

IMPROVE Guidelines for the validation of competence of people at work

1. Scope

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)*¹. More information can be found on the project website: www.improveguidance.eu/.

1.2. These guidelines apply only to the validation of competent workers. They do not apply to validation of prior learning for gaining an educational or vocational diploma or qualification.

2. Glossary

2.1. Assessment Center: a process where a group of participants undertakes a series of job-related exercises 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 type of 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 (Adapted by McClelland, 1998).

2.3. Competence (used only at singular): a generic quality imagined to be possessed by a person able to carry out an occupation or job main task up to a predetermined standard.

2.4. Competency (plural competencies or competences): each personal characteristic (including knowledge) or set of personal characteristics antecedent of job performance.

2.5. Competent worker: a person able to carry out an occupation or a job task up to a predetermined standard.

2.6. Elements (for validation): personal features or key job activities that a worker has respectively to possess or master to successfully pass validation.

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

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2.8. Job analysis: a systematic study of the tasks that are performed in a work role and of the personal features necessary to perform them.

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

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

2.11. Performance Focused Interview (PFI): a standardized professional discussion (see entry below): 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 competent workers where the elements to be assessed are the performance of job tasks.

2.13. Personal features based approach (to validation): a framework for validation of competent workers where the elements to be assessed are knowledge and personal features.

2.14. Professional discussion: a conversation in which candidates describe and reflect on their performance and knowledge in relation to the requirements of the standards (Read H., 2006).

2.15. Professional supervision: the process by which a practitioner activity is periodically revised and supported by a supervisor.

2.16. 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.

2.17. 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.

2.18. Validation framework: a set of rules for validating competent workers.

3. Preamble

All validation frameworks include three components:

3.1. What is recognized or granted. It can be 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)

3.2. 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.

3.3. 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. 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.

3.4. More in detail, knowledge and personal features are usually assessed using combination of some of the following assessment methods:

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

3.5. 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.

3.6. 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 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. 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 3.5.

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 evaluators.

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 evaluator, shall guarantee the confidentiality of the results towards third parties.

4.8. When validation is initiated by the practitioners themselves, 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 evaluators

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

4.10. The quality assurance system of the validation procedure has to include professional supervision among the evaluators and the sharing of their experiences with other evaluators for learning purposes.

4.11. The evaluators must declare any possible conflict of interest and must withdraw themselves from any assessment in which impartiality and confidentiality cannot be assured.

The assessment process

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 regulations of the context of the assessment.



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.

4.15. Feedback on the validation process has to be collected from every participant through a predetermined procedure.