

Steps Toward Language Awareness in the Workplace

Background: Resolving the workforce shortage

- To increase the number of international students and experts
- Finnish Government: at least 75 % of international graduates should stay and find employment in Finland

Challenge

- International experts face integration and employment difficulties in Finland
- Deficient language skills in Finnish/Swedish of job seekers is one of the major obstacles
- Lack of practices supporting language learning at the more advanced level (e.g., in workplaces).

One solution: Model for language learning in workplaces

Based on research literature and results of previous studies and projects (e.g., Language for work; Kurhila et al. 2021, Lehtimaja et al. 2021), we have developed a tool for multilingual workplaces to enhance language awareness and support language learning and integration. The model contains five stages, beginning with small actions within the workplace. In the final stage, the community has established functional multilingual practices and is committed to supporting employees' language learning at work. The model visualizes the progress of economic and social resources investment in the workplace.

RESEARCH-BASED PRINCIPLES:

- **CONTINUOUS LEARNING**
- **LANGUAGE LEARNING AS SOCIAL ACTIVITY**
- **LEARNER AS AN ACTIVE AGENT**

1

Introducing language awareness

- e.g.
- inviting experts to talk about language awareness and how it supports the well-being of the work community

2

Finding common ground

- e.g.
- discussions about employees' language-related needs and problems

3

Performing small actions

- e.g.
- regular coffee breaks in Finnish/Swedish
 - parallel use of languages in routine situations such as greetings

4

Changing structures

- e.g.
- agreed multilingual practices (e.g., bilingual slides in meetings)
 - supporting employee's language proficiency (e.g., language study during work hours)
 - individual language proficiency goals discussed and agreed upon with superior

5

Establishing extensive practices

- e.g.
- workplace language policy is explained, documented, and made available
 - language questions are included in workplace orientations
 - language skills are recognised (e.g., language bonuses)
 - the connection between language use and well-being at work is acknowledged

Kielibuusti project

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The project is based on the idea that language is learned not only in language courses and as a result of individual effort but also everywhere in our environment through interaction with other people. The primary setting for learning languages is not language courses but the everyday and institutional situations in which people participate.

In practice, the project is looking for ways to support learners and their immediate communities by enhancing language learning and producing learning paths, pedagogical models, digital solutions, and support materials based on the methods identified in the process.

References

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