Development of a Virtual Learning Environment at Statistics Finland

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Development of the use of statistical information is one of Statistics Finland's strategic goals. This presentation describes how the use of statistical information is advanced at Statistics Finland by means of training. At Statistics Finland customer training mainly belongs to services subject to charge. Each year about 40 training events are arranged on statistics methodology, contents and information sources. Now this activity is planned to be expanded by virtual training. In addition to chargeable customer training, free training services will be developed on the Internet "for all citizens". Statistics Finland's personnel can also utilise this same learning environment. The first network modules will be produced on population statistics and census, basics of statistical science and labour force statistics.

The strategic objective of several statistical agencies is to advance people's statistical literacy and use. Use of statistics and demand for them increase constantly. Statistics and the ability to read them are needed extensively in society as a whole. Statistical literacy can be promoted in various ways, for example by developing various information distribution channels and by training customers. But even statistical professionals need to be trained and developed constantly so that they are sufficiently prepared for customer-oriented product development.

Efficient use of information technology has also been a strategic solution in response to changing customer demands, and in order to retain one's competitive position. Both commercial training organisations and personnel training units of various organisations are already using information technology widely to support their training. Network services are developed to enhance the organisation's present products and services as well as marketing. Customers are offered alternative, multi-communication service modes. Different training channels are not mutually exclusive but complement one another. Information technology is not valuable as such for the development of teaching and learning. During planning it is of vital importance to pay attention to customers' needs, skill levels and possibilities and willingness to utilise new technology and different services.

Through the network different learning materials can be offered either for self-study or to support other training/information activities. Digital learning materials can be made livelier with animation, moving images and exercises on which instant feedback is given. Network learning materials should thus activate students to learn by doing, to apply and process actively the information received. The network also makes it possible to understand the subject under study more extensively, for example by means of lists of links to

pages of other information producers. The basic idea of network studying is to support collaboration between students and open distribution of information. The teacher's role in the network is to direct learning and arrange the information in a pedagogically functional manner.

New methods need to be developed for presenting essential information in the midst of the growing information supply in the information society. The objective of the service being planned at Statistics Finland is to:

- Give customers (and personnel) informational support in the use of statistics (concepts, statistics compilation principles and limitations).
- Activate customers to use statistics by means of exercises and examples.
- Transfer the know-how of older statistical experts to the network for the use of younger generations.
- Teach a customer-oriented and team-based working method by utilising new technology.

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RESUME

Le développement de l'exploitation des données statistiques est une des lignes stratégiques de Statistique Finlande. Cet exposé décrit comment Statistique Finlande s'efforce de faire progresser l'exploitation des données statistiques au moyen de la formation. Chez Statistique Finlande la formation des clients fait principalement partie des services payants. Chaque année une quarantaine de cours de formation sont organisés sur la méthodologie et le contenu des statistiques et la source des données statistiques. Maintenant notre intention est d'étendre cette activité vers la formation virtuelle. En plus des services payants, on développera des services de formation non payants prévus "pour tous les citoyens" et disponibles sur Internet. Le personnel de Statistique Finlande peut exploiter le même environnement d'apprentissage. Les premiers modules de réseau porteront sur les statistiques démographiques, le recensement, les notions élémentaires de la statistique et les statistiques sur la population active.