In Search of Missing Links in Disseminating Good Practice – Experiences of a Work Reform Programme in Finland

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This article examines learning and good practice dissemination in the light of the evolution and experience of the Finnish Workplace Development Programme (TYKES), which has been running from 1996 in Finland, and will complete its third term in 2009. The emphasis will be on the new project concept used in the second term of the Programme, namely *learning networks*. The concept of "good practice" is critically examined, and some ideas, pointing out to a need to pay due attention to the quality and learning spaces of "everyday small loops of learning", in trying to bridge the "dissemination gap", often identified in programme and project learning, are examined in the light of a feasibility study of a new TYKES-financed learning network project, PEERS, led by the author.

Key words: Workplace development, work reform programmes, good practice dissemination

1. The Finnish context and TYKES

The Finnish Workplace Development Programme – TYKES – has been now running for over 12 years – a commendable achievement of sustainability in the Finnish context for a purely policy-based programme (as opposed to a permanent institution, agency or fund). Programmes, which have proliferated especially since Finland joined the EU in 1995, have, according to national evaluations, tended to have weak internal learning mechanisms (to harness

and spread "good practices"), and weak learning from one programme period to another. On these terms, TYKES emerges as a better than average performer, according to several independent evaluations (Valtakari et. al. 2007; Arnkil. et al. 2003, 2004), so it is worth examining the ideas and experiences of the programme to perhaps throw some light on the possibilities of improving learning, or mainstreaming good practice.

TYKES has drawn inspiration from and engaged in a benchlearning dialogue particularly with other Nordic programmes (Gustavsen 2007; Gustavsen 2003; Gustavsen et. al. 2003; Finne 2007) and lately also more and more from a broader European and global context (Alasoini et. al 2006).

In order for the foreign reader to get to grips with the Finnish context, let me first briefly describe some key features of societal development in Finland, to put TYKES in context, and then carve out some key features of the TYKES programme itself, to give a feel for its significance in the Finnish context.

Finland, a country of 5,3 million inhabitants, and geographically about the size of Italy, has experienced a real roller coaster in terms of economic and employment development since 1990. First, after a rather long period of low unemployment and reasonable growth figures, Finland was hit in 1992 by the worst depression in the post-war period. Then, in a matter of just a few years, an impressive recovery took place, with record growth rates, the highest in OECD countries since 1997, and eventually a considerable drop in unemployment (presently 6,8%, and employment rate 69,3%, and improving).

Finland has a very high investment rate in R&D, technology and education. In various international assessments Finland has been singled out as a top performer – World Economic Forum, PISA, UNDP Human Development Report, Transparency International, and others. Castells and Himanen (2001) go as far as signalling a particular "Finnish model", successfully combining a technologically advanced knowledge society and a socially responsible welfare society. One can question the merits of these comparisons, but nevertheless, the last decade in particular has been a success story in Finland.

The politics of Finland are highly consensual, with a high degree of consistency in pursuing global competitiveness and societal development across government terms. Tripartite cooperation has, until recently, been a corner-

stone of just about any major initiative put forward, including the TYKES programme. Local government, in a typical Nordic fashion, plays a very important role in terms of welfare service delivery and employment (especially of women). This means that workplace development in the public sector is highly important – again a feature included in the TYKES.

Societal development in Finland is overshadowed by a world record generation change, one of the steepest in the world, in the next 15 years. Together with the considerably improved labour market situation, this means that Finland will have to look into the mobilisation of its national labour resources, into *workforce enlargement*, renewal of internal and external recruitment in organisations and the quality of working life, in all its aspects, much more seriously than hitherto.

2. The TYKES Programme[1]

2.1 Positioning the programme

Political and institutional basis: TYKES[2] was launched in 1996 as one of the new policy initiatives incorporated in the programme of Prime Minister Lipponen's first government. Both the designing and managing of the programme was based on tripartite cooperation. The "home" of the Programme has been the Ministry of Labour, with a coordinating group. The first programme period was 1996 - 1999. The programme was continued as a part of the programme of Prime Minister Lipponen's second Government for the period of 2000 – 2003, and again continued in the programme of Prime Minister Vanhanen's first and second government 2004 – 2009. It is worth noting that TYKES has thus survived three changes of government, form a broad coalition to a centre-left and finally a centre-right government. TYKES has enjoyed consistent positive feedback from all key stakeholders in several evaluations.

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[1]   Basic information on TYKES:
      http://www.mol.fi/mol/en/01_ministry/05_tykes/index.jsp

[2]   The programme was called TYKE until 2004, and thereafter TYKES. I will use
      TYKES throughout this article.

Mission and goals: TYKES promotes what it calls "sustainable productivity growth" in Finnish companies and organisations i.e. modes of operation of Finnish companies and other work organizations, with an eye to simultaneous enhancement of productivity and the quality of working life. The goals have been somewhat modified during the course of the programme.

Development activity in the programme projects is based on cooperation between the management and staff of the workplaces concerned. In addition, TYKES promotes the dissemination of project results and expertise on workplace development. TYKES is based on the view that the most effective way of generating new innovative solutions for working life is close cooperation and interaction between workplaces, researchers, consultants, public authorities and the social partners.

Focussed or broad: The mission and objectives of TYKES are well articulated, but they embrace a broad spectrum of thematic areas and issues. Its scope is broad in terms of geography and sectors; covering the entire country as well as all economic sectors (public, private and third sector) and all kinds of workplaces.

Policy positioning: As far as the policy environment is concerned, the place of TYKES is at the crossroads of innovation, employment and economic policies. However, it is not positioned in the centre of any one of these. TEKES (Finnish Funding Agency for Technology and Innovation)[3] emphasises innovation and technology, and the EU structural funds employment and social inclusion, whereas TYKES, focussing on organisational and social innovations, is somewhere "in between".

Size and resources: Budget for 2004 – 2009 is EUR 87 million and its annual budget is EUR 14.5 million. This will mean in this period about 1,000 development projects with about 250,000 employees participating, to a varying degree, in the whole programme, which corresponds to about 10% of

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[3]   TEKES website: http://www.tekes.fi/eng/. TEKES is a permanent agency funding innovative research and development projects in companies, universities and research institutes. From the beginning of 2008 the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Trade and Industry were amalgamated to form a new Ministry of Employment and the Economies (http://www.tem.fi/?l=en). In this instance, TYKES was incorporated in TEKES. What the consequences of this might be, is taken up later in the article.

the Finnish workforce, not an insignificant reach. All in all, in the Finnish context TYKES can be described as belonging to a "middleweight category" as far as its budget and time-frame are concerned.

Steering and organisation: The programme has a management group consisting of representatives from the Ministry of Labour, labour market organisations, other ministries and R&D funding bodies. The management group reports to the tripartite Council of Labour Affairs. As a whole the basis of the programme is tripartite agreement and consensus. The programme is supported by an expert group which processes the applications, a Scientific Forum of Experts and a network of regional contact persons working in the Employment and Economic Development centres of the Ministry of Employment and the Economies. The practical work is done by a Project team, operating in the Ministry of Labour (now the Ministry of Employment and the Economies).

2.2 Goals and levels of the programme

The programme identifies four different levels of goals, public policy level, programme level, generative level and workplace level[4] (see figure 1).

The goal of the *public policy level* is to achieve qualitatively sustainable productivity growth in Finland, in accordance with the TYKES vision and main goal. Qualitatively sustainable productivity growth wants to strike a sustainable and long-term balance between the innovation, competitiveness and productivity goals and achievements and the personnel well-being, competence and cooperation development goals and achievements at the workplaces. From a development programme perspective, success here hinges on the development of a rich and balanced innovation environment of workplaces. This is indicated in particular by the diversity and quality of expertise possessed by innovative centres (for example R&D units, consultants, labour market organizations, authorities and workplaces) and by the diversity and quality of their cooperation. Taking a broader societal perspec-

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[4]   The description of the programme goals and modes are based on TYKES documents, and articles by TYKES programme manager Alasoini (2008, 2007).

tive, achieving sustainable productivity growth hinges on the society's ability to create social environments that generate trust – a concern traditionally high on the Scandinavian agenda (Gustavsen 2007).

The goals of the *programme level* reflect the goals of the public policy level. They are related to how the programme is able, via its own measures, to realize the TYKES vision. The goals concern the extent to which the programme's project and other operations generate qualitatively sustainable productivity growth and enhance the innovation environment. The project modes are development projects in workplaces, method development projects and learning network projects. The programme also supports doctoral dissertations and licentiate theses written in connection with project activity.

The aim of the *generative level,* as it is called in the programme, is to disseminate new work, organizational and management practices and development methods, models and tools created and tested in projects as generative ideas acting as sources of learning and inspiration (good practices) for other workplaces and stakeholder groups. As the project documents point out, this does not mean that other workplaces would adopt good practice as such, but rather that they would act as a source of new ideas and encourage development activity. The generative level consists of forums and workshops, run by TYKES and TYKES projects or other actors, plus the publications, websites and information provided by various actors engaging with TYKES activities. The main interest of this article, then, is to explore this generative level.

The aim of the *workplace level* is to strengthen, via development projects, the ability of workplaces to create qualitatively sustainable productivity growth, i.e. growth with gains for the quality of working life. This calls for broad cooperation between management and personnel in development activity, and the ability to make skilful use of expert networks in support of development.

## 2.3 Programme modes and their evolution

The programme finances three different kinds of projects: Workplace development projects (589 approved in 2004 – 2007, corresponding to 74% of funding), Method development projects (24, 12%), and Learning networks

(17, 12%). The programme also finances basic analysis (feasibility studies), 105 in 2004 – 2007 (2%). So the major effort, in terms of quantity, is in workplace development projects.

Workplace development projects are highly user oriented, with a focus on workplace gains. Workplace development projects were, especially in the earlier stages of the programme, usually limited to one workplace, or a limited set of workplaces. Whereas workplace development projects have been – to varying degrees – successful in enhancing productivity or job satisfaction in the workplace, they have been weaker in terms of producing generative results, i.e. results that (eventually) benefit people other than project participants.

Generative effects have been somewhat better in *method development projects*. Method development projects can involve the application of a "best practice or method", further elaboration of an existing method, or testing of a completely new one. The financing is restricted to those actors that are committed to the use of the method.

Figure 1:   TYKES-programme structure
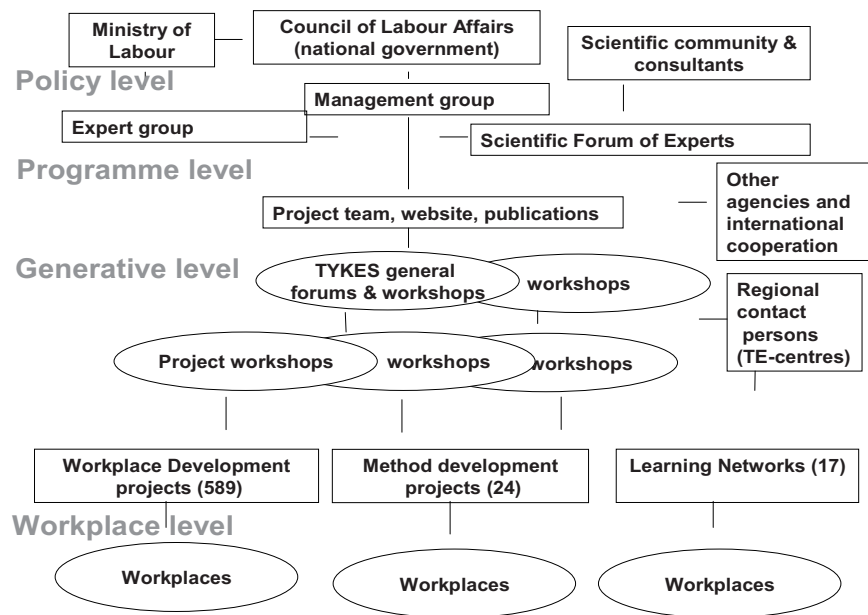
The latecomer in TYKES is *learning networks*, partly spurred by evaluations, which pointed to a need to enhance the generative mechanisms in the entire programme.

The basic idea of learning networks is to act as "open source forums", learning spaces that bring together actors who represent a diversity of perspectives, but share an R&D issue interest. Whereas in the other two project types learning is in a way a "by-product" of action, in learning networks enhancing learning itself is the focus. So the project activity aims at enhancing the ability of the programme to produce generative results.

The core mode of the learning networks in the programme is joint learning forums of workplace R&D units and workplaces. A number of researchers and developers with common interests take part in the learning networks together with a number of workplaces, the development of whose operations is supported by cooperation with external experts. The learning networks may include other participants as well, like consultancies and development agencies or regional actors. In TYKES there has been a somewhat stronger share of consultants vs. scientists as compared with for instance the Norwegian ED 2000 and VC 2010 Programmes. During the programme evolution TYKES has increased the role scientists and research while at the same time wanting to retain the practical focus provided by consultants.

The purpose of the learning networks, as it is described in the programme documents, is to increase the developmental expertise of the participants, to create and experiment with new forms of development cooperation between R&D units and workplaces, and to generate new, innovative solutions for Finnish working life. Each learning network has a regularly updated development plan that shows the development targets of the network for the short term (about a year) and the long term (about 3-4 years).

In selecting learning networks to be financed, precedence is given to those networks that aim at the creation of new knowledge and expertise on qualitative sustainable productivity growth, and aim at creation of new forms of cooperation at several different actor levels. Including a diversity of expert organizations and workplaces is preferred, and the network should have potential for development.

TYKES has so far financed 17 such learning networks. They represent a wide range of themes and methods, and have variably a more regional or national emphasis. About 6 have a primarily regional focus and another seven a thematic focus. The rest have a particular method as the hub. As examples of focus, the networks are addressing regional company networks promoting environmental protection, tourism and well-being at work, developing the development organisations and skills, strategic human resource management, combining training and development in organisations, devising strategies collaboratively, business concepts, developing methods for rewards and incentives, enhancing peer learning between organisations, and others.

Presently there are about 200 work organizations from different sectors and about 100 researchers and consultants involved in the 17 learning networks. The number of workplaces per network differs considerably, being on the average about 10. The life span of the learning networks often exceeds the project life-span (which on the average is about 4 years). Sometimes there is an existing network that the TYKES-network project is built on, sometimes it is created through the project. The span of sustainable learning network afterlife differs, too, and it is also early to make strong judgements on that.

Examples of methods used in the networks and their forums are variations of the dialogue conference method, change laboratory, problem based learning and platforms enabling open source innovation.

The first phase of learning networks tended to be method focussed and driven, and mostly nationally oriented, whereas towards the end of the present programme period more "open forum" kinds of learning networks, also regional, exploiting also more and more the Internet 2.0. tools, have been established.

The results of the learning networks will be evaluated – both by the programme and by the networks themselves – against the following set of result areas: (1) Results in productivity and quality of work in participating workplaces, (2) New modes of development skills and activities developed, (3) Mutual learning forums created, (4) Co-produced processes, tools and development methods, (5) New forms of development and networking between workplaces, (6) New forms of development and networking between workplaces and expert organisations, (7) New permanent national, regional or

sectoral development structures, (8) Publications, databanks and disserta-
tions.

With success and growing legitimacy, the programme has been able to
take on more ambitious goals, in terms of complexity and setting the sights
on good practice identification and dissemination. So far the key operators in
managing and supporting the programme, i.e. the project team, expert group,
scientific forum of experts and the management group have been successful
in negotiating the growing complexity of the programme – with the support
of external and internal evaluations and various workshops and forums – in
drawing key lessons to take the programme further from one period to an-
other. Evaluations of the programme have been positive, but also pointing to
some important challenges.

2.4 Evaluations of the programme

As a whole, according to independent evaluations (Valtakari et. al. 2007;
Arnkil et al. 2003, 2004), the programme has been a steady performer on
some significant key success factors. It has retained its relevance and support
of political consensus and all key stakeholders in the Finnish context, with
the pressures of global competition and the imminent shortage of labour only
emphasising the main goal: sustainable productivity growth. Within the
policy and programme framework of Finland, TYKES has been a forerunner
of organisational innovations, and in comparison with other programmes (EU
structural fund programmes, earlier productivity programmes, among others)
has been more advanced in re-innovating its activity modes and support for
learning and dissemination. Results of the development projects show a high
success and sustainability rate (comparable to other similar programmes in
the Scandinavian countries). Even with the quite rapid growth in complexity,
the programme has been so far successful in retaining its "unbureaucratic"
and easily approachable, negotiative and communicative nature vis-à-vis its
customers.

But as the intermediate evaluation (Valtakari op.cit) pointed out, the pro-
gramme is probably approaching some important "bifurcation points" in
terms of being able to continue developing, to harness and contain its com-

plexity and position itself in the Finnish innovation policy and programme environment. The inner capabilities of the programme management and coordination are already quite stretched, and there are changes and new challenges in the programme environment.

The generative mechanisms, i.e. learning mechanisms of the programme which have been deemed quite innovative and "better than average" (vis-à-vis other working life related programmes in Finland) but have, for the most part, still been rather linear, and with weaknesses in disseminating mechanisms (good practice case-banks, events, spreading information, publishing and marketing, etc.), and also making the information produced in the programme more approachable for the practical community in terms of readability and "liveliness".

Also the positioning of the programme has been somewhat ambivalent and precarious. Not enjoying a permanent status, the programme has been under the threat of change of political winds, despite the highly consensual politics of Finland. The programme has so far had a rather limited regional dimension (as opposed for example. to the Norwegian ED 2000 and VC 2010), reflecting also the fact that regional steering of *any* function in Finland has been ambivalent, overlapping and confusing.

Situated between technologically and societally oriented emphasis has been an interesting balancing act, but it has been pointed out in the evaluations that a better connection to mainstream technological innovation, exemplified by TEKES, is needed. With maturity, TYKES has a richer connection to working life, also in terms of technologies, and TEKES, in turn, has evolved from a strictly technology oriented agency to a broader understanding of innovation, including organisational innovation. Recently TEKES launched a new programme for 2006-2010, *Service Innovations* , where organisational innovations and service concepts are emphasised.

A new broader innovation concept is also reflected in the new strategy put forward by the Science and Technology Policy Council of Finland (2003) emphasising a balanced development of technological and social innovations and a need to speed up social innovations in the face of global challenges. The Council puts emphasis on the "third task" of universities and polytechnics and the closer collaboration of workplaces and R&D units.

These challenges have been, at least partly, solved in conjunction with the amalgamation of two ministries in Finland, from the beginning of 2008, the Ministry of Labour (the "home base" of TYKES) and the Ministry of Trade and Industry (home base of TEKES) into a new Ministry of Employment and the Economies. TYKES is now a part of TEKES, as a "branch" of its activities. What the implications of this will be, is yet to unfold. In a good scenario, TYKES will benefit from a new environment and mix of approaches, gain a better connection to mainstream innovation, and gain also in reaching workplaces. Then again, TYKES might be smothered and diluted beyond recognition, losing its rather unique character, also in terms of developing learning around good practice. There might also be a clash of cultures, because TEKES, with a strong emphasis on technological innovation and product development, is more secretive and closed, where TYKES has always been "open code". Also, TEKES does not have a tripartite steering body, whereas TYKES has been strongly connected to tripartite steering. This might also have implications for stakeholder engagement and support.

TYKES has thus been for the most part a success story, also in terms of being a forerunner in developing and experimenting with learning networks, both at the whole programme level, and concerning projects. One can see that this is not due to only one or a limited number of factors, but a whole constellation, ranging from the political and societal environment of innovation policy to consensual and sustained policy all the way through a rich web of contacts to actors, good programme management, and a negotiative and open culture, both in generating and running projects, plus critical reviews and self reviews. The main findings of the successive evaluations are summarised in table 1.

Table 1:   A synoptic summary of successive TYKES evaluations

Aspect	Key findings in the evaluation of 2003	Critical questions for the future identified 2003	Key findings in the second (intermediate) evaluation of 2007
1. TYKES in the Finnish societal context	Strong political consensus about the need for workplace development, "national survival"	Addressing the key future questions, like generation change, restructuring of the public sector	"Tripartite consensus" in Finland is under new pressure, together with pressures of the global economy
2.TYKES in the Finnish innovation policy context	TYKES as a forerunner of social and organisational innovations in Finland	Addressing successfully contact to innovation, productivity, quality of working life, and employment discourses	Connection to mainstream and TEKES needs improvement, which has been partly realised in the new Ministry of Employment and the Economies
3.Results of TYKES-projects	Clear evidence of sustainable results in projects	Shifting from project-based to network and module-based sustaining	Learning networks represent a clear new emphasis on this
4.TYKES in comparison with other working life development programmes in Finland and abroad	Main strengths: comprehensiveness, flexibility, local drive. Main weaknesses: scientific input, regional reach, strategic learning	Developing project generation, regional reach and programme learning	Strengths and weaknesses much the same. Challenges to contain new level of complexity. Regionality in a pilot phase
5.Generative mechanisms (learning and dissemination) in TYKES	Getting more attention than usual programmes, still a rather linear approach	Developing real time and complex learning	Need for further steps to contain the rising diversity and complexity of projects and networks and find new and better interfaces between actors
6.Engagement of experts	A tendency towards use of consultants more than scientists (a practical vs. scientific research orientation)	Finding the right balance of researchers and consultants and developing the role of regions and polytechnics	The role of experts has been seminal, but the challenges remain largely the same. Scientific input has increased.
7.Engagement of stakeholders	Broad consensus, strong support, but gap in understanding TYKES social innovation approach as innovation	Promoting a multi-faceted approach and understanding of sustainable working life development	Stakeholder support maintains high, pressures on tripartite steering
8.Evolution of the Programme	No major changes in the themes and emphasis, network aspect gains momentum along the way	Developing a learning programme mechanism and probing the future	Promoting network projects has progressed but need to develop ways to utilize results and experiences has risen
9.Management of the programme	A well-run and un-bureaucratic management of the programme	Developing adequate resources and roles in the new, larger programme, with regional systems	Still an unbureaucratic and easily approachable programme, but open questions what will happen as TYKES is a part of TEKES
10.The future of TYKES	The TYKES plan addresses many of the identified challenges, like research, learning, regions	More attention to: mediating roles (brokers, feasibility), specific needs of sectors (private, public, third), gender, diversity management, among others	Largely the same recommendations hold for TYKES. In the remaining period of TYKES more attention to utilization, TYKES-TEKES connection, regionality and the ability to contain diversity

3.   What next? – identifying further challenges in good practice dissemination

Programme strategies, both domestic and transnational still tend to be rather traditional and linear in their learning and dissemination strategies. TYKES has tried to work towards a more rich and non-linear learning infrastructure to provide a seminal learning space, as a whole, for generative ideas to emerge. What kinds of ideas could there be to further enhance border crossing and dissemination of good practice? Tackling this in a comprehensive way exceeds the possibilities of this article, and, indeed, my intellect, but let me make some illustrative observations in the light of a feasibility study of VERTAISET (PEERS) – a peer learning network in Finland (Arnkil et. al 2007). PEERS – Learning Network – the project is financed as one new learning network by TYKES. It is executed in collaboration by the Finnish Association of Municipalities and the Work Research Centre (WRC) of Tampere University and Spangar Negotiations Co. in 2007 – 2009.

3.1 Dissemination gaps identified in a comprehensive municipality programme

The societal and policy backdrop for the PEERS project is the comprehensive change presently taking place in local government in Finland, the biggest in the post-war period. This contains both renewal and reinvention of service delivery concepts and structures, and amalgamations of the fragmented municipality landscape, in order to secure more viable economic and social units. This change process is being supported and ushered by central government via PARAS reform programme (Reform of Local Government Services and Structures).

The research and evaluation basis for PEERS was a set of critical observations from a major strategic development programme, acronym KARTUKE, 2002 – 2004 (Arnkil et.al.2006). KARTUKE consisted of the development of strategic performance and human resource management of Finnish municipalities, by implementing and developing the Balanced Scorecard (BSC) method. It was the biggest set of projects ever funded by the Finnish Work

Environment Fund, a major player in funding development projects in Finland.

The dissemination strategy of the programme turned out to be quite linear (i.e. research led BSC pilots) dissemination to the wider context). The learning spaces provided by the programme operated mostly in a traditional "present the results" and "lecture" modes, although more dialogical forums also existed. It turned out that although *individual* developments of BSC occurred in certain functions of *individual* municipalities, the rate of good practice dissemination *within* municipalities, across sectors, not to speak of *between* municipalities, was unsatisfactory.

Also, the dissemination task rested on the temporary project organisation, and once that was disbanded, more or less all on offer was a set of publications and websites. The publications themselves constituted quite a wealth of interesting information and findings, but, again, in a rather traditional "write to a research audience" mode, not easily accessible for the practical community.

This prompted the idea to enhance the quality of the learning spaces *during* the execution of the programme, and to invest more in the permanent learning infrastructure between municipalities and municipalities and the R&D community. Via a feasibility study (Arnkil et. al. 2007), PEERS learning network was launched in the autumn 2007.

The "big and small loops" of learning

The whole idea of good practice dissemination – promoted in the EU as a part of "open coordination" – is based on the idea that decision making, making choices in companies, organisations, management and governance would, by being exposed to good practice, be in position to make more informed decisions. The ideal here seems to be, with some exaggeration, that scientifically validated practice, supported by evidence based casebanks (resting in Internet), will guide decisions.

We all know from practice that decision and choice making in organisations does not operate like that. The more complex, (or "wicked", i.e. often "backfiring", Conklin 2006), the issue the innovation is addressing, the more

complex and embedded practice it contains, and the longer usually is the time needed both for real impacts of the practice to emerge, and the time needed for the (complex) learning process to move it across contexts.

Do the decision makers wait for 10 years to be informed what choices to make? Of course not. They scour and sniff around, trying to find interesting ideas that *might work*, and make do with very preliminary, if any, evidence that the practice actually delivers. It then probably boils down to the question how rich is the everyday learning environment, the "small learning loops" to "sniff around" and how effective learning spaces and interfaces are available. Then, in the longer run, it becomes a question how this tentative understanding of the practice is linked to evidence of real impact, to the strategic "big loop" of learning.
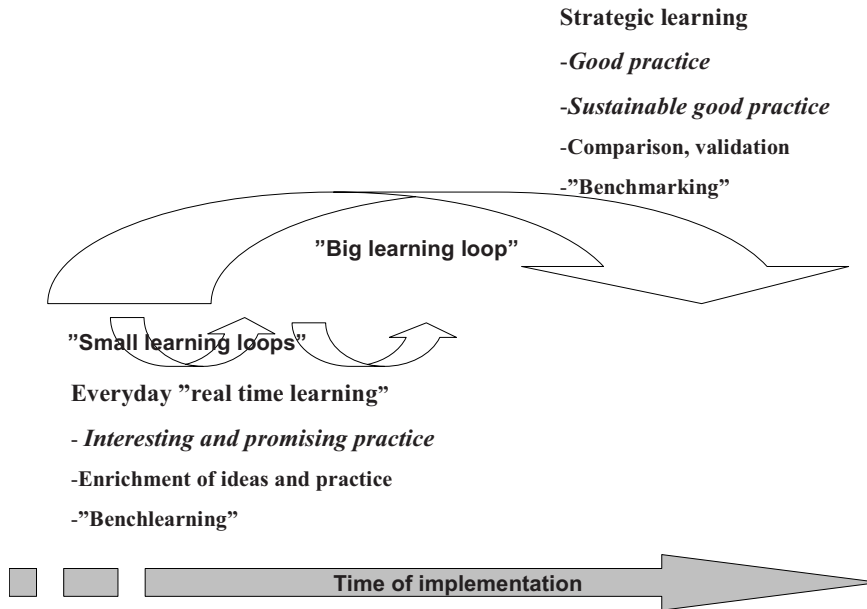
One of the paradoxes is an attempt to "compress" this time of validation. A permanent pressure on evaluation, and research, is to provide evidence of results that simply is not there. This ends up as "quasi-evaluation", neither doing justice to short term learning nor to the long term strategic learning (Pawson 2002). This results in underdevelopment and under-investment in the quality of the small loops, and a poor connection between the small and big loop.

What does this mean in terms of good practice? Good practice "proper", does not emerge in the short term, only perhaps *promising*, or *interesting* practice exists. This can be drawn upon, and one's own ideas or practice can be enriched, but the evidence comes later. There is of course existing validated good practice, produced earlier in the long term, to be drawn upon, too, sitting in reports, casebanks, scientific findings, and embedded and established practices. But experience shows that the practice sitting in these does not travel and cross borders easily.

Thus we get two time spans, a big learning loop of strategic learning, typically more like a decade than less, depending heavily on the work of the scientific community and the links of the scientific community to the work community. Here we have evidence and casebanks of good practice, or even sustainable good practice, comparisons and benchmarking. How that evidence is validated, used and reached, and how the quality of the big loop, and

its connection to the small one could be enhanced, is riddled with challenges, but I will not deal with it here.

Figure 2:   Small and big loops of learning

Strategic learning

-*Good practice*

-*Sustainable good practice*

-**Comparison, validation**

-**"Benchmarking"**

"Big learning loop"

"Small learning loops"

Everyday "real time learning"

- *Interesting and promising practice*

-**Enrichment of ideas and practice**

-**"Benchlearning"**

Time of implementation

The other time span, my main interest here, is the short term, or the (everyday) complex responsive process, as Stacey (2003, 2000 and Shaw 2001) call it,[5] a set of small learning loops. This is learning in "real time", in the muddle of things, sifting promising and interesting ideas and practices in their emergence. Here it is more a question of enriching one's choices, being exposed to often tentative solutions, to emerging generative ideas and engaging in "benchlearning".

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[5]   Stacey uses the concept "Complex Responsive Process" , where the emphasis is on ordinary, everyday conversation and the quality of participation, i.e. being sensitive to the themes that are organising conversational relating.

Enhancing understanding good practice

During the feasibility study for PEERS we experimented with "360-degree storytelling" of good practice, in order to make the practices more approachable and understandable between contexts. We can think of any practice, more permanent (like a service) or temporary (like a project) always being a "360-degree" practice, meaning that every practice is embedded in a 360-degree context: there is a customer/citizen dimension, a horizontal networking and partnership dimension and a vertical management and governance dimension in every practice. This complex 360-degree constellation moves in time, it has a past, present and future. The practices form a network, with stronger or weaker ties, and also gaps in the network. In order to be "good" and to survive, the practice has to address, within a reasonable time-span, successfully all these dimensions, otherwise it evaporates. This "goodness" contains, as we know, a good dose of embedded, tacit knowledge, not easily documented or conveyed. So, in this sense, good practice is more like decathlon (where you have to get a result in every event) and not a 100-metre dash.

In order for person or organisation group A to understand, what successful implementing of the practice developed by B would mean in their context, they would have to, somehow, be able to know and understand how the tackling of the "360-degrees" has taken place in B. People from B could tell the people from A "how they did it". Even more powerful in terms of learning is to have people from the *actual* 360 degrees (customers, partners, managers…) telling *their* story. All in all, without being able to cover the richness and tacitness of the practice, nevertheless, the learning experience is considerably enhanced by such a multi-voiced and multi-perspective account of the practice. This could be done in face-to-face workshops, and also in written and Internet banks of good practice, to make them more understandable and approachable. The learning experience can further be considerably enhanced by using facilitators, mediators and non-verbal methods (picture, sound, play). Overall, storytelling has emerged as a promising "bridge" in enhancing understanding (Denning 2001).

In all, this is of course not a particularly radical discovery or a suggestion to bridge gaps. But critically investigating and observing the materials, websites and forums of programmes and projects, both domestically and

transnationally,[6] we have found that telling about good practice is mostly very one dimensional (like telling about customer results, but not about network learning or governance). It is often very bleak, or on the other side, overly wordy and complex. In other words, it often makes it extremely difficult for people from the practices themselves to approach the material, and become motivated to find out more.

The Internet offers of course a multitude of possibilities for good practice dissemination, but there is widespread disappointment in this. The learning lesson, at least for us, from all around the world, from evaluations of the EU structural funds, from OECD and from working life development programmes, seems to be, that passive "good practice case-banks" or information alone, sitting in the Internet, are not powerful tools for good practice dissemination, but coupled with some other components, could be. Improving the descriptions of good practice (the 360-degrees is just one example) and making the casebanks active, and offering facilitation, communication, help desks, problem solving and links to communities of practice would enhance the learning experience.

During the feasibility study we decided that due attention should be paid to the "small learning loops", a neglected and underdeveloped "piece" in enhancing good practice dissemination. Here good practice would be understood as "emergent candidates", where every actor perspective is as valuable, and should be listened carefully and be provided entry points. The process and connection of small loops to big loops could be enriched by developing the ways good practice is described ("360-degree storytelling"), facilitated (using mediators and boundary spanning actors), discussed (in multi-stakeholder dialogue forums), developed further (via communities of practice and their networks), and finally, supported by an active Internet platform, an active *Clearinghouse of Practice*, which offers various and lively entry points to good practices.

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[6] We examined critically for instance the following platforms providing "good practice examples: TYKES, The Finnish Association of Municipalities, Finnish Work Environment Fund, Finnish Institute of Occupational Health, National Development Centre for Welfare and Health, plus a set of international websites.

Figure 3: **Spanning boundaries**
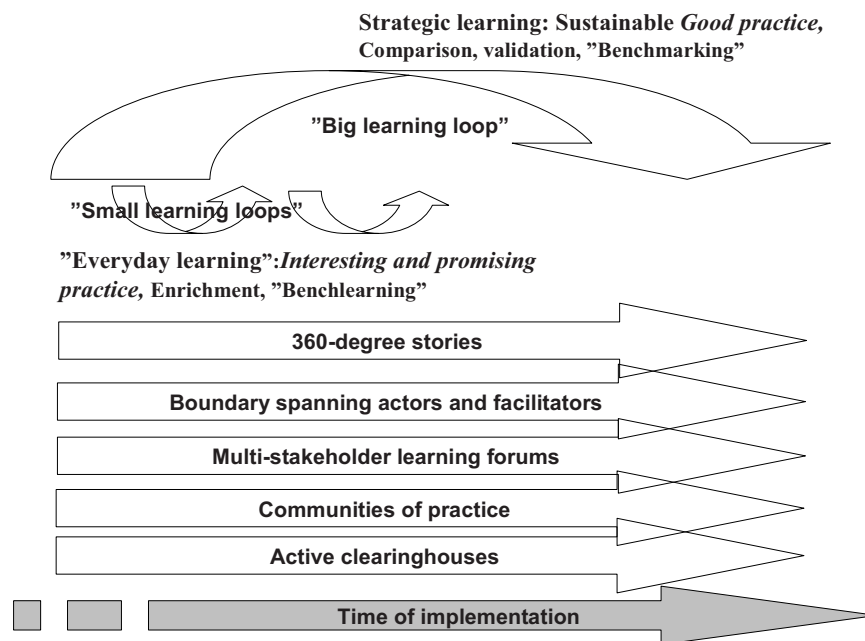
Summary

In a couple of recent articles the TYKES programme manager Alasoini (2006, 2008) points out that "good practice" needs to be understood as *generative ideas*, rather than "ready made objects". He identifies a gap between the success on the workplace level, and what he calls the *generative level* (transferring the benefits to a wider context) of programmes. From another point of view this is often referred to as the knowing-doing gap, too (Pfeffer and Sutton 2000, O´Dell 1998). There is plenty of knowledge about good practices, but to find them, reach them, understand them and implement them in another context poses a challenge.

Traditionally a programme spells out a vision/mission and finances (hopefully innovative) projects. The results are evaluated, innovative and effective = good practices (or even "best") are identified, validated ("evidenced"), and then, in a linear fashion, disseminated through various mechanisms, like

training, seminars and databanks with the expectation of reaching a wider audience and mainstreaming them to reach sustainability.

The problems start with the very concept of "good practice". It seems that understanding good practice and its "evidence" are dominated more by a commodity-to-be-disseminated than practice-to-be disseminated concepts. This, coupled with a linear "cascading model" seriously limits, not only the possibilities of good practice dissemination, but also what is perceived and recognized as good practice.

TYKES in Finland emerges as a good and interesting programme in tackling these challenges, as illustrated by its latest investment in learning networks. The success in good practice dissemination and mainstreaming in TYKES is not due to any single set of variables, but to being a steady performer in a whole constellation of factors, as the evaluations point out.

In enhancing boundary crossing, plenty of challenges remain, of which I have pointed to the need to pay more attention to the quality of "small learning loops", tackled in one of the TYKES learning network, PEERS. The "small loops" are only a part of the story, and the other TYKES networks are making other contributions towards a richer and a more non-linear learning infrastructure in workplace development.

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