

Enhancing employee communication to support onboarding: developing an intranet

Case Electronic Arts Finland Oy

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<p>In late 2017 a need to enhance employee communication during onboarding, in addition to a missing platform for internal knowledge sharing were detected at Electronic Arts (EA) Finland Oy. The thesis objective was to create a new communication platform - an intranet - by the end of 2018 to enhance employee communication to specifically support the local onboarding process. The intranet's impact on employee communication both for new hires and the entire staff, as well as content and functionality requirements were evaluated during this project.</p> <p>A comprehensive literature review was completed around the phenomena of employee communication, employee engagement, as well as onboarding in order to support the research and development work. The theoretical framework is exploring existing research to explain the relevance and connection between these topics.</p> <p>The mixed method case study was chosen to conduct the thesis project in order to deepen the understanding behind the research phenomenon. Data was gathered in form of a staff survey, in-depth interviews, as well as observations. Based on the analysed data the development work around the intranet was planned and implemented, after which the effects of the developments were evaluated in form of a panel discussion.</p> <p>In conclusion, the research objective was achieved as employee communication at EA Finland was enhanced by creating the intranet from the onboarding point of view. The intranet proved to lower levels of uncertainty and stress of new hires and supported learning and knowledge sharing generally. Positive effects on employee engagement levels are possible, but not confirmed by this research directly.</p> <p>Content that was considered relevant to be added to the intranet was information on local work practices, processes, employee services and benefits as well as the work community. Quick links to the global intranet, a section to share conference trip summaries as well as page tags were desired content improvements to support the entire staff better going forward. Efforts in keeping the page content up to date were also considered important in future. The only relevant communication functionality on the intranet was considered to be commenting from both the general employee and the new hire perspectives.</p> <p>Further research is suggested to be conducted around the possible effects of the entire onboarding program on employee engagement levels, as well as the impacts of a new hire mentor program. In addition, effects of leadership communication could be studied as part of enhancing employee communication overall at EA Finland.</p>	
Keywords Onboarding, employee communication, organizational socialization, employee engagement, intranet, knowledge management, employee experience	

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1 Introduction

In today's business world, where competition is fierce and the pressure to achieve more profit is increasingly high, the essential focus point is the workforce. As common sense would suggest, investing in those resources that drive the business is smart and yet this seems to be quite a challenge for many organizations.

According to Morgan (2017) those organizations that succeed in considering the long-term results of employee satisfaction and offer stellar employee experiences, benefit more compared to those companies with a shorter-term vision. Rather than making efforts to gain temporary spurts of employee engagement in roller-coaster style cycles that often begin to feel like manipulation attempts on behalf of the organization, companies should build workplaces where people want to – not need to – operate each day, while revealing their maximum potential (Morgan 2017). The employee experience became one of the biggest Human Resource trends in 2018 and it looks like it is here to stay.

A study with 250 organizations suggests that companies who invest in the employee experience are four times more profitable compared to those who do not, and outperform based on the metrics of employee growth, employee pay, average revenue and profit overall (Morgan 2017). Bolden-Barret (2018) reports that the IBM Smarter Workforce Institute and Globoforce WorkHuman Analytics and Research Institute found out that companies that are listed in the top 25 % in an employee experience listing, gain almost three times the return on assets they have invested compared to those organizations on the bottom of the list.

Inclusion, trust, fostering feelings of belonging and purpose, as well as transparency and joint goals are aspects contributing to the employee experience. In hopes of long-term results, emphasis should be on constant evaluation and development work throughout employment spans. However, attention should be put on the new hire employee experience specifically.

When taking into account that up to 20 % of staff turnover takes place in the beginning of employment – more precisely within the first 45 days – it becomes evident that the beginning of a new work relationship is of significant importance when it comes to building positive employee experiences and keeping staff retention rates up. The entire first year of employment shapes the perception of the new employees towards the hiring company and their onboarding experience widely determines their motivation to stay and thrive. (Carucci 2018.)

A well-designed onboarding program – an organized process built to support new hires to acquire the required knowledge, competences and behaviours in order to turn into valuable, long-term employees – ensures better return on investment for organizations. Part of the onboarding is to help employees to become confident in their roles, increase company awareness in terms of culture, goals and behavioural expectations and make introductions with people and departments relevant to the new hires' work.

Onboarding, however, is a complex concept that combines talent management elements such as employee communication and long-term employee engagement. But what is the role of employee communication exactly when it comes to the onboarding process? How can employee communication be enhanced during onboarding? What are the connections between employee communication and employee engagement levels? These interesting and contemporary topics are in the centre of this thesis and are explored thoroughly both in theory and practice.

2 Research problem in the context of the company

This chapter explains the context around the research project. It begins with an introduction of the company at which the project was conducted at, followed by the description of the company needs that led to the initiation of the development project. Also, the exact objectives and research questions are presented in this part of the paper. The last part of the introduction is an overview of the thesis structure and content.

2.1 Company introduction

Electronic Arts Inc. (EA) is a leading interactive entertainment software company. The publicly listed global organization produces games, online services and content for computers, mobile phones, tablets and consoles and world-widely known EA brands are for example EA Sports (FIFA, NHL, NBA Live), Battlefield, the Sims, Dragon Age and Need for Speed. The company was founded in 1982 by Trip Hawkins and is headquartered in Redwood City, California in USA. (Electronic Arts 2019.)

Electronic Arts' net revenue in fiscal year 2018 was 5,15 billion dollars and the organization has around 9500 employees worldwide. There are more than 30 EA game studios located in Northern and Southern America, Europe and in the Asia Pacific area and there are over 300 million registered players around the globe. Electronic Arts' purpose and beliefs that formulate the foundation for the global company culture are creativity, pioneering, passion, determination, learning and teamwork. (Electronic Arts 2019.)

Electronic Arts Finland Oy is a mobile game development studio fully owned by Electronic Arts Inc. and is located in Helsinki. This self-functioning game studio was founded in 2012 and consists of a team developing their own mobile games – SimCity BuildIt and a new game still in concept stage. Mobile games refer to a game type that can be played on smartphone or tablet devices.

Whereas EA Finland is the official company name, the studio's personalized name is "Tracktwenty" or "T20" in short, as the office is located next to the nineteenth train track on the Helsinki railway station. The team currently consists of 52 employees of 14 different nationalities. The entire game development team for SimCity BuildIt is based in Helsinki and includes members of server and client software engineers (programmers), product managers, data analysts, a quality assurance team, artists, designers, development directors, producers, the live operations and administration teams, as well as a team manager, two game general managers and the studio general manager. Each competence group

has a designated team leader. EA Finland strives to operate closely according to the studio values as passionate creators and ambitious pioneers, always emphasizing on team work.

EA Finland's support functions such as a larger quality assurance team, customer support, marketing and public relations, customer insights, communication, business operations, HR, facilities, legal, IT, finance and higher executive management are located outside of Helsinki. The support contacts and teams are mainly located in Sweden, Romania and UK within Europe, as well as in India and USA.

2.2 Introduction of the development project

In late 2017 the topic of EA Finland's onboarding process was raised at the bi-weekly competence team leader meeting for the first time. The team had grown since the five years of the company's existence, and especially with the organizational structure updates in 2017, the new people managers who had been assigned and the new game project on the agenda, the topic seemed of relevance.

Onboarding had never been discussed jointly at EA Finland; it seemed rather unclear what currently happens when a new employee joins the team and who should be in charge of what exactly. Especially as the talent acquisition and human resource teams are located outside of Finland, responsibility areas and practices around local and global general onboarding and communication - not to mention the work introduction - were hazy. This was still the case even when a global onboarding program called "Game On" was launched company-wide in October 2017, as this helpful program content only includes global company aspects.

Another concern was the lack of local, work-related documentation that was raised in connection with the onboarding discussion. Questions were raised: where could new employees obtain work-related knowledge regarding Tracktwenty's game projects or EA Finland-specific project practices at the moment? What happens when an employee leaves the company – how can the expertise area related information be secured? What about all the Finland-specific knowledge that is not mentioned on the global company intranet EA World?

In summary, two concrete problems were identified by the competence team leaders; the non-existence of a proper onboarding process, and the lack of internal work-related documentation. It became clear that these concerns needed to be addressed in order to secure

a more positive onboarding experience in hopes of increased levels of employee engagement in the long run, as well as a more strategic knowledge management process. The timing for the development work was significant, as with the new game project an increase in the headcount was anticipated. This is how the researcher and research problem found each other and the thesis topic was determined.

As team growth was anticipated in early 2019, development works were kicked off in practice during the fall of 2018 with the aim of having a newly implemented local onboarding process, including updated knowledge management practices, in place in the new year. The process was planned to be evaluated in spring of 2019. The planning and preparation of the project were commenced in the beginning of 2018.

The concept of the thesis began to form after the initial research problems were determined. As established above, a company-wide intranet called EA World exists within the organization but has little Finland-specific content available when it comes to both general company and project related information. As EA World is maintained at the headquarters and overall contains a lot of globally relevant data, it was decided that a local intranet would be created on another platform that suited the local needs better also from the technical standpoint, at least to begin with. As the EA Finland team uses Confluence, a project management software, as the daily game development work platform for its game projects, it was considered the best platform also for the new local intranet in terms of usability and technical qualities.

In hopes to contribute positively to the onboarding, the objective of the new intranet was to enhance employee communication, operating as a centralized forum for all kind of knowledge a new hire requires when joining EA Finland. This was the starting point for the newly to be created intranet on a thought level, which would at later stages be developed to act as a wider communication platform benefitting the entire staff. Of course, creating the new intranet primarily targeted to new employees does not exclude the forum from serving also existing employees already at the first stages of its existence.

Slowly the development focus became clearer and more concrete, and eventually grew larger than initially intended. In the end, the entire project targeted to develop EA Finland's employee experience by

- firstly, defining the onboarding process overall specifying responsibilities, actions and timelines
- secondly, planning and introducing a new hire mentor program and other helpful support tools

- thirdly, building the new intranet as a knowledge sharing centre to support new hires, but also existing staff members in the long run in terms of an enhanced employee communication practice

The goal of the project was to fit in the developments with existing global processes and tools. The new local onboarding process was planned to co-exist with and support the global Game On onboarding program and the newly to be introduced local intranet would by no means replace EA World, but rather build bridges between these communication forums. No knowledge would be duplicated, and the local intranet was designed to include links to EA World where necessary and relevant.

As measuring developments in onboarding experiences would be extremely challenging in the time span available for this study program project, the thesis scope only captures a part of the entire development project conducted at EA Finland. This limits the study to a more suitable extent for a master's thesis and narrows down the focus of the research. The objective of this thesis is thus limited to study the impacts of the intranet on the local employee communication as part of the onboarding. The definition work of the EA Finland onboarding process, as well as the creation of the new hire mentor program are left outside of the thesis scope.

The specific research questions for the thesis were:

RQ. How to develop employee communications to support the onboarding process at EA Finland?

RQ1. How does the new intranet contribute to EA Finland's employee communication as part of the onboarding?

RQ2. What kind of content and communication functionalities are required on the new intranet?

RQ3. What kind of content and functionalities are needed to further develop the intranet to support all employees better?

To establish the exact development needs from the employee perspective, research data was planned to be gathered by different techniques; a team-wide survey, as well as in-depth individual interviews of the most recently joined employees, as well as team leaders. The analysed data would serve as the base for the development actions that follow as a next step. After the implementation of the development work, data would again be gathered in form of a group interview in order to evaluate the impact of the actions taken and to determine how the research questions could be answered.

As research indicates that employee communication has strong impacts on employee engagement, and as employee communication is a vital part of onboarding, the theoretical fields of employee communication, employee engagement and onboarding formulate a coherent package of knowledge to support this thesis. The aim of the development project in the thesis is to study how introducing a new employee communication forum affects employee communication as part of the onboarding process in form of a case study.

2.3 Thesis structure

This thesis consists of six main chapters, including the general and thesis specific introductions. The next chapter is the theoretical framework that contains a thorough literature review evolving around relevant topics to the development project. The fourth chapter is the empirical part that dips into the research methodology, data collection and analysis to establish how the research was conducted. The fifth chapter presents the findings of the research and a description of the conducted development work. The last chapter completes this thesis with a discussion around conclusions, analysis of the results, an evaluation of trustworthiness and ethical viewpoints, as well as suggestions for further research and reflections on the thesis work. The last pages include a list of references and appendixes.

3 Theoretical framework

This chapter contains a thorough literature review of the topics that are relevant to the thesis. More specifically, employee communication aspects, the phenomenon of employee engagement, as well as a deep overview of onboarding research are discussed. This theoretical framework gives a solid base for the case study research of this thesis and enables connections to be drawn between the empirical work and existing theory.

3.1 The role of employee communication today

When striving to develop employee communications, for instance by introducing a new communication forum to an organization as in this research project, it is significant to understand the role of communication today and why it is important. This is why firstly the aspect of employee communication in general, the roles within it, as well as channel options and the impact of employee communication are explored.

Both internal and external communication is an – if not the most – important aspect of doing business. Cowan (2017, 12-13) describes how the 21st century is a fluid and challenging, crowded communication space where the cost of transmitting information is low and the volume of digital information high. He further states that there will never be a time with less information available, where people will be less connected with each other and where the style of communication will be less transparent than this day and age (Cowan 2017, 13).

Hargie & Tourish (200, 4) write how communication used to be reviewed as a simple and linear process of message transmitting between a sender and a source. The source would internalize, understand and act upon the message. Especially in the organizational environments research was conducted in order to manage this process in hopes to improve productivity, work task execution and cost-effectiveness. A shift in communication thinking occurred in the 1980s when it became clear that conception of the message transition did not justify the entire phenomenon of organizational communication. (Hargie & Tourish 2000, 4.)

From then onwards communication was studied from the perspective of dynamic relationships between the communication processes and broader systems of human organizing. All in all, it was detected that communication is an aspect that creates and reflects relationships between different parties of an organization and defines, configures and explains these relationships with variable success. (Hargie & Tourish 2009, 4-5.)

At the end of the day company-wide communication is essential for profitability of organizations, as a common direction in form of goals, behaviours and values need to be understood by all employees and other stakeholders. Employee communication can be viewed as the glue that keeps institutions reproducing and evolving with the help of joint activities managed by employees who have been able to make sense of what it is they do together. (Hargie & Tourish 2009, 5.) Employees do not push aside their human needs and feelings during working hours and also discuss these matters outside of the workplace. It is, thus, important for the employer to address these needs in order to avoid dysfunctional satisfaction and instead benefit from the emotions. (Hargie & Tourish 2009, 16.)

People who feel empowered choose to do more and in today's society employees have high expectations for their careers and desire to know and understand more about what the company they work for does (Hargie & Tourish 2009, 25). Communicating well with employees is a key factor for a successful business – the exact recipe of how to communicate effectively with the workforce, however, depends on the organizations' and employees' specific needs (Hargie & Tourish 2009, 26).

3.1.1 Cornerstones of employee communication in the 21st century

Employees are in today's vastly changing and connected business world one of the most significant strategic feature of companies. Firstly, by being the production engine that directly affects the organization's profitability and secondly, by acting as company ambassadors and brand promoters when it comes to internal and external stakeholders, both online and offline. Having this in mind, maintaining satisfied employees acts strongly in organizations' interests in terms of gaining a high-quality production force in addition to strengthening the invisible company advantages, such as image, reputation and brand. (Men 2014, 265.)

A company image refers to the general picture that someone has about an organization and it can be based on little actual experience about doing business or working for the organization in question. In contrast, the company reputation is an opinion people have about the quality or characteristics of a company and is often based on past behaviour and experience. A company brand is something the company attempts to build intentionally, aiming for people to associate the organization with specific activities, features or ideas to steer their opinions towards in order to boost competitiveness. A company brand has both internal and external impacts. (Cambridge Dictionary 2019.)

The significance of corporate reputation, image and brand has increased over the past years and these aspects can be strong competitive advantages that have connections to

organizational communication, amongst other business functions. As every employee acts as a brand advocate both inside and outside of the company, this has an impact on the corporate reputation overall. Studies confirm that companies with higher ranked reputations are of bigger interest to potential investors. (Hargie & Tourish 2009, 19.)

Internal communication, or employee communication as referred to in this thesis, is thus of big strategic importance in today's modern society. Aspects that affect employee communication are for instance organizational culture, power distribution, inclusion and diversity, company structure and management conduct. (Men 2014, 266.) Men (2014, 266) believes that especially the leadership style has big impacts on how employee communication functions and is perceived.

The technological developments have changed the role of communication in general and this has naturally had effects also on the company internal communication landscapes. As new digital forums for communication have evolved, the way of communicating with employees has transformed, and same goes for the channel preferences and use of various channels. (Men 2014, 265 - 266.) Cowan (2017, 13) in addition considers interconnectedness a further significant change and elaborates how nowadays everyone is interconnected and interdependent as nations, companies and individuals. He also believes that speed is one effect on communication brought by the digitalization, as everything is happening relatively faster than before - deadlines, attention spans and even lifetimes of products and information (Cowan 2017, 13).

Cost is another change factor mentioned by Cowan (2017, 13) who states that getting into new business opportunities or public spaces is cheap these days. For instance, launching a new magazine, internal website or other media channels to communicate and spread ideas to the world and company internally through these channels does not cost a lot anymore. On the other hand, this has led to increased demands for privacy as well as different styles of surveillance both online and offline. (Cowan 2017, 13.)

Cowan (2017, 13) also refers to shifts around transparency in communication and considers that it is needed nowadays when it comes to legal and cultural viewpoints. It is more challenging to hide any information in this communication age, but simultaneously feelings of obtrusion and discomfort are more likely to be evoked because of increased transparency, which is significant when it comes to employee communication (Cowan 2017, 13).

Men (2014, 266) considers the leadership's role in today's employee communication environment. She states how managers play a vital role in influencing top-down communication and that acts of leadership are widely executed through communication – the quality, style and channel of this communication can affect attitudes and behaviours of employees. Research proves that people-oriented leaders, compared to task-oriented ones, have stronger communication capabilities; especially a transformational leadership style has shown to result in positive effects on job satisfaction, organizational commitment and trust in leadership (Men 2014, 266).

Transformational leadership refers to a leadership style where an emotional connection between the followers and leader is created by the leader genuinely taking interest in the wellbeing of the followers. This is achieved by applying compassion, empathy as well as emphasis on building relationships and innovation in a way that supports individual development. (Men 2014, 267.)

The communication style of transformational leaders can be described as caring, passionate and empowering. This type of leaders also strive to interact closely with their followers to address their requirements, distribute decision-making power by engaging them, and share authority in order to make the followers less relying on the leader. (Men 2014, 267.) Listening, openness, feedback, relationships and participation are key aspects of transformational leadership. These are simultaneously attributes of symmetrical communication – a dialogic natured communication style promoting trust, adequacy of information and network symmetry. (Men 2014, 268.)

Not surprisingly thus, Men's (2014, 276, 278) research study supports the suggestion that transformational leaders were most often found to use information-rich communication forums, such as discussions over the telephone or face to face, when communicating with their employees. These are typical forms of symmetrical communication, allowing instant feedback, listening and discussion on the spot (Men 2014, 268).

As a transformational leading style was found to have a positive impact on organizational symmetrical communication, a connection was also detected between the communication style and employee satisfaction rates. By empowering employees, listening to their opinions when it comes to decision-making and truly caring about their needs, they naturally experience a better power balance and rather than feeling controlled or manipulated, they feel cared for. (Men 2014, 268.) Men (2014, 282) emphasizes that managers on all organizational levels should be provided with accurate knowledge and obtain training to ensure

they are capable to act as transformational leaders. All managers should facilitate and develop skills in strategic employee communication which always needs to be aligned with the company values and objectives (Men 2014, 282).

The management's role in employee communication is significant also in Hargie's & Tourish' (2009, 7) opinion, who consider it to be the managers' responsibility to essentially build and maintain a sense of purpose. After all, organizations consist of individuals whose behaviours and attitudes are formatted and directed in order to achieve joint goals and to increase organizational effectiveness. This means that the managers need to be able to create an enthusiastic, committed work force so that set objectives can be reached, and this requires dialogic communication with the staff. (Hargie & Tourish 2009, 7.)

It makes sense that employees cannot actualize ideas that they do not know or understand properly. Then again sticking to decisions the staff has not in any way been included in can be challenging. Committed and engaged employees will not only be more productive, but also show their satisfaction and enthusiasm to customers and other external and internal partners. (Hargie & Tourish 2009, 7.) Feedback from the manager, the belief that the manager listens to its employees and a sense of belonging are important factors in shaping a positive communication climate according to Hargie & Tourish (2009, 8-9).

Research suggests that not many companies master creating engaged, collaborative and productive workplaces according to the employee perspective. Hargie & Tourish (2009, 8) see this as a result of poor communication programs and manager work. In fact, studies indicate that effective management is dependent on open communication characterized by warmth, honesty and dialogic interaction, rather than monologues (Hargie & Tourish 2009, 9).

Eventually communicating is a big part of a manager's work role, as effective leadership evidently requires constant communication in order to design meaning, share the company vision and create a common focus on the joint organizational agenda (Hargie & Tourish 2009, 9). Not surprisingly, thus, the more competent a company's leaders are in communicating, the higher are also the job satisfaction rates of its employees (Hargie & Tourish 2009, 10, 17).

Ruck (2015, 49) summarizes that well executed employee communication evokes trust, as well as understanding – if members of the organization do not understand the strategic

direction of the company, they cannot be committed to it and might have difficulties in trusting the management and organization to achieve objectives. It is thus crucial to keep employees up-to-date about plans, processes, progress as well as achievements and changing factors in the context of the company values. Every employee needs to be informed about these matters, but the importance of filling in the new employee at the beginning of the employment relationship is highlighted. Also, the communication environment is heavily affected by a company's leadership style. (Ruck 2015, 49.)

3.1.2 Employee communication channels – focus on intranet

Even with the technological developments and evolved communication channels especially in the social media, Men's (2014, 279) study suggests that employees prefer to acquire information regarding policies, events, decisions and changes via email as well as face-to-face forums, such as for instance staff gatherings and one-on-one meetings with the managers. In comparison, communication in form of printed materials, such as newsletters, brochures and policy manuals, were less popularly perceived by employees. Interestingly, despite the growing usage of social media channels and public relations efforts in fostering community and enhancing engagement with external audiences, these new channels were not appreciated as much when it came to employee communication according to the study. (Men 2014, 279-280.)

Welch (2012, 250) conducted a research about employee perspectives of written internal communication and the feelings of appropriateness and acceptability towards the chosen internal channels. This study suggests that employees clearly prefer electronic formats in internal media, such as internal newsletters via email, pdf-files and the organization's intranet, in comparison to printed media, which supports Men's (2014, 279-280) findings above partially.

According to Welch' research the cost saving aspect, as well as environmental issues influenced the employees' opinion on their preference of communication format. Furthermore, reasons for the popularity of electronic communication formats were usability elements such as the possibility to easily save, store and retrieve information, as well as the ability to obtain information on intranets. These findings suggest that employees appreciate having control over the employee communication access. (Welch 2012, 251.)

Welch (2012, 248) elaborates how receiver-controllability attributes can influence the probability of a specific media reaching and the content being accepted by a target group. Acceptance refers to the employees for instance reading a printed newsletter, clicking an e-mail attachment, opening an intranet link or attending a company-wide joint meeting. In

contrast, the other side of employee-controllability relates to rejection behaviour, such as ignoring of newsletters, deleting e-mail information without opening it, not attending joint meetings or disregarding intranet links. (Welch 2012, 248.)

As in this thesis an intranet is created and introduced as a new communication channel to employees, some theory around this forum is explored in more detail next. Morell, (2015, 145) writes how the often used and 20 years ago established communication channel intranet can be a useful tool for companies in terms of saving documentation, distributing ideas as well as completing work tasks. It can be a valuable channel for instance for strategic knowledge management (Morell 2015, 145).

The usefulness of this forum, however, depends on the type of the organization and work, number of employees and culture. It is critical that the intranet is seen and perceived by all users, including especially senior stakeholders and content creators, as an important business tool supporting the company goals. (Morell 2015, 145.) An intranet is mostly a one-way communication forum established for employees to retrieve information and knowledge, but interactive communication functions can be integrated, such as commenting or chatting. This communication forum can be a useful addition in supporting other, non-written communication means, such as face-to-face events and one-on-one meetings. (Morell 2015, 146.)

It is recommended to have an intranet strategy in place that aligns with and supports the overall company strategy, as well as communication, IT and HR strategies, if available. The objectives that the intranet is striving to achieve need to be clearly figured out in addition to a plan that distinguishes the responsibility areas of content creation, communication and sponsors. It also needs to be determined how exactly the set goals of the strategy will be achieved and how performance will be measured along the way. (Morell 2015, 146.)

In order to identify what the target audience needs and to figure out how to gain the biggest benefit of the communication forum, it is often helpful to run a staff survey to establish if and why employees would need an intranet, and if already existing, what they currently use the forum for and what kind of improvements they would like to see. Key senior stakeholders within the organization should be identified to gain their support, but also for them to understand the advantages the communication channel can bring to support their efforts. Also, benchmarking or external consultation could be valuable to determine how competitors have structured and strategized their intranet forums. (Morell 2015, 145-146.)

Welch (2012, 252) agrees with connecting with the target audience to find out firstly what media they prefer in the first place, as well as the type of content that is required. One single-case study for instance indicated that aspects employees criticized regarding written employee communication, in addition to the cost and environmental related concerns regarding printed media, were also poor search abilities on internal websites, as well as dysfunctional links in terms of electronic communication formats (Welch 2012, 252). This type of feedback is critical when working on establishing a new communication forum.

Welch (2012, 252) highlights that internal communication preferences are not necessarily uniform and need to be explored according to the specific target audience. Aspects such as demographics, individual communication needs and level of education affect how employees like to be communicated with – a one-size-fits-all method does not necessarily apply for each employee group or company. This means that the target audience should be considered as a multi-dimensional group of diverse stakeholders instead of a single body. (Welch 2012, 252.) Snyder & Lee-Partridge (2013, 418) conducted a research which suggests that the richness of a communication channel, the communication environment in general and how co-workers perceive a channel influence the communication channel choice of employees.

Morell (2015, 147) continues that after an intranet strategy has been approved, an action plan should be drawn up detailing how the forum will be created and implemented. Actions should be planned for the short, medium and long terms and prioritized to indicate how much they are likely to benefit the company. Naturally also resources should be considered carefully. (Morell 2015, 418.) Morell (2015, 148) agrees with Welch (2012, 252) and emphasizes how user feedback is crucial also during the development work of an intranet. End-users who should be benefitting from the forum eventually should be given the chance to provide regular feedback, as with even little time, effort and cost simple changes to the forum might result in significant improvements in employees' productivity and even make large savings for the company (Morell 2015, 148).

Morell (2015, 151) highlights that the users must be able to trust the content on the intranet to be up to date and recommends to always have a date visible that indicates the content to have been reviewed or updated. Content should be reviewed on a regular basis by the dedicated owner and any content that is out of date must be removed straight away. Furthermore, it should always be clear to the user that any content is accurate and available with the right permissions. For example, company single sign on system can be of use here. (Morell 2015, 151.)

It should also be considered that company-widely used labels about internal or secret content need to be clarified, and it also must be clear to the audience whether an article is only available for reviewing, or if it can be freely edited in addition. How these options are presented depends on the technology used. (Morell 2015, 151.) Also, any content on an internal communication forum must be legally competent, composed with integrity and ethical morale (Morell 2015, 152).

According to Morell (2015, 151) it is significantly important that the content presented on an intranet is valuable and usable for the users – something that is interesting and relevant to the target audience. This includes articles being clearly formatted and easy to read, interest awakening headings and functional links, without issues to find content or risks of unclarity and confusion. Unless employees are satisfied with the intranet content, the organization cannot benefit from a communication forum such as the intranet. This is exactly why including employees on the development phase is so crucial – regular surveys about the usage and content should also be arranged. (Morell 2015, 151.) Furthermore, also the user experience must be smooth – in the end employees should want to use this forum for obtaining and sharing information and knowledge and thus it needs to be visually appealing and pleasant for all to use (Morell 2015, 152).

Welch (2012, 253) confirms Morell's (2015, 151-152) above views, but again highlights the importance of choosing the appropriate communication forum in the first place. One of the findings in her study was how choosing the appropriate communication channel, as well as including relevant content in it is vital when it comes to any form of employee communication, due to the fact that negatively perceived media formats might cause an obstacle for effective employee communication. When feelings of annoyance and irritation are evoked for example by a chosen means of communication, the employees might shift the negativity also towards the actual message that is communicated. In escalation this could lead to employees avoiding or even boycotting employee communication altogether. (Welch 2012, 253.)

Morell (2015, 147) believes that the communication around an intranet depends heavily on the company culture; for a more regulated and command-driven company it might be characteristic to resist knowledge sharing and using the intranet altogether. In contrast, a company that is more flexible and receptive towards new ideas and constructive feedback might have a more encouraging attitude towards sharing and obtaining knowledge and information on a company intranet (Morell 2015, 147).

In some cases, the intranet strategy could be launched already at early stages to motivate employees to contribute in the development phase of the communication forum in order to enhance the feeling of joint ownership and to engage the employees. In other cases, again, selective sharing and senior “buy-in” approval methods might be required before the wider communication is started. (Morell 2015, 147.)

3.1.3 Eyes on knowledge management

Snyder & Lee-Partridge (2013, 417) consider that in a knowledge-based society the capability to utilize solutions, ideas and knowledge in general within an organization has an impact on a company’s competitive advantage. The process where both tacit and explicit knowledge is acquired, organized and communicated between employees, in order for them to benefit from it and become more efficient in their work, is called knowledge management (Snyder & Lee-Partridge 2013, 417).

Companies often use a codification strategy which is a people-to-document method where technological solutions support capturing, codifying and storing the knowledge of employees. For example, an intranet can be a useful tool in this sense. In comparison the personalization approach drives on interpersonal networks where specifically tacit knowledge is distributed – this approach requires employees to be willing to share knowledge with each other openly. (Snyder & Lee-Partridge 2013, 418.)

Knowledge can be shared via various information communication channels ranging from traditional non-technological methods such as face to face communication to traditional technologies such as email and phone to contemporary technologies such as intranets or blogs (Snyder & Lee-Partridge 2013, 418). As Welch (2012, 252) found out in her study about employees’ preferences of internal communication in general, Snyder & Lee-Partridge (2013, 418) also believe that key is to establish what motivates employees to share knowledge and through which channels knowledge is preferred to be shared and obtained in - the to be communicated message needs to fit the chosen channel.

Knowledge sharing in companies is affected by cultural, technical as well as organizational and individual factors and constitutes to the individual’s willingness to distribute knowledge that is acquired and generated in cooperation with others within the organization. It is challenging to share knowledge in complex environments because of the often tacit nature of information, but also due to the nature of organizational environments with potential issues regarding flexibility of the staff, time pressure, restrained organizational structures, unfolding role definitions and having experienced staff leaving the company. (Snyder & Lee-Partridge 2013, 419.)

Research suggests that trust is a key aspect when it comes to knowledge sharing as employees are found to be more willing to share information when they trust their co-workers to reciprocate this. Interpersonal trust is also relevant when it comes to knowledge sharing in interaction relationships, as employees who trust each other are more likely to distribute knowledge that they would otherwise not share with peers. (Snyder & Lee-Partridge 2013, 419.)

In addition, having a shared goal also supports knowledge distribution. More importantly, however, the company culture affects knowledge sharing, as the need for reciprocity is lower when the organization has a strong emphasis on collaboration and cooperation – a company culture based on fairness and innovativeness. (Snyder & Lee-Partridge 2013, 420.)

3.2 Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is a significant aspect of concern around the world, as it is one of the vital elements for innovation, effectiveness and competitiveness. A survey conducted in USA in 2009 suggests that employee engagement is one of the top three organizational trends and similar studies confirm that the matter is of interest also in Europe. (Welch 2011, 328.)

Welch (2011, 329) identified different waves of research around the concept of employee engagement, according to which in the pre-wave era (before 1990), the general need for employees to engage in their work activities and companies was detected in the first place. During the first wave in 1990 to 1999, the term of employee engagement was introduced, and practitioners begun to show increased interest in the subject that was firstly studied from the personal point of view (Welch 2011, 332).

During the first wave of the employee engagement era Kahn (2010, 22) found in his studies in the 1990s that three psychological needs must to be met in order to satisfy employees; meaningfulness, safety and availability. He believes that people only use their voice when they feel that their words matter and can make a difference or change a direction - add meaning to something bigger than themselves. When this is not perceived to be the case, employees hold their tongues. (Kahn 2010, 23.)

People who do not listen, cause muteness. But fact is that successful change, and development can only be achieved when people do engage, bring issues to the table and learn from offering data to alter things, both in and outside of the business world. (Kahn 2010,

23.) During the years between 1990 and 1999 the term of employee engagement was introduced into business literature as something that the right person with the right manager and the right role will drive (Welch 2011, 332).

The second wave of employee engagement literature identified by Welch (2011, 333) describes the work around the employee engagement aspect in the beginning of the 2000s until 2005 and is characterized with a stream of practitioner work, as well as the growing interest from academics. Levels of employee engagement started to increasingly be measured by different means and a new conception of the phenomenon was cognitive and emotional factors in combination at the workplace (Welch 2011, 333).

One generally accepted definition of the phenomenon during the second wave was: “a positive employee attitude towards the organization and its values, involving awareness of business context, and work to improve job and organizational effectiveness” (Welch 2011, 333). Significant for the era was the shift to the positive psychology movement where focus from negative outcomes of attitudes, such as burnout, were replaced by positive ones, like work engagement – this switch triggered increased interest in the topic amongst academics (Welch 2011, 333).

The third wave of engagement literature describes the second half of the decade (2005-2010) where further research work especially by practitioners was conducted actively. One meaningful development was the addition of a spiritual element to the definition of employee engagement, as it was determined that employers must win employees’ hearts, heads and souls to evoke true passion and desire to strive for excellence. Attributes from different disciplines such as human resources, psychology and workplace behaviours were combined more strongly, whereas correlation between engagement and internal communication and management intervening were discovered as well. (Welch 2011, 334.)

3.2.1 A deeper dip into engagement theory

Kahn (2010, 21) has studied employee engagement for a long time and describes how engagement is not only hard work, but it comprises of a combination of it in addition to levels of self-involvement - a person’s self. The real self comes to the surface when people say what they think and feel, and this happens when people really care about what they are doing and are committed to doing their best at it. An engaged employee does not only follow routines like a robot, but adds own experiences, ideas, feelings and hunches to the game in order to solve the problems at hand. Engaged employees are focused and stay committed to their tasks – they show they truly care about them not as being show-offs, but as being intensely present at their work. (Kahn 2010, 21.)

Kahn (2010, 22) elaborates that being engaged is not a constant form of being, and it comes and goes in intervals. Employees need space to re-charge before they can be engaged again and in the short-term moments of absence such as holidays and breaks are effective. In the long run, however, building and maintaining levels of engagement is a complex task for organizations to master. (Kahn 2010, 22.)

Clear organizational roles allow employees to express themselves more confidently and encourage them to be smart, creative, organized or whatever their role demands them to be. When roles are unclear and boundaries hazy, people are more likely to disengage as they are uncertain about authority and decision-making. Job meaningfulness also goes hand in hand with performance measurement and evaluation. Employees need to feel recognized and valued when they succeed in their role. The evaluation system must give sensible, justifiable feedback leading to fair end results – otherwise it is challenging for employees to understand the meaning of what it is they do. (Kahn 2010, 23.)

According to Kahn (2010, 24) meaningfulness can also be harvested from relationships at work. Co-workers can provide help, mentoring and support. Work life is suggested to matter more when employees feel connected to their co-workers; learning together, making sense of complex issues and having fun. The behaviour employees are treated with also matters in term of meaningfulness and when encountering dignity, respect and appreciation, engagement levels are likely to be increased. (Kahn 2010, 24.)

The safe organizational environment for people to raise their voices and be their authentic selves matters a lot. Employees must know that the company is a psychologically safe space where they can express what they know and ask about things they are uncertain about, say what they feel and think and be creative, stay silent or jump around in excitement and be their true selves without being punished for it. Punishment can be formal for instance a notification in the performance evaluation or informal in form of laughter, judgement or awkward silence. Knowing how safe an organizational environment is, determines levels of engagement. (Kahn 2010, 25.)

Based on the vast volume of literature evolving around the topic of employee engagement, it is a phenomenon that could be considered as a psychological construct, a positive or neutral attitude or psychological or motivational states. Welch (2011, 336) recommends communicators to look at engagement as a complex mix of attitudinal-type states with fixed state traits, because this emphasizes the requirement for employee communication to be understandable for the audience's core communication needs, in addition to those communication needs on the surface.

3.2.2 Connection between employee communication and engagement

As briefly mentioned before in this chapter, employee communication can impact employee engagement strongly. Welch (2011, 339) states that high-quality internal communication increases levels of engagement and not surprisingly poor employee communication can act as a barrier for engagement and lead to disengagement. Employee communication is a powerful organizational practice to convince all employees of company values and goals. Thus, well-planned and executed communication programs are an essential factor for engagement. (Welch 2011, 339.)

Welch (2011, 340) proposes a conceptual model for this phenomenon. The model in figure 1 below demonstrates the connections between communication and employee engagement in an organizational environment, as well as its effects (Welch 2011, 340).

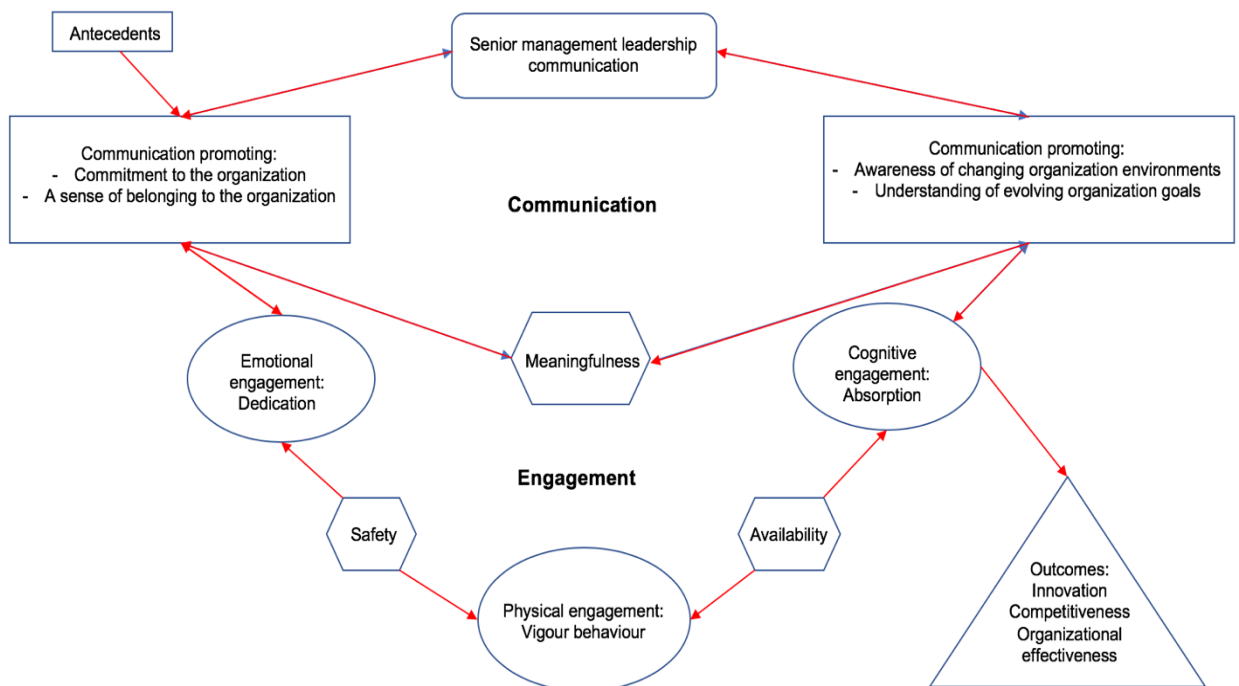


Figure 1. The employee engagement concept and internal corporate communication: a conceptual model (Welch 2011, 340)

Employee engagement is presented in figure 1 as a three-dimensional composition comprising of emotional, cognitive and physical components. These components are connected to dedication (emotional), absorption (cognitive) and vigour behaviour (psychical), in addition to three psychological aspects proven to be included in engagement; meaningfulness, safety and availability. (Welch 2011, 340.)

The model lists organizational commitment and a sense of belonging as forerunners of engagement, and these in turn are impacted by the leaderships' communication, as established also in the previous chapter. Characteristics of corporate employee communication are also mentioned as communication engagement results, such as awareness and understanding. (Welch 2011, 340.)

Leadership communication draws connections to various aspects reflecting engagement - communication overall is one of the concrete needs that organizations must accommodate to retain and further develop levels of engagement and thus it is the driving force for engagement visualized in the model. Consequences of employee engagement are presented to be innovation, competitiveness and organizational effectiveness in the conceptual model in figure 1 above. (Welch 2011, 340.)

Hargie & Tourish (2009, 18) agree with Welch (2011) and point out that total work engagement and job satisfaction cannot be achieved by a sole focus on the actual work tasks. They rather suggest that by implementing effective communication, people are able to specify their needs, reduce uncertainty by getting access to required information and build opportunities for themselves to be included in decision-making processes. To support employee engagement, a balance between individual and joint needs must be managed. It is not sufficient to communicate clearly about organizational goals and motivations without making the connection to how the employees can contribute to them and what the individuals need in order to do so. (Hargie & Tourish 2009, 18.)

Also Ruck (2015, 41) states that strong internal communication supports building employee engagement. He refers to studies that suggest responsibility, conciseness, professionalism and honesty in employee communication drive better interaction, more trust, efficiency as well as enhanced performance and gratitude. Another research indicates that clear internal communication results in employee motivation during recession. Yet another research suggests that companies that execute clear and transparent employee communication were four times more likely to have higher rates of engagement compared to those organizations who did not. (Ruck 2015, 41.)

Hargie & Tourish (2009, 15) list concrete communications practices applied by leading companies which have proved to have brought positive results in terms of engagement. This list includes matters such as ongoing communication training activities for all employees and especially senior leaders, acknowledging and talking openly about problems, a dedicated communication team planning and sharing activities together, an informal network to collect regular employee feedback, daily newsletters, CEO visits to each company

location on annual basis and internal talk-show style programs about quarterly results (Hargie & Tourish 2009, 15).

A survey conducted in the UK in 2012 indicates furthermore that there is a connection between engagement and psychological wellbeing. The research results stated that engaged employees had higher degrees of wellbeing overall in contrast to disengaged staff members, indicating that engaged employees were more frequently enjoying the work they did, were better in managing work related issues in addition to being less likely to lose sleep over work related thoughts. A positive impact on improved safety performance in organizations has also been detected to be shown by engagement, more so than awareness about occupational health and safety policies at the workplace. (Ruck 2015, 85.)

Considering the fact how research proves that well-managed communication programs have direct correlations to workplace satisfaction, better performance, commitment and engagement levels of employees, it is surprising that not more companies strive to improve processes and practices around employee communication according to Hargie & Tourish (2009, 10). Even though effective communication will not result in employee engagement and commitment by its own, studies suggest it will drive employee morale, promote innovativeness, increase employee retention rates and productivity which inevitably brings competitive advantages in the market. Poor employee communication practices in contrast have been found to support feelings of isolation, decreased levels of involvement and overall dissatisfaction. (Hargie & Tourish 2009, 11.)

3.3 Employee onboarding

The Finnish Employment Contracts Act (55/2001) specifies in section 1 of the second chapter that it is the employer's obligation to work towards improving the relationship with and among employees in general. Furthermore, the same section of the act specifies that it is the employer's responsibility to make sure all employees are capable of executing their work tasks, also in case the company's operations, the work tasks or working methods change or are developed. It is another employer obligation to make efforts for the employees to develop themselves within their abilities in order for them to advance in their careers. (Employment Contracts Act 55/2001.)

In addition, also the Occupational Safety and Health Act (738/2002) describes in section 14 of the second chapter that employers must provide "an adequate orientation to the work, working conditions at the workplace, working and production methods, work equip-

ment used in the work and the correct method of using it - -". Also, sufficient guidance regarding safe working practices, specifically before the beginning of a new work role or task, as well as before the introduction of new work equipment or newly introduced working or production methods is mentioned in this law. The same chapter furthermore specifies, that any employee guidance shall be complemented whenever necessary. (Occupational Safety and Health Act 738/2002.)

Legal obligations, however, are not the only reason why employers should focus on making sure their new employees are able to integrate to their new organizational environments and conduct their tasks properly. Statistics estimate that the generation of baby boomers, consisting of people who were born approximately between early to mid 1940s and 1960 to 1964, change jobs ten times during their working lives. As later generations are expected to change work places even more frequently, the phenomenon of onboarding is of great importance. (Ellis, Bauer, Mansfield, Erdogan, Truxillo & Simon 2015, 204.) This third part of the theoretical framework concentrates on this aspect and is considered from different viewpoints.

3.3.1 The concept of onboarding

Plenty of research has been done in the field of organizational socialization, which analyses the activity of new employees successfully entering a new work role and overcoming uncertainty to adjust to new work environments (Ellis & al. 2015, 204). Knight (2013, 153) defines that onboarding is a process during which a new employee is integrated to the organization, whereas socialization is considered a slightly wider concept than that, concentrating on the newcomers learning company values, beliefs and attitudes required to effectively work in their new roles. Saks & Gruman (2018, 13) again define that with organizational socialization the introductory activities and events are meant that help the new hires to orientate themselves at the new work place and specifically where they learn about attitudes and behaviours.

Many can relate, and research proves that starting a new work is a stressful experience. Thus, the objective of effective onboarding is to lower the stress levels and to reduce uncertainty in order to feel more confident and capable to work efficiently in the new job role. (Ellis & al. 2015, 204.)

Bradt & Vonnegut (2009, 3) define that "onboarding is the process of acquiring, accommodating, assimilating and accelerating new team members, whether they come from the outside or inside the organization" and emphasize how alignment within a company about the new hire need and role is vital. Bradt & Vonnegut (2009, 3-4) furthermore elaborate

how in addition to the alignment on the role and expectations of the new hire the right people for the needed role need to be identified carefully – acquiring needs to be handled skillfully.

With accommodating, preparing for the new hires' arrival is meant as the required tools and support should be provided to the new hire efficiently (Bradt & Vonnegut 2009, 3). Assimilating in the above definition refers to the help that should be provided to the new employee in terms of being able to work together with the necessary contacts and stakeholders. Finally, accelerating refers to the support that needs to be offered to the new hire in order to deliver expected results faster. (Bradt & Vonnegut 2009, 4.)

As in most organizations new hire related processes, such as recruitment, orientation, training and management are handled by different teams or people, this causes a big risk for misalignment and disengagement of new hires. Concrete issues here can be unclarity about the required role that needs to be filled, high-pressure interviews that result in disinterest in exactly those people the organization needs to hire, hiring employees who are not a right fit for the company culture or unpreparedness on the first day. Unpreparedness could include no one to greet new hires, no workstation set up, missing work tools or lack of onboarding support in getting to know the team, work tasks, tools and processes when the actual employment has begun. (Bradt & Vonnegut 2009, 4.)

An unsuccessful onboarding process risks having new employees either fail to deliver the expected work results or leave the company. Onboarding failures are not always detected right away and can carry consequences that determine the employees' entire perception, motivation and commitment towards the company altogether. As already stated above, starting a new job is a turbulent process for everyone and if the onboarding is poor, it is hard for the company to make corrections down to road – first impressions are essential. (Bradt & Vonnegut 2009, 5.)

According to Bradt & Vonnegut (2009, 6), the start of a new working relationship is a vulnerable and powerful time for the new employee, and thus it represents a very important teachable moment for the organization. If this moment is planned thoroughly in advance, and the employee and company find full alignment in the onboarding process becoming part of the organizational culture, significant improvement in business results will be achieved (Bradt & Vonnegut 2009, 7). A well-executed onboarding program assists in building and sustaining higher performing teams, as well as brings along culture-shaping competitive advantages (Bradt & Vonnegut 2009, 3).

In fact, Bradt & Vonnegut (2009, 4) consider onboarding as one of the most important factors in terms of achieving long-term success for the organization, as a well-managed onboarding enhances employee productivity, improves the ability to deliver results and remarkably improves talent retention and cost. Yet in Bradt & Vonnegut's (2009, 4) perspective only few companies manage this part of the business operation well and seldom have coherent onboarding programs or plans in place to guide the relevant parties to success.

Bradt & Vonnegut (2009, 4) reason that this could be due to the fact that onboarding is not something to be dealt with every day and is thus challenging to master. Also Knight (2013, 153-154) agrees that even though onboarding is one of the most common human resource processes, organizations often do not succeed in it as well as they should.

3.3.2 Organizational socialization theory and tactics

A lot has been studied in the field of organizational socialization. The organizational socialization theory indicates that when successfully applied, it firstly evokes adjustment and outcomes such like task proficiency as well as social integration that are then followed by traditional or related socialization results of work satisfaction and commitment towards the hiring company. (Saks & Gruman 2018, 13.)

Organizational tactics has been researched thoroughly as part of the organizational socialization theory. Tactics can be categorized in more systematic and collective approaches (institutional tactics) and more unstructured and irregular personal ones (individual tactics), or higher order categories such as content, context and social tactics. Older studies suggest that especially the focus on institutional onboarding tactics reduces levels of stress and supports the new employees' ability to cope better. Mitigating connections have been found between socialization tactics and burnout symptoms. (Ellis & al. 2015, 211.)

Organizational activities around socialization are recommended to include building work-related and social capital in terms of providing training, work tools and sufficient information in addition to socializing help, events and professional manager support. Not surprisingly studies confirm that those new employees who had attended optional training sessions reported to understand the company better which resulted in them being more committed to the organization compared to those who did not attend the training. Further research highlights the importance of social connections as part of the onboarding, and for instance helpfulness of colleagues has been detected as a positive indicator for the adjustment of new hires. (Ellis & al. 2015, 212.)

Furthermore Ellis & al (2015, 209) suggest that companies applying organizational socialization tactics are more likely to achieve results in terms of gaining better employee adjustment, including role clarity and social integration. The proximal outcomes of applying organizational socialization tactics in turn have been confirmed to be associated with performance, commitment, work-satisfaction and aims to remain employed by the company in question. In comparison, those companies that applied a less structured onboarding process, or none at all, leaving the new hire to wonder about the job role, culture and processes on their own, tend to be left with weaker results of efficacy, job clarity and social integration. (Ellis & al. 2015, 209.)

3.3.3 The aspect of uncertainty

Most of the organizational socialization theory is based on the thought of reducing employee uncertainty. Miller & Jablin (1991, 94) highlight how the feeling of uncertainty is a major component when joining a new company or position. This is only natural, as new hires leave familiar work groups behind and are bound to set aside parts of their identity to fit in with the new employer, also abandoning any accustomed roles from the past work environment in the process to learn about the new role and expectations around it (Miller & Jablin 1991, 94).

Uncertainty is experienced in terms of relationships and expectations in general; learning formal and informal tasks, responsibilities and rights, hierarchical power relations, relevant behaviours and attitudes to evaluate their fit within the social and work-related networks of the new company (Miller & Jablin 1991, 94). Taking these dimensions into account, it is no wonder that the “sink or swim” technique is not a successful one when it comes to onboarding.

Miller & Jablin (1991, 95) divide uncertainty into effort behaviour uncertainty, where the employees might question their personal skills and competences in regard to the new role, and behaviour-outcome uncertainty, where the employees are finding out exactly what to do in the new job roles in question. Effort behaviour uncertainty is general in its nature and has a high chance of decreasing once work tasks are managed successfully. However, behaviour-outcome uncertainty is heavily dependent on received information and can be affected also by an excess of information and conflicting knowledge about what good performance means. This type of uncertainty is likely to take much more time to get reduced. Uncertainty is in general a driver for information-seeking behaviour. (Miller & Jablin 1991, 95.)

Another study indicates that employees who were offered intense structure at the beginning of their employment were more likely to search for required information in order to be more productive at the job. This is surprising in a way, as one would assume that when people are not offered information, they would be more likely to seek for it (Mathieu 2006).

Miller & Jablin (1991, 95) studied this phenomenon from a different point of view when they investigated that the amount of uncertainty the new employees experience should have a direct impact on their communication behaviour, especially in terms of information seeking. This was supported by the idea that higher levels of uncertainty cause an increase in the information-seeking behaviour of the new hire. As the levels of uncertainty are lowered, also the information-seeking behaviour declines. (Miller & Jablin 1991, 95.)

It is significant new employees have clarity about what is expected from them in their position and how they can achieve set objectives at the very beginning of the employment. Rebuilding an individual's identity depending on goals and the collective viewpoint encourages employees to ask more questions. Feedback and guidance from team members and managers are essential here. However, the exact style and nature of the onboarding support should be identified as appropriate to the company and the new hire. In today's business world and especially from the talent management point of view where autonomy and flexibility are trends, finding a balance between providing the new hire with an appropriate amount of freedom and structure is critical. (Mathieu 2006.)

3.3.4 Various viewpoints to the onboarding process

One viewpoint to onboarding is the stress-reduction factor. According to Ellis & al. (2015, 204) the stress factor is known to cause a decrease in physical and psychological work-wellbeing, as well as poorer performance, attitudes and even increased employee turnover rates.

Ellis & al. (2015, 205) represent the viewpoint as to which socialization is a process implemented in order to reduce uncertainty around the new organizational environment, workplace attitudes and behaviours, as well as job expectations regarding tasks, cultural aspects and people. This is why one of the main goals of onboarding according to them is to offer sufficient information to the new hire about these matters to support them in the learning process (Ellis & al. 2015, 205).

A result of a successful onboarding should thus be a clear picture about the job role to be assumed, as well as bringing the new employee up to speed in terms of the organization itself, the culture and employees. As the uncertainty a new hire experiences when joining

a company often is a stressful experience that causes emotional exhaustion, which in turn might hinder the integration to the work culture in addition to causing a loss in profit, another clear goal of onboarding is to reduce the levels of uncertainty. (Ellis & al. 2015, 206.)

During onboarding, Ellis & al. (2015, 207) highlight the fact that it is critical to find out what the biggest stress factors are for the new hires and provide support in terms of individual differences based on their prior work experience, industry-specific competences as well as individual personality differences. When resources are invested based on an individual need assessment, they will positively influence the process of adjustment and other personal outcomes such as understanding organizational culture and values, self-efficacy and social acceptance that lead to better work performance and wellbeing, as well as talent retention. (Ellis & al. 2015, 209.)

Within the studies evolving around socialization, the proactive behaviour of new employees has been another primary focus. Proactive behaviour has been researched in the context of tactics applied by new hires to reach their professional goals and facilitating their own integration in general. Proactiveness can be defined more specifically in terms of socialization as seeking feedback about the company and job role to gain clarity about how things are handled in the company, networking and building relationships, as well as a crave for control to achieve better work results by altering the understanding of uncertainty and desire to learn. All in all, literature suggests that proactivity in new employees leads to increased adjustment and comprehension. (Ellis & al. 2015, 210.)

New employees who experience continuous stress, have a significantly lower capability to manage demands compared to those new hires who are armed with abilities to build a strong social network, maintain positive beliefs around their own competences and understanding their role clearly (Ellis & al. 2015, 211). Cooper-Thomas, Paterson, Stadler & Saks (2014) found that there is reliable evidence to prove that when new employees are being proactive and showing behaviour such as seeking for feedback, making direct inquiries and networking, it has an impact on their socialization.

Proactiveness results in better learning, integrating socially and in turn in job satisfaction and desires to stay with the hiring company. Even if proactive behaviour on its own benefits the new hire generally for instance in terms of socializing, this kind of behaviour can also evoke proactive outcomes from organizational insiders, for example in them providing information to the seekers. (Cooper-Thomas, Paterson, Stadler & Saks 2014.)

Cooper-Thomas & al. (2014) did a study where they researched how proactive behaviour and proactive outcomes affect aspects such as the learning, wellbeing and work engagement of the newcomers. The study confirms that proactive behaviour of new hires indeed predicts learning, wellbeing and work engagement, however, the most positive results were dependent on the proactive outcomes of the behaviour rather than the proactiveness on its own. (Cooper-Thomas & al. 2014.)

In practice this proves how the co-workers of the new hire are in a critical role with their behaviour in terms of the socialization. Colleagues should take the time to actively socialize, answer questions, build strong relationships as co-workers and managers and take the initiative to actively include the new hire in the work community in order to make their integration more efficient. (Cooper-Thomas & al. 2014.)

Yet another angle to look at onboarding is learning and information as part of the socialization theory. Ashforth, Sluss, Saks (2007, 448) studied how socialization tactics and proactive behaviour combined influence new employees' learning, as prior research shows that learning is connected between the socialization process and adjustment outcomes thereof. Ashforth & al. (2007, 448) not only confirmed that learning is essential for the integration of new hires, but also investigated how the way they are socialized essentially determines what they learn.

By learning, knowledge acquisition around the work and job role, interpersonal and group relationships and the organization as a whole are meant. More specifically for instance technical information around how to manage set job tasks, knowledge on what exactly is expected in the job role and how performance is measured, information about what the company culture is like as well as descriptions of power distribution within the organization along with information about other people and internal relationships with them. All in all, learning in this context is about gaining knowledge and again, reducing uncertainty. (Ashforth & al. 2007, 449.)

Ashforth & al.'s (2007, 458) study suggests that institutional socialization in combination with proactive behaviour were connected with learning in a positive manner and this learning was in addition positively correlated with job satisfaction, performance and company identification. The results of the study all in all confirm that applied organizational socialization tactics combined with proactive behaviour of the new employees are in connection with learning outcomes, as also suggested in former research, but more meaningfully it adds to the theoretical perspective the angle of how the socialization process content is of great significance in terms of learning and sensemaking. (Ashforth & al. 2007, 458-459.)

Also the staff retention aspect should be considered when it comes to onboarding - Yamamura, Birk & Cossitt (2010, 60) write how first impressions are critical when aiming to retain top talent. Whereas a company brand, reputation and image are essentially the very first connections a potential new hire might draw towards a company, the first exposure to the organization is obtained when it comes to the initial contact to the team, and actually joining it. Thus, the recruitment and the onboarding processes are in a central position here. As the competition for the best talent in the market is often ruthless, it is vital for a company to be able to manage first impressions about the firm, profession and work role which impact the decision of the potential new hire to join a company, but also to remain employed at it. (Yamamura & al. 2010, 60.)

Various studies prove correlations between staff retention rates and optimal onboarding programs. For instance, Hall-Ellis (2014, 139) states that top rated employers applying best-in-class onboarding processes reported 86 % of their first-year new hires to have been retained and 77 % of the new employees having achieved their performance goals on time within their first year of employment.

Hirsch (2017) writes about a study that proves that 69 % of employees who considered their onboarding experience as great were more likely to stay working for an organization for a span of three years than those who rated the experience poorer. The same study suggests that new hires who had been offered a structured onboarding program were 58 % more likely to stay with a company for longer than three years, and that new hire productivity rates were 50 % higher than at companies without a program in place. (Hirsch 2017.)

Gupta, Bhattacharaya, Sheorey & Coelho (2018, 62) based their research on a study of 1000 respondents who had left a company inside a period of six months after starting a new position. The main reasons for terminating the work relationships were categorized through the perspective of the socialization resource theory as poor orientation training, task specifications, as well as interaction with leadership and co-workers. Gupta & al.'s (2018, 62) study investigated whether the onboarding experience during the first year of employment effects turnover intentions over different industries, and this hypothesis was proved to be accurate; the better the scores were for the onboarding experience, the lower the turnover intention rates.

3.3.5 Links to employee engagement

Even though relatively much is known about the indicators and outcomes of work engagement as described in the previous subchapter in the theoretical framework of this thesis, it

has only more recently been included as an aspect in the research around organizational socialization (Saks & Gruman 2018, 13). In an older study of Saks & Gruman conducted in 2011, they detected an indirect correlation between socialization tactics and work engagement through self-efficiency, positive emotional and person-job fit perceptions. Another study conducted by Cooper-Thomas, Paterson, Stadler and Saks (2014) that was briefly mentioned earlier in this chapter, presents that the ground cause for the effects of proactive behaviours on the new hires' work engagement was proactive outcomes.

As established in this literature review around onboarding, the viewpoints on the socialization theory are traditionally based on the uncertainty reduction theory, including aspects of gaining proactive behaviour, learning outcomes and stress reduction. Recent research however has studied connections between onboarding and engagement levels in more detail – more specifically how the new employees' work engagement levels develop and progresses during the beginning of the employment. Engagement levels are likely to be affected based on the onboarding experience.

Saks & Gruman (2018, 14) state that most new hires have rather high levels of work engagement readiness before starting at the new work place due to expectations and excitement about the new job and organization. However, research indicates that there is often a decline in new employees' job attractiveness, satisfaction, motivation and commitment perceptions after starting at the new company. (Saks & Gruman 2018, 14.)

One reason for this “hangover effect” could be that the primary excitement about the new work role wares off when the employee starts to work on more routine like and mundane tasks, a bad person-job fit or unchallenging work altogether. To avoid a decline in work engagement of new hires after the organizational entry, the onboarding process needs to be introduced in a manner that maintains and further develops levels of engagement and it thus plays a critical role in terms of talent management for the organization overall. (Saks & Gruman 2018, 14.)

Research evidence suggests that work engagement of new hire varies along the course of the first year of employment. In order to better understand the fluctuation the work engagement can take during the socialization process, and to investigate the patterns of changes it can demonstrate, Saks & Gruman (2018, 14) created the newcomer work engagement maintenance curve model. Newcomer work engagement maintenance curves present development in new employees' work engagement over the first year of employment, starting from the organizational entry. The below figure 2 demonstrates five curves

that show how new hires' work engagement may increase, decline or remain steady over the specified time frame. (Saks & Gruman 2018, 14.)

All curves in figure 2 start from a rather high work engagement level, because as described above, the engagement readiness of new hires traditionally is high to start with before the start date at a new organization. Curve A demonstrates an immediate drop in work engagement after the start in the new job position which indicates that the organizational socialization or onboarding was implemented poorly or was non-existent, due to which the employee is unable to maintain high levels of work engagement within the first year of employment.

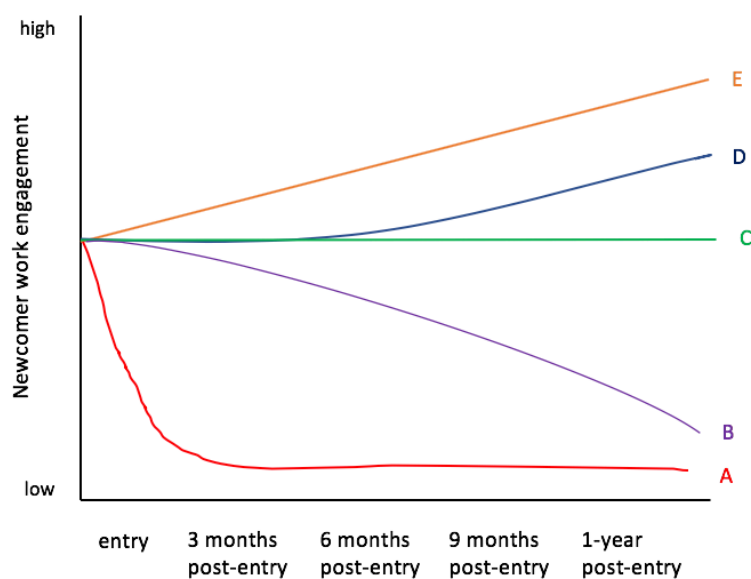


Figure 2. Newcomer work engagement maintenance curves (Saks & Gruman 2018, 15)

Curve B in figure 2 remains at the same level since the employee joined the company for only a short while, before descending steadily until a very low level of work engagement is reached by the time the first year of employment has been reached. This would suggest that primarily a limited socialization program that was implemented helped the new hire to stay rather highly engaged at the very beginning of employment, but after the end of the onboarding program no sustainable support seems to have been provided which results in the new hire quickly becoming more and more disengaged.

In contrast, curve C in figure 2 presents a new employee whose work engagement level remains relatively high and steady throughout the entire first year of employment which would indicate that different kind of socialization support and practices were offered on a regular basis and helped the new hire to stay rather highly engaged. A new hire mentor for instance could have been assigned who has been available for providing support,

feedback and guidance throughout the entire first year of employment (Saks & Gruman 2018, 15).

Engagement in curve D in figure 2 remains on the same relatively high level since the beginning of employment and starts increasing after half a year and ends at a high level by the first year's end. This would suggest that a socialization program was successfully executed to maintain the relatively high level of work engagement in the beginning of the employment that rises to high levels possibly through the application of additional formal and informal socialization practices.

The fifth curve, E, in figure 2 shows a permanent increase of work engagement levels since the first day of employment, resulting in a very high level of engagement at the end of the first year post organizational entry. This kind of exponential increase of engagement suggests that a very successful and effective onboarding program was applied with the specific focus on keeping new employees highly engaged during the entire first year of employment, and beyond that. To a new hire with a newcomer work engagement maintenance curve such like this, various orientation resources such as for example social events, regular feedback, mentoring, a buddy program and motivating work tasks, were offered at the very beginning of the employment and throughout the entire socializing process of the first year that fitted the personal needs. (Saks & Gruman 2018, 15.)

Newcomer work engagement maintenance curves can assist in identifying problems during the onboarding process, in case the engagement is declining, and interference is required in order to increase or maintain higher levels of work engagement of the new hires. Opposed to the focus in current applications of organizational socialization which are based heavily on the uncertainty reduction theory, this model offers to develop and maintain work engagement during the socializing period and beyond with an emphasis on long-term benefits. (Saks & Gruman 2018, 16.)

Whereas Saks & Gruman (2018, 19) agree with the positive effects of socialization tactics of supporting new hires in adjusting better, they argue that the uncertainty reduction theory is limited when it comes to work engagement and bring their theory one step further. Even if uncertainty reduction lowers anxiety and stress levels, as studied by Ellis & al. (2015, 204), Saks & Gruman (2018, 19) believe that providing job resources are more significant than easing job demands. More precisely, they represent the opinion that the objective of effective onboarding should be offering new hires the required resources for strengthening and maintaining work engagement, as this brings longer lasting benefits for the organization (Saks & Gruman 2018, 19).

Saks & Gruman (2018, 20) state that the reason that socialization tactics are primarily related to new hires' ability to adjust is that the tactic does not focus on the actual content of the socialization process and is heavily depended on the organizational stakeholders providing the required support functions – in terms of work engagement levels it is not only relevant that an insider is available to support the new hire, but rather the quality and extent of the resources provided. Saks & Gruman (2018, 20) furthermore elaborate that proactiveness of the new hire is not enough to achieve desired socialization objectives, as it has been detected that proactive behaviour is only effective when it causes also proactive outcomes, for instance receiving answers to questions, as proven by Cooper-Thomas & al. (2014).

3.3.6 Concrete measures towards successful onboarding

The significance of socialization or onboarding has been expressed, but the question remains what successful onboarding looks like in practice. Several studies suggest that relations are of high importance in terms of socialization.

It is evident that positive experiences with colleagues, mentors and managers establish trust within the new employees to tackle the challenges and demands around the new work role by knowing they will receive the needed support, information and approval from their co-workers around them. This kind of trust and increased amounts of information furthermore motivate new hires to longer-term learning and risk taking, leading to enhanced levels of effectiveness in the long run. (Ellis & al. 2015, 222.)

A study Mathieu (2006) refers to supports the need for structure and strong relationships during onboarding. New employees who were offered a mentor and a structured onboarding program were more willing to ask for advice in comparison to those with less or no support at the beginning of their employment. Different methods to provide structure during the onboarding and to support relationship building are for example formal trainings, mentoring programs, fixed timetables and clarity around workplace guidelines and more senior employees and their roles. (Mathieu 2006.)

From a different perspective another research points out that having a new employee mentor was perceived positively in terms of acquiring information about the organization instead of having to find out details from co-workers (Ellis & al. 2015, 220). The mentor role has also been researched in the stress related context. Connections have been detected between mentoring styles and work-related stress levels, as well as mentoring and

work-family conflicts. Further research proves a negative connection between learning experiences and supportive mentors and role stress and burnout symptoms. (Ellis & al. 2015, 221.)

Knight (2013, 157) elaborates that a successful mentor should not be a hiring manager or someone who is in direct competition role-wise with the new hire. Instead a suitable mentor candidate should be someone who has interest in the guiding role, demonstrates enthusiasm and commitment to the role as well as a good chemistry with the new hire and availability. The aim is to build a longer-term learning program to help the new employees grow and develop their competences (Knight 2013, 157).

The mentor optimally shares both personal and professional experiences during the joint learning and guiding period. It is important to recognize that the offered mentor program symbolizes the organization's commitment to the new hire's adjustment. Buddy programs in contrast are often less structured, allowing the learning relationship to grow naturally, and the role of a new hire buddy is to give advice, help to socialize and answer comfortably difficult or politically sensitive queries. (Knight 2013, 157.)

Also Ashforth, Sluss, Saks (2007, 450) base their studies on the research knowledge according to which the use of mentoring and collective training have shown a positive connection to learning about new tasks, the organization and people groups. Likewise, also Knight (2013, 157) highlights the importance of human interaction in the onboarding process, as implied knowledge is needed to tackle feelings of anxiety and to build up a support system needed for proper integration into the team. In order to benefit from tacit knowledge, however, relationships fostered through human interactions are needed and for this to work out, the responsibility of the co-workers in the process needs to be promoted to the existing staff by providing information behind the acquisition and benefits of retention of core knowledge workers (Knight 2013, 157).

As is all sort of relationships, Knight (2013, 156) confirms that communication plays a critical role when it comes to onboarding. Consistent, effective communication is needed between the organization and new professional joining the team as policies, organizational processes and the meaning behind the company's vision, mission and values need to be clarified to avoid invalid assumptions or misinformation from unreliable sources. (Knight 2013, 156.)

As part of this, well-written job descriptions, organization charts, policies and work programs to communicate about the company structure and also how performance is managed and what the exact duties a job involves need to be openly communicated. The formal orientation process sets the tone for the socialization, even though also inevitably occurring informal onboarding is of importance. Clarifying matters specifically around the work culture and anything else that might be in any way unclear to new hires can mitigate mistakes and evoke higher levels of comfort. (Knight 2013, 156.)

But in addition to the communication between organization and new hires, also the general employee communication with existing employees is critical. Discussing the employment and the selection of new hires with the existing employees beforehand is important in Knight's (2013, 156) opinion to minimize any risk of potential threats to existing staff members and to have them support the newcomer. In addition, regular and constructive feedback is a vital part on the communication circle, to address mistakes or shortcomings in the early stages of employment to support the work engagement capability and productivity of the new hires (Knight 2013, 156).

Bradt & Vonnegut (2009, 211) also highlight the importance of collecting regular feedback about the progress of the new hires during the onboarding process. Positive feedback supports possibilities to strengthen engagement, whereas negative comments are helpful in terms of adjusting the process of onboarding. Gathering feedback can be arranged simply by asking the new hire and their stakeholders for suggestions to improve the onboarding and it should be done at planned points of time, for example after week one, month one and 100 days. (Bradt & Vonnegut 2009, 211-212.)

As inevitably the long-term benefits for organizations in form of employee engagement is of interest, the work engagement angle of Saks & Gruman (2018, 21) is also studied in terms of concrete onboarding actions. This viewpoint has a heavy emphasis on resources and with these social, psychological and physical attributes about the work are meant that will help to achieve set goals, assist in personal professional growth as well as motivates to learn and develop competences. Job resources are for instance information and support around salaries, career development opportunities, manager work and team culture as well as participation around decision making, task definitions and work feedback. Studies indicate that job resources have a connection to positive work outcomes and work engagement. Also communication is in the focus again. (Saks & Gruman 2018, 21.)

Saks & Gruman's (2018, 23) socialization resources theory (SRT) encourages to take contact with the new hires or involve them in social activities already before they join the

team officially to ensure high levels of work engagement readiness, convince them about being welcome and providing contacts for social support and answering questions. Recommended resources to be provided immediately when the new employee joins the team are an orientation program, encouragement for proactiveness and assistance including providing a mentor or buddy and encouraging the new employee to ask questions in order to provoke proactive outcomes to their proactive behaviour. Also letting the newcomer get involved in job crafting is suggested. (Saks & Gruman 2018, 23-24.)

After the orientation Saks & Gruman's (2018, 24) SRT theory urges employers to offer social events for relationship enhancement and strong manager support in form of job planning, training, additional information, constructive feedback as well as recognition and appreciation. Especially assignments and feedback about these are significantly important during the first six months of employment based on work engagement research according to Saks & Gruman (2018, 25).

Like Bradt & Vonnegut (2009, 211) also Saks & Gruman (2018, 25) consider it to be vital to stay connected with the new hires even after the official onboarding period has ended to find out how they are doing and in order to offer additional support when needed. This is why regular follow-up meetings are suggested by both sources to visibly provide the required social support in addition to an evaluation of the company's socialization practices to gather feedback about its' effectiveness and success. Focus should be specifically on the resources that were offered to ensure work engagement levels can be affected also in future (Saks & Gruman's 2018, 25).

Ellis & al. (2015, 220) confirm how clarifying behaviour performed by managers has been proved to have correlations to better role understanding, efficacy as well as job performance and satisfaction and commitment towards the company. Knight (2013, 158) also points out how a new employees' manager has a central position in the communication – even if HR or other departments or people are involved in the onboarding process of new hires, the hiring manager needs to own the process. This means ensuring the formal part of the onboarding is completed successfully and supporting the process with structured and welcoming communication in addition to applying necessary tools and resources (Knight 2013, 158).

As managers' attitudes can strongly affect the onboarding of new hires, it is crucial to pay attention to the behaviours and relationship building in the very beginning of the employment – credibility is hard to gain afterwards. It is a manager's responsibility to identify the type of communication, tools and trainings needed to achieve success. (Knight 2013,

158.) Both Knight (2013, 158) and Mathieu (2006) agree that the onboarding process and communication must be flexible and fit the individual needs as it is important to acknowledge that support needs can vary a lot between different professionals.

3.4 Summary of the theoretical framework

Employee communication is one of the most important aspects in business, as the workforce needs to understand and be aligned on the organization's common direction of goals, values and encouraged behaviours. Employee communication is thus of great strategic importance when it comes to achieving profitable outcomes. The workforce needs to be kept informed about plans, processes, progress, changing factors and basic details of the business and company in the context of the organizational values.

While research proves that employees often prefer face to face communication when it comes to internal messaging, a preference in written employee communication are digital platforms, such as email and intranets. An intranet is considered a useful communication forum to save documentation, to provide support in completing work tasks as well as to distribute news, information and ideas. While creating or developing an intranet it is crucial to include the target audience in the development work regarding content, functionalities and launch strategy of the forum.

In a knowledge-based society, the process of employees utilizing and sharing solutions, ideas and knowledge company internally brings clear competitive advantages to an organization. An intranet is considered a suitable tool for this type of knowledge sharing and management purposes. Knowledge management is not only crucial when new hires are joining organizations, but also in developing competences as part of the talent management processes and staying on top of things to secure sustainable company success.

Key to effective employee communication is to establish what the team's specific needs are. These specific employee needs and communication preferences need to be matched with the appropriate solutions in order to succeed in employee communication and to gain desired results. The leadership communication style has a strong impact on a company's communication culture and trust levels.

Employee engagement is a crucial element when it comes to the innovativeness and effectiveness of employees and overall the profitability of a business. Cornerstones of employee engagement are meaningfulness, safety and availability – when employees are engaged at work, they are able to operate on their highest possible capability, sharing issues

and ideas, being focused on work tasks, as well as feeling committed towards their job duties and hiring company, which they truly care for. Naturally how employees are communicated with has effects on their engagement levels.

Strong and well-executed employee communication is essential in terms of gaining higher levels of employee engagement. Organizations should strive to improve employee communication efforts by enabling employees to specify their needs, reducing uncertainty and by providing access to necessary information while building opportunities to be included in knowledge sharing and decision-making processes. Whereas successful employee communication does not necessarily evoke employee engagement on its own, research proves how boosting employee morale, commitment, innovativeness, increased retention rates and productivity are outcomes of it and can be considered as forerunners or building blocks of employee engagement.

As people increasingly change jobs in today's business world, the process of onboarding has become an important part of the talent management function of a company – not only because the Finnish law obligates organizations to onboard their new hires, but also, as it brings along clear competitive advantages. Onboarding is the process of integrating new employees to an organization and introducing them to company values, beliefs, attitudes, organizational structures and goals in order to manage their given job tasks successfully.

Plenty of research proves how high-quality onboarding programs indeed affect the levels of stress new hires experience and their learning abilities, as well as increases proactive behaviour as well as staff retention rates and levels of engagement. Culture shaping advantages, such as sustaining higher performing teams, productivity and delivery of desired results support more profitable business results.

Important parts of onboarding are internal company relationships, for instance between the new hire and their manager, colleagues and mentors, as well as smooth communication. Company policies, work and talent management processes, tools, vision, mission, company structure and values must be clarified to every new employee joining a company. A proper understanding of the organizational culture and methods mitigates the risk of mistakes and supports levels of comfort, while also encourages the employee to stay engaged towards the work tasks, as well as the company. Even if transparency in company objectives is vital to all stakeholders of an organization, first impressions when it comes to new hires – and getting them right at the very beginning – are essential.

4 Conducting the research at EA Finland

This chapter is the empirical part of the thesis and presents the target, objective, research problems and development task of the project. The research methods and justifications for their choice are explained in this chapter and in addition the implementation of the different project steps, as well as data gathering, and analysis methods are described in detail.

4.1 Target, objective and development task

The objective of this development project was to enhance employee communications at EA Finland to better support the onboarding process. After establishing that a local intranet would be created, the project objective was to eventually find out how the new communication forum, especially from the viewpoint of new hires, contributes to the employee communication within the onboarding process. In addition, also other employee communication related aspects around the intranet were explored, such as the content and functionality expectations, as well as further development needs.

The entire onboarding development project scope at EA Finland was wider than this, as in addition to creating the intranet other ways were explored to improve the onboarding experience overall by working on a new onboarding program. This included visualising the entire onboarding process and gathering tools and methods for the managers to utilize as needed, including for instance a new employee mentor program. These developments, however, were excluded from the thesis research, but explain the wide scope of the theoretical framework of the thesis.

The research questions to be answered in the study were:

RQ. How to develop employee communications to support the onboarding process at EA Finland?

RQ1. How does the new intranet contribute to EA Finland's employee communication as part of the onboarding?

RQ2. What kind of content and communication functionalities are required on the new intranet?

RQ3. What kind of content and functionalities are needed to further develop the intranet to support all employees better?

For the scope of this thesis, the target was to build an intranet to serve new hires as a knowledge sharing platform which would inevitably also benefit existing employees in terms of enhanced employee communication. In order to investigate what exactly was missing and how the communication forum could be designed to serve the team members

and potential new hires best, data was collected. Based on the data the actual development work was conducted, after which data was again gathered to evaluate the impacts the developments had.

The main research question (RQ) formulates the base for the thesis project and is answered by general observations evolving from needs based on discussions with the team leaders and leadership team before the actual thesis work was started. Partially also the replies of the staff survey under the title “developing T20’s onboarding experience” confirm the development needs for the employee communication to be around the onboarding specifically, as questions also evolve around the general employee communication needs the staff has.

As RQ1 focuses around the impacts of the intranet on the employee communication as part of onboarding, this question is answered with the knowledge gathered in a group interview conducted after the development work of the intranet was conducted. The intranet had been in use for several months which gave the focus group enough time to familiarize themselves with the content on the new communication channel and to evaluate the affects it has had on the local employee communication in their opinion, specifically from the new hire point of view. Employee hopes around the impact of the intranet were also mapped out in the staff survey and in-depth interviews prior to the actual development work.

RQ2 around the content and communication functionalities of the intranet is answered by analysing the data from the staff survey prior to the development work, as well as the in-depth interviews of the newest EA Finland hires. Some supportive data is in addition gathered from the group interview after the launch of the intranet to answer this research question. RQ3 is answered based on the staff survey results, as well as the panel interview held after the launch of the intranet.

The staff survey evolves around questions regarding both the general employee communication needs EA Finland employees have, as well as content and functionality desires for the intranet. The in-depth interviews describe desires and needs the staff has in regard to onboarding, as well as the content and functionalities for the intranet specifically. The group interview reviews the actual realization of the content and functionalities integrated to the intranet and allows additional insights post-development work also regarding employee communication in general, in addition to the onboarding point of view.

4.2 Research method, methodological choices

This study is conducted as a case study, using mixed methods of qualitative and quantitative research. The case study method was chosen, as the aim of the development project was to find out relevant factors and issues that could be applied also in other situations or companies. Another objective was to test existing theories in the field of business literature within the relevant topics and by thorough research of needs and desires achieve positive impacts in the development area at EA Finland. (Myers 2013, 75.)

Empirical evidence was utilized from people working in a contemporary organization which is one typical characteristic of a case study. Also, answers to the questions “how” and “why” were in the focus, as it is the aim of researchers in case studies to get a clear understanding of why and how matters work or do not work in a specific way. (Myers 2013, 76.)

When doing a case study, a mix of various types of evidence should be taken into account. Also, it is recommended to study a phenomenon from different perspectives of interested parties. Thorough records should be kept from all material in order for an external partner to review any research material. An ethical approach should always be applied and bias information that has been collected needs to be viewed critically – it is crucial to stick to the truth even if it would go against a good human-interest story. (Fisher 2010, 71.)

Mixed research methods, both a survey and interviews, are applied for the researcher to understand the essence of what people say, do and think – the social and culture contexts within which people’s decisions and actions take place. Deeper meaning and understanding of contexts to explain specific phenomena are best received by talking with people, which is characteristic for qualitative research. (Myers 2013, 5.) Quantitative studies often represent values which can provide insights to theoretical concepts from a different angle (Myers 2013, 7).

In quantitative research numbers are in the focus to interpret theoretical constructs they represent in order to provide scientific evidence of how matters work. Often statistical tools are applied in quantitative research to analyse data, but this is not always required, as in the survey of this thesis project. (Myers 2013, 7.) The qualitative research method is applied to investigate social and cultural aspects and usually include data collection methods such like interviews, observations as well as the researcher’s impressions and reactions (Myers 2013, 8).

The mixed method research was chosen for this development project, as the aim was to study a particular subject in depth – how to improve employee communication, especially focusing on the newcomer point of view in the onboarding process. It is challenging to generalize qualitative research results, but the goal is to generalize study results in reflection to theory around the topics of employee communication, employee engagement and onboarding. The quantitative method often trades circumstances for the capability to generalize phenomena better and was thus applied to support the qualitative research. (Myers 2013, 9.)

4.3 Description of implementation and working methods

In this thesis several data gathering techniques were applied in order to get a holistic view of the stakeholders to use this data as a base for the development works needed. First of all, a questionnaire was sent out to the entire staff of EA Finland to gather viewpoints about onboarding experiences so far and in general about the knowledge gathering at the beginning of the employment, as well as desires and wishes for the new intranet and employee communication in general.

The questionnaire was pre-coded and thus different answer options and scales were presented to the audience in addition to a few open questions. The objective of the questionnaire was to get an overall picture of current experiences and requirements for development with concrete content suggestions and communication preferences to guide the development phase of the project.

The questionnaire was prepared in the digital survey tool “Webropol” and it was announced at the general staff meeting, after which it was shared to all employees via email and chat communication. The email also contained a short description of the purpose of the questionnaire and the development project overall. The survey was open for a duration of two weeks, during which regular reminders were sent through by email, chat notifications and face to face in the weekly staff meeting. The survey data was used to support the answer to the main research question, as well as planning the development work. The questionnaire can be found in appendix 1.

In addition to the questionnaire, two sets of in-depth interviews were organized in the data gathering phase. According to Yin (2009, 106) interviews are one of the most significant information sources in case studies and characterizes interviews as guided conversations, rather than structured inquiries where the stream of questions is likely to be fluid. Especially in-depth interviews key people are interviewed about specific facts and opinions

about a certain event or process. Information obtained in in-depth interviews are often critical the success of a case study. (Yin 2009, 107.)

Both in-depth interviews were semi-structured by their nature, meaning that the interview included open questions prompting informal conversations, as well as pre-formulated questions to keep the conversation on track and to gather relevant data from all necessary angles (Fisher 2010, 175). Any new questions emerging from the conversation are welcome to be asked by the researcher, as improvisation is supported in a semi-structured interview – the beforehand prepared questions provide needed focus, but the informal atmosphere at the interview allows the interviewee to add meaningful insights as they come up (Myers 2013, 122-123).

The first set of semi-structured in-depth interviews was conducted with the employees who had most recently joined the company, within the last 14 months. This comprised of 11 employees who were willing to be interviewed. The interview questions were prepared and tested beforehand and were based on the staff questionnaire results.

The aim of these sets of interviews was to get a deeper understanding of the core issues and needs new hires had had when joining EA Finland and in what way the newest employees would suggest the process, especially the new communication channel intranet to be designed to better support joining team members. Also development hopes regarding employee communication in general were explored.

Interview times were scheduled well beforehand through the company email calendars and one hour was set to be the maximum timeframe for the conversations. The interview questions were shared with all interviewees beforehand per email. The in-depth interview questions with the employees who most recently joined the company can be found in appendix 2.

The second set of in-depth interviews was arranged with all competence team leaders. As the intranet needed to be created in cooperation with the entire team, it was considered important to also gather the team leaders' views regarding the development work. Further questions evolved around other supporting methods to be implemented to improve the onboarding experience for new hires overall, which, however, was left outside of the thesis scope. Also these one-hour-interviews were scheduled in advance through the email calendar and the tested questions were shared in advance in order for the interviewees to have the opportunity to prepare themselves and gather some thoughts around the topics.

The data of both in-depth interview rounds was used to further plan the development work, and to provide answers to RQ2 and RQ3, even if the main focus of the competence team leader interviews was on providing insights for the onboarding experience development work outside of the thesis scope. The team leader in-depth interview questions can be reviewed in appendix 3.

The third data collection technique applied in this thesis was informal observation in form of a researcher's diary. This diary was kept throughout the project documenting any happenings, comments and feedback during the different project phases – briefing sessions, status update meetings, catch-ups with the development team and staff meetings. In addition, ideas, flashes of insights and ideas were collected in the diary.

At the end of the project, after the development work around the intranet was conducted, a group interview was arranged in order to evaluate what kind of impacts the newly introduced communication forum, the intranet, had had on the employee communication from the new hire perspective and thus, provide an answer to RQ1. The focus group interview also further provided supporting answers to RQ2 and RQ3.

According to Fisher (2010, 175) focus groups are a common research method, and as individual interviews, can be more structured or open, depending on the research needs. The idea of a focus group is to bring a group of 4 - 12 people together to discuss a specific topic in a free-flowing, yet focused manner (Fisher 2010, 175 – 176). Myers (2013, 123) further elaborates that as the purpose of a focus group interview is to get collective views, the people invited to participate in the discussion should be known to have experienced certain matters and considers 7 – 12 people an appropriate group size. The interviewer, who does not in all cases need to be the researcher her / himself, directs the discussion and interaction and allows interviewees to engage in reflective conversation in a respectful atmosphere (Myers 2013, 123).

The benefit of a focus group interview is for the researcher to acquire points of views, attitudes and beliefs of group members and data is typically rich due to the group dynamics. Focus groups give the researcher more control than during observation, but in contrast a more limited amount of control as during individual face-to-face interviews. (Myers 2013, 124.) Due to this reasoning, the focus group data collection was chosen. Challenges can be dominating or uncooperative participants, and the fact that responses need to be obtained from all group members to make sure the topic is discussed to the fullest possible coverage (Myers 2013, 124).

The one-hour focus group interview during the thesis project was booked three weeks in advance and the invited participants were the same 11 employees who had most recently joined the company and who had been interviewed individually before the development work was conducted. Out of this group seven employees were present at the interview. All participants were personally asked whether they would like to take part in the focus group, and after receiving everyone's consent, email invitations were sent including the interview questions. The questions were tested beforehand with another staff member outside of the focus group. The panel group questions can be viewed in appendix 4.

4.4 Data and types of analyses used

The data from the staff questionnaire was gathered in the online tool Webropol which is able to document the responses in a visual manner that supports the analysis of the data. All in all, the questionnaire comprised of 15 questions. The first three questions were multiple-choice questions with one possible answer option, the third one including a free comment box in addition. These were questions around the timing of the employment start, overall onboarding experience and description of it.

To determine from where specific knowledge was obtained exactly during onboarding, several multiple-choice questions with the possibility to choose various options were added to the questionnaire. All of these questions included a comment box for additional, freely formulated answers. Also opinions about communication functionality options, as well as communication style preferences were asked in form of multiple-choice questions including comment fields.

The questions about actual content desires and requirements that was considered interesting or important by the employees were evaluated by the Likert scale. This is a technique commonly used when attitudes or opinions are measured, and it consists of statements that the respondent is asked to rate between low and high. Once all responses have been gathered, the overall score can be determined to confirm an average can be discovered. (Fisher 2010, 214-215.)

The questionnaire ended with two open questions providing the respondents with the possibility to add anything else coming to mind regarding the development of the onboarding process or employee communications in general. The data from the questionnaire was visualized in Webropol in format of graphs in terms of multiple-choice and Likert scale questions, and answer listings for the open questions. This gathered information was printed and analysed based on the graphics, reflecting the answers to theory and coding

the open answers by categorizing similar answers into labels and separating these by colours.

The different answers to the open questions were colour categorized per questions as additional information (for example explanations regarding experience ratings), concrete suggestions (regarding places or people from where or whom onboarding information was obtained from or other communication functionalities not listed in the questionnaire) and general open comments (categories for intranet and employee communication in general and process, content and other ideas). Every data category was transferred to an Excel sheet into their own categorical column in addition to the data obtained from the multiple-choice questions, where at a later stage the new data from the in-depth interviews was also added to.

A similar thematic coding technique was also used for analysing the in-depth interview data. The data gathered from the survey (for instance content and communication functionality preferences) were listed under separate columns and numbers of how many times the same aspects were mentioned were collected to compare how many interviewees represented similar or differing answers.

Patterns from positive and negative onboarding experiences were identified in a similar way, by listing descriptions that came up several times, and adding another line for "other" and specifying those answers here. Again, concrete suggestions regarding intranet content or structure, communication functionalities on the page, as well as onboarding process related, and general employee communication related data was categorized separately.

All interviews were recorded by mobile phone with the permission of each interviewee, after which the conversation was documented into one Word file. The Word document was printed, and thematic categories were coded into colour codes to analyse the results on paper before transferring the answers to the Excel sheet as described above.

The first set of interviews with the newest hires of EA Finland was documented and analysed, before determining the questions for the second round of interviews with the competence team leaders to serve the project better. Additionally, the researcher's diary was printed and analysed at the point of time when data analysing was conducted for the various data collection techniques before and after the development works. These additional ideas or comments, though limited in volume, were added to the Excel sheet to complement any documented data, under the category "other ideas", or wherever appropriate.

The panel interview was also recorded with the permission of all interviewees by mobile phone, and the answers were documented in writing, printed, and categorized as separate answers in Excel. Here the data was thematically separated, and the answers were summarized per interview question, regardless of the interviewee answering the question.

The data from the staff questionnaire and the in-depth interviews was obtained at EA Finland by mid-October 2018 was used as a base for the planning and execution of the development works around the intranet, as well as other development actions outside of the thesis scope. The intranet and renewed onboarding program were launched on 17th December 2018. The post-development work evaluating panel interview was arranged three months later, on 15th March 2019. Figure 3 below visualizes the research project phases to clarify the different steps between the initial data collection phase and finally the evaluation of results.

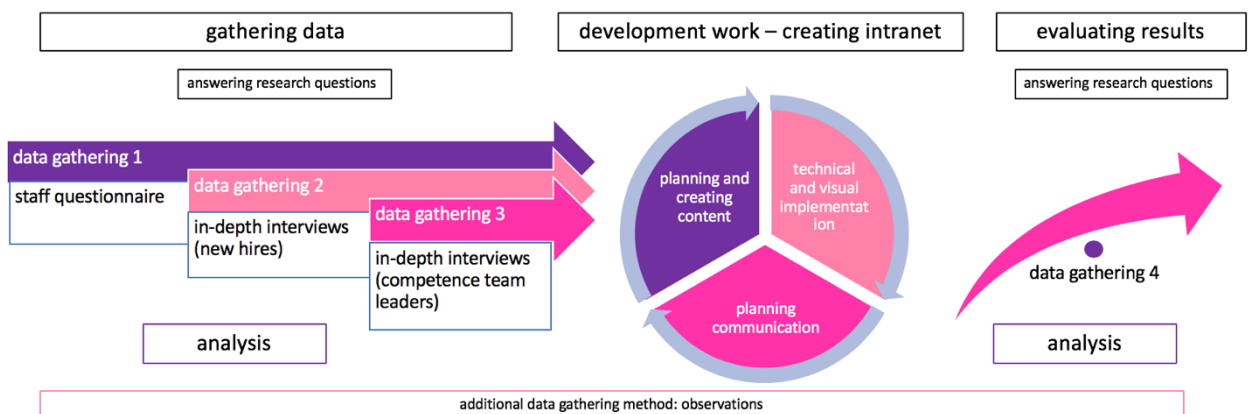


Figure 3. Visualization of development project steps, including data gathering phases

5 Findings

This chapter goes over the results of the research. As the thesis scope is narrower than the entire conducted development project, the staff survey results, as well as the in-depth interviews with the hires who had most recently joined EA Finland, as well as the post-development work panel interview outcomes are described. Also the actual development work phase and observations are explained in detail. To provide clarity, the applicable discoveries are **bolded**, as not all findings are relevant to the thesis scope.

5.1 Results from the data gathering phase 1

Firstly, the results of the staff questionnaire were reviewed. This phase of the project is the “data gathering 1” step visualized in figure 3 on page 49. The Webropol survey was taken by 44 employees out of 52, so the response rate was approximately 83 % altogether. Respondents had time to take the survey within a period of two weeks. The full questionnaire can be found in appendix 1 of this thesis.

The first questions of the staff questionnaire determined when the respondent had joined the team – before or after October 2017. October 2017 was a meaningful cornerstone in terms of onboarding at EA Finland, as this is the timing when an EA-wide global onboarding program was launched. Before that each location and studio had done local onboarding only. Even if it has not directly to do with the thesis development project, it was considered interesting to see whether the introduction of the global onboarding program Game On had impacted onboarding experiences, and ways to obtain knowledge. Out of the 44 respondents, 33 had started before October 2017 and 11 in October 2017 or thereafter.

The second question of the first questionnaire asked the respondent to choose one rating to describe their onboarding experience overall. The options “satisfactory” and “good” were both chosen by approximately one third (13-14 votes) of the respondents. The bottom three answers were eight ratings for “OK”, five for “excellent” and four for “poor”. The replies indicate that the bottom responses “poor” and “OK” were only chosen by employees who had joined before the global onboarding programme was launched in 2017.

Thirdly, the questionnaire asked the respondents to describe their onboarding experience to get a better understanding of the employees’ feelings around their beginning of employment. The respondents were able to choose a description from a multiple-choice answer listing or could write about their experience in their own words in a field named as: “other – please specify”. **Most of the respondents, 12 employees, chose the answer option:**

“My onboarding was partially informative, but I did not receive sufficient information on local T20 working methods, processes and tools”.

Almost the same number of employees (10) stated that their onboarding had been informative and that starting their new work role was effortless. Five employees chose the answer options according to which their onboarding was uninformative due to which they had to find out a lot by themselves, as well as option: “My onboarding was partially informative, but I did not get enough information about local T20 work responsibilities, the organizational structure and competence team structures”. Three employees felt their onboarding had been partially informative, but did not receive enough information about global benefits and policies at EA.

Nine employees had written their own description about their onboarding experiences. Three respondents write about the fact that they were among those few first employees who were present when the company was founded, and back then no onboarding process was in place. Two employees highlight the fact that their onboarding had been non-existent, and one describes it as “sink or swim style”.

Two respondents emphasize the fact that out of the multiple-choice questions they would combine the facts that they did not receive sufficient information about local working methods, processes and tools, as well as information about EA Finland work responsibilities, organizational composition and competence team structure. One employee felt that they did not get sufficient information around the codebase, which relates to the lack of information about work processes and methods. One employee cannot remember how the onboarding experience had been.

The following five questions were asked to determine from where specific knowledge was obtained from and several answer options could be chosen. Firstly, **regarding general EA-wide company information most of the respondents reported to have received knowledge from asking co-workers, secondly from the local administration team** and thirdly during the first week’s onboarding sessions. In order of next most answers also supervisors, the on-boarding materials obtained during the first week, the EA-wide intranet and lastly the Game On webpage had been of service. **Some open comments also revealed that knowledge about the company was obtained slowly by figuring out things on own initiatives.**

Information regarding EA global policies and benefits were mostly received from the administration team, asking co-workers and the onboarding sessions during the

first week. Only after these options the company intranet, the supervisor and materials from the onboarding sessions of the first week were listed. Lastly the Game On webpage was mentioned, as well as open comments regarding working at other EA studios and obtained information when the company was founded.

EA Finland specific details around work processes, tools and roles were definitely mostly obtained by asking co-workers, the supervisors and the administration team. Several open comments suggested here that this specific knowledge had to be found out without support by the new hires themselves. The onboarding sessions during the first week, as well as the materials shared during that process were at the bottom of the answers in regard to studio specific details.

Information regarding local benefits and services, including health care, insurances and office practices was mostly obtained from the administration team and colleagues, as well as the onboarding sessions during the first week. Following these options also the supervisor and the onboarding session materials had been of help. At the bottom of the answers was the global intranet. The Game On webpage received no answers at all.

Lastly in this line of knowledge sourcing questions, **work community related knowledge around employee contact details, roles and responsibilities, organizational charts and seating order were mostly received from co-workers, the administration team and asking the supervisors.** Also some information about this topic was obtained during the onboarding sessions and materials during the first week of employment. However, little or no information was received from the global intranet or Game On webpage. **The open comments again confirm that a lot of this type of information had to be sourced by own initiative.**

The next question asked the respondents to rate listed content ideas to be added to the onboarding intranet based on how important they consider the items on a Likert scale from “not at all important” to “extremely important”. Figure 4 below visualizes the responses.

9. Please rate how important you consider the following topics to be represented on the new onboarding page:

Vastaajien määrä: 44



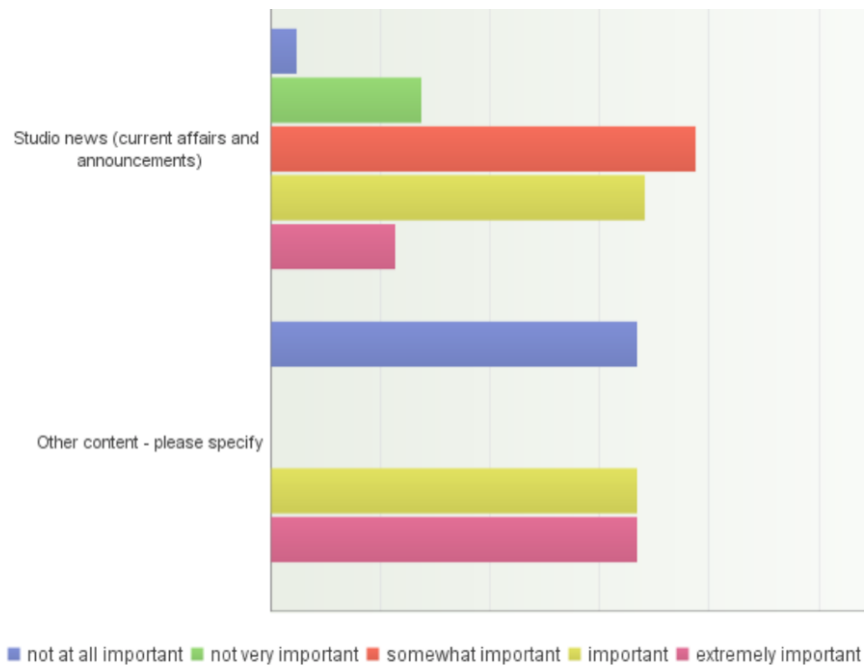


Figure 4. Question 9 answers of the first employee questionnaire – intranet content rating based on importance on the Likert scale (44 respondents)

As shown in figure 4 above, **descriptions about local work processes, such as project work methods and designs on high-levels as well as information on local working practices, such as competence team responsibilities, processes and tools were considered most important by the respondents. Based on the average rating, information about the local work community was next in line in terms of content popularity, at the same position as details about local benefits and employee services.**

Again based on the average rating and as presented in figure 4, at the bottom were content suggestions about studio news including announcements and current affairs, as well as communication about local events and happenings. **The open comments revealed furthermore that more information was desired about near-by lunch options and IT support knowledge and that more social integration support was hoped for. Also sub-pages for each competence team were mentioned several times.**

Question 10 of the questionnaire was about different communication functionalities the employees would like to have implemented on the new intranet – again several answers could be chosen. **The most popular answer option with 27 votes was commenting, but 12 employees considered no functionalities necessary.** Nine of the respondents' answers favoured reactions, for instance the use of emojis or likes, and eight people liked

the idea of having the possibility to chat via the intranet page. **The open comments also gave a suggestion of having the possibility to share intranet articles in the chat used by EA Finland and gave further support for the commenting function to keep the content up to date and to ask questions.**

When asking about the communication preference during onboarding, again several answer options were possible to be chosen. **By far the most preferred communication style was face to face interaction with 35 out of the 44 respondents choosing this option. Evenly popular with 25 – 27 votes each were email, pdf-material package and online articles.** Video guide material was not very popular receiving only 11 votes. Comments elaborate that an intranet or in general material gathered on the web, combined with face to face communication would work well in a few employees' opinion.

The last rating question in the survey (question 12) was mapping out how interesting specific, listed topics were perceived by the employees to be added to the intranet later down the road, when considering using the intranet as a broader communication forum in regard to all employees and not only focusing on new hires. Figure 5 below demonstrates the answers of the ratings.

Game related data, such as number and graphs currently presented on the studio info screen, as well as an online calendar demonstrating upcoming events, co-worker absences, happenings and project-related milestones were considered most interesting out of the listed options. Following these content ideas, a local benefit portal where for example game or benefit vouchers could be ordered online instead of manually and studio news currently presented on the office info screen were considered as interesting content additions.

Lastly, out of the listed options the least interest was shown towards blog posts around current affairs including topics about work-wellbeing and safety. The open comment section did not present any new information or additional ideas in terms of intranet page content.

12. How interesting do you rate the following content if it would be added on a studio intranet to support the entire team going forward?

Vastaajien määrä: 44

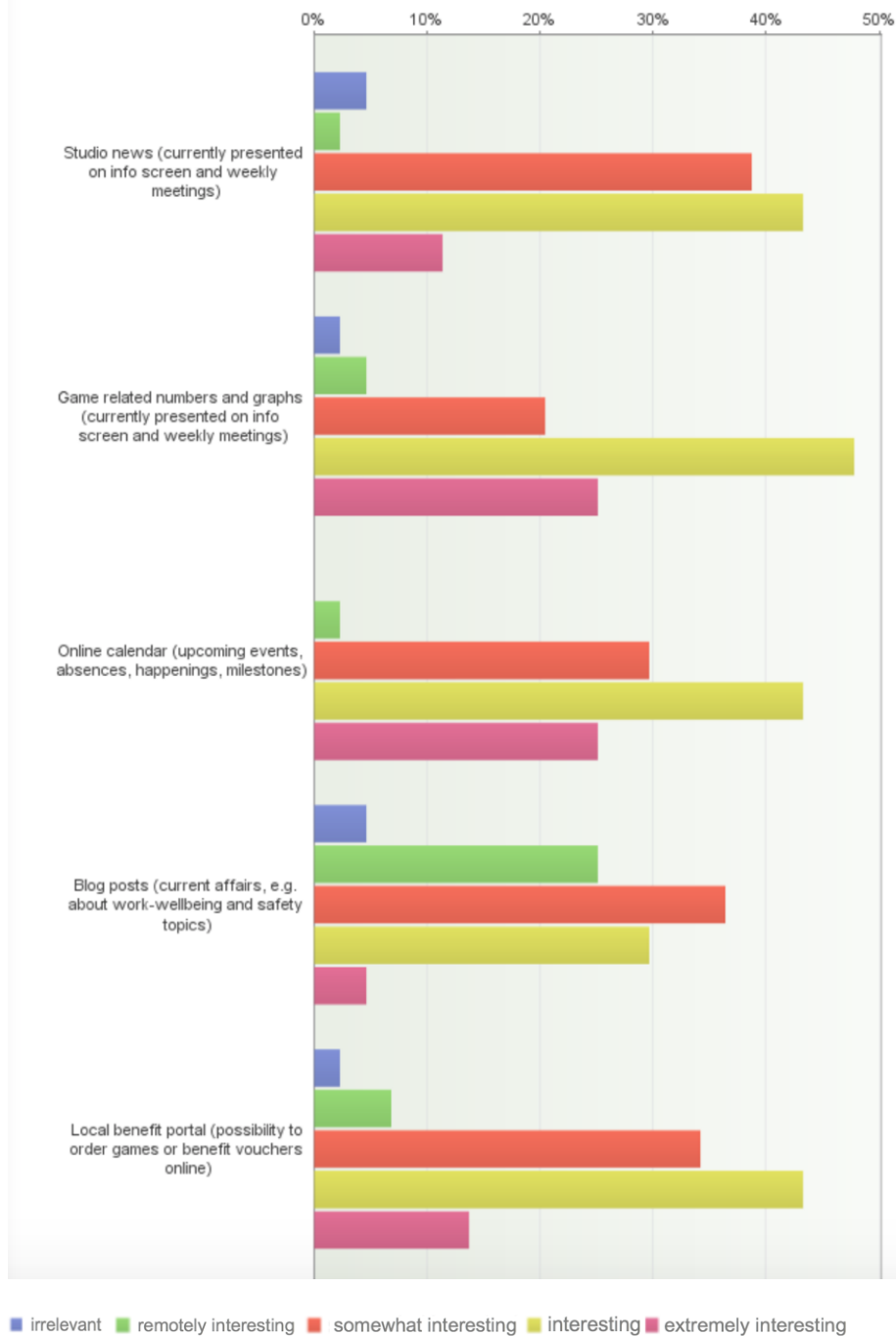


Figure 5. Question 12 responses of the first employee questionnaire – intranet content idea rating based on interest on the Likert scale (44 respondents)

The desires around communication functionalities for a wider-used intranet were very similar to the opinion about the onboarding intranet functionalities. **The most popular option was commenting, followed by reactions**, no functionalities and chatting. Additional

comments listed an interesting idea about adding the possibility to do voting or polls, as well as signing up for events online instead of through calendar invites.

Lastly, the employee questionnaire had two open questions; firstly, asking what else comes to mind about how to develop EA Finland's onboarding experience. Several respondents wrote about introducing a mentor program to help with IT set ups, integrating into the team and providing support in completing first work tasks. Considerations regarding securing sufficient amounts of time for this and a suitable location next to the new hire were expressed as well. Several mentionings were also done in regard to a work buddy who could help the new hire to socially integrate easier. **One theme that popped up was more support that is needed around the IT systems and set-ups, especially when it comes to licences, programs and tools.**

Another clearly formulated line of thought detected was around gathering information and knowledge on one forum, including how-to-articles and technical details, so not everything work-related would need to be figured out by asking others or looking for scattered pieces of information. Overall the general onboarding received positive feedback, but the work introduction has been perceived somewhat challenging. In terms of concrete ideas, content-wise a list of abbreviations was mentioned twice and a chat-channel for new hires and some mentors was suggested a few times.

The very last question of the survey was an open question mapping out whether the respondents have any additional ideas about how to make the local employee communication more efficient in general. **Support for the intranet idea was expressed**, as well as role clarity in terms of managers and the administration team should be worked on. A few respondents felt there could be more or different kind of information on studio info screens. **One concern was also in general the lack of written information as knowledge is often shared and discussed in verbal format or in the chat.** In addition, concretely a wish was presented for all employees to add pictures to the chat profiles to support getting to know the work community faster.

5.2 Results of data gathering phase 2 and observations

In this subchapter the results of the in-depth interviews are reviewed, as well as the observations. The interview phase of the project is the "data gathering 2" step visualized in figure 3 on page 49. As explained in the previous chapter, in order to receive a deeper understanding of how the new hire experience has been for EA Finland employees, the most

recently hired 11 staff members were interviewed in depth. The complete in-depth interview questions can be found in appendix 2.

Firstly, the interviewees were asked to describe in their own words how the onboarding experience was overall when they joined the company. Overall the general feeling was described rather positive and several interviewees mentioned that they felt welcome. However, **a clear message that was identified was that the contrast to the general onboarding of getting to know the workplace and the actual work tasks was big and most interviewees encountered problems with the job-related introduction.**

The reason for these issues was often described to be due to the lack of work-related information available, as it was either non-existent or scattered into several places. Many also explained how there was no-one to ask questions or guide them, as either no-one was specifically assigned to act as a mentor, or people were absent, or predecessors had left the company. Also, IT and hardware related problems were mentioned. All in all, the onboarding experience was described as good, neutral and slightly unorganized.

The second question was asking what kind of information needed to be obtained on the new hires' own initiative after the official onboarding was over, in order to start with the actual work tasks and engage in the teamwork. Here again **the fact that work-specific knowledge is not documented in one place and information regarding processes, practices, tools, pipelines, what programs to use, how to set up the computer and from where to obtain what information were concrete matters mentioned many times.**

Several interviewees also mentioned **the need for support material in terms of the work community, as it is difficult to remember over 50 names and faces without supporting material. In regard to this also the global company structure as well as contacts remained speculative and additional information would definitely have been needed.** For some the actual job tasks and expectations were also unclear which inevitably caused delays in getting started with the work tasks. Quite concretely **several interviewees did not know how to start their tasks and no or little work-related support in any format was offered,** however, several employees responded by saying help was usually received when it was asked for. **Again, the need for a centralized knowledge platform which would contain both general and work-specific information in written format was raised.**

The third question intended to specify why any lack of information was problematic at the beginning of the employment and how would it have helped if the needed support would have been available. **Almost all interviewees who had encountered issues during their onboarding mentioned that the lack of documented knowledge had been time consuming. A few even described feeling stressed and mentally drained and elaborated that would information and support have been provided, more confidence in the new role could have been gained sooner, as well as the ability to prioritize in the given role.**

Leading the conversation towards the newly to be introduced communication channel, the wishes and hopes around the intranet content were discussed next. **Generally, the idea to design and create an intranet to contain all information a new hire needs was perceived very positively. Most interviewees mentioned how work community information should contain not only titles and names, but also details about their special knowledge and competences, as well as pictures and seating order locations. Several also mentioned that a visualization of the organizational chart would be useful.**

A subpage format for all competence teams in addition to a general main page gained support and interviewees were hoping to have information about local benefits and employee services also added to the page. The wish for separate competence team pages was mentioned several times. This is because processes and tools used vary a lot between the different competence teams and game development related practices cannot be specified in detail for all new hires jointly. However, **general knowledge about the project work; how the team works, what methodologies are applied and who is in charge of which process area, was considered relevant in addition to having the separate competence team pages with further details for tools and pipelines for artists, designers, server engineers and the other competence team groups.**

Details around events and news were not considered necessary additions to the intranet by all, as communication around these already takes places in other forums. **Tools and technical instructions were mentioned by many interviewees to be an important addition. Concretely also general game development information about clearer schedules and methodologies were welcome in the interviewees' opinions, as well as links to other project and instruction pages on Confluence and EA World.** Concerns regarding keeping information up to date on the intranet, as well as the risk of an information overflow were expressed by interviewees.

Almost all interview candidates were of the opinion that if any communication functionalities were to be added to the intranet, commenting only would be preferred.

Arguments included that questions could be asked this way, and most importantly a page author could be notified when some piece of information on the page was out of date. **Almost in unison the interviewees were of the opinion that in addition to the existing chat channel, no interactive communication functions were necessary to be added to the intranet.** Some respondents thought adding the possibility to react to articles with emojis and likes could be a fun, but not necessary, addition.

At the end of the interview ideas for improving the onboarding process overall were asked. Almost all interviewees mentioned the need for a new hire mentor program, which could systematically help to give active onboarding support to the new hire, especially when it comes to getting started with the actual work tasks. Better preparation in the IT and hardware set up matter was also repeated several times. **A valuable comment was also that if the local onboarding would be more organized in terms of introduction to the work tasks, new hires would have more resources to invest in the Game On materials, such as e-learning materials and webinar with other new starters around EA.**

Concretely, also a chat channel specifically for new hires was mentioned. A few interview candidates also expressed wishes to have information presented to new hires about performance and talent management processes including rewards, compensations and career development in general. **One joint desire was in general clarity about organizational roles; knowing who to approach in what type of questions as well as clarity of the immediate manager's role and support function, as well as responsibility areas during the onboarding process.**

The researcher's diary resulted in helpful notes in keeping a clear mind about the project as well as support in planning next steps and communication. To mention some concrete ideas that came out of the diary observations were firstly the platform for the intranet, as a one of the competence leaders suggested the page to be integrated as part of the Game On pages in order to integrate the process better into the global picture of EA. As there were technical unclarities how and how fast this could be achieved, it was decided that the intranet is at this stage created to Confluence, but that discussions with EA's LEAP team will be started to discuss possibilities to add the page to the Game On site further down the road.

Secondly, at one of the project team catch-ups in midst the intranet development phase a co-worker suggested the new intranet to be set as the default browser page on all new

hardware in order for the new hires to have direct and easy access to the page. This has been taken up with IT to be arranged. Even if the researcher's diary and observations only resulted in a few additional ideas or comments to support the project, all in all keeping a research diary helped to keep a clear mind throughout the project and its different phases.

Also any development ideas that have come up in casual conversations with the staff regarding the intranet content have been noted in the diary, for instance the addition of the career development workshop materials which was suggested by the general manager.

The general observation during the intranet launch was that the initial reactions towards the intranet were very positive and plenty of informal compliments were received for it – both the visual look and the content.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the second set of in-depth interviews with the competence team leaders was left outside of the thesis scope, as these questions evolved more around the onboarding process and rebuilding the new hire experience at EA Finland. This data gathering phase refers to the “data gathering 3” step in the project visualization in figure 3. However, to summarize briefly, 13 semi-structured interviews were conducted with the team leaders, and the finalized interview questions can be found in appendix 3.

The content suggestions for the intranet were discussed, as were ideas around keeping the documentation up to date. Furthermore, the implementation of a new hire mentoring program, evaluation actions regarding the onboarding process, as well as ownership of it, possible risks and open development ideas regarding EA Finland's onboarding process were discussed and documented. This information did not reveal anything that had not come up in the staff questionnaire and first set of in-depth interviews, yet was very helpful in the development work outside of the thesis scope, where the onboarding process was shaped up in cooperation with the local people managers.

5.3 Development work phase

The gathered data directed the course of the development actions taken, and thus in the thesis scope the local intranet was planned, designed and created in the project management software Confluence. This part of the project is called “development work – creating intranet” in figure 3 visualizing the entire project on page 49.

The development phase was a team effort run by the researcher, with all the competence leaders formulating the project group representing the eight in-house discipline groups consisting of art, engineering (client, server as well as development and operations), live

operations, design, product management and analytics, quality assurance, development work (project management), as well as administration.

Planning and the actual content creation work was distributed within these teams as seen appropriate, but communication and meetings happened between the competence team representatives and the researcher. The general manager, team manager and game general managers were also included in all communication to keep them up to date on the project work. **All in all, this project phase consisted of planning and creating the page content, implementing technical and visual elements, as well as planning work around the launch communication.**

By going through the collected research data and analysed conclusions drawn out of this material, a framework for the intranet needs was agreed on, according to which each competence team gathered content for their subpage for the intranet. In addition to clear action points regarding content needs, also deadlines and responsibilities were discussed jointly. The researcher had put together a presentation for the project team to demonstrate the main messages out of the data gathered. Based on this data and its analysis, a conclusion was drawn that the intranet would be consisting of separate competence team subpages with its own content, in addition to the main page containing knowledge equally relevant to all new hires.

The simple guideline presented to the project team for the content was as follows:

Competence team introduction page – please specify

- Who is part of the team? What are the roles and responsibilities?
 - High-level: What do you do?
 - High-level: How do you work? (high-level description of work process, regular meetings amongst the competence team, Slack-channels, email distribution lists etc.)
- ➔ target audience: colleagues or new hires that are not necessarily part of your competence team. Please provide an overview that is of interest to anyone in the studio to get an overall understanding of who your team is and what your team does.

Further subpage/s of your competence team site – please specify:

- What tools are needed, how can they be installed / obtained and put into use?
- Who are possible external EA and/or other parties your team works with?
- What do the work processes and practices look like in detail?

→ target audience: new hire that is joining your competence team. Please explain how can they get started and what do they need to know in order to get up to speed with their work tasks.

Subsection pages for each competence team were already opened under the intranet on Confluence, so content could be added directly to the platform, as page related user accesses had been granted to the project team. The researcher would take on the responsibility to work on the intranet's overall visual appearance, as well as the general information relevant to all employees and new hires, such as details around the work community, local benefits, policies and other useful staff information, general IT instructions and other content suggested in the interviews and questionnaire.

The team was instructed to have free hands in terms of the page structure and design and exact content, as long as the leading questions above were answered. After all, the designated competence leader will know what type of instructions and information a new hire joining the team might need and could also utilize the data gathered in the staff questionnaire and interviews of which a summary was sent to all project team members. It was clarified that no duplication of information should occur, and links to other Confluence pages, EA World and other EA networks and software are recommended.

It was recommended to consult newest hires within the competence team to get more detailed insights and inspiration for the content and page structure. Many teams utilized existing materials that could be found on different places, for instance on the server, other Confluence pages, as printed materials or in email format. This type of competence-team specific onboarding material most often already existed, but not in one central place and thus hardly any team needed to start the content creation from scratch. The project team was also instructed to consider a system around keeping the subpage up to date further down the road – these ideas would be discussed together at a later stage of the project. A joint deadline for the first version of the competence team pages was agreed on.

Regular check-ins with the project group enabled the work to progress and questions to be answered. Meanwhile also page visuals, technical issues as well as team communication were planned and discussed with the lead of the researcher. One of the EA Finland's artists volunteered to work on the graphic design of the page layout and another co-worker was assigned to act as the technical support person in the intranet project. Also global contacts such as the IT support and LEAP team were consulted when needed at different stages of the project.

Outside of the thesis scope, also the onboarding process was defined and visualized and work around the new hire mentor program guidelines and other support tools for hiring managers was conducted. A coherent “Tracktwenty onboarding” material package was eventually shared with all people managers on an EA internal cloud drive after agreeing on the exact content. As this is a guide specifically put together for the hiring manager to better support the onboarding program and to create better onboarding experiences for new hires, it was not considered appropriate to be published on the intranet.

At the end of December 2018 all the development work was completed as planned for version one of the intranet – the “Tracktwenty homepage” – and the grand launch took place in the weekly staff meeting on 17th December. A proper introduction to the new communication forum, its purpose and functions were jointly discussed both in face to face communication, as well as in written format, as planned ahead. In addition to the intranet also the onboarding support material package was finalized, discussed and launched within the manager forum of EA Finland both face to face and on the drive mentioned above before year-end in 2018.

The intranet main page consists of quick links grouped in appropriate categories, such as “studio contacts and information”, “local benefits and insurances”, “health care & sick leave”, “studio-wide pages”, “useful staff information”, “IT and general studio information”, “studio values”, “time off”, “talent management at T20”, projects “Snowball” and “SimCity BuildIt”, “other projects”, as well as a calendar and “studio news” section. At the upper corner of the page, the competence team pages, as well as contact information of employees are visible and easily accessible. For reference, screen shots of the main intranet page, as well as two competence team pages (game design and office administration) are visible in appendix 5.

5.4 Results of data gathering phase 4

The last phase of the research project was “data gathering 4” as stated in figure 3 on page 49. This step provided the final data to answer all research questions, which are analysed in the next chapter.

Based on the initial growth plans of EA Finland, an increase in the headcount was expected to happen in the beginning of 2019. Due to changed circumstances, however, these growth plans were postponed further into the future. The original plan was to evaluate the impact of the development actions of this project by interviewing new hires who had joined the team in early 2019, after the new intranet and onboarding process had

been launched and implemented in order to compare data pre and post development actions.

As no new employees had joined EA Finland by March 2019, where the post-development data gathering was planned to take place, an alternative solution had to be found. With no new employees in the company to interview, it was decided to gather data in form of a panel discussion. These group interview questions asked of the seven participants consisting of employees who had most recently joined the company can be found in appendix 4 of this paper.

The first question was about the effects the intranet has had on the onboarding process. **Employees felt the T20 homepage was very helpful for new hires, as information is gathered on the page in a centralized manner that replaces the former problem of having to constantly ask people about specific matters and having to find the appropriate contact persons to start with.** Panel candidates specifically mentioned that for example for engineers the technical methodology related information and instructions on their competence team page would be very useful in order to get started with any new or basic work tasks. In addition, **the development page detailing matters around the game project work methodology gained praise, as this is relevant information for anyone joining the game development team, regardless of the competence team they belong to.**

One interviewee from the art team mentioned having received a new work computer recently and **finding very helpful instructions on the art competence page about setting up the computer when joining the art team.** As specific software, programs and licences need to be set up on an artist's computer, **having this information that was earlier nowhere documented, saved time and effort in getting the work equipment set up to do actual work tasks.** The interviewee thus summarized that the intranet can be helpful to also older employees and not only the new hires.

One employee from the server engineer team also stated that their competence team page includes a section with "field notes" with random pieces of information added to the page by the team members, which is a frequently used page amongst the existing members of the team. Before, this type of information was shared in the chat, but **nowadays this knowledge is available for anyone also joining the team further down the line, or for someone who was not present when the information used to be shared on the chat.** Also other interviewees mentioned that they had started to add information on

their intranet competence team page instead of the chat, so information is shared more efficiently internally, according to the discussion group.

Furthermore, it was mentioned, that **the new intranet overall is mitigating the need for guessing, asking and finding out information on an employees' own initiative, which was perceived as a very positive impact.** The group interview candidates also felt that **the intranet is easy to use, and the structure is clear and that there is no barrier to obtain or add information to the page.** Some page contents were detected to be missing or incomplete, but the interviewees felt that this is something that can be developed further. As the author of a subpage is visible in Confluence, the information seeker – either new hire or older employee – would at least know who to approach with a question regarding some information that is missing on the page.

The second question was targeted at the content and the functionalities of the intranet and how they meet with the needs of a new hire joining the company. **The interviewees thought that the relevant page content is easy to access and find. When looking for more detailed information regarding processes or tools around work tasks one can easily choose the appropriate competence team page from the main page menu and either read through everything to get kickstarted or look for specific information.**

This, however varied between competence team pages, as for example it was found that for instance on the art competence page the details around the technical 3D processes were missing – this is highly relevant information for a new 3D artist. **It was again stated that the actual platform of the intranet and structure are useful and clear, but that some content is missing that could be added to complete the information shared.**

Several interviewees agreed that the **information about the working community was an essential new addition that did not exist before; having a structured page with every local employees' photo, a description of their expertise area, and a link to the seating order map was considered helpful and easy to use.** Also, the main page including the **general information for example regarding health care, local benefits, a list of commonly used acronyms or meeting room booking practices was perceived a very welcome improvement that meets the new hire needs.** The only interactive communication function, **commenting, that is integrated to the intranet was considered helpful in terms of asking questions, highlighting information that needs to be updated or sharing own tips.** The group also found it positive that **anyone can add to or change subpage content, as it lowers the barrier to share information openly.**

Thirdly the panel group was asked how the intranet contributes to the company's employee communication overall and in general the interviewees felt **the intranet has had positive effects due to the simple fact that before the launch of the intranet there has been no internal electronic platform containing information to share and obtain from at EA Finland.** A few specific topics the interview candidates mentioned were the **studio calendar on the main page of the intranet, as it shows immediate attention needing matters. Also, the links to the weekly studio news, as well as the archive containing the weekly staff meeting minutes were considered helpful, if something needed to be checked later on.**

The weekly staff meeting minutes are also shared per email on a weekly basis and the material is considered to be easier accessible through this communication channel, if for example someone was absent during a specific meeting. However, if some detail would need to be looked up afterwards, it is easy to search for the minutes of the meeting in question through the online archive, to which a link is available on the intranet. Again, it was highlighted that **the positive impact of the T20 homepage is to have a centralized forum for all information – there is no need to guess or remember where to go and look for information.**

One interviewee also elaborated how they did not know about company discounts in specific lunch restaurant and that this information was shared to him via the chat, as a link to the intranet where this information is listed. The interviewees thought **this was a good example to demonstrate how there is a lot of “silent knowledge” within an organization that is actually helpful to a wider audience, when documented somewhere.** Some employees also stated that as they had already joined the team a year ago, they did not find a lot of news on the intranet they did not already know about but **emphasized the usefulness of the communication platform for new hires specifically.**

The next question was about further development needs and how this new communication forum could better support all employees – not only new hires – going forward. Firstly, **interviewees thought it would be a good idea to remind the local staff about existing material in order to properly integrate the intranet into the everyday work routines at EA Finland.** As this is a new communication forum, the older team members are not necessarily yet used to visit the page, so more reminders about its existence would be helpful. Some improvement ideas to benefit all employees were also given for the main page which contains information relevant to all employees.

Group interviewees suggested that **a blog-type section could be added to the main page of the intranet to include summaries and mentionings of EA global changes and news, for example new tools taken into use globally.** Recently EA had started to use Zoom instead of Skype Business for instance, and a while back also Google Drive was introduced company-wide at EA and security policies keep being updated in regular intervals. Interviewees find it difficult to stay on top of these updates, as so much global email communication occurs and filtering out the relevant bits of information can be difficult. Even if these matters are mentioned in the weekly staff meeting, the documentation is missing in a place that is easily accessible in the interviewees' opinions, as digging this kind of details out of the meeting minutes can be time consuming, when the details could be on the front page of the intranet directly.

Also, finding specific information in the wide global EA World intranet was perceived challenging. Thus, **highlighting global updates and changes in practices and tools would be a welcome addition on the local intranet main page.** In general, **also more links to globally used pages, such as the HR tool Workday would be beneficial to be added to Confluence.** This could be for example in the form of **“quick links to globally used EA tools”** or something similar.

It was also mentioned that **the blog part of the intranet, or perhaps a separate section, could also include links to conference trip summaries.** EA Finland has a routine of hosting presentations after conference trips, where the employees attending conferences or other business trips can share their learnings and the most relevant insights of these trips. Unfortunately, no documentation is shared about these sessions and **one improvement idea for the intranet was to add this type of presentation materials on the main page under a section called “things that are currently going on”** or similar. This section could be close to the link to the weekly studio news which are more on a general need-to-know practical level.

The interviewees also suggested that **the intranet could have some technical additions**, if possible, in Confluence. Especially on the competence team pages a **“popular items”** or **“pages that have been most often visited” tags** could be added to guide the target audience better. One interviewee furthermore suggested to have **a second commenting field added to the page architecture that could capture improvement ideas for the page content.** The reasoning for this was that not every page viewer has the time or knowledge to add specific content, but could this way easily highlight the fact of something missing and this could be picked up by the competence team leader in charge of the subpage in question. Overall also **keeping the existing content always up to date was**

considered an important action by the interviewees in order to keep the page benefiting the entire team going forward.

When asking the panel group about the concerns or risks they see in regard to the intranet as a communication forum, **the biggest concern was clearly keeping the content constantly up to date.** This was considered a big risk, as old or incorrect information can make the communication platform unorganized and confusing in the interviewees' opinion. One candidate mentioned that in their competence team some members are very active in adding information and keeping their sub-age content up to date, whereas others are rather passive. The interviewees agree that it can be challenging to motivate everyone to constantly work on the intranet content, but that having assigned responsibilities here might help.

Another issue regarding old content was also considered to be employees who leave the company, as their online articles might need updating at later stages and in some cases the relevant knowledge to do so is not existing in-house. Giving instructions and planning the future of that specific content should be a part of EA Finland's offboarding process, but this has not been considered at all yet, as the intranet was only just introduced.

One interviewee stated that keeping content up to date is a general risk any wiki page (a page that allows the readers to update and add content) encounters and that there is no ultimate solution to this problem other than working to maintain the page. **The interviewees considered that constant reminders through the competence leaders for instance would help to solve this issue at EA Finland.**

Other concerns that were raised were the page becoming too cluttered with information, as the layout of the intranet needs to remain clear and user-friendly in order for it to benefit the team as a communication forum. It was also raised that **the page needs to be easy to use and effortless, and for instance too much clicking to find the information the viewer is looking for was considered a problem.** Several interviewees highlighted the risk of the intranet being considered a replacement for the face-to-face onboarding and getting to know work tasks and the team members. The candidates thought that having the intranet is a great support for the onboarding but think that personal guidance and mentoring especially in regard to work tasks should not be forgotten.

The second last question was for any open development ideas on how to make EA Finland's employee communication more efficient. The interviewees confirmed again how

they see the intranet as great communication forum addition which was missing before; at EA Finland a lot of communication is done verbally which is considered good, but for history keeping an electronic, central platform is essential. Not having records of discussed or learned matters is a barrier also for remote work, which is a constant discussion at EA Finland (no remote work is conducted as a rule due to the heavy emphasis on team work). **The intranet was considered to be an asset also as a tool for knowledge sharing.**

Additional ideas were that meeting minutes could be shared, for instance via the intranet, in general more, as currently only the weekly staff meeting minutes are shared to all via email and the homepage. The interviewees thought this would benefit both new hires, as well as the existing team members, as people are ill, on business trips or on holidays and information still needs to flow. Additional employee communication development ideas were physical, digital meeting room calendars outside of meeting rooms as the calendar booking system via the email account is not considered very user-friendly.

In the additional open comment section of **the interview candidates were expressing their positive feelings towards the development project and described the intranet as a fun, great and helpful new communication forum.** One interviewee thought **the page strengthens both the competence teams', as well as the studio's identity overall.**

5.5 Summary of the findings

The case study approach with mixed methods was used for this thesis. The objective of the research was to gather data to understand how the employee communication at EA Finland could be improved, and more specifically from the new employee perspective by introducing a new communication forum - an intranet. As part of the project one of the goals was also to answer the research questions. Outside of the thesis scope the onboarding process was clarified and new support methods to develop the onboarding experience were established in cooperation with the people manager.

The required data was gathered by several techniques. Firstly, a company-wide questionnaire was published after which two sets of in-depth interview rounds were organised with those employees who had most recently joined the company, as well as with the competence team leaders. In addition, observations were made in form of a researcher's diary. After the development work was executed based on the collected data, a post-development phase panel discussion was arranged amongst the group of employees who had

most recently joined the company. Data was analysed using Webropol's graphs and visualizations, as well as text coding and categorization methods to detect patterns and directions. The analysed data was reflected upon the theory and used as a base for the development works, as well as for drawing conclusions for further development needs at the end of the project.

The research results indicate that when it comes to employee communication at EA Finland, improvements were urgently required around the onboarding process. Overall EA Finland's employees were rather satisfied with their onboarding experiences so far, but clear improvement needs were detected in the work-related onboarding practices, in terms of missing or scattered documentation as well as lack in personal support and guidance. It was decided to create an intranet to support employee communication during onboarding better. Desired content for the intranet was competence team-based sub-pages containing knowledge about work processes, practices, responsibilities and tools.

Also it was considered important to add to general staff information facts about local benefits and employee services, as well as details about the employees and work competences. Commenting was considered a welcome addition to the intranet, but except for this functionality, no big interest was shown in other options. Furthermore, a chat channel for new hires, as well as a new employee mentor program were concrete suggestions repeatedly mentioned in the data. In addition, clarity in manager roles and responsibilities and the wider use of the office info screen were mentioned.

The development work to create the intranet was done in cooperation with the competence team leaders, out of which the project team consisted in addition to technical and artistic support contacts. The intranet was created based on the analysed team needs, and the page was launched according to the planned schedule.

All in all, the intranet was considered to have a positive impact on the local employee communication overall in terms of knowledge and information sharing, especially for the new hires as part of their onboarding. The main intranet specific content and communication functionality needs of the employees were considered to be met in the development work; however, some further content development was still required. Concrete content additions to support the entire team also going forward were shared within the data collection phase at the end of the project, and the biggest risk or concerns were around keeping the intranet content up to date, as well as maintaining a clear and user-friendly page structure.

6 Discussion

This final chapter of the thesis is analysing the research results and development work impacts in reflection to the theoretic framework, resulting in conclusions. In addition, the trustworthiness and the ethical viewpoints of the study are examined. Based on the conclusions of this research, additional development ideas and suggestions for further research are presented. Finally, the thesis process and learnings are evaluated in the last part of this chapter.

6.1 Considerations of results

To summarize the results of the research, the research questions are answered below.

RQ. How to develop employee communications to support the onboarding process at EA Finland?

The main development area when it comes to employee communication at EA Finland was detected to be during the onboarding process, when communicating with the new hires. This was determined when the need for the research project was established by observations. In addition, this point of view is confirmed in the first round of data collection ("data gathering 1" in figure 3 on page 49), the staff questionnaire. Even though the questionnaire was created based on the assumption that communication needs to be strengthened during the onboarding process specifically, the open questions around developing local employee communication overall at EA Finland confirm the need to work on this area. In more detail, the development action to be taken to support both new hires, and all employees better in the long run, was building a local intranet as a new communication forum. This was supported by the employees of EA Finland through the staff survey and in-depth interviews, as well as the post-development panel discussion and the theory.

RQ1. How does the new intranet contribute to EA Finland's employee communication as part of the onboarding?

The post-development work panel discussion disclosed that the new intranet, the Tracktwenty homepage, has had a positive impact on obtaining and sharing internal knowledge, as well as in supporting the onboarding of new hires in general at EA Finland. In the employees' opinion the new communication forum saves time, as both general and competence team specific information is centrally gathered in one electronic platform. The page was considered easy to use, with the main page including quick links to generally

relevant information, as well as the competence team specific subpages with more information on actual work processes and tools. For example, the work community related information on the intranet was considered helpful in terms of supporting face to face communication during onboarding. Even though some of the intranet content still needs complementing, the forum was considered an asset for both new hires, as well as existing team members. New hires can receive useful information in getting started with their work tasks from the intranet, which was evaluated to reduce stress levels and uncertainty as well as support learning. The new intranet motivates older employees to share knowledge more actively and openly, as anyone can contribute to the page content.

RQ2. What kind of content and communication functionalities are required on the new intranet?

Through the staff questionnaire (“data gathering 1” in figure 3 on page 49), as well as the in-depth interviews (“data gathering 2” in figure 3) it was established that the employees of EA Finland consider firstly, information about local working practices, such as competence team responsibilities, processes and tools important content. Secondly, descriptions on local work processes such as project work methods and design, thirdly details around local benefits and employee services such as fringe benefits, health care, insurances, wellbeing matters and office rules as well as lastly, information about the local work community, such as the team member names, pictures, roles, contact details and seating order location were reviewed almost equally important content to be added to the intranet. Less important, but yet described as “slightly important” was content about studio news, as well as communication about local events and happenings. Commenting is the only communication function considered relevant for this communication forum, mostly for the purpose of keeping page content up to date or asking additional questions.

RQ3. What kind of content and functionalities are needed to further develop the intranet to support all employees better?

During the post-development work panel discussion (phase “data gathering 4” in figure 3 on page 49), it became evident that the intranet content and functionalities are considered to already partially support all employees with the current content. New content to support the employees better in the long run could be global news and updates about new EA-widely used tools and policies, and quick links to globally used platforms is general. Also, a section to share conference trip presentations in a blog-type format and some technical

additions like “popular item” or “pages people have often visited” tags were desired. In addition to a second commenting box for improvement ideas, no further communication functionalities were considered to be important to be added at the moment.

All in all, the research questions were answered during the project, and the outcomes of the development work were overall perceived to have a positive impact on EA Finland’s employee communication from the onboarding perspective. A more detailed analysis of the conclusions follows in the below subchapter.

6.2 Research conclusions

The communication channel choice was based on the existing research around the topic, as well as suitability fit for the company culture at EA Finland. As a gaming company, the most convenient written employee communication forums are digital, as the target audience prefers digital messaging and has advanced technological skills. Both Men’s (2014, 279) and Welch’s (2012, 250) studies suggest that even if the communication channel preference of employees might vary depending on the target groups demographics, backgrounds and attitudes, electronic communication forums are clearly more popular than printed media when it comes to written communication this day and age. The base for the communication channel consideration at EA Finland was the usability aspect, and the actual communication needs at the company, with a specific focus on onboarding support and knowledge management.

As Snyder & Lee-Partridge (2013, 417 - 418) confirm, the ability to share solutions, innovations and knowledge company internally is essential in a knowledge-centric society, and thus a codification strategy where technological applications are used to assist in saving, codifying and recording knowledge for example in form of an intranet is sensible. As established in detail in the third chapter of this paper, the onboarding process should be created with the objectives to reduce levels of uncertainty and stress, to support learning and long-term employee engagement (Ellis & al. 2015, 205; Ashforth & al. 2007, 458-459; Saks & Gruman 2018, 13) – an intranet was considered to be a useful communication format to support these objectives at EA Finland.

Usability elements that were taken into account in the communication channel choice at EA Finland were based on Welch’s (2012, 251) study where the option to save material, store and retrieve it quickly, as well as obtaining information and sharing it online were found to be employee preferences when it came to internal communication. Morell (2015, 145) supports this argumentation by confirming that an intranet is recommended for companies planning to save documentation, distribute ideas as well as provide support for

completing work tasks and also emphasizes how it can be a valuable channel for strategic knowledge management. The intranet was in addition chosen as the appropriate communication channel to support receiver-controllability to strengthen acceptance of the actual content published there, as researched by Welch (2012, 251).

As other electronic communication means such as an info screen, email and chat were already in use at EA Finland, an intranet was considered the most suitable option as a new employee communication channel, considering the company needs in regard to the onboarding support specifically. As a conclusion it can be confirmed that the newly created communication channel choice of introducing an intranet to EA Finland was the result of careful consideration of local needs, as well as support from the existing theoretical literature around the topic.

In terms of the main research question, this development solution can be reviewed as an appropriate choice for EA Finland, considering the support the improvement idea gained in the staff questionnaire and in-depth interviews, as well as the positive reactions that were observed during the launch of the intranet and that were verbalized during the panel discussion afterwards. Based on the research results, the introduction of this type of communication forum can be generally recommended to businesses with a similar user demographic, when support is needed for employee communication from the onboarding perspective specifically.

As Morell (2015, 145 – 146), Snyder & Partridge (2013, 418) and Welch (2012, 252) all agree, the target audience needs to be consulted when it comes to the messages that are planned to be communicated via the chosen communication channel – the content must meet the employees' needs and the communication channel in order to be effective. With the main objective to enhance EA Finland's employee communication, this gave strong grounds to include the employees in deciding about the intranet content and functionalities that were to be introduced. These answers are captured clearly in RQ2 and partially RQ3 and were the baseline for planning and creating the actual intranet content.

The answer to RQ1 suggests that the intranet has had a positive effect on the employee communication at EA Finland from the onboarding point of view by introducing a new way of communication. Specific impacts have been reduction of uncertainty and stress levels and support for learning. Supporting learning and reduction of uncertainty levels by providing required information in a clear manner was mentioned directly by the research participants, and reduction of stress levels is an interpretation reflecting on the onboarding theory.

According to the theory, one objective of effective onboarding is stress reduction, in form of reducing uncertainty about job expectations, the new organizational environment, as well as people and cultural aspects (Ellis & al. 2015, 2014). As research participants confirmed to have felt stressed out during their onboarding due to the lack of available information around work practices, responsibility areas and tools, and indicated this risk to have been mitigated after the intranet was launched, it is reasonable to conclude, that EA Finland's new intranet does reduce stress levels during onboarding.

Even though companies should strive to build their employee communication as dynamic relationships between different parties of an organization, not all forms of communication need or can be two-way in their nature. Men (2014, 268) writes about symmetrical communication that a company should aim for – a communication style that promotes trust, information and network symmetry as well as adequacy and happens in channels that allow instant feedback, listening and discussion on the spot.

Yet as Morell (2015, 146) states, an intranet is for the most a one-way communication channel most often built for team members to receive knowledge and information from. It is possible to add some interactive communication functions into the page software - for example in EA Finland's case anyone is able to contribute to the page content, in addition to submitting comments – yet an intranet is not considered an interactive communication forum.

As Ruck (2015, 49) emphasizes, one of the outcomes of effective employee communication is to gain understanding, as team members must comprehend processes and changing factors in the company value context in order to function in a productive manner. From this point of view, it gets clear, how feeding information to new hires especially at the beginning of an employment is essential – even with the help of a one-way communication forum.

As onboarding is a crucial learning phase for employees that aims to reduce uncertainty and stress levels, as well as to strengthen employee engagement in the long run, the intranet at EA Finland supports employee communication to be exercised for these purposes. As established in the questionnaire, face to face communication during onboarding is considered the most important way of communication during onboarding according to EA Finland's employees; the meaning is not to replace any of that with introducing the intranet, but rather to support the communication from the learning and knowledge sharing points of views in written format.

The research data indicates that the impacts of the intranet have been positive when it comes to onboarding, but one matter that needs to be taken into account is that none of the employees who were interviewed in the panel discussion group had joined the company after the new communication channel was introduced. As due to the changed circumstances no new hires had joined the team after the intranet was launched, there was no other option than to interview employees who had already gone through their onboarding programs.

However, reflecting on the theory mentioned above, and considering the feedback about the usefulness of the content on the intranet given by the group interview candidates, it is unlikely that the research results would be completely different, if actually new hires would have been interviewed. Especially keeping in mind that all the content was created based on the employee feedback that was thoroughly gathered and analyzed. Still, this aspect needs to be taken into consideration when evaluating the validity of these research results.

Even though RQ1 asks specifically about the impacts of the intranet from the onboarding perspective, the research results suggest that positive effects have also been detected in terms of knowledge sharing among the entire team. According to Snyder & Lee-Partridge (2013, 419) trust and a shared goal are key components when discussing knowledge management, as employees are more likely to share their knowledge, when they can trust others to reciprocate this. The argument of enhanced knowledge sharing possibilities is also supported by the feedback provided during the panel discussion, where information was stated to be shared more actively within teams since the intranet was launched. It can thus be concluded that the new intranet supports learning and sense making, as researched by Ashforth & al. (2007, 458-459).

But also, the company culture impacts the knowledge distribution, as a strong, collaborative culture lowers the requirement for reciprocity (Snyder & Lee-Partridge 2013, 420). It seems that EA Finland's company culture had an effect on the creation of the intranet's content, as the staff participated actively in contributing to informative intranet content with the lead of the competence team representatives.

In final conclusion, it should be highlighted that the employees – the target audience of the new communication forum – were actively included in creating the content of the intranet, which has been perceived as an asset when it comes to the employee communication during the onboarding process specifically. However, the intranet should only be considered an additional communication means as part of EA Finland's onboarding program and

is specifically designed to help with reducing stress levels by lowering levels of uncertainty and supporting learning. Knowledge management is another point of view that is supported by the intranet and affects the entire staff of EA Finland - not only the new hires. Sharing knowledge is vital when new employees join a company, but also in terms of developing the existing staff's competences to ensure business success.

Even though content and comments can be submitted via the intranet by any member of staff, the intranet is considered a mostly one-way natured form of communication, supporting the other face to face communication, such as new hire mentoring, introduction during the first week, as well as email and chat communication. The collaborative team culture at EA Finland contributed to the success of creating the intranet, even if the quality of the content does vary between competence teams. To generalize, the statement from above can be repeated, as this type of employee communication enhancement can work for similar organizations with a same type of target group demographic, but with an emphasis on content and intranet structure, that specifically meets with the target group's needs.

One of the main topics of the theoretical framework is employee engagement, as it is studied to be one of the effects of successful employee communication. As established in chapter three, employee engagement is extremely important for organizations, as employees who feel safe in their organizational environment are able to be confident, creative and the most productive versions of themselves (Kahn 2010, 25). Research proves that well executed and managed employee communication has positive effects on employee engagement levels (Welch 2011, 339).

As part of a larger scope, theory suggests that communication that supports organizational commitment, a sense of belonging, as well as awareness of company changes and understanding the evolving company goals in combination with effective leadership communication builds employee engagement through different components (Welch 2011, 340). Speculatively, EA Finland's intranet could potentially enhance feelings of organizational commitment, sense of belonging, awareness and understanding in effect of lowering levels of uncertainty and stress, but this has not been proven in this research.

Also, leadership communication has not been studied at all during this project. It is, thus, not possible to conclude if the intranet has had any effects on EA Finland's employee engagement levels. However, the positive results confirming that employee communication was enhanced from the point of view of the onboarding could possibly indicate a positive impact also on the employee engagement levels.

In the longer run, when considering long-term goals of EA Finland's onboarding, positive effects on employee engagement are of course desired. Yet considering the scope and available time for this research project in question, it was not realistic to measure effects on employee engagement, but rather studying the impacts on the perceived employee communication – especially as the intranet and new hire perspective are only parts of the big picture of EA Finland's employee communication overall. Still, this project gives a helpful base for further development actions and research of a wider scope that can be conducted in future.

6.3 Suggestions for further research and development needs

When only considering the aspect of employee engagement through the onboarding lens, a similar conclusion can be drawn as mentioned above regarding further research down the road about employee engagement overall. Again, thinking of the longer-term benefits of functional onboarding processes, employee engagement comes to play. As Saks & Gruman (2018, 19) write in their research, reducing stress levels and uncertainty can in fact be effects of successful onboarding programs also recognized in this thesis, but when taking the impact desires one step further, employee engagement comes to the picture. Thus, the objective of great onboarding should at the end of the day be maintaining work engagement, as this is a longer lasting benefit to the company also supporting talent retention (Saks & Gruman 2018, 19).

It would be interesting to test Saks & Gruman's (2018, 23) socialization resources theory in practice at EA Finland, and measure fluctuation in engagement levels over a longer period of time. This process would include new hire support measures conducted already before they join the company, and at least one year into their employment, as well as evaluations of the actions' impacts on employee engagement. This would be a much larger project than this thesis and would require sufficient time and other resources. If this kind of bigger research project could be kicked off at EA Finland, it might also give the opportunity to actually measure impacts on staff retention rates.

Hargie & Tourish (2009, 11) have researched how effective communication and higher levels of employee engagement can increase employee retention rates and productivity. Realistically thinking, a project of this scope would probably only be possible at EA Finland after some company growth has occurred – also in general considering the unpredictable nature of the mobile game business, executing a project of this range might not be possible.

When looking into realistically doable future research possibilities and development needs of EA Finland, some thoughts are reflected from the panel discussion data; firstly, for savoring the positive impacts of the development work conducted in the scope of this project. The biggest concern the group interviewees had regarding the intranet and its benefits, was the page content not staying up to date.

As also one of the interviewees stated, this is a common issue when it comes to knowledge sharing platforms - Morell (2015, 151) emphasizes that the intranet users need to be able to trust the content to be accurate and recommends content to be reviewed regularly. Also Snyder & Lee-Partridge (2013, 419) highlight that it is difficult to distribute information in company environments because of potential challenges with flexibility of the employees, evolving organizational structures, unfolding role definitions, having people leave the company and especially time pressure. A risk analysis could be done in terms of these factors and a plan could be put in place to tackle these challenges.

To ensure the positive effects of the intranet as a communication forum at EA Finland also in future, the content definitely needs to be managed. Regular reminders for the researcher's content to be updated are already set up, but in addition, competence team leaders will be reminded in upcoming team leader meetings about this. Also, when a new employee is informed to be joining the team, this is a suitable time to check the intranet content is up to date.

In addition, constant feedback about the intranet should be obtained from the target audience, in order to benefit from the forum, and in terms of this, perhaps an annual staff survey around the intranet and improvement ideas could be introduced. After all, Snyder & Lee-Partridge's (2013, 418) research does indicate that the richness of a communication forum, the communication environment generally, as well as the fact of how colleagues perceive a channel influence the communication channel choice of employees.

As the aim for EA Finland's intranet is to be a communication channel benefitting all employees, meeting the target audience's current and evolving needs is crucial, or alternatively other communication forums need to be introduced according to the requirements and changes. After all, choosing the right communication channel, in addition to adding appropriate content is crucial in employee communication, as communication that is not designed according to its target group's preferences can create barriers for effective employee communication (Welch 2012, 253).

Also, new data could be collected once new hires have joined the team. This could be done in the form of a questionnaire, as originally planned for this thesis project – when the questions are designed based on the staff questionnaire of this thesis, data can be compared to see how people used to describe their onboarding experience overall, and from where they have obtained specific knowledge from. This could bring valuable and unique insights for further improvement work around the intranet, and onboarding process in general.

The improvement of the onboarding process overall is another further development area. As explained earlier in this paper, the development work at EA Finland was wider than the scope of this thesis, as in addition to the intranet also the onboarding process was clarified and visualized, and supportive material was compiled for the people managers, including a new hire mentor program and other supportive tools. Once new employees will be joining EA Finland, the impacts of the newly introduced onboarding process need to be evaluated, in order to develop the process further.

As the long research span is a challenge when it comes to measuring fluctuation in employee engagement a result of the new onboarding program, as mentioned before, shorter term impacts, such as perceived company commitment, innovativeness or sense of belonging could be researched at EA Finland. These are all proven to be impacts of effective employee communication by Hargie & Tourish (2009, 11).

One more specific research area, more suitable for instance for a master's thesis, could also be researching the impacts of the newly introduced new hire mentor program on the onboarding experience. Hargie & Tourish (2009, 18) implicate that employee engagement is a balance of individual and joint needs, and thus in addition to clear general employee communication, employees must also understand on an individual level how they are expected to contribute to joint goals.

As this thesis research already proves that the specific work-related, individual, introduction has been weak at EA Finland, and plenty of research, for instance done by Ellis & al. (2015, 222), Mathieu (2006) and Knight (2013, 220 – 221) proves that fostering strong relationships is an important part of onboarding, the mentor program at EA Finland could potentially have a big impact on the overall perception of the local onboarding process, when designed to suit the company culture.

From a wider employee communication point of view, it would furthermore be interesting to research the effectiveness of the leadership communication at EA Finland and its impact on the employees, as this has never been studied before. Leadership communication is considered to have a significant effect on empowering employees and employee satisfaction rates and requires a dialogic relationship with the employees (Men 2014, 282; Hargie & Tourish 2009, 7). Especially at a company with quite a new people manager network, researching leadership communication might lead to improvement suggestions that could benefit EA Finland overall.

6.4 Trustworthiness and ethical viewpoints

Ojasalo, Moilanen and Ritalahti (2009, 48) summarize that in a work-based research project the combined ethical rules of doing science, as well as the business world apply. The goals of any development project should be morally appropriate, the work should be done honestly, thoroughly and carefully and the consequences should be considered beneficial in practice. All in all, the same ethical guidelines apply in doing research, as in society and interacting with people generally - as development work always evolves around human action, shortcomings and constraints of the researcher will also affect the actual work. (Ojasalo & al. 2009, 48.)

In order to ensure ethical viewpoints were taken into account in this research project several concrete actions were taken throughout the project. It was ensured of EA Finland that the project was permitted to be conducted and allowed to be published, and whether any contract documentation was required from the legal point of view. A written confirmation from EA Finland's legal counsel, as well as the general manager have been obtained for the company's permissions about the thesis itself and the permission to publish it under the company's name. The company's general code of conduct related practices were naturally applied also during the development project in terms of protecting company-confidential information, respectful treatment of co-workers, as well as other rules for instance around conflict of interest.

At all stages of the thesis project, work was conducted in a thorough, conscientious and honest manner, including paying attention to confidentiality issues and open communication with anyone participating in the research. Fisher (2010, 74) describes how in fact informed consent is one the key issues in research ethics and elaborates how all participants in a research project should give their consent to participate while fully understanding what their participation in the project includes, as well as what the use and purpose of the research is.

The above was done during the thesis project in question by asking employees to participate in the data gathering rounds (survey, interviews and panel discussion) on a voluntary basis, and fully explaining the reason for the specific data being gathered, as well as the justification about what the data was used for. Project goals and objectives were brought up and repeated at every data gathering point, and also shared in writing. Anyone who was not interested or willing to participate in the project was left alone and no persuasion has taken place.

There were no issues in terms of role challenges, as the researcher is not in a people manager position. Fisher (2010, 75) describes this as one of a more frequent challenge during master level projects at work, as in some cases the researcher cannot be sure the employee's consent to participate or to give honest answers was freely given based on a neutral decision.

All research data was handled in a confidential and anonymous manner. The staff survey was conducted in electronic format, and before launching it, the questionnaire was tested to ensure no personal details based on which a respondent could be identified from is communicated via the tool. The in-depth interviews, as well as the panel discussion were recorded with each participant's individual consent and the recordings were stored in a location only the researcher has access to, without mentioning the interviewee's names – no other personal data was collected during the project. It was also mentioned at every interview that the recording could be interrupted at any point during the interview, should the employee ask for this, as described as proper ethical behaviour in qualitative research by Fisher (2010, 81).

Objectivity is a challenging ethical aspect, as it can be difficult as a researcher to be fully objectives with specific outcome desires and objectives is mind. This is why it is important to be transparent in documenting the parts of the project that describe collecting and analysing data and how interpretations were made out of the findings. This allows the reader to make own judgements about the research material and evaluations about the data being fairly interpreted. This can also be tested by using one of the research participants or someone similar to the involved employees and asking for their point of views on how the research material, findings and conclusions are presented. (Fischer 2010, 82.)

By writing a detailed and rich description of the data collection methods, findings and analysis, along with the interpretations and supporting any suggestions with solid argumentation and referring to literature where appropriate, the reader of this thesis is given the possibility to draw same or similar conclusions out of the data. Even if the reader would not

agree on the conclusions, at least this method offers to understand how the available data has been taken into account from the researcher's point of view. Any existing theory that has been used in this paper has been referred to by the official thesis instructions to clarify the sources of information.

A person from both within and outside of EA Finland have read through the thesis and were asked to comment on the ethical conduct in the paper in order to test the viewpoints and methods applied. The questionnaire, as well as all interview questions were also tested separately before launching them with colleagues from within the organization to ensure employees from the same organizational context consider the data gathering methods ethically appropriate, and understandable content-wise. Ethicalness to any research project is essential, and based on the above listed evidence, different viewpoints around it have been thoroughly taken into account in this thesis.

Validity of a research refers to the truthfulness of the research methodology as well as results and depends on the researcher's capability and endeavour. Ghauri and Gronhaug (2010, 210) write about validity in research and state it can be evaluated based on the research being descriptive, interpretative, theoretical and generalizable. Descriptive validity refers to the level to which a description in the thesis actually is truthful. Interpretative validity confirms how well certain aspects have been interpreted, theoretical validity in contrast refers to the truthfulness of suggested theories and generalizable validity considers to what extent specific findings can be generalized to other companies or situations. (Ghauri & Gronhaug 2010, 210 – 211.)

The validity of this mixed method research is proven by writing in an as detailed, descriptive manner as possible. Any documentation used for the thesis, such as the collected data before and after the development action, is saved, in case anyone would like to double check some details. Screenshots of examples of the collected data graphs, as well as development work results have also been presented in the thesis to support their validity.

All interpretations of data have been done with supportive arguments from the theoretical framework, and thorough reasoning to support truthfulness. Generalizations are made with a specific scope only and some of these are clearly stated to be speculative until similar research is done to confirm the generalization of this thesis case. Again, testing the thesis by having had people outside and inside of EA Finland read the material and comment on the content has given insights to how a reader considers the state of validity. Also documenting the entire development project phases in the researcher's diary helps to support truthfulness of the different phases of the study described in the thesis.

By applying triangulation, a combination of multiple data sources during a study of the same phenomenon, the reliability of judgements and analysis of the results can be strengthened. To enhance the validity of a study also gathering different kinds of data on the research subject can work. (Ghuri & Gronhaug 2010, 212.) Due to this reason, different kind of data was gathered in various manners, using the staff questionnaire, as well as in-depth interviews with two target groups, as well as the researcher's diary to build a complete and reliable picture of the phenomenon prior to any development work.

Again, a different type of data gathering method, a panel discussion, along with the researcher's diary, were chosen for the inquiries done after the development works were launched. All in all, triangulation was intentionally applied in this thesis to ensure the truthfulness of the research and the results, in addition to the other measures elaborated above in this chapter.

6.5 Evaluation of the thesis process

Writing this thesis was overall a great experience to me, the main driver being the passion for the topic of employee communication, as basically everything around developing the employee experience excites me. In contrast to my bachelor's thesis, I applied different data gathering methods, about which I learned some new aspects, and generally also diving deep into the theoretical material around the relevant topics taught me a great amount; the psychological insights around employee engagement and impacts of employee communication are fascinating topics in my opinion. It is an absolute priority to find a thesis topic that excites the author, as spending this many hours on something boring would be a completely different story – even with an interesting topic the thesis is not always a walk in the park.

It is simultaneously challenging, yet also rewarding to write such a comprehensive paper about a project, as often during the study program courses it tends to feel that some topics are only briefly touched upon and that barely the surface is scratched. During the master's thesis project, the same cannot be said, as being able to write and actually gain some positive development results during the project, a proper, deep understanding of the relevant phenomena needs to be obtained. This felt overwhelming in the beginning of the project, as there is such a vast amount of existing theory and research material in place, and it felt impossible to get on top of it all.

The classic mantra of "one thing at a time" helped to get through the times when the project felt impossible, and piece by piece everything started to make sense. For me the most motivating part was to actually see tangible improvements the conducted development

work brought along, and to have a reason to properly gather elaborate feedback from employees afterwards. In many everyday development projects, the post-development feedback is often vague and not enough time is invested in analysing outcomes, and so the thesis project made me feel like I achieved something meaningful at work that actually benefits the company and its employees.

As a person who enjoys writing, the phase where all the thoughts, material and steps needed to be documented to complete the paper, was mostly enjoyable. Of course, the academic style needed to be taken into special account and slowed down the writing pace at times. Generally, the main challenge was to find enough time slots to write and analyse, as alongside the full-time work, the other studies and the development work I was responsible for within the project, time resources were limited, as probably is the case with any part-time master's student. But being aware of this and knowing myself, I planned to complete the writing work over a relatively compact period of time in order to keep the level of interest and the hard work up. Overall, this was an enjoyable project that thought me a lot, but which I am happy to consider completed now.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Pre-development work staff questionnaire

[Link](#) to Webropol survey

1. When have you joined the EA Finland team?
 - Before October 2017 (before global EA 'Game On' onboarding process launch)
 - In October 2017 or later (after global EA 'Game On' onboarding process launch)

2. How would you rate your overall onboarding experience (likert scale: 1 poor, 5 excellent)?

3. How would you describe your on-boarding experience overall?
 - My onboarding was informative and starting my new job role was effortless
 - My onboarding was partially informative, but I did not receive sufficient information on local T20 working methods, processes and tools
 - My onboarding was partially informative, but I did not receive enough information about global benefits and policies of EA
 - My onboarding was partially informative, but I did not receive sufficient information about local T20 benefits, policies and office practices
 - My onboarding was partially informative, but I did not get enough information about local T20 work responsibilities, the organizational structure and competence team structures
 - My onboarding was uninformative, and I had to find out a lot by myself
 - Other – please specify

4. From where did you obtain basic EA company related information when you joined the team? Please choose all suitable options.
 - The on-boarding sessions during week 1
 - The onboarding material (pdf-document) received during week 1
 - The 'Game On' webpage, e-learning videos and webinars
 - From my supervisor
 - From the Admin team
 - Conversations with team members

- Company intranet EA World
- Other – where?

5. From where did you obtain information on EA global benefits and policies when you first joined the team? Please choose all suitable options.

- The on-boarding sessions during week 1
- The onboarding material (pdf-document) received during week 1
- The 'Game On' webpage, e-learning videos and webinars
- From my supervisor
- From the Admin team
- Conversations with team members
- Company intranet EA World
- Other – where?

6. From where did you get information on Tracktwenty specific working methods, processes and roles? Please choose all suitable options.

- The on-boarding sessions during week 1
- The onboarding material (pdf-document) received during week 1
- The 'Game On' webpage, e-learning videos and webinars
- From my supervisor
- From the Admin team
- Conversations with team members
- Company intranet EA World
- Other – where?

7. From where did you obtain information around local T20 employee benefits and services (health care services, office practices, fringe benefits)? Please choose all suitable options.

- The on-boarding sessions during week 1
- The 'Game On' webpage, e-learning videos and webinars
- From my supervisor
- From the Admin team
- Conversations with team members
- Company intranet EA World
- Other – where?

8. From where did you get information about the local work community (contact details, organizational structure, seating plan)? Please choose all suitable options.
- The on-boarding sessions during week 1
 - The 'Game On' webpage, e-learning videos and webinars
 - From my supervisor
 - From the Admin team
 - Conversations with team members
 - Company intranet EA World
 - Other – where?
9. Please rate how important you consider the following topics to be represented on the new onboarding page: (1 not important, 5 very important)
- Information about local work community (team member names, pictures, roles, contact details, seating order)
 - Details around local benefit and employee services (fringe benefits, healthcare, insurances, wellbeing, office rules)
 - Descriptions on local work processes (project work methods and design on high level)
 - Information on local working practices (competence team responsibilities, processes, tools used)
 - Communication about local events and happenings (team events, visitors, scheduled absences)
 - Studio news (current affairs and announcements)
 - Other – what?
10. What kind of interactive communication functionalities would you add to the onboarding page?
- Commenting
 - Reactions (likes, emojis etc.)
 - Chatting
 - None
 - Something else - what?
11. In what form would you like to obtain onboarding information? Choose all options that interest you

- Text on online forum
- Pdf-material package
- Email
- Video guide material
- Face to face communication
- Other – what?

12. How interesting would you rate the following content that could be added on a studio intranet to support the entire team (1 irrelevant, 5 very useful)

- Studio news (currently presented on info screen and weekly meetings)
- Game related numbers and graphs (currently presented on info screen and weekly meetings)
- Online calendar (upcoming events, absences, happenings, milestones)
- Blog posts (current affairs, e.g. about work-wellbeing and safety topics)
- Local benefit portal (possibility to order games or benefit vouchers online)
- Other – what?

13. What kind of communication functionalities would you like to be introduced to a local intranet?

- Chat
- Commenting
- Reactions (likes, emojis)
- Other – what?

14. Is there anything else that comes to mind about developing T20's onboarding experience?

15. Do you have any other ideas about how to make our local employee communication more efficient?

Appendix 2. In-depth interview questions for most recently hired employees

1. Please describe your onboarding experience overall when joining the team
2. What sort of information did you have to find out by yourself after or during your onboarding period in order to start with your actual work tasks properly and engage in the teamwork?
3. Why was the lack of that information problematic – if the needed content would have been available to you, how would it have helped you?
4. Which concrete locally relevant content would you suggest to be added to our new intranet to make the onboarding experience more positive? (if needed, answer options from team survey Q 9 can be repeated to support interviewee)
5. What kind of communication functionalities would you add to the intranet? E.g. chatting, liking, sharing, reacting, none, something else and why / why not?
6. Do you have any other ideas how to develop the onboarding process at T20?

Appendix 3. In-depth interview questions for competence team leaders

- short overview of survey results and newest hire interviews and questionnaire
- 1. suggestions for improving onboarding experience:
 - creating local intranet to support onboarding + all employees in terms of enhanced employee communication
 - 1. what are your thoughts regarding the content and page structure?
 - 2. going through content suggestions based on interviews and survey – is there something you would add?
 - 3. what are your ideas on how to keep content systematically up to date?
 - 4. do you have suggestions on how to integrate this page in practice?
 - having a more structured local onboarding process in place including one on one's with local key contacts
 - 1. local key contacts - who should we include in your opinion?
 - implementing a mentor program
 - 1. for whom would you introduce this?
 - 2. how would you plan and implement the program in practice?
- 2. Do you have further suggestions or other improvement ideas regarding the local onboarding process?
- 3. Who should be the owner of the onboarding process overall?
- 4. How can we evaluate the success of the onboarding?
- 5. What risks do you see for our development work and/or implementation of the developments?
- 6. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding developments on our employee communication?

Appendix 4. Post-development group interview questions

1. What kind of an effect does the T20 homepage have on our onboarding process in your opinion?
2. How do the content and functionalities of the homepage meet with the needs you had when joining the team?
3. How does the T20 homepage contribute to the studio's internal communication overall?
4. As we need to constantly work on developing our internal communication at T20; how could this new communication forum better support all employees – not only new hires – going forward?
5. What kind of concerns / risks do you see or have regarding the homepage as a communication forum at T20?
6. Do you have any other ideas about how to make T20's internal communication more efficient?
7. Do you have other comments / feedback / development ideas?

Appendix 5. Screenshots from the intranet “Tracktwenty homepage”

The screenshot shows the main page of the EA Finland - Tracktwenty intranet. The page is titled "EA Finland - Tracktwenty Home" and is created by an unknown user. It features a navigation bar with "Studio Quick Links" for various departments: Contact List, Art, Analytics & PM, Engineering, Live, Design, QA, Development, and Adm. The main content area is organized into several sections:

- Studio News:** A section for checking out the latest Tracktwenty news and reading through weekly meeting notes. It includes a calendar for March 2019 with events like "Weekly", "Lunch", "Inclusion @ EA", "Lunch walk", "SIMCITY brand - 30 years", "Clearing desks", and "March Goals".
- Studio Contacts and Communication:** A section for work community details, including email distribution (helinki@ea.com), disciplines (Admin, Art, Analytics & PM, Client Engineering, Design, Server Engineering & Dev Ops, Live, QA, Development Directors), general managers, studio slack channels (e.g., #20-helsinki, #20-meetings, #20-whiskey-club, #20-absences, #20-random, #20-IT, #20-support, #20-recruiting), and studio contact details (Töölönlahdenkatu 3 B, 00100 Helsinki, +358 40 775 5061 finland@ea.com).
- Benefits & Insurances:** A section for local and global benefits and insurance information.
- Health Care & Sick Leave:** A section for occupational health care, sick leave rules, and medical insurance.
- Time Off:** A section for time-off tracking, annual holidays, public holidays, and leave policies.
- Talent Management at T20:** A section for performance management and career development.
- SimCity Buildit:** A section for project "Icebox" (SimCity Buildit) using Confluence and Jira.
- Studio-wide Pages:** A section for onboarding and global EA onboarding program.
- Useful Staff Information:** A section for a list of acronyms, studio safety, lunch info, IT service sector collective agreement, business travel, and EA security tools.
- IT and General Studio Information:** A section for meeting rooms, general IT instructions, studio details, and events/activities.
- Studio Values:** A section for studio values and behaviors.
- Snowball:** A section for project "Snowball" and snowball home.
- Other projects:** A section for game jam December 2018.

Figure 1. Main page view of the intranet “Tracktwenty homepage”

The main page of the intranet includes a menu for all the subpages of the competence teams and the work community details, as well as plenty of quick links to any general topics relevant to the new hires as shown in figure 1 above. The links on the main page are grouped into similar topics, for example “health care and sick leaves”, “benefits and insurances” and “IT and general studio information”.

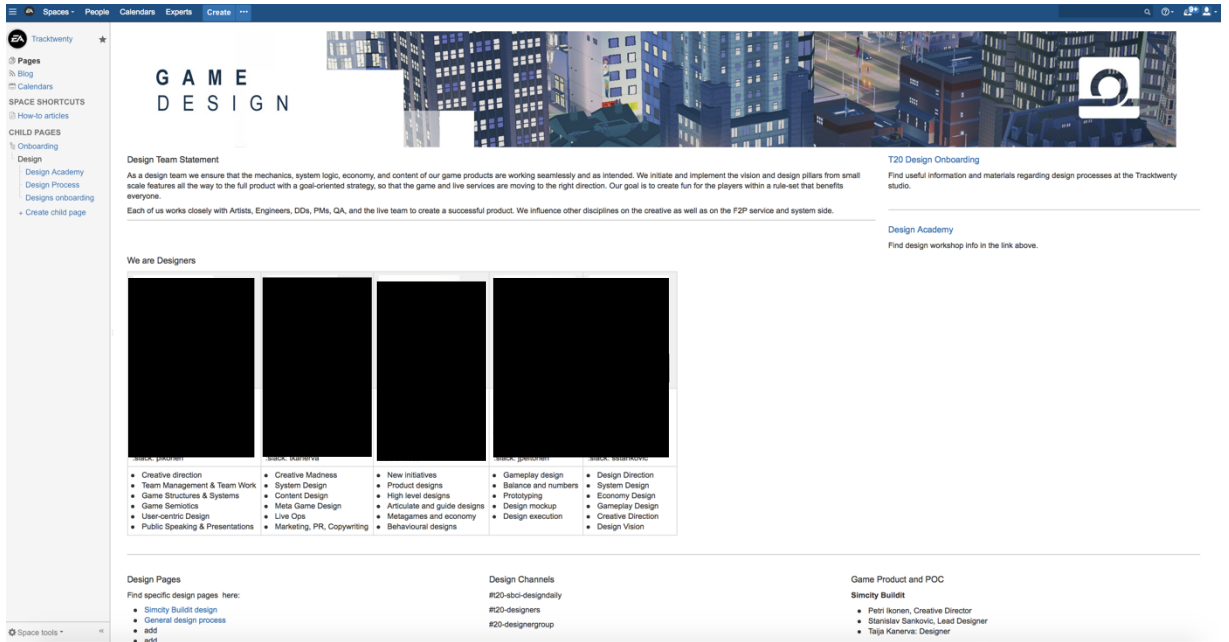


Figure 2. Example of a competence team subpage: game design (photos and personal details have been covered for privacy reasons)

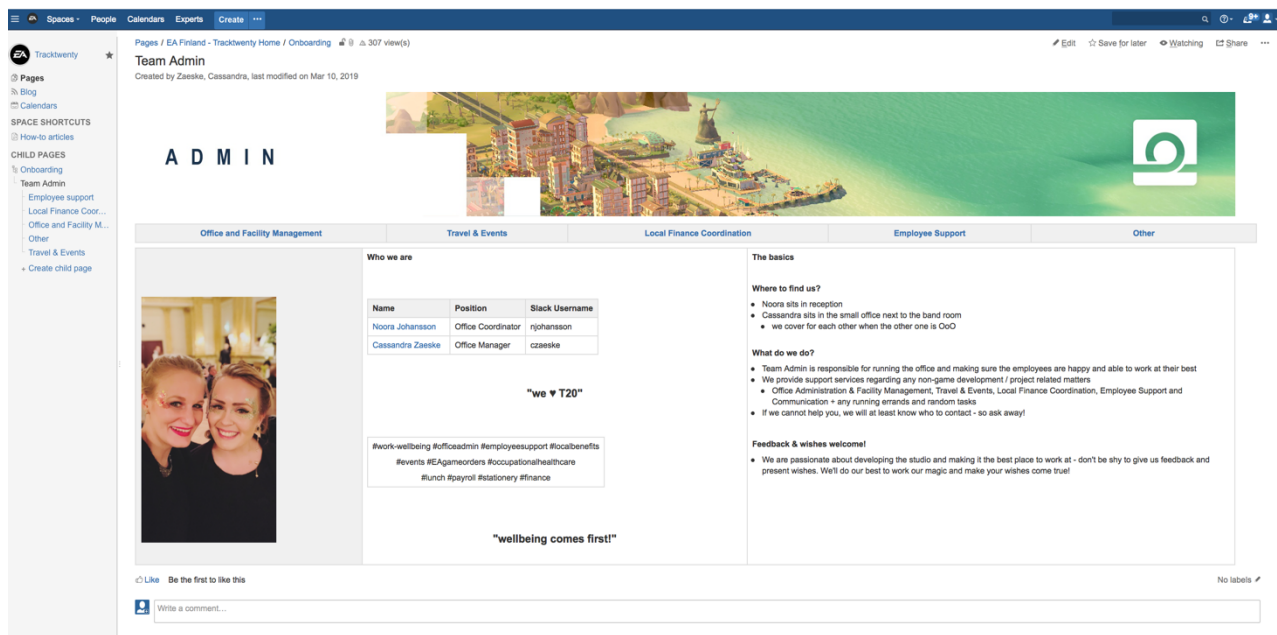


Figure 3. Example of a competence team subpage: administration team (the permission to use the photo is granted)

Under “T20 Design Onboarding” and “Design Academy” in figure 2 above more detailed information and instructions are included for new hires specifically joining the game design competence team. Under “office and facility management”, “travel & events”, “local finance coordination”, “employee support” and “other” in figure 3, the detailed information regarding work processes, contact persons and instructions are presented for any new hires joining the administration competence team.