



Pekka Korhonen

* 26.11.1944 † 24.1.2024

Pekka Korhonen, Professor Emeritus of the Department of Information and Service Management at the Aalto University School of Business, died on 24 January 2024, at the age of 79, exhausted by a long illness.

Korhonen was born in Kuopio on 26 November 1944. At the time of Pekka's birth, Finland had just signed the Armistice and was a poor and war-torn country. He was raised by a single mother in modest conditions in Kuopio. He was part of a large generation and had many friends. But it was not obvious that even gifted children would go to school. As far as we know, Korhonen was the only one in his circle of friends who applied to grammar school, and later to university.

After passing his matriculation examination in Kuopio, Korhonen pursued mathematics at the University of Helsinki. Mathematics was a popular subject in the 1960s and lecture halls were packed with students. Korhonen distinguished himself as a talented student and earned his Master's degree fairly quickly in the late 1960s. His first job was at the Computing Centre of the University of Helsinki, where he worked for ten years. Pekka Korhonen's doctoral thesis *A Stepwise Procedure for Multivariate Clustering* was approved by

the Faculty of Social Sciences in 1977, opening up new academic job opportunities besides the Computing Centre at the University of Helsinki.

Decades of uninterrupted scientific collaboration between Pekka Korhonen and Jyrki Wallenius began by chance in the autumn of 1978, when they both spent a year at the then Vaasa School of Economics and Business Administration. Their exceptionally long and close collaboration continued until Korhonen's death, although for many years they worked at different universities and lived in different countries. Korhonen's and Wallenius' collaboration quickly expanded to include important international partners and post-graduate students.

Pekka Korhonen was a researcher at heart. His scientific output was extensive, focusing on solving multi-objective optimization problems and productivity analysis. In these optimization problems, the unique optimum solution is replaced by a so-called efficient or Pareto optimal surface. Perhaps Korhonen's most significant research was on how to navigate the Pareto-optimal surface and find the best solution for the decision-maker. This was particularly significant given the state of

information technology in the 1970s and 1980s. Back then, it was not easy to construct interactive (man-machine) algorithms. Korhonen was an active developer of decision support systems, for which he also received awards. He understood early on that decision-making is not just mathematics (although mathematics is important), but that the psychology of decision-making also plays a vital role. Despite being a “theoretician” by nature, Korhonen was involved in numerous applied research projects, where the algorithms he developed were applied to solving practical problems.

Korhonen spent most of his career at the Helsinki School of Economics. He joined the Helsinki School of Economics in 1979 as acting Assistant Professor in the subject of Systems. He was appointed Professor of Statistics in 1988, a post he held until his retirement. Over the years, Korhonen’s course on multi-objective decision-making was taken by many future decision-makers, including the Mayor of Helsinki Jussi Pajunen.

For several years in the 2000s, Korhonen served as Director of the Doctoral Programme and Doctoral Education Centre at the Helsinki School of Economics. During his time, the School of Economics’ annual doctoral output rose to over 30, when in the 1980s there were years when there were no completed doctorates. Korhonen was a good supervisor and mentor to numerous postgraduate students who enjoyed working with him. Korhonen modernised doctoral education, raising quality standards to the international level and helping doctoral students apply modern statistical methods. He was twice named “Supervisor of the Year” by the Helsinki School of Economics Support Foundation. Postgraduate education also

included our joint, successful Graduate School with the Systems Analysis Laboratory of the then Helsinki University of Technology. Korhonen retired in November 2012 but remained an active researcher in retirement.

Korhonen served as the third President of our society (International Society on Multiple Criteria Decision Making) from 1996 to 2000. He was also awarded the Society’s Georg Cantor Award in 1994. Korhonen was Honorary President of the Finnish Operations Research Society, whose founding meeting he attended fifty years ago.

Pekka Korhonen held several positions of trust in Finland during his life. He served for several years on the Council of the Finnish Union of University Professors, among others. Korhonen was appointed a member of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters in 2002.

In the early 1990s, Korhonen was a visiting professor at the University of Georgia in the United States. At the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis outside Vienna, he served as the Director of the Decision Analysis and Support (DAS) project in 1997 and 1998.

Korhonen’s passing is a great loss for our international scientific community, but also for the Aalto University School of Business. Korhonen’s contribution was extremely important for the doctoral education, internationalisation and especially the promotion of a quality publication culture at the Helsinki School of Economics. Korhonen served as a collaborator and a role model for younger generations of researchers. Together with Jyrki Wallenius, Pekka Korhonen was one of the first at the Helsinki School of Economics to publish in some of the leading journals in

the field. By the time Korhonen retired, the Aalto University School of Business had become an international, high-quality business school. Pekka Korhonen played a key role in this process.

We, Pekka's collaborators and students,

feel privileged to have had the opportunity to work with Pekka for so long. We miss him and will always remember him.

Pekka is missed by his wife Kaiju, seven children, 13 grandchildren, and a wide network of friends and collaborators.

*Obituary by Jyrki Wallenius
and Eero Kasanen*