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STARTING OVER THROUGH DIFFERENT LEARNING AREAS

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Abstract

This paper aims to present a pilot study, with an action research methodology, in a campus recently created by a public university where a Upskills: Digital Skills & Jobs program has been developed. This vocational training program is funded by the Institute of Employment and Vocational Training and is aimed at unemployed people who have at least secondary education and English language skills and who wish to obtain qualifications in the area of digital technologies. It integrates six months of intensive training in areas such as programming in several languages, cloud platform management or low-code platform programming. However, this audience is very diverse, they can be people with masters, doctorate or no higher education and even people who emigrated and now return to their country and can't integrate into the labour market. Thus, two modules of transversal skills were developed, one for preparing the entry into the labour market and another for training already in the organization.

Based on an in-depth analysis and deconstruction of the concept of decent work (ILO 2019), the aim is to develop the main axes that should be present in the active job search. The general orientation is to promote self-knowledge and skills assessment, the resources and abilities that each person possesses and that can be mobilized in this search. The general objective is to enable students to make informed choices that enhance their knowledge and abilities, respecting the requirements of decent work that will be discussed throughout the course, reconciling these guidelines with the opportunities. The other is invested in the development of interpersonal skills that enable students to enhance their individual abilities such as social skills (social interaction and cooperation). We know that any organization wants to have a team of employees that can work in full harmony, promoting a pleasant and healthy corporate space. However, the reality of teamwork and conflict management does not always correspond to such an expectation. In this context, applying conflict management strategies in the workplace becomes essential.

Since teams are formed by people with different personalities, opinions, cultures and visions, if a small problem is not solved in a timely manner, as well as communication and/or time management failures, the success of work processes is hindered, causing delays, difficulties and wear and tear. From this experience we can share positive results of the 7 groups formed so far and of their inclusion in the labour market.

Keywords: Soft Skills, Life long learning, Labour market

1 INTRODUCTION ¹

UpSkills is the result of a partnership between the Institute of Employment and Vocational Training (IEFP, IP), the Coordinating Council of Higher Polytechnic Institutes (CCISP) and the Portuguese Association for the Development of Communications (APDC) and is part of the Digital Transition Action Plan in Portugal at nationwide level.

The aim of this initiative is to respond to the needs of companies for qualified resources in digital technologies and, simultaneously, to provide the acquisition of technical skills by unemployed or underemployed people, allowing them to start a new career, in order to contribute to the increase of the country's competitiveness, preparing people with more qualifications and knowledge and more capable companies for the market.

The Organizations/Companies identify the technological areas and the locations in which they intend to hire professionals, to enable the definition of training actions and the quantity of professionals they need for each of these areas. If they want dedicated classes, they have to identify a minimum of 15 places in

¹ Part of the text of this point is adapted from the official site of this program <https://upskill.pt/> and from the site of Iscte-University Institute of Lisbon.

a given location/technology. There may also be classes shared by a group of companies that prefers a minimum number of 15 trainees.

The UpSkills Management board approves the training actions, provided that the conditions are met by the Higher Education Institution(s) and that the set of places indicated by the companies reaches at least 15 trainees (per location and technology). These actions are very focused, e.g. JAVA programming, .NET, ERP platform management, Cloud etc.

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), in the various locations identified by the companies, create the training actions (duration between 3 to 6 months) and work together to develop the content of the training programmes.

The Programme, through its Directorate, launches an application process for trainees, so that people who meet the conditions, i.e. unemployed or underemployed, with completed secondary education, can apply. The candidates who meet the conditions are directed to a portal of english and psychometric tests, with the latter aimed at assessing the capacities in areas considered critical for the training to be provided, namely logical and mathematical reasoning.

The candidates with the best evaluation in the tests are channeled into interviews with the participating companies and the IEFP, IP, for a final validation of their motivation to accept this challenge. The candidates are ordered by the evaluation obtained in the tests and placed in the training actions, considering their selection. Once the placement process is closed, the higher education institution (HEI) where the action will take place will communicate the starting date to the trainee. At this stage the trainee must ensure his/her registration at IEFP, IP, if he/she is not yet registered as unemployed.

During the training, evaluations associated to the various modules will be carried out, being 2 of these evaluation processes monitored by the companies. At the end of the training, the approved candidates will be directed to interviews in the companies (Shared Groups).

The candidates approved by the companies are integrated in one of the adhering companies for a period of 3 months in professional training in a work context (which may be extended to 6 months). After this last phase, the companies hire the candidates they approve, considering a minimum of 80% in relation to the number of vacancies they have identified.

From the financial point of view, all the training component is paid by public funds and the trainee has a scholarship, equivalent to the national minimum wage paid during the training period by public funds and during the on-the-job training period by the company.

Iscte - University Institute of Lisbon (Iscte) is one of the higher education institutes that is involved in the Upskills: Digital Skills & Jobs programme, developing effective lifelong learning strategies, based on the European Charter for Lifelong Learning in Universities [1]. A more supply-side oriented view of employability in higher education that emphasizes job prospects and/or skills that enhance their employability.

Given the relevance of the issue and according with the European Union Life Long Learning Memorandum [2], institutional strategies were outlined to entrench widening access to new audiences and lifelong learning, with education and training provision aimed at a diverse population; study programmes were designed to widen participation to other audiences; reforms were undertaken to promote a flexible and creative learning environment for all types of learners to strengthen the relationship between research, teaching and innovation; and partnerships were developed at local level, which will certainly be extend to regional, national level.

As said above the programme was designed to provide these students with intensive training (6 months) in specific areas framed in information and communication technologies, followed by 3 months of on-the-job training in one of the member companies. However, this audience is very diverse, they can be persons with masters, doctorate or no higher education and even people who emigrated and now return to their country and can't or have difficulty integrating the labor market.

Besides that, nowadays, all jobs require also soft skills. Evidence of desirable social and behavioral attitudes and skills is an asset to career growth. Independently of the need to acquire knowledge, the development of soft skills is always a priority. One of the ways to improve at this level is through capacity of acting at the level of self-discovery and personal growth. It takes time and energy and can sometimes take us out of our comfort zone, however, it is much more likely to have a long career and sustainable professional growth if we develop our (soft) skills continuously.

In this sense, the Soft Skill Lab-Iscte² (Laboratório de Competências Transversais-Iscte) was challenged to join the programme in order to complement these courses with its curricular units, thus, two modules of transversal skills were developed, one for preparing the entry into the labour market and another for training already in the organization.

2 METHODOLOGY

The Module 1- “Skills of self-knowledge and personal development” (25h), is based on an in-depth analysis and deconstruction of the concept of decent work [3], the aim was to develop the main axes that should be present in the active job search. The general orientation was to promote self-knowledge and skills assessment, the resources and abilities that each person possesses and that can be mobilized in this search.

The general objective is to enable students to make informed choices that enhance their knowledge and abilities, respecting the requirements of decent work that will be discussed throughout the course, reconciling these guidelines with the opportunities.

Table 1. Module1- Skills of self-knowledge and personal development

Learning outcomes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Building a professional profile: contexts, strategies and practices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - General and specific principles for decent work; - Self-evaluation and skills assessment; - Plan a career path: define professional objectives; know the market possibilities - type of qualifications required; identify target organizations. 2. Building a network and manage connections <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify online job search platform; - Build self-profiles according to professional objectives; - Promote and target personal profile to target organisations. 3. Setting up a digital portfolio <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Building the public profile, literature summary, networking (Who am I and what are my talents and goals; how do those talent(s) and goals converge with those of the organisation). - General elements that integrate the planning of the application process: formal issues & recommendations 4. Time management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Managing change and organising time with a view to reconciling work, family and personal life
Teaching methodology	<p>Given the instrumental nature of this course, the learning is acquired through practical activities that seek to stimulate the need for a proactive attitude of planning and anticipation of challenges in the search for professional recognition. According to the 4 axes of the programme, define decent work standards, knowing who they are, where they want to go, and what they need to achieve these objectives is the script of the teaching-learning process of this course.</p>
Evaluation/Assessment	<p>The evaluation is organised around four axes of activities: Balance of competences with the elaboration of a CV and a motivation letter where the student identifies and values his personal resources of technical and relational knowledge (25%); Creation of a profile and network of professional contacts in an online platform (25%); Construction of a digital portfolio (25%) Clarity, objectivity and adequacy of the</p>

² The Soft Skills Lab constitutes a support structure to the acquisition and development of essential competences, within the curricular structure of Iscte courses and all 1st year degree students have to complete 6 ECTS, as a response to the constant need to adapt to new situations and which is based on personal abilities to analyze information, solve problems and apply knowledge, as well as socio-emotional and behavioral skills such as time management, organization and planning, communication skills, leadership, autonomous and team work, among others.

	materials produced in the scope of the autonomous work (25%).
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Source: Own elaboration

The Module 2- “Social and emotional intelligence skills” (24h) is invested in the development of interpersonal skills that enable students to enhance their individual abilities such as social skills (social interaction and cooperation). We know that any organization wants to have a team of employees that can work in full harmony, promoting a pleasant and healthy corporate space. However, the reality of teamwork and conflict management does not always correspond to such an expectation. In this context, applying conflict management strategies in the workplace becomes essential. Since teams are formed by people with different personalities, opinions, cultures and visions, if a small problem is not solved in a timely manner, as well as communication and/or time management failures, the success of work processes is hindered, causing delays, difficulties and wear and tear.

It starts also from the concept of decent work [3] of previous module and continuing with the Self-knowledge skillsets module, we seek to develop the main axes that should be present in organizational behaviour. The orientation is to promote self-knowledge and relational skills, the resources and skills that each person possesses and that can be mobilized in performance. The overall objective is to enable trainees to value their intra/interrelation skills, which are also part of dignified work and manifest themselves in everyday work life.

Table 2. Module2- Social and emotional intelligence skills

Learning outcomes	The student who successfully completes this module/Curriculum Unit will be able to: 1- Understand the inevitability of conflict and know how to manage it adequately. 2- Recognize the various types of conflict and know how to transform dysfunctional conflicts into functional conflicts. 3-To use communication assertively and effectively. 4-To recognize the different conflict resolution strategies, know how to use and adapt them to different situations. 5-To recognize the specificities and the essential aspects for a successful teamwork. 6-To identify the success of teamwork highlighting advantages and underlying dynamics. 7-Recognize and describe the importance of interpersonal relationships for the performance of the professional activity.
Teaching methodology	To stimulate the need for a proactive and collaborative attitude. From an intrapersonal point of view, and in accordance with the programmatic axes, knowing who they are, how they relate to each other, what they need to relate better, and how to develop strategies to do so, is the teaching-learning process of this course.
Evaluation/Assessment	Students will demonstrate their talents and intra/interpersonal skills with concrete challenges of simulating situations/role plays that they will face in a real work context in organizations. The result will be: Identification and valorisation of personal resources and relational knowledge (25%); Clarity, objectivity and adequacy of the materials produced within the scope of the autonomous work (25% ind. + 25% group work). Final work of individual reflection on a practical case (25%).

Source: Own elaboration

In order to evaluate this training action, the trainees/students of the seven classes (N=126) were asked on the last day to fill in the final evaluation form, a questionnaire with the objectives of: (i) assessing the extent to which this training corresponded to their needs and expectations: (ii) improvement of future training actions.

The questionnaire was answered (anonymously) by all the Trainees/students and had 4 questions, with a Likert scale with 5 points (1-didn't exceed – 5 completely exceeded) and (1-very negative-5-very positive):

1. Overall, the training you attended met your expectations
2. Assessment of the degree of adequacy of the following items: Duration, installations, audio-visual systems, teaching methods, content usefulness, content, goals
3. Regarding the trainer, how do you rate the following items: relationship with the group; domain of subjects; ability to motivate; expression capacity
4. The quality of the documentation provided

From this experience we can share positive results of the seven groups formed so far and of their inclusion in the labour market.

3 RESULTS

According to the training provided and the results obtained, it can be concluded that trainees feel the need for training in the behavioral area. They showed great interest both in the theoretical content and in participating in the different exercises proposed in the sessions.

This was possible to verify through the openness in the exposition of their doubts (articulating theory with practical questions of their professional day-to-day) and from the discourse, "due to the importance of the topics addressed, these trainings should be included in the workplace"; "It is very important to acquire conflict management tools to manage interactions in the workplace"

There is interest and motivation for future training actions, in an attitude of constant learning to optimize their professional performance. The trainees themselves propose follow-up sessions to assess the application of learning in practice; sessions by department/team.

Satisfaction with training exceeded (n= 91) or completely exceeded (n=28) expectations.

Concerning the teachers, with regard to the ability to express, motivation, mastery of content and relationship with the group, the results were unequivocal, the 126 trainees consider very positive;

"The trainer has an excellent ability to interact and motivate the students", "The trainer has a very important role in the way she motivates the students and dynamizes the actions" which undoubtedly translates into an added value for the development of future training.

The group remained very participative, committed, open, the sharing of experiences was very enriching and at each session there was a growing motivation and satisfaction in the face of this learning opportunity. This makes it possible to offer more training that contributes to the individual and professional well-being of trainees.

The meaning presupposed by learning and training is a central issue, namely when it is considered the importance and the relationship between training and the construction of identity(ies). When it is considered learning and training as a condition of existence and becoming, in this biographical and social temporality [4] that includes all the events, places and interactions of existence, it can be understood the meaning of education as a sense of being [5] and the way of access to the understanding and construction of the self-world and the World

Learning and training are, in this sense, an approach of the individual to the world, to others and to himself/herself, they are an approach to knowledge that is not only epistemic, but also identity and social [6].

4 CONCLUSIONS

Education emerges as a constitutional right both at the level of internal law of the European States in the national dimension and at the level of European Union law [7]. Fundamental right enshrined in the Constitution as a manifestation of the original constituent power and constitutional in the current European perspective in the sense of founder, structural and element in the construction of the integration model chosen. Whether in university, training or lifelong learning aspect, can condition the performance of economic vectors. As a human right [7], it is important to value education from

kindergarten to higher education, in the formation of values and education for law, citizenship and participation.

It is, in fact, to reverse the logic, valuing educational processes as much as possible, since they are a condition for the satisfaction of human dignity, as well as an important mechanism for accessing other rights and in this case many students start afresh, or have for the first time the opportunity to study or take up this possibility again.

Training and lifelong learning has become at world level, in the community and national space, as an indispensable condition to ensure economic and social development at global level, individual and organizational competitiveness [8]. It is a dynamic, interactive and participatory process that when complemented with the so-called transversal competencies and soft skills promotes integral capacitation of the individual, for the awareness and understanding of the causes of problems in a context of interdependence and commitment to a transforming action based on the capacity to participate and contribute to a sustainable development.

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