

THE TALENT TREE AND THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY: EMPOWERING YOUNG PEOPLE

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Project key features

key features characterise the present scenario:

- A drop in birth rates in many developed economies;
- Increased recruitment of young people from third countries;
- Overspecialisation of young people in narrow fields: lack of adaptability.
- Asymmetry between skills/abilities offered by young applicants and those required by industry.

Project Outline

Commissioned by the regional government of Lombardy for the hospitality sector, the project aims to:

1. examine and contribute to changes in the dynamics which currently govern the process leading from education and professional training, through job application and recruitment to orientation and on-the-job training;
2. provide individuals with an adequate set of skills, fundamental for a quick and effective access to the job market and create solid foundation for life-long learning;
3. develop new learning strategies and innovative school/University curricula to ensure a competence-based and cost-effective vocational education and training system.

Key issues emerging

- Fundamental economic and technical changes in the industry are having a profound impact on the internal human resources policies of companies, especially young recruitment;
- Companies are finding their basic requirements/expectations of young recruits are not being met;
- Critical gaps in the process which leads young people from school/technical training to an effective insertion in the labour market are acknowledged by industry and educators alike.

The present phase

The present phase of the project is concerned with developing a provisional working model of training and professional induction which takes account of the requirements, in terms of competence, that our target industry has expressed as well as the broader interests of the job applicants themselves as they begin to navigate a complex and rapidly changing professional landscape.

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The next phase

The next phase, that of experimentation, will be concerned with testing, adapting and improving our provisional model for a year-long period. 120 students, 48 teachers and trainers, 12 university-level professional trainers and 12 human resources managers from the industry will be involved. These latter will be providing insights into industry experience of mentoring, coaching and tutoring in relation to new recruits.

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Project preliminary results

The search for a coherent approach

The last quarter century has undoubtedly seen profound changes in the workforce profile required by the developed economies. The generalised 'need' for more adaptable, multi-skilled, employees where abilities which might previously have been associated with management have descended further down the chain of command has been understood and categorized in a vast number of different ways, changing rapidly over time. A bewildering plethora of differing presentations of the 'need' has resulted from those who work in the field of human resources and has been expressed in an equal number of analytical, or quasi - analytical, models of 'competence', 'core-skills' (and various other descriptors), for educators and employers alike to puzzle over. Indeed, as academics, educators, professional trainers, human resources managers, trade ministers, education ministers, regional governments, supra-national administrations, employers groups and the like vie for the last word on the issue, whilst necessarily reflecting their own cultural, political or economic interests in doing so, they all agree on one thing: the field of 'competence' lacks a coherent approach. Another point of agreement is the need to find one; a lazy scepticism concerning the field in general is not an option.



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Project preliminary results

Strengths and weaknesses: holistic vs atomised approaches

Broadly speaking, models using what has been termed competence-based logic appear to be of two basic types. Early models, such as the 'core skills model' concentrated on listing the essential skills or competences that were necessitated by the change to a service/information economy. There are three main problems with this approach. First is the danger of tackling inter-dependent facets of competence as separate issues as if one may be of value without the other – this has been called 'atomisation'. Second is the arbitrary nature of the lists themselves, as 'numeracy' is listed alongside vague terms such as 'communication skills'. Also terms such as 'motivation' which have more to do with psychology are found in the same category. The third - connected - difficulty is that of finding any consensus as regards terminology since a single concept may be expressed in a thousand ways. The very existence of a publication entitled "500,000 professional competences" speaks for itself. Later 'holistic' models such as 'the job competence model' which attempt to describe the underlying dynamics of competence per se and thereby 'embed' core skills are seen by many – and by ourselves - as a useful reaction to these problems. They represent an attempt at an integrated definition of professional competence in an intelligible form which may be incorporated meaningfully into the learning process. The 'core skills', in a sense, flow from them and do not have to be treated separately. We favour this approach because our research has demonstrated it to resonate more closely with employers' own ideas concerning 'competence' as it relates to the requirements of the hospitality sector, demanding as it does a 'rounded', rather than box-ticking, approach to work.



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Project preliminary results

The distrust between educators and employers

A key theme that has emerged from the research phase of our project has been one of mutual distrust between educators and employers. At the risk of oversimplification, it could be said that educators feel imposed upon by employers' demands which reflect short term commercial interests rather than those of the student. Employers, on the other hand, feel ill-served by an education system which is out of touch with, at times even uninterested in, the needs of industry. This is not to say that both spheres are not self-critical. Far from it: the sharpest arrows fired at those educationalists who publish papers on 'competence' issue from the bows of other academics who accuse them of attempting to create and institutionalise a pseudo- science. Many employers, perhaps frustrated by the overcomplicating tendency of some models which have emerged, have been quick to agree. On the advice of leaders in the hospitality sector itself as well as those involved in training and education, our overriding concern has therefore been to keep it simple; this has been a complicated process! However we believe that we have arrived at an intelligible model from which coherent educational and training strategies may be derived.

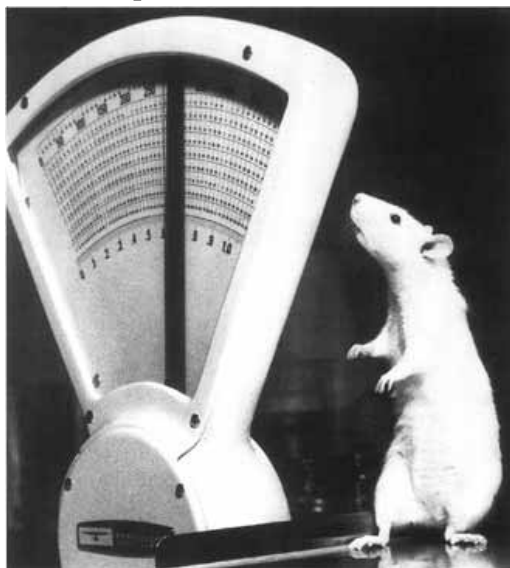


The skill incubator: Construction of a working model along holistic lines

The point of departure

Against this somewhat complex background, for the purposes of the project Skill Incubator, we do not claim to have produced a radical reinterpretation of the field in general but rather a conceptual tool, readily comprehensible both to educators/trainers and to the hospitality industry. In doing so, we have drawn upon the work of those who have produced models of competence which, we believe, are best suited to the core aim of the project.

Cognitive competencies



Cognitive competencies

- Searching for new knowledge and information autonomously
- Recognising the links between micro objectives and between them and the final aim
- Identifying and putting forward solutions to problems
- Evaluating and applying knowledge and information proactively
- Understanding and using the numeric language, even applied to economic-financial resources
- Implementing intellectual capacities suited to the situation or context, resorting to the affective attitudes (e.g. intellectual curiosity, self-confidence, open-minded outlook)

Interpersonal competencies



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Interpersonal competencies

- Entering into a relationship with others
- Adapting communication to the context and the characteristics of the interlocutors
- Identifying, selecting and using the means of communication suited to the aim
- Expressing messages, verbal and non-verbal and decoding those of others
- Correctly using, besides the mother tongue correctly, one or more languages according to the expected European standards
- Showing an ease in the use of written as well as oral communication
- Arguing logically
- Evaluating the congruence of his/her own communication
- Preventing, identifying, managing and resolving conflict

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Organisational competencies



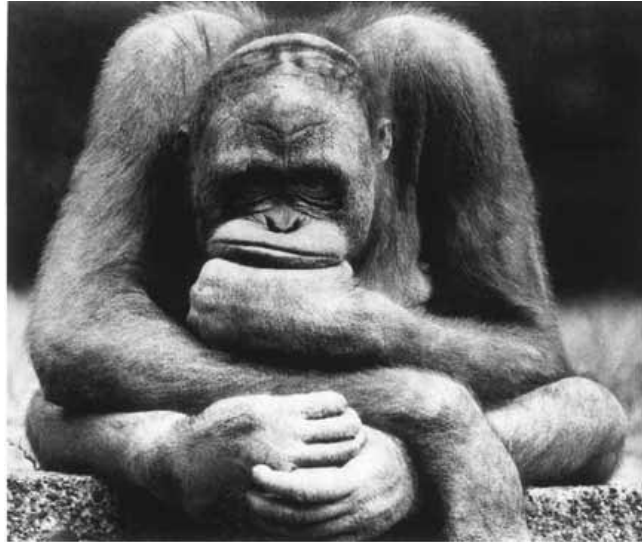
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Organisational competencies

- Identifying, structuring and managing tangible and intangible resources according to a systemic rationale
 - Defining priorities considering the environmental and temporal constraints
 - Developing systems and processes in timely fashion to deal with unexpected circumstances
- Identifying and using the sources of information appropriate to the purpose
- Structuring the information according to the established systems
 - Developing projects and new systems autonomously and coherently
 - Using the information technologies relevant to the context
 - Identifying, developing and handling the available resources, of a tangible and intangible nature
 - Knowing what to do in situations of emergency and need

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Competencies of self-development



Competencies of self-development

- Identifying contexts, contents and instruments suited to one's own development
- Identifying and using well all of the internal and external resources with a view to one's personal and professional development
- Searching for and implementing the most useful and opportune practices for improving performance
- Managing personal emotions by adjusting individual needs according to the expected result

The quality of work matrix:

CRITICAL COMPETENCE LARGE FUNCTIONAL AREAS	Interpersonal competence Entering into a relationship with others	Cognitive competence Acquiring, selecting and using the relevant knowledge and information	Organisational competence Identifying, structuring and managing the tangible and intangible resources	Self-development competence Identifying contexts, contents and instruments suited to personal and professional development
1. Understanding the aim of the business (philosophy and expected result) and relating it to one's own professional goal	x	x		x
2. Analysing the context in relation to the aim		x	x	x
3. Devising processes and products to achieve the ultimate aim		x	x	x
4. Defining the strategy and obtaining the stakeholders' participation (superiors, colleagues, clients)	x	x	x	x
5. Planning the activities and identifying the resources in order to reach the ultimate aim in time		x	x	x
6. Implementing the activities by monitoring their performance concomitantly		x	x	x
7. Evaluating and planning improvements and/or changes		x	x	x

Competence –The reactor

Starting from the developed critical areas of competence we have developed a model which defines all the ingredients **whose integrated implementation will allow the generation of a competent work.**

The model developed should act as an **orienting map** for job quality and learning process effectiveness.

It is based on a logical and at the same time easy framework, which is meant to be a term of reference both for the world of industry, which recruits and introduces young people to the labour market for the first time, and for the educational & training system in whose hands young generations are left for a long time, so as to let them be appropriately prepared to become aware of their duties as adult protagonists in our increasingly complex and open societies (i.e. the world-village), and more specifically in the development of our productive systems, through one of the most important dimensions of adulthood: i.e. work, creative action and as a strongly human builder of meaning.

ACTIVATORS



- Achieving the function according to quality criteria of the work agreed and defined transparently and in writing
- Choosing the pace (timescale) and the optimal sequences/choice of priorities (less waste of resources/maximum benefits)
- Preventing and dealing with unexpected events and the contingencies, in relation to the ultimate aim, adapting the planning/realisation of the activity
- Establishing, developing and maintaining relations coherently with the context both internal and external to the organisations^[1]
- implementing all the initiatives apt to one's own development and that of others.

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CORE VALUES



- Understanding and accepting the fact that existing is coexisting in the "global village"
- Recognising the identities, the difference and the universality of rights
- Acting in community and knowing how to identify and respect the thresholds
- Being aware of the uniqueness of each subject in its own time
- Promoting and respecting the original conditions of each living ambient
- Considering the orientation to the service and to the client/user as a function-strategic task

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ATTITUDES



- A taste for continuing learning
- Continuing search for quality improvement
- Courage for risk-taking
- Propensity to innovation
- Team-working aptitude

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KNOWLEDGE



- Scientific-experimental learning method
- Models, methods and instruments for resource planning
- Techniques for risk management
- Methods and instruments of project management
- Methods and instruments for the creation, management and development of the teams
- Innovation and knowledge management
- Methods and strategies for research-learning-action
- Introduction to the productive cluster of interest, possible delimitations, core businesses
- Analysis in terms of mega-trends in the productive cluster of interest
- Methods and techniques for the construction of an industry profile
- Models, strategies and communications media
- Models and instruments of consultancy, orientation, coaching, mentoring and tutorship.
- Instruments for monitoring and evaluation
- Construction of the skills portfolio
- Influencing, advocacy, lobbying e negotiation

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From the quality of work to the learning strategy



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From the quality of work to the learning strategy



Our approach is based on a clear distinction between job quality standards and learning standards, the latter understood as statements that allow us to define **measurable learning goals**.

Only once we have defined a language for all the stakeholders simply and comprehensively that describes which performances are expected from the young person entering the world of work for the first time can we, and must we, ask ourselves:

what must the person learn to satisfy the expectations and how must he/she learn it?

That means identifying actors and roles without overlaps, but also without constructing boundaries which nowadays are unacceptable.

Life-long learning revolutionises the concept of environments and actors. There are no more distinctions between formal education (the scholastic institutions), the non-formal ones (organisations), and the informal (all the other scenarios of day-to-day life).

All the environments become recognised learning contexts and they should be managed in that light by the VET policies.

However, schools cannot waive their mission, their own specific task: they have to perform, to high professional standards, their duty as an engine for a increasingly large learning environment, in which the young person becomes an adult capable of using his/her whole range of inner resources (motivations/values, knowledge, attitudes and abilities) as well as the external ones. First of all, it is necessary to develop a reality-relation method; schools have the important task of developing this method, empowering and/or rectifying/adjusting what is learned, mainly unconsciously, in the other contexts.

The learning specialists have the responsibility of creating appropriate learning models (method s & contents). They have to identify the best strategies and cooperation models between the working environment and the school world.

Once the skills reactor model has been understood and shared, and this time starting from a cognitive model, i.e. from a conception of how each person learns, the educational and training system specialists (scholastic and university systems) will have to define the indispensable learning goals for a school system that does not seek to waive its new and highly important role, its functional specificity, in the context of the multiple training ambients. So the education system must be endowed with a solid research and development capacity that, within the context of stable benchmarking with the world of work, identifies the most appropriate learning strategies and develops adequate operational models, in other words modules or ties between the learning modules in which the methodologies, the instruments, the contents are harmoniously structured in relation to the ultimately expected aim (i.e. the nature of the profession competence), the characteristics of the subject (young person entering the labour market for the first time or an adult) and the environment in which the learning is supposed to be taking place.

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From the quality of work to the learning strategy



A second condition is equally essential: It is necessary to underline this: it is a solid learning theory, without which we fall into the only model prevailing today within the school system, i.e. the oral transmission of notions.

For decades young people have displayed their malaise in many ways, but their complaints have remained unheeded. In this regard we should say that first and foremost a solid investment is needed for the construction of fully-fledged systems of research, development and supply at the service of the educational and training institutions, together with a sold commitment in building up a real system of skills that operate at a high level of quality in the research system, in the system of engineering and therefore in the system of applications, monitoring and evaluation of the training and learning processes. A system of quality education and training that, however, comes at a high price; in an international arena it can only be constantly measured against the specificities of other cultures and geopolitical contexts.

It is for the development of excellence in this system that the services of **Talent Tree** will be honed and delivered experimentally during its second year of activity, due to start in September 2007.

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