Assessing voluntary experiences in a professional perspective

Pilot project: Leonardo da Vinci programme of the European Commission: General Directorate for Education and Training

Report on experimentation
of the competence portfolio in Hungary

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Content

The aim of the report

The aim of this report is to present the competence portfolio and the relevant method developed in the frame of the fourth step of the Leonardo da Vinci pilot project n° F/03/B/P/PP-151002 "Assessing voluntary experience in a professional perspective " - that aims to identify, evaluate and validate skills and qualifications acquired through informal learning within volunteer activities for a professional purpose. It also describes the experimentation of the tool among volunteers, associations and human resource professionals, conducted in Hungary. The final part discusses the conclusions and proposals of the experimentation.

The former steps of this project were state of the art research on volunteering and valuing volunteering, consultation among the associations and proposal of the method and tool for assessing voluntary experiences by each participating country.

The partners of the Leonardo project agreed upon the general framework of the portfolio on their third meeting in London on the 18th and 19th of November, 2004.
The following outline of the tool was decided, with flexibility over the order and method of support given to a volunteer:

- Presentation of organisation
- Missions fulfilled in organisation
- Competences acquired and developed
- Level of experience
- Synthesis document: Curriculum vitae, training followed during the voluntary experience …
- Possible additional document is a letter from the organisation saying they have read the folder and agree with it – signed or stamped.

On the basis of the above-mentioned common framework each country developed their unique device, reflecting the country-specific differences but built on common principles.

The AVE tool would be defined as 'a supported self-evaluation tool assessing competencies gained by a volunteer in an organisation (association).

The AVE device comprehends:

1. A portfolio for the volunteers: portfolio of skills and qualifications acquired and assessable in a professional perspective;

   The definition of volunteering decided upon was:

   - Being voluntary, done out of free will
   - Not for financial gain (although reimbursements of expenses and honoraria were acceptable)
   - For the benefit of society
   - Formal volunteering (in the context of an association or official organisation)

2. A guide for the users: information on the AVE project together with explanation on the process (portfolio) and its aims (going back on the labour market).

Each of the partner countries experimented the tool and method, on the basis of the general framework agreed upon in London in November 2004. It was agreed that the portfolio should be experimented among volunteers fulfilling two conditions: having a representative experience in volunteering (to be defined); willing to use the voluntary experience to return to the labour market.

Presentation of the Hungarian competence portfolio

In Hungary we developed a competence portfolio for the volunteers to assess their competences and a guidebook for the volunteer coordinator of any association willing to support the volunteer in the assessment process.

Concerning the method used, the portfolio is based on self-evaluation. The tool is created in a way that it guides the user along the process.

In case any questions emerge the employee of the association can support the volunteer using the guidebook for associations.

The target group was identified as volunteers who are job seekers, especially parent returners, young people with no work experience, people changing jobs, people improving jobs, the unemployed. The main prerequisite for using our method and tool is to be a volunteer and willing to renew with a professional activity.

The content of the Hungarian competence portfolio:

Introducing the portfolio

The portfolio starts with an introduction that tries to make people aware that volunteering is more that giving it is about gaining experiences and learning new skills, gaining competences as well! In this part we answer questions that might come up like:

- What does competency mean?
- What is a portfolio of competences?
- What are the elements of the portfolio?
- What is the portfolio of competences good for?
- Who is the portfolio of competences for?

The aim of this section is to give a general introduction and overview on the portfolio.

How to use the portfolio?

This part describes the method to be used: self-assessment and lists the steps to be followed when completing the device. Among the eight steps volunteers will find an example for the mind-mapping method, too.

Mind map

We gave an empty mind map to be filled in or give an idea to the volunteer what is should look like if he/she chooses to draw his/her own one. This is the first exercise of the volunteer – it helps to discover and identify both the activities and the competences.

List of voluntary activities

Here the volunteer can find the definition of voluntary activity and fifteen different examples of the most common volunteer activities with short description. The volunteer has to put an X next to the relevant activity. In case his/her voluntary activity is not listed among the fifteen there is enough space left to add his/her own activities.

Competences

After the definition of competences the typology of competences (basic, general, organisation –specific) is given. It is followed by lists of the three different types of competences obtainable through volunteering. The volunteer is asked to indicate those with an X that he/she did as a volunteer at a non-profit organization. It is explained that he/she will have to pull together the competences indicated here in the final summary table. If the competence he/she gained is not on the list, he/she can add it to the table.

Describing voluntary activities

To be able to prove that a volunteer has developed or increased any competence he/she should provide specific examples.

In this section the volunteer is asked to describe at least one of his/her voluntary activities through which he/she managed to utilize or develop his/her competences.

List of knowledge gained through training and seminars

This table helps the volunteer to keep a tack of all the training and other educational courses he/she attended and gather the knowledge gained through them.

The volunteer is advised to attach the documents certifying the qualification to the portfolio.

Tables summarizing competences

We gave two different tables to choose from. They gather the competences and activities of the volunteer from different angle.

It is up to the volunteer which one to present to the employer or attach to the CV.

I. version: It assesses the competences he/she obtained through volunteering. He/she has to enter to this table the activities and competences indicated with an X from the above list of activities and competences.

It also contains those non-profit organizations for which the volunteer did voluntary work regularly for at least a year.

II. version: This section was added after the project meeting in Rome, where we discovered an alternative way of summarising the outcomes of the portfolio. The volunteer can decide which one she/he would like to present to the employer.

It is based on the thought that the employer would like to read the simplest possible version of the competences of any applicant. Therefore this table is more simple and easy to follow.

Appendices

Contains examples and advices on additional documents that should be collected in the portfolio. The following documents should be filled in by the volunteer and signed by the volunteer coordinator/manager.

Samples that should be filled in by the volunteer and signed by the volunteer manager:

- Sample Curriculum vitae in EU format – This is the currently used CV format within the EU. It can be expanded if more space needed.
- Sample Organizational certificate - In this document the organisation at which the volunteer is active currently certifies that they have read the competence portfolio and agree with the content.
- Sample Volunteer reference sheet – This document should be given by /collected from each organisation where the volunteer has done voluntary work. It gives an overview on the organisation and certifies that the volunteer has been volunteering in the organisation doing specific activities, gaining certain skills, attending trainings.

Documents that should be added to the portfolio by the volunteer:

- Any promotional material of the organization where you volunteered
- References given by the organisations
- Any documents, certificates, degrees proving trainings and qualifications
- Press cuttings or newsletters
- Other documents relating to your volunteering such as letters of thanks and appreciation, photographs, annual reports, records of attendance

Presentation of the Hungarian Guidebook

The aim of this guide is to give more information on the AVE project but it describes the tool, has explanation on the process as well. The person accompanying the volunteer when filling in the portfolio should use it.

It starts with a short summary about volunteering.

The second part is about the Leonardo research project, describing the aim the target group the main criterion of the project. Short description and contacts of the partners will be added to the appendix as it proved to be too long when reading the guide and interrupted the flow of the information.

The third section gives introduction into the actual tool, it explains what is a portfolio, what is a competence portfolio good for, what are the different parts of the portfolio.

The next section gives a step by step guide – how to implement the tool into the organisation and mentions the activities that have to be carried out by the volunteer coordinator accompanying the volunteer.

Evidently the guide also contains the instructions given to the volunteer in the tool itself.

We have collected a list of the most important words of the topic and given their definitions.

In the appendix we have given to sample of registering those applying for the competence portfolio and keeping track of the volunteers who have filled it in.

Experimentation

We had a workshop meeting with ÖKA network partners: 4 organisations from different regions of Hungary. Apart from this the portfolio was given to three different organisations to test. The first organisation deals with elderly people. The volunteers – mostly young people - visit the lonely elderly in their homes and entertain them or just have a chat with them. The second organisation is a public benefit organisation working for the creation of a society built on the respect for life. It is engaged in nationwide campaigns and education, as well as in representing the interests of animals. The third association is the Foundation for democratic youth. Their purpose is the creation of a youth volunteer's network - consisting of youngsters between 14- 25 years of age - for strengthening civil society in Hungary and in Central Europe.

At all there associations the volunteer coordinators read the guide book and invited the relevant volunteers to fill in the portfolio. Furthermore we invited individual interested volunteers into out office to undergo the process.

I was present at all the testing to be able to follow the remarks of both the volunteers and the volunteer coordinators.

Two independent HR experts were interested in participating in the process and a company that created a system for those unemployed people who can't reach the internet.

Remarks of the organisations

- They would love to be able to collect and promote all the competences that can be gained through volunteering at their organisation. Therefore they need a wider range of competences and skills that could be added to the guidebook. This way associations could develop the activities, skills, competences specific to their organisation.

- Associations would give reference and certificate only for the volunteer activities done at their organisation. What about the other activities and competences that were gained at other organisations but are part of the portfolio. They can't certify those as for this they would have to be able to test them. It is not possible for them.

- The volunteer coordinators (or at places where there is no volunteer coordinator as such one member of the association) supposed that an overall orientation training on the use of tool for the associations is needed.

- Associations wondered how to keep track (registration system) of the given references, certificates and filled portfolios?

- Organisations gave the ides the electronic data processing would be useful moreover the tool could be available online.

Remarks of the volunteers

- The whole idea is very useful and new.

- Even if not accepted by employer useful tool to gather what they have done apart from the work experience and keep these in one folder. They would even have filled it in alone at home as it is important from different aspects. Not only helps to identify and assess their competences but the filling in process itself is an opportunity to improve themselves. It helps them to organise all they have learnt and studied as volunteers.

- Need more help to fill it in
- Bit long and confusing (too many different competences)
- Difficult to evaluate own level of competence
- Too much writing
- Title should be more appealing, more personal
- Volunteers were wondering where they can get additional copies of the portfolio.

Remarks of HR professionals:

- The first impression of HR experts was that the whole program and the tool has to be promoted amongst for profits otherwise no chance of acceptance.
- They realised that a change of paradigm is definitely needed before this tool will be accepted by everybody.
- They see a higher chance at public authorities as they have a different system.
- Problem of accreditation was mentioned.
- The experts pointed out that this is a great project – volunteers can be the future pool for real human capital with real values.

The conclusions of the testing

In the following paragraph you will and the results of the modifications and amendments made due to these results.

- Almost all of the volunteers have reported that the portfolio is too long with **the length** of 24 pages. However it has to be this long to be a useful and holistic.
- The **title** of the competence portfolio was in the first version: Portfolio of my personal competences. On the basis of the consultation with volunteers we have custom-made the title: **Thesaurus of my skills and competences (Competence portfolio)** to be more personal and simple. It is more appealing and it doesn't sound foreign.
- We have changed the **format** of the sheet into landscape from portrait. It proved to be more convenient to use and more space is available to add own lines in case of competences and voluntary activities.

- The **level of the competence** was removed. The volunteer can't assess his/her own level of expertise alone. When presenting the competences for the employer the volunteer should be able to describe his/her level of competence by giving example and timeframe of the activity. Therefore the level is not mentioned.

- **Tables summarizing competences.** Originally there was one summarising table to gather all the competences relevant to the applied job. Due to the consultation with the HR expert we added an other summarising table to the portfolio that is easier to overview for the employers. The volunteer can chose from the two tables, it is up to the volunteer which one to present to the employer or attach to the CV.

  They gather the competences and activities of the volunteer from different angle.

  I. version: It assesses the competences he/she obtained through volunteering. He/she has to enter to this table the activities and competences indicated with an X from the above list of activities and competences.

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- **The order:** The summarising table was put after the list of the trainings and courses. This way the competences and knowledge achieved in trainings can be added to the summarising table. The general competences and attitudes were put to the end of the three different types of competences.

- An additional **sample of mind mapping table** was included to give more support to the volunteer and make it easier to draw his/her own one.

- The **list of the partners in the guidebook** was put into the appendix on the recommendation of the volunteer coordinators – it has interrupted the flow of the text.