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## **The relevance of knowledge transfer**

A qualitative study of labour-intensive organisations with high employee turnover

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## **Abstract**

*Title:* The relevance of knowledge transfer

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*Key Words:* Knowledge transfer, Labour-intensive organisations, Employee turnover, Organisational learning, Key employees, Organisational culture, Organisational structure, Performance

*Purpose:* To study how key employees, organisational culture, and organisational structure affect knowledge transfer in labour-intensive companies with high employee turnover.

*Methodology:* We used a qualitative case study. We conducted a pilot study with three interviewees in order to identify what factors influence knowledge transfer. This was later delved into in a main study with six additional respondents to understand how the factors affect the transfer of knowledge. All nine interviews were semi-structured.

*Theoretical perspective:* Previous literature shows that high employee turnover in companies has a negative impact on the company's performance. This becomes more evident in labour-intensive companies since they are dependent on the employees in their work processes. However, there are labour-intensive companies that are successful despite high employee turnover. Previous literature emphasises the importance of knowledge and knowledge transfer within the organisation. However, it is not clear how other factors influence this process when employee turnover hinders the transfer of knowledge. This is the theoretical basis of our work, and we therefore chose to examine how the factors we have identified affect knowledge transfer. The identified factors are key employees, organisational culture, and organisational structure.

*Empirical foundation:* EF is a successful service company with high employee turnover, and is therefore a well-motivated choice for our study. We compared two cases within the company with different outcomes in performance, but otherwise equal. Respondents with insight into the knowledge transfer process in the cases were interviewed. The cases were then compared in the analysis to see how they differ in terms of the three factors.

*Conclusion:* It was found that knowledge transfer is not as important as previous literature has stated. Instead, we can see that key employees, organisational culture, and organisational structure affect the learning process of employees, and, therefore, the performance of the company.

## **Sammanfattning**

*Titel:* The relevance of knowledge transfer

- A qualitative study of labour-intensive organisations with high employee turnover

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*Nyckelord:* Kunskapsöverföring, Arbetskraftsintensiva företag, Personalomsättning, Organisatorisk inläring, Nyckelpersonal, Organisatorisk kultur, Organisatorisk struktur, Prestation

*Syfte:* Att undersöka hur nyckelpersonal, organisatorisk kultur och organisatorisk struktur påverkar kunskapsöverföring i arbetskraftsintensiva företag med hög personalomsättning.

*Metod:* Undersökningen baseras på en kvalitativ fallstudie. Vi gjorde en pilotstudie med tre intervjuobjekt med utgångspunkt att identifiera vilka faktorer som påverkar kunskapsöverföring. Den här följdes av en djupgående intervjuomgång med ytterligare sex respondenter för att förstå hur faktorerna påverkar överföringen av kunskap. Alla nio intervjuer var semi-strukturerade.

*Teoretiskt perspektiv:* Tidigare litteratur visar på att hög personalomsättning i företag har en negativ inverkan på företagets prestation. Det här blir mer påtagligt i arbetskraftsintensiva företag då dessa är beroende av personalen i sin arbetsprocess. Dock finns det arbetskraftsintensiva företag som är framgångsrika trots hög personalomsättning. Tidigare litteratur betonar vikten av kunskap och kunskapsöverföring inom företag. Det framgår emellertid inte hur andra faktorer påverkar denna process då personalomsättning hindrar överföringen av kunskap. Det här ligger som teoretisk grund för vårt arbete och vi valde därför att undersöka hur de faktorer vi har identifierat påverkar kunskapsöverföring. De identifierade faktorerna är nyckelpersonal, organisatorisk kultur samt organisatorisk struktur.

*Empiri:* EF är ett framgångsrikt serviceföretag med hög personalomsättning och är därför ett välmotiverat val för vår studie. Vi jämförde två fall inom företaget med olika utfall i prestation men som i övrigt var likvärdiga. Respondenter med insikt i fallens respektive kunskapsöverföringsprocesser intervjuades. Fallen ställdes sedan mot varandra i analysen för att jämföra hur de skiljer sig åt i termer av de tre faktorerna.

*Resultat:* Studien visar på att kunskapsöverföring inte är lika viktigt som tidigare litteratur påstått. Istället visar vårt resultat på att det är organisatorisk inläring som är av störst betydelse. Vi kan se hur nyckelpersonal, organisatorisk kultur och organisatorisk struktur påverkar inlärningsprocessen hos personalen såväl som företagets prestation.

## **Acknowledgements**

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# **1. Introduction**

Organisational learning is vital to the success and the performance of a company. The learning process is created through the interaction of the internal organisation and its external environment (Argote, 1999). Knowledge creation exists both on an individual and an organisational level (Carley, 1992). Knowledge management has been getting increased attention over the years and organisations need to be able to effectively manage knowledge transfer as a result of globalisation and the increasing movement across borders (Grant, 1996). This is not always easily achieved. However, we can still see how organisations are being successful.

A case study of EF Education First (further referred to as EF) has been used to investigate how other factors influence knowledge transfer in service companies with high employee turnover. From a broader scope, three essential factors were identified and selected through an initial pilot study. Key employees, organisational culture and organisational structure were recognised to be of significant importance in terms of our purpose and was further investigated in our main study. Our result shows that knowledge transfer may not be as essential as previous research has suggested. Instead, the extent of the identified factors has a significant impact on the performance of the firm.

Throughout this paper the words “organisation”, “company” and “firm” will be used without distinction and act as synonyms within the context.

## **1.1 Theoretical Background**

Knowledge creation and the process of knowledge transfer are central concepts when talking about the context of organisations and their performance. According to the resource-based view (further referred to as RBV) of the firm, an organisation with valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources has the potential to create a sustainable competitive advantage

(Barney, 1991). Knowledge has gained increased attention within the research of organisations and their competitive advantage (Grant, 1996; Kogut & Zander, 1992; Spender, 1996). A knowledge-based view (further referred to as KBV) has been evolved from the basis of RBV and it emphasises knowledge as the most important resource of an organisation, seen from a strategic point of view (Grant, 1996). Knowledge creation is an activity on individual level (Grant, 1996; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995), which makes the organisations dependent on its members. Firms learn as their employees learn (Carley, 1992; Simon, 1991) and the firm's primary role is to apply existing knowledge into its production (Grant, 1996; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).

Previous research discusses how different types of knowledge affect the way knowledge is created and transferred (Grant, 1996; Kogut & Zander, 1992; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Spender, 1996) and reviews the difficulties of the transfer process (Argote, 1999; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). We have primarily focused on two central categories of knowledge in our research, explicit and tacit knowledge. Explicit is “knowledge about” and can be codified or written down in words while tacit knowledge is about “knowing how” and is based on personal experience (Grant, 1996; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Spender, 1996). This makes tacit knowledge difficult to formalise and therefore also to transfer (Grant, 1996).

When an organisation experiences high turnover it has a negative impact on the organisational performance (Shaw, 2011). This becomes particularly evident in labour-intensive organisations, such as service firms, since the company is more dependent on the interaction of its employees and cannot easily rely on explicit knowledge embedded in things like processes and technologies (Eckardt, Skaggs & Youndt, 2014; Youndt, Subramaniam & Snell, 2004). The more of the organisational knowledge that is built upon tacit knowledge, the greater is the knowledge loss as a result of employee turnover (Eckardt et al., 2014; Shaw,



2011; Youndt et al., 2004). An organisation will not only lose an employee when the person leaves the company, but also the personal tacit knowledge occupied by that employee.

Even though employee turnover is proven to be harmful for organisations, there is evidence that companies with high turnover are successful. Previous research has put a great emphasis on the understanding and the importance of knowledge transfer and knowledge creation within organisations. However, little has been said about how other factors influence knowledge transfer when the contextual attributes of an organisation hinder the process of transferring knowledge.

## **1.2 Practical Background**

According to previous literature, the effects of employee turnover hinder the knowledge transfer process within an organisation. Furthermore, research about organisational learning has closely studied the transfer process of knowledge, but little emphasis has been put on the fact that knowledge transfer within the organisation is extremely difficult to achieve, especially if the knowledge is tacit (Grant, 1996). Being a labour-intensive organisation that depends on the knowledge and skills of its employees, as well as facing high employee turnover, suggests that the company would struggle with the process of knowledge transfer (Grant, 1996; Kogut & Zander, 1992; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Shaw, 2011; Spender, 1996). According to theory, this should have a negative impact on the organisation's overall performance (Shaw, 2011). Hence, we found it interesting to look at the phenomena in a labour-intensive industry, such as the service sector, where tacit knowledge is a great part of the organisational knowledge needed in the production process.

An example of a service company that is highly dependant on its employees in the production process to deliver a desirable product to its customers, is EF. One of the products within EF is Language Travel (further referred to as LT), where students go abroad to learn a

new language. Employee turnover becomes particularly evident within this product since it is a summer course programme and therefore has major seasonal fluctuations in the need of employees.

Previous research also declares that the concentration of new employees in an organisation or a unit would worsen the effects of turnover in terms of performance because of the lack of resources available for socialisation and training (Hausknecht, Trevor & Howard, 2009). However, EF was founded in Sweden over 50 year ago and has been growing and developing their organisation ever since. Today, the company is the self-declared world leader in international education. Their success implies that there is a discrepancy between the theoretical conclusion and the actual outcome. EF is therefore a well-motivated choice for our study.

## **2. Purpose and Research Question**

Previous literature has emphasised the importance of knowledge transfer in organisations. However, companies that have high employee turnover cannot easily achieve knowledge transfer, especially if the knowledge being transferred is tacit. The purpose of our study is to see how certain factors influence knowledge transfer within organisations. We have chosen key employees, organisational culture, and organisational structure as the three factors we aim to analyse. This leads us to our research question:

“How do key employees, organisational culture, and organisational structure affect knowledge transfer in labour-intensive organisations with high employee turnover?”

### **3. Theory and Literature**

This section is a review of the previous research and literature relevant for the background of the theoretical problem that we have identified and according to which we have chosen to position our own study.

#### **3.1 The Knowledge-Based View**

Today's economy is evolving towards a knowledge-based view and the output of production is dominated by services rather than goods (Grant, 2002). It is through the production process and the transformation of inputs into outputs where the creation, acquisition, and transfer of knowledge become fundamental to the organisation (Grant, 1996). In terms of input, great emphasis is put on intangible assets, such as brands and technology, in favour of physical and financial assets (Grant, 2002). The assumption that knowledge is the critical input and the primary source of value is the basis of the KBV. Looking at organisations from this view, knowledge is the strategically most important resource (Grant, 1996).

However, knowledge is too complex to easily build a dynamic, knowledge-based theory of the firm (Spender, 1996). Grant (2002) supports the argument and declares that KBV is not a theory in a formal sense but rather a set of ideas about the nature of firms and the reason for their existence that underline the role of knowledge. Kogut and Zander (1992) further evaluate why firms exist and say that the reason is that they are better than the market at sharing and transferring knowledge between individuals and groups within the organisation. Their research also suggests that knowledge held by individual employees becomes embedded in the organisation through the social contexts of cooperation. If the knowledge was only found on an individual level, the company's skills would be dependent solely on its employees. Employee turnover could therefore change the basis of the organisation (Kogut & Zander, 1992).

### **3.2 Organisational Learning**

Fiol and Lyles (1985) make an attempt to define organisational learning as the process of improving actions through better knowledge and understanding. They also argue that no model or theory of organisational learning has a widespread acceptance. Argote (1999) follows the same direction and argues that organisational learning is created in a context that includes the characteristics of the organisation as well as the external environment in which the organisation is surrounded.

The learning curve is a well-known concept within the area of organisational learning (e.g. Argote, 1999; Reagan et al., 2005). It was first introduced by psychologists that primarily focused on the behaviour of individuals. They discovered that the time an individual took to perform a task and the number of errors they made associated with the task declined with the increased experience (Ebbinghaus, 1885). Wright (1936) was the first to show how learning curves also exist at an organisational level by documenting how the amount of labour required to build an aircraft decreased as the number of completed aircrafts grew and the cumulative outcome increased. The studies of learning economies were at first mainly focused at the manufacturing industry, but Hirsch (1952) found evidence that the effect of learning curves is greater in labour-intensive industries than in machine-intensive.

Carley (1992) further discusses the relationship between individual and organisational learning and states that since experience is expected to lead to improved performance of individuals, and because organisations are reliant on the knowledge and abilities of its members, companies learn as their employees learn. Argote (1999) argues that organisational learning can explain significant variations in performance between organisations and that the learning process consists of different parts such as knowledge acquisition, knowledge retention and knowledge transfer. Argote (1999) also argues that the acquisition of knowledge will not be kept on a constant level, it rather declines over time.

This becomes particularly evident when knowledge is found at an individual level. If the individual leaves the company, so does the knowledge he/she possesses (Argote, 1999).

### **3.3 Knowledge Transfer**

Knowledge transfer within organisations is becoming increasingly important and companies that effectively manage knowledge transfer between divisions and units have a greater chance to survive in the global market (Grant, 1996). The definition of knowledge transfer is the process in which one unit (individual, group, department, or similar) is affected by the experience of another (Argote, Ingram, Levine, Moreland, 2000). Even though significant benefits in organisational performance can be obtained by transferring knowledge within the organisation, successful knowledge transfer can be hard to realise (Argote, 1999).

In order for there to be any knowledge to transfer, knowledge within the organisation must be created. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) have put great emphasis on two types of knowledge, explicit and tacit. Their research has generated a framework called the SECI model that is used to understand the process of knowledge creation within an organisation. Tacit knowledge is harder to formalise and communicate since it has a personal quality and is based on action, commitment, and involvement in a specific context. In contrast, the explicit knowledge is codified and is possible to transfer to a formal and systematic language (Grant, 1996; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Spender, 1996). The knowledge created within organisations is formed by a constant process and the collaboration between explicit and tacit knowledge (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Their study showed that individuals create new knowledge, but the organisation is critical for articulating and amplifying that knowledge. The SECI model (see figure 1) developed by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) consists of four modes of knowledge conversion that interacts to drive the knowledge creation process: 1) from tacit

knowledge to tacit knowledge, 2) from explicit knowledge to explicit knowledge, 3) from tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge, and 4) from explicit knowledge to tacit knowledge.

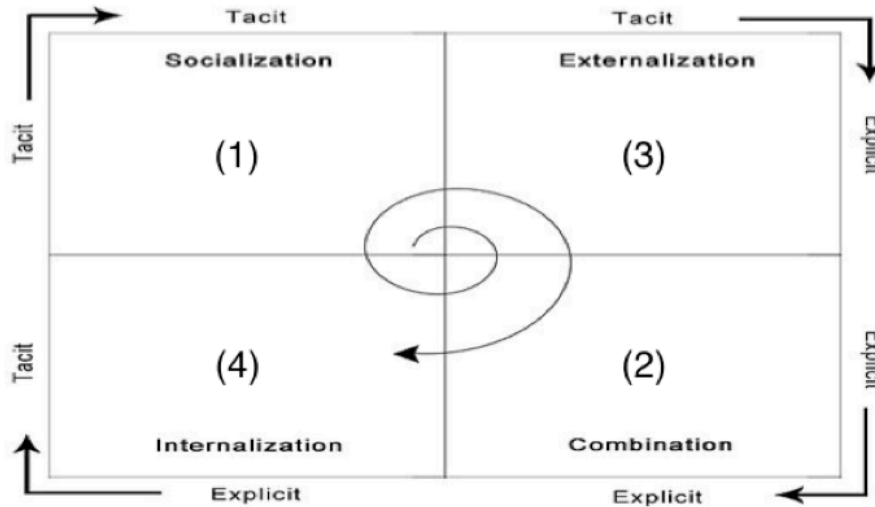


Figure 1: SECI model (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).

The first described mode of conversion allows us to convert tacit knowledge through interaction between individuals and is called “socialization”. The second one consists of social processes that combine bodies of explicit knowledge held by different individuals and is called “combination”. For the third and fourth modes of knowledge conversion it involves both types of knowledge and is based on the idea that tacit and explicit knowledge are complementary and can expand through interactions over time. It is called “externalization” when tacit knowledge is converted into explicit knowledge and this is created through dialogue and reflection. When it is the other way around it is called “internalization” and it is based on learning-by-doing.

Kang, Rhee, and Kang (2010) argue that knowledge that is more tacit, difficult, or important also takes more effort to transfer. This is supported by the knowledge-based theory that says that tacit knowledge becomes the foundation of the organisations competitive advantage (Grant, 1996) since it is difficult to transfer as well as to imitate by others. Tacit

knowledge requires more time and effort to make sure the transition from the tacit knowledge to explicit is successful. Also the importance of the knowledge plays a vital role in terms of the transfer of it. If the organisation or the employee values the possession of certain knowledge, more effort will be put into transferring it (Kang et al., 2010).

### **3.4 Employee Turnover**

This section has been limited to the contextual effects of employee turnover. The reason for this is that we do not seek to examine turnover as a concept but rather to understand how this is relevant in terms of our purpose.

Previous research shows that employee turnover has a negative impact on organisations as a result of the knowledge loss it leads to (Shaw, 2011). However, according to Argote (1999) employee turnover does not always lead to disadvantages since knowledge is not necessarily related to a constant increase in productivity. Turnover can instead be beneficial for an organisation if knowledge becomes out-dated, for example as a result of new technology, and the holders of the existing knowledge have difficulties assimilating to the new knowledge. To understand the relationship between employee turnover and knowledge depreciation, it is important to understand what knowledge is embedded in technologies, processes and structures and what is found in people. The more knowledge found in the latter, the greater the risk of knowledge depreciation due to employee turnover (Argote, 1999). This is also in line with the study made by Eckardt et al. (2014), which examines how service and manufacturing companies are affected by employee turnover as a result of their different characters. The result of the study shows that the negative impact on performance is bigger in the service sector because of greater significance of human interaction in the work process.

Organisational capital is knowledge that is specific for the organisation and that has been codified and embedded into things like systems, databases and processes, and affects the

flow of which knowledge passes through the organisation (Youndt et al., 2004). Since organisational capital is not tied to a specific employee within the organisation, the knowledge is considered to be consistent and stable over time. Organisations with a higher degree of organisational capital should be able to reduce the negative impact of employee turnover in terms of organisational performance and knowledge loss (Eckardt et al., 2014), as well as experience the benefits of faster knowledge transfer (Zander & Kogut, 1995). However, the result of the study made by Eckardt et al. (2014) is limited to service firms with a high level of production worker turnover. This is explained by that organisational capital has a greater potential to provide facilitating benefits when the dependence on employee production knowledge is higher. The study also indicates that there may be significant costs that are associated with developing organisational capital and that such costs could have a negative effect on the organisation's performance unless there is a substantial risk of losing important knowledge (Eckardt et al, 2014).

The structure of an organisation affects its ability to learn and is therefore also of significant importance when talking about the consequences of employee turnover. The study made by Carley (1992) shows that the team learns faster than hierarchies when welcoming new staff into the organisation because they have eliminated the different levels of decision-making and therefore often performs better than hierarchies. Hierarchies, however, have a greater capability to meet the negative impacts of employee turnover because they are not as sensitive to particular individuals since they have the ability to buffer information by passing it through the hierarchy. This normally results in that hierarchies are better off when it comes to performing simple tasks and are less affected by turnover since they act as information warehouses. Teams, on the other hand, will learn faster and better when the tasks are of a more complex character as well as when new employees are novices or fit well with the organisation, and should therefore be less affected by an increased work complexity due to



turnover (Carley, 1992). The study made by Hausknecht et al. (2009) shows that the concentration of new employees in a company deepens the negative impact of turnover in terms of organisational performance due to the lack of resources available for socialisation and training.

### **3.5 Factors**

There are a countless number of factors that could be used to analyse an organisation and its performance. However, we have chosen McKinsey's 7S framework (see figure 2) to establish seven aspects that could be of relevance to our study. It is a well-known model used to analyse organisations and their effectiveness. It was developed in the early 1980s mainly by two consultants working at McKinsey & Company and was presented in the article "Structure is not Organisation" (Waterman, Peters & Phillips, 1980). The model has been widely used since the introduction and is considered an important tool to understand the complexity of organisations (McKinsey.com, 2008). The basic premise of the model is that there are seven internal factors of an organisation that must be aligned in order for a company to be successful. These interdependent factors are divided into hard and soft elements. Strategy, structure and systems belong to the hard elements and are easier to manage as well as identify. The soft elements are style, staff, skills, and shared values. They are just as important, but less tangible and more difficult to identify. Placing the shared values in the middle of the model emphasises the importance of these values for the development of the other factors. Those factors all derive from what the company stands for, what it believes in, and why it first was created. The following factors are defined by Waterman et al. (1980). Strategy is the plan to achieve competitive advantage over time and competition. The structure refers to the way units are being organised and the information of who reports to whom. Systems are defined as the processes and procedures of the daily work and how

decisions are made. Style could also be referred to as culture and represents the way the company is managed. What type of and how many employees needed within the organisation is addressed by the staff element. Lastly, skills are referring to the abilities of both individuals working for the company and the organisation as a whole.

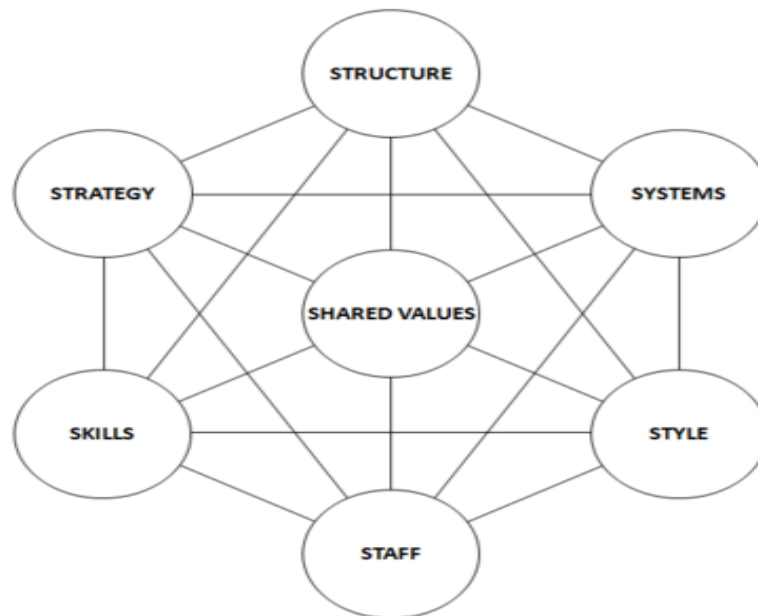
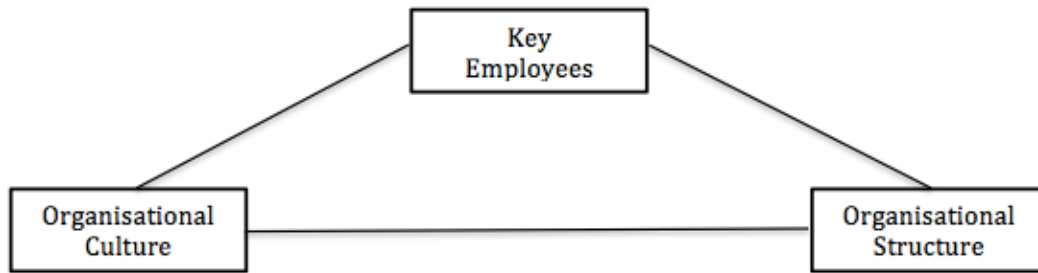


Figure 2: McKinsey's 7S Framework (Waterman et al., 1980)

The framework shows several aspects of which factors that are important for the success of an organisation. However, the result of our pilot study emphasised three factors that we have chosen to focus on in our research. These factors are key employees, organisational culture and organisational structure. These are referred to in the 7S framework as staff, style and structure (see the *Course of Action* section for a more detailed review). An overview of previous research relevant to our study is presented below along with an illustration of the preliminary theoretical framework.



*Figure 3: The preliminary theoretical framework illustrating the factors identified through the pilot study.*

### **3.5.1 Key Employees**

Knowledge management has become one of the main focuses when talking about the best HR practices. It includes the creation, distribution and utilisation of knowledge on both an individual and an organisational level (Morawski, 2013). According to Davenport (2000) the essential concern of human resource management is both the recruitment and the retention of valuable employees. Becker and Huselid (1998) support this image and declare that human capital is an essential resource to the success of an organisation. However, employees tend to put most effort into the job when starting it, and that such motivation can fade over time, especially when the job is physically or psychologically demanding (Staw, 1980).

Morawski (2013) uses a definition of key employees that we have decided to simplify to “people of great essence to the organisation and that through experience have acquired valuable knowledge about the company and its processes”, which is the definition we have chosen to apply. The term “experienced employees” will be used equal to the meaning of “key employees” throughout this paper. The importance of experience is supported by the theory of learning curves (Ebbinghaus, 1885). The knowledge accumulated by individuals will result in an increased cumulative outcome, both on a personal level and for the organisation as a whole (Wright, 1936).

Reagan, Argote and Brooks (2005) further discuss the concept of learning curves and learning-by-doing as an important condition for the performance of organisations. The authors have identified three interdependent factors that affect how quickly an organisation learns and how well it will perform. The first is the individual worker's skill, the second is the employee's ability to take advantage of the knowledge accumulated by others, and the third is the possibility of coordinated activities within the organisation. Each factor being dependent on different levels of experience.

Aime, Johnson, Ridge and Hill (2010) extend the theoretical understanding of the effects that the turnover of key employees will have on organisational performance. They concentrate on the mobility of key employees between competitors but the study shows that when an organisation with a valuable set of routines loses an employee to a competitor its competitive position is debilitated. As a result of this, their findings confront the conventional argument that socially complex routines within an organisation will create a sustainable competitive advantage since the complexity makes it hard for others to imitate, and the advantage of the context is not dependent on a particular individual. Aime et al. (2010) further claim that routines will remain stable even when losing key employees but the advantages coming from them will not.

### **3.5.2 Organisational Culture**

As mentioned before, organisations that are labour intensive use their employees as the main force to drive their company. The organisation is dependent on how these employees behave and work on behalf of the company. The forms and causes of people's behaviour in organisations is explained and predicted by the concept of organisational culture (also called corporate culture) (Janićijević, 2013). Jiménez-Jiménez, Fernández-Gil, & Martínez-Costa (2014) define organisational culture as “the set of beliefs and values shared by the members of the organisation and that conditions their behaviour, productivity and the expectations of

the company.” The organisational culture is, therefore, at the basis of all decision being made by employees at the company. This is the definition of culture that will be used throughout the study. Sadri (2014) adds by saying that organisational culture “can operate as a substitute for formal rules and regulations”. This because the individual is already basing his/her decisions on what is best for the company (Janićijević, 2013).

Previous research has put focus on dividing culture into different categories and types. One of these types is what Jiménez-Jiménez et al. (2014) call “the organisational learning culture”. This form of culture emphasises teamwork, cooperation, and other environments that generate learning. For a company to achieve an organisational learning culture, it needs to be flexible, risk-taking, and adaptive (Jiménez-Jiménez et al., 2014). It needs to be willing to go through continuous change in order to generate new knowledge and aid the company’s growth process (Jiménez-Jiménez et al., 2014). If the company at hand manages to fulfil all above criteria, it is well on its way to becoming a company with an organisational learning culture. This type of culture also emphasises the importance of knowledge sharing within the company. A dynamic process is needed to generate new knowledge, and employees need to understand that knowledge creation is essential in both their individual decision-making and in the decision making of the team (Jiménez-Jiménez et al., 2014). As with organisational culture as a whole, there are many components to the organisational learning culture. In line with Jiménez-Jiménez et al. (2014), we have chosen to define the organisational learning culture as a culture within which the creation of new knowledge and sharing of existing knowledge is essential to the company as a whole, and is accomplished by the dynamic process of sharing, teamwork, adaptation, and flexibility.

A second type of organisational culture that is found in modern day organisations is the so-called “high performance corporate culture” (Sadri, 2014). As the name reveals, it is an organisational culture that concentrates on growth and achieving the best possible outcome

for the company. Sadri (2014) explains that there are six aspects to a high performance organisational culture. The first point is that the culture needs to have a good foundation. That means that the culture needs to be defined when the company starts. It is easier to develop a thorough, high performing organisational culture when it has been within the company for a long time (Sadri, 2014). The second aspect is a guiding and inspiring vision or mission. Here, a mission statement can help employees understand what kind of values the organisation works according to (Sadri, 2014). A vision usually speaks to employees, not customers. The third aspect is managerial maintenance. This means that it is up to the people holding executive positions to uphold the high performance culture. Sadri (2014) says, “employees look to what managers say and do, which behaviours they reward and how they respond to difficult situations.”

The fourth point to be made is selection. Organisations have to choose the right employees in order to be able to sustain an organisational culture which aim is to grow and perform well (Sadri, 2014). In this case companies are looking for a person-organisation fit rather than a person-job fit. This means that more focus lies upon how a person is compatible with the organisation rather than comparing him/her to the work tasks that the job entails (Sadri, 2014). The fifth facet of a high performance organisational culture is “learning the right way”, which is further referred to as formal training. If there is a concrete handover process where the new employee learns about the organisation’s culture and how the job at hand should be done, then the chances of the new employee doing a good job are higher (Sadri, 2014). Lastly, the sixth element is “keeping the culture alive”. To ensure a functioning culture’s future, continuous evaluation and re-evaluation is of importance (Sadri, 2014). This ensures a continuance of high performing organisational culture. In conclusion, a high performance organisational culture is based on: founding ideas, a vision or mission, managerial maintenance, employee selection, formal training, and “keeping the culture alive”.

Above, two types of organisational culture have been presented. To be noted is that there are several other types of organisational culture. The reason why these two were included, and not others, is because they are considered most appropriate for the study at hand.

### **3.5.3 Organisational Structure**

As with organisational culture, there are many aspects to organisational structure. Martínez-León and Martínez-García (2011) define organisational structure as “the formal scheme of relationships, communications, decision processes, procedures and systems which allow an organisation to develop its functions and achieve its objectives.” They highlight two main types of organisational structure: the hierarchical and bureaucratic structure, and the organic and decentralised structure.

The hierarchical structure is centralised, meaning that decisions are being made from a group of people, usually the managers in the organisation (Moradkhannejad, Mahmoudsalehi, & Safari, 2012). These decisions are then communicated from top-down. Employees working toward the bottom of the company’s hierarchy, therefore, have no control or right to influence the decision making process (Moradkhannejad et al, 2012). In bureaucratic organisations there is also a high degree of formalisation and specialisation. Employees are specialised within their fields, making it difficult for others to introduce new knowledge (Moradkhannejad et al, 2012). It is said that a very formalised organisation has trouble developing organisational learning. This because employees are made to work according to the rules and standards of the organisation, and are therefore restricted in their creative process (Martínez-León et al., 2011).

On the other hand, there are organisations with an organic and decentralised structure. What this structure entails is at many times the opposite of the hierarchical structure. First and foremost, decentralised structures allow employees at all levels of the

organisation to make decisions (Martínez-León et al., 2011), it does not have to come from top-down. Organic structures are also less about the individual, and more about teamwork (Martínez-León et al., 2011). This means that the organisation is flat, and focus is put on the social aspect of the work tasks. It is the people that manage the outcome of the company, not the technology or the machines (Moradkhannejad et al., 2012). Companies that have an organic structure usually have complex tasks. Knowledge that is flexible and easy to change is therefore more important than any other type of knowledge (Martínez-León et al., 2011).

To conclude the above-mentioned types of organisational structure, Moradkhannejad et al. (2012) recognized three characteristics that decide the structure of the company. Those characteristics are: centralisation, formalisation, and complexity.

First of all: Centralisation. Again, centralisation means that decisions are made from top-down. Moradkhannejad et al. (2012) mean that high centralisation “inhibits interactions among organisational members, reduces the opportunity for individual growth and advancement, and prevents imaginative solutions to problems.” A decentralised organisation is more including in the decision making process of the organisation, all employees are able to affect the outcome of the company (Moradkhannejad et al., 2012). The decision makers are not as concentrated to the top management (Moradkhannejad et al., 2012).

Second of all: Formalisation. With formalisation comes standardised routines and rules according to which employees perform their work tasks (Moradkhannejad et al., 2012). Rules and procedures guide employees at all levels of the organisation but can to some degree hinder spontaneity and creativity. In less formal, and more flat organisations these rules and procedures are not as apparent (Martínez-León et al., 2011). Employees are not as restricted in the processes of the company, and more focus is put on the individual’s way of working rather than the description of the job. The degree of formalisation is often referred to as the amount of hierarchy in the company (Martínez-León et al., 2011). If the organisation is very



formal, it is also hierarchical and bureaucratic (Moradkhannejad et al., 2012). On the other hand, if the company is informal, members of the organisation have more freedom and are less structured by rules and standardised processes.

Lastly: Complexity. There are different types of complexity: complexity in work tasks and social complexity (Moradkhannejad et al., 2012; Martínez-León et al., 2011). Complexity in work tasks includes how difficult the task being performed is. This can be seen in managerial roles in formalised organisations. It is up to the manager to coordinate the actions of employees with the actions of the organisation. Complexity can also be seen in the work tasks of employees in less formalised structures (Martínez-León et al., 2011). Here the complexity is spread to all parts of the organisation. This means that even employees in non-managerial positions can work on complex tasks. The complexity comes from the lack of rules and standardised procedures; it is up to the employee to solve a problem when it arrives without the approval of management (Moradkhannejad et al., 2012). Social complexity, on the other hand, is most apparent in the way employees work with each other. If employees are prone to networking and teamwork, then an organisation is more socially complex (Martínez-León et al., 2011). This because individuals communicate with others according to the task at hand. In more simple social organisations, that width of communication is not needed to the same degree, meaning that employees do not work in teams to the same extent (Martínez-León et al., 2011).

The structure of an organisation depends on how apparent three characteristics are and those were introduced as level of centralisation, formalisation, and complexity (Moradkhannejad et al., 2012; Martínez-León et al., 2011). To be noted is that there are many subcategories to these two structures, and other characteristics that influence the structure of a company. However, the ones chosen for this study are considered to be most applicable to the research question.

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1 Course of Action

We executed our thesis by first completing a pilot study, which means that a pre-study was made with three respondents with the aim of finding factors that would help us answer our research question. These factors were later analysed on a deeper level in our main study, which was conducted with another six respondents.

#### *Pilot Study*

Step 1: Our first step was to do a pilot study. We did relevant research within the area of knowledge transfer. The purpose of our pilot study was to identify what factors were important in terms of knowledge transfer and that we would base our main study on. We later proceeded to the stage of selecting a case to study and set up the three criteria for our case, which will be further discussed in the section *Case Selection*. The company EF met all of the criteria and was therefore chosen.

Step 2: After the research and selection of case study was done, an interview guide was formed (see Appendix 1). The questions were broad and general, which was in line with our inductive approach. Appropriate employees at EF were contacted in order to conduct interviews for our pilot study. McKinsey's 7S framework was used to categorise factors that are important for organisational performance. Within the area of those seven aspects we could identify three factors that were greatly emphasised throughout the interviews. Three interviews were held and the shared values, strategy, structure, systems, staff, style and skills were narrowed down to key employees, organisational culture and organisational structure. Seeing as the dialogue in the interviews was of such an open nature, the answers did not correlate to the exact definition of the factors in the 7S framework. We therefore chose to name them key employees, organisational culture, and organisational structure.

### *Main Study*

Step 3: After having done the pilot study, we returned to the literature and did relevant research within these areas. A preliminary theoretical framework was created with the factors as the foundation. This framework was tested in our main study. An interview guide (see Appendix 2) for the main study was designed and after having discussed it with our advisor from Lund University School of Economics and Management, it was finalised. The questions were based on the factors that we had identified in our pilot study in order to analyse them on a deeper level.

Step 4: Six employees at EF were contacted and the interviews were held. During the interviews, an emphasis was put on keeping as open of a dialogue as possible to give the interviewees a chance to say what first came to mind. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Step 5: After holding the interviews included in the main study, we proceeded to the analysis. We discussed the collected data from all nine interviews and how to further connect it to the theoretical framework. We revised the preliminary theoretical framework and updated it to a finalised version, which includes all aspects of the interviews.

## **4.2 Research Approach**

According to Bryman & Bell (2013) the inductive approach aims to draw general conclusions based on data that is collected through research in the shape of observations and findings. After the data is collected, the information found will be put together into a theoretical conclusion. In this thesis we had an inductive approach when conducting our pilot study. The inductive approach was considered appropriate as we studied how employees perceive EF's situation and theoretical conclusions were drawn based on that. We also did not want to limit ourselves when exploring what factors might affect knowledge transfer since only limited

research in this area was found. Our aim was to add theory to previous research, which characterises an inductive approach. The design of the study made it difficult to translate certain aspects into simple constructs since they are mainly contextual. This further contributed to the selection of an inductive approach.

On the other hand, a deductive approach has the theory as the base. It is through using a hypothesis as a starting point that the author attempts to find support for this in empirical studies (Bryman & Bell, 2013). After the pilot study, we were able to observe a preliminary theoretical framework. It was based on this framework that we could create a hypothesis that was tested in the main study. Seeing as the theory was found after the first round of data was collected, a more deductive method was used when conducting our main study.

### **4.3 Data Collection**

A qualitative approach was used in this thesis. The method has an interpretive perspective and is intended to be used when the author wants to understand a social situation based on how individuals in that particular environment perceive it (Bryman & Bell, 2013). According to Bryman & Bell (2013) it has an emphasis on words, rather than quantification. This provides space for a deeper and more nuanced outlook on the subject being analysed. Since we intended to examine individuals' perceptions on shifting social environments, it is preferred to use a qualitative method. Furthermore, a qualitative method is often used together with an inductive approach, which further contributed to our choice.

A quantitative method, on the other hand, has an objective view and is often used when the thesis has a deductive approach (Bryman & Bell, 2013). It is therefore found suitable when the author aims to test a theory. Bryman & Bell (2013) further state that a quantitative method is preferred when measurable factors are required. When collecting and

analysing data, a focus is being put on quantification. Since we aimed to investigate soft values that are hard to quantify, we chose to discard a quantitative approach.

#### **4.4 Research Design**

The formulation of the research question was of such a nature that we found it meaningful to answer it with a case study. A case study analyses a particular case, which can be an organisation, location or a person (Bryman & Bell, 2013). Bryman & Bell (2013) further say that when conducting a case study, the author has the aim of getting an in-depth explanation of a certain object of interest. The purpose is to elucidate the unique feature of the case, which means that the case study has an idiographic approach. We considered a case study suitable because we were able to do an in-depth study, which gave us the opportunity to do a comprehensive analysis. Our case is extreme and has unique features, for example high employee turnover, which is essential in order to do a reliable analysis and further contributed to our choice of executing a case study. We chose to compare two destinations, which according to Bryman & Bell (2013) is a multiple-case study. However, Yin (2003) states that a case study has its limitations regarding generalisability. Due to the fact that a case does not represent a sample, a statistical generalisation is difficult to reach. In this sense, the goal will instead be to expand and generalise theories, which is called analytical generalisation (Yin, 2003). Hence, our thesis will aim for analytical generalisation.

#### **4.5 Case Selection**

When selecting a company to study we created three criteria: high employee turnover, labour intensity, and success. We chose high employee turnover because transferring knowledge is particularly hard when human capital is constantly changing. The more knowledge that is found in employees, the greater the risk of knowledge depreciation due to employee turnover (Argote, 1999). Labour intensity was a criterion due to the fact that in the labour-intensive

sector, human interaction is more significant in the work process than in manufacturing, therefore more knowledge is found in the employees (Eckardt et al., 2014). The third and last criterion was success. This was chosen because previous literature states that high employee turnover in labour-intensive companies is damaging for the organisation. We, therefore, wanted a company that had those two criteria but still managed to be successful. Our definition of success was: the company being a world leader within their industry. We chose the company EF as the case to analyse because the company met all of the above-mentioned criteria. It is a labour-intensive company since it is a service company. Furthermore, EF has high employee turnover because the workload varies greatly during the year. EF is also world leading in international education which fulfils our definition of success (EF.com, 2015).

Furthermore, EF has many products. Since we wanted to do an in-depth study in order to fulfil the qualitative aspects of the thesis, we chose to limit ourselves to one product. We chose to delve into LT. This because employee turnover is most noticeable in this product, since it is primarily used during the summer. However, LT exists all over the world. Due to limitations in time we chose to narrow it down to one country. The country we decided on was the United Kingdom. The reason why we chose the United Kingdom was because of convenience. We had had previous contact with people working in this country within LT.

Finally, the students can choose to travel to different destinations within the United Kingdom. We wanted to compare two destinations with the aim of seeing similarities and differences in the way they transfer knowledge. The criteria when choosing the two destinations were: one being above the company performance average and one being below the company performance average, and other destination characteristics being as similar as possible. The reason for this was to see if there were any differences regarding the impact of the factors on the two destinations. If one destination was successful in reaching beyond the company's goal, it indicates that some factors have to differ compared to the destination that

did not reach the average. When interviewed on May 12th 2015, Daniel explained that, at Language Travel, they measure company performance by receiving feedback from the students throughout the summer. The students rate their experience on a scale from 1-5, where 1 is the worst and 5 is the best. The company performance average year 2014 was 4.0. Destination Y was awarded best destination in the world within EF Language Travel last season with a score above the company average. Destination X had a score below destination Y and below the company average. In terms of other destination characteristics they are similar regarding job titles and work tasks. The two destinations also have the same pool of resources that they can use. Both destinations have facilities such as beach clubs, lounges, and multiple schools, which makes their physical structure similar. However, there are two main differences. The first one being the age group of the customers, where Destination Y is a junior destination with younger customers, while destination X has an older clientele. We do not see this as a big factor that might impact the way knowledge is being transferred within the destination and the organisation. This because the work tasks of the destinations, the training the employees receive, and the product is the same regardless of the age of the students. The second and last difference is the size of the destinations. Destination X is twice the size of Destination Y in terms of the amount of students that arrive each season. This is a factor that could affect the knowledge transfer process, which will be further discussed in the section *Limitations*.

#### **4.6 Research Instruments**

The primary method for collecting data was semi-structured interviews. The process is flexible and focuses on how the interviewee perceives and explains a certain phenomena. In other words, the focus is on the interviewees' point of view (Bryman & Bell, 2013). Bryman & Bell (2013) further explains that the semi-structured interviews allows for the interviewer

to depart from the interview guide, use follow-up questions and ask the questions in any order found suitable for that particular interview. “Rambling” is encouraged as it gives a deeper insight into what the respondents find essential (Bryman & Bell, 2013). The thesis intends to examine the underlying factors for a specific phenomenon, which is why this method is considered suitable. As we were trying to understand the interviewees’ perception of the social context they are active in, we wanted the respondents to be able to express themselves freely in order to be able to interpret their words. The semi-structured interviews gave us the flexibility and the opportunity to do a deeper analysis. Since we intended to compare different cases within the organisation, we chose to use semi-structured interviews instead of unstructured as it provides greater reliability when comparing data (Bryman & Bell, 2013). Structured interviews are often used in quantitative methods when you want to achieve quantifiable data. The research question addressed in our thesis is of such a nature that interpretations of the data are needed to execute a deeper analysis. The closed questions that characterize structured interviews (Bryman & Bell, 2013) do not allow such interpretations and was therefore rejected. Due to geographical factors and constraints in terms of time and money, interviews via Skype were selected instead of conducting the interviews in person. EF uses Skype as their main way to communicate with each other, which was expected to make them more likely to participate actively during the interviews.

#### **4.7 Research Sample**

For our semi-structured interviews, we used two sampling methods. Initially, when first contacting EF, a convenience sample was used. This method is used when the individuals that are relevant for the study are easily available to the authors (Bryman & Bell, 2013). Three interview objects were chosen, as they were easily available. They were the Operations Manager for several destinations in the United Kingdom, one Assistant Operations Manager,



and one senior staff member. At a later stage, when the destinations were selected for our analysis, a snowball sample was used. Such a method is used in cases where a sample frame is difficult to identify (Bryman & Bell, 2013). As we consider us not possessing the information needed to create a representative sample frame we used the Operations Manager for several destinations in the United Kingdom to do this. The person holding this position is also responsible for the recruitment of part-time employees during the summer. We applied the assumption that this employee has unique access to information regarding human resources and company performance and would therefore be able to create a sample frame. Two destinations were recommended by that person and were therefore selected. The chosen interview objects at the two destinations were the Operations Managers, who works full-time, and two senior staff members/leaders who only work during the summers. The reason behind this choice was to get two different perspectives. One perspective from the full-time employees who are a part of the whole process, and one perspective from employees working a short period of time and needs to learn their role quickly. We chose to let the respondents be anonymous. All the names in this thesis are therefore fictitious. Bryman & Bell (2013) states that there is a risk that the respondents are restricted in their answers if they are not anonymous, which is why this choice was made. We believe this resulted in honest and sincere responses.

#### 4.7.1 Table of Interviews and Respondents

Location	Name (Fictitious)	Position (Summer Season 2014)	Date	Length
Pilot Study				
N/A	Adam	Operations Manager (Several Destinations)	2015-04-10	1:13
N/A	Bea	Student Services Coordinator (Senior Staff)	2015-04-12	0:41
N/A	Christine	Assistant Operation Manager	2015-04-12	0:56
Main Study				
Destination X	Daniel	Operations Manager	2015-05-12	0:49
Destination X	Emma	Academic Manager (Senior Staff)	2015-05-11	0:50
Destination X	Flora	Activity Manager (Senior Staff)	2015-05-02	0:52
Destination Y	Gary	Operations Manager	2015-04-28	1:03
Destination Y	Henry	Activity Manager (Senior Staff)	2015-05-18	0:49
Destination Y	Isabelle	Local Leader	2015-05-19	0:47

#### 4.8 Data Analysis

Pattern matching is an analytical tool that compares an empirical pattern with the proposed or predicted one (Yin, 2003). Yin (2003) further states that the first step of pattern matching is comparing the research question to previous literature. This is later compiled into a preliminary theoretical framework. The result of the case study is then matched with the preliminary framework. If the two patterns match, the study supports that existing theory has answers to the research question. If the patterns do not match, an analysis of the differences between the theoretical and empirical answers is made. Conclusions are then drawn as to whether this means that something should be removed or added to the frame, which is

adjusted into a final framework. Pattern matching is considered an appropriate data analysis method since the aim was to test whether previous literature gives us answers to our research question. A preliminary theoretical framework was made with the purpose of testing this by analysing a case. A more deductive approach is used at a latter stage, which further contributed to the choice of using pattern matching. Although a deductive approach is not supposed to be used in a qualitative method (Bryman & Bell, 2013), when using pattern matching as a data analysis method it becomes purposeful.

To ensure our study is objective we chose to apply triangulation (Bryman & Bell, 2013). The data collected from the interviews was verified by comparing the answers received from the respondents. In cases where the information contradicted itself, we chose not to include that data. Since the purpose of the study was to compare two destinations, we did not apply triangulation between the destinations. Only the answers within the destinations were triangulated.

## **4.9 Validity**

Validity addresses whether the author measures what he or she intends to measure (Bryman & Bell, 2013). Within qualitative research two concepts have been developed, internal and external validity.

### **4.9.1 The Internal Validity**

The internal validity deals with the degree of consistency between the author's observations and the theoretical conceptions he or she has developed (Bryman & Bell, 2013). Our thesis's internal validity is considered high. The reasons are that the sample represents many levels of the organisation and is relevant for the study. When creating the criteria for selecting the interview objects (one full-time employee and two part-time employees) it was made with the purpose of strengthening the internal validity. This was achieved by making sure their

position and experience at EF was relevant for the study and their input was relevant when answering the research question.

#### **4.9.2 The External Validity**

The external validity addresses whether the results can be generalised to other situations and social environments (Bryman & Bell, 2013). Regarding the external validity, it is lower than the internal validity. This because we only have analysed one company in our case study and interviewed a limited number of employees. That the selection in the first stage consisted of a convenience sample also contributes to the external validity being low because such a sample is not considered representative. However, since we are aiming for analytical generalisation we still believe that our study will contribute with additional knowledge and information.

#### **4.10 Reliability**

Reliability refers to the stability and consistency of the results derived from the research (Bryman & Bell, 2013). Reliability is also split up into internal and external reliability.

##### **4.10.1 The Internal Reliability**

The internal reliability addresses whether the authors have reached consensus on how data should be interpreted (Bryman & Bell, 2013). It is considered high since we have done extensive preparatory work. All researchers participated in all interviews, which reduces the risk of data being interpreted in different ways. A clear focus on accuracy in transcribing was also applied and contributed to the high internal reliability.

##### **4.10.2 The External Reliability**

The external reliability deals with the degree to which the study can be replicated (Bryman & Bell, 2013). In a qualitative study, a high external reliability is difficult to achieve because it is unstructured and largely based on the author's innovative ability (Bryman & Bell, 2013). There are difficulties in ensuring that the interviewees' responses are unvarying when asking

the same questions at different times and that the same follow-up questions and interview techniques are being used. We will counter this by being transparent in describing our methodology and approach. These parts are described in detail in order to provide a basis for future researchers to replicate our study in another context. Because the thesis is based on the interaction between the interviewer and the respondents, it is impossible to conduct the study in the exact same way.

## **5. Results**

This section begins with a general overview of EF as a company. It is followed by an empirical rendition of the data collected from the interviews in our study. This is concluded with an analysis of the data where the empirical result gets substance by being linked to the theory. The results have been divided in terms of the factors as well as the destinations in order to be able to identify any potential divergences between the two destinations. The result of the analysis is summarised in a table and concluded in the end.

### **5.1 General Overview of EF**

As stated before, EF is a company that operates all over the world. In the United Kingdom, the Head Office is situated in London where the Top Management has its base. At every destination there is a team that is managed by an Operations Manager. The team consists of senior staff and leaders that only work during the summer. Due to the fact that the majority of the staff is part-time employed, the employee turnover rate is high and there is therefore a significant demand to employ new people every season.

EF has a training process for the newly employed part-time workers with the aim of preparing the staff for their work. A training weekend is held that all the senior staff members attend from the various destinations. The main focus is to learn about how EF works as an

organisation and as a product, their goals, and the overall mission, as well as teaching the employees how to do their jobs and the structure of the daily tasks. It was described by one of the respondents as “an overall spectrum of what we do.” The local training was explained as having the aim of teaching the staff the local logistics rather than the overall views and goals of the company.

## **5.2 Empirical Results**

### **5.2.1 Key Employees**

#### ***5.2.1.1 Generally for EF (Language Travel)***

When asking about the experienced staff and what role they play at EF, the general answer was that they are invaluable. Adam stressed the importance of having experienced employees around you by saying “I mean, they are invaluable [...], if Martha, Brooks, and Jennifer left we would all be running around as headless chickens.” All the respondents agree that you learn from the people who have been in the company for a while and that those experienced staff have deeply valued knowledge.

#### ***5.2.1.2 Destination X***

Several interviewees stated that the key employees are important for the knowledge transfer process in the organisation. However, few have had formal contact with the person holding the position before them. It is rather the people around you that you are working with at your destination that you ask for help. Operations Manager Daniel confirms the importance of experience among employees by declaring that “[...] with experience you do not have to figure out what the problem is, you see the problem and can solve it directly. Somebody without that experience does not see the problem directly.” These topics are further addressed by the returning Activity Manager Flora. She emphasised how valuable the experience she gained last year is from two perspectives. First, to build upon her own previous knowledge in

order to improve things, and secondly to be able to provide training for the new Activity Managers.

All of the respondents highlighted the group dynamic as a significant part of the learning process as most of the important knowledge was gained while working during the summer. When talking about how you learn and what can be taught it becomes clear that it is not possible to prepare for every scenario that could appear. Daniel indicates how not all the knowledge can be taught from start and how the experienced employees play an important role by saying that “[...] whether it is someone in my team or at another destination, I am always happy to help because I know how it can be being a new manager and not have the knowledge you wished for.”

Emma talked about how EF can give you a framework and some preparation, but a lot of the things have to be learnt on-the-job. The respondents say that it comes down to the person you are in order to feel comfortable not knowing every aspect of the summer beforehand. Daniel mentioned, “We talk a lot about EF people. You have a lot of like-minded people that are positive, hardworking, passionate [...]”. Simply, they are looking for “EF people” when they hire new employees.

### ***5.2.1.3 Destination Y***

There were only similarities in terms of key employees between the two destinations. When being asked about the experienced staff at her destination, Isabelle said “I just think that we have a very advanced team, they have a lot of knowledge about what they are doing and quite a lot of people within the company have stayed there, so they have a lot of years experience and I think that is crucial, because they have covered so many situations since they have been there, so you know you could go to them if you did not know how to solve a situation [...]” It was disclosed that when learning about the role and what it entailed, key employees played a significant part in the learning process.

Henry also talked about the importance of experienced staff for the performance of the destination. New employees have to learn about the foundation of EF and how things work while the more experienced staff already have that knowledge and can concentrate on trying to improve things. They have little formal knowledge transfer processes, it is rather through friends and informal discussions that knowledge is transferred. This is further discussed by Gary, the Operations Manager, by expressing “You do tend to kind of not understand the EF role until the middle of the summer and then six weeks later they leave and you then need to recoup all of that information and it gets lost and that is a difficult thing.” However, this is followed by the statement “I do not think we are working in an environment where you can write stuff down.”

Henry further evaluates the role key employees play in the interaction with new employees. He said that when he started at EF, the senior staff saw the passion of their existing Operations Manager and that he “really believed in the company and the product and without a doubt that affected the rest of the staff.” All of the respondents in Destination Y also agreed that it takes a certain mind-set and certain personality traits to be successful and enjoy working for EF.

## **5.2.2 Organisational Culture**

### ***5.2.2.1 Generally for EF (Language Travel)***

When asking about the culture at EF, all interviewees agreed to the same aspects of the organisational culture. Those were: Hard working, social and open, and continuous learning. Consensus was also reached regarding the vision EF has. Both of the Operations Managers expressed the importance of EF’s core values and that it pervades the company.

### ***5.2.2.2 Destination X***

In Destination X, the formal training consists of Senior Staff Training. Emma thought that the formal training might not have been enough for someone new to the company. She thought



that new employees need at least a couple more weeks of training and learning before the students arrive, just to be able to put everything learnt during Senior Staff Training into context. She did, however, believe that Senior Staff Training was enough for returning employees.

Working together in a team was a second aspect that was brought up on all interviews. They said that it is what is most important for the employees' communication process. It also makes it possible for employees to adapt the decisions made to the situation at hand. It was expressed that if there is a question that needs to be answered, there is nothing stopping you from asking that question. One of the respondents said "even when you start at entry level, when you are not a member of the permanent staff, you still get the feeling when you go to the organisation that you all are working together in this [...] You still get the same homely feeling that everybody is working together here and you can go and ask help from anyone, it is not restricted in that way." This results in an open communication environment where knowledge and information is exchanged between all members of staff.

Lastly: Continuous learning. According to the respondents, when there is an open environment, the learning process for employees becomes easier. The formal training that occurs before the summer begins is the previously mentioned Senior Staff Training. However, most of the learning is done throughout the summer. The respondents said that you teach each other and you learn from each other, even though it is not structured training.

### ***5.2.2.3 Destination Y***

Preparatory training starts much earlier in Destination Y. Gary, the Operations Manager, says, "we are getting far more professional and structured in how we do handovers", mentioning that they are not as ad hoc as earlier. The two employees at Destination Y started to get work tasks before the summer season started (apart from Senior Staff Training), mentioning that the tasks have helped them prepare for the summer. Isabelle says, "it has been on-going for a

couple of months. The information I was getting was getting me ready for exactly what is going to happen. I was prepared.”

As with Destination X, the social and positive nature of the organisational culture could not be stressed enough among our respondents, as they say that it helps the team-building facet of the summers. Isabelle emphasises “it is noticeable if someone is not in that same mind frame. If 99% of the team is positive and is there for the students, because the students are our customers, and 1% is not there for that, then it is very noticeable.” All of the respondents also agreed that an open environment is present which aids the communication between the staff members.

Destination Y also had an extensive part of their knowledge being taught during the summer through learning-by-doing. Isabelle expressed it as “because each summer is different, you do not know what information you need”. She also mentioned that having a positive attitude and being open to change is essential before and during the summer.

### **5.2.3 Organisational Structure**

#### ***5.2.3.1 Generally for EF (Language Travel)***

The majority of the respondents agreed that on a destination level, EF has a flat organisational structure. However, looking at EF from a greater perspective many of the respondents believed the company to be more hierarchical. In regards to the three factors within organisational structure (centralisation, formalisation, and complexity), the only difference observed between the destinations was found in formalisation.

#### ***5.2.3.2 Destination X***

Regarding the degree of centralisation of the company, many of the respondents experience that they are given the responsibility to make their own decisions. Although, the decisions have to be in line with certain rules and regulations that apply for the organisation as a whole. Flora states, “So in my role, if I was coming up with a new activity or a new event, I could

take ownership of that. But it would be centralised in that I have to run the activity, the guidelines of how EF is run and that things are done properly according to how EF would want. It is more of a framework.” The respondents meant that the platform for communication is open for everybody, and ideas can be developed both individually and in groups.

The Operations Manager also declares an ease in contacting whomever is needed for different situations, even if they are in a higher position than yourself, “because you have access to somebody that is so many steps higher, you can just Skype or turn around and ask them and get the knowledge so much quicker rather than have to wait days or weeks to schedule a meeting or going through a personal assistant, you can just ask the person.” The respondents expressed that EF is not hierarchical, but rather flat in the way that communication is done on both a vertical and horizontal level.

Furthermore, whether it was a Local Leader or an Operations Manager, the phrase “work hard, play hard” was brought up at each and every one of the interviews. By “work hard, play hard” they meant that focus should be put on being 100% present and attentive with the customers, paying attention to whatever might be happening in that exact moment, but also including some social aspects for all employees at each destination. Emphasis is put on working hard within the company, especially during the summers. However, Flora mentions that both playing hard and working hard at the same time could be draining. This since the social aspect is a significant part of networking and communication between employees during the summers. Lastly, referring to the complexity of the work tasks, one of the respondents said, “it is not rocket science”. Instead, they are rather simple and based on common sense, and hence do not need specialised training.

### ***5.2.3.3 Destination Y***

Destination Y is also in consensus in regards to it being simple to ask the right person for help and having a framework within which decisions can be made individually and in groups.

Isabelle states “[...] there are rules and regulations, but it is decentralised in the way that you are given permission as an employee. If you have a good idea that is taken aboard, and you can run with it, that can be passed on to other destinations.” As with Destination X, employees have the same framework according to which they need to work, but have freedom to pursue new ideas as long as it is in line with the framework.

What could be seen as a difference from Destination X, was the amount of professionalism and hierarchy viewed from the role of the Operations Manager. Gary stated that “I would say that I have got some great friends from EF, but in the summer I would say that there is a professional element”. He also highlighted the fact that he is still the boss over the employees working during the summer, and the line should not be crossed where he is only viewed as a friend.

The social aspect was also discussed in Destination Y. Gary mentioned the “work hard, play hard” attitude of the company. He said “When I first started, talking about the core values, passion was actually “work hard, play hard”. We had to change that because we probably played a bit too hard sometimes.” Continuing by saying that it has been a significant part of the networking aspect of the summer.

## **5.3 Data Analysis**

### **5.3.1 Key Employees**

#### ***5.3.1.1 Generally for EF (Language Travel)***

The empirical result supports the research stating human capital is a critical resource for the company’s success (Becker & Huselid, 1998). There was no significant disparity between the destinations that could be distinguished. The employees seemed to have a similar view of the role of key employees and experience within EF. Therefore, our findings apply to both

destinations and could not be used to explain the differences in performance between the destinations.

### ***5.3.1.2 Destination X***

One of the aspects affecting how quick the organisation learns is the skill of the individual employee (Reagan et al., 2005). Talking to the respondents it becomes clear that the importance of individual employees is vital within EF. They trust the experienced staff to share their knowledge and all the respondents reveal that it is those employees that have been most important for their learning process. People who have worked for EF for a long period of time possess invaluable skills and knowledge derived from their experience, which makes them the foundation of the company. This is in line with the definition of key employees that was previously outlined.

The second aspect was the employee's ability to take advantage of the knowledge accumulated by others (Reagan et al., 2005). Both Daniel and Flora addressed the significance of being able to take advantage of knowledge accumulated by others when stating that the knowledge held by experienced staff could be shared in order to help new members of staff. Since tacit knowledge is based on experience (Grant, 1996; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Spender, 1996), most of the knowledge accumulated by the experienced staff is tacit. This indicates that the learning process, both on an individual and on an organisational level, would be hindered without the experienced key employees.

The third aspect is the possibility of coordinated activities within the organisation. Emma explained how EF gives you a framework that is used to make sure the basic structure is followed, which would help coordinate the necessary activities within the destination. Aime et al. (2010) mentions that the right people need to be employed in order to have as sufficient of a decision-making process within the framework as possible. This is confirmed by the respondents, referring to the company employing “EF people”.

### ***5.3.1.3 Destination Y***

The three aspects mentioned above also apply to Destination Y. Our result shows that knowledge is not automatically transferred, but key employees are essential in supporting new staff in their learning process by sharing what they know. All the respondents said that a lot of the knowledge was gained through learning-by-doing, which can be seen in the SECI model as “internalization” (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). This is in line with what Reagan et al. (2005) expressed by stating that the concept of learning curves is important for the performance of the company. Since experienced employees are further along on the learning curve, they are vital to the success of the company since they can focus on improving things based on their experience rather than learning the fundamentals of working for EF.

Few formal processes of knowledge transfer exist. We could rather see that this is based on informal discussions and personal relations. The empirical result also displays that there is little official transfer between seasonal staff holding the same position. This is supported by the fact that many of the people we interviewed emphasised the tacit knowledge within the company. As previous literature states, and that our research confirms, tacit knowledge cannot easily be transferred (Argote, 1999; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Kang et al., 2010).

Research says that employees tend to put most effort into the job when starting a new position and such motivation can fade over time, especially when the job is physically or psychologically demanding (Staw, 1980). As the jobs at EF seem to be demanding, it confirms the importance of hiring people with the right mind-set. This in order for the key employees to be able to embrace the demanding role and make the right decisions within the framework they are presented with.

## **5.3.2 Organisational Culture**

### ***5.3.2.1 Generally for EF (Language Travel)***

There are many components to the organisational learning culture and the high performance corporate culture. The factors that were similar generally for EF in the high performance corporate culture were founding ideas, managerial maintenance, and keeping the culture alive. These factors have been excluded in our analysis due to limitations in space and because the other factors are more relevant to our purpose. Instead we focused on vision or mission, employee selection, and formal training. For the organisational learning culture we included all factors, which are knowledge sharing, teamwork, adaptation, and flexibility because we found them important for the analysis.

### ***5.3.2.2 Destination X***

Returning to the two concepts introduced in the previous literature section regarding an organisational learning culture and a high performance corporate culture (Jiménez-Jiménez et al., 2014; Sadri, 2014), there are certain aspects within Destination X that resonates with them. Seeing as Destination X has put a significant amount of effort into making an environment where working as a team is supported, the teamwork aspect of the culture is upheld. The communication process is aided through the sense of belonging and the feeling of “we are all in this together”.

Employees receive a framework within which they are allowed to make their own decisions. Hence, the explicit knowledge of the summer is taught through Senior Staff Training. The tacit knowledge is built when employees receive their work tasks, making the work process adaptive from summer to summer. Destination X fulfills three of the four aspects of the organisational learning culture seeing as new knowledge is created in a flexible, adaptive, and teamwork-like environment. Destination X has less formal training beforehand

than Destination Y, resulting in the knowledge sharing aspect of an organisational learning culture not being fulfilled to the same extent.

The high performance corporate culture, on the other hand, emphasises growth and high achievements (Sandri, 2014). One of the aspects within the high performance corporate culture was the employee selection, meaning employing the right people and aiming for a person-organisation fit rather than a person-job fit (Sadri, 2014). As could be seen in the *Key Employee* section, the destination is prone to employ what was referred to as an “EF person”, resulting in accomplishing this aspect of a high performance corporate culture. The values introduced when arriving to the company also directs the employees’ decision-making process throughout the summer. The values are guidelines in how employees should think when making decisions, and how much effort should be put into the summer (Sandri, 2014).

Another factor introduced in the high performance corporate culture was formal training. As with the organisational learning culture, this is the part of the high performance corporate culture that does not resonate with what is done at Destination X. The only formal training received by employees is the Senior Staff Training, resulting in formal training not being as prominent. The training and handover process that occurs, apart from the Senior Staff Training, is rather on an informal basis. These handover sessions have not been a part of EF’s mandatory training, which results in the high performance culture being moderate at Destination X.

### **5.3.2.3 Destination Y**

In Destination Y the learning process is more thorough. Isabelle mentioned that learning and information processing had been “on-going for a couple of months”. They did, therefore, cover the factors of an organisational learning culture being flexible and dynamic in the teamwork process when learning new knowledge and sharing previously gained knowledge. As with Destination X, the work process is adaptive due to the decision-making rights and the



ownership the employees possess, resulting in fulfilling all the criteria for an organisational learning culture.

Regarding a high performance corporate culture, Destination Y also has a significant focus on employing “EF people” with the aim of getting a person-organisation fit (Sandri, 2014). The same resonates with the criteria having a vision where the core values play an important part. The difference that can be observed is, yet again, the higher amount of formal training the employees receive at Destination Y compared to Destination X. As the senior staff get tasks before they start their busy period during the summer, the employees felt more prepared. A high performance corporate culture is therefore achieved at Destination Y by fulfilling all of the required criteria.

### **5.3.3 Organisational Structure**

#### ***5.3.3.1 Generally for EF (Language Travel)***

Generally for EF, the only difference between the destinations was the formalisation. This means that for both destinations, centralisation and complexity are at the same level.

#### ***5.3.3.2 Destination X***

Destination X has a decentralised structure. Flora mentioned ownership in her interview which, according to Moradkhannejad et al. (2012), shows that the decision-making process is not only top-down. Employees are allowed to have a voice in how the destination should proceed on a day-to-day basis. Even though there are clear job roles in what the work tasks are for each employee, the centralisation aspect of the organisation is not present and does not hinder decision-making on a lower scale (Moradkhannejad et al., 2012).

The second aspect introduced was the formalisation of the organisation. Here we can see that there is a framework within which employees are allowed to make decisions and that the destination is flat. There are certain rules and regulations that have to be followed for EF Language Travel as a whole, which Destination X has to follow. This means that the structure

would be organic rather than hierarchical (Moradkhannejad et al., 2012). The Operations Manager mentioned the ease of contacting someone through Skype or talking to him/her in person, which is one of the aspects of an organic organisational structure (Moradkhannejad et al., 2012).

Lastly, there was complexity. Two types of complexity were introduced, complexity in work tasks and social complexity (Martínez-León et al., 2011). Seeing as there are several employees who work at the different destinations, there will be a wide communication network throughout the summer, making the destinations socially complex (Martínez-León et al., 2011). The teamwork aspect of the summers also strengthens the social complexity of the destination. Employees are encouraged to network and communicate with each other. However, as Flora mentioned, networking to the extent to which they do in Destination X is draining for the employees. The work tasks, on the other hand, are fairly simple, referring to one of the respondents mentioning that it is not rocket science (Martínez-León et al., 2011).

#### ***5.3.3.3 Destination Y***

Destination Y is only different from Destination X in one aspect. This is seen in the slightly higher formalisation of Destination Y. As mentioned above, the Operations Manager said that it is important to have a professional approach to staff members. Although most employees perceive the organisation to be flat and organic, he still keeps a sense of hierarchy in the daily work tasks. Moradkhannejad et al. (2012) means that if there is a presence of hierarchy in the structure, it cannot be completely organic. This results in Destination Y having a less organic structure than Destination X.

### 5.3.4 Overview of the analysis of the three factors

	Destination X	Destination Y
<b>1. Key Employees</b>		
1.1 Importance of	High	
<b>2. Organisational Culture</b>		
2.1 <i>Organisational Learning Culture</i>	Moderate	High
2.1.1 Knowledge sharing	Moderate	High
2.1.2 Teamwork	High	
2.1.3 Adaptation	High	
2.1.4 Flexibility	High	
2.2 <i>High Performance Culture</i>	Moderate	High
2.2.1 Founding Ideas	Prominent	
2.2.2 Vision or Mission	Prominent	
2.2.3 Managerial Maintenance	High	
2.2.4 Employee Selection	Prominent	
2.2.5 Formal Training	Low	Moderate
2.2.6 "Keeping the Culture alive"	High	
<b>3. Organisational Structure</b>		
3.1 Centralisation	Low	
3.2 Formalisation	Low	Moderate
3.3 Complexity	Moderate	
3.3.1 Social Complexity	High	
3.3.2 Work Task Complexity	Low	

## 6. Discussion and Conclusion

### 6.1 Discussion

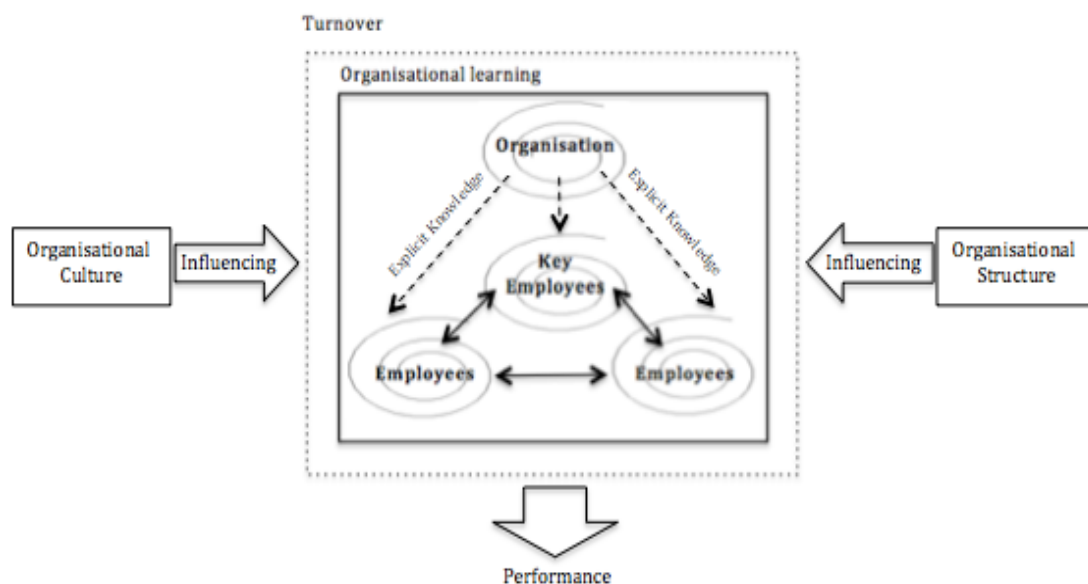


Figure 3: Framework illustrating the essential processes and how the identified factors are connected to the theoretical background of the study.

The framework above (figure 3) is used to demonstrate how the factors described and analysed are connected to the results. We can see that knowledge creation is generated through the interaction of explicit and tacit knowledge on each level of the organisation, which is demonstrated by the loops. The communication between key employees and employees is illustrated by the arrows. While explicit knowledge was found to be transferred down to an individual level we could not find any tacit knowledge being transferred between units even though tacit knowledge was identified to be the most important type of knowledge. The explicit knowledge being transferred is working as a frame of what the employees need to do, but within this frame it is down to the individual how they want to do it. The result supports the research stating that tacit knowledge is hard to transfer (Grant, 1996; Kang et al., 2010) and shows that it is rather created through experience at an individual level (Grant, 1996; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Spender, 1996). Our research also shows that organisational culture and organisational structure have a strong impact on the organisation and the way of working, which is shown by the level of influence in the figure. All together, this will create the outcome of the organisation's performance.

Our research question was: "How do key employees, organisational culture, and organisational structure affect knowledge transfer in labour-intensive organisations with high employee turnover?" The result of our study suggests that knowledge transfer is not as important for organisational performance as previous literature has emphasised (e.g. Argote, 1999; Grant, 1996; Kogut & Zander, 1992; Spender, 1996). Instead, we have found that learning is most important. We suggest that in future research, focus should be put on understanding the learning process of the organisation rather than the knowledge transfer process. This in order to understand why labour-intensive companies with high employee turnover manage to be successful, which, according to Grant, (1996), Kogut & Zander (1992), Nonaka & Takeuchi (1995), Shaw (2011) and Spender (1996) is difficult to achieve.

Returning to the two destinations, Destination Y had a score above the company average and Destination X had a score below the company average. Seeing as our results show that learning is the most important aspect of organisational performance, the difference in the destinations' performance depends on the amount of existing learning. This concludes that there is more learning in Destination Y than in Destination X.

According to Morawski (2013), key employees construct the core of the company and as the analysis further establish, they play a crucial role in the company and therefore act as the centre of the junction. However, since there were no differences in terms of the importance of key employees, this could not be used to explain any variances in the performance between the destinations. Our results are therefore in line with what previous literature states (Becker & Huselid, 1998; Davenport, 2000; Morawski, 2013).

The two differences in the destinations' organisational culture indicate that it is important to have an organisational learning culture and a high performance corporate culture in order to sustain a beneficial learning process. Since Destination Y has more formal training than Destination X, it also has a more substantial high performance corporate culture. Destination Y also has a more prominent organisational learning culture since the communication process starts earlier and, therefore, knowledge sharing is higher. This is in accordance with what previous literature (Jiménez-Jiménez et al., 2014; Sadri, 2014) has said regarding the importance of culture in a company's learning process.

Finally, regarding the organisational structure of the two destinations, one difference was observed. The difference was the amount of professionalism and hierarchy in the daily work tasks. This was more prominent in Destination Y, which leads to a slightly more formalised structure. Hence, we can see in Destination Y that formalisation to a certain extent is important for the learning process, which opposes the findings of Moradkhannejad et al. (2012). Our results show that it actually is a significant aspect of the creative decision-making

process of a company. This is important to have in mind when exploring the field of organisational learning.

Returning to the framework, the more the organisational culture and the organisational structure influence the learning process, the better the performance of the company. Key employees are important for the learning process of the new employees, making them equally important for the organisational learning and, therefore, the performance of the company.

## **6.2 Conclusion**

We can state that the transfer of knowledge is not as important as declared in previous literature. Instead it is the learning process, during which employees learn about their new tasks, that is of utmost significance for the success of the company studied. Again, instead of having a knowledge transfer process between each season, the three factors (organisational culture, organisational structure, and key employees) affect the employees' learning process.

Key employees are important for the continuance of the company. A company needs to employ the right people to be able to grow in the right direction. It is also necessary for the company to have employees that have stayed in the company for a long period of time, as they possess knowledge that cannot be found elsewhere. This means that the tacit knowledge they have is essential for the company and, therefore, they become important for the new staff's learning process.

The organisational culture affects the learning process through an organisational learning culture and a high performance corporate culture. A successful, labour-intensive company with high employee turnover needs to fulfil all aspects of the two types of culture in order to have an organisational culture that supports organisational learning.

The organisational structure is also important, as there needs to be a certain degree of

professionalism in the company's formalisation. The structure needs an open environment, where a decentralised structure opens up to decision-making at all levels. However, complete freedom cannot be apparent, as professionalism is needed to structure the employees.

In conclusion, knowledge transfer is not important for the success of a labour-intensive company with high employee turnover. Instead it is the learning process, influenced by key employees, organisational culture, and organisational structure that is of utmost importance for the performance of the company.

### **6.3 Limitations**

One of the most apparent limitations in our study was the size difference between the two destinations we analysed. One destination is twice the size of the other, which could result in a lower score on the 1-5 scale in the feedback from students. This because there are more students to satisfy and give the best possible experience. However, since the other characteristics of the two destinations are similar, we do not believe that the size has had a significant impact on our study.

Other limitations include the style of the interviews. Seeing as we had no personal interviews, we were not able to get a personal connection to the interviewees. All interviews were made through Skype. We do, however, believe that the structure of our interview guide and the strength of our empirical results outweigh the information that could have been lost not having personal interviews.

Another limitation is that we based the analysed factors solely on the 7S framework. Other frameworks could have been used as the foundation for the thesis, in order to explore the research question from another point of view. Also, we could have focused on all seven factors. This would result in a broader analysis of the research question. However, since we

wanted a deeper analysis, we chose to limit the study to the three factors we perceived to be most relevant for our purpose.

Lastly, all the differences observed between the destinations within the three factors might not have an impact on the performance of the company. It could, rather, be a result of a difference within only one of the factors. This because we have not studied the correlation between the three factors. This is something that we encourage to be researched further.

#### **6.4 Further Research**

As mentioned before, we decided to limit our study to three factors that originated from the 7S framework. What can be further delved into are the other four categories, which are shared values, strategy, systems, and skills. We acknowledge that the three factors that we found are the ones most apparent in our case study. However, there could be other conclusions based on the remaining factors in the 7S framework as well as other factors not included in this framework.

Our study has provided a foundation to further analyse the research question over a longer period of time. This could be done by conducting a longitudinal study. Another aspect, as mentioned in *Limitations*, is to study the correlation between the three factors. This in order to further understand to what extent each factor affects the performance of the organisation.



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# Appendices

## Appendix 1

### General questions:

What does EF stand for according to you?

- How has that affected your position?

Can you describe EF's organisational culture?

How would you describe EF's structure?

- How much individual/team work is there?
- Is it flat or hierarchical?

What is your position at EF? What does it entail?

### Questions about knowledge transfer:

What did you learn while working for EF?

What would you have wanted to know before starting your employment?

How did you learn about the tasks in your position before you started?

- *Was it in line with what you actually experienced?*

Who taught you about your position and what it entailed?

What would you have liked to have known to do a better job?

What would you like to transfer to future employees holding your position?

Have you transferred the knowledge you gained during your time as (position)?

- *How did you transfer that knowledge?*

Did you use any standardized routines in your position?

- *In which tasks were they apparent?*

Was there any knowledge missing among your colleagues and your boss?

What do you wish your colleagues and your boss had had a wider knowledge about?

Are you happy with the amount of preparatory training you have received?

Are you happy with the amount of on-the-job training you have received?

What do you think most employees think about the training process at EF?

What work tasks were easy to learn?

- *How was it easy?*

What work tasks were hard to learn?

- *How was it hard?*

Are you able to influence/make your own decisions?

- *In which situations are you limited?*

Have you run into any problems working for EF?

- *How did you solve it?*
- *Did you learn anything from it?*
- *Did you communicate what you learned?*
- *To whom?*

**Full-time employee**

How did you learn your new tasks when you got a new position within the company?

Can you describe the process of handing your job over to your successor?

- *Did you write a testament?*

Is there a difference in the work process between the different positions you have had?

How have the different seasons/destinations differed?

- *In terms of information, training, and knowledge transfer?*

**Ending questions:**

Are there any more topics you would like to address?

Anything else you want to add to your previous answers?

## Appendix 2

### General

- Could you describe your positions and what it entails?

### Employee Turnover

- Why do you think EF has high employee turnover?
- Do you think that has affected the way EF works?
- Do you think it has affected EF's performance? How?

### Knowledge transfer

- What do you think is important to perform a good job?
- If you did not know how to perform a task/handle a situation, how did you handle it?
  - If it was related to budget/computer system etc?
  - If it was related to customer complaints/emergency situations etc?
- Do you think it is necessary to have knowledge about your work tasks before you start?
  - What kind of knowledge is necessary?
  - What kind of knowledge is not necessary?
  - What are you able to learn once you started your job?
- Did you write a testament?
- Did your view of the amount of knowledge needed to do a good job changed after you started working?
- Who has been important for your learning process?
- What has been important for you learning process?
- What was difficult/easy to learn about your new job?
  - When did you learn about your work tasks?
- When a situation arose that you had not experienced before, did you learn anything?
  - Did you transfer any of that knowledge? How did you transfer that knowledge?
  - Is it necessary to transfer that knowledge to future employees at EF?
- When you ended your employment at EF, did you transfer any knowledge/experiences?
- Do you think it is important to transfer that knowledge?
  - Why is it important/not important?

### Key employees

- Have you come up with any new ideas for improvements?
- How did you take that further?
- Who did you talk to?

### *Full-time Employees:*

- Why have you chosen to stay working for EF?
- Who do you mostly communicate with during the summer?
- In what situations have you contacted the head office?

- How do you communicate? Is there a difference between the way you communicate with different people? E.g. staff in the head office/summer staff at the destinations?
- What is good about it?
- What is bad about it?
- Are there any internal factors that affect the way you communicate?
- Are there any external factors that affect the way you communicate?
- Is there a difference in the way you communicate with people working in the head office vs. people working in the destinations?
- Did you have any contact with the person holding your position before you?
- What professional relationship do you have with your employees?
- How active were you in helping others learn about their work tasks?
- Do you think they received the help they needed?
- If you left the company, what would happen with the knowledge you have gained?
- Have you communicated that to anyone? If that person/people left, what would happen with the knowledge then?
- Have you written the knowledge down in any way?

*Part-time Employees:*

- Are you interested in working for EF in the future?
  - Why/why not?
  - If yes, what would you change?
- Who has been important for the learning process related to your work tasks and your role?
- Did you have any contact with the person holding your position before you?
- What professional relationship do you have with more senior staff?
- Did you feel comfortable asking more senior staff for help/advice?
- In what situations have you contacted more senior staff?
- Did you receive the help you needed?
- Did you communicate what you learnt during the summer to anyone? To whom? How did you communicate that knowledge?
- Was it difficult to do that?
- Do you wish that the communication between you and the organisation had been better or were you fine with the way it was?
  - How could it had been better?
- Were you satisfied with the amount of preparatory training you received?
- Were you satisfied with the amount of on-job-training you received?
- Had you been able to perform your work tasks even if you didn't receive any training?
- Was there any knowledge you had to know before you started?
- What kind of knowledge could not be taught before you started?

**Organisational culture**

- How would you describe EF's organisational culture?
- Is EF's culture important for the organisation?
  - If yes, how and to what degree?



- If no, why not?
- How does the organisational culture affect the way you work with your colleagues?
  - With colleagues working at the head office?
  - With colleagues working at the destinations?
- What do you like about the culture?
- What do you dislike about the culture?
- How did you perceive EF's organisational culture before you started your employment?
  - Was it different from what you experienced during the summer?
- Where is EF's organisational culture most noticeable?
  - Why do you think that is?
- Would you say that EF's organisational culture affects the way you work in any way?
  - Would you work differently if EF had another culture?
- Would you say that EF's organisational culture affects the way knowledge is transferred within the organisation?
- Has EF's organisational culture helped/hindered you to learn about your work tasks?
  - In which tasks?
  - How has it affected your learning process?
- Which, according to you, are EF's values?
- To what extent do you think EF's values affect your decision-making?
- The people working for EF, are they alike personality wise? In which ways?
- What personality traits are you looking for when recruiting?
- Why do you find yourself suitable to work for EF?
- How do you create a cohesive organisational culture?

### **Organisational structure**

- How would you describe EF's organisational structure?
  - Would you say that EF is centralised or decentralised?
  - Is it flat or hierarchical?
  - Is it complex or simple?
- How does the structure at EF influence the way you work?
- What do you like about the structure?
- What do you dislike about the structure?
- Has EF's organisational structure helped/hindered you to learn about your work tasks?
  - In which tasks?
  - How has it affected your learning process?
- How has the environment you worked in affected your work?
- In situations where you had to make your own decisions, what affected your decision? Can you tell us about an example?
- To what extent do you think your personality/experience affected your decision?
- How much of the daily work is controlled by EF's standards and rules?
- To what extent are you controlled by rules/routines?
- How much of the daily work is controlled by the destination itself and its staff/boss?