



Career Learning  
as a Success Factor  
for Lifelong Learning

# Work Exploration and Guided Reflection



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Teacher Materials

EN



Work exploration and guided reflection

These teacher materials are made for the benefit of the Development of Innovation project

## Career Learning as a Success Factor for Lifelong Learning

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### **Vocational education and training in a fast-changing world**

From the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, industrialization brought the new practice of vocational guidance, described as a “micro-tool for the Industrial State” (Arthur et al. 1999, p. 163). New occupations and professions arose and often people had job security throughout their working lives. In recent decades, however, globalization and rapidly improving information technologies have been catalysts for a less easily-defined employment landscape.

As a result, “these changes require workers to develop skills and competences that differ substantially from the knowledge and abilities required by the 20<sup>th</sup> century occupations” (Savickas et al. 2009, p. 240). People, professions and careers became and continue to become more flexible. This paper concentrates on the economic/employment aspects of the current concept of life design approach to vocational education and training.

Traditionally, vocational training consists predominantly of theoretical knowledge communicated by schools and/or universities. Such “standardized” knowledge can lead to a biased picture of professions and provide false security, so that “under real-life conditions (it is) difficult to perform” (Savickas et al. 2009, p. 243), thus students may find it difficult to apply much of the life learning to their preparation for finding a job or career (Law 2002, p. 445).

### **Work exploration and guided reflection: Why it is necessary**

Learners “need to learn how they deal with the working world” (Law 2006, p. 8). Work experience can help get a picture of one's own future “working life”, as we mentioned above, complete. It “links learning to the settings, tasks and people involved in what the learning is for” (Law 2006, p. 17). Consequently, effective vocational education and/or training should consist of theoretical and practical elements, not all of which has to happen in an educational setting.

Students need to be guided in order to visualise their career path through dialogue in a ‘client’/‘counsellor’-style relationship. Career guidance counsellors should enable clients to understand their own career and working life (Savickas 2005, p.43). Part of this is to link theoretical knowledge and learning in practice, but for most clients, this is not an easy step to take as counsellors might themselves have difficulties linking theory and practice in order to help students and pupils to draw a complete picture.

### **The DELTA-Method: Combining theory and practice**

The “DELTA-Method” is a tool for counsellors and teachers to initiate a dialogue. Its goal is to make the client reflect about his/her practical experiences and it can be used in everyday school life after some practical development sessions, several weeks in companies or a longer work experience. It uses 15 questions which should be sufficient for a talk of about twenty minutes and is suitable for linking theoretical knowledge and practical aspects of work.

In a number of educational systems across Europe, practical experience plays a minor role. If there is any, it tends to be voluntary takes place at the end of a student's time at school, college or



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university. Evaluation of practical experience appears not to be common practice. Even less is done to link the skills a student has developed outwith the learning environment.

Thus for most educational institutions the DELTA-Method presents something new and hopefully helpful when talking to students. The set of 15 basic questions for counsellors or teachers can be expanded and more detailed questions to get a more in-depth understanding of any topic. DELTA simply provides a guideline for a student-teacher-dialogue whose main goal is to connect theoretical knowledge with practical experience and help the students able to make their own judgements.



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## 2. WORK EXPLORATION AND GUIDED REFLECTION: A NECESSARY ALLIANCE

Competence is the set of abilities, knowledge and skills that enables a person to act effectively in a job in a variety of situations.

In acquiring competence, there are seven different aspects to be considered:

- **Academic skill** is mastering theory; knowing about things.
- **Professional skill** is mastering practice; performance.
- **Expertise** is mastering the predictable part of thinking and acting in the occupation; reflections are “Can you explain?” “Can you do?”
- **Team routine** is collaborating in different teams.
- **Self-reliance** is being able to adjust to the work process in practice.
- **Practical repertoire** is what happens in real-life work situations; reflective questions are “What happened?” “Did it work?”
- **Judgement** means weighing relevant arguments and possibilities (expertise) against realistic expectations (practical repertoire).

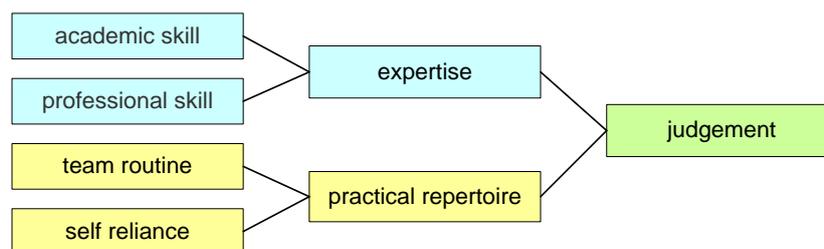


Chart:Geerligs 2012

A student is competent when he performs adequately when the practical situation changes. His competence is recognised as soon he is trusted with a role in the working process. Trust is given when someone is able to make good decisions in the context of different work-place situations: with a new customer, a different approach, a new team. A student is self-reliant when he/she has the ability to make adjustments when necessary. When the student makes decisions using their expertise to weigh up a situation based on skill and their practical repertoire in a realistic context that is called using judgement. Judgement connects ideas and reality and therefore, the level of competence depends on judgement.

How can students achieve this judgement skill?

### Two learning processes and cycles

Expertise can be acquired mainly by instruction. Academic and professional skills can be learned quite well at school, and what is necessary for them can be described, recorded and evaluated quite simply.

On the other hand, acquisition of team routine and self-reliance is determined by what the student experiences in practice. Here an assessment of the possible contribution of the work place is crucial.

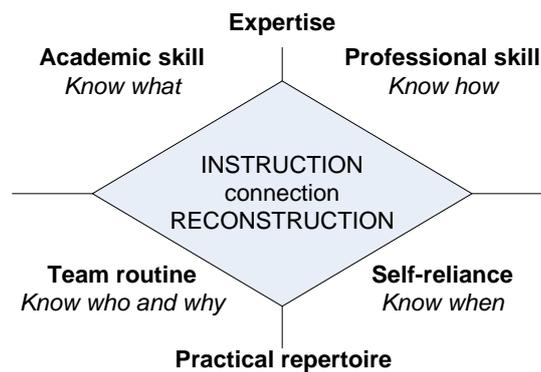


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When choosing a work place, it is important to consider in advance what needs to be learned. However, practical situations are unpredictable and what can be learned from experience must be discovered through reflection and reconstruction.

This leads to the existence of two different learning processes:

- Declarative learning: instruction. As a result, students develop declarative judgement. This is the main process to acquire expertise.
- Procedural learning: reconstruction. The yield is reflective judgement. This is the process for the acquisition of practical repertoire.



However these two learning processes are not unrelated. Each should benefit from the other. On one hand, expertise is necessary in order to work in practice, and on the other, developing a practical repertoire is necessary in order to find out what expertise you still need to be professionally competent.

These processes take place in two different learning environments: the school, college or university and the work-place. Both processes are involved in both situations, as depicted in the following figure:

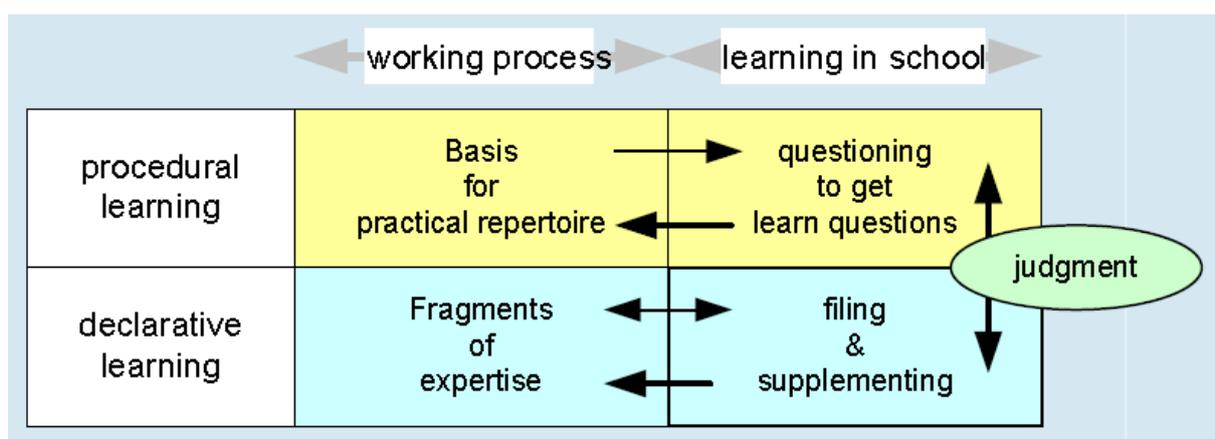


Chart: Geerligs 2012

Learning processes are not finished in the working process, and learning processes at school do not add professional experience.



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To realize a competence-based curriculum, a school must organise three learning processes:

- Learning of academic and professional skills according to learning goals, instruction, and formative testing as assisting instrument, in a varied and attractive form.
- Development of team routine and self-reliance through learning in the work place, with reflection that leads to a learning question.
- The connecting of the two learning processes. This is done in many ways. Using learning questions will connect theory and practice. Analysing practical situations connects expertise with practice. Practical repertoire gives sense to expertise. Defending a judgement requires the student to make explicit how he weighs the validity of argumentation (expertise) against the realism of expressed stakes (practical repertoire).

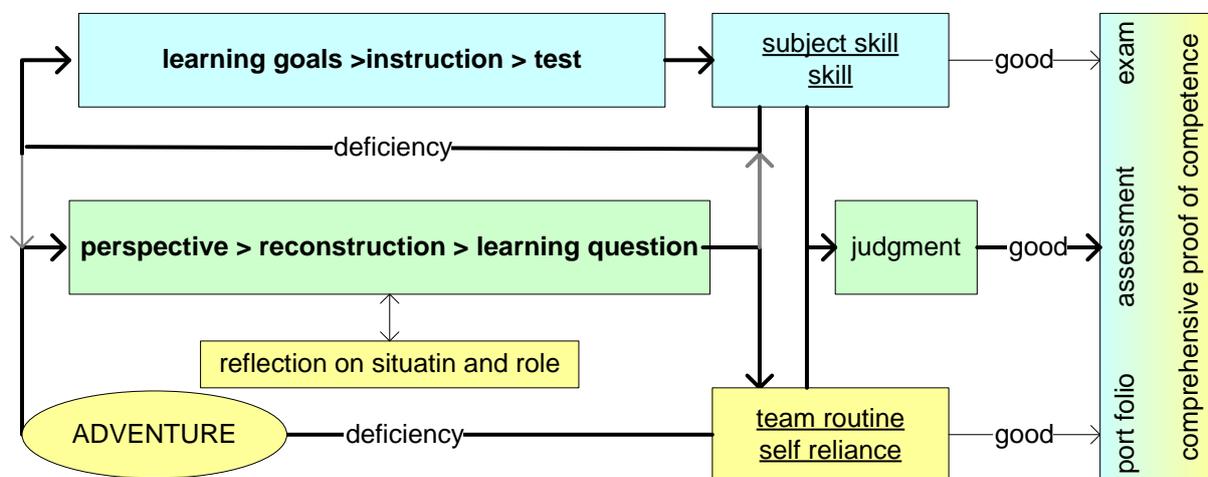


Chart: Geerligs 2012

American and Dutch research has proved that work-based learning alone does is not fully effective because :

- In the work place the learning process is undervalued. The focus is on performance.
- In the work place hardly any real reflection was observed and because of this, the students' mindfulness and situation awareness were not trained and students had few learning questions.
- The few occasions where learning questions arose, these were not written down and discussed in the further educational process.

We can thus draw a conclusion: a work process is not automatically an effective learning process. Students should have opportunities to talk about what they are doing in practice: guided reflection on their experiences in the work place is necessary to reconstruct what happened. From there a continued learning process needs to be organised and that can only be guided by the school, college or university.

When a teacher reflects with a student on an experience, he ought to be as curious as the student about what took place. Through the reconstruction of an experience, one may find out with the



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student what the students' own role was, what the complexity of the situation was, what the desired and delivered performance was, etc. The student becomes situation-aware – and the teacher also. The experience changes into a directed learning experience. In other words: the student becomes aware of what he has been exposed to. He receives insight into what he has learned, but also what he still does not know or cannot do.

Out of this the teacher may help the student to formulate and write down a learning question. The learning question can be part of a new instruction (I need more knowledge) or a new practical situation (I am ready for a more complex task). Repeated practice in different situations combined with repeated reflection will ultimately lead the student to understand how things work in the profession, but also how he handles different situations.

This also means that a guidance teacher cannot separate what happens at school from what is done in practice. Academic and professional skills are required in order to advance in practice. During practice, new learning questions will arise that the curriculum must pay attention to.

One of the challenges for the guidance teacher is to combine the two processes, because in most learning situations the student will not be able to do it himself. The guidance teacher needs knowledge of the practice (what is important for the company), of the curriculum (content of subjects and required qualification), and skills in reflection (how do you make another aware of how well he is doing and what he needs). These activities form part of the competences of the teacher .



### 3. OVERVIEW OF DELTA-METHOD (GEERLIGTS)

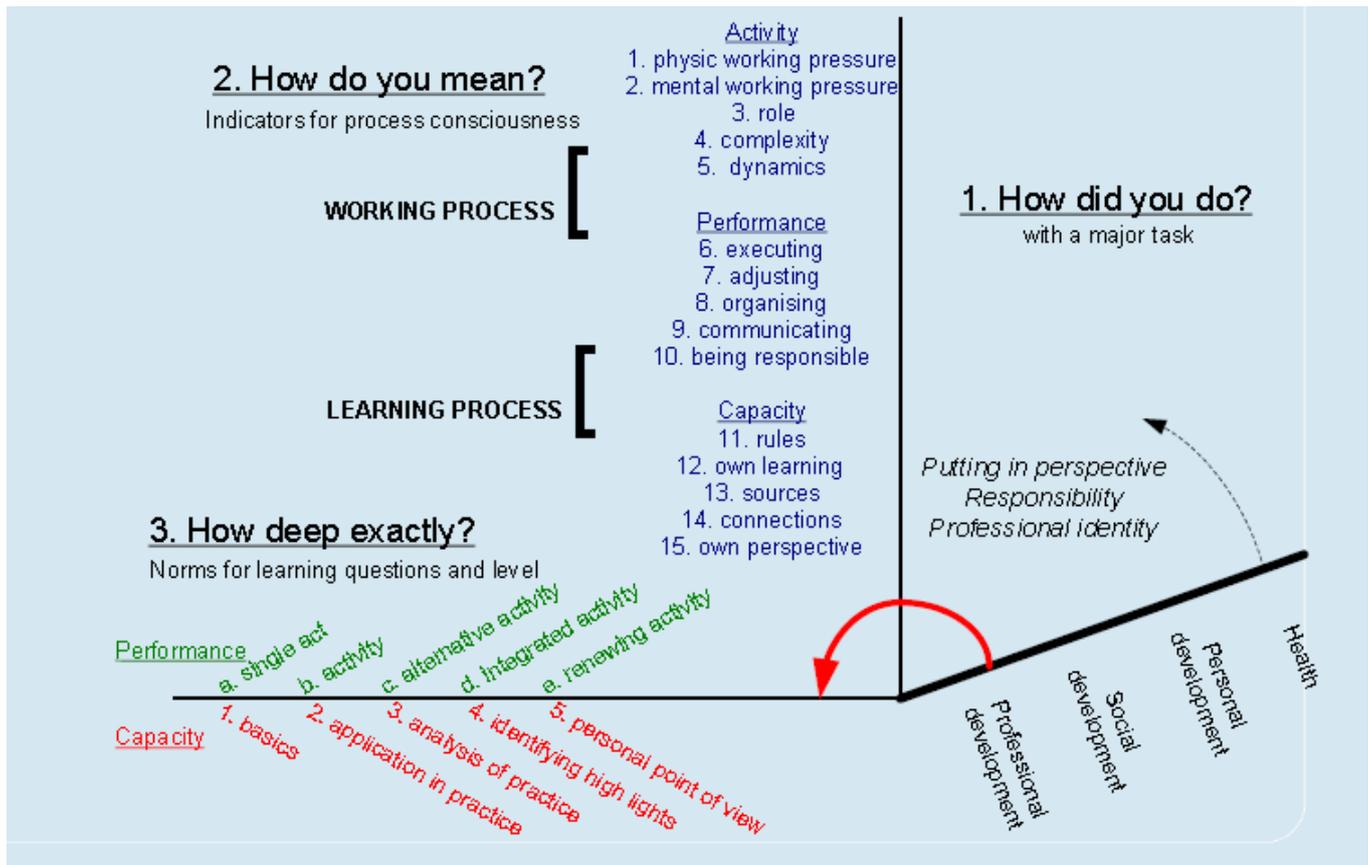


Chart: Geerligts 2012

The diagnosis with DELTA has three layers – axis, for a 20-minute talk with the students:

- Axis 1: How did you do? Do you want to talk about your practical work?

In this phase of the conversation, the teacher explores the willingness of the students to talk about his/her experiences at the work place. He may be ill or have a physical or psychological problem. The situation at home or in broader social context may be worrisome. The student may have doubts about his occupational choice and the choice of the school. There may be cultural, social, mental or cognitive problems in the workplace; with colleagues or with the boss. All these things need to be recognised and solved before the acquisition for the targeted competence can begin or continue. In any case the first question for reflection can be: “How did it go?” And once the “it” – the issue – is clear, the course of events can be reconstructed. Personal and social issues should not be explored in depth, but assigned to specialists in the school/college or elsewhere. The guidance task for teachers / coaches is to get into greater depth on occupational issues. The questioning session however should not take more than 20 minutes. If the results of a 20-minute session are not constructive, a new conversation should be planned.

- Axis 2: What do you mean? Analysis of working process and learning process. Here we have the 15 criteria to be discussed more deeply in the next section.



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- Axis 3: How deep exactly? Steps in competence development.
  - Development of performance: Performance is acquired with structured small steps:
    - First you train a **single act** and read about it. Reading theory can be done in advance or afterwards.
    - Then you train all the acts in an **activity**. This includes the execution, adjusting, communication, organization and responsibility.
    - Once you master an activity you may train an **alternative activity**.
    - The next step in performance is the **integrated activity**.
    - The fifth step is training a **renewing activity**. This means performing acts that have not been done before.
  - Development of capacity: Capacity is more about what you know than what you do:
    - It starts off with **basics**. Basics encompass theory from science and technology, but also from practitioners.
    - The next step is **application in practice** of basics. The practice of the working process, learning process, use of sources, connections and awareness.
    - After that you train the **analysis of practice**. This can be a single act but also a renewing activity.
    - A further development is **identifying highlights** in practice.
    - Finally the basics may represent values for you; this is the development of **personal points of view**. We expect from an experienced person to be able to give a meaning to basics and also that he/she will change their views over time.



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#### **4. 15 CRITERIA FOR REFLECTION, DIAGNOSIS, GUIDANCE AND ASSESSMENT OF COMPETENCE**

As was stated in previous sections of this paper, the purpose of guided reflection is for the student to become situation aware. It is normal that before an experience is fully understood it takes talking and thinking over– this is called reflection. A good discussion can be clarifying and change the perception of what happened. Reflection is a means to train awareness. Good awareness is a must for attaining competence.

When a student is aware of the work process in a practical situation, he/she can learn from it and will develop a sense of reality, ambition and professional identity. Reflection will lead the student to discover that he/she did some things automatically, while other things required more thought. This is reflection on your learning process. Reflection is also a means to talk about your learning.

The fifteen variables, and the steps of development and mastering, are an aid for the expert coach to work with the student systematically on situation awareness, consciousness of acquired competence and learning questions for further development. How realistic, motivated and concerned is a student? Has the student met the objectives of the programme? Is the student ready with his learning in the workplace (as far as required for the objectives in the programme)? The answers to these questions can be made to relate to any level of competence for a particular working process.

The fifteen variables, five for activity, performance and capacity each, are used to reconstruct an experience in a practical situation. Different variables will carry greater weight depending on the learning situation which is being reconstructed. The fifteen can be used to describe the reconstruction of any experience in any practical situation. For the reconstruction both the working and learning processes are subject to reflection:

- The reconstruction of the working process is done with ten variables: the five of activity and performance. With these ten the context and process of production are described.
- For the reconstruction of the learning process again ten variables are used: the five of performance and capacity. With these ten variables the process and result of personal development are described.

The student may firstly become working process-aware and then learning process-aware. In the learning process the experience, an event that happened, may change into perception, a thing with a meaning. After that the perception may change into an experience, a thing that changes the self. This learning has two outcomes:

- Something that worked out well and should not be forgotten, that should be acquired to the full extent and be applied repeatedly – this is a new experience.
- Something that did not work out well, that is relevant though for full competence and that needs to be learned and trained – this is a learning question.



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### ACTIVITY VARIABLES

The first thing to do is to describe the activity. It is important to be aware of your activity in a practical situation, and so be able to adjust in due time. There are five important aspects to describe the conduct in a working process:

1. Physical working pressure: the physical capacity required by a situation. When it is too high, the student may lose attention. The teacher has to look for answers to questions such as: *How tired is the student? Will the student be able to keep up the pace of the work?*
2. Mental working pressure: the psychological burden of a situation. The stress the students feel could easily affect their mindfulness. It is very important for the reliability of every worker and his work that the student manages both body and mind.
3. Autonomy: the (change of) roles in a situation. Students have to be aware (of a possible change) of their role. They may be executing a task and all of a sudden be warning and advising, even be in charge of a working process. Some aspects: *Does the student respect the boss? Is the student prepared to take extra responsibility?*
4. Complexity: the number of variables in a situation. In common situations three variables can be controlled at a time, more is difficult. And in new situations the new variables have to be learnt one by one, until one is used to coping with them. Does the student have an overview of the situation?
5. Dynamics of a working process: this is when the variables themselves change. *Is the student flexible and consistent?*

### PERFORMANCE VARIABLES

Performance means achieving something. It has a double meaning: performance as effort – working hard – and as a product or service provided – high quality. Performance dictates how we act in a working process. The concrete performance is important, as an employer primarily demands something to be delivered. The reconstruction of performance follows the reconstruction of the situation (activity). Without a clear picture of the situation the performance cannot be analysed. There are also five variables for performance, which describe in what respect a student contributes to the result of an activity:

1. Executing: doing what is demanded in a situation. So this is the first thing to ask. For this, the students should apply their academic and professional skills.
2. Adjusting: correcting when a situation changes. During the working processes things can turn out differently from expected or planned beforehand and have to be adjusted and that requires being mindful about the things happening in the working process. Self-reliance is adjusting within the working process in practice
3. Organising: caring for a smooth execution. Make preparations, watch the progress, make sure things are cleaned up.



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4. Communicating: making sure all stakeholders are informed. That means to be sure that all people concerned receive information, so that they can see progress in the working process.
5. Being responsible: deciding and defending initiatives and progress. That means to be accountable for what happened and to defend the decisions taken during the working process.

The main questions after a performance are: *How did it go? How did you do?*

The five aspects of performance do not have the same weight for every competence. The level of expected answers will differ tremendously between a student from school or college and an experienced person, between a student at the start of the curriculum and before final assessment. Performance improves as the expertise and the practical repertoire develop.

## CAPACITY VARIABLES

Capacity has much to do with learning processes, acting in learning processes. Employers expect workers to know more than they need to know to perform basic tasks: for instance, to be mindful and anticipate things which could go wrong. This “more than doing”, these extra tools in the kit are called capacity. The five variables related are:

1. Rules: mastering and using (practical) theories. A working process has many characteristics. Understanding the working process may require knowledge of many different rules. In order to reconstruct the student’s use of rules the teacher reflects with him/her on relevant characteristics, one by one for the purpose of recognition, analysis, application, setting priorities or putting things in perspective. This may be technical, economic, organisational, or more fundamental physical, chemical, psychological or social. It can be along the lines of practical theories or expected behaviour. In this step determinative judgement is used and developed.
2. Own learning: steering and completion of own development. *How can the student find the rules when needed? Can the student organise his/her own learning? How did the student add to his/her knowledge? What did the student do in an urgent situation?*
3. Sources: choosing, utilising and developing sources. When getting the rules from others, sites or books, the reliability of the data gathered is important. *Did the student use suitable sources? Were these multiple sources, were they reliable, how was validity checked?*
4. Connections: trans-disciplinary weighing, for instance between theory and practice or between practices. In working processes quite often different approaches need to be combined. *Was the student aware of this? Did he/she take part in trade-offs, did he perhaps organise them?* This includes reflexive judgement.
5. Mental growth: steering own aims and perceptions. Most students entering vocational courses at a junior, senior or higher level are psychologically in the instrumental phase. In that phase they recognise their own goals/needs. This is important for the self-reliant worker. The next phase is the interpersonal phase where someone can understand the goals/needs of other people. This is important for an operational chef, for instance. Next is



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the self-steering phase, which means that somebody is able to step back from from both his/her own goals/needs and those of the group, and can make autonomous decisions.

Main questions on capacity are: *What did you know about it? How did you know it?*

The five aspects of capacity do not have the same weight for every competence. Capacity grows as the expertise and the practical repertoire develop. At the lower diploma levels performance is more important than capacity, but at higher levels it is the other way round.



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## **5. DELTA (Diagnosis of Experience for better Learning and Training of Awareness) IN BRIEF: STEPS IN LEARNING IN THE WORKPLACE, CAREER LEARNING AND REFLECTIVE JUDGEMENT (GEERLIGS, 2012)**

1. The master (expert/teacher) asks the student about his experiences: “What did you do – in the work place?” The student provides information about his/her professional activity. In this case the master continues with 3, if not with 2.
2. The student describes his/her (physical or mental) condition, personal doubts and questions about the professional choice, conflicts ,etc. This requires specific attention and the master attends to that first.
3. The student shows reflects on his/her working and learning processes (criteria 1 – 15). The master may elaborate with him on details. In this case the master continues with 5, if not with 4.
4. The questioning of the master and the reflection of the student shed light on what happened from the student’s point of view. The aspects of activity, performance and capacity are indicators of process consciousness. Supported by the master, the student makes a reconstruction of his/her experiences; he becomes aware of his working and learning process.
5. The student recognizes development steps in his working and learning process (norms for performance and capacity). In case of a conscious learning process the master continues with 7, if not with 6.
6. Through reflection, the master goes with the student into the background of his/her steps in learning – on some of the aspects of performance and capacity.
7. The student identifies shortcomings in expertise, practical repertoire or judgement and formulates applicable learning questions. In this case the master continues with 9, if not with 8.

**Please note: at this stage the student makes a switch from indicators for process consciousness towards educational aspects of competence. He goes from reflection to learning activity. This is the connection between learning in the workplace and curriculum.**

8. The master generalizes and analyses with the student his/her experiences and they jointly formulate the learning questions.
9. The student organizes the approach of the learning questions. In this case the master continues with 11, if not with 10.
10. The master and the student deal together with the approach of the learning questions; these may be contracted in the work place, in lessons in the school or in continued reflection.
11. The student shows enough discipline to address the learning questions and to harvest from them at the required level. The pupil is aware of perspective, responsibility, and professional identity at a required level. The master concludes.



## 6. A SAMPLE OF QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED DURING A CLIENT-COUNSELLOR DIALOGUE

ACTIVITY				
PHYSICAL WORKING PRESSURE	MENTAL WORKING PRESSURE	AUTONOMY	COMPLEXITY	DYNAMICS
<p>Was it hard / difficult?</p> <p>Did you give up?</p> <p>How much have you been challenged?</p> <p>Have you been very tired from work?</p> <p>Was there a deadline for your work?</p> <p>Was it finished in time?</p>	<p>Was it much the same work?</p> <p>Was it interesting / exciting?</p> <p>Could you keep cool /under control?</p> <p>Were you very stressed?</p> <p>Was there a deadline for your work?</p> <p>Was it finished in time?</p>	<p>What was your position?</p> <p>Were the roles clear?</p> <p>How responsible were you for the work?</p> <p>Did you have to make decisions?</p> <p>What did you choose?</p> <p>What did you consider?</p> <p>What did you decide?</p>	<p>What did you see at work?</p> <p>Did you have a general overview of the situation?</p> <p>What made it difficult to have a general overview?</p> <p>Were there many variables involved?</p> <p>Could you control all the variables?</p>	<p>Was the work variable?</p> <p>Was it different from what you expected?</p> <p>What changed unexpectedly?</p> <p>Should you be flexible at work?</p> <p>What did you change?</p>



<b>PERFORMANCE</b>				
<b>EXECUTING</b>	<b>ADJUSTING</b>	<b>ORGANISING</b>	<b>COMMUNICATING</b>	<b>BEING RESPONSIBLE</b>
<p>What did you do?</p> <p>How did you act / react?</p> <p>How did you handle it?</p> <p>Can you demonstrate what you did?</p> <p>Did you take a picture of your work?</p> <p>What did you do first?</p> <p>What was the purpose?</p>	<p>Did you carry out the activity as planned?</p> <p>How did you know it went well?</p> <p>What did you do differently if things went wrong?</p> <p>What was the most radical adjustment? Did you do that yourself?</p> <p>What would you do differently?</p> <p>What did you decide?</p>	<p>How many people were involved?</p> <p>Did you prepare the activity yourself?</p> <p>Did you do everything for yourself?</p> <p>Where did you get help?</p> <p>Did you have problems with colleagues?</p> <p>How did the others react?</p>	<p>How was the contact with others?</p> <p>Did you share information? What?</p> <p>Did you tell your boss / team-mates?</p> <p>Did you help others with your information?</p> <p>Who asked you for help?</p> <p>Did you get annoyed when the communication didn't work?</p>	<p>Did they ask whether it worked?</p> <p>What worked best?</p> <p>What didn't work?</p> <p>Did you have your own answer?</p> <p>Were you responsible for that work?</p> <p>Was your performance (not) good?</p> <p>Why did act as you did?</p> <p>Who took the initiative?</p> <p>What problems did you give to your supervisor?</p>



<b>CAPACITY</b>				
<b>RULES</b>	<b>OWN LEARNING</b>	<b>SOURCES</b>	<b>CONNECTIONS</b>	<b>MENTAL GROWTH</b>
<p>Why did certain rules exist?</p> <p>Which did you base your action upon?</p> <p>How did you know you did it right?</p> <p>What facts were important?</p> <p>Which is the connection between the facts you saw?</p> <p>Could you explain the problem?</p> <p>Did it meet the requirements?</p> <p>What was the explanation?</p>	<p>Are you sure?</p> <p>How did you find out?</p> <p>What did you learn from that?</p> <p>How did you solve it?</p> <p>Did you study the subject in advance?</p> <p>What experts asked you for help?</p> <p>What were your key learning moments? Why?</p> <p>Had you experienced the situation before?</p> <p>Was your expertise enough?</p>	<p>Which sources did you use?</p> <p>Did you know how to use them?</p> <p>Did you find them yourself?</p> <p>From which sources did you learn the most?</p> <p>Where did you find information about the activity?</p> <p>Was the source reliable and accessible?</p> <p>Was it easy to select the source?</p>	<p>Did you make links to other disciplines?</p> <p>How have you used each one of the disciplines?</p> <p>How do you know you have used the relevant disciplines?</p> <p>Was it related to other situations?</p> <p>What does this remind you of?</p> <p>Which areas were important in this case?</p> <p>How did you know which one was the most important?</p>	<p>What do you want to be?</p> <p>Who do you want to be?</p> <p>Was it fun to learn? Why?</p> <p>How did you get inspired?</p> <p>What part of learning fascinates you most?</p> <p>Have you got a clear mission?</p> <p>Have you had a similar experience before?</p> <p>What do you do when you have doubts?</p> <p>Do you try to solve a problem first by yourself?</p>



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