Tampereen yliopisto
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Communal workplace learning in financial administration digitalisation

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Background

- Financial administration is one of the fastest digitalising fields of business today.

- The adoption of software robotics is changing job descriptions and the nature of work → The need for continuous learning

- The focus on formal learning is not enough → The essential role of informal learning that takes place in everyday work activities

- The communal nature of learning: interaction between members of the work community, work tasks and tools

- Learning in the workplace is heavily tied to the cultural norms and conventions of the work community → Communal learning is considered a prerequisite for lasting changes in work practices.

Introduction of the study

- A two-year (2018-2020) qualitative action research project funded by The Finnish Work Environment Fund

- The aim is to examine digitalisation-related communal workplace practices, focusing esp. on how robotics are adopted to the work communities practices, how organisations can support communal workplace learning, how employees' agency is constructed in organisations' and work communities' practices, and how employees' agency can be supported in digitalisation-induced change.

- Participants: three financial administration service centres

- The approach of Appreciative Inquiry is applied → provides a fruitful framework for identifying already existing good practices as well as developing new ones

Steps of Appreciative Inquiry:

| I Individual interviews (ca. 10 per organisation) Spring - summer 2019 | II Workshops (3 per organisation) Autumn 2019 | III Group interviews (1-2 per organisation) Spring 2020 |

Discovery | Dream | Design | Delivery

Research questions, methods & data

- Individual interviews (n=27) carried out in spring 2019

- The aim of the interviews was to gain general understanding of the situation in the workplace, discuss digitalisation-induces changes in work, identify already functioning practices that support communal workplace learning (Appreciative Inquiry step 1: Discovery), and discuss skills and skill-development needed in digitalising work.

- The method of content analysis was applied to the interview data.

- **The questions covered in this presentation:**
  - What kind of existing practices do the participants perceive as supporting digitalisation-related communal learning in the workplace?
  - What kind of new digitalisation-induced skill-requirements do the participants identify?

Background:

Current situation in the participating organisations
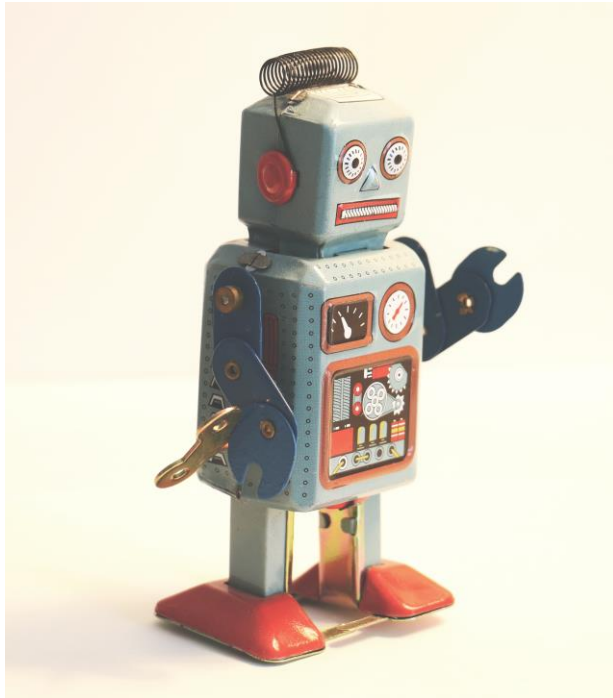
- Parts of some tasks have been robotised, but not whole tasks or processes.

- The average age of employees is quite high, many positions will not be filled after the current employee retires.

- Some issues with reliability of the robots

- Some of the staff (employees and managers alike) have unrealistic expectation of what kind of functions can be robotised and in which timeline.

- The roles, tasks and interaction between the robotic process automation (RPA) developers and the financial administration professionals is constantly moulding.

Preliminary findings:

What already supports communal learning?

- RPA-developers' understanding of financial administration processes
  - In-house RPA-developers
  - Contact persons and visits between RPA-developer teams and financial administration teams

- Involving financial administration employees in the robotisation process
  - Process descriptions from employees doing the job
  - Channels for suggesting new tasks to be robotised

- Knowledge- and task-sharing in work teams
  - Job rotation
  - Meetings, documentation
  - Solving problems together

Preliminary findings:

New skills needed in the digitalising financial administration work

- Increase in expert work: specialised customer work, analysing, deeper understanding of technology

- Development-orientation and -skills

- Adapting a new mindset: letting go of old practices, harmonising practices

Conclusions

- The importance of involving financial administration professionals early on in the robotisation process (participating – not adjusting)

- Supporting seamless collaboration between financial administration professionals and RPA-developers

- The biggest changes in skills needed are not directly connected to technology, but rather to the increase in expert work.

Thank you!

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