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JUST

Joint University and Small and medium sized enterprises (SME) Training

Project ref: 2021-1-SI01-KA220-HED-000029948

THE IMPLEMENTATION SUITE

Partnership:

Faculty of Advanced Social Studies Nova Gorica (SLO)

RDA of Northern Primorska (SLO)

University of Malaga (ES)

Internet Web Solutions (ES)

University of Gabriele D'Annunzio Di Chieti-Pescara (IT)

IDP SAS (IT)

Comenius University in Bratislava (SK)

Slovak Business Agency (SK)

Institute of Higher Training in Community Policies (BE)



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1. INTRODUCTION

JUST (Joint University and Small and medium-sized enterprises Training) is an international project financed under the Erasmus+ programme and delivered by a consortium of nine partners from five different countries (Belgium, Spain, Italy, Slovenia, Slovakia). The project is coordinated by Faculty of Advanced Social Studies Nova Gorica (SLO). The objective of the project is to enhance cooperation between Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) with a special focus on smaller educational institutions and smaller businesses.

Collaboration between higher education institutions and micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises is always considered instrumental in realizing the “knowledge triangle,” enhancing innovation, bridging the mismatch between supply and demand for skills, and shortening the transition between the world of education and the world of work.

Over the course of the project duration, the consortium has developed a comprehensive set of tools and training materials tailored to the most wanted skills required by employers from graduates. The JUST Implementation Suite is conceived as a comprehensive set of guidelines to mainstream and facilitate the replicability of the JUST project beyond the formal timeline of the project and partnership itself.



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Considerable efforts have been invested in the development of training materials to make them self-guiding and self-explanatory for all prospective instructors interested in their use. To fine-tune these developed materials in line with the needs of target group beneficiaries, a piloting procedure was undertaken. This provided the consortium with feedback along several dimensions relevant for the delivery of individual courses and training as a whole. As a result, valuable insights were gathered that are now being translated into guidelines for the implementation and use of project results (courses, case studies, best practice examples, and decision games) independently or within curricula of higher education institutions.

The gained experience constitutes the pillars of this document, the guidelines for the use of the project results. The aim is to provide prospective users with some practical, experience-based insights gathered through piloting and initial implementation of developed materials. The guidelines cover a wide range of topics from the organization of training to tips for communication with target groups and participants, recruitment, and group management. Particular attention was given to issues of blended learning and experiences gathered through online transmission of training. These experiences are crucial for the delivery of trainings during challenging periods, such as the recent Covid pandemics, in an online or blended



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learning format. Finally, the guidelines provide advice on increasing participant motivation as well as lessons learned through the collection of participant feedback.

While providing a starting point, these guidelines are not definite rules for the implementation of JUST trainings. Prospective users are encouraged to experiment and enrich our suggestions with their own ideas. As a living entity, JUST is intended to grow and develop through implementation.

JUST CONSORTIUM



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2. DEVELOPEMENT OF COOPERATION MODEL

JUST (Joint University and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises Training) aims to enhance collaboration between Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) to improve student employability. JUST filled this gap by creating operational tools to facilitate interaction, leading to demand-driven curricula and enhanced WBL opportunities.

JUST produced four national (for Spain, Italy, Slovenia and Slovakia) and one pan-European report to provide evidence-based results on HEI-SME interactions for student training and education. A detailed analysis identified needs and trends, resulting in a set of tools such as cooperation model based on best practices, documents and protocols to promote HEI-SME collaboration, including working methods, code of conduct, and selection criteria for SMEs. The project produced guidelines, reports, and tools to support HEI-SME collaborations.

3. ORGANIZATION OF TRAINING

JUST (Joint University and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises Training) trainings are developed for application in both traditional classroom and blended learning (online) formats. Throughout the piloting phase, both formats have been tested, and gathered experience suggests that these kinds of trainings



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are highly effective when organized as practice-oriented sessions, accompanied by attractive training content tailored to the targeted topics, and supported with interactive tools. For example, participants may use PowerPoint presentations, video materials, as well as case studies and decision games as starting points for developing discussions.

Prospective instructors can use these trainings in more or less homogeneous groups, but also in heterogeneous settings involving students from different countries. It is particularly useful if trainings are embedded in the related parts of a wider curriculum. Examples of modules where our trainings may be particularly useful include Human Resource Management, Business Negotiations, or Business Communication.

Prospective instructors are encouraged to begin their classes by providing as much information as possible about the tools and the expectations from students to ensure smooth application and interaction within the group during sessions. By setting clear guidelines and objectives from the outset, instructors can facilitate a more engaging and productive learning environment.

The training courses developed under the JUST project include a variety of topics such as:

Smart working characteristics, tools, and good practices: Defining smart working and differentiating it from other work types, getting acquainted with smart working principles and good practices. Participants will learn to manage setting up a smart working place and choose proper tools and technology. They will also become familiar with the relevance and specifics of smart working in relation to wellbeing and a well-balanced work life.

Interacting safely in a digital setting: Explaining the importance of maintaining good cybersecurity practices, highlighting the importance of protecting personal information, and providing a general overview of effective cybersecurity tools.

Key competences for the 21st-century workplace: Introducing important soft skills for the modern workplace, explaining how to improve and apply them in work and life.

Time, tasks, and teamwork management: Emphasizing the importance of personal organization, explaining the urgent-important matrix and how to use it, and teaching how to avoid procrastination.

Being smart, effective, and efficient in managing your workload: Helping learners better plan and strategize their workload by prioritizing tasks and commitments, teaching them how to perform under pressure, and how to remain productive.



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Collaboration and Communication Skills: Explaining how to build relationships with teammates, create good communication dynamics, and improve understanding of people and situations within organizations.

Business Etiquette: Introducing the concept of business etiquette and its role in presenting a united company image, fostering mutual respect among team members, and improving workplace communication.

An unconventional guide to office life: Presenting the concept of organizational hierarchy and its typical frameworks, explaining the Pyramidal Principle of communication for more effective business communication, and how to structure messages when sharing knowledge and information.

The 8 training courses consist of a PowerPoint module and a handout document for each, enriched with a glossary and a final self-assessment test. To access the course contents, please visit the direct link: www.just-training.eu/training.

Currently, these courses are undergoing testing and validation (T&V) by 300 university students who provide invaluable feedback on content and structure, ensuring they meet the needs of both academia and the job market.



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4. RECRUITMENT

Recruitment of participants for the JUST project can be facilitated through multiple channels. Effective approaches include reaching out to groups within similar educational domains or stakeholders engaged in related activities. Leveraging existing relationships with organizations and institutions that support young professionals and recent graduates can be key. Utilizing associated partners of participating institutions enhances recruitment efforts, while promoting the benefits of the Open Educational Resources (OER) platform attracts teachers and instructors to incorporate JUST training materials into their curricula. Additionally, organizing JUST training sessions in conjunction with other academic or professional events can further maximize exposure and participation. By employing these strategies, the JUST project aims to effectively engage higher education institutions, SMEs, academic staff, and students, ensuring successful collaboration and participation.



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5. COMMUNICATION WITH TARGET GROUP AND PARTICIPANTS

Effective communication with the target group and participants is essential for the success of the JUST project. Here are some strategies to ensure clear and engaging communication:

Create an Engaging Environment: Use ice-breaking techniques to create a welcoming and comfortable atmosphere. This helps participants feel more at ease and encourages active participation. Trainers should strike a balance between being approachable and maintaining their authority, fostering a respectful and interactive setting.

Utilize Multiple Communication Channels: Reach out to participants through various channels such as emails, social media, newsletters, and the project website. Tailor messages for each platform to ensure they are concise, engaging, and relevant.

Clear and Consistent Messaging: Develop consistent messages that clearly articulate the goals, benefits, and opportunities of the JUST project. Emphasize the importance of the project for both higher education institutions and SMEs, and how it bridges the gap between education and the job market.

Interactive Content: Incorporate interactive elements such as webinars, Q&A sessions, and online forums to facilitate engagement. These platforms allow participants to ask questions, share feedback, and interact with trainers and peers.



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Regular Updates: Keep participants informed about the project's progress and developments through regular updates. Use newsletters, social media posts, and website announcements to share milestones, achievements, and upcoming events.

Feedback Mechanisms: Implement feedback mechanisms to gather input from participants. Use surveys, feedback forms, and discussion forums to understand their needs and preferences. This feedback is valuable for improving the project and ensuring it meets participants' expectations.

Leverage Partnerships: Collaborate with partner institutions and organizations to disseminate information about the project. Encourage partners to share updates within their networks to extend the reach of communication efforts.

Personalized Communication: Tailor communication to address the specific needs and interests of different participant groups. Personalized messages can enhance engagement and ensure that information is relevant and meaningful to each audience segment.

By adopting these strategies, the JUST project can effectively communicate with its target groups and participants, fostering a supportive and collaborative environment that enhances engagement and participation.



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6. GROUP MANAGEMENT

Effective group management is crucial for fostering active participation and engagement in the JUST project. Here are some strategies to effectively manage group dynamics:

Encourage Participation: Create a supportive and inclusive environment where all participants feel comfortable expressing themselves. Encourage even the shyest individuals to share their thoughts and opinions by fostering a sense of freedom and flexibility within the group.

Identify Allies: Recognize individuals who naturally emerge as informal leaders or spokespersons within the group. These allies can help influence group dynamics and encourage participation among their peers.

Utilize Visual Aids: Incorporate slides and PowerPoint presentations to guide discussions and highlight key takeaways. However, be mindful not to rely too heavily on these materials, as they should complement rather than dominate the training environment.

Interactive Activities: Assign self-paced tasks to participants, such as exploring the OER JUST Platform, completing self-assessment quizzes, or providing feedback. Encourage active participation throughout the training session to create a collaborative learning environment where ideas and questions can be shared freely.

Dynamic Presence: Maintain a dynamic presence in the room as a facilitator of knowledge and expertise. While monitoring participants' reactions is important, avoid appearing too static by actively engaging with the group and encouraging interaction.



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Facilitate Dialogue: Transition from traditional lectures to interactive discussions by posing open-ended questions to the audience. Encourage participants to actively contribute to the co-development of ideas and solutions, fostering a collaborative learning ecosystem.

By implementing these strategies, trainers can effectively manage group dynamics and create a dynamic and engaging learning environment for participants in the JUST project.

7. BLENDED LEARNING AND ONLINE TRANSMISSION

In alignment with the objectives of the JUST project, our training approach encompasses both traditional classroom settings and online delivery methods. While the JUST OER platform serves as a valuable resource for self-learning and online training, it is essential to balance its use with interactive offline sessions to maintain learner engagement.

Traditional teaching tools, such as blackboards and markers, offer dynamic opportunities for engaging students and illustrating complex concepts. Trainers play a vital role as facilitators, utilizing physical classroom spaces to enhance the learning experience.

However, digital resources also play a crucial role in online delivery. The JUST OER platform serves as a conceptual map, providing an overview of course content, while additional resources are used for more detailed explanations and interactive face-to-face sessions.

During piloting sessions, technologies such as presentation media, Moodle resources, and video conferencing tools (e.g., Google Meet, Zoom, or MS



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Teams) received positive feedback from participants. These tools enhance content comprehension and create a dynamic learning environment, both online and offline.



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8. PARTICIPANT MOTIVATION AND OPINIONS

In the context of the JUST project, participant motivation for engaging in training activities varies widely. Through our experiences, we've identified several key motivators observed during piloting sessions. These include curiosity, a desire for self-awareness, and the recognition of the need for continuous skill development in a competitive job market. Additionally, some participants may feel compelled to join due to peer pressure, while others seek to enhance their soft skills knowledge.

A critical factor in sustaining motivation and ensuring the effectiveness of JUST trainings is the ongoing collection of participant feedback. While formal feedback mechanisms like surveys and interviews are valuable, we've found that informal feedback collection methods are often more effective in maintaining participant engagement. By fostering open communication from the outset, participants feel more comfortable expressing their thoughts and opinions about the training content, sessions, and facilitators.

In cases where formal feedback collection is necessary, various channels can be utilized, including focus groups, mobile survey applications, and online feedback forms. However, it's essential for instructors to provide technical support and be readily available to participants to address any issues they encounter during the feedback process.





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9. ALTERNATIVE SCENARIO RECOMMENDATIONS

In line with the dynamic nature of the JUST project, continuous improvement is essential for the effectiveness of the training materials and methodologies. We encourage all users to tailor the provided trainings and materials to suit the specific context in which they are being implemented. Additionally, careful consideration should be given to the timing of delivery, as overloading students with too many modules within a short timeframe can be counterproductive.

Instructors play a crucial role in fostering an interactive and engaging learning environment. It's important to avoid static delivery of the training content and instead promote a climate of co-development and co-creation. Building a trust-based environment is paramount, as it encourages open and spontaneous participation, facilitating the exchange of valuable feedback and insights.