Building a **Cross-organisational peer learning** Program

Final **Report**

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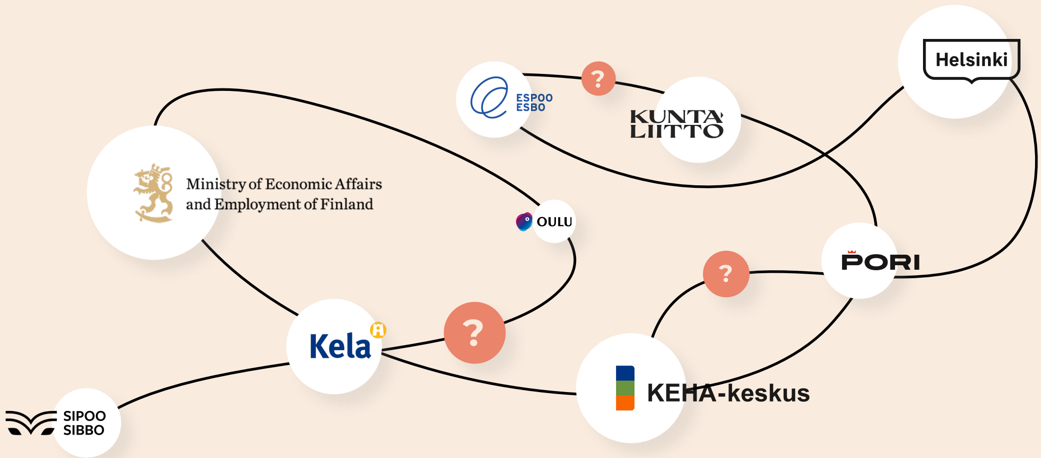
Executive **Summary**

In the TE2024 reform, employment services will be transferred to the municipalities from the current state-led, centralized structure. The aim of the reform is to bring the employment services closer to the customers by creating a new service structure. The municipalities are expected to be able to offer better targeted and tailored services to jobseekers in a way that meets the needs of local labor markets [Ministry of Employment and Economic Affairs (MEAE), 2021]. The decentralization of the employment services will require the municipalities to play a larger role in taking over the basic services for jobseekers and innovating new services. TE and municipality employees will be learning to do things differently, and the organizations as a whole need to find new ways of working. We suggest that peer learning can act as a leverage point in the network of different entities working on this reform, allowing them to self-organize, form new connections and communicate across organizational boundaries. This can help mitigate some of the issues and uncertainties arising from the reform.

The peer learning practices that exist are fragmented and do not manifest the full potential of cross-municipality collaboration. Individuals do reach out to other municipalities, but this currently takes a lot of time and resources. Another issue with the current peer learning practices is that they are too formal which limits certain topics and problem-areas that would be useful for the users. To fix this, we suggest that peer learning could play a larger role in the reform by being included in the reform policy. This would facilitate the formation of a peer learning program. This program should introduce a more comprehensive understanding of peer learning that is grounded in utilizing user-experience, the relevant literature and benchmarking successful initiatives elsewhere.

Executive **Summary**



We suggest that the peer learning program should be created by a working group consisting of all the key actors, such as KEHA, KELA and Kuntaliitto, and it should be coordinated by MEAE. We suggest that the working group should work in an open and collaborative manner. It should aim to use the existing resources and expertise available to the different actors.

As a part of our proposal, we have created a tool that the working group can use in creating the program. The tool consists of seven cards that encapsulate the key elements of peer learning. By using our cards, the working group will ensure that the program created will be comprehensive and feasible and take into consideration a wide-range of issues while addressing the needs of the users. By using our tool the working group can coordinate the process and create a peer learning program that will be ready to use by the municipalities in 2024, when the reform will be fully implemented.

Introduction

Finland is currently undergoing the largest change in employment services in decades. Compared to our Nordic peers, Finland has had relatively high unemployment rates. The current government has set out to improve this by overhauling the employment services by shifting from a centralized system to one where the services are provided by the municipalities. (Aho et al., 2022) The reform is influenced by the success of the Nordic Model, which was particularly applied in a similar reform implemented in Denmark in 2007. The end result of the reform is envisioned to improve the employment rate, to be more innovative and flexible and to have more focus on the individual job seeker's unique situation and needs. For these purposes, among other things, the municipalities are expected to coordinate activities with local learning institutions and businesses to find solutions to the employment mismatch problems locally. (Aho et al., 2022). All these changes means that there are many different actors who need to coordinate their work in new ways.

The reform is set to take full effect in 2024. Nevertheless, at the moment all of these changes are being piloted in several municipalities. In this sense, practical experience is currently being accumulated in different places simultaneously. Moreover, with the formulation of the legislation still on going, there are a lot of moving parts and unknowns.

What makes this reform especially tricky is the myriad of different actors involved, with the municipalities taking a central role in the activities and requiring coordination between KELA, employment services, ministries, local learning institutions, businesses, and others. This coordination needs to happen in a way that produces a good and effective experience for the job seeker.

Our brief was to focus on the public servants' needs in order to ensure collaboration between different parties in a way that produces a people-centered outcome.

Understanding the Stakeholders

Public servants are not a homogenous group with the same needs so they do not necessarily require the same solutions. It is thus important to understand how each stakeholder sees their role and situation. For this purpose, conducting desk research was the first natural step we took as a group in order to understand the reform.

At this stage, for example, we went through some available reports. However, reports tend to reflect on the point of view of those who wrote them, so they can be very limited. To gain novel insights it is important to be able to formulate questions from your own point of view, and most importantly ask them.

In this sense, together with all the other groups working with the same brief, we collaboratively organized a round-table discussion with representatives from KELA, TE-office, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment and the city of Espoo. We asked them about their goals, their perceptions on successes and challenges, and current activities among other things. We managed to gain valuable insight into how the different actors see this reform. One viewpoint shared by all of them was that the jobseeker perspective needs to be put at the center of the process, and to work with "yhden luukun periaate" (one-stop shop principle). Another point that arose was the need for improvement of information flows and collaboration. The uncertainties of the ongoing formulation of legislation and pilot experiments were also brought up during the discussion by several parties. As a representative of Kuntaliitto aptly put it; what is needed is "not only collaboration, but working together."

It is easy to get swamped with information and data when trying to understand a complex issue. While it is important to gain an understanding of the big picture, at the same time it is also important to understand the relevant details. In the end, our goal was not to influence the legislation, but to bring a design perspective into the mix in a way that can help the people in this system.

Focusing on the problem instead of the solution

Trying not to jump into solutions is difficult but necessary. At this point we were shifting from trying to understand the nature of the reform into trying to understand the relationships within the reform, and finding the relevant ones to focus on.

As we were moving into more in depth interviews in the coming week, we had more questions than what we started with, but all of this served the framing of the problem in a way that we can eventually start working out a solution for.

Systemic Analysis:

Understanding relationships between organizations participating in the reform

The TE2024 reform is a complex initiative with a lot of moving parts and uncertainties. For this reason it was important for us to study the reform and the activities within it holistically in order to frame a well rounded problem that was relevant to solve. This is when we adopted a few systems thinking approaches. ***'Systems thinking is a way of making sense of the complexity of the world by looking at it in terms of wholes and relationships rather than by splitting it down into its parts.'*** (Ramage, M. Shipp, K. 2009) ***'It has been used as a way of exploring and developing effective action in complex contexts.'*** (Government Office for Science. 2012). Considering this ideology and its similarities to our case, it was logical for us to look at the TE2024 reform as a large system in itself with all its entities or participants having interdependencies when it came to legislative, planning, informative and implementation activities. According to Meadows, D. H. (2015), a system is an interconnected set of elements (which are different employment service organizations in our case) that are organized to fulfill a certain purpose (the TE2024 reform). Using systems thinking as a guiding concept helped us effectively structure our understanding of its three main components -

1. Elements (Activities and participants of the reform)
2. Interconnection of these elements
3. The purpose of the system (the goals of the reform in our case).

This framework was useful in discovering elements we could affect and leveraging their interconnections as a means to realize our ideas.

Unearthing **challenges, triumphs & expectations** with on-the-ground employees

To understand where crucial pain points are situated and who they are most challenging for, we conducted semi-structured interviews with representatives from most of the organizations in this system, ranging from people working with employment services in the municipalities to representatives of KEHA and Kuntaliitto. Based on our desk research and the round table discussion, we had identified several topics that we wanted to delve deeper into. We coordinated the interviews with the supergroup we had formed with the other groups and discussed how we could most effectively use the time with the interview participants. Based on this we formulated open-ended questions that would spark discussion on various topics.

The interviews were semi-structured, as we were still exploring different topics and wanted to encourage the emerging of new issues. The interviews were conducted by 2-3 students participating from the different groups. Prior to the interviews, a consent form was sent by email to the participants to inform them of how the interview data would be used and of the research ethics. All of the interviews were carried out online, using Microsoft Teams. The responsibilities of the interviewers and note takers were delegated between us, and the interview notes were shared between all of the students in a Google Drive folder to make sure all the data was available to all the groups. We wanted to hear about their experiences and find connections for the negative experiences or challenges, that is, to identify the starting point or the root of the problem within the system of this reform. When it comes to positive experiences, we aimed to outline ways to make use of their best practices in a way that helps other organizations.

A lot of everyday challenges and feelings about the reform and its communication to employees surfaced during these conversations. This also helped us understand the magnitude of certain problem areas beyond our assumptions. Our interviewees comprised of TE employees at customer service levels, Kela's customer service personnel, Planners from pilot municipalities, and representatives from Kuntaliitto and KEHA.

These few quotes gave us an idea of the spirit of current reform transitions :

- *"The main problem is that this is such a messy thing and there are so many levels, there are not many people who get the big picture or can facilitate these discussions."* - Kuntaliitto Employee

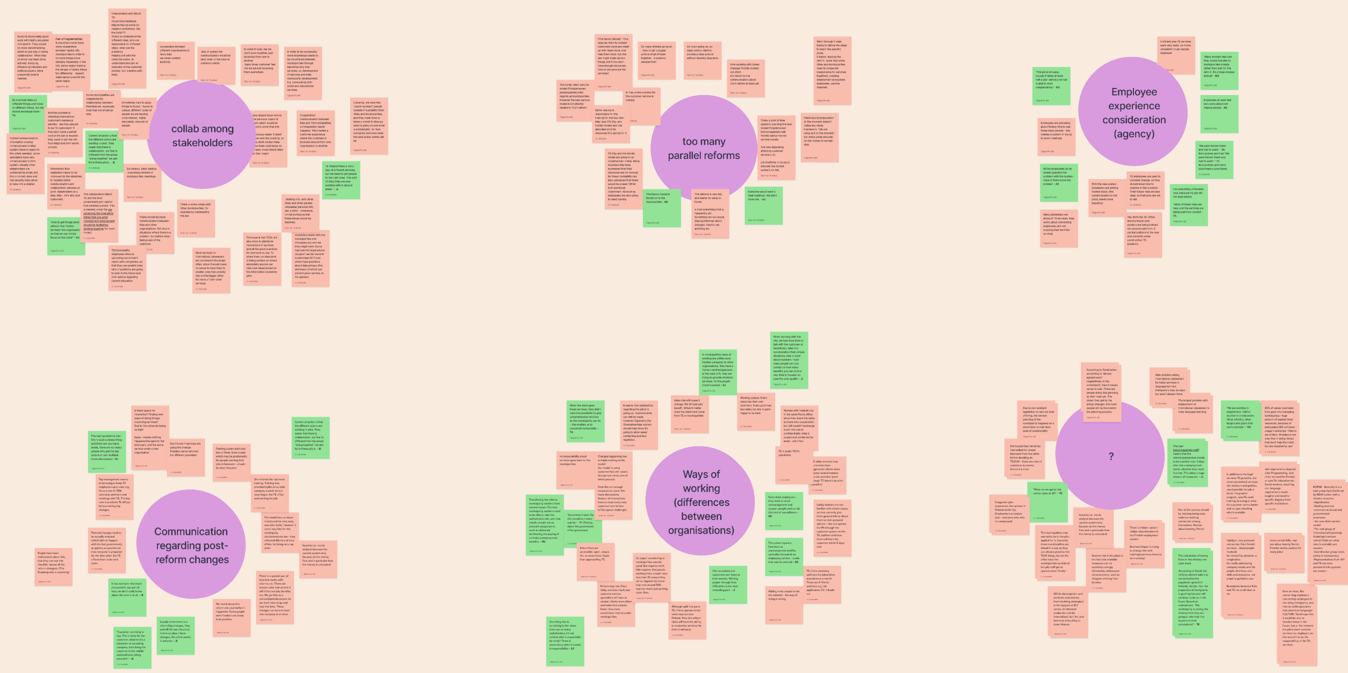
- *"I do everything differently now, because my job did not exist before."* - Planner at the Helsinki pilot

- *"When do we get to a normal state?"* - TE Employee

- *"Usually when there is a reform/big changes, they wait till the last minute to inform us about these changes, like a few weeks in advance."* - KELA customer service personnel

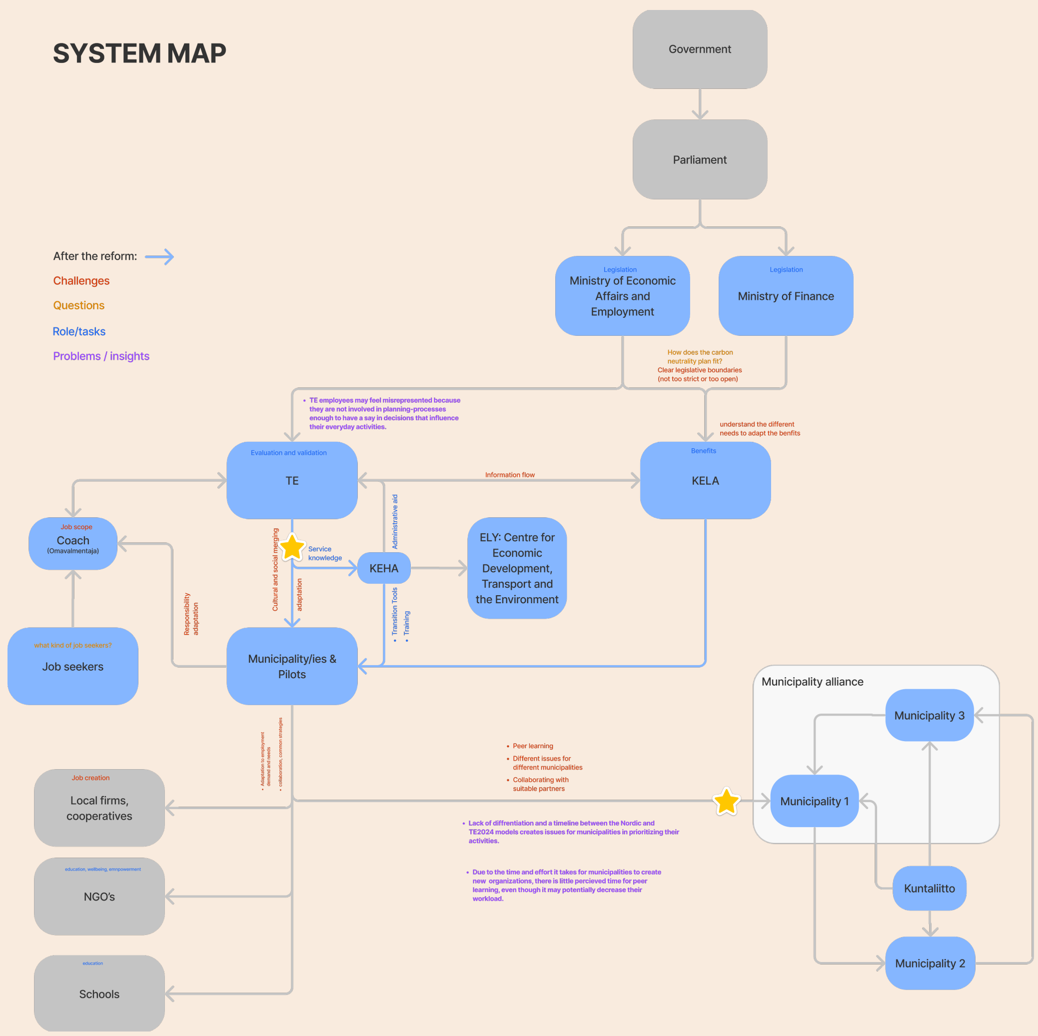
- *"The current system functions as an unemployment benefits controller instead of an employing service."* - Researcher at the Espoo pilot

Once we went through a process of marking down key observations from all our interviews, we began our analysis by identifying common themes which were mentioned by a lot of employees. We then put these together visually with the theme in the center and evidence (quotes) around it. ***This is what we refer to as an ‘Affinity map’. This activity helped us locate emerging patterns related to the kind of problems the employees brought up and their severity which eventually led us to framing our main problem statements.***



Current interactions & changing relationships between employment service entities

Parallel to conducting these interviews we were working on creating a system map in order to see what are the roles of different organizations in relation to one another, hierarchies of information flow and cause and effect relationships of different reform activities. While the affinity map is good at gathering common themes between various actors, it is important to outline the relationships and responsibilities between them. Always having this map to go back to helped us understand the context of this reform, main stakeholders and the bigger picture which served as a canvas for us to situate our insights and interview findings on.



How we chose to structure our systems map is to first outline the hierarchy of the reform decisions (by organization) and then add a layer with all the roles these different organizations play and another layer with how these roles change after the reform. After having this meta-level overview we moved on to focus on smaller groups or loops on the map and identified more specific challenges which we then juxtaposed with data we gathered from our interviews.

This gradual development of the TE2024 reform system now leaves us with a comprehensive structure of roles, challenges and perspectives of different organizations and their employees. What this will now help us do is find the perspective we want to focus on and identify points of leverage or intervention where we can help design a change.

Three **problem segments** at the grassroots

After having analyzed all the information we have so far by itself and as a part of the interconnected system of the reform we outlined three problem areas that were of concern to a large number of interview subjects.
These three segments are :

- ***TE employees' under involvement in the reforms planning processes.***
- ***The goal overlap between different ongoing reforms which leads to lack of motivation in implementing either one effectively.***
- ***The vicious cycle of having no time for peer learning due to the burdensome task of creating new organizations even though peer learning would reduce this burden.***

The next step was to further narrow down our areas of intervention within one of these segments and outline a more precise area to work with for example selecting one stage of the employment service.

Three **problem segments** at the grassroots

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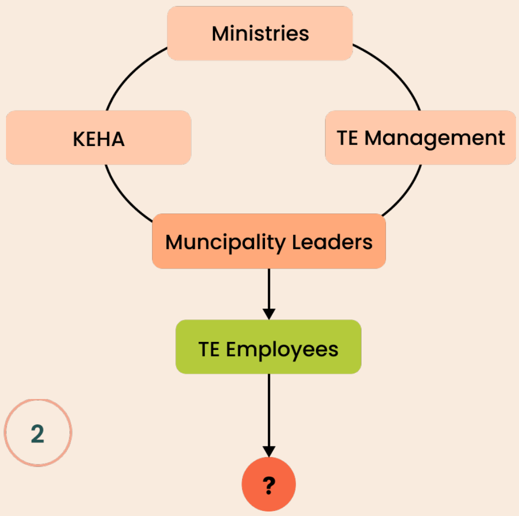

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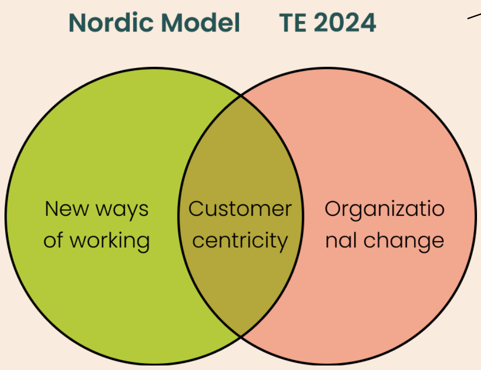

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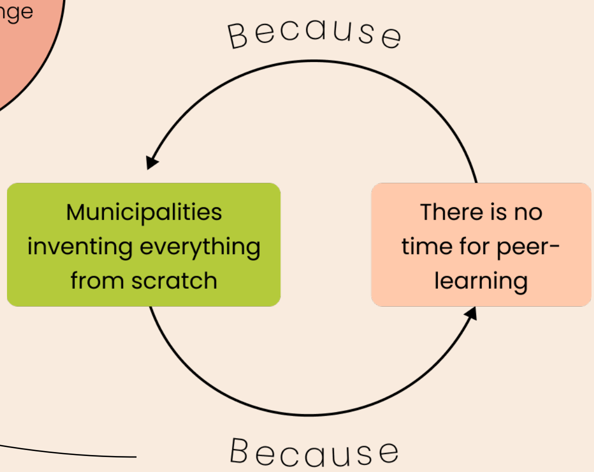


Design Intervention:

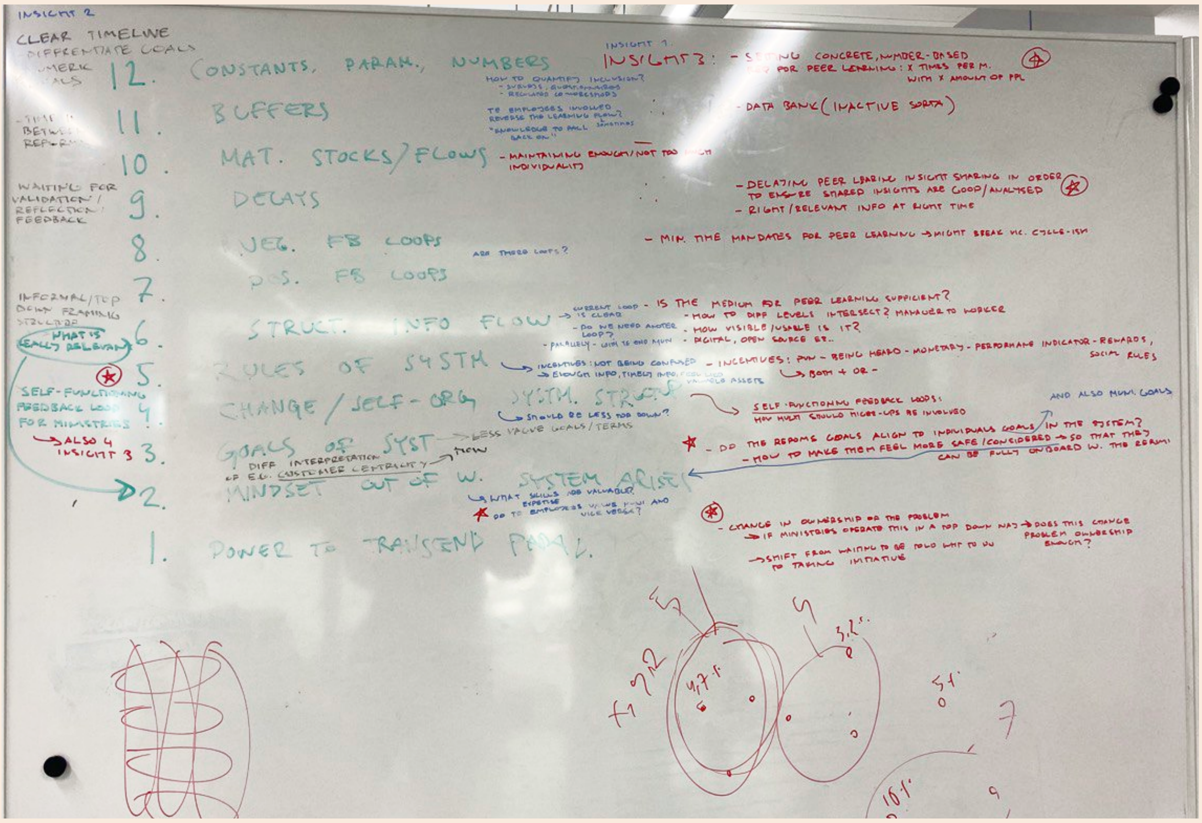
From Top Down Governance to

Peer Collaboration

In order to move forward from identifying the problem areas to better understanding where our interventions could take place, we engaged with Meadow's Leverage Points framework (Meadows, 1999). This framework aims to identify the places within a complex system where a small shift can produce big changes. Nevertheless, we always kept critical about not trying to find the "silver bullet," Instead, we sought to create a concrete and feasible solution that would help address a specific challenge of the reform.

We used Meadow's twelve leveraging points systematically, by mapping them to our three problem statements. For each of our problem statements, we ideated potential interventions based on each leveraging point. Overall, the exercise helped us uncover layers of complexity and new perspectives within our three problem areas. One particular leveraging point, "the power to add, change or self organize system structure," stood out to us and evoked ideas about self-functioning, inter-municipality peer learning networks.

Additionally, we realized some themes were common between our three problem statements. One of them was that information seems to flow down very vertically from the ministries to the municipalities. This theme was linked to two of our problem areas: the lack of peer learning strategies and the under-involvement of employees in the reform's planning processes. This is one of the reasons why we decided to position the concept of horizontal, self-functioning systems at the core of our design intervention.



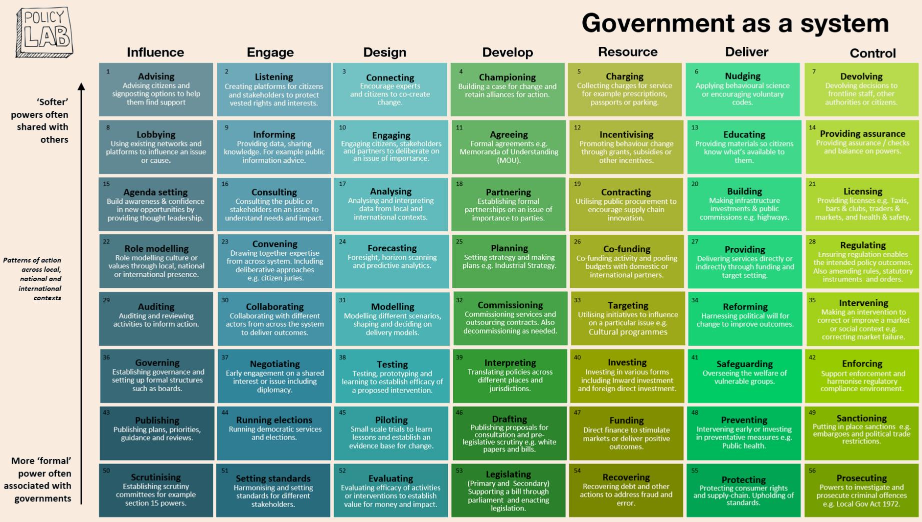
Moving Towards Our **Design Intervention**

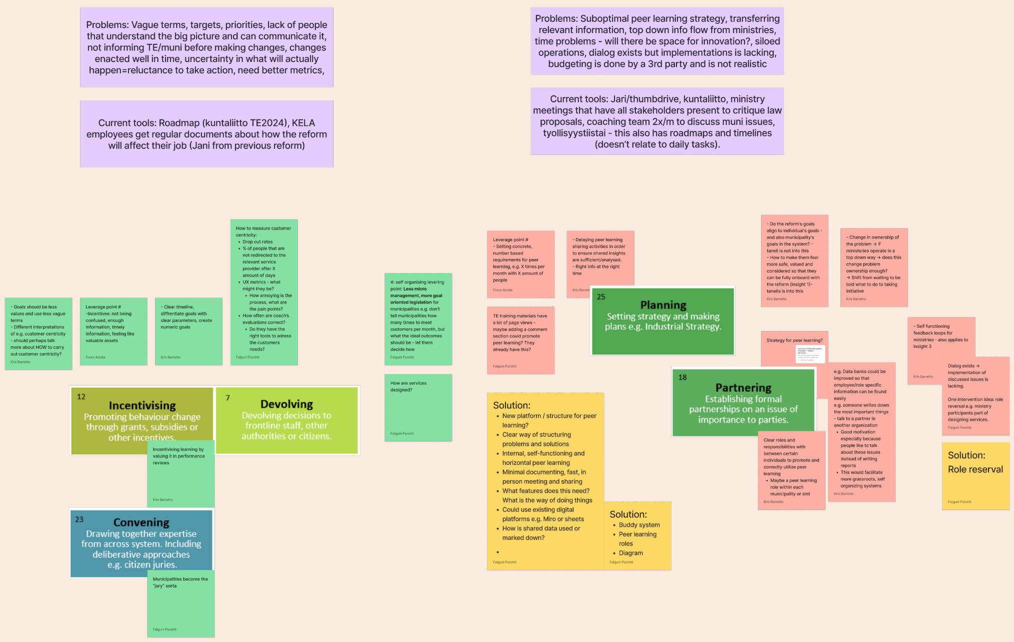
The next phase of our process involved the use of the Policy Lab Toolkit. The toolkit offered a matrix of intervention types commonly used in government. Similarly to how we made use of Meadow's leverage points, we mapped out intervention types that seemed appropriate for each of our three problem statements. Since we went through the vast list of intervention types one by one, the process of selecting suitable ones for each problem statement was thorough but rather slow. Once we had formed a list of suitable intervention types, we used them as inspiration to brainstorm more concrete interventions.

At this point we noticed that our problem statement related to cross-municipality peer learning ended up with the most intervention ideas. Our ideas were essentially methods of connecting municipality employees to better facilitate peer learning. Additionally, we realized that these interventions would also partly address the challenges in our other two problems statements. Since improvements in peer learning would promote a more horizontal governance structure, we reasoned that it would also improve TE and municipality employees' morale by making them feel more empowered and appreciated.

Based on our intervention ideas, we created a storyline of an ideal outcome. This helped crystallize what exactly we wanted our interventions to accomplish. In our scenario we described how an improved peer learning initiative could benefit both ministries and frontline employees. Frontline employees would have better means to connect and learn from peers while the ministries would be able to more easily keep track of issues in the municipalities, allowing them to adjust legislation accordingly.

The combination of Meadow's leverage points, Policy Lab's intervention matrix and our ideal outcome storyboard all helped us in exploring the design space and narrowing down our focus.





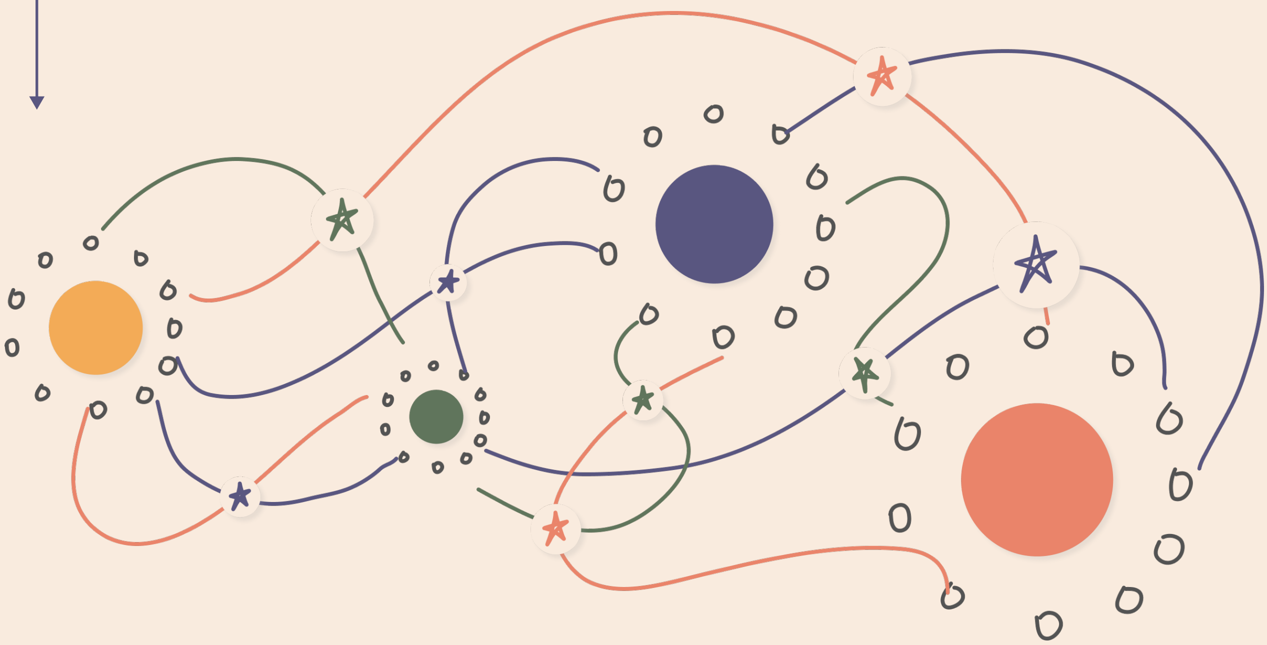
Potential **ideas**

Now that our focus had been narrowed, our potential intervention ideas started to take on a more concrete form. We had ideated ways of facilitating horizontal, cross-municipality peer learning. One of our ideas was a hackathon where municipalities could interact, share and tackle mutual challenges together. We also considered the creation of new roles dedicated to peer learning since the municipalities are currently undergoing a large scale recruitment process. Yet another idea was a buddy system where individuals in one municipality would be paired to suitable counterparts in other municipalities in order to foster collaboration and peer learning.

With these tangible interventions in mind, we reflected on what would be required in order to make them achievable. This led us to explore what exactly makes peer learning successful, ultimately resulting in our final proposal which we will elaborate on in the following chapter.

Final proposal: Building a Cross-organisational Peer learning Program

In this section we will break down our proposal, show where it offers value and explain how we got to it. Our proposal is for The Ministry of Employment and Economic Affairs to form a working group to collaboratively design a peer learning program. In order to drive the program, we also suggest the need to integrate peer learning as part of the reform's policy objectives. To support the program design, we offer a design tool, the elements of peer learning cards, to help the working group get started and ensure that the program would be well rounded.



What problems does the proposal address and **where does it offer value?**

Although the need for peer learning and better collaboration may sound rather self-evident, the design of a structured peer learning program, how this might be carried out and who would facilitate it is perhaps less apparent. In our research we have found significant challenges with the current means of peer learning. Although municipalities do reach out to each other, the process tends to be tedious, slow and partially based on luck.

Knowing who to connect to in other municipalities for assistance and expertise, often requires well connected individuals and their personal networks or extensive investigation. When the reform is fully implemented, these issues will compound as there will be 50-70 municipality groups, increasing both the need for collaboration and the complexity in doing so.

A structured, well defined peer learning program would address these issues by providing a cohesive, more straightforward means for collaboration across the country. Not only would this provide equal opportunities for all municipalities to peer learn, but it would also potentially save a considerable amount of time. Instead of creating everything from scratch independently, municipalities would be able to work together and decrease double work. From a frontline employee perspective, the program would directly make their jobs easier and more effective. It would help them more easily connect, share problems, make use of best practices and co-work solutions with employees from other municipalities. For ministries, the program would allow them to better serve the municipalities and ease their transition into the reform. Kela would also benefit from having an improved avenue to collaborate with municipalities.

Defining the **Scope**

Since our research pointed towards the need for a more structured means for peer learning, ***why did we not design a peer learning activity or program ourselves?*** After narrowing our solution scope to peer learning, our team did in fact ideate and brainstorm potential ways of connecting municipality personnel together. We started looking into what would make a successful peer learning activity and came up with ideas such as an inter-municipality buddy system or regional hackathons. However, at this point we realized the magnitude of the challenge we were attempting to solve.

How could our team possibly know what peer learning format would be most successful? How could we ensure that our idea would make best use of the current infrastructure, ways of working and instruments that the government currently has in place? It became evident that we could not, but we could offer a path for those who could. This is where we began framing our solution as a proposal for specific stakeholders to design a peer learning program. To support the program design, we worked out general guidelines about how the program could be created and started to develop a concrete design tool.

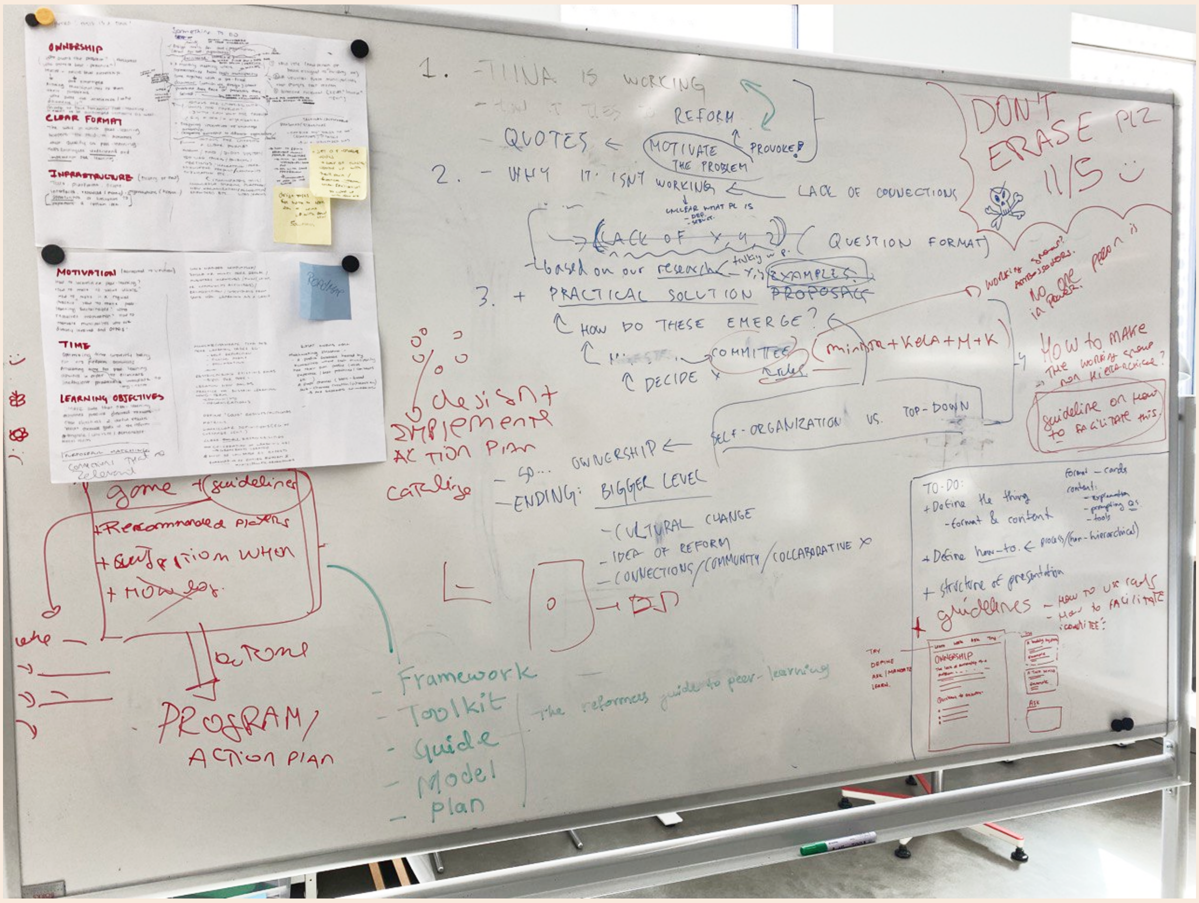
From peer learning research to **a design tool**

The process of creating our design tool was not particularly linear. Our initial exploration of potential peer learning activities already revealed some insights into what makes a successful collaborative activity. However, only after framing our solution as a program proposal did we realize the research we had done into peer learning could be the basis of a design tool. Although we had inadvertently already been designing it, we only later realized what it was that we were creating.

We resumed our study of peer learning, now with the intention of building a tool. We went back through past interviews and highlighted what interviewees desired and found troublesome about peer learning. We also looked through successful examples of peer learning, such as the means for cross-municipality collaboration Denmark has in place as a result of the recent employment service reform there. In addition, we also conducted general desktop research into peer learning strategies. One notable study that supported our thinking was, "A study of peer learning in the public sector," by the Effective Institutions Platform (Andrews & Fanning, 2015).

The tool that we had in mind was a breakdown of peer learning. We wanted something concrete that could assist our proposed working group with designing the peer learning program. While developing this tool, we realized that there are potentially an infinite amount of variables when designing a peer learning program, but some variables would matter more for the outcome than others. It became clear that our tool needed to help the working group structure complex choices by influencing choice architecture. According to Thaler, Sunstein & Balz (2014), people adopt different strategies for making choices depending on the complexity and the amount of available alternatives. When having to choose from only a few alternatives, there is a tendency to examine all the attributes of the alternatives and make the necessary trade-offs. However, this becomes difficult when the choice set gets large. In these cases the alternatives are often looked at through a more simplified lens.

When forming a peer learning program, we did not want the working group to choose between a large number of existing programs. Instead, we wanted them to develop a singular program, or a couple of alternative programs that properly considered all of the necessary characteristics.



As these characteristics can manifest in many different ways (e.g. there are many different platforms that could be used for peer learning), the number of alternatives and choices that needs to be made in designing a peer learning program is high. As the number of choices increases, a good choice architecture will provide structure which will then influence outcomes (Thaler, Sunstein & Balz, 2014). Thus the elements we discovered through our research would need to be translated into a tool that would provide a good choice architecture for building a well functioning and feasible peer learning program. So after much iteration and refinement, the result was a short, neat list - the seven elements of peer learning. These elements were our way of controlling the choice architecture and simplifying the process of designing a peer learning program.

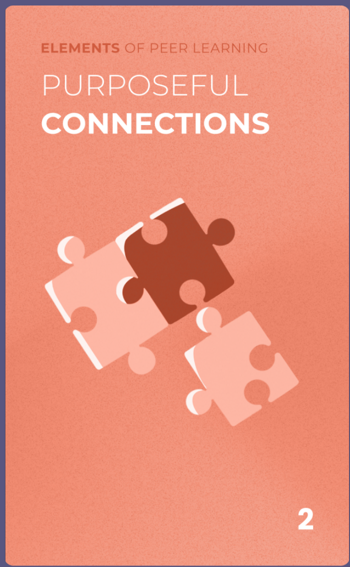
Our **Design Tool**

The peer learning breakdown consists of the following seven elements:

1 Learning **Objectives**
2 Purposeful **Connections**
3 **Responsibility**
4 **Format**
5 **Resources**
6 **Time**
7 **Motivation**

Learning objectives considers what the aims of peer learning are and who defines them. ***Well defined objectives*** are necessary to ensure that learnings are useful. ***Purposeful connections*** address who it makes most sense to connect. This includes both the macro level of what organizations and municipalities might be connected, as well as the more micro level of what individuals and roles make the most sense to connect. ***Responsibility*** considers who is responsible for bringing up issues and who is responsible for best practices or expertise that may help in solving those problems. ***Format*** deals with where and how peer learning takes place. For example, is it carried out in the form of one-on-one meetings, hackathons, Teams meetings or on some other digital platform? ***Resources*** are the means to facilitate and make peer learning feasible. They may include people, new roles, infrastructure, platforms or funding. ***Time*** must be clearly allocated for peer learning, both in the short and long term. Collaboration is most effective when it is sustained over a longer period of time. ***Motivation*** questions how both individuals and organizations could be incentivised to motivate them to take part in peer learning.

To make these elements of peer learning more usable, we designed them in the form of cards. The flip-side of each card includes a description of each element, the most relevant questions to consider and additional tips.



As we designed the element cards, we simultaneously conducted a second round of interviews to validate and refine the cards and program proposal. The following quotes reveal a few significant insights from these interviews.

- *"It takes a lot of time to sort it all out. Even this relatively simple thing was behind many meetings, even just to be aware that this is happening. If you don't know the actors or the history you might not even know where to start looking."* - Senior Planning Officer from Helsinki, describing how they acquired knowledge from a peer.

- *"There are individuals and groups of people who reach out to others to do things together. There are Teams meetings and Teams groups are formed but they are not very organized. I would like to see it more organized."*

- *"There is no one person who is paid to organize these kinds of events. And there hasn't been time to organize them"* - Senior planning officer, Espoo.

Electing our target stakeholder, the **Ministry of Employment and Economic Affairs**

While developing our tool, we knew it needed a clear owner. Who would take ownership and lead the design of the peer learning program and utilize our tool? What level of government would make most sense to use it? There were seemingly many stakeholders that could take ownership in facilitating peer learning such as the ministries, Kuntaliitto, KEHA, individual municipalities or groups of municipalities.

We had a particular dilemma between selecting municipality groups or the Ministry of Employment and Economic Affairs to be the primary users of our tool. We saw the merits of decentralization, and knew the municipalities would be able to create their own peer learning initiatives. However, we also knew that mandates from a ministry level would produce a more cohesive solution across municipalities.

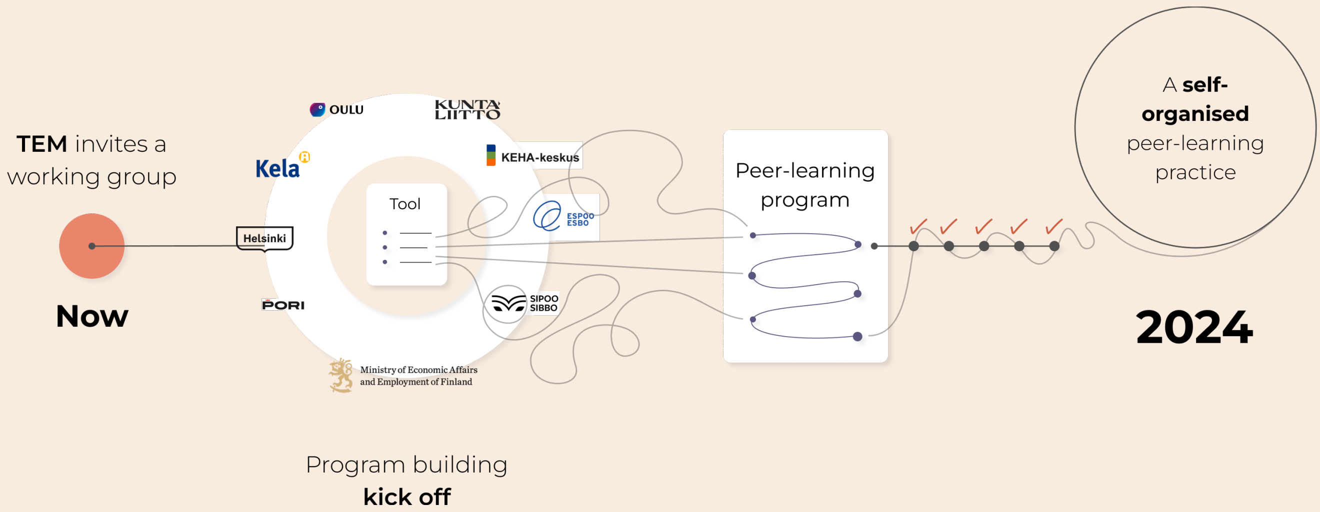
This dilemma was quite crucial since choosing the wrong stakeholder could potentially make even a decent proposal unfeasible. Getting ideas through in government is already extremely challenging, even with the perfect stakeholders involved.

After an extensive comparison and a lengthy pros and cons list, we ended up with MEAE. We reasoned that if municipality groups each designed their own peer learning programs, collaboration between different municipality groups would be chaos. Everyone would have their own ways of conducting peer learning, which could lead to regional silos and challenges learning best practices from other municipality groups.

Guidelines for designing the peer learning program

In addition to narrowing down our target stakeholder to MEAE, we proposed a specific program design process that would align with the reform's ideology of decentralization. Although MEAE would technically be the project owners, we suggest that they form a working group consisting of representatives from Kuntaliitto, Kela, Keha and the pilots. In this working group, MEAE would be on equal standing to the other representatives, and act as more of a facilitator and connector. We reasoned that these actors would be able to bring their existing resources, knowledge and networks to the table that simply need to be utilized and connected in order to form a country-wide peer learning program.

As part of our general guidelines, we also suggest a rough timeline for the program. Essentially, we reason that MEAE should form the working group already now so that there would be enough time to design the program before the reform is fully implemented in 2024.



Summary

To recap, we first identified issues with the current means municipalities have to conduct peer learning. This revealed the need for an easier, more structured way for employees in municipalities to connect and learn from their peers. We then ideated potential peer learning activities and initiatives, quickly realizing that our time was better spent supporting the creation of a peer learning program rather than designing it ourselves. Research into peer learning led to our design tool, the seven elements of peer learning which we formed into cards. When deciding who should take responsibility for the peer learning program and utilize our tool, we elected MEAE due to its capacity to create a standardized, cohesive solution for all municipalities. In order to avoid a top down peer learning mandate from MEAE, we suggested the program be designed by a collaborative working group, where MEAE would act more as a facilitator and connector. We hope that our program proposal and design tool would lead to a ***well rounded, effective way for municipality employees to collaborate and learn from each other.***

Conclusion

As our group members come from different backgrounds, the learnings we gained from the course were naturally slightly different. For example, for the ones with a business background, the course provided a lot of learnings about design approaches themselves. However, after reflecting on the course content and our work with the project, we have outlined several key areas that we all agreed had some important learnings.

In the following parts we will reflect on what could have been done better, what we did well and key learnings we gained throughout the course in relation to understanding complex systems, stakeholder engagement, the methods and processes used and finally our group work itself.

The **knowledge threshold**

One of the most difficult aspects of this project was the complexity of the object of our brief, the TE2024 reform. The key issue for us was establishing how much of the reform was necessary to understand in order to produce a viable proposal that matched our brief. We spent a lot of time researching the reform itself by interviewing different actors and discussing it in the tutoring sessions. We felt like we were continuously discovering something new about the reform that would influence the way we thought about our solution. Consequently, it was difficult to determine when we knew enough, as the next revelation could always have been just around the corner. We were driven to employ a fair amount of abductive reasoning, where we had to simply decide that the information given to us was sufficient enough to make decisions and to move forward with our project. Our reliance on abductive reasoning also influenced the scope of our solution. Since we felt like our knowledge of governmental ways of working was not complete enough for us to design an entire peer learning program, we shifted our focus to designing something that fit our best guesses and level of knowledge.

Stakeholder **engagement**

One of the clear highlights of this course was the chance to work with a real-life brief and the ability to directly engage with the stakeholders. Coming up with good questions and making the interviewees feel comfortable enough to talk about potential issues in their work is a lot more challenging than one might think. Our initial round of interviews provided us with a lot of data to be processed. As we moved on to the solution space, we were able to schedule two interviews with people working with employment services in the municipalities to validate and further develop our understanding of the problem we were tackling. We were successful in developing our ideas based on the research findings, but had we had more time, the validation of our solution with the stakeholders would have been equally important.

This would have been a good opportunity to understand the processes of the actors who our proposal concerns and tweak our proposal, but also an opportunity to sell our idea. Interviewing stakeholders is a way to build your own understanding by receiving information from them, but it is also a way to engage in a dialogue with them about the proposal. Fifteen minutes is a short time to explain a complex proposal, and perhaps if we instead had one hour interviews with all the relevant stakeholders that our proposal concerns, they would have understood better what we were trying to communicate.

Additionally, we might have been able to just use language that is slightly more familiar to them so that our idea would have made more sense to them. In the end this came down to resources, as we simply did not have time to do this. It is also not certain that the relevant stakeholders would have had time for the interviews either. We could have managed the time better in our project, but it is difficult to rush ideation.

Methods & **Processes**

Throughout the course, we were offered a structured set of methods and tools to help us unpack the brief and come up with a proposal. At the start of the course — in the problem exploration phase — we conducted semi-structured interviews and created a systems map, both of which helped us better understand the complex issues and systems that we were working with. Although these methods effectively facilitated sensemaking of the entire system, when we moved towards a more specific solution area they started to lose some of their potency.

When dealing with the specific case of peer learning, we ended up having to research a great deal more about detailed information related to that particular topic. We needed to know specific information about what instruments the government currently had in place and deep dive into the intricacies of peer learning itself. Because of this constant need to research, the investigative process often felt like it was not producing that much tangible output. We also felt like we were going back and forth a considerable amount.

An example of how our process was not very straightforward can be seen with our use of leveraging points. We first used leveraging points in an extremely structured way. We took our three problem statements and Meadow's twelve leveraging points and then proceeded to ideate as many leveraging points as we could for each problem statement. However, this in itself did not lead to a direct solution, but rather sparked some ideas. As we diverted our focus to those ideas, the concept of leveraging points was almost temporarily forgotten. We just so happened to end up designing a way of creating self-organizing structures through other means, even though self-organizing structures was actually one of Meadow's leveraging points. Later on, we returned to the self-organization leveraging point as a way to validate our ideas, even though it did not directly lead to those solutions. Perhaps the leveraging point was in the back of our minds all along, but in practice it was considered, forgotten and returned back to in a nonlinear manner.

This nonlinearity in our process revealed that it is impossible to ground ideation purely in empirical findings in a perfectly structured way. When designing, it is natural to sometimes freely ideate, which may lead to solutions that stray off the acquired research. This has similarities with the concept of problem-solution co-creation, where the development of solutions may lead to a new framing of the problem or brief at hand. In either case, the fuzziness of our process was not necessarily a negative thing, since it may simply be viewed as a typical feature of the design process. Nevertheless, we could not help but feel like the final couple weeks where we were working on a concrete solution felt more straightforward and effective. However, it is important to keep in mind that although our use of the design methods and processes may have felt somewhat fuzzy, without them we would have most likely not gotten to our final proposal.

Working as a group

Working as a group of students from very different backgrounds, our work benefited from the different points of view and the different kinds of experience the group members had. Two of the members had a design background, while the other two had a business background. Perhaps because of being used to different ways of working, the group functioned most efficiently when working together. We met up often on campus for several hours to brainstorm and develop our ideas further with the aid of sketching on whiteboards. These sessions were always fruitful and we managed to forward our project in leaps as a result. The process flowed very organically and we developed a successful way of building on top of each other's ideas. On the flipside, we could have been better at delegating more of the work and managing the project more effectively. We felt that a lot of the work was done towards the end of the course, however, this might have been a reflection of the fact that much of the visible work towards the solution was done in the latter half of the course. The first half of the course was dedicated to exploring and understanding the problem, which was necessary in order to develop the solution in the first place. In the end, spending a lot of time working together was necessary to find a common language. As we are satisfied with our proposal, our process brought about the results we wanted.

The tutoring arranged as part of the course was very helpful especially with validating some of our early ideas. We often found ourselves at cross-roads with different ideas, and having someone external with a lot of knowledge on both the process and the reform itself nudged us in the right direction and got us forward many times. The critical and relevant questions helped us look into areas we had not considered, and to build a stronger case for our proposal.

To sum up, it was extremely exciting to learn about the potential of Design in the context of governments and work with theories that help tackle the challenges that are often a part of such contexts. We thoroughly enjoyed this dynamic process filled with confusion, imposter syndromes, eureka moments and moments of gaining and losing control.

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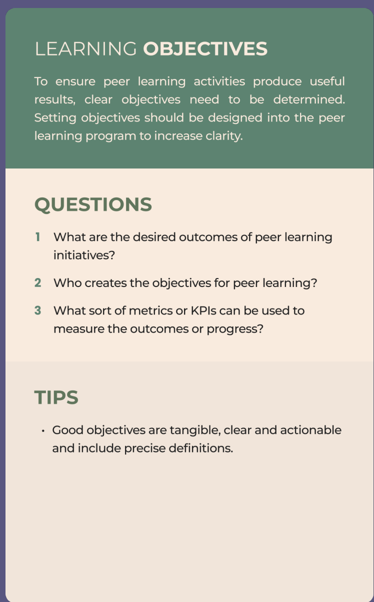
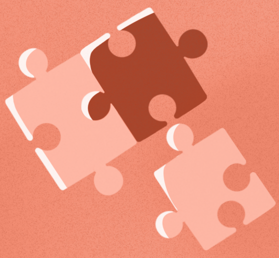
Appendix

Element Cards



ELEMENTS OF PEER LEARNING

PURPOSEFUL **CONNECTIONS**



2

PURPOSEFUL **CONNECTIONS**

Connecting relevant peers is crucial for peer learning outputs to be relevant as well. Determine who should be connected and how are those connections formed, e.g., individuals with problems to those with potential solutions or expertise.

QUESTIONS

1. How is a peer defined? Are they individuals or organizations?
2. What individuals, roles or organizations are relevant to connect for peer learning?
3. How will these connections be formed and determined?

TIPS

- There are existing networks between municipalities that could serve as a way of connecting similar peers.

ELEMENTS OF PEER LEARNING

RESPONSIBILITY

3

RESPONSIBILITY

The responsibility for managing peer learning initiatives needs to be defined. Ownership also needs to be designated to relevant roles and individuals. Additionally, ownership encourages individuals to be proactive and take initiative in implementing ideas or solving problems regardless of their role or position. This helps peer learning to become a self-organized process.

QUESTIONS

1. Who is responsible for managing the peer learning initiatives?
2. Who takes initiative on the municipal level for finding solutions and dealing with problems?
3. How can it be ensured that learnings are utilized in the municipalities?

TIPS

- For peer learning to be successful on a grassroots level, it helps for it to be authorised and supported by management.

ELEMENTS OF PEER LEARNING

FORMAT

4

FORMAT

The format refers to the kind of activities or medium through which peer learning happens, e.g., a hackathon, an online communication channel or a report. A clearly defined format provides the means for participants to interact and learn.

QUESTIONS

1. What formats would best support particular learning objectives?
2. What kind of formats are already available?
3. What specific peer learning formats are most wished for amongst potential users?
4. How will the outcomes be documented?

TIPS

- A combination of different formats can be useful for creating a more holistic peer learning experience.

ELEMENTS OF PEER LEARNING

RESOURCES

5

RESOURCES

Various resources are required to facilitate the execution of peer learning activities. It may be in the form of tools, platforms, people, interfaces, financial resources, organizations or physical infrastructure.

QUESTIONS

1. What kind of infrastructure is required to facilitate potential formats? Does it need to be developed or acquired?
2. How is time allocated for individuals participating in peer learning?
3. What types of resources are required to facilitate peer learning activity? How might they be acquired?
4. What resources are needed for the peer learning program itself?

TIPS

- Consider if existing resouces and infrastructure could be utilized for peer learning.

ELEMENTS OF PEER LEARNING

TIME

6

TIME

Like any activity, peer learning requires time allocated for it. On a more macro level, the timeline of the peer learning program should also be considered to ensure its continuation.

QUESTIONS

1. How will time be allocated to peer learning activities in the short-term and long-term?
2. How is time allocated for individuals participating in peer learning?
3. How might time invested in peer learning save time from other activities?
4. How will peer learning be sustained in the long-term?

TIPS

- Consider that time must also be allocated for preparing and adapting peer learning activities, in addition to peer learning activities themselves.

ELEMENTS OF PEER LEARNING

MOTIVATION

7

MOTIVATION

In order to get individuals on board with new peer learning intiatives, there needs to be a plan for incentivizing and fostering motivation.

QUESTIONS

1. What incentives would allow peer learning to become a regular and sustainable practice?
2. How might municipalities be motivated to get on board with peer learning initiatives?
3. How might individuals be motivated to get on board with peer learning initiatives?
4. How can the value of peer learning be made more visible and tangible in order to better motivate both individuals and organizations?

TIPS

- Individuals might find motivation from different things. Think about various forms to motivate individuals.

Appendix

Interviews

Click here to view a summary

Thank you . Kiitos . Tack