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BRIDGING THE EMPLOYMENT GAP OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN
PORTUGAL THROUGH A TRAINING AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT NO-CODE
PLATFORM

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Bridging the employment gap of
people with disabilities in Portugal
through a training and skill
development no-code platform:
**Analyzing the training and skill
development gap**

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Abstract

This thesis presents the Empower Ability project, a platform designed to enhance employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities in Portugal. Through in-depth research and collaboration with various stakeholders, the project identifies gaps in employment systems and develops a tailored solution. Utilizing agile and lean methodologies, Empower Ability employs a user-centric approach, ensuring fast development and responsiveness to stakeholder feedback. The project aims to bridge employment gaps for individuals with disabilities by providing essential training for inclusivity in the job market. The collaboration with partner organizations ensures the project's adaptability and potential for real-world impact, making it a practical solution for social change.

Keywords

Employment Gap Analysis, Social Inclusivity, Tailored Training Programs, Inclusive Education, Soft Skills Development, Barrier Identification, Disability Inclusion, Platform Development, Low-Code/No-Code Technology, Agile Methodology, Lean Startup Approach, Empowerment of Persons with disabilities, Inclusivity, Social Entrepreneurship

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1. Introduction (Group part – Edin Selimagic, Juan Barreto)

The integration of individuals with disabilities into the labour sector is a complex and important topic that remains relevant around the world and not only in Portugal (Eurostat, 2022). Despite an increasing emphasis on workplace diversity and inclusion, many persons with disabilities continue to experience barriers to effective employment, resulting in disproportionately higher unemployment and poverty rates (Eurostat, 2022). This project focuses on Portugal, where individuals with disabilities have a much lower employment rate, 58,4% compared to 77,4% for people with no disabilities (Felix, 2023) and have limited access to educational and training resources.

In order to understand and address these challenges, the approach was based on using a comprehensive research methodology that involves extensive talks or interviews with a wide range of stakeholders, including experts, organizations, and people with disabilities themselves and subsequently working together with them to find the best possible solution that will effectively bridge the gaps in employment market inclusion.

The usage of low-code/no-code technologies, as well as agile and lean startup methodologies, is critical to the development process of this project at the later stage after the problem finding. From the very beginning this combination allows for fast prototyping and iterative changes. It enables rapid concept testing and refinement, resulting in an efficient and responsive development cycle through constant feedback from stakeholders that can be implemented almost immediately. By implementing this methodology, the project will be much closer to having a real impact on the issue.

This project focuses on real life change through direct interaction with existing organizations. It intends to launch something that provides real advantages that will help to gradually include people with disabilities into the Portuguese job market through accompanying existing solutions. Although focusing on a specific gap of the problem, the overall goal is to help

increase the inclusivity. The objective is that this work will influence and inspire organizations to continue with the findings, so the effort leads to real world impact and positive change.

1.1. Contextual Background

Nowadays there is a growing emphasis on inclusivity, especially in the employment market where a lot of potential from the persons with disabilities can be valuable and used for the benefit of everybody in the society (United Nations, 2006). Like other countries, Portugal faces the difficulty of integrating people with disabilities into the labour sector (Eurostat, 2022). There is still a significant gap between the employment rates of people with disabilities and the general population despite different initiatives and organizations already working on this issue (Eurostat, 2022). This thesis aims to comprehend and tackle this challenge specifically in Portugal where many organizations are already working on the employment of people with disabilities. Their approach shall not be copied. Instead, the idea is to work together with them and fill in existing gaps.

1.2. Problem Definition

This thesis is dedicated to exploring the significant barriers that individuals with disabilities encounter in the Portuguese job market. There are many barriers that are part of the problem such as training and skills, workplace and societal attitudes, psychological and physical barriers, support service barriers and many more (World Health Organization & World Bank, 2011). Through research and extensive interviews with experts and organizations the goal is to find the untouched gap and fill it while working with other solutions to the overall problem. The “Five W” outlines the general problem that this report and project aims to tackle and contribute to a solution (Georgia Institute of Technology, s.f.).

The problem statement, following the "Five W" framework, is articulated as follows:

"Individuals with disabilities (who) in Portugal (where) currently (when) face significant employment challenges due to various barriers of educational, psychological and physical nature (why), which results in their limited participation in the job market (what)."

This statement shows the primary focus of this thesis, laying out the base problem that it aims to address and where a significant gap to existing solutions should be found to mitigate this problem and to find a way to increase the participation in the job market. The finding of a specific gap and addressing it with a solution is the goal.

1.3. Objectives of this Report

The objectives of this report also represent the structure of it. At the very beginning the objective is to identify existing solutions and organizations that address the issue of inclusivity of people with disabilities into the society and into the job market in particular. At the next stage the goal is to closely examine the problem together with them and map out the current gaps in order to identify the most pressing one that this project will address. In this stage it is also necessary to identify whether persons with disabilities with a specific disability should be chosen as a niche or if the target group should be defined broader. When the gap and the target group are specified, the next step is the detailed analysis of the mentioned gap in order to come up with the best possible solution. This solution is ought to be done in an iterative process together with the stakeholders, being the organizations and the persons with disabilities themselves with usage of low code or no code development tools and the lean start up and agile methodology. Overall, the report should be structured in a way that it can be used by the partner organizations or to continue the process together with them after presenting the key findings and result.

2. Literature Review and Empirical Research (Group part – Edin Selimagic, Juan Barreto)

2.1. Literature Review

In today's globalized world, the importance of inclusivity in the job market cannot be emphasized enough. As societies grow more diverse, the need to ensure that all individuals, regardless of their abilities, have equal opportunities in the workforce becomes more and more important. This is not just a matter of social justice but also of economic significance. Diverse workforces have been shown to foster innovation, resilience, and adaptability in organizations (Bonaccio, Connelly, Gellatly, Jetha, & Martin, 2020). The Portuguese context offers a specific lens through which to examine this issue. As a nation, Portugal has shown a commitment to the rights and inclusion of individuals with disabilities, as evidenced by its constitutional and institutional frameworks (Thornton & Lunt, 1997). However, like many countries, it faces big challenges in translating this commitment into tangible outcomes in the job market. One of the major issues is training and skills provided to individuals. Equipping individuals with disabilities with the necessary skills and knowledge is not just about preparing them for the job market; it's about challenging societal perceptions and breaking down barriers. As the experiences of individuals with intellectual disabilities reveal, there's a strong desire among the community of people with disabilities to be recognized for their valuable contributions and to be treated as equals in the workplace (Voermans, Taminiau, Giesbers, & Embregts, 2021).

The Landscape of Employment for Individuals with disabilities Nature and Role of Sheltered Employment

Sheltered employment, a concept that has gained popularity in various parts of the world, refers to specialized workplaces designed specifically for individuals with disabilities. These environments, often centered around manufacturing or general services, aim to provide a more

accommodating and supportive setting compared to mainstream employment (Bend & Priola, 2023). While countries like the USA and Canada have seen a rise in such workshops, there has been a notable decline in other countries such as the UK, mainly due to concerns over their economic viability (Bend & Priola, 2023). However, the debate about sheltered employment is ongoing and has many experts in favor but also against it. Critics argue that these workshops, while well-intentioned, might unintentionally sustain capitalist labor market ideals without genuinely challenging the mainstream organization of work. There's a concern that such environments might segregate 'less able' workers rather than actively integrating them into the broader workforce (Bend & Priola, 2023). In Portugal, the approach to sheltered employment relates to broader vocational training and employment policies. The country has established sheltered employment centers, emphasizing not just employment but also skill development. Yet, transitioning from these sheltered environments to open employment remains a significant challenge (Thornton & Lunt, 1997).

Experiences and Challenges of Workers with disabilities

Individuals with disabilities, particularly those with intellectual disabilities, often face issues with societal perceptions and self-image. Their strong desire for inclusion and recognition in the workplace is frequently met with stigmatizing attitudes, leading to feelings of dependence and reduced opportunities (Voermans, Taminiou, Giesbers, & Embregts, 2021). These challenges are further worsened by myths and misconceptions about their performance, productivity, and safety, which, as research indicates, are often unfounded (Bonaccio, Connelly, Gellatly, Jetha, & Martin, 2020). Barriers to employment are numerous, ranging from societal attitudes and inaccessible infrastructure to personal challenges like low self-esteem (Heron & Murray, 1997). However, among these challenges, there are also stories of resilience. Many individuals with disabilities adapt their behavior, either by showcasing their abilities or by

masking their disabilities to combat stigmatization (Voermans, Taminiau, Giesbers, & Embregts, 2021).

Strategies and Best Practices for Inclusion

Organizations worldwide are recognizing the value of diversity and inclusion. Many are framing their diversity initiatives in terms of diverse thoughts rather than group identity, emphasizing the collective benefits of an inclusive environment (Gould, Parker, Mullin, & Jones, 2019). In Portugal, legal provisions ensure that disability does not become a reason for dismissal, increasing a sense of security among job seekers with disabilities (Thornton & Lunt, 1997).

Yet, the journey towards real inclusivity is framed with many challenges. While organizations may express commitment, there can be a substantial gap between rhetoric and practice. Bridging this gap requires a multidimensional approach, from training and development initiatives (Bonaccio, Connelly, Gellatly, Jetha, & Martin, 2020) to the crucial role of placement officers in connecting job seekers with disabilities with potential employers (Heron & Murray, 1997).

Towards a More Inclusive Job Market: Training Development, and the Role of Job Coaches

One of the most consistent themes across the literature is the important role of training and development in increasing inclusivity. Tailored training programs can boost the self-confidence of individuals with disabilities, empowering them to create their own opportunities in the workplace (Voermans, Taminiau, Giesbers, & Embregts, 2021). Even managers benefit from training, especially when it comes to understanding best practices for accommodating and supporting employees with disabilities (Bonaccio, Connelly, Gellatly, Jetha, & Martin, 2020).

Crucial agents of change can also be job coaches. By assessing the capacities and personal wishes of individuals with disabilities, they optimize the support provided, ensuring that the match between job seekers and roles is both appropriate and fulfilling (Voermans, Taminiou, Giesbers, & Embregts, 2021).

Legal Considerations and Organizational Integration

Legal frameworks have a double-sided role. On one hand, they offer protection to individuals with disabilities, ensuring that they cannot be dismissed without just cause. On the other, they provide guidelines for organizations, ensuring that inclusivity efforts are both genuine and effective (Thornton & Lunt, 1997). Proactive understanding and adherence to employment laws, such as those highlighted in Portugal's constitution, can mitigate concerns and lead to a more inclusive environment (Bonaccio, Connelly, Gellatly, Jetha, & Martin, 2020).

Another significant factor of the success of inclusivity initiatives is organizational culture within a company. An inclusive culture, where diversity is truly valued, can significantly improve the experience of employees with disabilities. Nevertheless, subtle forms of discrimination, such as exclusion from informal gatherings, can persist and need to be actively addressed (Bonaccio, Connelly, Gellatly, Jetha, & Martin, 2020). Mainstream disability inclusion should be the ultimate goal of any inclusivity initiative, idea, or project. This means integrating disability considerations into existing workforce policies and practices and reducing the need for special accommodations (Gould, Parker, Mullin, & Jones, 2019). However, for inclusion to be meaningful, it must go beyond symbolic practices. Organizations need to ensure that opportunities for individuals with disabilities are substantial, sustainable, and value-adding (Gould, Parker, Mullin, & Jones, 2019).

Financial Incentives and Support Mechanisms

In motivating companies to hire and train individuals with disabilities' financial incentives can play an essential role, for example in Portugal, employers receive various financial benefits, such as compensation for initial lower performance, reduction in social security charges, and grants for adapting workstations (Thornton & Lunt, 1997). These incentives not only make it economically viable for companies to hire individuals with disabilities but also highlight the advantage these individuals bring to the workforce. Support mechanisms extend beyond financial incentives. Technical equipment aids, self-employment grants, and other support structures can significantly facilitate the integration of individuals with disabilities into the job market (Thornton & Lunt, 1997). Such mechanisms can be instrumental for platforms aiming to connect companies and job seekers with disabilities, emphasizing the importance of general support.

Peer Support and Community Building

The role of Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) and similar community-building initiatives cannot be underestimated (Gould, Parker, Mullin, & Jones, 2019). These groups provide a space for employees with disabilities to discuss workplace issues, share experiences, and facilitate accommodation requests. By fostering a sense of community and belonging, ERGs can significantly enhance the job satisfaction and increase retention of employees with disabilities. Moreover, peer-support groups and continuous feedback mechanisms can play a significant role in boosting the confidence of individuals with disabilities and in that way ensure their successful integration into the workforce (Heron & Murray, 1997).

The chosen literature shows an overall picture of the challenges and opportunities associated with promoting an inclusive job market for individuals with disabilities. From the difficulties of sheltered employment to the countless experiences of workers with disabilities, the journey

towards inclusivity is complex. However, the rewards, both for individuals and for society at large, are immense.

Strategies for inclusion, as highlighted in the literature, range from legal frameworks and financial incentives to training programs and community-building initiatives. Each plays a crucial role in shaping an environment where individuals with disabilities are not just accommodated but valued and seen as peers. As efforts continue globally and specifically in countries like Portugal, platforms that aim to bridge the gap between individuals with disabilities and potential employers through training could be an asset. By combining the insights from the literature, such platforms and initiatives can and could lead the way for a job market where diversity is celebrated, and inclusivity is the norm and not just a buzz word.

2.2. Empirical Research

In research exploring how people with disabilities join the workforce, several key interviews were conducted with partners actively involved in assisting people with disabilities in society, particularly in their integration into the workforce. Each interview shaped the understanding and direction of the Empower Ability project. The journey began with an important meeting at the Inclusivity Community Forum (ICF) at NOVA SBE, which established a strong bond from the beginning. This meeting was a starting point that enhanced the comprehension of the challenges and opportunities in employing people with disabilities. Furthermore, it laid the cornerstone for the project's focus, which would be more on the processes of entering jobs rather than on in-job processes such as workplace design, workplace consultancies, or others. The ICF was also instrumental in providing contact and facilitating connections, thereby aiding in reaching experts in the field.

The initial insights for the project were greatly influenced by Vera Bonvalot. She is the vice-president of the European Disability Forum and the executive director of Novamente, which

supports individuals with traumatic brain injuries and their families. One of her key initiatives is "Capacitar para Empregar - Empower to Employ." This program focuses on empowering individuals with disabilities by providing them with job opportunities and enhancing the understanding of their situation in the workforce. It played a crucial role in shaping the research. Building on these insights, the research examined existing corporate training programs, such as "Centro Incluir" by Jerónimo Martins. These programs are designed to equip individuals with specific job-related skills through pre-hire training. However, a significant challenge was identified in the accessibility and affordability of these programs for smaller companies. This revealed a specific area where the Empower Ability project could contribute, managing training programs in general from which all people with disabilities and all companies, not just corporations, could benefit from.

The research deepened through interactions with Vera Bonvalot and her colleagues, enhancing understanding of disability employment complexities. It highlighted the importance of soft skills and effective job placement pathways. This led to identifying three key areas: connecting companies with individuals with disabilities, implementing in-job training, general training in fields that are recognized as untrained or undertrained and soft skills. The critical role of tailored training programs, designed to meet the unique needs of individuals with disabilities, became clear in preparing and empowering them for the workforce.

Interactions with individuals with disabilities offered crucial validation of the purpose and deeper insight into their challenges and aspirations. These direct engagements confirmed initial hypotheses and revealed specific issues, such as difficulties with memory and understanding sequential processes when having cognitive disabilities. This highlighted the essential need for soft skills and a work environment that is supportive and tailored to their unique needs. On a personal note, those talks have been challenging our own prejudices, heart-warming and motivating to keep going in order to have real impact and really help to increase inclusivity.

The discussions highlighted shortcomings in current government programs, particularly in their lack of personalized approaches. This brought attention to the need for ongoing, individualized support in the employment process for people with disabilities, suggesting a shift towards more tailored and supportive methods.

The final meetings with Valor T, a Portuguese job agency for individuals with disabilities, brought clarity to the important role of Empower Ability in disability employment. This meeting emphasized the need for a platform dedicated to training and skill development. Furthermore, it highlighted the gap that this project has to tackle. Valor T is already connecting people with disabilities with companies wanting to employ them. There is no need to copy this process. The lack of real and specific training opportunities, also for soft skills, was mentioned in the meetings with the ICF, Novamente and Valor T and especially the talks with Valor T motivated to fill out the gap before the employment process itself, meaning training. The feedback they got from companies is exactly this and they are looking for solutions. Thus, they got interested in this project and helped immensely. In addition, Valor T shows interest to continue working on this topic with the project team beyond the thesis deadline to make it a real-world organization that works together with them and along them. These insights defined a clear direction for Empower Ability's mission. They showed the importance of creating tailored training programs that meet diverse needs.

The iterative and cumulative research process solidified the core principles of Empower Ability. It brought to light the need for customized training programs, the importance of meeting diverse and individualized needs, and the crucial role of training in creating an inclusive and supportive professional environment for individuals with disabilities. All interview partners and organizations showed substantial interest in the project and offered help during the whole process. The expectations are to continue working with them beyond the work project deadline.

2.3. Opportunity Identification

The integration of individuals with disabilities into the job market represents a significant challenge everywhere, also in Portugal. According to (Eurostat, 2022), approximately 35% of Portugal's population comprises individuals with disabilities. Yet, despite such a substantial percentage, these individuals face considerable barriers to employment. The unemployment rate for people with disabilities in developed countries is twice that of individuals with no disabilities (United Nations, 2007). Such disparities not only hinder the economic potential of these individuals but also contribute to broader societal issues, such as increased social exclusion and a higher risk of insufficient social protection (International Labour Organization, 2023).

The private sector's efforts towards this cause remain limited. While there's a growing emphasis on gender inclusivity, the focus on disability inclusion is still not the same and in the early stage. Many companies lack awareness or the necessary tools to recruit and integrate individuals with disabilities effectively into their workforce (International Labour Organization; Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2018). On the public sector front, while strategies and action plans exist, they often fall short of addressing the core issues.

However, this challenge presents a unique opportunity. Addressing the integration of individuals with disabilities into the job market can lead to positive externalities for various stakeholders. For individuals with disabilities, it can result in increased income, higher living standards, and improved well-being (Dean, Shogren, Hagiwara, & Wehmeyer, 2018). For businesses, a diverse workforce can bring a range of skills and perspectives, leading to higher economic activity. Moreover, societal benefits include reduced poverty and a more inclusive community.

The opportunity lies in bridging the gap between individuals with disabilities seeking employment and companies looking to foster a diverse and inclusive work environment, but not directly as a job platform as there are existing solutions for that. By providing a platform that offers tailored courses and training programs, there's potential to equip individuals with disabilities with the necessary skills to thrive in the job market. Furthermore, by raising awareness among companies about the benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities and providing them with the tools to do so, we can create a more inclusive job market in Portugal.

2.4. Solution Introduction

Our platform is mainly planned to be designed as a hub for education, community, and awareness. By offering courses that improve both hard and soft skills, we aim to equip individuals with disabilities with the knowledge and skills they truly need in the workforce, and which are asked for by the industries which we know by constantly being in change with the stakeholders. These courses are priced fairly or paid by others such as scholarships and funds, ensuring accessibility while maintaining financial sustainability. This pricing strategy is balanced by students with no disabilities if they choose to study at our platform paying a higher fee, reinforcing the platform's commitment to inclusivity (Neomarca, 2021).

Beyond education, the platform serves as a community space. Here, users can share experiences, seek advice, and connect with potential employers. This community aspect is vital, as it not only provides support but also fosters a sense of belonging, crucial for the mental well-being of individuals with disabilities (Gilbert, 2019).

Furthermore, the platform could at a later stage actively engage with companies through awareness-raising sessions together with the partner organizations. These sessions will highlight the benefits of a diverse workforce and provide companies with the tools and

knowledge to create more inclusive work environments. By doing so, we aim to shift the corporate mindset, emphasizing the value individuals with disabilities bring to the table (Hunt, y otros, 2023).

However, the platform's success is dependent on its ability to adapt and evolve. The job market is changing all the time, and the needs of individuals with disabilities will probably change at the same pace. Continuous feedback, gathered through surveys and interviews, will be crucial. This feedback will guide platform updates, ensuring it remains relevant and effective in its mission (Jones, 2023).

In summary, our platform offers a practicable solution to a complex problem. By focusing on education, community, and awareness, we aim to create a more inclusive job market where individuals with disabilities are not only participants but also valued contributors.

3. Analysis of the Identified Gap: Training and Skills (Individual part Juan Barreto)

3.1. Problem Tree Analysis

This thesis uses a problem tree analysis (see appendix 1) to thoroughly examine the complex issue of insufficient integration of individuals with disabilities into Portugal's job market. This methodical approach helps identify the root causes and consequences of this specific problem, providing a comprehensive framework to understand its various dimensions. Through this methodology, the research delves deeply into the complex factors contributing to the employment challenges faced by individuals with disabilities, ranging from educational deficits to legal inadequacies, and their social, economic, and psychological impacts (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2001).

The expanded understanding through problem tree analysis reveals numerous core issues. A significant factor is the deficit in specialized educational resources, including a lack of tailored training programs for individuals with disabilities (Albinowski, Magda, & Rozszczypala, 2023) and limited educational opportunities that accommodate special needs. Additionally, inadequate support systems, employer reluctance, and societal biases further intensify the problem (Wegscheider & Guével, 2021).

The analysis also highlights specific barriers directly linked to individuals with disabilities, such as a lack of job-relevant skills often due to socioeconomic factors, low motivation affecting job applications, and a tendency to underestimate their abilities, leading to passive job-seeking behavior (U.S. Department of Labor, 2020). On the side of companies, there is a notable lack of awareness about the employment issues faced by people with disabilities (McKinney & Swartz, 2021), further complicating the job market match between individuals with disabilities and employers.

The consequences of these challenges are far-reaching. For individuals with disabilities and their families, there is an increased sense of social exclusion and difficulty in securing employment. This exclusion, coupled with the pressure and anxiety of not being recruited, can severely affect their mental health (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023) and increase their risk of poverty (Eurostat, 2022). Companies miss out on potentially valuable employees, while society suffers from the broader economic impacts, with the unemployment of people with disabilities potentially affecting GDP by 3% to 7% (Vallas, Knackstedt, & Thompson, 2022).

To address these issues, several solutions are proposed. Enhancing educational resources remains crucial, with the need for specific training programs and greater access to specialized education. Strengthening support systems is vital, encompassing comprehensive job coaching,

career guidance, and community support networks. Improving employer engagement and awareness is necessary, achieved through educational campaigns and diversity training in workplaces. Economic and financial measures, such as subsidies for workplace accommodations and incentives for employers, are proposed to encourage businesses to hire individuals with disabilities. Legal and policy reforms are essential, focusing on strengthening disability rights law enforcement and refining policies to promote inclusive hiring practices. Finally, advancements in technology and improvements in accessibility are crucial to ensure that online platforms and physical work environments are inclusive for all forms of disabilities (International Labour Organization, 2019).

3.2. INE Approach

The INE Approach, focusing on Importance, Neglect, and Externalities, provides a clear framework for examining social issues, and it's particularly useful for this thesis on individuals with disabilities in Portugal's job market. By looking at how important the issue is, where it has been overlooked, and the wider effects it has, this method allows a thorough exploration and understanding of the problem. This approach not only points out the key aspects of the problem but also shows where more efforts and resources are needed and predicts the broader impact of these efforts. The INE Approach was part of the Applied Social Entrepreneurship course with Loic Pedras during our studies.

Importance of the Issue The challenge of integrating individuals with disabilities into the workforce is crucial for several reasons. This group forms a considerable part of the population, and they often struggle to find jobs. This lack of employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities has wide-ranging effects. It impacts their financial independence, social participation, and overall quality of life. The high unemployment rate among people with disabilities, particularly in developed countries, shows the barriers they face in society (United Nations, 2007). Their absence from the workforce leads to broader economic and social issues,

including increased reliance on social welfare and the loss of their potential contributions to the economy and society (International Labour Organization, 2023).

Neglect in Addressing the Issue Despite recognizing the importance of this issue, there's a noticeable gap in effectively addressing it. In the private sector, more work is needed to make workplaces more inclusive (International Labour Organization; Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2018). This suggests a broader issue of companies not being fully committed to social responsibility and inclusivity. Public sector policies and action plans, while present, often lack the depth and reach needed to make a significant difference. This gap between policy and implementation suggests a need for stronger and more focused strategies to help individuals with disabilities find meaningful employment.

Externalities of the Issue Successfully integrating individuals with disabilities into the job market brings several positive outcomes. For the individuals, employment can mean better economic stability, improved self-worth, and a sense of belonging, all of which are essential for mental and emotional health (Dean, Shogren, Hagiwara, & Wehmeyer, 2018). These benefits extend beyond the individuals to the wider community and economy. For businesses, including a diverse range of employees can lead to a richer skill set and broader perspectives. On an economic level, integrating individuals with disabilities into the workforce can boost overall productivity and growth, while reducing reliance on social welfare (van der Zwan & de Beer, 2021). This shows the broad benefits of inclusive employment practices, not just for individuals with disabilities but for the entire society.

3.3. Impact Gap Canvas

The Impact Gap Canvas is a tool used in this thesis to analyze and understand the challenges of integrating people with disabilities into Portugal's job market. It helps to map out the problem, identify existing solutions, and assess the gap between these solutions and the actual needs.

This method is particularly useful for clearly seeing where improvements are needed and for developing more effective strategies to address these gaps (Papi-Thornton's, 2018).

Challenge Mapping The main challenge addressed in this thesis is the difficulty faced by people with disabilities in finding jobs. Statistics show that 17% of persons with disabilities were unemployed in 2017 in the EU (Lecerf, 2020). This high unemployment rate points to a real problem in how society includes people with disabilities in the workforce. The reasons for this include people with disabilities's own challenges, such as a lack of necessary skills and low self-confidence. On the company side, there's often a lack of understanding and commitment to including employees with disabilities. Additionally, there's a mismatch in the job market between what job seekers with disabilities can offer and what companies need.

Solutions Mapping Some current solutions involve non-profit and government projects working with companies to improve how they include people with disabilities (World Economic Forum, 2022). There are also platforms like Ability Jobs or Valor T that provide job opportunities (Ability Jobs, 2022). However, these solutions don't fully address the need for skill development among individuals with disabilities. The thesis, therefore, sees a gap in providing educational platforms focused on specific skills that people with disabilities need for the job market.

Impact Gap Assessment An assessment of the current situation shows that existing solutions aren't adequately building the skills of individuals with disabilities. They also often provide unclear information about job opportunities. To close this gap, the thesis proposes focusing on training programs that align with market needs, working with companies to create an inclusive culture, and addressing overlooked issues like reinforcing negative stereotypes or creating solutions that are not effective or accessible. Addressing these challenges can significantly

improve the lives of people with disabilities, contribute to their health, and bring untapped skills to businesses, helping them grow and solve labor shortages.

3.4. Theory of Change

A Theory of Change (see appendix 3) is a comprehensive description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a specific context. It outlines the necessary preconditions, activities, and expected outcomes for achieving a long-term goal. For this project, focusing on developing a training platform for individuals with disabilities in Portugal, the Theory of Change is instrumental in mapping out the steps needed to achieve an inclusive job market. It helps identify key activities, stakeholders, and metrics for success, ensuring a strategic and impactful approach (United Nations Development Group, 2017).

The long-term goal of creating an inclusive job market in Portugal for individuals with disabilities' centers on their effective integration into the workforce. This ambitious goal requires a mix of policies and initiatives, with a special emphasis on training and development. Understanding the specific needs and challenges faced by individuals with disabilities is essential. Aligning this goal with broader societal and economic objectives will help garner support and commitment.

Preconditions and Necessary Conditions: Awareness, Legal and Inputs

Awareness and Attitude Change: Changing employer and societal attitudes is critical but needs to be paired with practical steps like creating accessible training programs.

Legal Frameworks Enforced: Enforcement of legal frameworks is essential, along with evaluating their effectiveness in promoting training and development opportunities.

Inputs: Key inputs include a capital investment of 300€ for the development of a no-code website, materials for teachers, and marketing campaigns, as well as the commitment of two

individuals working on course provision and an academic partnership with Nova Inclusive Community Forum but also with organizations such as Novamente and Valor T.

Focusing on training and development, the project will address how these programs will be designed, funded, and made accessible. An analysis of existing training programs will guide best practices and improvement areas. The project aims to reach 2500 people through communication efforts and enroll 1000 paying platform users, including 600 course enrollees and 400 individuals with disabilities in the community.

Collaboration between various stakeholders is vital for success. The engagement level of employers and private sector players will be analyzed, along with potential challenges in collaboration. The project aims to partner with 15 companies, enhancing their ability to find skilled employees with disabilities.

Measuring the impact of these initiatives is crucial. The project will develop and use effective metrics to accurately capture the impact of training and development initiatives. This includes considering actions from other actors and removing unintended consequences to assess the social impact accurately.

The project's social outcomes focus on providing individuals with disabilities with community access, skill improvement, and potential recruitment opportunities. For companies, the goal is to simplify finding skilled employees with disabilities and raise awareness about integrating individuals with disabilities into the labor market. Teachers will benefit from new job opportunities and a revenue source. The social impact will be assessed by adjusting outcomes considering broader sector actions and focusing on the unique contributions of this training platform.

3.5. Our Idea to close the Gap

The platform presented here is specifically developed to enhance training opportunities for individuals with disabilities in Portugal. Its aim is to equip them with essential skills and knowledge, preparing them for future employment. This approach, centered on specialized education and community engagement, is designed to address the initial stages of career development for individuals with disabilities.

A key feature of the platform is its array of tailored educational courses. These courses focus on vital areas like language proficiency, digital literacy, and programming, and are crafted to meet the specific needs of individuals with disabilities. The platform's educational approach goes beyond traditional learning; it is designed to build confidence and provide the foundational skills necessary for future employment. Each course is structured to be accessible and relevant, ensuring that participants gain both practical knowledge and a deeper understanding of various subjects.

In addition to education, the platform fosters a supportive community environment. This community serves as a space for individuals with disabilities to exchange experiences, seek advice, and gain motivation from peers. It's a platform for encouragement and learning, where participants can engage in discussions, share resources, and support each other's growth and development. The community aspect plays a vital role in enhancing the learning experience and preparing participants for future job-seeking.

Collaboration with key stakeholders is integral to the platform's strategy. By working with government bodies, non-profits, and educational institutions, the platform aims to create a robust and effective training environment. These partnerships are essential for ensuring the platform's offerings are comprehensive, up-to-date, and aligned with current job market demands. Ongoing investment in the platform's content and user experience is crucial to

maintain its relevance and effectiveness in equipping individuals with disabilities with necessary skills.

Overall, the platform is dedicated to providing training and skill development opportunities for individuals with disabilities in Portugal. Its success will be measured by its ability to deliver impactful educational content, create a nurturing community environment, and engage with relevant partners to ensure the training it provides is practical and valuable, setting a strong foundation for participants' future employment journeys.

3.6. Social Value Proposition for the Online Platform

The Social Value Proposition (see appendix 2) for this platform is a foundational element of the thesis, offering a strategic framework that underlines the societal impact and relevance of the platform's services. It specifically caters to the needs of key stakeholders - individuals with disabilities and companies - ensuring that the platform not only meets their individual requirements but also contributes significantly to broader societal goals. This proposition emphasizes the platform's role in addressing critical social challenges and opportunities, underscoring its importance in creating a more inclusive and equitable job market.

Beneficiary Segments:

- **Individuals with disabilities:** The focus is on individuals with disabilities seeking employment opportunities. They need accessible, tailored educational programs, skill development, and a supportive community that addresses their unique challenges in the job market.

Customer Segments:

- **Individuals with disabilities:** As customers, they seek practical, accessible training and resources to directly enhance their skills and employability.

- **Companies:** Companies aiming to diversify their workforce and enhance their social responsibility profile are also key beneficiaries. Their requirements center around finding skilled, diverse employees and effectively integrating them into their workplaces.
- **Educational Institutions, Social Enterprises, Individual Lecturers:** These groups look for collaborations to extend their social impact and educational outreach.

Value Proposition for Individuals with disabilities: The platform aims to integrate individuals with disabilities into the job market by addressing the significant skills gap hindering their employment. It provides tailored educational programs designed to resonate with the unique experiences of job seekers with disabilities, significantly enhancing their professional development. The platform also offers a robust support network for sharing experiences, seeking advice, and finding encouragement, crucial for successful job market integration.

Value Proposition for Companies: For companies, the platform is a valuable resource for inclusive hiring practices. By training individuals with disabilities, it gives companies access to a skilled talent pool and the opportunity to directly hire from it, thereby enhancing their inclusivity practices. This is particularly beneficial for small and medium-sized businesses, offering insights and practical approaches to employing and integrating individuals with disabilities into their workforce.

Customer Relationships: The platform maintains ongoing relationships with both individuals with disabilities and companies. For individuals, this includes continuous educational support, community engagement, and personal development opportunities. For companies, it provides ongoing engagement in diversity training and support in creating inclusive work environments, extending beyond the initial hiring phase.

Channels: The primary channel is an online platform that offers access to educational content, community forums, and job-related resources. This is supported by social media, email marketing, and strategic partnerships for broader outreach and engagement.

Impact Measures: Success is measured through various metrics, focusing on the employment rates and career progression of individuals with disabilities, companies' satisfaction with their hiring and training processes, and the overall societal impact in terms of enhanced workplace diversity and reduced inequality.

This Value Proposition Canvas showcases a deep understanding of the needs of individuals with disabilities seeking skill development and education, and companies' pursuit of a more diverse and inclusive environment. By aligning the platform's offerings with these needs, the aim is to create a significant and sustainable impact, contributing to a more inclusive and equitable job market.

3.7. (Social) Business Model

This section presents a comprehensive social business model (see appendix 4) for our online platform, meticulously crafted to address the challenge of enhancing employability among individuals with disabilities in Portugal. This model strategically aligns tailored educational programs, a supportive community network, and collaboration with key stakeholders, aiming to create a transformative impact in both the lives of individuals with disabilities and the broader job market.

Strategic Partnerships and Collaboration: The platform's foundation is in strategic collaborations, a concept underscored by Parkhe (1993) in his exploration of partnership dynamics. These alliances go beyond basic resource acquisition, focusing instead on enhancing content, supporting advocacy, understanding employer requirements, and aligning with

relevant policies. By engaging with a spectrum of organizations, including educational institutions, disability advocacy groups, corporations, and governmental bodies, the platform fosters a rich collaborative environment. This approach is not only pivotal for mutual benefit and social impact but also for cultivating community trust, an essential element for the platform's credibility and long-term sustainability.

Core Operational Activities: Central to the platform are key operational activities including the development of relevant and dynamic course content, comprehensive platform management ensuring accessibility and ease of use, active community engagement through forums and support groups, and focused marketing and outreach efforts. These activities are critical in maintaining the platform's relevance and effectiveness.

Resource Allocation and Management: The platform's resource allocation strategy encompasses a broad range of areas including financial investments, IT infrastructure, and skilled personnel, ensuring that resources are managed efficiently to optimize service delivery. This strategic channeling of resources is key to maintaining operational efficiency and effectiveness, aligning with the insights on resource management (Barney & Arikan 2005).

Value Proposition for Varied Stakeholders: The platform offers a unique value proposition to its diverse stakeholders. For individuals with disabilities, it provides accessible educational resources and a supportive community, enhancing their job market readiness and employability. Employers are offered insights into workforce diversity and access to a pool of talented individuals. This dual approach not only empowers individuals with disabilities but also supports employers in meeting their diversity and inclusion goals.

Building and Maintaining Customer Relationships: The customer relationship strategy focuses on personal assistance to ensure users with disabilities can effectively navigate and

utilize the platform and fostering a strong community for networking and support. This approach is pivotal in building trust and ensuring user satisfaction.

Diverse Distribution Channels: The platform leverages multiple channels to reach its audience, primarily through the online platform for course delivery and community engagement, supplemented by social media and marketing campaigns. These channels are critical in ensuring wide accessibility and engagement.

Customer Segmentation and Target Audience: The primary beneficiaries are individuals with disabilities seeking employment opportunities, with a broader audience including employers, government bodies, and educational institutions. Understanding the needs of these segments is key to tailoring the offerings and achieving the social mission.

Financial Strategy and Sustainability: The financial model of the platform includes diverse revenue streams such as course fees, with discounted rates for individuals with disabilities, government grants, and company-sponsored scholarships. This versatile approach ensures financial sustainability while promoting inclusivity. It is planned to offer all courses with government grants and/or company sponsored. The course fees are only for courses where both grants cannot apply.

Diverse Revenue Streams: Course Fees and Discounted Rates for Individuals with disabilities: The primary revenue stream involves offering courses through a freemium model, providing foundational courses for free and premium courses for a fee (Sussman & Siegal, 2003). Offering discounted rates or scholarships for individuals with disabilities ensures accessibility while creating a source of income. This aligns with the philosophy of inclusivity and equity (Hockerts, 2017).

Government Grants: Securing government grants or funding through social impact investment programs is pivotal for initial capital and sustaining operations. Collaborating with government bodies or disability-focused initiatives can provide financial support (Mair & Marti, 2006).

Company-Sponsored Scholarships: Partnering with corporations to sponsor scholarships or training programs for individuals with disabilities aligns with their corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives (Garriga & Melé, 2004). This collaboration not only ensures financial support but also creates a positive brand image for the companies involved.

Strategic Partnerships for Financial Sustainability: Educational Institutions: Collaborating with universities or vocational training centers can aid in content development and access to a wider audience. Joint ventures or endorsement agreements can ensure mutual benefits and financial sustainability (Sussman & Siegal, 2003).

Disability Organizations: Partnering with disability-focused organizations can provide financial support through grant opportunities and advocacy for inclusive educational initiatives (Hockerts, 2017). These collaborations reinforce credibility and attract further funding opportunities (Mair & Marti, 2006).

Scalability and Growth:

Market Expansion: Diversifying course offerings and expanding beyond Portugal's borders can increase revenue streams. Leveraging technology for multilingual courses can attract a wider international audience. The potential of the expansion was drawn in many of the interviews.

Monetizing Additional Services: Besides course fees, offering certification programs, consulting services for companies on inclusivity, or premium memberships (for companies) for advanced features can be additional revenue sources.

Impactful Operations and Social Goals: The operations are structured to maximize social impact, measured through variety of content, reach, user satisfaction, and skill development. The social impact goals are ambitious but achievable: reducing unemployment among individuals with disabilities, fostering workforce diversity, and enhancing societal awareness about the capabilities of individuals with disabilities.

Surplus Utilization and Type of Intervention: Any surplus generated is reinvested into the platform, expanding course offerings, and establishing new partnerships, thus ensuring continuous growth and improvement. The intervention type is primarily educational and supportive, focusing on skill development and community building.

At its core, the social business model embodies a thoughtful fusion of purpose-driven strategies and practical financial approaches. It's a testament to our dedication to confronting the distinctive obstacles encountered by individuals with disabilities in Portugal. We aspire not just to make an impact but to set off a chain reaction, fostering a job market and society where everyone, regardless of their abilities, feels included and valued.

3.8. Competitive Analysis

Understanding the landscape and the current competitors is crucial for the success and differentiation of Empower Ability. It will open the door to a deeper understanding of reality, the current needs and opportunities so that value is delivered in a unique and impactful way. This expanded analysis delves deeper into understanding the existing competitors, both within Portugal and internationally, highlighting how the platform stands out in this sector.

COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS













					
 OVERVIEW	Is a Portuguese company that facilitates the integration of people with disabilities into the labour market.	+ Competencias is a program within the company that focuses on offering courses and skill development programs to everyone.	Connects companies, businesses and non-profits with disabled job seekers.	Is a global online learning and teaching marketplace that offers a vast array of courses covering a wide range of subjects.	Is a non-profit organization dedicated to support and assistance to survivors of traumatic brain injuries.
 MAIN COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE	Strong partnerships and understanding of specific strengths of the individual in order to create better job matching.	The scale and power of the company ensures top quality, tools and cutting edge methodologies applied to the programs.	Scale from a perspective of expertise and extensive data. Being one of the largest companies in this niche, they have a large and diverse talent pool.	Extensive course offerings and the flexibility and accessibility for all the content since everything can be accessed online.	Is highly specialized in TBI and therefore has precise resources to attend the needs of this particular group.
 GENERAL INFO	Foundation: 2021 Presence: 	Foundation: 1989 Presence: Global	Foundation: 1995 Presence: Global	Foundation: 2010 Presence: Global	Foundation: 2010 Presence: 
 LIMITATIONS	Focuses only in matching jobs with disabled individuals but does not offer trainings nor education programs.	The programs are intended to be given to everyone. This means that the programs are not tailored to disabled individuals.	They focus mainly on connecting disabled job seekers with companies, but they do not offer training.	By being a general platform, lacks of specialized courses and programs adapted to disabled people.	Focuses only on traumatic brain injuries, leaving aside all the other physical disabilities.
 EMPOWER ABILITY DIFFERENTIATION	Our focus relies into empowering disabled individuals by developing their skills to create more tailored job matches.	Our approach allows to address the specific needs of disabled people.	Through tailored education programs, courses and trainings we aim to reduce even more the gap between opportunities and seekers.	The tailored approach addresses the unique challenges and learning styles of disabled individuals.	The services will be offered to the whole spectrum of disabilities, including both physical and mental.

Figure 1: Empower Ability Competitive Scenario

Empower Ability distinguishes itself in the marketplace by offering specialized training programs tailored specifically to the unique needs of individuals with disabilities. Unlike competitors that focus on broader employment services or general education platforms, Empower Ability aims on comprehensive skill development for this specific demographic. This targeted approach ensures that courses, training programs and education are not only accessible but also relevant to the particular challenges faced by people with both mental and physical disabilities. Empower Ability's competitive advantage lies in its dedication to a complete educational experience that empowers this community through personalized learning pathways.

4. Final Reflections: Impact, Limitations and Conclusion (Group part – Edin Selimagic, Juan Barreto)

4.1. Impact assessment

The online training platform for individuals with disabilities in Portugal, designed to aid in their employment journey, has achieved its initial goals and shows promising potential for a significant wider impact. This potential can be effectively measured using a combination of specific metrics, providing a clear picture of the platform's effectiveness, and identifying opportunities for further development.

The platform's expansion and reach have been notably enhanced through strategic partnerships with various educational institutions, advocacy groups, and potential employers. The effectiveness of these collaborations can be measured by the number of cooperative initiatives, the variety of organizations involved, and the quality of feedback received from these partners. The growing interest from external entities suggests the project's capability to move beyond its academic roots, with indicators such as additional development funding, long-term commitments from partnering organizations, and plans for future scalability serving as key metrics.

A significant aspect of the project's wider impact is its contribution to creating more inclusive employment practices and altering employer perceptions about hiring individuals with disabilities. This can be quantified through the employment rates of users after completing the training, satisfaction levels measured through surveys, and research assessing shifts in employer attitudes. Additionally, the platform's adaptability to user needs and changing market conditions plays a crucial role in maintaining its relevance. Metrics such as the frequency of course updates, user engagement statistics, and the rate of user feedback incorporation into platform improvements are essential in assessing this adaptability.

Quantitative measures, including user numbers, course completion rates, and growth over time, offer concrete evidence of the platform's reach and success. Complementing these, qualitative measures like user testimonials, case studies, and feedback from employers and partnering organizations provide deeper insights into the platform's qualitative impact and user satisfaction.

The potential impact of the online training platform is extensive, spanning educational opportunities, societal change, and enhanced employment prospects for individuals with disabilities. Through a blend of quantitative and qualitative metrics, the platform's impact can be thoroughly evaluated, guiding future enhancements and affirming its role as a valuable resource in promoting an inclusive job market in Portugal.

4.2. Limitations

In the creation of an online platform designed to assist individuals with disabilities in finding employment, a series of significant limitations were encountered, each contributing to the overall learning experience and shaping the project's trajectory.

One of the most pronounced challenges was the difficulty in gathering comprehensive data about job seekers with disabilities. Unlike more commonly studied groups like students, information on this demographic was scarce, necessitating innovative methods to connect with and understand their unique needs. This gap in data not only complicated the research process but also extended the timeframe needed to acquire the necessary insights.

Resource constraints also posed a major hurdle. The decision to use the Bubble platform, while cost-effective, brought limitations in terms of customization and scalability. Balancing the need for a functional, user-friendly platform with limited resources was a continual challenge, highlighting the importance of efficient resource management in such social ventures.

A critical barrier was changing societal attitudes towards hiring individuals with disabilities. Addressing longstanding beliefs and practices was a complex and slow process, significantly impacting the project's success. This challenge underscored the necessity for persistent advocacy and awareness-raising to effect meaningful social change.

Technologically, ensuring the platform was accessible and functional for various disabilities was a significant challenge. The need to balance advanced technological solutions with user-friendly design required innovative thinking and adaptability. This aspect was pivotal in making the platform inclusive and practical for all potential users.

Furthermore, considerations of long-term sustainability and adaptability were constant. Strategies for revenue generation and user engagement were explored alongside the need to adapt to changing job market trends and technological developments. This strategic approach was essential for ensuring the platform's continued relevance and effectiveness.

These limitations proved to be valuable learning experiences. They highlighted the complexity of creating a solution that is not only technically sound but also genuinely meets the needs of job seekers with disabilities. The project evolved beyond just building a website; it became an initiative deeply rooted in understanding and facilitating the integration of individuals with disabilities into the workforce. These challenges, while daunting, were instrumental in guiding the development and future direction of the platform.

4.3. Sustainability and Scalability Strategies

The Empower Ability project, aimed at improving employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities in Portugal, is rooted in a well-rounded plan that ensures both its sustainability and capacity for growth. This plan strategically balances a diverse financial approach with collaborative efforts, underscoring the project's commitment to creating lasting impact.

Financial sustainability is a key focus, with the project exploring various income sources including course fees, government grants, and corporate scholarships. This approach ensures continuous operation and aligns with the inclusive mission of the project, making it accessible to everyone in need. The diversity in funding not only stabilizes the project financially but also allows for flexibility and resilience in facing economic challenges.

Collaborations form a central pillar in the project's strategy. By partnering with schools, organizations supporting people with disabilities, businesses, and government agencies, the project goes beyond just acquiring resources. These partnerships enhance the platform with quality content and advocate for the needs of individuals with disabilities, ensuring a concerted effort towards shared goals.

Operational efficiency is vital for the project's day-to-day relevance and effectiveness. Regularly updating course content, maintaining an accessible platform, and keeping the community engaged are crucial aspects that ensure the project remains a helpful and relevant resource. These operations are driven by the goal of staying attuned to the community's evolving needs.

User engagement and support are at the forefront of the project. Personalized assistance and a supportive network ensure that users feel valued and an integral part of the community. Engagement efforts extend through various channels, including the online platform, social media, and targeted marketing, ensuring wide reach and awareness of the project's offerings.

Looking ahead, the project plans for the future by reinvesting surplus funds into expanding course offerings and forging new partnerships. This forward-thinking approach is key to adapting to changing user needs and market conditions, ensuring the project's long-term viability and relevance.

Success and impact are measured through tangible outcomes such as employment rates of individuals with disabilities who use the platform, user satisfaction, and the extent of learning achieved. The project aims to reduce unemployment among individuals with disabilities, contribute to more diverse workplaces, and showcase the potential of individuals with disabilities in the workforce.

In essence, the Empower Ability project is more than a temporary solution; it's an evolving initiative designed to adapt and grow to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities in Portugal. By smartly managing finances, fostering collaborations, maintaining operational effectiveness, and building strong community relationships, the project is not just impactful now but is also positioned for enduring success and relevance.

4.4. Conclusion

The Empower Ability project, as outlined in this thesis, represents a significant initiative aimed at improving employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities in Portugal. Through thorough research and analysis, this project has focused on identifying and addressing gaps in the current employment system, creating a practical solution to these challenges. The evolution of this project has been deeply influenced by extensive feedback and discussions, leading to pivotal adjustments in its approach and implementation.

Empower Ability acts as a crucial link in connecting job seekers with disabilities with meaningful employment opportunities. More than just a digital platform, it functions as a vital bridge, equipping individuals with disabilities with necessary skills and opportunities, while also offering employers access to a unique and valuable talent pool. The platform's effectiveness in meeting the specific needs of its users and engaging potential employers showcases its carefully crafted design. The project has tackled the challenge of integrating individuals with disabilities into the workforce head-on. It emphasizes providing targeted

training programs, nurturing strong community support, and forming strategic partnerships. This approach demonstrates a deep understanding of the barriers faced by individuals with disabilities and a commitment to overcoming these challenges in a comprehensive and inclusive way. Looking to the future, the sustainability and adaptability of the Empower Ability project are key to its ongoing relevance and impact. Strategies centered around financial stability, active user engagement, and continuous content development are critical to ensure the platform remains a dynamic and relevant tool in the fluctuating job market. This proactive stance is crucial in upholding the platform's effectiveness in creating a more inclusive job market.

In conclusion, while the Empower Ability project is at the beginning of its journey, it has the potential to effect significant social change. Rooted in the solid foundation laid by this thesis and bolstered by the support from collaborating organizations, the project is well-positioned to grow into an impactful tool for societal advancement. The project team, based on the success and potential of this initiative, is committed to either continuing their work on the project or handing it over to the organizations involved, ensuring its real-life impact and effectiveness. This project highlights the value of collaborative, responsive, and user-centered design in addressing immediate challenges, particularly in empowering individuals with disabilities through training and overcoming social barriers. As the Empower Ability project moves forward, it stands ready to transform lives, shift societal perceptions, and make a significant contribution to creating a diverse and inclusive workforce. This thesis captures a journey of effective social development, marking a crucial step in addressing the employment challenges faced by individuals with disabilities.

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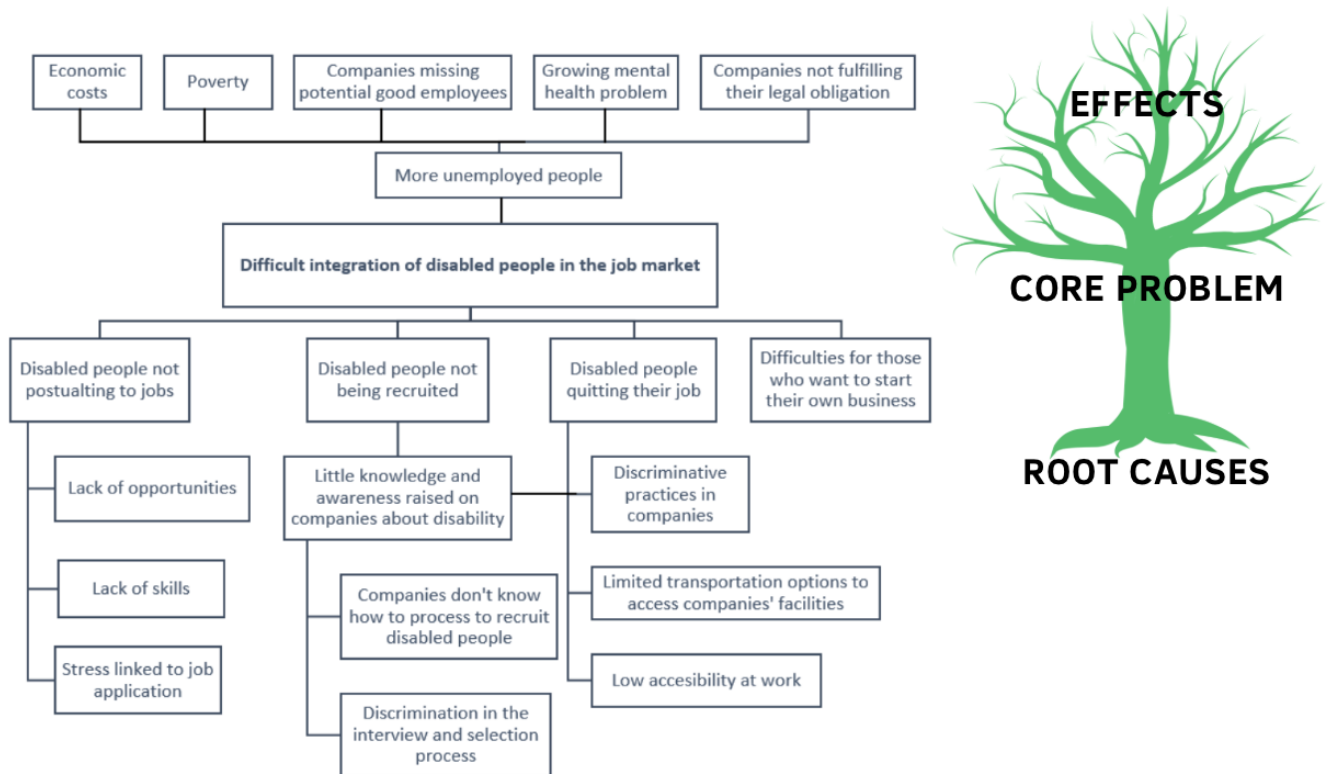
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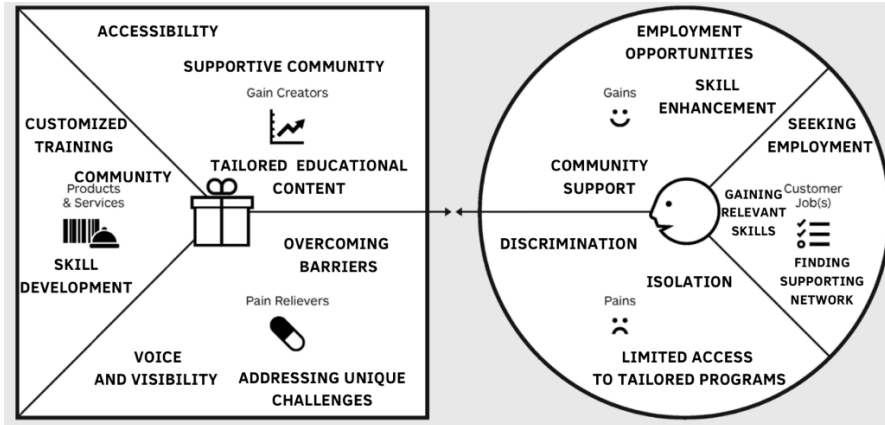
6. Appendixes

Appendix 1 – Problem tree

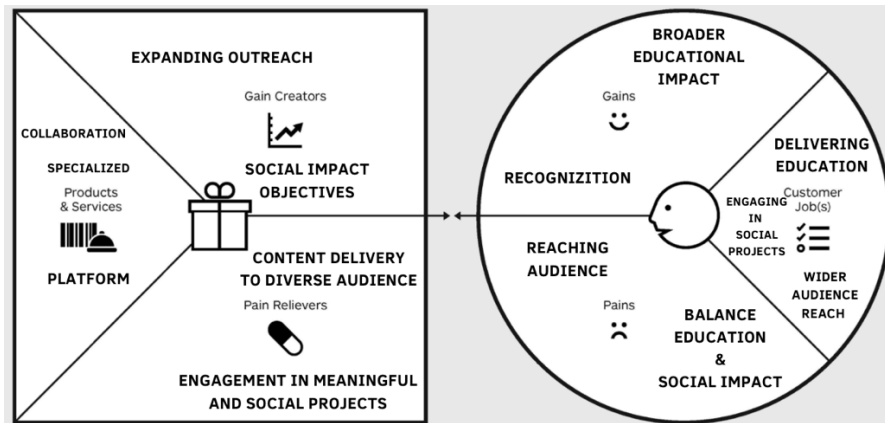


Appendix 2 – Value Proposition Canvas

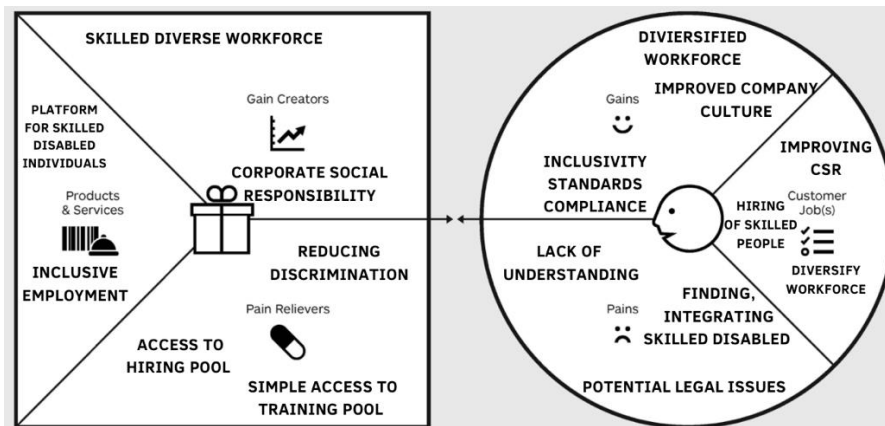
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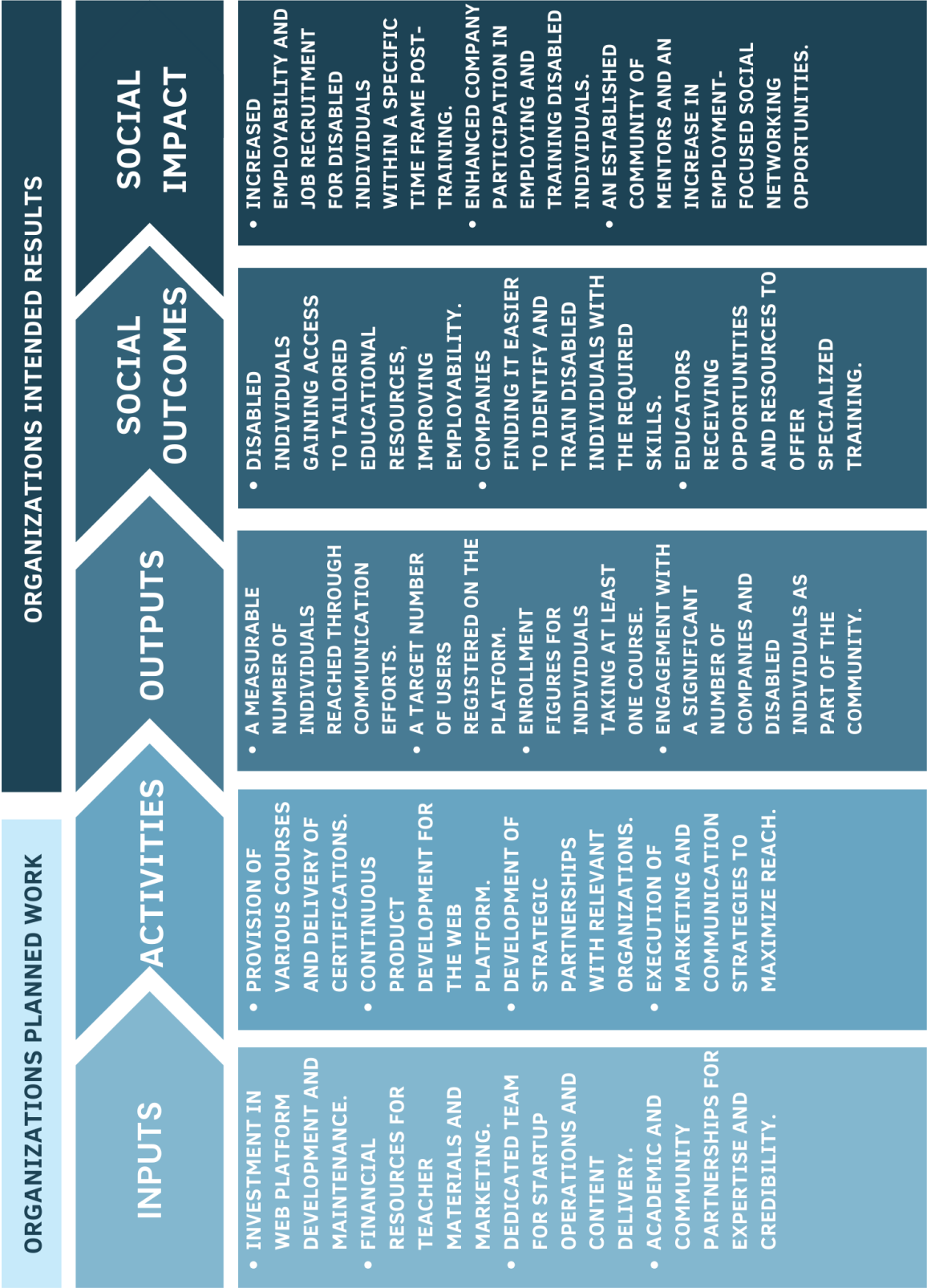
Course providers



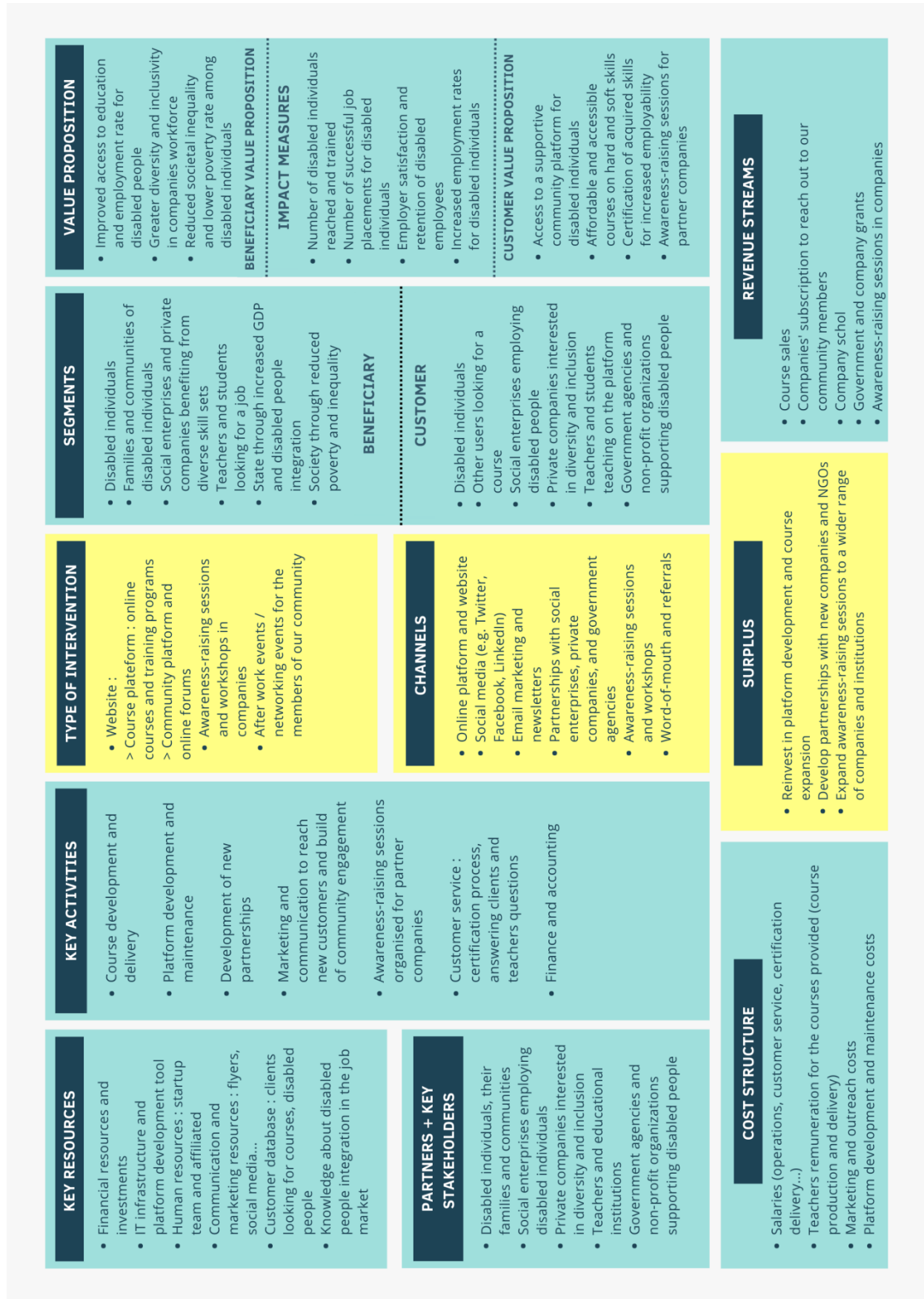
Companies



Appendix 3 – Theory of Change



Appendix 4 – Social Business Model



Appendix 5 – Meeting (notes) that led to the idea.

First Meeting with ICF from NOVA (Inclusive Community Forum)

Date: 4th September 2023

Key Points Discussed:

1. Project Introduction:

- Name of the initiative: "Empower to Employ" (Portuguese: "Capacitar para Empregar").
- Contact Person: Vera Bonvalot.

2. Current Training Programs:

- Existing training programs for people with brain disabilities, focusing on social skills, digital literacy, and language skills.
- Potential collaboration with these programs.

3. Data Collection Challenges:

- Difficulty in obtaining relevant data, especially within the Portuguese context.

4. Industry Feedback:

- Feedback from 50 companies indicating that skills development is a primary concern.
- Recommendation to engage with some of these companies for further insights.

5. Notable Company Initiatives:

- Jerónimo Martins and their “Centro Incluir” as a successful case study.

6. Legal Framework:

- Need to obtain information on legal requirements for Portuguese companies regarding disability employment.

7. Awareness Programs:

- ICF conducts awareness sessions for companies about disability employment.

8. Network Expansion:

- Suggestion to contact social organizations for partnerships and insights.

9. Project Focus:

- Emphasis on focusing on abilities rather than disabilities, avoiding generalizations.

10. Expert Consultation:

- Randy Louis mentioned as a notable disability employment advocate.

11. Company Employment Practices:

- Understanding that each company has different employment practices for individuals with disabilities with no standardized guidelines.

12. Physical Accessibility in Workplaces:

- Three companies already assisting others in enhancing workplace accessibility.

13. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the Project:

- Number of people employed after training.
- Number of people currently in training.
- Number of companies engaged with the platform.
- Total users on the platform.
- Number of partnerships with other organizations.

14. Data Collection Methods:

- Strategies to collect data through collaborations with other organizations.

Meeting with Vera (Novamente), Juan, and Edin

Date: 12th September 2023

Key Discussion Points:

1. Needs of People with disabilities:

- Focus on the lack of soft skills among individuals with disabilities.
- Recognizing the critical need to place people with disabilities into jobs.

2. Three Dimensions of Focus:

- Connecting companies with individuals with disabilities.
- Strategies for in-job training and skill development.
- The role of caretakers in this process.

3. Training Benefits for Companies:

- Companies gain new perspectives through training and need to adapt their training approaches accordingly.
- Emphasis on the importance of accessibility in training programs.

4. Case Studies and Approaches:

- Accenture's approach to providing tailored training based on actual skills of individuals with disabilities.
- Cisco's method of training people with disabilities and employing some of them.

5. Mobility and Accessibility:

- Challenges regarding physical accessibility for mobility-individuals with disabilities.

6. Mentoring Programs:

- The concept of mentoring within companies, including the Erasmus project where peers become mentors.

7. Inclusion vs. Exclusion in the Workplace:

- Concerns about caregivers leading to exclusion and dependence in the workplace.
- Need for inclusivity in the mentoring process, involving various stakeholders like HR and management.

8. Proposed Solution:

- Creating a pool of companies and a pool of individuals with disabilities to connect them through training and job opportunities.

9. **Potential Collaboration:**

- Suggestion to talk to Joao Cadima from Valor T, who connects similar groups but not through training.

10. **Ideal Platform Vision by Vera:**

- A platform that provides all possible trainings offered by companies, includes a diverse group of individuals, and facilitates connections through training, not just job placements.

11. **Remote Work Considerations:**

- Recognizing that remote jobs might not be the best solution as they can foster loneliness. Emphasis on the need for individuals with disabilities to seek social contact and community involvement.

Meeting with Antonio (Novamente) incl. individuals with disabilities

Date: 29th September 2023

Key Discussion Points:

1. **Partnership with Novamente:**

- Exploring partnerships with entities like Novamente, who are keen on employing individuals with disabilities.

2. **Focus on Soft Skills:**

- Emphasis on the importance of soft skills and social cues for individuals with disabilities in the workforce.

3. **Feedback Collection:**

- The idea of deploying questionnaires to people with disabilities who are already working, to gather insights.

4. **Group with Cognitive Disabilities:**

- Discussion about a specific group of people with cognitive disabilities and their employment needs.

5. **CRPG Program:**

- Reference to CRPG's six-month intern care program following incidents leading to disabilities.

6. Existing Government Programs:

- Overview of government programs that are already in place to support individuals with disabilities.

7. Ongoing Support:

- The necessity of continuous support for individuals with disabilities in employment settings.

8. Identifying Potential and Skills:

- The process of discovering the potential and skills of individuals with disabilities.

9. Work Environment Considerations:

- Importance of the work environment, with a focus on issues like noise sensitivity.

10. Novamente's Employment Office:

- Existence of an employment office at Novamente and its functions.

11. Mentorship and Community:

- The concept of having a colleague or mentor to assist initially and throughout the employment process.

12. Entrepreneurship Support:

- Novamente's efforts in helping individuals with disabilities who want to pursue entrepreneurship or self-employment.

13. Cooperative Initiatives:

- The idea of forming cooperatives that combine the efforts of various individuals with disabilities.

14. Leveraging Disability for Support:

- Utilizing the shared experiences of disability to provide mutual support.

15. Social Networking Opportunities:

- Potential of a targeted social network focused on work and collaboration.

16. Standards in Design:

- Need to create and improve standards, not just in working conditions but also in the physical layout and appearance of workspaces.

17. Addressing Limitations:

- Encouraging individuals with disabilities to express, acknowledge, and accept their limitations as the first step towards better coping with their conditions.

Valor T Meeting

13th of October and 17th of November 2023

Key Discussion Points:

1. Benefits and Gains for Companies:

- Understanding what companies gain from this initiative, including enhanced employee skills.

2. Training Needs Identified:

- Languages, computer skills, and soft skills identified as key areas for training.

3. Training Companies as Clients:

- Conceptualizing training companies as clients who would benefit from the platform's services.

4. Job Availability:

- Acknowledging that finding jobs is not the primary issue, but the skill gap is more significant.

2nd meeting

1. Training Offerings and Financing:

- Decision-making on the nature of training (paid or free) and financing models.

2. Scholarship Projects:

- Implementing scholarships for those who cannot afford courses, financed by companies.
3. **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):**
 - Focusing KPIs on aspects directly under control rather than overall employability, which is influenced by multiple factors.
 4. **Role Limitation:**
 - Emphasis on providing courses, not full career paths, and avoiding the role of career advisors.
 5. **Course Creation and Evaluation:**
 - Policies on who can create courses and how to evaluate lecturers and courses.
 6. **Differentiation from Existing Platforms:**
 - Contemplating the unique selling proposition compared to platforms like Duolingo or Edx.
 7. **Accessibility for Blind People:**
 - Developing features to make the platform accessible and useful for blind users.
 8. **Building a Community:**
 - Creating a community for connecting people with disabilities and people with no disabilities.
 9. **Training Delivery Modes:**
 - Identifying the best methods for delivering training, emphasizing the importance of offline training for some.
 10. **Course Location Accessibility:**
 - Integrating Google Maps to help users find local courses or training.
 11. **Multilingual Website Structure:**
 - Ensuring the website is accessible in multiple languages.
 12. **Forum and Community Engagement:**

- Adding a forum for specific queries and including third-party partners like career counselors.

13. Website Categories:

- Differentiating categories like online training, job training, general soft skills, and hard skills.

14. Engaging with Companies:

- Initiating contact with companies interested in offering courses.

15. Various Considerations:

- Discussing standards, decoupling demand and supply, language of courses, demand models, financing, and aesthetics of course offerings.

16. Market Gap Identification:

- Recognizing the gap in the market for this kind of service and the necessity to bridge it.

17. Engagement with ICF:

- Reference to 54 companies associated with ICF as potential collaborators or clients.

Appendix 6 – SWOT Analysis.

Strengths:

The project's primary strength lies in its profound understanding of the labor market's difficulties, particularly regarding the integration of individuals with disabilities. This understanding has been cultivated through broad engagement with stakeholders, ensuring that programs are precisely tailored to meet the unique requirements and abilities of everyone. Such educational resources fill a crucial void in the market by addressing the distinct skill gaps faced by job seekers with disabilities, thereby enhancing their employability.

Strategic partnerships with influential organizations such as Novamente and Valor T further empower the project, leveraging their expertise and networks to fortify the platform's offerings. These collaborations not only provide credibility but also expand the resources available, significantly amplifying the project's reach and efficacy.

The agility of the platform's design, facilitated using adaptable technologies, allows for rapid development and iterative improvements. This responsiveness ensures that the service evolves in concert with user feedback and labor market demands, maintaining its relevance and effectiveness.

Opportunities:

Exploring the horizon of opportunities, the project could significantly broaden its impact by diversifying its skill development programs. Expanding vocational training and enhancing soft skills education are pivotal steps toward comprehensive job market preparedness. Furthermore, there is a strong opportunity to foster corporate inclusivity. By guiding companies to understand and implement inclusive hiring practices, the project can be instrumental in reshaping corporate culture towards embracing diversity.

In terms of policy influence, the data and successes collected from the platform could serve as compelling evidence to inform and shape public policy. This influence has the potential to catalyze systemic changes that support the integration of individuals with disabilities into the job market on a broader scale.

Lastly, the project's scalability is a promising horizon. The model's adaptability suggests that it could be replicated or expanded nationwide, potentially serving as a catalyst for reducing the employment disparity faced by individuals with disabilities across Portugal. This scalability underscores the project's capacity to present meaningful social change and contribute to a more inclusive economy.

Weaknesses:

Despite the project's solid foundation, it encounters some vulnerabilities. Tailoring programs to individual needs can be resource-intensive and may not be scalable at the desired pace. Additionally, the reliance on technology may alienate some users who are less tech-savvy, potentially creating a barrier to access. Moreover, the project's success hinges on ongoing stakeholder engagement, which could be challenging to maintain over time.

Threats:

The project operates in a dynamic environment where policy shifts and funding changes can pose significant risks. There's also the ever-present possibility of societal attitudes lagging behind, which could dampen the progress towards inclusivity. In the wider economic landscape, recessions or downturns could lead to reduced hiring overall, impacting the project's core mission of job integration for individuals with disabilities.

Appendix 7 – Financial.

This financial appendix presents a three-year forecast for the startup, aiming to provide a realistic financial perspective of its journey. The forecast is built on a set of assumptions that reflect the challenges and opportunities a new venture might encounter, especially in the context of a social impact startup in Portugal. The financial model includes projections for government and company support, operational costs, total revenue, and net profit/loss. It is designed to offer insights into the financial planning required for a startup focused on integrating disabled individuals into the job market, considering the specific economic landscape of Portugal. This forecast serves as a crucial tool for understanding the potential financial trajectory of the startup, guiding strategic decisions, and highlighting areas of focus for sustainable growth.

ITEM	YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3	YEAR 4	YEAR 5
Government Support	€ 10.000.00	€ 20.000.00	€ 30.000.00	€ 45.000.00	€ 55.000.00
Company Support	€ 5.000.00	€ 10.000.00	€ 35.000.00	€ 50.000.00	€ 60.000.00
Course Fees	€ 5.000.00	€ 10.000.00	€ 15.000.00	€ 20.000.00	€ 30.000.00
Certification Programs	€ 0.00	€ 2.000.00	€ 4.000.00	€ 5.000.00	€ 8.000.00
Consulting Services	€ 0.00	€ 3.000.00	€ 8.000.00	€ 12.000.00	€ 17.000.00
Premium Memberships	€ 0.00	€ 1.000.00	€ 2.000.00	€ 4.000.00	€ 6.000.00
Operational Costs	€ 75.000.00	€ 75.000.00	€ 86.000.00	€ 118.000.00	€ 123.000.00
Salaries	€ 30.000.00	€ 50.000.00	€ 50.000.00	€ 70.000.00	€ 70.000.00
Technology Development	€ 30.000.00	€ 15.000.00	€ 20.000.00	€ 25.000.00	€ 25.000.00
Marketing	€ 15.000.00	€ 10.000.00	€ 10.000.00	€ 15.000.00	€ 20.000.00
Office Expenses	€ 0.00	€ 0.00	€ 6.000.00	€ 8.000.00	€ 8.000.00
Total Revenue	€ 20.000.00	€ 46.000.00	€ 94.000.00	€ 136.000.00	€ 176.000.00
Total Expenses	€ 75.000.00	€ 75.000.00	€ 86.000.00	€ 118.000.00	€ 123.000.00
Net Profit/Loss	€ 55.000.00	€ 29.000.00	€ 8.000.00	€ 18.000.00	€ 53.000.00

Government Support

This represents financial aid or grants that the startup expects to receive from government sources. It steadily increases as the company establishes its credibility and proves its social impact, aligning with government objectives to support disabled individuals. By Year 5, the increased support reflects the company's solid track record and successful outcomes.

Company Support

These figures reflect potential funding or sponsorships from private companies. Initially, the startup may receive limited support (€5,000) due to its newness in the market. As the company grows its network and demonstrates value, support is projected to increase and then in Year 3 jumps to €35,000, factoring in the prize from Prémio BPI Fundação “la Caixa” Capacitar. This substantial support is a recognition of the company's contribution to aiding disabled people and highlights the positive reception from the corporate sector.

Course Fees:

These fees represent a critical revenue stream that grows as the company expands its course offerings and user base. The increase each year indicates a growing market demand and the effectiveness of the freemium model in converting free users to paid services.

Certification Programs:

The introduction of certification programs in Year 2 provides an additional revenue stream, with growth reflecting the market's appreciation for accredited training that enhances employability.

Consulting Services:

Starting in Year 2 and increasing each subsequent year, consulting services revenue showcases the company's expanding expertise and the market's need for specialized knowledge in integrating disabled individuals into the workforce.

Premium Memberships:

Launched in Year 2, these memberships indicate a strategic move to offer value-added services to corporations, providing a steady revenue source while strengthening corporate partnerships.

Operational Costs

These costs are higher on the first year since the initial investment is high mainly because technology development. After this for year 2, the costs focus on maintenance and constant small improvements. After this, increasing each year, these costs reflect the company's growth and investment in staff, technology, marketing, and office space to support expanding operations.

Salaries:

The largest expense, consistently growing, reflects the company's commitment to attracting and retaining skilled employees to drive the company's mission forward.

Technology Development:

Significant investment, especially in the early years, ensures the platform remains cutting-edge and user-friendly tailored for people within the full spectrum of disabilities, with expenses expected to stabilize as the technology matures.

Marketing:

Crucial for user acquisition and brand visibility, marketing expenses grow as the company scales and seeks to penetrate deeper into the market.

Office Expenses:

At the beginning the company will operate fully remote and once it's more established and since there will be new hires, there would be the necessity to migrate to a coworking environment paid on a monthly membership basis. This cost will remain relatively stable, suggesting effective cost control and a lean operational model.

Total Revenue and Total Expenses:

The trend shows a responsible scaling of the business, with revenues catching up to expenses by Year 3, indicating the breakeven point, thanks in part to the prize money from the BPI Foundation.

Net Profit/Loss:

Year 3 marks a pivotal moment as the company transitions from negative to positive cash flows, signaling a successful pivot towards sustainability and setting the stage for profitability in subsequent years.

The financial forecast outlined in this appendix underscores the dynamic nature of Empower Ability's early years, emphasizing the importance of strategic financial planning and resource allocation. While the startup is projected to experience initial losses, primarily due to substantial setup costs, there is a clear path towards reducing these losses and moving closer to financial sustainability. The increase in both government and company support over the years highlights the growing credibility and impact of the startup, reinforcing the potential for a positive social and economic contribution. This financial journey reflects the startup's commitment to creating meaningful change in the job market for disabled individuals, balancing social impact with financial viability. As the startup evolves, continuous financial assessment and adaptive strategies will be key to its success and longevity.