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Ladies' Business Menu

fFORUM – PROMOTING WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND LEADERSHIP

ePOOKI 20/2013 – THE PUBLICATIONS OF RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT WORK OF
OULU UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

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Foreword

Women's leadership has been a subject of global debate for decades already. One of the first times the issue was discussed in more official terms was in 1965 in the prominent business management journal *The Harvard Business Review*. The question was: Do women in management act like people? Do they think of themselves as people? Are they treated in business life like people? Fortunately, both the topics of interest and ways of thinking have diversified since those days.

Today, the development of female leadership and entrepreneurship has evolved into an important theme around the world. It should no longer be news to anyone that a high level of gender equality in business firms, workplaces and societies is associated with their economic success. A more intriguing question is what kinds of solutions are made to improve gender equality, and why some solutions seem to work better than others. The promotion of equality demands the courage to take initiative, but there is also a need to develop new modes of thinking and acting.

The Global Gender Gap Report issued annually by the World Economic Forum gives a wide comparison of gender equality between countries. Although Finland ranks high in this comparison at a general level, the main problem

culminates in women's poorer opportunities to advance to business leadership and decision making positions in economic life compared to men. Wage differences also work to the advantage of men, and entrepreneurship is less often taken up by women than by men. In these respects Finland is not world a leader – at least, not yet.

The Oulu University of Applied Sciences (Oamk) has responded to the challenge by developing a novel way of thinking and acting. Oamk is an important pioneer in boosting female entrepreneurship and management. From the early 2000s, several projects have been implemented to advance the issue. This long-term research and development work has led to the creation of femaleForum (fForum), a training palette which is unique even in international terms. The underlying theme is the EU objective on gender equality. In spring 2011, fForum was chosen to represent Finland at the European Enterprise Awards competition by the European Commission in Budapest.

fForum offers recipes for success to starting female entrepreneurs as well as experienced long-timers. Thus far, 30 new enterprises have been established and 54 new jobs created as a result of the project. fForum has helped women to advance in their careers and given them

the competence to face ongoing changes in the business environment. The training has enabled immigrant women to integrate better into Finnish working life. Improvements have been implemented in various workplaces and business enterprises. fForum participants today form a significant network of women, not only in Northern Ostrobothnia but extending to other parts of Finland, for cooperation without borders.

This book tells the story of fForum. What started off as a mere idea has grown into a success story of creativity and courage, hardships and triumphs. At centre stage are the women who have taken part in fForum training. The recipes for success in this Ladies' Business Menu were designed in collaboration with our professional cooperation partners, whose voices add to the array of spices and flavours in the menu.

The work is a collaborative effort between two EU-sponsored projects, iForum and Naisurat (Women's Careers). It is targeted to everyone who is interested in female

entrepreneurship and leadership. For those involved in education and development, this book opens a window to ways in which working life equality, management know-how and entrepreneurship can be improved through training.

We are deeply grateful to the many people who gave valuable help in preparing this book. Hotel Manager Anna Paakkari, fMBA, and Chef Mikko Huhtala of Hotel Restaurant Lasaretti, and Service Manager Marjo Wallin, fMBA, of Luovi Vocational College, assisted in planning and executing the food menu. Graphic Designer Karoliina Sänisalmi and Assistant Graphic Designer Reeta Rossi of Oamk, Communications Services, made the book's layout and design. We also thank the European Social Fund and the Northern Ostrobothnia Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment for providing the main funding for this work. But above all, we owe our gratitude to the 13 fForum participants who told their own story and gave a face to this book.

We wish you an enjoyable taste journey with fForum.

Oulu, October 2013

Terttu Savela, Anna-Maija Lämsä, Saara Kärki



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fForum – lifelong learning

FIRST STEPS

Since 2000, the Oulu University of Applied Sciences (Oamk) has implemented various projects for the development of female entrepreneurship and leadership. Initially the emphasis was on improving women's practical entrepreneurial skills and evolving their business ideas. Quite soon, however, it became clear that more long-term and in-depth training was needed to support and enhance their competence. Having accumulated specific knowledge in female entrepreneurship training and in the management of entrepreneurial development projects, Oamk came up with the notion of utilizing this knowledge capital in a novel way.

At first the idea was to advance female entrepreneurship and leadership by implementing projects in different parts of Finland. This initiative was taken forward by starting the design of an MBA programme to improve women's leadership skills. At this point, the Jyväskylä, North Karelia and Turku Universities of Applied Sciences also became involved, in addition to which the University of Jyväskylä provided expertise in project planning. In 2004, the parties sought funding from the Employment and Economic Centres of their respective regions for MBA training to female entrepreneurs and managers. The intended target group was women with limited possibilities to participate in non-subsidized MBA education.

The idea took flight in Northern Ostrobothnia, where the regional Employment and Economic Centre decided to grant support to the fMBA pilot project at Oamk. The financing decision was made in spring 2005. Actually the need for female entrepreneurship promotion was already well recognized in Northern Ostrobothnia, whereas the Employment and Economic Centres in the other regions failed to grant financial support to the project. This may

have meant that a number of new enterprises and women's career advances were never achieved in these regions.

The large amount of applications for the pilot project was a pleasant surprise. And so the first fMBA programme was implemented in 2005–2008.

EXPANDING THE PROJECT

During the European Social Fund (ESF) programme period 2007–2013, Oamk sought funding for a more comprehensive female entrepreneurship and leadership project, femaleForum (fForum). Besides fMBA, it comprised three other training projects, each of which was tailored according to the participants' business life cycles, development needs and ethnic backgrounds.

fForum was among the first projects to obtain a favourable funding decision during this ESF programme period. The project is financed jointly by ESF, the Northern Ostrobothnia Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (CEDTE), Oamk, City of Oulu and the participating organizations. The City of Kuusamo has joined in at a later stage.

Due to the popularity of the projects, two further financing applications were made during the same programme period. The Northern Ostrobothnia CEDTE decided to grant the financing, and so the fForum implementation period would be from 1 June 2008 to 30 June 2014.

fForum activities spread from Northern Ostrobothnia to Koillismaa region. Funded by the City of Kuusamo, a new fMBA programme started in October 2011. In May 2012, another project,

iForum(internationalForum) was launched to support the internationalization of fForum. The two-year iForum project has made it possible to extend the good practices identified through fForum to an international level. Another aim is to explore the good practices and approaches used in other countries. Indeed, research and development occupy a major role in all fForum projects. In iForum, research efforts are specifically directed to developing a tool for responsible leadership assessment.

TOWARD INTERNATIONALIZATION

In spring 2011, the fForum project participated in the European Enterprise Awards competition organized by the EC Directorate General for Enterprise and Industry. The target of this annual competition is to identify and award the most successful European public-sector promoters of entrepreneurship and to display the best entrepreneurial policies and practices in Europe. A total of 399 projects took part in the national selection round in 39 European countries. fForum was chosen to represent Finland at the awards event in Budapest.

Numerous new contacts and networks were formed during the competition between fForum and various European actors involved in promoting female entrepreneurship. Additional international contacts were established at the Women as Global Leaders conference in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, in March 2012, including a presentation on the fForum project and its achievements.

Networking trips to Matera (Italy), Dublin, Vilnius, Kaunas and St. Petersburg have further strengthened the project's international ties. Moreover, fForum study tours – for example, to the Shanghai World's Fair in autumn 2010, New York in spring 2013 and St. Petersburg in autumn 2013 – have provided more excellent opportunities to build new cooperation relationships.

Study tours abroad are, in fact, an important element in the long-term fForum training projects. International activities and



The destination of a study tour is decided together with the group. In Shanghai, participants visited the local female entrepreneurs' association.



One of the objectives of the trip to St. Petersburg was to inquire into the shopping behaviour of Russian tourists and their expectations regarding tourism to Finland.

multiculturalism are increasingly a part of the everyday life of small and medium enterprises. The tours include studies on business internationalization processes and internationalization management, as well as familiarization with the host country's business opportunities and culture.

International visibility for fForum research

From the very beginning, fForum has sought visibility for its research in the international arena. Research results have been presented at various congresses and conferences around the world and in international publications.

A career guidance method, which was developed within fForum and is based on an autobiographical narrative approach, was introduced at the European Academy of Management congress in Paris in May 2007. An article on the presentation was published in 2009 in *Gender in Management: An International Journal*.

Further, a study report on the use of this career guidance method in HRM practices was presented at the 2008 HRM Global Conference in Turku, organized by the International Industrial Relations Association. The paper was published as an article in the conference proceedings.

The spouse's roles and influence on women managers' careers was discussed at the European Academy of Management conference in Liverpool in spring 2009. An article based on this presentation appeared in *Gender in Management: An International Journal* in 2010. Another article on the subject will be forthcoming in 2014 in the *Scandinavian Journal of Management*.

Studies have also investigated the effects of fForum on the leadership and management competence of female entrepreneurs and managers who have taken part in the training. Preliminary results were analysed at an international conference organized by the NAS-TA Women's Leadership project in autumn 2009. The final results were then presented at the Women as Global Leaders conference in Abu Dhabi in spring 2012. Additionally, a paper examining the development of leadership skills from a gender construction point of view was introduced at the annual conference of the Baltic Management Development Association in Kaunas, Lithuania, in spring 2013.

DIVERSITY OF fFORUM

fForum is a comprehensive training palette which combines education, development and research following the principle of lifelong learning. Management education is designed taking into consideration the lifecycle phase of the business. The goal is to offer tools which enable participants to achieve profitability and growth of their businesses and develop their managerial and leadership skills.

The four versatile management training modules of fForum – fStart, fFirma, fMBA and fPro – are planned to support women who are considering entrepreneurship, already acting as entrepreneurs, and wishing to advance their career opportunities and improve their leadership skills. The palette includes a module tailored for immigrant women.

fForum strengths:

- Clear-cut, comprehensive learning and development path offers solutions for different entrepreneurial and business lifecycle phases and target groups.
- Training is tailored according to each target group, which makes it possible to consider the group's particular needs and expectations.
- Possibility to move between training projects encourages lifelong learning and continuous development.
- Top professionals working as teachers and experts ensure the high quality of training.
- Multi-form studies bring flexibility into the studies.
- Training and development are backed up by research.
- Module designed specifically for immigrant women prevents social exclusion and helps their integration into Finnish society.

- Versatile networking enhances participants' cooperation and opportunities for success also in the future.
- fForum training improves entrepreneurship and improves workplace equality.

fForum principles:

The project relies on the constructionist learning theory, which sees the learner as an active builder of her own learning, knowledge and understanding. Kolb's experiential learning theory with its four-stage learning cycle – experience, reflection, conceptualization and application – plays a central role in all the training palette options.

fForum training observes the following principles: utility, enjoyment, challenges and harmony.

Utility refers to the participants' possibility to increase their knowledge capital. Training gives them the opportunity to raise their own value in the labour market, improve their competence and develop their business. New contacts and networks also bring utility, as participants become acquainted with specialists and other actors from different fields. The development studies and other written assignments, where participants need to apply their learning into actual practice of everyday work, provide additional utility.

Enjoyment means that even though learning demands effort, it also has to be fun. The overall aim is to create an atmosphere of motivation, encouragement and trust for all participants. Developing a sense of togetherness is very important, because it gives each individual a chance to discover new insights. The exchange of experiences and knowledge within the group has a significant role in the learning process.

Challenges refer to the need for participants to commit to the demanding education and, on the other hand, to their need for mentoring and support during the training. They may face the chal-

lenge of changing their own customary practices and then applying new ideas into practice.

Harmony relates to a holistic concept of man, which means thinking and acting accordingly. The underlying idea in fForum is to understand each individual as a whole, whose wellbeing requires a balance between her various aspects of life. Knowing and recognizing their own values and behavior and planning their goals on that basis will enable participants to clarify where they want to direct their operations.

Training palette for the fForum project's entrepreneurial skills



Ideas, dreams, opportunities

HORS D'OEUVRE (4 servings)

Salmon tartare

300 g freshly salted salmon
2 tbsp capers
1 red onion
1 bunch of dill
1 tbsp olive oil
black pepper

1. Cut the salted salmon into small cubes.
2. Chop the red onion, dill and capers finely.
3. Mix the salmon cubes with the other ingredients.
4. Season the mixture with chopped dill, olive oil and black pepper.
5. Serve with black "archipelago bread".
6. Garnish with finely chopped onions and sprigs of dill.

Lightly salted reindeer

200 g filet of reindeer
1-2 tbsp cut brandy
2 tbsp salt flakes
4-6 sprigs of thyme
freshly ground black pepper

1. Brush the filet with cut brandy.
2. Mix the spices and pat them on to the meat.
3. Wrap the spiced meat, first in cling film and then aluminium foil, into a tight parcel and allow to marinate in the refrigerator for a couple of days. Turn the package from time to time to ensure that the meat is evenly seasoned. Replace the thyme sprigs with fresh ones and place the filet in the freezer.
4. To serve, remove the meat from the freezer, let it thaw slightly and cut it into paper thin slices using a very sharp knife.
5. Garnish with lingonberry jelly and lingonberries.

Lamb terrine

200 g minced lamb
1 egg
2 dl cream
½ tsp freshly ground black pepper
50 g smoked loin of pork
6 g salt
thyme
1 tsp black currant jelly

1. Dice the smoked pork loin.
2. Place the minced meat, egg, smoked loin, jelly and spices in a mixer and mix for about 10 minutes.
3. Add the cream in a thin stream.
4. Spoon the mixture into a terrine pan and bake for about 30 minutes in a water bath on the stove or in a steam oven at 150° C.

fStart



fStart is a compact four-month training package for starting female entrepreneurs. It offers the newest practice-oriented knowledge on the process of starting an enterprise and the various subsectors of business: marketing, management and financial control. In the course of the training, each participant's business idea is ripened into a workable business plan. Participants also acquire the skills to pursue a vocational degree in entrepreneurship, and can apply for start-up business funding if necessary.

This training module is meant for women who are contemplating setting up or who have recently set up a business, and wish to evaluate and clarify their plans. The start-up process is backed by enterprise-specific consultations, where participants are personally assisted by an experienced professional in preparing their business plans and starting up their entrepreneurial operations.

So far, 78 women have taken part in fStart training in four groups, and 25 of them established a business of their own during the project period.

”

A business idea needs thorough scrutiny

All my consultations with fStart participants were meetings in person. We usually met five times, and in between meetings the participants had home assignments.

During our consultations we discussed the process of becoming an entrepreneur and evolved the business idea together. Nearly every participant already had an idea in her mind, which she had been maturing for some length of time. Each idea was weighed very realistically, including detailed profitability calculations.

We also went to see other entrepreneurs working in the same branch of business, from whom the participants received valuable information. One of the main topics of discussion was whether this was the right moment to start a business.

Whatever the outcome of the consultations – whether the participant decided to start as an entrepreneur or recognized that her business idea or life situation was unrealistic for setting up a business – it was equally important. I trust that the consulting process was a worthwhile exercise for each participant and gave her ideas to carry forward into her next stage in life.

Wonderful women, good business ideas, genuine commitment, hard work, group support, and endless energy from one another – that's what our consultations were about.

Minna Åman-Toivio, Training Consultant, Managing Director, Medkit Finland Oy



Thinking of the ordinary user

When Eeva Kangas was given notice, she refused to sit idle. Instead, she resolved to become an entrepreneur, and within three months already had her own business set up. She says entrepreneurship has taught her things she could never have imagined when she started.

FixUi, the usability service company established by Eeva Kangas, is engaged in largely the same kind of work as she used to do while employed at a subcontractor for Nokia. Hence, the job in itself is easy for her, but there are other things in an entrepreneur's everyday life that she has had to learn from the basics.

Eeva Kangas tells about her start-up: "The idea of entrepreneurship had been brewing in my head for a long time, but it was so easy to stay in a big firm. That's why getting fired was really what forced me to take the steps I hadn't dared to before. I got fired in July, took a month's vacation, and in August I was already acquiring the official documents needed to establish an enterprise. In September my company started its operations."

At the same time she noticed an announcement for fStart training. Having no previous entrepreneurial training or knowledge of financial affairs, Eeva Kangas applied to join the project. Besides learning what she needed about entrepreneurship, the training also provided just the network she had been looking for. Even though the participating women worked in different lines of business, they had all been wrestling with the same kinds of issues.

"Sure, it was tough to go and study after a full day's work, but because the subject was so important to you, you simply found the time and the energy for it."

Mastering the "elevator pitch"

Eeva Kangas is especially pleased that the women in her group represented many different fields of operation. What surprised her was that they were all puzzling over similar problems.

"I found it important that the basics of financial matters and management were dealt with clearly and in detail. It was also good to learn where and how to market. Not to mention the lawyer who told us when we might need to consult a legal professional and what types of contracts to make."

Another issue she recalls is what is referred to as the "elevator pitch". The purpose is to present a quick, concise introduction of yourself and your company. Eeva Kangas says the elevator pitch has proved very useful for her. She also praises the teachers for being so inspiring. And, although fStart training lasted less than half a year, it was sufficient to become aware of the many aspects of entrepreneurship.

"Some of us got their new business underway, some did not. That gave perspective into what you yourself were doing. A few of us realized they didn't have what it takes to become an entrepreneur, or that they didn't really want to become entrepreneurs."

Entrepreneurial responsibility

Time has made Eeva Kangas see that an entrepreneur's days can be very different. There are days without a care in the world, and days when the calendar is less full and you have to wonder where to find the money to pay the salaries.

"I haven't had too many surprises along the way. What has been unexpected, though, is that a customer may not always pay the invoice on time. I've had to learn the meaning of responsibility in a whole new way, now that I don't have a big firm's network to back me up."

Eeva Kangas works in a largely male-dominated sector. In a sense, this has proved to be an advantage. At events where 90 percent of participants are men, potential customers are very likely to notice and remember her. She also says she could never have imagined how much time goes into networking and entertaining of customers.

Besides Eeva Kangas herself, the company now has two other permanent employees. She also employs fixed-term workers for various projects. From the beginning her intention has been to make the business grow so she can provide employment for others as well.

"Entrepreneurship is about everything possible. I keep visiting all kinds of events so I can meet new customers and take care of old ones. Naturally I also have to be a supervisor to my workers, see to financial matters, pay bills, take care of many other tasks. An entrepreneur is a human resources manager and marketing manager all at once, and a work safety officer and everything in between."

FixUi

- Usability service company specialized in designing and evaluating the usability of products and services
- Established in Oulu in 2011
- Products also include industrial design services
- www.fixui.fi



Taina Lempeä's job alternation leave five years ago led her into entrepreneurship. Her previous job as a home economics teacher has made her an expert at multitasking. This is a valuable asset in her business which offers a variety of services from traditional catering to cooking classes.

Flourishing creativity in a catering business

When Taina Lempeä took her job alternation leave from teaching, she was having trouble with persistent back pains. Fortunately she found a good physiotherapist who provided relief.

"I'll never forget my physiotherapist's comment that after her treatment, even steel fixers have left the treatment table well and fit for work. I thought to myself that if steel fixers have, then so will I", she laughs. That was the beginning of a road that led to a total change in her life.

The smell inside the catering business is so delicious that you could sniff it endlessly. A batch of black "archipelago bread", the company's hit product, is baking in the oven. Taina Lempeä became an entrepreneur through fStart training. She had seen an advertisement in the paper and sent in her application. The idea of a business of her own grew stronger during the training, until finally there was no returning to the teacher's job. Lempeät Eväät had been born.

Seasonal rushes

The business has seen various phases over the years. At one point Taina Lempeä worked as the project coordinator for a local food project. The assignment meant a year's break from entrepreneurship, so that operations had to be restarted practically from scratch.

One of the challenges of a food business is finding suitable premises. The requirements are very demanding, with regulations concerning aspects like the right types of surface materials and appropriate storage space.

"It's challenging trying to calculate adequate margins for the products. But when you work with such great passion you don't always realize that you must also calculate a reasonable price for your own time and effort. In the beginning I somehow imagined, perhaps a bit naively, that customers would just appear from somewhere. Well, that is not the way it goes, and so I've had to learn to look for customers."

In a catering business the workload varies by seasons, peaking at Christmas and in springtime. The spring season in particular – with school leaving and graduation ceremonies, spring meetings and

weddings – keeps Taina Lempeä busy. Workdays may stretch up to 15 hours.

"Luckily my back allows me to cope with long working hours, since this is a standing job. Every now and then I go and hang from the pull-up bar that I have here for the purpose."

One of the most important skills of an entrepreneur, according to Taina Lempeä, is networking, for which she is especially grateful to fStart training. The participants, who represented various different fields of business, were supportive of each other, and no one had any reason for distrust or envy.

"We fit in so well together. The teachers were excellent and held us at their fingertips. They gave encouragement to us at every turn. We were all able to back each other, although our experience was from different business sectors."

Passion and creativity combined

Starting up as an entrepreneur did not require as much courage as Taina Lempeä had initially expected. She had been nursing the idea of entrepreneurship long enough. In the end, the decisive step seemed quite small.

Taina Lempeä has not regretted her decision. She says she gets so much energy from the chance for self-fulfilment every day.

"This work combines creativity with passion. I admit it has required some learning on my part, which hasn't always been simple. But I am able to fulfil myself on a daily basis and do things my own way. That is an awesome feeling", she summarizes.

Lempeät Eväät

- Catering service and cooking school, which favours local, pure raw materials
- Established in Oulu in 2009
- Includes a bakery
- www.tainalempea.fi



Freedom for self-fulfilment

The idea of entrepreneurship had been maturing over a period of 10 years before Mari Siltakoski finally took the critical step. Not once has she regretted her decision.

Mari Siltakoski had always thought that if she ever took up entrepreneurship, she definitely wanted to benefit from fForum training. Luckily enough, fStart was just about to begin when she reached the decision to become an entrepreneur. The training was so rewarding that she continued to pursue her studies with fFirma.

“Networking and mutual peer support in the group was just tremendous. Although we all came from widely different lines of business, we shared the same basis. We were able to talk things through. I still keep contact with many of my group members.”

And so Mari Siltakoski set up her marketing company Imago+. From the very start it was clear to her that she also wanted to offer employment to other people besides herself. She kept her resolve, and less than a year later hired her first employee. Today she has two to three additional employees working on a project basis, depending on the size of the projects.

An easy step forward

Like many of the other participants, Mari Siltakoski had also been pondering entrepreneurship for a long period of time. As an employee in a marketing enterprise, she had been able to observe at close range what the life of an entrepreneur was like. After a decade in the business, her own job description had grown so similar to that of an entrepreneur that her final step into entrepreneurship did not feel like a giant leap.

“Working for someone else I finally reached the point where I wasn’t making any progress any longer. That was when I felt it was high time – either now or never. Starting a business did have its own challenges, of course, like where to acquire funding and how to really get operations underway.”

She had the good fortune to find cooperation partners who helped her to obtain customerships. In addition, her company works as a subcontractor.

Yet, running an enterprise also has its challenges, such as identifying suitable employees. Mari Siltakoski points out that a job

advertisement may easily attract 50 to 100 applications, which is quite a pile to go through.

“There’s a certain trick to spotting the right qualities when you’re not such an experienced recruiter. It isn’t enough that the applicant is a solid professional, because everything else has to click into place as well: whether she fits in well with the team and what her salary request is. I find this a very demanding task every time. I hired my current permanent employee a couple of years ago and have been very satisfied.”

Entrepreneurial freedom is the reward

As the mother of a child who is starting school this autumn, Mari Siltakoski has come to realize what combining entrepreneurship and parenthood involves. The major support and assistance of her spouse has enabled the smooth running of everyday life and made it possible for her to commit to her work.

“When there’s a tight project underway, I may be working day and night. But as an entrepreneur I can then be flexible in other situations. The training, in fact, felt quite relaxing compared to this.”

Through entrepreneurship, Mari Siltakoski has found the opportunity to fulfil herself and steer her own business in whatever direction she herself sees fit. After four years as an entrepreneur, she considers this as the best thing about her decision. The company is now expanding its operations to the city of Kuopio – and who says that growth will stop there?

Imago+

- Marketing communications company, with services ranging from brochures and advertisements to web services
- Established in Oulu in 2009
- Operations being expanded to Kuopio



Creating your own recipe

ENTRÉE (4 servings)

Freshwater crayfish and fennel-dill salad

120 g freshwater crayfish
half a fennel
dill
half a cucumber
½ dl water
6 basil leaves
lemon juice
salt

1. Slice the fennel and chop the dill.
2. Combine the crayfish, fennel and dill.
3. Season with salt.
4. Mix the diced cucumber, water, basil leaves and lemon juice in a mixer.
5. Combine all the ingredients and serve in portion bowls.

fFirma



fFirma training is targeted to female entrepreneurs at an early stage of their entrepreneurial careers. The training involves comprehensive development of the participants' business operations and enhancement of their personal entrepreneurial and leadership skills. The primary objective is to improve both the enterprise and the entrepreneur's professional management competence using a practice-oriented approach to building the company's future. During the training, each participant plans and implements development measures in her enterprise and updates her business plan.

Participants are also offered enterprise-specific consultation or mentoring by an experienced entrepreneur, who provides advice and support in developing the business and its management. fFirma training includes a study tour abroad, whose destination is determined jointly with the group. The two-year project coaches participants to pursue a vocational degree in entrepreneurship or a specialist vocational qualification in business management.

As many as 14 of the 19 women who participated in fFirma completed a vocational degree in entrepreneurship. The competence-based examinations for the degree were organized in cooperation with the Institute of Marketing. The participants also conducted a comprehensive reassessment of their business and designed practical measures for its development.

”

Entrepreneurship demands courage

It takes daring to become your own employer, which is why starting up as an entrepreneur easily causes hesitation. The move from reflection to action is very short as a journey, but it may still prove too long for some people.

Entrepreneurial development is a question of growth, but the faster the growth, the worse the growing pains. But a person who wants to develop as an entrepreneur needs to conquer herself. Entrepreneurship is a synergy of what we have inherited and what we have learned, as are so many of our patterns of thought, behaviour and attitudes.

Aleksis Kivi, Finland's national author, remarked that the fish we angle for are the fish we catch. Sometimes the fisher will soak the angleworm in the water in vain, but making the catch requires a real effort. The entrepreneur whose closest circle may discourage her initiative will do well to remember this and remain resilient, even if her closest circle tries to discourage her initiative, because such disheartening attitudes, 'more's the pity, we see everywhere, and it's a disagreeable thing to see'.

There is an encouraging observation in Aleksis Kivi's novel *Seven Brothers*, which gives reassurance in a tough situation – that life, after all, is 'so-so, good and bad mixed, but good, doggone it, has the upper hand, and this life's hassle is OK, it's OK'. The entrepreneur can revert to these words in a tight spot

Matti Koironen, Professor Emeritus, entrepreneur



Learning the role of manager

At the brink of the 1990s recession, Sirpa Erho took a bold step and bought a physiotherapy business. What started off as a one-woman operation has now, within twenty years, grown into an enterprise with eight employees.

Sirpa Erho certainly lacks neither courage nor persistence – this becomes quite clear after only a brief chat. When recession hit Finland in the early 1990s, she was in danger of losing her job. However, in contrast to many others, she managed to avoid joining the jobless queue.

“I bought a physiotherapy business. At first I offered to operate it under the Deaconess Institute, but a firm with just one employee was considered too small for the institute. So I really had no other choice but to become an entrepreneur. And that is the road that I am still on today”, she laughs.

At present, Oulunseudun Fysioterapia has two physiotherapy units and eight employees. Sirpa Erho notes that she has done things in the wrong order: she first established the company, and only then sought managerial training. After completing her vocational degree in entrepreneurship in connection with fFirma, she grew interested in continuing her studies within the fMBA programme. The particular aspect that appealed to her in both projects was their emphasis on women.

“I had previously taken part in training where the majority of participants were men. The worlds we came from were so different that it was hard to find any common interests. But fForum, in turn, was of great help to me. I could put many of the things learned there directly into use in my work.”

From entrepreneur to manager

Sirpa Erho has made some brave solutions in her career, even when the people around her have considered them crazy. Yet time has shown that her solutions work, so she has had no reason to doubt the power of intuition. This does not mean that everything has happened automatically. She has also had to learn by trial and error, but she says the main thing is that you are able to learn from your mistakes.

“At one point of transition, I decided to hire a business manager for the company. The problem was that I wasn't quite sure what share of my workload could be handled by someone else. So I did some reorganizing. This spring I am giving up actual therapy and will try to concentrate on management. To me it sounds like a huge difference.”

Steady growth has taught Sirpa Erho that managing a business is a fulltime job. This observation was confirmed by the fMBA participants, who represented several different fields of business and different-sized companies.

“The training dealt with everything you need to consider when you expand the business. It's vitally important to network and know how to choose the right kind of partners. I, for instance, realized that it is possible to 'buy' expertise. I changed my bookkeeper when I understood that routine accounting was not enough, but that I also needed a financial advisor.”

Courage to act

Sirpa Erho expanded her enterprise to Oulu in 2003. She had visited several locations before finding the most suitable business space. As operations grew, her company secured an agreement with the city in 2006. It might appear that this mother of five is too quick in her decisions, but in reality she reaches them only after careful deliberation.

“It's in my nature to believe that life will carry you through. The years have taught me to always take my annual holidays. That's how I manage to cope. As an entrepreneur it's so easy to let your work get the upper hand of you, but you just need to watch out for yourself there.”

Sirpa Erho describes herself as a values leader. Future will tell whether she will continue as a fulltime manager – or whether she wants to return to therapy work on the side.

Oulunseudun Fysioterapia

- Physiotherapy and lymphatic therapy company
- Established in Oulunsalo in 1992
- Eight employees
- www.osfysio.fi



Entrepreneurship is about learning new things

Sanna Seppänen became an entrepreneur when she set up an accounting company together with one of her colleagues. Her business partner has changed since then and also the number of employees has grown. To her, entrepreneurship is a journey which teaches plenty of interesting new things.

Sanna Seppänen has always wanted to be an entrepreneur. Finally, when she was on maternity leave, she took the ox by the horns and started the accounting company Avisan with a colleague as her business partner. She immediately felt at home as an entrepreneur, even though in her dreams it was never quite clear that the enterprise she would eventually start would be an accounting firm. But the life of an entrepreneur proved far different from what she had envisaged.

“The job involves so much more than just bookkeeping. At first you thought the work would be much the same as what you did when you were an employee, but that’s not the way it goes. An entrepreneur has to do so much more. Ultimately the situation is quite different from what you imagined. But I haven’t regretted it a single day.”

Sanna Seppänen ran across an advertisement for fFirma training already when she was establishing the enterprise. Entrepreneurial training sounded to her like a brilliant idea, and right she was. She got to know other women who were in the same situation, which evolved into what she calls a “splendid network”. It showed that you did not need to struggle with your problems on your own, because there were others who were pondering over the same issues. The group members found support in each other and looked for solutions to problem points together.

Finding your own customership

In the early stages of entrepreneurship, the biggest question had to do with finding customers. How do you find them? When you were an employee, the customers just emerged from nowhere. Now, as an entrepreneur, you had to acquire them yourself.

“In the training we were urged to think about customer acquisition and come up with feasible marketing ideas. This was very valuable for us who were at an early stage of entrepreneurship. But once you have created your own customer network, it’s much easier to get new customers through old ones.”

When the company had succeeded in increasing its customership, Sanna Seppänen was faced with the classical problem of a growing entrepreneur: recruitment. What would be the best time to hire an employee? Who would be a good choice? How to decide which applicant is most suitable?

“You really had to think about these things. Even if you asked someone over for several interviews, it was only a question of brief moments. In this business you want to hire someone who already has experience from working in an accounting company and who is able to endure stress.”

Sanna Seppänen says she now has just the right people working in the company, although finding them was not that easy. The whole staff get along very well together, which is the key to a good work atmosphere.

Investment into training pays off

Because the company had already been established when fFirma training began, Saara Seppänen could apply what she had learned straight into practice. She recommends the training for everyone who is considering entrepreneurship.

“After fFirma I am now studying for a specialist vocational qualification in business management. I want to be a good boss. That’s why I want to develop as a manager and get further training in my leadership skills”, says Saara Seppänen.

Avisan

- Accounting company with services including consulting and financial advice to companies and associations
- Customers from all forms of company
- Established in Oulu in 2009
- www.avisan.fi



Appetite comes with eating

MAIN COURSE (4 servings)

Pan-fried white fish

700 g white fish filet
2 tbsp oil
salt

1. Pat the skin dry with paper towels.
2. Heat the frying pan until hot and add the oil.
3. Fry the fish filets skin side down until almost done, and season with salt.
4. Turn the fish over for a few seconds and serve immediately.

Buckthorn-white wine sauce

1 tbsp white wine vinegar
3 shallots
1 bay leaf
1 dl white wine
1 dl buckthorn juice
1 dl cream
50 g butter
1 tsp salt
white pepper
sugar

1. Peel and cut each shallot into six pieces.
2. Place the vinegar, wine, peeled shallots, bay leaf and buckthorn juice in a saucepan. Boil for about 10 minutes and strain the sauce.
3. Let the sauce simmer till half reduced.
4. Add the cream and reduce further (for about 10 minutes).
5. Add the butter in small cubes while stirring.
6. Season and serve immediately.

Caramellized turnip

200 g turnips
½ dl cane sugar
30 g butter
salt

1. Peel the turnips and cut them into cubes.
2. Heat the butter and sugar in a pan until they start to melt.
3. Add the turnips and allow to simmer gently until tender.
4. Season with salt.
5. Serve as a side dish for the white fish.

fMBA



The fMBA programme provides advanced and comprehensive training on entrepreneurial and organizational operations, enabling participants to further improve their management competence. This training is intended for female entrepreneurs with solid work experience as well as female managers and specialists who wish to develop their business or workplace practices and their leadership skills. fMBA includes an extensive analysis of the future prospects, competitiveness and potential for change and growth of each participating organization. It coaches the women on how to succeed in managerial and consultant positions in business enterprises and other organizations.

During the training, participants prepare written module assignments and a wider development study related to their own work community, which helps to transfer their learning directly into practice. To assess and enhance their own leadership, participants have the opportunity for 360 feedback and personal coaching. The scope of the two-year fMBA programme corresponds to 90 ECTS credits. An international study tour is also included and its destination is decided together with the group.

The programme has been very popular. Three fMBAs have already been implemented in the Oulu region with a total of 63 participants, and 20 women took part in the fMBA programme organized in Kuusamo. All of the participants have been strongly committed to completing their fMBA.



A thirst for theory meets hands-on experience

I have had the pleasure of acting in four fMBA programmes as responsible teacher in strategic management. Seldom has a teaching job been simultaneously so easy and yet so challenging.

The job was easy because of the enormous thirst for theory of the fMBA women. They themselves possessed a huge amount of practical experience in business management. Actually their stories brought the theories to life far better than any examples from world-class business.

Participants also brought rich practical questions to each training session. Besides testing the strategic theories, their questions also tested the teacher's competence.

The most valuable attributes of a manager – a passion for leadership and a sense of personal meaning in management – are something you don't learn from books. These women seemed to have the spark of passion in themselves as a 'factory setting'.

With the backing of their peer network, these fMBA participants have a great chance to grow in their managerial vocation. By being themselves in their managerial job they can best serve the *raison d'être* of their own organization.

I feel humbly grateful for having had the opportunity to share a part of the journey.

Paula Kirjavainen, D.Sc. (Econ.), Docent, University of Turku, Turku School of Economics, Managing Director, Novetos Oy



The many roles of a managing director

Johanna Koskelainen is the managing director of a successful family business and also a member of the Oulu city council. Besides her other activities, she also participated in fMBA training, which proves that she certainly does not lack energy.

Several years ago Johanna Koskelainen took part in training courses for female entrepreneurs organized by Oamk, where she heard about the forthcoming fMBA training. Her previous study experiences had been so positive that she ventured to join the programme, confident that her time would not be wasted.

“Of course you need to make some arrangements to get all the pieces to fit together, but studying gives you so much in return that it’s worth the effort. I was able to put what I learned in theory straight into practice. In my position it’s very important to know something about everything, and the training gave insight into things like the coming trends in HRM, for example. A managing director needs to take a long view and have a broad perspective”, remarks Johanna Koskelainen.

She commends the extensive scope of the programme and its excellent study structure. In the course of the training, each participant came to understand why the studies proceeded in a certain order and how the study units supported each other.

“The fact that the written assignments and wider development study were directly associated with everyone’s own job naturally gave added value. We all were able to benefit immediately.”

Importance of managerial education

As managing director of Kymppi-Eristys, an industrial insulation company, Johanna Koskelainen works in a male-dominated field. She does not see gender as having any relevance with regard to professional competency.

“Many training programmes tend to treat the subject of leadership and supervision quite narrowly, but that wasn’t the case with fMBA. I think it would be good for all working at a certain managerial level to obtain some kind of management training. I myself am a straightforward leader and I give my employees a lot of freedoms. I believe that everyone is capable of more than what they’re doing right now.”

She naturally does not want the broad freedoms she has granted to lead to any trouble. That is why it is important that all supervisors how to support their subordinates. Due to the very nature of the work, you need to have trust in their sense of responsibility, as they may be working on the other side of the world for months at a

time. In such cases, Johanna Koskelainen keeps in touch with them through communication links.

Belief in honesty as the cornerstone

The company policy is to ensure that everyone assumes responsibility for their own work. The managing director relies on her employees, and her motto is that every person is honest until proven otherwise. Project work demands perseverance from the employees, since circumstances can change many times over. As a manager, Johanna Koskelainen wants to be an enabler, who provides the resources necessary for her staff to succeed in their work.

“People need to be led in different ways. It’s not even a generation issue necessarily, but a question of character. A manager has to have a knowledge of people and recognize that some people require more feedback than others. So a manager will do well to keep some knowledge of behavioural sciences in her back pocket.”

The company is now entering into new market areas in the frontlines of its industry branch. Johanna Koskelainen believes it is better to be ahead than to follow behind your competitors.

“I think business success – like success in life in general – depends on your own commitment. If your knowledge, skills and motivation are in order, you can succeed. I am a solution-focused person and believe that if something isn’t working, it has to be changed. And this goes for work as well as private life.”

Kymppi-Eristys

- Service company specialized in process industry pipeline and machinery insulation and maintenance
- Established in Oulu in 1982
- Over 300 employees
- www.kymppi-eristys.fi



Soft and sensible management

Arja Sutela works as the secretary general for a social services association. During her career she has witnessed from close range the great need for social and health care services. Though the sector is easily described in terms of soft values, she is too often faced with extremely difficult situations. But fortunately she is not one to scare easily.

Indeed, it is almost too apposite that the secretary general of a century-old association has her offices in a 200-year-old wooden building in downtown Oulu. In the corner of the room stands the original tile stove with donated wooden toys on the mantelpiece.

In connection with her previous job as the executive manager of the Mother-Child Home and Shelter in Oulu, Arja Sutela had taken part in managerial training. She then noticed an advertisement for the fMBA programme, which immediately aroused her interest, because it sounded like a good continuation for her earlier studies. She was right, and she also found it rewarding to see how well the fMBA women formed into a group. They all represented different sectors of business, and their different experiences contributed to the diversity of the programme.

“When I joined the training, there was much talk about turning associations into independent companies and making them more business-oriented. Naturally I had many questions criss-crossing in my mind, which I wanted answered. Recognizing that there were no ready answers, I felt I needed to find them. So I chose this as the subject of my development study, and the intermediate written assignments were important for me as well”, Arja Sutela says. Her development study was, in fact, a great success, and was awarded at the end of the fMBA programme.

The advertisement for the job of secretary general of Nuorten Ystävät (Friends of the Young) appeared just as Arja Sutela had completed her fMBA. This job combined all that she had recently been contemplating. It felt tempting, although she had not considered changing jobs, even though many of her fellow fMBA participants had either found another job during the training or advanced in their current career. But she applied anyway, and was chosen.

Visible results right away

The social and health service sector is constantly in a state of change and motion. No two days are alike, and you never get the feeling of “having seen it all”.

“I like working with young people. My clients give me a lot of energy, and the job allows me to see the results of my work.”

She also gets strength from her staff’s well-being and enthusiasm in their work. As a manager she says she is calm, thoughtful and broad-minded – but resolute as well.

“Many people may be misled to see me as a soft ‘social auntie’, but I can be tough, if necessary. But don’t expect me to get involved in an argument.”

From theory into practice

Arja Sutela leads the oldest child welfare association in Finland, with close to 650 employees working in 14 locations. The group corporatized its service production in 2006, and the accumulated business profit is used for the public good and non-governmental activities and for specialist and voluntary work.

“The association is managed like any large firm, which, in fact, it is. We also have middle management like any other business. I’m able to put into practice all the things I learned in theory during training.”

Arja Sutela finds a counterbalance to her demanding work in leisure time spent with the family and with her horse and two dogs, and books. She also formed permanent human relationships during the fMBA training programme. The women continue to see each other on a monthly basis.

“We have lunch together, a bit depending on how each of us is able to make it. We all are very different women, but we’re united by this great experience that we shared and all we went through together.”

Friends of the Young (Nuorten Ystävät ry)

- Specialist social services association and advocacy group; its business group provides nationwide special services for children and young people, people recovering from mental health and drug abuse, disabled people, and their families
- Over 650 employees
- Established in 1907
- www.nuortenystavat.fi



Steady hand at the company wheel

Jaana Kokko has always worked in a male-dominated business and feels at home there. She finds communicating with men straightforward and in no way difficult. The good feeling seems to be mutual, as her transport company was awarded the 2013 Deed of the Year prize for well-being at work.

The magnificent view that opens to the sea from Jaana Kokko's office allows her to enjoy the cycle of the seasons. In springtime, the managing director can watch daring ice fishermen sitting patiently, heedless of the ice around them ripping to shreds. In wintertime the snowy shoreline glistens in the sun, deserted except for the occasional skier or jogger. From this office she leads her company Oulun Autokuljetus with an open but firm approach.

"I want to be a participatory leader, open and easy to approach. I'm a manager of people and accustomed to delegating responsibility. But at the same time I expect you to stick to what has been agreed on and to hold on to what's important."

The work atmosphere in the company has won nationwide recognition. In spring 2013, it was awarded the Deed of the Year prize for investing into employee well-being by the Regional Council for Northern Ostrobothnia. A well-being at work project was launched in the company at the beginning of the millennium, where the entire staff had an opportunity to participate to improve their well-being. A good work atmosphere and job satisfaction do not happen by chance, but require active measures and long-term commitment.

Venturing into the midst of women

Having worked with men throughout her professional career, Jaana Kokko felt that the only aspect of fMBA which raised doubts was its all-women participants. In retrospect she can only say everything went perfectly. The training fit well in with her personal situation, and studying on the side of her work did not feel too demanding.

"We came very suitably from different business sectors and different-sized companies, so there was no kind of competition between us. Quite the contrary, it was most important and rewarding to hear diverse views and experiences. Our group welded together very well, and we still try to get together a couple of times a year, slightly depending on who of us are able to make it."

Jaana Kokko has clear goals towards which she steers her company. She points out that you're your vision and objectives are in place, it is easy to pursue them. This, to her, is the best part of her job as managing director.

"The best thing is the freedom to define for yourself how to reach your targets. We have a really good management team, where I

can find support if I need it. We all pull together, because naturally all of us want what's best for the company."

Everyone works with a smile on their face when the budget is reached and the atmosphere at work is good. The message inevitably conveyed to the outside world is that things in this company are very well indeed.

Family and fitness as a counterbalance

In her spare time Jaana Kokko likes to exercise: she counterbalances her challenging job with solo Latin, golf and Pilates. Taking time for herself was not a matter of course – she had to learn to take it. However, the years have taught her how important it is to have your own time.

"Our family always tries to have our meals together when all of us are at home. I must admit it often requires lots of adjusting of schedules. My husband is also a managing director and he's a good support here. We both keep reminding each other of the need to take care of ourselves."

She finds additional support in her fellow fMBA students, who often wrestle with similar problems as she does. This support from her peers has helped to cope long after the training was over – not to mention all the knowledge she gained from participating in the fMBA programme.

Oulun Autokuljetus

- One of the biggest transportation and earthmoving service providers in Finland
- Established in Oulu in 1947
- 75 own employees; about 400 when associated transport providers and drivers are included
- www.oak.fi



Training brought to the front door

Marjo Jurmu and Tarja Mustonen took part in fMBA training in Kuusamo. They were especially pleased with the diversity of the programme. The two women work in very different and different-sized companies, but this never prevented their close sense of togetherness.

Marjo Jurmu had resolved that she had had enough of studying for the time being. Then, just when she had been nominated as the director of care services of the City of Kuusamo, she heard that a new fMBA programme was to start in her own hometown. The temptation was too big to resist. She had always felt that if she ever did any more studying it would be for MBA. She describes studying as more like a hobby to her – and you always find time for a good hobby.

“This was a chance of a lifetime. The fee was reasonable. The training was to take place in my hometown, so I could study alongside

my work. I've done a great deal of studying in my life, but never had the opportunity to study for a degree so close to home. This has been one of the top training programmes of my life. The best thing about it is being able to apply what I've learned straight into practice. This has truly been precision training.”

Tarja Mustonen, who runs the tourism company Stella Polaris in Kuusamo together with her husband, was in a similar situation as Marjo Jurmu.

“My husband first started studying for the MBA degree, and at that point we agreed that only one of us would study. But then the opportunity came to study for fMBA in Kuusamo. I went to the info and the training sounded just right for me. So I applied and was admitted. It was all a matter of coincidence”, says Tarja Mustonen.

fMBA gave her just what she had been looking for: leadership training and strategic business competence. She had a chance to plan and reflect over issues that you do not normally contemplate or note down in a small business.

Soul sisters in the group

According to Marjo Jurmu, the women who happened to be in the same fMBA group seemed like soul sisters from the very start. Participants came from various locations of northern Finland besides Kuusamo: from Salla, Posio, Taivalkoski and Oulu.

Marjo Jurmu describes herself as an easily approachable manager, who prefers to lead from the middle rather than from above.

“It's a little like Finland's Marshal Mannerheim, whose style was to lead from the front and the middle. A leader needs to listen with a sensitive ear and always be on the cutting edge. In this job you also have to react quickly and resolutely.”

Tarja Mustonen, for her part, has had to learn to be tough. A woman in a men's world, she has had to fight for her position among them. As a manager she says she is assertive but fair.

“I think men act differently than women. With men you don't need to read between the lines so much. But the toughness that I've learned – perhaps I ought to learn to back down a little... So I would be a bit easier to approach.”

Essential art of networking

fMBA training also offered the participants a much-desired opportunity for networking. This is especially important in a fairly small area like Kuusamo, where contacts have major significance. Tarja Mustonen praises the smooth cooperation between the area's entrepreneurs, which makes it possible to offer more comprehensive service packages to customers by purchasing services from other entrepreneurs.

“I must say the fMBA studies have given us an excellent possibility to grasp what management is all about. Our teachers and lecturers were top-class. There were no let-downs at all. The content of the programme was not something quickly whipped up: it was very in-depth. I had the feeling that our teaching staff had really put in a lot of effort for us”, Marjo Jurmu says with gratitude.

Marjo Jurmu's work as a care services director demands a command of large and complex issues as well as economic thinking. Her job description resembles that of a business manager. At the same time it requires good HRM skills. As a whole she describes her job as quite challenging.

Tarja Mustonen's management job involves a considerably smaller number of employees, but she gets off no easier in the high seasons. She says she needs to decide daily where to draw the line between work and leisure.

“Every now and then you obviously need to take a break. But you have to travel far enough so you don't have a chance to pop in at the office”, she laughs.

Kuusamon Perusturva

- Organizes services for health and coping with everyday life, both regionally and collaboratively
- Creates the conditions for independent living and home living for community members and families
- www.esitteemme.fi/kuusamon-perusturva

Stella Polaris

- Company which offers tourism services including different kinds of safaris and river rafting
- Unbroken tradition in tourism for 80 years, now in the fourth generation
- Established in Kuusamo in 2005
- www.stellapolaris.fi

Halva sorbet

175 g halva, vanilla-flavoured
 2 dl whipping cream
 3 eggs
 1 dl sugar
 200 g Turkish yoghurt
 ½ dl Cointreau liqueur
 1 tsp vanilla sugar

1. Whip the cream into a foam.
2. Whisk the eggs and sugar together until light and fluffy.
3. Grate the halva, mix together with the yoghurt and add to the cream.
4. Gently fold the mixture into the egg-sugar foam.
5. Flavour with the liqueur and vanilla sugar.
6. Rinse a pasty mold (about 1.8 l) with cold water. Pour the mixture into the mold.
7. Cover the mold with aluminium foil and freeze in the freezer for at least five hours, preferably overnight.
8. Remove the sorbet from the freezer into room temperature a while before serving. To serve, flip the mold over to a serving dish.
9. Garnish with lingonberry sauce.

Lingonberry sauce

200 g lingonberries
 1 dl water
 ½ dl icing sugar (to taste)

1. Puree the lingonberries in a blender.
2. Add the water and sugar.
3. Strain the sauce through a sieve.

*Feing on the cake:
 a pinch of the exotic*



fPro

fPro training is aimed to women with an immigrant background who wish to develop their business operations, are planning to set up an enterprise of their own, or are working in their family business.

During the training, participants receive practical knowledge on how to start an enterprise and on the various services and financing opportunities available to entrepreneurs. Particular attention is paid to acquainting the women with local business practices and culture. In open-door events they get to know other entrepreneurial-minded immigrant women and Finnish entrepreneurs. Training also includes company-specific consultations to find solutions to their business problems. The development of participants' entrepreneurial competence is further supported through mentoring.

The teaching language is Finnish. Interpretation in plain Finnish is available in the teaching situations to facilitate group discussion of difficult words and concepts. fPro is a one-year training project.

The 19 fPro participants came from 12 different countries of origin. Four new enterprises were established as a result of the project.

”

“Ice breaking” the obstacles to learning

Entrepreneurial daring and perseverance, positive service attitude, and professional pride – these are some of the things we Finns could well learn from our entrepreneurial-minded immigrant women.

The challenge of entrepreneurship in a foreign culture and a foreign language received special attention in the training. Besides improving the women's practical entrepreneurial skills, the focus was on strengthening their knowledge of Finnish business language and culture. I had the interesting role of a plain language interpreter and ‘ice breaker’ in the project.

My duty was to ensure that the immigrant women understood the teachers and vice versa. However, except at the very beginning, it turned out there was not much use for my ice breaking role. Participants approached the educators freely and openly, and were quite unafraid to ask them about unclear topics. Their ability to learn was reinforced by their cheerful and optimistic attitude, which gave the whole project a positive atmosphere.

The women who were already working as entrepreneurs described very frankly how they had coped with their challenges. Their stories boosted everyone's confidence in immigrant women's success as entrepreneurs. While not all participants started a business of their own, they took with them a diverse package of entrepreneurial knowledge which can be useful in whatever they decide to do.

Maarit Räisänen, Communication Educator, Oamk, School of Vocational Teacher Education



Converting photography into entrepreneurship

Moving to Finland from China, Monica Suopanki at first had a great deal to get used to. The shops did not sell familiar vegetables, and ethnic stores were nowhere to be found. But 10 years have passed in a flash. Today she has a photography studio of her own, which offers personalized portrait photography.

Monica Suopanki's story is most intriguing. First she established an IT store in China together with her brother. Within seven years they had expanded it into a company with 40 retail outlets. This proves that she surely knows how to do business. Then everything changed when she met the Finnish colleague of a friend's husband.

"He often travelled to my hometown on business, and persistently contacted me every time he was in town. When we really grew to know each other, I recognized what an honest and decent man he is. We fell in love, got married, and finally I moved to Finland."

With her previous background in business, Monica Suopanki began planning potential import and export opportunities. One idea was to start importing e-bikes, but the idea failed due to the harsh northern climate. In the Finnish winter, the bike's battery would go empty in no time.

She then signed in for a language course. Finnish seemed to her an exceedingly difficult language to learn. Soon all entrepreneurial plans had to be abandoned, as the family had a baby, and Monica Suopanki became a stay-at-home mother for three years.

"When our daughter went into daycare, I considered it extremely important to find something to do. I could not just stay home and do nothing."

From a hobby into a career

During her years at home, Monica Suopanki had spent a large amount of time with photography, a hobby from her youth, and taken innumerable pictures of the baby. This spurred the idea to train as a photographer. Her knowledge of Finnish was still so limited that she thought it better to study in China. This way she was sure to learn the terminology and technique of photography properly. After half a year's studies she made up her mind to seek entrepreneurial training in Finland. A friend from her language course told her about fPro training, and so Monica Suopanki joined the project.

"We had all possible information available to us at fPro. It was great. That's where I also heard about apprenticeship training. I managed to get an apprenticeship in a photography studio. I received a lot of advice and knowledge there."

Now that she had the necessary competence, she had to decide how to convert it into work and earnings. The family had bought a single-family house with a garage, and so they renovated it into a studio. This enabled the aspiring entrepreneur to save on the high rents in downtown Oulu and also be close by when the daughter got home from school. It was easy to reach the studio by bus or by car, and parking was free of charge.

A gradual take-off

Monica Suopanki established her photography studio Let's Foto in the autumn, and it was fully operational around Christmas and New Year. But now she knows that the turn of the year is certainly not the best time for a photo business in Finland.

"I kept wondering why the phone didn't ring. I had distributed a huge amount of brochures and bought advertising space in the local paper. I was perplexed: what on earth was the reason for the silence? Finally a friend told me that Finns use up all their money at Christmas, and nobody has any more money to spend on anything early in the year."

She learned another similar lesson in the summer: she found she had booked a trip to China in the midst of the busiest season for wedding photography. From then on, the trips to China would be made after the turn of the year to celebrate Chinese New Year.

Let's Foto

- Photography studio which offers a new kind of portrait photography, including a wide variety of photography props
- Established in Oulu in 2011
- Make-up services for photography also available
- www.letsfoto.fi



Twenty years of Asian flavours

Oulu seemed an extremely cold and dark place to Thi Thu Cuc Vo when she first arrived in Finland. Over the years she has learned that it does get warm eventually. Ngan Pham found it only natural to follow in her mother's footsteps and take up the management of the family business in Oulu. Both women now know what it takes to be an entrepreneur in Finland.

It is very hard to compare Vietnam today with what the country was like in the 1980s. The situation at that time made the young Thi Thu Cuc Vo want to leave the country. After a couple of twists and turns, she ended up in Oulu in mid-winter of 1989. It was pitch-dark and freezing cold. She found it impossible to believe there was a country where it could be this cold day in, day out. At this stage Thi Thu Cuc Vo was not even aware that the cold would last more than half the year.

She first took her little daughter to a daycare centre and signed up for a Finnish-language course. She will forever remember standing at the bus stop in the cold, dark mornings. She worked hard in many different companies, but the job was seldom long-term due to the difficult times. At one point she even took a job in Turku, over 500 km away, until she decided to return to Oulu and set up a restaurant of her own.

"When I was leaving Turku, one of my colleagues warned me against leaving: 'for goodness sake, don't go, a recession is coming, this is really not the time to start a company'. But I didn't listen and established my own restaurant in Oulu."

Vitality from fresh ideas

Ngan Pham and Thi Thu Cuc Vo took part in fPro training together. Ngan Pham thanks the training for its diversity and wide amount of knowledge. She is an entrepreneur in the second generation, as her mother started the restaurant Little Dragon in downtown Oulu in 1994. Ten years later, responsibility for the business was handed down from mother to daughter.

"I get to learn new things all the time. Of course, the job is demanding as well, because I didn't have any entrepreneurial education beforehand. But I've seen that with time you also learn a lot about entrepreneurship in actual practice. Another important thing is to know people who are able to help", says Ngan Pham.

Although a family business has its good and bad points, the good prevail, according to Ngan Pham. Schedules, for instance, can be easily flexed as needed.

Both women agree that good employees are the lifeline of any enterprise, but admit that finding them is not always simple.

"I learned a huge amount of new things in the training. The teachers were great. You always need fresh new ideas in an enterprise, and I do, too", remarks Thi Thu Cuc Vo.

Customers give energy

Thi Thu Cuc Vo sold her first restaurant to a friend in the late 1990s and took a few months off from entrepreneurship. She travelled to her home country for a holiday and pondered over what she wanted to do. Finally she decided to start another restaurant, this time one serving Thai food. And so Pikku-Thai was established.



Responsibility for the restaurant Little Dragon was passed from mother to daughter. Regular customers fill the restaurant especially at lunch time.

“We have lots of regulars who don’t even live in Oulu but come to visit us each time they are in town. They come from all over the world, from Germany to the USA. As a matter of fact, I’ve been asked by my customers to open another restaurant in Helsinki”, she says.

Regular customers are also the backbone of Ngan Pham’s restaurant. Its buffet lunch is particularly popular. The Pham family has another restaurant in Oulu as well, which used to be a take-away place but was changed into a full-fledged restaurant at the recommendation of its customers.

“Our customers suggested this would make a good lunch place, so we converted it into a lunch and à la carte restaurant. We have not regretted the decision”, Ngan Pham remarks.

Both women say that the best part of their job is customer service, which ensures that no two days are alike. Neither one of the women has made any conclusive plans for the future, but development and growth of their businesses are by no means ruled out as alternatives.

Pikku Thai

- Vietnamese-Thai restaurant, which serves lunches and à la carte menus
- Established in Oulu in 2001
- www.facebook.com/pages/Restaurant-Pikku-Thai

Little Dragon

- Chinese lunch and à la carte restaurant with two locations in Oulu: Joutsensilta and Kaijonharju
- Established in Oulu in 1994
- Family business, where management responsibility was handed down from mother to daughter
- www.littledragon.fi

Examples of research and development studies

fForum has generated a large variety of supportive research in collaboration between the University of Jyväskylä, School of Business and Economics, and Oamk. The Hanken School of Economics has also participated in this research. The contribution of the fMBA participants’ development studies has helped to enhance practical working life and business activities in many different ways.

MANAGEMENT COMPETENCE AND CAREER ADVANTAGES

A specific study was conducted in connection with the fMBA programme to investigate its effect on the careers and managerial competence of the participants (Lämsä & Savela 2010). Another purpose was to see how participants felt about training intended exclusively for women. Twenty women who had completed the programme were interviewed 1.5 years after the training.

Results indicated that slightly less than half of the participants had been doubtful or had conflicting feelings about all-women training before the start of the programme. Their attitude grew distinctly more favourable in the course of fMBA training. This finding supports the claim of previous studies that attitudes tend to change in a more positive direction after personal involvement in the issue at hand. Discussions on themes related to women’s leadership

held during the training also had an influence on this change in attitudes.

Participants felt that the career development goals they had set prior to the fMBA programme had been clearly exceeded thanks to the training. Of the 20 interviewees, 17 told about a change in their career and job, and 16 of them associated the change with fMBA training. Changes either referred to more demanding duties at the previous organizational level or to career advancement.

Also the development of management competence considerably exceeded the initial goals of the fMBA women. All participants said they had progressed in clarifying their managerial identity and self-understanding as well as increasing their self-reliance and confidence. As for leadership competence, they particularly felt that their assertiveness and delegation skills had improved. They had experienced similar improvement in strategic management, control of the whole business process, and conceptual knowledge of management. These were assessed to have increased their managerial credibility and plausibility.

From a practical viewpoint, the study suggests that a diverse women's group is a richer social and mental resource in management training than a group with members from a single field of business or from the same organization. Also the fact that participants included entrepreneurs as well as women in employment appears to have brought diversity into the programme. The finding further implies that women's versatile and in-depth competence in management can indeed be promoted through a diverse, professionally supervised group of participants. It is also important that the companies represented by the participants are not too close competitors.

SOCIAL SUPPORT IS INVALUABLE TO WOMEN MANAGERS

KA study by Kortelainen (2011) explored the meanings of social support to the fMBA participants and examined how they experienced it during the training.

The study showed that managerial training for women offers them a welcome arena for open and honest exchange of ideas and feelings related to female leadership, and a free atmosphere to receive and give social support. Their background as women managers gave them a common language to discuss leadership, and created understanding and mutual empathy between them. On the other hand, it provided a framework to deal with various difficult questions related to management which they might not have a chance to raise in their day-to-day working life, for instance, due to a lack of networks.

One of the main meanings of social support to the participants had to do with their self-image as managers and the demands they set on themselves. Hearing about the experiences and problems of other female managers made them less hard on themselves and allowed them to realize that they often demanded too much of themselves as managers. The women also described how their self-esteem had increased as a result of discussions with other female managers.

This type of social support among fMBA participants can be regarded as a mental resource which the women exchanged through their interaction to encourage each other forward in their careers and their personal lives. Social support is a product of mutual care and togetherness. A feeling of belonging to the group may in itself be a form of social support.

At its best, social support gives a sense that you have no need to face your problems alone, that there is always someone to share them with. This is priceless knowledge particularly for a woman manager, who is easily left outside the male networks of business life and often has to tackle her difficulties on her own.



Applying new knowledge to practice

I feel privileged to have acted as a supervisor for the development studies of fMBA students. They have allowed me to get a glimpse of the participants' experiences and the challenges they as entrepreneurs have to face in practical working life. To me, supervising such studies is the spice of a teaching job.

Study supervision offers an excellent opportunity to monitor the functionality of new trends and research results in different organizations. It also adds to my own understanding of the current practices and challenges of business organizations. But naturally, the main emphasis is always on the participants' own learning.

The subjects of the participants' development studies have ranged from the improvement of work practices of a family business board to the development of the service path or customer responsibility system of an enterprise. I have been pleased to see how fearlessly these women tackle the various real and topical questions that need to be addressed in their own organizations. This is proof of both their will and ability to apply what they have learned into their own practical working life.

Satu Nätti, Docent, University of Oulu, Oulu Business School

Toward the future

In its programme period 2014–2020, the European Social Fund (ESF) gives major importance to sustainable development and social responsibility in business. Other future challenges include promoting the internalization of enterprises and particularly the need to support women-owned growth companies, which are still quite rare today.

A project called Going for Growth has done valuable work in Ireland to further the growth of women's enterprises. An exchange of good practices and mutual learning between fForum and the Irish project was initiated in 2011 in Budapest in connection with the European Enterprise Awards competition. The Irish actors were interested in the fForum training palette and particularly in launching a similar fMBA programme in Ireland. The main objective of this cooperation is to combine the valuable experiences and knowledge gained in the two projects.

Presently the fForum project is developing a method of responsible leadership for the assessment of the superior-subordinate

relationship. Besides researchers associated with fForum, also the members of the Kuusamo fMBA group have been actively involved in this development work. The intention is to evolve the pilot version into a computer-based version for use as an evaluation tool in leadership development programmes. The method can then be expanded onto the group or organization level in the future.

The fForum training palette and its individual training modules have sparked international as well as domestic interest. Oamk is currently investigating the potential of the projects for education export or as international training projects. At the national level, interest in project cooperation and development of the training modules has emerged in two regions, Jyväskylä and Tampere. The new ESF programme period offers good prospects for intensified collaboration at all levels.

From the very start, the motto of fForum has been: "The future lies in competence." We continue to have a strong belief in this principle.



Relaxing after a day of lectures gives a chance to learn new things: golf, river rafting, skiing techniques, wine knowledge – and there is always an expert to be found within the group.

fForum-generated publications, study theses and presentations

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Development of female entrepreneurship and leadership is today a major subject of discussion worldwide. The Oulu University of Applied Sciences is among the leading pioneers in the promotion of this important issue. Active development and research at the University has produced fForum, a successful training palette for the enhancement of female entrepreneurship and women's management competence.

Ladies' Business Menu tells the story of fForum. At centre stage are the women who have participated in fForum training. This book is intended for all who are interested in female entrepreneurship and leadership.

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