

Understanding and preventing digital illiteracy

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Introduction

In a hybrid or remote work (HRW) setting, digital tools have replaced many traditional forms of communication and collaboration. However, not all employees possess the skills needed to navigate this digital landscape confidently. **Digital illiteracy is the difficulty or the inability to effectively, safely and confidently use technology and digital tools and access the internet.**

According to recent European data, more than 90% of jobs in Europe require basic digital knowledge, while **32% of Europeans lack basic digital skills**. Gender, education and place of residence play a role in digital (il)literacy.

Adressing digital illiteracy in HRW

In remote settings, technology is everywhere in the workplace. Employees who lack digital skills may struggle to communicate effectively in virtual meetings or chat platforms, collaborate on shared documents or projects or adapt to new tools and systems. There is also a risk in terms of cybersecurity and protecting sensitive data.

If not properly addressed, digital illiteracy among employees can lead to reduced efficiency and communication breakdowns and isolation, not to mention unequal access to growth opportunities.

Hence, building digital literacy is essential for promoting equity and engagement in a digitally driven workforce.

What digital illiteracy looks like

Ever felt annoyed by your colleague who writes in all-caps or the one that “replies all” to an e-mail when it is not necessary? Do you, yourself, use “password” as your password?

If so, **you may have encountered various forms of digital illiteracy.**

It can consist of:

- Difficulty using emails, video calls, or shared drives
- Hesitation or silence in virtual meetings
- Using weak passwords, falling for phishing scams
- Slow adaptation to new tools and platforms
- Inability to create or edit a document

Team efficiency in HRW relies on the digital literacy of team members. If digital literacy levels are too different among a team, it may be harder to work together and it can lead to some employees feeling isolated.

Considering that digital illiteracy is more prevalent among women, people with less diploma or people living in rural area, the discriminatory risk is all the more important and requires employers' attention.

Digital literacy checklist **for** **hybrid team**

To assess employees' digital literacy and target areas for improvement, you can rely on the following checklist:

Can employees...



Basic digital skills

- Use email confidently
- Manage cloud storage effectively
- Edit and create basic documents
- Install and update software independently



Communication and collaboration

- Navigate video conferencing tools easily
- Write and engage in chat platforms
- Manage calendars and virtual meeting invites
- Co-edit shared documents



Remote work etiquette

- Follow virtual meeting norms (mute, video, chat)
- Communicate clearly in writing
- Set and respect digital boundaries
- Submit remote work updates properly



Cybersecurity awareness

- Use strong, secure passwords
- Identify phishing attempts
- Follow data privacy practices



Self-sufficiency and learning

- Troubleshoot minor tech issues
- Seek out help or documentation when needed
- Give and receive feedback on tech use



Further reading

- **Digital literacy in the EU: An overview**
<https://data.europa.eu/en/publications/datastories/digital-literacy-eu-overview>
- **What is digital literacy? Definition, skills and importance**
<https://potomac.edu/what-is-digital-literacy/>