

Promoting Workplace Innovation in an Innovation Policy Context: The Case of the Finnish Liideri Programme

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Abstract

The wider societal impact of Workplace Innovation development programmes has typically been limited by their poor ability to scale up project outcomes and disseminate good practice. Researchers have proposed different means to address the challenges of diffusion. One of the suggested means is to strengthen the integration of programmes to industrial or innovation policy frameworks, instead of an industrial relations framework. Using the “Finnish Liideri – Business, Productivity and Joy at Work” (2012–18) programme as an object of analysis, this article examines what added value the programme’s attachment to the innovation policy context brought compared to previous Finnish programmes and to what extent this attachment helped to bring new solutions to the challenges of diffusion. The analysis shows that the Liideri programme included many new features compared to previous Finnish programmes, opening up opportunities for more holistic development work in companies. However, based on the data available, it was not possible to give a clear answer to the question of the real added value of this integration to the development of companies or compared with the results of projects funded by previous Finnish Workplace Innovation development programmes. Concerning the question on dissemination of good practice, the article concludes that, despite its large-scale and high-quality activation work, the Liideri programme did not include sufficiently efficient and innovative measures that would have enabled it to meet better the challenges of diffusion.

Keywords: Development programme, Evaluation study, Innovation diffusion, Innovation policy

Introduction

Many European countries have implemented publicly funded programmes to improve productivity and the quality of working life (QWL) by promoting new forms of work organisation or other kinds of Workplace Innovation (WI) already since the 1960s and 1970s. The programmes have been able to bring about desired changes in the companies involved, but, at the same time, their wider societal impact has typically been limited by their lesser success in scaling up project outcomes and disseminating the good practices developed in the projects to a wider range of companies (Alasoini et al., 2017). This shortcoming has been an obvious problem regarding the legitimacy of WI development programmes in the eyes of administrators of public finances and other policymakers, while the justification for publicly subsidised interventions in working life should be based on their ability to generate positive externalities (e.g., knowledge spillovers, network effects or cumulative innovations) in addition to isolated, one-off successes.

The difficulties facing the programmes in disseminating good practice and achieving wider societal impact are already partly related to the nature of WI. The diffusion of WI (or any other innovation or good practice) is not a process of mechanical transfer from one context to another, but must be understood as a process requiring local re-invention, re-creation and learning on the recipient side (Ansari et al., 2010; Kennedy & Fiss, 2009; Lillrank, 1995; Wareham & Gerrits, 1999). The more complex and abstract the innovation, the greater the need for local learning and redesign.

Over the years, researchers have proposed different means to address the challenges of diffusion. The means range from more effective use of means of communication (e.g., training, seminars, publications and good practice data banks) to better use of networks (e.g., diffusion, innovation or learning networks) and redefining the policy contexts in which the programmes are conducted (Alasoini, 2016; Brulin & Svensson, 2012; Gustavsen, 2017; Naschold, 1994). German scholar Frieder Naschold, who was involved in the evaluation of many well-known development programmes in the 1980s and 1990s, presented in 1994 a “best-practice model of national development strategies” (Naschold, 1994). The model employs six generic principles that Naschold considers crucial for the societal impact of national strategies.

One of Naschold’s key arguments is that the strategic justification for a workplace development strategy should arise primarily from macro-level industrial policy issues, rather than within the industrial relations system or research system. He claims that without an adequate link with macro-level industrial policy issues and, consequently, with the strategic development goals of companies, there is a danger that workplace development could easily remain simply a way of intervening reactively with various “corrective” measures, for instance, in the problems caused by new technologies or new business and production models. According to his line of thinking, development that originates one-sidedly from the problem settings of the industrial relations system carries the danger of producing too conservative solutions; the main problems are considered in a traditional way, from the perspectives of

structures that currently exist but are gradually disappearing. As a consequence, development may not be able to sufficiently support the emergence of new, evolving structures.

While Naschold's argument can be considered valid as such, it is possible that excessive integration of WI development programmes into industrial policy or mainstream (business- or technology-driven) innovation policy may bring new problems with it. One of them concerns the role of the social partners. As Mikkelsen (1997, p. 74–76) has pointed out, the involvement of the social partners has played an important role in strengthening the social legitimacy of WI development programmes, especially in countries and sectors where both employers and employees are highly organised. Above all, their involvement has helped to ensure that the programmes also pay attention to employees' goals and opportunities for participation in the processes of change. On the other hand, the inclusion of this democratic element in development activities, guided by problem settings of a mainstream industrial or innovation policy framework that preponderantly reflects the interests of businesses, is by no means self-evident. In fact, there is the risk of transforming WI development into only an instrument of owner- or management-driven business development. The European programme history so far shows that the industrial policy and industrial relations frameworks have intermingled with each other as policy contexts for the programmes in a variety of ways, and the programmes' attachment also to industrial policy has not as such become a silver bullet in meeting the challenges of diffusion (Alasoini, 2009; 2016).

This article takes as a starting point the interplay between the different policy areas discussed above in the context of WI development programmes. The empirical subject of the article is the "Liideri – Business, Productivity and Joy at Work" programme that was implemented in Finland in 2012–18 by the Finnish Funding Agency for Innovation (Tekes). Liideri was intended to serve as a showcase of how the promotion of WI can be combined with the new national innovation strategy adopted in Finland since 2008, based on the principle of a "broad-based innovation policy".

The article starts with an elaboration of the research questions and an explanation of the research method. This is followed by an analysis chapter divided into four sections, including an overview of the preceding Finnish programmes, a general description of the Liideri programme, a look at the programme's policy rationale and an assessment of its outcomes. In the final chapter, conclusions will be drawn.

Research questions and research method

The two research questions in the article are as follows: *First*, the article asks what added value the Liideri programme's attachment to the innovation policy context brought compared to previous Finnish WI development programmes. The *second* research question is to what extent this attachment helped to bring new solutions to the challenges of diffusion. Underlying these questions is an argument derived from Naschold's (1994) model that an

industrial or innovation policy framework forms a better starting point for programmes for meeting diffusion challenges than a strong commitment to an industrial relations framework.

Two types of analysis are used to answer the research questions. The first is a re-reading of an external evaluation study that was conducted of the Liideri programme at the commission of Business Finland (a new public organisation that was established in 2018 as a result of a merger between Tekes and a public export- and investment-promoting organisation Finpro). In 2020, according to the normal practice of Business Finland (and previously Tekes), the Liideri programme was evaluated two years after the programme ended, together with three other programmes. These four programmes had in common that they were forerunners for promoting human-centric businesses and intangible value creation in the eyes of Business Finland. The evaluation report, conducted by a Finnish consulting agency Owal Group (Oosi et al., 2020), contains a separate evaluation of each programme.

Another method for evaluating the Liideri programme and answering the research questions is the author's own subjective views as an insider. Being an "insider" means here that the author participated in the design of the programme concept, and was a member of the programme steering group until the beginning of 2018, but did not actively participate in day-to-day operations of the programme, especially in its final stages. The author was no longer employed by Business Finland at the end of the programme and was not in any way involved in the planning or implementation of the evaluation study.

Combining these two lines of inquiry, the author seeks to supplement the image produced by the external evaluation study in three ways: first, by deepening the role of the Liideri programme as part of the continuity of Finnish WI development programmes; second, by diversifying the view of Liideri as a new type of activity as part of the operation of a traditional technology and innovation funder (Tekes); and, third, by mirroring the evaluation results to previous discussions on the social impact of programmes and especially the Naschold model (see Introduction). The author is fully aware that the insider perspective carries the risk of bias. Biases may relate, for example, to emphasising one's own role in the successes of the programme, to legitimising one's own activities in the programme more generally, or to highlighting the successes of the programme at the expense of shortcomings: or, for one reason or another, the other way round. The risk of bias is likely to be reduced by the fact that the article does not seek to challenge any of the results of the evaluation study. The author's criticism of the study relates only to a certain narrowness of its question setting (for more details, see below).

Analysis

Finnish WI development programme history in the 1990s and 2000s

Finland was a latecomer compared to its Nordic neighbours in introducing WI onto the political agenda. The first serious attempt in Finland was taken by the Working Conditions Committee in 1991. The Committee that was appointed by the Ministry of Labour two years earlier, and comprised mainly representatives of different public agencies, recommended in its final report that the Ministry should launch a national programme to improve QWL in co-operation with the social partners. However, in the middle of an economic recession that plagued Finland in the early 1990s the attention of policymakers was in soaring unemployment, and the recommendation was downplayed by both the Ministry and private employers. Neither did the proposal receive unconditional support from the academic community.

However, as a response to growing tensions between employers and trade unions during the recession, the social partners prepared a joint initiative for the promotion of productivity. Their proposal led to a launch of the National Productivity Programme (NPP) in 1993. NPP became coordinated by the Ministry of Labour. During its first years of operation, NPP funded a number of applied research projects, which strengthened the belief among the social partners of the need for joint activity in meeting problems with productivity. This paved the way for broader co-operation in issues dealing with WI as well.

In 1996, the Ministry together with the social partners launched the Workplace Development Programme TYKE as part of the programme of Prime Minister Lipponen. Initially, TYKE was set for four years, but it continued for another four years as part of the programme of the second Lipponen Government. The justification for the programme, and the need to raise WI onto the political agenda, was to “fix holes” in the Finnish innovation system, which was still one-sidedly technology-oriented at the time, and to improve its social effectiveness. Between 1996 and 2003, 668 projects in all sectors of the economy were funded by the programme. A clear majority of them were development projects in which consultants and (action) researchers worked side by side with practitioners, reflecting the demand of private employers’ associations that the programme should take needs of the workplaces as its starting point. In addition to development projects that focused on the development of work processes, new forms of work organisation (e.g., teamworking) and workplace community, TYKE also sought to disseminate good practice and reinforce knowledge base of WI in Finland through network building, seminars, publications and data banks (Alasoini et al., 2005; Arnkil, 2004).

To continue the work of TYKE and NPP that had been running in parallel, the Ministry launched the new Workplace Development Programme TYKES in 2004. The new programme was initially established for six years but was later continued for an additional year. Its policy rationale and main forms of activity were basically the same as in the previous programmes,

but TYKES had more ambitious aims, a more advanced programme concept and greater financial resources. A guiding principle underlying TYKES was to evolve to a kind of social movement for scaling up WI and bringing about visible improvement in QWL in Finnish working life (Alasoini, 2004). The programme awarded funding to 1,168 projects, focusing increasingly on SMEs. It also laid more emphasis on the development of development methods, learning networks and dissemination than the TYKE programme. Especially by funding learning networks, TYKES sought to create arenas for long-term innovation collaboration between groups of workplaces and researchers.

In a great number of involved workplaces, improvements in productivity and QWL could be shown (Ramstad, 2009). On the other hand, the programme's success in disseminating good practice and evolving into a genuine social movement did not fully meet the expectations (Alasoini, 2016; Arnkil, 2008). After the programme ended, it has become obvious that more focused activities and a better integration with overall business development and innovation strategies of workplaces were needed for the future.

New opportunities for this opened in 2008, when the government adopted a new national innovation strategy for Finland under the catchword "broad-based innovation policy" (Aho et al., 2008). The new strategy's key principle was that the focus of innovation policy should be shifted increasingly to demand- and user-driven innovations and the promotion of non-technological innovations. Underlying this strategic reorientation was an observation that although the Finnish innovation policy approach could be characterised as "systematic" at the time, it was still "narrow" in the sense that its focus was firmly on technological innovation, it concentrated on advances in certain key branches and technologies, and it promoted innovation activity mainly by funding leading-edge firms and top universities and research institutes. As part of the new strategy, funding WI that improves labour productivity and QWL was added to the legal tasks of Tekes, the largest public R&D funding agency in Finland.

General description of the Liideri programme

Following the parliamentary election of 2011, a new government led by Prime Minister Katainen took office. In its programme, the government decided to draw up a National Working Life Development Strategy for Finland. The strategy was prepared by the new Ministry of Employment and the Economy, in co-operation with other ministries and the social partners (Ministry of Employment and the Economy, 2012). The Ministry established the Working Life 2020 project to promote the implementation of the strategy from the beginning of 2013. Working Life 2020 became an umbrella that sought to co-ordinate working life development activities of more than eighty public, private and non-governmental institutions (including also Tekes) with only a small budget of its own. The Sipilä Government that took office in 2015 continued the project until 2019.

As part of the Strategy, Tekes launched a new programme entitled "Liideri – Business, Productivity and Joy at Work" in 2012. The Liideri programme aimed to produce management

and organisational practices, which renew business activities and working life (Alasoini, 2012; 2015). At the beginning, the programme had two focus areas. The *first* of them was employee-involving innovation. This concept referred to active and systematic participation of employees in ideation, innovating and renewing of products and services and ways of producing them, with a view to creating new solutions that add value to customers. The *second* focus area concerned research and development on new forms of work organisation and working, as part of renewal of business activities. The programme started out with the premise that work organisations of the future will be increasingly built on principles such as decentralisation, self-management, process-orientation, customer-orientation, emergence and agility. Special emphasis was laid on organisational forms that follow the above principles and are based on the ideas of shared leadership, networking, distributed work, employee-customised solutions and innovative application of new technologies. However, a *third* focus area that was called Management 2.0 was soon added to the programme. This concept referred to management principles, processes and practices that help an organisation to promote initiative, creativity and innovation potential of personnel, with a view to achieving competitive edge based on them.

The Liideri programme also faced many other changes during its operation. The most important change occurred in 2015, when Tekes, due to severe cuts in its budget, decided to centre its R&D project funding solely on companies that seek growth from the international market, by renewing and expanding their business activities. This narrowed down considerably the number of companies eligible to Tekes funding and led to a steep decline in the number of applications submitted to the Liideri programme, since many of the companies that were funded by the programme before the change in strategy were operating and seeking growth only in the domestic market. Following the change, managing international growth became an increasingly important target for projects funded by the Liideri programme. Another important renewal that took place in accordance with the new Tekes strategy was an increased emphasis laid on the role of digital technologies in the reorganisation of work. These changes also led to a reformulation of both the programme mission and the programme vision in 2016 (Oosi et al., 2020).

Both development projects and research projects were funded in the Liideri programme. Compared with the previous TYKE and TYKES programmes, in the development projects, a closer connection between the development of management and organisational practices, on the one hand, and of products, services and business operations, on the other hand, had to be found. The Liideri programme granted funding to 267 development projects and to some fifty applied research consortium projects between 2012 and 2018, totalling about EUR 67 million of Tekes funding. The group of workplaces whose development projects could be funded was narrower than in the TYKE and TYKES programmes, as indicated above. In addition to the fact that only companies that sought growth from the international market could be funded from 2015 onwards, Tekes had a high threshold for funding development projects in public organisations. The share of industry and the construction sector of all funding awarded for development projects was 47%. Companies in the private service sector

accounted for a roughly equal share, while the share of public-sector organisations totalled less than 5%. Within industry, the metal and engineering industry accounted for a lion's share of development project funding. In private services, companies in the information and communications sector (including software development companies) were clearly ahead of other service industries with a share of 27% of all funding to development projects. The proportion of the programme's funding awarded for development projects in SMEs was about 70% of the funding awarded for development projects in total. In addition to the 267 development projects, all research consortium projects involved, alongside universities and research institutes that acted as project applicants, companies or other workplaces that had to commit to the project with a small financial input. The number of such companies was over three hundred.

The Liideri programme also sought to raise the awareness of workplace management, and to encourage them to launch development and innovation projects in keeping with the scope of the programme, and to disseminate information on the lessons of funded projects. Thematic focus areas of such activation work varied annually. Activation work mainly took the form of case descriptions on the programme web pages, arranging seminars and meeting forums for companies and organising information campaigns with different headings (Oosi et al., 2020). Of the different programme focus areas, most effort, especially at the end of the programme, was focused on how companies can manage international growth by distinguishing underlying critical success factors.

The programme steering group was a mixture of representatives of Tekes, companies, social partners and research institutions. Compared with the TYKE and TYKES programmes, especially the role of the social partners was lesser in the planning and implementation of the programme. Tekes did not have the same tradition of tripartite co-operation underlying its innovation-funding activities as the Ministry of Labour in labour policy.

Putting the principle of a broad-based innovation policy into practice

The principle of a broad-based innovation policy formed the general policy framework for the Liideri programme. The programme policy paper (Tekes, 2012) started with the assumption that Finnish companies will increasingly have to seek competitive edge in the globalising economy from innovations in their business activities. The policy paper further argued that, in the future, a growing number of such innovations will be intangible and service oriented. In generating service-oriented innovations, knowing the wishes, expectations and needs of users and customers will become increasingly important. As a result, the group of innovation actors will grow and become more versatile. The policy paper especially emphasised that employees' active role in innovation will become an increasingly important competitive factor for companies for at least three reasons:

The market will change at a faster pace. Market changes will take place faster, and they will become more difficult to predict. Being able to react to changes rapidly requires continuous

feedback from customers and users. Employees working at the customer interface have an important role in producing this information.

The economy will become networked. Due to networking and outsourcing, producing innovations will be increasingly spread out within the business field from big corporations to smaller businesses which do not have the same kind of specialised R&D personnel as larger companies. They must innovate by also encouraging their rank-and-file personnel to participate on a broad front.

The skills and competences of employees will improve. The general level of education and know-how of employees in industrial countries has improved, and companies employ more and more people with the ability to see larger entities and participate in solving even complex problems. Many employees already perform knowledge-intensive work that essentially includes problem-solving.

In addition to the fact that the starting points of the programme included a new rationale for employee participation, the programme policy paper argued that involving employees on a broader front in innovation is not possible without simultaneous renewals in management principles, processes and practices. The programme policy paper especially emphasised the role of innovation management, knowledge management, diversity management, human resource management and value management. Furthermore, according to the policy paper, participation in innovation is also an important means of improving employee well-being in an increasingly volatile working life by contributing to employees' sense of coherence, i.e., helping employees see their work as comprehensible, manageable and meaningful.

The conceptual background of the Liideri programme was a combination of diverse sources of influence. As mentioned above, from a policy perspective, Liideri represented an approach in keeping with a broad-based innovation policy, by emphasising the significance of non-technological innovations and the role of workplace communities in innovation, thus broadening the view on the group of relevant innovation actors. The idea of giving rank-and-file employees an increasingly important role in innovation was supported by simultaneous academic discussion on employee-driven innovation, a new concept originated among a circle of Nordic academics and trade unions (Høytrup et al., 2012). The debate on employee-driven innovation, in turn, had interlinkages with discussions by many contemporary leading management thinkers on the need for radically reforming the basic principles of management, and helping companies to become "innovation democracies" in the new business context. For example, the ideas presented by the US management scholar Gary Hamel that passion, creativity and initiative are now the most important human capabilities in terms of company value creation (Hamel, 2007, p. 59), was an appealing argument that was well in line with the basic starting points of the Liideri programme.

Exploring the successes and shortcomings of the Liideri programme

Making judgements of the successes and shortcomings of the Liideri programme in promoting WI is made difficult by at least three factors. *First*, unlike the TYKE and TYKES programmes, Liideri did not have a systematic built-in way to collect data on the effects of its projects as they ended. The external programme evaluation study (Oosi et al., 2020) includes some data on the projects' economic impacts but does not provide information on their broader social and human impacts, due to the study's unfortunately narrow question setting (see below). *Second*, the programme underwent many changes during its implementation, and even its mission and vision were rewritten in 2016. Should this be taken as an indication of strategic agility of the programme or, alternatively, indecision on the part of Tekes and the programme steering group about what the programme ultimately sought? *Third*, the Finnish business environment in the 2010s was more challenging for workplace development than in the 1990s and 2000s. During a long period of sluggish economic growth and volatile economic environment that plagued Finland until the end of the 2010s, the threshold for launching long-term development projects was high for many companies. Uncertainty and frequent organisational restructurings, and negotiations concerning dismissals and layoffs, made it difficult for many companies to carry out collaborative development.

In the following, the Liideri programme is explored from two perspectives. The results and conclusions of the external evaluation study are supplemented with the author's own observations and remarks of Liideri as a WI development programme, mirroring them to the previous TYKE and TYKES programmes.

The external evaluation study highlights, as a general result for all four programmes, that they had served as a means of raising awareness within the funding agencies (i.e., Finpro and Tekes) of the importance of non-technological innovation for businesses. Doing so, they had managed to bring new customers for both agencies (Oosi et al., p. 66). However, at the same time, this had also given rise to new problems, especially in innovation funding. Requirements for public funding of innovation at Tekes were originally designed from the perspective of technological product or process innovation, and they did not fit well in all cases where the object of funding was a non-technological innovation (ibid., 68).

Concerning the Liideri programme, the evaluation study states that there is evidence of plenty of concrete results, especially in the form of development projects that have led to important organisational or other kinds of changes for the involved companies and boosted their development activity. Using an econometric analysis, the study concludes that the Liideri programme has had a statistically significant positive effect on turnover and the number of employees in firms participating in the programme, when compared to a control group in a three-year time frame. However, the study did not find a statistically significant difference between the two groups in labour productivity growth or the growth of exports (ibid., p. 45–49).

The evaluation study brings up the fact that the focus of the Liideri programme shifted during its operation. The shift of focus was caused by changes that took place from outside the programme, without the programme steering group being able to influence them. The evaluators argue that strategic shifts in the programme portfolio require careful planning and communication with the programme participants. The evaluators do not comment on the appropriateness of strategic and organisational changes that took place at a fast pace in Tekes between 2012 and 2018, but they let us understand that these caused discontinuity, and led to uncertainty and anxiety among the programme implementors and other participants (ibid., p. 68–69).

Despite the above problems, the evaluation study considers that the overall quality of programme service of Liideri was high. However, as a more critical point, the study states that the programme activities focused too much on those companies, and other stakeholders, who were already somehow attached to the programme. This shortcoming was exacerbated towards the end of the programme, when the programme's support increasingly focused only on companies seeking growth in export markets and geared to their ability to manage growth in their international businesses (ibid., p. 69–70). This observation also makes the evaluators raise the question whether Business Finland, the new amalgamation with a new mission and strategy, is any more an appropriate public agency to conduct activities for promoting WI (ibid., 72).

The evaluation study deals with all the four programmes, mainly from the perspective of what was new for Tekes and Finpro, and what lessons could be learned from them for the future operations of Business Finland. In the following, the Liideri programme will be examined from another perspective, i.e., as a new phase in the chain of Finnish WI development programmes. Doing so, it is possible to distinguish six new features in which the Liideri programme differed most from the previous TYKE and TYKES programmes:

A closer link between business development and workplace development, as well as technological innovation and WI. Unlike in the cases of both TYKE and TYKES, it was possible for Liideri to support innovative development of business operations, technology, products and services, management and work organisation within the same project. There are reported case examples in Liideri, where this holistic approach has brought clear added value to companies. Unfortunately, the evaluation study does not shed much further light on this issue. Therefore, it is not possible to statistically assess the real significance of this more holistic approach's added value for a larger group of companies, or the effects of the more holistic development approach in terms of employees' opportunities for participation or their overall role in project goal setting.

A stronger focus on management reform. In the beginning of the Liideri programme, the need to renew management principles, processes and practices was, first and foremost, considered a means of promoting the initiative, creativity and innovation potential of personnel, and paving the way for employee-involving innovations. Later, with the changes in

the strategy of Tekes, management reform became an even increasingly important target area in Liideri, but now for another reason, i.e., as a prerequisite for safeguarding successful international growth. However, focusing on management reform as the *raison d'être* is a double-edged sword for any publicly funded programme. On the one hand, management affects, directly or indirectly, most things in companies, and management innovation can probably produce longer-lasting competitive advantages than any other type of innovation (Hamel, 2007). On the other hand, measuring and assessing effects of development projects with a focus on management reform (let alone management innovation) is much more difficult than in the case of more traditional development targets, such as new forms of work organisation or the work environment.

Increased emphasis on digitalisation in the renewal of business and ways of working. The TYKE and TYKES programmes did not place special emphasis on technological development as a factor for change in working life and a catalyst for WI. In the beginning of the Liideri programme, the advance of digital technology was considered as one potentially important trigger for the need to renew ways of working, but, again, with the changes in the strategy of Tekes, the role of digitalisation as a potential means of radically transforming business gained more prominence in the programme. Liideri sought co-operation with publicly funded digitalisation programmes that were run parallel in Tekes, focusing on themes such as artificial intelligence, digital business platforms, industrial internet and the fifth-generation mobile networks, in joint research calls, campaigns, events and strategy workshops. Once again, it is not possible to assess the potential added value of this strategic shift and increased programme-to-programme co-operation on programme- or project-level effects of Liideri.

A more systematic approach to integrating WI into broader transformative changes at the level of companies and ecosystems. Especially towards the end of the Liideri programme, Tekes started to increasingly bring business ecosystems to its strategic centre. Now, Business Finland has renewed its financial instruments and other services to better support, alongside individual companies, the creation and development of such ecosystems. In line with the strategic reorientation of Tekes/Business Finland, during the last two years of operation, the Liideri programme also funded a bunch of large development projects, with an eye to supporting broader transformative change of business. Evaluation data on the impacts and successes of those projects is not available.

A more instrumental view on QWL and employee participation. The Liideri programme adopted a renewed view and terminology towards QWL and employee participation. Instead of QWL, the programme talked of “joy at work”. With this change of terminology, the aim was to indicate that good QWL as such is not enough to bring about the level of initiative, creativity and engagement that is needed for a culture of employee-involving innovation to root in the workplace. The TYKE and TYKES programmes required from a project to get funding, that also employees in question can directly participate in the implementation of the project, whereas in Liideri the focus was on employees' role in innovation as such. It is not possible to estimate, reading the evaluation study, how the ambitious targets set in the Liideri programme

concerning employees' involvement in innovation and joy at work were realised in practice. This can be considered a serious flaw in the evaluation study, as one of the special objectives of the Liideri programme and its special feature as the Tekes programme was just the promotion of employees' role in innovation and joy at work among participating employees.

A narrower focus on working life change. The Liideri programme had a narrower focus than the previous TYKE and TYKES programmes, in terms of both themes and the group of potential applicants eligible to project funding. Based on the experiences of the TYKES programme, it was evident that more targeted action for developing working life was needed in Finland for the future. In the beginning, Liideri centered on companies that were seeking growth in general, but, with a change in the strategy of Tekes, programme funding started to focus solely on companies that sought growth from the international market. As a publicly funded programme, it makes sense to target resources to an area with the greatest potential benefit to the whole economy, i.e., in this case, expanding the volume of Finnish exports. However, at the same time, targeting increasingly a smaller number of better-than-average companies carries a risk of widening the gap between companies in general. As shown by an analysis published by the OECD (Andrews et al., 2016), a productivity gap between frontier firms and other firms has been rising in recent years, indicating that the dissemination of good practices from one company to another has become increasingly arduous. This means that it may be increasingly difficult for any programme that focuses solely on the (exporting) national productivity frontier to set into motion a learning effect among a larger group of companies without an explicit, skilfully designed "gap-bridging strategy". Such a strategy would call for a comprehensive repertoire of programme instruments or, alternatively, close collaboration with other programmes and institutions specialised in dealing with follower companies. In the case of Liideri, such a strategy was missing.

Conclusions

This article sought answers especially to two questions. First, the article examined what added value attachment of the Finnish Liideri programme to a broad-based innovation policy context managed to bring about, compared to previous Finnish WI development programmes. The second question concerned to what extent this attachment helped to find new solutions to the challenges of diffusion.

The Liideri programme *did* include many new features compared to previous Finnish programmes that were made possible by the Liideri programme's new home base at Tekes. The most visible indication of this was that it was now possible to integrate parallel innovative developments in organisational, management, or other work-related practices with the development of new products, services and business operations within the same company development projects. This opened up opportunities for more holistic development work in companies and made it easier and more flexible for them to apply for public support for such innovative development projects. Many companies used this opportunity, either as part of

the Liideri programme or in other projects that were funded from outside the programme, as individual Tekes development projects or as part of some other Tekes programmes. However, as this issue was not included in the question setting of the Liideri evaluation study, it is not possible to give a clear answer to the question posed at the beginning of the article about the real added value this integration has brought to the development of companies or compared with the results of projects that were funded by previous TYKE and TYKES programmes.

Concerning the second question posed in the article, the answer is quite negative. The Liideri programme largely focused on supporting projects in individual companies, and its other programme activities did not include sufficiently strong measures that would have enabled it to support the dissemination of project results to a wider range of (even export-oriented) companies. As indicated above, overcoming the challenges of diffusion would have called for a comprehensive repertoire of instruments specially dedicated for this purpose or, alternatively, close networking with some other programmes or institutions. Being connected with the Working Life 2020 umbrella project could have been such a channel for Liideri. However, the project's home base was at the ministry level and its focus on co-ordinating activities was between networks at the level of institutions, such as public agencies, labour market organisations and different kinds of intermediate organisations, and not at the level of companies or workplaces (Valtakari & Nyman, 2019).

All in all, it is a pity that the question setting of the external evaluation study of the Liideri programme remained one-sided and narrow, leaving many important issues with little or no mention. This kind of narrowness is nothing unusual in the evaluation of publicly funded programmes. Question settings in such evaluation studies are typically linked closely with the special features of the programme in question and to the special interests of the party (in this case, Business Finland) who requested the study, not to academic interest or theory building. Studies are conducted using different conceptual frameworks, approaches and methodologies. Evaluation studies also tend to be tendered, using the cost of the study as one of the key selection criteria, which does not usually encourage innovative question setting. Consequently, the knowledge created by individual evaluation studies does not easily accumulate in an interconnected way (Alasoini, 2016). This remark also applies to the present evaluation study (Oosi et al., 2020). In fact, it is by no means possible to directly compare the study's results concerning the Liideri programme with the results provided by the previous TYKE and TYKES programmes.

Since the end of the Liideri programme, the debate on how to promote WI in Finland has come full circle. In 2008, promoting WI was integrated into the new innovation policy framework, and Tekes was given the task of also promoting WI. The Liideri evaluation study raised the question of how well the support for employee-driven innovation and management innovation fits into the increasingly business-oriented thematic portfolio of Business Finland (Oosi et al. 2020, p. 74). The social partners, not completely satisfied with their opportunities for influence in both Liideri and Working Life 2020, took again the initiative

after the programmes ended. They managed to work out a joint proposal for a new publicly funded WI development programme that became adopted by the Government of Prime Minister Rinne in 2019. The new WORK2030 programme that lasts until 2023 is coordinated by the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health and geared to promoting WI in the context of digital transformation and COVID-19. To better meet the challenges of diffusion, the focus of programme funding is not any more on the workplace or company level, but on collaborative projects between industry-level social partners and regional and thematic networks.

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