

NetStart – Achieving new abilities with ICT

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Abstract. NetStart Project is focus on the abilities development, beginning with basic computer science literacy, for access to tools based on the Internet and proceeding according with the established objectives, through a cycle of continuous improvement of its abilities. Project has for base the IPAT - Personalized Itinerary of Technology Adaptation, which in its first phase intends that disfavoured people like unemployed, young people with low qualifications and older actives, to accede to the basic tools of the ICT. In a second phase the IPAT will lead the user to trace its goals of career, using for that, professional profiles adjusted to the work market of and adjusted to the new and emergent types of jobs, in order to take a place in the work market. After the identification of the goals, it will be possible to develop the abilities identified in the diagnostic, considering the knowledge level and the reaching goals, through the participation in training courses using e-learning (being privileged the b-learning at the first time). The project is within the Equal Initiative, this is a laboratory for new ideas to the European Employment Strategy and the Social inclusion process.

Keywords: abilities, e-learning, professional profiles, training, low qualifications

Northern Portugal region, and specially the Viana do Castelo region, is facing a real problem. New jobs are emerging and unemployed people and older employees need to develop new abilities. Another problem is the lack of knowledge and use, among this group of people, of the new Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). This region also has a relevant number of young people with very low qualifications that can only get low degree jobs.

ICT allows in a more flexible and easier way, namely through e-learning, to rapidly achieve or develop new abilities. So it's necessary to increase the knowledge and the dissemination of these new technologies among the region we are settled.

Netstart main objectives are the development of several instruments that will allow in an independent way people to begin using ICT and then being able, supported in those technologies, to develop new abilities, thus becoming more competitive and capable of facing new career challenges.

Netstart is a project in the EQUAL¹ Initiative, and is funded through the European Social Fund. The EQUAL initiative is a laboratory for new ideas, implemented in and between Member States, to the European Employment Strategy and the Social inclusion process. Its mission is to promote a more inclusive work life through fighting discrimination and exclusion based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.

Netstart Project is focus on the abilities development, beginning with basic computer science literacy, for access to tools based on the Internet and proceeding according with the established objectives, through a cycle of continuous improvement of its abilities. For the achievement of all these goals it was defined the Personalized Itinerary. This Personalized Itinerary consists of several phases. The first phase will emphasise in giving the target users the first steps in using and accede to the basic tools of the ICT.

The products that realize this phase are a flyer (Fig. 1) and a CD-Rom (Fig. 2). The flyer will give all the directions necessary, to someone without any experience in ICT, to start using a Personal Computer (PC) till the stage of inserting and start using the CR-Rom. All the language used within the flyer and CD-Rom is very easy to understand. This is a very important factor as we are leading with low qualification people. So in the end, it was also decided that all the language in the development of the Netstart project would have a special attention, because this would allow that more people used all the tools of the project.

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal/index_en.cfm



Fig. 1. Flyer



Fig. 2. Netstart CD-Rom.

The CD-Rom consists of several games and tutorials that will allow the user to access, in an independent way, the second phase tool and the e-learning content. The CR-Rom is divided in four main subjects: Knowing better your PC (use of the mouse and

keyboard, how to use programs, etc.), the Internet (browser, hyperlinks, search engines), E-mail as an important communication tool (create an email account, how to use e-mail) and how to use Netstart (portal, tools and e-learning platform). All the tutorials in the CD-Rom are interactive and need the user to participate in them. This will allow the user to get all the necessary knowledge in a pleasant and simple manner.

The second phase, the more important and also the nuclear one of the project, will lead users to trace its goals of career, using for that, professional profiles adjusted to the work market of the region and, also, adjusted to the new emergent job types, in order to take a place in the work market.

This phase is supported in a web based application. In this application, developed within the project partnership, the user, after an initial registration, selects the job functions he already has, then regarding those job functions has to select what tasks/ roles he has skills. Going on, the user has to tell the level of ability that he has for each task. For simplifying all the process it was previously defined three levels: simple, medium and advanced. Then the user has to select how it will be proved those levels, and he can prove it in a documental manner, for example with a certificate; his employer can also prove its abilities levels and he can also ask for a diagnose test. The next step will make a match between the profiles and needs found in the system and the information introduced by the user. For a better reading and understanding, a graphical representation is used to show how approximate is the information introduced by the user to the profiles needed or saved in the system. For finishing all the process, the user selects a profile that satisfies his goals for a career and the system will return his Personalized Itinerary. The itinerary will inform the user what training he needs to entirely satisfy, considering as a starting point his actual abilities, that professional profile.

The web application stores all the information introduced by the users and keeps track of all changes occurred, and, as needed, users can access and update the information introduced. Thus, the web application retrieves what activities - namely training courses, proof of task/roles levels - are done and what have to be finished.

The web application can also be used by employers or organisations to submit and introduce specific needs, and to manage the training needs within their organisations. The development of this web application was preceded by the definition of a functional analysis (Fig. 3). For the development of this functional analysis was important the participation of the target people, the technicians and also the partnership. They together worked as a whole, thus satisfying all the requirements and defining a tool that it's important to increase the competitiveness of our region.

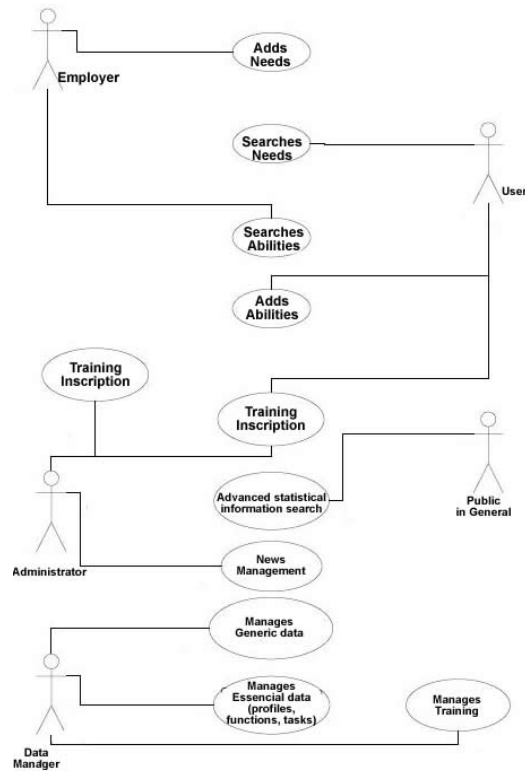


Fig. 3. Functional Analysis.

When the user has his Personalized Itinerary, he can through the participation in online training courses reach the goals and abilities asked by the profile selected- this is the third phase. This phase only depends in the motivation and the needs of the user. It was privileged the e-learning system known as blended learning (b-learning), and it was also defined that all the evaluation would be done physically in a classroom. This is important for the credibility and recognition of the abilities among the employers. The training courses, if chosen by the user, can be done externally, even through traditional training system (physical classroom). After the completion of the courses, through this system, the user will be able to update its itinerary. Such a process allows the user to choose what best suits its interests.

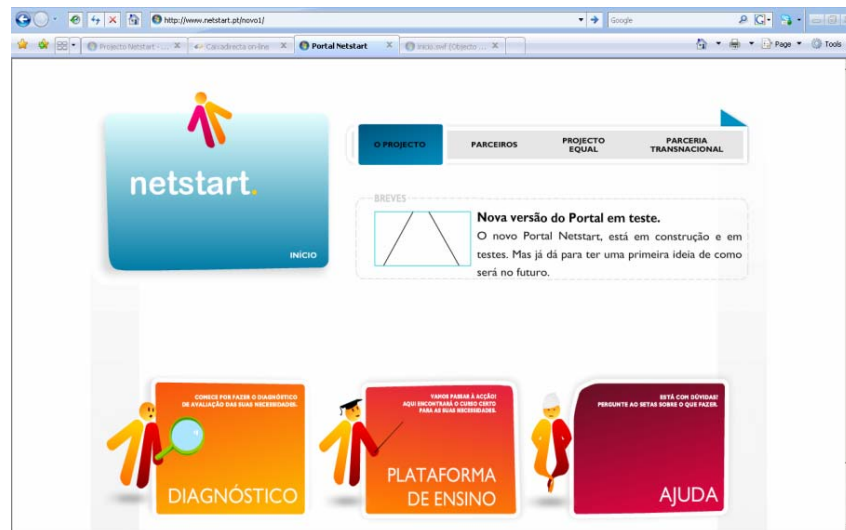


Fig. 4. Netstart Portal.

Netstart is a powerful mean of competitiveness improvement supported in abilities development and ICT. These together surely will make the difference and will start changing the training paradigm in our region. Nowadays the traditional training is used, the tools and results of the Netstart project firmly advise that it's time to move on and to assume that training can be more flexible and accessible. All these results will be in a web portal (www.netstart.pt/novo1- Fig. 4); from here it will be possible to access the web application, the e-learning platform and also relevant information.