

CASE STUDY

The Young Fish:

Working Together and

Communication



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**GOOD
GUIDANCE**
Stories 2.0

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Competence

Develop and deliver career learning programmes.

This involves designing programmes to meet identified needs; delivering sessions and activities; reviewing and evaluating career learning programmes.

- Related skills:
- Adaptability
- Team building
- Affirmation skills
- Persuasion skills
- Empathy
- Flexibility
- Resilience

Abstract/Introduction/Background

The expression working together does not refer solely, to the mere division - either vertical or horizontal - of tasks and actions which are necessary to the attainment of professional objectives or the compliance with certain standards. Working together is primarily a crucial competence which is based on three pillars: (I) communication, (II) trust, and (III) individual development. In this very sense, such elements represent the core of the case study and their importance is described in meticulous detail throughout all the paragraphs of the case study. The latter tells the story of Raquel, Dylan and Eva respectively. A project manager, an employee and a volunteer of Eurocircle Association's Mobility Department. After a brief description of the association itself and of the context in which it operates -Marseille, France - the narration highlights traits of each character's personality in an attempt to show, explicitly and implicitly, some essential skills which allow us to effectively work together (empathy, flexibility, adaptability and resilience among others). In addition, the case study tries to widen the meaning of working together by relating it to IAG public: young people. In this sense it evidences how guidance cannot simply be seen as a series of actions that, as practitioners we carry out for the young people but rather as a process to undertake with them.

The case study further describes Eurocircle's practice in developing career learning programmes as well as the general structure and logic behind what is defined as a "Three steps process"

Key Words

- Guidance
- Team
- Verbal and non-verbal Communication
- Trust
- Individual development

Key Characters

Key characters of the story are Raquel, a project manager, Dylan, an employee, Eva a volunteer and Romain, their client. Although invented, the four of them represent the everyday reality of Eurocircle; their personalities, attitudes, points of view, strengths and weaknesses were shaped and refined thanks to a series of interviews with the actual employees and volunteers of the association.

The Case Study Story

The context: Eurocircle and Marseille

Eurocircle (EC) was founded in Berlin, Germany in 1992 as a European confederation of independent promoters of the social, educational and employment services. In 1996, the association was then established in Marseille, France as a non-profit organisation. For more than 20 years, its mission has been to foster the social and professional inclusion of young people and especially those with fewer opportunities - the so-called “NEETs”¹. EC’s commitment to provide young people with opportunities and to guide them along the process of professional self-discovery, lays upon two fundamental aspects: firstly, the adoption of solidarity, tolerance and intercultural dialogue as fundamental values; secondly, the real concern posed by young people’s socio-economic situation. In Marseille in fact, the reasons of socio-economic inequalities are complex, multidimensional and well rooted back in time. Yet, if we simply consider the last two decades, one of the main causes of the growing gap between the wealthy bourgeoisie and the poorer segments of the society, relates to the ferocious evolution of the urban dimension of the city². The latter has represented the core of the economic renaissance of Marseille and was primarily driven by the renovation of the old port and its surroundings which, nowadays constitute the beating heart of the administrative, touristic, and commercial life of the city. According to the sociologist Michel Peraldi however, such a renaissance was purchased at the expenses of the poorest and most disadvantaged, who were progressively assembled and confined to the external areas of the city. It does not come as a surprise therefore, that in these contexts the reverberations of the 2008 economic crisis still pose serious concerns, particularly for the youth. In 2015 for instance, the 14th arrondissement of Marseille registered a critical youth unemployment rate of almost 50%³. Moreover, according to a study carried out by the research centre Compas, the poverty rate – which refers to those earning less than €977 per month - of such neighbourhoods ranges between 42% and 55%, the highest value recorded in France.⁴ Such difficulties are also illustrated by young people’s level of education, less than half of them have a diploma greater than or equal to the baccalaureate. While one out of five leaves the school system early without a diploma⁵. In 2018 the overall youth unemployment rate (15 to 24 year olds) in the department les Bouches-du-Rhône reached 23.4%⁶. The same year, the French Ministry for National Education noted and was shown in several researches. The impact of international mobility on young people is of great significance in terms of self-confidence, social inclusion and cultural openness. European and international mobility represents, a pivotal

¹ Eurostat glossary “Neither in employment nor in education and training”. Retrieved from:

[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Young_people_neither_in_employment_nor_in_education_and_training_(NEET))

[explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Young_people_neither_in_employment_nor_in_education_and_training_\(NEET\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Young_people_neither_in_employment_nor_in_education_and_training_(NEET))

² Peraldi, M. Duport, C. Samson, M. (2015). *Sociologie de Marseille*. La Découverte, Paris

³ Centre d'observation et de mesure des politiques sociales. Retrieved from : <http://www.lecompas.fr/ressource/nos-publications/>

⁴ Ibidem

⁵ Ibidem

⁶ INSEE (institut national de la statistique et des études économiques), 2019. Retrieved from:

https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/2134411#tableau-TCRD_087_tab1_departements

asset as regards to youth policy.⁷ In this very sense, EC aims at fostering young people's conditions by enabling them into an intercultural or professional experience abroad. The latter, adapted to young people's personal and professional background is considered by the association as a great chance for the acquisition of social, professional and intercultural competences. Mobility as mentioned above, is not seen as an end but rather, as part of a three steps process. Using the words of the responsible of the Mobility Department, aims at helping them to find a long-term professional or educational perspective.

Developing career learning programmes: a three-steps process

- 1) *Pre-departure training*, which is based on methods of non-formal education⁸, address all the crucial aspects of a mobility: intercultural dialogue and dynamics, cultural diversity and cultural self-awareness, active citizenship, language and body language etc. In this sense, the contribution of EC's volunteers is extremely important. Their intercultural experience is in fact, something that the young people can look up to as to boost their motivation, find answers and dispel doubts, compare lifestyles and working practices in different countries. To simply exchange between peers and much more. In addition, pre-departure trainings represent the first chance for EC's practitioners to build trusting relationships with young people and to evaluate, through an approach which combines both one-to-one counselling and group activities their needs, interests, aspirations, and related concerns and obstacles.
- 2) The second step refers to the *mobility* itself. During this period, EC practitioners carry out activities of monitoring and distance tutoring to ensure young people's optimal development, both on a professional and personal level.
- 3) *Post-mobility training* and subsequent follow up are finally considered as essential in order to allow young people to fully capitalise on their experience.

These are carried out through a variety of actions which can be described in two phases. Firstly, moments of group reflection facilitated by one or two practitioners and organised according to methods of non-formal education. The aim of such workshops is to help them recognise the impact of the mobility and their improvements, especially in terms of hard and soft skills, as well as self-confidence and autonomy. The second phase consists instead of a one to one counselling and joint research to evaluate possible educational or professional opportunities. This is further complemented by actions of personalised follow up such as guided revision of CVs and motivational letters.

The team: Raquel, Dylan and Eva

Raquel arrived in Marseille from Spain 4 years ago. After a one year of traineeship, she was hired as project manager in Eurocircle's Mobility Department. For the past 3 years, her main tasks have consisted in the development, management and implementation of mobility programs for young people with fewer opportunities who wish to live a professional experience abroad. More precisely, her job is not only to establish solid relationships with foreign companies where young people will then carry out their internships, but also to prepare them to live their first, long-term personal and professional experience abroad, as well as to provide them, once back in France, with a coherent guidance towards a positive outcome. Following the association's well-established practice, she has therefore developed pre-departure training and workshops which keep a balance between group activities on the one hand and individual, personalised counselling on the other. The combination of both a group and an individual approach is key for Raquel. NEETs in fact, are not an easy

⁷ Ministère de l'éducation Nationale. (2012). Mission de lutte contre le décrochage scolaire. Retrieved from: <https://eduscol.education.fr/cid55115/mission-de-lutte-contre-le-decrochage.html>

⁸ Non-formal education refers to planned, structured programmes and processes of personal and social education for young people designed to improve a range of skills and competences, outside the formal educational curriculum. Retrieved from <https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-youth-foundation/definitions>

demographic to deal with and for a number of reasons. First of all, they are not a homogeneous group, their educational and professional profiles vary greatly and so do their (sometimes difficult) personal backgrounds. The majority of the young people that contact Eurocircle have had a hard time in school which, along with the possible failure of pursuing a diploma, can most critically result in lack of self-confidence and esteem as well as in professional disorientation. In this sense, Raquel must be strict and rigorous in providing them with a precise framework with a step by step guidance, which should not compromise their autonomy and spirit of initiative. In light of her experience, Raquel finds that many young people are haunted by their insecurities and that these often endanger their motivation and sense of engagement in the mid and long-term. For this reason, she has to be patient and resilient and she must be aware of her own possible bias and take nothing for granted.

Raquel is also the referent person of her team, which is made of 2 other people: an employee, Dylan, and a volunteer Eva. Eva is a 22-year-old German student, stellar and committed to her service, who wishes to become a youth trainer in the future. Although able to speak French, she is aware of the fact that language still represents a barrier in certain situations. This is a critical issue for Eva, the fear of not understanding and not being understood makes her feel less effective, thus dragging her down from time to time. Dylan is 29 and has been working in Eurocircle for one year and half, he is French and has a degree in EU project management. His colleagues call him “the clock” because of his precision. He is in fact always on track, strict and well organised. His precision and strictness hide an occasional lack of confidence outside of his administrative comfort-zone. As the only French native speaker of the team, Dylan pays a lot of attention to his language, he avoids jargon and especially with Eva, moderates the pace of his voice.

Raquel knows that she can count on them and although ready to take the responsibility when important decisions are needed, she doesn't waste any occasion to ask for their opinion to involve them in the creation of new contents for the training in general and in the overall projects' implementation. She also realises that it is primarily up to her to foster their personal and professional development in the association. It is her job to make Eva feel welcome and integrated into the association and as a foreigner herself, she knows that this will not only come along with Eva's progressive confidence in her language skills. Similarly, Raquel is aware of Dylan's difficulties in opening up and taking initiatives outside the administrative aspects of his job and she knows that without a small push, he will not leave his comfort zone.

The project

In few weeks, the team will put into place a very important project: “CAN? DO!”. After one month of training focussed on language courses, cultural diversity, cultural self-awareness, group cohesion and conflict management. CAN? DO! will provide 36 young people (in three flows of 12 people each) with a 4 months traineeship opportunity, either in Germany or Spain. CAN? DO! represents a great challenge for the team and all the three of them have high expectations and a big amount of motivation. Raquel has in fact invested a lot of time and energy last year in conceiving, refining and developing such a project. Which wraps up three years of experience, dedication and efforts. Dylan's responsibilities in the project are significant and this time, do not relate exclusively to the usual administrative arrangements with both the young people and their host structures. Raquel has in fact insisted to have him participating in the recruitment process and after an initial moment of hesitation, managed to convince him. Finally, CAN? DO! will give Eva the opportunity to assist Raquel in the running of the training, thus providing a first glance of what being a youth trainer would be. Moreover, her participation as a German volunteer in France will be very significant as she will share her own intercultural experience with the young people.

At the project's eve, the three of them took a moment to revise together the action plan for the coming months. They checked the list of all the administrative documents required and that of practicalities and materials needed for the training. They shared their concerns, individuated possible obstacles along with their respective solutions and Eva wrote everything down on a flip chart. Before leaving the office, Raquel gave the other two a

piece of paper on the top, the title read *"This is water"*⁹. It was a short story: *"one day, two young fish who were peacefully swimming along, happened to meet an older fish swimming the other way. The older fish nodded and said, "morning boys, how's the water?". The two young fish swam on a bit longer and, eventually, one looked at the other and said, "what the hell is water?"*. Raquel had added a few lines: *"as you might have guessed, the point of the story is that the most obvious and important realities are often the hardest to grasp and to talk about. In this project, we will not be the old and wise fish who will explain the young people what water is. Tomorrow, let's not take what is obvious for us for granted, let's put ourselves into question, let us be flexible, patient and resilient. Let's have fun!"*.

The recruitment process and Dylan's struggles

"Say something, come on, say something!" Dylan's own voice was echoing in his head in the vain attempt to make him swallow that lump in his throat. He couldn't stop playing with that pen in his right hand and tapping his leg; he was looking for the right words to say but the interview passed quickly without him being able to make a sound. It was the second day of the recruitment process and Raquel and he had already met a dozen candidates. Exceeding all the expectations, eight of them had resulted a perfect match for the project and Raquel could barely hide her excitement while ranging the CV and the motivational letter of the last interviewee. Dylan was happy too, he believed in this project and to see the selection going that well was simply fantastic. If only he could manage to overcome his insecurity... *"that would help me to fully feel as part of this project"* he thought. With the arms crossed against his chest he gave Raquel a quick look. She was doing a great job, she was not only carefully explaining the project with its goals requirements and implications, but she was also showing her engagement and true interest in everyone's experience. With a mixture of professionalism and familiarity, she was guiding the conversations by asking the right questions, avoiding those with a yes/no answer and letting each participant feel like he/she truly had a story to tell. Most importantly, she was making everyone feel comfortable. Dylan had the impression that whoever entered that room even the most shy person, could easily find his or her ease after few minutes into the conversation. By simply sitting there, up and straight on her chair and with a slight raise of the eyebrows and a smile. Raquel was creating the ideal conditions for each candidate to fully express him or herself. She was giving everyone a fair shot, Dylan included. The two of them had already spoken about it more than once and when few weeks earlier Raquel had asked him to participate in the recruitment process, he knew that it was to help him face his sense of unease in this kind of situations. For this reason, they had prepared a general schedule to follow during the interviews. Dylan was in charge of introducing the association as well as presenting the initial administrative steps of the project, while Raquel would have described the project itself and asked follow up questions - professional and personal experiences - to the candidates. *"Remember"* she had told Dylan that morning, *"our goal is to evaluate whether this project meets the candidate's needs in terms of employability; once we have done that, it is a matter of understanding whether he or she is ready to live a long-term experience abroad. This is not a job interview, so let us not be too formal. Ah, one more thing: do not hesitate to ask further questions and to intervene whenever you feel like!"*. And yet, the only words that he had been able to speak in these two days were just *"hi, would you please fill this in with your first name, family name, email address and phone number?"*. *"The clock"*, he thought, *"I really deserve such a nickname"*. During the break, Raquel joined Dylan in the office with two cups of coffee and invited him to sit with her at the round table in the middle of the room. They spoke for about thirty minutes consulting the notes that they had taken during the interviews and looking at the CVs of the other candidates. *"I know this guy"* said suddenly Raquel holding a CV in her hands. *"He contacted me by phone some weeks ago asking for some clarifications about the project. We spoke for quite a while..."*. She hesitated for a moment trying to remember the call. *"He was really shy and sounded pretty lost. He didn't really know much about the project to be fair"*. Dylan took the CV to give it a quick look. *"Romain, 22. He lives in the 14th arrondissement"*. Raquel nodded and added: *"we'll see!"*.

⁹ By David Foster Wallace. Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/sep/20/fiction>

The interviews continued in the afternoon and Dylan was quite surprised to realise that slowly, he was starting to feel a bit more relaxed. He was trying to mimic Raquel's posture and kindly invited by her he had also asked a couple of questions to a very friendly applicant, who was so excited about the idea of going to Spain. That she had spent the whole interview on the edge of her seat. When she left the room, Raquel checked the list of candidates. In ten minutes, at 3 pm it would be the turn of Romain. Suddenly, someone knocked on the door and it was Eva. *"There is a problem with one of the partners in Germany"* she said and then added *"I'm at the phone with the responsible, she would like to speak with you"*. Raquel looked at Dylan, *"I'll be back soon, you can start"*. Few minutes later, Dylan heard again knocking on the door. He brought his hands on his hips and said: *"please, come in"*.

Face to face with Romain

Romain entered the room, he closed the door and walked towards Dylan taking the seat right in front of him. *"Hi, how are you?"*, said Dylan while the two were shaking hands, *"would you please fill this in with your first name, family name, email address and phone number?"*. Romain nodded and without saying a word, took the paper and a pen. Dylan, who was intent to buy some time and wait for Raquel to come back, was trying to recall the words that she had been using to break the ice, when he suddenly noticed that Romain's hand was shaking. He was clearly nervous and although he had just entered the room, he was already checking his watch. Dylan shook his shoulders as if he wanted to throw off the stress with a shrug, then he started speaking: *"so, first of all, welcome to Eurocircle! Was it easy to find us? No? No worries, I remember the first time I came here: I had to walk twice around the block. I'm serious, I went all the way up to the train station and back down to the main square before finding the front door!"*. Romain smiled but kept looking down on the document that he was filling in. Then, he raised his head while taking his phone from his pocket. *"Well, shall we start?"* said Dylan giving a quick look at Romain's phone which was blinking on the table. *"All right... If you checked our website, you know that we have several mobility projects: these can be both long and short-term and consist either of a volunteering experience or a professional traineeship. CAN? DO! for example, is the last traineeship program that we have created, and we are glad that you applied!"*. Dylan took a short break to briefly examine Romain's facial expression. He seemed absent, probably immersed in his own thoughts. He was tapping his leg and was not really able to keep eye contact for more than few seconds. But Dylan did not perceive his behaviour as disrespectful or disinterested, on the contrary despite his own unease, he felt empathy and a different profound sense of responsibility. It was his job to guide Romain out his bubble but to do so he needed to gain his trust and make him feel comfortable in opening up. *"I am not the old and wise fish"* he thought.

"If you're fine with it, I will briefly sum the project up, then we can go through those points, if any are not clear to you and we can speak about your interests and expectations. I would also like to take a moment to discuss your previous experiences, both professional and personal and do not hesitate to let me know if there is anything that you did not mention in your CV but that you would nonetheless like to share with me". Dylan was apparently calm and carefree, but inside he was almost euphoric. Unfortunately, he did not have much time to enjoy the fact that he had just said something like twice the number of words that he had spoken in the past two days. Romain in fact, was not sharing his enthusiasm at all. On the contrary, he was once again checking his watch and taking quick (but obvious) looks at his phone which was still blinking. *"Well, CAN? DO! entails one month of pre-departure training where participants will benefit from an intensive language course and several group activities on cultural diversity, intercultural shock, conflict management etc."* Dylan, this time, was determined not to give up: *"there will also be moments of one to one counselling specifically aimed at matching your interests and needs with the most appropriate traineeship. I see here in the expectation form which you have filled in, that you would like to go to Germany, but you did not specify a field of interest for your traineeship. Did you have time to think about it?"*. Romain took a long breath and crossed his legs, then he said: *"not really... I mean... In school I was quite good in mechanics and my parents think that I should..."* he took another long breath and then he continued: *"I don't know, probably I should just take anything you can propose me ..."*. Dylan did everything he could in order not to have any moment of silence after Romain's statement. He told him that the first one to one meetings could also be devolved to the analysis of various opportunities in different fields and that the final choice was not to be exclusively based on one's educational or

professional background. Romain was not simply shy, he was feeling like he had no choice but accepting whatever someone else would tell him to do, as if his interests or inclinations were unworthy of attention. Dylan decided then to drastically change topic. They spoke about Marseille, of how strange it was for him to move there from Paris; *“it is something completely different”* said suddenly Romain, *“you will never find anything like Marseille in France! I mean it’s unique, each neighbourhood is a small village which can show traits that you won’t find in the next one just around the corner”*. Dylan realised that the ice was finally broken. They spoke for some thirty minutes and while sharing his hobbies, Romain took his phone to show him something: *“look, two friends of mine have made this”*. He gave Dylan his phone, it was a website called *“a hundred stories about Marseille”*. Then he continued: *“It is a collection of everyday stories of common people a greengrocer, a baker, a mailman, a street artist, just name one and you will find it in there. I designed the website and it was a lot fun!”*. *“Where did you learn that?”* asked Dylan surprised. *“On my own, on my computer, at my desk. My parents have always told me not to waste time with it...”* replied Romain in a low voice.

When Raquel came back some 10 minutes later, the two were speaking about travelling and living abroad. She apologised with both of them for the interruption and introduced herself to Romain, who shook her hand with a look that Dylan interpreted as a bit intimidated. Dylan took a moment to sum the interview up to Raquel. Without avoiding telling her of Romain’s point of view on Marseille and paying special, enthusiastic attention to his website. A moment of silence followed Raquel’s manifestation of interest in the website. Dylan was expecting her to take the lead and continue the interview but she sat back on her chair and said calmly: *“please go on guys”*. Dylan stared at her a bit surprised and said quietly *“don’t you want to ask a question? Or to present again the project maybe?”*. *“I just came to introduce myself and to assist at the end of the interview”* replied Raquel with a smile. Dylan looked at Romain and he immediately realised that the momentum of the interview was fading *“All right”* he said *“we were speaking about travelling, right? What about that road trip? Where was it?”*. After an instant of hesitation, Romain told them of that summer of three years ago when he went to Scotland for a road trip that lasted for two months. He explained how nervous he was at the idea of travelling alone and that he had to plan every little detail, even the most obvious ones, because that was making him feel safe. *“It was pointless in the end as I stepped out of the plane, I was so excited that I totally forgot about my plan!”*. Raquel and Dylan laughed and Romain addressed them the first sincere smile since he entered the room. Few minutes later, while opening the door to leave the office, Romain looked back to Dylan and thanked him for the pleasant conversation, then he added: *“I really like this project, I’ll keep my fingers crossed!”*.

Questions, Comments and Topics of Discussion

- Do you think that Romain should be selected for the project? Is he ready to live a professional experience abroad?
- What kind of questions would you ask for such an interview?
- Did Raquel allow Dylan to effectively face and overcome his unease during the interview process? Was her decision to include him in the recruitment process a good idea in the first place?
- Try to individuate Raquel’s actions and efforts to ensure an effective and smooth working together. In general, how do the members of the team support each other?
- In which occasions did Dylan show adaptability and empathy?
- Was Dylan’s choice to deviate the conversation and speak about Marseille appropriate in that moment?
- What signs of non-verbal communication could you individuate in the story?
- In light of the role of EC volunteers in the implementation of pre-departure workshops, how should Raquel include Eva in the delivering of the project’s training?
- How should the team support and encourage Eva to face and eventually overcome her insecurities during the training? Consequently, how do you imagine Eva’s personal and professional development?

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