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# Find misuses or improve working conditions

Reasons behind high and low short-term sick leave rates, from a  
company perspective

Master Thesis in Strategic HRM and Labor relations.

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# Master's Thesis in Strategic Human Resource Management and Labor Relations

Title: Find misuses's or improve working conditions. Reasons behind high and low short term sick leave rates, from a company perspective

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## **Abstract**

Short-term sick leave can become costly for companies in Sweden and is a high debated HR problem. Since 1992 the companies in Sweden are responsible for the sick pay of the short-term sick leave, referring to the first 14 days of sickness, with day one as waiting day. Many companies have increased their interest and awareness of short-term sick leave with purpose to reduce their related costs.

This thesis contains a cross sectional research with a quantitative and qualitative study of elected warehouses where permanent employed blue collar workers with logistic and sometimes heavy physical work and often shift work works. The purpose with the research is to analyze how the short-term sick leave rates differ in comparable warehouses to company A unit A2 at the rural area and unit A1 located at a small city within logistic area. To find out which the strategies are used to minimize short-term sick leave rate in warehouses with already low or high rate of leave?

The study is from a company perspective and predominantly focuses on how the HR management and how the management handles the short-term sick leave among the elected companies. Interviews are done with HR representatives and hence all information is coming from those representatives. Therefore it is an appreciation from the HR department how they found working situation for their co-workers.

Individual differences, leadership and organizational changes, creates differences and tend to influence the individual co-worker very much according to the HR representatives, hence educations and strategic procedures that increase relations between co-worker and management are encouraged. Reasonable working groups are recommended, since one manager just has the capacity to take care of a certain amount of co-workers.

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## 1 Introduction

Short-term sick leaves of employees are costly to the employer and are a highly debated personnel problem within companies that struggle to reduce their short-term sick leave rates. HR departments try to set up strategies to prevent and minimize the short term sick leave, but at the end it is the relation between closest manager and co-worker that can make the greatest difference (Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005).

Private sick leave insurance system has existed in Sweden since mid 19<sup>th</sup> century with the purpose to give the employee economic guarantee if they got reduced working capacity due to sickness or injury. Since 1955 the Swedish sick leave insurance system became state financed and concerned all workers in the country. 1992 the companies became responsible for the sick pay of the short-term sick leave, the first 14 days of sickness (Johnson, 2010). The first day is a waiting day, where the employer does not need to pay anything, the employer pay from day 2 to day 14 of the sick leave. After day 14 the responsibility changes to Försäkringskassan, the Swedish National insurance office, since the sickness is classified as long-term sickness although the company continues to pay employment taxes (Försäkringskassan, 2011).

The government made this reform to decrease short-term sick leave rates by implement policies and give the responsibility to the companies and employers. The employer acts, from a profitable perspective and therefore has incentives to decrease short-term sick leave since it is very costly for the companies, it is at this point it become an aware personnel problem for the HR departments. After the change there is no authority who registers the short term sick leave rate, hence there is lack of statistics of short term sick leave rate if companies want to know for example the average short term sick leave rate in a specific business.

In the present research permanent employment will be in focus because it is first when the employee get permanent employed, the real usage of economic and social incentives becomes clearer and therefore possible for the employer to influence and prevent short-term sick leave and absences (Engellandt & Riphanh, 2005).

When you get a permanent contract it makes you entitled to different kinds of benefits in the Swedish society. As an employee with permanent work contract it is easier to become a credit customer and get a bank loan to buy for example a house or a car. To some circumstances the employee can decide when the employee wants vacation every year. Due to Swedish employment laws it is not possible to get terminated because of sick leave when you are permanent employed (Andersson, Edström & Zanderin, 2010). While you are temporary employed and get sick there is a risk of missing another job offer or get excluded from employment since the employer can choose to do that. Temporary workers also try to obtain a permanent contract since it implies a security and stability. A claim is if temporary jobs are steppingstones or dead end jobs to a permanent contract are open for discussion (Håkansson, 2001). Temporary jobs can be steppingstones to get the preferable permanent job. This result in temporary workers provides significantly more efforts at work to reach a permanent contract, (Engellandt & Riphanh, 2005). Hence this research has a focus on permanent workers since it is while you have a permanent contract you can misuse your presence of work and be protected by Labor laws.

Changes in the insurance system influence the sick leave rate which has been discussed by Björn Johnson in his book *“Kampen om sjukfrånvaron”* from 2010. There are several sides of the problem. Is it cheating or bad working environment that cause high short-term sick leave? Or does the bad working environment influences the employee to misuse the system? Companies with exceptional high short-term sick leave can question themselves if they have just bad luck that got employees who gets sick often or if there are reasons to believe that there are other underlying reasons.

This thesis is written from the viewpoint that the employer has to work on the supposition that employee not misuses the system. The employee might begin misusing the system due to the working environment. It is therefore interesting to know what the company does to prevent this situation. Do they have an environment and HR strategies that make the employee to misuse the short term sick leave system or do they have an environment and HR strategies that not encourages misbehavior of short-term sick leave? (Johnson, 2010).

### **1.1 The Setting**

The research is a commission research with initiative from “company A” to whom the author applied to do this research. All participating companies within this research are anonymous. Within the quantitative study no company names are mention.

The qualitative study includes 3 companies named company A, B and C. The companies are participating with two units each located at different geographical areas named unit A1, unit A2, unit B1, unit B2, unit C1 and unit C2.

### **1.2 Purpose**

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze how HR management deals with short-term sick leave among permanent employees at warehouses with logistics and sometimes heavy physical work and how it is possible for HR managers together with line managers to work strategically to improve the short-term sick leave rate for permanent employees within their company.

Find out if the HR managers are aware of that the company can create misuses or improve working conditions to reduce short-term sick leave within their companies.

### **1.3 Research questions**

- How and why do the short-term sick leave rates differ in comparable warehouses?
- Which HR-strategies are used to reduce short-term sick leave in warehouses with low and high rate of leave?

### **1.4 Background**

Short-term sick leave is expensive for companies operating in the Swedish labor market. An employee working at a warehouse driving forklift costs at the age of 25 and with a salary of 24 000 SEK monthly, the employer 22 904 SEK for being sick the first 14 days according to the Swedish Social Insurance Administration “calculate costs of sick leave”, (Försäkringskassan, 2012). Costs of losses of production, extra workers and administration are not included, but are additional high costs, difficult to declare.

Due to several changes in the Swedish Labor laws during the 20<sup>th</sup> century the short-term sick leave has changed depending on which intervention that has been implemented in the Swedish labor laws of sick leave (Andrén 2005; Henrekson & Persson 2003).

Table 1 below there is an overview of the most important changes in Swedish Labor laws of sick leave from 1955, when the public insurance of sick leave was implemented for the first time in Sweden, and forward.

**Table 1: Changes in Swedish Labor laws**

<b>1955</b> Public insurance of sick leave was implemented for the first time in Swedish labor laws, (Johnson 2010).
<b>1961</b> National Insurance was implemented.
<b>1962</b> The law of public sick leave insurance came into force.
<b>1963</b> Self-employed accedes the sick leave insurance and replacement period increases.
<b>1967</b> Increased payment and decreased waiting period within the sick leave insurance.
<b>1974</b> Increased payment and the sick leave insurance became taxable.
<b>1987</b> The last waiting day was removed and the payment of sickness cash benefit was restricted to only scheduled workdays.
<b>1991</b> Decreased payment in the sick leave insurance.
<b>1992</b> <b>Sick pay period of 14 days is implemented. The employer got in charge of the sick pay for short-term sick leave, the first 14 days of sickness.</b>
<b>1993</b> One waiting day was reintroduced. The payment of long-term sick leave decreases. (Johnson, 2010)
<b>2008</b> Sick leave payment normal level (80% of the salary) is paid in a maximum of 1 year and a sick leave payment on continuation is possible hereafter in 550 days with an amount of 75% of the salary. Evaluation of capacity for work follows a rehabilitation schedule, (Forsakringskassan, 2012).

Sources: Johnson, 2010; Forsakringskassan, 2012

Important regime changes in the social insurance system in Sweden occurred in 1987 and 1991. Where the reform 1987 restricted the payment of sickness cash benefit to only scheduled workdays. Reform 1991 made a reduction of the replacement rate. Both reforms 1987 and 1991 gave the effect of reducing the duration of short-term sick leave, because of reduced sickness insurance benefit (Henrekson & Persson 2003).

1991 reform is the first reduction in compensation levels since the origin of the system in 1955. A reason for this can be that the 1991 reform happened at the same time as the onset of a deep economic crisis. The reform was created to respond the economic crisis. 1991, the compensation for sick leave decreased to 65 % the first three days and 80 % day 4 to day 90, resulted in a strong decrease of short-term sick leaves, because of economic losses for the employee (Bjurvald, Hogstedt, Marklund, Palmer & Theorell (2005). A reform in 1992 was important; the employers got the financial responsibility for the first two weeks of a sickness spell, the short-term sick leave period (Henrekson & Persson, 2003). The purpose with employer involvement was to decrease the huge costs for the Swedish national budget, represented by the sick leave pay. The government also wanted to decrease the administrations around the sick leave pay and use those resources to rehabilitation activities.

The responsibility of rehabilitation cases changed from Försäkringskassan to the employer. It is the employer in consultation with the insured that together look for the needs of the insured to be able to make an effective rehabilitation (Försäkringskassan, 2005).

Since 1992 there is no data available for short-term sick leave rates, because there was no longer need to report the sick leave to the National Insurance Board, since the companies pay the short-term sick leave themselves.

The rules today concerning short-term sick leave are as following. If a person has an employment, it does not matter if it is temporary or permanent, at least one month and that person has worked 14 days continuously, the person has the right to get normal sick-pay the first 14 days of the period of sickness. The sick-pay is paid by the employer. The first day of sickness is a waiting day which signifies that you not get any sick-pay that day, so the employer has to pay the sick-pay from day 2 to the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the sickness absence. The sick pay is 80% of the salary. This means that the short-term sick leave is a cost for the company from the second day until the 14<sup>th</sup> day the employee is sick. If the employee is sick and begin to work and become sick again within five days, it is counted within the same sick leave and there is not another waiting day, hence the person get sick-pay from the first day of sickness. If the employee is sick more than a week, the employee has to give a medical certificate to the employer. After the two weeks of sickness, the employer does not need to pay for the sick employee anymore. An application for sick-pay is made by the employer and sent to Försäkringskassan who will continue to pay the public sick leave insurance (Försäkringskassan, 2011).

Short-term sick leave is a highly debated issue since labor laws have changed several times and the responsibility since 1992 changed from social security system to the employers who are responsible to pay the sick pay for short-term sick leave. Employers also continue to have additional cost of long-term sick leave employees, something that is not brought up within this thesis. Sick leave in Sweden therefore concerns the Government, the employers and the employee.

How a problem is created and finally becomes a societal problem depends on the debate in society (Johnson, 2010). Is the co-worker sick or is it misuse of the sick leave system? A societal problem always has different views. It can both be seen as problem but also as an opportunity (Johnson, 2010).

Within this thesis and the subject of short-term sick leave and absences from work, have different anticipatory reasons. Does the system create misuses' and make the coworker to misuse the short term sick leave system? Or does the creation of a control system and fair treatment of the coworkers prevent misuse and encourage a good working moral? These are important aspects to take under consideration while looking at short-term sick leave rates.

## **1.5 Disposition of the thesis**

Previous research introduces the reader to the current field. Further the theory and explanations of short-term sick leave will be described and thereafter the method with both quantitative studies included a smaller survey and qualitative case studies will be presented.



The results will be presented and the master thesis will end up with analysis, conclusion and further studies in accordance with a report.

## 2 Previous Research

Previous research regarding comparison of short-term sick leave rates tends to be difficult to find from 1992 to present. A reason can be that since the reform 1992, when companies in Sweden became financial responsible of short-term sick leave, there is no common database or Swedish authority to where the companies report the sick leave rates. Therefore it is difficult to know how you as a company are located within short-term sick leave rate in comparison to other companies.

There are several underlying reasons to why there is a high, average or low short term sick leave rate at companies; biological reasons, economic incentives for both employees and employer and social incentives.

Biological reasons as sickness and diseases have always existed. The humanity has always had colds, flus and other illnesses and diseases. Some years those strike harder at than others. To prevent and decrease sick leave days, giving instructions about keeping a good health and information how to decrease the risk of infection is important among employees. This are called the normal and healthy sick leave rate, the one the employer counts with while employing a person.

Presence of sickness at work can be a problem. The sick employ can infect the other employees and hence increase the sick leave and its costs, although sick employees typically do not come to work according to Steere & Rhodes, (1973). How the health care at the company is promoted is very important shows a Swedish study by Källestål, (2004) as well as the possibility to measure the preventions of healthcare within a company (Ahmed & Zasowski, 2002).

The incentives of sickness can be many and of different kinds (Lantto, 1991). Economic incentive is a factor that influences the short-term sick leave rate. It appears to be strong affects between changes in sick leave pay and the relation to sick leave behavior according to a research by Henrekson & Persson, (2003). Co-workers tend to be sicker and increase sick days, when the sick pay becomes more generous. When the sick pay is reduced the sick leave also tends to fall. Researches support that if there is reduction in compensation levels as in the reform 1991, the sick leave also tend to fall (Andrén, 2005; Henrekson & Persson, 2003).

Economic incentives come from both the employee and the employer side. Since the Swedish sick leave reform 1992, the companies in Sweden became financial responsible of the short-term sick leave. The companies got economic incentives to reduce the short-term sick leave, the more they discourage and prevent the short-term sick leave, the less the companies have to pay. It is demonstrated in several studies that economic incentives do affect the sick leave rate, the employee tend to be less sick if it will affect him/her economically (Andrén, 2005; Johansson & Palme, 1996; Chelius, 1981).

Economic incentives can be changed by government through policies, as implementation or remove of a waiting day which decreases or increases the income during sickness. Decreased

or increased sick pay changed by policies have also had causing effects on the short-term sick leave rate (Johnson, 2010).

Financial rewards can be given through short-term cash or equity, or long-term cash or equity. Short-term cash is the base salary, and or on the spot rewards for milestones or extraordinary performance. Short-term equity can be a reward of restricted stock or stock grant. Long-term cash can be bonuses either in form of a profit or gain sharing. Long-term equity is stock options (Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005). This is not so common because of the costs for the companies.

One of the purposes with the reform of 1992 was to increase the company's incentives to invest in preventions of sick leave. Awareness of the cost and the affects of production of short-term sick leave will make the companies willing to work with work environment and improvements to reduce the sick leave rate (Hammargren, 2004). Relation between manager and sick co-worker is one of the most important reasons for recovery of the sick co-worker, therefore it is important that managers have education in management and leadership and that the manager not has got a too large numbers of co-workers to be responsible of, that he/she cannot manage the care, indicates the study from Hammargren, (2004).

Further study about if the privatization of sick leave insurances was the right way, evaluates results of the 1992 reform. Changes in behavior have occurred among co-workers, since the entrance of the reform 1992. The changes indicate a decreased short-term sick leave rate. But there are more explanations. A recession that took place in Sweden the same years, also explains the decreased affect of the short-term sick leave rate. The higher unemployment the less the co-worker tends to be sick, frightened of losing the job. Although the study indicates that the reform itself has had the largest impact of decreasing short-term sick leave rates, (Lindberg & Horntvedt, 2005).

Socials incentives are a very important factor that influences absence and short-term sick leave. The companies have a possibility to influence the social incentives and hence decrease short-term sick leave. The overall job satisfaction of a co-worker tends to have significant impact on absenteeism. Job satisfaction is according to Porter and Steers (1973), the sum of the total of an individual's met expectations on the job. The more the expectations are met the greater satisfaction of the co-worker gets. Porter and Steers (1973) divide the job satisfaction into four different variables. First, pay and promotion policies are satisfied to the co-worker. Second, individual work, unit, size, supervision and coworker relation plays part of the satisfaction. Third, the content of work is another important factor, if the nature of job requirements is fulfilled to the co-worker. Finally, and fourth factor of job satisfaction is if the person himself with age and tenure matches to the job according to Porter and Steers (1973).

Herzberg, Mausner & Snyderman (1993) differentiates in the Herzberg's two-factor theory the hygiene and motivational needs. Hygiene needs are the basic needs for accepting a job and motivational factors are the factors that motivate you to work. These are measurement of job attitudes developed in a study by Frederick Herzberg (Herzberg et al., 1993)

Contrary to Porter and Steers (1973), Herzberg differentiates satisfaction and motivation. The employee tends to be satisfied when the all basic factors at agreement of employment are fulfilled. Motivational factors are created by achievements, recognitions and psychological fulfillments of the employee, during work time (Herzberg et al., 1993).

### **3 Theory**

#### **3.1 Short term sick leave rate and the 2-factor theory by Herzberg.**

Many different reasons are sources behind short-term sick leave rate in a company. The research will cover the explanations of short-term sick leave from a company perspective by looking for reasons to be absence at work. Presence of sickness is also included in the general absenteeism. The research focuses on social incentives from HR departments of the companies' perspectives and opinions where the 2-factor theory by Herzberg is used as theoretical framework.

Social incentives at work are important and will be in focus of the research while looking at the participating companies. Herzberg makes differences between basic factors and motivation factors in his two factor hygiene model. The basic factors called hygiene factors must be fulfilled for acceptance to work. The motivations factors will increase well-being and make the employee satisfied with his work, which might decrease the short-term sick leave. The absence of some of these factors may influence the workers unwillingness to work and dissatisfaction of work, and therefore create absence of the worker, which is a part of short-term sick leave and the current HR problem for the management.

### 3.2.1 HERZBERG 2-factor theory

Herzberg 2- factor theory is divided into hygiene needs, the basic factors that every person is in need of and the factors that motivate the person, in this case at work. Herzberg's view of when and how a person got satisfaction and dissatisfaction is classified into two categories. (Herzberg et al, 1993) Below in table 2, the needs are divided.

Table 2: Herzberg's two-factor theory

Herzberg's 'hygiene' needs (or maintenance factors) at the workplace are:	Herzberg's true motivator factors:
salary	achievement
policy	recognition
work conditions	work itself
status	responsibility
relationship with supervisor	advancement
relationship with subordinates	
security	
company car	
personal life	

Source: Herzberg et al. (1993)

#### 3.2.1.1 Herzberg's hygiene factors

**Hygiene factors** are the essential job factors that must exist and be at work if existence of motivation at a workplace shall take place. The hygiene needs does not create positive satisfaction in a long-term perspective. But the hygiene needs must be at the workplace otherwise it will lead to employees' dissatisfaction. The hygiene needs are basic external essentials at work and necessary needs to the employee to come to work. Those can be reasons for not feeling well and therefore create short-term sick leave.

These needs are also called dissatisfies or maintenance factors, because they are required to "avoid" dissatisfaction. The needs describe the work environment. The hygiene factors are the psychological needs and demands that the employee wanted and was expected to fulfill when applied for the job.

Pay, the salary structure must be appropriate and reasonable in accordance to the agreement when the co-worker accepted the contract. Equal and competitive salary within the same industry and domain, is a natural alternative that avoids dissatisfaction. Company Policies and administrative policies are simple, fair and clear, so the co-worker understand them and are able to work in accordance to them without any misunderstandings. Flexible working

hours, dress codes, breaks and vacation facilitate work for the employee and maintain the daily life of the co-worker. Fringe benefits, offered healthcare plans, benefits for family members and employee help programs are additional benefits that the co-worker have agreed upon while signing the working contract. Physical Working Conditions as safe, clean and hygienic as well as updated and well-maintained work equipment to facilitate the co-workers job performance. Status, there must be familiar and retained employee status within the organization. Interpersonal relations are appropriate and acceptable relations between employee, his peers, superiors and subordinates. No conflicts or humiliation elements shall be present at work. Job Security must be provided by the organization to all employees. (Herzberg et al, 1993) Lack of hygiene factors can increase short-term sick leave rate due to dissatisfaction resulting in resistances to work.

### ***3.2.1.2 Motivational factors according to Herzberg.***

According to Herzberg the hygiene factors are not possible to be regarded as motivators. Therefore the second factor of Herzberg two factor theories is motivators. The motivational factors imply positive satisfaction. These factors give the employee motivation for a superior performance and are involved in the employee performances at the workplace. The worker finds motivational factors essential rewarding. It is the motivational factors that fulfills the additional psychological needs to the employee, and gives the employee the benefit of self-fulfilling. (Herzberg et al., 1993)

The motivational factors are hereby described. It is important that the employee has a sense of achievement, depending on which kind of job. A daily achievement makes an overview to the co-worker of reaching goals and gives the co-worker a print of what has been achieved. Recognition, the manager shall appreciate and recognize the employee for their accomplishments, by giving the co-workers for example feedback, which gives the employee a satisfaction. Rewards and incentives at work and with work tasks increase the wellbeing of the employee since it is a proof of what the employee has achieved. Growth and promotional awards gives opportunities of development, increasing the knowledge of the employee as well as ambitions to develop. To motivate the employees of good performance there must be growth and advancement opportunities in the organization. Responsibility for work and ownership of the work, minimize control and retain accountability among the co-workers. Meaningfulness at work is important as well as the quality of having a great value at work. To make the employee perform well and get motivated through meaningful, challenging and interesting work. Motivational factors leads to satisfaction. (Herzberg et al., 1993)

### **3.3.1.3 Combining the hygiene and motivation factors**

By combining the hygiene and motivation factors there are results of for different scenarios that can appear.

High Hygiene + High Motivation: The ideal situation, the employees are highly motivated and got few complaints

High Hygiene + Low Motivation: Employees have few complaints but are not highly motivated. The job is perceived as a paycheck.

Low Hygiene + High Motivation: Employees are motivated but have a lot of complaints. A situation where the job is exciting and challenging but salaries and work conditions are not up to par.

Low Hygiene + Low Motivation: The worst situation. Unmotivated employees with lots of complaints.

## **4 Method**

The study combines a quantitative approach with a qualitative research (Bryman, 2001). The quantitative approach is used to compare short-term sick leave rates among warehouses and to get an overview of possible cases for the case study. A case study is a research of specific phenomena in a defined area, in this case comparable warehouses with low and high rates of short-term sick leave (Merriam, 1988).

The companies were bound to be warehouses with logistic work where the employees work with forklifts and/or heavy work. Another criterion was that the employees included in the research have permanent shift job and the ambition was to get 2 shifts/nights/evenings although some companies with normal day work are participating in the research. Further criterion of the unit within the company that was going to participate in this research was a need of minimum 50 employees, for the purpose to reach anonymousness as employee among the workforce. Companies from different geographic areas were going to be collected as well as mixed rural areas, small towns and urban areas. Rural areas means more warehouses and industries and hence easier to get another job because of more job opportunities. Small towns in a logistic area where it is also fairly easy to get another job, small town area less easy to get a new job and rural areas where there is less job opportunities. On the other hand in the urban areas where everybody knows each, the social control is much stronger. Depending on the rules of the society and its inhabitants the social control can result in either severe or softer work ethics.

### **4.1 Quantitative study and questionnaire survey**

The quantitative study was done with purpose to find comparable cases to units A1 and A2. Contacts to similar businesses were made by a phone call to relevant HR manager and a letter of enquiry was sent by mail. When the contacted company accepted the enquiry to participate in the quantitative study and the statistics was collected, a smaller survey was sent to the participants with the purpose to get uniform information about the company and the units

participating (see appendix 1). The survey collected information of how many blue collar workers at the units, how large part of them are women, age composition of the blue collar workforce, geographical position of the unit and structure of work referring shift and day work. A central question was how the companies and units calculated their short-term sick leave rate and therefore the researcher standardize this procedure to get comparable rates between participating companies. In this research the sick leave rate is counted by year 2011. By dividing the total amount of sick leave hours of permanent workers in year 2011 by total contracted hours year 2011 and further divide by 12 ( number of months), the average short term and long term sick leave rates of 2011 are calculated. The sick leave rate is in percentage. The calculations were done by the HR departments of the companies who further provided the author with the calculated sick leave rates. Collected data are in table 3, page 15.

**Table 3: Statistic summary of participating companies**

Unit	Geographic area	Employees	Women (%)	Age ≥ 29 (%)	Age 30-39 (%)	Age ≤ 50 (%)	Short term sick leave (%)	Long Term Sick leave (%)	Frame of Work	Employee turnover	STSL Valued by company	Company goal T=total S=short L=long
1	Small city	250	23	25	43	17	5.70	4.98	Double shift work	2.8%	Too high	T:7%
2	Urban area	310	23	10	63	27	4.05	2.13	Mainly daytime	No answer	Too high	T:6% S:5% L:1%
3	Small city	143	23	25	43	17	4.00	3.00	Double shift work	2.8%	Too high	T:7%
4	Urban area	58	16	19	56	25	4.00	3.20	Double shift work	Average employment 11 years	A bit too high	T:4.7%
5	Urban area	75	17	15	56	29	3.90	2.66	Double shift work occur	Low	Too high	T:5% S:2.5% L:2.5%
6	Small city	107	22	57	33	10	3.75	3.39	Continuous operation	12.15%	Too high	T:5%
7	Rural area	139	25	23	49	28	3.73	1.12	Double shift work occur	Low	Too high	T:5% S:2.5% L:2.5%
8	Small city	200	48	19	47	34	3.70	1.80	Different schedule no shift work	Very low	A bit too high	T:5% S:3% L:2%
9	Small city	113	23	12	61	27	3.47	1.29	Double shift work occur	Low	Too high	T:5% S:2.5% L:2.5%
10	Small city	59	17	12	76	12	3.31	1.63	Daytime	Low	A bit too high	T:5% S:2.5% L:2.5%
11	Small city	143	20	15	52	33	3.18	4.19	Mainly daytime	5.4%	No answer	T:7.3% S:2.8% L:4.5%
12	Small city*	244	59	57	27	16	2.87	5.50	Continuous operation	6.56%	Too high	T:5%
13	Small city	66	21	26	45	29	2.69	1.11	Double shift work occurs	Low	A bit too high	T:5% S:2.5% L:2.5%
14	Small city	76	5	19	56	25	2.60	2.80	Double shift work	Average employment 11 years	A bit too high	T:4.7%
15	Rural area	238	54	12	57	31	2.59	2.04	Mainly daytime	7.6%	Satisfied	T:4.55% S:2.75% L:1.8%
16	Urban area	68	23	15	63	22	2.57	1.01	Mainly daytime	Low	Satisfied	T:5% S:2.5% L:2.5%

17	Rural area	537	18	7	57	36	2.54	1.80	Mainly daytime	7%	Satisfied	T:5% S:2% L:3%
18	Rural area	232	18	1	61	38	2.24	3.08	Shift work	Very low	Satisfied	T:8% S:4% L:4%

\*in the total planned working hours includes also employed by the hour, sick leave, vacation, parental leave and care of sick children. This decreases the actual real sick leave rates at these units.

Seven companies with a total of eighteen units are included in the study. From the collected statistics there are no clear indications of the causes to short-term sick leave. The short-term sick leave rates diversify regardless to geographic location, part of employed women, or age group. The short-term sick leave rate varies between 2.24-5.70% within the population, with only one unit who stands out with 5.70% otherwise a range between 2.25-4.05%, not outstanding numbers for a physical hard repetitive work, according to interviewed HR managers within the business.

Concerning geographic areas no huge differences between units and companies are found. Rural areas has got a short-term sick leave rate between 2.24-3.73%, small towns has got a rate between 2.68-5.70% and urban area, close to one of the three biggest cities in Sweden has got a short-term sick leave rate between 2.6-4.04%. No outstanding signs related to geographic area can be found by looking at table 3 above. It is a too few cases within the study to draw general conclusions, however it is possible to look for similarities and differences between units within companies by proceed from units A1 and A2.

## 4.2 Qualitative research and comparative study

From the findings in table 3 conclusions can be drawn that the highest and lowest short-term sick leave rates are represented by company A within their two different units. By looking at the similarities and differences of company A units, and make comparisons with other participating companies and their units, the other cases for the study are selected. The companies were chosen to be a part in the qualitative study where descriptive research methods in the shape of interviews were taken place. The selected companies were contacted to make appointments for a suitable time to interview HR managers at respective unit.

Company A has got a high short-term sick leave rate at location small town and a low rate at location rural area. Hence an interesting case is company B who has got two units, differently from company A, with a lower short-term sick leave rate in small city and logistic area and by comparison higher sick leave rate at their unit in south of Sweden located relatively on the countryside. Hence company B and its units were chosen to participate in the qualitative research.

The other company interesting for this research, company C, has also two units that differ worthy of note, similar to company A cases. Company A and company C have both higher sick leave rates with the location rural area than the location small town. Company C was the third chosen participating company to the qualitative descriptive research.



**Table 4: Companies within the qualitative study**

COMPANY	Short-term sick leave rate	Geographic Area	General information
A1	5.70%	Small town/ logistic area	250 employees, double shift work
A2	2.24%	Rural area	232 employees, double shift work
B1	3.73%	Rural area	139 employees, double-shift work occur
B2	2.69%	Small town/ logistic area	66 employees, double-shift work during high business activity
C1	4.00%	Rural area	58 employees, double shift work
C2	2.60%	Small town/ logistic area	78 employees, double shift work

### 4.3 Research structure

Advantages of the chosen research structure are that the researcher first gets an overview of short-term sick leave rate in general within the chosen area and the additional information as number of employees, geographical area, age of workforce, women part of workforce, frame of work, employee turnover and company goal of sick leave rates. Thereafter it is easier to choose cases with similar and contra dictionary patterns to be able to make comparison by looking for similarities and differences within cases of similar businesses from table 3. Further on, from the descriptive interviews it is possible to find out workable HR strategies to suggest possible proposals to decrease short-term sick leave rates among permanent employees at warehouses.

### 4.4 Limitations

Disadvantages within the study are from the author perspective, that companies can be excluded since they denied participation because of problems with short-term sick leave rate. On the other hand the companies that are extremely successful companies within short-term sick leave rates among blue collar workers at warehouses might not have seen a need to participate. Also added is that spring time is a very busy time for logistic companies therefore difficult to get participants in the research, in a less busy period more participants might had participated in the research.

A certain amount of 7 companies and 18 units, have been participating in the study due to limitation of time of the thesis. To draw general conclusions what is a normal average short-term sick leave rate, need a more extended research. However it is possible to get an appreciation about the average short-term sick leave rate at warehouses.

Since it is only employees from HR department that has been participating in the interview, it has to be taken in consideration that the answers can be biased, although it is in the

interviewees own interest to give the most honest answer as possible. But it might be the reason that the interviewees do not be aware of the real truth of the employees. What is considered at for example care from the manager perspective might be considered as control from the co-workers perspective. Since the focus in this study is from the HR perspective, the researcher has to work on the supposition that the HR departments are aware of the short-term sick leave situation at their companies.

Additional, the interviews were held in Swedish, the author has translated the information into English. The quotations are also translated into English by the author.

#### **4.5 Research ethics**

A decision was made to anonymize the company names in the research with purpose to make a neutral and objective comparison between the units and companies and prevent comparisons between the company names that will distract the focus of the study.

Another ethical decision was made to not be at the office of company A, who wanted to perform the research, to be able to get a more neutral and objective perspective and overview of the research, equality for all participating companies.

Criteria as well as descriptive interviews are chosen from without company A, who wanted to perform the research case, since it is a commissioned research. Together with the HR generalists at both units of the company, a creation of criteria for selection of comparable warehouses was made, where the similarity to the operation at the warehouses of the commissioned company was central.

### **5 Results**

In this chapter the results from the performed interviews will be presented. Differences between the units within the companies are presented and the differences between the company units are presented in the analysis part.

Questions to the interviewees and reasons of selection of the interview questions can be found in appendices.

#### **5.1 Interviewees**

HR Generalist, Unit A2 (Interview 2012-04-19)

HR Generalist Unit A1 (Interview 2012-04-25)

HR Partner, Area South-West, Company B (Interview 2012-05-08)

HR Manager, Company C (Telephone interview, 2012-05-15)

#### **5.2 Company background**

Information about the companies is provided here. Historical background, the kind of operation and recent organizational changes important for the research are described. The history of the units and companies are of importance since it influences the relation, confidence and trust between employees and employer and therefore also working moral, work situation and well-being at work.

##### **5.2.1 Unit A1 and A2**

The business concept of company A is to produce and sell high quality interior and outdoor decorating. They have got two large main warehouses distribution centers in Sweden, where

their freights are allocated, unit A1 and unit A2. Unit A1 distributes the freight to local located warehouses next to the department stores of the company while unit A2 deliver the freight directly to the customer, when they have ordered the articles, hence it is more difficult to schedule the demand of staff at this warehouse.

Unit A2 has existed since the creation of the company. This means that the company culture also has characterized the warehouse at this location.

On the contrary unit A1 has only been owned by the company A since 2006, when it was bought from a logistic company who previous provided the logistic services to company A. During the ownership of company A, two huge redundancies have taken place at these warehouses, autumn 2008 and spring 2009, due to the financial crisis. Although redundancies also took place at unit A2, these were not comparable to the circumstances at unit A1.

According to Swedish Employment Protection Act, the first employed is last to leave the company, this is called the list of LAS. During redundancy it is according to this law, the last employed lose his job. Since the LAS-list was applied the youngest and recent employed had to leave the company.

Due to the huge uncertainty during the time of the redundancy, company A also had recruitment freeze, the redundant employees got temporary employment, sometimes not longer than two weeks at unit A1. This created mistrust and uncertainty among employees. Apart from the redundancy experience, the units at unit A1 have always had a high short-term sick leave rate, which might indicate a need of moral changes according to the HR generalist at unit A1.

One recent organizational change is the creation of “one united company” of company A, where both employees and the organization within the company A learn from each other. It has created a healthy relation between both coworkers and the management and frequently contact between HR departments at unit A1 and A2 according to the interviewed HR generalists.

### **5.2.2 Unit B1 and B2**

Company B provides logistic services to other organizations. Company B Supply Chain is specialized in contract logistics. The business concept of company B is to give the customer long-term competitive advantages by deliver their products at the market faster and more effective. Company B supplies many solutions, specific for the business in the entire chain of the flow of goods. Another of company B’s business concept is to create flexible solutions to the most complex customer demands where the delivery always guarantee highest quality according to the interviewed HR partner.

Company B has got staff-intensive activities where 50% of their total businesses are personnel costs. The company B business is volatile and sensitive due to dependence on the progress of other companies businesses. The success factor is about daily earnings, increased performance, and the potential to gain productivity among employees. The chosen units of company B Supply Chain are located at unit B1, rural area and unit B2, small town, within logistic area. Unit B1 is a geographic separated unit. Contrary to unit B2, this is a unit that has got 6 different customers and is located in an area with logistic movements.

Losing a small contract for company B is only a report within the business and the business will not disappear or be depending on one customer. Unit B1 is slightly different organized. It

is a very slim organization with fewer officials where fewer managers are present therefore team leaders must take more responsibility. Having a global contract customer, a demanding customer in terms of administrative work and procedures as reports and a higher service demand, creates more pressure on the organization in general as well as on the coworkers. Attentions to problems are enormously higher since the Headquarter of company B will have their eyes on and control unit B1.

Last year a huge Swedish profitable customer stopped pay company B money for their provided services at one of their units in Sweden. Many millions are lost every month and the company was bleeding. That business affected the entire organization. The economic issues came into focus with cost savings and harder controls and a focus on performance in the entire organization. A total focus on cost reducing and profitability was necessary for the survival of the organization. This influenced the whole organization.

### **5.2.3 Unit C1 and C2**

Company C is a part of Norway Post. Company C transports and stores both nationally and internationally, cold and frozen goods, mainly food. Company C has got more than 60 years of experiences of tempered logistics and is a qualified partner to the food industry. Company C's business concept is to make sure of punctual deliveries, storing of fresh, cool and freeze products by a unique infrastructure for unbroken cool- and freeze ranges, effective warehouse solutions specialized at food and logistics solutions which affectivities operations of the food industry.

Unit C2 is located at a small town within logistic area, while unit C1 is located in an area counted as a rural area although the close location to the second largest city in Sweden. Most of the employees at unit C1 comes from the area and are not prepared to change job and go to the big city for work for example. Unit C2 got a healthier employee turnover than unit C1 according to the HR manager, to get the new employees and perspectives into the business. The employee turnover in unit C1 is minimal and do not leave space to get new employees into the business says the HR manager.

### **5.3 Short-term sick leave rate**

The short-term sick leave rate is an average rate of year 2011 within all participating units, where total sick leave hours among permanent employees, 2011, are divided by total contracted hours of permanent employees, 2011.

Unit A2 has got a short-term sick leave rate of 2.24% while unit A1 got a rate of 5.70%. Unit B1 has got a short-term sick leave rate of 3.73%. Unit B2 has got a short-term sick leave rate of 2.69%. Unit C1 has got a short-term sick leave rate of 4.00% and unit C2 got a rate of 2.60%. Below the HR partner of company B and the HR manager of company C express their view of short term sick leave rates, neither of the company founds they got a problem with the short term sick leave rate.

*"A sick leave between 2 to 3% in a warehouse operation with sometimes not fairly good conditions is satisfying. We struggle all the time with problems of indoor environments, sometimes it is rather cold and it contains heavy lifting. It is no office work, there are*

*problems with the wind, and it is easier to catch a cold if you sit on a forklift all day than if you sit in an office. An absence of these figures is not a problem.”*

-HR Partner, Area South-West, Company B

*“If you have a total sick leave rate between 4-6%, it has been quite a healthy sick leave. One should expect that people get flu or colds quite a bit, a few times a year.”*

-HR Manager, Company C

#### **5.4 Is the short-term sick leave prioritized at your unit and company?**

At unit A2 the short-term sick leave is a very much prioritized question. HR has always been a part of the organization.

At unit A1 the short-term sick leave is also a high prioritized question. Unit A1 put up a lot of resources to continuously try reducing the short-term sick leave. Although unit A1 spends a lot of resources to prevent the short term sick leave, they obviously have got a high short term sick leave rate says HR generalist at unit A1:

*“Unit A2 has a lot of projects going on to decrease the short-term sick leave rate”*

-HR Generalist, unit A1

Short-term sick leave is prioritized at company B, when there are unusual high figures for the company. At unit B1 the short-term sick leave is not a huge problem, it varies between 3.5 - 4.5% each months. It is easy scheduled, and they have consultants, who cover up, says the HR partner. At a total sick leave rate of 7-8 % or when it comes to trend breaks as at unit B2 it becomes a problem. Otherwise it's not a big issue. It has very much to do with the individual manager at the different sites, and their leadership skills, according to the HR partner.

At company C short-term sick leave become prioritized when it becomes a problem. At the current situation the HR manager does not see a big difference of the sick leave rate of 2.6% unit C2 and 4.0% at unit C1. Both are very low, from his point of view.

Company C does not work actively with the short-term sick leave. The work of reducing sick leave rate is more individual-related. As soon as someone stands out and get a high absence, they work with them. The HR manager at company C believes that if a co-worker begin to have a lot of short-term sickness absence, it is not far to get long-term sick leave, so they prefer to pick up the co-worker before they become long-term sick.

#### **5.5 The most important reasons behind short-term sick leave**

At unit A2 usual reasons behind short-term sick leave are wrenches, strain injuries, sick- and work adaption. Work accidents happen sometimes but not very often despite work towards vision zero %. Safety is utmost important at company A.

Presence of sickness occurs very seldom, if it happens that the sick person is sent home.

Unit A1 believes the reasons to short-term sick leave are lack of motivation and attitude which provides misuse of the short-term sick leave system. A research has been done among

coworkers where it was concluded that attitude problems and motivation caused short-term sick leave. This conclusion was made, after evaluation conversations with a nurse. It was the attitude and motivation together with a soft life style that was the main reasons. For example young workers who play videogames nighttime and comes late to work, overslept or went on sick leave. Organizational distrust is possibly another reason. In the organizational paper, a measure of trust was made recently which resulted in 80% of the co-workers got trust to the closest manager, but it was just 50% of the co-workers that have trust to the top management. Acts from the organization may have influenced the co-worker to stay at home at unit A1. Since unit A1 works with deliveries towards customers, it is difficult to schedule the demand of staff. Therefore the organization prepare the absence of sick leave from previous years statistics and pre-book sufficiently with workers to secure not running out of workers and not be able to provide their services. This might lead to that the co-worker gets signals to be replaced before the co-worker is sick. The co-worker might feel that he/she is not an irreplaceable worker. If the co-worker feels that he is already replaced before he is at work, it does not increase the co-workers incentives to go to work, and this might increase incentives to sick leave. The HR generalist at unit A1 expresses the importance of right signals between the company and co-workers:

*“We have to send signals to the co-worker that we care about them”*

-HR Generalist, unit A1

Inevitably unit A1 is a very complex warehouse due to 8 different departments who pick goods. They deliver directly to the customer, the customer has already ordered and paid for the goods and hence reduced working capacity will affect the customer.

The recent years, because of financial crisis and organizational changes there have been movements among workers. New working groups have been created and the co-worker might have changed work place to new departments. This makes new worlds to the co-worker which naturally affects the satisfaction with work among the co-workers, says the HR generalist.

Common recurring reasons of short-term sick leave at company B are colds, injuries and some cases because of lack of motivation. It is also very individual, some co-workers are sick more than others, says the HR partner.

At company C the mainly most common reason for short-term sick leave is colds, flues or stomach disease. One can see clear indications of sickness that follow the seasons, reflecting the community itself. Though there are troublemakers in all organizations, the managers are usually aware of them and can stay focused on them, says the HR manager.

## **5.6 What HR-strategies are used to prevent short-term sick leave**

### **5.6.1 Unit A1 and A2**

At unit A1 and unit A2 the sick leave questions concerns the entire organization and is problem for managers to take care of. HR department support the organization, as a cooperation partner of strategic HR implementations and HR service center helps out with administrative work and support. At company A the HR questions are very important and lots

of resources are spent on them. The HR Generalist at unit A1 expresses the importance of the individual co-worker and why HR questions are important within company A:

*“The founder of company A has always had a focus on the human being already from the very beginning. He realizes that without the co-workers and their incentives and motivations will us not reach anywhere with the corporation”*

- HR Generalist, Unit A2

At unit A2 there has been integration of HR work into the business for a longer time than in unit A1. Low short-term sick leave rate is reached by implementing processes and routines in the spirit of company A. The managers in charge of the co-workers have got simple routines to follow when the co-worker gets sick. Unit A1 has been struggled to create common HR routines and processes the recent years, since the warehouses became owned by company A, 2006. Even though problems with absence at the warehouses at unit A1, have existed a long time before the ownership of company A, improvements within the organization have been made to prevent and eliminate those problems. This often takes time, says the HR generalist at unit A1.

Today, there are clear activities, modes of operations and routines for everybody in the organization. There are personnel directives and routines on how to act on. That makes both coworker and managers more secure and comfortable within their situations. This will take a while to establish says the HR generalist at unit A1.

At unit A2, it is the team leader that is responsible of short-term sick leave and personnel related question for their respective coworkers. He/she also, works together on the floor with the co-workers. This creates a close and valuable relation between the team leader and the co-workers at unit A1.

At unit A1 the structure is different. They have got a team leader and a foreman. Team leader at unit A1 is not working in his working group since he got a white collar position. Therefore unit A1 has got both a foreman, blue collar worker, and a team leader, white collar worker, that has got the responsibility of the co-workers. The relation between team leader and the foreman must be very close and tight since they cooperate very much. The foreman works together with the group and is responsible for dividing work tasks to the group. The foreman has to relieve and facilitate the work and be an intermediary to both the team leader and the co-workers. The contact between coworker and team leader must be there even if the team leader is not working with the co-workers. The team leader is there at the start up work, and at the completion of the day. The team leader does not get the everyday contact with the co-workers, the everyday contact that builds trust and confidence. The foreman got educated in leadership at a lower level than the team leader. A co-worker has got the chance to advance to a foreman and further possibility to be a team leader, a possibility to advance within the company.

The team leader of today at unit A1 has a focus on leadership and leader skills. At the previous owners the focus was at logistic knowledge. All line managers are trained in human resources as internal educations in leadership, work environment, recruitment and health care. Management education is given to new leaders. A part of the managers every day work is to



actively work for an enjoyable workplace with co-worker influence, where all considerations come to and through the team leaders. The team leaders need to be well aware of the human needs and the fact that individuals have different needs.

In unit A1 a sick leave phone system is used; Medhelp. Medhelp is an external company who provides specialist help in terms of that the sick co-worker get to talk to a nurse. Medhelp also provide statistics concerning sickness and recovery at unit A1, the team leader phones the sick co-worker. This is differently to unit A2 where the co-worker phones the HR service center and the team leader to report their sickness and recovery. In unit A2 as well as in unit A1 the managers have also the responsibility to get in contact with the sick coworker regularly, and having an active conversation between managers.

At both unit A1 and unit A2 there are weekly prognoses of short-term sick leave rate available at all units. When the co-worker passes 28 days of sickness, a rehabilitation dialog is held, together with the team leader and Försäkringskassan. The HR department is represented if demanded, to help with misuses and labor legislative subjects.

6 times sick in a year, 5 times absence in 9 months, 2 weeks continuously sick or if the co-worker demands, a rehabilitation dialog will be held at units A1 and A2.

Unit A2 got health coaches at the spot two days a week and at unit A2 four days a week. The coworker can talk to them if they are in need of health consulting and health coaching. The health coaches at unit A1 are also very good at promoting themselves and reach the coworkers. Both units cooperate with Previa, the corporate health service, which is also always available at both unit A1 and A2.

There is cooperation with Lotus and Iris, companies who are specialized in alcohol and drug abuses and gives lectures within subjects, if needed. At both units A1 and A2 there is a monthly reserved time with the team leader, with the purpose to have a dialogue concerning health and well being together with the coworker. The talk is supposed to be a consideration and rehabilitation dialogue.

At unit A1 small health care projects are constantly, incentives comes from co-workers. An example of such a project is a typical mixed working group at unit A1, where different ages and high short-term sick leave (14%) appeared. They were going to walk half an hour twice a week at working hours. Everybody had to be committed to the task. An investigation was made before the beginning of the project where the physical health was measured. It measured that the group had better physical health than the average Swede, before they made the walking project. After a couple of months walking half an hour twice a week the sick leave tended to decrease, not in occasions but in days, and a better team spirit was created.

### **5.6.2 Unit B1 and B2**

Company B's HR Department consists of 2 co-workers. The interviewed HR partner of the south-west region in Sweden; Jönköping, Göteborg and Skåne, is one of the workers. The HR partner's working tasks are working with rehab cases, organizational changes, be a sounding board within HR issues for management and achieve motivation and development of the employees. The HR partner also indirectly assists and trains managers to perform the everyday HR work. The managers are responsible of their business and related personnel questions. The managers do all administrative work and negotiations, but the HR partner helps out with complex cases and special competence when it is required.



HR is not the core activity within company B's business even if it is important. The managers got many working tasks to focus on within the business of company B. Company B work a lot with performance of their employees since they believe that performance and sickness go hand in hand. The co-workers who perform less also tend to be more absent from work, says the HR partner.

The business units in Sweden are responsible for their own units and rehabilitation cases. Additional tasks are buying out of employees, redundancy papers and documents, re-employment rights during redundancies and the HR partner support.

Unit B2 does not work operatively with short-term sick leave since they don't think they have alarming figures. But the HR partner at unit B2 believe that the short-term sick leave will increase at the unit this autumn since they recently have lost a big customer and redundancy of 60% of the employed co-workers. The lost of the customer and its orders means that 60% of unit B2 last employees will be laid off. This penetrates the business and exposes the problem that they have not worked with short-term sickness absence in the past. The HR partner believes that productivity and absenteeism will increase. In general it is the last employed employees that are the most overachievers and most productive. Losing them decreases the productivity. A solution to the problem is to hire consultants who got overachievers performance to compensate the workforce, according to the HR partner at company B.

The requirements of the co-workers have also increased due to higher organizational pressure. The employees that perform less are suddenly visible due to the lay off. The energy has been on recruiting new overachievers, and high performed consultants to offset the low achievers in the company. The present situation of short-term sick leave has been satisfied and hence no resources are devoted to make changes.

Every year the manager holds a dialog with the employees. Company B has also got age related health tests. The co-workers in the risk zone with more than 3 times sick in a year are followed up. Sick leave is reported monthly. At company B it exist procedures for the manager to follow up the employee when he/she gets sick. Even if the usage is mandatory for the manager it is not required from the organization. The co-worker calls the manager to report sickness. This creates a close contact between co-workers and their manager.

Unit B2 is within a big business unit with many customers and where the operations are changeable. The flexibility is solved with consultants. All business units got a site manager. In unit B2 there are 2 site managers because of the big size, 120 employees while the white collar workers are included and more or less 50 consultants.

Beyond the site manager there is operations manager. The operation manager is a white collar worker, responsible for operations to client missions. Below to the operation manager there is a supervisor, also a white collar worker, who manages the work tasks administratively at the warehouse and distributes work. Every group got a team leader since the co-workers are working team-based. A group is usually between 7-12 co-workers since one person only can get an overview of a number of employees.

The team leader is somebody who mobilizes the group, distributes the work but also work together with the coworkers. The team leader has not got the responsibility of the colleagues, but the team leader is a good resource for the supervisor since the team leader meets the co-

workers on daily basis. It is the responsibility of the supervisor to utilize the team leader as a resource to gain knowledge about the health of the coworkers.

The logistic business is changing and simultaneously creating insecurity among co-workers. In reality the need of the staff is generally focused to about 9 months a year and sometimes 4 days a week. There are relatively easy job tasks and therefore company B can easily hire consultants to do the work. The consultants often rotate among companies and returns to company B. It is profitable since the learning up period is not expensive either. Company B replaces sick staff with hiring a consultant if needed. There is a weakness since the co-worker can feel that he/she are not irreplaceable, believes the HR partner. The co-workers having a role or a responsibility tend to have less short-term sick leave.

Generally company B has no preparatory work for short-term sick leave. But when a new trend has been noticed as in unit B2, where one half of the year with low short-term sick leave and the second half of the year with doubled up short-term sick leave, the HR manager will have on eye at the unit. The HR manager will also focus on the unit since he is aware of that organizational changes have occurred.

Company B tries to avoid long-term sick leaves. They prefer to buy out those workers and move on, than working with a co-worker that does not like the job.

Unit B1 has only got one big customer. Both the customer and the head quarter of company B make recurring revisions at unit B1. The managers work similar to the unit in unit B2 but in unit B1 there are less operation managers and more team leaders subordinated the operation manager. This means a huger responsibility and more administrative work for the team leaders. As long as no contract and prices changes, there are not any problems with short-term sick leave rate, says the HR partner.

The continuously choice in the business is to save or invest to increase productivity. It is an industry with thin margins; the sites have to do much of different administrative work to make the budget. Primary is the happiness and satisfaction of the customer. A profitable customer can cover up intermediate customers. When losing a profitable customer, the focus changes to the intermediated businesses, there it is not possible to afford a convenient approach. The company was bleeding last year and the manager of Sweden gave orders to extreme cost savings. The business became very tight to create profitability. It works that way in this kind of market-sensitive business. It was a question of sending home the consultants half an hour earlier. The manager could tell the co-workers that they had to reduce their 20 minutes coffee break to just 15 minutes. The manager influences each other and the pressure on the co-worker increases.

### **5.6.3 Unit C1 and C2**

The HR manager of company C, does organizationally strategic HR work. He establishes the need of resources as well as reduces resources in collaboration with the site managers and the Swedish company C's management team. There are two people who works at the HR office and 500 employees positioned at 14 locations. The HR Manager is in charge of the recruitment, reorganizations, layoffs, sick leaves. The HR manager looks at short time as well as long time sick leaves, rehabilitation cases, relocation of employees and redundancies. The HR manager also works with statistics and key figures, training and development of

employees, decisions regarding pay, negotiate salaries, benefits, policies and rules within the company, evaluation of services and checks the market prices. The pay roll department takes care of pay roll issues and belonging administrative work as well as collection of related information.

At the units of company C, it is primarily the closest manager who is in charge of HR related work. The HR manager has got a support role to the managers, and back up when need of HR support. The warehouse manager is responsible for the entire warehouse and got team leaders for different business projects within the warehouse. Subordinated team leaders are the supervisors. The supervisors work together with the blue collar workers and are in charge of staffing. The supervisors also get extra people to handle the volume received, if needed. The supervisor has no more than 10-15 people in each group. The group will not have more employees because otherwise the supervisor will not be able to handle the HR questions, according to the HR manager. It is the supervisor who is responsible for short-term sick leave. The HR manager of company C expresses the importance of leadership:

*“The kind of leadership is very important and affects the groups very much.”*

-HR manager, company C

At both unit C1 and C2, the managers have got instructions how to behave when a co-worker is on short-term sick leave absence. A natural relation to the employee is favorable to be able to see how the co-worker feels. The manager gets in contact with the sick employee after a day or two, says the HR manager. It is in the manager's interest to get the employee recovered since they are responsible for the staffing. The sick employer gets replaced if needed, by consultants.

Company C has got a sick and healthy report service, within all their units. The sick employee reports the absence and recovery and gets to talk to a nurse. The nurse provides self-help and professional counseling. The nurse also can, depending on symptoms, tell the co-worker to go to work or not. The supervisor gets a message from the company of sick and healthy report service when a co-worker is sick. The supervisor keeps track of its employees. The company of sick and healthy services also keeps statistics on sick leaves, sends messages to both HR department and responsible manager, if an employee is absent unusual many times. That way, the managers are able to keep track of sick leave absence of the co-worker.

Company C holds a co-worker dialogue 2 times a year, one in early spring and another in late autumn. The co-worker dialogue is not mandatory, but it is always held if it is required.

Company C measures the productivity per group therefore the group members put pressure on each other. It is not possible to go and be lazy. The co-workers working almost always in groups, since it is important to be a part of the group and that the coworkers get along together. Common breaks in itself creates team spirit believes the HR manager.

The warehouse manager, group manager or supervisor takes initiative to meet up for barbeque and similar activities a couple of times every year to create belonging among co-workers. Internal recruitments and development are also common within the company to create incentives to advance among co-workers.

## 5.7 Why the strategies are successful/ unsuccessful

### 5.7.1 Unit A1 and A2

Unit A2 has struggled with implementing of the managers follow up routines. Manager and service responsible co-worker is the same person, who got a very close contact and every day relation with the co-workers. Therefore it is easy to see if something is wrong with the co-workers. Half of the line managers have been changed the recent years. New young line managers below 28 years have been recruited. The HR generalist believes it might be easier to teach new managers the new extra administrative tasks and routines, since those tasks are also a part of the line managers' daily job.

At unit A1, the HR generalist believes they have to keep to the created strategies they set now to be able to build up the co-workers trust to the organization. It might take some time of both efforts and struggle for the organization but will be profitable in the long-run. The new strategies and projects are just 3 years old and it is not until the recent year company A really got into strategies and applies them. Before maybe too many things were tried to find the correct path they think they are on today, believes the HR generalist. Everything in the organization is supposed to support the strategies they got now. The small test projects with incentives from the employees goes besides the strategies, and are encouraged.

Company A is an organization inclined to changes, who changes a lot and often. There is a focus at change management, and how to involve their co-workers. It is a well aware organization, which distribute information through for example workshops. Therefore it is also a need to improve implementing new strategies within the unit. Unit A1 got the structure and the tools today and is and will be systematic encouraged using them, according to the HR generalist of unit A2.

### 5.7.2 Unit B1 and B2

Overall, the employees at company B enjoy their work, believes the HR partner. It is a relatively independent work, the co-workers are responsible of their orders and the co-workers are measured on their productivity. Monitoring at the individual level, the co-worker control over his/her own work. Below the HR partner of company B expresses the importance of a caring manager.

*“Do you have a manager who has time to care, talk to you, calls when you are sick, check how you are doing and follow up your performance, the manager pays pretty quickly his own salary”.*

-HR Partner, Company B

At both unit B1 and B2, initiatives come from the managers to meet up together in a fun way after work. It is nothing the company itself organizes, that has to come from employees themselves or their site managers. They organize both kick off in the fall and family days.

Company B encourages career paths, for example team leaders to become supervisors and so forth. Career opportunities within the company create company culture and a better understanding for the business. It also creates trust from the employee perspective as well as the trust for the activities the company is doing.

At unit B1 there are fewer executives close to the business. Many team leaders take care of the current problems, since there is no time for that anything else. The eyes from the headquarter and the big globally customer are on the organisation at unit B1. This creates a more pressed work situations at unit B1 which the HR partner is aware of that.

### 5.7.3. Unit C1 and C2

The HR department of company C has no preparatory strategies for short-term sick leave. But the HR manager has always an open dialogue with their managers. In general company C Sweden has got a pretty low short-term sick leave rate on the total national level. It is the same system of leadership in both unit C1 and C2. There are different kinds of managers with different leaderships, but they don't differ in routines. Unit C1 is a unit where employees have been employed for a very long time. Most people have friends and family in the located town and live within the area. Low employee turnover can be seen as negative in the case of unit C1. The HR manager refer to that they want to get new impressions into the organization, a too low employee turnover prevent that.

The co-workers work in teams and pick a certain volume. The jobs can differ a bit between groups. Sometimes the co-worker is satisfied and do the same work, sometimes they rotates to allow everyone to work with all activities. It is mandatory to drive a forklift to all employees in company C since it increase flexibility among workers.

There is no room for personal initiative, referring that it is a uniform work.

Company C prefer to recruit internally while recruiting leaders and managers since it creates incentives to develop among those workers who are both suitable and desire to do so. It is common to recruit managers from the groups. If an individual desire to become a manager, the person gets to study useful and appropriated courses. An example is the warehouse manager of unit C1 who began working at the warehouse many years ago. Company C also tries to advertise vacancies internally to get a movement within the organization. There are development opportunities for those who want.

Many of the collective groups are happy with the job, and have a rich leisure time where they put their energy according to the HR manager at company C. The HR manager means that they do not force the development if it is not necessary for the company.

Unit C1 is historically a closed group, the co-workers has worked there for many, many years. Unit C2 has got a higher staff turnover and got occasionally new workers, with new perspectives. A healthy staff turnover benefits the unit from both working perspective and sick leave terms, believes the HR manager. It is not good with a high employee turnover, it can be cost full, but a low employee turnover does not benefit the working groups either says the HR manager.

## 6 Analysis

In this chapter similarities and differences will be presented between companies and units, in comparison with Herzberg 2-factor theory and previous research. The comparison will be follow the same structure and headings as in the presented results in the previous chapter.

## 6.1 Company background

Unit A2, unit B1 and unit C1, have similar geographic locations, that is, located in rural areas. Unit A1, unit B2 and unit C2 are located in small towns but in logistic areas that provide both opportunities and competition. But there is not possible to draw any general conclusions of the geographic location since both unit B2 and unit A1 are located in the same region and have very different rates of short-term sick leave.

Company B and company C are warehouses with logistic work as a core business while company A has the warehouses and logistic work as a part of the business. This might have an effect of the view on how to work with HR questions as well as acceptance of the short-term sick leave rates, in terms of what are low respective high rates.

Organizational changes affect the co-workers because of the violation of Herzberg's hygiene needs. When working policies and working conditions changes, insecurity of future work or more pressure within the organization can creates tension between co-workers and managers and create an insecure situation for the co-worker. Patterns can be seen, where the organization works under pressure, the short-term sick leave tend to increase. This can be a piece in the explanation of the somewhat higher sick leaves at unit A1 and at unit B1.

Customer of the businesses is another factor that influences the business. The customer of the business have different demands, some are more demanding in services than others. It puts pressure on the organization and managers who put pressures on the individual level, the co-worker. High pressure on the co-worker as well as higher demands from the manager can affect the co-worker negatively and make dissatisfaction. Dissatisfaction of a co-worker can influence an increased short-term sick leave. Dissatisfaction is a violation of Herzberg's hygiene needs as working conditions and relation with supervisors. As the management put the organizational pressures at the individual co-worker, the co-worker feels uncomfortable and unsatisfied at work (Porter and Steers, 1973) and incentives to absence increases.

## 6.2 The short-term sick leave rate

The opinion differs to answer the question what is a high and a low short-term sick leave rate within warehouse environment with logistic work. Neither the HR partner of company B nor the HR manager of company C Sweden, find their short-term sick leave rates of 2.69%, 3.73%, 2.60% and 4.00% abnormal for a warehouse environment. Neither of the HR partner of company B and the HR manager of company C thinks they have any problems with the short-term sick leave rates, it is normal figures according to them in such an environment as working in a warehouse. The sick leave rate could be even higher without be alarming figures. Unit A1 is satisfied with their short-term sick leave rate of 2.24% and works toward to keep it that way. However unit A1 believes they have a very high short-term sick leave rate of 5.70%, they regard it as a huge problem. This means that the short-term sick leave only is defined and looked upon as a problem at unit A1. Up to 4% and even above is not seen as a problem by company B and C who got the logistics as a core business, this means that the participating companies have different views of what a healthy short-term sick leave rate at warehouses is. According to Johnson (2010) there are several sides of a problem but it is only unit A1 who think they have got a problem at all with the short term sick leave.

### **6.3 Prioritized sick leave at the company**

To the author prioritized work is while working with something on daily basis.

Short-term sick leave rate is prioritized answered all the interviewed units. Unit A1 and A2 continuously strategically work to try reducing the short-term sick leave rate. But differently unit B1 and B2 and unit C1 and C2 are acting when the numbers are alarming or with certain much absence among employees. High individual absence is always taken care of. Hence it is just to company A the short term sick leave is prioritized.

### **6.4 Reasons behind short-term sick leave rate**

Company C, company B and unit A2 believes there are mainly biological reasons behind their short-term sick leave rates. Most common are the flu, colds and stomach diseases. They all agree about that there are some exceptions of lack of motivation which exist in all businesses. The satisfaction in these warehouses does not seem to be a problem according to the interviewed HR generalist, HR partner and HR manager, although differences in sick leave vary.

However unit A1 has reasons to believe that there is lack of motivation and working moral that is the most common reason behind the short-term sick leave at their warehouse. Dissatisfaction can have many underlying reasons. By comparing the 2 factor theory by Herzberg, possible anticipatory reasons can be found. It concerns both the hygiene factors relations at work and work conditions, as well as motivational factors as achievement recognition, the work itself and responsibility

### **6.5 Sick leave questions and HR-strategies to prevent short-term sick leave**

#### **6.5.1 HR work structure**

Common to all three companies and six units are that the HR manager and HR department works with strategic HR work and support to managers within HR questions. The closest manager to the blue collar worker has got the responsibility of the short-term sick leave. The closest manager in the research is called supervisor at company C and team leader at company A and B.

#### **6.5.2 Leadership and responsibility of short-term sick leave**

Relation with supervisor is a hygiene need according to Herzberg et al. (1993), and influences the co-workers satisfaction at work. The leadership can affect the motivational factors of the co-worker as achievement, recognition and responsibility and hence increase the motivation of the co-worker.

It seems that a tighter leadership and awareness of its co-workers, the less short-term sick leave rate tends to be, this can be seen from unit A2 where a close relation between managers and co-workers are built up for a longer time. Also the relation at unit C2 has got a more mature and close relation between co-workers and managers than unit C1. This difference can explain the lower sick leave at unit C2.

Responsibility of short-term sick leave differs between unit A2 and; team leader is the one in charge of both the co-worker and division of work, working together with co-workers in unit A2 while the team leader and foreman system at unit A1 signify that team leader is not working together with co-workers, the foreman in charge of the division of work, works



together with co-workers at unit A1. Communication between team leader and foreman have to be very close it that system shall work out the same as in unit A1 where there is just a team leader, one person in charge. In unit A1 the co-workers lose the daily work contact with their team leader. The daily work contact can build a trust and confidence relation that is a very important hygiene factor according to Herzberg et al. (1993).

At company B the supervisor is in charge of the short-term sick leave, together with team leader who is working together with the co-workers. Unit B1 has less responsible managers present, and more pressure on the organization because of one global customer. In unit B2 are more customers which imply a more relaxed approach.

At company C it is the supervisor, who works together with the co-workers, who is responsible for short-term sick leave.

### **6.5.3 Sick leave report**

Unit A1 has got sick leave phone system called Medhelp to report sicknesses. Medhelp is an outstanding company who provides specialist help in terms of that the sick co-worker get to talk to a nurse, but also provide statistics concerning sickness and recovery at unit A1. The team leader phones the sick co-worker. This is differently to unit A2 where the co-worker phones the HR service center and the team leader to report their sickness and recovery.

Company C has got a sick and healthy report service, within all their units. The sick employee reports the absence and recovery and gets to talk to a nurse, who provides self-help and professional counseling. The manager phones the sick co-worker. At company B the co-worker report sicknesses to the team leader. The team leader got the contact with the co-worker during sickness.

Sick leave report system with a specialized company provides the companies with statistic as well as mails when there are alarming absence among the co-worker. This makes it easier for management to have an overview of their sick leaves. They are therefore able to use more resources on taking contact with the co-worker for a faster recovery. The manager will not miss anyone, by using that service.

### **6.5.4 Recognition of the absent worker**

Recognition of the absent worker, motivation factor and relation with manager, hygiene need, is important for the co-workers satisfaction, Herzberg et al. (1993).

At unit A1 and A2 weekly prognoses of short-term sick leave for managers are done and there is a control system that signals when the co-worker has been absent unusual many times. If the co-worker is 6 times sick in a year, 5 times sick in 9 months, 2 weeks continuously sick or if the co-worker demands, a rehabilitation dialog will be hold with the manager how to improve the health. This is positive from the HR-managers point of view to be able to take care of their trouble employees. On the other hand such a system can be seen as control system to the employee. Hence it is can be negative feelings for the employee that thinks the management mistrusts them.

At company B the employees are followed up if they have been sick more than 3 times in a year.

At company C, the company of sick and healthy services sends messages to both HR department and responsible manager if an employee is absent unusual many times, so that the managers are able to keep track of the co-workers sick leave absence.



### **6.5.5 Prevent biological reasons**

To prevent biological reasons to sick leave company A has got health coaches and Previa, corporate health service both at unit A1 and A2. To get close to the co-workers the manager holds a monthly health and well being dialogue with co-workers at both unit A1 and A2. Additionally small health care projects are done at unit A1. At company B and company C neither known activities are done. Health coaches is a benefit for the employee, but it also benefit the company since healthier co-workers means reduced short term sick leave rate.

### **6.5.6 Advancement**

Incentives to advance create motivation among co-workers according to Herzberg et al. (1993). Management education holds at all units.

The incentives to advance within company A might be easier at unit A1 argued that the team leader-foreman system makes it easier to slowly learn more and more.

At company C the co-worker is encouraged to develop within the company, most of their managers are working managers and they began to work as blue collar workers at the shop floor. This increases the satisfaction among coworkers (Herzberg et al., 1993; Porter and Steers, 1973)

## **6.6 Why the strategies are successful/ unsuccessful**

Unit A2 has structured and implemented the managers follow up routines. The manager and service responsible co-worker is the same person, who got a very close contact and every day relation with the co-workers. This increases the satisfaction of the co-workers, both by a better relation between managers and co-workers but also by distinctive the work tasks of the co-workers. In accordance to the theoretical framework of Herzberg's hygiene needs, relation with supervisors and work conditions creates increased satisfaction of the co-workers.

Lack of hygiene need creates dissatisfaction and distrust. Distrust exists among co-workers at unit A1 because of organizational changes that have affected work conditions and relationship with managers as well as the security of having a work according to the Hr generalist at A1. Rebuild and build up a trust to the co-worker is in need as well as encourage the employees to use worked up processes that has been developed.

All participating companies agree that management and leadership plays a huge part. Internal recruitment, encourage in all of the companies, is a true motivational factor according to Herzberg's two factor theory.

At company B lack of managers, can explain difference between unit B1 and B2 since Independent work, a true motivational factor, does that the co-worker enjoys their work at company B according to the HR manager at company B.

A beneficial employee turnover is encouraged at company C. A beneficial employee turnover refers to an employee turnover that permit new workers with new perspectives coming into the business who gives new energy long employed employees and increases the working energy and working capacity. The beneficial employee turnover and might be one of the explanations to the differences of the short term sick leave rates between unit C1 and C2.

Company C1 is historically a closed group referring to that the co-workers has worked there for many, many years. Unit C2 has got a higher staff turnover and hence got new workers

with new approaches into the organization, a reason why unit C2 got a lower short-term sick leave rate. Different kinds of managers with different leaderships at company C also play a part why the short-term sick leave rate differs.

## 7 Conclusion

This thesis has shown differences in short term sick leave rates between warehouses in Sweden and deals with differences between units with high and low rates of sick leave. A quantitative study, table 3, collected and compared for this research, made it possible to get a reasonable view of what the short-term sick leave rate tends to be at warehouses with logistic work. The short-term sick leave rate of the participating units is between 2.24-4.05 % with one exception of 5.70 %. Neither of the short-term sick leave rates tends to be exceptional for logistic work at warehouses except the rate of 5.70 %. It is only unit A1 with short-term sick leave rate of 5.70% that think they have got a problem with and an exceptional high rate of short term sick leave. The results come from the HR departments' perspective at the participating companies.

Even though the criteria's of selection of the companies and units were similar, the companies and units tended to be very different. The companies worked very similar in many ways but when it came to organizational pressure, individual differences and leadership that influence the individual co-worker, differences were found. This is in accordance to Porter and Steers (1973), who found that job satisfaction is the sum of the total of an individual's met expectations at work.

In accordance to Herzberg's 2-factor theory, the employee tends to be satisfied when all basic factors of agreement of employment are fulfilled. Common to the three companies and six units participating in the qualitative interviews, is that the HR manager and HR department works with strategic HR work and support to managers within HR questions.

The closest manager to the blue collar worker has got the responsibility of the short-term sick leave. This relation tends to be very important. Common to units with high short term sick leave are the lack of relation of leadership and high organizational pressure.

A suggestion is to not involve the individual co-worker in management questions that not directly concern them, and to have close working managers who are capable to control, care and have time for the co-workers. A good leadership/ relation with supervisor is one of the basic hygiene needs of the co-worker that has to be fulfilled to make the co-worker come to work according to Herzberg's 2-factor theory.

Although all the HR representatives responded that short term sick leave is a prioritized question at their company, two of the companies only got time to work with short term sick leave when the rates get alarming and they do not have preventive work.

An interesting aspect is that the units in company B and C have got less short term sick leave rate than unit A1 where a lot of preventive work of short term sick leave is going on. This

conclude that is not how much resource you spend on preventive work for short term sick leave that decreases the short term sick leave rates; it is how you handle the question that matters, a question about leadership and management.

Violations of Herzberg's hygiene factors where the short-term sick leave rate were higher indicate that organizational changes tend to create an insecure working place. There is possibility to believe that organizational commitment creates pressure on the individual co-worker. Being part of a company for a long time means stability in the organization. A stormy history with overthrown changes recent years, increases organizational pressure which affects the co worker and increase the short term sick leave rate.

Rebuild and build up a trust to the co-workers is in need as well as encourage the employees to use worked up processes that has been developed to stabilize the violated hygiene factors of Herzberg.

Leadership and management are strongly related to Herzberg's hygiene and motivation factors. In comparison of the units with high and a lower short term sick leave rates it can be seen that relationship with supervisor, relationship with subordinates and work conditions do affect the absence of the co-worker. Units with lower short term sick leave rates have a closer relationship between supervisors and subordinates. A leadership that is better and more mature and a more presence from their managers are other variables for a lower short term sick leave rate.

Fewer executives close to the business signifies the team leader has got increased responsibility and therefore limited with time for the co-workers. Many team leaders take care of the current problems here and now, since there is no time for anything else.

In accordance by Hammargren (2004) I want to highlight the importance of that manager have education in management and leadership as well as the importance for the manager to have suitable numbers of co-workers to be responsible of. A tighter leadership between closest manager and its co-workers is recommended. Reasonable sizes of working-groups for a manager to handle make it possible for the manager to have an overview of their co-workers.

Structured and implemented follow up routines for the managers facilitate their job to get an overview of the co-workers. It is encouraged that the closest manager to the co-workers got a very close contact and everyday relation with the co-workers. The everyday relation increases the satisfaction of the co-workers and creates a better relation between managers and co-workers. The everyday relation also makes the work tasks clear to the co-worker with fewer misunderstandings which creates stability and motivation to the co-worker in accordance to Herzberg et al. (1993).

### 7.3 Further studies

This research is done from a company perspective. To make a broader view of the research with different perspective of short-term sick leave in warehouses with logistic work among permanent employees, it is important to do further and deeper research on the employee perspective. Hence possible reasons behind the sick leave can be discovered that the employer is not aware of. In this research representatives from the HR department have been interviewed, so it is their view of the problem. To get the real point of view from the co-workers, deeper researches with interviews of the co-workers are needed.

The finding that the relationship between closest manager and the co-workers matters concerning short-term sick leave is interesting. Further and deeper studies at the leadership, relation between manager and co-worker and its depending on short-term sickness is encouraged.

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## 9 Appendices

### 9.1 Questionnaire survey

#### Questions to companies and units within warehouses and logistics participating in a research about long-term and short-term sick leave

Name of the company and unit:

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How many employees are working at the current unit? :

---

How big part of the employees working at the unit is women (answer in %):

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Age distribution (answer in %):

29 years and below:

30-49 years:

50 years and above:

---

Geographic location (closest city):

---

How does the structure of work look like at the unit? ("mostly daytime", "shift work without nightshift", "shift work with nightshift" "only nightshift" etc.)

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Make an appreciation of the employee turnover! It is great if you got a number of the average length of employment, otherwise you can answer "high", "average" or "low" and appreciate what you mean with your answer, for example "yes, we have high employee turnover, the employee stay with us by estimate 2 years before the employee are looking for other opportunities in the Labormarket" or "we have low employee turnover, the employee works with us for many, many years"

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What do you think about your short-term sick leave rates? (Put a cross above right alternative)

Too high

A bit too high

Satisfied

---

What is your goal with the short-term sick leave rate? (Answer in %)

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What is your goal with the long-term sick leave rate? (Answer in %)

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**Thank you for your time!**

**It helps me very much to get uniform information from all participating companies and units!**

**Sincerely,** *Sofie Svensson*



## 9.2 Interview questions

### **Interview questions to the representative from the company's HR department**

Name of the unit and company

Name and title of the interviewee! How long time the interviewee has been working at the company? How did the interviewee reach the position, the career path?

How does your company work with questions concerning the employees? Who are involved? For example: HR department, management, line managers?

How does the HR department work with short-term sick leave rate? Are you currently working with the short-term sick leave rate or are you satisfied with the situation? Develop!

Who is responsible of the short-term sick leave rate at your company?

Is the short-term sick leave rate a prioritized question at your company/unit? Why? Why not?

Which are the most relevant reasons behind short-term sick leave among your employees? How do you work to prevent those reasons?

Which HR strategies do you use and why?

Why do you think these strategies are so successful at your unit/company?

How do you manage the short-term sick leave? For example do you hire extra workers or do the permanent employees work harder or extra hours?

### 9.3 Explanation of selection of interview questions

Descriptive interviews were made with the purpose to get to know the HR strategies within the companies and their different units, to find out similarities and differences in short-term sick leave management between the two picked out units in each company. Below follows an overview of the questions asked in the interviews.

**How do your company and unit work with questions concerning human resources?**

**Who are involved? Example: HR department, direction, management or line managers.**

The question is chosen to answer how the organization is build up concerning human resources and find out how they can differ and if they differ between units as well as companies.

**Who is responsible of the short-term sick leave at your company/ unit?** This question gives a picture of who is in charge of the short-term sick leave and hence show who has to make changes if there is need of them and so forth.

**Is short-term sick leave a prioritized question at your company/ unit? Why, why not?**

The question answers if the company spends resources on short-term sick leave, as well as if they are in need to spend resources on preventing short-term sick leave.

**How does the HR department work with short-term sick leave? Is something you do operatively or are you satisfied with the situation? Develop!** An attendant question to the previous asked, to see if the organization works actively with short-term sick leave questions and if the company has routines how to handle the short-term sick leave.

**What reasons do you think cause short-term sick leave among your co-workers? What do you do to prevent them?**

The answer shows if the organization is aware of short-term sick leave problems and if they are how they work to prevent the rate to increase.

**Which HR strategies do you use and why?** The question is chosen to get to know the HR strategies of the company and units and why they work with them.

**Why do you think those strategies work so well at your company/unit?** The purpose with this question is to get to know why the strategies are successful/ unsuccessful at their company and if they have specific knowledge and experiences of those strategies.