Remote Working - The Webseries: Training Meets People Caring and the Liberating Power of Laughter

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Abstract— **Adult motivation is the main issue about engagement, and in the recent pandemic it has been specially under surveillance in companies that have had to reorganize into remote working. People caring has rapidly become a strategic issue for Human Resources management, which used tools and training language to support organizational transformation, to engage people, to spread and promote the corporate culture even in remote working contexts, to recognize individual contribution and to support a sense of belonging. Training, therefore, even in phases of organizational change and transition, is a lever not only for learning, but also for managing people. The training experience presented in this paper regards best practices about WFH (Working From Home) in Sorgenia s.p.a. (Italian energy company) and highlights this double level of training objectives on learning and people caring. The adoption of a training approach oriented to known situations, practical contents and possible solutions, humorous video realization, characterized the illustrated didactic experience. Participants' engagement passes through the levers of familiarity of the situations (and recognition of possible or already known problems), accessibility of the solutions provided in a light and ironic way enabling individual resources. Engagement is promoted by a serial format (the web-series), which is periodically released and thought a humorous language. It is also interesting that engagement was pursued through active participation in the video production process to maximize the familiarity of the situations also through the recognizability of places and colleagues.**

Keywords-Engagement; humorous video-learning; web-series; people caring.

I. INTRODUCTION

Andragogical studies always tried to identify what influences adults' motivation to learn and what encourages greater engagement in training courses. There are two initial strands, one dating back to Thorndike [96] and inaugurated by the book "Adult Learning", in which it was experimentally demonstrated that adults are capable of learning but do it differently from children; and the other from 1926, with "The Meaning of Adult Learning" by Lindeman [58], that dealt in greater depth with how adults learn. In addition, many contributions are from psychotherapy (Freud and the subsequent), psychiatry, clinical psychologists and humanists, such as Maslow [61], who emphasized the role of a sense of security in human

growth, and Rogers [88] who talked about learner-centered teaching in the same way that therapy focuses on the patient.

Training design is based on adult learning principles both to create an entire course or a single training session (synchronous or asynchronous), to be engaging, effective and memorable for those who participate. It is well established that adults first and foremost need to know why they need to learn something new, the benefits they might gain from learning and the negative consequences of not learning. Adults also need their self-concept to be respected, to feel autonomous regarding the content to be learned. Adults, after all, "are the experiences they had": they feel ignored or undervalued if their past experiences are not considered. Good training must therefore start from real experiences, accompany analysis and understanding, and use them as a starting point for improving future experiences. Adults are motivated to engage in training if what they are taught actually improves their ability to deal with tasks and situations in every day and working life. They ask and want the answer to the question: will what they learn really be useful to them? In line with the andragogical model, the role of the learner is therefore central: adults must become active participants in the process, supporting the trainer in the implementation of the whole activity, clearly in various forms, as summarized and rationalized in the 1980s by Knowles [54]. Bruner [8] distinguished between expositional and hypothetical modes of teaching: in the former, the teacher decides and exposes the contents and the student listens, while in the latter, teacher and student cooperate and the participant is not just a mere listener but a protagonist in the formulation of the contents. These concepts are all consistent with Knowles' andragogical model [54]. Andragogic theories and models on the value of engagement in learning have their roots unquestionably in pedagogical studies. Consistent with the andragogic approach, in Kolb's theory of Experiential Learning [56] we find not only the reference to the studies of Dewey, Piaget and Lewin but also the central role of concrete experience and reflective observation in the learning process. Experiential learning is a process in which knowledge occurs through observation and transformation of experience, i.e., not through the passive acquisition of notions, concepts and relationships. Kolb [56] picks up on Dewey's [34] "experience-reflection-learning" scheme, which highlights how the meeting point between personal development and education is fundamental. According to Piaget too, knowledge does not come from

perception but from action and interaction with the environment: a process of adaptation that oscillates between assimilation and accommodation. Piaget [78] also talked about learning as a process: the knowledge path is fundamental, not just the achieved result. All learning is re-learning and constantly linking new learning to previous experiences. Experience and experimentation are two key words of training for Kolb [56]. It is also correct to highlight the "experiential approach in groups" in this analysis. According to Lewin [57] there is a relationship between group dynamics and the experiential approach. The group is unity, totality, dynamic reality: single person action modifies the group and vice versa. Despite its dynamism, the group will always tend towards balance between forces that tend towards disintegration. The group facilitates the integration of theory and practice: new learning emerges from reflection between the group's experience and theory. From the reflection on group dynamics, comes the interest in the value that the sense of belonging has in the engagement on learning paths. This view origin stems, on the one hand, from the deepening of positive parenting and, on the other, from modern approaches to learning design and gentle leadership. Although the concept of discipline is conceived with a view to raising responsible, independent and collaborative children, in families and schools, with respect and kindness, we have found in the concept of a sense of belonging touched on several times by the theoretical approach, a further confirmation of how fundamental it is, even in adults, to engage in participation, learning, sharing, availability, openness. "The primary goal of a child is: I just want to belong". "The child who needs love is very often the one who behaves in the least loving way". "An encouraged child does not need to behave badly". "Children behave better when they feel better". Trying to substitute the word child, in these sentences from J. Nelsen's text [74], it becomes evident that leveraging the sense of belonging increases engagement in training courses, in line with the main techniques for attracting attention and flipped classroom considerations. In his book "Happiness: a hypothesis", Haidt [47] talks about the human brain as an elephant and its driver. The driver is conscious, controlled thinking. The elephant is everything else and the opposite. It is gut feelings, reactions, emotions, visceral intuitions that make up a large part of the automatic system. The driver part of the brain is the rational part, then. The elephant wants, but the driver tends to curb the desire. However, if the elephant is not involved, the adult is not attracted, motivated, engaged. And elephants like stories, they like to feel like heroes of the journey, they favor the urgent, they are attracted by emotional resonance, by unexpected rewards, surprises, interesting questions, by collaboration and social proof, not always but sometimes by competition, if used sparingly. By play, by beauty, by fun.

The project presented in this work rise in response to the specific need expressed by the company Sorgenia Spa, to train its staff on the good practices to be followed to live the remote working in an effective, efficient and stress-free way by the development of the training proposal "Remote working- The Webseries" (during the Covid-19 pandemic). In the development of the training proposal "Remote working - The Webseries", it was important to experiment how the different dimensions touched upon in the andragogical approaches, combined with the enhancement of the sense of belonging, are fundamental to raising the level of engagement in training initiatives. This article recounts an experience and is structured as follows: in section I the theoretical context, in section II the need and the methodological response with related drivers, in section III the subject matter of the training, in section IV the work phases and the professionals involved, in section V the elements of transferability of the project, finally in section VI the insights gathered for future experiences.

II. TRAINING PROPOSAL "SMARTWORKING": TRAINING WITH THE WEB SERIES MEETS PEOPLE CARING AND INCREASES ENGAGEMENT

The training proposal "Remote working- The Webseries" addressed to all the staff of Sorgenia Spa (Italian energy company) during the Covid 19 pandemic and was motivated from the express desire and concern of the company to support its employees in the new working methods introduced by remote working.

A. Format

The Sorgenia staff were not only the recipients of the training intervention, but they actively participated as actors. This choice helped to strengthen engagement and identification, leveraging the need to belong, even stronger in a period of forced "distancing". Remote working- The Webseries is built on the stories of a small number of characters, in a familiar and ordinary environment, a block of flats revolutionized by the new rules generated by remote working. The protagonists are four condominium families, chosen with great attention to the values of diversity and inclusion. The web series, made up of nine episodes, winks at some typical situations of working life in remote working, touching on critical aspects but also on their inner value. It thus stages absurd, comical and yet decidedly realistic situations. And there is no lack of small "homages" to the TV series of the moment.

First episode is available at
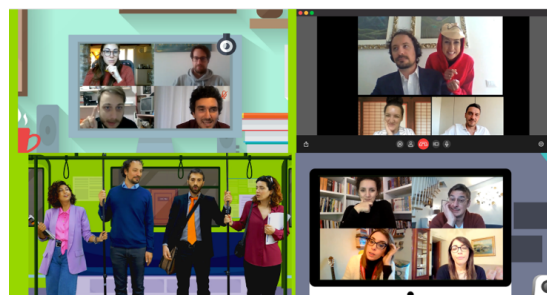https://vimeo.com/534372808/05c5b0b645

Figure 1. Example of a of one episode.

A short downloadable infographic (Figure 1) at the end of each episode proposes a recap of good practices, as a

memo to keep handy to live your "connected" life with balance. It contains a few instructions to work better and smart safeguarding people's wellbeing, work-life balance, but also productivity, and narrated in a "typically Sorgenia" language that every employee could relate to. With the pandemic and the spread of remote working, the way companies communicate with their employees and the way they communicate with each other has also been transformed. The values of sharing and communication are a fundamental component of this new productivity paradigms, because they keep people together and allow them to overcome critical issues simply through dialogue. Sorgenia, a highly innovative company that is attentive to people's wellbeing, is a forerunner in this sense, because it believes and feels strongly that people's wellbeing is a value that affects motivation and productivity, helping to improve every aspect of the business. For Sorgenia, in line with the values it has in common with Piazza Copernico, taking care of its employees and their wellbeing passes through a clear trajectory, which the webseries wanted to follow to become a symbol of a culture, a way of thinking, a way of being and understanding the company. In addition to the classic incentives for workers, such as benefits of any kind and economic rewards that have a limited and temporary influence on motivation, there is a whole series of activities that can be introduced by companies to take care of their employees and their well-being, to make them feel a fundamental part of the company:

- offer trust, flexibility, autonomy; involve people: the more the employee is involved in company dynamics, the more productive he/she is.
- spreading the company culture by training management first, so that they lead by example.
- involve people in work strategies and objectives.
- build loyalty by acting on the sense of belonging, to make people feel part of the company and its development.
- improving communications, spreading and acting on the culture of sharing.

B. Chosen method drivers

Three drivers guided our methodological approach (Figure 2):

Figure 2. Method drivers

VIDEO EXPERIENCE: watching videos, as well as creating videos, is now part of everyone's experience. The society that has become increasingly audiovisual (Feierabend and Rathgeb, 2009) [36] and increasingly mobile (James, 2016) [52]. Smartphone itself is also increasingly a tool aimed at learning (Giannakos, Jaccheri and Krogstie, 2014)

[44]. Video as an educational tool has great potential: it involves simultaneously several senses, is direct, immediate, achieves direct and emotional communication. Educational sciences talk about Kirkpatrick's so-called 'picture superiority effect' [53], referring to the greater likelihood that pictures have of being remembered than words. Neuroscience support the effectiveness of visual experience: about half of the resources committed by the brain at any given time are devoted to sight, according to Medina [63].

The effectiveness of video-based interventions in training is certain: video integrates and supports, through the visual dimension, practical and direct observation, the teaching-learning of good practices otherwise explained only verbally (Santagata, Zannoni & Stigler [92]). Video is valuable in modelling practices (Santagata & Guarino, [93]) and contributes to the development of a specific professional language (Minaříková, Janík, Píšová & Kostková, [67]); video promotes general and personal reflection - in the case of self-analysis on didactics, if we think for example of the practice of micro-teaching (van Es & Sherin, [107]); and is able to focus students' attention (Franke et al, [39]; Santagata, Zannoni & Stigler, [92]; van Es & Sherin, [108]). Video supports learning (Chambel, Zahn, and Finke, [19]): the reconstruction of real experiences, of the high degree of authenticity and realism, of the visualization of dynamic processes, which cannot be observed live (difficult to reproduce, dangerous, expensive) or which are difficult to describe verbally.

STORYTELLING: This does not only refer to images, but to the telling of stories, i.e., stories in which the viewer-learner can recognize himself. Because storytelling connects, promotes, facilitates remembering.

"Stories reshape information, transforming it into meaning", Duarte, [33]. Stories are powerful and indispensable tools of human beings to connect with other human beings. As neuromarketing teaches, the primitive brain reacts very positively to emotional storytelling. Everyone learns and builds his or her own meaning system from an early age with stories. Life itself constitutes a narrative as a story, according to Bruner, [8]. Narrative is innate to mankind, there is no evidence of civilization that has not used narrative: with the emergence of sociality and inter-human relations, narrative was born, an attitude that has always been present together with rationality. Each person is not only the sum of his/her experiences or the relationships he/she establishes, but even more so the sum of his/ her stories and the contextual frames that are created around the stories (Bruner [8]). Narrative thinking is, moreover, a specific cognitive mode through which individuals structure experience and construct interaction with the external environment. Understanding actions, behaviors and experiences according to the typical mode of narrative thinking is a fundamental operation that guides the human mind in the attribution of meaning and significance (De Rossi, [29]). Restak [84], a neurologist who has studied the role of neural networks in learning processes, maintains that narration modifies the structure of the brain as much as personal experience. This claim is also supported by the behaviour of so-called mirror neurons, which are dedicated

to recognizing the emotions of others. Stories can be experienced emotionally and have meaning for each of us because these emotions trigger a process of identification with the characters who live those emotional experiences. Researchers including Hung [51] have now clearly demonstrated that storytelling used for learning has positive effects on motivation, knowledge consolidation and awareness building.

HUMOR: and then you want to laugh and make people laugh. Laughing relaxes mind and opens it up to new stimuli, it helps to fix situations in memory and promotes learning, because mind does not distinguish between spontaneous and induced laughter. In general, laughing always produces great psychological and physiological benefits. According to Hippocrates and Galen laughter inevitably influenced the course of an illness. Gelotology (from the Greek ghelos= laughter and logos= science; the science of laughter) studies and applies laughter and positive emotions for the purposes of prevention, therapy, rehabilitation and training. This science has ascertained that in our bodies there are numerous connections between the nervous, endocrine and immune systems. Any alteration to one system also affects the others, influencing the overall health of an individual. Laughter activates the glands that produce endorphins, which stimulate and strengthen the immune system. Various studies over time have richly demonstrated the power of laughter in different areas of life. Patch Adams, the father of clown therapy, together with other doctors, has made great contributions to the study of the effects of positive emotions. And today, laughter therapy also enters homes and offices. Many coaches use laughter to facilitate the achievement of serenity, well-being and success in private life and at work. Warm cognition or warm learning undoubtedly makes it possible to learn better and faster, by using smile and fun. Irony produces solidarity, cohesion, inclusive dialogue, but also adaptability, resilience and questioning. Laughter is a fundamental aspect of antifragility. It is no coincidence that we are increasingly talking today about humor training or even humor coaching. Smile:

- resizes limiting beliefs and reactivates positive attitudes towards potential and limits.
- activates psychological and neural resources that awaken the body and mind from moments of immobility.
- deconstructs habitual patterns of perception.

This allows to see, feel and therefore experience things from another point of view. It stimulates lateral thinking and creativity, facilitates the magical synthesis of fantasy and reality. Davies [23] hypothesized that the origin of the forms of humor linked to tragedies or catastrophic events is also a consequence of the widespread and massive media coverage of such events, as was also the case during the Coronavirus pandemic. It seems that the continuous media narrative plays a significant role in how the pandemic emergency is perceived, generating increases in stress and anxiety (Garfin, Silver, & Holman, [43]). In this scenario, as in the past, humor has been and is a possible way of salvation (Fessell, [37]), "[...] the most powerful defense mechanism" (Freud,

[41]), with different functions acting on physical and mental well-being, quality of life and perception of events. The use of humor or comedy helps to overcome stressful moments (Fritz, Russek, & Dillon, [40]) or to mitigate their negative effects (Pietrantoni & Dionigi, [79]). More generally, experiencing comic situations supports mental and emotional well-being (Borcherdt, 2002[5]), has a beneficial effect on health conditions and mood (Marziali, McDonald, & Donahue, [62]; Vagnoli & Dionigi, [106]) and allows for a more positive evaluation of experiences and quality of life (Rivista italiana studi sull'umorismo, [86]).

III. CONTENT AND LEARNING PATH

The content of the webseries was divided into 9 episodes:
- Video call: your survival kit (episode zero)
- Remote working- how to live it well
- The effects of remote working
- Video calls: how to deal with them
- A good video presence
- Dive into deep working
- Video calls: instructions for use
- Managing a team remotely
- Healthy misunderstandings

The development team was made up of different professionals: learning experience designer (trainer), scriptwriter (trainer), actors, video maker, web designer, graphic designer, developer, social media manager, as well as Sorgenia representatives and staff.

An article in "Sorgenia Up", the company's official magazine, kicked off not only the training campaign, but also the related social experience, to increase the interest of the company's population in the release of the episodes, which ended with the publication of the classic bloopers. In a difficult moment of health emergency and from the company's need to communicate to its employees, who had been remote working for months, "We are here", and the idea of the dedicated web series was born.

The proposal was a targeted training and information initiative, but also a people-caring operation aimed at providing employees with 'good practices' to deal with remote working positively, effectively and without stress. The "distance" in carrying out work activities did not affect the sense of belonging to the company, which continued unabated to take care of its employees.

IV. WORKING METHOD

Compared to a classical model of designing and developing content for digital learning, in this project some phases were specifically taken care to make content and method functional for the objective to promote participants high engagement. In the following, indications on the most peculiar phases of the project are given.

1) Client material receipt and demand analysis
The project started with a careful analysis of the client's needs. In several meetings, the client's values, intentions,

objectives and received reference materials were brought to light. At the end of the analysis, a project document was produced which presented the methodology and action plan.

2) Drafting of the macro-design (number of episodes, subjects, campaign calendar)

The design work started with the analysis of the materials/interviews with the owners, to structure a preliminary map of the learning experience. The next step was to identify the learning objectives, as "the description of a performance that students must be able to show in order to be considered competent" by Mager [60]. Specifically, the learning objectives' tree is hierarchical structure, constructed in relation to content, explicit in the results to be produced and enriched with indications of complexity according to Bloom's taxonomy [4]. Design and development of two prototypes, differing in narrative style and graphic format and client's choice of prototype

3) Script editing

For the design of videos Piazza Copernico uses a storyboard model inspired by real screenplays, with essential editing, typical of the genre. This format is used indiscriminately for videos with live actors, such as video lessons, sketches, commercials, and for graphic videos such as motion graphics, whiteboard animation, etc. The script is divided into several columns containing: narration and dialogue, scene description, settings, character mimicry, graphic effects and text on screen, music, filming materials, location, etc.

4) Script validation

5) Casting actors and extras

Piazza Copernico has professional actors, with experience in theatre and cinema/TV, who are able to perform and enhance the scripts at various levels. In addition to the actors, in order to act on engagement, enhancing the sense of belonging to the project and the company, Sorgenia workers also participated in the role of protagonists, who were available for filming and interpreting the scripts.

6) Filming

For videos played by actors, Piazza Copernico shoots in its own studio, or in other indoor or outdoor locations, depending on the needs of the script. In this case, both studio filming, on green screens, and in real locations were carried out, as well as direct screen casting to reproduce remote working situations and video calls. The operator/director and scriptwriter cooperated constantly throughout the production. Sorgenia's HR representatives launched a company contest for employees to participate as actors: the countless entries to the experience confirmed the interest in the initiative. A short casting among people was carried out and 10 employees were selected to participate in the filming.

7) Design and creation of final infographics

Figure 3.   Figure: Infographic example

8) Editing and post-production

Made by professional video makers with dedicated software such as Premiere and After Effect, suitable for editing and compositing, with the possibility of adding text, motion graphics and VFX elements of various kinds, designed and planned by the developer in consultation with the director and screenwriter.

9) Tracking preparation

10) Debug and publishing in Piazza Copernico's LMS (Learning Management System)

The episodes were assembled in a scorm package, with content structuring that follows a linear and sequential logic: it is necessary to complete the fruition of each episode, before being able to move on to the next one. The engine used, standard scorm, is accessible and mobile friendly.

11) Serial delivery

The training campaign lasted approximately six months (May - October 2021). A calendar for the publication of the episodes was structured and shared with the company. The episodes were published every 2-3 weeks, also in consideration of Sorgenia's working calendar (e.g., holidays).

V. RESULTS

In the pilot phase, the results were collected from the point of view of the perceived impact by the management, since by design choice no direct ex post evaluation tools were included on the training experience. Instead, it is important to consider the impact on the working climate and processes, as assessed by the company, internally and independently from the webseries design group.

The evaluation carried out within the company is summarized in the contribution of Dr. Silvia Guidi (Diversity, Inclusion & People Care, Innovation & Development Department of Sorgenia SpA) commenting on the experience: *"Remote working - The web series was a new learning experience for us: thanks to our collaboration with the Piazza Copernico team, for the first time we used irony to transfer valuable content and we did it in the midst of a pandemic, when the context around us was anything but*

'playful'. Hence the decision to convey instructions on how to best live our new 'connected life' in a light-hearted and fun way that was in line with our values, among which the principle of 'HAVE FUN' stands out, which translates as follows: in Sorgenia we face the challenges we face with enthusiasm and passion, collaborating with each other and encouraging self-fulfillment in everyone. In addition, we directly involved our colleagues through a 'contest' that allowed them to play a leading or co-leading role in some episodes of the web series, alongside the actors of Piazza Copernico: another aspect that generated engagement and helped make this training project even more interesting and stimulating for us at Sorgenia".

Future corporate objectives include adopting the developed model as applicable to all content of universal interest to the corporate population, where it is essential to share best practices and corporate values.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The project was strongly oriented towards training engagement, as important factor for a broad and widespread participation for remote workers, and to actively promoting the best fundamental practices for working effectively and maintaining adequate wellbeing and a good quality of life.

In transformative organizational contexts where practices and values need to be conveyed clearly, quickly and effectively, traditional training paradigms are out of place. engagement is the winning factor to be achieved and promoted. In the project, engagement was pursued at all stages of the project, i.e.:

- in the design of real-realistic situations related to the working context,
- in filming by involving company people and places,
- in the direct, ironic and emblematic language,
- in dissemination on the company's social networks.

The fundamental lever used was the recognition/ identification that created closeness in single participant to the stories, and the sharing among the participants (who recognized the situations experienced from different points of view), as well as the ironic key to demystify the criticality in favor of a more solution-oriented reading.

The project has shown multiple potential transferability elements, as this methodology is exportable to other contexts, contents and organizational change process. In terms of content, the episodes are built on typical work routines of many companies, which could benefit from the dissemination of good practices to experience remote working effectively and positively. From the point of view of method, its effectiveness was demonstrated precisely in its ability to shorten the distance between personal experience and organizational experience, helping to reduce the emotional distance from the organization, and encouraging involvement. In terms of development, all material was used, even errors (bloopers), which helped to interest people in the content. From the training point of view, in fact, the aim of this type of training material is to use formats typical of other contexts (e.g., television), to interest people in the topics of interest, then providing content (e.g., infographics, materials,

etc.) to refocus the training meaning of the video material. This refocusing on training is fundamental to avoid the risks connected to these types of formats, which, by focusing attention on situations, can risk a blurring of the underlying training meaning. Therefore, authors suggest some caution in method use and dissemination, alias the *reality ironical copy* (ironical replication of reality). It is necessary to strengthen the collection of emblematic stories and concrete examples at an early stage, to strengthen the link with the reality. It is also strategic involving company staff more actively in the material production. Finally, a key winning element is to include tools for collecting and listening to the real effects in the working context (e.g., surveys, communities, focus groups, kpi analysis.). Only through a perceptions and meanings analysis on actual difficulties, it will be possible to design and redesign videos and the learning mix to be most suitable to support the organization's objectives.

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