

Key strategies and contents on digital skills for hybridization of jobs in the Social Care sector

KEY MESSAGES

Recommendations to develop policies and practices to support employers and employees from Social care sector in acquiring digital skills.

To adopt of a E.R.P. unified at national level for patients monitoring, health records, and best practices.

To create a permanent network dedicated to updating on the sector.

To motivate the employee in acquiring digital skills and employers in planning training actions at all levels.

CONTEXT

This policy paper presents the conclusions of the workshops held in the framework of the ACSOL Erasmus+ project by the Social Care Sector triple helix stakeholder working group in Italy.

This is a regional proposal at sectoral level with recommendations and strategies to better approach workers to train them on digital skills that the technological changes and the COVID-19 crisis effects on jobs and labour market conditions has revealed as critical for maintaining jobs in this sector.

The paper includes the identification of opportunities, needs and risks of digital transformation as well as key digital skills and proposals for promoting training within our target group.

DIGITAL SKILLS IN THE SECTOR

Within the scope of E+ ACSOL project, the Italian partner focused on the Social Care Sector. Based on results achieved with a survey addressed to employers and employees from the sector we found that the most demanded digital skills are:

- Computer use
- Use of the Microsoft Office suite or programs
- Use of the main internet search engines
- Use of e-mail

From employees point of view the opportunity to increase their digital skills can facilitate the following tasks:

- Coordination with their supervisors and work colleagues;
- Communications between their clients and their families;
- In the daily monitoring of the patient's health conditions.

Demand for Skills levels:

- Mid-high level of digital literacy with specific attention to the knowledge of usage of devices and application for remote telecare;
- Usage of digital tools for communication and networking;
- Basic knowledge of domotics;
- High skills in creating solutions to problems are also applied to the digital environment.

CHALLENGES

The rapid evolution towards the digitization of professions in the social care sector, accelerated by the ongoing health emergency, requires deepening what will be the actions necessary to innovate personal care processes and services both in residential facilities and assistance home-based. Digital innovation in Social care is a crucial issue not only to face the current emergency conditions but also to face the slowdown in demographic growth which implies at national level an increase in the rate of population needing assistance.

Barriers in the digitalization of the sector derived from the Italian Public Health system itself that is too slow in embracing digital changes and unable to innovate accordingly with the demands rising from the health care sector.

Despite the need for greater exchange of information both on patients anamnesis and on new therapies and best practices for new treatments, the Italian Public Health System is rigidly structured without allowing any exchange of experiences between different fields and/or occupational profiles (e.g. doctors and nurses).

As a result, Institutes for social care services (i.e. RSAs) are no longer able to fulfil the growing demand for assistance on the territory; the challenge is to digitally innovate social care services to provide remote assistance.

Additional barriers in digital innovation derived by the lack of actions in terms of vocational training in the social care sector. The need for an educational program on digital literacy includes the need to form nursing and social care operators in managing digital devices and data on patients' conditions.

Moreover, the sector suffers from a gap between employers' perspectives on the need for digital skills and fieldwork operators' expectations and their actual needs to acquire and/or enhance their digital knowledge. In this regard, managers of social care institutions still lag behind the actual need of field operators.

REGIONAL STRATEGIES

Adoption of a E.R.P. unified at national level for patients monitoring, health records, and best practices

Each region adopts the “Electronic Health Record” (HER) which is an online tool designed to improve the social and health care service at national level. EHR includes a set of digital health and social-health data and documents generated by present and past clinical events concerning the patient, and has as its main objectives: to facilitate patient care, offer them a service that can facilitate the integration of different professional skills while providing a consistent information base.

Since each region adopts a different software of Enterprise Resource Planning (E.R.P.), it is not possible for administrative nor health personnel (e.g. nurses, doctors) to consult or accede to patients archive from any other region and in some cases not even from a city different from the one patient is resident.

Finding from Italian expertise in the sector recommend unifying the HER tool by merging the different versions currently available in each region into a one unified platform with the same E.R.P. The lack of a tool accessible at national level engenders the paradox to nullify the aims of the HER itself in terms of overall improvement of the quality of services of prevention, diagnosis and treatment.

Permanent network dedicated to updating on the sector

To enhance the chances of achieving success of regional strategies, it is advisable to create a network, a permanent working group involving regional key players (companies, professional training facilities, pro-inclusion social organizations and public institutions) to establish a strategy to move the sector forward along with specific courses of action required for Social Care sector.

The scope of a network is to provide a permanent space of discussion, evaluation and feedback about actual problems faced by workers daily, an environment even online where they can find recommendations and updates on most recent practices. It will help all public and social institutions improve their services and guarantee coverage for anyone seeking aid, training and/or assistance to enhance his/her digital skills.

Campaign to motivate the employee in acquiring digital skills and employers in planning training actions at all levels

Findings from an Italian survey showed different levels of awareness between employers and employees in the sector about the need to acquire digital skills. In particular, employees have an awareness of their needs grounded on their daily work while employers still lag beyond their workers. To overcome this gap it is recommended to plan actions to motivate employers in foster professional training courses accordingly with employers' requirements (including flexible time scheduling).

Networks can include groups created by work categories to foster peer-to-peer learning (e.g. to reach the people who are working in the sector with higher digital literacy).

Investments for the Social Care Sector

In the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR), regarding the Italian Health and Social Care sectors, two macro objectives are outlined:

1. Proximity networks, structures and telemedicine for territorial health care.
2. Innovation, research and digitalization of the National Health Service.

The second objective involves huge investments for the modernization of the technology park and the hospitals; for the strengthening of the technological infrastructure and tools for the collection, processing, data analysis and simulation; the development of technical, professional, digital and managerial personnel of the health system.

Especially in the Social Care sector, areas have been identified on which to intervene immediately: e.g. an evaluation system capable of measuring the effectiveness of interventions; a method that encourages the knowledge sharing, adoption and adaptation of good practices; thinking in terms of a team, re-evaluating the role of the socio-health professions so that it is possible for the patient to have a referent but that in turn the referent acts supported by team work.

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RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRAINING IN THE SECTOR

1) Training opportunities and learning station within the workstation

Based on findings from the Italian state of the art is recommended a training methodology that includes remote and in presence learning and training in a complementary way. In particular, it is recommended to dedicate a space for training stations within working places (i.e. residential, hospitals etc.) active during specific time slots to allow workers to schedule their activities accordingly.

The training actions must be planned to provide experience and guidance on digital skills actually demanded in the sector. Given that low-skilled people lack of job experience or lack of practice, in particular, students near to get graduated in health degrees which required a mandatory in-field training as part of the vocational education process.

2) Recommendations on how to develop training sessions in the sector

It has been detected a gap of training provision and moreover a gap between the point of view of field operators (i.e., care assistants, home care workers, nurses etc.) and employers. Specifically, the field operators are aware of their need to be trained and achieve new digital skills or higher levels of their current knowledge, despite their willingness to be trained, employers do not provide or act in this direction because their awareness of their employees' need for digital skills is at an early stage.

We argue that to overcome the detected gaps it requires a “bottom-up” approach that refers to the opportunity to structure future learning and training actions based on field workers' current needs and demand for training, to guide employees in implementing effective training strategies.

Additionally, training can be structured to foster “a generational exchange” of competencies. In detail, those employees with high levels of expertise in the field (e.g. workers with more than 30-40 year of seniority but with low level or any digital literacy) can teach younger employees and receive in return from them their expertise on digital skills.

3) Actions to foster change management and innovation culture

A strong gap has been detected between innovative techniques and procedures and the know-how of managers in the social-care sector. Usually training and skills development in companies start from a managerial input or from suggestions from a joint initiative of employees and employers. Therefore,

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the policies should consider developing moments of high-level training on new avenues and changes in the sector. Those courses, oriented to all the company profiles, would produce the twofold contribution of 1) fostering the managers' awareness of educational and training needs of their employees and 2) develop an internal and external network of exchange of knowledge and practices.

About the Acsol project

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