



Pro bono activity in higher education with a project-oriented approach

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Abstract: Volunteering and mutual assistance are becoming increasingly important in today's fast-changing world. The growing social, income and knowledge gaps between different social classes are creating huge gaps. This is true at the social level, but also at the organisational level. Recognising problems and wanting to help are powerful values and skills that need to be recognised. In this paper we would like to present the main steps and stages of a pilot programme implemented at the Keleti Károly Faculty of Business and Management of Óbuda University, with a project-oriented approach, pointing out the constraints and the potential opportunities of the programme. This paper presents the partial results of a six-country (Spain, Portugal, Bulgaria, France, Hungary) Erasmus+ project named "Boosting Employability and Empowering Social Engagement in High Education through Pro Bono". Building on the experience of the programme, we would also like to present the future of the programme as a subject in higher education curricula. In this paper, we will present the results of the three pilot projects carried out over three years, along the lines described above, and highlight the importance of volunteering.

Keywords: volunteering, pro bono, CSR, project approach

1 Introduction

Volunteering and its importance is one of the most important core values of our time. Seeing problems, helping people in today's fast-paced world is very important. Different generations have different approaches to volunteering. According to the basic concept of generational marketing, each generation can be differentiated according to the common values that are specific to it. (Töröcsik, 2003). In this paper, we present the results of an international Erasmus+ project, "Boosting Employability and Empowering Social Engagement in High Education through Pro



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Bono", which was carried out in six countries (Spain, Portugal, Bulgaria, France, Hungary), along the project approach. The project involved young Generation Z students. Generation Z is also known as the "new-conservatives", the "Facebook generation", the digital natives, the "instant online" generation, the net generation, the iGeneration. Because of the former, they are often referred to as Generation C, named after the English word connection, or D, which refers to the word digital, but also R, which comes from the English word responsibility (Tari, 2010). They are the world's first global generation, growing up in the same culture, sharing the same food, fashion and places. Globalism is also part of their linguistic toolbox: modern technologies, IT and the online world have come of age with them and become part of their identity (Törőcsik, 2017). This also has an impact on their communication: they are at home in the online world, but face-to-face contact and social communication often confuses them (Tari, 2011). Another important characteristic of this generation is the search for experiences, which permeates their everyday life, determining their choice of sports and leisure activities, their cultural and consumption habits, and not least their learning and choice of jobs (Csehné 2017; Pink, 2010).

Another dimension of the research, beyond generational specificities, is pro bono, a specific volunteering activity based on professional knowledge transfer. It consists of young university students supporting non-profit organisations in the form of voluntary work on specific professional issues and projects under the guidance of company professionals. This has a number of benefits for both the universities and the companies that employ them, in addition to the non-profit organisations that receive support. It is beneficial for the employer because pro bono can fit well into the employer branding strategy: it gives employees the opportunity to work with other organisations, expanding and updating their knowledge and practical skills, while creating social value. This can take employees out of their daily routine and give them a sense of achievement in a noble cause that fits in with the corporate culture. This increases employee satisfaction, loyalty and motivation. As the programme is based on teamwork, it is also an excellent tool to develop teamwork and project spirit.

And for corporate HR, Pro Bono is also an excellent way to recruit and find prospective employees and talents: they can assess the professional competences and social skills of participating student volunteers in a live project. Such a process of recruitment has a much smaller margin for error than traditional methods (tests, interviews). In the current workforce context, characterised by an increasing demand for labour across Europe, HR needs all the tools it can get to help find and retain the right people (Kópházi, 2007; Lazányi 2014).

ProBono also brings adequate benefits for university actors. Universities can use the programme to strengthen the practical orientation of their training, expand their contacts with companies and use such events to sensitise teaching staff towards volunteering.



During our programme, young students visited NGOs and transferred their economic knowledge to people who did not have the necessary skills to run their organisations and who did not have the money to improve their knowledge. The students mentored multinational companies and helped deserving NGOs, while ensuring the right professionalism. In this paper, we will share the characteristics and experiences of the three pilog projects implemented during the programme.

2 Pilot programmes implemented under the project

2.1 Characteristics of the first, long-term pilot programme

The first pilot programme under the programme was implemented in Hungary by the University of Óbuda in cooperation with the Volunteer Centre Foundation. During the preparation of the programme, the main concern was to ensure that the work could be fully integrated into the semester timetable of the students. In this pilot programme, a short description of the areas of knowledge to be transferred by the students was prepared. It was also here that the NGOs and the mentors and business experts were selected. An important aspect of the programme was to increase the social awareness and motivation of the students, so they had to have a clear vision of the framework of the programme. In addition to the university, the foundation involved in the programme has many years of experience and a wide network of contacts, which was a great advantage in this pilot programme. The NGOs selected for the programme were those that were looking for and in need of the knowledge that our students could offer them. It could be seen that the NGOs were mostly looking for the information needed to prepare and implement their strategic ideas and were also open to the information needed to select the right target markets.

2.2 Characteristics of the second, short-term programme

The second pilot programme was a short-term project. The conclusions of the first pilot programme were taken into account. We made the preparation process shorter and much more structured, and we were much stricter about deadlines. We have tried to incorporate all lessons learned into the subsequent programmes. During the preparation process, the main aim was to continue to fit the pilot programme into the semester timetable of the students and to adapt the programme to the subjects the students were studying. We then prepared a brief description of the knowledge we could offer to the NGOs. It was also at this stage that the mentors were selected and the students were introduced to the main steps of the Pro Bono programme. A high percentage of NGOs were looking for marketing communication solutions and asked for help in developing their online platforms.



2.3 Characteristics of the third, medium-term programme

The third pilot programme was medium-term. It took into account the experience of the first and second pilot programmes. We made the preparation process shorter and much more structured and we were even stricter about deadlines. Unfortunately, this phase of the programme was interrupted by the pandemic. All work had to be transferred to online platforms, using online communication tools. This is where the first meetings with NGOs took place. The main aim of the first meetings was to gather the necessary information and to start developing solutions to their problems. The first meeting was followed by a series of online meetings to discuss issues related to the key problems faced by NGOs. The problems of the CSOs involved were very complex and multifaceted. The issues ranged from communication to day-to-day economic issues. In many cases, lack of funds was the main problem, so the students also developed fundraising campaign plans to increase their resources.

2.4 The tasks and tasks of the pilot programmes

The main tasks of the University in the three project phases can be summarised along the following lines:

- recruiting motivated students,
- finding targeted volunteering activities (skills) for the selected NGOs that we can help,
- support the coordination of the whole project from the university side,
- offering appropriate infrastructure facilities
- supporting students throughout the project (providing them with information, knowledge),
- an active partnership between the company, the NGO, the egetem and the ÖKA.

The diagnosis based on the pilot programme was very important for the study part in several respects:

- understanding the main characteristics of the pro bono programme: objectives, tasks, framework,
- the realisation that young people are open to doing something for society and that a well-targeted communication and programme can increase their social awareness,
- we could recognise that there are many NGOs in Hungary who are looking for the knowledge and professional support that we can offer them,
- the diagnoses provided a great opportunity to get to know better the partners of the pro bono programme.
- to increase the analytical skills of the students,
- to broaden our corporate contacts and our practice-oriented educational activities.



The lessons learned from the pilot programme are summarised below:

- recruitment of students and NGOs should start a little earlier,
- ask for more written feedback from students from the very first step,
- the time frame and the
- time limits should be much stricter.

3 SUMMARY

The activity carried out under the programme can clearly be described as unique and innovative, with the challenges and new situations that it entails. The programme has brought many lessons for all parties. It was particularly interesting to see the differences between the national sections of these activities, the process of implementation and the difficulties encountered. These jointly implemented programmes, but run in different contexts, have provided a number of lessons on which to build an even stronger and more effective guidance campaign in the future. A particular benefit of the programme was that the students remained motivated throughout. They gained skills that cannot be taught in the classroom. Increasing our social awareness and the desire to help are human values in today's fast-paced world that should be emphasised and retained. In view of the positive impressions of the programme, we would certainly like to continue it in the future, launching separate courses to promote voluntary work, for which there is an increasing demand today, not only from NGOs but also from society as a whole.

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