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Freedom, responsibility, power: A phenomenographic study on self-directedness

Self-directedness is interpreted in multiple ways in the Finnish world of work. Different interpretations of the same term can create confusion, for example, if a superior uses a term in a different way from a follower or a job candidate. The aim of this research was to discover and describe the scope of meanings attached to the concept of self-directedness in the context of Finnish expert work. The phenomenographic method was used to produce meaning categories of self-directedness. The categories are in logical order and do not overlap. The data consist of 50 interviewees' definitions of self-directedness. Two of the resulting meaning categories relate to self-directedness as an individual worker-level phenomenon. The first category describes self-directedness as autonomy, while the second describes it as decision-making power delegated by the manager. The third category describes self-directedness as a team phenomenon, whereas the final category emphasises self-directedness as co-directedness at the organisational level. In this study, the critical variation between meaning categories was based on different employee and leadership competences. The final categorisation of meanings attached to self-directedness offers opportunities for a shared understanding of what kind of behaviour and competences are required by employees and superiors in self-directed work.