

ULISSE - Understanding, Learning and Improving Soft Skills for Employability

Name of the Project: ULISSE Understanding, Learning and Improving Soft Skills for Employability

Project Number: 2018-1-IT01-KA203-048286

Project Coordinator: Università di Pisa (Italy)

Lifetime: 01.09 2018 - 30.06.2021

Partners: Instituto Politécnico do Porto (Portugal) Miguel Hernandez University (Spain) University of Latvia (Latvia) Erre Quadro (Italy) Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini (Italy)

What is ULISSE?

Soft skills, according to ESCO's (European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations) definition, are the cornerstone for the personal development of a person; the building blocks for the development of the "hard" skills and competences required to succeed in the labour market. Success in the labour market is seen to be more and more dependent upon possessing the hybrid skills – technical and soft skills – that employers increasingly value.

Soft skills can be distinguished into personal and interpersonal skills or interpersonal qualities and personal attributes that one possesses. This conceptualises soft skills in somewhat abstract terms and characterises them as innate. The idea on which this project is based sees soft skills as having “hard” component, which makes it possible to develop them by learning using appropriate tools, procedures and methods.

The human resource functions within companies often use soft-skills as a catch-all term without ever really defining them. But when placed in context – e.g. problem solving in relation to a systems failure on a production line – this might be regarded as a “not-so-soft-skill” (NSSS). This because there are tools, procedures and methods for learning how to solve problems. Of course, this needs to take into consideration the attitude of the person (their fortitude, determination, etc.), but there are other elements to problem solving too that can be learnt.

This lack of clarity has many consequences, not least that it is likely to lead to a poor match between applicants for a job and the content of that job, thereby wasting the time of the applicants and the recruiters. ULISSE project aims to unveil the true meaning of soft skills by developing the concept of “NSSS” and creating a common language with respect to soft skills among the key actors involved (intermediaries, job seekers and employers).

Based on this, the project partners will design specific training paths for addressing the company's NSSS needs, to increase the students employability and the job match-making. The training courses will be focused on tools, procedures and methods, specifically designed to address this goal, ensuring effective and Pareto efficient results.

For designing the course, the partners will first create a common lexicon of soft skills, through a data mining process: different databases, scientific papers and job vacancies provided by all the partners will be processed in a semi-automatic way using the Technimeter®.

Soft skills will be then unveiled, i.e. broken down (or “decomposed”) into more detailed and specific skills - representing their “hard side” - to be addressed efficaciously with tools, procedures and methodologies. The result will be synthesized in a mind-map, expressing the “unveiled” soft skills and their relations.

To select the topics to address in the training course, the partnership will conduct a gap analysis overlapping the skills in students' CVs and the already existing University training with the results achieved in IO2. The workshops designed and then piloted in all the project countries will involve in total 65 -100 students and will blend theory, methods and tools, exercises, practical work. The partnership will give open-access to all the learning materials, ppts, exercises and methodologies adopted during the course.

Partners will also elaborate an innovative evaluation methodology, keeping into account two elements learned by their experience: i) the bias due to the common misunderstanding on the true meaning of them and ii) that the real outcome is the actual implementation of the tools, procedures and methodologies in every-day working-life. This methodology is based on a three-step procedure, assessing the students before the training course, at the end of it and some weeks later.

Finally, the partners will develop an IT tool and its guidelines aimed at helping companies to describe their job vacancies in a more effective way, thus facilitating the matching of job supply and demand. The toolkit will be designed and then piloted with a limited number of companies, before releasing the final version in English and all partner languages.

The key target groups for the project will be employers, employment intermediaries (headhunters, recruiters, other Career Services (CS), etc) and job seekers, in our case University students/graduates. Employers will benefit from the IT toolkit developed by

the partners for supporting them write job vacancies in a more effective way. Universities will benefit from the project outputs the common lexicon and the mind-map of soft skills to further develop their research on the project domain and the possibility of adopting the syllabi and training materials. CS will be more effective in their intermediary role to help students design their career path, students will benefit from the courses and materials delivered (IO3) that will help them enhance their employability.

Project coordinator: Anda Paegle, anda.paegle@lu.lv

Project expert: Lasma Saimena