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Best practice

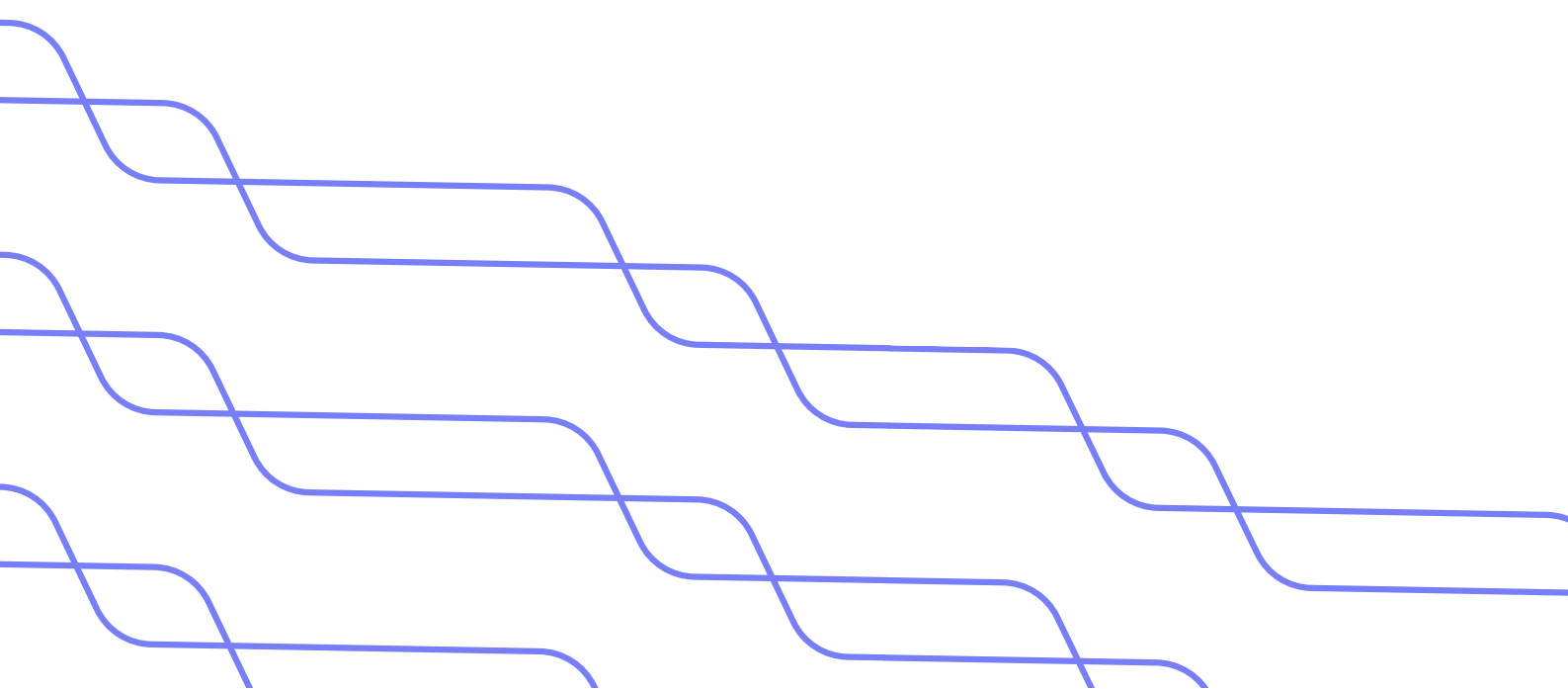
ERASMUS+KA2 - SMALL SCALE PARTNERSHIP "LAILA"

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Phase 1: Comparing good practices and approaches to the effective process of innovative educational leadership

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Presented by
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AKTIBATU programme: a personal and professional skills development pathway

Objectives

This programme arose within the context of the HAZILAN project, co-financed by ESF 2014-2020 in the Basque Country (Spain) in 2015, with the aim of improving the employability of young people (aged between 20 and 44) with qualifications (degrees, diplomas and higher-level vocational training). This occurred at a time of high unemployment (around 50%) among the young population with intermediate or higher-level education.

The distinctive feature of qualified young people is that they are well trained but lack occupational experience associated with their professional profile. Education itself is not enough to give young people the best possible opportunities on the job market. Companies are looking for profiles capable of **adapting** to constant changes, **managing conflicts**, working under pressure, **managing emotions**, coordinating with a team, etc. Soft skills that are not covered by the time spent in education, but which represent decisive aspects.

In response to this challenge, GARAPEN designed the AKTIBATU programme. The programme consists of approximately 80 hours, providing guidance in developing personal and professional skills, and the management of relationships between the individual and society.

The AKTIBATU programme covers the following contents:

- Personal/Emotional Skills: Self-image management, Emotional management, Self-motivation
- Professional Skills: Organisational context skills (creativity, responsibility, flexibility, planning, decision-making) and Relationship management
- Market positioning skills
- Self-management of group spaces (enhancing cooperation skills for efficient cooperation and knowledge exchange)
- Individual and group monitoring, to assess achievements and calibrate intervention

The objectives of the program are to:

- Support the definition of the professional goals of each individual, stimulating self-awareness
- Identify each individual's personal and professional skills
- Value the know-how and abilities acquired by the participants in informal/non formal settings
- Strengthen the skills and abilities required for professional inclusion
- Develop participants' proactive attitude
- Promote mutual support and group cooperation

Stakeholders and Partners

The beneficiaries are qualified young people aged between 20 and 44. The entities implementing the good practice are 17 Development Agencies in the Basque country, which deliver the programme in each of their municipalities.

What was the process?

Having been operative for more than 7 consecutive years, the Aktibatu programme stands out for the way in which it places the individual centre-stage, as the protagonist in the process, by allowing each participant to define the starting point and the objectives to be achieved in the process.

Work is based on 3 milestones: who I am, how I am now, and where I am going. This is addressed through **individual reflection** in order then to move on to a group reflection, creating spaces of trust to share experiences and give people a sense of security. A practical focus and agile dynamics are used to share people's real experiences, allowing them then to move on to the theory, rather than the other way around. Each individual's professional goal provides the basis used to specify their pathway, with the commitments to be achieved in order to allow them to fulfil their goal within a clear and tightly defined timeline.

The process always begins by addressing **self-awareness**, before moving on to employment techniques tailored to each case. The participants receive help in understanding the language of the job market, putting their job applications into words, learning how to define themselves, who they are, what their skills are. It is this initial step which lays the foundations allowing the rest of the content to be addressed. The tools used to work on self-awareness are based on academic results in the Emotional Intelligence field of research, as well as the most impactful Emotional Intelligence-based practices currently in use in the private sector.

Validation

The programme stemmed from a project by 17 Development Agencies in the Basque country, that met up on a yearly basis to compare results, share impressions and conduct an overall appraisal of the programme. This served to make progressive improvements and adaptations in line with the needs of the participants, while also ensuring that the technical staff gained experience and know-how throughout this entire period. During the 7 years of the project, forums were also maintained for gatherings of the technical facilitators. These forums made it possible to pool the different realities, learn about how processes were addressed in each case, the methodologies used and their results, but above all served as a "security and mutual support" platform for the staff themselves, as well as a means of validating the actual programme.

Impact

In the 7 years that the Aktibatu programme has been in operation, a total of 2,142 people have taken part (63% were young women). 74% of participants have found employment straight away upon completion of the project. The participants' report on the experience is "very positive": the vast majority of them assert that the experience "helped them **change their attitudes and increase their motivation** and security with regard to their job search". The knowledge acquired within the programme includes preparation for future job interviews or teamwork. Participants in previous editions recommend the programme "to all young people who find themselves unemployed or are in a job unsuited to their educational background".

Success Factors

The keynotes to allow this Good Practice to be successfully replicated are as follows:

- Selection of the individuals. It is important that the individuals be predisposed to share, that they see the need to take part in this type of process as a key element in their employability.
- Selection and adaptation of the content to be addressed. Depending on the beneficiaries at any given time, the content and methodologies must be adapted to their needs. This is achieved when the technical staff have experience in delivering this type of session.
- The engagement of the participants. This is a participatory process, which makes it important for the participants to open up, connect and share.
- The training of the technical staff in the skills addressed. Provide the technical staff with tools they can use throughout the programme.
- Set up meeting places to foster collaboration among technical staff or facilitators. As this is a collaborative project, sharing experiences, problems, etc. at the technical level offers huge benefit.

Constraints

The programme participants shared the same challenge of finding employment, irrespective of whether they were women or men. This challenge was addressed by first focusing on the individuals' self-awareness, before then beginning to define their professional goals. The key element of this good practice is that the methodologies and focus must be adapted to the composition of the group. Each group was different, so the way in which the themes were addressed, and the resources that were used, likewise changed in accordance with the group composition.

Sustainability

While evaluating the benefits offered by the program in comparison with the overall costs, we would emphasise the following aspects:

- This is a case of lifelong learning impacting not only a job search, but social skill of everyday life, thereby contributing significant value
- the majority of participant have become more employable, opening up all the opportunities of social inclusion and upwards mobility that follow from that.
- The system counteracts the brain drain. After completing their studies, young people tend to move to bigger cities rather than staying in the district where they grew up. The programme gives them the chance to learn about the companies in their district, and so in the case of those who have been through this programme, having gained work experience in the local area, they may stay rather than leaving for elsewhere.

Replicability and up-scaling

The Aktibatu programme can be replicated in any geographical area. As mentioned throughout, this programme is being conducted in the Basque Country, in different districts with different realities. The companies and organisations in each district must therefore believe in the importance of retaining talent and be aware of how this can help improve their competitiveness. Meanwhile, the participants must have a desire to change their occupational situation and freely participate in the project. It is likewise important that the development of both personal and professional skills be systemic, with each individual placed at the heart of the process, supported by the facilitator. Another important factor is that the implementation and funding criteria should not dictate the development of the project or undermine its goal.

