



Continuous learning in Central Finland's full-service restaurants

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Abstract

Talent shortage continues to impact not only the Finnish restaurant sector, but the whole working life in the country. Commissioned by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD, has informed the current learning system in Finland to be biased towards formal education. The cabinet of Sanna Marin launched the continuous learning reform in 2019, aiming to accelerate continuous learning in the working life among other goals. However, the restaurant sector has not participated in the reform as the Confederation of Finnish Industries has explicitly denied the problem on behalf of the working life and claimed that the public education system is the one needing the reform, not the working life. Yet, the Confederation of Finnish Industries claims that formal learning accounts for only 10 percent of all workplace learning. The Finnish Hospitality Association (MaRa) has not issued any public statements about the reform.

The research problem identified was the invisibility of informal learning in the restaurant sector due to several reasons, notably the everydayness of informal workplace learning as such and weak lobbying. The research aimed to describe informal workplace learning from the restaurant sector employee perspective. The employee perspective was recommended by previous, highly related research conducted in Linköping University. The research was narrowed to full-service restaurants in Central Finland. Data was collected using the focused interview method as well as retrieval of publicly available online job advertisements (OJAs) in Central Finland in Duunitori. Qualitative content analysis was utilized for the analysis of the data.

As a result, two prevailing themes were identified: organizational support and individual accountability. The interviewee held themselves accountable for continuous learning at work and their learning was well supported by their employer. Several informal learning practices were identified from the focused interview which reflected the interviewee associating mostly positive meanings to informal workplace learning. While most OJAs did not mention learning opportunities at all, some presented continuous learning solely as a skill requirement, which was argued to be a counterproductive practice in the current labor market.

The results also hint to a direction that informal learning in restaurants supports the emergence of company-specific competence, which was concluded on one hand to support the competitiveness of a single company. On the other hand, this raises issues regarding the transferability of competence and its recognition. Future research is suggested to examine how outcomes of informal workplace learning are recognized by both employees and employers in the beginning and end of a contract of employment.

Keywords/tags (subjects)

lifelong learning, informal learning, on-the-job learning, competence management, restaurant sector

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Jatkuva oppiminen Keski-Suomen à la carte -ravintoloissa

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Tiivistelmä

Osaajapula vaikuttaa yhä suomalaiseen työelämään, erityisesti ravintola-alaan. Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriön sekä työ- ja elinkeinoministeriön tilaaman OECD:n (taloudellisen yhteistyön ja kehityksen järjestö) selvityksen mukaan Suomen tämänhetkinen oppimisjärjestelmä korostaa liiaksi muodollista koulutusta osana elinikäistä oppimista. Sanna Marinin hallitus käynnisti jatkuvan oppimisen uudistuksen vuonna 2019. Uudistuksen tavoitteena on mm. lisätä jatkuvaa oppimista suomalaisessa työelämässä. Ravintola-alan osallistuminen jatkuvan oppimisen uudistukseen on kuitenkin jäänyt lähes olemattomaksi, ja Elinkeinöelämän keskusliitto EK on jopa kiistänyt ongelman suomalaisen työelämän puolesta ja väittänyt, että julkinen koulutusjärjestelmä on reformin tarpeessa, ei työelämä. EK on kuitenkin väittänyt muodollisen koulutuksen muodostavan vain 10 prosenttia kaikesta oppimisesta työelämässä. Matkailu- ja ravintolapalvelut MaRa ry ei ole julkaissut asiasta julkisia tiedotteita.

Tutkimusongelmaksi tunnistettiin jatkuvan, epämuodollisen oppimisen näkymättömyys ravintola-alalla, jonka pääteltiin johtuvan arkioppimisen luonteesta, mutta myös alan lobbauksen puuttumisesta. Tutkimus pyrki kuvaamaan epämuodollista oppimista ravintolatyöntekijän näkökulmasta. Työntekijänäkökulma valikoitui Linköpingin yliopiston työssäoppimisen tutkijoiden jatkotutkimusehdotuksen perusteella. Tutkimus rajattiin Keski-Suomen à la carte -ravintoloihin. Aineistonkeruumenetelminä käytettiin teemahaastattelua sekä julkisten työpaikkailmoitusten systemaattista keruuta Duunitori.fi -sivustolta. Analyysimenetelmänä käytettiin laadullista sisällönanalyysia.

Tuloksista tunnistettiin kaksi keskeistä teemaa: organisaation tuki sekä yksilön vastuu osana jatkuvaa oppimista. Haastateltava piti itseään vastuussa omasta oppimisestaan, minkä lisäksi haastateltavan työnantaja tuki oppimista eri keinoin. Haastattelusta tunnistettiin useita jatkuvan oppimisen käytäntöjä, jotka heijastivat haastateltavan lähinnä positiivista asennoitumista jatkuvaan työssäoppimiseen. Useimmat työpaikkailmoitukset eivät maininneet jatkuvaa oppimista lainkaan. Joissain työpaikkailmoituksissa jatkuva oppiminen esitettiin pelkästään hakijaan kohdistuvana odotuksena, minkä pääteltiin olevan haitallista alan nykyisessä työmarkkinatilanteessa.

Tutkimuksen tulokset antoivat myös viitteitä siitä, että ravintola-alan jatkuva oppiminen tuottaa organisaatiokohtaista osaamista. Vaikka organisaatiokohtainen osaaminen yhtäältä tukee yksittäisen yrityksen kilpailukykyä, herättää se kysymyksiä osaamisen siirrettävyydestä ja sen tunnistamisesta. Jatkotutkimusaiheiksi havainttiinkin ravintola-alan työntekijöiden ja työnantajien jatkuvan oppimisen kautta syntyneen osaamisen tunnistamisen käytännöt työsuhteen alussa ja lopussa.

Avainsanat (asiasanat)

elinikäinen oppiminen, informaali oppiminen, työssäoppiminen, osaamisen johtaminen, ravintola-ala

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1 Introduction

Talent shortage is a common topic not only in global discussion but also in the Finnish hospitality sector, notably in restaurants, which have been impacted by it for many years already. The Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture launched a continuous learning reform in 2019, focusing on the upskilling and reskilling of people in the working life (Reforming Continuous Learning n.d.). The reform is much needed, considering that the same ministry (although under a different government) cut the budget for vocational upper secondary education in 2018.

However, the reform's preparatory work as well as the general discussion about learning in the workplace focus on larger companies and information work and provide little participation opportunities for restaurant companies, 90 percent of which are SMEs (small and medium enterprises) (Yritysten toimipaikat toimialoittain ja henkilöstön suuruusluokittain 2019 n.d.). Additionally, the author has heard from several colleagues working in the restaurant sector that they do not have time for teaching: "it's the schools' problem, not ours". The Confederation of Finnish Industries (Elinkeinoelämän keskusliitto EK), which represents the Finnish Hospitality Association MaRa (Matkailu- ja Ravintolapalvelut MaRa), has even argued that the working life is already contributing enough to continuous learning and that the public education system is the one needing a reform, not the working life (Susiluoto, Heikinheimo & Vieltojärvi 2020). The research problem, identified from the discussion around preparatory work for the continuous learning reform, was the everydayness of informal workplace learning, the lack of understanding of informal workplace learning (perhaps due to its indistinctness) and therefore, the risk of informal learning being ignored not only during the reform, but also in human resources management.

The research objective of this study is to gain understanding of what informal learning means to full-service restaurant employees in Central Finland as well as how it manifests in online job advertisements in the same context. The research questions, *what informal workplace learning opportunities are mentioned in the online job advertisements of directly recruiting full-service restaurants in Central Finland (Q1), what meanings do Central Finland's full-service restaurants employees give to in-formal learning (Q2) and how does informal workplace learning manifest among full-service restaurant employees in Central Finland (Q2.1)*, aim to fulfill this objective.

The perspective is on full-service restaurant employees. The restaurant sector is understood here as a diverse sector that requires high skill but not necessarily higher education. Based on the author's experience, full-service restaurants as workplaces are more learning-intensive than fast food or casual restaurants and are thus more likely to bring width to the research data. Appendix 1 contains a mind map used to delineate the topic.

Accelerating continuous learning in restaurants is crucial, considering that more and more employees choose their workplace based on the learning opportunities offered (Allen, Bryant & Vardaman 2010, 57; Ojala 2018, 19). A better understanding of informal workplace learning practices will benefit first and foremost the working life: the results can be used by restaurant managers and employees alike to engage in dialogue around continuous learning in the workplace.

The theoretical framework of this study is largely based on Wallo's (2008, 153) theory of performance-oriented leadership and learning-oriented leadership. In line with this theory, a literature review revealed that previous studies regard workplace learning as either a separate human resources development function or an integral part of the organization.

The author has previously worked as a general restaurant manager in charge of continuous development. In his hospitality management studies, the author has specialized in talent management and has previous studies in business administration where his focus was human resources management. The reader should keep in mind that the author does not claim expertise in pedagogy or psychology, fields linked closely with learning.

2 Continuous learning and the restaurant sector

The theoretical framework for this study is divided in four sections. First, key concepts are defined. The second section presents an extension to the introduction, which presents the discussion around the topic in the Finnish society. The third section examines previous research and sets the theoretical framework and lastly, the fourth section introduces the research problem.

2.1 Key concepts

The key concepts defined here are **full-service restaurants, informal learning, organizational learning, adaptive learning, dialogic learning,** and **reversed learning**. Definitions for other concepts are provided alongside the text they are used in.

In this study, restaurants are classified into fast food restaurants, casual restaurants, and full-service restaurants. By this definition, fast food restaurants are mainly chain restaurants, such as Hesperburger and are relatively easy to distinguish from casual and full-service restaurants. Casual restaurants might only offer a lunch buffet or limited table service. In Finland, self-service restaurants and restaurants that provide both self-service and full service are common, and often the restaurant employee role is that of a cashier. Full-service restaurants, as understood in this study, focus on table service and the preparation of individual food and drink items, and therefore provide a more useful starting point for research as their competence needs are perceived most complex within the classification above.

The definition of **informal learning** requires the description of its hypernym, lifelong learning. Lifelong learning includes all intentional learning activities throughout a person's life (Classification of Learning Activities (CLA) 2016, 9.). In statistical parlance in the EU, lifelong learning activities are divided into informal, non-formal and formal learning. All of these contain learning activities that are intentional and therefore exclude random, unintentional learning such as hearing a fun fact from a friend. Informal learning has the most flexible definition and must only be intentional to occur. Non-formal and formal learning must be organized or happen within an institutional frame-

work or location. In non-formal learning, the learning or teaching methods can be decided in advance. Formal learning must meet all these criteria as well as be recognized by the authorities. (ibid., 14-16.) Figure 1 summarizes this definition of lifelong learning.

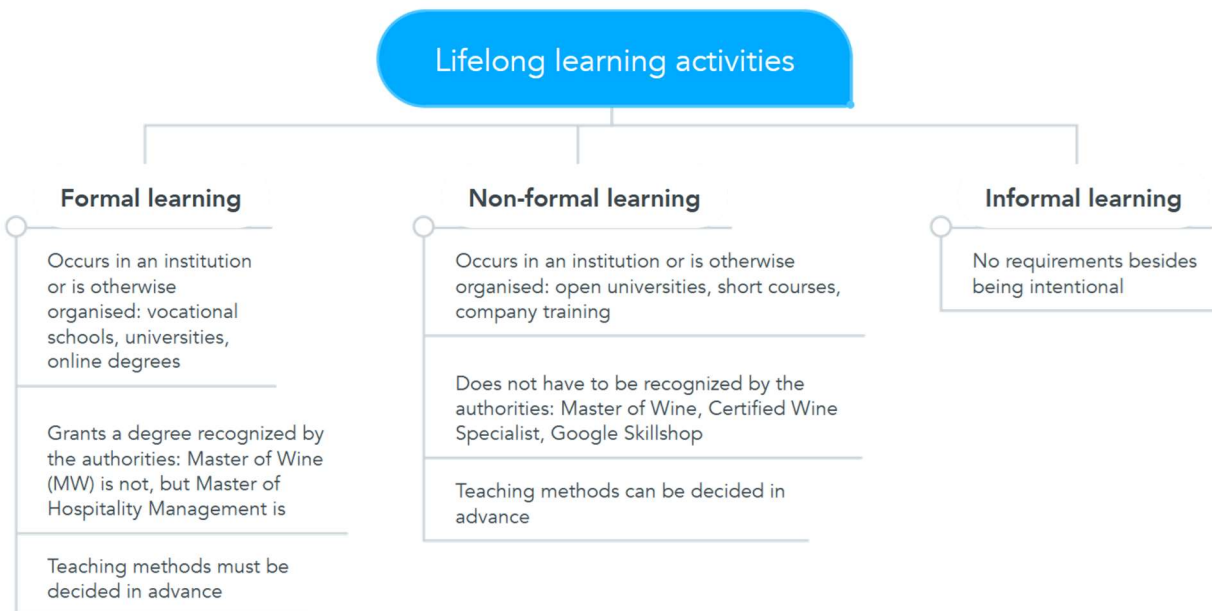


Figure 1. Lifelong learning activities (ibid., 14-16).

The CLA's prerequisite of purposefulness in all lifelong learning activities means that informal learning exists only when the learner intends to learn *and* when a learning opportunity exists regardless of the employer's contribution to the emergence of the opportunity. Albeit being a statistical classification and therefore being limited to providing accurate representations of reality, the definition for lifelong learning does point out two important indicators of informal learning: opportunities and intentions.

This understanding of lifelong learning activities helps us place informal learning into the spectrum of alternation between learning and working in the workplace (Figure 2). Figure 2 demonstrates how informal learning in this context is intertwined with work instead of being a separate function. In this study, continuous learning is used interchangeably with informal learning. To avoid

confusion, it is essential to notice that this definition of continuous learning (informal learning) differs significantly from what the continuous learning reform, elaborated in the next section, contains. The continuous learning reform is not reforming continuous learning (informal learning) as such, but driving lifelong learning activities, notably formal learning, to a better integration with the working life. Figure 2 also reveals the reform's limits – at the time of writing, the state of Finland has very little influence on what people learn, or not, informally in the workplace except for the state as an employer, of course.

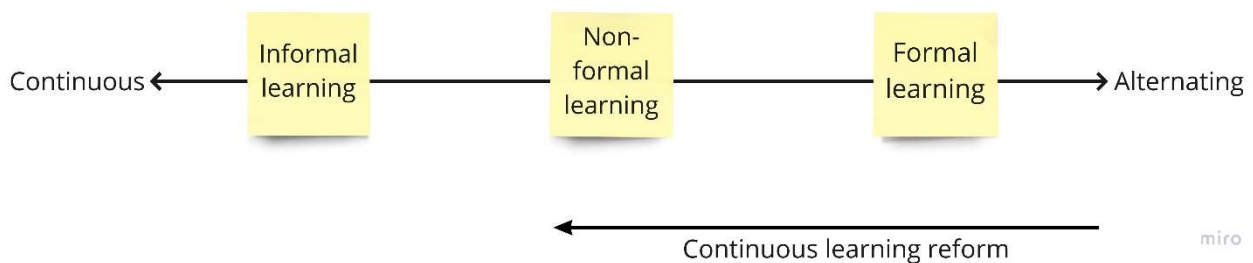


Figure 2. Alternation of working and learning in lifelong learning activities (figure by the author).

The most accurate description for learning activities in the working life was found to be that of Wallo (2008, 160), who differentiated workplace learning activities into planned, partially planned, and spontaneous and assimilated these with formal, non-formal and informal learning activities. An example of spontaneous learning is solving work-related problems. Partially planned learning can manifest as job rotation, for example, and planned learning activities as courses.

Organizational learning occurs when the organization's goals are either met or when the organization fails but corrects itself. The individuals, not the organization itself, produce the behaviour that leads to achievement or failure. However, organizations have the potential to greatly influence this behaviour. To promote learning, they can create conditions that drive individuals to identifying problems, designing solutions, and acting. To restrict learning, organizations can do the opposite. (Argyris 2003, 67.)

Kupias and Peltola (2019, 30-31) present a model for the flow of learning and development in between the organization and the individual employee: **adaptive learning, dialogic learning, and reversed learning**. These are demonstrated in Figure 3. In its strictest form, the organization already possesses enough knowledge and the employee's role is to adapt to the well-defined instructions. In the other end, the organization is the learner: employees are so competent, that the organization is learning from them. As the middle way, dialogic learning participates both sides to learn together, creating learning opportunities for both the organization and the employee. (ibid., 30-32.)

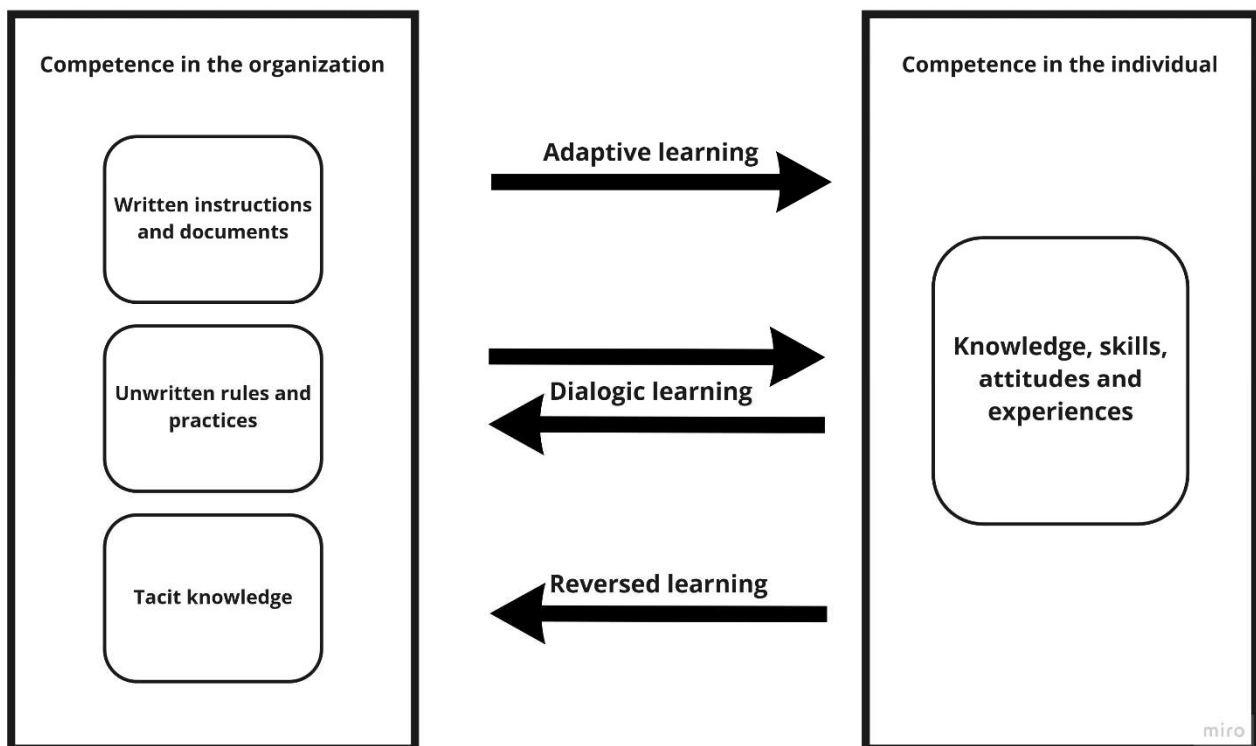


Figure 3. Adaptive, dialogic and reversed learning (ibid., edited).

Additionally, the model contains the definitions for organizational and individual competence. The competence of an individual employee is seen to include knowledge, skills, attitudes, and past experiences. (ibid., 31). The individual's competence is presented as a set, whereas organizational competence seems to be divided into three levels: explicit, implicit, and tacit. This study looks at the middle level: unwritten rules and practices.

2.2 The continuous learning reform

This section takes a deeper look at what is discussed about the continuous learning reform in the Finnish society.

A recent report published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD, and commissioned by the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, has identified key challenges in the Finnish education system, which include:

- financial incentives are biased towards formal learning over non-formal learning,
- the learning provision offers limited upskilling opportunities to adults with vocational qualifications,
- short higher education courses have limited availability,
- learning provision is not aligned with the labour market and
- adults with low basic skills do not receive enough targeted support (Continuous Learning in Working Life in Finland 2020, 50).

Among other public policy recommendations, the report recommends encouraging employers to develop training programmes (ibid.). Apart from being encouraged to develop training programmes, the report offers no other direct opportunities for the restaurant sector because most changes come through public policies. The lack of participation opportunities for the restaurant sector can be seen as a positive problem: it reveals boundaries on what the sector can and cannot influence and by doing so (Figure 2), confirms that informal workplace learning is indeed in the hands of the employers. This overrules the “it’s the schools’ problem, not ours [the restaurant sector’s]” attitude presented earlier in the introduction – the talent shortage (for which the reform is a solution to) is an issue for the whole society.

During the preparatory work for the continuous learning reform, Scarpetta (2020), representing OECD, agreed with Tynkkynen (2020), representing the student union of Tampere University, that lifelong learning is not limited to serving only the needs of the working life but does include the non-utilitarian aspects of civilization and education. This perspective is important as it reminds us that learning can be other things than just an approach to organizational competitiveness. In the

scope of this thesis, however, informal learning is narrowed to informal workplace learning and indeed utilised to serve the restaurant sector.

In addition to the Finnish government, the European Union is also engaged in lifelong learning. The benchmark set by ET2020 Framework is to have at least 15% of adults participating in learning by 2020. Not surprisingly, there are large differences among EU countries: the lowest being Romania with 1,3% and Sweden the highest with 34,3% of adults participating in learning. The score for Finland is 29,0%. (Education and Training Monitor 2020 2020.) Skule (2004, 8-10) argues that lifelong learning benchmarks are biased towards formal learning and that informal workplace learning is not quantified. Representing Elinkeinoelämän keskusliitto EK (the Confederation of Finnish Industries), Heikinheimo (2020) has also criticized how current statistics do not take informal learning into account and expressed EK's concern of the effects of this bias on the continuous learning reform.

The contribution of the hospitality sector in the preparation of the reform has not been apparent. The Finnish Hospitality Association MaRa has not issued any statements concerning the continuous learning reform. In a publication from 2019 where MaRa published its goals concerning the new government programme, the well-known (and well discussed) talent shortage was not mentioned at all, although MaRa did find it necessary to propose changes on school holiday schedules (Kilpailukyky kuntoon n.d.). The magazine for MaRa's member companies, Vitriini, has had its perspective consistently on apprenticeship contracts (*oppisopimus*) and unpaid internships (Halmetoja 2020). While increasing collaboration with educational institutions (non-formal learning) is likely to partly relieve the talent shortage, it rules out those employees who have already completed a vocational degree but need further learning due to changes work expectations (in the case of a pandemic, for example).

The labor union for service workers, Palvelualojen ammattiliitto PAM ry, has called for developing continuous learning. PAM's goals for the term 2020–2024 are to lobby for the lifelong development of basic skills (literacy, mathematic and ICT skills) and to ensure that employers offer equal training opportunities for all employee groups. (PAMin tavoiteohjelma 2020–2024 n.d., 20.)

2.3 Previous research

Recent studies about workplace learning revolve around human resources management functions such as performance appraisals (Bednall, Sanders & Runhaan 2014), performance management (Hakkarainen 2020) recruitment (Laitinen 2021; Heikkinen 2015), competence need anticipation (Arola 2021; Laine 2021; Piesala 2020; Mikkilä 2020), employee engagement (Somppi 2020; Mustonen 2020; Amani, Al-Abbadi & Alshawabkeh 2020; DiPietro, Drew & Pratt 2019, Metsä-Turja 2021; Ellonen 2021) and talent or employee retention (Supi 2021; Tews, Hoefnagels, Jolly & Stafford 2020).

Studies where learning is seen as a more integral part of the organization, concentrate on organizational culture (Al Dari, Jabeen, Hussain & Al Khawaja 2020; Beenen 2021, Sirén 2019), learning from errors (Guchait, Lee, Wang & Abbott 2016; Kinnunen 2010), learning environments (Ilmaranta 2020; Ballesteros & De Saá 2012; Bishop 2020) and promoting learning in daily management (Wallo, Kock, Reineholm & Ellström 2021).

These two perspectives in recent research seem to follow a pattern. Wallo (2008, 153) presents two orientations that describe the relationship between learning and leadership in the working life: performance-oriented leadership and learning-oriented leadership. In performance-oriented leadership, learning relates to formal education and improving work performance through existing competencies. Performance-oriented leadership also uses planned and partially planned activities, thus relying on formal and non-formal learning. Learning-oriented leadership, in its turn, views learning as informal and continuous and has a strong connection with everyday work. In learning-oriented leadership, learning activities are only partially planned or spontaneous. (ibid., 153-156.)

2.4 Research problem

Wallo, Kock, Reineholm and Ellström (2021, 22) have suggested a future research focus on the employee perspective of learning-oriented leadership, which might provide insights into how employee's learning is affected by different learning activities (planned, partially planned, spontaneous) and managers' behaviours. The purpose of this study is to describe informal workplace learning among full-service restaurant employees and to partially continue the work of Wallo,

Kock, Reineholm and Ellström in the context of the Finnish restaurant sector. The research objective of this study is to gain understanding of what informal learning means to full-service restaurant employees in Central Finland as well as how it manifests in online job advertisements in the same context.

As the previous chapters demonstrate, due to the quantifying and measuring issues related to the nature of informal workplace learning, its potential as a solution to the talent shortage is hardly discussed in the restaurant sector. The research problem of this study is:

Employees' informal learning activities in restaurants are not visible and therefore risk being ignored in decision-making in both organizational and societal level

This sector-wide research problem was concluded from the author's experiences on restaurant development, the dialogue around the continuous learning reform, MaRa's lobbying focuses, sector publications and discussions with colleagues. The full-service sub-sector was chosen because it was regarded to have the most complex and demanding competence requirements compared to fast food and casual dining establishments and therefore, more likely to provide a deeper understanding of informal workplace learning in restaurants. Full-service restaurants are not considered here to represent the whole restaurant sector; this choice is purely strategic. Geographically, the scope of this thesis is Central Finland.

Research questions are derived from the research problem (Kananen 2019, 21). The research problem above is further narrowed to two research questions:

- Q1. What informal workplace learning opportunities are mentioned in the online job advertisements of directly recruiting full-service restaurants in Central Finland?
- Q2. What meanings do Central Finland's full-service restaurants employees give to informal learning?
 - Q2.1. How does informal workplace learning manifest among full-service restaurant employees in Central Finland?

Considering the research problem identified, the practical applications from the results and conclusions of this study are limited: no list of generic best practices is provided. Instead, the reader is

encouraged to engage in dialogue about informal learning in the restaurant sector. The value of this study lies in the provision of in-depth, empirical perspectives to that dialogue.

3 Methodology

Previous chapters have described the theoretical and societal framework of this study. This chapter presents the methodology, research material collection and analysis methods. Before moving on to these, it is important for the reliability of this study to describe how the strategies and methods were chosen.

The goal of working life-oriented research, such as that produced by UAS (Universities of Applied Sciences), is to combine theory, experience, and professional practices (Vilkka 2021, 15). Previously, the text has established a theoretical framework and presented the working life perspective. To meet this goal, professional practices are investigated next through empirical research thus presenting a reason to describe this study as theoretical-empirical. Qualitative studies cannot be conducted without theoretical reference points (Juhila n.d.).

The basis for working life-oriented research are research questions, which are derived from the research problem, which is derived from the needs of the commissioner (Vilkka 2021, 49). This study is conducted independently, without a specific restaurant company as commissioner because the aim is on sectorial dialogue over organizational development.

The purpose of this study, to describe informal workplace learning among Central Finland's full-service restaurant employees, supports a qualitative, and more precisely, exploratory approach. An exploratory study is best suited to lesser-known phenomena and describes social systems among others (Adams, Khan & Raeside 2014, 2). In this study, the phenomenon in question is informal learning among full-service restaurant employees and the social system to be described is the full-service sub-sector, understood as a set of learning organizations.

3.1 Hermeneutic phenomenology

Informal workplace learning is argued to be sometimes highly visible (in the welcoming of a recruit, for example) but becoming less visible over time. For example, some organizations use employee induction checklists as an effort to standardize informal learning outcomes, after which the

employee might be left alone in charge of further learning. This understanding supports the research strategy followed in this study: a combination of phenomenology and hermeneutics. The aim of hermeneutic phenomenology is to make visible what has become self-evident and invisible or what has been experienced but not consciously thought about (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009, 35).

Phenomenology is a research strategy that is based on philosophical questions such as how humans are seen and what the nature of experience-related information is (Laine 2018, 25). Here, humans are seen as social apes whose brains are so developed that they have allowed the creation of a sub-reality available mostly to themselves and often invisible to other lifeforms. This study sees humans as natural creatures who have imagined and given meaning to such constructions such as a *bachelor's degree*, for example.

The second fundamental question related to phenomenology, according to Laine (2018, 25), is the nature of information related to experiences. In phenomenological theory, meanings are considered constructed of individual and shared elements and research aimed at the meanings of a phenomenon reveal both (ibid., 26). This theory is adopted in the description of informal learning practices, which are seen as meaningful actions that belong both to the reality of the individual employee as well as their workplace and more broadly, the restaurant sector and the Finnish society. The research material is collected through two methods: retrieval of publicly available online job advertisements (OJAs) and focused interviews.

According to Hodder (1994, 395), subordinate experiences in particular are hidden from language. This supports phenomenology as the core of the research strategy in this study. Simultaneously, it reveals a problem with language: should this study be entirely phenomenological, the purpose of presenting something through language that is hidden from it in the first place would be like Magritte's *The Treachery of Images*: a painting of a pipe is not a pipe. Consequently, hermeneutics is needed. The hermeneutics aspect of the hermeneutic phenomenology also helps make visible what has become self-evident (Laine 2018, 30). Whereas phenomenology aims to find themes from the research material and describe reality as experienced by the interviewee (painting the pipe from a real-life model), hermeneutics complements it by interpreting the findings (looking at

the painting, reasoning) (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018, 48). In this metaphor, what differentiates a surrealist painter from a researcher is the researcher's focus on the research questions and the meticulous documentation of the reasoning process.

3.2 Focused interview

According to Wallo, Kock, Reineholm and Ellström (2021, 3), previous research has over-emphasized behavior description questionnaires; this comment was reflected on when determining the research methods for this study. Since the researcher inevitably has made content-guiding decisions before the interviews (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2015, 18), this method could also be described as a research material *production* method. Although both terms can be used, *collection* is preferred here to highlight the methodological view that the role of the researcher is mostly observational.

Focused interview is a term used by Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2015) but can also be expressed as qualitative research interview (Kvale 1996, 27). Regardless of the specific term used, the structure of this interview method is between an open conversation and a questionnaire, guided by pre-defined themes (Kvale 1996, 27; Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2015, 47).

To answer Q2 (What meanings do Central Finland's full-service restaurants employees give to informal learning?) and Q2.1 (How does informal workplace learning manifest among full-service restaurant employees in Central Finland?), focused interview was chosen as research material collection method for several reasons. First, research interviews fit to research problems which seek out to bring forward the meanings participants give to the topic. Secondly, this approach supports a research problem that aims to use spoken text in a broader context and third, when the topic is less known. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2015, 35.) Considering hermeneutic phenomenology as research strategy, the societal importance and timeliness of the topic as well the pre-study conclusion that the topic is less discussed in the restaurant sector, the choice to utilize focused interviews is justified. Another alternative or complementary method could have been observation which, however, was deemed inappropriate in relation to the research strategy. After all, future research can continue this study through different methodologies.

Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018, 101) argue that it is not meaningful to focus on saturation in a study that seeks diversity. Therefore, research material collection is ended upon *sufficient* saturation or when it answers to the research questions *well* enough. These words are of course, subjective, but on the other hand, an *exhaustive* presentation of informal workplace learning practices among full-service restaurants is outside the scope of this thesis.

As advised by Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2015, 72), pre-interviews were implemented before forming the interview guide (Appendix 3) to help improve the quality and reliability of the research interviews. The interview guide contained a checklist to ensure that the interviewee was properly informed of the any necessary aspects of the interview (purpose, data protection etc.) in accordance with the ethical guidelines (Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) n.d.; Ranta & Kuula-Luumi 2017, 415). Another purpose of the interview guide was to establish a common understanding of the roles and the nature of communication as well as to build trust and minimize the chance of biasing the quality of interviews through non-systematic introduction.

Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2015, 66) suggest that in focused interview, the interview themes can be based on concepts from previous research. In this study, the interview themes were adapted from Wallo's (2008) classification of spontaneous, partially planned, and planned workplace learning and Ellström's (2001) grouping of factors that influence workplace learning:

- task complexity, variety, and control,
- feedback, evaluation, and reflection opportunities,
- work process formalization,
- employee participation in problem handling and development and
- objective learning resources, such as time for learning.

The recruitment cycle was conducted twice. The first cycle focused only on the original scope of this thesis, fine dining restaurants in Central Finland, but after no voluntary participants reached out, the scope was first widened to fine dining restaurants in the neighbouring region of Pirkanmaa. The second and final recruitment cycle concerned full-service restaurants in Central Finland. A list of restaurants was gathered through TripAdvisor listings, dropping out any restaurants that did not comply to the definition in chapter 2. An inquiry (Appendix 2) was sent to the general

e-mail address (such as info@restaurant.com) of each restaurant. The inquiry explained the purpose of this study, the value of participation to the interviewee and asked whether a research permit would be needed from the employing organization. Following the recommendations of Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2015, 86) in recruiting interviewees, the topic was presented in a neutral fashion. It was highlighted that interns and managers were not in the focus of interest. If the recipient of the inquiry did not respond to the email within three working days, a reminder was sent. Ultimately, one voluntary interviewee reached out.

3.3 Online job advertisements

To answer Q1, online job advertisements were collected from Duunitori on 29 October 2021. The search phrase was “Ravintola- ja matkailuala (ala)”, a pre-set sectorial search phrase which made data collection more reliable as opposed to several search phrases comprising of different job titles. The search was narrowed to the Central Finland region. Then, as the site provided no more relevant search filters, each job advertisement was opened and its direct link copied to a data file on the conditions that:

- the job advertisement was published by the recruiting company itself, excluding any labor hire companies or third parties that offer recruiting services to employers,
- the employer represented the private sector,
- the location of the job was in Central Finland and
- that the job advertised was based on actual recruiting needs (not collecting open applications).

After these filters were applied, the remaining data was broken down into an Excel table. Each line contained a running reference number, a link to the job advertisement (the last part of the link contained Duunitori’s internal reference number), name of the employer, recruiting unit, job title and the job description. This was followed by classifying the data by sub-sector: fast food, casual and full service and then filtering the data to only full-service restaurants.

A final filter was to exclude all remaining job advertisements that did not mention learning or learning-related words, such as growth or development.

The Focus Guide (Appendix 4) was consulted throughout the data collection process to ensure that the filters applied were relevant to the research questions and the context of the study. At this stage, three job advertisements were filtered out after noticing that their text was almost identical to other job advertisements in the material and was unlikely to provide further insight. After reducing the data from 160 job advertisements to 7 relevant ones, the job description and the identification number of each job advertisement was copied to a Word file, each to their own page. These 7 job advertisements are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Job advertisements analysed.

ID	Duunitori code	Employer	Unit	Job title
19	13873769	Osuuskauppa Keskimaa	Ravintola Satamankärki	Keittiömestari [head chef]
10	13824141	Osuuskauppa Keskimaa	Amarillo Jyväskylä	Kokki [cook]
17	13888865	Osuuskauppa Keskimaa	Franseska	Kokki [cook]
40	13741603	Viikinkiravintola Harald Oy	Viikinkiravintola Harald Jyväskylä	Kokki [cook]
43	13513247	Tirehtöörin pytinki Oy	Kuokkalan Kartano	Kokki [cook]
16	13900529	Osuuskauppa Keskimaa	Frans & Sandra	Ravintolapäällikkö [restaurant manager]
11	13907265	Osuuskauppa Keskimaa	Frans & Sandra	Tarjoilija [server]
29	13861140	Tirehtöörin pytinki Oy	Kuokkalan Kartano	Tarjoilija [server]
15	13900530	Osuuskauppa Keskimaa	Rosso Jyväskylä	Vuoropäällikkö [shift manager]
20	13873021	Osuuskauppa Keskimaa	Frans & Sandra	Vuoropäällikkö [shift manager]

The phrases, parts of phrases and words that related to the research questions were then highlighted in yellow to distinguish them from the rest of the content. The process described above produced the core of the data for the qualitative content analysis of the job advertisements. The public employment office's (*TE-palvelut*) site was also consulted during the data collection process but contained either duplicates of the OAJs already retrieved from Duunitori or OAJs that did not meet the search criteria.

3.4 Qualitative content analysis

During the research material collection, phenomenology played an important role: the purpose was to understand the subjective world of the interviewee. Hermeneutics, in turn, is used here to interpret the research material. Puusa (2020, 141) argues that research material collection and analysis are intertwined with each other. This intertwining started already during the interviews: although phenomenology strives to refrain from any assumptions (Laine 2018, 25), hermeneutics accumulates understanding in an iteration of pre-understanding and new understanding. It is ar-

gued that because of the conflict between refraining from assumptions and building understanding on top of previous understanding, the tension of these two philosophical traditions is more or less present throughout this whole study. Yet, combining hermeneutics with phenomenology enables a deeper analysis which does not simply describe the experiences, but also interprets them (ibid., 28).

According to Puusa (2020, 145), the purpose of qualitative analysis is to create a meaningful set of research material with which interpretations and conclusions of the research topic are formed. Puusa's (2020, 145) claim is considered to improve the reliability of this study in the sense that it helps the reader differentiate between the qualitative content analysis (chapter 4) and the author's interpretation and dialogue with previous research (chapter 5).

After the interview, the audio recording was transcribed, coded, and classified based on what was considered essential to answer the research questions, thus realizing the intertwining of material collection (production) and analysis. The whole research material, including the OJAs, was then divided into themes.

The qualitative content analysis followed Eskola's (2018, 188-195) presentation of the analysis process, in which theory is integrated into the analysis only after the core conclusions have been formed from within the research material. The interview themes (note: not the same as themes which emerged from the analysis) were based on Wallo's (2008) and Ellström's (2001) classifications and thus had a guiding effect on the contents of the research material.

4 Results

The purpose of this study was to describe informal workplace learning among Central Finland's full-service restaurant employees. The research strategy was a qualitative study with a hermeneutical-phenomenological methodological frame and a context in the Central Finland's full-service restaurant sector. The research problem was informal learning's high importance (concluded from the continuous learning reform) but low visibility in dialogues about workplace learning or competence development, especially in the restaurant sector.

The research questions managed to surface not only the meanings that restaurant employees can associate with informal workplace learning (Q2), but also some concrete practices of how informal learning can occur in full-service restaurants (Q2.1) as well as how employers bring forward learning opportunities when recruiting new employees (Q1). Table 2 presents a synthesis of the results, analyzed in more detail in the next two chapters.

Table 2. Synthesis of results.

Meanings	Practices	Learning opportunities
ME1: curiosity and creativity	PR1: browsing social media and books	LO1: learning-supportive environment
ME2: deliberate practice	PR2: culinary experiments	LO2: working in several units
ME3: opportunities for professional growth	PR3: asking questions	LO3: career advancement
ME4: meaningfulness	PR4: mindful daily work	LO4: influence over job's contents
ME5: commitment to the employer	PR5: learning from errors	
ME6: feelings of accomplishment and errors	PR6: instructing others	
ME7: job security		

Citations are provided first in their original language in Finnish, followed by a translation in square brackets. Any square bracketed words inside these phrases are the author's additions and are meant to provide better context for the citation for improved readability.

4.1 Meanings and practices

The interviewee (codename Interviewee01) was a trained, skilled professional with a long and vast experience from the restaurant sector. The interviewee was considered highly self-organized in practicing continuous learning at work. Self-organization and internal motivation were emphasised in the meaning of informal workplace learning (Q2) whereas the interviewee's learning practices (Q2.1) were driven by the interviewee's personal values but also by organizational support.

Table 3 presents a synthesis for the results for Q2 (ME = meaning) and Q2.1 (PR = practice). The results for Q2 are presented in the order of their interpreted importance to the interviewee. The results for Q2.1 are presented in the order they were discovered during the analysis.

Table 3. Results for Q2 and Q2.1.

Meanings	Practices
ME1: curiosity and creativity	PR1: browsing social media and books
ME2: deliberate practice	PR2: culinary experiments
ME3: opportunities for professional growth	PR3: asking questions
ME4: meaningfulness	PR4: mindful daily work
ME5: commitment to the employer	PR5: learning from errors
ME6: feelings of accomplishment and errors	PR6: instructing others
ME7: job security	

ME1, curiosity and creativity were the dominant meanings the interviewee associated with the topic. Curiosity and creativity manifested through voluntary learning that the interviewee practiced outside working hours, driven by personal interest. When asked, the interviewee was confident their supervisor would give paid time for learning should they ask for it. Concrete examples of voluntary learning outside work were the browsing of social media (Instagram, YouTube, Google) and printed books (PR1). This informal learning practice was focused on professional growth through strengths: the interviewee sought inspiration from fine dining restaurants and looked for culinary techniques from social media and books that could be learned considering their current skill level. Although it could be argued that PR1 is not strictly informal *workplace* learning given its voluntary occurrence in the interviewee's free time, the interviewee did use the ideas and inspiration from PR1 to experiment, and actively collecting feedback about them at work (PR2). In practice, the opportunities for learning by doing at workplace (time, space, tools, helping hands, equipment etc.) were interpreted to guide the content of PR1. In fact, one source for ideas and inspiration was the work itself:

...sitten illalla kun on taas päivän aikana tullut niitä asioita mietittyä että mikä voisi olla kiva juttu, niin illalla tulee taas sellaisia ahaa-elämyksiä, kun voi katsella jotain kirjaa tai lueskella tuolta [sosiaalisesta mediasta], että mikä olisi joku mitä haluaisi tehdä. [...then in the evening, when I have thought about nice ideas during the day, I get these lightbulb moments while browsing a book or reading from there [social media] about something I would want to do.]

ME2, deliberate practice, differed from curiosity and creativity (ME1) because it underlined discipline, honing of skills, and setting ambitious goals yet accumulating learning through small steps. ME2 also manifested through culinary experiments but also through mindful working (PR4), which, in turn, was linked to meaningfulness (ME4).

PR3, asking questions, was considered a collaborative learning practice itself, but also a means to sound learning opportunities within the organization. The interviewee asked questions and often questioned the status quo, describing it being acceptable and even encouraged in their current workplace. Moreover, they considered theoretical understanding (not necessarily scholar in this context) of the topic essential to the learning itself:

...jopa ihan kannustettavaa kysyä miksi-kysymyksiä, koska et mielestäni opi sitä asiaa jos et tiedä miksi se tehdään niin kuin se tehdään. [...even encouraged to ask why questions, because in my opinion you don't learn the thing if you don't know why it's done as it's done.]

The interviewee was interpreted to experience that continuous workplace learning (or in the interviewee's terms, development) was almost always present in restaurant work, yet its extent as well as content were largely influenced by the employing organization. The interviewee considered that because of the diversity of business concepts, informal learning was needed. The necessity of informal workplace learning was interpreted as both an opportunity to widen one's professional capabilities as well as a threat to professional self-worth during changes in employment:

...[ravintolaliiketoiminta] on niin laaja-alaista toimintaa että sitten jos kuvittelee et tässä omassa työpaikassa olisi hyvä, sitten voit mennä johonkin toiseen paikkaan mikä tekee täysin erilaista ruokaa, niin sitten aloitat taas nollasta. [...[restaurant business] is such a vast sector so that if you consider yourself good in your current job, then you can go to another place which makes completely different food, and so you start from zero again.]

ME6, feelings of accomplishment and errors, were strongly related to learning through experimentation. Because of the interviewee's already high level of culinary skills, they experienced that most of their experiments were a success and they associated learning by doing to feelings accomplishment. Their orientation towards ideas to be experimented was neutral in the sense that they

let the audience, whether that was co-workers, customers, or both, judge the idea. The interviewee would then proceed to further develop the experiment based on this feedback. Errors, unlike accomplishment, was not an outcome of the interviewee's learning processes, but an antecedent. The interviewee described how in their work community, errors in the kitchen give rise to frustration, yet errors are swiftly corrected. Should the cause of the error be unknown, the interviewee explained how their work community diagnoses the problem efficiently and collaboratively by going through the production process step by step.

According to the interviewee, the most learning-intensive moments in their workplace occurred around menu updates every two to three months. Although technically these moments could be seen as non-formal learning or company training and therefore not in the scope of this thesis, they are described here anyway to extract more analytical insight from the interview. According to the interviewee, the menu update process reflected the management's main perspective: to communicate the management's vision and to guarantee production consistency. Before the menu update, the restaurant manager first presented the new menu, then explained it to the staff. After this, the interviewee and their colleagues were asked for comments and ideas on how to improve the selection. The interviewee often participated by sharing their ideas and felt heard by the management: if their idea was not directly implemented, it might have been saved for the next menu update or the one after that. Following the menu update, learning by doing was highlighted in the work community when training the new menu items: new techniques and recipes were learned in the kitchen.

Trust was a persistent theme that was discovered from the interview data. Learning-related trust in the interviewee's organization was related to the management's high trust in their staff's ability to learn during the menu update process, the interviewee's high trust in the management should learning or development become overwhelming but also to the work community: asking questions and questioning was acceptable. However, the interviewee's instruction of less experienced colleagues was often not well received:

...jos on joku sellainen juttu mitä on itse tehnyt paljon ja sitten toinen tekee sen ensimmäistä kertaa tai kolmatta kertaa, niin sitten tulee sanottua [miten se tehdään] vaikka ehkä. Yleensä

vastaus voi olla siellä että 'joo joo kyllä minä tiedän', mutta kyllä se kuitenkin tulee silti kerrottua. [...if there is a thing you have done a lot yourself and then somebody does it for the first or the third time, then I might say [how it's done]. Usually the answer can be like 'yeah yeah I know that' but I still tell them anyway.]

ME7, job security, and ME5, commitment to the employer, were related to the necessity of informal learning: the interviewee had resigned from a previous job due to the lack of continuous learning opportunities and when asked, would certainly leave their current job as well for the same reason. The resignation was preceded by the interviewee's request to transfer to another restaurant within the company, but their request was denied.

Thus, the issue between learning opportunities and job security was related to self-motivation and did not seem to contain external threats, such as learning as an alternative to losing one's job (Järvensivu 2006, 182). In the case of the interviewee, the theme of job security was interpreted to be an individual, not an organizational matter. ME5, commitment to the employer manifested not only through seeking employers that offer learning opportunities but also through giving back to the employer by participating in the mitigation of risk of food waste by instructing colleagues in economic production of food items (PR6). According to the interviewee, especially during busy dinner services, the interviewee might postpone and externalize instruction by advising the colleague to learn the proper part of food production process themselves from YouTube or Google. While the act of watching a video from YouTube itself might remain the same, it was observed from the interview data that its meaning can vary widely depending on the source of motivation.

Although the interviewee greatly values learning, it is not an intrinsic value to them: the balance between learning and working is. When reflected with Figure 2 (see chapter 2.1), the interviewee was interpreted to appreciate learning while working, instead of alternating between separate periods of learning and working. They did express that participation in formal learning is also attractive because it helps to understand operations in other restaurants or in a general level. The interviewee explicitly expressed that their ratio of importance between informal and formal learning was 60 percent and 40 percent.

Informal workplace learning evokes meanings that the interviewee experienced as both positive and negative but associated it with mostly positive feelings. Although these orientations were distinguishable in the data, their interdependence was also noted: a positive meaning to continuous learning is the challenge it brings to the daily work, yet if given too many new tasks to master at once, learning can overwhelm and become a source of work-related stress. The main positive notion of informal workplace learning was keeping otherwise often repetitive work interesting and meaningful. Whereas learning opportunities represent meaningful work, the interviewee associates their absence with boredom.

4.2 Learning opportunities in online job advertisements

The overarching theme in the data from the online job advertisements (OJA) is organizational support. Another, contrasting theme was employees' individual accountability of learning. The presence of these two themes varied in the full data (160 OJAs). Table 4 demonstrates this variation.

Table 4. Themes from online job advertisement analysis.

	CATEGORY 1	CATEGORY 2	CATEGORY 3	CATEGORY 4
Organizational support visible	YES	YES	NO	NO
Individual accountability visible	YES	NO	YES	NO

Bearing in mind the research question, only those OJAs that mentioned informal learning opportunities (categories 1 and 2) were of interest and therefore under deeper analysis. Research question Q1 asked, what informal workplace learning opportunities are mentioned in the OJAs of full-service restaurant companies in Central Finland. In the filtered data (7 job advertisements), the learning opportunities (LO) mentioned are:

- LO1: Learning-supportive environment
- LO2: Working in several units
- LO3: Career advancement
- LO4: Influence over job's contents

Learning opportunity LO1, learning supportive environment, included the employer's expression of commitment to an environment that enables learning and development. Although no concrete

examples of a learning-oriented work environment were given in the job advertisements, expressions like the one below point towards learning-oriented leadership (Wallo 2008).

Tarjoamme monipuolisen ja innostavan työympäristön, jossa on mahdollisuus oppia, kehittyä ja laajentaa osaamista. [We offer a versatile and exciting working environment where there is an opportunity to learn, develop and broaden competence.] (16)

Several job advertisements, published by the same employer but for different restaurants, mentioned the possibility to work in other restaurant units of the same organization (LO2). For a restaurant sector professional who is paid by the hour, combining several work contracts to reach a satisfactory salary level (or for other reasons) is by no means a new phenomenon or one that is employer exclusive. Thus, LO2 could be seen to contain a paradox: “come work for us so you can work elsewhere”. However, it was reasoned that the implicit opportunity in LO2 was the practical facilitation of working in several restaurant units, perhaps through a shared shift planning system or similar service protocols. Again, the expressions in the job advertisements were rather imprecise:

Sinulla on mahdollisuus päästä kehittämään ammattitaitoasi vaihtelevissa työympäristöissä – meillä pystyt työskentelemään myös Keskimaan muissa toimipisteissä. [You have the opportunity to get to develop your expertise in changing working environments – at us you can work also in other units of Keskimaa.] (10)

LO3, in turn, mentioned career advancement (implicitly: promotion) opportunities. LO4 contained an opportunity to tailor the job’s contents:

Tehtävässä vastualueet muodostuvat omien kiinnostuksen kohteidesi ja osaamisesi mukaan. [In the position, areas of responsibility form according to your own areas of interest and competence.] (15)

5 Conclusions

The research problem was:

Employees' informal learning activities in restaurants are not visible and therefore risk being ignored in decision-making in both organizational and societal level

Implementing the research strategy managed to surface some of the many meanings, practices and recruitment communication related to informal workplace learning. Additionally, the indivisibility, or indistinctness, of the phenomenon itself was made visible:

- Full-service restaurant employers in Central Finland communicate workplace learning as either a skill requirement or an opportunity, or a mix of these. Most online job advertisements did not mention learning at all.
- While the phenomenon of informal workplace learning does manifest itself in everyday work, it does not easily submit to language and surfacing it requires focusing on dialogue and people skills (focused interview competence).

Based on the results, the extent of informal learning was concluded to vary by organization. This conclusion is supported by data from Norway: hotels and restaurants have the largest proportion of learning deprived jobs (38%) and the lowest proportion of learning-intensive jobs (20%) (Skule 2004, 13). LO3, career advancement and LO2, working in several units, were seen to be linked: both learning opportunities rise from the job's deprivation of learning.

Common themes throughout the research data were organizational support and individual accountability, which can be also assimilated to external and internal motivation. People working in the restaurant sector (including owners, managers, employees) are encouraged to reflect on and discuss these two themes in their professional life. Given the current challenges in finding skilled workers, restaurant employers and recruiters are recommended to reflect whether in their job advertisements they can afford to require continuous learning from candidates but not bring forward how their organization supports it. This recommendation is backed by Ojala (2018, 19), who claims that more and more employees choose their workplace based on the learning opportunities offered.

Having concluded that the restaurant company can influence the extent of continuous learning in the organization, the content of it is also within the employers' power. The interviewee's expression of "starting from zero again" when changing jobs as a skilled and experienced restaurant worker could point to the direction that informal learning in full-service restaurants might be biased towards the emergence of company-specific competence. As another tactic to attract talent, restaurant employers could benefit from recruitment communication that underlines the recognition of previously acquired competence.

According to a 70-20-10 model used widely in the working life, informal learning accounts for 70 percent of all workplace learning (company training 20 percent and formal education 10 percent) (Susiluoto et al. 2020). Backed by empirical evidence from this study (the interviewee valuing informal learning 60 percent over against formal education's 40 percent), the importance of informal learning as a means to develop competence was confirmed. In order to utilize this competence and realize any investments and efforts put into the development of informal learning processes in the organization, the competence has to be if not officially validated, at least acknowledged. This is a challenge for restaurant sector employees and employers alike.

Those restaurant sector professionals who work with the management of competence or competence development are suggested to contact their local higher education institutions who already have years of experience of recognizing and validating informally acquired competence. The interviewee regarded formal learning as an opportunity to acquire more generic and transferrable competence as opposed to company-specific competence, such as recipes that apply only to a particular concept. For the restaurant sector, the combination of informal and formal learning is presented as a holistic strategy for competence development as opposed to relying on any single channel.

Based on the focused interview, most learning activities were related to daily, operational work. Apart from learning through action, reflection and collaboration were identified from the results, as well. In the case of the interviewee in this study, learning by doing was mostly self-organized and self-motivated, not to mention reflecting on culinary ideas at home. Collaborative learning, as one can expect, was more intertwined with the organization and its goals and therefore an opportunity for restaurant management to accelerate learning in the workplace. An empirical example

of a collaborative, learning-oriented event in this study was the menu update in the interviewee's workplace. Restaurant employers are encouraged to sound any such change events in their operations that could become collaborative learning forums.

Lastly, informal workplace learning can represent different things to different people. In this study, the interviewee experienced workplace learning mainly through curiosity, creativity, and voluntariness, but for others, it can mean anxiety over losing their job (Järvensivu 2006, 182). Because of the diversity of personal meanings and in some instances, the sensitivity of the topic to the individual, restaurant management could benefit from open listening and open understanding of their employees when engaging in a dialogue about learning or professional development. Positive outcomes of such dialogue would be organizational trust (as described in the results from the focused interview) and job security for both parties.

During the research process, putting together a series of facilitating questions was considered. However, Kupias and Peltola (2019) have already created such a tool and the reader is recommended to familiarize themselves with their work.

At the time of writing, the continuous learning reform was still ongoing. Recommended sources for related, reliable information concerning the reform are the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, the Finnish Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment as well as Sitra. For academic information, the author recommends Linköping University's Department of Behavioural Sciences and Learning (IBL).

6 Discussion

This study succeeded in making a part of taken-for-granted informal workplace learning more visible. Additionally, the phenomenon's invisibility itself was made visible. This contains both a threat and an opportunity to the dialogic development of the restaurant sector: if informal workplace learning in restaurants is not addressed now that it is surfaced, there is a risk of it being forgotten once again.

Learning opportunities were concluded to be a less important theme in OJAs researched in this study as the few that did mention learning opportunities, were rather generic in their description. The focused interview method managed to surface more concrete examples of how learning occurs in Central Finland's full-service restaurants, but it is argued that without the author's interview training before the encounter, many practices could have been left unspoken.

An unexpected challenge during the research process was the difficulty of recruiting interviewees. Initially, the study was narrowed to fine dining restaurants in Central Finland. The interview requests were sent to each applicable restaurant's general email address and the recipient was asked to share the message in their work community. Only one restaurant confirmed the message had been shared. Reminders were sent but after no replies, the neighbouring region of Pirkanmaa was included in the study, but no applicable interviewees were found. Finally, after changing the scope from fine dining restaurants to full-service restaurants in Central Finland, one interview candidate reached out and an interview was scheduled. During the recruitment phase, the author acquired interview and analytic competence in order to extract the maximum of insight from the interview.

Although Kananen (2019, 49) does advise on reflecting on whether saturation was reached, Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018, 101) argue that saturation is not meaningful in a study that seeks diversity. Nonetheless, saturation through similarity could be considered reached, since each factor group influencing informal workplace learning (Ellström 2001, 432) was identified from the interview. Wallo's (2008) description of learning-oriented leadership was identified in the organization the interviewee was currently employed in.

6.1 Future of informal learning

The Confederation of Finnish Industries (Elinkeinoelämän keskusliitto EK) has argued that the working life is already contributing enough to continuous learning and that the public education system is the one needing a reform, not the working life (Susiluoto et al. 2020). However, if the working life does not hold itself at least partially responsible for the talent shortage, solutions can be hard to find. After all, the employer has created the competence demand for which it struggles to find supply and the public education sector does have its limitations in terms of how it can far employers' constantly changing and increasing expectations. In fact, competence is argued to be insufficient by nature: there is always room for development. Thus, a more socially sustainable and balanced working life can only be developed through critical examination of the competence capital in the labor market and employers' expectations but most importantly, the driving values, attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs behind these two forces.

During the time of writing, the restaurant sector was still heavily impacted by not only the talent shortage, but the pandemic as well. Based on the internal discussion among restaurant sector professionals, many starting entrepreneurs consider very carefully whether it is a good idea to open a restaurant during the pandemic. Reflecting on this, future restaurant owners are advised to include a voluntary investigation of not only the business environment and the consumer market, but especially the labour market. Learning strategies are predicted to be a considerable competitive advantage in future restaurant companies.

A meaningful future study could research, whether informal workplace learning in restaurants is biased towards company-specific competence. The answer to this question could reveal valuable insight about the core of the ongoing talent shortage in the restaurant sector as well as help make company-specific competence more easily transferrable. Another research focus could be to investigate the differences between learning opportunities of restaurant employees and managers, which could be conducted as a case study.

6.2 Research ethics and reliability

Reliability and credibility were continuously reflected during the research process and therefore the most reliable evidence of reliability, in addition to this chapter, is the thesis itself. Separate artefacts for the description of reliability of this study are the appendices.

The Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK has published the responsible conduct of research (RCR) (Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) n.d.), which is complemented by JAMK's ethical principles (Ethical Principles for JAMK University of Applied Sciences Approved by the Student Affairs Board on 11 December 2018 2018). The guidelines and principles of both TENK and JAMK were followed in this study and integrated into the study. To guarantee consent and proper informing before the focused interview, the interviewee was handed a data protection and privacy information sheet, the structure of which was provided by JAMK. In the beginning of the interview, the interviewee was asked whether they had understood their rights as well as the nature of the interview encounter. In the recruitment mailing sent to the restaurants, the restaurant company was asked whether a research permit for their organization is needed because the interviewee was recruited directly through the organization (Kuula-Luumi n.d.). The interviewee's employer did not require a research permit.

A data management plan (DMP) was composed before conducting the research and updated after the group of interest was narrowed from fine dining restaurant employees to full-service restaurant employees. The DMP, approved by the supervisor of the thesis, contained detailed descriptions of how data protection and privacy issues. Direct citations were left to a minimum and function as curiosities. As a complementary privacy protection measure, the interviewee was referred to using gender-neutral pronouns. To guarantee proper analysis and avoid losing valuable information in translation, the research material was processed in Finnish (the author's native language) and translated only for citations.

This study is of subjective nature, much like all qualitative research (Puusa & Julkunen 2020, 189). This subsection arises from the obligation of a UAS thesis to serve the working life through problem-solving (Bachelor's thesis n.d.; Vilkkä 2021, 14). This study revolves around leadership, but complementary education and social studies perspectives have been considered throughout the

research process. As mentioned earlier in this text, informal learning does contain non-utilitarian perspectives, but they are purposefully left out given the mandate of UAS to conduct applied research. A further bias is on the Finnish restaurant sector and full-service restaurants, and this is particularly visible in the research problem.

A reliability issue arose from the classification of sub-sectors in restaurant business: they were subject to the author's interpretation and the difference between casual and full-service restaurants did not depend on a single absolute criterion. To overcome this, the content in the casual restaurant category was analyzed after the primary analysis to ensure that even if some data could have been misplaced to the casual restaurant category, it would still be taken into account should it be considered utile from perspective of saturation. However, as a result, no new insight was gained from this secondary analysis.

After the pre-study (literature review), the author had an assumption that increasing informal learning is a partial, yet potential solution to the talent shortage. This assumption was never considered to be directly applicable to any given restaurant organization or situation but was, nonetheless, carefully bracketed before conducting the study to improve reliability of what was mainly a phenomenological study. The assumption originated from the author's previous experience in the restaurant sector.

Although no expiry date is presented, this study serves its purpose best right after publication in February 2022. For questions and comments regarding the content of this thesis, please contact the author on LinkedIn.

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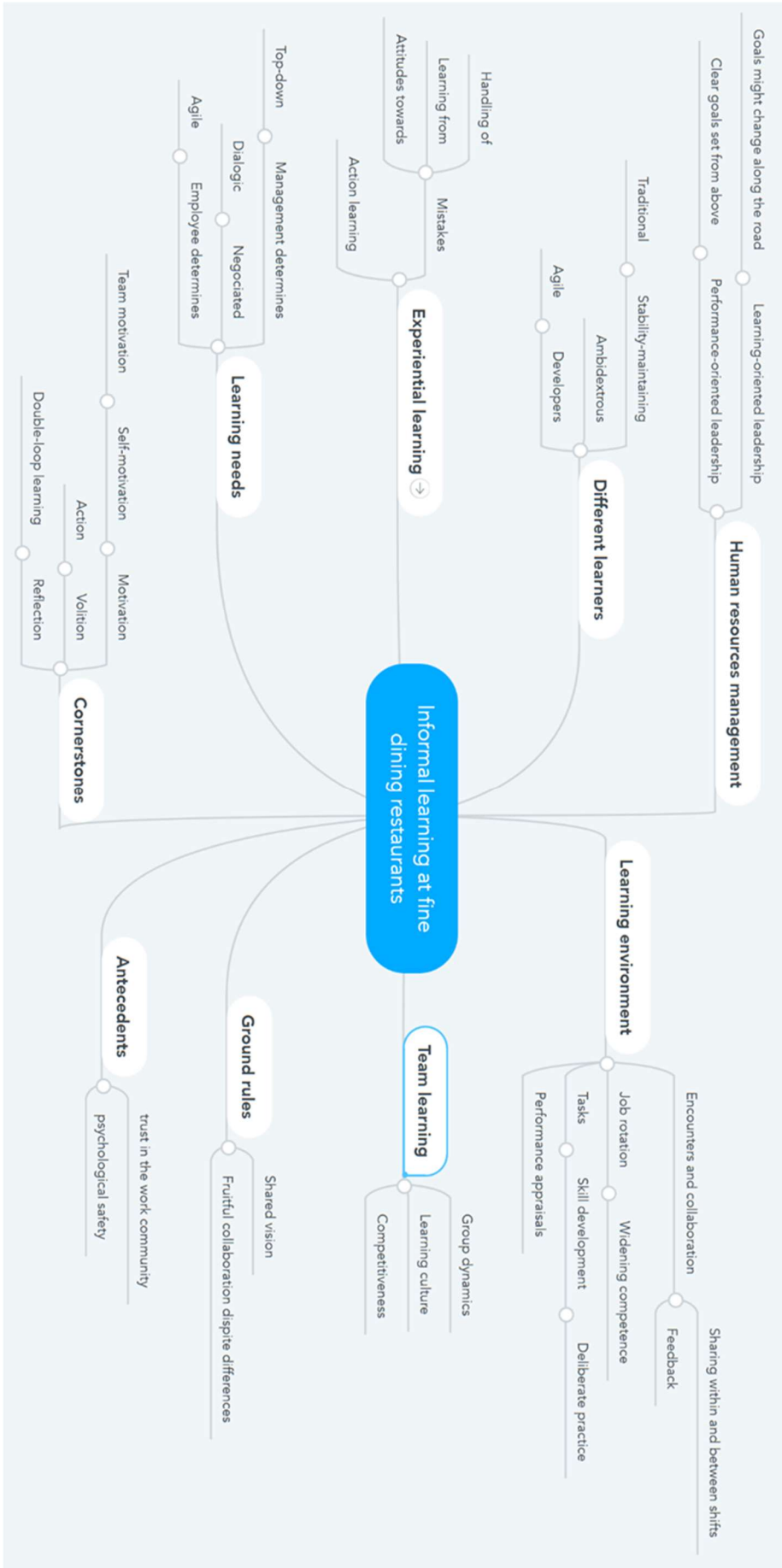
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Appendices

Appendix 1. Mind map used in delineating the topic.



Appendix 2. Research inquiry.

Hei,

Kirjoitan opinnäytetyötä jatkuvasta oppimisesta Keski-Suomen ravintoloissa. Opinnäytetyöni tutkimusosion tarkoituksena on kerätä ravintolatyöntekijöiden kokemuksia jatkuvasta oppimisesta. Tutkimuksen tuloksia käytetään tekemään näkyväksi ravintola-alan työntekijöiden tämänhetkisiä jatkuvan oppimisen merkityksiä ja käytänteitä.

Toteutan tutkimuksen yksilöhaastatteluina ja etsinkin nyt vapaaehtoisia haastateltavia työyhteisöstänne. Tutkimuksessa tarkastellaan nimenomaan työntekijöitä (kokit, tarjoilijat ja muut työntekijät), joten esihenkilöt sekä henkilöt, joilla on koulutus- tai oppisopimus, eivät kuulu tutkimuksen kohderyhmään.

Yhden haastattelun kesto on 30–60 min ja toteutan haastattelut etäyhteydellä – käytössä ovat Teams, Skype, WhatsApp ja Messenger. Haastattelujen ääni nauhoitetaan, litteroidaan kirjalliseen muotoon ja käsitellään tietosuojaselosteen (jaetaan ennen haastattelua) mukaisesti. Yksittäistä haastateltavaa tai tämän työpaikkaa ei voida julkaistusta opinnäytetyöstä tunnistaa.

Sopiaksesi haastatteluajan, voit olla minuun yhteydessä sähköpostilla M3166@student.jamk.fi. Ehdota sinulle parhaiten sopivinta aikaa!

Tuhannet kiitokset etukäteen avustasi.

Parhain terveisin,

Jouni Koskinen

restonomiopiskelija

Jyväskylän ammattikorkeakoulu JAMK

Appendix 3. Interview guide.

Kiitos että päätit osallistua.

Kerro tavoite (kokemusten kerääminen, jatkuvan oppimisen näkyväksi tekeminen)

Rakenna luottamusta:

- ei oikeita tai väriä vastauksia
- luottamuksellinen keskustelu, itsenäinen haastattelija
- sinua tai työpaikkaasi ei voida tunnistaa
- varmista, että tietosuojaseloste ymmärretty

Esittele tutkimushaastattelu:

- kokemustiedon keruutilaisuus, ei terapiaa, ei kehityskeskustelu, ei journalistinen
- teemahaastattelu kahdesta teemasta (merkitys + käytännöt), sinä olet äänessä

Täsmennä oma rooli: tutkija, ei kollega, ei asiakas, ei työnantajan edustaja

Haastattelun kesto max. 60 min

Aloitetaan taustatiedoista.

Etunimi:

Nykyinen ammatti:

Työsuhteen kesto:

Työsuhteen muoto: osa-aikainen / kokoaikainen - vakituinen / määräaikainen

Työkokemuksen määrä ravintola-alalla vuosina:

Työyhteisön koko:

Keskitytään pääosin nykyiseen työpaikkaasi muistojen tuoreuden vuoksi. Voit kuitenkin kertoa vapaasti myös aiemmista työpaikoistasi. Aloituskysymykset:

Mitä sinulle tulee mieleen jatkuvasta oppimisesta työssä?

Puhutaanko työyhteisössäsi oppimisesta? Millä sanoilla? (käytä näitä sanoja läpi haastattelun)

Teemat:

Jatkuvan oppimisen merkitys

Itsen

Esihenkilön

Työyhteisön

Suunnitelmallisuus-spontaanius

Käytännöt

Tilanteet

Yhteistyö

Tehtävät

Palaute

Aika oppimiselle

Ongelmanratkaisu

Onko sinulla vielä jotain mistä haluaisit kertoa lisää?

Kiitos haastattelusta. Lopetan nyt nauhoittamisen.

Appendix 4. Focus guide.

FOCUS GUIDE

Research problem

Employees' informal learning activities in restaurants are not visible and therefore risk being ignored in decision-making in both organizational and societal level

Research questions

Q1. What informal workplace learning opportunities are mentioned in the online job advertisements of directly recruiting full-service restaurants in Central Finland?

Q2. What meanings do Central Finland's full-service restaurants employees give to informal learning?

Q2.1. How does informal workplace learning manifest among full-service restaurant employees in Central Finland?

Theoretical framework

Wallo (2008): learning-oriented leadership <> performance-oriented leadership

Ellström (2001): five factor groups that influence learning potential of a job:

1. task complexity, variety, and control,
2. feedback, evaluation, and reflection opportunities,
3. work process formalization,
4. employee participation in problem handling and development and
5. objective learning resources, such as time for learning.

Methodological framework

Hermeneutic phenomenology

Working life perspective

integrated, neutral