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Work Absence Related to the Psychosocial
Work Environment

A Case Study at Ikea Gothenburg

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PREFACE

The number of people in Sweden, who are absent from work has increased from 134 000 persons in January 1997 to 300 000 in January 2002. The total cost of rehabilitation and sick leave benefits has increased dramatically during the last couple of years and this development is suspected to continue. Many different reasons are given behind this development, reasons related to both the working environment as well as the society in general. Some of the actions taken to convert this trend are stricter labour laws, where the employer's responsibilities are extended.

Work absence, has strong connections with the working environment. The historical development of fighting work absence has mainly been of physical character, and the psychological needs of employees have been neglected. This is the main reason behind my choice of work absence as subject for my master thesis. The Swedish company Ikea has always had a good reputation when it comes to managing human resources, thereof my choice of empirical study. Furthermore, I have worked part-time at Ikea Gothenburg, six months before and during my thesis work.

ABSTRACT

The aim of this report is to investigate how the psychosocial working environment influences work absence. Consequently, a case study has been made where the psychosocial working environment and its influences on the individual has been viewed from three different levels, the organisational, operational/human resource management and individual level.

The traditional human resource motivators have been questioned in terms of its manipulative force to increase performance, rather than support and encourage the employee in his or her daily work. These factors have shown to influence stress levels and personal health negatively since the motivational forces are exaggerated and therefore conflict with the organisation's traditional values. Further, they and are adopted under general assumptions rather than individually adapted to the needs and abilities of the employee. According to the case study, it is of higher importance for the employees to be noticed and appreciated, in terms of social support from the closest manager. The time and opportunities given to achieve this seems to be more vital for the individuals than traditional human resource motivators, as learning and development and extrinsic rewards.

The main finding is that since the rapidly changing environment of today influences the individuals as well as the organisations they operate within, the necessity to satisfy psychological needs of the individual should be emphasised further. These needs have to be considered by the organisation in order to create a positive and supporting psychosocial working environment, which in turn influences the well being and health of the individual.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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PROLOGUE

When talking about IKEA, every Swedish person seems to have their own experiences and stories, stories about an incredible cheap sofa, missing screws or mismatching construction descriptions. Everyone knows about Ikea and its shopping procedures, how you walk around the store and compare, measure, write down the storage numbers and then go down to the storage where you hopefully will find that package, which just has to fit into the trunk of you car…

This is no mystery since Ikea is a huge chain of stores spread out all over Sweden, and can also be found in many other countries. What separates Ikea from most other well-known brands, is that everyone, at least all Swedish people, knows the name of the founder, his place of birth and roughly how old he is. Most people also know the history behind the company and how the founder once created this company. Maybe this is what makes Ikea so Swedish?

During my business and human resource studies, Ikea was often brought up as an example, even if I completed the main part of my studies in Australia. The thing about the organisation, which interested me the most where its strong organisational culture. How is it possible to influence so many people, working in different geographical areas, to feel this strong unity? What is it that makes people work and behave in a certain way? How is it possible to steer so many people in the same direction through values and attitudes? Since this simply represent the essence of the whole HRM philosophy, with personnel care, common goals and motivation. It was with these thoughts in mind I started my investigation, fascinated of the things I read and heard.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Whether we work or study, are young or old, we are all influenced by the time era, or environment we live in. In order to be successful and grow we have to adapt to the requirements and demands it includes. The same conditions concern the organisations operating in the same environment. To describe the message of today's time era, words such as change, flexibility and development are often used. For an organisation this means continuous improvements, new techniques, more effective work processes and a frequent flow of new innovations. In order to satisfy the ever-changing customer demand these are all factors that have to be considered and prepared for (Peters and Waterman, 1982; Argyris & Schön, 1996; Senge, 1990.)

If the demand increases, the means to reach the new goals has to be made available. This seems very logical and straightforward as one imagines the simple process of supply and demand, plant and harvest or give and take. But what if this simple equation does not work? What if fulfilling your part of the deal, providing with the means required to execute the work, or allocate the resources agreed upon, is not enough?

The scenario described above is what seems to be happening in the labour market today. Even though the majority of the organisations in Sweden follow their part of the deal, with adequate salaries, a safe working environment and other legally contracted tools needed to perform a job, the amount of people in Sweden who are unable to perform their job constantly increases. The people absent from work due to bad health increased from 134 000 persons in January, 1997 to 300 000 in January, 2002. The governmental costs related to rehabilitation and sick leave compensations where 36.4 billion SEK in 2000, and are expected to increase to 48 billion in 2002 (SOU 2002:5)[1]. According to

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[1] Action plan for increased health in working life [Handlingsplan för ökad hälsa i arbetslivet] by Jan Rydh.

Ekström (2002), the total governmental costs of all kinds of sick leave compensations and rehabilitation costs, related to diminished abilities to work, currently increase at a rate of 25 millions per day.

It is known that the level of work absence always increases in times of growth and decreases during a recession. Absence from work due to bad health was extremely low throughout the recession in the early 1990s´. These low levels of absence from work lead to a 20-30% decrease in job vacancies, which shows what a great difference a healthy and well-performing work force means to the effectiveness of the organisation (Arbetmiljöfakta, 2002). However, it is not only the indirect costs related to decreased performance, which is an important issue for organisations. Work absence is also a large and costly direct expense, in terms of sick leave benefits, temporary recruitment and training of new staff. The hidden costs, as delays and decreased motivation and work efforts, makes the total costs related to absence even higher (Hällsten, 1997).

Peoples' good health and ability to work is a presumption for a positive societal development, as well as an indicator for organisational success. The fact that decreased health also leads to a lower quality of life for the individual due to elimination from the working life, economic dependence and less control over the personal life situation, should also be considered. Consequently, possible solutions to convert this trend are of great importance.

1.2. Description of Research Area

> *"To give simple, honest people a chance to develop as*
> *individuals and as professionals so that we together and with a*
> *great commitment can create a better day for ourselves and*
> *our customers."[2]*

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[2]Own Translation of Ikea's personnel philosophy. Source: *IKEA koncernen 2000/2001*, PR & Communications, IKEA International A/S

The words outlined above are Ikea's personnel philosophy. These work related values and words of encouragement can be found in every booklet and document describing Ikea and what the organisation stands for. What the organisation stands for is a typical Ikea thing on its own. Few organisations have such a clear message and strong values, which are not directly in line with the actual success and profit of the organisation. At Ikea, people and relations appear to be very important, even though furniture is the core business.

Ikea has constantly been mentioned and brought up as a good example, all through my business studies, whether I have listened to a lecturer in Australia or in Sweden.[3] Ikea has been a good example of how a healthy culture positively influence the individuals within an organisation, how a respected brand name gives the organisation a fruitful image and a proud workforce, how a strong and true mission leads the company in the right direction, and how employees well-being and development are prioritised and seen as an essential part of an organisation's success.

These gracious expressions have awakened my curiosity, as well as my admiration. Is Ikea actually so concerned about the employees? Do the members of the organisation really feel that Ikea is like a big family?, as Salzer (1994) describes in her international study of Ikea. Is it possible to continuously promote these types of feelings in an organisation as the outside world changes? Can these strong values and caring culture diminish the tendency of absenteeism? To investigate these issues further I have chosen to study the situation of work absence at Ikea in Gothenburg, looking at the reasons behind, and the actions taken to prevent absence among employees and department managers, which are the groups I have chosen to focus this research on. This will be done through the use of four main sources. The first source is internal statistics and quantitative information received from Ikea Gothenburg's Human Resource Department. Secondly, the results from an investigation made by

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[3] Organisational Theory, Dwight H. Zakus, Ph.D. Sem. 2, 2000. Griffith University, Gold Coast, Australia. Strategic Management, Professor Liz Fulop Sem 2, 2002, Griffith University, Gold Coast, Australia.

Previia[4], including 34 employees from two different departments, will be used. The third source are eight interviews, six of them conducted with sales-department managers, one with a human resource manager, Previa's employee who is responsible for the organisational health care at Ikea Gothenburg were also interviewed, and finally the Chairman of the most dominant labour union at Ikea Gothenburg. The fourth source is my own experiences and observations from participating in the daily operations by working part time for six months before, and also during my research period.

1.2.1. Purpose

In this thesis I will investigate and map work absence due to bad health in relation to the psychosocial work environment at Ikea Gothenburg, in order to fulfil the purpose, which is to find areas in particular need of attention to convert this trend.

1.2.2. Research Questions

In my research I will mainly focus on how the psychosocial work environment affect the health of the individual. I believe that this particular view is especially interesting in Ikea's case, since the strong organisational culture and modest values may have an impact on the psychosocial working environment. Also, I believe that this view is more closely related to managerial responsibility, which is within my area of knowledge and educational experience. Below, I have identified and displayed questions that I will consider in my assignment. I have divided the purpose of the report into three sub questions; each of them will provide me with the information needed to move on the next level in my investigation. For each question I have acknowledged the sources of information that will give me the required results. Where in the assignment these results will be demonstrated is also outlined. To further underline my course of action I have described my disposition of the report in Figure 1.

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[4] Previa and the investigation are presented more in detail in the methodology (Appendix 1).

- *What are the main elements in the psychosocial working environment, which affect the degree of work absence in general?*
  This question I have chosen to look at first because it will give me an understanding of the reasons behind work absence due to bad health[5]. The answer will therefore work as a knowledge base and guide my investigation at Ikea Gothenburg. The question will be answered through a literature study in relation to general trends and patterns of work absence and the situation at Ikea Gothenburg. The information is mainly collected from books in the area of organisational theories and human resource, but also from research reports, investigations and statistics. The question will be answered partly in Chapter 2, and mainly in the theoretical framework (Chapter 3), with a theoretical model (Figure 6) as the core ingredient, which also will be used to give an illustration of the situation as a whole.

- *What are the main reasons behind work absence, related to the psychosocial work environment at Ikea Gothenburg?*
  This question will answer the first part of my purpose, to map the work absence at Ikea Gothenburg, but it is also needed to fulfil the second part, which is to give recommendations and find solutions to diminish these problems of absence. I will answer the second question through a field study at Ikea Gothenburg. How this is done, is explained more in-dept in the method section (Appendix 1). I will map the main reasons behind the current absence and describe what is done today to prevent work related illness and high stress levels. The results are presented in Chapter 5 and give an analysis of the problems at Ikea. The results and analysis of the field study will be compared with the theoretical model (Figure 6) constructed to answer the first question.

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[5] From now on, work absence due to bad health will be referred to as work absence.

- *What areas or issues are in particular needs for attention to convert this trend at Ikea Gothenburg?*
  The analysis of the situation in relation to the theoretic model will give me recommendations and conclusions to Ikea Gothenburg situation, which will answer in the last research question and thereby conclude my investigation. This discussion will be found in Chapter 6.

Figure 1 below will further explain my course of action. I will use both empirical data and theory to conduct my theoretical model (Figure 6), which will be used as my instrument to map the situation at Ikea and give possible recommendations.

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  │ Statistics          │                        │   Surveys       │
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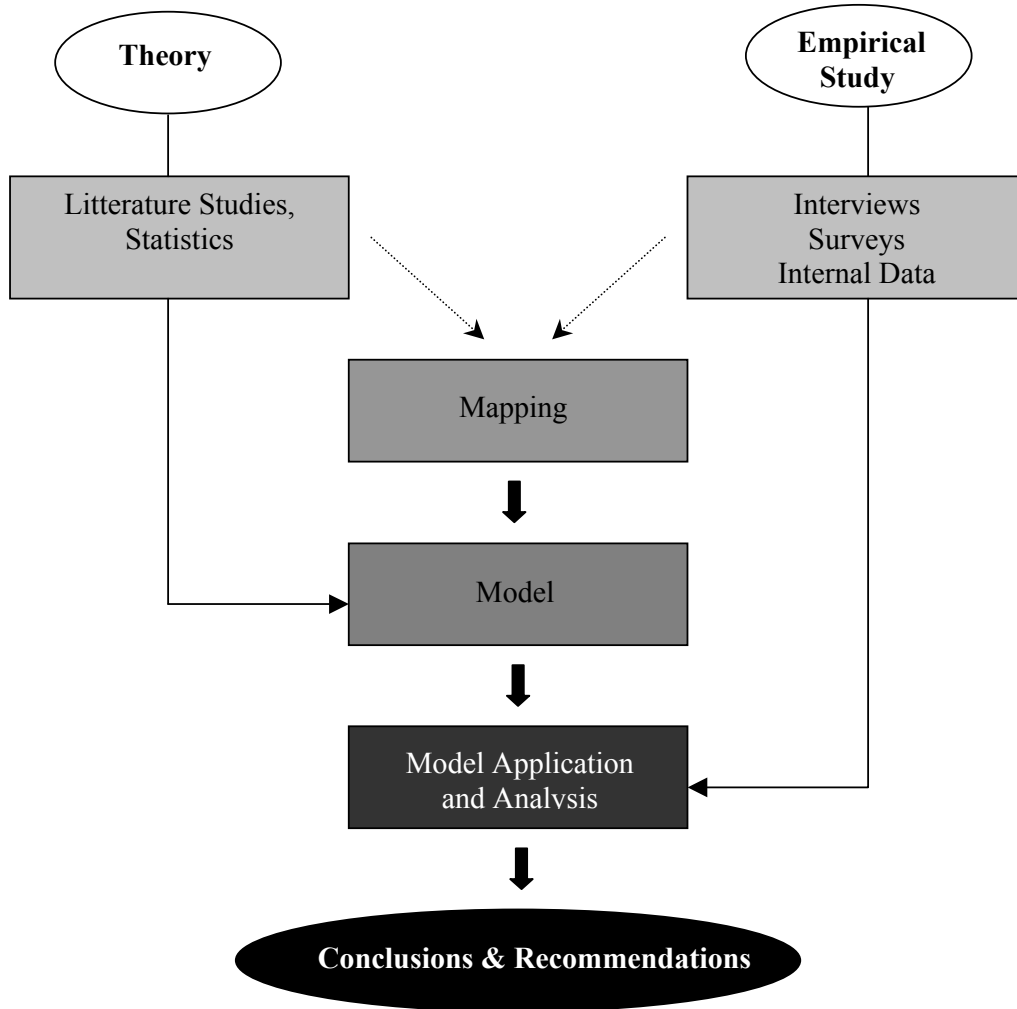
Figure 1**:** Distribution of thesis

2. TRENDS AND PATTERNS OF WORK ABSENCE

This section will guide my theoretical framework, since the general information found in research, statistics and findings will give me an understanding of relevant theoretical areas to search within. I will examine the trends and patterns of work absence with the purpose of increasing the understanding concerning the problem and putting the situation at Ikea in a larger context. In order to understand what role the employer plays in this relation and what obligations the two parts have towards each other, the Swedish labour laws concerning these issues have to be examined.

2.1. Labour Laws

As a result of the social awakening at the beginning of the last century, different types of labour laws started to evolve and a better working environment and fair treatment became important. Findings predestined that if the workers living standards where improved, their working efforts would follow (Damm, 1993).

The Working Environment
The law regulating the working environment was not only developed to diminish physical injuries and unhealthy behaviour in the place of work, but also with the purpose to positively work towards a good working environment to create the feeling of well-being[6] at work (Adlercreutz, 2000; SOU 2002:5). The working situation has to be adapted to the individuals' conditions, both physical and psychological and the employee has to have a possibility to co-operate in this process. This procedure includes all employees, both those who have been absent from work and those who have not. The employee also has to be given the opportunity to assist when developments and changes concerning his or her working conditions are planned (2:1 § AML). Further, the employer has to work out an action plan, to explain and outline how these goals can be reached. The employers' responsibilities also include to continuously

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[6] Well being was the closest English synonym to the Swedish word *trivsel* I could find.

investigating the risk for work related accidents, work-related injuries and then take action to diminish these risks. An action that cannot be dealt with immediately has to be planned for within reasonable time (3:2 § AML).

Rehabilitation

Lately, much attention has been given different possibilities to rehabilitate the employee after being absent from work. When the employee has been absent for one month or a total of six times in one year, a rehabilitation plan has to be outlined by the employer. Suitable activities should be suggested and someone who is responsible for carrying through these activities, also special resources should be put aside to support this (Adlercreutz, 2000).

Sick Leave Benefits

All employees of the Swedish work force are insured to prevent the economic deficit from becoming too extensive due to work absence. The employer is obligated to pay sick leave, which is 80% of the employee's wages, for the first 14 days except for the very first day when no benefits at all are awarded (6§ Lag om sjuklön).

Suggestions for Changes

The organisations of today are faced with new challenges, challenges in terms of increased feelings of anxiety and stress. To deal with these new problem areas, the need for a signification of psychological factors has been recognised. Some new ideas concerning working hours are that the obligated amount of hours should be decreased, since more work opportunities could be created, and health problems related to stress could be decreased. As flexibility has become the new fashionable word of working time regulations, the employer should be able to adapt the employees' hours to best suit the customer demands. Suggestions have also been discussed that the employee should have more possibilities to decide which hours are most suitable to his or her own situation (Adlercreutz, 2000).

2.2. Work Absence - Reasons Behind It

During recent years many researchers has tried to find reasons behind the increasing levels of work absence. Situational factors, which often are viewed as a stressful problem for employees are the relationship between the employees and their work, how the work is organised, what routines are present at work and how resources are allocated (Theorell, Michelsen & Nordemar, 1993; SOU 2002:5). Decreased staff and working peaks due to absence are other reasons mentioned (Nenzen, 2002). A governmental report shows that the increasing levels of organisational changes with downsizing and personnel reductions, demands a more flexible and adaptive workforce, are the main reasons behind increased levels of stress [7]. Also, Theorell and Bermin (2002) mention how increased demands of flexibility and competence due to organisational changes has an impact on psychological health. Besides this they point out that different subcultures may lead to culture clashes and differences in loyalty towards the organisation, which can lead to psychological damage. Another important matter included in their report, is the important part played by the managers. The authors argue that the managers' attitudes and personality may be determinant for how the employees value and experience their work situation. In fact leadership has shown to have a direct impact on the levels of stress among employees.

A study made among employees in Gotland also showed how important the experience of the working situation is. The probability for a good health did increase for those who believed that they did a good job, rarely where involved in conflicts, where appreciated by colleagues and received support and advice from their closest manager. Also, the likelihood of being in good health was twice as high if you had the possibility to control your own working situation. Along with a bad working climate, high demands with low levels control increased the risk for long-term absence from work (SOU 2000:121). The working climate was also shown to be of importance in an investigation made

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[7] Included in the report, *Långsiktig verksamhetsutveckling ur ett arbetsmiljöperspektiv – en handlingsplan för åtgärder på arbetsmiljöområdet* Ds 2001:28, from the department of trade and industry (näringsdepartementet).

by Prevent[8], where 700 individuals ranked 18 work-related factors according to what they believed to be most important for a good, healthy working environment. The results from this investigation are illustrated in Figure 2.

The Most Important Factors Determining Well-being and Comfort at Work

Factor	Percentage
Open climate where one may express feelings and thoughts.	71
Balnce between work and privat- social life	65
Social support as childcare, schools, elder care	61
Varying work	61
Importance of the work	59
Trust in management	59
Ability to influence how work is organised	59
Good future prospects	56
Clear goaloriented organisation with routines	53
Possibility to competence development/education	52
A job that suits my interests	50
That I keep myself in good shape, through exerice	49
A low risk for work related injuries	48
The economic compensation	43
Active personnel care	41
Flexible working hours	34
Access to organisational health care and rehabilitation	32
To not work under time preassure	25

Figure 2: The Most Important Factors Determining Well-being and Comfort at Work, Source: Arbetsliv, (vol. 3, December 2002, p. 14).

An open working climate is the most important factor determining well-being, comfort and good health at work, other important factors are balance between private and working life, societal support, which are all factors closely related to individual stress levels. Issues such as task variety, trust in management,

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[8] Prevent should not be confused with Ikea's organisational healtcare Previa, which is a separate company.

ability to be involved and participate at work and clear goals and routines are typical human resource management issues, which I will discuss further in my theoretical framework.

The reasons mentioned above all affect the stress levels and discomfort among employees. However, as underlined by the findings presented in this section the psychological discomfort and negative stress do not mainly arise from the increasing workload itself. It is when the demands exceed the employees' capability and ability to perform, that the unhealthy stress and anxiety are developed, as the investigation from Gotland showed. Employees do not have the resources, in form of time, formal responsibility or qualification, to perform the tasks, although they are required to do the job. Studies show that at least 16% women and 13% men are in this situation (Arbetslivsfakta, 2002).

Other reasons behind absence, not related to the specific working situation have also been found. According to Ekström[9] (2002) the reasons behind work absence are not always related to the work itself. She believes that it is the correlation between stress in everyday-life and stress at work that is important. Today, many people live a very stressful life with high demands on themselves, which has a bad influence on both their physical and psychological health. The working situation still plays a significant role, but research and possible solutions to decrease stress outside work should also be recognised. An investigation presented in Svenska Dagbladet showed that every third person that is absent from work is absent due to tiredness or boredom. No connections could be recognised between the absenteeism and relevant issues in their work situation. In another similar investigation, presented in the same article, 60% of the persons interviewed believed that it was acceptable to report sick and stay home from work every now and then even if their health would not stop them from performing their work (Henriksson, 2002).

Investigations have shown that the Swedish people are in very good health in general; it has at least not decreased during most recent years. Compared to

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[9] Anna Ekstöm, Chairman of SACO, interviewed by Jobbhälsaonline, 2002-09-09, www.previa.se.

other countries, Sweden is far ahead according to most health related indicators. Rather, it is the self-experienced health that has decreased, especially psychological illness (SOU 2002:5). This trend can be recognised in Norway and the Netherlands as well, where people generally are of good health even if the work absent rates rise. Partly, the large number of older people in the work force can explain this, which is the same for all the countries mentioned. These somewhat obsolete labour force conditions are argued to be a result of the recession in the early 90's. Throughout the following 6-7 years the pre-age retirements decreased to historically low levels, and not until 1999 could a turn around be acknowledged, however still small compared to earlier years (Arbetslivsfakta, 2000). Since elder people feel more stressed and have more physical injuries this could be the reason behind the problem. We simply work for "too long" in Sweden, Norway and The Netherlands. However, according ESOs'[10] recent findings, the high level of older people in the work force can only explain 5% of the total increase, since work absence has increased in all age groups (Dusing, 2002).

The absent rate has increased within all age, gender and societal groups but varies between equivalent organisations; therefore, problem has to be acknowledged at an organisational level as well (SOU 2002:5; www.rfv.se, 02-09-09).

2.2.1. Organisational and Occupational Differences

Many investigations and research reports show that there is a strong connection between absence and the situation at work. The amount of people absent from work differs with the size of the organisation, it is three times higher in large organisations with more that 100 employees (Bergstedt, 2002; SOU 2002:5). Employees within occupations with a high level of customer contact, as teachers, doctors, nurses and all type of service occupations do more often feel that the psychological demands of their work are high, which lead to a negative stress (Theorell, et. al. 1993).

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[10] ESO Expertgruppen för studier inom offentlig ekonomi

Even though there are other factors influencing physical health, it is mainly the correlation between the individual and his or her working situation that is important to diminish absenteeism and develop a healthy working life. The working life of the future has to be developed with the best interests of the individual in mind (SOU 2002:5).

2.2.2. Gender and Age Differences

Women and older people are absent from work to a higher degree than men and younger people. According to statistics two thirds of all people receiving sick leave benefits from the health insurance are women. Both physical injuries and psychological illness are more highly represented among women (www.rfv.se, 02-09-09).

Back injuries after each week of work, among 50 to 64 year old women, are 45,8%. Within the same group 48.1% had pain in their shoulders or arms. Looking at the total percent of all women from the age of 16-64 the numbers are alarmingly high as well, 42.1% had back problems and 37.8% had aches in their shoulders or arms. To make a comparison, 24% of the men had back problems, and 23.7% had pain in shoulders or arms. Nearly half of the men (43%) and women (48%) in the investigation was exhausted after a days work, at least one day each week, 43.1% of the men and 50.6% of the women also believe that they have a physically demanding job (www.scb.se, 2002-09-09).

Almost two thirds of the females and more than half of the men feel that they have far too much to do at their jobs, (www.scb.se, 2002-09-09; Arbetsliv, 2002; Nordin, 1999). At least one day each week, 47.4% of the women and 44.3% of the man cannot calm down after work, in the sense that they cannot stop thinking about their job. 19.2% of the men and 32.5% of the women experienced headache, which is a typical stress related disease, at least one day each week (www.scb.se, 2002-09-09).

Comparing with the reasons behind absence, which are declared above, it can be recognised that women to a larger extent (51.9%) could never (or not most of the time) decide on when to do what working tasks. The same percentage for

men is 38.9%. 53.2% of all men and 48.6% of the women included in the research had been educated in the way that was required for their job (ibid.). The fact that women still perform more of the household duties and family care also has an impact (SOU 1998:6)[11]. Every third female expressed that her job was so demanding that she did not have enough time or energy to take care of the duties at home or spend time with the family (Arbetsliv, 2001).

Although, I will focus on reasons related to the working situation, other reasons such as family situation, a stressful life or the physical shape are all contributing factors, which should be kept in mind when reading and evaluating my results. Even though other factors contribute to this development, the working conditions mirrored by the statistics above does not seem to be in agreement with the legal obligations of the employer. Maybe some employers are not keeping their part of the deal after all? Or are these laws illusory, compared to the situations of today's working environment? To find the reasons behind the differences of how it should be and the way it is, I will now move on to view this problem in an organisational setting, investigating how the individual is influenced by the organisation he or she is operating within.

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[11] Report from Kvinnomaktutredningen

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As the chapter above showed, there are many aspects included in the work situation related to health and well-being. In the following chapter I will give a brief summary of theories related to the situation of work. I have divided the chapter into three main parts: the organisational view, the operational/human resource management view and the individual view. From the organisational view I will investigate how the organisations' structure, routines and culture may influence its members. The managing of human resources are important in terms of motivation, how these factors influences the individual experience of work. The individuals psychosocial needs will be viewed from a human psychological view in order to understand how we function in an organisational setting. I am exploring these three areas with the hope of discovering what activities and behaviour are of importance in order to prevent people feeling anxious and mistrust towards their work, which in turn may lead to absence. I will look at this problem mainly from a managerial perspective, as I believe that the managers have the responsibility to enable performance among employees. Bearing in mind which type of organisation Ikea is, and what industry it operates within, I have decided to focus my investigation and look deeper into issues which are in line with the information I have concerning the specific situation at Ikea, which I will discuss further in the empirical chapter.

3.1. Organisational Level

Organisations are formed to reach goals, which cannot be reached individually. Instead, many people are joined together to reach them, by co-ordinating themselves in the most effective way. This pattern of co-ordination is called the organisational structure and determines the responsibilities as well as the decision-making channels. The structure influences the organisations' culture and the other way around (Daft, 1998). Therefore, both these issues determine what informal and formal values and attitudes the organisation has. In order to understand how the organisation influences its people, I will in the following chapter describe how the structure and culture may reflect values and attitudes

of the organisation upon the individuals, and thereby influence how they experience their work situation.

3.1.1. Organisational Structure

The organisational structure is not only a pattern of co-ordination, it also organises the relations within the organisation. On the one hand, a structure creates order in our lives, which is linked to a certain purpose. We develop structures to reach certain goals, which at the same time limit us from reaching others. The most basic in an organisations' structure is its form of organising-its construction. On the other hand, the structure regulates the relations within the organisation, who and how often we talk to different people, what similarities certain formal positions have. The structure contains rules, procedures, roles and systems, which defines what relations are possible. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the structure of an organisation in order to understand its behaviour (Jackson & Carter, 2000).

By determining the relationships people have to one another, the structure can also be viewed as a way of controlling people by using discipline. Foucault (1974) describes the hierarchical structure as a continuous and functional control system. He argues that it is organised as a various, automatic and anonymous power system. The control rests upon individuals but is rather a network of relations from the top to bottom, which holds the hierarchy together. "Constantly controlled controllers." The structure generates power by dividing the individuals into specific fields. Consequently, the structure gives a relational power, which is maintained by itself through its own machine (Foucault, 1974). To view these thoughts from another point of view, I have looked at more resent findings concerning structure and its controlling power, where the thoughts of structure as an anonymous power system is further developed. Jackson and Carter, (2000) describes this view by explaining that a relation between two people are created of themselves and can never be decided by an external source. The process of linking people together in the form of a structure is only an imagination made to simplify the perception of reality. Therefore, no structures can organise the relations of individuals. Instead, it is the sense making itself that creates the structure. The structure is a

result of making sense of the situation, rather than being the reason behind the sense making (ibid.).

Alvesson (1993) views the structure from a cultural and symbolic perspective. He argues that the structure cannot be seen as an unambiguous, stable and objective phenomena, but as symbol system. It cannot easily be read but has to be analysed. How many people one manager is responsible for, if one gender is over represented, what the formal roles mean to the individuals, how important status and prestige is or how most people view their work, are some of the issues reflecting the structure of the organisation. The symbolic perspective includes illustrative symbols as the flat or hierarchical organisation. The flat organisation struggles to unite the members of the organisation, create a we-feeling, a fellowship. The flatness symbolises closeness, informality, free communication, while the hierarchic symbol of organisations means the opposite (Alvesson, 1993).

To conclude this discussion and relate it to my research question I believe that the power relationships and rules determined by a structure may influence the individual both negatively and positively. In terms of psychological divisions it may create a destructive feeling of we against them, with the result of internal competition and conflicting interests. People may feel pressured to achieve things determined by their formal role, even though they do not have the resources required to do the job. How an individual perceives his or her formal role are closely related to the cultural values of the organisation, which I will discuss in the next chapter.

3.1.2. Organisational Culture

All organisations have a more or less distinctive culture. It includes the way people in the organisation think, act and behave in certain situations. Norms, rules, ideas and values are often mentioned as shared understandings, which describe a companies' culture. But, also more concrete issues, such as how problems are solved, decisions are made or which people are recruited. Even less meaningful things as what sports and spare time activities are the most popular among the employees, can be influenced by the organisational culture

(Peters & Waterman, 1982). Other important factors determined by an organisations' culture are the way people behave towards each other's formal roles. How the subordinates behave towards their manager, how the manager behaves towards them. Loyalty and the feeling of belonging is also an important matter, how the members of the organisation view management and their relationship to them (Schein, 1985). According to recent health reports, stress coping is also connected to culture, how the people handle a stressful situation and how these actions or behaviour affects the individuals (Theorell & Bernin, 2002). All these issues related to the organisations culture are significant factors concerning the individuals' feeling of comfort and well-being at work.

Everyone who works in an organisation, any kind of organisation, is influenced by its culture to a certain degree. Therefore, a strong culture is of great importance to unite the workers. This can be recognised in real life as successful companies often have strong cultures (Peters and Waterman, 1982; Schein, 1985; Alvesson, 1993). Alternatively, culture may have a negative impact when it point behaviour in the wrong direction. This attitude concerning culture assume that it can be good for a certain purpose, viewing culture as a strategic tool, which can be used to steer the organisation in the right direction. Alvesson (1993) means that an organisations' culture is not so easily managed, instead, it is far more complex. Issues such as cultural norms to guide employee behaviour, leadership to influence the employees' understanding, or culture as a guidance of individual values are outcomes of a culture, not a strategic tool that can be managed to reach organisational goals. He argues that the organisational culture should be seen as a metaphor, which influences all subsystems within the organisation. The business idea, structure, strategy and technology are all subsystems, which are influenced by the culture. Alvesson (1993) explains this further by arguing that organisations should be seen as multiple cultural configurations. This means that people have different relations towards the organisation, which creates different type of cultures. Profession, gender, class, ethnic group etc. all influences the culture, which means that many cultures overlap in an organisation. The culture is therefore, not manifested in a pure form. All organisations are exposed to a cultural traffic meaning that the organisational culture changes along with societal culture.

Salzer (1994) has a similar view of culture, as something an organisation is, not something it possesses. Organisations are ongoing processes of reality construction, through which structures; actions and events are created and given meaning. It is a process of making sense of the reality one lives in. Therefore, the organisational culture should according to Salzer (1994), be understood as both a process of social construction and a structure of meaning systems. Within every organisation there is a process of constructing and reconstructing meanings. As individuals interpret and define their reality in interaction with others, a collective understanding and shared world-view are created. Therefore, culture can be viewed as both the collective meanings within the organisation, as well as the communication through which it is sustained. As organisations are cultures, they should be viewed as cultural phenomena (ibid).

Organisational Climate in Relation to Culture
As seen above the whole organisation, and everything within it, is influenced by its culture. The climate in an organisation is connected to some extent to the culture of the organisation. Nevertheless, it is not as deep and complex as the culture, it is more easily changed and modified and therefore an important factor when looking at the possibilities to influence individual feelings as well being, satisfaction and meaning in relation to work. The same climate may appear in different cultures and the same culture can produce different climates. Incidents, success, growth and image are influencing the climate far more than the culture, which changes slowly and indirectly as a reaction to external social and economic factors (Alvesson, 1989).

Both the formal structure, with its organising nature and the informal culture, determining the shared understandings and loyalty towards the organisation, influences the individual's work experience. These collective messages and feelings have a strong impact on the individual according to Moxnes (1978). He explains that everyone in the organisation is sharing a social reality, and how this reality is experienced determines the individual's comfort in the organisation. This is also underlined by the organisational differences of work absence explained in the previous chapter. For these reasons I believe that the

structure and culture, especially strong ones, have an impact on individuals psychological health.

3.2. Operational Level/Human Resource Management

By explaining some reasons behind the development of human resource management I hope to increase the understanding of how the interaction between the individual and organisation is viewed in human resource management literature and the impact this might have on the health of the individual. Human Resource Management (HRM) is a fairly new definition of the personnel work and emerged in the 1980s'. At this point in time the importance of unity between the employer and employee was recognised. This was the new way to optimise organisational effectiveness, and HRM suits this way of reasoning since it sees the members of the organisation from a management perspective, operating in alliance with business philosophies, organisational strategies, as well as societal influences (Damm, 1993). HRM is essentially a strategically driven activity; the contribution the manager of employment relationships makes to the overall managerial process is vital and formative to the organisation as a whole. HRM is about shaping and delivering corporate strategies by means of the organisations' human resources (Damm, 1993; Beardwell & Holden, 1994).

Within the organisational motivation theory there are two main categories, humanistic and behavioural psychology. I will in this chapter discuss the latter category since it is focusing on guidance of behaviour and actions, and therefore often mentioned in the HRM literature. The other category, humanistic psychology, will be discussed in the chapter about the individual since it is more focused towards why we become motivated at all. In the behavioural psychology different motivators plays a major part. If you feel that you can gain something of importance, you will make an extra effort to reach that goal. If the goal is not important to you, the motivation to reach this goal diminishes along with the efforts (Wall & Lichterson, 1972; Senge, 1990; Alvesson, 1993; Rudman, 2000).

3.2.1. Employee Participation and Involvement

Notions of employee involvement and participation are central to HRM, terms such as empowerment; teamwork, autonomy and communications are peppered throughout the management literature. There are three elements central to participation: influence, interaction and information sharing (Wall & Licherson, 1977). Even though involvement should be an important factor in today's working environment, and new laws concerning this issue has been discussed (Aldercreutz, 2000), the statistics above show that this is often not the case. I will in the following section explain the importance of involvement and participation according to the traditional HRM view.

In Figure 2 participation and possibility to influence the own work situation, where among the more important factors to increase well-being and a positive feeling towards work. Vroom and Jargo (1988) explains that participation enhances the employees' work satisfaction and their attitudes towards the managers and the organisation. Firstly, because the participation affords them the opportunity to affect their working situation towards there own interests. Also, it gives the employees a chance to utilise their talents and become a significant part of the group.

According to Jackson and Carter (2000) competence and ability seems to be hierarchically distributed (higher = smarter), which makes it possible for management to foresee the employees and ignore them. To ignore most of the actors in the organisation is the same thing as treating them as they are passive. They are only allowed to reacts on others' decisions, instead of acting themselves. This view is accepted in many organisations today, and it means that employees are not encouraged to be creative and develop as explained above (Jackson & Carter, 2000). Consequently, keeping the workforce in the dark, not informing, or involving them, will generate disputes and a climate of distrust, which will create a feeling of us against them (Marchington, Goodman, Wilkinson & Ackers, 1992).

The positive sides of involvement seem very simple and straightforward. Perhaps it is not as easy in a real life situation, where individual and situational

differences complicate this black or white view. However, as participation and involvement is one of the basic components in the HRM philosophy, I believe that one may view all the following parts of this chapter keeping both the positive consequences of involvement and the negative consequences due to lack of involvement, in mind.

3.2.2. Job Design

Another usually mentioned element in the HRM philosophy is the theory and practice of job design. It is founded upon its prediction and promise that individuals who will be provided with stimulating and enriched jobs in turn will become motivated (Beardwell & Holden, 1994). Looking at the situation in the Swedish labour market today, job design may also be viewed as a rehabilitation procedure to come back to work after being absent. To adapt the work to the individual is a legal obligation today. I will, therefore, investigate the matter of job design viewing it both as a pre-active, motivating force to prevent absence from work, as well as an instrument helping those who have been absent and want to come back. In both situations the actions and feelings described in the following sections are applicable.

A meaningful job will influence the critical psychological state of the employee, promoting a sense of responsibility and value, which might increase organisational effectiveness and economic prosperity (Beardwell & Holden, 1994). Styhre (2002) develop these arguments further by describing how our identity processes are connected to our formal role in the organisation. To create an identity in the post-modern society, the formal role or position in an organisation has become central. Since we live in a society where people no longer are inheriting their positions, we are forced to create our own status roles. The organisation provides the opportunity to create an identity in the appearance of a formal position within the framework of the organisation. Therefore, the organisation is not only a place where one earns a living, but also an arena for creating an identity, both through the choice of organisation and position within it (ibid.). The organisation gains from this through the employees' experiences of a positive psychological relationship with their jobs, as well as their managers, employer and organisation.

Not only will the individual employee perform more varied and skilled jobs, the organisation will become far more competitive because of the quantitative and qualitative performance improvements. In terms of HRM the investment and progressive skill development, leading to an integration and reconciliation of the employer and employee's interests seems idealistic. Nevertheless, this utopia of management-worker consensus has been criticised for its innocence and idealism. It is therefore argued that job design has to prove itself in terms of hard economic performance indicators as productivity, quality, efficiency and profitability (Beardwell & Holden, 1994). The affect job design might have on the health of the individual is clearly recognised in many investigations and research reports outlined in Chapter 2.

3.2.3. Learning and Development

In order to survive, and be competitive, organisations of today must reach high levels of quality, continuous improvement, flexibility and adaptability. To satisfy these demands the learning and development of human resources are of crucial and strategic importance. This trend can also be recognised in the labour market statistics as the job vacancies increased by 230 000 opportunities in Sweden during the period of 1998-2000, which is the fastest growing rate since the end of World War II. However, many of these jobs required a new and higher level of competence than before (Arbetslivsfakta, 2000).

This new type of competence development does not only call for extended training in task skills, but also completely new task boundaries, ways of working and thinking about work. To become a learning organisation with the ability to adapt to the changing environment and customer needs, all members of the organisation have to learn how to learn. An organisation, which has the ability to break down traditional barriers of work and job descriptions, and develop new structural working relationships, has a grater possibility of convey personal knowledge into organisational knowledge (Beardwell & Holden, 1994).

The arguments concerning different levels of job design, and individual learning and development, suggests an incompatibility of hard HRM as economic concerns, and soft HRM as employee welfare concerns. On one side, most people feel that responsibilities and personal development motivates them and increases their work satisfaction. While to much pressure and demand to develop, in order for the organisation to be profitable and successful, can have the opposite effect. Therefore, a simpler, more direct type of motivator could be used, which I will give a brief description of below.

3.2.4. Rewards

"To Make The Rich Work Harder You Pay More
To Make The Poor Work Harder You Pay Them Less"[12]

The emphasis placed upon the workforce as a source of competitive advantage has, apart from issues such as involvement and personal development, encouraged a strong interest in different methods to reward employees. Rewards are another type of HR motivator, with a perhaps more straight forward approach.

Porter and Lawer (1968, in Beardwell & Holden, 1994) created a motivation model considering the relationship between effort-performance-reward for each individual and thus provide a more dynamic theoretical reasoning for most reward strategies. Figure 3 describes the main variables in the Porter and Lawer's model of motivation.

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[12] Jackson &Carter, 2000:148
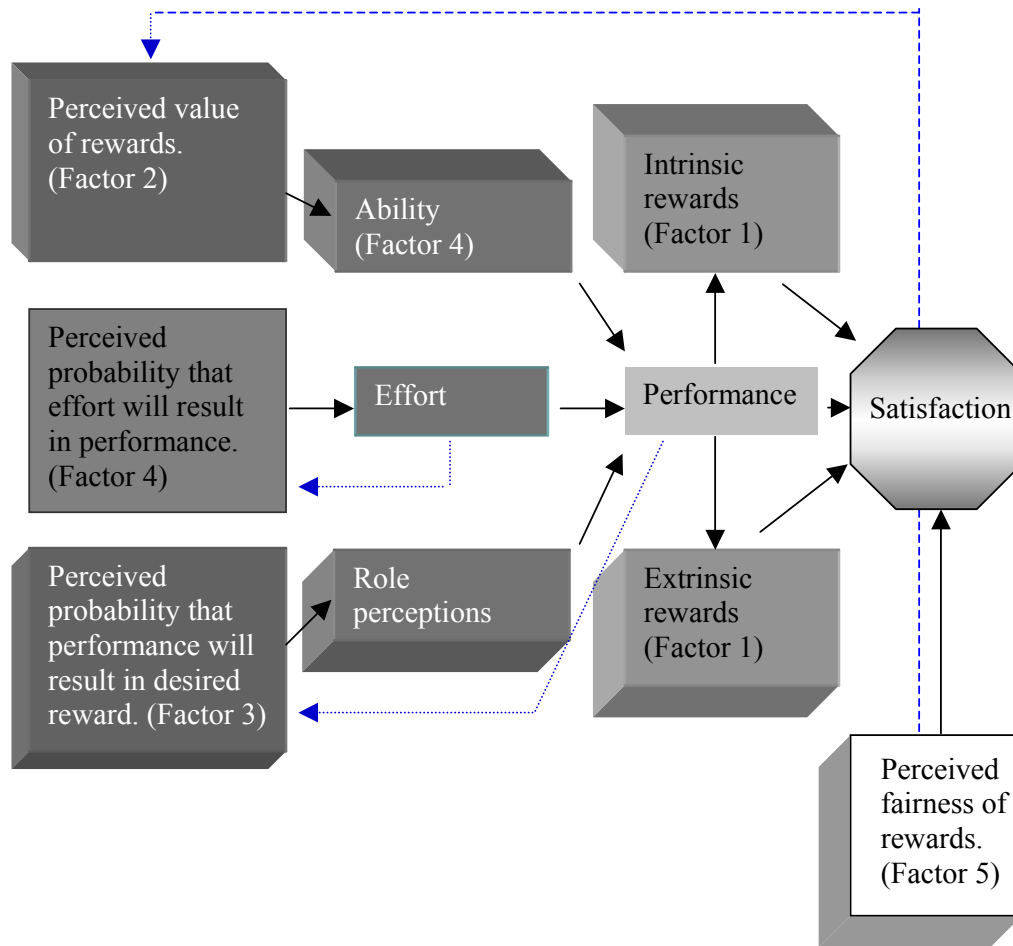
Figure 3: Porter and Lawer's model of motivation, Source: Beardwell & Holden, (1994: 503)

Extrinsic Rewards

Extrinsic rewards result from the actions of others and are easily controlled by managers. Examples include pay, fringe benefits, praise and promotion, which gives the employee:

- short-term material enjoyment
- long-term security
- social status
- recognition of personal achievement.

Intrinsic Rewards

Intrinsic rewards are less tangible. They originate from the person or job itself. Examples of such factors include:

- variety in job content;

- sense of being a part of the whole "value adding" process;
- belief that they are a valuable member of a team;
- increased responsibility and autonomy;
- sense of accomplishment;
- participation in setting targets and opportunities to achieve them;
- feedback and information;
- recognition;
- opportunities to learn and grow.

Perceived Value of Rewards
- Employees must value the rewards offered by the organisation.
- Employees must feel that good performance will be linked to the achievement of the desired rewards.
- Employees must also have the ability and possibility to carry out the tasks and understand what behaviour is desired.

<div align="right">(Beardwell & Holden, 1994)</div>

To use Figure 3 as a summary of the HRM chapter, the previous sections of job design, involvement, learning and development are all intrinsic rewards related to the job itself, which means that they are still related to increased performance even if it does not reward the actions itself. Extrinsic rewards are frequently used as motivator since it can easily be differentiated and computed, linked clearly and visibly to desired performance.

The behavioural psychology, which the motivational theories above rest upon, focuses mainly on how behaviour can be steered in the right direction, it does not explain the influences work might have on the individual's psychological health and personal development (Alvesson, 1993). As seen in the demographics chapter, the flexibility of the working situation, the increased responsibility areas, or high demands from managers are not always motivating the individual and increases performance. Alternatively, the person might feel distressed and anxious, which has a negative impact on performance. The psychological health seems to be more closely linked to relations, relation with others and to the work itself, issues included in the psychosocial working

environment, which I will explore in the next section when investigating the humanistic side of psychology.

3.3. The Individual

In the category of humanistic psychology, the motivational factors are not so focused on individual behaviour; instead it defines the forces behind and the content of motivation. Different things may vary in importance and generate different levels of satisfaction for different people. The relation between the employee and the organisation has always been a give-and-take relationship, where the employer provides the employee with economic support, a social identity and a feeling of belonging, while the employee work in the best interest of the organisation (Hällsten, 1997). Even though, as the statistics and absence rates point out, the relationship is not that easy and straight forward.

3.3.1. Psychological Needs in Relation to Work

The occupation is an essential part of who you are. It is the most important description of yourself, after your name. I have mentioned how humans develop through work by creating an identity for themselves or how they may feel more satisfied with themselves through their work. According to the traditional motivation theories, everyone should feel motivated to develop and reach self-actualisation through work. It has been common knowledge for quite some time that most psychologically healthy people develop along certain lines towards independence, that every individual needs to find an expression for self-actualisation and growth (Argyris, 1957). These thoughts concerning personal development within an organisational setting arise from the psychological theories of human nature. One of these theories, which have played a significant role in the management and HR research, is Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs. This theory has been widely used by organisational theorists as Argyris, McGregor[13] and Hertzberg[14] even though it was not created for an organisational setting in the first place. Maslow arranged

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[13] *The human side of enterprise* (1960)

[14] *Two Factor Theory* (1959)

individual needs in a hierarchy, implying that if one level of needs had been achieved the next level would become more prominent and the individual would thereby develop to that level (Maslow, 1954).
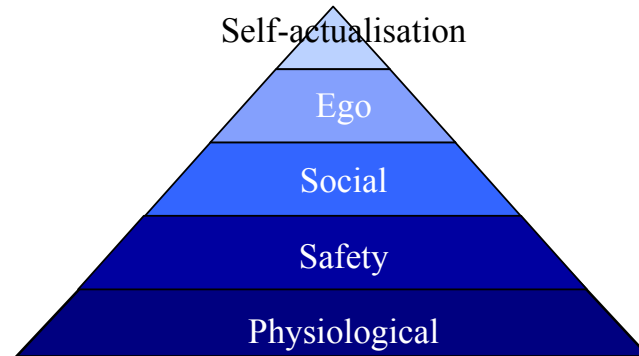
Figure 4: Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Source: Maslow, (1954).

- *Psychological needs* are basic biological needs essential for survival. They include food, drink, shelter, rest, sleep, sex and oxygen.
- *Safety and security needs* include protection from physical and psychological threats in the environment such as freedom from fear, and a wish for certainty.
- *Social and belonging needs* include a need for love, affection, friendship, social interaction and acceptance of others.
- *Ego and esteem needs* include a need for self-respect, confidence, recognition, respect from others, status, power and competence.
- *Self-actualisation* includes self-fulfilment, achievement, individual growth and the realisation of potential (ibid.).

Maslow's behavioural theory indicates that everyone have needs to grow, that is, we are all born with the same urge to develop. If all people are born with this need for development, or if all the people who does not develop along these lines are unhappy or simply hold back their internal desire for personal development will be discussed further in the next section. I have looked deeper into individual differences and the source of these differences.

A New Perspective

According to Berger and Luckman (1967), each individual lives in a reality constructed by their social surrounding, as language, social interaction, upbringing and culture. Everything is developed through shared, accumulated experiences, which give rise to assumptions, ideas, values and norms. Therefore, there is no objective reality, rather a creation of reality evolving from interactions between people. These meanings may not exist inside the individual mind. Instead, it is part of a general flow of constantly changing narratives (Hoffman, 1990). Jackson and Carter (2000) argue that in the same moment as we become aware of other people, we form the "self" by mirroring ourselves in interaction with others. When people in our surrounding react upon our behaviour we reflect and behave to suit their reactions. Our primary wish is to become a part of, and be accepted by, others otherwise we become isolated, meaningless and alienated. However, not all people have the same kind on influence on us. Some people mean more to us that others, an expression describing these person(s) are the "significant other". These persons are not always the same as the ones who have the power to influence our lives, but rather persons who are of symbolic value to us. It could be a parent, a friend or maybe an idol or religious figure. The significant others are those whose values, attitudes and behaviour is especially important to us. An example is advertisement, which is an attempt to make us buy products by stimulating our willingness to identify with the significant other, the successful and glamorous person in the commercial.

If personal development is viewed in the terms explained by Jackson and Carter (2000), it cannot be seen as the general hierarchy of needs as Maslow's hierarchy, but rather as a search for acceptance from the significant other. The willingness to work does therefore, not necessarily arise from a desire to develop, but a desire to reach other incentives related to work. These incentives are different for each individual, since each individual is developed through the interaction with different people, in different social situations. Support from friends, the view of ones self, amusement, or money, are some examples of what could make a person enjoy work. Personal development may not be important to everyone according to this view. If appreciation from the manager is my personal goal, he or she would be the significant other, and my personal

development and satisfaction level would be related to the manager's appreciation of my job, not necessarily to personal development or climbing the social status ranking (ibid.).

This view complicates the ability of developing and satisfying the employee's needs as no general motivator or desires to work exists. Instead, each individual has to be seen as unique, with unique desires.

3.3.2. The Psychosocial Work Environment

The discussion of the significant other implies that we are all different, with different needs. However, according to this very discussion, and the scientific reports and statistics exposed above, most of us seem to have some things in common. Ability to influence the work, managerial support and a friendly and open working climate have shown to be of importance in order for many people to enjoy work. A correlation has been found between social problems at work and psychosomatic problems. Lack of appreciation, or a bad relation with the closest managers or colleagues ("the significant other") increases the risk of absence (Alvesson, 1993; www.rfv.se, 02-11-01).

Several theoretical models have been introduced for the study of the relationships between psychosocial environment and health. One model, which is designed to assess the environment in order to provide information for job design, is the model proposed by Karasek (1979) (in Alvesson, 1993; Theorell in Orth-Gomer & Schneiderman, 1996). The model does not cover all aspects of psychosocial work environment but it discusses two important dimensions of work, demands (stress factors, work load) contra decision latitude (involvement, skill utilisation and power to make decisions). According to the model (illustrated in Figure 5) there is an interaction between high psychological demands and low decision latitude. The high demand and low decision combination – job strain is regarded as the most dangerous one in relation to illness development. Karasek used a drastic analogy to describe this combination: "If a person is crossing a street and sees a truck approaching, he or she may speculate that he or she will be able to cross the street without being hit by the truck, if he or she regulates his or her speed appropriately. However,

if his or her foot gets stuck in the street, his or her decision latitude diminishes dramatically, and he or she is now in an extremely stressful situation." (Theorell in Orth-Gomer & Schneiderman, 1996:70) According to Karasek's theory, this type of stress, or not necessarily as dramatic, increases the risk of psychological and physical illness. He found that working conditions influences depression significantly, and nervous symptoms as anxiety, difficulties to sleep and exhaustion increase where the demands are high and the possibility to control is low. Psychological and physical demands also interact in complex ways and generate disorders. Physically hard work can lie behind demands, which are experienced as psychologically stressful (Theorell & Bermin, 2002). Karasek points out that it is not necessarily the demands that need be diminished, rather the relevant responsibilities have to be increased (Alvesson, 1993).
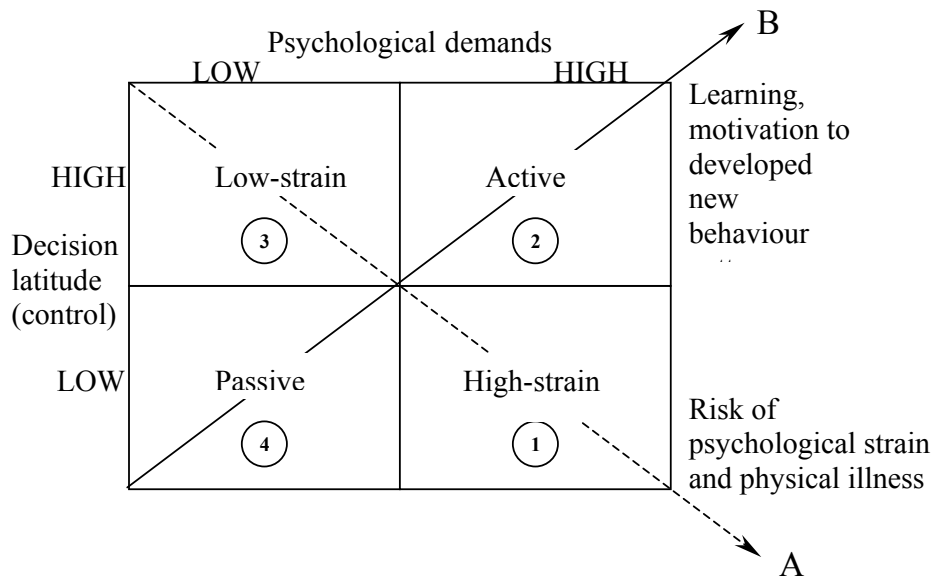
Figure 5: Psychological demand/decision latitude model, Source: Karasek, (1979) in Orth-Gomer and Schneiderman, (1996).

The psychologically related illness and discomfort has increased dramatically over the last few years, anxiety, depression and all kinds of stress related diseases have increased. Psychological demands are also connected to muscular tensions, tiredness and pain in the back, neck and shoulders, which lead to

work absence due to physical injuries even if psychological problems lie beneath (Theorell et al, 1993; SOU 2002:5, Arbetslivsfakta, 2002)

3.4. Model Construction

To summarise the theoretical chapters and use this information in my analysis I will construct a model that outlines the main points of each chapter. This model will answer my first research question, and will in turn be used to answer my second, which includes an analysis of the situation of work absence at Ikea Gothenburg. By illustrating the model in the same way I have used the information included in the report I hope to further outline the structure of the report and the correlation between the different parts. The patterns and trends of work absence has been the main information source behind the choice of investigation levels, also the information I have received from Ikea Gothenburg guided my theoretical framework.

To view the information from these three levels is important since the individual's health should be analysed within an organisational setting to give the most accurate result. Therefore, I decided to look at the problem of work absence from an organisational, operational and individual level. The organisational level will be investigated since the structure and culture reflects the values and attitudes of the organisation upon the individual, and thereby influences the experience of the work. The operational/HRM view is important since the motivational factors, job design, learning and development and rewards are all used in order to encourage performance and stimulate individual development. Finally, to investigate the humanistic psychology in order to find out what it is that lies behind feelings as work satisfaction or negative stress, the individual level should be examined.

Demographics of Work Absence

Organisational Level
Sructure
Culture

Operational Level/HRM
Job Design
Learning and Development
Rewards

Individual Level
Psychological Needs
Psychological Demands

Work Absence
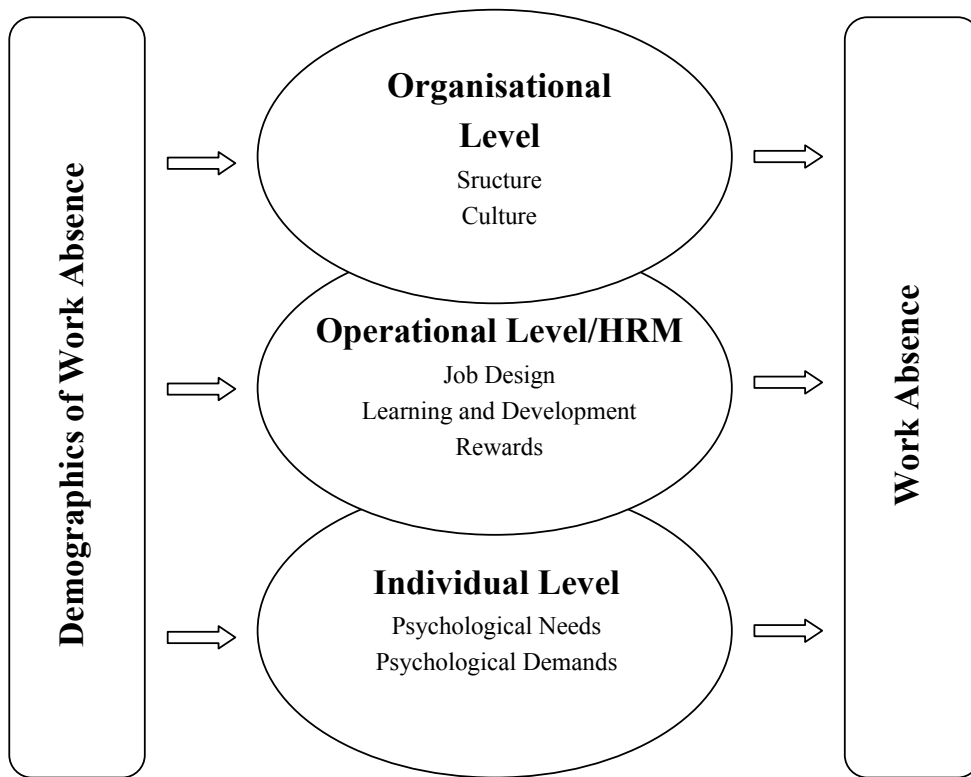
Figure 6: Theoretical Model

4. EMPIRICAL STUDY

4.1. Introduction to IKEA

The Ikea Group[15] hold 143 furnishing stores all over the world. Ikea also operates as franchiser in 14 countries, where the stores are owned and operated by franchisees. All together there are 175 stores with more than 53 000 employees. The turnover for the year 2001 was 10, 4 billion EURO (99,2 milliard SEK). All these numbers gives a picture of a global, successful and expanding company. However, to present a picture of Ikea, the philosophy and stories of Ikea is what distinguishes the company from most other global conglomerates. Therefore, I will now draw further attention to these issues.

4.1.1. To Create a Better Everyday Life for the Majority of People[16]

To create a better everyday life for the majority of people is Ikea's vision. The vision is outlined on the wall in the personnel entrance and included in a book describing the foundation of Ikea, which is given to all newly recruited employees. The book starts by explaining the surroundings and situation at the time Ikea was founded, which gives an understanding of where Ikea's values come from. The most central part of the saga is the founder of the organisation, Ingvar Kamprad. In the book, old pictures of him, his first warehouse and products are shown as a part of the saga. Information about the company are integrated with anecdotes describing the thoughts and actions of the founder. The story ends with a letter from Ingvar himself written in 1976, explaining the vision, outlining nine cornerstones of the Ikea philosophy. The whole concept of giving an explanation to where everything comes from, understanding this

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[15] The Ikea Group is a foundation, with its head quarter in Holland. It contains functions as Product Range, Purchasing, Distribution Service and Retailing.

[16] This is the heading of "A furnishing salesman's testament", which is nine points or cornerstones describing the goals and philosophy of Ikea. Source: IKEA, 2002.

young boy and his dreams, sharing the thoughts, myths and heroes in the saga, gives you a feeling of becoming a part of something special.

All over the store, and in every information sheet, the employees are reminded or informed about the Ikea spirit [Ikea andan]. The spirit or philosophy of Ikea has a social mission, both towards customers and colleagues. To provide simple people with good furniture, being humble and honest, dealing with small means, work harder to offer lower prices, are some of the sayings in relation to the customer. Even if the customer relationship is what Ikea is most famous for, the Ikea philosophy also underlines the importance of taking care of each other, helping each other with everything, welcoming everyone into the family. It is the people of the organisation who are the Ikea spirit's core element, therefore, their relationship towards the work, is underlined and an included part of the Ikea spirit. According to Kamprad (1976) [17], the work should never be viewed just as means for survival, but a source of enthusiasm and inspiration. The employees have to be encouraged, motivated and rewarded by their employer. By following these guidelines the Ikea spirit are to be kept alive and developed.

4.1.2. At Ikea Gothenburg

The organisational philosophy portrayed above includes my case company, Ikea Gothenburg, with its 538 persons, including all type of part time workers. The house was built in 1972 and is one of the ten best selling houses in the world, compared to its size.[18] The turnover has increased dramatically over the last four to five years. The gender differences are 50/50 within management and according to numbers from 2001 there is a slight overrepresentation of women among the employees. The age distribution at Ikea Gothenburg is illustrated in Figure 7.

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[17] The information is included in the nine cornerstones of IKEA, found in Salzer (1994) and *Möjligheternas tid är inte förbi,*(1984) a book used for internal education at IKEA.

[18] I did apply for the exact numbers of Ikea Gothenburg's profit and turnover, but since this is not public data, I have used the information from my interwievs.

Age	Percentage of employees
<25	37%
26-34	27%
35-44	20%
45-54	7%
55-	9%

Figure 7: Age distribution at Ikea Gothenburg, Source: Engman and Garshnek, (2001).

Numbers Concerning Work Absence

The numbers shown in the following section includes all 538 people working at Ikea Gothenburg, including sales personnel, administrative work, storage, customer service, cashiers, cleaning and restaurant workers. The amount of people working at Ikea Gothenburg in 1997 was 329 persons.

Even though work absence rates have increased within most Swedish organisations, differences can be recognised when comparing companies, some have actually maintained low levels of absenteeism. When presenting only numbers, they can give an inaccurate and unfair picture of the reality, since numbers do not explain the whole story. The statistics used in Figure 8 are based on information from SAF[19], including 215 000 workers from different industries, between the year 1997 and the first quarter of 2002. The average work absence per year of these 215 000 workers form the index 100.

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[19] SAF, Sverigs Arbetsgivarförbund (www.saf.se)
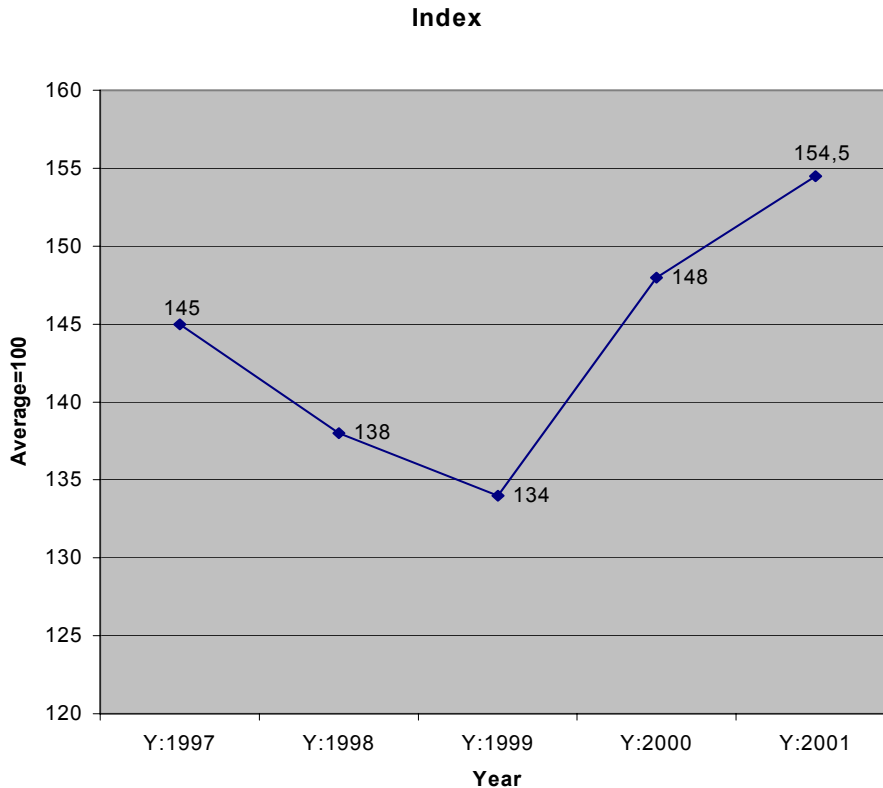
Index

Figure 8: Ikea work absence comparison with the SAF-index, Source: Ikea (2002).

Since the average in Figure 8 is set to index 100, these index numbers show that Ikea Gothenburg is quite high above average. These numbers cannot be blamed totally on the changing environment and stressful society of today, since all the participants included in the SAF-statistics, both Ikeans and others, live in the same society. Geographical differences, such as living in the country or in a big city, could be a reason behind different levels of stress within organisations. Although, according to internal Ikea statistics no particular conclusions related to geographical areas can be recognised, some of the warehouses located in the smaller towns have higher levels of work absence than the houses placed in a larger city (Ikea, 2002).

The numbers in Figure 9 represent the percentage out of ordinary working hours that individuals have been absent from work due to bad health at Ikea Gothenburg, divided upon men and women.

Work Absence at Ikea 1997-2002
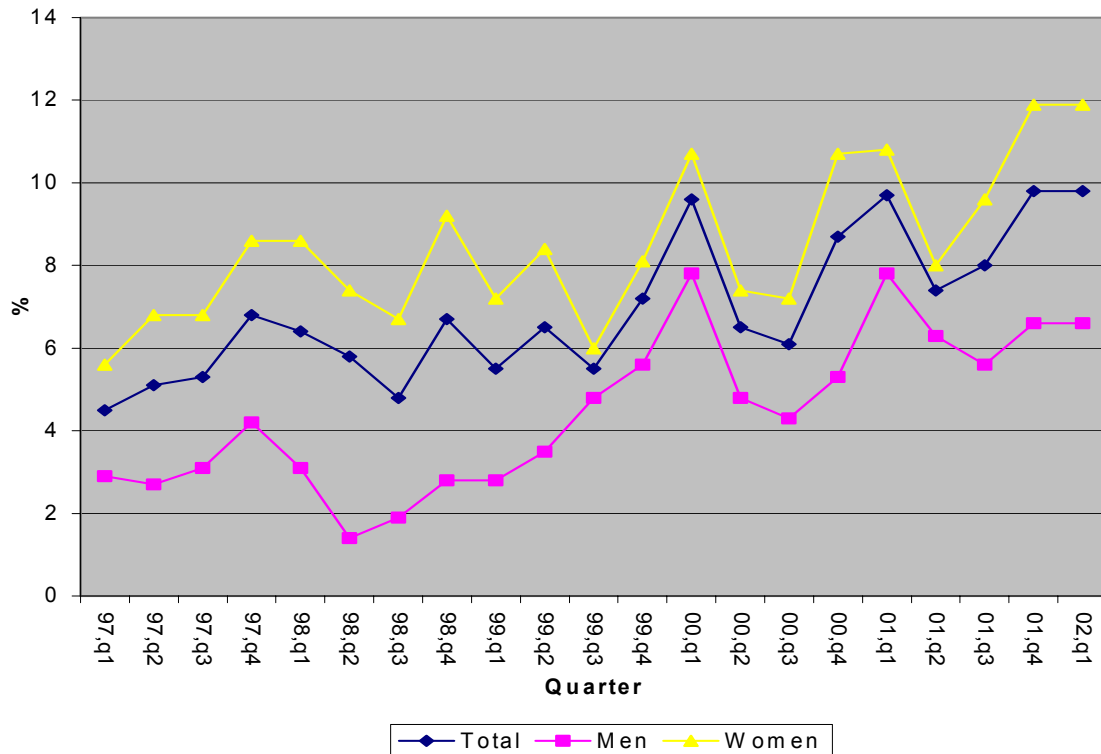
Figure 9: Percentage of ordinary working hours that individuals have been absent from work due to bad health, from 1997 until 2002, Source: Ikea (2002).

Gender differences in the levels of absenteeism can be found, as Figure 9 shows. The women at Ikea Gothenburg are absent from work due to illness or bad health nearly 50% more than men. The same deviation can also be recognised in the general statistics above. However, as the levels are increasing within all groups of age, social status and gender the problem becomes even more complex, and the old work force or the women cannot be held responsible for this development, which is something I believe to be of great importance when reading the following statistics, numbers and analysis; there is not a single reason for, or problem behind, this development.

The numbers in Figure 10 are based on the same statistics used in Figure 9, which is absence statistics from Ikea Gothenburg during the period: September 2001 to August 2002.

Number of work absence hours (2001/09/01 - 2002/08/31)	
Type	2-14 (short-term)	>14 (long-term)
Tot.	13400	33000

Figure 10: Hours of work absence from 2001/09 to 2002/08, Source: Ikea (2002).

Type is divided into the two categories of absence: 2-14 days and more than 14 days. The reason for this division is that Ikea does not have to pay 80 % of the employee salary after day 14, only social fees and vacation compensation.

How Much Does Work Absence Cost? / A Cost Estimation
Work absence is a problem not only for the individuals affected, but also an economic matter for the society as well as for organisations. The costs examined in Figures 11, 12 and 13 are not exact, but an estimation through an average calculation of the costs related to short-term absence (2-14 days) and long-term absence (>14 days) during one year at Ikea Gothenburg, namely 2001. All the costs are presented in SEK. The first day of each absence period is not included since the employer does not pay any compensation during this day. The estimation includes part time workers.

The cost calculations in, Figure 11 and Figure 12 are based upon absence statistics from Ikea Gothenburg during the period of September 2001 to August 2002.

Cost Calculation for Short-term Absence (2-14 days)	
Average salary	14175
After hours compensation	2500
Social fees and vacation compensations	9463
Monthly cost	26138
Working days per month	20
Cost per day	1307
Work absence compensation	
Number of days (max.)	14
Compensation in %	80
Cost of work absence per day	1140
Cost of work absense per hours	143
Cost of work absence	
Hours of short-term absence per year	13400
Total Cost of Short-term Work Abcense per Year	**1909751**

Figure 11: Direct costs of short-term work absence at Ikea Gothenburg, Source: Ikea (2002).

Cost Calculation for Long-term absence (>14 days)	
Average salary	14175
After hours compensation	2500
Monthly salary	16675
Social fees and compensations	**9463**
Compensation for vacation (13%)	**2168**
Working days per month	20
Cost /per day	**582**
Cost /per hour	**73**
Cost of work absence	
Number of absent hours	33000
Total Cost of Long-term Work Abcense per Year	**2398842**

Figure 12: Direct costs of long-term work absence, Source: Ikea (2002).

Through comparison of the numbers in Figure 11 and Figure 12 it can be noticed that long-term absence is about twice the amount of hours as short-term absence (see Figure 13).

Cost Comparison	
Total Cost of Short-term Work Abcense per Year	1909751
Total Cost of Long-term Work Abcense per Year	2398842
Total Cost of Rehabilitation per Year	33750
Total Cost of Work Abcense per Year	4342343
Percentage of Total Cost of Work Absence per Year	
Short-term	44,0%
Long-term	55,2%

Figure 13: Cost comparison between short-term and long-term work absence, Source: Ikea (2002).

Cost calculation for rehabilitation is made in Figure 14 and is a crucial element in the field of work absence prevention and recovery. The difference with these costs compared to the others, are the fact that the rehabilitation costs prevent work absence from proceeding further, which could be seen as preventable costs that pay off in the long run. The costs calculated in Figures 11 and 12 represent costs that are not so well spent, as the rehabilitation costs are. The data used in cost calculation for rehabilitation is based upon the internal data from Ikea Gothenburg and may differ compared with other organisation and businesses.

Cost Calculation of Rehabilitation Costs	
Number of rehab. per year	10
Sever cases / year	5
Hours to investigate sever cases	10
Less sever cases / year	5
Hours to investigate less sever cases	5
Number of persons involved	2
Total salary per hour of persons involved (SEK)	225
Cost of server cases	22500
Cost of less sever cases	11250
Total Cost of Rehablilitation per Year	33750

Figure 14: Direct costs related to rehabilitation, Source: Ikea (2002).

Figure 15 is a summary of all the cost elements of work absence and presents a total cost of work absence per year estimation. Note that this calculation is based upon internal data and a number of estimations and approximations have been conducted throughout the calculation process.

Total Direct Costs Calculation of Work Absence	
Work absence 2-14 days (short-term)	1909751
Work absence >14 days (long-term)	2398842
Rehabilitation Costs	33750
Recruitment Costs	X
Total Direct Costs of Work Absence	**4342343**

Figure 15: Total direct costs of work absence at Ikea Gothenburg during the year 2001/09 until 2002/08, Source: Ikea (2002).

The total direct cost of work absence at Ikea Gothenburg during the period of 2001-09 to 2002-08 is estimated to be more than 4, 34 million SEK. The indirect costs are not even included in this huge amount. The indirect costs are costs of recruitment, introduction of the newly recruited, guidance by other employees who's effectiveness will be diminished etc. are expected to be between 50 and 100.000 SEK for every new individual employed to replace someone who is absent. When adding these numbers to the direct costs above the total costs related to absence becomes far too large to be ignored and referred to as a result of societal trends.

Preventable Actions

Before I analyse the health situation further, I will present the actions in progress, as well as those planned within a near future by Ikea Gothenburg with a view to diminish absence. Apart from the support the employees (and managers) receive from their closest manager, the HR department gives guidance in all kinds of personnel and HR questions. The labour union plays a significant role, as they advice employees about their legal rights.

The co-operation with Previa, using them as professional health guides, introducing consultation for physical injuries together with investigation I am to be using in the analysis, all show that this problem has been acknowledged. Previa is also offering the employees different types of ergonomic courses. The employees can also get massage, as well as a discount of 1000 SEK on different types of gym-cards and membership fees within different health clubs.

It should also be mentioned that motivational or psychological encouragement is used, which has a strong impact on how the employee experiences his or her

working situation. The campaign "the people in focus" [Människan i fokus] is a newly started campaign, which emphasises the importance of keeping individuals in mind in every decision and action taken by responsible managers, and by colleagues. Different associations are present at Ikea Gothenburg, which could have an impact on relations and development of interests outside work. Those who wish to learn more about their job or about Ikea can take courses in sales technique or visit the headquarters in Älmhult to learn more about the history and values of Ikea. The employees who want to show an interest to progress to the next level are entitled to internal education with this purpose. A new course for the managers will begin in a few months, where those who have already been working as managers have the possibility to further develop within their formal role.

At the beginning of next year an investigation related to the health and well-being will take place. This investigation is more extensive than the one Previa just finished. Since Ikea will not start this investigation until next year, and since the management of Ikea Gothenburg do not wish to distress any of the employees with any more investigations until then. I was not allowed to interview or use the employees' opinions concerning the matter of work absence as a primary information source in my study.

The internal statistics and calculations show that work absence is an expensive problem for Ikea Gothenburg, both in terms of the direct and indirect costs related to absence, but also because absence is negative to the company's development. As those employees and managers who are present have to work harder to make up for lost efforts, the organisational growth in terms of long term planning, employee work enthusiasm and a loyal workforce may also be negatively affected, which will be further analysed in the next chapter.

5. PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

I will in this section present and analyse the results from my sources, Previa's findings, my interviews with department managers and support persons, and my own experiences from participating in the daily work at Ikea Gothenburg. The internal Ikea statistics have been presented above, but will still be included in the analysis and contribute to my conclusions[20].

All through the presentation I will refer to my interviewees as a group:

A = Three managers with long Ikea Gothenburg experience
       (> 5 years)
B = Three managers with less Ikea Gothenburg experience
C = Three managers with long managerial experience (> 5 years)
D = Three managers with less managerial experience
The support persons

A pattern of opinions and answers could be noticed according to managerial and Ikea Gothenburg experience. Therefore, I divided the interviewed department managers into these four groups. Since I interviewed six managers, each person is included in two of the four groups described above and the groups overlap each other.

I will refer to Previa's findings as:

Department 1 = Where employees have customer contact
Department 2 = Where employees do not have customer contact

According to all the sources, the main problem behind the high levels of work absence due to bad health, are related to high levels of stress and workload

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[20] The information concerning the interviewees and Previa's investigation are presented more in detail in the Methodological Considerations, Appendix 1.

among both employees and department managers[21]. The reasons behind this problem, what the consequences of it might be, or how it can be diminished, is what I will analyse further in this chapter. The findings will be presented from an organisational, operational/HRM and individual level, keeping the overview of the current trends and patterns of work absence in mind. This is done in the same way as these sections are presented in the theoretical model (Figure 6). I will present and analyse the results through applying the model on the Ikea Gothenburg situation.

5.1. Organisational Level

5.1.1. Structure

Ikea Gothenburg's organisational structure is of the traditional hierarchical kind with a store manager and management group at the top, containing one person from each function[22]. Every department has a responsible manager, with an assistant group manager. However, it is mainly the department manager who is responsible for the employees thereof, I have chosen to focus my research on them and their view of the situation. As all the managers had similar opinions concerning this matter I will not use the deviations in this section.

Viewing the structure from a symbolic and cultural perspective, where the structure is seen as a process through which the formal roles and status are evaluated (Alvesson, 1993). Ikea Gothenburg can be recognised as the very family Salzer (1994) refers to. Even though it is a hierarchical organisation with clear definitions of functional departments; the hierarchy is not so noticeable in terms of status, prestige or formal roles. According to Previa's investigation 100% of the employees in Department 1, and 63% of the employees in Department 2 believed that their relationship (in terms of co-operation and contact) with their closest manager were very good. All of the

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[21] The internal Ikea statistics show this result in terms of amount of employees compared to turnover. However, since these numbers related to turnover are not public, I will present this information in the form of the interviewee's comments on the subject.

[22] Ikea Gothenburg's organisational structure is outlined in Appendix 3.

managers believed that the friendly relations between the hierarchal levels is present at Ikea Gothenburg, and four out of the six departmental managers pointed out the good relation they experienced with their closest manager, who they refer to as a good friend. The formal roles do not define where your friends are, whom you have an informal talk to, or whom you trust and respect. All the interviewees, as well as many other people I have talked to during my work, imply that working at Ikea Gothenburg means that there is a short distance between managers and employees, there is a feeling of unity among all members of the organisation. All the managers I interviewed had something positive to say about this informal feeling of unity.

"At Ikea you talk over the borders of formal roles. Especially during lunch, when you sit together and talk about this and that with both manager and employees… When you work as a manager at Ikea you do not shut your door and hide in an office, you work together, eat together and wear the same cloths as everyone else. "

A reason for this feeling of unity and less hierarchy can be because there are so many managers at Ikea Gothenburg, each with a fairly low span of control, which Alvesson (1993) means can be used as an indicator of how the structure influences the employees.

"No one has the status of a traditional manager at Ikea as everyone is valued equally, from store personnel to managers, and I like that very much. On the other hand I have never experienced a place of work with so many managers, which decreases the distance between them and their subordinates. There is a sense of openness at Ikea, but always a time shortage"

This low span of control enables close relations to the managers also in terms of availability.

"At Ikea, an employee can go straight to the warehouse manager and have a chat, there is nothing strange about that."

The discussion above also refers to Jackson and Carter's (2000) description of how the structure contains roles, procedures and systems, which enable relations. The friendly impression you receive and the possibility to create a relation with whomever during lunch or as they walk around the store implies

that similar background, attitudes and interests are of great importance, compared to formal status, in order to create relations with others. This friendly way of relating to your colleagues creates the we-feeling and fellowship that defines the flat organisation Alvesson (1993) refers to. Status and prestige related to hierarchal levels does not seem to be of great importance when it comes to fellowship and friendly conversations at Ikea, which suits my highly subjective prediction of the organisation.

However, as within every friendly relationship, a similar background and interests are of meaning. Within the warehouse this type of issues has shown to be of importance, historical background and the right type of personality. All interviewed managers said that if your personal values and attitude did not agree with Ikea's you would not fit in, and therefore probably leave the organisation. How do these thoughts affect the structure or formal roles?

Interpretation of Formal Roles
When asking the questions concerning the formal roles I noticed a deviation among the answers in terms of Ikea Gothenburg experience. Therefore, I will refer to the interviewees in this section as those who are experienced Ikeans (Group A) and those who are not (Group B).

Foucault (1974) discussed how the structure controls the individuals. As formal roles and status do not bring so much respect at Ikea Gothenburg it is rather the friendly relations and experience, which can be viewed as a type of control system. Half of the departmental managers interviewed have a long experience within Ikea (> 5 years). All of them identified themselves to a greater extent as a boss than those with less Ikea experience. Even though all managers felt a bit like employees, the managers with less Ikea experience where more eager to point out their recognition of themselves as employees as well as managers. According to the discussion of the "significant other" (in Chapter 3.3), it is impossible to assign someone importance, as the "significant other" is not always the same person as the one who has the power to influence our life (Jackson & Carter, 2000). Therefore, a manager cannot be assigned importance due to his or her formal position with the expectation that others are influenced by the manager's values. The employees may not see the manager as their

"significant other", and therefore not assign them the importance they should have in order to be respected as managers. This could make the working situation for the externally, newly recruited departmental managers more difficult. They do not have the important fellowship or historical experience to the same extent, therefore they have to become recognised as "Ikeans" and learn everything included in that role, as well as an "Ikean-manager" with the formal responsibilities and respect required to lead others. This may complicate the identification of themselves as managers, and the employees' view of them as managers who are responsible to lead the work of the more experienced employees. In some cases, even the feeling of being an outsider may exist, even though the overall experience of Ikea as a friendly "family company" is still present. These identification problems should not be confused with the trust departmental managers feel toward management or that they would enjoy their work less. Not a single one of the department managers included in the research made by Engman and Garshnek (2001) noticed that they where <u>not</u> loyal to the organisation. Instead, 91% of the departmental managers see themselves as Ikeans within five years, compared to 61% of the employees and 65% of the total participants[23]. However, even though the managers in Group B are loyal to the organisation and enjoy the work a difference can be noticed, as a managers with less Ikea experience (Group B) explain:

"Everyone who has been working here for a long time has the same values, they have all gone the same way and been schooled in. If you haven't worked here for so long and haven't got the same background, you feel a bit of an outsider"

An example of the problems connected to the recognition from colleagues, are further explained by a another manager in Group B:

"When I started working as a manager, with only X months of Ikea-experience behind me, there where a few colleagues who where disappointed that I applied for the job. However, after a while I talked to them about it, and then there was no longer a problem"

The willingness to help each other over the boarders of responsibilities included in the formal role are also positive.

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[23] These numbers include answers from departmental managers, group managers and employees in the warehouse of Gothenburg, Örebro and Älmhult.

"We are all friends at Ikea both upwards and downwards, I receive a lot of support from colleagues… Formal roles are of less importance within the house. Experience, however, is important and I often ask for help."

However, the negative side of this is the problem of identification of the responsibilities included in the formal role of the department managers, which might have negative consequences for the managers in terms of a too extensive workload. The recognition needed from employees in order to focus on these duties is also important. One of the managers in Group A pointed out the importance of the friendly relations at Ikea Gothenburg.

"The amount of feedback and help you receive from your closest manager at Ikea are in part dependent upon the relationship you have. It shouldn't be like this, you should not have to be friends to get better feedback, this should be included in the formal responsibilities of all managers to a greater extent than it is now."

Another manager in this group explains how the employees' recognition defines his/her formal role.

"I feel more as a manager than an employee, but it is mostly because all the employees view me as a manager."

With these results I wish to underline how the importance of friendship and how being "just as all the others" might complicate the managerial identification process, with all the responsibilities and (sometimes) tough decisions included. If the employees find the formal role of the manager a bit diffuse as well, it will probably complicate their view of this person as a manager with the managerial responsibilities they should have, instead of someone who should share the daily work. The complicated picture of themselves partly as employees and partly as managers may have an impact on their psychological health. However, the huge amount of workload included in this double-role, most certainly has an impact. Other reasons behind this diffusion of formal roles and the duties included in each are further discussed in the sections about job design and cultural traffic and social construction.

Message From Top Management

Even though The Ikea Group is a complex, centralised and hierarchal organisation, this is compensated by the social relationships and strong humanistic, equal values, introduced by the founder. By making everyone in the organisation feel special and valued, a central strong supervision can be used to the organisations advantage (Alvesson, 2002). This combination of clearly defined, centralised rules and a strong feeling of unity and pride has probably been one important keystone behind the success of Ikea. Therefore, concentrating on the house in Gothenburg with its fellowship and friendly relations, it seems somewhat more flat than hierarchal, even though the Ikea Group makes many of the important decisions.

These values can be recognised in the information you receive from Ikea, it can be divided into two categories. The basic promotion of Ikea-values, vision and philosophies, and the encouraging type of information exposing results, notifying the members about new ideas and giving them the latest news. This information cannot be ignored as it is placed within all personnel areas. Pictures and boards outline different philosophies and greetings to employees, which increases the feeling of being welcomed and appreciated. The second category of information contains organisational news as sales-numbers and other kind of results often combined with a positive comment. All information is always very positive and friendly, focusing on happy news and strong encouragement. Different managerial or formal roles are seldom expressed when news are notified, it rather refers to the particular warehouse in question. Even though the messages are embedded in this happy and friendly encouragement, the importance of performance, numbers and growth are always included. Perhaps this is not a surprise, since Ikea is an organisation dependent on its growth and profits just like any other organisation. However, in the case of Ikea Gothenburg, it seems as the soft values, which traditionally has been so important to Ikea, have been placed in the shadows behind an exaggerated importance of profit and growth. This is partly related to the fact that Ikea Gothenburg has a history of high performance and large turnover, compared to other warehouses of the same size. Nevertheless, related to the current absence situation, a sense of suspicion, and in some situations even frustration, can be recognised and the profit related numbers are experienced

more as a negative pressure, than a motivating encouragement. The importance of reaching higher and higher sales numbers are not seen as a requirement that suits the reality, as more and more people cannot stand the pressure this should, instead, be of top priority according to many of the managers interviewed, and employees I have talked to.

The suspicion and frustration are mainly focused towards the top management of Ikea Sweden, as they are giving the directions. Another example of the suspicion is the campaign "people in focus" [Människan i fokus], which are not taken that seriously by many of the employees I have talked to. Also, the managers in Group A have strong opinions concerning this matter, which I believe are both due to the fact they have experienced a more calm and less stressful working situation at Ikea Gothenburg, and the self-confidence most of them feel in their formal role as a department manager. As they have been around for a while, they have the experience required to stand up for themselves and their employees.

"The working pace has risen continuously over the last couple of years, we are supposed to become more and more efficient. Finally, you start wondering how fast we are supposed to work, how effective are we supposed to become? This, I believe, is something that the employees keep in mind since it has been Ikea Sweden's main focus all through the 90's…I sure wonder what Ikea will do to put the people in focus."

Another manager in Group A gives his/her explanation concerning the pressure from top management.

"The working pace are very high, they talk about the focusing on people, but things are not going to improve until we receive more resources… we have more work than we can deal with today… I believe that the situation is not taken seriously, everyone is calling for help, and it feels as no one have the energy to take on the situation. If or when the extra resources finally come it is often too late or too little, which is very frustrating… Somewhere along the line there has to be is a limit for how much two arms and legs can perform."

One of the managers in Group C compares the situation at Ikea Gothenburg with his/her earlier experiences form being a manager:

"When evaluating the situation as it is today, I need more personnel altogether. I have the same amount of personnel now as I had four years ago even though the turnover has increased by 100%."

Also, among the employees a suspicion towards top management of Ikea Sweden can be recognised, not so much towards the management at Ikea Gothenburg. Instead, they are seen more as colleagues and friends that have to follow directions and rules from above. However, since this message from top management is conflicting with Ikeas traditional values, philosophy and culture, it promotes the deviation into the "we and them" feeling, which is not positive for the future unity and loyalty among the employees towards the organisation. Ekstrand (1988) explains that if the organisation holds attitudes and behaviour that the individuals within it do not value, the consequence is that people distance themselves. It may not mean that the employees quit there jobs, but is has a severe affect on their health. In order to analyse how this conflicting message from top management, along with the high levels of stress, are coped with, I will in the following chapter focus on the organisational cultural of Ikea Gothenburg.

5.1.2. Culture

As I started this investigation it was Ikeas' distinct organisational culture with its clear message and strong values, that was one of the things I believed to be most fascinating about the organisation, and if the culture really has such a strong, positive influence on the individuals, which makes them the proud work force, that I have read about in my earlier studies. At Ikea the organisational culture even has its own name, the "Ikea spirit" [Ikea andan], which is explained more in detail in the introducing chapter of this empirical study. Indeed all interviewees explained how important it is to share the values included in this spirit in order to remain and develop within the organisation. The Ikea spirit creates a sense of unity and belonging, as discussed in the structure section above. According to the numbers included in Engman and Garshnek's (2001) report 70% of all individuals (94% of the department

managers) feel that the organisation cares for them to a great extent[24]. The same investigation also shows that 97% of all participants at Ikea Gothenburg claimed to be rather or very loyal to the company.

The organisational culture of Ikea Gothenburg points in the right direction in the sense that the employees feel loyal towards the organisation, and believes that the organisation cares for them to a great extent. A feeling of belonging is present, even if the suspicion towards top management, especially towards Ikea Sweden, can be noticed. According to my research this means that is the climate, rather than the culture, which has changed during the last couple of years.

Climate
As Alvesson (1989) explains above, compared to the culture, the psychosocial working climate is more easily changed and modified, and therefore different incidents influence the climate far more than the culture. He also means that the climate is an important factor when looking at the possibilities to increase personal feelings as well being, satisfaction and the meaning of work, which are the very same results as the investigation made by Prevent[25] (illustrated in Figure 2) show.

An incident, or change, which may have modified the climate at Ikea Gothenburg are the increasing levels of workload during the recent years, along with a feeling of less support from top management as discussed above. Many of the employees seem less convinced about the current presence and weight of the Ikea spirit. All of the interviewees explained that they believed that Ikea Gothenburg had gone through a change in relation to the spirit and traditional values concerning the care for the employees. Two of the interviewees, a manager in Group C and a support person express:

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[24] Included in these numbers are the findings from the Gothenburg, Örebro and Älmhult warehouse.

[25] The organisation Prevent should not be confused with Ikea Gothenburg's organisational healthcare company Previa, even though they are operating the same industry.

"The Ikea spirit has changed during the last four of five years…it was more of a family feeling before, now it feels more industrialised. It is more work to do and we have less time for each other".

One of the support persons expresses similar thoughts:

"There has been a change during the last couple of years, the climate has become more harsh at Ikea Gothenburg. Especially the way the personnel are treated, it has always been a thing with the Ikea spirit that the employees have been appreciated, but that is not the case today. The personnel are not seen as a resource anymore, they are seen as robots."

This attitude, that the strong caring values included in the spirit has changed, can also be recognised among the employees, the relation to the high workload and levels of work absence is clear.

"It feels like we are so easily replaced, if one of us breaks down they can easily replace us with someone else."

"The economic concerns seem to be of such great importance, how we feel is less important."

An experienced Ikea Gothenburg employee reflects over the differences between now and then:

"It was different before, during the time of Kamprad. You felt more valued and you felt pride in working at Ikea. At dinners and different activities organised by Ikea Gothenburg you got to bring your husband or wife and the activities felt more special. Back then, managers from other furniture stores called me and asked if I wanted to come and work for them instead, because the personnel at Ikea where sought after. I do not believe that we still have this good reputation."

These are some of the statements I recall from my informal interactions with employees during work. The important essence of these attitudes is the fact that the working climate at Ikea Gothenburg does not mirror the values of the Ikea spirit to such a great extent anymore. The conflicting messages from top management create a climate with somewhat negative feelings and attitudes among the employees', which in turn influence their health, as Ekstrand (1988) explained, but it also has an impact on the productivity. According to Theorell (2002), psychosocial problems within the work place lead to decreased

productivity and disloyalty among the employees. This change in climate should be of concern since it does not only decrease productivity, if it continues to weaken the trust and loyalty among the employees, it may also change the more stable culture Alvesson (1993) refers to, and will then be much harder to deliberately change back again. On the other hand, the organisation can never isolate itself from everything in the surrounding environment, if the time changes so do the organisations.

Cultural Traffic and Social Construction
The surrounding environment has a great impact on the organisational culture, as the culture of an organisation should be understood as a process of constructing and reconstructing meanings, and as an interpretation of reality (Salzer, 1994). The collective understanding of meanings and shared world-view Salzer (1994) refers to, are very much influenced by the high levels of work absence and stressful environment in general. The surrounding environment cannot be used as an excuse for all the absence however, as the society influences all organisations (and the people within them) and there still are differences in absence levels among these organisations. The index numbers presented in Figure 8 show that the work absence at Ikea Gothenburg is well above the average absence levels. Therefore, influences from organisational issues, issues as the working climate, the message from top management or how the job is organised, should still be of priority and concern, even if the society affects the absence levels as well.

In the same way as the changes in the surrounding environment influences the organisational culture, so does the people within the organisation. Alvesson (1993) explains that a culture is exposed to a cultural traffic. This means that the people within the organisation comes and goes, and they all have different relations towards the organisation, which influences it in different ways just as the changes in society does. Therefore, many different climates and cultural configurations can exist at the same time, in one organisation. This can be recognised at Ikea Gothenburg mainly in terms of younger and elder employees, as well as more or less experienced people, as mentioned earlier. A long experience has shown to be of importance since those who have been present longer have both a greater Ikea-working experience and knowledge

concerning the true Ikea spirit. According to Engman and Garshnek (2001), none of the persons over the age of 55 where <u>not</u> loyal to the organisation, the same numbers among the employees between the ages of 26-34 where 21%[26]. This difference in loyalty can also be recognised among the interviewees. Younger employees in particular are viewed upon as being less loyal to the organisation, and in some circumstances, to their duties as well. One of the managers in Group D points out that younger people may feel more pressured from the societal changes:

"It feels like younger people are absent to a greater extent, maybe they have a different working moral…The reason behind the high absence rates at Ikea is partly a result from the stressful society we live in as many people in the house suffer from depression, especially the younger ones."

Another manager from the same group, and one of the support persons, mean that the younger employees are less aware of what Ikea is all about, and that this may have an impact on their loyalties towards their duties.

"The work force of Ikea has been transformed, those who felt more responsibility towards their jobs are not present to such a great extent anymore. Younger people of today do not have the same respect for work."

"There are many students, who are just passing through without any intention of staying within Ikea. There are a lot of young persons today, 20 years ago Ikea Gothenburg where an organisation where you worked full time, with the intention to stay… Many of the young people working here today do not know anything about the Ikea spirit…"

All the interviewees believed that those who did not believe in, or valued the Ikea spirit would leave the organisation. However, as some values are less distinctive as the people of the organisation and society changes, so do the terms determining who fits in and who does not. As shown in Figure 7, 64% of the participants at Ikea Gothenburg are younger than 35 years of age. This means that two thirds of the employees and departmental managers (which are the participants included in the investigation) have not been present during the

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[26] These numbers include answers from employees working in the warehouses of Gothenburg, Örebro and Älmhult.

time of Kamprad, and have not experienced the strong spirit and family feeling the more experienced employees often refer to. Instead, they bring new values to the organisation at the same time as some of the old ones survive. One of the managers in Group A explained:

"Young people of today have a different life style, they travel, change jobs, people are not so loyal to one organisation today and therefore, the Ikea spirit changes in some areas. Younger people of today have different values compared what employees used to have before. It is OK to work at a company as Ikea, since we are perceived as a good organisation in some areas, but Kamprad's old premises are probably gone."

The same argument was explained to me during an informal talk with a younger employee:

"Some people talk about this old man as he is some kind of hero, I have no idea what he has said. I think it is all right to work at Ikea since the company is concerned about the environment, equality, and things like that."

According to these results and to the literature studies, the same type of values and norms cannot be continuously promoted in an organisation as the outside world changes. Some of the things, which where important to the employees during the 70's, when the nine cornerstones where written and the house was built, are not important to the same degree for people today. On the other hand, some values are always important to people, and some things do always make us anxious and stressed, as discussed further in the chapter about the individual.

Therefore, the organisation should consider both the demands of the individuals and the surrounding environment. If the adaptation to the surrounding environment is exaggerated, the needs of the individuals are forgotten. The fact that some employees at Ikea Gothenburg feel less valued and treated as robots may be an indicator that the exaggeration of external demands is what is happening at Ikea Gothenburg today. As the organisational issues concerning how the everyday work is organised also makes a difference to how the employees perceive their working environment this should now be investigated further.

5.2. Operational Level/Human Resource Management

HRM is about shaping and delivering corporate strategies by means of the organisation's human resources. These strategies are delivered through motivating the employees by uniting their personal goals with the goals of the organisation (Damm, 1993; Beardwell & Holden, 1994). To reach this important participation and involvement from the employees, the common goals described above have to suit their needs. In this chapter I will investigate whether the motivators job design, learning and development and finally rewards, suits the needs of the individuals at Ikea Gothenburg. As the results from this study determines if the employees are participating and are involved in their work arrangements, this factor will not be investigated on its own.

5.2.1. Job Design

The analysis of how the jobs at Ikea Gothenburg are designed to fit the needs and abilities of the employees and department managers are very much influenced by the large workload and high levels of stress. The law requires that the work situation has to be adapted to the needs and abilities of the individual. Recently, the employees should also have the possibility to co-operate in the process of job design, and the employer has to work out an action plan, to explain and outline how these goals can be reached. This could be seen as a pre-activity as well as pro-activity related to work absence. The intrinsic rewards in the form of a varying or well-adapted job may prevent the individual from becoming anxious or stressed over his or her working situation. The pro-active part is the adaptation of the situation of work required for the person who has been absent in order to come back.

Job Design- Employees
According to all my sources the legal requirements of adapting the work environment are followed at Ikea Gothenburg. The preventive job design are difficult to adapt to the employees' needs and wishes to such a great extent, and the newly introduced process including an action plan to adapt the work situation has not yet been established. This is difficult for Ikea Gothenburg as

well as for many other employers, since the already existing labour laws are not yet as flexible as this way of adapting them to individual needs requires. This lack of adaptation can be noticed in Previa's results, where only 20% of the employees believed that they had enough time to perform their duties. The amount of persons feeling stressed at Ikea Gothenburg (to a rather high extent or a very high extent) where 51% of the people (Engman & Garshnek, 2001).

Only one of the managers interviewed believed that the work situation could be adapted to the individuals' needs and requirements to a satisfying extent. This manager is a part of both Group A and Group C, which might have an influence on the ability to perform his/her duties. The other two managers included in Group A explained how much they could adapt the work to the needs and abilities of the employee:

"Not at all really. The amount of work is extremely hard to adapt. Even though I increased my turnover with 35% last year, I was not allowed to expand the amount of paid working hours, therefore I am unable to affect the situation."

"Not that much, I can adjust the hours of work according to the family situation. However, one's social life always gets damaged to some extent when you work these late hours. Also, I have to give the company what it needs, if there are many customers here on a Friday night, I have to have more employees working during these hours."

The three less experienced Ikeans all emphasised how hard they tried to adapt the work. It could be noticed that they were more concerned over this matter. One of them says that it can be done if he/she helps the employees with their duties.

"I try, but it is very hard. I help the employees a lot myself, and during performance peaks I invoke people who can more easily face the pressure and stress levels."

Another manager in Group B also explained that this could be done on the expense of someone else:

"It is difficult and has to be done at the expense of others who are willing to work more, but it damages them too. They can always talk to me and I do my best to fix things, however it cannot always be done."

The third manager in Group B where troubled mainly by the small possibility to adapt working hours, but explained that it could be done most of the time, if noticed in advance.

Five out of the six managers I interviewed believed that they could not adapt the working situation to the employees in the way they wished to. This problem with work adaptation is related to the large workload. All of the managers believe that they do not have time to deal with this type of long term issues, which is rather related to the job design of the managers.

Job Design – Department Managers
As described above, job design should be seen as a motivator, it could also be seen as an intrinsic reward (Figure 3). I will investigate whether the department managers are motivated by their job design and if the forces behind the reward of increased responsibilities enhance a feeling of being valued by the organisation, as Beardwell and Holden (1994) explains in the theory section above. The legal requirements discussed in the employee-section should also be kept in mind.

All managers interviewed claimed that they did not have enough time to act and work fully as managers. Every single manager interviewed argued that just-in-time, short termed tasks most of the time had to be prioritised before the long-term managerial responsibilities. No deviations could be made between the more or less experienced managers or Ikeans concerning this matter. Some of the statements are outlined below:

"I would like to devote more time to the personnel, but there are so many other things I have to do. The sales take so much time, so I do not have time to talk to the personnel about how they feel, which is distressing since I believe that this would have had an impact on the well being and comfort of the employees… I would also like to have a more structured job design, to know what is expected of me, more feedback… I guess we all need a more structured working environment where everyone knows what is required. I would like to have more distinct goals and expectations from the management group. Maybe they could prioritise 3-5 duties that we could focus on instead of 10."

Short-term duties, as helping the employees with their daily work are often prioritised, before long-term planning and active social support. All managers

believed that if they would have more time to deal with the long-term issues and be more supportive to the employees (by talking to them more and being able to encourage them more) this would make a difference for the employees in terms of well being and psychological health.

"As a leader, you have to take time to see each individual and work with long-term questions. To constantly fill up holes and put out fires is a very short-termed way of working… The more I work, the more work I generate. I remember more and more things, which should be done. I become very frustrated by working this way since everything I do is done mediocre. It does not feel good, because others are dependent on my results… There are certain things that I have to do, which are not included in my formal role as a manager. This can of course be determined by myself, but when some people are absent you simply have to help the employees a lot and then it becomes like a spiral."

Another manager explains how this large workload affects his/her work, the employees and the climate.

" The work load is to extensive for me and I cannot be a good manager, which I believe affects the employees negatively. The workload is too large for them as well and the climate is not so good. This is in fact where all my bad conscience lie, I do not have the time to be a proper manager."

The responsibilities included in the formal role as a department manager are: HRM issues, see to it that Ikea's rules and spirit are understood and followed, be aware of the local situation in the surrounding area and how this may affect sales, be responsible for the commercial message the department is sending out, etc. (Ikea, 2002). These are only a few of the responsibilities included in the formal role definition of a departmental manager at Ikea Gothenburg. This problem, in association with the fact that the employees also have a lot of work to do, makes it even worse. The duties referred to as "putting out fires", are most often work that should have been performed by the employees, but due to an extensive work load in combination with absence, has to be performed by the manager, while his or her formal duties are postponed. One of the support persons refers to this problem by arguing that:

"There is not enough personnel as it is, the workload becomes even larger when some are absent… The managers do not always feeling good either, as they have so many things to do. They can simply not cope with this situation."

The manager's working situation cannot be adapted to such a great extent outside the requirements of the law either. The motivational forces behind job design is lost, instead, it seems to have grown into a problem for many of the managers at Ikea Gothenburg. Firstly, the large amount of workload influences how much the jobs can be adapted, since everyone has a large workload that has to be done, the abilities to adapt the work decreases. Secondly, the lack of education among departmental managers where mentioned by the three managers in Group C as an additional reason behind the problem. All the sources used in this report shows that the problem of extensive workloads is very much related to the high levels of work absence, and the other way around. In the following section the matter of learning and development will be developed further.

5.2.2. Learning and Development

According to my theory section above, education may be one of the reasons behind the problem of job design. As organisations of today requires continuous improvements and flexibility, the importance of education should be emphasised (Beardwell and Holden, 1994). How this is done at Ikea Gothenburg will now be analysed in order to investigate if the motivational force behind this HRM factor has an impact on the employee satisfaction, and if the above discussed problem could be diminished.

Learning and Development - Employees
Concerning the learning and development at Ikea Gothenburg, the investigation made by Engman and Garshnek (2001) shows that 90% of the participants would like to obtain greater possibilities to develop, to a certain or great extent[27]. To the question: "Would the employees be interested in more internal training?" 79% answered yes (Engman & Garshnek, 2001). To investigate the significance of this wish and if the matter of education may have any negative influences on individual health Previa's investigation can be used. When the question: "Are you feeling worried about new technology, new

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[27] These numbers include answers from departmental managers, group managers and employees at Ikea Gothenurg, Örebro and Älmhult.

ways of working etc." 93% (Dep. 1) and 79% (Dep. 2) where not worried at all. Therefore, this wish for more internal education cannot be connected to any negative stress, which could lead to absence, among the employees. However, also in this case, the potential motivational force behind this HRM factor is lost.

Also, when looking further into the Previa investigation half of the employees from Department 1, the department with customer contact, answered "no" on the question: "Do the competence you have correspond to the demands put on you?" It should be noticed that the employees working only a few days a month are included in the investigation. Nevertheless, this number could be an indicator that one type of education, or at least some kind of additional support, could be appropriate for the employees working in close relation to the customers. This, since the customer demand can be a source of anxiety and negative stress for the employees if not satisfied, which will be discussed further in Chapter 5.3.2 below.

Learning and Development – Department Managers
The departmental managers, on the other hand, have a much wider area of responsibilities. One of the two reasons mentioned as why many managers' workload is too large, where argued to be a matter of education, or lack of such. The three managers included in Group C, all had opinions concerning this matter. According to two of them, the departmental managers at Ikea Gothenburg have not received any kind of managerial education, apart from an introductory course.

"We have so many different responsibilities and it is not easy to know which questions are the most important. Often, we work with the wrong questions… You have to become aware of how to work as a manager… In the beginning you may run back and forth because everyone wants your help, which is fun in the beginning since it makes you feel special. But after a while you become aware of that you are only running in a labyrinth… The workload keeps us within our own little world. You do not have the energy to look outside the department walls and develop. It would be much better if the department managers could have some kind of medium, where we could meet and work together in an organised way… Today we have information meetings, but we should have more opportunities to co-operate."

The other managers in this group also explain how hard it is for those with less experience to prioritise work:

"It is hard for the newly recruited managers to prioritise what duties are the most important ones. Many of the things you learn in the Trainee-course[28] do not work in reality and no one works like that later anyway, things just happen. It is not so strange, though since sales have increased with almost a 100% the last 4-5 years."

The fact that the managerial area of responsibilities can grow very large do of course complicate the prioritising of duties further, especially for the less experiences managers. The third manager included in Group C explains how he/she would like to share the managerial responsibilities with the employees in order to lighten the burden of work and at the same time improve the organisational development to satisfy the increasing customer demand.

"It would have been great if I could be available for the employees to a greater extent, to provide them with the information they need and explain operational changes. Instead I worry over the things that are not done, it would have been great if the personnel could have helped me with these things, if they would have more responsibilities. There is a course running at the moment, with the aim to lessen the burdens for some of the department managers[29]. The point of this course is that the employees should be able to do some of the things I am doing today, so that I can put more time into my managerial duties. However, this does not work at the moment, since I have to have the time to learn these new things before I can pass them on to others. This way of reasoning is very good; since it prevents that some things are delayed if I do not have the time. But the course has not even finished yet and I will not have the time to pass it on as the working situation looks today."

One of the managers in Group D explained similar thoughts:

"I would like to have more time to work as a manager, invest in the personnel and make them feel valued… We have to educate more and develop the personnel, otherwise we cannot provide the right service and we will continue to things in the last minute."

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[28] The Trainee-course [Aspirant-kursen] is an internal introductory course for those who are, or wish to become, department managers at Ikea.

[29] The manager refers to an internal logistic course.

Beardwell and Holden (1994) explain how lack of internal education is negative force for organisational development. They make clear how the organisation's ability to adapt to the changing environment and customer demands is diminished if the members of the organisation are not educated properly. This is not only a matter concerning the future development of Ikea, it is also important in order to lighten the burdens of the managers. On the other hand, the Previa investigation shows that the employees do not have enough time to perform their own duties as it is, therefore cannot an increase in employee duties and workload be viewed as a solution to the problem. This HRM factor has a negative impact on motivation as well, and in the managers' case, it also seems has a negative impact on the individual's health.

5.2.3. Rewards

According to Porter and Lawler's model of motivation (Figure 3) job design and learning and development are both intrinsic rewards and should, if used in the right way increase performance and steer it in the right direction. I will in the following section explore in what ways the managers can reward the employees in order to increase their level of satisfaction, the way the model (Figure 3) shows.

All of the managers believe that the greatest rewards you can receive at Ikea Gothenburg are intrinsic social rewards, such as verbal encouragement, positive feedback or just being able to do things together. The few monetary, extrinsic rewards present at Ikea Gothenburg are not mentioned as great motivators by any of the managers. Instead recognition, encouragement and more managerial support are mentioned. As no deviations between the groups could be recognised concerning this matter either, some of the statements are outlined below.

"More personnel altogether could also be viewed as a needed reward… The simple encouragements are the most important things. One morning all the members of the management group where standing outside the store welcoming the employees with Christmas cookies and drinks, which was very appreciated."

One of the managers describes how the high pressure increases the need for the right type of rewards in order to encourage the employees.

"The fact that the Gothenburg house is so successful could be an encouragement on its own, since it should make us proud. But it can also be a source of frustration since we have to perform so much compared to other houses of our size. The goals set for the Premium-salary[30] where much harder for us to reach. Historically, we have always sold very well. Therefore, the belt is tightened a little bit for each year. I do not believe that people think it is worth it anymore, why work 120% extra the whole year around to get one extra bonus of 3-5000 SEK… Rewards do not have to cost so much, but you cannot give someone a cinema ticket when that person has just completed a sale for 200 000 SEK, it almost feels like a joke."

Another manager also views the rewards in relation to the employee efforts and describes his/her own wishes:

"I believe that positive and negative criticism are of importance, I would have liked to have some more of that too. To be seen is of major importance, this means more than one might think it does… The increase in sales during the last couple of years is a result of the huge turnover, which is illogical. This increase in performance means that we no longer have time to talk to each other, look after the personnel… I would like to go away on shorter trips in relation to work, things like this are really hard to organise since there is not enough time. I believe that it would have made a huge difference; to talk to each other, do something else. I would also like to be seen more, get some feedback, both from managers and employees."

This last, short comment will represent the reward emphasised by all interviewees, including the support persons:

" The most important thing is for the employees to be seen."

The rewards the departmental managers refer to, as the most important and needed rewards at Ikea Gothenburg, can be compared with some of the intrinsic rewards referred to in the model of motivation outlined in Figure 3. The described connection between effort-performance-reward cannot be applied on the type of rewards explained in the statements above. The fact that none of the managers wanted more of these type of rewards support the argument that

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[30] The Premium-salary [Premiumlönen] is a yearly reward all employees within the Swedish warehouses receive if they reach organisationally set goals related to salesnumbers.

traditional HRM concerns, of employee development in relation to organisational development, are rather a manipulative tool used to force the employees to work harder, as most of these motivational activities means more work for the individual. Some individuals view this pressure as a motivating force, and others feel stressed and cannot cope with these demands (Ohlsson in Tedenljung, 2001). In Ikea Gothenburg's case none of the motivators has the wished motivating force, instead, they signal the very conflicting massage described in the organisation chapter above.

The common goals, and the ability of reaching a trade-off between the organisation's requirements and the needs of the individual seem hard to find. One might question if the common HRM assumption of united goals between the employee and the organisation really exist to such a great extent. The fact that these goals always work as a motivator and increase performance might also be questioned, as motivation cannot be viewed as a phenomenon isolated from social, cultural or historical influences, according to Alvesson (1993).

Ekstrand (1988) gives an explanation of how the increasing pressures to be effective may negatively influence the individual. The organisations become more and more slimmed, and in this machine of effectiveness and rational behaviour, the people and their interests are lost. What really means something to people is not prioritised. As people are not always rational and effective, the human needs cannot be ignored. Ekstrand (1988) explains that if people are forced to ignore their personal feelings and just follow the rules, the individual is alienated from personal goals, reduced to an instrument or tool to reach the goals set for the organisation. The content of this somewhat dramatic description relating to the individual's needs will be studied further in the next section.

5.3. Individual Level

Work satisfaction is supposed to be closely linked to motivation. However, according to Alvesson (1993) motivation is more about guidance, a guidance to steer the individual's actions towards pre-required duties. Work satisfaction on the other hand, influences the employee turnover and absence to a greater

extent than motivational factors and is more closely linked to human psychology. Therefore, I will now look deeper into what it is that makes a person satisfied with his/her working situation and what makes the employees feel anxious or stressed.

5.3.1. Psychological Needs

Viewing Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Figure 4), the *social belonging* and *ego and esteem needs* are probably those of the higher needs that can be related to the Ikea spirit and family feeling. When Kamprad (in Salzer, 1994) describes the Ikea spirit, he refers to the wonderful and strong relationships among the employees, how they always should take care of, inspire and help each other. The new employees should always be welcomed into the family.

These values can also be recognised in the Gothenburg warehouse, however not quite as strong as outlined by Kamprad (in Salzer 1994). In Previa's investigation the question "Do you receive support from anyone at your place of work?" was included. In Department 1, 67% believed that they received a great support from someone. The same percentage for Department 2 was 84%. When answering the question "Do you experience that the co-operation and contact within your team is good?" 84% of the employees from Department 2 where very positive, the same numbers from Department 1 where 53%. These numbers should probably have been higher if the traditional values explained above would be followed to a greater extent than they are today.

Jackson and Carter, (2000) explains that the important social belonging and respect from others does not have to be connected to any kind of relation associated to status or formal roles in order to satisfy the employee. Instead, it is whomever the individual find important that fulfils these feelings. When adopting the view of these authors, each individual's situation has to be investigated in relation to the person's own interests and subjective reality. According to the findings above, there is no time for such time consuming investigations at Ikea Gothenburg today, however the possibility to do so is highly sought by all the managers included in the investigation.

5.3.2. Psychological Demands

Karasek's model deals with how the work is organised (how demand relate to control) and how this relates to bad health. The psychosocial stress, which are investigated are not related to social classes or only a problem for people with a lot of responsibility, which researchers tended to believe previously. Other findings also show similar results, when employees do not receive resources in form of time, formal responsibility or qualification to perform the tasks required, a negative stress and psychological discomfort occurs (Arbetslivsfakta, 2002; SOU 2002:5).

In some aspects the high demands in relation to lack of control included in Karasek's model (Figure 5) can be recognised at Ikea Gothenburg. The high levels of stress and huge workload referred to in many of the previous chapters create high demands on the employees and department managers. The employees at Ikea Gothenburg cannot, due to the nature of the work, plan the working hours or control unforeseen situations, e.g., difficulty to forecast customer demand, due to complex customer interests and behaviour. The managers cannot do this to such a great extent either, as I discussed in the chapters about *Job design* (Chapter 5.2.1 and 5.2.2). Therefore, the employees cannot be placed in the *active* stage (Figure 5), as this stage requires a higher level of control. Since the situation today limits the possibilities to control the working situation for many of the department managers as well, only some of them can be placed in the active stage.

According to the general statistics, occupations including a high level of customer contact more often generate high levels of negative stress, because the demands are too high (Theorell et. al., 1993). The high level of customer contact at Ikea cannot be diminished, however some of the incidents that establishes negative stress, due to low levels of control, could be avoided. As the customer pressure are exceptionally high at Ikea Gothenburg, well functioning information and aiding tools are of importance to spare the employees from stressful situations whit irritated customers and angry complaints. Today, false or delayed information or assistance are in many cases

given to customers, due to inaccurate information systems or slow support systems. One of the managers refer to this problem in one of the interviews:

”There is a particular system developed to facilitate our work, but this system is more of a frustration than a help since it delays the work and hold up the customers longer.”

Many of the customers exposed to this problem, or any other related to misunderstandings or incorrect information, become irritated and angry when they notice the fault or delay and turn their complaints to the employees working in the store. According to two of the support persons who meet many employees everyday, the complaints from customers are definitely a source of anxiety and negative pressure on the employees. This is also shown in the Previa investigation when looking at answers from Department 1 (the department with customer contact). The investigation show that 53% often feels irritated and impatient, which is referred to as a symptom of a too high psychological demand. Since the employees in most cases cannot do anything to compensate the customer, and thereby increase their level of control, the negative stress becomes even higher. These problems of inadequate assisting tools can never be avoided, since systems always break down, and the human factor always plays its part in the updating of them. Still, these problems could maybe be avoided to a greater extent.

Another similar frustrating problem, mentioned by most interviewees and which also is a commonly known fact within the store, is the lack of space. The store does not really have the capability to provide the large amount of customers with products and service. The storage is too small, the cashiers are too few and the cafeteria, as well as the building, is often over-crowded. This is of course another major stress factor for the employees as these problems also frustrate the customers, who complain angrily. In every interview the problem of the small house was brought up as a reason behind the stressful environment at Ikea Gothenburg today. One of the department managers explained that a new ware house where the most significant solution to the problem of stress. Two of the managers from Group A explain:

“…Ikea is open for many hours, during these opening hours the same amount of people as lives in a small town may be walking through the house… Nothing much will happen before

the new house is in place and running, it is too ineffective to do a good job today, which increases the level of stress among the employees. When there are no more cashiers to open, no more space in storage, which constantly has to be refilled and is often emptied, the working situation becomes ruff for the employees. No matter how we toss and turn this problem, it does not change the fact that the house is too small!"

"It will be interesting to see if the absence-rates will decrease when the new house is finished since this means less customers and work, for us."

As the new house is not planned to open until the year 2004, the problem of bad health in relation to the psychosocial work environment cannot be delayed until then. On the other hand, five out of the six managers do not blame the physical surroundings for the bad work situation.

When comparing the situation at Ikea Gothenburg with Karasek's model (Figure: 5) it is the organisation of work that once again seems to be a problem. As mentioned in the HRM chapters, the work is not organised in a way that motivates or stimulates the individual. The psychological needs, has to be better matched to the psychological demands. Also the findings presented in chapter two above should be considered. Those who believed that they did a good job, where rarely involved in conflicts and received support from their closest managers were more seldom absent from work. In fact, those who where able to control their working situation were absent from work 50% less than those who could not (SOU 2002:5). Lastly, I would like to give a short reflection of the gender representation in relation to absence. With the high overrepresentation of women I do not believe that this matter should be all together left out of my analysis.

Gender Representation
As can be seen in the empirical statistics, women are absent from work almost 50% more than men. Therefore, this matter cannot be avoided and I will discuss some of the gender differences I found in my research. Before any conclusions are drawn from this chapter I would like to underline one of the main the messages of this thesis, as well as the message of Berger and Luckman (1967), who explain how each individual socially construct their reality, which give rise to their assumptions, ideas, values and norms. As all

individuals are different and no personality differences, specific talents or abilities can be related to gender, one should therefore view the gender related statistic differences as differences that are socially constructed.

At Ikea, the gender distribution within the store is roughly 50/50, however, the fact that women to a higher degree work with customers, as more men work with storage and unloading, could have an impact on the stress levels of women. Employees working in close relations with customers or patients are more often absent from work due to high stress levels and high demand at work (Arbetslivsfakta, 2002).

The friendly relations at Ikea are positive in the sense that they probably have a positive impact on the psychosocial work environment. Yet, when discussing workload, it may also have a negative side, since it is harder for everyone to turn down a friend in need. The Ikea philosophy brings out the importance of never saying no, always be prepared to help a colleague or a customer, the many employees who are still inspired by, and are working according to this state of mind, may find it difficult to deny a helping hand. Even though the required duty are not included in their area of work.

Recently, an article about this very subject could be found in a daily newspaper. According to Nordell (2002) persons with the problem of saying "no" are more often absent from work due to bad health than others. This matter is more usually found among women, according to Nordell, women, to a higher degree than men, find it very important to avoid conflicts and agree with others. As a result of this, their situations of work more often include high workloads and high levels of stress, than do those of men.

I have in this chapter mapped the main reasons behind work absence related to the psychosocial work environment at Ikea Gothenburg, which has given me an answer to my second research question. In order to answer the third question I will conclude my analysis and give some recommendations in the following chapter.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

To answer the last research question of how the psychosocial work environment at Ikea Gothenburg relate to the increasing levels of work absence, I will in the following section summarise my concluding remarks.

When I started this research I questioned if the culture and unity of Ikea where as strong as the saga of Ikea enlighten? If the "family-feeling" and proud work force really exists and if it has an impact on the psychosocial working environment, and in turn work absence? Now, that I have finished the analysis and done my research, I have come to the conclusion that the strong culture exists. Perhaps the spirit is not as strong as the saga of Ikea implies, and the values are not exactly like the ones Kamprad (in Salzer, 1994) outlined in his nine cornerstones. However, as I have tried to mirror in my analysis, the feeling of unity and friendship exists at Ikea Gothenburg. The hierarchal levels and formal roles do not have a strong impact on how your contribution to the organisation is valued or whom you talk to. This strong feeling of unity, openness and the lack of formal status and hierarchy, emphasise the illusion that Ikea Gothenburg is a flat organisation. There is still a family feeling and work enjoyment among the employees. The flat organisational culture together with the success of Ikea Gothenburg is a source of pride among the employees. These are all positive aspects and according to the theories, as well as to the trends and patterns of work absence, which should have a positive impact on the psychosocial working environment.

As the analysis further shows, the work environment at Ikea Gothenburg today is not as it once was, the workload is greater and the stress level has increased. Even though, the spirit and unity still exist and therefore these changes can be related to the working climate, which affects the psychosocial work environment to a high extent. Alvesson (1993) explains the climate as not so extensive and deep as the culture and can therefore be modified by different actions. Hence, it is important to take steps to prevent this unhealthy climate from eliminating the positive aspects of the culture. Employees refer to the

feeling of not being appreciated or noticed to the extent desirable, which is quite the opposite to what the traditional Ikean values stands for. As the strong concern for the employees is one of those things that has made Ikea the successful and admired organisation it is today, these values should not be forgotten or put aside.

The fact that times change has to be kept in mind. Organisations cannot isolate themselves from this changing environment. As described above, people form organisations, to reach goals, which cannot be reached individually (Daft, 1998). As the individuals within the organisation, as well as the possibilities to reach the goals, changes, so should the organisation. Values and interests among people change, and so should the organisations' values, in order for the employees to be proud of, and feel that they belong to and believe in the organisational values. Therefore, I do not believe that it is possible to continuously promote certain values as the outside world changes. I do not believe that this is possible in the sense that some of the time related values has to be changed. In Ikeas case, the social concerns of the 50s', 60' and 70's including how the simple people should afford to live decent and to "care for them who nobody else care for", where probably more close to the reality back then, than in is today. As the young employee expressed, values as pollution issues, a concern for the working environment of those who builds the furniture, or equality in terms of gender, are more important today. I believe that Ikea has succeeded with this adaptation, at least internally.

However, some values never change, as a friendly spirit among employees, to be cared for and appreciated, and how status and formal roles does not determine who you are allowed to speak to or how you are valued as a person, these are ethics that are always important, independent of time, era or nationality. At Ikea Gothenburg, these universal, emotional values, which are apart of the Ikea spirit, have been put in the shadow behind the strong focus on profit and sales. This has in turn contributed to a more pressured working climate and suspicion towards top management of Ikea Sweden. The traditional Ikea values included in the spirit should, along with the ones required by the societal trends that subsist at the moment, be underlined further by the

organisation and kept alive to create a better psychosocial working environment.

To further clarify what I mean, I will draw some conclusions from the operational/HRM part of the analysis. HRM has brought to the force a concern to maximise the potential of employees, which has opened a new chapter in the debate about developing and investing in the employees. In the analysis, it is questioned if these motivators should be viewed more as a manipulative tool to increase performance than an inspiring tool to encourage the individual. Looking at the motivators in relation to work satisfaction and personal development at Ikea Gothenburg, none of these factors seem to give these results. Instead, it has quite the opposite influence. The supposition concerning manipulation can be viewed as the downside of the traditional motivational factors. This occurrence is not so bizarre however, as their main point is to increase the responsibility or working areas, which in the end often means more work and higher performance for the individual in question. Even if it is supposed to be a win-win situation it may be experienced as the psychological pressure Karasek (in Alvesson, 1993) refers to if the individual's needs and abilities are not considered. This appears to have happened at Ikea Gothenburg, as the motivators included in the research have not been developed or used in the way that suits the individuals. This lack of concern for the individual is one example of how the important values described above has lost its importance. The individual's needs are not considered and the motivators are not suited to encourage, simply because there is no time set aside to do so. In order to improve the working climate and decrease the level of work absence the motivational factors, such as job design, learning and development and rewards, has to be used in the best interests of the employees and to a greater extent. Today, the motivational forces included in the research are counterproductive, instead of motivating the employees and thereby, increase performance they pressure and stress the employees, which not only decreases productivity, but also the health of the employees.

As I explained in the introduction, when the demand increases, the means to reach the new goals has to be made available. Even if this seems very logical and straightforward as one imagines the simple process of supply and demand,

plant and harvest or give and take, this is not as easy when it comes to the working process within the organisation. As Alvesson (1993) explains, values and norms, which guide the managers and employees in the right directions, are outcomes from the culture rather than a strategic tool used to reach organisational goals. Therefore, Ikea cannot rely on the strong culture and Ikea spirit to increase performance, or feelings of responsibility among the employees, since these feelings and actions are outcomes from this very same culture, which has to be kept alive by the means required by the people of the organisation.

7. EPILOGUE

During the work with the thesis the most important thing I learned is what concludes my report. If high performing employees are required by the organisation, their needs in order to achieve this have to be satisfied. As can be noticed in this report, this is not so easy as it sounds.

This can be one of the reasons to why Kamprad was so well-liked and appreciated by the employees, and why the employees in turn where loyal to Ikea. The values he followed where important to many employees during that time era.

The support and encouragement many employees lack today, seem to be values of the general and universal kind, which do not change in importance due to changes in time. Especially not when the work is seen as such an important part of life and personal identity as it is today. We no longer identify with our family, background or religion to such a great extent anymore, instead, we identify through our work. Therefore, as the importance of the work increase, the risk of being disappointed or frustrated because it do not fulfil our needs, also increase (Jackson and Carter, 2000; Styhre, 2002; Johannison, 2002).

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9. APPENDIX 1 - METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The increasing level of work absence is a major problem for many Swedish organisations today. The fact that more and more people seem to experience their jobs as a problem rather than a source of personal development and satisfaction is another reason to why this problem is of great importance. Therefore, I have chosen to investigate one of the most elementary grounds to enable feelings as personal development and work satisfaction, which are good health. My report will consist of a study concerning psychosocial work environment in relation to work absence due to bad health. I intend to investigate only organisationally related causes behind the problem. There are of course other reasons behind work absence, which I will not include in my study.

I chose to write my thesis in co-operation with Ikea, sine I find this organisation especially interesting with its strong humanistic spirit, described more in detail in Chapter 1.2 and 4.1.1. Therefore, the approach of this study may be different from most other studies concerning the psychosocial work environment in relation to work absence, since the affect of the organisational values are taken into consideration to a greater extent. In this study I anticipate to analyse if the humanistic concerns influences the psychosocial work environment at Ikea Gothenburg, and thereby also the work absence. I hope this thesis will give me some answers to both the secrecy behind the Ikea spirit, as well as if its "symbolic force" has an impact on the organisational members' work experience.

To increase my understanding by own experiences, I applied for a part time job at Ikea Gothenburg. Since I have been working part time in one of the sales departments for six months before and then during my study, I have experienced the feeling of being an "Ikean". In order for me to view the organisation as objectively as possible and not see myself as one of them anymore I have taken a step back. I have been working with the thesis mainly

on my own, and have only been working at Ikea for a few days each month. What other efforts I have made to investigate this problem will be outlined more in detail in this chapter.

Data Collection

Through applying the theoretical model (Figure 6) upon the material from Ikea Gothenburg (Chapter 4 and 5) I will analyse the findings from an organisational, operational and individual view. I have chosen these three, since I find them relevant to the work situation. Concerning the organisational view, Salzer (1994) points out that official definitions or metaphors, as Ikeas' "family-feeling", may emphasise unity and community, which affects the organisational members' collective view of themselves, might influence how the individual perceive his or her psychosocial working environment. The operational/HRM view is perhaps the most logical way to investigate this matter, since it describes the organisation of the individual's work and therefore has a clear impact on the working situation. Finally, the individual view, which I believe is important due to human behaviour. How we tend to react in certain situations makes knowledge about human behaviour valuable, in order to understand how to avoid, or develop, certain situations or patterns of behaviour.

The Method of Abduction

To illustrate which factors could be contributing to the problem of work absence I have constructed a general model (Figure 6). In order for the model to reflect reality in the best possible way, both theory and empirical data has been used, letting one guide the other. This method of investigation is called the abduction method (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 1994). To further explain my approach; theories, general statistics and empirical experiences have been used to map and plan the construction of the model. It can be explained as continuous examination of theories and research findings in relation to empirical experiences, and the other way around. During this process the empirical research area was continuously developed in relation to the theoretical framework, which was refined and adjusted simultaneously. The empirical data was consequently used to lead the search of theory and produce

new ideas (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 1994). Therefore, the theory analysis and empirical study has been conducted in parallels, since neither of them can be understood without the other. An empirical study was necessary to identify the nature of the problem and the literature study was necessary for solving and describing the problem. The relation between the theoretical and empirical study and the disposition of the thesis is shown in Figure 1.

Model Construction

The analyses and conclusions drawn from the theories in the theory section, guided by the general statistics and field material, have contributed to the construction of a model (Figure: 6). As the model is of a general character within the field of work absence, it will be used as a tool to reach my aim of illustrating problems and possible solutions to the situation at Ikea Gothenburg. When creating this model I was inspired by the system analysis. In this type of analysis the actual situation is seen as a system, a system containing different components. How these components relate to each other and to the whole, gives an increased understanding of the situation (Abnor & Bjerke, 1994). Holme and Solvang (1994) argue that the parts in a system are explained by the characteristics of the whole. Since I noticed that the problem of work absence in relation to bad health has many different organisational reasons or causes, this type of system, which includes many factors and their relations to one another, seemed appropriate. In order to give the reader a coherent understanding of the subject and thereby simplify the view of the research subject, the model will map some of these elements.

The Empirical Study

Primary and Secondary Data

The theoretical background was obtained through secondary data, as literature studies, statistics and theories. The field material contains secondary data in the form of personnel statistics from Ikeas' HR-department and Previa's results from their investigation. Primary data were collected through participation in the daily work, note taking, observing and talking to my colleagues. The eight interviews are another source of primary data that I used to obtain a deeper and

more detailed picture of the situation. I have been interviewing middle managers at Ikea, the chairman of the most dominant labour union at Ikea, a represent from their organisational, independent health care (företagshälsovård), as well as a human resource manager.

Quantitative and Qualitative Information

Both a qualitative and quantitative approach is used. The qualitative approach allows a wide range of interpretations and perceptions of what seem to be more or less characteristic in the research, since the method is based on an understanding of the situation. The important thing is to increase the understanding of the research problem and be able to describe the whole in which this problem exists (Holme & Solvang, 1997). Quantitative methods on the other hand are more formal and structured. But this does not mean that the approach is objective, as the used numbers and techniques not always are interpreted at the optimal level of objectivity. Instead objectivity is subordinated predetermined perceptions of the researcher (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 1994). Therefore, I have used the strong sides of each approach to complement each other.

The qualitative approach has been used to search for some of the reasons behind work absence, as well as current activities used to convert the trend. This was done through interviews and by actively taking part in the daily works at Ikea. The participation in the daily work has both guided my investigation and given me a wider understanding of the current situation when it comes to the analysis. The many impressions, participation in different events and informal talks, have made my picture of the situation clearer. Referring to Figure 1, I used this information in the "mapping" and "model application and analysis" stage of my process.

The strength with qualitative interviews according to Holme and Solvang (1994) are that the situation where the interview takes place are similar to an everyday situation and a ordinary conversation, where the interviewee are only guided towards the desired topics. I have interviewed as many persons as possible in order to retrieve as much information as possible but also to increase the reliability of the study. The first two interviews I conducted early

in the process with two of the support persons. These interviews where what Eriksson & Wiedersheim (1999) calls open interviews and where of a more dialogical kind, since I used them as informative sources rather than investigative. Since Previa also functions as Ikeas' organisational health care (företagshälsovård) I found it useful to interview the responsible person, which had an excellent knowledge concerning the health situation at Ikea Gothenburg. The other informative interview(s) I did were with my facilitator at Ikea, a HR manager, since she has expertise with the field of HR at Ikea Gothenburg. She guided my research and provided me with internal information. To illustrate what point in time these two interviews where used I will refer to the first part of my investigation in Figure 1, the "mapping". The interviews aided my mapping of the problem and helped me to establish the focus of my investigation.

During the other seven interviews, with six department managers and one support person I used a more structured type of interview, with prearranged questions. The interviewees still had the possibility to expand on issues important to them as long as it was within the scope of the research topic, the questions where used to keep the interview on track. I created questions in relation to my theoretical model[31]. The interviews were between one and one and a half hour each. A tape recorder was used to record the interviews, so I could pay full attention to the interviewees. I have used the same questions for each interview to increase the reliability of the interviews. These interviews have been the main source of my investigation and where used to support the almost final step in my research, the "model application and analysis" (Figure: 1).

The quantitative part includes numbers from internal Ikea statistics and external general numbers of work absence and sick leave in Sweden. I also collected quantitative information from Previa[32], who investigates the issue of work

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[31] The questions I used to guide my interviews are listed in Appendix 2, in Swedish.

[32] Previa is a part of the Capio group with 1100 employees and 70 different locations all over Sweden. The organisation operates within all types of industries. They work to create a positive development of the client company's internal health and environment. They view

related health, both physical and psychological illness, at Ikea Gothenburg. The internal Ikea statistics and general numbers gained from research studies and statistics has helped me to put the situation at Ikea Gothenburg in a wider picture. It has helped me to focus my investigation, as well as perceiving the results found. Previa's investigation contains qualitative data including 34 employees from two different departments. The employees have answered questions and expressed their feelings toward their working situation. This investigation has been going on for one year and is based on both interviews and health care examinations. This information was used to create an understanding of the psychological as well as physical situation at Ikea in relation to work absence. Previa's investigation gave me a more wide understanding of the problem. Even though, the problem of work absence where viewed upon from a somewhat different perspective by Previa, the results from their investigation where a useful source for me in order to increase the understanding of how employees experience their working situation, looking at both physical and psychological demands. However, since I do not have the possibility to steer their method I felt the need to complement this information with interviews.

Analysis of Data

All through the empirical study, the theoretical model (Figure 6) has functioned as a guideline. The compilation of additional internal information in relation to the information in the theory section, combined in the model, has given me an understanding of the Ikea situation. The model has narrowed down and specified my investigation, which was positive since it has kept my investigation together and related it to my area of knowledge. As mentioned before, there are many causes and reasons behind the problem of work absence. However, I have decided to look at the phenomena from an organisational view.

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both the individual's personal health situation and the companys' organisation and leadership (www.Previa.se, 02-09-27).

Presentation of Results

The internal numbers and statistics from Ikea Gothenburg will be outlined and analysed mainly in the introduction of the empirical chapter to give the reader a preview of the current absence situation.

Previa's study includes quantitative information from two departments, which will be referred to as Department 1 (the department with customer contact) and 2 (the department with no customer contact). The employees of Department 1 have daily customer contact while those from Department 2 works "behind the scene" and have therefore no customer contact.

In the analysis I do not refer to any of the interviewees by their name or make distinct descriptions of the interviewees. Instead I refer to the managers in terms of their managerial experience, or their history as employees at Ikea. They have been divided into these groups since they have similar opinions in certain questions. A similarity in opinions could be noticed among the managers with a long Ikea experience (three persons), who where formed into Group A. Those with less Ikea experience (three persons) where develop into Group B. Within Group C (three persons) the managers with a long managerial experience, within or outside Ikea, where placed. The remaining three, with short managerial experience where placed in Group D. With long experience I mean more than five years. All department managers work in departments with customer contact. Since all the departments currently have, or have had a history of, high absence rates of some type[33], I will not refer to the managers in terms of these numbers. I will refer to the last three interviewees as "support persons".

My own experiences and observations will be presented mainly through referring to informal conversations I have had with employees and managers during my daily work in a sales department at Ikea Gothenburg, but also through explanations of how I have experienced some of the working situations

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[33] One of the department has notably low absence rates due to illness, but according to the department manager, the absence due to care of sick child are on the other hand high, might hide some of the health problems.

referred to in the text. I am currently working in the organisation a few days a month and had done so for six months when I started my investigation.

The information from these four sources will be presented in the analysis, and the theoretical material included in the first half of the report, will be used to analyse this empirical information. The analysis will follow the structure of the theoretical model (Figure 6). The information included in this model will be used to investigate the psychosocial working environment at Ikea Gothenburg and how it may affect the employees, from three levels: the organisational, operational/HRM and individual level.

Trustworthiness

Validity

The question one may ask in order to examine the extent of validity is: Do I measure what I intend to measure? In other words, validity is the measurement of what a measuring instrument is supposed to measure and what it really measures. Validity can be divided into one external and one internal part. The internal validity deals with the investigation itself, the direct connection between the theoretical framework and the empirical study, for example, the interviews should be held with relevant people. External validity measures whether it is possible to generalise the study or not, it concerns the whole content of the study in a broader perspective. If the investigation lacks internal validity, it is also short of the external. But it could lack external and still have a good internal validity (Eriksson & Wiedersheim, 1999).

"It is not possible to separate knowledge from the knower" (Steedman, 1991 in Alvesson & Sköldberg, 1994:7). This means that we always see things from a certain perspective; in fact the interpretation is inseparable from subjective perceptions. As it is impossible to give an unambiguous answer to the questions explained above it is important to systematically reflect the situation from many different perspectives. The interpretation can thereby reach a higher level of quality, which gives the empirical science a value (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 1994). I have viewed the problem of work absence from many different

perspectives in order to interpret the empirical situation in the best possible way.

Since I have built the theoretical framework partly on findings from general research within the area, the external reliability increases. To increase both the external and internal validity, other persons have examined my model and methodology and given their thoughts concerning this research. The persons I am referring to are my facilitators at Gothenburg School of Business and Commercial Law and at Ikea Gothenburg. I also received positive feedback from additional sources during a seminar, which was held in the last pace of my working process.

Reliability

The reliability of the measurements refers to their accuracy, consistency and predictability, which means that the measurements most be performed several times in the same way without very different results in order for the reliability to be high. Interview effects, standardisation problems or interpretation problems are some factors, which could influence the reliability of the results. To prevent this from happening, several different indicators should be used. If a number of sources give the same information, this information is probably more accurate than if only coming from one source. If a measurement is not reliable, it cannot be valid. The opposite however, may entail that the information also is valid (Eriksson & Wiedersheim, 1999).

I chose to interview middle managers, as I believe that they are the ones working most closely with, and have the responsibility for employees. Therefore, no others have the same knowledge concerning the psychosocial work environment and its influence on the employees. An important issue when looking at the problem from this perspective is that individuals have different perceptions of the same situation. As one person may be satisfied with high levels of control and an autocratic leader, others may recognise this situation as disappointing. Therefore, I believe that middle managers, working in close relation to their employees remark the overall atmosphere and feeling of the employees. It would have been too difficult and time consuming for me, working on my own as an outsider, to get the same understanding of the

situation by interviewing employees. Secondly, the managers are those who have the power to change the employees working situation. It is their responsibility to make it possible for the employees to perform. However, Alvesson (1993) argues that the most commonly used view when analysing work related psychological health is from the subjective view of the individual in question. Through the investigative research conducted by Previa I have been able to compare those results with my own in order to increase the trustworthiness of my research. Also, as the managers are employees as well, the response from employees towards the working environment, management of Ikea Gothenburg and Ikea Sweden will not be lost.

Additionally, the interviews with three other people (the support persons) working in relation to numerous employees, giving them advice and listening to their problems, will increase the reliability of my research even further.

I have collected the same kind of data from four independent sources in order to increase the reliability. I have also examined the methodology behind the numbers included in my two quantitative sources, Ikea's and Previa's numbers and statistics. These numbers were used along with my qualitative sources, the eight interviews and my personal working experience. I have compared the output from all these four sources and analysed them, by applying my theoretical model and referring to Chapter 2.

10. APPENDIX 2 - QUESTIONNAIRE

In this chapter I present the guidelines to the interviews with the department managers

Jag kommer att utveckla alla frågor beroende på de svar jag får (varför, hur ofta, hur, vilka, o.s.v.). Målet med intervjuerna är att få en bild av hur den intervjuade upplever sin arbetssituation/psykosociala arbetsmiljö och hur han eller hon jobbar för att förbättra de anställdas arbetssituationer/psykosociala arbetsmiljö.

Bakgrund
- Vilken avdelning jobbar du på?
- Hur länge har du jobbat där/ och på IKEA?
- Civilstånd?

Arbetsmiljö
- Beskriv sammanhållningen på Ikea? Både mellan chefer och anställda? (öppenhet, trivsel, support, formella roller, hierarki)
- Vem identifierar du dig med? (vi och dem känsla)
- Hur tycker du att stämningen kring sjukskrivning och frånvaro är på din avdelning, på IKEA?
- Tänker du mycket på att jobba enligt IKEAs riktlinjer, dvs. IKEA mässigt?
- Tror du dessa riktlinjer spelar stor roll idag, mer nu än förr?

Hur de jobbar som chef
- Hur skulle du beskriva dig själv som chef? Vad tycker du är viktigt? (resultat, personal, utvecklingsinriktad)
- Hur jobbar du för att minska frånvaron på din avdelning? (För att se om de använder sig av Ikeas resurser, och vad de gör?)
- Hur tycker du att det fungerar?(respons från anställda)

- Känner du till vilken ytterligare hjälp du kan få från IKEA? (undersöka om de är medvetna om resurserna, företagshälsovård?)
- Finns det något mer du skulle vilja göra? (indirekt fråga om de är nöjda med sin arbetssituation, om mer resurser behövs från IKEA?)
- Beskriv hur och hur mycket du kan anpassa arbetet till den anställde?(arbetstider, arbetsuppgifter, arbetsmängd, utformning av arb. plats, hjälpmedel, utvecklingsamtal)
- Rapporteras eller dokumenteras dessa anpassningar?
- Beskriv hur du resonerar när du tar beslut på din avdelning. (anställda delaktiga i besluten)
- Hur belönar du dina anställda? (både belöningssystem och social support)
- Varför tror du att frånvaron är hög/låg på din avdelning?
- Vad tycker du borde göras för att minska sjukfrånvaron på IKEA?
- Beskriv vad det är som får dig att ta ett beslut att gå till jobbet (eller inte) när du känner dig krasslig?

Arbetssituationen

- Beskriv ditt jobb? (arbetsbelastningen, krav- möjligheter, förväntningar, attityder, kontroll)
- Har något besvärat dig den senaste tiden, något bra hänt? berätta.
- Kan du beskriva hur man blir delaktig i IKEAs beslut? (demokrati)
- Kan du beskriva de mål du arbetar efter? (stimulans – vägledning, support, kontroll)
- Hur delaktig är du i att sätta dessa mål?
- Tycket du att de är realistiska?
- Hur ofta har du utvecklingssamtal?
- Hur vet du att du tagit bra beslut och gjort ett bra jobb? (feedback från chefer, belöning)
- Övrigt?

11. APPENDIX 3 - ORGANISATIONAL CHART

Organisation IKEA Göteborg
November 2002

			Varuhuschef Ulrika Persson **Stf vhchef** Marie Lundstöm				

Möbler Peter Centervall	**Kök/Work Ikea** Lotta Svensson	**Saluhall** Maria Sjöquist	**KomIn** Marie Lundström	**Kundservice** Tf Sanna Dahlman	**Logistik** Roger Johansson	**Personal** Ingela Oléhn	**Administration** Patrik Olsson
Vardagsrum John Börjesson (stf möbelchef)	WI Ute Patrik Johansson (stf kök/work)	Lampan Tf Fredrik Engman	Kajsa Cramer AC Komm/Hantv (stf KomInchef)	Restaurang Sanna Dahlman	Godsflöde Magnus Ottehall	Helen Svensson (stf personalchef)	Kassan Patrik Torbjörnsson
Sovrum, Barnens Anette Bomgren	Kerstin Carlberg	Fredrik Engman	Anna-Lena Jönsson AC inredare möbler	Kökschef Olle Henriksson Assistent Git Pettersson Assistent Niklas Johansson	Tobias Burford Per Jarsved Karl-Edvin Almqvist		I-M Benjamninsson Monika Svensson
Agneta Åberg	WI Inne Melcher Andersson	Textil Theresia Hansson (stf Saluhall) Vik Tx Sandra Fornhäll	Pernilla Åhsberg AC inredare butik	Kundtjänst Susanne Cotra-Steen (stf kundservicechef)	Logistik adm Vakant		Recovery Bo Edvardsson
Tag Själv lager John Garshnek	Anita Thoursie	Vakant		Stf Johanna Sahlin	Varuexponering Mattias Johansson		Säkerhet/Fastighet Håkan Skattberg
Jonas Lindqvist	Kök/Matrum Johan Dahlman	Husgeråd Helene Karlström (vik stf Saluhall)		Family Camilla Ceder			Stf Christer Andersson
	Kajsa Pörscke	Anita Tegland		Kenny Johansson	Elisabeth Degerman Frida Gustafsson		Städ Toivo Bergvall
		Spara&Förvara vik Claes Wahlberg		Miljöansvarig Karin Vedlin			
		AO 50 Ulrika Svala					
		Anna Langervik					

Source: Ikea (2002).