MILEAGE

Focus Group Summary Report

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Summary of Focus Group Reports

It is confirmed that the Internet, communication and information technologies are part of the daily life of each of us. If we talk about seniors, more than half use ICT tools often and regularly. Roughly a third of seniors use them occasionally, and only a small percentage work with ICT exceptionally. People 65+ most often use smartphones, computers and tablets, of which phones are on a daily basis.

Older users of ICT tools prefer to use applications and services that are well known to them - e-mail, the social network Facebook, Whatsapp, Youtube, Google, e-shops, educational servers, local information websites, Viber, Skype, internet banking applications, weather, maps, or a digital wallet. They hardly get acquainted with new trends in the field of ICT and feel considerable discomfort both in the company and personally.

It is understandable that older people do not have the same knowledge and skills in the ICT area as younger generations. This gap has become even wider during the pandemic when seniors have experienced social and digital exclusion. Users of ICT technologies aged 65+ also face many other problems, such as low self-confidence, too fast technological development, misunderstanding of terminology and modern internet language, fear of fake news, fraud and loss of personal data.
Seniors most often learn how to work with ICT from their family members or friends. However, such learning is not optimal for many reasons. Children, or grandchildren, do not have a pedagogical approach, they underestimate the abilities of elders, and their explanations do not meet the needs of seniors. Very often, seniors are self-taught but lose motivation as soon as they encounter the first problems.

There are ICT courses whose target group is not clearly defined, so several generations meet there at once. Such an educational technique leads to rapid demotivation and has a negative impact on the further efforts of seniors.

It is absolutely essential that ICT courses are designed specially for seniors and trainers teach them effectively. One of the most important factors is mapping and understanding the needs of the target group (tools to communicate with friends and family, user skills for the needs of communication with authorities, e-shops, personal interests, etc.). The trainer can then effectively and comprehensively set up education, in which a personal approach is important with regard to the condition of older people - possible difficulties associated with impaired vision, hearing, weak memory must be taken into account and the teaching methods and conditions must be adapted to this (e.g. color contrast, font size, clear expression, lighting, glasses, etc.). Seniors also need individual access, face-to-face communication, patience and flexibility, positive motivation, step-by-step training of new skills in a safe environment and support. Course content should be easy to understand and topics should be chosen so that the seniors enjoy it and use it later in practice. Participants of the courses should feel included. In order for the course to be of high quality, other aspects must also be taken into account - the space should ideally have barrier-free access, the course lesson should not be too long and should focus on one topic.

In order for the 65+ generation to feel integrated in society and the digital world, it is necessary to design and implement courses adapted to their needs and abilities. Adult educators should have the necessary education in the field of ICT, they should also have a positive relationship with older

people and be more than just a trainer for them, but also a guide and mentor. The training of these educators needs to be addressed as a comprehensive concept that has a clear structure and where they can learn from examples of good practice and share experience with each other.

1. Main needs regarding an educational program for digital media literacy

Older ICT users need effective and practical courses. It is absolutely essential that the way of education is adapted to their age, needs and abilities. It is necessary to take into account their physical (impaired sight, hearing, mobility) and mental conditions (memory, fear of the unknown, lack of knowledge of a foreign language) and adapt the course to these conditions (suitable environment, optimal lesson time, text size, color contrast, lighting, appropriate tools such as a keyboard).

One of the most important factors they lack is respect, individual approach, personal contact with the trainer, support and a safe environment where they can try out new knowledge without fear. Mutual help, interaction and sharing of experience is very beneficial.

Seniors would like to expand the possibilities of using ICT in their everyday life, such as when communicating with their family members and friends. They also have problems processing information - how to correctly search, evaluate, organize, store and share it. They need to engage in activities that they will then use in the practical life, whether it is communication with authorities, online shopping, social networks or video calls. Their interest and motivation depend on the topics and their presentation.

Closely related to this is the fact that older people are relatively easy targets for fake news and fraud. It is necessary to work on strengthening their self-confidence in the field of ICT so that they can safely move in the environment they want and need to use. It is necessary to work on improving their computer literacy, to speak in terminology they are familiar with and to teach them ways of safe communication. Seniors also feel a great deal of insecurity when it comes to the protection of computer equipment, they often do not have an overview of the healthy and reasonable use of ICT. They cannot help themselves when solving unexpected problems, and such situations are stressful and demotivating for them.

2. Needs of trainers regarding skills development

The trainer must be competent and have perfect knowledge of ICT. An important role is played by a positive attitude toward older people, flexibility, empathy, the ability of active listening, understanding of educational needs and a pedagogical approach.

Ideally, there should be trust between the trainer and seniors, the trainer must be able to motivate, be patient, creative, communicate effectively using understandable terminology and be aware of specific difficulties and the way of thinking of the target group. Teaching requires an active approach, but it is never a one-sided process, an open dialogue must be maintained. The trainer gives illustrative and practical examples, and is helpful in solving problems and creates a safe environment.

The trainer must map the needs of seniors and their level of digital literacy. He/She then adapts the teaching methods, plans the course and prepares individual structured lessons. Learning takes place in such a way as to connect with the practical life of seniors and solve those matters that seniors really need to solve.

3. Training & pedagogical advice

The course needs to have a clear structure and take place in the right place under the right conditions. Each lesson should last an optimal amount of time, too short will not cover the topic, and too long will tire and demotivate participants. The topics are chosen to be as close as possible to the real needs of the target group. It's a good idea to start with intuitive apps. If there is a demand for another topic during the lesson, it is better to first clearly process it and include it in the next lesson so as to maintain the continuity of one topic in one lesson.

It is not appropriate to include all seniors in one course just because of their age, it is necessary to check their level in the field of ICT and accordingly divide the target group into e.g. complete beginners, advanced, etc. It has also been shown that seniors appreciate the so-called micro-lessons, that do not follow each other, and participants may join irregularly.

Seniors should actively participate in their education, contribute their own initiatives, ask questions and lead discussions. The target group shares positive experience and advises and supports each other. Each participant of the course can try out the acquired skills on their own in a safe environment, it is necessary to ensure enough material - if the senior works with his smartphone, but has a computer at home, it is good to provide him with space at the computer as well.
Not only at the end of the course but also during the lessons, seniors should be asked to give feedback on whether they understood the topic, mastered new skills, enjoyed the lesson or whether the approach needs to be changed.

4. Conclusion

The development of digitization is very fast, and the pace of the acquisition of new skills by seniors does not match this speed. The digital literacy of seniors is generally increasing. So far, however, the majority prevails, those who have used ICT only marginally or, for example, in their job only under specific conditions.

Therefore, it is absolutely necessary that people aged 65+ can continue in education and expand their knowledge in the field of ICT. This will prevent their social and digital exclusion. Seniors need support to bridge the personal and online worlds, often unaware of the risks and dangers they may face. Sometimes, on the contrary, they are too worried about the digital world and avoid the challenges associated with ICT.

They can receive quality education from properly trained trainers who will guide them through courses in an adequate and effective way, with respect, a human approach and understanding.

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