



# URBAN GROWTH

**URBAN GROWTH GSIP VANTAA  
EXPERIENCES SO FAR FROM THE FIELD**

# GREETINGS FROM THE PROGRAM MANAGER

We are proud to present to you the Experiences from the Field publication that consist of 16 articles written by the experts of the GSIP Vantaa project team. This unique co-development project engages experts with diverse background from ten different organisations; their varied experiences and findings are reflected in these articles.

The GSIP Vantaa project funded through the Urban Initiative Actions of the European Union, targets Vantaa-based small and medium size enterprises (SMEs) with 10–200 employees that are challenged by the high percentage of workforce with low competence and education level in Vantaa, the share being as high as one third of the workforce in Vantaa.

The project addresses this challenge by creating new solutions to increase employees' competence levels in SMEs, while also helping companies develop and accelerate their growth through introduction of improved technological solutions. A solution that encompasses both social investment and growth dimensions is at the core of the project, which also the project title indicates. The project has followed a process model, in which different services were designed and tested with five partner companies followed by a piloting in targeted 60 SMEs. The services designed to benefit SMEs, have comprised a wide range of services such recruitment services, executive and employee coaching, growth training, apprenticeship training, support for planning technological advancement and so on. To ensure greater scalability and impact at longer-term, the project team has made efforts to develop service models that incentivize companies to truly enhance employees' competence levels.

While the project has created great opportunities for the project team to network and learn from each other, it certainly has provided a conducive space for innovation of new ideas. Each team member's earlier experiences and insights enrich the project, and the publication portrays the experiences of the diverse team who contribute to this unique co-development project.

Briefly about the initiative:

[www.urbaaniakasvua.fi](http://www.urbaaniakasvua.fi)

[www.urbaaniakasvua.fi/organisaatiokaavio](http://www.urbaaniakasvua.fi/organisaatiokaavio)

Enjoy you reading and get in touch with us for any comments or questions.

**Mirka Henttonen**

Program Manager

**Mirka Henttonen** (M.Soc.Sc., M.Sc.) started as Program Manager of the Urban Growth Vantaa project in September 2020. Mirka has a strong background from project management in international organisations. She is particularly interested in the competence development, revolution of the working life and corporate responsibility issues. She is extremely motivated to be working in a socially significant and innovative project with a team of talented specialists. Mirka works at the Employment Development Services at the City of Vantaa.



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**SOCIAL  
INVESTMENTS  
IMPROVE  
REPUTATION  
AND ECONOMIC  
GROWTH**

**The project encourages companies in Vantaa for social investments and responsible growth, and it aims to raise the competence level of the workforce in Vantaa, improve and increase employment in the region and support companies to grow responsibly.**

The objectives of the Urban Growth Vantaa project can be examined from the perspective of **Pierre Bourdieu's** theory of capital or, on the other hand, through investments and reputation. This article will not contain deep theoretical reflection or argumentation. Instead, we want to stir some thoughts and ideas from the perspective of the project's objectives.

Bourdieu (1930–2002) was probably France's internationally most famous sociologist of his time. According to his view, society consists of numerous overlapping and stratified fields of social activities that represent a system of objective relationships and function as an arena for conflicts and competitions. Individuals operate on these fields to gain capital that is valuable in that field. According to Bourdieu, participation in the society's fields and battles fought on them requires the individual to have sufficient control over personal resources. Bourdieu conceptualises resources as capital that has been distributed unequally among the different actors. Controlling capital gives you power on the field, which helps you succeed in the battles fought on that field. (Bourdieu 1998, 44, 77.)

Bourdieu divides capital into three separate categories: economic, cultural, and social. Economic capital refers to

income and material assets in general, while cultural capital refers to education, know-how, experiences, relationships, and all non-mone-

tary. The project's capital that the individual uses to succeed in society. Social capital refers to social obligations and connections. It is connected to social networks in which participants accept and recognise each other. A social network is offered by, for example, a group in which the members' collective resource is social capital. (Bourdieu 1998; Bourdieu 1994, 114.)

The concept of social investments comes from the European Commission's social investment package from 2013. In 2019, the European Commission clarified the definition of social investment so that it refers to investments in people. Education, bringing up children and health care are policies that aim to strengthen people's competences and capacities. In other words, a social investment, for example, an investment in education, increases people's social capital and resources.

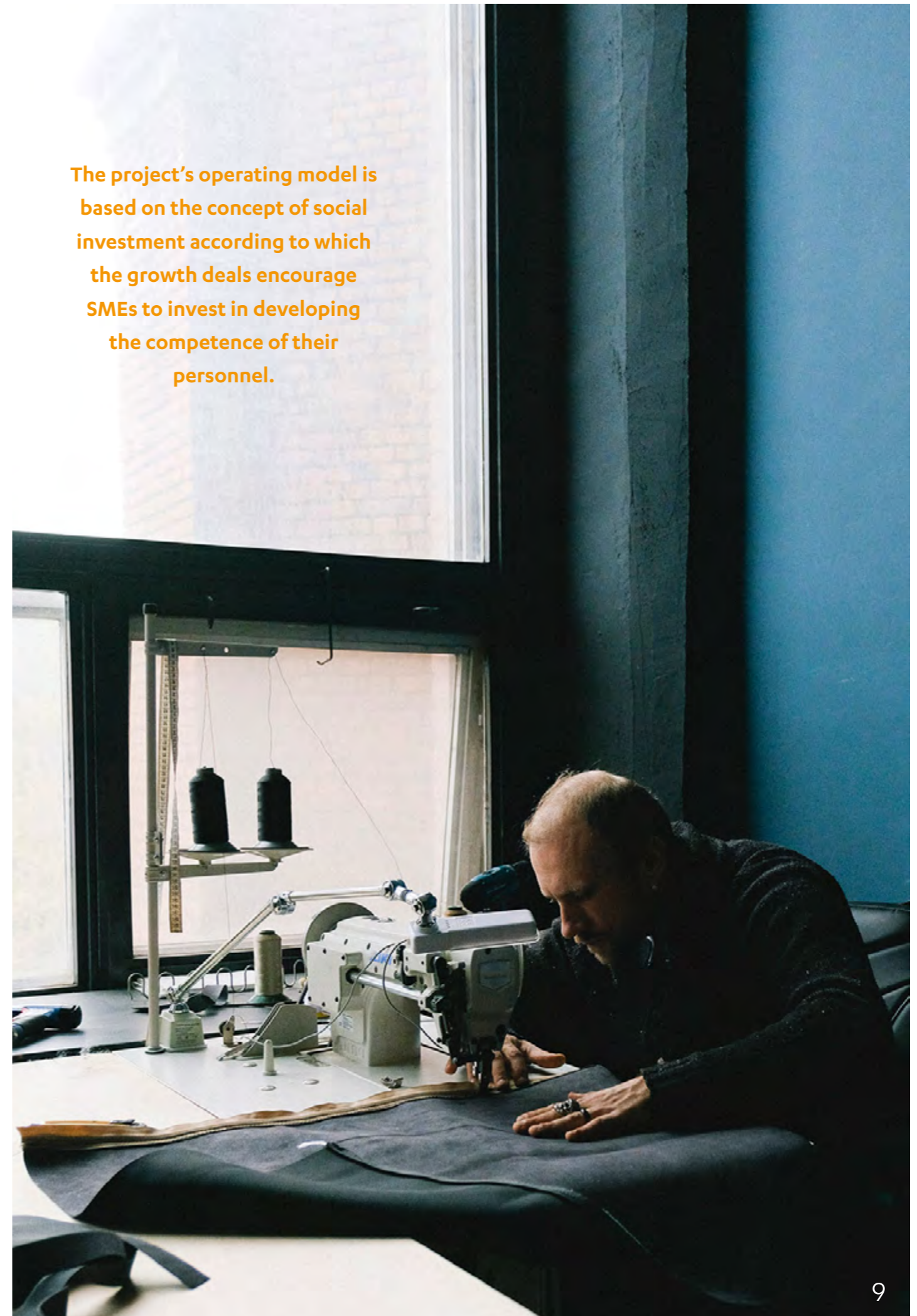
**Social investments have a positive impact on individuals and companies**

The operating model of the Urban Growth Vantaa project is based on the concept of social investment according to which companies take part in growth deals that encourage them to make educational social investments, i.e. to invest

**Kati Myrén** (Lic.Soc.Sc) is Project Specialist at the City of Vantaa. Kati is a visionary, bold and innovative professional of customer-orientation. Her role in the project consists of communication with companies and service design, particularly in terms of potential automated solutions.



**The project's operating model is based on the concept of social investment according to which the growth deals encourage SMEs to invest in developing the competence of their personnel.**



in developing their employees' competences. In return, companies are offered various growth-focused services for competence development.

The results of social investments can be assessed on two levels: the individual or corporate level. At the individual level, the competence development strengthens employees' skills and capacity, and it also motivates and helps them cope with their work. Gaining skills and competence can also lead to advances in one's career and a better pay, i.e. increased economic capital. Put simply, we can say that education helps an employee gather cultural, social and economic capital in the spirit of Bourdieu and, thus, gain a better position in the company. In addition, accumulating capital gives individuals a better chance to be reemployed if they are laid off. Thus, social capital as a collective factor seems to have a positive impact, while the utilisation of cul-

tural capital increases the individual's capacity to operate in their current or future duties.

From a corporate perspective, social investments guarantee economic growth (economic capital) for companies and prevent the isolation of individual employees through the accumulation of social capital. Economic capital makes it possible to maintain competitiveness, offer high-quality products or services and, therefore, ensure a good customer experience.

### Good reputation is an excellent resource

From a corporate perspective, social investments correlate tightly with the company's reputation and reputation management. American Professor Charles Fombrun summarises reputation as a "representation of the organisation's

current activities and future plans, which describe the organisation's general attractiveness in the eyes of all of its key stakeholders compared to its competitors." According to Fombrun, reputation refers mainly to feelings, sensations and emotions. (Fombrun 1996, 72.) Even though we cannot physically touch reputation, it is true and a genuine part of corporate activities. Reputation is the stakeholders' view of the organisation that directs the trust and confidence they have towards the organisation. (Aula & Heinonen 2002, 26.) Three things can be associated with a company's reputation: awareness, evaluation of the company based on its actions and values as well as the general impression of the company (Pitkänen 2001, 17–18).

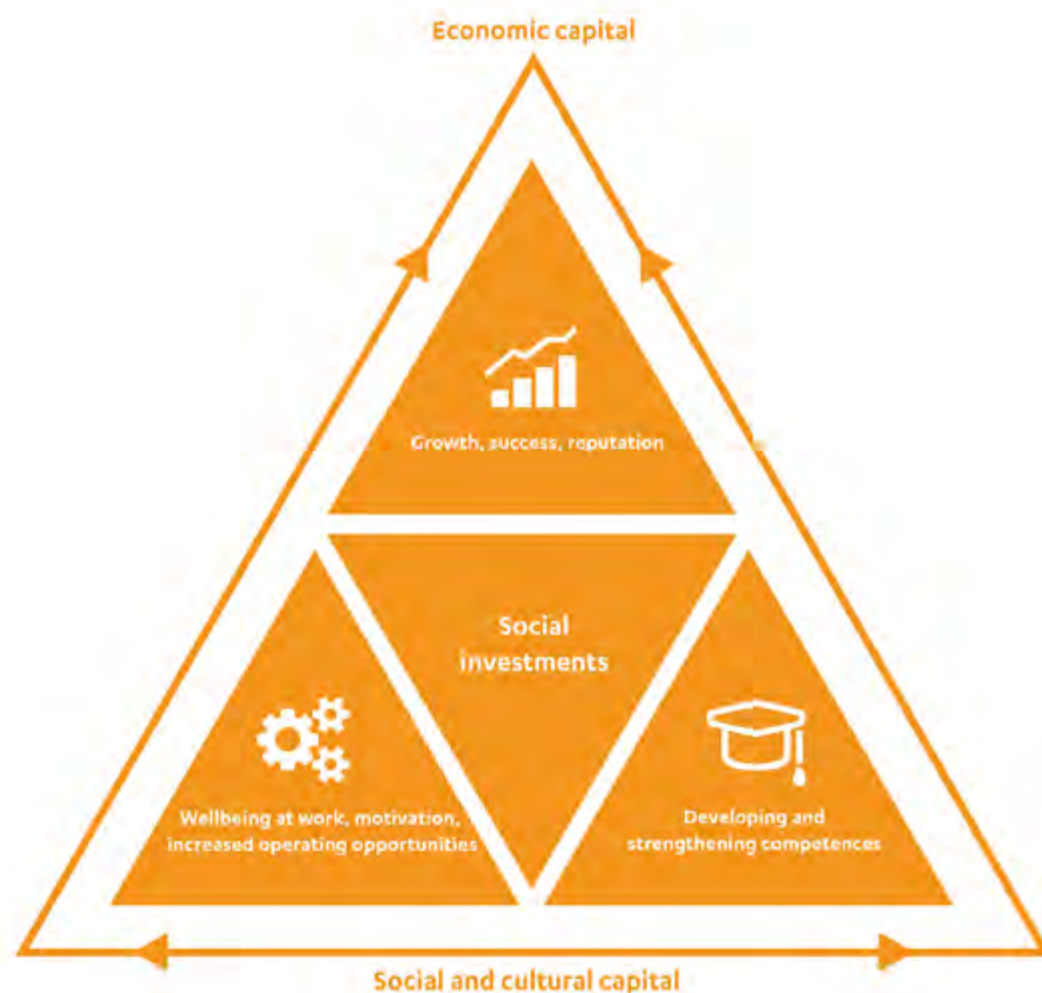
To gain and maintain a good reputation, companies must take care of the message they portray externally, their actions and their relationships with various stakeholders (Aula & Mantere 2005, 76). On this basis, the starting point of a company with a good reputation is good activities and good deeds. The company's social investments, such as focusing on the development of the

employees' competence and continuous learning, are activities towards gaining and maintaining a good reputation.

Having a good reputation is indispensable to companies and, without it, their chances to succeed are weak. In the modern service society, a good reputation is one of the key competitive factors. The benefits of a well-maintained reputation are clear: it attracts customers by communicating the quality of the products and services, impacts employees' motivation, reduces employee turnover, makes the organisation attractive for investors, is directly connected to the company's financial success and creates a strong trust basis between the company and stakeholders. (Aula & Heinonen 2004, 63–66.)

The innovative deals in the Urban Growth Vantaa project, i.e. cooperation models for companies, encourage companies to make social investments so that they can promote the accumulation of social and economic capital on an individual level while the company grows responsibly and maintains its good reputation. ■

**Good reputation is valuable for companies. Investments on the development of employees' competences and continuous learning mean that the company is working towards gaining and maintaining a good reputation.**



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# APPRENTICESHIPS ARE A CONVENIENT WAY TO UPDATE COMPETENCES

As we were planning services that would help develop competences in Vantaa-based companies, apprenticeships turned out to be an attractive option. The project's services were used to solve the awareness problem that apprenticeships experience and to lower the threshold to take apprenticeships in use by providing companies with specialists that would walk them through the competence development process. Updated competences benefit both the employer and the employee.

## Companies are not familiar with apprenticeships

An apprenticeship is a practical way to develop your professional skills. Experiences from the project have shown that companies are not aware of the many possibilities offered by apprenticeships. Companies might not be familiar with the system at all, or they have not considered it as an option for what a great way they are to develop how well suited apprenticeships are for the development of the competence of employees who already work for the company. The initiative's work with Vantaa-based SMEs has shown that small companies do not always have the skills or resources to find out about the options offered by the education sector, which is one factor increasing the risk of a competence deficit.

Finland offers incredibly vast opportunities for competence development. This means that understanding all education possibilities is incredibly demanding for the person responsible for competence development. The project has also shown that there is a lack of knowledge even among professionals who work with education, training or development services. Professionals generally know the basics of apprenticeships, but they have not understood its full potential and versatile nature.

The poor awareness has, unfortunately, caused the apprenticeship model to be underutilised in the working life.

The need for continuous learning in the working life is undeniable, and the significance of competence development is present in many social discussions (see, for example, the

## The apprenticeship model solves the company's and employees' educational needs and binds them together.

reform of continuous learning, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2020). In Vantaa, the need for development is particularly urgent. The average competence level in Vantaa is lower than in the other large cities in Finland, which is caused by, among

other things, the economic structure in Vantaa. This risk of a competence deficit can be unravelled with apprenticeships, as they are particularly well suited for labour-in-



APPRENTICESHIPS ARE A CONVENIENT WAY TO COMBINE STUDIES AND WORK. THEY ARE A PERFECT WAY TO DEVELOP EMPLOYEES' COMPETENCES.

tensive industries with low competence levels. Apprenticeships connect learning tightly with the company's and employee's daily work.

## The project services help companies

One of the key objectives of the Urban Growth Vantaa project is to develop the low competence level of the workforce in Vantaa. Growth Deal 2 tackles the problem specifically through provision of vocational competence development service for Vantaa-based SMEs with the aim of increase awareness of apprenticeships among companies and employees in Vantaa.

The project model includes a comprehensive turnkey service that gives companies the possibility to develop their vocational competence. The starting point of the service is to survey companies' needs, which always begins with a discussion with the company management. Based on the

discussion, a suitable service package is tailored together with the company. It can include, for example, information events to increase awareness of competence development and apprenticeships at the different levels of the company. In addition to the information session, the programme also includes guidance discussions that aim to find a suitable competence development path at the individual level. Once the path is clear, a project adviser participates in discussions in which the study module is planned together with the educating party, and walks alongside the company throughout the entire service process until the apprentice-

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PROCESS FOR VOCATIONAL COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

ship contract has been signed. The extent and duration of the service packages vary from case to case. The longest collaboration processes have lasted for approximately six months, and the fastest ones have whizzed by in two weeks.

The vocational competence development service is designed on the basis of corporate needs. The development work started by searching a solution to an identified need together with the companies, and the model was cocreated with project partners. The pilots, carried out with the partner companies (see article on the InfoCare pilot), functioned as the starting point. The service is developed further as we get more user experiences. Vantaa Vocational College Varia's expertise on vocational qualifications and apprenticeships combined with first-hand company data

has created a unique way of pursuing a higher competence level for companies in Vantaa.

### First user experiences from SMEs

Vantaa-based SMEs have been extremely interested in the vocational competence development services created and offered by the project. The initial experiences show that companies have a need for informative guidance that is available every step of the way. Companies have gladly project the initiative specialists to carry out a needs assessment and create a competence development plan for the personnel. We can already observe that particularly our smaller target companies, the size of 10–20 employees, have no skills or resources to manage competences. This has led to a deficit in competence development.

Small companies identify the lack of competence as a risk factor, or they are able to see the employees' increased professional skills as an enabler, but they have not been

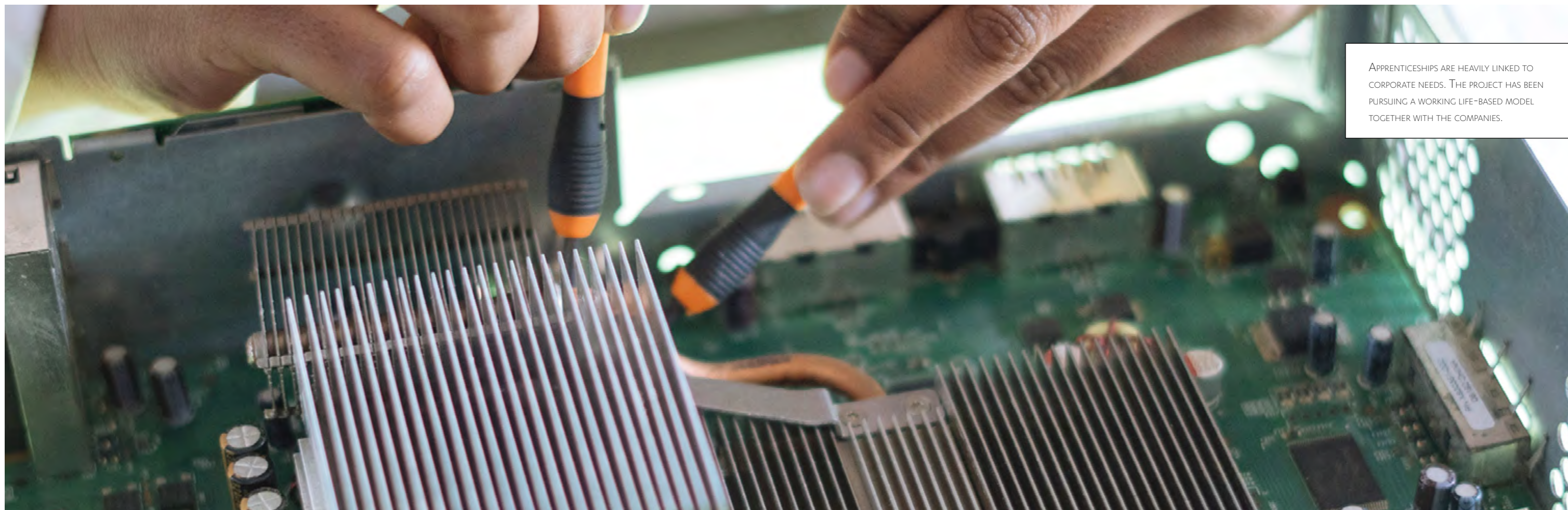
able address the issues internally. Thus, the project's proactive approach and comprehensive support package leads to agile interventions. Competence gaps are identified, a development plan is created, and all organisational levels are engaged together with the project's specialist. When the CEO and line employee share an understanding and willingness to develop competence and make the agreed effort, the personnel's competence and qualifications can be updated through joint efforts. This can lead to a professional, motivated and even more enthusiastic professional as well as new innovations and potential for the company. The implementation of the competence development service for SMEs has confirmed

the tentative observations from the pilot phase's indicating that we are providing the right service that fulfill a genuine service need meaningfully.

**Collaboration between project specialists and company managers makes the needs assessment and competence development plan proceed in an agile manner.**

**Apprenticeships increase confidence and produce competitive benefits to the company and employee**

An apprenticeship is a flexible way for the employer to raise the personnel's competence level. Competence development needs appear when a person changes roles and advances in their career or the working life changes in some other way. In the rapidly changing world, all industries need to master new technologies, learn new working methods and renew their



APPRENTICESHIPS ARE HEAVILY LINKED TO CORPORATE NEEDS. THE PROJECT HAS BEEN PURSUING A WORKING LIFE-BASED MODEL TOGETHER WITH THE COMPANIES.



IN APPRENTICESHIPS, THE LEARNING HAPPENS AT THE WORKPLACE, WHICH MEANS THE EMPLOYEE'S EFFORTS BENEFIT THE WORKPLACE. THERE ARE FEW SCHOOL DAYS, DECREASING THE NEED FOR SUBSTITUTES.

competence. Competence can expire quickly, which makes updating of skills necessary. Competence development needs can exist on all levels of the organisation: management, supervisors, specialists and employees.

Apprenticeships are rewarding for both the employer and the employee. The learning occurs while carrying out genuine tasks, and the employee attends classes in person only when necessary. As the studying is combined with the daily work, it keeps the student motivated. As studying is linked to the student's role, the competence is guaranteed to be useful. The concrete nature of the studies might also be helpful for internalising the information as the student is familiar with the examples. Apprenticeships are known to be well-suited for people

**Apprenticeships are fully linked to the working life. Increasing employees' competence level impacts the company in many ways.**

who are not naturally inclined to spend time studying in the traditional manner.

Apprenticeships are financially affordable. The studies are free of charge for the student, and the employee is paid a

normal salary. The employer pays the salary, while the employees' efforts remain on their duties with the exception of a few days at school. Thus, the company does not really have a need for substitutes. If the days spent studying at school are unpaid for the employ-

ee, the organiser of the education pays a compensation for the salary.

Increasing employees' competence level will always impact the entire company. Studying gives ideas and develops thinking, which is an undeniable benefit at work. When a

company is committed to develop an employee's competence, even the extended working community will learn. Sparring with supervisors or colleagues helps the studying employee to complete their assignments and solve genuine work problems at the same time. Employees are generally excited to utilise their new competences and share their insights with co-workers. As studying is strongly linked to the working life, the bonuses, i.e. lessons for the entire work community and new innovations, are even more certain to be integrated in the real work as well.

Apprenticeships increase the student's professional skills and the entire company's competence. When a company educates its personnel, it's sending a message that it's committed to a shared future. Working while studying communicates mutual commitment, which is particularly valuable and creates confidence in today's world, full of all kinds of uncertainties. The employee strengthens their position on the uncertain job market with their fresh vocational competence. At the same time, the employer makes sure it remains competitive by ensuring its team has top-of-the-range competences. ■

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## WHAT IS AN APPRENTICESHIP?

In an apprenticeship, competence is gained mainly by working at the workplace and verified through demonstrations. The demonstration can comprise one or several tasks, the performance of which is assessed by the teacher and a representative of the workplace. In addition to learning at the workplace, competence can, if necessary, be supplemented by studying at the school according to a personal study plan. In an apprenticeship, the student has an employment relationship with the place of apprenticeship. The education is free of charge for the employer and student. The employer pays the student a salary in accordance with the collective agreement for the duration of the education. On a case-by-case basis, the organiser of the education pays the workplace a compensation for the studies. If necessary, the student will be compensated with, for example, daily or travel allowance for the study days. An apprenticeship is suitable for updating the competence of employees with an employment relationship as well as for recruiting new employees.

An apprenticeship can be used to study a vocational qualification or a part of it. There are three types of vocational qualifications: 1) initial vocational qualification; 2) further vocational qualification; and 3) specialist vocational qualification. The initial vocational qualification gives the student strong professional readiness for various tasks in the industry. The further vocational qualification targets a more specific role in a more detailed manner and focuses on the needs of the working life. The specialist vocational qualification goes even deeper and contains multisectoral competences in addition to mastering one's vocation. The qualifications are constantly updated to correspond to the changing needs of the working life. At the moment, there are 164 vocational qualifications, 43 of which are initial vocational qualifications, 65 are further vocational qualifications and 56 are specialist vocational qualifications.

All 164 qualifications consist of modules that can be studied as such. The qualifications mainly consist of mandatory and optional modules. The optional modules can be selected across qualifications, so it's easy to make the studies suit various kinds of needs. The studies are always planned according to individual needs together with the student, workplace and educational institute. An updated list of the current qualifications and their contents are available on the ePerusteet website. The organisers of the education will help the students and employers in finding the correct qualification and study module. ■

# VOCATIONAL COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT WITH A CORPORATE FOCUS: THE INFOCARE OY PILOT

The vocational competence development service in the Urban Growth Vantaa project is designed together with companies. One of the development phase's key pilots was implemented with InfoCare Oy. InfoCare had identified the need to develop their competence level and, based on its values, the company saw this as important. The company was committed to the process by enabling and supporting the education of many of its employees.

## Targeted information sparks interest

12 InfoCare employees participated in the project's first ever Innostu Opiskelemaan information session. InfoCare's HR Business Partner Sini Veijalainen also participated in the event. Her efforts were invaluable already at the planning phase. Veijalainen has worked with InfoCare's human resources management for a long time and is responsible for, among other things, competence development. According to Veijalainen, the shared information session was an easy way for the company to gather all employees interested in studying in one place. The service model made it easy for the company to motivate everyone to study and to communicate the possibilities to anyone who was interested. Veijalainen thinks that, in addition to communication, the group information session also increased team spirit and peer support.

As Veijalainen, who was involved in planning the information session, knows the employees and the company's needs so well, it was possible to tailor the information session perfectly for InfoCare. For example, the qualifications that were presented were suited for the participants so that the infor-

mation would be directly connected to the employees' daily work. This way, everyone could easily see how a qualification or part of a qualification could bring added value to their work. An important contribution to the event was Veijalainen's speech as a representative of the employer, in which she promised that the company is committed to support the studies. At the end, she reminded everyone of the concrete benefits and other incentives that the studies would give to the individual. The company had already examined the matter thoroughly beforehand.

"InfoCare sees competence development as something that benefits the entire company. Even though an employee already knows how to do their work, education strengthens their professional confidence which is reflected in their out-

put. An employee who is sure of their professional skills is also happy to share their competence," Veijalainen explains. Even as an experienced HR professional, Veijalainen still learnt new things from the pilot. InfoCare had used apprenticeships before, but she was surprised by the wide variety of tailoring options.

After the information session, it was necessary for the company and educational institu-

tion to work closely together. A specialist from Varia took the responsibility for coordination so that the apprenticeships could begin as soon as possible. Veijalainen was responsible for maintaining the enthusiastic atmosphere until the studies began. Veijalainen says that the students were expectant and even impatient once the spark had been ignited. At this stage, it was important to keep the momentum going. The educational institute was responsible for initiating the studies while the students were still receptive for new ideas.

**The enthusiasm to study is contagious, and the cumulative effect is already visible. The information sessions and planning the studies have also motivated supervisors to further educate themselves.**

## Wide-scale impact

Thanks to good groundwork, a successful information session and careful after-activities, half of the participants at the information session signed up for an apprenticeship. However, Veijalainen believes that the impact will cumulate; once the education begins, the enthusiasm will lead to others becoming interested. Students will naturally spar each other on as a group, which is likely to inspire others at the workplace. "The cumulative effect is already evident. The students' supervisors participated in planning the studies, and the process has already motivated some of them to develop their competences as well. They are about to start vocational qualifications for supervisors," Veijalainen explains. Already when the information session was being planned, a few people were immediately inspired to study as soon as the company started talking about the competence development. A few supervisors also started supplementing their competence with a specialty vocational qualification in leadership and corporate management.

In addition to getting immeasurably valuable material from the InfoCare pilot to develop project services, it also gave InfoCare various important competence development paths.

Veijalainen is well acquainted with

her employees, so she knows that the information session inspired even people who were not planning on studying before the information session. As an IT company, InfoCare is considered to have a high competence level, but even they have needs for competence development on all levels of vocational qualifications.

As COVID-19 hit, there was a lot of uncertainty in the air, and many companies were announcing cooperation negotiations. With the threat created by the pandemic, InfoCare considered it important to communicate to their personnel that the employees and their competences are one of the company's most important resources. An excellent indication of this appreciation was the fact that even when faced with a crisis, the company was ready to support education. InfoCare operates in the IT industry, in which a prerequisite of competitiveness is up-to-date know-how. The variety of study programmes started in the pilot indicates that, in addition to IT competences, it's also important to develop in areas such as teamwork and project management to stay relevant in the working life. ■

**Elina Salo**

# PEER LEARNING IN WORKPLACES AND BEYOND



## You have probably heard of mentoring at some point in your life? The roots of the concept go far back in history, as the word “mentor” comes from the Greek mythology.

According to the story, Greek champion Odysseus asked his friend Mentor to take care of his son as the father headed to war. Mentor raised, advised and guided his friend's son for years. The method of transferring information did not remain in antiquity. The traditional apprentice–journeyman–master chain has been used to transfer Finnish vocations and skills from father to son or master to apprentice for decades. Mentoring is not an old concept, as it was introduced in Finland only in the 1970s (Kupias & Salo 2012).

Lately, the traditional mentoring model has been replaced with new methods and perspectives of mentoring. Educationists are interested in peer learning in which the differences in learners' skills are not that significant. As the group's competence level is equal, the cognitive conflict, based on knowledge and understanding, becomes greater. In practice, this means that if a teacher's knowledge about a subject is far superior, their views and manners are accepted as such. However, when the parties of a learning event have a more equal level of know-how, the conflict can create a situation that demands problem-solving and deepens the level and quality of learning. (Fields & Plathan 2014.) In peer mentoring, neither party has superior know-how, so mentoring happens through equal discussions. The peer mentoring model can be used to “achieve a genuine equal

dialogue, which, in its turn, can create something new that belonged to no one before the discussion. At best, this kind of a model creates new innovations.” (Kupias & Salo, 2012.)

### Reserve time for peer mentoring

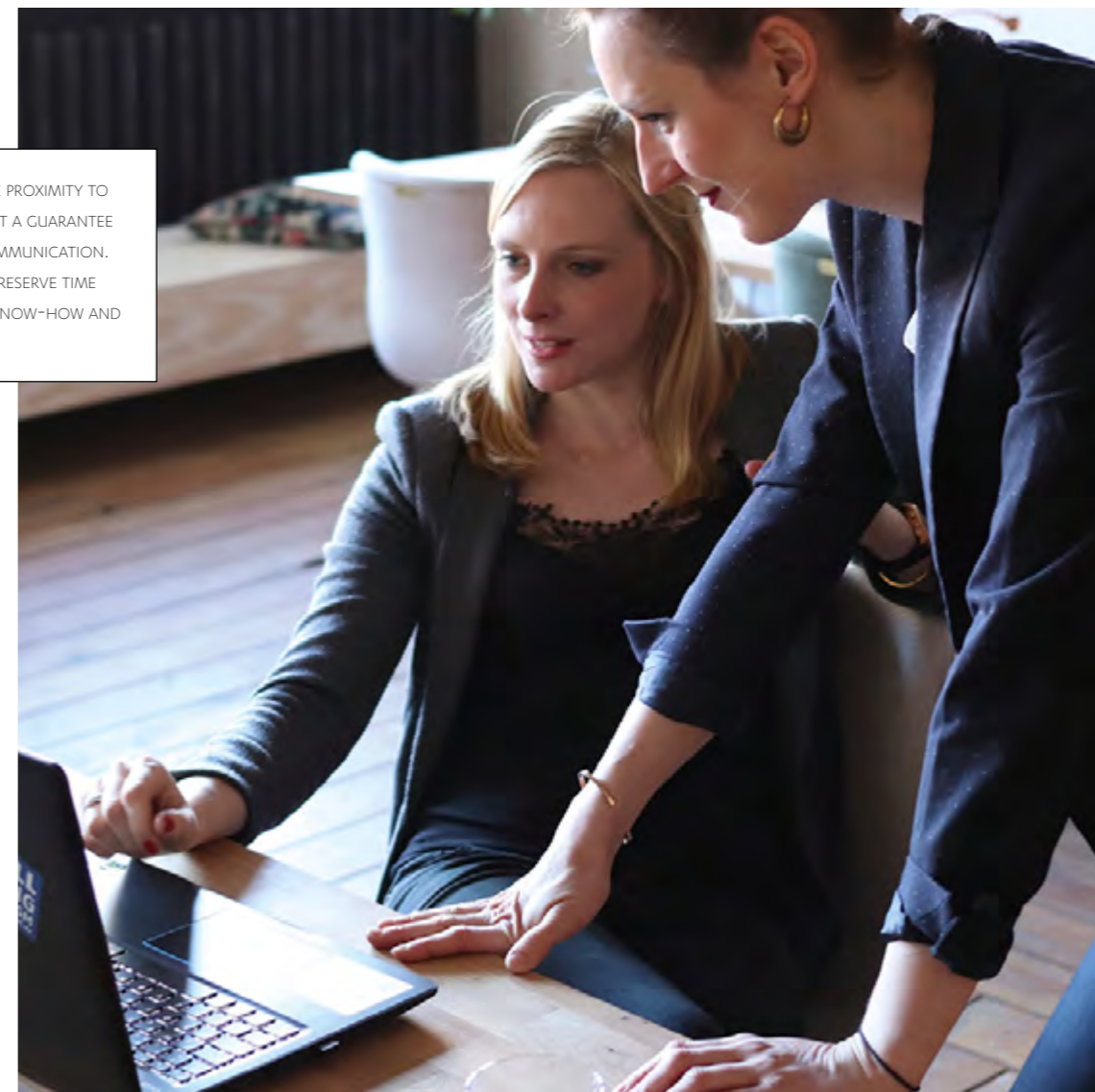
In the traditional mentoring model, the apprentice's knowledge-base is narrow, and they accept the given information as such. This might be a functioning method in some situations, for example, in corporate orientation, in which an experienced worker helps the new employee get started. In peer mentoring, equal actors exchange views and competences with each other, sometimes running into conflicts. This kind of a model is best suited for people whose roles include similar work phases and contents. Successful peer mentoring increases employees' competences and, therefore, the company's knowledge and skill capital.

A common misconception is to think that competences are automatically exchanged and shared in, for example, a shared workspace. The fact that people work close to each other is no guarantee of communication. Time must be reserved for the exchange of competences. The Chamber of Commerce's book *Valmentava mentorointi* (Ristikangas & Ristikangas 2019) lists 13 common challenges of collaboration. Three of them are clearly time-related. Sarah and Sam from payroll might not have talked about their working methods for a long time, if ever, and initiating the discussion might feel too personal. Our way of working is unique, and initiating the conversation demands trust and an open and equal atmosphere, in which both parties feel like they are giving and receiving new insights that develop their

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WORKING IN CLOSE PROXIMITY TO A COLLEAGUE IS NOT A GUARANTEE OF SUCCESSFUL COMMUNICATION. IT'S NECESSARY TO RESERVE TIME FOR EXCHANGING KNOW-HOW AND INFORMATION.



competence. Peer mentoring does not work with just the sheer joy of professional development. A prerequisite for its success is support from the management, the clearest signal of which is dedicating working hours for this kind of increase of the competence capital.

### Peer mentor from another company

Educational organisations are the most active institutes utilising peer mentoring. The job of a teacher is rather lonely as everyone is individually responsible for their work. Very few classrooms or other learning environments have a colleague sharing the responsibility. I participated in peer mentoring two years ago, and my mentor partner came from another institute of higher education, just under 100 kilometres from my

workplace. The short distance enabled face-to-face meetings, but we have also often exchanged ideas via email and remote meeting tools. The mentor partner that was meant to be an experiment for one term ended up staying in my life and, two years later, I still know whom to turn to if I need a competent opinion of a course module, assignment or assessment criteria.

A unit in a university of applied sciences and an SME are challenged by the same concentration of expertise, which means that one or two people are responsible for one specialty area. Even if you are surrounded by a good, functioning work community, it's lonely to work within one's specialty.

One person might be responsible for communications or marketing in a small company, potentially only

**Even if you are surrounded by a good, functioning work community, focusing on one's specialty area can feel lonely.**

part-time. Hopefully, the employee will be supported by their community; however they do lack a sparring partner and peer learning experiences. How much would they benefit if they had the chance to examine an upcoming marketing campaign or a renewal of communications materials with a professional colleague working with similar tasks? If the person examining their work is another professional, both the content and format of work could develop. The improvement suggestions can be stored for the next time, and the person's competence capital has increased. The only thing peer mentoring demands from the company is a temporal commitment and opening up the culture so that showing unfinished work outside the

**Benefits are more significant than challenges, so I encourage you to boldly network with colleagues and keep peer mentoring in mind.**

organisation is allowed and can be seen as a good thing. The challenges of peer mentoring circle around the same

issues: limitations of time and creating a confidential relationship. The benefits are more significant than challenges, so I encourage you to boldly network with colleagues and keep peer mentoring in mind.

### Sharing know-how at networking events

Senior Advisor **Mirka Järnefelt** from the City of Vantaa's Employment Development Services

says that the city has organised plenty of places and events for peer mentoring, but not exactly with the above theme.

"For example, at cluster events, people are interested in the same theme and there is plenty of discussion during the networking," Järnefelt describes and continues that it's probably no coincidence that networking is more efficient in some events than others.

"Some participants have contacted us after the events to continue a promising sparring discussion," Järnefelt explains.

At its best, well-facilitated and planned networking is all about sharing competences, just like peer mentoring. It's up to the participant to utilise the time reserved for networking well and, above all, to be responsible for what happens afterwards. This is why I encourage every participant to consider the future and ponder whether they could find an equal colleague with whom they could spar work-related questions in the future.

Järnefelt identifies the work-related support needs and says that Vantaa Employment Development Services utilise similar sparring.

"You can bring work-related challenges and tips that you are currently struggling with to the sparring group. Peer support helps, pushes you forward and gives all participants new information and support."

The Employment Development Services in Vantaa are continuously developing services and solutions that help entrepreneurs and their employees. They are working on new services and support, and the idea of targeted peer mentoring was received with interest. ■



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PEER MENTORING IS NOT JUST MENTORING WITHIN THE COMPANY, BUT EVEN ACROSS COMPANY BOUNDARIES. SHARING COMPETENCES AND INFORMATION WITH A PERSON WHO DOES THE SAME KIND OF WORK IN ANOTHER COMPANY CAN TURN OUT TO BE VERY FRUITFUL.

# **SUPPORT FOR CHANGE SITUATIONS BY IDENTIFYING AND DEVELOPING COMPETENCES**

**– PLANNING**

**RESILIENCE TRAINING**

**The working life is changing as, for example, the automation of the working environment is increasing. Companies and their personnel need new competences to survive the change. Identifying competences and having the readiness to develop them are an important part of an individual's ability to renew and cope, i.e. their resilience. The project is co-developing resilience training sessions for SMEs in Vantaa. The purpose is to find functioning ways to increase employees' resilience.**

Technological development is changing the way we work. Your current competences might not be enough to survive in the working life. Instead, new competences are needed to face changes. It's important to identify the kind of competences a company needs to implement its strategy and how the company's and its employees' competences should be developed in this regard.

In the corporate world, resilience is seen as a company's ability to cope, adapt and grow in change situations (Niemi et al. 2017). A resilient company is always able to renew itself and change its business model and strategies when circumstances change. At the individual level, resilience refers to the ability to cope and adapt in unpredictable and surprising change situations (Jalonen 2017). Identifying

competences and having the readiness to develop them are an important part of an individual's ability to renew and cope, i.e. their resilience.

#### Planning by co-development

The Urban Growth Vantaa project is trying to respond to the challenges caused by the technological revolution. One of the objectives in the project's third Growth Deal is to implement a training that strengthens employees' resilience in change situations. The kick-off event of the third Growth Deal started by defining the project's perspective on resilience. Resilience was examined as an individual's and company's ability to renew and cope. Co-development was used to produce numerous ideas to how employees' resilience could be developed. In a material analysis,

the development of resilience was structured around three perspectives: 1) personal competences and their identification and development; 2) work community's culture and operating methods; and 3) leadership. Next, we will describe co-produced material from these perspectives.

#### Identifying and developing your competences

The team work efforts linked resilience to various matters related to the individual. Highlighted topics included the significance of the feeling of ownership, self-knowledge as well as identifying one's competences and development needs. Other issues included the skill to learn and maintain-

A CULTURE OF WORKING TOGETHER SUPPORTS INDIVIDUALS' ABILITY TO RENEW AND COPE, I.E. THEIR RESILIENCE.



ing that skill as well as increasing the motivation to gain new competences. Overall, the individual attitude and motivation for change and understanding the importance of your own activities were highlighted. The ability to ask for and receive help was also considered as important. It was noted that experience and education create confidence and increase individual resilience.

#### Culture and operating methods in the work community

The second examined perspective concerned the significance of the work community and its operating culture, which was considered to have a significant impact on an individual's resilience. A positive culture of working together and developing oneself supports resilience. It's important to be interested in continuous learning and encourage the acquirement of versatile competences. It's also essential to make professional development opportunities visible and identify

**Identifying competences and having the readiness to develop them are an important part of resilience.**

competences in the work community. Having one's needs heard in the organisation was considered to support resilience. Work community skills, an open and solution-oriented work community as well as knowing where help is available were seen as important factors. It was also considered important that, before employees are trained, the existing competences are surveyed, and the motivation, support and guidance for learning are ensured.

#### Leadership

Based on the team work, leadership was considered an important factor in increasing resilience. The management's willingness and support were seen as an important foundation. Being goal-oriented and systematic in developing employees' competences was seen as particularly important. Identifying the potential of employees and utilising multi-skilled employees in change situations was also a highlighted topic. The importance of communications, sharing information as

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well as maintaining and developing orientation and well-being at work were other highlighted factors.

### Competence at the core of resilience

Based on the above material and its structuring, the project's development team started to further the idea of resilience training. Employees need new competences to face changes in the working life.

It was noted that resilience training must strengthen the readiness to identify competences and develop them — to get through change. The further development strengthened the perspective of the project's resilience training: competence identification, development and management as methods to strengthen resilience.

So how can competences be identified? A competence analysis presented on the Ekonomit website was selected as an example of identifying competences (Hägg 2020). The analysis looks at competences from three perspectives. Professional competence is competence accumulated through education and experience that is related to one's profession or work. General working life skills are skills needed in any profession or role. These skills change over time; not based on the task or industry. Self-management skills are often skills a person has naturally, but they can also be learnt.

### Competence is gained by learning new things

Identifying and developing competences is closely related to a learning process that was included in the self-management skills in the above classification. The ability to learn

new things and, on the other hand, to unlearn old things is significant for resilience. In a changing work environment, it's important to adopt new thinking patterns and operating methods quickly. Generally, people are used to learning as they go, and the learning method does not change. This means that they might not become aware of the learning process either.

**In a changing work environment, it is just as important to learn new skills as it is to unlearn the old thinking patterns.**

The project wanted to shake up the learning process. Various learning methods had already been tried, so now was the time to experiment with something new. The idea was that just trying risky methods is challenging and increases an individual's resilience and ability to renew as such. It was decided to engage partner companies to experiment with different

kinds of participatory learning methods.

Together with our partner companies, we started assessing the key competence development needs from the presented themes around self-management and general working life skills. Similarly, we thought about which participatory learning method might work and which one should the company experiment with internally. The following learning methods were offered: drama-based pedagogy, escape room, Lego Serious Play and interface technology. We thought about the idea and suitability of the learning methods together with our partner companies. The escape room idea was a popular one. Co-development started producing some concrete topics for further development.

### Competence management ensures continuous learning

In early autumn 2020, we started planning the concrete implementation of resilience training with three partner

companies. The participants were Vantti, InfoCare and Solteq. The themes and target groups of the training became more specific. Identifying, developing and managing competences to ensure continuous learning were selected as the key themes. It was seen as important that the competence of supervisors and management was strengthened first so that they would have the readiness to start creating a systematic model for identifying and managing competences in the company. The training was decided to be implemented through various forms of coaching sessions. The resilience coaching was created in three formats for supervisors, and companies could then choose to try one of them. We offered in-person and online coaching as well as an escape-room implementation.

Coaches from the project will lead the coaching sessions for the partner companies in late autumn 2020. The objective is to identify competence needs led from the company's strategy, particularly those caused by the technological revolution. The purpose is to develop companies' competence identification, competence management and the enabling of continuous learning. This way, the company can support individuals' and the entire organisation's resilience as well as the ability to and awareness of change. Based on the experiment, we will develop a resilience training model for a wider selection of Vantaa-based SMEs for the spring 2021. The purpose of the model is to respond to the new technological challenges employees are experiencing in the working life. ■



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# FEEDBACK SUPPORTS THE DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION

Feedback surveys are an essential part of planning and developing education. Feedback also helps you understand which factors make the education experience a successful one. Feedback should be useful for the receiver, preferably happen through dialogue, and the received feedback should be examined objectively. According to feedback from the project's themed training sessions, what the participants considered important were the concrete benefits, tools related to one's occupation and implementing the insights in practice.

The project services included various themed training and coaching sessions for employees in Vantaa-based companies in the autumn 2019 and winter 2020. All participants had the possibility to give anonymous feedback with an electronic feedback survey. Feedback from the project's training and coaching sessions and courses gives project actors the possibility to plan and develop the training and coaching sessions to better suit customers' needs. Collecting and receiving feedback is important in order to ensure that all participants have the possibility to have their voice heard and give feedback of their experience for the organiser of the training or coaching.

Hirsto (2013) highlights that training and teaching are services, and collecting feedback from this point of view is purposeful. From the perspective of the learning experience, it's challenging to gather feedback as it's not possible to receive responses to all qualitative factors based on the students' experiences. An assessment of teaching can be divided into reaction, learning, behaviour and results. This article presents a section from the Urban Growth Vantaa project's feedback survey that focuses on reactions from the learning experience.

**Open discussion about the significance of earlier feedback in planning and implementing education might motivate students to provide feedback.**

Kukkonen et. al. (2017) note that feedback from students produces information about how they have experienced their studies in relation to their personal goals, which the students use to reflect their studies from different perspectives. The study experience comprises the teaching, learning and all activities of the participants, including the working-life experience. Therefore, the development and feedback is impacted by all experiences created in the education context. Participants in the Urban Growth Vantaa project have been interested in personal development and

receiving new points of view with the help of education.

**Why give feedback in the first place?**

When receiving various feedback surveys, I often wonder how and why I should respond. What kind

of a perspective would benefit the party sending the survey? On the other hand, is my assessment today sufficient to develop the issue for which I have received the feedback survey?

A feedback survey is essential from the point of view of development and progress. Without discussion, commenting and feedback, development will not happen; things will remain the same. A certain level of satisfaction might sti-

ple development — nothing changes if no one speaks. The same underdevelopment occurs if no feedback is given when people are unsatisfied. This can make the organiser think everything is fine.

Open discussion about, for example, the significance of feedback when planning and implementing training, coaching or course modules might motivate the participants to provide constructive feedback. By giving constructive feedback, you can impact the contents and implementation methods as well as give the organiser a possibility to renew their thinking patterns. Experiences and feedback can highlight areas that have remained unclear for the participants. After receiving the feedback, the organiser can make better choices based on the participants' feedback, which was the case for the Urban Growth Vantaa project's training.

The same situation applies for well-functioning courses and training. Giving feedback shows an interest towards the party offering and organising the training, coaching or course. Feedback from the Urban Growth Vantaa project's training, coaching and courses might impact the future experiences of the respondents' and participants' colleagues in the training and coaching sessions in the autumn 2020.

Metalevel feedback improves working life skills, critical thinking and teaches you to give and receive constructive feedback from the perspective of participation and the provided implementation. Reflection for the purpose of devel-

oping individual reflection skills and the education, coaching or course from the participant's point of view is essential for the development of assessment skills, influencing, constructive feedback and interaction.

Feedback surveys give each participant a voice, and the right to give feedback strengthens the significance of the participants' voice and self-assessment. Kukkonen and Marttila (2017) remind us that when feedback is positive and successful, it might be difficult to identify the learning it leads to and necessary development areas. Positive feedback will usually increase motivation and promote success. This might not necessarily occur if there is no clear motive for analysing the feedback that would drive the actors forward. It does not force them to reflect on the specific factor in the positive feedback that created the positive experience and feedback. Good and functioning practices might not be the best ones to base your teaching on. This is why it's good to challenge these practices every once in a while.

Feedback is collected from learning experiences in order to know whether the education or training in question was successful. The feedback makes it possible to learn from one's mistakes and develop the next service. The difficulty of measuring results is directly related to its importance; the more difficult it is to measure the results, the more im-

**Giving feedback**

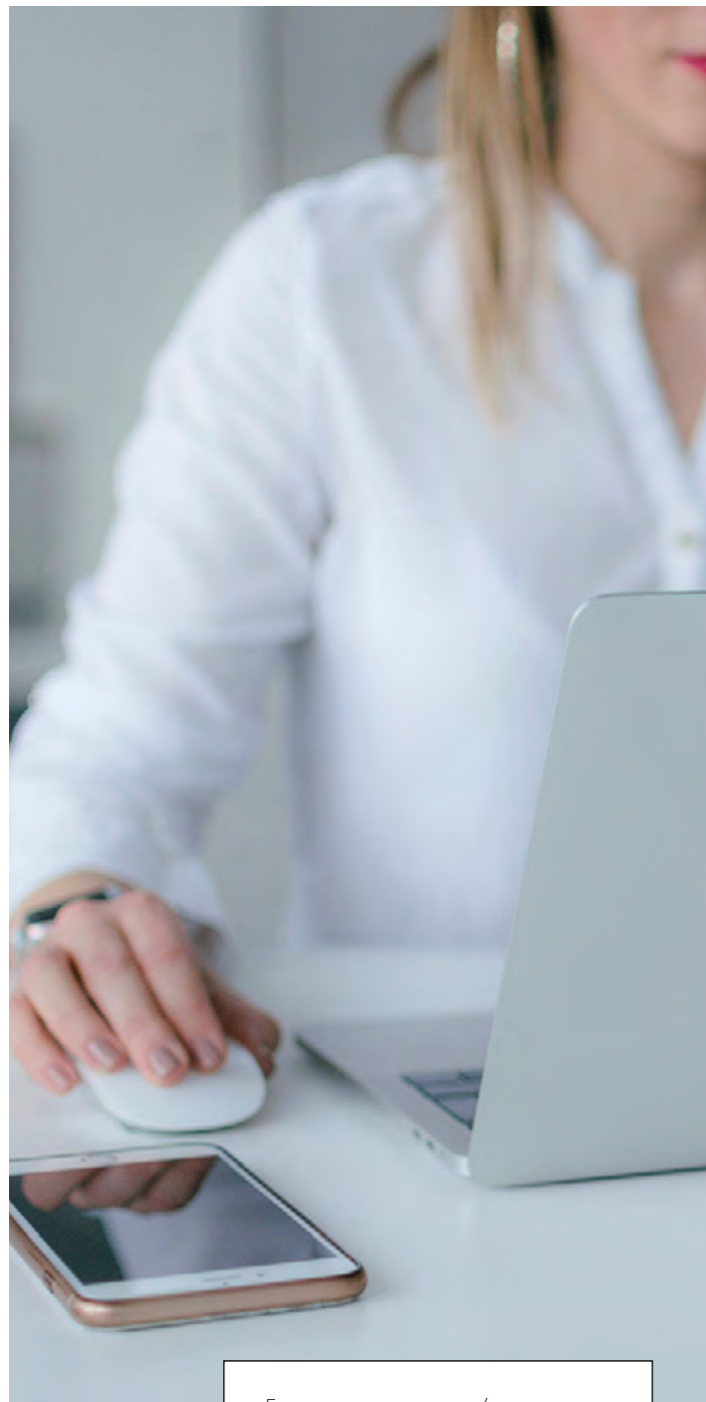
Feedback is collected from learning experiences in order to know whether the education or training in question was successful. The feedback makes it possible to learn from one's mistakes and develop the next service. The difficulty of measuring results is directly related to its importance; the more difficult it is to measure the results, the more im-



THERE IS NO DEVELOPMENT WITHOUT DISCUSSION, COMMENTING AND FEEDBACK.

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FEEDBACK FOR THE PROJECT'S THEMED TRAINING SESSIONS DEVELOPED THE EVENTS TOWARDS A COACHING DIRECTION. IN ADDITION, THE VIEWPOINTS OF THE PARTNER COMPANIES' MANAGEMENT TEAMS WERE CONSIDERED WHEN PLANNING THE TRAINING.

▶ portant it is. Successful measuring requires a patient attitude, discipline and the discovery of patterns. (Kuitunen & Sutinen 2018.)

Therefore, one should pay attention to what kind of feedback would benefit the receiver the most. Feedback should reflect the respondent's actions, be appropriate, solution-oriented, descriptive, well-justified, contain justified development ideas and mention well-functioning areas. Feedback is always a personal view of the matter. It combines the respondent's personality, actions and working method with self-respect. The giver and receiver of the feedback should process the feedback together so that both parties can link the feedback to the correct context, thus developing teacherhood for both the giver and receiver of the feedback.

Feedback should be given in dialogue with genuine people reflecting on a given topic in a result-oriented manner and in good interaction. Feedback comprises experiences and observations which are positive or negative. The starting point is to start the feedback with positive matters, continue to things that could be developed and circle back to positive ones at the end. When giving feedback, the respondent can easily respond with "okay" or "average", which does not let the receiver know how they actually succeeded.

### Examining feedback

When examining feedback, it should be interpreted from the selected perspective as objectively as possible. When doing this, you should be looking for ideas or alternatives for future development and reflect on their usability as a solution in development. Feedback is an assessment of the experience with observations, and processing feedback re-

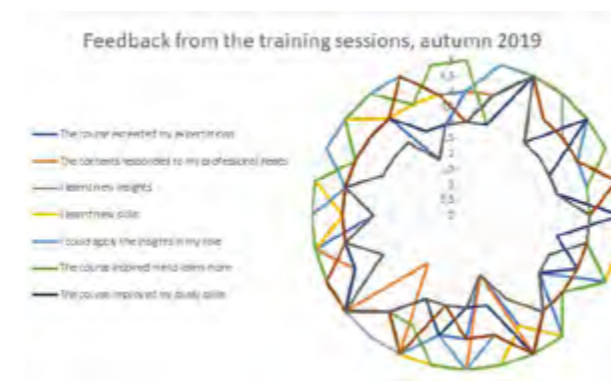
## The giver and receiver of feedback should process the feedback, consisting of experiences and observations, together.

sults in an assessment that combines the issues and solution suggestions that the respondent has reflected upon.

Giving feedback usually makes the respondent feel like they are being listened to. Therefore, the possibility to give feedback correlates with a positive atmosphere and mindset and motivates the respondent to think about matters from a wider perspective. In the end, this defines, for example, the professional identity as well as the motivation to learn and develop from the perspective of education. Without feedback, the educator will not know whether they should do something differently or continue as before.

### Feedback experience from the project's themed training sessions

In the autumn 2019 and winter 2020, the Urban Growth Vantaa project organised various training sessions for Vantaa-based companies participating in the project. The below image is a collection of seven experience definitions from the training that the survey focused on.



FEEDBACK FROM THE TRAINING SESSIONS ORGANISED BY THE URBAN GROWTH VANTAA PROJECT'S. (SIVÉN 2020)

When looking at the feedback, we can see that the average assessment of all sections is on a good level. A few responses — how the training responds to professional needs, adaptability with one's role and learning new skills — is on a satisfactory level (2). Based on the responses, the most positive experiences included the motivation to learn more, learning new insights and skills as well as the practical nature of the contents which linked the learnt skills close-

ly with the student's tasks. This kind of positive feedback gives an image of training that went well. At worst, it can lead to a deceptive feeling of satisfaction, which is why the implemented themed training sessions were examined critically in the light of fresh materials so that subsequent training sessions could be developed with a participant- and customer-focus.

The following voluntary questions were asked from the participants:

- What supported the learning of an employed learner?
- What kind of content would an ideal course for an employed learner contain?

The participants who responded to these questions thought that the practical approach of the training and completing assignments in an encouraging atmosphere supported the learning of a full-time employee. In addition, the tools used in the training received positive feedback as they supported the planning of work. Research-based content gave new perspectives and strengthened one's thinking. However, one participant thought some of the materials included expired information, so they emphasised the need to review the materials and include some fresher perspectives.

The respondents thought that ideal courses would be well organised and supplemented by in-person meetings. The respondents hoped that materials would contain a lot of practical information as well as links to further study material.

This feedback was acknowledged and used as a basis for planning the training sessions in the spring 2020 as well as the Urban Growth Vantaa project's morning coffee sessions in the spring and autumn 2020. The educators and coaches in the Urban Growth Vantaa project received the most useful insights from the open-ended questions that emphasised concrete tools related to one's work as well as implementing the information in practice. This feedback was acknowledged and used as a basis for implementing company-specific training sessions that were based on the companies' management teams' views about the competence development needs among their personnel. ■

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# CONTINUOUS LEARNING

IS COLLABORATION  
BETWEEN EMPLOYEE,  
WORKPLACE AND  
EDUCATOR



**Discussion about continuous learning often neglects the perspective of the learner who is developing his/her competences. In our study, we examined what is important and useful for the working learner, what inspires them and what their expectations are for continuing education. The results of the analysis can be summarised in the following manner: ideally learning was carried out in interaction with others, yet according to individual needs, the insights ideally correspond directly with the challenges the learners face in their role, and as a result the learning strengthened the working learners' self-efficacy and motivated them to further develop their competences.**

The content and demands of work are constantly changing. We update our competences continuously: when we hear about a useful application from a colleague, test a new feature in a programme or experiment with a more efficient way of communication. However, tips from a colleague or personal experiments are not always enough. Instead, you need to study subjects and phenomena in a more systematic manner. Updating competences purposefully makes us lifelong learners.

The importance of continuous learning (also lifelong learning) is widely acknowledged in Finnish workplaces and society. Various Finnish stakeholders are collaborating to support continuous learning and solve its challenges. One of the national key initiatives is the parliamentary reform

Close collaboration between educational institutes and companies enhance the flow of competent and skilled labour force to the labour market. Educational institutions offering the professional degrees also aim to satisfy the companies' novel competence requirements with short courses and training sessions. The significance of collaboration between the working life and educational institutions in designing the education services is strongly acknowledged (Järvilehto 2019), and educational institutions have invested in that work. For example, the reform of upper secondary education in 2018 increased collaboration between schools and workplaces and created new possibilities for cooperation. The Rectors' Conference of Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences has also systematically

of continuous learning originated by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture. It examines the available education, its' funding as well as students' possibilities for livelihood. In a similar manner, The Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra supports the development work of various actors in life-long learning. The Confederation of Finnish Industries' (EK) Business Tendency Survey (2019) notes that businesses see the availability of competent workforce as the most common barrier to operational growth, and 30% of the surveyed companies reported to have had recruitment issues because of that(EK 2019). Sitra's report (2019) also emphasises the significance of maintaining and developing competences needed in the working life in order to boost Finnish economic growth and well-being.

A WORKING LEARNER WANTS LEARNING TO HAPPEN IN INTERACTION WITH OTHERS, YET IN A MANNER THAT ACKNOWLEDGES INDIVIDUAL NEEDS AND DOES NOT BECOME TOO BURDENSOME FOR THE LEARNER.



emphasised the role of continuous learning in renewing the strategies of higher education (Arene 2020).

It is necessary that employers support employees' competence development, but commitment varies from company to company. Particularly in SMEs, continuous learning is considered to be the employee's responsibility and something that should be financed by the employee and occur during their own time (Urban Growth Vantaa Project 2019). On the other hand, employees' willingness to educate themselves is challenged by the wide variety of education forms and the difficulty of finding comprehensive information. One of the challenges of continuous learning in Finland noted by the OECD (2020) is making education equal and available to everyone.

The general discussion about continuous learning has included the perspectives of education formats, needs of the employer and financing of education. These discussions often neglect the perspective of the learner who is devel-

oping his/her competences. It has been noted that the lifelong learner's operating environment and possibilities (i.e. use of time and interests) differ from degree student (Erkkilä & Kortessalmi 2020). A working individual is particularly challenged in their learning by the limitations in available time (Sitra 2020). Thus, it is important to research also the learner's perspective.

**Learning happens when our internal model of a phenomenon or object starts to resemble reality better than before. The more our internal model corresponds with reality, the better we are as experts.**

In this study, we describe working learners' wishes and needs for contents of the training, implementation methods and personal development. We examine what is important and useful for a working learner, what inspires him and what are his expectations for the training. In this study, a working learner refers to an adult who is studying while working, updating his competences and

skills on an organised course or participating professional coaching. Unlike a working student, a working learner is not studying in a degree programme.

In our study, we analyse the survey material collected from working learners who had participated in the Urban Growth

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A MORE SYSTEMATIC DEVELOPMENT OF ONE'S COMPETENCES ALSO REQUIRES FORMAL AND GOAL-ORIENTED LEARNING. DEVELOPING COMPETENCES ON SHORT SUPPLEMENTARY COURSES HAS AN IMPORTANT ROLE.

► Vantaa Project's courses and coaching (n=68). The analysis responds to an identified need to plan the selection and implementation of continuous learning in a customer-focused manner that considers the needs of a working learner.

The results of the analysis can be summarised in the following: learning ideally occurs in interaction with others yet according to individual needs and in a manner that does not challenge the daily life. Secondly, the learnings correlate directly with challenges in the learners' work. Thirdly, studying strengthened learners' self-efficacy and motivated them towards continuous competence development. This benefit was considered particularly important from the individual growth point of view. The results of the study are summarised in figure 2.

**Continuous learning is demanding — the learner's role needs to be defined**

Learning happens when our internal model of a phenomenon or object becomes more accurate with reality. The more our internal model corresponds with reality, the better experts we are. Learning is an individual's internal cognitive process in which the environment is strongly present. For example, feedback from others helps us to revise

our internal models, and examining phenomena in interaction with others gives new perspectives. Learning is not limited by time, place or situation — we learn everywhere and at any time.

The workplace is a natural place for learning. "Work teaches the one who works" is an old Finnish saying, based on the idea that you learn a job by working. When formal vocational education was created, learning became separated from work. Education that occurs at school was given pedagogical objectives and became formalised. (Poikela 2005; Mocker & Spear 1982.) Workplace learning focuses on the requirements of the work, and is therefore not seen as formal goal-oriented learning.

Poikela (2005) divides continuous learning into four fields based on goal-oriented and non-goal-oriented activities. In formal learning, the learner and educator pursue a shared goal. For example, a learner signs in to the course with given content and objectives. In incidental learning the educator's and learner's activities are not goal-oriented. For example, a random visit or pops in to the school to listen to a lecture taking place at the same time. In informal learning, learning is unintentional. As an example, we learn a new way to use SharePoint by following a colleague's work. When an

educator's goal-oriented activities encounter an occasional learner, it's a question of non-formal learning. For example, participation in events such as a conferences or Night of Science. This classification highlights the significance of learning situations.

The learner's way of operating also defines continuous learning. A pragmatic and functional perspective of learning highlights the significance of concrete actions in the learning process (Dewey 1938; Kolb 1984). These ideas have been applied in agile learning and the Learning by Developing (LbD) schools of thought (Rajj & Niinistö-Sivuranta 2011). In agile learning, the knowledge-basis is built around problem solving, while in LbD, the development of activities continues after the problem has been solved. Working in global networks has changed the nature of work and the way we work. As a response, corresponding views of learning have been outlined. For example, in connectivism, learning highlights the importance of transferring and sharing data enabled by data networks (e.g. Siemens 2005).

At workplaces, continuous learning is primarily realised as executing the daily tasks. It's generally estimated that 70 per cent of learning occurs by doing the work, tackling challenges and solving problems. This kind of learning is usually not goal-oriented and considered as informal. Formal and goal-oriented learning is needed for a more systematic development of one's competences. Developing competences on short and supplementary courses has an important role in continuous learning. In Sitra's Lifelong Learning in Finland 2019 survey, 32 per cent of the respondents said that they had learnt new things by participating in courses in the past 12 months. Correspondingly, 12 per cent improved their competences by completing an official degree or part of a degree (Sitra 2020).

The idea of continuous learning includes the idea of a self-directed learner who has more autonomy to choose their education services instead of the traditional education path. Autonomy also creates a responsibility for one's

choices. In the context of learning, self-direction is often defined through agency (Giddens 1987; Eteläpelto et. al. 2013). Agency is created in a process in which the learner's background and experiences strongly influence what kind of learning situations they are looking for and how committed they are to solve challenges in them. The learner's

**The idea of continuous learning includes the idea of a self-directed learner who has more freedom to choose their education services instead of the traditional education path. Freedom also means a responsibility for one's choices.**

agency refers to goal-oriented activities in which objectives are assessed through one's capabilities. However, the evaluation and selection of alternatives is strongly connected to the environment and the possibilities and values it enables (Schoon 2018). The agency of a working learner is, therefore, strongly related to goal-orientation as well as the possibilities offered by the workplace and educational organisations. Guidance

from the workplace and immediate supervisor is also needed to define learning objectives. According to Sitra's Lifelong Learning survey (2020), only 23 per cent of the respondents were certain of the direction they should choose to develop their competences.

Competence development and continuous learning are part of a constant dialogue between the objectives of the employee, the organisation and the various education possibilities. Competence management can be used to acknowledge the employee's individual readiness and objectives as well as the opportunities offered by the employer organisation and education institute. Working learners have individual support needs, so supervisors must be able to identify various abilities to learn. In the future, it's important to examine in more detail how much the supervisor and organisation can support continuous learning (Erkkilä, Lamberg and Kortessalmi, in press).

Institutes of higher education offer specialisation studies, further education and training sessions including parts of degree studies. The objective is to make education more transparent and accessible. A new Finnish government financing model encourages institutes of higher education towards this goal. Education should also be easy to find. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) and online materi-

als have made an enormous amount of information easily available. The number of educators outside the educational system is constantly rising. Actors from outside of traditional education have entered the market. These actors train people within the framework of their industry (Koulutus.fi 2019) For example, Google has developed training programmes for IT and programming, Amazon for could architecture. However, it is a challenging process for a working learner to adapt online materials in order to build his competences.

The contents of a training targeted to a working learner should correspond to the needs of the working life. They also should be inspiring. The practical challenges of combining work, free time and studying limit the completion of studies. In addition, the number of participants in adult education are impacted by the fact that people do not consider studying as an attractive option for their free time, or the content of the studies do not match their interests or

needs (Koulutus.fi 2019). Tracking competence development, communicating with the educator (Billet 2018) as well as collaboration and encounters with the educator and other learners is important for a working learner.

Figure 1 presents the preconditions for working learners and workplace learning as well as the collaboration between the working life and the educational organisation. We know that educational organisations and the working life carry out important collaboration to enable impactful continuous learning. Companies appreciate continuous learning that is tailored to their needs and insights that can be directly utilised in their operations. In this article, we will focus on describing the factors that impact a working learner's learning process in particular. We will go through what a working learner expects from the implementation of formal continuous learning and suggest how the educational organisation can respond to these expectations (figure 1 below).

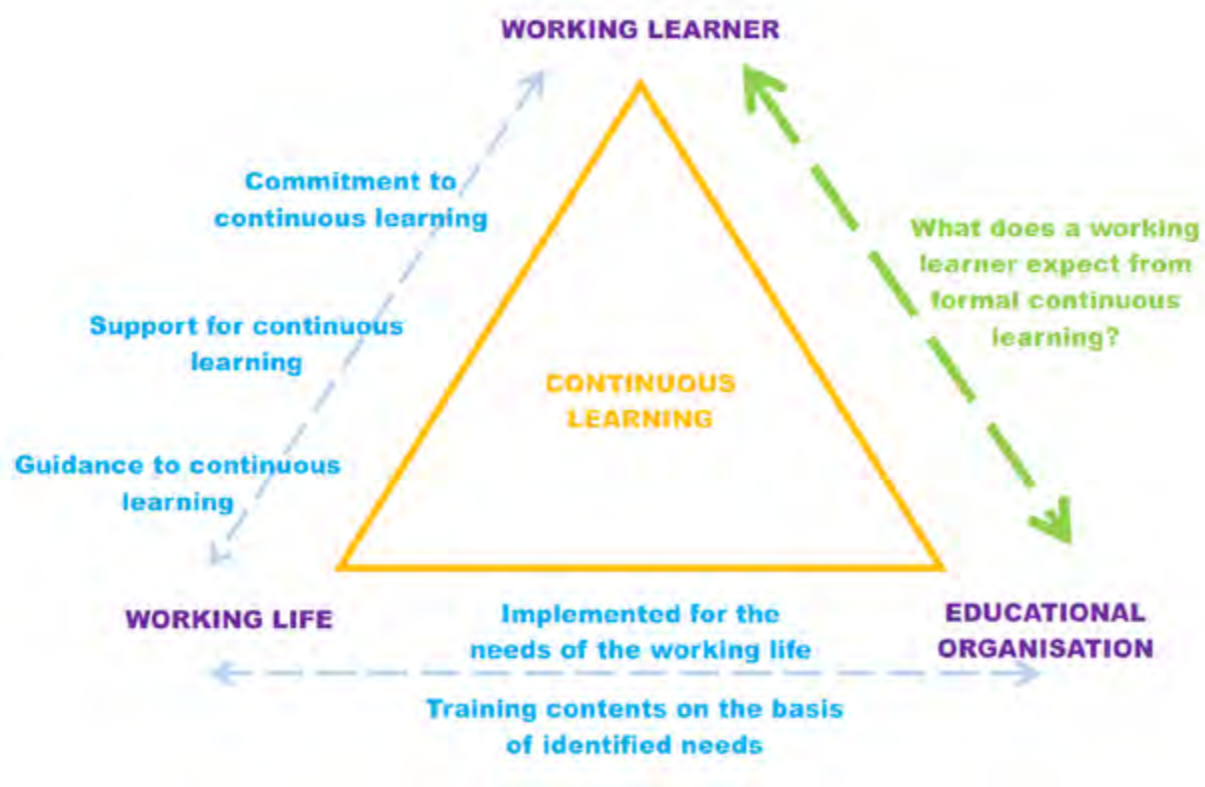


FIGURE 1. CONTINUOUS LEARNING IS COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE LEARNER, WORKING LIFE AND EDUCATIONAL ORGANISATION (ERKKILÄ AND KORTESALMI, 2020).

## Working learners' views of organising impactful education

The data was collected from working learners (n=68) who participated in courses and training sessions (later trainings) in the framework of the Urban Growth Vantaa Project. The trainings were implemented at Laurea and Metropolia Universities of Applied Sciences as in-person learning with support from online materials. The training sessions were based on the needs of the working life and organised during mornings or afternoons. Working learners were provided a learning platform on which the educator added assignments supporting the in-person meetings and individual learning as well as materials for further study.

The trainings were co-developed together with educational organisations (Laurea and Metropolia), representatives of the working life (partner companies of the project) and working learners (learners who participated in pilot trainings for partner companies'). We organised 13 workshops in which employees, supervisors and management of the company discussed competences needed in the working life. The training was planned and organised on the basis of material from the workshops. The educational organisations were responsible for the co-creation. The training aimed to utilise implementation methods with contents that corresponded to the working life needs so that the implementation was motivating and flexible and considered the learner's operating environment. The themes of the training revolved around business, and they were offered to the project's target group of companies during autumn 2019 and spring 2020. A total of 159 people participated in these training experiments piloted for Vantaa-based SMEs.

## Implementation of the survey

After the training, the participants received a link to an electronic feedback survey via email. Most of the questions were closed-ended, and the respondents selected the most suitable response on a scale of fully agree — completely disagree. These questions were obligatory. Material for this analysis consists of the answers to the voluntary open-ended questions.

The open-ended questions asked the respondents to respond with their own words, and the questions were formulated so that they would complete the information collected with the multiplechoice questions and dropdown



RESULTS OF THE SURVEY INDICATE THAT LEARNERS WERE EXPECTING AN INTELLECTUAL CHALLENGE, PROFESSIONAL EDUCATOR, UP-TO-DATE MATERIALS AND FLEXIBLE ARRANGEMENTS FROM THE TRAINING.



options. The questions were in the form “In your own words, explain what/what kind/how...”. The respondents had the possibility to give feedback in their own words and to complement the answers they had given in the earlier questions. On average, 21 per cent of the participants responded to the open-ended questions. In general, the project’s training received positive feedback; respondents were mainly satisfied with the implementation, educators and content.

The participants answered the open-ended questions with versatile and rich descriptions of a successful and ideal training. The context of the responses was the training organised in the framework of the Urban Growth Vantaa Project. Trainings were different from education that leads to a degree diploma in terms of duration and contents. We tried to reduce the impact of the selected implementation method on the responses by giving the respondents the possibility to describe their ideal implementation, content, motivation and impact. Another factor impacting the content of the responses was the closed-ended questions in the feedback survey. The provided responses did not follow the vocabulary or themes in the closed-ended questions. Thus, the collected material is considered reliable. The free-formed verbal responses in the survey’s open-ended questions were analysed in a data-driven manner by utilising content analysis methods.

### Working learners want to feel motivated, succeed and exchange experiences

The qualitative data was analysed by content analysis (strategy). There were four themes: the training implementation, training content, the educator’s ability to motivate and personal impact. Open-ended responses related to each theme were analysed individually. We will present the results in the order of the themes.

#### THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE TRAINING CAN CHALLENGE THE LEARNER’S MIND BUT THE NOT THE DAILY LIFE

The material highlighted four implementation-related factors that support the working learner’s learning process. The learners were expecting intellectual challenges, but the implementation method should not challenge their

### The participants answered the open-ended questions with versatile and rich descriptions of a successful and ideal training.

daily life. Firstly, the working learners appreciated a professional and up-to-date educator. An inspiring educator challenged learners’ old-fashioned thinking, sparred them on, gave feedback and, at best, guided them in a rather individual manner to find current insights.

*“The assignments and feedback helped me learn and made me more confident about my work.”*

A working learner was expecting up-to-date content and assignments. The educator’s expertise was essential in the drafting of clear and challenging materials. Thirdly, the respondents expected the practical arrangements to be flexible. Working learners appreciated motivating in-person sessions and sufficient time to adopt everything between the in-person meetings.

*“Enough time for self-studies complemented by actual meetings. This course had successful arrangements.”*

Working learners were particularly unanimous on how the practical arrangements could support their daily life: in-person meetings before noon, a few hours in duration and not too often. It should be noted that working learners did not really want remote meetings. They felt that they learn best together with others. They thought that an online learning environment is important to support their learning, but in-person meetings were a self-evident part of learning.

*“The more practical information that I can use in my work, the better.”*

Fourth, the respondents thought that their learning was supported by renewing their professional framework. An impactful training stirred the learner, challenged and developed their “old-fashioned” thinking. An important factor in enabling this was defining the group’s and individual learner’s needs and reacting to them in an agile manner during the training. Meetings with others also enabled the learners to compare their situations with each other.

#### PARTICIPANTS WANTED CONCRETE TOOLS THEY COULD USE AT WORK

The working learners appreciated the concrete tools, models and process descriptions that they could immediately apply at work. The development of skills and more efficient work practices were some of the expected consequences.



WORKING LEARNERS APPRECIATED THE FACT THAT THEY COULD UTILISE THEIR INSIGHTS DIRECTLY AT WORK.

A more experienced learner wanted adequate contents. It should include practical insights applicable directly at work, the insights should correspond to the learners’ needs and preferably make work easier.

*“Concrete models and templates that I can utilise, not just useless theories.”*

The role timeliness and credibility of contents and materials were emphasized in continuous learning. The educator was expected to use relevant, research-based contents and well-designed comprehensive materials. The learners thought it was important to be confident of being learning best practices and not wasting time or making a poor investment. A working learner knows how to be critical of the teaching. Even if a working learner might not always know what they want to learn, they will surely know what they do not want to learn. The working learners felt that they have already gained their general knowledge elsewhere.

#### A CONNECTION WITH THE OTHER LEARNERS AND EDUCATOR MADE THE TRAINING MOTIVATING

If important factors for contents were convincing information and directly applicable concrete insights, the motivational factors were communal in nature. The participants appreciated in-person meetings, peer discussions and shared insights. In other words, the training was considered meaningful because of the interaction with the learners and the educator.

*“Discussions as well as good ideas from the training and other participants.”*

The learners already had experience from the working life. Discussions and joint reflections, prompted by experiences, were considered to bring clear and meaningful added value. Working learners did not associate to learn just from the educator — they were also learning from their peers and from the competence network. The learners were great-

ly motivated by the immediate benefits their increased competences created. In the long term, shaking up one's thoughts was considered motivating.

*"Becoming aware of my old-fashioned thought patterns increased the willingness to diversify my competences."*

Feedback was also considered to be a motivating factor. The participants expected the educator to give encouraging and individual feedback. This is considered to be a consequence of the feedback-oriented culture in work communities. People are used to receive and give quick feedback in a work places. Feedback helped him to confirm the direction of development and efficiency of his activities.

The material highlighted the fact that, for the purpose of this survey's target group, continuous learning was associated to acquiring practical information for a specific need. It was important for working learners to be able to utilise the insights immediately. This kind of learning, tied directly to work, gives the learner competences in specific areas that will not give a same kind of an added value for the learner as a complete degree. In short, renewals of capabilities, the clear value of using the insights was a sufficient immediate benefit for the learner.

**LEARNING INCREASED THE FEELING OF SELF-EFFICACY AND ACCELERATED PROFESSIONAL GROWTH**

As working learners described the impact the studies had on them, they were able to identify strong positive feelings promoting learning and its impact.

Training gave insights, strengthened self-efficacy and gave courage for professional interaction.

*"You shouldn't get stuck on the current routines but, instead, seek out new challenges. I started to think about how things are in my life, work and the working community, and what kind of improvements or changes I would like to make."*

Professional development was seen as another important and expected consequence. The learners thought it was important to get ideas and tools to develop their work. Insights and new ideas also created enthusiasm, the courage to implement

**Adult learners bring their views regarding learning and teaching to the education situation. This challenges the educator.**

changes and to test operating methods in their own organisations. A reminder of the existing competence was also an important experience.

*"The course took my professional development forward, so it fulfilled my objectives perfectly."*

Positive learning experiences also strengthened the feeling of being able to increase one's competences even further. The learners said that they had been inspired to reflect on a deeper level. Learning also increased their willingness to learn new things and to seek more challenges. Thus, participating in the training did not just produce quick insights and ready-made models for one's work. The participants said the training and learning experiences functioned as a spark for a more long-term change.

*"I started to think about how I could develop."*

**Excitement and immediate personal benefits encourage continuous learning**

It is challenging to place the competence development to the working life. To enable this, the learner, working life and educator must collaborate for it to work. The working learner's agency plays an important role in this (Schoon 2018). First of all, positive learning experiences build self-efficacy and curiosity and increase the willingness to develop even further. Secondly, the impact of the environment, both the possibilities offered by the employer as well as the structure and content of the studies offered by the educational organisation, have a strong impact on the working learner's experience of the teaching and learning.

In this article, we have described the elements of the relationship between the working learner and educational organisation (figure 2). To enable impactful continuous learning, each stakeholder needs to be committed. It is important for each stakeholder to identify their contribution in the process. Based on our data, the most important factors of continuous learning for a working learner are to accelerate their professional growth, to learn in inspiring interaction with peers as well as to utilise immediately the competences in real life.

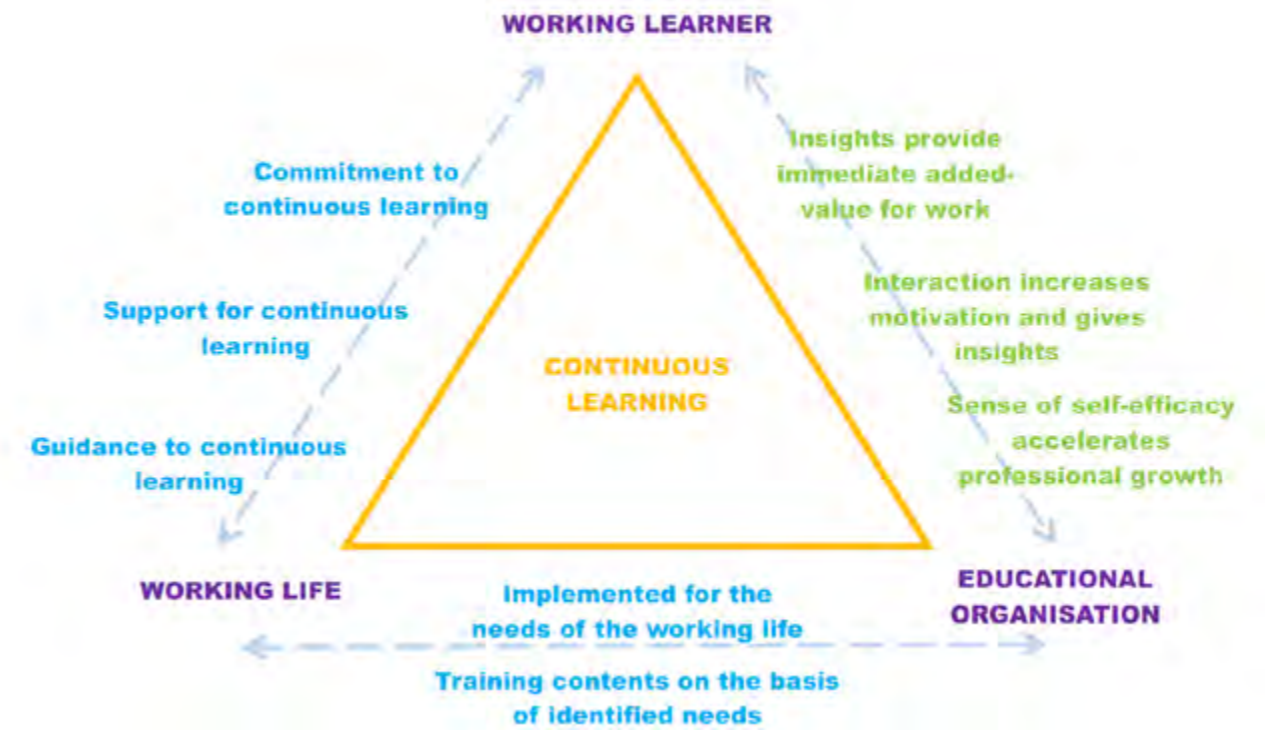


FIGURE 2. CONTINUOUS LEARNING IS COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE LEARNER, WORKING LIFE AND EDUCATIONAL ORGANISATION — WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM A WORKING LEARNER? (ERKKILÄ AND KORTESALMI, 2020)

**Working learners are demanding customers. It is necessary to understand their needs to plan a successful training.**

A working learner wants to benefit from the training, particularly in the short term. For example, new tools and models can be immediately applied in one's work. In return for the time invested in learning, a working learner expects to receive up-to-date contents from a professional educator. The participants expect the implementation to include professional guidance and interactive elements, because reflecting together produces insights, and receiving feedback improves their learning. According to our data, online studies, which is considered to be a flexible form of studying, are not ideal for the working learner if interaction and feedback are overlooked. Becoming excited about learning and experiencing new things encourage people for continuous development and support professional growth.

It is challenging to design inspiring continuous learning trainings. It is a good idea to think about how to implement

contents tailored individually for the learner without compromising on the communal nature and still enabling peer learning. In other words, working learners want flexi-

ble implementation methods that acknowledge individual needs as well as to interact together with other learners. This means that the educator should be a seasoned professional, who studies the learners' needs in advance. The educator should also be able to react to them as the implementation progresses.

In a learning situation, a working learner expects to be guided to relevant information sources. It is particularly important for the learner to understand how the insights benefit them. On the other hand, adult learners also bring their views regarding learning and teaching to the education session. This setting challenges the educator. An adult learner should take responsibility for their learning, and the guidance should support them (Billet 2018).



THE EDUCATIONAL ORGANISATION CAN TAKE A CLEAR AND VISIBLE ROLE IN THE FIELD OF CONTINUOUS LEARNING AND PROFILE ITS OFFERING.

Before implementation, the working learner should be given a clear idea of what the objectives of the training are. Commitment and motivation are maintained and the success of the implementation promoted by ensuring meaningful learning objectives for the working learner. The quality of the education is often considered to be directly aligned with the educator's credibility. At best, the educator can help the educational organisation to differentiate itself from other service providers.

What can we learn from the findings? Firstly, the working learner's specific needs challenge both the planning and implementation of the education. Secondly, when planning a successful implementation, the customer's (the working learner) needs must be understood.

Workplaces are not currently managing competence development sufficiently. Immediate supervisors' possibilities and resources to offer training alternatives and paths for competence development vary. Going forward, educational organisations should help learners to tailor their development paths independently. A skilled educator can identify the learner's needs as well as guide the learner to further studies and facilitate the continuous learning process.


The educational organisation is able to take a clear role in directing the learner and in profiling its offering in the field of continuous learning. It is also important to make sure that the implementation and contents of continuous learning correspond with a working or adult learner's needs. We found that needs and expectations and needs are not met ideally by allowing working learners access to degree study modules. A continuous learner can be seen as someone who is looking for specific insights and study modules that he can utilize instead of larger education packages, hence their commitment to just one educational organisation is limited. Institutes of higher education do not have an easy role balancing the employee's needs, company's expectations and societal anticipations for growth and well-being.

At best, a working learner experiences feelings of success, excitement and confidence as they learn. Continuous learning is not just about renewing competences. At best, the working learner's self-efficacy for learning is strengthened. By acknowledging elements that interest the working learner, it is possible to attract them to new kind of trainings and to unlearn the old norm of learning things by heart. Elements that support learning and motivate learners make continuous learning meaningful for the working learner in a resource-efficient manner. ■

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A top-down view of a white ceramic coffee cup filled with dark coffee, sitting on a matching saucer. The cup and saucer are placed on a white, wrinkled fabric surface. To the left of the coffee, a portion of a silver laptop is visible, showing the Apple logo. The overall scene is bright and clean, suggesting a morning routine or a workspace.

# **MORNING COFFEE WEBINARS**

**– INSPIRATIONS  
FOR COMPETENCE  
AND COMPANY  
DEVELOPMENT**

## 30-minute-long morning coffee webinars were held almost weekly. They gathered together people interested in developing themselves and their companies.

As COVID-19 emerged in the spring 2020, it messed up practically everyone's work and personal life. Several organisations switched to remote work because of the governments' recommendations regarding gatherings that even closed down schools. This meant that people had to come up

with new solutions for public events and meetings. What do you do when plans are cancelled but your schedule isn't so flexible?

The sudden societal change forced companies to face a new and surprising situation. Orders and customers could disappear completely. Companies had to think about how to survive in the change and crisis situation, how to pay salaries, how to restructure business activities and if the situation could be utilised to develop staff's competences.

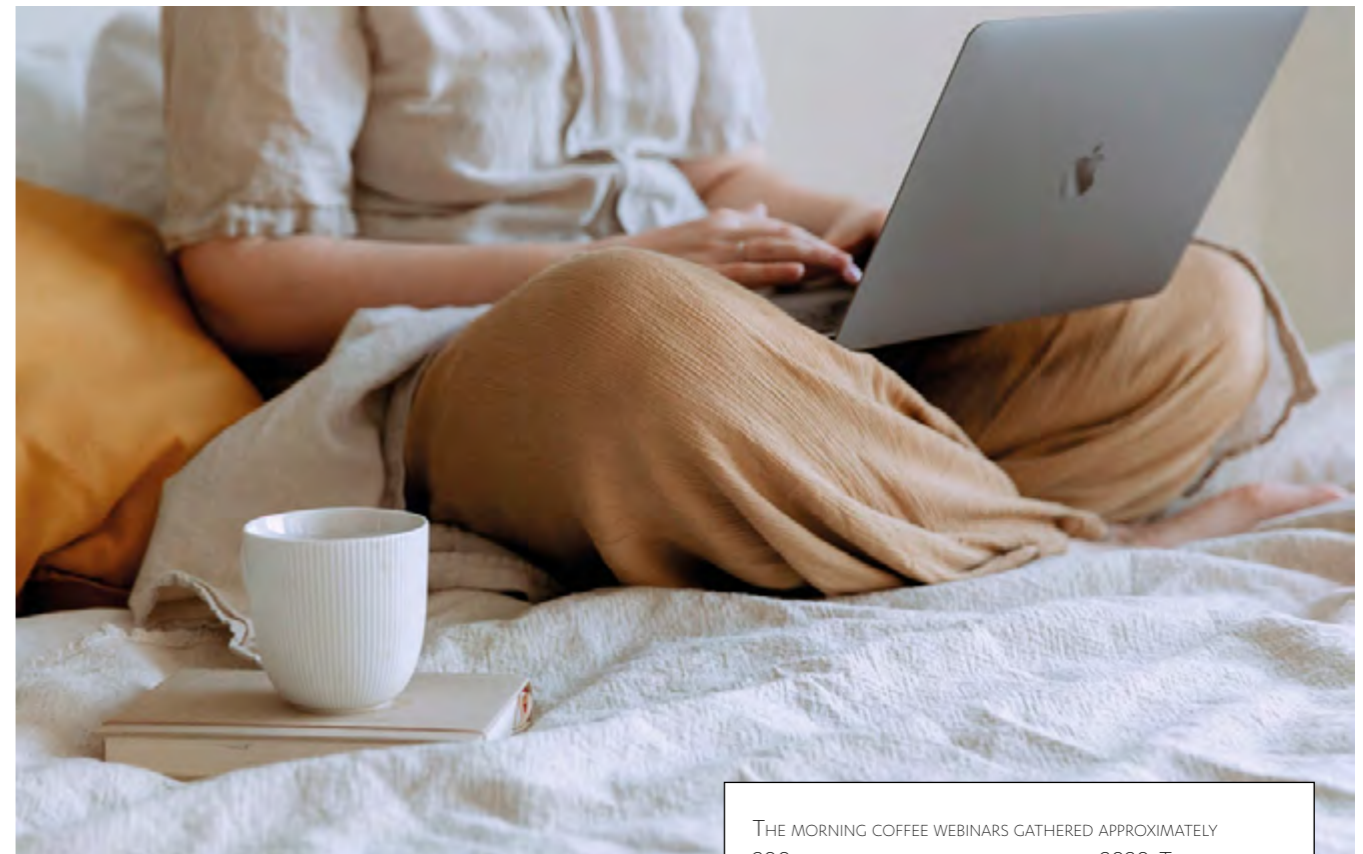
With respect to the companies' changed needs, the Urban Growth Vantaa project developed morning coffee webinars as one solution. These efficient 30-minute meetings were primarily planned for the needs of the project's target companies but eventually they were open for everyone and free of charge. During the webinars, experts from various fields discussed current questions related to the development of business, work and competences. The purpose was to offer inspiring and easy-to-approach events on hot topics, such as how IoT technology can be used to boost business and support growth. The webinars also aimed to inspire the project's target companies to use its services in the future.

### From building trust to crisis economy

The morning coffee webinars were planned and organised in a quick schedule in the spring 2020. They continued in the autumn with new topics. Webinars were organised on Zoom almost every week in May–June and the autumn. The sessions covered a wide range of topics from managing diversity to building trust and the crisis economy:

- Resilience as a support in change
- Work and professions are changing! Can I keep up?
- Significance of interaction and trust in supervisor-employee relationship
- Facing unemployment at the age of 55 — How can I shape my future? Personal and business perspective
- "A cosy B&B by the sea" — How do you transform your dreams into a profitable business?
- What can a SME learn from baseball?
- Change of the labour market and competence needs
- How to build trust in working life?
- Managing diversity, parts 1–5
- Utilising data analytics to boost your business
- How can IoT technology strengthen the growth of your company?
- The curse of COVID-19 in business — Can I stick to my values? Biila's story.
- Will your company's finances survive the crisis?
- Efficient and interactive remote meetings

The topics were planned in a cooperation with the project experts. They responded to the change in the business environment and needs identified in the companies. The experts from Metropolia and Laurea Universities of Applied Sciences as well as Vantaa Vocational College Varia led the



THE MORNING COFFEE WEBINARS GATHERED APPROXIMATELY 200 LEARNERS IN THE SPRING AND AUTUMN 2020. THE TOPICS DEALT WITH BUSINESS FROM DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES AS WELL AS COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT.

webinars. Several sessions also had an external guest. The discussions were organised as a dialogue or interview. The participants also had the chance to take part in the discussion and pose questions.

The morning coffee webinars gathered around 200 participations altogether. Most of the participants were employees in Vantaa-based companies and organisations. In addition, some jobseekers and students participated as well. The most popular sessions were the ones dealing with diversity management.

### Morning coffee webinars require new skills

The morning coffee webinars were a way to flexibly adapt to the changed situation created by the crisis. The project needed to react quickly, reorganize work and sharpen digital skills. Adopting the online platform tools, sending invitation links, understanding various online facilitation techniques and having smooth collaboration with the guests and participants required a variety of skills.

The webinars were planned to last for "a cup of coffee" so that it would not take away too much time from companies surviving in the crisis and other participants. The 30-minute time limit also posed a set of challenges. It was noted that it is important for the organisers to prepare carefully, practice in advance and get to know other webinars. The topic should

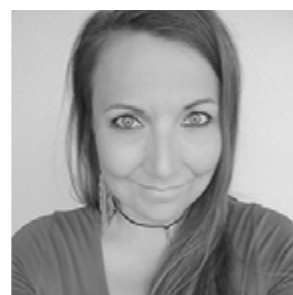
be presented in a compact, yet inspiring manner. Naturally, you can usually only scratch the surface in 30 minutes. Nevertheless, participants should be able to have at least one inspiring thought after the event. Therefore, the topic should be clear and concrete — one that spikes interest.

All in all, attitudes towards the webinars were positive although some topics were considered more interesting than others. Concreteness and currentness are the key when coming up with the topic.

### Tips for organising morning coffee webinars:

- Plan the event well; preferably minute-by-minute
- Rehearse in advance
- Test and learn to use the technology and devices
- Send the invitation well in advance
- Inform participants about the content and schedule of the event clearly
- Talk directly to the camera
- Engage participants in the discussion (depending on the topic)
- Do not have too much text on presentation slides
- Use various online facilitation techniques
- Stick to the schedule
- Send a thank-you message ■

**Anna Linna** Anna Linna (M.Sc.) works as Project Coordinator at Metropolia University of Applied Sciences. In the project, she focuses on monitoring and evaluation, reporting and various communication tasks.



A woman with blonde hair, wearing a blue blazer over a white shirt, is looking intently at a computer screen. She is in a meeting room, with other people's hands and arms visible in the foreground, suggesting a collaborative work environment. The background is slightly blurred, showing office furniture and walls.

# SOCIAL RECRUITMENT IS AN OPPORTUNITY, NOT A THREAT

Vantaa Tilapalvelut Vantti Oy's ambition is to support the employment of immigrants and those who are partially disabled or long-term unemployed. Vantti has networked with various actors without middlemen and created its own model to support the employment of unemployed job-seekers. Vantti wants to encourage other companies to invest in social recruitment by being an example with successful employment stories.

VANTTI IS A COMPANY OWNED BY THE CITY OF VANTAA WHICH PRODUCES MEAL, CLEANING, PROPERTY, LOBBY AND SECURITY SERVICES FOR THE CITY OF VANTAA.



Recruitment is social when the recruitment of people in the target group is taken care of in a specific manner in phases. The target group contains people who fulfil certain criteria, such as long-term unemployment, immigration and people in a difficult career phase or classified as partially disabled. In addition to the TE office, various disability associations and organisations as well as job coaching services provided assistance in finding labour force from these target groups.

Vantaa Tilapalvelut Vantti Oy's ambition is to support the employment of immigrants and long-term unemployed and partially disabled people. The company also employs people who have been granted rehabilitation subsidies. They are offered the chance to return to the working life through work try-outs. Generally, the employment relationship begins as a work try-out or job coaching on a case-by-case basis. This means that both the employ-

ee and employer have the possibility to assess whether the job is suitable for the person in the long term. The purpose of the work try-out is always to lead to employment if at all possible.

**Social recruitment is recruitment happening in phases in a defined manner.**

Other forms of employment exist as well. Apprenticeships are a way to hire an unemployed job-seeker directly to the company and give them a tailored training to the vacant position. We have hired a few unemployed job-seekers to various departments at Vantti in this manner. Pay subsidy can be applied already as the apprenticeship is being prepared before

the employment relationship begins. Once you have been granted a pay subsidy, the apprenticeship can take effect, and Vantti's own temporary work contract can be signed. The employer can apply for pay subsidy for the duration of the entire apprenticeship. The employment contract in an apprenticeship with pay subsidy is temporary. In the same

**Minna Tuomi** participates in the initiative as Project Coordinator at partner company Vantaan Tilapalvelut Vantti Oy. She has a long career in managerial positions within the restaurant industry and has led large projects. Developing operations is her preferred way of working.



manner, a temporary apprenticeship can be organised as vocational rehabilitation with support from an insurance agency. The contract is signed once the insurance agency has granted the rehabilitation benefit.

**Supported employment is a common cause**

Supported employment is based on a mutual agreement that is advanced with the person looking for work, the person coaching for the job and the company. The coach helps the job-seeker find a suitable job and guides the job-seeker and employer in matters related to the employment relationship. The company surveys suitable tasks, location and a work community that the employed person would be best suited for. Vantti also acknowledges where the person lives so that commuting to work would be as effortless as possible and not cause extra stress. With good advance planning, recruitment is more likely to be successful and lead to a good end result.

The purpose of supported employment is to promote access to paid employment in the open labour market among groups that need special support as well as to support the continuation of their employment in the long term. At the same time, we strengthen disabled people's right to work. Vantti wants to participate in this collaboration and provide jobs on social grounds. Job coaching services are produced and sold by various service providers, such as multi-service centres and private service providers. Job coaching is also offered by various companies, associations, foundations, organisations, educational institutes, municipalities and cities. The purpose is to find a job on the open labour market.

**Vantti creates important employment work through networking**

Vantti has made recruitment and social recruitment more efficient with the help of the collaboration created in the Urban Growth Vantaa project. We networked with various actors without any middlemen and created our own model to support the employment of unemployed job-seekers.

We have carried out direct collaboration with, for example, the City of Vantaa's occupational rehabilitation and job coaching organisations. We have partnered with the City of Vantaa's competence centre which supports the employment of immigrants. In addition, we collaborate with Live Palvelut, a coaching and specialist company focused on employing those who need special support. Vantti has also

networked with the City of Helsinki's Supported Employment service.

A particularly important collaboration for Vantaa has been Virtaamo, an employment coaching service for the disabled. The company works together with customer to look for work that matches the customer's competence and ability to work. The service offered by Virtaamo is free for both the customer and the employing company. Most disabled persons employed by Vantti have been found through Virtaamo.

To enhance recruitment, Vantti created an internal operating model in addition to the existing external operating model. We surveyed the employee needs together with regional supervisors and communicated them to the collaboration partners. The collaboration partners sent the job-seekers' resumes to us in advance, and we read them in the company's internal meetings, after which the most suitable candidates were invited to interviews. As a concrete measure in the fall 2019, we organised Vantti's own recruitment fair together with Virtaamo, where employee candidates were directly invited to quick interviews with our company's supervisors. Thus, the recruiting was made as easy as possible for the supervisors. A requirement for the operating model is that the company must have an active person who takes care of networking and arranges everything. These recruitments have been particularly successful at Vantti. Employments happened quickly after the new operating model was implemented. Vantti has used the operating model created in the context of the project to employ immigrants, partially disabled people, unemployed job-seekers and disabled people. We have also employed unemployed job-seekers from job coaching services through vocational rehabilitation. The employments started as work try-outs. Some continued as apprenticeships to train for tasks at Vantti.

**The project collaboration produced top results in recruitment**

The contacts created as a partner company in the Urban Growth Vantaa project as well as our own networking with various actors have supported this new operating method that has brought a lot of competence to Vantti. Our collaboration with the above parties created 34 jobs at Vantti in the six months of Growth Deal 1, which was part of the Urban Growth Vantaa project. The development of collaboration and promotion of employment has continued in

## The current employment model does not function well enough. We need an efficient core network, management of the big picture and collaboration.

2020. In particular, Vantti has succeeded in employing more partially disabled and disabled people. Vantti has employed 46 of them with the help of Virtaamo and Live Palvelut. In addition, a few recruitments have come from other collaboration partners.

The same method can be recommended to other companies. More networking and direct collaboration with actors who aim to rehabilitate and employ those in a difficult labour market position.

In my opinion, the TE Office should take a stronger role as an actor supporting employment by, for example, offering pay subsidies to as many people as possible. I think that

pay subsidy could be offered to all unemployed people for a temporary time, not just the long-term unemployed or partially disabled. The same could apply to the Vantaa and Helsinki subsidies, which are paid in addition to the pay subsidy to support recruitment. Why is this benefit not paid for the employment of all unemployed, as it would be more affordable for the government than paying unemployment benefits without any obligations at all? This way, more people would be employed and become a productive part of the society. Companies would be more likely to hire someone who has been absent from the working life if the company received a relief for salaries.

Employment initiatives such as the Urban Growth Vantaa project are necessary precisely because the current employment model does not function well enough, and we are not able to reduce unemployment with the existing measures. Companies, the TE Office and other employment-promoting parties should develop this collaboration to make it function better.

As I have done research, I have noticed that there are various employment initiatives and actors doing good things to support employment. However, no one is managing the big picture, and there's a need for a larger collaboration network. Activities do not often lead to results, or the results

are known by just a few insiders. There's a lack of communication, and actors cannot find each other or do not know what the others are doing, thus leaving them unable to collaborate. Either the employment initiative or financing ends before anything has been advanced in a sufficient manner, or the work does not produce results because potential collaboration partners cannot be found. Finland should be more aware of this perspective of employment and develop collaboration with existing actors. A lot of work and numerous initiatives do not guarantee quality and results — an efficient core network and collaboration do. The Urban Growth Vantaa project has tried to solve this specific problem. ■

## VANTTI EMPLOYED AN ACTIVE AND POSITIVE GROUP OF PEOPLE

Collaboration with Helsinki's Supported Employment services brought Caretaker **Atte Salo** to heat up saunas in Kuusijärvi and **Tero Järvi** to maintain the area as Vantti's employees. Atte Salo heats up the smoke saunas in Kuusijärvi every day. Heating up smoke saunas demands special skills that not many people have. The person must be conscientious, skilled and reliable, which is exactly what Atte is. He is always there, taking care of his tasks meticulously and well. It's hard to find a replacement for Atte, as you need to have special skills to heat up a smoke sauna, so Atte's contribution is invaluable for Vantti. We are now training one person to help out when Atte is on holiday.

Assistant Tero Järvi takes care of the maintenance of the grounds. He makes sure that Kuusijärvi's grounds and outdoor recreation areas are in excellent shape throughout the year. Tero's tasks include all regular property maintenance tasks. In the summer, he cuts and trims the grass and ploughs the snow in the winter. These energetic Vantti employees take care of the services in the Kuusijärvi recreation area and create a positive atmosphere in the entire outdoor area with their work. Our employees often receive positive feedback from people visiting Kuusijärvi, according to Service Manager Instructor **Masi Majaneva** from Vantti. Atte and Tero have such positive attitudes to work that would benefit all of. We are very happy to have them work with us

at Vantti. Both men work part-time per their own request, and they have permanent contracts.

Coach **Mirjam Ruusunen** from Helsinki's Supported Employment services comments:

"We have collaborated with Vantti also in the area of summer workers. Helsinki's Supported Employment services have found stand-ins for Vantti's permanent employees' summer holidays. Their tasks include heating up the saunas and taking care of the outdoor areas at Kuusijärvi. Many job-seekers in our service have gotten valuable work experience at Vantti, and the company has gotten employees who have wanted to and been able to work part-time. The permanent employees have carefully trained the new employees as they have experience from working at Kuusijärvi for a long time — some have even worked there for more than 5 years.

**Oskari Malmström** was employed by Vantti through Virtaamo. Oskari currently works with food services at nursing home Myyrinkoti with a temporary contract. He works full-time, and his job includes all of the varying tasks in food services. Vantti's Regional Supervisor **Teija Karimäki** told us that Oskari is an excellent employee who has done an outstanding job during the pandemic. Oskari is a really happy and good guy who puts the entire team in a positive mood.

He will join Vantti in the beginning of 2021 with a permanent contract, Karimäki confirms.

All partially disabled people worked throughout the entire difficult COVID-19 situation in the spring 2020 even though other Vantti employees were temporarily laid off, so we owe a big thank you for their contribution. The role of partially disabled employees was highlighted even further, and they have been an irreplaceable help for the company.

Job coaches support job-seekers, help implement the recruitment and support orientation at the workplace. Vantti currently employs 40 partially disabled or disabled people,

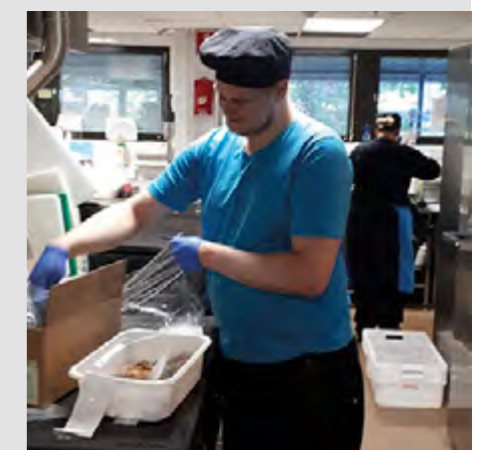
and their employment continues. In the coming winter season, the number of employed people will increase even further, as we have had a really positive experience with these partially disabled employees. Good collaboration and its continuation with our partners is key in supporting and enabling these recruitments. The employees' tasks are assisting tasks in cleaning, meal and property services. Vantti wants to take part in supporting social recruitment and encourage other companies to recruit partially disabled and disabled job-seekers as well. We want our successful employment stories to function as an example. ■



RELIABLE, CONSCIENTIOUS AND SKILLED ATTE SALO AT HIS FAVOURITE TASK: HEATING UP SMOKE SAUNAS.




TERO JÄRVI DOES AN EXCELLENT JOB AT TAKING CARE OF THE OUTDOOR AREAS AT KUUSIJÄRVI.



OSKARI MALMSTRÖM'S POSITIVE NATURE AND HARD-WORKING ATTITUDE CREATE A GOOD SPIRIT FOR THE ENTIRE TEAM.



# TAILORED COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT SOLUTIONS BENEFIT SMES



Competence development must be agile in a constantly changing society and working life. Workplace learning and its guidance have a key role in the development of companies. Companies benefit more from tailored coaching than training individual employees. Business coaching can focus on an identified business development challenge in the company.

Changes in the work environment impact employees' competence requirements. Work tasks are becoming more digitalised and automated, which means employees must be ready to develop. Employees' competences and change resilience play a key role as companies face change situations. Because employees and their competences lay the foundation for competitiveness, companies should invest in the development of their employees' competence (Ojala & Pöysti 2012, 32).

Competence development should be seen as a strategic measure, which means it should be led in a systematic manner. Quickly changing tasks and their demands challenge companies. Competence needs are difficult to anticipate, so the necessary competence might not be available. This means that it's important for the management to be interested in employees' competences and enable competence development to ensure skilled labour force for the future.

### Continuous learning and support are needed in the changing working life

With today's changing competence needs, the idea of work as continuous learning is emphasised. Employees need support to solve the daily learning challenges that arise at work. This is why the significance of support and guidance from the organisation is highlighted during the learning process. This raises the question of how learning is supported at workplaces or in work communities. (Lemmetty 2020, 86.)

Guidance skills are significant for learning, as everyone is a counsellor, developer, and coach of everyone else's learning. A supervisor can guide learning or a colleague act as an enabler of learn-

ing. Counsellors also help bring new perspectives to work. Sometimes, it's good to stop and get some distance to your work and activities. It is possible to learn new things when you occasionally look at the situation from a distance. We need curiosity, enthusiasm and motivation to learn in the different phases of the working life. (Kupias & Peltola 2019, 246–249.)

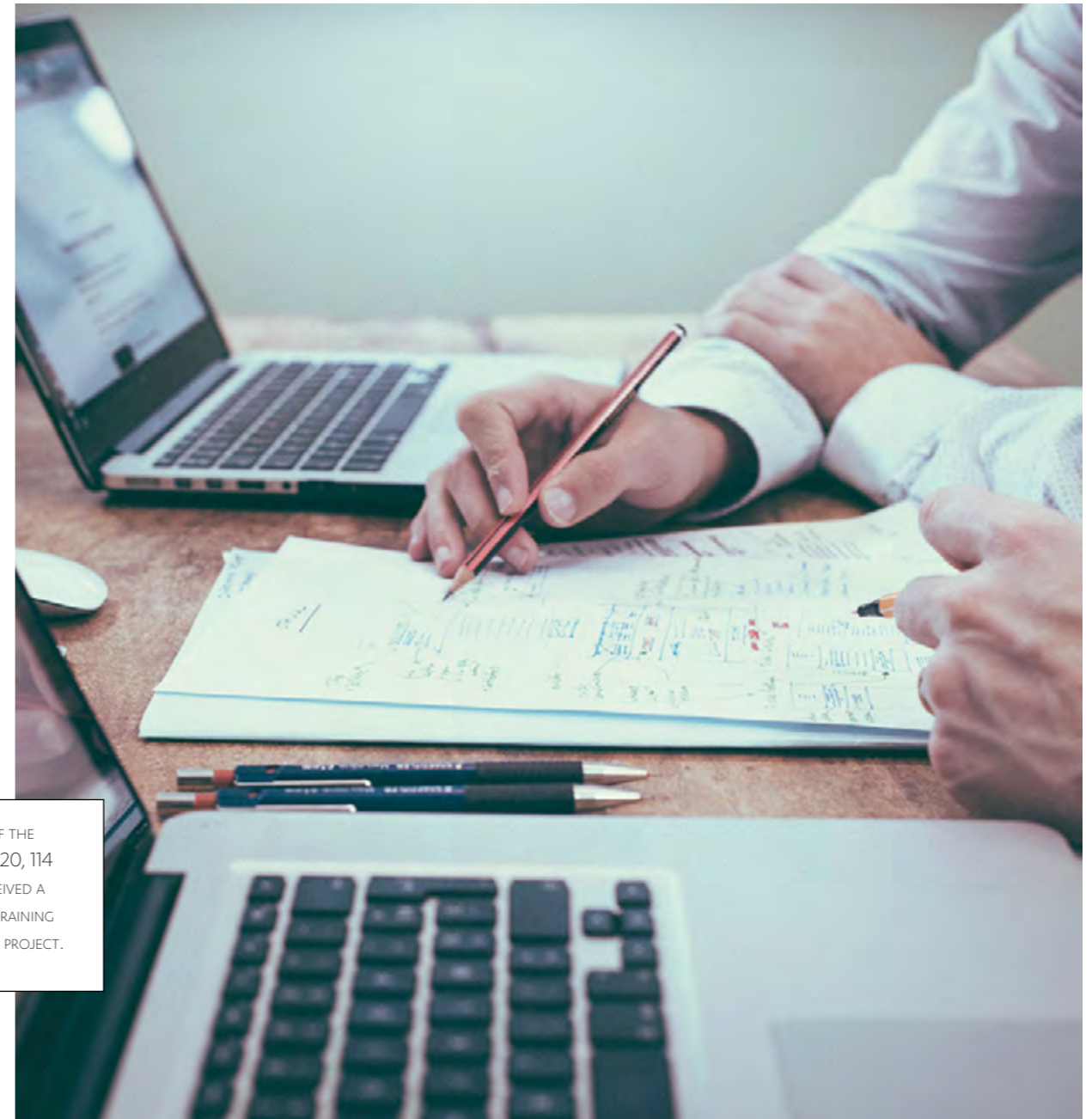
Companies need employees who have the ability to acquire and adopt new information and who know how to apply this information to problem solving or the development of work (Ojala 2019, 29). Without employees' ability to learn, creativity and competence, workplaces cannot produce new solutions to unprecedented situations that might arise suddenly (Ojala 2008, 16). Thus, companies should think it's important to have the ability to learn continuously and understand the need for competence renewal.

The Urban Growth Vantaa project works with SMEs that employ 10–200 employees. Our target companies come from various sectors, and their sizes vary. The smaller companies do not have separate administrative units, as employees participate in a variety of tasks in the company. Larger SMEs have appointed employees who are responsible for matters such as HR, sales or finances. During the project, we have identified the significance of having a person who is responsible for competence development. Many companies have the need for concrete guidance and support to help their employees find applicable competence development services.

**Competence development should be seen as a strategic measure.**

### Interaction in the work community supports workplace learning

Wisdom, skills, and competences are often created in a situation in which



AT THE TURN OF THE YEAR 2019–2020, 114 EMPLOYEES RECEIVED A FOUR-MONTH TRAINING OFFERED BY THE PROJECT.

people interact with others and utilise the resources and materials around them (Grönfors 2010, 20). Thus, interaction plays an important role in learning. When you are looking for a solution and reflecting on your options, it's usually very fruitful to process the matter with a colleague. You get new perspectives by asking for advice or an opinion.

It's important for the working community or team to stop and look at what they have learnt, as learning experiences are not always created spontaneously. It is also essential to process achievements and results; what kind of successes or failures did you have and what can you learn from those situations.

When the members of a team are not working in the same physical location, interaction is not created by coincidence.

The company can have various offices, which means your colleague can work in a completely different location. In the past year, remote work has also increased significantly, which has changed interaction. Meetings are planned in advance and scheduled efficiently. This means that casual reflection and discussions as well as spontaneous innovations are easily missed. It is a good idea to schedule some time in your calendar to identify and share insights. It is possible that the most important insights for your work might come from your colleagues.

### Learning must be tied to working

Before, studying and working were seen more as something that happened one after the other. However, many

**Elina Taponen** participates in the initiative as Project Manager for Metropolia University of Sciences. Elina is a specialist in continuous learning and competence development. She is interested in workplace learning solutions developed for corporate needs.





▶ people are now studying and increasing their competences as they work. Learning is also often carried out in the context of work. This means that learning is created out of a need, problem or goal instead of planning in advance what you should learn and where. The faster competence expires, the more important it is to have the ability to learn new things continuously.

Traditional courses and training sessions are not the most agile or efficient way to gain new competences at the exact moment the organisation needs it. New insights are sought from various sources, and they are usually most readily available from colleagues, professional networks or various channels.

Short-term training and coaching sessions organised outside the organisation have been quite popular for a long time. At times, the challenge with them is how difficult it is to apply the learnt insights to practice at workplaces (Grönfors 2010, 125; Kupias & Peltola 2019, 27)

This is related to the fact that thinking and learning are always context related. It is challenging for the learner to connect what they are learning to the correct context if

**Without the employees' ability to learn, creativity and competence, workplaces cannot produce new solutions in unprecedented situations.**

it's not linked to a real situation or their job. To be able to adopt knowledge in a profound manner, the learner must be placed in authentic situations in which they would be solving problems anyway. (Hakkarainen, Lonka & Lipponen 2004, 118–119.)

The purpose of the training sessions is to produce stimuli, but it's rarer for them to produce a more permanent change in thought patterns or practical work (Grönfors 2010, 48). If the content-related benefits remain superficial and separate from one's work, it has a direct impact on the learner's enthusiasm and motivation. In this case, not even the organisation's

support can make an impact, even though it's generally a prerequisite for learning and the utilisation of the results. The best case would be to link studying to work, making it more likely for the learner to be supported by the organisation, supervisors and colleagues. (Grönfors 2010, 124–126.)

Individual training sessions are utilised often when one wants to strengthen their competence in matters, they care about but that are not necessarily related to one's work. They are also necessary when an employee must acquire a certain qualification or certificate. A separate event can be organised for a larger group of employees.

### **Themed training sessions strengthen competences**

In the first phase of the Urban Growth Vantaa project, we organised training sessions with various themes for employees in Vantaa-based SMEs. The purpose of these general training sessions was to raise the competence level of the labour force in Vantaa. A secondary objective was to help companies develop as the individual employees participated in training that produced insights that the employee could then apply directly in their work. For example, an employee who participated in a communication training might realise they struggled with selling ideas, in which case they could practice it in a safe environment in addition to receiving tips and feedback.

In order to receive information of current competence needs, we organised workshops in five of the project's partner companies (Finnair Cargo, InfoCare, ISS Palvelut, Solteq, Vantti) who participated in the development and testing of the services. We started planning the training sessions based on materials from the workshops. First, we formulated the main themes, after which we planned the topics in more detail together with the educators by utilising co-development methods.

**SMEs are not particularly motivated by the benefits of training.**

The purpose was to produce customer-focused and working life-oriented training sessions that acknowledged the combination of work and contents, suitable participation times in terms of work and the duration of the in-person meetings. The training sessions comprised four 90-minute inperson meetings as well as online assignments and materials.

Main themes of the training were customer understanding, supervisory work and leadership, Lean, Office programmes and communication.

The selection included almost 30 individual training sessions that employees from various organisations could sign up for. In November 2019 – February 2020, a total of 114 employees received a certificate for participation. The training sessions were organised at the educational organisations' premises, except for the Office trainings which were organised online.

We utilised the Vuolearning online platform to support learning. The objective was that it would be easy to complete the tasks at a suitable time for the learner, and maybe they would even be inspired to learn more. Based on the

analytics, the activity of using the learning environment varied. Each trainer built their own pedagogic solutions for their training, but each implementation included at least videos to orientate the learners to the topic of the in-person meetings.

We had a fair number of participants considering how quickly the selection was completed and communicated to the companies. On the other hand, not all training sessions were realised, and many groups had very few participants. Signups came partly from the same companies but, on the other hand, one employee could participate in several training sessions. Another objective was that representatives from different companies would get to know each other and strengthen their network by meeting each other during the in-person days.

### The general education offering is not interesting enough

The project has noticed that SMEs are not particularly motivated by the benefits of training. It is challenging to grasp the existing selection, for a variety of reasons. First, when prioritising the use of time and energy, it's natural to emphasise the business operations and profits. On the other hand, the benefits of a general training are not necessarily seen as attractive and beneficial. A third observation is the importance of personal sales. The service must be sold to the person in the organisation who makes the decision to participate.

Predetermined training schedules are not suitable for everyone. It might also be challenging to be able to leave the workplace. If the employee's perspective were examined more carefully, the interviews carried out in the project would show various factors that impact participation.

Based on the activity of using the online learning environment, studies completed fully online do not seem to be the ideal option for employees in SMEs. The first challenge came when participants signed up for the platform, and time spent with the learning materials varied from one end to the other.

### Company-specific training creates added value

In addition to themed training sessions, the first phase consisted of company-specific coaching sessions under the topic company image and sales. The coaching sessions more detailed contents were formed according to each company's needs. They were organised at the companies' premises, and a variety of employees participated, depending on whose job the contents related to.

The company-specific coaching sessions were received well and seen as a concrete benefit to the company. When comparing the coaching sessions to the implementation of

the themed training sessions with participants from various organisations, the benefits of the themed training were more focused on the individual employee's competence. The impact of coaching, on the other hand, comes from the fact that participants include several employees from the same organisation. When you learn, gain insights and create an identified development area together, the

benefits are greater from the company's point of view.

Coaching programmes are efficient for companies as they handle genuine work-related situations that can be related to problem solving or the development of a specific matter. In this case, the contents are not just focused on offering stimuli, as the insights can be directly applied to practice. (Grönfors 2010, 48.)

Coaching sessions are an efficient way to impact companies' development areas. This is why we continued with the so-called growth coaching in the second phase of the project according to our coaching theme. We defined the framework, theme and implementation method for the growth coaching sessions that were then used to define objectives and contents with the coach and representatives from the companies. It's important for the company that the content-related focus areas of a coaching session arise from their needs and that they can impact the schedules. In addition, the companies must understand the benefit of the service in order to want to participate in the coaching.

**A coaching model is more tailored to the company than a ready-made training. Coaching changes according to needs and situations.**



TO BE ABLE TO ADOPT KNOWLEDGE IN A PROFOUND MANNER, LEARNING MUST HAPPEN IN AUTHENTIC SITUATIONS WHERE EMPLOYEES ALREADY SOLVE PROBLEMS.

Each feedback in which the company said that the coaching impacted their operations positively is a positive signal of how beneficial and significant the services are. Services offered through the project are free for the participating companies. However, time is money, so it is not the only reason a company participates if the service does not serve it in any other way. Individuality and benefits are more important than the price of a service.

### Renewal is required to succeed in the competition

In the Urban Growth Vantaa project, we have identified the importance of competence development as well as

the problem areas for which we are building new solutions. We make visible different kinds of competence development options and increase awareness. At the same time, companies receive concrete sparring, support and ways to develop their business operations. There are many options for continuous learning that people are not aware of — what kind of training and coaching is currently offered and where. In addition, new solutions are constantly developed to make sure companies have competent labour force and new specialists.

What you learn today might be expired tomorrow, so we need the ability to continuously learn new things. Success is defined by agile renewal. Employees' working life skills and ability to learn learning are crucial for companies now and in the future. ■

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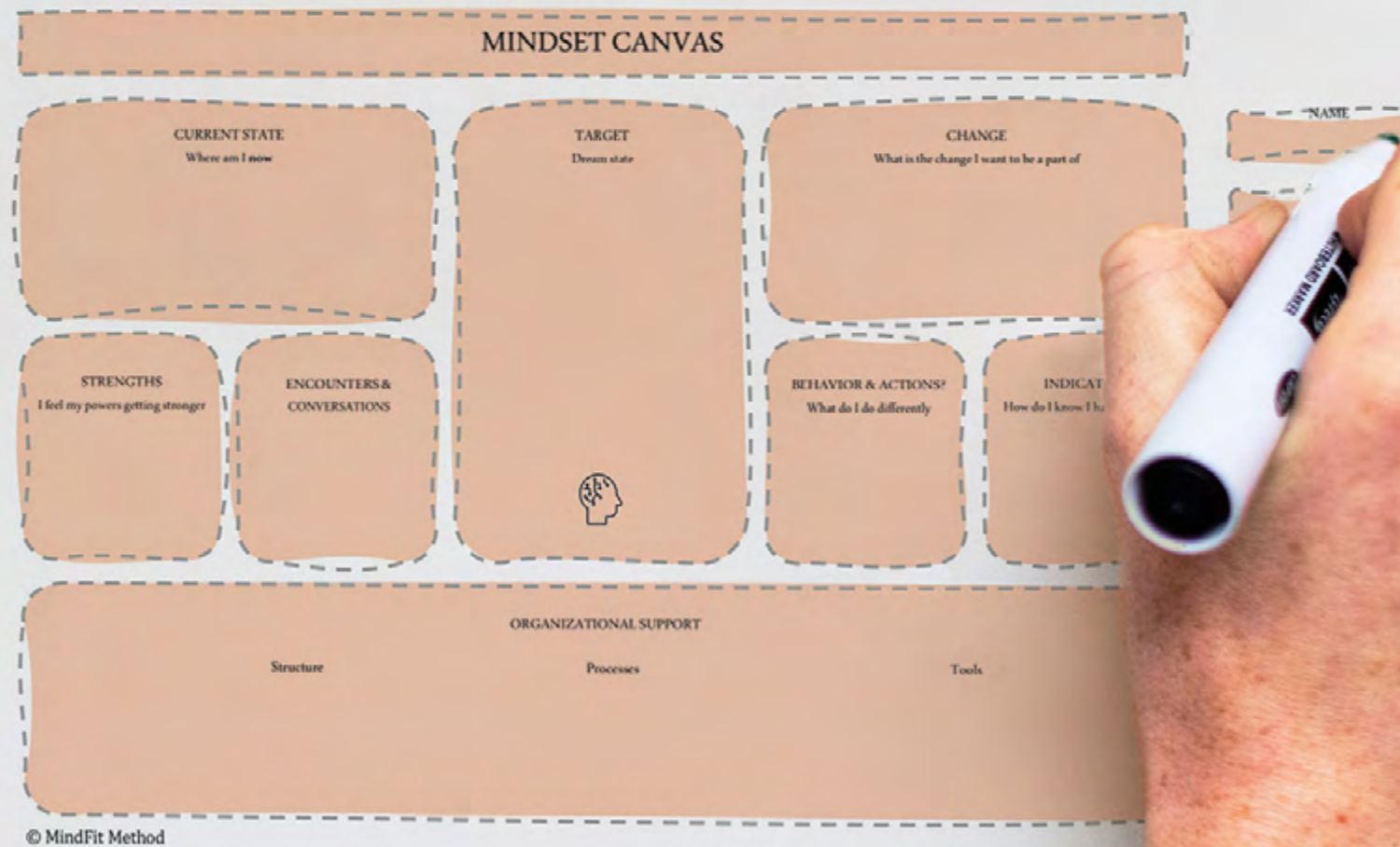
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# EFFICIENT COACHING TOOL

## – THE MINDSET CANVAS



**The mindset canvas is a visual tool for learning and change management. It helps people being coached to develop their thinking and actions. People can use the mindset canvas to structure the most important matters in their activities into one overview.**

**Why is visibility important?**

CEO **Matti Alahuhta** writes how Kone Plc’s strategy for 2008–2010 needed sharpening. Once the elements needed for continuous renewal and the creation of new competitive strengths had been defined, the most important development programmes were created to help promote the realisation of the strategy. In his book, Alahuhta gives credit to HR Director **Kerttu Tuomas** for the idea of visualising the strategy and its elements as a holistic picture. Once everyone understood how their work impacted the mutual bigger goal, commitment grew. (Alahuhta 2015, 51–59.)

Visibility is a basic principle of lean thinking in a well-known management philosophy (jidoka in Japanese). Lean professional Sari Torkkola (2016, 49–50) emphasises that visualisation increases communication and transparency. It’s possible to make decisions together based on the big picture.

The most famous canvas tool in business management is **Alexander Osterwalder’s** Business Model Canvas (BMC) from 2008. The canvas tool helps companies structure their business model and has become popular among start-ups and growth companies. The tool helps you get your thoughts moving in a resource and customer-oriented manner and prevents the blank page syndrome.



Do you want to try it? The Business Model Canvas tool is available at: <https://www.strategyzer.com/canvas/business-model-canvas> You can find instructions by googling “Business model canvas entrepreneur”.

The benefit of visual tools in any activities cannot be denied. They help you see the big picture and understand the most important aspects of a presentation in just a few glances.

**Utilising visibility in coaching**

How can visibility be utilised in coaching? For example, how can the person being coached summarise the objective quickly and recall the status of the most important matters that need to be advanced?

The MindFit method is a method I developed for managing beliefs and different states of mindset (2020). The word “method” comes from Greek and refers to a road that must be taken. By going through certain phases, the people being coached can reach their intermediate objectives, targets and goals. By linking the journey, which is usually mental growth of mindset, to future objectives, people can make the most of their potential. They will repeat: “I can!”, “I will!”, “I am able!”. As a coach, I can use the mindset canvas to make sure that the person being coached is



ASENNEKANVAASI, MINDFIT -METODIN VALMENNUSTYÖKALLU

able to collect the most important matters that need to be advanced on one page (illustration 1). The mindset canvas can be applied to many topics: selfmanagement, supervisory work, sales or project management among many others.

**The elements of the mindset canvas from the perspective of the person being coached**

**CURRENT STATE**

The first issue is to figure out the current state. Where am I now? How do I get things done? What has gone well so far? Where do I experience challenges, problems or even pain?

**CHANGE**

What is the change I am involved in? What should I change to make things better in the future? How should I develop my activities, emotional life, thought patterns or operating patterns?

**GOAL**

What is the dream state of the matter at hand? You can visualise and imagine this stage in your mind! Setting a goal clarifies your ambitions. What am I pursuing? What kind of visible and identifiable change needs to happen?

**STRENGTHS**

How can I strengthen my strengths? In which matters do I feel my strengths are being reinforced?

**ENCOUNTERS AND DISCUSSIONS**

With whom should I meet and what should the encounters and discussions be like? Who are the three people I should talk with to be supported in reaching my goal?

**BEHAVIOUR AND ACTIVITIES**

What should I do differently in the future? What is the smallest step I can take? Where do I start tomorrow?

**Marjo Huhtala** is a coach, an author and a change management professional. Marjo has written four books on mindset and change management. She has held positions such as HR Director and Executive Board Member. In the project, Marjo’s role is Business Coach in the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences’ team.



## INDICATORS

How do I know I succeeded? Indicators tell us about successes. The participants are responsible for reaching the goal, and the coach pushes them towards the goal.

## SUPPORT FROM THE COMMUNITY

Structure, processes, tools. Do they work? What needs to be improved? How do we communicate that to the management and get their support?

## What is important when using the mindset canvas as a coaching tool?

Many participants see canvas-based coaching as a smooth, effortless and systematic manner of developing themselves, their work and the work community. Working with the mindset canvas is based on the idea that your mindset is a choice.

Mindset can help in any situation, regardless of the circumstances. Even if a change is difficult or challenging, you can always choose how you react to it and what you do. Choosing your mindset might not necessarily make the situation better, but it can increase your resources at hand and help you see your possibilities. It is always possible to improve and develop even if the starting point is already good. (Huhtala 2015.)

The coaching sessions are not about looking for the right or wrong solutions — rather, they are about developing the participants' self-management skills both in the daily life and in demanding and even uncertain situations. The coaching sessions can be used to find the participants' own particular strengths and potential.

The aim is to find the participants' resources and solutions in relation to their goals. The participants take responsibility for their learning and the application of their insights practically at work in between the events. The most rewarding moment for the coach is a turning point when the person being coached has an insight.

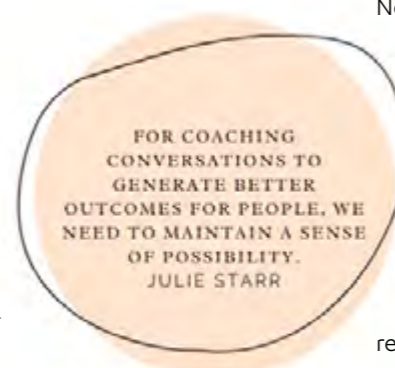
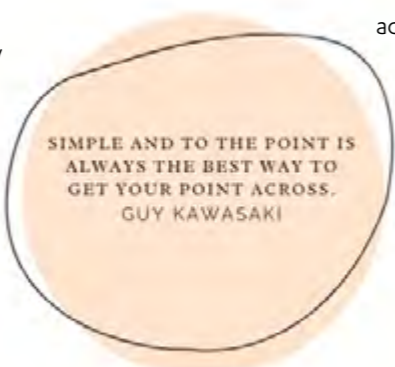
## Checklist for coaches:

1. How do you encourage the participant to break down their objective so that it is limited enough? Encourage them to start so small that they feel embarrassed! That is when the goal is correctly sized and possible to achieve in a busy life situation.
2. Remember to give positive feedback during the process.
3. How do you balance the time spent on analysis and details with at the same time seeing the bigger picture?
4. Be present and ready to encounter various feelings related to changes.

The canvas can be printed on a large piece of paper and everyone can have their own paper version, or it can be located on a shared network drive where it can be supplemented. The canvas requires a lot of work, and the schedule is often demanding, so stay focused on what you are doing. The master of limits is the master of everything, and as the manager of the process, the coach is a key person.

Participants cannot be interrupted during an important moment of insight but, on the other hand, the coach is responsible for making sure the event moves forward. The mindset canvas is a pedagogically logical tool.

Nothing needs to be ready at once as the process develops mindset and learning, which will be visualised during the journey. The participant can reflect matters in their daily life, collect feedback from their environment and complete the attitude canvas before the following coaching session. Every once in a while, they can send the canvas and their reflections to, for example, the coach. The coaching session increases the competence of the persons being coached momentarily to a higher level. As a professional, the growth journey is never finished. Everyone needs coaching and the feeling of having their strengths and mindset strengthened at times. ■



A SHARED MINDSET CANVAS IS EASY TO USE AND CREATES STRUCTURE FOR THE WORK COMMUNITY'S COACHING SESSION. UTILISE THE FAMILIAR TOOL EVEN FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT.

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# MORE EFFICIENT RECRUITMENT WITH COMPETENCE DESIGN

The efficiency of matching challenges both employers and employees. The project created a Competence Needs Organisation and Design Service to help companies with their recruitment needs. The service supports Vantaa-based companies find skilled labour force. At the same time, companies are encouraged to recruit in a socially responsible manner as the labour market needs the input of the whole working-aged population.



## The efficiency of matching at the labour market

The efficiency of matching has been an issue in Finland for a long time. The efficiency of matching refers to demand and supply: does the available labour force correspond with employers' needs? Can vacancies be filled with job-seekers? Are there jobs for the unemployed? There have been efforts to solve the efficiency of matching but, as the challenge is so complex, no single solution has been found. (Pehkonen, Huuskonen & Tornberg 2018.)

The global pandemic has brought its own aspects to the employment sector. In the spring, many companies had to adapt their operations to the exceptional situation, and a large number of people were temporarily laid off. During the summer and early autumn, there have been signs of recovery and, according to statistics, it seems that some of the temporarily laid off people have been able to return to work (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment 2020). A fresh SME corporate barometer predicts that most companies are able to hold on to their employees (Suomen Yrittäjät ry 2020). However, it's impossible to make reliable predictions of the long-term consequences. We can see the true impact of the COVID-19 crisis only after some time has passed.

Because of the pandemic, the number of job-seekers has increased at least temporarily. Even so, the efficiency of matching is still an issue. According to a recent study by the Chamber of Commerce, businesses' demand for com-



THE EFFICIENCY OF MATCHING AND SERVICES BRIDGING THE GAP (ILLUSTRATION: JOHANNA LÖNNQVIST 2020)

petent employers has not disappeared with COVID-19 (Valtonen 2020). Thus, we must continue to pay attention to employing labour force in a versatile manner. An unsustainable solution is to leave the partially disabled or long-term unemployed outside the working life.

There are many services that support job-seekers and aim to increase the applicants' eligibility on the labour market. The efficiency of matching is improved with various employment services by, for example, helping the applicants update their competences, offering career coaching or teaching job-seeking skills.

## Support for recruitment

The efficiency of matching cannot be solved with job-seeker services only. The employer side needs support as well. Companies need ways to fulfil their labour force needs and help to recruit the labour force on the market.

The Urban Growth project created a Competence Needs Organisation and Design Service to assist companies with recruitment. The service was created on the basis of the needs of the working life when, in the beginning of the Growth Deal 1 pilot, it turned out that small companies had no idea about the labour market situation. Small companies do not always have a separate HR Specialist, as recruitment can be a responsibility among other tasks that, for example, the CEO takes care of. When

there is no specific recruitment competence, the recruiting party can have unrealistic expectations of the process and employees available on the market.

As we discussed with the companies, we found out that several companies had not been able to fill their vacancies as they were not able to find a suitable person for the position. When their recruitment processes were examined in detail with a specialist from the project, it was noted that it would be possible to find suitable job-seekers by refining the recruitment process.

To facilitate companies' recruitment, the service had socially responsible objectives as well: when there's a lack of employees or a suitable person cannot be found for some other reason, the recruitment of the difficult to employ becomes

**Companies' competence needs have not disappeared during the pandemic. We must pay attention to a versatile recruitment of the labour force.**

IT'S POSSIBLE TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM OF THE EFFICIENCY OF MATCHING. JOB-SEEKERS' SKILLS AND EMPLOYERS' COMPETENCE NEEDS WERE MATCHED THROUGH COLLABORATION WITH THE PROJECT'S SPECIALIST.



**Elina Salo** works for the City of Vantaa as Project Specialist. In the project, Elina has been planning and piloting recruitment services and vocational competence development services.



▶ meaningful. When recruiting diverse people, special attention must be paid to matching the doer with the task. This is where external support can be beneficial.

### A successful recruitment process

The first step in the corporate recruitment process is to find out what kind of competences the company already has. This increases the understanding of the necessary new competences and specifies recruitment needs. The better you can describe the role, areas of responsibility and competence needs in the vacancy ad, the more certain it is that the job-seeker will become interested. Evasive formulations and vague phrasing make the job sound so ambiguous that it will not attract job-seekers. Of course, the ad can still attract job applications but, if concrete requirements are missing, there's a risk that the employer's and job-seeker's understanding of the content of the work do not match. The worst case is that different expectations are revealed only once the employment relationship has already started, and the employment needs to be terminated. Thus, the employer must be aware of what kind of a role they are recruiting for and what kind of competences are required in the role in question.

Once the contents and requirements of a role have been clarified, you can still think about which requirements matter the most. Which skills must the applicant already have and which competences can be taught? If the employee must have an Occupational Safety Card to carry out the job, could the employer organise the training for the new employee and simultaneously make sure that their skills are up-to-date? Or could the new employee complete a Hygiene Passport test as part of their training at the beginning of their employment if they do not have the passport yet?

The key skills in many jobs are skills that you gain by working. Because each workplace has a different culture, habits, tools and products, few people have the exact competences that a company needs. If a new employee is able to learn and develop, their skills can be complemented during orienteering.

Describing tasks on a concrete level and reflecting on competence needs in a profound manner is rarely easy for the

employer. However, good groundwork is worth it because it promotes successful recruitment and creates lasting employment relationships.

### Selecting the correct person

Once the job has been formulated and worded in the ad, you will receive job applications. Read through them with an open mind. In addition to experience, note the potential that you see. A CV can reveal competences an applicant has acquired through hobbies and what they are interested in or willing to learn more of. The recruiter should consider whether the company is more interested in the applicant's job history or current passion. The revolution of the working life means that few of us know what our jobs will be like in the coming years so, in addition to current competences, it's a good idea to pay attention to an applicant's development possibilities. Invite applicants with diverse backgrounds to an interview and be brave as you try out how they fit in with your corporate culture.

During the interview phase, find out if it's possible to apply for financial subsidies to support the employment. The employment of a long-term unemployed person is supported financially by both the government and municipalities. In addition, Vantaa offers special recruitment subsidies when you employ young unemployed people. Employment relationships of partially disabled people can be supported by concrete assistance from a job coach during, for example, orienteering. If an employee needs instruments due to disability or an illness, you can apply for a subsidy for arranging working conditions. Once you are aware of all possible subsidies, it's easier to select the best person without, for example, a partial disability putting them in a disadvantaged position. This way, the company will not miss anyone's potential.

Once the correct person has been selected, the company needs to continue to invest in the recruitment process. A new employee needs comprehensive training, regardless of their background. If necessary, you can always start out with an apprenticeship, which means that the employee's skills will be complemented with vocational training. Various internal training sessions can also be beneficial at the beginning of an employment relationship. Generally, every-

**A suitable person can be successfully recruited once the company knows what kind of a person it is looking for.**

THERE ARE VARIOUS SUBSIDIES THAT HELP YOU TO HIRE. IT'S EASY TO SELECT THE BEST APPLICANT WHEN YOU KNOW WHAT KIND OF SUBSIDIES ARE AVAILABLE.



one has something new to learn as they start a new job. In order to gain the best possible results, reserve time for learning and training at the beginning of the employment relationship.

### Support services minimise risks

All of the above was carried out with SMEs in the framework of the project's Competence Needs Organisation and Design Service. The processes created lasting employment relationships and helped companies fill such employee needs that they had been trying to fill for a longer time. There's always a risk involved in recruitment, and you cannot guarantee a person's suitability in any way. However, good

groundwork in formulating the description of the role and wording it concretely removes pitfalls of recruitment. There are many kinds of recruitment assistance services and subsidies that help you minimise risks. The TE Office organises national recruitment services for employers, and cities' recruitment services help on the municipal level, for example, Yritysohjaamo in Vantaa (see Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment 2020, City of Vantaa 2020).

Even though the success of a recruitment cannot be 100% guaranteed with any support or subsidy, the biggest risk is that the company does not recruit at all. Without workforce, companies cannot remain vital, and competitors will win in no time. ■

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# GREETINGS FROM THE FIELD

– THE IMPACT  
OF COVID-19 ON  
VANTAA-BASED  
COMPANIES



Project workers **Anne Innanen**, **Anni Sarantila** and **Juha Leskinen** contacted more than 200 companies (n=225) to ask how they were doing in the summer 2020. It was not possible to get in touch with all of the companies during the hectic weeks. The companies that responded represented a variety of typical Vantaa-based SMEs: wholesalers, retailers, and the logistics, construction and hospitality sector.

No industry or sampling was emphasised in the contacts, so the summary can be considered as a comprehensive perspective into the situation in Vantaa-based SMEs during the historic pandemic year of 2020.

Understandably, COVID-19 was the most popular topic of conversation. Companies in the accommodation, restaurant, culture and entertainment industries were the ones suffering the most. We heard stories of severe 80–100% drops in sales. Rough drops in the same size class and change situations that impacted the entire company were described by companies selling traditional products as well as specialty stores. Because of the changes, companies had to temporarily lay off employees.

“Many companies are thinking about how to hold on to their employees when they cannot make any promises about the future,” Anne Innanen summarised feelings from the corporate side.

“This creates a risk that employees will find another employer,” Juha Leskinen added.

We also got some positive reports. If a company was confident in its abilities and possibilities to survive the crisis, the decreased market demand gave time to learn new skills and competences.

“Training employees in the middle of a slow market situation was something the entrepreneurs had been thinking about. Fortunately, most of the companies that we interviewed had survived the exceptional situation well or quite

well. We could hear that they were clearly interested in developing their employees’ competences,” Leskinen explained.

Situations in the various industries varied in the middle of the global crisis. Even though one company was facing a catastrophe, another one’s sales had gone up. Positive business development was reported by sectors such as consumer goods, construction and

renovation, gardening, summerhouses, takeout, logistics and various online shops. At the time of writing this article in October 2020, it was still too early to estimate how permanent the changes in consumer behaviour would become or how it would develop over time.

B2B sales and acquisitions also experienced some changes. COVID19 had a significant impact on subcontractors’ operational reliability and delivery times. One company’s loss became someone else’s profit.

“Companies whose production was geographically closer to Finland had a higher delivery reliability than companies whose production was in Asia,” Sarantila described the subcontracting chains.

**Many companies were wondering how to hold on to their employees in an uncertain situation. Training was seen as one solution.**

**Tiina Leppäniemi** is Lecturer at Laurea University of Applied Sciences. In the project, she has educated and coached companies interested in communications.



Many industries made huge digital leaps or advancements in their working methods. Remote connections were used both internally and with customers.

“Industries in which personal sales had been the core of operations were naturally forced to make quite the digital leap as activities, such as B2B sales, became remote,” Sarantila said.

The respondents said that remote work had challenged traditional office work. Some companies had experience from remote work, others did not. Many of the respondents said that, during the spring, they noticed that work could just as well be done at home. However, there was something missing when meeting people online.

“Many leaders had the need for more efficient interaction through remote connections. The development of online facilitation skills was seen as necessary,” Sarantila said. Leskinen added that while many employees thought it was easy to transfer to remote work, supervisory work and management demanded bigger changes in their operating methods. Many new management practices of the remote-work era were still under development.

When writing this article in the autumn 2020, it was still difficult to say how the year 2020 really impacted SMEs in Vantaa. It certainly shook everyone like an earthquake and reminded us of how quickly the entire world can change. The entrepreneurs had not really thought about a potential

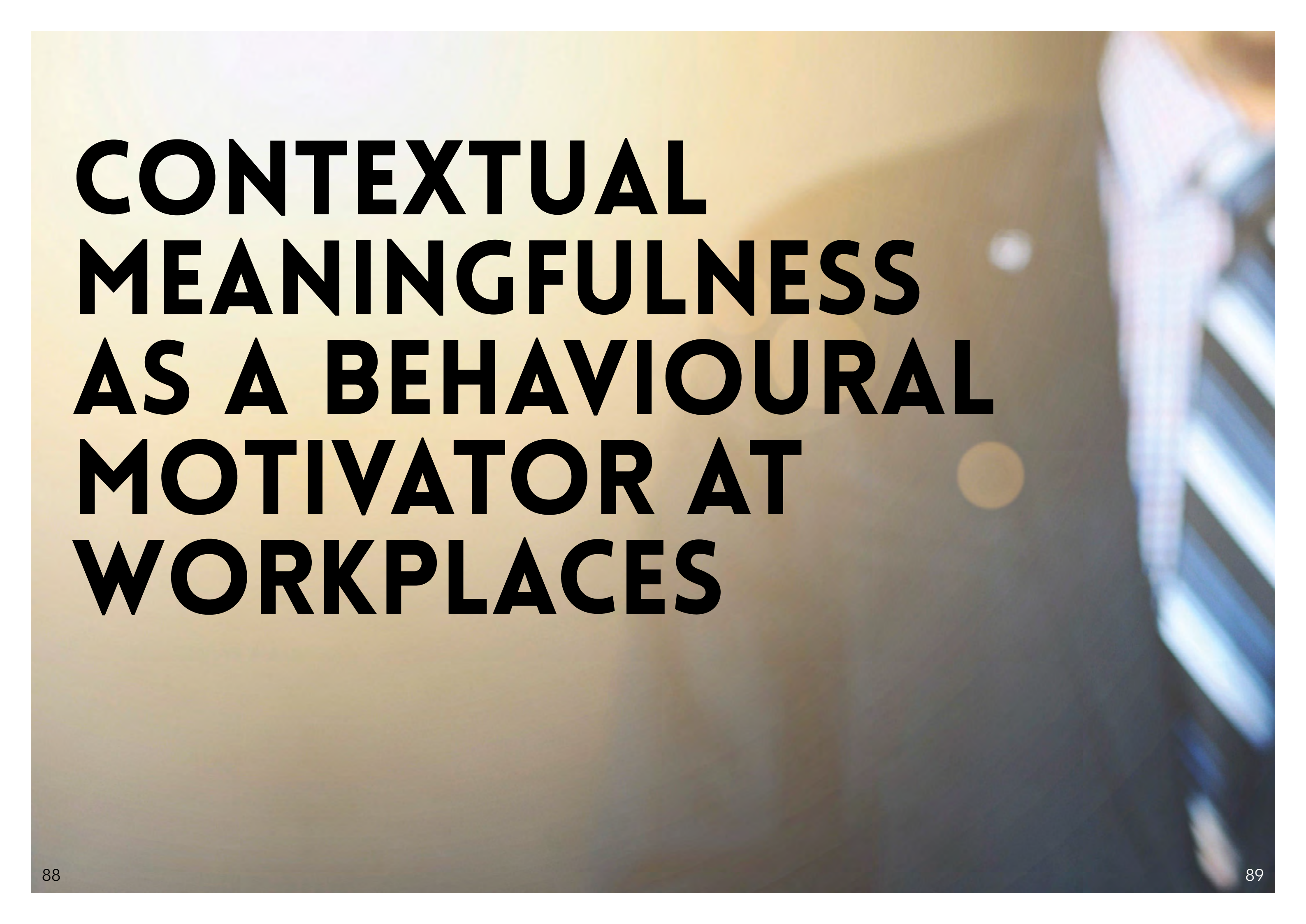
second wave of COVID19 before or after the summer. Many companies believed that they would survive by developing their business operations or by continuing to carry out the same successful work as before. Others were in a worse situation, and it might be that the sampling of more than 200 contacts did not reach most of them as the message or phone call might have been missed due to the difficult situation.

The Urban Growth Vantaa project acknowledged the wishes and needs that came up during the discussions and quickly updated its training and coaching offering. Already in the spring, we implemented a series of morning coffee sessions, where specialists from various industries discussed current topics in the area of work and competence development, such as diversity management, corporate finances during a crisis and remote meetings. In the autumn, the online morning coffee sessions continued with new topics, such as designing profitable business operations, resiliency and increasing trust. In addition to the online morning coffee sessions, companies were offered a management coaching service during the summer. The service supported corporate management in change and crisis situations. In the autumn, we continued the management coaching by offering growth coaching and training sessions related to themes that companies had identified as development areas.

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# **CONTEXTUAL MEANINGFULNESS AS A BEHAVIOURAL MOTIVATOR AT WORKPLACES**

**People know how to make good, context-related decisions. Decision-making works best when a person feels like they are doing meaningful things. In this article, we describe a conceptual model of human decision-making and explain how elements of the model could be applied when designing the Personal Digital Coach application.**

Human behaviour and decision-making models are mainly based on studies in which the impact of a certain stimulus on human behaviour is studied in a controlled environment. The basic idea is that a certain type of behaviour is caused by stimuli outside the person, and when the quality or number of the stimuli is varied, the mechanisms of human behaviour are revealed. According to these traditional models, the impact of the stimuli on human behaviour is the same regardless of the environment. (DuBrown et al. 2017; Purves et al. 2015; Tymula and Plassmann 2016.) Undeniably, these studies have revealed several basic mechanisms of human behaviour, but they also include various problems. Namely, it looks like human behaviour is more likely to be guided by mental expectations and goals rather than stimuli and other elements in the external reality (Bar 2011; Suomala 2020). This means that key criteria in describing and explaining behaviour are the individual's contextual expectations. Expectations, on the other hand, are connected to meaningfulness and self-efficacy. This article describes a contextual behavioural model that acknowledges people's contextual expectations.

The article progresses as follows: after the introduction, we describe the contextual behavioural model. Next, we

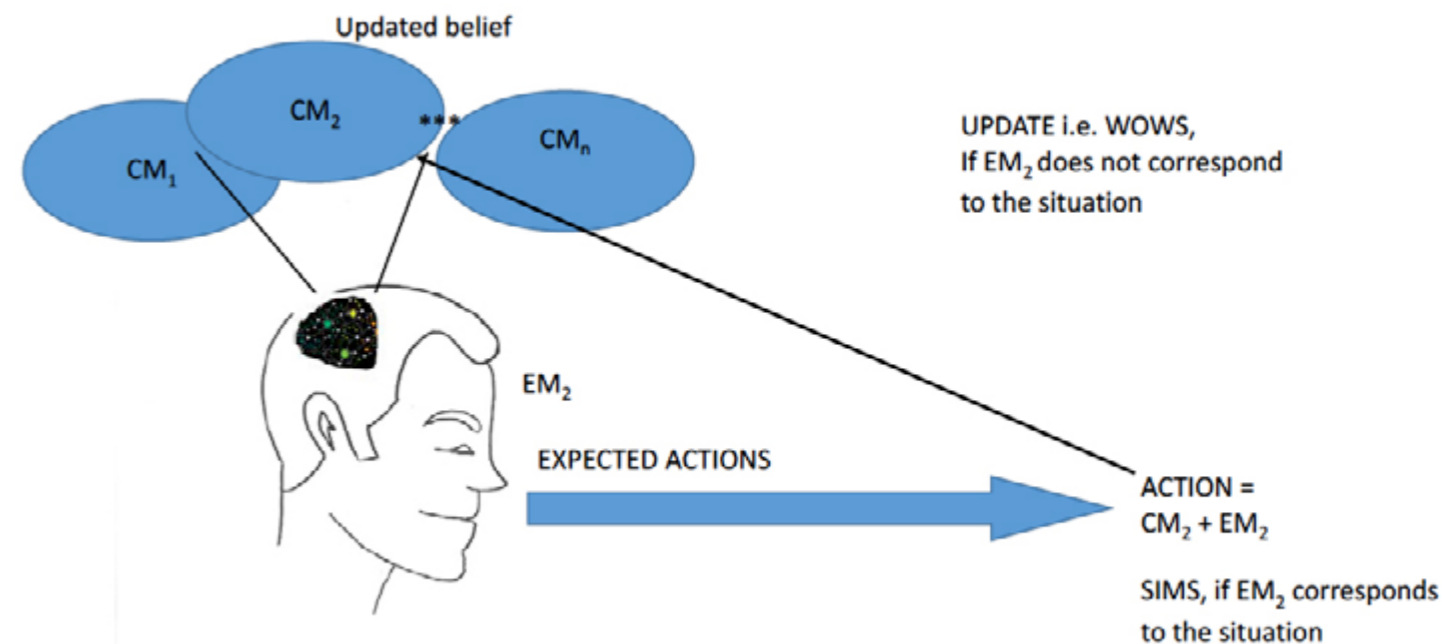
dig deeper into two main decision-making strategies: SIMS and WOWS. Both of them are related to the principle of the meaningfulness of behaviour, which, in turn, contains various dimensions of the mind. We examine two dimensions: self-efficacy and future vision. Their significance in, for example, education choices and the development of resilience is key (Arno and Lieder 2020; Bandura 1977; Sisk et al. 2018).

Thirdly, we ask the question of how technology can be used to support and develop individual job-seekers' career- and education-related self-efficacy and future vision. Good tools include mini surveys and applications that boost or nudge individuals towards meaningful education and learning paths. We conclude the article by introducing the Personal Digital Coach (PDC) plan that was developed in the context of the Urban Growth Vantaa project. It's an application that supports an individual's self-efficacy and future vision.

**The contextual behavioural model**

We make dozens of decisions daily, and most of them are subconscious (Iyengar, 2011). In addition, most situations we encounter are ordinary and familiar to us. These situations have given us mental models that create expectations for these situations. According to the contextual decision-making model (figure 1), people's contextual expectations are created by things that are likely to happen in these situations, and we do not really waste energy on thinking about unlikely things (see Jaynes, 2003).

Next, we will illustrate the contextual behavioural model in figure 1 with an example. Imagine a situation in which a person remembers that their child will soon have a birthday party (Cm2). The memory of the situation "child's birthday"



KUVIO 1. KÄYTTÄYTYMISEN TILANNESIDONNAINEN MALLI. TM=TILANTEESEEN LIITTYVÄ MENTAALI MALLI; TMO=TILANTEESEEN LIITTYVÄ ODOTUS. (MUKAILLEN SUOMALA 2020)

(Cm2) activates contextual expectations (PB2) related to the event "child's birthday" which then guide the person's future behaviour, such as purchase decisions (Suomala 2020). In an actual situation, there are many things that need to be considered. You need to make decisions on matters such as guests, food, presents, decorations and programme. "Child's birthday" is a situation with many established traditions and expectations that guide the behaviour related to birthdays. A person might go to a shop and look for snacks suitable for a birthday party. If they are experienced, they will try to find the necessary items as quickly as possible based on their expectations. The expectation might conflict with reality if the shop has ran out of an item or the person finds something new and interesting related to birthdays. However, the essential thing is that real-world

situations are generally familiar and repeated often so people have a relatively clear belief of how to act in the context.

According to the contextual behavioural model, people optimise their behaviour by focusing on the typical characteristics of a situation (Ratneshwar et al., 1987). On the other hand, in traditional decision-making models (Kósze-gi, 2010), rationality means that a person gets to know as many options as possible and selects the option that creates the biggest benefit. Figure 1 describes the contextual behavioural model.

Human behaviour is based on expectations (Figure 1: PB1, PB2,...,PBn) activated by various contextual models (Cm1, Cm2,..., Cm n). People enter situations guided by their expectations, and the assumption is that the typical charac-

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►  
teristics of that situation correspond to the personal prediction of the situation. Thus, the person behaves according to their personal expectations. How the expectations and

### Self-efficacy refers to a person's understanding of their abilities and confidence in that they are able to complete matters and tasks on a certain level.

actual situation correspond with each other is a key factor in decision-making (Bar, 2007, 2011). If the expectation and situation deviate greatly, either positively or negatively, the person updates their mental model which then becomes the new model for the situation in question. The contextual decision-making model in question is a conceptual application of quantitative Bayesian reasoning (Baum, 2004; Jaynes, 2003; Kording, 2014). Here, we assume that the typical characteristics of the situation are not necessarily statistical quantitative variables, but they also include qualitative characteristics, such as social operating methods and cultural practices.

A separate interesting question is how big the conflict between expectations and reality must be in order for the contextual model to change and for this updated model to start guiding the person's behaviour. This is essential when, for example, examining how significant a person's professional competences and studying are for their lives. The expectation, activated by the situation, is a basic decision-making strategy. We call this the SIMilarity Strategy (SIMS, see Suomala 2020). The assumption is that people use SIMS in the majority of their decisions in the daily life. SIMS is a basic starting point for behaviour and decision-making, and people usually act accordingly. In other words, they have clear expectations of what is to come, and they do not really spend time thinking about things that rarely occur in such a situation.

On the other hand, if a person's expectation deviates from the actual decision-making situation, the SIMS strategy will

not work, and the person changes to the WOW strategy (WOWS = What-is-Out-there-in-the-World-Strategy, see Suomala 2020). They start to think about how they could update the contextual model in question. The change in the decision-making strategy contains an important question of how big must the difference be between a prognosis and realisation for the strategy to change? Strictly speaking, situations are never completely identical (Bar, 2011). The mind has the ability to uphold a feeling of similarity even though small changes — both mental ones and ones related to the situation's physical characteristics — happen all the time. When a person changes

their strategy from SIMS to WOWS, they learn something new about the situation. If we go back to the example of the child's birthday party, the person might notice a new brand of ice cream. Previously, they have not served ice cream at the child's birthday party, but now they decide to serve ice cream in addition to cake and other treats. Could we call it a "new" mental model just because one thing was added to the contextual model? This is a question that demands further investigation. However, on a general level, we could talk about a balance between expectations and realisation, and when the person is in this balance state, SIMS is active. When there is an imbalance, WOWS is activated.

From the perspective of further education, people should be encouraged to update their competences and to learn continuously. This is how they learn to apply WOWS to situations. Utilising WOWS means that the person must have mental and other resources. If a person experiences a certain context as safe and meaningful, they want to use WOWS. People primarily see SIMS as meaningful and avoid WOWS. Next, we will look at the principle of meaningfulness.

### Principle of meaningfulness, self-efficacy and future vision

The feeling of meaningfulness is an important factor guiding human decision-making and behaviour. People have a natural inclination to behave and find contents and activities that they find personally meaningful. In his book, *Man's Search for Meaning* (2002), Viktor Frankl suggests that

meaning is the biggest power guiding human behaviour. In the same spirit, George Loewenstein (1999) describes the activities of a mountaineer from the perspective of meaningfulness. Most mountaineers grew up in stable environments in which their living standards were secure and life was reasonably comfortable. However, these people reach for mountain tops and experience extreme physical and mental stress to reach these objectives. Paul Thagard (2012) also argues that the feeling of meaningfulness is a key factor in people's lives, and this experience is related to love, work and hobbies. Other researchers include purpose and recognition in meaningfulness (Ariely et al. 2008). Purpose refers to the person's understanding of how their behaviour is connected to the objectives of the activity. Being acknowledged means that another person appreciates what

the person is doing. Ariely et al. (2008) claim that these two factors — meaning and being acknowledged — are two of the most significant factors behind human behaviour.

Going further, meaningfulness is tied to self-efficacy (Bandura 1977) and the future vision (Geary 2005). Self-efficacy refers to a person's understanding of their abilities and confidence in that they are able to complete their task and other things on a certain level (Wood & Bandura, 1989). Self-efficacy is tied to a feeling of meaningfulness and the kind of predictions a person makes related to certain situations. For example, when a young person is applying to study, they compare the various options with the hopes and goals they have for their life (Suomala et al. 2017). Another key factor related to the feeling of meaningfulness is the future vision, which refers to the person's understanding of their

THE FEELING OF MEANINGFULNESS IS A KEY FACTOR IN THE HUMAN LIFE. THIS EXPERIENCE IS RELATED TO WORK, LOVE AND HOBBIES.



► future potential (Geary, 2005). People use the future vision to organise and control their actions so that things related to the future vision come true. Geary (2005) proposes that the future vision is an individual's "perfect world" where the things that the individual thinks are optimal come true. The ability to adjust one's actions based on their objectives is related to the pursuit of the future vision.

The conceptual model we have presented (Figure 1) describes human decision-making with the help of two main strategies (SIMS and WOWS). Including the above principle of meaningfulness and the related self-efficacy and future vision in the model gives a hypothetical answer to the question of when SIMS becomes WOWS. People seize the change if they see it as meaningful. This happens when a person's self-efficacy and the creation of their personal future vision are reinforced. Next, we present how technology can be used to strengthen self-efficacy and clarify the future vision.

### Personal Digital Coach supports self-efficacy and the future vision in the working life

Society and the working life are changing. To make it in the working life, people need to be motivated to learn. In addition to traditional institutional education, there's a need for tools that can be used to support people's self-efficacy and future vision in the working life and the related competence development throughout their careers. A person's activity is a key change factor in lifelong learning. The Urban Growth Vantaa project developed a Personal Digital Coach (PDC) plan that is meant to be implemented and tested during the project. Its comprehensive framework is the contextual decision-making model presented in figure 1, and its specific factors dig deeper in self-efficacy and impacting the future vision. The development of the PDC relies on the idea that further education alone is not enough. There is

**To make it in the changing society and working life, people need to think learning is motivating.**

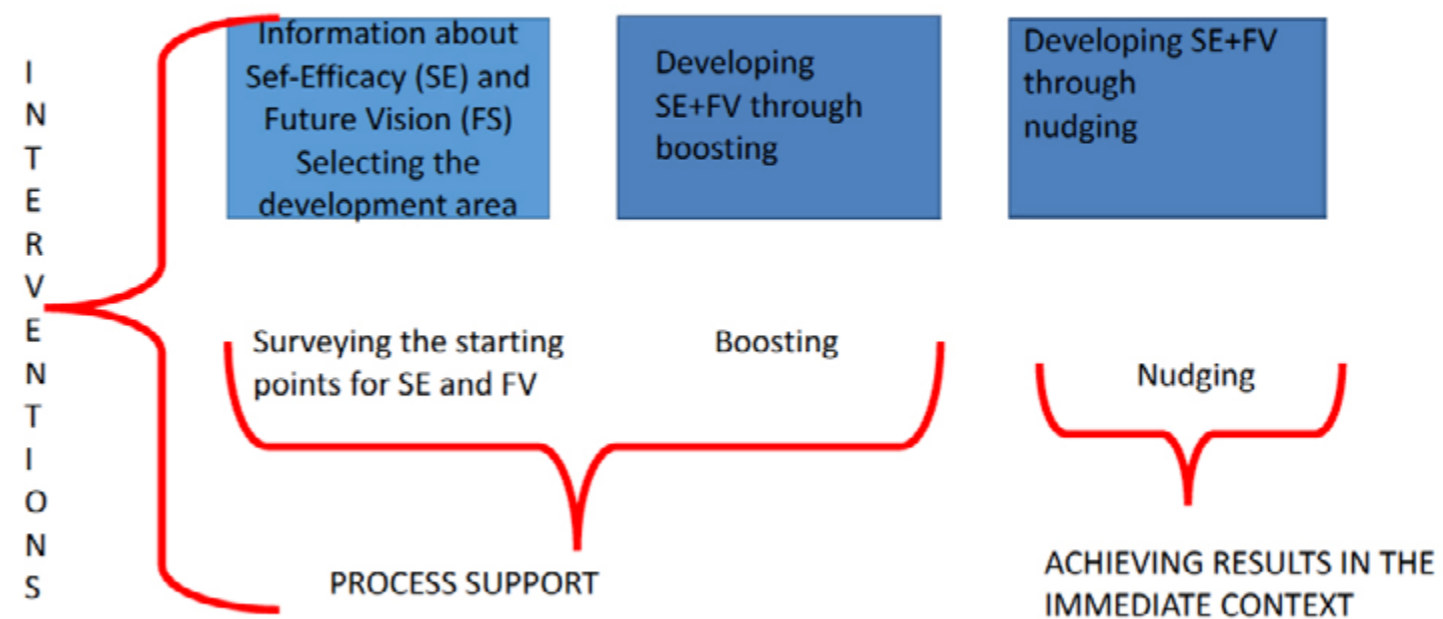
also a need for personal guidance related to an individual employee's training and working life skills. The PDC aims to be this kind of a guide and motivator.

When a person changes their decision-making strategy from SIMS to WOWS, it's a change in behaviour. Studies have shown that boosting and nudges are particularly efficient methods to achieve changes in behaviour. Nudges are mostly unnoticeable hints in the decision-making context that make people act in a certain way without restricting their freedom of choice (Thaler & Sunstein, 2009). For example, information about other people's behaviour will often nudge people to act in the same manner as others in the same situation would. Thus, disclosing the information of how many of the previous guests in the same hotel room had used the hotel's towels for several days increased the guests' likelihood to use towels for several days as well (Goldstein et al., 2008). This is an example of how nudges help protect the environment as the washing cycle is extended. In a similar manner, information about a person's own previous behaviour in a certain situation may act as a nudge. Boosting is another common way of promoting behavioural change. It aims to develop a person's competence in the long term with the help of interventions (Grüne-Yanoff & Hertwig, 2016). By applying both boosting and nudges, the PDC acts as an intervention, the purpose of which is to increase self-efficacy in the working life.

Nudges and boosting are not opposites, as they can be used flexibly to support each other. A central objective of the PDC is to support people's self-efficacy and the creation of a future vision with the help of nudges and boosting. Boosting and nudges are implemented as the users reply to questions in the application, for example, every other day. It's a mini survey that is convenient to complete on a mobile. There are only two questions. The first one is related to

## Towards Context-sensitive behavioral model by planning, testing and building The PDC (Personal Digital Coach).

### BROAD CONTEXT: A PERSON'S WORKING LIFE



The mini survey is active throughout the intervention

KUVIO 2. PDC:IN (PERSONAL DIGITAL COACH) SUUNNITELMA (JYRKI SUOMALA 2020).

the current state of mind in relation to the user's development area in the working life. The second one is related to a long-term goal, such as speaking one's mind more bravely in workplace meetings. The answers to both questions are given on a Likert scale. In order for the mini survey to target the correct issue, the user must define a work-related development area as they start using the PDC. Figure 2 presents the PDC plan.

Processing one's personal situation starts by surveying the starting point. In the end, the user selects a development area. Mini surveys related to the development area are implemented throughout the intervention. The questions are related to the exact response time and a more long-term development area. If, for example, the development area is to speak one's mind more bravely at workplace meetings,

a future-related question could be: "In three months, I will be braver when speaking my mind in meetings compared to the situation today." The question related to the current state could be a declaration: "I think that right now I would bravely speak my mind". The response is coded automatically, and the user receives regular feedback for their development. Boosting feedback can be related to reflection of the development area, and nudges to using a simple emoji (thumbs up, smiley).

The mini surveys are implemented with digital tools by obeying the principles described below. The benefit of the mini survey is that it's easy to use. If a person is experiencing problems in their life, they might also lack the motivation to work on their situation. This is why traditional extensive surveys with multiple questions are problematic methods.





A person might not be interested to take the survey, and they might not have the energy to think about their situation in an all-rounded manner, so the survey will not produce reliable information.

First of all, the survey utilises the Likert scale, which means the questions are declarations that the person evaluates based on the current situation (Completely agree... Completely disagree). Secondly, the survey only asks two questions. The purpose of the first question is to survey the long-term theme that is related to the person's work-related future vision. The person can take the survey in ten seconds, and the spontaneity produces reliable results. Thirdly, the survey and its contents are changed regularly. The questions are changed so that the first question is always related to the long-term theme, and the second question to the current mood. It's important that the questions are not always positive — sometimes things are approached through negation. Fourthly, repeating the survey daily improves the reliability of the data significantly. The person forgets the questions from the previous time and responds according to the current situation. Previous responses do not distort the new responses. Finally, the person has to be motivated enough for the study. Mini surveys as a method makes the threshold to participate as low as possible, and poor motivation to respond does not distort the results.

Statistically, the method produces some potentially interesting material as part of the PDC. The person's responses to the "theme" and "current mood" can be connected to and analysed from the perspective of the development of the theme/mood. This is how we can find out how a person's mood changes from one day to another, and how their personal theme develops. When there are several people in a target group, a single respondent's responses can be analysed and compared to a control group: how active, able

or motivated the person is compared to the control group and, above all, how can their self-efficacy and future vision be reinforced. The mini survey also creates a timeline that is often missing in these kinds of surveys. The timeline produces valuable information about how the person is developing over time.

The PDC and mini survey are best implemented on digital platforms. It's important that the person does not need to look for response links or sign in every time. The questions appear on the phone, and the person can reply immediately. It's possible to include a reward mechanism in the mini survey method. In PDC, it's related to boosting and nudges. This creates an interest-

ing extra dimension to the method; how can a small reward impact a person's mood and development, and can their mood go from negative to positive with correctly timed rewards? What should the reward be like? Is it a thumbs-up emoji, a smiley and an encouraging message, or maybe a gift card to a café?

## Conclusion

In this article, we have presented the contextual behavioural model and related mental concepts. Human behaviour is related to mental expectations, and a change in behaviour is a consequence of the expectation not matching the action required by the situation (DuBrown et al., 2017; Suomala, 2020). This means that the person must update their mental contextual model. Studying compatibility as such is an interesting and useful future object of research but we chose to focus on contextual behaviour with the help of meaningfulness, self-efficacy and future vision. We used them as a basis as we planned the Personal Digital Coach application. The plan will be implemented within the Urban Growth Vantaa project in 2021. ■

**Human behaviour is related to expectations created by the mind, and a change in behaviour is a consequence of the expectation not matching the action required by the situation.**

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# THE IMPACT OF PERSONALITY, MOTIVATION AND TEMPERAMENT ON LEARNING

This article looks at the impact of personal characteristics, temperament, earlier experiences, and beliefs on learning from a practical and personal perspective. In addition, I will look at how learning objectives and needs impact motivation.



▶ In the spring 2020, I participated in the Urban Growth Vantaa project, the purpose of which is to develop the competences of labour force in Vantaa and support business growth. We interviewed employees and supervisors in the project's partner companies about the needs and possibilities of competence development. These interviews inspired me to write about how personality, motivation, and temperament impact learning. I will reflect on the interviews on the basis of **Riitta-Leena Metsäpelto's** and **Taru Feldt's** book *Meitä on moneksi – Persoonallisuuden psykologiset piirteet*.

Learning and motivation are impacted by personal characteristics, temperament, earlier experiences, life experience and beliefs, not to forget learning objectives and needs. Identifying one's competences, making them visible and verbalising them can increase the motivation to study especially if we look at competence development and studying. I have been constantly studying something alongside work for 26 years. I started this study marathon because I wanted to complete a higher academic degree. I was motivated by the experience of learning to learn during my years in basic education. I was never a particularly good pupil, and I had to work hard for my grades. However, as I studied, I got hungrier and finally completed my higher academic degree at the age of 45. For me, lifelong learning was worth it. Throughout the years, I learnt to learn, verbalise my competences and highlight my skills.

### The significance of experience

Metsäpelto and Feldt have divided learning motivation into several areas. The lack of learning motivation can be caused by, for example, a learnt helplessness, created in situations that the individual cannot impact. This experience can lead to a feeling of helplessness and, later on, passivity in education and study motivation. Memories from school might bring up negative thoughts such as cramming for exams, large classes and weaker students being overlooked.

Anticipating failure based on earlier learning experiences can lead to self-destructive behaviour and coming up with an "acceptable excuse" when faced with a challenging learning situation. In other words, if you fail an exam, you blame the flu, even though the true reason was something completely different, such as a celebratory weekend with friends that demanded a few extra days for recovery.

A positive self-image related to success and confidence in your own abilities can lead to illusory operating methods, where you explain your lack of success with factors related to the situation or other people. Success at school does not guarantee success in an actual job where you have to apply what you learnt. Theory and practice do not always meet, which can lead to a crack in one's self-image. You believe more of yourself than what is true in reality. Inversely, a strong belief in yourself can be the key to success. As an ex-

**Outstanding success at school does not guarantee success in an actual job where you have to apply what you learnt.**

IDENTITY AS A STRUCTURE THAT ASSEMBLES YOUR PERSONALITY HAS A STRONG IMPACT ON THE MOTIVATION TO LEARN AND EDUCATE ONESELF.



ample, I could tell you a story of a young recently graduated economist who is hired as a financial director. In theory, they know the job but, in practice, the payroll clerk has to teach them how salaries are actually calculated and posted.

### Appreciate your skills

Earlier experiences in similar situations impact how a person acts in a new situation. This is a learnt thought pattern of, for example, "we've never had an upper secondary school graduate in our family". If earlier studies in basic education were not so successful, it has led to a certain self-image.

Believing that you are not able to learn new things and learn to learn might be a hinder for further education. Appreciating oneself as a satisfactory individual might have marked the person's identity early on. Learning is seen as something

forced that has no benefits: "It's not going to be worth it, I will not benefit from it, and I don't even know what options are out there". Being busy at work lowers one's motivation to study, and work potentially piling up during the studies prevents the initiation of studies. Aging impacts motivation along the lines of "that train has passed". On the other hand, continuous workplace learning and keeping yourself

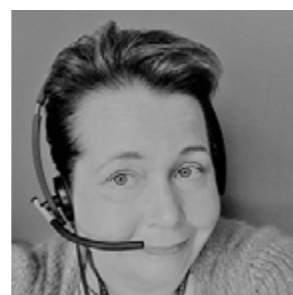
**Temperament impacts both success at school and learning in the adult age.**

up-to-date might cause an information overload that decreases motivation for further education.

People can identify a surprisingly small fraction of their competences. Throughout the years, all of us gain a variety of information and skills that we cannot verbalise or see from both the working life and hobbies.

How do you highlight these skills to your supervisors and use them as a resource for professional development and promotion? How do you combine them with studies? It might be a good idea for employees to teach each other

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▶ the knowledge and skills they have gained. This could be done by booking a training session with a colleague. The training could be implemented so that, for example, there are five employees in training for fifteen minutes at a time. This model would save time and money for both the employer and employee.

### Defined by your temperament

Your temperament impacts your success at school and adult learning. This can be a direct or indirect impact. Direct impact affects the student's study methods directly and has the biggest impact.

Indirect impact comes from an assessment of the pupil's maturity, gifts and motivation which are impacted by the teacher's attitude and expectations. An intensive, calm and positive pupil is seen as gifted, mature and motivated. A less intensive and ill-tempered pupil with a low reaction threshold is considered to be immature, less talented and unmotivated for school.

I have personal experience of this from my twin girls. One of them is a mature and gifted pupil with a very strong temperament. The other one is a less gifted, but very resilient learner who encourages others to learn and try. The teachers' views and attitudes had a big impact when the one with the stronger temperament was placed in a class for so-

called challenging pupils in lower secondary school and the other one was integrated to a special needs class.

Identity as a structure that assembles your personality has a strong impact on the motivation to learn and educate oneself. Sources of motivation can be the objective of better grades, learning new things, competence development, a better salary, promotion or studying just for fun.

Particularly in adult education, studying is goal-oriented and easily applicable at work or in one's profession. Education should enable a new role or promotion. Salary reviews,

appreciation, expansion of current competences or professional development to another role should be some of the benefits gained by education. The "encourage, persuade and force" method is hardly appropriate today — motivation and the joy of learning must be found somewhere else. This is a challenge for both employers and employees. ■

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# **MOVE FORWARD OR STAY PUT – FACING UNEMPLOYMENT AT THE AGE OF 55**

There are many options running through your mind when you realise that you might need additional competences and maybe even a new job at that age. What kind of solutions do people make or are forced to make? Here, the author presents his solution and some statistics and examines a better way to do and think about things.

For a long time, I had thought about how to improve my skills. First, I just wanted to be better at my job — I was not really thinking about career development in the long term. As I was facing the termination of my current role, I realised that the company had no other positions I could apply for. The further education I had considered earlier became a reality as I understood that I needed to learn new skills. I had already applied for a new job without result, and resignation without a plan was not an option.

### “Age matters, unfortunately”

This is what Managing Director at Häme Chamber of Commerce **Jussi Eerikäinen** says in his article (2020). With good reason, he considers the question that you get when you browse the official unemployment statistics. Our country wants to prolong careers simultaneously as the unemployment of people over the age of 50 is rapidly increasing. The objective and reality do not meet.

At the end of May 2020, there were 141,600 unemployed Finns over the age of 50. Compared to the same time period the year before, this is an increase of 56,600 people — nearly 67%. The corresponding percentage for people over the age of 55 was 57%, and for people over the age of 64, it was 119%. Even higher percentages than these can be seen in the age group of 35–44, in which the increase was 112%. (Employment Bulletin May 2020) However, re-employment or further education is easier in younger age groups.

Ending up in the unemployment path to retirement is one option for the aged losing their jobs. This refers to additional days of unemployment allowance which the unemployed jobseeker can enjoy until they retire. According to Suvi Hautanen (2020), from the beginning of this year, unemployed jobseekers born in 1961 can benefit from the un-

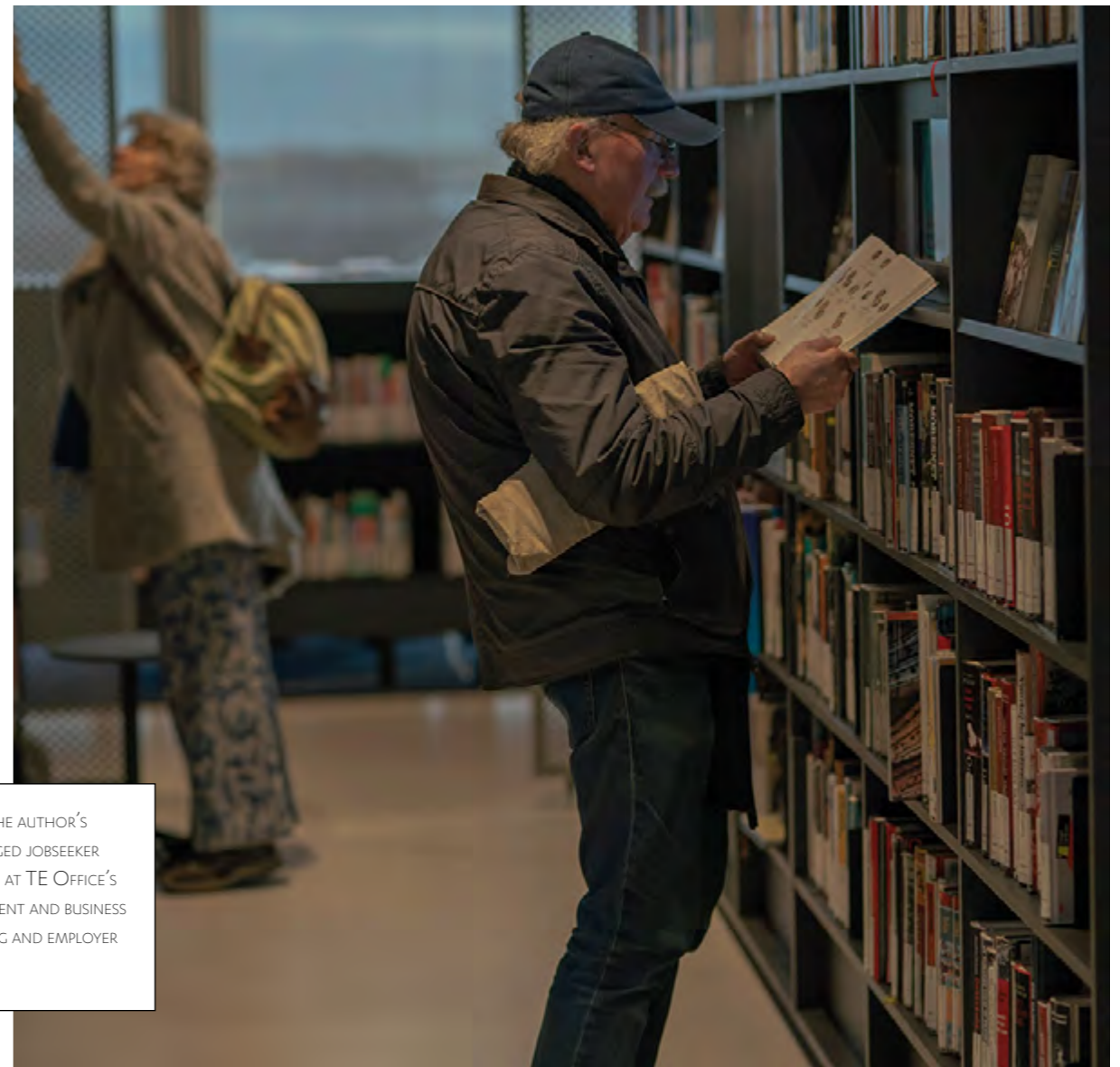
employment path when they turn 62. Just before Christmas government decided to close the unemployment patch gradually, starting in 2023. This means that then the 1965 born unemployed cannot anymore raise the earning-related unemployment allowance above the maximum of 500 days. (HS 2020)

Specialists unanimously agree that the unemployment path increases unemployment among older employees and raising its lower limit increases employment. It impacts employees’ decision as they lay off people as well as the likelihood of employees’ re-employment (VATT Research Reports 184, 70–72).

Why does age matter? It’s possible to discover reasons that impact the negative development of the employment of people over 50. Employers might be concerned about hiring a person from the perspective of a higher pension payment if the employee is granted disability pension. In the recruitment situation, they must also weigh their options between a young and educated person and someone with more experience but who potentially needs further education. The jobseekers and applicants might have various reasons for applying, such as a temporary layoff, termination of employment or other negative experiences. Former entrepreneurs might be coming from a bankruptcy or a termination of their business due to external circumstances. Unfortunate events in your career history might impact your self-confidence, ambition and willingness to start working again. While some might be encouraged to learn more, many will feel paralysed or discouraged.

How well do the services at the TE Office (Public employment and business services) find the older jobseekers when filling vacancies? I think they work well as long as you need to find a job. The TE Office provides guidance and support.

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ACCORDING TO THE AUTHOR’S EXPERIENCE, AN AGED JOBSEEKER SHOULD BE ACTIVE AT TE OFFICE’S (PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT AND BUSINESS SERVICES) TRAINING AND EMPLOYER DAYS.

They also actively offer courses. However, it’s up to the applicant to find a job that they enjoy. After they understand and accept their situation and the need for renewal, it’s possible to set a new goal and truly work for it. However, this is where the jobseeker is often left alone. In some ways, it might be a good thing. The willingness to work or develop your competences must come from within the person.

Based on my experience, some employers’ — and some employees’ — attitudes as well as the need for further education impact the likelihood of people over the age of 50 staying at their job. The unemployment path has taken many of my acquaintances out of the working life. The regional demand and supply do not always match at the labour market even in this age group.

For me, the possibility to study with a labour market subsidy was a requirement for competence development. Without this possibility, I would probably have gotten stuck at the unemployment office, waiting for retirement.

### Social media, Photoshop and language skills

Roles and tasks are changing faster than ever before, both now and in the future. Above all, this is caused by the accelerating changes in the working life and the surrounding society. In this situation, the employee and organisation must be able to develop themselves. Thus, the need to learn new things applies to people, but organisations carry a great responsibility for competence development. An organisation will not develop as an actor if its employees cannot develop themselves. (Hiila, Tukiainen & Hakola 2019.)

The Russian language, new technologies and marketing communication tools were some of the first things that made me want to update my competences at my job at the time. I did well or well with the four most common languages in my industry but, as the significance of our Eastern neighbour grew, it felt meaningful to learn the basics in Russian. The importance of social media marketing increased the need for image editing skills. Facebook and

Instagram were the most important social media channels just five years ago. My task was to look after the company accounts on these platforms, so I wanted to learn how to edit images.

Working with younger colleagues encouraged me to develop my competences. My new colleagues had a completely different readiness in the areas in which I found my skills to be lacking. Of course, they supported me if I asked for it, but I could not keep asking for help forever. In the autumn 2014, I decided to apply for further education (Bachelor of Business Administration in Business Management) at Laurea University of Applied Sciences.

### Where can I find help?

Throughout the years, I had improved my language skills on various courses. I had studied German and Russian on courses organised by the employer or during my free time at the Adult Education Centre. However, the use of the languages varied daily. If we did not have collaboration partners in the countries in question, I could not practice, and the threshold to communicate in the language became too high.

Studying alongside work turned out to be challenging. A new language as well

as new marketing technologies and channels demanded a more thorough effort. I thought that learning everything would be most successful if I were studying half- or full-time. At the same time, I could update my competences in a more comprehensive manner.

After I noticed that I needed to develop my competences and made some more detailed objectives, it was time to make a decision. The TE Office (Public employment and business services) helped me with that. I was able to visit their career psychologist after I signed up as an employed jobseeker. I had five meetings of approximately one hour. We went through both my personal and career history. At that stage of a long career, it was nice to have a professional asking questions and listening. It was also a good experience for myself to verbalise my life and experiences. A new profession started to appear with the help of these meet-

ings. I was suggested teaching, coaching or consulting on the basis of my business experience. They would combine my education, knowledge and personal tendencies, such as performing, which I have become familiar with through my music-related hobbies.

### I want to continue in a role that matches my education

Personal motivation is crucial for competence development. This is why it was so important to think about what I wanted to achieve career-wise as I was facing unemployment. Am I looking for new, even bigger challenges, am I satisfied with similar tasks on the same level or should I apply for something completely different? Would I enjoy simpler tasks more? All of the options had their pros and cons.

As I was facing unemployment, my options were to apply for similar tasks with a new employer or find employment

after further education. In both cases, the goal was to be unemployed for as short a time as possible. As the first alternative turned out to be difficult or even impossible to actualize, I took the opportunity to gain more skills in business management. I succeeded, which made me satisfied — when I was reflecting on my

career path, I had early on come to the conclusion that I wanted to continue with tasks that correspond to my education. I felt learning new things would mean that I needed to detach myself from my old career. I needed a fresh start, which I would get through studying.

My decision was motivated by my family background, education and life experiences. My parents' example, education level and upbringing encouraged me to learn and work. As I grew up in the technology-enthusiastic 1960s, went to school in the reformist 1970s and completed my professional education in the beginning of the internationalising 1980s, I could not avoid having friends and an ideology that encouraged a spirit of entrepreneurship and self-development. This is something that not even authoritarian corporate cultures had destroyed. After all, I shared the goals of these organisation: growth, internationalisation and a better future.

**Roles and tasks are changing faster than ever before, both now and in the future. It means that the employee and organisation must have the ability to develop themselves.**

I had a very high internal and external motivation. I was not happy with what I had achieved in my career so far. Even my earlier education started to feel insufficient; I could do better. I wanted to show myself and others. For example, I thought that my children would surely note my decision in this situation and might use it as an example in their own life, just as I had been influenced by my own parents' life choices.

### What could we do better?

I think an older jobseeker can find employment in Finland if they want to. I am sure there are regional differences, but key factors are competences, the willingness to develop them, your attitude, how you apply for work and how employers look for employees. The different parties should look into the matter more and create an operating model that ties together the labour authorities, educational organisations, companies and jobseekers.

The general view of the possibility to find employment after you have turned 50 years old is pessimistic. Nonetheless, the government, ministers and labour authorities emphasise the extension of careers to mitigate the growing sustainability gap. Celebratory speeches often highlight how

important long work experience is when filling vacancies. Every now and then, there are positive news about how older people were employed in a way that motivates them and benefits the employer. According to what the older employees say in the media, they more or less think that jobs should be freed up for the younger people while the more experienced ones should be allowed to retire. However, many have also said that they want to go on working. Positive and encouraging messages about the activity of the different parties should be more readily available.

I applied for dozens of jobs before and during my further education. I received two invitations to interviews, and none of my applications led to an employment relationship. Only once did I receive more detailed reasons and, even then, they were not really something that would help me develop my competences. Generally, the negative responses had to do with the demands of the role that my applicant profile was not suitable for. I fully understand that organisations are busy after the application process has ended, but constructive feedback would be irreplaceable for jobseekers in developing their competences and finding the right job.

Based on my experience, an aged jobseeker should be active at the TE Office's (Public employment and business services) training or employer events. These are mass events with many visitors, which makes it hard to differentiate yourself. However, you can succeed by doing your homework, i.e. by making sure your CV and social media profiles are updated. Exchange contact details with employers immediately either electronically or with traditional business cards. Once, I came upon a miracle at a recruitment event. I met an employer who was looking for and hiring over 50-year-olds! The representative even told me that they had hired five people in this age group just by early autumn that year. I hope companies will continue with these kinds of activities — bravely highlight the possibility of hiring an aged person and show concretely how and to what extent you are doing it. The media should let the public know about these situations more often. ■

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**TECHNOLOGY  
SUPPORTS  
LEARNER  
MOTIVATION AND  
COMPETENCE  
DEVELOPMENT**





**The online learning platform Vuolearning was utilised as part of the training and coaching offered to the SMEs participating in the project. A key perspective was to motivate learners to formal education that occurs by learning in everyday situations, even unnoticed. Both the educators and learners had a primarily positive experience of the Vuolearning platform. A learning platform should serve and motivate both the educator and the learner.**

Motivation is a force that gets us moving and makes us act. Whether you are starting to exercise, applying for a job, or learning something new, motivation leads us to transformation and makes us work to achieve our goal. Motivation can be internal or external. Internal motivation is created by your interests and the willingness to learn and develop. The learner thinks that the action is rewarding. External motivation comes from elsewhere in the form of, for example, feedback, a higher pay, appreciation from others or career progress. External motivational factors can also be things such as the fear of punishment or a weakening situation. It is not always possible to clearly define these factors, as the internal and external motivational factors can impact simultaneously. (Martela & Jarenko 2015; Sinokki 2016.)

No matter if the learner's motivation is created by internal or external factors, learning must create the feeling of success, empower, and motivate. Whether learning happens in a physical classroom or online should not matter so much today. Remote learning can be just as much of a shared ex-

perience that brings joy as traditional teaching. Today's learning and meeting tools and methods enable this.

In the first phase of the Urban Growth Vantaa initiative, employees were offered a comprehensive selection of training and coaching sessions. We acquired a separate platform, Vuolearning, to support the sessions. In this article, we discuss the criteria set for the learning platform as well as user experiences from the perspective of the learner and educator. In addition, we will look at how a learning platform can be utilised better when motivating a learner towards competence development.

**The project's criteria for the learning platform**

When thinking about the purpose of a learning platform, it's important to think about what it's used for. Will the platform only function as a place where assignments are submitted, or do you want it to enable more comprehensive contents and the sharing of ideas, learning and development? The objective of the project's training sessions was to support the labour force's competence growth. We wanted to motivate people who are not necessarily inclined to study or look for information to start the lifelong learning process. Therefore a learning platform utilised in training should be more of an enabler of peer support and the exchange of experiences and thoughts rather than just a channel for

perience that brings joy as traditional teaching. Today's learning and meeting tools and methods enable this.

In the first phase of the Urban Growth Vantaa initiative, employees were offered a comprehensive selection of training and coaching sessions. We acquired a separate platform, Vuolearning, to support the sessions. In this article, we discuss the

distributing materials and storing assignments with no interaction.

During the project, the implementation method for the training and coaching sessions was a combination of in-person meetings as well as materials and assignments on the learning platform. The training and coaching sessions were implemented by Laurea University of Applied Sciences and Metropolia University of Applied Sciences. Both institutes have their own online learning platforms which are difficult for outsiders to use without a complicated login system. Therefore, the initiative wanted to have its own learning platform that the members of the initiative team — coming from various organisations — and learners could easily log in to with their own email addresses.

The educators who participated in the project wanted the learning platform to be easy to adopt and use, enable individual guidance and feedback as well as have clear and versatile user analytics. Additional criteria were a Finnish-language user interface and support services.

In addition to the educators' wishes, it was also important to acknowledge the learners' point of view. The universities of applied sciences that were responsible for implementing the training sessions understand the pedagogics of online training. Ease of use, visual aspects and the clarity of tracking course completions were selected as criteria for the learning platform. In addition, the co-development initiative acknowledged the workplace's and learner's needs and wishes when planning the general outline of the training. For example,

**An ideal learning platform is an endless source of information which the learner can explore, and where they can complete the most interesting sections that develop their competence the most.**



WHETHER LEARNING HAPPENS IN A PHYSICAL CLASSROOM OR ONLINE SHOULD NO LONGER MATTER.



**Anniina Honkonen** is a project worker from Laurea University of Applied Sciences. In the project, her role has included administration of the Vuolearning learning environment, communications, planning and development.

► employers believed the learner cannot be absent too often. Learners are not motivated by old-fashioned learning in a classroom — they are motivated by inspiring teaching that happens regardless of time and place, even unnoticed.

Experience from the project shows that an employed learner should be motivated and supported to formal learning with the methods of informal, everyday learning. Content-wise, the purpose of the platform was to encourage the learner to browse the materials, which supports independent learning to some extent. An ideal learning platform is an endless source of information which the learner can explore, and where they can complete the most interesting sections that develop their competence the most. In addition, the platform should enable peer support, feedback, and mobile use.

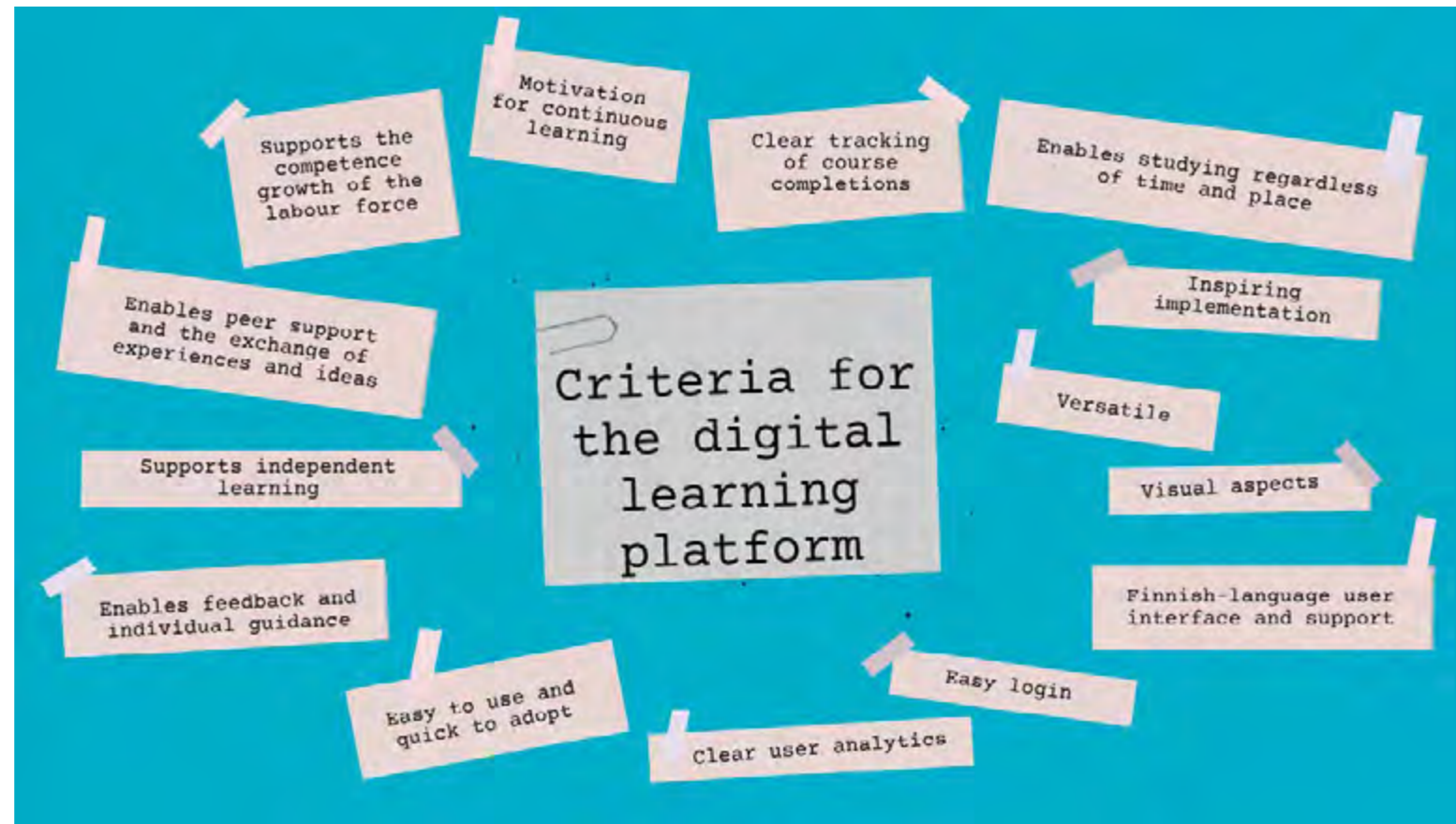
After getting to know various alternatives and testing them, the project team decided to select the Finnish Vuolearning platform. In total, 26 courses and 12 company-specific coaching sessions were implemented in the first phase of the project. Main themes of the courses included communication, supervisory work, lean, Office and customer work. Main themes of the company-specific coaching sessions were corporate image and sales development.

The learning platform was utilised in a variety of ways at the courses and coaching sessions. Some courses were completed fully online, while most courses and coaching sessions consisted of inperson days and material on the platform. The utilised materials consisted of videos, podcasts, written materials, assignments that needed to be submitted and discussions.

### Educators' experience: clear and logical with some technical challenges

After the training and coaching sessions ended, we assessed how well the selected Vuolearning platform functioned and what could be developed for future training and coaching sessions. The project's educators took a short survey that assessed their experiences of the Vu-

**A learning platform should enable the learner to participate in competence development and planning of the studies.**



CRITERIA SET FOR THE DIGITAL LEARNING PLATFORM (ANNIINA HONKONEN 2020).

olearning platform and, for comparison, other learning platforms they had used earlier. In addition to the Vuolearning platform, the educators had used the online learning platform Optima. Three educators had experience of the Moodle platform, while two respondents had also used other learning platforms (Canvas, Campwire).

The educators thought the Vuolearning platform was easy to use and user-friendly. Its appearance was clear and the basic functions were sensibly organised. This made it easier to learn to use the platform and structure courses that proceeded logically. The user analytics were easy to use and clear. Of the learning platform's functionalities, positive features included the creation of materials and distributing them to learners, communicating with learners and supporting learning. The educators liked the visual aspects of the platform.

*"Easy and simple logic. A smart layout (like a website) made it easier to learn. The logic was so good that I didn't need to look at the instructions at all."*

*"With Vuolearning, you can create materials directly onto a 'template'. It's a bit like writing a book."*

*"I think Vuolearning also has the best user analytics."*

The technical aspects were primarily easy to use, but there were challenges with downloading files, the comment function for submitted assignments was considered to be inflexible, and reviewing assignments was somewhat difficult. In addition, editing PowerPoint slides to a visually pleasing format was felt slow and laborious.

*"Vuolearning is great for teaching short units. Returning assignments and commenting them on the platform is inflexible..."*

*"Making PowerPoint slides visually pleasing demands a lot of work."*

### Learner experiences: implementation promoted learning

After each course ended, the learners received a feedback form with questions related to the implementation of the course. In total, 57 participants responded to the survey. The courses had 114 participants, so the response percentage was 50%.

The form was used to survey learners' experiences of the implementation of the courses. Generally, learners were satisfied with how the courses were implemented (average 4.7 on a scale 1–5). The respondents thought that the online learning platform Vuolearning supported their studies (average 4.5) alongside the group meetings (average 4.8).

Thus, group meetings were considered to be a slightly better implementation method than the learning platform and remote learning. This raised the question of how could the learning platform, the courses on it and their implementation be made more attractive and successful? For example, could the features of the learning platform and their placement motivate users? With the course analytics, it was possible to track which features, such as videos, images, texts or assignments, were attractive to learners. The big picture gave an idea of whether enthusiasm was dwindling, for example, towards the end of a certain chapter or course, or whether the participants went through all materials meticulously until the end.

In the open-ended questions, the learners said that the materials in the online learning environment were a good addition that supported learning. Online assignments and feedback were considered to promote learning. As we were examining the total course analytics, we noticed that videos and short assignments were popular contents.

*"I liked that the teacher commented my responses in Vuolearning so I could have feedback."*

*"Good self-study materials. The video assignments were a good preparation for the meetings and elaborated on the themes even further. The possibility to study online is a good support."*

*"A suitable amount of group meetings and remote assignments/material."*

▶ **A learning platform must serve both the learner and educator**

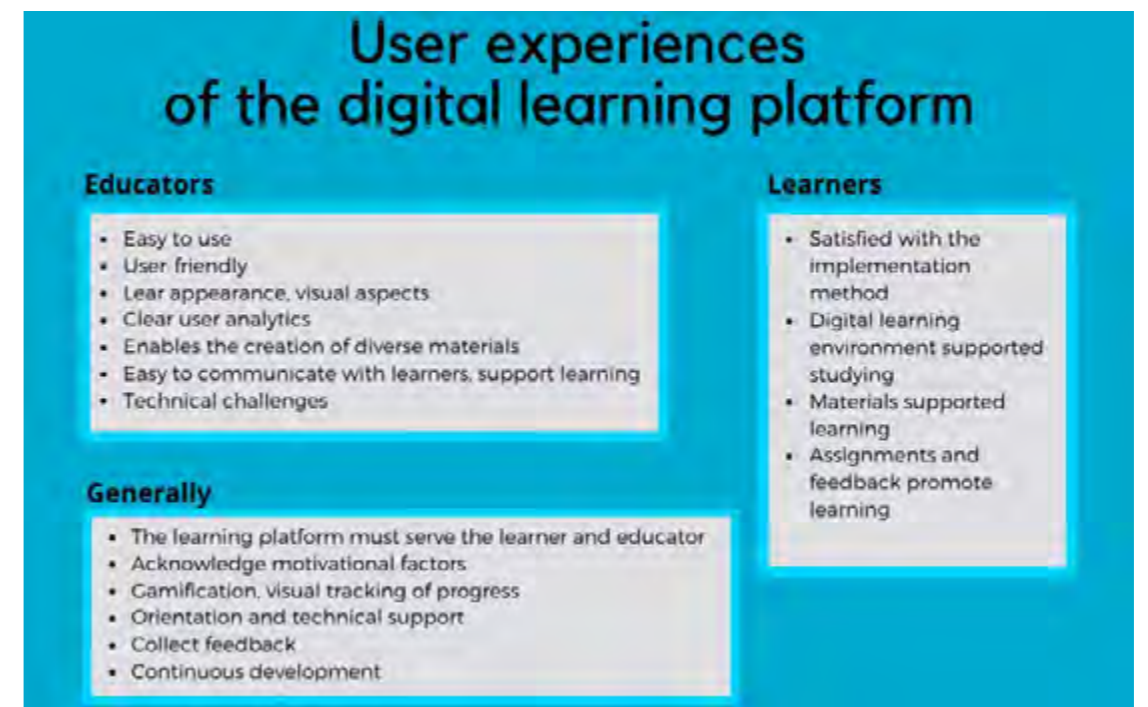
Whatever the learning platform, they all share the same challenges: how can learners be directed to start using the platform and what motivates them? This is what the Urban Growth Vantaa project is focused on. The project's target group is wide: the entire labour force in Vantaa, which is not a homogenous group. Necessity works until a certain point, for example, in education leading to a degree, where certain things are required to pass a course. However, it will not work when we are talking about voluntary self-development and a learner developing their competences while working.

What drives people to new things? Is it a thirst for knowledge, the fear of having weakening competencies, the impostor syndrome or the example of others? There are as many answers as there are learners. Motivational factors should be considered when planning courses and study units and creating implementations. In addition, you have

to think about how to attract new learners to the course and make old learners return or continue developing their competences on the online platform.

Gaming and visual tracking of one's progress could have a positive impact. A course certificate could be a source of inspiration and function as a social status of competence development. Some learners could benefit from a thorough orientation and support in the beginning of the course so that they are familiar with the learning platform and its functions before the actual studying begins. From the beginning, it's a good idea to collect feedback of how the platform works in order to figure out issues that slow down its use and so that you can react quickly during the course. Below, we have summarised criteria and expectations related to the learning platform from the perspective of the project, educator, and learner.

The Urban Growth Vantaa project will organise resilience training related to technological change for employees in SMEs. The purpose of the training is to support employees'



EDUCATORS', LEARNERS' AND THE PROJECT'S GENERAL USER EXPERIENCES OF THE DIGITAL LEARNING PLATFORM (ANNIINA HONKONEN 2020).

change ability to adapt to the technological changes they encounter in the working life. If we want to utilise the Vu-learning platform in a more comprehensive manner, we should think about how internal and external motivational factors could be considered better in content development. We must be able to motivate learners for studying and competence and resilience development. In addition to the topic, contents, implementation method, interaction, reflection of learning and feedback, the learning platform also has an impact on motivating and inspiring the learner. The learning platform can enable the learner to participate in the development of their competences and planning their studies, which increases the motivation to study.

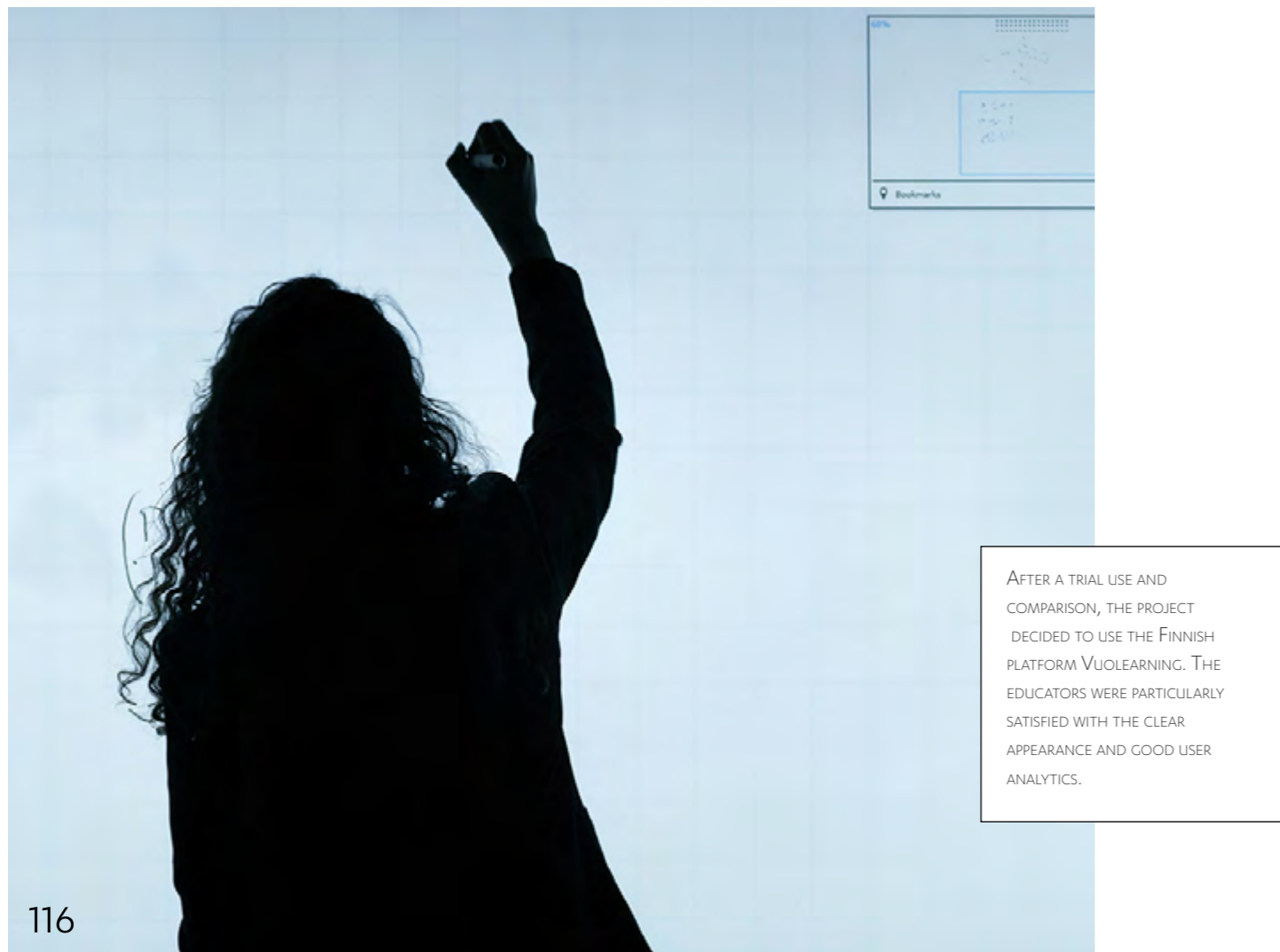
The learning platform serves both the educator and learner. For the educator, it enables the creation of versatile and content-rich training as well as the further development of assignments and implementation based on the acquired user data. This motivates the educator to develop and improve the contents of their courses and make them more technically advanced and attractive to learners. For the learner, the platform is a rewarding and inspiring environment where they can develop their competences alone or together with others. Attractiveness can be increased with inspired contents, interesting implementation methods, functioning technology and, above all, communication. At best, technology supports the learner's motivation and promotes their competence development. ■

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AFTER A TRIAL USE AND COMPARISON, THE PROJECT DECIDED TO USE THE FINNISH PLATFORM VUOLEARNING. THE EDUCATORS WERE PARTICULARLY SATISFIED WITH THE CLEAR APPEARANCE AND GOOD USER ANALYTICS.



# CO-DEVELOPMENT IN PROJECT FINANCES

The co-development project Urban Growth Vantaa is unique, and there are no similar co-development initiatives in Finland.



WHEN THE NEW OPERATING MODEL SUCCEEDS, THE AIM IS TO SCALE IT NATIONALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY.



The main purpose of the Urban Innovative Actions project is to offer European municipal authorities the possibility and resources to experiment with courageous ideas that have not been tested in practice and that aim to respond to intertwined challenges and to try their functionality in the complicated real world. The supported initiatives must be innovative and of high quality and planned and implemented together with the key stakeholders participating in the activities. Additional requirements include result-orientation and transferability (see the UIA website: <https://www.uia-initiative.eu>).

The project has ambitious objectives for employment and business growth through training and competence development. The project's culmination is the goal of developing an entirely new kind of an operating model which helps job-seekers who need a job and new competences find the companies offering competence development. If the operating model succeeds, it will be utilised both nationally and internationally.

**Project finances**

Project finances can be briefly defined as the process created by the cost accounting, monitoring and reporting during a project's lifecycle. To support these activities, the co-implementors have signed and approved a project partnership agreement which defines the obligations and responsibilities of the participants as well as the financier's demands for the funding's purpose of use and the nature of the supported project activities.

In the Urban Growth Vantaa project, co-implementors (Vantaa Vocational College Varia, Laurea University of Applied Sciences, Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, Helsinki Region Chamber of Commerce, Etna Economic Research, Labour Institute for Economic Research PT as well as partner companies InfoCare Oy, Finnair Cargo, Vantaan Tilalvelut Vantti Oy, Solteq Oyj and ISS Palvelut Oy) manage their finances and budget independently and prepare the necessary documents and appendices for reporting according to the agreed schedule.

Cost development is monitored and reported in a six-month cycle. This means that each coimplementor drafts a reim-

bursement application and appendices for review and approval by the main implementor (City of Vantaa) The application will include the costs that they estimate will be entitled to funding during a six-month period. After the application has been reviewed and approved, the subsidy (80% of the approved costs) is transferred to the co-implementors to cover their expenses.

The total funding of the initiative has been distributed to several years based on the estimated costs so that the financier transferred 50% of the total granted subsidy to the main implementor City of Vantaa at the beginning of the project. The subsequent financial items will be received when the agreed shares of the total subsidy have been presented to the financier.

**About financing and budgeting**

In addition to the actual initiative employees, direct financing granted by the EU (approx. EUR 4 million) for the Urban Growth GSIP Vantaa development initiative (2018–2021) has helped us employ specialists to project finances in all co-implementor organisations. Right now, approximately 35 people work part- or full-time with actual project work, and approximately 11 people work in project finances. Since the beginning of the project, the number of project employees has grown as more operations have been added according to the various work phases.

**In a co-development initiative, it's necessary that the people responsible for finances in the various organisations communicate often.**

Tracking and budgeting the initiative's financing as well as coordinating co-implementors' accounting and reporting on the basis of the financier's requirements has demanded new kind of planning in order to make sure the reporting process functions smoothly and timely. The accounting description must be so detailed that a person outside the organisation understands how the costs have been entered and what they are based on. Close communication with employees responsible for the accounting and finances in the various organisations is necessary from the perspective of coordination.

**Liisa Rapo** (M.Ed.) is Project Coordinator for the City of Vantaa team. Her responsibilities include guidance and advising in the initiative's reimbursement application process as well as tasks related to budgeting and financial reporting.



## Co-implementors are united by digitalisation

Each co-implementor has its own budget in the project. The budgets and budget outlines deviate from each other based on the duration of the work phases defined in the initiative plan and how competences fall upon the participants in the project. The various competence areas of the co-implementors are education and learning (Universities of Applied Sciences Laurea and Metropolia and Vantaa Vocational College Varia), digital training for SMEs (Helsinki Chamber of Commerce), research and social impact (Economic Research ETLA and Labour Institute for Economic Research PT) and business operations (InfoCare Oy, Finnair Cargo Oyj, ISS Palvelut Oy, Solteq Oyj and Vantaan Tilapalvelut Vantti Oy).

One of the project's goals is to raise the employment of people with a low competence or education level as well as to accelerate the growth and digitalisation of business operations, so it was well-founded that universities of applied sciences and companies offering and developing education participate in the initiative. The role of research institutes is highlighted when assessing the impact of the initiative and gathering and analysing the right kind of information. A factor connecting all co-implementors is digitalisation and its development in the framework of learning, education and corporate activities.

## About the structure of and key tasks in project finances

### Cost reporting

From the perspective of co-development, the key in project finances is to report costs correctly to the main implementor and financier. The financier's Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system requires specific reporting templates which we use. The costs are reported according to our budget outlines. Costs that are subsidised based on the budget outlines include salaries, travel, third-party specialist services and devices. Some of the initiative's costs (e.g. small office supplies, IT and information management) are reimbursed according to a fixed percentage (15%) of salary

costs. The flat-rate method makes it easier to report and verify small, yet laborious costs. Everyone who works and enters their salary costs for the project fills in a "staff assignment" form based on the description and percentage of work carried out each period. Part-time employees also fill in a working time form so that the share of working hours completed for the project and description of the completed work can be verified.

## Work phases and cost centres

To support and facilitate reporting and accounting, the project is divided into seven work phases, each with its own cost centre. The preparatory subsidy, granted at the beginning of the initiative, is meant for costs created by setting the initiative in motion. The main implementor's coordination and steering tasks, project managers' administrative tasks and, for example, steering group work have their own administrative cost centre. Initiative communication, advertising and marketing form their own significant unit in the project finances. Development, testing and simulation (work phases 4, 5 and 6) form the key work phases of the initiative. The most significant financing in the initiative budget has been reserved for the above work phases. In addition, a so-called termination subsidy has been granted for terminating the initiative.

## The initiative's seven work phases support and facilitate reporting and accounting.

## Thoughts from the coordinator midway through the project

### Guidance and effortlessness of the reimbursement application process

The coordinator's most important co-development task in project finances is guiding the reimbursement application process and making sure it runs smoothly. The project plan's description of financial reporting has required some additional clarifications. The co-implementors have different kinds of organisations, so account reporting and the applicability of operating methods have demanded efforts from both sides. Challenges in the various phases of the

AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE REPORTING METHOD REQUIRED BY THE FINANCIER MAKES PROJECT FINANCES EASIER. THE COORDINATOR WORKS AS AN INTERPRETER FOR THE FINANCIER AND IMPLEMENTORS.



reimbursement application process have been solved on a case-by-case basis with the objective of finding the best possible operating method.

The financier's ERP has facilitated reporting as it has been possible to enter costs directly in the financier's platform. This has made it possible to eliminate clear defects and mistakes in the reimbursement applications. We started by practising the use of the system with a few co-implementors. Going forward, the purpose is to increase co-implementors' independence by granting them access rights and user IDs to use the system.

## Self-assessment

### Inspiration and the motivation to learn

My work has emphasised self-management, assessing my own activities and operations and making sure I work with meaningful tasks. The most important thing I have noticed during the project has been the joy of getting to know the people working in the project. Enthusiasm, the willingness to learn and team work support and motivate me in my independent work. Discussions with the co-implementors have revealed similar feedback from their side. One coimplementor said: "It has been interesting to participate in such a socially significant project and closely follow how the project proceeds and what kind of results we receive."

## Working group meetings and the significance of remote work

Participation in the project employees' working group meetings has increased my awareness of the different work phases. As the coordinator, it's good to know what is happening in the project on an operational level and what is going on right now. Considering the restrictions caused by COVID-19 in the spring and autumn, remote work has enabled efficient working. There has been no need to travel from one location to another or return to my office at the end of the day. There has been more time to take care of tasks in the personnel and financial administration interfaces. Tasks integral to the project finances include changes in the terms and conditions of the employees' employment relationships. People moving to new tasks and recruitments of new people are typical personnel changes in project. Tasks in project finances contain a lot of reading and applying instructions depending on the number of financiers and the forms of financing. From a learning perspective, the use of remote connections and participating in meetings has brought its interesting dimension to teamwork. A meeting invite can be sent quickly and, if there's space in the schedule, the meeting can even be organised immediately.

During the initiative, I have learnt to live in the middle of change. Changes in personnel and new recruitments have brought necessary extra resources to advance the project. The personnel are the most important resource, even in this project. ■


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