

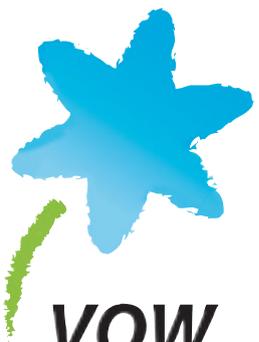


***Validating competencies
in the workplace***



Value of Work **VOW**

Validating competencies in the workplace

Value of Work  **VOW**



Education and Culture

Leonardo da Vinci

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First meeting in Iceland: *From left to right, back row:* Ronny Nilsson (Centre for Validation, City of Malmö, Sweden); George Isaías (Synthesis RE, Cyprus); Sigurdur Albert (Finance Workers Union, Iceland); Bjarni Ingvarsson (Education and Training Service Centre, Iceland). *Front row:* Fjóla María Lárusdóttir (Education and Training Service Centre, Iceland); Lene Poulsen (Danish Institute for Educational Training of Vocational Teachers); Natascha Elvira Jelenc (Slovenian Institute for Adult Education); Anne Hansen (National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, UK); Ingela Bergman (Centre for Validation, City of Malmö, Sweden)

Introduction

The Value of Work (VOW) project has brought together organisations from six countries across Europe to develop methods and tools that can assist the process of validating competencies acquired in the workplace. The aim of the project was to open gateways to education and training, making it easier for people with little formal education to develop their competencies and, by this process, to secure their position in the labour market.

In the main, the project has been carried out in the banking sector (Cyprus, Denmark and Iceland), but has also included work in the social care sector (Slovenia) and the administration sector (Sweden). The competence standards were formulated in the UK with contributions from partner countries.

In each country, a Professional Task Group (PTG) was formed to facilitate the validation procedure. The PTGs included stakeholders from trades unions, bankers, human resource professionals and from other relevant fields. In each participating country the Professional Task Groups have supported the development of the project. They have been particularly active in sourcing and commenting on the appropriateness of standards and sub-standards of competence for the sector in their particular country having regard to national employment and training cultures, customs and practices.

Project aims

The project aims are to:

- identify competencies acquired by people with little formal education in the workplace;
- develop methods and tools to assist in the process of validating competencies in workplaces, with an emphasis on transferability between sectors and on the role of stakeholders; and
- make competencies visible to employees (to increase motivation) and to all social partners.

Target groups

The target groups of the project are:

- people who have acquired competence through non-formal and informal learning and have little formal education;
- social partners; and
- other relevant actors.



VOW colleagues in Copenhagen



Project outcomes

- A handbook of competence standards.
- A handbook on methods and tools for the validation process.
- A guideline brochure describing the validation process in the workplace for all those involved.
- A project website presenting all the outcomes.

Project products can be found on the VOW website: www.valueofwork.org

Common European Principles

This project is about validating competence acquired in the workplace, generally through informal and non-formal learning. The European Commission has identified a set of common principles for such validation, created through wide consultation and from the work of an expert working group. These Common European Principles for the Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning have been the basis for our work. The principles should stimulate validation of non-formal and informal learning at national level and support a voluntary process leading towards more coherent and comparable practices in Europe. The principles are listed below:

- the purpose of validation
- individual entitlements
- responsibilities of institutions and stakeholders
- confidence and trust
- impartiality
- credibility and legitimacy.

Further information can be found at:

http://www.ecotec.com/europeaninventory/publications/EC_common_principles_validation_20040303.pdf

Source: Common European principles for validation of non-formal and informal learning, European Commission, Brussels, 3 March 2004

Types of learning

Formal learning

This is defined as learning that occurs in an organised and structured context (in a school or training centre or on the job) and is explicitly designated as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support). Formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. Typically it leads to certification.

Informal learning

This is defined as learning that results from daily work-related, family or leisure activities. It is not organised or structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support). Informal learning is in most cases unintentional from the learner's perspective. Typically it does not lead to certification.

Non-formal learning

This is defined as learning which is embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning



time or learning support), but which contain an important learning element. Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. Typically it does not lead to certification. Validation of informal/non-formal learning This is defined as the process of assessing and recognising a wide range of knowledge, know-how, skills and competences which people develop throughout their lives in different contexts – for example, through education, work and leisure activities.

Source: Tissot, P., *Terminology of Vocational Training – A multilingual glossary for an enlarged Europe*, Cedefop, 2004.

Validation of competencies

The development of competencies takes place in many different environments and in various contexts. The workplace is an extremely important learning arena, where individuals develop their competencies through hands-on experience. Through the validation of competencies acquired in the workplace, employees and employers can gain a better insight into the competencies within the company, helping to focus on further developments.

Formal qualifications provide only a fraction of the information that is required for an individual's assessment, be it for selection, training or promotion purposes. Competencies, however, are

regarded as behaviours that take time to develop and need to be observed in the workplace. They are not as apparent as formal qualifications at first glance during an interview, or when studying a CV, but they are equally important since they provide a clearer picture of an employee's various capabilities at work.

Validation of competencies is a procedure using various methods and tools to assess, recognise and make visible the knowledge and skills that are acquired at work by employees.

Development of standards

The compilation of standards was a major task of the project, given their importance to the validation pilots in banking and the two transfer sectors.

Ten general competence standards and a range of sub-standards have now been developed by the Value of Work project partners. It was important that the standards created would be fit for purpose and adopted in each of the partner countries.

Iceland

'My competence became visible to me'



Initially there was a very broad understanding of occupational competence standards among participating countries. Some countries had a view that standards would be general and able to accommodate sub-standards; whereas others had a very definitive and detailed understanding of occupational standards, broken down to reveal every single task performed by a post-holder. The standards were redrafted and revised, based on job descriptions from the banks, and on the objectives of the Standard Examination Model of the European Foundation Certificate in Banking. Eventually a new proposal on general, transferable standards was produced and adopted by PTGs in partner countries as appropriate for addressing the validation task. A detailed description of the standards and their development can be found in the Handbook of standards (www.valueofwork.org)

In order to ensure the successful adoption of standards, the following have to be considered:

- It is important to involve all relevant stakeholders in the validation process from the beginning. This can contribute to ensuring that the validation results will be valid within the respective sector.
- A proper analysis of the job in question must be carried out before it is possible to determine the competency standards required to perform that job.
- When describing competencies, the focus should be on learning outcomes, stated in measurable terms.

Sweden

“This process has aroused the interest for further learning activities”

- Once the key competencies in a job have been identified they become the basis of the standards to be used. This allows the appropriate selection of assessment tools to be used in the validation process.
- Each employee's competencies can then be compared to the competency standards that are required for the job in question, from which informed decisions can be made for promotion, training or selection purposes.
- The employees themselves are central to the process but frequently it may involve peers, supervisors and even customers.

The standards

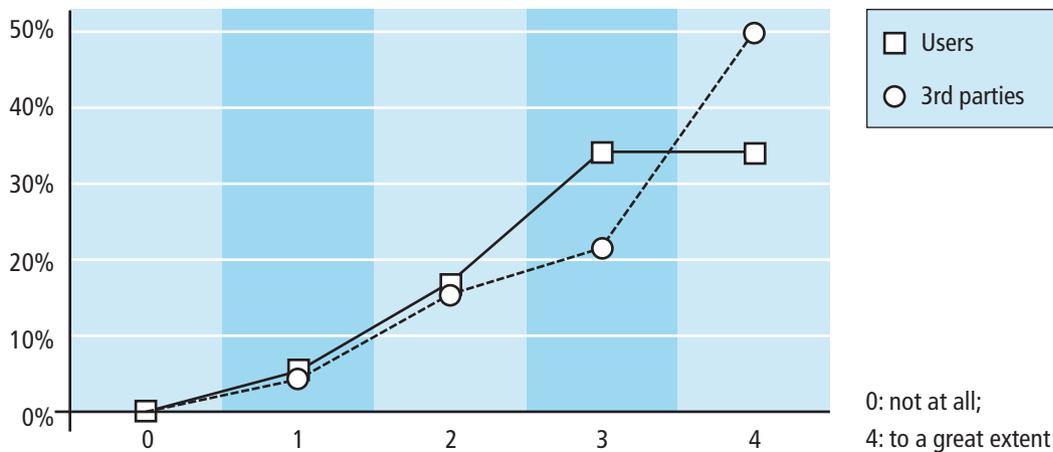
1. The ability to manage the job function on a relevant level based on an understanding of the national and international economic, financial and societal context within which the bank operates.
2. The ability to manage the job function on a relevant level based on an understanding of the products and services of the bank



3. The ability to relate the individual customer's needs to the product and services of the bank based on an independent assessment/judgment.
4. The ability to take part in customer relations with empathy and sensitivity towards the customer's needs and to communicate respectfully and professionally in the situation.
5. The ability to manage the job function with respect to ethical codes and confidentiality.
6. The ability to put the customer first by managing the job function service-oriented and by inspiring confidence.
7. The ability to express oneself clearly and understandably about banking matters verbally and in writing.
8. The ability to manage the job function with responsibility, precision and punctuality.
9. The ability to take part in teamwork and internal co-operation acting with responsibility, initiative and development orientation.
10. The ability to keep oneself updated on development trends with implications for the job function and to show flexibility and adaptability in this respect.

Visibility

The **competence standards** used in this process clearly contributed to the visibility of competence





Validation–process overview



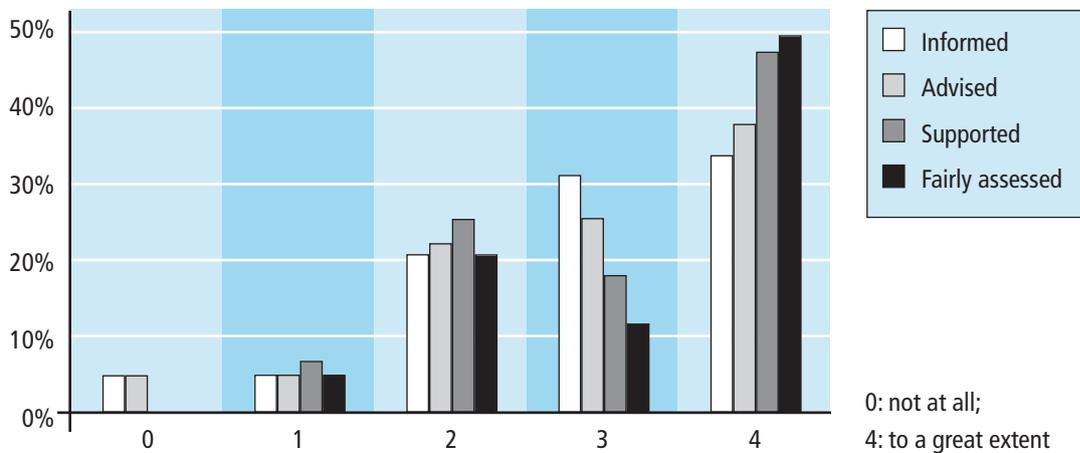
Guidance

The process of validation: how is it done?

The validation of competencies is a step-by-step procedure. In this project, after the design of the standards and sub-standards, and the planning and organisation phases, various methods and tools were used to implement the validation process. Valuable experience was gained from the pilots. A detailed description of the validation process developed in the VOW project can be found in the Handbook of methods (www.valueofwork.org). Here we outline some of the main steps, issues, barriers and comments which arose during the validation process in this project, and offer it as a model for others to follow.

Support during the process

Throughout the process I felt I was...





Main steps

Initially it is of utmost importance to provide sufficient information for potential participants about the whole process so that they can make an informed decision about participation. General professional guidance should also be made available throughout the whole process.

A PTG should have an active role in deciding the methodology used. That will better guarantee the value of the certificate which is the end-result of the process. The training of assessors and advisors involved should be emphasised. Quality issues are addressed in the Handbook of methods.

Methods and issues

At least three methods for validating the competencies of the participants were used in each country. The most common were the qualification portfolio, self-assessment together with a dialogue with a supervisor (supervisor assessment), and case studies.

All partner countries used the qualification portfolio through group-work. The time used (the amount of time given to participants during working hours) with this method varied depending on the company involved (from 5 to 20 hours). The timeframe of the project was also a factor. Some countries came to the conclusion that it would be beneficial for the participants to spend more time on creating their portfolio with descriptions of their competencies.

The "self-assessment/dialogue with the supervisor" method was used by all countries with little variation. Some of the participants found the task quite long (too many sub-standards) while others a bit short (no sub-standards). The sub-standards were considered necessary, though, for clarifying the content of the general standards, making the self-assessment more comprehensive and transparent. It was interesting to note that generally the supervisors gave higher ratings than the employees' own self-assessments.

In addition, some of the supervisors found that the assessment scale needed numbering and definitions in order to enable a more objective and comparable self-assessment, while others found it difficult to use a numerical assessment as an indication of the value attached to each area.

Slovenia

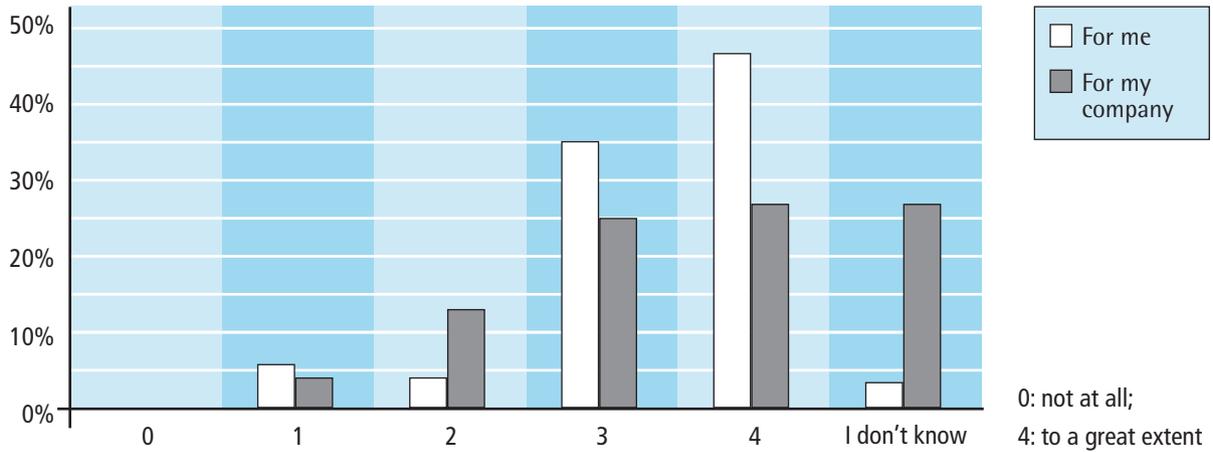
"The more you know – more valuable you are and then it is easier to develop personally and in relation to people"





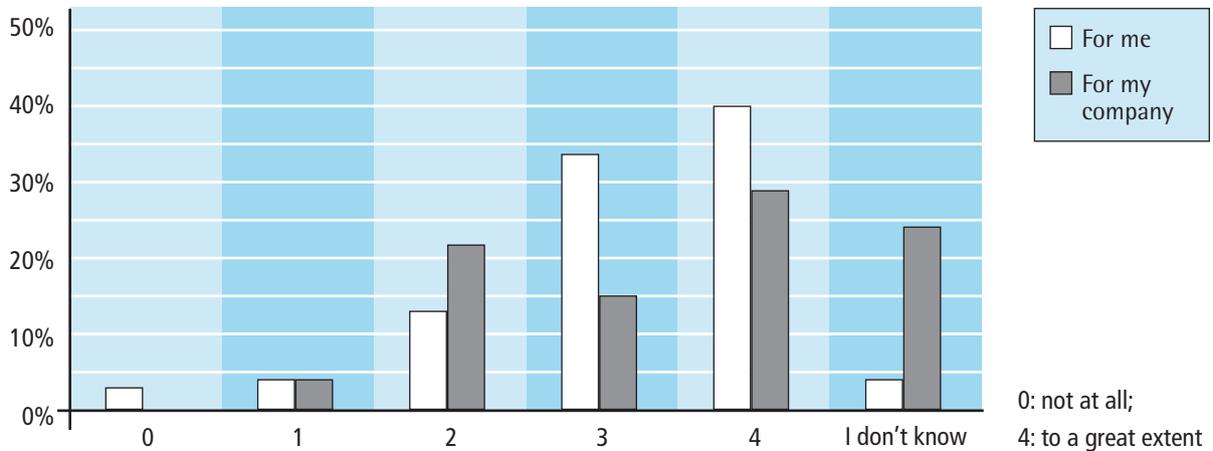
Visibility – identification/users

In my opinion, the validation process helped to better **identify** my competences



Visibility – validation/users

In my opinion, the validation process helped to better **validate** my competences





"Case studies" were used by most of the countries and were considered an effective method for assessing the participants' competencies. Other methods used were "essay-writing", "observation", "supplementary questionnaires" and "interviews".

Barriers

The main barriers to implementing all methods were generally accepted to be time and the need for more people to be involved in the process. This would have been more costly for the employer. The most important factor was that the assessor should be satisfied with the evidence of competency collected to be able to validate them.

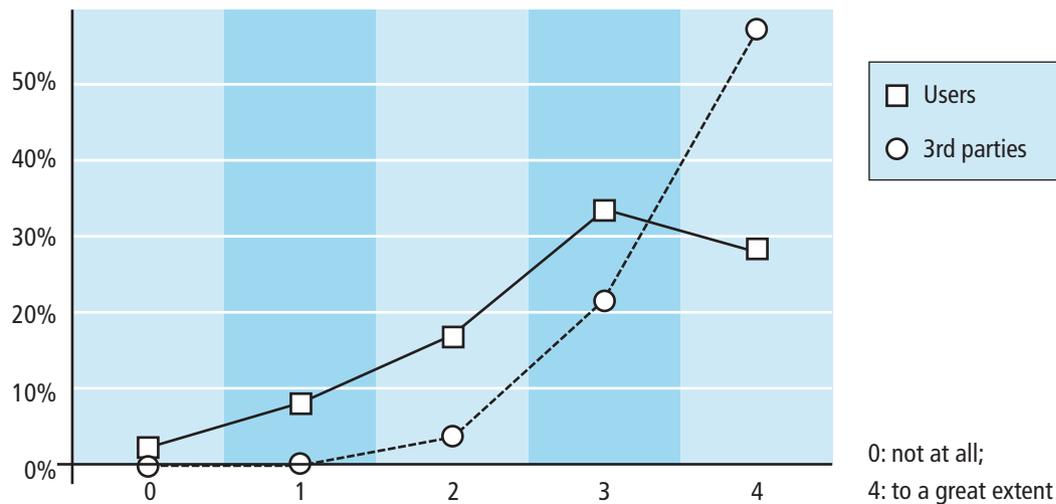
Comments

The methods and tools suggested at the initial stages of the project were considered successful, although some countries had to modify them slightly to their national context.

The process

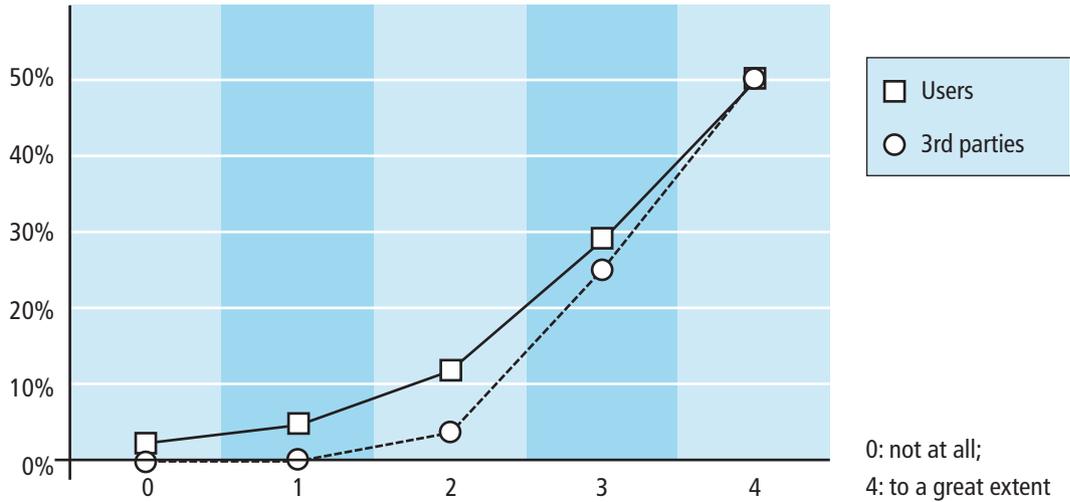
Validation of occupational competence pilots in banking was conducted by Icelandic, Danish and Cypriot partners. A total of 41 participants completed the validation procedure in banking from 45 starters. In the transfer sectors, home care workers and administration workers, piloted respectively by Slovenian and Swedish partners, a

Motivation to undertake or resume vocational training outside the company



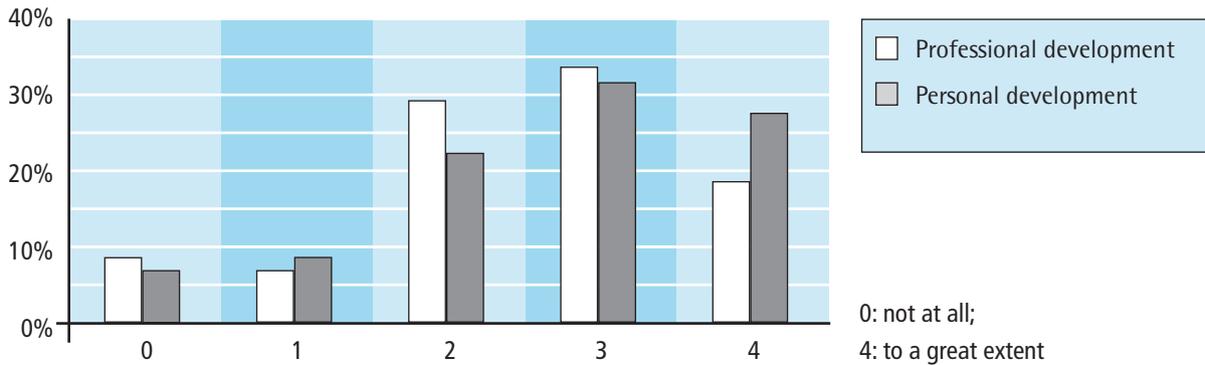


Motivation to do the job better



The process/users

Extent to which the validation process improved **personai/professionai** development





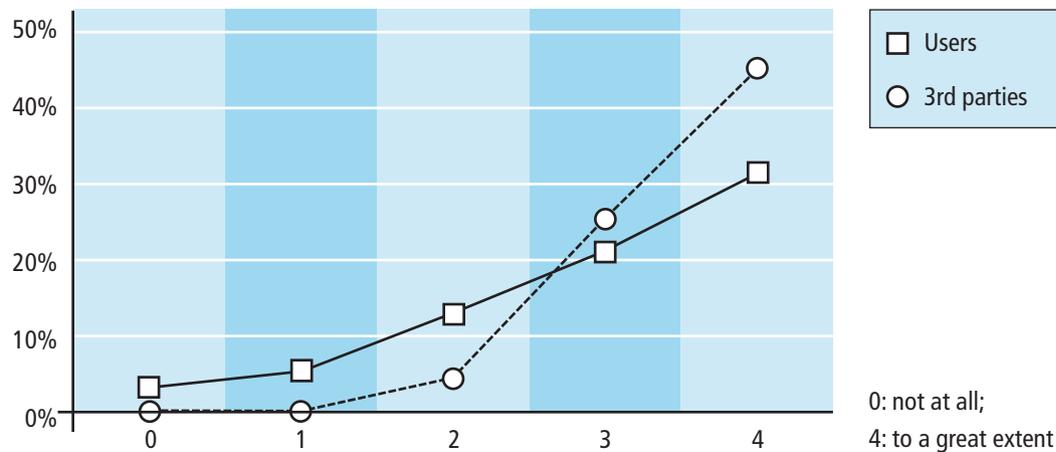
total of 21 participants completed the validation procedure from 25 starters. In banking, Iceland and Denmark devised and adopted sub-standards. In the transfer sectors, national sub-standards were adopted for validation in the Slovenian home care sector and developed for validation in administration by Sweden.

After the completion of the process, participants from all countries received a certificate signed by the representative of the banking sector or the transfer sector and also signed by the partner involved. Some certificates were more detailed than others, including all sub-standards based on which the participants were assessed and validated.

Iceland

“Motivation comes out of the fact that when you document all these things, it becomes clearer to you that although the formal education has not been long, the ‘school of life’ is not less important, and you learn various things in it, and in many places you can find useful opportunities”

Motivation to keep the job





Discussing competencies in Iceland

Certificates were very well received by all participants. They are an extremely important part of the process, forming evidence of the participants' learning to take further in their

lifelong learning. The legitimacy of the certificate should therefore be established at the beginning of validation projects, serving as a motivational factor and a statement of the value of the validation process.

Slovenia

“The process is also beneficial for our users, because our knowledge and our horizons are deeper now”



Benefits for companies who work with validation

Through validation a company can develop its human resources operation, strengthening the company and giving it a better position in the competitive market. Employees will be motivated to make full use of their competencies and to develop them further. By more accurate matching of employees' competencies and tasks, a company can increase efficiency.

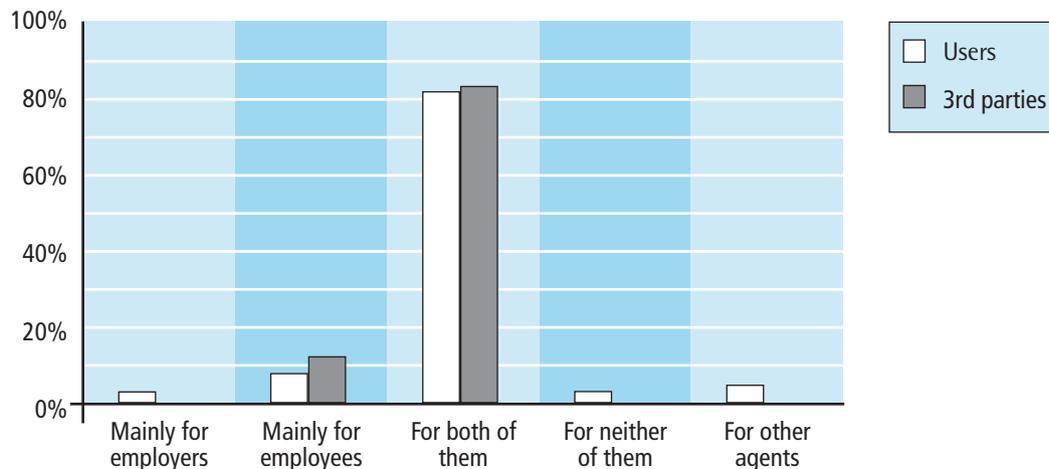
Through the validation process employees develop more self-confidence, which can increase job satisfaction and thereby decrease staff turnover in a company.

Iceland

“I thought it was great to get this chance to document my competence, to review and become better aware of my knowledge and everything I have learnt through the years”

The process

In my opinion, the process will be beneficial...





To facilitate validation of competencies, a company can:

- obtain information about training and other non-formal and informal learning in the workplace;
- develop competence-based job descriptions or standards;
- support or initiate the development of employee portfolios;
- focus on job development in co-operation with employees through individualised learning plans and employee interviews; and
- attend to the rights of the user according to the Common European Principles for Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning.



Focus Group in Ljubljana, with a participant from each of the countries

Actors and their roles in the validation process

- Relevant stakeholders (such as companies, trades unions, occupational council, representatives from the formal school system, and so on).
- Adviser (in some countries the term adviser is not used, and the term coach/counsellor should be substituted)
- Assessor(s).

The role of trades unions in the validation process

In a knowledge society it is becoming increasingly important for the employee to be active in lifelong learning and obtain formal qualifications. The trades union's focus is on the interests of its members. Recognising learning in the workplace, through validation (leading to qualifications), can be of importance for the competence development of trades union members, improving their position in the labour market.

Society as a whole will benefit from the validation of competencies because if employees know that their competence will be acknowledged through the process of validation, they will be encouraged to make full use of their skills and work towards reaching their potential. This will increase overall productivity and welfare in the workforce. To facilitate validation of competencies, trades unions can:

- learn about the concept of validation and the validation process;



- initiate validation in co-operation with relevant stakeholders;
- inform their members of the concept and process of validation;
- support portfolio development and lifelong learning;
- link educational and vocational guidance to employees; and
- attend to the rights of the user according to the Common European Principles for Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning.

The role of the adviser in the validation process

Competencies acquired in various learning arenas are made visible through validation. In the workplace, this process reflects a change in attitude towards the competencies acquired outside the formal education and training settings that currently define our perception of what is good and valuable learning. This shift of attitude increases the self-confidence of employees with little formal education. In this way, the validation process can dramatically increase an employee's motivation for lifelong learning. Through validation employees can obtain a clearer perspective on their existing competencies and make more informed decisions about future development.

The main role of the adviser is to:

- provide information and guidance throughout the validation process;
- provide individual interviews regarding exploration and planning;
- assist employees in documenting their

competencies through portfolio and CV development;

- plan interviews with assessors;
- support employees in the assessment phases and serve as their spokesperson if necessary;
- motivate and provide follow-up sessions for employees to set goals and plan further training; and
- attend to the rights of the user according to the Common European Principles for Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning.

The role of the assessor in the validation process

It is of utmost importance that the main assessor does not have any personal interest in the results of the validation. The assessor should be a professional within the sector and have knowledge of the standards utilised. He/she should also be trained in the various validation methods. Communication skills, empathy and a positive attitude towards the methodology of validation are important assets.

Slovenia

“The process was interesting and a learning opportunity. At the end you know your competences”





The main role of the assessor is to:

- plan the assessment phase;
- choose and develop methods and tools for verifying and assessing competencies, in cooperation with stakeholders;
- verify and assess competencies identified in the exploration phase;
- provide constructive feedback to the employee;
- record outcomes; and
- attend to the rights of the user according to the Common European Principles for Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning.

Iceland

“I enjoyed the process very much and will try to use my portfolio as the best I can, both in my work and for further education”

Partners



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Education and Culture

Leonardo da Vinci