

SITRA

SITRA'S SEVEN RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LIFELONG LEARNING IN FINLAND

SUMMARY



Finnish well-being and competitiveness are based on expertise, which everyone should be able to develop in different stages of life.



Why recommendations?

This summary introduces Sitra's seven recommendations for promoting lifelong learning in Finland.

The recommendations serve as tools for lifelong learning policy creators and decision-makers for managing and implementing a joint view of lifelong learning in Finland. The recommendations are discussed in more detail in the publication Millä suosituksilla? – Kohti elinikäisen oppimisen Suomea (On what recommendations? – Towards lifelong learning in Finland) (in Finnish).

The study is based on the work carried out in the Lifelong learning project (2018-2021), initiated by 30 key public-sector, educational sector and business and industry representatives and based on their shared views on the direction of lifelong learning in Finland. The recommendations are a response to two of the four theses presented in the report: “General knowledge, basic skills and competence are the foundations of well-being” and “Competence improves working life and working life improves competence”.

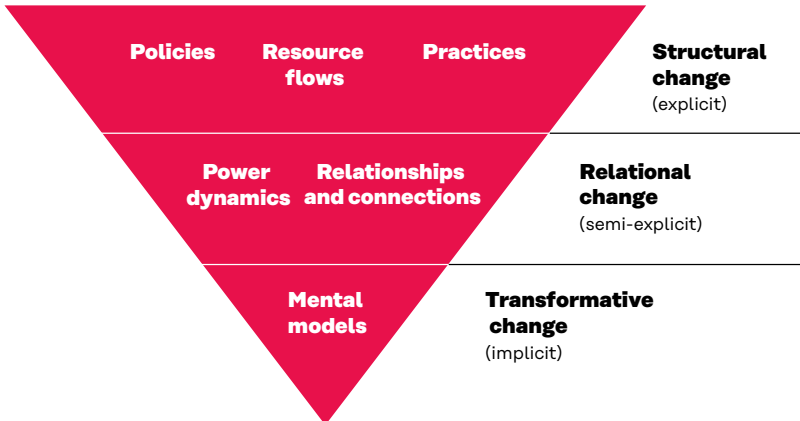
The backdrop to this work is Sitra's co-operation with stakeholders and various pilot projects carried out across Finland, as well as studies produced by the future fund.

Fine-tuning the existing leadership models and structures is not sufficient in the face of rapidly changing competence needs. What is needed is a more flexible model in which competence is seen as the foundation for well-being and a sustainable economy in Finland and where lifelong learning is a viable option for everyone at all stages of their lives.

Lifelong learning requires a systemic approach

Systemic change requires concurrent changes in structures, relations and mental models. The approach we adopted for the recommendations follows the framework developed by Senge (2018).

Six conditions of systems change (Kania, Kramer, Senge 2018)



Systemic change is possible only when each stakeholder is prepared to analyse and change their mental models and the ways they operate. In Senge's model, six conditions of systemic change are divided into three levels. In the top tier of the "inverted triangle" are the explicit conditions: policies, resource flows and practices. In the second tier are the semi-explicit conditions: power dynamics and relationships and connections. In the bottom tier are implicit conditions, the mental models. The latter is the most challenging as well as the most important of the conditions in long-term systemic change, as it forms the foundation on which the explicit and semi-explicit conditions are built.



Changes in the operating environment pose a challenge for the implementation of lifelong learning

The work of the Lifelong learning project began with 30 key societal stakeholders identifying three change scenarios they saw as presenting a challenge for lifelong learning:

1) the speed of change is challenging current systems; **2)** there is a growing emphasis on the significance of competence as the foundation for sustainable economic growth and well-being; and **3)** societies are becoming increasingly diverse. The change scenarios are creating pressures for the implementation of lifelong learning and, therefore, addressing these observations is essential for development.

1. Changes are becoming more unpredictable

CHALLENGE

The capacity and opportunities for individuals and communities to respond to rapid changes vary.

CONCLUSIONS

The aim is to support people's view of themselves as persons of competence.

The time for modernising the provision of education is now.

Businesses' capacity for renewal must be supported.

2. The foundation of sustainable economic growth and well-being is at risk of being eroded

CHALLENGES

The decline in the size of the working-age population is threatening to lead to a contraction of the economy.

There is a danger that an increasing proportion of the population will be excluded from working life.

Finnish society and its working life are not seen as an appealing option by the international workforce.

The rate of increase in the level of education among the population is too slow.

CONCLUSIONS

Investments in raising the level of education must be continued.

Student and labour immigration must be increased.

Everyone's engagement with working life according to their abilities helps secure economic resilience.

3. The benefits of diversity are overlooked

CHALLENGES

The demand for increasingly diverse competences and skills is still largely misunderstood.

Competence can be achieved through different paths and sometimes existing competences are unidentified and hence underused.

The potential offered by the immigrant-background population has not been recognised.

CONCLUSIONS

Regional competence needs must be responded to and access to education must be secured.

The development of more diverse competences must be supported with greater focus.

To facilitate the recognition of diverse competences, new methods and personalised services need to be developed.

Sitra's seven recommendations for lifelong learning in Finland

1

The comprehensive examination of lifelong learning requires that we challenge our mindsets and place the individual at the centre of the phenomenon.

Systemic change requires challenging our mindsets and the acquisition of new knowledge to support decision-making. To understand the opportunities and obstacles to lifelong learning, the analysis must place the individual at the centre of the phenomenon.

For the desired systemic change to be possible, each stakeholder should take into consideration people's overall situations and the shared goals of different administrative branches to promote longer careers, competence development, sufficient income and well-being for all.

2

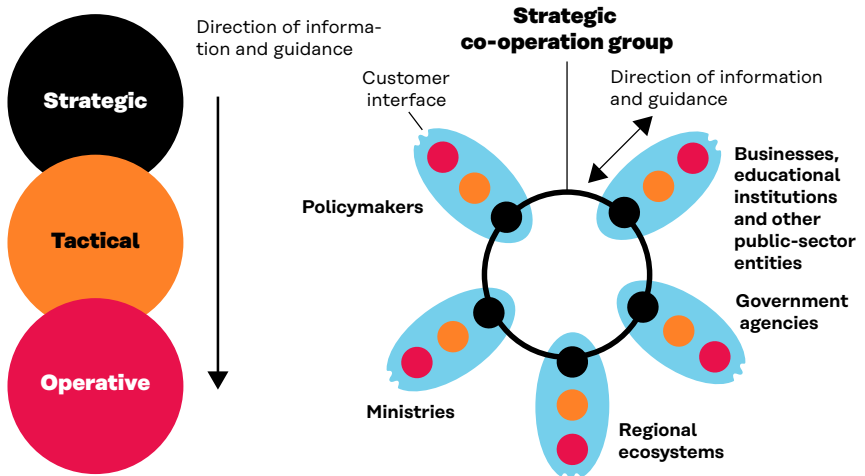
Those involved should collaborate on a joint lifelong learning strategy.

Setting strategic objectives jointly gives a common direction to action and greater strategic freedom to regions and institutions. The hierarchical leadership model should be replaced by decentralised leadership.

Comparing hierarchical and decentralised leadership models highlights the challenge to lifelong learning management. In a hierarchical leadership model, those at the top of the hierarchy dictate not just the strategic content but also the tactical and operative decisions. In a decentralised model, however, the entire system is directed on the basis of goals and objectives established through a collective process so that each stakeholder is able to engage with the process according to their respective tasks and roles.

A decentralised strategic goal-setting process gives the operations a shared direction, giving more strategic freedom to regional stakeholders and individual educational institutions. Strategic freedom gives lifelong learning entities the opportunity to set their own tactical objectives and develop their operations to better match the needs of diverse customer groups.

Hierarchical leadership model and decentralised leadership model



3

Greater political consensus needs to be achieved on the expected outcomes of long-term investments in competence development.

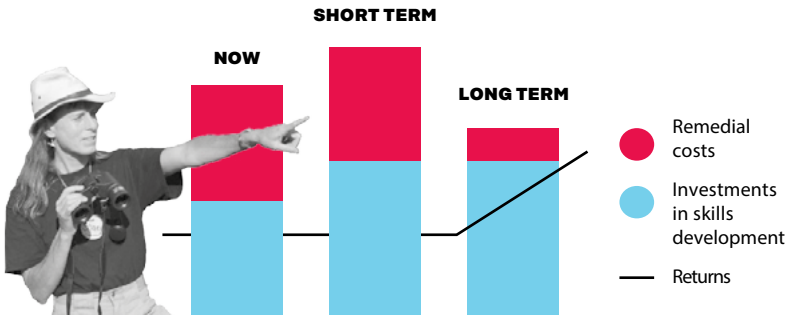
Skills are strongly linked to Finland's economic development. Investment in skills development in all sectors is more modest than is financially sensible.

3A Investment in skills development must be seen as a long-term investment to strengthen the economy.

3B Phenomenon-based budgeting must be promoted in a targeted manner.

3C The level of investment must be assessed in relation to national targets.

The estimated impact of investment in competence development on public finances



4

Key contributors must gauge their development work to meet the real competence needs of regions and businesses.

Needs-based development should be the leitmotif for development work between businesses and education and training operators. At the moment, development investments are not guided by a shared vision of how project outcomes could be converted into the desired changes and long-term impact.

4A Development funding must boost the strategic development work carried out with basic funding.

4B Development funding criteria must be goals-based.

4C The needs of businesses must be at the centre of collaboration between educational institutions and businesses.

4D The implementation and scaling of practices with the greatest impact must be supported.

4E There is a demand for increasingly diverse ways of implementing lifelong learning.

5

Stakeholders are developing new goals-based ecosystems for the renewal of skills.

Network-based collaboration requires a shared situational understanding and goals. Responsibility for initiating and co-ordinating collaboration must also be clearly established. The current funding models are not conducive to the decentralised collaboration model.

5A Building and updating a shared situational awareness takes time and commitment.

5B There is a demand for parties prepared to assume the responsibility for initiating and co-ordinating collaboration.

5C Public-sector stakeholders should support the emergence of new networks and skills clusters.

6

Lifelong learning providers produce and rely on evidence-based information.

Open data offers great opportunities. Efficient use of open data requires authority-led collaboration and a cross-administrative expert body for the development of AI. Open data platforms are needed to enable data sharing.

Recommendations on official information

6A The quality and collation of official information needs to be improved and better co-ordinated.

6B Open data platforms forming mutually complementary entities are required.

6C Models for consistent interpretation of data must be developed.

Recommendations on open data

6D The use of open data requires authority-led co-operation between the organisations with access to open data platforms.

6E A cross-administrative expert body to develop AI is required.

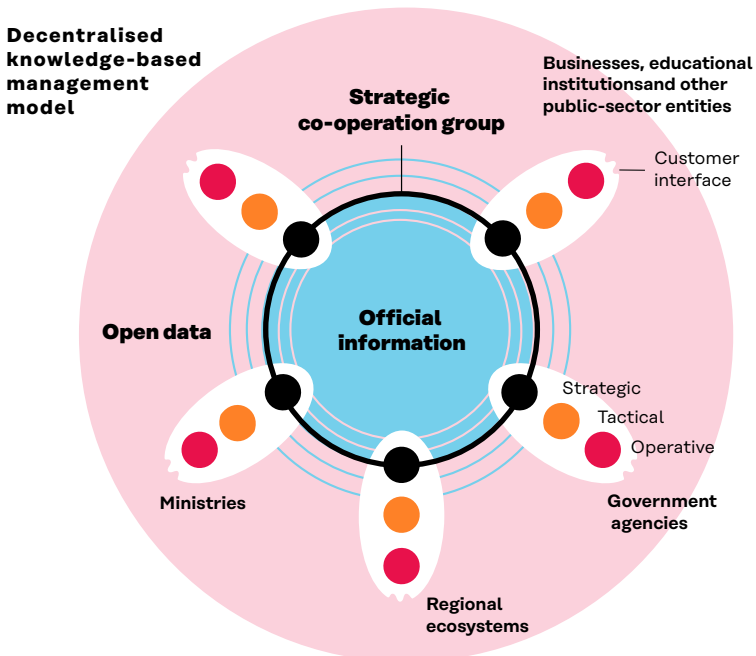


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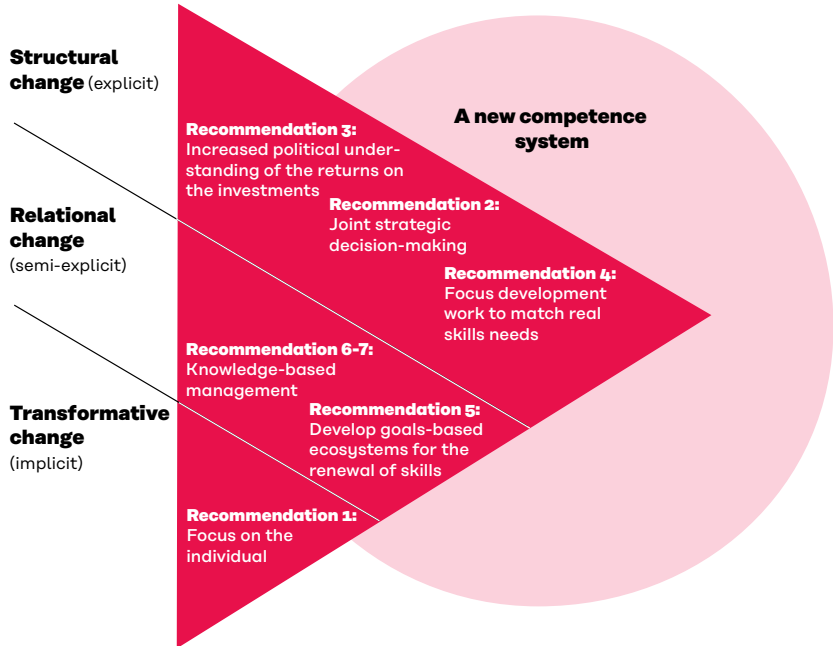
A far-reaching knowledge-based management model inclusive of the different contributors must be developed.

The phenomenon-based management of lifelong learning requires decentralised leadership and taking the decision-making close to the customer interface.

A knowledge-based management model sets out how strategic goals are jointly defined, how a shared situational understanding is achieved, how knowledge is jointly produced and interpreted and how knowledge about the impact of measures guides decision-making. These will give decision-makers and funding providers the opportunity to review the goals and retarget resources as necessary.



The seven recommendations by Senge's (2018) framework for systems change



Recommendation 2 (joint strategy), Recommendation 3 (political understanding) and Recommendation 4 (matching need) represent the explicit conditions of the system. Recommendation 5 (competence ecosystems), Recommendation 6 (high-quality data) and Recommendation 7 (knowledge-based management) represent semi-explicit conditions. Recommendation 1 (comprehensive management, focus on the individual) represents implicit, transformative change.

Conclusions

Rather than offer solutions to specific problems, these recommendations create a foundation for successful systemic change. *Systemic change is possible only if change is promoted on all three levels illustrated by Senge's framework.* With challenging our mindsets and placing an individual at the centre of thinking, effective investments in competence and skills development will lead to a profound impact on people's well-being and enhance our competitiveness in the ever-accelerating process of change.

Public-sector decision-makers create the conditions for the comprehensive management of lifelong learning that engages the different stakeholders extensively to work together and reform their thinking, and to provide the stakeholders in lifelong learning with the power to respond to the actual needs of learners and clients.

Finnish well-being and competitiveness are based on expertise, something everyone should be able to develop throughout all stages of their life.



Instead of simply tweaking the current management models and structures, what is needed is a comprehensive reform of management and structures. This will build opportunities for lifelong learning for the people of Finland. We must place the individual at the centre of our thinking.



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**COMPETITIVENESS
AND WELL-BEING
FROM LIFELONG
LEARNING**

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