

The Relevance of (Re)Designing Professional Paths with Unemployed Working-Age Adults

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Abstract : Professional paths must be understood in the multiplicity of their possible configurations. While some actors tend to represent their path as a harmonious succession of positions in the life cycle, most recognize the existence of unforeseen and uncontrollable bifurcations, caused, for example, by a work accident or by going through a period of unemployment. Considering the intensified challenges posed by the ongoing societal changes (e.g., technological and demographic), and looking at the Portuguese context, where the unemployment rate continues to be more evident in certain age groups, like in individuals aged 45 years or over, it is essential to support those adults by providing strategies capable of supporting them during professional transitions, being this a joint responsibility of governments, employers, workers, educational institutions, among others. Concerned about those issues, Porto City Council launched the challenge of designing and implementing a Lifelong Career Guidance program, which was answered with the presentation of a customized conceptual and operational model: groWing|Lifelong Career Guidance. A pilot project targeting working-age adults (35 or older) who were unemployed was carried out, aiming to support them to reconstruct their professional paths, through the recovery of their past experiences and through a reflection about dimensions such as skills, interests, constraints, and labor market. A research action approach was used to assess the proposed model, namely the perceived relevance of the theme and of the project, by adults themselves (N=44), employment professionals (N=15) and local companies (N=15), in an integrated manner. A set of activities were carried out: a train the trainer course and a monitoring session with employment professionals; collective and individual sessions with adults, including a monitoring session as well; and a workshop with local companies. Support materials for individual/collective reflection about professional paths were created and adjusted for each involved agent. An evaluation model was co-build by different stakeholders. Assessment was carried through a form created for the purpose, completed at the end of the different activities, which allowed us to collect quantitative and qualitative data. Statistical analysis was carried through SPSS software. Results showed that the participants, as well as the employment professionals and the companies involved, considered both the topic and the project as extremely relevant. Also, adults saw the project as an opportunity to reflect on their paths and become aware of the opportunities and the necessary conditions to achieve their goals; the professionals highlighted the support given by an integrated methodology and the existence of tools to assist the process; companies valued the opportunity to think about the topic and the possible initiatives they could implement within the company to diversify their recruitment pool. The results allow us to conclude that, in the local context under study, there is an alignment between different agents regarding the pertinence of supporting adults with work experience in professional transitions, seeing the project as a relevant strategy to address this issue, which justifies that it can be extended in time and to other working-age adults in the future.

Keywords : professional paths, research action, turning points, lifelong career guidance, relevance

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