



“Start with Self”. Inclusive Training Proficiency

A competence model for business trainers and educators who care

Part 8

Digital Skills and Innovation in Service of Equity



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Digital Skills and Innovation in Service of Equity

Technology can widen gaps — or close them. Digital Skills and Innovation in the Service of Equity explores how digital tools can make learning more accessible, flexible, and fair. This competence encourages you to use innovation not just for efficiency but for inclusion: ensuring everyone, regardless of ability, location, or resources, can participate fully. By blending creativity with equity, you'll harness digital potential to make learning truly open for all.

From this e-book, you will learn:

1. What is Digital Skills and Innovation in Service of Equity?
2. What might hold you back?
3. How to identify excluding behaviours?
4. How to do it differently?
5. What good practices will help you develop this competency?
6. How to begin?

Grow your inclusive competencies!

Check out other competencies from our model!

INCLUDE Project Team





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1. What is Digital Skills and Innovation in the Service of Equity?

1.1 Definition

Digital Skills and Innovation in the Service of Equity is the strategic use of technology and digital tools to remove barriers, enhance accessibility, and create more inclusive learning experiences for all participants.

It involves leveraging digital innovations not just for efficiency or engagement, but specifically to address inequities and ensure that technology serves as a bridge rather than a barrier to participation.

This competency requires both technical proficiency and equity-minded thinking, using digital tools to amplify marginalised voices, provide multiple access points for learning, and create more democratic participation in virtual and hybrid learning environments.

1.2 If you're interested in expanding your knowledge about research and sources:

- Digital Divide Research: Extensive research by organisations like the Pew Research Center demonstrates persistent gaps in technology access based on income, age, and geographic location. Understanding these disparities is crucial for equitable digital design (Digital Divide 2021, Pew Research Center).
- Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in Digital Environments: Research shows that digital tools can provide unprecedented opportunities for personalised learning when designed with UDL principles, offering multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression (UDL and Blended Learning, CAST, 2016).
- Assistive Technology Research: Studies demonstrate that when digital tools include accessibility features from the start, they improve usability for everyone, not just people with disabilities, a concept known as the "curb cut effect" (Design for Inclusion, Microsoft Inclusive Design Toolkit, 2016).





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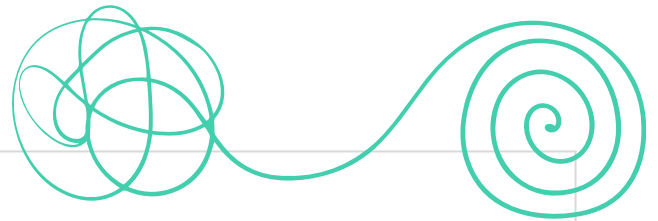
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1.3 By working on this competency, you will:

- Expand your reach to participants who couldn't access traditional formats: digital tools can eliminate geographic, mobility, and scheduling barriers, allowing you to include participants who might otherwise be excluded from in-person training.
- Create more engaging and personalised learning experiences: technology enables adaptive content delivery, real-time feedback, and multiple interaction modes, leading to improved learning outcomes and participant satisfaction.
- Future-proof your training practice: as digital and hybrid learning become standard expectations, equity-focused digital skills ensure you remain relevant and competitive whilst serving diverse learners effectively.

2. What might hold you back?

2.1 Common thinking traps:



Beliefs	Possible consequences
Technology is too complicated and will exclude less tech-savvy participants.	This assumption prevents you from using tools that could actually increase accessibility. Many participants are more comfortable with technology than trainers assume, and proper support can help others develop confidence.
Digital tools are impersonal and reduce human connection.	Whilst poorly implemented technology can feel cold, thoughtfully used digital tools can actually enhance connection by providing more ways for participants to share and interact, especially for those who are shy in face-to-face settings.
Everyone has the same access to technology and internet.	This belief leads to digital exclusion of participants with limited devices, slow internet, or technology restrictions. It assumes universal access that doesn't reflect reality for many communities.



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3. Identify excluding behaviours

Before you can change something, you need to notice it first. Here are some behaviours that might exclude people. Do any of these ring a bell? You might have seen them in yourself, participants, or fellow trainers. In the second column, we explain exactly why these behaviours are excluding, so you can get a fuller picture.



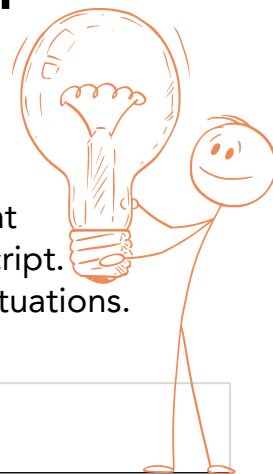
Behaviour	Why does it exclude?
Using digital platforms without considering accessibility features (captions, screen reader compatibility, keyboard navigation).	This creates barriers for participants with disabilities who rely on assistive technologies, effectively preventing them from participating fully in digital learning experiences.
Assuming all participants have high-speed internet and latest devices.	This assumption excludes participants with limited economic resources, those in areas with poor connectivity, or those using older technology, creating a technology-based class divide in learning access.
Providing digital content in only one format without alternatives.	When materials are only available as videos without transcripts, or only as text without audio options, participants with different processing needs or accessibility requirements cannot engage with the content.
Rushing through technology instructions without ensuring everyone can follow.	This leaves less tech-savvy participants behind, creating anxiety and disengagement, and signals that technological fluency is required for participation.



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4. How to do it differently?

The best way to learn? Get concrete and hands-on! Now that you know what excluding behaviours look like in digital skills and innovation, let's flip the script. In the third column below, you'll find inclusive approaches for these same situations.



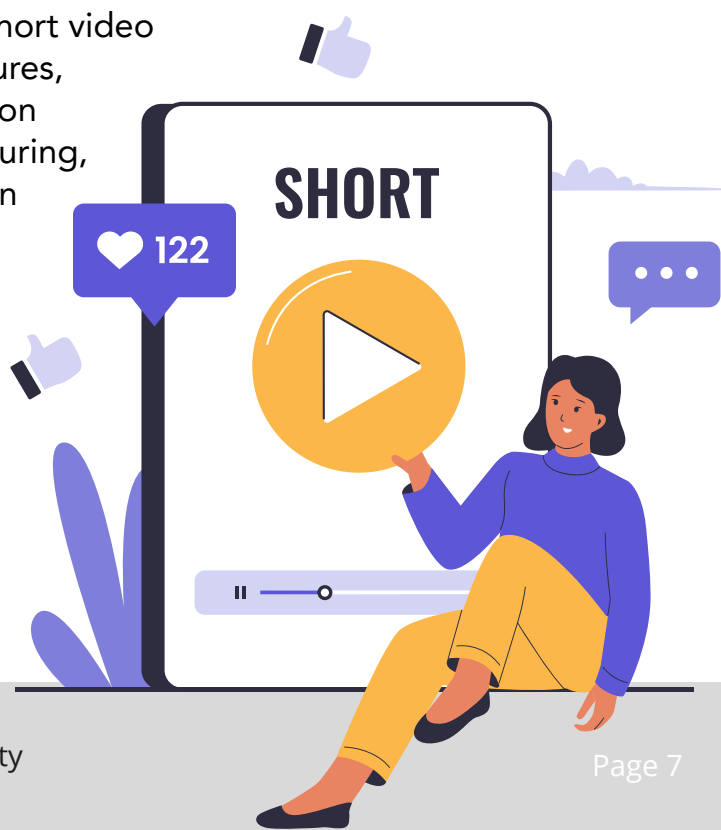
Excluding behaviour	Why does it exclude?	Including behaviour
Using digital platforms without considering accessibility features.	This creates barriers for participants with disabilities who rely on assistive technologies.	Always enable and highlight accessibility features. Start sessions by showing how to turn on captions, adjust text size, and use keyboard navigation. Provide tutorials on accessibility features before the main content begins.
Assuming all participants have high-speed internet and latest devices.	This assumption excludes participants with limited economic resources or poor connectivity.	Design for low-bandwidth and older devices. Provide phone dial-in options, use platforms that work on mobile devices, share materials in advance for offline access, and offer simplified interfaces when available.
Providing digital content in only one format without alternatives.	When materials are only available in one format, participants with different needs cannot engage.	Create content in multiple formats from the start. Provide videos with captions and transcripts, audio recordings with written summaries, and interactive elements with text-based alternatives.
Rushing through technology instructions without ensuring everyone can follow.	This leaves less tech-savvy participants behind, creating anxiety and disengagement.	Build in dedicated technology orientation time. Start sessions 15 minutes early for tech setup, provide step-by-step visual guides, and assign tech-savvy participants as helpers for others.



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5. Good practices

- Create technology equity checks. Before digital sessions, survey participants about their technology access, internet speed, and comfort level. Use this information to adjust your platform choices and provide additional support where needed.
- Develop a digital accessibility standard. Create a checklist that includes captions, screen reader compatibility, keyboard navigation, colour contrast, and alternative formats for all digital content. Make accessibility a non-negotiable part of your digital design process.
- Provide multiple participation pathways. Use platform features that allow participation through chat, voice, reactions, polls, and breakout rooms. This gives participants options to engage in ways that feel comfortable and accessible to them.
- Create technology mentorship opportunities. Pair tech-comfortable participants with those who need support. This builds community whilst ensuring no one is left behind due to technical difficulties.
- Record comprehensive tutorials. Create short video guides showing how to use platform features, access materials, and troubleshoot common problems. Make these available before, during, and after sessions so participants can learn at their own pace.





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6. First step

Great, you've got the theory down and probably have a good sense of what we mean by Digital skills and innovation in the service of equity.

Now we encourage you to tune into the emotions, thoughts, and reactions you had while working through this competency.

You can take your first step right now . No need to call anyone, set up meetings, or make any arrangements. Just stick around for a few more minutes and tackle one of the questions below.

Or go ahead and try all of them:

- How did it feel working on this competency?
- What behaviours can you start using immediately?
- Did anything bug you?
- What parts did you want to skip?
- What does your reaction tell you about yourself?



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