Need for support personnel – analysing the need and the economic impact of a service assistant in Company X

Anna-Maria Kauppinen

Author	
Anna-Maria Kauppinen	

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This thesis studied if there was need for a service assistant in Company X by studying the managers' tasks, the time the tasks take, and the nature of the tasks. This thesis studied also the possible economic impact a service assistant would have by estimating how much of the managers' time would be released for the managers' core competences and e.g. other value-creating tasks. This thesis was conducted as a case study for Company X.

The topic was discussed with the managers prior the start of thesis work, and the need for a service assistant rose to as the management felt there was not enough time but to only complete the most necessary functions, impairing certain tasks that were felt less necessary.

This thesis looked into managers' and assistants' general functions, and the possible advantages and disadvantages an assistant can create. The empirical data was gathered though interviews and observations. There were three separate interviews, one for service assistants to gather data about their duties, second for managers who have a service assistant in their unit to gather data on how the need for a service assistant is viewed, and third for the two main units', Units 1 and 2, managers to list their tasks and the time tasks take to be able to evaluate the possible need for a service assistant and how much time the assistant would release for their core competences, and therefore add value for the units.

The main analysis concentrates on the need and the economic impact a service assistant would have for the Units 1 and 2 in Company X.

Keywords
Management, time management, key functions, workforce strategy

Table of contents

1 Introduction

This thesis studied if there was need for support personnel, in other words, for a service assistant in two units, Unit 1 and 2, at Company X by studying the units' managers' tasks, the time the tasks take, mapping and remapping the processes, and by listing key functions and establishing key positions. This thesis studied also the possible economic impact a service assistant would have by estimating how much of the managers' time would be released, and the economic impact of this released time. This thesis was conducted as a case study for Company X (Thomas 2013)

1.1   Background and motivation

Company X operates in various countries with many employees, and with its headquarters located in the metropolitan area in Finland. The Unit 1 operates mainly in the metropolitan area with a few operations at customer sites located outside the metropolitan area. The Unit 1 has also international customers and customer sites abroad, and some projects require technicians to travel to these customer sites. The Unit 2, however, does not operate abroad nor internationally, but operates mainly in the metropolitan area.

During this study, there were three managers in Unit 1 and five managers in Unit 2. This study concentrated on the operations and tasks of two of the Unit 1's managers, and two of the Unit 2's managers.

1.2   Research objectives and research questions

The main research objective was to analyse the need for a service assistant in the Units 1 and 2. The second research objective was to list tasks, the time the tasks take, and analyse the possible time released for the managers for their core competences and other, possibly value-creating tasks. The estimate of the released time gave the base to analyse the possible economic impact of a service assistant by analysing the economic aspect of the time released. The third objective was to find possible advantages and disadvantages of having a service assistant.

The research questions according to these objectives were:

1) Is a service assistant needed in the units?
2) What functions and tasks handled by a service assistant would release more time for the managers for their core competences?
3) What are the advantages and disadvantages of having a service assistant?

The first and second research question contained the scope of the empirical part and defined the main frame for the interviews with the managers and assistants. The questions also supported the literature review. The third question gave the main frame for the online questionnaire held for the managers in units that have a service assistant. All three research questions were the basis for the final separate report that was made in accordance to the thesis and interview findings and analyses.

1.3   Structure of the study

This thesis is divided into four parts: (1) introduction, (2) literature review, (3) empirical study and (4) discussion.

The first part consists of chapter 1 where the case company is briefly presented alongside with the background and motivation for this thesis, the research objectives and questions, and the structure of the research and the study. Also, chapter 2 is a part of the first part, and the chapter explains the methods used in this thesis.

The second part consists of chapters 3 and 4 where literature and theory relevant to the research topic is reviewed. Chapter 3 focuses on the need for an assistant and the impact an assistant has. Chapter 4 brings insight to the management-assistant relationship and how the management needs to change its work methods to get the most out of an assistant.

The third part, empirical study, will consist of the Unit 1 and 2's managers' tasks, the current situation and the economic impact a possible service assistant would have, along with the observation and interview analysis. The third part consists of chapters 5 to 11.

Chapter 5 brings an insight on the managers' tasks and the time the tasks take. In chapter 6 is analysed and listed the key functions for the managers. Chapter 7 presents the mapped process in the units. In chapter 8 is analysed the assistant interview findings, as well as the results and analysis of the questionnaire to analyse the necessity of a service assistant. In chapter 9 is analysed and documented the remapped process, and in chapter 10 the key positions are es-

tablished based on the analysis of strategically important positions. In chapter 11 the economic impact a possible service assistant is estimated and analysed.

The fourth part includes chapters 12 and 13. In chapter 12 are presented the recommendations according to findings and analyses, and in chapter 13 is the discussion for this study that investigates the results of the study.

2   Methods

Some of the content hidden in this chapter, for Company X's internal use only

This study followed case-study methodology. A case-study method is recommended when the main research questions are "how" or "why" questions, when the researcher has little or no control over behavioural events, and when the study focuses on a modern real-world social phenomenon. For a case study it is possible to gather evidence through direct observation of the events or phenomenon being studied and interviews of the people affected. Also, informal manipulation may occur. (Yin 2014, 2-16)

The research approach was inductive. Inductive approach can be called a bottom-up approach, where you move from specific observations to generalizations and theories. Deductive approach works the other way around and can be called a top-down approach. In deductive approach you begin with a theory and narrow it down to hypotheses, collect observations to address the hypotheses, and test the hypotheses with specific data to reach confirmation. Inductive and deductive approaches are presented in figure 1. (Trochim 2020)

Deductive	Inductive
Theory	Observation
Hypothesis	Pattern
Observation	Tentative hypothesis
Confirmation	Theory
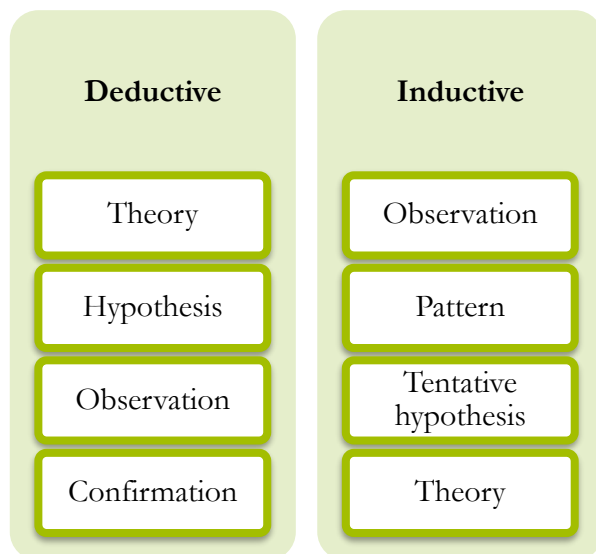
Figure 1. Deductive versus inductive approach (Trochim 2020)

The research scope was both qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative research is used to reveal the respondents' opinions, thoughts and feelings. The method is used to inform new concepts and requires more in-depth involvement from the researcher. However, the outcome is shaped by the researcher's interpretation. The qualitative research method was used in the open and closed interviews, and the quantitative research method in the economic impact of a

service assistant analysis. Quantitative research method is concerned with collecting and analysing structured data that can be represented numerically. The method is used to reveal uncover behaviours and trends; however, the method does not provide motivation behind observed behaviours (answer to question why). (Goertzen 2017, Tiley 2017)

Participant observation was used to gather data of the managers' tasks, responsibilities and duties, as well as possible problems and challenges they face. This was the main approach for the thesis. As the possible outcome for the thesis product was based on the economic aspect, the analysis needed to be complete and well argued. Observation can be used when research questions and objectives are concerned with what people do. To analyse a need for support personnel, the tasks and the time they take should be analysed. As there was no written nor documented job description for the managers, the obvious way in which to discover the nature of their work to observe them at work. (Saunders & Lewis & Thornhill 2009, 288; Thomas 2013)

There are two types of observation: participant observation and structured observation. Participant observation is qualitative, and structured observation is quantitative. Participant observation implies that the researcher immerses in the research setting enabling the researches to share their experiences by observing and feeling what is happening. "Structured observation is systematic and has a high level of predetermined structure." By using this method in data collection, the researcher adopts a more detached stance, and the methods function is to tell how often things happen rather than why they happen. (Saunders & Lewis & Thornhill 2009, 290, 300)

The data from participant observation and separate interviews with the managers provided the economic aspect for the need for a service assistant. The need was analysed by calculating how much time each task takes by average, and how much managers' time was taken by administrational tasks that could be completed by a service assistant. The amount of time released was estimated and analysed. The analysis brought insight on tasks that would require more of the managers' time, and what benefits could be achieved by releasing the required time for the managers to complete tasks for which they did not have enough time. With the help of the listed tasks it was possible to build current and new work order flowcharts to help further explain the need for a possible service assistant, along with the task description for the possible service assistant.

The empirical data was gathered by interviewing the case company's employees. The assistants working in similar duties in other units were interviewed to have a better understanding of their duties and responsibilities, and to be able to list possible tasks for the service assistant in Units 1 and 2. Also, there was a short closed online interview for the managers in those units that have a service assistant to study opinions on why an assistant is needed and possible advantages and disadvantages of having an assistant. With the interviews an analysis on opinions why a service assistant is needed, the possible benefits and disadvantages, as well the possible functions for a service assistant were analysed. The findings were reported with a separate report.

The process began with collecting relevant theories to help decide what kind of data is needed. In accordance to the collected theory, the data gathering process began by observing the managers' workday. Based on the observations and asking questions throughout the day, a list of tasks and duties was built.

The managers' tasks list was checked by the managers and changes were made according to given feedback. The list is presented in appendix 1. With the help of the managers' tasks list, data on how much time each task takes began by interviewing each manager concerned. They were able to give estimates on how much time each task takes in a one workweek. This gave the basis for the economic analysis.

Also, with the help of the managers' tasks list, building work order flowcharts began. Two charts were built: one chart to present the current situation, and one to present the situation where a service assistant would be available. These charts are presented in appendices 6 and 7.

With the data collection on tasks and the time each task takes was completed, I began writing the separate report in Finnish. The completed report was checked with the help of the managers in Units 1 and 2. The completed report is presented in appendix 8. With the report ready, follow-ups on further actions began according to the given feedback from the managers, as well as the short closed online interviews were conducted.

The people open interviewed and close interviewed (online survey) for this study are presented in table 1. A total of 24 employees were interviewed for this study. In the Unit 1, the managers were observed and open interviewed. With the help of interviewing the managers, the managers' tasks and duties were listed, as well as the time the tasks take, along with the possi-

ble opinions on whether a service assistant is needed and why. In the Unit 2, the managers were observed open interviewed to have a better understanding of their tasks and the time tasks take, along with possible opinions on if a service assistant is needed or not.

The service and general assistants were open interviewed to have a better understanding of their tasks, duties and responsibilities to be able to build a better and more accurate job description for the possible service assistant for the Units 1 and 2. The managers that were close interviewed by an online survey were interviewed autonomously and therefore I cannot say from which unit the employees are from.

Table 1. Employees interviewed for the thesis

Job title	No. of persons interviewed	Type of interview
Manager 1	1	Open interview
Manager 2	1	Open interview
Manager 3	1	Open interview
Manager 4	2	Open interview
Manager 5	1	Open interview
Service Assistant 1	1	Open interview
Service Assistant 2	1	Open interview
General Assistant 1	1	Open interview
Manager 6	1	Open interview
Manager 7	9	Closed interview
Manager 8	1	Closed interview
Manager 9	2	Closed interview
Manager 10	2	Closed interview

3 Assistants

In this chapter is presented the assistant's position and the position's impact in a company. Also, the process on how to analyse the need for an assistant is presented along with the advantages and disadvantages of an assistant for a company.

3.1 Assistants – invaluable resources and influencers

Dick Beatty, professor of Human Resource Management in the School of Management and Labor Relations at Rutgers University, states in his interview in the Harvard Business Review that organizations try to be different to add value to the customer. Once this is done, organizations try to differentiate internally with financial and material resources, information and time, forgetting their most expensive resource, the workforce. There is not necessarily good information about the organization's workforce, and how it adds value in the marketplace. (Michelman 2009, Warner 2017)

Assistants are invaluable resources and influencers. Assistants and support personnel are the makers of order no matter the size of the organization, business unit, or team. "They are the lifeline to anyone and everyone in the organization." According to Harvard Business Review's article 'The case for executive assistants', as companies have faced pressure to cut costs which has in many cases and in many companies resulted in reducing the number of assistants at lower levels. "That is unfortunate, because effective assistants can make enormous contributions to productivity at all levels of the organization". (Duncan 2011, 89; Pontefract 2019, Raudsepp 1989, 118)

Assistants save their bosses more time than the company invests in the assistants. Managers' time is more expensive for an organization than assistants' time. Assistants' worktime is time saved from the managers, hence making them more productive and releasing them time for their core competences. (Duncan 2011, 89)

Timing, expense and purpose are a few of the core factors that can help decide if an assistant is needed. Heather Markel presents three questions in her article "Do you need an assistant, or do you just have to work harder?" that can help define whether an assistant is needed, and where they will bring the most value. The questions are: (1) Is it time for an assistant or strategy overhaul, (2) can you afford an assistant, and (3) what kind of an assistant should you hire. "An assistant can be a needless business cost or one of the most valuable resources you have.

Creating a logical way to analyse your business needs will help you determine the right time and the right person to hire." (Markel 2017)

A good indicator for a need of an assistant and other support personnel is that managers are extremely busy, and everything does not get done. However, first should be analysed if there is need for focus, not or for actual help. When administrative work takes time away from more important tasks, an assistant is usually needed. Basically, in this situation the activities waste time instead of create revenue. An assistant will bring value by releasing time for the managers to focus on value-creating tasks. The strategy to avoid the expenses of an assistant will cost more in long term and in lost revenue. An assistant should do at least one of the following: save time, bring value, and expand customer service. (Markel 2017)

3.2 Analysing the need for an assistant

Assistant is a key part of support staff, and the number of assistants in a company should be related to the size of the company and to the number of tasks. Analysis for the need of a possible support staff can be determined by reviewing and analysing tasks and the time they take, listing all key functions, mapping processes, and then establishing key positions. (Thomas 2013)

First, the number of tasks and time that each task takes should be reviewed and analysed. This reveals who is doing what and how much time is spent on each task. For example, if payroll processing takes 4 hours a week for 30 people, i.e. 8 minutes per person, you will be able to define how long it will take for more, or less employees. The analysis typically reveals inefficiencies and opportunities, also if there is requirement for support. (Thomas 2013)

Once the analysis for tasks and the time each task takes is identified, the second step is to list all key functions, e.g. invoicing, new job setup, resourcing etc. The third step is to map the way the key functions are processed. Mapping in this context means drawing a chart on the process, and how and who does what. This is an effective way to identify possible opportunities for improvement. (Thomas 2013)

Remapped processes should be documented, so that they can be used for training and monitoring, hence increasing efficiency, accuracy and easing the training of new employees. Documenting also makes it easier to manage and right size the support team. Therefore, documenting can be used to explain and argue why an assistant may or may not be needed, as well as

assess and determine if the right person is in the right position. "Establishing - - key positions along with the development of clear processes will help structure and simplify your office, making it more manageable, measurable and accountable, which will allow you to do more with less." The process to analyse the need for a support personnel is presented in figure 2. (Thomas 2013)
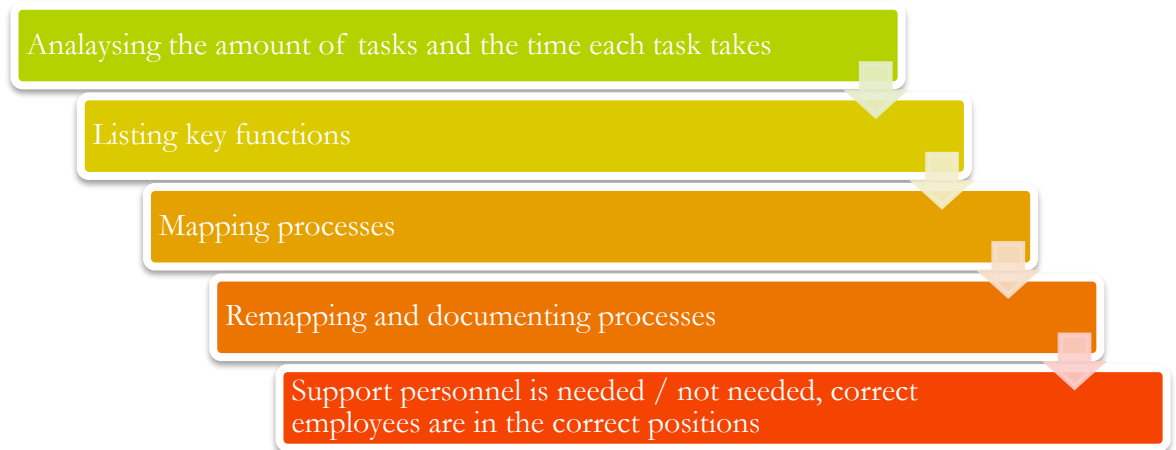
Analaysing the amount of tasks and the time each task takes

Listing key functions

Mapping processes

Remapping and documenting processes

Support personnel is needed / not needed, correct employees are in the correct positions

Figure 2. Process to analyse the need for support personnel (Thomas 2013)

3.2.1 Utilizing an assistant

There are two main factors that determine how well an assistant is utilized: first the managers willingness to delegate work to the assistant, and second, the assistant's willingness to assume new responsibilities. Strong manager-assistant relationships ultimately benefit the companies. (Duncan 2011, 90-91)

Managers need to realize that a part of their job is to manage their relationship with the assistant to get the highest possible return, as the assistant is eventually a strategic asset. Many managers spend too much time on operational details that should be delegated to the assistant, if possible. Of course, the managers need to able to trust the assistant's professionalism and expertise. Great assistants are crucial to being productive. Assistants, however, need to proactively look for ways to improve their own skills and competences, by e.g. learning new technologies, systems or languages. (Duncan 2011, 90; Pozen 2011)

A skilled assistant can reduce the number of tasks, meetings and communications that consume the managers' time. An assistant can make managers more productive and successful with e.g. communication and strategic planning. (Masterson 2017)

3.2.2 Impact on productivity

Efficiency and productivity are usually compared. and considered as synonyms. However, strategy-wise the two are very different. Mankins gives the following definitions: efficiency is about doing the same with less, and productivity is about doing more with the same. Efficiency is usually measured by comparing the number of hours required to produce a product or service, and this can be improved by finding ways to reduce the required hours to produce the same level of output. Productivity, however, is usually measured by comparing the amount of goods and services produced with the inputs used in production. Productivity is directly tied to an organization's performance. (Mankins 2017)

In practice, efficiency is reached through reducing the number of employees in an organization. However, today, a different view is required. The benefits reached from efficiency have diminished and are next to impossible without top-line growth. (Mankins 2017)

Adopting a productivity mindset is challenging but critical. "Instead of focusing on continuously managing the denominator, by cutting headcount, executives should identify ways to boost the numerator, and increase output." According to Harvard Business Review article "Great companies obsess over productivity, not efficiency" by Michael Mankins, the best companies are over 40 per cent more productive than others. The difference in productivity results in higher profits and faster growth. (Mankins 2017)

3.3 Advantages and breaking even

> "Consider a senior executive whose total compensation package is $1 million annually, who works with an assistant who earns $80,000. For the organization to break even, the assistant must make the executive 8 per cent more productive than he or she would be working solo – for instance, the assistant needs to save the executive roughly 5 hours in a 60-hour workweek." (Duncan 2011, 89)

Hallie Warner lists in her article "5 ways executive assistants can add value to their company" ways assistants can add value to a company that are e.g. keeping right information flowing, volunteering to lead special projects, and communications. Assistants have control of information flow, and they choose who to share certain information with. The way the information is shared also defines how the assistant is seen: information can be used to gain power or shared with co-workers to be an influencer and a resource. The priority is to maintain confi-

dentiality but understanding what can and should be shared with who is important. (Warner 2017)

Today, organizations do more with less people. Therefore, it is important for assistants to act as problem solvers and fixers. Assistants may need to work on projects that do not fall to any specific category or department but that are important to the managers. Assistants also need to sometimes communicate on behalf of the management. According to article "Two-thirds of managers are uncomfortable communicating with employees" by Lou Solomon, a majority (69 per cent) of managers feel often uncomfortable communicating with employees. Assistants need to make sure that communications work, as it may lead to dysfunction and disconnection, resulting an unproductive team. (Solomon 2016, Warner 2017)

Good assistants make a deep impact on businesses. When managers have access to an assistant, or shared resources, productivity is boosted. As mentioned before, adopting a productivity mindset is beneficial to an organization. (Duncan 2011, 89)

3.4   Disadvantages and costs

It can be more difficult to find a good assistant than other management employees. A good assistant needs to have emotional intelligence, good judgement, and capacity for foresight. Misreading corporate culture, failing to build bridges with other assistants, not asking enough questions, and speaking to external parties without authorizations, are the most common missteps that an assistant makes according to Melba J. Duncan in her article 'The case for executive assistants'. (Duncan 2011, 91)

Delegating tasks may also prove difficult, as not only tasks that the managers consider unimportant, and are only routine tasks, should be delegated to assistants. This can reduce motivation and create a casual attitude towards the tasks given, hence reducing productivity. Younger managers may have higher self-sufficiency due to growing up with technology, and therefore they have difficulties delegating duties to the assistant. Senior leaders too may struggle knowing what can be delegated, or how to delegate responsibility and not just tasks. By being unable to delegate duties well to the assistant can have negative impact on the corporate culture. (Duncan 2011, 91; Raudsepp 1989, 120; Riegel 2019)

The recruitment process and introduction create costs well, and as previously mentioned, finding the right person for the position can be difficult. The hiring process itself costs in e.g. ad-

vertising, reviewing applications, interviews, and background checks. There are costs that cumulate from having a workstation and required materials and accesses for the assistant, e.g. phone, computer, external screen or screens, and accounts, licenses and access to used software and applications. (Mueller 2019)

These investments are made to increase production; however, it takes time for the costs to break even. A survey of 610 CEOs by Harvard Business School estimates that for a mid-level manager it takes 6.2 months to reach the break-even point. During the first month, after training is completed, the productivity level of a new employee is about 25 per cent which then increases to 50 per cent during the following two months, and to then gradually from 75 per cent to full productivity. (Mueller 2019)

The possible advantages and disadvantages of an assistant are presented in figure 3.

Advantages
- Information flow
- Problem solvers and fixers
- Communicating on behalf of management
- Boosted productivity

Disadvantages
- Finding a good assistant can be difficult
- Possible difficulties in delegating tasks
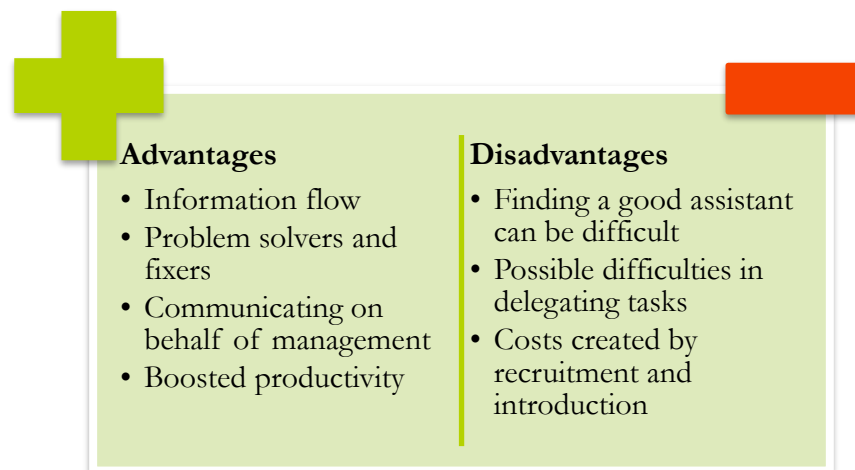- Costs created by recruitment and introduction

Figure 3. Advantages and disadvantages of an assistant (Duncan 2011, 89, 91; Mueller 2019, Raudsepp 1989, 120; Riegel 2019, Warner 2017)

4   Managers and assistants

In this chapter is presented the functions of management, and how to make the managers and the assistants the most productive.

4.1   Functions of management

The first theory of principles of management was created by a French engineer Henri Fayol in 1916. Fayol stated the five functions of management that were universal and performed daily by every manager. These functions are still seen relevant to organizations today. The five functions are planning, organizing, commanding, coordinating and controlling. They focus "on the relationship between personnel and its management and they provide points of reference so that problems can be solved in a creative manner". This is presented in figure 4. (Shah 2017, Van Vliet 2011)
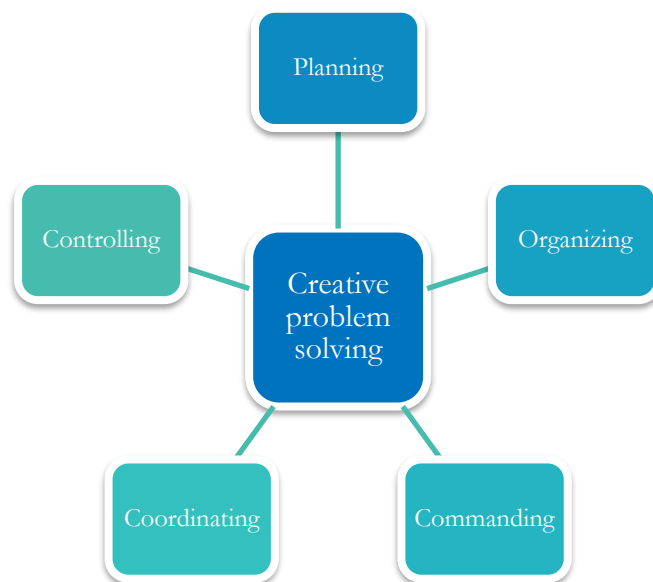
Figure 4. Fayol's Five functions of management (Shah 2017, Van Vliet 2011)

It is often easier to discover what the problem is and to make choices than to find out what the creative solution is. The five functions of management present steps for problem solving that starts with a creation of an environmental analysis of the organization and ends with the evaluation of the implemented solution's results. (Van Vliet 2011)

Planning is the most difficult function of the five. It requires active participation from the whole organization. Managers plan future conditions and develop strategic objectives by evaluating future contingencies that affect the organization taking into consideration available

resources and personnel's flexibility. "With respect to time and implementation, planning must be linked to and coordinated on different levels." (Shah 2017, Van Vliet 2011)

Organizing is important, as only a well-organized organization can function well. The workforce must be organized efficiently, and the activities need to be structured and aligned by managers. There should be enough capital, workforce and materials for the organization to run smoothly and to be able to build good working structure. Managers need to train and recruit the right people for the job and ensure that the workforce is skilled and educated. (Shah 2017, Van Vliet 2011)

Commanding means supervising and inspiring subordinates. Managers need to give orders and clear working instructions, communicate company goals and policies to subordinates. (Shah 2017, Van Vliet 2011)

Coordination means harmonizing all activities within an organization. Each unit's activities should complement and enrich each other. Managers need to aim for motivating and stimulating discipline within group dynamics so that intended objectives can be achieved. (Shah 2017, Van Vliet 2011)

Control is required to make sure that everything is going according to plan. "Managers must control that company activities are in line with general company policies and objectives." (Shah 2017) Control is a four-step process of first establishing performance standards according to objectives, second measuring and reporting performance, third comparing results with performance and standards, and fourth taking possible corrective or preventive measures. (Shah 2017, Van Vliet 2011)

Henry Fayol's five functions of management give a structured overview but may not completely represent the total complexity of tasks that managers face. The overview gives managers the idea on what they should focus on in their daily work. For example, theorists Frederick Herzberg and Elton Mayo's theory focuses more on motivational factors that can secure a satisfied and motivated workforce. (Shah 2017)

The main responsibility for managers is to oversee employees in a department or in a specific group or company. Managers' contributions are reflected in workplace morale, as well as in

company profits. Managers' duties are e.g. setting goals, administration, motivation, training, evaluation and delegating work. (Telegraph 2017)

Assistants are multitaskers with wide expertise. Assistant create the prerequisite for the managers to be able to concentrate on value creating tasks. Therefore, assistants may have a higher, third level education. Today, it is also possible for an assistant to proceed to management duties. Administrational assistants are the centres of silent information, and they know who knows what. They are both gate keepers and door openers. The administrational assistants need to be flexible but also able to limit what they do, otherwise they will end up doing all sorts of duties. (Aamuposti 2020)

4.2   Delegating work

Delegating work is important. If not done correctly, it can cancel out any time-savings assistant can offer to management. Delegating can help increase productivity, morale and commitment. It can be a struggle to delegate work, even if you know what needs to be delegated. (Fast Company 2017, Riegel 2019)

> "Knowing how to work with assistants, whether virtually or in person, can help you delegate more effectively. As a result, your entire team will be more productive and efficient." (Young Entrepreneur Council 2019)

According to Eugene Raudsepp's article "How to delegate effectively" managers who delegate well accomplish more. "Delegating allows managers to transform themselves from working supervisors into instructors, motivators, and evaluators." (Raudsepp 1989) Delegating work saves the organization's money as managers' time costs more than assistants' time. The work is also continued in the managers' absence, and more discretionary time is provided for the manager. Managers can also focus on their highest priorities and core competences when duties are delegated well. This ensures that team members develop, and creates a culture where delegation is embedded. (Raudsepp 1989, 117-118; Riegel 2019)

It takes time for the management and the assistants to be on the same level with the delegated tasks. Even if the assistant is a seasoned expert, he or she is going to need instructions regarding how the management wants things done. Taking the time to train may seem counterintuitive, however, that time will eventually be more time for the management to concentrate on other tasks. Therefore, this effort will quickly pay off. The management should also have clear

standards, and the expectations should be reasonable but set high, so that the assistant knows what to aim for, and to keep the work consistent. (Young Entrepreneur Council 2019)

Delegating tasks well is impossible without continuous communication and feedback. The management should check in with assistants regularly, and also keep the assistants informed as much as possible on e.g. changes is schedule, project scope, and responsibilities. The assistants also need to know what is important to the management, so that the tasks are prioritized correctly. The management also has a responsibility to answer questions and provide the assistants more information if needed. (Young Entrepreneur Council 2019)

4.3   Making the two most productive

Tom Wujec states in his presentation "Build a tower, build a team" that a group of CEOs with an executive assistant perform better than CEOs without an assistant. The improvement is about 440per cent. The reason for this is because administrative assistants have special facilitation skills, keeping the CEOs focused on the task at hand instead of letting them continue to jockey for power and control. "Any team that manages and pays close attention to work will significantly improve the team's performance." In an organization, an assistant helps the managers stay focused on important tasks. (Wujec 2010)

Making the management and assistant most productive can be achieved following the following tips: (1) reinforcing the right habits, (2) systemizing procedures, (3) tracking delegated tasks, (4) meeting regularly, and (5) setting reminders. All these functions require what is needed for a successful relationship between management and assistants: trust and communication. (Fast Company 2017, Young Entrepreneur Council 2019)

By reinforcing habits, time-management habits that are beneficial to both are reinforced. The habits demonstrated by the assistant should be praised early on. These habits are e.g. self-imposed working, good communication, learning new systems and software, and keeping up with the work pace. (Fast Company 2017)

Ideally there are ready step-by-step procedures, however, if there is not, management should delegate to the assistant to write these procedures down by the management demonstrating the procedures. Every frequently repeated administrative task should be delegated and documented. This ensures that duties stay consistent, and also saves time from the management needing to explain everything every time and from the assistant needing to ask the same ques-

tions repeatedly. Documenting and recording delegated tasks will also help in long-term, in case the assistant changes at some point. (Fast Company 2017, Martell 2015)

The management should not confuse tracking delegated tasks with micro-management. Tracking is about recording delegated tasks so that the assistant can mark off their progress with the given task. " - - this habit can add some clarity to tasks and processes that are now split between two people, rather than just handled by one." (Fast Company 2017)

The management should have weekly meetings with their assistants. These regular meetings do not have to be long, 30 to 60 minutes, and with the help of the meetings the management and assistants are kept on the same page, and duties can be prioritized for the week. The meetings should be seen as an opportunity to go through delegated tasks, to explain new projects, and generally to make sure that the correct information is available for the assistant. Clarifying tasks can save hours and takes only a few minutes. (Fast Company 2017, Martell 2015)

Setting calendar reminders for recurring tasks helps to confirm that duties are finished in a timely manner. Setting these reminders can be delegated to the assistant. This kind of a system is a good safeguard to make sure that the management stays up to date that tasks get done. The system also ensures better and effective time management. (Fast Company 2017, Juneja 2019)

4.4   Time management

Time management is the process of managing time effectively so that time is allocated correctly to each activity or task. Time management includes planning, setting goals and objectives, setting deadlines, prioritizing activities, spending the right amount of time on the right activity, and delegating responsibility. (Juneja 2019)

Planning is about writing down important activities that need to be done against the time allocated to each activity: the higher the priority, the higher the position on the list. Projects are made up of smaller parts that need to be completed before the project itself can be completed. By creating to-do lists, projects and goals are easier to achieve, keeping in mind that activities should be completed before any new are started. This may require limiting the number of activities worked on at once. (Juneja 2019, Rampton 2018)

Ensuring that the activities are finished within the stipulated time frame is important, as setting a time limit to each activity prevents from getting distracted or procrastinating. Working with realistic and achievable goals and objectives ensures that the activities are completed. (Juneja 2019, Rampton 2018)

Setting deadlines can be done by using e.g. planners to mark important dates. Deadlines should be set according to the importance and urgency of the activity, as well according to the estimated time required for the completion. Therefore, the activities need to be prioritized prior to setting deadlines. Prioritization can be done by identifying activities that need to be done within a set timeline, e.g. day, week or month. Also, it is important not to waste time on an activity. If an activity can be completed in an hour, you should not waste an entire day on it. (Juneja 2019)

Delegating responsibilities is a part of time management. However, delegating is not always an option, especially in situations where there are no available resources. When there is a possibility to delegate, the activities should be delegated according to the interest and specialization of an employee to make sure that the activities are completed within set deadlines. In other words, an employee who has little to no knowledge on the activity requires more instructions and time than someone who is familiar with the activity. This can make delegation a bit tricky, as for some it may be hard to let someone else do their work, and for others there is no time to train someone else to complete activities. The importance of delegating is that it is a real time-saver as it lessens workload, giving more time to work on other important activities or even doing less work. (Juneja 2019, Rampton 2018)

"Time is the most important asset you have as a - - leader and staying focused on what matters most is essential." Time management can be completed and supported by a good assistant. (Kerpen 2014)

5　Review and analysis of managers' tasks

As mentioned, analysis for the need of a possible support staff can be determined by reviewing and analysing tasks and the time they take, listing all key functions, mapping processes, and then establishing key positions. In this chapter the Units 1 and 2's managers' tasks are reviewed and analysed. (Thomas 2013)

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5.1　　Observations and analysis

The process to analyse the need for a service assistant began by collecting data about the Unit 1 and 2's managers' tasks by observing three managers' workdays. With the data collection complete, the main tasks and key functions were reviewed, analysed and listed. After having listed the tasks, separate interviews on how much time the managers spend on each task began. Four managers were interviewed for this: the three whose workdays were observed.

The managers' workdays were observed as there was no existing data of the managers' tasks. There was also no written or documented job description for the managers, however, there was an overall job description with the main duties and responsibilities for the positions in the Company X's intranet.

The observations were held for three days with three managers. One of the Unit 2's managers has less administrational duties than the other manager working in similar duties. Therefore, I did not spend one working day with this manager, only open interviewed him on a later occasion.

From the three days of observing the managers, I was able to better analyse and identify the current situation, the amount of work, the tasks and the variability of responsibilities, the estimated amount of time each task takes, and possible problems and challenges. The three-day observations also supported my own professional growth, and I was able to find new ways in which I could support the managers through my own work. The findings and interview analyses are presented in this chapter. The tasks are listed separately in appendix 1.

5.2 The managers' responsibilities

The managers' tasks are versatile and require knowledge and skills of multiple functions, as well technical knowledge in the unit's field of service. The managers need to have an overall understanding of processes and responsibilities of other units. They also need to have a vast understanding of the tools in use. The work requires a lot of multitasking, communications, customer service and problem solving. Many of the managers have background in working as a technician in the same or similar technical field they manage.

In the Company X's intranet, you can find an overall description for the main tasks for the managers' positions. It is good to keep in mind that the description are overall descriptions of the positions and responsibilities related to the positions. They do not give information on the tasks that the managers carry out in their work.

5.3 Time the tasks take

On table 3 are presented tasks and the time each task takes. The time estimates were given by the managers in Units 1 and 2. The reported times are estimated hours spent on a task in a week. The listed tasks do not include possible other tasks of the managers who did not participate in this thesis. The estimates were asked to be given even if the task is completed once or more times a month. For example, if a task is completed once a month, and it takes 4 hours to complete, the time spent on this task in average is one hour a week.

All the tasks do not have estimates on how much time is spent on that task. This is because, although it is a task that should be completed, there simply is not enough time to complete it. Therefore, these tasks are completed only when necessary. Also, during the observations and interviews, some tasks are completed only partially.

During the interviews and discussions with the higher-ranked managers, they seemed to have the assumption that the managers do not have enough time only because they do not schedule and manage their own work properly. Especially in the afternoons the office is quieter, and the managers should be able to finish all tasks within regular working hours.

When I discussed about this assumption with the managers, they questioned how they could manage and plan their work and days, as the days live and change at least once an hour. Some of the managers may complete certain tasks during the quieter hours of the late afternoon to ensure that they are not interrupted, or that there are less interruptions.

The higher-ranked managers may assume that the other managers are not busy during the afternoon hours, however, the situation could be completely different. In my opinion, it seemed that the higher-ranked managers did not really understand the nature of the other managers' work which caused these assumptions. Also, the higher-ranked managers do not observe the other managers throughout the whole day and therefore the opinions should be considered only as assumptions.

What stands out is that the reported hours are in total higher than the managers' official weekly working hours. This indicates that the managers do overtime without marking it anywhere and fortifies the assumption that there is not enough time to complete all tasks. Some of the managers said that they stay late in the office, as it easier to do some tasks after office hours as there are fewer interruptions.

As the time estimates given by the managers are higher than their official weekly hours, the data is easier to analyse when turned into percentage. With the help of this transformed data, it is easier to analyse the importance of each task, as well as estimate how much time an assistant could release from the managers, and it is also easier to relate the estimates to the official weekly working hours. The percentages per category are presented in figure 5.
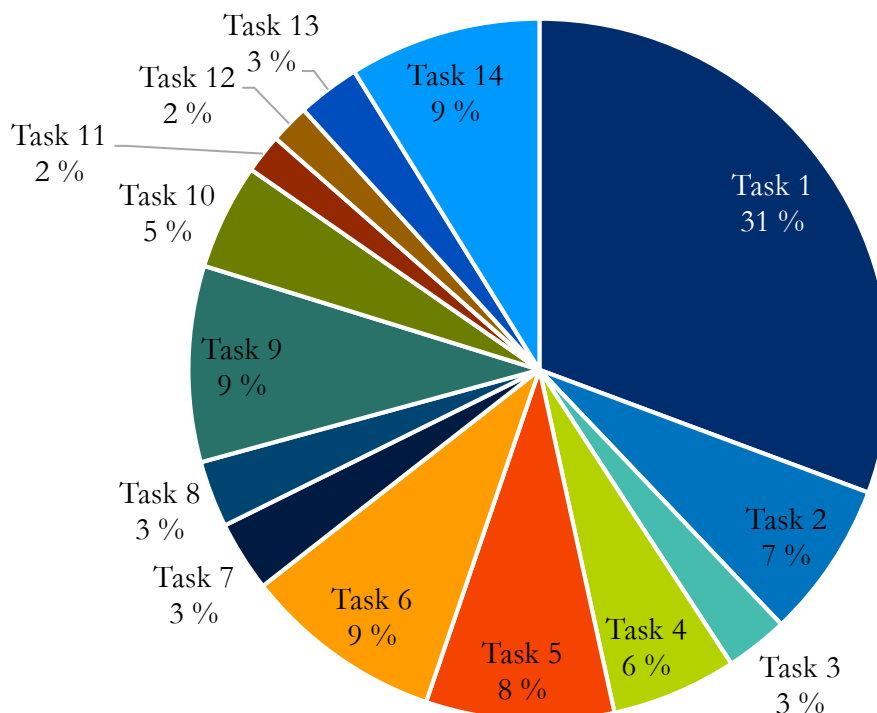

Figure 5. The percentage of time spent on task category in a week

6   Listing key functions

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As mentioned, the five functions of management are planning, organizing, commanding, co-ordinating and controlling. Planning is the function of planning future conditions and developing strategic objectives. Organizing means the function of organizing the workforce efficiently and structuring and aligning the activities. Commanding is the function of supervising; coordination of harmonizing all activities; and controlling means the function of controlling activities to ensure that everything is going according to plan. These functions are universal and repeated daily by managers. (Shah 2017, Van Vliet 2011)

With the help of these five functions of management, and the main responsibilities for the managers and the listed tasks we can define the key functions for the units 1 and 2. These are the functions that only the managers can complete because of their position as a supervisor, as well as because of their technical competence knowledge. These functions cannot be carried out by a possible service assistant.

According to Company X's definition, supervisors have the overall responsibility to supervise and show direction to subordinates. They have a fixed reporting line, and they are responsible for planning and budgeting the unit's economy and resources. The supervisors' responsibility is to offer their subordinates correct support and an opportunity for development.

7 Mapped process

In this chapter the current processes are presented. The flowcharts were built using the information gathered from the workday observations, from the managers' interviews and from my own work experience at Company X.

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7.1 Building the flowchart

The work order flowchart in production management's material for new employees was used as a base for starting to build the more detailed chart for the maintenances. The flowchart for projects was built with the help of Unit 1's internal short flowchart for projects. I also read Company X's project handbook to have a better understanding of project flow, however, the handbook was not utilized in making the flowchart, as the handbook is more of a guidebook and it is not easy to build a flowchart using the handbook. The mapped flowchart for maintenances and projects in presented in appendix 6.

7.2 Maintenances

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7.3 Surveys

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7.4 Projects

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8 Service assistant

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As mentioned, a good indicator for a need for an assistant is that managers are extremely busy, not everything gets done, and administrative work takes time away from more important tasks. In this kind of situation, the activities waste time instead of create value. The managers interviewed for this study all stated that there is not enough time to complete all the tasks, some tasks are delayed or postponed being able to complete more important and urgent tasks. (Markel 2017)

A way to determine a need for a possible support staff is to review and analyse tasks, the time the tasks take, list all key functions, map and remap current and new processes, and then establishing key positions. This method was used to analyse the need for a possible service assistant. In this chapter we investigate the possible tasks for a service assistant to be able to remap the current process. (Thomas 2013)

8.1 Interview analysis: assistants' tasks in Company X

To have a better understanding of assistants' tasks and responsibilities in Company X and to be able to determine what tasks in Units 1 and 2 could be delegated to a service assistant, I conducted three open interviews: two for two service assistants and one for a general assistant. The main tasks for these assistants are listed in appendix 2. Also, an online survey was held to the managers who have a service assistant in their unit to have a better understanding of how the feel about the necessity of a service assistant in their unit. These interview findings are presented and analysed in this chapter.

Two of the assistants interviewed work as service assistants in two different units. The third assistant who was interviewed works as a general assistant and assists managers in the Southern Finland area. The interviewed assistants are referred to as Service assistant 1, Service assistant 2 and General assistant in this analysis.

The Service assistant 1 has been working as a service assistant for two years. The Service assistant 2 is relatively new in her position, as she worked as an assistant for one customer in the unit until September 2019. Her prior duties concerned only this one customer, and did she worked closely with one manager who oversaw the tasks related to the customer. The General

assistant has been in the company since Company X was formed, and her duties differ the most from the other two service assistants' duties.

The Service assistant 1 stated in her interview that her tasks and duties are that of managers. She also assists her unit's higher-ranked managers with e.g. meeting room reservations and catering orders. The Service assistant 2 said in her interview that her duties are still forming, as she has only recently started as a service assistant and her duties and job description has changed. She is doing tasks like the Service assistant 1, however, some of her tasks need to be confirmed and approved by her official supervisor before she can complete them. The General assistant's duties differ completely from the service assistants' tasks, and so does her job description.

8.2   Questionnaire: the necessity of a service assistant

The closed interviews were conducted as an online questionnaire. The questionnaire was sent to a total of 38 managers in three different units. The reply rate to the questionnaire was approximately 37 per cent. The reply rates are presented in figure 6. On the left is ratio of how many replies were received, and on the right the ratio of managers out of the replies received.
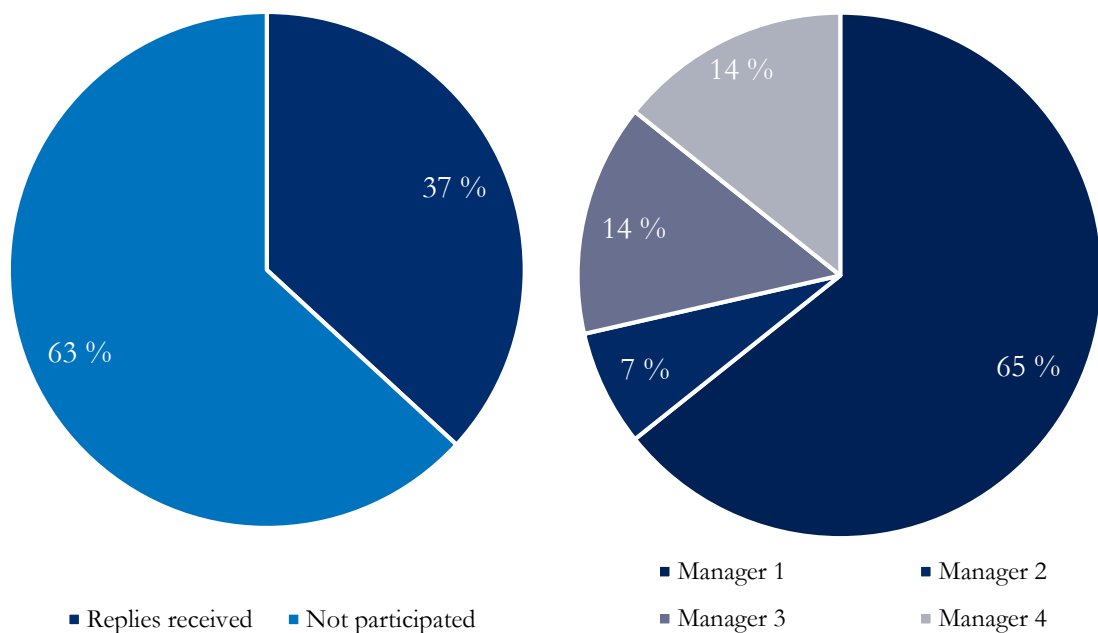

Figure 6. Questionnaire statistics, reply rates

The questionnaire was conducted to be able to analyse how the managers feel about having the assistant and if having the assistant is considered important or not. All questions were

mandatory, and therefore replies were given to all questions. Questions 1 and 3 to 7 were open questions, and the questions 2 and 3 were closed, multiple choice questions.

The questions and multiple options for the questions were:

1) Your work title
2) How long have you been working for Company X?
   Options: Less than a year, 1 to 3 years, 3 to 5 years, 5 to 7 years, 7 to 10 years or over 10 years
3) How important do you think it is to have a service assistant in your unit?
   Scale: 0 not at all important, 5 not able to say, 10 extremely important
4) Why do you think the managers should or should not have a service assistant available?
5) What do you think are the advantages of having a service assistant?
6) What do you think are the disadvantages of having a service assistant?
7) What qualities do you wish from a service assistant?

Majority of the respondents had been working for Company X for over ten years, and the minority 5 to 7 years. Most of the respondents had been working for Company X for more than 7 years, a total number of 9 out of all the respondents. Six respondents had been working for Company X for over 10 years, three for 7 to 10 years, one for 5 to 7 years, two 3 to 5 years, and two for 1 to 3 years. None of respondents had been working for less than a year at Company X. The distribution of the replies for question 2 is presented in figure 7.
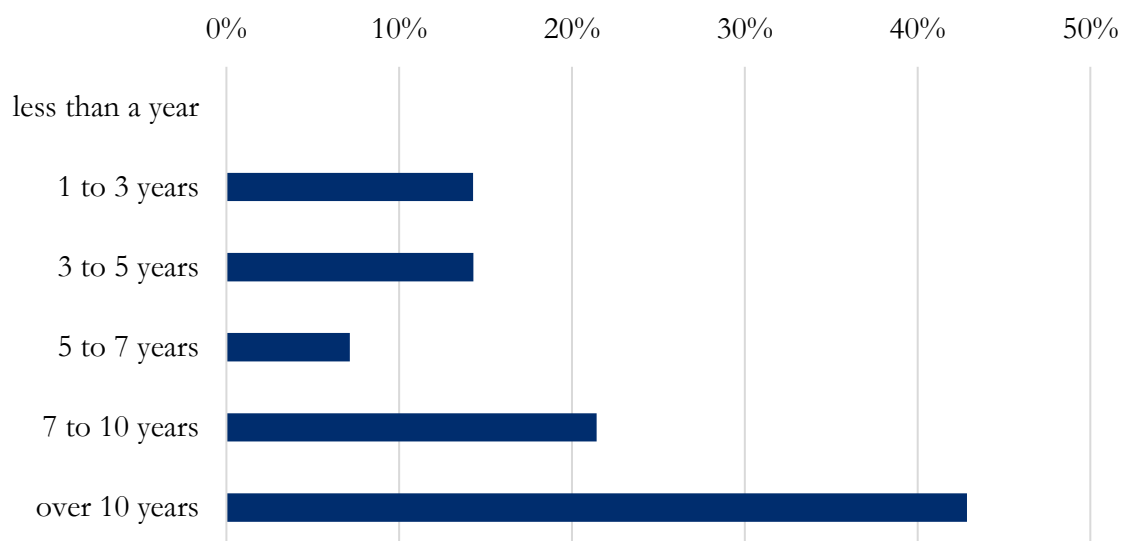

Figure 7. Respondents' number of work years at Company X, percentage

For the third question the respondents were asked to evaluate the importance of a service assistant for the unit on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 stands for not at all important, 5 not able

to say, and 10 for extremely important. The distribution of replies to this question is presented in figure 8.
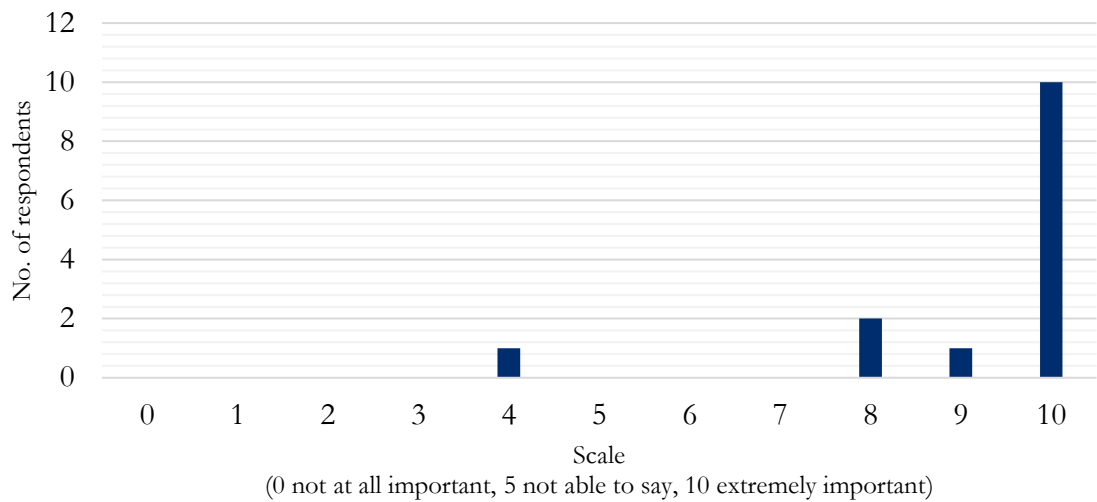

Figure 8. The importance of a service assistant, scale 0 to 10

Most of the respondents, a total of 10, in percentage nearly 71 per cent, evaluated the service assistant as extremely important to have in their unit. One respondent evaluated the service assistant as important on a scale of 9, and two respondents on the scale of 8. Only one of the respondents did not evaluate the service assistant in his unit as important, however, this respondent stated in the following question, in question 4, that it is useful to have extra hands available, however he did not feel that an assistant is needed full-time in his work.

In question 4 the managers were asked in an open question to tell in their own words why managers should or should not have a service assistant in their unit. Most of the managers stated that a service assistant is needed especially for ad hoc duties. The managers' felt that their work should be more technical than administrative. Also, the number of administrational tasks for the managers has grown that makes the necessity for the assistant even greater. Instead of wasting time on non-value creating tasks, the managers felt that it is more important to use the time to e.g. upkeep customer relations. Also, as the assistant would be assisting multiple managers, tasks that the managers only seldom complete would be easier for the assistant to complete, as the assistant would repeat the tasks more often.

One of the replies on question 4 stated that the need should be assessed, and the job description for the assistant. should be documented. The job description for the assistant may be vast and may not fit automatically all units. The assistant should also be familiarized to everything:

to the technicians', managers', and to administrative services' work. With the help of this kind of familiarization the assistant would understand the so-called bigger picture, as well as the processes. Otherwise there is a risk that the work delegated to the assistant is mainly work that the managers do not like to do, and the assistant only completes unimportant, routine tasks. This may reduce the assistant's motivation and turn the assistant's position into a cost expense instead of an asset that can help create more value.

In question 5 the managers were asked about the advantages of having a service assistant, and to tell the answer in their own words. Some of the managers said that with the help of an assistant the managers can be more efficient in their work, and they have more time for value-creating tasks, e.g. customer visits, making offers and creating additional sales. With these tasks, the assistant's salary is easily paid off. The assistant also saves the managers' time by being the managers' support at the office when the managers are out in the field. The assistant can search for information on behalf of the managers with using the tools available only at the office, and the managers do not need to go back to the office to search for the information themselves.

Another way to save the managers time, according to the replies, was that as the assistant regularly uses systems and completes tasks that the managers only seldom do, the assistant completes these tasks faster and more efficiently and helps to stay in schedule. Some of the replies repeated what had been answered to question 4 stating that the assistant saves the managers time by completing the time-consuming ad hoc duties, and the assistant ensures that tasks are not left uncompleted.

One reply for question 5 stated that it is important that the assistant is utilized wisely by delegating the assistant tasks that the managers only seldom complete. By doing this, the assistant operates as a link in everything and is a part of everything. If needed, the assistant can direct technicians, complete administrational duties, work as a little manager, use maintenance books, and operate different systems. With the help of the assistant everything, e.g. contracts, are kept up to date. To be able to get the most benefits out of the assistant, the assistant should be enabled to be a part of the operative functions.

In question 6 the managers were asked to, in their own words, state the possible disadvantages of having a service assistant. Eight of the replies for this question stated that there are no disadvantages, or not any disadvantages were stated in the replies. Disadvantages that did come

up were i.a. excessive initiative, lack of information flow, distrust between the managers and the assistant, the costs created by having an assistant, and the assistant not knowing his/her work.

One of the replies for question 6 stated that when the assistant is absent, e.g. on holiday, the managers have difficulties getting the required information or documentation as fast as possible. However, I do not really see this as a disadvantage but as an advantage in a way that the assistant helps the managers get required information easier and faster, and the benefits are emphasized when the assistant is out of office. One reply stated that especially in the beginning of having an assistant there are more disadvantages than advantages as the assistant does not know what to do, and the managers may have difficulties delegating work to the assistant, and may find it easier to do the work themselves.

In question 7 the managers were asked to tell the qualities they wish from a service assistant. Some of the managers wished the assistant to have technical knowledge or understanding of Company X's industry, or in general interest in the industry. Also, having IT skills was a quality that came up in several replies.

Personal qualities that the managers wished for an assistant to be were reliable, active, calm, creative, initiative, honest, team worker, cooperative, versatile, and willing to learn. Also, the ability to endure stress, and patience were traits that the managers wished the assistant to have, as the situations may change quickly and there are many managers that the assistant needs to be able to work with. One manager used one of the current service assistants at Company X as an example for a skilled service assistant as this assistant has the knowledge of the industry, knowledge to operate and willingness to learn systems, as well as the understanding of the managers' work.

Overall, the managers seemed to asses a service assistant as an asset that can release time for the managers for value-creating tasks. The assistant, however, should have the personal traits, interest in the industry, and knowledge required for the position so that the assistant does not become only a cost to the unit. It is also important to have a clear job description for the assistant's so that not only tasks that the managers do not like to do are delegated to the assistant. The tasks the assistant should mainly be responsible for should be tasks that the managers perform only seldom, but as the assistant assist many managers, the tasks are repeated more often by the assistant.

9 Remapped process

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The remapped process assumes that there is a shared resource, a service assistant, available for Units 1 and 2. The process was built taking into consideration the managers' tasks as well as the managers' wishes whether the tasks should be delegated to a possible service assistant, the listed key functions, the mapped process, the assistants' tasks listed according to interview results, as well as the questionnaire results and analysis. The remapped process chart is presented in appendix 7.

In the following subchapters are presented the plausible processes in which a service assistant would be an additional resource.

9.1 Maintenances

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9.2 Projects

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10 Establishing key positions

A key position is a position that if vacant would have significant impact on the organization's ability to conduct normal business. These positions can be managerial, technical, or support. For the analysis of establishing the key positions, i.e. whether there is a need for support personnel or not, the analysis of strategically important positions was used. (Hassan 2016, Thomas 2013)

10.1 Strategy-based approach

Re-examining the job and work design periodically is important, however, most companies do not do this. The requirements for work have significantly widened in the past few years, along with the changes in the work. Therefore, the ordinary work evaluation systems are no longer as practical as they used to be, and a more strategy-based evaluation and approach to build a job description is needed. With the help of a strategy-based approach a need for support positions for the strategically important positions can be defined, as well as the possible need to reduce the number of non-strategically important positions. (Becker & Huselid & Beatty 2009, 54; Huselid & Beatty & Becker 2005)

"The workforce is the most expensive yet poorly managed asset in most organizations." Companies tend to focus on process improvement at the expense of strategic value. Companies with successful workforce differentiation have a clear view of identifying A positions and an action plan. (Becker & Huselid & Beatty 2009, 55-56)

Traditionally the relative value of jobs in an organization has been assessed by focussing on the level of skill, effort, and responsibility; or by believing that people's wages reflect the value they create. "The trouble with both of these approaches is that they merely identify which jobs the company is currently treating as most important, not the ones that actually are." Also, although it might be believed that companies with the most expertise win, the companies cannot afford to have A players in all positions when taking into consideration the economic and management resources with which to attracts, choose, develop and keep the best performers. (Huselid & Beatty & Becker 2005)

Companies should concentrate to find the *right* people to the *right* positions, i.e. the best performers in strategically most valuable positions, good performers in support positions, and the worst performers and the non-value creating positions should be removed if possible. These

positions can be defined as A, B and C positions. The effective management of A positions requires intelligent management of B and C positions as well. To be able to define a position's strategic importance the company's own strategy needs to be clear: are you competing with price, quality or service. After this needs to be defined the company's strategic capabilities: the required technologies, information and knowledge for competitive advantage. The last step is to define positions that are essential to execute strategy. (Huselid & Beatty & Becker 2005)

10.2   Recognizing strategically important positions

By being clear about the company's strategy, by identifying the company's strategic capabilities, and by defining the jobs that are critical to executing the strategy, you can determine a position's strategic importance. The positions are variable, relatively rare, and most likely scattered at all levels of an organization. (Huselid & Beatty & Becker 2005)

The variation in the quality of the work is the substantial difference between the high and low levels of performance in each job. The variation represents upside potential: raising the average performance in the A positions has direct positive effect on the corporate value. If the variation exists across the organization, it may be a source of competitive advantage, hence making the position strategically important. A strategic position that does not have variability in performance is relatively rare, as the position involves more than proficiency in carrying out a task. (Huselid & Beatty & Becker 2005; Becker & Huselid & Beatty 2009, 52)

According to article ""A Players" or "A Positions"?" by Huselid, Beatty and Becker (2005), the two defining characteristics of A positions are (1) the positions' disproportionate strategic importance, and (2) the wide variability in the quality of the work displayed among the employees in the position. To meet the requirements for A positions, the job must meet, based on the two characteristics, the dual criteria of being strategically important and having performance variability. (Becker & Huselid & Beatty 2009, 59-61; Huselid & Beatty & Becker 2005)

From the A position's characteristics flow other positions: B and C positions. B positions can be indirectly strategically important through supporting the A positions, or they can be potentially strategic but exhibit little performance variability. Although B positions may not create value, they are often important in supporting to create or maintaining it. C positions, however, play no role in furthering company strategy, create or maintain little value, and may, in fact, not be needed at all. On figure 9 is presented and compared the characteristics of A, B and C positions. (Becker & Huselid & Beatty 2009, 59-61; Huselid & Beatty & Becker 2005)

	A Position Strategic	**B Position** Support	**C Position** Surplus
Defining Characteristics	A strategic impact **AND** High performance variability, representing upside potential	Indirect strategic impact by supporting strategic positions and minimizing downside risk by providing a foundation for strategic efforts **OR** Potential strategic impact with little performance variability	May be required for the company to function, little strategic impact
Scope of authority	Autonomous decision making	Specific processes or procedures to be followed	Little discretion in work
Primary determinant of compensation	Performance	Job level	Market price
Effect on value creation	Creates value by substantially enhancing revenue or reducing costs	Supports value-creating positions	Has little positive economic impact
Consequences of mistakes	May be very costly, but missed revenue opportunities are a greater loss	May be very costly and can destroy value	Not necessarily costly
Consequences of hiring wrong person	Significant expense in terms of lost training investments and revenue opportunities	Fairly easily remedied through hiring of replacement	Easily remedied through hiring of replacement

Figure 9. A, B and C position characteristics and comparison (Becker & Huselid & Beatty 2009, 60)

The most important characteristics of an A position are the position's strategic impact and direct impact on one of the company's strategic capabilities, as well as the position's high variability in performance. Other characteristics are e.g. the difficulty to fill the position (hard to find and keep the best performers), the best performers in these positions increase the company's possibility to meet its strategic objectives, and weak performance can immediately be detected. (Becker & Huselid & Beatty 2009, 59, 63-64)

B positions support or enable the A positions' performance. Even the best performance in a B position has only a neutral or little effect on a company's economic performance. Despite this, not having B positions can have a significant negative impact on the company's performance. In other words, although you cannot win with B positions, you can certainly lose without them. (Becker & Huselid & Beatty 2009, 64-65)

C positions may be important for a company to function even if they have none or little impact on the company's strategy or economic performance. C positions can be divided into two categories: "jobs that contribute to strategic success and jobs that primarily influence operational excellence". (Becker & Huselid & Beatty 2009, 65-66)

A, B and C positions can be described as follows: value creating positions (A positions), value neutral positions (B positions), and possibly value reducing positions (C positions) depending on the employees' level of performance. (Becker & Huselid & Beatty 2009, 68)

Improving the A positions' efficiency is important, as the positions have to most influence in e.g. the company profits and economic performance. The efficiency can be improved by e.g. training the people in the A positions, and with the help of evaluation and bonus systems. It is also possible to improve efficiency by creating support positions (B positions). (Becker & Huselid & Beatty 2009, 53; Huselid & Beatty & Becker 2005)

10.3   Company X's company strategy

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10.3.1 Management's strategic impact

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10.3.2 Management's performance variability

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10.3.3 Assistants' strategic position

Assistants' expertise is exactly what is most needed in strategy operations: communications, organising, coordinating, project management, scheduling and organising events. Assistants usually have more corporate information than middle managers who operate within a unit or line. At best, the assistants can be a part of strategy development. (Kärnä 2011, 25; Kärnä 2016, 20-21)

The common tasks for assistants in strategy process are assisting in information retrieval, meeting arrangements, scheduling, and taking care of presentation materials and technology. They may also be a part of practical action planning, budgeting, communications and events for presenting strategy. (Kärnä 2011, 25)

Assistants are strategically important as they operate as communications links between the management and other employees. The assistants translate strategy to organizations' other languages and to stakeholders, especially in international organizations they communicate strategy between parent company and its subsidiaries. The assistants' role may be significant in communicating strategy and in supporting the whole organization in implementing strategy. (Kärnä 2016, 21)

Assistants work as support personnel and support the employees in strategic positions. As mentioned, B positions support or enable the A positions' performance, and B positions have neutral economic effect. (Becker & Huselid & Beatty 2009, 60, 64-65)

In my opinion, in the possible service assistant would act as support for all the managers in Units 1 and 2. Although the assistant's work and position can be considered as a non-value creating position, not having the assistant may create creates losses. There probably would not be KPIs to follow and assess the assistant's work, however, the possible effect of the assistant's support could be evaluated by analysing the managers' KPIs and by surveying the overall work satisfaction.

10.4   Conclusions

Although the service assistant as a position does not directly create value to a unit, the support releases time for the managers for tasks that create value. The position can also be analysed by viewing the position's strategic importance. The managers' position fills the dual criteria for an A position: their work has a strategic impact, and their performance variability is high. (Becker & Huselid & Beatty 2009, 59-61; Huselid & Beatty & Becker 2005)

If we consider the managers' positions as A positions, it would be recommended to have an assistant in a B position to support the managers so that they can concentrate on value creating tasks. Although you cannot win with B positions, you can certainly lose without them. As the managers use their time on routine, administrational tasks that create no true value, unnecessary costs are created. The managers' pride in the work also is affected, as they feel that the tasks are tedious and non-managerial tasks. In my opinion, this affects the managers' productivity. (Becker & Huselid & Beatty 2009, 64-65

A service assistant would support the managers in their duties and tasks and would therefore have an indirect strategic impact and would minimize the downside risk by providing the foundation for strategic efforts. The position would show performance variability, as the tasks would be the managers' tasks, and as there would be no limit to which tasks would and should be completed, and the characteristics of the position would be determined by the skills and willingness of the person in the service assistant position.

The interviews with the other service assistants and the assistant in support duties concluded that the tasks vary, there is no written job description, and the tasks may not be limited to those the units' managers the assistant is primarily assisting. Therefore, the position of a service assistant would fall in the B position for the position's defining characteristics

Other characteristics that define the service assistant position as a B position are that specific processes or processes in general should be followed, the compensation would be defined by the job level, and the position supports value-creating positions, i.e. managers. The consequences of mistakes would not necessarily be costly, giving the position a C position characteristic. However, if a wrong person would be hired to the position, hiring a new person would be fairly easy, but would create expenses in terms of lost revenue opportunities, as the tasks would fall for the managers to complete, hence making them lose time from possible revenue creating duties.

The possible service assistant would be completing some of the current tasks for the managers, as well as other additional tasks that the managers do not have enough time for. Keeping in mind these tasks, and by comparing the mapped process for the current situation with the remapped process chart it can be determined that more tasks would be completed, and there would be more customer contacting as well as more time for the managers for value-creating tasks and to ensure that the work is completed and invoiced promptly. In my opinion, with the help of the supporting tasks, the customer satisfaction along with the unit profitability would improve. Presented on table 2 are the characteristics of managers' position is comparison to a service assistant's position.

Table 2. Manager vs service assistant: positions characteristics (Becker & Huselid & Beatty 2009, 60)

	Manager	Service Assistant
Defining Characteristics	A strategic impact **AND** High performance variability, representing upside potential	Indirect strategic impact by supporting strategic positions and minimizing downside risk by providing a foundation for strategic efforts
Scope of authority	Autonomous decision making	Specific processes or procedures to be followed
Primary determinant of compensation	Job level	Job level
Effect on value creation	Creates value by substantially enhancing revenue or reducing costs	Supports value-creating positions
Consequences of mistakes	May be very costly, but missed revenue opportunities are a greater loss	Not necessarily costly
Consequences of hiring wrong person	Significant expense in terms of lost training investments and revenue opportunities	Fairly easily remedied through hiring of replacement

11 Economic impact of a service assistant

The possible economic effect of a service assistant was defined by counting how much time the tasks that could be delegated to a service assistant would save from the managers. The times were analysed in percentage, not in hours, as the hours reported by the managers significantly greater than the official working hours they have in a week. Therefore, the estimate does not present possible overtimes the managers do, nor tasks for which the manager have time to complete only partially or tasks they have no time to complete.

11.1   Determining the impact

When discussing the thesis topic with the managers, the only way to make concrete changes in the units is to present the possible economic impact a service assistant would have for the units. However, the exact economic impact of the released time is difficult to estimate, as some of the tasks are only partially completed, and for some there is not enough time.

The possible additional costs or savings from the released time from the managers is difficult to estimate, as this would require an estimate on how much additional sales is not done or how cost-efficiently the managers use the released time. It also difficult to estimate unit-based savings from the released time.

It is as difficult to estimate the possible effects on project profits if the managers would have more time for e.g. surveys and offer or plan calculations. Therefore, any of these estimates that are difficult to estimate have not been included in the estimates presented in this chapter. However, we may assume that with a competent service assistant in use there would be savings in the units' costs, especially when and if the managers spent the released time cost-efficiently.

During one of the interviews rose the need to improve processes, however, the manager questioned if there would really be a need for a service assistant, but possibly for another manager. When you look at the tasks that the managers are responsible for, you can notice that part of the tasks are administrational tasks. In my opinion, and in the opinion of the other managers interviewed, these tasks should not be completed by managers, as they create no value.

The managers' expertise goes to waste when they complete supportive tasks. Usually an assistant completes the tasks better and more carefully as the techniques and systems are in con-

stant use. According to one of the managers, it easier to recruit an assistant that to increase the number of managers.

It is good to keep in mind that a service assistant would be a supportive and a limited resource, and that some of the managers' current tasks would be completely or only partially possible to delegate to the service assistant within the assistant's own competence and working hours. If necessary, the managers should still be able to complete the delegated tasks, especially in situations where the service assistant is not available.

11.2   Time released by the service assistant

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Taking into consideration the listed key functions, as well as the tasks that could be delegated completely or partially to the service assistant, the time that could be released from the managers can be estimated. The estimate is presented in figure 11.

The time the managers spend on administrational tasks is closer to 40 per cent of their weekly working hours, not all these tasks can be delegated or completed by the service assistant due to the managers' competence knowledge or as the tasks may require managerial status to be completed. The service assistant may lack these skills or the status to be able to complete these tasks.
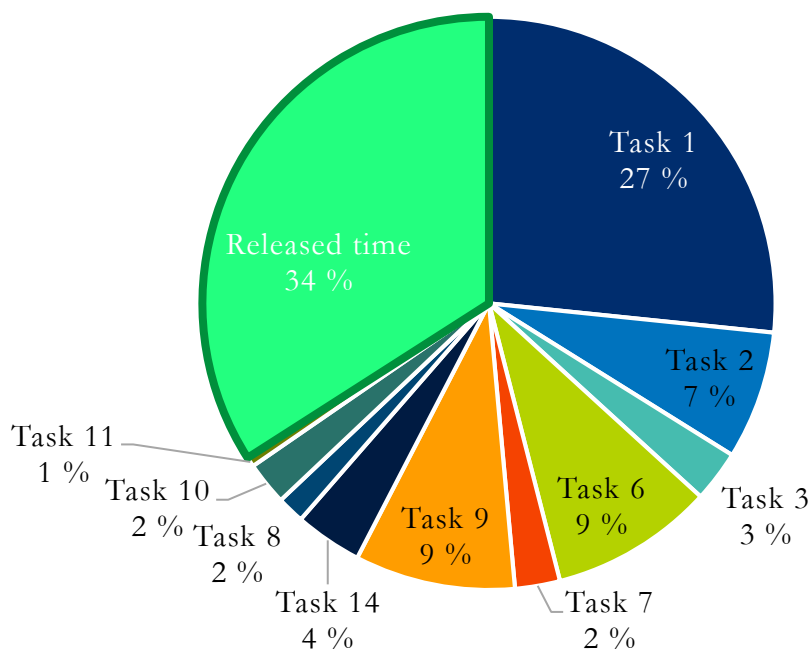

Figure 10. Percentage of time released by a service assistant

From figure 10 it can be noticed that a service assistant would release an estimate 34 per cent of the managers' weekly working hours. The estimate is based on the tasks and functions carried out by the managers, as well as on the estimated times reported by the same managers. The estimate does not include possible overtime or extra hours done by the managers, nor tasks the managers have no time to complete, nor the actual estimates of how much time tasks that the managers complete only partially would require. The estimate presents the minimum of the time saved by the service assistant, as it is based on the percentage of the hours estimated by the managers.

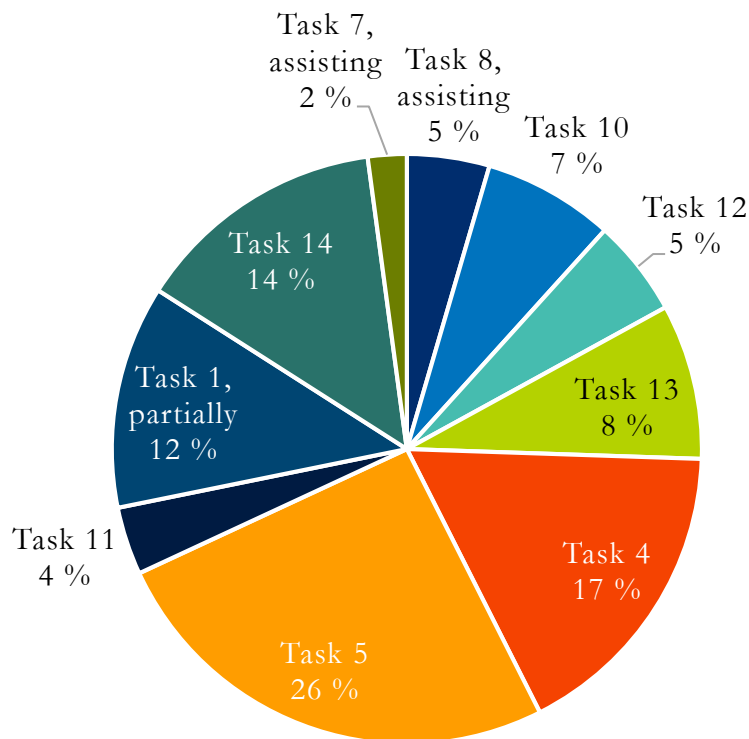The tasks that are included in the estimate are presented in figure 11.

Figure 11. Percentage of tasks in the released time

11.3 The economic impact of the released time

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As the service assistant's position can be assumed to be an expense, as the assistant would not mainly be doing tasks that create value. The costs created from the position are e.g. salary, work equipment and other mandatory personnel costs.

According to the estimate presented in figure 10, a service assistant would release 34 per cent of the manager weekly working hours, meaning an average of 51 hours a week when the man-

agers work 37.5 hours a week. The estimate presents the time released from four managers, meaning that the assistant would release in average 12.75 hours per manager a week. The economic impact of this saved time can be calculated by calculating how much one saved hour costs, and by subtracting the assistant's salary from the saved hourly costs.

If the assistant was to complete the counted the estimate of 34 per cent of released hours in 37.5 hours, this would mean a saving of 13.5 hours in a week for the two units. In other words, the amount of released time would be 51 hours that equals to 13.5 hours of saved time. The estimate 13.5 hours means that it would be circa 26.5 per cent more cost efficient to have the tasks completed by a service assistant than by the managers.

The true economic impact, and the savings created by the possible service assistant can be determined by assuming that the assistant does the tasks in less time than the managers. As the assistant can better concentrate on the tasks, and has the position's required knowledge and/or training, it can be assumed that the assistant does the tasks faster and more efficiently than the managers, and therefore the real savings in percentage, hours and euros is assumable higher than presented in this estimate.

The saved costs from which come from having a service assistant can be best determined and counted through practical and real work. It can be assumed that a service assistant completes administrational tasks faster and better than the managers as he or she has better opportunity to focus on the tasks as well as the required training and experience in completing the tasks. The assistant would also perform certain tasks more often when the managers complete these tasks only seldom. Therefore, it can be assumed that the actual savings presented and estimated may be higher.

As mentioned, the estimate of 51 hours a week of released time is in the minimum estimate of the time that would be released, as not all tasks that the assistant could perform have been included in the estimate, and the estimate does not include the possible extra hours that the managers do outside their normal working hours. Also, one should not forget that the assistant's focus would be in administrational duties that should not be completed by the managers as the tasks create no value.

As mentioned, assistants create value by releasing time to the managers for value creating tasks. With the help of the assistant also processes would be clearer, and all tasks related to the

processes should be completed. However, if the service assistant lacks the expertise and personal traits required for the position, the costs can be higher than can be estimated e.g. in the assistant's salary, as the tasks would need to completed by the managers, creating additional costs, and possible mistakes made by the assistant might create additional work and therefore costs. (Markel 2017)

12 Recommendations

A good indicator for a need for an assistant is that managers are extremely busy and not all tasks get done. Another indicator for a need for an assistant is when administrative work takes many managers' working hours, hence taking away time from more important, possibly value creating tasks. An assistant brings value by releasing time for the managers to focus on value creating tasks. The strategy to avoid the expenses of an assistant will cost more in long term and in lost revenue. An assistant should do at least one of the following: save time, bring value, and expand customer service. (Markel 2017)

As mentioned, an assistant is a key part of support staff, and the number of assistants in a company should be related to the size of the company and to the number of tasks. Analysis for the need of a possible support staff can be determined by reviewing and analysing tasks and the time they take, listing all key functions, mapping processes, and then establishing key positions. (Thomas 2013)

According to the observation and interview results the managers spend nearly 40 per cent of their weekly working hours on administrational tasks. The managers also felt and confirmed that not all tasks get done due to lack of time and resources. These findings support the need for a service assistant. Also, the remapped process flowchart that presents a situation where a service assistant is available, the tasks that the managers do not have time to complete, among other tasks, would be completed, hence improving the workflow and possibly cash flow, sales and customer satisfaction.

The administrational tasks create no value and are cumulated as the units' internal costs in cost prices. Although, the service assistant's position may be considered as a mere cost to the units, the value the assistant creates from his or her work comes from the time released for the managers to concentrate on their core competences and on value-creating tasks, e.g. creating additional sales. The service assistant would also support the other managers in the Units 1 and 2, managers that were not included in this study.

In the online interview for the managers that have a service assistant available in their unit stated that the benefits from an assistant come especially from the assistant completing tasks that the managers seldom complete, as the assistant supports many managers, and therefore completes these tasks more often than a single manager would. By doing these tasks, the managers would also have more time for value creating tasks.

In my opinion, all the managers' tasks in the Units 1 and 2 should be documented in greater detail as well as the time spent on the tasks. Then the tasks should be distributed evenly between all the available resources, in other words, managers.

The overall findings support the need for a service assistant, and in my opinion, it would be wiser to hire a service assistant instead of another manager. An assistant should have the knowledge and expertise to complete administrational tasks, as well as the knowledge to use the tools to complete the tasks. By hiring a new manager or several managers, the administrational tasks would still take away the managers' time from value-creating tasks, and the new managers would not necessarily have the knowledge to complete the administrational tasks as efficiently as a possible assistant.

The service assistant would support the managers by completing most of the administrational tasks, especially tasks that the managers complete only seldom. The assistant would also complete tasks that the managers have no time to complete.

The main advantages from having a service assistant would come from the time the assistant would release from the managers. The assistant would also act as a so-called person that holds all the strings, i.e. who has the overall understanding of the units' situation and who could give and find the necessary information especially in urgent situations or when the managers are away from their workstations. However, finding and hiring a good assistant may be difficult, as well as delegating the correct tasks to the assistant to ensure that the resource the assistant creates is used cost-effectively.

13 Discussion

As mentioned, the results of the study indicate that there is a need for a service assistant the Units 1 and 2. The results are based on the interview and observation results, as well as to the task and process analysis. Also, when considering the strategic importance of the service assistant position for Units 1 and 2, the theory supports the result that there is a need for an assistant. With the help of the assistant the units could create more value and could strengthen their customer relations and satisfaction.

For this study it needed to be distinguished if the managers know each other's tasks and duties, and whether they know how the tasks and duties are completed. It may seem that all the managers do the same tasks and know what the others do, however, the way the tasks are completed may vary according to who is completing the task. Therefore, it was critical to clarify and check the task lists with all the managers, and not just take one's word what one manager says about the other manager's tasks.

There was also a risk with how much time the managers estimate each task takes. The estimates may be too high or too low, and therefore distort the reality and validity of the data. The estimates may also be subjective. Also, the fact that the managers are constantly interrupted in their work and during tasks, made it difficult to estimate the true time a task takes.

The hours the tasks take, and the economic impact were mainly based on the managers' own estimates which can be questioned. Most of the managers stated when asked to estimate the hours for the tasks that it is difficult to estimate them as there are constant interruptions, and some tasks are completed throughout the day or even the week. There is a risk that the estimates were too high, and that some tasks take more, and some tasks less time than estimated. Therefore, the analysis is based on the percentage the tasks take rather than on the actual hours estimated. The percentage was turned into hours by using the official weekly working hours for the managers. This method was used to eliminate the analysis the error in the estimated hours.

The analysis does not present the challenge that the units would face if they decide to invest in and to hire a service assistant. By hiring a person who has no or only a little knowledge in the managers' tasks, in the processes and the systems and tools used, it would take time to get the most out of the new hire no matter how talented the person would be. The fact that the managers do not have written nor documented job descriptions adds to the challenge as it could

be used to help define the assistant's job description, as well as an indication for a need for a service assistant.

In my opinion, it would have been necessary to interview few of the technicians as well, as during the interviews with the assistants they stated that they do assist the technicians too, depending on the nature of the task. However, when the primary objective for this study was discussed the managers, it was concluded that there is no need to interview the technicians. Therefore, in accordance to these wishes, the technicians were not officially interviewed for this study. By interviewing them, the tasks for the possible service assistant could be different, the flowcharts for technicians would have more detailed descriptions, and there could be more in-depth information on why the assistant would or would not be needed from another point of view than that of only the managers.

The thesis process took longer than expected, as gathering the information from the managers proved to be challenging. It was challenging to find suitable times to interview the managers. Also, when the interview results were written out and analysed, more questions rose to be able to e.g. explain the tasks and processes in detail. This caused the analyses to be delayed, and the whole process to be delayed. Because of the situation the separate report was prioritized so that start for the process inside the units to acquire a service assistant would not be further delayed.

During this thesis I was able to learn a lot about the systems and tools in use, about processes, the managers' responsibilities as well as about how I can affect and even ease the managers' and technicians' work through my own work. Understanding the bigger picture was something that I had not thought about in my work prior starting the thesis work.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Managers' tasks, interview and observation results

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Appendix 2. Service assistants' tasks, interview results

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Appendix 3. General assistant's tasks, interview results

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Appendix 4. Process chart

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Appendix 5. Self-inspection checklist

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Appendix 6. Process chart

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Appendix 7. Process chart, service assistant available

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Appendix 8. Thesis product

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