

Soft skills development in adult learning in continuous vocational education and training: a scan of the landscape

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| Participating Countries COUNTRY | Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Kosovo, Latvia, Norway, Scotland |
| Level of analysis | Macro level (VET systems) and Meso level(VET providers) |
| Dimensions addressed in the analysis | Key Points and Lessons Learnt |
| <p>1. Introduction</p> <p>1.1 What is the context and challenge(s) being addressed?</p> <p>1.2 Which soft skills are being imparted?</p> <p>1.3 For how long has the intervention been carried out ?</p> | <p>Key point : Identification of soft skills</p> <p>1.1 The good practices describe soft skills training within public policies on adult and continuing education and training. The interventions range from training courses (provided on an <i>ad hoc</i> basis or within the frame of existing training programmes/ projects) to policy initiatives (national frameworks, regulations on examinations, certification of qualifications of trainers and prior learning validation procedures)</p> <p>1.2 The good practices focus on a variety of soft skills that can be used in many different types of jobs: communication, bargaining/negotiation, conflict management, problem solving, selling skills, customer care, managing relationships, alliance and trust building, autonomy, responsibility, being a team player/working with others and problem solving.</p> <p>1.3. The time span of the described interventions varies, i.e.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Training courses may be i) <i>ad hoc</i> courses or ii) courses delivered within short-term or long standing programmes; b) Policy initiatives (national frameworks, regulations on examinations, certification of qualifications and prior learning validation procedures) have been in place for some time or are the result of reforms extending from late 1990s/early 2000s to the present. <p>Lesson learnt</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The typology and importance of soft skills depend very much on the context and the perceived needs of individuals and organisations. However, two interlocked categories of soft skills seem to prevail among others, i.e. a) communication skills, including such different aspects as oral communication, conversation and b) interpersonal skills, namely the ability to work in teams, relate to people, manage/mediate conflicts, discussions, negotiations and bargaining and c) problem solving |

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| <p>2. Stakeholders and partners</p> <p>2.1 Who is the target group of the good practice, e.g.employed adult learners, unemployed adult learners, other?</p> <p>2.2 Who are the users of the good practice,e.g.: employers, employment services, other?</p> <p>2.3 Who are the institutions and partners involved in the good practice, and what is the nature of their participation?</p> <p>2.4 What main challenges do teachers/trainers face in fostering adult learners'soft skills within AL/CVET programmes, e.g. curriculum development, pedagogy, assesment?</p> | <p>Key points:</p> <p>1. Policy areas associated with soft skills and challenges in developing adult learners'soft skills within AL/CVET programmes</p> <p>2.1. Target groups are diverse and include : school staff (teachers/trainers, school psychologists and special educators, kindergarten assistants), further education learners, trainers of adult learners, employees, unemployed, job seekers, beginner entrepreneurs, groups at risk of social exclusion</p> <p>2.2 Users of the described good practices: teachers/ trainers, examiners, learners, employees, employers, LLL providers, employment services, experts (in subject matters and psychology), unemployed, job seekers, beginner entrepreneurs, groups at risk (pre-retirement age people, adults with no primary and secondary education, individuals with low basic skills)</p> <p>2.3 Participation of stakeholders involve: Ministries, State Agencies/Governmental bodies, Sector Skills Councils, Research Centres, VET teachers/trainers training centers, social partners(e.g. employers and employers' associations).</p> <p>2.4 Challenges are context related and, consequently, they arise from diferent sources, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ a) the pressure from the training providers to make skills embedded in units/courses order to maximise income for the providers; b) the conditions for training delivery (i.e. time, place and pace that suits both the training provider and the learner), the assessment of learning, the development of awards and training material due to the fast change within certain sectors, c) type of soft skills to be developed, how these will be adressed in curriculum development and which pedagogical strategies will be used to develop them, d) need for education systems to provide a mechanism for the recognition of knowledge and skills acquired outside the formal education system, thereby increasing personal career development and mobility opportunities, while saving the individual's time and financial resources. <p>Lessons learnt</p> <p>1. Policy areas associated with soft skills development are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Social inclusion: associated with unemployed, job seekers, employees and beginner entrepreneurs, groups at risk of social exclusion (such as pre-retirement age people, adults with no primary and secondary education, individuals with low basic skills); ▪ Employability: associated with a) acquired qualifications (in which case, soft skills complement the knowledge gained in education/training with the requirements of professional roles), b) the acquisition of specialised qualifications; ▪ Organizational effectiveness : associated with management of classes (with students showing learning difficulties and/or behavioral problems, or difficulties coming from different mother tongue and culture) and school counseling services (crisis intervention and conflict resolution). <p>2. Main challenges in developing adult learners' soft skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The main challenges in developing adult learners'soft skills within AL/CVET programmes seem to be linked to a) the |
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| | identification of the kind of soft skills to be developed and b) how these soft skills will be addressed in i) developing the curriculum, ii) defining the adequate pedagogical strategies and iii) assessing/measuring outcomes. |
| <p>3. Methodological approach</p> <p>3.1 What methodology has been used to address the initial issue(s) and lead to a successful outcome? In what way has it been a participatory process?</p> <p>3.2 Which pedagogical strategies did work best in developing this type of skills?</p> | <p>Key point: Focus on what works for whom</p> <p>3.1 Methodological procedures vary depending on the level of analysis (macro or meso level)</p> <p>a) At macro level, policy initiatives (e.g. frameworks and regulations) are characterized by the involvement of social partners (Sector Skills Councils, Chambers of Commerce and Industry, trade unions, voluntary organisations) who ensure the relevance of the skills to the occupational role and any other relevant qualifications which a learner is required to achieve, confirm the practical relevance of regulations;</p> <p>b) At meso level, provision interventions feature such methodological procedures as i) trainers initially training in-house supervisors/managers as work based assessors, ii) embedded learning, implying a thorough need analysis at the workplace, iii) project work, including "piloting" of learning outcomes in real life context, and iv) modular approach, including writing case studies, v) blend learning (distance and in-class learning), role playing, case studies.</p> <p>3.2 Methodologies such as experiential learning, embedded learning, blend learning together with pedagogical strategies such as project work and case studies are used to the detriment of more traditional delivery modes.</p> <p>Lesson learnt</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Methodologies echo such principles as a) not everyone learns in the same way, as epitomised in Kolb's experiential learning theory (ELT) and Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences² (MI), b) active learning (e.g. cooperative learning, project-based learning), and c) transformative learning, defined by Mezirow³ (TL) as making meaning of learners' experiences through reflection. At the heart of the above-mentioned theories and methodologies of adult learning, there is centrality of experience, together with transformative learning whereby adult learning is perceived as a means of personal and social transformation. |
| 4. Validation | Key point: "Fit for purpose" practices |

¹ Kolb, Y. Alice and Kolb, A. David (2008). *Experiential Learning Theory: A Dynamic, Holistic Approach to Management Learning, Education and Development*. Available at <http://learningfromexperience.com/media/2010/08/ELT-Hbk-MLED-LFE-website-2-10-08.pdf>

² Gardner, H. (2011) *Multiple Intelligences : The First Thirty Years*. Available at https://howardgardner01.files.wordpress.com/2012/06/intro-frames-of-mind_30-years.pdf

³ Mezirow, J. (1997). Transformative Learning: Theory to Practice. *New directions for adult and continuing education*, no. 74, Summer 1997. Jossey-Bass Publishers. Available at www.hrdmax.com/images/column_1325932983/Mezirow%20Transformative%20Learning.pdf

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| <p>Confirmation by employers and learners that the practice addresses their training needs, i.e. Has the good practice been validated with the stakeholders/final users? If so, please describe it briefly.</p> | <p>The purpose of validation is to ensure the relevance of AL/CVET interventions in the field of soft skills training but there are slight nuances according to the type of intervention, i.e. a) to ensure that frameworks and regulations are consistent with and contribute to VET national strategies and policies, b) to ensure that the training is securely located within national frameworks and regulations, c) to ensure that the training offers a valuable learning experience to learners.</p> <p>Lesson learnt</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Positive and proactive engagement with stakeholders is perceived as a critical factor in ensuring the quality of AL/CVET interventions in the field of soft skills training, both at macro level (policy frameworks and regulations) and at meso level (AL/CVET courses/programmes). Active participation of learners, employees and employers is acknowledged as being a guarantee that the intervention is “fit for purpose”, i.e. it fulfils stakeholders’ requirements, needs or expectations. |
| <p>5. Lessons learnt</p> <p>5.1 What are the key messages and lessons learnt to take away from your good practice experience? 5.2 How long did it take to learn lessons and identify key success factors?</p> | <p>Key point : Unlocking the value of soft skills</p> <p>5.1 Some helpful insights emerge from the good practices on soft skills training and learning in AL/CVET:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Need to develop comprehensive training systems for professionals, including the acquisition of knowledge as well as hard and soft skills; ▪ Acknowledgment of key role played by stakeholders (e.g. enterprises, social partners, employers, employees, professionals) in developing a) policy on soft skills (regulations, frameworks) at system level and b) training courses on soft skills at VET provider level; ▪ Responding to industry needs by delivering industry-driven and enterprise led training ▪ Researching best practice by keeping a close eye on what is happening internationally ▪ Supporting the development of meaningful careers ▪ Addressing specific quality issues, e.g. scrutiny procedures to ensure that soft skills are delivered in dedicated units or embedded within a unit and or course, cooperative work by employees and employers in planning the mode of delivery, learning goals, and content. <p>5.2 Length of time to learn lessons and identify key success factors is hardly mentioned or, if mentioned, it is not clear how it may influence or may have influenced the review of the intervention.</p> <p>Lessons learnt</p> <p>Unlocking the value of soft skills in AL/CVET training constitutes a challenge for both VET systems and providers, including curriculum developers, teachers/trainers and assessors.</p> <p>A strong point that underpins Member States approaches to soft skills training is the fact that AL/CVET interventions in the field of soft skills are subject to the same quality guiding principles as those used to support the evaluation and quality improvement of VET systems and/or VET providers , i.e.</p> |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) close cooperation with stakeholders (learners, teachers/trainers, employers) in framing and regulating those interventions as well as in conceptualising, planning the mode of delivery, setting learning goals/objectives and content of AL/CVET training programmes on soft skills; b) identification of both employers and learners' needs in the field of soft skills training. <p>A less clear point seems to be the evaluation of the interventions, including the impact evaluation of policy initiatives at system level and the assessment of soft skill attainment for judgement of quality and standards of soft skills training programmes.</p> |
| <p>6. Quality assurance</p> <p>6.1 How is the process of developing learners' soft skills quality assured?</p> <p>6.2 What are/were the measures that need(ed) to be put in place for the good practice to be institutionally and financially sustainable?</p> | <p>Key point: Enhancing employability through quality assurance</p> <p>6.1 The process of ensuring the development of learners' soft skills comprises a) at macro level such legal initiatives as national skills frameworks, regulations, certification and validation of prior learning systems; at provision level: i) use of the EQAVET quality cycle (plan- implement-monitor-review), ii) training assessors to equip them with the necessary expertise and skills , ii) validation, verification and external authentication of provided training</p> <p>6.2 Institutional sustainability seems to be unproblematic when the described good practice is at system level or is part of a long standing training programme. Financial sustainability for some of the interventions, in particular participation in training courses, seems to depend on two sources of funding. i.e. ESF co-funding and individuals' fees.</p> <p>Lessons learnt:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Three main policy goals have contributed to the development and implementation of the EQAVET Framework over the last decade, which include: a) to widen participation in VET programmes, namely AL/CVET programmes and b) to enhance employability and lifelong learning. The impact of quality assurance in employability, can be considered in three dimensions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Policy makers at all levels have developed a more sophisticated understanding of i) the complexity of the workplace, ii) the needs of employers and employees in a variety of work settings (e.g. public and private, large and small, self-employment and iii) employment) and an appreciation of the diversity of attributes that contribute to employability (knowledge, "hard" and " soft" skills) 2. There has been a wider debate on the nature of employability, whereby employment and career paths go beyond the first destination of VET programme completers 3. There is an increasing awareness of the diversity of activities of AL/CVET providers and a sharing of good practice in the sector. |
| <p>7. Conclusion</p> <p>Conclude, explaining the impact/usefulness of your</p> | <p>Key point :</p> <p>Most of the the examples of good practices highlight the value of the described interventions which include, for example,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the institutionalisation of validation procedures (through agreements established between government body and VET institutions), |

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| <p>good practice for</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) adult learnersb) other relevant stakeholders, e.g. employers | <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ inclusion of verified training courses in the offer of further education institutions;■ recognition of benefit from training by learners and employers. <p>Lesson learnt</p> <p>Due to the importance placed on the development of soft skills within the AL/CVET training, the impact of actions on organisations and individuals is regarded as a key issue, i.e. the relevance and quality of interventions are perceived as determining their effect on individuals and organisations/enterprises. However, no formal impact evaluation seems to be in place. Instead, there is anecdotal evidence that learners and employers value training: employers seem to see an improvement that hopefully leads to improved business performance while learners/employees acquire skills relevant to today's workplace..</p> |
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