

REPORT ON COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT AND CAPACITY BUILDING IN V2V PROJECT

(Individual and organisational development)

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Celje, February 2023

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1. Introduction and framework

This report presents an analysis of the responses of participants in the VET to VET Capacity Building in the Western Balkans project (hereinafter V2V project). It is an exploration of the transfer of developed competencies and knowledge of participants into their work practice after the activities (capacity building and job shadowing).

All project partners and participants were requested to participate in interviews from the 18th of January 2023 until the 3rd of February 2023. All partners responded to the invitation.

1.1. Interview sample

The sample for the interviews consisted of project managers and staff members (teachers and technicians) of programme beneficiaries who have been involved in international training and support activities for V2V Capacity Building.

No specific sampling was conducted, the list of participants was provided by the project coordinator (APRO FORMAZIONE).

1.2. Interview setting

The interviews were planned to be carried out “one on one” on the platform Zoom or Teams and video recorded. 14 interviews were done on the Zoom platform and one on Teams.

11 interviews were done one on one. Three interviewees were interviewed at the same time on Zoom due to a communication misunderstanding.

Interviews covered all main questions, while sub-questions were asked if the need arose during the interview. The longest one on one interview lasted 46 minutes, while the shortest was 20 minutes long. The interview with three interviewees lasted about 50 minutes and some additional written answers were given later by two of the three interviewees by e-mail.

1.3. Interview documentation

All interviews were video-recorded and together with additional written answers are kept safely on the computer of the principal researcher. Access is limited only to the Slovenian research staff involved in the project.

1.4. Interview questions

The semi-structured interviews explored the transfer of developed competencies and knowledge of participants into their work practice after they participated in the capacity-building and job shadowing activities.

The questions are divided into four sections:

1. Individual level – personal goals, individual learning, and competences
2. International level – follow-up activities inside the institution, institutional goals, and organisational learning
3. Networking of participants
4. Future plans

The main research question is: “How did capacity-building and job shadowing activities contribute to the development on an individual and at the institutional level?”



2. Results

This chapter will summarise the key results from the interviews. It follows the flow of the interviews.

2.1. Individual level

Majority of the interviewees participate in the V2V project from its beginning. For some it was the first experience with the European projects; in fact, some institutions are the first country to start with Erasmus+ project.

Most of the interviewees (almost 75%) reported that their role or function in the institution has not changed since the start of the project. For the ones that it has changed, they report for instance promotion from administrator to technician and change from school principal to teacher position. One interviewee explained that her teaching profession has not changed, but she was given additional tasks related to the project.

Only two interviewees had previous experiences with a project, and most were encouraged to participate in the project although they had no experience. As one explained:

"At first I was terrified and confused. / ... / Great improvement and development in professional and personal life." (Interviewee 2)

Before going to the activity (capacity building/job shadowing) participants did not have high expectations. As some have never had such experience, they were interested and expected to hear something new about projects applications and cooperation. Majority was surprised by opportunities to learn and gain knowledge in project management, as well by the activities that were implemented.

All interviewees stated that they **developed personally**. Most of them improved their proficiency in English, knowledge of programmes (e.g. Excel) and gained new experiences in the multicultural field since most of them participated in an international project for the first time.

"We went to the companies with which we can now cooperate, work on projects, exchanges practice in the field of work (logistics, transport). We've also seen how to solve problems through local projects" (Interviewee 5)

Sharing experiences on an international level was also a valuable experience for all participants, especially for their work with students as they want to *"show them the importance of international cooperation to gain new experiences (Interviewee 11)"*.

"It was good to see how they organize work, teaching and how they equipped the classrooms." (Interviewee 15)

2.2. Institutional level

All interviewees confirmed that they improved their competencies on **internationalization**.

"We learned how to get new EU partners." (Interviewee 6)

"The knowledge acquired in the field of finding project partners, how to find and join the network of partners. I got to know new creative learning approaches (e.g. QR codes)." (Interviewee 4)

60% of interviewees confirmed that they gained **ability to write projects**. Some already wrote a project, while one institution is planning to set up a project group and project office for writing project proposals. For this purpose, they have trained two people who will implement projects in cooperation with teachers and students. The ones who did not gain ability to write projects explained that their English is not good enough or claimed that was not their task ("another colleague was there").

"I am more confident how to write a quality project / ... / now we have expanded the circle/network of partners and I learned how to present myself to the partners." (Interviewee 4)

Most interviewees (86,6%) believe they improved their **ability to manage and develop projects**. They got familiar with the timetables, time management, reports, risk-triangle method. Most (86,6%) also learned to **cooperate with colleagues about internationalization**. When **finding candidates for mobilities**, the biggest problem is still proficiency in English – for students and teachers. Other obstacles are lack of finances, neophobia (fear of new things) and mandatory vaccination (many parents did not want to vaccinate students). Problems with obtaining a visa were also highlighted. As it is not obligatory, some teachers also tend to avoid mobility. To overcome mentioned obstacles, interviewees and their institutions use various solutions. For example, sharing experience among peers works the best for (longer) mobilities (see Interviewee 11). However, interviewees claim it is easier than it used to be:

"Students received information from their friends [already on mobility] and are now very open to applying." (Interviewee 5)

One institution reported that they had too many candidates and therefore selected them based on their knowledge of a foreign language.

Regarding the **ability to analyse teacher training needs**, the answers were mixed. Still, almost 75% believe teachers need trainings to improve and learn new things. One institution has "joint staff meetings, where they analyse the previous year, review the work, and then cooperate with senior experts which are invited to the institution. Sometimes teachers are not aware of their lack of knowledge until they meet an invited (external) trainer" (see Interviewee 15).

According to the interviewees' statements, institutions recognize **internationalization as a chance for professional development** and some see it as a strategic choice.

"Every collaboration at the international level enables new knowledge and acquisition of new skills." (Interviewee 7)

Hence, institutions give interviewees sufficient support in terms of time to travel and substitution arrangement when needed. There is also support from other teachers and instructors, for example in the selection of students for mobility, in the process of organizing an event for project partners etc.

All organisations are committed to sharing of activity results. **Sharing experiences and outcomes** with colleagues is a recognized form of learning. Interviewees usually present acquired knowledge and experience, answer questions and share material to other colleagues and students. Most of the interviewees passed on their experiences to students during classes and encourage them to go on mobility. The most important assessment of management besides discovering knowledge in their employees is providing a safe environment for sharing. For this purpose, institutions organize regular meetings with presentations for employees and lecturers.

"The practice in Alba was really stunning and new to us and helpful experience, which we can show to our teachers and students." (Interviewee 2)

Interviewees agree that activities such as capacity building and job shadowing are beneficial. Most often, they add that activities positively influence knowledge acquired by individuals and thus institution itself. Knowledge transfer and sharing of outcomes and results is part of organisational culture for majority of institutions. Interviewees **transferred or implemented the acquired experiences** to their daily work in various ways, but certainly, by making optimal use of the available resources they have at each institution. Depending on the (school) subject and possibilities of their institution, teachers introduce innovation into their daily teaching. However, it is difficult to transfer new knowledge into everyday work. This is because systemic changes require a lot of time, they receive little support from the institution, and/or due to a lack of funds.

"A very successful job shadowing in Alba and a very good experience in Groningen. We will transfer it to the school, we already spoke with the management." (Interviewee 2)

"We transferred experience from other countries / ... / good practices between institutions and companies." (Interviewee 6)

No interviewee believe that knowledge transfer is inadequate in the respective organisation.

Only one **internationalization strategy** was in place at the time of the interviews. Nevertheless, institutions are "willing to apply, willing to have more projects, ready to participate in them" (Interviewee 1). Some believe there is desire to write an internationalization strategy:

"Based on the benefits that the school (management, teachers, and especially students) has had from this project, I believe that internationalization will be part of the school's development plan in the near future." (Interviewee 9)

2.3. Networking

Regarding **cooperation with colleagues** that participants met, they have created (Viber) groups on social networks. They continue cooperation with institutions even after the activities have been completed. They share experiences and seek advice. Some of them organized visits from foreign teachers.

"Yes, we are still in regular contact. The project made me realize that team spirit is important, that despite the fact that they are different from each other, they complement each other" (Interviewee 4)

Some of the interviewees set up a new network and even developed a deeply personal relationship with other participants.

Institutions always seek to make new partners and expand their partnership networks. Because of this project, one institution was invited to two new projects, another institution connected with four new institutions through this project. Now they know how to find partners and strengthened cooperation especially at the local level.

2.4. Future plans

Cooperating in V2V project has opened new perspectives for the interviewees. *Every single* interviewee stated that they incorporated further projects into their future plans. One interviewee was very specific: they would like to start producing healthy juices themselves as they were shown by the partners in the project.

3. Conclusion and summary

Institutions and interviewees experienced several positive effect and outcomes of their involvement in the V2V Capacity Building in the Western Balkans project. In general, contribution to development can be divided into two levels:

- a) Contribution to the development of institution, and
- b) Contribution to the development of the individuals (personnel).

Interviewees find activities (capacity building and job shadowing) useful and see them as added value, substantively as they contribute to the development of both personnel and institution. Such activities foster competences, knowledge, and skills of personnel. For most interviewees it was the first experience with the European projects. Majority were surprised by opportunities to learn and gain knowledge in project management, as well by the activities that were implemented. All interviewees stated that they developed personally. Most of them improved their proficiency in English. All interviewees also confirmed that they improved their competencies on internationalization, while majority confirmed that they gained ability to write projects. Most interviewees believe they improved their ability to manage and develop projects and learned to cooperate with colleagues about internationalization. When finding candidates for mobilities, the biggest problem is still proficiency in English.

Because of their involvement in the project and activities, institutions experience an increased level of knowledge, new and contemporary methods of work, specifically teaching, insights into good practices of other organisations, and methodology. For most institutions this project was the first one that they ever participated in.

Only one internationalization strategy was in place at the time of the interviews. Transfer of knowledge is sometimes strategically conducted in the participating institutions. It must be noted that they do exercise commitment to the knowledge transfer and sharing of outcomes and results of activities. All institutions are committed to sharing of activity results. Sharing is usually carried out at the weekly meetings, and for meeting's purpose, the participants prepare a report. Discussions are then held on the results and possible proposals for the future.

Every single interviewee stated that they incorporated further projects into their future plans.

4. Appendices

4.1. Questionnaire

VET to VET – Capacity Building in Western Balkans (2020 – 2023) Capacity building follow-up questionnaire

These guidelines refer to the interviews after the capacity building activity. The interviews seek to explore the transfer of developed competencies and knowledge of participants into their work practice through semi-structured interviews, 9 months after the activity.

Introduction

- Introduction of the interviewer
- Context and purpose of the interview
- Processing of interview responses; consent for recording; anonymisation of responses; confidentiality of data: no disclosure to third parties; data used exclusively for research purposes.
- The interviews could take up to 45 minutes but should not be longer.

Warming up

MQ1: Personal relevance related to the project or their life since the capacity building activity.
SQ: Looking back over the past 9 months: which events come to your mind that you consider being most important?

Individual level [Personal goals, individual learning, and competences]

MQ: Background/role and function in the organisation? Has it changed since capacity building activity?

SQ: Did your professional role change? How? Why?

SQ: Have you participated in further activities or trainings since? If yes, how many? If many, why did you participate in several trainings?

MQ: Expectations (“triggers”) for participating in that specific capacity building activity (motivation)?

MQ: What did you do in the activity?

MQ: Lessons learned of the activity focussed on competencies?

SQ: What did you learn and gain? (personal development, improved competencies of staff about internationalization, ability to write projects, ability to manage and develop projects, cooperation with colleagues about internationalization, decreased difficulty to find candidates for mobilities, improved validation and recognition of mobilities)

PM: the ability to analyse teacher training needs, acknowledgment of international strategy importance (personal development focussed on capacity building activities, improved competences of staff about internationalization, ability to understand application forms and granting programmes, ability to write projects, ability of staff to manage and develop projects, availability of training for teachers, ability to analyse

teacher training needs, acknowledgement of international strategy importance, improved interest of teachers in mobility, ability to plan staff training programmes, involvement of managers in internationalization, cooperation with colleagues about internationalization, improved ability to plan mobility phases, ability to set up preparatory activities, ability to set up documents, improved ability to structure logistical aspects, decreased difficulty to find candidates for mobilities, decreased cultural shock about mobilities, improved communication about mobilities, improved validation and recognition of mobilities, improved ability to validate and recognize non formal and informal competences, ability to evaluate internships abroad).

SQ: Has something changed? What has changed? How?

SQ: Coming back to routine ('security' of activity set is over)

SQ: Reaction of colleagues

SQ: Self-confidence esteem

MQ: What did you gain from the activity? Please give concrete examples/details.

SQ: Have you shared your experiences/outcomes with colleagues or other people?

SQ: Have you used/done anything as a result of the attended activity in your daily work practice, that you might not have done without the attended activity? If yes: What did you use? How did it work for you?

Institutional level [Follow up activities inside each institution, Institutional goals, and organisational learning]

MQ: As a consequence of the activity, did you develop/update/review an internationalization strategy?

MQ: Overall, have the objectives of working internationally in your organisation changed since the activity was completed? If yes/no: Why?/why not? Please give concrete examples/details/obstacles.

MQ: The way you are planning/preparing/implementing projects, can you consider any changes since your participation in the activity? If yes: Which ones? Are you still applying for them?

SQ: PM: Does the staff involved continue to apply the learned methods and tools?

MQ: Teachers: What support have you been given by your organisation, if any, for transferring acquired experiences/learning outcomes of the attended activity into practice? Please give concrete examples/obstacles.

MQ: Teachers: Is internationalization seen as a chance of professional development by the management?

Networking of participants

MQ: How is your relationship with colleagues from the training activity? Are you still in touch? If yes/no? How? Why?

MQ: Did you set up any new network (local, regional, national, or European)? (Increased number of international partners)

Future plans

MQ: Which ideas and plans do you have for your future life? (training, activities)

SQ: Did the activity stimulate any changes to your future plans?



4.2. List of interviewees

Table 1: List of interviewees

Participant	Interview (date)	Notes	Duration (in hours)
Interviewee 1	18/1/2023	Zoom interview	0:35:12
Interviewee 2	18/1/2023	Teams interview	0:46:18
Interviewee 3	19/1/2023	Zoom interview	0:30:10
Interviewee 4	25/1/2023	Zoom interview	0:45:00
Interviewee 5	25/1/2023	Zoom interview	0:35:33
Interviewee 6	25/1/2023	Zoom interview	0:33:37
Interviewee 7	27/1/2023	Zoom interview	0:31:21
Interviewee 8	27/1/2023	Zoom interview	0:54:00
Interviewee 9	27/1/2023	Zoom interview	0:54:00
Interviewee 10	27/1/2023	Zoom interview	0:54:00
Interviewee 11	27/1/2023	Zoom interview	0:30:30
Interviewee 12	27/1/2023	Zoom interview	0:27:35
Interviewee 13	23/1/2023	Zoom interview	0:25:03
Interviewee 14	23/2/2023	Zoom interview	0:20:16
Interviewee 15	3/2/2023	Zoom interview	0:31:56