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OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AS A MANAGEMENT TOOL

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Abstract

Optimal work performance of an employee consists of a balance between work and leisure. The personnel is more productive and satisfied if areas such as appropriate workload, healthy working conditions, effective stress management, sufficient recovery, a balanced diet and lifestyle together with a satisfactory level of physical exercise to deal with the daily demands of a job and daily life are taken care of.

The wellbeing of employees has become an important issue in the business world. The aim of this thesis was to find out if occupational health can be used as a management tool. I examined occupational health in Osuuskauppa PeeÄssä from two perspectives, the personnel and management, and also how the personnel and the superiors have experienced Työvire-activity.

The thesis consists of theory and research parts. There were two researches conducted for this thesis; the first one was a written questionnaire for staff members of one outlet. The other study was carried out in a form of an interview. The interviews were gathered from the managers of four outlets. The questionnaire for the personnel focused on the methods of maintaining a good state of occupational health. The interviews of the managers focused on the managerial perspective; what is the responsibility of a manager in occupational health and can it be used as a management tool?

The state of occupational health of an outlet does have a direct impact on the wellbeing of the personnel, work atmosphere, on the number of sick leaves and on the financial figures. The managers felt that Työvire-activity improves the fellow-feeling and atmosphere if arranged properly. Työvire at its best is a combination of work-related and lifestyle activities which improve the general wellbeing of the staff.

Looking after occupational health is one of the most important duties of the manager; daily observations of the mood of the staff have to be carefully examined. In case the manager does not react to possible issues early enough, the occupational health of the outlet is in great danger. The consequences of a weakened work atmosphere and occupational health reflect on daily work efficiency, the level of customer service, the mood of the staff, and in the end, the financial performance of the company

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1 INTRODUCTION

Occupational health has become an important part of the business world. The physical and mental wellbeing of staff has a direct impact on the financial performance of the company. The aim of this thesis was to find out if occupational health can be used as a management tool. The role of a manager and management is emphasized in this thesis.

The reason for examining occupational health was very simple; I wanted to know how occupational health is regarded by staff members and management. I also wanted to find out how occupational could be taken in consideration in daily managerial work. The physical and mental wellbeing of the staff does show a link between the efficiency and financial outcome of corporations.

The amount of money invested in wellbeing services is relatively high and therefore, the real contribution of these services should be examined; what is the real benefit to the personnel and to the financial performance of the companies.

As a new manager myself, I also wanted to learn something that I could possibly utilize at my daily work and of course, share the same information to my fellow managers. The wellbeing and good work atmosphere have always been important to me and I am interested in everything that helps in developing these areas.

I collected data in forms of a questionnaire from the personnel and an interview from the managers of Osuuskauppa PeeÄssä. Osuuskauppa PeeÄssä is a province wide service corporation in the area of Pohjois-Savo. PeeÄssä operates in the fields of supermarket retail, travel, nutrition and petrol stations in the area of 23 corps. PeeÄssä has about 80 outlets and about 1800 employees in its operation field. The success of PeeÄssä is based on profitable business and skilled personnel. (S-kanava 2010 a)

The turnover of Osuuskauppa PeeÄssä in 2009 was 539 million Euros (Tervetuloa PeeÄssään 2010).

Osuuskauppa PeeÄssä is a part of S-group. The S Group comprises the cooperative enterprises and Suomen Osuuskauppojen Keskuskunta (SOK) with its subsidiaries. The S Group provides services nationally for the supermarket trade, the service station store and fuel trade, the department store and speciality store trade, the tourism and hospitality business, the automotive and accessories trade as well as the agricultural trade. The purpose of S Group is to provide services and benefits for members. The co-op members, S-etukortti-card holders own the cooperative enterprises and the 22 cooperative enterprises own Suomen Osuuskauppojen Keskuskunta (SOK).

(S-kanava 2010 b)

Structure of the study

The first chapters of the thesis are an introduction to occupational health; what the concept really means and what it consists of. Next chapters describe the meaning of occupational health. The research part includes two different studies; the employee and manager perspectives. The employee research consisted of a written questionnaire. The study of the managers includes four interviews from the managers of Osuuskauppa PeeÄssä. Occupational health is then examined from the perspective of management. The last chapter includes the analysis and discussion of the thesis.

2 OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH

Occupational health in working life

According to the Finnish social and health ministry, occupational health consists of the health and physical wellbeing of the employee, safety of the work place, well organized job tasks, work atmosphere and management. Each employee has an influence on their own health and wellbeing. Healthy and energetic fellow workers are naturally beneficial for the efficiency of the company as well as for the general work environment.

The role of a manager in creating good occupational health is as significant as the role of the staff. A manager is responsible for the safety of the work place, organizing tasks appropriately, looking after work atmosphere and leading the entire community in to the right direction. The Finnish social and health ministry also states that a staff with good occupational health works productively and professionally. The employees find their jobs pleasant, rewarding and as a part of general control of life. (Suomen sosiaali- ja terveysministeriö)

According to Furman et al, (2006, 30-32) “Työpaikan pelisäännöt ja miten ne tehdään”, interaction is something that can be learnt and common rules and ways to act can be built around it. A good work atmosphere has a positive impact on the health of the employees, the innovativeness of teams, information flow, and customer satisfactory as well as to the result and productivity of actual work. This matter has yet not been thoroughly examined but according to a survey, which can be taken liable, tense and routine oriented work atmosphere causes symptoms among the employees and increases the number of absences and sick leaves significantly. Instead of concentrating on existing problems, solution oriented approach should be used. This approach means turning problems into goals. The benefit of solution oriented approach is that it increases hope and willingness to co-operation.

2.1 Occupational health in S-Group

The aim of the principles of occupational health is to define what developing occupational health in S-group means and to describe the essential parties that are responsible for developing occupational health. The aim is to clear the meaning of development of occupational health and its different forms as a part of the management culture and daily managerial duties.

S-group is a nationally operating corporation in the service sector. Over 80 % of the staff is working in sales or in the service sector. Occupational health of these people is vital and has an impact on customer satisfactory and on the entire financial performance of the corporation. Occupational health is cherished in S-group and is being looked at from the perspective of social responsibility. The 34 000 employees of the S-group form numerous different, and different sized work communities. Occupational health of these communities has to be seen as an even clearer real social core competence that the employer can influence as well. The amount and quality is decided and controlled by the employer.

Occupational health is not alone a positive or a negative but more of phenomena that constantly changes with work. Due to that, occupational health requires constant attention from the managers and the board of executives. Occupational health is born from a functional way of work. Clearly organized work tasks and defined responsibilities create a foundation for controlling work and achieving goals. Managerial tasks and management are based on creating results through people, and with them. Developing occupational health at its core is building long term core competences.

Businesses have a responsibility based on the law (health and protective laws) to look after the safety and health care of a work place. In addition to these basics, the boards of executives in the S-group are responsible for creating a working culture that promotes wellbeing. In daily development, managers are in a key role with special instructions and forms. (S-ryhmän työhyvinvointiperiaatteet 2007)

Occupational health is one area of wellbeing. At its best, work promotes the overall experience of wellbeing and health. Safe work that corresponds to the prerequisites of an individual together with feeling of provoking and continuous learning experiences is the essential of occupational health. Healthy lifestyle, hobbies, other free time activities and close relations to family and friends balance the stress caused by work. The entire wellbeing of a person consists of a balance between work and free time.

S-group has its unique brand of occupational health, Työvire (work drive). Työvire is born as a result of succeeded daily work and good management. The aim of Työvire is an employee, who is feeling well and is a part of a pleasant work community and always aims at the best possible results when performing tasks. The following figure describes factors that have an impact on professional health.

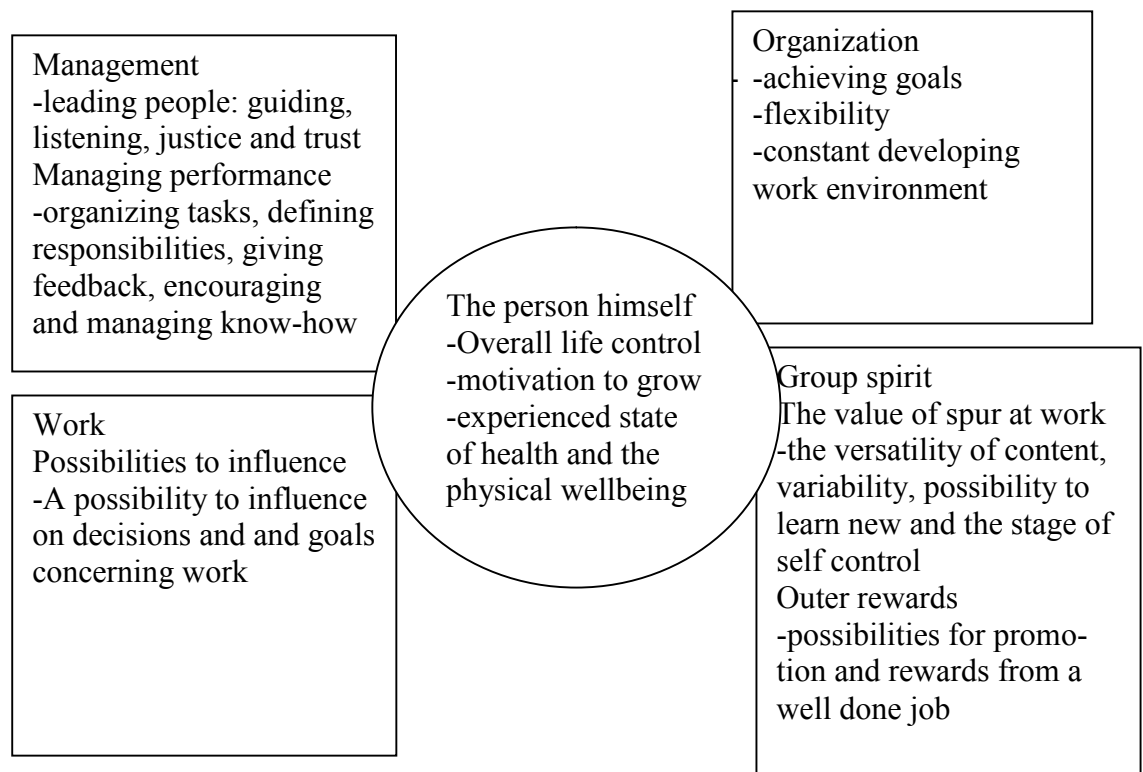


Figure 1. *Factors affecting to professional health:*

(S-ryhmän työhyvinvointiperiaatteet 2007)

Supporting units of occupational health

Occupational health is a part of the daily management and operations of each unit. All and all, managers and the members of the work community are responsible for developing Työvire activity and the success of it. When developing the unit and solving problems, help from the experts from the outside is often needed. For these situations, each corporation should organize a Työvire-co-operation model, which is formed by three different parties; a person responsible for human resources, health care of the unit and the education centre of Suomen Osuuskauppojen Keskuskunta, Jollas Instituutti. These support units are responsible for guiding and coordinating the local developing of occupational health.

The Suomen Osuuskauppojen Keskuskunta human resources department, S-health care and Jollas Instituutti come along if needed in its own knowhow area and will help in developing and problem solving of matters that involve with occupational health. These three main units form developing Työvire, a support organization covering the entire S-group, which functions as a common know how centre regarding to questions about occupational health.

The responsibility of an individual and the maintenance of occupational health

Wellbeing always involves taking responsibility of an individual's own life, job and ability to work. A manager should aim at encouraging the staff in developing their wellbeing but the employee also has his own responsibility and obligation to take care of his own wellbeing. Taking care of individual wellbeing is a part of the subordinate skills of the employee. The manager should although look after that the staff has a chance to affect on the planning and developing of the operations of the work community. (S-ryhmän työhyvointiperiaatteet 2007)

Työvire in Osuuskauppa PeeÄssä

Työvire activities in Osuuskauppa PeeÄssä aim at developing the wellbeing of the personnel. Työvire has been defined as part of improving work atmosphere and therefore, the main goal of Työvire activities is to strengthen team spirit. There is an idea on the background of the activities that good team spirit is based on physical, psychic and social abilities, which are tried to be influenced by Työvire activities. The entire strategy for developing the personnel is really operations to maintain the ability work in PeeÄssä even though it is not especially mentioned.

Työvire aims at developing most factors that affect on the ability to work. These factors do not include outlets themselves, equipment or ergonomics due to the fact that these matters are looked after in other contexts. Työvire activities in Osuuskauppa PeeÄssä are seen as activities aiming at maintaining broad ability to work. The amount of money annually spent on Työvire activities is significant and varies between outlets. (Holopainen 2003,)

The content of Työvire is decided by the human resources department and by the superiors of outlets. Before year 2010, Työvire activities were mostly ideas of the managers. The human resources requested a Työvire plan with a planned budget and activities including professional, social, physical and psychic areas. From the beginning of 2010, each employee has received a certain amount of coupons for exercise, maximum worth of 180 Euros per year. Osuuskauppa PeeÄssä also participates in the cost of work shoes every year by 50 % of the price of the shoes. In addition to this, there is a possibility to arrange a dinner and a culture event, Christmas party or perhaps a weekend at Vuokatti or Tahko, where they have special offers for cabins to our staff members. As the exercise coupons increase the level of responsibility of an individual, it is important for a manager to listen to the staff members of their feelings and ideas concerning Työvire-activity. (Tervetuloa PeeÄssään 2010)

A part of the employees is satisfied with the current situation and has found a way to exercise on their own. There is also a group of employees who find it challenging to exercise alone and therefore, some outlets have started to take part in e.g. dance classes as a group where each person can utilize the coupons, and still get to do something together with the community. (S-ryhmän työhyvointiperiaatteet 2007)

According to *Ässä* magazine, Doctor Jari Malmström from S-healthcare believes that annual Työvire-diplomas encourage the rewarded outlets at their daily work. The rewarded units had both good financial performance and strong results on work satisfactory results. An employee, who feels good, performs well at work at the same time. Juha –Pekka Mäkelä, a manager of one of the Työvire rewarded units from S-market Jämsänkoski considers managing occupational health significant. In Jämsänkoski, the wellbeing of the personnel has consciously been developed. According to Mäkelä, Työvire consists of several daily factors, which form a larger entity. The mission of a manager in the entity is to look after the employees and encourage them at their work.

The developing area of year 2009 has been improving communications. In addition to annual performance review discussions and weekly meetings, communication is promoted in new methods. Internal communication was seen as a challenge and therefore, common rules of the work place were written down and the level of obeying them is being followed in monthly discussions. As new method of communication, they have started to use flap boards. This increases communications between the morning and night shifts. The flap board makes it easy to inform others about unfinished tasks as an example.

Everybody needs to make an effort when developing a work community. The responsibility of the development is on the entire personnel. According to Mäkelä, working as a team leads to good results. (Ässä 2009)

The early support program of the S-group

The early support program of the S-group consists of all kinds of anticipation, which can help in creating a better state of occupational health and cut down costs. The early support program aims at helping the managers of the S-group in detecting possible problems in the work community as early as possible. The benefits of the early support program are the stability of staff, improving working methods and productivity together as well as preventing sick leaves and premature retirements.

The guide approved by the human resources department of the S-group states that the manager is obliged to react on the problems that occur among the employees in time. The most common signs of an employee not feeling well are continuous under performance at work, constantly coming late for work, sick leaves exceeding five times or twenty days during the previous year, weakened results of work satisfactory survey and negative customer feedback, either appointed towards a single worker or towards the entire work community. In case there are problems, the manager should try to solve them using an early support program-discussion form as an example and try to come across a solution inside the community. Depending on the nature of the problem, the solution will be sought either inside the work place or with an outsider, such as health authorities.

When solving problems at work place, the overall state of occupational health has to be taken in consideration; how the tasks are organised, what are the working hours and conditions, the rules of the community, work motivation activities and the possibilities of professional development.

Support of a manager is also a part of the early support program. The employee should be contacted during a sick leave in order for him to know that he is looked after. In case the sick leave exceeds 30 days, the employee must be contacted. By staying in touch, the employee knows that he is welcome to return back to work and is not left alone with his problems. (S-ryhmän varhaisen tuen malli 2007)

The effects of occupational health on financial performance

Otala & Ahonen in *Työhyvinvointi tuloksetekijänä* (2003, 72-75) state that researches indicate that the wellbeing of staff and the financial performance of a company have a connection. It has been calculated that the money companies invest in occupational health can be got back by 10-20 times. Occupational health is exactly the core competence that creates stable result development; it helps the personnel to renew and work on good results in the future as well.

Otala & Ahonen (2003), present factors that have a direct impact on the financial figures; sick leaves and accidents, efficient time management, individual productivity, processes and development.

Otala & Ahonen continue by stating that there have been calculations of the costs of sick leaves. These calculations in Työterveyslaitos indicated that a company can save up to 1000-2500 Euros annually by investing in wellbeing and occupational health. The savings were born as a result of decreased amount of sick leaves and the growth of productivity. The most profitable investment was to develop management and professional skills. Good management and staff satisfactory were seen to be linked to the productivity of the company.

Otala & Ahonen summarize that according to studies, financial benefit was received from improving the work atmosphere, sick leaves decreased and efficiency increased as the staff was encouraged to look after their physical wellbeing. It has been indicated that there is a link between productivity and education. Companies that invest in education grow faster compared to the ones that do not. If the personnel have a possibility to participate in and influence on job related matters, the productivity increases and sick absences decrease.

3 MANAGEMENT

Organizations have started to need new type of management. Instead of giving orders and controlling work, a manager is nowadays closer to a motivator, inspirer or a discussion partner. This type of leadership emphasizes managing changes inside the organization, creating visions and increasing the engagement level of people. Traditional leadership knowhow is needed when planning realistic budgets, organising work, solving problems and controlling operations. Managing occupational health has to be included in the content of work and the processes, the actions of the work community, equipment- and environment and combining work with personal life. (Rauramo 2008, 148)

3.1. The basic pillars of a well functioning work community

Pekka Järvinen's book *Esimiestyö Ongelmatilanteissa* (1998, 45-47) describes the basic pillars of a well functioning work community in the following Figure 2. The prerequisites of a well functioning work community are looking after both, the productivity and the wellbeing of the work community. The book presents the basic pillars of a well functioning work community; an organization supporting the every day work, management serving the every day work, organizing tasks rationally, common rules that have to be obeyed, open interaction and constant follow-up of the operations. A sign of a well functioning work community is that work is a continuous topic in discussions of the employees.

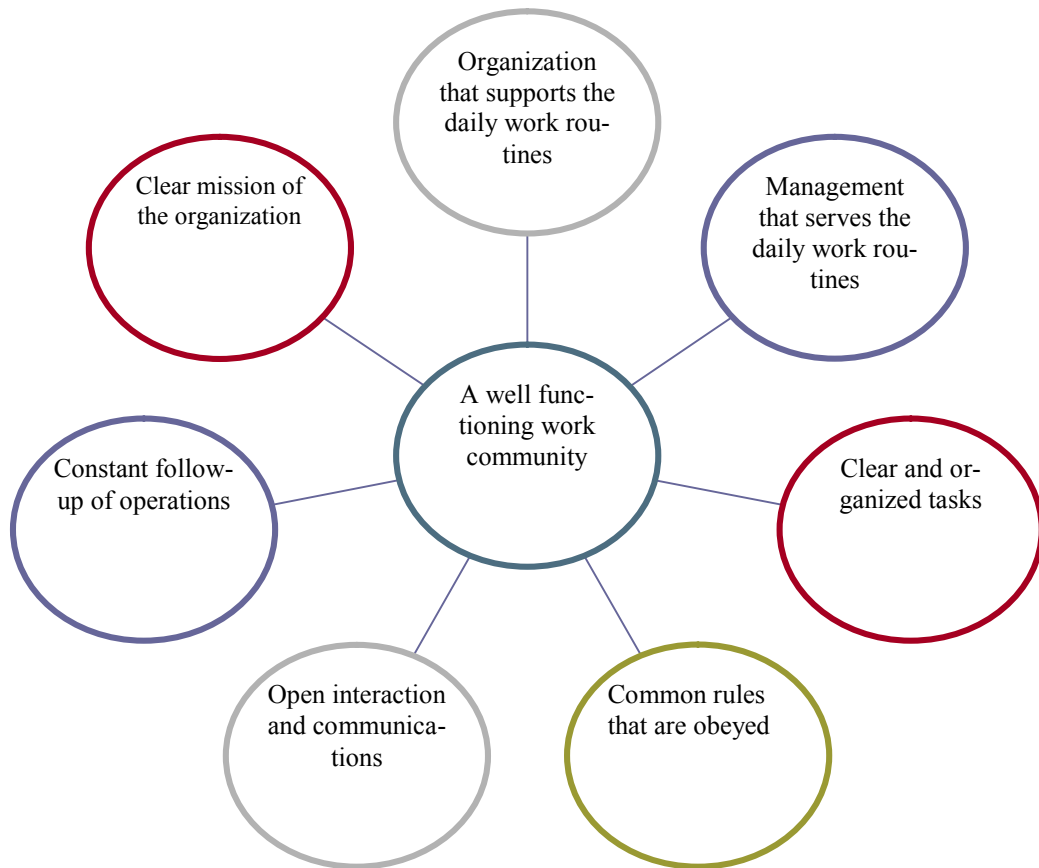


Figure 2. *The basic pillars of a well functioning work community* (Järvinen 1994, 46)

The book gives an example of a community with a poor work atmosphere. The problem was tried to fix by lifting up the so called “we-spirit” by having fun together. The method did not solve the actual problems but instead strengthened the existing small groups inside the community. This was a result of not dealing with problems concerning work at all. Instead of having fun there should have been discussions about the core and basic of the job; why do we exist after all and come to work every day. The aspect of customer service and customers should have been emphasized as well. The management and staff should question and criticize all actions and operations of the corporation that can not be explained via the aspect of a product or the buyer of the service. All and all, every operation of a company, such as internal trainings, devel-

opment, administration or different support services, is produced for the customer's sake.

According to Järvinen (1998, 63-65), management that supports working means that the manager works as a certain type of coach close, yet far enough from his subordinates. Järvinen's book has an example as former chief executive of Nokia Jorma Ollila states that it is important to create an organization that people feel as their own. The professional or unprofessional example behaviour of the manager always reflects on the employees as well. Therefore it is important that the manager engages himself to the development and strategies and does not only expect his staff to do so.

Well organized job tasks mean that each employee knows the expectations he should fulfil and what are the things expected to result from his actions. Rules that are defined together also define the spirit of the corporation. It is crucial to inform new employees about the limits, responsibilities and what kinds of actions are permitted. Open interaction in management means sharing information to those parties of the community that the matters involve. Open feedback is also an obligation of a manager; the employee always has a right to justify his behaviour.

Järvinen stresses the importance of always examining the actions and operations of a company from its core. From the perspective of the success of the company it is very important how the basic mission is handled. The core, basic meaning for a company to exist is also a matter connecting the staff, the overall reason why people come to work every day. In a well functioning work community the discussions of the personnel are always related to work, customers or products.

3.2. The role of a manager

A manager is always an example to his employees. If the behaviour of a manager encourages to a certain type of action, the employees also think they are entitled to a similar type of behaviour. Aarnikoivu in *Esimiehenä arjessa* (2008, 177-178) introduces the term co-leadership. According to Aarnikoivu, everything begins, and in the worst case, ends, to a manager. Good leadership and management directly reflect on the good result of the company and to the wellbeing of the staff. This can be considered as core competence.

A manager who utilizes co-leadership knows that he is in a crucial role in the work community. It is important for a manager to promote achieving goals, support the staff and charge for responsible actions. Co-leadership means that the manager truly understands how he is looked up as a role model and acts according to it all the time. An important emphasis should be put on subordinate skills together with common interests and aims. Co-leadership means that as well as the manager as the employees should be able to examine their own actions in a critically from time to time.

Aarnikoivu (2008, 177-178) summarizes the management style of co-leadership as following:

- Coach = create prerequisites in order to succeed and develop
- Care = pay attention, give feedback, notice the meaning of unofficial communication
- Demand = challenge to develop, set goals, follow up
- Inspire = motivate, encourage and energize
- Share responsibilities = point out the meaning and effects of doing and not doing tasks properly
- Communicate = chat, inform, share about matters concerning work
- Interact = discuss, commit, participate
- Strengthen = help the employee to see the strength in himself and indicate the ability to affect on his own wellbeing and results, trust

In practice, a manager works as a coach in every day life; it is a manager's duty to support, guide and develop his own team towards better results. A manager should also pay attention and interest towards the employees from simple daily greetings to giving positive and constructing feedback. As a manager, one should also demand certain things from the staff; the continuous evaluation and developing of operations, setting goals and challenges help the work community to develop and maintain their professional skills. When a manager is following and demanding high quality and good results of the every day work, the community has a clear idea of the core of the existence of the business.

The meaning of taking responsibility should be showed via indicating the influence of completing and on the contrary, neglecting tasks. A manager should clearly express the meaning of a free rider from the perspective of the entire community. Communication, the daily verbal and body language, as well as work related build trust and open interaction. A written document on the wall often is not enough communication, real conversation and exchanging opinions face to face is truly important. Strengthening on the other hand is the interaction between a manager and an employee, with which the manager convinces the employee of his personal resources and his ability to influence on his occupational health and results. (Aarnikoivu 2008, 177-178)

3.3. Managing health and safety

Health and safety gives a manager a chance to be more proactive than reactive. There are strategies to improve workplace health and safety:

1. Design – safe and healthy systems at work
2. Exhibit – strong management commitment
3. Inspect – the workplace for health and safety hazards
4. Establish – procedures and controls for dealing with health and safety issues
5. Promote - safe working behaviours
6. Develop - training programmes
7. Set up – health and safety committees

8. Monitor – health and safety policies
9. Draw up – an action plan and check list

Guaranteeing a safe and healthy workplace succeeds best when possible hazards are eliminated as early as possible. If safety and health is not clearly appointed to be a part of every manager's responsibility, there will not be enough commitment to the issues and there is a danger for apathy that has been a major cause of work accidents in the past. One proactive strategy is regularly inspecting the workplace; observing the work environment and arranging physical examinations for the employees.

A manager can create a "psychological contract" with his own behaviour; if managerial behaviour promotes health and safety; the employees are likely to act in a similar way. By increasing the amount of safety and health knowledge, the personnel adapts to regulations better. Employee representatives in form of committees have great potential in developing health and safety at work.

The importance of monitoring health and safety should not be forgotten; managers should regularly make sure that safety policy, management procedures and arrangements are functioning and are adapted to any new developments or structures concerning work at the workplace. (Bratton & Gold, 2003, 175-185)

European Union health and safety legislation

European Union member countries have both EU directives, and the legislation of their own countries to follow. In the UK as an example, the EU legislation overrules the domestic laws. The EU directives include several health and safety issues, such as the use of asbestos, accident hazard control, risk assessment, regulations concerning equipment and prevention of repetitive strain injuries. The directives are binding although countries are entitled to decide whether they are legal or administrative. (Bratton & Gold, 2003, 162)

Human Resource departments are responsible for health, safety and welfare issues. The role of human resources is to formulate policy statements and procedures, monitor safety policy, advice managers and the personnel about the safety legislation, de-

sign, provide and record health and safety training and to liaise with the safety and occupational health authorities. (Stredwick 2000, 359)

Finnish legislation

According to Finnish legislation, the employer is responsible for looking after the health and safety of the personnel at work. The employer has to take in consideration work, working conditions and other factors related to working environment and the individual needs of the employee.

The employer has to have a program that is planned for promoting health and safety and also for maintaining the employee's ability to work. The program covers developing ideas for working conditions and issues involving with work environment. The aims of the program for developing health and safety and maintaining working ability have to be taken in consideration in the developing and planning process of the company and the aims have to be discussed with the employees or their representatives. (Työturvallisuuslaki 2003)

The science of wellbeing

According to an article by Peter Crush (2009) it is very challenging to define what a healthy wellbeing policy is and even more challenging to evaluate the benefits to employee performance and financial figures. The group medical officer David Batman of Nestlé UK is cited in the article as he states that instead of forcing the staff for healthy lifestyle options they should have more autonomy in their jobs. According to Batman, increasing autonomy has a positive impact on stress, blood pressure and heart conditions. He also introduces the idea of rather investing in good management than persuading traditionally healthy work policies.

Crush' article (2009) also introduces a thought of a HR director of Parcel Force Peter McDonald who admits utilizing wellbeing in order to gain commercial advantage. In addition to saving in costs, McDonald emphasizes the quality in service; with replacement personnel the job is often done slower and with a poorer outcome from the

customer's point of view. McDonald offers regular benefits such communication and health benefits to his personnel and is eager to find out which of them especially have an improving influence on specific results.

Crush's article deals with engagement level as well; according to Michelle Smith from OC Tanner/Towels Perrin, a survey conducted to OC Tanner/Towers Perrin in 13 countries revealed that wellbeing and opportunity were the most important reasons for the engagement level of the personnel. The engagement levels varied from places with weak wellbeing of 35 % to strong wellbeing with the engagement level of 76%. Smith advises companies with weak engagement levels to pay attention to making the employees feel appreciated.

Crush's article emphasizes the importance of not just buying wellbeing services but carefully examining their influence on the performance of the entire company in each area.

4. RESEARCH METHODS AND RESULTS

4.1 Research objectives and methods

According to Ghauri and Grønhaug 2002 (36-37) problems drive research, and therefore, without research a question there is no research at all. The purpose of a research is to create new aspects, to find out something we do not already know. The purpose of this thesis was to study occupational health from the perspective of management; is it possible to utilize occupational health in daily management and what kind of effects it has on work atmosphere, sick leaves and to the financial figures of the company.

I combined quantitative and qualitative research methods in this thesis. Ghauri and Grønhaug 2002 (85-88) state that the choice of a research method depends on the answers that we are looking for. According to the book, quantitative methods tend to be considered more scientific, but often most suitable methods and techniques depend on the research problem and its purpose. Qualitative research method is often chosen if the research topic is something that we do not know much before hand. Qualitative methods are most suitable also for understanding human behaviour and functions. Quantitative methods again focus on facts, have a logical and critical approach and have a controlled measurement.

Descriptive research methods were chosen for the thesis. There was a questionnaire and interviews. I chose to use more qualitative than quantitative methods as I felt they would give me a wider perspective and more verbal freedom for the respondents. The questionnaire of the personnel was both qualitative and a quantitative. I wanted to have a structured questionnaire that could be analysed and processed easily. Especially during the interviews, it was possible to lead the conversation further if interesting new perspectives were raised during the interview. In the quantitative questionnaire the answers were limited just for the specific questions I had planned beforehand.

4.2. The research of the staff

Two researches were made for this thesis. The other one was made for the staff of a single outlet of Osuuskauppa PeeÄssä and the other one was for the managers of Osuuskauppa PeeÄssä. The research for the employees dealt with questions related to occupational health, the current state and characteristics of it. The research was executed by a written questionnaire and a personal health spin-form. The research for the managers was done via personal interviews.

The questionnaire for the staff was built from six open questions and a personal health spin-form. I planned the questions based on the results of the 2008 and 2009 staff satisfactory results; occupational health and working environment in general seemed to be in a weak state. I wanted to pick up the atmosphere and approach the topic from the staff's point of view.

The results of the employee questionnaire

The results of the questionnaire of the personnel give a good impression how the employees feel about both, their personal and the general state of occupational health of the work community. The questionnaire (Appendix 1) included six open questions and a personal health spin-form and was filled by eight employees.

All respondents considered the state of their own wellbeing good. Exercise and rest were the most common ways of maintaining personal occupational health. The respondents wrote that things that had a positive influence on work atmosphere were solving problems together, positive customer feedback, working as a team, humour, goals, customers, positive feedback from the manager, meetings and other gatherings, attitude, colleagues and everybody's personal effort concerning tasks. Negative atmosphere was created by not reacting or responding to questions, accusations and spying, gossiping behind each other's back, differences of opinion, minding the ways of working of others too much and exceeding checking up on things.

In my research on a scale from 1-10, the average grade given to the atmosphere of the unit was 7, 75. In the staff satisfactory study the staff evaluated the working atmosphere as 3.4 out of a 5. The grade is not terrible but could clearly be improved. Personally I feel that the biggest area of development is increasing open interaction. From a manager's point of view this means open and interactive feedback, informing and lifting up the spirit of the community. From the staff on the contrary this requires positive attitude, helping a co-worker, informing others and leaving gossiping behind. Trusting a colleague, and forgetting the spying, would probably decrease the level of tenseness.

The personal motivation at work and wellbeing can be maintained by giving the employees the moderate amount of work, by having hobbies and other activities, work mates, positive attitude towards work, feelings of success, versatile and well done shifts and new challenges. In a staff meeting, where the results of staff satisfactory survey were discussed, the employees impressed that they wished the manager would consider going from night shift to morning shift either via a day off or by a day shift. Two days off in a row was also a common wish of the employees concerning schedules.

The respondents said that the manager can build and maintain good work atmosphere by encouraging; after all, positive feedback always creates more good than the negative. Being equal, and fair to everybody, justice and friendliness were pointed out as the most important qualifications of a manager. Minor and human mistakes were hoped to be left for less attention. The employees also wished that the manager would discuss and listen to the opinions of the staff. Unclear issues were also requested to be solved as early as possible. Acting as a role model and the ability to take in consideration the wishes and thoughts of the subordinates was said to be very important in the behaviour of a manager.

According to the respondents, each individual can have a positive impact on the work atmosphere via positive thinking, collaboration and helping a colleague when needed. It was also important to be yourself, appreciate the work of a co-worker, avoid gossiping behind anybody's back, have good spirit, being active, take everybody in consideration and work as a team. Good attitude, finishing personal tasks as well as possible,

being social and treat other's as you wish they treated you- mentality were also mentioned among the answers.

The personal health spin-form (Appendix 2) brought rather good results. The respondents evaluated their physical and psychic health, relations to family and friends, social and professional condition and an ability to renew. The average results on a scale from 1-10 were as following:

- Physical health 8,
- Psychic health 8, 75,
- Relations to family and friends 9, 25,
- Social condition 8, 25,
- Professional condition 7, 75,
- Ability to renew 8, 75.

A quick conclusion can be made based on the results; the employees are doing very well outside the job but have a clearly weaker professional condition. According to the staff satisfactory study 2009, the individual capacity had gotten weaker from the previous year 2008. Improving professional health should be started by asking staff how they see the current task organizing in the unit. Is work shift planning as it should be; are there enough people at work at each time, are the different shifts well balanced with proportional work loads. A manager has to carefully look into this matter; in case the manager has been planning shifts the same way for several years, it may be a time for a complete stop and truly examine if the shifts made in the past are the most efficient ones and offer the right amount of work load to the employees. A certain revenue/working hour efficiency rate does limit the manager to a certain extent when budgeting hours, but naturally, the employees have the right to express their opinion as well.

4.3. The interviews of the managers

The second research was conducted in a form of an interview. There were 17 questions that I asked from each of my interviewees. I did not limit my questions to the 17 planned ones, but expanded the questions and conversation with additional questions if the interviewees seemed to be willing to speak more about the topic.

I wanted to have a certain question frame in order to be able to compare the answers and results with each other and also give space to follow up questions that rose up during the interview. I felt like I got more information out of the interviewees compared to sticking up strictly to the planned questions.

I interviewed four managers from Osuuskauppa PeeÄssä. I recorded all interviews with a tape recorder and was able to write down everything the interviewees said.

I scheduled appointments with them before hand and went over to their work places. The interview took about an hour and a half. The aim of the interview was to find out the role of management in the state of occupational health,

The meaning of occupational health

I started the interview by asking how the managers would define occupational health. All respondents thought that the word occupational health is a very broad term. According to one respondent, occupational health consists of the physical and mental wellbeing of the employee. Work atmosphere, safety issues and management style are also seen as factors that have an impact on work environment. Another one summarized occupational health as liking one's job and feeling good about coming to work every day. Pleasant work environment where safety and correct amount of work is planned for each employee was a definition of the third interviewee. The fourth respondent summarized the definition of occupational health to general good feeling; both at work and in personal life. When both are in balance, the employee survives from the work load much easier.

The state of occupational can be directly measured in the number of sick leave days but also by the general state of the employees; how tired or energetic are they, are their tasks well organized and by the atmosphere in the break room. If the atmosphere is out of its place there is a danger that the employees are constantly in a bad mood and this directly has an impact on the result of their personal work and on the turnover of the company.

Another manager stated that the overall state of occupational health can be instantly seen in the staff as they come to work every day. The general feeling can be sensed; and this also shows to customers and affects on the number of customers, number of sick leaves, to the financial numbers, staff satisfactory survey, to the general condition of the store and customer service.

Occupational health as a management tool

The role of management is significant. It is important that the manager takes care of the everyday basic needs, such as safety, machinery and other equipment, clothing, schedules, organizes work loads rationally and encourages the employees to take care of their personal wellbeing as well. Personal wellbeing consists of exercise, healthy diet and other activities that maintain good physical and mental state of the employees.

According to all respondents, the state of occupational health can be seen as a tool of management. Management can be seen in everything and can also be measured by the state of work environment, number of absences, the outcome of the corporation and in the results of staff satisfactory survey. It is also important to let the staff know what is expected, how those goals can be achieved, common rules, feedback from positive outcomes at work and on the contrary, explaining the reasons for constructive feedback and thinking if there is a way to develop these areas.

One of the respondents highlights that occupational health has a direct impact on the costs of the company; the number of sick leaves is instantly shown at the expense accounts. Työvire activities have a positive impact on the income on some level but the most important thing is keeping the daily basics in order. Another respondent felt that

the outcome and results of the daily tasks has a direct effect on the last row of the income statement.

The responsibility of an individual

The respondents think that the employees are responsible for their own personal physical and mental wellbeing. In order to maintain good occupational health it is also important to speak about personal problems to the manager or colleagues. One sign of a good work atmosphere is that a colleague takes care of another colleague; in case an employee sees that another employee is having a hard time, asking how they are doing or telling this to the manager may prevent some serious damage if the problem expands before any type of intervention.

One opinion is that each employee is responsible for his own colleague and customers. Each member of the staff has to know the rules according to which everybody acts. The attitude towards work of the employee and wellbeing outside of work are matters that easily show outside. In case the employee has problems, which can not be solved outside of work and have a negative effect on the result of work, there should be a chance for the employee to talk with the manager or another employee. Personal difficulties often have a direct impact on the result of work and customer service.

All interviewees said that manager himself has to find out a way to release some of the stored information to his own manager, to other manager colleagues or via hobbies for instance. If there are difficult issues at work, they often stay in mind but the longer one works as a manager, it is important to learn to outsource those things and only focus on family and free time when off duty.

Managerial behaviour

The daily occupational health is generally taken care of by keeping the every day basics in order, participating in the expenses of work shoes, covering all expenses of work clothes and arranging days off when requested. It is important for the manager to realize that the employee also has his/her personal life outside of work.

One of the respondents emphasizes the importance of managerial behaviour; the manager works as an example from the first contact of the day with the employees by smiling and greeting all employees, asking about personal life, not only how things are going at work. The employees should feel that the manager can be easily approached, that the atmosphere is open and that the communication works both ways. A manager should never ever forget the importance of giving feedback; the employees truly crave both positive and constructive feedback.

Työvire in Osuuskauppa PeeÄssä changed a bit towards individual activities in 2010. Each employee gets 180 Euros worth of coupons for exercising in various sports centres. One of the respondents feels that before there were more resources for group activities whereas now, everybody does something individually. This can also be seen as a positive; the pressure of a manager gets smaller as he is not responsible for creating the entire Työvire activity plan by himself.

One respondent has planned “Olympic games” with four other outlets where the employees get to know each other better via fun games. Other Työvire activities in this outlet include at least some kind of cultural event and dinner, Christmas party together with another unit and a massage device to the break room as neck and shoulder area is causing somewhat pain to the employees. The benefit of combining Työvire with other units is to learn to know each other and make it easier and more comfortable to occasionally work in other units via staff exchange program, Duunipankki. Other benefits include information and experience exchange, sharing, comparing, and an increase of a fellow-feeling.

Benefits of good occupational health

The overall benefits of good occupational health were decreasing number of sick leaves, the general good feeling at work and the fellow-feeling. Työvire, according to all respondents, should be both professional and completely off-work related activities. The professional Työvire should be job related, but perhaps from a little different perspective. There were a few units in Kuopio who participated into Subordinate skills-day. The aim of the day was to make people realize how their everyday behaviour, the way they treat others and their personal physical and mental state affect on the entire work community. The feedback of the day was positive and mind opening.

Työvire

Other managers have also done co-operation with other units with Työvire activities. Especially smaller outlets with small staff numbers find it comfortable to arrange e.g. exercise or Christmas parties together. A part of Työvire is also arranging retirement parties for long term workers. Professional form of Työvire, a seminar or something similar, is also important to include in the Työvire plan. Encouragement for regular exercise and healthy lifestyle maintain better physical wellbeing and help staff members at their daily routines.

The respondents feel that Työvire in Osuuskauppa PeeÄssä has become almost something that is expected, wanted and taken for granted. Managers say that if there has not been any arranged Työvire activities for a while, the employees start asking questions about the next possible activity. Työvire activities are seen in a very positive way and especially young employee's knowledge it and participate in it eagerly. It is important to emphasize the importance of doing things together and staying as a group if Työvire is in a form of a concert or a play as an example.

Work atmosphere

The respondents had mostly worked in units with good work atmosphere. Poor atmosphere was mostly shown as a temporary phase and was often related to sick leave spins. One respondent described a work community with poor work atmosphere as following: "Nobody likes going to work, gossiping behind each other's back is common, and as a result to this, the revenue and net income get weaker". When asked what was done to the situation, the answer was facing the problem by discussing about the issues. It was very important for the manager to clear up the rules that were to be obeyed as well as emphasizing the importance of appreciating a fellow worker. Basic things such as saying hello and welcoming a colleague to work, how to respond to constructive feedback and getting rid of constant accusation cycle are matters that need to fixed right as soon as possible. The manager should always be alert and intervene if the situation seems to be getting out of hands. The words thank you and I'm sorry should actively be used in the daily vocabulary of the workers.

The characteristics of a work community that is feeling well were said to be general good atmosphere, positive feedback of interns who say that it was nice to work in the outlet, the low number of sick leaves, open work atmosphere, mutual trust, taking in consideration shift requests and naturally, saying thank you.

According to the respondents, it is possible to engage the staff to maintain their occupational health by bringing up the positive effects of it; a manager can encourage an employee to take care of his physical wellbeing by informing the entire work community about the benefits of staying in shape. A manager should aim at emphasizing the benefit that the entire work community gets when each individual employee is feeling well in all areas of life.

As an answer to what kind of management weakens work environment, the managers mentioned neglecting and overlooking the staff. As an opposite, good management takes individuals in consideration, encourages achieving set goals and results, guides, gives an advice when needed and most important of all, manager himself acts as a role model and example. Acting as an authority was also mentioned as an important positive factor.

When asked who is mostly responsible for the state occupational health of an employee, the manager, the work community or the employee himself, three out of four respondents said that the biggest responsibility is definitely on the manager. Second, is the community and third, the employee himself. Outside of work, the employee naturally has to maintain his health and physical wellbeing on his own.

In case the community is not doing well, the problem should be faced according to all respondents. Discussions should be arranged, first individually and then perhaps in a bigger group or in the midst of those who the issue concerns. Arguments or differences should be solved by seeking the real problem and trying to find a solution to that. The manager should evaluate his own behaviour, and if it has something to do with the issues, should act according to it and start looking for answers to make things better.

All and all, the managers find occupational health as an essential part of management. The core of occupational health is that the employees like their job, their co-workers

and have a possibility to influence on the variety their job tasks. Common rules have to clear and obeyed and respect between the personnel has to exist.

5 DISCUSSION

Optimal work performance is born as a result of a balance between work and lifestyle factors. These areas include appropriate workload, healthy working conditions, effective stress management, sufficient recovery, a balanced diet and lifestyle together with a satisfactory level of physical exercise to deal with the daily demands of a job and daily life. (Hoffman 2009)

The state of occupational health in outlets of Osuuskauppa PeeÄssä is observed by both, parameters such as the number of sick leaves, results on staff satisfactory surveys, by the financial performance of the company and also simply by the manager. If the daily basics, such as common rules, equipment and atmosphere are out of their place or if the staff does not feel well, if they are stressed, unmotivated or have personal issues, the entire work community suffers. As the daily efficiency decreases, the employees start losing their motivation and tasks will not be completed as well as they used to be.

Taking care of occupational health is one of the most important duties of the manager; daily observations of the mood of the staff are vital for the manager. In case the manager does not react on possible issues early enough, there is a great danger for the entire work community. The consequences of a weakened work atmosphere reflect on daily work efficiency, to the level of customer service, to the mood of the staff and in the end to the financial outcome of the company.

The role of Työvire activities is not the most significant when taking a look at the entire concept of occupational health but definitely cheers up the daily routines, gives a chance to spend time and even work as a group and discuss about work perhaps from different perspectives. Työvire activities also send a message to the employees that their employer cares for them, their wellbeing and is willing to spend time and money on it.

The basic, daily routines are the base for a good state of occupational health; if the staff does not know how their job should be done, what are they expected to get done in a certain time frame and what are the rules that everybody needs to obey, everybody is lost and work efficiency gets weak. Discipline in every work community is needed or else the employees start telling the manager how things should be done.

It is interesting to notice how similar the answers of staff members and managers were; it seems that both, the employees and the managers know how things should be done in theory but practice is apparently quite far from the reality. Often managers may be too busy to notice the problems or find it difficult to approach them in a right way. Pekka Järvinen in *Esimiestyö Ongelmatilanteissa* (1998, 60-61)) introduces an idea that a manager has to involve himself into a problem between subordinates only if it seems that they are not able to solve the issue on their own. There is always the danger though; that the intervention comes too late, when the negative has at its worse spread to other people and has already caused problems. At this point, the manager should at latest have thorough discussions with the employees about the issues and try to solve them as well as possible. If the skills of a manager are not enough for this, there is always a possibility to ask help from the human resource department of *Osuuskauppa PeeÄssä*.

When thinking about good management overall, both the managers and the employees feel that giving feedback is one of the most important things. Yet, managers seem to give it too little. Feedback and other type of communication increase the interaction and openness inside the unit; when the employees receive information about how they are doing their job, their motivation and wellbeing increases and they know exactly which areas should be developed.

Can occupational health be used as a management tool? I strongly believe that management has the most significant positive or negative role in the state of occupational health of the personnel. The manager is responsible for determining the amount of daily work load and is responsible for organizing schedules and vacations, is the one who decides if personnel are able to educate themselves and develop in their jobs. The manager is obliged to intervene into a conflict between employees if they can not solve it by themselves as Järvinen (1998) states. Järvinen's idea about the basic pillars of a well functioning work community applies to managing occupational health very

well; if the employees do not realize the very basic meaning of the daily work, the manager has not done his job well. The employees must understand that at work their main focus has to be on work or work related issues. When the employees start losing their work efficiency, motivation and the non work related talk starts to dramatically increase, the manager should notice that the occupational health of his staff has weakened. Improving the state of occupational health again is in the hands of a manager. Managing occupational health is one of the most challenging yet one of the most rewarding management tools, which at its best works as a truly competitive edge.

5.2. Additional research

Additional research could be done in a much larger scale; interviews with personnel and the superiors would help in developing the level of occupational health and also, Työvire activities. Face to face interviews would probably bring the most useful information for further development of occupational health in Osuuskauppa PeeÄssä.

It would probably be possible to conduct a quantitative electronically survey to the entire personnel of Osuuskauppa PeeÄssä; at its best there could be nearly 2000 respondents and hundreds developing ideas for how to look after occupational health.

It is challenging to know exactly which wellbeing services are worth buying and what kind of contribution they make on the performance of the business. By investigating the importance ratio between wellbeing and management more thoroughly, occupational health and Työvire-activities would bring a lot of extra value to both, the personnel and to the company.

Conclusion about the writing process

This thesis was written in a few different parts. In fall 2009, I started to gather the theory part together. In November 2009, I collected a questionnaire from the staff members of one outlet. After receiving the answers to my questionnaire, there was a break in between the thesis process. I started working on it again in February 2010 by

interviewing managers of Osuuskauppa PeeÄssä. After collecting all the data, I started analysing the results and writing them on paper.

It was challenging to write the thesis without an executive organization; there were no clear guidelines, deadlines or aim in the beginning. Even though I did not write this thesis for any company, I was lucky to be able to collect data from the employees and employers of Osuuskauppa PeeÄssä. There were no difficulties in arranging the interviews or getting people to answer the questionnaire; the real problem for me was to find a way to come up with questions, which would give the best possible answer to my research problem. When searching for theory for the thesis, it was important to keep in mind the aim of the thesis and especially after collecting all the data, the contents of theory had to be in balance with the researches.

The most time consuming phase of the writing process was to analyse the data. The questionnaires were relatively easy to process as the questions limited the answers a lot. The interviews on the other hand took more time to analyse; the respondents were given a chance to freely continue speaking about any topic that was raised from any question, even if it was not truly related to the original questions. The additional conversations made the interviews longer as planned before hand and made the littering part a bit more challenging. If only one respondent carried on the conversation about a certain topic, I sometimes did not find a context where I could fit it in smoothly.

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APPENDIX 1 Appendix The interview of the employees

1. How would you evaluate the state of your current occupational health? How do you take care of your own wellbeing?
2. Please elaborate the factors that have a positive/negative affect on the work atmosphere?
3. How would you describe the current state of the work atmosphere of your outlet? (A grade from 4-10 and a verbal comment)
4. How is the state of your own wellbeing, do you feel like you are able to fulfil the expectations you are assumed to fulfil? What are the factors that help/motivate you at work every day?
5. How can a manager influence on the work atmosphere?
6. How can you personally influence on the work atmosphere?

APPENDIX 2

Attached you will find a health spin form, which includes important sectors from the perspective of overall wellbeing. Your assignment is to spontaneously grade each area of wellbeing according to your current life situation.

Professional health: means good results and experiences of succeeding at work. Factors that affect on this: needed professional skills, control of information, computer science, over all knowledge, being initiative, taking responsibility etc.

Physical health: means good general physical wellbeing, being energetic and durable. Factors affecting on this: healthy life style, rest, right nutrition, exercise etc.

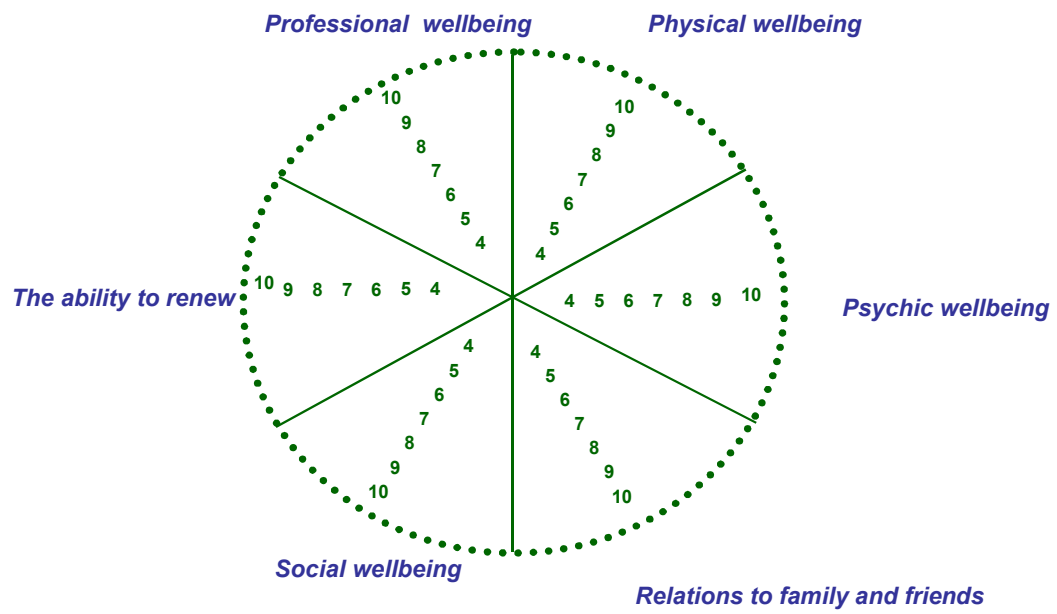
Psychological health: meaning psychological and emotional wellbeing, stress control and balance. Factors affecting to this: healthy self esteem- and confidence, firmness,

believe in personal resources, encourage dealing yourself critically, working according to personal values and moral, spiritual hobbies etc.

Relations to family and friends: meaning having a support net, spending quality time with your loved ones. Factors affecting to this: enough time and support to them, commitment, taking care of relationships and family routines, taking care of the elderly etc.

Social wellbeing: meaning good relations, functioning social nets. Factors affecting to this: communication skills, co-operation skills, management and influencing skills, the ability to perform and communication skills etc.

The ability to renew: meaning keeping up the changes, constant developing. Factors affecting to this willingness and an ability to learn, creativity and curiosity, control of changes etc.

EVALUATION OF OVERALL WELLBEING

APPENDIX 2 Appendix 2 The interview

1. How would you define occupational health?
2. How would you evaluate the state of occupational health in staff?
3. How would you evaluate occupational health as a management tool? How does it appear? How significant is it?
4. Does Työvire (Work drive activities) have a direct impact on the income and revenue of the company?
5. How can a manager improve the state of occupational health?
6. What should the staff do in order to maintain a good state of occupational health?
7. How is occupational taken care of in your outlet? How/ in what ways? Amount of money/ activities? Työvire?
8. Evaluate the benefits of putting an effort on occupational health?
9. Please describe how does the staff react on operations that try to improve the state of occupational health?
10. Would you please elaborate in case you have some experiences of a work community with poor level of occupational health? How was the situation handled?
11. Please describe the characteristics of a community that is doing well over all?
12. What are the tools to engage the staff to maintaining and developing occupational health?
13. What kind of management weakens/ strengthens occupational health?
14. Please elaborate the methods for maintaining the over all state of occupational health?

15. What is the role of the employer when it comes to the state of the occupational health and wellbeing of an employee? Who has the biggest responsibility; the manager, the work community or the person himself?
16. What are the ways to repair a work community that is not feeling well?
17. What would you say is the base for a good occupational health?