

Influences of seasonality on employee motivation and work wellbeing – Case Rukakeskus Ltd

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<p>Tourism industry is growing in Finland, and this together with four different seasons, means there will be more seasonal and part time employees. Wellbeing is a trend nowadays, and there are plenty of studies about wellbeing at work in general, and how it is linked to company success. Still, there is no research how seasonality might influence on employees' wellbeing.</p> <p>The objective of this bachelor thesis is to understand employee motives in seasonal job, and to improve their work motivation and work wellbeing. This research evaluates how seasonality in general influence employee motivation and wellbeing, and how employees experience seasonal work.</p> <p>Rukakeskus Corporation, which is one of the leading tourism companies in Finland, commissioned this research. Rukakeskus is in charge of the slope operations in Ruka ski resort, and it's mainly operating during winter seasons. Rukakeskus hires around 150 seasonal employees every winter.</p> <p>The used research method was qualitative, and the information was gathered through theme-centered interviews in February 2017. The respondents were seven seasonal employees, who were randomly chosen from different units of Rukakeskus.</p> <p>As a result, Rukakeskus employees had very similar answers yet they were working in different tasks. The employees were mostly motivated by passion for skiing or snowboarding, not by job itself. Also feeling of freedom was attracting employees in seasonal job. Some improvement ideas what Rukakeskus could do for better work wellbeing was, to focus on recruitment process, give more practical job orientation, have more open communication, and support employees self-management.</p>	
Keywords Work wellbeing, seasonal work, employee motivation, tourism, Rukakeskus	

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1 Introduction

Finland has four different seasons, which means there are also many positions which are only available for a certain period. While tourism is growing, seasonal employment is becoming more common. Employers have a challenge to find enough professional and motivated staff, and maintain work wellbeing in rapidly changing working life.

Rukakeskus Corporation is one of the leading tourism companies in Finland. It is in charge of the slope operations of Ruka ski resort, but it is also operating in accommodation, rental, and store businesses in the resort. The company operates mainly during winter season and hires around 150 people.

This research evaluates how employees experience seasonal work and why they choose to work in seasonal job, and how seasonality influence employee work motivation and work wellbeing. The objective of the research is to understand seasonal employees work motives, and improve their work wellbeing in seasonal employment. Rukakeskus Corporation commissioned this research and it is conducted in Ruka ski resort in spring 2017. The supporting research questions are:

- What motivates people in seasonal job in tourist destination?
- How employees experience seasonal work?
- Which factors in seasonal employment increase or decrease work wellbeing?
- How employer can improve employees' wellbeing at work?

This topic was chosen because of the author's own work background in tourism and seasonal jobs, and interest towards work wellbeing in seasonal employment. In author's own opinion, working life can be very different comparing a seasonal job to a permanent job. There is a lot of studies about work wellbeing in general, but not so much about seasonal work. The commissioning party Rukakeskus Ltd was perfect company for this research, since most of its employees are only working through winter seasons. The author thinks it is important to find out how seasonality influence on work motivation and work wellbeing, since the amount of seasonal employments are increasing while tourism industry is growing.

This thesis starts with an introduction to the topic. After introduction comes the theoretical framework, which is divided in two parts; seasonal work in tourist destination and wellbe-

ing at work. The first part is considering seasonal work, tourism industry in northern Finland, work motivators, employee expectations, and work load. The second part is about work wellbeing and its divisions, and factors which effect on work wellbeing. After theory part comes the empirical part which is introducing the case company Rukakeskus Ltd, research methods and implementation, and results of the research. At the end of the empirical part there is a discussion of improvement suggestions for possible future research of the topic.

This research was made using a qualitative research method, and the data was collected through theme-centered interviews in February 2017. There were seven respondents from different units of Rukakeskus, and they were randomly chosen.

2 Seasonal Work in Tourist Destination

2.1 Tourism industry in northern Finland

Tourism is a way of travelling which aims for pleasure. Tourism is also part of hospitality industry and employs an increasing amount of people. The way it differs from other jobs, is that it combines cultural, economic, and social life together. In addition, while others are on vacation, others work. (Valkonen & Veijola, 2008, 23.)

Tourism industry has an essential impact on total employment in Finland, and it is growing rapidly. There are already 27 000 companies and over 180 000 people working in tourism industry in Finland. Major part of these people are seasonal employees. (TEM, 2016) Still, the seasonal nature of tourism industry with its short and part-time employments, makes it difficult to calculate yearly statistics. As the table below (table 1.) shows, the permanent employees in tourism businesses in Lappland, cover only a bit more than 30% of the whole staff needed during the high season. (Valkonen & Veijola, 2008, 19.)

Table1. Tourism businesses and seasonal employment in Lappland

Type of Employment (289 organisations)	Number of People	% of total labour
Permanent employees	1276	38%
Seasonal employees	2105	62%
Total	3381	100%

Tourism business is in a way return to the past of pre-modern times when forces of nature, in this case seasons, defined the job. Besides seasons, market forces such as tourists and money, are moving people and work. (Valkonen & Veijola, 2008, 28-30.)

Seasons are an advantage for Finland, but natural conditions are slowly changing, while winters get warmer. In tourism industry, especially in Lappland, every year there is a prediction which one comes first, snow or winter tourists. It is predicted that in the future snow will fall many weeks later than usual. At the same time summer season gets longer.

Global megatrends such as climate change, new technology, the aging of the population, and networking need to be considered, since they affect every tourism company.

(Kaksonen, Ojuva & Oallen, 2012, 4-10.)

Climate change will at first hand affect winter tourism destinations, when the snowy season gets shorter. Companies need to adapt the changes and create also services, which are not depended on weather. Especially in Lappland, tourism is a significant industry, since it's one of the few industries in hinterland which is growing. (Kaksonen & al. 2012, 16.)

2.2 Seasonality and employee motivation

Seasonal employment is a short-term contract, which employs only for a certain period of the year and the work tasks are dependent on seasons. Typical seasonal employees are students who work through holiday seasons for example. Major employers for seasonal jobs are for example ski resorts in Lappland during winter and archipelago destinations during summer. (Työ- ja Elinkeinoministeriö, 2014)

Working life has been changing rapidly during the last decades. The old form of work was permanent; people had the same working tasks and working hours through their whole career. Now there is a new form of work, and typical features of it are flexibility, uncertainty, and constant change. Tourism industry is a great example of this new form of work. (Rantala & Hakkarainen, 2014, 34.)

What differs a tourism job from a typical one, is that working time and leisure time have merged, and are not clearly separate. Working days can be long and working times vary, and employees are working while other people are on their vacation. On the other hand, employees in tourism businesses can have their long holidays outside of high seasons while others are living normal life. Also, tourism job rarely feels like normal routine job, what makes it feel more "exotic". Workers in tourism businesses feel like their daily life and holidays are not so far from each other. (Valkonen & Veijola, 2008, 62-63.)

There is a romantic image of tourism businesses and travelling job, which draws people to tourism destinations. Part of the image are entertainment and luxury. Working environment and daily life can consist of fancy hotels and nice restaurants. Also, customers are spreading their "holiday mood" among workers. But, this romantic image might not survive, while seasons are getting longer, the number of tourists get bigger, and training requirements are increasing. (Valkonen & Veijola, 2008, 33-34.)

Work motivates people for different reasons; for some it's a necessary evil, for others source of livelihood, and for some people it can be even mission of life. In 1960's Herman Kahn and Anthony J. Wiener defined six different meanings of work, which Päivi Rauramo pictured later as a pyramid (see figure 3). (Rauramo, 2012, 125.)

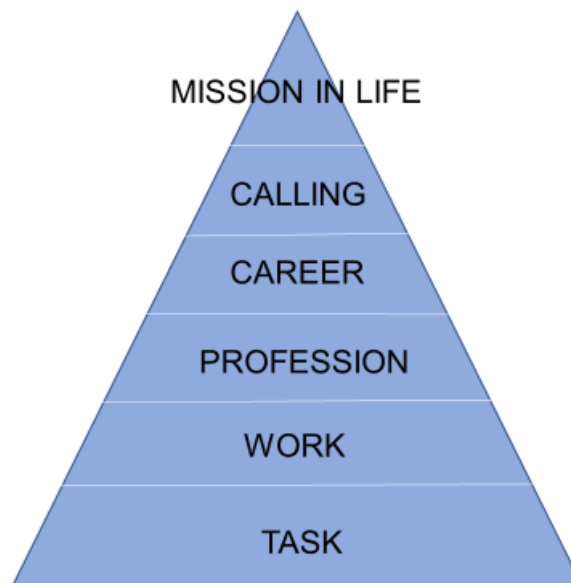


Figure 3. Meaning of work by Rauramo (2012)

1. Job is a task, which disturb daily life. It is a necessary evil, and source of income. The nature of task is usually indifferent, and an extreme form of this can be a crime.
2. Job is work. It can be somehow interesting, especially made done with nice people but the most important thing is livelihood.
3. Job is a profession. This means, a job provides satisfaction, when an employee can use her/his skills, and might have an education for it.
4. Job is a career. A person wants to develop him/her self continuously, and his/her work, and wants to take responsibility.
5. Job is a calling. This includes self-realization, fulfilling one's own inner potential, and serving others. Still nowadays people tend to be more wageworkers.
6. Jos is a mission in life. A person is totally dedicated to his/her job, and believes he/she has an impact on society. Sometimes a religious belief can be related to this.

(Rauramo, 2012, 125-126.)

Work is an essential part of human life and a source of wellbeing. Work ensures the livelihood, work brings rhythm in life, social relationships, and pleasant things to do. On the other hand, private life reflects in the work. Meaningful work is very subjective experience and topic, and work environment and working conditions influence how it will form. (Rauramo, 2012, 126.)

2.3 Employee expectations

Tourism industry is defined by seasons and employments are usually part-time or fixed-time contracts. Many employees in tourism businesses live with uncertainty with their jobs. It is also typical for tourism work that the work place and working time are uncertain; during high season people work overtime and days off can turn out to be working days after all. To be able to adapt this uncertainty, an employee must be flexible and adaptable. (Rantala & Hakkarainen, 2014, 40.)

While the new way of flexibility in work has given people more freedom, the same time it ties people up to the organisation in a different way than before. There is no clear line between working time and leisure anymore. Workers are expected to adapt easily, and tolerate fast changing conditions

Tourism industry workers are expected to be multidisciplinary skilled, which also describes the nature of the industry. Employees need to have trainings through the career, and get more know-how even outside of working hours. Workers are also expected to cope with different tasks besides of their own expertise. These expectations are usually set by an employer, but also by customers. (Rantala & Hakkarainen, 2014, 34.)

In tourism industry, the personality of an employee and his/her characteristics are important besides knowledge. One need to be open, social, brisk, and cooperative. In addition, employee need to have language skills, and she/he must be a fast learner, and service-oriented. (Rantala & Hakkarainen, 2014, 35.)

Tourism is part of the hospitality industry, and customers are expecting great customer service. Customers with their hopes, needs, and expectations are defining the customer service situations. It is difficult to know the requirements of great customer service in advance, since every customer has her/his individual needs. This requires an employee to be good at reading people. (Rantala & Hakkarainen, 2014, 38.)

2.4 Job orientation

Job orientation is a process which introduces employees to their new work. It is making sure that an employee has safe and right ways to work in his/her working environment and work community. The process also clarifies the working tasks, use of working tools, and prepares an employee for exceptional situations. Job orientation includes also workplace rules and policies, risk management, and anticipating too heavy work load. A committed and professional employee wants to take responsibility of his/her know-how at work. (Työturvallisuuskeskus)

Job orientation belongs to each staff department, as well as to summer employees, agency workers, and to other seasonal employees. Job orientation is needed for example when the job is new for an employee, work tasks change, working conditions change, work is done infrequently, or there is a work accident. (Työturvallisuuskeskus)

Job familiarization is an important part of risk management and prevention. Also, work ergonomics assessment is essential so an employee knows the healthy ways to work. Besides physical risks, there are mental and social risks as well, which can be prevented through job orientation. These kinds of risks can be for example discrimination or violence at work. Workplace rules are important to clarify for the newcomers. Law of Finland also requires that employee must have guidance and orientation to his/her work. (Työturvallisuuskeskus; Työturvallisuuslaki 2002/738 14 §)

2.5 Psychosocial workload and stress

Today's working life is changing rapidly. Organization structures and employment models have changed, and the demand on workers have increased. Even though contents of work have become more wide and diverse, it doesn't mean better wellbeing. (Jänkälä, Kangastie, Rahkola, Tekoniemi-Selkälä & Tolvanen, 2010, 16.)

In many positions workers feel, work load has increased, and they need to cope with less people at work. Also, uncertainty and unpredictability in working life have increased through globalization. More and more people feel insecure with the stability of their job.

People work more overtime without compensation. When workers are pushed to reach high-quality results in limited time and limited resources, it might lead to a burnout. (Jänkäälä & al. 2010, 16.)

Since working life has changed during the last decades, psychosocial workload has become more common. Besides of concentrating on technical and functional work environment, there must be a focus on psychosocial work environment as well. Psychosocial work environment includes work arrangements, management, teamwork, communication, and individual behaviour in work community. Psychological and social factors influence psychosocial workload.

Psychical factors are individual and they are for example;

- too small or too big amount of work
- the pace of work
- unclear goals and responsibilities
- possibility to influence the amount of work and pace of work
- interruptions and disturbance
- self-development at work
- feedback and assessment

Social factors that depends on communication are for example;

- working alone
- missing support of colleagues or a supervisor
- inoperative teamwork
- discrimination
- lack of communication
- conflicts

(Työsuojelu; Rauramo, 2012, 54-55.)

Well organized work feels pleasant and is still challenging enough. A person can learn new things and develop. Also, relationship between an employer and an employee should be healthy. Psychosocial wellbeing at work can be improved by giving people possibility to influence and manage their own work. It is also important to have enough breaks at work,

and work itself should be versatile. These are some ways to prevent fatigue and too heavy psychosocial workload. (Rauramo, 2012, 55.)

3 Wellbeing at work

3.1 Definition of work wellbeing

The definition of work wellbeing was formed in the beginning of 21st century, even though the content of the subject is older. Organizations have always thought about the wellbeing of their staff in one way or another in order, to make more profit. This core idea is still the same. (Kauhanen, 2016, 22.)

Työterveyslaitos (2009) is defining work wellbeing as a combination of pleasant, productive, safe, and healthy work. A good management in an organization is part of the work wellbeing, as well as professionalism of the employees. Pleasant and rewarding work supports also life management in general.

The Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions SAK defines a healthy organization is both productive and comfortable. Employees in wellbeing organization are committed, and happy for their job, and there are less sick leaves, absence from work, work accidents, and turnover. Also, relationships between personnel and management are good. SAK describes the following factors as part of the healthy work community;

- Safety at work
- Meaningful work
- Suitable work load
- Professionalism
- Cooperation
- Social relationships

(Kehusmaa, 2011, 23-24.)

Wellbeing at work influence company success, company reputation, and competitiveness. Many researches show that, wellbeing at work is linked with productivity, profit, customer satisfaction, less amount of sick leaves, and rarely changing staff. (Työterveyslaitos)

3.2 Divisions of work wellbeing

There are diverse factors which effect work wellbeing. These factors can be related to the individual and life conditions, or to the organization (see figure 1.) The starting point is the individual itself, the mental and the physical health. Genes, life and working conditions,

values, attitude, know-how, health, and motivation in different stages of life, are all effecting on health of an individual. (Kauhanen, 2016, 28-29.)

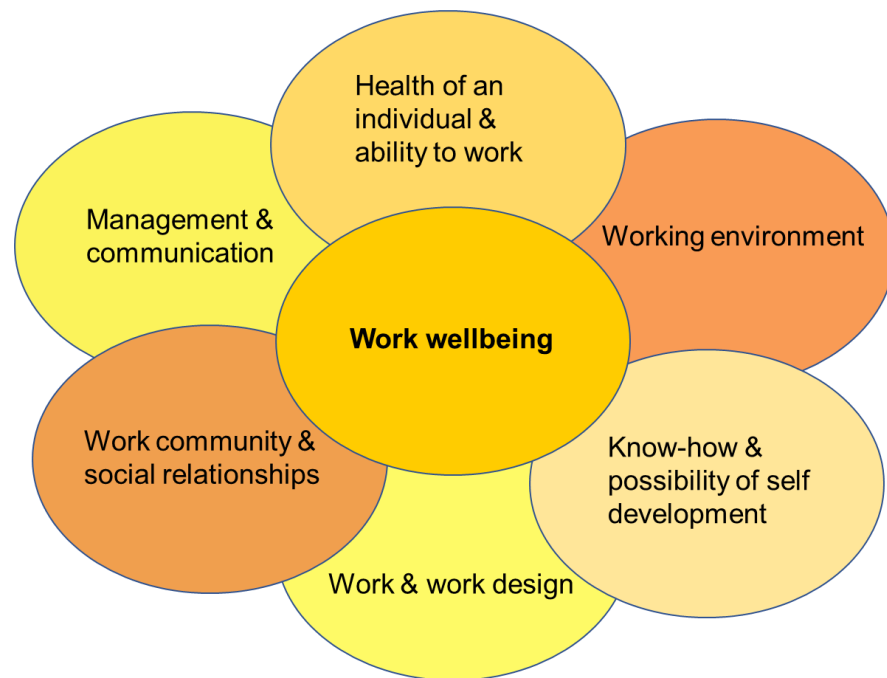


Figure 1. Divisions of work wellbeing

Besides the individual, there are some organizational factors which effect work wellbeing:

- Management
- Employment relationship
- Work content
- Rewarding system
- Work environment and working conditions
- Working hours
- Internal communication
- Colleagues and equality
- Know-how and expertise
- Possibility of self-development

(Kauhanen, 2016, 29.)

Still today when talking about wellbeing at work, people are referring to old psychological theory of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (figure 2.) which was published already in 1940's. It is often represented as a pyramid, which includes five tiers of human needs;

1. Psychological needs
2. Safety needs
3. Belongingness and love needs
4. Esteem needs
5. Self-actualization

(Mc Leod, 2016)

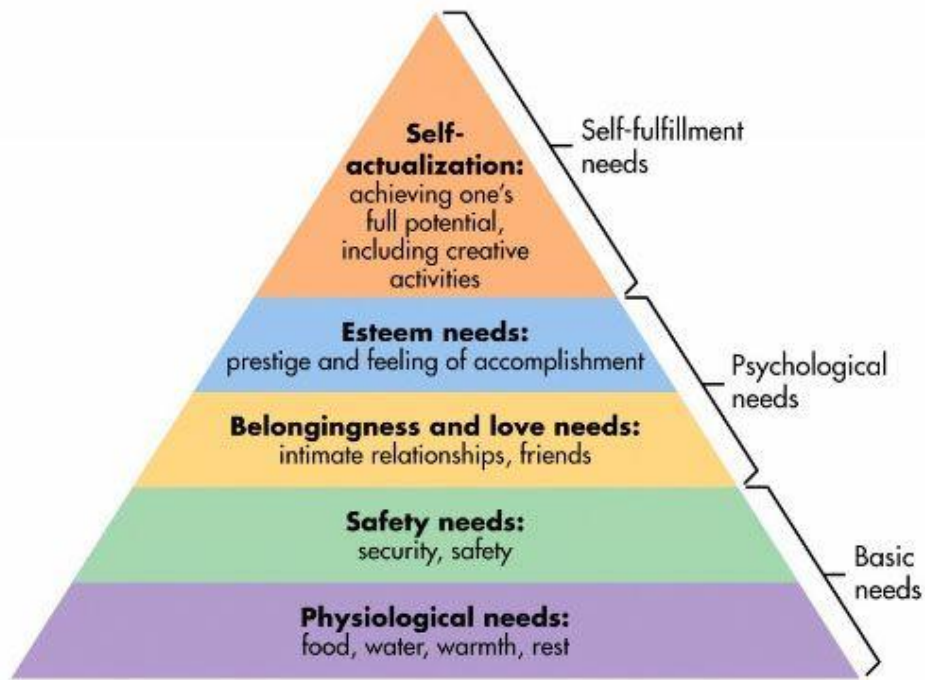


Figure 2. Maslow's hierarchy of needs

Maslow (1943) stated that people are motivated to achieve certain needs, and that some needs take precedence over others. Our most basic need is for physical survival, and this will be the first thing that motivates our behaviour. Once that level is fulfilled the next level up is what motivates us, and so on. (Mc Leod, 2016)

Maslow's hierarchy is many times criticized, due to the fact, that a person must fulfil the needs of the lower steps before moving on to the higher steps. Still, needs of one specific step might be emphasized in different situations. For example, the flow experience in work effect in a way that a person forgets to fulfil the basis needs such as hunger. (Kehusmaa, 2011, 16-17.)

From the basis of the Maslow's hierarchy Päivi Rauramo has created a new model; stairs of work wellbeing (Figure 3.) which is suitable for today. Rauramo's model is taking into

consideration both individual level and organizational level. The model is about basic human needs in relation to work, and how these needs affect work motivation. On each step, it has information and aspects about work wellbeing from the individual's point of view as well as from the organization's point of view. The five steps are; health, safety, community, valuation, and know-how. (Rauramo, 2012, 13.)

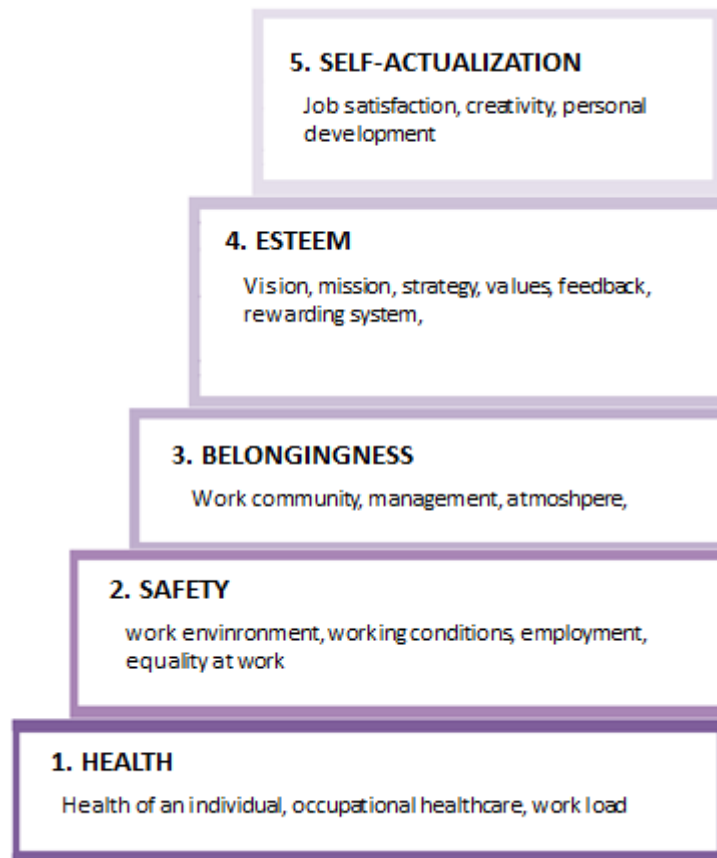


Figure 3. Stairs of work wellbeing by Rauramo (2012)

The first step is about psychophysiological needs. On the individual level, it means healthy lifestyle, including exercise, nutrition, sleep, rest, etc. On the organizational level, it means that the workload is suited for an employee, and he/she can have enough free time. Organization is also responsible for occupational health care. (Rauramo, 2012, 25-67.)

The second step of safety is about safe work environment. Organization provides safe work procedures and equipment, livelihood, employment stability, and equal treatment of everyone in organization. Risk management and occupational safety are also part of the organization's responsibility. Individual itself is responsible to follow the rules and safe work procedures. (Rauramo, 2012, 69-102.)

Community step, number three, include all the factors which aim to fulfil the need of belongingness. Organization is taking care of good management and creating a pleasant working atmosphere. Trust, support, and openness are essential factors what comes to relationships at work. Organization should support team spirit and togetherness in a company. Everyone in a company is partly responsible for creating a pleasant working atmosphere. (Rauramo, 2012, 103-121.)

Step four is esteem and includes organization's vision, mission, ethics, and values. Also, rewarding system and feedback are part of esteem in a company. Mutual valuation towards everyone's work is important. People have a natural need of high self-esteem and self-respect. The valuation of others should be part of the everyday work life in an organization. (Rauramo, 2012, 123-143.)

The fifth and the last step fulfils the need of self-realization. On individual level, it's about creativity, managing one's own job, and work satisfaction. It's about willingness to develop one self and create new. On organizational level, this level is about giving this freedom to employees in order a company to develop. This way company will be more competitive. (Rauramo, 2012, 146-169.)

Stairs of wellbeing model has been created to find key factors and models, which affect wellbeing at work. This model is a tool, which is helping to understand the big picture of work wellbeing, and supports the improvement processes. (Rauramo, 2012, 13-14.)

These motivational factors need to be applied, according to the situation and working environment. Wellbeing and motivation in general are so diverse topics, that there are also other factors than needs which effect on them. For example, personal values and personality itself have strong impact on wellbeing. (Rauramo, 2012, 170.)

In conclusion, in wellbeing organization people work together, they trust and support each other. Giving positive feedback to each other is essential, thus people are not afraid of bringing up the negative things as well. The workload shouldn't be too heavy either. Healthy employee feels he/she is important. The job itself should feel exciting and rewarding. The work tasks should be designed so that the employee can use his/her strengths and knowledge, and knows his/her goals and expectations. There should be not only the feeling of belongingness, but also enough independency. Healthy employee is committed to his/her work and wants to take responsibility. (Työterveyslaitos)

3.3 Investment in work wellbeing

Every organization have improvement areas, and more and more companies have chosen to focus on wellbeing. Some of them simply have a pursue of humanity, when others hope to make more direct or indirect profit. Some companies are aiming to both. Studies show that investing in work wellbeing reduces staff costs; number of sick leaves, premature retirement, and accidents at work decreases. In addition, investing in wellbeing at work will improve job satisfaction and staff will stay longer in a company. Finally, this will affect company productivity. (Kauhanen, 2016, 63.)

Personnel benefits are one way to improve work wellbeing and job satisfaction. Benefits might also help to connect working life and leisure. These benefits can be material or immaterial. Most organizations focus on the financial and material benefits, while immaterial benefits are also important. Personnel benefits might include very different things in different companies, but three main functions are occupational health care, workplace physical activities, recreational and cultural activities, and staff training. The staff often take these personnel benefits for granted, and don't always appreciate them so much. (Kehusmaa, 2011, 199-2016; Kauhanen, 2016, 17-35.)

Since 1978 employers have had an obligation to provide preventive occupational health care for their employees. Together the employer and the health care service provider design the content and the procedures of the occupational health care, suitable for the specific organization and its needs. (Kela 2016; Kauhanen, 2016, 35-28.)

“The purpose of occupational health care is to prevent work-related illnesses and accidents. It is also intended to promote employees' work capacity and functioning and to help the workplace to function more effectively.” (Kela, 2016)

Employer can encourage staff to take care of their wellbeing by giving vouchers for physical, recreational, or cultural activities. Motivation of taking care of oneself increases, when one can decide him/her self how to use these vouchers. (Smartum, 2016)

Exercise vouchers have been tax-free employee benefit since 2004. After the popularity of exercise vouchers, arouse the interest towards mental health as well. Soon after the cultural vouchers became also tax-free. (Smartum, 2016)

Many organizations are focusing too much on financial benefits and rewards, and can't see the big picture of rewarding system. Besides of material rewards, organizations should focus on immaterial rewarding such as;

- respect and feedback at work
- training and opportunity to develop
- opportunity to influence and involvement
- working time arrangements and flexibility

(Kehusmaa, 2011, 199-201.)

4 Case - Rukakeskus Corporation

4.1 Rukakeskus Ltd

The case company Rukakeskus Ltd and Pyhätunturi Ltd are part of the family business owned by Aho family. The Aho family has ran both of the resorts for many decades already. Juhani Aho started the business in 1973, and later on the ownership was divided with his children. Aho family also owns the medical center Lääkärikeskus Aava. Together these tourism and health care companies are known as Aho Group. This research is focusing on Rukakeskus Ltd, which is one of the leading tourism company and a market leader in ski resort businesses in Finland.

Slope operations is the core product of Rukakeskus, but during summer there are also other activities around Kuusamo area such as hiking, fishing, rafting, etc. Due to company's seasonal character, the number of employees vary a lot. Most of the staff is hired only for winter season, when almost 70 people are working permanently. During winter season, there are almost 200 employees together. Average age of the permanent employees is 44,6 years, when seasonal employees average age is 32,9. In addition, more than 50% of the seasonal employees are younger than 30 years.

There are different units inside the company; management unit, ICT unit, digital services and marketing, sales service Rukabooking, slope operations, property maintenance, Ruka info, Ski school, rental shops and ski passes sales, and Rukastore. They also cooperate with restaurant and accommodation businesses around the Ruka region.

The core idea of the whole company is passion for skiing. Other company values are happy customer service, willingness to develop and being a visionary, and finally collaboration. This season there are four strategic goals;

- the strongest ski resort brand in Finland
- the most snow-sure ski resort in Europe
- the most profitable ski resort in Finland
- the best for families

(Rukakeskus, 2016, Tervetuloa joukkoon - Opas talon tapoihin 2016-2017)

4.2 Work wellbeing and benefits of Rukakeskus

Competent and healthy staff is the most important asset for the company. Therefore, the company is focusing on recruitment processes and job orientation. It is important that everyone in a company knows about the operating model. All the newcomers need to attend in Ruka-Kuusamo region orientation, but it is also recommended for everyone else to attend in every three years.

In the latest years, there has been a goal to develop ways to support staff work wellbeing and working ability in everyday life through their whole career. In addition, the company aims to reduce the amount of sick leaves and work related illness. Besides of occupational health care in Terveystalo and accident insurance the employees have also insurance for leisure time.

Safety and health at work is also important for Rukakeskus. The responsibility of safety is for both employers and employees. Employers have the functional and financial responsibility, when each employee is also responsible for taking care of his/her own health and safety. Accident and risk prevention is made by writing down also all the accidents that might have happened. The idea is to notice the risks and dangers, and try preventing them to happen. Rukakeskus also follows the program of Savuton Työpaikka Työaikana, which means smoking is not allowed while working. This aims to improve health and safety of the staff.

Internal communication is important for staff to stay up to date about the company and region matters. Different channels for sharing the information are; Intranet, Talon Tavat - book for all the employees, info days, regular meetings, handouts, etc. The company has also positive attitude towards training, and is ready to arrange some additional training for an employee if needed.

The staff of Rukakeskus has different kinds of employee benefits. Since there are permanent, seasonal, short time employees and trainees, the benefits also vary. Ski passes are always for free at least during the employment, and ski school has reduced prices for the staff. There are also ski passes together with other ski resorts which the staff can use when visiting other ski resorts. Equipment rental is for free.

Each person of the staff gets a staff card which gives many discounts around the Ruka ski resort area, such as restaurants, accommodation, and other services. One can also carry

out Ruka Tentti -test, which gives more discounts when passed. The company also gives out exercise and cultural vouchers, which the staff can use for all kinds of wellbeing services.

All in all, Rukakeskus value its staff, and takes care of everyone's wellbeing. Every season there are also new ideas tested to improve and maintain work wellbeing. Each team and unit is maintaining their own team spirit, while there are some activities together with the whole staff. (Rukakeskus, 2016, Tervetuloa joukkoon - Opas talon tapoihin 2016-2017)

5 Research Project

5.1 Research method and implementation

The objective of the research is to improve and maintain employees' work motivation and work wellbeing in seasonal work in Rukakeskus Ltd. The research aims to discover what motivates people to work in seasonal job in Ruka ski resort, how they experience their seasonal job, and find factors in seasonal employment that influence employees' work wellbeing. The goal is better understanding of employees and their motives, and find new ideas to improve and maintain their wellbeing at work. The research questions are:

- What motivates people in seasonal job in tourist destination?
- How employees experience seasonal work?
- Which factors in seasonal employment increase or decrease work wellbeing?
- How employer can improve employees' wellbeing at work?

There are different research interview techniques, and one of them is a theme-centered interview. In this kind of interview method, the theme areas of the topic are considered in advance. Theme questions are often opened through supporting questions, which help the interviewer to bring up the important aspects of the topic. The interview situation is supposed to be like a conversation, when the interview is progressing flexibly from one theme to another. This way interview structures can be different comparing to each other. This also requires an interviewer to be familiar with the topic. (Rantala & Hakkarainen, 2014, 24.)

The research was made using a qualitative method, and the information were collected through theme-centered interviews (Appendix 1). This was the best way to understand the phenomenon how employees experience their work itself and work wellbeing, and get detailed information when every interview can be suited for each person. There were two main themes in interviews, which are also linked to each other, and cannot be considered totally separate. The themes are;

1. seasonal work and employee motivation
2. wellbeing factors in seasonal job

Both themes were supported by around ten supporting questions around the theme. The first part consisted of the meaning of work and motivators to work, employee's own expectations and the expectations against an employee, job orientation, and work content such

as working times and work load. The first theme aims to find out how employees experience seasonal job in general and what motivates them to work in seasonal job.

The second part of work wellbeing factors was formed using the model Stairs of work wellbeing by Rauramo (2012). The supporting questions were created from the basis of these five steps of the stairway model, which was introduced earlier in the theory part. The steps included factors about health, safety, belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization, which all have an influence on work wellbeing. The model was helping to categorize different parts in work wellbeing. In the end of the interview there was a question of improvement ideas in general in work wellbeing.

The interviews were carried out with different seasonal employees from different units of Rukakeskus Ltd. The author wanted to interview people who are working with different tasks, and find out if there are common themes in seasonal work regardless of the job.

Interviewees were randomly picked by asking around and reached through Facebook. Among the group there were both men and women of different ages between 26 and 35 years. What was in common with all the interviewees, they were all working only through winter season/seasons. There were in total seven interviews and they were all done individually, to get personal and honest opinions about the topic. Interviews were conducted in February 2017, and outside of working hours.

6 Research results

This part is considering the results of the research. There were two main themes; work itself and employee motivation in seasonal job, and wellbeing factors in seasonal job.

6.1 Seasonal work itself and employee motivation

6.1.1 Employee motivation

No matter what was the job, all interviewees answered that the motivator to work in seasonal job in Rukakeskus was a hobby, in this case skiing or snowboarding. That is why it was natural to have a seasonal job, since the ski industry in Finland is operating only through winters. For some of them the hobby seemed to be the only reason for working, but most of them enjoyed the work itself. Anyhow, most of the jobs are closely linked to skiing or snowboarding itself, such as jobs like ski instructor, slope employee, etc. Even though all the interviewees said the hobby was the motivation and passion behind the job, there were many people who complained about employees who are not sharing the same interest. They said there are surprisingly many employees in the company, who are doing it just for the money.

6.1.2 Employee expectations

The expectations towards seasonal job varied a lot. Some of the interviewees applied a job having no expectations at all, they just expected to do some snow sports while working or on free time. Some of them expected to have an easy and relaxed job in a holiday destination, where not only customers have the holiday mood but also the employees. And, some expected to have irregular working hours depending on high and low seasons. They expected to have a lot of work at high season and less when its low season.

The interviewees also felt that seasonality has an influence on the expectations the employer or manager have towards them. Because of the unsteady nature of seasonal job, all the employees answered that they were expected to be very flexible with working times. But, many of them expected flexibility from the management as well. Also, extremely great customer service was expected since the customers are on their vacation. Some of the interviewees said they need to adapt fast to changing conditions and be always ready to possible changes.

6.1.3 Job orientation

Most of the interviewees said they had an insufficient job orientation or almost no orientation at all in the beginning of the season. The people described that the orientation is mostly focusing on the company facts and not enough on the actual working tasks. Still, managers were expecting fast learning in short time. And, in the beginning of a new season the old employees were expected to already know the job.

6.1.4 Work load

The interviews showed the biggest factor which caused negative work load in seasonal job was working times. They seemed to cause different stress to different people. Some of them were complaining about the lack of free time; there were too much work, or too little work, poorly designed working schedules, calling to work on free time etc. This was causing for some too little time to rest, or do their own things.

6.2 Work wellbeing factors

6.2.1 Factors which improve work wellbeing

As already said above, all the interviewees said they applied the job because of the hobby behind it. The fact that the job does not necessarily feel like a job increase work wellbeing. Some said that it feels almost like you are on vacation for half a year even though you are working. And, even if one couldn't ski or snowboard while working, it was still possible outside working hours, which made employees happy.

Some of the interviewees answered that seasonal job in this kind of destination, ties employees more tight together, when the working days are long and people spend more time together during their free time as well. All the interviewees mentioned the importance of good working atmosphere and team spirit. They said it is also important to spend time with colleagues outside of working hours as well. They mentioned recreation days and other get-togethers as part of the work wellbeing. In addition, meetings at work were mentioned being one factor improving work wellbeing.

One of the improving factor in work wellbeing in seasonality was the freedom; employees are working for a half of the year and the other half they can do whatever they want. Some

of them said they are only on holiday for the rest of the year, and some are doing a totally different job. Most of the interviewees said it is nice to change places and see the world, and there is no worry to get stuck in routines.

6.2.2 Factors which decrease work wellbeing

What comes to health on an individual, some of them said that seasonality has an influence on it. They said when it's a busy high season there is more consumption of coffee and nicotine, and less sleep. Also, physical stress is getting higher during high season. Still, most of the people answered that is up to each person how he/she is maintaining his/her health, and it is not depending on seasonality.

In seasonal job, there can be a lot of turnover in staff, and this seemed to cause some conflicts. Some said there are often hired wrong people with no interest towards the job. This of course causes conflicts since some of the employees the job is a passion and they take the job very seriously and some are just working for money. This is not only causing a bad working atmosphere, but also making job orientation harder.

But, newcomers or seasonal workers are not the only reason for conflicts at work. Many interviewees said that the problem is more often the permanent staff and the management which is not motivated enough. It seems like they are the ones spreading bad atmosphere also among the seasonal employees. Respondents said the permanent staff are tired to train newcomers, and are not always giving enough information to people who would like to have it. There seems to be a lot of hidden information inside the company which is decreasing employees work wellbeing. Also, people were quite unhappy with management in general; employees felt they are not heard enough, and there is no proper feedback from management. All the good feedback comes from customers.

What is decreasing work wellbeing in seasonal job is also the fact that career progression inside the company is almost impossible. There was only one person who answered he was hoping for a permanent position in the future. The rest were felt it was almost impossible to get a permanent job inside Rukakeskus. Still, all the employees wanted to develop in their work and become more professional, and they were sad that the company didn't offer more trainings.

6.3 Improvement ideas for better employee motivation and work wellbeing

Even though all the interviewees had different working tasks, the improvement ideas were very similar. First, people wished for better recruitment process. The company should hire people who have at least interest towards skiing or snowboarding, and even better if they have any experience on that area. This way the newcomers would naturally have the right motivation towards the job.

Better recruitment process would also help to improve working atmosphere, if employees share same interests and hobbies. However, interviewees wanted especially management to improve their own attitude to achieve better working atmosphere for everyone.

Job orientation was one of the hoped improvement areas. For many respondents felt it was too fast, and impractical. They said the focus should be on doing working tasks in practice and at slower pace. Some also wished for going through more special situations, so that they won't be total surprises. Employees also wished for better patience from the management, so they are not expecting too much too fast.

One of the improvement areas was about sharing the knowledge in the company. Many were unsatisfied for the fact that information is not available for everyone, or it is not equally shared, and managers are keeping the knowledge by themselves so no one could threaten their job. Most of the employees felt like they wanted to self-develop and become more professional, but not having a chance for it. They hoped more trainings, and simply sharing know-how for those who want to learn. Those who worked with snow sport equipment, hoped for more equipment trainings to be even more aware of what they sell or rent.

Almost all respondents mentioned that they would be happier if they could have more control over their own work. Especially working hours and working schedule were things people wanted to affect. They hoped management would hear everyone's wishes personally. For example, some wanted to have two days off in a row, not just one to have enough rest. And, some wanted to work more when there is busy, and have holidays when there is not so much work.

Those who had physical job, hoped for appointment with physiotherapist to maintain and improve their personal physical health.

7 Discussion

7.1 Conclusions and research results

This bachelor thesis was evaluating the nature of seasonal employment, and how it influences on work motivation and work wellbeing. The objective of the research was to improve employees' work motivation and work wellbeing in Rukakeskus Ltd. The supporting questions were;

- What motivates people in seasonal job in tourist destination?
- How employees experience seasonal work?
- Which factors in seasonal employment increase or decrease work wellbeing?
- How employer can improve employees' wellbeing at work?

When analysing the results, the author wanted to find possible similarities in answers regarding to seasonality. The author was interested if there are some common factors affecting to work motivation and work wellbeing, even though employees were working in different work tasks. The answers and results were also compared with Rukakeskus company's description about work and work wellbeing, to get more honest picture how employees experience their motivation and work wellbeing in seasonal destination. Goal was to find out what can be done better or differently.

First, there were surprisingly similar answers between different people. What comes to work motivation, all seven respondents answered that the main work motivator was a hobby, skiing or snowboarding. This was not a surprise when Rukakeskus itself is describing the same passion as a core value in the company. Besides that, the motivator was a feeling of freedom, when one is hired only for a half of the year, and rest is either holiday or some other job.

What was surprising was that many were wondering why the company is hiring people who don't share the same interest. Still the company is saying that they focus on recruitment process. One improvement step would be hiring the right people into the company, who share the interest towards snow sports and naturally have the right motivation towards the job.

When talking about the seasonal job, there is a new start in the beginning of every season. There are newcomers, employees from previous seasons, and permanent staff. This

is a challenge what comes to learning process and job orientation. The company is describing they are focusing on job orientation to train competent staff. Many respondents said that the job orientation was great what comes to company details, but incomplete concerning one's own working tasks, especially in practice. Job orientation could be improved by considering the company details more generally, and focus more on individuals and their work tasks and roles. This might also help for the feeling that employees are expected to learn everything in short time. Also, giving more time for trainers to orientate newcomers would reduce trainers and employees' stress.

Seasonal employees are often expected to learn fast but they are also expected to be extremely flexible, especially with working times. Interviewees were mostly aware of this, and they were ready to work more when it's high season and less when there is not that much work. Still, many of them wished for more control over their work and shifts. The flexibility should be both sided, when an employee is flexible to work almost whenever, a manager should listen more to his/her wishes.

Even though internal communication is important for Rukakeskus staff, respondents felt like there is still a lack of getting enough information. The interview results showed that many employees felt like they are not getting the information they need. In addition, if they wanted to have some extra information or knowledge it was hard to get. There was a feeling of concealing the knowledge, maybe because of the short employment. Equal and shared knowledge and information is important in competitive company, even when employees are staying only for certain period.

What was good, all the felt that the company is supporting team spirit and togetherness. People were happy for the recreation days and other get-togethers. Still, most of these social events happen only inside units, not with the whole Rukaskus staff. That is why it is even more important to maintain and improve working atmosphere inside these units. Many respondents were hoping for better working attitude among permanent staff and the management, since they are affecting the whole unit.

One problem which occurred in interviews was poor chances to make a career inside Rukakeskus. That is understandable since Rukakeskus operates mainly during winter season, and doesn't have so many permanent positions available. Still, company could offer its employees a chance to develop and get more professionalism. Respondents were hoping more trainings and possibilities to get better in their jobs.

All in all, what drives people to work in seasonal destination is passion for skiing or snowboarding and the feeling of freedom. Seasonal employees are also expected similar abilities, such as flexibility and great customer service. In return, employees are expecting flexibility and self-management from the employer as well. The main factor which increases work wellbeing among seasonal employees was social events and colleagues. The main factor which decreases work wellbeing was a lack of information and know-how, and narrow job orientation. Conflicts between the staff were also mentioned. So, the main improvement areas for the employer were;

- better recruitment of new employees
- more practical job orientation
- more open communication and sharing of know-how
- employees' self-management

7.2 Proposition for future research

There are many studies about work motivation and work wellbeing in general, but there should be more research focusing on seasonal and part time jobs. This is because working life and definition of work is changing. In Finland, there are four seasons which means there has always been and will be more seasonal jobs, especially in tourism industry which is growing. Therefore, it is important in the future to focus on the factors due to seasonality which influence wellbeing.

This research was an overview to the factors which influence work motivation and work wellbeing between seasonal employees in Rukakeskus in general. In the future, the research could be more targeted to a specific group to get more detailed information. One group could be also managers and their experiences and point of views, since almost all the studies are made from employee point of view.

Interviewing employees was the best method to get information, and people were really excited about the topic. Also, wellbeing is a trend nowadays, and people are really interested about it. Since people are more and more aware of their own wellbeing, it is important for managers to focus on employees' wellbeing at work.

This study applies to other seasonal jobs as well, but especially in ski resorts. This kind of study could be made to different kind of seasonal jobs as well.

7.3 Evaluation of the thesis process

The thesis process started in December 2016 when the author got the idea of the topic. The idea of doing a research of work wellbeing in seasonal employment aroused from the author's own work background. The author had many years worked in seasonal jobs in tourism industry. She felt like it was whole different working life, and it would be interesting to study more. The same time she got an idea to spend winter in Ruka ski resort in northern Finland, which was also a perfect place to do the research. The first idea was to conclude the whole Ruka ski resort area into the study.

During December, the author created the thesis outline and waited comments until the end of Christmas holidays. During holidays the author got an offer for a new job, which was about to begin in the end of March. This fact formed the time schedule for the whole process, and the deadline was set in the end of March 2017.

Finally, in the middle of January 2017 there came an idea of choosing just one company for the research. Choosing Rukakeskus for this research was an obvious choice since it is a big company responsible for all the ski operations in Rukakeskus, and in this case, hires a lot of employees only for winter season. Rukakeskus was willing to join the study to improve wellbeing in a company.

It took some time to get a thesis supervisor, and the author was struggling with the theory part. The author was surprised how wide the topic of work wellbeing was and it was time to time really frustrating to form a clear theory part. At the same time author was stressing about the time limit and deadline, since there was not too much time.

In the end of January, the author finally got her thesis supervisor and got help with defining the topic more clearly. The idea of diving the topic into two themes; work itself and work wellbeing factors were formed. There was still another fact causing stress, becoming winter holidays in the middle of February. There was only a couple week before holiday rush, and during those weeks the interviews were had to be done.

Luckily, the author already had in mind the employees she wanted to interview, and the interview base was formed quite fast from the basis of the theory part. The time-consuming parts were setting up the interview times, interviewing itself, and transcription of the interviews.

However, interviews were successful and the author got the answers she was looking for, and it wasn't hard to find interviewees either. The empirical part was easier to write, since it was interesting to analyse the interview results. The author was also happy to find what she was looking for.

The process in general was a great learning process for the author. She learned how important the well-made literature search and theory part is, before making the actual interviews. Time to time the process was frustrating, and defining the topic was difficult. The author doesn't enjoy writing, while she loves reading and talking with people. This fact became even more clear during the process; making the theory part was difficult and making the empirical part was pleasant.

What comes to authors own work wellbeing, she realized how difficult it was sometimes to motivate herself to write when she was in holiday resort. Separating working time and free time was a challenge. Also, the author realized that working alone is not for her. To her mind, this thesis process would have been better made with a support of a student colleague.

If the author could do this process again, she would do it in pair, and the topic would be more clearly defined already from the beginning of the process. Still, the author was happy for the results of the research, and she is sure they will also help Rukakeskus to maintain and improve employee wellbeing in the company.

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Appendices

Interview layout

Miten kausiluontoisuus vaikuttaa työn merkityksellisyyteen ja työhyvinvointiin Ruokakeskuksen työntekijöillä?

TEEMA 1. Itse työ/ työn merkitys (kausityö ja matkailukohde)

Työn merkitys ja motivaatio:

1. Miksi valitsit kausiluontoisen työn? (motiivit; työ itsessään vai ulkopuoliset asiat, mikä tärkeää)
2. Kuinka mones kausi tämä on sinulle? Miksi palasit?
3. Miten kausityö vaikuttaa työmotivaatioosi?

Työntekijän omat ja häneen kohdistetut odotukset:

4. Minkälaiset odotukset sinulla oli kausiluontoista työtä kohtaan?
5. Kuinka työ on vastannut odotuksiasi?
6. Mitä sinulta odotetaan kausityössä? (nopea oppiminen, joustavuus, stressinsietokyky, etc.?)

Työhön perehdytys ja työn aloitus:

7. Kuvaile työhön perehdytystäsi kausityössä? (ensimmäinen kausi/ seuraava kausi)
8. Miten työhön perehdytys vaikutti työssä viihtyvyyteen? (auttoiko se, olisiko pitänyt olla kattavampi etc.)

Työajat ja työn kuormitus:

9. Kuvaile työaikojasi.
10. Kuinka koet työn ja vapaa-ajan erottumisen kausityössä?
11. Minkälaista kuormitusta tai stressiä koet kausiluontoisessa työssäsi? (työn sisältö, olosuhteet, työyhteisö)

TEEMA 2. Työhyvinvoinnin tekijät

Terveys:

12. Kuvaile kausityön vaikutuksia terveyteesi ja elintapoihisi? (fyysinen, psyykkinen, sosiaalinen; uni, lepo, liikunta, ravinto, alkoholinkäyttö, juhliminen jne.)

Turvallisuus:

13. Miten kausityö vaikuttaa turvallisuuden tunteeseen? (työsuhteen ja toimeentuloon liittyvä turvattomuus, muutosmyllerrys etc.)

Yhteisöllisyys:

14. Miten kausiluontoisuus ja henkilöstön vaihtuvuus vaikuttavat työilmapiiriin?

15. Minkälaisia ristiriitoja kausiluontoisuus mielestäsi aiheuttaa työpaikallasi?

16. Miten mielestäsi yhteishenkeä tuetaan kausiluontoisessa työssäsi? (virkistyspäivät, kokoukset, työpaikkaliikunta etc.)

Arvostus:

17. Kuvaile arvostuksen tunnetta kausiluontoisessa työssäsi? (palautteen anto, kehityskeskustelut, palkitseminen)

Osaaminen:

18. Onko sinulla halua edistää osaamistasi ja kehittyä tässä työssä? (työssä oppiminen, koulutus, omaehtoinen kehittäminen)

19. Miten koet työn kausiluontoisuuden vaikuttavan etenemismahdollisuuksiisi?

Kehitysehdotukset:

20. Miten itse kehittäisit työhyvinvointia?