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OPENSEL Project

To establish new open, online courses to develop social emotional skills, in cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices

Presentation of an international initiative

Project participants are the Óbuda University (Hungary), the Képes Alapítvány (Hungary), the Malta College of Arts, Science & Technology (MCAST) (Malta), the Vista College (The Netherlands).

As machines can perform an increasing range and variety of tasks, individuals will need to develop the skills that humans excel at, such as social-emotional skills or creativity. While the importance of social-emotional skills will increase in the future job market, they are highly valued by employers at present, too. Motivation to perform, good communications skills, the ability to work in a team, flexibility/adaptability are frequently mentioned among the required skills of the optimal applicant. However, except for jobs requiring a high level of specific technical knowledge, employers often focus more on cheerful attitudes and soft skills as they treat these skills as less trainable. They also have less capacity to develop these skills in their employers.

In the framework of our innovative OPENSEL project, partners from Hungary, the Netherlands, and Malta collaborate to create three Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) for higher education students developing social-emotional skills that are highly relevant for employability: presentation skills, teamwork skills, stress management skills.

The presentation skills development MOOC (IO1) will cover topics such as: creating a presentation about a topic, including ways of creating an interesting, convincing script about the topic, structuring and designing slides, interacting with the audience, delivery of presentations of different lengths, and presenting oneself during job interviews.

The teamwork skills development MOOC (IO2) will cover topics such as: listening to the other person and taking the other's perspective, communicating effectively/assertively, ability to adhere to group norms/rules, conflict resolution techniques and approaches.

The stress management skills development MOOC (IO3) will cover topics such as

- recognizing own emotions and beliefs/interpretations,
- recognizing own needs and motivations,
- identifying and modifying maladaptive thinking patterns,
- techniques for managing stress and building resilience.

Our target groups are higher education teachers, trainers, mentors, and their students. We also make the courses available for secondary school students (through ROC), companies, and interested other parties. Anyone can join the courses free of charge if they register with them during the registration period.

The project is innovative, as there are no similar MOOCs available for either the students of the participating partners. Furthermore, there are no similar complex online courses in these fields that are offered free of charge to the public. Compared to existing MOOCs/online courses (in other topics)

offered by the partners, instead of the standards practice of recording lectures and turn them into video lessons, we will create many short videos that are specifically designed to illustrate different aspects of the selected topics. They will include dialogues between trainers about the essential issues, interviews with experts on the topics, visual demonstrations, and role-plays, which increases students' engagement and competence development.

The project fulfils real needs in both the training field and the industry. By the soft skills training, the training portfolio of the partners will expand, the students will get useful and valuable knowledge, and the companies will have employees with broader competencies.

These competencies can be applied in the corporate environment and – such as stress management – to ensure a better balance between working and family life. The long-term impact of the development is that the curricula developed in the project will form an integral part of education at all levels. It will also contribute to the better employability of the students.

Benefits of the objectives

All three training courses will expand the general portfolio of all the participating partners' institutions, leading to students getting more useful and valuable knowledge and prospective companies having employees with broader competencies. These competencies can be applied both in the corporate environment as a unit and amongst employees in achieving a better balance between working and family life.

The long-term impact is that curricula developed in this project will eventually become an integral part of the education system at all levels. It will then contribute to better employability chances for students.

In a labour market that is continuously changing, growing and developing, these 'soft skills are vital requisites for companies to compete holistically. Employers frequently list 'teamwork, collaboration, and communication skills as highly valuable yet hard-to-find qualities in potential new hires. That is the reason why training in such skillsets requires professional training, consistency, and supervision.

Besides the desk research, this project is carrying out a 'Needs Analysis' in the participating countries to determine how representatives of companies in Hungary, Malta and the Netherlands value all three soft skills. Based on the interviews, companies in each country highly valued these skills and assessed their presence/absence during job interviews.

An excellent solution to achieving long-term employment is to find a balance between employer needs and the cognitive skills to be developed so that productivity can grow in parallel with organizational growth and the process of personal development. Thus, employers providing training focusing on competencies specific to the organization's immediate needs will fail in the long run if cognitive skills are ignored. At the same time, cognitive skills need to be accompanied by social and emotional skills to achieve and promote holistic positive life outcomes.

It has been reported that many students lack specific social, emotional, and moral skills, and therefore struggle to cope in a range of day-to-day situations, including work placements outside of school (Education Counsel, 2011; OECD, 2009). Our interviewees further reported a lack of training options in all three participating countries; none of the participating organizations offers these courses online, which are widely available for students.

The aims of each curriculum

The results of the survey of companies showed that freshly graduated students struggle with a lack of self-esteem. They undersell their knowledge/skills. They feel anxiety when they must talk in front of many other people. They lack knowledge and confidence in many essential areas, such as the lack of a clear message, the lack of clear structure in the presentation, the lack of preparation, the ability to summarize clearly and briefly, the ability to understand how concepts are linked together. Students are afraid to make mistakes, so they need to learn and practice to make different types and lengths of

presentations clearly and engagingly, they need to learn and practice reducing anxiety before and during lectures, they need to learn how to connect with the audience, get to know self-presentation strategies that are essential to making a good impression in job interviews.

The goal of the first course is to learn how to create a ***presentation*** about a topic, how to tell a story (ways of creating an interesting, convincing script about a topic), how to use text and graphs to put through ideas in an easy-to-follow, transparent way, what to pay attention to when creating a pitch (2-5 minutes), a 15-minute presentation or a 1-hour presentation, how to interact with the audience during the presentation and through the questions and answers period (including how to deal with fear and anxiety).

During ***the second course***, the focus is on ***Teamwork*** in terms of work and business, but the knowledge participants will gain by the end of the course will help become a better team member in any organization. Companies have started to look at Teamwork from a different perspective. The reason for this shift in the mindset is that today's companies would like to operate their businesses in the most efficient way, which leads back to the Team's original idea. However, a lot more can be achieved with the combined effort of people working as a cohesive group. The more participants understand how teams operate, the more likely they will be able to work in their Team that is beneficial for themselves and their Team.

In ***the third course***, the goal is to show how to manage the symptoms of acute and chronic stress by selecting the situations we face, making our evaluations, and increasing our resources to cope. Most people cannot cope with their stress correctly or deal with it sufficiently. Not all stress is bad. It can help to adapt to the environment and meet and overcome challenges. Problems arise when a person is overwhelmed by it or when stress becomes chronic. On the one hand, situations differ based on the challenges they generate for us.

On the other hand, different people react to the same event differently. Therefore, the strategies of stress management vary from person to person based on the individual's stressors. Various stress management techniques can implement to handle the stress effectively. Some approaches address stress physically and psychologically and help to develop the skill of resilience.

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