

# Acts of Appreciation.

A toolkit to move from a burnout to an *appreciation culture* that values employees, designed focused on the TE2024 Reform.

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**Design for Government course @ Aalto University.**

Cover & Report layout: Bhuvana Sekar.

A heartfelt thank-you to our teachers,  
tutors, stakeholders, friends, families  
and our mind & bodies for enabling and  
supporting us to understand, believe,  
enjoy and complete this project.

Project done as a part of the  
Design for Government course  
Aalto University 2022

# A Summary.

Finland is undergoing multiple reforms in public services and that will significantly change how public administration and service engagement works between state, regional and municipal levels. One of the reforms is called the TE2024, it looks at the transfer of employment and economic development services (TE services) to municipalities. The aim of the reform is to create a service structure that contributes to an increase in the jobseekers employment trend and improves the availability, quality, effectiveness and diversity of employment services. This way the reform is aiming to streamline services for the customers, by decentralizing and bringing the services closer to the customer. Municipalities will possess the unique advantage of offering tailored, targeted and customer-oriented services, in addition to job seekers for employers and labor markets in their area.

With our research we have identified challenges and concerns, how to manage workforce competence, adjustment and training across municipalities with newly needed skills. How to build a new organization, municipalities and TE services working together? And ensure a positive work culture, avoiding the resistance to change, during the transition and after? How to make sure that customers receive good service that is secure, relevant and seamless, with the newly hired caseworkers learning their challenging roles and also while many employees feel burnt out?

We approach the challenge by stating that ensuring the success of TE2024 reform, by helping municipalities make their employees valued and introduce a culture of appreciation to their organization. Our proposal is both a toolkit and a process for municipalities to envision the new reform as an organization that moves from burnout to generating an appreciative culture that values caseworkers. Employee appreciation is defined as the act of recognising and rewarding employee contributions to the workplace either through formal or informal channels. The goal is to give a sense of agency and a sense belonging to their employees as well as a willingness to share their experiences.

Our proposal is called “Acts of Appreciation”. These acts can happen on different levels, based on agency and should develop around appreciation themes relevant to the caseworkers job. We recommend beginning the effort by using the toolkit to understand local needs and co-create acts together. Now is a particularly good time to implement this toolkit because with the ongoing Nordic reform, new resources are available and many newly hired employees make this rare opportunity to intervene and take systemic action on this critical issue, which will definitely lead to a prevailing sense of meaningfulness and positive culture. The value for organizational level is that it will improve collaboration, anticipates difficulties proactively, increases employee well-being and development, all while giving jobseekers faster relevant job opportunities and benefits. This helps achieve success for the TE2024, but also for any other future reform as well.

# Some key terms.

## **TE2024 Reform**

In its mid-term policy review in spring 2021, the Government decided to continue preparations for the transfer of employment and economic development services (TE services) to municipalities. The services will be transferred in 2024. The reform aims to create a service structure that will contribute to rapid employment of jobseekers and increase the productivity, availability, effectiveness and diversity of employment and business services. The reform will take into account equal access to services.

## **KELA**

Kela, the Social Insurance Institution of Finland, is a government agency that provides basic economic security for everyone living in Finland.

## **KEHA**

Development and Administration centre for ELY Centres and TE Offices (ELY-keskusten ja TE-toimistojen kehittämis- ja hallintokeskus). In this project context, KEHA is the the development and administration centre for the ELY Centres (KEHA-centre) and TE Offices

## **Maija, a Case worker**

In this project context, Maija is a public servant from the TE-Office who works as a case-worker. She could also be involved in customer frontline roles in other organisations like KELA, International house etc

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# The Team.



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# Introduction.

## Let's begin.

As a part of the Design for Government course at Aalto University, our team has been working on a 14 week project together with the Ministry of Finance, KELA and other stakeholders as our partners. The project focuses on public servants' aspects in the upcoming **TE2024 Employment services** reform by using people-centred perspectives to ensure a successful transition in 2024.

This report documents our process and the results. It includes our research methods, findings, final proposal – Acts of Appreciation, as well as reflection points.

# Quick Context.

Finland is undergoing multiple reforms in public services that will significantly change how public administration and services engagement works between state, regional and municipal levels.

One of the reforms called the TE services-reform 2024 looks at the transfer of employment and economic development services (TE services) to municipalities. The aim of the reform is to create a service structure that contributes to an increase in the jobseekers' employment trend and improves the availability, quality, effectiveness and diversity of employment services.

This will be achieved by moving the TE-personell and public-servants from existing TE-offices and merging them into the 50+ municipality entities by 2040.

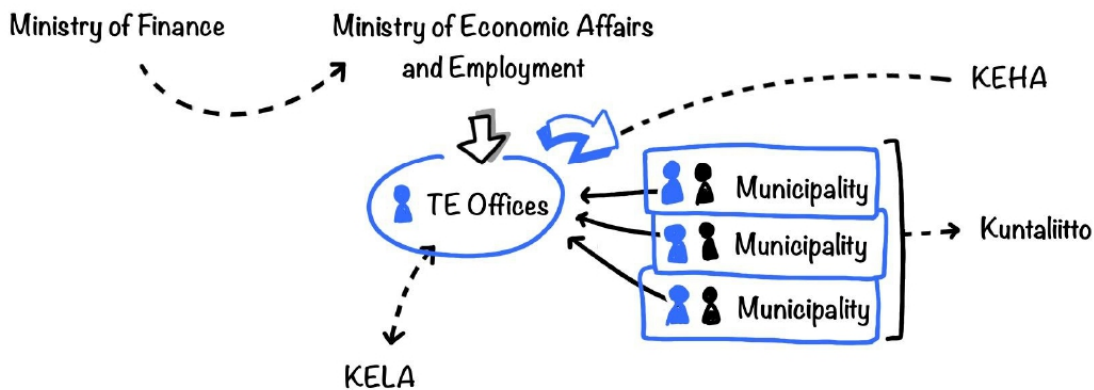


Figure 1. Simplified stakeholder and relationship map: Pre-TE2024 context (own illustration)

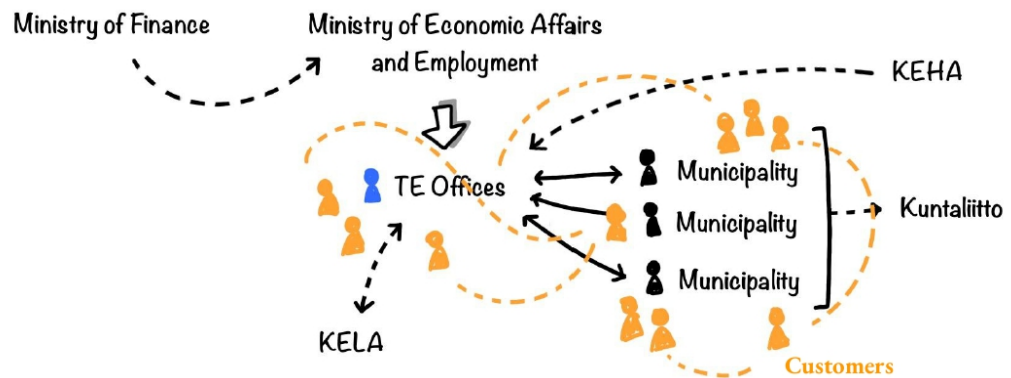


Figure 2. Simplified customer touchpoint map: Pre-TE2024 context (own illustration)

## What will change post reform?

By moving the services from TE offices into local municipalities, the reform will bring in the following changes:

- Decentralization and services being brought closer to the customers.
- Enabling the municipalities to possess the unique advantage of offering tailored, targeted and customer-oriented services,
  - not just for the residents,
  - but also to meet the needs of both the employers and labour markets in their local jurisdictions.

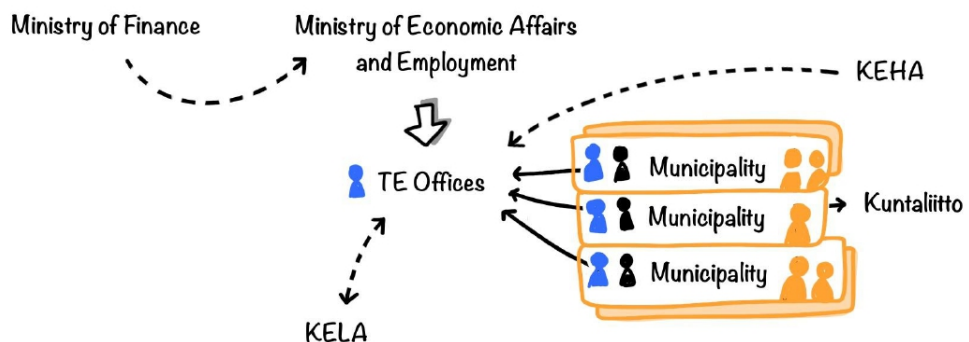


Figure 3. Simplified customer touchpoint map: post-TE2024 context (own illustration)

# Research Process.

## Preliminary Research.

In the beginning, we started out by approaching the brief by collecting and going through materials pertaining to the reform being piloted in various municipalities across Finland.

To learn more about the brief and global examples of such employment model reforms, we found some inspiring examples and pointers:

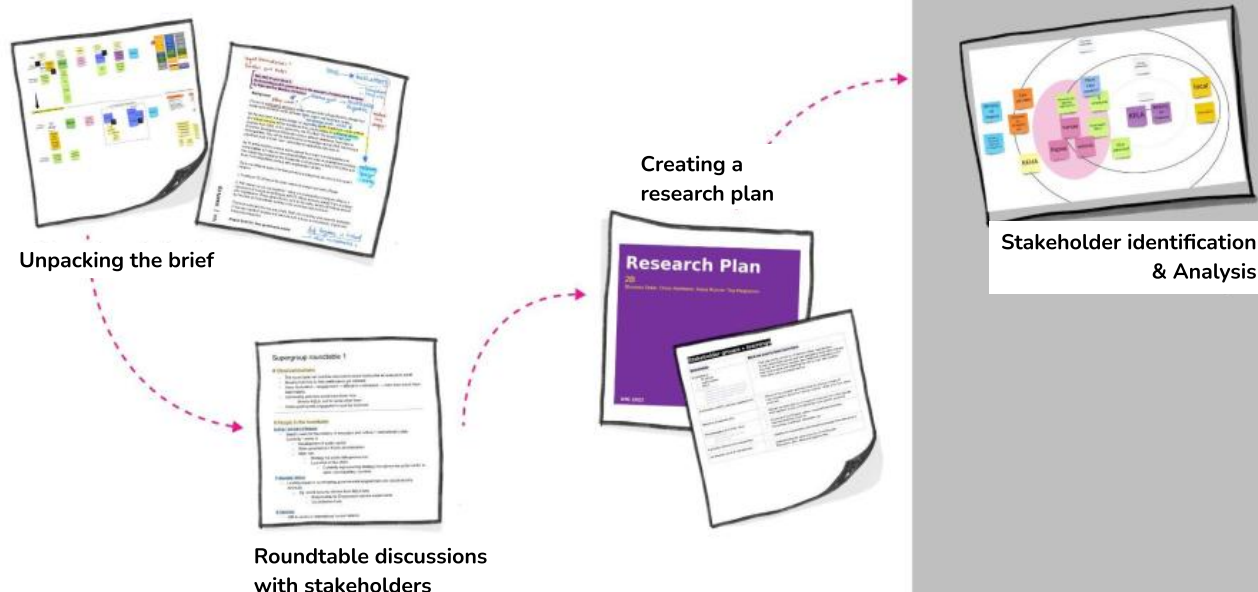
- Danish Reform model - specifically Flexicurity aka the Danish labour reform model (Kongshøj Madsen, Per. 2008)
- Public strategy renewable principles
- Successful employment reform models (Mazza, 2022).

With the vastness of the brief, we gave some direction to our research by creating a research plan and focusing it a few questions:

- Who are the stakeholders involved in the reform project and what are their roles?
- What is the relationship between them and how does it affect the current employment model and what could be the changes post the reform?
- How does the scene change pre and post reform?
- What is the most important aspect to narrow down in this project and why?

Figure 4. Research process from week 1 and 2 (own illustration)

### Research Process | Week 1, 2



# Stakeholders engagement.

As expected in a complex governmental reform, there are lots of stakeholders involved in this project, namely –

- Ministries
    - Ministry of Finance
    - Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment
  - The various municipalities
  - TE services
  - KELA
  - KEHA centres and
  - Kuntalitto
- all preparing to run this transfer together.

To understand our stakeholders’ pain points, goals and motivations, we collaborated with our peers allocated to the same project and created a supergroup with whom we shared our research, insights and questions.

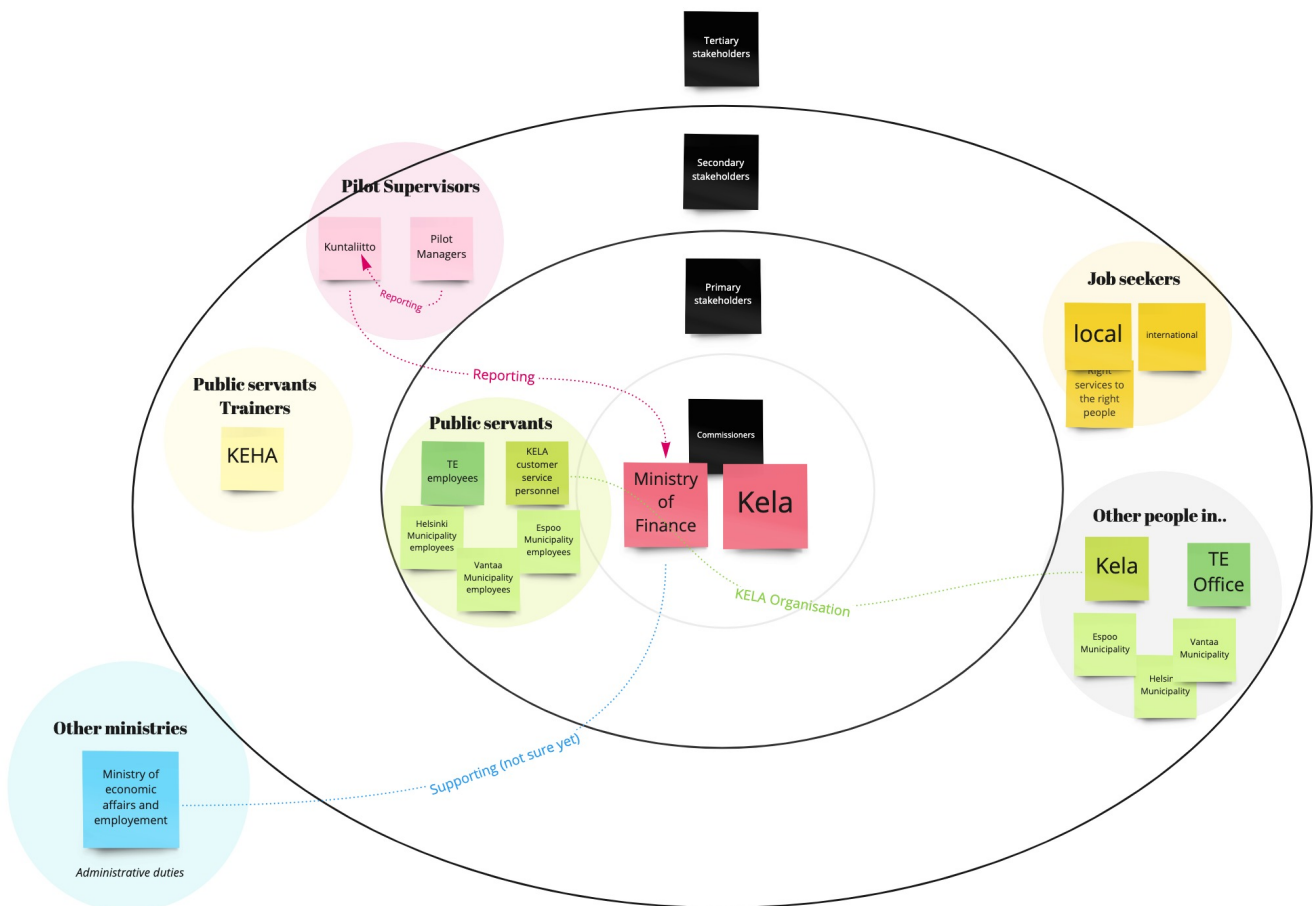


Figure 5. Stakeholder's involved in the project (own illustration)

Figure 6. Research process from week 3 and 4 (own illustration)

## Research Process | Week 3, 4



After collating questions together, we conducted a 2-hour roundtable session with representatives from a few of the above organisations (Kela, TE offices, and the pilot municipalities of Espoo). Through the conversation, we gained more clarity on the reform from their individual perspectives.

The insightful conversation shed light on some key problems and challenges today:

- Intertwined dependencies between the pilots (ongoing and upcoming) with competence development, specialisation and adaptation of the workforce across municipalities, TE offices and Kela.
- Ensuring a balance and supporting the municipalities' individual ways of working and cultures
- Building a new organisation while also training many newly hired specialists in the challenging roles of employment and economic development services.

- Building a common organisational culture to avoid resistance to change from employees from various organisations.
- And finally, ensuring a secure, seamless and relevant flow of information, collaboration and communication between the partners.

Based on this data and more questions, we decided to split the stakeholder types between our peer groups and moved ahead to recruiting stakeholders for 1-1 interview sessions.

# Interviews.

After extracting first-level insights from the roundtable discussion, we realised that we needed to reach out to our stakeholders individually, to get a deeper perspective. That led to clarifying our research objectives as 2 focused questions, and figuring out a plan of action to reach stakeholders:

- How do the stakeholders collaborate today to provide employment opportunities to people living in Finland and various municipalities?
- How do the information flow (and where does it get stuck) across the multiple ecosystems and stakeholders today?

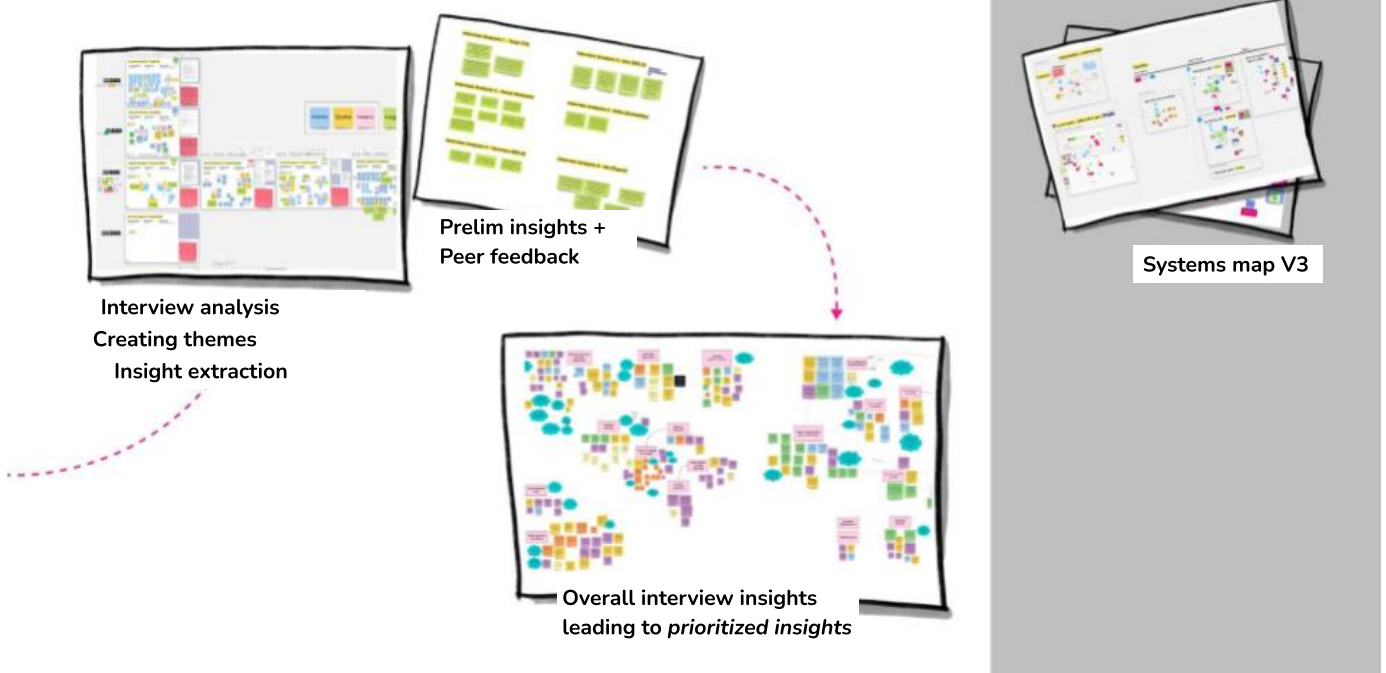
Keeping the above in mind, we reached out to various stakeholder contacts and scheduled interviews with each stakeholder type.

As a part of this phase, we had a few enriching and insightful conversations with stakeholders from KELA, KEHA, Municipalities (Espoo, Helsinki), Kuntaliitto and also International House Helsinki.

Each conversation was noted down and cross-verified in groups to ensure the legitimacy of the information and slowly we could see some themes and patterns emerge.

Figure 7. Research process from week 5 and 6 (own illustration)

## Research Process | Week 5,



Based on the roundtable discussion and 1-1 interview sessions, we started noticing some patterns in terms of current challenges, possible opportunities and further questions.

Some more problems and concerns observed were:

- The lack of guidelines, common collaboration, communication or knowledge available to municipalities both in pilot and about-to-go to pilot stages.
- The fragmented and often isolated customer (case) information due to existing organisational regulations, GDPR constraints, etc.
- Difficulties in finding the right place to get employment-related services from a customer point-of-view and providing the right tailored service from a personnel perspective.
- Concerns with respect to the short timeline and the huge change needed to anticipate, facilitate and manage the transition in each organisation and also, together.

Additionally, we also noticed some themes emerging in terms of the different cultural attributes within each organisation that can be both strengths or risks for the transition; unique strategies, eco-systems, plans and metrics used in individual pilot municipalities etc.

As a project owner at Kela noted there is “a need for more information from social services to shape those services and benefits to meet the needs of the customer” and “not-a-one size fits all solution but tailored to each customer is needed”.

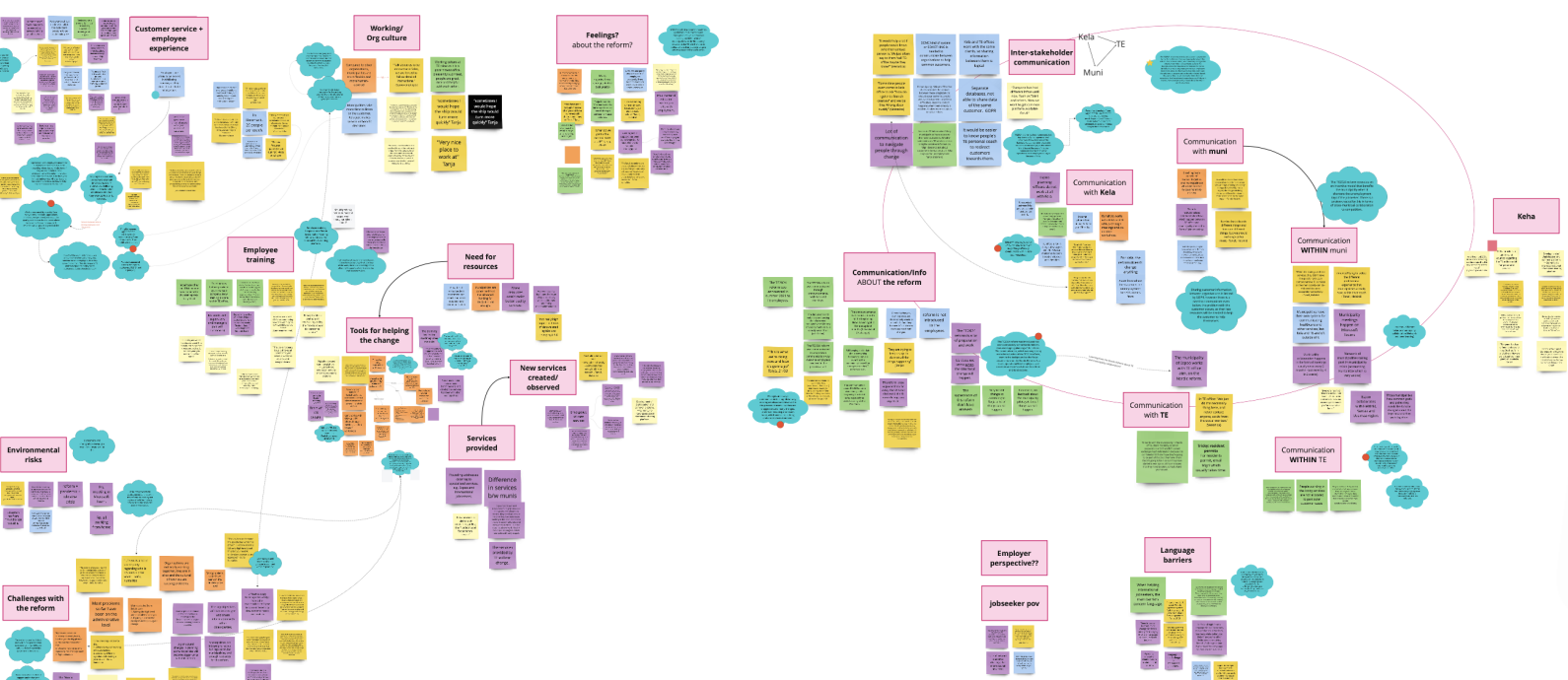


Figure 8. Research process from week 5 and 6 (own illustration)



# Distilled focus - focusing on the public servants, and why.

For the front-line personnel involved in these organisations, especially in the TE offices, Kela and municipalities – this is going to be a major change and making it as smooth as possible will ensure the overall success of the reform.

Hence, for our group - cumulatively, looking at all the data we had - we decided to narrow down the scope is to take the **public servant** [Municipalities (pilot offices) + TE office workers who will be transferred & also KELA service personnel as a part of the service ecosystem] as the core starting point. Why? Because:

- They are the heart of the entire reform system and moving them from existing TE offices to the municipalities is both a key opportunity and friction point for the reform's success.
- They are the ones who will be developing and providing these new and better services in the new organizations by the end 2024.
- They are also the 'face' of the entire employment model by being the front line talking to customers everyday and solving their problems - leading to tangible customer experience and hence, reform success metrics.

In this context, understanding this project from the position of a TE-case worker became the angle to continue with the project as they - public servants (workers from municipalities, TE state offices and Kela) - are the backbone of this reform. We decided that understanding their needs, pain-points and focusing on bringing them together to collaborate in a people-centric way - is one of the most promising ways to ensure the success of the reform – by 2024.

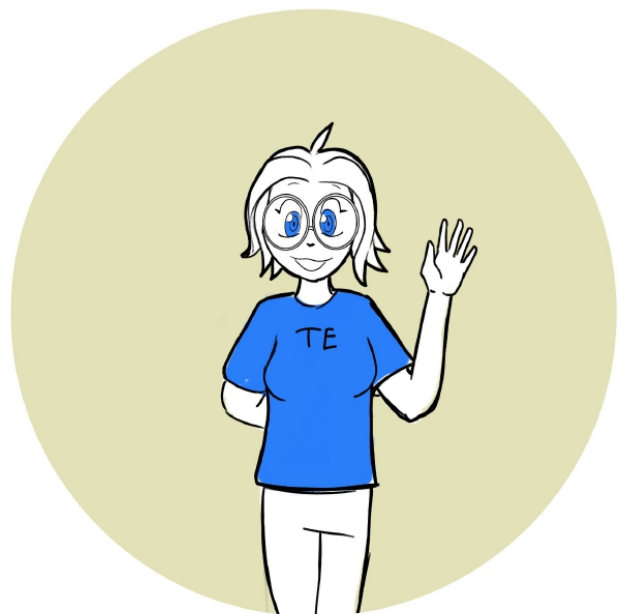


Figure 9. Core project focus - public servants (own illustration)

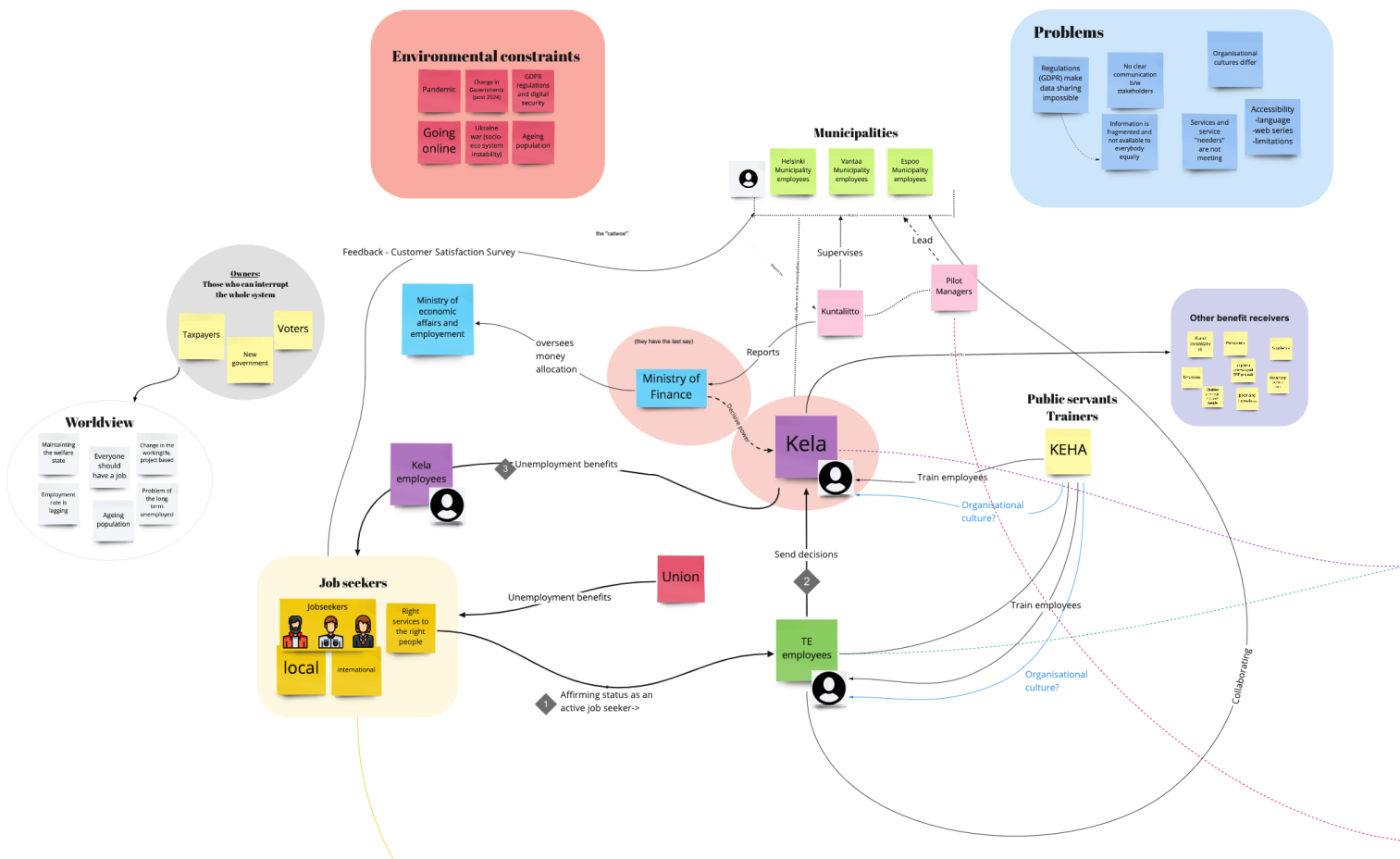
# Systemic Analysis.

## Our process.

As the TE2024 reform aims to alleviate challenges of today's employment services, major administrative changes are expected to happen. The logic behind decentralizing employment services to the municipal level is to give more flexibility to municipalities, so that they can tailor their services to their respective needs.

While the Finnish social service network is as bureaucratic and complex as any, the shift towards a more localized system would ultimately mean that we would not be using too much effort in order to understand the exact legislative relationships between municipal and ministerial levels of administration.

Figure 10. one of the initial system maps (own photo)



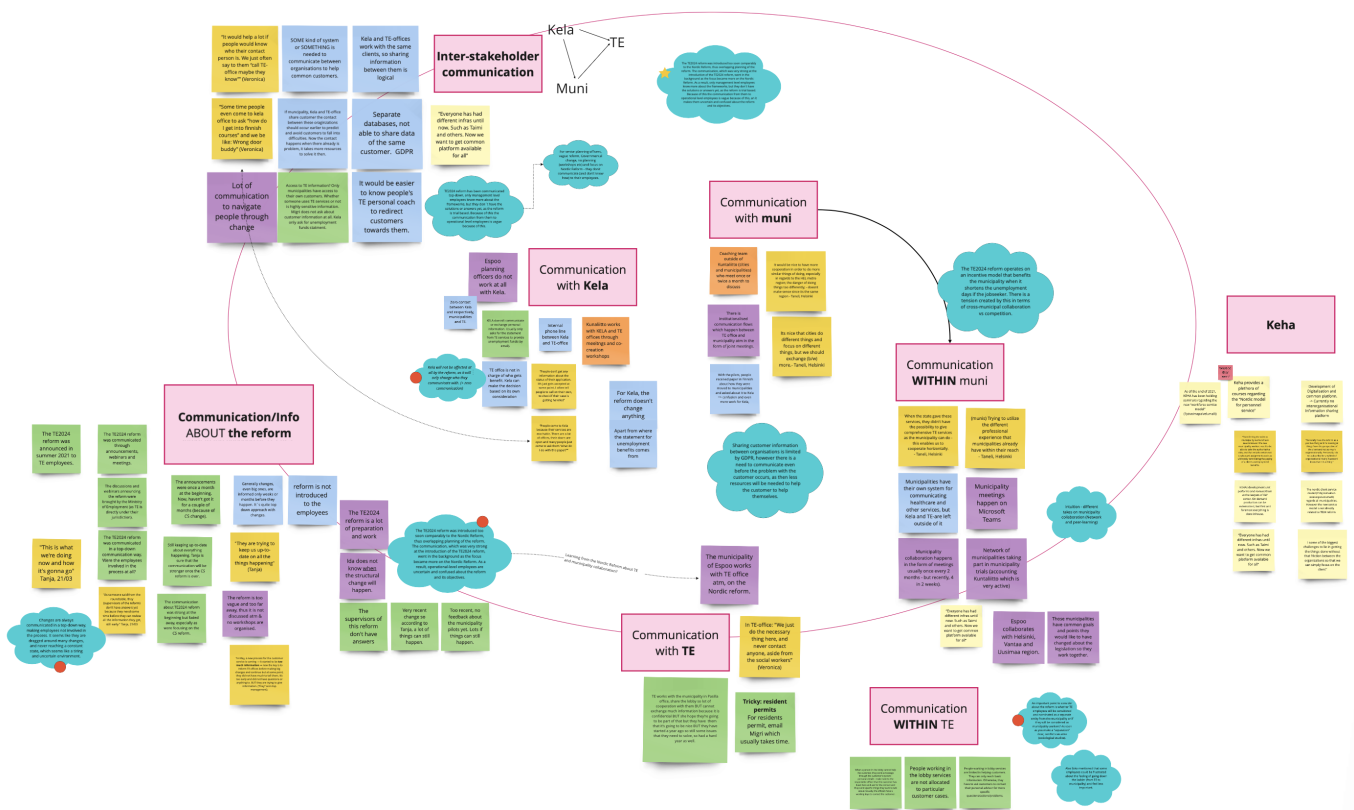
# Our methods.

The brief of our project focused on the employees' perspective therefore, the most relevant and central source of information used was the interviews from employees of various organizations. As one of our central themes would be the trust and appreciation of workers, it was only prudent to put faith in the word of the professional workers. Especially since the ostensibly non-related interviewees would often talk about their problems in a coherent and non-contradicting manner.

After multiple recorded interviews we had loads of useful quotes that started to illustrate the reality of social-, municipal-, and employment service workers.

We used an **affinity diagram**- it is a visual tool that helps organize the information gathered. Using the affinity diagram, one can sort ideas into different groups or categories based on their relationships. We arranged the quotes in an affinity diagram where we categorized what people had said according to recurring themes. This helped us to see who and how often things were shared in themes across stakeholders. The quotes were color-coded according to which organization the person giving them was from.

Figure 11. Affinity method for categorising and grouping insights (own photo)



# Emerging themes.

Ultimately, quotes and insights were categorized into the following themes (or topics):

## Customer service & employee experience

Very important category, featuring interviewees insights on things that would hamper or benefit the work of (for example) a TE-office worker.

*“Kela workers have no time to talk to the customers, pressure to be fast is in their work”-KELA Employee*

## Challenges with the reform

Yes. There are quite a few of them.

*“There are no clear facilitators involved in this process (who everyone identifies with), this leads to a lack of ownership, guidance and inspiration.”  
-Espoo Municipality*

## Employee training

Naturally, we wanted to know how each organization prepared their employees to work and what kind of training they would go through.

*“Training was before provided by an outside company. Now, training is done within TE office.”  
-KEHA Representative*

## Working/organizational culture

General insights about what it is like working in a given organization

*“Talk about us being innovative is false. We are forced to follow precise instructions”  
-TE Caseworker*

## Need for resources

Among the most central promises of the TE2024 reform are additional resources for the overworked TE units. We wanted to understand what kind of resources or general needs the units might have.

*“not really high hopes” in terms of data-related legislations changing  
-International House Helsinki*

### **Tools for helping the change**

The interviewees were able to offer sophisticated insights for planned resources as well as even present their own ideas.

*"At the moment we are creating or are creating a roadmap for the reform (1. April). This is the first kind of tool for this reform, on a very general level for the 'leaders/managers' at municipalities so that they understand what is actually happening at this reform and between the organizations" - Kuntaliitto employee*

### **Environmental risks**

We wanted to understand what kind of threats the whole reform might face. Forming this category also clarified that the scene of employment would be in constant shift one way or another.

*"Immigration brings completely different challenges in the Helsinki area, most of the immigrant customers are there."*  
-Kuntaliitto employee

### **Feelings about the reform**

Often during the interviews, open questions such as: "How do you feel about the reform" yielded very useful insights:

*"Generally I see the reform as a positive thing and I'm looking at things from the perspective of the client and not so much organisationally. Personally I do not subscribe for any kind of organizational rivalry however I know that it is a thing."*  
-Keha employee

### **Inter-stakeholder communication**

During the systemic analysis, a notable amount of effort was put into understanding the communication within and between organizations. So much so, that it warranted its own affinity diagram.

*"Changes are always communicated in a top-down way, making employees not involved in the process. It seems like they are dragged around many changes, and never reaching a constant state, which seems like a tiring and uncertain environment."*  
-TE Caseworker

### **New service created/ observed**

This mainly regarded the people working on various pilot enterprises that were able to inform us about observations and insights found during the pilots.

# Key Insights.

After compiling quotes and forming insights based on them, we repeated a process familiar to the affinity diagram with these insights.

The groups would lead into more refined or general insights that would eventually form the core of our approach towards our objective. Finally, the refined insights were used to form sort of causality diagrams. This helped us to see cause and effect relations between problems and phenomena recognized in the research.



Figure 12. Extracting insights from our research (own photo)

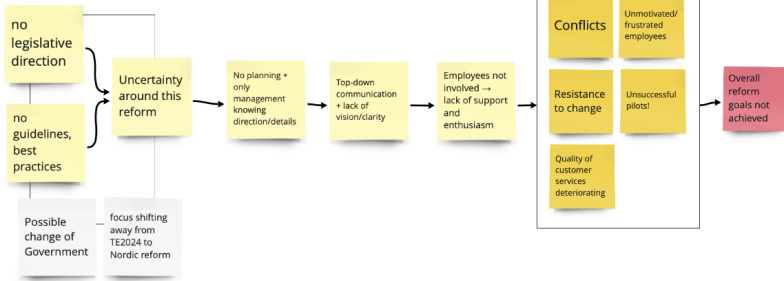


Figure 13. Mapping causality through Insight 1 (own photo)

**At this stage, we had 3 distilled key insights:**

- Top down communication: TE2024 reform has been communicated top-down, making public-servant-employees feel that they are NOT involved in the process. With uncertainty about how the reform will happen and who is responsible, no legislative direction, no common roadmaps, guidelines or best practice etc - Planning ahead for it is also extremely difficult.

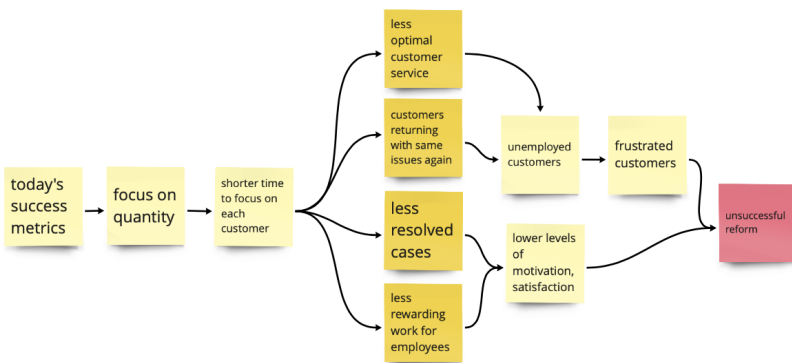


Figure 14. Mapping causality through Insight 2 (own photo)

- Stressful customer experience: Operational level employees find intrinsic reward in their job when helping customers, they have the expertise to cater to a variety of customer needs. However, currently their work is measured in terms of quantity as opposed to quality where they DON'T HAVE TIME for all the customers they need to attend to.

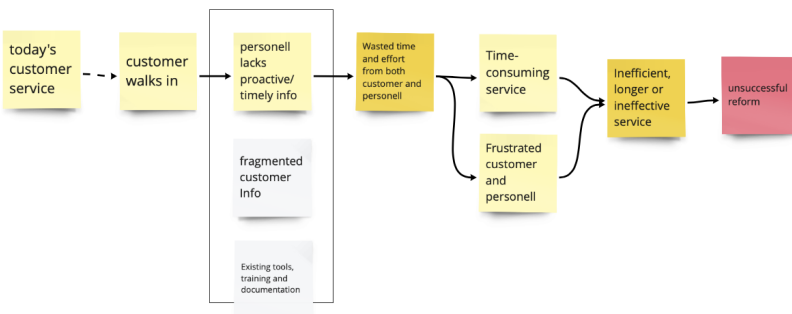


Figure 15. Mapping causality through Insight 3 (own photo)

- Preventable service frictions: A lot of service friction in the customer journey happens simply because the public servants are not equipped to handle the customer case proactively. For example: understanding language barriers (booking translators etc), RP situation etc

# Design Interventions.

## Where to take action?

What helped to identify this intervention? Our focus shifted from the research phase to ideate about where and what our intervention could be. To find our intervention point, we started by studying Donella Meadows' Leverage points and what kind of design interventions could happen in our project context.

Meadows' Leverage points are points in the system where a change could result in a significant change in how the whole system works. Some points are more powerful than others in the sense of how much change they can cause. We were looking at our insight about measuring success, and found that there are several leverage points possible to intervene within that.

For example:

- Leverage point 12 is about constants, parameters and numbers. This could be looking into the numbers of customers per caseworker, or numbers of people the service is provided for in general. *What kind of calculations are used for the success metrics?*
- Leverage point 5 is about the rules of the system. We thought here about the incentives and intrinsic reward for employees and constraints like the time allocated for each jobseeker.
- We also identified point 3 with the goals of the system.
- Point 2, the mindset or paradigm out of which the system works. These are related to what is considered as success, for example, for the TE services and what is thought that could lead to success and how.

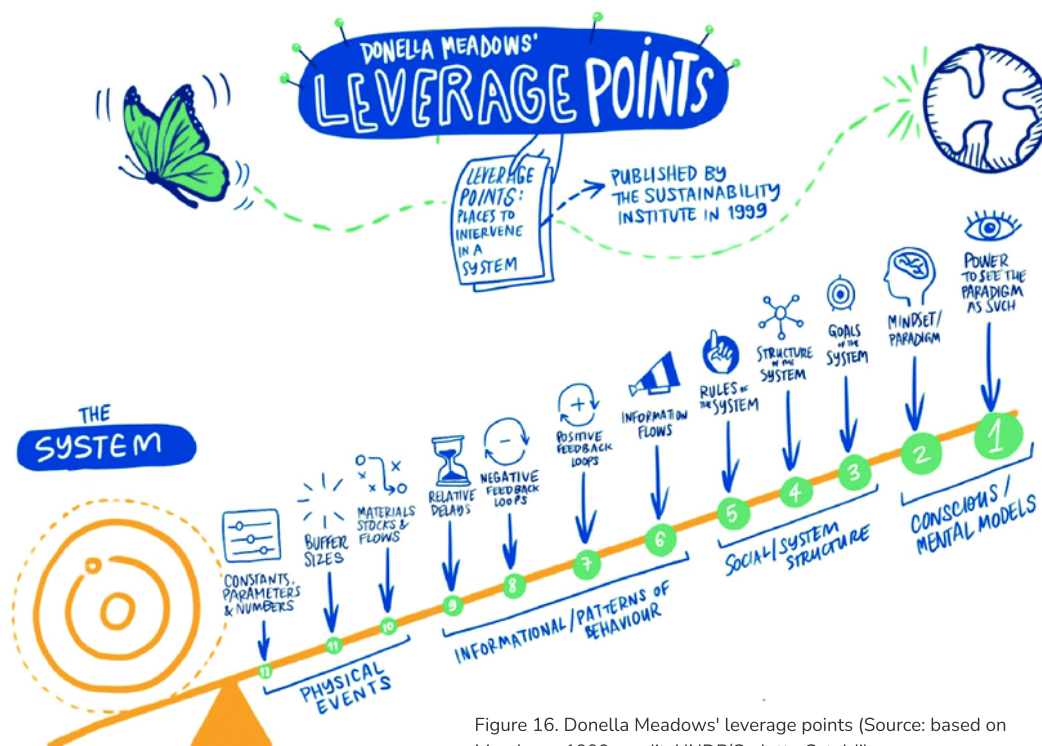


Figure 16. Donella Meadows' leverage points (Source: based on Meadows, 1999; credit: UNDP/Carlotta Cataldi)





# Government as a system

	Influence	Engage	Design	Develop	Resource	Deliver	Control
‘Softer’ powers often shared with others	1 <b>Advising</b> Advising citizens and signposting options to help them find support.	2 <b>Listening</b> Creating platforms for citizens and stakeholders to protect vested rights and interests.	3 <b>Connecting</b> Encourage experts and citizens to co-create change.	4 <b>Championing</b> Building a case for change and retain alliances for action.	5 <b>Charging</b> Collecting charges for service for example prescriptions, passports or parking.	6 <b>Nudging</b> Applying behavioural science or encouraging voluntary codes.	7 <b>Devolving</b> Devolving decisions to frontline staff, other authorities or citizens.
	8 <b>Lobbying</b> Using existing networks and platforms to influence an issue or cause.	9 <b>Informing</b> Providing data, sharing knowledge. For example public information advice.	10 <b>Engaging</b> Engaging citizens, stakeholders and partners to deliberate on an issue of importance.	11 <b>Agreeing</b> Formal agreements e.g. Memoranda of Understanding (MOU).	12 <b>Incentivising</b> Promoting behavioural change through grants, subsidies or other incentives.	13 <b>Educating</b> Providing materials so citizens know what’s available to them.	14 <b>Providing assurance</b> Providing assurance / checks and balance on powers.
Patterns of action across local, national and international contexts	15 <b>Agenda setting</b> Bold messages & confidence in new opportunities by providing thought leadership.	16 <b>Consulting</b> Consulting the public or stakeholders on an issue to understand needs and impact.	17 <b>Analysing</b> Analysing and interpreting data from local and international contexts.	18 <b>Partnering</b> Establishing formal partnerships on an issue of importance to parties.	19 <b>Contracting</b> Utilising public procurement to encourage supply chain innovation.	20 <b>Building</b> Making infrastructure investments & public commissions e.g. highways.	21 <b>Licensing</b> Protecting citizens e.g. bars, clubs, traders & markets, and health & safety.
	22 <b>Role modelling</b> Role modelling culture or values through local, national or international presence.	23 <b>Convening</b> Drawing together expertise from across systems. Including deliberative approaches e.g. citizen juries.	24 <b>Forecasting</b> Formalised systems forecasting and predictive analytics.	25 <b>Planning</b> Setting strategy and making plans e.g. Industrial Strategy.	26 <b>Co-funding</b> Co-funding, activity and pooling budgets with domestic or international partners.	27 <b>Providing</b> Delivering services directly or indirectly through funding and Target setting.	28 <b>Regulating</b> Ensuring disciplines enables the intended policy outcomes. Also amending rules, statutory instruments and orders.
More ‘formal’ power often associated with governments	29 <b>Auditing</b> Auditing and reviewing activities to inform action.	30 <b>Collaborating</b> Collaborating with different actors from across the system to deliver outcomes.	31 <b>Modelling</b> Modelling various scenarios, shaping and deciding on delivery models.	32 <b>Commissioning</b> Commissioning services and outsourcing contracts. Also decommissioning as needed.	33 <b>Targeting</b> Utilising initiatives to influence on a particular issue e.g. Cultural programmes.	34 <b>Reforming</b> Harmonising political will for change to improve outcomes.	35 <b>Intervening</b> Making an intervention to correct or improve a market or social context e.g. correcting market failure.
	36 <b>Governing</b> Establishing governance and setting up formal structures such as boards.	37 <b>Negotiating</b> Early engagement for a shared interest or issue including diplomacy.	38 <b>Testing</b> Testing, piloting and learning to establish efficacy of a proposed intervention.	39 <b>Interpreting</b> Translating policies across different places and jurisdictions.	40 <b>Investing</b> Investing in various forms including inward investment and foreign direct investment.	41 <b>Safeguarding</b> Harmonising political will for change to improve outcomes.	42 <b>Enforcing</b> Support enforcement and harmonise regulatory compliance environments.
	43 <b>Publishing</b> Publishing plans, priorities, guidance and reviews.	44 <b>Running elections</b> Running democratic services and elections.	45 <b>Piloting</b> Small scale trials to learn lessons and establish an evidence base for change.	46 <b>Drafting</b> Publishing proposals for consultation and legislative scrutiny e.g. white papers and bills.	47 <b>Funding</b> Direct finance to stimulate markets or deliver positive outcomes.	48 <b>Preventing</b> Intervening early of investing in preventative measures e.g. Public health.	49 <b>Sanctioning</b> Putting in place sanctions e.g. embargoes and political trade restrictions.
	50 <b>Scrutinising</b> Establishing scrutiny committees for example section 50 powers.	51 <b>Setting standards</b> Harmonising and setting standards for different stakeholders.	52 <b>Evaluating</b> Evaluating efficacy of activities or interventions to establish value for money and impact.	53 <b>Legislating</b> (Primary and Secondary) Supporting a bill through parliament and enacting legislation.	54 <b>Recovering</b> Recovering debts and other actions to address fraud and error.	55 <b>Protecting</b> Protecting consumer rights and supply chain. Upholding of standards.	56 <b>Prosecuting</b> Powers to investigate and prosecute criminal offences e.g. local Gov Act 1972.

Figure 17. Government as a system toolkit (Source: Cooper, A. (2020, March 6). <https://openpolicy.blog.gov.uk/2020/03/06/introducing-a-government-as-a-system-toolkit/>)

Next we looked into Andrea Cooper's “Government as a System” toolkit for system change and improving policymaking. We found that there were several possible intervention possibilities for us. We continued further with role modeling, connecting, engaging, modeling, piloting, safeguarding, incentivising, protecting, intervening, regulating and devolving.

Another revelation we had was concerning the video lecture by Ramia Maze of Governmentality. She talked about governing security and safety in a project called VPUU (Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading) in Cape Town, Khayelitsha area, that was done in a very complex setting.

The local community and the city found a way of policing that was co-produced, and more importantly, this way was accepted better than the top-down method used before. They found other solutions on how policing is usually done, for example the police was not the one surveilling violence, but local women were. Overall, new people were involved, as well as new actors and new power. This was a reminder for us of how participation can lead to addressing and directing the resources, in a way that reaches actual needs.

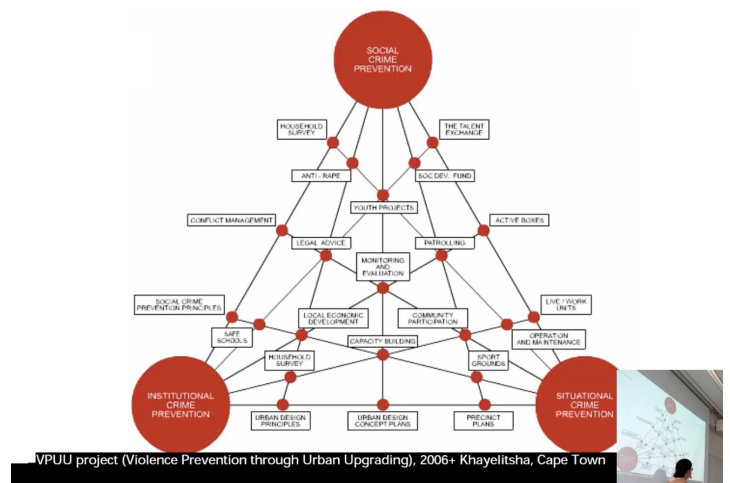


Figure 17. VPUU project. (Source: Video Lecture by Ramia Maze on ‘Governmentality’ at aalto University 2019)

# Design Interventions.

Going through our materials, while learning from lectures and exercises about storytelling, storyboarding and scenarios, we slowly moved away from measuring. We got more confident about the fact that we all previously already knew that quality is not measured but described, assessed and/or discussed.

**What we learned about caseworkers' work,** is that there is a lot of good work they do, which fulfills the mission of their organizations, but is not measured. Maybe highlighting these unnoticed and uncelebrated actions could get us to a meaningful intervention.

It took time to find the right word to describe what we wanted to work with. First, we used the word **Celebration** to celebrate the work of caseworkers, but soon we noticed that it had a wrong and naive sound to use in the context of work, where caseworkers are working for people who are in trouble with their lives. Caseworkers' workload is overwhelming; we have heard municipality workers having many times more clients than what is budgeted for one worker. There are times when their own safety is at risk because sometimes the client's rights to get the service are prioritized over the rights of the caseworker who gives the service. For example: a client not using a mask during the Covid-19 pandemic has the right to get the service from a municipality worker. Caseworkers nevertheless, do their best.

**The selected word we want to use in this context is therefore:**

**Appreciation.**

Their work has direct consequences for unemployed individuals. They should be treasured. People who understand their work appreciate it, and caseworkers should get their fair share of recognition for their good qualities. Feeling appreciated is an emotion, a very important one, and as we have found out, it has multiple ways to surface, but it always includes interaction with others.

# Examples of interventions.

To learn more about caseworkers' work we had created a story about a caseworker called Maisa with the tools that we learned during the lectures. We narrated what her day at work looks like, what kind of actions she is taking and what kind of actions are taken towards her.

We searched for references, and benchmarks, and looked through the recognition pillars and toolkits. However, most of the actions we found were too plain and superficial for our purpose.

## We found some interesting examples:

- how the 911-call center workers shared affirming stories about their work, and there was research that sharing those stories lowered the burnout level.
- STAR, an evidence-based policy-making organization for the Danish Agency for Labour Market and Recruitment, was also interesting.

In addressing appreciation, we also discussed the resources and money because although our design intervention can not solve resourcing, we needed to understand decision-making on budgeting. Budgets are relatively small, but allocating money is something that reflects the values of an organization and what is appreciated. The feeling of appreciation can't be high among the employees, if the sums are too low. As time is money, we ideated how we could somehow stretch the time that the caseworker has per client. We thought about different software that could make automated personas and create journey suggestions to make caseworkers work faster and how they could have more power over their own work. Maybe dividing caseworkers through specialization to work with certain groups of clients could make their work faster? Then we realized that caseworkers have for sure thought about all these solutions many times over.

So behind all this was the question: **how to bring caseworkers more involved into how they do what they do?** Through workshops they could be heard.

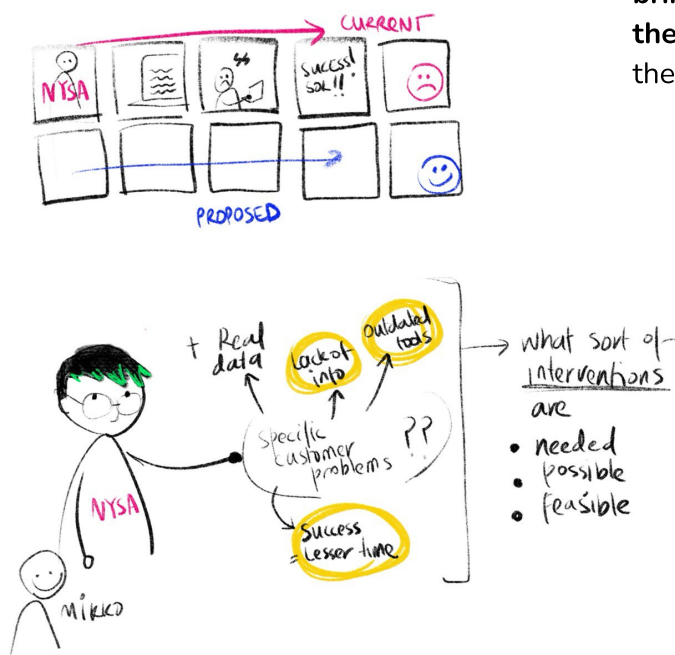


Figure 18. Storyboarding a public servant's appreciation needs (own illustration)

After discussing with a caseworker from Helsinki municipality, who confirmed almost all our assumptions and lack of appreciation also at the societal level, as civil servants are often to blame when something goes wrong, but they rarely can defend themselves as there is an oath of confidentiality.

Likewise, there is a lack of media coverage when they have done great work with helping someone because people rarely contact the media when all is well. We asked her what she would see as appreciation regarding her work.

The main points were:

- managing the workload so that the upper management would understand their work
- having individual talks with supervisors about how they want to develop their work and being offered specialization possibilities and training
- identifying their individual strengths
- a personalized approach for supporting them
- having a skilled team coaches that can support their work
- and that they would not have to pay for themselves for the Tyhy-day (employee well-being day).

## What would happen if..?

When turning to our previous research the top-down management style is embedded in how caseworkers are seen.

**What would happen if this was turned around so that supervisors and managers would ask what their subordinates need to do their work? And trust that they will do their work well, and move the quantity metrics aside?**

We started to get the idea that our design intervention is not one nudge or action but could be a process and a toolkit. We created an “Acts of Appreciation” toolkit and a process to help the stakeholders recognise and identify the relevant acts of appreciation needed in their organization. And enable them to apply, experiment and eventually develop their own appreciation culture at the work-place.

Re-looking at the current institutional and infrastructural ways of value-assessment and work-measurement will bring sustainability and success to caseworkers work, and via that to the goal of the reform and to all stakeholders involved.

# Our Proposal.

## Acts of Appreciation.

With our reframed project brief around helping municipalities make their employees valued and introduce a culture of appreciation; our proposal aims at introducing and embedding acts of appreciation in municipalities. To that end, our solution is a **toolkit** for municipalities to envision the new reform as an organization that moves from burnout to an appreciative culture that values caseworkers. Ultimately, it will support the success of the TE2024 reform by supporting employees such as Maija, whose work is at the heart of the reform.

The toolkit consists of different acts of appreciation tailored to the needs of case workers, identified from our desktop and design research. For more simplicity and clarity, we organised these acts of appreciation around six appreciation themes. Acts of appreciation can happen on different levels, based on agency. Indeed, some can be more informal and employee-driven, whereas others are the responsibility of higher level positions and are more formal.

Appreciation is defined as “the act of recognizing and rewarding employee contributions to the workplace either through formal or informal channels.” (BasuMallick, 2021, p. 1). Strategically, organizations usually implement an appreciation culture around different pillars which resonate with their values, vision and strategy. Pace University for example chose to build its appreciation program around Connection, Recognition, Growth and Performance. More generally, studies showed that the four main pillars of appreciation in companies are Integrity, Autonomy, Transparency and Investments (Ghaye & Gunnarsson, 2009).

Overall, these initiatives all have one vision in mind: giving a sense of agency and a sense belonging to their employees as well as a willingness to share their experiences.



Figure 19. Snapshot of research on appreciation culture from PACE University, 2021 [Photograph]. <https://www.pace.edu/human-resources/working-pace/awards-and-recognitions/employee-appreciation-toolkit#recognition>

**Within the context of public services, more precisely TE offices, what are the appreciation themes?**

We drew from our design and desktop research six appreciation themes, which are the following:

- (1) **Connection**: fostering connection between caseworkers.
- (2) **Integrity**: consists in giving a voice to employees and making them feel heard.
- (3) **Care & Safety**: ensures case workers evolve in a safe environment and enhance their well-being
- (4) **Autonomy**: giving employees enough freedom to manage their work
- (5) **Development & Recognition**: about supporting the case workers development and rewarding their work
- (6) **Investments & Incentives**: providing resources and incentives for case workers

A particular emphasis is given on the **Care & Safety** pillar in our proposal because this theme is what differentiates most appreciation cultures in corporations from appreciation cultures in public services. Indeed, compared to corporate employees, employees in public services, especially case workers have a stressful, and emotionally draining daily job.



Figure 20. Appreciation Act categories (own illustration)

# Some appreciation examples for the TE-services context

The recommended acts of appreciation are usually giving shoutouts on social media, offering personalised rewards or celebrating success with employee of the month awards (Craig, 2017). Within the context of TE public services, acts of appreciation are organised around the appreciation themes presented previously.

- Connection: Peer support or collaborative workshops.
- Integrity: Anonymous feedback surveys or collaborative workshops.
- Care & Safety: One-to-one coach sessions or debrief after a difficult case.
- Autonomy: Shift success metrics or a more flexible workload.
- Development & Recognition: Training opportunities or a notification system (when a jobseeker found a job).
- Investments & Incentives: A raise or money allocated for the fun days.

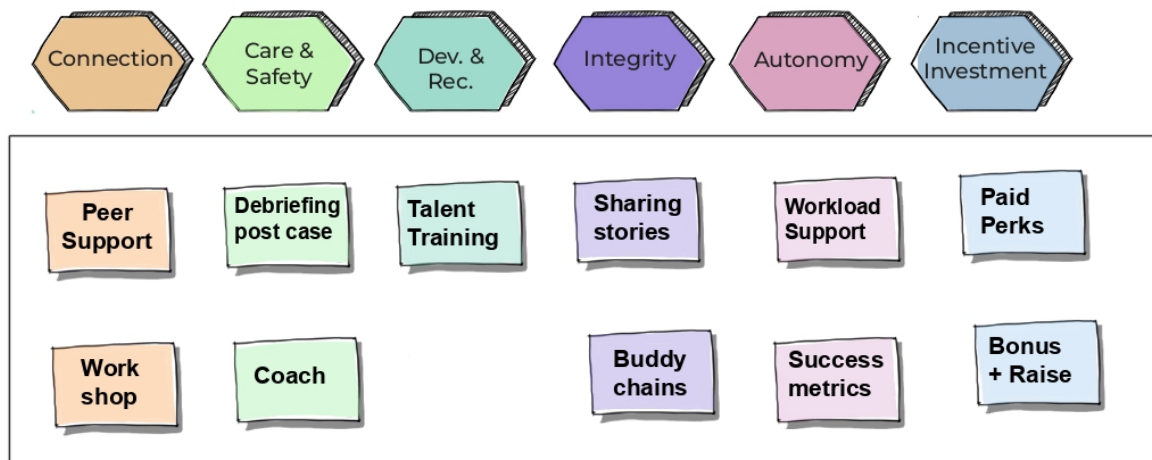


Figure 21. Appreciation Acts toolkit framework (own illustration)

# Framework and Principles

The horizontal axis (appreciation themes) and the vertical axis (level of agency) ensure alignment between the different acts of appreciation.

The six appreciation themes represent different areas of actions to implement an appreciation culture. It is only by acting on all those themes that the organisation can hope to build an appreciation culture, otherwise the risk might be for acts of appreciation to be scattered around without any coherency and measurable impact.

Similarly with the level agency, having some alignment between the employee-level and higher levels will allow case workers to feel supported and ensure continuity and impact to shift towards a more appreciative culture.

- **Customisable:**

This toolkit is what we call a 'living document'. It should be customisable by each municipality and evolve over time. Considering that each municipality differs in terms of size, location and customer base, their function differently and their employees have different needs, priorities and issues.

Therefore, municipalities should have enough freedom to tailor their toolkit to their situation.

- **Evidence-based (a.k.a Co-designed):**

This toolkit is not a catalogue of acts of appreciation ideas. It is a toolkit built by case workers.

This toolkit provides examples of acts of appreciation we identified from our design research which were brought up by case workers. As case workers and other public services sit down to build their own, they should come up with their own acts of appreciation. This is why there are different interrogation points on the framework, it shows that acts of appreciation are to be determined.

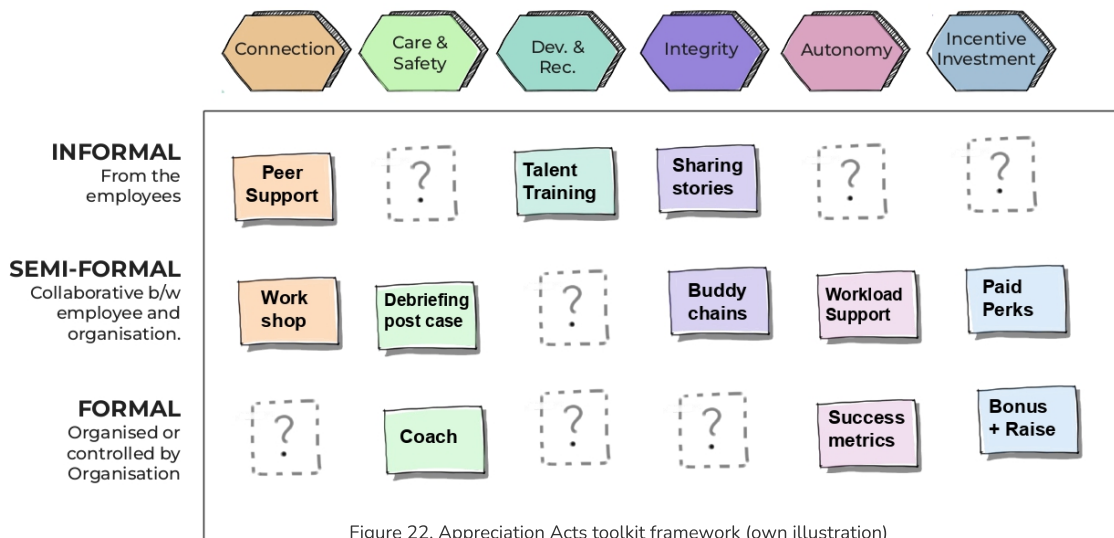


Figure 22. Appreciation Acts toolkit framework (own illustration)



# How might it look in practice?

Here are some examples to illustrate how the acts of appreciation presented here are evidence-based.

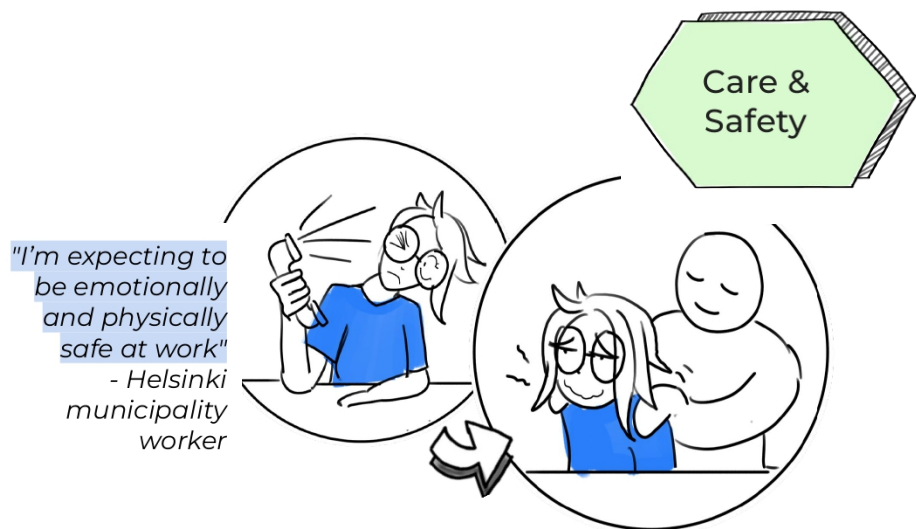


Figure 22. Toolkit in practice, care and safety example (own illustration)

## Debrief after a complex case **(Care & Safety)**

Case workers have reported to us during the interviews that they face jobseekers who sometimes find themselves in difficult life situations, which can emotionally drain employees. Moreover, the metrics prioritising quantity over quality makes them evolve in a very stressful environment, where they feel like they don't have the time to truly help the jobseeker. Facing those constraints, they want to be physically and emotionally safe at work. "I'm expecting to be emotionally and physically safe at work" - Helsinki municipality worker

This is a glimpse of the pieces of evidence we collected to find the Care & Safety pillar, and as a response, we decided that debriefing with a supervisor after a complex case could be an act of appreciation. For example, let's say - Maija has had a difficult case who also used insulting language towards her and she is emotionally drained. She lets her supervisor know and as the Acts of Appreciation toolkit is part of their working culture, they arrange a meeting with a skilled coach (Finnish: työnohjaaja), so Maija can unpack her strong emotions and get a feeling of being heard. As a result, she can now again concentrate to her job with other customers.

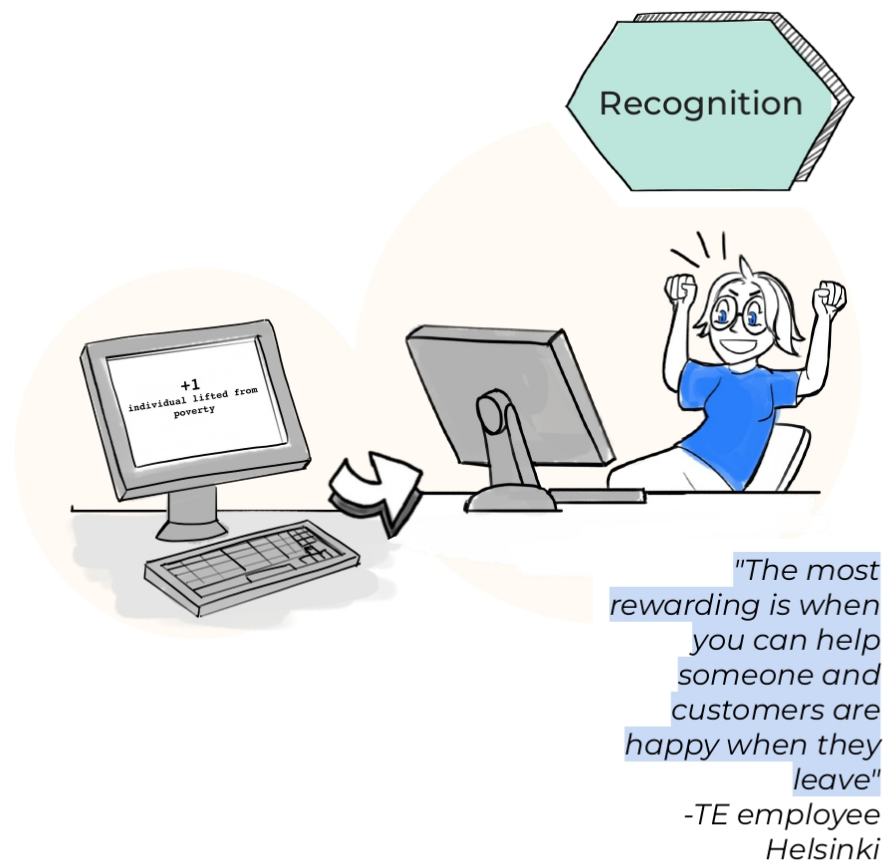


Figure 23. Toolkit in practice, recognition example (own illustration)

### **Notification system (Development & Recognition)**

Many caseworkers expressed that what they found the most rewarding in their job was to be able to help jobseekers. "The most rewarding is when you can help someone and customers are happy when they leave" \_TE employee Helsinki

Consequently, we considered a notification system, under the Development & Recognition theme. It would consist of case workers receiving a notification when a jobseeker they took care of finds a job.

# How to use the toolkit?

We recommend the putting the toolkit to practice by the following ways:

- **Understand local needs and co-create acts of appreciation, together**

Different actors working in the same municipality should meet to understand the local needs and use the toolkit to brainstorm and come up with acts of appreciation under each theme. The group could meet bi-weekly at the beginning in facilitated workshops to make sure that the needs of case workers are followed and can be answered. This group could encompass people from different backgrounds and roles within the org to get different perspectives such as TE caseworkers with working experience - those moving in from TE offices, supervisors, HR representatives, existing well-being department teammates, managers, planning officers etc. Having a facilitator supervising the workshop would help understand power balance and issues faced by the ground and discuss them in a safe manner without fear of judgement or possible repercussions.

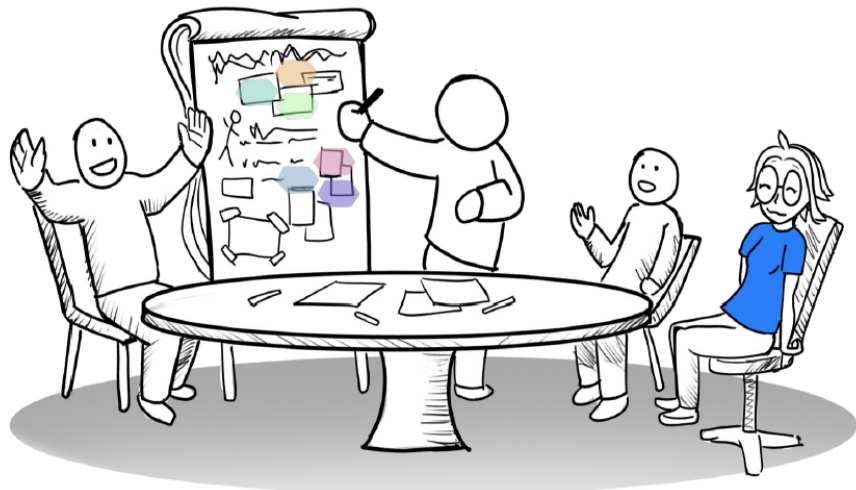
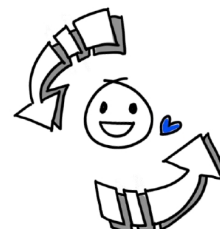


Figure 24. using the toolkit - understanding local needs (own illustration)

- **Assign and train 'Appreciation coordinators'**

The people in charge of the toolkit should be current or former TE case workers. This has been mentioned multiple times by case workers. They want the Appreciation coordinators to understand what case workers go through and have closure. The "Appreciation coordinators" will be in charge of coordinating the appreciation acts and implementing the toolkit.

- **Improve and iterate on the ideas** and practices found through the co-design actions. The toolkit being a 'living document', it should be constantly improved and iterated as municipalities evolves.



Their duties include:

1. Facilitating the workshops
2. Identify and bring in the right participants
3. Bring in relevant resources such as specialists that can help with designing various practices.
4. Ensure collection of insights, notes, documentation that should become evidence for future discussions.
5. Moreover, the Appreciation Coordinator(s) of each municipality should meet together under Keha's supervision and report to Keha. This cross-collaboration would allow Appreciation Coordinators to exchange knowledge and best practices.

*Note: The appreciation coordinators should be trained to have leadership and facilitation skills to fulfil their duties.*

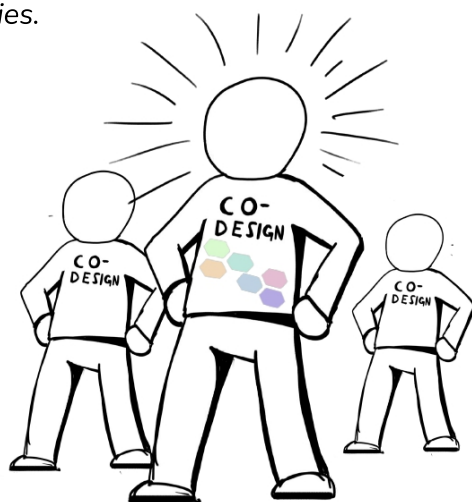


Figure 25. using the toolkit - appreciation coordinators (own illustration)

# Positive impacts :)

This proposal is especially relevant at this point in time. From our understanding, the lack of appreciation culture is very present but is constantly pushed down at the bottom of people's priority.

Within the context of the **Nordic Reform**, changes are happening, new people are being hired and new resources are available. This toolkit represents an opportunity to identify acts of appreciation which work or not in each municipality and allocate some of these resources where it is needed and impactful.

Overall, an appreciation culture has many benefits such as inspired employees, higher employee retention rates, better customer experience, positive work culture, positive peer influence (Wickham, 2022; Craig, 2017; Robbins, 2019).

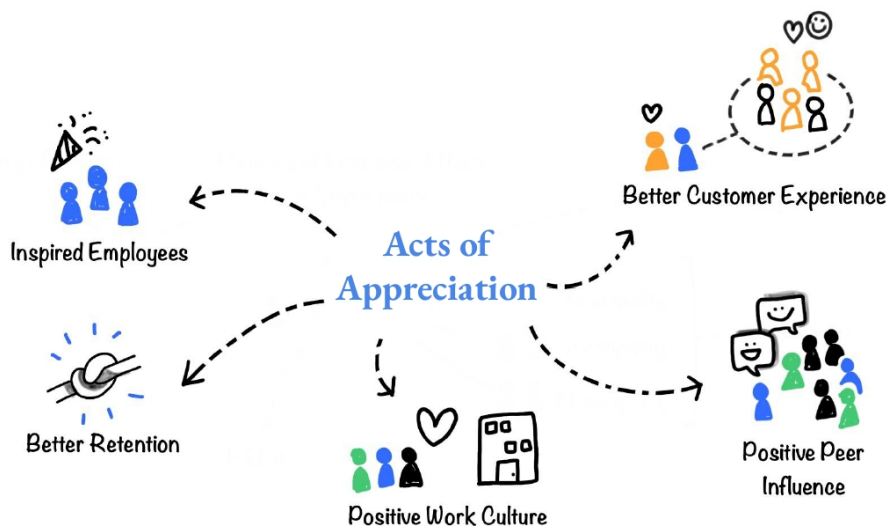


Figure 26. Expected positive impacts from the proposal (own illustration)

# Value Proposition.

## Value to each stakeholder:

- **Customers.** Our proposal will provide customers with faster, quicker and relevant job opportunities and benefits. Moreover, the service quality will be higher as they will feel more cared for.
- **Kuntaliitto & KEHA.** Our proposal will allow to improve the collaboration between municipalities, Kuntaliitto and KEHA, anticipate difficulties proactively and find new opportunities and ideas.
- **Municipalities** and **case workers.** Our proposal will allow municipality to develop more tailored services, improve the work environment of their case workers and increase employees' wellbeing and reduce churn.

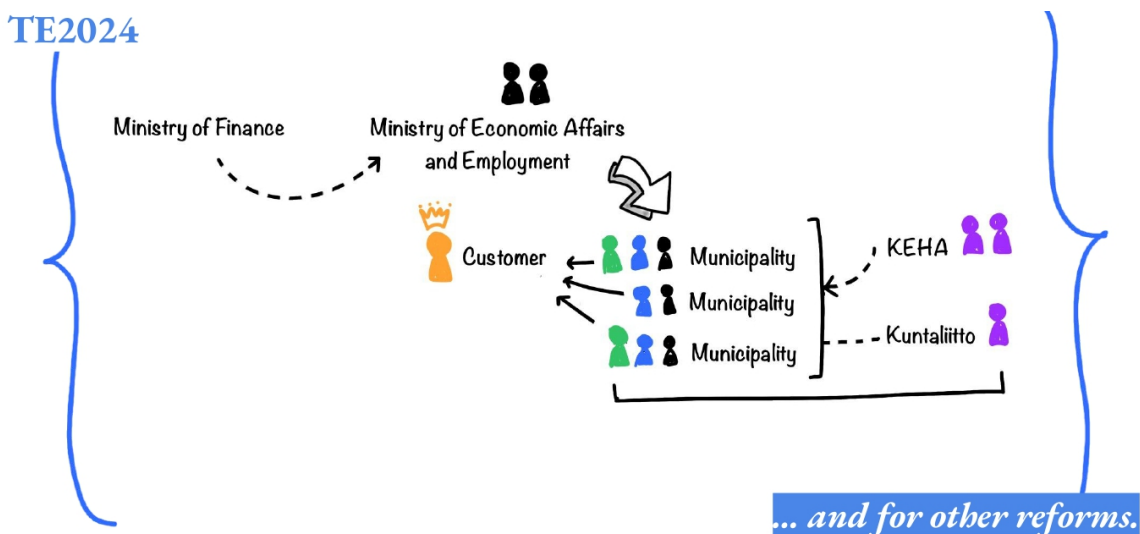


Figure 27. Proposal's value proposition to stakeholders (own illustration)

Overall, the TE2024 reform is the perfect opportunity to envision organisations to move to an appreciative culture - for everybody. Build common understanding, empathy. Finally, Ensure reform success not just TE2024, but be better prepared for any other reform that may come in.

# Conclusion.

## Some reflections.

From the start, we had the assumption that the organizational culture of municipalities would be affected by the TE2024 reform as the structure was changing and people from different entities would work together. Ultimately, we found from our research that the case workers felt undervalued and burnt out and decided to focus our solution on generating an appreciation culture in municipalities.

The most challenging aspect of our working process was coming up with a solution. Design methods such as systems thinking were not particularly relevant concerning the appreciation culture. Indeed, the literature showed that there was not a leverage point - one area of intervention- to foster an appreciation culture. An appreciation culture is built through different small actions.

Moreover, we found ourselves trying to solve what looked more like a managerial challenge than a design one, but with design tools. Ultimately, we think that this allowed us to bring a new perspective to work around appreciation culture. Moreover, our design research process allowed us to develop an appreciation toolkit tailored to public services.

Finally, design methodologies such as character personas -the presentation is built based on one person's story- allowed us to give the relatively abstract concept of appreciation culture, a more personal, human, and relatable dimension.

Overall, the toolkit allows having a tangible, concrete way of implementing an appreciation culture in public services. Thanks to the feedback we received from our presentation, the lack of appreciation culture does not only happen in municipalities but more broadly in public services. Therefore, this toolkit could be adapted to other public services too. This showed us that there is a paradigm shift that needs to happen around public services and how society perceives the job of social workers. We hope that initiatives like our proposal "Acts of appreciation" will support this change in perspective. We uncovered an issue that was not only present within the context of the TE2024 reform, but which impacts everyday life and every decision.

Due to the length and the intensity of the course, we would advise having more time to research the literature around appreciation culture. Moreover, having an ideation workshop to work with case workers on brainstorming acts of appreciation would help improve our toolkit.

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