work?
Did it make the change process' direction more clear?
Do you feel like knowing the vision helped in decision-making?
was the vision realistic and reachable?
Did you set any goals based on the vision?

Communication during the change process:
What communication channels were used during the change process?
Which ones do you think worked the best?
How frequently was the same information repeated?
Did you ask feedback from the employees? If not, did you get feedback anyway?

Empowering the employees:

Did you notice any resistance among the employees?

How did you deal with it?

What kind of practical issues did merging different working cultures cause?

Did the employees get any training during the change process?

Short-term wins:

Did the management set any short-term goals?

What were they?

Which ones were achieved?

Were they strongly linked to the change process?

How fast were the first short-term wins reached?

Anchoring and consolidating the changes:

Have you noticed any changes in the work environment or culture?

Other:

Did you encounter any challenges?

How were these challenges dealt with?

Did you encounter anything else surprising during or after the change process?

Appendix 2. The employee survey

Which office did you work at before the fusion?

- Haukivuori
- Itä-Savo
- Järvi-Savo
- Metsä-Savo

How long had you been working at Metsänhoitoyhdistys when the fusion took place?

- Less than a year
- 1 -5 years
- 6 – 10 years
- 11 – 15 years
- 16 – 20 years
- More than 20 years

Sense of urgency:

Do you understand why the fusion was necessary?

- Yes
- No
- I do not know

On a scale from 1 – 5, how necessary did you think the fusion was? (5 = extremely necessary, 1 = not necessary at all)

Did you notice the need for the change yourself?

How was the need for the change justified to you?

The guiding coalition:

Can you name all the people who were responsible of leading and managing the change process?

On a scale 1 – 5, do you think that the team was easily reachable? (5 = very easy to reach, 1 = not reachable at all).

Do you feel like you got enough support during the change process?

Did you get intermediate information about the progress of the fusion?

- Yes, enough
- Yes, but not often enough
- I was not informed about the progress of the fusion

Would you have needed something more from your superiors?

The vision:

Can you describe the organization's vision?

How has the vision been visible in the organization's day-to-day activities?

Did knowing the vision make the change process' direction more clear?

Did knowing the vision help in decision-making?

Do you think that the vision was realistic?

What channels were used to communicate the vision?

Do you think that the vision was motivating?

- Yes
- No
- I do not know

Communication during the change process:

In your opinion, what was the most effective communication channel?

- Emails
- Employee meetings
- Personal discussions
- Text messages / WhatsApp
- Other, please specify

How often was the same information communicated?

- Repeatedly
- Fairly often
- Once or twice
- Only once
- I was not always officially informed about the matter, I heard about it from elsewhere

Were you asked to give feedback during the change process?

- Yes
- No
- I do not know

Empowering the employees:

Did you get any training during the change process?

If yes, do you think the training was necessary?

Yes

No

I do not know

Do you feel that you were able to contribute to the change process?

Short-term wins:

Did the management set any short-term goals?

If yes, please describe how reaching the goals was visible within the organization.

Were the short-term goals linked to the change process?

Yes

No

I do not know

Anchoring and consolidating the changes:

Have you noticed any changes in the work environment?

What good came with the change? What bad came with the change?

Other:

Here you can comment on anything else related to the change process