

# RAPPORT DE STAGE

Euromedia Group – Czech Republic

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## ORGANISATION OF THE THESIS

This thesis is organised into three main parts and its content is structured in the following way: part one is dedicated to introduction of the company called Euromedia Group, Corp. in which I had my internship, to its organisational structure with a short description of its parent company and its successful performance on the world media markets. The thesis continues with a brief summary of the main activities of Euromedia Group, Corp. in the Czech Republic and focuses on a dominant role it has been playing on the Czech book market for many years. The first part of the project is also dedicated to my role which I played in this company and to a short description of my main responsibilities and duties in the organisation.

The second part of this thesis focuses on several methods I used during my internship and emphasises my opinion on the use of these methods in practice. Moreover, in the second part of the project I tried to summarise my recommendations for those methods which I had not found to be of the highest efficiency in practice, for the overall attitude of company's managers towards their subordinates which was sometimes unprofessional and excessively unjust, and for some other issues that seemed to me to have more or less problematic nature.

The last part, conclusion, summarises the whole thesis, it stresses its main issues and reflects on how I can use my participation in this internship in my future professional life, in my career and how I think it influenced me from different perspectives.

## PART I: ANALYSIS OF THE COMPANY

**EUROMEDIA<sup>®</sup>**

## Introduction of the company

I did my internship in a company called Euromedia Group, Corp. At its basics, Euromedia Group, Corp. is one of many worldwide subsidiaries of an international media and media-related services corporation called Bertelsmann AG. Euromedia Group, Corp. is one of total six subsidiaries of Bertelsmann AG in the Czech Republic, the other five being: *Arvato Services Management Czech Republic, Corp.*; *Arvato Services, Corp.*; *Knizni Klub Management, plc.*; *Motor-Press Bohemia, plc.*; *VAW CZ, plc.* Euromedia Group, Corp. is the biggest subsidiary of Bertelsmann AG in terms of equity. (List of shareholdings of Bertelsmann, 2010)

## **BERTELSMANN**

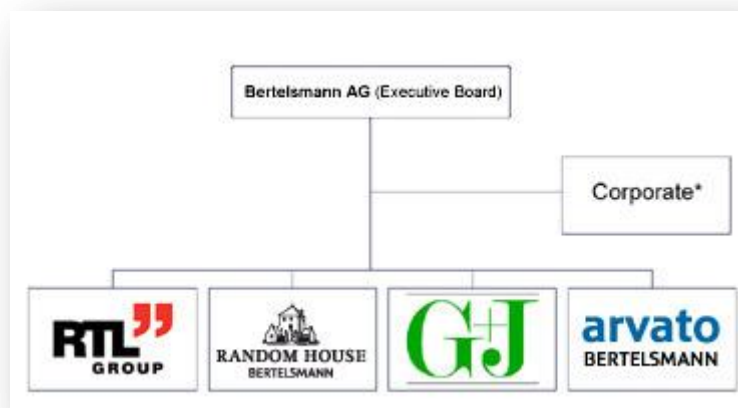
### Bertelsmann AG

Bertelsmann AG is the world's foremost international media and media-related services corporation that has many business areas in which it specialises, among which for example books and book publishers belong, next to TV and radio; magazines and newspapers; media and communication services or club and direct marketing businesses. Bertelsmann AG is a German company which was founded in 1835 by a German entrepreneur Carl Bertelsmann and after whom the organisation is also named. It was in 1940's and 1950's – under the leadership of Reinhard Mohn from a younger generation of Bertelsmann's family - when the company went through transformation from a medium-sized publishing and printing corporation into an internationally recognised member of the world media markets. (Bertelsmann AG, 2011) With its headquarters in Germany (city Gütersloh) and over 176 years of its successful existence, Bertelsmann AG has spread its operations, goods and services into more than 50 countries worldwide employing as much as 105,000 people. (Bertelsmann AG, 2011)

### Organisational Structure of Bertelsmann AG

Bertelsmann AG is divided into 5 main areas of business and each of them has its own management and market. These 5 media-related divisions are: *RTL Group (seated in Luxembourg, the No. 1 broadcaster in Europe)*, *Random House, Inc. (New York, the world's largest book-publishing group)*, *Gruner + Jahr (Hamburg, the biggest magazine publisher in Europe)*, *Arvato (Gütersloh, media and communications services provider)*, and *Corporate (Corporate Center + Corporate Investments, including for instance BMG - music rights business)*. According to Bertelsmann's revenues presented in its 2010 Annual report, RTL Group was the most important and the largest member of the organisation because it participated by 34.7% in the group's total revenues, followed by Arvato (31.5%). (Bertelsmann AG, 2011)

*Graph No. 1: Organisation structure of Bertelsmann AG*



Source: Bertelsmann AG (2011). Available at <http://www.bertelsmann.com/Bertelsmann-AG/Structure.html>. Accessed online 16<sup>th</sup> September 2011.

### Euromedia Group, Corp.

Euromedia Group, Corp. is a company that is located in the Czech Republic (capital Prague) and its business activity is distribution of books. Euromedia Group, Corp. operates solely on the Czech market which is focused on books. It is the most important company and also the biggest and the strongest as well as the most stable player on the book market in the Czech Republic.



For the last several years, Euromedia – Book distribution has been the strongest book wholesaler with its portfolio containing more than 20,000 titles published by more than 250 publishers. Almost all domestic booksellers, e-shops, bookstore networks (such as Beta-Dobrovský, Neoluxor, Kanzelsberger, etc.), international business chains (such as Globus, Tesco, Kaufland, Hornbach, Bauhaus, Baumax, and others) belong to its main customers. There is a team of sales representatives within Euromedia whose main duty is to take care of all these important customers.

Euromedia Group, Corp. is a very successful company on the Czech book market which is supported by the fact that the company owns as much as four very famous **publishing brands**, namely Knižní klub (English translation is The Book Club, owner since 1992), Odeon (since 1999), Ikar (since 2000), and Universum (since 2000 as well). All these publishing brands have slightly different orientation and, therefore, target market which goes in hand with the main activity of any company or brand. (Euromedia Group, 2011)



### The Book Club

The Book Club is the oldest and the largest publisher in the ownership of Euromedia Group, Corp. It focuses on Czech and international literature, detective stories and thrillers,

historical and wartime novels, military literature, and literature for children of all ages. After almost 20 years of its existence on the book market, it has 210,000 members who capitalize on being members of the Book Club in many ways. For instance, they benefit from receiving a printed colour catalogue of the latest book offer five times a year which is free of charge for them; from having a significant reduction (10 - 50%) in the price of all books in the offer; from a customer service of the highest level (in Euromedia there exists a small department oriented only on the Book Club members); from many programmes arising from loyalty of customers or gift items and special events which are organised from time to time in some of the Book Club stores (namely special book-signings). The Book Club offers around 400 new book titles every year which makes the Book Club a major publishing house on the book market in the country. (Euromedia Group, 2011)

The Book Club runs 12 club shops which are spread equally all over the Czech Republic (4 of them are located in the capital Prague) and they represent one way of how to acquire a new book. The other way of getting new books is the use of the internet. Euromedia's internet domain [www.bux.cz](http://www.bux.cz) offers a wide range of books to non-members of the Book club whereas internet domain [www.knizniklub.cz](http://www.knizniklub.cz) serves only for Book Club members. There is also one more domain ([vo.knizniweb.cz](http://vo.knizniweb.cz)) which handles business to business trading (B2B), i.e. book e-wholesale to booksellers and other organisations. The most up to date internet domain connected with Euromedia Group and its Book Club is [www.ebux.cz](http://www.ebux.cz) which serves for customers who wish to read books electronically on their smart electronic devices, such as their notebooks, iPads, iPods Touch, iPhones, smart phones with Android platform or Symbian operating system, Android tablets, Windows mobile or personal computers with Windows operational system. Domain [www.ebux.cz](http://www.ebux.cz) started operating on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2011 and started offering more than 600 e-books written mainly by Czech authors with a guaranteed price of around one third of price of a printed version of the same title. (Dočekal, Daniel, 2011)

The Book Club was created with the objective to help authors from the Czech Republic succeed on the Czech book market. They are often in a difficult position because they publish in a small country where a competition is quite high and finding a publisher who could ensure a reasonable price for their titles while ensuring a high volume of printed copies is not very easy. The Book Club perceives this difficult situation on the Czech book market which is the reason why it decided to award a special Book Club prize called Literary Awards in 1995. The first year of the prize was realised in 1996. In the competition of manuscripts, there are only such pieces of work which have not been published yet and which are written in Czech language, and they are evaluated by a special jury created by five literary experts (mainly authors, literary critics, journalists, and booksellers) composition of which slightly differs from year to year. The winner of the Literary Awards gains a reward in a monetary form (100,000.- Czech crowns) and, furthermore, he has a guarantee that his piece of work will be published in quite a high impression during the same year with no expenses for the author. No matter the fact that there are many other literary awards on the Czech book market the Book Club's Literary Awards remains the most prestigious prize because of the origin of the organiser (awarded by a famous publishing house), because of its long tradition as well as the nature of the award (a financial reward and guarantee of publishing). The last



year of the Literary Award which took place in 2010 was the most successful one with turnout of as much as 244 authors (almost three times higher number compared to year 2009) of which only 5 pieces of work advanced to the final round. (Euromedia Group, k.s., 2010)



### The other publishing companies

Next to the Book Club, there are three other publishing houses in Euromedia's ownership. Ikar is oriented mainly on female readers as its main genre is romances, social novels and memoirs, guides, and cookbooks. Odeon publishing house focuses its orientation on publications of internationally famous and internationally recognised Czech as well as foreign authors of both poetry and prose, including Nobel Prize winners. The last publishing house, Universum, is a publishing brand implying high-quality publications with a character of encyclopaedias, illustrated publications, travel guides, foreign language textbooks and dictionaries. Regularly, since 2000, Euromedia Group, Corp. has published through Universum publishing house a general encyclopaedia under the same heading, i.e. Universum, which was later named Universum A-Ž or DVD Universum 5 and became a very popular title. (Euromedia Group, 2011)

In the Czech Republic, it is only Euromedia Group, Corp. which is entitled to publish such internationally recognised authors as for example Agatha Christie, Robin Cook, John Irving, Gabriel García Márquez, or Johannes Mario Simmel which only boosts its major position on the Czech book market. However, there are also many Czech authors that chose Euromedia to publish their books (namely for example Arnošt Lustig or Tereza Boucková). Last but not least proof of the size and important role of Euromedia Group in the Czech Republic is that it is the Czech President himself who chose the Book Club to publish regularly his books (called Year 1 - Year 7). Our president is notorious for his requirements of accuracy and standards on a high level which is why his choice of publisher is so exceptional and confirms quality of Euromedia Group and its publishing houses. (Euromedia Group, 2011).

### My duties and main responsibilities

Basically, Euromedia Group, Corp. is divided into two main parts. The first part of the company is created by its administrative centre which is located in Prague (namely Prague 5). The other part is formed by the logistical base of the group and a huge store of books which is located about 35 km west of Prague in a small city called Nove Straseci.

My work grade was called a “**Junior manager of the logistics and distribution department**” of Euromedia Group, Corp. It should be obvious from my job title that my work position was not located in the administrative centre of the company but in the logistical centre of Euromedia Group. Description of my main duties and responsibilities as I had some

during working at position of a Junior manager of the logistics and distribution department follows below.

### **1. Getting familiar with a basic logistical work in the book store**

First of all, before I was allowed to have a higher amount of responsibility, to have the first contact with customers and, with Euromedia's partners, before dealing with problems of more serious possible consequences, I had to spend few weeks in the store of books itself. The purpose of this job allocation was to get to know and explore the very basic functioning of the work in a huge store. I was part of one shift and our superior was a shift chief who was responsible for job allocations and for the overall performance of the group of shift employees. Along with me and the other trainees, there were employees with a very basic education – majority of them completed only the elementary school - and there were also many students (both secondary school and university students who just needed to earn some money for whatever work they were asked to do) employed at this position of the lowest level possible. Store workers had to work on alternate shifts - morning and afternoon shifts which were combined also with night shifts at the peak season which is Christmas and Christmas holiday. They got to work at the beginning of their working hours and some of them had their job predetermined whilst the rest had to wait for the shift chief to give them work at the beginning of each shift. Clearly, content of their work and their actual responsibility was also dependent on the job done – or, sometimes more discreetly, undone - by the previous shift.

Most of the time, my role during working at the position of store worker was very similar every day. At the beginning of my working hours, I was told by my shift chief what I would do during the whole shift, than I usually started doing my assigned job, in case I had any problem I went to see my shift chief and discussed my problem with him – as he was responsible for my performance and he had authority and capacity to solve problems – which, of course, happened from time to time, and, at the end of each day, my shift chief finally checked the whole job done by me once again – nevertheless, he was constantly checking my actions during the whole shift on his personal computer in case anything goes wrong he notices my mistake soon enough to prevent more severe consequences. Predominantly, during my store worker practice I did the manual work which consisted in getting a special electronic device in which the list of all unprocessed purchase orders was recorded and which waited for being processed and, subsequently, being sent to customers. The orders were included in the ordering system according to their priority, i.e. according to the time they had been received from customers and recorded into the system. Every store worker was allocated one order and started searching for ordered book titles among thousands of books and collected the right ones. When all the ordered books were gathered and, thus, ready for sending off, they were handed over to another store worker whose job was to check if all chosen books are the same as those that were in the purchase order and if yes he, subsequently, prepared them for transportation into their desired point of destination. Books were wrapped into paper or plastic boxes so that they would not be marred up at all during their transport and corresponding invoice was enclosed with the order. This was the point when the job of a store worker was done and the boxes filled with ordered books waited

either for their owners to be picked up or for hauliers to be shipped into book shops all over the country.

When I did my practice as a store worker I had a possibility to experience the time of stocktaking, too. During this time-consuming and precise activity the vast majority of employees of the whole logistical department was asked to participate in the process of stocktaking because there was a need for more people than the actual capacity of store workers which was deficient for such a complex and demanding process to do the manual computation of all books that were to be found in the store and, afterwards, to check if the computed number of actual quantity lying in the store is in accordance with a record in the internal information system. Therefore, as a consequence of this unusual and unordinary store activity, I had a chance to meet other and, until then, unfamiliar employees of Euromedia Group – mainly its more office-like work positions' employees with whom I cooperated in the near future, for example mentor of junior managers, company's sales representatives, coordinators of transportation, etc.

## **2. Responsibility for customer order management - monitoring of orders, processing of orders, tracking of orders, working with internal information system**

While working at the position of a Junior manager of distribution department I was - for a given period of time and among other duties arising from this position - responsible for communication with customers of Euromedia Group. I was in contact with them every day and I solved various customer enquiries related to products, product availability and other general information – it was me who they contacted when they had difficulties of any kind with preparing purchase orders of books and I had to do my best to give them an adequate answer for their questions or come up with an appropriate solution or, for example, they contacted me when they did not receive their merchandise in time and they wanted to know the reason how this could have happened. In this case, my responsibility was first of all to validate their claim – if it is based on the real situation or not - and, successively, to find the current location of their merchandise and I had to do this as soon as possible – it could have been either still in our store waiting for transfer which means that it was already prepared and ready for transport, it could have been already on the way to its point of destination or not yet prepared at all. I had to find out why the deadline of delivery could not have been met and solve the problem immediately. Simply put, my duty was to monitor delayed shipments and derive corresponding actions.

Customers contacted me mainly with issues connected with their orders – both orders already processed and orders they intended to make in the future. The whole system of making purchase orders was quite old fashioned – every single customer had to write an email to me or my colleagues, having the same responsibility as I did, stating exactly which book titles he wishes to order, in which quantity and what would be his preferred means of transportation – he could either come to our store to get his books in person (or send his own transport) or use haulier from our offer which was a slightly more expensive alternative for

him. In case he wanted us to deliver his merchandise he should also state a preferred deadline for delivery. My job was to put every piece of information which was important for a smooth processing of the order accurately and on time into the databases. As soon as the order was rewritten into the information system for orders this purchase order appeared, consequently, in the electronic device of the store keepers whose job was to process it according to instructions being given in the system. It was my responsibility to administer, maintain and check the correctness of purchase orders' inputs into our database.

Overall and together with a shift chief, I was responsible for dispatch of goods (i.e. books) to its target customer and for the smoothness of the process of delivery of goods. Altogether, to summarise my role at this positions, the main responsibility - was to provide such customer services that will keep our customers satisfied with our goods and service of delivery which was, sometimes, quite difficult to manage. In case of more technical request from customers I had to ensure its escalation and follow up because the main goal on this position was customer satisfactions.

### **3. Finding solutions of complaints expressed by customers which were related to the quality and timeliness of order processing**

Customers who were not happy with our delivery services, with the quality and accuracy of processing of their orders or with the overall state of delivered merchandise which may have repeated and was not improved despite many previous complaints (some books may have experienced only a slight damage or defect of a more serious kind on their cover pages, for example) may have contacted a few employees with a special educational background for this job because they were trained in the field of effective business negotiation - relationship between a company and its customers - and they mastered some techniques leading to prevention of notices from customers' side and, thus, to satisfied customers.

I was a part of this small and very special team only for a short period of time but I learned some useful things and techniques which can be applied not only to relationship between a company and a customer, but also to a relationship between two employees and I learned how to use these techniques to keep this kind of relationship on a professional level while maintaining a friendly relationship between the actors. What is important is the positive attitude, ability to answer questions - which may be unpleasant and uncomplimentary but, unfortunately, sometimes true - in such a way that the other party become calm and open to any further discussion about the problem, and ability to express sympathy and understanding for the problem of the other person.

### **4. Working and cooperating with other members of the team and with the mentor (senior manager of logistics and distribution department of Euromedia Group, Corp.)**

The fact that I was only one member of a larger group of employees with a similar job position in the company led to our duty to work and cooperate with the other members - co-

workers junior managers – and, certainly, with our mentor. There were regular meetings with other junior managers of logistical department which were organised by our mentor once per month and which we were required to attend. My role was to create one part of the team and, among other duties, provide support to other colleagues in the team while our mentor's role was to coordinate departmental meetings and to be responsible for the overall performance of the team as a whole as well of the individual members of the team (junior-level staff), help them develop their skills and professional knowledge, deepen and guide the direction of cooperation among the team members, and broaden their horizons, both on a professional level (i.e. related to job content – occupational requirements of a job – “hard skills”) and personal level (i.e. communication with co-workers, ability to empathise, – “soft skills”).

##### **5. General administration duties and other supporting activities related to the mentioned work position and its demands for content of work**

Since I was a member of logistical department as I was its junior manager, it was me who was responsible also for smooth run of the logistics and distribution department. The administration duties which I was required to carry out from time to time were quite simple - for example handling phone calls, sorting of emails targeted to my co-workers, managing the correspondence between members of the department as well as between the department and customers who were external, or operative tasks solving. From time to time, my duty was for example to order stationery for the department, together with a simple distribution of our special magazines - catalogues which were published every three months to our customers – I had to ensure handing the catalogues over to our customers either personally or ensure delivery through our sales representatives.

## PART 2: REFLECTION ON METHODS I USED AND MY RECOMMENDATIONS

This part of the thesis is dedicated to reflection on methods I used in practice during my internship in Euromedia Group, Corp. I selected such procedures and manners which, according to me, my knowledge and my experiences, could be improved and I also present my suggestions for their improvement, for their simplification, for their modernisation or I tried to give some advice from the area of human behaviour on a professional level – both towards customers and employees in lower-level positions (i.e. towards subordinates).

### 1. Ordering system was old-fashioned and costly

The first and, in my opinion, very important problem which I experienced during my internship was the whole system of making and, subsequently, processing of purchase orders which was lengthy. The system which had been practised in the company for many years showed, in my eyes, a lot of weaknesses but only a very few, if ever, strong points which would make the whole process of ordering simpler, faster or transparent.

The current practice was very humble. Its basics lied in the fact that, first of all, it was the customer who complicatedly had to summarise his purchase order in an email or contact a person responsible for customer orders by telephone and inform him about his order. Secondly, a person receiving the order had to transfer all the information necessary for smooth and correct processing of the order from this email or his notes to the customer order information system. This process was time consuming and employed two people with no effect whereas this work could have been done by one person only which would also ensure higher exactness and diminish the possibility of making any mistake. Subsequently, these order data were automatically electronically transferred into special electronic devices which were in hands of store workers. After this transmission was completed, they could easily process the order as they accessed it online in their device.

I think that the desired system should work in a completely different way which would be also more up-to-date and subordinated to modern methods and devices which are widely accessible and which are used massively in many international companies. If I would have that authority I would invest a little money into a special information system oriented on orders' processing. This information system would be accessible to customers after their connection to web pages of Euromedia Group, Corp. They would access their online account by giving their customer number and their password and, by doing this, they would also have access to their online account, they could control the different phases in which their order currently is and, if necessary, take corresponding steps to speed up the process.

The other option to do, which they would have in their online account, would be online ordering. In their electronic ordering webpage, there would be a list of all book titles, which were either newly or less recently published but also the other books that would be available either in Euromedia Group's stores or would be delivered later after making an order, that the customer could access and choose simply by clicking on the selected items only such titles which he would like to add into his order basket. Subsequently, the next step would show a table of selected books into which the customer would insert the desired number of selected titles and, in the next step, he would select his preferred means of transport. During this step,

there would be a box into which he would have possibility to specify his comments regarding transportation, if he would have any. In the last step of electronic ordering system, there would be a well-arranged table that would summarise the whole order with all comments and after our customer would check his order once again, he would click on a confirmation button which would cause an automatic transfer of his purchase order into the internal system in the store.

Immediately, during any hour of the day or night, the information system in the store would register the order and include it in the system which keeps files of orders according to their time or to their priority. As soon as the time of processing of the order would come, any store worker could easily process it and prepare for transportation. Any changes in the order would not be possible after the order would be started being processed. These changes could be made by any person that would have access to the ordering system, i.e. mainly Customer service department workers and shift chiefs who are responsible for correct processing. However, in case of an unpredictable change in the order, the customer would have to contact directly the responsible person as there would be no changes possible in the electronic ordering system. This is because the online application proceeds with orders automatically and immediately after their confirmation. I am convinced that any system of making orders like this one presented by me or a similar one would make the whole process of ordering simpler, more transparent, more reliable, modern, and would raise the overall image of Euromedia Group which is perceived by its customers, competitors, and also employees.

## 2. Shift chiefs' behaviour

In Euromedia's store, there were 2 shifts of store workers and each of them was led by its chief. As being mentioned earlier in this thesis, there were no exceptional requirements to become a store worker, the only condition was a completed primary degree of education. This means that some store workers were of a lower level of intelligence but some of them were well educated who just were in need of a regular income from any job which they took for a limited period of time, i.e. until they found a job which would be more appropriate for them (mainly secondary school and university students). However, the majority of store workers belonged to the first group and so did both shift chiefs. The problem with shift chiefs' behaviour emerged because shift chiefs were former store workers and they began to think that they were better than other store workers because they had been promoted and they adjusted their behaviour towards ordinary store workers to their estimation which was wrong.

Shift chiefs talk to the lowest level employees with disrespect and their behaviour seemed to me to be inappropriate. Sometimes, there was a harsh treatment of some employees (those who were not afraid to raise objections against their practices). This kind of unprofessional behaviour from the managerial side of Euromedia's employees led to de-motivated attitude of store workers and they felt quite bad about their performance at work because it was not recognised or rewarded.



There exist several managerial styles that can be applied in organisations towards lower-level employees. The autocratic managerial style is the one that was practised from the shift chiefs' side in the company. This style is authoritative, it comprises no space for negotiation or for two-way communication and high supervision takes place from the manager's side; it is rather a one way conversation which involves giving directions and tasks while the manager expects his subordinates to do their work exactly as he wants it. This autocratic managerial style may be effective when being applied to such subordinates who need to be treated this directive way, mainly when controlling a large number of low skilled workers. However, this style of managing people appeared to be effective in stores of Euromedia Group only when having been applied to some – not all – employees because not all the store workers had the same skills and, thus, they did not require the same treatment. I, personally, would prefer more paternalistic or even democratic style of management.

A democratic style of management is characterised by trust in employees and their skills and a manager is open to any discussion and comments observed by his employees. I would appreciate if I would have been given at least a small trace of a trust from the side of my shift chief. Liberal management style (*laissez-faire*) which emphasises almost no leading of the manager's subordinates would not be effective in such organisations as Euromedia was. The last main style of management is called a paternalistic style. Conversely to the autocratic style, the paternalistic management style acknowledges the needs of employees and is based on more 'father-like' approach of managers towards his subordinates. Managers are interested in social needs of employees and they want them to be happy at work. Nevertheless, a manager still makes decisions by his own (which is quite similar to the autocratic style) but he is aware of his subordinates' views and acts in their best interests. (Management Style, 2010)

However, no matter what style was practised and whether it was or was not the right style to apply, the problem with shift chiefs was rooted in their unprofessional behaviour. This emerged as a result of the autocratic style they had been practising – store workers waited to be told what they should do and did nothing more which made them much more inferior than they really were. There should have been a notice from superior managers towards shift chiefs but there was none because these superior managers did not want to occupy themselves with the lowest level employees and their opinions on shift chiefs. I think this is in origin wrong and it is not important if it is the lowest level employee or any supervising manager who brings any complaint – if there is any, its verity should be investigated and responsible steps should be taken. And this was problem in Euromedia – despite the inappropriate behaviour of shift chiefs, which sometimes resulted in store worker's notice, the managers did not occupy themselves with this problem. If they had solved it the performance in the store could have been more satisfactory and the overall atmosphere among workers could have been more positive.

### 3. Transition from an old system practised in the store into entirely new one

When I started working at Euromedia Group, Corp. as a store worker an old-fashioned working system was employed there. This system featured, for instance, no use of modern electronic devices which were at those times widely available on the market but the system relied on papers and pens – surprisingly for me. I could not have imagined that in such a huge and prosperous company the main work in the store would be based on a simple use of tons of papers. The whole system functioned in the following way: a person responsible for purchase orders received an order; he had to print it out and, subsequently, deliver the paper with ordered number of titles to the shift chief who was responsible for delegating the processing of orders to the store workers. The store worker who just finished another order got this paper and started collecting the desired book, based on what was written on his paper. As soon as he found one title, he crossed it out and started searching for the second title until he got to the end of the order. Sometimes it may have happened that the sequence of books on the paper was wrong – i.e. not the shortest way in the store – and it was up to each store worker to check the locations and make such changes which would make his route more convenient for him and which would shorten the time needed for gathering the books. At the end of collection, he attached the order paper to the trolley filled with books and handed them over to another store worker responsible for wrapping the books and attaching an invoice to the order.

I worked as a store worker for several months and I experienced both systems – the old system working in which was really time-consuming, prone to mistakes, and ineffective and also the new one which finally turned out to be a modern one. Later, when I had a chance to compare both systems, the second one appeared to be 100% better and 100% more effective. The new system worked in the following way: the process of ordering by customers remained (unfortunately) still the same but this was the only thing that did not undergo any change. As soon as the purchase order was received by a responsible person, he typed the details of order into a specialised system which automatically transmitted the order into electronic devices which were in possession of every store worker. The moment any store worker had his order finished the new order which appeared in his device was ready for him and he was able to start processing a new order, without going to a shift chief and asking him for a new paper with order. The good qualities of the new system continued during further processing of the order (i.e. packing, enclosing invoices, and preparing for transport) in terms of time savings as well as costs savings.

There were 2 main problems when we consider transition from an old-fashioned system into a modern system which immediately increased the effectiveness and productivity of the whole department, represented mainly by store workers who must have used the new system every day. The first problem is related to timing – in my opinion, the transition from the old system into a new one should have happened much earlier than it really happened. The electronic devices were available on the market several months before Euromedia decided to modernise its ordering system, but the company modernised much later. On the other hand, we must admit that this delay in modernisation did not bring any severe outcomes because the company still occupied an exceptional position among other players on the book market.

The other issue connected with transition into a new system relates to the choice of IT specialists who were responsible for the transition which included training of all workers. These external IT specialists had to implement the transition by installing the software, by its regular testing, and as soon as these steps were performed they were ready to teach all the workers of the department how to work in the system, how to operate the devices and how to deal with basic problems which may have arisen. In the beginning of their three-months stay in our department there were many problems with basic functioning of the system which were later reflected when we had been taught how to work with the electronic device. It happened quite often that the device did not communicate with the system and the training must have been discontinued until the problem was solved. I would tolerate this to happen from time to time, mainly in the beginning of the whole process of transition, but with this particular transition there were quite many problems which caused troubles to the smooth operation of the whole department. Also, as a consequence of all the problems, I considered the process of involvement of IT specialist lengthy and not very effective.

Choice of IT specialists responsible for transition and workers' training should have been more complex. There should have been more IT companies in pre-selection and each of them should have been examined in detail (in terms of which services it offers for which price, its references should have been checked, etc.). From the final list of pros and cons, the candidate with the best result should have been chosen and the deadline of the transition (together with penalties for the case of delay) should have been stated in the contract. This would have guaranteed either that the deadline would have been met or that the losses would have been reimbursed.

#### 4. Soft skills development

Soft skills can be measured by emotional intelligence quotient (EQ – emotional intelligence involves social skills and abilities to empathise, capacity to deal with other people to achieve common goals in an effective way or ability to express feelings appropriately) whereas so-called hard skills are those skills which people are usually born with and are part of one's intelligence and can be measured by intelligence quotient (IQ).

Soft skills (also called “people skills”, “interpersonal skills” or “social competences”) are defined as personal attributes that enhance interactions of an individual, his/her job performance as well as his/her career prospects and that are interpersonal and broadly applicable. Soft skills are less tangible and more difficult to quantify in comparison with so-called hard skills. Soft skills are usually characterised with the use of terms which are closely tied to personality attributes and qualities (including for example common sense, responsibility, optimism, a sense of humour, motivation or integrity) together with competencies that usually can be practised and improved (including ability to empathise, ability to work in a team, conflict management – i.e. ability to remain calm under pressure, communication skills, ability to negotiate and lead others, good manners, sociability, ability to teach others, engaging in dialogue, etc.). The basic condition for determination of individual's possession of soft skill is existence of a genuine love for other human beings.

(Parsons, T. L., 2008) To summarise the main features of soft skills, we can say that they are competencies that help us understand others as well as ourselves, soft skills facilitate and improve the quality of working with other people, and therefore are essential in today's working environment and they are required by employers.

By contrast, so-called **hard skills** are defined as specific abilities that are more or less easy to be taught and may be necessary in a certain type of task, activity or context, for example in a job, and they can be defined and measured. Some examples of hard skills may be academically-oriented skills, such as typing, mathematical abilities, proficiency with specific applications, ability to speak a foreign language, etc. (Parsons, T. L., 2008)

Both soft and hard skills are usually mentioned when applying for a job. It is believed that it is mainly the hard skills that ensure somebody interview while one's soft skills are necessary to get and successfully keep the job. (Investopedia, 2011) Clearly, every employee of an organisation brings more or less different interpersonal behaviour patterns – how things are done, how to behave in a group, how to talk to others, etc. - that are natural for him, which he did not learn anywhere, and which he uses on a regular basis automatically and, most of the time, unconsciously. These behaviour patterns were observed, examined, and, later, accepted by these individuals at their very early age. Although some portfolio of interpersonal skills may become effective and appropriate, other may be of less efficiency and may lead to problems. (Coates, Denis E., 2006)

There are only very few organisations that require individuals to have exactly the same soft and hard skills that are required in other organisations. Therefore, every organisation requires possession of slightly different “people” skills. When someone applies for the job of an accountant who will work independently and would have only very few co-workers then it is not supposed that this employee has highly developed soft skills and masters negotiation in a large team of people. Besides, this kind of soft skills would be of no use for an independent accountant who would have to rely only on himself and would cooperate mainly with himself. On the other hand, good negotiation skills which are part of soft skills would be expected in such work positions which include teamwork, managing other people or delegation of power. Likewise, workers at positions which are similar to sales representatives are expected to have ability to empathise and they should genuinely love other human beings because they have to be in everyday personal contact with them, they have to listen to them and guide a dialogue with them.

My position of a Junior manager of logistical department required possession of both soft skills as well as hard skills. Among the hard skills I was expected to have an education in the field of economics – university education was required, I should have a basic idea of how logistical department functions, my knowledge of English language should have been at a high level (but as time went by I did not understand why I should have mastered English language because I had not used it in my job at all), and I should have been computer literate. I guess I possessed all these skills which is supported by the fact that I was accepted for this work position. However, hard skills were not the only skills that were expected from me.

From the soft skills I showed a common sense, responsibility, and ability to empathise. At the same time, I expected from my employer that there would be some possibilities to improve my soft and hard skills or practical lessons to learn any new manners important for my profession. However, the reality appeared not to be that generous and, unfortunately, I found out quite early that in Euromedia Group at a junior level managerial position there would not be almost any possibility to deepen my soft skills and any chance to improve my hard skills.

During working as a store worker I was not expected to have any skills or special education at all. The only requirement for this position was a primary school graduate and that was all. It was my advantage that I had a little higher education and, I would say, deeper soft skills than other (ordinary) store workers. This helped me when I had to solve problems with my shift chief, for instance.

Later on, I worked in the office and my responsibility was securing customer service and I was in everyday telephone contact with our customers. At this position there were several soft skills that were expected from me and if I had them they would facilitate my work. First of all, there was a need for ability to listen to customers and to understand their claims or simple questions. Secondly, I should have a common sense to give them a sufficient reply or propose a good solution for their problem. Thirdly, there should be some capacity to understand their problems – to empathise – and suggest a solution which would be reasonable and favourable for both sides. Finally, I should have ability to negotiate and communicate with my co-workers because some solutions were possible only after discussion with them.

My position as a Junior manager – trainee – put me in many situations when I had to cooperate with the other junior managers and with our mentor which required some level of soft skills as well. During our regular meetings, we had to express openly our remarks, comments and our feelings to the other team members which was not always easy for me and, I guess, was not easy for the others either. I have always had difficulties when I had to present my ideas to other people, mainly to people that I met for the first time. Therefore, I expected that we would get some special tips how to present without stress and with confidence. However, we – trainees – only sometimes presented our ideas and views in front of others and if we did our mentor did not give us any special tips how to improve our presentation skills. As I was thought during my studies, I know that the best method to feel confident when making any presentation is very simple – practice; but if there is no possibility for this then there cannot be any visible improvement.

In many international companies, for employees to improve their relationship with their co-workers there are often so-called teambuilding activities or teambuilding weekends that are organised from time to time. Since I worked in an international company which has been a major player on the book market in the Czech Republic for quite a significant period of time I presumed that there would be regular teambuilding weekends for deepening our working relations. Later on, I changed my mind and I only expected there would be at least some teambuilding weekend for junior managers which were in the company for quite a short

period of time and it was obvious that these people would work closely together and, thus, their relation would be one indicator of their performance. Unfortunately, as was revealed later, there were not any teambuilding activities at all during my presence in the company. The only event that was organised for the whole department and in which all workers from the lowest level to the top managerial level took part was a Christmas party. This event lasted few hours and there cannot be said any word about improving relation with other employees or managers simply after this one teambuilding activity. I rather think that this event was organised with the objective to delight as many Euromedia's employees as possible during one event.

To summarise this point dedicated to any progress in the development of human skills, both soft and hard, I reckon that the organisation was not able to offer a sufficient number of opportunities to improve either soft or hard skills. To be specific, I adjusted my soft skills to particular situations which required slightly different form of soft skills than I had usually used before, one example of this situation may be telephone contact with customers who were important for us and I had to keep them satisfied and I did not have authority to reject their claims even if there were not based on true. In terms of hard skills, I expected some possibilities to improve my English language knowledge, or at least possibility to communicate in English at work. However, even this expectation was not met (in the distribution department, there was not any opportunity to communicate with Euromedia's central office in Germany and, therefore, there was no need to speak fluently any foreign language – there would be chance for me to be in everyday communication with headquarters if I would have been employed in a different department located in Prague which was not my desire at that time; thus, there were not organised any language classes which could improve my foreign language knowledge either) which led to dissatisfaction on my side. The question which arises is why trainees had been expected to master English language when they did not use it in their job? I guess that the answer is for their possible relocation in the future. As I mentioned earlier, the administrative offices in Prague were in everyday contact with Germany which required hard skills in the form of ability to speak fluently a foreign language and if I had worked for Euromedia few months longer and if I had been interested in this opportunity I would have been offered a job in Czech central offices in Prague. I also assume that there would be some opportunities how to improve and deepen knowledge of English language because its sufficient level was needed for everyday professional communication.

## PART 3: CONCLUSION

Euromedia Group is a very successful Czech subsidiary of a mother organisation called Bertelsmann AG which is a major player on the media market on the international scale. Bertelsmann AG is based in Germany and over 176 years of its prosperous existence it became a very powerful organisation operating in various areas worldwide among which for example TV, magazines and books belong. However, Euromedia which operates solely on the Czech market focuses on books, their distribution (wholesale together with retail), and also on publishing. Euromedia belongs to the most stable companies on the Czech book market occupying the third place at worst in rankings of successfulness of book distributors and publishing houses during last decades. Euromedia's business activity of publishing can exist thanks to its publishing brands which Euromedia exclusively owns. The most successful and also the oldest publishing house is called the Book Club which gained its success thanks to publishing mainly such books which have a wide range of target readers so that it is not extremely difficult to succeed in bulk buying.

Euromedia Group has its administrative centre in the capital of the Czech Republic whereas its store and logistical and distributional department is based 35 km west of Prague. I was employed in the distributional department at a work position called a "Junior manager of the logistics and distribution department". I had four main areas to learn about and, subsequently, to take care of and the most interesting work was set for me in the book store where I had to learn basically how each book should find its customer. It was quite interesting for me to monitor the journey of the book and check whether it will find its destination in time or observe all the processes that needed to be done in the store. I also enjoyed having direct contact with Euromedia's customers and I liked helping them find answers to their questions and solutions for their problems. One has a satisfying feeling when the agreement is reached which is the biggest reward for his hard work.

In the company, I had several opportunities to experience various work positions within the distribution department and, thus, understand how this specific department works, what is needed for its smooth existence, and also which role the distribution department finally plays in the value chain of Euromedia Group. Moreover, after my internship in the distribution department and after I had possibility to be part of different teams of employees I realised that the most important asset in any department is people who create the job and who are an integral part of the company. The more skilled and the more satisfied people who work in the organisation the higher the performance they can achieve and the more satisfying the outcome of their work would be. Therefore, I assume they should be treated like a valuable and inseparable part of the company which appeared to be a problem in Euromedia Group. Shift chiefs did not realise that their behaviour towards their subordinates was inappropriate and this was not realised by the company's managers either. There were some other problems in the organisation (ordering system which was practised in the store seemed to be quite old-fashioned and to be a waste of time as well as money; very low efficiency of the process of transition from the old system practised in the store to the new system which should facilitate work in the store after a given period of time which was not met; very low emphasis put on soft skills development of managerial workers in the department) which were of more or less impact on the overall performance of the company.



I had a chance to observe what things are needed to be done in the distributional department to make it work easily, how these things should be done in the most effective way with the minimal use of financial means of the company and what is the right timing for them to be done. I believe I tried to learn as much as I could during my internship. However, unfortunately, I am aware of the fact that every company slightly differs from any other company - every company has its procedures that are certified and these are usually slightly different from what anyone else can learn anywhere else. Thus, I appreciate the possibility to observe what practices are used in a major international company on the Czech book market because it is very likely that its procedures are standardised and are very similar to those used in other companies in which I may work one day. I can definitely use my participation in this internship and my knowledge I gained during this internship in my future professional life and in my career - in whichever way it will develop. I also appreciate that I had a possibility to work at the lowest position possible, i.e. as a store worker, and, thanks to this chance, I could perceive all the processes as a person having almost no responsibility and no authority. I felt the needs of the lowest level employees and listened to their opinions and comments. Moreover, I experienced what it is like to be treated as a person who is not the most important element in the company.

Overall, my work experience in subsidiary of an international media organisation was very contributing for my future professional life. To me - a young student of the last academic year at university - any work opportunity would be a great asset which would enable me to find a better full-time job after graduation. But I had a chance to participate in everyday operations in such a successful company as Euromedia Group in the Czech Republic certainly is which was even better asset for me in my CV. I had a chance to observe all the activities in the logistical department even directly in the store from the perspective of an ordinary store worker or in its administrative offices when being the administrative support of the department. I could gain -and I believe I did gain - different views from different perspectives because both positions had a different specialisation which was a big plus for me and I reckon I will fully appreciate all the benefits of this internship in a few months when I will become a full-time worker.

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