



FAST EXPERT TEAMS

vs. CORONA

– LET'S PREVENT FINLAND'S PARALYSIS

This report describes the Fast Expert Teams initiative of over 100 experts, outlines measures backed up by research and experience, presents the eight teams that make up the Fast Expert Teams network and includes links to reports on their work.

SUMMARY

The Fast Expert Teams network was founded on March 16, 2020 to prevent Finland from getting paralyzed under the restrictions imposed by the coronavirus pandemic. The goal of the initiative was to take advantage of digital tools in order to bring experts together across sectors (ministries, universities and research institutes, businesses and public organisations) to solve the challenges related to the coronavirus pandemic. The network of experts grew rapidly, and within just month, it included 100 experts in different fields.

The network of experts embarked on missions they felt were important and invited relevant experts to join them. The network chose the following missions: national research on the adaption to remote work, a research and development project to investigate potential methods for the decontamination of respirators, bringing together expertise on 3D printing, combining employment and gig work as an alternative to furloughs, good practices for remote work, virtual facilitation, effective RDI instruments and the utilisation of data and artificial intelligence.

When it comes cross-sectoral collaboration, it is important to have a shared challenge, to create trust and to commit to solving the challenge. In addition to digital tools to support it, the collaboration was made successful through clear roles and shared situational awareness and developing shared practices.



Fast Expert Teams initiative: key conclusions



1. Finland should make significantly more use of fast digital collaboration between experts across sectoral and organisational boundaries.

The collaboration of 100 experts in eight teams within the Fast Expert Teams initiative showed that at its best, cross-sectoral problem-solving can be very fast and highly productive.

2. While requirements for remote work vary greatly, development measures can lead to significant improvements.

Both the internal activities of the Fast Expert Teams as well as the data collected in the national study on the transition to remote work show that the remote transition prompted by the coronavirus pandemic was mostly smooth.

Before the pandemic, 71 per cent of respondents had never worked remotely or had worked remotely a maximum of one day per week. However, 60 per cent of respondents said over 80 per cent of their tasks could be done remotely. Nearly all tasks that can be classified as knowledge work can be done remotely if there is a significant reason for it and if everybody is committed.

3. Data collected from different sources must be better utilised in order to solve social challenges and to enable shared situational awareness.

The data that is accumulated in society can support the work of fast expert teams in order to solve complex problems and crises. The collection, refining and utilisation of data, and the co-operational capabilities and practices related to it, must be improved in different areas of society.

Recommendations for measures



1. Build stronger network connections and functioning communications infrastructure

While the remote transition has shown that network connections do function, there are significant regional differences in their capacity and functionality. Remote work and work that involves travelling will keep increasing even after the coronavirus pandemic.

The proliferation of remote work may increase the appeal of living outside of expensive, densely populated urban areas, and investments in communications and transport infrastructure in rural regions and holiday areas will enable effective and non-location specific remote work. Especially in terms of knowledge work, utilising the country's entire skilled workforce as extensively as possible will likely help to address mismatches in the labour market.

2. Improve the remote work environment

As remote work becomes increasingly common, society and employers can support employees with necessary investments in order to create a functional remote work environment, which includes access to fast internet connections at a reasonable cost. This is an opportunity to promote the vitality of rural areas, environmental sustainability goals as well as for information and communications technology providers.

Rural regions can attract returning migrants and new inhabitants through incentives (moving, apartments suited for remote work) and by transforming facilities into co-working spaces that enable socially distant remote work outside of the home.

The increase of remote work can also be considered in the spatial design of apartments and the planning of residential areas, which, instead of being 'commuter towns', could

provide services that are needed during the workday, such as fast printing, network and IT support and cafés and restaurants. This will also promote employment at the local level.

3. Strengthen the culture and practices of remote and flexible work in the workplace

It is possible to significantly increase the level of remote work. Workplaces must assess which tasks and job descriptions are suited to flexible working hours under the new Working Hours Act.

Investments must also be made towards remote work management and the utilisation of new methods of communication. Workplaces must comply with flexible hours employment contracts and create shared, transparent rules and practices for flexible hours employment and the support needed for it (see recommendations 4–5).

Employers should be encouraged to adopt flexible working hours as a way to promote work-life balance. Rules and practices related to remote work vary across organisations. Workplaces need clear and flexible rules in order to identify and make visible existing psychological agreements (= individual, partly unconscious expectations).

4. Increase training and digital skills for remote work

The coronavirus pandemic has shown that many organisations require active communication and constant coordination in order to operate effectively during a crisis. It is important to increase the ability of organisations, collaborative teams, temporary projects and employees to independently enact their missions.

The speedy transition to remote work that took place due to the restrictions showed that workplaces, employees and collaborative teams across different sectors differ in their capability

for remote work. In addition to organisational rules, remote work support and management, the focus must be on strengthening selfgovernance skills and the digital capabilities of teams and project groups.

The coronavirus pandemic has also created a unique opportunity to promote digitalisation and to learn digital skills (media literacy, IT skills, collaboration skills). Remote working skills can be developed and taught both in the workplace and in training sessions.

5. Ensure sufficient social interaction and communication when working remotely

Social isolation, which has been identified as one of the challenges of remote work, can be alleviated by fostering informal interaction within organisations through digital tools and practices. Virtual groups and tools that enable encouragement and recognition are important ways to boost a sense of

community. Promoting social interaction would lessen the feeling of social isolation when working remotely. Furthermore, it supports knowledge-intensive collaboration on digital platforms. Physical isolation and a lack of interaction may lead to a situation where organisations start to lose the social capital that is vital to their activities. Ideally, organisations will invest in interaction both face-to-face and digitally.

6. Improve the measurement and management of knowledge work productivity

The productivity of knowledge work – whether it is remotely or on-site – can only be evaluated when everybody is aware of tasks and expected outcomes and knows where to find support. Going forward, workplaces must pay special attention to the productivity of knowledge work, in other words, its effectivity (=whether a desired outcome is achieved) and efficiency (=whether it is achieved

within a given time). This requires effective technological solutions, clear, measurable goals, ways to monitor the progress of processes and projects, and investments into the conditions of knowledge work.

7. Encourage the use of collaboration platforms and communications technology and develop digital collaboration processes

According to the national remote work survey, email is still the most common method of communication, although virtual meetings have grown in popularity. There are several modern complementary and alternative solutions to email (e.g. project management tools, visual collaboration platforms, instant messaging apps), and as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, new and advanced solutions are entering the market. By combining and

experimenting with different technologies, it is possible to customise user-friendly work environments for various purposes, from the efficient execution of routine tasks to creative and collaborative problem-solving.

In addition to traditional virtual meetings, there is a need to develop communication methods for efficient collaboration within scattered expert teams, which will enable organisational development and reform. These can include, for instance, fostering and developing client relationships and co-innovation. Investments are especially required to facilitate collaborative processes, the shared learning of new tools and timing simultaneous and asynchronous work within scattered teams.



8. Encourage fast expert collaboration across sectors and develop policies and practices to facilitate it

The work of the Fast Expert Teams network has shown that when experts from various sectors of society come together, they are able to solve complex problems efficiently and creatively while considering various aspects. Ministries, universities, public organisations and businesses across various sectors and sizes must be encouraged to experiment with and to develop different types of digital collaboration methods in order to utilise scattered expertise independent of time and place.

In order to support collaboration between individual experts, collaboration across governmental organisations and sectors must be encouraged through policies and practices which enable linking the socially relevant knowledge created in expert networks to public decision-making.

9. Strengthen trust between individuals and organisations

Trust has always been the foundation of Finnish society. Trust in institutions and in people reduces the risk of negative social developments and supports the society through more effective communication, collaboration and commitment to shared goals. In addition to having trust that is based on shared characteristics and familiarity, Finland increasingly needs to be able to meet varying expectations, to combine social and institutional trust, to address situations that threaten to erode trust and to build trust between different parties.

While fear and uncertainty obstruct reform, investments and progress, trust enables continued activity in uncertain, unpredictable and risky conditions. Trust also enables rapid and efficient collaboration between experts across different sectors during a crisis, as the examples from the Fast Expert Teams demonstrate. Crises may either strengthen or

erode institutional trust. It is important to make sure that Finns can trust in their future and in the competence, benevolence and ethical sustainability of their society and organisations.

10. Develop sustainable data economy practices in order to utilise data for social development and crisis resolution

Data and experience-based knowledge are the key resources of the digital era. The broad utilisation of data and the experience-based knowledge of experts to support decision-making in society offers great opportunities for social development and crisis resolution. Collaborating across sectors and capitalising on the knowledge and insights of different parties is important in this context as well.



Bringing together
expertise across
sectors:
Fast Expert Teams



1. Remote work lab (LUT, JYU, Aalto, UEF, TAU and TTL)

The team launched a longitudinal study on Finland's transition to remote work. The team collected quantitative and qualitative data, which has been reported to interested parties and to the media. The group continues its work, collecting longitudinal data and producing scientific articles and theses. Read about the first results of the longitudinal study here: <https://cocodigiresearch.com/covid-19-survey-results> (Text in following links and blogs is in Finnish)

2. Decontamination of respirators (VTT, PVTUTKL, LUT, THL, LAB, TTL, FIMEA)

The project developed and tested an innovative method for the process and logistics of decontaminating and reusing high-efficiency FF2 and FF3 respirators in case new respirators

were unavailable. Project implementation was founded by the Finnish Defence Forces, and some 100 individuals participated in the project. In addition to practical crisis management, the team will continue its collaboration by producing scientific articles

See [the first project report](#) and [a photograph of the HEDE decontamination facility](#).

3. Combining employment and gig work (CM & HR Consulting, Howspace, LUT, VM, TEM, SitraLab)

The team focused on understanding the possibilities of combining employment and freelance expertise for Finland. This question was approached from the following perspectives: 1) part-time employment instead of unemployment/furlough, 2) supporting the continuous development of experts and employers, and 3) distributing

individual expertise across several employers and businesses.

As a result of the collaboration, the team suggested the following approaches for supporting professional activity and learning:

a) Active steps for furloughed individuals, a midpoint between employment and entrepreneurship. The approach supports furloughed employees. The goal is for individuals to understand their expertise and demand, and to shape their expertise into a service, a freelance business. The model is based on facilitated work in small groups on a digital platform.

b) An alternative to furlough, an approach which would enable knowledge workers to virtually join new expert teams, in accordance with their own expertise or interest, in order to find solutions to various complex, cross-sectoral assignments. The model proposes an alternative to employers, offering them the chance to forgo furloughs while creating savings on personnel costs, and an opportunity for expert workers to participate in inspiring, cross-sectoral

virtual teams that will enhance their expertise. The model will simultaneously benefit individuals, businesses and society.

Read more on the team's blogs:

Could the coronavirus pandemic be a watershed moment between old and new cultures of governance? [Ministry of Finance's blog](#).

The role of facilitation and digital platforms in the success of the Fast Expert Teams: [Howspace blog](#).

The possibilities of part-time expertise and having multiple jobs: <https://www.sitra.fi/blogit/rohken-emmeko-osaajien-ja-osaamisen-ja-kamiseen/>

An alternative to furlough: understanding the approach from the perspectives of the individual, the employer and the society <https://www.riittahyppanen.fi/rubiikki-lomautus-lamautus-vai-paaoman-kasvua/> 29.4.2020

4. Expertise in 3D printing (LUT, University of Turku, Aalto and University of Oulu)

The team assembled a nationwide team of professors and researchers to provide knowhow on 3D printing: materials, methods, equipment, domestic printing capacity and competence in case of a shortage of necessary spare parts. In webinars and virtual meetings, industry representatives (HVK, EK & Technology Finland) and researchers started a discussion about approval processes and responsibilities during the crisis.

Links to the team's blogs and information packages:

[A blog entry about 3D printing](#)

[A list of Finnish professional printing competence produced by the MFG4.0 project](#)

[An information package about 3D printing.](#)

5. Good practices for remote work (Regional Council of Häme, YKA, the Association of Finnish eLearning Centre)

With a focus on good practices for remote work, the team compiled existing information and successful examples and shared good practices for remote work.

Summary of the team's work

[Good practices for remote work](#)



6. Virtual facilitation and the coordination of self-governance in a virtual, cross-sectoral collaboration network (Humap Consultation, Regional Council of Häme, Sitra, Finnish Academy of Science and Letters, LUT)

The goal of the team was to facilitate the development of activities in the Fast Expert Teams network and to coordinate collaboration throughout the entire process. The objective was to quickly create collaborative relationships with sufficient trust and to facilitate transparent thinking across different teams during the process with the help of technologies and virtual facilitation, creating an environment in which generating and commenting on new ideas and asking for help would support progress. The team gathered insights, lessons and practices to support the self-governance of individuals and groups in similar network collaboration projects in the future.

Summary of the team's work

[Lessons from virtual facilitation](#)

7. Agile RDI instruments (VTT, TEM, LUT, Regional Council of South Karelia; Industryhack)

The team evaluated EU and national level funding instruments from the perspective of the urgent need created by the coronavirus pandemic. Regarding the flood of applications received by Business Finland, the team gave the following recommendations for measures, which were brought to the attention of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment: the automatic screening and classification of applications received by Business Finland using as a minimum tax data, patent and registration data as well as information that is publicly available online, temporarily increasing personnel at Business Finland, and providing Business Finland with a rapid instrument towards saving start-ups. In addition,

the team contacted the Academy of Finland regarding the launching of a call for applications for the coronavirus period.

The team also discussed economic and technological blocs in the post-coronavirus world. Third, the team evaluated the possibility of using the European Regional Development Fund and other forms of funding for economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic.

Fourth, the team supported a start-up in the development and piloting of its Case Ausculting diagnostic method based on data analytics and a high-quality sensor. The method was designed to identify abnormal heart and lung sounds and to monitor and predict the progress of illness.

[Results of the RDI team](#)

[Case Ausculting](#)

[A funding instrument for start-ups: an initiative](#)

8. The utilisation of data and artificial intelligence (Gofore, VTT, TEM, LUT, TAU, YKA, Profinder, Aiwo.ai)

The AI experimentation and advanced analytics team focused on creating situation analyses on the societal level and promoting the network's research project through analytical experiments. Data was collected from public sources (Business Finland, Twitter), through various partners (Social Science Professionals – YKA, Profinder) and through surveys conducted by the network project.

The data was refined with the help of Gofore's analytics services (quantitative situation analyses) and Aiwo.ai's natural language processing service (qualitative analyses). The analyses focused on organisational remote work practices, changes in work environment caused by the coronavirus crisis (remote work survey, YKA),

describing the financial situation of Finnish companies before the coronavirus crisis and the allocation of Business Finland subsidies to the business sector.

Data-driven situation analyses created interest and were used to develop, among other things, membership services for social science professionals (YKA) for the coronavirus period.

[Summary of the team's work and analytical results](#)



Bringing together expertise across sectors: Fast Expert Teams

Considering all initiatives,
more than 100 experts participated
in the work of the network.

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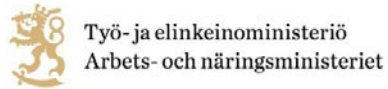
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