

Digital and sensory expertise: Thinking deskilling and reskilling across automation

Workshop at the Technical University of Denmark on June 20, 2023 at 10.00-16.00.

Organized by Brit Winthereik & Minna Ruckenstein

Digital expertise, Tamar Sharon (2021, 54) argues, has become “an entry ticket to previously autonomous spheres, bringing with it other values and interests and granting newfound power to reshape spheres according to those values and interests.” She describes how digital expertise has disrupted and disturbed work practices in fields ranging from health and law to media and education. Since similar processes are at play, we can detect traces of the digital across them in how people are forming and protecting their work processes and work identities. An example could be that people resist decisions leading to disembodiment or that they work around automation processes that distribute their expertise (Jorgensen, Gad & Winthereik, 2023).

The aim of this workshop is to explore forms of expertise emerging in current automation processes and uses of artificial intelligence and consider them in tandem with various forms of resistance. We are interested in the particulars of cases, what is shared, but also what is different across new forms of digital expertise and their resistances when it comes to clashes with existing practices, values, and routines at the workplace and outside of it. We expect to find different forms and aspects of digital expertise. To investigate their configuration, we ask: How is expertise being shaped by automation processes in ways that take away qualities of work that people find meaningful?

An established way to think about changes of expertise is to explore them as processes of deskilling and reskilling, identifying qualitative and material reshaping of competence and its valuation. We are interested in how people experience losses and gains when it comes to skills and capabilities, impacting senses, and ways of knowing and doing. We seek to emphasize the sensory ways of knowing to better understand how digital environments modify them. Thus, we would like to pay particular attention to what happens to embodiments of skills and bodily knowledge in these processes. Here, we also ask whether and how reskilling is possible in ways that combine machinic ways of doing things with human sensory and interpretive competences. How to make automated environments tests beds for exploration and improvisation that can lead to new insights about human work, creativity, and learning?

Overall, our workshop seeks to establish a shared agenda for understanding forms of embodiment and expertise amidst processes of automation. To move into that direction, we ask the workshop participants to write short position papers (1-2 pages) to respond to some or all of following questions in the context of the case or development that you are looking at:

What forms of deskilling/reskilling are relevant in the context of work/expertise that you are studying?

How is it similar/different than earlier forms of devaluing /revaluing work in that field?

What does competence or lack of it promote in the context of expertise you are studying?

What is the role of bodily, sensory knowledge in the environment you are studying, how does automation impact on it, and does it bring about other forms of knowledge?

How do people react to automation, do they talk about deskilling/reskilling at all, or do they relate to it as a question of reconfiguration of expertise?

The workshop will include short research presentations, group work, and a panel debate. The selection of presenters will be based on the quality of their work and its relevance to the workshop. All submitted position papers will be used as background material for the group work and debate.

Deadlines:

Submission of position paper: **PLEASE SEND YOUR POSITION PAPER TO veera.koskinen@helsinki.fi** before May 10th.

Acceptance: May 15th

Circulation of program: May 20th

Participation without paper: June 1st (max number of audience/participants without paper: 30).

The workshop is co-sponsored by **Reimagining Public Values in Algorithmic Futures-project led by Minna and Division for Responsible Innovation and Design at DTU Management.**

References

Jørgensen, B., C. Gad, B.R. Winthereik. (2022). "Organizing artificial intelligence and representing work", In: Lanzeni, D., Waltoorp, K., Pink, S. and Smith, R.C. (eds.) *An Anthropology of Futures and Technologies*. Bloomsbury Academic.

Sharon, T. (2021). Blind-sided by privacy? Digital contact tracing, the Apple/Google API and big tech's newfound role as global health policy makers. *Ethics and Information Technology*, 23(1), 45-57.