

---

# **ASSESSING INTRANET SERVICES**

A Usability analysis of employee portal in HAMK Valkeakoski



Bachelor's thesis

International Business

Valkeakoski 13.5.2011

Johanna Ylimys





Valkeakoski  
International Business  
International Management

---

<b>Author</b>	Johanna Ylimys	<b>Year</b> 2011
<b>Subject of Bachelor's thesis</b>	Assessing Intranet Services	

---

ABSTRACT

A Portal is an online service for the employees of a company; it shares information equally with all employees and possibly encourages them to communicate with each other or makes their job tasks easier. The thesis gave the reader an insight to HAMK Valkeakoski employees' portal. The commissioning organization was HAMK and Valkeakoski units' portal being the focus of the study.

The following objectives were determined: To define the different features of a user friendly portal (1) to assess employees' needs for the portal (2) and to create a development plan for HAMK Valkeakoski (3). The thesis focused on the user point of view and aimed at improving the users' experiences of the portal.

To acquire theoretical understanding of the matter a variety of literature was studied, some of them from Finnish experts such as Anja Alasilta, while most of the theory was from many different experts from the area of internal issues in companies. This theory was used to define the features of a user- friendly portal service.

Data was collected through interviews and a survey. The survey was conducted among the employees to find out the needs of the employees in HAMK Valkeakoski. The survey was conducted via email through an online form. The respondents came from HAMK Valkeakoski making the survey more qualitative than quantitative, as the amount of respondents was scant.

Currently, the usability of the portal is average and needs improvements. The improvements needed are training, defining goals between management and employees, increasing and perfecting the functions in the portal.

**Keywords** User friendliness, information sharing, usability, portal service

**Pages** 53p. + appendices 10p.

<b>Tekijä</b>	Johanna Ylimys	<b>Vuosi</b> 2011
<b>Työn nimi</b>	Assessing Intranet Services	
<b>Työn säilytyspaikka</b>	HAMK, Valkeakoski	

---

## TIIVISTELMÄ

Portaali on internetpalvelu yritysten työntekijöille. Sen kautta jaetaan tietoa tasavertaisesti kaikille työntekijöille ja mahdollisesti kannustaa heitä keskinäiseen kanssakäymiseen tai se saattaa helpottaa heidän päivittäisiä työtehtäviään. Työ antaa käsityksen HAMK Valkeakosken työntekijöiden portaalista. Toimeksiantajayritys HAMK:in Valkeakosken yksikkö on huomion keskipisteenä työssä.

Opinnäytetyön tavoitteina oli, määrittellä käyttäjäystävällisen portaalin eri ominaisuudet (1), arvioida työntekijöiden tarpeet portaalin suhteen (2), ja luoda kehityssuunnitelma HAMK Valkeakoskea varten (3). Työ käsittelee asiaa käyttäjän näkökulmasta ja pyrkii parantamaan käyttäjien kokemuksia portaalista.

Teoreettisen ymmärryksen saamiseksi tutkittiin kirjallisuutta, osa suomalaisilta alan asiantuntijoilta kuten Anja Alasillalta, ja eri asiantuntijoilta käyttäjäystävällisen portaalin alalta.

Tietoa kerättiin haastatteluilla ja kyselyllä. Kysely suoritettiin, jotta HAMK Valkeakosken työntekijöiden tarpeet saataisiin selville. Se toteutettiin Internetin välityksellä, virtuaalikaavakkeella. Kaikki vastaajat olivat HAMK:in Valkeakosken yksiköstä, mistä johtuen kysely oli enemmän kvalitatiivinen kuin kvantitatiivinen, sillä vastaajien määrä oli niukka.

Tällä hetkellä portaalin käytettävyys on keskitasoa ja vaatii parannuksia. Parannukset sisältävät koulutusta, tavoitteiden määrittämistä johdon ja työntekijöiden välillä, sekä portaalin toimintojen lisäämistä ja kehittämistä.

**Keywords** käyttäjäystävällisyys, tiedon jakaminen, käytettävyys, portaali

**Pages** 53s. + liitteet 10s.

---

# CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.1	Topic background.....	1
1.2	Research question and the objectives.....	3
1.3	Research methods and the target group.....	4
1.4	Establishing challenges .....	5
2	THEORETICAL BACKGROUND .....	7
2.1	The portal, the basics.....	7
2.2	Internal communication techniques and theories .....	8
2.2.1	Technical aspects.....	11
2.3	Usability framework.....	13
2.4	Areas of focus.....	18
3	EMPIRICAL STUDY .....	22
3.1	HAMK introduction .....	22
3.2	HAMK Valkeakoski employee portal.....	23
3.3	Data collection.....	24
3.4	Survey analysis.....	26
3.5	Conclusion.....	36
4	FINDINGS .....	38
4.1	Current challenges – portal usage .....	40
5	SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	44
5.1	Recommendations for further study.....	50
	BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	54

Appendix 1 Interview framework, Employee 1, HAMK

Appendix 2 Interview framework, Employee 2, HAMK

Appendix 3 Survey

Appendix 4 Survey results

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Topic background

HAMK University of applied sciences has a portal designed for students where all needed information is available, throughout sometime this portal has been continuously improved and it has turned out to be effective, useful and accepted by the students. Yet the employees of HAMK are introduced to a different side of the portal, which is only available to them. When a new employee joins the staff they also need to start using the employees' portal. This portal has information about HAMK as a company as well as a university.

This thesis project started because the portal so far has not been able to work on a satisfactory level. HAMK Valkeakoski as a working environment has been divided into many different areas, for example teachers, degree programmes and buildings. To get an insight to the portal usage was crucial to know the working environment of HAMK.

The topic of studying the intranet services came up as a hot topic as many companies had recently started to use it, and found themselves in trouble when facing challenges. Companies of all sizes have started to use the portal as an information sharing tool which works well for most of the time, yet the little time that these portal services have been available to a variety of companies is small. Therefore common practises of dealing with challenges have not yet been created. This global issue makes this thesis very up to date and needed in the business life of today.

HAMK is also one of these companies that have taken the portal service into use. HAMK Valkeakoski as well as other units has its own share of this portal. HAMK uses the portal mainly as information storage and sharing tool. Employees from different units and locations can check different information through the portal, for example looking for a certain person or information of a degree programme.

The HAMK portal is a way of delivering important information equally around the workplace without the need for personal contact, any paper memos or anything comparable to those. It is planned to make the work of HAMK Valkeakoski employers and employees easier, faster and therefore more efficient. During my discussions with my HAMK work colleagues they expressed their reservations about the HAMK Valkeakoski staff intranet. Therefore it was sure that something with such a good purpose had severe shortcomings and a development plan was definitely needed.

A new way of communicating is that the communication happens online, it is faster, more efficient, and cost effective. The Intranet means a website where employers and employees can jointly share information. In the age of the internet, companies are creating intranets in order for staff members

to share work-related information more efficiently. It is only available to the employees of a company and employees as any other website where you log in with a password and username to access information.

The intranet is one of the methods that companies use to improve their internal information flow. In HAMK Valkeakoski all staff members and employees from Automaint and library have access to the same information easily via the HAMK intranet. Well organized communication includes communication between management and staff, between different departments and different university locations. HAMK as a university has various locations including Lepaa, Hämeenlinna, Riihimäki, Valkeakoski, Evo, Forssa, Hyvinkää and Mustiala. When these units have to share information amongst them it is reasonably easy to share it on a common online page that allows every staff member to access the information at any time.

This thesis aims to find out how to develop the current portal system to benefit the employees more, while being beneficial to the employer's side too. This means that this thesis would need to explore the purposes of the portal, what kind of content it has, how the technical side works and how easy it is to use. Discovering these issues and their current state, it is the task of the thesis to point out what needs to be improved. This development plan focuses on creating a portal that benefits the staff members of HAMK Valkeakoski as much as the management.

HAMK staff would benefit from this study because this thesis would suggest ways on improving the intranet system in HAMK Valkeakoski and improve their working process. The whole unit would benefit because when the employees can use the intranet effectively they would save time, and improve company effectiveness.

During the pre-seminar certain issues needed more definition, such as the definition of the topic and after some time the topic was defined to be about the usefulness of the portal to the HAMK Valkeakoski employees. The thesis should study the issues about the portal that have come to be problematic within the personnel.

The thesis covers the basic information about the portal when considering what it should be and what it is. What it should be is discovered through various theories that are combined together to give us a thorough picture of what is expected from a portal. What it is at the moment is investigated through a survey using the Webropol service and emails. After these two are conducted successfully it is possible to combine this information to create future plans for HAMK Valkeakoski to improve what they are doing now with the portal and to further develop in the processes.

Suggestions follow the line of what information the portal should include and how it is presented in the portal, how useful it is to the staff and what the factors that make it useful are. What should be changed as well as how to encourage the staff to use the portal. After improvements are made to the portal it should become a major tool of working, and if the correct at-

tention is not given to this process the benefits are lost in a short period of time.

### 1.2 Research question and the objectives

The Research question of this thesis is: “How to develop the use of intranet to benefit the staff members and management of HAMK Valkeakoski more?”

The following objectives were determined:

1. To define the different features of a user friendly portal
2. To assess the employees’ needs for the portal
3. To create a development plan for HAMK Valkeakoski

The key in using a portal is the sharing of information and the easiness of that process. Also covered in the thesis is what kind of information the portal should include. This means that there are more than just fast informative messages shared through the portal. The theory part of this thesis covers the issue of what kind of information should be available in the portal, and also how it should be presented in the portal. The presentation of information is crucial because it can enhance the effectiveness of the intranet and therefore allow more effective use.

The theory also studies the ideas that have been a concern; the urgent need of developing the intranet more for example the content of the portal page, the usability of the portal from the employees’ point of view, and the purpose that the portal is serving.

The theories also explore the internal communication in other companies. The writer endeavours to find out what exactly is said about the content of the intranet and what can be found in the portal. It is crucial for the staff to be able to find the information they need through the portal without unnecessary difficulty, which includes issues like the links on the pages that staff members have to use. In the thesis the fact of how well employees can find information through the portal, and if the portal has the right kind of information in the first place, is studied more.

On the other hand we should not forget that all companies have their own requirements for their portals. Based on the company type, it is possible to find recommendations about the intranet content of the page which might not come up when asking HAMK’s staff, yet when the content would be changed it would improve the working processes in HAMK and other crucial issues in the routines of the employees. The writer keeps in mind that companies vary and their needs are different, that is why theory presents all possibilities to HAMK Valkeakoski. The unit needs to be covered as an independent organization of its own with its own needs, and the theory needs to be applied to those factors.

### 1.3 Research methods and the target group

Furthermore a very important issue that is covered in the thesis is the overall usefulness of the portal to the HAMK Valkeakoski employees. It is not clear if and when a portal is created to help the employees that it also would succeed in its task. The situation is studied mainly through the survey, because the usefulness is not only based on the availability of this kind of service created for the employees, but also affected by many other factors that are explored in this thesis. This is covered in the survey so that the HAMK Valkeakoski employees can tell about their experiences with the portal as well as their concerns and hopes. The survey itself is based on various interviews made with the HAMK Valkeakoski staff members.

It is also useful to find out, how much the portal helps the employees in their day to day work tasks, if it shortens their information search time or decreases the difficult they have over their jobs tasks. This combined to finding the information they need would be finding out how beneficial the portal is to the HAMK's employees. Studying the survey answers gives a good picture of how beneficial the portal has been to the employees. It also gives a good starting point for improvements towards making the portal as useful as it possibly can get to the employees of HAMK Valkeakoski unit.

In order to find out the current situation in HAMK Valkeakoski informal interviews were considered, however the conclusion is to use some of the interviews as a basis to create the survey that goes deeper into finding out the actual problems. Before planning the survey some crucial theory is covered and the interviews are used to create a survey that gives the best possible results. The interviews are a good way to get some kind of understanding over the issues that the employees are going through, this way the survey questions are focused on the right issues. The focus of the questions is especially important because the survey is qualitative instead of quantitative.

These methods used in this thesis strive to collect the necessary information from HAMK-s staff members, as said before, one of them being interviews conducted with few people to get background information about the situation. The survey is planned based on the interviews yet it is going to be inspired by the theory that is studied in the first parts of the thesis. Webropol offers a great service of planning questionnaires online so that they can be sent to the target group through emails.

The survey methods would be called qualitative because the amount of answers or the size of the target group is not supposed to be too large, and therefore it is only possible to do a qualitative survey instead of quantitative survey as it was explained earlier in the text about the company unit size and the relation to the topic of the thesis. The qualitative method would mean that instead of putting the emphasis on the amount of answers or questions or interviews, the emphasis is on the quality of the questions, interviews, and the answers that are received. Even more emphasis is being put onto the accuracy of the questions so that the answers are giving enough information and the right information, for the development to hit the right places.

The survey points out some of the issues that should be improved in to order to make the portal more beneficial – this part being much needed since it portrays the comments and concerns of the employees. As the theory would give a good base to the survey it thus makes it easier to concentrate on the areas of concern more carefully as the topic is something that many of HAMK employees get to use on a daily basis. The survey is the main method of collecting information of the current situation from the staff members of HAMK Valkeakoski. The questions of the survey are based on the theory that has been studied earlier in the thesis.

The survey reveals the current situation of HAMK Valkeakoski, and the results are analyzed with the help of programs like SPSS and Microsoft Excel to join the answers into a more understandable form and to be an entity that gives a clear picture of what is happening and what should be improved. The survey answers are a clear result pointing out areas where improvement is needed, also areas that the employees might find themselves satisfied with.

### 1.4 Establishing challenges

HAMK as an employee should care for its employees but also always mind its resources. It is not enough to create something that should be important only to find out that it has challenges. Yet the survey and the results of the interviews and this thesis strive to bring the picture to better light. What HAMK needs to improve and what does it need to fix in the HAMK portal? This thesis encourages HAMK to take the actions it should have taken a long time ago and keep on doing the correct things they've been doing while moving towards an environment where it can be trusted to take care of its human as well as financial resources in a accepted professional way.

This thesis is concentrating on the portal which is a crucial working tool for HAMK Valkeakoski employees. This tool is created to make their work easier and faster, and of course work that is done with less stress normally tends to be more efficient and in long term would definitely create savings. HAMK has bought an expensive Oracle portal system that should be used in its entire capacity, so that it can bring as much benefit to the entire company. Not only would it be beneficial money wise because it would allow HAMK staff members to be more efficient but it would allow the work processes to be faster and better by offering new ways to conduct them through the online portal, but also because the portal system is expensive to create and manage. Improvements would therefore bring some actual valid results that are appreciated in all units. HAMK could create a system out of the portal that would be a more useful way of informing the employees of new events, communicating with them from the management point of view or encouraging them to communicate between units as much between themselves. The portal could also offer new ways to man-

age information, by its storing capacity, or it could help the employees to do some of their tasks in the intranet.

After the current situation with the HAMK portal has been explored and discovered and some areas of improvement have been clearly pointed out, the writer takes time to combine these different parts of the thesis to create the practical part for HAMK Valkeakoski unit. This practical part mainly means that the information that is gathered through theory is used to analyze the survey answers and the current situation is compared to the optimal situation that the theory has presented. When these two situations are compared and the differences between them pointed out, it shows clearly where mistakes have taken place. It also shows where the portal has proven out to be useful. Also what is pointed out is how this current situation could be transformed towards the optimal situation that the theory has presented.

This thesis is expected to find out how to improve the benefits of the portal to the employees of HAMK Valkeakoski unit. It focuses on developing the portal so that it is of more beneficial to staff members and employers. This means that some changes have to be done and not only for the short term but rather for the long term as well, in order for portal to stay as a useful working tool to all of the employees in HAMK Valkeakoski, now and in the future. Therefore HAMK Valkeakoski should develop the portal as an ongoing project that is both a short and long term .

In other words after the suggestions have been presented to HAMK through the thesis some actions from HAMK Valkeakoski unit are expected so that the situation could improve and the employees could find their work flowing more easily and their stress levels and frustrations would decrease.

As a conclusion the goal of this thesis is to find out how useful the portal is to the staff and then based on the answers to that question improve the usefulness of the portal. Second, to improve the work environment of the employees of HAMK Valkeakoski by improving the portal as being one of their main tools of communication, information search and a basic short cut leading to what they need in their work daily.

To create a beneficial thesis it has to aim toward development, which would be a standard for not only HAMK but all companies. All in all, this thesis is written so that the staff members' benefit is the focus and the purpose of this thesis is the improvement that comes clear to the end users. Hopefully the results reveal areas that bother most of the staff members collectively. This would mean that areas could be improved so that greater amount of people finds their work easier afterwards.

## 2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### 2.1 The portal, the basics

There are many theories about establishing a portal, they have been published and are considered valuable information today. We have to consider theories about communication inside a company and theory covering the area of online and internet based communication. These have not been an issue for more than a few years, especially because intranets were only thought to be used in big companies only - but nowadays even the small organizations can have and benefit from having intranets.

The process of communication is sometimes thought as being easy and simple; something that is done fast with very few mistakes expected. Yet it is very common for us to think about communicating situations when we have misunderstood someone or we have not been understood. This means that communication is in fact a complicated process that needs a lot of attention. Taking communication too lightly is a common mistake inside companies. (Boddy 2005, 524.)

Communication is defined in the book *Management an Introduction* as something that happens when people share information to reach a common understanding. Communication is seen in two parts, the actual information sharing part which can happen by writing or talking, which could be referred to as the easy part. The second part is reaching common understanding which would be the difficult part. As known from a multicultural point of view, reaching a common understanding can sometimes be extremely hard, yet it does not require that much, differences are common amongst different cultures because people always come from different backgrounds which affect their ability to accept and absorb information. Yet it is crucial to comprehend that. If common understanding is not reached then communication has not actually taken place. (Boddy 2005, 522)

As much as reports, memos and meetings are communication methods, so are intranets. All forms of communication are widely used, and electronic forms are continuously developed as they get more common. Intranets are no longer used in only big companies but the smaller organizations have recognized their usefulness as well. Intranets profit both employees and companies by offering various ways to save money and to keep employees happy. (Boddy 2005, 521,522)

Communication systems are created to make communication easier. Communication as such is defined to be something that starts with passing the information forward and ends with common understanding, and if both are not achieved, communication has not taken place. Many times passing the information happens easily, but common understanding turns out to be difficult. That is because people interpret messages through their own ex-

periences and might then end up with different conclusion than what was first meant. (Boddy 2005, 522, 525)

A collaborative intranet is a system that encourages all kinds of communication by creating the chance for that. For example by adding useful features to the intranet, these could be corporate calendars and discussion forums. Means of communication are forums where people can talk online and even blogs where the communication is more one-sided but has the feature of sharing (Three Approaches to Intranet Strategy, 2003, Accessed 12.01.2011, [http://www.digital-web.com/articles/three\\_approaches\\_to\\_intranet\\_strategy](http://www.digital-web.com/articles/three_approaches_to_intranet_strategy)).

The collaborative intranet system is beneficial to the user company because it can save money by reducing the amount of time that employees use to search information. Collaborative system saves money because it avoids the cost of having to print out information and distribute it evenly to distant locations.

Collaborative system also benefits the employees because the information available decreases the amount of wrong information that might have been spread through rumors. Various surveys can be concluded through the intranet among the employees, which means that ways to improve working processes are available. Not only do these surveys benefit the staff members whose job satisfaction can be measured regularly, but also it is a good way for the company to find ways to improve processes and save costs (Three Approaches to Intranet Strategy, 2003, Accessed 12.01.2011, [http://www.digital-web.com/articles/three\\_approaches\\_to\\_intranet\\_strategy](http://www.digital-web.com/articles/three_approaches_to_intranet_strategy)).

The issue of internal communication means information flow inside a company. It includes the informing of coming events and other issues that interfere with the daily duties of the staff members. It is therefore understandable that this issue is important to every single company. We get an insight into the companies' internal communication in the next chapter.

## 2.2 Internal communication techniques and theories

Communication inside companies means delivering information about various issues, it can be about internal issues like processes or materials. Today intranets are seen as useful tools to store all the company's information and company correspondence, so that details can be easily found and also saved to a certain place. A concern to companies has also been their transparency, and the intranet has proven out to be useful in this way too – since the information is available to only a small group of people inside a company, for example marketing data or accounting information, can now be shared with the help of intranet (Three Approaches to Intranet Strategy, 2003, Accessed 12.01.2011, [http://www.digital-web.com/articles/three\\_approaches\\_to\\_intranet\\_strategy](http://www.digital-web.com/articles/three_approaches_to_intranet_strategy)).

Organizations that have experienced growth have trouble changing communication needs. When a small organization passes information to a

small target group it is simple, but if the business expands and therefore needs to pass information to others, then that is more complex. Companies like this normally develop rules and guidelines about passing information inside the company. These communication ways are described as communicating horizontally, upward or downward. (Boddy 2005, 533)

First, horizontal communication means communication between people that mainly work in similar hierarchical levels. This means that information flow between departments, and online based information sharing between people from similar levels is horizontal. Horizontal communication is more common in companies where the organization structure is less mechanistic and hierarchical but more organic structure where decisions are delegated from managers to lower levels. (Boddy 2005, 537)

Second, upward communication is a way of passing information that would allow different systems of employees to pass their ideas, concerns, and views to the management. It is only called upward because subordinates are in a lower position in a company than their supervisors and managers. In bigger companies where there might be a lot of hierarchical levels or many locations and departments it is crucial to create mechanisms that keep the information flowing, so that management does not make decisions based on assumptions or wrong information. (Boddy 2005, 535)

Third, downward communication means communication from management down to employees that are hierarchically in a lower position. This is information like new ways of doing things, meetings, training opportunities, or some changes in departments. This is a very good and very informative communication form that is mainly one way communication where the message is delivered, yet not answered in any other way than maybe following the news in action (Boddy 2005, 534)

In the following picture different styles of communication are shortly summarized and show the idea behind the terms upward, downward and horizontal communication.

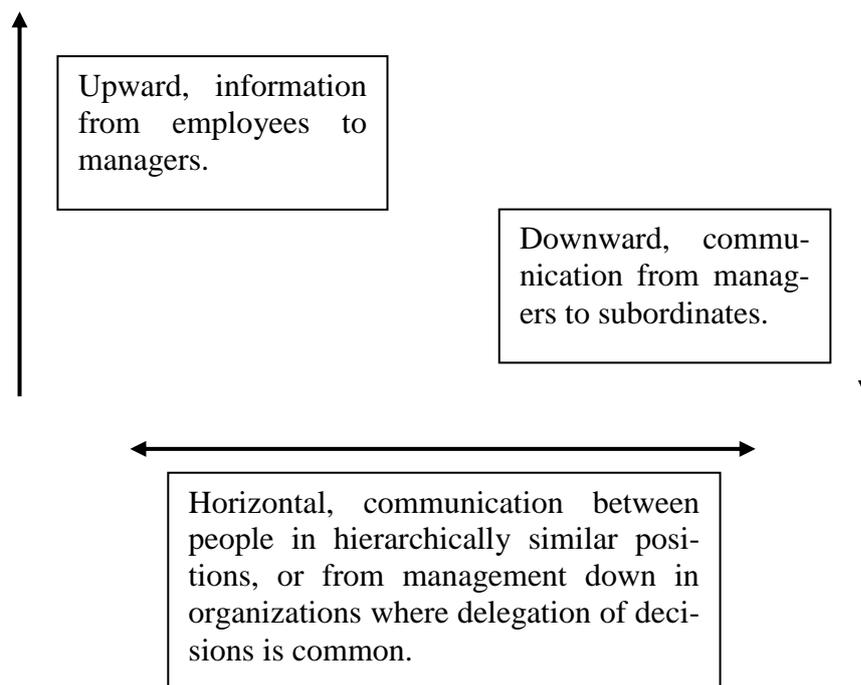


Figure 1 Upward, downward and horizontal communication explained as a figure

Portals are created to benefit both the organization as well as the users, which brings up a challenge of deciding what it is that the company needs as well as what the users need. Different types of information can be used to reach the employees, yet even before choosing the information type they should decide the portal type or ratio. The portal can concentrate on sharing information, supporting communication or task completion out of which all are necessary, but only one can be the main concentration. All of these issues need to be considered before or when creating an intranet that is going to benefit all of its users and the creators (Three Approaches to Intranet Strategy, 2003, Accessed 12.01.2011, [http://www.digital-web.com/articles/three\\_approaches\\_to\\_intranet\\_strategy](http://www.digital-web.com/articles/three_approaches_to_intranet_strategy)).

Quality is one example of sharing information about employers' wishes to the employees. It has to be understood by the entire organization and the management has to emphasize how everybody's work can affect others and communicate what quality means to the company – it is only by this that satisfying quality can be implemented. Communication is also very important in this case considering that the management has to be able to communicate its opinions about quality so that the employees can implement the requests. They need common understanding which takes us back to the issue of 2-staged communication where the first stage was delivering information by writing or talking, and the second was common understanding that takes place when both parties share the same view of what has been discussed before. (Boddy 2005, 523)

Having an impact and influencing others is a process where the target is to change attitudes, actions, or opinions or all of them – to do that it is crucial to get those people activated in thinking, criticizing or meditating. Influencing might not always encourage change but also encourage some current behavior, attitude, or opinion – for example the quality standards at a workplace. This is called reinforcing the current situation. (Lohtaja, Kaihovirta-Rapo 2007, 41-44)

For the portal to create some kind of results in employees behavior the process would then be to first inform them and then communicate to them so that they can get more motivated to repeat the needed or desired actions. For the image of the portal to be appealing to the users it has a lot to do with the appearance and readability of the text. It is quite hard to determine what kind of text is best for the readers. Of course the best way of finding out the users' preferences is to find ways for them to give feedback about the text and the web pages. Feedback has an impact on the information that is put online, how it is put online and to the page system. When users notice that their opinions are heard and put to use, it motivates them to use the pages more and more. The users are more likely to agree and follow the given instructions when they get the information from a source that they accept. (Lohtaja, Kaihovirta-Rapo 2007, 24)

When creating the information sharing page, the purpose of that page has to be defined and focused. Those purposes can be divided into informative, affective or entertaining purposes though they can also be slightly or more combined and mixed together. The purpose of the page shows in the messages put into the system. (Lohtaja, Kaihovirta-Rapo 2007, 41- 49)

### 2.2.1 Technical aspects

When considering the information that goes around in companies intranets get a lot of recognition because of their accuracy. Compared to the situation when before all information would only find itself lost on people's desks under masses of other information in paper form, now a day's information is shared online and updates show first whereas older information is available for long periods of times. When some of the information sharing processes can even be automated so that it is transmitted between departments automatically accuracy is even greater. Accuracy is greater because the message stays the same and does not get lost on its way. It reaches people on time or at least in most cases is available on time, and it is quicker to find information that people need. Faster processes mean also delivering information to greater groups of people faster and more efficiently. (Boddy 2005, 540)

Online messages are the easiest way for an organization to deliver messages about procedures, news, meetings, events or anything that should reach a large amount of people at once. This also secures that the same information reaches all employees in the same form. Yet this kind of intranet based information sharing can easily lead to information overload when people are receiving more information than they need. The greatest danger in this case might be that finding the information they need is so hard to find, or that all the information they have distracts them from what they are supposed to do as their actual work. (Boddy 2005, 530-531)

Intranet is a system that stores great amounts of information that might have been previously available to very few people or to only one person, and shares it to the entire work community. Companies many times find the portal a way to store all of the information of the company in one place, where it is then easy to find. Portals and intranets are becoming more common. Intranets are accepted to be a part of the employee's duties, because the employees check the ongoing issues of the company through the intranet. Companies can share information with their employees, in a faster, more cost effective way. It would be hard to find a company today that would not have any kind of intranet system for it's' employees (Three Approaches to Intranet Strategy, 2003, Accessed 12.01.2011, [http://www.digital-web.com/articles/three\\_approaches\\_to\\_intranet\\_strategy](http://www.digital-web.com/articles/three_approaches_to_intranet_strategy)).

Since companies have moved towards more and more efficient communication methods just like intranets. These enable them to share information never minding the location or time, because they can collect, store, and deliver data. Information sharing systems has developed a lot in the past years. Still existing right next to them are the informal systems of sharing

information like rumors and gossips that normally travel faster than the online based systems, which creates a challenge in credibility and acceptance. (Boddy 2005, 655)

Many companies put a lot of effort in using data more effectively and put attention on the transactions happening online and capturing some important details of those transactions so that they could put those things online and make it available to all employees. Intranets are the kind of databases where useful data is available for certain people, also the information is kept current. Most of the information available to different departments is consistent, even though the data might be stored and updated in different locations. (Boddy 2005, 661)

When a company has units or departments that have their own distinctive operations in different locations it might be more efficient for them to have their own information systems. These might be created as separate systems even though they are still linked together through being connected to the whole system of the entire company. This kind of page system is sometimes referred to as being a hierarchical page system where the company has a main page where from employees from other units can find their way to their own unit's pages, and access information that is necessary for them more simply. (Boddy 2005, 668)

The portal system that HAMK is using is an Oracle system, which means that the portal can have several layers of information in several forms yet bound together smoothly. This is one example of a hierarchical system. HAMK system is most likely to be a hierarchical system since it has units in several locations and several degree programmes in each unit. Oracle system requires the provider to have training so that the person updating the pages knows how to do what is needed. Normally the training is organized cooperatively by the local Oracle representatives and the employer (Oracle Software, 2010, Accessed 15.10.2010, <http://www.oracle.com/us/corporate/software-hardware-complete-069519.html>).

Companies can use electronic monitoring systems to follow the usage of their communication systems that they have offered to their employees. In the book *Management an Introduction*, an example of using monitoring systems in Universities in Netherlands was given. The example tells that the national institute uses a kind of monitoring system to check on the progress of students, and based on that decided whether to reduce their scholarships or not. (Boddy 2005, 677)

Companies that have many branch offices around the world can use monitoring systems to get information or to even control those offices more effectively. These systems offer information about attendance and performance more accurately since it is available anytime and recorded constantly. This makes the information reliable and available at all times. It is a management's decision whether they want to use those systems or not, and where others depend on them others would not want to start using them in the nearest future. (Boddy 2005, 678)

### 2.3 Usability framework

When talking about computer based communication it is easier to control misinterpreting messages, but when that is not done properly misunderstandings happen as much as when talking to someone directly. This is because when we are communicating face to face we infer meaning from the persons tone, words, facial expressions, and their reactions to our own words. When messages are delivered online this kind of instant feedback is out of our reach and has to be expressed clearly with words. (Boddy 2005, 524)

This is why a company has to create a common style of communication, which includes the intranet side as well as the offline side, where people who work together can finish the communication process and actually share and learn crucial matters. It is important to make sure that processes are thoroughly taken until the end and understanding is shared (Three Approaches to Intranet Strategy, 2003, Accessed 12.01.2011, [http://www.digital-web.com/articles/three\\_approaches\\_to\\_intranet\\_strategy](http://www.digital-web.com/articles/three_approaches_to_intranet_strategy)).

In the intranet the communication responsibility has been transmitted to the receiver, because as the information has been made available the users have to take the next step to use the information. The Intranet supports increasing offline communication, discussion and learning through the model of collaboration where the employees find needed information from the portal yet needing the interaction with their colleagues to actually communicate. This can even happen through forums that have been made available in the intranet system that the company uses (Three Approaches to Intranet Strategy, 2003, Accessed 12.01.2011, [http://www.digital-web.com/articles/three\\_approaches\\_to\\_intranet\\_strategy](http://www.digital-web.com/articles/three_approaches_to_intranet_strategy)).

Yet as communication was defined to be a process of two parts, first to have information delivered and the second part which is mutual understanding – online based communication still cannot ensure mutual understanding. For people of larger groups to achieve mutual understanding the people who share the information need to have interpersonal communication skills as much as they need to have skills to choose the correct communication technology. Interpersonal skills are needed because as mentioned people do interpret messages through their own previous experiences and therefore might result with misunderstandings. Before message is delivered interpersonal skills must be put to use to make sure that what is possible is also done with the text so that there is as little as possible misunderstandings as possible. (Boddy 2005, 540)

Just as in any communication the first impression determines how the situation proceeds. The listeners judge the presenters based on their professionalism and how friendly they find them. Friendliness here means the behavior but also how the presentation has been formed in a way that it would be reader friendly. This applies also in portal systems, where the

readability is part of the friendliness of the page, and where searching results and usability and other factors count as professionalism. (Lohtaja, Kaihovirta-Rapo 2007, 72)

Online text has to be carefully structured so that the message is understood correctly. Areas of concentration are first relevancy, it is essential to select the words and symbols used very carefully so that the messages keep their importance. Second the message should be kept simple, too much of too professional terms make the message difficult to comprehend unless the target group is known to be used to that kind of text. On the other hand accurate and descriptive words are better than loose explanation.

Third area is to structure the text so that it covers each topic one by one. Fourth point is repeating the important issues of that certain point at least twice to make the information stick to the readers mind. Fifth point is to stay focused on the message of the text, it should be kept clear and too many details should be avoided. (Boddy 2005, 525)

There is too much information for us to absorb at once that is why we continually need to develop a system of selective attention. Selective attention means that we only give our attention to a very small part of all the information that we face daily. The strength of the signal for example a headline affects our decision of what to read. In addition the reputation of the source of the information affects our interest in the information, because people interpret information sources into reliably, trustworthy and others. Sometimes our opinion about the source also changes how we read and understand the message. This is one reason why feedback is needed to make sure that messages are always interpreted correctly. (Boddy 2005, 527)

A method of dividing information into separate parts would be to continue the information with links. In this way readers can choose the reading experience based on what they need and following links. Links are measured in width and in length. Width means that from one link there should not be more than seven options to continue. Even having options up to seven is a huge amount of links only from one page. Basically width means the amount of links at one page. (Alasilta 1998, 106-107)

In the picture below the issue of width is presented. As we can see it means that from one page you can have several possibilities to continue on reading. All these separate links are related to the first page but not linked to each other, meaning that the user cannot get from a link to another, but can get to the main page and that way to other links.

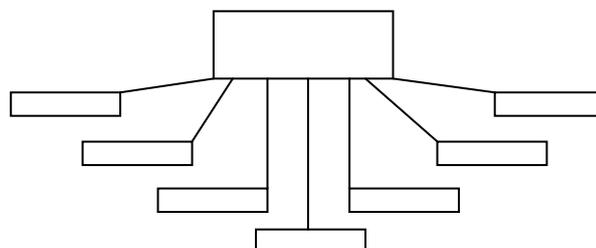


Figure 2 Example of width when considering links

Length on the other hand in links means that after opening a link you can open another link straight from that page. More than five links after another should be avoided. Length means the hierarchical amount of link levels. Several links after another might create a feeling of getting lost, as the path might be hard to follow backwards. In the picture below is a simple example of the length in linking. Length is presented as a stream of links following each other. (Alasilta 1998, 106-107)

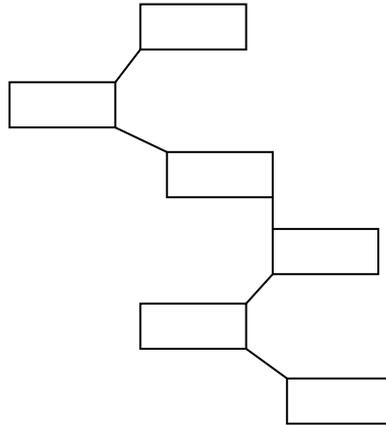


Figure 3 Example of length when talking about links

Often companies do not always have this kind of simple link models in usage. Instead they use a combined model where width and length go together in a sense that from the main page a stream of following links start and from each link one can open other links meaning that there is both length and width. (Alasilta 1998, 106-107)

In fact if not for intranet links the online text would not have many advantages when compared to the traditional paper form of texts. It allows readers to concentrate on their own interests, or what is most important. As the portal is common to HAMK Valkeakoski employees, an employee can choose the things he wants to read. It is frustrating and unnecessary for all employees to read everything put into the portal just to find what they need, when in fact most of the information would not even be necessary to them. By having links on a page that give the employees opportunities to choose what they want to read is the key to the effectiveness in portal communication. The links give the chance to use time effectively and avoid too much information.

When it comes to reading from the screen and reading text that is online, there are some challenges that have to be considered, these are covered in the book *Näin kirjoitat tietoverkkoon*. For example it has been discovered that reading from the computer screen is much slower than reading text that is in printed form. Readers might get disturbed and it becomes abrupt. This means that it is harder to read the whole text all at once, and this creates difficulties in recalling whatever has been covered in the text. Other smaller issues are that if a reader turns away from the text it is harder

for him to find the exact place again from the screen than from text. (Alasilta 1998, 44)

When considering the issue of reading from the computer screen we should consider other reasons why it is harder. Some reasons are that our learning system is still oriented to reading from paper, since that is the main way of learning from the first grades in school. This affects not only the actual process of the reading experience but also the attitude we have towards the process. If the person who is responsible for the layout of the portal does not take into consideration the difficulties that come with on-line text, the users are not be able to find anything that would encourage them to use the portal. ( Alasilta 1998, 43-45)

Another important point is that comprehending an entity is easier from a paper than from screen, since usually the whole text can fit the paper yet on screen the text might continue much longer and an entity might need us to follow links or roll ourselves on the page. Some technical reasons for difficulties in reading from the screen are for example that the screen has a constant shine or light that stresses the eyes. ( Alasilta 1998, 43-45)

We could concentrate on the text being understandable for its readers in a sense that it is interesting and easy to follow. The more technical and unnecessary words are used the less it keeps up interest. Some professional words are needed, extravagant usage of terms might make the text hard to follow. The writer has to consider the audience, because the target group might not be so in depth with the technical details of the matter at hand or might not be interested. (Alasilta 1998,141)

Text can be written in many forms, different samples for writing are a triangle and an hourglass. These forms present an easy way of demonstrating how information is situated in the text. For example in a triangle form most of the important information is in the beginning in the head line and in the first important chapters or lines, which makes this text form most profitable for those who need to go through text fast and need to read the important issues first. Those who have more time can then move forward in the text for further information and possibly something more detailed. In triangle form the important information are in the headline and in the first two paragraphs. (Lohtaja, Kaihovirta-Rapo 2007, pg. 42)

Triangle is a text writing guide that also supports the idea that the text should not get too long, a suitable length of a text would be something that can fit the screen so that there would not be any need to roll the page. Easy ways of making the text shorter is to use fewer words and using shorter words. Even replacing some text with pictures is a good method. Writers can also remove words that are unnecessary such as some adjectives. Long sentences might be a sign of the writer being too insecure and trying to hide that by using many words. ( Blundel, Ippolito 2008, 60-62)

In the following figure the triangle is diagrammatic. Also the way of information flow indicates that the simple and most important information should be placed at the beginning.

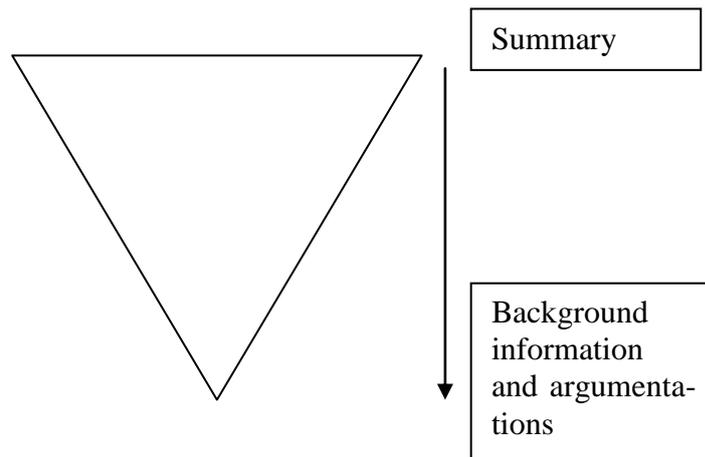


Figure 4 Putting the text into triangle format

All messages need to be thought through before being made available for the end reader. This is necessary because the message content might not be valuable for the diverse members of staff. The writer should use techniques to construct his message so that it is more readable. One of these techniques is mind mapping. Mind mapping helps the writer to share and structure his ideas before sharing them. ( Blundel, Ippolito 2008, 48)

Another simple way of keeping the text readable and understandable is to use the most simple and basic types of fonts, trying not to use too much of highlighting methods. When talking about how clear the text has been to the readers it is about how well the reader can recall and explain the valuable information of the whole text some time afterwards. ( Alasilta 1998, 32-38,141-142)

One idea mentioned is to summarize a long text into a picture, for example if the employees need to read about new studies or graduation issues, the information can easily be put into charts or diagrams that summarizes the issue and make it easier to remember. It is also an applicable method to consider, because looking at the picture takes less time than reading the same amount of information in a text form and is easy to memorize. (Blundel, Ippolito 2008, 31)

The writer can create an understandable text if he takes the time to go through his text and see if it relates to the practical side of the readers' life, when the text connects the reader to their actual work tasks or other normal routines it is easier for them to read it and recall it later. The writer creates a common ground between all employees and himself by using language that all the employees can relate to, this way he shows appreciation towards the readers. (Blundel, Ippolito 2008, 48)

### 2.4 Areas of focus

Communication inside companies means delivering information about various issues, it can be about internal issues like processes and materials or about the financial statements of the organisation. Intranets now-a-days have been found to be useful tools to store all the company's information in one place, so that details can be easily found and also saved to a certain place. A concern to companies has also been their transparency, and the intranet has proven out to be useful in this way too – since the information that used to be available to only a small group of people inside a company, for example marketing data or accounting information, can now be shared with the help of intranet to the entire company staff (Three Approaches to Intranet Strategy, 2003, Accessed 12.01.2011, [http://www.digital-web.com/articles/three\\_approaches\\_to\\_intranet\\_strategy](http://www.digital-web.com/articles/three_approaches_to_intranet_strategy)).

Online-based information sharing systems are communication tools as much as talking and meetings are, and can forward information effectively including cost efficiency as well. Yet computer based information has its own limits and has to be dealt with explicitly. Structured information cannot pass tacit information well enough because of its limitations in showing example or correcting mistakes while learning. (Boddy 2005, 521,522)

In the case of intranets the need for putting information online so that it is available to everybody comes from the users or from the providers, and based on that information the focus can be more easily passed to the end user. When the focus and the goals are clear the text is easier to read and it does not have any unnecessary information. The users find this kind of messages more interesting and more understandable. Having these positive feelings about the pages the users are motivated to use the pages more. (Lohtaja, Kaihovirta-Rapo 2007, 41)

Intranets are in fact a tool to enhance communication inside the company, and to avoid communication fail. This is because the people have access to a lot of information. This includes information that used to be available to only a small group of people, but no access to the creators of the information – which decreases the amount of gossip being transmitted by word of mouth and mistakes that come with that (Three Approaches to Intranet Strategy, 2003, Accessed 12.01.2011, [http://www.digital-web.com/articles/three\\_approaches\\_to\\_intranet\\_strategy](http://www.digital-web.com/articles/three_approaches_to_intranet_strategy)).

Every message has a purpose no matter if it is said or written. Messages can be divided into three main groups, those being influencing messages, informative messages, and entertaining messages. Normally the case is not that simple because messages cannot be of one type only, it is common for the message to be clearly of one main group but have influences from other groups as well. The writer is the one deciding which of the types the message should be, and if it should have some features from the other types. (Lohtaja, Kaihovirta-Rapo 2007, 41)

Information that should have an influence on the receivers has two main concentration points, first to create a sense or feeling of need of a change in the receivers, and second to influence with a feeling of responsibility.

The first point, creating a need for change is important because in normal situations people like slow change and are not willing towards faster changes. Second the feeling of responsibility; responsibility is easily carried when the effect of the message is based on sensible and ethical reasons. The target audience should never be tricked with false or incomplete background information since it will backfire in the future. (Lohtaja, Kaihovirta-Rapo 2007, 42)

Informative messages are a kind of communication, yet it is one of the most needed forms of communication in companies. The main purpose is to pass on information, and even though it usually creates conversation it is not its original focus point. Normally the information that is passed on is some kind of piece of news or the personnel might be informed about negotiations, meetings, or events. (Lohtaja, Kaihovirta-Rapo 2007, 45-46)

Informative text is provided from the management of the company in situations where they find it unnecessary to have the possibility for discussion or asking questions right at the same time when the information is shared. In case a company's management wants to give the personnel a chance to ask and converse, it organizes a meeting to reveal the information or support discussion online in forums. (Lohtaja, Kaihovirta-Rapo 2007, 47)

The key to entertaining messages is to create something that is meaningful and unique to the readers. Entertaining content is not created mainly by humor but by the common experience that the provider and the receiver share, so it is good to have an extra notion on the points that join the readers as a group. Entertaining information normally has a peak point which is best when presented clearly by emphasizing it. At the end of the day work life messages are supposed to only have an influence or to inform because of the nature of the work. Yet a good text can have an entertaining side to it even if it is about a serious issue. (Lohtaja, Kaihovirta-Rapo 2007, 48-49)

When the messages online can be of three different types, the focus of the intranet can also be of three different kinds. It is important to connect these two with the upward, downward and horizontal communication types.

As mentioned the intranet can have three different focuses that are managing knowledge, communication and task completion. These three are important areas of concentration and needed in all portals whether it is a small or a big company (Three Approaches to Intranet Strategy, 2003, Accessed 12.01.2011, [http://www.digital-web.com/articles/three\\_approaches\\_to\\_intranet\\_strategy](http://www.digital-web.com/articles/three_approaches_to_intranet_strategy)).

Knowledge Management type of portal is created as a huge storage for all the information that the company has. It includes accounting information as well as human resources news. It is a portal where anyone from the company can go to in case they were looking for some information that used to be available only to a small group of people inside the company. All information is saved into this portal system and all the information is

available. Transmitting the information to the right people is not the main concentration of this type of portal, but to make the information available.

The benefits of this kind of system are multiple; first it reduces the amount of confusion among employees because they can access information they need. Second it increases productivity and faster decision making because the chance of wrong information decreases significantly. Third and last is the benefit of this system preparing the organization for example for personnel changes with the accurate, up-to-date information that is available to all (Three Approaches to Intranet Strategy, 2003, Accessed 12.01.2011, [http://www.digital-web.com/articles/three\\_approaches\\_to\\_intranet\\_strategy](http://www.digital-web.com/articles/three_approaches_to_intranet_strategy)).

### Concentration: Information Management

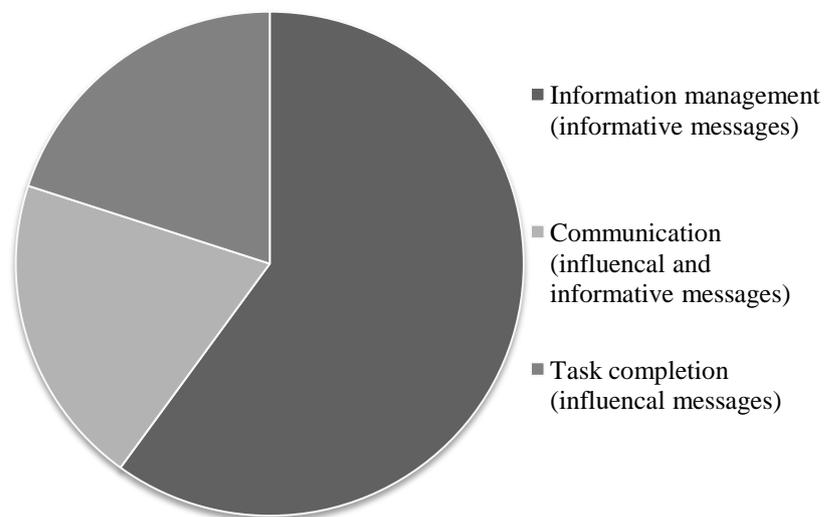


Figure 5 This figure shows the estimated proportions that each type has when the concentration is Information management (The estimations are not based on any scientific data).

A communication styled portal is thought to be the best kind of portal, when in fact it cannot work without a lot of information available. This style encourages the online and offline communication by offering chances to share and learn from others. This type of portal is not about the management of information, but encourages communication in all its forms and tries to support it by offline communication methods as well as online methods. Especially when distant locations are making face-to-face communication too difficult to organize, such as project team pages and internal announcements are established (Three Approaches to Intranet Strategy, 2003, Accessed 12.01.2011, [http://www.digital-web.com/articles/three\\_approaches\\_to\\_intranet\\_strategy](http://www.digital-web.com/articles/three_approaches_to_intranet_strategy)).

The third approach is the task completion; whereby the main concentration is towards actions where as the previous ones have only been about shar-

ing information or communication. This approach improves the daily processes of the employees and save their time by offering chances like booking classrooms online. Usually this type of portal saves money since it saves the employees' time and gives them more time to do their own jobs and concentrate on their tasks. This portal type tends to have a feature where the work done is automatically saved, when talking about for example converting paper forms into web-based forms that can easily be stored in the computer system – this makes the employees happier at what they do and increases productivity (Three Approaches to Intranet Strategy, 2003, Accessed 12.01.2011, [http://www.digital-web.com/articles/three\\_approaches\\_to\\_intranet\\_strategy](http://www.digital-web.com/articles/three_approaches_to_intranet_strategy)).

All in all the portal needs to have a clear focus of one of the above, as much as it needs a dedicated writer and organizer that is focused on the creating messages that the end users can benefit from. When the staff members benefit from the information available the benefits are transmitted to the company as well for example through cost efficiency and increased productivity.

As a conclusion about the portal it can be said that it is a common information sharing page for all HAMK employees. It is created to shorten the process of normal activities that the employees have to do all the time.

Online based text is very accurate as it is possible to send the same information to a group of people and they all receive it without any changes in the content. A negative point to this kind of information sharing is that sometimes employees get overloaded with too much information many of which might not be necessary to them. Links are used to divide information into pieces so that each user can individually choose to use based on his own needs. (Boddy 2005, 530-531)

Another positive factor to this information sharing way is that it makes information available to everyone in the company, including information that has been out of the reach for many employees before. It also saves cost since a lot of printing is avoided, as well as transmitting the information is faster and can also be done completely online (Three Approaches to Intranet Strategy, 2003, Accessed 12.01.2011, [http://www.digital-web.com/articles/three\\_approaches\\_to\\_intranet\\_strategy](http://www.digital-web.com/articles/three_approaches_to_intranet_strategy)).

Other way of motivating readers is to create the information sharing base with the users kept in mind. The pages that are used need to look motivating, which means that the appearance of the page is important. One very crucial issue is to form the information so that it attracts attention and holds it. This can be secured by using understandable text. Understandable text means that the simplest fonts are used and that the text has some points where it reflects to the work or life of the end users. ( Alasilta 1998, 32-38,141-142)

Content of the page is crucial and it needs to be decided before the page is used by the employees. The focus can be on sharing information, encouraging communication, or creating possibilities for staff members to com-

plete some of their tasks through the portal. Each focus relates to a type of message, such as informative messages that normally appear in downward communication style relate to the information management focus. Entertaining messages can be related to all focuses and communication styles as it can be described as a bonus to the readers since it makes text more interesting to read. Communication focus in intranets is common in companies where horizontal communication style is normal; all types of message types are met in this type of intranets.

Having achieved a full understanding of what is a beneficial portal to both employees and employers, issues affecting the portal being beneficial, and the importance of the portal it is now time to move towards a more practical side of this study. The practical side concentrates on answering yet the following questions of the importance of the portal to HAMK Valkeakoski staff members, and the differences between the optimal portal and the current challenges with the portal that is being used at the moment.

### 3 EMPIRICAL STUDY

#### 3.1 HAMK introduction

HAMK is a polytechnic university that has several degree programs for students all over the world. HAMK has units in Lepaa, Hämeenlinna, Riihimäki, Valkeakoski, Evo, Forssa, Hyvinkää and Mustiala. HAMK offers education in Finnish as well as in English. The head of HAMK units is the unit in Hämeenlinna, the main governing body of HAMK is located there, and even though the units have their own heads Hämeenlinna still has a strong word in what the units can have or do. (HAMK locations 2011, [http://portal.hamk.fi/portal/page/portal/HAMK/Organisaatiojatoimipaikat/Toimipaikat\\_kartat](http://portal.hamk.fi/portal/page/portal/HAMK/Organisaatiojatoimipaikat/Toimipaikat_kartat), Accessed 2.5.2011)

HAMK Valkeakoski has three degree programs, International Business, Automation Engineering, and Industrial Management. Automation Engineering and Industrial Management were taught in Finnish only, but since 2008 they have started to conduct these programs in English. (HAMK degree programmes 2011, [http://portal.hamk.fi/portal/page/portal/HAMK/Organisaatiojatoimipaikat/Toimipaikat\\_kartat/Valkeakoski](http://portal.hamk.fi/portal/page/portal/HAMK/Organisaatiojatoimipaikat/Toimipaikat_kartat/Valkeakoski), Accessed 2.5.2011)

Automation Engineering is a field of study that has to do with everything modern people use in their everyday lives. Automation can be about simple things, like the doors of a shopping centre that open by themselves or it can be something bigger such as the energy flow of a building in heating systems. To become an automation engineer takes a student four years. (HAMK automation engineering 2011, [http://portal.hamk.fi/portal/page/portal/HAMK/koulutus/International\\_DP1/AutomationEngineering](http://portal.hamk.fi/portal/page/portal/HAMK/koulutus/International_DP1/AutomationEngineering), Accessed 2.5.2011)

Industrial Management is about connecting business and technical engineering. Industrial Management tries to focus on the industry as a process as well as a business to have a wider understanding of the entire process of managing a business, meaning that the students do not only understand the marketing and investment side but also the processes of production. Duration of Industrial Management studies are as planned four years. (HAMK industrial management 2011, [http://portal.hamk.fi/portal/page/portal/HAMK/koulutus/International\\_DP1/Industrial\\_Management](http://portal.hamk.fi/portal/page/portal/HAMK/koulutus/International_DP1/Industrial_Management), Accessed 2.5.2011)

International Business concentrates on the marketing and management issues of businesses with a small glimpse of production processes. Students can choose to specialise in marketing or management and studies normally last three and a half years. Students graduate with skills to face several challenges in business life, and also with the skills needed to start their own businesses. (HAMK international business 2011, [http://portal.hamk.fi/portal/page/portal/HAMK/koulutus/International\\_DP1/International\\_Business](http://portal.hamk.fi/portal/page/portal/HAMK/koulutus/International_DP1/International_Business), Accessed 2.5.2011)

Outside degree programs HAMK Valkeakoski is also a home to Auto-maint, which is a research and development centre working for international businesses and local SME's especially for marketing purposes. (HAMK automaint 2011, [http://portal.hamk.fi/portal/page/portal/HAMK/Tutkimus\\_ja\\_kehitys/Osaa\\_miskeskittymat/AutoMaint](http://portal.hamk.fi/portal/page/portal/HAMK/Tutkimus_ja_kehitys/Osaa_miskeskittymat/AutoMaint), Accessed 2.5.2011)

The head of HAMK Valkeakoski unit is Matti Väänänen. HAMK Valkeakoski is a very international unit with students from at least 20 different countries studying full time or coming for exchange. Not only the students are international but HAMK Valkeakoski has teachers from various countries with international experience. (HAMK organization 2011, <http://portal.hamk.fi/portal/page/portal/HAMK/Organisaatiojatoimipaikat/Organisaatio>, Accessed 2.5.2011; HAMK international activities 2011, [http://portal.hamk.fi/portal/page/portal/HAMK/In\\_English/About\\_HAMK/International\\_activities](http://portal.hamk.fi/portal/page/portal/HAMK/In_English/About_HAMK/International_activities), Accessed 2.5.2011)

### 3.2 HAMK Valkeakoski employee portal

The portal is a common place where all HAMK employees from all HAMK units have rights to log into and access information. Yet not all users can put information to the portal. HAMK Valkeakoski, as well as the other units, can further go on to their unit's own page, which doesn't require any repetition of password or username.

The portal is an online page that can be used in any location. It is updated mainly by appointed people specific to their unit. This means that each unit has their own special group of people who can change, edit and add content into the portal.

In HAMK Valkeakoski five people have had training to learn how to use the portal in a sense that they can add information there and edit or change the content. Yet at the moment only two out of those five people are still working for HAMK Valkeakoski. This means that they only have two people who have the knowhow to do all those editing and updating tasks that are needed.

The portal is mainly available in both English and in Finnish, but editing the portal means that you have to do both languages separately. Some pages are still available only in Finnish.

The HAMK portal is an oracle software, which is a software system used by many companies from various fields, for example the Finnish company Metso uses Oracle as their intranet system.

Oracle is maybe the most widely known business hardware and software provider, recognized by its over 370 000 customers. It has customers of all sized businesses from 145 countries. Oracle has developed its systems and has effective software that creates a system that binds pieces together so that they work together as a complete one entity. Oracle started already 30 years ago and can offer a wide range of business applications software. It is the market leader in business applications software (<http://www.oracle.com/us/corporate/software-hardware-complete-069519.html>, last accessed 15.10.2010)

### 3.3 Data collection

Before creating a survey to find out the usefulness of the portal to the employees of HAMK Valkeakoski some interviews were made to find out what would be the focus of the survey. The interviews were made with people who are responsible of the portal in Valkeakoski unit, or in the head unit of Hämeenlinna.

The interviews were made based on some guidelines that were taken from the topics of the questionnaire as well as the objectives of the thesis. In the book *Doing Your Research Project*, was mentioned some reasons to avoid extremely unstructured or structured interviews: “Most interviews carried out in the main data-collecting stage of the research will come somewhere between the completely structured and the completely unstructured point on the continuum. Freedom to allow the respondent to talk about what is of central significance to him or her rather than to the interviewer is clearly important, but some loose structure to ensure all topics which are considered crucial to the study are covered does eliminate some of the problems of entirely unstructured interviews”. (Bell 1997, 94)

The interviews were helpful in reference to determining the questions in the online survey.

For example a HAMK Valkeakoski employee defined the focus of the portal with the words:

*“Valkeakoski tries to keep the portal focused on work related issues”*

(Employee 1, HAMK, 2011)

*“The main focus has been to inform and to avoid e-mail traffic.”*

(Employee 2, HAMK, 2011)

With this kind of simple information it was possible to determine how vast the survey focus should be. The interviewees were also expressing their personal opinions in the interviews, such as:

*“It is hard to find any information unless you are very certain of where to find it, because the information might be buried somewhere so deep in the page that it is hard to get there.”*

(Employee 1, HAMK, 2011)

*“The hierarchical system makes it hard to find things in a logical way, sometimes people just wonder about and get lost in the page.”*

(Employee 2, HAMK, 2011)

Based on the personal opinions of the interviewees it was possible to add issues to the survey plan that might have otherwise been left out. Their personal opinions clearly portrayed what was important to them and with that it was necessary to assume that these issues might be of interest to other employees as well and therefore needed an insight.

The online survey was made with the help of a survey service online called Webropol, that offers companies and students to plan surveys, send them and finally collect the information through their online services. Webropol has been classified as an AAA company by Dun & Bradstreet for many years now. It has units in addition to Finland, also in Sweden, Germany, United Kingdom, Singapore and Indonesia. Worldwide Webropol has approximately 40 000 users (Webropol survey service 2011, Accessed 10.04.2011, <http://w3.webropol.com/finland/yritys/tietoa-yrityksesta>).

After the thesis was planned and organized with the help of Webropol it was sent to the employees of HAMK Valkeakoski via email. The survey was named HAMK Valkeakoski employees' portal's usefulness survey. The name of the survey was to show the reader what the study is all about. (Bell 1997, 20)

The information collection time was two and a half weeks, after which the survey had gotten 35 answers which was 53 percent of the respondents. With this percentage the final part of the data collection and analysing could start.

### 3.4 Survey analysis

The questions in the survey were divided into three different groups based on the objective they had. The three different groups were:

1. Basic issues about using the portal, such as how often the person uses the portal.
2. What does the user think about the current state of the portal's usability?
3. What does the respondent wish to get from the portal in the future?

The questions that belong to the first group that was about the basic issues of the usage of the portal were trying to find out how much the respondents answers have credibility – for example the question number one was asking how often the staff members use the HAMK Valkeakoski unit's portal pages.

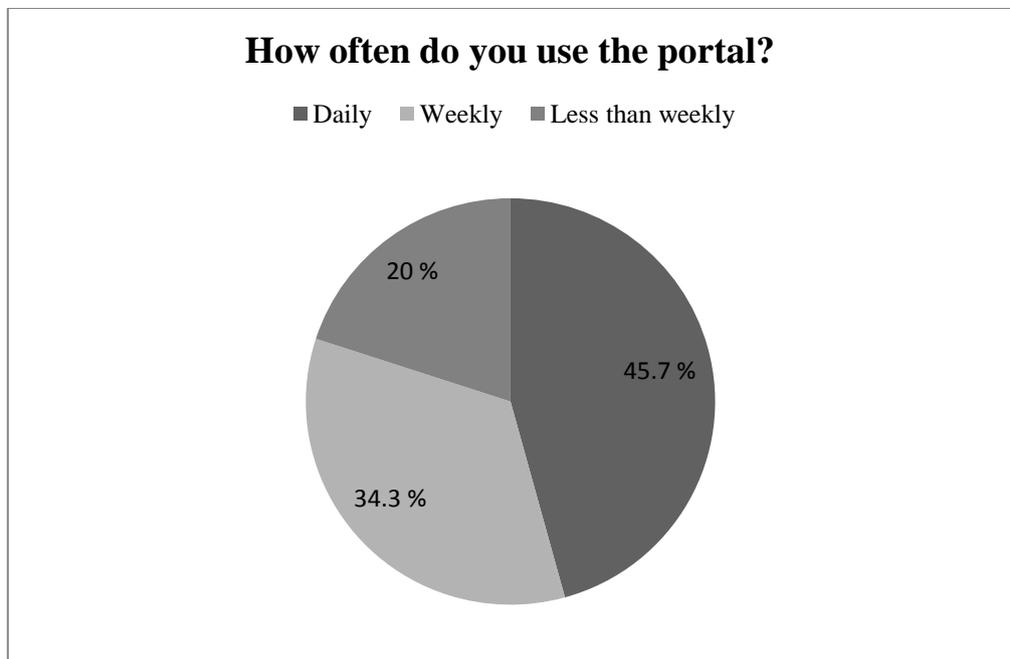


Figure 6 *How often do you use the portal*, the answers to that question were to show how much credibility is on the survey and on the answers.

Moving on to analysing the questions they are portrayed in the same order that they were presented to the respondents on the Webropol service.

On the question of how often do you use the portal? 45.7 percent of the respondents noted that they do use the portal on a daily basis, while 34.3 percent said they use the portal weekly and 20percent of the respondents use the portal less than weekly. This means a great majority of the HAMK's workforce get to use the portal on a daily basis, a lot of them

also get to use the portal on a weekly basis, while a sizeable 20 percent of them get to use HAMK's portal less than weekly. The figures indicate that the portal has been established as a daily working tool to most of the HAMK employees.

The next question on which of the following best suits the respondent's situation, for the option that I use the portal mainly to search for information, 77 percent choose this option. 20 percent said they use the portal to take care of small work related tasks, and 2.9 percent said they use the portal to communicate with their colleagues. These results mean that a great deal of the workforce in HAMK Valkeakoski use the portal to search information. 20 percent of the employees choose to use the portal for mainly work related tasks. The last percentage shows that very few of the respondents use the portal to communicate with other employees which might be a result of the portal not offering a sufficient way for that.

The following chart presents the division between the answers when asked to choose the option that best suits the respondents' situation. As it was said earlier and what can be pointed out from the figures, the chart clearly shows that the portal is mainly an information search tool for most of the staff member

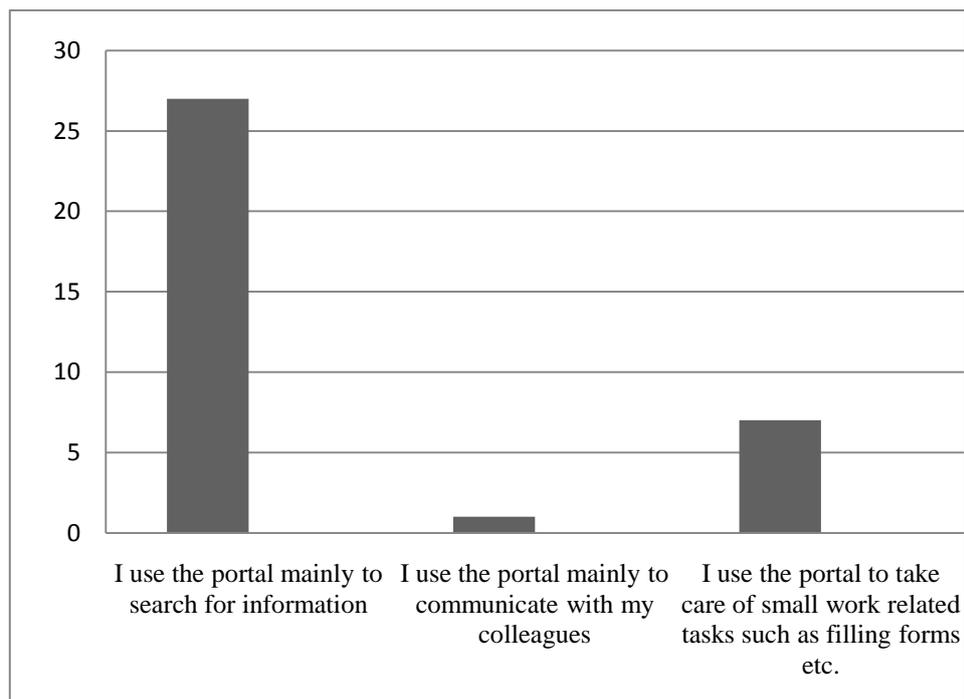


Figure 7 The pole chart above presents the division between different answers on the question of which of the options suits the respondents' situation the best

On the next question on which of the following statements do you mostly agree with, The search engine does not find anything got 40 percent of the respondents while 51.4 percent noted that information is behind several links and finding it is time consuming, only 8.6 percent of the responders noted that searching for information is not a problem at all.

Analyzing this question, it shows that the search engine even though it works, needs improvements. A huge 40 percent reflected that they were not able to find what they searched for on the portal. The majority being 51.4 percent reflected that their search materials are hidden behind several links, thus making it difficult to find what they searched. Only 8.6 percent stated that the search machine in HAMK's portal worked on a satisfactory level considering their usage.

On the question of how many of the responders use the search engines in the portal, 68.6 of the responders said yes, while 31.4 percent of the responders noted that they did not. This would mean that there is still room to encourage HAMK employees to use the search function more. The survey shows that the portal is mainly used to look for information. As the main usage has to do with information, it is crucial to create a useful search tool for the people to be able to find the facts that they need in a suitable time.

The following question on the search function results was to define the reasons behind the answers to the previous question of whether the respondents use the search engine or not. The next question continued from the question if the respondents use the search engine as following, if yes do you think the search function results are, excellent, good, satisfactory or poor? None of the responders thought that the results were excellent, 7.7 percent thought the portal was good, 30.8 percent of the respondents said the portal was satisfactory, 61.5 of the respondents said the portal performs poorly. With this information we can be sure that there is a sizeable improvement to be done, in making the results in the portal better for HAMK's staffs. Also what can be seen here is the relation between these two questions showing that as 68.6 percent of the respondents actually use the search function, the second question shows that almost the same percentage 61.5 found the search function results of poor quality. This relation indicates the need of improvement in the search function process. The following picture presents the how clearly the usage of the search engine and the results being evaluated as poor are in connection to each other.

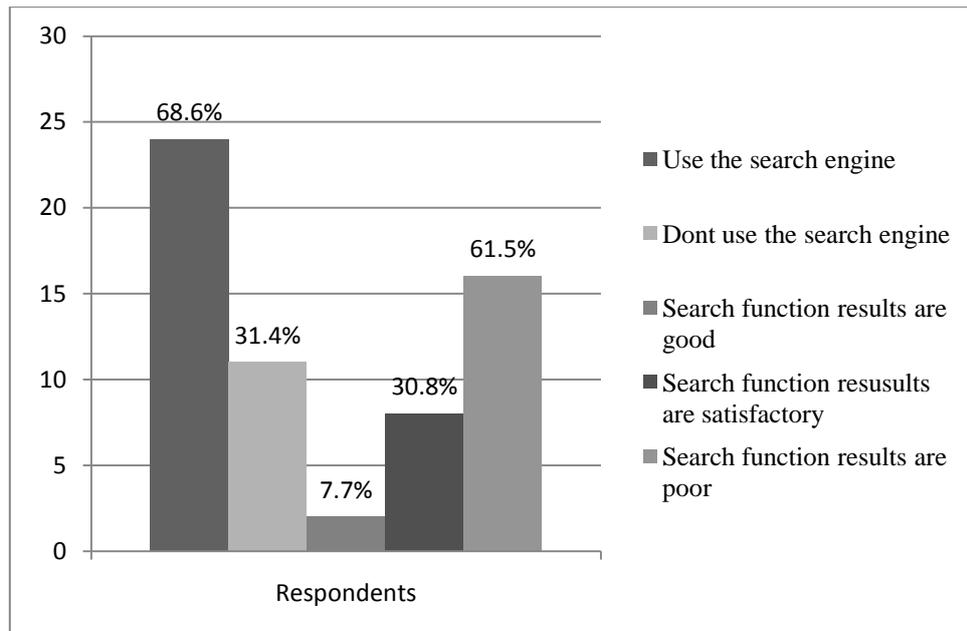


Figure 8 The chart shows the relation between the numbers of respondents using the search function and the respondents finding the search results poor

The next question was how would you rate the information search process from the portal when not using the search function? The respondents had several options to choose from. Only 2.9 percent of the respondents said it was not hard to find information which indicates that these people might have had some training to use the portal as some staff members have gotten training on the portal usage issues. A share of 45.7 percent noted that sometimes it was hard to find information, 40 percent of the respondents said it was hard to find information, finally 11.4 percent of the respondents said it was very hard to find information. On this self explanatory question, HAMK Valkeakoski does need to improve the way its members can search for information on the portal, and thus improving the process of searching for information where the suggestion from a HAMK employee interviewed for this thesis might be found useful later on as he noted:

*“There should be more training on how to use the portal and how to update it. When people would have more information on how to use this service they could do so much more with it.”*

(Employee 1, HAMK, 2011)

Positive side to the question here is that a minority finds the information search on their own very hard whereas most of the respondents found it hard, which indicates that the respondents in general are not extremely negative of the information search issue. Improvements are needed as it was clearly noticeable from the results yet the situation is not close to hopeless.

On the question of which of the following methods do you find most useful as an information sharing module? A share of 17.1 percent said daily

meetings would be the best way to share information, 20 percent of respondents said the portal pages would be their choice for information sharing, 60 percent said that sending emails was the most useful way of sharing information, and only 2.9 percent said phone calls would be the most useful way. These numbers point out that most of the staff members find emails much more useful information sharing way than the portal, this indicates a severe need of improvement. The following chart shows how much support each question got.

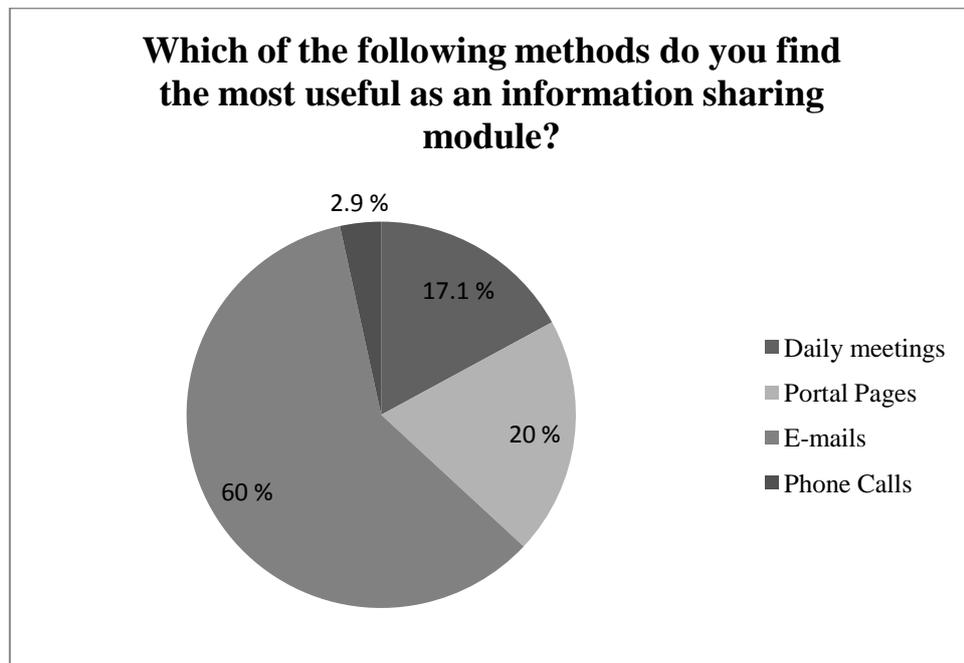


Figure 9 The chart above shows the division between questions in percentages

Moving on with the survey the next three questions had their focus on the possible problems that people might have had with the portal. The next question was “Do you have any problems using the portal?” A share of 22.9 percent said they rarely have problems with the portal, 57.1 percent noted that they have had problems sometimes, 20 percent of the respondents said that they have had problems most of the times. In looking at this information we can be able to ascertain that some improvements were needed since the majority of the respondents had had problems at least sometimes.

To get a better understanding of what the problems might have been the next question asked the respondents to describe some of the problems they have faced. The respondents described their issues as following:

*“The information that I try to find is rather poorly organized, so in that way really hard to find. The search engine doesn't find documents that I try find.”*

*“The biggest problem is that staff does not use and utilize the intranet as information spreading forum. Valkeakoski intranet pages are almost dead - new information after year 2008 - 2010 has been put there hardly at all.”*

*“Information is behind so many "links" that it's difficult to find.”*

To summarize the rest of the responses, other issues mentioned were the language since some of the information is only in Finnish and to the English speakers it is not available. Others mentioned that it is hard to figure out the logic in the pages so that one could logically conclude where to find certain information.

The following question gave the respondents the possibility to suggest how to improve the situation with the portal pages, and the following statements were given:

*“I think the portal has been built up over time and has become muddled. I think it needs a complete revamp/rebuild like Oscar.”*

*“To make the internal pages simpler.”*

*“Categorize and simplify the main headings. People should know where they are walking.”*

*“Either make the portal better by optimizing the code or then change the portal application to a better one.”*

What we can conclude from the section that focused on the problems is that the amount of people who have problems at least sometimes is a great majority of about 50 percent, these people have problems mainly with finding information where as some have issues with the language and the logic of the pages.

These respondents would want the situation to improve and their suggestions for that are focused on the portal's structure and content. Some wish the entire program to be changed where as some think it is enough to rebuild the information inside the portal.

The respondents were told to rate the following statements from 1 to 5, 1 being I strongly disagree and 5 being I strongly agree. On the statement of if the information in the portal is useful? Out of the respondents 21.2 percent of the respondents choose I strongly agree, while 39.4 percent of the responders choose I agree. A percentage of 27.3 of the respondents gave an average 3, of not really having any opinion about the matter, while 9.1 of them gave the information available in the portal is useful -statement a 2 meaning they disagree with the statement. A minority of 3 percent gave a 1 to this statement meaning I strongly disagree. This information presents that the majority of respondents find the information in the portal useful as most respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

The respondents were asked to rate the availability of accurate information on the portal, with 1 being the respondents strongly disagree while 5 meaning that the respondents strongly agree. A percentage of 12.1 of the

respondents choose that they strongly disagree, while 24.2 percent of the respondents choose that they disagree. The percentage of the respondents that choose 3 was 27.3 percent, while 30.3 percent of them picked that they agree, and only 6.1 percent picked 5 meaning that they strongly agree. This would suggest that there needs to be more accurate information on the portal indicating that there is a need for more frequent updates.

When asked if the information was hard to find, in which 1 would mean that the strongly disagree and 5 would mean that they strongly agree, 5.7 of the respondents chose 1 as in strongly disagree. The same percentage selected 2 as it means agree, while 20 percent of those questioned selected 3 which basically means that they did not have any opinion about the issue. The percentage of those that choose 4 as they agree was 37.1, while 31.4 percent strongly agreed that finding information on the portal was hard, and thus selected the number 5.

This would suggest that it is difficult to find information from the portal and the problems that staff members have are again pointed towards the information search and find. The process of using the search engine seems to be frustrating based on the employee answers as it is not an effective tool for finding the needed information from the pages. The employees can choose from two options that are looking for the information on the pages on their own, which could be called random search as trying to find the correct page where the information is, or they can try to use the search function. Both methods have so far let the users down and it is the main reason why the usage is dropping. The following figure shows the division between the answers, on the left it shows the amount of respondents where as on the top of the pole it shows the percentage.

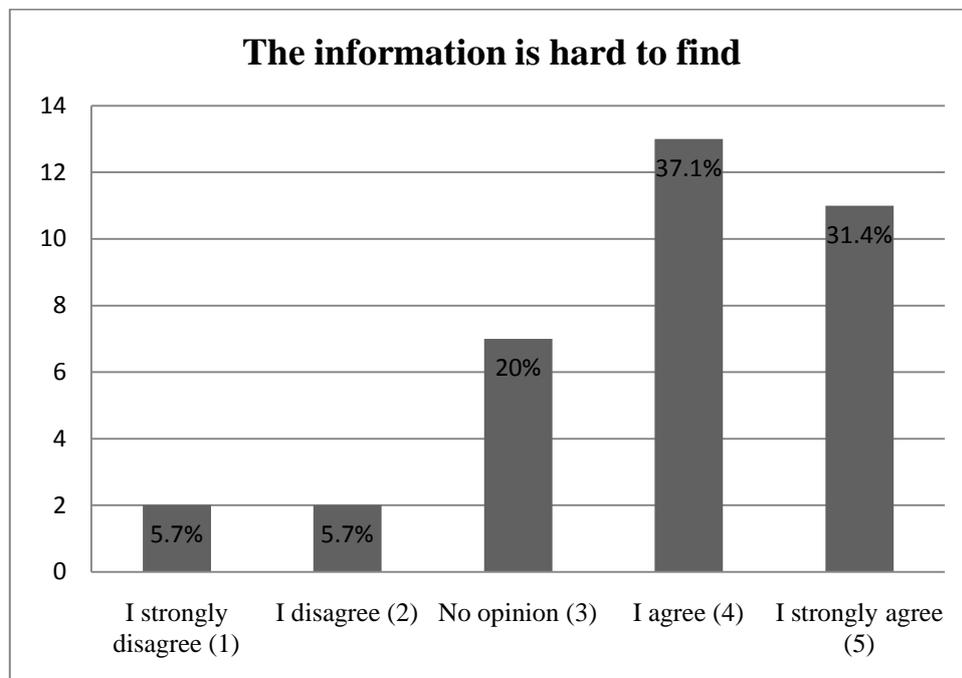


Figure 10 This chart shows the division of responses when asked if the information is hard to find

On the question if the information they found in the portal was not useful, in which 1 would represent strongly disagreeing, while 5 would be strongly agreeing, 15.2 percent strongly disagreed by choosing 1 indicating that they think that the information is after all useful. The percentage that chose 2 was 39.4 which also give some positive feedback about the information being somewhat useful from their point of view. Those that choose 3 as in not having feelings toward any direction were 33.3 percent. A share of 9.1 percent of the respondents choose 4 meaning that they find the information on the portal somewhat not useful, while only 3 percent choose 5 indicating that they find the information in the portal not useful. This would show a majority of people who at least think that the information is useful to them. The figure below shows how the division between opinions was not great, as most respondents disagreed with the statement of the information not being useful, meaning that most of the people find the information on the portal useful.

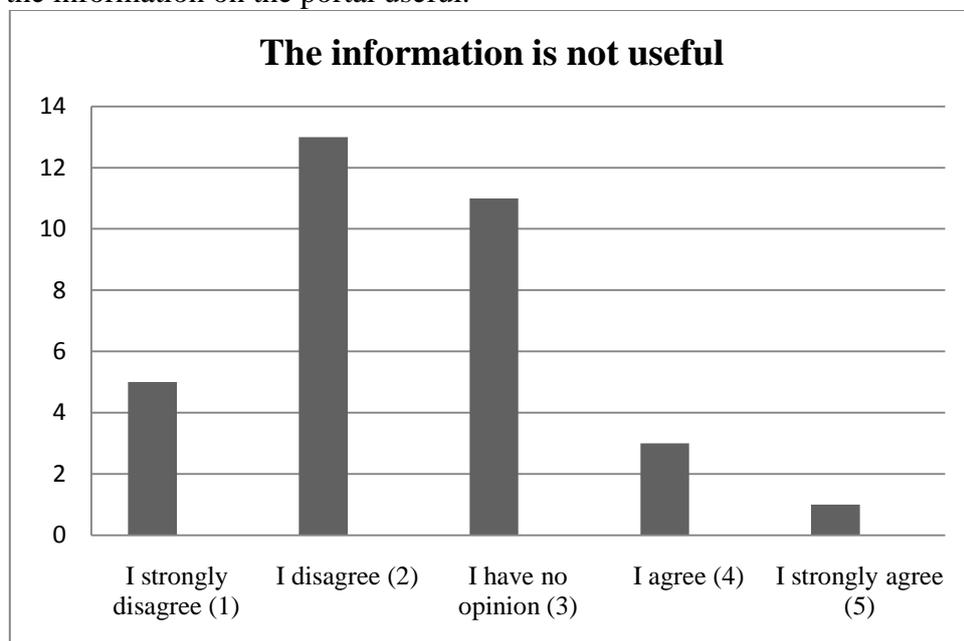


Figure 11 This chart above shows how most of the respondents do not agree with the statement claiming that the information is not useful

When asked if they respondents thought the portal was as useful as it can be. In which 1 would mean that they strongly disagree and 5 would mean that they strongly agree, 31.3 percent strongly disagreed by choosing 1. The same percent choose 2 as in they disagree that the portal is as useful as it can get. The percentage that selected 3 stood at 28.1 while 6.3 percentage selected 4 as in they agree and only 3.1 percent strongly agreed and thus choose 5. This would suggest that most of the respondents find the portal having more possibilities to be useful than what it is using now. Most of the respondents' answers indicate that they think that there is a great possibility to improve the portal as it is not yet as good as it could be.

When asked to agree or disagree about the statement if they thought the information in the HAMK Valkeakoski's portal should be more accurate, in which 1 would mean that they strongly disagree and 5 would mean that they strongly agree, a minority of 0 percent strongly disagreed, and 15.6 percent of the respondents choose 2 as in to disagree with the statement. While 37.5 of the respondents choose 3 as in having no opinion at all, the percentage of respondents that choose 4 is 31.3 percent while 15.6 percent strongly agreed and thus choose 5. These responses suggest that most of the respondents find it necessary to improve the accuracy of the portal by agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement if the information available in the portal should be more accurate.

When the respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the statement I think the portal should offer communication options like blogs, forums, and questions and answers section, the majority of 38.7 percent answered 3 as in having no opinion about it. A percentage of 19.4 agreed with the statement and 16.1 percent strongly agreed with the statement. Only 6.5 percent strongly disagreed with the statement and 19.4 disagreed thus choosing the option 2. This gives an idea of the respondents not seeing it very necessary to have a communication sharing function in the portal, yet the main opinion was more positive towards an idea of having communication possibilities than negative.

When asked if the respondents agreed or disagreed with whether the portal should ease their daily activities such as filling forms and booking class rooms, in which 1 means they strongly disagree and 5 means they strongly agree, majority of 45.5 percent strongly agreed. A minority of 3 percent choose the option of strongly disagreeing and no one choose 2 as in to disagree. Option 3 of not disagreeing neither agreeing got 18.2 percentage of the responses and 33.3 percent agreed with the statement. This indicates that most staff members would want to have a possibility to ease their work load through portal.

Finally the respondents were asked to choose if the portal has enough functions at the moment, 9.7 percentage of respondents strongly disagreed and 3.2 percentages strongly agreed. The majority of responses therefore fell in the middle and 51.6 percentages had no opinion in this issue. Yet 29 percent disagreed with the statement where as 6.5 percentage agreed with the statement. These figures indicate that the majority of those with an opinion to the matter mainly think that the portal doesn't have enough functions at the moment. This means that improvements in this area are needed to look for a way to make the daily responsibilities easier for the staff members of HAMK Valkeakoski.

The statements above that the respondents got to evaluate shows that the respondents find it possible for the portal to improve and that out of the given options they do not find the portal having enough functions – yet the respondents do not think it is necessary to add any communication possibilities where as some other functions to ease their workloads through the portal would be welcome.

When asked to choose which statement the respondents agreed to most. In which 1 would mean that they strongly disagree and 5 would mean that they strongly agree. A share of 23.5 percent noted that the portal should share information only about work related matters, while 14.7 percent picked the choice that the portal should concentrate on work issues and have a more relax and entertaining side to it. A percentage of 11.8 said that the information on the portal was okay as it is at the moment, while 50 percent of those asked agreed that it was hard to find information on the portal if you did not know where to look for it. These figures indicate that the information in the portal needs some changes, as only 11.8 percent said that the information is ok as it is. This question repeats the need of improving the search process in the portal pages. The portal's information type is at the moment focused on work related issues and that seems to be something that the employees wish for it to be in the future as 23.5 percent said that they most agree with the statement saying that the page should concentrate on work issues.

When asked if the respondents would be ready to add updates to the portal from their own areas of expertise? a percentage of 54.3 of the respondents said yes, they would, while 45.7 said that they would not. This is shown in the pie chart to show how close these figures are to each other.

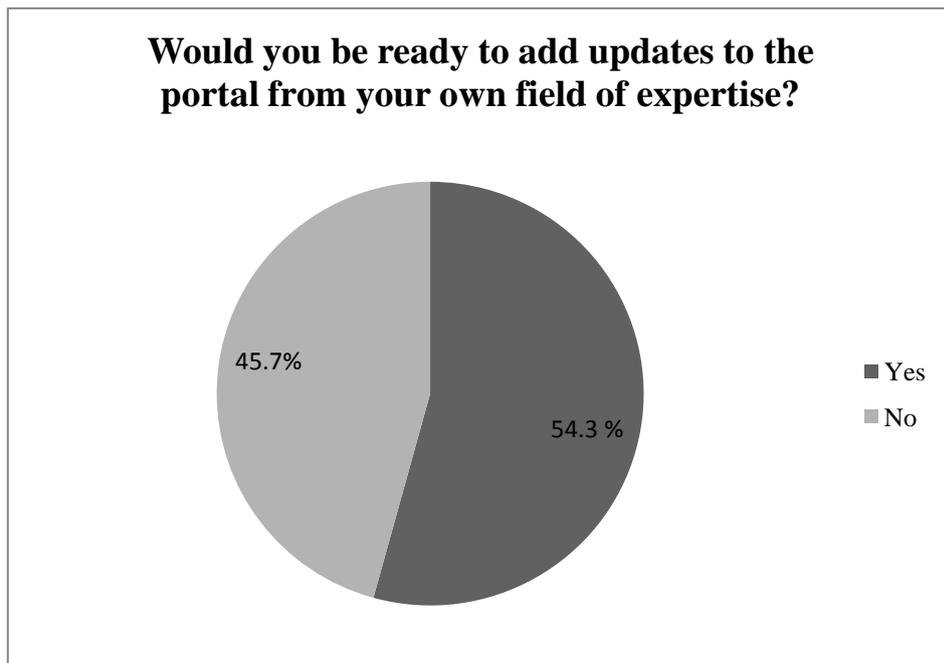


Figure 12 This piechart presents how close these percentages are to each other

When asked if the employees would be ready to add information on the portal a slight majority replied yes, but still 45,7 percent replied that they would not want to add to portal. The possible reasons behind this reply might be something like lack of time or skills, which both can be taken care of to improve the information available on the portal.

The last question asked the respondents to kindly give suggestions if they had something they would still want to add. The respondents gave suggestions as following:

*“There are a lot of untapped possibilities to utilize the intranet. The intranet should really be taken into use, without any excuses.”*

*“There is no reason to have unit level portal pages. We should have only and only HAMK level intranet -everyone should learn how to use that.”*

*“Human stories I pick up while traveling around HAMK. Examples of best practice which seems difficult for Finns to report as it goes against their culture to do so.”*

These answers show that the personnel actually do think that the portal could be a useful tool for them yet it takes some improvement projects to make the portal as useful as it can be. The problems that the portal has are studied in depth in the next chapter.

### 3.5 Conclusion

The survey to find out the HAMK Valkeakoski staff members' opinions about their unit's pages was the key in this thesis project as it is the part that points out the areas of problems. Theory points out the most common issues in companies and a survey shows which of them need attention in a company.

The survey questions need to be thoroughly thought through so that the hypothesis of the questionnaire is successfully covered. The hypothesis of this survey was to find out what are the key problem areas in the portal of Valkeakoski unit.

Before the questionnaire was made some interviews had to be conducted to find out what kind of things should be asked. This is necessary because with theory it is impossible to create a sense of focus. The questions need to be focused on certain issues and the interviews help to define the issues.

The interviews were conducted partly via emails because of issues with location, while the rest were done in person. These interviews were done with people who have experience in the area of the portal as users as well as updating. After the process was completed the survey was designed and planned with the help of Webropol and staff members who have used the service before. Webropol gave the option to plan the survey online as well as to send it and collect information online.

The survey was sent to all in all 66 people who all work in the HAMK Valkeakoski unit via email. The response rate was good as during two weeks 35 responses were received. That remaining the last figure of respondents it became 53 percent of all of the possible respondents. This figure was enough to begin analyzing the responses, as over 50 percent re-

response rate is thought to give reliable results. The picture following shows how many people answered to the questionnaire and how many did not respond at all. The meaning of positive is that response was received and the meaning of negative is that no response was received.

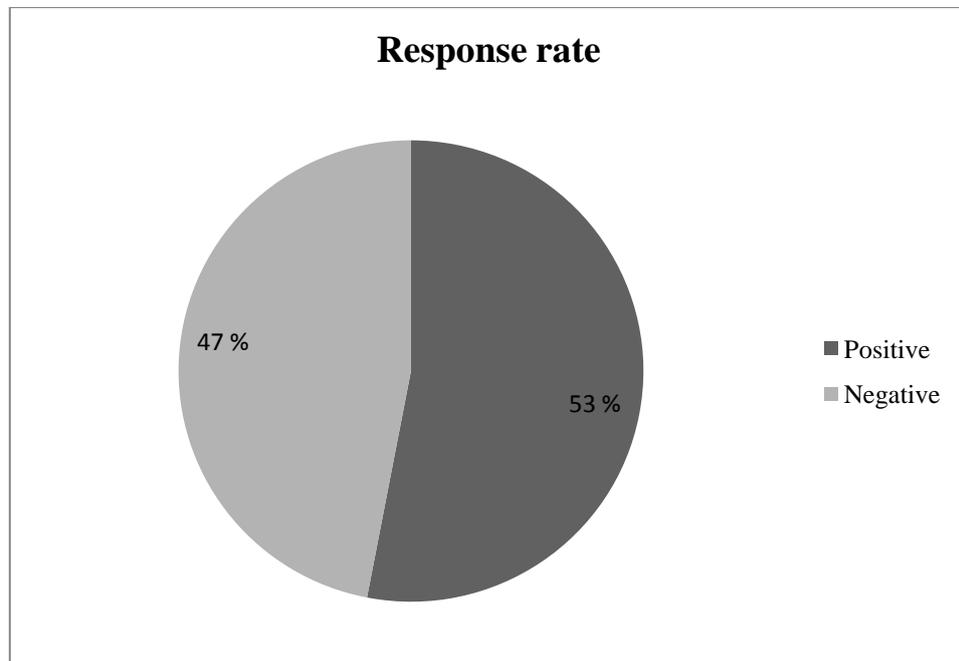


Figure 13 The piechart above shows the response rate, positive meaning that a response was received and negative meaning that no response was received

The survey was analyzed with the help of Webropol's service and Excel program. When analyzing these numbers and open answers where respondents were giving their own opinions, some critical issues came up over and over again.

In the survey one negative issue was more visible than any other, as well as one positive issue rise over other points. The negative issue that came up over and over again was that the respondents clearly expressing their disappointment in the information search process and in the way it is created to work for them but as it has failed in doing that. The positive issue was that once the information is available and found, the respondents found it very useful. Their responses indicated that the focus of Valkeakoski unit portal pages is correct as it focuses on the work related issues only, where as some units have entertaining messages on their pages.

The survey was successful as the response rate was over 50 percent. Analyzing the responses was done to point out the results one question at a time, since this helps to cover the results in a critical way with the help of theory. This is done in the following chapter that has the focus of pointing out the critical issues that the survey brought up in the light of theory.

## 4 FINDINGS

Whereas a company might be seeking for improvement in different areas of operating the employee might be seeking for a lost file or a way out of a difficult situation. This means that the employee and the organisation are rarely seeking the same things. Defined goals are the most concrete form of strategy for many employees, this means that individuals have their own treasures to seek for and these things are the same ones that the company wants them to seek. When one has challenging goals to go for they are ready to work to achieve them. Goals give each member of an organisation the possibility of achievement which genuinely motivates them. (Paavola 2010, 55)

The goals of HAMK Valkeakoski portal pages were brought up in the interview as the interviewees told that the main goals have been to reduce email traffic by informing on work related issues. Yet it seems to be somewhat unclear to the staff members as in the survey 60 percent of the respondents said that emails are the most useful information sharing module. Regardless of what the answers should be, it is clear that the goals of HAMK management and staff members are not yet united and well defined, which areas of improvement are.

A simple work tool might make a process frustrating and create a sense of reluctance in the employees. From the answers that were received in the questionnaire some points of challenges in their everyday work lives can be noticed. HAMK Valkeakoski unit has its own goals for the employees, yet the simple processes that are not well managed can be a reason for many of these goals left unmet.

Change is one of the key words of organizations today; change management and change resistance are portrayed as good and bad qualities. Some companies even repeat the slogan “The only consistent thing is change”, when in fact the thought of change is moderately empty since everything changes no matter what. As much as the past is recalled as the good old times, the good times can be ahead as well, yet the obsessive need for change has created an atmosphere of quick changes at many workplaces. It is important to present the change to the employees as a new positive thing. (Paavola 2010, 77-92)

HAMK as an organization is divided into units and those units need to find information through the company’s portal pages. HAMK Valkeakoski has its own portal that serves a purpose of helping the employees. So far the results of the Valkeakoski unit’s pages have not been satisfactory to the staff members, some changes have been made and some more are still ahead.

When there is more than one kind of group involved in the change process all of them need equal amount of attention. Attention to the right people at right times eases the change process. When some key people have been

assured of the benefits of the change the implementation turns out to be smooth. It is important for the person in lead of change to have the trust of the employees, because then he can convince them that everything ends up well. (Harju 2010, 56)

In HAMK Valkeakoski there are different responsibility areas where staff members have been appointed for their duties, for example the teachers have their own responsibilities that differ from the responsibilities of those working for the student affairs office, when a change is started in the entire unit all different people need to be given the needed attention to guide them through the changes.

In a change process communication has to be consistent and continuous even if nothing is happening, because there is someone who is going to think that something is happening and he is missing it. As a process leader one has to be able to inform others all the time and many times – even the same information over and over again. Sometimes the same message has to be sent out in many different ways for it to be understood similarly by all employees. (Harju 2010, 55)

IT systems are often blamed for many failures or challenges. The normal explanation is usually that the information did not flow, and therefore the reason is the information that is not moving whereas the fault might not fall on anyone who should have informed or found out. Now it is very common to blame the organization and blame the rules, habits or the unclear division of tasks. In the business life today the one employee is hardly accused of mistakes but more likely the blame goes to the organization culture, inadequate training or lack of encouragement. (Paavola 2010, 138-139)

This thesis is concentrated on the problems that the IT side of the unit Valkeakoski is having. Since the IT side is the main information sharing channel in the company it crucial for it to serve the users faultlessly. Yet the portal has not been able to satisfy the expectations people have for it.

When thinking about what motivates employees we can say that when our expectations are met, it motivates us. Just as normally is recognized that employers require and expect various things from their employees it is also the other way around, meaning that employees expect certain things from their employers. When management understands that they need to fulfill some expectations and do so, they get in return better results from their employees. Some of these expectations are clearly stated in contracts, but a big part of them are tacit, never mentioned in contracts type of expectations. (Boddy 2005, 482 - 484)

In this case the action to improve the portal has been taken and through the survey many staff members expressed their own willingness to help the change happen and in the future help keeping the site as good as possible. Now the management is facing the expectations of change. The challenges HAMK Valkeakoski units portal pages are having were found in the survey and they are covered in the next subchapter.

#### 4.1 Current challenges – portal usage

The challenges that are met in HAMK Valkeakoski might also be an issue in other units of HAMK. We could ask if it was necessary to implement some changes in all units to improve the overall portal, while these challenges were only studied in HAMK Valkeakoski unit similar challenges are common. Some of the issues that were mentioned in the study in HAMK Valkeakoski are so much intact with the entire HAMK portal that they might be hard to change if the entire portal is not changed, for example the multi-layered structure of the pages is a challenge to the users – yet it might be impossible to change that fact because the entire HAMK is in the same system and changing only one units' system is practically impossible. At the end of the day the entire thesis is studying HAMK Valkeakoski situation only and has to concentrate on those things that can be improved.

With the survey completed HAMK Valkeakoski need to answer the question: how to encourage HAMK employees to use the portal search engine in HAMK portal. The survey also shows that as much as staff members would be willing to use the search engine in the portal they are faced with a couple of problems in the functionality of the search function which has turned down the usage. This issue of searching for information is the key challenge that the HAMK Valkeakoski portal is having. It is the issue that the employees bring up over and over again as the main source of frustration.

The reasons behind having hard time finding any information from the pages are more various than just the search engine failing at times to find the needed things. One source to this issue is the portal software being all in all very hierarchical, meaning that it has several levels. The following picture shows what is meant by the pages having several layers.

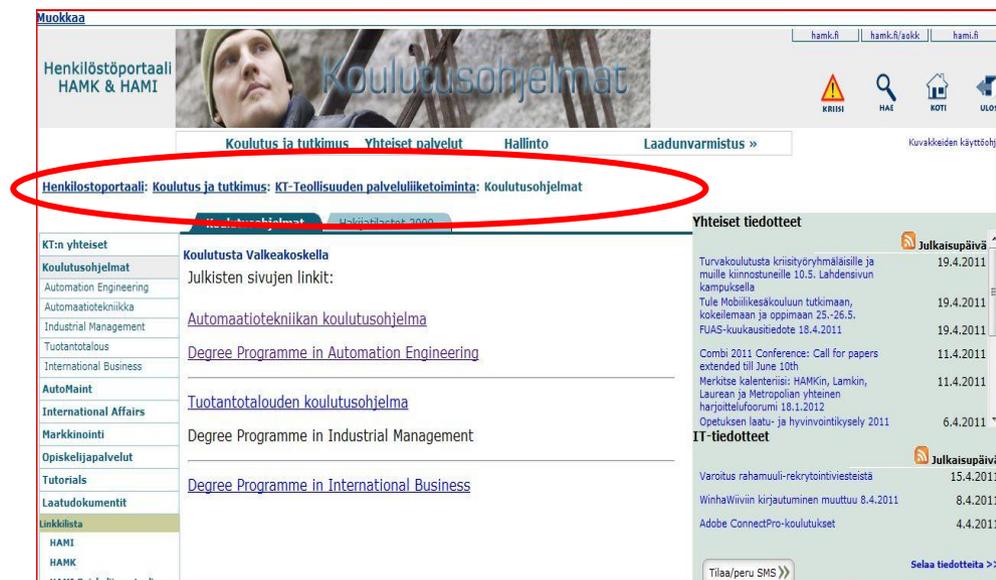


Figure 14 The highlighted part shows that some information might be behind several pages

The picture shows how the information might be behind several pages and requires knowledge on where to find the issue that one is looking for or just as someone might say, good luck that you end up at the correct page.

Getting lost online is not usually recognized by the users that much, but subconsciously it affects our online behavior. A too complicated link system creates a feeling of being lost. Being lost online would mean that you cannot find something you were reading before. Pages that seem complicated create negativity towards them because efficient usage of for example a company's intranet requires that all the layers are bind together so that the path stays clear to the user in all circumstances. (Alasilta 1998, 16, 106)

This issue of getting lost in the portal pages is an issue among the staff members as they replied in the survey to the question on if the information was hard to find, in which 1 would mean that the strongly disagree and 5 would mean that they strongly agree, the percentage of those that choose 4 as they agree was 37.1, while 31.4 percent strongly agreed that finding information on the portal was hard, and thus selected the number 5. This clearly shows that the information search is too hard for the employees on regular basis.

The problem of the search engine not being able to bring results is mainly because when created a document online, in the process the creator has to define some key words on the file so that when someone searches the document with any of those words it appears to the person looking for it. Yet if those words are not defined or they are few it makes it hard to find the document. Other issue is that the person putting the data online might find different words meaningful as search words, yet the person looking for the information is not necessarily thinking of the same words when he wants to look for the data.

The answers given on the survey indicate that there is a strong need for HAMK Valkeakoski to improve the search engine service in the portal. Over and over again during the course of this survey, respondents have indicated their reservations about the search engine service in the HAMK Portal. This cannot be ignored by the management. The survey shows that when the staff is given the possibility to tell what they are mainly worried it is the search engine function. Yet going back to the issue of getting lost in the portal pages is also an issue that might be affecting the feelings of the staff members.

An example of how the employees using the portal might find themselves lost and at the same time thinking that the search of information is very hard is a regular every day issue. Getting lost might happen to any of them many times, since the survey shows that the portal is mainly used to look for information – it is the information search process that it is mainly connected to. When the staff members face problems in the page it is most

probably a problem that occurred when they were searching for information. The problem could be that the information is linked behind so many steps that the path becomes hard to keep track of. When one is looking for the information and follows a link line it might be impossible to find their way back or even find what they were looking for in the first place. This is called getting lost online.

HAMK must find a way to make the portal easier and thus more effective for employees to use. In order for HAMK Valkeakoski to do that, it would need to address the concerns of its staffs, and other concerns that have been indicated on this survey to the management level of HAMK. As mentioned before some changes might require changes in all levels of the HAMK portal, not only HAMK Valkeakoski unit's portal.

Portal is a communication tool that has been created to work for the HAMK employees. Readers judge the portal based on its professionalism and its friendliness towards the readers. When this first impression is negative it means that changing the impression takes twice as much work than it would've taken to start off well. (Lohtaja, Kaihovirta-Rapo 2007, 72)

As the first impression of the portal has already passed it is going to take much more effort from the management to convince the employees to use the pages again more and more. This effort should not be wasted and the question comes again to the issue of how much can be changes since HAMK has a certain framework on how the portal should be, and even though different units have been given a lot of freedom in their own portal pages the general framework puts some limitations to the needed improvements.

This survey also uncovered divisions among staff members when it came to how to use the portal and what to use the portal for. While some employees thought that the portal is now concentrated on work related issues only and found that a good thing, some still thought that the portal should have an entertaining side to it, as some other units have done this kind of thing too. Some differences in opinions also came up when employees were asked if the portal has enough functions at the moment of if it should increase communication options or some other options that would make the work related tasks easier.

This presents a clear issue between the policies that HAMK Valkeakoski has taken as to keep the portal focused on work related issues and with the opinions among the staff members. HAMK Valkeakoski needs to clearly define the role of the portal to its staff members and as the improvements step in they might need to meet as in to compromise on the issues where the present situation and the hopes contradict each other, to see how best could the portal be utilized. HAMK would need to decide how much they want their employees to use the portal, and for what uses? This certainly needs HAMK to create some clear guidelines on the portal matter.

As this survey gives HAMK the ideas on what things to change or implement on the portal HAMK should think on how these changes are com-

municated to the HAMK staffs and how they are encouraged to transition from the old ways of the portal to a newer and more effective way of using the portal.

Changing the behavior of people has a lot to do with the type of personalities are dealt with, because some individuals see changes more positive than others. Normally it is not easy to create new ways to do things, and it is even harder if the people who are expected to accept the change, have no earlier negative experiences on the issue. Even if the matter that requires change has not been working well, it is hard to create trust towards change if earlier changes have not worked out too well. (Lohtaja, Kaiho-virta-Rapo 2007, 43-44)

The portal now is now getting a lot of attention as some improvements on the student portal side have been taken already in the form of creating the Oscar pages. Similar attention need to be given to the internal pages as well.

Given all the information collected by this survey HAMK would have to make decisions on how it would reduce the problems that people are facing when they use the portal. The problems that the employees have are first of all the search engine complications. Second problem the staff members are having is the information being available behind many links and finding it without help or accurate knowledge of where the information is. A third issue that came up in the survey was not brought up as a problem but more of a shortcoming from the operator's side, this issue was about the functions that the portal has. This could be described as the portal not being able to ease the tasks of the staff members. The employees strongly disagreed in the survey that the portal has enough functions at the moment. Fourth and last was the issue of common goals, the survey brought up the issue of people having mixed views on what the portal should contain. Some employees think that the portal is only for work related information while others wish for it to have an entertaining side. The problem here is that the HAMK has a policy about the information in the portal, and Valkeakoski unit has decided the portal to be informational only about work related issues / obviously this policy needs to be delivered to the employees better.

Also HAMK would need to find ways on how to improve the availability of information in HAMK portal and make finding information easier. This survey show that HAMK staffs have very serious concerns about finding information on the portal, and those concerns should be issues to the management as these problems even affect the results of job tasks. As mentioned this is the most serious problem that staff members are having, and the problem is divided basically into two parts of using the search function and finding the information on their own. Simply the problem with the search engine is that the data creators are not putting enough key words when creating the document. Some certain rules should be created for the users and for the creators so that both know on which basis the information is searched. The other part of the problem is that the information is crowded behind too many unnecessary steps. This problem of having too

many links was issued in the theory part where it was mentioned that there should not be more than five links following each other to keep the path clear, and information in a logical location.

Information accuracy is one challenge that was brought up in the survey as some respondents were concerned about the lack of new updates on the Valkeakoski unit's portal pages. This challenge requires a lot of flexibility from the staff members as the information needs to be put to the portal in a certain way and most of the users do not have any training on it. Although most of the respondents do not have training they expressed to be used in making the portal more accurate as 54.3 percent of the respondents would be ready to update the portal in the future. This attitude could even be more encouraged by the management by offering training on the usage of the portal.

Another challenge is to encourage all the staff members to use the portal daily as their main source of information, to achieve the goal of the portal pages being the main information sharing method and to reduce email traffic. In the survey was found that 45.7 percent use the portal on a daily basis but the rest of the respondents used it only weekly or less than weekly. The usage rate needs to be improved for the portal to achieve its meaning in the company. If people do not use the pages, probably it is not serving the users as well as it should.

HAMK faces the challenge of making sure that the effectiveness of the portal is improved and also pay serious attention to make the information available and acquired in the portal more accurate and more tasks related, while communicating the policy of the portal to the staff members as they are increasingly encouraged to participate in the improvement project of the portal.

## 5 SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As some challenges came up and a need of improvement has been established the suggestions for these improvements are presented in this chapter where as some recommendations are made.

The first challenge that needs improvement is the goals of HAMK Valkeakoski unit in the matter of the portal. HAMK as a company has not defined goals with details from its head unit in Hämeenlinna – yet it has given some guidelines whereas the units can decide on their own what it is exactly that they wish to do with their own pages. Information can be divided into three groups those being informative, entertaining, and influencing. HAMK Valkeakoski has decided to put the main focus of the pages on being informative about work related issues. This simple goal needs to be defined to all staff members, keep in mind that as the portal needs more accurate information it is going to need almost all of the staff members to add some updates when it is very important to make the focus of the pages clear to all – so that they stay simple and united. ( Lohtaja, Kaihovirta-Rapo 2007, 41)

Other goal of the portal so far has been to reduce email traffic. This means that as people normally would send each other emails to find out what information they need, they are encouraged to use the portal to find the information not needing to send emails and wait for the reply. Yet the survey brought up the issue of 60 percent of the respondents finding emails still the best information sharing module. What we can conclude is that the information is not yet in a form that would be easy for the staff members to find so that they would not need emails.

HAMK Valkeakoski does not need much effort put into the goal issue itself. As a suggestion to this issue is a couple of hours of portal training that would take place in the HAMK Valkeakoski premises where some issues of the portal should be covered one of them being the goals of the portal. Even though it might sound as a natural decision to some of the staff members, some also wish for the portal to have a more entertaining side and therefore the reasons behind this decision should be made clear with some argumentation for the professional focus.

The second issue was the usage of the portal, the survey asked how often did the respondents use the portal and 45.7 percent answered that they use it on a daily basis while 34.3 percent use the portal weekly, finally 20 percent used the portal less than weekly. These figures put together a majority of the respondents use the portal weekly or less than weekly. This means that some improvements in the usage need to be implicated.

One suggestion to increase the usage of the portal is to publish some important information only there. This in a way forces the people to use the portal, which later on increases their motivation to use the portal. (Bovève, Thill 2010, 69)

The reason behind staff members not using the portal might also be found from the responses they gave as describing the portal hard to use. There is no point in trying to encourage people to use the portal if they do not know how to use it or how to find information from it. As a part of training it would be important to also show how to find some information in there and set some time goals considering when the employees should have moved completely to finding their information from the portal. Training is a key word here as no one can be expected to know how to do something without any help. HAMK portal has some clear functional problems yet the usage problems might be fixable as the employees can learn how to use the portal.

The third problem that came up in the interviews as much as in the survey was the problem of finding information from the portal pages, the problem being both using the search function as well as trying to find the information without this help.

The issue that people are having with the search engine goes back to the issue of how the pages are updated. When an update has been created the creator needs to define some key words, that when being used as search terms then find the correct data. Sometimes the creator of the text might

skip the keywords point and not define any terms; this makes it impossible to find the text with the search engine. This challenge might be improved by training where the creators are taught how important it is to do the updates as well as possible. The other challenge for the people updating the pages as much as to those trying to find the information is to find the correct search terms or key terms. As the words that the creator might find logical relating to the page might in fact not come to the user's mind at all the problem is ready. It is hard for both of these parties to try to think what could be the words that the other one uses. As a suggestion to this issue is to create some rules how the words should be defined, so that both parties could at least feel more comfort in their processes.

Another issue that makes it hard for the staff members to find information from the portal is the extremely hierarchical Oracle system that is used as the software. Basically the system being hierarchical means that information is behind other information. In other words the information is behind several links, and the user has to change the page when looking for information. The reason for HAMK having a hierarchical system is because they have many locations, and in locations they have information for all as well as only for the degree programs or some even smaller groups inside units. The picture below shows how the information is divided in the pages. The picture below show the matrix system of HAMK portal pages where all levels are connected, and from all units users can access other units' information. This shows also how complicated the system is, even though this picture shows only a fraction of the hierarchical system. The more levels there are and the more connected all the levels are – the more links there is.

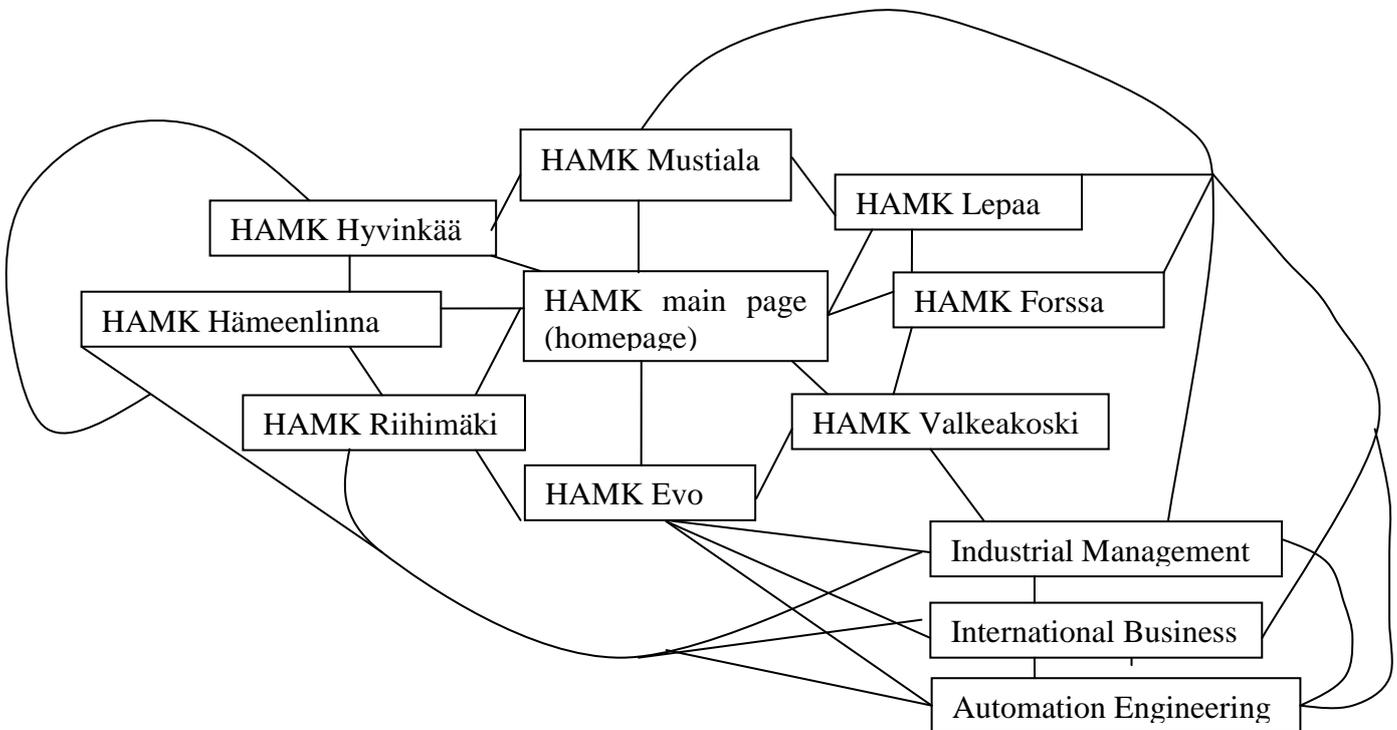


Figure 15 This picture shows the hierarchical page system in HAMK portal

Unfortunately there is not much to do about the hierarchical system as it would require the entire HAMK to change its portal software. Yet again it is possible to improve the help that has been created for information search, as in the search function. By improving the function the information search gets faster and becomes more practical tool for the employees. Also what could be offered is the training to use the portal in an efficient way for the employees to be able to logically conclude where to seek for information.

Next issue is the accuracy of the information, as the survey found out that most of the respondents thought that the information should be more accurate. The picture below shows how the responses were divided about the question on how much they agree with the statement of the information being accurate enough.

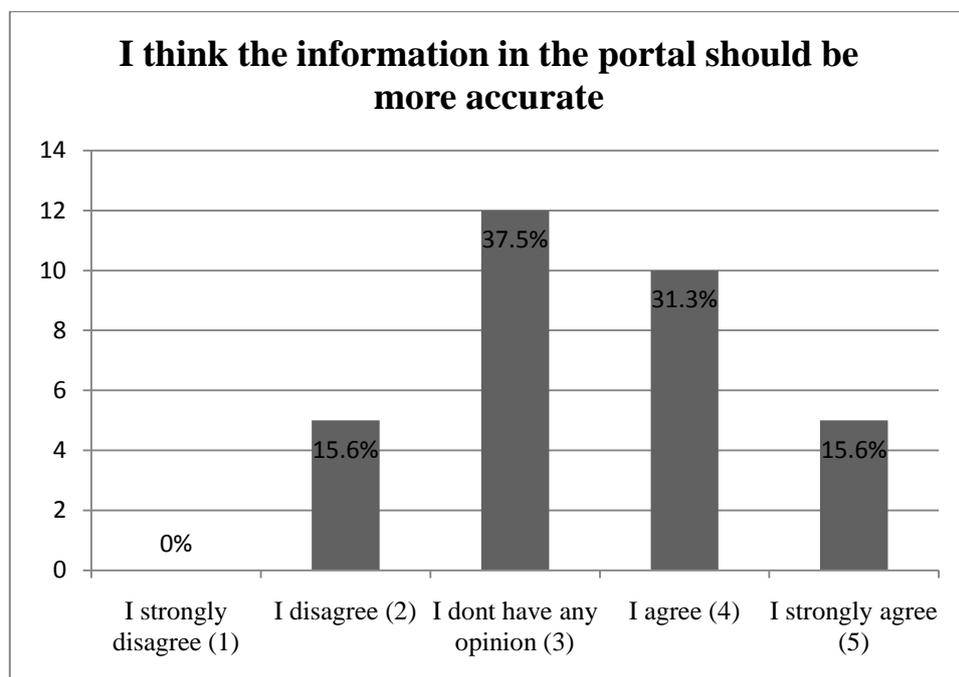


Figure 16 This chart above shows what people think of the accuracy state of the information in the portal

The accuracy of the portal means that new information should be updated to the portal on a daily basis. For example the Valkeakoski unit has weekly meetings, yet sometimes all staff members cannot participate. It is very important for them to get the information somehow, and when the information is available in the portal it would make it very much easier for those who could not take part to still keep updated.

One way to improve the situation of updates would be sharing the responsibility of updating. When asked whether the staff members would be ready to add updates from their field of profession to the portal a majority of 54,3 percent said they would be ready to do that. The respondents who feel reluctant to update to the portal might get encouraged by some train-

ing as much as it might encourage them to know that they share the responsibility with other staff members.

A job enrichment model by Hackman and Oldham (1980) suggests that when employers offer their employees change in their jobs it creates more satisfaction. According to them changes in some working processes or tools can be motivational to employees when they feel that they succeed in challenges, yet their work is not at risk. Necessarily the employers do not have to change the employees' entire area of responsibilities only some small changes in process or task characteristics are needed to create some excitement and interest towards the work. (Boddy 2005, 506-507)

Based on the job enrichment model the task of updating the portal creates change to the employees' routines and makes them feel more interested in their work again. Training and preparation is of course needed but as everyone could have some responsibilities in the portal updates the workload would not be too heavy instead it would be the right amount to create interest towards the work.

Finally the last point that needs improvements is the portal functions. As the portal at the moment does not offer any possibilities for the employees to ease their daily tasks the survey showed a great deal of interest towards this. Two questions were asked, the first one being if the employees would want the portal to offer them more chances to communicate with their colleagues as the other one was finding out what the employees think about having possibilities to use the portal to ease their tasks.

The survey results showed that the respondents were mainly positive about adding communication possibilities to the portal as 19.4 percent agreed and 16.1 percent strongly agreed with the statement ' I think the portal should offer communication options like blogs, forums, and questions and answers section'. Even though a majority of 38.7 percent did not have any opinion about the matter, the results were more on the positive side than on the negative as 19.4 percent disagreed with the statement and only 6.5 percent strongly disagreed.

This indicates a need of discussion about the need of adding a communicative side to the portal. When HAMK Valkeakoski employees have a development meeting and project over the topic of the portal they need to address this issue when they define the goals to all employees as well as when they decide about the desired functions in the portal.

The other point being if the portal had enough functions was even more clearly on the positive side. When the respondents were asked whether the portal should ease their daily activities such as filling forms and booking class rooms, a majority of 45.5 percent strongly agreed with this point, and 33.3 percentages agreed. Only 3 percent strongly agreed as no one choose to disagree. A share of 18.2 percent did not have any opinion about the matter, which doesn't change the fact that the results were clearly positive about adding this kind of functions to the portal.

These positive answers express the need of the employees to use the portal effectively in their everyday tasks. Different kinds of possibilities are available as the portal could have for example documents of travelling expenses available online so that they can be filled and sent without any printing needed. Another thing the portal could offer is to show the current situation of classrooms in the unit. Teachers could book their classes through this service and if they cancel a lesson, they could mark it down in the service and others who need a class room can easily check the availability of classrooms at the time.

Computer based information can get even more accurate by systems that follow the usage of the pages or that measure processes, and that by systems that automatically share information to those who need it. This makes the information sharing faster and significantly more up to date. It is good to point out here that the information that is shared online is available to all who have the rights to the pages. (Boddy 2005, 540)

This means that the employees could similarly to some other commercial pages check their area of business as well as their interests and the portal posts links that have to do with the things they have checked for. This information would have to show in their emails with a short introduction text and a link to the information. When the data is created it would be located to several of these interests so that people would get the information they need. Some information is of course important to all employees and has to be shared to all, and not all information needs to be informed to the employees through email. For example the weekly meetings updates should have their own place in the portal and without sending a link to an employee; he should be able to check that information from the portal. Yet some other updates about recent projects or changes might not concern everybody and therefore only a share of people need to see this information, sending a link to those who have expressed their interest even avoids too much traffic on the email side to colleagues.

As a final question about the functions that the portal offers the respondents were asked if the portal has enough functions at the moment. A majority of respondents had an opinion of the portal not offering enough functions at the moment. The following picture presents the division between different answers to the question.

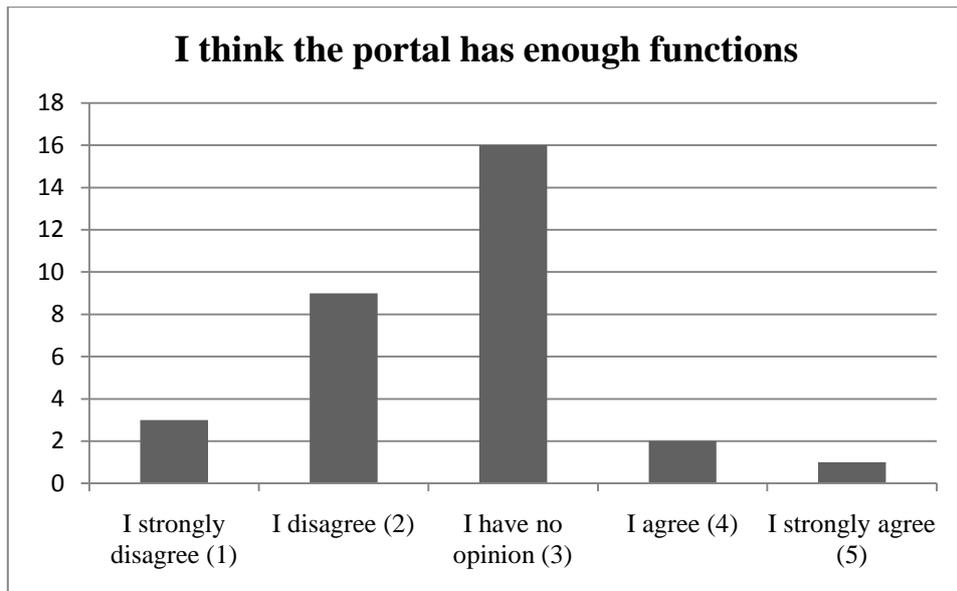


Figure 17 The picture shows the division between opinions on the portal having enough functions

As the answers being mainly negative about the portal having enough functions it is even clearer to make the changes needed. The functional changes can be defined more in a further study of what kind of functions the employees would appreciate more – yet the recommendations chapter concentrates on them more closely.

The HAMK Valkeakoski unit’s portal needs improvements in the five areas of defining goals, increasing the usage of the portal, making the information search process easier, having more accurate information available, and creating more functions. These areas need an improvement plan and as they have all been covered one by one with suggestions, they are gathered together in the next chapter of recommendations on how to continue from here on.

### 5.1 Recommendations for further study

The main challenges that HAMK Valkeakoski unit is facing with the portal service are first the goals that are not yet clear between employees and management. Second the usage rate of the portal as it needs to be increased, third the information finding problems among the users, fourth the information accuracy as in how current information is available, and finally the functions that the portal offers as in the lack of functions.

The first step in improving the situation has to be defining the goals. When HAMK Valkeakoski management and employees have common policy of what the portal includes many distractions and doubts can be erased. Defining the goals of management and employees first separately is going to need another project. A student or an employee can work on finding out

the wishes and thoughts of both management and staff members, and then when both have been set there is a need for discussion.

Representatives of the management side as well as the employee side should meet together to agree on a set of goals that define the portal's purpose. For example now it is unclear to some employees whether there should be a more entertaining side to the portal. Some other units have decided, or management thinks that the portal should be strictly informative and mainly about work related issues. Both sides need to agree to what is the best focus for HAMK Valkeakoski unit. Yet the objective of this project and discussion is to define the policy that employees know to follow when adding data to the portal and when using the portal.

Defining the goals is important as the development plan aims to involve all employees more in the portal service not only by using it for their own purposes but to add data to the site. When everyone knows what belongs to the portal the image of the portal is going to stay clear and it has a defined role in the tasks of staff members.

The second problem was that the usage rate of the portal on a daily basis is not as high as it should be. People have forgotten about the possibility to use the portal and have moved on to the other ways of sharing information that they feel most comfortable with, for example sending emails requesting for information that is available in the portal.

The usage rate being quite little might explain itself as the survey discovered that most people use the portal to look for information, yet the information is hidden behind other information and even the tools created to help one to find it are not functioning on a satisfactory level. Negative experiences with the portal in the past have created a certain attitude of reluctance among the employees.

The portal is a hierarchical system that has information behind several links and that might be very confusing. Therefore the employees of HAMK Valkeakoski need to take part in training on how to use the portal. Valkeakoski unit has the needed premises to train the employees in two patches. Training can be organized so that one day is used to getting familiar with different possibilities of how to use the portal and all the different opportunities that it offers to ease the employees' tasks. Some time should be spent on questions and answers as well as going through some real situations that the employees face often and have problems with.

Different challenges were also coming up from in the field of information searching. As most of the employees use the portal to find information it is crucial for them to be able to find the information and for the information to be current. This brings us to the next two challenges of information search and improving the information accuracy.

First the problems that are faced with information searching have to do with the portal being a very hierarchical system. When information is hidden behind other information it is necessary to have a tool that helps to

find the information, this would be the search engine in the portal. So far the search engine has not been of much help, and trying to find the information on their own many have become frustrated.

As improvements are needed in this area more training is needed. This training should be directed to all users of HAMK Valkeakoski and it should take at least a day, as it needs to cover the issue of how to add data to the portal and how to make it findable. The solution to the search engine issue lies within the people updating it, as in the process of adding data a set of key words need to be defined for anyone to be able to have the chance of finding it. Without any keywords the data does not show in any searches done with the engine. On the other hand the problem is also to find the right key words, and search words – since when these two match it is possible to find the data. The question now is how to make sure the terms match. This is why there is a need to create a policy of how to make the data findable. First of all a set of rules need to be created to define how a person adding data can put online keywords. A set of rules needs to have instructions for example; all words need to be in a nominative form. These rules are available to all so that also the people looking for information know that when searching, they are supposed to use nominative forms of words.

Another suggestion would be that the data would go through two persons. In this way they can both add key words, as the first person might be the actual creator of the data it might be easier for an outsider to be able to read the text and determine key words that a user who does not have deeper knowledge of the issue would use when searching for the data. Yet the increasing workload might not encourage employees towards this solution, therefore a policy on how to add data key words and how to determine search terms should be created.

The second point being the accuracy of information available is fixed by the employees encouraged to be more active in adding data to the portal. In the survey there was not a lot of interest from the employees to start updating the portal. The reason behind this kind of reluctance is most likely because of the lack of knowhow and time. Yet the training on the information search would also train the former users to become creators as well. When these two roles are more mixed than fixed the staff of HAMK Valkeakoski could soon find themselves being experts in the portal usage and the challenges they were facing reducing.

More people updating the HAMK Valkeakoski portal pages would create an increasing amount of up to date information. The employees willing to take the extra task of updating would soon find it enriching their weekly tasks as the updates do not need to be daily, and therefore would not take a lot of resources. At the moment only a few people are carrying the entire responsibility of working on the portal. Shared responsibility of updating and using would create a more united spirit inside HAMK Valkeakoski. As everyone would use the portal in more than one way continuously knowledge would increase and problems with the portals many functions would decrease – this including the information search challenges.

The mixed responsibility framework creates a cycle of positive events, as more people adding data creates more accurate information that can be searched. The training that the employees have received improves the quality of the information where as the training makes the information possible to find. This results in people being more satisfied with the entire portal.

The last point of challenge with the portal was the functions of the portal. Again the management and the employees need to define together if the portal functions are currently satisfactory or if they could be increased according to the wishes of the employees. HAMK Valkeakoski employees expressed their interest in having both communication opportunities in the portal as well as some functions that could ease their job tasks. The suggested improvements in the HAMK portal are to first increase the communication possibilities by adding a forum site where users can start their own discussion topics, which have to follow the determined policy of the portal's role in HAMK Valkeakoski. As it is only informative now, the discussion topics could be about challenges in their tasks or in any other work related topic. Another communication function that could be added is a simple questions and answers forum, where the user can post his question on a work related issue, for example how to add pictures to the data he is updating to the portal, and other users with knowledge on the issue can help the person by posting their own answers.

The second function related improvement was even more desired by the employees'. The portal could offer functions like booking classrooms through the portal, and giving accurate information about the classrooms availability at any point. For example a teacher could book a classroom for his course for the entire time of the course yet if a class is canceled he can update that information in the portal, so that other staff members can check the available rooms and have accurate information. Another task easing possibilities is offering the chance to fill forms and sending them to the correct person through the portal without any printing needed.

These improvements all together include two days of training where the employees would learn how to use the portal effectively, as well as training on how to search information and add information to the portal. The management needs to be engaged in the definition of the portal policy as much as deciding the improvements in the functions of the portal. The employees need to be encouraged to keep the portal as a vital part of their daily job tasks.

HAMK now faces the challenge of making sure that the effectiveness of the portal is improved. Another challenge is to pay serious attention to making the information available and retrievable in the portal. It should be more accurate and more tasks-related, while communicating the policy of the portal to the staff members as they are increasingly encouraged to participate in the improvement project of the portal.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alasilta A., 1998, Näin kirjoitat tietoverkkoon, , Second Edition, WSOY

Bell J., 1997, Doing your research project, Second Edition, Open University Press

Blundel R., Ippolito K., 2008, Effective Organizational Communication, Third Edition, Prentice Hall

Boddy D., 2005, Management an Introduction, Third Edition, Prentice Hall

Bovève C. L., Thill J.V., 2010, Business Communication Today, Tenth Edition, Pearson

HAMK automation 2011,  
[http://portal.hamk.fi/portal/page/portal/HAMK/Tutkimus\\_ja\\_kehitys/Osaamiskeskittymat/AutoMaint](http://portal.hamk.fi/portal/page/portal/HAMK/Tutkimus_ja_kehitys/Osaamiskeskittymat/AutoMaint)  
Accessed 2.5.2011

HAMK automation engineering 2011,  
[http://portal.hamk.fi/portal/page/portal/HAMK/koulutus/International\\_DP1/AutomationEngineering](http://portal.hamk.fi/portal/page/portal/HAMK/koulutus/International_DP1/AutomationEngineering)  
Accessed 2.5.2011

HAMK degree programmes 2011,  
[http://portal.hamk.fi/portal/page/portal/HAMK/Organisaatiojatoimipaikat/Toimipaikat\\_kartat/Valkeakoski](http://portal.hamk.fi/portal/page/portal/HAMK/Organisaatiojatoimipaikat/Toimipaikat_kartat/Valkeakoski)  
Accessed 2.5.2011

HAMK industrial management 2011,  
[http://portal.hamk.fi/portal/page/portal/HAMK/koulutus/International\\_DP1/Industrial\\_Management](http://portal.hamk.fi/portal/page/portal/HAMK/koulutus/International_DP1/Industrial_Management)  
Accessed 2.5.2011

HAMK international activities 2011,  
[http://portal.hamk.fi/portal/page/portal/HAMK/In\\_English/About\\_HAMK/International\\_activities](http://portal.hamk.fi/portal/page/portal/HAMK/In_English/About_HAMK/International_activities)  
Accessed 2.5.2011

HAMK international business 2011,  
[http://portal.hamk.fi/portal/page/portal/HAMK/koulutus/International\\_DP1/International\\_Business](http://portal.hamk.fi/portal/page/portal/HAMK/koulutus/International_DP1/International_Business)  
Accessed 2.5.2011

HAMK locations, 2011,  
[http://portal.hamk.fi/portal/page/portal/HAMK/Organisaatiojatoimipaikat/Toimipaikat\\_kartat](http://portal.hamk.fi/portal/page/portal/HAMK/Organisaatiojatoimipaikat/Toimipaikat_kartat)  
Accessed 2.5.2011

HAMK organization 2011,  
<http://portal.hamk.fi/portal/page/portal/HAMK/Organisaatiojatoimipaikat/Organisaatio>,  
Accessed 2.5.2011

Harju K., 2010, Tiukat Paikat, johtamisen tulikokeita, First Edition, WSOYpro

Lohtaja S., Kaihovirta-Rapo Minna., 2007, Tehoa työelämän viestintään, First Edition, WSOYpro

Oracle Software, 2010,  
<http://www.oracle.com/us/corporate/software-hardware-complete-069519.html>  
Accessed 15.10.2010

Paavola V., 2010, Työpaikan ikuiset myytit, First Edition, PS-kustannus

Three Approaches to Intranet Strategy, 2003,  
[http://www.digital-web.com/articles/three\\_approaches\\_to\\_intranet\\_strategy](http://www.digital-web.com/articles/three_approaches_to_intranet_strategy)  
Accessed 12.01.2011

Webropol survey service 2011,  
<http://w3.webropol.com/finland/yritys/tietoa-yrityksesta>  
Accessed 10.04.2011

INTERVIEW FRAMEWORK, EMPLOYEE 1, HAMK

1. Tasks with the personnel portal.
2. Training on how to use the portal.
3. How much information about Valkeakoski is being put into the portal?
4. What kind of messages does the portal mainly include?
5. How much attention does the Valkeakoski unit get?
6. Does the portal offer any possibilities for the employees to improve their work processes?
7. Problems with the portal.
8. What works with the portal.
9. Wishes and hopes.
10. Other notes.

INTERVIEW FRAMEWORK, EMPLOYEE 2, HAMK

1. Tasks with the portal.
2. Training on how to use the portal.
3. How is it decided that what is put on the portal?
4. Has HAMK given guidelines on what can be published in the portal?
5. Some notes about the Oscar service.
6. How much is the portal being used?
7. Is the portal purely informative?
8. How important is the portal as an information sharing channel?
9. How much does Valkeakoski get attention in the portal?
10. Does the portal make some tasks easier for the employees?
11. Problems with the portal.
12. Hopes.
13. Notes.

SURVEY

1. How often do you use the portal Daily/ Weekly/ Less than weekly
2. Out of the following statements which one suits your situation the most?  
I use the portal  
 mainly to search for information/ I use the portal to communicate with my colleagues (leave messages on forums, update a blog)/ I use the portal to take care of small work related tasks such as filling forms etc.
3. Which of the following statements do you mostly agree with?  
Search engine  
 doesn't find anything/ Information is behind several links, and finding it is time consuming/ Searching for information is not a problem
4. Do you use the search engine function in the portal Y/ N
5. If yes, do you think the search function results are: Excellent/ Good/ Satisfactory/ Poor
6. How would you rate the information search process from the portal when not using the search function? Choose the statement you mostly agree with.  
It is not hard to find  
 information/ Sometimes it is hard to find information/ It is hard to find information/ It is very hard to find information
7. Which of the following methods do you find the most useful as an information sharing module?  
Daily meetings/  
 Portal pages/ E-mails/ Phone calls
8. Do you have problems using the portal? Rarely if ever/  
 Sometimes/ Most of the times
9. Shortly describe the problems you have had
10. How would you fix these problems?
11. Rate the statements below from 1 to 5 (1 =I strongly disagree, 5 =I strongly agree)  
1 5
  - a. The information in the portal is useful OOOOO
  - b. There is enough accurate information in the portal OOOOO
  - c. The information is hard to find OOOOO
  - d. The information is not useful OOOOO
12. Rate the statements below from 1 to 5 (1 = I strongly disagree, 5 = I strongly agree)  
1 5
  - a. I think the portal is as useful as it can get OOOOO
  - b. I think the information in the portal should be more accurate OOOOO
  - c. I think the portal should offer communication options like blogs, forums, and questions and answers section OOOOO
  - d. I think the portal should ease my daily activities (Such as filling documents, booking class rooms etc.). OOOOO
  - e. I think the portal has enough functions OOOOO
13. Choose the statement you agree most with: The portal should  
 share information only about work related matters/ The portal should concentrate on work issues and have a more relaxed, entertaining side to it/ The infor-

## Assessing Intranet Services

---

mation on the portal is ok as it is/ It is hard to find the information you need if you do not know where to look from

14. Would you be ready to add updates to the portal from your own field of expertise?  
Y/N

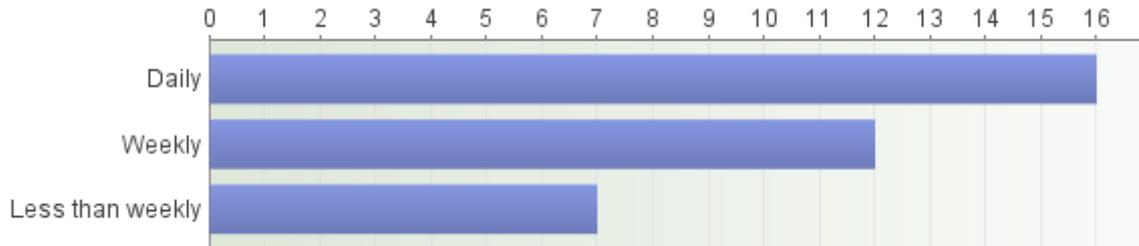
15. Do you have any other suggestions:

SURVEY RESULTS

HAMK Valkeakoski portal's usability research

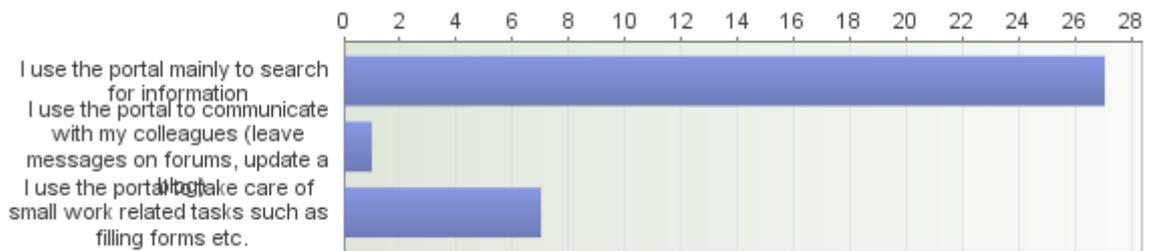
1. How often do you use the portal?

Vastaajien määrä: 35



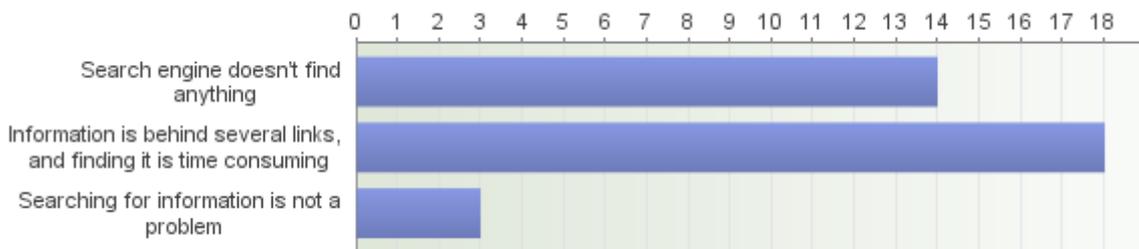
2. Out of the following statements which one suits your situation the most?

Vastaajien määrä: 35



3. Which of the following statements do you mostly agree with?

Vastaajien määrä: 35



4. Do you use the search engine function in the portal?

Vastaajien määrä: 35

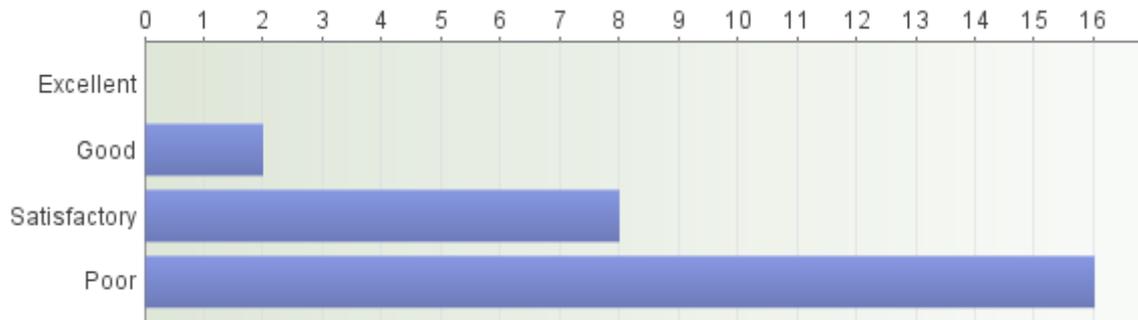


## Assessing Intranet Services



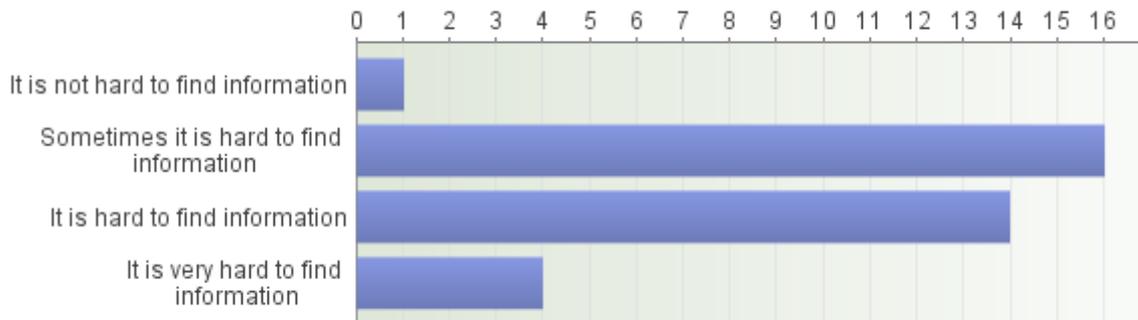
5. If yes, do you think the search function results are:

Vastaajien määrä: 26



6. How would you rate the information search process from the portal when not using the search function? Choose the statement you mostly agree with.

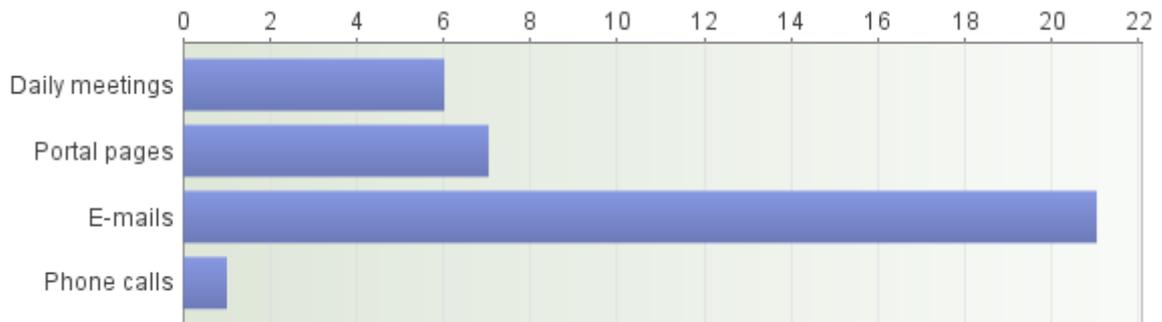
Vastaajien määrä: 35



7. Which of the following methods do you find the most useful as an information sharing module?

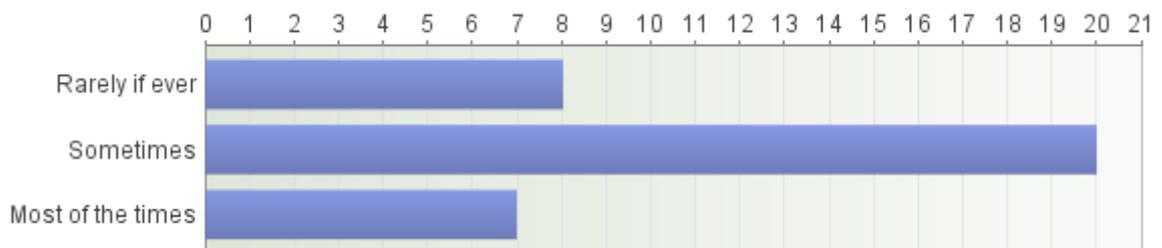
Vastaajien määrä: 35

## Assessing Intranet Services



### 8. Do you have problems using the portal?

Vastaajien määrä: 35



### 9. Shortly describe the problems you have had

Vastaajien määrä: 24

- Finding what you are looking for, especially if it is the first time, is near on impossible.
- Pages keep changing too frequently without relinking to new pages. Also, search engine does not work if no key words are assigned (problem caused by page creator).
- The information that I try to find is rather poorly organized, so in that way really hard to find. The search engine doesn't find documents that I try find.
- The information is missing or it is difficult to know the logics where to search.
- Difficult to use. You do not find anything.
- Trying to guess the logic: where to find certain information.
- Finding the information I need.
- Sometimes it doesn't load the page or the page loading is slow
- it is difficult to find the information
- where I am and where I should go
- It's hard to find some information. Sometimes Google is better even with HAMK issues.
- Finding information related to financial and HR matters such as salary, travelling.  
+ Especially when I need to find some forms to fill I can hardly find them
- Finding the relevant information is sometimes hard.
- There is lack of time in saving information and updating the portal.
- Information cannot be found. Surfing is sometimes slow (at work).
- Information is behind so many "links" that it's difficult to find.
- Information is almost impossible to be found.
- Loogisesti ajattelemalla ei aina pääse eteenpäin

- Soleops sucks!
- If not told where in the portal the information is, it is very hard to find it.
- Cannot find anything
- Just having a hard time finding the needed information...
- A lot is in Finnish so for me there is a language problem. The other problem is its complexity and multi layers that do not work intuitively for me.
- The biggest problem is that staff does not use and utilize the intranet as information spreading forum. Valkeakoski intranet pages are almost dead - new information after year 2008 - 2010 has been put there hardly at all.
- Tietoa on vaikea löytää, hakukone ei toimi.

### 10. How would you fix these problems?

Vastaajien määrä: 20

- It needs to be redesigned by a normal, everyday user NOT a technical whiz kid!
- Relink the old page to the new one. Assign keywords to the pages.
- Better search engine
- I do not know.
- -
- ??
- I will ask somebody.
- Either make the portal better by optimizing the code or then change the portal application to a better one...
- Categorize and simplify the main headings. People should know where they are walking to
- To make the internal pages more simply.
- There should be a definition of policy, what information we save in portal and whose responsibility it is.
- First of all I think somehow staff members need to be activated for the portal use. The portal should be able to provide information that it makes it worth to visit daily.
- Get rid of current portal platform and evaluate available options for new platform. And also I am quite sure that there is something seriously wrong with structure of information.
- Change the program.
- The portal should be replaced with some other software or improvements into the search function are critical ergo the metatext/tags should be in place so that the search would find the right subjects.
- Change search engine
- replace the search feature with something better
- I think the portal and been built up over time and has become muddled. I think it needs a complete revamp/rebuild like Oscar
- The staff - all members of it - should follow the HAMK policy, given several years ago, when intranet was taken into use as information giving and searching forum. Everyone should understand his/her duty to inform about matters related to work and programmes. Everyone should be ready (and able) to put information s/he produces into intranet. This informing process should be lead by a heads or directors. Someone must have responsibility to direct the informing and spreading the daily work related information, in time - on daily basis.
- Parempi tiedon organisointi ja parempi käytettävyys portaalille. Portaalin ulko-asua pitäisi selkiyttää.

## Assessing Intranet Services

Yleisesti ottaen: Less is more ja keep it simple.

11. Rate the statements below from 1 to 5 (1 =I strongly disagree, 5 =I strongly agree)

Vastaajien määrä: 35

	1	2	3	4	5	Yhteensä	ka.
The information in the portal is useful	1	3	9	13	7	33	3,67
There is enough accurate information in the portal	4	8	9	10	2	33	2,94
The information is hard to find	2	2	7	13	11	35	3,83
The information is not useful	5	13	11	3	1	33	2,45

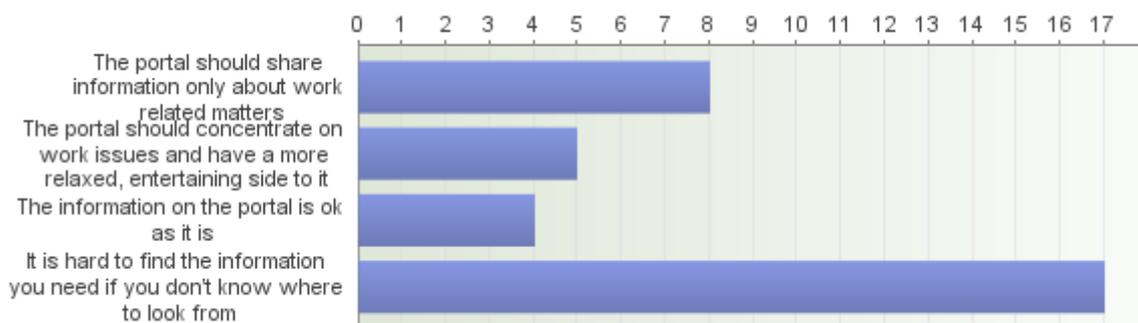
12. Rate the statements below from 1 to 5 (1 = I strongly disagree, 5 = I strongly agree)

Vastaajien määrä: 33

	1	2	3	4	5	Yhteensä	ka.
I think the portal is as useful as it can get	10	10	9	2	1	32	2,19
I think the information in the portal should be more accurate	0	5	12	10	5	32	3,47
I think the portal should offer communication options like blogs, forums, and questions and answers section	2	6	12	6	5	31	3,19
I think the portal should ease my daily activities (Such as filling documents, booking class rooms etc.).	1	0	6	11	15	33	4,18
I think the portal has enough functions	3	9	16	2	1	31	2,65

13. Choose the statement you agree most with:

Vastaajien määrä: 34

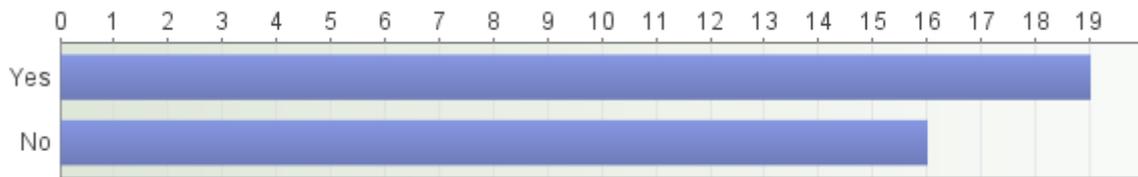


14. Would you be ready to add updates to the portal from your own field of expertise?

## Assessing Intranet Services

---

Vastaajien määrä: 35



15. Do you have any other suggestions:

Vastaajien määrä: 8

- 
- 
- I would like to remind that all the members of personnel have the possibility to update this portal.
- think it again
- Thank you!
- There is no reason to have unit level portal pages. We should have only and only HAMK level intranet -everyone should learn how to use that.
- koskien no 14: kylä olen lisännytkin esim. tiedotteita.
- Human stories I pick up while traveling around HAMK. Examples of best practice which seems difficult for Finns to report as it goes against their culture to do so.
- There are a lot of untapped possibilities to utilize the intranet. The intranet should really be taken into use, without any excuses.