SYNCLUSIVE

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Living Lab Report

Kokkola, Finland

Appendix 2 to D2.1 Realist Evaluation



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1. Living Lab: Finland

1.1 Building a Coalition

In the Finnish Living Lab (Kokkola), a network focusing on employment reform already existed before the SYNCLUSIVE project. However, the network operated in a relatively unsystematic manner, with issues often addressed through bilateral contacts on a case-by-case basis. The stakeholders were familiar with one another, and a strong foundation of mutual trust existed between them. This provided a solid starting point for forming the coalition. New stakeholders were invited, and collaboration was promoted through information-gathering and activation events organised by the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health (FIOH) and the employment services of City of Kokkola.

Between 2023 and 2025, four major coalition gatherings were held. These demonstrated strong interest in maintaining engagement, with around 10–12 stakeholders involved. However, activities between stakeholders remained largely bilateral, and some participants were primarily engaged in direct operational work rather than representing their organisations at a managerial level.

In the end of 2025, FIOH launched a renewed activation phase with a broader focus on regional vitality, including employment. The aim was to better engage employers. The employment services took a clearer leadership role and FIOH facilitated. A successful employment ecosystem from North Karelia was presented as a benchmark. Coalition strengthening proceeded through a series of workshops: first, defining mission, vision, objectives, value proposition, roles and commitment; second, identifying joint activities and establishing four thematic working groups (employment, employment of vulnerable groups, continuous learning, and internationalisation); and third, agreeing on group composition, chairs, and next steps. New stakeholders joined throughout. The stakeholders also agreed to develop a written coalition agreement to strengthen credibility and organisational commitment. This agreement is currently under preparation, and working groups are expected to begin in autumn 2026, with progress to be reviewed in September 2026.

Overall, the coalition aims to move beyond traditional bilateral cooperation towards more multilateral collaboration in addressing complex challenges.

Representatives of the following stakeholder organisations participated in the coalition's activities:

- Employment services of City of Kokkola
- Business services of City of Kokkola
- Training institutions: University of Applied Sciences (Centria), The Federation of Education in Central Ostrobothnia (Kpedu), Vocational College (Luovi), Kokkola adult education centre
- Third sector organisations: The Finnish Red Cross, Kokkola Association of the Unemployed, Mello=an association providing social services
- Wellbeing Services County of Central Ostrobothnia (Soite)
- Associations of local and Central Ostrobothnia entrepreneurs
- Some bigger and smaller employers
- Some representatives of trade unions

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1.2 The target group

The main target group of the Finnish Living Lab is long-term unemployed jobseekers, defined in Finland as individuals who have been unemployed for at least 12 months. This group is highly heterogeneous; many face health and work ability challenges, have outdated or insufficient education, low self-confidence due to prolonged unemployment, an immigrant background, live in rural areas, and are either young or older (Farchy & Immervoll, 2021).

At the start of the project, there were approximately 650 long-term unemployed individuals in Kokkola, and the unemployment rate was 8.4%. Due to the economic downturn in Finland, the number has risen in Kokkola to 9.7% (April 2026). In 2026, Finland has the highest unemployment rate in Europe (11.6%, April 2026, Official Statistics of Finland).

Two different interventions were targeted at **jobseekers**. First, a peer group-based Taite coaching was aimed at those unemployed who have been unemployed for over a year but have great potential and motivation to gain employment and generally do not face severe health challenges. Second, IPS (individual placement and support) coaching was targeted those facing more significant barriers to employment, requiring more personalised support from job coaches for both them and their possible employers.

The City of Kokkola, as a large employer, is interested in exploring ways to support **employees** in vulnerable labour market positions (e.g., those with lower educational levels). Although the organisation offered various programmes for employee skill development, there was no structured guidance for **supervisors** on supporting competence and career development within their teams. To address this gap, the supervisory coaching programme Guiding Skills and Development was developed through collaboration between FIOH and the City of Kokkola's HR Department. The training was offered to voluntary supervisors to maximise reach and build consistent leadership capabilities across units. Participants came from several sectors, including early childhood education, comprehensive school education, technical and environmental services, cultural services, cleaning and catering, and human resources.

1.3 From drivers and barriers to solutions

At the individual level, the main obstacles of **jobseekers** relate to prolonged unemployment, low professional skills, and impaired health. Individuals who have been unemployed for a long time are not necessarily aware of current labour market demands, and many have lost self-efficacy and motivation to seek employment. At the employer level, the main challenges are linked to the structure of the regional economy: 83% of companies are micro-enterprises with fewer than six employees. These SMEs have limited opportunities for career development, mobility, or new recruitment, and employers are concerned about the costs of sickness absence. They often lack the resources to onboard employees or support the skills development of those who have been unemployed long-term and therefore call for employment subsidies and job coaching support. At the service level, there is fragmentation in services and cooperation between employment services and other service providers.

These multi-level challenges regarding employment provided the context for the development of targeted interventions. Following an administrative reform that transferred employment services from the state to municipalities, the City of Kokkola gained greater autonomy in

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service provision. Although the existing service palette was already extensive, greater effectiveness was sought. Consequently, employment services turned to research- and evidence-based solutions to strengthen the job search capabilities of the long-term unemployed and improve employment outcomes. Rather than developing entirely new intervention, they chose to implement coaching methods with established effectiveness, namely Taite and IPS coaching. Employment services and third-sector organisations jointly implement the Taite coaching, also continuing after the project has ended.

Regarding **employee mobility**, larger companies often have well-established practices for recruitment, as well as competence and career development. In some cases, they also provide in-house training programmes or maintain their own training institutions, reducing their need for external collaboration. In contrast, SMEs have limited opportunities for internal mobility and fewer needs for structured competence development. They also face challenges in releasing employees for training or onboarding new staff, as workforce shortages during these processes create time and cost pressures. At the employee level, individuals may lack the financial resources to pursue education or training in their own time and may also have negative prior educational experiences or learning difficulties.

Against this background, FIOH initiated negotiations with two larger employers involved in the coalition to explore interventions that would promote employee mobility within organisations. The employers identified challenges related to integrating employees with immigrant backgrounds into the workforce and the instability of career paths among younger employees, and both highlighted the need for supervisor training. Potential interventions and target units were planned in collaboration with the organisations and two regional training institutions. However, just before final decisions were made, both organisations withdrew due to ongoing organisational reforms, resource constraints affecting employees and supervisors, and existing or planned collaborations with external partners outside the region and the coalition. In parallel, local SMEs were consulted through activation events, interviews, and a survey regarding their needs and interest in joint interventions on recruitment and mobility, but none expressed willingness to engage further.

1.4 Methods

1.4.1 Recruitment of participants

Voluntary **jobseekers** for both the TAITE and IPS interventions were recruited by job coaches from the City of Kokkola's Employment Services. Individuals who enrolled in the coaching programmes were invited to participate in the study by the FIOH. In the TAITE coaching programme, FIOH provided participants with a baseline questionnaire and a return envelope at the beginning of the coaching. At the same occasion, participants were also invited to take part in a research interview, which was conducted as an individual interview after the coaching had concluded. In the IPS coaching, participants who enrolled received a study information sheet, a paper-based baseline questionnaire, a return envelope and an invitation to participate in an individual interview conducted by FIOH from the job coach. In addition to jobseekers, FIOH recruited TAITE and IPS **job coaches**, and employers involved in the IPS programme to participate in the interview study.

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The job coaches were not permitted to disclose participation data to the FIOH research team, as these constituted client records rather than research data. Thus, there is no exact info available on the number of participants who completed or dropped out of the interventions. Based on informal information provided by the job coaches, only a few participants dropped out of the Taite coaching. No data on intervention discontinuation were available for the IPS coaching.

Voluntary **supervisors** were recruited for their coaching intervention by the HR department of the City of Kokkola. With the participants' consent, the HR department provided their contact details to the research team, which then recruited the participants into the study and sent them an electronic baseline questionnaire to be completed before the coaching. In addition, a few supervisors were recruited to participate in the interview study either before or after their participation in the coaching. FIOH conducted the interviews individually. Because the intervention was delivered by FIOH research team, data on participants' attendance were available.

To assess the effects of the supervisory intervention, the **employees** of participating supervisors were also recruited into the study. As the HR department was not permitted to disclose employees' contact information to the research team, electronic questionnaires were distributed to employees by the HR department. A quasi-experimental design was established. Accordingly, prior to each supervisory coaching group, an electronic baseline questionnaire was distributed to employees whose supervisors participating in that group. A follow-up questionnaire was then administered four months after the completion of the coaching. This procedure was repeated for all three coaching groups. Following the final coaching group, the questionnaire was distributed to all other employees of the City of Kokkola whose supervisors had not participated in the intervention, and a follow-up questionnaire was again administered four months later.

1.4.2 Attendance and participation

Table 1 presents the numbers of participants enrolled in the different interventions, together with the number of individuals who consented to participate in the study at baseline (T0) and the respondent counts at two follow-up measurement point (T1 and T2). Table 2 summarises the number of participants who took part in the qualitative interview study.

Table 1: Participants in training interventions and quantitative research activities in the Finnish Living Lab.

	Number of people recruited for the intervention	**Number of people who started the interven-tion**	**Number of people who dropped out of the intervention**	**Number of people who completed the inter-vention**	**Number of people who participated in research at T0**	**Number of people who participated in research at T1**	**Number of people who participated in research at T2**
Jobseekers Taite IPS	 N/A N/A	 79 19	 N/A N/A	 N/A N/A	 71 9	 59 1	 35 0
Employees[a]	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	185 (int.=71; cont.=114)	N/A	130 (int.= 53; cont.=77)
Supervisors	N/A	37	2	35	29	22	N/A

[a]There was no intervention targeted directly at employees.

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Table 2: Overview of qualitative data collected in the Finnish Living Lab.

	Individual level: jobseeker		**Individual level: supervisors**		**Coalition level**	
	Phase 1: theory developing[b]	Phase 2: theory refinement / testing	Phase 1: theory developing	Phase 2: theory refinement / testing	Phase 1: theory developing	Phase 2: theory refinement / testing
Interviews	0	19[a]	5	7	10	8
Focus group (number of participants)	0	0	0	0	0	1 (10)

[a] Includes interviews of Taite and IPS job coaches (4 interviews) and IPS employers (2 interviews) besides jobseekers; [b] Since the Taite and IPS coaching interventions were evidence-based, theory development was not required.

As seen in Table 1, total of 98 **jobseekers** attended the first coaching session. In total, 80 jobseekers provided their informed consent to participate in the study by answering the baseline questionnaire (T0). Those who completed this questionnaire (T0) were invited to complete the first follow-up survey (T1) either at the end of the final coaching session (Taite) or after a potential job opportunity had been presented to them during the coaching process (IPS). The second follow-up survey (T2) was mailed to participants four months after the completion of the intervention. Most participants (89.9%) in the Taite and less than half (47.4%) in the IPS coaching took part in the study at baseline (see Table 1). The response rate for the first follow-up survey of Taite was 83.1%, and for the second follow-up survey 49.3%. Survey data collection for the IPS intervention was unsuccessful. Based on available information, it is likely that some participants discontinued the intervention before its completion. Only one participant responded to the first follow-up survey. Furthermore, because the Employment Services discontinued the implementation of the intervention, the second follow-up survey was not sent. Due to the very small sample size, the IPS data could not be analysed quantitatively. As shown in Table 2, a total of 13 participants from the TAITE (n=8) and IPS (n=5) coaching programmes were interviewed. In addition, interviews were conducted with four TAITE and IPS coaches and two employers.

Table 1 shows that 37 **supervisors** enrolled in their coaching intervention. Two of them dropped out after the first coaching session. In total, 29 supervisors participated in the study at baseline and 22 immediately after the coaching, yielding response rates of 78.4% and 59.5%, respectively. Among the supervisors who consented to participate in the study, five were interviewed prior to the coaching programme and seven following its completion, each with a different individual (see Table 2).

In addition, 185 **employees** responded to the baseline and 130 to the follow-up surveys (see Table 1). Response rates could not be determined because the research team did not have access to information regarding the size of the eligible population. Of these employees, 71 represented at baseline the intervention group (i.e., employees whose supervisors

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participated in the coaching), and 114 the control group (i.e., employees whose supervisors did not participate). The employees were not interviewed.

1.4.3 Characteristics of study participants

Table 3 presents the background characteristics of the study participants.

Jobseekers who participated in the quantitative study of Taite coaching had a mean age of 38.9 years. Their gender distribution was relatively balanced, with slightly less than half of the participants being women (43.7%). At baseline, jobseekers reported that a lack of job opportunities posed a moderate challenge to their employment prospects. This factor was mentioned more frequently than any other barrier to employment. Work ability challenges did not appear to be a key obstacle to employment, as participants generally assessed their work ability as moderate. Nevertheless, considerable variation was observed in respondents' self-assessments.

Employees' mean age was 47.5. Majority of then (81%) were women. Most participants (64.3%) had at least a tertiary-level education qualification. These results indicate that the respondent sample probably overrepresented employees working in early childhood and basic education, which are typically female-dominated and highly educated occupational groups in the municipal sector. Like the jobseekers, employees perceived the lack of job opportunities to be the most important barrier to their career advancement. The employees rated their work ability as good.

The participating **supervisors** had a mean age of 39.1 years. Most participants (86.2%) were women, and the majority (75.9%) had completed a tertiary or higher education degree.

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Table 3: Baseline characteristics for study participants in the Finnish Living Lab.

Population characteristics	**Jobseekers (N=71) at T0**	**Employees (N=185) at T0**	**Supervisors (N=29) at T0**
	Means (SD) / Percentage (N)	Means (SD) / Percentage (N)	Means (SD) / Percentage (N)
Age	38.9 (13.7)	47.5 (10.3)	39.1 (13.6)
Gender (% women)	43.7 %	81.0 %	86.2 %
Level of education • Basic education • Secondary education • Tertiary or higher education • None of the above	 9.9 % 66.2 % 21.1 % 2.8 %	 4.9 % 30.3 % 64.3 % 0.5 %	 0 % 24.1 % 75.9 % 0 %
Years of employment in City of Kokkola	N/A	12.2 (10.6)	13.5 (9.5)
Years in supervisory position	M/A	N/A	11.7 (7.8)
Weekly working hours in average	N/A	35.4 (9.3)	37.2 (4.2)
Obstacles (1-5 scale: 1=not at all, 5=very much): • Lack of job opportunities • Commuting difficulties for example: difficult transport connections, long distances • Lack of training and skills for example: language skills, lack of professional qualifications or outdated qualifications • Diminished work motivation or desire to work • Problems connected to health or functional capacity • Personal life situation for example: family, relatives, friends (caregiving, childcare)	To what extent do the following factors make it difficult for you to participate in employment? 3.91 (0.93) 2.49 (1.26) 2.45 (1.06) 2.03 (1.13) 2.05 (1.36) 1.74 (1.19)	To what extent do the following factors make it more difficult to take the next step in your career, accept a new job role, take on new tasks, or assume new responsibilities at work? 2.71 (1.39) 1.62 (1.01) 1.77 (1.04) 1.70 (0.94) 1.74 (1.04) 1.76 (1.07)	N/A
Work Ability (0-10 scale: 0=unable to work; 10=lifetime best work ability)	7.64 (1.80)	8.08 (1.31)	N/A

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1.4.4 Methods of analysis

The quantitative research data were described using means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions. The paired samples t-test was used to test the effects of the interventions on jobseekers' immediate outcomes such as self-efficacies and job search activity. The test measures the change by considering only on those participants who responded at both T0 and T1 (or T2). However, by using listwise deletion the mean differences that are reported in the tables (5-6) do not reflect the actual means at each measurement point. The analyse the effects of the supervisory training intervention on employee and supervisor outcomes were examined using Anova for repeated measures. Among supervisors, the immediate impact of the intervention was evaluated between T0 and T1, while among employees, longer-term changes over a four-month period were assessed between T0 and T2.

In addition, jobseekers who participated in the study also gave permission for collecting information on their employment status from the Employment Services register. These objective **register data** were available to the research team for both the baseline and the second follow-up measurement points.

The **qualitative data** consisted of interviews with jobseekers, job coaches, supervisors, and coalition stakeholders (see Table 2). The individual interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams by a member of the research team. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. The data were analysed using a context-mechanism-outcome (CMO) framework. Subsequently, pseudonymised summaries of the interviews were produced and shared. However, summaries of the job coaches' interviews were not provided as part of the dataset. This is because, in the Kokkola municipality, it is widely known who these individuals are, as there were only four coaches involved. Therefore, even pseudonymisation cannot prevent a summary from being linked to the specific individual concerned. In addition, the CMO summaries of the coalition stakeholders do not contain any direct quotations from the data. This is because the study was conducted in a small city with a limited number of participants. Including direct quotations could potentially reveal the identity of interviewees. Furthermore, during the research ethics review conducted by the FIOH's Research Ethics Committee prior to the study, it was stipulated that the summaries must not contain direct quotations from the data in this case due to the small size of the municipality. This restriction was imposed to minimise the risk of identifying individual participants.

1.5. Quantitative results

1.5.1 Main results for jobseekers

Register data indicates that the Taite coaching intervention had a significant impact on employment status among the long-term unemployed target group (see Table 4). Before the intervention commenced, almost 80 per cent of the study participants were unemployed jobseekers. None were participating in education or training, while only one participant was engaged in subsidized employment and one was employed in the open labour market. Four months after the intervention, fewer than half of the participants (48.6%) remained unemployed. However, considering the multiple barriers often faced by this target group, competitive employment cannot be regarded as a realistic outcome for all participants. In these cases, the intervention contributed to other positive labour market transitions, including movement into education, training, or supported employment. Such transitions represent

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meaningful progress and may serve as important stepping stones towards employment in the future.

Table 4: Changes in the employment status of participants in the TAITE coaching: Register-based results.

Employment status	**T0** (before the training) N (%)	**T2** (four months after the training) N (%)
Unemployed	55 (78.6%)	34 (48.6%)
Employed, subsidized employment	1 (1.4%)	4 (5.7%)
Employed, in the open labour market	1 (1.4%)	11 (15.7%)
In part-time work	3 (4.3%)	2 (2.9%)
In an employment promoting services	10 (14.3%)	11 (15.7%)
In education/training	0	4 (5.7%)
Outside the labour market	0	3 (4.3%)

* Note. At T0, 70 participants consented to the extraction of employment status data from the Employment Services register.
[a]Outside labour market often refers in this context to transition to disability retirement or old-age retirement or military service.

A more detailed analysis of individual-level changes in employment status showed that for 34 per cent of Taite participants had a positive transition during the follow-up period. They moved from unemployment to paid work, from part-time to full-time work, or from unemployment into training or employment promoting services. In contrast, 3 per cent experienced a negative transition, moving from paid employment to unemployment. In addition, 4 per cent moved outside of the labour market, for example, to pension. The remaining 59 per cent of the participants had no change in their employment status.

In addition, **comparison data** were obtained from the Employment Services registers and consisted of jobseekers who had been unemployed for more than 12 months (n = 798). The data were extracted in January 2025 and re-examined four months later, in May 2025, for the same cohort. The results showed that transitions from unemployment to employment were less common among individuals who had received services other than TAITE coaching. Of the 798 unemployed jobseekers, 85.5 per cent (n = 682) remained unemployed after four months. Only nine jobseekers (1.1%) had found employment in the open labour market. Twenty jobseekers (2.5%) had entered employment promoting services, while seven (0.9%) had obtained subsidized employment and another seven (0.9%) had entered education or training.

Table 5 presents the immediate effects of Taite intervention on jobseekers' perceived **skills, self-efficacies and job searching activity. One of the main** aims of Taite coaching is to improve the participants' job search self-efficacy (Wikström et al., 2025). In this respect, the intervention achieved its intended objective: participants' job search self-efficacy increased statistically significantly between the baseline (T0) and the follow-up (T1) measurements. No statistically significant changes were detected in the other outcome measures.

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Table 5: Immediate (primary) effects of the Taite coaching on jobseekers' skills, self-efficacies and job searching activity (Paired sample T- test).

Outcome	**T0 N, Mean (SD)**	**T1 N, Mean (SD)**	**T2 N, Mean (SD)**	**Mean difference (T0-T1)**	**Effect Size (Cohen's d)**	**P-value**
Skills (0-1 scale)	68, 0.57 (0.15)	58, 0.59 (0.14)	37,0.59 (0.14)	0.01	0.08	0.54
Self-efficacy (0-1 scale)	70, 0.75 (0.15)	59, 0.77 (0.12)	37, 0.77 (0.15)	0.004	0.05	0.69
Job search self-efficacy (0-1 scale)	70, 0.57 (0.14)	59, 0.64 (0.14)	37, 0.60 (0.12)	0.06	**0.53**	**<0.001**
Motivation to work	69, 0.71 (0.20)	59, 0.70 (0.19)	37, 0.67 (0.24)	-0.01	-0.09	0.52
Job search attitude	69, 0.65 (0.17)	59, 0.65 (0.16)	37, 0.54 (0.18)	-0.04	-0.04	0.76
Job seeking activity (T0-T2)	66, 2.19 (3.89)	56, 2.04 (1.83)	36, 2.33 (4.35)	-0.38	-0.06	0.72

1.5.2 Main results for employees

In the long-term follow-up, there were no statistically significant differences between the intervention group (employees whose supervisor participated in the training) and the control group (employees whose supervisors did not participate) regarding employees perceived career self-efficacy, skills, career motivation and mobility, occupational well-being or evaluations of leadership behaviour besides work ability scale (see Table 6). Employees whose supervisors were assigned to the intervention group reported a modest improvement in their self-rated work ability over the follow-up period, whereas a slight deterioration was observed among those in the control group.

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Table 6. The impact of a supervisory training intervention on employee outcomes in the four months follow-up (n=123-130) (Anova for repeated measures).

Outcome	**T0 Mean (SD)**		**T2 Mean (SD)**		**Effect Size (ηp²)**	**P-value**
	Intervention	Control	Intervention	Control		
Self-efficacy for performing current job (0-1 scale)	0.78 (0.15)	0.78 (0.10)	0.78 (0.13)	0.76 (0.12)	0.012	0.22
Job progression self-efficacy (0-1 scale)	0.64 (0.18)	0.61 (0.15)	0.63 (0.16)	0.60 (0.14)	< 0.001	0.85
Skills (0-1 scale)	0.66 (.14)	0.70 (0.12)	0.65 (0.11)	0.70 (0.14)	0.001	0.77
Organisational mobility (0-1 scale)	0.53 (0.22)	0.51 (0.18)	0.50 (0.21)	0.50 (0.18)	0.002	0.58
Career planning (0-1 scale)	0.60 (0.21)	0.59 (0.22)	0.58 (0.22)	0.56 (0.20)	0.001	0.75
Job satisfaction (0-1 scale)	0.68 (0.21)	0.70 (0.15)	0.67 (0.23)	0.68 (0.17)	0.001	0.71
Work ability (0-10 scale)	8.20 (1.54)	8.05 (1.13)	8.24 (1.60)	7.93 (1.39)	**0.004**	**0.47**
Mental health (0-1 scale)	0.20 (0.17)	0.23 (0.17)	0.20 (0.17)	0.25 (0.18)	0.002	0.62
Living Lab Specific Outcomes						
Informal learning (1-5 scale)	3.15 (0.76)	2.86 (0.88)	3.00 (0.67)	2.86 (0.89)	0.011	0.24
Career search attitude (1-5 scale)	2.94 (1.12)	2.79 (0.94)	2.91 (1.03)	2.95 (0.99)	0.019	0.12
Coaching-based leadership (1-6 scale)	3.12 (1.00)	3.19 (0.95)	3.07 (0.80)	3.00 (0.96)	0.013	0.21
Supervisory support for development (1-6 scale)	4.14 (1,27)	4.03 (1.29)	4.07 (1.20)	3.93 (1.30)	< 0.001	0.87

In addition, Figure 1 illustrates that most participating employees reported no changes in their **career mobility** during the follow-up period. However, some differences were observed between the intervention and control groups. Respondents in the control group reported more frequently than those in the intervention group that they had taken on new tasks, roles, or responsibilities during the four-month follow-up period. However, the differences between the intervention and control groups were not statistically significant in terms of taking on new tasks, roles or responsibilities (χ^2(df) = 2.75(1), p = .10) or moving upward or sideward (χ^2(df) = 0.80(1), p = .37).

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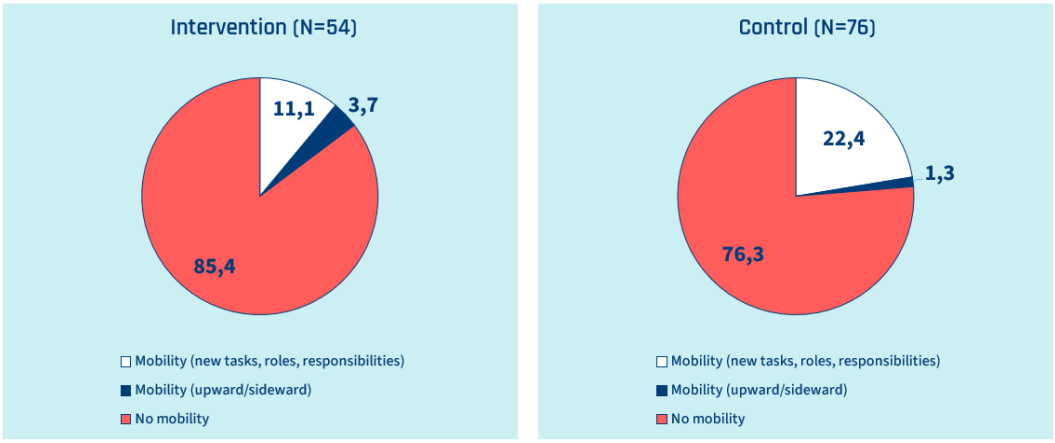


Figure 1. Employee mobility in four months follow-up.

1.5.3 Main results for supervisors

The main aim of the supervisory coaching intervention was to enhance supervisors' preparedness for supporting employees' skill and career development. Preparedness is a focal personal resource consisting of specific self-efficacies and preparation against setbacks (e.g., Pankkonen et al., 2025; Vuori & Vinokur, 2005). As seen in Table 7, the intervention had the expected short-term effect on supervisors' preparedness: the intervention increased supervisors' confidence (self-efficacies) in supporting the skill and career development of their employees and their ability to solve possible challenges (preparation against setbacks) in these areas. Cohen's d for self-efficacy was 0.78, indicating a large-sized effect, whereas Cohen's d for preparation against setbacks was 0.50, indicating a medium-sized effect.

Table 7. The impact of a supervisory training intervention on supervisors' preparedness to support employees' skills and career development (n=22).

Outcome	**T0 N, Mean (SD)**	**T1 N, Mean (SD)**	**T2 N, Mean (SD)**	**Mean difference**	**Effect Size (Cohen's D)**	**P-value**
Self-efficacy (scale 0-1)	0.64 (0.10)	0.71 (0.11)	N/A	0.07	0.78	< 0.001
Preparation against setbacks (scale 0-1)	0.52 (0.13)	0.58 (0.12)	N/A	0.06	0.50	0.02

The participating supervisors also assessed the acceptability and perceived benefits of the intervention immediately after the coaching at T1. First, the participants evaluated their satisfaction with the program and thereafter the extent to which the training enhanced their readiness in the targeted areas of the intervention program. As seen in Table 8, the participants perceived the training to be very useful for reflecting on and improving their supervisory work. Table 9 in turn shows that participants reported benefiting most from their improved readiness to understand different ways to learn at work and develop competence and to bring up competence development with their employees.

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Table 8. Supervisors' perceptions of the usefulness of the training (T1) (n=29).

Items (scale: 1=strongly disagree, 6=strongly agree)	**Mean (SD)**
The content of the training matched my needs and expectations.	5.00 (0.45)
I found the training useful for improving my supervisory work.	5.19 (0.61)
The training made me reflect on my ways of working.	5.29 (0.56)
During the training, I gained new ideas and perspectives for my supervisory work.	5.10 (0.62)
Because of the training, I will change some of my practices as a supervisor.	4.76 (0.83)
I learned something new during the training.	4.90 (0.89)

Table 9. Supervisors' perceptions of the benefits of the training (T1) (n=29).

To what extent did the training provide your readiness to… (scale: 1=not at all, 5=very much)	**Mean (SD)**
support employees in workplace learning and competence development?	3.81 (0.60)
promote employees' career development?	3.38 (0.80)
understand different ways to learn at work and develop competences?	4.14 (0.65)
strengthen employees' motivation for workplace learning and competence development?	3.62 (0.74)
bring up issues related to competence development with employees?	4.10 (0.62)
solve supervisory challenges related to employees' workplace learning and competence development?	3.60 (0.60)

1.6 Realist evaluation (qualitative) results: coalition level

1.6.1 General context information

Kokkola is a medium-sized city and employment region in Finland and small by European standards. This bilingual city has ~48.200 inhabitants and is located on the west coast of Finland. In 2022, 18% of inhabitants were under 15 years old, 59% were aged 15−64 and 23% were over 64 years old. The educational level of inhabitants is polarised: 21% of them has a higher education, whereas secondary education is lacking from 25% of inhabitants (Kokkola municipal information card).

In November 2023, 3127 companies had their operations in Kokkola. The largest sector was retail. Most of the companies (83%) were micro-organisations having less than six employees. The biggest employers in the region are the municipality of Kokkola (~2.300 employees) and Wellbeing services county of Central Ostrobothnia (Soite) (~4.000 employees). In November 2023, there were 383 vacancies open in Kokkola. The vacancies were most often open in health and social care sector, food industry, catering business, and inorganic chemistry (Kokkola municipal information card).

1.6.2 Key mechanisms driving coalition formation and functioning

Governance procedures and leadership: The importance of leadership as a mechanism was emphasised in the stakeholder interviews throughout the project. In the early phase of the coalition, the absence of leadership was identified as a main barrier to forming a well-functioning and committed coalition, which in turn led to vague multi-lateral collaboration and low participant engagement. Stakeholders identified leadership and strategic alignment as essential foundations for a sustainable coalition by clarifying roles, coordinating operations, and guiding decision-making. Effective collaboration was seen to require a clearly mandated

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leader (ideally a public authority with formal responsibility) supported by shared objectives, a common strategy, and formal governance arrangements such as contracts. Neutral (public) leadership was seen to lower barriers to participation and promote collective goals rather than the interests of individual organisations. Under these conditions, the coalition is more likely to achieve stronger collaboration, coordinated interventions, sustained commitment, and continuity beyond project cycles. Conversely, unclear, fragmented, or actor-driven leadership can undermine trust and participation, limiting impact of the coalition.

Stakeholders also viewed positively the coalition structure consisting of four smaller working groups alongside a central coordinating body. Assigning concrete tasks to the working groups and jointly reviewing progress within the wider coalition was seen to strengthen ownership, encourage goal-oriented work, and maintain momentum between coalition meetings. This structure supports continuous collaboration rather than merely functioning as a discussion forum, leading to stronger commitment, more concrete solutions, and tangible progress.

Member participation and diversity: Stakeholders viewed the active participation of a diverse range of stakeholders as essential for coalition functioning, effectiveness and stability. Coalition success was seen to depend not only on committed individuals capable of contributing to concrete actions, but also on credible institutional actors that provide coordination, legitimacy, and resources. When diverse stakeholders are actively engaged, the coalition can draw on a broader range of perspectives, knowledge, and expertise, resulting in more effective, coordinated, and sustainable solutions.

It was agreed that the most relevant stakeholders were already included in the coalition, representing a range of functions with distinct perspectives and roles (e.g., public services, Wellbeing services county, third-sector organisations, educational institutions, and employers). However, there were calls for stronger participation from SMEs, entrepreneurs' associations, chamber of commerce, and organisations involved in regional business development and social security funding. Greater involvement of actors closely connected to employers would provide valuable insights into companies' conditions and needs, while also encouraging higher participation among them. This, in turn, would enhance the coalition's effectiveness, even if the direct participation capacity of individual SMEs remains limited. Stakeholders also highlighted the need for coalition to strengthen collaboration between educational institutions and employers. Closer cooperation can improve the responsiveness and adaptability of education and training provision to changing labour market needs.

Collaboration and commitment: In the beginning of the coalition, many stakeholders highlighted that there was already well-functioning bilateral cooperation between them. However, commitment to broader, multi-level collaboration remained limited although it was seen that in challenging labour market conditions, the need to find solutions to complicated problems encourages collaboration among various stakeholders.

Strategic alignment and shared and concrete objectives were seen as key mechanisms for enhancing collaboration and engagement. Moreover, a clear structure, structured processes and defined roles and responsibilities (incl. leadership) were seen to create trust, a sense of purpose and engagement. The coalition should also address issues that clearly benefit its members, and the value of participation must be effectively communicated to all stakeholders. An overly narrow focus on individual stakeholders' activities was not considered conducive to effective coalition-building, as it does not foster broad ownership. Many stakeholders emphasised the need for a coalition agreement to bind partners together, strengthen

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commitment, and enhance sustainability beyond project-based cooperation. The establishment of working groups was seen as particularly important for translating commitment into action, thereby supporting the coalition's sustainability and effectiveness.

The importance of these mechanisms is amplified in contexts where stakeholders face competing priorities, limited resources, and multiple responsibilities across organisations and networks. In such circumstances, clearly defined coalition goals and tangible benefits for participants' own work are essential. Without them, the coalition may be perceived as an additional burden, leading stakeholders to prioritise organisational objectives over joint action. This can result in fragmented efforts, duplication of activities, and limited coordination.

Communication and knowledge sharing: Communication and knowledge sharing were identified as key mechanisms for strengthening collaboration and commitment within the coalition. Although stakeholders were familiar with one another, more open and regular information sharing along with structured discussions and face-to-face meetings, were seen as important for enabling stakeholders to exchange information, knowledge, experiences, and perspectives that would otherwise remain fragmented across organisation. Through these exchanges, coalition members develop a shared situational awareness, improve coordination, build trust, strengthen motivation for joint problem-solving and create a sense of continuity. Over time, effective communication and knowledge sharing can improve intervention design and the sustainability of coalition activities.

It was suggested that coalition could be supported through a shared platform for information exchange and dialogue, enabling more systematic communication and coordination between stakeholders. However, high data protection requirements may constrain information sharing. Concerns about privacy risks and regulatory compliance can make stakeholders hesitant to exchange information. As a result, opportunities to develop data-driven solutions and coordinate actions effectively may be reduced.

Stakeholder relationships and trust: Stakeholders emphasised trust and strong relationships among coalition members as critical enablers (i.e., mechanisms) of effective collaboration and coordination. As mentioned above, trust associates with open communication, knowledge sharing, and a willingness to work towards shared goals. In this relatively small region, where most stakeholders are familiar with one another, existing bilateral relationships have already created a strong foundation of trust that supports close cooperation. At the same time, trust could be further strengthened through regular joint actions, opportunities for both formal and informal exchange and accessible support among stakeholders, which contribute to sustained collaboration over time.

Other mechanisms: Tailoring of solutions was identified as a key mechanism for strengthening engagement. In particular, for SMEs tailored training and support services could increase motivation to participate in coalition activities. In addition, a sector-specific focus could enhance employer engagement within the coalition.

1.6.3 Contextual circumstances associated with mechanisms

Governance structure: Since early 2025, responsibility for employment services has shifted from the state to municipalities, which have formed employment regions. The City of Kokkola belongs to the Central Ostrobothnia region with seven smaller municipalities. Prior to this **administrative reform**, a municipal coordinating body fostered stakeholder collaboration and established cooperation as a shared norm, supporting coalition building in this project. The

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reform **decentralises** decision-making, increases regional autonomy, and enables better consideration of local conditions. It allows municipalities to set priorities, develop localised services, test new approaches, and build partnerships such as coalitions and collaborate within them. The reform has also made economic considerations more prominent ("euroization"), as municipalities now bear greater financial responsibility. As a result, employers' perspectives and needs are more strongly integrated into employment services, thus increasing diverse memberships in the coalition and, increasing the likelihood of solutions that both support vulnerable groups and generate cost savings.

Despite its positive outcomes, the administrative reforms have also **generated uncertainty**, necessitated the reorganisation of operations, and imposed additional demands on stakeholders, consequently diverting resources from coalition building. During reform processes, attention is typically directed primarily towards internal organisational matters and management, rather than towards the development of coalitions.

Existing national social policies: Although responsibility for employment services has been decentralised, national legislation and funding mechanisms continue to guide operations. Recent national policy changes have affected key employment instruments, reduced resources and financial support for employment promotion and set more obligations for jobseekers. For example, the eligibility criteria for wage subsidies have been tightened, and rehabilitative work activities in the third sector have been restricted. In addition, the adult education allowance has been abolished. At the same time, municipalities are financially responsible for unemployment through penalty payments, which influences their incentives to promote employment. These **policy developments** have several consequences. It limits employers' ability to recruit individuals in vulnerable labour market positions and restricts opportunities for skills development, particularly for those with limited resources. On the other hand, it can increase collaboration between stakeholders and motivate to foster diverse membership in the coalition (i.e., greater employer engagement) and development of new support mechanisms.

Institutional quality and effectiveness: The small region is characterised by long-standing, network-based collaboration built on close interpersonal and bilateral relationships. As stakeholders know each other well, it creates trust, enables flexible cooperation and the continuous adaptation of collaborative practices. The established relationships have remained largely unaffected by the recent employment services and health and social care reforms. However, such **relationship-based collaboration** requires active maintenance by the partners. As a shortcoming, the **long-standing bilateral networks** may also create an overestimation of the extent of cooperation, potentially limiting attention to the development and renewal of collaborative practices.

To make the coalition stronger, greater participation of the Wellbeing services county in the coalition and in collaboration is recommended. However, layoffs and co-determination negotiations in the county have limited its capacity to participate. In addition, the municipal business development company could have a stronger role in the coalition as it has direct links to both large companies and SMEs and could promote the coalition by disseminating information to employers. When companies are approached with concrete, context-specific measures such as tailored training, information on financial incentives, and accessible workplace support, they probably are more likely to participate in the coalition and its activities. However, regional development activities have often focused on large companies.

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Strengthening SME-oriented outreach and responsiveness is therefore essential for the coalition improving employment of vulnerable people.

Labour market structure: The regional labour market is predominantly composed of **SMEs,** many of which are entrepreneur-led and operate without dedicated human resources capacity. Their activities are strongly focused on core business operations, leaving limited time, resources, or motivation for participation in broader initiatives such as coalitions. This is particularly evident in contexts of weak overall employment. Nevertheless, some SMEs express willingness to employ individuals in vulnerable labour market positions, but their structural constraints often make this difficult in practice. Companies' limited growth orientation and a focus on day-to-day operations reduce incentives to invest in training, skills development, or inclusive hiring practices. In addition, the fluctuating labour demands (i.e., the need for labour force is unstable and changes quickly) challenge employers, training institutions and employment services. The public services often operate within inflexible structures and schedules, whereas companies' needs may arise quickly and unpredictably. Moreover, a mismatch between jobseekers' skills and job vacancies exists.

Economic situation: Due to the weak economic situation of the state, cuts have been made to social security and services, and further reductions are expected. This creates uncertainty, erodes trust in services, and makes it more difficult to improve the situation of vulnerable groups. Kokkola municipality also faces **increasing unemployment and limited job opportunities,** creating an employers' market. Employers prioritise immediate business needs, prefer tailored training, and carefully select their employees. All this weakens the labour market position of vulnerable people. Furthermore, as resources are directed towards maintaining core operations, less attention is given to developing employment-related measures or the coalition itself. However, in the economic downturn coalition-based cooperation seems to become increasingly important for identifying and developing solutions to support vulnerable groups. In addition, as a future labour shortage is anticipated due to industrial growth, coalition is seen essential to platform for strategic planning and preparedness.

Education and training system: The education and training system has been affected by reduced national funding, leading to cuts in provision, qualifications, and changes in content. At the same time, changes in the labour market require constant skill updating. This creates challenges for maintaining adequate and responsive training opportunities. Despite these constraints, the region benefits from multiple education providers, and from strong partnerships and formal agreements. Training institutions also aim to respond to SME needs by offering targeted courses and continuing education opportunities for improving job matching and onboarding. In addition, a regional skills forecasting network supports shared understanding of future competence needs among employers and other stakeholders. Collaboration is further supported by municipal ownership of regional training institutions, which creates aligned incentives for cooperation. Although the abolition of the adult education allowance has reduced individuals' financial ability to pursue training, coalition-based cooperation can help provide alternative support for career development.

Cultural attitudes toward vulnerable groups: Attitudes toward vulnerable groups vary. Professionals within the service system generally hold positive views, but employers' attitudes are more mixed. Concerns about commitment, productivity, and potential absences are common, especially toward those with longer unemployment histories or immigrants with

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limited language skills. These attitudes are shaped by broader labour market conditions. In times of high unemployment, when employers can be more selective, prejudices may intensify. Although negative attitudes are not widespread, they can be influential. At the same time, several factors support more inclusive outcomes. For example, the region's rural character fosters social responsibility, and there are also employers and partners committed to socially responsible practices. Practical measures such as anonymous recruitment and targeted support for onboarding, skills development, and workplace adjustment can further improve the situation.

Other context factors: The service system lacks sufficient resources and structures to support **employed individuals** in vulnerable positions. As a result, skill development often depends on individuals' own initiative. At the same time, structural changes in the labour market have reduced the availability of entry-level jobs with low qualification requirements. Increasing emphasis on formal education, combined with fewer accessible job opportunities, limits entry pathways into employment for individuals with limited skills or work experience. In addition, the informants saw that although high data protection strengthens trust and legitimacy, it also slows down and complicates information exchange and collaboration.

1.6.4 Coalition outcomes

Because the coalition in the Finnish Living Lab played only a limited role in the co-creation and tailoring of individual interventions within this project, the stakeholder interviews yielded relatively little information on how the coalition influenced the inflow of jobseekers and employee mobility, or on the contextual factors and mechanisms associated with these outcomes. Instead, stakeholders mainly reflected on the conditions that shaped coalition building, as well as the relationships between contextual factors, and coalition-related mechanisms and outcomes, such as effective functioning and long-term sustainability. These findings have been presented above.

However, it was emphasised that a well-functioning coalition may also contribute to improving labour market participation and mobility among vulnerable groups in the region. A concrete example of successful collaboration in the coalition is the Taite coaching, jointly implemented by two stakeholders. This shared initiative whose results have been regularly monitored has functioned as a form of social glue, strengthening trust and communication between stakeholders and fostering collaboration more broadly within the coalition and finally producing higher employment among participants.

With regard to efforts to **support inflow of jobseekers**, six Context-Mechanism-Outcome (CMO) configurations were identified from the stakeholder interviews (see below). Overall, these CMOs highlighted the importance of clear leadership, shared goals, and the exchange of information and good practices as key resources. These resources triggered the following mechanisms: fostered a shared understanding of challenges and opportunities, enhanced problem-solving and resource allocation, promoted more coordinated and proactive actions, strengthened stakeholder commitment, and encouraged innovation. In turn, these processes contributed to the effective functioning of the coalition and may ultimately lead to improvements in employment opportunities and labour market participation among vulnerable groups.

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CMOS for jobseekers' inflow:

1. **If** stakeholders operate in a time-constrained, resource-limited, and multi-network environment, **then** a coalition with shared goals, clear coordination, and well-defined leadership roles can create structure, purpose, and alignment in collaborative work, which in turn **may lead to** an improved capacity to coordinate and target interventions that support the labour market entry of vulnerable groups.
2. **If** there is high unemployment and decreasing job opportunities in the region, **then** coalition-level collaboration and support between relevant regional stakeholders promote strategic alignment, coordinated efforts, and shared resource allocation, which **may lead to** an enhanced inflow of vulnerable groups by creating pathways that align their needs with available opportunities.
3. **If** there is a shortage of entry-level jobs in the region, **then** the coalition can facilitate the sharing of successful employer practices and models for supporting these specific situations by promoting increased understanding, adaptation, and innovation among other stakeholders, which **may lead to** wider adoption of these models and improved employment opportunities for low-skilled jobseekers.
4. **If** information on labour market needs, vacancies, and jobseekers is dispersed across organisations and labour market mismatch persists, **then** coalition-based interaction and knowledge sharing among relevant stakeholders can create a shared understanding and better coordination, which in turn **may lead to** improved matching between jobseekers and vacancies and increased inflows into employment or employment-related services.
5. **If** labour shortages are anticipated in the region, **then** collaboration and strategic planning among coalition stakeholders can improve preparedness for future recruitment needs by fostering proactive workforce development, skills alignment, and targeted training initiatives, which may lead to increased employment opportunities for vulnerable groups in the future.
6. **If** there are high structural unemployment and competition for jobs in the region that affects all stakeholder, **then** stakeholders are more motivated to collaborate with shared objective within the coalition, enabling multi-stakeholder problem-solving and coordinated action that **may lead to** better alignment between workforce skills and labour market needs.

In the stakeholder interviews, less information was available on initiatives aimed at improving employee mobility. However, three potential CMOs were identified (see below). Stakeholders highlighted information sharing, joint planning, and co-creation as key mechanisms that can help identify potential career pathways, develop more targeted training and professional development opportunities, and thereby promote mobility across roles both within and between organisations in the future.

CMOS for employee mobility:

1. **If** stakeholders have limited resources to promote career mobility independently, **then** active participation in the coalition can facilitate information sharing, coordination, and joint planning, which **may lead to** the identification of career pathways and in the long-term increased employee mobility across roles and organisations.

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2. **If** structural changes in the labour market and evolving skill requirements create uncertainty and there are resource constraints, **then** a coalition of diverse stakeholders can build a shared situational understanding and co-design measures that better match labour market needs, which in turn **may lead to** better targeted training and development opportunities as well as opportunities for career transitions and workforce mobility.
3. **If** there is a shortage of entry-level jobs in the region, **then** the coalition can provide a platform for educational institutions and employers to jointly design and plan interventions, which **may lead to** better-aligned pathways into employment and improved labour market mobility.

1.7 Realist evaluation (qualitative) results: individual level

In the Finnish Living Lab, three individual-level interventions were implemented: TAITE and IPS coaching for unemployed jobseekers, as well as supervisory training for supervisors in the City of Kokkola. Next, we describe each of them individually, including their CMOs.

1.7.1 TAITE coaching

Training context: evidence-based training program conducted by trained instructors

Taite-coaching is the latest Finnish adaptation of the JOBS© peer group-based method, which has been shown to effectively strengthen the job search skills and mental well-being of unemployed individuals. The efficacy of the JOBS method has been demonstrated in several randomized controlled trials conducted in different countries (see a meta-analytic review by Liu et al., 2014; a summary of international studies by Vuori & Price, 2015). The aim of Taite-coaching is to enhance participants' employment prospects in the open labour market and to reduce the negative effects of unemployment on self-confidence and self-efficacy.

The decision to implement Taite-coaching was made by the Employment Services of the City of Kokkola. At the beginning of the SYNCLUSIVE project, the municipal employment services were particularly seeking research- and evidence-based solutions to strengthen the job search abilities of the long-term unemployed and ultimately improve their employment. Due to an administrative reform in which employment services were transferred from the state to municipalities (in the City of Kokkola in 2023), municipal employment services gained greater decision-making autonomy regarding the services offered to their clients. Although the service palette was already rather extensive, greater effectiveness was expected. Instead of developing new interventions, the employment services decided to test and implement a method that had already been proven effective.

In this Living Lab, a Taite-coaching group typically consisted of 6–12 participants (jobseekers) who met for five consecutive days, simulating a full working week. Participation in the coaching was voluntary and financially supported so that participants maintained their employment benefits throughout the training and received small reimbursements (i.e., 9 euros) for travel costs, for example. The training sessions were held face-to-face at the premises of local partners (e.g., employment services or third-sector organisations). The peer-learning process was facilitated by two instructors per group, all of whom had been trained by the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health. The instructors followed standardized method manuals, and participants used their own workbooks. The instructors were experienced job coaches from

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employment services and a third-sector organisation. They worked in pairs and were familiar with the participants' situations and challenges.

Jobseekers' context: prolonged unemployment causes many challenges that can be tackled in Taite coaching

The employment services decided to target Taite coaching to jobseekers who had been unemployed for at least one year, which is the threshold for long-term unemployment in Finland. Although the target group was heterogeneous, participants shared many common challenges. Many participants had health or work ability concerns of varying severity, low or lacked vocational education, outdated qualifications or skills, limited work experience, or possessed insufficient Finnish language skills. Furthermore, prolonged periods out of work had negatively affected many participants' self-perception and self-esteem. Many of them no longer trusted in themselves, their abilities, or their chances of finding employment. Their job search skills often needed updating: their application documents did not meet current standards, and they required practice in job-interview situations. Participants with a migrant background had limited knowledge about Finnish working life and were often afraid to use Finnish in job seeking. However, most participants were very motivated to find employment and were eager to take part in Taite coaching, whereas others had become passive, discouraged, and unmotivated to apply for jobs. This latter group was often quite distant from the open labour market. They had ended up in services after other or were waiting for more permanent solutions, such as work disability related retirement.

At present (in 2026), Finland has the highest unemployment rate in Europe, creating an employer's market where they can select the strongest candidates. Our target group therefore starts from a clear disadvantage. However, if they manage to demonstrate their motivation and skills through tailored job application documents, present themselves convincingly in job interviews, and frame their challenges in a positive way (for example, as learning experiences), their chances of finding employment will improve, especially when the economic situation strengthens again and the demand for labour increases.

1.7.1.1 CMOs for TAITE coaching

Practicing real-life job-search situations, identifying strengths, and giving positive feedback build skills, positive self-perception and confidence in job seeking

Mechanism
The training provided participants with opportunities to *practice job searching in real-life situations*. It included, for example, exercises in which they developed their job-application documents, practices how to succeed in job interviews, and learned to introduce themselves to employers in a positive light by using their existing strengths. In these exercises, they also *learned from each other's experiences*. These activities improved participants' *job-search skills*. In the training, each participant's *strengths and skills were* also *identified* and used in various exercises. The participants also received *positive and supportive feedback* from instructors and peers. These processes helped them develop *a more positive self-perception* and increased their *self-confidence* in job seeking.

Outcomes
After the training, participants are more likely to show *greater perseverance and increased*

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activity in job searching, instead of procrastination and avoidance. Due to their improved skills and self-efficacy in job-search, they also have *better possibilities of finding employment*.

Context: jobseekers

These mechanisms seemed particularly relevant because the job search skills of those who have been unemployed for a long time often need updating. Furthermore, prolonged unemployment has typically had a negative effect on many participants' self-perceptions and their self-esteem and confidence in finding a job. They may believe that they do not have any strengths or skills relevant to the labour market. However, many of them are motivated to find a job and therefor also motivated to participate in the training.

Overarching CMO

If jobseekers have been unemployed for a long time and have weak job-search skills and low confidence in themselves and their employment prospects, **then** practical job search training may build their skills, positive self-perception and confidence in job seeking, **because** it offers opportunities to practice real-live job search situations, identifies participants' existing strengths, and provides supportive feedback from peers and instructors, **which may lead to** participants' more active and persistent efforts to find employment and, ultimately better possibilities of obtaining a job.

2) Participatory exercises providing positive feedback and peer support increase engagement and activity

Mechanism
The training utilised group-work exercises and *participatory methods,* such as drama exercises, in which participants received *positive feedback* from the rest of the group. This increased participants' *activity levels* and *engagement,* instead of them remaining passive bystanders.

Outcomes
After the training, the participants are more likely to feel vigorous and energetic. The improved level of activity also indicates that they will be more active and engaged in future job search efforts.

Context: jobseekers

The participatory and activating elements of the training seemed particularly relevant because the participants had become passive and be unmotivated in their job searching due to prolonged unemployment caused by severe challenges related to health, education and work experience.

Overarching CMO

If jobseekers have been unemployed for a long time, for example due to poor health, and have become passive in their job searching, **then** practical training that utilises participatory methods, such as group work and drama exercises, and that offers positive feedback and peer support, may strengthen participants' levels of activity, energy, vigour, and engagement. This

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is **because** it helps break the passivity the participants may have become accustomed to. These changes **may lead to** greater activity and efforts in future job-search activities.

3) Support and encouragement from peers and instructors create a feeling of being accepted

Mechanism

The training, which focused on *positives and opportunities* rather than difficulties and utilised *peer support and encouragement* created a sense of normalisation. The participants recognised similar challenges among their peers and received support from them, which fostered a feeling *of being accepted and not being alone* in their difficult (unemployment) situation.

Outcomes

As a result of the training, participants' feelings of failure are likely to decrease. They will remain engaged in the training rather than dropping out, even if they are initially sceptical during the first session. Furthermore, if transitioning to the open labour market is not realistic for them, the training can still increase their activity levels and help them identify alternative paths forward (e.g., retirement or other services).

Context: jobseekers

Peer support and encouragement appeared particularly relevant because jobseekers usually receive support only from job coaches. Peer support was a new element for them that contributed to *normalization*. Support and encouragement were also important because the participants had low self-esteem and self-confidence and had experienced many setbacks in job seeking. Due to their challenging circumstances, their risk to dropping out of the training was higher.

Hindering factors

Training that enhances job search skills and offers support and encouragement may be less effective for participants who lack genuine motivation to find employment, face major health or work-ability challenges, or are not required to seek work. The training cannot create motivation for job seeking if it is entirely absent.

Overarching CMO

If jobseekers face significant health or work ability challenges, lack confidence in their ability to find a job, and are not motivated to pursue employment, **then** peer-group support and encouragement and exercises focusing on positive rather than challenges and difficulties, may enhance participants' sense of being accepted **because** shared experiences can normalise difficulties. This **may reduce feelings** of failure, increase activity levels and help identify alternative paths forward beyond employment.

4) Practicing job search situations in Finnish within an encouraging group increases immigrants' skills and confidence to use Finnish language

Mechanism

A positive and encouraging atmosphere in the training group *encourages* participants with an immigrant background s *to speak Finnish* during the training sessions. The training provided

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opportunities to *practice job search in real-life situations in Finnish,* which increased their *skills and confidence* to cope with job-search situations in Finnish and reduced the stress they associated with searching for work in foreign language.

Outcomes
Training will equip immigrants with skills they can apply in job searching and thereby will improve their chances of finding employment.

Context: jobseekers

Training that offers knowledge about Finnish working life and enhances both job search and language skills appeared particularly relevant for participants with an immigrant background. The positive and encouraging group atmosphere lowered the threshold for using Finnish, as many participants were initially afraid to speak it.

Hindering factors

Training may offer less added value for highly educated immigrants. They often possess strong professional skills and may need more specialized guidance from instructors on their job-search process – guidance that peers with more severe challenges cannot provide. Consequently, without tailoring, the training may not substantially improve their employment prospects.

Overarching CMO

If jobseekers have an immigrant background and limited Finnish language skill, **then** peer-group-based training that provides and encouraging atmosphere and opportunities to practice job-search situations in Finnish may improves their confidence and skills**, because** it encourages participants to use Finnish and reduces the stress they associate with job searching in a foreign language, **which, in turn, may lead to improved** chances of finding employment.

1.7.2 IPS coaching
Training context: evidence-based coaching conducted by trained instructors

Individual Placement and Support (IPS) is an internationally researched, evidence-based employment support method originally developed to promote employment among individuals with mental health conditions. The method emphasises rapid job search with the aim of placing jobseekers in competitive employment as early as possible, followed by the provision of intensive and individualised support once employment has begun. IPS is delivered according to standardised procedures, and method-specific training is available for professionals implementing the service (https://ipsworks.org/index.php/evidence-for-ips/).

A substantial body of research has demonstrated that IPS coaching can enhance health and well-being. Studies indicate improvements in self-esteem, hope, social networks, and quality of life among jobseekers with mental health conditions (Bond & Drake, 2014; Modini, Joyce et al., 2016; Waddell & Burton, 2006; Drake & Wallach, 2020). IPS has also been adapted to support the employment of other groups in vulnerable positions, including clients of various social services. In Finland, IPS-based employment support has been successfully piloted not only for individuals recovering from mental health conditions but also within adult social work

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and disability services, under the name “Quality Criteria–Based Employment Support” (Blomgren et al., 2025).

The decision to implement IPS coaching in the Finnish Living Lab was not jointly made by all coalition partners. Similar to the rationale for adopting Taite-coaching (see above), the municipal employment services sought evidence-based methods to strengthen the labour market participation of long-term unemployed individuals facing significant barriers to employment. Rather than developing entirely new interventions, employment services opted to test and introduce a method with established effectiveness.

In the Finnish Living Lab, IPS-coaching was delivered by three job coaches employed by the municipal employment services. All had completed formal IPS instructor training and provided IPS coaching alongside their other responsibilities; thus, they were not exclusively dedicated to employment support. Clients consisted of long-term unemployed individuals who were recommended by employment services to participate voluntarily. The job coaches implemented IPS in line with its core principles, focusing on rapid job search tailored to each participant’s strengths, skills, and interests. After job placement, the job coaches also provided ongoing support to both employee and employer. The frequency of face-to-face meetings in IPS was higher than in standard employment services.

However, the implementation of IPS-coaching did not proceed as intended. Staff turnover among job coaches led to interruptions in service delivery. Employment opportunities were not fully explored, and clients may not have been sufficiently informed or engaged, leading some to discontinue participation. Monitoring the service also proved challenging: response rates to questionnaires were low, and changes in instructors disrupted the data collection process. After six months, the employment services decided to discontinue the intervention. At that time, regional unemployment was increasing rapidly, making it unfeasible for instructors to focus exclusively on the limited caseload of approximately 20 clients per job coach required by the IPS model. In fact, employment services are responsible for numerous statutory duties, including meeting with unemployed jobseekers, preparing employment plans, and monitoring job-search activities. As unemployment increased, job coaches were required to divide their time between IPS coaching and these mandated responsibilities. Consequently, statutory obligations often took precedence, limiting the resources available for the implementation of the IPS intervention.

Jobseekers’ context: prolonged employment causes challenges that require more individualised support

The employment services decided to target IPS-coaching to jobseekers who faced multiple challenges to entering the labour market. Consequently, the client group consisted not only of long-term unemployed individuals but also of others experiencing significant challenges related to employment. These challenges included health conditions, limited or narrow work experience, low educational attainment, financial difficulties, and broader life circumstances. A common denominator among participants was low self-efficacy, uncertainty regarding the labour market, and previous unsuccessful job-search experiences. In addition, many participants required support in strengthening their job-search skills. All participants engaged in the IPS coaching voluntarily, expressed interest in the service, and demonstrated motivation to participate.

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At present, Finland has the highest unemployment rate in Europe, resulting in an employer's labour market in which employers can select the most confident and competitive job applicants. As a result, the target group is at a clear disadvantage. However, if job coaches succeed in encouraging jobseekers, helping them identify their strengths and competences, and leveraging existing connections with local employers during the job-search process, the jobseekers' prospects of gaining employment are likely to improve.

1.7.2.1 CMOs for IPS coaching

1) Regular in-person meetings with job coaches, combined with completing job-search-related developmental tasks, increase understanding of the job-search process, roles and responsibilities

Mechanism
IPS coaching included *regular face-to-face meetings* with job coaches, completed by *interim developmental tasks* that supported progress in the job-search process (e.g., identifying personal strengths and interests). These activities enhanced participants' *understanding of job-search process* as a whole, as well as their roles and responsibilities within it.

Outcomes
As IPS coaching progresses, participants' ability to plan their actions and manage their time during the job-search process will improve. They will develop a clearer understanding of their roles and responsibilities, which will strengthen their activity, engagement and sense of ownership in job seeking.

Context: jobseekers

Regular face-to-face meeting meetings, individualized support and structured and scheduled job-search exercises appeared particularly important for participants facing complex life situations, those whose job-search skills had eroded during prolonged unemployment, and individuals with limited experiences in planning and directing their own actions. Personal support from a job coach and recognition of strengths enhanced self-efficacy and confidence among participants who had repeatedly experienced unsuccessful job-search attempts yet remained motivated to find employment.

Overarching CMO

If jobseekers have been unemployed for a long time, have multiple negative experiences related to job-search and employment services, and have diminished confidence and job-search skills, **then** IPS coaching may increase their understanding of the job-search process and their roles and responsibilities within it, **because** it provides regular individualized support and clarifies the job-search process through step-by-step tasks completed by participants. **This may lead to** participants' improved ability to plan and regulate their job-search activity leading to greater engagement, reduced passivity, and stronger ownership in the job-search process.

2) Financial counselling reduces stress and uncertainty and increases motivation and confidence in employment

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Mechanism
IPS coaching included *financial counselling* provided by job coaches. This counselling *reduced* participants' *stress and uncertainty about their financial situation* and increased their *motivation and confidence* in pursuing employment.

Outcomes
When participants are less concerned about their financial situation and how the employment might affect it, they will become more motivated and active in seeking work.

Context: jobseekers

Financial counselling appeared particularly relevant because prolonged unemployment often leads to a gradual deterioration of an individual's financial situation, eventually exhausting any savings. Jobseekers' incomes become dependent on various unemployment-related benefits, requiring careful budgeting around payment dates. Even small amounts of earned income can interrupt benefit payments or lead to long processing delays. The financial counselling offered through IPS consisted of practical computational support and concrete examples illustrating how, for instance, part-time or fixed-term employment affects different benefits, and how irregular earnings and benefits can be coordinated. By receiving accurate financial information and support in managing the interactions between earned income and benefits, participants experienced reduced financial stress. This, in turn, enhanced their motivation and their ability to focus on active job-search, as less energy was required to manage an already fragile financial situation.

Overarching CMO

If jobseekers experience financial difficulties and rely on multiple social benefits for their livelihood, **then** IPS coaching may reduce their stress and increase their motivation and confidence in employment. This is **because**, IPS provides accurate financial counselling and support in coordinating benefits with earned income, reducing fear that employment will destabilize their financial situation. This **may in turn may lead** to more positive attitude toward employment and improved motivation for active job seeking.

3) Identifying strengths and using employer networks creates more positive self-perception and strengthens confidence in employment prospects

Mechanism
IPS coaching helped to *identify* participants' *skill and strengths* and *focused on positives* and opportunities rather than difficulties. This helped them to develop a *more positive self-perception and stronger self-confidence* in job seeking. In addition, job coaches' efforts to *use their existing employer networks* to search for suitable employment opportunities increased participants' *confidence* in their value in the labour market and their prospects for finding work.

Outcomes
As participants' confidence in their employment prospects improve, their likelihood of becoming employed will increase.

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Context: jobseekers

Recognizing strengths and skills and emphasizing positives seemed particularly important for participants whose work experience came mainly from a single employer or a narrow occupational field, those with low educational attainment, and those facing other challenging life circumstances. Such jobseekers may believe they lack strengths or skill relevant to the labour market and may develop negative self-perception. This may also reduce their willingness to approach potential employers. In this context, job coaches' use of their employer networks to match jobseekers (with particular skills) with specific employers improves employment prospect and opportunities to find employment.

Overarching CMO

If jobseekers are uncertain about their skills and their prospect in the labour market, yet motivated to find work, **then** IPS coaching may enhance their positive self-perceptions and increase confidence in becoming employed, **because** it identifies their strengths and skills and utilizes job coach's employer contacts to match jobseekers with suitable employment opportunities. This **may lead** to jobseekers' better chances of becoming employed.

4) Active communication and available support for employers reduce hesitation and increase confidence in the hiring process

Mechanism
Active *information sharing* with employers *about the benefits, services and support* available when hiring unemployed individuals in vulnerable situations *reduced* employers' *uncertainty and hesitation* regarding hiring. This transparency *increased their trust and confidence* in the hiring process.

Outcomes
Awareness of the support offered by job coaches increased employers' willingness to hire people in vulnerable situations.

Context: employers

Some employers wish to take social responsibility by offering jobs and training opportunities to jobseekers in vulnerable situations. However, they may lack information about the financial incentives or other support mechanisms available to them when hiring someone in a vulnerable position. They may also perceive the risks of hiring as too high or have limited trust in the recruitment process, which in turn can reduce their willingness to offer employment. In this context, job coaches' personal contacts and active communication about the benefits, services, and support may be particularly important for reducing these hesitations.

Hindering factors

If job coaches do not take an active approach by building employer contacts or maintaining regular communication with employers, then, even if employers are initially interested in hiring people in vulnerable situations, they will not receive the information or support they need to follow through.

Overarching CMO

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If employers are willing to hire people in vulnerable situations but have limited knowledge of the incentives, services and support available to them, **then** the employer-focused support included in IPS coaching may reduce their uncertainty and hesitation regarding recruitment-related risks and increase their trust and confidence in. This is **because** job coaches are easily accessible and provide employers with relevant information and services. This **may lead** to employers' greater willingness to hire people in vulnerable situations.

1.7.3 Supervisory training

Training context: Competence development at the core of human resource strategy

Supervisors often influence both employees' access to developmental opportunities and the psychological climate that encourages self-directed career behaviour. Thus, their role in supporting the competence development, and employability of their subordinates is critical. As part of the SYNCLUSIVE project, discussions with the City of Kokkola were initiated to explore ways of providing support for employees within the organisation, especially those in a vulnerable labour market position (e.g., individuals with lower educational levels). Competence development was identified as a major goal in the human resources strategy. While the organisation implemented various programs and methods for skill development, there was no guidance or support for supervisors on how to approach competence and career development within their work communities or how to provide support at the team level.

To address this gap, the supervisory coaching program "*Guiding skills and Development*" was created in the Finnish Living Lab by researchers from the FIOH. The coaching is a peer group-based, resource-building intervention aimed at strengthening supervisors' skills in supporting employees' career and competence development and on-the-job learning. The intervention was expected to enhance employees' skill development, career advancement, organisational mobility, and occupational well-being by building supervisors' resources for this work. Grounded in theories of social learning (Bandura, 1986) and planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), as well as cognitive stress inoculation training approach (Meichenbaum, 2007), the intervention emphasised active learning, social support, and problem-solving exercises to enhance supervisors' self-efficacy and ability in promoting employee development and to cope with challenges associated with these topics. The coaching utilised principles of coaching-based leadership and developmental leadership to foster a leadership approach that enables supervisors to encourage employees' self-directed development and provide supportive actions to guide their team members in developing their skills and competences.

The coaching program was implemented in 2025 for supervisors in the City of Kokkola. The program consisted of two three-hour modules, and the training sessions were conducted face-to-face on the premises of the participating organisation. They were facilitated by two trainers from FIOH. Three pilot programs were conducted (June, October, November 2025), and a total of 35 supervisors participated.

Supervisor context: participants from several sectors

In the City of Kokkola, The City Group consists of the city organisation, one independent public utility, 42 local authority subsidiaries, 17 associated companies, and 7 joint municipal authorities. The organisation decided to offer the training for all voluntary supervisors to maximise reach and to build consistent leadership capabilities across units. Supervisors from several different sectors, such as early childhood education, technical and environmental services, cultural services, cleaning and catering, and human resource enrolled in the training

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program. This cross-sector participation enabled supervisors to share ideas and knowledge about their current development practices as well as their role in promoting employee development, with colleagues from various units and occupational fields.

Many supervisors have extensive leadership experience. However, they may lack tools for providing individualised support to employees, relying instead on one-size-fits-all guidance. In addition, supervisory work is often characterised by high time pressure which creates barriers for team-level competence development. Typically, supervisors perceive workplace skill and competence development through formal development structures and practices. Therefore, increasing their knowledge and understanding of more informal, on-the-job learning practices would be highly beneficial.

1.7.3.2 CMOs for supervisory training

1) Peer learning around practical exercises improves skills and self-efficacy and leads to change in supervisory roles and practices

Mechanism

The intervention created opportunities for supervisors to engage in peer-based problem-solving. Exposure to how peers handle similar situations enabled *vicarious learning* by providing practical, real-life supervisory cases and transferable approaches to everyday challenges. The exercises deepened supervisors' *understanding of their role* in workplace learning and competence development and strengthened their *skills and self-confidence* in managing these situations.

Outcomes

After the training, the supervisor *delegated responsibility* for competence development to subordinates and *established a development team* instead of leading the process by oneself. The supervisor also sought to integrate the learning outcomes from the training into performance and development discussions with subordinates and to further develop incentive-based remuneration practices in their unit.

Context

Supervisory work is characterised by high time pressure, and both everyday problem-solving and the acquisition of new competencies largely depend on the supervisor's own initiative. Participating supervisors viewed competence development as a central aspect of managerial work and demonstrated a development- and change-oriented mindset.

Overarching CMO

If supervisors have a development-oriented mindset and feel responsible for competence development, **then** peer learning can strengthen their skills and self-efficacy because it supports vicarious learning by incorporating practical examples and collaborative problem-solving in the context of supervisory work, **which may lead to** changes in supervisory practices by promoting employees' active role in competence development and integrating competence development more systematically into discussions with subordinates.

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2) Peer learning around practical exercises broadens understanding of age-specific competencies and knowledge transfer and changes performance and development discussions

Mechanism

The training included concrete *case examples and peer discussions* focusing on how supervisors can engage with employees of different ages in competence management. Through these activities, supervisors' *mindsets were broadened*. The training supported the realisation that learning occurs in everyday work, not only in formal training contexts, and that the same approaches to competence development do not apply equally to younger and older employees. The supervisors also came to understand that employees at different career stages may not always be equally motivated or able to consistently invest energy in competence development.

Outcomes

Following the training, the supervisor designed a method to ensure the transfer of tacit knowledge from employees approaching retirement to the wider work community. The supervisor also revised the structure of the performance and development discussions to address competences and strengths more explicitly and began scheduling these discussions more systematically. Moreover, the supervisor developed a plan to monitor employees' competence development and knowledge sharing more systematically, and to link these outcomes to individual performance-based pay supplements.

Context

The supervisor had extensive work experience in developing and managing employees' competencies.

Overarching CMO

If supervisors engage in peer learning through discussions and concrete case examples related to age-differences in competence development and knowledge sharing, **then** their mindsets regarding competence management broadens, **which may lead to** changes in supervisory practices, including more explicit attention to competencies and strengths within the work community, as well as improved transfer of tacit knowledge between employees.

3) Training combining research-based knowledge and practical exercises offers new insights and tools and refines group discussion practices

Mechanism

The training incorporated the most recent research evidence and case examples from real-life situations, which were examined collaboratively with peers. Through engagement with up-to-date research, the supervisors *gained new insights, perspectives, and tools,* which they sought to *align with their existing knowledge* and prior experience.

Outcomes

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After the training, the supervisor developed a plan to implement a concrete intervention in their workplace related to competence management. Specifically, they planned to introduce a new group discussion at the workplace focusing on learning and competence management.

Context

The supervisor had positive attitude toward continuous professional development and extensive work experience in developing and managing employees' competencies. They perceived competence development as an important working-life skill.

Hindering factors

For supervisors with extensive prior experience in workplace learning and competence development, expectations for the training were initially low. However, the research-based and knowledge-oriented nature of the training proved to be particularly relevant and valuable.

Overarching CMO

If supervisors have extensive experience in managing on-the-job learning and competence development, **then** up-to-date, research-based, and practice-oriented training may provide them new insights **which may lead to** adjustments in existing routines and supervisory practices.

4) Peer support normalizes the challenges of supervisory work and encourages greater peer interaction

Mechanism

The training provided social support and encouragement, as well as opportunities to address practical examples and challenges collaboratively within a peer group composed of supervisors from multiple sectors and professions. Peer support fostered a sense of *normalisation*, *reduced feelings of being alone and isolated and lowered the threshold for adopting practices* and experiential knowledge from others. This occurred, as supervisors recognised that similar challenges are faced across sectors.

Outcomes

After the training, the supervisor established an informal peer group consisting of colleagues from multiple sectors. This led to more frequent contact with peer supervisors and provided ongoing support for everyday supervisory work.

Context

These mechanisms appeared particularly relevant in the context of time-pressured supervisory work. Addressing everyday challenges is often a solitary task, and peers may not be readily available within one's own unit or area.

Overarching CMO

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If supervisors have limited peer contact and experience their work as isolating, **then** a multi-sectoral training programme that provides peer support and reflection may help normalise the challenges and reduce feelings of isolation, **which may motivate and lead to** more frequent peer interactions in the future.

1.8 Overarching findings quantitative and qualitative analyses

1.8.1 Reflecting quantitative and qualitative results

Of the two interventions targeted at jobseekers (Taite and IPS), **Taite coaching** proved to be effective. Consistent with theoretical expectations, the quantitative findings showed that the intervention significantly strengthened participants' job search self-efficacy. Participants reported statistically significantly higher levels of job search self-efficacy immediately after the coaching programme compared to the baseline measurement. In addition, register-based data indicated that participation in the Taite coaching programme led to improved employment outcomes over a four-month follow-up period. Compared with employment changes observed among other long-term unemployed individuals, employment among Taite participants increased significantly more.

The interview data collected from participants and job coaches provided a deeper understanding of the mechanisms underlying both the proximal and long-term effects of the Taite intervention. Accordingly, coaching elements such as opportunities to practise real-life job search situations, a focus on identifying individual strengths, and the provision of positive and encouraging feedback appeared to build participants' job search skills, strengthen their positive self-perception and confidence in job seeking, and increase their effort and persistence in pursuing employment. These findings were closely aligned with the quantitative results.

The interview data also increased understanding of the benefits of the Taite coaching for jobseekers facing more challenging circumstances, such as limited motivation to find employment or health-related difficulties. Although these participants did not necessarily find employment after the coaching, the programme helped them identify alternative pathways forward, including training opportunities and subsidized employment. For these individuals, peer support and the participatory elements of the coaching increased energy and activity levels and, through a process of normalisation, reduced feelings of failure. Furthermore, among participants with an immigrant background, opportunities to practise job search situations in Finnish and receive encouraging feedback from Finnish peers reduced stress and improved their prospects of finding employment.

Based on its positive outcomes, Taite coaching will continue in Kokkola in the coming years. FIOH will train new instructors in August 2026, drawn from Employment Services and third-sector organisations. The coaching method is also expanding to other municipalities in Central Ostrobothnia through the new Taite+ project partially funded by the European Social Fund (ESF+) (see Taite coaching for jobseekers takes root in Kokkola – a proven method for helping people move forward | Finnish Institute of Occupational Health). Although Taite coaching has strengthened collaboration between implementing stakeholders, it also appears to have the strongest potential for scaling nationally and perhaps also internationally. The training materials support this implementation.

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The quantitative data on **IPS coaching** were too limited to allow for a robust impact assessment. However, interviews with participating jobseekers, a job coach, and employers suggested that regular face-to-face meetings with job coaches, combined with concrete step-by-step job search tasks, increased participants' sense of ownership of the job search process. Similar to the findings for Taite coaching, efforts to identify participants' strengths and skills, together with job coaches' efforts to match jobseekers with suitable employment opportunities, appeared to improve participants' self-perceptions and confidence in their employment prospects. The IPS coaching was also seen to reduce employers' hesitation to hire long-term unemployed individuals facing various challenges. This effect was achieved through the active communication and support that job coaches provided directly to employers and workplaces. In Finland, many long-term unemployed individuals struggle with the network of multiple social benefits, and entering employment may even weaken their financial situation. For this group, the financial counselling included in the IPS coaching helped participants view employment more positively and better understand the financial implications of returning to work.

Due to a rapid increase in the number of unemployed jobseekers in the region, the Employment Services decided to discontinue the implementation of the IPS programme in autumn 2025. As the number of clients grew, it was no longer feasible to provide such personnel-intensive coaching to all those in need. However, the IPS coaching has also attracted broader interest in Finland, and it is already being piloted in some employment regions and wellbeing services counties.

To improve **employees'** opportunities for career development and mobility, a supervisory coaching intervention was developed and implemented for supervisors working in the City of Kokkola. A quasi-experimental study design was used to examine the impact of the training on employees. According to employees' self-reports, the supervisory coaching intervention did not appear to influence their sideward or upward career mobility, nor did it affect their perceptions of competence and skill development. The relatively short follow-up period of four months and the limited sample size may have constrained the ability to detect such effects.

Nevertheless, according to the survey data collected from participating **supervisors,** the coaching programme was perceived as beneficial and strengthened supervisors' confidence in supporting employees' skill and career development. The participants also felt more capable of addressing potential challenges and setbacks related to these issues. In the interviews, supervisors emphasised that peer learning through practical exercises enhanced vicarious learning and collegial problem-solving, which in turn improved their skills and self-efficacy. They further noted that these improvements could lead to positive changes in their supervisory behaviours and practices. These qualitative findings were therefore consistent with the survey results. Through the sharing of research-based knowledge and participation in practical exercises, the coaching programme was also perceived to provide new insights and tools for refining supervisory practices. For supervisors who experienced a sense of isolation in their role, the coaching helped to normalise common workplace challenges and provided opportunities to build peer networks that could continue to offer support beyond the duration of the programme.

The City of Kokkola has not indicated whether it will continue implementing the programme. However, the organisation and its culture were described to be development-oriented and the decision to invest in workplace learning and competence development was seen as strategically important, which would support its continuation. Furthermore, some HR staff

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familiar with the programme could act as trainers, as they participated in the pilot group. However, further implementation and dissemination require understanding and decisions from upper management and allocation of resources to both HR and supervisors as well as substitute arrangements to enable supervisors' participation. To support wider dissemination, the training manuals will be published in Finnish and English and made freely available to workplaces in autumn 2026. The relatively short duration of the training (6 hours) enhances its feasibility for workplaces. The programme also includes exercises that supervisors can apply independently within their teams (e.g., in developmental group discussions), regardless of sector, organisational size, or region. Participation in the coaching is not a prerequisite for teams to carry out these activities.

1.8.2 Impact of coalition on individual level outcomes

Because the coalition in the Finnish Living Lab played only a limited role in the co-creation and tailoring of interventions within this project, the coalition-level interviews yielded relatively little information on how the coalition context and mechanisms influenced the interventions targeted at jobseekers and employees and, consequently, their labour market entry and mobility. Instead, coalition stakeholders mainly reflected on the conditions that shaped coalition development, as well as the relationships between contextual factors, coalition mechanisms, and coalition-related outcomes, such as effective functioning and long-term sustainability of the coalition.

Nevertheless, a well-functioning and stable coalition was perceived as a potential contributor to improving labour market participation and mobility among vulnerable groups in the region. A concrete example of successful collaboration within the coalition is the Taite coaching programme, which was jointly implemented by two regional stakeholders and is being expanded to additional stakeholders across the region in 2026–2028. This shared initiative, whose outcomes have been systematically monitored, has served as a form of social glue, strengthening trust and communication among stakeholders and fostering broader collaboration within the coalition. Ultimately, these processes have contributed to improved employment outcomes among programme participants.

Overall, the coalition interviews highlighted the importance of clear leadership, shared goals, and the exchange of information and good practices as key coalition resources. They triggered mechanisms such an improved and shared understanding of challenges and opportunities, enhanced problem-solving and resource allocation, more coordinated and proactive actions, strengthened stakeholder commitment, and encouraged innovation. In turn, these processes contribute to the effective functioning and sustainability of the coalition and may ultimately improve employment opportunities and labour market participation among vulnerable groups.

Compared with jobseekers' inflow, the coalition interviews provided less information on initiatives aimed at improving employee mobility. However, the interviews revealed that information sharing, joint planning, and co-creation among stakeholders are key mechanisms that can help identify potential career pathways, develop more targeted training and professional development opportunities, and thereby promote mobility across roles both within and between organisations.

1.8.3 Maintenance and sustainability of the coalition

The coalition activated and strengthened through the project appears likely to continue beyond the project period. Several key factors support its maintenance and long-term sustainability. First, even prior to the project, the small city was characterised by strong familiarity and trust

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among stakeholders, as well as a well-established culture of collaboration. During the project, the emphasis on promoting regional vitality alongside employment and social inclusion increased employers' interest and engagement. Furthermore, a shared understanding of regional challenges helped stakeholders recognise that these issues could not be addressed through bilateral cooperation alone, which had previously been the dominant approach. The facilitated process, consisting of a series of workshops, enabled stakeholders to develop a jointly defined vision and common objectives for the coalition. It also supported the emergence of self-organised working groups that advanced themes identified and developed collaboratively. In addition, the employment services assumed a clearer leadership role within the coalition. However, the coalition's effectiveness is not dependent on any single actor; rather, it is grounded in collaboration, shared responsibility, and the collective expertise of participating organisations. Finally, the forthcoming coalition agreement between stakeholder organisations is expected to further strengthen the coalition's sustainability and provide a formal foundation for its continued operation beyond the project.

1.8.4 The ENGINE approach

The ENGINE model, which sought to facilitate career progression and mobility through employee upskilling and thereby create vacancies for the recruitment of unemployed jobseekers, was not realised in the Kokkola Living Lab. The ENGINE approach proved difficult to implement in a region characterised by an SME-dominated business sector, relatively high and increasing unemployment, insufficient labour demand, and a growing incidence of dismissals and temporary layoffs. During the economic downturn, employers focused primarily on maintaining core business operations, leaving limited incentives to invest in employee training and skills development, inclusive recruitment practices, or broader collaborative initiatives such as the coalition.

According to coalition stakeholders, the ENGINE approach was perceived as overly theoretical, particularly among small and medium-sized enterprises. These organisations typically have limited opportunities for internal career progression and relatively modest competence development needs, reducing the relevance of a model based on employee mobility and upskilling. Nevertheless, the stakeholders believed that the ENGINE model could be more effectively implemented in larger organisations or at the sectoral level, if employers recognised its long-term benefits for both their own operations and the wider regional economy. Labour demand often fluctuates across workplaces and over time, and greater flexibility in workforce mobility, both between employers and between education and employment, could help to address skills mismatches and improve labour market resilience. Such developments could also strengthen workforce retention within the region. Furthermore, given the region's anticipated industrial investments and future labour demand, closer cooperation among employers could support skills development and facilitate workforce mobility if these objectives were explicitly incorporated into collaborative efforts.

The stakeholders further noted that a stronger coalition, involving larger companies at the earlier phase of the project, might have enabled the development and testing of the ENGINE model within at least one organisation. In the absence of such engagement, the employment services, as a key stakeholder in the coalition, decided to focus on activities targeted at unemployed jobseekers, allowing the project to progress towards one of its central objectives despite the limited implementation of the ENGINE model.

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