

OFFICE INTERACTORS - INNOVATION IN MOTIVATING ADULT LEARNERS

OFFICE INTERACTORS – INOVAȚIE ÎN MOTIVAREA CURSANȚILOR ADULȚI

*PETRESCU Elena-Lucia*¹, *COLIBABA St.*¹, *COLIBABA Anca*²,
*COLIBABA Cintia Lucia*³, *URSACHE Ioana*¹

¹“Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași, Romania

²“Gr.T. Popa” University of Medicine and Pharmacy Iasi, Romania

³University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Iasi, Romania

Abstract. *Updating the teaching/learning process is probably one of the most important means of motivating learners, especially adult learners. The Office InterActors project transfers the experience and the products of a previous project, InterAct, with the purpose of offering beneficiaries a motivating learning experience. The methodology developed focuses on valorizing participants' personal experience to support the learning process. The use of ICT elements provides a wide variety of activities. The blended approach implemented by the project involves both face to face meetings and other diverse types of online communication with the international partners thus taking into consideration the learning needs and affordances of all the groups activating within this programme.*

Key words: in-service training, motivation, blended approach, ICT, professional development.

Rezumat: *Actualizarea procesului de predare/învățare constituie probabil unul dintre cele mai importante mijloace de motivare a beneficiarilor, mai ales a cursanților adulți. Proiectul Office InterActors transferă experiența și produsele unui proiect anterior, InterAct, cu scopul de a oferi participanților o experiență de învățare motivantă. Metodologia dezvoltată este bazată pe valorizarea experienței personale a celor implicați cu scopul de a susține procesul de învățare. Utilizarea elementelor ICT oferă o mare varietate de activități. Abordarea mixtă din cadrul proiectului implică atât ședințe de lucru tradiționale precum și alte diverse tipuri de comunicare online cu partenerii internaționali. Sunt astfel luate în considerare necesitățile de studiu precum și disponibilitățile tuturor grupurilor care activează în acest program.*

Cuvinte cheie: învățare la locul de muncă, motivare, abordare mixtă, ICT, dezvoltare profesională

INTRODUCTION

Today's society has clearly modified its requests towards practitioners, irrespective of their field of activity. There is the need of identifying an opportunity to mould professional affordances so as to update them to the market request. These kinds of experiences have to address a much wider range than that of professional skills and abilities. Success in all professional fields includes research and work within a complex frame that offers individuals the chance of

having a holistic view on the entire activity field, including more than the strictly professional aspects.

The present project reaches in-service courses using a methodology previously developed within the InterAct project (the result of a Leonardo da Vinci project awarded the European Label in 2007), proven successful and adaptable to learning at the workplace. The principle at the basis of this method considers the fact that the beneficiaries of these courses need to be integrated or reintegrated in the present society making relevant links to their professional domains. This includes activities meant to widen the multicultural and multilingual horizon within which the target groups are either active or with which they are about to interact.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

As mentioned before there is a clear need of handling complex information in diverse ways for different results that would approach matters from various perspectives for a holistic view. This can only be accomplished through innovative methodologies implemented on the basis of needs analysis to ensure their relevance and coherence in relation to the target groups. In this sense Office InterActors brings along a new set of experiential learning strategies aimed at raising awareness, developing skills and offer opportunities to practice them. Beyond the soft skills, ICT and intercultural knowledge load the project includes aspects related to the professional field the course is addressed to – in this case that of economics. This leads to another important aspect, the fact that on the basis of this methodology and strategic structure the Office InterActors courses can very easily be adapted and transferred to other areas of interest simply by customizing the Moodle platform with a new scenario dedicated and specially developed for a certain group of students.

There are two rounds of courses. The first round is planned to be implemented in Autumn 2009 and the second one in spring 2010. Participants from Spain, France, Lithuania, Bulgaria and Romania are organized in national groups which communicate online by the help of a moodle platform to accomplish collaborative tasks developed on the idea of role play and problem solving. The scenarios created offer an authentic and relevant support for the acquisition of all aspects that have to do with participants' professional domain. Tutors are encouraged to adapt the original work model to the target groups they are to work with. The first tutors training was delivered in Iasi and the second will take place within the international conference (Sofia Feb.2010). This creates the possibility of dissemination towards other parties interested in the specific methodology and structure of this type of courses. The site of the project will be used to support this approach as it offers a resource data base for the delivery of the courses (<http://www.officeinteractors.eu/about-us.html>).

The target groups in the project are structured on three levels:

1. Educational / VET professionals and institutions interested to include the Office InterActors model in their educational offers
2. Employers and umbrella organizations representing employers, interested to invest in the training of their staff, apprentices or new recruits,
3. Students studying Business & Administration, recently graduated employees and would-be employees.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A very important aspect is the structure these courses are built on. All activities are developed to meet both the level of knowledge and level of the learning needs participants have. Thus, within the same group, individuals with a lower knowledge level in the IT area will be supported by the other group members who possess this knowledge, all being monitored by the tutor.

Within the same groups individuals with a longer work experience will become the “coordinators” of the activity in those stages that are focused on the above mentioned aspect. Activities will alternate these basic and advanced levels to allow, and more than that, to encourage authentic and useful communication amid all participants in order to consolidate their collaboration. Motivating participants is also implemented through valorizing personal experience. This is done firstly by the individual who has to select from his own experience those aspects only that could contribute to the learning process of the entire group. This is turned into a reflection exercise upon personal experience. Secondly, all the group members benefit from these ideas and from the shared experience especially by reflecting on how this shared data could be adapted to their own environments.

Innovation in motivating adults participating in this training programme is also imbedded in the format and the structure of the courses. These have been developed to include beneficiaries within an authentic and relevant process suitable for the professional area within which the participants activate. Using scenarios allows identifying common aspects for all the international groups offering thus the possibility of transferring abilities in an international frame. Cultural awareness and the multilingual medium help widen the cultural horizon of the beneficiaries in a natural way allowing at the same time to share work experience with the international partners. Along professional abilities, another aspect included in the activities developed is promoting foreign widely used and less widely used languages. The use of the linguistic component offers another possibility to acquire the elements that have to do with the professional environment through facing the local specificity with the international one through the international partners.

The need to introduce less widely used languages as part of the training of office workers who may work internationally either in multinational companies or in national companies involved in international trade is reflected in the results of the ELAN study commissioned by the European Commissioner for Multilingualism, Leonard Orban, in an attempt to analyse the impact of foreign languages on the development of trade and commerce. The study has shown that when one wants to buy, English or another widely spread language is enough, but when one wants to sell, speaking the language of the potential buyer makes a significant difference.

Another innovative aspect that allows beneficiaries a continuous processing of the knowledge they gain is including in all activities the concepts of team work, negotiation and time management. All these help raising awareness upon

individual professional needs and also structure an individualized path for each beneficiary to follow in order to attain the knowledge and abilities that would correspond to the individual professional portrait. All these constitute a motivational kit for the participants who have the chance to look beyond the relatively narrow space of the local professional frame. International communication and collaborative actions in which participants are activated are at the basis of future development of team work abilities.

Using this methodology with adults assures a high degree of involvement on the part of all participants due to the communicative approach implemented both in the relations amid beneficiaries and in transferring information.

CONCLUSIONS

The activities created focus on developing abilities starting with the transfer of information and continuing with personalizing, adapting and further developing it to suit the professional needs of each participant. Including work mediums that promote international communication and offering a course support in the shape of a moddle platform (<http://www.euroed.ro/online/>) equipped with all the necessary material for the successful implementation of the activities is a motivating factor for both tutors and participants.

Gathering all these Office InterActors proposes a viable alternative for the in-service training of specialists from all the domains, at the same time promoting intercultural communication, multilingualism and ICT elements as resources for an updated training of the beneficiaries.

REFERENCES

1. Office InterActors website: <http://www.officeinteractors.eu/about-us.html>
2. Moodle platform: <http://www.euroed.ro/online/>
3. Office InterActors, project proposal