

**IMPROVE** –*Improving Validation of Not-Formal Learning in European Career Guidance Practitioners*

## IMPROVE - Guide for Validation of Career Guidance Practitioners' Competence

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## Introduction

The aim of this Guide is to discuss the basic principles and methodology related to the assessment, recognition and validation of career guidance practitioners' competence with a clear focus on performance, rather than qualification, learning outcomes or knowledge, attitudes and other aspects that support competence<sup>1</sup>. This Guide is designated to discuss the similarities between guidelines for assessment and validation of competence and presents a concrete and piloted model for the validation of career guidance (CG) practitioners' competence.

This Guide has been developed and written within the Project IMPROVE<sup>2</sup>. IMPROVE<sup>3</sup> is an international project co-financed by the European Commission within the Lifelong Learning Programme, Grundtvig. The IMPROVE project includes the development, usage and improvement of a guide to validation of non-formal learning in career guidance practitioners coherent with the European Guidelines described by CEDEFOP (CEDEFOP, 2009). The project involves partners and their networks in six European countries (Italy, Spain, Romania, Check Republic, Greece, and Germany) that are dedicated to research and training in the field of career guidance and to the delivery of career guidance services. In each country a defined number of practitioners and stakeholders were invited to take part in the validation process and to evaluate and feedback the developed model. The partners seek the following through IMPROVE:

- to better understand how the existing frameworks for validation the competence of career guidance practitioners work,
- to evaluate how effectively the frameworks assess CG practitioners competence and their task related performance,
- to identify how the efficacy of the frameworks can be improved and finally,

<sup>1</sup> For the most relevant terms see glossary in section 2.4.

<sup>2</sup> This document has been edited by Peter C. Weber [pweber@ibw.uni-heidelberg.de](mailto:pweber@ibw.uni-heidelberg.de) and Leonardo Evangelista with assistance from Rachel Nelson for the project *IMPROVE - Improving Validation of Not-Formal Learning in European Career Guidance Practitioners* 510640-LLP-1-2010-1-IT-GRUNDTVIG-GMP (2011-2012). The chapters 1-3 are written by Peter Weber and edited with support by Rachel Nelson and Leonardo Evangelista. Chapter 4 is written by Leonardo Evangelista and edited with support by Rachel Nelson. Chapter 5 is edited by Peter Weber on the base of the results of the pilot carried out by all partners of the project.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.improveguidance.eu/> (2012-09-18).

- how the recent CEDEFOP Guidelines on assessment of non-formal learning and work and can be applied to the existing frameworks.

This Guide is designated to describe a set of guidelines for the validation of career guidance competence and to describe the methodology of the pilot carried out in the six participating countries. We focus on the competence shown in the performance of professional guidance provision. The aim is the validation of such competence. The aim is the validation of the main competence that is needed and shown on the job (performance). This Guide does not focus on validation that leads to the granting of formal educational qualifications.

Due to the fact that of the many parallel activities and frameworks for validating the competence of career guidance practitioners have been developed within the last years and the richness of the material available (see Reid, 2007; Evangelista, 2007; Evangelista, 2011), this Guide is not aiming to add another singular model, but to describe a set of guidelines on how to apply the existing and future frameworks in order to improve validation efficacy and reliability. In accordance with this aim, this Guide discusses a set of (minimal) conditions that must be reached and complied during validation activities.

This Guide should be useful for institutions that already provide the validation of career guidance practitioners' competence, are about to start with such a provision or are considering a framework to promote and validate learning and quality provision based on competence performance. This Guide is also designated to parties and persons in the field of Career Guidance who are interested and involved in the topics of career guidance practitioners education and practise at the European level, national level, regional or local level as well as within service providing organisations.

This Guide brings valuable inspiration also for associations of guidance practitioners, decision makers and other interested parties dealing with career guidance and validation of non formal learning. It is important to note, that the Guide is not another framework for validation.

Improving the validation of career guidance competence is a task where many different institutions should be involved. Thus the Guide addresses people and institutions from career guidance and career guidance validation practise as well as policy makers within career guidance education, training and research.

The presented Guide is one tool for testing and improving instruments for competence validation in six countries. In all partner countries validation processes with CG Practitioners

were conducted between 2011 and 2012 based on the same methodology with some country specific variance. Chapter two discusses general requirements and guidelines for validation (ISO, CEDEFOP) (Chapter 2.1 and 2.2). The IMPROVE project synthesised these criteria in the IMPROVE Guidelines. The IMPROVE Guidelines are presented together with a glossary of most important terminology used in Chapter 2.4. Chapter three gives an overview about possible approaches in competence assessment and presents different methodology. Chapter four presents one specific performance-based methodology, the "Performance-based-interview" (PFI) in the piloted form (PC) Approach, which was the basis of the pilot in the IMPROVE project. Chapter five is a summary of the national reports on the piloting of the methodology. More than 120 Practitioners took part in validation processes based on the described methodology. The validation processes were planned and supported by the partner institutions.

All partner institutions involved experts in the field to carry out the validation processes and all partners established a group of national experts, which ensured the quality of the validation process and supported the dissemination and the sustainability of the results.

## **1. General Aspects**

### **1.1 Background and Acknowledgement**

The improvement of life wide and lifelong learning is a crucial task for all societies and individuals in the upcoming decade. Validation of non-formal and informal learning is one of the ways that are seen to support this. Informal and non-formal learning seem to be of increasing importance across Europe. Many countries in the EU and the OECD show commitment and action to strengthen the relevance of validation. Validation of prior learning and competence is seen as an important element of national policies on education, training and employment. The validation approach has, in this whole field, a bridging character and can support people and systems in many ways (see CEDEFOP, 2009: 16). This is important for the educational context in general, but also for specific educational and vocational fields.

The EU and its member countries have worked for several years on principles and common ideas that help to identify and validate non-formal and informal learning (European Council, 2004). In the years 2006-2009 within the 'cluster on recognition of learning outcomes' different countries developed, in a peer-learning process and in strong cooperation with the European Commission and the CEDEFOP, the 'European Guidelines on Validating non-formal and informal Learning' (see CEDEFOP, 2009: 2).

These European Guidelines are the major source of information of this Guide. But aside from this, materials such as relevant ISO norms and materials from the field of Career Guidance are recognized. Thus, this Guide is based on different sources and publications that exist around the topic of competence and competence theory, validation and recognition of competence and related fields. These sources are carried out by single researchers, research teams, by CG association or by national or European projects. A list of sources will be given at the end of this documented in the bibliography. Wherever online-resources are cited, the links are integrated directly into the document.

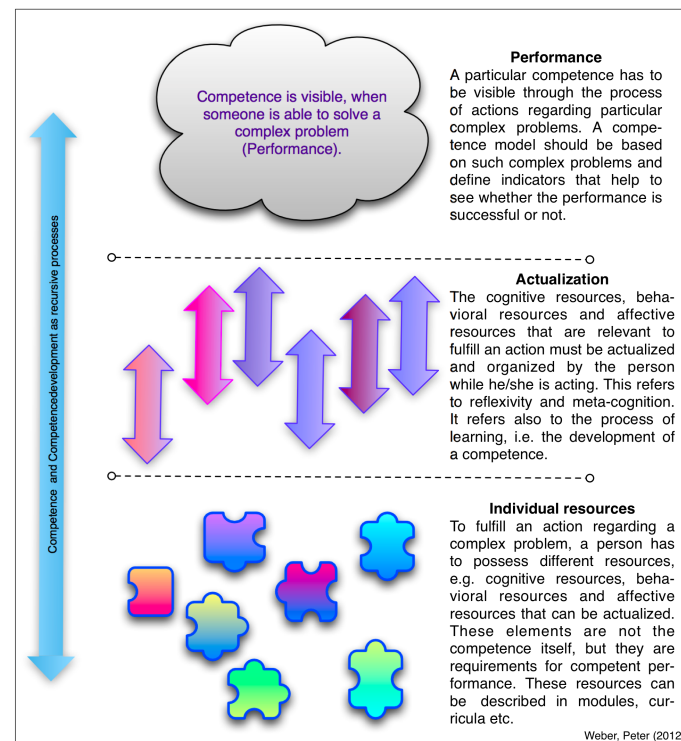
### **1.2 The validation of competence**

Assessment, recognition and validation of competence is one specific form of recognizing former learning.

In essence, the underlying concept of competence is based on the definition of 'key competencies' as used by the OECD in the DeSeCo-Project:

“A competency is more than just knowledge and skills. It involves the ability to meet complex demands, by drawing on and mobilising psychosocial resources (including skills and attitudes) in a particular context. For example, the ability to communicate effectively is a competency that may draw on an individual’s knowledge of language, practical IT skills and attitudes towards those with whom he or she is communicating.” (OECD, 2005, p.4; see also Rychen/Salganik, 2003).

One primary aspect of this definition of competence is that it is regarded as the attribute of an individual. Also, it can be learned and be more or less developed (OECD, 2003, p.8). Another central aspect of this understanding of competence is that it is performance-oriented: Having a competence means being able to act effectively in a particular situation through the possession of all relevant cognitive and practical skills, pieces of knowledge as well as attitudes, emotions, values and behaviours (see Graph 1).



Graph 1: Competence as ability to act regarding complex problems (Source: Weber u.a. 2012, p. 36).

Thus, competence comprises more than the recollection of taught knowledge. In order to deal with complex situations, individuals need to be able to mobilise a large range of intellectual, motivational and emotional resources. Doing so requires an understanding of hu-

mans as reflective beings who are capable of “thinking for themselves as an expression of moral and intellectual maturity, and to take responsibility for their learning and for their actions.” (OECD, 2005, p.8)

Reflexivity lies at the heart of this understanding of competence: It can be described as the ability of individuals to make sense of unknown/ non-routine situations and apply or adapt relevant resources to cope with these situations successfully. Reflexivity as an act of critical thinking is closely linked to the process of dealing with change and uncertainty”(see Weber, et al., 2012, p 35).

Assessment, recognition and validation are three steps that can be undertaken to support practitioners, service providers and certifying institutions to

- identify CG practitioners performance of competence (assessment),
- document and present results in a transparent and useful way (e.g. to the practitioner) and
- take a decision (a competent body with mandate) regarding whether a competence is at a certain level that is defined e.g. to fulfil a given task (validating).

Thus, the last step can be combined with giving a certificate, if the certifying body has the mandate to give a certificate. For career guidance practitioners there are different reasons and aims that can be targeted by assessment, recognition and validation process. For example:

- orientation for practitioners for self reflection and planning for further professional development,
- supporting employers and services to plan their personal development tasks and recruiting processes,
- supporting training providers in the field of career guidance,
- supporting employers in the process of recruiting and HR development,

- provide evidence for institutions that validate and certificate career guidance practitioners.

The main goals of the validation of practitioner’s competence in the context of career guidance are:

- Comparison of demanded competence and performance,
- assessment, recognition validation and certification of such performed competence (also acquired in formal or non formal learning processes),
- transparency about the existing competence for practitioners themselves but also for clients, employers, users and other stakeholders.

The following table shows, that different approaches can be applied to validate competence.

<p>“To recognize and assure jobs are carried out well is a constant concern in our modern societies. We define competent the person that is able to do something well<sup>4</sup> or, if we want to be more precise, to a predetermined standard.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ There are several approaches to assure an occupation is carried out by competent people (Evangelista, 2008)<sup>5</sup>. For example we can recognize as competent:</li> <li>▪ Who holds a specific educational qualification</li> <li>▪ Who holds a specific experience (usually measured in terms of time length of the experience)</li> <li>▪ Who holds specific personal features - skills, knowledge, etc.</li> <li>▪ Who can directly prove a good performance in the specific job”.</li> </ul>
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Table 1: Four approaches (Evangelista 2011: 7).

<sup>4</sup> Competent. (n.d.). Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary Online. Retrieved on February 3, 2011 from <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/competence>; one of the examples of the entry is *a competent secretary/horse-rider/cook*.

<sup>5</sup> Evangelista, L. (2008). The quest for competence. *Orientamento.it*. Retrieved on February 3, 2011 from <http://orientamento.it/orientamento/8d.htm>.

From these four approaches, only the last one, the “performance based approach” includes the demonstration of the direct performance by a person in a specific task or job. In accordance with the goals of the IMPROVE project, this guide refers to the methodology and procedures, that are able to contribute to the validation of competence in the sense of the fourth approach (prove a good performance in the specific job).

The most important arguments for choosing this strategy are:

- focusing on competence without taking into account performance is misleading, because other methods focus on other criteria (e.g. personal features, knowledge, experience or qualification) but not competence in the sense of the given definition,
- the existing approaches in the field of Career Guidance mostly focus on the recognition of qualification, experience or personal features (knowledge or skills)(see Evangelista, 2011),
- to have a close insight into the practise a CG practitioner is able to carry out the chosen approach should be as close as possible to this practise to give him/her the chance to get insight and a valuable source for reflection and further development.

## 2. Sources for Guidelines on validation of competence of Career Guidance practitioners

Different sources which define requirements or guidelines for validation and certification of competence and other learning results;

- CEDEFOP, 2009: “European Guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning”<sup>6</sup>
- ISO/IEC 17024, 2003: “Conformity assessment – General requirements for bodies operating certification of persons”
- Existing frameworks for validating the competence of career guidance practitioners.

### 2.1 The CEDEFOP Principles and Guidelines for the validation of prior learning

Validation of prior learning as well as the validation of competence has become more important over the last years. Already in 2004, the European Council adopted common European principles for identifying and validating non-formal and informal learning.

#### *Individual entitlements*

Identifying and validating non-formal and informal learning should, in principle, be a voluntary matter for the individual. There should be equal access and equal and fair treatment for all individuals. The privacy and rights of the individual are to be respected.

#### *Stakeholder obligations*

Stakeholders, should establish, in accordance with their rights, responsibilities and competences, systems and approaches for identifying and validating non-formal and informal learning. These should include appropriate quality assurance mechanisms. Stakeholders should provide guidance, counselling and information about these systems and approaches to individuals.

#### *Confidence and trust*

The processes, procedures and criteria for identifying and validating non-formal and in-

<sup>6</sup> CEDEFOP 2009. Source <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news/4041.aspx> (2011-03-02).

formal learning must be fair, transparent and underpinned by quality assurance mechanisms.

*Credibility and legitimacy*

Systems and approaches for identifying and validating non-formal and informal learning should respect the legitimate interests and ensure the balanced participation of the relevant stakeholders.

Table 2: Fundamental principles in identifying and validating non-formal and informal learning, Council of the European Union 2004.

With the CEDEFOP 2009 publication 'European Guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning' the 'European Cluster on recognition of learning outcomes' contributed to this with a set of more elaborated guidelines for validation. It is a result of a peer learning process involving partners from 29 European Countries.

The CEDEFOP publication deals with following issues:

- Effective validation practice: the European perspective, the national perspective, the organisational perspective and the individual perspective
- The structure of validation procedures
- Assessment methods
- Validation practitioners
- Summary of principles and guidelines

In this guide, we refer to the CEDEFOP Guidelines, wherever it is necessary and helpful. The structure of the validation process, the assessment methods, the validation of practitioners and the quality criteria formulated in the CEDEFOP Guidelines are especially relevant. The CEDEFOP Guidelines are a focus, because within these Guidelines we can find standards for the validation of all types of prior learning. After some years of testing out ways of validating competence and prior learning in a wide range of different concepts, the CEDEFOP Guidelines give a general frame of guidelines and help to discuss the appropriateness of existing or newly designed frameworks for validating the competence of career guidance practitioners.

## 2.2 The fundamental principles and guidelines in detail and examples for validation of Career Guidance practitioners

From the conclusion of the CEDEFOP publication, the following fundamental principles and guidelines should be considered:

- The individual is in the centre of the validation.
- Validation must be voluntary.
- The privacy of individuals should be respected.
- Equal access and fair treatment should be guaranteed.
- Stakeholders should be involved in establishing systems for validation.
- Systems should contain mechanisms for guidance and counselling of individuals. (...)
- The process, procedures and criteria for validation must be fair, transparent and underpinned by quality assurance.
- Systems should respect the legitimate interests of stakeholders and seek balanced participation.
- The process of validation must be impartial and avoid conflicts of interest.
- The professional competences of those who carry out assessments must be assured.

Table 3: The fundamental principles underpinning validation: (CEDEFOP, 2009: 70).

*The individual is in the centre of the validation*

The activities of other agencies involved in validation should be considered in the light of their impact on the individual. The CEDEFOP Guidelines state, that everyone should have access to validation and the emphasis on motivation to engage in the process is particularly important. The multiple stage process of validation offers individuals many opportunities for deciding about the future direction of their validation. Decision-making should be supported by information, advice and guidance (CEDEFOP, 2009: 72)

*Validation must be voluntary*

The CG practitioner participates in the validation of his competence by free will and voluntarily. Validation is not meant to be proposed as compulsory by a third party, for example: employers, public bodies or professional bodies.



*The privacy of individuals should be respected*

Throughout the entire validation process the privacy of the participating CG practitioners must be respected. Staff must comply with Data Protection legislation when dealing with personal details. Neither the information given by the participant, nor the information about the validation process or the results shall be given to a third party.

*Equal access and fair treatment should be guaranteed*

The validating organisation has to make sure that all practitioners who want to take part in the validation procedure have access to it. This includes that the organisation takes action to inform in a transparent and visible way about the opportunity and details of the process. All relevant stakeholders, CG networks and professional bodies should be actively involved in the promotion process. The participant in the validation process shall be treated in a fair manner. This means basically:

- that they are informed before the process about the validation procedure, the requirements, the resources needed and the opportunities,
- that all participants are treated in the same way and under comparable conditions, and
- that the result of the process is based solely on the assessed competence.

*Stakeholders should be involved in establishing systems for validation*

Cooperation with stakeholders from the field is needed to establish a system of validation for career guidance practitioners. Different European, national, regional and local stakeholders should be involved, at all levels, when an actor starts to establish a system for validation. Important stakeholders are:

- Politicians and public institutions who deal with Career Guidance
- Career Guidance networks
- Employers and employer associations
- Professional associations and relevant trade unions
- Providers for education and training of CG Practitioners
- Other relevant stakeholders

*Systems should contain mechanisms for guidance and counselling of individuals*

The validation system that is settled upon should involve mechanisms and opportunities to provide guidance, counselling or advice on the validation procedures. Such support shall be impartial and informed. Candidates should know before they decide to participate in a validation procedure:

- what is the added value (e.g. in terms of further educational or occupational options),
- what can they expect (e.g. in terms of support and results),
- what standards have to be met (e.g. competence that are assessed, methods of assessment used)
- what form the evidence of learning outcomes need to take, (e.g. presentation of evidence),
- how the process is carried out (e.g. timelines, costs, procedures)
- what quality can be expected (e.g. forms of evidence, quality and standards).

The CEDEFOP Guidelines propose that the participating practitioner should be offered information and advice about potential further routes to further qualifications and job opportunities at the end or after the validation procedure. This kind of guidance and advice can be offered in face-to-face settings as well as in an online or other distance setting (see CEDEFOP, 2009: 53). It should be pointed out, that different skills are needed for the guidance related to the assessment issues, the more technical process guidance and more personal issues.

*Systems should be underpinned by quality assurance*

The process, procedures and criteria for validation must be fair, transparent and underpinned by quality assurance. What is said about quality assurance of validation systems is also relevant for the validation process, procedures and criteria as well. However, for these topics certain professional and technical aspects are also of relevance. If a validation system is built, a quality assurance system should be defined that covers a clear commitment to quality criteria (guidelines for validation) on the one hand, and procedures for quality assurance and quality development on the other hand. Such procedures should especially include:

- clear responsibilities for quality assurance

- defined quality assurance mechanisms
- evaluation and feedback structures
- frequent revision of processes and procedures
- continuing learning and training for involved staff
- high transparency for all interested parties about the quality assurance model and actions taken.

Quality assurance of the system is a relevant task for all involved stakeholders at the policy level, the organisational level and the level of practitioners involved in the validation procedure. In addition, a validation checklist is presented in the CEDEFOP report that gives general quality guidelines for validation activities.

For the quality assurance of the validation practices, the CEDEFOP Guidelines proposes in addition the following quality indicators:

- reliability
- validity
- safety, security and confidentiality
- standards/reference points for measuring competence
- sustainability
- visibility and transparency
- fitness for purpose
- cost efficacy

#### *Reliability*

'Reliability' means that the validation procedure must come to the same results when it is applied to different CG practitioners with the same level of competence. This is of importance because the validation process must lead to trusted results. If the settings for learning and validation vary greatly, then the process of validation must allow for these differences; should the process be repeated then the outcome must be the same (CEDEFOP, 2009: 78).

#### *Validity*

The term 'Validity' describes the demand for the validation procedure and the methodology used to assess and validate the described competence. The evidence documented for an

individual must be directly related to the standards being used for validation. The evidence must not be allowed to shift the understanding of the standards (CEDEFOP, 2009: 78).

#### *Safety, security and confidentiality*

Initial and continuing engagement with the validation process from identification through to certification must not be compromised by lack of trust and consequential deterioration in motivation to proceed.

#### *Standards/referential*

The term 'Standards' refers here to the framework that describes the competence that shall be validated. These are the basis and the purpose of the process and the assessment. Such a competence framework should present a clear and operationalized description of the relevant competence regarding certain job roles or key job activities. The competence framework must exist in a clear and unambiguous form that has the confidence of the key stakeholders, e.g. the relevant national professional boards, the relevant national networks or the employers. The competence framework is also an 'organiser' for the documentation of the results. Without a clear competence framework the validation process cannot pass the identification of the individual competence stage.

#### *Sustainability*

Sustainability refers here to the continuing existence and offering of the validation procedure and the certification. This is important because validation processes can be resource intensive, especially for individuals who present themselves for validation. Trust in validation also depends on the time the process has been operating and the way it is known and understood in communities. Thus, sustainability is a key consideration (CEDEFOP, 2009: 79).

#### *Visibility/transparency*

The way the assessment and validation process operates must generate trust for the judgments to have meaning. Transparency and visibility of the validation is one of the fundamental features supporting trust. (CEDEFOP, 2009: 79). This is important at the European, national, regional and local level and includes the visibility of the validating organisation,

the validation scheme and the transparency of the established standards/competence frame. Thus, marketing and networking are of high importance.

#### *Fitness of purpose*

The variety of methods and frames for judging the level and sufficiency of evidence of competence is very large. The methods chosen should fit the competence framework that is the base for the validation but methods in combination should also create a sensitive and trustworthy toolbox of methods of assessment (CEDEFOP, 2009:79).

#### *Cost-efficacy*

It is generally the case that validation processes for non-formal and informal learning are highly individual and do not have the benefit of large-scale application (large cohorts of learning being assessed in similar ways). Therefore economies of scale are limited and costs need to be measured in relation to the expected returns to the stakeholders concerned (CEDEFOP, 2009:79).

#### *Systems should respect the legitimate interests of stakeholders and seek balanced participation*

In the process of building and maintaining validation systems the relevant supporting stakeholders should be involved. Stakeholders are such persons or institutions who do not counsel, assess or manage the validation system itself but who have an interest in the successful operation of validation. Such stakeholders are for instance:

- responsible people in public bodies that fund the process;
- responsible people in public bodies that have agreed upon a policy for validation;
- managers of human resources for private companies;
- community leaders that seek engagement of groups of individuals in learning and working;
- education services in the formal sector;
- charities that are donors.

The integration of these stakeholders in an advisory committee should be considered. They can play an important role in supporting, developing and maintain the validation of CG practitioners and are important links to the various communities served by validation outcomes.

The composition of such a committee should be well balanced between types of stakeholders (see CEDEFOP, 2009: 69).

#### *The process of validation must be impartial and avoid conflicts of interest*

Validation of competence is an opportunity for the individual CG counsellor. As stated before validation is undertaken by his or her free choice. The candidate shall not be forced to participate by third parties. "The interests of the individual are not compromised by the interests of those managing validation and other stakeholders (no conflict of interest)" (CEDEFOP 2009: 79). Therefore the organisation of and the validation procedures and involved persons have to be independent and neutral.

#### *The professional competence of those who carry out assessments must be assured*

Assessors have the responsibility to "seek and review evidence of an individual's learning and judge what meets or does not meet specific standards" (CEDEFOP, 2009: 67). Thus, such persons should be "familiar with the standards and the potentially useful assessment methods that might be used to reference evidence against standards" (CEDEFOP, 2009: 68).

In addition assessors should be professionals in the sector in which they are evaluating practitioners. "The authenticity of the assessment situation is likely to be improved when sectoral experts can direct the use of an assessment instrument or judge the outcomes of its use" (CEDEFOP: 2009: 68).

Persons who take this role must:

- "be familiar with the validation process (validity and reliability);
- have no personal interest in the validation outcome (to guarantee impartiality and avoid conflicts of interest);
- be familiar with different assessment methodologies;
- be able to inspire trust and to create a proper psychological setting for the candidates;
- be committed to provide feedback on the match between learning outcomes and validation standards/references (via support systems);
- be trained in assessment and validation processes and be knowledgeable about quality assurance mechanisms" (CEDEFOP, 2009: 68).

Aside from the fundamental principles in the CEDEFOP publication additional guidelines are

also described. The most relevant in terms of validation practise seem to be those that deal with the validation in more practical terms:

- The structure of validation procedures;
- Assessment methods;
- Roles in the validation process.

#### *The Structure of the validation procedures*

Validation of competence of CG practitioners follows three major steps: Information, Assessment and (external) auditing/recognition of the results. The three processes of orientation/information and advice, assessment and external audit can be used to evaluate existing validation procedures and support the development of new validation procedures (see CEDEFOP, 2009: 72).

Validation procedures can seem complex as many elements interact with others but they can be simplified for the purpose of communication and organisation. In the CEDFOP Guidelines it is suggested that there are three distinct stages of validation procedures:

First is orientation (information, advice) of an individual. This covers aspects of producing and distributing information and interaction of the CG Practitioners with staff involved in validation. The end of this phase is reached with the decision to participate and when the activity begins to focus on assessing the individual's actual competence. This includes for instance, the agreement between the validation body and the candidate about the validation process, the timetable, the price etc.

The second step from the CEDEFOP's point of view is the assessment of the competence of the CG practitioners. This includes:

- Understanding the requirements and standards of the whole process of assessment,
- identification of learning,
- searching for evidence about competence,

- organising it for assessment, and
- following agreed assessment and validation procedures.

The end of this second phase is defined by the statement of the assessors which is a recommendation to the body that is in charge of validation (awarding body), that the person has the appropriate competence or not.

The last step is the audit (or recognition) of the validation process. This is easier to define and represents a post validation stage that involves an external, independent review of the results of the assessment. This indicates that the second and the third step must be carried out by two different bodies, on one hand the organisation that carries information, advice and assessment and on the other hand an awarding body who recognises and certifies the result.

#### *Assessment methods*

When used for validation, assessment methods have to be adopted, combined and applied in a way that reflects the individual specificity and non-standardised character of CG competence. Validation methods need to be fit-for-purpose (see CEDEFOP, 2009: 72). There are various methods that can be used to assess the competence of CG practitioners. The CEDEFOP Guidelines point out, that methods that are used have to be adopted, combined and applied in a way that reflects the specificity of the kind validation that will be undertaken. Thus the validation of CG practitioners' competence needs methods that are fitting. Certain criteria can be used to check the fitness of methodology:

- breadth of knowledge, skills and competence to be assessed;
- depth of learning required to gather these competence;
- how current or recent are the knowledge, skills and competence;
- sufficiency of information for an assessor to make a judgement;
- authenticity of the evidence being the candidate's own learning outcomes (CEDEFOP, 2009: 59).

Chapter three will discuss methods for validation in more concrete way. Chapter four will describe the methodology as it is used in the IMPROVE pilot.

#### *Roles in the Validation Process*

Competence validation is done in a process between a practitioner who seeks validation and different experts who support him/her directly or whose support secures the process and the quality of it. To support the practitioner in a most effective and helpful way, we need to distinguish different roles. The following guidelines are the most relevant aspects we have to take into account. Effective operation of validation processes depends fundamentally on the professional activity of:

- Guides/Career guidance practitioners – provide information, advice and guidance;
- Assessors – carry out the competence assessment;
- Validation process administrators – manage and organise the procedure;
- External observers – ensure networking with the relevant actors, (e.g. professional bodies, national forum) communication and quality.

The preparation and continuous training of these people is critically important. Networking that enables shared experiences and the full functioning of a community of practice should be a part of a development programme for practitioners. The professional competence of those who carry out assessments must be assured. The effective operation of validation processes depends on the professional activity of different persons. They should be prepared and trained continuously. The establishment of a community of practice' should be a part of a development programme for practitioners (see CEDEFOP, 2009: 66).

Interaction between the different practitioners in a single validation process is likely to lead to more efficient and effective practices that support the individuals seeking validation (CEDEFOP, 2009: 66). We want to stress that it is not absolutely possible to distinguish all aspects of these roles/functions; maybe there are some that, in practise, overlap. Additional roles/functions may be needed or the same person may take on more than one role in different stages of the process. "Each validation process is unique and the roles (functions)(...) can vary (...)" (CEDEFOP, 2009: 66). It seems to be important, that for the practitioner who seeks validation, as well as for external actors, the quality and transparency of the process is good. Thus training, documentation and information about the involved roles and the related tasks are necessary.

### **2.3 ISO 17024: Conformity assessment – General requirements for bodies operating certification of persons**

In addition to the CEDEFOP Guidelines, the ISO norm 17024<sup>7</sup> is an important source of information about requirements for validation processes (Evangelista, 2011: 31). The ISO Norm 17024 focuses on certification rather than on validation but the definition of certification is quite similar to the given definition for validation<sup>8</sup>. Certification is defined as follows: "Certification of persons is one means of providing assurance that the certified person meets the requirements of the certification scheme. Confidence in the respective certification schemes is achieved by means of a globally accepted process of assessment, subsequent surveillance and periodic re-assessments of the competence of certified persons" (ISO 17024, 2003: V). The greatest difference, is, that the ISO Norm focuses more clearly on competence and the CEDEFOP Guidelines on all kind of learning outcomes (see ISO 17024, 2003: V).

This ISO norm states different requirements for organisations operating certification of persons. Therefore the ISO norm 17024 can be seen as a set of guidelines in addition to the CEDEFOP guidelines that give an additional base for improving existing validation schemes in the field of career guidance.

According to ISO (2003: 5), the standard ISO 17024 "has been drawn up with the objective of achieving and promoting a globally accepted benchmark for organizations operating certification of persons. Certification of persons is one means of providing assurance that the certified person meets the requirements of the certification scheme. Confidence in the respective certification schemes is achieved by means of a globally accepted process of assessment, subsequent surveillance and periodic re-assessments of the competence of certified persons. (...) one of the characteristic functions of the personnel certification body

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.iso.org/iso/catalogue/catalogue\\_tc/catalogue\\_detail.htm?csnumber=29246](http://www.iso.org/iso/catalogue/catalogue_tc/catalogue_detail.htm?csnumber=29246) (2011-03-03).

<sup>8</sup> "The confirmation by a competent body that learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and/or competences) acquired by an individual in a formal, non-formal or informal setting have been assessed against predefined criteria and are compliant with the requirements of a validation standard. Validation typically leads to certification" (CEDEFOP, 2009: 71).

is to conduct an examination, which uses objective criteria for competence and scoring.”

Table 4: The rationale behind ISO 17024 (2003): V

The ISO norm gives clear regulations on the following points:

- independency and impartiality of certification bodies
- certification scheme(s) has to be developed by a scheme committee appointed by the certification body
- a 'scheme committee' is responsible for the development and maintenance of the certification scheme
- the scheme committee shall fairly and equitably represent the interests of all parties
- methods and mechanisms to be used to evaluate the competence of candidates are defined by the certification body in agreement with the scheme committee
- the certification body shall evaluate the methods for examination of candidates.
- examinations shall be fair, valid and reliable.
- appropriate methodology and procedures (such as collecting and maintaining statistical data) shall be defined to reaffirm, at least annually, the fairness, validity, reliability and general performance of each examination and all identified deficiencies corrected.
- successful completion of an approved training course (by the candidate) may be a requirement of a certification scheme
- the certification body shall examine competence of the candidate, based on the requirements of the scheme, by written, oral, practical, observational or other means

Table 5: Requirements of ISO (ISO, 17024, 2003: 2ff.).

#### *Independency and impartiality of certification bodies:*

The *certification body* is the institution that has the mandate to carry out assessment, the validation process and awards the certificate. The certification body, its policies and procedure and the administration shall be related to the criteria of the certification, shall be fair and equal for all candidates. It shall comply with all applicable regulations and requirements (ISO 17024, 2003: 2). This should be stated within defined policies of the certification body.

The organisation of the certification body should be structured to give confidence to all interested parties regarding its competence, impartiality and integrity, especially in terms of the ethics of their operations, responsibility of its decisions and the definition of the persons which have the overall responsibility for evaluation, formulation of policies, decisions on certification, implementation of policies and procedures, the finance of the certification body, the delegation of authority to any committees or individuals. The certification body shall be established as a legal entity or part of a legal entity (ISO 17024, 2003: 2f.).

In addition there are some more aspects that shall be developed, established or guaranteed:

- the appointment of a scheme committee that is responsible for the accreditation scheme;
- the necessary financial resources;
- clear policies to distinguish the certification activities from other activities;
- that the same institution does not provide training or aid others in the preparation of such services (unless it demonstrates how the training is independent from the evaluation and certification);
- that it has a defined policy and procedure for the resolution of appeals and complaints received from applicants;
- that it has contracted enough people with the necessary education, training and technical knowledge and experience (ISO 17024, 2003: 3.).

Together these points state very clearly that the certification body has to be built up and defined very carefully and professionally. There is a need of highly developed procedures and policy statements, as well as, high transparency to ensure that confidentiality and impartiality are not compromised.

*The certification scheme(s) has to be developed by a scheme committee appointed by the certification body:*

The certification body shall examine the competence of practitioners based on the requirements of the scheme, by written, oral, practical, observational or other means. The certification body establishes a scheme committee: "The certification body shall appoint a scheme committee, which shall be responsible for the development and maintenance of the certification scheme for each type of certification being considered. The scheme committee shall

fairly and equitably represent the interests of all parties significantly concerned with the certification scheme, without any particular interest that predominates. Where a certification scheme is developed by organizations other than the certification body, the respective developer of the scheme shall adhere to the same principles" (ISO 17024, 2003: 3). The certification scheme defines „specific certification requirements related to specified categories of persons to which the same particular standards and rules, and the same procedures apply" (ISO 17024, 2003: 1).

The certification body is responsible for the definition of the methods and mechanisms to assess the competence of the candidates. This includes the definition of policies and procedures for the development and the maintenance of these methods. (ISO 17024, 2003: 4). In addition, the certification body defines a process for the (further) development and maintenance of the certification scheme. The certification body is responsible for the continuing evaluation of the methods for examination of candidates. The examination shall be fair, valid and reliable.

*Methods and mechanisms to be used to evaluate the competence of candidates are defined by the certification body*

Appropriate methodology and procedures (such as collecting and maintaining statistical data) shall be defined to reaffirm, at least annually, the fairness, validity, reliability and general performance of each examination and all identified deficiencies corrected. (ISO 17024, 2003: 4).

The criteria of assessment/evaluation of the competence have to be those defined by the certification body. They should be defined in accordance with international standards and other relevant documents. The certification shall not be restricted by limiting conditions such as undue financial requirements or membership of an association or group (ISO 17024, 2003: 4).

*Management System:*

The carrying organisation shall apply a management system, which is documented and covers all requirements of the international Standard ISO 17024. ISO 9001 is such a management system. This management system should be implemented on all levels of the organisa-

tion. The management system should be reviewed and cover continual improvement (ISO 17024, 2003: 4).

*Subcontracting:*

If the certification body has subcontracts with other organisations with aspects related to the certification, a documented agreement that covers the arrangement (confidentiality, prevention of conflict of interest) shall be drawn up. The certification body is fully responsible for the subcontracting, especially for choosing a partner that is competent, willing and able to comply with the international Standard ISO 17024. (ISO 17024, 2003: 4f.).

*Records, Confidentiality and Security:*

The certification body has to maintain a record system to confirm the status of the certified persons, to document the assessment process and its effective fulfilment. Application forms, assessment/evaluation reports, surveillance activities and other relevant documents shall be recorded. The certification body has to keep all information confidential. This shall be documented in legally enforceable commitments that cover all individuals working within the body (committee members, individuals acting in its behalf). All examinations shall take place in a secure environment (ISO 17024, 2003: 5).

*Persons employed or contracted:*

The necessary competence of the involved people should be defined within and alongside the certification process. All persons should commit themselves to comply with the rules defined by the certification body. For all employees and contracted persons instructions cover aspects such as their duties and responsibilities. The competence of the persons, the appropriate education, experience and technical expertise shall be identified. The relevant qualification of each individual shall be documented. Assessors have to meet the necessary requirements of the certification body upon applicable and competence standards (ISO 17024, 2003: 5f.). Especially they shall

- be familiar with the certification scheme,
- have knowledge of the relevant examination methods and documents,
- have appropriate competence in the field to be examined,
- are fluent in the language of the candidate and

- are free from any interest that they can impartial and non-discriminatory judgments (assessments).

In case the examiner has any conflict of interest, the certification body has to make sure, that the confidentiality and impartiality of the examination is not compromised (ISO 17024, 2003: 6).

#### *Certification process*

The ISO norm 17024 foresees a three-step certification process that consists of application, evaluation (assessment) and decision on certification.

In a first step 'Application' provides a detailed description on the certification process that is appropriate to the certification scheme in use. Furthermore a description of requirement for certification, applicants' rights and the duties including a code of conduct should be described. Application is documented in an application form, signed by the applicant. The application form includes the scope of the desired certification, a statement of the applicant that he/she agrees to comply with the requirements for certification and to supply any information needed for the evaluation/assessment (e.g. general information about the applicant, information about relevant qualifications supported by evidence) (ISO 17024, 2003: 6).

Evaluation (Assessment). The certification body reviews the application of the applicant and confirms that the certification body has the capacity to deliver the requested certification, including the capacity to accommodate any special needs of applicants (e.g. language and/or disabilities) and the applicant has the required qualification, experience and training specified by the scheme.

The competence shall be examined based on the requirements of the scheme by written, oral, practical, observation or other means (ISO 19024, 2003: 7). The planning and the structure of the examination shall ensure that all requirements are objectively and systematically verified and documented. Documentation shall be done in an appropriate and comprehensible manner and includes information about the performance of the candidate and the results of examination (ISO 17024, 2003:7).

Decision on certification, the third step, is done by the certification body and is based on the information from the evaluation/assessment of the candidate. Those who make the certifi-

cation decision shall not have participated in the examination or training of the candidate (ISO 17024, 2003: 7).

The certification body provides a certificate and maintains the sole ownership of these certificates. It has the form of a letter, card or other medium and is signed or authorized by the responsible person of the certification body. It contains as a minimum following information: name of the certificated person, an unique certification number, the name of the certification body, a reference to the competence standards and other relevant documents, the issue, on which the certification is based, the scope of the certification (validity conditions and limitations), the effective date of certification and date of expiry (ISO 17024, 2003: 7).

Aside from the presented aspects, the ISO 17024 includes some more such as e.g. surveillance, regulations for re-certification and the use of logos and marks. Also, an appendix of the ISO 17024 describes the development and maintenance of a certification scheme for persons (ISO 17024, 2003: 8f).

It seems to be, that aside from the requirements of validity of methodology and ethical aspects, the institutional aspect is very much focused upon. In the context of the IMPROVE Project it should be an aim, to make use of these guidelines wherever it is appropriate. Some of the aspects highlighted here, for example the existence of 'independent and impartial certification bodies', a 'scheme committee' or the aspect of sustainability, are requirements for further development. The experience with these aspects will be discussed within the project.

#### **2.4. IMPROVE Guidelines for the validation of competence of people at work**

The following section describes the Guidelines for validation of competent workers/practitioners. They are developed on the base of the documents presented in chapter 2.2 and 2.3 as well as on the base of experience and models existing in the field of career guidance (see Evangelista, 2011). They attempt to be more concrete in the crucial aspects in terms of assessing career guidance practitioners' competence in a performance-based approach. They do not neglect the more general requirements described by CEDEFOP and ISO 17024. Table 6 shows in detail the specific focus of the IMPROVE guidelines in comparison with the CEDEFOP and ISO guidelines. An additional important source is the comparison



study done by Evangelista (Evangelista 2011). The Guidelines will be discussed further in the context of the six pilots developed during the project.

### **“IMPROVE Guidelines on validation of the outcomes of not formal and informal learning”**

#### **1. Scope of this document<sup>10</sup>**

**1.1.** These guidelines have been developed by the partners of the project IMPROVE *Improving Validation of Not-Formal Learning in European Career Guidance Practitioners* 510640-LLP-1-2010-1-IT-GRUNDTVIG-GMP (2011-2012)<sup>11</sup>. More information can be found on the project website: [www.improveguidance.eu/](http://www.improveguidance.eu/).

**1.2.** These guidelines mostly focus on the validation of the current performance of workers.

#### **2. Glossary**

**2.1. Assessment Center:** a structured assessment process where a group of participants undertakes a standardized series of job-related exercises in controlled conditions under observation, so that their personal characteristics can be assessed. The exercises can include interviews, psychometric tests, individual and group role play (the former includes for example, leaderless discussion).

**2.2. Behavioral Event Interview (BEI):** a structured interview that elicits personal features. The interviewee describes, in his/her own words, what he/she said, thought, felt, and did in six episodes—three positive and three negative—at work. The interview is recorded, transcribed, and coded for various personal characteristics. Personal characteristics are coded both for frequency of occurrence in the interview and for the level of complexity or scope at which they are displayed (adapted by McClelland, 1998).

**2.3. Competent worker:** a person able to perform an occupation or a job task up to a predetermined standard.

**2.4. Elements (for validation):** personal features or key job activities that a worker has respectively to possess or master to successfully pass validation (see Evangelista, 2011).

**2.5. Evidence (for validation):** a proof that demonstrates possession or mastering of the elements on which validation is based.

<sup>9</sup> IMPROVE Guidelines (Version of 21 July 2012),

<http://www.improveguidance.eu/sites/default/files/Guidelines.pdf> (2012-09-16).

<sup>10</sup> The numbering is the original numbering of the IMPROVE Guidelines.

<sup>11</sup> In alphabetical order Leonardo Evangelista (ASEV Agenzia Sviluppo Empolese Valdelsa [www.asev.it](http://www.asev.it), IT), Zuzana Freibergova (Národní vzdělávací fond, o.p.s.[www.nvf.cz/sppps/](http://www.nvf.cz/sppps/), CZ), Rachel Nelson (DEP Institut [www.dep.net](http://www.dep.net), ES) Speranta Tibu (ODIP Asociația Observator pentru Dezvoltarea Învățării Permanente [www.odip.ro](http://www.odip.ro), RO), Mary Tountopoulou ISON Advanced Applications In Management Systems Psychometrica [www.ison.gr](http://www.ison.gr), EL), Peter Weber (Heidelberg University [www.ibw.uni-heidelberg.de/](http://www.ibw.uni-heidelberg.de/), DE) The project has been partly funded by the European Commission. This document reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

**2.6. Job analysis:** a systematic study of the tasks that are performed in a work role and of the personal features necessary to perform them. The tasks are identified drawing a flowchart describing how a job is carried out and this way main tasks, tasks and sub tasks are described as a tree root, where combination of simpler actions allow to carry out the more complicate. The job analysis allows identifying a hierarchy of tasks, from the most important and general (main tasks) to the minor ones (tasks and sub tasks).

**2.7. Job tasks:** the actions that can be identified in a flowchart describing how a job is carried out. See also (job) *main task*.

**2.8. Learning:** a process by which an individual assimilates information, ideas and values and thus acquires knowledge, know-how, skills and/or competences (source: quoted in CEDEFOP (2008) Terminology of European education and training policy. A selection of 100 key terms).

**2.9. Learning outcomes:** the set of knowledge, skills and/or competences an individual has acquired and/or is able to demonstrate after completion of a learning process, either formal, non-formal or informal (source: quoted in CEDEFOP (2008) Terminology of European education and training policy. A selection of 100 key terms).

**2.10. Main (job) task (or key job activity):** each of the main identifiable and self standing activities a person carrying out a job can accomplish.

**2.11. Performance Focused Interview (PFI):** a structured professional discussion (see entry below). In PFI the questions are focused on specific predetermined aspects of performance and all the Candidates are asked the same list of questions. However the evaluator may ask additional questions for clarification or a better understanding.

**2.12. Performance based approach (to validation):** a framework for validation of performance of workers where the elements to be assessed are the performance of job tasks.

**2.13. Personal features:** personal attributes (for example skills, knowledge, attitudes) required to perform a certain work.

**2.14. Personal features based approach (to validation):** a framework for validation of personal features where the elements to be assessed are knowledge and other *personal features*.

**2.15. Professional Checkup:** a methodology for validating performance of practitioners, used in the pilot of the project IMPROVE and based on the Performance Focused Interview. The Professional Checkup can be carried out in small groups or at an individual level. When carried out at an individual level the Professional Checkup is made up of three interviews carried out with an evaluator during a period of 1-3 weeks: the first interview is informative about the methodology, the second uses the Performance Focused Interview technique to assess performance in main tasks for which validation is sought; the third interview is used to help the practitioner to develop an improvement plan. The interviews

can be carried out face to face in person or at distance using videoconference tools.

**2.16. Professional discussion:** An interview conducted between an assessor and Candidate (assessed person), in which the Candidate describes his/her job tasks and how his/her performance achieves requirements set by standards.

**2.17. Professional supervision:** the process in which through focused observation and targeted questions an expert (the supervisor) considers the effectiveness of intervention, supports quality of work and the practitioner's ability of reflection of own work and of feelings during the process of working with clients.

**2.18. Skill:** a personal faculty required to do something or get something done. Skills are of a general nature. For example leadership is a skill, but *to give instructions to subordinates* is the result of applying leadership (together with other skills) to a job task and not a skill in itself.

**2.19. Standard:** something considered by an authority or by general consent as a basis of comparison (source: Dictionary.com)

**2.20. Validation:** a process where a competent body assesses and officially recognizes that a person, a person's activity or one or more personal attributes comply with a predefined standard.

**2.21. Validation framework:** a set of rules for validating performance of workers, personal features of current or perspective employees or knowledge and cognitive skills of perspective students.

### 3. Preamble

**3.1. As learning** refers to the process of learning, the term *validation* must always refer to the outcomes of learning.

**3.2. Validation of the outcomes of non- formal and informal learning** can have three different goals:

- A. to allow to gain an educational title or a vocational qualification by shortening the length of the study path
- B. to hire people (recruitment) or to assign existing workers to higher or diverse positions and responsibilities (potential appraisal)
- C. to be sure current workers perform their tasks up to a set standard.

In cases B and C the outcomes of learning that are validated come from all forms of learning, including formal.

**3.3. Every goal** requires different directions of assessment. For example in case A. general or specialist knowledge and some cognitive skills (reading, writing, calculating) are assessed. In case B Personal features causing good performance on the job, such as knowledge, skills (usually interpersonal and cognitive), attitudes, motives, etc, depending on the target job. In case C. Performance on the job (observed and/or reconstructed).

**3.4.** All validation frameworks include four components (points 3.1., 3.2., 3.3, 3.4.):

**3.5.** What is recognized or granted at the end of the procedure of validation. It can be a title, (for example Education and Vocational Guidance Practitioner, as in the IAEVG's framework), a qualification, an attribute to a qualification (as in Registered EuroPsy Psychologist), or a certificate (such as MEVOC's European Certificate for Career Guidance Counselors) or academic credits.

**3.6.** The elements that the Candidate has to possess (in a personal features based approach; they can be for example knowledge, transversal skills, technical skills, attitudes, character traits, etc.) or master (in a performance based approach; these are job tasks) to be recognized as competent. The elements are the learning outcomes we want to validate.

**3.7.** The evidences that demonstrate possession or mastering of the elements identified in the previous point 3.2. These evidences can be documents or results from tests, interviews, or observation. For example a degree in psychology can be an evidence of some specific knowledge useful for working as a Career Guidance practitioner. Transferable skills are usually elicited and measured by the BEI Behavioral Event Interview and/or leaderless discussion, this last contained in the Assessment Centre. Job main tasks performance can for example be assessed by observation of the worker.

**3.8.** An assessment procedure to collect or to elicit evidences.

**3.9.** More in detail, personal features are usually assessed using a combination of some of the following assessment methods:

1. Examination of Candidate's CV or narrative of professional biography
2. Control of possession of educational qualifications and other educational or training certificates
3. Control of possession of proven experience
4. Interview or written test about technical knowledge
5. Tests (skills, personality, interests, etc.)
6. Role playing focused on transversal skills (as in the Assessment Center)
7. Interview focused on transversal skills (as in BEI Behavioral Event Interview).

**3.10.** More in detail, performance can be assessed using a combination of some of the following assessment methods:

1. Direct observation of the person whilst carrying out his/her work
2. Professional discussion
3. PFI Performance Focused Interview
4. Discussion of case studies
5. Testimonies from colleagues and supervisors
6. Testimonies from clients
7. Examination of documentation produced by the person whilst carrying out his/her work
8. Examination of portfolio of work
9. Simulation of job tasks.

**3.11.** In all frameworks it is necessary to find a good compromise between efficacy and weight of the assessment procedure. A procedure may be very effective but if it requires significant dedication of time and economic resources it will have minimal possibility to become established and widely implemented (unless it is enforced by a public authority). On the other hand, a procedure which requires little time, but is less effective also presents the weakness of minimal utility.

#### **4. The IMPROVE Guidelines**

##### **General principles**

**4.1.** The validation process of current performance of workers must be performance based. Substantial focus on the assessment procedure must include the direct examination of the work performance of the Candidate and/or on the reconstruction of performance of Candidate at work such as in the Performance Focused Interview (PFI).

**4.2.** The elements (job main tasks and job tasks) the Candidates have to master must be previously defined through a job analysis, and examination of available documentation on occupations and a pilot study. The results of the investigation have to be discussed and agreed upon among practitioners and other sector stakeholders.

**4.3.** The evidences that demonstrate mastering of job main tasks should be based on the assessment methods taken from that listed at point 3.10.

**4.4.** Successful validation cannot be conditional on the possession of an educational qualification, proven experience or attendance of specific training courses, membership of association or group.

**4.5.** The validation framework, including its structure, assessment process, roles, scoring system, key terms must be clearly described and freely available.

**4.6.** The assessment process and assessment methodology used must be the same for all Candidates and applied in the same manner by all Assessors.

**4.7.** Validation can be initiated by an organization to check the competence of its employees and collaborators or by the practitioner him/her self. In the second case the validation process, and specifically the evaluator, shall guarantee the confidentiality of the results towards third parties.

**4.8.** When validation is initiated by the practitioner, him/her self, the validation process should also be a learning experience. The Candidates must receive a feedback which precisely describes how they scored on each task that was examined, identification of any areas of improvement and guidance on how to carry out such improvement.

##### **The Assessors**

**4.9.** The Assessors must be appropriately trained for the validation process and possess a thorough working experience of the main tasks they are assessing.

<p><b>4.10.</b> The quality assurance system of the validation procedure has to include professional supervision among the Assessors and the sharing of their experiences with other Assessors for learning purposes.</p> <p><b>4.11.</b> The Assessors must declare any possible conflict of interest and must withdraw themselves from any assessment in which impartiality and confidentiality cannot be assured.</p> <p><b>The assessment process</b></p> <p><b>4.12.</b> A direct examination of the Candidate (direct contact or mediated contact through videoconference) is compulsory.</p> <p><b>4.13.</b> A copy of all the documents has to be conserved and the direct examination should be recorded according to the applicable data privacy regulations of the context of the assessment.</p> <p><b>4.14.</b> The evaluator must write a report on evaluation, which precisely describes the Candidates' main answers, how they scored on each task that was examined, identification of any areas of improvement and guidance on how to carry out such improvement.</p> <p><b>4.15.</b> Feedback on the validation process has to be collected from every participant through a predetermined procedure. The feedback is also part of the documents that must be stored about the validation process on the given Candidate".</p>
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Table 6: The IMPROVE Glossary and the IMPROVE Guidelines<sup>12</sup>

## 2.5. Main aspects and comparison of CEDEFOP, ISO 17024 and IMPROVE Guidelines

The following table is a comparison of the presented Guidelines from the CEDEFOP (CEDEFOP, 2009) publication and the ISO (ISO 17024, 2003) with those developed and applied in the IMPROVE project<sup>13</sup>. Table 7 can be the base for the development and piloting of national validation systems for CG practitioners as well as for the further discussion of the IMPROVE Guidelines for validation of CG practitioners.

Criteria	CEDEFOP	ISO 17024	IMPROVE Guidelines
The Individual CG	The individual is in the centre of the	The certification (policy and procedure)	1.2 These guidelines mostly focus on the validation of the

<sup>12</sup> IMPROVE Guidelines (Version of 21 July 2012), <http://www.improveguidance.eu/sites/default/files/Guidelines.pdf> (2012-09-16).

<sup>13</sup> IMPROVE Guidelines (Version of 21 July 2012), <http://www.improveguidance.eu/sites/default/files/Guidelines.pdf> (2012-09-16).

Criteria	CEDEFOP	ISO 17024	IMPROVE Guidelines
Practitioner	validation. Everybody should have access. Individuals should be supported by information and advice. Validation has to be voluntary. Privacy must be respected, no data from the validation shall be given to third parties. The participants shall be treated in a fair manner.	shall be fair and equal for all candidates. There is a defined policy and procedures for the resolution of appeals and complaints received from applicants.	current performance of workers. 4.7. Validation can be initiated by an organization to check the competence of its employees and collaborators or by the practitioners themselves. In the second case the validation process, and specifically the assessor, shall guarantee the confidentiality of the results towards third parties. 4.8. When validation is initiated by the practitioner, him/her self, the validation process should also be a learning experience. The Candidates must receive a feedback which precisely describes how they scored on each task that was examined, identification of any areas of improvement and guidance on how to carry out such improvement.
General architecture of the validation system	The link to international, national and organisational systems shall be guaranteed. Identification and involvement of all relevant stakeholders. Respect of legitimate interest of all stakeholders. Stakeholders should be integrated in an advisory committee.	The certification body has to be independent and impartial. It shall comply with all applicable regulations and requirements. This should be stated in defined policies. The organisation should be structured to give confidence to all interested parties. The certification body shall be established as a legal entity. A scheme committee is appointed. This is responsible for the accreditation scheme. The necessary finan-	3.2. Validation of the outcomes of non formal and informal learning can have three different goals: A. to allow to gain an educational title or a vocational qualification by shortening the length of the study path B. to hire people (recruitment) or to assign existing workers to higher or diverse positions and responsibilities (potential appraisal) C. to be sure current workers perform their tasks up to a set standard. In cases 2 and 3 the outcomes of learning that are validated come from all forms of learning, including formal.

Criteria	CEDEFOP	ISO 17024	IMPROVE Guidelines
		cial resources have to be guaranteed. Certification activities are distinguished clearly from other activities. Subcontracting is transparent and quality assured.	3.3. Every goal requires different directions of assessment. For example in case A. general or specialist knowledge and some cognitive skills (reading, writing, calculating) are assessed. In case B Personal features causing good performance on the job, such as knowledge, skills (usually interpersonal and cognitive), attitudes, motives, etc, depending on the target job. In case C. Performance on the job (observed and/or reconstructed). 3.8. An assessment procedure to collect or elicit evidences.
Transparency	Information shall be available to potential candidates and third parties about e.g. the validation scheme, requirements, assessment procedure, and process related aspects, quality.	All relevant information shall be stated in defined policies.	4.5. The validation framework, including its structure, assessment process, roles, scoring system, key terms must be clearly described and freely available.
Competence Framework	(Competence) Standards for the validation have to be defined (on European or national level). The Standards has to be transparent and shall be improved continuously.	The certification scheme has to be developed by the scheme committee. The certification body defines a process for the (future) development and maintenance of the certification scheme. The competence scheme is defined in accordance with international standards and other relevant documents.	3.6. The elements that the Candidate has to possess (in a personal features based approach; they can be for example knowledge, transversal skills, technical skills, attitudes, character traits, etc.) or master (in a performance based approach; these are job tasks) to be recognized as competent. The elements are the learning outcomes we want to validate. 4.2. The elements (job main tasks and job tasks) the Candidates have to master must be previously defined through a job analysis, and

Criteria	CEDEFOP	ISO 17024	IMPROVE Guidelines
			examination of available documentation on occupations and a pilot study. The results of the investigation have to be discussed and agreed upon among practitioners and other sector stakeholders.
Methodology	A wide range of methods can be adopted. Methods shall be adopted that meet the specific need for validating the practitioner's competence and the fit for purpose. Assessment Methodology has to fulfil quality standards, e.g. reliability, validity, defined competence scheme, fitness for purpose, sustainability, cost efficacy.	The certification body shall examine competence, based on the requirements of the scheme, by written, oral practical observation or other means. The certification body is responsible to define the methods and mechanisms to assess the competence of the candidate.	4.1. The validation process must be performance based. Substantial focus on the assessment procedure must include the direct examination of the work performance of the candidate and/or on the reconstruction of performance of candidate at work such as in the Performance Focused Interview (PFI). 4.12. A direct examination of the candidate (direct contact or mediated contact through videoconference) is compulsory. 4.3. The evidences that demonstrate mastering of job main tasks should be based on the assessment methods taken from that listed at point 3.10.
The validation process	Validation of competence is following three steps: - Information and Advice - Assessment - Auditing/recognition The process of validation must be impartial and avoid conflicts of interest.	Application contains to provide a detailed description on the certification process that is appropriate to the certification scheme in use. A three step certification process that consists of - Application, - Evaluation (assessment) and - Decision on certification is foreseen.	4.6. The assessment process and assessment methodology used must be the same for all candidates and applied in the same manner by all assessors. 4.12. A direct examination of the Candidate (direct contact or mediated contact through videoconference) is compulsory. 4.13. A copy of all the documents has to be conserved and the direct examination should be recorded according to the applicable data privacy

Criteria	CEDEFOP	ISO 17024	IMPROVE Guidelines
			<p>regulations of the context of the assessment.</p> <p>4.14. The evaluator must write a report on evaluation, which precisely describes the Candidates' main answers, how they scored on each task that was examined, identification of any areas of improvement and guidance on how to carry out such improvement.</p> <p>4.15. Feedback on the validation process has to be collected from every participant through a predetermined procedure. The feedback is also part of the documents that must be stored about the validation process on the given Candidate.</p>
<p>Functions/Roles involved in the process</p>	<p>At least four roles are specific to carry out the validation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Counsellor, (Guide, Career Guidance practitioner) who provides information, advice and guidance for the candidate.</li> <li>- Assessor, who carries out the competence assessment .</li> <li>- Validation process administrator, who manage and organise the procedure.</li> <li>- An external observer, who ensures networking with relevant actors, com-</li> </ul>	<p>All persons involved in the different roles and tasks have the necessary competence.</p> <p>The competence and qualification of all employees or contracted persons shall be identified and documented.</p> <p>Especially they are familiar with the certification scheme, have knowledge of the relevant methods and documents and have appropriate competence in the field to be examined.</p> <p>All shall commit themselves to comply with the rules defined by the certification body.</p>	<p>4.9. The assessors must be appropriately trained for the validation process and possess a thorough working experience of the main tasks they are assessing</p> <p>4.10. The quality assurance system of the validation procedure has to include professional supervision among the assessors and the sharing of their experiences with other assessors for learning purposes.</p>

Criteria	CEDEFOP	ISO 17024	IMPROVE Guidelines
	<p>munication and quality assurance.</p> <p>For each role specific competence and experiences are needed.</p> <p>The persons who carry out the validation in the different roles are trained continuously.</p> <p>The professional competence of those who carry out assessment and validation as well (as the other roles) must be assured.</p>		
Quality Assurance	<p>The System should be underpinned by quality assurance including responsibilities for QA, defined QA mechanisms, evaluation and feedback structures, revision of processes and procedures, training of staff, transparency of QA.</p>	<p>The certification body is responsible for the continuing evaluation of the methods for examination of the candidates.</p> <p>There shall be a defined management system, (e.g. ISO 9001) that covers continual improvement.</p>	<p>4.10. The quality assurance system of the validation procedure has to include professional supervision among the assessors and the sharing of their experiences with other assessors for learning purposes.</p> <p>4.15. Feedback on the validation process has to be collected from every participant through a predetermined procedure.</p>
Conflicts of Interest		<p>The certification body should avoid conflicts of interest.</p> <p>The certification body does not provide training or aid others in the preparation of such services (unless it demonstrates how training is independent of the evaluation and certification).</p> <p>The involved persons shall be free from any</p>	<p>4.11. The assessors must declare any possible conflict of interest and must withdraw themselves from any assessment in which impartiality and confidentiality cannot be assured.</p>

Criteria	CEDEFOP	ISO 17024	IMPROVE Guidelines
		interest so that they can be impartial and make non-discriminatory judgements.	
Documentation		The certification body has to maintain a record system to confirm the status of the certified persons and to document the assessment. All information has to be kept confidential.	4.14. The assessor must write a report on evaluation, which precisely describes the candidates' main answers, how they scored on each task that was examined, identification of any areas of improvement and guidance on how to carry out such improvement. 4.13. A copy of all the documents has to be conserved and the direct examination should be recorded according to the applicable data privacy regulations of the context of the assessment.

Table 7: Comparison of CEDEFOP Guidelines (2009), ISO 17024 (2003) and the IMPROVE Guidelines (own table).

### 3. Overview about Methodology available for assessing competence of Career Guidance practitioners

This chapter is designated to give an overview about available methodology for the validation of performance of competences. In addition to short descriptions it provides some reflection points that help to choose and combine validation methods. An overview about different methods is given by the CEDEFOP Guidelines (CEDEFOP, 2009). A source for more extended descriptions of some methods that are used in the assessment of competence in the service sector is given by ENTO (Read/Wells, 2004). The IMPROVE Guidelines, that are referred to in chapter two pointed out in paragraph 3.6 what kind methodology are used in terms of performance oriented competence assessment within the project IMPROVE. The following sections give first a short introduction into the need of fitness of methodology for the purpose of the validation of CG practitioners' performance of competencies (3.1) and in section 3.2 an overview about available methodology. Chapter 4 will describe the method used in the pilot within the project in detail.

#### 3.1 Fitness of methodology for the validation of Career Guidance practitioners performance of competence

The first aspect that should be considered is the type of competence we are dealing with when looking at CG practitioners. Especially:

- the breadth of knowledge, skills and competences needed in this kind of practice,
- the depth of learning that is required to gather such competence,
- the actuality of the knowledge, skills and competences we are dealing with (CEDEFOP, 2009: 59).

Talking about CG practise it is obvious that we are dealing with a complex, communicative, highly embedded social service that requires recent and actual knowledge from different fields as well as very fundamental knowledge about individuals and communication processes. As discussed in professionalization theory (e.g. Mieg, 2005; Singer/Ricard, 2009), such kind of professional tasks require competence that is developed in a long and intensive

period of learning – whether formal or informal, while formal learning without practical experience and reflection never can be sufficient. Considering this, the methodology being exerted has to fit into such kind of professional competences (see Weber u.a. 2012).

Thus the methods we use in validation of competences and prior learning should fulfil certain criteria set up for instance by the CEDEFOP Guidelines: "It is possible to examine the fitness for purpose of different assessment tools. The following criteria need to be considered for each potentially useful assessment tool" (CEDEFOP, 2009: 59):

- "Validity: the tool must measure what is intended to measure,
- reliability: the extent to which identical results would be achieved every time a candidate is assessed under the same conditions,
- fairness: the extent to which an assessment decision is free from bias (context dependency, culture and assessor bias),
- cognitive range: does the tool enable assessors to judge the breadth and depth of the candidates learning (or competence),
- fitness for purpose of the assessment: ensuring the purpose of the assessment tool matches the use for which it is intended" (CEDEFOP, 2009: 59).

In terms of assessment methodology the first two aspects are the most crucial and relevant ones.

We can distinguish two types of *validity*. First: Do the measurements really cover what shall be realized as competence in practice (validity of the construct) and secondly: do the instruments capture what covers the construct of competence (internal validity). Thus the methodology must have proof e.g. under experimental conditions that it measures what it should measure (*validity*). It should be proven, that the measured aspect is causally linked to the ability to perform in practise.

The actual state is, that there is no methodology used in competence assessment for CG practitioners that has proven validity in this sense. But Examples are existing in parallel sectors, e.g. VET (Achtenhagen/Winther, 2009; Nickolaus u.a., 2009; Abele u.a., 2010; Baethge/Arends, 2009) or counselling and teachers Education (Hertel, 2009).

And the second aspect: *reliability*. This means that the competence that is measured once by a methodology and a certain candidate should be measured each time with the same result, (whether by the same assessor or by another). The proof of reliability, in terms of measuring performance of competence, is difficult to prove because performance of competence is always situated and influenced by many aspects (e.g. the relationship between practitioner and client or between practitioner and assessors and the actual context). Until now none of the methods in use have proven their reliability under research conditions. For both aspects, validity and reliability, more research should be conducted. Until this is realized such methods should be used that have proven their quality in practise. And they should be used under conditions that ensure the best graspable results. E.g. use of more than one assessor, discussing results in teams, documenting methods and results (e.g. by minutes and video).

*Fairness* in terms of the methodology is an additional factor that should be considered. Bias in assessing performance of CG practitioners' competence can come from different reasons. E.g. assessors can have pre-assumptions about certain guidance or counselling approaches or theories. Or assessor and practitioners come from different cultural or social background or have different language. In such cases it should be ensured, that the methodology and e.g. how the assessors make use of it, are open for diversity.

The aspect of *cognitive range* of the instruments should also be considered carefully. The ascertainment of methods have to mirror the breadth and depth of the competence that shall be assessed. Tools should be carefully investigated, if they are able to reach the desired aims in terms of assessing competence. A competence validation procedure should make clear which range of competence can be assessed by the chosen methodology and procedure. By combination of different tools, the probability to evaluate a certain competence in the breath and depth can be improved.

Last not least it should be ensured, that a method of assessment has *proven its fitness of purpose*. E.g. there should be a compensated balance between effort of the methodology and the outcome. Methods in use should be graspable for all parties in terms of time and costs. The aspects of validity, reliability and fitness should be balanced.



### 3.2 Overview about methods available

The methods described and collected in this chapter are drawn from different sources. Aside from the analyses of Evangelista (Evangelista 2011), the CEDEFOP Study on Validation (2009) as well as from ENTO (Read, H./ Wells, 2004). And methods are added that are described and used in different national contexts and projects (see Reid/Ford, 2008; Evangelista, 2007).

It is an important goal of the IMPROVE project, to involve such a methodology that allows to recognise and validate competences and results of experience and former learning in a appropriate manner and depth (see the Guidelines in Chapter 3). In the CEDEFOP Study some criteria on choosing methods are given, that should be discussed when choosing methodology for the validation of former learning and competence:

- When used for validation, tools have to be adopted, combined and applied in a way which reflects the individual specificity and non standardised character of non formal and informal learning.
- Tools for assessment of learning need to be fit for purpose.

Table 8: Effective practise: the methods (CEDEFOP, 2009: 72).

It seems to be important to reflect the argument about the adoption of methodology carefully. The way competence is developed and can be shown by an individual can not standardised, it is always specific and unique. Even more if we reflect, that competence always is a competence to perform a concrete action in a concrete situation (see Weinert, 2001). We argue, that the "fit for purpose" argument should especially reflect the specific problems and demands when we aim to validate performance of competences. In accordance with competence concepts (see. Evangelista, 2011; Evangelista, 2007; Sultana, 2009; Schiersmann/Weber u.a., 2008; Weinert, 2001) it is evident, that competence is a combination of knowledge, skills and also emotional and motivational aspects in certain actions. To take this fact into account, validation has to include methods that allow the observation of performance rather than for instance just a self-rating on the bases of competence catalogues. Useful methods for validating competencies and especially career guidance/counselling competencies are described in several singular approaches (see Evangelista, 2011) and in

comparison in different working papers and publications (Evangelista, 2011; CEDEFOP, 2009; Achtenhagen/Winther, 2009; Nickolaus u.a. 2009; Gnahn, 2007). For an overview we present two of these comparative lists:

- debate: offers the candidate an opportunity to demonstrate depth of knowledge as well as communicative skills;
- declarative methods: based on individuals' own identification and recording of their competences, normally signed by a third party, to verify the self-assessment;
- interviews can be used to clarify issues raised in documentary evidence presented and/or to review scope and depth of learning;
- observation: extracting evidence of competence from an individual while they are performing everyday tasks at work;
- portfolio method: using a mix of methods and instruments employed inconsecutive stages to produce a coherent set of documents or work samples showing an individual's skills and competences in different ways. (...);
- presentation: can be formal or informal and can be used to check ability to present information in a way appropriate to subject and audience;
- simulation and evidence extracted from work: where individuals are placed in a situation that fulfils all the criteria of the real-life scenario to have their competences assessed;
- tests and examinations: identifying and validating informal and non-formal learning through or with the help of examinations in the formal system.

Table 9: Methods of validation (CEDEFOP, 2009: 59f.).

A collection of methods that goes alongside the "performance based approach" is presented in the "Study of existing Frameworks" (see also the Guidelines in chapter 3)

1. direct observation of the person whilst carrying out his/her work
2. simulation of tasks and work situations,
3. discussion of case studies,

4. testimonies from colleagues and supervisors,
5. examination of documentation produced by the person whilst carrying out his/her work,
6. examination of portfolio based evidence,
7. PFI Performance Focused Interview.

Table 10: Methods of validation (IMPROVE Evangelista, 2011: 8).

For the Validation of Career Guidance/Counselling practitioners different types of validation-methods should be distinguished in different categories to discuss their purpose, strengths and weaknesses more clearly.

- Methods Type A: Presentation
- Methods Type B: Self and Peer Assessment
- Methods Type C: Performance oriented methods

In the process of validation methods of all types can be used and combined. Each methodology has its own strengths and weaknesses. From the point of competence theory as well as from the question of validity of assessed competences we can assume, that methods “type B” enables deeper insight into the CG practitioners competence than from “type A” and from “type C” more than “type B”. It is recommended that just methods from type C allow for a concrete and valid judgment whether a person is able to perform a certain competence in accordance to a given task (within a certain setting and under given environmental conditions). The effort we have to put in the validation of performance of competence is growing proportional to its impact. Thus it can be discussed, what kind of combination of the methods in the whole validation process has an acceptable validity and an acceptable cost-effect ratio.

Methods Type A include such methods that are based on written or oral presentations of all kinds of experience and former learning activities that are relevant for the validation process. This type of methodology is important for different reasons. Firstly, the applicant has the chance to show at least partly ‘who he/she is’ by giving a picture of his/her (learning and experience) biography and beyond this about him/herself as a person with background. Due to this, methods are recommended that allows the applicant to add biographical aspects rather than just facts and dates in a CV.

Examples of methods of type A:

- CV (e.g. European CV),
- Portfolio of documents,
- Letter of experience, reported experience and practise,
- Portfolio of relevant pieces of practise.

Methods type B includes all methods that leads to a structured self-assessment against a given competence catalogue. Such self-assessment is of worth to give the applicant the chance to reflect upon the broad scope of competences and to give a statement of his/her own perception of competence. At the same time, it is evident that such methodology never can fulfil the demands stated earlier. One of the problems is of course the fact, that such methods test the self-concept and self-perception of the participant rather than competence. The other weak point is that such methods are very much based on a cognitive and language based approach. Action, experience, emotion and affects as well as performance itself are different aspects and not assessed by these kinds of methods. We assume, that these methods are always a step in the direction of getting insight into competence, not assessment of performed competence itself.

List of methods of type B:

- Describing and presenting of experience
- self-assessment based on competence catalogues

- examination of portfolio based evidence,
- testimonies from colleagues and supervisors,
- structured interviews.

Methods type C include all methods that go beyond the self assessment of competence. In all methods summarised in this category there are two aspects. The first one is the extension of the reflective moment: The practitioner has to work out, where he/she developed a certain competence and how he/she applies it in actual practise. By reflecting, the practitioner can demonstrate e.g. values, experience, flexibility and reasoning he/she is undertaking in practise. The second is the communication with an assessor about this experience. While doing this it should be recognized that validation of competence is different from an oral exam. The purpose is not to make known if a participant is able to give the 'correct answers', but to make evident, that (and how) he/she *is acting in accordance to a certain competence* that is demanded in a certain situation. The methods grouped in this section can come close to get evidence about competencies a person has shown in his/her professional life. But also here, the integration of a real and contextualised situation is missing and the evidence is 'just' indirect in most of the listed methods.

Some of these methods deal with the presentation and validation of a 'real' piece of professional action. As discussed earlier such methods go alongside a higher effort and also higher costs. Often more or less of the core of the competence model can be examined rather than a comprehensive model. Another restriction is, that the given situation (with a client) is always unique (e.g. with special demands) and it can be a source of error to conclude from one single case to a general competence. The benefit, in terms of competence theory is that in the performing situation the real complexity is given and the performed competence is graspable, visible for the assessor. Knowledge, skills and attitudes, the presence of emotions and the control of affects, the acting and parallel the planning of the next step, the presence of basic attitudes like continuing awareness and synchronisation or empathy and so on. It should be noted, that the assessor should make use of a kind of rating instrument that allows him/her to concentrate on the most relevant aspects in a transparent way and to document what has occurred. This is also important because in terms of fairness and learning, the assessor and the client should have the chance to have a conversation about the

session. In some approaches this is of special interest also in terms of the competence of the practitioner (subjective-theory-approaches).

List of methods of type C:

- Self-assessment and external assessment with collection of evidence on experience and pieces of practice,
- reflexive conversation,
- role play,
- discussion of case studies,
- debate on competences and experience,
- PFI 'Performance Focused Interview',
- direct observation of the person whilst carrying out his/her work,
- observation on basis of video taped sessions,
- simulation of tasks and work situations.

In the following chapter 5. one specific methodology from type C, the Performance Focused Interview (PFI) will be described in depth.

## 4. Validation of not formal and informal learning in practice<sup>14</sup>

This chapter describes:

- A. the choices and practical steps in developing a tool for validating not formal and informal learning outcomes and
- B. the Professional Checkup, a tool for validating not formal and informal learning used in the pilot of the European Project IMPROVE.

For a glossary of the terms used in this chapter (validation, personal features, key activities, etc.) please see the Glossary contained in the IMPROVE Guidelines. For an in depth description of some existing frameworks for validation used in the career guidance field see Evangelista (2011).

### 4.1 Developing a tool for validating not formal and informal learning

When validating non-formal and informal learning outcomes, several choices have to be made. We list them one by one.

#### 4.1.1 The goal of validation

From the outset, we have to decide the goal of validation. There are three main possibilities:

- to shorten the length of a study path in order to gain an educational title or a vocational qualification;
- recruitment or potential appraisal: to hire people or to assign existing workers to higher or diverse positions and responsibilities;
- to be sure current workers perform their tasks up to a predetermined standard.

In case 2 we want to foresee what the future performance will be. It is worth pointing out that in both case 2 and 3 the outcomes of learning that are validated come from all forms of learning, including formal learning.

<sup>14</sup> Author of this chapter is Leonardo Evangelista, ASEV, 3<sup>rd</sup> July-2012, editing courtesy of Rachel Nelson.

#### 4.1.2 What is recognized or granted at the end of the procedure of validation

The second step is to decide what will be recognized or granted at the end of the procedure of validation. It can be (Evangelista 2011) a title (for example Education and Vocational Guidance Practitioner, as in the IAEVG's framework), a vocational qualification, an educational qualification, an attribute to a qualification (as in Registered EuroPsy Psychologist), a certificate (such as MEVOC's European Certificate for Career Guidance Counselors) or academic credits.

#### 4.1.3 The list of elements the successful candidate has to possess or master, their level and scoring system

The third step is to draw up a list of elements the successful Candidate has to possess or master to achieve validation and a specification of the desired level of attainment of each element. The elements are the learning outcomes we want to validate. Depending on the goal of validation the elements assessed can be knowledge and cognitive skills (goal 1), personal features in general (goal 2), or main tasks, tasks and subtasks carried out at work (goal 3) (see table 11). In the case of goals 2 and 3, the list of elements can also be referred to as a competence framework or a competence profile.

Goal	What is assessed
1. to issue educational title or a vocational qualification by shortening the length of the study path	Usually general or technical knowledge and some cognitive skills (reading, writing, calculating, etc.)
2. recruitment or potential appraisal (to hire people or to assign existing workers to higher or diverse positions and responsibilities)	Personal features which result in good performance on the job, such as knowledge, skills (usually interpersonal and cognitive), attitudes, motives, etc, depending on the target job
3. to be sure workers perform their tasks up to a predetermined optimum standard	Performance on the job (observed and/or reconstructed)

Table 11: Goals of validation of not formal and informal learning and direction for assessing.

The lists of elements can be defined by different means. When the goal is to shorten the length of the study path to gain an educational title or a vocational qualification, the requested knowledge (and sometimes cognitive skills) and their respective levels are listed in the syllabus of the course.

In recruitment and potential appraisal the list (and sometimes level) of desired personal features can be taken from descriptions of occupation profiles or directly elicited using a BEI Behavioral Event Interview. The BEI can be defined as *(IMPROVE Guidelines) a structured interview which elicits personal features. The interviewee describes, in his/her own words, what he/she said, thought, felt, and did in six episodes—three positive and three negative—at work. The interview is recorded, transcribed, and coded for various personal characteristics. Personal characteristics are coded both for frequency of occurrence in the interview and for the level of complexity or scope at which they are displayed.*

The list of main tasks (and sometime levels of performance) can also be taken from descriptions of occupation profiles or produced directly by a job analysis. Job analysis can be defined as *(IMPROVE Guidelines) a systematic study of the tasks that are performed in a work role. The actions are identified drawing a flowchart describing how a job is carried out and this way main tasks, tasks and sub tasks are described as a tree root, where combination of simpler actions allow to carry out the more complicate. The job analysis allows identifying a hierarchy of tasks, from the most important and general (main tasks) to the minor ones (tasks and sub tasks).*

When the levels (of knowledge, personal features or performance) are not already available, they have to be defined.

In some frameworks for validation levels are not listed nor explicitly defined, but nonetheless they are considered met if a specific evidence is possessed. For example possession of a specific educational title or of some year of specific study can be considered enough to prove possession of an adequate body of knowledge in a specific field or mastery of specific cognitive skills.

Most frameworks rely on implicit levels of understanding by the Assessor: the Assessor compares the evidence provided or elicited by the Candidate with his/her own opinion on what the level should be. In these cases, the opinion of the Assessor is often built on experience of evaluation with previous Candidates or, when performance is assessed, in direct previous professional experience of the Assessor in the same main tasks to be assessed. Implicit levels can be misleading because different Assessors can have different ideas about the standard level.

Clearly, to explicit validation levels requires additional work by framework developers and is often elusive, but it is worth the effort because it allows for a more precise and uniform validation.

An implicit level understanding is requested even when some description of levels is provided. For example, IAEVG's Educational and Vocational Guidance Practitioners framework describes the levels of performance of some tasks and some knowledge in terms of *(0) Negligible, (1) Inadequate, (2) Competent (3) Significant (4) Outstanding*, but the meaning of each term is not further described (IAEVG, no date).

A more precise description of levels can be taken from the *EQF European Qualification Framework*. The levels for 'competence' are *1. work or study under direct supervision in a structured context; 2. work or study under supervision with some autonomy; 3. take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study; 4. manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches and take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams; etcetera.* (Education and Culture DG, no date). However, this is still unsatisfactory, as for example in level 2 it is not clear how *some autonomy* is defined.

The scoring system can be only defined once the elements have been determined and their desired levels defined. There are several options: for example it can be decided that the Candidate has to be assessed and meet the standard in all the elements or only in a sample of them or that every element has to be assessed and scored. Similarly, it can be decided that the scale for scoring has to be yes or no or graduated in a range such as 1 to 5.

#### **4.1.4. The evidence that demonstrates possession or mastering of the elements by the successful candidate**

Once a list of elements has been agreed upon, the evidence to be presented must be decided. In many frameworks for validation whose goal is to permit a shorter study path to an educational title, the evidence can be certifications about previous (interrupted) studies granted by educational authorities or, in the case of a vocational qualification, certifications about length of previous work experiences granted by former employers. More rarely, the Candidate has to pass written, oral or (in the case of vocational qualifications) practical tests.

The tools for collecting evidence related to personal features are numerous (*IMPROVE Guidelines*):

1. Examination of Candidate's CV or narrative of professional biography (the evidence being a declaration by the Candidate of previous experience in work and education)
2. Control of possession of educational qualifications and other educational or training certificates (the evidence being the certificates)
3. Control of possession of proven experience (the evidence being the certificates granted by former employees)
4. Interview or written test about technical knowledge (the evidence being the answers to the question or the results of the test)
5. Tests (skills, personality, interests, etc.) (the evidence being in the scores in each test)
6. Role playing focused on transversal skills (as in the Assessment Center) (the evidence being the results of each role playing)
7. Interview focused on transversal skills (as in BEI Behavioral Event Interview) (the evidence being the assessment of the interview).

Evidence related to performance on the job can be collected by a combination of the following (*IMPROVE Guidelines*):

1. Direct observation of the person whilst carrying out his/her work (the evidence being observed performance)
2. Professional discussion (the evidence being the answers to the questions of the interviewer)
3. PFI Performance Focused Interview (the evidence being the answers to the questions of the interviewer)
4. Discussion of case studies (the evidence being the answers to the questions of the interviewer)
5. Testimonies from colleagues and supervisors (the evidence being the testimonies)
6. Testimonies from clients (the evidence being the testimonies)
7. Examination of documentation produced by the person whilst carrying out his/her work (the evidence being the documents)

8. Examination of portfolio of work (the evidence being the works presented)
9. Simulation of job tasks (the evidence being observed performance).

#### 4.1.5 The procedure of validation

The last step in developing a tool for validating not formal and informal learning outcomes is shaping a procedure (several activities within a certain logical and chronological order, using a combination of the tools for collecting evidence listed in the previous section) to measure possession or mastering of the elements.

In shaping the procedure and choosing the tools it has to be considered that in validation it is necessary to find a good compromise between efficacy and weight of the assessment procedure. A procedure may be very effective but if it requires significant dedication of time and economic resources it will have minimal possibility to become established and widely implemented (unless it is enforced by a public authority). On the other hand, a procedure which requires little time, but is less effective also presents the weakness of minimal utility (*IMPROVE Guidelines*, see Chapter 2.4).

#### 4.2 The Professional Checkup

The Professional Checkup (from now on PC) is the methodology for validation of performance used in the pilot of the project *IMPROVE* (Evangelista, 2012). The PC was initially developed by Leonardo Evangelista thanks to a previous European project<sup>15</sup> and additional individual work<sup>16</sup>, then it was refined, translated and piloted in several European countries thanks to the *IMPROVE* Project Partners.

Following the pilot results, the initial PC structure has undergone some minor changes; furthermore, in the final structure there are some differences amongst partner countries to take into account national contexts. The following description refers to the structure of the PC produced after the pilot and adapted to the Italian context.

<sup>15</sup> See EAS. European Accreditation Scheme for Careers Guidance Practitioners website. Retrieved on the 10th July 2012 at <http://www.corep.it/eas/uk/>

<sup>16</sup> See Evangelista L. (no date). EAF Accreditation Framework for the European Career Guidance Practitioners at a Glance. Retrieved on the 10th July 2012 at <http://orientamento.it/orientamento/1e.htm>

The PC described here refers to practitioners delivering career guidance. However, the PC methodology can also be used in other fields by using a different list of elements (competence frameworks) developed in accordance with the activities carried out in other sectors.

#### 4.2.1 The goal of validation

In the PC, the goal of validation is to be sure career guidance practitioners perform their tasks up to a predetermined standard, so validation is focused on their current performance.

#### 4.2.2 What is recognized or granted at the end of the procedure of validation

The successful Candidate receives a certificate (*The PC Certificate*) listing the main task (s) and corresponding elements that have been assessed and stating his/her expertise has been valued adequate to the standards:

*We declare that [name of Candidate] has carried out the PC for the main task(s) [name of the main task (s) considered]. During the PC the expertise of the Candidate has been assessed in the following elements [names of the elements assessed] and recognized as adequate to the standards in all the elements, with a total score of [score reached].*

The unsuccessful Candidate receives a certificate listing the main task (s) and corresponding elements that have been assessed and stating he/she has drawn up a plan for improvement.

*We declare that [name of Candidate] has carried out the PC for the main task(s) [name of the main task (s) considered]. During the PC the expertise of the Candidate has been assessed in the following elements[names of the elements assessed]. During the PC the Candidate has set up a plan for improvement.*

#### 4.2.3 The list of elements the successful candidate has to possess or master

As the goal of the PC is to assess current performance in work, 3 main tasks were defined then further divided into subtasks (assessed elements) to take into consideration the diversity and character of Career Guidance work activities. The job main tasks are listed and described in Table 12.

1. Deliver information related to career guidance as a separate activity	This is usually carried out by interactions lasting few minutes at the counters of career guidance services or by telephone or electronic mail. In this main task the practitioner doesn't examine in depth the situation of the client, and only information is delivered.
2. Perform career guidance interviews (with adults, with young students or for both)	This is usually carried out on appointment in a reserved space. During the interview the practitioner carries out an in depth analysis of the situation of the client and assists him/her in drawing up a realistic and effective action plan.
3. Carry out career guidance activities in small groups (with adults, with young students or for both)	This is usually carried out with students (often focused on improving knowledge of self, of educational opportunities and on improving decision skills) and adult unemployed (often focused on improving job search skills).

Table 12: Job main tasks used in the PC and their description

Main tasks II and III are differentiated by kind of clients, depending on if the Candidate works mainly with adults or with young students (<18 years of age) or with both. The PC has a mosaic structure: the Candidate can choose on what main tasks (and for main tasks II and III what kind of clients too) he/she wants to be assessed. Differentiation by main tasks and clients allows the process to take into consideration the different contexts and specialization in which career guidance is delivered. For example in many Italian schools career guidance delivery is entrusted to ordinary teachers that work only inside the school within single classes. They can choose to be assessed (and receive a PC Certificate) only on main task III. *Carry out career guidance activities in small groups with young students.*

This way there are 7 different kinds of the PC Certificate that can be granted: 3 each for main task II. *Perform career guidance interviews:* with adults, with young students or with both and III. *Carry out career guidance activities in small groups:* with adults, with young students or for both plus 1 for main task I. *Deliver information related to career guidance as a separate activity.*

For every main task the PC lists the tasks and subtasks that make it possible. These elements are assessed and are those that must be mastered by the successful Candidate. It is worth pointing out that in the PC the main tasks are not assessed directly, but indirectly by evaluating the performance of the Candidate in tasks and some subtasks that make each main task possible. Table 13 below lists all the elements referred to within main tasks II and III (first column) and (other columns) which elements are assessed depending on main task and type of client.

List of tasks and subtasks to be assessed (elements) for main tasks II and III	Job main task II. with adults	Job main task II. with young students	Job main task III. with adults	Job main task III. with young students
1. Use appropriate interview techniques to manage the interview	X	X		
2. Use appropriate group facilitation techniques to manage small groups			X	X
3. Assist adult clients to identify their professional goals	X			
4. Assist young clients in their educational and training choices		X		X
5. Assist clients to determine and implement action plans related to work or learning	X	X	X	X
6. Assist adult clients in their job search	X		X	
7. Working relationships of the Candidate with practitioner belonging to external organizations	X	X	X	X
8. Deliver updated and reliable career guidance information	X	X	X	X

9. Develop clients' career skills	X	X	X	X
10. Develop and apply ethical practice	X	X	X	X
11. Continuously improve own knowledge and skills and the service	X	X	X	X

Table 13: List of tasks and subtasks to be assessed (elements) for main tasks II and III

Elements 7 to 11 are transversal sub tasks embedded in job tasks that make main tasks II and III possible, therefore they are always assessed.

The elements underlined in left column of Table 3 must be combined depending upon the main task and type of clients chosen by the Candidate. For example, element 1. *Use appropriate interview techniques to manage the interview* (whatever clients' typology) will be assessed only when a Candidate requests to have his/her performance validated on main task II. *Perform career guidance interviews* and element 2. *Use appropriate group facilitation techniques to manage small groups* only when a Candidate requests to have his/her performance validated on main task III. *Carry out career guidance activities in small groups* (whatever clients' typology).

A Candidate requesting to have his/her performance validated in main task II. *Perform career guidance interviews with adults* will be assessed on elements 1, 3, and from 5 to 12. A Candidate requesting to have his/her performance validated in main task II. *Perform career guidance interviews with young students* will be assessed on elements 1, 4, 5 and from 7 to 12. For the description of the levels of each element and of the scoring system of the PC see the next section.

#### 4.2.4 The evidence that demonstrates possession or mastering of the elements

One must keep in mind that in validation a compromise has to be found between efficacy and the weight of the assessment procedure, in the PC the main tool chosen for collecting evidence is the PFI Performance Focused Interview. Element 1. *Use appropriate interview techniques to manage the interview* is also assessed by examining the quality of interaction of the Candidate with the Assessor during the PFI (see table 17).



The PFI can be defined as (The *IMPROVE Guidelines*): a standardized structured professional discussion, that is to say an interview conducted between an Assessor and Candidate (assessed person), in which the Candidate describes his/her job tasks and how his/her performance achieves requirements set by standards. In PFI the questions are focused on specific predetermined aspects of performance and all the Candidates are asked the same list of questions. However the Assessor may ask additional questions for clarification or a better understanding.

In the PFI, the evidence for determining validation is the answers given by the Candidate to the interview questions. For example the questions used to collect evidence about element 11. *Continuously improve own knowledge and skills and the service* are the following:

Questions	Criteria to be considered under the cut off
1. Could you please list resources / tools you can use to improve your own skills and knowledge related to Career Guidance?	<i>For question 1: Candidate doesn't know most of the resources listed in the document Informative for Candidates.</i>
2. What have you done in the last year to improve your knowledge and skills?	<i>For questions 2, 3: in the last 12 months Candidate has not carried out any activity to improve knowledge or skills (read books, articles, websites, specialized mailing lists, attended conferences, shared cases with colleagues, etc.) or has no plans for the future</i> <i>For questions 4, 5: in the last 12 months Candidate has not carried out nor planned any activity except in case this depends by strict procedures and not space given to suggestions of employees</i>
3. What will you do in the next 12 months?	
4. What have you done in the last year to improve the service where you work?	
5. What will you do in the next 12 months?	

Table 14: Questions and cut off criteria for element 11. *Continuously improve own knowledge and skills and the service.*

In the right hand column the criteria or level considered as under the required standard are listed. For example, if in question 2 the Candidate affirms he/she has not carried out any

activity to improve knowledge or skills in the last 12 months, he/she is considered to have performed under the standard in element 11.

To be successfully validated in the PC the Candidate must give answers above the cut off levels for all the questions within all elements, that is to say that if in one question of one element the response is under the cut off point, then the validation of the related main task is considered unsuccessful. The reason for this policy is that all the elements of the PC are considered fundamental and compulsory for satisfactory performance each main task. In the case of an unsuccessful PC, a new PC focused only on the elements not previously passed can be requested after 6 months, but no later than 12 months after the first PC.

In order to have a more precise description of the general expertise of Candidate, every element is scored using a 4 point scale (see table 16 below), this, however, does not alter the general rule that the successful Candidate must perform above the cut off levels in his/her answers to all questions. The total score, in the case of successful validation, is listed in the *PC Certificate*.

Score	Meaning and criteria
1	fully not met: Candidate under the cut off in more than 1 question of the same element
2	not met: Candidate under the cut off in 1 question of the element
3	met: when Candidate is convincing about performance but cannot explain clearly embedded theory and principles
4	4 very good: when Candidate is convincing about performance and can explain clearly embedded theory and principles

Table 15: Score range and criteria for scoring of single elements.

Table 16 below shows the Evaluation log that both the Assessor and the Candidate (see point 5 of the procedure described below) have to fill out.

1. ID of Assessor.....
2. ID of Candidate .....

3. Main task(s) and kind of clients chosen by the Candidate .....	
4. Date of interview 2 .....	
Please give your marks to the elements that follows according to the following criteria:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 fully not met: fully under the standard</li> <li>• 2 not met: slightly under the standard</li> <li>• 3 met: when Candidate is convincing about performance but cannot explain clearly embedded theory or principles</li> <li>• 4 very good: when Candidate is convincing about performance and can explain clearly embedded theory or principles</li> </ul>	
Please score only the elements appropriate to the combination of main task(s) and kind of clients chosen by the Candidate.	
When an element is scored 2 or 1, under <i>Reasons for the score</i> it has to be listed also the number of the question(s) where the cut off was not met.	
Elements	Rating
1.A. Use appropriate <u>interview</u> techniques to manage the interview (evaluation to be based on the answers to the questions of the PFI for element 1) Reasons for the score .....	
1.B. Use appropriate <u>interview</u> techniques to manage the interview (evaluation to be based on the quality of interaction of Candidate with assessor during the overall PFI) Reasons for the score .....	
2. Use appropriate <u>group facilitation</u> techniques to manage small groups Reasons for the score .....	
3. Assist <u>adult</u> clients to identify professional goals Reasons for the score .....	
4. Assist <u>young</u> clients in their educational and training choices	

Reasons for the score .....	
5. Assist clients to determine and implement action plans related to work or learning Reasons for the score .....	
6. Assist <u>adult</u> clients in their job search Reasons for the score .....	
7. Working relationships of the participant with practitioner belonging to external organizations Reasons for the score .....	
8. Deliver updated and reliable career guidance information Reasons for the score .....	
9. Develop clients' career skills Reasons for the score .....	
10. Develop and apply ethical practice Reasons for the score .....	
11. Continuously improve own knowledge and skills and the service Reasons for the score .....	
Total score	
Final result (performance in the combination of main task(s) and kind of clients chosen by the Candidate) Validated / not validated	

Table 16: Evaluation log for each Candidate (main tasks 2 and 3)<sup>17</sup>.

#### 4.2.5 The procedure of validation

In the PC procedure there are two distinct roles: the Process Manager and the Assessor.

The Process Manager:

- Receives requests for information by potential Candidates and if necessary directs them to the document Informative for Candidates to the PC available on PC website.

<sup>17</sup>For the sake of brevity, the elements of Main Task 1 are not listed here.

- Receives from Candidates requests to undergo the PC, as well as their CVs and their written authorization about privacy of data collected, including an authorization to record interviews
- Assigns Candidates to an Assessor
- Checks that the process is carried out according to the set procedure
- Carries out sample checks on the activity of the Assessors by reviewing the videos of interviews
- Examines the feedbacks of the Candidates on the PC (including evaluations of the Assessors' behavior and expertise)
- Prints and sends to PC Certificate to the Candidates
- Keeps the registry of Candidates and the PC results of every Candidate
- Invoices the Candidates
- Studies and gives suggestions about improvements to the PC procedure
- Writes periodical accounts about the diffusion and popularity of the PC.

The Assessor:

- Carries out the PC according to the procedure
- Gives periodical suggestions about improvements to the PC procedure

It is worth pointing out that external assessment (assessment carried out by a third party, the Assessor) is only one component of the PC. Once the Candidate has been assessed he/she is requested to self-assess him/herself using the same grid (Assessment log) used by the Assessor (see point 5 of the procedure described below). Then the Candidate and the Assessor compare and discuss their grids. Finally the Assessor helps the Candidate to draw up a Plan for Improvement.

For each of his/her assigned Candidates, the Assessor will carry out 3 interviews in 1-3 weeks' time. To spare costs of travel, the PC is usually carried out using a videoconferencing software such as Skype. In any event, it can also be carried out face to face in person. To make the interview for assessment more manageable, some elements are assessed through written responses. To allow for sample checks of the Assessor's activity, interviews 2 and 3 are recorded and stored in a restricted area of the PC website. To avoid halo effects, the Assessor receives the Candidate's CV only after the interview for assessment (interview 2) has been carried out.

The detailed procedure of the PC is the following:

1. The Assessor contacts the Candidate in order to agree upon the timing of the PC.
2. Interview 1: the Assessor checks the Skype functioning of the Candidate in case Skype is going to be used for the next interviews and gives the Candidates additional information on the PC if needed. Interview 1 is brief (15-20 minutes).
3. The Assessor sends to the Candidate the questions related to the elements 7 to 11 to which the Candidate answers in writing.
4. The Assessor receives the answers by electronic mail and examines the answers related to the elements 7-11.
5. Interview 2: the Assessor interviews the Candidate on the remaining elements following a Blueprint of questions. Interview 2 takes about 1 hour. At the end of Interview 2 the Assessor sends the Candidate an empty Assessment Log and the Blueprint of questions and asks the Candidate to assess him/herself within one day of completing the assessment interview. As soon as the Interview is finished the Assessor also fills out the Assessment Log.
6. The Candidate sends to the Assessor the Assessment Log and his/her CV.
7. In no more than one week the Assessor examines the Assessment Log filled by the Candidate, adding his/her scores and comments together with a grid where the Candidate is requested to draw up a Plan for Improvement.
8. The Candidate examines the feedback by the Assessor, fills out the grid of the Plan for Improvement and sends it to the Assessor.

9. Interview 3: the Assessor and the Candidate discuss the results of Interview 2 and finalize the Plan for Improvement. Interview 3 takes about 1 hour.
10. The Assessor transmits to the Candidate a link of an online questionnaire where the Candidate expresses his/her feedback on the PC procedure and the Assessor's behavior and expertise.

The validation process is finished by sending the PC Certificate to the Candidate.

on main body) and kind of events chosen by the candidate .....

4. Date of interview 3 .....

For every element, please write how you can improve or keep updated your performance or professional behavior and when you can do it. In doing this exercise, please keep in mind there are several ways to learn:

1. By attending a class based course, in the traditional way
2. Cooperating with other colleagues, through community of practice based on websites or mailing lists.
3. On your own through websites, books, journals
4. On your own reflecting on your practice
5. On your workplace, under mentoring by a colleague or supervisor.

In your Plan for Improvement it can be useful:

- A. to define what you what to learn or improve, possibly defining clearly the level of knowledge or performance you want to reach
- B. to define what kind of help you want to get by a community of practice, a colleague or a supervisor
- C. to decide how much time and when you want to reserve for learning
- D. to keep a learning log describing you learning (it can be shared with other learners using social websites such as Facebook)
- E. to verify periodically how your learning is going by talking with a friend, a colleague,

Element	Score (self-assessment)	Score (Assessor)	How I can improve	When I want to do it
1. Use appropriate <u>interview</u> techniques to manage the interview				
2. Use appropriate <u>group facilitation</u> techniques to manage small groups				
3. Assist <u>adult</u> clients to identify professional goals				
4. Assist <u>young</u> clients in their educational and training choices				
5. Assist clients to determine and implement action plans related to work or learning				
6. Assist <u>adult</u> clients in their				

job search				
7. Working relationships of the participant with practitioner belonging to external organizations				
8. Deliver updated and reliable career guidance information				
9. Develop clients' career skills				
10. Develop and apply ethical practice				
11. Continuously improve own knowledge and skills and the service				
12. Communication				

Table 17: Plan for Improvement (for main tasks 2 and 3).

## 5. IMPROVE national report – overview about the national pilots carried out in six countries

### 5.1 Introduction

The pilot consisted in assessing the performance of career guidance practitioners and testing, in turn, the framework for assessment. The assessed elements were developed within IMPROVE with reference to previous Projects (see chapter 4). The Guidelines (see chapter 2.4) have been the basic quality criteria for the pilot. It should be noted that only performance in *career guidance interviews* was assessed, while other activities such as, for example, to deliver *career guidance information* as a standalone activity or *carry out CG activities in small groups* are not considered. A full report of the pilot will be published.

The pilot took place in six countries, led by six organizations dedicated to research, training and the delivery of career guidance services. The IMPROVE project partners carried out the pilot within their network and their own validation context which are described below.

CZ. The Czech partner is a NGO with strong links with the Association of the Educational Guidance Counsellors (school level) and the Association of the University Guidance Counsellors. Both Associations' Boards have been reserved and distant regarding full involvement in the pilot process of IMPROVE validation. The Guidance Services Support Unit is, at the moment, working on a national project on "bilan de compétences" and its working group composed of experienced career guidance counsellors also demonstrated the same unwilling approach to the IMPROVE pilot. Therefore, the starting point of piloting was quite complicated and not easy.

DE. It is important to support the national developments for more coherent systems in Guidance and Counselling. This pilot ensures the necessary experience for the institutes responsible for Guidance. The testing of tools, the questionnaire, the organisational process, the contacts with good assessors is very important as well as the experience in organizing the trainings, development of good role plays, experience with new communication methods like making interviews on skype, etc. is very good.

ES. DEP Institute is a private organization specialised in strategic, sociologic and marketing research and information in the field of education, training and work with more than 15 years of experience working at the local, regional, state and European levels. Educaweb.com, created in 1998 by DEP, is the leading portal of academic and professional guidance and information services in Spain with more than 45.000 resources. While DEP does not provide regular training for CG practitioners, it has strong ties to the guidance and education communities through its network of clients and its sister company, Educaweb.

GR. There is a lot of interest in the topic in Greece, as there is no formal system for accreditation of CG counsellors, though the number of CG counsellors is getting bigger. Ison Psychometrica was responsible for the pilot in Greece and is responsible for the data processing and statistical analyses for the whole pilot.

IT. In Italy the professions in career guidance are not regulated (only some very wide requisites are set by some Regions and additionally by social partners for working in training organizations) and many career guidance practitioners (from now onward CGP) learn to work mixing formal learning with (in bigger part) learning on the job and self-administered learning. Formal learning: general university courses such as in Education, Psychology or Social Sciences, but sometimes CG practitioners hold degrees not related to CG, university masters and not university workshops focused on CG. Learning on the job and self-directed learning can include internships, reflecting on its own work, reading books and website about CG, participating to conferences and so on. For this reasons there is a general request for methodologies that allow for the identification of competent CGP notwithstanding their formal learning training paths. The pilot in Italy was organized in agreement with three Italian CG Practitioners Associations that are interested in practicing methodologies for validation because they want to develop a Register of the IT CG practitioners. The associations invited their members to participate in the pilot as Candidate and to be trained as assessors.

RO. It is an important topic especially for the educational sector where the network of CG practitioners is growing. Accreditation and supervision is mainly for psychologists, but there are also initiatives for professionals with other backgrounds. The reflection on one's own experience within a good framework is important for the professionals.

## 5.2 The Assessors and their training

It was important to find suitable assessors and to train them adequately for the pilot actions. The different countries referred for this reason to the description of the process and took several ways to manage this important step successfully. There were theoretical trainings by Skype and in real time, role-plays and supervision. There were at least two evaluators trained in each country. Some assessors received payment and others volunteered their time. Most countries required that CG practitioners have experience of more than 4000 hours in the field of career guidance in order to be assessors. The characteristics of the assessors and their training in each country are noted below.

CZ. Two career guidance counsellors offered their help with piloting and an agreement to carry out the pilot testing of eleven assessments was made with each of them and both fulfilled their task very well. Training took place in three steps: 1) study the materials in detail 2) a Skype conference helped to ask the open questions in going through the whole blueprint. During the Skype they had to take interviews in both roles, the assessor and the assessed participant.

DE. The organiser in Germany involved 6 CG practitioners with scientific backgrounds and interest in further developments in terms of competence recognition. The Trainings started in an online-conference and the materials were given to prepare the assessors. Their feedback was used to improve the questionnaire. All assessors were trained in a workshop with role-plays and to reflect their first experience with the instruments.

ES. The assessors involved in the pilot are all active guidance practitioners and all assessors are regular collaborators with DEP Institute and Educaweb.com. Assessors have experience with both academic and professional guidance, with years of experience in local public employment services. Currently, however, the assessors' work is primarily in academic guidance services for young people. The training of the assessors consisted of a one-day training session (6h) and two follow-up training and discussion sessions of about two hours each. The training sessions consisted of a review of the theory related to the IMPROVE assessment methodology and then a detailed review and role-playing with the blueprint of questions. After the initial training session and by request of the assessors, each of them prepared written answers to the blueprint questions in order to have a second session all together dedicated to an analysis of the scoring system and in order to become more familiar

with the blueprint of questions. The pilot manager met with the assessors once a month to supervise, find solutions for issues and more.

GR. Greece made an announcement to CG practitioners and a mailing and got 20 applicants. With every applicant an interview took place, where the process manager decided who met the minimum standard of more experience in CG than 4000 hours. In the end 6 assessors started the 3 full- day training process. The assessors met once a month for supervision.

IT. Italy wrote to 3000 organizations delivering CG and made mailings and mailing lists to find adequate assessors. The IT coordinator found 46 available assessors, but in the end there were just 22 which started the training. A blended learning training took place after a real time workshop with theoretical parts on the basis of the checkup, the structure and with role-plays. Skype meetings added the forums page to discuss the documents, which the assessors were given. They had the task to present themselves on a webpage, to read articles, to participate in the presence training, to carry out one checkup as interviewee with an assessor in training, to carry out the checkup as an active assessor with 5 candidates and to observe 5 candidates interviewed by another assessor in real time or in video. Just 9 assessors arrived at the end of the training path.

RO. The ODIP sent information about IMPROVE to many institutions concerned with the topic of CG. 6 CV's were received, all of them complied with the IMPROVE criteria for assessors. Assessors received the four documents (translated into Romanian) to work with and to pose questions on the one-day training which was divided into a theoretical part of 4 hours and a role-play part. 3 additional sessions also took place.

## 5.2 Structure of the pilot validation process: The three steps (Interviews)

In all countries the main pilot documents were translated into all country languages. Almost all scored with a 1-4 mark scale. 2 of the 6 countries evaluated the elements and not every question. The process was similar in all countries with small adaptations to each context. In almost all cases a 3-step-interview process was undertaken, some pilots consisted in completely in face-to-face interactions, but skype and even phone were also used to carry out the interviews.

CZ. The department translated / produced the following documents:

1. IMPROVE Information for pilot participants (containing information both for participants and assessors)
2. IMPROVE Template for recording the results of assessment interviews (containing only short guidelines how to do the interview, how to score the answers and the blueprint of questions)
3. IMPROVE Report for assessed participants (containing scoring of 9 elements and final verdict – succeeded x not succeeded)
4. IMPROVE Certificate

DE. All relevant documents have been translated into German. Some aspects were added or changed, so that it suits better to the national context. Especially:

1. IMPROVE Information for pilot participants
2. IMPROVE Template for recording the results of assessment interviews.

The Interview took place face-to-face or online or via telephone. After every interview a feedback loop have taken place to give the participant feedback regarding his/her results. Additional guidance was not part of the pilot in Germany. But the participants are informed where such support is available.

ES. The Informative for Participants and the Informative for the assessors were translated into Spanish with some slight linguistic adaptations. Furthermore the blueprint was translated. Interview 2 was blind, the assessor received access to the CV of the candidates after Interview 2 and before Interview 3.

GR. The Greek team followed as close as possible to the methodology agreed with the IMPROVE team. The first interview was to explain the process to the candidate and to answer questions. It took between 25-40 minutes. 2-7 days later interview 2 took place (phone, skype or face-to-face). There were always 4 people: the candidate, the main assessor, the process manager and the observer. Every question was given a mark 1-4. Interview 2 took one hour – 90 minutes. After Interview 2 the candidate had to write down the points of strong and weak points and what could be done to improve. Afterwards the assessor gave feedback on the basis of Interview 2. They elaborated an improvement plan. These meetings were evaluated as very positive of the candidates. An online feedback questionnaire was the last step for both, candidates and assessors.

IT. The project validation took place as agreed with the IMPROVE partners. 1-2 weeks after interview 3 the assessor sent to the participant a short description of the results and the

participants filled in an evaluation questionnaire. The blueprint was the agreed one with the partners except one question was added. The scoring scale was the one agreed with partners. Just the elements were scored, not each question.

RO. All relevant documents were translated into Romanian. The 3-steps interview was used according to the general agreements. First the process manager made 24 Skype meetings with the candidates. For the second interview two assessors made each interview, one conducted the interview, one was the observer. A 4-point scale was used and the results were filled in an excel-sheet. After all Interview 2s all assessors met to talk about the results and afterwards the main assessors wrote the improvement plans. Then the candidates received them and a link to the questionnaire. 19 candidates filled in the questionnaire.

### 5.3 Practical aspects of organizing the pilot

In almost all countries the process manager organised the contacts, the recruiting process and brief interviews with potential assessors including the decision about it. The assessors gave feedback on the questionnaires, the blueprint, etc. and made the interviews. The Skype conferences were not always working, so that the people had to make phone calls or put the remove video possibility, but using Skype was measured as helpful. The timetable was too short in most cases.

CZ. At the beginning the assessors had to contact the participants but this did not work. The team, therefore, decided that the participants have to choose the assessor and to contact her, and it worked. Almost all interviews took place face-to-face, a wish of the participants. The rest took place through Skype. Lack of time of the assessors was difficult because both of them had teaching duties and the pilot had to be done very quickly.

DE. The Pilot structure was tested and discussed in a meeting with potential assessors and with colleagues from the Institute in a full day workshop in September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2011. The structure was discussed additionally with the persons who wanted to become assessors in an online meeting. All people who wanted to become an assessor got the materials and gave feedback on the pilot structures. Recruitment of the assessors was organized using the alumni network of Heidelberg University. All alumni of the master degree program "Career counseling and organizational development" were invited to volunteer and to participate in the project as assessors or observers. Eight people applied and six were trained between Sep-

tember and November of 2011. The pilot was carried out in face-to-face meetings as well as in online meetings using Skype or adobe connect pro. Most of the assessors had experience with both forms (face-to-face and online). In the German pilot it was part of the concept to always have a co-rating. The reason was, that the internal reliability of the instrument is an important question. In addition we used in the face-to-face Interviews that took place in November 2011 an observer in each interview. The observer documented the process and his or her perceptions and collected feedback from all participants (candidates and assessors and co-raters).

ES. Skype was used to conduct the majority of the interviews (75%). If it did not work or produced serious interruptions, the interviews were completed by phone (15% of interviews). Only 10% were conducted only by telephone. The logistic tools used in the project brought the most problems (Skype was often used for the first time by participants) and to find good time slots between assessors and participants to carry out the interviews. Recording of video of the interview did not always work, but having the audio recording was very helpful.

GR. Three people organized the pilot in writing mailings and making announcements. 8 assessors were found and 36 candidates. The process manager had a brief meeting with all 8 assessors and decided they were adequate. The 3 step interviews were divided: the 1<sup>st</sup> Interview was between just the candidate and the assessor; in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Interview, the second assessor and the process manager could join. One week later the last assessment took place. For 12 candidates it was face-to-face, 6 were through Skype. In focus groups on one day with all the assessors the improvements recommended were collected. The assessors were paid to ensure their commitment for the whole process. The Skype conferences did not always work, so phone calls had to be made instead.

IT. The process manager, with help from other personnel from ASEV, organized all of the translation; the technical concerns like homepage for video storing, software and the organisation of the full recruiting process and the selection. The assessors made checkups and gave feedback, filled in the questionnaires.

RO. The Romanian team made 24 interviews (18 by Skype, 6 face-to-face), every interview evaluated by an assessor who wrote the results on paper and filled in after the interview 2 in an excel-table. The assessors have been prepared with a 1-day training and 3 more meetings for role-play.



#### 5.4 Feedback from all stakeholders

It was part of the pilot to have structured and systematic feedback from all relevant stakeholders: participants, assessors and external experts. For this reason, different forms of collecting feedback (direct after the sessions, via a online format and in focus groups) were applied.

The participants were invited to give their feedback regarding the validation procedure and the interviews. Different actions to identify participants and assessors for the pilot have been taken. The participants had the possibility to carry out the professional checkup and to demonstrate their competence in delivering CG interviews and to set an action plan for improvement. The "Informative for participants" document was important to the participants to understand their tasks. In all countries after the pilot the experience has been discussed in focus groups with experts, participants and assessors. The feedback from focus groups underlined the quality of the applied methodology and the value the competence validation can have for the participants. It has been said, that the idea of the professional discussion as a method for showing how CG practitioners perform in practice is working quite well. At the same time some questions and methodological problems become visible. For these questions careful further testing and reflexion would make sense. Important suggestions cover issues like combination of different instruments, the scoring system, the competence and training of the assessors and an eventually bias regarding participants who are more or less extroverted. It has been discussed in some countries, if it is possible to cover the broad competence frame in one instrument and one session.

CZ. Just four of the participants agreed to join the Focus Group. Two said it was interesting, because they had to answer questions that they had not considered before. One result was, that the assessors assume that the participants are able to be emphatic, so that they can imagine and out of it describe situations of clients they just suppose to be like that. A 4 point-scale was for different reasons difficult. For example the more talkative people have been scored better than the others. One assessor found, that the assessment interview should not be the only instrument of competence assessment. Successful participants got advice too. Skype without video-function was not a problem.

DE. Two types of Focus Groups reflected on the process and the achieved results, which should be taken serious for further development. The broadness and the depth of the questionnaire was discussed critically. Combined with the other pilot instruments, self-assessment instruments could be useful. Competence of assessor is indeed relevant for the quality. A further development of instruments and competence profile is recommended.

ES. A focus group was held by Skype Group- Calling two weeks after the final Interview 2 took place and after all of the feedback reports were sent to participants. General interest in participating in the discussion among the 21 participants was high. In the end, due to availability, 7 pilot participants were on the Skype Group Call. The focus group was approximately 1 hour and the discussion was carried out through Skype Group Calling and also Skype group chatting capabilities. In general the participants in the focus group all felt the check-up experience was very interesting, beneficial and was helpful at identifying both strengths and weaknesses.

GR. 7 assessors took part in the focus-group-meeting on Skype. In general they found it very interesting and helpful to identify strength and weaknesses. The questions regarding theory in the questionnaire should be reconsidered. There are a lot of not accredited cause of not knowing the name of the author of theories. Skype was considered as innovative even though technical problems appeared. Important: The given information was valued positively as well as the questionnaire. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Interview was very positively considered. The process seemed adequate to most of the assessors. But there are some suggestions to broaden the assessment by making an observation of work or a case study in interview 2 and to repeat the process again one year later, if an improvement was established with the participant. Greece was content, the assessors were the right ones, all participants were convinced of them and they found all counsellors should take part in the process.

IT. The main suggestions of assessors for changes in the Checkup in our opinion are the following: It was suggested to reduce the length of interview 2 by asking to answer by written to some minor elements (for example 5, 8, 9) and to send the answers before Interview 2, to include also the drawing of interview 3 in the evaluation and give final evaluation only at the end of Interview 3, to allow conditional accreditation in case of one point 2, to rework element 3, to provide an additional element related to working with students and to give the possibility of coaching and follow up.

The feedback from participants show, that important hints are the following: One part of the participants think that the Interview 2 of the checkup is not good for real assessment of competence. The reasons listed are problems of communication due to Skype (see answers to questions 6, 12, 14, 16), the use of the interview (based on declarative knowledge and not on 'real' performance, question 16), the structure of the blueprint of the questions (question 12). The main problem for participants has been the use of Skype (questions 6, 12). Most of the participants found the checkup a valuable experience to learn new hints about their competence or confirm what they know about themselves (see questions 6 and 8).

RO. Five assessors considered that the validation process was very useful and should not stop here. Role-plays were a good instrument to train the assessors and to write improvement plans are a very good exercise for the assessors to do; precise, positive, clearly argued. The Blueprint was good for the assessors, but it was suggested to keep to the same structure for every element, and some suggestions were offered in relation to the need to reformulate some of the questions. The scoring system was the most debated topic. It was concluded that every question should be scored. A description of the entire scoring scale is needed. The participants were content with the process and with the methods, supervision and improvement plan. The document Informative for Participants was valued as clear and well organized.

### 5.5 The perception of the IMPROVE Guidelines

After the pilot, the participating partners, observers, assessors and practitioners value the IMPROVE Guidelines (see chapter 2.4) as positive and helpful. It seems to be a high acceptance and an additional value of general Guidelines: "the assessors respected the guidelines".

CZ. Both the assessors and the pilot participants read the IMPROVE Guidelines before the piloting and did not mention any suggestion for their improvements.

DE. The Guidelines were discussed after the pilot. It was stated, that the Guidelines reflect on important and pivotal quality criteria for validation and can be used for further validation activities in the field of CG and also in other related fields.

ES. The pilot in Spain complied to the maximum with the context of the IMPROVE Guidelines. The validation framework, including its structure, assessment process, roles, scoring system, key terms, was clearly described in the guide for candidates that was given to all of them and the methodology and process used was common for every candidate.

GR. The methodology chosen followed closely the IMPROVE Guidelines and took the PFI. It was a learning experience with getting feedback of results and ways to improve and maintain their performance. Greece kept close to the Guidelines.

IT. A point to be discussed is what measures a procedure for assessment based only on declarative knowledge (as the PFI) is effective for reconstructing performance.

RO. Because the initiative came from practitioners, the process was positively confirmed. The assessors respected the procedures and the validation process complied with the IMPROVE Guidelines.

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