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MARKET RESEARCH ON HR-SERVICES ON A CURRENT CUSTOMER BASE

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BACHELOR'S THESIS | ABSTRACT

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MARKET RESEARCH ON HR-SERVICES ON A CURRENT CUSTOMERBASE

Digitization has been a long-standing discussion in the field of financial management. The automation of routine processes are being implemented in the work. This change brings pressure for companies in the field to develop ways to provide value for their customers in the future when A.I is able to deliver the calculations without professionals. The issue is also on how to be able to keep the occupations alive for payroll administrators.

Payroll administrators are working closely with employment relationship and as the routine calculations are decreased, the possibility to provide consultation regarding the employment laws increases. Therefore an HR-service would possibly be a step towards the future of payroll administrator professionals. This thesis will include outlines of the obligations of payroll administrator and an HR professional. How the digitization is affecting the industry of financial management and whether the Company X should be proceeding with the HR-services at this stage, by conducting a market research within the company's own customer base.

KEYWORDS:

Insert 3–7 keywords here using the keyword practice of your field. You can use the web catalogue in <http://finto.fi/en/>.

Market research, HR-service, Digitalization, demand, financial management

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS (OR) SYMBOLS

Abbreviation	HR (Human resource)
	NPV (Net Present Value)
	BCR (Benefit-Cost Ratio)

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Motivation

Administrative work assignments have been the goal for myself after familiarizing with the subject at school. Work has been done in order to succeed in that goal by building a career step by step. With administrative work, especially human resource management has been a goal. I identify myself as a people person who has a need to build a foundation where people can achieve their goals. A position in HR seems evident. To succeed in HR the requirement is to understand the labor laws in Finland but also to work as a financial manager on the side. (Accountor, 2020) The Company X of this research employed author and gave assignment to help the company with their issues and help to build a better future for them. By conducting this research the author hopes to benefit his future career development in HR, moreover the benefit the future of Company X .

1.2 Background information

I did a trainee period in Company X which operates in the field of financial administration. At the moment the company offers services to companies of all sizes. The services consist of taxation consultation, accounting, payroll administration and financial statements. To stay at the top of the industry and to help the customers with their issues in the future, Company X was considering to expand their service selection with HR-services in western Finland. The author was employed to make a research on the demand of HR-services in their biggest customer segment, and also to develop the existing service entirety in co-operation with their HR-management. The target for this service and also the respondents of the questionnaire are the most influential persons in the customer companies of Company X regarding revenue stream and customer size.

The research is conducted based on a premeditated HR-service package. The service consists of all key elements of HR duties such as employment relations, strategic development of personnel, employer branding, compensation and analytics of the gathered data from these acts. The service is confidential, therefore the service itself won't be displayed in this thesis.

1.3 Research question and objectives

Research questions:

- Will the current payroll administrators be able to convert their knowledge to become a future HR professional?
- Is there a need for HR-services inside the current customer base?
- How well does the premeditated HR-service package serve customers needs?

The research's purpose is to find out the need for outsourced HR-services in the current customerbase of Company X. In western Finland and whether the premeditated HR-service entity serves the need.

1.4 The structure of the thesis

The thesis consists of chapters where the topic is justified and studied upon. The subjects are presented with coverage of the needed information. Thesis starts on building knowledge on the changes affecting financial management industry and proceeds to represent the obligations of a profession being affected. The profession under the change regarding digitalization is payroll administration. Their duties are adjusted towards HR and the obligations of HR are covered.

The text is conducted in a manner that it is easy to read and suits the hectic schedule of company, in order to read the results clearly. The thesis's structure follows a logical order by starting from the issues an accounting company face.

The research includes a survey which will help the Company X. to determine the demand for HR-services within their customer base. The survey questions are based on the premeditated HR-service entity. At the end of the research the author is able to provide findings for the company, whether the company possess demand within their own customer base for the service. By receiving that information, the author is able to give advice for the company to proceed or not with their current service blueprint.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents the factors affecting the research, justifying the researches significance. To fully understand the connection between payroll administration and HR, it is important to understand the current status and the possibilities to exploit the possessed knowledge for the future needs. Therefore, literature review will focus on defining the future change needs of financial management company and the possible evolution regarding current work assignments of the payroll administration.

2.1 Digitalization affecting financial management

There has been a lot of speculations about the future of financial management. Speculations that the automation will eventually demolish the positions in accounting and in the payroll administration. (Suuniitty, 2018) As Suuniitty suggests in his blog, this is not necessarily the truth. The automation will change the field of financial management, it is inevitable. Automation will help the accountants in their everyday workload to alleviate the routine tasks, but accountants will still be needed in the future. (Suuniitty, 2018) Financial management company has to adjust it's ways of working and build a service, which will be advantageous for the future needs of the customer. The work will transform from a routine calculations towards consultancy and customer service. These claims are assured by Antti Soro, the CEO of Finnish financial management association, who told the author about these changes in a industry seminar. The work of an accountant and payroll administrator is changing rapidly due to digitalization and automation of the everyday processes. (Ääritalo, 2018) Therefore it is crucial for a company to adapt their procedures to the needs of the future in order to stay at the top of the business in the long run. The adaptation is significant for a company to be able to deliver value for customers through their employees. What this means is that the automation will eventually do all the routine calculations very accurately and efficiently. It is the professionals duty to deliver the numbers and explain the meaning behind the data and act more as a business partner, rather than a calculator. (PwC, 2020)

A prominent step towards the future is to provide human resource services in addition to the traditional payroll administration. The payroll administration is working closely with the employment law in Finland. This means that the professionals in payroll have very

broad knowledge of various collective labor agreements from different corporate fields. This knowledge helps them to provide the customers with available information of the up-to-date employment obligations. Additionally the data gathered from the payroll reports are essential to reflect on the possible improvements inside the customers procedures. (Accountor, 2020) Regardless, the transition from payroll professional to HR isn't directly comparable, nevertheless the knowledge works as a steady foundation to build on.

2.2 Duties of a payroll administrator in an accounting company

The payroll administrator is responsible for the calculations of salaries of the employees. This might sound like a plain occupation, but the calculations contain many variables. (Seppänen, 2019)

Some duties of a payroll specialist;

- Payment of salaries.
- Legal payroll accounting.
- Monthly and annual payment declaration to government.
- Assistance in legal matters regarding employment.
- Interpretation of collective labor agreement.

When an employee receives their payslip, the calculations of their salary, deductions, additions, reimbursements, benefits and assistances needs to be calculated. The amount of each of these variables vary between different branches due to collective labor agreements. Therefore the vast knowledge of laws and regulations support payroll professionals in an accounting company to provide essential information to customers. The labor laws and collective labor agreements are the most important policymakers in employment relationship, since these are lawfully binding obligations which the employer face. Without the knowledge of the labor laws employer might neglect their responsibilities and therefore is in risk for legal charges. (Mäkinen, 2013) Hands on expertise of the laws and regulations of employment, give payroll administrators a great asset to expand their knowledge towards HR in general, since the most important factors are already possessed.

2.3 Concept of HR

Human resources is an intrinsic part of any organization. The main focus is to educe the full potential of the personel together with the objectives of a company. To succeed in such assignment, HR professionals need to posess vast understanding of the objectives of a company. By understanding the objectives of the company, decisions on personnel can be made, whether to hire, train, transfer or promote personnel within the firm. Knowledge on the aim of the firm helps to make necessary decisions, but it's not enough. HR has to have knowledge on the labor laws and the collective labor agreement in order to make lawfully decisions. (Ayers, 2020) Being in a HR position it is a management position. This means that the person is in charge of the accomplishment of the personnel goals. Management positions in general require five functions;

- Planning
- Organizing
- Staffing
- Leading
- Controlling

(Dessler, 2017)

Every decision is to be done in symbiosis with the objective of the company. HR is responsibe of the personnel throughout the employment relationship from hiring to dismissal. A lot of laws and agreements within different branch are adapted into Finnish employment laws and regulations. These laws and regulations oblige employer to guarantee certain rights and benefits for their employees in various ways, for instance; employment agreement, unbiased treatment, introduction to the assignment and workplace, insurances, salary and benefits. (Itika, 2011)

The mentioned obligations are only the minimum requirements for employer. To be succesfull and to obtain a desirable workplace there are many other aspects to consider such as;

- Future labor needs.
- Employment relations
- Employee engagement.
- Training new employees.

- Appraising performance.
- Strategic talent management.
- Employee satisfaction.
- Communication.
- Process development.

By handling these issues meticulously, a company will obtain a desired workplace where employee's thrive in. (Dessler, 2017)

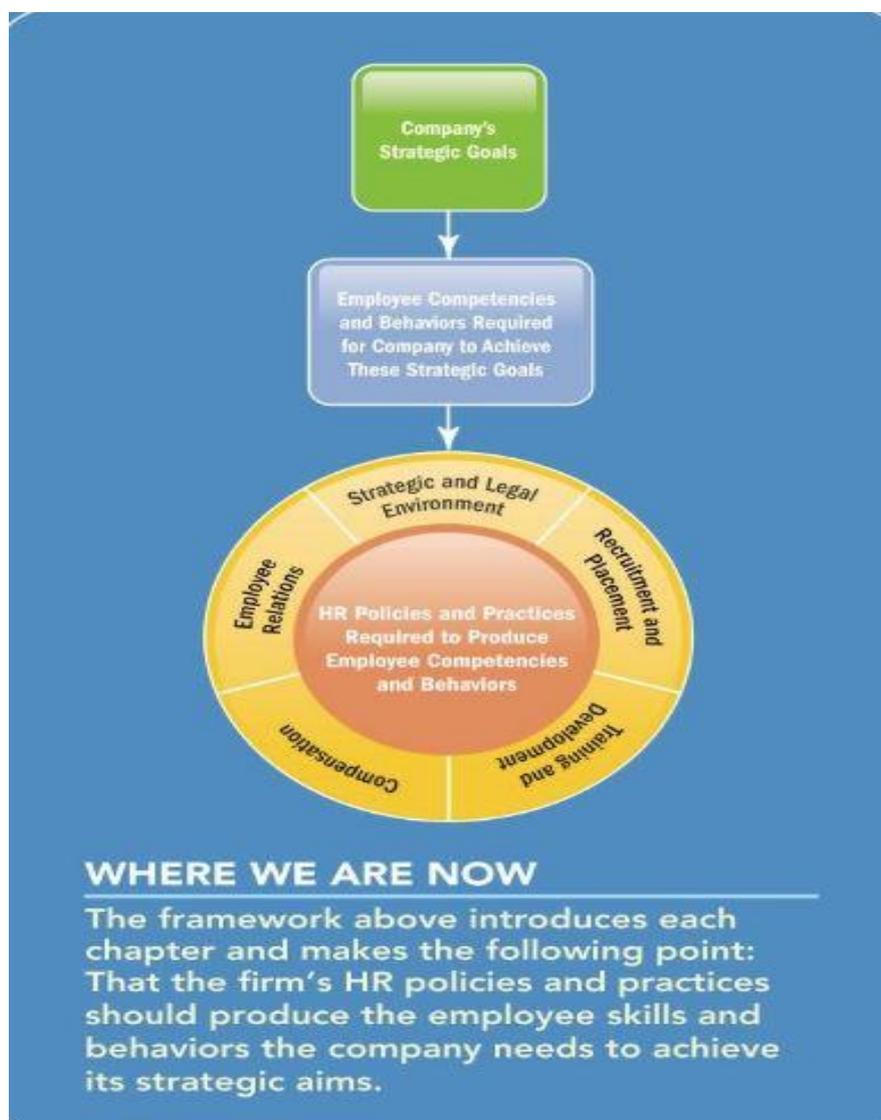


Figure 1, Graph expressing HR responsibilities (Dessler, 2017)

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this section author delivers the chosen research methodology. The questionnaire was conducted to serve the hectic schedule of executives for not being too time consuming. Furthermore the quantitative method allows author to gather a lot of data from a broad target group in a short period of time. Quantitative data produces information which is convenient to analyze and ultimate decisions. (Babbie, 2010)

3.1 Research method

In order to achieve the objectives of this research, quantitative research method will be conducted in this case. The selection of the chosen research method was unambiguous. As the research question suggests, the objective of this study is to find out whether the current customer base of Company X contains a demand for HR-services. In order to scout the demand in the current customer base and whether the premeditated service entirely serves their needs, a questionnaire was conducted.

A questionnaire provides statistical data which will provide focused insight of which the company can ultimately make a decision whether to support the designed HR-services or not. (Mark N.K. Saunders, 2019) Additionally the results of quantitative methodology allows the company to estimate their customers needs and also examine the opportunities regarding the services. The results of the survey will be used to determine whether to proceed with the premeditated service entity in western Finland or not, and whether the premeditated service entity needs changes. The results of the questionnaire provides the required data from the specific HR-service entity, but also a standpoint for the need of the services.

Quantitative research serves the purpose for this study. It gives the opportunity to scout a large number of customers in a specific segment. It also allows an efficient way to gather data from a great customer base within the target group of the services. With the data gathered a conclusion and recommendations are easier to provide. The questionnaire will deliver a result on whether to proceed or not. (Mark N.K. Saunders, 2019)

To efficiently scout the need of a large customer base, a vast amount of contacts must be executed, therefore a questionnaire will be the most beneficial for the purpose. Quantitative will be the only methodology used in this study, therefore it will be a mono method. This method is efficient in collecting essential information from a major customer database. (Mark N.K. Saunders, 2019) The questionnaire conducted in this research will be provided to Company X's the most significant customer segments in terms of revenue, These segments will be the target market for the service. This particular customer segment is the most important for Company X due to large revenue and the respondents are executives of their company. There were two segments selected which are the biggest companies in terms of turnover for Company X. The questionnaire will provide an opportunity for the respondents to leave their contacts for future interviews on the subject. This presents an opportunity for a precise need scouting.

To be able to analyze the outcome of the questionnaire, a cost benefit ratio calculation formula will be displayed in the thesis. This formula will provide Company X guidelines on how to ultimately calculate the possible outcome of the service. With the costs and benefits behind the service, Company X is able to determine whether to proceed with the service or not.

3.1.1 Survey overview and analysis

The survey was conducted online using Company X's own survey program. It was spread amongst the biggest customers of Company X by email after mapping the customer segments. The respondents were executives of their companies and therefore major decision-makers. The respondents had two weeks time to respond to the survey and they were reminded after the first week. The decision of the timeline was made due to the experience of the marketing department of Company X that the questionnaire will not receive responses for longer state of being open.

The questionnaire was sent to 360 companies. The number of responses acquired during that two weeks period was 14. Total response rate of 3,8%. All of these 14 respondents are executives of their company and major customers of Company X's in terms of turnover. Therefore the response rate can not be overlooked, considering that these are responses from the direct target group of the designed service. It is also important to acknowledge that the respondents are the most influential decision makers of their company. The exact companies to whom this service is designed for.

3.2 Limitations

Initial thought was to provide the survey for the companies who are customers of only payroll administration and located in western Finland. However the response rate was so low, that the segment needed expansion. Decision was made to expand the target of respondents throughout Finland to the biggest companies in the customer base. This conclusion was essential in order to achieve results. Additionally the current state of the country being affected by the coronavirus might have an impact on the issue by lowering the interest. Seems evident that the executives of many companies are struggling with their own issues, therefore priorities are elsewhere.

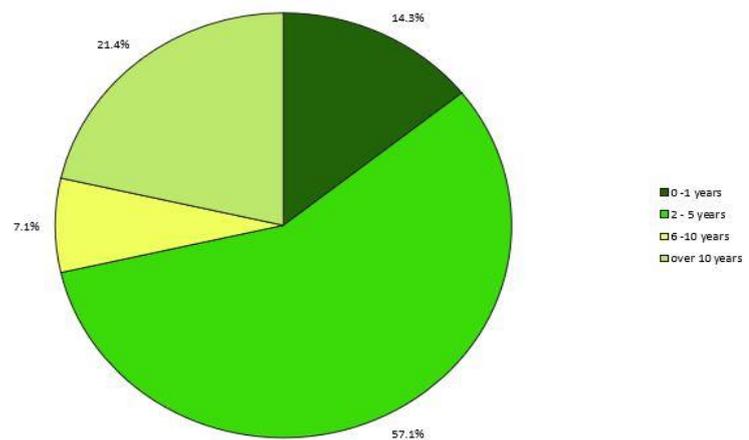
4 RESEARCH RESULTS

4.1.1 Customer relationship

The survey was started by acquiring the knowledge of the respondents and Company X's history.

Most of the respondents had been a customer of Company X for 2 – 5 years with 57.1% and 6 to over 10 years of customer relationship was established with 28,5%. Figure 1 indicates that a long business relationship has been established with the respondents. With this relatively long relationship an understanding of one another's procedures is

1. How long have you been a customer in Company X?



achieved.

Figure 2 The customer relationship length.

What is interesting is that although the relationship between Company X and the respondents is rather long, the respondents are not convinced about the quality of the business relationship. This is a conclusion author made based on the responses of the figure below. The vast majority with 53,9% would not be interested in partnering with Company X regarding HR-services. However 23,1% would be really interested in

receiving HR-services from the company.

Would you be interested in partnering with Company X regarding HR? On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = Not interested, 5= Really interested)

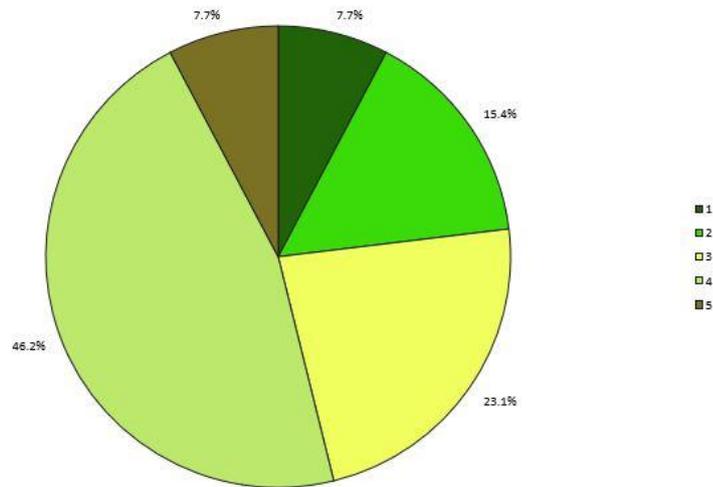


Figure 3 The interest of customers partnering with Company X regarding HR.

4.1.2 Reason for outsourced services

The reason for the respondents for outsourcing operations to Company X, for vast majority with almost 80% the reason was the possibility to focus on their core competence. Other important factors were optimization of their resources and quality control with 43%. These factors are really important when considering outsourced services. These results indicate that the respondents acknowledge the importance of being able to outsource services which are not directly within their own expertise. By outsourcing the respondents are able to centralise time to develop their business. This

advocates the HR service further.

2. What issues outsourcing solves for you?

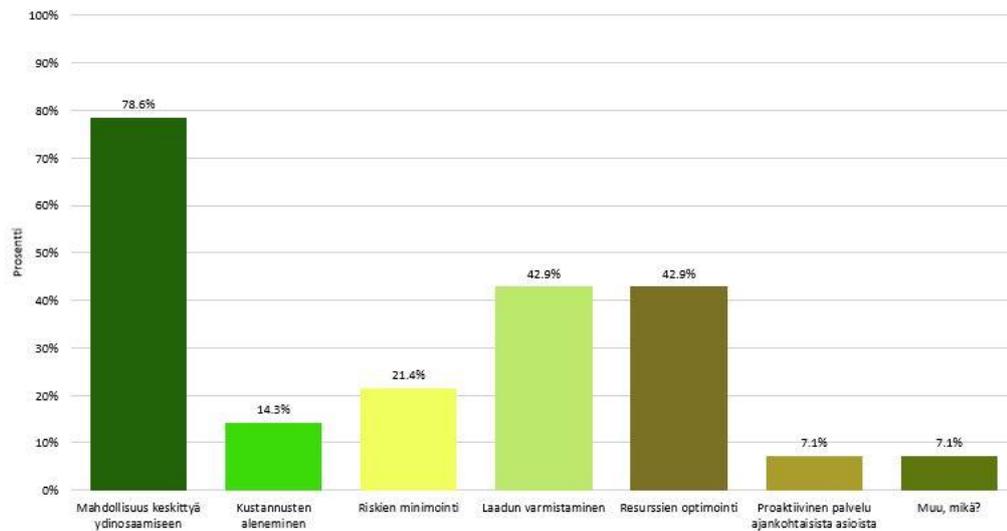


Figure 4 Reasons behind outsourcing services in the first place.

4.1.3 Notability of the service content

To be able to make conclusions about the need for the premeditated service entity, direct questions regarding the need for content has to be reviewed. The results were interesting and desirable, since every aspect of the service received interest. As can be seen from the Figure 4, every section of the question received interest, which indicates that there is a demand for HR-services within the customer base. The response option in Figure 4 were Employee training, development of employer branding, development of HR-processes, personnel engaging, development of employee welfare, management and personnel training and HR-reports (cost per hire, absenteeism, revenue per employee, turnover etc...) if respondents were facing other issues they were asked to specify them. Not one service stood out from the rest of the options with ease. Management and personnel training, development of employee welfare, and HR-reports were the most appealing to the respondents, but just merely. This result foreshadows the conclusion

that the designed service will receive demand.

18. How interested would you be in the following services on a scale of 1 to 5? (1= The most interesting, 5 = The least interesting)

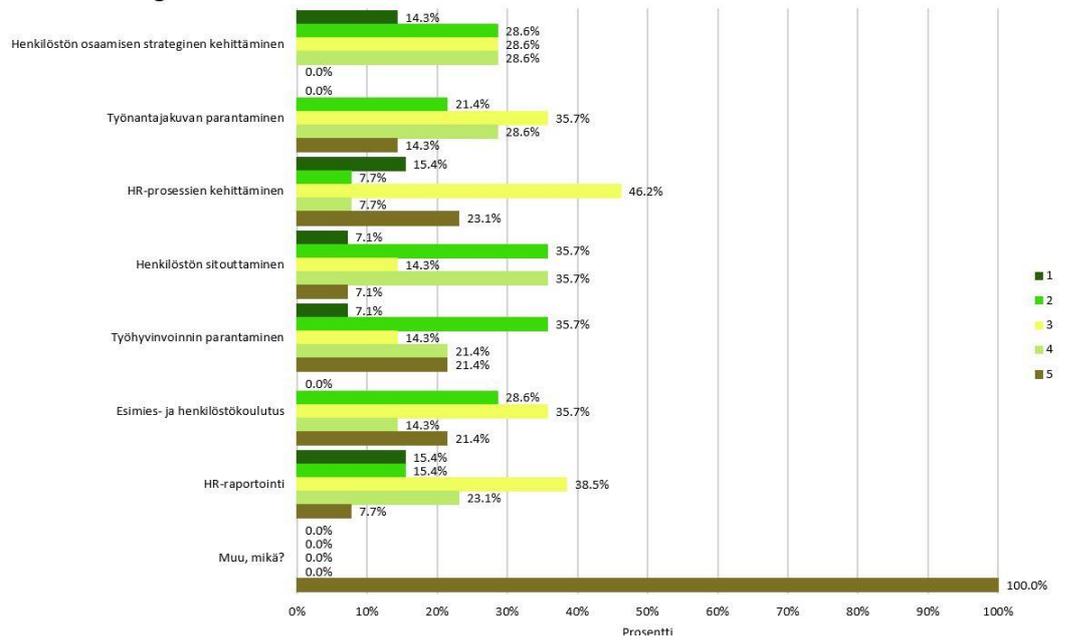


Figure 5 Interest within the customerbase towards the designed services

6. How challenging you feel the following employment relationship issues? (1 = Really challenging, 5 = Not challenging at all)

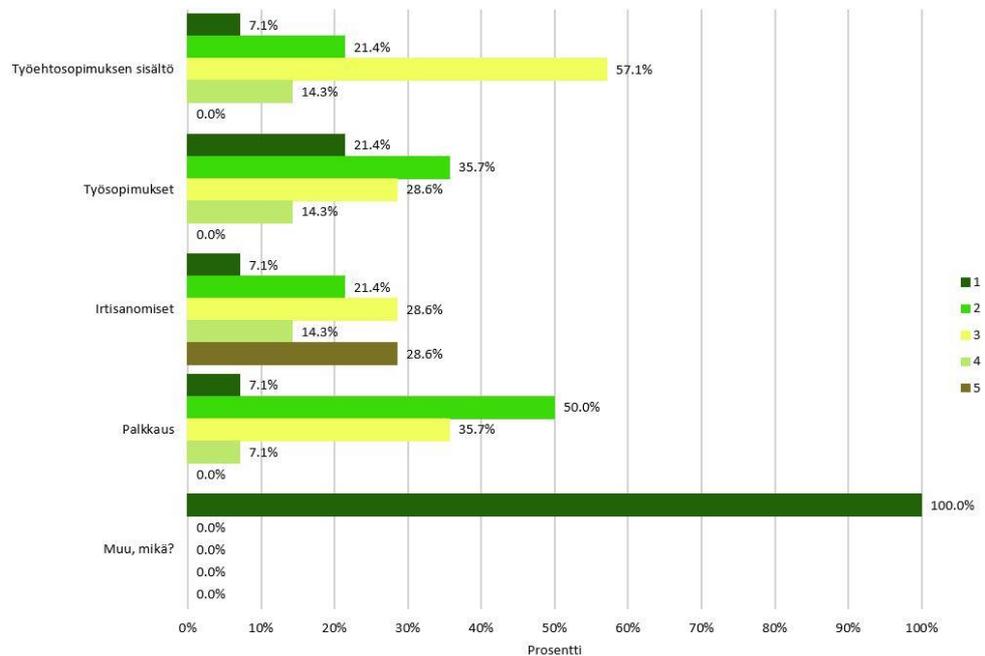


Figure 6 How challenging customers feel about the employment relationship obligations.

The figure 6 suggests that the services designed are interesting to the customers and some parts of it they feel struggling with, such as dismissals. Employment agreement, collective labor agreement and dismissals all indicate that the entity of employment relationship management is somewhat challenging to the customerbase. These services will require continuous service which was the thought of the respondents as well, since 50% of them wanted the service to be continuous and 35,7% didn't know which one would they prefer. These results assert author to advise Company X to proceed with the services.

Do you see the possible personnel development needs as a project or as a continuous service?

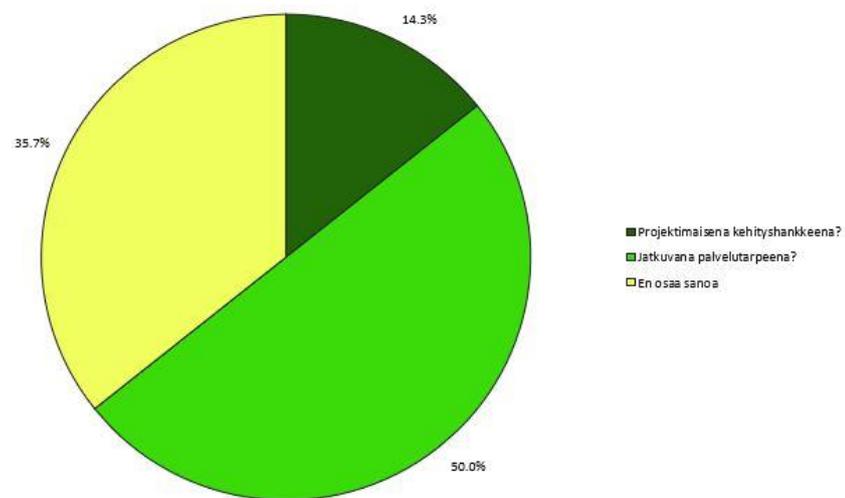


Figure 7 Would customers want to have a business partner or a project.

4.1.4 Software

9. Is there a dedicated HR software already in use in your company? If yes, kindly specify

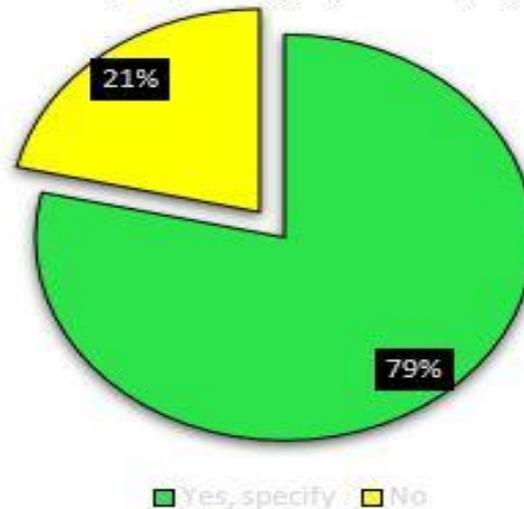


Figure 8 Does customers have a software which they already use in HR.

As mentioned, digitalization has brought a lot of new technologies in to the everyday processes of a company to ease their routines. This can be seen from the respondents whom almost all of them has a HR-software of some sort. A few mentions regarding the softwares which were specified were, Sympa, Mepco and Workday. The few who did not have a software for the purpose, assumably their processes has already been outsourced somewhere. The company wanted to find out which software customers use and whether they would be interested in having the service integrated within a software that they are currently using, the respondents were requested to specify the program. Therefore, as the service is developed, a dedicated software selection is easier to make.

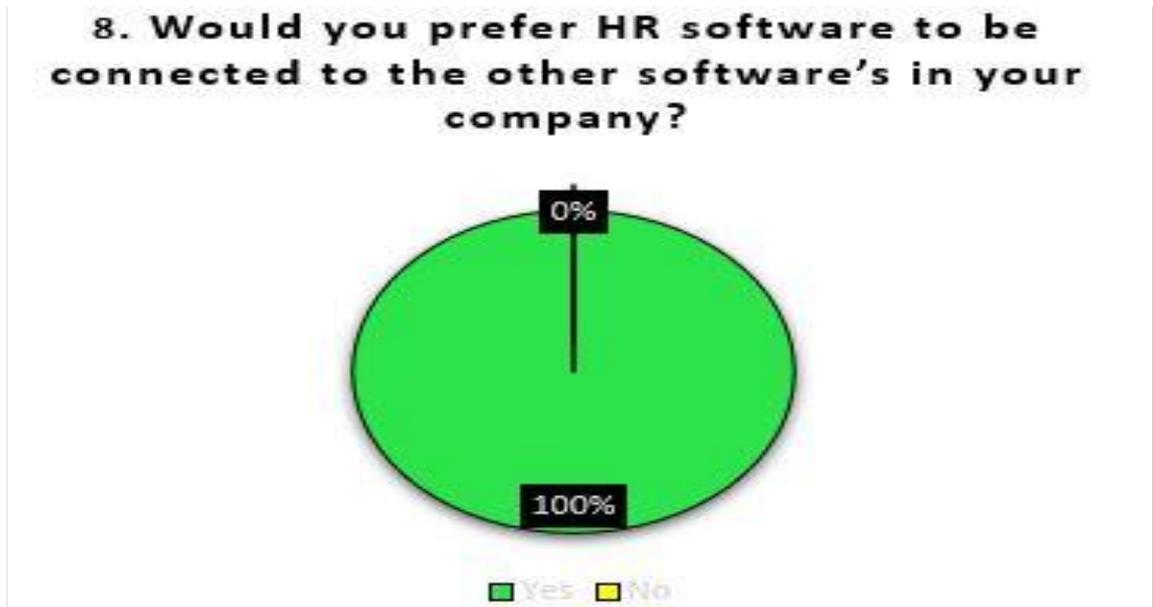


Figure 9 Describes whether customers would like to have their dedicated software to be integrated or a new software

The results were predictable, since 100% of the respondents wanted to have the system integrated to their software. This was predictable due to the experience in the field. If a new service is sold the biggest issue that customers have is that they should learn a new software to use. By being able to offer a service through a software which they already have would be a great.

4.2 Cost benefit analysis

To determine whether to proceed with the service or not, a tool for decision making which is used is cost benefit analysis. This method assists decision making by evaluating the possible costs versus the benefits. The cost benefit analysis will be conducted using the following steps;

- Goals and objectives
- Alternatives
- Shown metrics
- Determine outcome of costs and benefits
- Determine the net present value
- Decision making (Landau, 2018)

The objective of this service is to deliver value for the customers for the future needs as stated before. Therefore acknowledging the changes affecting future, it is evident that actions need to be made. The alternative option is to keep offering the same services as before and focus on delivering them. The metrics shown in the questionnaire which was answered by executives of organizations suggests that the premeditated service entity will receive demand.

Costs; possible hire of a HR-manager, training of current personel, sales of the service, possible software costs.

Benefits; Being able to deliver value for customers, long time business relationship, employ staff in the future, meet the objectives of the future, cutting edge against competitors in the field.

Cost Benefit Analysis Formula

$$\text{Net Present Value (NPV)} = \sum \text{Present Value of Future Benefits} - \sum \text{Present Value of Future Costs}$$

$$\text{Benefit-Cost Ratio} = \frac{\sum \text{Present Value of Future Benefits}}{\sum \text{Present Value of Future Costs}}$$

Figure 10 Shows the formula how to calculate valuation (WallStreetMojo, 2020)

NPV, Net Present Value indicates the changes in cashflow during a determined period of time. If the outcome of calculation NPV is positive, the service should be executed, if negative then the risks should be evaluated. (Kenton, 2020)

Benefit – Cost Ratio is used to outline the relationship between costs and benefits of a project. If the outcome of calculation of BCR is greater than 1 the service should be beneficial for the company and their investors. (Hayes, 2019)

5 CONCLUSION

The objective of this thesis was to find out whether the current customer base of Company X contains demand for HR services and whether the premeditated service would serve their needs. Additionally, the research was to verify the competences of a payroll administrator to adjust their obtained knowledge into being an HR specialist. Company X requested for perceptions. Based on the research the author is able to share observations about the findings. This section will be focused on the findings. When Company X is able to deliver concrete numbers affecting the service the NPV and BCR are able to be calculated. These outcomes will eventually help Company X to determine whether to proceed with the services or not.

5.1 Observations on survey

The results of the survey are very clear. The outcome of the survey is suggesting that the premeditated service will receive demand. The respondents were facing issues with every part of the service and also interest was shown. Interesting part was that the most challenges that companies face were the once regarding employment relations. This is the area where the payroll administrators have the most knowledge of.

Based on the results of the survey, author will suggest Company X to proceed with the services. Author could not indicate substantial reasons for not to do so. It is evident that payroll administrators obtain the knowledge which could be added to the current service entirety as an addition. For future purposes augmenting the additional employment relations consultation service to the payroll administration would be beneficial for the Company X and their personnel. This way the payroll professionals could adapt to the world of consultation and learn more about the role of HR as a whole. Then case Company X could test the market in real life situations without big investments and also get hands on knowledge from the field about the issues companies face and develop the service.

Improvements that author suggests Company X to do. The survey indicated that most of the respondents were not eager to partner with Company X on HR related matters. This indicates dissatisfaction in the current customer base. As mentioned, the respondents were the biggest customers of Company X and therefore the most significant in terms of

turnover. With them hesitating to obtain more services from Company X is alarming, since these companies are taken care of the most. This issue needs to be taken under investigation to find out the reasons behind.

5.2 Results

Author was able to provide answers to all of the research topics. Author delivered essential information regarding the demand for the service, but also for future needs delivered formulas how to ultimately calculate the affects with NPV and BCR. Company X was given essential information regarding the service entirety. As mentioned, Company X should definitely proceed with the services regarding the survey results and also the literature review. Payroll administrators are definitely in a great position to advance their knowledge to be able to bring value in the future with their knowledge on employment obligations.

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7 APPENDICES

7.1 Cover letter

COVER LETTER

Dear Customer,

Are you struggling with one or more of the following issues;

- How to get more potential out of employees?
- How to tackle the issue of employee turnover?
- How to engage employees to the company?

We are developing human resource services in co-operation with our customers. Personnel is the most important asset in a company. We want to help our customers to ensure their personnel optimization, to bring out their full potential.

We invite you to develop comprehensive human resource services by answering the questionnaire below.

The questionnaire takes approximately 5. Minutes to answer.

Please share your thoughts by **DATE**.

Thank you in advance.

The questionnaire and its results will be used anonymously in a bachelor's thesis.

7.2 Questionnaire

1. How long have you been a customer in company X?

- 0-2 Years
- 2-5 Years
- 6-10 Years
- Over 10 Years

2. What problems does our services solve for you?

Choose one or more.

- We can concentrate to our core business.
- Decline in expenses.
- Risk management.
- Quality control.
- Optimizing resources.
- Proactive service.
- Other, what?

3. Which one of these fields you consider is in need of development from a scale of 1 to 5? (1 = really in need of development, 5 = Fully under control)

Choose one or more.

- Developing personnel's strategic know-how.
- Employer branding.
- Developing HR-processes (Recruitment, Introduction, Evaluation etc...)
- Engaging personnel.
- Employee well-being.
- Management and personnel training.
- Other, what?
- None of the above.

4. How challenging you feel the next employment relationship issues on the scale of 1 to 5? (1=Really challenging, 5=Not challenging at all)

Choose one or more.

- Collective labor agreements.
- Contracts of service.
- Dismissal.
- Salary.
- Other, what?

5. How interested would you be on the following services on the scale of 1 to 5? (1=Not interested, 5=Really interested)

Choose on or more.

- Development of personnel know how.
- Development of employer branding.
- Development of HR-processes.
- Engaging personnel.
- Development of employee welfare.
- Management and personnel training.
- HR-reporting (Cost per hire, absenteeism, revenue per employee, turnover etc...)
- Other, what?

6. How are HR issues handled in your company currently?

- By HR-Manager
- By dedicated HR-department
- By someone at the office
- By myself
- Other, specify

7. Would you be interested in partnering with Company X regarding HR? On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = Not interested, 5= Really interested)

8. Would you prefer HR software to be connected to the other software's in your company?

- Yes
- No

9. Is there a dedicated HR software already in use in your company? If yes, kindly specify

- Yes, specify
- No

10. Do you see the possible personnel development needs as a project or as a continuous service?

- Project
- Continuous service
- Other, what?

11. Did this questionnaire raise any questions or thoughts?

(free word space)

12. Would you like us to be in contact regarding this issue?

Leave your contacts here