Dialogue on the use of digitalisation in workplaces and industries

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In Finland, digital tools are already in use in all professions and are developing rapidly. The digital services offered are also growing rapidly. However, the biggest benefits of digitalisation usually come only when practices and service processes are renewed. Dialogue between management and staff is needed in the workplace.

Successful use of digitalisation will enable significant improvements in productivity, public services, work communities and well-being at work.

> **The common view of the labour market organisations is that there is a need for more dialogue on digitalisation in all workplaces and in all industries.**

Dialogue in workplaces and industries is the most appropriate way to implement the European framework agreement on digitalisation for employers and employees in Finland.[i] To this end, this discussion initiative has collected discussion topics, examples and questions that we hope will encourage discussions that we find useful, and further experimentation and co-development. Through good dialogue, the successful use of new technologies and the development of perceived better practices will be accelerated.

New technologies enable different new ways of working, but it is up to us which ones we choose and whether we succeed in exploiting them: Will the work we do and the services we provide be better because of it or not?

EXAMPLE

Appreciation and dialogue in the company

– When I started as managing director, the first thing I did was to set aside three hours to talk to each of our employees. I asked what each of them would do if they were in my position and mostly I listened. I think it shows appreciation to involve people in doing something new, rather than just thinking things through on your own or in the management team.

This is how the managing director of a successful company described his own way of engaging in dialogue with his company's staff. Similar stories of the importance of dialogue can be found in the background of many successful companies, organisations and their units.

DIALOGUE IN THE INDUSTRY:

The future of work in the financial sector has been examined together since 2014

The Prosperous Financial Sector is a joint industry initiative between employers and employees in the financial sector, which has organised joint seminars and workshops with companies on digitalisation and the future of work. They were also attended by bank customers and students in the industry. The project has received a lot of positive attention and has served as a model for similar sectoral dialogues and joint development projects between labour market partners. The financial sector is one of the pioneers of digitalisation in Finland. The results of the project include

- Mapping the impact of digitalisation in the financial sector (2015).

- Bringing together best practices in the industry (2016).

- A study on teleworking and a workbook for workplaces to improve productivity and wellbeing at work (2017).

- Anticipating future skills needs together with the institutions that train people in the sector at the Finance Finland (2018).

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Employers' organisations were represented in the project by the Finance Finland Association and Service Sector Employers Palta. All the sector's trade union confederations have been involved: Trade union Unio (formerly trade union Nousu ry), Trade Union Pro ry, Union of Insurance Employees VvL ry and The Federation of Professional and Managerial Staff YTN. [ii]

How to succeed in dialogue in your own work community, organization and industry?

Digitalisation – for example digital tools, artificial intelligence or different working platforms – now affects almost all work communities and professions. The new ways of serving customers, working with others or, for example, working from multiple locations, made possible by digitalisation, are changing the way we work, which makes dialogue interesting.

The dialogue is facilitated by the fact that it is given time and space. For example, it could be a series of conversations in the workplace. Ongoing informal discussion is also useful. Discussions can be prepared with thematic introductions and other content.

In the following chapters, four themes for discussion and related perspectives and questions are proposed:

1. **Digitalisation for people**
2. **Building digital skills**
3. **Work from anywhere, anytime**
4. **When AI enters the workplace**
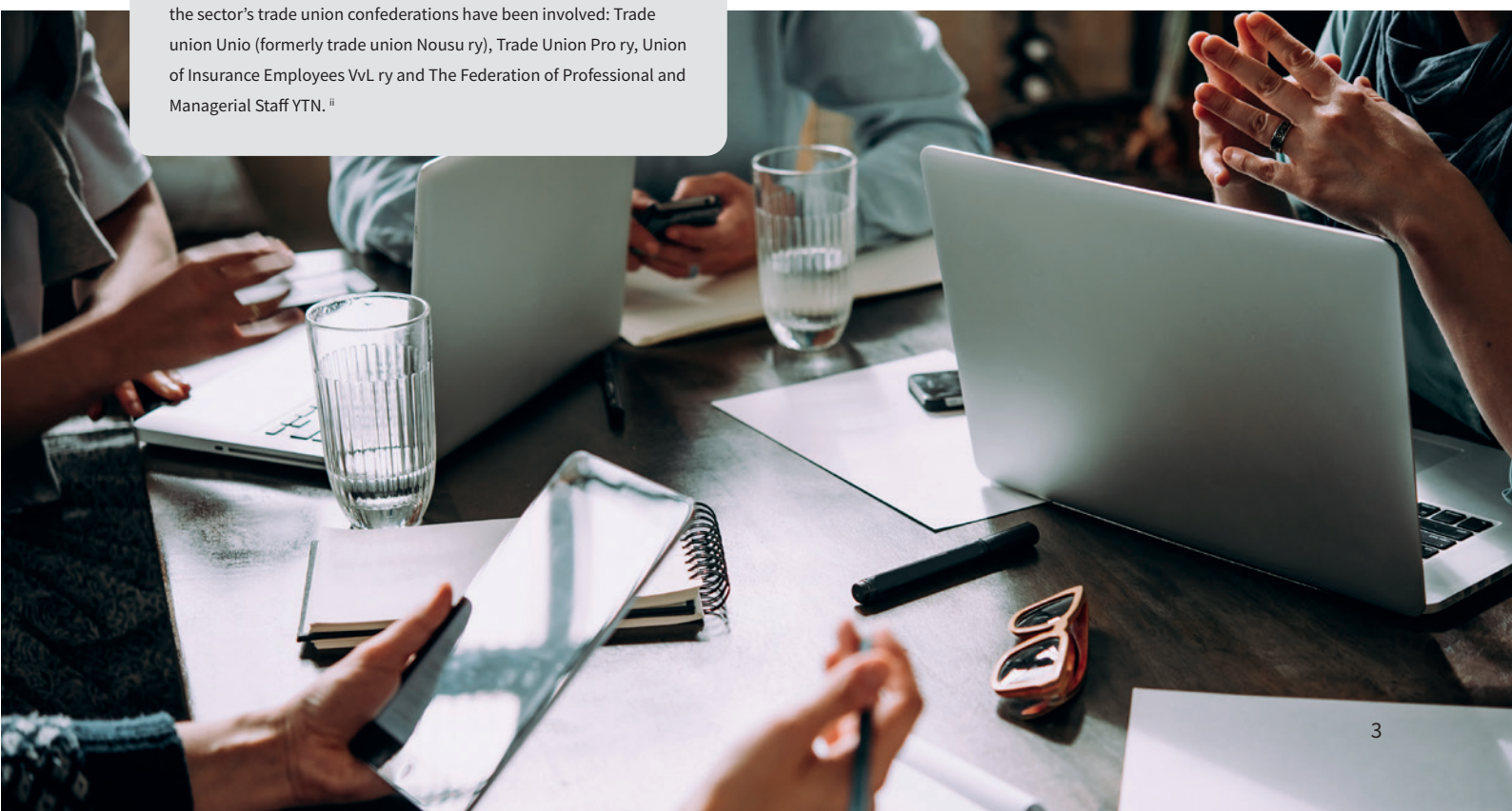
Digitalisation for people

Perhaps the most significant impact of digitalisation on working life has been that it accelerates change in work and working practices. However, it happens differently in different industries and professions. The use of digitalisation and other new technologies in working life is also changing the skills needed for work in all industries.

At the same time, this means that over the coming years and decades, some of the old tasks will disappear or be taken over in other ways. Meanwhile, however, new tasks, sets of tasks and professions are emerging.

For example, the car factory in Uusikaupunki has the largest number of industrial robots in use in Finland. However, in the 2010s, Valmet Automotive Oy was one of the manufacturing companies that has increased its workforce the most.

When the heaviest, most dangerous and monotonous jobs are outsourced to machines, there is more room for other types of work. It is also an encouraging idea that artificial intelligence is gradually being acquired to support work, as support intelligence for various tasks. The final report of the AI programme[iii] put it like this: "Artificial intelligence is support intelligence, and often the combination of the best performance of machines and humans."

It is likely that the effects of digitalisation will be best seen in the coming years in the form of better services, smoother processes and improved usability of software and hardware.

The most significant new issue

In monitoring the change in work in the municipal sector,[iv] hospital management and staff were asked what they considered to be the most significant new issues in the transformation of work and technology. In response, we received the following Top 5 list:

1. A culture of cooperation as a guarantee of good care

2. Smooth, disease-specific care pathways, and a holistic approach to the patient

3. Doctors, nursing and other staff work together to think about how to implement the changes and how the client will benefit most from them

4. Systematic accumulation and sharing of expertise

5. AI will help monitor early symptoms, diagnose diseases, advise on and encourage healthy lifestyles.

Similar responses were also found in 15 other occupations. Despite the fact that new technology and medicine, for example, are advancing rapidly, the most significant new issues were often related to the culture of collaboration and how to deal with other people such as customers, partners and colleagues. During the corona period, remote communication and the associated change in culture and mindset also emerged in the follow-up.

EXAMPLE

Digitalisation for people

HealthVillage.fi is an online service for specialist care provided by the best experts in university hospitals together with patients, which is always open regardless of the place of residence, offering information and support to citizens and tools for professionals. The online service has millions of users a year. Already in 2017, the one million user mark was passed.

HealthVillage (Terveyskylä) has also changed the way we work: In the online service, the treatment paths have been described and implemented in such a way that the patient always has the support of an expert and the information needed at any given time. In 2021, the Health Village had 32 houses, including a children's house, a mental health house and a pain management house.

The views of the labour market organisations

Technology in itself is not good or bad, but people determine and appraise how technology is used.

Digitalisation is used for people: to deliver value to customers, to solve difficult problems for the industry and for humanity as a whole, and to help people do and improve their work.

While digitalisation is changing the way we work together and the content of our work, technology will continue to be used by people. It is people, alone and together, who make the most significant changes, not technology per se.

Digitalisation and future work should be considered and developed together. Because changes in operating methods, operating culture and required skills do not happen overnight, it is important to get started as soon as possible.

Questions to stimulate discussion

1. How has digitalisation changed your industry and customer behaviour?

2. What would your management and staff highlight as the most significant new things in the transformation of work and technology in recent years?

3. What are the expectations of management, staff, customers and partners for the development of your operations and services or products?

4. What kind of discussion do you have about the future of work and where your company or organisation is going?

5. What are the most interesting aspects of using new technologies for your own work and your organisation at the moment?

6. Which tasks would you prefer to leave to machines? What tasks would you use the time freed up from this to do?

A TIP:

DIGITAL TRAINING CARDS

The digital training cards published by the Ministry of Finance in 2021 can be found at **Valtiolla.fi/digiosaaminen**. They can help work communities and organisations to engage in a dialogue on digitalisation and build the digital capability of the organisation. Although the cards are aimed specifically at senior and middle management in public administrations, they can also be used to support and assist the debate in other industries.
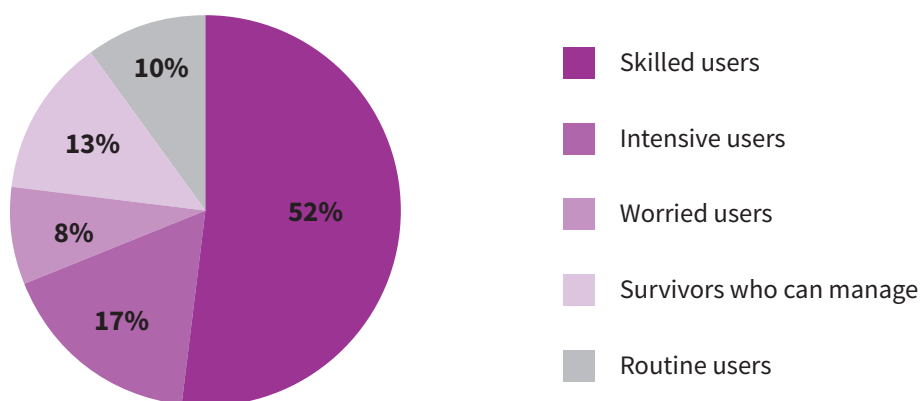
Accumulation of digital age skills

When some jobs moved to teleworking with only a few days' notice during the coronavirus crisis, not everyone was yet a master of remote working. Even then, the key to success was the support of colleagues and the work community for their members, and the sharing of their own expertise. Finland was already well advanced in the use of digital tools even before the corona time (Picture 1).

Workplaces should build up digital age skills in a systematic way. By discussing this among the entire work community, it is possible to strengthen community spirit and encourage the development of the necessary skills in the coming years. It is advisable to have regular discussions about the direction in which we are heading, and what kind of skills will be needed.

It has been estimated that for those already in working life, most learning – around 70% – takes place on the job, by taking on challenges and responsibilities, 20% by getting feedback from others, sharing experiences with them or following the work of experienced colleagues, and 10% through formal training such as courses, coaching or seminars.

Picture 1. Different user groups of digital tools in Finnish working life[v]

- Skilled users — 52%
- Intensive users — 17%
- Worried users — 8%
- Survivors who can manage — 13%
- Routine users — 10%

EXAMPLE

A strategic approach to skills development at ABB

At ABB, part of business development has been to identify talent and develop skills and capabilities. Knowledge management has been integrated into strategic planning. The company has built a model that combines innovation, new services development and skills development, which can be applied to new business areas regardless of their size or complexity.

– Not everyone needs to know everything, but it is important that the work community and its network of partners build up the skills needed for the digital age and the future.

Continuous, lifelong learning is vital. Even a good business idea won't work if you can't find the right people to make it happen. Continuous competence development, "upskilling" and "reskilling" are a key part of strategic business development at ABB.

The views of the labour market organisations

Competence is Finland's strength. An increasing proportion of learning will continue to take place through work and doing new things. This is why it is important that both management and employees are committed to developing their own skills.

It is advisable for management and staff to look together at what skills will be needed in the future, how they will be acquired and how study and learning will be integrated into everyday work.

What is important is that more and more workplaces are places where employees and the whole work community can learn new things. The best way to do this is to develop activities, services and products in the workplace, and to involve everyone: staff, supervisors and management. Identifying and responding to the competence needs is essential for all development.

It is also necessary to look at future work and the skills needed in the industry on a sectoral basis, together with representatives of the workplace.

Questions to stimulate discussion

1. Do you integrate knowledge and learning into your company or organisation's strategy, management and business development?

2. Did you think together about what kind of skills are needed in the future?

3. Are there suitable digitalisation-related projects, programmes, networks or training courses available to build up the necessary skills?

4. How could your company or organisation make better use of and collaborate with educational institutions?

5. What kind of digital skills should every member of your work community have? (e.g. to master the software, data security and communication etiquette needed at work)

6. What kind of digital skills do your own tasks require?

7. In what matters is it enough that only some members of your work community have digital skills?

8. How could the development of digital skills be integrated into everyday work?

A TIP:

SKILL CARDS FOR SPECIFIC OCCUPATIONS FROM THE SKILLS ANTICIPATION FORUM[VI]

The skill cards present experts' assessments of the most relevant future skills, work-life skills and digital skills in dozens of different professions.

Work from anywhere, anytime

The changes brought about by digitalisation are challenging working life practices. The corona time has contributed to accelerating the change.

In the first corona year 2020, almost half of Finnish employees worked partly or fully remotely, which is probably a European record. When Statistics Finland surveyed the impact of the corona crisis in spring 2021, 70% of those who worked remotely said they wished they could work at least half of their working hours remotely even after the pandemic. In the August 2021 Yrittäjä Gallup opinion poll[vii], one in three companies also planned to permanently increase their multi-site working.

Once the teleworking recommendations expire, workplaces will be able to adopt a wide range of solutions combining remote and local working. Many of them require more detailed rules of the game to be agreed within work communities or units. Whereas it used to be agreed when you could work remotely, nowadays it may also be necessary to agree when to meet at the workplace.

Boundaries and coordination of work and leisure time also need to be addressed in the digital age and when working remotely, hybrid or from multiple locations. There are also limits to working time when the work is done regardless of location. It is important to preserve the right of workers to take a break from work and have time off in the future.

In the digital age, workplaces need to have a common discussion about the culture they want to create and the practices and rules that go with it. It's not just about data security and contacting others, but more broadly about building a sense of community and keeping workloads under control.

> **Task clutter refers to messages that flood in through various channels, which demand action from the recipient and easily fill even small free moments at work. This is also a phenomenon typical of the digital age.**

EXAMPLE

Hybrid work aims to combine remote and on-site work in a natural way

A group of Finnish digital pioneer companies drew up a checklist for workplaces during the corona[viii] crisis for hybrid work:

1. Consider and define the principles of hybrid work, including:
   - roles and responsibilities
   - teleworking times and places
   - meeting practices and accessibility
   - security, including cybersecurity
   - wellbeing
2. Involve teams and employees in the development process.
3. Draw up concrete checklists.
4. Train managers to lead hybrid work.
5. Be prepared to learn from experience and adapt to changing situations.
6. Remember to share information and maintain dialogue.

The views of the labour market organisations

Digital tools now allow you to do expert and office work regardless of time and place. The Working Hours Act, the Co-operation Act and health and safety regulations set limits for teleworking to ensure that work does not extend beyond the norm.

It is necessary to respect the employee's rest and leisure time.

Managers, supervisors and employees have effective ways of dealing with their own or a member of the work community's excessive workload. In teleworking, it is important to acquire the skills to manage yourself and your work.

It is a good idea to discuss the teleworking guidelines to be followed together, but also the procedures to be followed in case teleworking does not go well.

When working remotely, particular attention must be paid to work-life balance and telework management.

Questions to stimulate discussion

1. How and for what purpose should you use the different communication channels, and how do you reduce the message overload and task overload?

2. How do you improve the work-life balance?

3. Is it possible for you to combine local and teleworking when the workload allows?

4. What is the experience of teleworking or hybrid working in the organisation among supervisors and staff?

5. If there is a lot of teleworking in the work community, how is the welcome of a new employee, various meetings and joint development handled?

6. How can flexible working and teleworking be used to ensure that employees are able to cope and keep to their working hours?

Boundaries and coordination of work and leisure time also need to be addressed in the digital age.

When AI enters the workplace

Artificial intelligence, and in particular what we call machine learning, could have a major impact on the work of the future. Today, most organisations are still in the early stages of exploiting them and creating better work processes and new business models. This is a good opportunity to reflect and discuss how machine learning or other AI can best be used in your organisation and how it can deliver economic results, improve services and support work.

The use of AI is an opportunity to increase the productivity of the organisation and at the same time the wellbeing of the work community, and to make a smart division of labour between employees, machines and different parts of the organisation. At the same time, we need to ensure that AI applications do not undermine but support people's work and taking responsibility for their actions. AI and robots also bring new data protection and security issues that need to be addressed from the start.

According to the EU Commission's guidelines, there are three factors that identify trustworthy AI: [ix]

- it must be legal, fair, safe and secure,

- it must operate ethically and ensure compliance with ethical principles and values,

- it must be both technically and socially reliable and not cause unintended harm. Social trustworthiness means, for example, that the AI does not act in a discriminatory or unfair way, and that people know they are dealing with AI.

EXAMPLE

The OP Group was surprised by the number of operational benefits of AI

The OP Group has been one of Finland's pioneers in the use of artificial intelligence in the workplace. In 2017, one of the drivers of development was supporting the work of people working in customer service. For example, the development of chatbots and digital advisors has transformed customer service in recent years, so that simple and frequently asked customer questions are answered by artificial intelligence instead of humans.

Chatbots are currently being developed by AI teachers trained in 2018 by customer service professionals. They do most of the small-scale development work for chatbots in production. Over the past three years, studying AI in other jobs has also been very popular at OP. The Introduction to AI e-learning training is among the most popular voluntary training in the group. In addition, more than 1,000 OP employees have been trained in AI through working day-long classroom training sessions.

The views of the labour market organisations

With the introduction of new technologies and digital services that enable the movement and use of data, particular attention must be paid to ensuring digital security at all stages.

The reliability of AI (the three principles mentioned earlier, such as ethics, legality and security) needs to be ensured at the procurement planning stage, and should be monitored as data accumulates in the system.

Control systems created through digitalisation and artificial intelligence enable improvements in occupational safety, wellbeing, productivity and customer service quality. They also allow issues that should be avoided such as advanced control, intrusive monitoring and misuse of personal data. The positive and negative potential of AI should be recognised in the workplace.

The rules on the processing of personal data, based on the data protection regulation, limit potential risks and guarantee the integrity of our operations.

When using AI to support decision-making in areas such as recruitment, selection or human resource management, care must be taken to ensure that the algorithm does not lead to a discriminatory outcome.

Questions to stimulate discussion

1. What is the best way to ensure data protection and security in your organisation?

2. What does everyone need to know about data protection and security? How will the relevant skills be ensured?

3. How do you get started or move forward in the acquisition and use of AI/machine learning/robots?

4. How do you ensure the ethical and fair operation and technical reliability of the AI to be acquired?

5. What personal data about staff will be collected through digital tools? What is the data used for? How and for how long will the data be stored?

6. How is confidential information concerning customers protected?

7. Where can you find information on good practices, projects, networks or similar related to AI or machine learning that you could learn from or participate in?

The use of AI is an opportunity to increase the productivity of the organisation and at the same time the wellbeing of the work community.

SOURCES

[i] European Social Partners Framework Agreement on digitalisation (2020)

[ii] Prosperous Finance Finland Project Pages.

[iii] Ministry of Employment and the Economy (2019). Final report of the AI programme

[iv] Results of the monitoring of the change in the joint work of the labour market partners in the municipal sector:

[v] Seppo Tuomivaara and Tuoma Alasoini (2020). Digital gaps and different users of digital tools in Finnish working life. The Finnish Institute of Occupational Health.

[vi] Osaamisen ennakointifoorumin ammattialakortit

[vii] Elokuun 2021 Yrittäjägallup

[viii] Digitalised Work Life and Cybersecurity publication 2021.

[ix] European Commission (2019). Ethical guidelines for trustworthy AI.

[x] Olli Koski and Kai Husso (eds.). (2018) Working in the age of AI: four perspectives on the economy, employment, skills and ethics. Publications of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment 19/2018.

GLOSSARY

Digitalisation is the modernisation of activities using information and technology, such as digital tools, artificial intelligence and different working platforms. In practice, it is also about changing organisational culture and learning.

Artificial intelligence refers to the ability of a machine to use skills traditionally associated with human intelligence, such as reasoning, learning, planning or creating. Artificial intelligence allows technical systems to perceive their environment, process their observations and solve problems to achieve a specific goal.

Machine learning is a rapidly evolving subset of artificial intelligence. In machine learning, a machine improves its performance by learning from the data it is fed or collects, either autonomously or under supervision.

Digital security includes the necessary information security, data protection and risk management skills, as well as business continuity and preparedness.

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Akava

Confederation of Finnish Industries EK

Church Labour Market Office

Local Government and County Employers KT

Confederation of Finnish Trade Unions SAK

The Federation of Finnish Enterprises

The Finnish Confederation of Professionals STTK

The Office for the Government as Employer

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