

Closing the information technology - communication skills for citizens through voluntary action



The gap between information technology experts and the average user continues to be great or is even growing. The more sophisticated and diverse programs and services become, the greater the difficulties average citizens and their communities have in finding adequate, workable and compatible programs and services for their use. What is needed are simple, tested, free services and ways of use, explained in clear understandable language, through which people and communities are able to maintain contact, participate in society, make themselves visible and realise their creativity.

Know-how-talkoot is a method of collaborative doing in which learning occurs indiscernably, in addition to and through doing. This is an EU venture, which, through advice from pilots and doing by one's self, provides existing organisations with skills individuals or organisations feel they need to enhance their activity. The use of freeware in the voluntary action enables organisations to enhance and further develop learned operational models without having to invest money in software. Thus the models learned in the venture are retained by the organisation for continuous use.

Know-how-talkoot method starts with the premise that the participant operates as an independent thinker and actor, able to combine acquired knowledge with previous knowledge and skill structures. There is no teaching or lecturing; rather the group begins to collaboratively do that which they consider important for their organisation. Of course, various issues are explored while doing, such as intellectual property rights and so on. The principle of completed products is also an essential part, that is, participants remain in the venture until a website or publication is finished and ready. This venture aims to create new communicative practices for organisations and improve the organisation members' communication skills in order to increase social capital, trust and openness.

Know-how-talkoot ranging from video or website creation to publications and audio processing have been held during 2008 in various parts of the country. This model is applicable to organisations and associations who work to empower civic activities. The model has been tested as a learning method for schools and an IT professional's custom of taking up new applications and understanding the user's perspective.

Technology gap communities

Below is a report on the Future Voluntary Action of Mankkaa School, Espoo, in which 9th grade students constructed three different scenarios of the future, producing concrete outcomes from each scenario, that is, scenario appropriate meals, a video or publication suitable for the scenario and a discussion on life according to their scenario as a foundation for everything.

People, tools and methods of the voluntary action

On Monday at noon there were 18 students, their teachers and three voluntary action pilots gathered in the biology classroom of Mankkaa School. During the next two days, the future was constructed employing a video camera, three projectors, two Mac computers, two mini-laptops (Linux operating system), a multi-functional device, three web sticks, memory sticks, extension cords, a dictating machine, paper, marker pens, tape, and the school's Windows computer. The voluntary action took place in the school's biology and home economics classrooms.

The students began work by writing up small moments of happiness which were analysed from a future perspective. They also considered in what kind of society is paid employment possible, what environmental factors are necessary to preserve nature or how will people study in the future, will schools exist at all?

Reflection was followed by the drawing up of a futures table. Students voted on the alternatives and the most desirable,

least desirable and a possible scenario were selected. These were named the Technology Scenario, the Cold Scenario and Collaborative Scenario.

Scenario appropriate meals

Once the scenarios were clarified, students began to plan appropriate meals, purchase ingredients and prepare food. Food for the Technology Scenario included saute reindeer, mashed potatoes and lingonberries; the Cold Scenario meal was fish fingers, dehydrated mashed potatoes, white chocolate mousse, Pepsi-Max and gummy bear sweets. Many different salads, grated carrot, smoked salmon, strawberry milkshakes and oat biscuits, made by the group, were enjoyed in the Collaborative Scenario.

In addition to food preparation, each group created a narrative of their scenario, either by filming it on video or making an illustrated publication.

The method is suitable for schools

There was an exceptionally enthusiastic and creative atmosphere in the Mankkaa School venture. All outcomes can be seen on the Know-how-talkoot website. Feedback received from the teacher afterwards indicates that other classes are interested in the products, and the participating students have been 'absolutely enthusiastic'. The school immediately received something new from the venture, in that the scenarios now form part of the learning material for geography lessons in which stu-

Tietotaitotalkoot -hanke

- The ESF Operational Programme in mainland Finland
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- www.tietotaitotalkoot.fi
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dents design a future city by planning a scenario appropriate town plan.

A cooperative work method for IT professionals

The voluntary action was also tested in a group of IT professionals, who aimed to create a social media electronic desktop. One goal was to create it on one's own machine for one's use, but some participants sought a new kind of use for social media to motivate students. Collaborative work, reciprocal learning, and increasing understanding through discussion produced many different electronic desktops, new ideas for teaching, new social contacts, and increased trust and social capital. In these voluntary actions, deciding on meals, their preparation and enjoying them together formed an essential part of the venture. Planning, preparing and partaking of meals are, as processes, similar to any other creative process, and food allows those who are uncertain about information technology to participate in the venture.

This EU venture began at the end of 2008 and will continue until mid-2011. The objective is to organise 150 know-how voluntary actions ventures. An essential component of the venture is the training of pilots, which has been initiated with the Laurea University of Applied Sciences' Kerava unit. A website will be created during the venture into which will be collected all useable freeware, products and discussion. The aim of the website is to act as peer support, an example and data bank.

Know-how-talkoot website
can be found at www.tietotaitotalkoot.fi

