MINDSET: THE KEY TO CHANGE

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ABSTRACT

Synergy Bulgaria organised a Study Visit as an activity for the ReACT project in June, 2019. The aim was to share knowledge, experience and methodology that we use in our daily work, to present the best case practices and last but not least - to strengthen the connection between the organisations. To achieve all that we built a program that included tools from coaching, personal development, gamification, impro theatre and body movement. Participants had the chance to experience new activities and to bring all of it back home to use in their everyday work.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to present the main tools and methods used during the Study Visit. They are all focused on the target group of the project — people working with long term unemployed adults.

Working with long term unemployed adults many times sums up to teaching new skills or providing qualifications. There are many institutions that are there to support people in having free courses and trainings. The end result mostly is some new skills on a basic level. What we believe though is that skills-trainings are ineffective without working on people's mindset. That is exactly the reason why the whole Visit went under the question "What is the change that needs to happen?"

Using an open discussion at the very beginning of day one we set up a common ground stating that skills-trainings are ineffective without working on the mindset of people. We look at it as the way people think about an ability and/or talent. Being without a job for a long term (which is considered to be more than 27 weeks) can make it difficult to overcome the impact this has on the individual's self-esteem, confidence, motivation, well-being and might cause doubt in personal qualifications. When it comes to this attitude towards the self - level and amount of skills makes no difference anymore.

Ultimately the mindset influences everything, from creative risk-taking to how you view feedback to whether or not you finalize difficult tasks. It is actually one of the greatest factors in determining whether or not one grows and improves their abilities

Having the right mindset is the key to overcoming eventual damage from the unemployment but working on that is not an automatic process.
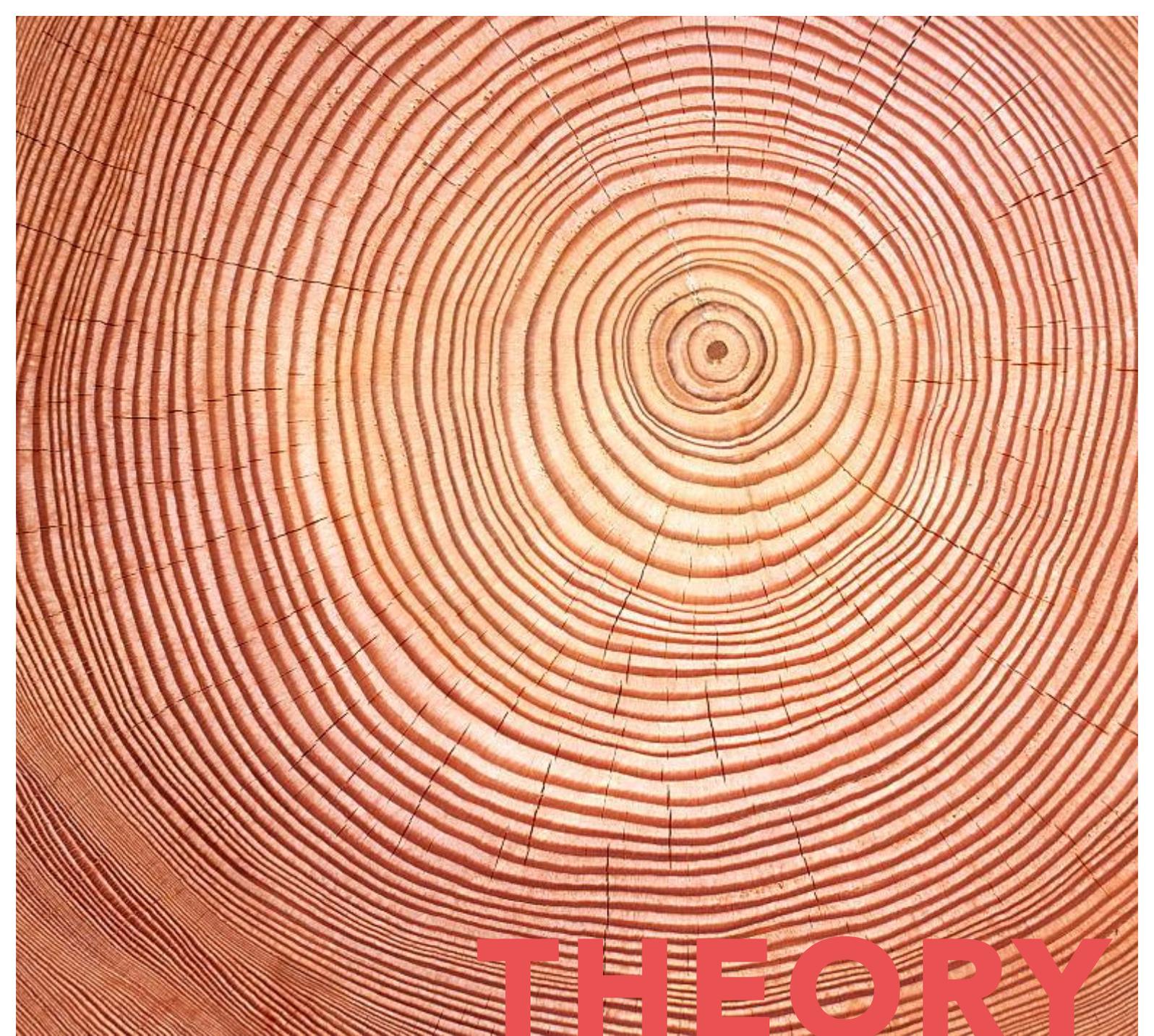
THEORY

MINDSET
4 COMMUNICATION STYLES
GAMIFICATION
IMPROV THEATRE

FIXED – GROWTH MINDSET

During the activity we focused on the types of mindset - Fixed and Growth. The Fixed mindset suggests that the abilities are innate and unchangeable whereas the Growth Mindset views it as something you can improve through practice. In the fixed mindset failure is being viewed as permanent but with a growth mindset it is seen as a chance to learn.

People with a fixed mindset are more likely to view negative feedback as a personal attack while the others will see it as a chance to improve and develop a new system. With a fixed mindset you are more likely to go for easier tasks and invest minimal effort. After all - if talent is a fixed thing why bother working on it and improving? Not only but if one does not have it then a fixed mindset will never allow him/her to work for it. On the other side, with the growth mindset one is more likely to embrace the challenge and work hard on improving.

Fig.1 - source: https://twitter.com/fpleditor/status/1169555175348035584

The ones with a fixed mindset are more likely to give up when an obstacle appears. Meanwhile people with a growth mindset will see the same obstacle as a chance to experiment.

When it comes to results in the fixed mindset the focus is on measurable accomplishments but with the growth one the focus is more on a journey of continual improvement.

When it comes to working with people our main focus has always been on building a connection. Here in use comes the concept of the outward mindset.

OUTWARD MINDSET

The very first step is to see other people as people. As strange as this might sound, and especially in the context of working with long-term unemployed people, it is a changemaker to be interested in the person or the group of people not just because it is part of the job but to make them, their needs and goals important. Once getting to this Outward mindset people tend to go about our lives and work activities in ways that are more naturally helpful to other people. In an opposite experience we are not even curious about the needs and the objectives of others. In these moments other people aren't really people to us. They are more like objects. When we dont see others' needs and objectives, everything we do tends to be about us, self focused. Even though we might be well intentioned but we just don't see our impact on others when we are inward because we are not taking others into account. The difference in our experience with our people moment by moment depends on our mindset. When looking outward and seeing other people we have what is called an outward mindset. Having in mind the target group of this project - people who work with long-term unemployed adults, we believe that having an outward mindset is the key to successfully supporting people. Having the outward mindset is a good approach towards working with long-term unemployed people. What comes next is a few steps that we believe can add to the mindset and the intention to help upport th

HOW TO IMPLEMENT THIS?

The very first step is to **get out of the box**. This one is a process on its own and the first thing to get you there is to notice the indications of the box. What we mean by that is **to be able to disregard all your judgements towards the person in front of you** (such as that he/she is not good/qualified/young/old enough) **and see things as they are and do things that you believe are right**. Of course this does not mean to get rid of your judgements because that is not possible. What it means is to be aware that those judgements are simply your thoughts, something you made up in your head. A good example is for parents - in the desire to give all the best possible we never get into the box when thinking or doing something for our kids. Think of someone who immediately gets your thinking and behaviour out of the box. In this way you will experience the feeling that this brings.

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Learning about the other person's current situation, past experience, needs and desires for the future is what is needed for one to guide this person into achieving what he wants and finding a new job (in our scenario). Instead of acting from obligation when it's simply following steps of a procedure, for **building a real connection** with the person (a.k.a step two) we need to take into account the specifics of what we are working with. Following the flow of the graph above, **listening and learning** is the next step and all it takes is to be fully open for the person.

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Very often we hear what people say but we don't listen to it. It's very easy to slip into the box and start putting labels on what comes from the other side such as *something they are doing is stupid, what they want is not possible, the experience they have is not enough for the job that they want and that it's not going to work*. If you are really listening to the person you work with you will start learning about the life of the person and what is really important for him/her.

Figure 1 is a scheme we made as a result of the Study Visit. It visualises our method.

Group of people

Individual

Common/mutual values

Community

Meetings

Reinforcing ritual

Building relationship with the person

Listen and learn

Teach

Correct

Relationship/Connection with people that matter to you

Being out of the box
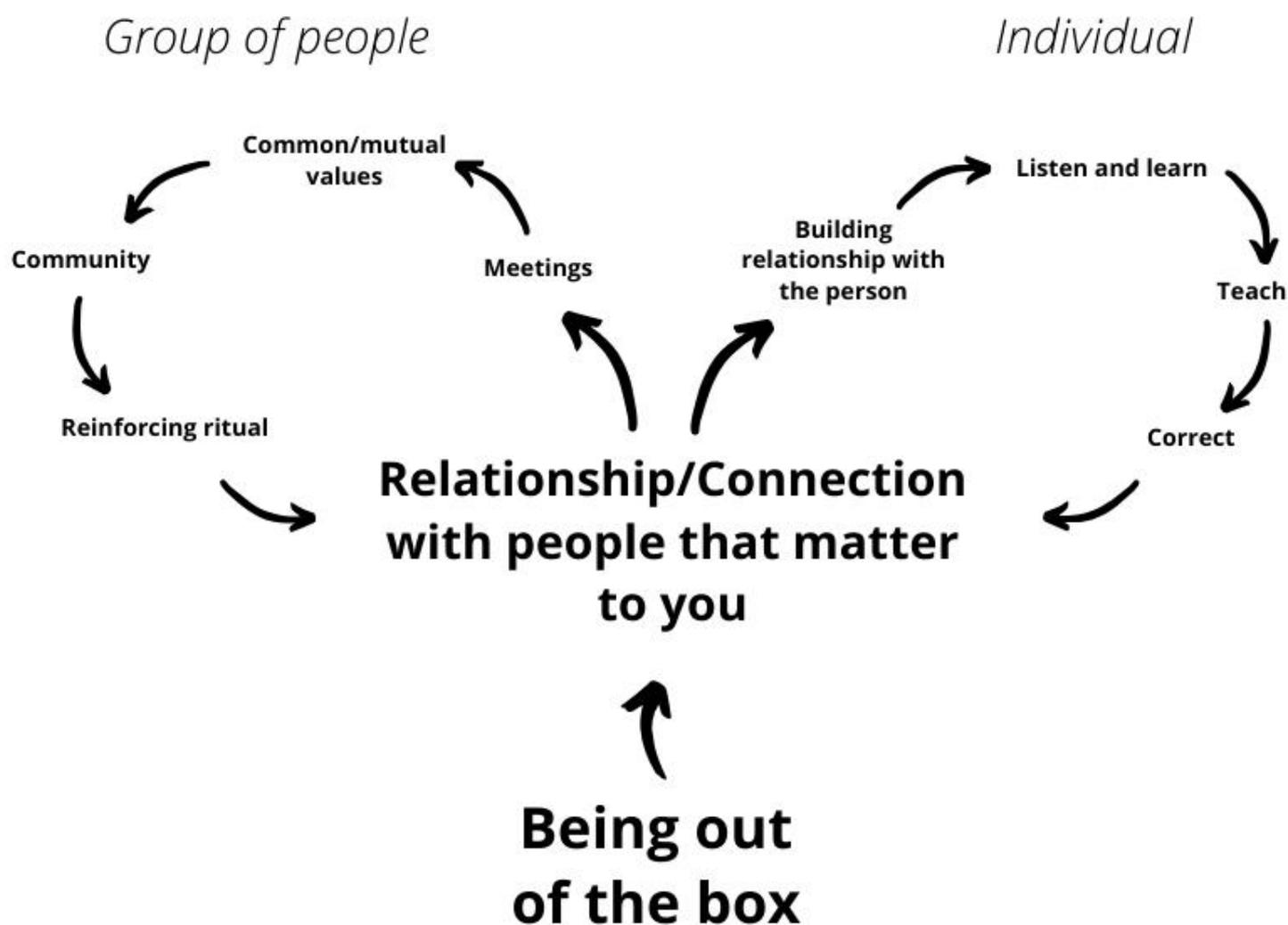
After you already are familiar with the needs of the other person you can proceed with teaching. Key point here is communication. What we mean by teaching is to give value - new skills, something he/she wants to learn and that is relevant for this person in the current situation. You don't judge on what is being done wrong but supporting things to go right (*example: "You are doing this wrong." vs. "Let me show you how to do this more efficiently/faster/in an easier way."*).

Teaching something relevant means not something that is relevant for you or what you think is needed but something that is valuable and needed from the person you work with. This is why listening and learning is very important.

> As you might already see it's a parallel process - every step is a continuation of the previous ones.

Only after you've already been through the steps above you reach a point where you can go for **correcting** if needed. You can share with the person that something he/she is doing is maybe not the best thing to be done, maybe it leads to a not-desired result and to show this person how he/she can correct it. It's the very last step and it works only if everything else before that is taken care of.

In case you get a negative reaction when you go for correction and the person gets annoyed, angry, he/she disconnects - it means there is a problem in the previous step. When you are not able to teach and the person does not accept the value you want to give and doesn't want to communicate with you - then there is a problem in the previous step. It means you didn't listen and learn, you didn't get how to get to the person and what verbal and body language would influence him/her. Going back to listening and learning might be that the person does not want to share the information that is needed with you. This means that the steps towards building the connection are not made.

In a situation where all this does not work there is a question you could ask yourself

∴ What is your judgement?

∴ What is the box you put yourself into?

∴ Which is the box that stops you from seeing the real person in front of you?

∴ Which one stops you from being real with this person?

While being in the box mostly we are in a role, playing a game. We put labels on people because it supports an image of ourselves that we have created and want to keep no matter what.

For this method to work at least 80 percent of focus must be spent on helping things go to the right direction (communicating, connecting, caring, listening, learning, teaching, giving a good example). Only maximum 20 percent of the energy and attention should be given to correcting. People are willing to change only if they really want to and have a good reason for it - living in a better environment, having a better career, etc.

How to present the theory with practice?

In order to practically work on the topic of mindset, getting out of the box, communication etc. during the Study Visit we organized multiple workshops including communication skills, gamification and improv theater.

FOUR COMMUNICATION STYLES

One of the first topic presented were the four communication styles. First thing to clarify is that these are ways people express themselves. They are not personality types but styles of communication/expression (both verbally and nonverbally). Also it is highly likely that someone's style is an intersection between one or more defined communication styles.

The FOUR COMMUNICATION Styles

Controller
- result oriented
- competitive
- takes charge

Analyzer
- organized
- likes facts&logic
- likes instructions

Promoter
- uniqueness
- dynamic
- creativity

Supporter
- prefers teamwork
- builds relationships
- avoids conflicts

formal

informal

dominant

passive

Starting with the matrix we show that there are dominant, passive, formal and informal styles.

CONTROLLER

People with the controller style (dominant, formal) are mostly active, independent and ambitious. They radiate confidence, take initiative and love to organize things. Usually they naturally take the lead. The ease and quick manner in the way they usually take decisions makes them look efficient, but also might create a feeling in other people of not being able to keep up with them. As a consequence of a strong task orientation it can be difficult for them to show their emotional side. Because they prefer order and organization they are able to easily create order in chaos. They like to have the lead and they do become resistant when others are leading them.

In their professional life they like a challenge with speed and getting bored if the pace is too slow. Their need for personal success can limit their ability to work together with others. They usually set goals and work to achieve them step by step. Others accept their authority and leadership easily because they guide and help to transform everybody's effort into concrete results.

Keyword for this style is result. Their movements are sharp, using direct eye contact and strong tonality. Language is sharp, to the point, no small talk. The effective way to communicate to people with the controller style is to bring up results, summarize facts, and be specific. Avoid starting a conflict, telling them what to do and being late or wasting their time.

ANALYZER

Another formal style is the analyzer but this time it's a passive one. People with this style are inclined to focus on gathering data. They aim more at ideas and concepts than relationships and feelings. Above immediate action they prefer to

study and consider very carefully. They often wait until others address them instead of coming in front with their own opinion. Usually they need a lot of facts and opinions before making a decision. Very often a sense of incompleteness might be sensed, because they are busy with collecting information even after they have come to a decision.

People communicating in this style are inclined to be formal even in personal relationships and because of that they are often considered as distant.

In their work they usually take the task in an ordered and systematic manner. Aimed at details and thorough as they are, they like it when business is rational and well organized. When being confronted with a disorganized environment they can be tense and even get paralyzed.

Keyword for this style is information. Body expressions are restricted, at a slow pace and the voice is monotonic. Language goes from general to specific, everything in chronological order. Communication with them should also go that way. Don't be general or imply that they do not understand.

SUPPORTER

The second passive style is the supporter and it is an informal one. Others often see people who are communicating with this style as easy and nice. They are more focused with feelings and relationships rather than logic or tasks. It's very rare to get in a fight with a supporter. Although they react well to people, in social situations they leave the initiative with others. They find it hard to refuse a request, because they want to be helpful, even if it goes against their own interest. Usually they don't have the need to impress others or to go into competitions or even to convince someone that they are right. They appear to have little interest in planning and setting goals and usually need structure and a specific description of what has to be done. They will do everything in order to succeed when doing an assignment, because they want to serve others.

In a working context they are aimed at working together and to serve others or the company. They work according to the rules in order to avoid that there will be misunderstandings between people and that is why they accept leadership easily. Supporters are loyal employees when there is an emotional connection. If they think that their idea will benefit others, then they will bring out that idea in a non-threatening manner.

Keyword for the style is cooperation. Movements are relaxed, moderated and the voice is soft. Language is high on emotions and compliments. For communication with them it is important to use a soft voice, to provide details and specific goals, no pressure over time limits. Avoid being harsh or criticising them in public.

PROMOTER

The promoter style is dominant and informal. In general people with this style love inspiring and exciting activities. Because detailed analysing doesn't go that well with them they easily generalize on grounds of having too little information. In communication they tend to exaggerate. Somewhat prone to drama they can be loud about certain things in a way to convince others. Their enthusiasm can come across as unbalanced or egocentric. They don't hide their feelings and like to help in interpersonal situations. People with this style usually don't care about details and go without even completing their task to the next one. They draw conclusions impulsively.

In their job they want to be liked by others. They attach themselves to leaders (who they admire and want recognition from). Approval and support motivates them the most. Usually they are loved persons to work with. Their imagination and enthusiasm can be a great source of motivation. Because they don't want to stand still at a task, they take pleasure with less quality just to keep going. Promoters work best in an environment which offers them some structure through planning and process, which aren't natural points of attention.

Keyword for the promoter style is unique. Body language is expressive with lots of movements. Language is loud, at a fast pace, with high tonality. Using humor and enthusiasm is always good to do when communicating with people from that style. Additional thing is giving them public acknowledgement. Spare the negative feedback (especially in public).

The description of the communication styles is only briefly presented since very detailed information can easily be found online.

GAMIFICATION

Gamification is the application of game elements into non-game problems such as business and social impact environments. The goal of gamification is to engage with others and the environment, to inspire collaboration and interaction. It takes elements from game-design and the general principles and theories which drive gameplay and applies them to a certain context.

Gamification is ordinarily (as we did as well) to solve problems and to motivate people to achieve their goals. Knowing the user and identifying the mission are key to getting gamification right. Because gamification is a very engaging learning strategy, we choose a specialist to present the concept and work around it on the topic of the ReACT project.

After explaining some theory on the topic, our facilitator created a space for many different playgrounds to be created.

IMPROVISATIONAL THEATRE

Improvisational theatre (improvisation or improv) is a form of live theatre in which the plot, characters, dialogues, scene or story are made up in the moment. Ideas might be taken from the audience or from another source of inspiration (just like in our case we already had the topic of the project). It can be spontaneous, entertaining, easy and fun but it is a powerful tool to fully experience and see a situation on both the inside and outside of it. There is a practice called applied improvisation which is used in classrooms as an educational tool and in business as a way to develop communication skills, creative problem solving and supportive team-work abilities.

PRACTICE BIT

4 COMMUNICATION STYLES

GAMIFICATION

IMPROV THEATRE

FOUR COMMUNICATION STYLES

With this group activity on the 4 communication styles you can easily demonstrate how different people communicate with different styles.

1.   Position the matrix with the communication styles in the room: divide the space in four, name which wall/side represents which style and put (imaginary) lines on the floor.

2.   Ask people to position themselves in the room in a way which represents their communication style. Do not forget to mention that positioning on the intersection of styles is possible.

3.   Ask a few people (or everyone – depending on the size of the group and the time available): Why did you position yourself at that place? Use questions to get more detailed information on how one recognizes his/her style.

4.   Choose 4 people (one representative of each communication style) to tell a story in front of the whole group for 3-5 minutes (you can suggest topics as „My last holiday", „My favourite movie" or let the participant choose the topic).

5.   After every story, open a discussion about which communication style did the person use, how did people recognize it and what were the strongest hints.

GAMIFICATION

For this activity many materials were provided. The list can go on and not be limited to: plastic bottles, colourful straws and balls, balloons, strings and ropes, blindfolds, colourful papers and cardboard, markers etc. Participants are being divided into teams and have the assignment to create a game where one person (or more) is in the position of the learner (representing the long-term unemployed in the context of the project) and another person is in the position of the coach/mentor/etc. The first needs to be guided through an obstacle. Each group has to come up with a game, rules and using the materials they create a "playground". After the time for preparation is up each group has a turn to present their game. First thing a group does is to explain the rules to everyone. After that a demo is being held which leads to debriefing questions. As a facilitator you ask questions such as What worked well?, What did not work?, What was the strategy? (if there was any). How did you feel? (asking both of the people), What could work better?. Depending on the group size you can set a limited time for the debriefing and as well provide the opportunity for a second try of the game. Debriefing after a second go might compare the difference between the tries and what was different at the approach and result.

IMPROVISATIONAL THEATRE

All the people are divided into working groups. The size of the groups depends on the amount of people but equal distribution is preferred. Then each group is given 20 minutes to decide on a problem that they want to present through their performance and how they are going to do it. The goal is that after the problem is presented the whole group creates a discussion on what is everyone's experience with it and what might be a solution for it. The facilitator walks around and supports the working groups in case there are questions. After the first 5 minutes are over and the problem is clear for each group (in case it's not you can give additional time) its show time. One by one groups are performing their improvisations. After each performance the facilitator asks the rest of the participants to identify the problem that was just presented and how familiar they are with it – have they ever experienced something like it. Last thing to discuss before going to the next performance is what might be a solution and sharing personal experiences on dealing with something similar.

CONCLUSION

Together with the 12 participants of this Study Visit we started from a point where we all concluded what is an important starting point when working with long-term unemployed people - their mindset. FIrst it was crucial to introduce the different types of mindset we focused on and how we can influence others to switch from a non-supportive one to another that can bring up many new opportunities. The second focus of this training was based on practice. The participants took part of different workshops and learnt new techniques on how to create their unique approach towards the people they work with, starting with recognizing their communication style.

At the end of the Study Visit the representatives of all the partners organizations of this project went back to their teams with new knowledge and perspective on working with our common target group - people who work with long-term unemployed adults.

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