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### 3.3 Work–Based Competence Interview KODE–NQF (WCI KODE–NQF) <sup>36</sup>

How can we learn something about the implicit experiences of people, about their true competences and strengths? This is the question that drives all human resources experts working on personal development, trainers and advisors who are searching for competences, suitability for challenging tasks and possibilities related to individual and differentiated personnel development. This question is especially interesting for approaches within the framework of the KODE-NQF Project. The issue is about obtaining distinct hints on the suitability of unknown persons. Highly efficient interview forms are required and should take into account the presence of false answers in traditional interviews. As a matter of fact, there is sufficient literature available through which it is possible to successfully prepare for validation interviews and to feign apparent high qualifications.

When the Work Based Competence Interview© is compared to the traditional, situation bound and problem solving interviews reveals that the questions are very different. Many traditional interviews continue to follow clichéd questions even today, such as:

- What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
- How would you describe yourself as a person?
- What type of books and magazines do you prefer?
- What would you like to be working on in five years, what would you say is one of your goals?
- Who is your role model and why?

Some may prefer such questions, because they are easy to understand. However, they allow for the expected specific, short answers. The interviews are absolutely easy to manage but there are also disadvantages. For example, the questions are highly generalised and allow hardly any statement about the actual experiences of a person related to the activity, the job that has been advertised or is to be assessed. The responses can be learnt brilliantly and answered in a relatively abstract theoretical manner. One learns hardly anything at all about true experiences, and rather more about rhetorical capabilities and presentation techniques.

In situation bound interviews or even in combined interviews, questions related to specific situations are asked, and it is expected that the person brings in his/her own experiences in the response, allowing them to be assessed. The interviewee has to indicate how he/she would behave in important situations at work or in life. The questions deal with the sudden or unexpected situation requiring a decision. The questions can be linked to small case studies. Typical questions in this case are:

- What would you do in situations in which you have to make a quick decision, but have only very vague and contradictory information?
- What would you do if your senior executive requires you to do something that you do not consider to be legal?
- Suppose you are working together with another colleague on a project. You have prepared

<sup>36</sup> The template of the Tool Work Based Interview available in Annexes (Tool 3), please also see Heyse, V.: Strategien – Kompetenzanforderungen – Potenzialanalysen. In: Heyse, V.; Erpenbeck, J. (Hrsg.): Kompetenzmanagement. Waxmann, Münster u.a.O. 2007

goals, a timeline, result plan and have also defined the respective responsibilities. But you note that your colleague is not keeping to the plan as discussed and this leads to a delay. What would you do in this situation?

The advantage of these questions, in comparison with the traditional ones, is the clear reference to different and concrete situations. In this way, different performances and accomplishment levels can be applied to the relevant situations referred to. Different answers are expected from a top salesman as compared to a junior salesman or from a manager as compared to a highly specialised expert.

These questions suggest a close correlation with the daily routine experience, but usually do not produce any usable answer. The conjunctive in the question (What would you do...?) leads to abstract, pleasing and easily prepared answers. There is at most a mid-level correlation between the ideal answer and the actual behaviour and it is not possible to get to any conclusion about the real behaviour.

A different interview method is based on unusual questions triggering an observable problem solving behaviour, the so called problem solving interviews. This kind of interview allows conclusions regarding the: intelligence of a person; reaction to atypical and indifferent problems; ability to work under stress; analytical skills and creative or innovative solutions to solve problems. Such interviews approach specific situations and tests the assessments. They are also appropriate for special requirements, e.g. if one wants to find out the capabilities of a programmer in identifying errors or a wrong information in a very complex structure. However, they cannot be applied to all the situations during the interview.

There are other disadvantages as well for the problem solving interviews. For example, the individual results of these tests cannot be considered meaningful enough to give any concrete information about the behaviour in real situations, where problems have to be solved. A failure under hypothetical stressful situations does not need to be an indicator for failure in real situations. Also it is often possible to guess and estimate a correct answer and a result may not say anything about the actual problem solving behaviour and intelligence of the person in everyday life.

What is the best way to escape from the dilemma of conventional interviews? It is to focus on the Work Based Competence Interview (WCI©) on single competences which are relevant to the profession and focus on concrete work-related situations. In this context, it has to be explained in details how a competence was acquired or used in a specific labour context.

The Work Based Interview KØDE-NQF contains 81 questions, three to each of the 27 competences identified in the German NQF out of the 64 competences of the KODE® Atlas of Competences. The interview questions are based on the competence theory of Erpenbeck/Heyse and it's underlying theory of self organisation.<sup>37</sup> The question groups are, therefore, theoretically validated.

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<sup>37</sup> Heyse, V.: Strategien – Kompetenzanforderungen – Potenzialanalysen. In: Heyse, V.; Erpenbeck, J. (Hrsg.): Kompetenzmanagement. Waxmann, Münster u.a.O. 2007

All interview questions are based on actual experiences of challenging situations, specific to situations that were more or less successfully coped with and are reflected on accordingly to the real work experience. For example, contrary to the traditional interview questions like: How do you work under pressure? Can you deal well with pressure in general? The WCI© approach allows the interviewer to ask about a specific situation and the candidate's most recent experience. For example, such questions could be asked:

- *Please tell about a specific situation in which you were really under stress and in which your capability of dealing with it was tested.*
- *Tell us about a specific case in your professional life where you were unable to successfully manage the stress. Think of a specific situation either from the past or recently.*

The WCI KODE-NQF is oriented towards a differentiated analysis of real performance situations and their individual response. The questions for KODE-NQF were developed based on the framework of the questions from WCI©.

Once the individual key competence requirements important for analysing certain qualification levels are known, then the Work Based Interview KODE-NQF can be used as a probing method. It is a real alternative to the interviews explained in the Chapter 3.2. and use of it also depends on the counsellor. It can be carried out on-site or even on the phone. The number of key competences to be probed should be determined on a case-by-case basis. The WCI© has a seven level assessment scale for this, which the interviewer fills up according to the descriptions of the interviewee. The determined level of the key competences verified using a seven level rating scale can be transferred in general to the other key competences that are required for a given qualification. Thus, an objectified indicator, not an absolute objective, can be obtained for the matching between the required key competences and their individual qualities.

## Example of the Work Based Competence Fulfilled by the Physiotherapist

**Table 1. Interview assessment scale**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not convincing		Almost matches. Needs improvement		Well to very well suited		Excellent. Leadership

**Table 2. Work-Based Competence Interview KØDE-NQF**

No. of selected competence	Questions <sup>38</sup>	Description of challenging situations	Score
<b>Consulting skills</b>	a ✓	I frequently answer the questions of patients with severe disabilities or incurable diseases. I never promised my patients too much. My counseling will be very realistic, helpful and hopeful and willing cooperate with the patient.	6
	b		
	c		
<b>Taking responsibility for oneself / Ability to take on responsibility</b>	a ✓	I always was fascinated by strong characters able to act and take responsibility for others in stressful situations. I have learnt it in my early childhood from my father. When errors occur, I never blame others.	7
	b ✓	I look up to people who do not give up in the most difficult situations like Leonidas, King of Sparta or heros in Hemingway's novels (e.g. Old man and the sea). I always try to apply it in my everyday practice.	
	c		
<b>Result oriented action</b>	a ✓	I try to motivate my patients by giving them short and long time goals realistically achievable. It is very important with young quadrapalegic patients, who usually lose their hope and will to live. In such scenarios, I have had unexpected good results.	6
	b		
	c ✓	When I was young, I was shy and afraid of stronger peers. I overcame this fear during my longlasting judo training. It has also taught me that physical strength is not important against open and courteous attitudes from others.	

<sup>38</sup> See Annexes, Tool 3, Table 3. Description of the assessment criteria