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ARVIOINTIKESKUS

EVALUATION OF THE FINNISH NATIONAL AGENCY FOR EDUCATION INNOVATION CENTRE

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1. Introduction

The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) carried out an external evaluation of the Innovation Centre between 1 October 2020 and 31 January 2021. The evaluation was carried out in accordance with the principles of independent and enhancement-led evaluation.

The purpose of the evaluation was to examine the operating period of the Innovation Centre of Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI) as a whole and the Innovation Centre as an experiment in the administrative branch. The evaluation focused on the impacts of the activities and the drawing of conclusions for the future. The evaluation concerns this operating period of the Innovation Centre. However, the Centre will not continue its operation in the same form. Experimentation activities will continue at EDUFI as part of overall leadership.

The evaluation was aimed at producing conclusions regarding what kind of impacts the activities of the Innovation Centre have had in the change of the operating culture and how the experimentation and development activities should be further developed. The evaluation has been given the task of providing EDUFI with recommendations for further development of the experimentation, development and innovation activities in the field of education.

The purpose of the evaluation was to produce information on the preliminary impacts of the Innovation Centre in the changing operating culture, on the impacts of the new unit on administration and on the Centre as a promoter of a system change. The evaluation focused on the main tasks of the Centre and their preliminary impacts on the change of operating culture in the field of education.

The evaluation team consisted of the following persons:

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- Jari Salminen, University Lecturer, University of Helsinki
- Anna-Mari Summanen, Director of Education and Culture, Municipality of Taipalsaari
- Elina Ylikoski, Director of Innovations, Diaconia University of Applied Sciences

The schedule of the evaluation was as follows:

- Planning the evaluation and mapping out the special features of the unit to be evaluated (October–November/2020, FINEEC)
- Compiling the evaluation data and implementation of a self-assessment (October 2020, Innovation Centre)
- Planning and implementation of the evaluation interviews (November 2020, FINEEC and Innovation Centre)
- Drawing up the evaluation report (November–December 2020, FINEEC)
- Factual verification of the evaluation report (January 2021, Innovation Centre)

The evaluation team interviewed the participants of the experimentation programme on the basis of the background material provided by the Innovation Centre. Reflective and analytical examination of the activities was emphasised in the interviews. The evaluation report and the conclusions in it are based on the material provided by the Innovation Centre (Appendix 1) and on the interviews. A total of 10 interviews were conducted with a total of 23 people. The interviewees comprised representatives from the leadership and personnel of EDUFI, participants of the experimentation programme, representatives of the Paraskoulu accelerator (Best School), representatives of stakeholders, and personnel from the Innovation Centre. The interviewees were selected using the list provided by the Innovation Centre.

The outline for presenting the evaluation results in this report is the following:

- Role and future of the Finnish National Agency for Education
- The Innovation Centre and the experiments as part of the organisation and operating culture of the Finnish National Agency for Education
- The Innovation Centre at the local level (In this context, the local level refers widely to schools, municipalities and stakeholders)
- Conclusions and recommendations

Results from the evaluation at the initial stage of the Innovation Centre 2018–2019

Between 2018 and 2019, FINEEC evaluated the initial stage of the Innovation Centre (Stenvall et al. 2018). One of the starting points in the evaluation team's work was the conclusions, strengths and development recommendations made in the previous evaluation report. The previous evaluation focused on the initial stage of the Innovation Centre, its first year of operation, the process-like working method, the choices made and their appropriateness, the activities in the context of a system change, and the Innovation Centre as part of the change of the operating culture in administration in the field of education and training.

In the previous evaluation, the committed and competent team of experts and the Centre's active and open interaction with actors at the local level were considered to be its general strengths. In addition, the Centre was considered to be encouraging a system change. The team of the Innovation Centre was considered to be nudging and encouraging a system change. The team's uncompromising way of working was identified as a particular strength. The results of this evaluation also confirmed the strengths identified in the previous evaluation.

One of the areas requiring development was the setting of objectives for the Innovation Centre, which had to be specified in more detail. The fairly small resources and system changes by means of a culture of experimentation were discussed in the evaluation. Objectives such as setting an example in initiating an experimental culture of system change and proceeding with small steps aimed at initiating larger changes were proposed for the Innovation Centre. The Innovation Centre was found to have proven through its activities how even a small team at EDUFI can begin to promote and initiate extensive system changes by means that are characteristic of the culture of experimentation.

The second area requiring development was the development of a learning model for the system change. The change in the Innovation Centre's role from a planner to an implementer in order to enhance the effectiveness of the activities was also highlighted. After the evaluation, the Innovation Centre has been developing an evaluation model, among other things. The development of the learning model remained unclear in this evaluation.

The third area requiring development was the need to improve communications and interaction to make the activities more visible. The Innovation Centre has developed its communications significantly, for example, by communicating about its activities by publishing customer stories. In addition, the concepts of the "language of experimentation" used by the Innovation Centre have been opened up, enabling people to understand them better.

The fourth area requiring development was the clarification of new operating methods and models. The evaluation highlighted the fact that a clarification of the operating methods and models through consistent and open dialogue and communications would strengthen the cooperation between the Innovation Centre and different actors. The operating methods and models seem to be easier to accept in theory than in practice. This also applies to the Innovation Centre. At the level of discussion, it is easy to say that "this kind of new openings are important". However, the different ways of acting have caused discomfort and even resistance at the practical level.

The evaluation team of the earlier evaluation also highlighted the need to increase the systematic nature and documentation of the internal activities of the Innovation Centre so as to increase the transparency and reliability of the operation. In this more recent evaluation, it was observed that the Innovation Centre has significantly improved its documentation and made its activities more systematic.

In addition, the evaluation highlighted the need to strengthen the functional links of the Innovation Centre with the anticipation, innovation and development activities in the field of education in order to ensure that the impacts and new operating methods will be permanent. The establishment of a specific steering group was also proposed in the recommendations. The promotion of this development area had been taken into account and the coaching team of the Innovation Centre was active until the end of the Innovation Centre's operation.

Source:

Stenvall, J., Frisk, T., Mustonen, K., Venäläinen, S., Ylikoski, E., 2019. Opetushallituksen kokeilukeskuksen käynnistysvaiheen ulkoinen arviointi ('External evaluation of the initial stage of the Finnish National Agency for Education Innovation Centre'). Evaluation report. Finnish Education Evaluation Centre.

2. Role and future of the Finnish National Agency for Education

The establishment of the Innovation Centre can be seen as a part of a wider societal change affecting all organisations in the field of education. Amid this transformation, the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI) has begun to identify new forms of operation by establishing the new unit. As already stated in the interim report published by FINEEC in January 2019, the objectives set for the Innovation Centre can be considered particularly demanding with regard to promoting the change. Based on earlier research information, it is already known that making a permanent and goal-oriented qualitative change is challenging and slow regardless of the educational sector.

The experiences so far gained from the unit's operation are different and are based on different types of situations both within EDUFI and in different networks of stakeholders. The time span of these interactive situations and activities has also been different. As evaluations and experiences are subjective and depend on the situation, comparisons between them are difficult in many respects.

The objectives originally set for the Innovation Centre, the material provided to the evaluation team and the interviews conducted reveal a clear tension between continuity and change. A clear dilemma can be identified between the strategy to establish the unit and EDUFI's long history. The new development unit was given considerable freedom of action in finding new operating forms and methods from the start. From the point of view of innovation, this decision has been justified. The unit has also been operating in a very different operating culture than the agency, which has a long history, many statutory obligations and the restrictions posed by a large organisation. This logically results in situations where the "traditional operating culture" (the agency) and the "new operating practice" (the experimenting unit) meet, sometimes even clash. However, these attributes should not be overinterpreted. Development work has also been conducted in the traditional agency before, and the new unit also has its own constrictions and marginal conditions.

The different experiences of different actors both within EDUFI and in the cooperation networks are partly explained by the ideological basis of the development activities. The Innovation Centre is part of the key projects and one of the pilots carried out by the previous centre-right government. The objectives set for the project by the financier in turn were fairly loose. This left plenty of room for interpretation at the level of the actual operation. The attitude to this change and the values behind the change

always depend on the worldview of the actors themselves: what values are promoted through the change, how the change is promoted and what is prioritised in it.

The Innovation Centre's objective of promoting a system change has been a demanding task. On the basis of the material, the objective can be evaluated at three different levels: as part of EDUFI, in cooperation networks with educational institutions and as part of the development of the innovation unit's own operating method. The obtained results must be proportioned to the small resources that were available and to the short time span of the operation. The views expressed by the different actors and units on the operation of the experimentation unit are very different to begin with because many simultaneous processes that are under way in different sectors do not necessarily proceed in the same rhythm with the desired change. Promoting a "change" and "agility" are also not compatible with all activities. If people cannot see a clear reason for the change, it will become a strain. EDUFI or especially the school system is not a one-way ecosystem in which competence can be moved easily between its different parts.

Until now, many positive experiences have been gained and the operating method can be taken advantage of in the overall strategy and future vision of EDUFI's operation. At the same time, when this kind of development work expands, awareness is required of the challenges regarding its scalability in relation to the operation and tasks of the entire agency and especially to the problematics of the development of the entire school institution. These issues will be discussed in the following chapters.

3. The Innovation Centre and the experiments as part of the organisation and operating culture of the Finnish National Agency for Education

When assessing the preliminary impacts of the Innovation Centre's operation on the change of the operating culture, administration and the promotion of the change, one of the main contexts is the organisation of the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI), its administration and operating culture.

In this context, the Innovation Centre itself has been an experiment and EDUFI's leadership and other personnel have had an important role in assessing its success/failure and possible impacts – not to forget the role of the Innovation Centre itself.

In the first meeting of the evaluation team, a lively discussion was conducted about the extensive material produced for the evaluation. It had been compiled and mainly also produced by the Innovation Centre itself as documentation on the two years following the first round of evaluation. The evaluation team had gone through the material before the meeting and discussed their first impressions of their future task on the basis of it. In the course of the discussion, the starting point of the evaluation was compared to a theatre performance with a huge number of colourful activities, changing situations and complicated storylines taking place on a strongly lit stage (Innovation Centre in light of the documentation). A strongly lit performance is easy to follow and describe in many different ways. However, the task of the critic (Evaluation team) is in fact to describe the impacts and impressions that the performance creates in the audience that remains in the darkness (EDUFI, the field of education, system).

The theatre metaphor brought up two important things about the Innovation Centre as an experiment at the very start of the evaluation. First of all, the Innovation Centre has exposed itself, in a way that is perhaps still exceptional for its administrative branch, to continuous feedback and external evaluation. This evaluation is already the second external evaluation during its four-year term. Secondly, the metaphor refers to the fact that the audience following EDUFI's experiment with great interest (and watching it with great enthusiasm) is very diverse, polyphonic and linked to the activities of the Innovation Centre from many different directions. Therefore, the evaluation team compiled interview material to be used parallel to the background material submitted by the Innovation Centre. The interview material provided important support for the evaluation and also made it possible to sufficiently include the voice of the "audience" in the evaluation.

3.1 The Innovation Centre as an experiment conducted by the Finnish National Agency for Education – general observations

The changes aimed at in the Finnish National Agency for Education's (EDUFI) operating culture, which the Innovation Centre was expected to promote, were related to wider strategic changes that were taken through in the organisation during the existence of

the Innovation Centre. Based on the material, EDUFI has aimed at dismantling the silos between different activities, removing obstacles to cooperation, making expertise visible and sharing and using it more widely across unit boundaries. A change in the traditional role of experts from experts into coaches or sparring partners in relation to the actors at the local level has been seen as one possible development path. An operating culture and work atmosphere that allow people to question the operating methods used and in which the experts and teams are encouraged to carry out experiments and challenged to innovate with a low threshold were also mentioned as objectives of the change.

Because the task given to the evaluation team was to evaluate the success of the Innovation Centre and its impacts on EDUFI's administration and operating culture, the evaluation team was interested in answers to the following questions, among others: Now that the experiment is coming to an end, do the people who launched it think it was successful or not? Did the experiment fulfil its purpose? Will the operation of the Centre continue as it is, will it expand or will it be discontinued altogether? Did some kind of new practices become established activity in administration? Did the operating culture change in the expected way? What will change at EDUFI as a result of this experiment?

Although the available material did not provide unambiguous answers, it was possible to deduce the following general observations from the material:

As an experiment, the Innovation Centre has been uncompromising and logical in the way it has been operating and loyal to the role given to it as a part of the system change at the level of individuals, organisations and the wider system alike.

Based especially on the interview material, but also on the internal documentation carried out at EDUFI, a certain uncompromising attitude has been possible in spite of the occasional adversities and resistance. This is thanks to the successful composition of the team and the support provided by the leadership. As an experiment, the Innovation Centre has been given the required mandate, opportunities and authorities. The people appointed to carry out the experiments within EDUFI have been experts who have, with the support of the Innovation Centre, engaged in doing things in a different way, looked at things from different perspectives and adopted new working methods to support their own work. As is typical with experiments, the new operating culture has already been adopted and used in these experiments, not merely wished for or planned.

Based on the interviews of people who have followed the activities of the Innovation Centre or been closely involved in it, EDUFI is seen as a bold experimenter – to some extent even as one of the pioneers in the public sector – which has taken seriously the demands to promote the culture of experimentation in its operation, administrative sector and even across administrative sectors. From this point of view, it can be said that the Innovation Centre has been a fairly successful experiment.

Based on its own documentation, the Innovation Centre has also systematically developed its activities on the basis of the development recommendations given in the previous evaluation. This determined commitment to the operating model of continuous development enabled an evaluation of the preliminary impacts of the activities on this round as well. It would otherwise have been a very challenging task during such a short operating period.

Within EDUFI, the experiences of the Innovation Centre and the assessments of its success as an experiment are strongly polarised on several different axes.

Polarisation was most highlighted in the interviews of EDUFI's personnel and leadership and to a lesser extent also in the material produced by the team of the Innovation Centre. The most dramatic confrontations and differences in views were seen on the following axes.

The titles of the table are the evaluation team's definitions of the extremes that emerged in the interview material, while the descriptions are matters brought up by the interviewees and the evaluation team's summaries of them:

Figure 1. Innovation Centre as an experiment evoking polarised experiences

<p>Positive experience</p> <p>In the operating practices of the Innovation Centre, respondents valued the attempts to have a dialogue, the constructive way of promoting interaction through questions, and the constant self-evaluation and willingness to expose itself to evaluation. Matters that were found positive were often seen as opposite to EDUFI’s “mainstream culture”. Matters such as setting an example, providing encouragement and inspiring engagement in activities that have not been “overplanned” in advance were considered positive. Many of the interviewees brought up the operating model of coaching management and co-creation with the help of questions vs. ready answers.</p>	<p>Negative experience</p> <p>The activities of the Innovation Centre were considered somewhat unplanned, confusing and difficult to perceive. As is typical with experiments, the processes of the Innovation Centre have not progressed in line with a traditional development process and some of the interviewees saw this working method as negative. If the characteristics of the culture of experimentation and experimentation activities had remained unclear or the respondents did not see any benefits in the experiments from the point of view of their own work, their experience of the Innovation Centre seemed to remain negative.</p>
<p>Established for an identified need</p> <p>The importance of the Innovation Centre was identified and recognised within EDUFI and the special nature of its role is accepted and understood at a general level. The need for new openings such as the Innovation Centre was highlighted in different contexts in the interviews conducted with both EDUFI and at the local level. The interviews also revealed that experiments such as this require the actors to have an ability to work under conflicting expectations, a permission to do things in a different way and a permission to also use time in a different way. The interviewees took a strong stand on this: The Innovation Centre was seen to respond to a topical need with precisely the right means.</p>	<p>No understandable justifications for its existence</p> <p>According to the interviews, the Innovation Centre continued to be seen as a unit detached from the rest of the operation and whose role in the organisation as a whole the interviewees did not understand. What attracted the attention of the evaluation team was that the Innovation Centre seemed to be expected to give weighty justifications both for its existence and for its operating methods while other established or different units at EDUFI did not seem to be required to do so. The evaluation team therefore got the impression that the mere existence of the Innovation Centre challenged the rest of the organisation even though there are numerous operating models and units at the agency.</p>
<p>Goal-oriented and overburdened</p> <p>Based on the documentation and the interviews, the evaluation team formed an impression of a unit which had been given numerous objectives and tasks by different parties and was subject to a huge number of expectations. Perhaps because of the partly conflicting expectations, it emerged that the expectations faced by the unit were not proportional to the number of its personnel. According to the interviews, the unit was found to be overburdened in a jungle of many assignments. Its operation was found to be goal-oriented by nature, albeit not in the same way as traditional development activities, which are based on specific plans.</p>	<p>Elitist and privileged</p> <p>At the other end of this axis, the interviews emphasised a critical view of the philosophy of the Innovation Centre's operation. The Centre was described as an elitist function where personnel was allowed to use time for discussions and to reflect on and develop their own activities in an exceptional manner. Time, or rather the lack of it, was highlighted as a factor preventing experiments in certain tasks. In this narrative, “there is no time for any extra reflection” in EDUFI’s established functions.</p>
<p>A successful experiment</p> <p>The success of the Innovation Centre as an experiment was conveyed by the interviews conducted at the local level, but to some extent also by the interviews of EDUFI’s personnel. In the messages from the field, the Innovation Centre was not directly referred to as an experiment, but rather as a sign of a change in the operating culture at EDUFI, which was found positive. The material also included direct references to changes in the project and development activities in which integrating an actor such as the Innovation Centre into projects was considered desirable and even regarded as a crucial driver of wider changes, even changes in the system. Such assessments indicate that the experiment has met certain objectives set for it, at least at the</p>	<p>A failed effort</p> <p>The most critical evaluations were actually not targeted at the unit, its personnel or operation but at the way in which the experiment had been launched and how it had been communicated about internally. In this criticism, the starting points of establishing the Innovation Centre were seen as vague and communication about the objectives, purpose and results of the activities were found to have been insufficient or failed. This criticism was brought up in some of the interviews.</p>

local level. Within EDUFI, making experimentation activities a visible part of the new strategy and organisation was highlighted as one indicator of the experiment's success.	
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When examining the table, it is important to take into account that the qualitative material and the description of the polarised views based on it does not reveal how common or rare the experiences or views between the different extremes or the neutral opinions between them are. The table only reveals the issues on which the different sets of material reveal strongly polarised opinions or views on the Innovation Centre, the object of the evaluation.

3.2 The impacts of the Innovation Centre in the administration and operating culture of the Finnish National Agency for Education

As it has already been stated, the direct impacts of the Innovation Centre's activities in different contexts are fairly difficult to evaluate over such a short operating period. Nevertheless, the material currently available clearly indicates that even in this short period of time, the operation of the Innovation Centre has made visible the Finnish National Agency for Education's (EDUFI) established practices, which may have been taken for granted. It has also provided discussion openings that have required people to justify the needs for change or the needs to maintain existing structures or operating models in different forums. This is likely to have been important in those change processes that were under way at EDUFI during the entire operating period of the Innovation Centre anyway.

In the interviews of EDUFI's experts and leadership, the interviewees find that the Innovation Centre has had a positive impact on the ongoing implementation of wider objectives for change. Furthermore, it may even have speeded them up by broadening the way of thinking and providing new, fresh perspectives and sometimes surprising approaches based on solid justifications and research data. Activities in accordance with the Innovation Centre's "can do" attitude and the principle "If you don't try and fail, you cannot know" are considered to have contributed to the internal development with valuable impulses regarding how to manage and change the organisation as a whole and the agency today.

4. The Innovation Centre at the local level

This chapter discusses and evaluates the Innovation Centre's activities and impacts at the local level. One of the Innovation Centre's main objectives was to enable the actors in the school system from schools to municipalities and education administration to realise the power and strength of experiments and co-creation in learning and reforming the operating culture. This was aimed both at promoting a system change and at producing information for decision-making. Activities that break the silos and cross administrative boundaries were seen as the main guideline. The important role of the experiments in increasing understanding of the nature of the challenges and in the development of new and innovative solutions was emphasised. Bringing about a change required genuine and active operation, learning by doing.

In accordance with the objectives of the key projects, the operation of the Innovation Centre focused on municipalities and understanding their operating environments, basic education and the model of experimental development. Voluntary teams from different municipalities defined themselves the local challenges to change and shaped them into pathways to a change through co-creation. They then followed these paths with the help of coaching provided by the Innovation Centre. The Centre's role as a supporter of the work of municipalities and schools, a recipient of experiences, a discussion partner and a peer learner was meaningful. This cooperation strengthened the understanding that *experimenting is not only about new methods and updating the tools available – the culture of experimentation has the power to change the way of doing things, the way of thinking and structures in much more depth.*

In this evaluation, we interviewed representatives of the municipalities, schools and stakeholders that participated in the Innovation Centre's experimentation programme. In light of the interviews, the Innovation Centre is shown in a fairly positive light at the local level. Naturally, there is also room for development.

4.1 Key strengths

A positive, appreciative perspective. The Innovation Centre was fairly consistently considered a positive actor that provides the school sector and the municipal sector with a new kind of innovative boost. The Centre's links with the national goals and its operation as a unit of an important expert organisation in the field of education was valued. The Innovation Centre was also seen to be acting as a pioneer opening doors and enabling cooperation with the local level to the rest of EDUFI's personnel.

The respondents liked the Innovation Centre's actions that questioned the operating practices used, encouraged to experimentation and challenged to innovation. The

participants also gave positive feedback on the creation of cooperation networks and learning to know new people. Furthermore, the developer models and theory models introduced by the Innovation Centre at the local level were found useful and based on research information. All in all, the feedback from the field was encouraging – there are now education providers and schools in which a positive buzz, flexible activities and a joyful spirit of development have emerged as a result of the Innovation Centre’s activities and support. The experimental practices have remained in use in many places, partly with a lower intensity than during the actual experiment.

Descending from the "ivory tower", changing from an inspector into a mentor who inspires and supports. The municipalities and schools that participated in the experimental activities gained great benefits and additional value from the coaching and support provided to them. This is a different operating method in the practices of a traditional expert organisation. It was regarded as bold and fresh activity in which the Innovation Centre had to balance between the roles of an expert and an experimenter. This may lead to internal reflection and partly cause a conflict in one's own role: can an expert be an experimenter who may not necessarily be able to give a definite answer? This was valued at the local level and was found to bring the local level and EDUFI closer and to improve EDUFI’s reputation.

On the way to learning: If you don’t try and fail, you cannot know. At the local level, the Innovation Centre’s encouragement to being bold and daring was found meaningful. Challenging oneself and gaining a stronger understanding that one should not be afraid of making mistakes and that even minor things are important were also seen as benefits of the Innovation Centre’s activities. With the coaching provided by the Centre, the understanding that trying something new is not a sign that something has been done wrong also increased at the local level.

4.2 Areas requiring development

Awareness of the Innovation Centre and its activities. Especially those actors who had been involved in the experiment teams and in other actions of the Innovation Centre were familiar with the Centre. However, the interviewees were not sure about awareness of the Centre and its wider visibility. On the one hand, this was an experiment lasting for the term of the Government’s key project and its aim was not to gain national visibility. It was an experiment, not a change of the operating culture. In this context, we should also remember the resources available to the Innovation Centre: it is not possible to change everything when the team and the resources are small. However, as the experiment successfully paved the way in the field of education, stronger investment in visibility, awareness and promotion of excellent activities and creating awareness might have led to even more benefits. In addition to the experiment teams, having an idea and being inspired to develop ones’ own activities could have been made possible to others as well.

How will permanence be guaranteed? From short-term activities to long-term development work. In the experimenting activities, the participants learnt a fast and agile development method, in which new directions were always taken where necessary. However, the people at the local level partly found the experimentation programme too short. Short-term operation does not enable the measurement and monitoring of the results. More long-term activities are required for it. Effectiveness at the national level requires more extensive projects, not small sporadic experiments. This way it will be possible to dig deeper in the system change and promote it.

The interviews at the local level revealed a wish that EDUFI should be more widely committed to the Innovation Centre's operating models and practices. Would the benefits and impact of such activities be wider if the experts at EDUFI adopted a coaching approach in their own areas of responsibility? This is something to think about and reflect on: which is needed at the local level, know-how or development? Which is more useful?

Less is more. The large number of activities and their expansion is visible in the documentation carried out by the Innovation Centre. In the external evaluation of the initial stage of the Innovation Centre implemented by FINEEC (2019, 8), one of the highlighted areas requiring development was the need to increase the systematic nature of internal activities and the documentation of the activities. This can be seen in the evaluation material. The high workload in the activities and joint meetings was also brought up in the interviews. The issues could not be considered in more depth. If the objectives have been prioritised and clarified, the impacts achieved could have been more concrete. Operation is challenging if the objectives are not clear. On the other hand, it must be noted that the experiments are by nature different from the usual activities based on objectives, outputs and results as the end result of the experiment is not necessarily known and traditional development work is not possible while waiting to achieve it.

Challenging terminology. FINEEC's (2019, 8) previous evaluation highlighted the challenges in understanding the terminology used by the Innovation Centre. The intentionally selected concepts that provoked new thinking were partly aimed at highlighting the activities of the Innovation Centre. The current evaluation also highlighted the difficult terminology and the new way of verbalising matters. On the one hand, the use of new concepts may convey a willingness to make a change and stand out, but on the other, it may also make wider shared understanding more difficult. If people cannot see a clear reason for the changes in concepts, could the concepts and their wider use even get a negative label? A shared understanding is still essential when matters are taken forward.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

This chapter summarises the conclusions drawn and recommendations given in the evaluation.

Above, we have discussed the results of the evaluation in the context of EDUFI and the local level. When it comes to a system change, even the term is challenging. This was already stated in the external evaluation of the first stage of the Innovation Centre, conducted by FINEEC (2019, 31). Because of its ambiguity, a system change can be interpreted in different ways. From a broad perspective, the system change in the field of education can be seen as a simultaneous change in different operating models and methods, structures and tools as well as in their interaction. It is aimed at creating the preconditions for building the digital ecosystem of the future, a path to comprehensive learning and overall wellbeing, among other things. Such extensive changes do not take place instantly. They are huge challenges in which one step forward is made at a time.

An evaluation of the system change cannot be conducted after such a short experimentation period and based on the material used. It would require considerably more comprehensive and more diverse evaluation material from both EDUFI and the educational institutions that participated in the experiment. The identification of real changes in different stakeholders would also require participatory long-term monitoring to enable the identification of more permanent changes.

In the Innovation Centre's own activities, it is possible to identify operating practices required for a system change, development work in accordance with the goal and widely usable know-how about system changes. From this perspective, it can be assumed that, if experimentation activities expand and become established at EDUFI, their impacts are likely to also initiate or strengthen more extensive system changes at the local level. These changes can be enhanced through experimentation, in particular. For example, such changes include lowering the silos separating the administrative sectors and organisational boundaries as well as promoting co-creation across them; strengthening an operating culture that encourages agility and bold experiments; and applying research information rapidly to practice.

Especially in the feedback received from the local level, the activities of the Innovation Centre were perceived as holistic cooperation in which the starting points of the activities were understood and which inspired confidence and encouraged the participants to critically reflect on the starting points of development. This principle was considered a good new way to understand the complex operating culture of schools, while support by experts was also provided for it. The operating method was found very positive in relation to many previous experiments and considered a successful and novel way for EDUFI to act. The experiment thus provided positive publicity to EDUFI. However, these positive conclusions are limited by the fact that, in addition to the conducted

interviews, no other material is available on the success of the experiments or the transfer of learning within municipalities.

However, from the perspective of the development of schools, the result is positive. Based on the evaluation, this operating method should be continued and extended. The experiments conducted at the local level aimed at bold, innovative operating methods that would potentially initiate a system change. Long-term monitoring would enable evaluation of whether there has been a system change. The activities were now based on a technique that was partly fragmented. It would be possible to evaluate the impacts of the experiments in a few years' time to see whether the individual experiments remained short-lived innovations in projects conducted at the local level or whether there have been any permanent changes? Afterwards, it would also be possible to examine whether the experiments led to a wider renewal of operating methods and the way of thinking, and whether it has been possible to use them to develop people's capabilities and agency instead of matters.

In some places, the Innovation Centre managed to sow seeds of courage and boldness at the local level. Several practical operating models and practices were created as a result of the experiments. Would it be possible to disseminate these to a wider audience, for example, by means of virtual experimentation project fairs? This way, the operation of the Innovation Centre would have a wider societal impact.

The Innovation Centre has with merit and in depth examined the development areas that FINEEC highlighted in the evaluation of the initial stage. The Innovation Centre's willingness to evaluate its own activities and to request external evaluation is also a significant change in the operating culture of the traditional agency.

Now that the Innovation Centre as an experiment is coming to an end, three different potential scenarios for how the impacts initiated by the Centre will in the end be realised in EDUFI's administration and operating culture can be outlined on the basis of the evaluation data. (In this context, a scenario means a scenario for the role of the Innovation Centre/experimentation at EDUFI as a whole). Justifications, supporters and opponents for all of these different scenarios were found in the material. Of these scenarios, EDUFI can choose the one that is the most compatible with the role it strives for as an agency, developer and promoter of a system change.

If we return to the theatre metaphor that was presented at the beginning of the chapter, we have now reached the point where the performance has ended. Instead of the stage, the spotlight is directed at the audience, whose reactions reveal what kind of impacts the performance had on the audience.



Scenario 1. Fire turns into ashes

The experiment ends up as information. The results are stored in reports, handbooks and the intranet, where they can be found if necessary. This scenario was strongly highlighted in the interviews in which the attitude to the experiments was positive but in which applying the experimentation activities in one's own work was considered to be difficult or even impossible. At the level of individuals, the experimentation activities may in the future be seen as an opportunity to improve oneself or learn to use new tools. This may lead to impacts. The comparison of fire turning into ashes arose from the fact that, in this scenario, the confidence and willingness to make a personal change are not necessarily felt to exist even though it seems to be appreciated in others. In this scenario, the impacts of the Innovation Centre could be evaluated, for example, by examining how much and in what contexts the knowledge and operating models produced during the experiment are used in future.



Scenario 2. The fire continues as fireworks

The experiment ends up as a feeling. The results of the experiment evoke feelings – enthusiasm and inspiration – and the information created as a result of the experiment may be used in the operation. Informal networking, dialogic evaluation and peer support may find their place inside the organisation and the experiments may continue and become established in contexts that may sometimes be surprising. However, experimentation is not an inbuilt part of leadership or the operating culture but rather a choice made by individuals in their approach to work. In this scenario, it might be possible to measure the impacts through the competence of the personnel and the perceived atmosphere at work.



Scenario 3. The fire starts a blaze

The experiment ends up as activity. Experimentation is integrated into the operating culture, and the job descriptions and the way of doing things are changed. Systematic use of the means of experimental development in appropriate contexts is a conscious choice that may lead to renewed justifications for the implementation and use of other working methods, operating models, development tools and approaches. In this scenario, the evaluation of the impacts and effectiveness is implemented in the short and long term, as part of other evaluation of impacts.

Appendices

Liite 1. Evaluation material submitted by the Innovation Centre

1. The team's operation and self-assessments, as appropriate (2019–2020)

The team of the Innovation Centre has worked in a self-directed manner, using different self-assessment methods and tools that support self-direction. Sampled examples of the team's working methods can be found in this section.

2. The coaching team's material (2019–2020)

Based on the recommendations given in FINEEC's enhancement-led interim evaluation, the Innovation Centre established a coaching group, the aim of which has been to support the work of the Innovation Centre and build a controlled exit with support from the work on scenarios. This section contains examples of the team's activities. The team has convened 2–4 times a year, as necessary. Its members are EDUFI's Director General Olli-Pekka Heinonen, Director Samu Seitsalo, Director of Education Tiina Hirvonen from the municipality of Nurmijärvi and Professor Jari Stenvall from Tampere University. The last meeting of the team was organised in October 2020.

3. Wrapping up the experimentation programme (2018–2019)

With support from Demos Helsinki, the Innovation Centre implemented a 12-month experimentation programme in which 12 municipalities participated. This section describes the process of the experimentation programme and the main learnings gained from it.

4. Wrapping up the experimentation programme (Stage 3, 2020)

5. Wrapping up the development of the evaluation model (2019)

As part of the experimentation programme, a pilot of a multi-perspective evaluation model increasing inclusion was implemented together with VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland and the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health for evaluating the experiments. In the pilot, criteria were developed for evaluating the experiments in basic education and an interactive fishbowl model was applied to identifying the impacts of the experiments. The pilot and what was learned from it are described in this section.

6. Wrapping up the #Paraskoulu accelerator (2019–2020)

As part of the set of projects related to the Comprehensive School Forum, the Innovation Centre implemented an accelerator with the aim of supporting the implementation of the experiments and peer learning. This section describes the process of the accelerator and what has been learned from it.

7. Wrapping up communications (2019–2020)

The Innovation Centre has systematically developed its internal and external communications based on the recommendations given in FINEEC's interim evaluation. This section describes how communications has been developed at different stages of the operation.

8. Scenario work (2019–2020)

When the operating period of the Innovation Centre ends at the end of 2020, the essential question will be how the Centre's way of operating could be introduced into use more widely and benefitted from at EDUFI. As part of this process, the Innovation Centre launched the so-called scenario work in 2019. In this summary, we describe the process of the scenario work and the scenarios for the new development roles drafted on the basis of the observations. These roles can serve as an inspiration and support decision-making when EDUFI reflects on its identity and the direction of its actions as a national developer and important enabler of a system change in its field.

9. EDUFI's experimentation programme (launched in 2020, ending in December 2020)

The Innovation Centre's impact action related to the performance agreement of 2020 is to guide a set of experiments at EDUFI with the aim of gaining knowledge from co-creation experiments in order to support the change of the operating culture in administration. The process is still under way, but the nature of the process and the material used in the joint work has been described in this section.

10. Description of preparations for an Erasmus+ project and the summary (2020)

In 2020, the Innovation Centre acted as a coordinator leading the preparation of an extensive set of Erasmus+ projects together with the University of Helsinki and three partner countries. The background of the project preparation and the summary of the application are described in this section.

11. Development of an innovation-friendly education system (2019–2020), a publication

<https://hundred.org/en/articles/undefined>

HundrED implemented a report on global and Finnish innovations in the field of education. The Innovation Centre participated in the report by identifying experiments in the field of education in Finland to be included in the report and participated in the steering group of the report.

12. The World's Biggest Parents' Evening – Finland's biggest virtual experiment (2020)

In spring 2020, the Innovation Centre created the concept of the World's Biggest Parents' Evening and implemented the event together with colleagues from YLE, Finnish Parents' League and EDUFI. More than 9,000 representatives of schools, municipalities, education administration and families from across Finland participated in it. A description of the production is available online (link in Finnish): <https://www.oph.fi/fi/uutiset/2020/maailman-suurimassa-vanhempainillassa-284-jaetaan-kokemuksia-etaopetuksesta>. The lectures given during the implementation are available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bqAk87iyRfE>



The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) is an independent education evaluation authority. It conducts evaluations related to **education** and the operation of education and training providers from early childhood education and care to higher education. In addition, FINEEC conducts evaluations and learning outcomes evaluations in basic education and upper secondary education. FINEEC's task is also to support education and training providers and higher education institutions in matters concerning evaluation and quality management and develop the evaluation of education.

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