

Field Trials in GeGS – The potential of e-services in IAG

The GeGS project aimed at developing and testing approaches to foster the digital shift in IAG service provision, both by accelerating the cultural shift in the organizations providing IAG services and by implementing e-services in IAG counselling. The e-service tested in the project was based on Jobiri, an AI-driven online career counselling tool developed by an Italian company which compiles job offers from different sources, provides support on writing a CV or a cover letter, and offers video lessons on employability skills, training and feedback for job interviews. This tool was adapted and redeveloped to the specific needs and circumstances in the three regions of Thessaly, Sardinia and Berlin, where the field trials took place. The adaptation process was supported by public authorities in the three field trial regions and further validated by organisations and professionals involved in GeGS. This adaptation process not only addressed regional requirements but also underscored the tool's potential for personalization, making guidance services more tailored and effective for individual clients.

In the field trials, a total of 35 IAG practitioners used this tool in their counselling processes with more than 350 clients over a period of almost 18 months (November 2022 to March 2024). While a majority of clients (about 60 %) were young adults entering the job market for the first time after compulsory schooling or initial VET, there was a variety of backgrounds and needs: About one client in six was older than 30 years, and about one client in ten was currently employed and came for career planning rather than placement.

During the field trials, opportunities and challenges arose both on the part of the clients and on the part of the IAG practitioners:

IAG practitioners needed to adjust their counselling process in order to integrate the new tool: They had to work out individually how, i.e. at what point of time and in connection with which activities, the tool could fit into their personal, tried-and-tested advisory process. While this process of readjustment took time and effort, it also presented an opportunity for IAG practitioners to critically examine their usual way of structuring and organizing their work. At its best, the process resulted in a gradual transition to a new technology, complementing secure and reliable familiar tools.

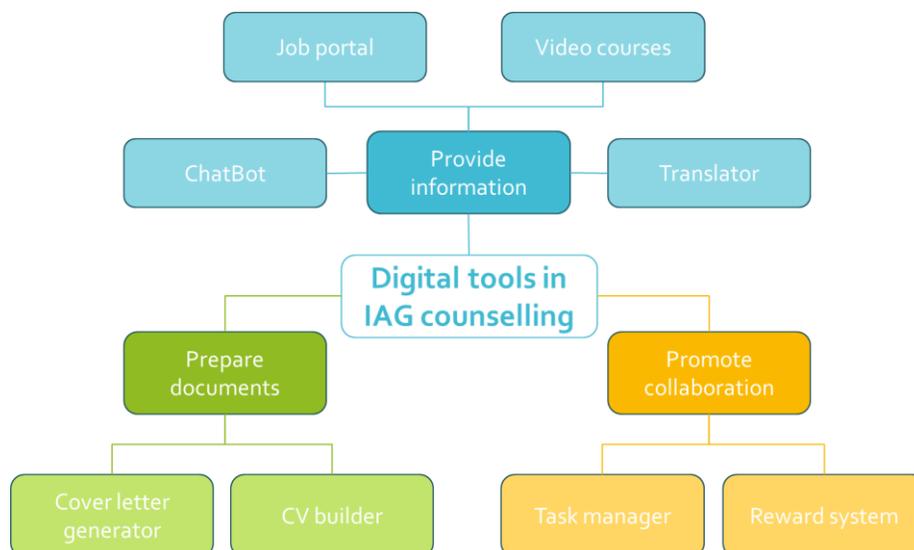
Clients needed to be able and willing to use a digital tool in the first place. Being able meant first of all that the clients had to have access to the necessary hardware and to the internet. Since the level of access was very diverse, this underscores the importance of optimizing digital tools for various devices, including smartphones. Moreover, clients had to have basic digital competences,

e.g. regarding logging in to a personal account or navigating a site.

Being willing to use a new tool required a certain degree of openness and curiosity, while at the same time reservations, e.g. with respect to data protection and privacy, had to be resolved. The field trials showed that in general, younger clients tended to be more open to using the tool, while older clients were more sceptical. However, using a digital tool in a practical situation such as IAG counselling can enhance digital literacy among clients and foster an environment of openness and curiosity towards new technologies even for more sceptical users.

Moreover, using a digital tool in a counselling process passes more responsibility to the client. The digital tool tested in GeGS not only provided information, but also comprised self-learning tools and tools for preparing application documents. In order for the tool to reach its full potential in facilitating and speeding up the counselling process, clients had to work with it independently in between counselling appointments. It turned out that not all clients were willing to do this. Rather, some exhibited a high level of service mentality, expecting the IAG practitioners to select suitable job offers for them or even to compile their applications documents. Using a digital tool in IAG counselling can thus support a process of empowerment and increased personal responsibility. This represents an opportunity for IAG practitioners to further develop their roles as facilitators of empowerment and self-sufficiency among clients.

The experiences from the field trials offer valuable insights for continuous improvement and feedback loops, essential for refining digital tools to enhance user experience and effectiveness, ensuring that they evolve in response to client and practitioner needs. In particular, the IAG practitioners came up with possible features of digital tools that can be found in the following mind map:



The practitioners see a high potential for digital tools when it comes to providing information to clients, be it specific information on job openings or more general information on the application process. In the latter case, both a chat bot and video courses can be useful. When combined with a translation software, such videos can be very useful for clients with limited language skills – not only for informational purposes, but also as a means to further train and improve their language skills.

Digital tools can also support clients in preparing documents they need in the application process, such as the CV and the cover letter. However, the rapid progress in text-generating AI and the wide availability of corresponding applications might turn a tool which focusses specifically on the application process obsolete.

Finally, digital tools can promote collaboration between the IAG practitioner and the client, e.g. through task management tools which both, practitioner and client, can access. These features not only enhance the efficiency of the counselling process but also foster a stronger collaborative environment between IAG practitioners and clients. By engaging clients in the process management, these tools empower individuals and encourage active participation in their counselling journey, enriching the overall experience. Moreover, implementing a reward system, similar to health apps, can provide an incentive for the client to actively pursue the counselling process.

Implemented this way, digital tools offer potential savings in the counselling process both time and resources, benefiting practitioners and clients alike. By streamlining certain aspects of the counselling process, digital tools can reduce the workload on practitioners and offer more efficient service delivery, ultimately enhancing the accessibility and quality of guidance services for a wider range of clients.