

TEACHING NOTE

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“Using Communication
and Facilitation Skills
to Deal with
Daily Issues at Work”

Competence: Communications and Facilitation Skills

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Summary of the Case Study

In the GUIDE! case study entitled "Communication and Facilitation Skills", the Agency for Local Development, in which three guidance practitioners primarily deal with the unemployed, is presented. This service is free of charge to the public and can be used by anyone who requires it. It is not targeted at an exclusive group but to the public in general.

Due to the rise in unemployment, the number of users who are going to the Local Development Agency for guidance has increased, so the waiting list has grown to several weeks long. The waiting time limit for clients to receive an appointment, set by the agency itself, has been greatly exceeded. Therefore they need to find a solution to this problem.

The job counsellors of the local development agency meet with the person responsible for the agency to find a solution to the problem. During this meeting they discuss the various alternatives to address the situation. After considering various options, they reach agreement to organise some counselling sessions with groups of four to five jobseekers.

Finally, the case study presents the first group session led by a job counsellor with a diverse group of four participants. For all of them, it is the second time they have come to the centre; the objective of the session is for the counsellor to find out how they have each fared in the job search process since the last session they attended, and to understand the needs that might have arisen since then, as well as to update their Curriculum Vitae in the database.

The Competence

The competence “communications and facilitation skills” has been understood as the way CEDEFOP define it, which is: *a range of skills adjusted and customised to different work settings: listening and attention skills; questioning, probing, supporting and challenging; summarising and ensuring two-way understanding; group and public presentations; writing; and interpersonal skills.*

All these skills among others (see below sections) are presented in an explicit or implicit way in the case study, adjusted and customised to guidance practitioners' working setting.

Target Group

Career guidance counsellors working in educational settings and their trainers.

Learning Objectives

This case study offers career counsellors working in educational settings the opportunity to discuss the communication and facilitation skills in this field, as outlined in the case study.

The pedagogical objectives of the case study are:

- › To recognise the importance of different communication and facilitation skills that one should possess to do good, professional work.

- › To provide the job counsellors with these communication and facilitation skills.
- › To demonstrate the importance of transferring certain communication skills to the jobseekers with which counsellors work.

Key Issues

The key issue dealt with is communication and facilitation skills in career counselling. The communication and facilitation competence can be conveyed in many practical ways. The case study presents some of them (to be specified in the next section).

Pedagogical Focus

The case study provides an example of a job counsellor in his work place. A particular set of circumstances that surround him at a certain time are used to present the communication and facilitation skills. The communication and facilitation skills described in this case study are presented at three different moments.

In the first part, when the users' complaints about the waiting time are discussed, the counsellor makes use of his communication skills:

- › Addressing criticism.

In the second part, communication skills are displayed during the meeting of job counsellors with the head of the Local Development Agency. Skills applied at this moment:

- › Listening skills
- › Conducting an opinion survey
- › Negotiation
- › Synthesis and bidirectional understanding
- › Nonverbal communication
- › Empathy

In the third part, they appear when the José, the main job counsellor in the case study, directs his first group session; the skills used here are:

- › Listening
- › Formulation of questions
- › Assertiveness
- › Positive Reformulation
- › Public speaking
- › Interpersonal skills
- › Conducting a meeting
- › Networking

Strategy

The case studies function as training material more closely related to daily practice than theoretical manuals. In this particular case study, it is intended to convey certain communication and facilitation skills to job counsellors, as well as those training to be job counsellors and trainers. The following section contains a suggested method for using this training material but the trainer / facilitator must always consider the features of the target group he/she is working with and adapt this method accordingly. The length of the session, the kind of questions raised, the activities worked on etc may vary from group to group.

It is recommended that this case study is used to develop the skills of job counsellors, those training to be job counsellors and trainers. The ideal number of students is a minimum of 9 and a maximum of 12. The ideal set up for the group session would be a classroom organised in an informal way (chairs circle, for example). The classroom has to be big enough to allow the small groups to work comfortably.

First, individual work is done by each group member. This work can be done in advance before the group session; if not, you must dedicate some time for participants to work individually during the training session itself. This individual work involves each student reading the case study individually. Then, they have to do a second reading but more in depth, highlighting all the communication skills that appear throughout the case reported and think about how to put them into practice.

Later, in small groups (three or four people), it is recommended that participants share the communication and facilitation skills they have identified in the case study. Afterward, each group presents the communication and facilitation skills they have identified in the case study to the whole group. Then, the participants can debate on how they would deal with a similar situation and what communication skills they would use and how. Finally, the questions below should be used to create a discussion.

Discussion Questions

- › Would you take a different approach to solve the problem of the waiting lists at the Local Development Agency?
- › If, in the future, the volume of clients accessing the guidance counselling services of the Local Development Agency decreases, would you recommend they continue holding group counselling sessions?
- › Would you organise the group session differently? With how many members? How would you run it?
- › What difficulties related to communication and facilitation skills may the job counsellor encounter when working with groups that he would not encounter in individual sessions?

Testing Experience

This case study was tested in Hungary with a group of 16 participants from different social services and with different level of work experience. The testing took three hours; participants got the case study in advance.

First, the trainer gave a short summary of the objectives of the training and the communication and facilitation skills. As preparation of the group work, she then asked participants to read the text again, and to highlight all the communication and facilitation skills.

After that, they worked in four working groups of four people each, to answer the following three questions:

1. Identify the communication skills used, and divide them into three groups: real communication skills; methods and tools of communication; elements of communication process.
2. What are the most important skills from these for our daily work?

3. What did the people in the case do well, what did they do wrong? What would you do in different way?

Then, they wrote down their answers on a board and each group presented their answers to the whole group. The whole group then discussed the strengths and weakness of the answers. During this discussion, they shared personal experiences. They also discussed the questions included in the teaching note. Finally, the trainer concluded the session.

Most participants liked that there was an open and tolerant atmosphere throughout the session and felt that the training method allowed them to actively participate.

This case study is more suitable for social workers or guidance practitioners with less work experience or lower education/with lower level of these skills. The method used with the case study in the testing session described above is useful for engaging social workers and guidance practitioners and highlighting the importance of communication skills to them.

Resources

- › HEATH, John. Teaching and writing case studies. A practical guide.
- › Guía sobre aspectos generales para el desarrollo de las acciones de orientación laboral. Junta de Castilla y León
- › Guía para la orientación laboral de colectivos vulnerables. Cruz Roja Española.
- › Módulo de orientación e información profesional. Comunidad de Madrid.
- › www.yoriento.com

THE GUIDE

PROJECT

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