



**EMPIRE (Empowerment through Mentoring to
Promote the Importance of real work Experience)**

Progress Report

Public Part

Project information

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Executive Summary

Career advice and guidance services are among the most important institutions for the early identification of skill needs especially for those most likely to become long-term unemployed as well as for clients with high qualification and skills profiles. Especially a more personalized advice can enhance the employability of job-seekers and improve career development. EMPIRE wants to make career development a more collaborative service by tying up closer links between career guidance services and employers' associations, enterprises and jobholders or -seekers. Starting from a series of focus groups, the project partners will lay down the base for the piloting of tailored blended-mentoring schemes to be run with different target-groups in 2009. A mentoring kit is prepared to equip mentors with basic mentor tools. The final piloting phase (partly based on an on-line support service) with mentees (i.e. the customers of career counselling services) will produce several Career/professional plans and reflection journals collecting the daily impressions of mentees and mentors. The experience as a whole will produce a set of guidelines/recommendations for career development agencies.

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1. Project Objectives

The best job positions still go to the most resourceful job seekers.

Career guidance and planning services have the potential to contribute significantly to the development of human capital. Nonetheless researches and policy reports have expressed concern that occupational information alone and traditional matching of people and jobs are not enough. Advances in the use of technology (cyber-counselling) and the introduction of new methodologies like mentoring could enrich the career counselling profession's contributions to individual development and expand access to a broader range of customers.

The EMPIRE project wants to:

1. make quality of career development work more cost-effective - how: by introducing less expensive mixed forms, so-called “blended” mentoring (e-mentoring combined with face-to-face forms);
2. rise attractiveness of career development work – how: by integrating more specialist services for deeper engagement with clients when this is required;
3. advance in the use of ICT based services in career guidance - how: by expanding interactive on line environments (cyber-counselling) to support the success of mentor initiatives anytime, anywhere;
4. prevent “deprofessionalization” of career counselling - how: by moving the service away from information-based vocational guidance and neglecting person-based career development practice to more qualitative methodologies like blended mentoring
5. improve employability of weaker labour force like this of mature workers as well as of self-employed - how: through extensive networking and well established relationships with business and industry and the presence of a mentor and increased group-based and cooperative learning;
6. prevent expertise loss in enterprises – how: by transforming blended mentoring into a mainstream tool for accomplishing important future human resources or staff development goals, including individual career development and knowledge retention.

2. Project Approach

Added value

Although all Member States have laudable policies and made genuine attempts to assist their citizens with life career development, many individuals do not have access to quality. A great source of support for the future of career counselling and guidance around the Europe rests in the collaborative efforts among national and international professional organizations, groups, and individuals concerned with career counselling which is the case of the EMPIRE consortium.

Activities

Some of the EMPIRE consortium members know each other from previous international cooperation projects but some never met before. The previous contacts were certainly helpful for outlining the project strategy and putting together the project team. Three partner meetings took place between 2007 and 2008. The last one was combined with a training session on mentoring methodologies to support the training of mentors, mentees and project supervisors.

The first half of 2008 was mainly dedicated to the organisation of a series of focus groups. They had to serve multiple purposes: explain and promote the project objectives, win-over participants for the mentoring program (both mentors and mentees), find out training needs and agree on testing issues.



The collected information was analysed to clearly understand the requirements for 2009. The second half of the year was used to prepare a tool kit for mentors, then translated into English, Spanish and German, and to provide customised guidance to partners. 2009 will be completely dedicated to piloting blended-mentoring programs, the validation of the results and their capitalization into guidelines for career counselling bodies.

Evaluation strategy

Partners were involved in the evaluation strategy which is essential for the project. We have to distinguish two levels of evaluation:

- 1) the first level refers to regular internal evaluation performed by the project partner themselves. The LP periodically collects feedback via a series of questionnaires and reports to monitor the project progress and quality of outputs. These tools are part of the so-called "Quality and evaluation plan".
- 2) the second level of evaluation wants to measure the success of blended-mentoring for career development which is the core of EMPIRE. For this purpose a "validation plan" was drafted and circulated among partners in order to define success indicators as well as 'hard' and 'soft' outcomes. The operative phase will start in year 2009 when blended-mentoring will be tested in a series of pilots.

Dissemination and exploitation strategy

All institutions supporting career development – hence mainly job centres – but also professional associations which are in charge with life-long learning of employees are long-term beneficiaries of EMPIRE. The benefits of the project is promoted on two levels to advise workers, mentors, trainers and "linked professionals":

The first level deals with direct involvement in the piloting phases of the project. The mentioned beneficiaries participated in the focus groups organised in Italy, Austria, Germany and Spain. They will be the direct users of the project outcomes (customized web based platform, tailored blended mentoring schemes, guide/kit for blended mentoring) and even contribute to edit the Guide/recommendation for career development agencies by summarizing the salient part of their personal testing experience for their colleagues. This will document the learning process of the project.

The second level refers to wider dissemination and awareness rising carried out via press articles, Wikipedia, and fair participation as well as direct co-operation with mentor-networks activities like TTnet or other mentoring projects identified in 2008.

3. Project Outcomes & Results

Major achievements and results of the reporting period

Beside the specific products prepared by the project during the first project year, there are some general achievements which have to do with co-operation, synergy and networking. Not all partners were equally familiar with mentoring when the project started although they all have a thorough experience in other forms of supporting personal development like tutoring or coaching. It was important to create a common base of understanding which was achieved through presentations prepared by the British partners who steered all methodological questions together with the Lead partner. We even went further. A specific training session was organised in occasion of the 3rd transnational partner meeting to simulate at least once before the pilot phase all salient steps of a mentoring process.

Furthermore the identification of interested stakeholders and motivated mentees – hence of the target group- was a work intensive but fundamental process. The partners run **Focus groups** in Austria, Germany, Spain and Italy to liaise with interested organisations or enterprises. This essential network will be maintained and animated throughout the project in order to keep stakeholders fully committed and to involve them in the project evaluation.

The national target groups for the blended-mentoring pilots which arose from the focus are as follows:

- Free lancers (creative professions)
- tax consultants
- safety officers
- In-comers and Out-goers
- Over 50 workers
- immigrant women
- trainers in adult education

Their needs were analysed during the follow-up activities and the mentoring pilot programs foreseen for 2009 planned in detail.

Furthermore a **mentoring-kit** was produced and will soon be available on the website in English, German, Italian and Spanish. It provides experienced and novice mentors with operative tools to successfully implement and document a mentoring program.

Operative templates

- Mentoring agreement
- Mentoring objectives and goals
- First need analysis
- Recall your past experience - school - training
- Recall your past experience – job
- Recall your past experience - personal sources
- Personal and professional development plan

Transversal templates

- A - Goal setting and Action planning – Personal learning steps
- B – Mentor's diary
- C – Mentee' diary

Partners now have a clear understanding of what is required in order to set-up and run their blended mentoring projects. They have well structured documents explaining how to manage and evaluate the schemes.

The project website was implemented. It also includes the platform for e-mentoring.
www.empire-leonardo.org

Two project brochures were developed with slightly different lay-outs and are downloadable from the website. The text can be easily changed when requested by partners. In this way a common pattern will be used by all partners.

4. Partnerships

Personalised employment services and career guidance services must develop new strategies and modalities when working in partnership with others. EMPIRE built-up an international and multidisciplinary collaboration across countries interested in creating, sharing, and delivering innovative strategies of career guidance. Generally the collaboration with enterprises is a critical factor, but in EMPIRE the enterprises as well as unions were involved from the very beginning.

A series of focus groups created a common platform for VET stakeholders –formal training institutions, social partners, business and industry as well as association - interested in testing blended-mentoring as a way to improve employability of people.

The partnership is composed by representatives of different professional sectors and institutions, also expressing the project potential users and beneficiaries: vocational training organisations, centres of research and content developers, employment agencies, trade unions, employers associations. All the project partners have also validated skills and expertise in managing projects co-financed by European programmes.

FIL Prato (LP) runs employment service centres. The mission is to provide people with guidance tools in order to help them to enter (or to re-enter) to the labour market, analysing their competencies, supplying training and facilitating the matching between work demand and offer. FIL also provides actions for work placement, creating a useful database for workers and employers.

Arbeit und Leben Hamburg is a 50-year-old adult education organisation, maintained by the German Trade Union Federation and the Vocational training school. It has a large network of foreign adult education institutions all over Europe and conducted several international training projects in Europe with continental and especially Northern Europe partners in the field of vocational, social and political education.

Scienter España is a research centre and service provider organisation interested in innovation of training systems, with main reference to the field of Open and Distance Learning. It has a vast experience in the field of international relations and in the global management of long term partnerships, working also on innovation in career guidance and evaluation of employment and training public policies.

The Spanish partner **IMFE** runs employment service centres for the labour intermediation and the socio-laboral insertion of the more disadvantaged groups of the local population in Granada.

The **IFS** is a institution of applied research, which focuses on topics of future learning and work and the promotion of lifelong learning. The IFS mission is to ensure more effective and cost-efficient education and respond to the increasing need to get oriented about the future of learning and the roles of technologies in education.

Amitié promotes training activities in software and information technology; over the last years Amitié has been increasingly involved in pilot and training projects concerning various topics of European interest, in particular in the culture sector.

Mentoring USA/Italy, a no-profit organisation created by National Research Centre and University of Rome, implemented a Mentoring Programme, joining an adult

figure (Mentor) to a child or adolescent in their care (Mentee) in a way that is able to support the smooth and winning development of personality. The organisation mission is to facilitate the social inclusion and to encourage and guide the young people into the difficult step of adult life.

BHR Consulting & Associates was established in 1994 and is composed by proficient trainers and authors of training materials for a wide range of audiences related to face-to-face mentoring, e-mentoring or blended mentoring, Work Related Learning and social exclusion, work experience and employment.

5. Plans for the Future

2009 will be fully dedicated to the piloting of blended-mentoring with:

- Free lancers (creative professions)
- tax consultants
- safety officers
- In-comers and Out-goers
- Over 50 workers
- immigrant women
- trainers in adult education

The learning experience will be documented by both mentors and mentees via the use of the platform and the mentor toolkit prepared in 2008. A thorough evaluation strategy will be applied to find out:

- A. how effective the programmes were;
- B. what the outcomes were for mentees and enterprises; and
- C. more about how blended mentoring works.

The salient results will be edited as guide/recommendation for career development work agencies.

National workshops will be organised in Italy, Austria, Germany and Spain.

6. Contribution to EU policies

EMPIRE contributes the priority of the Lisbon Strategy “*Investments in Education and Learning Public expenditure*” as well as “*Learning Enterprise expenditure*”. Career development work agencies have to deal with very tight resources which leads them to focus narrowly on the unemployed as a priority. Resources are not sufficient to reach career guidance-related goals such as career management and development in a lifelong perspective. EMPIRE will take traditional mentoring practices and blend them with the latest technological advancements. Web-based mentoring will make interaction easier, more frequent and in the long term less expensive.

Furthermore EMPIRE is dealing with career transitions in enterprises. In a concrete test case (Italy) employees coming from different SMEs will be pooled and mentored in group to face a new job position in line with the objectives of the enterprises but also with the European security prescriptions (Council Directive 89/391/EEC). The pooling of various enterprises with similar learning needs will optimize the enterprises’ investments’ in learning. In other words the pooling of resources and the organization of a joint initiatives where partners can contribute depending on where their specific strengths lie, will make service delivery more effective.

EMPIRE target groups and beneficiaries will range from young people who leave school or university to older customers. They will all participate in e-mentoring trials – in other words “*open learning environments*” as requested by the Lisbon Strategy. The attractiveness of learning is important for the success of EMPIRE. It promotes the clients’ ability to improve their life by means of a dialogue with a mentor who has a direct career experience. Learning about lived experience is considered a promising approach since the reliance on the individual's career story becomes the collection of images depicting the way the person perceives himself or herself in the world.

7. Extra Heading/Section

N.A.

