DigAge+

THE COMPANY GUIDE

Strategies for Digital Upskilling and Inclusive Growth

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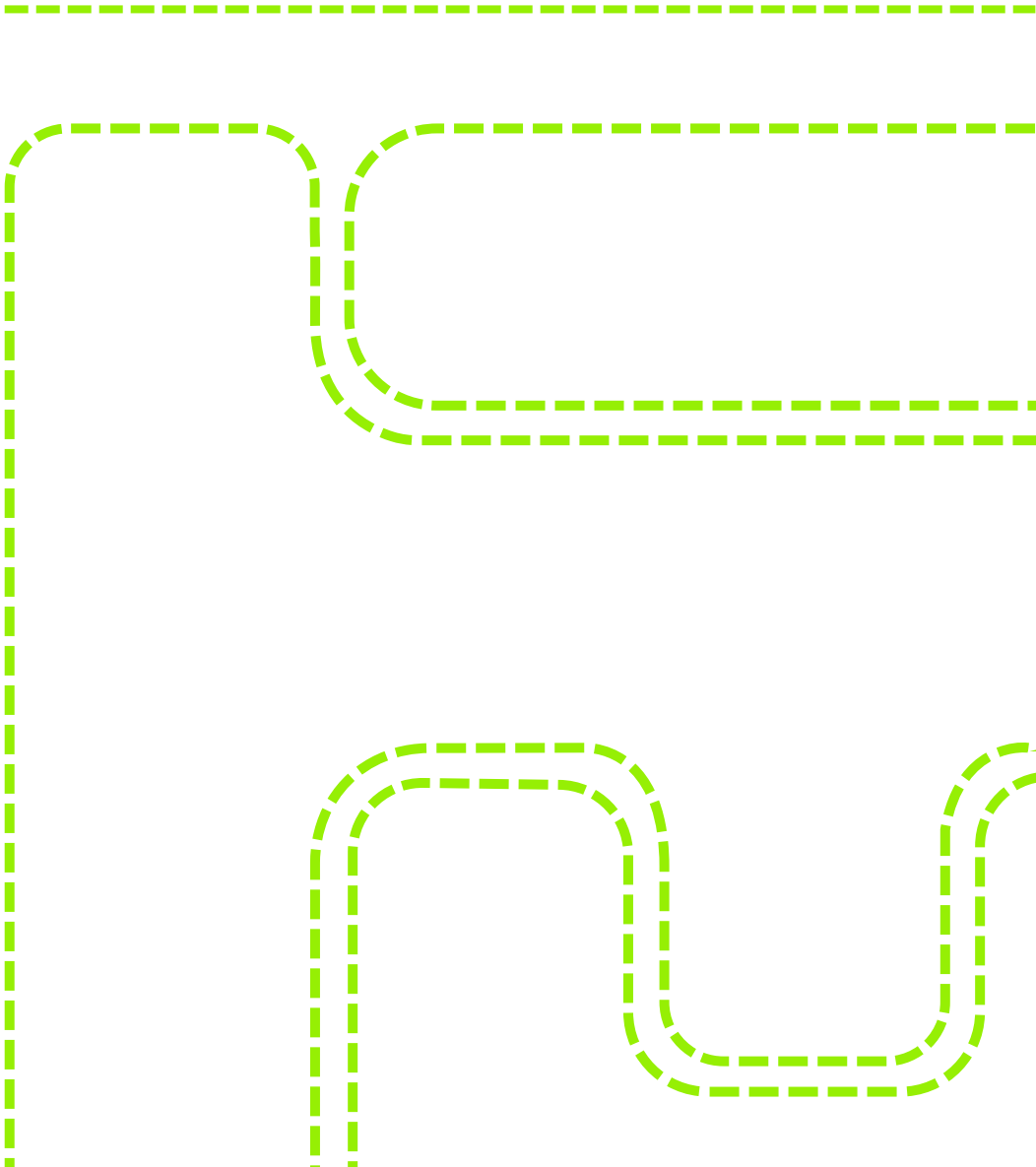Nina Vaurula (Educraftor)
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PART I:
INTRODUCTION.

Introduction

Digital upskilling refers to the **process of enhancing an individual's skills and knowledge in the digital domain, enabling them to adapt and thrive in an increasingly digitized world**. For the ageing workforce, digital upskilling is essential as it allows them to **remain competitive, employable, and capable of navigating the challenges** brought forth by rapidly **evolving technologies**. The importance of digital upskilling for the ageing workforce cannot be overstated by companies, as it not only ensures their **continued contribution to the economy** but also empowers them to **take advantage of new business and professional opportunities**.

The ageing workforce, a growing phenomenon across Europe, refers to the increasing number of older workers remaining in or re-entering the labour market. This trend is particularly relevant in the European Union, where **workers aged 55 and above currently account for 16% of the total workforce**. In some European countries, the proportion of older workers is even higher, reflecting the broader demographic shifts taking place across the continent.

Based on the Digital Economy and Society Index 2022, **only 54 percent of Europeans aged between 16-74 years have at least basic digital skills**. Barriers to **lifelong learning** and **limited investment in training** are slowing down the European Union's efforts to fill the digital skills gap.

The topic of Europe's ageing workforce is of great importance for several reasons. First and foremost, an ageing population presents numerous challenges for policymakers and European companies, including concerns related to employment, working conditions, living standards, and welfare. As **the proportion of older workers increases**, it becomes essential to ensure that appropriate measures are put in place to support their **continued upskilling and participation in the labour market**, such as raising state pension ages, providing training opportunities, and implementing policies aimed at keeping older individuals in the workforce for longer and assuring their **professional performance and effectiveness**.

GENERAL
SITUATION.

General situation

Europe's ageing workforce presents unique challenges. Although older workers generally enjoy greater life satisfaction, especially in the western and northern EU Member States, they face barriers such as age discrimination in the labour market. **The European Union's 'active ageing' policy** aims to address these challenges by focusing directly on aspects such as **raising the retirement age** and **increasing the employment rate of older workers**. It is clear that specific strategies and actions are needed to effectively support Europe's ageing workforce.

But how can we ensure their successful integration into the job market, their professional performance and development? A number of challenges shall be addressed on European, national and local levels both by policymakers, but also other stakeholders like European companies employing aged workers:

➔ The need for targeted policies to **promote the employability of older workers**, such as age-specific training and skills upgrading opportunities, flexible working arrangements and appropriate support measures. The need to upgrade skills is essential here.

➔ The importance of **fostering an inclusive working environment** that values the skills and experience of older workers, while tackling any age-related prejudice and discrimination.

➔ The need to **overcome age discrimination** which is a significant barrier faced by older workers in the European labour market. Older employees may be perceived as less adaptable, less technologically competent or less productive than their younger counterparts.

➔ The importance of **encouraging lifelong learning** and removing barriers to further training, as lack of investment in training is a key factor slowing down the EU's efforts to close the digital skills gap.

By implementing these best practices, we can significantly **improve the digital skills of an ageing workforce**, ensuring their employability, professional performance and boosting their contribution to the development of any company and overall economic growth.

Policies and initiatives to support older workers

Reduced turnover rates have been an essential factor in supporting older workers within the European workforce. By 2016, the employment rate for older workers aged 55-64 in the EU stood at 55.3%, compared with 66.6% for those aged 15-64 as a whole. The increase in older workers remaining in the labour market has resulted in **various policies and initiatives focusing on their retention and employability**. One such policy toolkit highlights good practices among EU members to **encourage employers to retain and hire older workers** and to promote their employability. This focus on **reduced turnover rates** is crucial in addressing the challenges that the EU's ageing population raises for companies' policymakers regarding employment, working conditions, living standards, and welfare.

Retirement age policies play a significant role in supporting the ageing workforce in Europe. In 2019, 48% of all working men aged 65 years or more in the EU-27 were employed on a part-time basis, compared with 60% of women aged 65 years and older.

Employment Rates by Age Group in EU (2016)
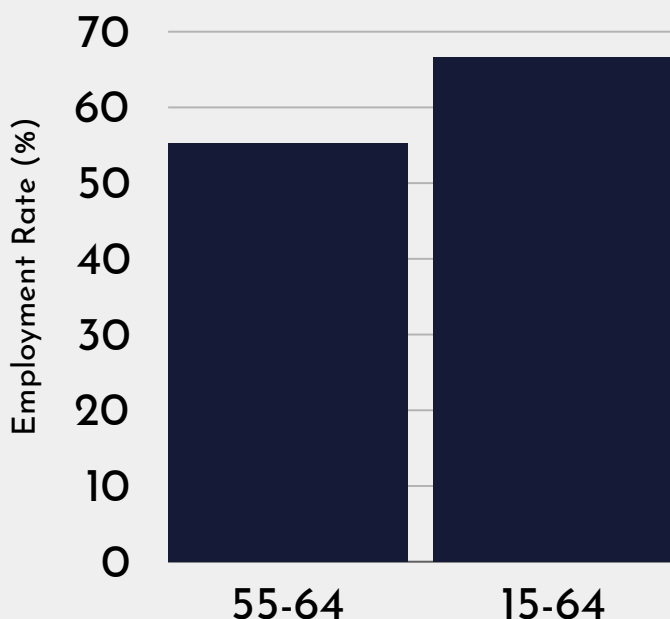
Part-Time Employment by Aged 65+ in the EU (2019)

Women 55.6%

Men 44.4%

These policies could remain ineffective if European companies are not keen to employ an aged workforce. The retirement age policies should be therefore designed taking into account both the needs of older workers and the ability of employers to meet those needs. Moreover, understanding **companies' role in maintaining, encouraging and upskilling** the ageing workforce has become essential.

Also, the **anti-discrimination laws** are crucial to creating and maintaining a favourable environment for older workers within companies in the European Union. It is important to note that European legislation only deals with age discrimination in the employment context. In more than 40 countries, legal experts specialising in employment have drawn up summaries of anti-discrimination legislation based on age, highlighting the **vital importance of these laws for the protection of older workers**. Effective implementation of these laws can make a significant contribution to ensuring that older workers are treated fairly, thereby promoting **equality of opportunity in the workplace**. As managers, it is crucial to actively integrate these laws into company policies and practices to **ensure an inclusive and fair working environment**.

The impact of COVID-19 on older workers highlights the crucial **need for training and development programmes** in Europe. To **remain competitive and innovative**, Europe needs to **improve and maintain high skills**, which is particularly essential for the ageing workforce. Policymakers are now focusing on **continuing training and career guidance** to help older workers **adapt to changes in the labour market**. These programmes are essential to ensure that older workers have the skills they need to keep their jobs and maintain their standard of living. Each manager plays a key role here by integrating these initiatives within their companies, thereby **ensuring the competitiveness and resilience of the workforce**.

Health issues concerns are a major issue for older workers in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although older people are less likely to work in physically demanding or hazardous jobs, difficult working conditions can still lead to health risks. Furthermore, in 2018, women aged 65 in the EU-27 could expect to live another 10.0 years of their remaining life in satisfactory health.

The pandemic is exacerbating an already worrying situation among the ageing workforce in the health and care sector, giving rise to problems such as **severe burnout and reduced productivity**.

Managers and stakeholders employing older workers, how do you ensure the health and well-being of your older employees? How do you plan to prevent burnout and maintain productivity among your workers ? Do you offer them any upskilling opportunities ?

Did you know?

What is the current state of the ageing workforce in Europe?

The ageing workforce in Europe is characterised by an increasing number of workers aged 55 and above, now accounting for 16% of the total EU workforce. This trend poses challenges for the labour market and social welfare systems, necessitating adaptive policies to support older workers' employability and welfare systems.

What challenges do older workers face in the European workforce?

Older workers in Europe face several challenges. These include age discrimination, where they may be overlooked for promotions or job opportunities due to their age. They also face health and physical limitations, which can make certain tasks more difficult. Furthermore, older workers often lack access to training and upskilling opportunities, which can limit their ability to keep up with technological advancements or new industry practice

What are the benefits of employing older workers in Europe?

Older workers bring a wealth of experience and knowledge to the workplace, often having a strong work ethic. They can provide valuable mentorship to younger employees and bring a diverse perspective, contributing to an inclusive workplace environment. Additionally, employing older workers can lead to reduced turnover rates, as they are often more loyal and committed to their employers.

What policies and initiatives are in place to support the ageing workforce in Europe?

First to be mentioned are retirement age policies that aim to keep older workers in the workforce, and anti-discrimination laws that protect them from unfair treatment based on their age. Training and upskilling programs are also being introduced to help older workers adapt to the changing workplace. However, more needs to be done to ensure these initiatives are effective and accessible to all.

What is the future outlook for the ageing workforce in Europe?

The outlook for the ageing workforce in Europe is influenced by predicted demographic trends, potential policy changes, and the evolving nature of work. The continued ageing of the population suggests that the number of older workers will continue to increase. This, alongside potential policy changes to support these workers, will shape the workforce of the future. The future of work, with increasing digitalization and remote work, also has implications for older workers, presenting both challenges and opportunities.

And how about you?

What is the percentage of the ageing workforce within your company?

Do you know what are the latest trends when it comes to companies' engagement in ensuring the efficient professional integration and performance of their aged staff workforce?

Are the needs of the aged staff members being consulted within your company and with which result? How would you describe the internal practices?

**Do you know the level of digital competences of your aged workforce?
Do you know what they are capable of and what type of difficulties they face daily?**

**Finally, when was the last time you evaluated the level of your digital competences?
Are you digitally competent?
Do you need any digital upskilling?**

**Could the level of your digital competences impact your decisions taken in relation to the digital upskilling of your staff members?
In which sense?**

THE NEEDS AND BENEFITS FROM DIGITAL UPSKILLING OF THE AGEING WORKFORCE.

The needs and benefits from digital upskilling of the ageing workforce

Strategic Seniors: Unlocking Invaluable Value for Companies

> *Senior citizens are an under-exploited talent pool. Yet they have many assets. The fact that they have worked in a variety of companies and sectors is an asset that makes them essential cogs in the transmission of knowledge to younger generations. Contrary to popular belief, they know how to adapt to change and new technologies, provided they are given access to appropriate training*

~ Muriel Bolteau,
founder and president of Réseau 137,
Expert in supporting business transitions

With an ageing workforce in the European Union, **senior citizens are experiencing an increase in employment rates**. The presence of older workers in the labour market is continuing and will not stop:

→ Between 2009 and 2022, the percentage of men aged 55 to 64 in employment rose by 6.1%, reaching 19.3% in 2022.

→ For women in the same age bracket, the percentage of employment has risen by 7.6%, reaching 19.2% in 2022.

→ In 2022, the employment rate of older people in the European Union was 62.4%, reflecting a significant presence on the labour market.

→ The employment rate should continue to rise as a result of ongoing demographic transitions and an ageing population.

It is imperative to **recognise and leverage their skills**, especially in the context of **digital transformation**.

Why are senior workers so valuable to companies across the EU? What are the **strong points of aged workers?**

➡️ **Experience and expertis**e ➜ To solve complex business challenges senior workers often use the wealth of experience and expertise they have accumulated over the years. Therefore they represent stability and trust within each company.

➡️ **Mentoring and Knowledge Transfer** ➜ An important ability to share tacit knowledge that strengthens cohesion within any teams and accelerates professional development of all staff members.

➡️ **Stability and Loyalty** ➜ The stability and loyalty of senior workers helps to reduce staff turnover, which in turn improves the stability of any business and the satisfaction of customers.

➡️ **Adaptability and versatility** ➜ Contrary to certain stereotypes, older people are adaptable and open to new technologies and changes. Their versatility can be exploited in different areas of any business.

All of these values are essential to the **development and growth of companies**, including yours, and will help to ensure their continued performance.

The transition to enhanced digital skills will ensure that older workers continue to make a **significant contribution to any business**, while **remaining competitive** in an ever-changing professional world.

Main Digital Skills Challenges for Companies

OPEN QUESTION:

Do you have a strategic approach to digital skills in your company? Have you ever reflected on the level of digital competences of your staff members and its impact on your company performance?

By addressing these challenges and issues, your company will be better positioned to meet the challenges of digital skills and remain competitive in an ever-changing business environment. **Investing in the development of your team's digital skills** is an essential step in successfully navigating today's digital landscape.

As leaders, it's crucial for you to **recognise the digital skills challenges within your team. With the rapid evolution of technology**, businesses need to support their employees to remain productive and make an effective digital transition.

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES?	WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?	HOW ABOUT YOU?
Data and information literacy	Employees must grasp the significance of confidentiality in **handling data**, along with concepts like **data ethics and security**. Skills in distinguishing between data and information, and adeptly **managing information** from diverse sources, are vital. Furthermore, the ability to assess online information reliability and tackle issues related to false information is increasingly crucial in today's digital landscape.	Do you think your teams/ senior employees understand the crucial importance of data confidentiality? Do you know how to assess the credibility of online information?
Online communication and collaboration	The **ability to interact and collaborate via digital platforms** has become essential to ensure the performance, efficiency and the success of any business organisation. This is usually supported with the help of tools such as Teams, Zoom, GoogleMeet.	Have you observed a gap between your employees in the usage of communication tools such as Teams or Zoom? Do you actually have a chance to evaluate those?
Creation of digital content	The **ability to produce different digital contents in a professional manner** is crucial in today's world where digital content creation is ubiquitous in all businesses. You need to be familiar with text editing, create simple videos and acquire the skills needed to create a basic visual identity.	What kind of digital contents are being produced within your company? Are those of good quality? How could they be improved and contribute better to the success of your business?

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES?	WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?	HOW ABOUT YOU?
Cybersecurity and data protection	This challenge is of crucial importance in the current context. **Understanding and reacting against risks and threats** to which your businesses are exposed, and developing your employees' **ability to protect personal data and guarantee confidentiality** in the digital environment, is necessary for the **security of your business**.	And you, have you or your company ever been the victim of a cyber attack? What have you done to prevent this from happening or happening again? Is your staff competent to defect and prevent any cyber attack?
Problem-solving and digital innovation	Creating a **culture of continuous learning**, **overcoming resistance to adopting new digital tools, supporting curiosity** about digital innovations and developing the **ability to solve technical problems** can only contribute to the development of your business and the wellbeing of your employees.	How would you evaluate the digital culture within your company? What have you done so far to develop it?

Implementing **continuous training programmes** to meet these challenges is imperative for your companies. We strongly encourage you to invest in the training of your senior employees to **ensure the longevity, adaptability and competitiveness** of your business in a constantly evolving digital world.

OPEN QUESTION:

Where are you with your digital skills? Can you inspire others with your digital competences to further development and upskilling? Are your decisions driven by the level of your digital competences?

Ignoring Digital Training Challenges for Seniors : Unravelling the Risks

In the face of the growing digital transition, it is essential to **carefully consider the challenges associated with digital training** for senior workers. Ignoring these challenges can lead to **potential risks** that could compromise your company's overall performance.

CHALLENGE	RISKS / CONSEQUENCES	AN OPEN QUESTION BOX
Technological Phase Shift	Ignoring digital training for senior workers will lead to a **technology gap.** For example, senior employees who are not trained in the latest technologies find it difficult to use online collaboration tools, leading to inefficiencies in internal communication and collaboration.	Have you observed a mismatch between your employees' digital competences and the tasks assigned to them? What was your reaction? Did any action follow this observation?
Loss of competitiveness and innovation	Your company must constantly **innovate to remain competitive**. By neglecting digital training for older employees, you risk depriving your business of the innovative ideas of this experienced generation. A lack of digital skills prevents **active participation in innovation projects** and the **implementation of new technologies.**	Is the digital part of your innovation ambitions? How are you implementing it?

CHALLENGE	RISKS / CONSEQUENCES	AN OPEN QUESTION BOX
Data security and cyber threats	Senior workers in your company who are not trained in good IT security practices can become **potential weak points and a danger** to your company's data security. Ignorance of digital threats increases the risk of **cyber attacks, data leaks and breaches of confidentiality**, jeopardising your **company's reputation, image and liability**. *"Today, it is certain that every company will one day be the victim of a cyber attack, and even of several attacks, so it is really urgent to ask the right questions and above all to anticipate in order to avoid serious consequences for the data of the company, its customers and its employees, as well as serious financial consequences".* ~Aude Muller, Educational director at The Nuum Factory	Are you aware of digital threats? Are you and your staff able to identify them? Do you have any internal strategy for cybersecurity?
Reduced productivity	The **lack of adequate digital skills** can lead to a **drop in productivity**. For example, if senior staff do not master the digital tools essential to their daily tasks, delays and errors, **affecting the quality of work and delivery times**, could occur, as with pack office tools.	How are digital skills linked with the productivity results in your company? How do you evaluate, measure and control it?
Impact on Employee Satisfaction	Senior workers who are not trained in digital skills feel a **lack of support from the company and its management**. This can have a negative impact on their **job satisfaction, staff retention and team dynamics**. *"If the over-50s are not trained, it can be difficult, if not insurmountable, to get to grips with the tools that are replacing paper. A tool like Excel, which seems like a basic tool, is in fact complex and not at all intuitive. This is an obstacle to the company's development and productivity".* ~Aude Muller, Educational director at The Nuum Factory	

CONCLUSION:

→ To mitigate all those risks and prevent potential negative consequences on your company, invest in personalised digital training for older workers, while considering their existing knowledge. This proactive approach ensures a seamless transition to essential digital skills, securing your business's long-term future and maximising the valuable contributions of older employees in the digital workplace.

OPEN QUESTION:

Have these risks been experienced within your company?

The digital training for the senior workforce:
A recipe for your company's success?

Investing in digital training for your senior staff is a **catalyst for your company's success** on several levels. Here are a few concrete examples of the tangible **benefits and advantages of digital training** for your senior staff:

BENEFITS / ADVANTAGES	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE
Improving operational efficiency	Targeted digital training programmes can **increase the operational efficiency** of senior workers. By providing digital training specific to their responsibilities, your employees will be able to **complete their tasks more quickly and efficiently**.	For example, mastering project management software such as Excel can **streamline processes and improve team coordination**. *"Companies that invest in the training and development of their employees, including senior managers, are more competitive in the marketplace."* ~According to the May 2023 "Future Job" report by the World Economic Forum (WEF)
Encouraging innovation	**Digital training stimulates creativity and fosters innovation.** By offering your senior employees the opportunity to acquire advanced digital skills, you encourage them to take an active part in innovative projects	For example, learning to master artificial intelligence can open up new perspectives for developing innovative products, services or procedures.

BENEFITS / ADVANTAGES	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE
Strengthening data security	Cyber security training is essential to **prevent data security risks**. By raising awareness of IT security best practice, you can reduce the risk of cyber-attacks and data	For example, training on how to detect phishing emails can make your **business more resilient** to online threats. 💡 Novartis, a Swiss pharmaceutical company, has invested in digital training programmes for its staff, including senior workers. The creation of the Novartis Learning Institute has made it possible to offer a variety of training programmes on personal effectiveness, digital skills and other topics. This has helped to increase the effectiveness of internal communication processes and maintain compliance with regulatory standards in the pharmaceutical sector.
Increased employee satisfaction	Training programmes demonstrate the company's commitment to the professional development of its employees. This can increase **job satisfaction, promote staff retention** and create a **positive working environment**.	💡 In 2020 Orange invested in an ambitious skills development and professional retraining programme. Today this has helped to strengthen, adapt or renew the skills of all its employees. It has also helped to strengthen Orange's ability to adapt to rapid technological change in the telecoms sector. *"It is important for us to confirm today our commitment as a leading and responsible player in the training of our employees in digital professions, and in the support of all our employees. We are convinced that the sustainable transformation of Orange will be linked to the ability of each and every one of us to learn differently, to share our knowledge and skills, and that the combination of technical skills and soft skills is one of the keys to our future success,"* ~ Valérie Le Boulanger, Executive Director of Human Resources for the Orange Group.

BENEFITS / ADVANTAGES	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE
Adapting to new market trends	Well-trained senior workers can help you **anticipate and adopt the latest technological trends**, securing your company's long-term future in an ever-changing business environment.	💡Lloyds Banking Group, a UK bank, has launched digital training programmes to improve the skills of its staff, including managers. This has enabled the bank to remain competitive in a financial sector that is undergoing rapid digital transformation.

Digital training for senior workers is not only an investment in individual development, but also **a winning strategy for overall business success**. By capitalising on the tangible benefits of digital training, you position your business to **thrive in today's digital age**.

The importance of digital competence cannot be overstated, as organisations with it are more agile, adopt innovative practices and are more **likely to grow rapidly, both nationally and internationally**. While larger corporations may grapple with bureaucratic structures, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) possess inherent agility, enabling them to make swift decisions and undertake more substantial risks.

Implementing a **strategic digital development plan** is a key element of organisational progress. This plan not only propels your staff towards digital proficiency, it also aligns with the overall objectives of the organisation. The absence of a structured digital skills development plan can impede progress and prevent organisational goals from being achieved on time. In the absence of a **clear roadmap for improving digital skills**, training becomes ad-hoc, lacking systematicity and adherence to a predefined timetable.

PART IV:
METHODOLOGY
HOW TO DO IT?

Methodology
How to do it?

Introduction

> **"**
>
> *77% of business executives agree that their organisations should help workers learn new skills, but only 5% strongly agree that their organisation is investing enough to enable people to keep up with the changing world of work.*
>
> **~ Deloitte 2022**

To be able to create an **understanding of the current skills set in your organisation** and meet the development needs of your organisation and your employees, it is important to **map out the current skills and knowledge of the workforce**.

In doing so, you create a corporate culture that rewards curiosity and lifelong learning, appreciating the **diversity of skills** that each employee brings. This **inclusive approach** not only boosts morale, but also fosters a sense of belonging and purpose among your staff.

To create a culture of lifelong learning and a commitment to development, it is important that you:

→ **support and promote learning**

→ ensure that **skills development is on the agenda** at all levels of your organisation

→ lead **learning at work** so that it is systematic and goal-oriented, and **assesses both skills needs and acquired skills.**

In cultivating a workplace that thrives on a skills-first approach and commits to the development of your employees' skills, you not only enhance individual performance but also ensure a workforce that is agile, innovative, and well-equipped to navigate evolving industry landscapes.

Remember that when employees and their skills are put first, it helps build an organisation that:

- commits to growing their talent
- recognises return on investment in your workforce
- rewards lifelong learning and curiosity
- values workforce diversity

Therefore, it is crucial that each employee is assessed and advised individually, and that they will have an individual skills development plan.
A one-fit-all approach will not be effective in developing their skills nor will it pay off financially either.

OPEN QUESTIONS:

What is the skills development strategy in your company?

Is there any strategy in place?

What is the importance you give to digital skills' development of your staff members?

Digital strategy

An **effective digital upskilling strategy** not only accelerates individual skill development but positions the entire organisation on a trajectory of **continuous growth and adaptability**. Investing in the upskilling of your workforce emerges not only as a strategic imperative but as a **catalyst for sustained success** in an ever-evolving digital ecosystem.

Investing in specialised **training programmes, workshops, and online courses**, as few examples, can **provide targeted skill development**, keeping your employees abreast of the latest technological advancements. Additionally, **fostering a culture of continuous learning** within the organisation, supported by **mentorship programmes and knowledge-sharing initiatives**, can create an environment conducive to ongoing skills enhancement.

By embracing a **multifaceted approach to skills development**, your organisation not only equips its workforce with the requisite digital acumen but also cultivates a **culture of innovation and adaptability** that is vital in today's dynamic business landscape.

How to finance this transition and digital upskilling?

SMEs can face a number of challenges when it comes to improving the skills of their employees (ILO 2008). With fewer employees, you may find it difficult to find time for training or lack the **resources to invest in skills development**.

Upgrading your employees requires resources, but the investment you make now will pay off handsomely in terms of professional effectiveness, productivity, improved skills, well-being at work and overall business growth. To make the best use of time and financial resources, it is important to identify a set of key elements of a **successful workforce investment strategy**.

There are several ways SMEs can finance employees' training and upskilling:

→ **Government Grants and Subsidies:** Explore potential government incentives by checking with local or national agencies for grants, subsidies, or tax benefits aimed at encouraging businesses to invest in employee training.

→ **Industry Associations:** Join industry associations or trade groups to access potential grants, scholarships, or discounted training programs exclusively available to members, leveraging valuable resources and networking opportunities.

→ **Online Training Platforms:** Optimise cost-effective online training platforms and resources, tapping into a plethora of courses and materials available at lower costs compared to traditional in-person programmes.

→ **Collaborative Partnerships:** Forge partnerships with educational institutions, vocational schools, or universities to tailor training programs for your employees, potentially securing reduced costs or subsidies.

→ **Peer Learning:** Cultivate a culture of knowledge-sharing through peer learning sessions or mentorship programmes, encouraging employees to share their expertise and skills with one another.

→ **Continuous Improvement Culture:** Nurture a culture of continuous learning within your organisation, motivating employees to actively seek out new skills and knowledge.

→ **Workforce Development Funds:** Investigate regional workforce development funds or programmes that offer financial assistance to companies engaged in employee training, identifying and leveraging available resources.

→ **Budget Allocation:** Dedicate a segment of your annual budget explicitly for employee training and development, establishing a designated fund for this purpose to ensure consistent investment in skill enhancement.

→ **Training Providers:** Negotiate with training providers for bulk discounts or flexible payment plans, facilitating the spreading of training costs over time.

→ **Internal Training Programmes:** Create internal training initiatives led by experienced employees or managers, aiming to reduce external training costs while leveraging in-house expertise.

→ **Employee Development Agreements:** Introduce agreements where employees commit to remaining with the company for a specified period after receiving training, potentially reimbursing a portion of the costs if they depart earlier.

→ **ROI Assessment:** Conduct a thorough return on investment (ROI) analysis to quantify the potential benefits of training, providing a compelling justification for the expense associated with employee development.

→ **Employee Training Accounts:** Establish training accounts for employees, where a dedicated portion of their salary is allocated for professional development, potentially matched by the company to enhance their investment in skills improvement.

Create a digital strategy for your organisation

STEP 1:

Identify the current and future digital skills needs of your organisation. Focus on identifying individual needs and corresponding to your business needs. Then identify, test and evaluate the current skills of your employees and compare them with the business needs.

You can use surveys, interviews, tests or self-assessments to learn about your employees' skills. Here some examples of accessible tools: https://europa.eu/europass/digitals kills/

STEP 2:

Set digital skills goals for your organisation, and create a personalised learning path for each employee or team. Make sure the goals are specific and achievable enough and thus also measurable. Set a schedule for the plans and testing & evaluation activities.

➡ STEP 3:

Choose the digital skills training methods that suit your organisation's budget and goals. Also ask your employees about their preferences and take them into account when possible. The key to best outcomes is that the training is relevant, accessible and engaging.

You can choose from online courses, webinars, workshops, coaching, mentoring, or peer learning, or mix and match different types of training. You can also create internal groups, where digitally strong workers will train others. In this case, always remember to recognise the efforts and knowledge of your internal mentors.

➡ STEP 4:

Create a continuous learning culture where employees are encouraged to engage in ongoing skill development. Ensure that leadership actively supports and participates in the upskilling initiatives. If necessary follow the up-skillIng path with your employees and give them a good example.

➡ STEP 5:

Evaluate the impact of the training on individual performance regularly. Make sure you also give your employees feedback and your recognition. After a certain time, do not forget to follow up on the training results. Upskilling is a continuous and a long term process. Exchange with your employees a few weeks after to check if and how beneficial to him/her the training program was.

STEP 6:

Choose which metrics you will use to assess the impact of the training, for example, quantitative methods such as completion rates, test scores, performance reviews, customer satisfaction, or productivity, or qualitative methods, such as surveys, interviews, or focus groups.

STEP 7:

Follow up. Upskilling is a continuous and long term project. You need to update your digital skills goals and need to keep up with the latest trends and new practices since digital ways of working keep evolving constantly.

Tips and Best Practices

ACTION	APPROACH	EXAMPLE
Understanding the Current Digital Skill Level	It is essential to understand the current level of digital skills of your staff. This can be done through surveys, assessments or direct feedback.	A German company, Siemens, carried out a company-wide audit to identify existing digital skills among its employees, which helped it to adapt its development programmes. Seminars and certified upskilling courses at SiTecSkills Academy and Qualifications to address skills shortage: Siemens launches digitalization academy	Press	Company
Tailoring training programs to individual needs	Training programmes need to be designed to meet the individual needs of the ageing workforce. One-size-fits-all programmes often fail to deliver the desired results, as they may not meet the specific learning needs of older employees.	A study carried out by the European Commission highlighted the importance of personalised learning pathways for successful digital upskilling. tent/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ%3AJOC_2016_484_R_0001
Incorporating a Mix of Learning Methods	The digital landscape is constantly evolving, so training programmes need to be regularly updated to ensure that they remain relevant. This means keeping abreast of the latest digital trends and incorporating them into training programmes	Successful examples include the UK's BT Skills for Tomorrow initiative, which combines online and face-to-face teaching methods. Providing digital skills for those in greatest need and maybe better this: Skills for Tomorrow - Good Things Foundation

ACTION	APPROACH	EXAMPLE
Creative a Supportive Learning Environment	encouraging a culture of continuous learning and providing support can motivate the ageing workforce to adopt digital skills. This can mean setting up a dedicated support team, offering incentives or celebrating the success of employees who excel in their training.	A French company Thales has an internal digital community to support its employees' digital transformation journey. Developing our people	Thales Group
Regularly Updating Training Programs	The digital landscape is constantly evolving, so training programmes need to be regularly updated to ensure that they remain relevant. This means keeping abreast of the latest digital trends and incorporating them into training programmes.	According to a report by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, companies with successful skills enhancement programmes regularly review and update their training content.

Best practice: Digital SkillUp

Digital SkillUp is an EU-funded initiative that offers innovative online courses. The courses are offered free of charge in English, French, German, Dutch, Croatian, Greek, Italian, Polish, Romanian, and Spanish. These courses explain emerging technologies in an easy and accessible way to everyone, regardless of their age, profession, or previous ICT experience, and each course has a certificate of completion available for those passing the course. The goal is to help all European citizens and SMEs keep up with emerging technologies and make the most of them.

The programme covers a variety of digital skills, including web development, data analysis, and digital marketing. It consists of a series of interactive online courses that are designed to be engaging and accessible. Participants can learn at their own pace and take the courses from anywhere, making it easier to fit into their busy schedules.

Investing in this program for your employees will directly enhance their practical skills, fostering innovation and ethical awareness in your workforce. Participants also gain access to a supportive community, attend events, and receive digital credentials. By cultivating digital leadership, you'll see improved productivity and decision-making in your team, alongside expanded business networks and opportunities, driving your company's competitive edge and growth. Visit digitalskillup.eu to learn more about the training.

Case study: Nuum Factory

The Nuum Factory (TNF) founded in 2018 by the Mouvement des entreprises de France in the Auvergne Rhône Alpes region is the first school for digital transformation created by companies to respond to their needs for digital upskilling of the labour workforce.

Offering state and labour market recognised certifications, the TNF stands out for its personalised approach to each student. This individualised support and supervision reinforce the efficiency of digital training of employees and managers who need to meet specific needs of their companies. Companies delegating their staff of different levels (employees, managers, CEOs) to the TNF school can choose between longer - diploma based, or shorter – certificate based thematic training. Having trained their staff in specialised training centres, the companies are satisfied with the results, as they gain security and an official confirmation of their staff' digital skills level, which enables companies' cyber development and guarantees evolution of their businesses.

The TNF school relies on a network of companies, which means it is immersed in the economic realities of the business world. This direct connection with the professional world ensures that the skills taught are aligned with the current needs of the job market. Graduates of The Nuum Factory are recognised on the labour market as skilled professionals, equipped with technical know-how and a deep understanding of the human issues involved in digital transformation, which today is necessary for guiding companies into the digital age. The school offers its program on paid basis, but learners have a flexible schedule which allows them to combine studying and working at the same time. Companies willing to train their staff at TNF can be co-financed by the state or from other public sources. If you need more informations: https://thenuumfactory.fr/

PART V:

TOOLS AND EUROPEAN INITIATIVES.

Tools and European Initiatives for Reskilling and Upskilling Older Employees

We want to draw your attention to some significant developments in the European landscape that could have a direct impact on your operations and strategies.

The new Skills Agenda for Europe: https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1223&langId=en, in conjunction with initiatives such as the **EU 2023 Year of Skills:** https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/european-year-skills-2023_en and the **European Digital Strategy:** https://eufordigital.eu/discover-eu/eu-digital-strategy/, is placing a strong emphasis on three key priorities:

→ Improving the quality and relevance of skills formation,

→ Making skills more visible and comparable,

→ Enhancing skills and intelligence for better career choices.

These priorities resonate deeply with the ongoing conversation surrounding upskilling within companies. As you know, **approximately 70 million European adults currently lack fundamental skills**, which poses significant risks in terms of unemployment and social exclusion.

Moreover, skill development isn't just about individual empowerment; it's a critical pathway towards enhancing employability, driving innovation, and fostering social cohesion. To achieve these goals, it's imperative for policymakers, stakeholders and company managers to undertake substantial policy reforms and strategic investments in human capital.

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Particularly interesting for SMEs is as well the European Year of Skills 2023, which aims to **rejuvenate lifelong learning initiatives, thereby equipping both individuals and companies with the necessary tools to navigate the green and digital transitions**. For SMEs like yours, this presents a unique opportunity to address skills shortages within the EU while promoting a culture of continuous reskilling and upskilling to secure quality jobs.

Importantly, the European Year of Skills 2023 seeks to meet ambitious social and digital targets set for 2030, including ensuring that **60% of adults engage in training annually** and achieving an employment rate of 78%. Additionally, it aims to ensure that **80% of adults possess basic digital skills** and that 20 million employed ICT specialists contribute to the EU's digital ecosystem.

To sum-up, these initiatives underscore the importance of prioritising skill development at both the individual and organisational levels. They offer us a roadmap to not only address immediate skill gaps but also to thrive amidst transformative shifts in our operating environment.

OPEN QUESTION:

Did you know that these initiatives existed?

We want to draw your attention as well to one of the most crucial European programs, **The Digital Europe Programme** (https://eufundingoverview.be/funding/digital-europe-programme), boasting a budget of €7.6 billion. This initiative is strategically crafted to **bridge the divide between research and the practical application of digital technologies**. Its overarching goal is to effectively **transfer research outcomes to the market**, thereby benefitting Europe's citizens and businesses, with a particular focus on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

One example of how you as an SMEs can benefit from this programme is through its emphasis on the development of digital skills. For instance, as a small marketing agency struggling to adapt to the digital landscape you can **leverage resources provided by the Digital Europe Programme to train your employees** in cutting-edge digital marketing strategies, data analytics, and social media management. By upskilling your workforce in these areas, you can enhance your competitiveness, attract new clients, and expand your market reach, ultimately driving business growth and sustainability.

Another program worth considering is **The Connecting Europe Facility - Digital** (https://hadea.ec.europa.eu/programmes/connecting-europe-facility_en), which boasts a budget of €2.07 billion, alongside Horizon Europe, with a substantial €95.5 billion allocated. These programs offer concrete **objectives and practical opportunities** that can directly benefit you as a manager, particularly in relation to the development of digital skills among older employees.

The Connecting Europe Facility – Digital aims to bolster Europe's digital infrastructure, enhancing connectivity and accessibility across the continent. For your company, this translates to **improved access to digital resources and training materials**. You can leverage this infrastructure to provide **targeted digital skills training programs for older employees**, ensuring they have the necessary knowledge and capabilities to thrive in today's digital workplace.

For you, being in managerial roles, it's essential to **embed continuous learning and digital skills development into organisational strategies**, ensuring a workforce that is both adaptable and competitive in the evolving digital landscape. These programmes can help you and your business grow.

OPEN QUESTION:

Do you know the educational avenue for your older employees to remain competitive?

Tools for digital skills development

There is a wide array of free of charge and paid **tools available for digital skills development** across various domains from **online learning platforms, digital literacy apps to virtual training platforms**.

We will focus on online learning platforms as they offer a **modern, scalable, and efficient approach to digital skills development** that is well-suited for the diverse needs of ageing employees. By embracing these platforms within your company, you as managers can contribute to a learning culture, foster inclusivity, and ensure that your teams, regardless of age, are equipped with the skills needed to thrive in today's dynamic business environment.

There are several reasons **why you should use / apply online learning platforms** as an approach to the digital re- and upskilling of your ageing employees – we present them in the table below.

Table: Reasons and benefits of using online platforms for learning digital skills

REASON	BENEFIT
Flexible learning	Online learning platforms offer flexibility in terms of when and where employees can access training.
Tailored learning path	You as manager can leverage online platforms to tailor learning paths for senior employees based on their roles, skills gaps, and career aspirations.
Cost effective training	Online learning platforms often provide cost-effective solutions, eliminating the need for extensive travel or trainer salary, and allowing employees to learn from the comfort of their homes or offices.
Encourages continuous learning culture	By encouraging senior employees to engage in ongoing skill development, you as managers contribute to a workplace where staying current with industry trends and technologies is the norm.
Reduces age related stereotypes	By promoting online learning, you as managers send a clear message that continuous learning is valued at all career stages. This helps combat age-related stereotypes and reinforces the idea that employees, regardless of age, can contribute meaningfully to the organisation's success.

When choosing the digital skills training (online) platform, here are some key aspects you should remember:

➜ make sure that it is user friendly,

➜ that its content is of high quality and up-to date – as well it should be aligned with the training goals, be developed by industry experts, professionals, or reputable institutions,

➜ it should allow for customisation to meet the unique needs of your workforce; it should offer flexibility in terms of content selection, course structure, and the ability to integrate company-specific materials,

➜ make sure that it offers interactive elements such as quizzes, discussions, and practical exercises as engagement is crucial for effective learning, and interactive features enhance the overall training experience,

➜ choose a platform that provides robust assessment tools and detailed feedback for learners.

Whatever the platform is, **remember to follow up and check with your staff if and how they have benefited from gained knowledge**.

In the following text we introduce some examples of platforms that, according to our perception and knowledge, meet the criteria stated above.

DIG-AGE+
Digital upskilling of the existing ageing workforce

The Erasmus+ project DIG-AGE+ offers a training program designed for employees aged 50 and above, delivered as a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) free of charge. The program consists of 5 modules covering essential digital skills:

➡️ Data and information literacy

➡️ Communication and collaboration

➡️ Creation of digital content

➡️ Digital/Cybersecurity and data protection

➡️ Problem-solving

Here's why we recommend it for your employees:

Enhanced Digital Competence: Employees will develop vital digital skills necessary for today's workplace, such as data literacy, cybersecurity awareness, and problem-solving abilities.

Improved Job Performance: By completing one or more modules, staff members can enhance their effectiveness in using digital tools and collaborating with colleagues, leading to increased productivity and efficiency.

Flexible Learning: The MOOC format allows employees to learn at their own pace and choose modules according to their specific needs and interests. Additionally, the availability of certificates upon successful completion provides tangible recognition of their newfound skills.

And above all, MOOC includes a lot of interactivities, challenges, case studies, best practice examples, micro units (videos, testimonials), quizzes, crossword puzzles, exercises with dragging words etc. All to keep the learners motivated, focused and interested.

TELEGROW HUB
Enhancing the Teleworking Digital Skills for the Middle aged employees

TeleGrow Hub, an Erasmus+ program, aims to develop digital skills of the ageing workforce in order they successfully adapt to the new reality of remote working. This platform helps you as managers maintain a competitive and skilled workforce, crucial for your company's success in today's fast-paced business environment.

The link to the e-learning platform (free of charge): https://telegrow.erasmus.site/platform/

The TeleGrow Hub offers:

➜ Insights for informed decisions: Utilise the TeleGrow Interactive Map and national reports to gain insights into telework conditions across different countries. This information can aid in remote team management and international expansion decisions.

➜ Training for a skilled workforce: The "How to stay gOLD" training guide offers valuable resources for developing soft skills essential for effective teleworking among older employees. emphasising work-life balance can boost employee satisfaction and productivity.

➜ Preparation for the digital era: Implement training modules on teleworking and digital skills to prepare employees for the post-COVID19 business landscape. Ensuring staff are well-equipped for remote work enhances company adaptability and resilience.

➜ Continuous learning with TeleGrow Hub: The TeleGrow Hub provides an e-learning platform for continuous learning and development. This tool supports ongoing upskilling efforts, ensuring a competitive and skilled workforce essential for business success

The Grande École du Numérique (GEN)

GEN provides a catalogue of MOOCs and training on digital skills. You can access a catalogue with more than 15.000 training courses in various digital disciplines and choose between them to enable your ageing workforce to re-and upskilling programs.

Link: https://www.grandeecolenumerique.fr/mooc

DC4WORK - DIGITAL COMPETENCE 4.0

The DC4Work (https://www.dc4work.eu/), an Erasmus+ program, focuses on the necessary digital skills that a workplace 4.0 needs. The aim of each company should therefore be to promote digital competencies for a better employability and therein the competitiveness of the company. For that we suggest you appoint a "Digital competence promoter" in your company or organisation.

The ability of you as CEO to identify your employees' digital skills needs and to appropriately support their development is of growing importance for your company's prosperity and success. These tasks as innovators and mentors of digital knowledge & skills at the workplace should be taken over by a "Digital competence promoter" of the company. His or her task is to enable colleagues or staff members to be aware of their improvement potential regarding digital competencies and translate it into action.

DC4WORK provides guidelines "Digital competence promoter" - a curriculum for vocational training of the "digital competence promoter". The digital promoter should obtain basic digital knowledge in general and specific knowledge in the sectors of tourism and retail. Although the project places an emphasis on the sectors tourism and commerce, the guideline can also be used to train promoters in companies of other sectors or scope.

AFX Age Factor

AFX AgeFactor (https://www.agefactor.eu/en/), is an Erasmus+ project which aims to enhance the skills and employability of adults aged 50 and over by leveraging social media and peer support. Key points for SME managers considering this program include:

→ Utilising New Media for Skills Development: The project focuses on using social media and apps to improve guidance and basic skills learning for older employees. This approach can be integrated into existing career development programs to enhance digital and transversal skills.

→ Enhancing Career Development: AgeFactor offers insights into developing career and education guidance using social media and job clubs, providing older employees with opportunities to update their skills and remain competitive in the job market.

→ Age and Diversity Management: SMEs can benefit from the project's insights on age and diversity management, refining employment practices to create a fair and inclusive environment for mature workers. This not only improves company culture but also enhances the brand's reputation as an inclusive employer.

In essence, by adopting the AgeFactor approach, you're not just supporting your older employees; you're also building a more inclusive, skilled, and forward-thinking workforce. This benefits not just the individual employees but the entire organisation, making it more adaptable, diverse, and competitive in today's dynamic business world.

The Digital Skills and Jobs Platform

We are introducing to you one more very important platform that you as managers of SMEs should be aware of when making decisions on training your older employees and improving their digital skills. The Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition is a multi-stakeholder partnership created by the European Commission to tackle the digital skills gap in Europe. It brings together governments, businesses, educational institutions, and other organisations to promote digital skills development and job creation. The programs offered by the Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition vary depending on the participating organisations and initiatives.

Several programs offered by The Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition could be particularly beneficial for SMEs seeking to train older employees in digital skills. Here's why:

- **Accessibility and affordability:** Many programs within the coalition are designed to be accessible and affordable, making them suitable for SMEs with limited resources. These programs often offer free or low-cost training materials and resources, reducing the financial burden on smaller businesses.

- **Tailored training for older employees:** Some initiatives within the coalition may specifically target older workers or offer training modules tailored to their needs. These programs recognise the unique challenges and learning preferences of older employees, providing content and resources that are relevant and effective for this demographic.

- **Flexibility and adaptability:** The Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition offers a range of training programs with varying formats, including online courses, workshops, and self-paced modules. This flexibility allows SMEs to choose the training format that best fits their employees' schedules and learning styles, making it easier to integrate digital skills training into their operations.

- **Certification and recognition:** Many programs within the coalition offer certification or recognition upon completion, providing SMEs and their employees with tangible proof of skill acquisition. This can be valuable for both professional development and recruitment purposes, enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs in the job market.

- **Support and networking opportunities:** By participating in programs offered by The Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition, SMEs gain access to a network of support and resources. This can include access to mentors, industry experts, and peer learning communities, allowing SMEs to exchange knowledge and best practices with other businesses facing similar challenges.

Digital certifications

The coalition's advocacy has led to increased recognition of **digital proficiency certifications**, benefitting older workers by formalising their skills. These certifications **positively impact the employability of individuals aged 50 and above** in the digital job market.

To maximise the benefits of these certifications for your older employees do not forget:

→ **Internal Communication:** Managers and team leaders should highlight and recognise each upskilling achievement within their teams. Promoting a culture of upskilling and celebrating staff members' successes encourages further skill development. Written or oral recognition, as well as potential incentives like salary increases or bonuses, can motivate employees to continue their upskilling efforts.

→ **Certificates:** Ensure you receive a copy of obtained certificates from your staff members. This provides detailed information on their newly acquired skills and allows you to expect improvements in digital practices and processes within your company.

→ **Promotion of Recognition Means:** Stay informed about recent and popular digital and professional skills recognition methods. By promoting and incorporating these into your company's practices, you can ensure that your older employees' skills are recognised and valued in the digital landscape

Digital badge and digital credentials that represent an individual's achievements, skills, or competencies in a visual and easily shareable format often recognise and validate accomplishments in various contexts, such as education, professional development, or online communities (https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/what-digital-badges-sertifierco/). They can be earned in a wide variety of environments and are used by individuals to showcase their competencies.

Micro-credentials certify the learning outcomes of short-term learning experiences, for example a short course or training and offer a flexible, targeted way to help people develop the knowledge, skills and competences they need for their personal and professional development. Shorter forms of learning opportunities than traditional qualifications, such as micro-credentials, are being developed rapidly across Europe and around the world. These opportunities are made available by a wide variety of public and private providers in response to the demand for more flexible, learner-centered forms of education and training. (https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/micro-credentials)

European Initiatives/projects supporting reskilling and upskilling of 50+ employees on digital skills

European initiatives and projects are noteworthy for their accessibility, **being free of charge and offered in various European languages**. We want to introduce you to some exemplary initiatives of a good quality, useful and beneficial for companies challenged by the ageing structure of staff members and therefore, in urgent need for reskilling and upskilling so as to remain competitive, productive and efficient.

As Erasmus+ are EU projects, they are providing you with a free of charge opportunity to train and motivate your staff to continue learning and development. Developed thanks to the co-financing of the European Union and collaboration of experienced European partners, those online tools are accessible in English or your national language. In the majority of cases, they are offering flexible access, being at the same time adaptable to the working schedule or workload of your employees and providing a certification as a form of recognition and validation of acquired digital skills.

We have undertaken extensive research on sister EU projects. We selected and presented five of them in the following text. These projects, presented on the Erasmus+ Project Results Platform[1] [2] (https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects), serve as exemplary models in the field of digital competence development. We encourage you to look for other examples of upskilling opportunities. To do so you can make your own research on the platform using basic keywords. We are convinced the suggested training will be interesting for you and your staff members. Check below how you, your employees and your company can benefit from the results of those European projects.

CONCLUSION.

Conclusion

In the context of rapid technological change, the importance of developing the skills of an ageing workforce cannot be overstated. As your businesses face the simultaneous challenges of technological advances and an ageing population, fostering a culture of continuous learning and development is emerging as a crucial strategy for retaining invaluable skills and knowledge within organisations. The essence of digital enhancement lies not only in improving operational efficiency, but also in ensuring the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of your small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

There are multiple benefits to digital upskilling for the ageing workforce, highlighting the importance of maintaining professional relevance, driving innovation, and improving adaptability to new technologies. This guide aims to encourage you to prioritise and invest in the education and ongoing training of their employees, highlighting the crucial role of digital competence in today's business environment.

Digital learning offers a range of sustainable and accessible training opportunities for SMEs. Online platforms such as ours, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and training programmes offer flexible, cost-effective solutions tailored to the varying needs and learning paces of your older employees. These platforms will not only provide you with essential digital skills, but also encourage a culture of lifelong learning and innovation within your organisations.

The challenge of funding and implementing skills development initiatives, particularly for SMEs, is addressed with pragmatic solutions. Various strategies, such as government subsidies, industry collaborations and digital learning platforms, help to overcome potential barriers to the implementation of comprehensive training programmes.

In conclusion, digitally upskilling the ageing workforce is not just a necessity, but a strategic imperative for your businesses in the digital age. By fostering an inclusive, adaptive, and constantly evolving working environment, you can ensure that your businesses remain resilient, innovative, and well-equipped to meet the challenges and opportunities of the digital future. The journey to digital competence will not only strengthen your ageing workforce, but also strengthen your entire business ecosystem.
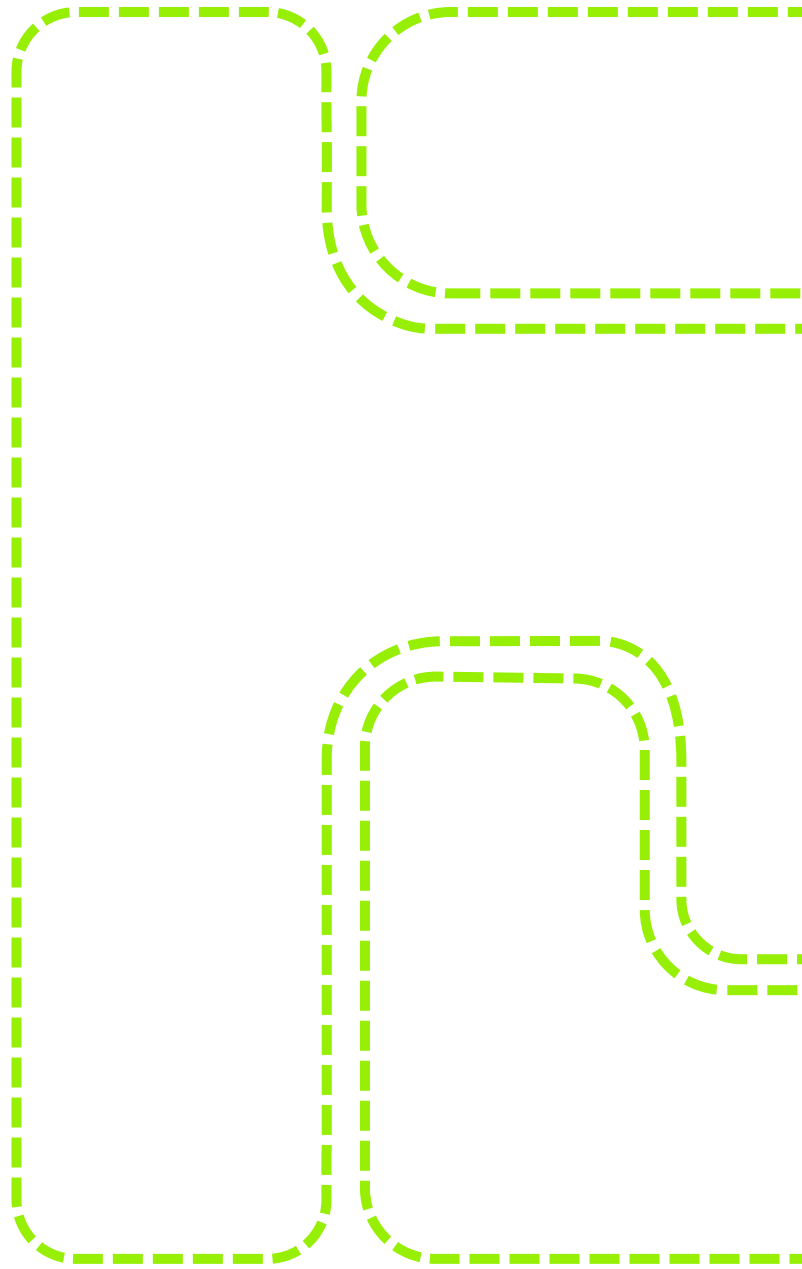
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