



Office InterActors - Developing Transferable Basic and Professional Skills for Business and Administration through Internet-based Problem-solving Role-play

LLP-LdV/ToI/2008/RO/017

<http://www.adam-europe.eu/adam/project/view.htm?prj=6074>

Project Information

- Title: Office InterActors - Developing Transferable Basic and Professional Skills for Business and Administration through Internet-based Problem-solving Role-play
- Project Number: LLP-LdV/Tol/2008/RO/017
- Year: 2008
- Project Type: Transfer of Innovation
- Status: running
- Country: RO-Romania
- Marketing Text: Office InterActors has produced a set of teaching materials easily adaptable to other fields of interests and domains of activity. The Office InterActors kit is accessible at www.officeinteractors.eu and provides guidance and support material for the implementation of an experiential methodology which directly involves beneficiaries in building their understanding and learning. This ensures a higher level of motivation and engagement of course participants. Tutors interested to apply the method and use/ adapt the materials already developed can use the Office InterActors kit. Also they can contact the representatives of the Office InterActors partnership at lucia.petrescu@euroed.ro For more details please visit www.officeinteractors.eu www.euroed.ro
- Summary: Office InterActors project addresses the need for intercultural awareness, transferable skills and lifelong learning strategies for professional purposes, given the increased work mobility nowadays. Office InterActors proposes a VET educational model and EU supported training opportunities for developing basic and professional skills in Business & Administration. These skills are transferable from study to work and from one work setting to another: foreign language skills (English and French as widely spoken, plus Lithuanian, Bulgarian, Romanian and Basque), ICT skills (including use of the Internet and Web 2.0), teamwork and negotiation (also in international teams through online collaboration), general and professional intercultural awareness and knowledge, entrepreneurship, other self-management skills and motivation for lifelong learning.
- Description: The Office InterActors didactic model aims to develop transferable basic and professional skills relevant to Business&Administration, with the following learning objectives:
- increased awareness and new knowledge of the Business & Administration culture in different European countries (Spain, France, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Romania and possibly others in the second round of delivery),
 - development of professional skills related to work in the area of Business & Administration (information management systems, financial management, human resources management, quality management and quality assurance strategies, management)
 - development of transferable New Basic Skills: language skills (English, including French and less widely used languages: Lithuanian, Basque, Romanian, Bulgarian, possibly others in the second round of delivery), computer skills (including use of Internet and Web 2.0 technology), teamwork and negotiation skills, intercultural awareness
 - other areas of personal development relevant to professional success: confidence, entrepreneurship, motivation for lifelong learning, time / stress /change management.
- Within the Office InterActors courses, the participants work their way together through roles and tasks within fictitious scenarios (to minimize the learners' stress) which are at the same time true-to-life and relevant to their profession. The participants and their tutors are organized in face-to-face groups in different locations (e.g. countries), from where they meet each other regularly on an online learning platform in order to carry out the tasks within the scenarios. The features of the online learning platform include the staged release of information by the tutors, authoring tools, internal e-mail and chat mechanisms, on-line editing and exchange of electronic files etc. The roles and tasks are designed in such a way as to require

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intense and engaging teamwork and negotiation at the level of both the national groups and internationally. The presence of persons working in various departments in a business will encourage dialogue and negotiation skills in the mother tongue while the communication among the international groups will structure the context for real linguistic and intercultural business dialogue. The need to learn basic linguistic and cultural information about the partners will thus emerge naturally and the input in that direction will be welcome by the participants. Moreover, initial, formative and summative (self-/peer-) assessment and evaluation activities will be deeply embedded within the scripts. The self/peer review exercises will also model strategies of quality assurance based of self-assessment. The delivery of InterAct courses can best be achieved with approval and support from employers/educational managers.

Office InterActors uses Blended Learning to provide participants with authentic opportunities to build their own understanding, select information, use it appropriately and through this, help them become independent learners. The tutors' role is to facilitate and support students' hands on activities, while enhancing information processing and personal intake.

Face to face contact is necessary to jumpstart the online activities. The tasks uploaded on the moodle platform imply first of all work in the national team, research and material development which is later used in the online negotiation activities.

Face to face activities are mixed with online activities. It is recommended that ~50% of the entire set of activities be online synchronous activities implemented within the international group, that is in cooperation with the groups in the other countries.

Online synchronous collaboration is being implemented with the help of chat mechanisms on the platform but also via skype. Being able to actually speak to the people behind the messages and the tasks motivates all participants and enhances their involvement in the course.

While face to face activities are facilitated by tutors, handling online mechanisms is supported by video tutorials and the assistance of the platform administrator. Also, the orientation meeting in the beginning of the Office InterActors course underlines the main features of the moodle platform and guides participants through the entire structure of the course they are going to participate in. The first round of piloting the Office InterActors courses and the moodle platform has produced valuable feedback from both students and tutors. This information has been used to update the platform and make it more user-friendly to future users and beneficiaries.

- Themes: *** Labor market
*** Quality
*** Intercultural learning
*** ICT
*** Others
*** Lifelong learning
*** Higher education
*** Enterprise, SME
** Utilization and distribution of results
** Social dialog
- Sectors: *** Information and Communication
*** Education
** Professional, Scientific and Technical Activities
- Product Types: evaluation methods
material for open learning
modules
others
CD-ROM

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distribution methods
teaching material
program or curricula
website

Product information: The scenario – using a fictitious scenario as the central piece of the course development and implementation ensures a relaxed work atmosphere appreciated by all the students (e.g. the action takes place in an imaginary country by imaginary institutions/individuals). This also activates shy or reluctant students, encouraging them to state their opinions and provide input for the tasks. Although it is fictitious, the scenario includes true-to-life issues, relevant to the learners' field of activity. Elements of business and administration, management, human resources, ICT, foreign languages and cultural references are blended together to create a complex framework.

Course structure – the course addresses two levels of entry competence (“basic” and “advanced”). Different roles and tasks in the scenario have different prerequisites, since not all learners have the same skills, levels or interests. The structure created guides each of the two level learners to work on their share of the tasks and, at the same time, offers opportunities for them to cooperate. Thus, students have the chance to support each other in their work and increase their confidence and self-esteem. The tasks are grouped in five steps (one each week), plus one orientation meeting at the beginning, to offer students the general information they need to use the platform.

Tasks – The tasks included in the scenario should be commonly agreed on by course organizers and beneficiary institutions, bearing in mind the needs and interests of the learners. The tasks selected in the Office InterActors course so far have integrated business content, ICT, language and culture elements to offer students a holistic learning experience. Moodle platform – We have used Moodle as a tool for project implementation as well as to deliver trainings and courses. Tutor training activities have been hosted online to provide trainee-tutors with a direct experience of the actual courses. Based on the suggestions received from the trainings, the platform was adapted to suit the affordances learner group participating in the first round of Office InterActors courses (Autumn 2009). Another way of updating the platform to the needs of the students was to have them make suggestion for it's improvement. Therefore, after the first round of courses the moodle platform has undergone major changes to make it more user-friendly.

Online collaboration – It is recommended that 50% of the course activities involve live online collaboration. This motivates students by providing the opportunity to practice their language skills through authentic communication. Discussions are focused on negotiating decisions and intercultural awareness. Students seemed to prefer Skype meetings more than other forms of chat or forum discussions.

Evaluation – ongoing formative assessment and evaluation have been built into the course rather than implemented separately at the end. The strategy here is to take all participants, tutors included, through a process of self-/peer-monitoring, reporting, debriefing and discussion (as well as providing feedback for the course designers). Several evaluation tools were used: pre, during and post course self evaluation sheets, students' blogs where they were encouraged to reflect on their Office InterActors experience, post course evaluation forms. All materials were developed by David Evans, the project's internal evaluator, who acted as an advisor to all aspects of the project implementation.
What do the learners say?

1. “The course was interactive and brought 5 different countries to the table of negotiation. It was quite interesting because we managed to learn about the other cultures, how they negotiate and how they behave generally in business relations.
As for personal learning objectives, we managed to improve our negotiation skills,

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the way we communicate and nonetheless, the most important thing, teamwork.”

2. “We feel that we have improved a great deal from the point we entered this course and until now.”

3. “We discovered that through Skype we could do a lot more things and in a smaller amount of time. For us, it worked really good. We didn’t have any problems regarding this matter. “

4. “We reach our objective with our involvement in making the tasks with passion, also we made a lot of research.”

5. “This Moodle it`s a suport for us to attach our uploads,to post our work about what this platform means and give us the possibility to interract through mesages with all the countries that participate to this project”

6. “The scenario developed our imagination, and challenged us. Also, it helped by guiding us to understand how we must work on this kind of platform.”, “The scenarios was at the right level for our knowlages,we think that this is a good way to understand our level of knowing English”, “Foe me they were rather difficult but I managed with help.”

7. “It was a new thing for us and therwith an advantageous one, because he helped us to understand each other better. It was a way to exercise our spoken English.”

Projecthomepage: www.officeinteractors.eu

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Project Files

DSC_2030.JPG

http://www.adam-europe.eu/prj/6074/prj/DSC_2030.JPG

Products

- 1 Office InterActors Website

Product 'Office InterActors Website'

Title: Office InterActors Website

Product Type: website

Marketing Text: If you are a student, already working or wishing to update you staff's skills then you should visit the Office InterActors website for FREE ACCESS to Office InterActors kit. You can use this to learn more about Office InterActors methodology. You can then implement such courses yourself or you can enroll in one of our courses. Next round of courses - SPRING 2010.

Description: Project website - offers information on the project, the aims and objectives of the activities implemented within Office InterActors.
I also hosts the Office InterActors kit which is freely accessible to those interested to implement Office InterActors courses with new beneficiaries.
The website also provides a link to the work area of the project - the Moodle platform - where all the Office InterActors courses and simulations were implemented.

Target group: The website is addressed to all those interested in the methodology developed in Office InterActors and also in international communication. The target groups directly approached by the partnership are university students in the field of Business and Administration, employees or unemployed people looking for a way in which they could update their knowledge and skills.

Result: The Office InterActors websites provides information for all those interested to get involved.

Area of application: Dissemination, teaching and training, providing materials and example of good practices.

Homepage: www.officeinteractors.eu

Product Languages: English

Events

Spring Round of courses

Date 01.04.2010

Description Starting this April the 2nd Office InterActors round of courses will begin. Teams from Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Lithuania, Romania and Spain will work together online and offline in national and international teams. The main tool used for the implementation of the courses is a Moodle platform specially customized for this round of courses.

Target audience The target audience for Office InterActors courses are

- students in the field of business and economy
- employed people in the field of business and economy
- unemployed people looking forward to update their knowledge and experience in order to increase their employment opportunities

Public Event is open to the public

Contact Information lucia.petrescu@euroed.ro

Time and place The Courses will start this coming April. Those interested to attend please write to Lucia Petrescu at lucia.petrescu@euroed.ro