

Work life development in tripartite co-operation: The WORK2030 programme

Introductory

WORK2030

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Introduction

In the early 2020s, the Finnish labour market has been undergoing a significant technology and work transformation accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. Work communities, organizations and their ability to adapt and update themselves have been tested thoroughly, also in new ways.

In order for the entire Finnish welfare state to survive and reform, it is essential that work communities, organizations and the networks formed by them succeed in their development and reform work. Finland has a long tradition in programmatic work life development based on co-operation. The goal of programmatic work life development is to promote improvements in performance and quality of work life and quality of work life in a large group of work communities and organizations, meet their development needs and support their own development competence and learning from each other's experiences.

This review describes the special characteristics of Finnish work life, the history of programmatic development and the programme work during the current parliamentary term of 2019–2023. The review focuses particularly on the description of the Work and Well-being at Work Development Programme (WORK2030).

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Key characteristics, strengths and challenges of Finnish work life

There are 2.6 million employed people in Finland. About 75% of the working-age population are employed. The percentage of employed people has grown in the 2000s, largely thanks to the increase in the employment rate of people aged 55–64. This growth is supported by various factors such as the higher level of education, better health and work ability, changes in the occupational and economy structure, reforms in the pension system and changed attitudes.

Technological development and international markets have made Finland's occupational and economy structure more oriented towards service and information work. The industrial sectors that have grown the most are business services and health and social services, of which the latter are primarily the responsibility of the public sector. Meanwhile, the number of jobs in industry has decreased significantly. The pattern of occupational change in Finland in recent years has been skill-biased. Nearly one in three salaried employees work as professionals or managers in occupations that require a high level of skills. The polarization of the labour market seen in many other countries, where the growth of occupations that require high levels of competence has been associated with the simultaneous growth of low-competence occupations, has not been the case in Finland [1].

Finland's strengths in the transformations of work life have traditionally been high skills, trust and co-operation between different parties and safety nets that make it easier to adapt to changes and lessen their impact.

Constant development of skills as a prerequisite for adapting to changes

Finland is a high-competence society that has been at the forefront of digital transformation over the past decades. In terms of the digital skills of the adult population, Finland is the leading country in the world and among the top countries in using flexible work arrangements that utilize digital applications

[2]. This is not only based on an advanced education system but also on great respect for education and research and an open-minded approach towards new technologies among Finns.

Finland has a strong tradition in lifelong learning and the culture and institutions to support it. The aim of the education system is to provide everyone with the opportunity to be educated and to encourage citizens to develop their skills and competence throughout their lives. More than 50% of the adult population receives training or education every year [3]. Over 80% of the employed feel that they can learn something new at their workplace constantly [4]. Finland is among the Europe's top in terms of learning opportunities provided by work life [5]. The competence of employees is developed particularly at work and the workplace and not necessarily through traditional course-like training. Increasingly important methods of learning in a rapidly changing work life include own work, peer learning and participation in the development of operations, products and services [6].

The transformations currently in progress, such as the digital green transition and demographic shift and the related labour shortage, will strongly increase the need of competent workforce in the future. It is anticipated that almost half a million people in Finland will need retraining or extensive further education in the coming years. An important issue that needs to be resolved is how to ensure that the people who need training or education most also receive it [7]. The opportunities for developing competence are currently distributed very unevenly. For example, socioeconomic status strongly determines inclusion, and those who need training or education the most or most urgently are at a risk of not being included [8]. The need for competent workforce cannot be met with Finland's current demographic structure, but more international experts from abroad are needed.

Trust and co-operation as the strengths of a small country

Finland is a networked society where the different parties of work life believe in the power of co-operation. Co-operation between companies in Finland is active when compared internationally [9]. The strong trust prevalent in Finnish society promotes effective co-operation between different companies as well as

between companies, educational institutions and research institutes and official authorities.

The trust Finns place in their national institute is stronger than in any other EU Member State [10]. This is based on the fact that, as a result of the evolution of a welfare state, societal inequalities and other gaps have narrowed. Education and well-being services offered to all citizens are important factors in supporting and providing opportunities for success to everyone. In developing these services, it is important that we increasingly pay attention to the diversity of our population.

Finland has a long and established tradition of dialogue and co-operation between employers and employees. However, there are significant differences between industrial sectors. Co-operation between employer organizations and trade unions and between management and staff has expanded from basic training and occupational safety and health matters over the years. The development discussions are more and more also about productivity, quality, innovations, competitiveness and well-being at work. A self-directing and team-based working practice where employees can influence their own work and work environment is characteristic to many Finnish organizations [11].

There is strong trust in institutions in society, and combined with effective telecommunication networks and the high level of digital skills among employees, this supported adapting to the changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The majority of workplaces underwent the shift to remote work smoothly. Remote work has not typically been supervised with new methods or tools, instead, for the majority, the shift to remote work signified an increase in self management and autonomy [12].

The primarily positive experiences of remote work during the pandemic have changed the methods of working permanently, both from the perspectives of employers and employees. The majority of those who have worked remotely want to continue it occasionally and to combine the best aspects of in-office work and remote work [13]. More than half of workplaces have also indicated their willingness to let teams and employees decide on the location of working according to the type of work and work situation once the pandemic subsides [14].

Commitment to changes through safety nets

Finland is a safe country for working and doing business. Finnish legislation guarantees employers strong protection of property and employees the possibility of exercising influence at the workplace [15]. The stability is based on an active civil society where people can participate voluntarily in various “grassroots-level” activities. An essential part of Finnish civil society is the tripartite co-operation between public authorities, employer organizations and trade unions. Social partners that represent the great majority of Finland’s employers and employees play an important role. Agreements between employer organizations and trade unions and tripartite co-operation has had a significant effect on the development of the Finnish welfare state. The social partners and public authorities have developed in co-operation safety nets and incentives that promote the structural changes of work life and lessen their social impacts on employees.

Important Finnish social innovations that are strongly supported by both employers and employees include the extensive occupational health care system and comprehensive public day care services for children [16]. The foundation for both of these systems was laid in the 1970s. Every child has the right to access the early childhood education system, which provides both parents of a child with an equal opportunity to participate in work life and balance their work with other aspects of life. In particular, this has supported women’s involvement in work life, which is almost at the same level as men’s in Finland.

Awareness of the importance of well-being at work with regard to inclusion in work life, prolonged careers and productivity has increased in Finland over the past decades. This can be seen as various national, industrial sector-level and workplace-level development programmes and projects (see the next chapter for more information).

However, well-being at work has been promoted the best by the development of leadership and work organization carried out by workplaces themselves. Shared leadership, self-directing team work and autonomy over working time have become more common in jobs where they are possible with regard to the nature of work [17].

In contrast to the improved work ability of elderly employees, the mental health problems experienced by young adults in work life have become more common in recent years [18]. It is difficult to pinpoint a single reason for this phenomenon. The COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the climate crisis are major global phenomena of the 2020s that compromise the safety and well-being experienced by employees in Finland's work life in a whole new way.

Brief history of programmatic development of work life in Finland

Finland's work life has been developed through co-operation between labour market organizations and public authorities for a long time. The basis for increased co-operation are the changes in legislation and reforms based on agreements between labour market organizations made in the 1970s. The aim of these was to improve the dialogue between employers and employees and to improve the employees' possibility of being involved in the changes related to their work. Many changes were re-modelled after reforms made in Sweden. According to the example set in Sweden, the Finnish Work Environment Fund, which is still active, was established in 1979 to provide significant support to the funding and competence of developing work life based on co-operation between employers and employees.

The first work life development programmes launched in the 1990s

The first national work life development programmes based on co-operation between labour market organizations and public authorities in Finland were launched in the 1990s. A strong impetus for these programmes was the exceptionally deep recession that ravaged Finland in the early 1990s. The recession highlighted the need to improve the productivity of companies and public bodies and to develop leadership and work organization.

Based on a joint initiative by labour market organizations, a national productivity programme was launched in 1993 and, three years, later, the workplace development programme TYKE was launched as part of the Government Programme. Both programmes were active until 2003. In 2004, they were combined to create the new workplace development programme TYKES, which ended in 2010. The TYKE and TYKES programmes provided funding to more than 1,800 projects between 1996 and 2010, the majority of which were development programmes launched by companies and public bodies. The projects' typical areas of development were processes, team work, working methods, personnel management and network co-operation. The support provided by the programmes was targeted at the work of consultants and researchers involved in the projects [19].

In order to receive the support, the development projects in the workplaces had to simultaneously promote labour productivity and the quality of work life and it had to be carried out in co-operation between the management and personnel. The aim of the projects was not to adapt ready-made “good practices” established by other workplaces. Instead, the goal was to support workplaces to find the best solutions to meet their own needs in order to strengthen their own development competence.

Experiences with the TYKE and TYKES programmes and other programmes more narrowly focused on the promotion of well-being at work in progress in Finland at the time showed that development work based on co-operation between the management and personnel is an effective means of promoting innovative solutions at workplaces. The programmes also helped improve the development competence of work life at workplaces, universities and research institutes and among consultants while strengthening the development co-operation between different parties. The most significant shortcoming of the programmes was that it was difficult to disseminate the solutions and lessons learned in workplaces participating in the programmes to other workplaces.

In the 2010s, efforts to develop work life continued on four different fronts

The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment co-ordinated the Working Life 2020 project between 2013 and 2019. Working Life 2020 provided a co-operation forum for different ministries, labour market organizations and other expert organizations where ongoing development efforts and other topical issues related to work life were discussed. Working Life 2020 did not provide direct funding to development projects, instead, it attempted to influence the operations of different parties through communications and coordination.

The Finnish Funding Agency for Technology and Innovation TEKES was placed in charge of supporting innovative work organization development projects in 2008. The aim was to improve the opportunities of companies to combine simultaneous development of management and work organization to their business and technology development projects. For this purpose, TEKES launched the six-year programme titled “Liideri – liiketoimintaa, tuottavuutta

ja työn iloa” (Liideri - Business, Productivity and Joy at Work) in 2012 to develop SMEs that sought growth, in particular [20].

A third development path in the 2010 was the activation of the mutual development co-operation between labour market organizations. In 2008, employer organizations and trade unions established the round table of productivity to serve as a strategic-level forum for central organizations in matters related to the development of productivity, well-being at work and other aspects of work life. Around the same time, employer organizations and trade unions started launching their own industrial sector-specific development programmes. Technology and the municipal sector, for instance, were the forerunners. Similar projects were launched in more than ten industrial sectors in the 2010s.

Funding from the EU has also been used in addition to work life development programmes, other work life development efforts and in supporting their implementation. For example, the European Social Fund (ESF) has provided resources for the development work carried out by workplaces and supported concrete national and regional development projects.

The experiences from these have been important with regard to the planning and execution of the WORK2030 programme launched in 2020.

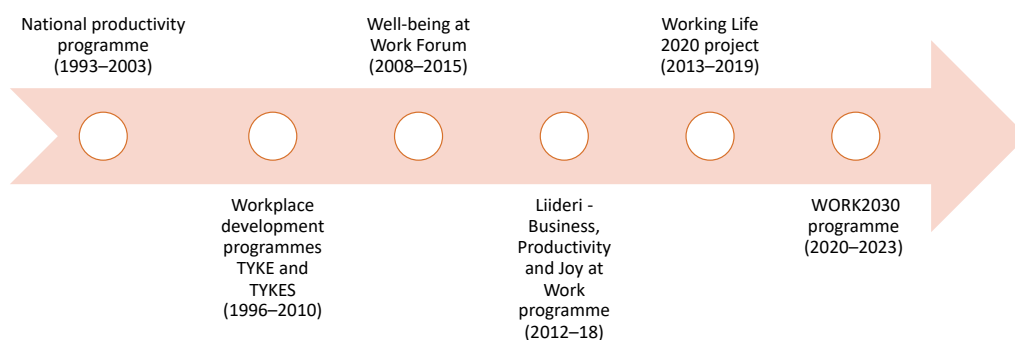


Image 1: History of programmatic development of work life in Finland between 1993 and 2023.

Work life development programmes as part of Finland's Government Programme 2019–2023

The programme of Sanna Marin's Government includes a strategic theme related to work life programmes aimed at increasing employment, well-being and productivity. The strategic theme consists of the WORK2030 programme, mental health at work and work ability programmes included in it. The work life programmes are part of the Government's employment promotion theme (3.5 Finland built on trust and labour market equality). The strategic theme supports the production of practical solutions for work life and the service system and, consequently, affects Finland's employment rate, productivity and well-being.

Reforming competence and methodology, allowing personnel involvement, supporting work ability and mental health and improving the opportunities for people with partial work ability play a key role in achieving Finland's target of an employment rate of 75%. Work life reforms take place at workplaces.

This review is about the WORK2030 programme, which aims to accelerate and facilitate the reform of competence and modes of operation while supporting productivity and well-being.

Objectives of the WORK2030 programme

The objectives of the WORK2030 programme specified in the Government Programme are:

- Accelerate the renewal of modes of operation and the use of new technology.
- Strengthen the work culture based on co-operation.
- Make Finland the leading developer of workplace innovations in the digital era.
- Make Finland the world leader in well-being at work by 2030.

The transformation of work life is constant and applies to all industrial sectors. Succeeding in the transformation and the opportunities it provides requires trust and cross-sectoral co-operation at all levels of work life. Regular, systematic interaction between ministries, labour market organizations, workplaces and educational institutions and other parties ensures a shared snapshot that allows for effective development work.

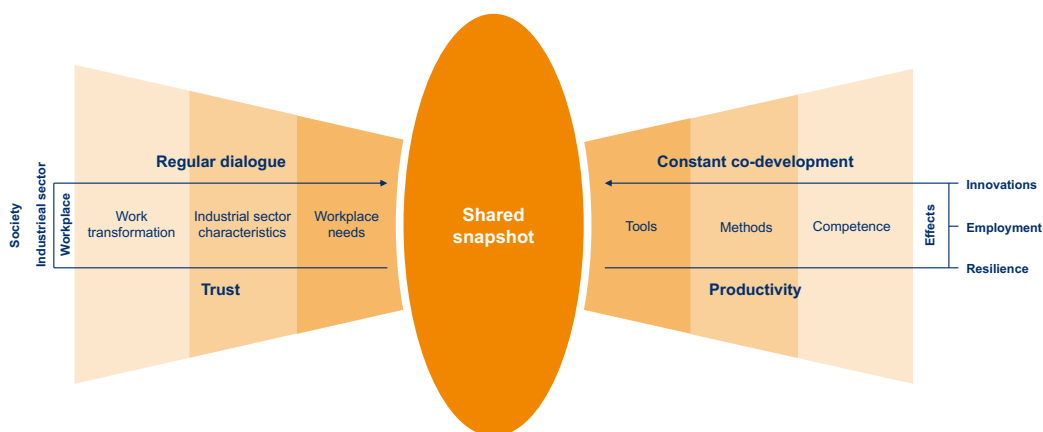


Image 2: WORK2030 programme trust and productivity path – a shared snapshot supports adaptability.

The Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health has been co-ordinating the WORK2030 programme in co-operation with the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, the Ministry of Education and Culture, labour market organizations and other work life operators. Finnish Institute of Occupational Health was responsible for the operational implementation of the programme.

The various measures of the WORK2030 programme have promoted the important themes of work life—trust and co-operation, continuous learning and utilization of digitalization

Trust and co-operation, continuous learning and utilization of digitalization are required in order to reform the competence and modes of operation of workplaces. These themes are promoted in the programme with an extensive range of measures. The programme’s measures include industrial

sector-specific and regional projects, a leadership network, R&D activities and communications and influencing. With the help of the diverse range of measures, workplaces and the service system has gained new, established models that promote well-being, competitiveness and employment.

Industrial sector projects are joint development projects between employer organizations and trade unions with objectives that vary according to the industrial sector's special characteristics and needs. In industrial sector projects, the goal has been to influence the development of work life extensively through the sector's organizations and distribute the effects comprehensively within the sector all the way to the workplace-level.

Regional projects are development projects carried out in co-operation with Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment that create services to meet the needs of the region's workplaces. Regional projects have focused on developing and experimenting with new methods to develop work life, promote digitalization and strengthen the development ability and co-operation between actors in the regions of one or more Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment. The regions have decided on the content of their projects according to the circumstances and needs of the region.

The leadership network co-ordinated in the programme brings together people interested in leadership and offers information, research and peer support related to the development of good leadership. Leadership plays a central role in the transformation of society and work life, increasing the opportunities of involvement of the working-age population and anticipating needs for competence.

R&D activities are arranged in a network consisting of universities, researchers, experts and workplaces. The activities focus on three cross-cutting themes that have involved various research projects and the development of new operational models and tools based on researched needs and the needs of workplaces.

The communication and influencing efforts of the programme and its stakeholders have highlighted the strengths, good practices and development stories of Finnish work life. Public discussion based on information and a snapshot of work life boosts the required change. In 2022, the programme

organized Finland's first open Work Life Forum, during which various discussions concerning the challenges and potential of Finnish work life were held. The forum was preceded by a wide crowdsourcing survey for all Finns about how they have experienced the transformation of work life and what they are expecting to change in particular in the coming years. Based on the nearly 30,000 comments provided in the survey, a snapshot about the strong digitalization of work life and increased demands and effectiveness was established. In the work life outlook of Finns, constant digital development and wishes regarding work flexibility and work-life balance continued to be highlighted.

The next section describes industrial sector-specific co-operation and project activities in more detail.

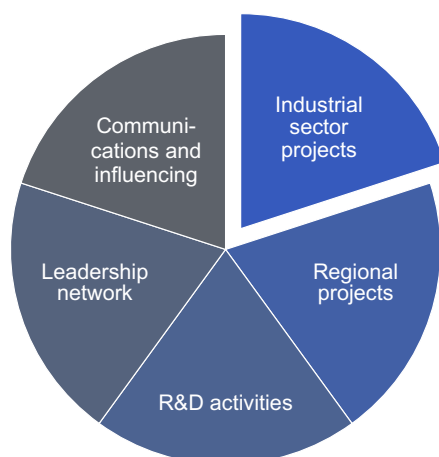


Image 3: The measures of the WORK2030 programme promote trust and co-operation, continuous learning and the utilization of new technologies.

Industrial sector projects build labour market trust and a shared snapshot as the basis of development

By the end of the 2010s, experiences with various development programmes and projects had shown that solutions implemented at individual workplaces and the lessons learned were difficult to disseminate more extensively in work life. In order to bring real changes in work life, networks that bring together different parties need to be involved from the very beginning.

Establishing such networks through industrial sector co-operation is natural. Industry associations, i.e. employer organizations and trade unions, as well as other interest groups and the Federation of Finnish Enterprises are already engaged in co-operation in various areas and the workplaces of the sector face similar development challenges. The industrial sector projects of the WORK2030 programme promote dialogue between social parties and develop new competence and practices required by the sector's workplaces accordingly. New opportunities provided by digitalization are applied in these projects.

Through development carried out between industry associations, the results of this development have been established within and between industrial sectors. The reforms are intended to be extensively utilizable by the workplaces of the sector, and new operational models have had great opportunities to become established widely in the industrial sector projects of the WORK2030 programme in respective industries. Actors involved in the programme have played an important role in creating new communications channels and for sharing information between industrial sectors about results of development activity in different sectors. The fact that the operations are extended to industrial sector and regional projects and the leadership network has been important in preventing the benefits and effects from being realized by only individual workplaces.

Throughout the parliamentary term, all labour market organizations and the Federation of Finnish Enterprises have been eligible to apply for the funding aimed at industrial sector projects. All projects to be funded are required to involve dialogue and co-operation between the employer and employees. The new operational models and tools developed in the project must be openly available to everyone when completed.

39 industrial sector projects were launched in 2020–2022. They have provided new, shared information and strengthened the parties' joint understanding of development needs. Several projects have provided new services, learning networks and peer support to meet the identified competence needs. The projects have developed various new operational models and digital solutions based on the needs of the workplaces in the industrial sector. Many industrial sector projects have also aimed at resolving the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. This has been done by creating new practices and solutions for situations in which the pandemic has made work in the industrial sector more difficult. The next pages describes few of the industrial development projects in more details.

All industrial sector and regional projects funded by the WORK2030 programme can be found in the [digital project library](#) (available in Finnish only).

The

“Vakuuttava työ

2030” project aims at establishing a shared snapshot about the future of the insurance sector. The project aims to encourage company-level discussion about where the sector is heading, what kind of jobs will be done in the sector and what is required from the company and its personnel. The trade unions and employer organizations of the insurance sector aim to support and help workplaces in developing open dialogue and co-operation with the future in mind. The results of dialogue about, for example, diversity and artificial intelligence, have been distributed in seminars/webinars and workshops as well as through new digital platforms and working methods. Good practices identified in the pioneering sector can be adopted by other similar industrial sectors.

The trade unions and employer organizations of the insurance sector aim to support and help workplaces in developing open dialogue and co-operation with the future in mind. The results of dialogue about, for example, diversity and artificial intelligence, have been distributed in seminars/webinars and workshops as well as through new digital platforms and working methods. Good practices identified in the pioneering sector can be adopted by other similar industrial sectors.

In the dialogue between the green and environmental construction interest group **Viher- ja ympäristörakentajat ry (VYRA)** and **the Finnish Ski Area Association**, new ideas for how two industrial sectors operating in different seasons can develop competence, culture and practices to allow people work in both sectors.

The development of continuous learning in **forestry service providers** is based on the results of the sector’s membership survey. Forestry service entrepreneurship is a relatively young industrial sector and the companies may be very different from each other. As it increases in popularity, the quality of services required has increased. The forestry sector is changing rapidly, which means that learning new things and development are vital for forestry service providers. The responses of entrepreneurs emphasized new digital competence, learning new forestry practices and improving the SME entrepreneurs’ and their employees’ ability to cope at work. The project has created and provided new connections between workplaces, training packages, peer mentoring and well-being practices.

**The
“Luova työelämä 2030”**

project develops tools to measure and develop the creativity of individuals and communities. Creativity is a critical capacity in work life. Creativity is needed to boost the reform of practices, utilize new technologies, produce commercial innovations and to make Finnish work life the best in the world.

**The
quality dialogue in
the construction sector**

focuses on the challenges faced by the sector together. The sector's productivity and ability to provide quality has been poor, although it provides nearly 18% of the jobs in the entire business sector. The construction sector's ability to provide quality through close, correctly timed co-operation between different parties and labour market organizations has been improved in a project. Practices, according to which different parties review the prerequisites for each phase of construction and the quality requirements related to working and the final result in advance, are developed together. This way it is ensured that all operators have the right information at the right time. These practices are developed in co-operation between the companies involved in the project and sites and the people working there. Development facilitates work and the exchange of information, removes unnecessary components and provides the quality described in plans.

**The industrial Hermes
development project**

has developed a multilingual phone app designed for foreign employees in agriculture and forestry. The Hermes app provides reliable, uniform content about employment terms and conditions, occupational safety and health, housing and residence permits in five languages. This also benefits employers as fair and socially sustainable work life also improves the quality and productivity of work life. Digitalization is at the heart of the project. The project also supports industrial sector-level dialogue between labour market parties, as it is a joint industrial sector project between Technology Finland, the Federation of Agricultural Employers, the Association of Private Forestry Employers, Metsähallitus and the Migration Institute of Finland.

Future prospects: The best work life is created together

Changes in the world, society and work life follow each other, and the effective development of work life requires long-term, determined effort. A comprehensive view in which the different parties of work life engage in open interaction and co-operation is needed in the development work. When it comes to programmes and other development efforts, extensive development work based on co-operation offers an excellent framework for this, and the results accomplished during different programme terms have influenced Finnish work life in a positive way.

The development of new practices in work life and at workplaces is an essential part of labour and innovation policies, competitiveness and well-being at work. Everything is based on trust and co-operation, with which various operational models, new technologies and good practices can be distributed and applied efficiently both in Finland and internationally. International co-operation will become increasingly important as a growing proportion of the workforce is international. In the future, it is important that Finnish workplaces succeed in the simultaneous development of well-being and productivity through co-operation and new innovations.

The dialogue and trust between employers and employees will also continue to play an important role in development work. Trust is an important competitive edge for organizations, especially during financially difficult times. However, trust must be earned and developed through practical actions by different parties. Finnish work life has benefited from co-operation across administrative branches and sectors, thanks to which not everything needs to be done on your own in a small country. Open, networked operations that take advantage of equality and inclusion is important. Continuous learning in work life takes place increasingly frequently in various interactions between people and communities, for which more space and practices need to be given and developed. The leadership of tomorrow is increasingly a shared capacity of communities that allows for fair and meaningful work and work communities for everyone.

Finland aims to be a leading country in matters related to work life. This means that we have to remain determined to stay on development paths and find new operational models for the future in co-operation with different parties in Finland and internationally.

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