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Exploring and enhancing the competences of foreign-born employees – Focus on supervisors' work

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Anna-Leena Kurki, Minna Toivanen, Auli Airila, Barbara Bergbom and Ari Väänänen,
Finnish Institute of Occupational Health

The Challenge

- Over 300 000 people of foreign origin live and work in Finland
 - Their formal education competences and positions in the labour market varies (Statistics Finland 2012; Sutela & Larja 2015)
 - Finding work that matches one's qualifications and skills is challenging for people of foreign origin (Sutela 2015; Kyhä 2011).

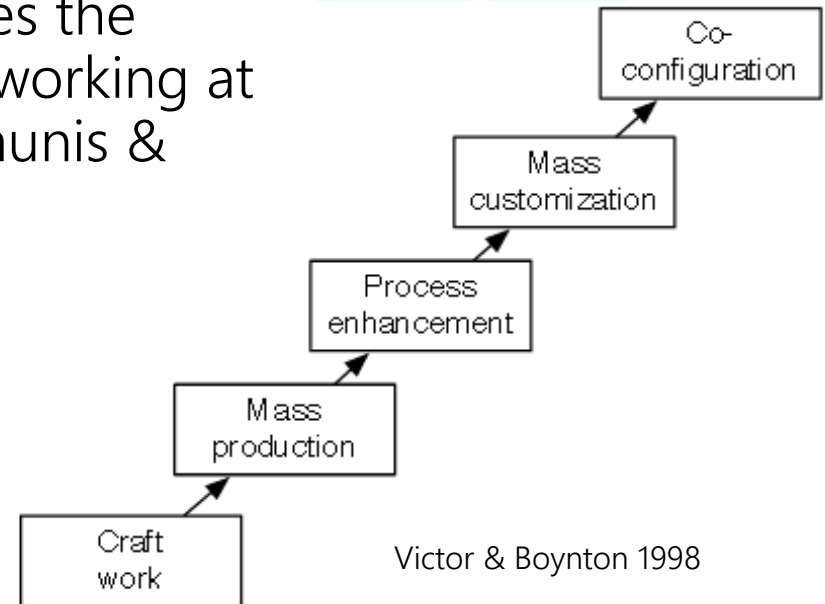
Our interest lies in the extent to which supervisors recognize the competences of workers of foreign origin:

How can these competences be taken into account in organizational development?

What particular central competences of foreign-born workers need to be developed?

Competence as a content specific and contradictory phenomena

- The current way of organizing dictates the central competences for employees working at different levels of an organization (Launis & Pihlaja 2007)
- Competence as a dynamic content-specific activity which take place at everyday work situations
- Competence as rather stabile individual capacity (Toivanen et al 2012)

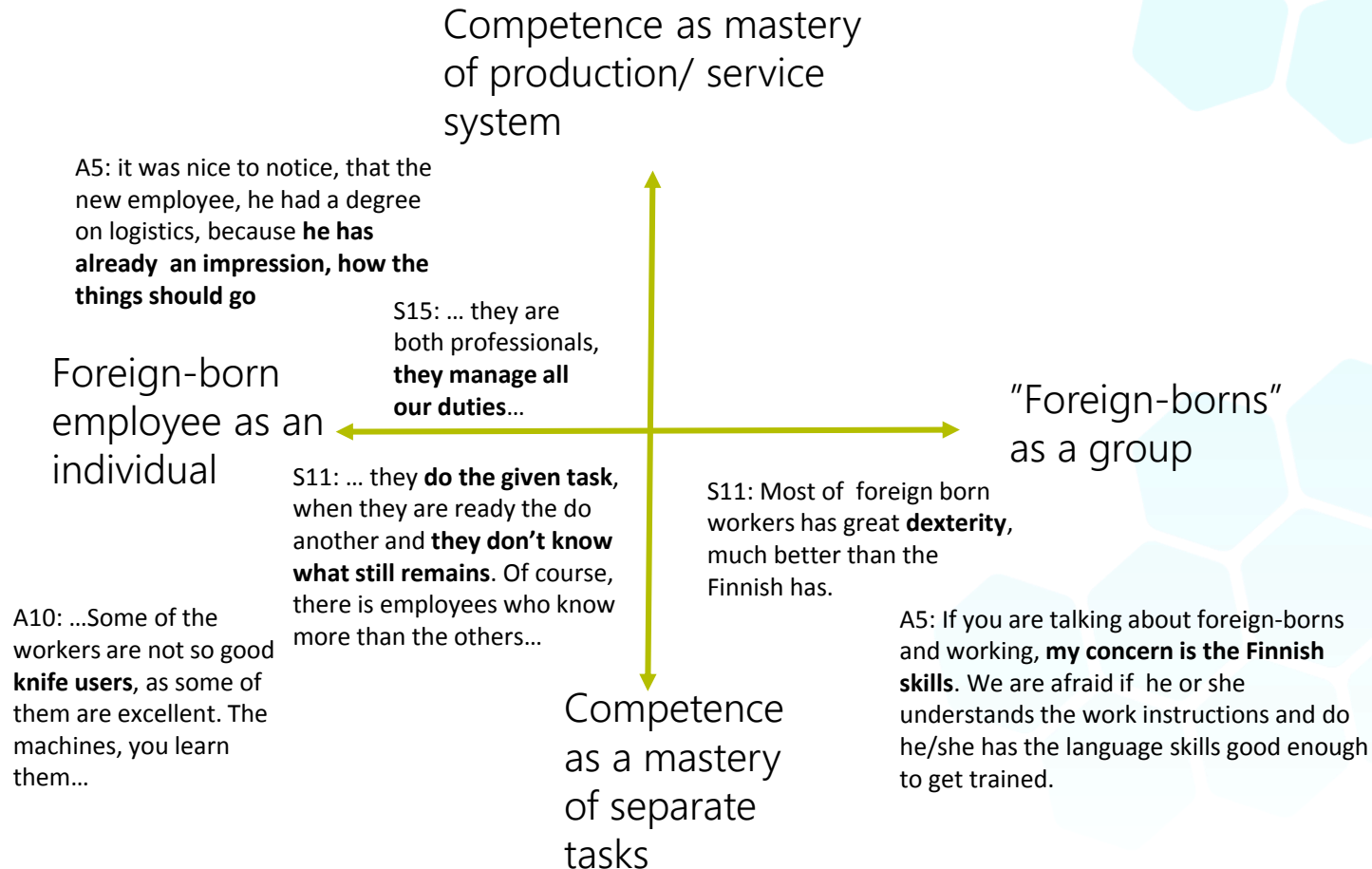


Case and Data

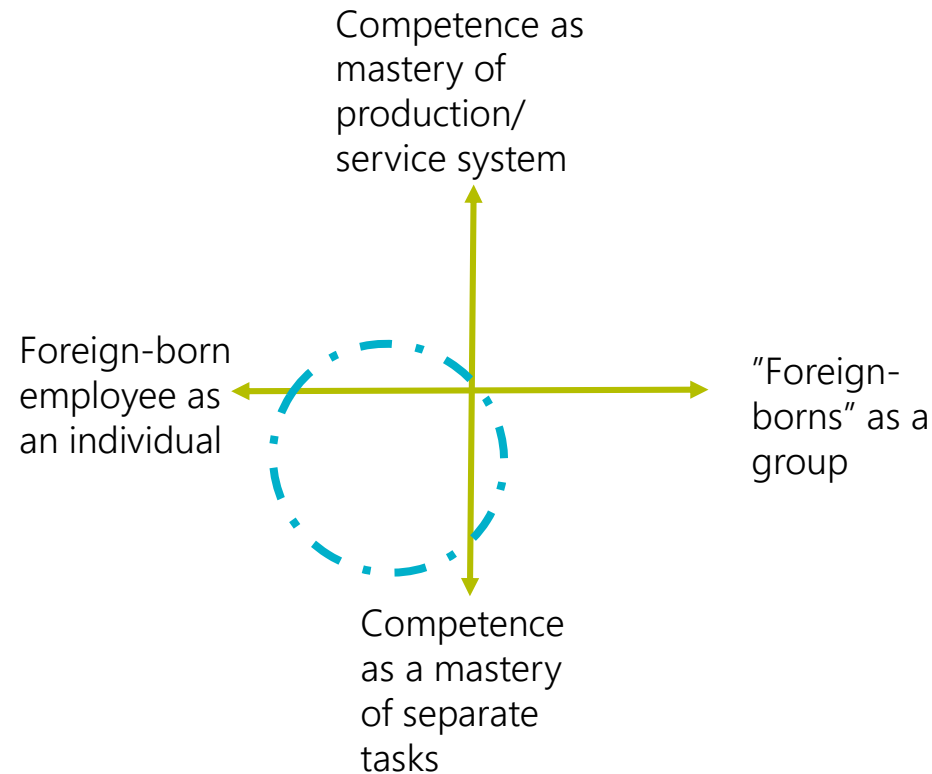
- Case: two Finnish multicultural organizations operating in the food industry and airport services
 - Over 40% of employees is of foreign background
 - Foreign born employees work mainly in manufacturing departments and in airport services in employee positions
- Data: 14 interviews of supervisors from manufacturing departments and airport services
 - carried out at spring 2016
 - á 60 min, recorded and transcribed

Our presentation is based on "The Balance of Knowledge and Work Tasks in Multicultural Workplaces" (2015–2017) project funded by The Finnish Work Environment Fund

To what extent supervisors do recognize competences of workers of foreign origin?



To what extent supervisors do recognize competences of workers of foreign origin?



- Employees' ability to manage current tasks, as well as their language skills were known quite well
- Competences, which are not directly connected to the employee's current tasks continue to remain mainly undetected
- Current organizational practices very limitedly help supervisors

Finnish language skills as a central competence in need of development

- Finnish language skills as a central competence development need that sets foreign-born employees apart from others
- Challenges of language has affect on
 - quality of work (e.g. hygiene)
 - occupational and customer safety
 - how employee can learn and broaden his/her competences at work
 - interaction (e.g. misunderstandings)
- Current practices to deal with language challenges: instructions through illustration and plain language, written summaries of information sessions, and cross-checking by supervisors, supporting language learning at work as well as on Finnish courses.

Conclusions

In order to take full advantage of competences of foreign-born employees, organizations need tools and practices that

- 1) enable supervisors to recognize better employees' competences, also cultural ones
- 2) encourage shared work development that also crosses the organization's functional borders, and
- 3) promote the learning of the Finnish language, thus fostering foreign-born employees' more active participation in organizational activities

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