How to motivate assembly line workers

Master Thesis within Business Administration. Subject: Management.

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Abstract

The purpose of our master thesis was to investigate what motivates assembly line workers performing low-skill jobs in a small industrial laundry business. We wanted to see what factors determine and influence their motivation to work and if and how this motivation can be improved with respect to assembly line systems in general. The method of our investigation was qualitative in nature, where we studied one firm that leases clean bed clothes and textiles to hotels and restaurants around Sweden. We constructed a survey on motivation and handed it out to the assembly line workers who deal with the laundry. Furthermore, we interviewed the shift manager in order to get the company’s view on employee motivation. Our findings indicate that there are several overlapping factors that determine and influence motivation in the long run. From this particular case we saw that a unified working culture and collective efforts both boost the willingness to work and help the process run smoothly. Furthermore, proper communication is motivating, where everyone should be committed to company goals, but the workers should be able to take part in profits, and not just generate them. Also, employees have to be considered as important as customers are. Another factor is to have the right resources to execute company plans, such as proper working techniques that minimise stress, injuries and frustration, and more responsibility that allows employees to see the whole system by learning about the technical aspects, or engaging in customer contacts. When trust builds up between the workers and the management, there will be less need for a controlling boss, and people will be more motivated to work when they are not constantly monitored by their leader. In addition, more CEO visits are encouraged at plant level, because they send the signal that the company cares about all its employees. Finally, a crucial factor is feedback, where the firm should not only criticise, but praise everyone for a job well done. This way, the workers will feel worthy. When long term factors are weak or missing in the company, the only motivation for the people is money. However, money can work as a short term and a long term motivator because it serves as a tool to satisfy needs of both security and self esteem outside work. Considering motivation and assembly lines in general, when the assembly line is at its core, where efficiency is the goal and workers serve as means to get there, the only motivation is money, and possibly working colleagues. Intrinsic motivation can be reached by moving away from the actual system and performing other tasks. Still, the long term factors can improve the situation to a certain extent, but sooner or later everyone will turn into a well oiled machine with no further ways to improve motivation, since boredom and routines will remain. One goes from being a cog in the machinery to an integral part of a successful engine. It is still the same content, but in a different package.
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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

In the late 1800s, the Industrial Revolution brought new aspects into the economic world, such as big machines and the concept of productivity, propagated by Frederick W. Taylor (Hatch, 1997). As markets grew and new ones emerged, people were looking for fast ways to meet consumer demand. This required control, routine and specialisation in the manufacturing process, which would result in efficiency. A system that would make this type of mass production possible was the assembly line.

The assembly line was first introduced around 1873 in the slaughterhouses and meat packing plants of Chicago, U.S.A. (Hounshell, 1981, cited in Heizer, 1998). It worked in the following way: a cow, a pig or a sheep was propelled on a trolley, and a line of specialised butchers would each cut a specific part of the meat, so that by the end of the line, the animal would be completely butchered (Ritzer, 2000). The same method was applied in the meat processing, packaging, and the treatment of leftovers. This efficient machinery processed 10 million animals per year, enabling export to the entire world and feeding 30 million people (Sinclair, 1906).

The actual fame of the assembly line came through the Ford Motor Company. Henry Ford, together with his colleagues, developed the first moving automobile chassis assembly line in 1913, on which the famous model T car was put together, piece by piece (Heizer, 1998). This new system led to the cutting of supply, inventory and space, as well as direct costs, bringing high volume cheap cars to the market. Furthermore, it reduced labour time from 20 minutes to 5 minutes per assembly task by each individual, and only one quarter of the initial workers were needed on the job (Arnold & Faurote, 1915, cited in Heizer, 1998).

Due to this mass production, many people could afford cars. The highway system expanded and the tourist industry grew rapidly. A lot of restaurants and hotels emerged, which eventually forced the service industry to apply assembly line methods as well, in order to meet the increasing demand (Ritzer, 2000). The most obvious example is the McDonald’s food chain, where food preparation is broken down into simple, repetitive tasks that anyone could do. The system is about routine and standardisation. For instance, all French fries are to be cut at nine thirty-seconds of an inch thick and there is a six step manual to window service: greet the customer, take the order, assemble the order, present the order, receive payment, thank the customer and ask for repeat business, over and over again (Ritzer, 2000).

The constant problem with the assembly line is that it neglects its workers. As a non-human technology, it controls people, and as a rational system, it is in fact unreasonable (Ritzer, 2000). Rules, regulations and command dictate what to do and how to do it. People follow rules without thinking. They become robots.

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2 George Ritzer is a Professor of Sociology at the University of Maryland, U.S.A. He has been Chair of the American Sociological Association’s Section on Theoretical Sociology and Organisations and Occupations.
Early on, no one in the business world bothered to do anything about the situation of assembly line workers, since there was always someone ready to work. Those that complained or could not perform were easily replaced. Frederick Taylor used to say that only stupid people would carry out these types of jobs (Ritzer, 2000). Henry Ford had the view that repetitive work is not considered bad by a majority of minds, but he himself could never do it. He also claimed that ‘the most thorough research’ has not shown that the worker’s mind will become twisted by repetitive work. Ford is assumed to have ordered his employees to not only hang their coats when entering the factory, but also their souls (Kressler, 2003).^3^ Society on the other hand took notice of the system. Upton Sinclair, in his book *The Jungle* (1906), told the true story of the slaughterhouses of Chicago, and the fate of the workers, whose days consisted of standing in one place, listening to the screams of dying animals, inhaling all kinds of chemicals and practically bathing in filth and disease, day in and day out. The only salvation for their souls was socialism. There was also Chaplin’s famous movie *Modern Times* from 1936, where he made fun of the automated assembly line and its irrationality, truly visualising the fact that workers are ‘a cog in the machine’. Throughout the 1960s however, the business world started to react, but for economical reasons. Mass manufacturing was becoming less and less popular and customers demanded flexibility and more choice (Bowen & Youngdahl, 1998). Global competition was forcing firms to move from employee control to employee involvement. The Japanese responded quickly by transforming the assembly system into lean manufacturing, which meant that the workers would be treated more fairly. They were allowed job rotation and more flexibility, they could produce several products instead of just one and they got to be more responsible for the actual process. A similar procedure took place in Volvo’s car manufacturing plant in Kalmar, Sweden. The managing director Per Gyllenhammar wanted to give assembly line workers a quiet environment and they got more freedom to organise themselves, working at any speed they wanted, just as long as the production schedule was met (Time Magazine Homepage, 1974). The goal was to work at all parts of the line, so that people would control the machines, and not vice versa. All of this was a response to international labour problems, because workers started to revolt against the system through heavy absenteeism, high turnover, poor quality production and strikes (Time Magazine Homepage, 1974). This revised assembly line was however inefficient for big, fast markets, so problems still remained in most places. When investigated, American and English assembly line workers showed little enthusiasm for their work. For example, one person had to push the same button 12,288 times per day. Another employee sarcastically pointed out that there is great variation in the activities: yawning, or scratching one’s nose (Terkel, 1974, cited in Ritzer, 2000). One worker said how people see themselves as mechanical nuts (Garson, 1977, cited in Ritzer, 2000). Furthermore, amongst the machine and assembly operators investigated

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^3^ Dr Herwig Kressler is a widely acknowledged specialist in the management of Human Resources. He has worked for Unilever for many years and has been Chairman of the International Human Resource Council. Currently, Kressler is a member of the Business and Industry Advisory Committee of the OECD and gives lectures at the University of Vienna.

^4^ Sinclair was paid by the socialist daily newspaper *The Appeal to Reason* to investigate Chicago’s slaughterhouses during 7 weeks. His findings caused a sensation, forcing the meat industry to change. Sinclair’s work has always been characterised by socialism and criticism of U.S. society.
recently in Sweden, around 60% said that they experienced high levels of physical tiredness after work, at least one day each week. Also, around 80% of assemblers, or plant operators said that their work was highly repetitive, at least half of their working time (The Swedish Work Environment Survey, 2001).

Still today, there is a lot of resentment, job dissatisfaction, alienation, absenteeism and turnover amongst the assembly line workers. For instance, the fast food industry alone has the highest turnover rate. In the U.S.A., it is 300% each year (Ritzer, 2000). If we look at call centres, the situation is similar. In the UK, scholars found problems of motivation and commitment among these workers, and the turnover rate was 30% a year (Taylor & Bain, 1999). Employees complained about boring, repetitive days where the mind goes numb because one receives 80 phone calls in four hours, and has to always greet the customer with the same voice and same words. Eventually, the situation resulted in resistance and sabotage.

1.2 Problem

It is obvious that the assembly line system still provides problems for its employees. Firstly, in the developing countries that are just going through their industrial revolution, the so called sweatshop workers are being exposed to exploitation and abuse, earning poverty wages (Ernbar, 2006) and whose working conditions resemble those of a hundred years ago. Secondly, in industrialised countries that meet minimum requirements for a decent working environment and where employees have more rights, no matter what kind of assembly line one works on, the tediousness and repetitiveness remains, which in the long run impacts negatively both on physical and mental health. One has reached a point where it is not enough to simply follow the law. More should be done to take care of the workers.

We have seen attempts to restructure the system through lean manufacturing and the Volvo experiment. Although these ideas are still present, they work in areas where there is a demand for complex product development and where the assemblers need to have high skills. But there are still assembly line workers that perform low skilled jobs and that have little choice for flexibility and job satisfaction. It is important to investigate just these people, in order to find out how one can improve their working conditions, especially when it comes to motivation. This should be valuable to the business, because it is assumed that motivated employees will perform better (Kressler, 2003).

Paul Orfaela, the founder of Kinko’s Copiers said that the biggest competitive advantage of a company is the attitude of its workers (Rubel, 1996, cited in Hooley, Saunders & Piercy, 2004). By neglecting employees, one automatically neglects the business and the whole system falls apart. For instance, unhappy workers can easily sabotage production or service delivery (Ritzer, 2000). The idea of replacing them totally with machines would not pay off either, since complete automation cannot respond quickly to the demand for varied products and shorter life-cycles (Bowen & Youngdahl, 1998).

In addition, those performing low skilled jobs are considered as easily replaceable, especially when unemployment is high. However, it would be better for a business to treat these

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workers well and thus avoid replacement costs. Big turnover rates and constant hiring and training are not desirable (Ritzer, 2000), since that can cause a decline in quality (Time Magazine Homepage, 1974). It should be noted that no matter how many replacements one can think of, if the system is unreasonable, all people will revolt sooner or later.

What is most important is that these workers deserve respect, because they have tough working conditions and despite their importance to the business, they are easily overlooked (Wiley, 1997). If a company reaches an understanding on how to motivate its employees, productivity will increase and this will result in success.

Therefore, the idea behind our thesis is to investigate how assembly line employees can be motivated on their job, but in order to do that we have to narrow down our focus. We have decided to concentrate on the laundry industry, and particularly the industrial laundry business that leases to hotels and restaurants. The reason is that its operation involves the assembly line system and also, the conditions of laundry workers have been in the media recently. Just two years ago in the U.S.A., laundry workers were being paid poverty wages of between 7 and 9 dollars per hour and were often subjected to unsafe working conditions (Maher, 2005).

Even though we are going to conduct our research in the Swedish laundry industry, where worker’s rights are generally better, the research is still relevant since this is a fast growing service industry with a yearly turnover of around 278 million euros and where the customer needs to get the product in the right time and at a low cost (Tvätteriförbundet, 2007a, 2007b). One can imagine what kind of pressure this leaves laundry employees with, having to work fast and perform difficult routine tasks every day. Furthermore, it is interesting to study the assembly line in a service sector due to the fact that service has always been considered, as Grönroos (2000) would say, a human business. Finally, to enable further focus, we will consider the small company size, because this environment makes it easier to deal with human resources, as opposed to large organisations (Eakin & MacEachen, 1998).

### 1.3 Purpose

The purpose of our thesis is to investigate what motivates assembly line workers performing low-skill jobs in a small industrial laundry business. We wish to find out what factors determine and influence their motivation for work, and if and how this motivation can be improved with respect to assembly line systems in general.

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6 Christian Grönroos is Professor of Service and Relationship Marketing at the Swedish School of Economics and Business Administration in Finland. He is considered the guru of service management and gives advice on how to market and manage service employees in particular.
2 Frame of reference

We begin the theoretical framework by outlining the rationale behind the assembly line system and how it is constructed.

2.1 The classical assembly line system

The assembly line system and similar systems are rational in nature (Ritzer, 2000). The basic components of a rational system are efficiency, predictability, calculability and control through nonhuman technology.

Efficiency involves choosing the optimum means to a given end. There is one best way of doing a task, so the work process is well defined and standardised. Workers only perform what they have to perform and the speed and specialisation create intense, homogenised labour. Efficiency results in lower costs and higher profits. The customers can obtain what they need easily and fast, but the workers become dehumanised (Ritzer, 2000).

Workers follow rules on how to behave, and they all behave in predictable ways, creating more or less identical products. Predictability allows for discipline, systematisation and routine. It helps customers know what they will receive and when. The workers have easy tasks and they do not need to think about anything. However, their minds go numb and they become bored (Ritzer, 2000).

The goal of the system is quantity, rather than quality and it can be calculated how much work needs to be done. The system makes it easy to determine salaries, as well as other monetary incentives. People do not need skills, but they can earn money (Ritzer, 2000).

Assembly line systems control employees through non human technologies. It is obvious when somebody fails to perform, since the different activities are connected to each other. Technology limits the uncertainty and unpredictability that humans create because it excludes them from the process. It can also replace direct face-to-face supervision through surveillance (Ritzer, 2000).

In order to figure out how motivation is influenced by the system and how it can be altered, we need to know the concept of motivation. We present general theory on motivation and apply it to the assembly line setting.

2.2 Motivation

Motivation is a combination of needs that influence behaviour and action (Kressler, 2003). If an employee is to successfully accomplish a task in any organisation, he or she needs motivation, performance capacity and development potential in order to activate skills, experiences, talents and creative energies, and reach company goals.

Organisations can influence the behaviour of workers and activate their motives, whether it is about specific tasks, or the achievement of particular goals. One has to bear in mind that there is no definitive motivation technique or a reliable and effective method that works for everyone in every situation (Kressler, 2003). It should be adapted to fit the circumstances.

Motivation can be influenced by personal or situational factors and it can change with changes in personal, social, or other factors (Wiley, 1997). One can be motivated by belonging to a group, or by feeling connected to the business objectives, as well as by the
value systems and interactions taking place in a company. Motivation can also be governed by a need to please others (Kressler, 2003). Negative motivation or frustration arises when people are not treated equally. For instance, it happens when someone is paid less than another person for the same job. Frustration leads to avoidance and refusal.

Frederick W. Herzberg outlines two types of motivation in *The Motivation to Work* (1959), namely *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* (cited in Kressler, 2003). Intrinsic motivation eventually leads to satisfaction when it is fulfilled through challenge. Extrinsic motivation (hygiene factors) leads to dissatisfaction when it is unfulfilled (when pay is not received). When hygiene factors are met, a person is *not dissatisfied*, but he or she is *not satisfied*. In other words, not being unhappy does not mean that you are happy.

According to Herzberg, badly and inadequately structured working conditions lead to dissatisfaction (cited in Kressler, 2003). They can be regulations, relationships with managers and colleagues, communication, work intensity and pay. A good pay check overcomes frustration, but it does not satisfy. Quality of work, success, recognition, career development and responsibility are examples of intrinsic factors that will eventually lead to satisfaction. However, studies have shown that needs for salary, recognition and responsibility can be both extrinsic and intrinsic motivators (Maidani, 1991, cited in Wiley, 1997). Herzberg’s findings are relevant for companies with clearly defined tasks and hierarchical structures, where people need others to motivate them (Kressler, 2003).

The first complete theory about motivation at work was developed by Abraham H. Maslow, in his book *A Theory of Human Motivation*, from 1943 (Kressler, 2003). Maslow presents five levels of human needs. One cannot move to a higher category before satisfying the needs in the lower category. Furthermore, the highest level (5) can never be reached. Maslow argues that only unsatisfied desires will motivate people. This is in line with the opinion that satisfied workers are motivated to participate, but it does not mean that they will actually work harder (Reis & Peña, 2001). Since they are satisfied, there is not much that drives them. This can either mean that they have all they need, or that they do not see possibilities for improvements. On the other hand, one can say that a satisfied person will be motivated to keep that level of satisfaction, or satisfaction could come from the ability to have motivation and to keep it running. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs is:

- **Level 5: Self-actualisation**: understanding the world, acquiring wisdom, clarifying life’s objectives, achieving independence, developing creativity and individuality.

- **Level 4: Esteem**: being acknowledged and esteemed by others, gaining self-confidence; having success; attaining knowledge, power, prestige, status and dignity.

- **Level 3: Love**: looking for love and affection; belonging to a family, a circle of friends, a group, a union, a business; attaining social security; avoiding loneliness, rejection and rootless-ness.

- **Level 2: Security**: need for physical security, including security in a figurative sense, stability, reliability, freedom from fear, threat and chaos; avoiding uncertainty; need for protection through law and order.

- **Level 1: Physiology**: nourishment, clothing, accommodation, sexuality, rest, relaxation, activity and movement.
2.3 Short term motivation – incentives

Incentives are short term, extrinsic stimulants and include payment for particular performance (Kressler, 2003). Since incentives encourage performance regardless of the level of motivation, they cannot really motivate. If one lacks the fundamental motivation to work, incentives will have little effect. If there is too little challenge, too much routine, or a lack of development possibilities, they are not useful. One is simply trained to do a task and will get paid for it, regardless of how well the task is being executed. Nonetheless, when an activity is not interesting or intrinsically motivating, extrinsic motivation is necessary (Gagné & Deci, 2005), because if motivation is in fact present, it is like a car, and incentives can be the fuel, the steering wheel or the brakes (Kressler, 2003). The car cannot get far without its components.

The most common incentive is the financial one. There are two types of financial incentives. The exchange of the sacrifice that employees make is labelled *compensation*, while the exchange for additional work should be understood as *reward* by the employee (Persson, 1994). The reward should be viewed closely and distributed for that extra effort, achievement and result. When these rewards are monitored, it gives the employee expectations of improvements, relatively to his/hers existing situation. It is these expectations that constitute the motivating incentive for the additional effort.

Another difference between compensation and reward is that compensations are always positive, since lack of performance does not result in lower wages (Persson, 1994). This is one argument to why money cannot motivate some people to work harder. Compensations are given based on contracted or implicit agreements. An earned reward on the other hand increases the worker’s salary and it serves to sustain or increase the direct productivity of the available staff. The reward is not considered a punishment for the company because the company itself makes a profit from that work effort that created the reason for the reward, which otherwise would not have occurred (Persson, 1994).

In order for money to motivate, people need to be rewarded and encouraged in a proper way. Rewards that are controlling or that are imposed to persuade someone to work bring no value to the actual job (McCausland, Poulakas & Theodossiou, 2005). For instance, if the supervisor tells his workers that working extra hard will lead to a high bonus, only some employees might try that. But if the supervisor says that five worst performers will be fired, everyone will work (Kressler, 2003). Still, those who fear losing their job might feel a lot of pressure to achieve results. So, the incentive is both a stick and a carrot.

It is important to create a link between reward and performance (Holtz, 2004). For example, one has to state that if the objective of the company is profit X, a certain bonus percentage depends upon reaching X (Kressler, 2003). Employees need to know and under-

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stand exactly what has to be done so that a bonus will be achieved (Holtz, 2004). This way, they will appreciate it. The firm can also give out rewards independent of specific tasks. Moreover, unexpected rewards are appreciated (Gagné & Deci, 2005). In addition, one can extend the reward over many years to make the system enduring (Persson, 1994).

A particular form of reward named *target fulfilment wage* can be used on groups as well as individual employees. It is based on an agreement that something has to be done within a specific time period (Persson, 1994). The incentive is then varied depending on the degree of the goals that have been achieved. The connection between rewards and productivity, and the motivation in the employment has been shown by Charles Murray and Gary Becker to be the best way to solve the problem of lack of performance among employees (cited in Persson, 1994).

If the response to the work done is appropriate, money can be a good motivator, since it will appeal both to the material and immaterial values of employees. Namely, money can be a type of feedback that concerns work, as well as a reward for ability and competence (Wiley, 1997). It can buy items so that physiological needs are satisfied, and it can boost self esteem, because it measures the relative worth or competence of the worker (Thornburg, 1992, cited in Wiley, 1997). A person can feel recognised for a good job through his/her salary. Furthermore, money can mean security. Security solves financial and practical needs, but it also brings wellbeing to the employee, so that there is less worry of losing the job (Leibman & Weinstein, 1990, cited in Wiley, 1997).

### 2.4 Long term motivation and the Human Performance System

Companies usually face three types of motivation problems that impact on long-term performance (Persson, 1994):

- Problems with availability (recruitment) and participation (absence).

- Problems with work productivity, where there must be an acceptance that the employer is in charge, coordinating work tasks and work intensity, which affects employee’s commitment and responsibility, and the ability to work with others.

- Problems with improvement, competency development, change and learning.

Now we take a look at more specific steps that can be taken to improve long term motivation, and thus performance of assembly line workers. We will investigate it from the point of view of the so called Human Performance System.

The Human Performance System demonstrates that in order to be able to optimize performance, all the components in the system have to operate correctly. As shown in figure 2-1 below, organizational inputs, people, and their behaviour (triggered by motivation) lead to performance, consequences, and feedback, which loop back through the system to the organization and the people in it, in an ongoing circle. Furthermore, the components of

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this system exist within an environment that also has an impact on performance (Fuller & Farrington, 1999)\textsuperscript{10}.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{human_performance_system.png}
\caption{The Human Performance System (Fuller & Farrington, 1999).}
\end{figure}

\subsection{Organisational Inputs: motivation through culture and communication}

The system starts with inputs that are provided to the employees (see figure 2-1). Inputs can be fixed or variable, formal or informal, documented or not documented, and they are real. These inputs are based on goals, values, and an overall climate that has an impact on people and the way they operate within it (Fuller & Farrington, 1999). Most organizations also have a culture that captures the values, beliefs and assumptions of its members regarding ways to think, act and behave. These values become codified into structures, systems and processes which guide organisational behaviour and are measured as the perceptions of organisational climate (Parker, Baltes, Young, Altman, LaCost, Huff & Roberts, 2003). Climate is a sense of what is important in a company (Grönroos, 2000). It affects motivation, which is connected to performance (Parker et al., 2003).

Considering service firms, they need to have particular service values that come across in the culture and that fit company structure. This culture means that service is appreciated and that the interest in customers is the most natural and important norm in the organisation (Grönroos, 2000). In order for the service culture to work, all employees must accept, understand and support the values, the mission and service strategies in a positive spirit. Those individuals who fail to adapt to the existing culture are socially punished by the

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group, choose to leave because they do not fit in, or get fired for not working with the team (Fuller & Farington, 1999).

The organization has to provide employees with a written proposition plan that shows what their role in the company is and what they are expected to achieve. This plan should portray a clear picture, but if it is not so, the employees could easily be misdirected, striving towards wrong performance objectives. This will result in the organization receiving poor evaluations (Fuller & Farrington, 1999). But, the problem can be solved by proper communication.

For instance, the "vision and values" statement are usually posted on the wall or made available to the employees in some way. The employees, however, are not easy to fool. They demand marketplace reality instead of well-crafted inspirational statements that cannot claim peak-performance workforces (Katzenbach, 2000). This is why communication has to correspond to the working environment (Holtz, 2004). One cannot come to assembly line workers and start talking about meeting Wall Street expectations. They will not care unless the numbers are made relevant and concrete, so that they are connected to what is actually being done. When communicating with employees, one has to be honest and say the right things in the right way. The only purpose of communication is to influence (Holtz, 2004). So, it is not only important what is being said, but how it is being said.

So, one should educate workers about the state of the company, the level of competitiveness and what they can do to influence results. Once employees have the whole picture in mind, they will be more inclined to commit. It is stated by Katzenbach (2000) that people are highly energized by clear evidence of the company’s achievements that reflect their own contributions. If employees feel like a part of an organization that cares about them, they will be committed to their job, which leads to intrinsic motivation and dedication to the achievement of these goals (Holtz, 2004). People are happy since they feel that they have done something that matters. For instance, if service employees are service oriented, their motivation rises, so the service quality, which is the gap between customer expectations and what they actually receive will be smaller, which leads to profitability (Grönroos, 2000). A crucial part of the empowerment process deals with actually giving workers appropriate resources to execute all company plans (Holtz, 2004).

**2.4.2 People: motivation through work design**

A demonstrated earlier, inputs affect employees. People take the input and apply their knowledge, skills, and attitudes, which then results in various behaviours (see figure 2-1). However, if their capabilities are not sufficient enough, people may perform their tasks incorrectly (Fuller & Farington, 1999). One needs appropriate skills for the job; otherwise there will be a decrease in motivation.

For instance, repetitive movements and frequent bending, which is typical for assembly line employees, can slow down the work and lead to injury (Shady, 2004). When people are

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hurt on the job, efficiency is reduced, equipment downtime increases and it costs money for the company (Shady, 2006). Therefore, the job should be designed to fit the workers (Shady, 2004). If we take a look at laundry workers in particular, they should be trained in all areas of the facility and they should have job rotations throughout the shift in order to minimise injuries that occur from only one type of work.

Employees need to have the right techniques for bending, reaching and lifting. It is also important to reduce the size and weight of items that are lifted and to install mechanical aids where appropriate (Shady, 2006). Furthermore, equipment heights have to be adjustable for the worker. Also, when laundry is changed from washer to dryer, it is wise to have those two machines close to each other to facilitate reach, but staff has to be able to turn completely while working.

An appropriate design of the laundry room is a u-shaped one, so that there are separate rooms for soiled linens, washing and drying. Also, laundry managers should come and watch staff work and take notes of movements such as bending and reaching and look out for signs of repetitive motion stress (Shady, 2004). Moreover, there should be no risk of diseases or allergies caused by the chemicals that process the laundry. Both the internal environment (situation of workers) and the external environment (nature) need to be treated according to laws and regulations (Tvätteriförbundet, 2007a). Furthermore, employees have to be aware of environmental issues (Tvätteriförbundet, 2007c).

Eakin and MacEachen (1998) found that injured workers keep quiet about their problems because they do not want to lose their jobs or reward systems. Also, they want to appear tough, or they do not want to bother anyone with their problems, especially if they have a good relationship with their employer. These workers blame their health problems on themselves, seeing it as a normal consequence of the job. They choose to put up with it because the customer is all that matters. This type of motivation can be dangerous in the long run. Moreover, those who have a negative relationship with their employer blame their injuries on the company and when they get no help, they sabotage the system (Eakin & MacEachen, 1998). Either way, neglecting the health of the workers is bad. One should show concern about the people, and not just worry about how the injuries will affect productivity.

Another way to improve the attitude of people is through individual accountability, where one can focus on a set of well-defined measures that transform corporate objectives into individual goals at all levels. Well-defined processes guide the efforts of people and also provide worker fulfilment as well as performance effectiveness (Katzenbach, 2000). Furthermore, workers themselves play a key role in selecting and designing the process and metrics that affect them. In this way, the process can enable initiative and innovation and ensure compliance and cooperation.

One of the aspects of being more accountable is connected with responsibility, which is an assessment that one deserves credit or blame for certain actions. Responsibility can increase intrinsic motivation, as stated by Hackman and Oldham (1976) (cited in Bartunek, 1985). There are four job characteristics that affect responsibility:

- **Clarity**: clearly defined roles, adequate feedback and clear objectives increase responsibility.

- **Task completion**: assembly line performance is about fragments, where it is difficult to see the whole picture, therefore outside direction is necessary, but this also
reduces the level of responsibility. However, if one identifies with the task, there could be responsibility (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; cited in Bartunek, 1985).

- **Task significance**: work is meaningful and worthwhile, and this leads to responsibility.

- **Autonomy**: freedom and independence in scheduling, where workers feel that it is up to them and not someone else (Hackman & Oldham; cited in Bartunek, 1985).

Responsibility of the workers is actually a crucial component of the alternative assembly line system called *lean manufacturing*, which actually can be applied both in manufacturing and services (Bowen & Youngdahl, 1998). Productivity is assumed to increase when employees are allowed to make decisions, conduct job rotations and share profits. Even though workers are not allowed to deviate from the standardised process, it is possible for them to change methods, by moving from one standardisation to another. One can also broaden the specialised work by adding different, related tasks to the already existing activities (Kressler, 2003). Furthermore, the workers are trained to identify problems in the system, so that they can stop the assembly line when something is wrong (Bowen & Youngdahl, 1998). According to different scholars, this ability to choose and to participate gives a sense of control, so there is more commitment, involvement and thus motivation (Krausz, 2000). If workers feel control, they do not see themselves as being used by the system. Redesigning the job in this way can help increase motivation (Wiley, 1997).

### 2.4.3 Behaviours and performance: motivation through leadership

Behaviour is measured in terms of specific actions or activities (see figure 2-1). Performance makes an organisation successful and is measured in terms of outcomes that the organisation desires and values (Fuller & Farrington, 1999). However, performance will depend on the actual behaviour. This section particularly looks at the concept of leadership and how the behaviour of the leader affects the behaviour of the group, their motivation, and the overall performance.

Basically, good leadership depends on the task, the size of the group, the type of people, how long they have known each other, their relationship and group pressure (Reis & Peña, 2001). Leaders are important, particularly when it comes to factory workers. The reason is that the factory supervisor is a clear link between the highest and the lowest levels of the company, and his/her face to face communication with others can enable a sense of trust (Holtz, 2004).

One important feature of leadership is the so called *management by walking around*, which was introduced in Hewlett-Packard (Holtz, 2004). It means that the boss of the organisation comes down to the plant and visits the workers. People appreciate these encounters, especially if the boss knows their name. Also, one can organise lunches with the CEO, where a couple of workers are selected to socialise with the top dog and ask important questions.

Douglas McGregor published *The Human Side of Enterprise* in 1957 where he presented two theories, X and Y, which should not be mixed in practice (Kressler, 2003). Theory X says that work is unpleasant for the average person in today's society. People feel reluctant to work and try to avoid it as much as possible. It is therefore necessary to put pressure on them and threaten with punishments. This is the only way for business objectives to be met. If work was instead left to those who volunteered for it or even enjoyed it, then every-
thing would come to a dead end. Moreover, people do not just want to avoid work but they also prefer to be led and guided, shunning responsibility and desiring security (Kressler, 2003). If people expect strict regulation and clear responsibility, they will need a manager that gives orders and controls. That is, X people need X managers. Organisations that have routine operations are suited for this type of tough leadership that motivates by fear, setting rules, giving orders and controlling employees (Woodward, 1965, cited in Reis & Peña, 2001).

According to Theory Y, the situation is totally opposite. It puts its weight in believing that work is a physical and mental activity, because it is something that is considered to be normal and desirable for the average person (Kressler, 2003). Work is a natural part of human life as is leisure or recreation. Being forced to work is therefore not only unnecessary, but can also hinder that the objectives are met. The reason is that if people feel committed to certain objectives, they will have self-control and self-discipline and do not need authoritative supervision in order to fulfil a task. Ultimately, it is important that work introduces a challenge when it is faced, and provides satisfaction when it has been performed (Kressler, 2003). Y-employees will work on their own initiative and the Y-manager will be participating in the process by challenging and recognising workers. This is connected to decentralisation, understanding and motivation through kindness, which are considered more suitable for companies with non-routine operations (Woodward, 1965, cited in Reis & Peña, 2001).

Considering both aspects, if people are externally regulated, they will behave in order to avoid undesirable consequences. For instance, when the boss is watching, people work (Gagné & Deci, 2005). But when workers take in and internalise values and attitudes from the surroundings, they will work even when the boss is not watching. However, this might lead to extrinsic motivation rather than intrinsic one, because one is still not actually interested in the activity, but performing it as such can help in the achievement of personal goals, such as feeling worthy (Gagné & Deci, 2005).

2.4.4 Consequences

We have seen that job performance has associated specific consequences (see figure 2-1). If the consequences reinforce the desired performance, then it is most likely to continue. B. F. Skinner demonstrated this relationship in his experiment (Fuller & Farrington, 1999). He showed that when looking at what causes problems in performance of individuals or groups, the problem lies in the fact that incorrect consequences are the performance barrier. Some examples of such barriers are:

- the correct performance that was ignored (so people do not bother to do things right)
- the correct performance that was punished (this discouraged the employees to continue with the performance)
- the incorrect performance that was ignored (so why bother improve or change)
- the incorrect performance that was rewarded (it encourages people to continue performing incorrectly)

Performance consequences should be aligned with organizational inputs. If they are out of
alignment, the employees are then forced to choose between doing what they are told to do and what actually gets rewarded within the organization. When this situation does occur, people are smart enough to give the appearance of following the inputs and at the same time doing what gets rewarded (Fuller & Farrington, 1999).

### 2.4.5 Feedback: motivation through criticism and appraisal

When the consequences have been established, they need to be fed back to the people and the organization (see figure 2-1). A system that does not give feedback is considered to be an open loop where the results are likely to be unpredictable. When provided regular feedback, people tend to modify their behaviour to optimize their performance and the associated consequences. Without a frequent response, employees are less likely to improve their performance over time. Using criticism wisely can improve the performance of an entire organization (Fuller & Farrington, 1999).

Employees should be seen as a first, internal market to which one offers services, just like one does with customers (Grönroos, 2000). People need to feel confident because appreciation and recognition for a job well done is the most powerful motivation tool (Wiley, 1997). Appreciation breeds positive self-concepts, and it meets the needs for esteem, self-actualisation, growth and achievement (Lussier, cited in Wiley, 1997).

Workers that are celebrated are being recognized for all their achievements in a meaningful and conspicuous way on regular basis. Both the individuals and group achievement are rewarded and celebrated constantly (Katzenbach, 2000). It is part of the management process and is connected to the informal structure of the enterprise. It can also be put into light that the non-monetary aspects of this effort are much more important than the formal compensation program. People tend to respond more positively to heartfelt, credible, non-monetary recognition than they do to financial rewards.

It is not enough only to be recognised and celebrated as a worker. One also needs to be provided with the opportunity to ask questions and leave suggestions. People want to be able to affect their situation and the company has to show that they notice and appreciate and seriously consider people’s ideas (Holtz, 2004). The company has to listen to the feedback of the employees, share their values and problems and improve their situation (Hooley et al., 2004). The key to all this is to change the concept of being a mindless cog in an industrial machine and to instead become an integral part of the company’s engine of success (Holtz, 2004).

### 2.4.6 Environment: motivation and the big picture

The last component of the system is the environment, where its factors include work processes, information and tools that can have an impact on performance (see figure 2-1). Flaws in the environment can seriously affect performance, even if organizational inputs, people, abilities, behaviours, consequences, and feedback are of the highest quality (Fuller & Farrington, 1999). The process must enable top performance, not provide barriers to it. If you put a great performer in a bad process, the process will eventually win, and not the person. We have seen that from the classical assembly line system. Well-designed information sources also play an important role in the environment as a whole (Fuller & Farrington, 1999).

Motivation of workers does not only depend on the internal environment, but also on the state of the economy and the industry. As mentioned before, motivation of workers de-
pends on economic and social factors, because as industries and economies change, so do the values of employees (Wiley, 1997). For example, one of the first employee surveys on motivation at work was conducted in 1946 by the Labour Relations Institute of New York and the subjects were industrial employees (Wiley, 1997). Similar surveys were conducted again within the same profession in the 1980s and in 1992. The result was that people mostly valued interesting work in the 1980s, because back then, the standard of living in the U.S.A. was high and one did not need to worry much about money. In the 1990s on the other hand, recession and downsizing were common, so good wages and job security were the best motivators.

2.5 Motivation and company size

Eakin and MacEachen’s (1998) findings indicate that large firms usually forget about the human aspects. Small firms on the other hand make employees feel like people, like members of one big family. This is especially the opinion among workers that perform low-skilled, assembly type jobs.

In small firms, the employer is looking after his or her workers who are seen as individuals rather than commodities. Control runs through informal channels and not through formal rules and policies (Eakin & MacEachen, 1998). Here, it is easier to move between different jobs and ranks, and the social distance between the boss and the worker is low. Furthermore, Ingham (1970) claims that in a small working environment the employees are closer to the business and they can reach a better understanding of the whole picture and identify with company goals (cited in Eakin & MacEachen, 1998). We reckon that these findings might indicate that small assembly line firms might have a better chance of improving the system than large ones would.
3 Method

3.1 Choice of method

In order to answer our purpose, we are going to study one small company situated in Sweden. This firm is in the industry laundry business, leasing clean bed clothes and textiles to hotels and restaurants around the country. The sorting, washing and processing of the laundry is being done through an assembly line system, and since the workers performing this job are the ones providing the service, extra care needs to be taken to make sure that they are motivated to perform their work.

Our method of investigation is thus qualitative in nature. A qualitative method studies things in their natural settings, trying to understand a phenomenon in terms of the meaning that people bring to these settings. It aims to secure an in-depth understanding of an issue (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). This is one of the reasons why we are investigating only one company. It will enable us to focus and to conduct a more detailed research than otherwise. Another reason for choosing one firm has to do with time restrictions.

The drawback of this method is the fact that we might find certain company-specific answers that cannot be generalised to other assembly line companies, but on the other hand, assembly line systems are more or less the same in any industry and the workers are facing similar problems, such as tediousness, repetitiveness and injuries. Furthermore, when collecting our frame of reference, we took into consideration general theories that can help us come to conclusions that might be applicable to other organisations as well.

Based on this choice of method, we need to consider the concept of transferability. This concept serves to provide knowledge through research that can be applied to other situations and similar settings (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993). So, in our analysis of the results, we have made an effort to distinguish between factors that affect motivation due to the specific firm situations and those factors that can be extracted as affecting motivation in general with respect to the assembly line system, regardless of any particular company case.

To take an important example, the firm that we are dealing with is only nearly two years old, which means that the workers have not been working there for a long time and therefore, they might not have a complete picture of all the factors that lead to motivation. On the other hand, this new company is an appropriate platform for experimentations, where it might be easier to make improvements and changes than elsewhere. Moreover, it could be easier to detect particular factors/lack of factors here that contribute to the motivation in an assembly line setting in general.

Furthermore, there is a bias in choosing this particular firm, since one of the authors of the thesis works in the company. However, she has remained as objective as possible, given the circumstances. Because she is very familiar with the situation, it has helped the research, especially in terms of preparations for the empirical investigation. Moreover, the other author who has no previous experience of the company has contributed to minimising the bias, adding observations from an outsider’s point of view. These aspects are important when it comes to transferability of knowledge, because the researcher is seen as a sensitive observer who has to record phenomena as truthfully as possible, in order to ensure internal validity (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993).
3.2 Collection of information

3.2.1 Questionnaires

The most important opinion that we can record with respect to our investigation is the one coming from the workers, because as Wiley (1997) claims, they are the best source of information concerning motivational problems. Therefore, our first step was to ask them a wide variety of questions. Due to: the fact that we were not allowed to talk to them while they were working (and they need to work fast), the shortness of their breaks, and the difficulty of contacting them before or after work, made us exclude personal interviews from our method of investigation. Instead, we constructed questionnaires, and the author that works in the company handed these out on one occasion to people that were on the job that day. There are two different shifts, with 28 people in each shift, so when the questionnaires were handed out; care was taken to hand them out to those that were leaving the morning shift and those who were coming in for an afternoon shift. Since some part-time (season) workers were not present that day, out of the total sample of 55 workers (when excluding the author who cannot participate for obvious reasons), 44 surveys were handed out. The idea was that the employees would take the questions home, answer them and hand them back as soon as possible.

The questions were written in Serbo-Croatian, Albanian and Swedish, representing three languages spoken by the workers who operate in the company. One of the authors has Serbo-Croatian as her native language, and the other author has Albanian as her native language. Both authors live in Sweden and are fluent in Swedish as well, all of which facilitated the translation. Care was taken to translate everything appropriately so that the wording and expressions fit each language respectively, thus avoiding getting ‘lost in translation’. Moreover, we tried to make the questions as easy as possible, presented in a simple language. The thought behind offering the survey in this way was that it would help the workers to better express themselves and feel more comfortable when providing the answers. Also, if someone might understand a question in one language, but be able to answer better in another, they have the possibility to do so. Another issue regards spacing between questions. It was difficult to know exactly how much spacing one could have, since some people write a lot, while others write very little, so we let the size of the question decide.

One can say that this survey was some sort of an informant interview, where people with knowledge of the local area (laundry employees working in the system) play the role of extra observers. These people are very useful in situations where there is not much time to perform observations (they know best about their motivation). In addition, a respondent interview offers more direct information about an individual’s own feelings, opinions, and reflections. In practice, the informant and the respondent is often the same person (Repstad, 1999). The workers are then both observing the situation on our behalf, and expressing their opinions at the same time.

The questionnaire was structured as for a regular face-to-face interview and is not in a kind of format where one checks boxes and has alternative answers. That way, people could choose on their own what to answer. This enabled us to get more in-depth replies, as we planned to analyse the questions qualitatively, interpreting what people wrote with the help of the theory. It is important to conduct the analysis this way, since motivation is a concept that can better be investigated qualitatively than quantitatively.

The survey (followed by its English translation) can be found in Appendix 1. That way, our research can be easily confirmable. As stated by McMillan and Schumacher (1993), confirm-
ability deals with objectivity and refers to the quality of the data created by the ways of collecting and analysing data and not by the researcher’s personal characteristics.

3.2.1.1 Age and gender

Both male and female workers of different ages are working in the organisation. We have not paid attention to variables such as age and gender, because we wished to treat everyone as equal. Male workers are underrepresented in the sample anyway. Moreover, the company makes no difference in gender when designing bonus systems. Also, age and gender are usually not considered important when investigating the working environment (The Swedish Work Environment Survey, 2001). This is especially the case in an assembly system. As long as people can work, they get the job, regardless of gender or age. Also, everyone operates in the same environment together, doing the same jobs, and internally, they are treated the same, so it is not efficient or economical to develop different styles when it comes to leaders, incentives and motivation concerning men, women, teenagers or older people; it would not be fair. If we take payment as an example, it has been found that pay or good wages are generally valued by all employees, regardless of gender or age (Wiley, 1997). Of course, a male teenager might have a different motivation to earn money than a middle-aged woman, but that is irrelevant to the business, although it can add to the understanding of the individual’s situation. Still, all the business sees is that money motivates both of these workers.

3.2.1.2 Responsiveness

Unfortunately, the response rate was very low, around 20.5 percent. Out of the 44 surveys that were handed out, only 9 were handed back. We were wondering why that might be the case. Firstly, the questions are many and detailed, and that could have discouraged the employees from participating. Perhaps they were reluctant to answer in written form, or maybe they were too tired, or had no time. For instance, those who had family obligations did not answer. There is also the issue of not daring to participate in fear of losing the job, since many people only work part-time. Attempts were made several times to increase the response rate by asking the workers to contribute to the research. Even the shift manager tried to get them to answer, but without any luck. In the end, we could not afford to lose more time, so we decided to work with what we had.

As stated by McMillan and Schumacher (1993), the researcher is responsible for accounting for the changes that have occurred in the process of the research and how they have affected the study. We were hoping for a higher response rate, but as we realised that this would not be the case, we had to work with what was available. We did the best we could with the answers that we received, and we hope that our thesis will still be trustworthy or dependable. In other words, it is important that it has stability of the findings over time, and the internal logic of the data in relation to what was found, and in relation to interpretations and recommendations (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). We can only speculate as to what the results would be like had we got a higher response rate. Perhaps those who were reluctant to answer from the beginning would have written only positive things in the survey, had they been convinced to participate. Their fear of criticising the company could then have given a false picture of the situation. Also, we saw that most of the workers in the sample that did answer, work in the after-treatment of the laundry process, which is the most stressful area. Therefore, these individuals might be more inclined to complain.

We had to structure the survey in the way that we did, by having many detailed questions, because it would be difficult to rephrase anything, or ask more, since we were not present
when the answers were being given. That is why we tried to ask as much as possible in the survey, also trying to avoid yes/no answers, which we succeeded in, although in some places answers were missing. Maybe the employees themselves have never thought in detail about what might motivate them and how, and it was hard for them to have an opinion on these issues. There is also the matter of working in a newly established firm and not being aware of all those factors, as mentioned earlier.

What is important to note is that we did a trial with one worker in order to test the questions before handing them out to everyone. It was quite helpful, because we saw what parts that could be rewritten and what order to put everything in, and also what was missing or unnecessary. Of course, it is difficult to revise the whole survey based on how one person had answered, because it might work in a different way for someone else. Nonetheless, it gave us an idea of how to construct the final survey. Since many questions from the trial version are present in the final version, we have included the trial questionnaire in those 20.5% that responded.

When it comes to analysing the answers that we did receive, we are aware of the fact that objectivity can never be fully reached with self-assessments (Kressler, 2003). Respondents might only give out some information and hide other, or they might lie. There is also the fundamental attribution error by Peters and Waterman (1980), where workers say that everything good that has been done is their doing, while everything that is a failure they blame on others (cited in Kressler, 2003). These issues have been taken into consideration.

What we noticed from this small sample that answered our survey was that the answers contained many different opinions. That became a good representation of the overall group, due to its realistic nature. It also made the sample more random, since we did not know who would answer. However, it also made the analysis a challenge, because sometimes it was hard to depict what is really going on. For instance, are there simply complaints, or are there more underlying conflicts to it? As it is hard to know what people actually mean, we have taken the liberty to analyse the answers so as we assume and interpret them.

### 3.2.2 Interview with the shift manager

We have also paid a visit to the company once, and interviewed one of the shift managers at the firm. This enabled us to present the company’s point of view and compare it to the opinions of the workers. This is in line with Repstad’s (1999) claim that one can combine different qualitative methods in one project. The researcher can, for instance investigate what people do and then observe if what is stated is correct. Thus, we were able to see whether the opinions of the organisation match those of the employees. Also, the shift manager is directly involved with the workers, so she represents a connection between them and the organisation.

When carrying out an interview, there are two ways in which it can be done. In a *structured* interview, the respondent is asked a set of pre-established questions. There is little flexibility in the way questions are asked. The aim is to minimise errors in and produce an ideal interview. In contrast, *unstructured* interviews are about understanding rather than explaining the establishment of a relationship between the researcher and the respondent. In this case, there is no formality and the conversation can move in any direction (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Our interview with the shift manager can be said to be a combination, like a semi-structured interview. We had prepared a list of questions in Swedish (can be found in Appendix 2, followed by its English translation), and during the interview, they were followed
one by one, but as we were involved in a face to face conversation, there was an open discussion during the process. This shows that an important characteristic of a qualitative method is its flexibility to adjust to situations. For example, an answer to a question often leads to a follow up question (Repstad, 1999).

Also, qualitative and quantitative strategies may be combined in the same project. By combining different methods, the researcher gets a broader foundation for the material and a safer ground for interpretations (Repstad, 1999). We were planning to add quantitative data such as sick leave and employee turnover, in order to compliment our research, but were not able to extract this information from the interview, since it is too sensitive for the company to give out.

3.2.3 Literature review

Considering the literature that we have chosen for the thesis, as we said before, we have tried to choose general theories that can be applied to our area of study and have presented different views from various journals and books, in order to provide more contrast. The reader can follow most of our sources in the footnotes regarding the information of the scholars and their validity. The sources generally agree on the concepts of the assembly line and the problems that it faced and is still facing today. Regarding the views on motivation, we have come across similar opinions from different researchers and also some dissimilar ones, which have enabled us to balance our framework of reference. We have chosen to focus on factors such as culture, incentives and feedback, just to name a few, because we think that they are easily combined and interrelated and can help us explain the entire picture of how motivation is determined and influenced in an assembly line setting.
4 Findings

4.1 The company

The company that we are investigating is a subsidiary located in Sweden. It is part of a Finnish organisation, which is one of the leading textile service companies in Europe. Their business idea is to provide hotel- and restaurant guests with comfortable, clean and high-class textiles such as (bed clothing, terry and table linen). The subsidiary has a vision to expand in the future and become the leader in hotel- and textile rentals in Northern Europe. Their core value is to have a profitable growth, but also to sustain long term relationships with the customers (around 70 of them), by working in a responsible way and showing enthusiasm for development. The company has 85 employees.

4.1.1 Working routines

The task of the sorting and washing department mainly consists of sorting and washing textiles. The sorting work is handled manually on an assembly line, while the work that is performed by machines is closely supervised. The team here consists of 5-6 persons and there is an existing working rotation (see figure 4-1 below). The working team of about 20 people continues with the treatment of the textiles, such as mangling, folding and packing. Mangling and folding is handled by machines, but all the feeding is done manually. This group is also responsible for packing the textiles.

If the people managing the Terry Machines are not working at their full capacity, or if there is a system dysfunction, while the rest of the machines are feeding as expected, then there will be an abundance of textiles at the Terry area (see figure 4-1). These textiles must then be packed in separate carts, which are stored and can be used when needed to complete the orders. The people packing the carts do this for only a certain amount of time that is predetermined by the workers themselves so that there is a flow in the rotation and everyone gets a chance to vary their work. It can be very heavy and tough if one is feeding for two straight hours without any variation. Also, at the after-treatment machines, everything goes very fast, so one needs to catch the constant flow in order to be able to handle it.

Behind the machines there are different carts and a guiding spreadsheet that specifically shows what and how much a cart should contain of each textile. These carts are containing different textiles depending on what the customer has ordered. The different hotels do not have the same assortment, and so the packers have to differentiate what should be in the cart. The content is simplified by little notes that are placed on the side of the carts with a specific number that indicates what has been ordered. The delivery managers make sure that the packer has these notes so that no confusion arises. The carts are stacked in order, ready to be loaded into trucks and delivered to the different customers. Every day, four trucks pick up the clean laundry from the company and deliver it to the customers. There is about 230-260 kg of laundry being picked up on a daily basis (shift manager, personal communication, 2007-04-20).
Figure 4-1. A map of the laundry system

- The laundry comes in here through the gates
- The blue bags are emptied in a large washer, which distributes the laundry to the different tunnels
- The washed laundry is emptied in carts that are distributed to the different machines that handle the after-treatment
- Bottom sheet drying/folding machine
- People in front of the machines hang the sheets, and the person who handles the bottom sheet, the cover sheet, and the pillow case machine in the back packs it in the same carts as the terry.
- Pillow case drying/folding machine
- Drying/folding machine mainly for restaurant textiles

It is sorted into different textiles, which are then elevated in blue bags to the ceiling
There are four breaks in between the work. Two of them are only five minutes long, one lasts for 15 minutes, and there is also a 20 minutes break. These breaks are used as a switching point for the rotation to function.

When it comes to monitoring the results, the laundry and the delivery are being measured in kilos. Regarding customers, they are able to call customer services and express their opinions on the service. That way the company can follow up and see if there are any problems (shift manager, personal communication, 2007-04-20).

The vision, the mission, and the company's core values are placed on the wall around the work area in order to remind the workers what is expected of them. This is also complemented by the working schemes that illustrate what everyone is supposed to do during the week. This scheme is changed every week to vary the routines.

Figure 4-2. Efficiency graph for the company.

Figure 4-2 shows that efficiency is being measured each month, in terms of kilos/person/machine. The first bar to the left shows the goal of the firm and the second shows the effectiveness of the workers in 2006. In the first few months of 2007, there is an increase, as seen from the third bar, although one has not managed to reach the goal quite yet.

4.1.2 Ergonomics

The tasks performed in the laundry firm are very stressful and damaging for the body. Figure 4-3 below illustrates the movements performed by the employees at the Terry Ma-
chines. They have to move their upper bodies sideways to take terry and feed the machine from a cart next to them, while standing firmly in one place with their feet. This causes injuries on their knees.

![Figure 4-3 Movement at the Terry Machine](image)

These movements are performed by those who work on the bottom sheet-, the cover sheet-, and the pillow case machines (see figure 4-1). When working on the sheet machines, the workers take a textile from the cart standing beside them and hang it on the hooks that are attached to the machine by lowering and raising their arms to a 90 degree angle in front of them. On the pillow case machine, people stand in front of the machine with the pillow cases on a knee-high stand. They have to bend over slightly, then up again and raise their arms to the same degree as on the sheet machines (see figure 4-4). The injuries that do occur on these machines are shoulder-, neck- and back pain.

![Figure 4-4. Movement at the pillow case machine.](image)

The company is well aware of these injuries and has therefore offered massage hours for the employees. The cost of such treatment is relatively low and is paid through a reduction of their wage by that amount of money. The workers have to, though, book a time outside working hours. Many have also been directed to a chiropractor as an alternative.

It is a bit hard to breathe in the factory, and it is relatively noisy. However, it is very clean and the internal and external environment are treated according to laws and regulations. The safety precautions taken by the company are, among other things, earplugs, both regular made of foam rubber and headphones with build-in radios. Other things that are of-
ferred and available to the workers are gloves and moisturizing hand lotion. There is also one chair available when someone needs to sit down.

4.2 Results from the survey

The following pages present the answers to all the questions from the questionnaire. The paragraphs are numbered, so that it is easier to follow the order with respect to the survey from Appendix 1. All the answers have been translated into English, once again in an attempt to avoid translation losses.

4.2.1 General

1. All of the workers that answered the survey work full time at the company. One answer is missing, and that is from the trial questionnaire, since we did not have that question initially.

2. Most of the workers have been working at the company for almost a year. One person has been there for six months, one for 10 months, one for 11, and two for 12 months. Also, two workers have been there for 13 months, one for 14 months and one for 17 months.

3. All workers work 40 hours per week, except for one worker who works 38 hours.

4. In the sample, there is one worker whose actual profession is engineer of chemistry and technology, and there are two workers that have only elementary school (complete 9 years according to the Swedish system). Otherwise, the majority has a high school education.

5. Everyone works both in the morning- and the afternoon shift. The working assignments are several for some people and only one type for others, at least at the time that they were being questioned. Four people are involved in feeding the laundry into the machine, where two of these are also packing the laundry. Two are dealing with after-treatment, one person is sorting, and one answer is missing.

4.2.2 Working routines and motivation

6. When asked how they feel about doing routine tasks all the time, there were mixed emotions. Four people had comments such as: not fun, hard, monotonous, boring and tiring. Two people thought it is ok, but can be monotonous at times, while three persons wrote that it is good and that they like it since the job involves a lot of movement.

7. When a working task is clear, eight people answered that their motivation is affected in a positive way. It makes the job more fun, it is good and positive, and easier to work and be motivated when there is clear information on what to do. Only one person said that it means that not much happens in the long run, and that it leads to boredom.

8. The employees are affected by the speed of the job in different ways. Five people mention that they can get either very tired and stressed, at least sometimes, and that it is alright in general. One person was affected in a positive way, although the speed wears one out more. One worker answered that the speed is appropriate while another wrote that he/she is mostly positively affected by the speed, since he/she wants to see how fast a task can be done (testing personal limits). Also, one answer is missing.
Only two workers have worked in all areas of the system. One of these knows a lot about the technical aspects, while the other one did not answer. Otherwise, six people wrote that they have not worked in all areas. They also claim that they know very little about the technical aspects and one comment is that if the machine breaks down in one place, the entire production suffers. One answer is missing.

Seven persons wrote that they were not involved in the planning and decision-making of the working schedule. One of those seven would like to be involved because it would be fun to participate and influence. Another wrote that it would be fun to be involved in the planning, because „the company does not know how to plan“. One employee is not sure whether he/she would like to participate, while two people do not want to be involved, because there is „too much fuss“, and „there are people for those things“. Two did not say whether they would like to be involved or not. Among the rest, two workers wrote that they are partially involved. One of them has taken part in a group discussion regarding the schedule, and that is a positive thing. The other employee also mentioned discussion meetings, and wrote that the workers refused to work one weekend, seeing that as a way of influencing the system.

When asked how they would like to change/ease/improve their way of working, the employees had a variety of answers at their disposal. Two people would like to sit more during work, because when standing all the time, one’s knees get ruined, and many have problems with their legs. A suggestion is to have high adjustable chairs. One person wants more rotation, another wants more help in the work, and another would like to put up reasonable working goals. Further answers include more breaks, prolonging the assembly line, and introducing a lift that moves dirty laundry so that they do not have to do it themselves. Also, one employee just wrote „we've come a long way in making the work easier“. One answer is missing.

Regarding the meaningfulness of their job, five people wrote that their job is meaningful and worthwhile. One of them claimed „yes, otherwise the customer would not get clean products, the company would not have customers, and we would not have jobs“. Another comment is that „we provide clean textiles to hotells all over Sweden. If we do our job right, the hotell staff can do their job right = happy hotell customers“. Another employee wrote that if the first part of the process does not work, then it is difficult for those that handle the after-treatment (seeing the actual contribution to the system as a chain that affects all else). Two of these did not comment to why it might be so that their job is meaningful or not, they simply gave a confirmative answer. Among the rest, two employees answered that the job is ok, or the job is meaningful, but not worthwhile, and one explained that it is so due to a poor salary. Two workers wrote that they do not feel that their job is meaningful or worthwhile, of whom only one explained that „the company does not care about us as much as they should, and money is a must“.

Three employees feel that they have no possibility of advancing within the company and getting a different job. One of them wrote that the jobs are too stressful and that there are too few places available. Two wrote that that they do not know what their possibilities are. One person thinks that the possibilities are small, while another claims that „it depends on how much you know the boss. It's like that everywhere“. One employee said that the company should „come and talk to us, because we know better how the laundry sorting works“. (This person probably wanted to say that they should be able to advance, since they know the job better than anyone else). One answer is missing.
4.2.3 Culture & communication and motivation

The employees have interesting comments on what the main goal/mission of the company is. These are: wash hotel and restaurant laundry; serve hotel customers; a service company in the textile business; maximum profit; efficiency and production; move, don’t talk (more as a joke); deliver what the customers have ordered; provide hotels and restaurants with textiles; wash and deliver; and work fast.

Eight employees answered that there is a focus on service and customers in their work. Four of these gave no further comments, while four added examples. For instance: it is good that the company cares about customers, „because they do not care about their staff“, and „there is focus all the time on how much is to be delivered to the customer, and that we have to make it happen, plus some more“. Also, „they care about how the laundry looks and that the customers can have everything that they ordered“ and when the company delivers on time, it is pleased with the employees. Only one person said that there is not enough focus because things are not done properly due to all the stress.

Two employees answered that they are motivated in a good way by the company focus and goals. One worker argued that it makes him/her do the best possible job and reach that goal. Another wrote that the motivation is ok, and it is important that the customer is pleased with everything. One person did not respond with respect to motivation, but only claimed that “of course the customer is supposed to get the very best goods”. One employee is not motivated much by the purpose, and another wrote “you want to feel like you did a good job, so you do as they tell you. Motivated? Not really…” One person’s motivation is affected negatively by the company mission, and one answer is missing.

The employees described the company culture as follows: cheerful, versatile, kind of ok, relatively good, good, and “more Swedish and everyone become more interested in the work”. One person commented that “the atmosphere is not bad, but we do not have the right to communicate with each other, just to work”. Two answers are missing.

When asked how the company culture affects their motivation to work, one employee wrote that „the nicer the working colleagues, and the nicer the working place, the more fun it is to work“. Another claimed that it affects everything. „If I cannot get along with the colleagues, I will not enjoy the job, etc.“ One person answered that „for me it’s totally ok, because I am a person that gets along with everyone“. Another answer is „it is better to communicate“. Two comments were as follows: „good, but the language could be better“, and that the motivation is affected negatively. „You should cherish more the culture of the country you live in, for instance the language“. Three answers are missing.

Seven employees answered that they have a clear picture of how they are connected to company profits, once they receive information about that. One of these seven wrote “more work gives more profits”. Another argued “if the company does well, you are positive = I have participated in accomplishing this”, and “you feel important in that process”. Two said that they are motivated in a good way because of this, while another claimed that it makes the work easier and the future looks better. One worker wrote that he/she is not affected by that information at all, while another answered that “we never get any information”. One person’s comment was that “we don’t get anything from the potential profit”.

Seven employees wrote that they get customer visits. One claimed no. In terms of how often, there were answers such as sometimes, don’t know how often and “rarely, as usual – work, work”. Then there were statements such as “they don’t always come to us at the
plant, it's a shame, we need to see our customers and eventually talk to them”; “our information is not the best one. We never know who is coming to visit. The motivation is not affected at all.” and "it’s good that the customers come and see how we work with the products that we deliver”. One person answered “I haven’t seen anyone”. One worker wrote “don’t know” regarding this issue.

21. When asked about what source of information they get about company performance, one employee answered papers, another wrote “big meeting with information on the situation and the economy”, and one worker claimed “sometimes from the shift manager”. Further answers include “by the board”, “little information” and three people answered that the CEO holds meetings (2-3 times a year). One answer is missing.

22. Regarding the way the information is presented, five workers answered that it was good/ok. One person said that it is a sufficient amount of information. There was also a comment “if it is not about working hours, etc, I don’t care”. Three answers are missing.

23. The type of information source that the workers would prefer are: meetings, same as before (such as CEO’s message), shift managers, the board, and the production manager. Three answers are missing.

4.2.4 Incentives and motivation

24. Regarding the salary and how it affects motivation, four people said that they were motivated in a negative way. Their comments were as follows: „tiresome work with bad pay“ and „Bad pay. You try your best anyway“. Among the others, one person answered „the higher the salary, the better the performance“ and another wrote that the salary affects motivation a lot. „The more money, the better it feels. It should be worth it. “ One person commented that „with a higher pay you feel more appreciated, but the motivation in connection to pay is not that important“. Two additional arguments were „even if you don’t have a really high salary, you have to do your job“ and „it’s not all that, because I am worth more, so I can do much more than they think“.

25. In connection to the previous question, seven people wrote that they are not satisfied with their salary. One person answered “kind of ok, could be better”. One answer is missing. When it comes the why/why not part, here are the statements: “compared to the effort that I put in, I think I should have a higher pay”; “too low salary compared to performance”; “We work hard. We even have the lowest possible pay there is” and “I can do much more on that workplace, from computer skills – even, assembly line and all other things”.

26. Six workers answered that a rise in their salary would affect their motivation to the better. One of them saw it as a natural thing, while another wrote that the rise should be big, plus a bonus. Two people argued „both yes and no...the salary is low, so it is hard to live on it, but the salary does not relate to motivation completely“ and it does not impact much, as one has to do the work anyway. One answer is missing.

27. Six people answered that their motivation is affected positively when they have to perform certain tasks in a certain way and within a certain amount of time, in order to receive a reward or a bonus. Two of these explained that the reason is “rewards or bonuses can make one work extra hard” and “then one has a “goal””. One person explained that great changes need to be made regarding the bonuses, while another one argued that there are not many bonuses being given out. Among the others, one person did not like the concept, arguing that bonuses are only for a short time. “What is important is health, stress is hard”.
Another employee claimed that if the bonus were higher, it would be good, but it is not. One answer is missing.

28. Seven people answered that they have a clear picture of what they need to do to get a bonus. Three of these claim that their motivation increases because of this, but “if everyone doesn’t have the same attitude, the whole idea falls apart” and “it’s disturbing that some people don’t care at all. Then it feels pointless”. One worker thinks that there is a lot of stress involved, which is not good for the motivation. Among the rest, a worker claims that he/she does not have a clear picture and that it decreases his/her motivation. One answer is missing.

29. Four people say that rewards/bonuses in terms of more money will get them to work faster/harder/more. One of them expressed it as „no small change, we’re talking about thousands of crowns...a part of company profits“. Among the others, one person wrote „I work almost the same regardless of bonuses or rewards“. Another employee answered „nothing“, while one person would like to hear words such as „please“. Two answers are missing.

30. Regarding the type of rewards/bonuses that motivate the most, five people mentioned money. One of their comments was “change the salary system so that those who can more get more”. Among the rest, one person said that he/she prefers individual rewards, so that “I can decide if I want a bonus and then I’ll work extra hard”. Another worker said “nothing, because it is most important that the customer gets the products on time”. One person would like to hear more “please” words. One answer is missing.

31. Considering the type of rewards that the employees would like to have, eight persons answered money, where there were comments such as „a salary that you can live on“, „a reasonable bonus“, „a bonus with respect to how we perform, not in terms of kilos washed“, and „the development system is good, so much more can be done“. Only one person wrote „compensation days for non-smokers“.

32. Seven workers said that they do not compete with their colleagues about who performs the most. Their comments are: „everyone does their best“; „there is no motivation for that“; „never“; „I’m not that motivated. I mind my own business“ and „we’re a group and that’s not necessary“. Only one person answered „It happens sometimes. One always wants to win“ One answer is missing.

4.2.5 Ergonomics and motivation

33. Five workers feel that their working environment is safe. They give examples such as clear exit signs, first aid boxes, emergency stops in every corner and maintenance staff. Two employees feel that it is not safe because „there is much electricity in the factory“ and „they need to come and ask us what we need and change the working place“. One employee thinks that it is both safe and unsafe, since there will be problems in case of a fire due to all the dust. One answer is missing.

34. All nine workers agree that they have not had any training regarding proper working movements and techniques.

35. Four people claim that they have no working injuries or health problems. Others mention the following (either occurring sometimes or always): a kneache on a stressful day, problems with the back, feet, psychological problems, and pain in the shoulders, arms and
neck. Among these, the motivation is affected negatively; the injuries make it hard to be motivated.

36. Four employees answered that the company is not doing anything to prevent or minimise the damage. The comments are: „it is hard to do anything about the kneeache“; „it affects me a lot“, „we keep yelling all the time, we need this and that, but they are not listening“. Four people answered „don’t know“. One person said „yes, but too little. There is job rotation, and for example massage.“

4.2.6 Leadership and motivation

37. Three workers wrote that they are motivated by their boss to work/work harder. One comment is that the shift manager motivates the workers when they need to hurry up, or when they are falling behind. They often hear „work, work, more, more“. Two employees answered that they are motivated only a little and it makes them work more according to their ability. Another person claims that it happens sometimes when the boss says that they are in trouble, but it is not for the sake of the company, but for the sake of the shift manager. Two workers wrote that they are not motivated by their boss, while one person answered that a cheerful boss makes a person work a little harder.

38. Five employees feel controlled and supervised during work either sometimes or a little bit, while three persons wrote a clear yes. One person answered no. Among those that fell the control at times, there were arguments such as: a boss hanging over their head, which makes them more stressed and the work takes a longer time; that it is negative for the motivation; it used to be worse before with „the other shift manager“ and it is annoying. Those that answered with a clear yes wrote that the board needs to have control during breaks and such things are taken care of, that it is a good thing that someone is around, and that it does not affect the motivation much.

39. Two workers feel that they are not being evaluated at work. It affects them negatively, since they would appreciate some feedback now and then. Five persons wrote yes, of whom one meant sometimes and that more needs to be done, and another meant only collectively, not individually, which was not considered good for motivation. Furthermore, two workers thought that it was good (such as individual conversations), while one person wrote that everyone gets evaluated and that it affects motivation negatively. Among the rest, one worker wrote “I don’t know” and another answered “probably, but it does not affect motivation in a negative way”.

40. Five people do not feel that they receive enough information about how they are being evaluated. Two people feel that they do, while two have not answered.

41. Seven workers claim that their boss is good at communicating and listening. Among them, one comment was that the situation is rather good, while two claim that the shift manager is good at it, but not the production manager, who does not listen. Among the rest, one person wrote “sometimes”, while another wrote “no, absolutely not”.

42. Five workers feel that the boss appreciates their work. They think that it motivates them to work harder, that it makes them want to give more, be faster and better, and that it feels good. Four people do not know. Their comments are ”don’t know if that would make any difference” and ”they have never said anything”.
The following comments were given on what kind of boss the workers would like to have: kind, outward-going, happy, good sense of humour, one that treats everyone the same and who really cares, a leader-type person, not a friend-type, someone who has experience in leadership, a thoughtful and fair person. Two workers argued that the shift manager that they have today is good, but more communication regarding work is needed.

Eight people wrote that the CEO/managers come to visit. Four of them wrote that it happens often (every week, every other week), while four answered not often. The comments regarding this are different. One worker answered that it makes him/her work harder, another claimed that more visits are needed and that “I think it affects motivation in a positive way”. One worker saw it as positive, however we are not sure whether it was positive that the CEO comes, or that the CEO does not come that often. Further comments are: “they just walk by” and “the CEO always says hello and might ask how’s it going. It’s important that one gets attention even by the higher bosses, so that one knows that they see that we exist”. One person wrote that the CEO/managers do not come to visit.

**4.2.7 Feedback and motivation**

The following statements show how workers think the company sees them: “a simple, but important workforce”; ”I don’t know how they see me. To them I’m probably just something that the cat dragged in”; “No idea, maybe one of many; slave? They nag on their employees”; “just an individual that is easily replaceable”; “I am money. It affects me negatively”; “Hopefully I’m something good. An employee that does the work. It affects me in a good way”; ”As an employee. It’s good” and “just a worker”. One answer is missing.

Four people feel that the company cares for their needs. Among these, only one worker says that it is very good that the firm has understanding for everything, while others are mostly writing „kind of cares“ and „cares sometimes“. One comment is „we have no working uniforms“. Three people feel that the company does not care and it affects them negatively. One person does not know and one answer is missing.

Six people feel that they can give feedback to the company. Two persons wrote no. One does not know and has not given any feedback. In general, the comments regarding the issue are: “the company hardly listens at all”; “I have discussed different things with the board. When someone listens to your opinions and ideas, the motivation increases”; “bad listeners = bad at doing something about it. Affects me negatively”; ”we discuss it with the shift manager, as we were told to do and “they don’t take it seriously”.

**4.2.8 Overall motivation**

When asked what motivates them to have this job, the workers answered: clean and nice; somewhat good salary; working colleagues; new building, fresh looking; „it feels that one has accomplished something by the end of the day“; fun; nothing; „I don’t have to go unemployed“; „I get to work with my body“; „it’s hard, but totally fine in the long run; bad pay and bad working hours, we’ll see how it will be with the new schedule“; „I like to work where there is a lot of movement and no standing still at all times“ and „I’m hired to work, and am interested in working, I get paid for it“.

The best thing about the job when it comes to motivation seems to be the working colleagues, according to four workers. One of these four wrote “without the colleagues I wouldn’t be able to handle the job”. Among the rest, one person sees the pay check day as
the best motivation and another likes the fact that there is work to do. A worker wrote that the best thing is “when they listen to us, sometimes we have the right to an opinion, we work for them”. Two answers are missing.

Among the factors that decrease motivation the most, the following issues were brought up: having to stand all the time; when the company doesn’t care or listen; nagging, nagging, nagging: “you get sad and down when some people just complain about everything. It’s better to see the positive things” and “constant nagging about the kilograms of laundry, about how you do too little, nothing seems to be enough”. Further answers are: the breaks are too short; don’t know, probably nothing and “when many do not take the job seriously. Some people work well – others don’t”. One answer is missing.

Most workers have a good overall attitude towards their work. They like it there, it is positive. One person is a bit sceptical and one answer is missing. Further comments are: „I am here for the customers, this is a service firm. With nice and good working colleagues, the job is just great“ and „you try to do your best to have a good atmosphere“.

### 4.3 Results from the manager interview

Regarding the interview with the shift manager, the findings do not follow chronologically according to the interview questions from Appendix 2, because some of the answers overlap; some belong in the description of the working routines, and the interview is not as structured as the survey is.

#### 4.3.1 The process

The customers are most important and they need to have what they order. They can order latest by 12.00 hrs, but the schedule is very flexible, and the company always has extra, unexpected orders coming in. The system works according to the so called quotas, which means that the amount of laundry that the customer sends in for processing is the exact amount that goes back to the customer. The shift manager does not like this system, but it is not possible to change it at the moment, because the company wants to have it that way (personal communication, 2007-04-20).

It is not possible to slow the system down, because this is a ‘tempo-job’. At present, the workers can reach only 70% of the machines’ capacity. Moreover, one should in fact never be satisfied with a certain performance or efficiency, but must always strive to be better. On the other hand, everyone does their best and it is not easy to be on top every day. When it comes to involving the workers in the decision making and the design of the system, there are meetings where different issues can be discussed, but there are not that many decisions to be made, since the job is shaped in a certain way. The shift manager asks the employees many times how they would like to work and they are free to express their opinions and communicate within the group on how everything should be done. She hopes that everyone takes their responsibility and does what they are supposed to do (personal communication, 2007-04-20).

#### 4.3.2 Incentives

The reward systems in the company are based on efficiency. When everything runs smoothly, i.e. when all the machines function and all the materials and staff are in place, the rewards pay off. For instance, if capacity increases to 75%, you can earn 5 extra crowns per
hour. In that way, people can affect their wage. Once, everything worked well for a whole week and a high bonus was collected. There are other types of rewards that the shift manager believes can increase the efficiency of the workers, such as cookies, treats and sandwiches, as form of bribery, and it actually works (personal communication, 2007-04-20).

4.3.3 Culture and communication

As claimed by the shift manager, the main goal/mission of the company is to increase its size and effectiveness, to gain more customers, and to spread across Europe. These goals are all long-term, since the contracts are usually on a 5-year basis. In addition, service is what the company is all about. Customers need to have the laundry in the right amount, and on time. The shift manager always reminds the employees about the importance of the customer. She nags on them to work faster, and they obey. All workers have been given an explanation of the mission, so the shift manager thinks and hopes that everyone in the organisation has the same goal and that they understand the mission, but sometimes she wonders if certain people know why they are there at all (personal communication, 2007-04-20).

In order to communicate the different plans to the employees, there are meetings where the board talks about numbers and performance. Later on, the information is distributed by paper, and there is always written information on the wallboards. The employees must accept the plans because of the customers. They usually react to it in a normal way. For instance, the parent company had recently acquired a factory in Finland, and everyone is curious about that. Regarding the overall culture, because the company is new, there is actually no particular culture; it is in the process of being built up. It takes time to establish it (shift manager, personal communication, 2007-04-20).

4.3.4 Ergonomics

When hiring workers, the company looks for people who can handle stress and are able to keep up with a fast pace. A lot of workers have the knowledge and abilities to fulfil the goals of the firm, but a lot more training is required, and in fact, it will begin by the end of April, where all employees will be taught how to work and why it is important to do so (shift manager, personal communication, 2007-04-20). It should be noted that our survey was conducted during April, when people have answered that they have not received training.

As the shift manager claims, people tend to forget things, and it has to be repeated many times. In fact, they are often being reminded that they should do proper lifting. In addition, the company has called in an expert on ergonomics, who is working to improve the system and ease the sorting of the laundry in particular. Furthermore, flexibility on the job exists in the way that employees are allowed to switch machines in order to have variation and rotation on the job. There is really nothing else that can be done in that area (shift manager, personal communication, 2007-04-20).

4.3.5 Leadership and behaviour

According to the shift manager, a way to motivate the workers is by giving them information on what to do, how to do it (usually by yelling and nagging, but also pleading) and by staying positive. She is not aware of any motivation problems, and if something comes up, it is discussed directly. For instance, one time a worker came to her complaining about be-
ing burned out and having no energy, so this person was sent home to rest a couple of days and came back in a better shape. Occasionally, measures like these need to be taken. Overall, the shift manager considers the level of trust to be good between her and the employees during her shift (personal communication, 2007-04-20).

4.3.6 Feedback and attitude

When asked about how the company sees its workers, the shift manager answered that the employees are most important and that the company would not function without them. In addition, the shift manager thinks that most workers like their job. There is always someone who does not; it is like that everywhere. Usually they have discussions about these things while running the shift, and also individual conversations with all employees are common (personal communication, 2007-04-20).

The shift manager is always there for the employees. All they need to do is to come and talk, and they do that. When people have done a good job, she praises them. Also, the workers have a chance to give suggestions, and they suggest many good things regarding for instance rules and order, and their ideas are taken into consideration (shift manager, personal communication, 2007-04-20).

4.3.7 General

There are not so many laundry firms in Sweden, but it is very good for the municipality (where this company is located) to have one, because it helped bring down high unemployment. Overall, it is hard to see any trends in the laundry industry at the moment. As this particular organisation has only been operating a bit more than a year, everything is still in the process of developing. Constant changes and improvements are being made (shift manager, personal communication, 2007-04-20).

In addition to this, we take a look at the state of the Swedish economy and more specifically at the private service sector, to which our company of investigation belongs. For example, The National Institute of Economic Research claims that the GNP in Sweden is increasing, while the unemployment is decreasing (Konjunktursinstitutet 2007a). More specifically, in the private service sector, around 40% of the firms are planning to employ more people. Also, their sales and employment growth is expected to continue in the next few months (see figure 4-5) (Konjunktursinstitutet, 2007b). However, some problems are to be expected in terms of labour shortage (Konjunktursinstitutet, 2007c).
Figure 4-5. The private service sector. (Source: Konjunktursinstitutet (2007b, February 23).
5 Analysis

5.1 The classical assembly line system

The classical assembly line system is very much applicable to the laundry service company. It follows the same path and strategies by having an input that is processed into an output by workers. If we look at the first system component presented by Ritzer (2000), namely efficiency, we can see that there is one best way to do the task, and the process is well defined and standardised, as seen in figure 4-1, and there is a logical flow of laundry: it is sorted, washed, mangled, folded, packed and transported. This is the sequence of events which cannot occur in any other way. Moreover, the process happens very fast, especially at the Terry Machines, where one has to monitor three of them at the same time when packing bottom sheets, cover sheets and pillow sheets.

The specialisation is apparent from figure 4-1 through the different ‘stations’ such as the sorting one, where every worker has a specific task to do. In addition, the efficiency in the laundry factory is to deliver what has been ordered by the customers on a certain time schedule. The purpose is that they get what they need easily and fast and it is clear from the opinion of the shift manager that the customers are most important. Furthermore, the fact that this efficiency leads to a dehumanisation of the workers can be seen from the opinions that speed makes them tired and stressed, and that the work is hard and tearing. However, there are those who see it as good, due to a lot of movement, and as challenging when it comes to testing one’s own limits. This finding can either be explained by the fact that there are people who enjoy these types of tasks, or the fact that they have not been working for a long time and are not aware of the long-term consequences of this kind of job.

The second component proposed by Ritzer (2000), calculability is apparent through the quota system, capacity measurements, spreadsheets of how much laundry each cart should contain, kilos processed each day and the efficiency graph in figure 4-2 that sets up goals and pushes the limits. It is easy to determine how much work has been done and, as the shift manager explained, based on the capacity reached, one can increase the salary of the worker. In addition, the goal of the system with respect to calculability is quantity. However, the goal of the company that we are investigating is to deliver quality as well as quantity. It is due to the fact that it is a service firm that has to offer comfortable high class textiles to their customers.

This implies that the company has to be even more efficient in order to satisfy the customers, putting more pressure on the workers to perform better and faster so that the time schedule is not exceeded. An assembly line system is more or less standardised regardless of the industry, but for a service firm, quality is an important concept, because as Grönroos (2000) says, it is the gap between what the customer expects and what the customer gets. However, the concept of quality seems to be pushing the system to its extreme. If one forces people to be more and more efficient, producing higher results each year, that cannot be good for quality or the motivation in the long run.

Regarding Ritzer’s (2000) predictability, the behaviour of the workers is highly predictable and the products are identical (i.e. all sheets are the same). There is discipline and routine, the tasks are not hard (sorting laundry, feeding laundry into machine), and people have expressed that this routine is monotonous and boring. However, there is also some flexibility in the system, and this is caused by unpredictable orders that customers make very often. Still, it all comes down to making sure that the hotels and restaurants know what to get and
when. Maybe one could surprise them by delivering the laundry faster than expected, but how would workers cope with that? One can either consider the clients, in terms of providing better service, but predictability is one of the core components of the assembly line system. Even though it is boring, it brings some stability and minimises the stress that unexpected orders cause.

Ritzer’s (2000) final concept, control through non-human technology shows that the different activities in the laundry factory are linked, meaning that one cannot start washing before sorting, and so on. Also, when somebody fails to perform, it is noticed immediately, just as in the example of a breakdown or delay at the Terry Machines. The machinery is somewhat excluding the workers from the process, because it is in control. As one worker expressed it, when a machine breaks down, the whole system suffers, and there is not much that anyone can do before it is repaired. Moreover, there used to be three shifts before, but now there are only two, since the demand for humans is diminishing due to the machines.

Most of the employees do not know much about the technical aspects of the machines, and if they did, they would be able to take control, because they would have more understanding for the whole process. Another way in which the machines are controlling the workers can be seen from the breaks. They are short, and most of them serve as a switching point so that people can move to another machine before it all starts again. It practically signals that the workers’s rights consist of an occasional opportunity to sit down and eat something. Also, it is hard to reach the speed of technology, as the employees only do 70% of the possible capacity. This points out once again the importance of efficiency in the assembly line process, and as the shift manager expressed it, there is a constant strive towards performing better every time.

5.2 Short term motivation – incentives

5.2.1 Compensation

One of the employees does not see a connection between salary and motivation, because the job has to be done anyway. This is in line with the fact that a lack of performance does not result in lower wages, as expressed by Persson (1994). You get a fixed salary for the tasks performed according to the contract. If you do more, the salary stays the same and the only way to increase the earnings is through rewards for that extra effort. In connection to this, Herzberg’s hygiene factors such as payment diminish dissatisfaction when they are fulfilled, but they do not motivate towards an actual satisfaction (cited in Kressler, 2003). If this person lacks the fundamental motivation to work, incentives will have very little effect. One is trained to do a task and will do it, regardless of how well. This kind of attitude will most certainly impact on the quality that the investigated company strives for, at least in the long run.

On the other hand, we have seen that most workers feel that their motivation is affected negatively by salary because it is actually too low. More money will make them more motivated and they will work more. The employees want more money so that the job will feel more worthwhile, and there is even an indication from one person that they do not do their very best because they are not paid enough. The workers want a salary that they can live on. This brings us to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (cited in Kressler, 2003). People will be motivated by a higher salary in order to satisfy the needs on several levels, since they do not feel that they are getting enough recognition and self-esteem, and the actual job is not exactly the most interesting one in the world, at least not according to the majority. Of
course, it can be so that the workers emphasise money in their answers, hoping that they will motivate the company to increase their wages.

So, if the wage is considered to be very low, one is motivated over longer periods of time to collect enough money for basic needs such as food and clothes (level 1) and security and stability (level 2). Money can go even further to level 3. By earning more, the workers can purchase certain goods that give them social security and make them feel like they belong to a certain group. Wealth can even stretch to level 4, where you feel valued or able (Wiley, 1997) according to the amount that you earn, and we have seen opinions that workers think that they are worth much more than what they receive. In this case, money goes from being only a hygiene factor, to an intrinsic motivator, but simply as means of reaching an intrinsic feeling and satisfaction outside work.

5.2.2 Rewards

Considering rewards, the workers feel that they cannot affect the size of the received bonus directly. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, the amount that they get depends on how much is being washed and not on how one performs. This is why many do not put enough effort to collect a bonus, thus adding to their regular wage. Secondly, there is in this case a clear link between reward and performance, which is important according to Holtz (2004). As the shift manager states, rewards are based on efficiency. When capacity increases by 5%, so does the extra earning. However, the workers feel that the bonus can be collected only collectively, and they are frustrated when some people do not care about reaching that goal. They do not feel that they can impact on the reward. This finding is supported by Kressler’s (2003) statement that if the company puts forward the idea that extra work leads to a bonus, only some people will try that, as is the case here.

What the company can do is to make the bonus individually based. This way, the shift manager will be able to encourage the employees to work their best, making them feel important and worth their reward. They will be able to decide on their own, as some worker expressed it, the size of this bonus. Still, since many have expressed that they avoid competition with their colleagues; individual bonuses could give rise to envy, which will disrupt group unity. Also, individual rewards require a revision of the system so that it can be adapted to an easy measurement of individual performance. Perhaps it might be less costly to synchronise the group towards performing together for a common bonus.

Most people do see an increase in motivation when offered with a reward. It gives them, as Persson (1994) would say, a target to fulfil, and makes them work harder. The majority wants financial rewards and also it motivates them the most. The minority is interested in non-financial ones such as hearing nice words. This can once again be connected to the hierarchy of needs where money can aid an assembly line worker in reaching upper levels faster than appraisal, still appraisal would make the work a lot easier and perhaps even motivate in the long term.

There were also comments that rewards stand in the way of a healthy working environment, since everything seems to be based on profits. Rewards might even cause stress to perform, diminishing motivation. This is in line with McCausland et al’s (2005) view that these types of incentives do not bring value if the worker feels that they are forced upon them. If we go back to the issue that the monetary rewards are based on the efficiency of the system, then it might be so that one feels the pressure to deliver. This can be causing resistance, while others feel that it is a sign of not caring. The motivation problem is then not the rewards per se but the way they are offered.
For instance, we have seen that the workers know what is required to reach a bonus, but there was a comment about not feeling that they get to take part in company profits. It seems as if they are provided with the figures about how they are helping the company earn money for itself. The firm should instead give employees what Gagné and Deci (2005) call rewards that have nothing to do with the task. These rewards are a celebration of good company results. They will not provide a direct link to the task and the stress that comes with it. It will instead be a way to say thank you for the whole picture.

Threatening to fire those that do not do their job would be one solution that might start to have effect in the long run, once people realise that it is not a joke and that they have to take the job seriously. This could work through systematic discipline and rules, in connection to the fact that assembly line workers are considered as easily replaceable, where other unemployed people would like to take their place. On the other hand, replacement costs would be high, and one could not really manage to establish a solid culture if new people keep coming along all the time. Furthermore, rewards work when the system flows without problems, which requires a synergy between three parts: people (that everyone is motivated to work together for the bonus), customers (managing their laundry supply chain) and the machines (must function properly at all times). It seems kind of ironic that a system that is designed as an expression of the concept ‘every man for himself’ depends on collective efforts in order to exist at all.

What is particularly interesting is that no one mentioned rewards that the shift manager believes strongly in, namely bribes in terms of food. Perhaps the workers do not see it as a reward or as something important. It could be one of those incentives that serve as fuel, if we go back to Kressler’s (2003) car metaphor. The food is the fuel of the car. Feeding the workers will give them energy to work. This energy can be considered a motivation of some sort, but only on a short term basis. People perform and bring results that meet a certain deadline. Given that food does not enjoy much attention in the employee’s answers, it might not even be considered as motivating. This is supported by the view of one employee who works the same regardless of the rewards given.

5.3 Organisational Inputs: motivation through culture and communication

5.3.1 Culture

Although the shift manager claims that the company culture is yet to be defined and established, the employees have managed to create a culture of their own. They already have certain values and beliefs, which guides their behaviour. These factors should have an impact on motivation, according to Parker et al. (2003). This is true here; because many have expressed that their motivation strongly depends on the relationship with their working colleagues. The culture has been described as cheerful, and with a good atmosphere, where people generally get along, which means that this urges them to be more productive and work better. Also, as Kressler (2003) claims, one is motivated by belonging to a group, which is apparent from an employee’s comment that it would not be possible to endure without the colleagues. What is worth noting though, is the need for the employees to communicate more, and they feel deprived of that because they are not allowed to talk during work. Of course, there is not much room or time for talking, as it would prevent the job from being done.
However, it brings us to an important issue that is also expressed by some workers, who put an emphasis on the usage of the Swedish language. As there are both Swedes and Balkan people in this company, and it has been observed by one author that they do not interact much on the lunch break but sit in their own groups, there is a need to get everyone to find a common communication ground outside work so that they can feel like a unity. And they already are a unity, perhaps without realising it. For instance, throughout the entire survey, individuals usually answer by writing “we”, while “they” stands for the company. There does not always seem to be a positive relationship between ‘us’ and ‘them’. One should firstly create a bond between the system components (worker - worker) and then a bond between workers and those that control the system (worker – manager). An example of how to maintain this type of relationship is to organize after-work activities so that everyone has a chance to connect on a deeper level and get to know one another.

By looking at the general goals of the company, we can depict that it wants firstly, to maintain its current customers through providing quality laundry, and secondly, to grow and find more clients. The shift manager also emphasises an increase in effectiveness in order to reach this goal. There is a need to always look for a better way to serve the customer. She also claims that all employees have been given an explanation of the mission/vision, but we have seen that the workers have all kinds of opinions of what that might be. If we make a summary of what they say, they see a simple aim, which is to wash laundry and deliver it to customers. This is in fact all that they workers feel capable of at the moment, but the other part that deals with quality and better service is out of their control, as they do not know much about what is going on there, and therefore they do not see the mission as the company sees it. It can result in, what Fuller and Farrington (1999) call, a reach for the wrong objectives.

In the interview with the shift manager, she said that she thinks and hopes that everyone has the same goal and that they understand it. This shows that there is not much effort made by the company to make sure that so is the case. For instance, there is a concern that some people do not seem to know what they are doing in the company in the first place. If they do not care, it means that it does not motivate them. In an effort to explain this, we need to look at the core concept of this company, which is the delivery of service.

5.3.2 Mission and service

Service is what the company is all about, as the shift manager says. Almost everyone realises that there is a focus on service and customers, and they are all well aware of how important the customer is. This is in line with what Grönroos (2000) emphasises. The workers mention it several times throughout the survey. For instance, one employee even refuses any kind of rewards because customers are more important. However, some argue that this causes a lot of stress and that there is not much caring about the employees. If one constantly argues how important the customer is, people might ask, What about me? Am I not as equally important?

Namely, the opinions on how people are motivated by pleasing the customers are divided. Some are motivated by that target. Perhaps it is easier when having a clear goal to reach, as was the case with the reward systems. Possibly one feels important by knowing that he/she can provide a service to the customer. This gives a good feeling, almost a feeling of being in control, or as Kressler (2003) would say, there is a motivation to please others in order to feel worthy. On the other hand, there are those who are not really affected by the goal, or even negatively motivated. Supposedly they do not care about the customers. The work-
ers are providing the service, but they do not see those that get the service, so they cannot connect to them. Or maybe they do not feel treated equally since they think that the company only cares about clients, which leads to frustration. Or there could be pressure to please customers all the time, resulting in task avoidance.

The understanding of the level of importance in delivering quality and quantity products to the customers has already created some sort of service culture. It must be maintained by motivating the workers to strive towards the same values and accepting the working process. People see that it is natural that the customers are being served. However, everyone must be committed and support the decision, but it must also fit the company structure, as claimed by Grönroos (2000).

Firstly, the workers need to have a closer connection to their customers in order to establish a relationship with them. One way could be to do as the Japanese consumer electronics company Matsushita did in the late 1960s. It actually sent its assembly line employees out as door to door salesmen (Bartlett, 2006). Perhaps the workers in our example could be introduced to the process of how deals are closed with the different hotels or restaurants and how the different industries are functioning. They could even be invited to participate in the meetings with the customers. This can work to improve motivation, because the concept of knowing the customer does not seem to be affecting the worker's motivation to execute tasks at the moment. The employees are not being properly informed about who comes to visit. All they want is to know who is coming, so that they get a chance to explain the process, since they know how the routines are performed better than those who are not working with that specific assignment. In other words, there is a lot of valuable knowledge that the workers possess and it should not be wasted. Moreover, the expectations by the company on the employees have to be clear and specific so that they do not strive to achieve the wrong objectives. The best solution, according to Fuller and Farrington (1999), to such a problem is by proper communication, which seems to be the major overlapping problem in this particular company.

5.3.3 Communication

Katzenbach’s (2000) example on how to establish a communication with workers is to post the vision/mission and values statement on the wall, as is the case of the company that we are investigating. The question is whether words on the wall motivate someone to work each day, or to think about these concepts while working. Words need to become concrete, and one has to connect to them. According to Holtz (2004), the expectations have to be reasonable and the communication has to be on a level that is accepted and understood by everyone, for it to have an influence on the motivation and the behaviour of workers. They should know why they are there and where they expect to be in the near future. They need what Fuller and Farrington (1999) would say a proper proposition plan.

The employees from this case do know what does and does not generate success. Almost all of them have a clear picture of how they are connected to company profits. It does make them feel important; they feel like a part of the process, like they have accomplished something valuable, which supports Holtz’s (2004) views on proper communication. But they do not feel that they get anything in return for accomplishing the result, as was seen in the problems caused by the bonus system. As claimed by Katzenbach (2000), a connection to the profits should motivate people to perform. However, they also need to know that they will be rewarded for their efforts, as stated by Holtz (2004). This is where motivation resides because it gives tangible evidence that the workers are a part of the mission.
When asked about the type of information that they get, people have different answers, which can indicate that there is an inconsistency in how information is being provided to them. On the other hand, the majority seems rather pleased with the information that they do receive, which is a bit strange given that they often complain about inadequacy in that area. What is most apparent is that the workers appreciate direct face to face communication with the company representatives. This is reasonable since it fosters interaction, becomes more personal and one can ask questions directly. It enables a company to be more open and honest and as Holtz (2004) would argue, allows it to say the right things in the right way. The company is moving in the right direction through these personal interactions with their employees, yet the crucial aspect is to really connect them to all goals and to make them motivated by letting the workers taste success and not only generate it.

5.4 People: motivation through work design

5.4.1 Proper techniques and health issues

The classical assembly line system states that workers do not need skills in order to perform the job tasks. Fuller and Farrington (1999) however disagree. They say that one needs appropriate skills for a job, or there will be a decrease in motivation. If the skills are inappropriate, the workers’ capabilities are not sufficient enough, which in turn will lead to an incorrect performance of tasks, hence causing injuries.

Typical of assembly line employees are repetitive work and frequent bending. This in turn causes health issues, which leads to lowered work efficiency and an increase in the costs for the company (Shady, 2006). In the firm that we are investigating, the movements made are damaging and stressful, particularly standing in one place all the time and only moving the upper body, as was displayed in figure 4-3. Although many employees claim to have no injuries, others give a wide variety of examples such as knee ache, stress, back problems, hurting feet, psychological issues, shoulder-, and arm- and neck problems, all of which affect motivation negatively. It is quite interesting to see all this given that they have not worked in the firm for such a long time.

Shady (2004) suggests that a company should design the job to fit the workers. They should be trained in all areas of the facility to perform their job correctly and there should be a job rotation in order to minimize injuries. Also, the employees have to be taught the right techniques for bending, reaching and lifting.

We have seen that some workers in the sample have worked in all areas of the system through rotation and variation, but they are too few. Also, everyone agrees that they have not had proper training. The shift manager recognises that more training is required to give competencies to do the work. Therefore, everyone is going to be taught how to work and why it is important to move appropriately. The shift manager usually does remind the workers of how to do correct lifting and perform the tasks correctly, since they have a tendency to forget. This is in line with Shady’s (2004) suggestion that managers should watch staff work, take notes of movements and look for signs of repetitive stress. There is also the example of one worker being sent home due to a “burned out” effect, where the shift manager noticed that this person was too tired to work.

It is very important that the company has recognised the need for actual training, because if the shift manager only walks around and constantly tells everyone to alter their movements, certain individuals could feel criticised; they could feel that nothing they do is good enough.
By putting it in the right context and having a real training session for everyone, it might be a good motivation tool. Perhaps then the workers will be more willing to remember those constant reminders and really realise that it is for their own good that they listen to the advice. After some time, when they catch the routine of good movements, their motivation could increase. However, as the injury problem is eliminated or minimised in the future, will the motivation come to a halt as there is not much more to be done in this area?

If we go back to the concept of injuries, we have seen a comment by one employee that it is hard to do anything about the knee ache. Perhaps this person feels that the injury is a normal consequence of the job. It indicates that some might ignore, or are indifferent to this issue because they want to keep their job, or not cause problems, which is in line with Eakin and MacEachen’s (1998) findings. This is the case when the employee has a good relation to the company. Although we have seen many complaints in the survey, the workers in general seem to like their job, or at least they are putting up with a lot because they feel that it is most important that they actually have a job. Another factor is the concept of customers. Since it is well known in this company that the customer is what matters, one has to endure the pain and keep working. The question is how long people are going to take it.

What Eakin and MacEachen (1998) also found is that people who do not have such a good relationship with the employer tend to blame the injuries on the company. If we interpret the complaints in the survey as an indication that the relationship between the workers and the company is not very good (at least based on our small sample), then it is portrayed in the workers’ opinion that the company does not do enough to prevent the injuries from occurring and that it is not listening. However, massage is offered (which the workers partially have to pay for) and employees are directed to a chiropractor. This might send the message to the people that it is up to them to take care of their injuries.

Because of this, it is really important that training starts as soon as possible. This way, the company actually shows that it cares, even though it does not have to. Although, it would have to care in the long run, since the injuries will affect productivity. Still, this last statement should according to Eaken and MacEachen (1998) not be the only concern of a company. One must also care about the people, because of the motivating effect that can later on result in quality products that the organisation always strives for. Of course, workers have to be prepared for a job like this, and the company always looks for those that have the ability to handle stress and keep up a fast pace. Even if one can handle stress, the long run motivation will diminish as the person wears out, so something definitely needs to be done to improve the situation.

As Shady (2006) claims, equipment heights have to be appropriate for the worker. If we take a look at the Terry Machines, people have to bend and raise their arms at the pillow case machines in particular, as seen from figure 4-4. In one way, one can find out what the most appropriate movements would be for this task, but perhaps these machines could have a lower height so that one does not need to move the shoulders all the time. This could be discussed with the ergonomics expert. In addition, it is good that the washer and the Terry Machines are close to each other (see figure 4-1). Also, the system is u-shaped, so that that the sorting washing and drying are all separate divisions.

One part of the workers feel that the working environment is safe and they point to the general things such as first aid kits and exit signs. Others do not seem that sure and they would like to discuss electricity and fire hazards. What no one seems to be paying attention to, and this is perhaps because they are used to the environment, is that it is hard to breathe in there (despite the dust collectors and the cleanliness). It might not be noticeable now, but
this dampness is not good for the lungs in the long run. Therefore, the workers should most definitely wear face masks of some sort. Considering the noise, the earplugs are a good solution, and the music can serve to take the boredom away. However, nobody mentioned music as being particularly motivating. Perhaps many do not listen to music as it distracts from work, and work has to be done fast.

What is apparent is that the workers seem to know a lot about what they need in terms of ergonomics. A good motivation, which will make the employees feel as a more useful part of the process and as a part of the organisation, is to let them participate in improving the working environment, since they have first hand experience on movements that are unpleasant. We have already seen several useful suggestions, such as being able to sit more, preferably on high adjustable chairs (there is only one chair available now), so that knee injuries are prevented. Other suggestions are to have uniforms, more rotation; more breaks, and to prolong the assembly line, as well as to introduce a lift to move dirty laundry to spare the employees from possible back pain. We would like to add orthopaedic shoes to this list, as a suggestion.

Motivation will probably increase after the training and after the appropriate changes that can be made in the company in order to ease the stress and the pain. When the environment alters, so will the attitudes of the employees and they might feel more cheerful and more inclined to go to work every day.

5.4.2 Altering the system through more responsibility

As Katzenbach (2000) explains, corporate objectives need to become individual goals when people are given the right tools to reach these goals. This will lead to worker fulfilment and performance effectiveness. We have seen among the employee’s answers that they are interested in being more involved and that they have several good ideas to put forward, but they are not given much responsibility, and this is probably why their intrinsic motivation is low.

If we look at Hackman and Oldham’s (1976) (cited in Bartunek, 1985) job characteristics and begin with **clarity**, clearly defined roles is what brings responsibility. When asked regarding clarity of working tasks almost everyone claims that their motivation increases when an assignment is clear and that it is helpful and positive. It is easier to do something when one knows what needs to be done. So, actual task clarity does not seem to be making problems for the workers. On the other hand, the tasks are very simple by nature. Since the environment involves speed and efficiency, it is logical that task clarity is appreciated by the employees. In one sense, those that find this job challenging can set a clear goal in personal capacity that they might be motivated towards reaching.

Considering **task completion**, it is important to see the whole picture, and one needs to identify with the task in question. Only two workers in our sample have been working in all areas of the system, so obviously the rotation that is being put forward in the company does not seem to apply to everyone, and this can make people frustrated because they feel stuck in only one place. There have been comments that more rotation is necessary. This way, all workers can get a sense of how the entire system works. In connection to this, it must be difficult to identify with a certain task, because one has been placed there without the ability to choose or test other areas in the laundry factory.

**Task significance** means that work is meaningful and worthwhile. The majority of the employees in the laundry company do feel that their job is meaningful and worthwhile.
They see a link between their work and the customers and the fact that they would not have a job otherwise. If they do everything right, the hotel customers will be happy. One person saw him/herself as an important part of the machinery that makes sure that other parts work. However, a high minority does not feel that the work is meaningful or worthwhile. While one group is so focused on customers, the others are inclined to say that there is no higher meaning in what they do. One can either feel motivated by trying to please the customer, and this is according to Grönroos (2000) a must for a service employee, but since many do not feel that it is worthwhile, they cannot make that connection between themselves and the customer, or it simply is not reason enough for them to appreciate their tedious and stressful job. Not one employee wrote that the work is actually meaningful because it makes him/her feel good about it.

Finally, **autonomy** is about freedom and independence in scheduling, where workers feel responsible and in control (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; cited in Bartunek, 1985). Some employees in the sample wrote that they are not involved in the planning and decision-making of the work schedule. One can see a frustration of not being able to influence the situation much, even though they would like to do that, and there is even a comment that they could do it better than the company. Others feel that they are involved, and their view is supported by the shift manager, who said that discussions are regular in the firm regarding these issues. There seems to be an inconsistency in communication and information, because one group is involved while the other is not, and it diminishes their motivation. The case might be that people are allowed to have opinions, but these opinions are not always turned into action.

All of these job characteristics that emphasise responsibility can lead to the creation of the *lean manufacturing* concept, which is the only known way to alter the assembly line system. Productivity will increase when employees can make decisions, rotate and share profits (Bowen & Youngdahl, 1998). In this particular example, more emphasis needs to be put on all three of these issues. People have to feel that they are getting a part of the profits, they should rotate more, and they need to be given more responsibility, as they already are asking for that. The workers will be more motivated when making their own choices and taking on more responsibility, but the shift manager can only involve the workers partially due to the fact that the system is shaped in a certain way. Employees have to do what is predetermined by the managers in order not to lose valuable time when changing places, so as to try to achieve the desired capacity and satisfy the customers, as well as the company.

However, one can still add different, related tasks to everyday work, as claimed by Kressler (2003). As already discussed, the employees could be invited to get to know customers directly and talk to them about the system and about the supply chain and regulation of orders, so that stress is minimised. The customers themselves are a part of a stressful industry and they are in fact passing on this stress to the laundry firm. Furthermore, as many employees lack knowledge of the technical skills, they should be trained to learn how the machines function and perhaps also allowed to help out when a repair needs to be made, so that they do not stand helplessly when the system breaks down, waiting for the repairman to fix it. This is what Bowen and Youngdahl (1998) call identifying problems in the system. These types of responsibility will lead to self esteem and intrinsic motivation. The reason is that it gives more quality to the work (Kressler, 2003), and one will experience more control and will no longer feel like being used by the system (Wiley, 1997). Making small steps in the right direction can prevent incidents such as work refusal, which already occurred once, and gave the workers a sense of being in control for the first time.
The motivation from increased responsibility will make the workers more willing to perform their best. They will be given challenges to overcome and will be made an important part of the organization. The motivation further increases if the employees themselves gain control within their own group, and if they foster communication on improvements in the rotation scheme. This way, they will share ideas and knowledge on how to simplify and perform the tasks. Furthermore, by giving the workers a chance of advancing in their workplace will make them strive even harder to reach that position, because career development is considered to trigger intrinsic motivation, as argued by Kressler (2003). At the moment, the workers do not seem hopeful towards advancing in the firm, but if they are stepwise guided through responsibility, they could reach level 4 in Maslow’s hierarchy, namely acknowledgement, confidence and success.

5.5 Behaviours and performance: motivation through leadership

5.5.1 X versus Y

It seems that we are dealing with a mixture of two types of theories in this company, namely X and Y, and that is according to McGregor (cited in Kressler, 2003), not recommendable. Due to the assembly line process, rules and routines, one would expect theory X to be applied, because generally, work is considered unpleasant. We have seen opinions that it is hard, stressful, monotonous and boring, but there are also claims that it is good, has movement and can serve as a challenge for testing one’s limits. Thus, work is also seen by some as a physical and mental activity, daring to say, almost desirable. This indicates that there is a mixture of both X and Y workers in the company.

As claimed by Woodward (1965) (cited in Reis & Peña, 2001), there is need for control in organisations of rule and order, and this is connected to theory X, which argues that people expect strict regulations and a clear responsibility, so they would want a manager that controls them, an X manager (Kressler, 2003). However, due to the fact that we observe a mixture of X and Y people, we see resistance to that type of management. Most workers have expressed that they feel controlled, and that it makes them stressed, it slows their work down, is annoying, and it also decreases their motivation to work. This is in line with the fact that Y people think that forcing them to work prevents the objectives from being met (Kressler, 2003).

From our findings, not so many feel motivated to work/work harder by their boss. It seems mostly that they are motivated when there is a need to hurry up and meet the deadline. Perhaps they would instead like to say that they are not actually motivated as much as pushed by the boss, and that they in fact simply obey in order to not get into trouble. As Gagné and Deci (2005) claim, people work when the boss is watching. The employees here do not seem to be internalising the attitude from the surrounding that would lead them towards wanting to work even without supervision.

On the other hand, some expressed that their boss does not motivate them at all. They must be thinking that they know what to do and that it does not help or hinder having anyone around telling them that. These people are internalising the attitude from outside, but do not seem to have the interest in the activity. They choose to perform in order to feel like they have done, as Gagné and Deci (2005) would say, something valuable. It could also be that they have become numb from the system, captured by the flow of the routine, so that the boss would serve only the purpose of a person who monitors a machine, making
sure that everything runs according to schedule. If connecting this to Y-people, they are considered not to need supervision because they are committed to their work (Kressler, 2003). One can argue here how high the level of commitment actually is. Maybe the self control and discipline that makes people work despite the boss is a sign of commitment, but they might not necessarily be happy about it.

Only two workers are directly pleased with the boss that they already have, even though they prefer more communication, while most workers took the opportunity to mention what kind of boss they would like to have. There is a division here as well, once again pointing to a mixture of X and Y people. Some want a charismatic, outward, happy and caring person. It is the Y-type, where the manager is supposed to challenge and recognise workers (Kressler, 2003). This sort of leadership would fit non-routine tasks, as discussed by Woodward (1965) (cited in Reis & Peña, 2001), which is the total opposite of the assembly line. How much can you be a Y-person, if your workers have simple, low-skill jobs? They are not exactly working in creative ways, trying new things. Moreover, other workers wrote that they want a distinct leader instead of a friend-type person, which supports the fact that X people want an X manager that really leads them and provides them with security (Kressler, 2003). Perhaps this is a complaint with respect to a lack of order and discipline in the company that causes disobedience and a disruption of the system. It can also be the case that people would still be indifferent to the actual leader, but prefer to have some order. What is apparent from both sides is that the leader should be fair and treat everyone equally. It is quite interesting, given that the workers differ.

Almost all workers in the sample feel that their boss is good at communicating and listening. At least, this is the case with the shift manager, and not the production manager, as they argue. This gives an impression that the shift manager in this case is kind of a Y-person, since X-managers usually give orders without interacting with the subordinates. Therefore, it might seem that even X people appreciate a Y-manager. This in turn contradicts theory, which does not recommend any kind of mixture of the two. Even those that feel that work is unpleasant want to have someone that understands, perhaps more than those who like their work.

The majority (5 people) feels appreciated by the boss. This motivates them to be better in their job, and it feels good. However, a very high minority (4 people) have another opinion. They think that the boss has never said anything and that they are not sure whether that would make any difference at all. Perhaps these employees see that they have a task to perform and that no matter what is being said, they will continue working as before, as was already discussed. They simply have a job to do. Furthermore, the supervisor in a factory is supposed to serve as a clear link between the highest and lowest levels of the company, enabling a level of trust (Holtz, 2004). If many workers do not feel appreciated by the boss, then they will not feel appreciated by the company. This will decrease their motivation.

The shift manager in this case claims that she feels that the level of trust between her and the workers is good. Still, perhaps those who are annoyed by control feel that the company does not trust them. But if they disobey, then the company cannot trust them. Moreover, the shift manager also thinks that a good motivation is to tell the employees what to do and how (yell, nag and please) and to be positive. She also showed the example of sending an exhausted worker home to recover for a few days. Clearly, the shift manager resembles a combination of X and Y, but there needs to be a fit between her efforts and the desires of all the workers.
If the workers in the sample are mostly Y-oriented, then they would need a Y-manager, but their behaviour indicates that there is a need for an X manager as well. Perhaps it is those that obey and work hard at all times that need no boss, while those who do not always obey perhaps cannot easily deal with authority, yet they might need it. Our guess is that there are more Y people than X people and that the boss is Y, trying to be X (because the system requires it), which leads to resentment. Maybe the answer is an X-Y leader that guides the people in the right direction, but lets them get there on their own. What we see here is a trade-off between the need to function according to the system and a need to take care of the human resources.

As Reis and Peña (2001) argue, good leadership depends on the task, group size, the type of people, how long they have known each other, their relationship, as well as group pressure. Here, the task requires control and routines, the small group size indicates that it might be handled with less commands, while the type of people are generally not interested in being monitored and pressured, while there is a need for more discipline as well. The workers have not known each other for a long time, their relationship seems to be in the process of evolving, and the group pressure can be causing the X and the Y people to disagree. Y people want the boss to be Y, but the boss needs to be X due to the system, while X people seem to prefer either type, or rather, a combination. It is therefore important that the boss in charge, in this case the shift manager gets a good idea of what the people are like before creating a leadership approach that could motivate them.

5.5.2 Management by walking around

We have seen proof of management by walking around in the company. Almost everyone says that the CEO/top manager comes to visit, mostly the CEO. However, there are conflicting thoughts about whether he comes often or not. He has the effect that people work harder. We do not know whether they do it to impress him, or because his presence actually motivates them. Generally it is considered good that he comes, and people would want to see more of him. A comment which shows that the CEO does interact with the workers and that it is a positive thing, because people feel that he knows that they exist, proves Holtz’s (2004) idea that management by walking around is a desired concept. What we can suggest is that the CEO really finds time to interact more with the workers and perhaps even has lunch with them on certain occasions. What this could lead to in the long term is a feeling of being more connected to the company from the employee perspective, and it could cause a desire and a motivation to perform better. It is also a very crucial concept for an assembly line environment, since the workers at the factory are isolated from the rest of the organisation and it means a lot to them that they get regular visits.

5.6 Consequences

If we look at Skinner’s list of barriers that are caused by incorrect consequences of a job performance (cited in Fuller & Farrington, 1999), we can depict some main points that we have spotted throughout the research and that are crucial for motivation.

Firstly, ignoring a correct performance means that people will not bother to do things right. In this case, we have seen that some refuse to do their best due to inadequate compensation. Furthermore, rewards are not given for performance, but for kilos washed. Also, people do not feel like they are taking part in company profits.
Secondly, punishing correct performance in this case might be the fact that those that work hard for a bonus cannot collect it due to others that do not work as hard.

Thirdly, ignoring incorrect performance has occurred by not giving the employees all the right tools to fulfil the entire mission. We specifically point to the customer contacts. Also, there are many ergonomics issues to be resolved.

Fourthly, rewarding incorrect performance is not quite apparent for this case, but we point to the fact that disobedience is not dealt with completely.

These consequences arise due to communication (input) problems between the company and the employees. Therefore, the workers can choose to simply do what they are told to, and cannot always reach to do what actually will get rewarded, as Fuller and Farrington (1999) would argue. There is either a lack of resources or competencies to enable them to do that.

5.7 Feedback: motivation through criticism and appraisal

Some workers have expressed that they are not evaluated at work and that it affects them negatively, since they would like feedback. Even though the tasks are rather simple, people want to know whether they are working hard enough, or appropriately, and what they need to change. This is in line with Fuller and Farrington’s (1999) view that lack of feedback gives unpredictable results. If people do not know how to behave, they will behave inconsistently. This is not appropriate for an assembly line system, because all the components are connected to one another and need to be synchronised. Feedback is required in order to optimise performance. Also, feedback in this case should be frequent because the line process is ongoing machinery that requires inputs so that it can improve.

On the other hand, most workers in the sample feel that they are being evaluated, although they do not know in which way. There are signs of both collective and individual feedback, which responds to Katzenbach’s (2000) statement that both are necessary; however one person expressed a concern of being evaluated in a group. Perhaps this person needs to, as Lussier would say (cited in Wiley, 1997) boost self-esteem and grow, and thus requires personal feedback. It can also be that the person can perform better alone, and given the criticism regarding lack of seriousness from certain workers, might want to take distance from the others and be evaluated on his/her own. Another employee does not want evaluation at all. This individual might think that evaluation is stressful or pressuring, or perhaps he/she has only experienced negative feedback.

There is also one interesting opinion regarding the whole issue, and that is the reflection that evaluation does not decrease motivation, but nothing was written as to whether it would increase it. The person that feels this way perhaps had negative feedback in mind; since appreciation and recognition for a job well done is supposed to be the most powerful motivation tool one can think of (Wiley, 1997). On the other hand, can a good word and a pat on the shoulder improve the situation in the long run? Appreciation received from the shift manager might meet the need for self-esteem and achievement, but it could be only for a short term. If the evaluated person thinks he/she is doing a good job, he/she will not want to change, or improve. However, the employees wrote that the biggest de-motivator for them is the constant nagging and complaints, where nothing they do seems to be good enough. Then perhaps good feedback more often might lead to surprising results.

Regarding the fact how the workers think the company sees them, around four people can be said to feel like nothing in the eyes of the company, using strong words such as “I am
probably just something that the cat dragged in”, “slave”, “easily replaceable” and “I am money”. Then there are two that have a neutral, distant view on the issue and use words “simple, but important workforce” and “just a worker”, while two expressed positive thoughts where they feel that the firm sees them as employees and that it is a good thing. As a contrast to all of this, the shift manager said in our interview that the employees are most important and that the company would not function without them. What is interesting is the fact that she also said that customers are most important, so there is clearly a trade off here. There is an obligation towards the customers, since they are the ones that provide the money, but, on the other hand, it is the people who enable the service in the first place. As Grönroos (2000) argues, employees are a first, internal market to which one offers services, just like one does with customers. Therefore, one has to care for both sides equally. This is a serious issue, given the strong comments that the employees gave about how they think to be perceived by the firm.

This brings us back to communication and culture. When people constantly keep getting the signal regarding the importance of customers, they become simple tools and nothing more. By explaining to the employees how important they are for the company, it can have a major impact on performance and increase their self-esteem, which leads to higher efficiency. Giving their work a meaning and the appreciation they deserve will achieve this. Individual gratitude can also boost one’s ego so that one feels worthy of attention. Although the workers responded very strongly to the impact of monetary appreciation, considering the emotions that they express about what they are to the company, it shows that they might value non-monetary appreciation more than one might think at first glance, and this is in line with Katzenbach’s (2000) view on the latter appreciation being the strongest one.

Considering the caring, people in general do not feel that the company cares too much about them, which is obvious given the comments given above. Still, some think that there is a good understanding. Those that say that the company does not care, feel that it affects them negatively. The shift manager on the other hand said that she is always there when the employees need her. She emphasised the importance of individual conversations, and said that people do come to talk. Either someone is lying, or there is a problem in communication and information sharing. It is necessary to listen to employees, share their values and problems and improve their situation, as Hooley et al. (2004) argue. Maybe it is like that for some, but this company does not reach out to everyone, and it is a problem.

Most people feel that they can give feedback, but they think that it is useless and that the company does not listen. However, one person feels that he/she has discussed different ideas, and since the firm listens, this increases his/her motivation. According to the shift manager, workers have a chance to give suggestions, they suggest many good things, and their thoughts are taken into consideration. Once again, there is inconsistency in the answers. As Holtz (2004) argues, one needs to be able to ask questions and leave suggestions. This is a part that the company does well. The second part, where people’s ideas are to be noticed, appreciated and considered, however is apparently not working, at least partially, which leads to frustration and a lack of motivation.

5.8 Environment: motivation and the big picture

5.8.1 Internal environment

If we summarise the different factors in the entire working environment of the human performance system, we can see that the process must not provide any barriers to perform-
ance (Fuller & Farrington, 1999). If you put a good performer in a bad process, the process wins. By looking at the classical assembly line system, one can see that the efficiency components very well apply to the laundry service company. The input and the output get most attention by the managers. There is a constant race to satisfy the customer and to survive. What the firm has to focus on, though, is the employees, since they form the basis of success of the entire company.

It starts with the inputs put forward through a culture that does not only see the customer. Yes, customers motivate the workers, but as a mere purpose of being at the assembly line. In other words, the workers are nothing but tools that are used to please the customer that does not appear to care for their existence at all. What is needed is that one connects to the different hotels and restaurants through interaction, so that both sides become aware of one another and each other’s demands and capabilities, in order to bring out particular abilities that can differentiate this organisation from competition. This way, one can improve motivation that will actually give meaning to the workers as human beings.

It continues through proper, consistent, unified communication, firstly within the working group that has to build a firm culture. The employees are strongly motivated by one another, and therefore it is crucial that they create a family like environment. Also, the system depends on it as one movement determines the other. Then, as Fuller and Farrington (1999) say, well designed information is crucial in making the whole process a success. The company is good at informing about company profits, and the employees know that they are important and that they are doing a valuable thing, but in order to be motivated, they have to receive credit for it as well.

The workers need to feel appreciated by being showed respect for their effort. One way of doing so is to listen to them and their opinions, since they do know their workplace a little better than outsiders do. It once again comes down to communication and information sharing. Everyone must feel that they can express themselves, but it should not stop there. The company has to listen and use the knowledge that the employees possess. It is good at criticising, but has to improve the positive feedback. However, in order for positive feedback to be possible, the workers have to perform, and the best way to perform accordingly is by having the proper resources that motivate towards that aim.

One resource is the proper working environment that will eliminate the barrier to motivation regarding the actual assembly line tasks being performed, because better health gives better results. Another resource is making sure that the view of the workers is broadened so that they can appreciate the entire picture and expand their responsibilities towards other areas of the business, so that they do not only get stuck in the same routines at all times.

Once the employees are given the proper tools to use for the company mission, then also the control and supervision from the company side will become less important. This will in turn lead to less stress and the boss will be able to go easy on the yelling and be more of a guide that supports the people in the achievement of the goals. The leader’s role will help change the attitude and the motivation and aid in bringing the company and the managers closer to the employees.

When all of the components of the human performance system are synchronised, the company will be able to avoid the three types of long term motivation problems presented by Persson (1994), which are: participation; productivity and commitment; and change and
learning. Thus, the workers will be treated as a success factor of the organisation, which according to the shift manager, they are.

If we monitor the entire picture from a short term motivation point of view, the most significant motivational factor among the majority of the workers is the size of the salary. They wish to get paid a large enough salary with respect to their work, because money can help them satisfy both material and immaterial needs. More money will mean more work, but it will be used to reach that feeling of self esteem outside of the job. It will not make work any more fun, unless one likes this type of job.

Considering rewards, even this short term motivation is affected by the lack of long term motivation, because the bonus system cannot be collected unless the group culture is unified, which will lead to efficiency. Also, the case that the workers are left on their own to literally earn every crown that they can. They do not feel that they can reach all those company profits, which brings us back to the concept of having the right competences for it.

5.8.2 External environment

Motivation is also dependent on the external environment. If we look at the state of the Swedish economy, we can see that the GNP and employment are growing overall and that the private service industry is doing well. Therefore, one would expect that due to the good prognosis, the workers would value interesting work the most, and not money and security, as would be the case during a recession. However, when asked what motivates them the most to have this job, the employees answered working colleagues, money, and the fact that they have a job. These factors are also considered to be the best motivators. Thus, we observe an emphasis on financial attributes. It can be explained by the fact that this particular company brought employment to the town in which it is located, and perhaps in the assembly line job, money is seen as being able to satisfy people’s needs easier than non-financial appraisal can at the moment. Also, assembly line work is usually the type of job that one takes just in order to have employment, and not fun. Moreover, since the company is new and dependent upon contracts to survive, there is uncertainty as to how long it will stay in business, so this uncertainty can be a reason to pay more attention to cash than interesting work. People depend on the system for existence. They are perhaps motivated by earning enough so that they can find a better job some day.

5.9 Motivation and company size

What is specific about our company of investigation is that it is small. It only has 85 employees. Despite this, it does not seem to completely fit Eakin and MacEachen’s (1998) criteria regarding small firms and human aspects. In one way, it can be seen as acting as a large corporation that treats its workers as commodities, considering how people wrote that they feel. On the other hand, the social distance between workers and the boss is low, where there are a lot of open discussions happening on frequent basis, and the relationship between the colleagues is starting to resemble a big family. However, control in a small firm runs on informal basis, while here, rules are necessary in order to reach company goals. Furthermore, in a small environment, employees are supposed to be better at understanding the whole picture of the business and to identify with the goals of the organisation (Ingham, 1970; cited in Eakin & MacEachen, 1998). It is apparent that the big picture is very much centred on the customer and that there is a connection to the goals, but identification with them is not that apparent, as discussed earlier. Also, not everyone has an idea of the entire system because they have not been introduced to it.
We think that company size is irrelevant as long as all the components in the human performance system operate correctly. In this particular case, they are not all synchronised. However, the small size can be a great advantage when making an effort to fix the system and increase the motivational aspects of the workers. Change might be easier than in a large firm. Furthermore, as the firm is relatively new, and there is no embedded culture yet, it will be uncomplicated to welcome this change from the very beginning. Finally, as the organisation is a subsidiary of a larger corporation, they will have the resources that small firms in general lack to improve the situation.

**Motivation and assembly lines in general**

We have been restricted in our interpretation of the findings because it has depended on the small sample of workers that actually responded to our questionnaire. A higher response rate might have brought different results. Furthermore, we are tied to company specifics and need therefore to reach a general conclusion with respect to motivation in an assembly line environment.

This particular case illustrates how one can dissemble the assembly line into its core components. When the system is about efficiency, where human resources are treated as mere tools with which company objectives can be reached, the only factor that determines and influences motivation is money. Although the human resource performance system can be applied to any type of firm as a general motivation guide, it is particularly important to an assembly line, because it shows that the lack of human resource management results in almost no motivation whatsoever.

The key to changing the assembly line system is not to just perform something, but to perform it in a particular way. Then, people start to matter. Good conditions can make this work more fun. Different factors such as culture, leadership or feedback can all serve to establish conditions that will give people a sense of belonging and it will motivate them towards working for the company because they actually want to. However, in the long run, these factors will create a well oiled machine that moves ahead without thinking. We have already seen the workers almost chant: customer is important, customer is important. Is this really sustainable? Can proper, perfect movements be endured? People are not machines.

In addition, the goal of motivation is satisfaction, as Kressler (2003) points out. Can this ever be reached on an assembly line? Perhaps the motivational factors can help one come to a certain top capacity, without being able to go any further, and then what? Then one is once again stuck with boredom and routines, and once again money and working colleagues is the only thing that matters, the only thing that can help. Additional factors that involve altering the system through more responsibility are an indication that real intrinsic motivation can increase if one moves away from the actual system and starts doing other tasks.

The major problem with assembly line systems and motivation is that there is always a trade off between the survival of the company and the survival of the workers. If the workers are kept at a low-skill level, they will be used for the job. The minute they gain responsibility and knowledge, the system falls apart. But the system can also fall apart without adding responsibility. Namely, motivation is a combination of needs that influence behaviour and action (Kressler, 2003). People are not machines, so their frustration will eventually trigger resistance.
6 Conclusion

The purpose of our thesis has been to investigate what motivates assembly line workers performing low-skill jobs in a small industrial laundry business. We wished to find out what factors determine and influence their motivation for work, and if and how this motivation can be improved with respect to assembly line systems in general.

Our findings indicate that many factors determine and influence motivation, and that they are connected to one another. If we consider long term motivation, then the culture of the workers plays a large role in increasing performance, especially because the assembly line system depends on everyone’s cooperation, not just to reach maximum capacity, but also to collect a bonus. Furthermore, we have found that a company objective can be motivating for the workers only if they are connected to it. They could feel the need to satisfy customers, but since the company seems to be focusing more on the well being of the clients than workers, motivation will diminish. Moreover, proper information has proved to be motivating to a certain extent, but it does not seem to be shared by everyone. The underlying problem is that people are informed that their work matters, but they cannot collect all the rewards that they deserve.

A strong determinant of motivation is being provided with proper tools to execute the tasks that the company has set forward. The routine and tediousness of the assembly line work is strongly dependant on a good working environment. What is also important is that the workers get a chance to move beyond their everyday tasks and that they are given responsibilities in other areas of the system as well. This way, their motivation will increase because they will feel more in control.

Once they are given more responsibility, the workers will have a better relationship with their boss and thus, the entire organisation. We have seen a need for a boss that is not very controlling, but rather cares and treats everyone equally. There is also a need for a real leader and not a friend. As the workers become more trusted in their tasks, the leader will be able to loosen the control and give them more space and motivation.

A crucial factor regarding motivation is the ability to give feedback to the workers. They have to hear good words, as they are frustrated about the constant criticism that they get. Furthermore, their motivation depends on them being able to not only say what they think, need, or to give suggestions for improvements, but it will be influenced if their ideas actually are taken seriously and implemented in the organisation. Feedback is relevant in the assembly line setting, as the workers are isolated from the rest of the organisation and cannot see the entire picture and cannot feel that they are able to impact on anything.

If the long term factors are weak, or lacking, then the assembly line workers are mostly motivated by a larger wage, or appropriate rewards, because this incentive can work both as a short term and a long term motivation that can help them satisfy needs on several levels. However, the money will mostly serve as an intrinsic motivator outside the work place, while it is extrinsic on the job.

If we conclude by looking at motivation in an assembly line setting in general, we can say that when the system is in its classical format, the only possible motivation is money and working colleagues. If the system is altered, motivation is reached through the different factors of the human resource performance system. Still, once these factors are settled and implemented, the workers will become a well oiled machine. Perhaps they will reach a certain point where motivation comes to a halt and cannot be improved anymore.
An important lesson to be learned with respect to assembly line work is that there is always a trade off between the company’s needs and the workers’ needs. It is important to ask whether the people can be in control of the system or if the system always takes control. As Holtz (2004) claims, one should stop being a mindless cog in a machine and become an integral part of the company’s engine of success. But isn’t that just a fancier way of saying the same thing?

6.1 Suggestion for further research

It would be interesting if the company that we have investigated decided to implement the human resource performance system and let it get established for a few years. Then we could come back and conduct the same survey (hopefully with a higher response rate) once again and see whether there are any significant changes in the motivation, especially when it comes to the importance of money.

Also, one could test other assembly line companies and collect more results in order to search for specific common grounds that can be added to the research, extending from service firms into other industries as well.
References


Appendices

Appendix 1 – Questions for the employees

a) Original questionnaire in Swedish, Serbo-Croatian and Albanian


Hulumtim (anketim) rreth punimit të temës se magistraturës për drejtimin e ekonomisë së ndërmarrjeve pranë shtollës së lartë të tregtisë internacionale në Jönköping. Punnar nga kandidatët: Valdete Jusufi & Maja Saitović.

Var vänlig skriv tydligt och svara så ärligt som det går. Dina svar kommer att behandlas konfidentiellt och det kommer att hjälpa oss mycket om du svarar. Se det som en chans att påverka din arbetssituation.

Budite ljubazni odgovorite iskreno na pitanja i pišite razgovijetno. Svi Vaši odgovori će nam puno pomoći u našem radu i oni će se tretirati povjerljivo. Ovu anketu možete posmatratи kao jednu šansu da utičete na Vaše radne prilike.

Ju lutem pergjigjeni sa ma qart dhe realt ne keta pyetje. Pergjigjet e jua det jen sekret, dhe ata de na ndihmojn neve shum nese ju pergjigjeni. Shikoe ket si nji shans qe ta ndikojsh situaten e punes.


2. Hur länge har du jobbat i företaget? / Koliko dugoite radite u preduzeću? / Sa kohe ke punuar ne ket ndërmargje (Fabrikë)?

3. Hur många timmar jobbar du varje vecka? / Koliko sati sedmično radite? / Sa ore punon ne jav?

4. Vad har du för utbildning? / Kakvo je Vaše obrazovanje? / Cfar edukimi (cfar shkolle ke kru)?
5. Vilket skift jobbar du och vilken är din arbetsuppgift? / U kojoj smjeni radite i kakvi su Vaši radni zadaci? / Celin ndrim punon dhe cfar je duke punu?


7. Om en uppgift är klar och tydlig, hur påverkar detta din motivation? / Ako je radni zadatak jasan i razumljiv, kako to utiče na Vašu motivaciju (želju za radom)? / Näše detyra e jote osht e qart, cfar ndikon kjo në motivimin e juaj?

8. Hur påverkas du av jobbets fart/snabbhet? / Kako utiče na Vas brzina kojom treba obaviti radni zadatak? / Cfar ndikim kini ju prej shpetsisë së punës?


13. Vilka möjligheter har du att avancera inom företaget och få ett annorlunda jobb? / Kakve mogućnosti Vi imate u Vašem preduzeću da napredujete i dobijete drugačiji posao? / Cfar mundsije ke ti për avansimin brenda fabrikës për përpërim dhe për të kru punë të tjera?

14. Vad har företaget som sitt huvudsyrte/mission? / Šta je glavni zadatak Vašeg preduzeća? / Cfar osht detyrë kryesore e ndëmarjes e juaj?


17. Hur skulle du beskriva ditt företags kultur? / Kako bi vi opisali atmosferu u Vašem preduzeću? / Si dë ta kishnje përshkruar ti atmosferen e ndërmarjes?

18. Hur påverkas din arbetsmotivation av företagskulturen (angående förhållandet med kollegerna, arbetsklimatet, delade värden, etc.)? Varför? / Kako ta atmosfera u preduzeću utiçe na Vašu motivisanost za radom (obzirom na odnose sa kolegama, zajedničke stavove, itd.)? Zašto? / Cfarr dikimi ka atmosfera e fabrikes nё motivim e juaj për punё (reth bashkpuni- min me koleget, klima e punёs, qendrimi i pёrbashkёt)? Pse?


21. Vilken informationskälla får du vad gäller företaget och dess prestation? / Koji način primanja informacija o Vašem preduzeću i rezultatima poslovanja je Vama dostupan? / Prej ku i merrni ju informatat për rezultatin e ndërmarjes?

22. Vad tycker du om det sätt som informationen framförs till dig (vad som sägs, hur det sägs, osv.)? / Šta mislite o načinu na kojem Vam se daje informacija (obzirom na šta se kaže i kako se kaže, itd.)? / Cfar mendon ti për metoden e përdorur për ti marr informatat (cfar dhe si folet)?
23. Vilken informationskälla föredrar du vad gäller företaget och dess prestation? / Koji način primanja informacija bi Vi najviše voljeli da imate? / Si mendon ti, cfar metode të përdoret për ti marr informatat?


25. Är du nöjd med din lön? Varför? / Da li ste Vi zadovoljni sa platom? Zašto? / A ije i kënaqur me rrogën (pagën)? Pse?/Pse jo?


32. Brukar du tävla mot dina arbetskamrater om vem som presterar mest? Hur påverkas du av detta? / Da li se Vi nekad takmiče sa radnim kolegama/kolegicama za bolje rezultate? Kako to utiče na Vas? / A shtuesh (bën gara) ti me koleget e tua per rezultat ma të mirë? Si ndikon kjo ke tu?
33. Känner du att din arbetsmiljö är säker? Var vänlig ge exempel. / Smatrate li Vi da je Vaša radna sredina sigurna? Molimo navedite primjer. / A mendon se vendpunimi i juaj osht i sigurt? Ju lutem shkruani nji shembull?

34. Har du fått träning angående riktiga arbetsrörelser och tekniker? Om ja, var vänlig ge exempel. / Da li ste Vi imali obuku u vezi ispravnih radnih pokreta i tehnike u radu? Ako jeste, navedite primjer. / A keni pas ushtrime se si ta kryni punën (cfar tekniqe me perdor). Nese po ju lutem shkruni nji shembull?


37. Blir du motiverad av din arbetsledare att jobba, eller att jobba hårdare och hur? / Dešava li se da Vas šef motiviše da radite ili da radite više i kako? / A ju motivon kryepun-tori për punë, ose me punu mashum dhe si?


40. Får du tillräckligt med information om hur du utvärderas? / Da li Vi imate potpunu informaciju o tome kako procjenjuju Vaš rad? / A keni informata të mjaftueshme se si vlersohesh ti?

41. Är din arbetsledare bra på att kommunicera och lyssna? / Da li je Vaš šef osoba dobra za saradnju i da li je ona/on spreman da nasluša Vaše mišljenje o nekom problemu? / A osht kryepuntori mirë për bashkpunim (a mundesh të komunikojsh leht) dhe a të ndigjion?


46. Ser företaget till dina behov? Hur påverkas du av detta? / Brine li se preduzeće o Vašim potrebama? Kako to utiče na Vas? / A brengoset ndërmarja për nevojat e juaj?


49. Vad är det bästa med ditt jobb vad gäller motivation? Varför? / Šta je to što je najbolje u Vašem poslu kad je u pitanju motivacija? Zašto? / Cfar osht mamirë me punën e jote kur osht në pytje motivimi? Pse?


Tack för din medverkan!
Zahvaljujemo na Vašim odgovorima!
Ju falemderohem në përgjegjet e juaj!

b) English version of the questionnaire

*Questionnaire on the motivation to work. Constructed for a master thesis within business administration at Jönköping International Business School, Jönköping, Sweden. Written by Valdete Jusufi and Maja Saitović.*

*Please write clearly and answer as honestly as possible. Your answers will be treated confidentially and it will help us a lot if you answer. Look at it as a chance to affect your working situation.*

1. Do you work full time or part time?

2. How long have you been working in the company?

3. How many hours do you work each week?

4. What is your level of education?
5. What shift do you work in and what is your working task?

6. How do you feel about having to do routine tasks all the time? Why?

7. If a working task is clear, how does that affect your motivation?

8. How are you affected by the speed of the job?

9. Have you worked in all areas of the system? How much do you know about the technical aspects of the system?

10. Are you involved in the decision making and planning of the working schedule? If not, would you like to be involved? Why? Why not?
11. How would you like to change/ease/improve your way of working?

12. Do you feel that your work is meaningful and worthwhile? Why/Why not?

13. What possibilities do you have to advance within the company and get a different job?

14. What is the main goal/mission of the company?

15. Do you feel that there is a focus on service and customers in your work? Please give examples.
16. How do the focus and the goal itself motivate you?


17. How would you describe the culture in your company?


18. How does this culture (in terms of relationships with colleagues, working climate, shared values, etc) affect your motivation to work? Why?


19. When you receive information about company profits, do you have a clear picture of how you are connected to these profits? How does this affect/motivate you?


20. Do the customers visit you? How often? How does this affect your motivation?
21. What source of information do you get about company performance?

22. What do you think about the way the information is presented to you (what is being said, how it is said, etc)?

23. What source of information about company performance do you prefer?

24. How does your salary affect your motivation to work? Why?

25. Are you pleased with your salary? Why/Why not?

26. Would a rise in your salary affect your motivation to work?

27. If you have to perform certain tasks in a certain way and within a certain amount of time, in order to get particular rewards or bonuses, how does that affect your motivation? Why?
28. Do you always have a clear picture of what you have to do in order to get a bonus? How does that affect your motivation?

29. What bonuses or rewards make you work faster/harder/more? Why?

30. What rewards or bonuses motivate you the most? Why?

31. What types of rewards or bonuses would you like to have in the company? Why?

32. Do you compete with your colleagues about who will perform the most? How does that affect you?

33. Do you feel that your working environment is safe? Please give examples.
34. Have you been trained in proper working movements and techniques? If yes, please give examples.

35. Do you have work injuries or health problems? If yes, which ones and how does that affect your motivation to work?

36. Has the company done anything to prevent or minimise your injuries? Please give examples. How is your motivation affected by the company’s reactions?

37. Does your boss motivate you to work, or to work harder and how?
38. Are you supervised and controlled during work and how? How does that affect your motivation? Why?

39. Are you being evaluated at work? How does that affect your motivation?

40. Do you get enough information about how you are being evaluated?

41. Is your boss good at communicating and listening?

42. Does the boss appreciate your work? How does that affect you?
43. What kind of boss would you like to have? Why?

44. Has the CEO or a top manager visited you in the company? How often? How does that affect your motivation?

45. How does the company see you? What are you to them? How does that affect you?

46. Does the company care for your needs? How does that affect you?

47. Do you have possibility to give feedback to the company? Have you done it? If yes, do they listen to your opinions? How does that affect your motivation to work?
48. Overall, what motivates you to have this job? Why?

49. What is the best thing about your job when it comes to motivation? Why?

50. What decreases your motivation the most? Why?

51. What is your overall attitude towards your job? Why?

Thank you for your participation!
Appendix 2 – Questions for the manager

a) Questions in Swedish (for the manager of shifts):

1. Kan du i korthet beskriva processen och tvätterisystemet i samband med kunder, leverans, logistik m.m.?
2. Hur många kunder har ni och hur ser ni på kunderna inom företaget?
3. Hur är det med deadlines? Är schemat alltid klart, eller är det flexibelt?
4. Vore det möjligt att sakta ner systemet?
5. Är du nöjd med företagets och arbetarnas prestation och effektivitet? Kan du ge exempel på detta?
6. Skulle du vilja förändra systemet och hur? Vad finns det för hinder?
7. Skulle du kunna tänka dig att involvera arbetarna i beslutsfattandet och utformandet av systemet? Varför/Varför inte?
8. Hur ser tvätteribranschen ut idag i samband med den svenska ekonomin? Trender, problem, tillväxt m.m.?
9. Vad har företaget för sitt huvudsyfte/mission både kort- och långsiktigt?
10. Finns det en klar fokus på service och kunder i samband med syftet? Hur framgår det i arbetet och hur gör ni för att förmedla detta till arbetarna?
11. Har alla i företaget samma mål? Kan alla ge en snabb förklaring av syftet/missionen?
13. Hur kommunicerar ni de olika planerna och uppgifterna till arbetarna? Vilka typer av kommunikation använder ni?
14. Vad tycker arbetarna om dessa planer? Hur reagerar de på det de får veta om företaget?
15. Hur ser ni på era arbetare? Vad är de för företaget?
16. Vad söker ni när ni anställer folk?
17. Känner du att arbetarna har de rätta kunskaperna och möjligheterna att uppfylla företagets syfte? Kan du ge exempel?
18. Hur ser ni på det här med skador och hälsoproblem? Vad gör ni för att se till att arbetarna utför rätta rörelser medan de arbetar?
19. Hur mycket flexibilitet tillåts på jobbet?
20. Hur mycket frihet och ansvar har arbetarna? Varför är det så?
21. Vad tror du att arbetarna tycker om företaget och sina jobb?
22. Hur motiverar ni arbetarna att jobba? Vad tror du motiverar arbetarna bäst?
24. Hur stödjer ni arbetarna? Får de tillräckligt med uppskattning och på vilket sätt?
25. Hur dana är belöningssystemen? Hur effektiva är de?
26. Vilka slags belöningar tror du kan öka arbetarnas effektivitet?
27. Har arbetarna en chans att ge feedback angående jobbet? Gör de det och hur?
28. Tar ni i åtanke de idéer som arbetarna lägger fram?
29. Hurdant är förtroendet mellan arbetsgivarna och arbetstagarna?
30. Mäter ni resulter? Och antalet nöjda kunder?
31. Hur högt är det årliga procentantalet av arbetare som lämnar företaget, och nyanställda? Varför?
32. Hur högt är antalet sjukkrivna? Varför?

b) English version:

1. Could you briefly describe the process and the laundry system in connection to customers, delivery, logistics and etcetera?
2. How many customers do you have and how do you look upon them in the company?
3. What about deadlines? Is the schedule always clear, or is it flexible?
4. Would it be possible to slow the system down?
5. Are you pleased with the performance and the efficiency of the company and of the workers? Could you give examples?
6. Would you like to change the system and how? What obstacles are there?
7. Would you consider involving the workers in the decision-making and the design of the system? Why/Why not?
8. What does the laundry business look like today in connection to the Swedish economy? Trends, problems, growth, and etcetera?
9. What are the short term and long term goals/missions of the company?
10. Is there a clear focus on service and customers in connection to the goal/mission? How is this represented in the work and what do you do to make sure employees know it?
11. Does everyone in the company have the same goals? Can everyone give a fast explanation of the goal/mission?
12. How would you describe the company culture? What do you do to preserve it?

13. How do you communicate the different plans and tasks to the employees? What types of communication do you use?

14. How do the employees feel about these plans? How do they react to what they find out about the company?

15. How do you look upon your workers? What are they to the company?

16. What do you look for when you hire people?

17. Do you feel that the workers have the right skills and possibilities to fulfill the company goals? Could you give examples?

18. How do you look upon work injuries and health problems? What do you do to make sure that the workers perform proper movements while working?

19. How much flexibility is allowed at work?

20. How much freedom and responsibility do the workers have? Why is it so?

21. How do you think that they workers feel about the company and their jobs?

22. How do you motivate the workers? What do you think is the best motivation?

23. What motivation problems are there? What other problems are there regarding workers and their performance? How do you solve that?

24. How do you support the workers? Do they get enough appreciation and how?

25. What are the reward systems like? How effective are they?

26. What kinds of rewards do you think could improve the effectiveness of the workers?

27. Do the workers have a chance to give feedback regarding their job? Do they give feedback and how?

28. Do you consider the ideas that the workers put forward?

29. What is the level of trust between the employers and the employees?

30. Do you measure results? What about customer satisfaction?

31. What is the yearly percentage of employee turnover? Why?

32. What is the level of sick leave? Why?