

Independent Studies Platform Development

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Learning Report

Abstract—The Independent Studies course gets students to participate in an extra-curricular activity to develop necessary skills for the future. Since it requires a great amount of management, it has a dedicated platform for that purpose.

This report describes what was learned from doing this activity, what was learned from what went well and what was learned from some mistakes that were made, and what lessons are taken to the future.

Index Terms—Independent Studies, Platform, Hard skills, Soft skills

Although well written and described, the execution of the activity was limited in duration!

1 INTRODUCTION

THE Independent Studies course focuses on developing students' soft and hard skills. Through extra-curricular activities, the students are subjected to an environment that is different from the normal school project one, normally a more formal work place environment.

Information Technology (IT) people are most of the time interpreted as introverted and since working in a team in a work environment requires that the elements of a team communicate between each other, it is necessary that the capability of communicating with others is developed before the student is "sent" to a work environment. Also the work that is done at schools does not involve certain aspects of that environment (they are taught in theory, but in practice they are most of the times not applied).

So this course sets out to prepare students for the period after school, the first job for some, so that students can adapt quickly to a first job and not be slowed down in their careers due to communication problems or disobeying the employer's chain of command, for example.

To develop some of these skills I decided to

participate in the development of the new Independent Studies Platform. This project, while focused in IT, is aimed at the school community, mainly at the students taking this course and the professor responsible for it.

This report describes what was learned during this activity, what skills have been developed, what was learned with the mistakes that were made, and what these lessons contribute to the future.

2 COMMUNICATION

Every time a team is involved in a project, communication is essential so that the project can be well executed. In school projects, normally, this is not a problem. Members of the team see each other possibly every day so arranging a meeting does not require much effort.

In a work environment this is not always true. The members of a team might see each other every day too, since they probably will work at the same place, but most of the times they have other obligations. Also there is a chain of command in that team, most of the times, so the way we address people can not be the same for everyone.

During this activity I worked with a team consisting of the professor of the course and another student, Alexandre Quitério. Also Alexandre was working a full time job and taking other courses at Instituto Superior Técnico (IST) which left him little time to work on

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(1.0) Excelent	LEARNING					DOCUMENT						
(0.8) Very Good	CONTEXT x2	SKILLS x1	REFLECT x4	S+C x1	SCORE	Structure x0.25	Ortogr. x0.25	Gramm. x0.25	Format x0.25	Title x0.5	Filename x0.5	SCORE
(0.6) Good												
(0.4) Fair	2	1	4	1	8	0.25	0.2	0.25	0.25	0.5	0.5	1.95
(0.2) Weak												

this project and communication was not always easy.

In these cases the best means of communication is email. It is something that people check everyday and reply when they have time to. Here enters the chain of command factor in communication. The professor is higher in the hierarchy so emails addressed to him have to be more formal, as opposed to talking between students/colleagues at work which is informal.

When the matters to discuss are of a greater importance, due to time restriction for example, the option should be to call the person. Nowadays almost everyone carries a phone so it becomes easy to be reachable at all times.

3 CODE STRUCTURE

When developing an application the structure of the code is very important. If it is done by only one person, that person generally knows where everything is but if the code is not very well structured, time is lost looking for something that would otherwise be easy to find.

Working with a team it becomes even more important. The other members of the team need to be able to find out what everything does without having to ask the person who did some feature about every line of code, as it decreases the efficiency of the team and that can be costly not only to the members of the team, that have to work more time, but also for the employer, that can incur costs due to delays in the projects.

Since I entered the project when it was already underway, one of the steps I had to take was to learn the code that had been done. Luckily the code was well structured so learning the code was not a hard task.

4 TIME MANAGEMENT

Time management is an essential part of life itself. It is necessary that a careful planning is done when working on a project. Specially when there is other work that has to be done.

This semester I did not manage my time well between this activity, other courses' projects and the thesis project report. This caused delays in some of the work and had a especial impact on the time invested in this activity.

5 LEARNING FROM THE MISTAKES

In everything we do it is important that we as people learn from our mistakes in order to avoid repeating them. During this activity I did some mistakes and came across some difficulties. At the end of the activity it is important to recall those and consider what can be learned from them.

The most noticeable mistake was the bad time management. Not planning my time to better distribute it between the activity, the projects and the thesis report, delayed some of that work. To avoid this from happening again I started planning ahead of time a daily schedule for the work that has to be done and setting goals for what needs to be done every day. This way I can better control my time be it to better help with studying for the exams or to plan what to do with the free time.

One difficulty that I came across was the installation of the different software used in this project. Since I was not familiar with most of the software often asked Alexandre for help which took time since he could only answer after work. The information I needed was accessible online and could have been found had I dedicated more time searching for it.

6 CONCLUSION

Developing hard and soft skills is important in order to have a successful career. Many employers look for many characteristics that go beyond the technical skills, like if the person can work in a group, how that person would relate with the colleagues, if that person can respect the chain of command inside a company, etc.

In order to develop these skills the course of Independent Studies provides students with an opportunity to work in a workplace environment.

The course requires some management and a new platform for that purpose was created. Given the opportunity, I chose to participate in this project with the objective of helping in the development.

Although some mistakes were made and my contribution was very little there is still something that was learned and that will help me

greatly when I start working. With what was described in this report, it is safe to say that, for me, this course served its purpose.