



DigiGo - Apprenticeships in the digital era

Module 6 – Empowering Learners

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Introduction

In order to have a successful apprenticeship it is important for learners to be empowered by their trainers. To empower is defined as 'to give someone more control over their own life or situation' (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, p.554). This means that by empowering learners, you, as educator, give the apprentices the ability, the confidence and the excitement to take control over their career and also their lives. In empowered learning it is essential that the learning approaches are self-directed, rather than taught by a trainer.

The use of digital technologies is certainly helpful in empowered learning, since it helps facilitating apprentices' active and creative engagement. By using digital technologies learners are able to develop transversal skills through different contexts and involve them in hands-on activities. Furthermore, digital technologies can be used to differentiate and personalize education by offering learning materials adapted to each individual's learning needs, allowing learners to develop at their own level and speed following their own pathway and objectives.

Since empowered learning asks for a different role of the mentor than traditional learning does, it is important for educators to understand their role and knowing how to guide their apprentices. In this module you can find the necessary information and activities to successfully empower your learners in the most digital way as possible.

A great focus will be on the project-based method, which enables more flexible learning, which is especially helpful for allowing apprentices to master complex tasks independently. It involves six steps in a chronological order. They are outlined below and will be explained thoroughly throughout this module:

1. **Information**

The apprentices gather all the needed information to plan and undertake their tasks independently.

2. **Planning**

The planning should be done by the apprentices working on a complete action plan for a specific task themselves.

3. **Deciding**

Apprentices discuss the realization of the plan with their company trainer. This company trainer checks whether the apprentice has the necessary competences for the task.

4. **Realization**

The apprentice has the full responsibility to carry out the task independently according to the plan, which the apprentice has developed him- or herself. Of course, the task can be carried out in a team context or independently, based on the nature of the task.

5. **Quality control**

Apprentices use methods and tools they have self-developed during the planning stage to control, but also evaluate their own work, thus providing them the power to be in control of own apprenticeship process.

6. **Evaluation**

The company trainer and the apprentice evaluate the apprenticeship process and all work done together. This results in the definition of new goals and tasks.

Information

1

Before the actual apprenticeship or a task during the apprenticeship begins, it is essential to have a clear understanding of what it entails. This understanding should be clear for both the mentor as the apprentice. Since the concept of empowered learning is for the learner to take control, it is important the learner gathers the necessary information itself. Therefore, it is important for the trainer/mentor to clearly state what is expected of the apprentice. Because, based on the expectation the learner will have to decide its own needed pathway with specific learning goals and how to achieve these goals.



Mentor: Before the apprentice is able to brainstorm, it is essential to have given the apprentice clear expectations of the tasks to brainstorm about. You can try to make these expectations visual, this will not only help in designing a clear picture, it also more likely the learner will feel engaged and motivated. This could take as much time and creativity as you would like, you can make an infographic, a presentation or even a video (see module 4 for different online tools to use, such as **Prezi or Canva**).

Based on your stated expectations, the apprentice will have to brainstorm about the tasks, the necessary steps to take and the learning goals. The apprentice can, for example, create a mind map in the tool **Mindmeister** (see module 4 for more information on this tool). This will allow the apprentice to brainstorm freely, with you as a mentor keeping an eye on it.

When you notice that the learner is struggling with finding the steps, learning goals or anything else, try to help the learner by asking questions rather than giving them the information they need. Questions to guide the apprentice could be:

- What is important to you to learn from this task/apprenticeship?
- What is the expected learning goal?
- How will you achieve this goal?
- What smaller steps do you need to take in order to achieve this goal?
- What do you need in order to take those steps?



Lastly, it is important to let the apprentices know that nothing is set in stone and the importance of flexibility, both of you as the learner itself. This could possibly prevent uncertainty, feeling pressurized or performance anxiety.



Apprentice: The goal for the apprentices in this step is to gather all the necessary information in order to plan and undertake their tasks. Gathering this information requires great attention to detail because the information will be used to develop the learning goals, the necessary steps to achieve those goals and the timeline of the tasks. The apprentice should also consider the priorities and level of urgency of each task when creating a timeline.

Planning

When the apprentice has gathered all the information, it is important for the apprentice to gain a clear overview of what has to be done and create a timeline of the necessary tasks, which will have to come together in an action plan. Having the action plan created by the apprentice itself means the apprentice will give itself a clear direction of where the tasks and the apprenticeship is heading. Moreover, it will give the learner a reason to stay motivated and committed throughout their apprenticeship. Furthermore, having an effective action plan the apprentice is able to track the progress and keep on track. But above all, it is important to stress that an action plan is not set in stone. There might be obstacles, changing circumstances or anything else you couldn't foresee happening. In those cases it is not a problem to revisit the action plan and make adjustments to meet the latest needs.



Mentor: During this step your role will be relatively small. You will only act as a helpdesk when the apprentice struggles and has questions. Checking whether the planning is realistic and feasible will have to wait till the next step. However, it is important to stress to the student that the action plan is not a definite plan and that it is fine when a certain step or task needs more time, as long as the student takes its own responsibility and makes adjustments which will be feasible again.



Apprentice: The gathered information has to be structured according to the different tasks in a complete action plan. This action plan should contain the learning goal to be achieved, the steps that need to be carried out to reach the goal and when the steps need to be completed (timeline with corresponding deadlines and milestones). The structure of a step-by-step action plan is as followed:

- Step 1. Define your learning goal/task
- Step 2. List down the steps or intermediate tasks to be followed
- Step 3. Prioritize steps/tasks and add deadlines
- Step 4. Set milestones
- Step 5. Identify the necessary resources
- Step 6. Visualize your action plan
- Step 7. Monitor, evaluate and update.



The first 6 steps should be finalized in this part of the apprenticeship. In order to create a clear overview for yourself, but also to make sure your mentor understands your plan, step 6 is especially important. A digital tool that could help you with this, is for example **Trello** or **Asana** (find more information on [Trello here](#) and find more information on [Asana here](#)).

Step 7 is a continuous step which you will follow throughout your apprenticeship. Whenever a task or step is completed make sure to mark this, so you can see how you have progressed. Moreover, you will be able to find the tasks that are pending or delayed. For which you can, subsequently, find solutions and then update the action plan. It is also important to continuously evaluate your progress and to keep track of this evaluation.

Keep in mind that it is your journey of the task or apprenticeship, so make sure the steps are feasible to you. It should be your personal learning goal, and the steps that you would like to take or that you think you need to achieve the goal. It will be your process, so therefore you will have design it yourself. Which also means that you can design any way you want it.

3

Deciding

After the apprentice has finalized its action plan, it is time to check whether this plan is realistic and feasible for the specific apprentice. Even though this sounds relatively simple, it does ask for a certain amount of knowledge of human nature of the mentor. It is essential to estimate the apprentice's competencies and skills, but also the amount of responsibility the apprentice will take. Therefore, it is important to have a serious one-on-one meeting in which the action plan will be discussed in much detail.



Mentor: Before entering the one-on-one meeting with the apprentice, it is important to already having received the action plan and having read the plan thoroughly. It is essential to have prepared well, in order to ask the right critical questions and to approve or disapprove the plan eventually. Since you, as a mentor, have an understanding of what you expect from the apprentice and what the end result of a certain task should be, you will be able to make a rough estimation of what steps the apprentice needs to take and how long it will take. Some critical questions you could ask the apprentice are:

- How will you use this action plan?
- How did you choose a direction?
 - o More smaller and intermediate steps or bigger steps?
 - o Starting simple for quick wins or the other way around?
- What will you do while implementing the plan?
 - o When will you take a look at the action plan? Every day, week, month etc.?
 - o How will you track your progress?
 - o When will we do a regular check together to take a look at the progress?
- Which steps/tasks do you think will be more easy to achieve, and which will take you more effort?
- Are there steps/tasks that will push you out of your comfort zone?

In order to approve the action plan, it is essential that the plan, the direction and the journey are clear and that it is heading to right expectations and outcomes. Furthermore, it is important that you agree on the feasibility and reality of the action plan and that based on this plan the apprentice will complete its tasks or apprenticeship successfully. When there are steps or tasks to improve, give the learner constructive feedback and time to adapt the action plan. When the feedback has been processed in a new action plan, make sure to discuss this plan again with the apprentice.

It is essential that before beginning on the actual tasks or apprenticeship, you are both on the same wavelength. Therefore, you will have to approve the action plan before the apprentice can actually start on the task. Furthermore, it would be helpful if you could keep track of the apprentice's progress throughout the apprenticeship as well, which is possible when using for example the digital tool **Trello**.

Apprentice: As soon as you have finalized your action plan and made it visual, make sure to share this with your mentor. This way the mentor will be able to take a look at it before you will discuss the plan



together. The design of your action plan is up to you and you can also use all your creativity in the way you'd like to present your action plan to your mentor. When you are better in writing, you can make a report, when you prefer presenting, you could make a PowerPoint or Prezi presentation. As long as you will be able to explain your own personal action plan as clearly as possible. Therefore, make sure that you don't only understand the action plan itself, but also understand why you have put certain tasks or steps in it and why you set certain deadlines. Keep in mind that this action plan is not set in stone. Whenever something unexpected occurs, you will be able to adjust your plan in order to keep it updated.

Moreover, it is important that you keep track of your progress along the way. Whenever you have planned for yourself to look at the plan, and mark the completed steps and see what the following steps are, remember to also make short evaluations. This will help you when you will have to make the final evaluation at the end of the apprenticeship. Again, you can use all the creativity that you would like, for example:



Keep a journal – Write short stories about your day or week. What went well and could have gone better. You can just write stories, but you can also keep a journal on the basis of a daily/weekly question. In this journal you can also write accomplishments, as well as expectations. You could also use online tools for this, such as **Evernote or Journey** (find more information on [Evernote here](#) and on [Journey here](#))



Keep a portfolio – Make pictures or videos of what you have been doing, but also remember to make sure it is clear what your successes and possible improvements were/can be.



Daily/weekly Tweet – Describe your day or week in just 140 characters and use important hashtags to strengthen your tweet.

When you struggle with finding a structure in which you can evaluate your progress, you can always ask your mentor for some guiding questions.

Realization

4

As the title of this step says, this is the step in which the action plan will have to be realized. The apprentice will have to execute the tasks and steps as written down. Any necessary tools or materials, which are discussed in the previous phase, need to be provided by the apprenticeship.

Mentor: The general instructions of the tasks or entire apprenticeship are explained by you in the beginning of this process. Besides, you also discussed the steps the apprentice will take throughout the task or apprenticeship. Therefore, your role in this step will be little to no role at all. The apprentice will have to follow its own action plan and take its own responsibility in executing it. Even though your role is very small in this phase, it is important you will keep a close eye on the apprentice and even more important that you are visible to the apprentice. In the firsts place it is essential for you to know whether the executed tasks and steps are executed properly. You could easily track the learner's progress when the learner uses an online tool such as **Trello or Asana** for planning. However, it is also important for the apprentice to know that you are easily approachable. Just in case the apprentice needs any tools or material, or when it has questions or struggles with certain steps. When you keep a close eye on the apprentice, keep in mind to note important progress or improvement for yourself, to discuss with the apprentice during the quality control. Be aware that it is important to discuss the



improvements, however to give the apprentice some more confidence and keep it motivated, it is also essential to give the apprentice compliments about the work it has done well.



Apprentice: After a lot of preparation work it is time to put your action plan into work. Thanks to the preparation and the action plan, you should know where to start and what you will need in order to execute certain tasks or take certain steps. This is a phase in which you will have to carry your own full responsibility, however this doesn't mean you will have to do everything alone. Be aware that you can always ask for help. Moreover, it is essential to keep in mind that you will have to be flexible. When you won't be able to achieve a certain step within the time frame you had in mind or another setback occurs, it won't necessarily mean you have failed. Instead of feeling defeated of this setback, take time to review your action plan and see what you can change. Furthermore, try to keep positive and motivated in achieving your goals. Here are some tips to stay positive and motivated:



Learn from your setbacks – As mentioned above, a setback is not a failure. When you pursue anything that is worthwhile, the chances are that you will experience setbacks. Therefore, it is important to learn from these experiences and welcome them as course corrections towards your inevitable success.



Focus on actions, instead of results – You will be able to control your actions, and the results will automatically follow your actions. Therefore, when you will focus on that what you can control (thus the actions), you will feel less pressure along the way.



Celebrate success along the way – try to visualize every day what your success of that day is, and treat yourself when you have overcome a challenging obstacle. Remember that success is a journey to be savoured and not simply a destination to be reached.

Quality Control

5

During this step it is important to take regular looks at the action plan to see whether the apprentice is on track, or when certain steps or tasks need to be prioritized. The amount and moments for the regular check-ups are decided between the apprentice and the mentor in the deciding phase. In order to check where the tasks stand, it is important to keep the action plan updated throughout the task or apprenticeship. Furthermore, the chances are that some tasks or steps are more important or urgent than others, in that case it is essential to prioritize the tasks. Therefore, prioritizing is an important skill to develop in this step.



Mentor: In the deciding step you have agreed with the apprentice when you will take a look at the progress of the action plan together. During this check-up, the intention should be to let the apprentice explain itself what the progress is. The apprentice should explain what tasks are on track and going well, what possibly needs more attention or improvement, whether it needs help with something etc. When an apprentice struggles with explaining its progress, you can help the apprentice by asking open questions. Keep in mind to ask open questions, rather than leading questions, because in order to guide the apprentice in the best way possible, you will need an honest explanation rather than what you would like to hear.

As mentioned in the introductory part of this step, prioritizing might be very important throughout the execution of the tasks or apprenticeship. For some people prioritizing comes very natural, whereas others find this more difficult. When you notice an apprentice struggling with this, you can suggest some prioritizing methods which the apprentice can use. Even though the apprentice will have to use and make the method itself, you can always guide the student in how to do so.

Lastly, it is essential to give the apprentice constructive feedback during your check-up. Even though the intention is to let the apprentice control its own journey, it still needs guidance. And when something is not going as it should, you will have to give the apprentice feedback on that certain task or step. There are some important principles to take into account when giving feedback:

- Be problem-focused and specific
- Talk about the situation, don't talk about the person
- Give also praises and compliments
- Give the feedback in person
- Be sincere
- Give the apprentice time to respond and listen to its response
- Don't necessarily wait for the check-ups to give feedback.



Apprentice: During this step you will take a look at your progress on the basis of your action plan. You will have to self-assess what went well and what needs possible improvements. Moreover, you will have to see if you are still on track, or whether you will need to adapt your action plan. In order to keep a clear overview of your action plan, it is recommended to keep track of the plan on a regular basis. Tick the tasks that are completed, take a look at what tasks are more urgent or important than others, and check the feasibility of the task. When you notice that a certain task or step needs to be changed or it needs more time, make sure to adjust this in your action plan. It is essential that your action plan stays updated whenever you take a look at it.

Besides your own personal checks, it is also recommended to do these check-ups once in a while with your mentor. Keep in mind that you are personally responsible for executing your own made action plan, therefore, it is important that you are able to explain your progress, your successes and your potential improvements clearly. Moreover, when you receive feedback from your mentor, be aware to note these for yourself and discuss the feedback. When you will update your action plan and work on your evaluation, keep this feedback in mind and more importantly, think of ways or solutions to work on the feedback.

When you feel overwhelmed with all the steps and tasks that are still in front of you, it might be helpful to use certain methods or tools to organize the tasks and prioritize these. Some examples of prioritizing methods with corresponding digital tools are:



The Master List: Shortly explained, this is a brain dump. You will have to write everything down that pulls at your attention. Once you have written everything down that swam around in your head, you can work off the list by prioritizing tasks by monthly, weekly and daily goals. Useful tools for this method are: [Microsoft To Do](#), [Todoist](#) or [Idonethis](#).



The Eisenhower Matrix: Even though the master list already prioritizes the tasks in monthly, weekly and daily goals, it can still be difficult to decide what needs to get done now or later this week. To separate urgent tasks from important ones, you can use the Eisenhower Matrix. This matrix contains 4 boxes :

1. Urgent and Important – Do these tasks as soon as possible
2. Important but not urgent – Decide when you'll do these and schedule it
3. Urgent, but not important – Decide whether to do these right away, or schedule it for today on a time in which you are more likely to be less focused.
4. Neither urgent nor important – Drop these from your schedule as soon as possible.

Useful tools for making an Eisenhower Matrix are: [Eisenhower Matrix app](#) or [Miro](#).



The Ivy Lee Method: When the list of urgent and important tasks is still overwhelming, it could be necessary to find the true importance of the tasks. This method forces you to prioritize your day by the following set of rules:

1. At the end of your work day you will have to write down the six most important things you need to accomplish the next day. Do not write down more than six tasks.
2. Prioritize those six tasks in order of their true importance.
3. When you arrive the next day, try to focus only on the first tasks. Work until the first task is finished before moving on to the next one.
4. Approach the rest of your list of tasks in the same fashion. When at the end of day, you weren't able to finish all the tasks, move those to a new list of six tasks for the following day.
5. Repeat this process every day.

Useful tools for the this method are: [Friday](#) or [Hourstack](#).

Evaluation

6

After finishing either a certain task or the entire apprenticeship, it is important to evaluate what the apprentice has learned, what its' successes were and what maybe could have gone better. In order to empower the learner, it is important the apprentice will self-evaluate its progress. By self-evaluating their progress the learners are more likely to be more motivated and engaged, they will have a greater belief that they can succeed and are able to adapt their approach if their used approach is not working. Therefore, self-evaluation is a powerful learning strategy and thus essential in an empowered learning apprenticeship. At the end of the apprenticeship a final self-evaluation is essential, in order to discuss the progress that is made and see what is learned during the apprenticeship. However, it is also possible to do smaller self-evaluations throughout the process.



Mentor: Before the final evaluation has to be presented or submitted, the apprentice has to prepare its evaluation. In empowered learning, it is important the learner will do this for itself and makes it in its own way. However, for your own perspective and maybe also for your company's perspective and the way you provide the apprenticeship, it might be good to make an assessment tool as well. This tool can, for example, gather information on what values and interests were important to the apprentice. This won't only help the apprentice in its self-evaluation, it will also help you in the set-up of the apprenticeship. Some online tools in which you can make your own assessment tools are: [Pointerpro](#) and [ProProfs](#).

When the evaluation will be presented by or discussed with the apprentice. Your most important task is listening. Let the apprentice tell its story, in whatever creative way suits the apprentice best. First, give the apprentice the time and space to tell or show its entire story. When the apprentice has

finished, you can ask some critical questions. Depending on the apprentice's evaluation you can ask critical question regarding the successes, setbacks or learning goals and whether they were achieved or not. After asking the last critical question you could think of, it is time to give the final feedback. Keep the same principles on giving feedback in mind as mentioned in the 'Quality control' step.



Apprentice: As mentioned before, in step 3 'Deciding', you will have to evaluate your action plan continuously throughout the tasks and entire apprenticeship. How you will evaluate your own journey depends on what suits you the best, and in which you think you can explain your progress the best way possible. When you have finished the task of the action plan or the apprenticeship, you will have to evaluate the entire process. This will be easier when you have kept track of the smaller self-evaluations during the process. That way you will only have to merge those evaluation together and evaluate the total journey you have made. A few tips for a good self-evaluation are:

- Make a list of your accomplishments and a list of struggles – Try to do this throughout your entire journey
- Align your review with the expectations stated at the start and your own learning goals.
- Stay positive when you describe the challenges you faced, and focus on development in case you still have challenges ahead of you.
- Acknowledge the possible mistakes you've made and explain how learned from them.
- Keep the focus on you – don't point any fingers when you weren't able to achieve a certain goal or tasks.
- Incorporate all the feedback you received throughout the process, not only the feedback from your mentor, but maybe you also received feedback from others.
- Use examples to strengthen your story.

Remember, self-evaluation is a powerful way to enhance your own experience. It's supposed to be your view on what you have learned, what your successes were and what you still have to learn or develop. As long as you can be both proud and critical of your experience and are able to explain this clearly, you cannot make mistakes.

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