Report N. 1 of the External Evaluator on the New Deal Project
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Introduction

Work package 2.2 "Quality assurance" aims at ascertaining the quality of the work performed in the project. In particular, the objective is to ensure the quality of the final product of the project, the NEW DEAL platform and to evaluate its relevance in terms of impacts with respect to its usefulness and its capacity to respond the new employees' need and to be effectively used by the enterprise.

Approach

According to the application form of New Deal project, this quality plan will be based on the mixing of three kinds of approaches to the evaluation: a positivist approach, a pragmatic approach and a constructive one.

The first approach will evaluate the project against its objective; the second one will take as references standards of quality, while the third one will focus on the process of implementation and the role and perception of the partners within the project.

In the first case, the task of the evaluation activities will be to measure whether the objectives are met; the objectives are the element against which a comparison is performed with the results. The project is considered as a desired change, the evaluation will tend to verify if these change has occurred.

In the second case, the evaluation will use judge the project on the base of an idea of value, which can be shared by the partners within the project in accordance with the value ideas of the external evaluator.

The constructive approach will give particular attention to the idea of the eventual changes due to the implementation of the project within a specific context and to the specific contribution through a participatory approach of the stakeholders, beneficiaries and partners.

Evaluation methodology

In general terms, the external evaluation will be articulated into three main phases: ex ante, in itinere and ex post evaluation; it will be applied at crucial moments or milestones of the project; that's at least 3 times along the duration of the project (initial, intermediate and final evaluation). Therefore an internal permanent auditing is necessary for day-to-day monitoring, avoiding that the monitoring activities generate reams, useless data and frustration. The monitoring within the evaluation activities will me more similar to the coaching than a directive inspection.

Actually, a special attention must be paid to the "kaizen" (or continual improvement) cycle, that is embedded to the experimental methodology of any Project (PDCA: Plan, Do, Check, Act).

The first step will be the elaboration of a breakdown of the project in order to single out the crucial passage of the project towards the creation of the platform.

Coherently, the following activities will be object of a qualitative evaluation:
- Survey and analysis of good practices;
- Definition of the learning process in the workplace
- Development of the platform of management of professional development
- Testing and fine tuning of the platform.

The evaluation of this activities will be based on the methodologies of the "auditing" proposed in:
- the Norms ISO 9001, about the quality of the organization (Applicant, Project Management, Team organizational behavior and approach): the degree of "conformity" of the organization to the requirements of a good research setting, a clear sharing responsibility, a rapid circulation of the information, a collegial decision of the program and objective evidences.
- The Guidelines of Corporate Social Responsibility and ethic certification, taking into account the great ethic and social impact of the project directed to new young employees who deserve a very respectful behavior in all the actions we do. The social commitment of all the players must be clearly visible.

- The Networking quality assessment, to establish how and with which degree applicant, partners, local authorities, enterprises etc. are connected with reciprocal trust, cooperation and "win-win" approach (as proposed by the "Game Theory").

The grids and tools already designed by Kairos[1] for the evaluation process implies all the "monitoring" techniques on "how we can do our share to ensure the quality of all the steps of the experimental research": a reliable monitoring system is important for a fine-tuned evolution of the Project. Its outcomes are effective if the target groups need Project outputs and services, utilize them on the field and thereby change their situation in the desired or expected direction.

Moreover, a global evaluation will be made through a careful and compared analysis about all the elements of the Logical Framework adopted by the applicant (Objectives, Expected Results, and Means for measuring the real effects of the activities, Assumptions for any precautionary condition concerning the successful or unsuccessful achievement of the intended objectives). The evaluation of these aspects follows the "Monitoring" approach of the GOPP METHODOLOGY (Goal Oriented Project Planning) or equivalent technique.

Actually, a special attention must be paid to the "kaizen" (or continual improvement) cycle, that is embedded to the experimental methodology of any Project (PDCA: Plan, Do, Check, Act), and to the "customer satisfaction analysis" or CRM (customer relations' management).

A grid of "questions" for and to the Project Team will be available.

Furthermore, as the application form reports, the external evaluator will support the activity of the customer satisfaction. The external evaluator will support the choice of the measuring system, the selection of the statistical sample, the choice of the methodology of data collection, elaboration of the questionnaire, analysis of results.
The external evaluation ex-ante, in itinere and ex-post will be applied at "crucial moments" or milestones of the Project: that's at least 3 times along the duration of the Project (initial, intermediate and final evaluation), according to the contract with the External Evaluator and its limitations. His duty is to certify the conformities or point out the nonconformities of the draft final Reports of the internal auditing.

Therefore, an internal permanent auditing is necessary for day-to-day monitoring, avoiding that the monitoring activities generate reams, useless data and lot of frustration. Projects which are over-administrated and under-steered, don't come to the expected results: therefore, monitoring must be more similar to a coaching process than a directive inspection.

While the results of the customer satisfaction will represent the perceived quality of the project, specifically of the platform, this quality plan will forecast a parallel evaluation of the provided quality.

The project outputs and, in particular, the platform will be evaluate through **quality criteria** and **quality factors** that will serve as strategic-level input to the process of evaluation of all the elements of the NEW DEAL learning model. The factors, the criteria and the model will be object of a shared process of discussion and decision among partners.

Quality factors that will be applied in the external evaluation process are as follows:

- Transferability
- Sustainability
- Interoperability
- Profitability

The quality factors are broken down into the quality criteria, of which score ranges from 1 (one) to 10 (ten) where:

[1] *Presented by Dr. Andrea Condotta in the meeting of the staff of March 26th. They will be available from the beginning of the Project,*

1 = the NEW DEAL model/product has not achieved at all the criterion scope;

10 = the NEW DEAL model/product has fully achieved the criterion scope.

The following table provides the representation of factors and criteria that will be applied and their description:

Factor	Criteria	Description
Transferability	Innovation	The degree to which NEW DEAL model improves and combine the use of existing knowledge and available data
	Simplicity	The degree to which NEW DEAL model defines and implements its elements in the most non-complex and understandable manner to permit an easy transferability
	Virtuality	The extent to which users can replicate NEW DEAL project using materials available online
	Training	The extent to which NEW DEAL outputs and NEW DEAL web platform can be used without a specific training
	Networking	The ability of NEW DEAL to exchange information with stakeholders, policy makers and training organizations and to mutually use the information that has been exchanged.
Sustainability	Security	The extent to which NEW DEAL web platform and project maintain the privacy of involved stakeholders and beneficiaries
	Equity	The extent to which NEW DEAL platform and project provides equitable opportunities and outcomes for all direct beneficiaries and in particular for whom that have specific needs
	Quality of life	The extent to which NEW DEAL improves the quality of life of the beneficiaries
Interoperability	Standardization	The extent to which NEW DEAL utilizes interface standards for protocols, routines and data representations
	ICT Independence	The degree to which NEW DEAL platform is non-dependent on the software environment (computing system, operating system, utilities, I/O routines, libraries)
	Conciseness	The degree to which NEW DEAL platform implements its functions with a minimal amount of code
	Modularity	The degree to which NEW DEAL model provides highly cohesive modules with optimum coupling
	Simplicity	The degree to which NEW DEAL model defines and implements its functions in the most non-complex and understandable manner in order to permit interoperability with other systems
Profitability	Image	The degree to which NEW DEAL provides a consistent, attractive identity which is understood by all users
	Penetration	The extent to which NEW DEAL is successfully disseminated to its intended user community and potential buyers
	Productivity	The extent to which NEW DEAL demonstrates an improvement of quality or productivity for those who use it
	Affordability	The degree to which potential users can afford to operate through NEW DEAL methodology and tool
	Cost vs. Benefit	The degree to which the benefits of NEW DEAL model out-weigh the costs

2. How to carry out the evaluation methodology

The independence of the evaluation process will be ensured through the same methodology of the "auditing" of so called "third part" in the Norms ISO 9000, through "semi-annual" inspections of "objective evidences" of the processes, according to the rules of the Norms.

It will be carried out not only according to "corrective" actions of the "errors" or nonconformities, but much more according to "preventive" actions to ensure a right track of the Project: the notes in Annex 1 are an exemplary form of the "preventive" actions to be planned.

A "third part" evaluation and audit (UNI EN ISO 19011:2012) doesn't exclude, as already mentioned in the previous paragraph, the two other types of "auditing": audit of "first part" (internal auditing) and audit of "second part"(auditing on the advisers, experts, partners and social players, which are, actually, "providers", for their respective contributions, of services and/or data). The quality of their competencies, cooperative actions and problem solving must be steadily monitored.

Every gap or deviation should be perceived as soon as possible, because "parvus error in initio, fit maior in fine" (said philosophers of epistemology). The evaluators of first part and second part play a decisive role in the quality assurance.

The approach of the External Evaluator must be forcedly limited (taking into account the very short dimension of the contract), to gap analysis of the macro-level of the Logical Framework, considering only the core elements or factors (or indicators) of the Expected Results.

A detailed quality evaluation system must be assigned to the internal auditors, under the survey of the External Evaluator.

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ANNEX N. 1: NOTES AND REMARKS CONCERNING THE APPLICATION FORM OF THE APPLICANT AND QUALITY PLAN THEREIN

a. Application form:

As far as the Application Form of the Projects is concerned, a first survey finds some weaknesses about one of the most important pillars of the Project, that's the considerations and proposals on the "training on the job" methodologies:

1. The description of the "collaboration between training and businesses better responding to labour market needs" is not clearly explained in its practical and operational aspects. The focus is prevailing on the "on line platform" more than on the specific and preliminary operations to be done together with businesses. The creation of a suitable and effective platform must be elaborated firstly within the labour market, more than within the partners' training experiences, because one of the lacks of the "school" is exactly its distance from the labour market evolution and innovative needs or requirements. Actually many employers can't find people with the right entry-level skills to fill their jobs and it is urgent to close the gap, pioneering new approaches to successfully transition from education into employment (what this Project aims to do). Nevertheless, Employers, education providers, and youth live in parallel universes, and Education-to-employment solutions need to scale up. This is not evident enough in the Application Form Text: the portfolio on informatics' platform doesn't seem sufficient (even if necessary and coherent) to be the "solution";

2. The competencies are described (page 21) as non-formal and informal: it is preferable to distinguish the valorization of the "formal and non-formal" educational "contexts" to achieve (better than in formal "contexts") the valorisation of the competencies (no matter if conscious or unconscious);

3. The choice of the "tools" for the investigation of the best practices: the text proposes explicitly "focus group" and "brainstorming". Nevertheless, they seem to be excellent methods, but in "other" contexts (marketing, customer satisfaction, problem solving etc.) not exactly for our educational research concerning training on the job. It is preferable to use GOPP instead of Focus Group and "benchmarking" (open) instead of brainstorming. As far as the professional profiles permanent improvement are concerned, it would be preferable to use the method "Delphi" that is much more scientific and appropriate.

b. Quality plan:

Quality Plan is very detailed and appropriate. I suggest improving it:

a) To introduce also a system for the evaluation and validation of the "potential";

b) To improve the "evaluation grids" adding a Likert scale for all the indicators (at least 3 levels, optimal would be 5);

c) To distinguish "efficiency" from "effectiveness": effectiveness (in the text) is placed within the grid of "efficiency". Actually, effectiveness is not absolutely included in the concept of efficiency (e.g. we can have an organization very "efficient", but not "effective": according to the organizational psychology, effectiveness is often intended as a "dialectic" factor with respect to efficiency). Therefore, I suggest improving the grid and introducing "effectiveness" as autonomous indicator, with a central or core indicator: the "Social impact" of the expected results.

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