

THE COM³ BOOK:

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND ITS
POTENTIAL TO CREATE COMPETITIVE
COMPANIES IN RURAL AREAS

- A method book with inspiration and concrete
tools based on the COM³ project.



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WHY DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IS IMPORTANT FOR RURAL AREAS

- And why your role as an intermediary is important in facilitating its success.

In rural areas, we are met by vast fields, beautiful landscapes and often a lifestyle that many of us long for. Being able to live closer to nature and run a business is something that some of us do, others are considering or dreaming about. To ensure that we create a sustainable future for our countryside, where both businesses and people prosper we need to explore several perspectives, including opportunities as well as challenges.

Digitalisation is one of these perspectives. Digitalisation creates opportunities, but also challenges in terms of accessibility, skills and infrastructure.

Digital transformation is important for our rural areas for several reasons; by using digital technologies, we can bridge the gap between rural areas and cities, increase the availability of services and products, increase the productivity and efficiency of business and agriculture, and improve the quality of life for people living in rural areas. Moreover, digitalisation can create new jobs and opportunities for innovation and growth. For rural businesses to remain

competitive, relevant, and attractive in a changing and digital world, we need to continuously work on strengthening their digital literacy and strategies.

However, public authorities, business support organisations and other support structures feel that they lack the tools and skills to support rural businesses on their digital journey. And that is why this book has been written. It is a helping hand for intermediaries as well as municipal and regional actors who want to boost the digitalisation journey of the business community in their geographical area. The book contains methods and materials as well as inspiration from various pilots within the COM³ project.

If you run a business, you can use some of the methods to develop your business – but also to help you communicate with your municipal representatives and intermediaries. And if you are neither a local or regional actor nor a business but rather just curious to know more about digitalisation, feel free to explore this book and its content!



The word **SME** is mentioned a lot in this book. It's short for small and medium enterprises!

Intermediary – a person who acts as a link between people to bring about an agreement; a mediator.

ABOUT THE COM³ PROJECT: BUILDING COMPETENCIES FOR COMPETITIVE COMPANIES

The [COM³ project](#), which is the source of the book's examples and methods, aims to bring about a shift in the way local and regional authorities think and act in their role as intermediaries in improving the technological and digital readiness of rural businesses and harnessing the potential for rural innovation and smart growth. The aim of the project was to introduce technological and economic interoperability for businesses – in other words, it highlighted the digital infrastructure and how local and regional authorities can support SMEs in terms of digitalisation.

The project has created the conditions for "tech-enabling" and "tech-branding" rural areas based on their local environmental, socio-economic and cultural assets. COM³ has developed a unique model that enables municipalities and regions to create a dynamic and stimulating environment for rural businesses by using both basic and advanced digital technologies.

The partnership has developed transnational support structures that were tested in 9 regions from North

Sea countries which you will learn more about under the "inspiration" segments in the book.

During COM³, a training and coaching model has been developed, cooperation hubs have been set up and matchmaking activities have been initiated, among many other initiatives and activities. In addition, the partnership has developed [quick win strategies to influence and improve policy in the area of rural development](#).

[The expected result is a 15% increase in technology use among rural enterprises and an increase in the portion of local/regional GDP attributable to information and communication technologies](#).

Ruraldigital.eu

The COM³ project contributes to the learning platform ruraldigital.eu, an initiative that focuses on digital transformation. The initiative provides solutions to help municipalities, regions and business support organisations thrive in a digital world. You can find all the tools, methods, and quick win strategies there,

so feel free to explore the website and learn more about how you as an intermediary can better support businesses in your area: <https://ruraldigital.eu/>

If you prefer the video format –

Listen and learn more about COM³'s best practices here:

[https://www.youtube.com/@COM³_NSR](https://www.youtube.com/@COM3_NSR)

HARD FACTS ABOUT COM³:

Project website: <https://northsearegion.eu/com-3/>

Funding programme: Interreg North Sea Region

Budget: Total budget for the project €3,725,000

Project period: July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2023

Partners:

- Intercommunale Leiedal (BE)
- Designregio Kortrijk (BE)
- Atene KOM (DE)
- Amt Hüttener Berge (DE)
- University of Groningen (NL)
- Drenthe Province (NL)
- Vejle municipality (DK)
- Aalborg University (DK)
- Stavanger University (NO)
- University of South-Eastern Norway (NO)
- Vinje Municipality (NO)
- Cluster for Industrial Asset Management - Stavanger (NO)
- Oldambt Municipality (NL)
- Alexanderson Institute (SE)
- Värmland County Administrative Board (SE)
- Torsby (SE)
- Compare (SE)
- University of Lincoln (UK)
- Lincolnshire County Council (UK)



WHY DID WE WRITE THIS BOOK?

It is crucial to provide support for businesses in rural areas. Below are some of the reasons for why this book is important:



More people want to relocate here: After Covid-19, more people want to move to the countryside and embrace a life close to nature. SMEs are making rural areas a more attractive place to live, work and make investments in.

More tools are needed: Local and regional public actors are looking for the right tools and skills to support rural businesses in their digital transformation.

Digitalisation: Digital technologies can simplify and transform our daily lives, the way we work and build flourishing and prosperous businesses. It is no longer about a digital world versus a physical world - they are connected. Digitalisation is an important force for SMEs to reach markets and interact with others.

Things are moving too slow: Many European companies, especially SMEs, have been slow to adopt digital solutions and have not benefited from the digital transformation.

Businesses require more support: SMEs, an important part of the European economy, are often constrained by a lack of available skills, access to finance and markets when it comes to their digital transformation.*

In the wake of the pandemic: The Covid-19 pandemic has forced SMEs to join the digital landscape, in many cases at a much faster pace than expected. For some, the inability to adapt and harness the full potential of digitalisation has resulted in bankruptcy.

Digital literacy: Digital literacy is key for SMEs to thrive and remain competitive in Europe and the world. The COM³ project and its partners have developed a model (which we will come back to later) that empowers local and regional actors in their role as intermediaries and enablers – experiences and practices that can be shared with more people with the help of this book.

We hope you will find the book useful. If you do, feel free to share it with people in your network!

* (reference: European Commission, 2021. "2030 Digital Compass: the European way for the digital decade").

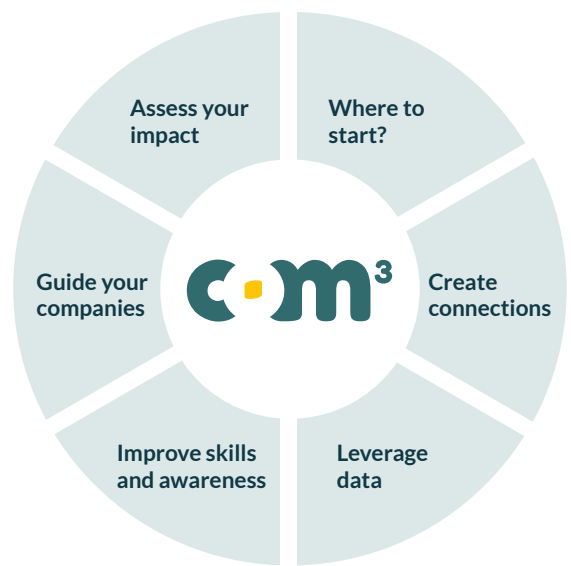
THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

This book consists of 6 different chapters based on the 6 different parts of the COM³ model. The COM³ model helps you – as an intermediary – to empower local businesses in their digital transformation and create a digital ecosystem. Small businesses in rural areas are particularly vulnerable to rapid technological change and often lack the right infrastructure and digital literacy therefore your competence, support and guidance is of great importance.

Each part of the COM³ model has its own chapter with inspiration and methods tested in the COM³ project.

At the end of the book, you will also find an appendix that provides a perspective and an outlook that invites you to reflect on the time we live in and are co-creators of. The chapter has been developed as a separate exploratory route where we have, through 5 different digital dialogue cafés, with digitalisation experts, companies, business developers, intermediaries and futurologists, discussed various perspectives related to digitalisation.

By clicking the headers in this book you will be redirected to the website where the course is available, the same goes for the stories under inspiration, **click the title to learn more!**



Before we get started, take a minute to reflect upon these questions:

What does digital transformation mean for you and your region?

How digitally mature are the businesses in your region?

What opportunities do you want to explore to create competitive businesses in your rural area?

Time to get started!

CHAPTER 1: WHERE TO START

SMEs that choose to be part of the digital transition can make rural areas a more attractive place to live, work and invest in. To provide the best possible support, it helps if intermediaries understand the needs, challenges, and ambitions of businesses they are meeting.

But where do you start? A possible first step could be to find out to what extent businesses are using digital technologies today; simply analyse the current situation and ask companies what the desired future situation is and why. Another way is to consider how your own area's circumstances, such as its demographic profile and level of education and business landscape, affect the possible ways forward.



In this chapter we will tell you more about:

- Where to start
- The importance of seeing the parts in a holistic manner
- The importance of asking the question why
- Making an internal inventory of the support structure in your region/area

INSIGHTS FROM THE COM³ PROJECT

Within the Interreg North Sea Region (NSR) project COM³, the adoption of digital technologies by businesses in the participating regions stands central. To evaluate the situation and circumstances in the different participating regions, research was conducted in the form of a survey and in-depth interviews with key stakeholders.

To summarise, the study showed that the conditions in the different regions differ. Despite this, several major challenges can be identified, such as:

- **Fragmented initiatives:** For fostering digital literacy or in general uptake of digital solutions, fragmented initiatives were mentioned as a challenge.
- **Cybersecurity:** Regarding cybersecurity a strong reliance on experts/ cloud providers was found, some businesses underestimate the risk or the resources to improve cybersecurity are missing.
- **Neglecting a long-term perspective:** Especially smaller businesses partly missed overviews regarding their progress in digitalisation efforts compared to other businesses or tending to not make pro-active changes, rather sticking to business as usual if possible.
- **Finding funding is tricky:** Regarding funding and regulatory support partly found as being a too scattered landscape when trying to find the right funding, further a hurdle to apply for funding, especially when again resources (human and financial) are missing for it.
- **Usual suspects:** Some businesses are hard to reach with public support measures in general, therefore the 'usual suspects' are making use of it (also more traditional businesses located in remote areas sometimes expected to be rather reluctant to offers).
- **The pandemic:** The Covid-19 crisis as an additional challenge affecting all regions, resulting in additional pressure on some businesses.
- **What do companies need?** Even when awareness is on the rise regarding digital technologies and their potential among businesses, it is found as a challenge to identify what is exactly needed/ how to best approach it.
- **Connectivity:** Partly, the improvement of the internet connectivity/progress of especially glass fibre developments was still a topic for some remote places in the regions.
- **Rather size than sector:** Instead of sectoral differences or based on the rurality of a business location, the size of companies was several times put central determining the degree of digital technologies

used in business processes and beyond (some exceptions are startups and other small businesses specialised in or focusing on digital solutions).

[The full report can be read here.](#)

Give it some thought!

Take a moment to reflect upon these challenges.

Do they apply to you and the context that you are working in?

How can you as an intermediary and enabler explore them further and create conditions for change and improvement in your area?

CHECK YOUR DIGITAL MATURITY!

Have you ever wondered how your municipality is performing on the journey of digital transformation? This digital maturity check will help you assess your digital maturity across a variety of dimensions, identifying your strengths and potential areas of weakness.

The aim of the maturity check is to provide a simple, intuitive yet comprehensive tool for small municipalities and rural areas. The maturity check allows for a quick overview of digital readiness and helps to identify priority areas where further investment and development is crucial.



The maturity model captures these four general dimensions:

- **Digitalisation strategy**
- **Technology**
- **Organization**
- **Competencies**

Each dimension contains three criteria that act as a heading for a question.

The model does not test the quality of the implementation of digitalisation measures; instead, it captures the stage of development where the implementation of a criterion takes place.

- **No activity:** The municipality has not taken an active role in the specific field of action.
- **Plan:** Single meetings for the conception and planning of the topic have taken place. The plan has probably been developed and responsibilities have been defined.
- **Do:** The municipality implements the planned activity. The activity may already have a positive impact on the municipality.
- **Control:** The activities have been implemented and are ongoing. The municipality actively collects information and feedback for improvements.
- **Act:** The Planning, Doing and Controlling stages have been completed. The municipality uses the collected information/feedback to start a new planning process. Activities are being improved.

Try it yourself! It takes about 20–30 minutes to complete the survey. Once completed, you will get a idea of the digital maturity of your municipality or region compared to other municipalities and regions in Europe. The survey also gives you an overview of your potential to embark on your digital transformation journey.

Good luck!

INSPIRATION

BRIDGE THE DIGITAL GAP

Oldambt in the Netherlands developed an integral digitalisation policy where digitalisation was used to bridge existing gaps and address urgent social and economic challenges. Empowered by the COM³ model, Oldambt now works closely with local and regional businesses, engaging in a dialogue on their potential and how targeted support can help them.

Click the title to learn more!

**Challenges**

Digitalisation is advancing rapidly, presenting great opportunities for change as well as challenges. This is especially true for regions with low employment, low literacy rates relative to other areas, and a high dependency on social services. Local authorities and government have a major role to play in addressing these challenges.

Digitalisation threatens the already fragile employment in various ways, it changes social services and access to them, and makes it even more difficult for

people with low digital literacy levels to develop the digital skills needed to participate in society and in the workplace. At the same time, digitalisation can create new jobs and offer new perspectives (and access) to social services.

Problem solving process

Based on [the CORA model](#), Oldambt worked on an integrated digitalisation policy with the aim of ensuring that the municipality's various digitalisation efforts support each other and strengthen the overall impact.

A digital agenda is a document or tool to coordinate efforts and actions in the field of IT

Oldambt interviewed internal and external stakeholders based on the CORA model to develop an overview of its digital agenda. At the same time, they engaged neighbouring municipalities in the development of a specific digitalisation policy for entrepreneurs.

Solutions & results

- With the programme Digitalisation of SMEs the municipality of Oldambt wants to support entrepreneurs on their digitalisation journey, thus facilitating growth and job creation. The COM³ collaboration inspired the data collection, the (digital) outreach to entrepreneurs, and a full-scale digital support and training proposition.

- For digital citizen participation, Oldambt implemented **the Consul platform** developed by the city of Madrid. The platform is an open-source software; however, it needs to be implemented and adjusted to local needs. Now, the Consul Software platform has been successfully used in various citizen participation projects. With the digital participation tools, Oldambt hopes to involve more citizens in decision-making processes and thus in their community. The digital tools can help to involve groups that have not been involved in participatory projects so far. Finally, through the digital participation tools, citizens can experience how digitalisation can also work and create value for them.

- Together with 7 municipalities, Oldambt is working on a dashboard for social and welfare services. This dashboard will provide insights into the use of various social services and the access of citizens to these services. Furthermore, it will support the municipality

to make these social and welfare services more efficient and will hopefully help Oldambt in supporting citizens towards becoming more independent from these services.

Moving forward!

Oldambt aims to continue and expand its positive digitalisation journey. For the municipal organisation this should entail supporting and promoting a learning climate. For the entire municipality, its citizens and its businesses, it should open up new perspectives for development and growth.

A dashboard is a type of data visualisation, giving you a clear graphical presentation of the data



METHODS

HANDS-ON DIGITAL SUPPORT FOR SMES

Click the title to learn more!

Vejle Municipality in Denmark supports economic development by providing local businesses with digital services such as video equipment and other services. SMEs can use the equipment to live-stream, organise webinars or hybrid conferences. Many small businesses, especially from the food sector, have used the tool to promote their products online. The live streaming service has been very valuable for businesses, especially during the Covid-19 restrictions.



Challenges

During Covid-19, many local businesses realised that they had to embrace a more digital approach to sustain their operations. Among other things, they needed more professional ways to promote their products and services online, but they lacked tools to compensate for the lack of physical meetings.

Solutions & results

Vejle set up a live streaming studio that can support SMEs from different sectors such as production, food and logistics. In the studio, they can test to organise online meetings with customers, but they can also, for example, create promotional videos for an extra fee. Businesses can then measure the impact of these new digital efforts, such as the development of online sales or how it affects their visibility on the local and regional market. The goal is to encourage companies to embrace additional digital

technologies in their business processes and utilise digital tools. The live streaming studio helps businesses to increase their digital competences and acquire new knowledge about digital sales, video performance, and digital service in general.

In addition, the studio was used for meetings between companies and investors. Through digital meetings, companies in Vejle had the opportunity to attract capital from all over the world!

Moving forward!

Vejle Municipality works on expanding the service to different business sectors. The challenge is to find the best way to introduce the products and services online – how do you best engage and reach the customer in the digital world? This is particularly difficult when it comes to products that cannot be physically sent to customer.

Using it in-house as well!

Vejle Municipality also hosted conferences, events and competitions digitally by using the live streaming studio, allowing more people to access their events and activities.

METHODS

TIPS FOR DIGITAL MEETINGS/ PRESENTATIONS

Time

Don't start the meeting at the appointed time - give your participants a chance to grab a coffee and settle down. You can open up the meeting room before the appointed time to make sure everyone who is to take part in the meeting is there and that they (and you) can see and hear everyone.

Breaks

We get more tired of participating in digital contexts - 45 minutes is the new 60 minutes - Create opportunities for participants to have a 15 min break before the next meeting/segment starts.

Avoid long monologues - as a rule of thumb, digital events should be shorter, but this can be worked around with multiple leg stretchers, energizers, chat rooms, etc.

Notes

Put post-its around the camera with your notes so you don't look down/away at your notes!

Flexibility!

Have a "Plan B" - should something unforeseeable happen (e.g. technical glitch) always have a plan b.

Can you throw in an extra leg stretcher or send participants out into breakout rooms with a question or can you simply skip that step until further notice?

Stand up/sit down:

Doesn't really matter. But if you stand up, there is a greater chance that you will stay energized!

TECHNIQUE:

Sound

The sound quality is more important than the picture quality - so check the sound before show time. Feel free to test whether an external sound (for example your headset microphone) source is better than the one for your computer.

Camera

Place it at eye level directly in front of the face. When speaking, always look straight into the camera, when others are speaking you can look around at the participants.

Make sure you have a neutral background, a virtual background will go a long way, but it is usually easier to work with the light in the room if you place yourself against a neutral background.

Lighting

Position yourself so that you have a light source in front of you. Beware of backlight if a window is located behind you.

If you have a table lamp, it can be beneficial to place it so that the light is directed towards your face.

If you have access to many light sources, they can be placed on either side of the camera to remove shadows that are formed with one camera.

PowerPoint

Your presentation should only be a support. Avoid that the presentation becomes your script. Instead, have a presentation that you use during the event and a presentation with documentation that you can then send out afterwards.

Videos

Moving material with sound is not fully compatible with digital meetings. There are often lagging and it's easy to forget to share computer audio. Test in advance to see if the audio and video works properly!

METHODS

Click the title to learn more!

FOSTERING THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF SMES

SMEs face a variety of challenges as society and the economy become increasingly digitalised. Especially in rural areas, the digital transformation of business models and internal processes will be crucial to maintain competitiveness in relation to their urban counterparts. When intermediaries are providing financial support, training and guidance to foster a digital transformation we are ensuring a thriving business landscape in rural areas!

This course gives you an overview of the main terms and concepts of the digital transformation of businesses, as well as the current state of digital transformation of SMEs in Europe with a specific focus on rural areas. It also highlights the most common and urgent challenges faced by SMEs and outlines the potential for public support.

METHODS

Click the title to learn more!

DESIGNING SUPPORT MEASURES FOR A RURAL DIGITAL ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM

The SMEs that embrace the opportunities of digitalisation helps make rural areas more attractive places to live, work and invest in. But how do you as an intermediary create an overview of the circumstances within your region and how do you find a strategy going forward? This course gives you an orientation to identify crucial place-based factors to be considered when working on digitalisation support measures in general, and for businesses in specific. You will be inspired to develop municipal or regional digital agendas and learn key definitions in the context.

What lessons can you learn from the chapter's examples?

- What challenges do you face?
- What unexplored opportunities exist?
- How can you learn more about your context?
- Who do you want to invite as a co-creation partner?
- How can you explore and test together?



CHAPTER 2: CREATE CONNECTIONS



The long distances in rural areas might sometimes be an issue, it can make it harder to meet physically and therefore, create a sense of isolation. The digital infrastructure is usually not as well developed as it is in cities and some services are not available outside urban areas. So, to survive and thrive it is important that businesses support each other and have the will and curiosity to collaborate with others. There are many great benefits in working and learning together. Collaboration and sharing of resources and knowledge are a given for some, but others may require some help and support along the way to see the potential of working together.

If you as an intermediary help facilitate connections, inspire collaboration, and introduce the potential in digitalisation, we are certain that new opportunities will arise.

There are many opportunities to strengthen the people and businesses in rural areas! You, as a local and regional intermediary, have the potential to increase cooperation in rural areas; through digital technology there is the possibility of increasing cooperation between rural and urban areas, locally, regionally, nationally and even globally.

In this chapter we will tell you more about:

- How to let businesses learn from each other, be inspired, improve, and develop by sharing resources and experiences
- How to build networks and facilitate good conditions for collaboration
- How to engage in dialogue and get people to collaborate and co-create

INSPIRATION

DIGITAL SOLUTION FOR VISITOR EXPERIENCE AND LOCAL COMMUNITY BUILDING

Click the title to learn more!

Torsby is a rural municipality located in the Värmland County in west-central Sweden. Together with other local actors (the County Administrative Board of Värmland and the innovation actor Compare), they want to promote innovation and growth for businesses and associations by developing digital solutions to improve the visitor experience. The technology and digital solutions provided are based on the needs of the local businesses and associations – with the aim of improving their competitiveness.

Challenges

Torsby municipality is the largest of the sixteen municipalities in the Värmland County. It covers almost a quarter of the total area (24%) of Värmland. Torsby is rural and sparsely populated and faces many challenges such as long distances and demographic decline with a growing elderly population.

Many rural businesses and associations are unaware of the digital opportunities that exist – opportunities

that could help them reach new markets and target groups. Businesses want to digitalise but don't know how to go about it because they lack the skills to get started. They are also unsure on what level they should digitize. Digitalisation can be an expensive affair and if you don't see the immediate value of the investment, it can be even more difficult to get started. But at the same time, the retailers in Torsby had an important motivator: their revenues were declining because customers in the area no longer chose to do their shopping in local stores, they rather did it online. And if the customer neglects the physical store, businesses must follow the customers and go online!

Torsby also had another challenge, poor internet access and limited coverage. Without a reliable internet connection, some payment service solutions did not fully function, causing a loss of income for local businesses, especially during major public sports and leisure events that Torsby organises both in the town centre and in the surrounding countryside.

“Businesses in our municipality knew they needed to digitalise but didn't quite understand how to do it. They saw that consumer buying patterns were shifting towards online shopping, which is why we set up an e-commerce store for small businesses. We organised workshops to strengthen the digital competencies of businesses. This resulted in several organisations setting up their own online stores”

Problem solving process

The challenges were clearly identified and the collaboration between innovation system actors, the municipality and the COM³ project was established from day one, making the co-creation process easy, when you know what to do and what challenge to work with it just a matter of getting started! The municipality was in contact with different suppliers to find the best cost-effective solutions, the right technology, and the best payment service solutions for a local e-commerce platform. By organising exploratory workshops based on the Design Thinking methodology (more on this in chapter 6) and by testing different Wi-Fi and digital solutions, the project had a learning-by-doing approach.

The project manager in Torsby contacted other municipalities to find out how they had solved various problems and what sort of technology they had used, learning from others saves time and money!

Solutions & results

During the project Torsby has mainly worked on improving digital solutions for businesses and associations. 14 companies has learned more about e-commerce and tested the use of a common e-commerce platform, iTorsby, for two years. As a result, many of the businesses have developed their own e-commerce platforms and hopefully more will follow.

As internet connectivity was not sufficient for the many major public sports and leisure events that take place in Torsby, the concept involved the installation and configuration of access points both in Torsby town centre and in the countryside, where major

events are regularly held. The Wi-Fi connections have been linked to digital services that help local shops and provide a better visitor experience for those attending the events. The aim was to bring tourists into contact with local citizens, businesses and associations. In this way, it was possible to solve the problem of taking payment from customers using digital payment services.

To improve the customer experience and attract visitors to Torsby, an unmanned self-service shop has also been created at the Hovfjället ski resort and the small village of Vitsand, which has not had this type of service for many years. This new service is much appreciated by the locals in Vitsand and the tourists at the ski resort. The shop provides the essentials and is accessed using digital e-identification.

Charge your and your phone's battery

Solar-powered benches have been placed in the centre where anyone who wishes can charge their phones while resting!



INSPIRATION

Click the title to learn more!

CREATING A HUB FOR LOCAL BUSINESSES!

Vinje in Norway is a little community with small businesses and a small scattered population. Deers migrate along the mountains, and it is winter here at least half the year. To further develop the community, a healthy and thriving business community is essential. Municipal actors have a strong interest in supporting local businesses and facilitating business development. Local businesses encourage authorities to take a central role in business development to help find new solutions to key challenges, which is also the aim of the work within the COM³ to design a hub for local businesses.

Challenges

The aim of the COM³ project was to address key challenges by strengthening the administration's role as a supporter for local business development. Vinje started with a workshop and in-depth interviews with businesses to get a better understanding of their needs and challenges. A major challenge highlighted by companies in Vinje was limited access to key resources for development, such as qualified labour, skills and networking opportunities. These challenges are supported by global trends and needs that have emerged as part of the rapid digitalisation

of society. Among the more specific challenges and needs identified, Vinje decided to focus on two areas: communication and networking, as well as access to training and counselling.

The solution

The basic idea was to achieve sharper and improved business development and strategic support for companies. On the next page are a few tips from Vinje on how to you as a public actor can become better at supporting SMEs by improving in the areas of communication and networking and training and counselling.

The municipality of Vinje have a long tradition of prioritising business support activities, often as a result of initiatives from the local business community

"What we have focused on is strengthening our role as a meeting place (hub) for business development. When we asked the local companies about their needs, two clear needs emerged: skills development and networking. To meet these needs, we created a new meeting concept that takes place in the evening three times a year. We have a speaker, the mayor shares information from the municipality and then we host a lovely dinner with social activities."

INSPIRATION

COMMUNICATION AND NETWORKING

- **Create engaging and interesting content for business – show that you want to help!** Start to think of the municipal business support department as an “editorial office” and strengthen your work with engaging information (written in a language that businesses understand) directed at businesses, short and informative newsletter are a great way to get the word out.
- **Find new ways to meet and talk!** Initiate and support new meeting arenas, including dialogue meetings with key stakeholder such as the head of business.
- **One point of contact!** Many contact points for businesses? Consider a new approach - individual business support, including a dedicated contact person for each business. This can help you create strong and trusting relationships between you and the companies you work with - you know them and they know you!



- **Know your businesses landscape!** In cooperation with the county authorities or other actors you can create a data base with information on local businesses. This can be based on publicly available data and possibly also on new survey data. This can help you get an overview of business in your area, identify needs as well as reaching businesses with specific activities and/or information that might be of relevance to them!

“ We have created a newsletter with the latest information on what is going on in the municipality, training programmes that businesses can participate in and so on. It is important that we show that we care and it is crucial to maintain continuity in our efforts.”

Kyrre Einar Hegg

INSPIRATION

TRAINING AND COUNSELLING

- **Be a broker!** Start to think of the municipal business support department as a broker between local businesses and existing providers of competency services. More specifically, this means mapping local needs and existing services to meet these needs, try to match the two!
- **Tailor-made activities!** Organising/developing tailored training where you see that there is a local need, for example, social media marketing, building a webpage. There might be many businesses that are interested in attaining the same kind of knowledge and competence.
- **Explore how to provide education in a digital way!** Is a learning managing system of relevance for your organisation? This could help you to provide courses for businesses in an easy way!
- **New perspectives from curious students!** Collaborate and invite students to engage in local business development. They can provide new perspectives and competencies! Its also a great way for them to meet future employers and see what job opportunities that are available in their area!

Learning management system (LMS) is an online platform that stores large amounts of learning materials in a digitalised format.



METHODS

START WITH THE WHY!

Many times, we start an innovation process or an exploratory process with the WHAT or HOW. We start generating ideas before we have clearly defined what problem actually needs to be solved. In order to work smart and use our resources in the best possible way, it is important to start with the question WHY. This is necessary for identifying the essence of the challenge for yourself but also for your team and potential partners. Ask yourself the question: Why digitalisation? Why data? Why AI? With the question WHY in focus, we can examine the essence of the subject we want to create or develop.

Step by step:

Answer the WHY question five times in a row. Each WHY follows the previous answer. In order not to get too far away from the actual area of concern, it is important to stop the exercise at five questions.



Examples of questions to start with:

- Why is it important for us to digitalise our processes?
- Why is there resistance to digitalisation among our employees?
- Why should we start collecting data?

Duration: 15 - 30 minutes

Material: Paper and pencil or a digital tool

Result: provides you with a quick insight into the complexity of the challenge and allows you to explore the issue further before dedicating time and resources to solving it.

Example

Why should we get a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system?

Because it gives us a better understanding of our customers.

Why is it important?

So that we can provide better service and increase customer satisfaction – the customers will return!

Why is it important?

Because it allows us to eliminate cold-calling and focus on creating strong and trusting relationships with our customers!

METHODS

INTERMEDIARY

– A key role

To establish a relevant and value creating network, you need to have the ability to gather and connect people who recognise the value of meeting. To let people, meet, discuss and share knowledge is important because it provides opportunities for new perspectives, increased learning and co-creation – it also creates engagement and relationships. But in turn the networks require structure! Interesting meetings where people gain real value from meeting and sharing do not arise out of thin air. To achieve this, someone needs to convene, organize, and take the lead. A person who is fearless, solution-oriented, and who sees collaboration opportunities where others see competition and obstacles. This person is (preferably) passionate about people, collaboration, dialogue, and development. Simply put, an intermediary!

An intermediary is a boundary-crosser who moves across different arenas – public, private, and academia– and someone who can master the skill to think strategically and implement things operationally. Perhaps this is you, perhaps it is your colleague, or perhaps you have just discovered that you lack this type of resource? We have listed some competencies to help you find a person who is suitable for the task of facilitating connections and create networks!

Competencies

- experience in process management, facilitating meetings and workshops as well as developing ideas.
- experience in strategic and operational project management
- excellent communication skills
- excellent ability to identify development and collaboration opportunities in new contexts (public – private – academia)
- experience in business and organisational development, preferably from both public and private sectors
- experience in running your own business is an advantage

Good qualities to have:

Courage, curiosity, energy
– and lots of patience!

**Other aspects to consider:**

The intermediary and boundary-crossing role can be shared between several people, preferably with complementary skills profiles. The person who operates in several areas simultaneously - neither exclusively in the public or private sectors nor in academia - is best equipped to deliver real change. Having at least two people sharing the role is also a way to minimise the risk that the intermediary becomes synonymous with the initiative (something that can otherwise make the whole initiative unstable) and to avoid having the person in question burn out.

Reflect on the specific needs and conditions of your location, town, municipality or region.

METHODS

DIALOGUE CAFÉ:

Learning, Sharing and moving forward together.

To promote development and awareness in an area such as digital transformation, it is often necessary to dig deep to understand the people and the industry's situation in detail and create a common ground around challenges and opportunities. This is important to be able jointly face the future instead of competing on a small and local level. The idea is to make the pie bigger so that everyone can get a bigger piece of the pie, smart right? Together you can create an overview of the digitalisation landscape within the local and regional industry and generate awareness, engagement, and solidarity by widening the perspective.

No one has all the answers. We need to develop new knowledge together. Inviting people to a dialogue circle and exploring challenges together, sharing knowledge and perspectives is an effective way to develop businesses, explore new opportunities and build strong relationships in a small town.

Hosting a dialogue café with businesses to address a challenge or explore a new opportunity together is

an interactive and collaborative process that requires some preparation and facilitating to be successful. Here are a few steps that can help you run an effective and engaging dialogue café:

1. Gather industry representatives and enthusiasts and add key public figures who can provide resources for digital transformation.

2. Frame a challenge and societal issue: Start by framing a challenge and question(s) for conversation that catches the curiosity of businesses. It should be broad enough to engage and open up for discussion and narrow enough to create value and relevance. The questions are the basis for the meeting and part of the invitation itself (participants should know what they are invited to talk about).

3. Create an agenda: Create an agenda for the meeting, covering the objectives of the dialogue café and the specific dialogue questions that are the focus of the meeting.

DURATION: Approximately half a working day.

LOCATION: In a neutral location so that it doesn't feel like one company is taking up more space than another. Preferably a facility with many rooms so that you can work in smaller groups.

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS: 5–20 people, depending on the number of process managers available.

MATERIAL: Large white sheets of paper and pencils.

RESULT: Increased awareness, new ideas and perspectives around digitalisation as well as suggestions for ways to explore and test digital transformation.

4. Create a collaborative atmosphere: Before you start the actual dialogue, it is important to create a relaxed and collaborative atmosphere where participants feel comfortable to discuss. Establish a positive environment by using icebreakers or other activities. Make sure participants can recharge their batteries by offering tea or coffee and fruit. Furnish with round tables and chairs that mimic a café environment where people enjoy spending time.

5. Start with guidelines: Before the start of the meeting, introduce dialogue guidelines that will help participants in meeting, listening, and fully engaging during the meeting. Suggestions for guidelines could include:

- Listen more than you talk.
- “Yes, and” (instead of “but”).
- Presence (be present in the moment).
- Allowing oneself and others to experiment when talking and thinking.
- Have a positive approach to what is being said.

6. Facilitate dialogue: Introduce the first question of the conversation and support the participants to stay focused, reminding them of the guidelines if necessary. Make sure that everyone gets to talk to everyone and ask participants to switch tables after a while. If it is important that the dialogue is documented, there could be a large white sheet of paper on the table with pens for everyone to write on or an extra facilitator at each table who can take notes.

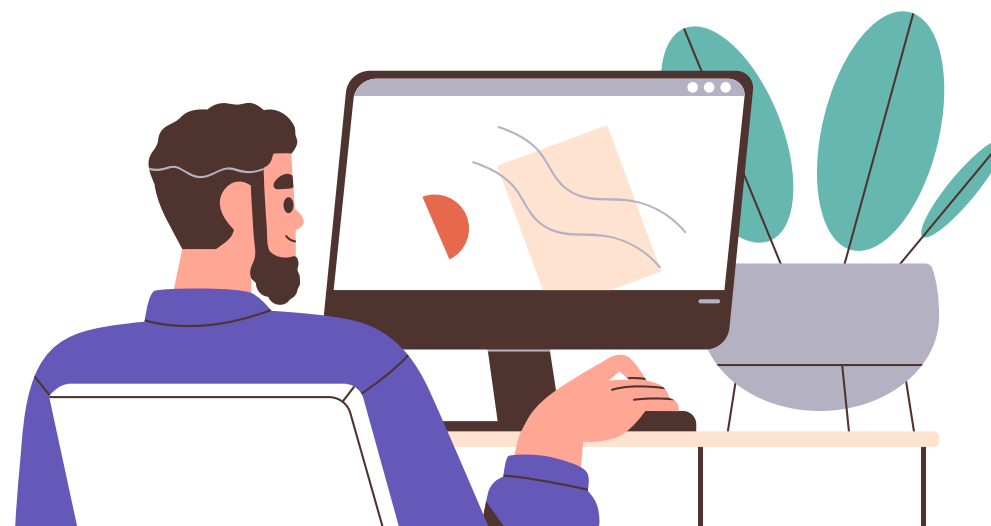
7. Create space for reflection: Ask some groups to summarise the essence of the conversation to share their insights and perspectives with others. By encouraging

participants to share their views and ideas, you will help create a common ground for finding solutions to the challenge you are trying to solve. At the end, everyone can share their conversation in a specific format, about 3–5 minutes per table. Then ask the groups to find common goals and strategies to explore the challenge or opportunity.

8. Actions: To conclude, we summarise and produce 3–5 actions, insights or perspectives from the conversation. Share these with each other.

9. Thank everyone and explain the next steps in the process.

By following these steps and being an effective and attentive facilitator, you can help companies solve challenges together in an effective and engaging way.



METHODS

Click the title to learn more!

[BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE BUSINESS STAKEHOLDER NETWORK](#)

This course is aimed at intermediaries and business support organisations. It provides a good overview of what a network is and its possible different stakeholders. The course defines the purpose of a stakeholder network, its different types, as well as many of the benefits and challenges you will encounter. The course also provides the keys to building and developing your network. You will learn how to create a digital strategy using the Lean and Agile processes. At the end of the course, you will be able to test your new knowledge via a short quiz.

METHODS

Click the title to learn more!

[HOW TO ORGANIZE SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS MATCHMAKING EVENTS!](#)

If you want to learn more about how to plan and organise successful events where both business and intermediaries meet and learn from each other, we recommend this course.

The course provides some dos and don'ts to consider in order to create a successful event where everyone can enjoy themselves and create new relationships and business opportunities.

METHODS

Click the title to learn more!

[RURAL DIGITAL HUBS – ENSURING BUY-IN AND ENGAGEMENT](#)

This course describes how to create co-working spaces, how to create a sense of community, how to use marketing, how to facilitate networking and collaboration, and how to make people grow together!



What lessons can you learn from the chapter's examples?

What would you want to explore in a dialogue café?

What unexplored opportunities exist?

Which people can be involved?

Who do you want to invite as a co-creation partner?

How can you explore and test together?

CHAPTER 3:

LEVERAGE DATA

Everyone talks about data, but what exactly is data? Data are facts and statistics collected for reference or analysis. Data can be, for example, information from the cash register, personal data such as your date of birth, information in the CRM or data from sensors.

As you probably have realised, data is a powerful resource, it has even been called the oil of the 21st century! Data can serve many different purposes for businesses, it can be used to better understand what customers are buying, make production more efficient or create new value propositions, just to mention a few things.

Many businesses collect a large amount of data without really knowing what to do with it. Data has great potential to drive innovation, but it requires processing and analysis to unlock its value. Data analytics is the process of collecting and analysing lots of data to be able to draw conclusions, for example, which products are frequently being returned by customers or how much demand there is for a certain product on a yearly basis. With this kind of information, you can adapt or develop your business. You can increase

the production of a certain item when you know it is going to be in high demand. You can also start to investigate why that specific product always get sent back and decide whether you should continue to sell it or not. The analysis of data can help business to make more fact-based decisions, improve business processes, reduce costs, and increase profitability.

We live in a time when there is already a huge amount of data available, but there are only a few people that have the skills to use it, at least for now. Therefore, there can be benefits in sharing data to gain new insights. Examples of how data sharing can add practical value are found in healthcare, where data sharing can be a way to provide more individualised care. Another example is the sharing of safety data in the automotive industry, which can be a way to reduce the number of road accidents.

In this chapter we will tell you more about:

- What data is and how it can help you
- How to inspire businesses to use data



How can we use data?

It is exciting to think about the potential of all the data that is already available, and even more exciting to think about how much more we can explore by collecting additional data. By allowing businesses to partner with local and regional authorities that support the setting up of public data platforms, we can increase access to data and use it to develop both the private and public sectors. Data offers enormous potential for local and regional public authorities and small businesses, including cost savings or opportunities to operate more efficiently. Therefore, public authorities should support this development and establish public data platforms. However you should always be aware of security and ethical aspects when working with data. Contractual and legal challenges can arise, such as how to collect, process and share data legally and ethically. A high level of digital literacy is required to make informed decisions and create a safe and secure process. Data collection and analysis is relatively new and unexplored, and regulations may not always be able to keep up. But if we manage to safely share data and create the right structures, we can overcome these obstacles and continue to grow, explore, and develop.

This is how it works:

Making data open and accessible creates new opportunities for local businesses. Data can be very abstract and difficult to identify, and sometimes the hardest part is knowing what the data will be used for. It is only when you have a clear idea of what sort of value you want the data to create that you can collect the right type of data and ask the right questions! As previously mentioned, data must be collected, processed

and made available to internal and external potential users in order to be analysed and used as a basis for decision-making.

Working with data can be very time- and labour-intensive, especially in early stages of development. Many public and private organisations face barriers to effectively identifying, analysing, sharing, and using data. While more and more data processing tools are available, these first need to be implemented and established.

In a public context, data can be shared via public data platforms. It serves as an infrastructure to collect and share high quality data. The use of data can take many forms: internally, integrated into public services or published as open data.



INSPIRATION

Click the title to learn more!

REGIODATABANK

- Building a regional SME database in Drenthe

The Province of Drenthe, in the Netherlands has developed Regiodatabank, a regional database, which includes information on SMEs in the region. Through this database, the Business Development Office and the business support programme gain valuable insights to further support SMEs and to foster new regional partnerships. SMEs can also access the database and use these data for their own activities – win-win!

Challenges

At the beginning of the project, the data regarding local businesses was very fragmented and was scarcely used for policy making and supporting growth in the region. For this reason, Drenthe focused its efforts on gathering data, using web scraping and by organising hackathons. When establishing the database a key challenge was to ensure that it was in compliance with GDPR legislation¹. This resulted in a long series of dialogues with the regional data protection officers which in its turn resulted in the formulation of all data security issues in one single document.

Solutions & result

The general objective of a regional database is to increase the effectiveness of policies and interventions

to strengthen SMEs. Using "big data"², Drenthe is able to access more precise and up-to-date data on local businesses, which strengthens their ability to provide the right and relevant support to businesses. The database is now readily available in of Drenthe's architecture for big data. Thanks to the database, they expect their support programmes to better meet the needs of SMEs in terms of scaling up and internationalising. The database has already attracted a lot of interest as an example of the potential of data science.

Lessons learned that might be of value for you too!

One major challenge in this pilot project was that many people already had established methods and ways of working. Hence, there was some reluctance toward changing as well as scepticism in working with data. It was deemed necessary to first demonstrate that data can add real value before proceeding. There was scepticism and a need to first demonstrate that data science can add real value. Businesses had to be convinced that they would benefit from the project; they felt there was no need to change their approach as the way they operated was already working. Here, the support programmes have provided a way to demonstrate the potential for continued growth and innovation.

Database – a collection of information that is organised in such a way that it is easy to search for and retrieve individual pieces of information, and often also to modify the information.

Web scraping – is a method for automatically "scraping" large amounts of content from one or more websites, which means that the content of the websites is copied. This can include images, summaries, contact details. This information can then be structured in a database. The method can also be used to copy data from one website and directly mirror the information on another website, much like price comparison sites do.

¹ <https://gdprinfo.eu/>

² Big data refers to digitally stored information of such a magnitude that it is difficult to process it using traditional database methods, instead requiring the use of new technologies such as AI. Big data includes technologies for very large databases (VLDB), data warehouses and data mining.

Click the title to learn more!

IGOD - Imagineering Of Data

- Utilizing open data in product and service design in Leiedal, Belgium.

By bringing together SMEs from the region, municipalities and relevant organisations in a process of co-creation, the goal was to create a unique and valuable community of local businesses. To achieve this, eight workshops with data experts were organised, which led to the participating companies taking on a common challenge over a period of two years: creating added value from available data. Through a qualitative, guided design process, the idea was to bring out innovative and novel ideas.

Challenges

As a result of Covid-19, businesses faced major economic challenges in terms of continuous growth, competitiveness, and improved cost-efficiency. In addition, they were facing major societal challenges such as climate adaptation, sharing and circular economy and creative use of scarce resources. Simultaneously, they needed to make a digital leap to remain competitive.

Problem solving process

Data offers many solutions to the challenges mentioned above. By bringing together SMEs from the

region, municipalities, research institutions and support organisations worked together in a co-creation process. Using design thinking as a method, new and innovative products, services and processes were developed and a valuable community grew among the participating companies.

Solutions & results

One of the challenges of the pilot was the large number of possible ways to start working with data. To address this challenge, the pilot used the design thinking methodology, which provides a clear structure to guide the process. This method provided companies with an awareness of the value of data, their own as well as that of others. They understood that the active use of data could solve many of the challenges they were facing. By using their own company data enriched with open data and/or available data from other interested companies it was possible to develop innovative products, services and processes. These should also be sustainable from a social and economic perspective. In the process, participants were inspired to use data to generate new insights that could lead to new business opportunities.

We will dive deeper into Design thinking in chapter 6

Lessons learned that might be of value for you too! - The value of data is difficult to describe or predict. During the preparation phase of the project, one of the lessons learned was that some companies and organisations want to see real examples and possible outcomes of the pilot activities before getting involved. As there was a desire for companies and organisations to start thinking about possible outcomes themselves, providing possible solutions in advance was avoided. This resulted in the realisation that in order to get companies engaged and enthusiastic about something examples are needed to inspire them!

METHODS

Click the title to learn more!

PUBLIC DATA PLATFORMS AS DRIVERS OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Data can help you! Local actors can benefit greatly from access to relevant, high-quality data. Public authorities can support this development by setting up data platforms.

This course provides you with an introduction to basic terms and concepts related to public data platforms. In addition, the course provides an overview of the importance of such platforms for local economic development, the EU policies and guidelines related to these. It also discusses possible barriers to successful implementation of the platforms and how the COM³ pilot projects in Drenthe and Leiedal have overcome them.

METHODS

Click the title to learn more!

FUTURES BY DESIGN

The EU project Futures by Design aimed to help SMEs grow and/or increase their productivity using data and data analytics. SMEs make up a significant part of the economy in many countries and their further development can be hampered by limited access to data as well as a lack of knowledge or capacity to analyse data. Data and its analysis can enable innovation and increase the profitability and efficiency of businesses. Futures by Design supported SMEs in data and analysis of data to stimulate innovation, profitability and growth. The project developed several tools to support companies in becoming more data driven.



What lessons can you learn from the chapter's examples?

Which challenges do you face?

What unexplored opportunities exist in relation to data?

Which people can be involved?

Who do you want to invite as a co-creation partner?

How can you explore and test together?

CHAPTER 4: CYBER- SECURITY



Small businesses in rural areas are particularly vulnerable to rapid technological change and the lack of digital and technological skills might make them a target for cyber-attacks. Digitalisation comes with many opportunities but also some risks. The risk of cyber-attacks is increasing and is a serious threat to digital infrastructure, especially for SMEs, which often lack adequate digital security. As the digital ecosystem is more complex than ever, attack strategies have become more sophisticated,

targeting everything from the portable devices of individuals (like your laptop) to satellites. It is therefore important to raise awareness of the need of cybersecurity and educate employees and individuals about the threats and how to protect both themselves and their organisations.

Lucky for us there are smart cybersecurity strategies that can identify threats and improve businesses' security level!

In this chapter we will tell you more about:

- What to consider in terms of cybersecurity
- How to raise awareness about cybersecurity and educate employees and individuals about the threats and how to protect themselves and the organisation

CYBERSECURITY

- what is important to consider?

Intermediaries and other business support organisations should inform businesses and organisations about the importance of cybersecurity. Businesses can be vulnerable to cyberattacks and data breaches, which can damage their business and have costly consequences. Here are some points to explore together with businesses:

- **Use strong passwords:** Make sure passwords are strong and unique for each account. Do not use the same password for multiple accounts and avoid using easily guessable words such as birthdays, names or common words. Mix lower- and upper-case letters, numbers and characters.
- **Regularly update software and systems:** Make sure that all software and systems on computers and other devices are up-to-date and using the latest security updates. This can help protect against known vulnerabilities and threats.
- **Use anti-virus software:** Install antivirus software on all computers and devices to detect and block malware and other threats.

- **Create backups:** Make sure to regularly make backup copies of important data and keep them in a separate location. This can help minimise the loss of data in the event of a cyber-attack.

- **Train employees:** Train employees in cybersecurity and safety procedures to minimise the risk of them exposing the company to threats.

- **Use two-factor authentication:** Enable two-factor authentication for all accounts possible. This means that you will need to enter an additional security code when logging in, in addition to the password.

- **Be careful with emails:** Do not open emails or click on links from unknown senders. Be extra careful with attachments.

- **Use VPN!** Make sure the network you are using is secure and safe.

By taking these easy steps you can help protect businesses from cyber threats and ensure that sensitive data remains secure.



VPN stands for “virtual private network” – a service that protects your internet connection and online privacy. A VPN creates an encrypted tunnel for your data, protects your online identity by hiding your IP address, and allows you to use public Wi-Fi hotspots safely.

HOW DO WE IMPROVE SKILLS IN CYBERSECURITY?

Training in cybersecurity and security practices is essential to minimise the risk of cyber-attacks and data breaches. Here are some tips and steps businesses can take to improve cybersecurity skills:

Create a security policy: Create a clearly defined security policy that includes guidelines and procedures for the use of computers, networks, devices and other IT resources. Ensure that all employees understand the policy and are aware of the consequences of violating it.

Prepare a training plan: Set up a cybersecurity training plan that includes training in basic security principles and techniques. The plan can also include training modules and sessions that employees can complete on their own. Check out the suggestions for courses in this chapter.

Use realistic scenarios: Use realistic scenarios to train employees to deal with potential threats. By simulating a cyber-attack, employees can learn how to detect and manage threats effectively.

Encourage incident reporting: Encourage employees to report any suspicious incidents or anomalies they discover, whether by email, phone or in person. This can help detect threats early and minimise the damage.

Repeat the training on a regular basis: Cybersecurity is an ever-changing arena, so it is important to repeat the training at regular intervals to keep employees updated on new threats and technologies.

Reward good behaviour: Reward employees who follow security protocols and demonstrate good cybersecurity behaviours. This can encourage all employees to take cybersecurity seriously and help create a culture of security in the workplace.



METHODS

Click the title to learn more!

CYBERSECURITY READINESS THROUGH HONEYPOTS

For those who want to learn more, we recommend the course Cybersecurity Readiness through Honeypots³. This course provides an introduction to cybersecurity and defence systems such as honeypots which can be used to detect attacks in a proactive way. In addition, the course provides an overview of honeypots by explaining how they work and what kind of threat-information is collected.

METHODS

Click the title to learn more!

DATA BREACH AND PRIVACY LEAK AWARENESS

In today's digital era, data is considered a valued asset. Companies and organizations affected by data leaks incur up to \$ 150 million yearly in compensation worldwide. The course Data Breach and Privacy Leak Awareness provides insight into the impact of data leaks and the risks of having a privacy leak. This course also provides an understanding of data leaks and how to identify or mitigate them.

METHODS

Click the title to learn more!

THREAT REDUCTION AND SELF-ASSESSMENT FOR SMES

Cyber attacks are becoming an increasing risk to digital enterprises. Adversaries are evolving their strategies for attacks to cause significant impact. The course Threat Reduction and Self-assessment for SMEs introduces techniques for threat reduction and self-assessment for SMEs. With this course, SMEs can use tools and methods to identify potential risks in their digital infrastructure.

The European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA) provides recommendations and suggestions to support SMEs in improving their cybersecurity. [You can find the full report here!](#)

³ Honeypots are a cybersecurity technique used to deceive and monitor cyber attackers. It works by creating fake targets that look vulnerable to lure attackers in, which provides organisations with threat intelligence. There are different types of honeypots that can be used, such as research honeypots and production honeypots. Honeypots are an effective method of protecting organisations from cyber-attacks by providing the organisation with a better understanding of the threats and tactics used by attackers.

How can you support business to increase their cyber security?

Which challenges do you face?

How can you learn more and stay up to date in regards to cyber security?



CHAPTER 5:

GUIDE YOUR COMPANIES



Digitalisation offers enormous opportunities. It allows businesses in rural areas to reach customers and partners all over the world, but to make this work, they need adequate digital infrastructure, digital literacy, and guidance in the digital world. Businesses want to operate and survive where they are located but need relevant support and assistance in accessing the right infrastructure, training and support to be equipped and prepared for the digital world.

The digital transition is about seeing digitalisation as a mean, not an end goal. It is therefore important that the focus is not only on the use of digital technology by businesses, but even more on creating opportunities for businesses to acquire the necessary digital skills; the right digital skills are necessary to remain competitive and to ensure continuous development in the field of digitalisation. The business value lies in the implementation of digital technologies (and knowing why it's being implemented). Digitalisation is an approach and a natural part of business development.

In this chapter we will tell you more about:

- Tools and business models to guide companies through digitalisation
- A guide on how to listen, ask the right questions to identify needs
- Why this leads to increased revenue and value creation and access to new markets
- How local and regional authorities can become more creative in making their region an attractive place to work and invest in

INSPIRATION

Click the title to learn more!

SHOPPING IN MY VILLAGE

Heimatware was a digital marketplace for marketing and selling local products in Hüttener Berge, a village in Germany with many farmers, traders and suppliers offering great local products.

Challenges: The municipality experienced difficulties in getting local actors to use digital media and services. Many small businesses had neither the resources nor the necessary digital skills to promote their products and services online. As a consequence, local customers were not aware of the great quality products right in their own neighbourhood!

Problem solving process: The municipality decided to help local and regional businesses take advantage of digital technologies while ensuring that the needs of the local community were met. After interacting with residents, farmers and traders, they came up with the idea of a digital marketplace that also offers home delivery, Heimatware.

Lessons learned that might be of value for you too!

Communication and cooperation are important components to address in complex projects of this type. External consultants contributed to the design of the pilot project. The municipality found a start-up capable of running the marketplace and that presented a good business plan. But when the business plan met reality, everyone in the project team had their own ideas about what actions needed to be taken, how to prioritise them and when to implement them. The differences between a flexible start-up and a slower public administration thus became apparent and a major challenge.

Something else that consumed a lot of time and energy was the **legal aspects:** how do you ensure, for example, that a local bakery is not disadvantaged compared to a bakery in another part of the country? The lesson is that there are no quick compromises in important matters. When signing a contract, everyone involved needs to think through all aspects and be prepared to repeatedly talk through points that they may have already thought they agreed on. In doing so, it is important to remember the common goal, to have continuous dialogue and to do your utmost to reach an agreement on what is really important.

Solutions & results: The digital marketplace combined a delivery service that allowed local operators to be competitive with larger marketplaces that operate over larger geographical areas. Thanks to the efforts of Heimatware and the municipality, residents could choose from more than 200 products from 22 local producers and get milk, eggs and much more delivered directly to their door.



ENHANCING DIGITALISATION WITHIN INDUSTRIAL ASSET MANAGEMENT

Click the title to
learn more!

Digitalisation has become a buzzword and many businesses feel the need to jump on the digitalisation train. In their eagerness to be a part of the journey many companies forget to ask an important question before implementing digital tools: "how can digitalisation help me develop my business?". That question is very important and has been explored by the University of Stavanger and the businesses in "the Cluster for Industrial Asset Management" (CIAM) with the goal of helping business create valuable digital transformation.

Through workshops and training events, businesses learn how to think about digitalisation in their own company and are guided in identifying which processes are worth digitalising. For CIAM there has been a particular focus is on the digitalisation of industrial asset management.

Challenges

There is a plethora of digital solutions, and it can be a jungle to find and implement the ones that will truly benefit and help businesses grow. Many businesses

are encouraged to implement digital solutions as an opportunity to grow and make more money, but "digitalisation" does not make more money by default. What often happens is that digital systems instead cause more expenses, which are not covered by additional revenue.

To ensure that the digital solution contributes to sustainable business development, it is therefore important that the solution solves a real problem, that the root cause is identified first and that the investment is a long-term one. Digitalisation is not an end in itself – it is a mean.

Solutions

The University of Stavanger and CIAM share various tools and methodologies to successfully establish and run a business. They introduce participants well known management approaches, like the LEAN approach from the MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology). This methodology aids companies in identifying business processes that are most suitable for

"There are already a number of solutions for digital transformation. The biggest challenge has been to help companies implement them in their context to make their businesses more sustainable and profitable. Our solution has included bringing together people from different sectors, creating space for dialogue and reflection – which has helped businesses bring value-creating input back to their businesses."

Odd Terje Høie, CIAM

Lean management is an approach to managing an organisation that embraces the concept of continuous improvement, and it is a long-term approach that systematically seeks to make small, incremental changes to processes in order to enhance efficiency and quality.

digitalisation. Often the digitalisation is pushed into the companies just assuming it will help the company becoming more profitable. The combination of well-known methodologies (Lean), which have this pull-approach where the need for digitalisation first are thoroughly explored before starting the digitalisation process has proven to have a great potential!

In parallel, the University of Stavanger and CIAM brought together smaller and larger businesses as well as municipalities and other business support organisations to spread knowledge on utilizing digital technologies.



Lessons learned that might be of value for you too!

During the first test, a few lessons become clear.

Firstly, a large part of the learning for companies is to interact with the other participants. This was achieved by giving companies challenges to solve between the meetings and then presenting these to the other participants.

Learning by practise and the sharing of knowledge and experiences accelerated the dialogue and learning process.

Secondly, the presentations need to be adjusted to the participants. Real cases or examples included in the presentation must be relevant and relatable to the companies. This is essential in order for them to be able to relate and put the methodology into their own context. And therefore, **see opportunities and create engagement!**

When engaging in dialogue with businesses, ask the following questions:

Step 1: THE CUSTOMER

Who is the customer?

What can we offer the customer?

What attracts the customer, in what way are we relevant and how do we reach our customer?

Step 2: VALUE

How do we profit from our product?

How we build and design our product?

Why is our product or service of importance in the world?

How can we test it? How do we create a Minimum Value Proposition (MVP)?

Step 3: DIGITALISATION

How do we scale up through digitalisation? How does digitalisation help us work smarter and create more value for our company, our customers and our ecosystem?

What data is available and how can we use hardware and software to create new solutions to the questions posed in step 1 and 2?

Click the title to learn more!

THE UoL 4.0 CHALLENGE!

The UoL 4.0 challenge is a multi-stakeholder collaboration between students, businesses, and government to address digital challenges in Lincolnshire, UK.

Challenges

The lack of digitalised SMEs and digital jobs in Lincolnshire has historically been due to a lack of digital infrastructure in the area. The region, which is predominantly rural, has lagged behind in terms of access to broadband infrastructure. This lag in broadband availability has affected the ability of SMEs to adopt digital technology. Statistics show that rural SMEs are less likely to embrace and realise the benefits of digital technologies – even in places where broadband is available.

The structure of Lincolnshire's economy poses a challenge; studies show that adaptation to digital

Industry 4.0 or the fourth industrial revolution is an umbrella term for a range of technologies and concepts in automation, process industrial IT and manufacturing technologies

technology is slower among the region's smaller businesses as well as those in traditional sectors. Due to the lower propensity for innovation and lack of digital skills, efforts are needed to help SMEs develop digital capabilities and encourage adoption of Industry 4.0 technologies.

Problem solving process

In this context, the UoL4.0 Challenge is a testing ground for development, where relationships between academia, industry, and the public sector can flourish and create valuable effects.

Solutions

The UoL4.0 Challenge approach is an interpretation of the Triple Helix of innovation that connects businesses, the public sector and universities in innovation processes that create benefits for all actors involved.

In total, more than 400 students have been involved in collaborative projects with SMEs.

Among the participating SMEs, half had implemented digital solutions as a result of participating in the UoL4.0 challenge!

"The project helps students become more employable by putting them in direct contact with companies and helping them implement digital solutions. The companies, in turn, get new ideas and new approaches to their business. The project has resulted in a number of new solutions implemented by companies. It is also a way to retain young talent in the area."

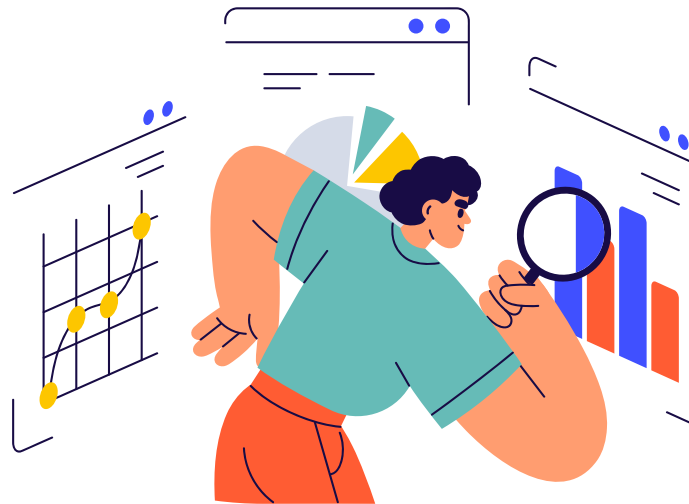
Liz Price

Who benefits from what?

- For SMEs: to explore how to connect new commercial ideas with potential markets; this by means of developing and using of digital technologies and applications.
- For students: to increase the level of employability by developing technology-based entrepreneurial and problem-solving skills to better solve real-world business challenges.
- For academia: to develop and test challenge-based principles and examples that may be disseminated to others.
- For the public sector: to link businesses with knowledge hubs and increase the impact of government programmes and actions.

Lessons learned that might be of value for you too!

The recruitment of SMEs to join the UoL4.0 Challenge was affected by Covid-19. For some companies, Covid-19 was a catalyst for digital transformation, increasing their need for digitalisation support. For other companies, it was a matter of survival, with some temporarily furloughing of staff and others experiencing an increased demand for their services.



Another challenge was finding suitable spaces for students to carry out their groupwork. There can also be problems if students are in different geographical locations. Fortunately, there are many ways for students to collaborate digitally nowadays! In the box you will find suggestions for some digital tools for collaborative work!

Additional digital tools that are useful for co-creation:

Miro, a digital whiteboard:

<https://miro.com/>

Mural, a digital whiteboard:

<https://www.mural.co/>

Discord, communications platform:

<https://discord.com/>

Buffer, digital marketing:

<https://buffer.com/>

Canva, create graphic material:

<https://www.canva.com/>

Zoom, communications platform:

<https://zoom.us/>

METHODS

Click the title to learn more!

STUDENT-BASED PROJECTS AS A SOURCE OF DIGITALISATION SUPPORT FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

Universities are no longer solely focused on providing higher education. They increasingly focus on equipping their students with skills that increase their employability – such as creative thinking, problem solving and the ability to work in a team.

Many universities and colleges welcome the opportunity for students to work on the “real world” problems and challenges facing companies. This allows students to contribute to the creation of real value. For rural areas with limited business support infrastructure, students can be a key source of innovation support. This course provides guidance on how SMEs can participate in student-based projects and accelerate their digital transformation.

METHODS

Click the title to learn more!

HELPING SMES DEAL WITH INFORMATION OVERLOAD

While there are usually plenty of activities available to assist companies in their digital transformation, companies rarely have the time and opportunity to keep up to date with the activities that are relevant to them. As an intermediary, you play an important role in finding and filtering the activities available to companies in your local area.

This course gives intermediaries ideas on how to find digitalisation activities for companies and tips on how to stay up to date in the field of digitalisation!

What lessons can you learn from the chapter's examples?

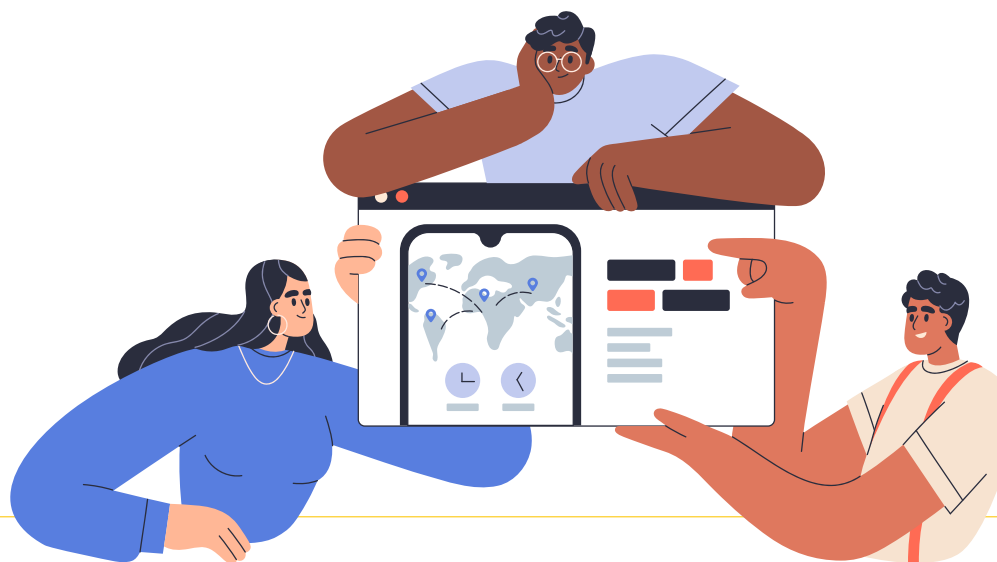
Do you see new opportunities for collaboration?

What unexplored opportunities exist?

Who can you involve?

Who do you want to invite as a co-creation partner?

How can you explore and test together?



CHAPTER 6:

ASSESS YOUR IMPACT

The digital landscape is constantly evolving and changing. How do we know that we are doing the right things? And how do we continue to stay up-to-date and keep exploring the field of digitalisation?

In this chapter we will tell you more about:

- Creating customised solutions and evaluating the experience of the businesses
- Creating something new by using design thinking



HOW DO YOU MEASURE DIGITALISATION?

One way to evaluate the impact of the initiative and activities is to send out surveys to the business who has been involved. But sending out documents after the process comes with the risk that the business fails to remember to fill it in and/or won't feel that they have the time to do so. To make sure you get answers that reflects the true opinion from the businesses you can't make do with just getting response from a few, you must seek the overall information. Therefore, it might be easier to collect the data and the business' experience by meeting them in person, this also give you an opportunity to ask follow up questions or dive deeper into specific topics that might be of relevance. In the project we used a business survey, feel free to use the questions or get some inspiration when you are creating your own survey. You'll find it here: [COM³ Business Survey 2023 \(onlinesurveys.ac.uk\)](https://www.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/com3-business-survey-2023)

We, as intermediaries, should try to work in an agile and ad hoc manner, which means that we should be able to adapt to changes and feedback from the businesses we are trying to help. Set aside time for evaluation, by collecting continuous feedback from the businesses and reflecting upon this information we

ensure that we are creating and carry out initiatives and activities that are of relevance and value for the ones we are striving to help and support.

Below are some concept that are worth while to reflect upon when it comes to development.

Resilience is the ability to withstand and survive adversity and crises through positive adaptation and flexibility. In a world of accelerating change and a constant succession of crises, this is becoming an increasingly important capability for modern businesses. An agile way of working promotes resilience because it creates agility and flexibility to respond quickly to challenges and opportunities. We learn by doing, evaluating and reflecting. The Design Thinking methodology and philosophy helps us get there and is described in this chapter.

Regenerative digital transformation means using digital technology and innovation to not only improve a company's performance but also promote a sustainable and resilient environment. It means using technology to restore and improve a company's

environmental impact while also enabling a more resilient and thriving business. By focusing on creating a positive impact on the environment and society, rather than just maximising profits, regenerative digital transformation can help businesses create a more sustainable and long-term future.

How can digitalisation support businesses become more sustainable?

What does it mean to be a resilient organisation? What does it mean to be a resilient employee?

INSPIRATION

COMPARE – BE DIGITAL

Compare is based in Karlstad, Sweden. Compare is a cluster organisation, bringing together companies, organisations and individuals who share a long-term ambition to develop Värmland into a digital, attractive and innovative region. The focus is now on digitalising the whole of Värmland. Digital literacy needs to be strengthened if Värmland is to be at the forefront as an attractive digital region.

Compare has created a database of companies operating in the field of digitalisation. It contains SMEs that need digital support. They can be filtered by their needs, size and digital maturity to be matched with suppliers who have the appropriate expertise. Compare has also launched the "Be digital" initiative, where companies can get a better overview of their needs and wishes to go digital with the help of a business coach. The formula is simple: the company meets with the coach to discuss 9 areas of its business. Based on the answers, the company gets an overview of what they need to develop to strengthen themselves digitally as well as concrete

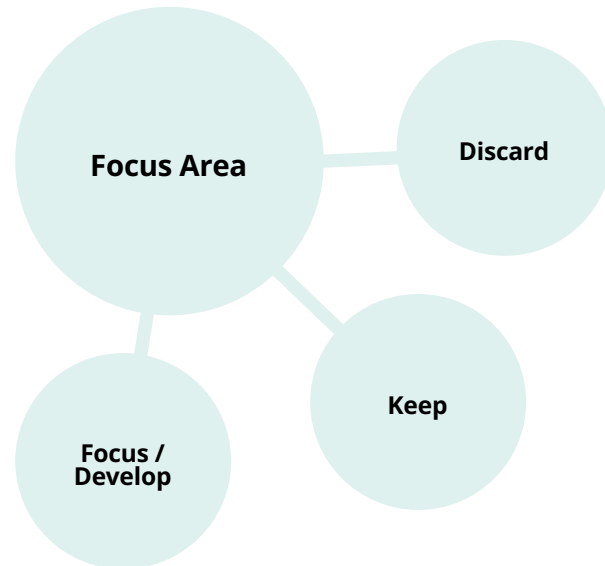


tools and methods to increase their digital skills. When establishing a roadmap for what digital skills they company need (or want) to strengthen makes it easier to see where they started and how their digital skills has improved throughout the process.

METHODS

KEEP, DISCARD AND CREATE

Let's say you, as an intermediary, have started new initiatives and activities. How do you know which to keep, develop and which ones you should stop doing? A simple method that is easy but helpful is to ask the question: What do you want to keep, discard and create? **Write on a piece of paper or draw the following model:**



After carrying out a test or facing a challenge in a project, you can try this method to move forward:

1. Write your question or focus area in the centre

2. Make three bubbles based on your focus area: keep, discard and create

3. Ask yourself:

- What do you want to keep (i.e., keep doing)?
- What do you want to discard (i.e., this is not useful or adding any value)?
- And what new things do you want to create? In what areas do we need new ideas and create new things?

Write the answers in the appropriate bubble.

Navigating and guiding through the unknown and venturing into new territory is a new way of thinking and doing. One of the reasons why it feels uncomfortable for many is that we have a brain that wants to conserve your resources and prefers to do things the way we have always done them. Your brain will do its very best not to try new things. This is because it



would need to expend more energy by doing so. If we practice our ability to work in an agile way, to learn by doing and to work in a goal-oriented way, it becomes easier. When a test doesn't go the way we want, a sense of failure can emerge. Then it's time to turn this mindset into valuable insights that move the process forward. It is simply a matter of learning from the experiences discovered along the way.

METHODS

BACKCASTING

Backcasting is a method for planning and achieving future goals by thinking backwards from the desired future state and working backwards to the current situation. It is like creating a map of what we want the future to look like and then working backwards to plan the steps to get there.

To use the method, you need to start by defining the desired future state as clearly as possible. This may involve thinking about what an ideal situation would be or what you want to achieve in the long term. This can be done through a Dialogue Café which is described as a method in Chapter 4. You then work backwards by identifying the conditions, obstacles and opportunities that exist to achieve the desired state.

Backcasting can be used in many ways, both for personal and professional goals. In personal development, backcasting can help create a clear vision and direction for the future, and plan the steps required to get there. In businesses and organisations, backcasting can be used to plan long-term strategies and



goals, ensuring that the company is on the right path towards a sustainable and desired future.

Backcasting is a useful method for achieving future goals as it helps us focus on what we want to achieve, rather than just reacting to current problems and situations. It also makes it easier to plan and prioritise our actions and decisions to achieve the desired state effectively. This method can also help us to reflect and measure what we have done through an impact measurement step by step – inventorying what we tested and what value-creating knowledge it gave us.

The fundamentals of Backcasting method

was outlined by John B. Robinson from the University of Waterloo in 1990. The fundamental question of backcasting is:

"if we want to attain a certain goal, what actions must be taken to get there?"

METHODS

FEED FORWARD!

After each digital or physical activity, let each participant share their experiences – what they take with them and what they want more of in the future. After each activity and effort with the companies, you measure their perceived value of the activity, the dialogue and how it points to the purpose of the project, a good tool to use is mentimeter – it's also anonymous which is helpful if you want the businesses to give you their honest opinion. This gives you as an intermediary a sense of what value you are creating in real time, which can be supplemented with digital or physical group interviews where the companies can reflect together.



METHODS

DESIGN THINKING

How do we develop something that does not yet exist?

Yes, most things are still to be done in the digital landscape and much is still yet to be explored. So how do we develop and explore what does not yet exist? Well, we use Design Thinking, a methodology that has been used by many partners in the COM³ project.

Design Thinking is a philosophy and methodology developed at Stanford University which we can use to manage uncertainty and solve complex challenges. Design Thinking takes the guesswork out of the equation and helps us develop relevant, attractive offers and new solutions. It is cost-effective, fosters our creativity and innovation and takes us quickly from idea to test. It is particularly well suited to digital transformation where analytical thinking does not give us new perspectives and where it is difficult to make long-term plans as the digital landscape is rapidly changing.

Briefly summarised, Design Thinking is all about:

Asking open questions

In Design Thinking, we listen to gain understanding. We don't hold a firm grip on the results, solutions, and ideas. Instead of stating "we are relevant now", we keep the question alive in our minds – how are we relevant?

We work very close to our users

And the user can be a customer, a citizen, a business partner. What do we really want to know and what is our users really telling us?

We have a trial and error approach

We work with prototypes. From the simplest "napkin prototype" to more extensive and complete prototypes. When things don't go as planned, a sense of failure can easily set in. We need to turn this mindset into valuable insights that take the design process further.

It is simply a matter of learning from the experiences discovered along the way.

METHODS

DESIGN THINKING

The method can be used by both public and private actors. Unlike linear innovation processes, Design Thinking helps us to work in a circular and agile way. There is no set way to use Design Thinking and you often jump back and forth in the different phases which can be described with this model:

1. Empathise: In this phase, we strive to understand and empathise with our users, target audience, and stakeholders who have a say in shaping the implementation of our project's prerequisites, desired state, and current state. We collaborate closely with key individuals within the organisations, as well as their customers and experts in digital transformation, to gain valuable insights. In the Design Thinking process, deep and attentive listening is critical. We seek to uncover experiences, stories, aspirations, and motivations. We conduct extensive research, keeping up to speed on current trends, and conduct interviews to deepen our understanding. Design thinking is about asking relevant and open questions before looking for answers.

Open questions – allow participants to respond in their own words. These questions are designed to elicit more information than is possible with multiple choice or other closed questions (yes and no questions).

Open questions often start with:

How - Describe - Tell me more - Explain - Why

2. Define: In this phase, we summarise everything we have learned from the previous phase. We define our users; we create personas and we clarify our mission statement and the challenge we are here to solve. Everything is summarised in short texts of a maximum of 1 page that are easy to disseminate in our networks and in the team that is involved in creating it.

3. Ideate: In this phase, we create ideas based on our challenge that we developed in the define phase. We don't stay here for too long. We create ideas that we can then quickly test and create prototypes around. Here we create with passion and use different methods to achieve a creative flow. This is about engaging the whole team and guiding rather than controlling. The breadth of knowledge in the team enriches our process.

4. Build and create prototypes: We experiment and work with rapidly developed prototypes. From the simplest "napkin prototype" to more extensive,

What opportunities do you see with using Design Thinking?

What would you like explore in a design thinking process?

Who is your user?

How can you test?

complete prototypes. The further into the process we get, the clearer our prototypes become. This way of working makes us agile and flexible. This requires leadership that promotes self-responsibility and self-direction and allows for reflection and creativity.

5. Test and evaluate: A test gives us greater insights, but a test is only half the story. What we do with the results is just as important. We run tests and mobilise our innovation capabilities to really understand what the target audience are doing and telling us, and what that means for our hypothesis.

Design Thinking is an iterative process and the five phases often feed into each other. We trust the process and jump between phases to maximise the use of resources, creating an efficient way of working with a focus on creativity and trust. This way of working makes us agile, flexible and it is well suited to the world we live and work in today. It requires leadership that promotes self-responsibility and self-direction and allows for reflection and creativity.

METHODS

DESIGN THINKING AS A PROBLEM SOLVING TOOL

Click the title to
learn more!

For those who want to go deeper, we recommend the course called Design Thinking as a problem solving tool. This course provides inspiration for intermediary and business support organisations that want to use Design Thinking as a philosophy and method and want to promote a human-centred digital transformation.



What lessons can you learn from the chapter's examples?

Do you have any processes that might be in need of some new perspectives?

Who do you want to invite as a co-creation partner?

How can you explore and test together?

Learn more about design thinking

If you want to learn even more about Design Thinking and how the methodology can support learning and exploratory processes, we recommend [this guide](#). Developed in the framework of the D-LEARNING project, funded by the Erasmus+ programme, this handbook describes the entire Design Thinking process. It shows practical methods for completing the different steps of the process and concludes with 6 case studies on the work of the project's partner organisations.

THE FOOD FOR THOUGHT

APPENDIX

This appendix is the summary of five exploratory conversations on digitalisation conducted during autumn and winter 2022/2023 in Sweden. They were carried out as part of the COM³ project with the aim of broadening the scope and gathering further insights from all the project's target groups: companies, entrepreneurs, innovation system actors, the public sector and others. Participants ranged from people who have worked at the forefront of digital technology for the past 30 years, to entrepreneurs, business developers and intermediaries who meet with rural businesses and want to explore the potential of digitalisation.

The conversations were conducted in Swedish in the form of digital dialogue cafés for 60 minutes with between 8 and 15 participants per session.

The five themes on which the dialogues were based were:

- **Why digitalisation?:** Research shows that those organisations that have a mission and a clear why are more resilient than others. Let's start from the beginning and ask: Why is digitalisation important?
- **Clusters and networks:** How do we facilitate connections and build attractive networks that are meaningful, value-creating and encourage people to develop and grow together?
- **Digital discipline:** How can we self-manage in a digital world? What creates well-being? How do we create routines that will help us find balance?
- **Digital strategies:** What business models are emerging and what kind of value do they create? Who are at the forefront of creating the new and what are they actually doing?
- **The future:** Looking ahead, how can we use digital technology in a way that will help us and not hinder us? What opportunities do you perceive with digitalisation? Which ones inspires you and why?



WHY DIGITALISATION?

Asking the question WHY digitalisation is important.

The core of why digitalisation is important is that it should make us more efficient and make things – and the world – available to us in a more cost-efficient way. And yes, it can approve your efficiency – if you know how to use it and what the goal is. What is your goal? Here are some reflections on why digitalisation is important:

- Technology has helped us meet the basic needs of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, and in practice it frees up time for us to have new and fulfilling experiences, work less and spend more time doing the things we love. On the other hand, we still work a lot, the retirement age is increasing, and the prognosis is that we will have to work even more. Why are we increasing the pace? Are there industries or sectors where we aren't using digitalisation in the right way? Should we really incorporate digitalisation in everything?
- Digitalisation can be used as a democratic tool; anyone can get their message across to anyone. Why is this important? Are you using digitalisation as a mean for democracy?



- Digitalisation eliminates borders and enables us to meet people all over the world. We can reach anyone at any time. We can share knowledge and experiences and develop understanding for other people, cultures and lifestyles. Why is this important?
- Digitalisation itself can be both an opportunity and a challenge - which one depends on how people choose to use it. There is still no formal game plan for how digitalisation can be used, and this leaves room for interpretation. What is your view on digitalisation and its opportunities and challenges?

CLUSTERS AND NETWORKS

How do we facilitate connections and build attractive networks that are meaningful, value-creating and encourage people to develop and grow together?

- Whether clusters and communities become value-creating and thus attractive depends largely on the interpersonal relationships, to what extent they are characterized by curiosity, to what degree the individual sees his or her part and is driven by the desire to contribute. A community where people meet and where there is also a clear and well-established WHY, is usually nourishing and value-creating. In fact, the dynamics and strength of a community depend on how strong the WHY is. You go where you feel invited but stay where you are needed.
- Communities and clusters are always the sum of all their parts, i.e., what each individual contributes with (for example in terms of commitment, interest and so forth). This determines how much value it will create for everyone involved in the end. Why should someone be a part of a network or a cluster? What is in it for them?
- It is crucial to strike a balance between the open network, where everyone is invited, and the more specialized forums where those who want to delve deeper are able to do so. This is where community members must curiously explore what really matters to them to be able to contribute with their commitment. Keep in mind the setting of your network, who would be interested in joining and why? How can you make it interesting for a broader audience or how can you narrow the scope down to be more specific and cutting edge?
- A dynamic engagement is the basis for further development. In a community, the individual needs to act as a co-creating subject; a community where individuals begin to view themselves as objects will not survive for long. Make sure that you see the members as resources and co-creators and ask yourself: how can I engage them in a meaningful way that benefits them as well as the network?
- Communities and clusters can unlock the unexpected if we allow them to be organic. This means to let them grow as they grow and to phase out as they phase out. A community is organic and not something that can be created by force. An agenda (or a vision, a dream or a goal) is a great way to frame your network and can create foundation for a thriving environment people want to be a part of! What is your network's agenda?
- Companies are often in much greater need of fewer and more qualitative contacts than the large number of general contacts. For example, within start-up communities, the focus has long been on organising pitch events to connect carriers of ideas with financiers and other enablers. Today, more start-up communities focus on creating meeting places between companies instead, as they consider this to be a more qualitative way of matching, for example, those who develop a certain technology with those who need it.

Questions for reflection:

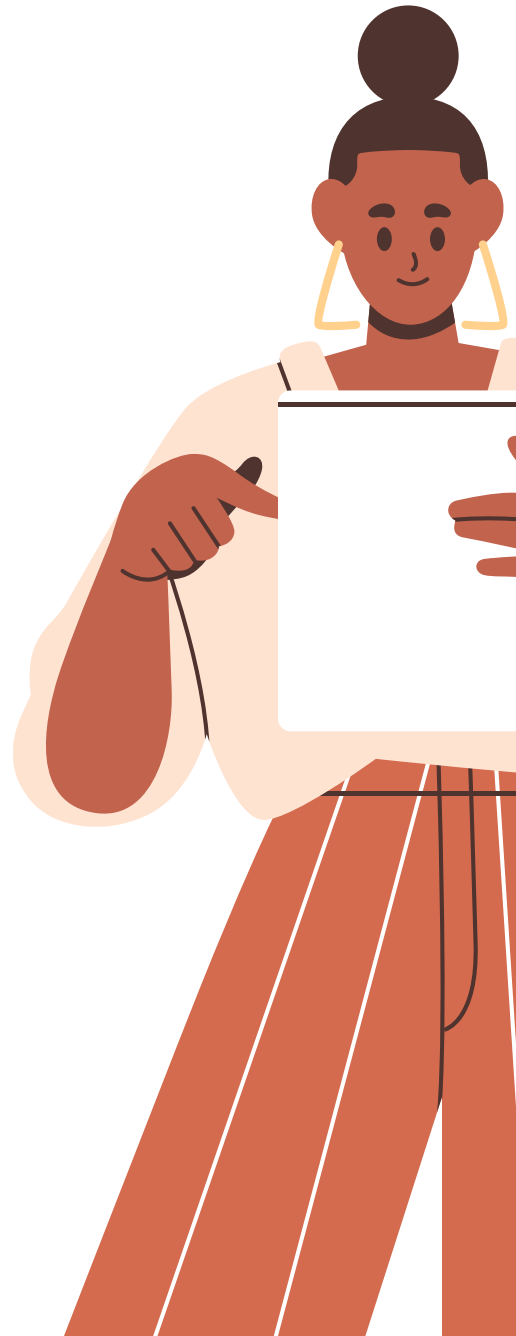
- What skills do you want to train and improve in regards to building networks and clusters?
- What kind of community is needed in your organisation, what is its agenda?
- How can you create the conditions necessary for this to happen and how do you know that you are on the right track?

DIGITAL DISCIPLINE

How can we self-manage in a digital world where we are constantly being interrupted by our digital devices? What creates well-being and balance? How do we create routines that help us find a balance between the physical and the digital realms?

It is very easy to become disconnected from the physical world when we spend time in the digital world. Therefore we need to be even more disciplined to avoid getting caught up in social media, mailboxes, games, and other digital distractions. As digital technology evolves, daily routines become even more important; we simply need to train our attention, and become aware of where we focus our attention and why.

Question for reflection: What do you do to create breathing space in your daily life where your brain can rest and process all the information - and maybe even transform it into creativity? Check out the box for some valuable tips!



Tips for creating breathing space and boosting creativity:

20-20-20: Every 20 minutes, rest your eyes 20 metres away from the screen for 20 seconds.

Minimise meaningless meetings! Conduct meaningful meetings with clear objectives, a structured agenda and clear roles. Conclude all meetings with an individual reflection followed by a group discussion and steps forward!

45 minute meetings: Meetings lasting a maximum of 45 minutes create 15 minute gaps between meetings and allow for individual reflection and increased creativity.

Have lunch with an entrepreneur: Have a weekly lunch with an entrepreneur or other person who works in a completely different field than you do – take in the perspectives of others and expand your own world.

Reflection journal: At the start and end of your workday – reflect on what you are proud of, what you are grateful for and what you aspire to do.

Short breaks for physical activity: Move body parts and stretch between and during digital and physical meetings!

Walk and talk: Leave your desk and take a walk with a client or colleague. Movement is good for both creativity and reflection.

DIGITAL STRATEGIES

What business models are emerging and what values do they create? Who are at the forefront of creating “the new” and what are they doing?

- In the start-up sector, companies can be divided into two different groups; the disruptive companies that do not have a customer base yet, but where the customer base emerges as the product/service is developed, and then those companies that start from existing products/services and develop them further, incremental innovation.
- When it comes to business models in general, there are those based on regular streams of revenue, such as subscriptions. There are also aggregation services such as Netflix, where a lot of things are gathered in the same place. Credits are starting to come back, meaning that you pay to enter a community where you get access to a range of products and services.
- There is also an rapid increase in business models based on micro-services, i.e., APIs (Application Program Interface) that allow programmatic access to services that enable the development of new programmes. A new type of business is emerging that simply sells access to its programmes to other companies, which in turn develop their own services based on

these. This type of business model is becoming much more integrated in the sense that companies are becoming much more inter-dependent than before. With such an integrated business structure, transparency will become almost impossible, and knowing who owns what information even more difficult.

- **So what does this mean?** One thing we know is that brands will become even more important, as it will be the brand that you are trusting to use your information. Blockchain technology can meet this challenge in part by allowing you to lock information on a blockchain and then choose to whom you give the key to access that information.



The blockchain technology provides a decentralised and public ledger showing all transactions. Essentially, the blockchain consists of blocks that are validated and are made up of cryptographic transactions verified by mathematical algorithms.

THE FUTURE

Looking ahead, how can we use digital technology in a way that will help us? What opportunities are there and which ones inspires you and why?

- Humanity is undergoing a tremendous shift, a shift of the same magnitude as when we transitioned from the agrarian and craft society to the industrial society. It is virtually impossible to predict what lies in the future, what effects digitalisation will have on society. In the 1960s, when the computer was introduced, it was clear that this would have a major impact – few, if any, people had an idea of the role the computer and nowadays digital technology would play in our daily lives. Nobody (or at least very few) knows today what the AI-oriented society will look like. The complexity of this societal evolution is much greater than in previous paradigm shifts and it is impossible to predict its effects.
- What do we really need humans for in an AI-oriented society? Will artificial intelligence take over our jobs? Or will someone who knows how to use AI steal it? In some industries, AI is already common, while in others it is not.

In the service industry, AI is already widely used for customer service issues. Chatbots and other robotics are used to write policies, texts for social media, and simpler tasks, while more difficult tasks are delegated to humans. This means that the customer service staff of the future will need to develop their emotional intelligence and social skills with a focus on the human listening, understanding and empathy, as the tasks that will end up on their desks will be more complex and will generally require more from the individual in terms of interpersonal skills.

- An interesting perspective is the extent to which digital tools help us develop our intelligence; there are those who argue that humanity is losing the ability to think for itself. What do you think?



Artificial Intelligence is a collective term for computer systems that can sense their environment, think, learn and take action. Today, AI is used in most industries, for example in digital assistants, chatbots and vehicles.

THANK YOU

Thank you for participating in and contributing to the making of the food for thought-appendix:

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Amt Hüttener Berge

