



# The EX-factor - Exploring elements of the employee experience

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Employee experience thinking puts the employees in the center of the organization's work. It can be defined in many ways according to the approach. The perspective can be managerial, organizational or individual but at best combining all three. The main purpose for an organization is to learn how to support the employees best at their work. The work is changing fast. Employee experience thinking is useful in change management for it creates empathy. Understanding the employees and acknowledging their expectations and work in a changing internal and external operational environment enhances engagement, wellbeing, and better performance. Employee experience affects customer experience and employer brand. Every organization is unique and should be considering designing their own framework for the employee experience according to their own preferences and emphasis.

The development method in this paper is close to action research. The task is to design a framework and explore elements of the employee experience for the case organization. The desired outcome is a suggestion for the first steps to explore the employee experience in the organization and the result is a list of doings, including possible questions for the employees and a step-by-step guide for a co-creating process. It can be useful for other organizations as well, keeping in mind that it should be designed hand in hand with the organization's own strategy. In this case, the organization wanted to emphasize the already established managerial coaching guidelines which naturally affected what elements would be chosen for the employee experience framework. The employee experience should be analyzed together with data of wellbeing, engagement, and performance. These can be seen as indicators of a good employee experience.

It is essential to engage employees into the employee experience process from the beginning. The employee experience thinking has a close relationship to design, customer experience thinking and leading with empathy. Design thinking and service design tools have been found especially useful for co-designing the employee experience. For further development it would be useful to combine and analyze all the employee experience approaches and build a step-by-step guide with different types of co-creative processes for exploring the employee experience for different purposes (managerial, employer branding, wellbeing etc.).

Keywords: Employee experience, EX, HRM, coaching, customer experience, design, empathy

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## 1 Introduction

Work is changing. It changes with all the global challenges, technological developments and even geopolitics. Technology is changing our ways of working with the development of software, artificial intelligence, deep learning, and robots. Automation technologies are replacing people in many tasks, including some specialist work. Some of the tasks previously performed by humans can already be completely transferred to more accurate and efficient machines. But not all human work can be replaced. There is still a lot of room for human intelligence. With all the automation and artificial intelligence changing our lives, the most valuable resource of an organization is still people.

Human resources are affected by other changes that must be acknowledged, as well. The Covid-19 pandemic showed that digitalization can work to our advantage in many cases and that technological development can be very fast if necessary. The Covid-19 pandemic also showed however, that in difficult times, individuals can react very differently to changes or sudden events. The human brain is ancient in many ways and the resistance to change can be strong, even if there are no thinkable reasons behind it. At the same time when the employees were struggling with the constant changes during the pandemic, the management might have been under severe pressure in many organizations for there was so little information to predict the future or make any realistic plans. On the one hand, the employees should have been given the means to survive and maintain their motivation during these most stressful times, and on the other, there were serious difficulties in keeping the engines running altogether.

In the last few years, the emotions and the state of mind of employees have been affected in many ways and by other global crises as well: the climate change anxiety, the energy crisis and the uncertainty of the future. An overlook on the research and studies published shows that in the past ten years or so, it has been somewhat trendy among some researchers, managers, and executives to emphasize the importance of empathy in the leadership, although very much from the leadership point of view, for example emphasizing the managers' coaching role. The expansion of the number of studies and literature on design thinking and employee experience in just the recent couple of years coinciding the years of and after the covid- pandemic indicates that enhancing empathy in leadership is gaining wider acceptance and more: it can no longer be ignored. We cannot help but talk about empathy when talking about human resources or employee well-being. Employee motivation and well-being are also factors that correlate with their efficiency and performance at work. Does the organization have enough tools and processes to promote empathy and really listen to the employees in their work environment?

Work is changing and the employees are in the core of this change. They have to face many challenges in their daily work in the new normal, where the old rules no longer apply. How are these experiences taken into consideration when building a strategy and planning

operative processes? Are they recognized at all? If there's a will, is there a way? Or is there always someone or something that tells you not to complicate things when you are ready to develop processes and customize your work?

Work is also changing with the working force. One of the earliest employee experience ambassadors Jacob Morgan reminds that this has naturally been the case always in the past as well, but in the fast-changing world and technology of today the people seem to change faster and the differences between generations are getting more abundant than ever before. Therefore, the gap between the oldest and the youngest generation at the working place can be huge when considering their ways of working, their values, and their needs with many steps in between. (Morgan 2017, 5-7.) Maula and Maula stress the interconnection between and importance of empathy and change: among the employees there are differences in values, demands for the workplace, ways to commit to the work, and simply in the ways of doing things. (Maula & Maula 2019, 242-243.) From the point of view of the leadership, this means that the management must change, as well.

Adapting to change is also about customizing the work. Why not customize it for the better? In a customer-oriented organization, the work should be organized systematically on how to best serve the customer. Whether the organization is offering tangible or intangible goods and/or service the logic remains the same. In this intersection between the organization and the customer are the individuals. (Holma et. al. 2021, 88-90.)

In the employee experience literature, which will be further demonstrated, one of the primary contradictions in the employee experience conceptualization is that the meaning of the concept can vary according to the level of organization or the approach. Therefore, the definition of the concept seems to derive from the cross points of all these approaches: the experiences and expectations of the individual employees, the managers, and the organizational culture. The employee experience design offers tools to gather knowledge about the needs and demands of all three, to combine them and to create organization-friendly and collaborative ways to enhance leadership by systematically and continuously following the experience, the well-being and the performance of the organization and its human resources.

In this paper I am going to explore the employee experience concept and how it positions to the wider picture of the Human resource management and its research traditions. The theoretical part of the study includes a historical review on where, how and why the concept has been developed and gained popularity as well as a listing of the elements of the employee experience defined by different authors. The literature consists of peer-reviewed articles, practical business guides and academical thesis reports. The aim of the development task is to develop an organization specific employee experience framework to conceptualize, follow and enhance the employee experience (EX). Considering the needs and the state of play of the case organization and combining that knowledge to the previous literature it is possible to

create a framework and find out what elements should be considered specifically in the case organization in the employee experience design process.

## 2 The Case organization, state of play and the development task

This development task was planned and performed together with and for the case organization. The case organization is a public organization with 80 employees and will be referred by “the case organization” in this paper by an agreement with the supervisor. The information about the state of play was gathered in initial interviews with the HR and the administrative director and from the intranet. (Interviews 1-3; Appendix 1.). The organization showed interest in enhancing the employee experience and show ambition in being a reliable and trustworthy employer, an organization of and for the experts working in it. The organization was therefore interested in finding and experimenting tools for (co-)designing the employee experience. The focus of the development task has however been reviewed since a couple of times; while gaining more knowledge about the organization and analyzing the previous literature and considering the development within the organization during this development task, it was agreed that the focus should not (yet) be in practical design work but to find out options for the organization.

The organization was confronting various changes during this period of analysis. The executive team suffered various dismissals including the departure of the HR manager and an early retirement of the executive director. There had also been a leadership-led initiative towards an organizational change, but the process was suspended due to employee resistance and finally the resignation of the executive director. Those developments are not in the focus of this paper, but it became soon clear that the organization had to get new leadership and a new start before anything could actually be done to enhance the employee experience. Therefore, the final development task was to build a framework to explore, enhance and measure the employee experience, the results being a list of suggestions for the case organization to proceed with the employee experience design process. The new leadership could then lead it into practice when and in the way they see fit.

The idea of exploring the employee experience can be seen as continuance to previous development and efforts in the organization. It had already been recognized that there was a need for developing the leadership and the organizational culture. That work started in 2020 by a survey about the organizational culture with the aim of exploring the target state and the current state of the organizational culture and the needs for development. This work continued by specifying the development needs and targets with the team leaders and the management in workshops. These workshops were conducted by an external consultant with principles of managerial coaching. When the development targets and needs were specified, the employees were asked to prioritize the most important needs and developments in a workshop. When the prioritization was done, the co-designed guidelines for managerial coaching were published in the intranet of the organization and the team managers were

expected to be committed to them. However, there was no tools for gathering continuous data about how these principles would be led into day-to-day work. The team leaders were key actors in implementing the managerial coaching principles, but it turned out that they did not necessarily have means to tackle the possible pain points nor to share best practices, nor to follow their own or the team's performance. Therefore, it was considered plausible to include these managerial principles already established in the organization into this development task. After considering various options of how the data for designing the employee experience was to be gathered and used with the help of previous literature it was decided that they would form the basis of it.

It was also the "year of personnel experience" in the strategy implementation of the organization: the organization has the practice to focus on one specific strategic area each year and in the year of the development task it was the personnel experience. There had been an appointed group of employees that would suggest actions to enhance employee experience. The results of that group were separate to this development task, but these two development lines are considered together by the leadership when deciding on the next steps.

The already established guideline for the managers in the organization starts by stating that "the ideal of the leadership in the organization is the principle of managerial coaching where the goal is to develop the competence and motivation of the subordinates. By discussion, listening and asking the leader and the subordinates figure out problems and find solutions together. This is the way to increase meaningfulness and enhance wellbeing at work." (Appendix 1.) The guideline also states that co-setting targets, learning new ways of working, and creating an open and confidential psychological working environment require systematic and consistent work and the commitment of the whole organization.

The managerial coaching priorities and principles for the team managers are:

1. Doing together
2. Individuality, human management
3. Goal setting
4. Results, metrics
5. How do I act as a trendsetter
6. Trust

"Doing together" can be reviewed internally and externally. A good customer experience requires multi-professional working. Interaction creates added value in the expert work and competences develop in the interaction moments. Transparency and stakeholder inclusion are valued, as well as respectful and constructive behavior, the importance and meaning given to the technical interactional platforms and customer-oriented working.

Individuality and managing humans as the second principle focuses on the individuals and their experiences and feelings. The managers are encouraged to ensure interaction and trust,

facilitating, and listening, acknowledging personal strengths, abilities and situations, ensuring equality in treatment and encouraging employees to take responsibility over their own expertise and developing their work and collegial accountability.

Goal setting refers in this context to four dimensions: bottom-up goal setting, assessment of short, midterm and long-term goals in teams, proactive leading ensuring the energy and space to reach the goals and a supportive organizational culture.

Results and metrics would be ensuring the impact and dynamics: the targets should be set by a cooperative process and the individual targets should be supporting the organizations' targets. Solving challenges is not the only end-product but the learning process, as well. The indicators measuring the quality of work and the processes should be defined by each team separately. They should be used for both assessment and learning. The performance indicators mentioned as example are quantitative: the number of stakeholder contacts, participants in stakeholder meetings, analytics from websites and location information service, keeping schedules, number of cases in the process, funding, working hours. There are no examples for qualitative indicators, but a statement there should be some. The managers are supposed to lead by creating empowerment, joy of work and meaningfulness, managing by example and authenticity. It is important to question one's own assumptions.

The last principle in the guidelines is trust. Trust forms the bases for cooperation and the managers should be building trust with day-to-day actions. The employees as well as the managers should have sufficient skills, enough time to perform their duties and correct attitude towards others. An atmosphere of trust enables focusing on the basic task. The ability to evoke trust is formed by three parts: Contractual trust (fulfill promises and be consistent), communicational trust (be honest and give constructive and positive feedback) and competencial trust (give space to grow and take responsibility and give recognition).

After creating and adopting the guidelines for managerial coaching for the managers the following development needs were recognized in the organization according to the HR:

- Prioritizing working tasks.
- Joint preparation of issues at an early stage.
- Developing a feedback culture, giving positive feedback.
- Remote/office work practices. (Interview 1.)

Other measures taken by the HR in the organization was a well-being survey decided to be performed every second year after a break of seven years. The last survey was conducted in 2021. One of the results was specifically shouting for a better employee experience design in the organization: the majority of the employees felt that the workload was overwhelming and there was too much work. In that area there has since been some small developments, for example a cognitive ergonomics development project. Other developments have been done inside the teams. There have not been however developed any metrics to follow the

development of the experienced workload on the organizational level, or tools for the management to tackle it.

The organization uses a pulse survey, approximately two times a year. In the pulse survey it is possible to ask about the feelings and emotions at work in a non-complicated matter and anonymously. There is always one standard question about the emotional environment and a few other questions that can vary. Pulse surveys are considered good for checking the state of the moment. Nevertheless, the pulse surveys remain in the abstract level, and they leave out some questions that would be important to ask, such as questions concerning the working processes and the need for support in them; if the salary is experienced just, are the skills up to date, is the working well organized in the team, do the managers have enough time for the employees, etc. In addition, there would be a need to develop some measuring tools at both levels: in the organizational level and in the teams. (Interview 3.)

The development task would be performed by the following steps:

- 1) Defining the state of play and the needs of the organization.
  - As described above.
- 2) Defining the target state and the further possible steps.
  - The target state is to acknowledge the employee experience in the organization with tools for explore, enhance, and follow the employee experience and including them as organizational support for both employees and leadership.
- 3) Finding a possible link between the previous development and the target state with the purpose of better engagement and lesser change resistance.
  - Including the managerial coaching principles into the employee experience framework
- 4) Creating a framework and guidelines for the organization about exploring and enhancing and measuring the employee experience.

### 3 The story behind the employee experience

There are many ways to understand the employee experience. The rising of the customer-oriented thinking and its wide implementation and dispersion is considered one of the most important factors that have been influencing the importance given to the employee experience. (Han & Lee 2022; Holma et al. 2021; Mahadevan and Schmitz 2020; Maula & Maula 2019.)

There is also an interesting debate about the influence of the design thinking to the leadership and to the leadership studies. (Lockwood & Papke 2017; Maula & Maula 2019; Mahadevan & Schmitz 2020) It also correlates with the rise of the importance of empathy in leadership and the current movement of co-creating the public services with the tools formally adopted and created by designers. (Lockwood & Papke 2017; Maula & Maula 2019; Yohn 2016.)

Especially in these times of continuous crises where many organizations are re-inventing themselves after a long period of rapid changes one after another employee experience offer a way to shape the “new normal”. Emmett, Komm and Moritz name it “the new possible”. (Emmett et. al. 2022.) In change management employee experience is a noticeable factor. Riordan reminds that the individual nonmanagerial employees are the implementers of change and therefore it is important and relevant to explore how they feel about the change. The employee emotions are important indicators of the relevance and organization of the processes of change. The employees’ needs should be taken into consideration when designing and implementing changes proactively. Understanding the employee experiences is critical in the competitive environment of today. Especially the Covid-19 pandemic and the recovering from it have made the importance of the employee experience especially visible. (Riordan 2023, 2-3 and 6.)

The concept of employee experience, or EX in brief, can be interpreted as combining two traditions: managing humans as resource and design thinking. Mahadevan and Schmitz (2020) divide the conceptualization of employee experience thinking in two phases: the instrumental approach to create strategies to assure the employee behavior desired for the best customer experience and the (current) approach of keeping the employees satisfied in their jobs in order to perform better. (Mahadevan & Schmitz 2020, 518.)

Managerial coaching was developed at the same time when employee experience thinking was emerging and gaining popularity. Coaching gave the managers tools to support the employees’ wellbeing and productivity, but it was not until design thinking gave the ways to design the employee experience the two different approaches with the same goal: happy and productive employees, could be linked. The rise of the concept of EX also makes visible the implicit contradiction in managing and facilitating work. Mahadevan and Schmitz claim the employee experience design can also be seen as an attempt to legitimize HR in the organization by integrating the two contradicting roles of the HR: as an advocate for the employee and as strategic partner on the organizational level. Cornelius, Ozturk and Pezet remind that establishing better organizational culture can also be considered as establishing more control over it. In other words, they claim that the organizational culture can entail the negation of the emancipatory potential of the employee experience. For the HRM the shift towards employee experience thinking means a wider selection of tools to understand the employees and their behaviors, the way to achieve better results and to recognize the employees. Mahadevan and Schmitz argue that the design thinking approach and the employee experience management are considered as the “next new trends” in HRM. (Cornelius et. al. 2022, 435; Mahadevan & Schmitz 2020, 515-516.)

### 3.1 Managerial Coaching

In this paper I will refer to the concept of managerial coaching like the case organization has described it as behaviors and practices adopted and performed by leadership and

management of the organization with the aim to enhance commitment and personal development of the employees and performed mostly in teams. Some scholars use mere “coaching” or “supervisory coaching” to refer to similar approach.

Coaching became popular in Human Resource Management already in the 1970s when sports coaching concepts were being absorbed into managing organizations. In the human resource management literature managerial coaching, mentoring, business coaching and executive coaching became especially popular in the 2010’s. Coaching can also be considered an organizational development measure to help employees to clarify their goals and tools to help them in achieving them. Managerial coaching has also been considered as means to improve the effectiveness and enhance the performance of the human resources. Coaching could be designed as an “ongoing process of helping employees develop themselves, not only for improving individual job performance but also for maximizing personal career potential”. According to Ellinger and Kim, coaching is most often thought as an interactive process that helps individuals in learning and self-improving and to increase performance or personal growth. It is most commonly performed by leaders and managers or human resource professionals. (Ellinger & Kim, Huang & Hsieh 2015.)

Boyatzis, Smith and Blaize emphasize the importance of the manager’s coping skills, which help performance at work and improve work results and prevent stress. They also see the manager’s own coaching role as a kind of stress prevention factor. Helping others and empathy maintain the leader’s own mental balance. When the organization generally adopts a coaching work culture, it may also have an inverse effect on the mental strain of the manager’s own work, when the manager is in an open, learning-encouraging organization. (Boyatzis, Smith & Blaize 2006, 9-10.)

Curiously, there have not been many references to managerial coaching in employee experience design literature. Although, there have been attempts to measure factors like commitment and engagement in relation to managerial coaching, these studies show purely a managerial perspective and tend to study how to increase performance rate with managerial coaching. Huang and Hsieh suggest that the coaching leaders can be seen as facilitators and highlight that the perceptions of the employees are in the key role: coaching can develop psychological empowerment of the individuals which leads to better performance and career self-managing. (Huang & Hsieh 2015.) Zheng and others study the relation of managerial coaching and creativity. Employees who believe in their abilities to perform, have some control over their work and can see the results of their performance are also likely to be more innovative and engaged to creativity. (Zheng et. al. 2022, 211 & 223.)

Huhta and Myllyntaus mention managerial coaching as an example of leadership or management practice that shows commitment to the employees. (Huhta & Myllyntaus 2021, CH 4.9) Managerial coaching can also be considered as an attempt to a more widely accepted behavioral change within the organization with the goal of becoming a “coaching culture”.

(Ellinger & Kim) To summarize, managerial coaching literature is not very far from the employee experience thinking and they have been emerging at the same time to the HRM practices. It also offers a good example of a managerial approach to the employee's performance, wellbeing, and engagement. Employee experience design can therefore be seen as tools to measure the success of managerial coaching practices.

### 3.2 Human Resource Management and employee experience

Managing people in business economics has traditionally been divided into three disciplines: leadership, organizational behavior, and human resource management. Leadership deals with the role of the manager and supervisor in people management. Organizational behavior studies the behavior of individuals and groups in an organization. Human resource management has been seen as the strengthening of certain roles at different times. These days it is mostly seen as part of the organizational strategy and as its implementer, developing different practices and supporting employees in their own work and working environment. (Viitala 2013, 40.)

The concept of employee experience gathers all these three approaches in managing people: it offers a useful approach for leadership (leading with empathy approach) and to gather insight about how to manage people with different expectations; it is also interconnected to organizational behavior and supports the HRM in its different functions. The employee experience can be explored from the managerial or leadership perspective, the organizational or organizational culture perspective and the individual perspective. When exploring what a good employee experience is in an organization one should consider all these three aspects and more: focus on the intersections of these. Cornelius, Ozturk and Pezet have studied the relationship between the HRM and the concept of employee experience. They see that the employee experience is not (yet) well enough established and considered in the HRM practices. They remind that there might still be some resistance to it in an organization, especially when it might lead to demands of drastic changes in HRM functions and practices: Using employee experience thinking as a tool would enquire openness to raising empowerment and equality among the employees as well as in the relationship between the employees and the management. However, new generations entering the work place are going to have new demands, now and in the future. Therefore, the relationship between workforces and their organizations should be continuously under consideration. (Cornelius et. al. 2022, 440.)

The change in the way of thinking in different eras, in the perception of people and learning, change, technology, customer orientation and globalization have influenced the development of human resource management during its history. In the earlier times the task of human resource professionals was first to take care of the social affairs of the workforce and gradually to develop the work, working environment and competence of the workforce. Since then, the role of the human resource management has developed more and more strategically

into an expert of the company's human capital in the company's decision-making. Human resource professionals were also seen as experts who bring the employee perspective to the other functions. (Viitala 2013, 26.) The strategic role of people management was strengthened in the 1990s, when a resource-based approach became common in business strategy thinking. According to this approach, employees were considered as one of the company's assets that give the company a competitive advantage. (Viitala 2013, 24.) Especially in large enterprises the role of the human resources as a business partner has been dominant and the focus on the employee has been slowly growing in the last couple of decades. (Mahadevan & Schmitz 2020, 517-518.)

The practices of strategic people management can be described in different ways depending on how the roles are perceived. According to Ulrich (1997) human resource management plays a strategic role in both process management (strategic human resource management) and people management (renewal and change management). The strategic human resource management combines business strategy and HR strategy, whereas people management in transformation, renewal and change ensure the company's resources. In addition to these strategic roles the HR has practical roles, as well: it provides different services for both the company and the company's personnel. The guidance and support services increase the organization's conditions for motivated work and to respond to various daily challenges and takes care of the employees' commitment to work and personal development at work. (Kauhanen 2012, 216; Viitala 2013, 35.)

Lämsä and Puceitate highlight the importance of **context** in management practices. Their article focuses on how organizational trust can be developed in the context of low work morale. The perspective is primarily managerial: the hypothesis is that trust increases competitiveness and therefore should be developed by managerial practices. Lämsä and Puceitate also study the creation of trust from the perspective of what kind of management and organization create a work atmosphere of trust. According to the authors the employees' trust can be fed by the company's management with the right kind of management practices suitable for the environment. They see the creation of trust as a process that can be influenced from above. (Lämsä & Puceitate 2006, 130, 138 & 139.) Lämsä and Puceitate's study was published about ten years before the concept of employee experience was starting to rise into the academic debate, but it has some interesting indications to the employee experience thinking: It introduces some of the core elements to the employee experience, such as creating trust and the importance of the working environment to the motivation of the employees and to the quality of their input.

Ulrich & Dulebohn (2015) distinguish three different perspectives to the HRM: individuals, organization, and management. The authors suggest that to produce added value, human resource management of the future must focus on identifying and building the organization's adaptability. (Ulrich & Dulebohn 2015, 190 and 195.) According to Ulrich & Dulebohn in 2015 research was only starting to begin to understand the impact of external factors and

stakeholders on the strategic planning and practices of human resource management. (Ulrich & Dulebohn 2015, 188.) Kramar points out that human resource management can be understood more and more with moral measures, as well. Kramar also reminds of the importance of considering external factors and context in human management research. (Kramar 2013, 1069, 1074 and 1083-1084.) After the Covid-19 Pandemic, it seems obvious that there is not much room for hesitation there anymore.

Ulrich and Dulebohn claim that from the 1980s onwards the human resource management has developed in four waves. The first wave focused on services to the personnel and compliance with regulations, the second focused more on people, recruitment, remuneration, organization, and work processes. The third wave focused on strategies for human resource management and the fourth on context-influenced personnel management, where human resource management is connected to the wider external environment and different stakeholders. In this fourth wave personnel management was seen both outside and inside the company as a producer of added value in the context of the operating environment. (Ulrich & Dulebohn 2015, 190 and 195.) Plaskoff argues that human resource management has most often the organizational or managerial perspective from the company's needs and goals to the control of the employee's actions to meet those goals. Therefore, it lacks to meet the needs of the employees. (Plaskoff 2017,137.)

Jacob Morgan was among the first to create a structured framework of employee experience that is based on actual data and organizational analysis of hundreds of organizations. The author promotes employee experience as an advantage for the organization's success. Give them "the workspaces they want, the tools they need and a culture they can celebrate" to "win the war for talent", he claims. He makes another analysis of human resource management much like the four phases above and with similar elements but from the employee's perspective. He argues that we live in an *employee experience era* that has developed in an evolution through 3 previous eras: the *utility era*, the *productivity era* and the *engagement era*. In the utility era the main idea was to make sure the employee had the utilities he needed to be able to work: a desk, chair, phone, etc. In the productivity era, Morgan argues, the focus was on how to support the employees to work better and faster. On the other hand, in the engagement era, the organizations noticed that happy employers perform better, and they focused on organization culture, created surveys etc. This was according to Morgan revolutionary for many studies have shown that engaged workers are more productive, stay longer at the company and are happier and healthier. In the *employee era* it is not anymore just organization culture but also the technology and space that need to be inspirational and at the same time the companies have shifted from having a mission to having a reason for being. (Morgan 2017, 5-7.)

### 3.3 Employee experience rises from customer experience and design thinking

As above stated, the concept of employee experience has been gaining popularity at the same time when HRM was seen more and more “as a producer of added value in the context of the operating environment”. It was however the notion of experience economy and customer experience thinking that practically created the employee experience thinking. Good customer experience and employee experience are interrelated. Hence, in many cases the motivation for designing a great employee experience have risen from the need to enhance customer experience. (Maula & Maula 2019, 242-243; Holma, et. al. 2021, 27.) The design thinking and design research have been decisive in this development. There are scholars that promote that the employee experience should be designed at the same time and/or methods than customer experience and not as an external part to it. Research with a more organizational or individual focus might consider employee experience totally separately from customer experience although acknowledging the interrelation.

The concepts of experience economy and customer experience were first introduced in 1998 by Pine and Gilmore in the Harvard Business Review. The main idea is that the customers don't only look for products but rather comprehensive customer experiences. Moreover, these memorable events that the companies should provide would be the end-products as such. Therefore, the product: the memory, the experience, should be designed only to answer the needs of the customer and at best - with the customer. Pine and Gilmore established that after the *agrarian*, the *industrial* and the *service economy* the next economy was the *experience economy*. In the experience economy, consumers focus on the experiences that have some personal significance to them that are long-lasting. (Pine & Gilmore 1998,9; Cornelius et al 2022, 434; Gruber et. al. 2015, 3.) According to Holma and others these customer experiences are created when the company sees the service situation as an innovative possibility to produce lifelong memorable moments and to commit the customers with memorable experiences. The customer often takes part in creating this experience as an active partner. (Holma et. al. 2021, 27.) Morgan defines customer experience simply as the relationship that a customer has with a brand. (Morgan 2017, 7.)

In a B2B environment customer experience is more complex than in the consumer business. It is typical for a B2B company that its products or services are used in various organization levels and by various people. The complexity multiplies: the more challenging the structures are, the more target-oriented point of view; the more people there are engaged in the process the more priorities are involved in the decision making. Although the communication is nowadays more and more digital in B2B businesses as well, a decisive part of the experience is created between individuals. (Holma et. al. 2021, 33-36.) When an organization has a customer-oriented culture it also should give the employees the opportunity to consider and analyze the customer's situation and the means to respond to the customer's needs and act in the best interest of the customer. This requires, according to Holma and others, that the company trusts the employees working in the customer interface. On the other hand, the

company should clearly describe the framework within which the employee can operate as well as the strategic goalsetting to what kind of customer experience is to be aimed for. (Holma et. al. 2021, 88.) Maula and Maula state that building a better workplace experience the leadership should first of all understand the true needs. The focus should be on added value but also on the organization's values and how they are in line with the personal values of the workers. Maula and Maula emphasize that the starting point should be understanding the customer journey: one should build experiences and not tools or processes. (Maula & Maula 2019, 242-243.)

Employees play a crucial role in creating the best customer experience. Perceived authenticity and relational commitment have been shown to have a positive impact on customer loyalty in service encounters from a customer point of view. (Han & Lee 2022, 7.) A positive employee experience can make employees happier and more satisfied which increases engagement and loyalty and thus improves the performance. Yohn reminds that employee experience can be designed according to the same values than the customer experience. If an organization can manage employee experience with the same standards than customer experience - and develop them hand in hand - it will provide better service and get a sustainable competitive advantage. (Fu & Ma 2022, 1; Yohn 2016.) Maula and Maula claim that at best the experiences of both customers and service providers would be considered together and not separately. (Maula & Maula 2019, 242-243.)

Genuine customer orientation requires empathy. Maula and Maula stress that it is important that the employee understands how his own actions relate to the organization's goals and produce added value for the customer. Each employee should have the opportunity to produce added value by thinking independently. At the same time, they should feel that the management values their work input and achievements. Especially for young employees, the meaning of work is increasingly important: their own values and the values of the organization's customers must be in line with each other. To improve the employee experience the management should first map the real and most important needs of the employees and develop a deep and empathetic understanding. Using the same empathic approach, one should also look at the roles and tasks of one's own organization, within the framework of which the needs are to be satisfied: the organization's management practices, systems and processes as well as tools that support the work. (Maula & Maula 2019, 126 and 240-242.)

According to Maula and Maula there has been a significant paradigm shift in management in the recent years. Every traditional company that has moved from products to services, from devices to software or from traditional to digital products has to focus on the customer's experience. In general, any company that wants to focus on innovation more than efficiency must look at problems from different angles and try new solutions. Design principles support management and decision-making, especially when decisions are to be based on future possibilities instead of past experiences and knowledge. (Maula & Maula 2019, 110.)

According to Plaskoff design thinking is beginning to be recognized as an approach for employee experience while it has already been effectively applied for customer and user experience. (Plaskoff 2017, 136.) According to a study by Lockwood and Papke (2017) managers who adopted design thinking became better listeners and more eager questioners and adopted often a coaching approach as well as a cooperative approach to solving problems. Lockwood and Papke found out that an empathetic approach leads to a deeper understanding of how to best inspire and motivate employees. (Lockwood & Papke 2017, 97.)

Lockwood & Papke point out some key characteristics common to design thinking organizations: First there is the desire to solve the right problem, that requires a deep understanding of the user and can be achieved through observation, fieldwork and research and an empathetic approach. Secondly, empathy is coupled with collaboration with the users and within the designers. Thirdly, in a design thinking organization organizational learning is achieved by experimenting, visualization, and prototypes. Using the prototypes, the goal is to fail quickly and numerous so that learning can occur. Finally, the design thinking organizations are able to combine the creative ideas with business aspects and into new business models. (Lockwood & Papke, 2017, 17.)

Design thinking is useful if the aim is to create a team whose members can produce different perspectives and elaborate other team members' ideas. It can also attribute to the data-based analytical examination with intuitive thinking and to get rid of habitual thinking. Especially in change projects it is sometimes necessary to abandon old presuppositions and go into another, possibly unfamiliar direction. The first prototypes are supposed to visualize an idea and give a form to it. In business design management means a shift to a more holistic thinking and it leads to decisions that are not necessarily based merely on facts but also on empathy and human intuition. In the strategy building design thinking provide a wider participation. Even conflicts can be used to learn and create something new. In a design-based organization, experimental prototypes are built and used widely, because new things can be learned through them. (Maula & Maula 2019, 25 -35.)

Maula and Maula describe the central principles of design thinking as following: empathy, criticality and challenge, curiosity, experimentation, clarity, comprehensiveness, openness to the new, interdisciplinary cooperation, visibility. Curedale describes design thinking as a human-oriented approach that supports innovation and intelligent change and that draws from both creative and analytical thinking and iterative learning. Problems are approached from the end user's point of view, and creative solutions only emerge when the user's unfulfilled needs and wishes, as well as situational factors, are deeply understood. (Maula & Maula 2019, 25. Curedale 2018, 79.)

Gruber, Leon, George and Thompson believe that design thinking is an important way to recognize the employee experience and could be useful for example in creating organizational structures, better processes and tools, work environments, both physically and

psychologically as well as in management and communication practices in general. According to the authors design thinking enables ways for re-examining adopted processes and ways of working with the networks and ecosystems and more: it gives tools for re-examining the entire working culture. (Gruber et. al. 2015, 1-5.)

Customer experience and employee experience are many times so much intertwined that they can be enhanced with the same design process. A deeper understanding of the end users' experiences and development ideas in workshops and interviews can lead to better understanding of the organization itself and enhance the motivation of the employees. This could be seen as an example of a customer dominant value creation that is supported by customer relationships and informal interaction, not always intended, or controlled by the supplier although facilitated. Järvinen describes a service design process in a hospital that led to a revelation that although the whole organization in question was built for creating the best possible service for the end-users, the organization actually lacked the necessary tools and processes to develop the service in a customer-oriented matter. In the service design process, it became clear that there was not enough supportive structures, the directors lacked a unified system for development and the employees lacked the knowledge and experience of innovation and development work. There was a will but not a way. The service design process not only made the lack of processes visible but at the same time, changed the mindset of the people involved. (Järvinen 2019, 29.)

Service design requires teamwork. Curedale reminds of the importance of collaboration: almost all great inventions and successful projects have been implemented in collaboration. In service planning teamwork team diversity, encouragement, enabling, conflict tolerance, multidisciplinary and low participation threshold are particularly important. (Curedale 2018, 79, 85-88.) Gruber and others recognize the value of design thinking as a tool for innovation. They define design thinking as a "human-centered approach to innovation that puts the observation and discovery of often highly nuanced, even tacit, human needs right at the forefront of the innovation process." The authors remind that this approach can appreciate both the technological and the sociocultural context of the process. (Gruber et. al. 2015, 1-5.)

Design thinking can be seen in different organizations in different forms because one can adopt the design principles and methods that suit them best. Design thinking starts from understanding the customer, and in the coming years designers will be found in more and more organizations because understanding the customer has become the lifeline of companies. Therefore, the valuation of the industry has grown rapidly in recent years. (Maula & Maula 2019, 90-93, 95, 111, 117.)

Brown defines design as an approach to thinking that utilizes "designers' sensibility and methods to combine people's needs and technological possibilities so that they can be transformed into added value for the customer and new opportunities in the market with the

help of strategy.” (Brown, T. 2008.) Design could also be seen as a catalyst for change when developing an organization. They define design as a goal-oriented way of thinking with the purpose of solving problems and producing the best possible customer experience. (Maula & Maula, 2019, 15 & 20.)

### 3.4 Approaches to Employee Experience

According to Morgan, the employee experience can be viewed through the eyes of the employee, through the eyes of the organization, or through the intersection of these two views. The reality as the employee perceives it is not always the same as what the organization believes (or wants) it to be. Morgan defines 17 factors that influence equally the employee experience in the cultural, technological, and physical work environment. The organization can manage the tools, equipment, and time we use at work, where and how we work (e.g. remote work rules) and in many cases these common rules are also agreed upon by the staff or their representatives. This intersection, where the expectations and reality of the employee and the organization meet, is defined by Morgan as the employee experience. In order to develop, the organization must be aware of these experiences. This doesn't just mean leveraging people analytics, but the ability and desire to connect with people. The employee experience can according to Morgan, be designed but the design process should essentially require the participation of the employees themselves. (Morgan 2017, 7-9.)

Dery and Sebastian define employee experience as a combination of work complexity and behavioral norms. They establish that the greatest challenge for big companies is to respond to disruption in their industries. In the fast turns of today's operational environment organizations must be able to respond rapidly in a creative and innovative way. According to Dery and Sebastian “creating a great employee experience is critical to enable work that creates value in the digital era”. They emphasize however that for creating value for the company, the behavioral norms of the company have a great role. More specifically, three behavioral norms emerged in their study as critical for building business value: collaboration, creativity, and empowerment. Those behavioral norms together with the complexity of work define the employee experience. It should be seen distinct from employee wellbeing but altogether considered as one of the decisive factors for the organization's success that enhance profitability, customer satisfaction and innovations. They define employee wellbeing as the benefits and beliefs that make employees feel good about belonging to an organization. (Dery & Sebastian 2017.)

Cornelius and others aim to “revitalize HRM for the needs of a new order”. The goal is to highlight the importance of employee experience to understanding work and workers in today's organizations. The authors recognize the dilemma in conceptualizing the employee experience. They claim that a positive employee experience can be defined as a collection of benefits offered by organizations to employees to ensure the employees' best performance. It cannot be defined solely either from the employees' or the organizations' point of view but

rather as an interrelated practice. They emphasize the continuous change of the concept much like the reality and the perception of it changes with time and with context. They argue that employee experience should be seen as a process or a processual reality with many emotional, cognitive, symbolic, and material implications and with no specific boundaries. Moreover, it is continuously renegotiated between management and personnel, employees, and employers. (Cornelius et.al. 2022, 436 & 439.)

According to Fu and Ma employee experience can be defined most of all in terms of interaction and more specifically as the meaning, connection, appreciation, and influence that the employees find in interaction with the organization's management, colleagues, and customers. They would also emphasize the roles of technology, physical environment, values, and work. (Fu & Ma 2022, 2.) Maylett and Wride talk about "the law of congruent expectations". A good employee experience consists for them of expectation alignment and employee engagement. The expectation alignment is good where the organization meets the expectations of the employee. The expectation alignment is built of 6 pillars and in a study of over 400 organizations in 7 countries Maylett and Wride established that at least 4 of them should be present to build a good employee experience that create employee engagement. The pillars are fairness, clarity, empathy, predictability, transparency, and accountability. (Maylett & Wride 2017.)

Plaskoff defines employee experience similarly as the employee's holistic perceptions of the relationship with his/her employing organization derived from all the encounters at touchpoints along the employee's journey. According to Debouk designing the employee experience can be useful for reducing anxiety and elimination of those kind of touchpoints that can consume mental energy unnecessarily, to reduce friction, to make the changes in technology and work environment faster and/or easier and to enhance necessary safety measures concerning the work environment. There should be a shift from providing services to designing an experience that considers the employees in their work with care and understanding the needs, wants, fears and emotions of each employee. An integrated and comprehensive employee experience strategy creates a long and productive relationship with the employees. (Plaskoff 2017, 137; Debouk 2020, 27-29.)

Mahadevan and Schmitz claim that employee experience is widely understood as a systematic human-centered problem-solving approach that has positive effect on the business. Employee experience is in their understanding a result of the appropriation of marketing and design thinking concepts in the HR that stem from the rise of the concepts of customer experience and user experience. They argue that employee experience should be distinguished from established HR concepts such as employee engagement and employee well-being and that it can be seen more and more inherent to the business functions than a mere HR initiative. It can therefore enlarge the scope of HR's roles and responsibilities, as well. (Mahadevan & Schmitz 2020, 515, 522 - 524.)

Mahadevan & Schmitz discover in their meta-analysis six different clusters in grouping employee experience approaches: In the traditional HR roles, either closely related to the concept of employee engagement and increasing the employee engagement or to the concept of employee wellness. In a more widely understood role enhancing employee experience can be seen as an expansion of the traditional HR roles. In addition to these three roles, the authors claim that employee experience can also be seen outside of the HR roles: Combined with customer experience in the marketing department, in communications or in IT. They create a special grouping for to the digital employee experience and last, for the consulting role of enhancing employee experience. They conclude that companies see employee experience mostly as something that can be managed by HR and especially in its role of strategic partner as it provides the link between organizational interests and the employee. (Mahadevan & Schmitz 2020, 515, 522 - 524.)

Jacob Morgan states that it is not the actual job that you do but the physical, technological, and cultural environment that makes the impact to the employee experience. In his employee “experience pyramid” he defines the employee experience as a sum of the four stages towards the point of the pyramid where the company’s Reason for being forms the base, the next levels being the 3 environments mentioned above and the 17 factors of importance that he has identified in those environments and at the top, the moments that matter for the employee. (Morgan 2017, 210-214.)

Panneerselvam and Balaraman claim that the employee experience is “the new deal of HR” with personalized HR services and an employer branding opportunity. The authors distinguish employee experience as a bottom-up approach from a more top-down concept employee engagement. They also make the difference between these two concepts by the time-span: employee engagement can be understood as a short-term view whereas employee experience focuses more on the long-term providing many opportunities of engagement. They define employee experience as a people-first management philosophy that examines workplace factors that have an impact on what works in organizations. Employee experience approach places employees to the focus of the customer experience and the technology companies seem to be the first to adopt widely the employee experience approach. The employee experience can also be understood as the means to achieve better employee engagement. (Panneerselvam & Balaraman 2022, 202-205.)

### 3.5 Designing (a good) employee experience

There are some elements that several authors include as an element of EX, an element that influence it or even an outcome, such as employee engagement and wellbeing. This is also due to the nature of interaction and continuous change of the concept. Some authors focus on the employee journey and the pain points and moments of joy, concepts borrowed from the customer experience design. This approach would be most useful when using a journey map to combine the customer experience and the employee experience to understand both

target groups' needs and to meet them for a best outcome. Quite a few authors also define the employee journey as an employee's journey in the organization, starting from the recruitment, quite separately from the customer journey. The methodology and the many tools of service design can be useful in designing the employee experience.

### 3.5.1 Service design method and tools are useful in designing the employee experience

Service design has been used quite actively and successfully in exploring customer experience and employee experience, especially in healthcare. The advantages are that it engages the employees and creates mutual empathy. Curedale defines factors that enable an organization to adopt a service design mindset. The management should present the service design to the entire organization and listen to everyone's thoughts. The organization should adopt a holistic way of thinking, which pays attention to both details and the whole. In customer service design, all the employees of the organization should get to know the customers' activities and listen to their challenges, so that they know how to tackle the real problems. Customers should also be kept involved in the service development process. (Curedale 2018, 79-80.)

Segelström finds the division of traditional, adapted, and innovative methods useful when talking about service design. Tools and techniques developed within design are, according to Segelström, often referred to as innovative methods. These innovative methods vary from the traditional and adapted methods in origin as well as in which kind of data they produce. Segelström introduces three very different approaches: the probe approach, design games and design documentaries as such and reminds that what unifies them is the importance of the research taking a more active role rather than trying to stay objective when identifying insights about the stakeholders' wishes and driving forces. (Segelström 2013, 40, 71-72.) Visualizations translate stakeholder research insights into easily accessible formats. Affective visualization helps to empathize, cognitive visualizations help to understand and collaborative visualizations help in sharing our thoughts and collaborating with others. (Passera 2017, 41.)

According to Maula and Maula training and communication related to design thinking can be organized in many different ways. Many people learn best by participating and experimenting themselves, and combining methods often works best. For the best results the different methods should ensure awareness (how to get people's attention), excitement (how to get people interested) activation (how to get people to learn and act) and establishment (how to establish design thinking as part of the organization's everyday life). New systems or ways of doing should not be introduced all at once but more like an ongoing challenging of what we are doing and how. Although individuals experience and use the design tools in their own way, a common approach is very important. (Maula & Maula 2019, 147 & 176.)

The principles of service design doing can be seen as following: it is human centered, collaborative, iterative, sequential, real and holistic by definition. Service design is more than anything a process of interplay between divergent phases where one seeks opportunities and convergent phases of making decisions. Through research and studies (divergent phase)

you get knowledge that you then organize and extract key insights (convergent phase). During ideation activities, you create many possible solutions (divergent phase) that you narrow down again to the most useful ones (convergent phase). With the help of prototypes and implementation, potential solutions are explored, then evaluated, and narrowed down to the most promising ones. (Stickdorn et al 2018, 26, 31 and 84.)

In the service design process, it is useful to get acquainted with the Double Diamond design process model developed by the Design Council, that conceptualize those divergent and convergent phases. The two diamonds represent a process of exploring an issue more widely or deeply (divergent thinking) and then taking focused action (convergent thinking). The double diamond model introduces four phases of the design process: discover, define, develop and deliver. The model gives the idea of the sequence of expanding and extracting. In the discovery phase you get insight into the problem, the defining phase narrows the scope down and focus. After that, there might be a need to redefine the problem. In the developing phase, the potential solutions are tested and in the deliver phase, you work towards a solution from many solutions that work and from the feedback from them. According to the double diamond framework the four core principles for design are: put people first, communicate visually and inclusively, collaborate, and co-create and then iterate, iterate, iterate. In an iterative process there is always the possibility and the obligation to go back and start again: doing, failing, and learning. (Design Council, 2020.)

There are many practical service design tools that can help in exploring the employee experience in different stages, and a lot of literature to explore. In the following there are just a few examples of useful methods. A survey is useful in defining the state of play. Workshops and brainstorming can be used to gather more insight to find new approaches or solutions. A brainstorming session could have the following stages: 1) Preliminary stage: setting goals 2) Warm-up phase: trying to get rid of stubborn prejudices and mind-limiting factors 3) Ideation phase: starting with free ideation and writing down ideas 4) Selection phase: ideas are critically evaluated according to the leader's instructions. Other variations for brainstorming and workshops are for example the idea walk or brainwriting where the ideation happens in writing; learning café where the group is divided in tables, which all tackle the problem from one perspective and the participants circle in different tables changing perspective accordingly; 8x8 method where a challenge is tackled by writing 8 perspectives, then 8 ideas is ideated for every perspective (Ojasalo et.al. 40 and 160-161). Interviewing is usually part of research in some form and often provides more in-depth information than other research methods. With the help of the interview, we find out the user's thoughts and experiences and build an understanding of his operating methods. The interview brings out the user's attitudes and the so-called tacit information that cannot be obtained from other sources. (Curedale 2018, 179; Tuulaniemi 2016, 147; Wilson 2013, introduction.) The challenge of the interview method is that it takes time (interview, transcription and analysis). The target group is often narrow, and quantitative generalizable information may not be obtained. The interview also requires special skill from the

interviewer so that essential and unbiased information is obtained from the interviewee. An empathy workshop recreates the interview situation by giving the participants opposite roles and could be useful for enhancing empathy. (Curedale 2018, 179.)

### 3.5.2 Examples of the employee experience design and elements to explore

There has been quite a few attempts to discover a simple formula to design a good workplace experience. There is the good workplace index and 17 factors that form a good employee experience of Morgan, there is the formula of Maylett & Wride of Employee experience (EX) plus Expectations alignment (EA) equals Engagement, the 3 elements of balance of Popelka: task, social, and fulfillment experience. (Popelka 2022.) But all these models include listening (and answering) to the needs of the employees. Acknowledging that the employee experience is an interactive and continuous process that gathers the social, managerial, and individual expectations is a good start. There are however no one size fits all solutions, but rather well argued suggestions to codesigning a good EX within the organization. As Huhta and Myllyntaus remind, the EX of an organization must be discovered within and by the organization. And continuously rediscovered. (Huhta & Myllyntaus 2021, CH. 4.9)

Focusing on the employee experience is long overdue, claim Emmett, Komm and Moritz. A successful employee experience can be thought as a means for building a balance between top-down guidance and giving the employees the freedom to do what they choose. The different functions of the organization and their employees can all be considered rather as partners in change management and implementation from the very beginning. At the same time, exploring the employee experience means to familiarize with the positive moments of the employee journey. Noticing these “moments of joy” the organization can enhance loyalty to the company, motivate for better performance and attract the best employees. Employees want to feel recognized. They are “hungry for trust, social cohesion and purpose”, they argue. Clear responsibilities and opportunities to learn are factors that drive today’s employees. The feeling of being valued creates commitment and engagement. Nevertheless, it requires a good employee experience and a profound reorientation from the traditional top-down leadership. (Emmett et al 2022; Speicher & Francis 2022.)

Design thinking combines empathy and data and puts the customers - or the employees - in the center of the problem-solving processes. Emmett and others emphasize its usefulness for leaders to understand what the employees care about. They remind that the design thinking has transformed customer experience in the last ten years or so. Now, the same should and could be done asking the same questions inside the organization. The authors establish a method with three steps to help organizations to implement the employee experience with success. They suggest that it is decisive to understand the employee pain points and talent needs as well as the emotional context and work journeys and that these journeys should be supported by digital tools. Their method consists of first building a baseline with data, then identifying the employee journeys by defining personas or archetypes and finding

the moments that matter and finally using that knowledge to co-create the desired employee experience support and measurement activities. (Emmett et. al. 2022.)

A good employee experience is relative to one's own work experience, skills and knowledge. It is also connected to an open and safe environment and trust. This can be achieved in a workplace with opportunities to learn new things, places and opportunities to collaborate with others and feeding the personal motivation factors, noticing the employees and giving them a chance to develop their own work. "For many, a good workplace experience means the opportunity to make independent decisions and manage their work as they see fit", Maula and Maula argue. (Maula & Maula 2019, 72-75.)

Yohn reminds that to improve employee experience a company would only to apply the principles of customer experience design from marketing and operations teams to the HR practices. These practices should be designed and applied to groupings of employees based on their wants and needs instead of departments and business units. That would require maybe an organizational change or at least a change of mind-set. Yohn also emphasizes that the employee experience as well as the customer experience should be based on the company's brand values. If the employees experience the benefits of the brand, they have also better motivation to reinforce them with customers. The organization culture is therefore at best created and supported by the brand values, the employee experience, and the customer experience. Yohn also makes a correlation between a good employee experience to both good customer experience and employee satisfaction. (Yohn 2016.)

There might be a slight change in the organizational culture as well, where the experience economy is moving from the customer interactions to reshaping the organizational structures. This would be much in line with the newest generational shift when the co-creator inclined employees of the Z generation enter the management level. (Mahadevan & Schmitz 2020, 518.) It should also be noted that there are some generational shifts that reshape the expectations between employees and employers which have also given floor to the recognition of the employee experience in leadership. Generation Y employees have shown evidence to desire more holistic framework of management that represent better their desires as workers. As well-educated and self-determined workers, they give more importance to the development of the self and personal growth, flexibility and variety in the work competing to the previous generation. Generation Z employees have shown a stronger shift towards equality and parity with the management and aim for more democratized learning options as well as diverse mentoring. (Cornelius et. al. 2022, 434; Gruber et. al. 2015, 4.)

The generational change at work requires rethinking the concepts of good work. Job satisfaction is created by the content and relevance of the work. The work must also fit in with the rest of the life situation, values and personal development plan. (Järvensivu & Piirainen 2012, 87.) Plaskoff reminds that we are facing the unprecedented challenge of

multigenerational workplace as there have been never before been four generations working together, each with their own expectations. (Plaskoff 2017, 138.)

Jacob Morgan has developed an index to define the employee experience and shares information in his website about the companies that have been most successfully recorded to offer a good employee experience rate. He claims that in “the war for talent” the employee experience is decisive. To get good scores in the employee experience the organization must succeed in all three areas of providing the best cultural, technological and physical environment for the employees. This can be counted numerically by the employees giving the score from 1 to 5 in 17 questions that explore the experiences in these three environments. To explore the physical environment, he includes questions about the actual work space, if the employees enjoy being there and like to show it to their friends, about the possibilities for multiple option for workplace, the flexibility they offer and how they reflect the organization’s values. The technological environment factors decisive for the employee experience include questions like availability, consumer grade technology and the relationship between employee needs and business requirements. Last, the cultural environment supports the employee experience by showing value and recognition, giving a legitimate sense of purpose, supporting the team building, diversity and learning, treating employees fairly, mentoring and coaching and focusing on the well-being at work. (Morgan 2017, 57, 59-70, 77-85, 89-126.)

For Panneerselvam and Balaraman the elements that create the employee experience are: meaningful work, empowering culture, enabling technologies, flexible HR processes and practices and inclusive leadership. (Panneerselvam & Balaraman 2022, 202-205.) Gruber and others remind that to define employee experience one must consider the structure of the organization, the processes and tools that enable the performance in the job, the psychological and social work environment, the internal and external interaction, remuneration and meeting practices. (Gruber et al. 2015, 1-7.)

Popelka divides the employee experience into the task experience, the social experience, and the fulfillment experience. Popelka reminds that as the employee experience is a combination of all three, there might be trade-offs. When one sector is stronger, it may compensate another. The elements that influence the employee experience are values, social issues, purposeful job, compensation, and learning. (Popelka 2022.) Emmett and others recommend a systematic approach to the employee experience that would include gathering data similarly of three types of experiences employees have in their work: Social experience, work experience and organizational experience. In the first experience group they would explore relationships with the people, teamwork, and social climate, in the second work organization, work control and flexibility, growth and rewards and in the last the purpose of the company, the technology in use and the physical environment of work. (Emmett et. al. 2022.) Huhta and Myllyntaus define 8 subsectors that belong to the EX: the reason d’etre,

culture, leadership, characteristics of the work, social environment, wellbeing, physical (working) environment, and tools. (Huhta & Myllyntaus 2021, Ch. 4.9.)

### 3.6 Outcomes of a good employee experience

The aim to explore the employee experience is twofold in an organization. Good employee experience create engagement and engagement creates better results. Employees who feel satisfaction in their work and the working environment are more motivated to contribute to fulfill the needs and goals of the organization. Thus, the organization's needs and goals can be met at best by satisfied employees. (Plaskoff 2017,137.) In designing the framework for the employee experience, it is important to know to what purpose the data is gathered. The outcome of the data analysis should be an indicator for the strategy. Naturally, it is strongly suggested to build an employee experience strategy in the organization to support the reason for being of the organization. (Huhta & Myllyntaus 2021, Ch. 4.9)

As a conclusion from the employee experience literature, it could be suggested that the outcomes of a good employee experience could be wellbeing at work, job satisfaction or "joy of work", engagement and professional individual and organizational performance.

#### 3.6.1 Wellbeing

A good employee experience enhances wellbeing at work. Speicher and Francis found out in their meta-analysis of 19 studies that the organization-driven initiatives that focus on increasing purpose and engagement can indeed increase the well-being of individuals more than any targeted physician-driven interventions. They claim that increasing teamwork, decision-making and distribution of the workload in an organizational level can have a great impact on the employee wellbeing. Moreover, they are interventions that are driven by the employee's needs. (Speicher & Francis 2022,1.)

Managing well-being at work has traditionally meant managing work ability and occupational safety from the perspective of the organization, so that the personnel can maintain and promote the organization's target-setting. However, well-being at work is seen today more broadly: at the organizational level as part of the organization's competitiveness; at the individual level as a part of the wider well-being of the individual. Well-being at work has long been studied from the point of view of stress prevention, but the focus is being shifted even more on the factors that affect the joy of work, because it has been found that certain resources that maintain well-being can help prevent stress and especially burnout. (Manka & Manka 2016, 87.)

Factors related to managing well-being at work can be addressed from the perspectives of both traditional stress research and positive psychology. With the transformation of work and new ways of working, the importance of interaction for well-being at work is being emphasized. Interaction skills and their development promote the organization's overall well-

being and goals, especially in information work. According to research, high-quality interaction in teams, pair work and manager-employee relationships are empowering and motivation-increasing factors. This is also an indication of why design thinking and co-working methods are useful for creating better employee experiences and wellbeing. (Perhoniemi & Hakala 2013, 90 and 98.)

Only healthy people can work effectively and learn and be creative. This requires also good balance between work and rest. (Viitala 2013, 212) It is also considered the basic right of employees to work in a healthy and safe working environment that should be understood physically, psychologically, and socially. (Kauhanen 2012, 196.) Well-being at work forms a basis for a long career. The definitions of Müller and others (2006) for well-being at work are very similar to other, later developed factors defining the employee experience. In the individual level well-being at work is that part of the well-being where work forms a significant part. It can also be defined as a status where the person's skills and knowledge are in the best possible balance with the working conditions and free time. It is affected strongly by the feeling of satisfaction one gets from a well performed task. Individuals give different meanings to well-being at work. Müller and others remind that each interpretation is unique and influenced by many internal and external factors. (Müller et al 2006, 2955.) Well-being at work can also be defined as strategic factor when it supports the performance rate of the organization. Aura and others argue that besides strategic leading for well-being at work one can lead the individual work capacity. (Aura et al. 2016, 5.)

Mental health factors have a direct influence on performance at work according to the research in human resource management. Focusing on the mental well-being can provide much better results than mere satisfaction to work. Robertson and Cooper give importance to a concept of psychological capital when studying the mental well-being of the individuals. A strong psychological capital of an organization can influence positively on the mental well-being. The positive drive of this psychological capital on the success of the organization consists of independent initiative, optimism, hope and readiness for change. In the individual level, Robertson and Cooper state that the psychological capital is connected to a good income and happy relationships, better health and better performance at work. It also relates negatively to absences at work. (Robertson & Cooper 2011, 4, 16, 18 and 25-26.) It is important to notice that all these concepts are also being acknowledged in the employee experience research.

Manka and Manka argue that the flexibility of the organization structure can be seen as a structural factor of well-being because it makes it possible to the employees to make their own decisions concerning their own area of expertise. The organization should provide the necessary information and support. (Manka & Manka 2016, 87 and 107.) Robertson and Cooper remind that the mental wellbeing should be separated from work motivation and job satisfaction. Both can be factors to mental wellbeing but are not enough to create it. Especially job satisfaction has a strong correlation to mental wellbeing. (Robertson & Cooper

2011, 3 and 34.) Manka and Manka (2016) argue that in managing well-being at work, it is particularly important to understand that simply removing dissatisfaction factors does not necessarily guarantee the kind of well-being at work that moves the organization forward and guarantees the best work contribution of the employees. (Manka & Manka 2016, 82.)

### 3.6.2 Commitment and engagement

Before the rise of the concept of employee experience the HRM research and practice had been more and more interested in the concept of engagement. It turned out that there was a need for a more complex debate that included the concept of engagement but was not limited to it. In fact, a lot of the earlier studies and management consulting on the employee experience focused largely on the differences between these two concepts. (Huhta & Myllyntaus 2021, CH 4.3.) Today, there seems to be a consensus on that the engagement forms a part of the employee experience or more precisely, is a result of it: a good employee experience creates engagement. Morgan reminds the employee experience is about the cultural, technological and physical design of the organization to create engaged employees. The changes in the organizations to acknowledge and improve the employee experience have been at least until now more short term and cosmetic changes that don't really improve how people work. In other words, there has not been a cultural change in workplaces just yet. That would require a real change of mindset. (Morgan 2017, 5-7.)

In the human resource management research, it is often stated that commitment is one of the key factors to the success of the organization. Robertson and Cooper argued in 2011 that improving commitment had been rising in priorities in the leadership and human resource management. Robertson and Cooper remind that commitment should not however be prioritized above the individual well-being, but they must go hand in hand. Committed workers are more satisfied to the organization, less eager to leave and more prone to tell others positive things about the organization. (Robertson & Cooper 2011, 27-28 and 35.) There are some similarities in these statements to Jacob Morgan's definition of employee experience and the EX-index he developed and also to the well-being indexes that are already widely adopted in the human resource practices. Morgan reminds however that the job is usually not about making the employee feel connected. Instead, the employees should go ahead and just do the job. He also reminds that extra perks for employees are both distracting and expensive (Morgan, 2017, 210.) Plaskoff argues as well, that perks are not enough to create employee engagement. Instead, an organization should aim to understand the individual employees better and co-design experiences with them. (Plaskoff 2017, 136.) Committed employees are more motivated, which is reflected in the productivity and quality of work. They stay more likely in the company and speak positively about their employer to their friends, family and customers. On the other hand, when the organization is highly hierarchical the management might not have a full understanding of the company's reality. The managers' role is decisive in the interface of the employees and the management in creating pathways for the consideration of employee experience. (Holma et al. 2021, 89-90.)

A coaching approach with goal-related guidance can as well encourage engagement by decreasing employees' concerns about failure, enhancing their confidence and helping them develop the needed skills. (Zheng et. al. 2022, 211-224.) The studies show that the initiative improves with flexibility. The meaningfulness of the work is influenced by how much possibilities the employee has to be involved in the decision making. The experience of meaningfulness also requires possibilities to use one's knowledge and skills and to see one's own tasks as part of a larger whole. The responsibilities and feedback are also big motivation factors at work. (Manka & Manka 2016, 87 and 107.)

### 3.6.3 Joy of work, the flow and job satisfaction.

The 'flow' or absorption of work is a fairly new concept in the HRM studies. It is defined by such a positive state in work, where energy, dedication, and immersion manifest. In the absorption of the work, the employee is motivated to give his best and to be an active and committed actor. (Manka & Manka 2016, 109; Järvensivu & Piirainen 2012, 82.) Being absorbed in the work - or "in the flow" - the employee is also proud of his work, energetic and enthusiastic. Job satisfaction is also connected to friendly and considerate behavior. (Perhoniemi & Hakala 2013, 89-91.)

The absorption of work can have positive consequences both at the individual level and at the organizational level. The absorption of work has been found to influence in greater levels of individual well-being, in life satisfaction and heart health. The absorption of work has also been found to correlate negatively to the number of sick leaves and depression. At the organizational level, job satisfaction has been discovered to be connected to initiative, commitment and better work performance. Perhoniemi and Hakala have studied working pairs and the so called "resource caravans". The resource caravans are resource factors that added to other factors accumulate and create more positive effects. According to Perhoniemi and Hakala, the flow of work can also be transferred from one working pair to another and thus create resource caravans that accumulate. Even at the team level, absorption of work can lead to better performance at work. (Perhoniemi & Hakala 2013, 90 and 98.)

The concept of the quality of work includes five dimensions according to Ojala and Jokivuori: professional skills and competence, work pressure, the effort and intensity of work required, (independent) decision-making and opportunities for influence, salary and risks, and the experience of well-being. The single most important factor explaining well-being and job satisfaction is the opportunity to manage and plan one's own work. (Ojala & Jokivuori 2012, 26 and 31.) It is noticeable that the job satisfaction is affected by different factors than job dissatisfaction. Success at work, recognition, job content, responsibility and motivation are such positive and encouraging factors that affect job satisfaction. The work environment, personnel policy, salary, human relations, work management and administration are factors that cannot increase job satisfaction, but which affect dissatisfaction when they are not in order. (Järvensivu & Piirainen 2012, 82.)

#### 4 Development task description

The development task is to develop a framework to conceptualize, follow and enhance the employee experience (EX). The purpose is to form a well-argued data package for the use of the HR to build a guide to design and measure the employee experience with the knowledge about the possible elements and a suggested toolset. The case organization was in the time of writing this paper affected by many internal and external factors. In addition, the leadership went through many changes and even the HR management changed during the period of this development work. Therefore, it was considered best to first gather knowledge and offer a suggestion to the new HR management and the new organizational leadership of how to enhance the employee experience so that it could be used by the time it was plausible to start with the task of enhancing the employee experience.

The change is nowadays so fast at work that these findings will probably be outdated in just a couple of years. In HR there a historical development of dominant approaches and employee experience can be seen as part of that line. Who knows, what the next focus in HR will be. Therefore, there is also a need to justify the focus on the employee experience and especially what elements are included in the employee experience and to analyze what those choices mean in the larger historical development and theoretical bases of the HRM. When the focus in HRM will change in the future the aim is that these findings will still be useful when building a new approach. By that there will surely be more and more data available, and it becomes even more important to justify every piece of data we gather.

Huhta and Myllyntaus suggest that each organization should design their own framework for the employee experience and suggest 8 different subsectors for it. (Huhta & Myllyntaus 2021, Ch. 4.9.) In this study the process of creating an understanding of the employee experience in an organization is the following:

- Define the state of play of the organization and the target state, including interviews and desk study.
- Create a theory basis for understanding the phenomena and to decide the appropriate approach adopted.
- Make an analysis of the theoretical approaches of the employee experience for designing the employee experience.
- Discover the crosspoints of the employee experience design and the organization's own established practices.
- Make conclusions from the theoretical approaches, combine it to the knowledge about the case organization and create the framework combining these.
- Present the results of the employee experience framework design in the form of suggestions to next steps for the use of the case organization.
- Make conclusions about the development process and further development areas and the possibilities to horizontal scaling in other organizations.

#### 4.1 The methodology and the application of the method

The method used for this thesis is near to action research. Action research combines developing and research in a cyclical process. It starts with a need for change and the result is an output. In this case the development task starts from the need for better processes to explore and enhance employee experience and the output is suggestions to an organization specific employee experience framework. Action research can be defined as a blended methodology research strategy or a process of deep understanding of the measures and actions to be taken into an envisioned future. Common to most action research approaches is the assumption that this deep understanding is 1) grounded in experience, 2) paired with an analytic approach and 3) followed by a reflection. The development work is based on existing theoretical framework but not restricted to any specific research method. The development task can also focus on different parts of the phenomenon being researched or the questions related to the process of (or towards) change. (Kananen 2012, 19 and 23; Carrweb.org)

According to Kananen there are some basic questions common to all development work: What factors influence the phenomenon to be developed and what are the causalities of these factor? How did the transformation succeed, what implications did the development work have and how was the development work experienced. (Kananen 2012, 25) As this study is focusing on the designing and planning a framework it must be noticed that although this study can be considered action research it is not identified as collaborative action research. The starting point and the purpose of the study or development task has been identified and designed collaboratively with the HR management but at this point the actions are not yet co-designed with the employees. Similarly, design thinking and service design methods are very present in this development work and form a part of the theoretical framework and the output of this action research. Therefore, although this study cannot be considered as a service design case as such, it offers the theoretical framework and a process description for a service design process that can be used in the case organization. It may also be applied to any other organization with the disclaimer that every organization is different, and the framework and the needs can be different in each organization and should be studied first. (Carrweb.org; Huhta & Myllyntaus 2021, Ch. 4.9.)

According to Kananen, knowledge of the phenomenon's structure, factors and causalities make it possible to influence the phenomenon. Development research is about taking solutions to a different operating environment. The researcher's own development research is positioned in the existing knowledge base of the field. By familiarizing with the literature, a researcher can find gray areas in the subject area that lack research. The literature review is also helpful in the practical implementation of the work. Previous studies offer proven tools such as metrics, research results and theories from which usage data can be derived for your own research. (Kananen 2012, 13 and 17.)

Action research often uses a mixed methodology of qualitative and quantitative and case-study research methods. It might be therefore either inductive, deductive, or abductive but cannot be defined by none of them. Inductive research aims to form a theory from specific findings which is often the case in qualitative research. Deductive research aims to verify theories using quantitative methods. In case-studies the methods can be described as abductive, that is, they aim to make observations and find a hypothesis to explain them. (Kananen 2012, 25-27.) Action research has the purpose of change which requires both deep understanding of causalities and how to influence them by an intervention. Design research can be seen as a part of action research but in action research the researcher does not necessarily take part in the design or development process itself, but the action or intervention is not complete until it is tested. (Kananen 2012, 38 & 45.) In this study, there is no intervention, but the aim is to understand the causalities of the employee experience (the research) and suggest possible tools for an intervention (action) with the purpose of change both in organizational and managerial processes. This change includes involving the employees better in designing the processes in the future.

Ojasalo and others define the following phases for an action research development task that are followed in this paper: 1. Identifying the object of development, 2. The perspective and the knowledge basis; 3. The development task; 4. Research approach and methods; 4. Implementing change and 5. Assessment. (Ojasalo et. al. 24-25.)

#### 4.2 Data collection and management

This development task is to find out the elements of and the reasoning behind the employee experience and the possible ways to measure it. It has not however included, due to the above-mentioned reasons any empirical data for the development task is to find a suggested methodology for gathering it based on the theoretical analysis. The data collected is from the desk study. In defining the state of play semi-structured interviews have been conducted with the HR management. The snowball method was useful in finding out the most essential questions to ask and to keep an open mind towards the development task. Other information is gathered from the written sources combining the literature and the information provided by the organization (in Annex 1). The name or the field of the organization are not expressed to create objectivity and possibilities for horizontal scaling.

#### 5 Suggestions for the employee element framework design and first steps

The case organization needs more insight on the effectiveness of the managerial coaching and on how the employees experience it. Therefore, it is important to define a specific employee experience framework for the organization that can be used as a tool to measure the good employee experience and how it can be enhanced by managerial coaching. This framework includes the following parts, using the modified principles of design thinking: Solve the right problem, create empathy by collaboration, make prototypes to learn and integrate it into new ways of doing.

A good employee experience creates wellbeing and job satisfaction, engagement and commitment and good performance. A good employee experience forms part of a good customer experience. The organization (the workplace society and rules) and the management form a part of how the employee experience is formed. Employee experience is also influenced by other internal and external factors. It creates empathy and insight on how the employees perceive the expectations by the organization and management. It is valuable to use design principles to create cooperation and engagement to the process.

The indicators on wellbeing, engagement and productivity should be combined with the data on employee experience and an analysis of the correlation between them. These elements can be seen as results of a good employee experience and are already being well acknowledged in the HR functions, organizational culture, and managerial practices. In the previous HRM studies it has already been stated that these elements of workplace wellbeing, employee engagement, job satisfaction etc. correlate with productivity.

To make the most of the employee experience thinking, the difference to the previous HRM approaches is that not all the elements that create the employee experience can or even should be manageable by the organization. The employee experience concept allows the organization to create the best circumstances for the employees to be the best employees they can and to meet the customer's expectations as well as they can. But this requires a whole new mindset and good communication of what is being expected from both sides.

Before starting the development process, it is useful to make a communication plan. In the first stage the purpose is to gather information on what the employees consider as important factors to their employee experience and give scores on how much they value each element's importance to the employee experience. In the second stage those factors chosen as most important should be explored with specific questions or statements. At this stage the employees could give points on how well the organization is performing in these elements and make suggestions to enhance the performance. In the third stage the employee experience thinking should be analyzed with additional data and integrated into the management processes and day-to-day work.

#### 5.1 Design thinking and service design methods are useful in exploring the employee experience

As the employee experience design has been developed at the same time and interrelated to the design thinking and service design it is warmly suggested that the process would include service design tools. There is a lot of literature supporting that interactive methods like service design are useful in creating an empathetic atmosphere and engaging the whole organization into the process.

Many people learn best by participating and experimenting. Service design is human centered, collaborative, iterative, sequential, real, and holistic and is especially useful in

change management, creating awareness and design new ways of doing. In a service design process, one should ensure awareness, excitement, activation, and establishment. The service design process and some examples of service design tools are explained shortly in chapter 2 .5 of this paper and are suggested to be explored more widely from literature and in practical courses. There is a collection of service design literature also in the references of this paper.

## 5.2 Before starting: Communication plan

For a good employee experience, it is also important to build trust and create empathy with proactive communications. The design thinking and service design tools offer a lot of information about proactive communication, and it is more: it is considered as an integral part of it. Including the communications functions from the beginning also creates more engagement to the process for they are the ones who think about the “how” in their every-day-work. It is easier to engage people to the process if they know what it is and what to expect from it.

Before getting started with the development process, it is valuable to take a moment to discuss the purpose of the process and how it will be communicated. This should be done by the owner of the process, for example the HR manager, together with the communications manager and the leadership. A communication plan should be made to create openness and transparency from the beginning. There is no need to dwell on the question of communication for a long period, but it might be a good idea to start with this step so that there is the easily accessible information about the process, and the reasons and values behind it. In the communication plan there should be all stages of the process: before starting at each stage and after the process about the next steps.

Information could be provided in the intranet about the process itself, about the story behind it and the target state and the state of will. There might also be a list of readings for those interested in learning more to support the learning-oriented culture in the organization. Chapter 2 of this paper provide a good overview about the concept of employee experience and the design thinking, and the list of references offer a suggestion of readings.

## 5.3 First step: Explore what the useful elements of employee experience are

The first step should be to select what elements of the employee experience the employees consider most meaningful and select the most appropriate elements to explore. This can be done by a simple survey of selecting the most important elements and give them scores of how much each element is valued. The resulting elements can be chosen from the results either by the team leaders in teams in a co-creative matter, in the organizational level or by the leadership. In this case, as the managerial coaching principles guidelines of the organization has the strong focus in doing together in teams and to create engagement it would be recommended to do the survey together at the same time with the team and go

through the results immediately and using some workshop method to make choices in the team level. This can be done by using an interactive digital platform for the survey that show the results anonymously and immediately in a visually understandable manner. The individual anonymous replies can be gathered by the organization for an organizational analysis, but the main purpose of the workshop is to gather insight of the teams' expectations of the employee experience. It is important however that the elements chosen to the next stage are equal to all employees of the organization, whereas at the team level, the results can be used directly to enhance the work experience in the team. The team results should be analyzed and put together either directly by the leadership or in a workshop including the organizations' employees. The organization has the tradition of regular joint staff meeting with the leadership and this workshop would be possible to be done, in some digital platform in a couple of minutes during this staff meeting with a simple question of: Choose the right questions.

Designing the employee experience there can be various ways for grouping the possible elements. In the organization the following managerial coaching principles are adopted as described in Chapter 1 in this paper:

1. Doing together
2. Individuality, human management
3. Goal setting
4. Results, metrics
5. How do I act as a trendsetter
6. Trust

Combining the employee experience approaches to the managerial coaching principles adopted by the organization and for the purpose of gathering data of their successful practice the organization could divide the employee experience elements in a similar grouping:

1. Doing together
2. Individuality, human management
3. Goal setting
4. Trust.

The metrics of the performance suggested in the managerial coaching principles should be used in comparison to the employee experience, and the personal outcomes of wellbeing, engagement, and job satisfaction. These data can be gathered either at the same time or, preferably separately within a reasonable timeframe. The process of exploring what the right indicators for the outcomes are, should be at best co-designed with the employees as well, but to get things started with a prototype, it could be plausible to decide on the outcome indicators taken from the strategy and co-creatively tackle on them later on, in the next strategy creating process, for example.

The fifth principle of managers as trendsetters and the management practices should be included as a crosscutting question for other principles and elements.

The managerial principles of the organization include pretty much the same elements that many scholars include in to the cultural and social environment of working as Morgan phrases them or under similar topics and it is quite easy to combine the elements with similar managing principles. However, equally many scholars argue that the technology or other tools in use as well as the physical environment of the working place affect the employee experience as well, and therefore it would be plausible to add one more topic, not included in the managerial coaching principles:

#### 5. Physical environment and technology

It would be suggested for the organization to include the following elements to the first survey to the employees. This listing should be presented in a survey/ in the workshops with an explanation. The explanation or the cover letter should be carefully thought by the HR together with the leadership and communications so that it presents the values and the state of will of the leadership and provides the necessary information.

##### 5.3.1 The cover letter for the survey/ workshops

The cover letter for the survey should include:

- A description the development task in question,
- Authors of the survey and possible author, target group of the survee,
- Justification of the necessity of the research,
- Mention of the use of the research results and data and the preservation of the respondents' anonymity,
- Mention that each respondent's answers are necessary for the success of the research,
- The last return date of the form (no response time longer than 1-2 weeks after receiving the form unless there is a particularly compelling reason),
- Thanks in advance for the answers and cooperation,
- Names and signatures of the author and the author's representative. (Ojasalo et. al., 133.)

Whatever is decided to write in the explanation, it is very important it is considered carefully: one should show appreciation and empathy, be precise with what is needed and be open about the process. It is equally important to nurture the language and endorse values in

what you say than what you say in this cover letter. It is essential to express WHY this process is being made and considered as important. The cover letter should be precise on what is needed at this moment and be as short as possible. You could be providing a section about the process in the website and provide links to gather further information about the process in this cover letter. The cover letter could be similar to the following:

*The managerial practices in the organization are supposed to support the following elements in your work grouped under earlier defined targets by the team managers in a co-creative process. **What do you personally consider the most important factors you would include when thinking about your own personal experiences in your work?** How do you value the following principles in your own work? Are they important for you to succeed in your tasks, for your wellbeing at work, motivation, job satisfaction and engagement to reach the goals set on our strategy?*

- *Please put the numbered topics in the right order according to your preferences, most important or significant up.*
- *Then give the elements below scores according to how you value them. The scale is 1-5 from the lowest to the highest evaluation. (1 No significance to my employee experience: Does not affect my work at all. - 5 High significance to my employee experience: Very important for performing well in my work)*
- *After this you may suggest your own topics: What do you consider we should measure so that we know we are supporting you in your work?*

*NB: Please be aware that at this point we are asking **what you think we should measure**, and you will have the opportunity to comment on the performance of the organization and your team at a later stage with other, more specific questions.*

### 5.3.2 Questions to tackle in the first stage in a survey and/or workshops

The topics that should be tackled at this stage are combining the elements of employee experience previously explored in the former literature and the managerial coaching principles adopted in the organization. It is very important to combine these two to create engagement to the managerial coaching principles and show appreciation towards the employees in following how they are performed. There should also be a possibility for the employees to suggest more topics. These new elements should be considered to either add as new topics or ensure these are included under the existing topics. These are the topics that are suggested to be discussed at the first stage at this point. The formulation is similar to the managerial principles so that the link to them is to be discovered easily. The organization leadership and the HR might also consider other topics not included in this list:

1. Doing together:

- Interaction
  - Transparency and openness in my team and in the organization
  - Stakeholder inclusion
  - Respectful and constructive behavior
  - Technical interactional platforms
2. Individuality, human management
    - Interaction and trust in every-day work, Facilitating and listening managers.
    - Acknowledging personal strengths and abilities aswell as personal life situations
    - Ensuring equality in treatment
    - Encouraging employees to take responsibility over their own expertise and developing their work.
    - Collegial accountability
  3. Goal setting
    - Bottom-up goal setting,
    - Assessment of short, midterm and long-term goals in the team
    - Proactive leading ensuring the energy and space to reach the goals and a supportive
    - Organizational culture.
  4. Trust
    - The employees as well as the managers have sufficient skills, enough time to perform their duties and correct attitude towards others.
    - Contractual trust (fulfill promises and be consistent),
    - Communicational trust (be honest and give constructive and positive feedback)
    - Competencial trust (give space to grow and take responsibility and give recognition).
  5. Physical and technological environment
    - The actual work space
    - The flexibility on the working place
    - **Technological environment**
    - Technological tools
    - Technological support

### 5.3.3 Analysis of the results

The result of the survey and/or workshops should be analyzed and presented. There might not be need for a separate presentation of the results as it could naturally be forming part of the second stage of exploring the elements. After the first stage you know what the employees value the most to perform their work. At this point it might be considered changing the order

of the topics according to what the employees value the most to create engagement and show empathy. Remembering that this is the first time they will answer, and they are not yet familiar with what exactly is considered under each topic, the order of the topics might be considered as a mere suggestion. However, it gives some idea of how the themes are valued: If most of the employees raise one theme above others it might be something that have suffered lack of appreciation in the organization. Altogether, this is something that you will explore in the second stage.

There should be a consensus over the analysis of the results and it should be discussed before starting the process: for example, should the themes be presented according to the appreciation in the next survey, how many elements of each topic should be included in the exploring of the employee experience and/or what are the numerical limits for an element to be included in the next stage or should all the elements be included but put the appreciation score visible. It is essential to plan the analysis according to the state of will but the results should not be influenced by the leadership. Planning the analysis in advance creates transparency and builds trust. It could also be communicated by anticipation in the cover letters or instructions of the first and the second stage.

#### 5.4 Second step: Explore the employee experience

The second stage can be performed in a similar way to the first stage, in a workshop in teams with the help of a survey and gathering the results in a workshop for the whole organization. At the beginning of the process, it is however important that there are not too many similar surveys or workshops on the subject and the processes should be therefore considered carefully considering that the employees should be able to make a difference between the two stages of “what we want” and “how we want it” and to ensure it is not too tiring to engage employees continuously in surveys and workshops. Later, only stage 2: exploring the employee experiences should be renewed continuously and stage 1: defining the employee experience more rarely.

It would be suggested to use statements that the employee could relate to - or not. The employees would give a number for each statement according to how they think the organization - or the team - has succeeded in the matter. The numbers could be from 1 (poorly) to 5 (excellently). At this point, after the first stage all the elements should be considered relevant but as there was no exact examples in the first stage to avoid misunderstandings of the question-setting, it might be considered to include a valuation score for each statement (from 1 to 5, how important this is for me?).

##### 5.4.1 The cover letter for the survey/workshop of the second stage

The cover letter should include the results of the first stage and the analysis principles and how they have been selected and why. As in the first cover letter/ instructions, it should be written according to the communication plan and with the help of the communications and

show appreciation and empathy, be precise with what is needed and open about the process. Not forgetting links offering more information concise instructions for the second stage is the main purpose of the cover letter or instructions. A suggestion for a cover letter:

*The managerial practices in the organization are supposed to support the following elements in your work grouped under earlier defined targets by the team managers in a co-creative process. Earlier we asked you about your feelings towards the themes we have identified as valuable for your work. The results of the earlier stage have been analyzed in the teams and by the whole organization. Now it is time for your evaluation so that we can create you the best employee experience: How is the organization performing in the following topics? Remember, it is your personal experience we are looking for. If you have suggestions how to improve, please let us know. If not, don't worry, we can figure this out.*

- *Please tell us if you think the statements below are correct. The scale is 1-5 from the lowest to the highest evaluation. (1 Not at all and 5 Extremely)*
- *After this you may suggest your own ideas to improvement, other elements that we have failed to mention here that affect your work either positively or negatively, and/or other feedback related to these subjects and statement or to the designing process in general.*

*The results of this survey will be discussed in teams and within the organization. The results will be communicated and cross-referenced and analyzed together to other indicators like wellbeing and performance. This survey is being conducted to ensure that you are being recognized in your own work, the ways of working and the ways for developing yourself and your work. The follow-up will be once in the year during this strategic period. The framework will be reviewed in the next strategic period.*

#### 5.4.2 Suggestion for statements for the second phase

Under each topic there are statements that the employees can evaluate, according to how true or false they find them. According to the results and analysis of the valuation of the topics at the first stage it might be considered whether to include the statements or not. The statements have been formed by combining the employee experience and design thinking literature. In addition to these statements there should be a possibility for the employees to suggest their own statements, express their feelings about the subject and suggest possible solutions freely. Under some topics there are more statements than others, but the organization is free to choose, how many statements there would be under each topic.

##### 1. Doing together:

###### Interaction

- Interaction with my team and other colleagues creates added value to my work.
- There are places and opportunities to collaborate with others.

- The meeting 43rganizat support my performance at work.

#### Transparency and openness

- The organization and my team is open and transparent and this helps me in my work.

#### Stakeholder inclusion:

- We include stakeholders into our work processes.
- There is supportive technology provided for stakeholder inclusion.
- There is managerial support for stakeholder inclusion.
- I have sufficient skills to perform well in including the stakeholders

#### Respectful and constructive behavior

- I feel that I am recognized in every situation for my skills, knowledge and performance
- I feel it is easy to express constructive criticism in our team
- There are established ways to express respect and constructive criticism in our team
- The management of the organization support respectful behavior in their behavior and their actions.
- I have the skills and knowledge to act respectful and constructively and know what is expected from me

#### Technical interactional platforms

- The organization provides well working platforms for interaction within the organization and outside the organization
- I have the skills and knowledge needed to use them
- The management supports using the technology in a productive way

#### Customer-oriented working

- There are established ways to enhance the customer experience and I know what they are.
- I am free to enhance the customer experience by developing my own work.
- I have the skills and knowledge needed to establish good customer experience.
- I have the skills and knowledge needed to explore and recognize the customer experience.
- The organization offers support for meeting customer expectations.

## 2. Individuality, human management

#### Interaction and trust in every-day work, Facilitating and listening managers

- The management does not micromanage the performance in our team.
- I trust the management in their work.
- I trust my colleagues.
- I can be open with my team manager about my life situation, wellbeing, job-satisfaction and performance at work.

- I can be open with my colleagues about my life situation, wellbeing, job-satisfaction and performance at work.
- I am accepted and respected for who I am.

#### Acknowledging personal strengths and abilities aswell as personal life situations

- I feel I am in the right place.
- I get acknowledged when I perform well.
- My team manager is familiar with my strengths and abilities.
- I get assigned tasks according to my abilities and strengths.
- There is flexibility in the working processes according to life situations.
- I have the possibility to work remotely or at the office and I am happy how it is arranged in our organization.

#### Ensuring equality in treatment

- Our team has rules and procedures that we all respect.
- I know what is expected of me and my colleagues.
- The management supports equal treatment in every activity.
- There is no discrimination or favoring in our team.

#### Encouraging employees to take responsibility over their own expertise and developing their work

- I am encouraged to learn new things.
- I can decide how to do my tasks independently.
- There is an established process for developing my work and expertise.

#### Collegial accountability

- I feel accountable mostly to my colleagues for performing well.
- I am accepted and respected for what I do in my work.
- My colleagues and team manager trust me in my work.
- The colleagues in my team have the sufficient skills and knowledge to perform well.
- I know what my colleagues do and trust them to perform their tasks well.
- I can rely on my colleagues to help me with my work, especially when I get sick go on vacation and there is an established process for that.

### 3. Goal setting

#### Bottom-up goal setting,

- I know what my team's and organization's goals are.
- We decide on our goals together in our team.
- The goal setting process is understandable, transparent, and inclusive.

- I have the skills and knowledge and managerial support to participate in the goal setting of my team.

Assessment of short, midterm and long-term goals in teams,

- We know what our goals are and how they are measured.
- The goal-setting process is clear.
- Our goals are flexible for changes and we know how to assess them in my team.

Proactive leading ensuring the energy and space to reach the goals and a supportive

- I can trust the management to see the upcoming challenges and to tackle them in a timely manner.
- The team manager knows what my tasks are.
- The workload is distributed evenly in my team.
- There is an established process for sharing and resharing the workload evenly when needed.

Organizational culture

- I know what is expected of me and our team in the organization.
- The organizational culture supports me and my team in our work and goal setting.
- There is an open and safe environment.

#### 4. Trust

The employees as well as the managers have sufficient skills, enough time to perform their duties and correct attitude towards others

- An atmosphere of trust enables focusing on the basic task.
- I can trust the team manager does not assign me projects I don't have time to tackle.

Contractual trust (fulfill promises and be consistent)

- I can trust my team manager and my colleagues to fulfill their promises.
- The team works consistently and therefore it is easy to plan my work.

Communicational trust (be honest and give constructive and positive feedback)

- I can be honest and give constructive feedback in my team.
- I get both constructive and positive feedback from my work from my colleagues and from the team manager.

Competencial trust (give space to grow and take responsibility and give recognition).

- I know I can learn and take responsibility in my work.

- I can affect my own working space, working hours and working methods.
- I get recognition from my work.
- The team is happy to get recognition from others in the organization.
- The manager recognizes each member's workload and working results

## 5. Physical and technological environment

### The actual work space

- I enjoy being at work and like to show it to my friends.
- There are possibilities for multiple options for workplace.
- My working station at the office offers me a place to focus and concentrate.
- It is pleasant to have meetings at our office.

### Flexibility on the working place

- I have enough choices to choose where I work.
- The organization supports remote working.
- I have enough influence on the remote working rules in my team.
- The team working processes and activities support and encourage participating remotely.

### Technological tools

- The tools we use support our working processes.
- I have sufficient skills and knowledge to use all the technological tools provided.
- Technology mostly supports my work and not hinder it.

### Technological support

- There is enough support for the use of the technology provided.
- The relationship between employee needs and organization's requirements are met.

#### 5.4.3 Analyzing the data and cross-referencing

It is also important to combine the employee experience data with the data about the outcome of a good employee experience: wellbeing, engagement, and performance (or by choice, other desired results) to the employee experience results. The questions for work satisfaction could include values, purposeful job, growth, and compensation. The questions for wellbeing should most likely be the already established questions in the well-being survey. The questions for performance could be decided either in the teams or by the management at this point.

This can be done at the same time or in another time. For example, the data on wellbeing is already gathered and it should be considered where the survey should be performed

separately or together with the employee experience. The results should also be connected to chosen performance indicators, for example those mentioned in the managerial guidelines or others selected in a equally codesigned process. Combining these three sources of data: 1) Employee experience performance scores of the organization, 2) Feelings on wellbeing and engagement of the employee and 3) defined performance indicators it is possible to follow how the employee experience evolves and how it effects on the individuals and on the performance of the organization.

### 5.5 Third step: Measure and integrate the employee experience into management processes

The third step is to measure the outcomes and create a strategy for employee experience. In the managerial coaching principles of the organization, the metrics are divided into qualitative and quantitative indicators. The qualitative indicators are not specified but the managers are encouraged to leading by creating empowerment, joy of work and meaningfulness, managing by example and authenticity. The guidelines give examples of quantitative indicators on the performance: the number of stakeholder contacts, participants in stakeholder meetings, analytics from websites and location information service, keeping schedules, number of cases in the process, funding, working hours.

The metrics to analyze and assess the performance on the employee experience goal setting are:

- **Employee experience indicators** as described and designed in the first and second phase.
- **Employee experience outcome indicators**, similar to the qualitative indicators of managerial coaching and according to the employee experience literature: Wellbeing at work (can be the usual wellbeing survey), job satisfaction and engagement.
- **Professional individual and organizational performance**, for example as described in the managerial guidelines of the organization or other indicators that support the strategy implementing.

It is important to integrate the employee experience thinking into day-to-day management both at the team level and at the organizational level, define the time span on how often new data is needed and when it would be useful to start the whole process from the beginning. For example: exploring the employee experience once a year and redefining the most suitable employee experience concept for the organization (the first step: what do we want to measure) every 4 years or how it works best for the organizational planning, example combining to the strategy process. The leadership should also define measures and guidelines to the management on how to tackle poor performance on employee experience elements.

The process is iterative and can be changed when necessary but keeping in mind that the organization also needs solid comparable data for a longer period of time.

As managerial coaching is performed mostly in the team-level in the organization it might be wise to consider mostly the measures of the employee experience designing also in the team-level although analyzing the results can be done in the organizational level, as well. This way, it would be a useful tool to measure how the managerial coaching is perceived in the teams, as well and would offer a good way to gather comparable data between the teams.

## 6 Conclusions and reflections

In the theoretical framework there are a lot of suggestions to be discovered, both for an approach and for the elements for the employee experience but the first lesson in this study has been that one size does not fit all. Huhta and Myllyntaus as experienced professionals in human resource management offer the most useful theoretical approach to employee experience: Create your own framework! (Huhta & Myllyntaus 2021, CH. 4.9)

To explore the employee experience the most challenging task is to keep the focus: there is so much information and formulae to discover the employee experience that there must be strategical choices made from the very beginning. Combining the EX thinking to other research traditions has resulted fruitful to create a specific framework for the case organization. It has helped to see that different organizations might have a different focus and different outcomes in mind. The many different lines of development towards the employee experience thinking: Leading with empathy, design thinking, experience economy, HRM development, managerial coaching... led to acknowledging that different approaches offer different outcomes and from different point of view: managerial, organizational, and individual and considering all these three aspects is essential for engaging the organization for the development and changing the mind-set.

There is no comprehensive theoretical guidelines for employee experience design in hand that combines the traditions of design to HRM practices, although the academic papers published in the recent couple of years is extensive. In just a couple of years there has been intensive development in practice and in the academical discussion that such meta-research would be useful that creates some taxonomy according to the tradition (design/ HRM/leadership studies/organizational psychology etc.) and the point of view (managerial, organizational or individual). For further development it would be useful to combine and analyze all the employee experience approaches and build a step-by-step guide with different types of co-creative processes for exploring the employee experience for different purposes. Keeping in mind that every organization needs to build its own framework, there could be a list of reference questions under each topic, much alike in this paper. However, (for the Finnish speaking readers), Työnantajabrändi ja työntekijäkokemus by Huhta and Myllyntaus (2021) is recommendable reading for creating an understanding of the phenomenon.

Another useful academical effort for the future development would be to combine employee experience thinking to the cognitive neuroscience and brain health. The workforce is by no means a growing resource although the tasks probably will change with the technology. Therefore, there will be a growing number of demands to the employees we are not yet quite familiar with not to mention how these new demands and developments will affect us. But empathy remains essential in all process planning that incorporates human resources.

Co-designing is essential to the employee experience: Design thinking creates empathy. As it has been shown in this paper it is most important to include the employees to the employee experience design process and for every leader it would be useful to learn interactive creating methods, for example using service design methods and tools. It is however as much important to discover what co-designing is not! Not every manager is an expert in co-design methods or wants to be and there might be frustration towards co-creating methods if there is not enough knowledge of how to use them: A workshop still needs to have some goal and there must be an outcome that can be seen as useful. Otherwise “doing together” can be seen as a time-consuming way to decide something that the managers could easily come up with themselves. Although employee experience is all about creating a more empathetical leadership approach there still have to be processes and managing one can rely on in doing their work. This is why employee experience thinking should be combining the expectations and experiences inside and outside the organization in the value-creation. The EX-elements should at minimum be connected to the strategical choices and vision of the organization.

Service design aims to find new tools and insight to develop the service provided. Combining the service design methods and the customer design to the theoretical framework and steps introduced in this paper would be plausible and fruitful. Yohn suggests that the employee experiences should be built together with the customer experience, based on the same values. According to Yohn a company should attend to its employee experience with the same intensity that to its customer experience. As a result, the employees will be more satisfied, and the customers get better service. (Yohn 2016.) Järvinen implemented service design in the health care sector to enhance customer experience in a very successful way. In the development process it became however soon obvious that the customers were not the only ones to benefit from the process but also the personnel. The service design development project enhanced the tool set for the development they were in their own experience previously lacking. The co-designed value formation can be useful in developing the organization of work. (Järvinen 2019, 24-28.)

In this case there was little or none at all focus on customer experience in the case organization but a subtle suggestion it should be recognized for building one. In a customer-oriented organization a full understanding of customer experience with employee experience could be giving the best results. In the case organization this would require involving the stakeholders. At the same time, it would probably influence the elements valued in the employee experience. In fact, Yohn makes a systematic correlation between customer

experience methods and employee experience methods. He claims that for the design of employee experience organizations should just apply the same principles to the HR practices their marketing and operations teams use for customer experience design. Yohn understands the employee experience design as means to empathetic leadership based on employees' motivation factors and desires. Yohn suggests segmentation and journey map as useful tools borrowed from the customer experience design. (Yohn 2016.) This was by choice not what was done in this development task but could also be considered, especially when the organization is, as in this case, customer oriented.

In the future development, while discovering the employee experience and especially when trying to measure it, it is useful to be aware of the many levels of experiences. This also indicates that simplifying the individual experiences into any chart or model is quite a complex task. Depending on their strength and level of importance there are casual and everyday experiences, conscious, memorable, or meaningful experiences or even disruptive and revolutionary experiences. Considering this in the context of the employee experience it would be possible to make classifications of the different elements of the EX: For example: are the "Moments of Joy" explored by some authors, i.e. Morgan being considered more in the casual everyday level, or should one think of them as rather revolutionary, mind-blowing experiences that dominate the employee experience? Are there more important experiences than others that can dominate the full picture or do they maybe compensate each other similarly as what Popelka suggest? Are there differences between the managerial approach and individual approaches in giving importance to some elements according to the level of the perceived experience? These are factors to explore while co-designing the employee experience. In any case it might be a good idea to create some indicators to show the level of importance of each element of the EX given by the employee. (Huhta & Myllyntaus 2021, Ch. 4.6.)

#### 6.1 Reflections on the development task, the methodology and the results

The leadership was changing in the period of the developing task and so it was agreed that it was up to the new leadership to decide how to use the results and not to mention any recognizable reference to the actual organization. Therefore, it was also possible to keep the findings public. Furthermore, it was also easier to distance myself from the actual organization and make more neutral findings that might be useful for other organizations, as well. This being said, it has been made clear that every organization should do the same work, one size does not fit all for every organization and every situation is unique. Some areas are more useful than others depending on the organization.

To explore the elements of and tools to design the employee experience can be exhausting for there are many different ways to even define the concept, let alone to find tools to measure it. It is very important to make an effort to discover the state of play and the target state. In this case it was done by 3 interviews and a desk study and naturally should be

followed by the suggested survey to the employees, first for the state of play and next for setting, achieving and measuring the target state. This is also useful for avoiding any extra work that does not lead to any action if the employees or the leadership is against it or don't find it relevant. During the development task it was curiously quite useful not to think about the uniqueness of the situation around every corner. The organization has experienced somewhat difficult couple of years and developing a strategical approach has helped to see much more possibilities in this development task. Although the next step should most definitely be involving the people working in the organization, it would have been laborious to confront the feelings and emotions of the employees without knowing what could be done next, referring to the transformation period between leaderships. This was also a personal learning moment: it is up to the management and leadership to see the uniqueness in the situation but distancing yourself from it for a moment might serve for a clearer view and openness for the new possibilities in the situation. As long as you then create the best possible ways to encounter the situation, with empathy and together with others. In design thinking changing views horizontally and vertically is an acknowledged tool to create empathy and to find new ways to encounter the challenge or find solutions and reasonably so. In workshops switching roles, for example, could be the way to be able to allow yourself to suggest something unordinary that can serve as an eyeopener or at least an icebreaker for ideating further.

The employees need clarity and trustworthiness in any development task made for the organization, especially when it involves their own work, working environment or working culture. The workshops are great for involving people to the decision making, for finding new paths and to enhance the sense of meaningfulness. But if the results do not lead to any actions the mutual trust between the management and the employees is endangered. Therefore, it is up to the new leadership to make and keep this promise when they decide on the further actions, possibly with the help of these guidelines.

The presented results are a conclusion and adaptation of the theory being studied. There are some decisions that could have been made differently according to the theories, some examples mentioned above. The focus in this paper was in the organizations abilities to conduct the development task in hand and therefore it has also influenced the decisions to do differently than what some authors have been suggesting. As the results should be seen as suggestions for the management at the same time, in the development process there has been a lot of consideration in how to combine all the knowledge into the operating environment of the organization, especially when intending to combine the previous development and create continuity. As the employee experience literature strongly suggests, creating empathy was also in this paper the first step.

The results of this development task focus on suggestions to the organization for the first steps in creating a framework for employee experience. The framework is unique and created specifically for the case organization. The theoretical part of this study is to verify what the employee experience is claimed to be, and it is written with the aim that it would serve to

form the basis for the knowledge about the employee experience generally, including the case organization. It would be wonderful if these suggestions or the before analyzed readings would be considered useful in the case organization or in any other organization (to build their own framework) but most importantly this is just one suggestion to move forward and open to any changes that the organization needs. This keeping in mind it is equally important to get started - it might mean failing but that is also part of the learning process.

Even this development task has been redesigned after failing. At first it was indeed the intention to form a more general approach to the employee experience with a theoretical classification of the different theoretical approaches. However, the first attempts for interviews and workshops failed dramatically: the employees either did not want to share their thoughts or feelings or they did not understand what the intention of the effort was. We did not speak the same language and there were essential elements lacking: trust, engagement and most importantly, empathy. Therefore, there was a need to change the focus and take a step back in this development task. This happened at the same time when there were many changes in the organization and therefore it became even more useful to change the focus and start from the framework and later engage the employees in workshops.

This paper was first started during the covid-pandemic. During the process of writing there has been a change in the operational environment as well as in the academical settings and focus. But it was the changes that so drastically affected the employees that mostly motivated for this work. Adler said in 2011, that management should be *management of possibilities* and based on hope, wishes, innovations - even beauty. Leadership should have the courage to see the current reality and different possibilities to inspire people to consider the possibilities. This quick perception of new possibilities requires continuous learning. The most important task of leadership training should therefore be to help current and future leaders to change their position and perspective, i.e. to see things on both at micro and macro level. Management should consider the importance of motivation for work results and at the same time strive to achieve inspiration and even the creation of passion in both managers and personnel. Adler encourages continuous learning also by learning from the environment. (Adler 2011, 208, 210 and 216.) After the covid-pandemic, this became suddenly, almost overnight, relevant in any leadership studies. Personally, while experiencing many simultaneous personal and professional challenges during this writing process familiar to many during and after the covid-19 pandemic in changing circumstances, the realization of what the *management of possibilities*, hope and inspiration and changing the perspective means in real life formed a solid basis and motivation for this work.

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## Interviews

Interview 1, 21.12.22 HR manager of the case organization.

Interview 2, 26.9.2023 administrative director of the case organization.

Interview 3, 9.10.2023 HR Manager of the case organization.

## Appendix 1

### The Guidelines for Managerial Coaching

*Printed from the organization's website 24<sup>th</sup> October 2023 and translated from Finnish to English by the author of this paper. N.B. In this appendix all the specific references to the case organization have been removed intentionally and replaced by more neutral terminology, like i.e. [organization].*

The ideal of the management [in this organization] is managerial coaching. In managerial coaching, the goal is to develop subordinates' skills and increase motivation. By discussing, listening and asking questions, the leader and subordinates together identify problems and look for solutions. This increases the meaning of work and improves well-being at work.

Coaching leadership demands a lot from both leaders and subordinates. Defining a common goal, learning new ways of working, and building an open and confidential atmosphere require systematic and consistent work to which the entire organization commits.

1. Doing together
2. Individuality, human management
3. Goal setting
4. Results, metrics
5. How do I act as a trendsetter
6. Trust

#### *Doing together*

"Are we doing things for people or are we doing things together with them?"

Doing together can be viewed from the perspective of internal cooperation and external cooperation.

A good customer experience requires that we work in a multi-professional manner, monitoring the interests of municipalities and operators in the region and responding to development needs. Effective and meaningful work requires that we respond to significant societal opportunities and challenges together with other actors in the region. The aim of the organization is to create a problem description and solutions, as well as ways to work together with customers.

The organization's management and ways of doing work must support working together, which accelerates innovation, multi-professionalism and responsibility-taking. In expert work, interaction brings added value. Competence exists and develops in communication between people - not between the ears of a single person. Economy and productivity increase when we

allocate our limited resources correctly by prioritizing the common agenda of the entire house.

The union already has a culture and way of thinking of working together and the will to develop them!

#### **Ways to promote working together:**

1. Let's determine the functional goals and prepare the projects together and make a choice about which things will be done together. There is a joint discussion about the goals and the substance of the work between the management group and the management team.
2. Let's make both work transparent and cooperation visible
3. Working together is resourced and things are done together systematically.
4. Let's involve stakeholders from the beginning and make their contributions visible.
5. Respectful and constructive behavior towards others. We are interested in each other's work. Let's help each other and be helped.
6. Let's clarify the meaning of current interaction platforms.
7. Let's look at all activities from a customer-oriented perspective: what added value does the activity bring to the customer.

#### *Individuality, people management*

"Interaction situations are the moments in which it is decided how well the team will succeed."

The organization's strategy can only be realized with the help of people. People and their experiences and feelings are at the center of the customer experience and personnel experience focal points of the union's strategy. On the other hand, achieving our strategic goals with focus on effectiveness and productivity and economy is strongly dependent on people.

#### **Interaction**

- The most important tools of managerial work are trust and interaction. Creating and maintaining trust requires constant interaction towards and between team members. Creative information work takes place between people.
- It is important for the supervisor to ensure time and procedures for interaction
- Through his own actions, the supervisor sets an important example of the meaning of interaction and the style of interaction
- The importance of listening - we (and especially managers) have two ears and only one mouth for a reason! Show interest and ask additional questions. The manager should not bring up his own opinion right at the beginning of the conversation. Tomorrow's manager doesn't say so much, but rather listens and facilitates people's joint movement of ideas.
- In a large group, different interaction techniques can be used, e.g. pair drills or opinion threads

#### **Individuality**

- Perception of difference as something that brings added value to the whole.
- In managing individuality, it is important to know your subordinates, their strengths, resources and situation
- Treating different people equally is also important

### **Taking responsibility**

- Encouraging employees to take responsibility for their own expertise and the development of their work
- Taking responsibility for one's own, the team's and the whole house's work and achieving goals is a journey towards adulthood. Co-workers and teams should feel responsible and accountable to each other, not so much to their superiors.
- Problems are discussed directly with the individual

### *Setting a goal*

"Ambitious bottom-up goals are the only way to operate successfully in an uncertain operating environment."

- Management by objectives in the context of coaching management
- The setting of the goals is guided by the strategy. Goals and measures derived from strategic choices are defined annually. Annual goals are defined from the bottom up; the starting point is operational planning. Short-term measures are defined based on annual goals.
- Goals are defined together
- When goals are set together, joint ownership of them is created, commitment is also made to them, and the level of ambition of the goal is often set higher
- Top-down goal setting is avoided
- When such questions are to be asked, it should be done in the form of a question
- Breakpoints of goals for joint assessment
- Short, medium and long goals and measuring their realization
- Evaluation of the realization of the goals and feedback together: We learn and can take a stand on possibly necessary corrective actions
- Management proactivity
- The leader must have a clear idea of the direction in which we are going. The leader stands on top of the mountain, eyes on the goal
- The manager's task is to ensure that sufficient energy is allocated to achieving the goal amidst the busyness of everyday work, that the actors are given enough space for so-called make a result

### **The importance of organizational culture**

- We dare to take reasonable risks when setting a goal, if we receive a signal from management that failures are allowed and we have internalized the nature of knowledge work and our operating environment: risks are an inherent part of our operations. Experiments serve as a means of risk management
- Goals come from the top down in the form of a question, allowing them to be challenged; commitment and ambition grow
- The team sets the goals, the supervisor ensures that they are in line with the strategy

- Encouraged to take on challenging tasks and supported in achieving goals

### *Results, metrics*

"How to get even more impact and dynamism in your work?"

- Setting goals
- Goal setting takes place in cooperatively and a particularly important role is played by the people who actively influence the unit's results.
- The unit's goals are defined based on the general goals of the organization.
- The starting point of the goals is the determination of issues and phenomena to be solved.
- When solving issues and phenomena, it is not only the solutions that are important, i.e. "the matter is taken care of", but the learning process, i.e. "how we perceive things and phenomena and how we solve them".

### **Metrics**

- The indicators point towards the future. They do not measure only the quantity of work, but above all the quality of work and processes. The metrics tell how the performance of the individuals and the group relates to the previous performance.
- Metrics must be defined for each team separately. This requires time, thought and cooperation. The metrics should be created together with the whole group.
- The metrics tell if the resources are directed correctly and if additional resources and e.g. cooperation across team boundaries are needed somewhere.
- Metrics are used both for evaluating results and for learning. If you can measure something, you can also improve it.
- It is worth benchmarking the metrics of a peer organization.
- "You can get started with measuring by taking a few meters for trial use."

### **Examples of performance indicators**

- Number and quality of stakeholder contacts (do the contacts have an appeal and implementation possibilities)
- The number of participants or participation percentages of stakeholder meetings
- Analytics of location information service and websites
- Keeping to schedules
- Number of cases to be processed
- The amount of funding coming to the stakeholders
- Working hours spent on a specific matter
- Qualitative evaluation of the effectiveness of the operation

### *How do I act as a trendsetter*

"Ask yourself: What comes into the room when I come in? What kind of energy do I spread?"

- The psychological, symbolic side of leadership is essential in showing direction. At its best, leadership creates empowerment, joy and meaning in work. It is important for a leader to be able to utilize his own personality in both good and bad moments and

days, while also taking into consideration the individuals of his own team. The leader's image of each person in the team's own life, plan, vision, etc. form the information bank for showing the direction to the leader.

- Leaders have a great tendency to reflect on their own objects of enthusiasm and with great force roll them onto their employees. It is good to remember that this may not always excite, and at least not everyone.

"A leader leads the sound of his own organization."

#### **Tips for acting as a trendsetter**

- Ask yourself: What will happen to the room when I get there? What kind of energy am I spreading?
- A good sound can be achieved even without an absolute pitch ear
- Lead but don't interfere: Give freedom when it's appropriate
- Leading by example is also a way to create commitment and a spirit of action
- The same applies to being in the middle of the crowd (cf. the ideal of standing on the edge of the field)
- A team always and primarily consists of people

#### **Challenge**

- facing obstacles increases courage and enables you to question your own assumptions
- It is important for a leader to be authentic and you with yourself
- The manager can act as an under cover agent: direction is shown if necessary
- Leadership is needed in all groups and organizations. It does not rule out joint steering

#### *Trust*

"Without trust, there is no coaching leader."

#### **Trust as the basis of cooperation**

- The manager creates an atmosphere of trust among the managers through his own actions
- Trust must be earned and it requires long-term investment in cooperative relationships. Trust is built through everyday actions. We need time together, where there is room for trust to grow and strengthen.
- Trust is voluntary - it cannot be commanded, demanded or forced
- Trust is needed at every level of the organization. Subordinates must have sufficient know-how to handle their work and the right attitude towards cooperation with colleagues. A similar requirement also applies between supervisors.
- If there is sufficient mutual trust in the work community and teams, the focus is mainly on handling the basic task. If the focus is more on relationships, it is a sign of insufficient trust.
- Trust is the lifeblood of organizations. A good working atmosphere and trust can be seen in the workplace as positive development and productivity

The ability to inspire trust consists of three different parts: contractual trust, communicational trust, competence trust.

### **Contractual trust**

- Grows when doing what is promised
- Be realistic and only promise what you are sure of. If you have to change plans, let us know right away
- Manage expectations: State what you expect and ask what is expected of you
- Keep the framework clear: Clarify the responsibilities and focus on the basic task.
- Delegate: Share tasks and use free time for management
- Think about things also from the point of view of others and encourage team members to do so
- Show confidence and stop explaining
- Responsible behavior: Face and bear your responsibilities immediately - not a moment later
- Consistent action: Stay in line and justify, preferably more than too little. Talk, talk and talk! Management is repeating things.

### **Communicational trust**

- With what attitude and state of will do you want to bring up and communicate issues related to everyday work?
- Way of expression, ability to communicate
- Share information: Tell, discuss and wonder because people need to know more than is necessary
- Be honest: Say what you think out loud
- Admit mistakes and make mistakes: Make admitting mistakes and learning from them a regular part of the meeting agenda
- Give critical feedback: Encourage and correct, at least three positive feedbacks for every critical one
- Speak with good intentions: Start gossiping systematically about positive things. Choose one person per day and tell others about them

### **Competencional trust**

- Experience of the person's skills and qualifications
- In organizations with competence confidence, requests are quickly responded to and actively offered to participate in various development projects. There are responsible adults at work who are committed to continuous development and improving operations. In addition, they look at development work through the goals and needs of the organization. They are true cooperative gamers.
- Confidence in competence can be increased by giving recognition to others for their competence, guiding people to learn and making them responsible for making decisions together
- Reinforce the skills of others regularly
- Allow employees to make independent decisions. Encourage them to do so.
- Learning together requires a regular structure and genuine dialogue

Source: Ristikangas M. & Ristikangas V. (2010). "Coaching leadership". Alma Talent. Helsinki

#### **What can a leader do when trust is eroded or lost?**

- Totally lost trust vs. crumbling trust. Trust can be rebuilt, but it depends on the seriousness of the matter, how much work and time is required to restore trust. In serious cases, the memory mark can remain for a long time.
- The consequences of a loss of trust may depend on whether it is a contractual / communication / competence loss. Things that are linked to values are very important for building trust.
- Bilateral loss of trust or collective loss of trust: Dealing with the loss of collective trust is more challenging and the consequences are extensive / affect the organizational culture -> the traces are really long.
- Restoring trust requires genuine discussion and openness.
- Knowing another person promotes trust.
- As leaders, we acknowledge mistakes and say them: we ask for forgiveness.
- Even if the trust is gone, the work must continue. However, the effects on work performance can be large. Therefore, the rebuilding of trust must be led.