Culture of Experimentation in Promoting the Development and Introduction of Digital Social and Health Care Services

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Background
The rapidly evolving technology enables the digitalisation of social and health care services. The challenges in the use of digitalisation still include the insufficient implementation of the required changes in work processes and the lack of knowledge on the use of digital services and on the experiments already carried out. The culture of experimentation implemented in multidisciplinary cooperation can contribute to the introduction of new services enabled by digitalisation for citizens and for social and health care organisations. The DigiSote projects of North Karelia and Northern Savonia (ESR) are working together to promote and develop the digitisation of social and health care services and to solve the related challenges. The projects aim at developing, evaluating and deploying new digital services through quick digital experiments. The duration of the experiments varies from one day to 100 days. The experiments also help to develop the digital competence of the different parties and enable the emerge of new innovations. Authentic project cooperation and network cooperation between the several local actors helps to support the success of the experiments and solve the challenges that have emerged. The projects are implemented by Karelia University of Applied Sciences and Savonia University of Applied Sciences, Savo Consortium for Education, the Municipality of Lapinlahti, and Siun Sote (Joint Municipal Health Care and Social Services Consortium in North Karelia).

Learning through experimenting - from challenges to solutions
It is typical for quick experiments that the planning phase of the experiments is light and, if necessary, the mode of implementation may be changed as the experiment progresses. It has been challenging to perceive what the actual goal of the experiment is. The starting point for a digital solution experiment is the need that has been discovered when analysing the current state. The assumption is that the product or service to be tested will benefit the customer and the organisation. We have discovered that customers’ service processes have not always been described from a customer’s point of view. In the projects, we have developed tools to help those involved in the experiments perceive both the current and the targeted customer process, to discover problems that could be partially solved with the use of digital tools, and to plan, implement and evaluate the experiment process. Organisations do not necessarily have the required technology, and that is why the project-led experiments have tried to maximise the use of technology already in use. Modification of the technology in use can result in new, creative solutions. An open dialogue between the technology provider, the social and health care organisation, and the participants in the experiment can ensure that the plan and the objectives of the experiment are appropriate. On the other hand, social and health care organisation should allow start-up companies in the field of technology to come and test as well as develop their products in an authentic environment together with the users. Multidisciplinary cooperation in experimenting digital services can be fruitful, but it requires respectful and equal attitudes of the parties towards each other.

Customer attitudes, lack of interest, and fears are examples of factors that have been preventing the successful implementation of the experiments. These challenges have been addressed through information distribution and by listening and developing the digital competence. Enabling customers’ digital participation has been considered significant and therefore, customers have been engaged in the planning of the experiment from the very beginning and they have, thus, been able to develop one’s individual digital competence. Furthermore, the attitudes, fears, competence, and lack of competence of employees are factors that hinder the deployment of digital services. Continuous development of the employees’ digital competence, motivation and support are the tools for meeting the challenges of digitalisation and they inspire people to start using these services and tools.

DigiSote project / North Karelia: www.karelia.fi/digisote
DigiSote project / Northern Savonia: https://pohjoissavondigisote.wordpress.com/