



The TrainerGuide – a web-based tool for in-company trainers

Introduction

The European Council in Lisbon responded to the changing global challenge by announcing a comprehensive economic and social policy strategy: to become, by 2010, "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth, with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion".

One of the means of achieving this objective was the crucial endeavour to improve the quality of teachers and trainers. This target should also be seen in the perspective that the average age of teachers/trainers has been growing steadily within the last decade and a retirement of up to 30% of the current teacher/trainer force within the next 10 years will necessitate the recruitment of teachers/trainers of a hitherto unseen extent.

It is now 2010, but this article shall not deal with the issue of whether the ambitious 2010 goal was achieved. Instead, the focus will be on how the TrainerGuide can contribute to the overall goals of strengthening the quality of vocational education and training, VET, and especially the training activities taking place in companies and other education-related workplaces.

Background of the TrainerGuide

The TrainerGuide has been in operation in Denmark since 2006. The fundamental principle behind the establishment of the web-based tool is that more support of higher quality for trainers will improve the overall quality of workplace training.

At the national Danish level, the Guide originally targeted the industrial, construction, gastronomy and transport sectors. In 2007, several trade committees formed an association with the purpose of maintaining and further developing the online version of the TrainerGuide. Since then, new trades have started the process of joining and using the Guide.

In 2008, links with vocational training organisations in other EU countries were established. The outcome of this process was the initiation of the Leonardo Project: "The European TrainerGuide". The project consists of partners from Finland, Germany, Denmark, Netherlands, Slovenia and Turkey. Based on an English TrainerGuide template, each country will be responsible for developing their own versions and in their own language.

The Danish Centre for the Development of Vocational Education and Training, NCE, developed, together with several trade committees, the original version of the TrainerGuide and is also the lead partner in the European project.

The approach of the TrainerGuide

Even though the 2010 goals refer to both to teachers and trainers, it is noteworthy that the indicators selected to assess the development within the area of VET teachers/trainers only applied to teachers, and not trainers. The rationale for omitting the trainers was that the concept 'trainer' is understood differently in different countries and that there is not much statistical information available.

Besides the lack of statistical information, it is widely acknowledged that the role of training and trainers is seen as a grey zone area, difficult to grasp and manage. As a result of these circumstances, only few countries have entered into discussions about trainers and how to enhance their competencies to meet changing labour market demands.

The lack of political focus on and attention to this area for trainers has resulted in an absence of a trainer identity, which is one of the major reasons that it is difficult to address trainers in enterprises as a target group. This also explains why there are almost no existing interest groups for this occupational category in Europe. Hence, most trainers in companies see themselves as skilled workers.



The TrainerGuide approaches some of these issues by raising awareness among companies and trainers themselves. The Guide provides illustrative examples to help trainers identify the work they do, the knowledge they have acquired and the skills they need to have to be a competent trainer. Central to the Guide's development was the view that trainers can train others more effectively, if they are trained in how to deliver training. This is a process that also can lead to the shaping of an identity, and thus seeing oneself as more than a skilled worker.

Target group and content of the TrainerGuide

The primary target groups of the Guide will be employees responsible for training of apprentices/trainees and employers. Secondary target groups will be training committees and organisations, VET schools and centers and other stakeholders involved in vocational education and training.

As already mentioned, the TrainerGuide is a web-based tool, which can be reached on line by the various users. The tool provides the user with a range of services that cover different aspects and topics within the extensive field of recruiting and training apprentices/trainees.

The online TrainerGuide consists at this time of 10 modules and includes topics like: Employment of apprentices (legal matters), workplace culture, the VET training system, introduction of training methods and learning processes, information and guidance in matters such as cooperation, youth culture and safety and advice concerning how to evaluate both ones own training and the performance of the apprentices.

In addition to an extensive amount of facts and information, the Guide provides sound cuts, in order to add more perspectives and variety to presentation of the diverse topics covered by the tool. The reason behind this is based on the experience that the users of the TrainerGuide, primarily trainers, often prefer to hear and see things instead of reading long and complicated papers. This is also the reason for presenting the materials in a simple and uncomplicated way.

One of the fine features of the TrainerGuide is the flexibility of the tool. There is no inbuilt prerequisite that the user has to go through all the modules starting with module one and moving forward. The user can pick from the range of topics in accordance what he/she needs here and now and referring to a specific training situation. Hence much attention has been paid to provide extensive user friendliness.

How can the Guide address the changing role of trainers?

It seems to be a general trend in EU that the role of the typical trainer is changing. Essentially, the changing role of trainers seems to refer to two aspects: one is an internal role re-definition of the trainer from instructor to coach or facilitator, questioning the former authoritarian position of trainer, and requiring new forms of communicative and social competencies in order to engage in teamwork, mentoring and facilitating innovative forms of learning.

The other aspect addresses the changing responsibilities of trainers, as the nature of training itself is changing, with more elements of project-oriented learning, new aspects of quality assessment in learning processes and more complex coordination with other training facilities and institutions.

The TrainerGuide addresses these features in several ways, especially in module 4, 5 and 6. Module four deals with how the instructor can improve his/her competencies e.g. by elaborating on and explaining how the trainer can improve his/her position as a coach and mentor.

Module 6 includes a number of youth culture related topics. Here the user has access to various perspectives and approaches concerning issues such as: youth behaviour, cultural diversity, adults as learners and talent management.

The TrainerGuide can contribute to the improvement of VET trainers' pedagogical, social and management competencies

In most EU countries, trainers in companies are not expected to have specific trainer qualifications, but



are usually skilled workers with a certain period of work experience – typically 5 years. Thus countries tend to focus on trainers' vocational background and expertise as a prerequisite for becoming a trainer. In terms of trainer competence, three levels of competence are of relevance to trainers: first, vocational competencies that enable the trainer to train in a work practice setting, i.e. basic vocational and technical skills; second, pedagogical and social competencies to facilitate didactic processes; and, third, management competencies to support so-called secondary training-related processes, including quality monitoring and assurance, project management and cooperation with different company departments or with external training institutions and vocational schools.

Most trainers lack pedagogical, social and management competencies. The TrainerGuide can provide useful information and input to alleviate this situation. This especially applies to the topics of learning processes and cooperation.

Module 5 in the Guide provides a great deal of practical and comprehensible input concerning how to approach issues such as learning styles, learning environment, feed-back situations and how to make learning visible.

Module 7 deals with external relations, colleagues and, more specifically, how to improve cooperation in regards to learning conditions and how to improve cross-disciplinary teamwork.

Conclusion

The TrainerGuide represents a new and innovative approach to providing relevant information for trainers and is developed to serve specific purposes in different training solutions.

The Guide is an online tool that is easy for trainers to access and utilise and has a flexibility that makes it possible for the trainer to choose between different topics, according to his/her specific needs and preferences.

All in all, the TrainerGuide can make an important contribution to enhancing the pedagogical, didactical and management competencies of trainers.