ABSTRACT: How often have we let on be carried by the current with the certainty that a source route would be found elsewhere? How often have we believed the currents that attracted us to interesting people, places and activities that we have been in the different times of our lives? How often have we been forced to go to the current since we get what we want? With the “Against Current” project, we intended to stimulate reflection about the different topics contained in this set of questions. In a more concrete way, it was intended to promote the recognition of personal strengths and its contribution to employability. With this aim in mind, three activities have been proposed: (1) “Every Current has its other current” (2) “Currents do not create opportunities, they are created using opportunities”, and (3) “Reconstructing opportunities: revisiting the personal project and the design of a new professional project”. A team of psychologists and a facilitator has been engaged in the preparation of the activities, and they were structured around the theme of the personal project in which they were sought. This vocational intervention project, that has been implemented during an entire morning beginning with two core groups of 30 elements, most of them from Metropolitan Association of Services (AMM), was planned in order to lead participants to (re)construct their vocational project, to guide their work as professionals who work with this specific population in the field of Vocational Guidance Psychological Counseling, in the transformation of their own view of the job search process. It is important to see as an opportunity to clients’ expression of their values, interests and personal skills in a meaningful and personally constructed project. This is the way to make their professional project more differentiates and, simultaneously, more valued (workers who can see more clearly the special qualities of a candidate as a potential interesting employee for the organization) and self-motivating to themselves (they can find in it a strong motivation for continual review and update their project as the internal dimensions in which their project is grounded change with life experiences). In line with this last conception, the “Against Current” project – which resulted from a collaboration of the Service of Vocational Guidance Psychological Counseling from Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences (University of Porto) with “Cidade das Profissões” (Center of Information and Counseling) – was conceived to optimize the vocational competences of low qualified unemployed people, in order to promote the quality of their actual and future work transitions.

INTRODUCTION: Approaching unemployment, as a structural problem in contemporary society, is not an recent trend in social sciences. In spite of it, this still prevails research and intervention paradigms, which are limited to the “intervention” orientation and/or to primary instrumental intervention of unemployed people. The opportunity for the elaboration of a model (Gahoda, 1982) which postulates that work can fulfill both latent and manifest psychological needs, it is the assurance of a legal and institutional conditions (e.g. upgrading qualification level, training employability skills and/or recycling technical skills), it is not enough when providing the support and care to unemployed people faced with the long challenge faced by professionals who work with this specific population in the field of Vocational Guidance Psychological Counseling, in the transformation of their own view of the job search process. It is important to see as an opportunity to clients’ expression of their values, interests and personal skills in a meaningful and personally constructed project. This is the way to make their professional project more differentiates and, simultaneously, more valued (workers who can see more clearly the special qualities of a candidate as a potential interesting employee for the organization) and self-motivating to themselves (they can find in it a strong motivation for continual review and update their project as the internal dimensions in which their project is grounded change with life experiences). In line with this last conception, the “Against Current” project – which resulted from a collaboration of the Service of Vocational Guidance Psychological Counseling from Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences (University of Porto) with “Cidade das Profissões” (Center of Information and Counseling) – was conceived to optimize the vocational competences of low qualified unemployed people, in order to promote the quality of their actual and future work transitions.

PROJECTS AIMS

1. TO PROMOTE PARTICIPANT’S AWARENESS ABOUT THEIR SURPLUS PERSONAL VALUE AND
2. TO UNDERSTAND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO THEIR EMPLOYABILITY STATUS BY HELPING THEM
3. TO INTENTIONALLY USE THIS EMERGENT SELF-KNOWLEDGE IN THE DESIGN OF A MEANINGFUL PROFESSIONAL PROJECT AND/OR EMPLOYMENT SEARCH PLAN

PARTICIPANTS: 32 SUBJECTS, MOST OF THEM...

... COMING FROM METROPOLITAN ASSOCIATION OF SERVICES
... ADULTS (FROM 35 TO 51 YEARS OLD)
... LOW-SKILLED
... LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYED
IN-TRAINING

INFORMATION INTERACTION

Psychologists established an informal dialogue with participants adopting a facilitative attitude which was expected to highlight participants affiliation and increase their motivation, involvement and effective participation in the intervention project.

INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY: HOW MANY PRECIOUS ARE NEEDED TO CONSTRUCT A CANON TO PROVIDE SELECTION IMPORTANCE OF LIFE/PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES

STRATEGY

PROJECTS EVALUATION: At the end of the intervention, the participants were asked to give their opinions about different dimensions of the intervention. Most of the participants reported special satisfaction with the facilitation involved. Among the several dimensions provided by the participants, the most valued was the opportunity to think about the personal project that they had been trained to help them in the definition of professional projects. The opportunity of deepening their self-knowledge, through interaction around vocational values, generative and transferable skills and personal interests consisted in the finding that they could think about the different and multiple dimensions of their personal and professional formation, life situation and personal needs as important. After all, finding a new job — say job — was their priority. In some way, we can find here the expression of social unemployment narratives primary. Actually, unemployment is likely to forget what could be main factor of their differentiation and inclusion in the labor market — in exemplifying the unique experiences and skills they’ve acquired through life in the construction of a personalized, yet flexible, professional and life projects. The project led them to this great insight! That they must see themselves as having qualities that could be appreciated by employers if those qualities are also valued by themselves in the search of a place in the work world.

MOMENT I: SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES TO EXPLORE EXPECTATIONS TO INTRODUCE THE PROJECT

METHODOLOGY

MOMENT II: SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES TO IDENTIFY PRIORITIZED VOCATIONAL VALUES TO PROVE SELECT VALUE IMPORTANCE LIFE/PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES

MOMENT III: SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES TO EXPLORE VALUABLE INTERESTS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROFILES TO PROMOTE THE IDENTIFICATION OF DISCREET PERSONAL SKILLS

SMALL GROUP ACTIVITY: “INVENTING EVENTS”

The members of each group were asked to discuss and agree about an event that would be planned to organize as a team. After deciding the kind of event to plan and the organizational purposes, they were instructed in individually define in which of the different event areas (e.g., logistics, catering, recreation, publicity, finances, decoration...) they want to take personal responsibility. Each participant should think about the activities to tackle and feel more able to accomplish with success and propose to the group higher possible contributions. When the final version of the planned event was achieved, participants were asked to make a list of the tasks associated to the specific areas of competences that must be performed by each of them. During all the process, the psychologists/facilitators registered, by means of observation grid, the individual behaviors in order to produce, at the end of the activity, specific feedback about participants’ participation and interpersonal skills (e.g., leadership, critical thinking, self-appraisal, perseverance...). Participants also fulfilled a work sheet about the interests, skills and values that they have acknowledged from their involvement in this activity.

MOMENT IV: SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES TO EXPLORE MEANINGFUL EMPLOYMENT ALTERNATIVES USING SELF-PREFERENCE AS CRITERIA AND ENVIRONMENT AS STIMULUS

INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY: “OPPORTUNITY CASCADE”

Using the metaphor of a water cascade, participants were invited to examine the selection of employment of different journals and to collect the elements that were more attractive to them. After that, they were asked to arrange sequentially the selected employment elements by putting them in different lines according to the respective level of preference. It was explained that, as in a waterfall, “preferences essential to the cascade” must be seen as flowing steadily downwards, i.e., decreasing one step at a time. When the cascade was completed participants were instructed to remember the results of the previous activity and to analyze what interests, skills and values were listed present in the chosen elements. Finally, participants must give meaning to the observed inconsistencies and reach their own conclusions about how to profit from what they learn about themselves in the process of work-market (re)integration.