Integrated e-learning system in the Public Administration

1. Why is the project needed? Rationale and the background of the project.

The Strategy for training the civil service workforce stipulates that the life-long education shall be one of the central principles of the Public administration. Following that concept the Institute of Public Administration and European Integration provides ample choice of courses tailored to the specific needs of the civil servants and public sector organizations. Hitherto these courses were designed, developed and taught in the classical analogous approach. What the Institute starts to develop now is the transition of small number of courses towards the Distance Learning model of education.

In the nearest future we expect to see rapid increase in the demand for such distant courses. The scale and complexity of the public sector however poses specific issues to be addressed and carefully planned in short, middle, and long term. Nowadays we have rather desultory system for needs assessment, strategic planning, implementation and evaluation of the learning cycle in the public administration. The main goal of the project is to pilot test an integrated e-learning system for education which will span over the varying facets of the knowledge management in the public sector. In contrast to the current system of organization of the education the integrity will provide consistency between the organizational goals, human development plans, available knowledge and the external environmental factors. In practice that philosophy means that the integrated system will create, maintain and update personal profiles of the civil servants and will process that information in order to automatically enroll learners to particular distant courses based on job titles, terms of references, location, skills, department and other attributes.

2. Objectives of the project? What is the expected impact of the project?

Objective 1: Testing the applicability of the distance learning model in the public administration. Sub-objective here is the testing at smaller scale the integrative functionality of the learning platform and to probe its potential for generalizations

Objective 2: Design, development, and implementation of integrated e-learning system for the needs of public administration

Objective 3: Development through the integrated system of technical and human capacity to implement the overall process of knowledge management in the organizational context of the public sector

Objective 4: Pilot development and deployment of the system. Testing the system with two distant courses
Objective 5: Creation of a cross-border network for training the civil service workforce by implementing the modern practices of the Distance Learning model

3. What are the main outputs/products to be developed by the project?

- A new model of the integrated e-learning system tailor-made for the needs of public administration in European context
- Increased awareness of the civil servants at the different levels of public administration to gain and manage specific knowledge in areas such as European integration, e-government, digital signature etc.
- Enhanced capacity of the IPAEI and the partner institutions to enhance, support, and promote the integrated e-learning system
- Distance learning courses based on the new integrated e-learning system and appropriate training materials (on-line guidelines, instructions, and on-demand help)
- European e-learning network of the partner institution for training and knowledge management of the public administration

4. What are the main activities of the project? Approximate timetable foreseen?

- Feasibility study of the software products necessary for the application of the integrated e-learning system; choosing a product that will enable in a highest degree to achieve the aims of the project; 1 months
- Purchase and installation of the product; development of guidelines and instructions; 2 months
- Training of; 3 months:
  i. system administrators – install, maintain, upgrade the system
  ii. e-learning system managers – assess, design, analyze, and monitor the overall process of application of the integrated system
  iii. e-tutors – develop and publish the courses in the learning system, organize communication channels with the learners (chat, e-mail etc.), evaluate and grade learners’ performance
  iv. end-users – use the course interface, upload and download materials, interact with the tutor etc.
- Development and implementation of two pilot courses through the new system in areas such as European integration and digital signature; 2 months
- Analysis on the impact of the new system on the organizational, personal, and managerial behavior of the end-users in the public administration. This will be studied through an experiment with two target groups – one exposed to traditional learning methods and one - to ODL/integrated e-learning system; 2 months
- Organization of workshops within the partner countries to share and evaluate the results of the pilot training among the target groups; 1 month
- Dissemination and multiplication of the project outputs to ensure the sustainability of the ODL models in the public administration

5. What are the precise target groups which will benefit directly and indirectly from the outputs/results and activities of the project?
Direct beneficiaries of the project will be the system administrators, e-learning system managers, e-tutors, and end-users at the target organizations. The partnering institutions will accumulate the technical and human potential to deploy and run integrated system for distance learning courses.

Indirect beneficiaries will be the central and local civil servants who will benefit from the new opportunities for access to training and knowledge. As a result this will lead to improved and more efficient public services.

6. What are the main pedagogical concepts and methodological/didactical approaches underlying the project?

The distant learning model implies that the learner will acquire the knowledge without significant interruptions of his/her daily activities. All the materials will be available 24/7 online and will allow individual pace of the learning process. The integrated e-learning system will provide opportunities for frequent dialogue between the two parties of the educational process based on e-learning methodology such as: e-lectures, e-reading materials, on-line chats, quizzes, tests, and electronic whiteboards.

7. Innovative traits of the project

An innovative aspect of the project is the design, development, and implementation of the e-learning system which will allow for integration between the educational and organizational components of the learning process. Combining these two layers will provide for coherent and meaningful organization of the education which will follow both the individual and organizational needs.

The project will provide a comparative analysis of the level of application of the integrated e-learning strategies in the European context. Based on that analysis the specific experience of the project partners in using ODL format will be shared and disseminated within the network. The project will facilitate exchange of experience and good practices in the European public administration to support the process of e-learning training and education.

8. Dissemination potential of the outputs/results

The sustainability of the project will be assured through further implementation of the distance learning model in the activities of the partnering organizations. In Bulgaria the accumulated experience will be used by the IPAEI to transfer gradually most of its courses towards the distance learning model.

The Distance courses will become part of the study curriculum of IPAEI and the other partner institutions and will be expanded to new areas according to the available technical, financial and human resources.
Monitoring and evaluation

The effectiveness and efficiency of the distant education will be measured through comparison with the traditional methods for pre-qualification. Specific indicators which will be used are:

- Estimated time periods for the different phases of the courses development
- Number of learners
- Financial expenses per learner, course etc.

The project partners will build and implement a system for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the different stages of the project. This will be used as a source of feedback from the outcome of each activity and will trigger the necessary actions. An independent expert will be appointed as an external evaluator of the degree of the achievement of the projects’ objectives.

The hypotheses to test are that there is statistically significant difference in the level of apprehension of the subject matter. The hypotheses will be non-directional, but the analysis will show which method is more effective. Also we will control for correlation between the level of apprehension and different demographic statistics.