City of Espoo

Business Espoo – how the Service Centre for businesses was created
The #MakeWithEspoo product family collects the results of the experiments conducted in Espoo in order to create tools of development, management and consulting according to the objectives of the City as a Service concept. It is an umbrella of the co-creation of frameworks, handbooks and tools created in 2017–2021 in different 6Aika projects that reforms activities in a socially, culturally, ecologically and economically sustainable way.

The joint 6Aika strategy of the six largest cities in Finland (Helsinki, Espoo, Tampere, Vantaa, Oulu and Turku) is developing more open, smart and sustainable services in cities in the period 2014–2022. The focus has been on identifying the city’s challenges and trying out new solutions between the city, companies, residents, educational institutes and universities. The 6Aika strategy has funded 64 urban development projects with a total budget of around €95 million.
Foreword

Our strategy at the heart of the Espoo Story is about building a sustainable future together with our residents, customers and partners. Networking and shared leadership have also been key to the development of Business Espoo.

Business Espoo's operating model has been built through the Designing for Services course at Aalto University, with students of Industrial Engineering and Management, in the 6Aika strategy project and with internal and external consultants. The approach has been open, and input has been sought from a variety of sources, from service design to hackathons. Business Espoo's unique co-creation work has been carried out with all operators defining, deciding and working together.

This handbook, part of the Make with Espoo product family, describes the development of Business Espoo, especially from the perspective of the city’s role. All materials and texts in the diagrams and graphs are initial specifications. The roles of organisations have changed and many things have evolved. The groundwork described in the handbook has been an excellent support for constant renewal. Business Espoo was created with these ingredients to create a future-proof and impressive network.

In Espoo, we create new success stories by introducing different operators, operations and networks to each other. Business Espoo has been one of these success stories. Warm thanks to all those involved in shaping the network and to the experts interviewed for this handbook, whose comments also appear as direct quotes throughout the book. Special thanks to development consultant Heli Hidén who has mainly written this handbook and has spared no effort in supporting the creation of Business Espoo together with the Director of Economic Development Harri Paananen, Senior Planning Officer Maarit Viik-Kajander and Marketing Manager Sari Mäkisalo.

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City of Espoo
Espoo's central value is resident- and customer orientation. One of the city's strategic objectives is to be a responsible leader and develop the City as a Service. This means developing the urban community in a socially, culturally, economically and ecologically sustainable way. Developing the city as a service strengthens a sustainable way of delivering and renewing services with residents and partners, using knowledge, innovation and digitalisation. The city's role has diversified from being a provider of services to an active partner for residents, communities, businesses, science and innovation. The idea is to think of the city as a community that, together with partners, builds pathways to sustainable growth. The Service Centre is one way of bringing together services for residents and customers in one place. The first service centre to be launched in Espoo was Iso Omena, and the lessons learned have been used to develop Business Espoo – the Service Centre for businesses.

**Iso Omena Service Centre**

The service centre concept is a model for providing key services for local residents in one place across sectoral boundaries. The City of Espoo's first service centre opened in August 2016 at the Iso Omena shopping centre, and proved from the very beginning that it pays to have ten public service units in shared premises. The services of the Iso Omena Service Centre include a library, shopping centre, youth services, employment Service Centre, health clinic, health centre, mental health and substance abuse services, the Social Insurance Institution (Kela), and the laboratory and imaging services of HUS. In 2020, the service centre model was extended to North Espoo. The Kalajärvi Service Centre provides a library, health centre, health clinic, information point and dental clinic for the residents of the area.

At the heart of the new culture built around service centres is the mutual customer. The staff views the customer in a more holistic way than in traditional public services because they are aware of the other available services, and are able to guide customers and, if necessary, also support them in a proactive way.

The service centre is also a natural place for developing resident services together with the public administration, companies and residents. The ethnographic study found three important co-creation skills at Iso Omena Service Centre:

- **The environment and facilities**: The large, public open space is open both spatially and from the viewpoint of its operating culture. Temporary, mobile pop-up facilities are best suited to co-creation.
• Atmosphere and operating culture: The staff at Iso Omena Service Centre are highly motivated and have a positive outlook on experiments. The staff from ten different units are creating a new operational culture where their mutual customer is at the centre of the services. Each customer is viewed as a whole person, not just as a customer of one unit, and is readily directed to various other services. Companies also appreciate the Iso Omena Service Centre staff’s views of what kind of services are needed.

• Unique flow of customers: Bringing public services to where the people are. This has lowered their threshold for seeking services and has engaged young people and other customer groups that are traditionally difficult to reach to Iso Omena Service Centre. The customers of the Service Centre also seem to be more active in participating than people on average.

The most important prerequisite of co-creation is a shared goal, which must be defined based on needs identified either by the customers or by staff. Co-creation requires companies and other partners to be proactive and take action, for example in communication. The main purpose of a Service Centre is to enable co-creation.

Service centre model starting points for businesses

The City of Espoo aims to support entrepreneurship and strengthen the attractiveness and vitality of the area. Entrepreneurship and business support services have previously been scattered among many different public operators, and there was a clear need for a one-stop-shop service channel. Business Espoo’s organisations had also noticed that growth-oriented companies such as startups in particular, were not familiar with or able to use the services of the city’s business service network. At the same time, the city wanted to participate in the development of the new startup hub and deepen cooperation between entrepreneurs. New networking opportunities were created through services and various joint events.

Business Espoo’s business service network was based on the model of the Iso Omena Service Centre, where many operators serve customers in one place. As at Iso Omena, effectiveness and efficiency come from collaboration and the location of services where customers otherwise move around.

The physical location of Business Espoo’s Service Centre for businesses was chosen to be A Grid, a brand new centre for startups at Otaniemi, which was a natural place to set it up. Currently, A Grid’s 25,000-m2 premises are home to around 150 startups, Aalto Start Up Center ASUC and ESA-BIC accelerators, as well as investors and various innovation- and business accelerators. A Grid’s facilities allow for the organisation of events, co-creation and networking.

Business Espoo aims to provide customer-centric, high-quality services and improved cost-effectiveness. Customer-centricity is achieved through dialogue, cooperation and listening to customer feedback. Cost-effectiveness is achieved by reducing duplication in service offering, and targeting resources at the services that are most needed. Services can be is designed together more easily, as the customer moves along an almost physical service path through the different organisations of Business Espoo.

The background and objectives of the Iso Omena Service Centre and Business Espoo’s Service Centre for businesses are similar, but there are differences. External service providers also operate at the Iso Omena Service Centre, but the City of Espoo is fully responsible for its operation, and the city’s management team and the management teams of the divisions draw up the policies affecting the Service Centre. At Iso Omena, a dedicated service centre steering group implements the policies defined by the city’s management team regarding the Service Centre concept. In addition to this, the steering group decides on service portfolio and shared finances, and monitors and supervises the centre’s objectives.

At Business Espoo, the city is one of the seven operators at the service hub. The City of Espoo’s management and management team make decisions related to Business Espoo, but they do not have direct decision-making power over the Service Centre for businesses. As a rule, Business Espoo offers services to companies, entrepreneurs and would-be, in other words the prospective, entrepreneurs – not to private citizens as the Iso Omena Service Centre does. In the employment services, both service centres partly serve the same clientele, but the main focus of the Business Espoo Service Centre is on the needs of the business sector.

A notable difference between the two is the openness of the facilities. The Iso Omena Service Centre is open to all with very few closed areas. At Business Espoo, on the other hand, customers are served in personal meetings in pre-booked meeting rooms.
Business Espoo is a network of services for businesses, entrepreneurs and would-be i.e. the prospective entrepreneurs in Espoo. Business Espoo is not a company or organisation, but consists of seven operators versed in business issues whose services are available to customers at a single convenient location. The network is made up of the City of Espoo’s Business Economic development and Employment unit, Enter Espoo (formerly Espoo Marketing Oy), EnterpriseEspoo (YritysEspoo - Espoon Seudun Uusyrityskeskus ry.), Federation of Espoo Enterprises (Espoon Yrittäjät), Helsinki Region Chamber of Commerce, Omnia and the Uusimaa TE Office.

Business Espoo’s experts work as a single unit, despite the fact that they work for different employers. It is based on the idea that it is not important to entrepreneurs whose services they use, but that they can easily get all the services they need in one place. It is important to note that Business Espoo also serves businesses in the surrounding areas, and the regional scope of services varies between the organisations in the network. There is close cooperation between the business services in the capital region and the wider region, and the customers – entrepreneurs and businesses – are largely served regardless of municipal boundaries.

In addition to the shared service offering and service channels, the network has shared communications and marketing, shared events and shared operations management and development processes. The customers take part in developing the services through service design processes and hackathons, for example.

In the future, the aim is to strengthen inter-organisational cooperation around service packages to ensure better customer guidance on services. Another key objective is to communicate and market services in a more targeted way.

Starting points and background to the idea

The development of Business Espoo was based on observations about the fragmentation of business services. Entrepreneurs may not have been able to find the services they needed in the maze of services behind different organisations, and were directed to services at random. This fragmentation also meant that customers were often far away from the customer service agents, and feedback was not systematically collected.

Many of the challenges facing business services culminated in communication. In the past, each business services organisation mainly communicated about its own services on its own website, which made it difficult to understand the big picture and in what situation each service was being offered. The customers need for a one-stop shop
was clear, and this common goal motivated the network’s experts from the start.

"In retrospect, it’s easy to see that the customers have had a lot of googling to do"

The desire for a business services network like Business Espoo existed for years before the seven operators moved to Otaniemi under one roof. Joining forces had been discussed before, and different operators were already working in the same or adjacent premises even years before the Service Centre was born. For example, EnterpriseEspoo (Espoon Seudun Uusyrityskeskus ry) and the TE Office operated on the same premises for about 10 years before the whole network moved together.

The first concrete outlines of the joint network were created at the end of 2016, and in 2017 Business Espoo started looking for premises in Otaniemi. Bringing many operators together meant careful space planning, complex calculations and administrative solutions.

The main developer of the conceptualisation and start-up phase of the Service Centre for businesses was Harri Paananen, Director of Economic Development at the City of Espoo. Harri’s recent doctoral thesis, Balancing Acts - Managing Inter-Organizational Collaboration for Innovation, and the inclusion of Business Espoo in the City of Espoo’s cross-governmental Dynamic Espoo development programme (Innostava ja Elinvoimainen Espoo, IEE) reinforced the formation of the Service Centre into what it is today. Business Espoo eventually served as the flagship of the IEE programme for various cross-governmental measures, and the programme became a major leverage for developing the business services network and funding joint resources.

The shaping of the Service Centre for businesses was highly iterative activity based on agile development. Members of the City of Espoo and other organisations in the network were engaged in a completely new way, with little in the way of written material or ready-made processes to support it. The work of the Designing for Services course at Aalto University from spring 2018 was used to help with the organisation and customer validation. [3] In the coursework, the students structured Business Espoo’s joint activities, outlined the way the three networks’ joint working groups operate, highlighted customer feedback on the services and customer steering they were working on, and came up with ideas for common ways for the network to operate and serve customers.

The work showed that the network organisations were keen to find new ways to share resources and expertise to improve customer service across the shared business services network. The coursework suggested that Business Espoo (at this stage working under the name Espoo Business Services) should focus its strategy on ways to have an impact on three levels of cooperation: internal communication and common policies, the customer and partner interface between A Grid companies and other operators and Business Espoo, and the service concept serving the whole of Espoo. Some of the suggestions made by the team that carried out the exercise concerned practices and services that were already part of the offering of Business Espoo’s organisations. However, it was found that these existing services were not easily found on the organisations’ websites, so the group’s report stressed the importance of communicating and developing these services. The findability of services was seen as the most critical area of development in the formation of the network.

The coursework guided people to start from two areas of development.

### The measures proposed under the visibility and accessibility area

- Establish Espoo Business Services
- Meet the clients where they are
- Illustrate the value of the service
- Improve service navigation
- Lower the threshold for starting a relationship

### The measures proposed under the internal communication & alignment area

- Facilitate a common understanding of the organizations and their employees
- Establish an internal information channel for sharing current work
- Establish a working group that meets regularly
- Create unified guidelines for collaboration
- Support networking for success

With the first two components already in place, the student team that did the coursework proposed moving onto concrete shared customer value creation - “Practical Value For The Customer At All Stages”, with measures such as

- Simplify overlapping services within the wing
- Connect the wing to other relevant public services
- Become a bank of other valuable resource
- Provide tailored and practical service packages
- Support networking for success
- Support learning from first-hand experience

The final report of the Aalto University DfS course and the interviews and group work that led to it provided a good basis for the formation of Business Espoo. Some of the student group's proposals were directly translated into action, while others served to reinforce plans
and ideas for action that had already been developed. Observations from an independent third party and interviews with client companies supported many of the initial ideas for the network and wishes of the network’s experts. Omnia became part of the business services network only after the completion of A Grid’s shared premises and was given office space next to the Business Espoo office wing.

In the future, closer positioning side by side with Omnia’s business services team would also improve the cooperation and development of learning and competence development service entities.

In the early stages of Business Espoo’s formation, dialogue was maintained with the people responsible for the development and coordination of the Iso Omena Service Centre. The people from the Service Centre share their experiences of the early stages of the project, and shared information on how to use the joint working groups and how to set the budget. Although the operators moved to the shared premises in stages, the Business Espoo Management Team started regular meetings in autumn 2018. The launch of the management team served as a kind of foundation stone for the business services network.

Network objectives

The Business Espoo network aims to provide customers with high-quality and effective services from a single location. The common objectives of the network can be roughly divided into three categories:

1. The Business Espoo network brings services together in one place, both physically and digitally
   - A shared online presence
   - A single service channel
   - Corporation in the production of services
   - Shared facilities and other resources
   - Working as a single team

2. More visibility through communication coordination
   - Core messages
   - Effective guidance to the services of other operators in the network
   - Joint campaigns and events

3. Putting the customer at the core
   - Being located in a centre of entrepreneurship puts you in direct contact with your customers
   - The customers take part in developing the services through service hackathons, for instance.

Business Espoo has established common indicators to monitor the achievement of the targets. As the network is still being set up, some objectives will be achieved earlier than others. For example, the establishment and development of customer guidance requires the definition, assembly and organisation of common services into appropriate entities. Achieving the goal of the common service channel is a good example of the steps taken by the network to work together. In order to have a common service channel and customer service, network members need to know their own and each other services, and to understand at a sufficient level the interconnection between services.

The network’s common goal has always been to provide businesses, entrepreneurs and would-be
entrepreneurs with services in one place, both physically and digitally. This objective has been achieved. The approach has been to put the customer at the centre and serve them according to their needs and the stage of their business, regardless of which organisation is providing the service.

In addition to the common objectives of business as part, the network organisations have also had their own specific objectives in terms of developing their own business activities, or the accessibility of services. Organisations have expressed a desire for greater visibility for their business services through the network’s joint communication, especially for those customers who have not been fully reached in the past. In addition to visibility, it was also hoped to increase the accessibility of certain services through the joint activities of the network. In particular, the aim of the organisations with a wide range of services was to make business services more accessible as part of the network’s offering. For example, Omnia’s skills development services support SMEs in particular. Small companies may not have sophisticated competence development processes, and they may be incomplete or the responsibility of one person, and in the worst case, due to lack of time, they may not be done at all. Skills development emerges as an important part of a company’s development and growth.

The city’s role and objectives in the network

Business Espoo does not have its own strategy, but the group implements the Espoo Story, which is the City of Espoo’s strategy written in narrative form. The Espoo Story emphasises the offering of customer- and resident-oriented services in a networked way with partners. The Business Espoo model clearly responds to this key objective of the Espoo Story. The city was the driving force behind the creation of Business Espoo and played a crucial role in the development of the Service Centre. The city’s role in the network has not always been entirely clear, so changing its role and adapting to the situation has required understanding from the other members of the network.

“The city plays a key role in Business Espoo; without the city there would be no network”

The role of the city is to be a coordinator, convener, inspirer and enabler

The starting point for the formation of the network was the city’s strong driving force. Therefore, in the formation, co-creation and follow-up of the network, the city had to allocate more resources than planned to, among other things, the facilitation of co-creation and the human resources of Business Espoo’s joint activities. For example, two people formally employed part-time by Business Espoo, the Marketing Manager and the Senior Planning Officer, were paid by the city, which allowed them to contribute 50% of their work directly to Business Espoo. In addition to human resources, the city invested in the network through, for example, the provision of premises and a website as a communication platform. The city has also funded the network’s activities in various one-off projects and experiments, such as the introduction of a chatbot, graphic design services and the organisation of various events.

The network model of cooperation is new to many operators and it was soon realised that network management needed to be invested both in terms of time and properly targeted resources. The city was a natural choice for the role of leader or main coordinator, as the network members felt that the city was the overarching public interest operator with a responsibility to improve and strengthen entrepreneurship and vitality in the region. On the other hand, the city has some degree of ownership with many of the operators, which made its role as owner-manager easy for some organisations. Particularly in organisations in which the city has a large ownership role, it has been easy to rely on the power and even authority of the city to create and develop the network. From the owner’s point of view, the more efficient use of resources, elimination of duplication, increase of synergies and cooperation between subsidiaries are also clear starting points and objectives for the creation of the network. The three network operators do not have an ownership or decision-making relationship with the city but, especially in the early stages of the network’s formation, the city was expected to provide owner-like leadership. Although the role of initiator of the network has also given the city responsibilities and expectations, clear common objectives and an open and equal atmosphere have facilitated and also eliminated prejudices against the city. From the city’s strategic point of view, it can be considered that the business services network has anticipated future changes in the service structure, such as the transfer of employment services more strongly to the municipalities.

“I may have had some initial prejudices about the city dictating everything, but these were dispelled at the first meeting.”

As the original coordinator of Business Espoo, the city was seen as a natural pilot and operator in the network, able to resource manpower to develop the network. The city resourced facilitation support for the formation of Business Espoo and development consultancy for the mapping of services and the design of service packages as part of the 6Aika - Ecosystems of growth. This meant a lot of service design work, the involvement of the whole network and the human resources of the City of Espoo’s service development department. The aim of the work was to find out how the city can support growth-oriented companies in growing their business, especially through services and by connecting entrepreneurs to the necessary networks in the city and between cities. At the same time, the project sought to identify how the city can connect growth-oriented companies more closely with RDI activities and operators. The objectives of the project were achieved through the development of service packages, networking events, hackathons and training. [4]
Network organisations, services and forms of cooperation

Business Espoo consists of seven organisations, all with different starting points for their operations. Each operator has the goal of helping entrepreneurs and businesses succeed in the Espoo region, but otherwise their starting points and backgrounds vary in areas such as:

- Services
- Goals
- Customers
- Operating practice and strategy
- Financing and ownership
- Number of staff, the way the work is organised
- Communications

Business Espoo’s network organisations can be viewed from many different angles, and below is a brief introduction to each organisation.

**GENERAL SERVICES**

City of Espoo Economic development and Employment Unit, responsible for developing the vitality and competitiveness of the city and related partnerships and city marketing, organizing and developing employment services, and networking and coordinating business services. Responsible for regional cooperation, city-level policies, development and advocacy related to their responsibilities.

**MEMBERSHIP SERVICES**

Enter Espoo attracts businesses, investment and visitors to Espoo and helps innovation and tourism ecosystems to thrive.

Omnia is responsible for developing the skills of companies and offers a range of services to meet their employment and job creation needs. At the heart of the offer are various training services, recruitment services and services for immigrants. It also supports companies in recruiting new staff and helps people find traineeships.

TE services’ business services provide services aimed at matching labour demand and supply, helping businesses, employers and people who want to become entrepreneurs.

EnterpriseEspoo provides life-cycle services for entrepreneurship, offering free business advice to both those planning to start a business and those already operating.

The aim of Federation of Espoo Enterprises is to secure the operating conditions of SMEs and a diverse business structure, promote entrepreneurship, protect the interests of entrepreneurs and support well-being and social community of entrepreneurs.

The Helsinki Region Chamber of Commerce strengthens the success of businesses and supports the City of Espoo in implementing its business and competitiveness policy. The aim is to ensure a competitive operating environment for companies in the Espoo region.
During the formation of Business Espoo, the role of each organisation as part of the network was defined according to the figure above and the more detailed top-level profile list below. The organisations were already familiar with each other’s activities and had worked together in different ways. However, the depth, strength and continuity of cooperation varied widely. It was clear that the operators had only a partial and superficial knowledge of the basic tasks of the other organisations in the network. Only by defining the functions and roles of the organisations was it possible to gain a preliminary understanding of the basic mission of each operator, what services and skills it brings to the network, and what it hopes to gain from it.

When mapping the basic functions, it is easy to come across a situation where the functions and activities are described in marketing terms and not necessarily through the actual range of services. Trust within the network as a whole, space must be given to both guided group work and informal chatting.

Start defining with mapping

Different tools and profiles were used to define the mission of Business Espoo’s organisations. Initially, understanding was sought from a customer perspective through public information. Each organisation’s online communications were identified as the main areas of focus for serving businesses, entrepreneurs and would-be entrepreneurs. The large amount of data was sorted into different categories from the customer’s viewpoint for, example by defining personal, face-to-face and online services, or the stage of the business where the service is provided. The mapping exercise provided a good starting point for the first joint definition phase, which realistically identified the services available to customers. A realistic definition of services was complicated, for example, by the existence of services offered to a small target group and services that have not yet been clearly communicated to customers.

Given the wide range of services in the network, the service mapping exercise sought to find clear headings, groupings and simplifications. Mapping the whole network proved to be a relatively difficult and sometimes cumbersome task. The mapping exercise could have been facilitated by repeating the objectives and the desired outcome even more often. The aim of many operators is to help entrepreneurs succeed, but what this means in concrete terms at service level is more difficult to define. For example, in the case of city services, it was found that some services are not available to everyone and are ad hoc rather than ongoing. Many of the city’s services take place behind the scenes as “back-office tasks”, such as highlighting companies in information campaigns or ad hoc business cooperation for an international visit to a particular market. This is where city services differ from many of Enterprise Espoo’s services, which are more easily defined and communicated, ongoing services offered to all.
Network activities at different stages of the business life cycle

When serving entrepreneurs and businesses, it is clear that service needs and customer roles change with the life cycle of businesses. In Business Espoo’s service mapping, this was like a third level in addition to service mapping and customer segmentation. To ensure customer steering and shared service quality, it must be understood how the customer service needs change over time and according to the situation. There are many different approaches to business life-cycle modelling. The network was formed using the very simple life-cycle model below, where the idea is that the life cycle of a company can also be a continuous cycle in which new businesses created.

LIFE-CYCLE MODEL – service at all stages of business

The services of Business Espoo’s organisations were divided according to the life-cycle stage of the company. At the same time, a preliminary mapping of the different customer segments to be served in the life-cycle phase was carried out. Such simplifications and examples were very important for identifying and segmenting shared customers.

Positioning of operators in the life cycle of a company
Forms of cooperation between organisations before the business Espoo network was formed

All seven organisations were working together long before Business Espoo was formed. For example, EnterpriseEspoo, the TE Office and Federation of Espoo Enterprises (Espoon Yrittäjät) were already operating on the same premises 10 years before Business Espoo was established. There are both “weak” and “strong” links between organisations: some can be clearly articulated and are visible to customers, while others are more difficult to describe. The challenge of mapping arises when there is a one-off collaboration between individual experts or in the organisation of a single event. Similarly, within the network, awareness of the services and forms of cooperation between organisations varies.

The first step was to identify the main points and strengths of the organisations’ existing forms of cooperation before the Business Espoo network was formed. There were strong links between the organisations in terms of ownership and funding. For example, EnterEspoo is fully owned by the City of Espoo and EnterpriseEspoo is mostly owned by the City of Espoo. On the other hand, advocacy in business policy served as a unifying objective where the link between organisations is strong, even if the measures to respond to the challenges may be individual. The strong links were also related to day-to-day and statutory tasks, such as the start-up grant advice and process that runs between EnterpriseEspoo and the TE Office as part of their core tasks. The diamond image, on page 24, illustrates these with examples. From the figure, you can see that the red areas are strong links that divide the network in two in terms of the amount of close cooperation. In shaping Business Espoo, these connections were seen as a foundation on which to build a more diverse cooperation than the original. The development of cooperation was led by the leaders of each organisation. Building a simplifying description that shows potential was a worthwhile approach to a new way of working. The diamond model proves that a lot is already being done together and that there is scope for new ways of working together. We are not building from scratch, we are already an entity with the potential to work even more closely together.
Potential new forms of inter-organisational cooperation – based on brainstorming at the initial stage of network formation

In the second phase, future forms of cooperation between the organisations were mapped and envisioned. These serve as a starting point for joint thinking and brainstorming. This picture shows a few examples of cooperation. Some of these are already under way and others may be introduced in the future.

The input for the envisioning process came from the workshops and group work in the service mapping exercise. This is where it is important to consult both the experts and the leaders of the network to strengthen the network. Business Espoo is a good example of a network of experts where managers do not have the opportunity to know every service in depth, but are responsible for providing direction and helping the experts to develop and succeed in their area.

As the network took shape and experts became motivated, it was important to bring their expertise to the fore and involve them in the planning of activities as at many stages as possible. As the experts' roles, work experience and scope of the field varied widely, the challenge was to motivate the more experienced experts and to encourage those who were newer or less sure of their skills. Both the facilitator and management played a major role in encouraging and motivating. The organisations in the network were structured differently, some as operational service providers and others as development organisations. The different approaches and roles of organisations easily introduce friction into the policy mapping phase.

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In the third phase, work began on identifying new forms of cooperation between the organisations in the network, either already established or in the process of being established.

At the heart of a service-oriented network are synergies, new shared services or services that reduce overlaps – the aim was to reinforce the thinking using this empty diamond diagram. For example, the skills clinic was a new service experiment to strengthen entrepreneurs’ skills that EnterpriseEspoo undertook with Omnia in the early stages of the business services network. It was important at this stage to broaden the overall view of each expert, and to highlight even the minor effects of co-operation. Such a description could well be updated and show the evolution of co-operation in the communication of the network’s internal debate. It is important to make clear what objectives have already been achieved through networking, so that the experts feel the long-term value of working together. It is natural to be frustrated by the network’s new activities; they are perceived as adding to the workload of the network. However, the motivation of experts must be based on clear objectives that value professionalism and communicate them.

One way is to use a diamond model like this to demonstrate new or improved common services. New types of common services are usually seen from the perspective of increasing cooperation, eliminating duplication or creating synergies between existing services, rather than from the perspective of adding new services to the overall range.
The strength and uniqueness of Business Espoo comes from the wide range of activities of the network’s operators. The network was often described as “services from A to Z”. The uniqueness of a broad network comes to the fore when mapping customers.

Customers can be segmented in many ways, for example, two main lines and breakdowns based on the size of the company:

Initially, customers were grouped into different categories according to the common denominators displayed on the public website in the above-mentioned service mapping. However, the initial breakdown did not work clearly, so customers were broken down from different perspectives and through example customers. The breadth of service range and customer segments made it necessary to simplify and explore the topic through service design. After the service mapping, group work and discussions, the common customers were provisionally divided into the following customer groups. The distinction between customers and stakeholders was also made in the network’s common perspective above. The differences in the number of customers, emphasis and segments varied so widely across the organisations that establishing a common segmentation required a high degree of simplification and tolerance of incompleteness.

**CUSTOMER GROUPS – intermediate stage of the service mapping exercise**

- **Thinker**
- **(Mature) student**
- Someone changing fields
- **Continuer and/or buyer of business**

**IMMIGRANT ENTREPRENEUR FROM ELSEWHERE**

**IMPORTANT STAKEHOLDERS (other than companies)**

**WOULD-BE/PROSPECTIVE ENTREPRENEURS**

- Investor
- Business VIP guests
- Grant, congress- and visitors/guests
- Mentors and coaches
- Job seekers and employees

**TYPES OF ENTREPRENEURS AND COMPANIES**

- Founder
- Internationaler
- Starter
- Established
- Employer
- Competence developer
- Growth company (scaleup)
- Quitar

**ENTREPRENEUR FROM ELSEWHERE**

An immigrant who may not yet fully identify him/herself as Finnish/integration in progress The same needs as Finnish entrepreneurs but the differences are in these areas: May not yet be familiar with the culture, law, practices, networks, may need training.

"Talent attraction outcome", i.e. a foreign talent attracted to Espoo, who starts/transfer his/her business to Espoo or is employed in the region. The same needs as Finnish entrepreneurs but the differences are in these areas: No knowledge of culture, law, practices, networks. Also needs other services in life (e.g. housing, healthcare, international schools for his/her children).

**THINGS TO OBSERVE**

In the Espoo region the amount of Sole entrepreneurs with a university degree doing consultancy-type work is substantial.

A customer can also be different to an entrepreneur (e.g. HR managers, person responsible for international affairs...).
In order to make progress in the network’s customer service, service mapping and overall design, it was also necessary to understand customers better. In addition, contact with customers varied widely between organisations. At EnterpriseEspoo, for example, entrepreneurs receive personal advice on an ongoing basis and are therefore well informed about the situation of their customer group. In other organisations, customer service can be indirect, for example by influencing the scope of growth-oriented companies in a broad sense or the ability to meet investors, serving customers as a team and directing them to the services of other operators. As customer service varied widely between organisations and knowledge of each other’s customers, common ground was sought through six example customers. By interviewing these example customers representing different customer segments, it was possible to find out what challenges and needs Business Espoo is already serving what it can contribute to in the future. The interviews resulted in sample profiles to which the network organisations involved in their service were added.

EXAMPLE PROFILES 1/2 – entrepreneur customers

NEEDS AND OBJECTIVES
- From entrepreneur to employer > the aim is to grow your business by hiring more talent
- Diversification of activities > e.g. consulting alongside (tax issues, etc.)

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS
- Barriers to growth are perceived to be the difficulty of employing workers > uncertainty and seasonality. Few suitable workers
- Recruitment challenges in the IT sector > e.g. finding a suitable pool of talent

IDEAS AND OPPORTUNITIES
- Introductions carried out efficiently and in a facilitated way > helped by, for example, a matchmaking tool
- Idea network encounters without artificial events > e.g. co-working spaces for sole entrepreneurs to find partners
- Marketing support > how a sole entrepreneur can get a foot in the door with bigger players

NEEDS AND OBJECTIVES
- Employment and acting as a local employer, including apprenticeships/traineeships
- Tailored staff training > e.g. qualifications, diplomas and language training
- Maintaining an established business

IDEAS AND OPPORTUNITIES
- Developing a network of entrepreneurs across sectors and influencing development plans and landscape planting in one’s own area
- Facilities > e.g. location, premises and their acquisition
- Support for change management and coaching > e.g. in merger situations

EXAMPLE PROFILES 2/2 – corporate customers

NEEDS AND OBJECTIVES
- Employment and acting as a local employer, including apprenticeships/traineeships
- Tailored staff training > e.g. qualifications, diplomas and language training
- Maintaining an established business

NEEDS AND OBJECTIVES
- Growth orientation and the international market already at a starting point > based on, for example, Adatis and business incubators and accelerators. Networks built on this foundation as well as on one’s own resources
- Scaling up operations and new markets

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS
- The recruitment challenge is to find or attract talent > requirements include specific skills needed and knowledge of the target market. How is it used, for example, international recruitment platforms?
- Operating across city borders > not too strict a distinction between, for example, matters/ topics in business services.

IDEAS AND OPPORTUNITIES
- Attracting and matching international talent with businesses is key
- What if networks are not already in place within Finland. It is easy to come across operators, but leverage is needed to get in touch with international contacts and investors. The high quality of events and genuine opportunities for further cooperation are important

Looking at the profiles of the example customers, it can be seen that they already use the services of many Business Espoo organisations – perhaps even without knowing it. This observation gave the network an early indication of the amount of overlapping work being done. Simplified snapshot of the profiles also provides a basis for how each example customer can be supported more effectively through customer steering and cooperation. Although the needs of clients vary widely, the sample profiles also reflect similar themes, such as the challenges of finding employment and recruitment, or the desire for mentoring or networking.

As the customer profiles and interviews were compiled at a stage where the basis for the network’s joint activities, service provision and customer management was being laid, the time was not ripe for a detailed analysis of every challenge or idea. As Business Espoo takes shape, solutions have already been found in many areas through services, customer steering or communications. In order to develop the network and address the current situation, it would be important to repeat the customer interviews and analyse how Business Espoo has already served what it can contribute to in the future. The interviews resulted in sample profiles to which the network organisations involved in their service were added.

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Customer service and customer steering

Business Espoo's main tasks naturally include joint customer service and customer management, which operate on two levels. The first level is the responsibility of all the experts in the network. Each expert acts as a customer service agent and a customer advisor, steering the customer to other services in the network, regardless of the channel or the issue that the customer has contacted them about. This first level is the real jewel in the crown of networking – the opportunity to serve customers in an effective, efficient and high-quality way. On the other hand, this is also the more difficult and complex level, which requires perseverance and networking skills from each expert. It is essential that the expert with whom the customer is dealing is able to market the entire range of Business Espoo services. Each expert must be sufficiently familiar with the network’s offerings to be able to boldly help the customer, even if it is not possible to know the hundreds of different services inside out. The second level of customer service and customer steering is an important part of the business services network. The traditional service approach, which is clearly visible to customers, is also easier to measure and analyse. On the second level, Business Espoo's customer service and customer steering is provided through the following channels: a common email address for information, a common customer service number and the common chatbot Bertta to advise and steer customers. The email address and hotline are managed by a single customer service agent who directs customers to the right experts and organisations. As Business Espoo does not yet have a common customer database, control is accomplished through simple email forwarding to a members of the customer service team from each organisation. At present, customer service steering is very much a case of guiding the customer forward in a general way, and does not initially analyse the overall situation of the customer who makes contact. Customer service is an identified area for improvement, which will be developed and better resourced. ChatBot Bertta has been the most popular customer advisor and is asked a wide range of questions. Teaching Bertta requires an effort from every organisation to ensure that the chatbot can help customers in different situations.
Business Espoo’s services were first mapped from a customer and findability perspective, for example, what services can be found on the public websites of organisations. The service inventory, tabulated in Excel, was used to hold a workshop for all network staff to correct, edit and supplement the service data with services that had not necessarily been publicly communicated. At the same time, the operators in the network were able to get to know each other and create a spirit of openness and expertise. The workshop found that the current state of listing and defining one’s own services and how challenging this is varied widely. The different organisations held their in-service mapping meetings afterwards to take the work forward. From the large service mapping exercise, service design was used to create the first preliminary service packages or “classification bins” into which services were categorised.

OVERALL SERVICE OFFERING – INTERMEDIATE STAGE OF SERVICE MAPPING – Service themes

The categories were initially intended as an intermediate step in the structuring process, to help the services become clearer. The first version of the full service range was examined from different angles and specifically from the customer’s point of view. Customer-centric thinking in grouping services required a lot of simplifications and supporting questions, such as “Is this a service I can get from Business Espoo or an expert?” For example, communication is not a service in itself but a support service for all other services, so does not qualify as a customer-oriented service. Similarly, services for immigrants are largely the same as services for other entrepreneurs, rather than a customer-oriented service in their own right. This overall service offering was tweaked and examined from different angles, and finally five main themes emerged as service packages, or service bundles, which included all the services of Business Espoo’s business services network.

Once the services of the whole network had been divided into five service packages, another workshop was held for the whole network. In order to test the service packages in a customer-oriented way and to take the first common customer management steps in the network, fictitious customer cases were created for the packages. Depending on the customer’s situation and needs, an example customer was transported from one organisation to another in a package and links were created between the packages. This exercise, like all the previous ones, was accompanied by many other activities to improve cooperation and services within the network. Examples of positive phenomena during the workshops were getting to know the experts in the network, noticing possible gaps or communication needs of different services and learning about future pathways for customer steering. It is important that, when conducting a large network service mapping exercise, there is also room for shared learning and discussion. In workshops and low-threshold discussions, it is possible to make big steps towards developing network skills.

Five service packages included service lists identified from both the original large service data and the joint workshops. From the list, a separate document was made for each package, briefly outlining what was included in the package in four categories: “advice and services”, “projects”, “financial support” and “partners”.

At this stage, the first customer testing of the packages was carried out. At an open-house event held at A Grid, startups and other entrepreneurs and members of the entrepreneurial community were invited to comment on the packages and mark the services and other content presented that they found most useful in each of the five categories. This discussion and testing of the categorisation was really rewarding. Each of the service packages had important things to offer entrepreneurs, and the packages were considered easy to understand and clear. The range of services offered by the growth companies was praised and, for most of the participants, the existence of the services was new. Although the uniform categorisation was still in its infancy, customer feedback showed that the packages were on the right track.

Clearly conceptualised service groups

The five services were grouped together in service teams made up of
experts from different organisations. At the same time, a sixth set of services for entrepreneurs and businesses in situations of change was created. Business Espoo’s communications team finally formulated the internal names of the service packages to give the customer clear and more precise descriptions of the services: start a business, grow your business, competence development, recruitment assistance, internationalisation and change situations.

During the first year of Business Espoo, the network’s services were also reviewed through the City of Espoo’s internal service productisation (Patu) project. The major service design work and service bundling work just done in the network served as input for the work in the workshop. As customer segmentation was also part of the service design, it was also possible to look at these as ready-made solutions. The Patu work was a useful addition for the network – it tested the work done from different perspectives and came to the same solutions, for example in terms of service packages. The services provided by the business services network cannot be divided into precise customer segments, but needs for services vary and intersect, regardless of the type of business. At the same time, it became clear that it was impossible to price multi-agency services and service packages in the same way as many other services offered by the city. The service productisation project found that, in simple terms, the common service covering all of Business Espoo is only service management and communication, marketing and shared events. Otherwise, services are always owned and managed by one or a few organisations.

**Tools and the development of service packages**

The Business Espoo service design process and service mapping also involved a lot of work on defining services more precisely. Some of the organisations had described their services in detail on their website, while others had not previously provided more detailed service descriptions. This was partly due to the nature of the organisations’ basic services, for example the City of Espoo’s business and employment services are mostly supportive of other organisations’ activities and service offering, providing background support and individual measures that entrepreneurs and businesses do not receive as a continuous service from the city.

The primary aim of the service packages was to make services easier to find and clearer for the customer. The services and service packages of the entire network were finally transferred to the Business Espoo website. The most important step in this work was to open up the service packages, sort the services and the main headings and describe them in a clear and customer-oriented way. A coordinator was chosen for each service package group to help the group take the packages forward. The expertise of each team member, the ability to take ownership of the task, time commitment, motivation and level of networking skills were important. The work was gradual and progressed in different ways and on different timescales. The basic idea that each expert in the network is the best person to tell customers about their organisation’s services was emphasised, and the experts produced the basis for the service descriptions to be put online. The communicators of the Business Espoo network made these texts in the same customer-oriented common language. Engaging experts as content producers is a new way of doing things that requires adaptation.

Another important part of refining the content of the service packages was the communication of the services within the network. From the very beginning of the mapping process, different ways of implementing a “service card” were explored, where each expert could find a description of the service and use it to guide the customer. Compiling a comprehensive list of services proved to be very challenging and demotivating. Therefore, the services were described under the packages in a format suitable for internal network briefings and training sessions. Later, these internal service descriptions were improved and used as the basis for a redesigned Business Espoo website, which also served as a service catalogue for the network’s experts.

As an example, the figure on the next page shows the content of the “Grow your business” service package at the heading level under four heading categories. Each service package was divided into 4–5 categories with an appropriate heading to make it easier to find the service. No service package operates in a silo, but all packages are interlinked – for example, the “Grow your business” service package is closely linked to the “Internationalisation” and “Recruitment assistance” service packages.
The monthly network briefings played an important role in the development of the service packages and in learning and communication within the network. These were sometimes focused on the overall offering and sometimes on individual service packages. At the same time, information within the network to support customer steering was improved. In presenting the service packages, it was important to get a concrete, current level in the discussion, questions and answers within the network. While it was important to see each organisation’s strategy and marketing presentations, these concrete presentations were perhaps even more wanted. Listeners to the briefings learned about services and the briefing organisers described the services they offer, linking them to other services. Internal briefings have also focused on the main topics of the moment, such as changes resulting from the COVID-19 situation or tips on the services available to help entrepreneurs in a crisis. Again, this activity emphasises the expert’s ability to communicate both his/her own services and those of other organisations to present the big picture.

Work on shared service packages never stops, services are constantly changing and new services are being added while others are being withdrawn. It is important for the network to work to a level where enough is known about the services together. This ensures high-quality and rapid customer steering, eliminates duplication and identifies gaps in service offering and areas for improvement.

**New shared services and experiments**

Business Espoo has seen the emergence of a wide range of new shared services and experiments. However, the greatest impact comes from a common customer service channel, the customer-oriented offering of service packages and shared customer steering. There is no intention to invent new services in an already wide range of services, except for where there are clear gaps. These gaps will also be filled by improving customer steering. The aim is also not to offer all services as part of Business Espoo’s Business services, but to be able to guide the customer further, if necessary.

The service packages are customer-oriented and, based on them, the Business Espoo website together with ChatBot Bertta will serve as the network’s digital service channel. ChatBot Bertta is a good example of a new service channel offered by the whole network. Another new digital service is the BE-Studios published on Business Espoo’s YouTube channel. Among the service packages, for example, the services of the “Start a Business” package have been clear and cooperation was established even before Business Espoo. Although not so many new services have been created as the network is taking shape, the package has become more compact, more structured and now involves an even larger group of organisations. It is also now easier to refer customers to internationalisation services such as those offered by the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN).

**Joint events and new experiments**

Examples of new services and experiments can be found at different levels. The skills clinic, a collaboration between Omnia and EnterpriseEspoo, offers a tailored skills development service for entrepreneurs. Joint events brought organisations together in new ways – for example, in the case of recruitment services, popular large recruitment events have emerged. All the organisations were brought together to talk about Business Espoo’s service offering in the “Boost your Business” series of events. The digital event calendar for entrepreneurs, implanted as part of City of Espoo Digital Agenda experiments, brought together events and training from Business Espoo and its partners to make it easier for entrepreneurs to find relevant events. Other joint experiments include a training on business services and entrepreneurship for research teams. A major new shared service of the network was the implementation of the grant application process for sole entrepreneurs.

“The events are important, they have achieved a lot, now the services have got a face, for example at Boost, where new business contacts and customers have been obtained”

“Events, Boost your Business, has received a really positive spontaneous reaction from customers, it’s a new way of doing things”

What is new for the city is even more active communication about the services on offer. Compared to many other sectors, the situation in business services is different from the city’s point of view. The city wants expressly more companies to use Business Espoo’s services – the impact for the city will then come from the growing vitality of companies.
Joint communication is at the heart of Business Espoo’s objectives, and its importance to the collective start of Business Espoo cannot be overstated. Communication is characterised by being not only the first point of contact with the customer, but also the support function for all other activities.

Business Espoo’s communications team is made up of communications professionals from each organisation. A similar field of tasks has facilitated a common understanding and a common starting point for the Communications team. As the network was being formed, communication had to work under pressure and, primarily, to communicate the common issues and services of the network, while the services were still being created. Because the network has not had a large shared communications budget, the necessary communications measures have been taken step-by-step. The digital accessibility of services has been one of the major objectives pursued. In addition, communication has been of great value to the internal functioning of the network for the smooth running of customer management, internal communication and motivating experts. A common brand, look and events also give a sense of cohesion to the network operators, and press releases and news about the network’s activities have made the progress of common steps more concrete.

“In the past, each organisation had services that were communicated in different ways. Now we have worked together to find the clearest way to communicate or name services”

Each organisation has also had its own communication objectives. By communicating together, organisations also want to strengthen the visibility of their own organisation and services. This has caused a balancing act, as, for example, only the Business Espoo logo has been used in the marketing of events, although some members of the network have also wanted their own logo to appear. If the communication resources were fully integrated under the Business Espoo brand, the range of business services would be more visible to customers. However, this is not possible due to the different operating principles of the organisations. Although the network has had different visibility objectives, it has been easier for communication to establish common objectives and to move forward with them. Communication objectives such as raising awareness are easy for everyone to grasp and the measures to achieve them are easy to understand. Listed below are the objectives of Business Espoo in its early years.
**Business Espoo’s communication objectives**

1. **Awareness**
   - Raising awareness of publicly funded and third-sector services available to businesses in Espoo

2. **Increase in the use of services**
   - Businesses learn how to use Business Espoo services
   - First contact with entrepreneurship and business services

3. **Vision for Business Espoo: well-known, agile, an accelerator for achieving business’ goals**

4. **Benefit for customers**
   - Networking opportunities for businesses
   - New business
   - Competence development
   - Sales growth

The Business Services Network is continuously developing its digital services, and in the future, the focus will be on collecting customer feedback and improving customer service, including in communications. However, great strides have been made in communicating the network. Before Business Espoo was set up, each organisation worked together on communications and shared information about each other’s events, but not with the intensity that we see today. A good example has been the power that network communication has brought, for example in the case of an urgent communication need for one organisation. Common communication methods have evolved over the early years and have brought new common ways of communicating with customers. Good examples include BE-Studios published on Business Espoo’s YouTube channel, the episodes of which address topical business and entrepreneurial themes and highlight service solutions that help entrepreneurs and companies to succeed. New forms of communication have been established, for example through a joint calendar of events and at the events themselves.

Business Espoo’s communication has included many measures, large and small, to support the findability of services, the visibility of the network and the co-creation of the whole network. The list below gives examples of the measures taken to communicate jointly with the business services network during the first 2–3 years of operation:

**Year I 2019**
- Building a common brand for the network
  - Communication strategy
  - A shared website and description of services on the website
  - Image: branding, graphic design, presentation and promotional materials
- Joint events: House-warming parties, Autumn meet-ups, Boost your Business events, open doors

**Year II 2020**
- Communication as a result of the coronavirus pandemic plays a major role in the second year of operations
- A customer friendly and constantly evolving website, use of ChatBot Bertta and continuous training, Google ads advertising
- Investment in content marketing, stories, news and events such as
  - Dedicated LinkedIn and YouTube channels
  - New-format BE-Studio created
- Various marketing campaigns – targeted communication by customer group
- Events, mainly virtual
- Development and means of internal communication, joint briefings and intranet
- Measuring, monitoring and analysing communication

**Year III 2021, actions implemented and plans**
- Acquisition of a newsletter tool and creation of a mailing list. Newsletters, including contacting newly established businesses and businesses that have moved to Espoo.
- Business Espoo’s branding measures:
  - production and publication of a brand video
  - advertising campaigns: BE service purchases on social media
- Events such as the Elinkeinofoorumi 2021
- Content marketing:
  - website news
  - visibility on social media, Business Espoo’s LinkedIn and the operators’ own channels
  - production and distribution of business stories
- Website redesign (new publishing platform and structure) and user experience survey for customers
- Segmented marketing and direct contact with companies for recruitment services
Operating model and management

Business Espoo’s business services network is a new way of organising business services. In the network, each organisation operates independently, but participates in the network’s joint activities with the aim of providing common services from a single location. In many cases, such a network is compared to a city-owned development company, which combines services but operates as an independent organisation with a clear governance and management model and, for example, its own budget. In Business Espoo, there is a formal cooperation agreement between the operators, but each organisation operates independently. For example, the Business Espoo network does not have a large shared budget or a joint manager, but rather costs are shared on a case-by-case basis and the manager of each organisation is involved in making joint decisions.

The Business Espoo operating model had been outlined in internal discussions within the City of Espoo, even before the network was formally established. The conclusions of the Aalto Designing for Services (DfS) course on the organisation of the network supported these outlines. Three working groups were set up to work together on the network, each with its own tasks.

- **Business Espoo Management team** acts as the network’s lead and decision-making body, to which various proposals are submitted and where the network’s common use of money is decided.

- **Business Espoo Communications team** is responsible for marketing, joint branding, joint communications and the communications plan.

- **Business Espoo Services team** (originally the Internal Communication and Cooperation Group) is responsible for putting together common services into service packages and further developing these packages.

Over time, each service package formed its own team, leaving the coordinators of the service packages in the general services team.

**Work done by the teams**

The three teams of the Business Espoo network; the Management team, the Communications team and the Services team, as well as the service-specific teams have all worked in different ways, and each team has experienced mixed progress in achieving its objectives. Common to all teams has been discussion on resourcing and taking ownership. Network work is often, by its very nature, additional work on top of one’s own job description. The networking, or in other words the work for the network, needs to be properly resourced, with clear objectives and monitoring, long-term benefits must be made visible. Experts prioritise the work of
their own organisation, and only then move on to the shared work of the network.

The first group to start its work was the Management team. The Management team acts as the network’s steering and decision-making body for its activities, resources and use of funds. In the early stages of the network’s formation, the Management team had a lot to decide. The modus operandi, resources, objectives, strategy, internal communication and rules of the game were all on Management team’s table and the team’s common way of working developed iteratively, i.e. by constantly developing together. Initially, as mentioned when discussing the role of the city, the role of Harri Paananen as the city’s representative and as Management team’s guiding force was indispensable. Each Management team member had to reflect on his/her leadership in the network’s collective operations and act as a leader in front of the staff of his/her organisation. In this role, it was easy to rely on the city to take the lead, although it was also important to maintain the autonomy, leadership and ownership of one’s own organisation. The Management team was under pressure from the difficulty of having to tolerate incompleteness, staff uncertainty and fears about new operations.

After the first year of operation, Management team moved to a rotating presidency, which has proven to be a success. This approach has brought understanding to the perspectives of each organisation, and engaged the different operators in taking responsibility for the success of the network. A steady stream of issues has been brought to the Management team for a decision. The network has expressed the wish for even stronger communication of alignments to experts and to the various working groups of the management team. Hopes for leadership vary between organisations and individual experts. Some need strong guidance from above, while others want to be more independent. The work of the management team has been demanding for those involved, so the development of resourcing in this team has also been important.

What has worked best is that each organisation has chosen a person who has been allocated enough time for the task and the measures, including between meetings, who has sufficient authority and a mandate to make decisions on behalf of their organisation and who has the widest possible top-level knowledge of all the services their organisation provides. In a networked environment, internal communication is of paramount importance and the way in which members of the Management team communicate issues to their subordinates has varied according to the workload and commitment to the network.

The mission of the Services team was to form service clusters and compile information on the service groups and services within them. Bringing services together and making them accessible to all required much workshop-style development.

**Forming and describing service packages**

The service mapping and service design project seemed chaotic at first. Difficulties were compounded by the fact that, in organisations, the description of services was not very comprehensive and had naturally not been done in a uniform way. However, in hindsight, co-creation was so important that the objectives of the Services team could not have been achieved without it.

“The teams have worked well, especially in the service mapping phase, and now we are in a situation where we are at the next step. For example, new cooperation can emerge in competence development.”

The Services team was divided into groups according to the service packages, which eventually fed into the service content that is now displayed on the website. The services clusters work well independently, highlighting service-related news and opportunities for joint action, setting targets and identifying potential service gaps and synergies. The best performing subgroups have been those that have identified gaps from the start, and have been able to make their services visible, for example with a view to grow your business, internationalisation and recruitment assistance.

“What has worked in the network’s teams has been finding counterparts from different organisations. What hasn’t worked so well is ideas and activities proactively emerging.”

The Services team and its subgroups have most clearly reflected the role and networking skills and network capability of each expert in the group. If an expert feels that he/she is an equal member of the team, acting as an ambassador for his/her organisation but also proactively moving the network forward, the activity is meaningful for both the expert and the team. Brainstorming and joint service development do not happen without someone taking ownership. For some, it has been important to see the benefits of the network materialise before the birth of the ownership of what they do together.

**Sizes and resourcing of service teams**

After the initial phase, there was also pressure on Management team to think about how to resource people from within the organisation for the Services and Communication teams. It has been important to check that the teams have the right representatives and that the same experts are not represented in each team. Care has also been taken to ensure that too much networking and too many meetings do not discourage experts from participation and co-creation.

The Services team and the groups of service packages show a big difference between the organisations and the individual experts involved in the network. The size of organisations varies, and smaller organisations in particular found it difficult to find representatives for several working groups. Some experts may have a very narrow job description and have sought concrete help from the groups themselves, for example in customer steering. For others, the job may involve influencing the wider service landscape and developing new approaches for the future. The exchange of news, plans and goings-on has also been important in the top-level teams, even if concrete measures are not immediately achieved together.

At the next meetings of the service
groups, the networks shared service promise will need to be further refined. To get the most out of network cooperation, it is important to understand what services are being developed and when to refer customers to organisations outside Business Espoo. Defining the service promise will also clarify how much personalised service is and will continue to be provided, and what part of the service should be provided in the form of digital information or further guidance. When all members of the team understand the service promise that is being sought and what is possible in terms of resources, co-creation will be clearer in the future.

“cooperation is difficult to force but it will emerge if given the opportunity to do so”

Business Espoo’s levels of activity relative to others

When building the internal operating model of the Business Espoo network, it was necessary to look at the levels of activity in the wider field. The relationship of the network to other levels of activity was outlined in the figure below. Every organisation in the network was seen to operate on all six levels, but what was new was the way in which the network’s relationship and activities were structured around the levels. Acting as a united front requires definition and simplification, as well as time to develop joint action. An example is the relationship of the network with the local entrepreneurial and business ecosystem, where each operator has been present mainly from the perspective of their own organisation. However, the local ecosystem layer has great potential to boost business and vitality when working seamlessly together. Working together can mean connecting contacts in the ecosystem, such as hubs or accelerators, to the network, or joint visibility at ecosystem events to make it easier for businesses to find the network’s services and each other.

On the other hand, many organisations are not themselves active with global players, but knowledge of the links with other organisations in the network helps experts to guide entrepreneurs to these networks. This thinking also emphasises the importance of smooth customer steering – not every organisation needs to have internationalisation networks and services, but the most important thing is to be able to direct customers in the network to the organisations that have these internationalisation services. Systematically mapping the levels of activity from a network perspective takes time, and is reflected in concrete ways such as customer steering and joint working on service packages.

Business Espoo joint action plan and indicators

From the very beginning, Business Espoo’s common operating model has been built iteratively, and the model has been shaped through cooperation and experiences. A business services network of seven organisations is a very new way of working, and there are no similar models to learn from. That is why the structure of the action plan has also been modified each year as a tool for the Management team. The action plan highlights the network’s main common priorities, priorities for action and areas for development.

Business Espoo’s priorities can be simplified into three main areas of focus:

1. Priorities of core activities
   - Services
   - Building awareness
   - Effectiveness and measuring it
2. Actions that support the core activities
   • Partnerships, influencing and advocacy
   • Customer involvement
   • Smoothness of internal processes

3. Financing
   • Finances
   • Resourcing

In the action plan, concrete plans have been opened up under each priority (such as the further development of customer service already mentioned for services, or the communication measures related to building awareness for each service theme). These plans include more specific annual targets, the achievement of which is monitored by the Management team. However, there are many changes ahead, such as the COVID-19 crisis, to which the network needs to react quickly and the action plan will be amended to deal with these with swift decisions.

Business Espoo’s joint activities are monitored using various indicators. The indicators are constantly evolving, and efforts are also being made to bring together different indicators from the different organisations in the network in order to assess the effectiveness of the network’s cooperation itself. Below are some indicators that monitor Business Espoo’s activities:

1. Customer service situations
   Events, personalised advice, electronic services
   Business Espoo has around 16,000 personal customer service situations per year.

2. NPS – the willingness to recommend Espoo for business

3. % of businesses in Espoo that have used or are familiar with Business Espoo services

4. % of entrepreneurs that are listened to/business-friendliness
   Source: Annual Espoo Business Environment Survey (Taloustutkimus Oy)

5. % of respondents that thought that business promotion was well-managed
   Source: Annual Survey on Municipal Services in Espoo (FCG)

Business Espoo from a network management perspective

Business Espoo is a pretty perfect example of a challenging network management context. Seven operators, whose relations are characterised by cooperation and conflict of interest, decide to work together to better serve companies and entrepreneurial customers. This can be described by the term ‘co-opetition’, which includes elements of both competition and cooperation. The operators are bound together by a cooperation agreement, but the main glue is a common goal and a shared customer.

The network’s leaders and operators need a range of strategic HR management skills to ensure that Business Espoo can truly deliver high-quality, customer-oriented and continuously evolving services. For example, there needs to be knowledge of how to:

• Design collaboration structures and management systems that enable robust but agile cross-organisational collaboration and co-creation.
• Support and enable a positive and collaborative network organisational culture, so that staff providing business services, regardless of whose payroll they are on, see each other as colleagues and share a common goal of customer benefit. So there must be an ability to build social capital between network operators.

• Coordinate staff cooperation in day-to-day work at various levels, in Management team work, service development, service management, communication and networking.

Typical challenges of network management include variable commitment to network goals, culture clashes, loss of autonomy, coordination fatigue and -costs, reduced accountability and management complexity. The five characteristics of an effective network are multilevel effectiveness - involvement at multiple levels, good network design, context-appropriate governance, building and maintaining legitimacy and network stability. [5] Business Espoo has experienced these typical challenges of network management, such as varying degrees of commitment to the network’s common goals and the resulting reduced accountability. The loss of autonomy was a challenge, especially at the beginning of the network’s formation. The main remedy for all the challenges so far has been to identify them honestly, declare them and address them jointly.

Business Espoo started with a new approach to network management and the way of working as a network. Right from the start, the aim was to build as non-hierarchical an organisation as possible, and it was essential to engage all staff from each of the organisations involved. At this stage, the support of the network’s management for work in progress and on-the-fly modifications was highlighted. Managing a network requires leaders to have a high tolerance of uncertainty. Unlike in normal single-organisation management, the message does not go directly to the leader, so many things that are going on may come as a surprise to the network leaders.

“Management commitment is super-important. What has been successful is the support of management, even before anything had been done”

The city has played a major role in network management. This has been essential, especially at the beginning of the network’s development. In the future, we need to consider what effect, for example, a large financial contribution from the city will have on the commitment of the network. Money can bind and engage, meaning that ownership and commitment to the network could be even greater if each organisation invested the same amount of money and resources.

It is also important to look at the initial situation, shaping, development and evaluation of the Service Centre for businesses, from the perspective of capabilities. The new way of working and developing activities has clearly highlighted the importance of taking into account the capabilities of the network’s organisations and individuals.

Capabilities are often connected to skills and competence but, in terms of organisations, the concept also has a broader meaning. Organisational capability describes the capacity of an organisation, i.e. the characteristics and competitive factors that make up the collective competence of individuals and groups of people. Intangible competences often mean competences related to skills, knowledge, expertise and interpersonal skills [6]. The capabilities of organisations are changeable and do not in themselves produce value. Capability is therefore built on all the elements that add value to customers and deliver value – the value- and service promise, operating models, processes, information, channels, financing, skills and resources.

The ability to change and to share and expand one’s own know-how proved to be the most important factors in the formation and development of the Service Centre for businesses. In addition to these, a major role was identified in the management and organisation of strategic capabilities, closely linked to the management of the network. In the new network, all levels of capability – from day-to-day and operational to tactical and strategic – should be taken into account and reviewed regularly. In order to realise the potential of the network, the capabilities of the different organisations should be coordinated to best support the delivery of the shared value promise. When talking about capabilities, it is essential for each person and organisation in the network to feel that their own competences are valued, and to dare to talk openly about the challenges and needs for development associated with them.

The network’s ability to build and develop a service centre

Network capability describes the ability to work in a network to achieve common goals. At its best, network capability is the starting point for networked action, 1+1=3, where together we are more. Because of its diversity, network capabilities are difficult to illustrate and measure. Below is an example of network capability from the perspective of customer management capability.

Fuelled by enthusiasm for networking - working for the network

Business Espoo is a network of experts working in very different fields, where commitment to the network’s cooperation has been mixed.

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6 Kyvykyylien johtamisen Käsikirja (handbook of capability management), 2018. Espoon kaupunki, 6Ai-ka-hanke, Piia Wollstén. [Link]
Some experts have needed more time and concrete evidence of the achievements of networking to get excited about working together. The attitude and motivation of management is perceived to have a major impact on the enthusiasm of the experts.

In autumn 2019, Business Espoo organised a series of Boost your Business Espoo events in cooperation with the network. The idea behind the event was to offer, for the first time, all business services of Espoo at a physical event using the strength of the whole network. The main objective was to provide services through service packages without highlighting the organisation providing the service, but working physically side-by-side across organisational boundaries.

Boost your Business was a good example of a new way of providing services and a pilot to test both the functionality of the service packages and the customer management of the network. During the two events, the experts filled in more than 150 simple customer referral reports, asking, for example, whether the customer had received the service they needed and whether they had been referred to the next experts and service packages. When the results were analysed, two key findings emerged:

1. Each entrepreneur who came to the events needed different things, and customer service paths crossed between different service points. It is clear that no single customer path can be clearly modelled, and that the needs are as individual as the customers. It is possible to find clearly progressive parts of the path but, at the next crossroads, customers often go in different directions depending on their needs and the stage of the life cycle of their company.

2. From a customer management and customer assistance perspective, network capability varied widely. Some of the experts referred the customer to different services in the network, regardless of organisational boundaries. On the other hand, some experts only offered their own services and did not know how to refer the customer to other services. Each expert was absolutely customer service-oriented, and the customers received the service they needed, but the ability to provide the full range of services varied widely. Below is a modelling of network capability levels based on reports and practical customer service monitoring. The key to looking at the levels is to see the many ways in which the development of the networking skills of the experts can be supported.

There are many ways to support networking skills. Some of the tools are so-called ‘business as usual’, i.e. joint events, communication and briefings. It is good to actively consider the forms of support for network capability, building up measures to support them. Business Espoo has sought to improve networking skills through various motivational measures and by strengthening team spirit. Even small things like uniform hoodies or the pre-briefing of a joint event serves not only to spread the word about the event, but also as an important motivator. The expert feels a full and valued member of the network when he/she is highlighted as being a professional in front of the network or partners.

In addition to motivation, enthusiasm and team spirit, network capabilities are based on shared knowledge and learning. Business Espoo’s regular morning briefings have increased learning and highlighted the network services in an accessible way. It is also important for learning to have an open and respectful discussion, where everyone feels able to ask questions without feeling that they are denigrating their own level of expertise. There are hundreds of different and changing services in the business services network that no one can master. Adequate understanding of services at the top level and their links to in-house activities is key. This allows the customer to be directed to services as efficiently as possible.

It is worth remembering that the capability of experts is constantly evolving as events are organised. When you open up your own partner organisations’ services to your customers, your own expertise increases and the services offered by the different areas are more concretely linked together. Internal network briefings are important for deepening cooperation between different operators and generating new ideas to improve customer service.

### Business Espoo experts’ networking skills and networking competence levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The network guru</th>
<th>The network guru</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Guides the customer expertly forward in the network</td>
<td>1. Guides the customer expertly forward in the network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Masters problem areas and finds a solution</td>
<td>2. Learns about the network services at briefings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Encourages others</td>
<td>3. Feels like a network “cousin” but not yet a “sibling”</td>
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**Involved in the network:**

1. Guides the customer partly forward in the network
2. Learns about the network services at briefings
3. Feels like a network “cousin” but not yet a “sibling”

**Opportunity:** additional training, involvement in different groups, with a little extra effort the possibility of becoming a network guru. Systematic planning and monitoring.

**The hanger-on – only their own field:**

1. Only does their own work
2. Does not feel part of the network, does not see its benefits
3. Does not guide the customer forward
4. Does not come to training, or cannot yet link things to their own activities

**Opportunity:** management presents the objectives and benefits of the network, links things to their own work, their own inner circles’ interpreters and people who provide encouragement.

**NOTE:** The main and the most important thing is to have the courage to steer the customer forward in the network – no one can know all the services of the network in depth!

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7 Business Espoo experts’ networking skills & competence and network capability levels (Business Espoon asiuntijoiden verkostokykyiden tasot), Heli Hidén, 2020
The city's role in supporting capabilities

This handbook has in many places discussed the major role of the city as a driver of the development of the service network. The city also has a major role to play in supporting network capability. From this point of view, it is useful to take into account the following points, among others, in order to improve network capability and effectiveness.

1. **Clear objectives from the city and their presentation** If the city is the lead partner, it must also highlight the network capability objectives and communicate them clearly to the network. This is a task for all the network leaders, but it is hoped that city representatives will take the first step and lead the way.

2. **The mandate and how to present it.** As the network takes shape, a wide range of co-creation roles will be needed. Many of these roles will be played by city employees who monitor developments and have their finger on the pulse of the network. Giving these observers and developers of network capability a clear mandate to also develop network capability can improve the situation quickly.

3. **A clear focus on supporting and developing activities.** As the network takes shape and activities grow, there will be more areas for development. It is also important to resource the workload of city developers by limiting the workload of measures, for example to a timeline.

4. **Supporting the taking of ownership** Networking skills are also crucially linked to taking ownership of various joint projects and working in teams. For example, the city can play a role in presenting the issue constructively in the Management team. If ownership is not taken, things will not move forward.

5. **Supporting co-creation** Co-creation plays a major role in improving network capability. The city can support co-creation, for example by motivating experts, highlighting objectives and communicating the timeframes to be achieved.

6. **A review of the city's own capability.** With a new kind of networking city operators must also be prepared to examine their own change capability. A critical examination of the various factors underlying capability is also an essential part of the process. The networking capability of different city operators can be influenced by their attitude towards change and development, resources, spoken and unspoken responsibilities and mandates between different city departments.
Co-creation and roles at the Service Centre for businesses

Business Espoo set out to create new ways of providing customer-oriented business services in a networked way. All the organisations in the network were invited to develop joint activities and services as were, in appropriate cases, the customers, i.e. entrepreneurs and would-be entrepreneurs. We were creating something completely new, so the co-creation was done in stages. Co-creation and experimentation were an integral part of the Service Centre for businesses.

Co-creation means purposeful cooperation between people, creating value for all operators. [8] In co-creation, the operators solve problems and develop new services together. In the case of Business Espoo, this meant tangible new services but, above all, a new way of serving customers. New services were not developed just for the sake of development, but to create synergies: to streamline customer steering and make services more accessible to the customer.

For business services, this work is at the heart of productivity and effectiveness. When entrepreneurs find the right services at the right time, they are more successful and bring vitality to the region. Co-creation focused on involving customers and stakeholders in the creation of the new operating model. This was also the case in Business Espoo. Before involving entrepreneurs in the development process, services had to be developed into understandable and clear service packages. Customers’ views on the subject was sought through feedback received through various digital channels.

Co-creation was chosen as a operation model for the service centre for businesses because its key objectives of goal-oriented interaction, value creation and collaboration are well-suited to uncertain situations where plans may need to be updated at short notice. We also utilised a model of agile experiments through development by experimentation, which means a systematic approach to innovative projects and development projects on the basis of real-life observations.

Experiments and experimental development worked well in the early stages of the new approach, although it was perhaps difficult to identify the initial measures as experiments. The aim of an experiment is to try and produce essential new information to the idea – product, service or operating model – being developed. It tests assumptions about the idea to be developed from both extremes – the most significant positive observation and the most uncertain observation requiring development. An experiment may also fail. Information received in an experiment has a significant effect on both the concept of the idea being developed and the progress of the development project. [9] In Business Espoo a common approach and a new way of

8 Yhteiskehittäminen: kaikki siitä puhuu, mutta mitä se on ja miten siinä onnistua? (Co-creation: everyone is talking about it, but what is it and how is it done successfully?) University of Turku, Aaltonen S, Hytti U, Lepistö T, Makitalo-Keinonen T, 2016

Co-creation management and findings

Business Espoo's co-creation management started with the city’s resources; those of the business and employment sectors and the resources of the 6Aika - Ecosystem of growth project. The aim was to mobilise the network cross-administratively and assist co-creation with the resources available to the city. The city's major role in leading the co-creation process sometimes caused passivity in the network. In managing co-creation, the city operators had to balance different roles and expectations, which was sometimes considered to be a burden.

In co-creation, it is important to consider the four balancing elements of co-creation management [10]:

1. Balanced cooperation development (partners jointly develop a unique, context-appropriate approach) where the cooperation model to be developed takes into account both structural (ownership, organisation, contracts) and interactive (cooperative practices and ground rules) aspects.

2. A balanced partner structure, where network members are close enough in different ways to be able to cooperate in a meaningful way, but at the same time distant enough to provide each other with unique added value and new ideas.

3. Balanced management of tensions in cooperation, where conflicts are handled constructively and openly as possible.

4. A balanced use of different collaborative practices, taking into account both the co-creation of new things and the more transactional exchange of information, both within the network and with external stakeholders.

Key to management and strategy policy is the ability to reconcile the expertise, competence and different interests of a wide variety of operators. Co-creation requires a multifaceted leadership, combining both top-down and bottom-up leadership. The result is what is known as plural leadership where the focus shifts away from the single leader model to a dynamic multi-person leadership team, which can be compared to the team spirit of a football team.

In the next phase, the focus of leadership shifts from the management of technology and material resources to the recognition of hidden human resources and values. In the case of Business Espoo, it is precisely a network of experts, where the value of the service is directly derived from the expertise and skills of the business service providers. Identifying human resources is part of everyday discussions and assessment.

“Networking is nobody’s business”

Co-creation requires a mediator to enable the development of multi-operator co-operation as the volume of the activities increases. Mediators are bridge-builders between groups of different operators and communities. Mediators are not content to simply build bridges between the operators involved in the co-creation process, and just to learn about their values, norms, practices and capabilities. Mediators are interpreters who understand the language and intentions of operators taking part in co-creation and are able to analyse the operators’ goals to form a shared insight. They are also activists who make things happen by creating places for co-creation. Mediators support the introduction of people and ideas to each other and create opportunities for learning new things. This is needed because, for many people, creating activities in cooperation with people outside their own organisation or department is a new way of working.

The mediator’s task is to support the learning of people participating in co-creation. The learning is not limited to adopting new practices alone; it is also about a change of identity: how can I become a co-creator with an open attitude to multi-operator cooperation? In the case of Business Espoo, it can be seen that the leaders of the teams of joint activities, such as communication and services, were partly mediators.

The role of the mediator has not been given enough weight and time in previous approaches. Working together in a network is often perceived as a burden on one’s own job description, and the pressure on doing things is intense. Progress and rapid results are expected, even if learning and taking on a new role are still in their early stages.

There are a wide range of tips for co-creation. The following guidelines are good illustration of Business Espoo’s co-creation journey [11]:

1. Ensure that all the parties benefit. Those who feel they will benefit are also prepared to invest and share the risks. An open attitude and learning through experiments is the surest way to produce benefits.

2. At Business Espoo, the experts understood the benefits and objectives of the new cooperation from the very beginning. A large proportion of the experts had experienced the fragmentation of business services in their own work, so the benefits of cooperation were very clear at the top level. The further the co-creation progressed, experts were able to invest and share the risks.
the more important it was to reiterate the benefits and objectives. The lack of resources and the sometimes slow progress of cooperation reduced the understanding of the benefits.

2. Recognise the roles and responsibilities of co-creation participants.

As Business Espoo took shape, there was so much work and so many different ways of working that the identification of roles became blurred. In part, the organisational culture, perceptions of the different experts and the way they reported their own work situation varied so much that it was difficult to know what role each person actually played.

3. Encourage! According to research, encouragement from the management, commitment of leading office-holders, freedom of action and the organisation’s willingness to reform are considered the most important factors affecting the success of experiments. The highlighted characteristics of experimental culture include an open, trusting, pro-development, encouraging and creative atmosphere.

Business Espoo’s management was in every way supportive of its employees in the early stages of co-creation. As the project progressed, some managers remained very supportive even if they themselves doubted the need and effectiveness of the co-creation. However, the amount of encouragement varied due to factors such as the leaders’ own motivation or lack of time. The main challenge on the path of co-creation was resourcing the experts involved. As the work progressed, efforts were made to address the lack of resources, for example by modifying the working methods of the teams.

4. Invest in facilitation. Recognising and reconciling the various needs, development orientations and operating methods of the co-creation participants requires efficient facilitation. The value of co-creation must also be delivered. In the early stages of co-creation, it is important for the facilitator to support the transformation of the network of operators into a group with a common goal.

In the case of Business Espoo, there had been sufficient investment in facilitation but, as the workload increased and the number of different types of non-co-creation work increased, more should have been invested in facilitation. There was a sense of optimism among creators that co-creation was further along and that things were more ready than they actually were. In a large network, much facilitation is needed and facilitators also need to leave time for reflection and coordination and to determine the background to the challenges that arise.

The patron is also known as the promoter. He/she inspires and encourages co-creation and communicates the strategic importance of co-creation. In Business Espoo, the patrons are especially the managers. The project found that some experts clearly needed a promoter more than others, and managers had to balance between necessary repetition and trying not to bore listeners.

Business Espoo also found advocates, orchestrator’s and network weavers in the role of co-creation, to varying degrees. These roles were seen as a common activity within each organisation. Advocates actively share positive information about the co-creation operating model outside their organisation or community. Orchestrators organise and arrange things, promoting in practice what patrons and advocates
Lessons and challenges of formation

Along with orchestrators, network weavers are needed at the launch stage to ensure that the operating model moves from talk to action. The role of orchestrator in Business Espoo was taken over by city employees. More influential and sometimes faster co-creation would certainly have been possible if more orchestrated and network weavers had been found in other organisations.

One person can have several co-creation roles at the same time and, on the other hand, the same role can be played by several people. Roles, like other things, are constantly changing in co-creation.

In the case of Business Espoo, the co-creation roles were perhaps divided among too few people, and the rest of the experts joined the project without internalising their own part in the whole. This problem highlighted the overburdened way in which city personnel operate in many roles. A situation was created where it was in a way expected that the city would also do the co-creation for everyone. On the other hand, it should be mentioned that there were also people from different organisations who naturally took on co-creation roles for themselves, despite the fact that the clear benefits for their own work were not immediately apparent. However, the customer focus united the members of the Business Espoo network so strongly, that understanding the customer’s interests served as a unifying force and a driving force for action.

Once a network of operators reaches a mutual understanding about the development needs and the targeted effects, it is time to look for a coordinator who coordinates the planning of the implementation and, for example, permits and contract issues. Business Espoo is a diverse network of business services, whose operational and development needs are constantly changing. A common understanding of development needs and impacts must be broken down into smaller areas of action, which has already been done in the case of service packages. These development needs are taken forward through separate projects with the help of a joint network coordinator.

Co-operation builders promote the establishment of trust-based relationships between the operators in the network. They are interested in the goals and capabilities of the other operators and can take the interests of various parties into account. In networking, it would be important to have relationship builders from each organisation in the network. This is an area that Business Espoo will continue to develop.
This handbook has highlighted a range of challenges and lessons to be learned in the formation of a service centre for businesses. Below is a summary of the clearest and most frequently raised issues.

**Objectives and motivation**
The main objective of Business Espoo was very clear to all members of the network. The need for a one-stop shop for customers was a common goal, and the motivation of the network’s experts in all activities from the very beginning. As the activity progressed and initial enthusiasm waned, it was important to reiterate and clarify the objective. Creating a common network of services initially required much work from everyone. There was service mapping, learning new things, opening up one’s own tasks to others and creating service packages and models. The longer work was done on the network, the more there was a need to highlight common goals. The lesson to be learned in order to maintain the motivation of both network experts and management is that regular communication on objectives, progress and achievements is needed.

Business Espoo is a good example of a network of experts where even managers do not have the opportunity to know every service in depth. Their role is to provide direction and help experts to develop and succeed in their own areas. In order for the network’s members to be motivated, it is important to bring their expertise to the fore and involve them in the planning of activities at as many stages as possible.

**Networking skills, network capability and knowledge of services**
Business Espoo has hundreds of different services and thousands of different referrals to services offered by other organisations in the network. It is important for the network to cooperate to achieve a level where enough is known about the services together. This will enable the quality and speed of customer steering, eliminate duplication and identify gaps in service offering and development needs. Not every expert can know all the services, but there must be a sufficient level of knowledge to steer the customer. Most importantly, it takes courage to go beyond the boundaries of one’s own organisation’s service offering, and to dare to start referring services to other organisations and experts.

It is essential for each person and organisation in the network to feel that their own competences are valued, and to dare to talk openly about needs for development and conflicts. There are many ways to support networking skills. Some of the means are so-called ‘business as usual’ activity, i.e. joint events, communication, briefings and getting to know each other. It is therefore important to actively consider the forms of support for network capability, and to continuously seek different developmental measures. In Business Espoo, many efforts were made to involve them in the planning of activities at as many stages as possible.

**Management and internal communication**
Leadership and network management play a huge role in building a service centre for businesses. When facing new challenges, the ability to tolerate uncertainty and change is needed from both the network experts and its management. Management has an important role to play in communicating objectives, tasks and progress, and in motivating and encouraging staff to move forward. Wavering motivation and belief in cooperation from management also have a direct impact on employees. In order to achieve real joint offering and discussion on cooperation between services and experts, trust within the network must be increased. And the example of management cannot be emphasised enough. If the organisation’s management is realistic about its service offering, it is easy for the employees to then start discussing opportunities for collaboration.

The best way to work with management teams and other network teams is to ensure that those elected to a team are allocated sufficient time outside of meetings, are given the necessary power and mandate to make decisions on behalf of their organisation, and are given the widest possible top-level knowledge of all the services provided by their organisation.

During the network formation phase, management may have a clear vision of what is being aimed for in the network, so that some of the tasks in the definition phase are carried out unnecessarily lightly. Time and resources need to be allocated to defining the basics such as the values of the organisation and what services and capabilities each organisation brings to and from the network. The lesson learned from the formation of Business Espoo was that these obvious things should be clearly defined and communicated to the whole network. In this way, expectations and actions will be clearer in the future.

**Resourcing**
There has been much discussion about resourcing in Business Espoo. The role of management is to ensure that resources are available for the work of the organisation and the network as a whole. This is not easy, and the need is often only stimulated when the load has already become too great. Common to all teams has been discussion on resourcing and taking ownership. It is natural that networking is often part of the additional work that comes on top of one’s own job.
description. Or it is if the networking is not resourced, the objectives and monitoring of the network not made clear, or the long-term benefits are not seen clearly enough. It is clear that experts do the work of their own organisation first, and only then the so-called network work.

The city's role
The city has played a multifaceted role in Business Espoo. It has acted as a driving force and pillar, which is not a long-term model for a network that supports co-creation and shared ownership. In the start-up phase, there was a need to find a single clear driver but, in the next steps, the driving responsibility should have been decentralised so that all organisations had ownership of and responsibility for taking the network forward. In the future, the city should clearly and openly communicate its role, and other operators should communicate their perception of their role. In any case, the city will have a major role and lead responsibility in this network, so it is important to be prepared to provide sufficient resources, especially in the first years of the network’s existence.

On the meaning of the word “we”
The word “we” best describes the development of network cooperation and network community. When an expert or manager describes services or activities using the word “we”, does he/she mean his/her organisation or the whole network? In order to reach a situation where the word “we” is used when talking about the network, space must be provided for both guided group work and informal chatting. Time and space are needed to form partnerships, build network capability and understand how the network works.

Management plays a major role in the development of cooperation. The use of the word “we” in the right places when talking about the network sends a clear message to experts. It is important to take this into account in all communication. It must be considered when to communicate in the name of the whole network, and when to communicate only through one’s own organisation. The key to communication is customer focus: the organisation providing the service itself is not as important information for the entrepreneur as the service or event that helps his/her own business.

No new ideas and joint service development, no development of service management or use of the “we” word will happen if the expert has not taken ownership of what the network does. For some, it is important to see the benefits of doing things together materialise before ownership of networking can emerge.

The coronavirus pandemic
The coronavirus pandemic brought both challenges and fast learning to Business Espoo. A good example of fast learning and effective cooperation was the rapid creation of the sole entrepreneurs’ operating grant process by the whole network working together. The investment in and development of digital channels also took place in leaps and bounds. The network was very quickly able to provide services to businesses remotely and customer service continued as before – but now in real time, digitally.

Remote working time also caused challenges for the network. Traditionally, remote work and virtual meetings are poison for networking, as multi-organisational collaboration requires meetings at multiple levels. Meetings need open interaction and an understanding of the underlying ideas. Non-verbal communication also plays a role. Remote meetings do not provide the same motivation to work together, and small but important feedback is easily missed. The motivation to do something new also decreases and the general apathy towards remote work may seem to be related only to networking, even if it is directed at the whole workplace.
Current situation and next steps

Cooperation in the service network is a continuous iteration. Now after about three years of operation, this is a reality that all operators have a shared understanding of. We are not aiming for a vision five years from now, but to develop our operations to adapt to a constantly changing business environment. This was well illustrated by the first year of coronavirus, which forced the network to reposition itself quickly and nimbly. The network is also so well-established as part of the activity of the city and its partners, that membership or participation in the network is no longer questioned. Where critical voices are heard, they focus on priorities for action or ways of working together. However, this is a natural and important part of the discourse in which the network develops itself.

Achievement and development of objectives

During its three years of operation, Business Espoo has achieved its initial main objectives well. Interviews with experts from different organisations for this handbook revealed that the common objectives of the network were surprisingly clear to all. Particularly from the start, the objectives were clear to those involved in the various working groups and the Management team. The newer the network member and the less involved he/she is in the joint effort, the more important it is to present and repeat the objectives.

Business Espoo has well achieved its goal of bringing services together in one place, both physically and digitally. This has been based on service mapping, the creation of service packages and learning about the services offered by the whole network on an adequate level. The shared digital channel now consists of a website that brings together a range of services and facilities, a chatbot called Bertta and BE-Studios that provide services and advice of interest to entrepreneurs. The services available to businesses, entrepreneurs and would-be entrepreneurs are constantly changing, partly in line with changes in the general economy and partly, for example, as the service responsibilities of different organisations change. The Business Espoo network has reacted quickly to these changes. For example, the whole process of applying for an operating grant for sole entrepreneurs was produced very quickly in cooperation with the network. A major recent change in the structure of the network’s services has been the government pilot on employment, which increases the city’s responsibility for employment management services. The services on offer are constantly changing, so a shared range of services can never be finally achieved in a physical or digital way.

Business Espoo’s shared facilities resources have brought savings to operators by sharing costs and providing space for staff in a sustainable and economically-minded way. The shared facilities have brought about the desired synergies, joint service development and
new ways of serving customers together. This approach reflects the idea of affordance, which gives space and opportunity for things to develop in cooperation between experts, rather than directing or forcing people to follow a particular plan. A joint project to map services and design service packages would also not have been possible before the move to shared premises. Unfortunately, the remote working caused by the coronavirus pandemic has slowed down the natural development of cooperation that the space brings. The crisis has brought rapid new ways of working together and has highlighted the potential of digital services. Most directly business advice takes place on the ground floor of Business Espoo. This solution has worked well, but at times the division of the organisations into two floors has come up for discussion, and there is a desire for closer cooperation between the two floors in the future. The idea of the Service Centre is for experts to meet and get to know each other in everyday encounters in shared facilities. The number of coffee breaks shared between the two floors will certainly be increased in the future. Closer cooperation could also be established with Omnia’s experts by inviting them to one of the shared facilities.

In the future, Business Espoo will invest in the joint development of customer service in different ways. For example, the single helpline that is currently in operation only provides a referral service, and is not yet able to identify needs or to provide a comprehensive service. On the other hand, not all services are yet within the reach of customer steering. For example, contacts and guidance for businesses from the city’s permit services have not been clearly communicated to the network, and are therefore not within the reach of clear guidance from business services. There is no common CRM system, so customer data is not being shared across the network. For legal reasons, not all information can ever be made available to the whole organisation, but more research will be done in the future on opening up general customer information. This could help steer customers more accurately and with better quality towards the right services. Without a common customer database, the quality of guidance will be better when the experts in the network have enough information about the full range of services. Network capability is also constantly growing through various internal training events.

Business Espoo’s goal of greater joint visibility has been well achieved. More joint visibility and awareness are needed to improve the findability of services. The publicity and favourable feedback from customers has been a positive surprise for the network. In terms of communication, it will always be a question of balance; how much visibility the whole network gets as a single operator and how much each operator gets individually. For some operators, such as Federation of Espoo Enterprises (Espoon Yrittäjät) which mainly serves its own members, it is important for members to be able to find the services they need and for membership to be increasing. The network’s joint activities have not initially led to a large increase in membership, but existing members can be served more comprehensively.

Putting customers at the heart of activities has already been largely successful. This is most visible in the customer-oriented service range and service packages. The whole idea is to provide services regardless of organisational boundaries. There is still room for improvement in the collection of customer feedback and, for example, information on the needs of businesses for the services now available or on possible shortcomings in the service packages is currently lacking in some places. The experts who work a lot with customers can see their needs for services, but no comprehensive customer survey has yet been carried out by the network. Service packages and customer steering have only just been developed to their current form, and only now can the networks combined service offering be assessed in terms of quality. In the future, we will be better able to focus on whether we have been able to address the gaps in service or gaps in service offering reported by customers. Customer feedback will next be sought on digital services, and feedback will be more readily available from customers as various face-to-face events and meetings increase as the coronavirus pandemic eases.

When assessing the achievement of the objectives, the results must also be seen in terms of network capability. Through service mapping work and the development of service packages, as well as joint briefings, events and projects, the network’s collective capability to serve the customer has improved. The fragmented services and piecemeal service paths during the initial situation are a thing of the past and, with improved customer steering, the customer service path will no longer be interrupted. The experts have got to know each other and each other’s services, and have worked independently to find synergies and better information sharing between activities. Working as a team has been a rollercoaster ride, but there has been steady progress towards the network’s common goals. The timeline of the network’s development has had its ups and downs and unexpected slowdowns, such as the coronavirus pandemic.

“It’s great to have been together, even though we lost our own offices, but now nobody misses them.”

"On a personal level, there has been fantastic cooperation, a can-do spirit and much humour, knowledge and skills that have not been skimped on”
The next steps

Business Espoo aims to continuously develop and renew its services to meet the changing needs of its customers. Now that the range of services has been described in a comprehensive and customer-oriented way, in the future it will be easier to identify areas for improvement or even gaps. Areas for development and new service needs can be found under each service theme, for example:

Start a Business → Developing business advisory services for immigrants and better integration of the city’s permit services into Business Espoo.

Grow your Business → Landing services, i.e., services for new businesses setting up in the city, more precisely described and smoother guidance to innovation and growth hubs.

Recruitment Assistance → Recruitment services for sectors with a labour shortage, streamlining the process of pay subsidies and the Espoo supplement and increasing cooperation between recruitment events.

Internationalisation → Synchronisation of international recruitment advisory services.

Change situations → How to give advice on change of ownership.

The development work will be carried out in cross-organisational development projects where the lead responsibility will be shared as equally as possible between the different Business Espoo organisations.

Medium-term objectives independent of service areas are:

development of customer advisory services towards a more consultative and coaching service model, smoother service guidance to the services of different operators in the network including the ELY Centre, Business Finland, Finnvera, etc., and proactive service offering based on the identified service needs of companies.

The above development objectives show that Business Espoo is ambitious in its service promise to provide all business services in one place. Although there is still much to be done, the network’s role as a pioneer of public business services can already be seen.

CASE: Business Espoo during the coronavirus pandemic
Maarit Viik-Kajander

The exceptional situation caused by the coronavirus pandemic required a rapid review of services and swift communication. The close cooperation of the network contributed to the smooth management of tasks, even remotely. Together, they created new services and service channels, such as the application and payment process for operating support for sole entrepreneurs, a chatbot and the BE-Studio webinar series for different business service needs. As the Business Espoo network was already in place before the coronavirus pandemic, it was possible to react quickly to the crisis and provide services and information to customers.

ChatBot Bertta

A chatbot is a computer programme designed to engage in a dialogue with people. When a person writes text, the chatbot answers or asks a question in return.

Fortunately, just before the coronavirus pandemic broke out, the City of Espoo launched a trial in which companies, entrepreneurs and anyone interested in entrepreneurship could try out the chatbot on the Business Espoo website. ChatBot Bertta answers general questions of companies regarding internationalisation, training and employment. The pilot was carried out in cooperation between the operators.

The goal of the Business Espoo pilot was to test the functionality and usefulness of a chatbot in improving services provided to businesses. The chatbot was initially only in Finnish but, after just over a month, an English-language version was released.

The customer – be it a private person, company or organisation – can ask general questions in the chatbot dialogue box that opens on the Business Espoo website. Customers can also provide user feedback throughout the testing period. In addition to testing, Business Espoo staff were also encouraged to use the bot in situations where they wanted to check informational processes related to the service. Bertta therefore serves both internal and external customers.

ChatBot Bertta quickly became the most popular customer service channel in Business Espoo. Bertta was trained to deal specifically with questions related to coronavirus subsidies, such as matters concerning operating support for sole entrepreneurs. The active use of Bertta can also be explained by its effective marketing. The undeniable advantage of a 24/7 chatbot is that costs do not increase even as customer numbers grow. In this experiment, the city and Business Espoo is
partnering with GetJenny Oy.

The experiment was part of Espoo’s digital agenda experiments aimed at developing the city’s services with the help of digital solutions and new technology. After the experiment, Business Espoo bought the chatbot for itself.

Operating grant for sole entrepreneurs
In April 2020, a government decree on the granting of state aid to municipalities to support sole entrepreneurs entered into force. The state aid is intended to cover the costs incurred by municipalities in providing a €2,000 grant to sole entrepreneurs in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. The purpose of the grant was to stabilise the temporarily weakened financial situation of full-time sole entrepreneurs. The financial situation of sole entrepreneurs was considered to have deteriorated if the company’s turnover fell by more than 30%.

The subsidy process was a great effort for Espoo but the city managed it well and with short processing times. A total of 2,809 applications were received and €4,188,000 was awarded.

Around 55 people from the Business Espoo business services Network were actively involved in the subsidy process. They came from the City of Espoo’s corporate administration, Enter Espoo, EnterpriseEspoo and Omnia. Their tasks included preparing the application process, tendering for the processing system, communication, advising, registering applications, processing applications, making decisions, preparing and submitting decisions to case management, notification of decisions, payment, monitoring legality, legal support, back-office support, appeals, liaising with the system provider and ensuring that the process worked.

The successful and rapid organisation of a completely new service process would not have been as successful without the cooperation of the Business Espoo network’s experts.

CASE: Boost your Business with Business Espoo
As part of 6Aika - Ecosystem of growth project gave birth to a new Boost your Business event concept, which aimed to serve growth-oriented companies in particular, in a customer-oriented way, prioritising service. The first event offered the services of the Business Espoo business services network. At the next event, other ecosystem operators also presented their services: Business Finland, HBH, Fiban, Finvera, Aalto Startup Center, ESA BIC, A Grid, Smart Otaniemi, HCH, FCAI, EEN and the Vantaa food cluster.

The events were open to all businesses, entrepreneurs and would-be entrepreneurs, and no registration was required. The original concept was a series of four events with more business service organisations and innovation hubs each time. Two Boost events were held in autumn 2019 and, in spring 2020, an even wider range of ecosystem operators, including all 6Aika cities and their innovation hubs, were due to be involved. Due to the coronavirus restrictions, however, the spring events did not take place as remote events were not well-suited to the original concept.

The Boost your Business event series aimed to
• provide low threshold services from different business services and ecosystem operators, especially for growth-oriented companies, in a new efficient way that was attractive to start-ups.
• to offer the services of Business Espoo and other ecosystem operators at the same time by dividing them according to the customer’s perspective rather than that of the organisation. The five service packages of Business Espoo with ecosystem extensions were used for the breakdown: “start a business”, “grow your business”, “competence development”, “recruitment assistance”, “internationalisation” and “innovation clusters”.
• to promote the visibility of ecosystem operators and innovation clusters and the awareness and findability of business services.
• to collect information from the event: where and how the entrepreneur moved, what service was missing, etc., so that the information can be used for business service development, mapping and path-finding, to collect information on how service pathways for growth-oriented enterprises are progressing and where the city and cities can jointly help.
Lessons from events
Feedback was collected through evaluations by experts at the service points who were asked about the success of the customer service and further guidance. The feedback reflected the wide variation in the needs of customers, i.e. entrepreneurs and growth-oriented enterprises.

However, the events were able to direct the customer to the right place or link them to important ecosystem operators in their sector. For example, a customer who spoke to an EnterpriseEspoo expert was referred to Omnia’s entrepreneurship courses after booking entrepreneurship services and a consultation, and to Finnservice and Business Finland’s service points to discuss finance and internationalisation. Customer paths crossed from one point to another, making it difficult to assess effectiveness. However, the events were successful in creating new jobs and finding routes for “invest-in” activities. Feedback from experts praised the opportunity for experts from entrepreneurial services and ecosystem operators to get to know each other and each other’s services. Some of the experts were well-informed about the service field and were able to provide comprehensive advice to entrepreneurs while, for others, their knowledge was largely limited to their own services. Our recommendation is therefore to ensure the spread of awareness among experts through informal and formal channels.

Excerpts from feedback, experts Boost II
Praise: much expertise on site, good services, catering, a relaxed professional event
Gripes: Next time, a shorter event with even more customers.

Boost your Business is, in my view, an appropriate way to serve growth-oriented businesses in particular?
Average score 4 (1= Not at all 5=Absolutely)

Excerpts from feedback, customers Boost II
Praise: lots of friendly experts, comprehensive services, all ecosystem operators on site at once, Finnservice and Business Finland speed-dating on site (15min/entrepreneur with advance booking)

Did I get help from Boost your Business?
Average score 4.3 (1= not at all 5= yes, just what I needed.)

Comments on the communication of the invitation to the event
The majority of Finnish-speaking customers had received information about the event by e-mail (64%), e.g. through the Chamber of Commerce or EnterpriseEspoo newsletter. In English, the majority of respondents to the feedback survey had heard about the event from a friend/colleague (50%).