IMPROVE COMPETITIVENESS IN THE CURRENT LABOUR MARKET

Through personal career management and strengthening of CV

University of Aveiro

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Skills covered: Employability skills, Innovation skills and Creativity skills.

Estimated number of lectures/teaching sessions needed: 8 hours

Aim: The course has as main aims give the students an overview of the different skills and competences that allow increasing the competitiveness of a graduate in the current labour market; as well as to analyse and identify the more relevant skills to increase their employability through the valuation of their personal Curriculum Vitae.

Brief Abstract: The course will give the students an overview of the different skills and the importance of be competitive in the current labour market. Starting from this overview (in module 1), with the characterization of the required skills and competences to increase the competitiveness in the current labour market, as well as the available means, it will proceed (in module 2) to a SWOT analysis based on a self-awareness and to the design of a curriculum vitae complemented personal forms of promotion in digital platforms that will be valued in the current labour market, given the profile and the preferences of each person.

Methods applied: Theoretical expository presentation, case studies, brainstorming discussion of ideas, specific tasks, work group and individual work report (SWOT analysis and individual Curriculum Vitae).

Type of class: Workshop.

Type of students: Students in the field of Business, Economics and Engineering & Computing.

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1. AN OVERVIEW OF THE DIFFERENT SKILLS AND COMPETENCES THAT ALLOW INCREASING THE COMPETITIVENESS OF A GRADUATE IN THE ACTUAL LABOUR MARKET

1.1. Introduction

The scholars' concerns and debates about graduate's employability have sharply increased in the last decade. This was mainly motivated by the Bologna Process reform of the European higher education system, which presupposes that the assessment of High Education Institutions (HEI) should be based on the employability of their graduates, by the current social and economic paradigm of European Union (EU) that has recorded in the last years the higher rates of youth unemployment of ever, as well as by the new Europe 2020 strategy.

One of the goals of the Europe 2020 strategy is that in the year of 2020 at least 40% of the people aged between 30-34 years old hold a higher education qualification. This education should be grounded in a modern knowledge-based economy that should be able to face and fulfil the needs of the labour market to guarantee this aim the Europe 2020 strategy developed the 'New Skills and Jobs' initiative which intend to stimulate and to anticipate changes in the skills needed for the future, as well as to realize a better matching between available skills and those required in the labour market, and to bridge the gap between HEI and the labour market (Humburg, Van der Velden & Verhagen, 2013).

Other important goals of Europe 2020 strategy are raising population employment levels, increasing investments in Research & Development (R&D) and innovation, reducing greenhouse emissions, reducing school drop-out rates and reducing the risk of poverty, all of which directly or indirectly imply an improved knowledge base in the population.

These goals intend to face the long-term prospects of the European Commission which state that highly qualified jobs will increase over 15 million between now and the year of 2020 in EU, while the low skilled jobs will sharply decrease, therefore, the importance of the improvement of graduates' skills and competences as well as measures to boost and promote the employability need now more than ever to be addressed and discussed by the all the stakeholders (public services, education, training providers, employers and students).

The present learning material module has as main goal to give the students an overview of the different skills and competences that allow increasing the competitiveness of a graduate in the current labour market; as well as to analyse and identify the more relevant skills to increase their employability through the valuation of their personal Curriculum Vitae in a physical and digital ways. With these proposes this module is structured as follow. After this introduction, in section 1.2 is presented an overview of the market labour and employability of graduates. In section 1.3 is made a contextualization of skills and competences. In section 1.4 are presented the different skills and competences that allow increasing the competitiveness of a graduate in the current labour market. The section 2 is divided into two case studies: The Erasmus Impact Study and the #EuropeHome. The sections 3 and 4 are composed by practical applications, being in section 3.1 presented a set of measures to transform the CV in a competitive advantage which will result from the development of a career plan SWOT analysis. The section 3.2 is another practical task where students have a problem to solve and the last section 3.3 is a quiz about graduates' kind of profile.

1.2. An overview of the market labour and employability of graduates

The last century, with its economic expansion and social development, brought to all children in western countries the right to education. However, nowadays just hold a graduation is not enough. People need to continue to learn throughout their lives, they need to be lifelong learners able to constantly adapt and improve and be able to maintain their competitiveness in the labour market in order to face the economics competitiveness and the fast technology development in which western societies live in.

This highly competitive and dynamic context and the adverse employment conditions that are currently affecting many countries in Europe may explain why it is urgent to address and debate the graduates' employability. But, first, what is employability? It is for sure a complex phenomenon and the scholars are not quite in accordance how to define it, therefore, there is no a universal definition but several definitions. Hence, there are definitions focused on graduate short-term employment outcomes: having the skills which are more appealing for employers and, thus, enabling the graduate to find a job (Oria, 2012). There are also definitions that distinguish between employability and employment: *"**employability** implies something about the capacity of the graduate to function in a job, and it is not to be confused with the acquisition of a job"* (Yorke, 2006: 6). There are even broader definitions: *"the quality or possibility of having a job, taken here in the lactu sensu of being an employee or self-employed. In this sense, employability also refers to entrepreneurship and the ability to create jobs, either for oneself and/or for others"* (Cardoso et al., 2014:18) or employability is to be "*successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy*" (Yorke & Knight, 2006:5).

> And, specific definitions like **employability of graduates** that refers to the graduates' abilities to adapt and use their personal and academic skills to more tangible educational outcome measures that associate graduate employability with employment (Knight & York, 2004; Andrews & Higson, 2018).

In fact, the youth unemployment, specifically to those who recently finished their graduation, is a serious problem of the European countries in particular for the South European countries that have recorded alarming rates of youth unemployment.

In December 2012, according to Eurostat, over 20 per cent of the people aged from 15 to 24 years old were unemployed in the European Union. In the last years countries such as Greece, Spain and Italy have been confronted with a high increase of their youth unemployment rates, over 55 per cent in the Greek case (Versteele, Londers & Ludo, 2014). According to these authors, in Portugal, Italy, and in some eastern European countries more than one third of people aged from 15 to 24 were unemployed.

According to the Eurostat (2007), the five countries studied in the #Europehome project (Greece, Latvia, Poland, Portugal and Spain) recorded medium to high values of youth unemployment. As is illustrated in table 1, already in 2007 Greece was the country with the higher rate (22.7%) of youth unemployment, followed by Poland (21.7%). On the other hand, Latvia was the country with the lower rate (10.6%) of youth employment. These rates sharply increased in 2011 with exception of Poland that just recorded an increase of 4 percentage points. Portugal and Greece doubled their rates of youth unemployment with a rate of 30.3% and 44.7% respectively; in turn

Latvia and Spain more than doubled their rates of unemployment recording 31.0% and 46.2% of youth unemployment respectively. This trend has worsened in 2013, particularly for Greece and Spain that recorded values over 50% in youth unemployment. In Portugal the youth unemployment increased 8 percentage points, Poland increased 1.5 percentage points and Latvia, contrary to this trend, was the only country that reduced their youth unemployment rate in almost 8 percentage points.

Table 1 – Youth unemployment rate evolution

Year	2007	2011	2013
Country			
Portugal	16.7	30.3	38.1
Spain	18.1	46.2	55.5
Greece	22.7	44.7	58.3
Lavia	10.6	31.0	23.2
Poland	21.7	25.8	27.3

Source: Eurostat (own elaboration).

Besides a general view of the youth unemployment is equally important to know the unemployment regarding the field of studies. Therefore, table 2 shows the unemployment rate of graduates according their academic field in 2007 and 2009. As expected, unemployment rates increased in the majority of the fields from 2007 to 2009. The field with the lowest rate of unemployment in both years was Health and Welfare, and the highest was Humanities and Arts (15.1%) in 2007 and General Programs (14.6%) in 2009. Social Sciences, Business and Law and the Engineering, the education field of the majority of the respondents of the #Europehome project, were in the middle of the table with an unemployment rate of 10.7% and 12.4% respectively in 2009. However, according to the European Vacancy Monitor (2013), the most recent data tend to be more positive, since Engineering staff were employed in greater numbers in 2012 in a large number of countries as well as staff from administration and business which, actually, were in 'Top 10' of growth occupations.

Table 2 - Unemployment rate by year and academic field

Academic Field	Unemployment rate by year	
	2007	**2009**
Education Science	9.82%	9.64%
Humanities & Arts	15.1%	14.5%
Foreign Languages	10.0%	11.1%
Social Sciences, Business & Law	10.5%	10.7%
Physics, Chemistry & Biology	14.3%	7.23%
Mathematics & Statistics	7.04%	7.87%
Computer Sciences	7.93%	11.0%
Engineering	11.1%	12.4%
Agriculture & Veterinary	11.1%	9.90%
Health & Welfare	4.12%	5.80%
Services & Tourism	10.1%	15.4%
General Programs	13.0%	14.6%

Source: Eurostat, 2014 (own elaboration).

Note: the percentage (%) do not add up to 100% since the category "other" is not included in the table

Finally, to reverse this trend of unemployment, graduates need to be equipped with a set of tools that will prepare them to face the current competitive and constantly changing labour market. This tools more than the traditional skills taught in higher education are a set of skills defined in the literature as soft or employability skills.

1.3. The Contextualisation of Skills and Competences

What does skill mean? In its broader sense skill is considered as the ability to perform certain tasks well. Nevertheless, there is no a unique definition of skill and due to its very broad approach there are in the literature several different terms addressing graduates' skills issues.

> For some, **hard skills**, referring to formal or technical knowledge, are also known as core skills, domain skills, and technical skills. Soft skills, in turn, are in the domain of personality, attitude and behaviour, and are also called interpersonal skills, life skills or employability skills (Andrews & Higson, 2008; Chell & Athayde, 2011). For others, **soft skills**, often referred as employability skills, are those which facilitate the creative and productive application of disciplinary skills or hard skills and knowledge in the workplace (Jackson & Chapman, 2012).

These and other various terms and definitions of skills have been used in higher education in Europe and around the world by scholars since the late 1980s and earlier 1990s (see Andrews, 1990; Brennan, 1985; Brennan et al., 1993; Fleming, 1991; Handy, 1989; Hawkins & Winter 1995; Pearson, 1985; Smith, 1987; Wolf, 1991). However, it was in 1997 with the Report of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, chaired by Sir Ron Dearing, which proposed an agenda for the development of British higher education for the forthcoming 20 years (NCIHE, 1997) that this issue was quite boosted in the literature. This agenda recommended, among other procedures, that HEI should specify learning outcomes for key skills and 'cognitive skills', as well as for subject-specific skills, and knowledge and understanding.

Hence, after Dearing (NCIHE, 1997), several studies were carried out with focus on the development and understanding of needed skills for graduates' employability. This was encouraged by employers who look to HEI as the major providers of highly able and skilled people and who say that higher education needs to become more relevant to business needs. But also through police makers that continuously emphasized the need for work-readiness graduates in order to face the challenges of an increasingly competitive labour market (Washer, 2007).

Nowadays, the issue of graduates' skills has attained a central role almost in all countries. Governments, institutions and scholars from USA, Australia and EU have set lists of graduates' needed skills for the 21st century, also known as soft or employability skills. All these lists of skills have much in common and all include elements of collaboration, communication, ICT literacy, and social/cultural skills, along with skills such as civic participation, creativity, critical thinking, and problem solving (Ahonen & Kinnunen, 2015; Voogt & Roblin, 2010). In table 3 are described some of the skills that fall under the broader category of 21st century skills. Graduates' understanding of these skills is quite relevant, since nowadays 21st century skills are those desired by employers and, thus, students/graduates need to know them in order to be more competitive in the labour market.

Beyond the skills' definition, is important to understand the meaning of the term *21st century skills*. However, due to the high diversity of agendas held by different institutions, there is no single widely-accepted definition of 21st century skills nevertheless is clearly attached to this term to have what it takes to succeed in the current century. Specifically, 21st century skills can be labeled as a set of skills considered necessary in the knowledge society, but where the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) is not a necessary condition (Caruana & Mcpherson, 2015). Silva (2009: 630) adds saying that the essence of 21st century skills is *"an emphasis on what students can do with knowledge, rather than what units of knowledge they have"*. Mishra and Kereluik (2011) reinforce the success idea stating that 21st century skills are required for successful learning and achievement in this particular century.

Table 3 - Description of the most cited 21st century skills

| Skills	Explanation
Communication	Ability to express oneself clearly and to listen to others
Problem solving	Ability to perform tasks and solve problems by reasoning and bringing together prior knowledge and experience in new ways
Critical thinking	Ability to assess and relate received information by using one's own critical faculties
Collaboration	Ability to work together with others in different groups striving for a common goal
Creativity	Ability to think differently and create new objects, ideas, and methods
Information literacy	Ability to receive, utilize, and apply information from diverse media sources
Technical Proficiency	Ability to utilize and apply technology and ICT in various everyday life situations

Source: adapted from Ahonen and Kinnunen (2015).

1.4. The different skills and competences that allow increasing the competitiveness of a graduate in the current labour market

A legitimate question that one might ask is, after all, <u>which skills lead to employability?</u> Both soft skills, currently addressed as 21st century skills, and hard skills are necessary to achieve professional success; indeed, the soft skills complement the hard skills in leading graduates to a successful career. According to Idrus, Dahan and Abdullah (2009), soft skills has a primordial importance in employability since technical/hard skills and knowledge represent only 15% of the reason why an individual gets a job, keeps the job and advances in that job, and the remaining 85% of job success is based on individual's soft skills. Hence, what carries more weight appears to be the soft skills rather than brain power or hard skills.

However, this is not a simple issue, and in the current paradigm, the development of employability skills are increasingly viewed not only as a personal achievement, but as an institutional or even governmental enterprise in which all the stakeholders act. In other words, nowadays, more than ever all the stakeholders, particularly, the universities and employers have a word to say when it comes to graduates' employability.

A study undertaken by the University of Kent (2011) about the most valued skills in the current job market have identified distinct skills and the most important are, indeed, in accordance with the defined framework of the 21st century skills: communicating, professionalism, team working, problem-solving, organizing and planning (Figure 1).
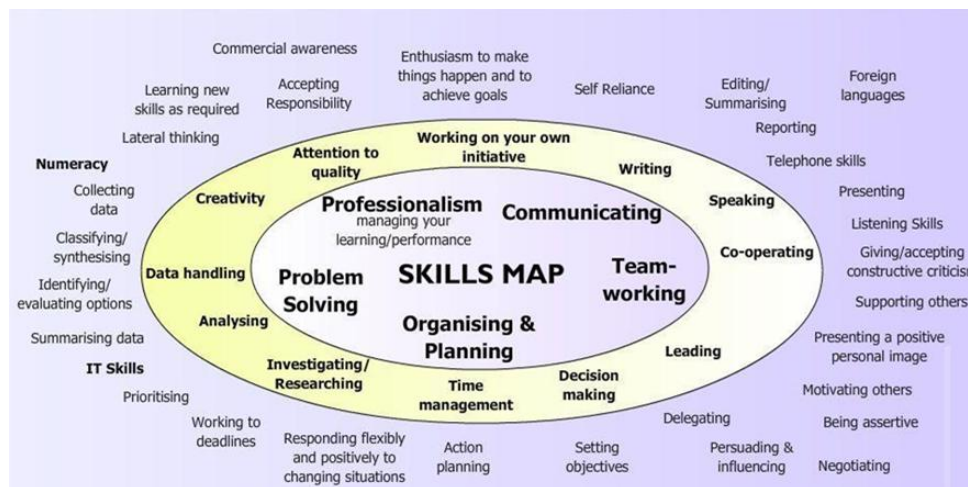
Source: University of Kent (2011)

Figure 1 - Skills map

Other important question that should be addressed is what do employers look for when they hire a graduate? Here it is a summary of several studies where employers' highlighted the main and most important skills that graduates should hold and mastery to be successful in the current labour market:

- Riemer (2002), in his study about engineering graduates' skills, observed that **language and communications skills** were fundamental, engineers must be able to employ **new communication technologies**, particularly when this communication occurs on a global scale.

- Markes et al., (2004), in his study about employability skill needs in engineering, inferred that both **technical skills and soft skills** are extremely valued by recruitment managers but according to them graduates really lack these skills, particularly the soft skills such as **social, communication, interpersonal, and problem-solving skills.**

- Archer and Davison (2008), in their study about employers' demand, defined a 10 top scale with the most important skills when recruiting new graduates and the three first listed skills were: **communication skills; team-working** and **integrity.**

- Hernández-March et al (2009) found out other graduates' skills valued by employers: **technical field-specific knowledge**, **interpersonal skills** with major importance to **teamwork ability** and **communication**.

- Wilton (2008) and Gray and Murray (2011), in their study about business graduates, found out that **spoken communication** was the most important, particularly in new graduates, and used skill by business graduates in their jobs as managers, followed by **management skills** and **ability to work in teams**.

- Hinchliffe and Jolly (2011), in their study about graduate employability, identified a set of skills most valued by employers: **1) interpersonal skills; 2) written communication; and 3) IT skills.**

- Humburg et al., (2013), in their study about graduate's recruitment in European countries, found out that **professional expertise** is a skill that strongly influences the hiring decision; however, they also found that having good **interpersonal skills** is equally important for graduates' employability. In addition, they emphasize the

increasing importance of **communication skills** in today's work-life particularly for team productivity.

🞦 <u>Ramadi et al., (2015),</u> in their study about engineering graduates' skills, concluded that this industry gives more importance to **professional skills** than to technical skills and as was underlined by the researchers the following set of skills **- cooperation skills, communication skills, and personal accountability skills -** were perceived to be the most important skills categories for employment.

🞦 <u>Su and Zhang (2015),</u> in their study about graduates' employability, identified that according to Chinese employers the most valued skills that graduates should hold are: **1) sense of responsibility; 2) teamwork skills; and 3) professional knowledge.**

Analyzing the cited studies one might say that according to employers' views, communication, team-working and interpersonal skills are the most needed skills that graduates should hold and master to be hired in the current labour market. This conclusion is summarized and illustrated in figure 2. Hence, is essential to HEI to impart these very skills in their graduates that in turn should assimilate and improve them in order to be successful in the current and competitive labour market.
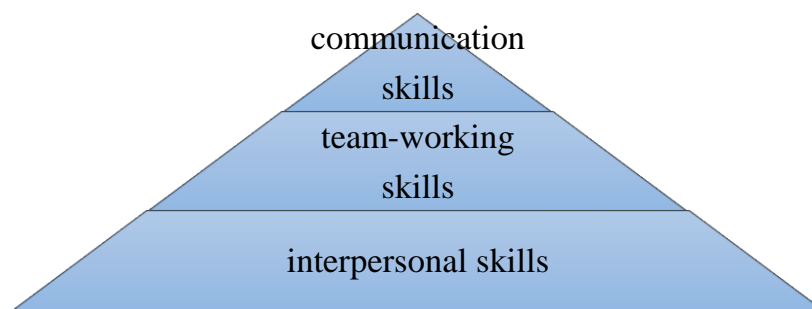
Source: own elaboration

Figure 2 - What do employers look for when they hire a graduate?
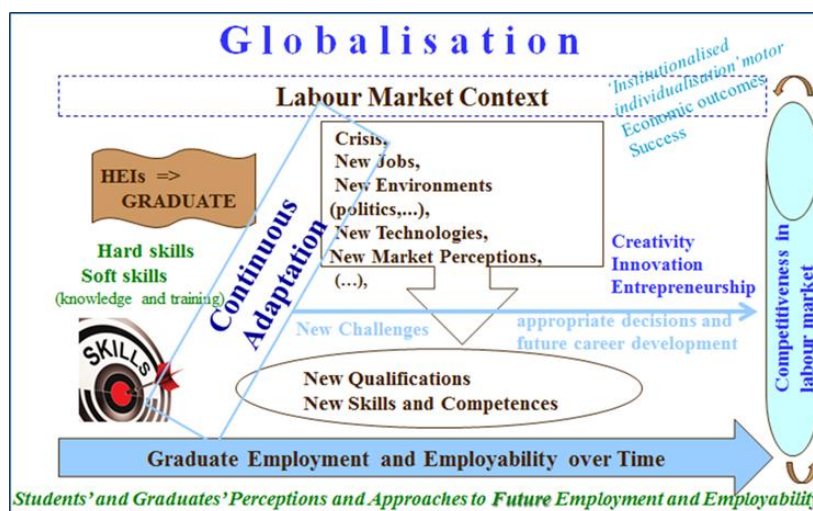
Source: own elaboration

Figure 3 – Competitiveness factors in the current labour market

In conclusion, figure 3 summarizes this chapter by highlighting the importance of the hard and soft skills with special focus in three soft skills: creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship as

factors of competitiveness in the current labour market. In other words, globalization changed the labour market paradigm, currently, we live in a world of mobility and the competitiveness is much higher now. Worldwide crisis reinforced this competitiveness and nowadays we have to be more prepared and continuously adapting to the needs of the market. Today hard skills provided from HEI are not enough we also need to acquire soft skills and merged them in order to be more competitive and prepared to daily challenges of the current and future labour market that is changing continuously (crisis, new jobs, new environments, new technologies). Hence, one need to be constantly creative and innovative in order to be succeed which implies well planned long-term decisions in their future career development. After this, there is a group of three questions to help to consolidate your knowledge about this first chapter.

1.5. Task 1: Chapter 1 assessment

| Now you should be able to answer these 3 questions	What kinds of skills do you anticipate to need in the year 2020?
	How do you rank and value the importance of twenty-first century skills?
	What skills and things in general do you describe as being the most important to your employability and valued in the labour market?

2. CASE STUDIES

CASE STUDY 1: THE ERASMUS IMPACT STUDY

The main goal of the Erasmus Impact Study (EIS)[1] is, first, to analyse the effects of Erasmus student mobility regarding studies and placements on individual skills enhancement, employability and institutional development and, second, to examine the effects of Erasmus teaching assignments/staff training on individual competences, personality traits and attitudes, as well as the programme's impact on the internationalisation of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

The study combines both quantitative and qualitative research. Online surveys covered 34 countries (EU Member States, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland, Turkey) and analysed responses from over 75 000 students and alumni, including over 55 000 who studied or trained abroad. In addition, 5,000 staff, 1 000 higher education institutions and 650 employers (55% SMEs) participated in online surveys. The qualitative study focuses on eight countries, diverse in terms of size and location: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Lithuania, Portugal, Spain and the UK. It included site visits, interviews, focus groups and institutional workshops.

The EIS shows that graduates with international experience fare much better on the job market. They are half as likely to experience long-term unemployment compared with those who have not studied or trained abroad and, five years after graduation, their unemployment rate is 23% lower. In addition, young people who study or train abroad not only gain knowledge in specific disciplines, but also strengthen key transversal skills which are highly valued by employers (see figure 4).
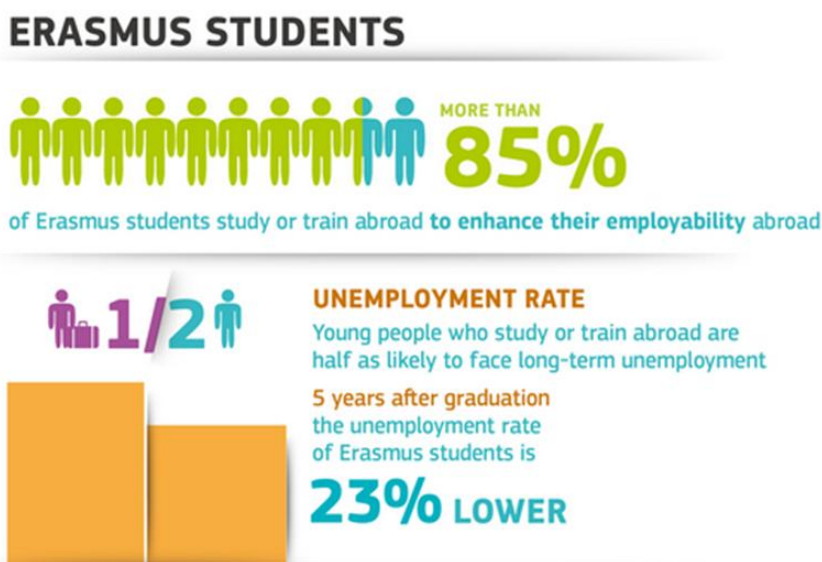
Source: EIS

Figure 4 – Employment and career development

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[1] EIS complete report:http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/study/2014/erasmus-impact_en.pdf

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Reasons for participating in student mobility programmes:

- Opportunity to live abroad;
- Improve foreign language proficiency;
- Meet new people;
- Develop soft skills;
- Improve career prospects in the future;
- Enhance employability abroad.

Over 90% of the employers look for transversal skills such as curiosity about new challenges, problem-solve skills, tolerance towards other personal values and behaviours, decision-making skills and confidence when recruiting and these skills are clearly increased in the Erasmus mobility programme. On average, Erasmus students have better employability skills after a stay abroad than 70% of all students. Based on their personality traits, they have better predisposition for employability even before going abroad. By the time they return they have increased their advantage by 42% on average. Besides transversal skills employers look for hard skills (91%), this is professional expertise in their field and relevant work experience (78%). In addition, for 64% the employers an international experience is also considered as important when recruiting (see figure 5).

Source: EIS

Figure 5 – Employment and career development

EIS report states that Erasmus students are in better position to find their first job and to enhance their career development. Since, more than one in three Erasmus trainees is offered a position at the enterprise where they do their traineeship. Erasmus trainees are also more entrepreneurial than their stay-at-home counterparts: 1 in 10 has started their own company and more than 3 out of 4 plan to, or can imagine doing so. They can also expect faster career advancement; staff with international experience is given greater professional responsibility according to 64% of employers.

In conclusion, Erasmus not only improves career prospects, it also offers students broader horizons and social links. As we can see in figure 6, Erasmus students have a more international life and are more likely to live abroad. Since, 40% of Erasmus alumni have moved to another

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country after graduation compared to 23% of non-mobile alumni. 93% of mobile students can easily imagine living abroad in the future, compared to 73% of their stay-at-home counterparts. 33% of Erasmus alumni have a life partner with a different nationality than their own compared to 13% of non-mobile alumni. 27% of Erasmus alumni state that they met their current life partner during their stay abroad.
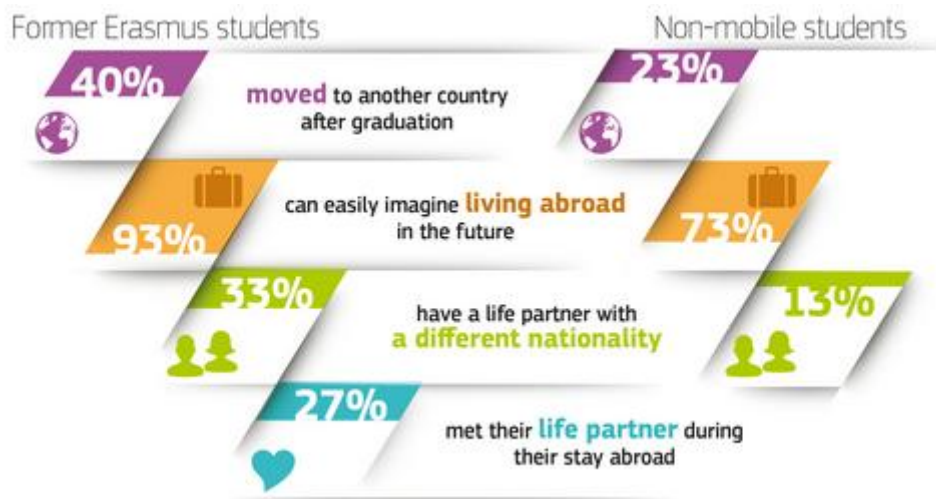
Source: EIS

Figure 6 – International life

CASE STUDY 2: #EUROPEHOME

The project #EuropeHome proposes a scheme with an aim to ensure favourable circumstances for students to earn competences, which are highly valued in the labour market and thus increase the employability of prospective graduates. Involving labour market actors in the design and delivery of programmes at universities, and including practical experience in courses will help to attune the curricula to current and emerging labour market needs and foster entrepreneurial awareness. Therefore, the overall goal of the project is to address the challenge of student employability and the need to increase the relevance of education by focusing on four main pillars: employability and entrepreneurial education; relevance of education; employability and mobility; employability and internationalisation at home.

Taking into account the main goal of the project, and based on the literature review about employability of students and graduates, were developed three questionnaires to three target groups implemented: Students, Employers and Academics. The questionnaires were sent by email to the target audience, and a survey was promoted and conducted by each one of the five partner universities: Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (Greece), University of Latvia (Latvia), Technical University of Lodz (Poland), University of Aveiro (Portugal) and University of Alcalá (Spain). As a result were obtained a total of 1734 valid responses (1204 for students, 303 for academics, and 227 for employers).

The main conclusions drawn of this project are:

🞥 Do graduates have the skills needed from companies?

Both academics (88%) and employers (93%) believe that graduates that have been recruited in the last three years have the skills required to work in the respective companies.

- Which skills do respondents consider essential to graduates to work?

  Students: communication, thinking and interpersonal skills.

  Employers: interpersonal, communication and learning skills.

  Academics: thinking, communication and interpersonal skills.

- Which skills do respondents consider students' lack the most in order to work?

  Students: personal, interpersonal and entrepreneurial skills.

  Employers: communication, personal and interpersonal skills.

  Academics: communication, personal and thinking skills.

- Which skills are best covered in the current curricula?

  Students: learning, thinking and interpersonal skills.

  Academics: Communication, personal and intercultural skills.

- Which are the measures that universities should focus on more to improve the employability of their graduates?

Students: include practical tasks and assignments in the courses, provide post-graduation support and include sector specific work placements as an integral part of the study programme.

Employers: include sector specific work placements as an integral part of the study programme, include practical tasks and assignments in the courses and Include sector specific work placements as an integral part of the study programme.

Academics: include practical tasks and assignments in the courses, provide on-going collaboration with the labour market actors and include sector specific work placements as an integral part of the study programme.

- How should universities cooperate with companies in order to improve the employability of their graduates?

  Academics: by offering real-life problem issues for students to solve and/or research on, and by organising internships for students

  Employers: by organising internships for students and by cooperation with career centres.

Finally, all the inquired groups (students, academics and employers) think that field-related work experience and specific professional skills and knowledge are the most important aspects that companies take into account when recruiting.

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3. PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

3.1. How to create a competitive advantage in the labour market through personal marketing

Nowadays several graduates with quite similar degrees and practical experience are entering in the labour market and competing for a small number of positions, and this competition has been intensified mainly due to the rise of mass higher education (HE) (Brown, Hesketh, & Williams 2003) and to the new employment paradigm which implies a constant career recycling and management. In addition, the massification of HE is, in a certain manner, decreasing the value of formal credentials (e.g. university degrees). In other words, if all applicants possess quite similar credentials it is, surely, more difficult for employers to use this information to choose among them (Roulin & Bangerter, 2013).

Roulin and Bangerter (2013) found out that graduates are aware of the increasing competition in the labour market and the majority believes that their degrees (hard skills) are not sufficient to ensure them a job after graduation and recognized the need for distinction that can be achieved through soft skills, the need for manage their own employability and the need of being prepared to face a more difficult career progression. Therefore, this chapter is divided into two subchapter s, which will help graduates overcome these difficulties, the first teaches graduates how to design an individual career plan and the second some tricks to strengthen their CV either physical or digital format.

3.1.1 Individual Career Plan

The first step, to overcome this competition is by developing an individual career plan. Since, this will enable you to focus your thoughts and ideas into a series of steps to achieve your career goals within a realistic timescale and, thus, identify your strengths and take advantage of your main distinctive factors.

As is illustrated in figure 7, the career plan is composed through four essential stages, however, this plan should not be static but an evolutive process as situations and priorities can change, therefore, regular reviews (e.g. annual reviews) of the process is valuable to ensure that your goals are still appropriate and allow new ones to be added. But first, you have to consider where you are now, that is, be self-awareness which means understand yourself in a deeply way, knowing who you really are and what you desire as well as your strengths and weakness are a key step to understand what are your current personal development needs (BBPSD, 2010). Be self-awareness will also allow you to be more confident and flexible, take better decisions, be less stressed and anxious, improve your communication and interpersonal skills. One good tool to know your better and achieve self-awareness is a personal/career analysis SWOT that will allow you to identify your strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats in your career field (Hansen & Hansen, n.d.).

A SWOT analysis is marketing technique that focuses on the internal and external environments by examining the strengths and weaknesses in the internal environment and the opportunities and threats in the external environment (Hansen & Hansen, n.d.). A well designed SWOT analysis will make you self-awareness and, thus, lead you to the next stage of your individual career plan: the personal development. Hence, in order to design your own personal/career SWOT analysis

you should address some questions like: What are your strengths and weaknesses? How can you capitalize on your strengths and overcome your weaknesses? What are the external opportunities and threats in your chosen career field? (Hansen & Hansen, n.d.). The figure 8 suggests how a personal/career SWOT analysis should be designed.

Source: adapted from Broad (2014) and BBPSD (2010).

Figure 7 – Individual career plan
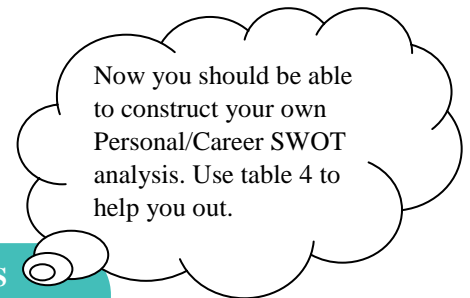
Source: adapted from (Hansen & Hansen, n.d.).

Figure 8 – Personal/Career SWOT analysis

Personal development consists in to develop and improve important aspects of an individual like skills, education and motivation among others. Since us as individuals and life are in a constant change, it is equally necessary a continuous improvement of us as person that will allow us to adapt and re-adapt to the moment we are living in. Within the personal development it is the professional development which means to master the skills and knowledge demanded for career progression and personal development (BBPSD, 2010). This professional development is often a personal responsibility, that is, it is up to you to keep on improving yourself or not. It must be you who define your ongoing development. So, here we are already in the take action of your plan career, that is, now after your SWOT analysis you are self-aware of which are your main weakness, threats or negative points that you should improve or eliminate and there are several activities that one may undertake in order to do that such as formal education, training courses, learning by doing, learning by observing others around you with experience, personal reading and research and so forth.

Table 4 – Critical questions to refine your SWOT analysis

Graduates' strengths	
What are your advantages?	Why did you choose your field of expertise?
What do you do well?	What do you expect to bring to this company?
Could you list your main achievements?	Which are your main motivations?
Graduates' weakness	
Which skills you need to improve?	What do you do badly?
How the lack of certain skills affect your job performance?	Which apparent negative personal characteristics you should improve/change?
Could you list your main professional weakness?	What should you avoid?
Career Opportunities	
Would a post-graduation distinguish you from your competitors?	Are you doing everything you can to enhance the most need skills in your field?
What formal training can you add to your hard skills that might bring you new opportunities?	To be proficient in another language would enhance your career prospects?
How quickly are you likely to advance in your chosen career?	Where are the promising prospects facing you?
Career Threats	
What is the current trend line for your personal area of expertise?	How can your field of expertise be negatively affected by the market fluctuations?
Are the requirements for your desired job field changing?	Which are the current main threats to your prospective position?
Could your area of interest be fading in comparison with more emergent fields?	What obstacles do you face?

Source: adapted from (Hansen & Hansen, n.d.).

3.1.2. Development of *Curriculum Vitae*

The second step, is to gather all the information that your develop in your career plan and SWOT analysis and use it to design an efficient CV. As your CV is the first contact and the first impression that prospective employers will have about you, therefore, you should transform your CV in an important tool to gain a positional advantage in the labour market.

But first, you need to understand what is and how this tool works. So, what does CV mean? CV is an acronym for *Curriculum Vitae* which is the Latin expression for "the course of one's life". A synonym to CV is résumé. The CV is an of a person's educational and professional history, therefore, should provide succinct information about one's skills, qualification and experience (Corbanese & Rosas, 2013).

A CV is the most flexible and convenient way to make applications. It is a marketing document in which you are marketing something: yourself! Think in CV as sort of visiting card that conveys personal and professional details to the prospective employer. You need to "sell" your skills, abilities, qualifications and experience to employers. The main purpose of the CV is to attract the interest of the employer to the application and consequently get invited to a job interview. Hence, it is compulsory to draw a good CV that highlights the skills and experience that are more relevant to a particular position (Corbanese & Rosas, 2013; University of Kent, 2011).

What makes a good CV? There is no single "correct" way to prepare a CV, although there are a number of rules that should be applied:

- The CV should be targeted on the specific job or career area for which you are applying and brings out the relevant skills you have to offer. Make sure the CV is tailored to the job you are looking for;
- The CV should be carefully and clearly laid out: logically ordered, easy to read and not cramped;
- The CV should be informative but concise: keep descriptions clear to the point (2 pages maximum);
- The CV should be accurate in content, spelling and grammar. Pay attention to spelling, punctuation, grammar and style. There are some specific words that convey involvement and accomplishments and make your CV more readable and effective (see table 5).
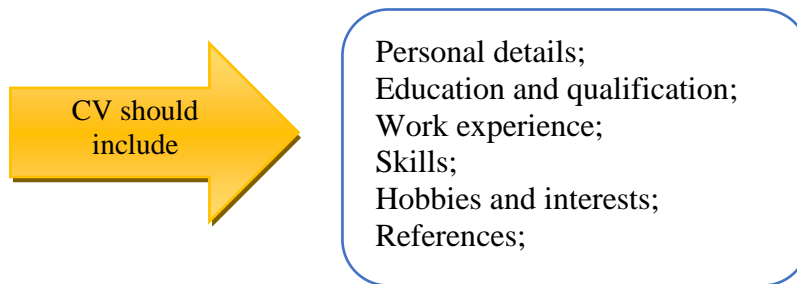
Table 5 - Power/key words for CVs

Experience	Ability	Personal Attributes
Experienced in	Trained in	Committed to
Demonstrates	Proficient	Confident
Extensive	Competent	Enthusiastic
Knowledge of	Initially employed to	Actively sought
Provided	Expert	Creative
	Working knowledge of	Innovative
	Organised	Positive
	Skilled	
Responsibilities	**Roles**	**Success**
Managed	Analysed	Promoted
In charge of	Evaluated	Succeeded
Supervised	Established	Proven track record
Delegated	Created	Experience
Coordinated	Designed	Successful
Familiar with	Formulated	Instrumental
Employed to handle	Initiated	Negotiated
Assigned to	Managed	Developed
Project managed	Presented	Impact
	Led team	Outcome
		Resulted in

Source: RACC (2010).

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A European Commission's (2012) study regarding the importance of the CV attributes found out that the most important aspects in a CV are:

- Match between field of study and job tasks (complete match, related but no exact match, not related): 25.8% ;
- Relevant work experience: 19.9%;
- Degree (bachelor, master, doctorate): 19.3%;
- Grade Point Average: 17,8%
- Study abroad: 11.0%
- University's prestige/reputation (top ranked, average ranked): 6.3%.

CV should include → Personal details;
Education and qualification;
Work experience;
Skills;
Hobbies and interests;
References;

The sections of experience and skills are of key importance in CV and are one of the distinct factors mentioned before. However, you may be thinking, this is exactly the most difficult section to complete since many of young graduates lack of work experience. This may be a fact but is also true that there are different ways to acquire skills and experience such as in extra-curricular activities, internships, hobbies, and so forth. For instance, if you have completed a project in school that involved teamwork, you should include this project and skills acquired in the CV. When the skills and experience are acquired from an internship or a summer job, even in a completely different field, you should also highlight this in your CV. This is equally true to extra-curricular activities such as sports, artistic, volunteer and community activities.
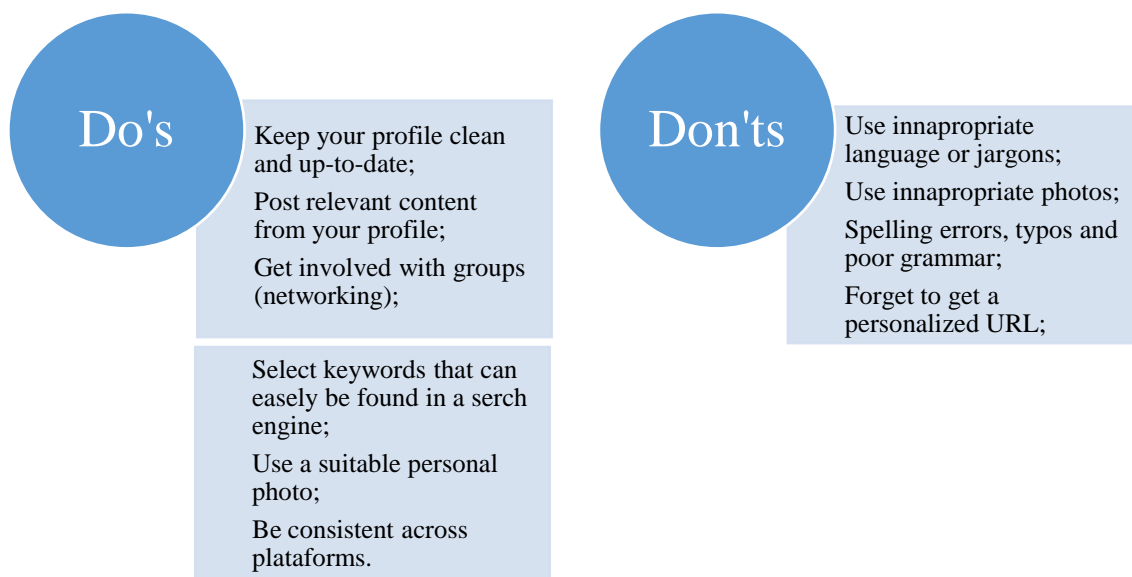
Participate in extra-curricular activities may be interpreted as a signal of the applicant's personality (Cole, Feild, & Giles 2003; Cole et al., 2009). In other words, volunteering for community activities can be perceived as a signal of openness, while being member of a fraternity can be perceived as a signal of extraversion, two personality traits employers particularly value because they are predictors of employee job or training performance (Hurtz & Donovan, 2000).

There are some studies that evidence the benefits of underlining in your CV your extra-curricular activities. For example, CVs of applicants with more extra-curricular activities and leadership positions in these activities got better evaluations and received more invitations for an interview (Cole et al. 2007; Nemanick & Clark, 2002). According to Chia (2005) in interviews, students participating in these activities received more job offers. Merino (2007) reinforces stating that the majority of graduates who participated in extra-curricular activities found jobs corresponding to their qualifications more easily than their colleagues who did not participate in such activities.

However, if you not attended or attend such activities you should not be demotivated or discouraged but look for your other experiences that you lived that equally show your skills and competencies. For example, you should mention in your CV your hobbies, even regular hobbies that the majority enjoys, but you cannot just list them you need to reveal the skills you have developed undertaking these hobbies. For instance, if you just write down in your CV reading and cinema this might suggest a solitary personality who doesn't get along with other people,

instead you should write down reading: helped younger pupils with reading difficulties. In fact, this could be the same individual as in the first example, but the impression is completely the opposite: an outgoing proactive individual who helps others (University of Kent, 2011).

Another important study, the Social Recruiting Survey (2013), found that 94% of employers use the social networks to hire or on his decision to hire. This means that, nowadays, apart from the traditional paper CV that we know before, you also need to create and boost a digital image through professional platforms like Linkedin but also less formal like Facebook. Therefore, you should be aware that employers will look for you on internet and, thus you should impart a credible and positive image of your digital footprint, the figure 9 outlines this by presenting some do's and don'ts that one should follow on online professional platforms such as Linkedin.

Do's

Keep your profile clean and up-to-date;

Post relevant content from your profile;

Get involved with groups (networking);

Select keywords that can easely be found in a serch engine;

Use a suitable personal photo;

Be consistent across plataforms.

Don'ts

Use innapropriate language or jargons;

Use innapropriate photos;

Spelling errors, typos and poor grammar;

Forget to get a personalized URL;

Source: own elaboration

Figure 9 – Do's and don'ts on online professional platforms

In conclusion, one might say that to boost your CV and transform it into a competitive advantage you need to highlight your distinctive characteristics, skills and experiences and this, as we seen it before, may be addressed through several ways, therefore is mandatory to tailor your CV according to your own competencies and skills but also with the competencies and skills required for the specific job that you are applying, furthermore, you should pay attention to the rules above suggested and details to include in your CV as well as to develop and follow your career plan in order to catch the eye of the prospective employer and convince them to invite you to an interview.

The following links will connect you to websites with useful information to boost and improve CV as well as other important tools to enhance your employability:

- http://www.prospects.ac.uk/example_cvs.htm
- http://www.theguardian.com/careers/covering-letter-examples
- https://docs.google.com/file/d/0BeOoMWEu9dZMGgybkNKTExYY0E/edit?pli=1
- https://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/pt/about
- http://www.kent.ac.uk/careers/cv.htm

- https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/employability/careers/apply/cv/index.aspx
- http://www.ucl.ac.uk/careers/gradclub/gradclubaccordion/workshopslides/introtogradrecruitandcvs

3.2. Task 2: Problem Solving

Students need to choose one entrepreneurship related problem, for example one specific product selling process and channels.

Student or group of students need to write down the most imaginative and creative problem solutions they can think of. As far as most imaginative and sometimes seeming impossible better the result.

After about 10-15 minutes, student needs to forget about being crazy and zoom back to normality and get on with solving their problems and be practical. They need to examine each of their crazy ideas to see what more practical solution it may suggest. They do not need to think of idea as crazy idea, but do the best they can from the ideas that are generated.
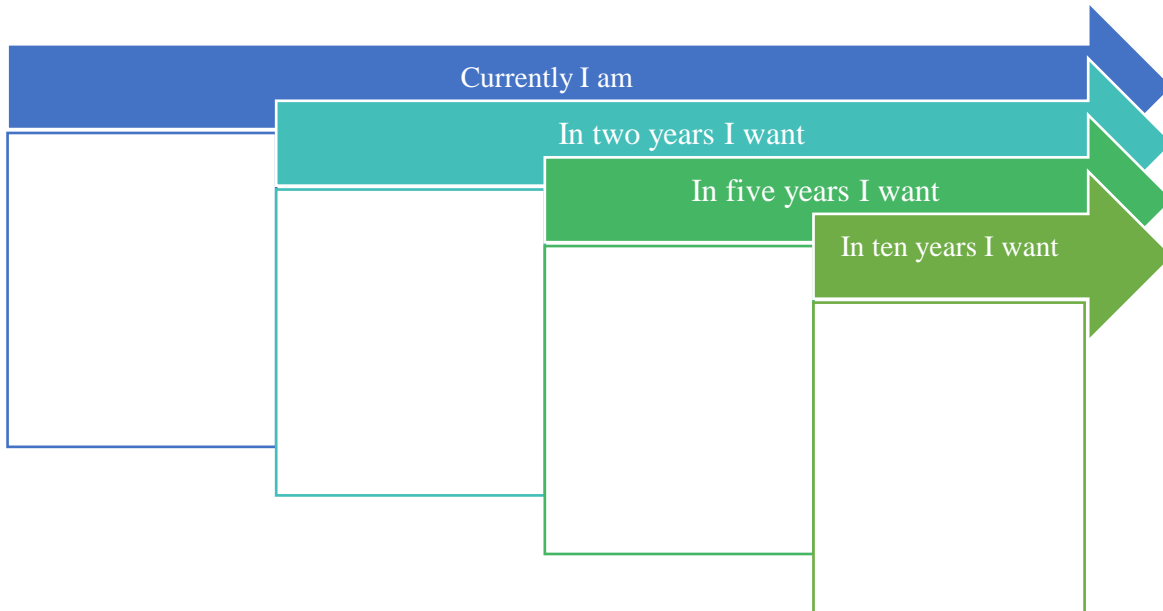
Check-up tasks ➔ Characterize red ocean strategy.
Characterize blue ocean strategy
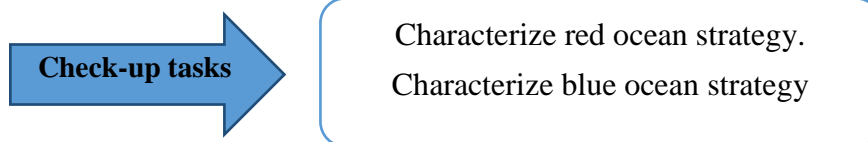
Discussion. After the tasks students need to share student team leadership tips and discuss what could be applied in entrepreneurship.

3.3. Task 3: Discovering Interests Quiz

Read the table 6 in the Annexes and for each statement thick the box if it is true. Count how many times you ticked the boxes A, P or S and this will help you to find out your interests and determine your profile which will be the highest scored letter. After that it will be deliver to you a short description of each profile. If you end up with equal totals for more than one letters, you may be suited to jobs that combine interests from different groups.

3.4. Task 4: Develop your competitive advantage in the labour market

Currently I am

In two years I want

In five years I want

In ten years I want

Design your own SWOT analysis and apply it in your individual career plan:

STRENGTHS
Insert here skills you possess

WEAKNESS
Insert here skills you lack

OPPORTUNITIES
Which skills will you need in future? Define how acquire them

THREATS
Competitors

Elaborate your current CV (in black colour) and **in blue colour** write some comments with a critical review of the aspects to improve in future to increase your employability according to your target profile and preferences

ANNEXES

Table 6 - Discovering Interests

	True	
1. I take pleasure in reading and learning new things		A
2. I like to work with my hands		A
3. I really appreciate to be the leader of a group		S
4. Instead of reading a book I prefer doing something else		P
5. I like to do problem-solving games		A
6. I really appreciate to help other people		S
7. First I have to know all the facts and just then I solve the problem		A
8. I see myself in a job where I have to deal with people all the day		S
9. I fancy working with materials and equipment		P
10. For me it is interesting to learn new facts and ideas		A
11. I enjoy taking care of others		S
12. I really like to design, to invent and to create things		P
13. I like expressing myself through art, music or writing		A
14. I am pretty persuasive and I lead people to do the things on my way		S
15. I like to repair and construct things		P
16. I fancy the research part of my projects		A
17. Collaborate with other people comes naturally to me		S
18. I enjoy to understand how things work by taking them apart		P
19. I certainly prefer to work with machines than with people		P
20. For me it is easy to follow written instructions		A
21. I really appreciate to learn how to use different tools		P
22. I like hearing other peoples' opinions		S
23. I fancy thinking up of different ideas and ways to do things		A
24. I enjoy being with people		
	Total A	
	Total P	
	Total S	

Source: Adapted from Corbanese & Rosas (2013).

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