ENABLERS AND BARRIERS OF LEARNING THROUGH CO-CREATION IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION ORGANIZATIONS

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Background of the study

- Vocational education and training (VET) organizations are facing changes in work and operating environments: e.g. digitalization-induced changes in learning environments, pedagogy and tools, decreased funding, increased student diversity, increased stakeholder collaboration, issues in employee and student wellbeing

     → There is a need for co-creation and communal learning to address these challenges.

- The need for increased cooperation between students, administrators, teachers and the working life emphasizes the role of co-creation.

Co-creation and its' role in communal learning

- Co-creation refers to collaborative development in the workplace involving two or more individuals, teams, and/or organizations.

- Core principles are equal participation and free exchange of ideas.

- Through co-creation, individuals share experiences, tacit knowledge and skills
  → Fosters communal learning through open, ongoing dialogue and "learning by doing" approach.

(Kiviniemi & Rajakangas, 2022; Tjulin & Klockmo, 2023)

YHES project

- **YHES - Enhancing renewal and well-being at work in vocational schools through co-creation** (development and research project, May 2024–April 2027)

- Co-funded by the European Union (European Social Fund)

- Participants: VET organizations in Pirkanmaa region

- Project implementers: Tampere University and Laurea University of Applied Sciences

Methodology and data

- The data were collected in four VET organizations in 2024–2025 through semi-structured interviews (n=12).

- The method of inductive content analysis was applied to the research data.

- The findings are preliminary due to ongoing data collection.

Enablers of co-creation

Organizational strategy and its implementation in organizational culture

- Strategy as the starting point
- Embodiment of strategy in organizational practices (e.g., shared leadership, low hierarchy, no organizational silos)

Enabling structures

- Possibilities to take part in and build collaboration, networks, projects, platforms etc.

Managerial support

- Allocating working time
- Encouraging and supporting
- Considering employees' strengths and interests
- Understanding of co-creation

Shared understanding of need and purpose

- Recognizing the need and benefit
- Working towards the same goal
- → a prerequisite for motivation and commitment

Trust

- Respect
- Reciprocity
- Openness and willingness to share with others
- Trust in others' skills and expertise
- → Psychological safety

Barriers to co-creation

Inward focus

- Pedagogical autonomy turning into 'pedagogical autocracy'
- Too strong a team orientation: lack of openness to outside ideas or collaboration
- Negative attitudes towards 'outsiders'
- Perceiving others as competition, holding back information and knowledge

Lack of resources

- Too busy or fragmented schedules
- Skills shortage

Unclear 'big picture'

- Difficulty in seeing the broader context and one's own role in it
- Focusing solely on one's specific work role or subject
- → Difficulties in seeing the point of co-creation, lack of motivation and commitment

Conflicting priorities and practices

- Difficulties in coordinating different practices and conventions
- Conflicting priorities (e.g. cost reduction vs. service quality)
- → The risk of suboptimization

Conclusions

- Co-creation holds significant potential for organizational development and communal learning in changing work. However, various organizational, team, and individual factors can either support or hinder this process.

- It is beneficial for organizations to assess and identify the factors that promote and facilitate co-creation, as well as the structures, conventions, practices, and mindsets that may impede it.

- Enhancing co-creation is more of a strategic and cultural endeavor rather than merely adopting specific work methods.
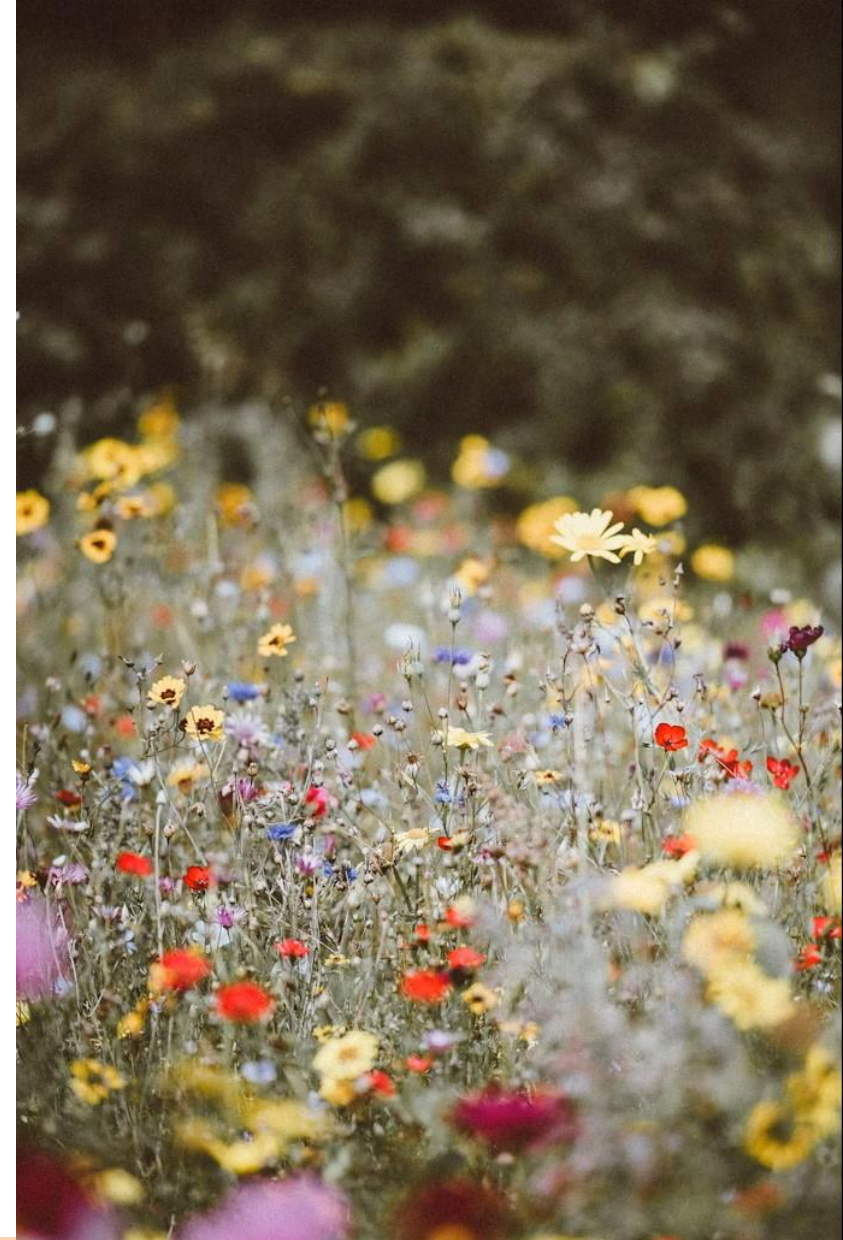
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- Tjulin, Å. & Klockmo, C. (2023). Learning through co-creation across internal organisational professions and responsibilities. Journal of Workplace Learning, 35(9), 101–116.

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