

A Work Project, presented as part of the requirements for the Award of a Master's degree in Management from the Nova School of Business and Economics.

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:

**Developing a no-code training and
skill development platform**

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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 – Juan Barreto, Edin Selimagic)

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 – Juan Barreto, Edin Selimagic)

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, Taminiau, 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. Development of a Training and Skill Platform (Individual part Edin Selimagic)

3.1. Challenges of the Social Business Environment

Establishing a strong and recognizable brand within the competitive online education sector is one of the initial hurdles (Hand, Murphy, MacLachlan, & M. et.al., 2022). The platform's mission, focused on job seekers with disabilities, is unique. However, ensuring that the target audience is aware of the platform's offerings is essential. Collaborations with social enterprises, private companies, and government agencies are key to enhancing visibility and reach. These partnerships extend beyond strategic alliances, forming a crucial support network for the platform's success.

Another significant challenge lies in adapting to the dynamic nature of the job market. The skills and training required by job seekers are continually evolving (Winthrop & McGivney, 2016). The platform is committed to keeping its course offerings updated and relevant, as underscored by McKinney and Swartz (2021). This commitment involves a continuous process of learning and adaptation, driven by user feedback and the latest industry trends.

Ensuring accessibility for all types of disabilities is a critical aspect of the platform's development. The design of an inclusive and user-friendly environment, catering to the needs of individuals with both physical and mental disabilities, involves significant investment in user experience design and ongoing consultation with the community of people with disabilities to ensure the platform effectively meets their needs (Galkienė & Monkevičienė, 2021).

Financial sustainability, especially in the early stages, poses another challenge. Exploring strategies to diversify revenue streams and expand the customer base is underway. Seeking government grants or subsidies is also being considered as a viable option to provide financial stability during the formative years (Sontag-Padilla, Staplefoote, & Gonzalez Morganti, 2012).

Changing societal perceptions about the capabilities of individuals with disabilities is an intangible yet vital challenge. While the platform equips them with necessary skills, the broader impact relies on the willingness of employers to hire them. Incorporating awareness-raising sessions into the strategy is part of the effort, but altering societal attitudes requires a sustained and consistent effort in advocacy (Collins, Rentschler, Williams, & Azmat, 2021).

Recognizing the existence of similar platforms, such as Valor T, has led to the understanding that collaboration can be more beneficial than competition. The aim is to grow by working together with these organizations, strengthening the overall effort to support the community of people with disabilities in their employment pursuits and allowing them to benefit from a cross-organizational customer journey (Ferreira & Oliveira, 2023).

Despite these challenges, the platform is poised to positively impact the lives of individuals with disabilities seeking employment in Portugal. Through strategic planning, continuous adaptation to user feedback, and dedication to its mission, the platform aims to significantly contribute to reducing the employment gap for individuals with disabilities. This approach lays the groundwork for subsequent discussions on competitive analysis, customer discovery and validation, lean startup, agile methodology in platform development, and feedback and improvements.

3.2. Lean Startup

The Lean Startup methodology, conceptualized by Eric Ries, has significantly influenced entrepreneurial ventures, especially in uncertain and rapidly changing environments. Central to this methodology is the development of Minimum Viable Products (MVPs), which are basic yet functional versions of a product designed to quickly gather user feedback and enable iterative improvement (Ries, 2011). This approach has been particularly relevant and beneficial to this project focusing on the employment needs of individuals with disabilities in Portugal.

Incorporating Lean Startup principles into the project has yielded several key advantages. The most notable is the efficiency in development. Rapid prototyping facilitated the testing of ideas and the understanding of user needs without requiring extensive upfront investment (Ries, 2011). This cost-effective approach allowed for a quicker adaptation to user feedback. Additionally, the continuous collection of feedback ensured that the solutions developed were closely aligned with the actual needs and preferences of job seekers with disabilities and potential employers. This ongoing input has kept the project deeply connected to user experiences, enhancing the relevance and effectiveness of the platform.

The initial phase of the project saw the development of a simple but functional platform offering career resources for job seekers with disabilities. User feedback during this phase was crucial

in directing the focus towards accessibility features. These early interactions highlighted the need for inclusivity in design and functionality.

Post-launch, the project entered a critical phase of feedback loops, involving interviews and direct interactions with potential users. Each piece of feedback was a catalyst for improvement, leading to the introduction of new features like a mentorship program, which connected experienced professionals with users. This addition was directly inspired by user suggestions. Moments of success throughout this phase served as affirmations of the project's value and impact.

Resource limitations were a constant consideration, balancing the need for innovation with the sustainability and project timeline. This mindful approach ensured that each iteration of the platform not only introduced improved features but also maintained the project's long-term viability.

Embracing the Lean Startup methodology fundamentally shaped the approach to this project. It grounded the development process in the realities of the users' lives, enabling swift adaptation to their needs and ensuring a focus on the goal of empowering individuals with disabilities in the Portuguese job market. This journey through the Lean Startup framework was more than just a methodological choice; it represented a commitment to creating meaningful, user-centric solutions with the potential to significantly impact the lives of the target audience.

3.3. Customer Discovery & Customer Validation

The Customer Discovery phase, as outlined in Steve Blank's customer development methodology, is fundamental in the development of our online platform (Blank, 2013). This phase serves as the cornerstone of our approach, emphasizing direct engagement with our primary users and stakeholders to gain a comprehensive understanding of their needs, challenges, and aspirations. It is the first step in a series of iterative processes that focus on validating our business hypotheses through real-world interactions and feedback.

In this phase, our goal is to step outside the traditional confines of assumption-based planning and move towards an evidence-based, customer-centric approach. This involves actively listening to the voices of our core customer segments - individuals with disabilities seeking employment and companies looking to diversify their workforce. By doing so, we ensure that the design, functionality, and services of our platform are not just theoretically sound but are also grounded in the actual requirements and preferences of those it is intended to serve.

The Customer Discovery phase is not just about gathering data; it's about engaging in meaningful conversations, observing behaviors, and understanding the context in which our customers operate. This empathetic approach allows us to uncover latent needs and subtle nuances that might not be immediately apparent. It helps us to build a platform that is not only responsive to the expressed needs of our customers but also anticipates their future requirements (Blank, 2013).

Through this process, we aim to validate our business model assumptions and refine our value proposition. It's about testing our hypotheses in the real world and being ready to pivot or iterate based on what we learn. This dynamic approach is key to developing a platform that truly resonates with our users and addresses the systemic challenges in the job market for individuals with disabilities in Portugal.

In summary, the Customer Discovery phase is more than just the initial step in our platform development; it is a continuous commitment to understanding and responding to the evolving landscape of our customer's needs and challenges. It sets the foundation for a platform that is deeply aligned with the principles of inclusivity, efficacy, and relevance, staying true to the ethos of Steve Blank's customer development process.

Expanding on the Identification of Customer Segments for the Online Platform

The process of identifying customer segments is critical for ensuring the platform effectively meets the varied needs of its users. It involves a thorough understanding of each group, enabling us to tailor our services appropriately.

For the **primary beneficiaries**, who are individuals with disabilities in Portugal seeking job opportunities, the focus is on comprehensively understanding their unique challenges. These challenges range from skill development needs to barriers in employment. The aim is to provide support that goes beyond just addressing educational requirements. The platform seeks to offer accessible and practical training resources, thereby enhancing the employability of these individuals. In doing so, the goal is to empower them throughout their employment journey, offering holistic support services.

The **secondary beneficiaries** include Portuguese companies and employers aspiring to diversify their workforce by hiring individuals with disabilities. Engagement with these companies is essential to grasp the specific skills they are looking for and to identify the challenges they face in their hiring practices. The platform is designed to facilitate stronger connections between these employers and job seekers with disabilities, aiming to smooth the integration and employment process. By understanding the needs of these employers, the platform can align its training programs with the market's demands, thus boosting employment opportunities for the primary beneficiaries.

Other critical stakeholders are government agencies, policymakers in employment and disability services, and educational institutions and training providers. These entities play a crucial role in ensuring that the platform's strategies are in line with current policies and educational standards. Their involvement is key in developing comprehensive training programs and possibly influencing policy improvements or resource allocation. Collaborating with these groups is a fundamental part of the strategy, aimed at enhancing the overall effectiveness and outreach of the platform.

Developing Hypotheses Consistent with Steve Blank's approach, hypotheses are formulated to guide the discovery process (Blank, 2013). It is hypothesized that:

- Individuals with disabilities may face challenges due to insufficient access to resources necessary for effective job market integration.
- There might be a lack of tailored training programs and opportunities specifically catering to the needs of individuals with disabilities.

In the Customer Discovery phase, a focused approach is employed to validate the hypotheses, engaging directly with individuals with disabilities, and collaborating with key organizations that assist people with disabilities in finding employment. This strategy is crucial for gathering a comprehensive understanding of the unique challenges and needs in this sector (Blank, 2013). Direct conversations with individuals with disabilities are central to this phase. These discussions provide invaluable firsthand insights into their experiences in the job market, highlighting specific training needs and the obstacles faced. Such interactions are vital for gaining an authentic perspective on the practical difficulties and aspirations of job seekers with disabilities.

Collaboration is also undertaken with organizations that specialize in assisting individuals with disabilities with job placement. These organizations have a wealth of experience and knowledge in the field, making them crucial partners in understanding the landscape of employment for people with disabilities. They offer a practical viewpoint on the skills in demand, the challenges in job matching, and the overall process of integrating individuals with disabilities into the workforce.

In addition to these organizations, engagement with HR managers from various companies is conducted. This engagement is key to understanding employer perspectives on hiring individuals with disabilities, including the skills they seek and the challenges they face in this

process. Insights from HR professionals help in crafting strategies that bridge the gap between employers and job seekers with disabilities.

The collaboration extends to the university's ICF team, experts in employment and disability services. Rather than direct interaction with government agencies, the insights from the ICF team provide a nuanced understanding of employment services for individuals with disabilities, identifying potential improvements and collaboration opportunities.

The process of capturing and analyzing data from these interactions is thorough. Feedback and observations from individuals with disabilities, job-placement organizations, HR managers, and the ICF team are meticulously documented. This data is crucial in identifying patterns, preferences, and unmet needs, guiding the development and refinement of the platform.

Overall, this Customer Discovery phase is a comprehensive exploration. It aims to understand the experiences and challenges of individuals with disabilities, organizations aiding in job placement, HR managers, and academic experts. The insights gained form the foundation of the platform, which aims to create a supportive and inclusive environment for all stakeholders involved in the employment integration of individuals with disabilities.

Customer Validation

Customer validation, a crucial phase in the development of innovative solutions, especially in the realm of social innovation, is integral to ensuring that the final product effectively meets the needs of its intended audience (Blank, 2013). In the context of creating a platform to improve employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities, customer validation took on a pivotal role. This process began with the formation of key hypotheses about the needs, preferences, and challenges faced by job seekers with disabilities and potential employers. These initial hypotheses, grounded in preliminary research and observations, suggested

significant gaps in existing employment services and barriers encountered by individuals with disabilities in the job market.

Engaging directly with the target users and stakeholders was the next critical step. Through various methods such as surveys, interviews, and focus groups, the project team gathered extensive feedback from individuals with disabilities seeking employment and from employers itself. This feedback provided valuable insights, revealing intricate details about the experiences and requirements of each group. Analyzing this feedback was an important process; it was essential to detect patterns and common themes that could inform the development of the platform. Key insights emerged from this analysis, such as the necessity for more personalized job support services for individuals with disabilities and the need for employer education on effective integration of employees with disabilities.

The insights gained from the customer validation process were instrumental in refining the platform. New features and modifications were made to better address the identified needs, enhancing the platform's overall effectiveness. For instance, the platform incorporated enhanced accessibility options and vocational training modules tailored to the specific needs of job seekers with disabilities. For employers, resources were developed to educate them on the benefits of workplace diversity and inclusive hiring practices.

Customer validation was not a static, one-time process but an ongoing activity that continued throughout the development of the platform. This iterative approach to validation ensured that the platform remained responsive to changing needs and feedback, evolving continually to better serve its users. By engaging in continuous interaction with users and stakeholders, the project team was able to ensure that the platform was not only theoretically sound but also practical and impactful.

In sum, the customer validation process was instrumental in shaping a platform that truly resonates with the needs of its target audience. This approach not only validated the initial

hypotheses but also allowed for ongoing adaptations to the platform, ensuring it remained relevant and impactful (Blank, 2013). By placing a strong emphasis on user-centric development and iterative refinement, the project successfully navigated the complexities of creating a solution that not only innovates but also significantly contributes to addressing the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities in the job market. This methodology underscores the critical importance of aligning product development with the nuanced and evolving needs of users, resulting in a solution that is both practical and transformative.

3.4. Agile Methodology in Platform Development

In the quest to address the employment challenges faced by individuals with disabilities, the Agile methodology has emerged as a vital approach (Rigby, Sutherland, & Takeuchi, 2016). Originally developed for software creation, Agile is used in this thesis in crafting dynamic solutions tailored to the unique needs of job seekers with disabilities, a group that often faces distinct barriers in the job market.

At the core of Agile is a focus on people, collaboration, and adaptability (Rigby, Sutherland, & Takeuchi, 2016), aligning perfectly with the requirements of projects aimed at assisting individuals with disabilities in finding employment. It emphasizes direct engagement with all stakeholders, an openness to changing requirements, and a constant prioritization of user needs (Rigby, Sutherland, & Takeuchi, 2016). These elements make Agile an ideal framework for developing platforms or initiatives that support job seekers with disabilities in their quest for meaningful employment.

A deep understanding of the everyday experiences of job seekers with disabilities is crucial in applying Agile effectively. This involves not just traditional research methods but also direct engagement with the individuals in question. By listening to their stories and immersing in their perspectives, a richer and more empathetic understanding of their needs is achieved. Such an

approach ensures that the Agile principles are harnessed to create solutions that genuinely resonate with and address the challenges faced by job seekers with disabilities.

One of the key features of Agile is its iterative development process, which breaks down projects into smaller, more manageable segments, known as "sprints." (Rigby, Sutherland, & Takeuchi, 2016) In the context of a platform aimed at aiding job seekers with disabilities, this methodology allows for the incremental building and refining of features, facilitating early testing and feedback. The involvement of job seekers with disabilities in this iterative process ensures that the platform is continuously shaped and refined to meet their specific needs.

The importance of continuous feedback in Agile methodology cannot be overstated, especially when developing solutions for job seekers with disabilities. This approach allows for the timely identification of accessibility issues, usability challenges, and other barriers, ensuring that the platform evolves in a manner that is truly user centric.

Agile thrives in environments where change is happening. In the realm of employment and accessibility, the needs and preferences of job seekers with disabilities can evolve rapidly, necessitating a platform that is equally adaptable. Agile's inherent flexibility enables development teams to respond swiftly to these evolving demands, ensuring the platform remains relevant, effective, and aligned with the latest in technology and user needs (Rigby, Sutherland, & Takeuchi, 2016).

The application of Agile methodology in creating employment solutions for individuals with disabilities represents a significant stride in social innovation. Its emphasis on collaboration, adaptability, and a user-centered approach aligns seamlessly with the goal of empowering individuals with disabilities in the job market. By adopting Agile practices, the development of solutions becomes a process that is responsive to real-world feedback, leading to the creation of a job market that is more inclusive and accessible for individuals with disabilities.

3.5. Developing a Training Platform with Bubble.io

At the heart of this project lies Bubble.io (see appendix 5), a transformative platform reshaping the landscape of web application development. It's particularly significant for enabling those with minimal coding expertise to bring their visions to life. This chapter focuses on how Bubble.io became integral to developing a training platform tailored for individuals with disabilities, tracing the journey from its conceptualization to actual deployment (Bubble.io, 2023).

Visual Design and User Interface The development journey of the training platform commenced with its visual design. Using Bubble.io's intuitive drag-and-drop interface facilitated the creation of a user-friendly and visually engaging interface. The platform's style editor was crucial in defining aesthetics such as color schemes, fonts, and layout properties, ensuring visual consistency across the platform and resonating with our brand identity.

Data Structure and Management Central to the platform's functionality is its data architecture. Bubble.io's built-in database management system was pivotal in creating custom data types and fields, representing entities like users, training courses, and instructors. Relationships between these data types were carefully established, mirroring real-world educational interactions and creating a scalable and efficient data model.

Workflow Logic and Automation Workflows form the backbone of the platform's interactivity. In Bubble.io, each user action triggers specific workflows, defining sequences of steps the application executes. These workflows manage key processes such as user registration, course enrollment, and tracking of educational progress, automating the platform's essential functions for a seamless user experience.

Conditional Logic and Dynamic Content The platform's responsiveness to user actions is managed through conditional logic. Bubble.io enables setting conditions that dictate the display

and behavior of elements, modifying styles or triggering actions based on user interactions. This ensures that content is dynamic and tailored, enhancing the user engagement.

API Integration and Expansion To augment the platform's capabilities, Bubble.io's API connector was utilized for integrating external services. This allowed the platform to adopt third-party tools for functionalities like advanced analytics, communication tools, and content management systems, enriching the platform's overall ecosystem.

Security and Privacy Ensuring user data security and privacy was a top priority, addressed using Bubble.io's comprehensive security features. The platform was built with a focus on protecting sensitive information, incorporating role-based access controls and data encryption, aligning with data protection standards.

Testing and Iteration The development process included continuous testing, enabled by Bubble.io's preview mode. This allowed for emulating the user experience, identifying areas for improvement, and integrating user feedback to refine the platform continually.

Deployment and Scalability Deployment was streamlined and efficient, thanks to Bubble.io's deployment tools. The platform's infrastructure is designed to scale, ensuring it can accommodate growing numbers of users and increasingly complex interactions.

In conclusion, Bubble.io's no-code development approach was key in creating a training platform for individuals with disabilities. It enabled rapid prototyping, flexible design, and the ability to adapt swiftly to user feedback. This project showcases how no-code tools can be effectively utilized in social innovation projects, especially those aimed at creating more inclusive and accessible educational opportunities.

The developed website can be found under the following link:

<https://empower-ability.bubbleapps.io/version-test/> (Barreto Vinasco & Selimagic, 2023)

3.6. Iterations: Feedback and Improvement

The journey of Empower Ability, marked by crucial interactions with Valor T and the Inclusive Community Forum (ICF) at Nova SBE, stands as a significant chapter in its evolution. These discussions were not just routine consultations; they were pivotal in reshaping the platform's approach towards enhancing the employability of individuals with disabilities. This transformative phase in development was characterized by a deep dive into the intricacies of the platform's functionality and business model, ensuring that every facet was aligned with its core mission.

In the dialogue with Valor T, the platform's training aspects were dissected and analyzed, leading to the realization that there was considerable room for refinement, both in terms of content and financial structuring. The proposition of scholarships funded by collaborative companies emerged as a groundbreaking solution, addressing the dual objectives of making training more accessible to financially constrained individuals and deepening the platform's inclusivity. This innovative approach was about more than just financial aid; it was a strategic initiative to weave a network of corporate partnerships, reflecting a shared commitment to fostering an inclusive workforce. The recalibration of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) was another significant outcome of the discussions with Valor T. The focus on realigning these indicators with Empower Ability's goals underscores the importance of creating a measurable and outcome-focused framework. This was not just a process of numerical adjustment but a strategic rethinking of how success and progress should be quantified and evaluated, ensuring a more effective and accountable platform. Moreover, the recommendation to specialize the platform's course offerings and streamline its content was a decisive step towards enhancing its educational impact. By focusing on specialized training, the platform sought to address the specific needs and aspirations of its users, thereby enriching their learning experience. This strategic reorientation towards specialized courses meant evaluating the existing course lineup,

identifying the most impactful content, and optimizing the platform's educational resources for maximum efficiency and relevance. The establishment of a robust evaluation framework for course creators and content marked a move towards upholding stringent quality standards. This framework was envisioned not just as a quality control mechanism but as a cornerstone in building trust and credibility among users. By ensuring that each course offered was comprehensive, accessible, and tailored to the unique needs of individuals with disabilities, the platform reinforced its commitment to excellence and relevance.

The feedback from Nova SBE's ICF brought additional dimensions to the platform's enhancement strategy. The suggestion to introduce Portuguese language support was a nod towards cultural and linguistic inclusivity, aiming to make the platform more accessible and relevant to the local audience. The detailed descriptions for each course were envisioned to provide transparency and clarity, aiding users in making informed decisions about their learning journey. The initial introduction and user-friendly design changes proposed for the website were aimed at streamlining the user experience. This approach was about simplifying the navigation process, making it more intuitive for users to access and engage with the courses. The focus on a user-friendly interface was a critical aspect of making the platform more approachable and easier to use for a diverse range of users. Addressing queries regarding the English and Pingo Doce training courses was an exercise in transparency and user engagement. By providing clear information about the availability and format of these courses, the platform aimed to build trust and set clear expectations for its users.

In distinguishing Empower Ability from established educational entities, the focus on unique features and value propositions was crucial. The emphasis on building a community of individuals with disabilities and individuals with no disabilities collaborating in the learning process underscored the platform's commitment to fostering an inclusive and supportive learning environment. The integration of features like Google Maps for course locations,

multilingual support, and an interactive forum was envisioned to create a more dynamic and engaging user experience. These features were aimed at fostering a sense of community and interaction among users, making the learning process not just informative but also collaborative and engaging.

Incorporating third-party collaborators like career counselors and industry partners was a strategic move to enhance the platform's resource pool. This collaboration aimed to offer users a comprehensive learning and development experience, leveraging diverse expertise and perspectives. The restructuring of the website into distinct categories for intuitive navigation and the active engagement with potential partner companies for course development were steps towards making the platform more user-centric and aligned with market needs.

In conclusion, the feedback from Valor T and Nova SBE's ICF has been a driving force in the evolution of the Empower Ability platform. These insights have steered the platform towards a more inclusive, impactful, and user-centric direction, ensuring that it continues to empower individuals with disabilities in their employment and skill development journey, remaining a relevant and effective tool in the quest for workplace inclusivity.

4. Final Reflections: Impact, Limitations and Conclusion (Group part -

Juan Barreto, Edin Selimagic)

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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6. Appendices

Appendix 5 – Bubble.io Development Journey

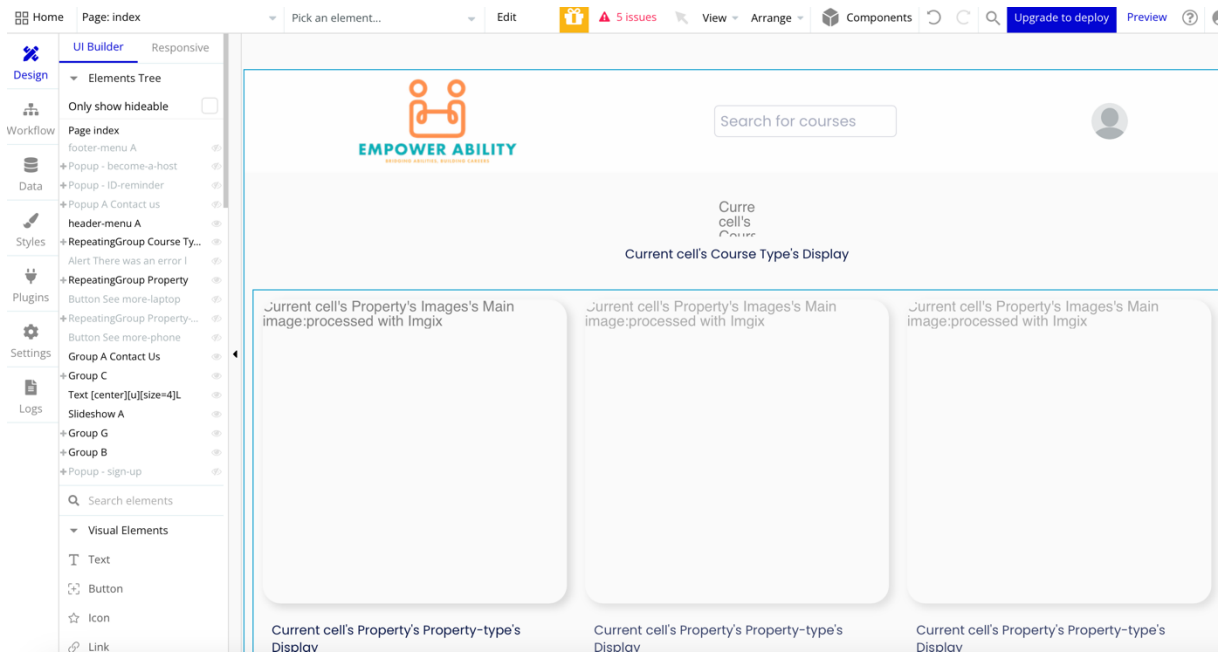


Figure 1 - Bubble.io Interface

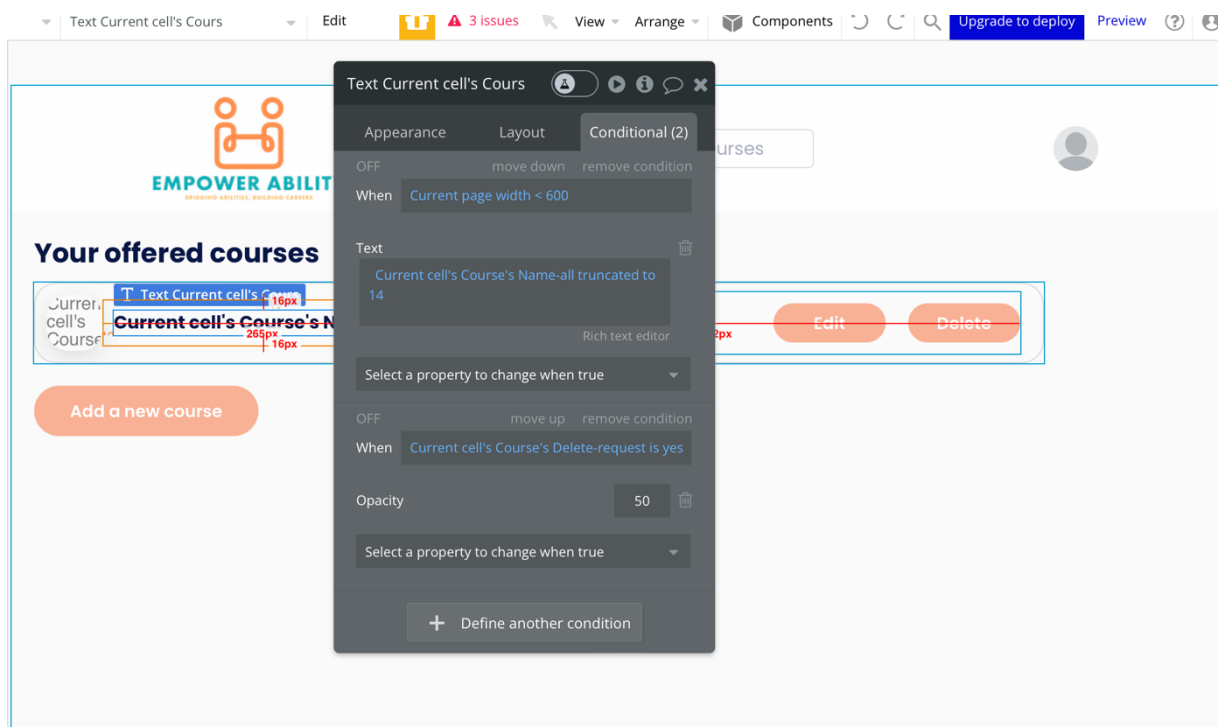


Figure 2 - Bubble.io Editing windows with conditionals

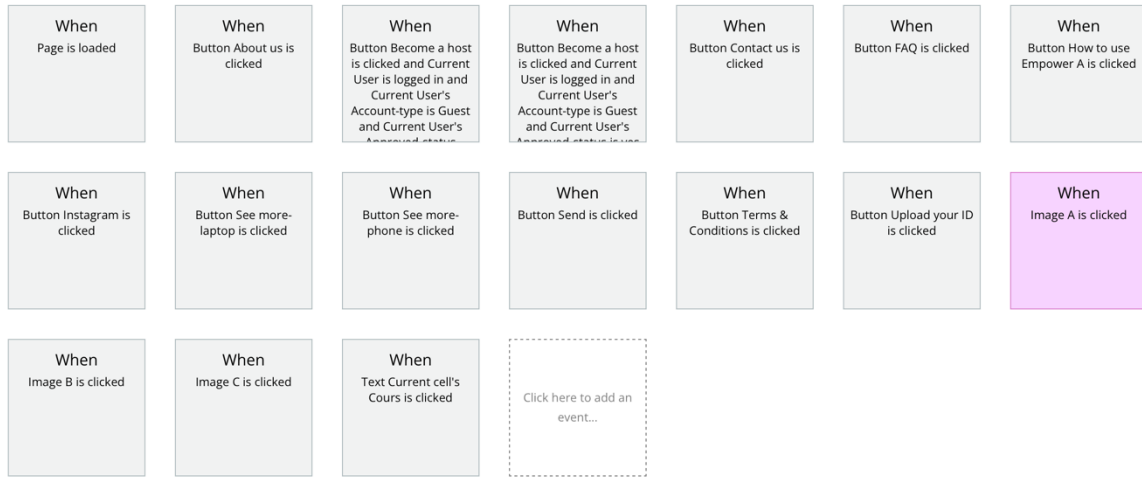


Figure 3 - Bubble.io Workflows

Data types Privacy App data Option sets File manager

App data Application data - All Users - Development version [Copy and restore database](#) [Switch to live database](#)

New view Primary fields Search Data entries 8 entries (displaying 8) New entry Delete (0) Upload Modify Export Bulk

Search Views or data types

All Bookings All Chats All Course Images All Courses All Messages All Reviews All Users

		Email	Account-type	Approved-status	Bio	City	Contacts	Country	ID-Lic
<input type="checkbox"/>	Run as →		Guest	no					
<input type="checkbox"/>	Run as →		Guest	no					
<input type="checkbox"/>	Run as →		Guest	yes					
<input type="checkbox"/>	Run as →		Guest	yes					
<input type="checkbox"/>	Run as →		Lecturer	yes	test				
<input type="checkbox"/>	Run as →		Admin	yes	Spanish teacher				
<input type="checkbox"/>	Run as →		Guest	no					
<input type="checkbox"/>	Run as →		Admin	yes	I like to provide my German skills to other people.				

14 additional fields

Figure 4 - Bubble.io Data Manager

Installed Plugins

Air Date / Time Picker

A very beautiful lightweight cross-browser date/time picker. Huge set of customization with multi-date and range support. Responsive and accessibility friendly. Works in all modern browsers: IE 10+, Chrome, Firefox, Safari 8+, Opera 17+.

To receive special offers and important updates please visit: <https://zeroqo.de/updates>

🔔 Get our 15 Top Plugins Bundle with 15 most popular plugins for only 20\$/month. Plugins included in the Bundle:

- Bubble Page to PDF converter
- Stripe Marketplace Express
- Air Calendar (Full Calendar 5.9.0)
- AWS File uploader - Any size
- Advanced Rich Text Editor
- Mapbox Map
- Phone Input Number with Formatting
- Advanced Multi Uploader
- Video Player
- Dynamic Height & Width of Elements
- Audio Recorder
- Repeating Group to CSV

Figure 5 - Bubble.io Plugins

Element styles | Style variables

Element type: Search by name:

Alert - Standard Alert (Default) | Standard Alert

Alert - Warning Alert

Button - Flat Button

Button - Outline Button

Button - Primary Button (Default)

Checkbox - Standard Checkbox (Default)

Date/Time Picker - Standard Date Picker (Default)

Dropdown - Standard Dropdown (Default)

File Uploader - Standard Uploader (Default)

Floating Group - Standard Floating Group (Default)

Remove this style as a default for all new Alerts

[Find all elements using this style](#)

...edit me...

Appearance | Layout | Conditional

Opacity: 100 %

App Font (Poppins): 600

16px | Text alignment: Left, Center, Right | Bold, Italic, Underline

Color: Primary contrast (#FFFFFF)

Word spacing: 0 | Line spacing: 1 | Letter spacing: 0

Center the text vertically:

Background style: Flat color

Color: Primary (#F8B195)

Figure 6 - Bubble.io Styles

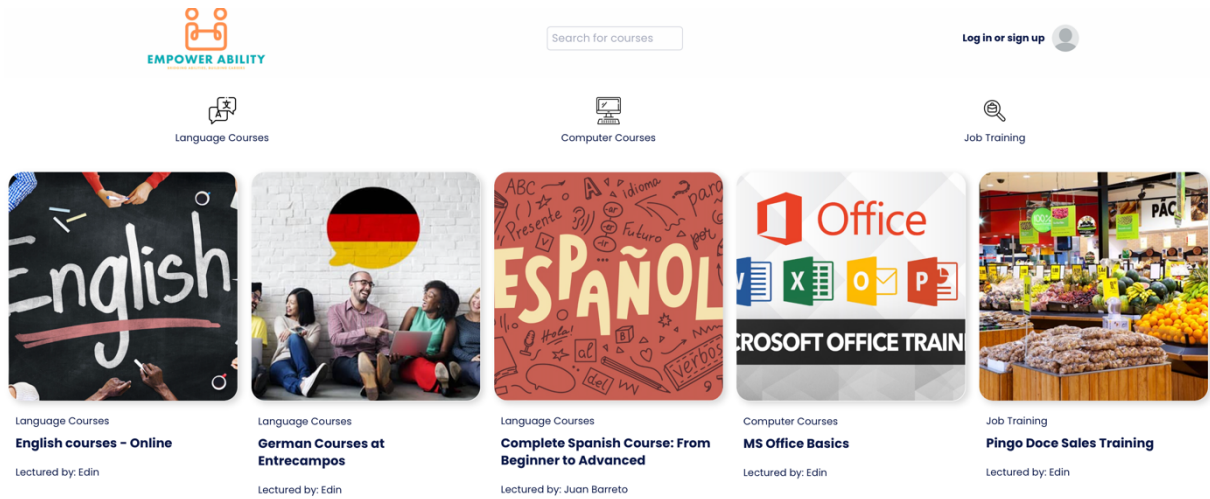


Figure 7 - Bubble.io preview of Empower Ability

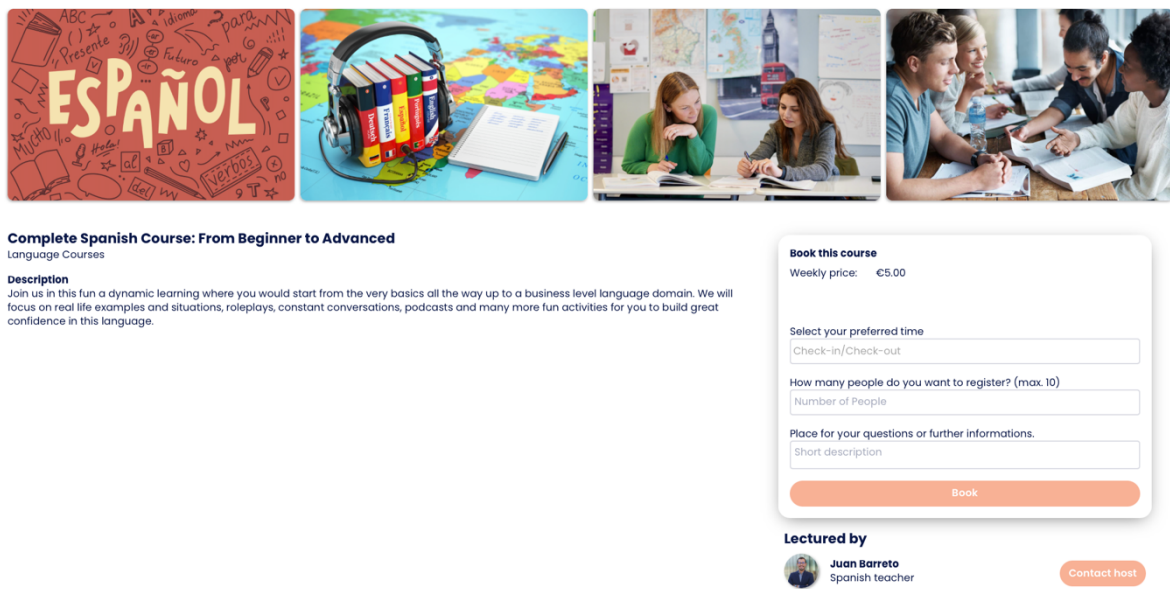


Figure 8 - Bubble.io Empower Ability Course booking window



Who we are

Empower Ability is a visionary platform dedicated to transforming lives by connecting people with disabilities to a world of opportunities. We understand that each individual possesses a unique set of abilities, and our platform is designed to nurture these abilities with job-relevant education and programs intended to bridge the gap between ambitious learners and a dynamic work environment.

Empower Ability stands as a beacon of inclusivity, where differences are celebrated, and each person's potential is unlocked. Our user-friendly platform offers a seamless experience, allowing learners to find training programs or courses tailored to match their skills and aspirations. **We believe that empowerment begins with the right opportunities, and that's precisely what we offer.**

What we want to achieve

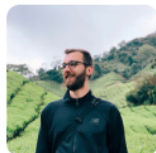
At Empower Ability, our mission is clear: we aspire to build brighter futures for people with disabilities. Our vision is grounded in the belief that everyone, regardless of their abilities, deserves an equal shot at meaningful employment and personal growth.

We aim to break down the barriers that have, for far too long, hindered the integration of people with disabilities into the workforce. By providing access to tailored training programs, education and a supportive community. We empower individuals to gain the skills and confidence they need to excel in their chosen careers.

Our goal is to create a world where inclusivity is the norm, not the exception. We want to see a society that values diversity and champions the potential of every individual. Empower Ability is not just a platform; it's a movement that strives to redefine the job market, fostering a culture of inclusivity and equal opportunity.

Join us in our journey to make a positive impact, one job opportunity at a time. Together, we can bridge abilities and build careers that lead to a more inclusive and equitable world.

The Team



Edin Selimagic



Juan Barreto

Contact us

Figure 9 - About us page



Frequently Asked Questions

Got a question? We've got answers!

If you have other questions, contact us using the contact button at the bottom of the page.

What is Empower Ability? ▼

Who can use Empower Ability? ▼

How do I know if a course is suitable for my needs? ▼

How does Empower Ability ensure courses are accessible? ▼

Who can provide courses? ▼

Figure 10 - FAQ page



How you can use Empower Ability



Course Learners

Create an account and navigate through our many courses, you can develop skills in social interaction, new languages and technology. Select the one that best suits your goals, relax and get ready to enjoy your learning process ;)



Business Training Programs

Create an account and select between training programs either by company or by content. We will handle the rest to put you in contact with the company so that you can start growing your career. No worries, will be there for you through the process.



Become a Lecturer

Create an account as a lecturer and start by filling the course information, give as much details as possible so that we can evaluate your proposal. Once it is approved you will be ready to go and spread great knowledge between your

Figure 11 - How to use page

Upcoming inquiries

It looks like you don't have any upcoming bookings at the moment. By adapting your listing's details, you might increase the chances of a booking.

Current/Past inquiries

German Courses at Entrecampos

Edin
Wed, Nov 8, 2023 - Wed, Nov 15, 2023
[Details...](#)

Contact learner

Approve/Reject

German Courses at Entrecampos

[Redacted]
Fri, Dec 1, 2023 - Sat, Dec 30, 2023
[Details...](#)

Contact learner

Approve/Reject

Figure 12 Inquiries to provided courses

Your offered courses

	English courses - Online	Edit	Delete
	German Courses at Entrecampos	Edit	Delete
	MS Office Basics	Edit	Delete
	Pingo Doce Sales Training	Edit	Delete

Add a new course

Figure 13 - Manage your provided courses



Messages

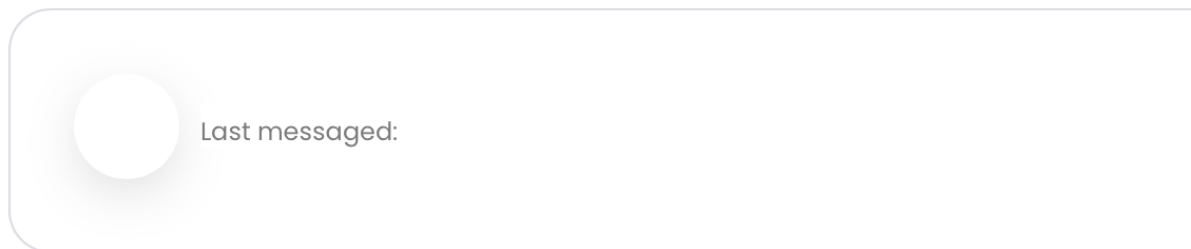


Figure 14 - Possibility to message

Your booked courses

Upcoming courses

Currently, you do not have any upcoming bookings. Once you book a place, the reservation will be displayed here!

Current/Past courses



German Courses at Entrecampos

Hosted by Edin

Dates: Nov 8, 2023 - Nov 15, 2023

Total: €0

Status:

Not Yet Approved

See Details

Review

Figure 15 - Booked courses

Appendix 6 – 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.