

The Shortcut Lab opens in the largest startup hub in the Nordics, bringing growth opportunities to everyone

The Shortcut is the non-profit sister organisation of Slush, the most prominent startup conference in Europe and Asia. Its aim is to tap into the business potential of immigrants, build diversity in the tech community and test new models of societal impact. In less than a year the organisation has already touched the lives of more than a thousand people. Now The Shortcut is expanding its operations and opening a community space and training centre in Maria 0-1, the biggest startup hub in the Nordics.

As the refugee crisis in Europe unfolded at the end of 2015, a small group of entrepreneurs, investors and others active in the Finnish startup and tech community decided to focus on the untapped growth potential that the newcomers offered. As a result, The Shortcut, a pre-incubator and a soft landing to the startup world was created. Its mission is to inspire and empower as many people as possible, from as many different backgrounds as possible, to create high growth companies or to work for them. The Shortcut's customer base quickly expanded from asylum seekers to include international talents, foreign students and second generation immigrants residing in Finland. Native Finns too were soon attracted by the energetic community and its high quality events and trainings.

The Shortcut offers a welcoming, inclusive set of services which encourages people from different walks of life to consider tech entrepreneurship as a way of (re)building their lives, and gives them practical tools to do it. Everyone is welcome to join the free-of-charge activities, which are held in English. The only requirements are the right attitude and an interest in technology and entrepreneurship.

“We arrange a lot of events, such as the three-week long [School of Startups](#), a series of workshops and boot camps which provides participants with the necessary skills and lets them test where their journey in the startup world could begin. Everything is run pro bono by startup doers, entrepreneurs, investors and other industry experts. In addition, we run peer-learning clubs, arrange different events and provide mentoring”, says Anne Badan, co-founder and CEO of The Shortcut.

The Shortcut has grown so rapidly and attracted so much industry goodwill mainly thanks to its roots in the startup ecosystem, where decision-makers understand what is needed for success. "I'm really glad to see the startup community in Europe grow and become more diverse. The Shortcut is an important initiative in driving through this change in Finland," says Miki Kuusi, co-founder & CEO at Wolt and the former CEO of Slush.

Value to people, value to business

Technology is an area particularly suitable for people who are not well-rooted in local society, due to its international character, cross-cultural markets and mobility of applications. Tech startups have a high multiplier effect in terms of revenues and employment, and there is growing demand from Finnish technology companies for new talent. Nevertheless, the sector is still heavily dominated by native Finns. This is something The Shortcut wants to change.

“The more diverse a startup ecosystem is, the better companies it will develop. If you wish to be competitive on a global market, you need to embrace diversity. One cannot pretend to run a global company if all your people are similar in every way. In the US, over 40% of major companies such as Apple, eBay and Google were founded by a first or second generation immigrant”, Badan says. “We don't see why that couldn't be the case in Finland too. Tech startups are a good way, irrespective of your origins or

language skills, to use your abilities to their full potential without having to deal with the discrimination you may face as you try to integrate. It is a way to develop your potential faster and better, and at the same time you can contribute to the economic development and societal growth of Finland.”

This autumn The Shortcut offers even better odds for success in the field. The new community space, The Shortcut Lab, will open on September 4 in Maria 0-1, the biggest startup hub in the Nordics, and in the middle of the active, vibrant startup scene. The opening is accompanied by a week-long BYOB (BeYourOwnBoss) bootcamp, powered by The Shortcut’s South African partner Rlabs. The programme will target young people still searching for their way in life, young asylum seekers/refugees, and international students who are new to tech and entrepreneurship, wishing for inspiration and learning the ABCs of where to start their lives in tech or the startup world.

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The Shortcut in a nutshell:

- Community organisation offering a welcoming, inclusive set of services which encourages people from different walks of life to consider tech entrepreneurship as a way of (re)building their lives, and gives them practical tools to do it.
- Founded in spring 2016
- Original co-founders Anne Badan, business angel of the year 2015 Moaffak Ahmed and Annukka Klinge
- Fully owned by The Startup Foundation, non-profit sister company to largest startup conference in northern Europe, Slush and the incubator Startup Sauna
- Runs on volunteering and donations. Funders include private individuals & startup investors, Suomi100, Entrepreneur Foundation of Finland, Kone Centennial Foundation and Technology Industries of Finland Centennial Foundation.
- In its first year of activities, The Shortcut ran over 40 events with nearly 700 participants
- More than 140 lecturers, trainers, spokespersons and organisers gave their time pro bono
- Active team of 30 people representing 12+ different nationalities
- Supporters and partners include: Supercell, PwC, Microsoft, Aalto University, Reaktor Ventures and Smartly.io
- Several influential people from the startup world endorse The Shortcut, including Kristo Ovaska, founder of the Finnish startup movement and Smartly.io, the fastest growing B2B software company in Europe, and Marianne Vikkula, CEO of Slush, Europe's leading startup conference.
- Dr. Jukka-Pekka Heikkilä’s team at Aalto University School of Business, Entrepreneurship Division is researching the way the ecosystem created by The Shortcut is evolving.
- International collaborations are being developed with partners in South Africa, and, through the ICC Diversity Connector, in Germany and France.
- The long-term goal is to expand the model abroad.
- Gets a new home on September 4th when the Community space and Training Centre, The Shortcut Lab, opens in startup hub Maria 0-1.