Development Plan for European Sport Services Ltd.

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European Sport Services OY (ESS) on ollut NHL Central Scoutingille tärkeä informaation lähde vuodesta 1983. ESS:n tärkein tehtävä on raportoida NHL:lle ja palvella sen 30 seuraa Euroopan eri maissa pelaavista nuorista jääkiekkokyvyistä. Viimeisten vuosien aikana on toteutettu merkittäviä muutoksia palveluihin, joita näille NHL seuroille tarjotaan. Tästä syystä on tärkeätä pysyä kehityksen kärjessä ja kehittää jatkuvasti palveluita, joita asiakkaille tarjotaan. Näin ollen asiakastyytyväisyyskyselyn pohjalta on luotu kehityssuunnitelma, jonka tavoitteena on havainnoida yrityksen nykyinen palvelutaso ja löytää kehittämisen kohteita tulosten perusteella.

Tutkimusmetodi oli kvantitatiivinen ja käytetty tekniikka oli asiakastyytyväisyyskysely. Kyseinen metodi valittiin, jotta pystyttiin luomaan kokonaisvaltainen kuva yrityksen palvelusta. Kyselylomakkeessa oli 16 kysymystä, jotka perustuivat seitsemään eri kriteeriin hyvästä palvelun laadusta. Nämä seitsemän eri kriteeriä ovat ammattimaisuus ja taidot, asenne ja käyttäytyminen, lähestyttävyys ja joustavuus, luotettavuus ja oikeudenmukaisuus, palvelun normalisointi, palveluympäristö sekä maine ja uskottavuus.

Tulosten mukaan ESS pystyy tarjoamaan asiakkailleen parasta palvelun laatua luotettavuudessa ja oikeudenmukaisuudessa, sekä palvelun normalisoinnissa. Myös asenne ja käyttäytyminen sai positiivista palautetta. Tutkimuksen tulokset saavuttivat tutkimukselle asetetut tavoitteet, sillä kolme eri kehitettävää osa-aluetta tulivat hyvin esille tutkimuksessa. Nämä kolme kohtaa ovat NHL Link Internet sivut, kirjalliset otteluraportit, sekä laadittu pelaajien ranking-lista. Kehittämällä näitä kolmea osa-aluetta ESS pystyy tarjoamaan parasta mahdollista palvelua asiakkailleen eli NHL seuroille. Halukkuus ja kyky jatkuvaan kehitykseen ovat elintärkeää pitkäaikaisen yhteistyön saavuttamiseksi NHL:n kanssa.

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European Sport Services Ltd. (ESS) has been an important source of information for the NHL Central Scouting since 1983. ESS's main task is to work for the NHL Central Scouting and to all of the 30 NHL teams by reporting on prospects playing in various European countries. During the last years, there have been changes in the services provided to NHL teams. That is why it is important to stay up to date and constantly develop these services provided to customers. Thus, a development plan is created according to the results of a customer satisfaction survey. The aim of the study is to find out the company's current service level and improve it through the results.

The method of the study was quantitative and specifically the technique used was a customer satisfaction survey. This was chosen in order to form a comprehensive outlook of the company and its services. The questionnaire form had 16 different questions, which were based on by the seven criteria of good perceived service quality. These seven criteria's are Professionalism and Skills, Attitudes and Behaviour, Accessibility and Flexibility, Reliability and Trustworthiness, Service Recovery, Services Cape and Reputation, and Credibility.

As a result, ESS is able to provide best values to its customers in Reliability and Trustworthiness as well as in Services Recovery. Also, Attitudes and Behaviour received positive feedback. The results of the study reach the aim of the study as three areas of development areas are clearly detectable. These three areas are the NHL Link website, the written game reports as well as the provided ranking. Improving these three services, ESS can provide the best possible value to the NHL teams. The willingness and ability for constant development is crucial for a long-term partnership with the NHL.

Key words
Ice hockey, scouting, customer satisfaction, development plan

Table of Contents

1 Introduction

Ice hockey is known as one of the fastest team sports in the world; hockey players move faster on their feet than any other team sport athletes (Hache 2002, 57). National Hockey League (NHL) is the best ice hockey league in the world (Häkkinen 2009, 1-2), and our company's core business is to help finding new players to the league. Our company, European Sport Services Ltd. (ESS) has been working for the NHL and its scouting bureau (NHL Central Scouting) since 1983, and has been a valuable source of information to the league and its teams regarding the European players.

Jack Button founded NHL Central Scouting back in the 1970s. The main reason for the existence of Central Scouting is to be a tool for the NHL clubs' amateur scouting department by providing different rankings and help for the teams. The rankings are separated between two regions, North America and Europe, as well as between the skaters and goalies. Therefore, the NHL Central Scouting publishes four different types of lists. Our company, ESS is in charge of two of those lists: European player and goalie rankings. The Central Scouting publishes a list called Players to Watch in early season, the Preliminary ranking in the fall, the Midterm ranking in January and the Final ranking near the end of the season.

Overall, the relationship between ESS and the NHL Central Scouting has been good over the years. However, if ESS wants to maintain its position in the changing sport world, constant development is needed. The purpose of this development plan is to retain ESS as a top organization in the development of the NHL and to ensure good quality service. A development plan is made based on a questionnaire aimed for the scouts who ESS provides its service. The questionnaire is conducted in order to find out the actual state of the quality of the service from the customers' viewpoint. In addition, the results from another previously conducted questionnaire will be used to in order to identify development areas. Overall, the specialties of the hockey world and how it works needs to be known prior, because there are some secrets and unwritten rules how to act and behave in the business.

In order to survive in this highly competitive market, really strong knowledge on sports as well as management and organizations is required. Figure 1 presents the definition for both organization and management, and later on the sport of ice hockey is defined more closely. (Covell, Hess, Siciliano & Walker 2007, 2-5)

> **Organization**
>
>> Any group of people working together to achieve a common purpose or goals that could not be attained by individuals working separately.
>
> **Management**
>
>> The coordination of human, material, technological, and financial resources needed for the organization to achieve its goals. Responsibility for performance.

Figure 1. Organization and management defined (Covell et al. 2007, 5)

This study is constructed from five main parts. First, the study will focus on explaining the structure of the NHL, because this will give an overall perspective of the environment where ESS is working in. Also, the study will explain shortly the IT systems used in the NHL. Second, the study will explain theory on customer satisfaction – this will be used to form the questionnaire for the study. Thus, the focus of the third part is to explain the purpose of the study followed by a chapter on the research method. Then, the fourth part shows the results of the questionnaire. Finally, the results will be discussed more in detail forming the development areas in order to answer to the aim of the study.

2   European Sport Services Ltd. (ESS)

European Sport Services (ESS) was founded in 1983 and is based in Finland. ESS is a family-owned company with three owners. The managing director of the company since the beginning has been Göran Stubb, who is also one of the owners. Overall, ESS is an economically healthy company and makes the break even. ESS is operating with a small yearly budget, but because of limited salaries it can still manage expenses and travel costs economically.

ESS's main task is to work for the NHL Central Scouting and to all of the 30 NHL teams by reporting on prospects playing in various European countries. ESS has three full-time employees working in Finland and six part-time employees working in Europe. Most of these employees work as a scout. ESS provides different services to the NHL Central Scouting and the NHL clubs: for example league and team directories, schedules, game reports, and rosters on dozens of leagues and tournaments in Europe, which all have NHL prospects participating. Along with these reports, ESS provides the NHL teams with video footage of the top prospects as well as two European player ranking lists during the season. These lists are used by the NHL clubs as a second opinion and as an aid in making their own ranking and prospect evaluations.

Furthermore, over the last few years Central Scouting has been inviting approximately 100 of the top prospects from around the world to Toronto for Medical and Fitness testing. As about 20-25 of these players are from Europe, ESS's task is to select them. Overall, this event allows the NHL teams to view the top players prior to the entry draft during the tests and gives the teams an opportunity to interview the players one on one.

3 Professional Ice Hockey

Overall, ice hockey is a popular sport: especially in Canada and Finland, ice hockey is the most popular sport. (Häkkinen 2009, 1-2)

Figure 2 presents the hierarchy of the professional hockey leagues in which NHL is on the top. Under the NHL there are professional leagues, which are in Europe and also in America. Kontinental Hockey League (KHL) is the second biggest league, operating in Russia and other Baltic countries. After KHL come the professional leagues from Finland, Sweden, Czech, Switzerland and Germany. In North America there are also farm leagues under the NHL called the American Hockey League (AHL) and East Coast Hockey League (ECHL). In Europe there are also lower leagues that are in about the same level than ECHL. The hierarchy of the profession leagues can be seen in Figure 2. (Häkkinen 2009, 1-2)
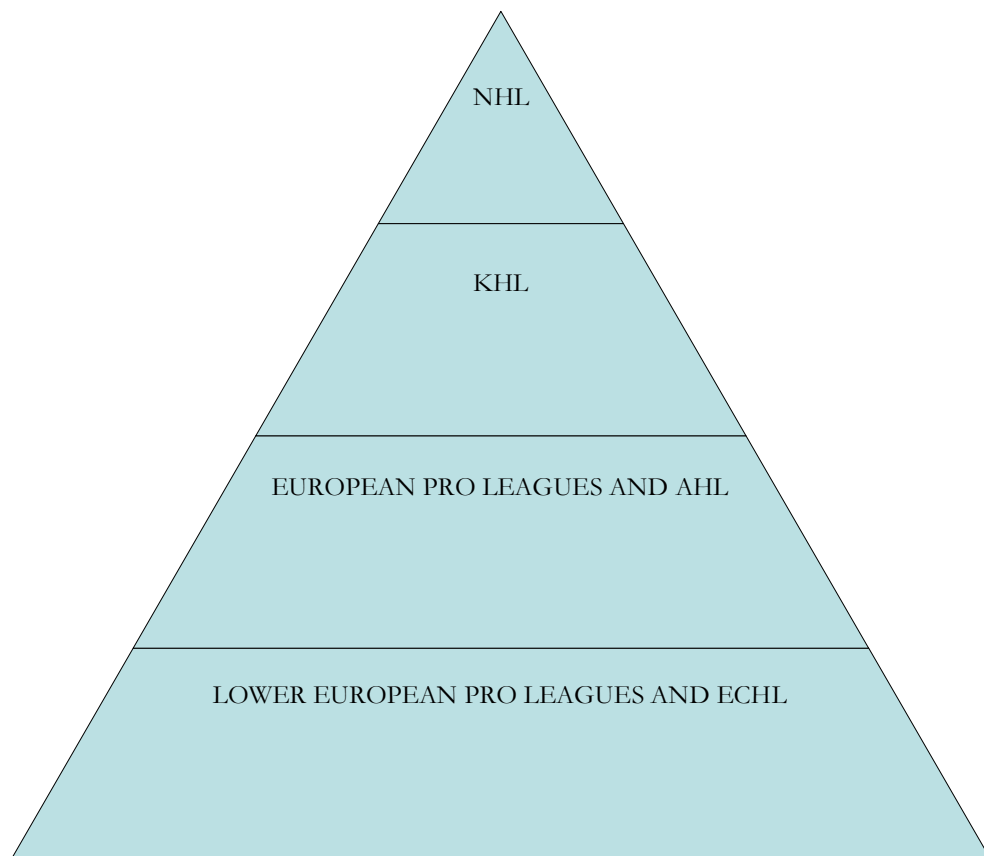

Figure 2. Hierarchy of the professional hockey leagues

3.1 Concepts

In the profession of ice hockey there are certain terms that need to be explained in order to understand the specifics of the sport. Here are some of the key terms of the study.

Collective bargaining agreement (CBA) — an agreement between a sport league and its player association that govern the terms and conditions of the players' employment with the league and their franchises. (Conrad 2006, 293)

Entry draft — annual procedure for NHL teams to distribute rights of the unsigned players. Was previously known as Amateur draft, but name changed 1979 when age limit changed to 18 years old. (Podnieks 2007, 66)

European scout — scout who assesses talent of players playing in the European leagues and in International tournaments. (Podnieks 2007, 67)

Expansion franchise — the new team that comes as an addition to the league. (Conrad 2006, 294)

Free agency — the possibility for a professional athlete to freely negotiate a contract to play for any team in the league. (Conrad 2006, 294)

General Manager (GM) — is highest official in hockey operations. Is responsible for acquiring players, negotiating contracts and other hockey operations business. (Podniaks 2007, 84)

GM meetings — meetings where team GM's are discussing the state of the game and league and it's different aspects. (Podniaks 2007, 86)

Lockout — disagreement between players and owners where owners refuse to let players play in their buildings, because the CBA (see the first term) was not signed. (Podnieks 2007, 123)

National Hockey League (NHL) — a North American league of professional hockey players. Founded in 1917 and has expanded from six teams to 30 teams presently. (Conrad 2006, 297)

NHL Central Scouting — organization which was formed in 1970 to serve as a tool for NHL teams scouting departments. Helps teams to eliminate the costs of scouting and gives universal evaluation of talent. (Joyce 2007, 40-41)

NHL Combine — an annual testing combine managed by NHL Central Scouting before NHL draft, for 100 best prospects from North America and Europe, where their physical abilities are tested and interviews are based. (Cox & Joyce 2010, 86-88)

Potential — is a promise, mainly based on skills of players that a young player may develop into an elite player. (Podniaks 2007, 165)

Revenue — money received from a particular source, for example ticket sale and sponsoring. (Heinz 1988, 235)

Salary Cap — an annual limit imposed on a NHL team on the total salary they can compensate to their players. (Conrad 2006, 299)

Scout — is a person who watches and attends the games to assess players' talent and potential. Amateur scout watches talent at pre-professional level and pro scout watches talent among professional teams and leagues. (Podniaks 2007, 188)

3.2 How Ice Hockey is Structured

As every sport has its own structure, ice hockey is no exception. Figure 2 presents the structure of the NHL; in order to proceed to the highest level the various routes leading to the top have to be known. The hockey career needs to be started young to ensure a future in the professional leagues. Players usually start to play hockey when entering the school life. As the players get older, the age division is not compulsory and some players can belong to a different division than they age would require. Table 1 shows the age groups and their division names used in North America. (Heinz 1988, 17-18)

In Europe, the age groups are similar, but the division names are different. For example in Finland the division names are letters from G to A, A meaning the oldest group.

Table 1. Organized hockey at junior age (Heinz 1988, 17)

Division	Age Group
House League	5-7
Novice	8-9
Atom	10-11
Peewee	12-13
Bantam	14-15
Midget	16-17
Junior	18-20

The number of practices and games increases year by year during the career; already in junior hockey level the number of games and practices almost equals the number of the professional level. After the junior level, players will move to play either in college hockey or professional level, or some can even go straight to NHL. (Heinz 1988, 20-21)

3.3 National Hockey League

National Hockey League (NHL) is an unincorporated, non-for-profit association that has a centralized office and a commissioner, who has been Gary Bettman since 1993. The NHL is traditionally a Canadian sport that operated with only six franchises until 1967. It has expanded rapidly in last 30 years and has now 30 franchises all over the USA and Canada. (Conrad 2006, 5-6) Figure 3 presents the structure of the NHL.

COMMISSIONER

BOARD OF GOVERNORS

LEAGUE OFFICERS

LEAGUE DEPARTMENTS

30 TEAMS
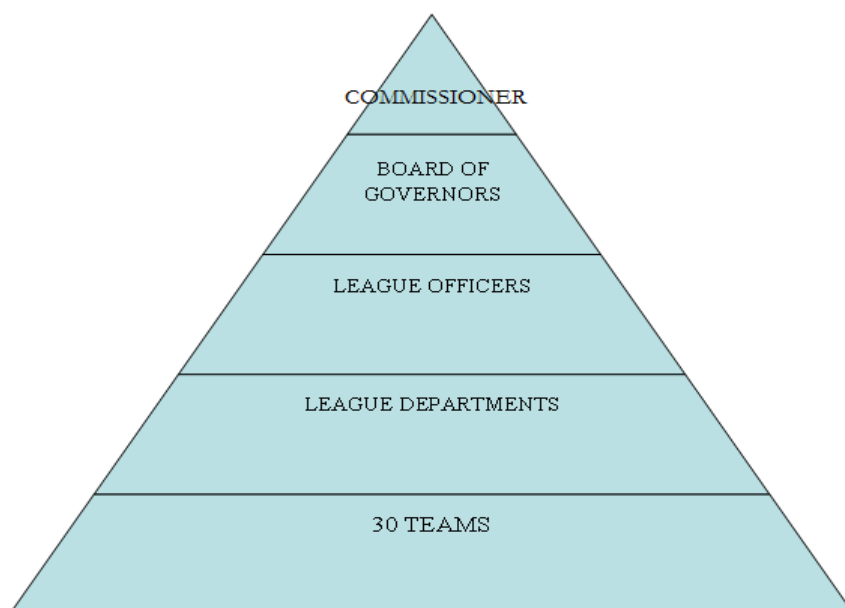
Figure 3. Structure of the NHL

NHL has different departments such as the Central Registry, Finance, Hockey Operations, Communication, and Central Scouting located in three different cities: New York, Toronto and Montreal. The Board of Governors consists of representatives from each of the league's teams. (Conrad 2006, 5-6; Heinz 1988, 25)

3.4   The Realities of the Game

NHL teams are trying to economize their operations by making scouts redundant as well as to achieve more results with smaller amount of investment, which has an effect on the scouts' daily operations. For example, Buffalo Sabres cut their scouting budget and started to rely more on the video scouting, which has been critiqued by many scouts as an unthinkable compromise because video offers only partial view to player. (Joyce 2007, 96-98)

Gleason (2010) writes in his interview of Buffalo Sabres General Manager that: "Regier was the first NHL general manager to fully embrace the idea that he could circle hockey's globe from his office. Five years ago, he reshaped his scouting department and replaced respected hockey evaluators with young computer whizzes whose greatest strength was collecting and breaking down video". However, the Sabres are doing the old fashioned scouting as well; if a player draws to their attention during the video scouting, a scout will be sent to see the player live. All the players the team has drafted lately have been scouted through both video and live playing. (Gleason 2010)

4 Equalizing Techniques in the NHL

NHL has different equalizing techniques of which the Entry Draft and Salary Cap are the two most important ones and the nearest to affect the hockey operations. Before the Salary Cap, there were high economic differences between the teams enabling the richest teams to buy the best players out of free agent market. (Devellano & Lajoie 2008, 252-253) These two techniques will be explained further next, starting from the Entry Draft.

4.1 Entry Draft

The Entry Draft was originally created in National Football League (NFL) in the year 1936 making the league the first of the North American pro sports leagues to institute the draft. The draft is necessary in order to maintain the competitive balance of the league, as the previous season's poor performing teams are picking first making the draft operate in a reverse order, which should theoretically reduce the differences between teams over time. Another aspect in the draft is that it eliminates the bidding war for new talent because only one team owns the right of the player. (Berri & Schmidt 2010, 68-69)

In the Entry Draft, a player who will turn 18 years old by the 15th of September in the draft year will be available for teams to draft. The highest age to be eligible for drafting is 21 for a European and 20 for a North American player. The NHL team holds the rights to the player for two years and after that the team needs to offer the player a contract; without an offer the player returns to be eligible for drafting again. As said, the lowest performing teams from the last year will draft first and best teams will draft last, which should lead to these then weaker teams to gain access to better players. However, it is also possible to trade the draft picks, which means that a Stanley Cup champion could draft first. As a matter of fact, the Entry Draft day is a busy day for player trades because everybody tries to improve their teams somehow. (Häkkinen 2009, 18-19)

In the professional sport of NHL, it is believed that the draft day is the most crucial day of the year. There is lot of hope for the underachieving teams; the early draft position is seen as the one only good aspect of missing the playoffs and finishing low in the standings. There have been drafts after which one franchise has made its way to the top performing teams when succeeding extremely well on choosing and developing players. For example, the Detroit Red Wings in 1989 had an excellent result in the draft by choosing six players, such as Lidstrom, Fedorov and Konstantinov, who all played a very good NHL career. A former NHL General

Manager, winner of seven Stanley Cups, Jim Devellano said that: "I hate trading draft picks, because I know how valuable they can be and I know that the only way to ensure long term success for a hockey club through the years is to keep your draft picks and use them wisely." (Devellano & Lajoie 2008, 161-163)

Drafting is not an exact science, but there are differences in the successfulness of the draft between the teams. There seems to be certain teams that draft consistently better than others, and it is believed that one of the reasons is the chief scout of the team as there are differences in the mentalities of the teams when it comes to investing in. However, drafting is very important part in trading too; in order to gain good players the team needs good players as well as a trading asset. (Devellano & Lajoie 2008, 266-267)

There has been a lot of debate, especially in Europe, that should the rights the team has to a player after the draft last longer than two years. The NHL team needs to offer the player at least a standard contract identified in CBA, and thus in some cases an offer will not be offered because the players development process has not proceeded as expected. Problems will come up if the NHL team has made the contract to a player in fear of losing him, but that player is not even close to the NHL level. This sometimes has an effect to the player development, especially Europeans, as they might be forced to play in lower North American leagues rather than developing in their home country, which in the past has been more successful for the player development. (Häkkinen 2009, 19)

According to Szemberg's (2006, 2) IIHF Study, it is more successful for the European players to develop in their home countries rather than entering North America too early. Szemberg says that: "A European player of top talent is normally good enough to step directly onto an NHL roster. The player, and his future NHL club, profits from polishing his skills in his European club before moving to the NHL." In addition, Szemberg (2006, 2) states that: "Players, who are rushed to the NHL before reaching the necessary level of maturity, are hurt in their development."

The draft's first round is not the only way for a team to get access to good players as in today's Salary cap era of NHL, the second round has also started to gain more interest than before. It is believed that the success of a team's draft will be based on, in addition to the importance of the first round, on how well the second round's players develop to become NHL players. A fact is that between 25 and 30 percent of players chosen in second round will play at least 80

NHL games. Therefore, some teams have tried to get multiple second round draft picks for same year hoping that at least one of those players will become a regular in the NHL. As an example, Minnesota Wild GM Chuck Fletcher knows that: "- once you get past the second round, the odds start to drop off fairly dramatically." A long time New Jersey Devils executive, David Conte also praises the importance of second round: "Sometimes you just shake your head that somebody is available with that pick. It doesn't happen often, but it does happen. I love the second round." (Campbell 2011, 42-43)

4.2   Salary Cap

NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman was hired in 1993 because the team owners wanted to have a Salary Cap in a collective bargaining agreement with the NHL's player association, NHLPA. The Salary Cap has been a major issue in negotiations between the NHL and the NHLPA; it has even forced two lockouts for seasons in 1994 and 2005. Finally after season 2004-2005 was missed, the NHLPA and the NHL signed the CBA where the Salary Cap was in stand. The NHL's first Salary Cap was 39 million dollars and it has a possibility to increase if the revenues are good for the league. In the first three years the Salary Cap did increase by 11 million dollars and it still has a possibility to increase even more. The Salary Cap is a good system for everybody; if teams are doing well economically, the players can benefit from it by increased salaries. Overall, the Salary Cap was crucial for the survival of the NHL. (Devellano & Lajoie 2008, 192-196, 251-253)

The idea of the Salary Cap is simple; by limiting the maximum and minimum salary the NHL teams are limited to use these are the salaries for their players. The Salary Cap's minimum and maximum salaries are based on the revenues that both the league and teams are making. The Salary Cap has two different aims: first is to keep the competitive balance that one rich team cannot buy all the best players. The second is to keep the league's economics in control that the teams would be economically viable also in the future.

The competitive balance between the teams is very important for any professional league as it keeps the interest towards the league high when it is hard to predict the champion. In addition, the competitive balance keeps the spectators motivated and excited. However, it seems that the competitive balance may struggle at times between the rich and the poor teams in the league and thus it is important to create systems that maintain this balance such as the Salary Cap. The economic control is in close contact with the competitive balance and it helps the teams to survive better in the competitive environment. (Korhonen 2008, 6-13, 36)

11

Table 2. An overview of the CBA's in the North American professional sport industry
(Taylor, Doherty & McGraw 2008, 193)

	NHL & NHLPA (Ice Hockey)	NBA & NBPA (Basketball)	MLB & MLBPA (Baseball)	NFL & NFLPA (Football)
Year established	1967	1954	1885, 1966	1970
Current CBA	2005-2011	2005-2011	2007-2011	2006-2011
Key features of CBA	Hard salary cap	Soft salary cap (ceiling with several exceptions)	No salary cap	Hard salary cap
	Revenue sharing across lower revenue teams	"Luxury tax" for excess payroll penalty (distributed to teams with lower payrolls)	"Competitive balance tax" for surpassing threshold (to lower revenue teams)	Fines paid to NFL and distributed to NFL-related charities
	Player compensation floor(minimum); Entry level compensation ceiling (maximum)	Player compensation floor and ceiling	Player compensation floor	Player compensation floor
	Free market system, players can move to any team when their contract expires	Free market system	Free market system	Free market system
	Regulation of player agent certification	Regulation of player agent certification	Regulation of player agent certification	Regulation of player agent certification

In Table 2, the differences between the CBA's in North American pro sports are presented. Noteworthy is that only two of the leagues, NHL and NFL have a hard salary cap. (Taylor, Doherty & McGraw 2008, 192-194)

5 Organizational Structure within NHL

It is crucial for organizations to have a clear structure, vision and understanding on its direction. In addition, the owner has to have a clear knowledge on the wanted type of employees. It is also very important to have stability in the organization and ability to develop personnel inside the organization. (Devellano & Lajoie 2008, 191-192)

5.1 The Structure of a NHL Team

Figure 4 presents the organizational structure, which is applicable to almost all NHL teams.

Figure 4. A basic structure of a NHL team (Heinz 1988, 26)

The owners of the teams have the financial gain as well as the power within the sport. In the end, the owner they have the final word, but in the reality the General Manager (GM) is chosen by the owner; it is the GM who runs the club's especially regarding the hockey decisions. The main task for owners is to make their business economically and competitively successful. Both of these can be achieved by attracting audience; having a winning and entertaining team. Thus, the owners need to provide the GMs with all the possible tools to build a winning organization. (Heinz 1988, 30)

As said, the General Manager is a person running all the hockey operations and being in charge of the performance of the team. In the early days, the GM took care of both the business side and hockey side but nowadays he only takes care of hockey operations, which usually represent 80 percent of the dollars income and 80 percent of the workforce within the organization. Again, the GM usually chooses the head coach and other personnel, as well as the players for the team. He is in charge of contract negations, trades and all the other team matters. The GM has also an Assistant GM's working right under him with other key management personnel such as the Director of Player Personnel and Director of Scouting. The Director of Player Personnel mainly takes care of the player related issues such as scouting and developing players by working close to the GM. The Director of Scouting is in charge of the Draft and an amateur scouting staff, which usually includes about 10 to 15 people. The scouting staff has normally a Chief Scout who is responsible for the whole scouting; being up to date on the player market and the scouting situation in the different leagues in North America and Europe. (Heinz 1988, 28-30; Smith 2007, 133, 136)

An amateur scout sees approximately 175 to 250 games in a season and it has been said to be one of the completely overlooked jobs in the hockey. (Malloy 2011, 6) An amateur scouts has to be one part detective, one part art evaluator, and one part psychologist; there is no guidebook to be a successful scout. Though some of the key characteristics are having an open mind, patience, work ethic, and having a good research and interpersonal skills. (Malloy 2011, 6-10)

A Former GM of New York Islanders, Bill Torrey, who guided the team to four straight Stanley Cups, was a good example of a GM who managed his staff very effectively. The owner of the team supported him, which enabled him to have full authority to run the hockey team the way he thought was best. Torrey preferred to hire employees that he gave power to do their jobs independently. For example, Torrey hired a director of scouting who he gave the authority to hire scouts as well as to run the Draft. One of the key things in running an NHL team is also to choose the best possible coach and to empower him to do the coaching without interference. It is vital to let everybody do their jobs and guide them to work together as a team. (Devellano & Lajoie 2008, 268)

5.2 Scouting

The NHL entry draft is the day that all the teams prepare for well in advance; scouting the players all over Canada, USA and Europe is the main task for the scouts in order to prepare for the NHL entry draft. The scouts are travelling in various countries and conditions when trying to find the talent that is crucial to every team. Scouts are trying to determine if players are good, big and fast enough. In addition, they are looking for playmaking skills, skating ability, puck skills, physical skills, hockey sense, and character. "There is no question in my mind that the scouts are the real unsung heroes in the game" says former NHL GM Lou Nanne. (Nanne & Burton 2010, 100)

Jim Nill, the assistant General Manager of Detroit Red Wings says that the projection part is the hardest aspect in amateur scouting. For example, when the players are 17 or 18 years old, the scouts are trying to predict what these players will be when they are in their mid-twenties – the peak of their career. This is especially challenging, as the players have big differences in the physical development in the age of 17. Thus, it is important to be aware of the leagues they are playing in order to take into account all the variables during decision-making. (Malloy 2011, 18-19)

The season always starts in early August with Ivan Hlinka World Cup, which is a tournament for eight best nations; Canada, USA, Finland, Sweden, Czech, Switzerland, Slovak and Russia for the draft year's age group held in Czech and Slovak. The tournament has been positioned to the NHL scouts' schedules months before and all the preparations for the first tournament have been made earlier in the spring. Although the NHL is not on the ice during the tournament, it is certainly in the stands; there are more than 150 scouts attending from all the 30 teams and several more from NHL Central Scouting. The tournament is a good start as all the teams are looking forward to seeing all the best players in same tournament in early season. (Joyce 2007, 1-2)

There are nine different sources from which the infinite majority of NHL prospects are discovered by scouts, and within these nine sources there are over 300 teams. All these sources have different characteristics; thus it is vital to have someone with the needed special regional knowledge.

These nine different sources are:

- Junior Hockey in Canada
- Junior Hockey in United States
- USA National Training Development Program (USNTDP)
- National College Athletic Association (NCAA)
- U.S. High Schools and Prep Schools
- European Leagues
- The Big Five: Russia, Sweden, Finland, Czech Republic, Slovakia
- The Developing Hockey Nations: Switzerland, Germany, Latvia, Belarus, Denmark, Norway
- World Junior Tournaments

(Malloy 2011, 29-43)

Besides the travelling and the games, the scouts need to make notes and reports of the players into specialized computer programs. In addition, they need to talk to various stakeholders within the hockey field such as the agents and coaches; the ones connected to the player. For example, there are meetings over the season where scouts of the teams are discussing about the players and when the scouts and teams combine their lists of scouting. (Nanne & Burton 2010, 101)

There are many different computer programs and software that are used in ice hockey, but only a few of those aids in the analysis of the mental dimension of the game. Scouting the mental aspect of the game is highly important when searching for the top players, but the dilemma is that how these different mental skills can be scouted. In relations, Tommi Kerttula, founder of Totalscouting, says that: "Clarifying and defining the psychological skills during the game is most challenging task for scout." (Kerttula 2005, 30, 35-36)

The former GM for the New York Giants of NFL, Ernie Accorsi also believes in the importance of the mental aspect when drafting a player as he says: "When we select a player, we are selecting people. In the final analysis, it's not the biggest and fastest player that prevails. It's the best competitor, the best man." (Callahan 2007, 110)

The NHL Central Scouting Service organizes an event called the Combine at the end of the season in Toronto. Around 100 best prospects are invited to participate from North America and Europe to physical testing, medical testing, and interview process with the teams. The physical testing includes normal physical tests such as bench press and aerobic- and anaerobic tests. The time for the interview is 20 minutes in which the teams can have a one on one discussion with the prospect; the teams can ask several questions in order to gain the needed information from the player. One major aspect the teams are trying to find out about the player is the characteristic that player has; the teams have time to achieve this goal during the interview and the time between the tests. The Combine is one of the last places the prospects can impress the teams in order to get drafted in the NHL draft. (Joyce 2007, 54-60, 299-300)

5.3   Ice Hockey Team and Player Management

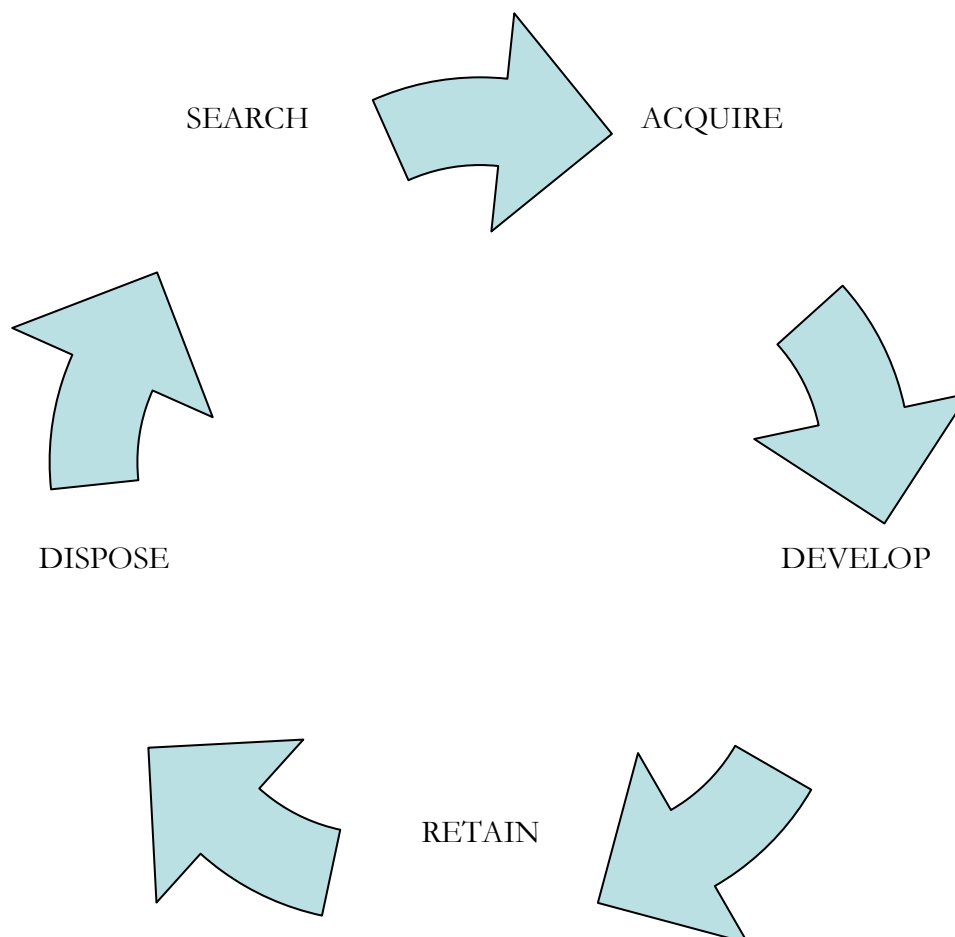The talent cycle in Figure 5 shows the phases in the player talent management.

Figure 5. Talent Cycle (Bolchover & Brady 2006, 228)

It is important to understand all the parts of the talent cycle as it works well for both the players and the management team. Many hockey teams are doing some parts of the cycle well, but the best teams manage all the parts excellently. In order to have the winning team, the talent needs to be combined with hard work and a good organization. (Bolchover & Brady 2006, 227-228, 258)

As most of the knowledge on the sport and on ice hockey team management comes within time and experience, succeeding in ice hockey only executively is challenging. However, there are some mandatory and common pointers that should be kept in mind when managing a NHL team. For one, drafting good players should be the first priority. In addition, hiring the best possible people to the organization and remembering that ice hockey is also a business operation should be remembered. Most of the most successful organizations in the NHL were built through the teams' successfulness in the draft; thus it is important to have highly skilled scouts working in the organization who know the characteristics of the players the team is looking for. Finally, maintaining the organizational stability in the form of for example lower turnover is another important factor making your club successful in the NHL. (Devellano & Lajoie 2008, 266, 270)

It is believed that the secret of succeeding is by surrounding your organization with individuals who support your goals, share the vision and operate in a cohesive manner. However, it can take years to achieve these conditions and during that process there can be obstacle such as adversity or other changes that need to be conquered. (Cashman 2004, 10-13)

Since the second NHL lockout in 2004-2005, the NHL draft has been the best way to build a potentially winning team to be a contender for the Stanley Cup. Table 3 shows the average number of homegrown players that have been drafted by the team per season since the second lockout. The player has to be in the final roster of a team and should have played at least 20 games. After the lockout, the best 10 teams in terms of games won have been Detroit (304 wins), San Jose (296 wins), New Jersey (278 wins), Vancouver (274 wins), Buffalo (273 wins), Nashville (272 wins), Anaheim (266 wins), Dallas (263 wins), Calgary (258 wins) and Pittsburgh (257 wins). As can be seen in Table 3, eight of the top 10 teams are ranked in the upper half of the teams with the most homegrown players. (Allard 2011, 45)

Table 3. Average number of drafted player in a team (Allard 2011, 45)

Team	Average number of home-grown players/season since the lockout
Buffalo	12
San Jose	12
Montreal	10,8
Ottawa	10,5
Pittsburgh	10,5
Colorado	10,2
New Jersey	10
Dallas	9,8
Detroit	9,2
Edmonton	8,7
Washington	8,2
Toronto	8
Columbus	8
Nashville	7,8
Chicago	7,3
Minnesota	7,3
Boston	7,2
Vancouver	7,2
St. Louis	7
Florida	7
Philadelphia	6,2
Carolina	6
Los Angeles	6
Atlanta	6
Tampa Bay	5,8
NY Islanders	5,7
NY Rangers	5
Phoenix	5
Calgary	4,3
Anaheim	4

It is vital to have the best people evaluating the talent of which the scouts are in charge of. If referring back to the talent cycle in Figure 5, the development aspect is an important part when trying to help the players to achieve the NHL – the big league. During the development phase, the players will be guided to different leagues and programs, which the team sees as the best option for these players' long-term development at that time. This development process is always a challenge for the player; thus it is important to have players who are emotionally and mentally strong in order them to survive the difficult times, slumps and injuries. (Cashman 2004, 15-17)

A former NHL GM, Mike Smith, also agrees that mentally tough players will be important when building a championship team. Smith says: "You are looking for people who are driven to be successful". In addition, Smith says that there are three things he looks for when hiring a player: talent, quality of person, and work ethic. (Smith 2007, 135,140)

Lou Nanne believes that trading the players is an interesting part of hockey. He believes that every team has their own trading philosophy. It is very common that the teams are afraid to make trades as they usually picture it through the worst case scenario that if the trade will not be a successful one; this way of thinking can usually ruin the upcoming trade. In Nanne's philosophy, the trade will be successful if the gained player will outplay the traded player; it is secondary to Nanne how he traded player plays elsewhere. Nanne is only concerned on how he improved his own team and on how the gained player performed on ice. (Nanne & Burton 2010, 97)

Nanne has also few other philosophies about the trading players. First, Nanne never allows the coach talk about trading the player after the game when the emotion of the coach might be too high. He believes that a single game should not have a too large influence in the decision about the trade. However, Nanne is also a true believer of teamwork; he has never made a trade without asking for a secondary opinion from the team's coaches and scouts as he really relies on their expertise and wisdom. (Nanne & Burton 2010, 97-98)

A Former GM of Boston Bruins, Mike O'Connell says that there are three aspects of the business that need to be taken into consideration if you want to be successful in sport management; the competitive, the financial and the entertainment aspects. All the decisions should be made based on the knowledge about the sport, the game, and the team. (O'Connell 2004, 106)

As discussed, player development has an important role once a NHL team has drafted the player. The NHL team player development staff can occupy skating coaches, puck-skills coaches, and goalie coaches, conditioning coaches, nutritionists, and psychologists; these persons help the players in the process of trying to become NHL players. The work usually starts with a one-week prospect camp, which usually takes place during the summer. There the player development staff can give guidelines and advices to players on what they can do when they return to their club in North America or in Europe. Overall, player development can be separated to several different categories such as the physical development, lifestyle coaching, sociological communication and psychological testing. (Malloy 2011, 225-235)

6   Information Technology in NHL

Information technology (IT) has developed rapidly in the field of sport management. IT represents a lot of opportunities and challenges and the same development has been seen in NHL Central Scouting too with the NHL Link service. IT can play a critical role improving the services provided by the individuals and organizations; therefore this chapter will discuss the aspects of IT.

There are different levels of IT to be used in the organization to share information. Level 1 is called TPS (Transaction-processing System), which is designed to perform the most basic and recurring transactions. Level 2 is MIS (Management Information System), which provides the managers information about organizational operations and performance. Level 3 is DSS (Decision Support System), which supports managerial decision-making, identifies needs and monitors the effects of the environmental change. (Covell et all. 2007, 83, 91-93) The use of information technology has given a constant possibility for organizations to get feedback on their performance from its stakeholders and IT can be easily used in all levels of organizations. It is important that everyone has an access to the needed information to conduct their work in order to continuously improve their decision making process. The level 3, DSS is used in various sport organizations, also in ice hockey, to improve the decision-making process of the scouting and the coaching departments. The player recruitment process has improved because of the use of Information Technology as it can offer new opportunities to scouting as well. For example videos, player information sharing, and constant feedback have all been part of using the technology to improve individual and team performance. (Covell et all. 2007, 94-95)

The rapid change in information technology can also cause challenges for the management; they needs to be aware of the changes to be able to guide the employees through them as everyone has their own way of managing change. The main challenge is to understand how the employees are able to gain access to the needed data and to understand what kind of information is useful for them. In addition, one of the key challenges then will be to guide the employees to use the relevant data for processes like: problem solving, decision making or innovation. In order to understand the quality of the information provided by the IT, the management can learn about the quality dimensions from the TRAC system presented in Figure 6. (Covell et all. 2007, 100-104)

Timely	Providing the most up-to-date information available
Relevant	Giving information that relates to and enhances understanding of key issues
Accurate	Ensuring that the information is a reliable and valid representation of what is happening
Complete	Providing information that is sufficiently comprehensive to represent all of the important aspects of situation

Figure 6. The TRAC model of quality information. (Covell et all. 2007, 102)

There are two most commonly used computer software in NHL that are used to help scouting departments. The first is RinkNet, which is used by 29 teams out of 30 teams. It was established in 1998 and changed the way teams collected the data of the players significantly. The second is the NHL Link, which is the NHL Central Scouting's program used by all 30 teams. This computer software helps the teams in having all the data of the players in one database; updated and instantly available 24 hours a day. The NHL Link software also helps in the teams in scheduling, finding all the rosters and accountability. (Malloy 2011, 50-54)

7 Customer Satisfaction in Business to Business Marketing

Overall, business to business marketing has special attributes compared to business to consumer marketing. Figure 7 shows the differences between buying industrial goods – occurring between business and business – and consumer goods – occurring between business and consumer. (Rope 2004, 15)

INDUSTRIAL GOODS	CONSUMER GOODS
Satisfies the organisation's needs	Satisfies the individual's needs
The number of potential customers is limited	The number of potential customers is nearly limitless
Complicated and complex buying process	Simple buying process
Complex product	Simple product
Expensive purchase price	Low-priced purchase price
High maintanance need	Low maintanance need
Buyers 'professionals'	Buyers 'non-professionals'
Direct contact between manufacturer and user	No direct contact between manufacturer and user
Hard to determine the purchase decision-maker	Easy to determine the purchase decision-maker
Buying interntionals rational	Buying intentions unrational

Figure 7. Special attributes for buying the service- and consumption goods (Rope 2004, 15)

ESS operates in the business to business service marketing field, which is even more unique than the business to business goods marketing field. This is mainly because of the wide meaning of service marketing and the fact that service itself can be hard to describe. However, service marketing has four special attributes: intangibility, variability, coincidence of production, and usage and uniqueness. One of the most important attributes is the intangibility; as in service marketing objects are not changed and services cannot be seen, tasted, or touched. In addition, service can have variation as it is concluded between people involving the customers themselves as well. Service is also unique as it disappears after the customer has used it. Due to these four special attributes, it is hard to describe the quality of the service. (Lämsä & Uusitalo 2002, 17-20)

The main goal for service marketing companies is good service quality. As said before, although it is hard to describe service quality, one useful way is to approach it through different perspectives. For example, the quality of the service can be divided to the six different areas, which are memorable, customer oriented, product oriented, production oriented, cost benefit oriented and ethical. (Lämsä & Uusitalo 2002, 22-26)

To succeed in today's marketplace, companies must deliver superior value to the target customers. It is important to build a relationship with the customer and be skillful in market engineering. Customer oriented companies understand that every interaction between the customer and the service provider is an act of marketing. (Kotler, Wong, Saunders & Armstrong 2005, 463)

From all the service providers, the customers choose the marketing offer, which gives them the most value. Figure 8 shows how this value that is delivered to the customers by the provider is formed according to Kotler et all. (2005). Customers compare the value they receive while consuming the service to the expected value they have prior to the consumption. This experienced value has an impact on the customers' satisfaction and thereby on their behavior. (Kotler et all. 2005, 463-464)

Total customer value	(Product, services, personnel and image values)
(minus) Total customer cost	(Monetary, time, energy and psychic costs)
(equals) Customer delivered value	(Profit to the consumer)

Figure 8. Customer delivered value (Kotler at all. 2005, 463-464)

Due to the fact that services are a series of processes where the production and the consumption cannot be separated and because the customer actively participates in the production process, it is important to understand what customers are really looking for and. If wanting to develop the company's service and how the service is managed, it is needed to be understood how the service is perceived and evaluated by the customers who use it. Thus, it is vital to understand the relationships between the service concepts, the offered service, and the possible benefits that are available for the customer. (Grönroos 2007, 72)

7.1 Service Quality

Improving service quality is mentioned as an internal goal far too vaguely in many cases. Without defining what is meant by better quality and how this quality is actually perceived by the customers, it is hard to get an understanding what customers really want and therefore any real value out of it. Grönroos (2007) says that; "- what counts is quality as it is perceived by customers." (Grönroos 2007, 73)

Although customer satisfaction questionnaires are a natural way to measure the quality of the service, it is also needed to know how the quality is actually perceived by the customers. Figure 8 presents seven criteria by Grönroos (2007) to which the customers compare the service's quality to. The criterion is based on empirical and conceptual research as well as on practical experience. Of course there are differences between industries as well as customers when it comes to the importance order of these criteria. However, if these differences are understood and the company is aware of the order of the criteria importance when it comes to their service, the criteria can be a useful tool for the management. (Grönroos 2007, 83-90) These seven criteria will be used as the basis of the study's questionnaire, and thus it is an important element for the whole study.

1. **Professionalism and Skills**

Customers realize that the service provider, its employees, operational systems, and physical resources have the knowledge and skills required to solve their problems in a professional way (outcome-related criteria).

2. **Attitudes and Behaviour**

Customers feel that the service employees are concerned about them and interested in solving their problems in a friendly and spontaneous way (process-related criteria).

3. **Accessibility and Flexibility**

Customers feel that the service provider, its location, operating hours, employees and operational systems are designed and operate so that it is easy to get access to the service and are prepared to adjust to the demands and wishes of the customer in a flexible way (process-related criteria).

4. **Reliability and Trustworthiness**

Customers know that whatever takes place or has been agreed upon, they can rely on the service provider, its employees and systems, to keep promises and perform with best interest of the customers at heart (process-related criteria).

5. **Service Recovery**

Customers realize that whenever something goes wrong or something unpredictable happens the service provider will immediately and actively take action to keep them in control of the situation and find a new, acceptable solution (process-related criteria).

6. **Services Cape**

Customers feel that the physical surrounding and other aspects of the environment of the service encounter support a positive experience of the service process (process-related criteria)

7. **Reputation and Credibility**

Customers believe that the service provider's business can be trusted and gives adequate value for money, and that it stands for good performance and values, which can be shared by customers and the service provider (image-related criteria).

Figure 9. The seven criteria of good perceived service quality (Grönroos 2007, 90)

7.2   Relationship Marketing and Quality

Relationship marketing involves creating, maintaining, and enhancing strong relationships with customers and it is oriented towards more long-term thinking. After all, the main goal is to provide long-term value for the customers, which can be monitored by constantly measuring the level of satisfaction the customers have. In Figure 10, it can be seen that when there are only few customers and the profit margin is high, the situation is called partnership. This means that the company interacts continuously with the customer to discover ways for delivering better value. (Kotler et all. 2005, 476-478)

Profit margins

		High	Medium	Low
	Many	Accountable	Reactive	Basic
Number of customers	Medium	Proactive	Accountable	Basic
	Few	Partnership	Accountable	Proactive

Figure 10. Relationship levels as a function of profit margin and number of customers (Kotler et all. 2005, 477)

According to Grönroos (2007), relationship quality can be described as the dynamics of long-term quality formation in on-going customer relationships. From the customer's part, relationship quality is continuously developing quality perception over time. Overall, relationship quality includes always at least two parties, which means that the quality perception actually needs both sides to develop. In addition that the customer forms their own quality perception also the service provider forms its own from the impression it gets from the customer's perception. Thus, interaction is the key concept in the service relationship between the provider and the customer. The perceived quality of the relationship is formed in on-going interactions, which are the basic phenomena in quality and value formation. Although interactions may be very different due to the changing actors, they are always present. (Grönroos 2007, 91)

8   Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to analyze how the customers – the 30 member clubs of the NHL – evaluate the quality of the service ESS provides and as a result, a development plan is made. Thus, the main aim is to identify areas of development within the provided service in order to make the development plan.

Overall, this thesis is important for ESS since it helps to keep in developing the quality of the service ESS provides to its customers. The company has one main customer, NHL, to whom the scouting services in Europe are provided. Within NHL, there are altogether 30 teams that can use ESS 's services. Therefore, ESS tries to provide the best possible value to its customer and aims in becoming an important and irreplaceable partner to all the NHL teams. Continuous development of ESS will help to maintain value high in the eyes of the customer. The service ESS provides is also important for the development of the young scouted players and their careers. For that reason, all ESS staff members should be well informed, educated, and up to date when it comes to their skills and competences. In addition, ESS should be able to make the best professional decisions when sending players to the NHL Combine.

9   Research Method

The chosen method for this study was quantitative and more specifically the technique used was a customer satisfaction survey in a questionnaire form. This was used in order to form a comprehensive outlook of the company and its services from the customer's viewpoint. In other words, the analysis will be made according to a questionnaire, which was sent via e-mail to the 20 representatives of different clubs playing in the NHL.

Overall, customer satisfaction can be surveyed through a questionnaire and it is actually useful to do them regularly in order to find out the satisfaction or dissatisfaction the customers might have regarding the provided service. However, when conducting a customer satisfaction questionnaire, some similar problems might occur as when doing service quality measurement. After all, there are some challenges when asking about the expectations from the customer, because there are several different levels of expectation people have towards the company. For example, the expectations are mainly based on the image of the company. (Kotler et all. 2005, 467; Mäkinen 1999, 10, 37-41)

9.1   Questionnaire Design

A variety of factors influences the planning of the questionnaire: e.g. the characteristics of the respondents, the importance of reaching the correct respondents, the correctness of the questions that they enable to answer the aim of the study, and the amount of questions per questionnaire in order to gain the most accurate answers from the respondents. The questionnaire form should be also thought trough as well as the resources that are available for the distribution and respondent wise. Designing the questions also needs consideration as they can be either taken from an existing questionnaire from the same topic or new ones can be developed. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2007, 357-358, 368)

The questionnaire for this study was formed from two preliminary questionnaires conducted in 2005 and 2009. The first preliminary questionnaire was made for the NHL Central Scouting Service during the summer 2005. The questionnaire was distributed to all 30 NHL teams from which 19 teams answered. The questions in this preliminary customer satisfaction survey were open-ended on six different topics (see Appendix 2 for the questionnaire).

The second preliminary questionnaire in 2009 was made in co-operation with Thomas Roost, who is a scout operating in Central Europe and the Vice President Human Resources at Hapimag AG during the season 2009-10. This questionnaire was given to 5 employees of ESS and 5 scouts from different NHL organizations. Each of those scouts represented the same countries as the ESS staff – Finland, Sweden, Czech, and Russia – in order to gain opinions about the service from all the countries ESS is operating in. This questionnaire is not included as an appendix, since the most recent questionnaire was formed from this one.

The questionnaires from 2005 and 2009 were important when identifying the questions to the most recent study in 2011. These two previous questionnaires helped in creating questions and finding out the most important parts that should be studied in the 2011 study. The 2005 questionnaire consisted from open ended questions and by analyzing those answers together with 2009 responses, the final questionnaire was formed.

On the basis of the two preliminary questionnaires, 16 different questions on service quality were identified. These questions covered all the seven criteria of good perceived service quality by Grönroos (2007): Professionalism and Skills, Attitudes and Behaviour, Accessibility and Flexibility, Reliability and Trustworthiness, Service Recovery, Services cape and Reputation, and Credibility. In addition, the 16 questions focus on the different aspects of the services ESS provides to its customers – the NHL scouts. The respondents were asked to rate the questions on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1= very dissatisfied, 2= quite dissatisfied, 3= no opinion of the statement, 4= quite satisfied, and 5=very satisfied).

Here are all the questions grouped into the seven perceived factors for good service quality by Grönroos (2007) seen in Figure 8:

Professionalism and Skills

1. The quality of the game reports written by the ESS staff.
2. The accuracy of the statistical information distributed by ESS.
3. The value of the players scouted by the ESS staff.

Attitudes and Behaviour

4. The level of customer orientation of the ESS staff.
5. The development of the ESS staff's scouting skills.
6. The presence of the ESS staff in games during the season.

Accessibility and Flexibility

7. The user-friendliness of the NHL Link –website.

8. The usefulness of the provided video footage for the scouting process.

Reliability and Trustworthiness

9. The quality of communication between ESS and NHL team scouts.

10. The quality of the provided information by the ESS staff during junior national team tournaments.

Service Recovery

11. ESS Staff willingness to help solving problems.

12. The response time when ESS provides a solution to a problem.

Services Cape

13. The quality of the hotels provided by ESS.

Reputation and Credibility

14. The accuracy of ranking lists compared to the NHL draft results.

15. The usefulness of the rankings during the season.

16. The quality of the earlier ranking lists.

In addition to these 16 questions and in order to understand the satisfaction of the respondents better, a question regarding the readiness to recommend ESS's services to colleagues was added to the end of the questionnaire. This question had also a 5-point Likert-type scale (from totally disagree to totally agree).

9.2   Sample and Data Collection

The final questionnaire for this study was sent to 20 scouts from different European countries – Finland, Sweden, Russia, and Czech – who also are working for different NHL teams. The reason for selecting only part of the NHL clubs as respondents is that some of the teams do not focus on the European countries, which means that these clubs do not use ESS's service as much as the selected respondents. Still, this variation of nationalities and teams will give a broad opinion of the comprehensive outlook of ESS.

All the scouts that received the questionnaire are working close to the ESS and have experience of working in their position at least five years. All the respondents are male as there are no women working as a scout for NHL clubs.

In addition, all the scouts answering the questionnaire are attending the tournaments and are frequent users of the ESS services and have the insight of the service provided to them. Because of the scouts' variation of nationalities and the experience of the services and knowledge of scouting, they have the ability to give a useful opinion about the current state of the service provided by ESS. Thus, the collected data is valid and answers the purpose of the study.

The data collection was made fully through email, because this is the easiest way to reach the scouts, who travel frequently for their scouting work. The questionnaire was sent and received as an attachment, which means the respondents answered by using the computer. From the 20 respondents that the questionnaire was sent to, 13 answered by the deadline; thus it can be concluded that the response rate was moderate (65%). Afterwards, a remainder email was sent to those respondents who had not answered by the deadline. However, no additional questionnaires were returned. The nationalities of the scouts who answered to the questionnaire were Finnish, Swedish, Czech, and Russian, all countries in which ESS scouts are also working.

10 Results of the Study

Due to the fact that the questionnaire was formed based on the seven criteria of good service quality from Grönroos (2007), this chapter has been divided into seven sub-chapters as well: Professionalism and Skills, Attitudes and Behaviour, Accessibility and Flexibility, Reliability and Trustworthiness, Service Recovery, Services cape and Reputation, and Credibility. The analysis of the results will be conducted according to these seven criteria.

As mentioned, the questionnaire was sent to 20 scouts working in different European countries from which 13 scouts answered. None of these respondents left any questions unanswered; thus the number of respondents is the same for each question. As a reminder, the nationalities of the respondents were Finnish, Swedish, Czech, and Russian.

10.1 Professionalism and Skills

There are three questions covering the aspect of Professionalism and Skills: the questions and the results showing the mean and standard deviation are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Results of the Professionalism and Skills

Professionalism and Skills (N=13)	Mean
1. The quality of the game reports written by the ESS staff.	3,54
2. The accuracy of the statistical information distributed by ESS.	4,46
3. The value of the players scouted by the ESS staff.	4

The quality of the game reports written by the ESS staff gained a mean of 3,54 with standard deviation of 0,66, which means that scouts have a consistent opinion of the game reports. However, some improvement could be done regarding the game report's quality as its' mean is the lowest from the three questions in Professionalism and Skills aspect. Second, the accuracy of the statistical information distributed by ESS was very high (M=4,46) with standard deviation of 0,78. Finally, the value of the players scouted by the ESS staff is somewhat satisfied as mean was 4,0. Overall, the scouts are consistent when it comes to their opinion about the Professionalism and Skills as standard deviation is under 0,8 for each question.

10.2 Attitudes and Behaviour

Again, there are three questions covering the second aspect, which is Attitudes and Behaviour. The questions and the results are seen in Table 5.

Table 5. Results of the Attitudes and Behaviour

Attitudes and Behaviour (N=13)	Mean
4. The level of customer orientation of the ESS staff.	4,54
5. The development of the ESS staff's scouting skills.	3,85
6. The presence of the ESS staff in games during the season.	4,15

The fourth question, which was about the level of customer orientation of the ESS staff, reveals that the scouts are very satisfied as mean is 4,54 and that the satisfaction would be consistent (S=0,52). Next, the development of the ESS staff's scouting skills is average with the mean of 3,85. Finally, the presence of the ESS staff in games during the season seems to be high (M=4,15). However, the standard deviation is rather high as well in this with 1,14.

10.3 Accessibility and Flexibility

The next two questions relate to the Accessibility and Flexibility aspect and they mainly cover the website and the video footage provided in the NHL Link website. Table 6 shows the mean and standard deviation for the questions.

Table 6. Results of the Accessibility and Flexibility

Accessibility and Flexibility (N=13)	Mean
7. The user-friendliness of the NHL Link –website.	3,77
8. The usefulness of the provided video footage for the scouting process.	3,31

The results of the user-friendliness of the NHL Link-website is rather divided with standard deviation 1,24 and mean 3,77. Again, the mean for the usefulness of the provided video footage for the scouting process is 3,31 and is the smallest result from all of the questions.

10.4 Reliability and Trustworthiness

The Reliability and Trustworthiness aspect is covered in the next questions seen in Table 7.

Table 7. Results of the Reliability and Trustworthiness

Reliability and Trustworthiness (N=13)	Mean
9. The quality of communication between ESS and NHL team scouts.	4,77
10. The quality of the provided information by the ESS staff during junior national team tournaments.	4,77

Overall, the reliability and trustworthiness aspect of the ESS's service seems to work very well as the mean for both questions was rather high (M=4,77) and the standard deviation was small (S=0,44) for both questions.

10.5 Service Recovery

The service Recovery aspect covers mainly the problem solving abilities and response time of the ESS staff. The results of mean and standard deviation are presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Results of the Service Recovery

Service Recovery (N=13)	Mean
11. ESS Staff willingness to help solving problems.	4,85
12. The response time when ESS provides a solution to a problem.	4,46

Overall, it can be said that the Service recovery works well in the company. ESS staff is willing to help solving problems as the mean is 4,85 with small standard deviation 0,38. In addition, the response time when ESS provides a solution to problem is good (M=4,46; S=0,66).

10.6 Services Cape

One question covers the Services Cape aspect by asking the quality of the hotels provided by ESS for the scouts during the season. Results are presented in Table 9.

Table 9. Results of the Service Cape

Services Cape (N=13)	Mean
13. The quality of the hotels provided by ESS.	4,15

The result for the Services cape is positive with mean of 4,15 and standard deviation of 0,69.

10.7 Reputation and Credibility

Finally, the Reputation and Credibility aspect is covered by three questions in the questionnaire. The answers are presented in Table 10.

Table 10. Results of the Reputation and Credibility

Reputation and Credibility (N=13)	Mean
14. The accuracy of ranking lists compared to the NHL draft results.	3,69
15. The usefulness of the rankings during the season.	4,08
16. The quality of the earlier ranking lists.	3,69

It is important to notice that the Reputation and Credibility aspect is one of the most crucial parts in this questionnaire. Overall, it has a large effect on the perceived quality of the customers. First, the accuracy of the ranking lists compared to the NHL draft results gained a moderate mean of 3,69. Yet, the usefulness of the rankings during the season is perceived as good with mean 4,08. Finally, the quality of the earlier ranking lists has the mean of 3,69. In all of these three questions standard deviation stayed lower than 0,75, which means only a small variation in the responses.

10.8 Responses on the Recommendation Question

In the most recent questionnaire, the last question asked the respondents to evaluate their willingness to recommend ESS to their colleagues. The answer was given on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1= totally disagree, 2=disagree, 3=I can't tell, 4=agree, 5=totally agree). The results for the question are presented in Table 11.

Table 11. Results of the recommendation of the ESS

Recommendation of the European Sport Services (N=13)	Mean
I would recommend the European Sport Services to my collegues?	4,54

The recommendation of the European Sport Service to colleagues is very high (M=4,54) with small standard deviation (S=0,52).

10.9 General Comments from Previous Questionnaire in 2005

The 2005 questionnaire (see Appendix 2) included open ended questions regarding the customers' satisfaction on the service of the NHL Central Scouting (CSS): e.g. the NHL Link website, player ranking lists, and the NHL Combine. As mentioned, this questionnaire was distributed to all of the 30 teams using NHL Central Scouting's services, from which 19 answered. This chapter focuses on analyzing the results from this previous questionnaire, since it had a crucial role for the questionnaire used for this study regarding the service of ESS.

First, the question about the NHL Link website reveals that it mainly received positive feedback. Most of the teams, 18 out of 19 teams, considered the website to be good and mentioned using it daily. The teams thought that the content on the website is a useful tool during the scouting process and that both the North American and the European sections are good. The teams also appreciated the provided hotel and scout directory. Still, some improvement suggestions were made by the teams, which are as follows:

- NCAA status or commitment list of scholarships.
- Newspaper articles from the CHL placed on the website.
- Pictures of prospects on the website.
- Enter data from the NHL Guide/record book.
- Log in procedure, remember the password.
- Improve scouts for hire section.
- Better co-operation from the CHL in terms of injury updates.
- Easier scrolling.

The teams also made interesting suggestions regarding the player's ranking lists. This part is especially important since it has a vital role on the perceived quality. The suggestions are:

- Keep the numerical order: gives some comparison to other sources and is valuable.
- Alterations could consist of top 100 numerically ranked and broken down to.
- Too many A- players listed.
- Concentrate on rounds 1-3.
- ABC grouping give a more general overview.
- Numerical rankings are inefficient.
- Rank players by league.
- Keep the numerical rankings ABC ranking are an easy way out.
- North American rankings should be combined with Europe.
- Include goalies in player rankings.

Other services that were covered in the questionnaire were about the NHL Combine, Central Scouting Player Questionnaire and filming. The feedback about the Combine was overall positive as all of the 19 teams agreed that it is an essential service offered by CSS. In addition, the teams mentioned that the Combine event improves every year and allows the teams to collect important information all at once. As the questionnaire asked in relations to the NHL Combine that should the teams have a say in who is invited to the Combine. For this, the answers were divided as 10 teams answered yes and 9 answered no. Another more specific question about combine was that can the interview process be better suited to the needs of the teams. Most of the teams (M=15) liked the current structure of the interviews; they realize the difficulty in accommodating everybody and were happy with the results gained from the interview process. In addition, the NHL Combine section asked about the usability of the Combine's fitness test. Half of the teams agreed that the testing that is carried out is useful and fulfills their needs, whereas the other half thought that the testing needs to be improved. The suggestions for improvements are as follows:

- Alert teams to players with serious medical conditions.
- On ice testing to supplement land testing.
- Tests too similar and more up to date testing methods, better testing equipment.
- More time between tests to let players rest.
- Europeans prospects game the day after the combine.

Next, the Central Scouting Player Questionnaires received a positive response as 16 teams answered that these questionnaires provide more than enough information and only 3 teams thought the questionnaires needed improvement. Still, some suggestions were made on questions that could be added to the questionnaire: e.g. the player's cell phone number and their personal goals for next season. Also, the most important suggestion was that the questionnaires should be accessible earlier.

Then, the question regarding the filming of the players also received positive feedback as 15 teams liked the new DVD format provided to the teams. However, 3 teams thought that the quality of the footage was not very good. Overall, the usability of the footage was considered high: 17 teams saw it useful and only 2 teams said it did not serve much purpose and was only a secondary tool. The question regarding the placement of the video footage in the NHL Link website resulted answers both for and against: 12 teams would like to see the footage in the website as well as receiving a hard copy on DVD, 4 teams were opposed to this, and 3 teams were undecided.

The questionnaire also had a section for the teams to fill in general comments on the service of the NHL Central Scouting. All together, the teams were rather satisfied with the service of the Central Scouting and the teams especially praised the information provided in the NHL Link website as it seemed that the faster the teams can access to all the provided information, the better. For example, one of the respondents stated: "You guys do a great service for us considering resources and trying to satisfy the needs of every team". In addition, one respondent praised that the survey was a great idea and they suggested having access to the game reports filed by Central Scouting scouts. Another respondent asked to include some form of psychological testing into the scouting process. One respondent says that Central Scouting does a good job under difficult conditions and provides useful information for the clubs. Finally, one respondent says: "I really appreciate the hard work and effort that is put forth by Central Scouting. A lot of time and effort goes into the prospects game, fitness testing, interviews and binders that we receive at the end of the year: Keep up the great work."

11 Discussion

The aim of this study was to create a development plan for ESS regarding the service the company provides to its customers by identifying areas of development based on the findings from the conducted questionnaire. In order to create the most recent questionnaire, the study used two earlier studies as a basis to identify the questions. All and all, the questionnaire was divided into seven parts – the seven criteria of perceived quality by Grönroos (2007). The questionnaire was sent to 20 NHL scouts who use ESS's services from which 13 returned the questionnaire by the deadline.

This chapter focuses on discussing the results, which were presented in Chapter 9 more closely. First, the customer perspective is looked at after which the development areas from ESS's internal process are identified. Overall, the results of the study enable to reach the aim of the study as three areas of development can be clearly pinpointed. These three areas are the NHL Link website, the written game reports, as well as the provided ranking. By improving these three services, ESS can provide the best possible value and keep itself as an irreplaceable source to the teams. After all, the willingness and ability for constant development is vital when aiming at a long-term partnership with the NHL.

11.1 Customer Perspective

The results show that the respondents are overall satisfied with several services ESS provides to them. It appears that ESS gained the highest scores from the aspect of reliability and trustworthiness; the respondents seem to be very satisfied giving the mean 4,77 for both of the two questions measuring the aspect. As a result, it can be said that the communication between the scouts and the ESS staff is working really well. This result is positive since reliability and trustworthiness will be a very important aspect also in the future and especially good communication is a key factor future co-operation with the customers.

According to the study, another strength that ESS has is service recovery. The respondents consider ESS's staff to be willing to solve problems and be helpful when assisting scouts in their work as most of the scouts, 11 out of 13, were very satisfied with this aspect of ESS.

Services cape was measured by asking the respondents to rate the quality of the hotels provided by ESS. This was mostly satisfying (54%), but the results also revealed that there are also some scouts who do not know about this service that ESS provides regarding the hotels. Most likely these scouts use other service providers when booking a hotel for a tournament.

Overall, the respondents were satisfied with the reputation and credibility of ESS. More than half (53%) of the scouts regard the accuracy of the ranking lists compared to the actual NHL draft results as satisfying. Although, there are also many (38%) who were unable to rate the question by answering 3, can't tell. A reason for this can be the fact that there are no research done about the possible correlation of ESS's ranking lists and the actual results of the draft. In the future, a study could be conducted in order to find out the actual accuracy of the provided ranking lists compared to the draft results. However, it is good to keep in mind that the job of ESS is not to speculate what happens in the draft. The main target of the ranking lists is to provide the scouts with a second opinion on the players who should be followed more closely on the ice.

Also in the reputation and credibility aspect, one important question was to find out the respondent's opinion about the usefulness of the rankings during the season. Most of the scouts (85%) were either satisfied (62%) or very satisfied (23%) with the rankings. The quality of the earlier ranking lists also gained positive feedback. This is good since some background work inside the company has been done to analyze earlier rankings followed by some discussion on what could learned from these previous lists. For example reflecting on what type of players did actually proceed to NHL and what types did not?

According to the results, one area of development is clearly the accessibility and flexibility of the NHL Link website. The reason for this is that majority (77%) of the scouts did not have knowledge of the provided video footage making this a crucial development target. After all, scouts need to be aware of all the services ESS provides to them. The user friendliness of the NHL Link website was also one of the least satisfactory services. Almost every fourth (23%) scout was quite dissatisfied with the website, but also there were many (38%) that were very satisfied. Although, there was a lot of variation within the answers, which can be caused by the different level of computer skills the scouts might have. This can lead to difficulties in using the new software. As a solution, training and guidance on using the NHL Link website by ESS could be offered to the scouts more frequently.

Professionalism and skills are a very vital aspect of ESS's work. Thus, it is important to analyze why half of the respondents (54%) were unable to comment on the quality of the game reports. One explanation could be the fact that the game reports are located in various places within the website and that the respondents did see the website as complicated to use on the question evaluating the user-friendliness of the website. From this it can be drawn that some of the scouts might not have seen all of the game reports due to the varying locations. A positive aspect is that the other half of the respondents was satisfied with the quality of game reports. Again, the accuracy of the statistic information showed good results as over half of the respondents (62%) were very satisfied. Finally, although the scouts seemed to be satisfied with the value of the players scouted, this aspect needs constant development due to its importance for the scouts as the players are one of the most important aspect within their work.

11.2   Internal Process

From the results of the questionnaire, altogether three development areas within ESS's internal processes can be identified. Current internal processes and new viewpoints are crucial when creating the development plan. Some employees are very co-operative and ready for changes, but the importance of training cannot be bypassed when implementing change. Everybody has to have clear understanding on the new direction and goals the changes bring. As for ESS, the results of the study highlight three development areas within the internal process that need to be addressed.

As mentioned, one of the most crucial areas of development is the NHL Link website. For one, the accessibility of the website should be improved as in order to increase the awareness of the scouts to all the services ESS provides within the website as tools for their scouting work and decision making process. However, the guidance for the scouts must be done in co-operation with the main organization, NHL Central Scouting since it is they are in charge of the NHL Link website. Though, ESS could focus on improving the knowledge of the European scouts regarding the website by for example providing user support material and offering verbal guidance. These kinds of support methods can also increase the user-friendliness of the website without drastic changes on the content.

The second area that needs to be developed is the quality of the written game reports. An important factor here is increasing consistency and preciseness by creating an internal guideline for writing the reports. These guidelines should take into account for example the number of evaluated players per game, the aspect of the game events, the length of the reports, and the time schedule when the game report should be added to the website. The quality of the game reports affect the value of this service; good game reports and checklists are more useable for the scouts. The guidelines can also improve the scouting skills of the ESS staff since they give an indication on what aspects are important to scout during the games and which are less important. After all, the scouting skills of the ESS staff could be identified as one area of development based on the questionnaire.

The final area that needs to be developed is improving the credibility of the ranking lists by having better guidelines for them. Ranking lists such as the players to watch lists and preliminary ranking lists are made already at the beginning of the season. As the making of these lists take time and effort from ESS and these are a service provided to the customers, it would be better if the lists could be better utilized by the scouts. For example, these early season lists could include information on the so called "A", "B" and "C" players in those rankings. A-player means that player might get drafted in the 1-3 rounds; B-player means that player might get drafted in 4-7 rounds and C-player means that the player needs to improve in order to get drafted. This type of additional information will give more meaning of the earlier ranking for the scouts. This will lead to the fact that the usage of the earlier season ranking will increase, which again will help the scouts to plan better their season schedule as they can focus more on the players they want to see more often.

However, you can't just focus the areas that need to be improved and forget your strengths. You need to remember that customers are overall very happy to services provided to them. Reliability and trustworthiness is very successful to the company and together with good communication company will be successful also in future.

When improving the three mentioned areas – the website, game reports and ranking – as well as maintaining the strengths, ESS can offer better service to the scouts. This will aid in fulfilling the ultimate goal of ESS, which is to provide the best possible value and to keep the company as an irreplaceable source to the teams.

11.3   Conclusion

Altogether the process of this development plan took couple of years and there have been some changes during the process. The purpose of the study was to analyze how the 30 member clubs of the NHL evaluate the quality of the service ESS provides to them. As a result, areas of development were identified in order to improve ESS's internal processes, which should lead to better service.

As said in the introduction and clarified in the literature review, ice hockey scouting has many special unwritten rules and secrets that only people working within the field can know. That is why it is important that every ESS staff member has clear understanding on what kind of information they should be providing to the customer. Understanding aspects such as scouting the games, filing the game reports, and keeping up the communication within the scouting community is the key to success for the future. Overall, preparation is a key to success for ESS.

In order to identify the development areas, a questionnaire was formed on the basis of the seven criteria of good service quality from Grönroos (2007): Professionalism and Skills, Attitudes and Behaviour, Accessibility and Flexibility, Reliability and Trustworthiness, Service Recovery, Services cape and Reputation, and Credibility. This was done in order to see how the customers perceive the service ESS provides to them. In addition, the quantitative analysis of the results was done according to these seven criteria. The questionnaire was sent to 20 scouts working in different European countries via email. The reason for selecting 20 out of the 30 NHL clubs as respondents is that these 20 focus especially on the European field at least more than those not selected. The responses within the deadline came from 13 scouts and from nationalities of Finnish, Swedish, Czech, and Russian.

As a result, three areas of development were identified – the NHL Link website, the quality of the game reports and ranking lists. By focusing on improving these three services, ESS can lead to better service quality perception in the eyes of the customer. In addition, by enforcing the strengths, such as communication and reliability the company can improve the services even better. Overall, this will enable ESS to provide the best possible value to the customers and to keep the company as an irreplaceable source to the teams.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. European Sport Services Ltd. questionnaire 2011

(1= very dissatisfied, 2= quite dissatisfied, 3= I can't tell, 4= quite satisfied, 5= very satisfied)

Professionalism and Skills

1. The quality of the game reports written by the ESS staff.   1 2 3 4 5

2. The accuracy of the statistical information distributed by ESS.   1 2 3 4 5

3. The value of the players scouted by the ESS staff.   1 2 3 4 5

Attitudes and Behaviour

4. The level of customer orientation of the ESS staff.   1 2 3 4 5

5. The development of the ESS staff's scouting skills.   1 2 3 4 5

6. The presence of the ESS staff in games during the season.   1 2 3 4 5

Accessibility and Flexibility

7. The user-friendliness of the NHL Link –website.   1 2 3 4 5

8. The usefulness of the provided video footage for the scouting process. 1 2 3 4 5

Reliability and Trustworthiness

9. The quality of communication between ESS and NHL team scouts.   1 2 3 4 5

10. The quality of the provided information by the ESS staff during junior national team

    tournaments.   1 2 3 4 5

Service Recovery

11. ESS Staff willingness to help solving problems.   1 2 3 4 5

12. The response time when ESS provides a solution to a problem.   1 2 3 4 5

Services Cape

13. The quality of the hotels provided by ESS.   1 2 3 4 5

Reputation and Credibility

14. The accuracy of ranking lists compared to the NHL draft results.   1 2 3 4 5

15. The usefulness of the rankings during the season.   1 2 3 4 5

16. The quality of the earlier ranking lists.   1 2 3 4 5

(1= totally disagree, 2=disagree, 3=I can't tell, 4=agree, 5=totally agree)

I would recommend the European Sport Service to my colleagues?   1 2 3 4 5

Questionnaire ESS 2011

(N=13)

(1= very dissatisfied, 2=quite dissatisfied, 3=I can't tell, 4=quite satisfied, 5=very satisfied)

	1	2	3	4	5
Professionalism and Skills					
1. The quality of the game reports written by the ESS staff.			7	5	1
2. The accuracy of the statistical information distributed by ESS.			2	3	8
3. The value of the players scouted by the ESS staff.			3	7	3
Attitudes and Behaviour					
4. The level of customer orientation of the ESS staff.				6	7
5. The development of the ESS staff's scouting skills.			4	7	2
6. The presence of the ESS staff in games during the season.	1		1	5	6
Accessibility and Flexibility					
7. The user-friendliness of the NHL Link –website.		3	2	3	5
8. The usefulness of the provided video footage for the scouting process.			10	2	1
Reliability and Trustworthiness					
9. The quality of communication between ESS and NHL team scouts.				3	10
10. The quality of the provided information by the ESS staff during jr nat. team tournaments.				3	10
Service Recovery					
11. ESS Staff willingness to help solving problems.				2	11
12. The response time when ESS provides a solution to a problem.			1	5	7
Services Cape					
13. The quality of the hotels provided by ESS.			2	7	4
Reputation and Credibility					
14. The accuracy of ranking lists compared to the NHL draft results.			5	7	1
15. The usefulness of the rankings during the season.			2	8	3
16. The quality of the earlier ranking lists.		1	3	8	1
I would recommend the European Sport Service to my colleagues?				6	7

(1= totally disagree, 2=disagree, 3=I can't tell, 4=agree, 5=totally agree)

NHL CENTRAL SCOUTING QUESTIONNAIRE   **Summer 2005**

Please respond with any input you may have with regard to making NHL Central Scouting's services more valuable to your team. (The example questions which accompany several of the service areas below are provided not as suggestions, but rather as "think about"-type possibilities which may have been brought to our staff's attention during casual conversations at the rinks).

www.centralscouting.nhl.com / **Our WEBSITE** :

This can (or *should*) be our Department's daily/weekly newspaper. Does your team use it? How often? Is there a way we can make it more user friendly? Is there added content which you would like to see on the site?

_____

_____

_____

Our RANKING LISTS:

Annually an early-season "Players To Watch" list (subdivided into "A"-list and "B"-list categories), a mid season ranking of approx. eight rounds of players eligible for the upcoming draft (goaltenders on a separate list of about 30), and a final, season-ending ranking of eight rounds (@240+), with goaltenders (@30) again being separated out.

Should we dispense with the notion of trying to differentiate between, for example, #48 vs. #53 with our current system? Perhaps in its place provide larger groupings, for example, an "A" list of the top 75 players who can/"should" be selected in the first two rounds, followed by a "middle rounds" grouping of perhaps the next 100 players, and then a "C" group of "development type" players (possibly possessing strengths in a limited number of hockey skill areas) who are, in our opinion, best suited for a later round selection.

_____

_____

_____

Our PROFILES (those pages contained in the Final Report binders):

End-of-season statistical information, numerical ratings on several hockey-specific categories and verbal descriptions for the top 120 North American and top 50 European skaters, as well as the top 30+ goaltenders, eligible for the upcoming draft.

Are the categories usable? Should there be different descriptive reports? Is the formatting understandable? Etc. ?

_____

_____

_____

The NHL COMBINE:

The annual invitation of the top 100 players eligible for the upcoming Entry Draft (@70 North American, @30 European), brought together in a Toronto airport area hotel for the purposes of individual NHL teams to conduct in-person interviews and to evaluate the Medical screening information and the Fitness evaluation testing results accumulated from this group setting.

Is the entire endeavor worthwhile? _____

Should the invitees be determined by a canvassing of each team's preferences (e.g., a "vote" similar to the selection process for the Top Prospects Game each year)? _____

_____

_____

Can the interview process be structured differently to better suit each team's needs?

_____

_____

Does the Fitness testing yield usable results? (please consult your respective Strength and Conditioning Coaches on this). If not, how can the procedure and/or protocol be restructured to better satisfy your needs?

_____

_____

_____

Central Scouting Player Questionnaires:

These are the self-reports completed by each player, usually at the beginning of each season, containing questions about personal background.

Are there questions and/or topic areas which you'd like to see added?

_____

_____

_____

FILMING of the Top Prospects:

Is the new DVD format acceptable? _____

 Is the footage provided usable (e.g., angles, clarity, etc.)?

_____

_____

_____

Whenever it becomes technologically possible, would this footage be better (more easily, more rapidly available) to be placed on our website? _____

Other General Concerns / Recommendations:

_____

_____

_____