Finnish Institute of
Occupational Health

Learning network approach to enhancing corporate hybrid work models

Meeting the challenges of communality, learning and innovation

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Communality, learning and innovation in the hybrid work mode – new management practices and technological tools

- Research project funded from Business Finland's research call "Competitiveness, productivity and quality of working life – leadership and organizational development in digital transformation".

- The project will be implemented between 15.5.2025 and 31.3.2028, in cooperation between Finnish Institute of Occupational Health and Turku School of Economics.

- Research activities (e.g. surveys, interviews, workspace analyses and foresight) and sharing activities (e.g. workshops) will start Q4/2025.

- The project acronym CHILL comes for the words Communality, Hybrid work, Innovation, Learning and Leadership

Project rationale

- As remote work became more common due to COVID-19, the public began to talk about remote work as the "new normal".

- However, instead of a "new normal", the situation today can be described more as a diversification of and increased experimentation with ways of working.

- Increased diversity forms a fertile ground for boosting learning from different solutions and is an important potential force contributing to company productivity and the renewal of work life.

- However, utilizing this potential requires research-based knowledge based on a systematic assessment of the functionality of different solutions and forums for B2B learning.

- The crucial issue is not the hybrid work mode itself, but its role as a trigger for new process flows, leadership and management practices, working hour models, forms of interaction, and technological and workspace solutions.

Project objective

- The objective is to bring about new solutions, which help companies gain a competitive edge from the opportunities opened by the hybrid work mode (HWM), with the help of new research knowledge.

- To be able to make such a contribution, the project sets and answers five research questions based on close cooperation with project participants.

Research questions

- How can companies in a hybrid work environment build a new work culture that also promotes communality, learning and innovation?

- What kind of supervisory role shift and day-to-day leadership and HR management practices does successful HWM require?

- What kind of technological and workspace solutions does successful HWM require?

- What new bottom-up forms of communality, learning and innovation are emerging in the HWM?

- What new opportunities and challenges are emerging for well-being at work in the HWM?

Areas of project contribution

Leadership and management practices

Technology and workspace solutions

Communality, learning and innovation

Well-being at work

Future outlooks
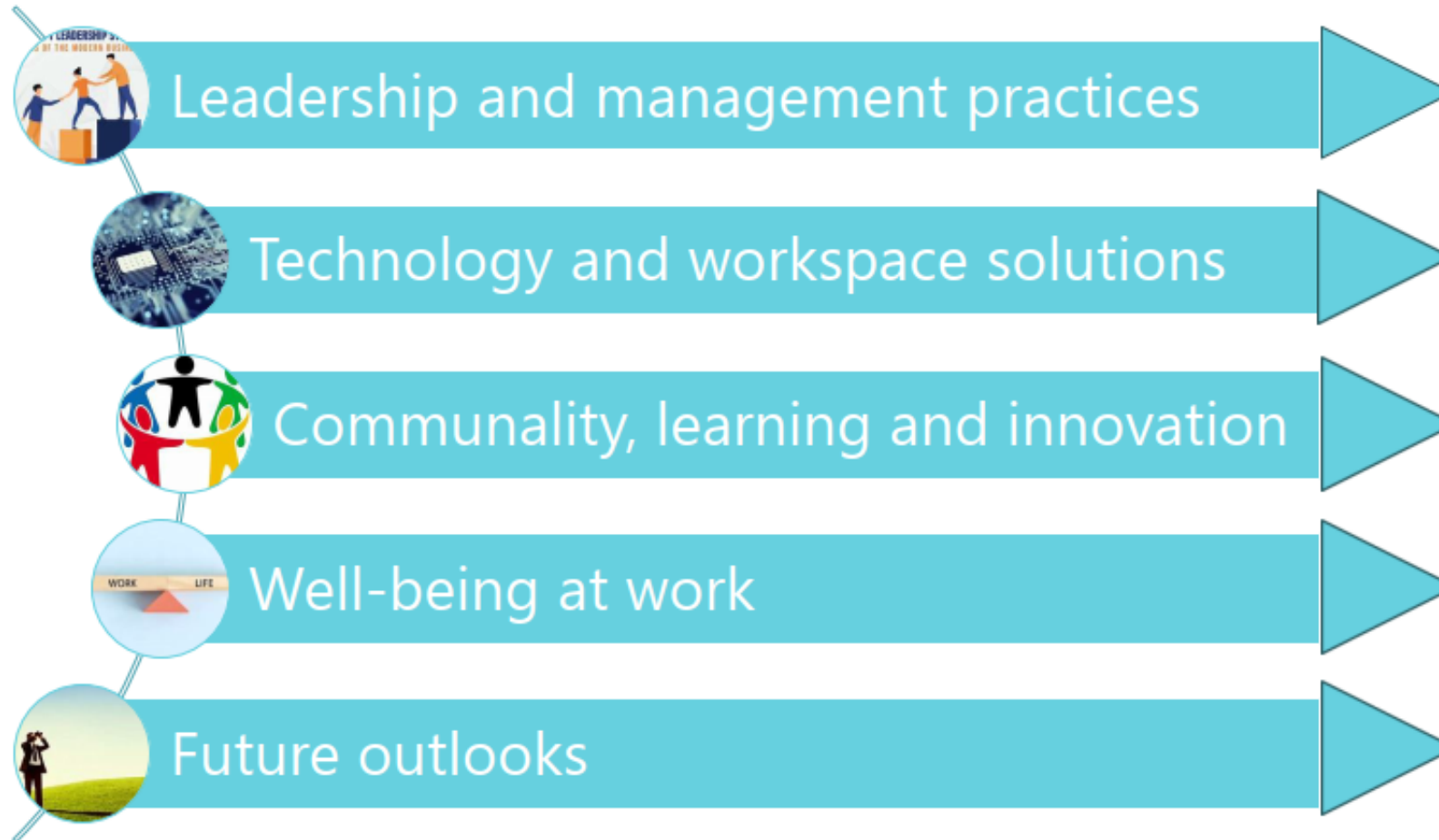
Roles of and key benefits for participating organizations

- RESEARCH PARTNERS (11-15 companies)

  - Research-based feedback data for the development of the company's hybrid work model and new solutions for promoting communality, learning and innovation in a hybrid work environment with the help of research data

- LEARNING PARTNERS (14-18 companies, public bodies or NGOs)

  - Opportunities for benchmarking, sharing experiences and learning

- ENABLERS (4 companies)

  - Opportunities for testing and developing the company's products and services concerning technological or workspace solutions

Hybrid work models of participating organizations

- Self-directed hybrid work model

  - About half of the organizations allow either individual employees or an organizational unit (e.g. team or department) to decide independently on their own ways of working.

- Constrained hybrid work model

  - About half of the organizations have set some maximum limit (e.g. 2 or 3 days a week) on the proportion of remote work an employee can do throughout the organization.

Learning network: what?

- The learning network is based on the idea of bringing together actors who share an interest in sufficiently similar development issues, but who still have a sufficiently broad diversity of expertise.

- The actors are engaged in long-term interaction, with the aim of creating development and innovation potential.

- As the name suggests, the concept of a learning network refers to a network that is created specifically for the purpose of learning.

- Here, learning is not just a 'by-product' of sharing experiences, which occurs in all networks.

- Rather, it is the explicit and primary function of the network to produce learning events.

Different interactive forums set-ups in learning networks

POSITION OF PARTICIPANTS	ALLOCATION OF KNOWLEDGE	TYPICAL LEARNING ACTIONS
TEACHERS AND LEARNERS	One member of the network has more extensive expertise in a given area than others	Other members gain ideas and encouragement for their own development work in that area
ALL TEACHERS AND LEARNERS	Several members of the network already have experiences of a given area	Benchmarking of experiences between members presenting their practices serves as a learning opportunity for them
ALL LEARNERS	A network examines matters which are relatively new to all members	Explorative activities, which help all members acquire greater expertise in the area in question, are launched

Learning network: advantages

- The key advantage of a research project implemented as a learning network for the companies compared to a more traditional research project is that it offers more learning opportunities.

- Learning opportunities are expanded not only by the larger number of participating organizations, but also by the closer interaction between network participants and their potentially greater diversity in terms of knowledge they possess or practices they deploy.

- The sheer number of participants in a learning network also brings other advantages of scale, e.g.

  - the sustainability of the project in the event of participants dropping out

  - the embedding of the project's practice-oriented results

  - the dissemination of the results to a wider group of companies

  - the raising of public awareness of the issues promoted by the project in general

Learning network: challenges

- The large number of participants, the increasing number of possible interactions within the network, and the potential complexity of the network structure can increase problems of coordination.

- All in all, a learning network is a demanding form of project implementation, but if successful, it includes great potential for building collaborative relationships, mutual learning and shared knowledge construction between network partners, and co-developing, experimenting with and scaling up new innovative solutions.