



Lifelong Learning Programme

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„TTV – Tools of the Trade for Teaching in VET (vocational educational training)“

Leonardo Transfer Project :10/2011 – 09/2013

Summary Report SOLARIS - Romania

Baseline situation

As of November 2011, Solaris has been providing 20 vocational training courses for circa 400 trainees, in trades such as: locksmith, plumber, forklift operator, crane operator, hairdresser, manicurist, chef, waiter/waitress, fireman, LPG operator, car mechanic (the total number of beneficiaries from Solaris training courses amounts at circa 4,000 per year).

For the purpose of exploring the baseline situation of Solaris vocational training activity we have conducted participatory observation in five training courses, both theoretical and practical (locksmith, plumber, forklift operator, crane operator, and hairdresser), and one group interview with five trainers (3 female and 2 male).

Most of the trainees have been employed as of the time of our observation, but either on unqualified positions or on low qualification positions, so that the main purposes of their attending the training courses have been to either shift to a position of qualified worker or to advance on the qualification ladder, both resulting in better salaries.

The theoretical courses pertained to introductory phases and followed the traditional classroom-based methods, such as presentation, exemplification, demonstration, monstration (printouts), with little use of teaching supplies. The communication was mostly one-way (trainer-trainee), yet with some interactive elements (recall of previously acquired knowledge). Almost no elements of cognitive apprenticeship could be noticed.

The practical courses, yet recalling on previously taught theoretical elements, were interactive, with trainers focusing mostly on trainees' resources and skills. Video material was used in a view

to give trainees a more intuitive picture of what they are going to achieve. In these cases, almost all elements/strategies of the cognitive apprenticeship have been observed.

The information collected through participatory observation was afterwards supplemented and substantiated through a focus group with trainers previously visited at their training courses.

The participants in the interview could not identify/express a basic attitude/guideline that orients their training activity, nor could they present a concept that gives the orientation in their work. Likewise, the interviewees could not evoke sets of methods or preferred methods of training. They referred instead to how they approach a training session, with emphasis on (continuous) evaluation of and interaction with trainees. These suggested a need for further training of trainers regarding the theoretical and methodological approach in vocational education and training.

The key framework conditions referred to by the interviewees were punctuality, strict observance of the curricula and focus on achievements (with special emphasis on graduation/passing the final exams).

All interviewees declared that they were paying attention to the feed-back received from the trainees, explicit or not (they had already achieved a certain sense of the level of understanding by trainees), which was used for adapting the pace and/or the conceptual level of their teaching to the capacity of trainees. With regard to the organisation/arrangement of the training courses, little room was left with the trainees, especially when it was about adaptation of the training schedule to their work schedule.

The perceived role of trainers in the relationships with trainees was of information/knowledge provider, in most cases associated with coach, while the relationship between trainer and trainee was of teacher-pupil type.

The lack of motivation among trainees, or of certain trainees, appeared to be mostly regarded as a fault of trainees and therefore sanctioned (trainee asked to stand up and repeat what had been said, or simply asked to leave). The psychological grounds and mechanisms of motivation did not seem to be known by our interviewees; hence, when it comes about lack of motivation among trainees it appears as a deviation from the rules.

No problems relating to differences emerging from cultural/ethnic background have been revealed (they had no case of immigrants so far), but when asked whether they would act the same way or differently in case such problems would occur the general answer was in the sense that the training course is one and the same for all. This suggests that additional training of trainers should also include aspects relating to the management of diversity.

Most of the interviewees declared that they would appreciate any opportunity for improving their training performance.

Questionnaire survey among trainers

The questionnaire survey was aimed at broadening the knowledge base on the practice of teaching in the partner organisations' regions, as well as at serving as a base for a more systemised knowledge on the situation of trainings and the trainers in their every-day situation of teaching – also with regard to differences between trainees and groups of trainees - as a basement for an overview on the necessities for support of trainers. The preparation process was a good opportunity for the partners to discuss about teaching processes in their regions and to develop a common basement and understanding of the conditions under which the transfer material can be applied in the their regions.

The results of the questionnaire were expected to help defining the exact starting points for the transfer of the German material. The evaluation of the common questionnaire findings was expected to contribute to a clarification of the most important topics on which the support / the support strategies of trainers should focus and also to give a guideline for the planned participatory observations in training centres and SMEs by the experts of AREA, GENESIS and SOLARIS under WPs 5-7.

Nevertheless, the results of the questionnaire were expected to be an important background for arguments in negotiations with training organisations, associations and regional policy makers and will especially contribute to the installation of quality assurance circles in connection with the EQARF logic in Germany.

The questionnaire developed by IRIS under WP 2, in cooperation with the experts from project partners, has been pretested by the Solaris project team on 11 trainers, of whom 4 women and 7 men, selected as to cover several training domains and levels.

With due consideration of the pre-testing results, the questionnaire survey in Romania was carried out on 79 trainers (35 male; 43 female; 1 not specified), of whom 60 trainers working for SOLARIS and 19 trainers working for their partner organisations.

The results from the questionnaire survey have been discussed with interviewed trainers and other stakeholders from SOLARIS operation area within a seminar.

The main conclusions from the analysis of the questionnaire survey results have been as follows:

The structure of trainers by fields of education largely mirrors the structure of sectors in which they teach, which reveals adequacy of human resources assignation to sectors/trades in which most training courses have been delivered.

Only 59% of the interviewed trainers had also benefitted from specific education in teaching, which suggests that in the subsequent phases of the project the transfer of knowledge should also include matters relating to teaching education/pedagogics.

There is a coherence of trainers' educational background and their work with trainees, mostly relating to their professional experience and/or seniority in the field.

The rating by our interviewees of different aspects and qualities of their teaching practice suggests a high level of self-appreciation, with highest levels for confidence in themselves and in their work and for their pedagogical skills.

The perceptions of trainers on the capabilities of their trainees to achieve the goal of the training are mostly positive.

If considering also the highly positive perception by our interviewed trainers of their teaching practice, one may conclude that we are in presence of a good ground for high motivation among the trainers, which is one of the key prerequisites of a successful training activity.

In the opinions of our respondents personal skills are the most important for proper achievement of the training objectives by the trainees, especially the basic attitudes and values and the psychological parameters concerning their performance (characteristics of achievement). From among the social skills, the ability to work in a team/group has been by far the most appreciated. However, the opinions on the skills needed by the trainees substantially differ in respect of the economic sector for which they are being trained.

The trainers' opinions on the skills needed by the trainees suggest that some additional support for the trainers in developing their knowledge of this important prerequisite of a successful training activity would be beneficial. Besides, in spite of pretty limited time lag available in the case of short term training courses, dissemination of good practice in enhancing and/or developing the trainees' skills while teaching in VET would also contribute to better achieving the training objectives.

All the key concepts that were supposed to guide the work of trainers from participating organisations and therefore proposed in the questionnaire in a view to be rated by the interviewees in respect of their importance have reached mean values between 4 = important and 5 = highly important (except "intercultural education" – 3.95), while the know-how of our respondents in applying these concepts has reached mean values between 4 = good knowledge and 5 = very good knowledge for all proposed concepts. This should normally be considered as a reflection of the importance that trainers have been assigning to those basic concepts in their endeavours to also acquire suitable know-how in using them.

Likewise, from the list of approaches and methods that are usually used in VET practice, which the respondents were asked to state how often, if ever, they are using in their teaching practice, the frequency of use by our interviewees of the proposed approaches and methods ranged between "3 – sometimes" and "5 – very often" for all of these, while for more than half it ranged between "4 – often" and "5 – very often".

The most efficient/successful methods for the learning of trainees, as rated by our respondents, have been “learning by doing” – 27.18%, “team/group work” – 14.56% and “practice/internships” (added under “others”) – 11.65%.

The predefined answering options to the question regarding the trainers’ role as teachers in their relationships with trainees did not prove to be good stimuli for the respondents’ appraisal of their roles. They appeared to cover all socially expected roles that teaching incurs.

The answers we have got to the question regarding the mental attitude of trainers that characterises the way in which they relate to their trainees have revealed that many of them still use a teacher-student / trainer-apprentice relationship with the trainees. Nevertheless, the analysis of these answers has also revealed that almost half of our respondents perceived their trainees as a resource (“future professionals”, “future co-workers”, “people with potential”), so that their work with trainees appears like an investment in the future rather than a routine teacher-student relationship. This approach is also likely to generate motivation for both trainers and trainees, which suggests that we are in presence of good perspectives for this training provider organisation to achieve their objectives.

All our proposed terms for describing the trainers’ personal style of communication have been assessed by our interviewees as suitable, with higher means for “instructive”, “fair” and “friendly”.

According to the findings from our questionnaire survey the Romanian partner in the project not only provides a range of support facilities to their trainers but also these trainers largely make use of them. This also applies to the findings regarding the so called “structural” possibilities for support and the extent to which these actually help trainers with the development/improvement of their professional life.

The answers to the last question aiming at measuring the satisfaction of trainers with the offers and facilities provided in their institution revealed that all trainers working for SOLARIS are highly satisfied with the offers and facilities provided in their organisation.

Support of trainers (coaching)

Based on the results from the questionnaire survey and with due consideration of the lessons learned from the German partners’ previous experience, as well as of the experiences with study visits to training centres from Ravenna and Freiburg, the WP7 focussed on transfer of knowledge and good practice to selected trainers working with SOLARIS.

Eight trainers have been selected by SOLARIS management for further coaching under the Project, having in mind the need to cover key areas of training provision by the organisation, but also the perspectives of the selected trainers to continue working with SOLARIS and their ability to act as multipliers afterwards. Five of these selected trainers have been assigned to one of the trainers in the Project team and three to the other one, also considering their availability and experience.

The main transfer of innovation materials received from the German partners that have been studied, adapted and used by the Romanian project team for the purpose of further improving the knowledge and training skills of SOLARIS trainers referred to the following topics:

- Modern methods in VET (especially the “master-novice” paradigm)
- Quality assurance in VET
- Diversity factors in VET
- Factors and criteria that contribute to a successful education in VET
- Methods of support and coaching for trainers in VET

The outcomes of the coaching process have been assessed by the coaches based on direct observation and discussions with participating trainers, as well as through before and after analysis based on questionnaire survey among trainees.

We are not describing here the coaching process, since this is subject to a separate report, presenting instead only the key conclusions.

- All the modern methods recommended as good practice in VET during the coaching process have been used by the trainers to a larger extent than before.
- The communication style of the trainers has not improved, but the degree of contentment in this regard among trainees was already high (more than 4 on a scale from 1 through 5).
- The extent to which the trainers explained the links between knowledge/skills to be acquired during the training courses and the practical requirements of the crafts they were preparing for has improved.
- The extent to which the trainers explained during the training courses the logic behind their statements/practical instructions has improved.
- The extent to which the trainers required the trainees to explain the logic behind their answers/practical exercises has not improved, but this method had been already frequently used (4.2 on a scale from 1 through 5).
- Learning by trainees within the training sessions (leaving with the lesson learned) has significantly improved.

The conclusions have been discussed within a regional seminar, held in Pitesti on August 22nd, 2013. The results of the seminar discussions are subject to a separate report.

Dissemination

Dissemination has started actually in Romania with the first regional seminar for discussing the findings from the questionnaire survey among trainers. Participants in the seminar included also representatives of relevant employers in the region, of the Chamber of Commerce, of public authorities responsible for oversight of VET activities, of county employment and youth services. They received general information regarding the project’s objectives and activities, participated in the discussions of the survey findings and provided input into discussions.

After getting acknowledged with the project several partner organisations have further contacted the implementing Association and were informed on project's activities. However, an overview of all project's activities and the main results were presented within the second regional seminar, held at one of Solaris training centres in Pitesti City on the 22nd of August 2013. A range of stakeholders participated in the seminar, among which many representatives of enterprises in the region. Media representatives attended also the seminar and a brief presentation of the project, its funding Agency and of the seminar's objectives and activities has been published in a well-known newspaper.

A synthesis document presenting the project, its funding Agency, the members of the implementing consortium, and its main objectives and achievements has been sent for information and possible multiplication to circa 40 stakeholders, including relevant employers in the region, chambers of commerce, municipalities and county councils, regional and local public authorities responsible for oversight of VET activities, other VET providers, county employment and youth services.

Furthermore, the TTV project was presented as a good practice example within the European Conference "Youth in 2020 – the Future of Youth Policies" organised by the Youth Partnership EC-CoE in Budapest, Hungary during October 1-3, 2013.

SOLARIS Project Team

