The "SPOC" as a tool supporting the development of the entrepreneur's "soft skills"

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Abstract—The entrepreneur is supposed to manage the unexpected, to convince, to be a leader... so many activities requiring « soft skills ». Such skills are vital in the professional life and get along with other technical skills « Hard skills » which have however long been advantaged. Yet, there are some methods enabling the reinforcement of the entrepreneurs’ « soft skills » both in-class and/or on-line: This is the case of the SPOCs (Small Public online course). This paper aims at showing that digital learning environments (e.g. the SPOCs) could boost the development of an entrepreneur's « soft skills ». The current article sheds light on two questions: What are the main “soft skills” expected of an entrepreneur? and how to design SPOC, soft skills, taking into account the social and the interactive dimensions?

Index Terms—SPOC, MOOC, soft skills, Hard Skills, design, entrepreneur, ICT

1 INTRODUCTION

Today, in a continuously changing environment, the entrepreneur is supposed to adapt to these changes and to rapidly penetrate into the business culture, so that they can disseminate the values allowing then to contribute to their success. They should also communicate with people from different nationalities, with various backgrounds and diverse experiences.

In addition, the entrepreneur should have leadership qualities. In the jargon of the theory of competence, these skills are called Soft Skills. These are contrasted with the «Hard Skills» which are the technical skills of an individual, formally demonstrable and proved by getting diplomas. In our entourage, there are people who, through their achievements, have an entrepreneurial profile. In effect, the entrepreneurial characteristics are the attitudes an entrepreneur possesses. Indeed, experienced entrepreneurs have learned how to manage difficult moments and overcome obstacles. This is a huge challenge for the young entrepreneurs. So, How to accompany these young entrepreneurs to develop their Soft Skills?

The distinctive characteristic of our society has recently been the rapid rhythm of technological change. It is time for the digital society (e.g. MOOC, SPOC... and so many other acronyms. The progress of these technological tools has come out to meet the significant changes in today’s society was marked by an evolution of knowledge [5]. Several researchers (Cisel, M.-Fun, Unow ...) have tried to describe the design steps of these devices. However, when using the Mooc (Massive Open Online Courses) in small groups, this is referred to as SPOC (Small, Private, and Online Course). Khosrow Ghadiri of the University of San José observed that the use of a Udacity course had led to a very high failure rate. While in an electronic course of EDX, conducted by means of SPOC, 90 percent of students have succeeded [7]. So, the Moocs, in the form of the SPOC, with personalized support, are radically transforming the vocational training. The use of online education will be generalized and significant savings will be obtained by reducing the need for visiting interveners [11].

The SPOC seems to be the path to take for the implementation of a device intended for the development of entrepreneurs' Soft Skills. This paper is structured as follows: In Section I, The entrepreneur’s Soft Skills are examined in more details. Examples of SPOC design projects intended for entrepreneurs, carried out by Francophone and Anglophone universities, are presented in Section II. Finally, sections III and IV are devoted to the description of the stages of the design of the SPOC-Soft Skills project developed within the framework of ORDIPU-LAPSTICE.

2 THE MAIN SKILLS OF THE ENTREPRENEUR

Quebecer Serge Harvey [1] defines the Soft Skills as competences WHICH ARE LIKELY to be orientated to serve human interactions by means of emotional intelligence. Serge Harvey subdivide the soft skills into four forms: personal (efficiency, reliability ...); Communicative (Ability to start a discussion, to build a social network...); Interpersonal (Sense of responsibility, team spirit, awareness of the hierarchy, ...), various (resourcefulness, passions, etc.). Although the term «Hard Skills» or «technical skills» is relatively a simple concept, the soft skills are a little bit more difficult to identify, referring to a varied list of attitudes. Generally speaking, the Soft Skills are included in the following categories of competence (see Fig.1):

- The skills of the entrepreneurs may be divided into two broad categories (Hard Skills and Soft Skills) [7]. From the schema proposed above, the Soft Skills include: Managerial skills /
Leadership skills / Contextual skills. Every entrepreneur should have the essential skills in order to fight and survive in a competitive world.

The essential skills Used at work are not the technical skills, but basic skills that an entrepreneur needs to continue learning and complete workplace tasks and daily activities, such as information technology and communication.

There are generally five essential skills which are indispensable for an entrepreneur to be a peak performer: reasoning ability, oral communication, written communication, computing and teamwork.

2.1 Managerial skills

They include the ability to manage staff, capitals as well as the ability to undertake organizational activities such as planning and marketing.

2.2 Leadership skills

The ability to motivate and help others to reach their full potential and to take risks and formulate a vision is a leadership skill. Moreover, the creation of a business is in itself a risk-taking.

2.3 Contextual skills

The ability to function successfully in different contexts, such as different countries or a culturally diverse workplace. The entrepreneur should demonstrate these contextual skills, e.g. when looking for new clients from other countries. The Technical skills are necessary, but they are not sufficient to overcome "the valley of death".

3 Valorization of the Soft Skills Via the SPOCs

The period during which a young company is in the development phase of its offer and its clientele, while seeking financing, is a step of great financial fragility. Expenses to be incurred in terms of human resources or strategy generally do not compensate for the turnover, especially when the company is entering a new market. This phase of imbalance takes the evocative nickname of "valley of death" as it is a very difficult stage because of the multiplicity of obstacles to overcome [8].

This phase is similar to a long obstacle race which requires both endurance and agility (Soft-Skills). Facing the financing constraint, going through the production difficulties, to the development barrier, the entrepreneur may sometimes give up [12]. In fact, « Technical competence is no longer sufficient because it is relatively easy to acquire, whereas managerial and relational competence is much more complex», says Pierre Dubuc Cofounder of Open class rooms [2].

Morocco needs entrepreneurs more than any time before, young people who, generally speaking, have too little interest in entrepreneurship must obviously be sensitized and encouraged to start a business [3].

So, How to accompany young entrepreneurs to develop their Soft skills in a world which is even more flexible? A year has passed since the SPOCs targeting the Soft Skills useful to the manager, have appeared on the American platforms (See Table I) Coursera and edX. Some American universities have seen it as an excellent way of making themselves known and enriching their reputation by spreading their knowledge to as many people as possible. They sometimes offer specializations in several courses focusing on soft skills such as "Managing People and Teams" at the University of Michigan, or "Conflict Management " at the University of California. Another revealing sign of interest in soft skills is in France this time, "From the manager to the leader", a course which has 90,000 learners. "The demand for learning relational and professional skills is growing more and more," confirms Johannes Heinlein, vice president of edX [2].

**Tableau I: Examples of SPOCs intended for the development of soft skills**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples of SPOC projects - Softs Skills</th>
<th>The name of Mooc or SPOC</th>
<th>Provider</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DEVELOP ITS BUSINESS PLAN</td>
<td>OPEN-CLASS-ROOMS</td>
<td></td>
<td>This course will allow entrepreneurs to have the tools to develop a business plan consistent with the entrepreneurial project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TO BOOST HIS PROFESSIONAL EFFICIENCY VIA SOFT SKILLS</td>
<td>UNOW/ CAPTAIN SPOC</td>
<td>LEARN ASSEMBLY</td>
<td>Identify, develop and mobilize their natural skills around their professional challenges.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MANAGERIAL INNOVATION</td>
<td>LONDON BUSINESS SCHOOL</td>
<td></td>
<td>Acquire the keys to understand the approaches of managerial innovation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEADING THE ENTERPRISE OF THE FUTURE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>This course focuses on the new managerial challenges in today's enterprise: flexibility, mobility, real-time information sharing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Experienced entrepreneurs have learned to handle difficult times and overcome barriers. That is a tremendous challenge for young entrepreneurs. Therefore, the SPOC can help them to develop their manageria and relationalskills, the question then is how to design the SPOC/SOFT SKILLS, taking into account the social dimension and the interactive dimension?

4 THE DESIGN OF THE SPOC-SOFT SKILLS

This part is an attempt to define all the steps concerned with the design and the development of the « SPOC-Soft Skills » within the framework of an engineering which is based on the ADDIE model (Analysis / Design Development / Implementation / Evaluation) (1980, Florida State University) [10] in order to contribute to the entrepreneurs soft skills development.

According to this pedagogical protocol (Fig.2.), nine basic steps are to be implemented in the design of the SPOC Soft Skills:

1-Before the start of the SPOC project design, pedagogical objectives together with the target audience have to be defined and formalised in a guideline note in order to be validated by the project stakeholders.

2-To constitute a multidisciplinary team to facilitate the realisation of the SPOC project.

3-Learning scenarios: to elaborate customized learning scenarios.

4-The choice of the ICT tools (applied to teaching) : In the case of SPOC-Soft Skills project, the Moodle platform has been adopted. Then online tools and resources have been selected for the learning types (Inquiry, Discussion, Practice, Collaboration, Production).

Indeed, in this SPOC-Soft Skills project, the teacher can ask the students many learning activities which can be summarised as follows (FROM LAURIILLARD, 2012) [9]:

**Acquisition:** reading, watching, listening

**Inquiry:** using resources to develop an evidence-based output

**Discussion:** debating, questioning, answering, negotiating ideas

**Practice:** acting, in the light of feedback, to achieve a goal or output

**Collaboration:** working with others to achieve a joint output

**Production:** making something for others to evaluate against agreed criteria

The ICT tools obviously improve and support all these learning activities (see Table II).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weeks of the SPOC-Soft Skills</th>
<th>Examples of the ICT tools</th>
<th>The learning outcomes</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 1:</strong> to communicate (oral communication)</td>
<td>Conference / video / text chat or the Voice Chat</td>
<td>Learning in real or simulated situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 2:</strong> to communicate (written communication)</td>
<td>/ wiki Forum,</td>
<td>to view videos / use of online resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 3:</strong> to plan (Create SMART objectives, ‘planning and control’)</td>
<td>ICT planning tools</td>
<td>use planning tools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 4:</strong> to plan (networking and the research of information)</td>
<td>Social media platform contact lists enterprise use of databases</td>
<td>To offer unique networking opportunities / the creation of a peer learning community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 5:</strong> to manage work in a multicultural team</td>
<td>Social media platform contact lists entreprises</td>
<td>To learn to work with each other’s differences in approach, experience, and background / to provide opportunities for collaboration / To build positive social relations with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 6:</strong> to evaluate</td>
<td>Assessment tools may offer a series of questions : online quiz</td>
<td>To build something new / encouraging and supporting innovation / produce a piece of work that answers the teacher’s question</td>
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In order to define the six weeks of the SPOC “Soft Skills” project, the prerequisites of our target audience in communication, management and leadership are firstly evaluated through an online questionnaire. Then the questionnaires are processed in order to define the objectives of the six-week
SPOC. Then pedagogical sequences are developed relating to these skills, based on the practice and the creation of the videos. In order to succeed in the learning scenario of the six weeks, the written contents have been reduced and the SPOC Soft Skills platform has been fed (see Fig. 3) with short videos accompanied by questions and learning activities (Inquiry, discussion, practice, collaboration and production activities).

**5-Beta-testing and evaluation of SPOC-Soft Skills**

Realization of a beta test to check the overall coherence, the quality of the teaching scenarios, the quality of the accompanying resources and the clarity of instructions. For the case of our project, the beta test stage began on December 15, 2016 on the Moodle platform (see Fig. 4), for a duration of 6 weeks for a target audience of 20 entrepreneurs. The group has a limited size and the same people are found throughout the training course. The course consists of a series of short videos, slides, quizzes and creative projects.

![Fig.3. The Screen Capture of SPOC Soft Skills](image)

**CONCLUSION ET PERSPECTIVE**

Taking into account the characteristics of the SPOC, the use of this system appears as a practical solution to guarantee the vocational training of entrepreneurs. The Spoc-Soft Skills project is likely to work, With motivated entrepreneurs, in small groups, and allocating adequate resources in terms of teachers and tutors. Via this device, the entrepreneur can overcome "The valley of death".

In other words, the future of MOOC is partly connected with the SPOC. As a practical extension, the results of the "beta test" stage of the SPOC-Soft Skills project will be presented within the framework of a future research. These results that could lead to reflect on ways for the improvement of the SPOC that meet the expectations and the needs expressed by both entrepreneurs and teachers.

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