

Freedom for all and feedback on demand

Professor of Computer Systems **Jari Nurmi** leads his team by trusting individuals and entrusting them with responsibilities. Feedback is available on demand and it is culturally adapted to suit the different backgrounds of the staff.

Over the years, 97 researchers have worked in the team. Each team member who completes a doctoral degree is granted permanent member status. One membership benefit that has proved appealing is free entry to the annual international System on Chip conference organised by the team.

"In addition to researchers on short term visits, we have returnees who come back to the team after spending some years elsewhere. Economic trends may have an impact, but researchers have returned to this team even after working in industry."



At present, Jari Nurmi's research team includes 24 researchers from six different countries.

Feedback on demand

Nurmi's research team is part of the Department of Computer Systems and develops hardware configurations for embedded systems. The team is divided into subgroups that meet every two or three weeks to report on their progress and to resolve possible problems. The subgroups communicate with each other whenever necessary. The entire team is assembled twice a year in a workshop to review the overall situation: who is doing what, what is going on, and where the team is headed.

According to **Fabio Garzia**, researchers tend to get more feedback from professors in Italy than in Finland.

"In Italy funding is scarcer, so professors usually keep a closer eye on the progress of research projects. Of course this is also a matter of personality and not only a cultural one," estimates Garzia.

Tapani Ahonen agrees that there are different styles of doing things at TUT, too. Neither of the two researchers feels they need more guidance. The main thing is that everyone gets the necessary information and feedback is given when it is needed.

"Time is also an issue in a group this big, and part of being self-directed is knowing how to ask," says Nurmi.

Freedom, responsibility and extempore get-togethers

Nurmi describes his team as a group of motivated individuals who he can entrust with responsibilities. Everyone wants to be worthy of this trust. Garzia and Ahonen are both in charge of their own subgroup with tutoring and inspiring others as their task. In Garzia's opinion, potential is created in a large group when

The team Nurmi retires shirt numbers to honour dissertations

The team Nurmi's shirts are yellow, and by completing a doctoral degree the members get their shirt number officially retired. Nurmi got the idea from the shirts of the legendary players of the Tampere ice-hockey team Ilves that hang from the ceiling of the Hakametsä ice hall, and the retired number of former Director of Administration Seppo Loimio's shirt that hangs from the TUT sports hall Tamppi Arena's ceiling. As far as is known, retiring a research team's shirt numbers is a new invention.



Fabio Garzia, Tapani Ahonen and Jari Nurmi. The team Nurmi plays in yellow shirts.

The first shirt, number 99, belongs to Professor Nurmi. The number refers to the year of founding the research team. This year yet another new number will be retired to honour the tenth dissertation in the team.

everyone's skills are harnessed towards a common goal. In Ahonen's view, flexible working culture also contributes to team spirit.

"All team members know our common goals. And within the limits of these goals we have almost unlimited freedom to operate," he describes.

Nurmi's team spends time together off-duty, as well. They have been go-kart racing and taken part in the Jukola orienteering relay, but the shared free time activities are mostly centred on food. Especially the sociable Italians promote these activities and someone's kitchen is always open to guests.

Multinational and international

Ahonen says that multinationality enriches the team. One quarter of the team are Italians, who work long hours and may show up at the department holding a toothbrush. Nevertheless, their work attitude is relaxed enough to dismiss fears of burnout.

"Despite their relaxed attitude, the Italians achieve incredible results," praises Nurmi.

The group is also outwardly international. In addition to European projects, bilateral collaboration is important. Informal connections with ex-team members may also spawn new projects.

"Our working method is to let ideas brew and develop within the team, before introducing them to potential industrial partners. Then the idea either gets approval or it doesn't, but that's part of the freedom, remarks Nurmi.

Text and photo: Kati Vastamäki