

**Youthpass**

**Youthpass and recognition essays**

# **Youthpass and Human Resource Development:**

**The missing link  
towards employability**



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# Youthpass and Human Resource Development: The missing link towards employability

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The main intention of this paper is to discuss the common points between the Youthpass process and the Human Resource Development HRD training and learning cycle as similar learning and developmental processes. It is argued that HRD approaches may provide Youthpass with an instrumental twist and Youthpass could also be acknowledged as part of HRD activities. Thus, this paper describes HRD and Youthpass process as complementary and intends to show how the HRD cycle and Youthpass process may contribute and support each other towards employability.

The paper is structured in six sections including this short introduction. Section 2 contains definitions, basic assumptions and premises as a starting point. The different stages of the HRD cycle integrating on-the-job learning and the Youthpass process are introduced in section 3. Each stage is analysed and examples for both models are provided to highlight similarities. Section 4 represents the practical side of the paper. This section considers HRD tools and methods where Youthpass can easily fit in and provide useful tools for employability. Section 5 looks at the policy implications from a stronger focus on HRD approaches. Finally, section 6 summarises the main conclusions of previous sections and identifies pending questions for further research.



## How does Youthpass fit into Human Resource Development (and vice versa)?

Employability, recognition, self-directed learning, validation, mobility, competences, personal and professional development, human capital; do they ring a bell for you? If they do, you are either involved in Human Resource Development or working with young people and Youthpass.

Youthpass is part of the European Commission's strategy to foster the recognition of non-formal learning. It is a tool for those participating in most activities of the Youth in Action Programme to certify participation, validate learning outcomes and identify competences from the learning process. Youthpass aims at supporting reflection upon the personal non-formal learning process, fostering active European citizenship, strengthening the social recognition of youth work, and finally supporting the employability of young people and youth workers.

Although Human Resource Development (HRD) and adult education have gone a long way side by side for more than half a century, only recently has employability become a key topic for practitioners in the youth field. Linking Youthpass as a European-level recognition tool and employability has



become a challenge for youth workers and policymakers who are searching for alternatives to fight unemployment and create new opportunities for young Europeans.

While there is no singular definition of employability, a review of the literature suggests that employability is about work and the ability to be employed (Hillage, 1998). This ability depends on “the combination of factors (personal attributes and competences, marketability and economic context) which enable individuals to progress towards or get into employment, to stay in employment and to progress during career” (CEDEFOP, 2008). It goes without saying that employability prospects rely not only on the job seekers but also on the needs of the organisations providing employment.

According to our definition, employability is a two-sided equation. Policy based on the assumption that formal recognition will assist employability puts the emphasis on the institutional/education side of the equation and disregards the opportunities arising from the business-oriented HRD approaches.

This paper looks at the added value of HRD as an effective link between Youthpass and employability. The starting point is HRD view on career development through lifelong learning as the ongoing acquisition of competences by study and experience throughout the duration of an individual's career (Mankin, 2009). Moreover, it takes a further step by matching the organisation's goals and objectives with the individual's. In this case, employability goals are implicit.

The critical question which we approach is to what extent HRD approaches should be considered when implementing Youthpass and where and how to exploit the learning outcomes. This leads us to consider what the HRD cycle approach implies for Youthpass and, in particular, for Youthpass and HRD practitioners alike.

# Human Resource Development process: from organisational and individual needs to personal and professional development.

The process of human resource development starts from the strategic plans of the organisations, which defines the resources required to achieve their goals. These strategies are translated into more specific definitions of what sort of employees will be needed (Armstrong, 1991). Optimal adaptations of qualification in terms of professional knowledge, abilities and skills to the requirements of work are the main tasks of human resource development through the application of the HRD cycle (Jereb, 1995). Therefore, the basic objective of HRD is satisfying actual and future employees' development needs vis-à-vis the organisation.

The 'Youthpass process' is an approach to learning and how this could be implemented in the Youth in Action programme. The Youthpass process supports the educational processes happening in youth work activities, and highlights the educational potential of such projects (Youthpass Unfolded, 2012). Thus, the purpose of Youthpass is twofold: to support the recognition of youth work, and the career and personal development of young people. It follows the timeline of a project in Youth in Action from preparation till the issuance of the Youthpass certificate at the end.

Figure 1 shows an adaptation of the HRD training and learning cycle. The diagram attempts to shed light on how formal HRD training interventions (inner cycle) are related to on-the-job learning (outer cycle). This responds to a current tendency showing a shift from off-the-job training to a more situated and experiential learning comparable to the Youthpass process. In both cycles learning is socially mediated and collaborative. The diagram also incorporates the different phases of the Youthpass process (Youthpass Unfolded, 2012) integrated in between the two cycles. The HRD cycle is divided into 4 stages.

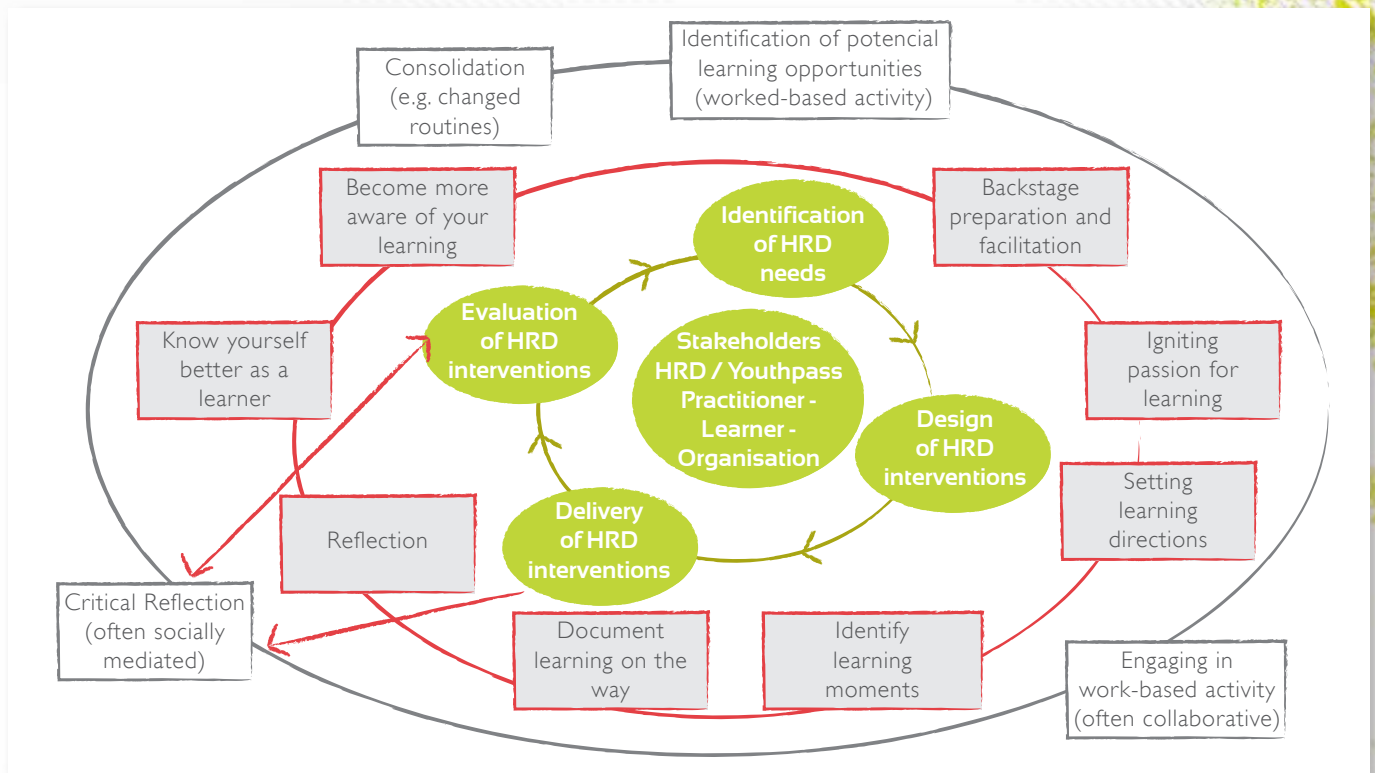


Figure 1. The HRD cycle integrating on-the-job learning and Youthpass process (based on Mankin, 2009, and Youthpass Unfolded, 2012)

### a. HRD needs: matching organisation's and people's needs

As in any learning and training process, the identification of learning needs is the first key step. The practitioner identifies the needs with the other stakeholders. Organisation's and individual needs are surveyed and analysed in order to find common points to match them towards a development objective. The task is to decide on which level to act, individual career development, organisational development or both. A shift to the outer cycle to identify learning opportunities at the workplace is comparable to non-formal learning activities with Youthpass but always in relation to the organisation's needs. Therefore, we can observe a two-level HRD process, one focused on training interventions and the other on non-formal or informal work-based activities.

Youth in Action processes fit in both cycles depending on the type of activity. They promote the autonomy of the learner, at the same time responding to societal needs and developments. The preparation stage in the Youthpass process parallels the HRD continuum from the identification of learning needs to the design of learning interventions and self-directed activities in the workplace. The so-called backstage preparation of the facilitator goes alongside with the setting of learning directions of the learner within the second stage of the HRD cycle.

### b. HRD design: setting a personal and professional development plan

The second stage is focused on the design of learning activities. It consists of different technical (budget, time constraints, venue, etc.) and methodological elements (objectives, methodology, evaluation, accountability, etc.). The inner cycle is led by the practitioner and requires the design of a variety of HRD interventions, such as training courses, seminars, mentoring and coaching sessions. The outer cycle, on the other hand, is more learner-driven and may not require formal training or facilitation. In the case of Youthpass, this is the phase where learners set the direction of their learning. If we look at the Youth in Action programme, it could range from the design of a training course, in the inner cycle, to coaching sessions during a youth initiative, or the preparatory visit in a youth exchange, for the outer cycle.

### c. HRD delivery: coaching and training - guidance and self-directed learning

The delivery stage may require the intervention of a trainer or facilitator or be self-directed by the learner with appropriate guidance, if necessary. Engaging in work-based activities in European Voluntary Service - where tasks have explicit training and learning purposes - shows a good example of the



Youthpass process within the outer HRD cycle. In the same way, socially mediated learning at the workplace incorporates peers and other learning collaborators (coaches, mentors, supervisors, etc.). Formal HRD interventions are usually "classroom" activities like training courses and seminars in pursuit of "harder" skills. At this stage, Youthpass can serve as a valid tool to identify learning moments and to document learning on the way. In the various Actions of the Youth in Action programme, the Youthpass process suits both levels, linking off-the-job and on-the-job learning. In HRD and adult education, reflection plays a major role in the ongoing and final evaluation of learning and training interventions. Reflection is an essential element of learning with Youthpass, as well. (Youthpass Unfolded, 2012).

#### d. HRD evaluation: assessing and transferring learning

As in the Youthpass process, the HRD cycle approach focuses on learning for the acquisition of competences along with their internal and external validation. In the Youthpass process, the emphasis is put on the self-assessment and recognition of acquired competences, confirmed by the learner and the dialogue partner. HRD practitioners concentrate on the internal and external validation of the learning outcomes. For HRD, internal validation is understood as a measurement of the extent to which learning objectives have been attained. External validation, on the other hand, measures the impact on the job behaviour and performance - the transfer of learning to the workplace (Mankin, 2009). In HRD, recognition is attained through external validation by observing the impact on the job. This is a change in routines leading to the consolidation of better performance. Official or formal recognition is implicit as a part of a self-contained learning process within the organisation. Youthpass contributes to personal and professional development by helping the learner become aware of his / her learning and describe the new competences acquired. Furthermore, it may initiate a new cycle of learning through empowerment and ownership of the learning process.

### From theory to practice: Youthpass as an HRD tool.



Youthpass can be combined with HRD approaches and prove remarkably useful as a tool for employability. I will take into consideration Youthpass in HRD practices with a positive impact on employability.

#### a. Experiential learning

Current trends in HRD support learning activities that combine training and on-the-job experiential learning. The main goal is to facilitate the transferring of learning directly into the workplace. Enterprises are putting into action learning strategies within the organisations. Trainers are increasingly taking the role of facilitators and even organising peer-guidance for self-directed learners.

Youthpass, as a process where learning to learn and self-directed learning is constantly encouraged, can demonstrate other models of delivering on-the-job career development interventions. For instance, active participation, collaborative learning, work-based activities are all elements that reflect the principles and methodology behind EVS, with a clear social and change-oriented focus. A current shift from training to learning in HRD supports the idea of interlinking non-formal learning and training interventions towards a more holistic approach in line with Youthpass.

### b. Reflective learning

Reflection is often described as a mental process with a purpose and/or an outcome: learning (Moon, 2000). Reflection has a key role in experiential learning. It is a fundamental stage in the well-used Kolb cycle of experiential learning and it is present throughout the Youthpass process. Reflective practice occurs in most learning instances from self-directed learning to mentoring and coaching. Peer-supported reflection is also common both in HRD and Youthpass. There are many ways and means to use reflection to improve learning, such as learning journals, simulations, concept maps, dialogue journals and interviews, among others. Youthpass can be also understood as a reflection tool in itself. A good example of reflective learning is using a learning journal to support the Youthpass process. Similar tools are widely used in job coaching and career development practices. By documenting and reflecting on the competences, the learner becomes aware of his/her potential, needs and learning objectives.

### c. Personal project plan

A personal project plan consists of a series of steps within an overall strategy for personal and professional development. Life and job coaching practitioners apply strength-based approaches as a means of empowering individuals. The design of a personal project requires a needs analysis, setting learning objectives, documenting learning moments and critical reflection

in order to attain certain objectives. Guidance from peers or coaches is widespread, though not indispensable. A Youth in Action project involves similar elements and Youthpass is intended to be the backbone to support the process. Needless to say, Youthpass can be assimilated into a personal project plan practice and HRD can benefit from young people that have gone through the Youthpass process.

### d. Learning assessment

The HRD cycle is closed by the transfer of learning and consolidation of the change. Evaluation and assessment are continual during the process to secure the achievement of the learning objectives. A well-founded assessment method should meet certain requirements: to monitor performance, facilitate self-assessment and reflective learning, and re-envision performance in some specific role or career, where learners can gain self-confidence based on their competences (Knight, 2003). Youthpass fully meets the above requirements and offers a valid alternative to evaluate learning under non-formal learning conditions. Employability-aware youth workers and HRD practitioners have an effective tool at their disposal. The former have direct access to an assessment and follow-up tool especially designed for non-formal settings. The latter can integrate it into their career development practices. This is one further step towards employability.







## Some policy implications

As a Youthpass and HRD practitioner, I believe that the recognition of Youthpass for employability is a two-way road, where Youth policy, and the business sector should rely on each other. The common goals are to keep on working together and learn from each other to help out young people to be employable. Although recommendations to both sectors are beyond the scope of this paper; a stronger focus put on the HRD side of the equation will have some policy implications:

- An increasing necessity to build and support bridges connecting the youth work and private sectors.
- Pursuing a more effective matchmaking between organisations' needs and employability policies.
- More emphasis on training needs analysis (TNA) on individual and organisational level to effectively address the dynamics of the marketplace.
- Reconsidering new approaches to working on the ground with the private sector and HRD practitioners to create synergies and foster employability.

# Conclusions and pending questions

The main conclusion of this paper is that there are several connecting points and common elements between the process of recognition of non-formal learning as seen within the framework of Youthpass, and Human Resource Development. HRD can easily incorporate the Youthpass process in its framework and Youthpass can also provide an alternative path towards career development and employability. Undoubtedly, the youth policy sector and the business-oriented HRD practice, together or separately, play a major role in turning the challenges of youth employability into employment opportunities. It can be concluded that Youthpass can serve better the validation and recognition of non-formal learning for employment purposes, if the youth field considers HRD approaches attuned to the individual needs and the demands of the workplace.

Youthpass is a useful tool within the HRD model. Youthpass can easily fit into HRD processes and practices leading to recognition from the business sector as a validation tool for learning in personal and professional development. A successful integration of Youthpass into the HRD field will build a bridge to connect the spheres of public youth policy and employment.

Nevertheless, the link between Youthpass and HRD towards employability may still pose a number of legitimate questions:

- Whether youth policy makers would consider and accept the development of Youthpass as an alternative way to increase employability.
- How to disseminate and raise awareness of Youthpass as a learning tool for professional and personal development with potential employers and their organisations.
- How to incorporate Youthpass or similar certificates into the workplace as entry-level tools for young people.

The above are pending questions worth examining in future research, hopefully hand in hand with the main stakeholders, job seekers and employers.

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