



# Umbrella skills in agronomic advisory

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WP3 – Improve the methods - Outcome n°10

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**LEONARDO DA VINCI TRANSFER OF INNOVATION  
CONVENTION: 2011-FR1-LE005-24388**



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## **IMPORTANT MENTION**

This report engages only the author(s), and neither the Leonardo National Agency nor the European Commission is responsible for any use which may be made.

## SUMMARY OF THE DOCUMENT

### English

The analysis of skills expressed by 59 agronomic advisers and trainers surveyed in April 2013 shows the need to strengthen the training and support they receive on the relational and behavioural dimensions of their profession. Considering the long list of activities, the diversity of concerns and the arrival of new stakeholders, we defined 'umbrella skills' that underpin the agricultural advisory profession.

A large part of the ways to respond to these training needs comes from the efforts made by national advisory organisations. Also, training organisations may have an important role through transnational projects supported by the European Union.

The convergence of these initiatives can contribute effectively to the adaptation of agronomic advisory in order to play a key role in innovating for the farmers and in reducing pesticides in agricultural production systems.

### French

L'analyse des compétences identifiées par les 59 conseillers et formateurs agronomiques interrogés en Avril 2013 montre la nécessité de renforcer leur formation et leur appui dans les dimensions relationnelles et comportementales du métier. Compte tenu de la liste très longue des activités, de la diversité des préoccupations et de l'arrivée de nouveaux acteurs, nous avons défini les 'compétences-ombrelle' qui fondent le métier du conseil agricole.

Une grande partie des réponses à ces besoins de formation s'inscrit dans les efforts des organisations nationales de conseil. D'autre part, les organismes de formation peuvent avoir un rôle important à travers des projets transnationaux soutenus par l'Union européenne.

La convergence de ces initiatives peut contribuer efficacement à l'adaptation du conseil agronomique, afin de jouer un rôle accru dans l'innovation au profit des agriculteurs et pour la réduction des pesticides dans les systèmes de production agricole.

### German

Im April 2013 wurden 59 landwirtschaftliche Berater befragt und daraus Kernkompetenzen für Berater herausgearbeitet. Die Analyse dieser Kompetenzen zeigt die Notwendigkeit, in der Beraterausbildung und der begleitende Unterstützung von Beratern („Coaching“) verstärkt den Fokus auf Aspekte der Interaktion und des Verhaltens zu setzen. Angesichts der langen Liste von Aktivitäten, der Vielfalt der Anliegen und neuer Akteure, definierten wir die übergeordneten Kompetenzen, die den Beruf des landwirtschaftlichen Beraters definieren.

Auf der einen Seite muss dieser Weiterbildungsbedarf größtenteils innerhalb der nationalen Beratungsorganisationen gedeckt werden. Auf der anderen Seite, können die zuständigen nationalen Fortbildungsorganisationen eine wichtige Rolle im Rahmen von durch die Europäische Union unterstützter, transnationaler Projekte spielen.

Die Konvergenz dieser Initiativen kann wirksam zu einem Wandel der landwirtschaftlichen Beratung beitragen, hin zu für den Landwirt nützlichen Innovationen sowie zur Reduktion des Pestizideinsatzes in landwirtschaftlichen Produktionssystemen.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction .....	5
I – Survey analysis shows diversity of advisers’ tasks .....	5
II - To effectively advise farmers, expertise is no longer enough.....	6
III - What are an adviser’s umbrella competencies?.....	7
IV - Results of the evaluation of the training offered to advisers so far.....	9
V - Why are relational skills and competencies crucial for agronomic advisers? ....	10
VI - Why should managers and employers encourage and support their advisers to develop and strengthen competencies?.....	10
VII – The crucial skills noted in the survey.....	11
VIII - More information: the framework of CECRA.....	11
Conclusion.....	13
APPENDIX: Results from the survey .....	15

## Figures and tables

Fig 1: Various advisory situations and subjects.....	8
Fig 2: Overall scheme of S&C for agronomic advice.....	8
Table 1: Adviser’s umbrella competencies.....	9
<b>References</b> .....	14
<b>Abbreviations and acronyms</b> .....	14

## Introduction

Agronomic advisers nowadays have to deal with a broad range of different tasks. During the last years, the job has become more complex for many of them, as budgets for agronomic advisory become shorter, which means less time to handle issues for the single adviser. At the same time, the amount of tasks is mostly increasing as new/additional tasks arise when new regulations, e.g. on integrated pest management (IPM), groundwater protection etc. come into effect.

To get an insight into the multitude into advisers' tasks and activities, we conducted a survey among 59 agronomic advisers and teachers in the project's partner countries, with advisers who have on average a job experience of 13 years. The survey followed a workshop on advisers' skills and competencies on which these advisers participated. We will come back to more detailed results of that survey in the course of this report.

## I – Survey analysis shows diversity of advisers' tasks

At the end of the workshop held in April 2013 in different countries after a significant time spent working together with Metaplan tool (see methodology described in outcome 9), each participant completed an individual questionnaire. The aggregation of responses is presented in Appendix.

The 59 advisers who answered are involved in various working fields: crop production and protection, horticulture, viticulture, dairy farming, grassland management, fertilisation advice.

At first, we note how the survey revealed a wide range of tasks:

### Time- and self-management

- Organisation of work
- handling of restricted time
- handling high workload
- Administration

### Facilitation and working with groups

- Group advisory with farmers
- Leading and managing groups
- Facilitating training sessions
- Organising group meetings

### One-to-one agronomic advisory

- Change management
- Technical support
- Answering questions
- Providing information
- Strategic farm consultation

### Vocational training and coaching

- Training of farmers
- Coaching/support of other advisers

### Teaching at agricultural schools

- Training of students
- Accompanying students
- Leading and managing groups

### Support of farmers with "technical" aspects

- Technical assistance in electronic data processing
- Chemical analyses
- Support in Cross Compliance

### Support about regulations and economy

- Assistance in filling out applications, Cross Compliance forms etc.
- Economic advice
- Advice on financial records
- Complete farm scheme applications
- Assistance in interpreting and applying regulations on farm level
- Questions on subsidies

### Agroecology

- Agroecology, Ecophyto...
- Environment impact assessment
- Reduction of plant protection, IPM
- Ensure farmers participations in the projects

### Management of processes

- Change management
- Project management
- Problem management
- Management of groups
- Farm management
- Vocational training

<p><u>Scientific tasks</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Supporting trials (pesticide, fertiliser and variety)</li> <li>- Collecting data</li> <li>- Preparing statistics</li> <li>- Support of scientific studies</li> </ul> <p><u>Provision of information</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Holding lectures</li> <li>- Giving presentations</li> <li>- Writing information sheets and newsletters for farmers</li> <li>- Advisory hotline</li> <li>- Answering of specific questions (e.g. on application techniques etc.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Organization and implementation of field days</li> <li>- Organizing meetings</li> </ul> <p><u>Networking</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Making connections between science and farming</li> <li>- Being connected with local authorities and institutions</li> <li>- Making connections with other advisers</li> <li>- Organizing meetings and field days</li> </ul> <p><u>Tasks within the interest of the company</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "Sell" the advice</li> <li>- Sell pesticides</li> </ul>
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This list does not only show the multitude of tasks advisers are faced with, it also shows that there are potential fields where conflicting interest may occur and the advisers' neutrality may be challenged. Although not every adviser fulfils all of the mentioned tasks neither in one person, nor are offered in the same service, the multi-tasking is a reality.

To be able to deal with this broad range of different demands and challenges, an adviser needs a set of competencies and qualifications which allow him handle these challenges in an appropriate way.

## **II - To effectively advise farmers, expertise is no longer enough**

In the recent years, the idea of an adviser's tasks has fundamentally changed. In the past, the main competency of an agronomic adviser was his/her technical and agronomical expertise, which was based on current scientific data and the ability to apply that knowledge to solve practical problems on farm. The approach behind is, that there is a specific and closed solution at hand based on scientific knowledge to every problem on farms, and that the adviser can identify it by himself, provided he has the right academic background in sciences and agronomy.

This approach considers that all problems on a farm are isolated issues, whereas in reality most issues and processes on a farm are interlinked. The "expert approach" which provides an isolated solutions for isolated problems does therefore not meet mainly the mid and long term needs of farmers anymore. It would pretend to provide a degree of security and control which does not exist in such a complex and dynamic system as agriculture. Instead, an adviser has to think in terms of processes and complex interactions. Sometimes several contradictory aspects intermingle. It is not important to find the most easily accessible or logical solution, but a path, a way forward while considering as many factors as possible.

Moreover, the range of simple issues solved by simple and at-hand technical solutions is shrinking thanks to (or because of) sustainable approach. Sustainability has driven both tougher regulations concerning agronomic practices, and a more field driven approach, the latter requiring specific solutions for specific agronomic conditions. At the end of the day, the character of the advisors provider of "off-the-shelf" technical solutions is moving towards the backstage. Thus, not so smoothly – both farmers and advisers being quite comfortable with the illusion of an "issue raised / immediate solution provided" relationship.

We can therefore say that advisers have to deal less and less with technical short term questions. Instead, there is a shift to strategic issues which influence the long-term development of the farm. The advisers no longer are technical experts who give a precisely defined and closed solution to a clear problem, but become rather a guide in a kind of co-construction process, in which the adviser accompanies the farmer in his decisions, in the setting of focus for his farm, but lets the farmer be the one who is in charge of both the decision and the realisation.

To illustrate this change in the advisory approach, the way how to deal with a long term weed problem is a good example. The “old” approach would be centred on a quick and easy technical solution, involving the adviser’s scientific knowledge to identify the weed and the corresponding herbicide as well as his technical knowledge on how to apply the herbicide according to good agricultural practice. The “New Adviser” has to go a step further: he is seeking for a long term solution for the issue, taking the whole farm and the farming system into consideration. Instead of focusing the advice on a herbicide, which due to resistances and regulations will not be a long term solution, he will try to develop ideas which go to the roots of the problem.

It is important for the adviser to be aware that the final decisions and adjustments are up to the farmer, who is the expert for his own farm and the “man behind the steering wheel”.

Together with the farmer, s/he will try to identify the reasons which had made that weed is a permanent problem on that farm. A possible solution for the problem could be a change in the crop rotation. To make this suggestion convincing to the farmer, a broad range of expertise is required: on crop rotation, the newly introduced crops, their handling, the required technical equipment, the marketing demands, the economic impact on the farm etc. This expertise cannot be held by one single adviser, but is spread in a network of advisers with different expert backgrounds.

Therefore, the main task of a “New Adviser” is to step back as an expert and to enforce relational skills (activating a knowledge network, communication with colleagues – the both, on advisors and farmers level – , connecting ideas and communicating with the farmer).

To summarize this movement with a rough sketch, we could draft the following evolution:

- 60’s to mid- 80’s: outbreak of the “technician”. Trained to provide off-the-shelf agronomic solutions
- mid 80’s to mid 00’s: shift towards the “adviser”. Agronomic engineer provider of half-tailored solutions, designed by the advisor alone in order to answer immediate concerns
- from the mid 00’s: emergence of a “New Adviser”. Support of farmers in order to help them carry out their projects within the frame of their strategic goals.

### **III - What are an adviser’s umbrella competencies?**

The multitude of tasks and challenges shows that the “New Advisers” need a special set of competencies which allow him to unify all these different demands in his own person. We therefore suggest that the most fundamental competencies of agronomic advisers today are what we call umbrella competencies. These competencies are not centred on special technical knowledge. Instead they cover a broad range of personal and relational skills and competencies which advisers nowadays require to fulfil their tasks in the huge framework of different demands, situations and subjects.

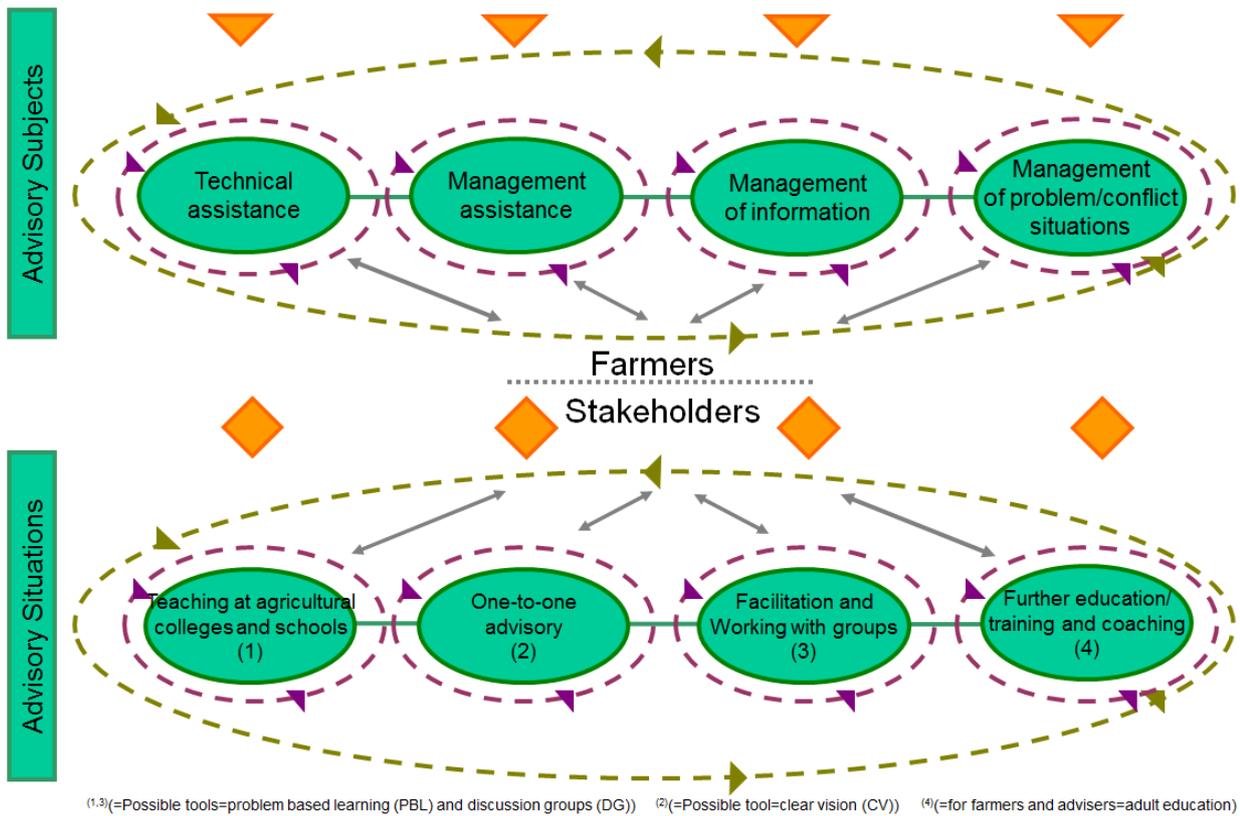


Fig 1: Various advisory situations and subjects (see figure above)

Advisers' umbrella competencies may be defined as competencies which are ubiquitous for all agronomic advisers. They do not depend on the advisers' technical focus and can be applied in all advisory situations, may it be adult education, advisory on integrated pest management or on Cross Compliance.

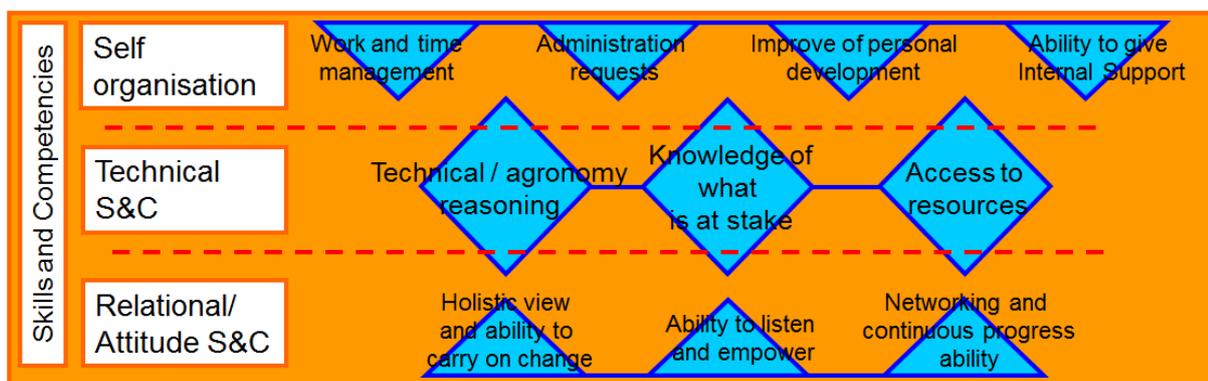


Fig 2: Overall scheme of S&C for agronomic advice

We can divide the umbrella competencies into two main categories: technical and attitude competencies. Whereas the technical umbrella competencies comprise all aspects of advisory for which pure agronomic background knowledge is required, the relational/attitude skills comprise what is often referred to as "soft skills": communicational, organisational, personal, social, pedagogic and methodological competencies.

Table 1: Adviser's umbrella competencies

Technical competencies	Relational/Attitude competencies
1. Agronomic reasoning	1. Holistic view and carrying on change
2. Discerning what is at stake	2. Listening to and empower
3. Access to resources	3. Networking and continuous progress
4. Self-organisation and company interests	4. Autonomy, cooperation and foresight

Obviously these skills formally separated in the table above are not independent of each other. Therefore:

- ⇒ **The various skills will be trained as far as possible simultaneously**, and the pedagogy of 'Learning by Doing' to do this is very efficient.
- ⇒ **The behaviour of adviser or trainer in situation** will mobilize one special resource, **which we called "internal support"** (see outcome 16a). For a complex job as agricultural advisory is, individuals and organizations must take care of the maintenance of internal support through appropriate training and management.

#### IV - Results of the evaluation of the training offered to advisers so far

Within the survey of 59 European advisers, we could find great differences in the trainings offered to advisers: There are advisers who did not get any training in their professional career yet, some just once or twice, while there is range of advisers who receives training on a regular basis up to twice per year.

The training focus varied broadly, but at least 56 % of the advisers say that their training already involved technical as well as relational aspects. 25 % received even at least one training with the main focus on relational skills.

When asked if and in which aspects the training helped to improve advising, **the answers were mostly positive:**

1. Understanding for the importance of methodology - being up to date on a technical level
2. sharing experiences - exchange with other advisers - new thinking/ideas - new approaches - more active listening and questioning
3. Ability to stand back and watch the job/the own performance from a distance → higher openness, self-improvement, a new perspective on the job
4. Being aware of the own posture, the influence on it and its importance - More self-confidence in group advisory and lectures - more self-confidence (both social and technical trainings!) - improved confidence which in turn lead to better communications with clients
5. Getting a better access to the farmer - improved working with groups - improved impact of advisory : Group facilitation skills gave me techniques (such as splitting groups and giving them tasks) to make experience more interesting and motivating
6. Higher understanding of difficulties students have - helps to address the roles with stakeholders
7. Insight in strategic advisory which helps in many advisory situations

**The few negative responses** were focused on the lacking connection to the daily tasks and the job profile and the strong effect of old routines. This shows that almost every adviser valorises the positive input of trainings on relational skills, but this training has to be connected to the actual tasks of the advisers.

Some advisers expressed **needs for a common standard in the EU** to ensure the quality of advisory and to set common standards on which both farmers and employers can rely.

## **V - Why are relational/attitude skills and competencies crucial for agronomic advisers?**

73 % of all advisers who participated in the survey stated that the relational skills are most or very important within their job. And 25 % think that this kind of competencies is important.

Skills and competencies are main part of available resources to meet the requirements of the advisers' job. Moreover, an adviser who is aware of his competencies and their importance is able to reflect his work and his areas of development and therefore to improve and adjust both the advisory work and the own personality profile to changing situations and requirements.

Put in short words, the advisory process is a communicative relationship based on a co-construction process between the adviser and the farmer(s) which is organized by both parties. The adviser brings in his special knowledge (mostly technical, scientific knowledge) together with his professional experience to work towards a solution together with the farmer(s) (communication and process management), backed up by his network of knowledge. As the whole process of advising is centred on the communication and relation between the advisers and the farmer(s), this aspect is where the key competencies of an adviser must lay.

To lead this highly communication-oriented process successfully, the adviser needs a set of communicative, social and personal skills:

The main competencies of an adviser are connected to the main steps in the relation and communication with the farmer or farmers' groups:

- ⇒ Judge personality of the farmer and (re)act correspondingly, using empathy, psychology, non-verbal communication
- ⇒ Understand the issue and what is behind using empathy (even more if the issue is a regulation which the farmer has to imply), listening ability, ability to ask the right questions, to see beyond, analytical ability,
- ⇒ (Co-) Develop solutions and communicate them to the farmer, adjust them to the farmers ideas and needs, using communication, networking, analyses, self-organisation, time management, innovative thinking and propose a process.

Apart from that, there are several tasks which are not directly connected to the tasks in one-to-one or group advisory, but are core tasks of an adviser's job.

## **VI - Why should managers and employers encourage and support their advisers to develop and strengthen competencies?**

An adviser who is competent in the non-technical field brings many benefits to his/her institution: an adviser who is aware of his competencies can act as a role model and thus encourage other colleagues to reflect and develop their competencies as well.

Apart from being an important knot in the internal network of an institution, competent advisers are strongly embedded in **a network with external experts as well, which makes him a relevant resource for his colleagues as well**. The competent adviser him/herself is more

easily able to carry out his/her tasks: his/her communication within the institution and with the farmers is more clear and effective, his/her access to knowledge is more easy due to a broad expert network, s/he is easily able to bring demands and solutions together, manages his/her time effectively and has the ability for self-reflection and thus for constant improvements.

## VII – The crucial skills noted in the survey

The advisers were asked, in which advisory situations they reach limits. Their responses are as follows:

### One-to-one/one-to group advisory:

- ⇒ Giving technically correct advice vs. problems on multiple levels - Getting to the core of the issue with the farmer (s)
- ⇒ Communicating precisely with the farmer (s), explaining (empathy and patience) - Fail to make a farmer move forward and to make change its practices - Showing farmers that one works in their interest (farms prioritize economic performance, ecological issues are more difficult to address) – Gaining credibility
- ⇒ Accompanying change – facing blocked positions of farmers, fear of change - Help farmer to identify skill/performance deficits and take remedial action
- ⇒ Meeting farmers who are not interested - Handling group dynamics and sometimes conflicts with farmers or between farmers
- ⇒ Establishing a group and setting a group leader - Group facilitation: find out needs and come to a productive solution
- ⇒ Listening and taking notes at the same time

### Self- and time management

- ⇒ Work organisation so to be efficient and to have enough time for the farmers (heavy workload, excess of work)
- ⇒ Insecurity – missing time for preparation and technical updates
- ⇒ Being prepared - managing by objectives - simulating tasks/missions/responsibilities
- ⇒ Lacking time to step back and analyse the own work/role and see ahead for required changes

### Aspects of the framework (institution, policy, regulations)

- ⇒ Political orientation of employer - Regulation vs. farmers demands - “Selling” things to farmers - Implementation of political, local interest which contrasts with the farmers’
- ⇒ Frequent change in agricultural politics - Wider informative background (National Paying Agency; Land Register Office; accountancy and legal problems)
- ⇒ Conflicts between advisory demands from farmers & data collection for researchers.
- ⇒ No global vision of problems and solutions, it’s all individual, no groups
- ⇒ Funding of advisory activity (private and independent)
- ⇒ Technical limits - Specialised knowledge - Lack of improved technical knowledge e.g. succession planning, Integrated Pest Management (IPM)
- ⇒ Advising on both technical farm problems and farm financial management, e.g. succession planning

## VIII - More information: the framework of CECRA

The framework of CECRA (Certificate for European consultants in Rural Areas) can give us an interesting highlight on an agronomic adviser’s skills and competencies.

This program was developed from a meeting of IALB (International academy of agricultural and home-economics consultants) on the question how to develop quality and competence for consultants in rural areas according to uniform IALB standards in the European countries.

Although the focus of IALB is on German-speaking and East European countries, the starting point was very similar to the starting point in the “New Advisers Project”: The initial position in the countries is much different. In some countries, the technical qualification of advisers is good, but there is a lack of competencies in the methodical, social and personal areas. In other countries, advisers have more and more different and sometimes conflicting tasks to handle in a very short time budget, which would call for a specialised competencies development, but is mostly neglected due to time constraints.

For CECRA, training modules were worked out according to IALB standards. There are mandatory training modules and optional training modules which lead to the final CECRA base certificate which attests a standardised and transnational recognised consulting competence. The training is offered by accredited providers in different countries.

According to the CECRA concept, an adviser needs competencies in two fields to fulfil the requirements his job profile gives. On the one side there is the need of competence in specialised knowledge. And on the other side there are the relational competencies, on which both CECRA and we in the “New Advisor project” want to focus, as they are so far rather neglected in advisers’ trainings and competency portfolios but most important to handle the requirements of the job in an appropriate way.

Following the CECRA concept, these relational competencies include:

Methodological aspects such as

- Work organisation, techniques of working, target oriented work
- Project management
- Moderation competence, media technology, visualisation
- Competence to solve problems and conflicts
- Adult didactics and education management
- Role understanding and consulting models

Communicative and social aspects such as:

- Cooperation, team and networking ability
- Conversation competence (esteem/empathy, questioning, listening)
- Ability to develop client relationships
- Information competence, effective knowledge transfer
- Handling of conflicts, ability of criticism

Intra- and interpersonal competence

- Analytical abilities
- Personal appearance
- Self-organisation
- Ability to work under pressure
- Desire to learn and to change/adapt management
- Intercultural acceptance and work readiness
- Innovative thinking and behaviour
- Recognition of abilities and limits, reference to further specialists
- Accompany processes

**The CECRA certificate appears based on a broad and structured approach of skills** in rural advisory, which is consistent with expectations and lacks expressed in our survey.

The CECRA preparatory training device developed by IALB-AGRIDEA is adaptable to different situations and audiences, thanks its modular format (for example, some modules may not be given only in German or English, but in other national languages). In following years, several training organizations acting at the national level may lead **local adaptation or co-construction of some new modules for agronomic advisers and trainers**, in the frame of a transnational cooperation extending our New Advisers Leonardo project (see Outcome 14).

## **Conclusion**

Workshops and survey in April 2013 showed the expectations of agronomic advisers and trainers to develop skills not limited to only technical expertise. They highlighted the importance of relational and behavioural dimensions in relation to what we have called the 'internal support'.

In each country, advisory organizations should continue the work with their own advisers. At European level, training organizations may offer specific training modules in the continuity of the existing. To do this, they can rely on the methods and tools used in the New Advisers Leonardo project (pedagogy of learning by doing, tested tools, see Outcomes 8, 9, 11 and 14).

**REFERENCES:** Various outcomes from the New Advisers Leonardo project, 2013

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- [6] CECRA Website <http://www.cecra.net/>

**ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

- ⇒ CAP (= PAC in French): Common Agricultural Policy
- ⇒ CECRA: Certificate for European consultants in Rural Areas
- ⇒ CC: Cross Compliance
- ⇒ I(C)T: Information (and communication) technologies
- ⇒ IPM: Integrated Pest Management
- ⇒ KW: Knowledge
- ⇒ NAP: National Action Plan (See Outcome 1)
- ⇒ SUD: Sustainable Use Directive (See Outcome 1)
- ⇒ S&C: Skills and Competencies

## APPENDIX

### Results from the survey on advisers' skills and competencies.

(This survey was carried out in April 2013)

#### Total amount of answered questionnaires: 59

Answers from Ireland, Spain, Sweden, Germany, Hungary, Slovenia and France

#### Profession (double answer possible)

Advisers 49 - Teacher 5 - Other 6

#### 1. Since how many years are you working in this position?

On average 13 years (very experienced advisers!), ranging from 1,5 to 35 years.

#### 2. What are your main tasks?

- Advisory in crop production, crop protection, horticulture, viticulture, dairy farming, CC, administrative issues, regulations, applying for subsidies, fertilisation, grassland
- Vocational training
- Group work with farmers, group advisory
- Sell pesticides
- Problem management
- Technical assistance
- Providing information
- Assistance in filling out forms
- Technical assistance in electronic data processing
- Supporting trials, collecting data, preparing statistics, support of scientific studies
- Management, organisation of work
- Agroecology, Ecophyto...
- Chemical analyses
- Environment impact assessment
- Coaching/training of advisers
- Project management
- Change management
- Facilitation training sessions/groups
- Accompanying students
- Application techniques
- Reduction of plant protection, IPM
- Presentations
- Networking
- Strategic farm consultation
- Writing news7 information sheets for farmers
- Single farm advice
- Advisory Hotline
- Giving lectures
- Organization and implementation of field days
- Organising meeting
- Complete farm scheme applications for farmers
- Ensure farmers participation on projects
- Economic advise
- Advise on financial records

#### 3. Which skills/competences do you consider essential for your daily work and why?

- (Active) Listening (to needs etc.), listening-discussion
- Find individually adapted solutions
- Analyse information and present it in an understandable way
- Contacting farmers and get them committed to the appointments with the adviser
- Strategic planning
- Social competence, good relations with farmers, relational skills, ability to reassure
- Good knowledge of facts
- Positive posture towards others, Openness, Adaptability
- Pedagogic skills
- Psychological/ andragogical (=adults' learning) skills
- Project management
- Quality of listening and questioning (to explain, understand, identify needs for change and possible barriers)
- Facilitation skills (to allow each member of the group to express and exchange), Make groups productive, bring out the inner knowledge
- Analysis and synthesis
- Understand relations and dynamics between humans
- Organisation of trainings etc., time, workload..., Management
- Responsiveness
- Experience
- Technical/ Agronomic KW
- KW of regulations, CAP
- Managing change, Accompanying farmers undergoing change,
- Curiosity
- Autonomy
- Networking
- Knowledge of the business
- Skills in personal development
- Skills in technology transfer
- Being adaptive

- Innovativeness when it comes to human interaction, relationship
- Self-reflection, Awareness of the own posture
- Understand and identify the cognitive processes in others
- knowledge how to innovate in ways that promote understanding and methodological knowledge
- Ability to adapt to different levels of understanding
- Leadership ability
- Cooperation and team work
- Reliability
- Empathy
- Responsibility, personal responsibility
- Ask the “right” questions
- Being precise in expressing oneself, communication (with staff and farmers!)
- Knowledge transfer
- Development trends
- Patience
- substantive vocational training
- Readiness and willingness to help
- Management of information
- Patience
- Credibility
- Knowledge on electronic data processing
- Ability to sell
- Ask for help, not be an expert for everything
- Step back, watch oneself
- Finding a common level of communication
- Knowledge transfer to students and farmers – make knowledge understandable
- Improve students’ skills
- people management - to relate to different personalities
- decision making
- computer/IT skills
- financial knowledge
- data analyses
- identification of solutions and their costs
- support in making changes
- ability to identify key issues
- ability to prioritize farmers’ interests

**4. How important are non-technical skills in your opinion?**

- Most important: 7
- Very important: 36
- Important : 15
- Less important : 1
- Unimportant : 0

**5. Are there situations both in organising your work and in contact with farmers/students, in which you reach limits? Could you describe such situations?  
Can you imagine any skills which would help you to handle the situation?**

- Listening and taking notes at the same time
- Work organisation so to be efficient and to have enough time for the farmers
- management by objectives
- Meeting farmers who are not interested, hard to handle groups
- Being prepared
- “selling” things to farmers
- Handling conflicts
- Managing simulations tasks/missions/responsibilities
- Political orientation of employer
- Frequent change in agricultural politics
- Technical limits
- Times with heavy workload, excess of work
- Lack of time to step back and analyse the own work/role and see ahead for required changes
- Lack of time to slow progress with farmers
- Technically advise vs. problems on multiple levels □ Clear Vision as possible solution
- Accompanying change
- Blocked position of farmers, fear of change
- Group facilitation: find out needs and come to a productive solution
- Group establishment and setting a group leader
- Handling group dynamics
- Coaching skills
- Fail to make a farmer move forward and to make change its practices
- Regulation vs. farmers demands
- Social problems of farmers

- Implementation of political, local interest which contrast with the farmers'
- Farmers who question credibility
- Insecurity
- Conflicts with farmers or between farmers.
- Time management
- Time for preparation and technical updates
- Conflicts between advisory demands from farmers & data collection demands of researchers. A helpful skill to help this situation would be the ability to say "no"
- Advise on both technical farm problems and farm financial management, e.g. succession planning
- Improved technical knowledge e.g. Succession planning, Integrated Pest Management
- Improved change management skills- help farmer to identify skill/performance deficits and take remedial action
- Communication
- Getting to the core of the issue with the farmer
- wider informative background (National Paying Agency; Land Register Office; accountancy and legal problems)
- Empathy
- Patience
- Showing farmers that one works in their interest
- Communicating precisely with the farmer, explaining
- No global vision of problems and solutions, it's all individual, no groups
- Farms prioritize economic performance
- Funding of advisory activity (private and independent)  add value to advisory as farmers more and more inform themselves on technical issues
- Not so far

**6. Do/Did you get training to develop your skills in advising/teaching during the last five years?**

Varies broadly: some didn't get training at all, some just one or twice in their career so far, but others yearly or even twice a year. Training is mostly offered by external institutions, sometime in house and some describe the training they had as rather unconventional.

Subjects: management, handling difficult people, technical aspects (quite a lot), pedagogy, facilitation, train the trainer, psychology, self-development, self-reflection, communication, strategic advisory, NPL, direct payments, methodology of advising,

**7. Which skills did you work on?**

- Technical: 10
- Social: 15
- Both: 33

**8. Do you think that the training helped you to improve your advising/teaching?**

**Positive:**

- more active listening and questioning
- new thinking/ideas
- new approaches
- ability to stand back and watch the job/the own performance from a distance → higher openness, self-improvement, a new perspective on the job
- meeting other advisers, exchange, sharing experiences
- helps to address the roles with stakeholders
- being aware of the own posture, the influence on it and its importance
- improved working with groups
- Provided more self-confidence (both social and technical trainings!)
- higher understanding for students
- understanding for the importance of methodology
- insight in strategic advisory which helps in many advisory situations
- being up to date on a technical level
- getting a better access to the farmer
- more self-confidence in group advisory and lectures
- improved impact of advisory
- helps to better understand difficulties student have

- Group facilitation skills gave me techniques (such as splitting groups and giving them tasks) to make experience more interesting and motivating
- improved confidence which in turn lead to better communications with clients

**Neutral:**

- new aspects are quickly forgotten if they are not applied in time

**“Negative”**

- own experiences count more
- learned techniques didn't match with the job profile
- it' easier to fall back in one's old routine
- a private adviser: main aspect is not the advisory, but “the solution” for farmers

**9. Are there fields in which you would like to have training? Which aspects would that include and which competencies would you like to improve with the training? How would that affect you daily work as an adviser/teacher?**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning - Structuring work - Time management</li> <li>• Selling</li> <li>• Speaking in front of groups</li> <li>• How to give good speeches</li> <li>• How to produce easy to understand handbooks</li> <li>• Technical matters to stay up to date</li> <li>• Networking</li> <li>• Economic aspects</li> <li>• Method for problem identification</li> <li>• Relational skills</li> <li>• Change management, accompanying change, adaption to change, how to tackle with barrier inhibiting change</li> <li>• Development of strategic approaches</li> <li>• Individual advisory, Clear vision tool</li> <li>• Group facilitation - Coaching</li> <li>• Farm management - business administration</li> <li>• Ability to express oneself clearly</li> <li>• Psychological knowledge</li> <li>• Pedagogical and adult education skills</li> <li>• Knowledge transfer</li> <li>• Communication</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Handling of conflicts</li> <li>• Legal aspects</li> <li>• methodology of advisory</li> <li>• Listening, getting to the core of problems</li> <li>• improve farmers' ability to solve problems</li> <li>• How to become a companion of the farmer and how to involve him</li> <li>• Skills to accompany farmers along a process rather than the specific advisory at certain moment</li> <li>• Problem management</li> <li>• Easier ways to administrate information</li> <li>• Active listening, reformulation</li> <li>• Successfully "talk to" the conversation partner</li> <li>• Overall understanding of the agricultural economy</li> <li>• how to be more confident in communication</li> <li>• Ability to deal with changes</li> <li>• Knowledge on benefit of delivered topics to target group</li> </ul> |
|--|---|

***Questions concerning the workshop (Questions after the workshop)***

**10. Did you get new insights referring to social skills (s) and competencies (c) for daily advising and/or teaching during the workshop?**

I realised that other advisers struggle with the same problems as me  
 Importance of putting things in a greater context to analyse and understand themselves  
 Importance of being engaged  
 Importance of being kind and of not judging  
 Importance of being positive and open-minded  
 Possibility of doing unexpected things  
 Importance of encouraging, reassuring and pointing out positive aspects/achievements  
 Importance of expressing oneself clearly  
 Importance of ability to structure  
 Need to work on the own posture, methodology etc.  
 Importance of collaborative work  
 Importance of empowering farmers to be independent, accompany them but let them take decisions independently  
 Importance of networking and exchanging personal experiences

Technical KW sometimes sets limits to work with some people  
 Awareness for the importance of "human relations" in advisory  
 Personal support is more important than technical expertise  
 Importance of change management  
 Importance of own curiosity  
 Importance of developing an own way of reasoning.  
 We emphasised the importance for further training  
 Importance of systemic approach for advisory  
 Importance of empathy  
 Importance of communication  
 Importance of transparency and simplicity  
 Importance of trust between farmer/group and adviser  
 The adviser should take into account the complex environment of farmers  
 Importance of adoption of advisory approach to problem and situations  
 Paying attention to non-verbal signals  
 Problem based learning  
 Need for greater assertiveness  
 The value of a formal structured approach to analysing a problem and finding a solution with the client  
 Holistic view and ability to carry on change- Very important to help farmer look at bigger picture and engage whole family  
 Ability to listen and empower- identify real long term issues as some times farmers can focus too much on present difficulties  
 Networking and continuous progress ability- the importance of incremental change

**11. Do you use already some or all of the discussed Skills and Competencies actually in your daily work?**

- |   |                              |                    |
|---|------------------------------|--------------------|
| • No, but I now see the importance to change strategy | • No yet / I do develop them | • patience         |
| • Yes, Clear vision                                   | • Networking                 | • listening        |
| • Yes (some)  | • Overall vision             | • leadership       |
| • Yes, active listening                               | • ability to carry on change | • problem solving  |
| • Yes, the ability to listen and empower              | • holistic view              | • time management  |
|   | • empathy                    | • organisation     |
|   | • flexibility                | • trouble shooting |
|   | • accuracy                   | • IT skills        |

**12. Apart from technical and social skills, what do you think which aspects most importantly influence the way you work as an adviser? Please explain why.**

**Time management**

1. Yes, no further explanation
2. as it is hard to decide how to use time most efficient
3. not to to deliver more than had been sold/promised
4. time and economy are always limiting factors
5. Nowadays the hard part is to make a mental leap in half hour of time from having to answer questions to much diversified projects on the same day (at the same time is what makes the job interesting).
6. More and more frequent interruptions of certain organisations on my field of activity concerning farming issues.
7. Flexible adaptation of the organization of work required due to time restrictions and weather conditions.
8. I have the impression that I do deal with highly urgent tasks all the time, the pressure never gets lower
9. Finding the balance between what we should do, what we would love to do and what we must force ourselves to do.
10. Time management determines the ability of personal dedication.
11. Importance of managing priorities
12. Too many missions are often mixed within the same period of time, which does not allow going through things as I would like.

13. The multiplicity of fields of intervention generates the accumulation of deadlines within a very short period of time, which generates pressure
14. too much administrative work - too many clients
15. short deadline, work jams
16. critical to prioritise work - difficult in April to July
17. Vital skill/competency but increasingly difficult with increasing workload and client numbers
18. it is easy to do this when you are least busy
19. One of most important skills as it is vital to identify the key issues that will give best returns

#### **Position in your company?**

1. Yes, no further explanation
2. Employee with day to day operational independence i.e. arrange my own daily and weekly work schedule
3. The other party it is hard to position oneself in our official framework (elected, political) with the people you work with who often play a double game.
4. it is best not to think about promotion in the current economic climate
5. As current project scheduled to finish Dec 2015, it's unclear what my next position will be

#### **Job description-versus reality?**

1. It is important to make oneself the won achievements visible in the company
2. Farmers: They demand accompaniment along a process more than the specific advisory at certain moments, and for this, are necessary skills that are missing to advisers.
3. to satisfy farmer demand i do more compliance work than job description covers
4. Office based and scheme driven by external agencies as opposed to leading agenda from within
5. I often wonder "does your life manager know what we do"
6. There is flexibility as to how I perform role day-to-day as long as project and job goals are being achieved

#### **Role of stakeholders?**

1. Yes, no further explanation
2. networking with other partners of other Chambers
3. impact of policy is sometime heavy, changing agro-ecological policies
4. strong influence of legislation
5. the many "faces of the adviser: facilitator or expert or researcher or social worker
6. elected officials and their cautioners about new alternative
7. correct analysis of problems situations
8. very important to interact with stakeholders
9. superficial
10. different stakeholders must be prioritised
11. Very important e.g. Project findings will have direct influence on review of Ireland's Nitrates Directive NAP and Derogation

#### **Advisory situation in general?**

1. Yes, no further explanation
2. More farmers who are more demanding, more one-to-one advisory
3. Too many farms
4. Legal requirements set limits
5. On the situation of agricultural advisory in general, I think we need that our work should be more valued by the farmers, but also by the politics and consumers, who do not know that neutral advisers do exist
6. The situation affects because farmers are not willing or asking
7. more collaboration required
8. more support by local administrations required
9. approval of other stakeholder is often too low
10. Farmers: They demand accompaniment along a process more than the specific advisory at certain moments, and for this, are necessary skills that are missing to advisers.
11. hugely important that farmers can get independent advice
12. Too many agendas and too few advisors to serve all interested parties
13. the future is very uncertain

**13. What skills and competencies do you think are most important for your current and future work besides the technical knowledge and skills?**

Methodological skills

- a. One-to-one situation (one-to-family)
- b. Working with groups (group interaction)

Organizing process

- c. Project management
- d. Organizing networking

Personal development of the adviser

- e. Self-reflection about his role in the advising process

**14. Please mark the following competencies with grades from 1 (not important at all) to 5 (most important) regarding your current advisory work?**

	Most important	Very important	Important	Less important	Non important
Working in a team and guiding a team	16	25	12	3	3
Rhetoric, presentation	12	19	17	9	2
Self and time management	24	17	11	3	4
Project management / project advising	9	18	18	9	5
Design of advisory processes	15	19	12	7	6
Dealing with difficult situations in advising / change management	18	20	9	10	2
Moderation and management of meetings	6	16	19	12	6
Marketing / public relations	6	14	19	10	10
Management of education and events	7	18	15	7	12
Advising and accompanying groups	22	20	12	1	4

**15. Are there important S&C missing you to face the future challenges?**

- project managing (if more projects)
- group processes, group dynamics, leading groups
- understanding and arguing for integrating agriculture in the territory
- It is not always easy to hear what some farmers do without changing. We often have a personal opinion which takes over the professional advice.
- On the other hand, I think we need to reassure the farmers that they are not "alone" and that they must accept the official framework which is given. The regulation is not perceived positively, though it is not (always) there to makes things harder for them.

- We need a coherent framework evolved that does not change with every election!
- Be able to engage in an activity (or to put into action the own advise) to be aware of the impact this may have in the person receiving the advice!
- Augmenting serene to convince - ability to be more assertive
- Empathy - patience without losing the objective out of view.
- Methodology, traceability, specialisation, benchmarking
- Languages and international culture
- Certainly, but I would not be able to name precisely which ones.
- knowledge how to communicate, knowledge how to sell
- Certainly. I'm always eager to learn new skills. Which ones is difficult to say, we should ask someone who participates in one of my groups.
- Creating social/personal relations in a company
- make my conversation partner talk/open up
- identify obstacles for change
- Adult education, pedagogical and psychological knowledge is necessary for each advisor
- gaining wide professional experience
- knowledge of foreign languages, practical experience
- systemic thinking, and international background
- The implementation of SUD is very important for our cooperative, for our customers who buy our wine
- All the advisers, we are interested to reduce the pesticides, but the problem is how? And also, how the advisers should transmit their how-know?
- the training centres as the framework to the advisers, as a starting point on the experience
- The administration as a link with capacity to coordinate this process
- The farmer should be responsible for their decisions, for this raison the advising and training must be linked
- The farmer should be responsible for their decisions, for this raison the advising and training must be linked
- The training centres as the framework to the advisers, as a starting point on the experience
- Advisor becomes companion, he knows to involve the farmer in making decisions – he must create trust with the farmer or the group
- The adviser should take into account the complex environment of farmers
- Updating social media skills
- Management of resources and people
- Facilitation skills- both one-to-one and group, helping farmers manage change
- Financial-succession planning
- Monthly cash flow budgets and cost control