

Profile on skills and competences

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WORKPACKAGE 3

Outplacement Support for Doctorates in Emerging Areas – OUTDOC

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1 - Introduction

In recent years, over two million jobs have been created in emerging fields, such as renewable energies, waste management, the digital sector, and innovation and technology, which will lead to additional needs for a qualified workforce.

However, at present companies often do not recognise the value and potential of doctorates. Consequently, there is a low percentage of hiring people holding these degrees, as they are assumed to lack practical knowledge, and considered primarily as employees of academic institutions.

To modify these hiring patterns in favour of greater job outplacement for PhD holders, higher education institutions are creating a wide range of employability programmes, including the OUTDOC project.

The OUTDOC project was started with the aim of contributing to doctoral students' employability in these areas. To do so, a specific training programme has been developed for them to acquire new skills and competences that will be necessary for accessing these jobs in the near future.

Via a study conducted in collaboration with over 250 companies in several emerging sectors in different European countries, the specific cross-cutting skills and competences were identified that will be required for the near future markets with regard to doctoral students.

The main objective of this study consists of identifying the skills that improve PhD holders' employability, in accordance with employers' needs, encompassing primarily the transferable abilities that professionals in all sectors can use.

The study conducted has utmost importance for being able to identify the skills and achieve one of the large objectives of the project, which is to create a custom and high-quality programme for PhD holders.

The results of this study have let us extract a list of the 10 competences most demanded by employers. This was the foundation for creating an innovative training programme aimed at building and training doctors in these skills and competences.

The list of the competences most highly in demand is:

1. Self-motivation and initiative
2. Work organisation
3. Responsibility
4. Flexibility and adaptation
5. Oral communication
6. Written communication
7. Creativity
8. Teamwork
9. Conflict resolution and decision making
10. Professional ethics

2 - Definition of competences

Hence, the OUTDOC project has created a training programme aimed at skills acquisition in the 10 aforesaid competences by PhD students and doctors from European universities, in order to contribute to and improve their employability.

Taking this objective as the starting point, and with the purpose of unifying educational and methodological criteria for creating the diverse educational materials for the programme with regard to the 10 competences, we have agreed upon a definition and characterisation of each of them.

A short descriptive summary is given below of each of the 10 competences, as well as some links and relationships between them.

2.1 - Self-motivation and initiative

Motivation is the force that pushes human beings to take on and tackle any action, activity or project. It is a relational concept, meaning that it is always linked to temporary, concrete and specific tasks that we are doing.

Motivation can come from two sources: intrinsic and extrinsic.

Intrinsic motivation is related to specific personal needs, such as self-realisation and achievements. To identify it as such, you only need ask yourself whether the planned action is in favour of your own values, giving you deep personal satisfaction. If the answer is yes, then this is intrinsic motivation.

Conversely, extrinsic motivation is related to needs stemming from our interpersonal relationships, such as for professional recognition or social status. In these cases, maintaining a certain behaviour depends on subjects continuously receiving external feedback. To identify this trait, reflect on the question: if there were nobody around me to see it, would it still be valuable to me?

The *self-motivation and initiative* competence includes the different types and sources of motivation with regard to the employability of PhD holders, as well as the analysis of their motivational processes. The purpose is to equip participants with tools to establish their personal action standards and relate them to their own motivational indicators. This is all with the vision and idea that training in these skills favours mental wellbeing and peace-of-mind, as it contributes to detecting and maximising participants' intrinsic motivational sources. Further, people who are clearly motivated based on intrinsic sources are much more capable of upholding their drive and initiative in a professional performance objective, which hence improves their employability.

2.2 - Work organisation

Work organisation is essential for improving our efficacy and efficiency in the workplace. To acquire this organisational competence, we should learn to identify, structure and prioritise the tasks we must do in our project or in our job post, as well as planning their execution over time, bearing in mind the priority that each one of them has. Thus, via organisation, we can produce a suitable personal structure to ensure that we reach a goal or target in a specific period of time.

Managing workplace organisational techniques is fundamental for two reasons. First, because it improves people's overall wellbeing, as being organised influences our physical, mental and emotional states, and is closely related to personal performance. Second, organisation is a condition that makes good teamwork possible: it strengthens efficacy, increases productivity, enables planning, improves the workplace climate... and all of these improvements can have a direct impact on increasing the company's profits.

A series of techniques and procedures are presented under the *work organisation* competence, in order to identify and structure professional functions, as well as to identify the main 'time thieves' to minimise their impact on daily functions and tasks. Several tools and technologies available to assist with organisation, structuring, prioritising and planning tasks, activities and projects are also presented. Finally, the concept is handled of organisation from a vision of

emotional intelligence, providing participants with interesting keys to personal time management focused on undertaking professional tasks.

2.3 - Responsibility

Responsibility drives us to fulfil and complete our obligations, to make and execute decisions carefully and consciously and, finally, to complete them, accepting any possible consequences.

In the work arena, we should bear in mind three essential and interrelated issues: individual responsibility, responsibility in teamwork, and organisational responsibility.

Individual responsibility is based on the ethical conduct professionals have both to themselves and to their environment, going much beyond simply complying with legal obligations. It arises from recognising our personal power to influence others through our actions, and accepting and making a commitment to employ this power to improve our time at the company and, consequently, our workplace relationships. This factor is decisive when evaluating the employability of a doctorate holder in a selection process, since commitment and a feeling of belonging at an organisation largely depend on oneself.

The second facet is related to teamwork. At present, all companies require their employees to be highly skilled at taking on and accepting full responsibility for their own tasks and functions to achieve a common goal.

All professionals should be fully aware that their actions and omissions will not only affect their professional performance, but will also have inevitable repercussions on the entire team. In this regard, solving problems responsibly will lead to others having more confidence in us, as well as ensuring that we outline more longer-lasting and effective solutions.

The third facet of responsibility in the workplace is related to organisational responsibility, which are the values and tools the company should convey to employees so that they can do their jobs in accordance with the company's targets and objectives and feel like they are part of a global project.

In the *responsibility* competence, the participants are encouraged to take a journey into self-knowledge, from the perspective of emotional intelligence, looking at their professional and personal interests and motivations, for their identification and sharing. Then the feeling of belonging, and responsibility's relationship to teamwork and leadership are handled. All of these core working areas and methodologies have the aim of training in responsibility over time, which will have an impact on the vital importance this skill has to improve doctors' employability at companies in emerging fields.

2.4 - Flexibility and adaptability

Due to the different financial crises and the emergence of new technical and technological possibilities for the labour market, organisations in emerging fields have been striving and toiling to remain in continuous movement to ensure that their businesses remain operational. Thus, they have developed a workplace environment that has progressively required increasingly more profiles for people who can adapt to these constantly-changing dynamics and workflows. These profiles must first and foremost have two competences: flexibility and adaptability.

Flexibility could be defined as the capacity to adapt and work in different situations and with diverse types of people. It is the skill to work in changing work environments, and entails understanding and assessing different stances and viewpoints.

With regard to professionals' adaptability in the work environment, it is characterised by them displaying efficacy in their jobs when faced with different changing situations and handling uncertainty to achieve the established objectives, despite any and all difficulties that may arise.

Nowadays, flexibility is a skill that is highly in demand in the labour market, as flexible people have more empathy, meaning they know how to listen, analyse without judging, assess and adapt, trying to give the very best of themselves for the good of corporate goals.

For the *flexibility and adaptability* competence, participants will be provided with working guidelines and dynamics that will let them develop these two competences and link them more stably to their own professional motivations. This training area is focused on acquiring the perspective to perceive the workplace environment positively and to learn to manage stress. It also deals with the need to manage social skills well, especially the need to develop an assertive communication style, so that doctors can be viewed as flexible and adaptable people in selection processes.

2.5 - Oral communication

In the work arena, just like in academic and personal pursuits, we must cope with situations every day that require the use of oral communication, such as job interviews, protect presentations, or team meetings. All of these situations have a common denominator: speaking in public and interacting with other people to inform them of our specific proposals or, in other words, conveying what we want to get from the interaction.

All oral communication processes necessarily involve at least two people: a speaker and a recipient of the message. Even though they may often be more personal experiences, they

always involve the same features. First, the speaker and listener must employ the same code, and the message must be clear and concrete to reach the other party correctly. Second, we should always remember that oral communication occurs both via the words that we say and the gestures we make when saying them, including verbal and non-verbal communication. Finally, we shouldn't forget that an oral communication process will vary depending on the context in which it occurs, so we should learn to identify behavioural guidelines, both for formal and informal meetings, as we will have to speak in both situations throughout our careers.

In order for oral communication to be effective, we must remove any 'communication barriers' that create interference with our recipient, as well as developing the habit of constantly giving and requesting feedback.

In the *oral communication* competence, participants are provided with the keys, tools and guidelines they need to develop their communication skills, both in verbal and non-verbal languages, including physical and mental preparation, and training on the beliefs and emotions necessary to get along well in different workplace settings. Communication preparation methods are also presented, with special attention given to self-esteem, so that doctors can thus improve their relations with their audiences and learn to control and use space to their advantage, to achieve truly effective communications.

2.6 - Written communication

Written communication consists of expressing the verbal content that we want to convey in an orderly, coherent and effective way. The competence to express oneself in written texts reveals the knowledge that professionals have of the writing code to produce discourses that are suitable and tailored to each context.

In the workplace setting, the importance of written expression rests not only in the fact that it is an essential component of the communication process, but also that good writing skills entail an essential tool for constructing thought, for expressing ideas and arguments, and for obtaining professional recognition and social prestige. All of these reasons are why this competence takes on such importance in the job outplacement context for doctors.

Training in this competence ensures that PhD holders will be capable of writing any type of document to work in line with achieving an organisation's objectives. Doctors must ensure that their writing showcases a logical organisation in setting out their ideas and information, a careful choice of vocabulary – pursuant to the cultural, formal and technical levels required by the aim of the writing – and proper use of grammatical structures, precise spelling and a style appropriate to the subject matter of the text and suitable for its recipients.

The *written communication* competence handles the structure and format of the main documents related to job searches, such as the curriculum vitae and the cover letter, as well as

the most common documents in the professional setting, such as emails, reports and presentations. Special emphasis is placed on the need doctors may have to draft simplified texts for the general public and to disseminate their knowledge. The most relevant issues related to quotation and reference models are also summarised. Finally, a section is devoted to the essential features of written communication in digital contexts, as employability at companies and in sectors in emerging fields is sought, all of them closely linked to new technologies.

2.7 - Creativity in professional environments

In our modern day, creativity is one of the competences with the greatest demand in the business sector, especially in emerging fields, as creative profiles also tend to be much more versatile, innovative and proactive.

Creativity is using knowledge from new and different perspectives. It is the ability that leads us to think and take positions from different viewpoints than the normal focuses, in trying to find solutions to situations, problems and conflicts centred on outlooks rarely practiced or even unknown until now. This skill lets PhD holders maximise their personal abilities and, consequently, expand their job prospects.

To work creatively, one of the best tools we have at our disposal is disruptive thinking. This means trying to remove all mental barriers and preconceived judgements that we all have, to try to think outside the box of our normal and established thought patterns. This way of tackling situations is related to the need to reorganise our mental structures: we need to try to forget our past experiences for a moment in order to let our ideas create new pathways, which forces us to leave our 'comfort zone' to confront new challenges. Employing this type of thinking takes us outside our professional routines, to create new solutions to new problems, even when everything else remains the same.

The *workplace creativity* competence offers participants extremely interesting tools, reflections and practical activities to put disruptive thinking into practice, along with creativity and continuous innovation. To this end, we provide an overview of the main agile methodologies, given that they work from this focus of disruptive thinking. And this information is complemented by an analysis of the different learning systems: visual, auditory and kinaesthetic, with the aim of helping doctors to identify which of them is most useful when establishing their own creative routine at work. Finally, the importance of training creativity to drive forward efficacy is handled, along with the importance of organising the workspace suitably so that our ideas can flow as optimally as possible.

2.8 - Teamwork

Teamwork is the ability for a group of people to work together towards a common goal. It starts from the holistic idea that – by creating a collaborative network – the sum of all individuals' work and effort will be much richer than what the same individuals could do on their own. A lot of work nowadays is done in teams and thus teamwork skills are very important.

In order for teamwork to work well in the workplace, the group of people must be committed to the project, in which each of them will take on a role and the organisation is developed based on concrete guidelines or action plans.

The main characteristics of team building are known as the '5 Cs', which include these features:

First is *complementarity*, meaning that each person on the team has specific knowledge and skills to enrich the task at hand and achieve the goals. Second, *coordination* is essential, which means that tasks must be assigned within the team to the different members, in accordance with their skills, competences and knowledge. The third factor is *commitment*: each team member must give the best of themselves and devote themselves wholeheartedly to achieving the team's objectives. This is a commitment that is personal, professional and to the other team members and to the company. The fourth key feature is *communication*, a mainstay to ensure the creation of a good work climate, in which all the participants cooperate and provide ideas and suggestions without fear of being judged and under equal conditions. Last, but not least in any way, is *confidence*, which becomes the feature that ties the team together, letting it do its work honestly and with internal coherence.

Today, companies are firmly committed to teamwork, in which each person must take responsibility for their own tasks and functions, and where every person involved must be able to proactively contribute and have certain leadership gifts. For this reason, this competence is extremely important for the employability of doctors at companies in the near future.

The *teamwork* competence sets out the fundamental issues for training in teamwork from a perspective of emotional intelligence. Managing the emotions is one of the main demands we find in present working environments, and it is a future trend, so that doctors who want to be hired in the job market must learn to manage their communication styles and social skills for working in teams. Moreover, there will be a review of the different phases of creating and maturity of a working team, as well as the relationships that could be formed both within the group and in inter-group work.

2.9 - Conflict resolution and decision making

Throughout our professional lives, we continuously have to deal with problems that arise and that affect us either directly or indirectly. As we take on more responsibilities at an organisation or on a working team, the greater the likelihood that we will have the need to solve problems. This makes it important for doctors to learn to identify and detect the most common problems that arise in the workplace and to confront and resolve them as efficiently as possible.

First of all, we should clarify that problems and conflicts that occur in the workplace do not have to be negative. Indeed, they can even be beneficial and entail improvements for the professional activity, the organisation or any of the parties involved. That is what makes it so important to resolve them effectively and not evade or ignore them.

Thus, a general definition of 'problem' could be the situation in which there is a matter to resolve or a solution or response that must be found. Moreover, when speaking of conflict, reference is made to a situation in which two or more people or parties involved have clashing or opposite needs or interests, so that deciding on one means that the other cannot be done, and vice versa.

In the competence for *conflict resolution and decision making*, participants are given the information they need to learn to conceptualise a problem, identify it and analyse it, bearing in mind the situations and conflicts that most commonly occur at the workplace, meaning the main types of labour conflicts. Different techniques are also set out for preventing and resolving problems and conflicts, as well as for making decisions, with the aim of training doctors in the skills needed to try to reach an effective resolution to the possible problems that could arise on the job.

2.10 - Professional ethics

Workplace or professional ethics is the set of norms or standards that improve how professional business is done. It is an essential component for doctors' professional development, particularly in the phases of actively seeking a job and being hired and starting at a new company.

Among the ethical values that all professionals should bear in mind for performing their jobs, the most important are: liberty, honesty, loyalty and justice. Firstly, liberty, understood as the ability to think and act for oneself. Honesty is also important, and a commitment to truth and transparency, a crucial factor in professional performance. Another value to bear in mind is loyalty to our own values and to the group to which we belong, beyond personal benefit. This concept is unavoidable when dealing with the feeling of belonging to an institution and even when facing possible situations involving ethical or value conflicts between professionals and the organisation for which they work. And, finally, justice, meaning a commitment to fairness for the common good.

We should point out that in the concept of its definition, ethics does not generally impose legal or regulatory penalties. However, professional ethics do tend to be established in the codes of conduct or ethics regulating professional work.

These codes are part of normative ethics and contain a series of principles and rules that must be fulfilled. Depending on the business sector in which the doctors are going to work, they

should learn to be governed by these normative principles, becoming fully aware of the responsibility that is not only personal, but also legal and even judicial, that their actions could have in exercising their professions. In this regard, we can specify that ethics suggests what is desirable and condemns that which shouldn't be done, while a code of ethics has administrative tools behind it to ensure that the profession is practiced ethically.

In the *professional ethics* competence, participants are provided with information on the main ethical values, such as responsibility, perseverance and discretion, as well as tools to identify the principles of justice, honesty and loyalty. A summary is presented of the different types of ethics that coexist in the workplace: personal, professional, and social or organisational ethics. And, finally, a series of tools is suggested for training and developing their own ethics with regard to the job post and best professional practices.

3 - The focus of employability

With the aim of offering the doctors participating in the OUTDOC project training that is both theoretical and practical, as well as innovative and high quality, for significant learning in the digital environment, a series of teaching materials have been created aimed at acquiring and training on the 10 competences set out above.

The focus must always be to favour the practical assimilation of the competences, with the aim of contributing to improving the employability potential of the doctors graduating from European universities in the modern-day labour setting, in line with the global goal for the project.

A focus of employability was selected because it is one of the perspectives leading to the best results in the area of job outplacement and integration today. This focus is combined with the possibilities of mobility in the European Union, due to being the contextual framework to which the students in this educational programme will be addressing their priority job searches.

An initial approach to the focus of employability brings to light the fact that our current educational systems, including higher education institutions in European countries, are still not fully prepared to launch their students into the job market. This is proven by the fact that doctors are not always equipped with the competences they require so that companies will hire them.

Thus, we could define employability as the ability to adapt our personal and professional circumstances, our capabilities, competences and knowledge to the needs of the labour market at the time when we embark upon a job outplacement process.

The modern-day context has been evolving at an accelerated pace in recent years, and emerging fields are evolving even faster, always related to innovation and new technologies. This obligates

professionals to adapt, increasingly faster, to changing situations, to manage uncertainty and to live with risk.

The key to employability is related to showcasing professionals' potential, and to the possibility of being attractive to the employers on which they focus their job searches. Consequently, it is essential that PhD holders do not neglect their ability to seduce companies, as they are often seeking professionals with these profiles.

Employability is a global matter that, in parallel, impacts each person individually. Thus, it is unproductive to make the education system or the job market responsible for this. Instead, all professionals must be capable of taking on a leading role when the aim is to appear attractive to the job market in the desired professional sector.

Being employable essentially consists of being open to the world and its possibilities. Doctors must learn to observe their surroundings and be up-to-date on the trends, needs, requirements and competences required in their profession, sector or professional activity. This involves searching for, investigating and processing information and – above all – moving from the theoretical into taking action. This means being in constant movement, doing things that bring us closer to our professional goals.

3.1 - Main factors that affect employability

When creating the teaching materials for the OUTDOC project, we have borne in mind a series of fundamental factors that affect employability:

1) Job Search habits

The first factor we must bear in mind when searching for a job or starting our careers is the actual time that we invest in finding a job opportunity and the actions we undertake to get closer to the job we really want.

It is extremely common to make the mistake – either due to fear or insecurity – of overthinking the starting situation without doing anything to try to move beyond it. Doctors must train their time management skills to learn to use time effectively, and they must learn to organise and prioritise their personal and professional tasks in order to obtain quality time for professional performance.

2) Formal education and complementary training

After finishing the university education stage and with the personal experience under our belts of having written an initial research work independently, doctors should be able, not only to accredit their knowledge, but also to prove that they can put it into practice.

The twofold decision to approach this training from the perspective of competences and, further, also doing it from a focus of skill building, is related to the need for practical application of theoretical contents.

The job market paradigm at present is marked by the need for lifelong education. This training may take place in formal or informal settings, meaning that professionals may acquire knowledge to improve their capabilities via many different sources. The doctors are responsible for finding out the training needs required at the job posts they want to apply for.

Today, the capacity of working on a team flexibly and adapting to changing contexts is a worldwide need that all professionals must have, so maximising these competences is a guarantee.

3) Work experience

Professional experience is important, but it is equally important to remember that all professionals start at some point without experience. Doctors must learn to search for the way to put their knowledge into practice and to seek opportunities.

One excellent option is to start with work experience or as a trainer in companies in our sector to acquire and develop certain cross-cutting competences, such as those that are part of this programme: oral and written communication, teamwork, problem resolution and decision making. The purpose of these initial working periods is to identify the strengths and weaknesses in our professional profiles so that we can improve them. In this regard, it is important to identify related jobs in which a professional with our characteristics could be a good fit.

4) Technical, technological and language competences

Technical, technological and language competences are increasingly more highly valued in a global job market. We must have identified which competences of this type are requirements in the jobs we want to apply for. Knowing languages is not a bonus on our curriculum vitae, but a need.

The approach of this educational programme, which uses English as a vehicular language for the entire consortium, has a deep commitment to maximising language learning by doctors to facilitate their integration into the labour market.

Moreover, the decision to create an educational programme based on online learning is related to doctors' needs to learn to more easily and fluidly in the digital environment, as the employer companies in emerging fields require.

5) Attitude towards the job search

Attitude is the most important internal issue we should work on when looking for a job, as we convey our attitudes through our words, our actions and our decisions.

This programme encompasses all competences from a perspective of emotional intelligence and management of personal and interpersonal skills, as they are *conditio sine qua non* for excellent professional performance. It is about expressing our interest in a specific company or specific job and has nothing to do with whether or not we have experience. It is related to how we face and cope with the circumstances we must undergo in the job market.

In summary, employability is a series of skills, attitudes, opportunities and talent. A short way to define employability is to manage to reveal and maximise our talent to obtain opportunities. And this has been the educational focus for presenting the contents for the OUTDOC project.

4 - 2D animation videos

The information contained in this guide related to defining the 10 competences worked on in the OUTDOC project is complemented by the creation of 10 short 2D animation videos by way of introducing each of the competences.

Our intention in producing these short video capsules is to create an interest among participants – in a friendly and approachable way – for defining each of the competences they will work on in these training contents. These videos will be the first educational resource that students come across when logging onto the training platform.

To this end, we created a 2D animation character named ‘Key’, a amusing recent graduate doctor who will give them the ‘key’ to accessing each competence, and will accompany participants on the course until they attain the 10 badges, which means acquiring all of the competences that are included in the programme.

When we came up with the idea of badges, we based them on the class game *Trivial Pursuit*, where players need to answer questions right to get ‘cheese wedges’ and only the person who gets all the pieces can consider their learning as complete.

This small detail lets us provide a foundation for gamifying the project, which tutors and mentors in the programme will be able to employ for monitoring students’ progress.