

# HelsinkiUNI DigiHUB - space for creating digital services

1st Maikki Sykäri<sup>1</sup>, 2nd Sami Nikander<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Helsinki IT Center, PO Box 28, FI-00014 University of Helsinki, Finland, maikki.sykari@helsinki.fi

<sup>2</sup>University of Helsinki IT Center, PO Box 28, FI-00014 University of Helsinki, Finland, sami.nikander@helsinki.fi

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## 1. Summary

HelsinkiUNI DigiHUB is a shared space for creating digital services in University of Helsinki. It is based on Lean and agile culture and designed according to principles of co-working spaces. The purpose of DigiHUB is to develop digital services and solutions by experimenting together. All teams that develop digital services for the University of Helsinki are working in DigiHUB. After moving to shared space, people have become much more interested in working together and sharing best practices. Surveys conducted among DigiHUB users indicate that DigiHUB both as a space and as a way of working has brought a positive and sustained change to work culture in digital service development.

## 2. Extended Abstract

### 2.1 Timeline of agile adoption in University of Helsinki

University of Helsinki was an early adopter of agile software development already in 2005, with its in-house software projects experimenting with Scrum, a novel methodology in the software industry of that time. Since the founding of the university's IT Centre's own in-house agile software development team in 2008, agile and lean methodologies have been in continuous use.

In 2013 agile thinking gained ground on several fronts within the university. The IT Centre trained several of its teams to use Kanban in their daily work, while the HR department offered Scrum Product Owner Certification courses for over 60 people. The university also established a framework agreement for outsourced software development, where it was stipulated that only agile development would be accepted from the contractors. Selecting only contractors that were committed to agile practices made it possible for cultural change to happen.

In 2014 an informal product owners' network was founded with the goal of sharing experiences and ideas about agile practices across the organization. It has since provided regular peer support in the form of approximately bi-monthly seminars during the semesters, facilitated by a skilled agile coach.

### 2.2. Shared space as a prerequisite for cultural change

While those first steps were necessary, they didn't have a great impact on wider organization besides team level. A proposition was created about HelsinkiUNI DigiHUB for the leaders of the University, where it was stated that "a shared space and knowledge infrastructure for digital service creation and experiment lab for University of Helsinki in a central location in Helsinki will enable us to maximize our potential in developing and measuring value for the University and the users of the services."

Previously digital service creation functions were spread out across different teams and projects. Getting permission from upper management to create a specific shared space was crucial for the development of HelsinkiUNI DigiHUB. By consulting several software companies and comparing their recommendations for best practices in shared hub environments, four different kind of spaces were identified:

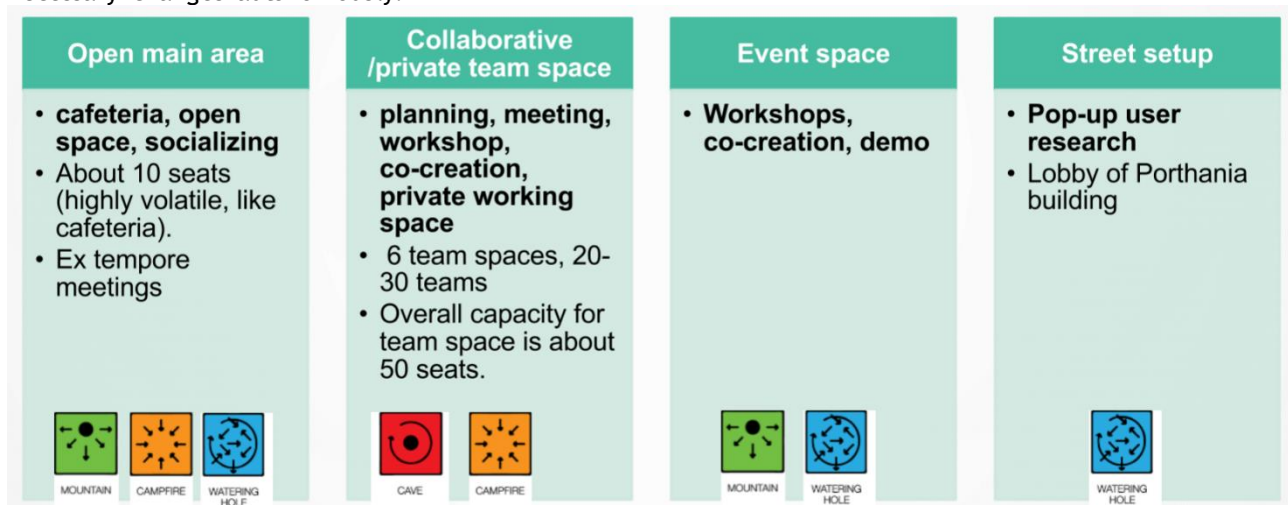
1) Open main area, 2) Collaborative team space, 3) Event space, and 4) Street setup (see **Figure 1**).

These types of spaces are based on four space principles (Bosch, 2019):

- Mountain - one-way communication, presenter space
- Watering hole - fast knowledge exchange
- Campfire - meeting situations, dialogue
- Cave - concentration without communication, private or not.

### 2.3. Shared spaces enabled community events

DigiHUB became reality in 2017 when several team spaces opened in City Centre campus and from 2018 onwards, the four spaces as described in **Figure 1** have been operational. All teams that develop digital services for the University of Helsinki are working in DigiHUB. There are around 20-30 teams sharing six team spaces. Team spaces are shared between teams in daily/weekly rotation: a team might occupy a space only during certain days of a week. When space allocation needs emerge, teams negotiate the necessary changes autonomously.



**Figure 1. Spaces and space principles in DigiHUB**

Methods used in DigiHUB complement an already thriving agile culture: co-creation, design lab, agile principles, lean ecosystem, lean start-up, service design and coaching are all used. Increased adoption of these methods was observed after all digital teams shared the same space.

After moving to shared space, people have become much more active in coming together and sharing best practices. When previously there were seminars and other events four to six times per year, in shared space the ‘public demand’ spontaneously increased to three to four community events per month. Specifically, more events covering specific topics were suggested and consequently three professional peer groups or ‘guilds’ were formed: service design, analytics and technology guilds. In 2019 there were total of 29 events organized for the DigiHUB community, on average an event almost every week during semesters.

### 2.4 Survey results indicate a change in work culture

In summer 2019, an online survey was conducted in DigiHUB in order to measure how much the work culture had changed. The response rate was 40% (75 of 186 active members). 73% agreed (somewhat, mostly or fully) that DigiHUB does support their work. 71% similarly agreed that their skills had increased because of DigiHUB. In open-ended questions there was plenty of positive feedback about the space and atmosphere, events and services. Negative feedback was mainly related to suboptimal conditions in team spaces, which resulted in teams autonomously reorganizing room allocations. Later it was verified that the teams were content with their new spaces. In 2020 a new survey was conducted with very similar positive results. These surveys indicate that the DigiHUB both as a space and as a way of working has brought a positive and sustained change to work culture in digital service development.

## 3. References

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#### 4. Authors' biographies



**Maikki Sykäri** works as IT Development Manager in University of Helsinki. Her main work areas are DigiHUB, Lean development in the university and service development in IT center. She holds a M. Sc degree in Computer Science from Aalto University (former Helsinki University of Technology). She has worked in IT development for 18 years, mainly as a project manager. She is also a professional coach.



**Sami Nikander** works as an IT Specialist at University of Helsinki. His main work areas are IT consulting, product development, agile and lean coaching and facilitation. He has over 20 years of work experience in IT and higher education. He holds a BSc degree in Computer Science, and is currently working on his Master's Thesis in Computer Science at University of Helsinki. [www.linkedin.com/in/niksunikander](http://www.linkedin.com/in/niksunikander)