IO2: The TRIAS textbook

TRIAS – Guidance in the workplace

Involving employers, reaching low qualified

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Chapter 1
TRIAS Guidance in the Workplace introduced

Involving employers, reaching out to low qualified employed

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Introduction

Involving employers, reaching out to low qualified

In the TRIAS project we have developed an innovative approach of career guidance called “TRIAS Guidance in the workplace”. For this purpose we focus on strengthening the capacities and competences of guidance practitioners for providing career guidance to the employed in their workplace with particular regard to the low qualified as one of the most important target groups in adult education.

“TRIAS Guidance in the workplace” is a highly promising approach to outreach education and guidance work – broadening the access to career guidance for employed adults, as only a small proportion of the workforce has access to some form of guidance or even considers guidance as an opportunity to actively shape their careers or adapt to necessary changes.

Since continuing education and training are of unprecedented importance, guidance outreach work in the form of workplace guidance has to raise awareness for guidance and lifelong learning as well as to provide low-threshold access to guidance services for the employed directly at the place where vocational and educational choices take effect – in the worklife.

For most guidance practitioners, however, it is new ground to approach companies and offer guidance to their workforce. All the more as the TRIAS approach to guidance in the workplace specifically includes the company itself as a relevant actor in the guidance process and considers finding the balance between focusing on clients and still taking the inherent organizational interests and procedures into account.
What to read in this chapter

This text book is targeted at professional guidance practitioners who want to offer guidance in the workplace. The textbook is to be used as a self-study learning material. It should guide you through the whole process of providing guidance in the workplace, starting from accessing companies, to working with the employer and thereby to reach out to the (low qualified) employees as main objective of this guidance intervention. Additionally, the TRIAS guidance process can also include activities after the actual guidance intervention like accompanying the implementation of training activities on a corporate level and/or supporting the individual learner in his/her learning pathway.

This textbook is centered on enabling guidance practitioners to provide guidance to employees in a company setting: What do professional guidance practitioners need to learn and understand about providing guidance in the workplace?

This first chapter will introduce you to the TRIAS approach and the importance of reaching out to low qualified employed. It will explain why and how this approach was developed. And shows strengths and weaknesses this approach entails and you have to consider when reaching out to the workplace.

Finally, we want to add that the textbook does not include basics in counselling (methods, competences, and approaches). If you need any references for basics in career guidance, you can e.g. use following study materials:

1.1 Why do we need the TRIAS approach to guidance in the workplace?

Improving guidance provision to the employed
One of the main challenges guidance activities have to tackle is the low take up rate of career guidance offers by adults and again by employed adults. Only a small proportion of the workforce has access to some form of career guidance. The Public Employment Services (PES) offer their services mainly to the unemployed. Many guidance providers focus on youth or young adults to assist them in vocational or educational choices as part of their initial educational pathways, as well as in their transition from education to employment. And companies focus their human resources development strategies mainly on talent or manager positions.

Lifelong Guidance for Adult learners is especially meaningful as it stimulates demand for adult learning (ELGPN 2015:39). Participation rates of adults in LLL, which constantly decrease with age and after completion of initial VET, are still insufficient as the EU target (e.g. ET2020) of reaching a 15% average participation rate of adults in LLL¹ by 2020 is still far out of reach.

¹ The percentage of the population aged 25-64 participating in education and training during the 4 weeks prior to the survey (Eurostat/Labour Force Survey).
Increasing importance of CVET and work-based learning
The importance of continuous VET (CVET) and a regular update and broadening of skills is increasing due to trends like ageing societies, longer working lives, digitalization and globalization. Rapid technological and socio-economic developments and as a consequence fast changing demands in the world of work requires people to continuously involve themselves in education and training activities and adapt their careers. It clearly shows that successful long-term careers do not only depend on high quality initial VET, but also on CVET and jobs, that enable people to learn and expand their skills.

For tackling these challenges, increasing work-based learning, which is so far more prominent in initial VET, in continuing vocational education and training is considered a promising way to go. Subsequently, guidance in the workplace can play a major part promoting work-based CVET and work-based learning approaches.

Focusing on the low qualified
The low qualified workforce is badly underrepresented in further education and training activities and is rather to be found in unskilled jobs that do not promote learning.
The low participation rate in LLL adds to the social and economic exclusion. Learning is considered a key to social participation.

This group is also most insufficiently reached by “office-based” guidance services, for which users have to show enough self-motivation and to be aware of their own educational needs to go and seek these services out. As a result, guidance users belonging to these target groups are mostly only offered guidance services when becoming unemployed, hence falling within the remit of the Public Employment Services (PES). However, providing guidance in the workplace can be considered as a long term prevention strategy to unemployment as a continuous educational career can help people to secure a job or re-enter the labor market who are otherwise confronted with a high risk of long-term or recurring unemployment.

**Access to Lifelong Guidance Services for high-risk groups through outreach guidance in the workplace**

The main objective in tackling the insufficient guidance take-up rate of disadvantaged groups is to offer a range of easily accessible, low-threshold guidance services, which especially target groups at risk of social and economic exclusion. For this, one of the best solutions is to increase effective outreach strategies aiming at raising awareness and motivation for education and training among these groups (ELGPN 2015:15, 39). The European Agenda for Adult Learning (EU 2011) also points out the necessity of outreach activities when it comes to offering guidance to these target groups who won’t go and see guidance providers of their own accord.

Especially, when it comes to career guidance focusing on continuing vocational education and training, our proposed solution is to approach people where most training activities take place, directly in the workplace.

**Guidance in the workplace – added value for employed, employer and policy makers**

Guidance provision for the employed has strong added value for the employed, for employers and for policy-makers.

- For Employees: guidance helps “to maintain their employability as well as to gain a better qualification through relevant training courses and through the validation of their learning experience. “[…] and to move and to manage the transitions from one job to another.”

- For Employers: guidance is a “major tool for human resource development, for maintaining a high level of productivity in the workforce, for attracting, motivating and retaining good-quality employees, and for matching the skills level of the staff with forecasted competence needs. […] it supports individual and enterprise deci-
Career guidance practitioners – whom are we talking about?

The TRIAS project directly works for and with the target group of guidance practitioners and other professionals who may find themselves in the position of offering guidance in the workplace. As with many professions, the definition of who is a career guidance practitioner and who is not varies between different European countries, as does the label for “career guidance practitioner” (e.g.: career advisor, career counsellor).

Triggered by a European debate on this challenge, NICE (Network for innovation in career guidance & counselling in Europe, 2016) came up with a suggestion of different types of “Career Practitioners”.

- **Career Advisors** are not Career Professionals, but professionals in another field, who offer some career support in addition to their primary roles and tasks
- **Career Professionals** are dedicated to Career Guidance and Counselling (CGC) and see it as their vocation to support people in dealing with complex career-related challenges
- **Career Specialists** are specialised in one (or more) of the different dimension of professional career guidance, and work towards the advancement of CGC in different ways

The TRIAS outputs, text book and curriculum, are addressing all three types of “Career Practitioners”. To reduce complexity, we coin all of them “career guidance practitioners”.

To become able to actively work in the field of “guidance in the workplace”, they need additional competences and know-how. The TRIAS project compiles a textbook for self-study purposes and develops a training program. By this means, the project strengthens the quality and competences of the work of guidance practitioners in this innovative field of action.

Workplace guidance in a European policy context

Workplace Guidance takes place within the framework of policies on Lifelong Guidance. The European Council of Ministers of Education, first in 2004, and again in 2008 (EU 2004; EU 2008), have adopted EU Council Resolutions on Lifelong Guidance with
a view to better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies. Thus the links between lifelong learning and lifelong guidance are clear, as they have been for decades. Resolutions, however, are guidelines, not directives. Other forms of mechanisms for creating convergence are utilised as a policy-making tool. Thus, in the most recent Resolution (ibid), EU member states were encouraged to give special attention to four key areas in lifelong guidance, namely:

[a] lifelong acquisition of career management skills;
[b] facilitation of access by all citizens to guidance services;
[c] quality assurance in guidance provision; and
[d] coordination and cooperation among various national, regional and local stakeholders.

This puts an emphasis on active citizenship, quality assurance and co-operation, along with career management skills and access. Workplace guidance is one such example of improving access to guidance offers.

In addition to the EU, the OECD has looked into career guidance matters in 2002-2003, when OECD conducted the Guidance Policy Review (see e.g. OECD, 2004a), which also resulted in a Handbook for Policy Makers (OECD, 2004b). The OECD issues direct recommendations, thus representing a somewhat different approach to the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), which is adopted by the EU and by EU’s think tank, the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (see e.g. ELGPN, 2015). All of these handbooks, resolutions, and similar documents stress the important role of Lifelong Guidance in relation to Lifelong Learning, which, in turn, is seen as a tool for sustaining both global competitiveness in the workforce, and for social inclusion and active citizenship. In addressing these issues, Workplace Guidance becomes pivotal in unfolding such Labour market and social policies in practice.

1.2 TRIAS Guidance in the workplace – what is it all about?

What does it mean for guidance practitioners to leave their offices and offer their services directly in the workplace of their clients? Guidance in the workplace means more than just providing guidance services in the client’s workplace. Usually guidance activities primarily focus on the client and their decision-making concerning career, education or training. Other actors are, however, only marginally taken into consideration.

“TRIAS Guidance in the workplace” leads to an additional activity field of guidance services with very particular challenges for guidance practitioners, as companies are included as relevant actors in the familiar client-counsellor-relationship. Guidance
practitioners have to find access to organisations, but also know about the corporate way of conduct and organizational human development strategies. They have to work with the employers as represented by the management, the human resource staff or possibly the employees’ representatives. And in addition they can expand their guidance and consulting portfolio to include promising and innovative learning concepts of work-based learning (e.g. promoting working conditions that encourage learning, work-based upskilling, job-rotation, job-enrichment etc.).

Although this triangle relationship of client, counsellor and company complicates the provision of guidance services, it also promises a more sustainable integration of guidance results into individual training and education activities. Studies show that most CVET activities take place in the context of a job and are rarely taken up and paid for by the employed themselves.

**Promoting education and training in the workplace – integrating two approaches that are already used on an individual level**

To develop the TRIAS approach of workplace guidance, the project integrates two already existing ways of promoting education and training in the workplace.

- Qualification consulting targeting companies
- (Career) Guidance in the workplace targeting employees

The main idea of the TRIAS guidance intervention is that each of the approaches implemented by itself always misses either the employer’s or the employee’s perspective. As the main target group of the project are professional guidance practitioners, one can rely on their competences in providing guidance to individual clients, but they usually do not have experience in working in a workplace setting. On the one hand, the project addresses challenges and tasks of this specific guidance offer.

On the other hand, as most guidance practitioners cannot draw on relevant experience in working with companies, the project uses experiences of qualification consulting, an organization-focused approach providing consulting services to companies on educational issues for employees. Existing knowledge on company-focused approaches, methods and consulting tools are gathered, prepared and adapted for the use of guidance practitioners.

By targeting employees but also working with the employers and integrating them into the guidance process as well, the usual distinction between client-targeting and company-targeting strategies in the promotion of education and training is no longer needed. By integrating these two strategies into one innovative guidance approach, guidance interventions in the workplace will have much better and sustainable effects.

TRIAS guidance unites the three essential actors in order to initiate educational processes in a triologue: guidance practitioners as *initiators* and *intermediaries*, em-
employees as guidance **users** and companies as **partners** for identifying guidance or educational needs as well as for implementing continuing VET activities.

### 1.3 Low qualified and unskilled labour as beneficiaries of the TRIAS approach: who are they?

The TRIAS project focuses on low-qualified workers. But who are they? In general, people in Europe who have only a basic level of education are considered to be low-qualified workers. They have attained at most lower secondary level education, and have not undertaken education or vocational training courses (of three or more years’ duration) after completing compulsory schooling. This is the definition by Eurofound (Ward & al, 2009).

They may be disadvantaged in three ways:
1. their employment options can be limited
2. they tend to be restricted to certain types of jobs
3. they may have fewer opportunities to participate in training than people with more formal education

Or they may experience none of these difficulties. By contrast, they may be self-taught with many relevant and desirable qualifications. They may indeed have a stable job with a large proportion of job satisfaction. The point is that statistics show a general picture, which covers a wide range of individual differences. However, Ward & al (2009) are helpful in depicting the range of the issue at hand:

‘The relative proportion of men and women with low qualifications varies markedly across Europe. It is particularly small in many of the new Member States (NMS), although it is especially large in Malta, where the great majority of people of working age have no education beyond basic schooling. This is also the case in Portugal. The relative share throughout Europe has tended to decline considerably over time (figure 2), which is also reflected in the much greater proportion of people with low qualifications among those aged 50 years and over than among young people who have just completed their education (figure 3). The decline has been particularly large among women, who used to account for the majority of those with low qualifications but who no longer do so among younger age groups.

In 17 of the 28 countries covered (27 EU Member States plus Norway), the proportion of women aged 25–49 years with low qualifications was less than for men. The difference was especially wide in Latvia and Portugal. In both Austria and Malta, however, the opposite was the case and many more women than men were low qualified. In all countries, the proportion of those aged 25–49 years with only basic schooling was less than for those aged 50–64 years – in most cases, substantially less.’
Figure 1: Low-qualified men and women aged 15-64 years, 2016 (%)

Source: European Labour Force Survey

Figure 2: Low-qualified men & women aged 15 to 64, AT vs. EU 28, 2007 - 2016 (%)

Source: European Labour Force Survey

Figure 3: Low-qualified men and women by age groups, 2016 (%)

Source: European Labour Force Survey
Low qualifications = low skilled jobs?
Besides looking at the educational level of the workforce, it is essential to also look at the qualification requirements of jobs. Unskilled labour is defined as jobs for which no professional/vocational qualification is needed.
Reflecting on jobs with low qualification requirements it is important to be aware that only a minority of people working on jobs with low qualification requirements are low qualified. In Austria only 37.3% of those working on these kind of jobs have no formal vocational qualification. (comp. Krenn, et. a. 2014) This tendency increases the pressure on formally low qualified workers as well as increases deskilling and dequalification of skilled workers.

Now reflect:
In your local area, what are the links between low formal qualifications and the jobs performed by the local workforce? Do the two sets of information match? Look at statistics, if any; interview workers or managers. Write up the results of your investigation.

(Fe)male? Women with low qualifications tend to have jobs which are different from those occupied by men. In your local area, what are the differences, and how are they perceived by people in the workforce?

What it is all about – reaching out to workplaces which do not promote learning
Whom are we looking for when reaching out to workplaces? Is it the low qualified in general, no matter of their current job situation concerning learning environments, job satisfaction? Or do we try do reach workers in unskilled jobs, which might have some formal qualification and relevant learning experiences?

As a matter of fact both can be simply indicators where to look for when trying to identify guidance users, which might benefit most from a guidance intervention. We are especially looking for these users in workplaces which both require little or no qualifications and – even more important – which do not promote learning.

It shows that employees in this kind of workplaces are on the one hand excluded from company based CVET activities. But on the other hand we also can see individual barriers to VET activities as education and training is conceived to make not much sense (concerning professional opportunities, income, etc.).

When it comes to education and training for these employees, learning on the job, the acquisition of practical knowledge matters more than formal training programs. Practical knowledge is attractive to low qualified, as well as often expected by employers. As in practice, however, like with (non)formal CVET activities, promoting informal
learning and the acquisition of practical knowledge rarely takes place. (comp. Krenn, et. a. 2014)

1.4 Opportunities and challenges of the TRIAS approach

**Why should we involve the employers in guidance in the workplace?**

Most of CVET activities take place in a company setting and are substantially funded by the employer. The TRIAS approach builds on the idea that more employer involvement in the guidance intervention will in the end increase participation in learning by employees.

Working and providing guidance in a company setting is based on the approval of the employer (as long as you are not invited by works council members). The involvement of important stakeholders in the company hierarchy, who have influence and can set the agenda, facilitates the implementation of the guidance activity and increases the sustainability of the intervention. Immediate actions, like training activities, can be quickly implemented.

The service of offering support in the field of career development (instead of only working with the employees) might be motivation for companies to participate at all, especially for SMEs, which often lack HR experiences. With your visit in the company and by talking to the employer, you show interest in the company as a whole. This helps to build trust, which is essential for starting any activities. Additionally, the management might feel less loss of control when included into the process.

By involving the employer, you will get a good picture of the actual education and training needs of the company and its employees. In a dialogue you can help the employer to identify these needs and provide adequate solutions and training offers.

**Why is it useful to reach out to employees in the workplace?**

Research and experiences has proven that outreach activities are necessary to raise awareness for education and guidance especially amongst certain target groups. But what makes it in particular relevant to focus your outreach activities on workplaces?

Many outreach activities take place in libraries, train stations, parks and therewith reach people in their private life. Considering vocational education and training is part of individual career planning and the job – or the professional life. Meeting employees in the workplace, these guidance users might be more ready to talk about career decisions. The workplace still is „natural space“ for them. They feel more confident and comfortable, especially if they do not have to go out for getting in touch with guidance practitioners and maybe with learning activities later on in the process.
The workplace still is an institutionalised setting with rules and regularities. By visiting a workplace a couple of times, you will have the possibility to meet the same people at the same spot over and over again. So you can use a gradual long-term approach to gain trust and raise interest of the employees.

By knowing and observing their workplace you will learn and understand a lot about their daily tasks and activities, which will also hint you to possible learning opportunities. The workplace gives away a lot of information to you simply by being there. As the TRIAS approach promises needs-oriented and accompanied training activities, which relate to the specific individual workplace, the benefit of learning will be easier to be pointed out to the individual user.

**The added value of combining employers and employees perspective of learning in the workplace**

One of the main objectives of the TRIAS approach is that by combining employers’ and employees’ perspective on and interest in learning you will create new learning opportunities. By improving the communication, the involvement and cooperation between employers and employees on learning, education and training activities, which are based on profound analysis of the employer’s and employees’ needs, sustainable changes can be encouraged. Tailor-made offers, which are based on the needs of both sides, can be introduced.

For example a guidance talk just before an HRD-intervention like an annual personnel talk can empower employees, increase their assertiveness and open up opportunities on personal development, which the employee than propose as part of staff development programs.

Additionally, the guidance intervention can contribute to increase the visibility of hidden skills and competences of the staff. The harvesting of these skills and competences can benefit both, the company and the individual employee.

The combination of working with employers and employees is a good opportunity to transfer guidance results immediately to work-based CVET activities and thereby use, if possible, company funding and the company as learning environment (e.g. learning on the job). Thus, the TRIAS guidance approach should make better and more successful results possible, which are even measurable by the guidance practitioners.

**What challenges do we have to face?**

The TRIAS – guidance in the workplace intervention is a new approach with little experience and knowledge on what works in practice. It is not yet fully clear what workplace guidance in a TRIAS-setting can and should be. Furthermore, it is difficult to tell what kind of challenges we can expect and what effects to look for.
First guidance practitioners will have to deal with raising awareness and interest for their offer. Promoting the benefits of guidance is needed to engage the users as well as the companies. Companies might not be interested at all to engage in career guidance as well as in education and training activities, especially for their low qualified workforce. But on the other hand, low-qualified employees might not be interested as well, to take up your guidance services (as it is not on their agenda).

Another big challenge when providing guidance in the workplace is the possible conflict of interests between the employers and employees, but also between the other actors like HRD-staff and works council members. When reaching out to the workplace, we enter a hierarchical setting, where guidance users cannot entirely freely speak about their current job situation, their future job aspirations and training needs. In any case it has to be ensured that the intervention does not have a negative effect on the guidance users.

On the other hand, it might be also challenging for guidance practitioners themselves, to leave their offices, reach out to workplaces and therewith move out of their personal comfort zones. When working with companies, the practitioners have to get involved with the employers’ perspective on learning and requirement for their staff, which does not necessarily correspond with the concept of education the practitioners normally base their work on.

Finally, when dealing with guidance in the workplace, one has to deal with the weak links with policy-making. This kind of approach might be difficult to sell to the policy-makers, regarding their priorities for education and training policies and budgets. This guidance approach is situated between different silos of policies (labour market, education, economy), which increases the risk that it gets lost there. Besides, if there is no (public) funding, on cannot assume that there is a market for paid services for employed adults.

**But in the end: it’s worth the effort**

When planning guidance activities, the pros and cons have to be carefully considered. But especially for reaching out to underprivileged target groups, which are never easy to get access to, we are sure that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. Although getting started in this new field of guidance will need more efforts than office-based offers or other outreach activities, we want to encourage the individual practitioners to use the setting of companies to explore the new possibilities that come with providing guidance in the workplace.
1.5 Caught between a rock and a hard place or right in the middle – providing guidance in the triade of employers, employees and practitioners

"During the intervention my multiple roles fluently merged – starting with consulting in organisational development, going on with staff development and ending with learn coaching and didactics – without ever being called like that. Depending on the respective situation, different questions, representing each of my roles, were in the focus.”

This quote of an educator in the workplace shows quite explicitly that guidance practitioners, who work in a company setting, will have to take over many different roles. Some of them are familiar and comfortable. Some of them might be new and out of the comfort zone.

This mix of roles can be very much fruitful and boosting for the work as guidance practitioners. But also confusing, not only for the practitioners but also for the employers and guidance users. All the more, it is important to have a clear pictures of each of the different roles and responsibilities. Is it good to know which hat you are wearing and what expectation it brings along. Tensions and confrontation with conflicting priorities (between corporate drivers and individual perspectives/interests) can be expected and demand preparation. But if the guidance practitioners succeed in bringing the perspectives of the different actor together, they will in the end also succeed in achieving a win win situation, in which the individual employee is empowered as well as the increased employability is of benefit for the company.

Within the whole process, keep the overall objective in mind

When requested to play different roles, the main idea why you are engaging in workplace guidance, might slip out of focus. Whatever you have to deal with within the whole guidance intervention, the overall objective of the TRIAS approach should drive your work. This objective is to reach out to the employed and offer guidance services especially to low qualified, unskilled labor, and employees at workplaces which do not promote learning. These include staff with basic education as well as staff with vocational education and training needs. To reach this objective and to identify staff, which will benefit from your intervention, the TRIAS approach will expect you to work with employers in the field of staff development and human resources. Although staff development is not the ultimate objective of your intervention, you can see the improvement of company structures, strategies and measures for training and qualification as a subgoal of your efforts.
1.6 Role and tasks of guidance practitioners in a company setting

Servicing companies by providing guidance in the workplace

The actual role of the guidance practitioner in the workplace will depend on the framework of the project as well as on the professional background of the individual practitioners. However when entering the company setting this specific role of the practitioner (and the distinction to classical business consulting) should be openly discussed with the employer and specified e.g. in a written TRIAS commitment.

There is a wide range of possibilities what the tasks of the guidance practitioner in the company setting can include, which also depends on the needs of the company.

When the guidance practitioners extend their service portfolio to include services in the field of Human Resource development and/or business development, the offer will on the one side be more interesting for companies (especially for SMEs with no HRD department and experience). On the other hand these activities will help to identify training needs and corresponding employees which could be targeted by guidance interventions and subsequent training activities.

Thus, the service portfolio can be extended to include HRD topics like analyzing the qualification structure of the company, analyzing/identifying jobs with learning-risks, improving work organization and the promotion of learning environments (e.g. job rotation, job enrichment).

Some examples (see in more detail Chapter 4- working with the employer):

- Raising awareness for the benefit of training low qualified
- Identifying education and training needs based on organizational development
- Identifying (groups of) employees with particular guidance or education and training needs
- Identifying and/or working out fields for organization development
- Introducing strategic staff development plans and activities

What is not the assignment of the guidance practitioner?

- If an intervention reaches too complex topics of business consulting, collaboration with business consultant can be fruitful.
Offering guidance to the employed in the workplace – what’s different?

Offering guidance to individual users is common ground for practitioners. However, the guidance practitioner faces the challenge to explore what kind of guidance can be provided in a company setting and what opportunities and limitations are to be dealt with. In particular, the practitioners have to tackle the question of how to offer guidance in the familiar user oriented way but in the same time considering and integrating the employers’ perspective.

Possible tasks of the guidance practitioner within TRIAS guidance in the workplace correspond to the “familiar” roles of guidance practitioners, e.g.:

• Raising awareness for guidance and education inside and outside the company setting
• Promote skills required for effective career management
• Integrate results of the guidance intervention in an individual as well as corporate development plan.
• Etc.

Initiators and intermediaries – the guidance practitioner’s role specific to TRIAS

When providing guidance in the Triade of practitioners, employee and employee, the practitioners have to take over a very specific role. It becomes their task to make the voices of both sides heard (employer and employees) and therewith they become intermediaries bringing two perspectives together. Their intervention can lead to an increased communication and involvement in corporate educational and training processes. If the practitioner accompanies the implementation of training activities, the role of an intermediary can expand to include arrangements and collaboration with trainers and training providers.

Considering other relevant actors in a business setting

When working in a workplace setting, the practitioners will also meet other relevant actors to collaborate or work with, especially when working with medium sized or larger companies. An important partner for implementing guidance in the workplace is the HRD department. If both sides support each other within the guidance intervention the collaboration can be very fruitful. However, if the intervention is considered by the HR-staff as competition or interference in their own work, it can jeopardise the whole process.

Other relevant stakeholders are trade union representatives or works council members. For each case the guidance practitioner will have to consider their possible participation. A fruitful collaboration will on the hand rely on the existing working rela-
tionship between management and works council. On the other hand it might be the case that the works council members are so far not involved in human resource development or the education and trainings activities and that this topic is not on their agenda.

1.7 The TRIAS commitment – introducing the rules of the game and coming to terms

The challenge of successfully providing guidance in the workplace is to gain the trust of both sides, the employer’s and employees’. The more important it is to put one’s cards on the table (as we propose) in form of a written TRIAS commitment, which can be annex to a contract in between employer and practitioner. This guarantees that employers as well as the guidance users know what they get involved with. Working in this form of partnership is easiest when all parties have clearly defined mutual interests.

**The TRIAS commitment in the perspective of the company**

The company should know the rules and conditions of participating in your guidance offer. It is important to prevent the monopolizing of the guidance intervention by the company’s interest. The commitment will point out the benefits of the intervention for the company but also explain the overall objective of all activities.

**The TRIAS commitment in the perspective of the employees**

The TRIAS contract will give the employees a clear picture on what to expect of the guidance intervention. It will explain the benefits to the employees, but also the limitations due to the workplace setting (as agreed on with the management).

Furthermore, the commitment tells what will happen to the results of the guidance interventions, what information will reach the employer and what stays with the employee (confidentiality).

**Most important points of TRIAS commitment:**

- Confidentiality: what will happen to the results of the guidance intervention? If anonymity is promised, what measures does the guidance practitioner take to preserve it? What information is provided to the employer and is it possible to anonymize it?

- Restrictions in guidance provision: are there any restrictions by the employer for providing guidance in the workplace? How do you inform the employees about these restrictions? What restrictions do you accept, what restrictions are not acceptable?
• Impartiality of the guidance practitioners: Does the guidance practitioners represent the interests of the employer or the employee when it comes to providing guidance? Impartiality and the role being an intermediary make great demand on the guidance practitioners. The task of the guidance practitioners may be to make the voices of both sides heard (employers and employees), and not represent one side in particular.

• Promotion of your guidance services outside of the workplace: is it okay for the employer that you openly promote your office-based guidance services? Is it okay for the employer to refer the employees to other guidance offers?

• Voluntary nature of (guidance) offer: the conditions for your offer may include that no employees will be ordered to participate.

• Involvement of the works council: the role and the collaboration of the works council with the management varies from company to company. It should be clearly be defined from the beginning where the works council members are to be involved in the guidance intervention.

• Cooperation and distinction of the roles and responsibilities of guidance practitioners and human resource department, if in place. What support is the HR-department supposed to give you?

Now Reflect:
Would you encourage the employee to search for another job post outside the company which better suits his or her qualifications?
What would you do if a company explicitly rejects some kind of training programs or training activities, you together with an employee identified to be the most needed?

How do you deal with possible sensitive issues and (justified) fears on both sides, when providing guidance in the workplace, with examples like “will the employees ask for more money? Will the employees leave the company?” (by the company) or “Will the results of the intervention be used against me? Will I be forced to participate in the guidance or training offer?”.

1.8 The TRIAS process

The handbook is structured according to TRIAS process, whereby each chapter of the textbook will deal with one of the different phases.

**Phase 1: Accessing employers**

1. Defining your strategy and marketing
2. Collecting addresses, marketing and communication
3. Making contact
4. Deepening contact & contracting

**Phase 2: Working with the employer – where do we stand?**

5. Assessing needs as starting points for guidance, education and training activities
6. Analysis of the existing training activities and attitudes of the company
7. Analysis of competence development demand in the employer’s perspective
8. Identification of workplaces and staff relevant for guidance intervention
9. Identification of ways accessing employees

**Phase 3: Reaching out to the employees – guidance in the workplace**

10. Accessing employees on an individual and/or group basis; choosing a setting for guidance in the workplace
11. Information and awareness raising for guidance and education & training
12. Individual and/or group guidance activities focusing on low qualified (incl. ensuring results by individual career action planning and referring to continuous guidance and coaching offers outside the company context)

**Phase 4: Integrating results of both analysis phases, implementing training activities, as well as accompany the employer and the employees**

13. Integrating the results of the different interventions
14. Accompanying implementation activities: Planning and implementing training activities
15. Accompanying employees in the learning process
16. Evaluation and ensuring the knowledge transfer to the company

**Remarks on the TRIAS process**

We understand the different phases and steps as a flexible modular system (depending on the project and context it will be used). Not all the mentioned steps will be implemented in each project. The proposed activities are optional and depend on the individual agreement in form of the TRIAS commitment (employer, employee, guidance practitioner) and the contract.

This means that a project based on the TRIAS approach might include some activities of phase 2, but stop after the individual guidance interventions. Other projects will resume after the guidance intervention to include also the support in compiling of staff development plans and to implement e.g. concrete training activities.
Phase 1 Accessing employers
- Defining your strategy
- Collecting addresses, marketing and communication
- Making contact
- Deepening contact & contracting
- Follow up and public relation

Phase 2 Working with the employer - where do we stand?
- Assessing needs
- Analysis of existing training activities
- Analysis of competence development demand (employer’s perspective)
- Identification of relevant workplaces and staff for guidance intervention
- Identification of ways of accessing employees

Phase 3 Reaching out to employees - guidance in the workplace
- Accessing employees, choosing a setting
- Information and awareness raising
- Individual/group guidance

Phase 4 Accompanying the implementation and transfer activities
- Integrating the results of the different interventions
- Accompanying implementation activities
- Accompanying employees in the learning process
- Evaluation and ensuring the knowledge transfer to the company
Chapter 2

Identifying and accessing relevant employers

The first step is always the hardest?

Author: Franziska Haydn (ÖSB Consulting)
With contributions of the TRIAS partnership

Introduction

Accessing employers as cooperation partners

Sometimes, the first steps are the hardest - nevertheless they are one of the most important elements for a successful project. When dealing with employers, it is easily overlooked how much effort has to be put into getting into contact with relevant companies and even more so into getting them on board for a joint journey towards successfully and sustainably providing guidance to their workforce in a company setting.

This joint journey has to be planned well, and most certainly there will be some barriers to overcome before the guidance intervention can be started. Thorough preparation will help to minimize complications and prevent some unwanted outcomes.

This chapter provides information on what guidance practitioners need to consider before getting in touch with employers, and how they can map out an adequate strategy of accessing and convincing employers to participate.

Before getting started, lean back and reflect:
What do you think are the challenges in winning over companies to participate? What pictures, expectations and fears come to your mind when you think of first talking to employers? What resources do you need to be successful?
What to expect in this chapter

This chapter will introduce you to different steps of the acquisition process. You will learn about what to consider when identifying relevant companies to approach, especially regarding their staff structure and whether they provide unskilled jobs and employ low-qualified staff. This chapter will help you to get a clear picture of your objectives and realistic prospects of successful contacts. The chapter will also support you in preparing for first contact with an employer (e.g. the owner or management) and provide you with general arguments for offering guidance in the workplace.

Most critically, you will learn about different approaches to getting in contact and you will be encouraged to search for innovative ways in establishing first contacts with companies.

Finally, the chapter will help you to get through the initial phase of getting into personal contact and support you to get the employers interested in your offer.
2.1 Step 1: Defining your strategy and marketing

Defining goals and objectives

Before mapping out concrete activities, the preparation of the acquisition process will be based on setting up clearly defined goals and get a clear picture of what you want to achieve during acquisition.

Before thinking in figures and quantitative targets – what do you want?

Besides considering quantitative targets, it’s good to have a clear picture of the objective of the acquisition phase. What is the general target of your acquisition activities? What do you want to achieve by your acquisition activities? Is it a long-term cooperation relationship? Do you look for few cooperation partners, with whom you have intensive working relationships? Or do you want to reach out to as many cooperation partners as possible?

When you think about your project, what is the overall objective of the acquisition phase?

- ... to get prospective customers from your list of addresses and recommendations
- ... to get clients out of prospective customers
- ... to get satisfied clients, whose needs were met by the guidance intervention, out of these clients
  and maybe in further consequence
- ... to get loyal clients out of these served clients
- ... to get long-term cooperation partners out of loyal clients.

Or simply

- ... to get a one-time cooperation partner, with no further contact after successfully concluding the intervention
Setting up targets for the acquisition process

The quantitative targets will be most likely already outlined in the project work plan, as calculation and reporting schemes are based on estimated sample sizes. The project often provides an implicit structure for what you can achieve.

Thus, your tasks may include breaking down the project targets into individual acquisition goals as a basis for your mode of action. The work is organised around basic assumptions about e.g. how many contacts you will need to have to establish for one guidance intervention.

For preparing your acquisition phase, you will have to consider the following (see also Worksheet 1 "Acquisition goals"):  

- What does the project plan tell you about quantitative objectives? Starting from this, all other activities can be broken down and calculated. These calculations and considerations are based on the approaches used to contact employers.
- How many telephone calls will I make until the end of the next month/year or end of the project?
- How many telephone calls do I need in average to reach an adequate contact person?
- How many contacts do I need to successfully set up an informational interview?
- How often can I go and talk to company representatives in person?
- How many fairs and events can I visit and how many personal talks and contacts will I be able to establish there?
- And finally, how many established contacts will you need to actually implement an intervention of guidance in the workplace?

Acquisition activities are difficult to calculate. There are plenty of factors which can influence the success of your efforts, and many of them may be outside your influence (e.g. general economic situation, attitude towards education and training etc.).

Most certainly you will have to adapt your targets and objectives in the course of your intervention depending on your later experiences. Documenting all your activities and contacts will help you to better calculate your future efforts by providing you with a “conversion key” (rate of necessary contacts for each successfully established intervention). It is advisable to build up an appropriate project database for documenting all activities right at the start.
Who? – Identifying relevant employers

The decision on what kind of employers to contact is crucial. This especially concerns the staff employed in selected organisations, depending on your target group for the guidance intervention.

Sector analysis for identifying relevant employers – In which sectors can you find low-qualified and low-skill labour?

The main target groups of the TRIAS project are the low-qualified working population and unskilled labour. For choosing employers to work with, it is relevant to consider in which employment sectors these target groups can be found.

By approaching employers to ultimately provide guidance to low-qualified workers, one has to identify the sectors where companies most frequently employ staff belonging to these target groups.

According to a recent study (Krenn et. al. 2014) on unskilled labour (“Einfacharbeit”\(^2\)), these jobs still exist to a substantial degree. In Austria every fifth person (21.7 % in 2012) is working on a job where no professional qualification is needed. While jobs with low qualification requirements decreased strongly in the manufacturing sector over the last decades, we actually perceive a strong increase of these jobs in the service sector. Consequently, totally two-thirds of unskilled labour are located in the service sector. Nevertheless, the highest concentration of jobs with low qualification requirements is to be found in specific manufacturing branches such as the leather and shoe industry or the waste management industry.

In Germany, a similar situation can be found:
Regardless of the trend towards a higher qualification, there are still some sectors which employ a relevant share of unskilled labour. Notable examples include the sector of employee hiring (temporary employment), cleaning and security services, the agricultural sector and hospitality sector. In absolute figures, the manufacturing sector provides up to one fourth of these workplaces in Germany. This is followed by the business services sector (logistics and cleaning services) with about one fifth of all services. Furthermore, potential workplaces in the field of health care and social work can also be considered to fit this profile. (cf. IAB-Kurzbericht 11/2014).

When reflecting on jobs with low qualification requirements, it is important to be aware that only a minority of people working on jobs with low qualification require-

\(^2\) „Unskilled labour“ is defined as an activity (job) where no professional/vocational qualification is needed which makes it clearly distinguishable from skilled labour.
ments are in fact low-qualified. In Austria, only 37.3% of those working in these kind of jobs have no formal vocational qualification. (comp. Krenn, et. a. 2014, see also Chapter 1)

Now, take the following into consideration and reflect:
What do you know about the situation in your country or region? In which sectors do you find the highest share of your target group? Where do you find data you can use to choose a sector and respective companies? Can you observe some major changes in this economic structure and the corresponding sectors in which your target group is employed?

If your target group include low skilled workers or workers in low skilled jobs, following indicators are some exemplary indicators which can guide you to relevant companies/sectors:

- Amount of temporary work in the company
- Amount of seasonal workers
- Kind of production: e.g. high pre-production volumes may indicate a high amount of low-skill jobs
- High amount of logistics in the production
- Clusters of suppliers to large companies

**What is needed? – Assessing the needs and interests of the companies**

Before getting in contact with company representatives it will facilitate your persuasion efforts if you know about the general skill and competence requirements companies might face (especially concerning unskilled labour).

**Skills and competence requirements for low- and unskilled jobs**

On a general level, not much data exists on skills and competence requirements for unskilled jobs. If you look into specific fields of business operations, you can find some more information.

In principle it shows that low-skilled jobs, which can be handled without basic education (reading, writing, basic maths), have declined. (cf. Alke 2009, S. 113). This concerns all different sectors, the productive sector as well as the health care sector.
It as well shows that also for low-skilled labour and formally low-qualified staff, comprehensive competence requirements are expected by the employers. These requirements mainly focus on self-competences. Reliability, flexibility, resilience and high motivation are emphasised in most fields of low-skilled labour. Regardless the missing or outdated formal qualification, work experience is expected. Although formal qualification is not expected, the applicants are demanded to quickly learn the ropes of their new labour and flexibly react to changing work conditions and tasks. If a person can rely on generic competences (transferable skills), there is an increased likeability to find a job, despite being low-qualified. (cf. Draganski et al 2015, S. 89-105).

On a general level, it appears that the requirements of companies towards their low-qualified staff are subject to change. Based on the John Holland model of making vocational choices (cf. Holland 1973), we can argue that “dealing with things” as traditional field of activity, is on the one hand replaced by “dealing with data and symbols” and on the other hand “dealing with people”. Knowledge-based knowledge becomes more important than experience-based knowledge. Competences like abstract thinking, logical thinking, using computers and soft skills (personal and social competencies) become necessary requirements to maintain individual employability even for low-skilled labour.

Now reflect:
What information can you use to analyse regional and sectorial education and qualification needs of businesses? Where do you find data and research results? Are there any experts you could talk to?

What to offer?

Getting a clear picture of the benefits of your activities

While promoting your offer, it is important to have a clear picture of the various beneficiaries and their most likely conflicting interests.

Offering career guidance at the workplace will benefit:

1. Employees – by contributing to achieve individual career objectives, etc.
2. Employers – by contributing to achieve HRD objectives, Corporate Social Responsibility objectives, etc.
3. Guidance practitioners – by contributing to achieve target group quotas, etc.
4. Society/Economy – by contributing to achieve human resource objectives, social objectives such as integrating risk groups, etc. (see also Chapter 1)
In trying to access companies, the benefits of the employers will be at the forefront of your considerations/strategies. What is it that you can provide to employers? However, it might be sensible to incorporate the perspectives of the other beneficiaries as well when developing your arguments.

All arguments that you can introduce to the company representative or HRD staff have to relate to the company or point out the company-oriented benefit of the service you offer. Your target is that the contacted employers perceive their individual benefit from your service.

One of the basic principles of the TRIAS approach to providing guidance in the workplace is the objective to create benefits for the companies as well as for the employees. The dialogue-based approach of working with the employers supports them to identify development and training needs (see also Chapter 4). On the other hand, the TRIAS approach uses outreach guidance work to raise awareness for guidance and education by directly encountering employees (see Chapter 3). As the TRIAS guidance practitioners works with both sides, they will act in the role of intermediaries and turn the spotlight on both the perspective of the employer as well as the employees and therewith make learning, education and training a topic to talk about.

**Important arguments on potential company benefits of offering educational guidance in the workplace**

Most obviously, the offer can contribute to HRD objectives of the company. Career guidance is an important strategy of staff development. Depending on the specific contents of the educational guidance offer it could contribute to:

- Improving the employability, adaptability and flexibility of the workforce
- Improving the productivity of the workforce
- Improving stability, satisfaction and motivation of the workforce (enhancing the company culture)
- Improving the adaption of the workforce to business changes as part of change management (e.g. implementation of certain certification, quality assurance tools)
- Improving long-term strategic HRD planning by analysing the qualification and age structure, etc. of the workforce
- Decreasing the error rate
- Decreasing sick leave
- Improving the process optimisation in workflow
- Improving staff and client satisfaction
• Improving staff retention
• Improving the work organisation by analysing learning risks of the company’s job structure and by providing structural learning solutions (job rotation, job enrichment…)
• Etc.

Less obvious, but still viable as additional argument, the company might be interested in boosting its corporate social responsibility (CSR) profile. Especially if the offer mainly focuses on low-qualified employees, highlighting the contribution of the offer – supported by the company – to social integration objectives might be a strong selling point. In particular big companies generally like to create, maintain and strengthen their socially conscious image.

Then again, in smaller companies there might be a closer and long-lasting (working) relationship between management, HRD department (if existing at all) and staff. In a paternalistic management approach, the individual welfare of the staff might be of higher importance than compared to bigger companies. In these cases, arguments for guidance in the workplace can focus on aspects like job satisfaction, personal development or well-being of the staff.

Now reflect:
How can companies benefit from your services? Which of these following factors concerning the general framework of your offer can additionally contribute to convincing your contact person to take part in your activities?
• The quality of service itself
• Flexibility of your services (time and space)
• Price/performance ratio
• Target group
• Consulting services (e.g. HRD)
• Specific approach of service provision (e.g. workplace-oriented)
• Networking – links to relevant training organisations, public employment services
• Consideration of regional factors
• Links to other relevant public funds and programmes
• Etc.
Getting your foot in the door! Acquisition approach and collecting contacts

The general definition of “acquisition” means the active contacting of a potential customer, to get them interested in one’s services. Activities of customer acquisition include all personal, email or telephone contacts as well as first informal talks. In a most positive scenario, the acquisition phase ends with finalizing a contract for coming activities.

Different acquisition approaches

The most common types of acquisition approaches are both cold-calling, which means that you contact a potential client for the first time (without any prior business relation), and contacting potential clients with whom you already had some form of contact (as being part of business or cooperation networks, email marketing etc.) or which have been recommended to you as business partners.

Experience shows that using multipliers and gatekeepers to approach companies provides higher successful conversion rates. But for each single project it has to be individually decided which approach (or mix of approaches) is most feasible and promising. In some contexts, a cold-calling approach might be the first choice.

When it comes to contacting companies to offer your services to, being creative and thinking about innovative ways to present your services will get you more attention and subsequently more interest in your offer. A recommendation by another companies or other relevant stakeholders in the field will most definitely increase your chances in gaining initial access into a company as new cooperation partner.

From the start of the activities onwards, it’s sensible to start compiling addresses in order to build up a growing address database and to keep track of your business contacts.

Using gatekeepers and multiplier events – how networking can help you with promoting your offer

To avoid cold-calling approaches, it is advisable to build on existing structures, representatives and stakeholders. Create your own list of ideas. One promising way to start is to conduct a stakeholder analysis. What are relevant stakeholders in the environment of the companies you selected to contact? Where do these companies meet for networking and exchange? Which events could you use to promote your services?
Collaboration with multiplier will not only help you to identify relevant employers, but they can also facilitate the access and the first steps with the employer. It especially helps, if these multipliers already have existing working relationship with the company, “speak the same language” and are already accepted within the company.

**Social partner and business associations**
How are the social partners organized in the business sector you want to work with? Which are the official business associations representing the interests of the companies? It might be helpful to schedule personal meetings with such association representatives. Let them invite you to informational events.

There might also exist some mailing lists of business associations or the chamber of commerce etc. which are potentially looking for relevant information to include in their periodical publications (newsletters etc.).

Guidance in the workplace interventions can also be initiated or promoted as part of a social partner agreement. Thus, the companies are approached beforehand by both employer organisations as well as trade unions. Starting a guidance intervention which is welcomed both by the employers and employee side provides optimal starting conditions.

The cooperation with trade unions can bring you in contact with works council members. However, if you want to get access to a company by talking to council members, it will only work out if the company and the works council have a good working relationship. Otherwise this approach may lead to refusal of the offer by the employer.

**Human resource experts**
It’s also possible to try to approach companies by getting in contact with the HRD representatives. Most likely, there will be also some regional HRD fairs, which could be used to directly address companies, or at which you might even give a talk to present your offer.

**Business consultants**
Another strategy is to team up with other consultants which already have access to the company. The cooperation of consultants and guidance practitioners/educators has already proven as a successful good practice. Building new ways of cooperation can be a positive side-effect for both sides. For business consultants, who lack expertise in guidance, cooperation with a guidance practitioner may help to upgrade his or her own offer. For the guidance practitioner, cooperating with a consultant facilitates the access to the company. Consultants are used to approaching companies and management. They might also bring a group of interested business customers along, which simplifies building up a trustful relationship. Also – and this fact should not be
underestimated – they know the corporate jargon and specifications of the companies they are dealing with.

**Testimonial – From experience of a guidance practitioner in the workplace**

“My first contact to a larger social business was established within the context of a panel for human resource managers, which was organised by the business association. A human resource manager, which whom I have already been working with, invited me to this event to give the key note at a workshop. This workshop dealt with the “promotion of competence development of staff in the workplace”. The listeners got to know my basic understanding of adult learning as well as my approach and experience in the field of further education of adults. And they could get to know me in person as well.

The head of the human resource department of this already-mentioned social business showed great interest in my input. She asked for my contacts and the conditions for booking me. Some weeks later she called me and asked for support in a workshop for management training. I went to see her for a personal talk. We discussed her needs and put our ideas into concrete terms. As it showed, she was very busy and it was very difficult for her to continue planning the workshop. Therefore, she gladly accepted my offer to fully take over the planning and design of the workshop. For the workshop we got really positive feedback. Both the key note at the HR panel as well as the workshop were great door-openers into a closer cooperation with the company. I could prove my professional approach and keep the risk for the company very low.

The workshop with the management staff proved to have another substantial advantage. They were the future decision-makers for further long-term interventions for development of low-qualified staff. This led to long-term cooperation with the company and to me supporting them in implementing a basic education programme for the low-qualified staff as well as to other train-the-trainer workshops and expert trainings. For me this is a good practice of approaching companies. What we can learn from it is that there are two important factors of success:
- using existing contacts and
- let decision-makers experience your work approach and get to know you (e.g. in talks and speeches at business meetings or similar events).”

**Cold-calling**

If a cold-calling approach is selected to approach companies, the legal regulations in your respective country have to be considered. In Austria, it is considered a legal “gray area” because unsolicited business-to-client but also business-to-business contact is not legal. This unclear legal situation leads to many people preferring contact-
ing by telephone to emailing. Generally, practical experience shows that the success rate for contacting by telephone are higher than for customer acquisition by email.

Experience shows that cold-calling activities have a much higher rate of failures than customer acquisition by recommendation or networking. However, in comparison the preparation time is much less time-consuming as cold-calling is simply more direct. Good preparation for the initial contact is even more important as you have less time to convince them and to make a lasting impression. It is advisable to prepare an “elevator pitch” in form of a short summary which explains the main ideas of your offer in a few sentences.

For getting the contact details, you might use official telephone directories, web research or you might come across certain already existing address lists, e.g. members of industrial associations, chamber of commerce, union of industry, trade unions etc.

2.2 Step 2: Managing contacts, marketing and communication

Establishing a way to organize and document your contacts

Before starting to approach companies, it is important to consider a way of organizing and documenting the contacts to companies and individual persons. Otherwise it will be difficult to keep track of the already established contacts and it will easily happen that you contact a company twice, which will come across non-professional, especially if your service was already rejected by the company.

Experience shows that the database, you will use for your acquisition phase, has to be easy to use and that only the most important data will be included to minimize the administration effort as well as to maintain a clear and exhaustive overview. A simple spreadsheet table might be enough (including data like date of contact, basic information on the company, contact person, position of contact person, status of contact like in progress, postponed contact or rejection).

As soon as the company agrees to further talks, it is advisable to use another more exhaustive database, which will be used during the whole process of working with the company and will help to keep track of the business contact and information exchanged.

Developing a public relations strategy – framing the offer and defining the target group
A well-prepared public relations strategy is the basis for target-oriented proceeding. It might help to consider the following steps:

- Developing a marketing plan including evaluation and monitoring
- Integrate results of sector analysis and needs assessment
- Choose a market segment, e.g. a business sector or a certain region
- Adapt the offer to the selected market segment
- Develop target group-related promotion material according to the market segment, but also targeted at the position of the person to contact (management, HRD personnel, employee representatives)

**Communication tools**

When getting in contact with a company, some supportive communication tools prepared beforehand will give you the possibility to immediately provide your contact person with further information if needed. Some examples how these communications tools may look like:

- Information package: a PDF document ready to be sent including information like who? what? why? what does it cost?
- Using “good practice” examples: look out for companies who are willing to present their experiences in PR-materials
- Use of different media: e.g. short videos showing testimonial companies explaining the benefits of participating in your project
- Website presenting the guidance offer: easy to find, easy to contact, providing information on good practice projects
- Social networks: Profile of practitioners on XING or LinkedIn – include information on your profile which catches the attention of employers, find a group focusing on the topic of workplace guidance, present the offer in HR networks, another option is to create a Facebook page presenting your guidance offer targeting management and HRD

**2.3 Step 3: Making contact**

**Preparing yourself – knowledge and competence requirements for guidance practitioners**

Working in a company setting brings along additional skills and knowledge requirements for guidance practitioners.
• Basic understanding of entrepreneurial mind-set: What problems and challenges do companies and their staff have to tackle? What are the professional jargon and the organisational culture of the management, HRD, but also the staff? How is the company organised (e.g. business models)?

• Ability of conducting a dialogue-driven needs-analysis and profile of requirements (see also Chapter 4): to be able to get involved and to put oneself in the perspective of the manager, to elaborate solutions to problems and not merely describing problems

• Know-how of regional and national funding structures for companies and their staff on a very concrete level: what can be funded? What cannot be funded?

• Sector knowledge (skills and competence requirements, educational offers etc.): sector-specific knowledge (also about products and services) is important to be taken seriously by the company. This can also possibly be acquired over time, as many employers allow consultants some time to adapt. Team up with experienced consultants in this sector. It might be advisable to start with one sector and develop know-how.

Now reflect:
Which competences will facilitate talks with the company or the HRD manager? Which competences should you further develop to be able to work with companies?

Before the first contact

Already before the first contact, a quick online research can give information on the company to be contacted. The websites of the selected companies can provide you with relevant information; they may include the most recent management report and – if available – the mission statement of the company, which points some aspects of the corporate culture.

Showing that you have done your homework and are well prepared for the personal meeting can give you a competitive edge. This preliminary analysis might include the following questions (also see Worksheet 2 in annex “Analysis of the company structure: basic data”).

• What sector does the company belong to? Which products/services does the company provide?

• What is the structure of the company? Who is in the management? Does the company have a HRD department? Who is responsible for staff development?

Some information on a possible first contact person and his/her professional background might be found as well.
This preparation will give some guidelines to the presentation of your offer in a few sentences (elevator pitch). Besides keeping in mind the main arguments for the benefit of the guidance intervention, your arguments should relate to possible needs of the respective company as a starting point of a dialogue-based needs-assessment. The preparation should also include the consideration of common counter-arguments to your offer and how you can react to them.

Now reflect:
How do you gather information on the company, you want to contact? Which kind of information do you especially consider important? What negative reaction of the employer do you expect? How will you respond adequately?

Who to talk to?
The main challenge will be to actually reach the most relevant person you should/need to talk to. The table below shows some common pro and cons of whom to approach. It’s important to find out how the company is organised to identify a contact person. Be prepared to face difficulties to reach this person especially when having your first contact by phone, as administrative staff is often trained to shield their superiors from calls from sales representatives.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Capacity</th>
<th>Pro</th>
<th>Cons</th>
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<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>Deciders for top-down decision to start guidance intervention, most interested in activities that benefit the company as a whole</td>
<td>Not much time, not easily accessible, not always involved in HRD activities and unaware of the significance of CVET</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HRD department</td>
<td>Most interested in activities concerning human resource development, have the best overview of existent company specific HRD activities and VET programmes</td>
<td>Can perceive intervention as competition to their own activities, do not have decisive power on participation and possibly on the implementation of subsequent, result-based training activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Employee representatives/work councils | Representing the interest of the employees concerning their needs, can be important for gaining trust of the employees | Possibly conflict-laden relationship between work council and management, which might prevent successful start of intervention,
in most cases better to involve them later in the process, provided that management agrees on it.

**Team leader**

Have personal contact to the individual employees and know about their activities and competences and needs.

Often no decision-making power concerning training activities, can be difficult to reach.

**Staff / guidance users**

Know best about their own activities, goals and possible training needs, target group of the guidance intervention.

No decision-making power, can be difficult to reach, little insight into strategic development of company.

It will depend on the individual company who will be the best cooperation partner. In many cases it will heavily depend on the size of the company and company structure. When it comes to discussing strategies and the general development of the organisation, the management might want to be involved. In other cases the practitioners will be referred to an HRD-responsible for further collaboration.

Especially for larger companies, the establishment of an in-house steering group can also help the process. The steering group can be composed of representatives from management, HR managers and employee representatives.

**The first contact**

The goal of the first contact(s) is to pave the way for a personal information talk, e.g. to set a date for a personal meeting.

For most guidance practitioners companies are terra incognita. Guidance practitioner might feel insecure when setting foot into a company. Especially when talking to an employer, who is known to be rather reluctant when it comes to CVET activities, it is difficult to estimate how the guidance offer will be received. The guidance practitioners should appear self-confident, especially concerning their services, and not as dependent on the employers’ goodwill.

As the first contact already includes interventions focusing on the employer, more details on how to organise your first contact are to be found in Chapter 4.1 (Working with the employer).

**After the first contact**

Stay tuned and focus on the objective to set a date for a personal meeting to have an informational talk about your offer.
If the first contact turns out fruitful, a swift follow-up might help to get things going. If the contact person indicates interest, a follow-up email including all relevant information of your offer can be announced during the talk and be sent immediately after. It will be useful to use ready-made text elements which can be easily adapted to the individual contact. A small info package in PDF format should include all relevant information like who? what? why? what does it cost?

To keep track of the business contact and information exchanged (including basic information on the company, quoting an education consultant “if you still need to ask about their product after the second meeting, you might have a problem”), it is highly advisable to compile a profile of the contacted company as part of your documentation and database.

2.4 Step 4: Deepening contact and contracting

The way forward – first informational talks

If the first contact was successful, you will be invited to more detailed informational talks. As this already includes interventions focusing on the employer, more details are to be found in Chapter 4.1 (Working with the employer).

Concluding a contract as a common basis for further steps

Before continuing the intervention following the path of the TRIAS process, it is in any case important to confirm all verbal agreements in a written contract. Thus, you make sure that there are no misunderstandings and that you can start your activities with a transparent definition of objectives, responsibilities and timing.

To be awarded the contract for career guidance activities is therefore a very central goal of the first meetings with the entrepreneur.

The contract should clarify all important aspects like roles of all actors, objectives and benefits, time plan and scheduled interventions:

• Clarification of objectives: what results are expected, what are the objectives of the intervention?

• Role, tasks and activities of guidance practitioners, employer and staff (the TRIAS commitment, see chapter 1) are pointed out clearly

• Approach and interventions: what interventions are planned?
• Time schedule: (concrete) dates of service provision, also concerning contacts to employees

• Concrete agreements for further collaboration and approach: how are the means and the timing for communication? Who is the contact person for each intervention? Which support services are provided by the company (e.g. providing of staff data, completion of staff development plans, organisation of trainings)

• Confidentiality of data: How is the confidentiality of received information (business data, staff records) guaranteed?

• General conditions for receiving consulting/guidance services

• If indicated: financial offer

It usually takes several talks in the company before a tailor-made offer finds agreement and can be implemented. At what point the contract for guidance counselling is signed depends on different factors. Employers that still need to be convinced to participate will not be ready to sign in the first talk. Also when employers, HRD managers and immediate superiors are different people (only in micro-enterprises one person will have all these roles), a contract will only be signed if an agreement about the planned project is made.

In many companies, the players to negotiate with will change in the process. Your contact person might need time to internally clarify and discuss the participation of your offer. We do not recommend to push your contact person into finalising the contract, but rather to give them time for the internal coordination process. The acceptance of your intervention by the management and the staff can also be increased if all parties are well informed and can participate in the decision-making process.

Only companies that have already used guidance service and that are familiar with the procedure, can be contracted very early.

**Funding**

A lot of the contracting and especially the funding of the activities will depend on the framework of your project. If the project is part of a public program, all services will be fully or partly financed by public funds. In some other cases your services will to some extent be covered by the company itself. It might be the case that the guidance intervention and all preliminary activities are funded by public programs, however subsequent training activities are to be paid for by the company.

If the companies are asked to contribute, you won’t be able to charge them for the first contacts and informational talks. The billable activities will only start after con-
tracting. This certainly entails some financial risks for the successful implementing of the project.

**The TRIAS commitment as part of the TRIAS contract – introducing the rules of the game and coming to terms**

The TRIAS commitment, a statement which introduces the TRIAS approach to all involved actors, ensures that the employer as well as the employees know what they get involved with. The TRIAS commitment was already introduced in Chapter 1.

**References Chapter 1 & Chapter 2**


EU (2007): Action Plan on Adult learning – It’s never too late to learn


EU (2011): Council Resolution on a renewed European agenda for adult learning


Chapter 3: `On the shop floor’

Author: Peter Plant
With contributions of the TRIAS partnership

Introduction

What to read in this chapter

This chapter falls in three parts

• Why: the rationale
• Where: the place
• How: the methods

This chapter is aimed at creating a space for learning and reflection in terms of guidance activities in the actual workplace. Such activities benefit from looking into approaches and facts with a view to deepening the understanding and development of career guidance in the workplace. New insights and actions may be the result of such mutual learning. With this backdrop, the suggested reflections and activities are designed to enhance interaction among the involved participants. Evidently, a number of barriers exist in relation to gain access to workplaces, as explained in Chapter 2. Here, partnerships and agreements with employers’ organisations, trade unions, or chambers of commerce can serve as door-openers. It is important to reach out to people on the shop floor: they are the focus of interest in this chapter. The guidance practitioner is the visitor – and should be a welcome guest. Guidance is by no means an activity for stigmatising low-skilled workers: it aims at job-enrichment and at added value for both companies and workers.
3.1 Why? The rationale: this section points to the reasons for providing guidance in the workplace

Guidance, advice, coaching, counselling: these types of activities are seen as a vehicle to promote lifelong learning. Why is this important? There are mainly two reasons: lifelong learning is an instrument for upskilling the workforce to compete in an increasingly global economy. And secondly, lifelong learning is a means of social inclusion and active citizenship. Learning in the workplace, as pointed out by Illeris (2006) is pivotal for both personal and professional development, and thus a means of productivity. And learning has many forms: formal, informal, and non-formal, as pointed out by the OECD (http://www.oecd.org/education/skills-beyond-school/recognitioofnon-formalandinformallearning-home.htm).
But learning opportunities are not easily accessed by everyone. In particular, the low-skilled often have few chances of accessing guidance offers. Guidance, however, acts as a societal lubricant, i.e. both a public and a private good to help people and companies to find and make use of learning options, second chance education, vocational training etc. One way of reaching out to those who are least prone to take up learning opportunities is to offer guidance in the workplace itself. This may be the way to get in contact with people who feel somewhat remote from learning opportunities. Guidance in the workplace may be a good help, but it may also appear somewhat invasive: guidance in the workplace must find a fine balance between the two.

Thus, feedback on guidance activities in the workplace should be part of the guidance offer, with a view to adjust and improve practices. In these terms, the voice of users should be heard, i.e. that workers should have a say, not just as respondents to satisfaction questionnaires, but by having a real influence on the set-up of guidance offers: this may range from informal feedback to more formal settings (Vilhjalmsdottir et al, 2011).

Now reflect

What are your thoughts after reading the above? Does this connect with your experience?

Why would you/your organisation want to engage in workplace-based guidance. What would be the reasons? And who would benefit? How would you create a balance between an emphasis on personal development aspects and/or on professional development?

What is the definition of career guidance within TRIAS – Guidance in the workplace?

Career guidance refers to services and activities intended to assist individuals, of any age and at any point throughout their lives, to make educational, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers. Such services may be found in schools, universities and colleges, in training institutions, in public employment services, in the workplace, in the voluntary or community sector and in the private sector. The activities may take place on an individual or group basis, and may be face-to-face or at a distance (including help lines and web-based services). They include career information provision (in print, ICT-based and other forms), assessment and self-assessment tools, counseling interviews, career education programmes (to help individuals develop their self awareness, opportunity awareness, and career management skills), taster programmes (to sample options before choosing them), work search programmes, and transition services. [OECD 2004b]
3.2 Where? The place: this section gives an insight into the importance of settings for workplace guidance

**How to reach out to employees**

The classical format for career guidance is: in an office, two people, and access to a computer. The two people talk: this is a guidance interview. The computer is humming in the background to be consulted as a dictionary, a pool of information. This format appeals to some people, but others feel alienated: it feels like a bureaucratic setting, if feels like control.

Research has shown that settings matter (Thomsen, 2013): place and space have an influence on the interaction. Thus, summoning people to come to an office may not appropriate if you want to reach out to particular groups, such as the low-qualified. One stop centres and shop-like guidance offers have aimed at showing a friendly face to customers. But even such settings may not reach out. Some examples exist, however, of guidance taking place in the actual workplace, on the shop floor (Plant, 2008), where a gentle and gradual approach was chosen in order to reach out to workers on the shop floor, or in the canteen, or the lunch-room.

Guidance in such settings may run into a number of barriers in terms of noise, restricted time for breaks, no available space, etc. But is can be done, as this example (below) depicts: these guidance activities were aimed at female workers, but similar projects have focused on males. And, interestingly, the apparent gender-bias in these projects was quickly brushed aside by the workers themselves, who took no notice of the origin of the guidance offer, as long as it came close to their needs, in the actual workplace.

**Trade union guidance corners in Denmark**

*’It made all the difference that guidance came to me, in the workplace, at a critical time of my life’. (Female worker in interview)*

*Kvindeligt Arbejderforbund* (KAD) developed initiatives in peer guidance, similar to those in the UK’s Union Learning Representatives initiative. KAD was a trade union for women only (now merged with others) mainly for those with few formal qualifications and low pay in different industries and in the service sector. Their attitudes towards participation in continuing education or training were mostly utilitarian: guidance was mainly linked to periods of unemployment, available only within office hours. Although convenient for unemployed members, it was less so for women in hourly paid employment who found it difficult to access. In response to this, KAD established guidance corners (*Vejledningshjørner*) in the canteen or resting areas of several major and
medium-sized companies. The guidance corner concept is simple: a trade union representative (or a career guidance professional) offers person-to-person guidance in a corner of a workplace assembly room, using pamphlets about education or training with a portable computer containing guidance and information programmes. This provides members with information on adult education options plus opportunities for discussion, questions and reflection on their current situation. Initially, such visits were conducted by KAD every two weeks in an open consultation mode, with a permanent exhibition of current training and education available, including rules on the funding for education leave. This, however, did not meet the actual needs of the female membership.

First, they did not show interest in the pamphlets offered on training or education to any significant degree. Secondly, few women in work requested guidance spontaneously, failing to see how it might benefit them. The concept of guidance was somewhat blurred, and, in their minds, mostly aimed at unemployed people. Thirdly, working in self-governing groups, as is the case in the high-tech company Bang and Olufsen, puts economic pressure on all members of the group. This limited their willingness to visit the guidance corner since leaving work for guidance would penalise the whole group. Moreover, as pointed out by Thomsen (2012), separate guidance interviews in the workplace reflect individualistic practices as opposed to more collective approaches which are the norm in some workplaces.

These obstacles had to be overcome: the guidance worker needed to get out of her comfort zone, and get into direct contact with the workers, on the shop floor, during breaks, in the lunch room. Having done this, applying more collective guidance methods, leaving the office-like idea of a separate guidance space, the approach gradually became more fluid and flexible, taking into account that situations and people differ and need different approaches.

This made all the difference: 'It took away my anxiety to be able to speak to someone who listened and took an interest in me. One who saw possibilities and supported my aspirations. I needed this sort of gentle kick. The guidance corner also provided valuable information. If information was not readily available, the guidance counsellor just found it for me before our next appointment. I might have been able to find some of this information on my own, but I did not know where to look. The supportive personal guidance element, however, was the most important part to me.’

Until then, these women had not seen further education as a plausible option for them, feeling marginalised in terms of training and education. They had focused on the financial barriers and the difficulties of being a mature learner, rather than new options for personal and professional development. One stated: ‘Getting fired turned out to be quite a gift for me, really. It forced me to see new avenues. Having used the guidance corner, I could realise an old dream which had been buried for while. Before,
in school, I was a quiet girl and often had nothing to say. Now, as a mature student, I talk all the time and my fellow students listen to me as the experienced one. Such a change’.

This is a female voice, but perhaps these reflections are not gender specific. In workplace guidance, however, it is worth remembering that there are at least three participants involved in the guidance activities: the worker, guidance practitioner, and the employer. This may both restrict and enhance the results of the guidance activities. Thus workers may feel inhibited or they may indeed feel encouraged by their employer to take up new challenges and learning opportunities.

The Danish approach (Guidance Corners) referred to above represents a bottom-up approach, where trade union representatives are actively involved in establishing the guidance offer in the actual workplace, on the shop floor, among the workers. In these terms it resembles such approaches as Educational Ambassadors (DK), or Union Learning Representatives (UK), who are elected among their peers, and are trained for the guidance tasks at hand on the basis of agreements with the employer (see https://www.unionlearn.org.uk/union-learning-reps-ulrs). Such approaches make use of a mix between intermediaries and professional guidance staff. Training/education fairs, newsletters, and making use of the intranet in the case of working with larger companies may be used to inform workers about guidance offers.

Top Down –Being referred to users by company representatives
The Slovenian approach, on the other hand, represents a top-down approach. In this case Maribor Guidance Centre closely cooperated with a human resource development (HRD) department in the company. The department prepared a list of employees (potential clients) in collaboration with middle management. According to the tender rules the list consisted of low-skilled employees above the age 45. The guidance interview took place during the working hours between two working shifts. Likewise, the training process which followed the guidance intervention took place only partly during the working hours.

The project involved the trade union in a more passive role. Both union representatives were informed in writing about the guidance activities taking place in the company. When the project came to an end, a note was published in the “Livarnar” internal newsletter of the company. The Maribor Guidance Centre also prepared a leaflet on guidance which was put on the information display (board) of the company by the HRD staff. Both additional sources of information were shown only minimal interest by the employees; most of the clients were referred to the guidance offer by the HRD department.
Another Slovenian example of in-company guidance gave trade union representatives a more significant role. The Maribor Guidance Centre noticed that HRD services do not connect the role of the union representatives with the field of learning and training/education. The first reaction to the project collaboration between the adult education guidance centre, the HRD department, and trade union representatives was not a positive one. Contrary to the initial awkwardness, the collaboration with the trade union in the company proved to be useful at a later stage. At the end of the project, the union representative was even involved in the evaluation.

These examples on bottom-up vs top-down approaches to guidance from different European countries point to the importance of creating an awareness concerning the working conditions and the established patterns of cooperation among the social partners in the actual workplace: what might work easily in one context, might create tensions in another.

**Now reflect:**

*Place and space: where would it be appropriate in your context to offer guidance to low-qualified workers?*

*Where are the barriers – mentally or in practice?*

*Which arrangements must be made with owners and managers of companies to be able to enter the workplace?*

*Would other arenas be more appropriate or accessible or prove less difficult to establish?*

*Some countries have no requirements and no guidelines concerning the level of training of guidance practitioners. Indeed, both private and public career guidance providers in educational institutions, in employment services, or in research institutions are often without (formal) qualifications in the very field in which they are operating. So, who should do the job: career guidance professionals, or e.g. union representatives, or others?*

*Read the case above; interview workers and managers and trade union representatives on the needs and views. Write up the results of your investigation; present your results to the persons involved; discuss your findings*
3.3 How? Methods: this section provides an awareness of different guidance approaches and their practical implications

Guidance is more than just talking and giving advice, face-to-face. In fact, it may not be about giving advice, but rather listening, mirroring (i.e. reflecting back), conceptualising, offering metaphors to explain the situation, summarising, or challenging e.g. stereotypes.

For example, the use of metaphors (Amundson, 2013), may help the guidance activities along. When we run out of words, we turn to images: if you are glad, the ‘sun is shining’. If you are in a bad mood, you are ‘in the dark’ or just ‘blue’. Some guidance practitioners apply this approach to talk about job (dis)satisfaction: ‘My job is a witch; she has secret powers over me; she gets me to work every day, but I hate it. She talks to me, but I tell her to keep quiet’. This could be the response to a question such as: ‘Tell me about your job’.

Metaphors may also be useful in narrative approaches: telling the story (Reid, 2007), perhaps through exercises with Jobcards, i.e. sorting images of work in, for example acceptable vs non-acceptable as a starting point for further guidance. Such approaches, by some scholars, are categorised as ‘soft methods’, as opposed the e.g. testing, interest inventories, and the like, which are considered ‘hard methods’.

In short, a multitude of approaches and methods are possible, but many have some kind of built-in progression along the lines of rational decision-making. Egan’s three stage model is one such approach (Egan, 2007). It is so simple: (1) where are you, (2) where would you like to go, and (3) how will you get there? Neat questions that will lead you to an action plan. You can even walk the model, as you move along using those three steps, perhaps moving around in marked areas, which symbolise each of the stages. This brings both the mind and the body into action. Egan explained his three stages and its sub-steps with these concepts:
Such stage-models are fine... if you know where you are going. But what if you don’t? Perhaps it may be more appropriate to start off with dreams and aspirations, rather than setting goals. In either case rushing to concrete action steps may be premature or even counterproductive.

Gelatt offers some practical help here, introducing Positive Uncertainty (Gelatt & Gelatt, 2003, see Worksheet 3 in the Annex). Thus, Gelatt points to an approach in which the applied methods take their starting point in uncertainty: this is the foundation to build on, shaky as it may be. This takes away the pressure of rigid goal-setting, but it adds a dimension of ambiguity. That’s life.

**Now reflect:**

*What is your strategy in terms of decision making in cooperation with guidance seekers?*

*Which kind of methods do you apply – and why these?*

*Read the two different approaches above (Egan; Gelatt). Try some of their suggestions out in your practice. Have someone else observe or make a recording (video or audio). Look at/listen to this. Discuss pro and cons of the two approaches. Create your*
own approach. Do a role play. Apply this in your practice, and look into the results in terms of e.g. client satisfaction or client actions or other types of outcomes.

Consider privacy and confidentiality issues: this is, after all, guidance in the workplace, which may create particular barriers to guidance activities and outcomes. Should guidance activities, for example, continue outside the workplace at some (later) stage in the guidance process?

References Chapter 3


Chapter 4: Working with the employer and implementation of training activities

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With contributions of the TRIAS partnership

Introduction

The approach TRIAS Guidance in the workplace is characterized by the involvement of the employers in the guidance process. The work with the company focuses on two different phases of the TRIAS process, both of which are presented in chapter 4:

- Phase 2: Working with the employer – where do we stand (chapter 4.1)
- Phase 4: Accompanying the implementation of activities and transfer (chapter 4.2)

Phase 1
Accessing employers
- Defining your strategy
- Collecting addresses, marketing and communication
- Making contact
- Deepening contact & contracting
- Follow up and public relations

Phase 2
Working with the employer - where do we stand?
- Assessing needs
- Analysis of existing training activities
- Analysis of competence development demand (employer's perspective)
- Identification of relevant workplaces and staff for guidance intervention
- Identification of ways of accessing employees

Phase 3
Reaching out to employees - guidance in the workplace
- Accessing employees, choosing a setting
- Information and awareness raising
- Individual/group guidance

Phase 4
Accompanying the implementation activities and transfer
- Accompanying implementation activities
- Accompanying employees in the learning process
- Evaluation and ensuring the knowledge transfer to the company
4.1 Phase 2: Working with the employer – Where do we stand?

This chapter focuses on how to inform the management or other representatives of the company such as those responsible for staff development on the TRIAS offer and how to convince them to collaborate. Career guidance in the workplace encounters a wide range of obstacles, which are partly caused by the structures of the educational and guidance/consultancy market, and partly by internal business conditions. The following arguments and approaches demonstrate how career guidance practitioners can access the company and promote the participation in the TRIAS guidance in the workplace offer.

The following aspects of TRIAS activities are addressed:

- Discussing the situation of the company concerning development needs as starting points for offering guidance and subsequent training activities.
- Analysing the approach of the company to vocational and educational training activities
- Analysing the skills development needs of employees from the perspective of the employer
- Identifying workplaces and employees that are a relevant target groups for career guidance

**Objectives in working with the employer**

> Every company is an individual.

The above statement clearly shows why working with companies constantly holds new facets in store and why every employer must be taken seriously with his/her views.
and assessments about leading the company and therewith also defining the role of career guidance in a workplace setting. It also makes clear that standardized strategies and procedures are not useful. The approach must be modified according the needs of the "individual company".

Career guidance in the business field always has more than one client: In small businesses there are one or more employee/s and the employer. Depending on the size of the company, the immediate supervisor or the employee representatives can be added. For larger companies, the talks will also include HR managers, direct superiors or other company representatives.

**Understanding the employers’ perspective**

Companies see themselves as places of work and less as places of learning. The entrepreneur's perspective is an economic, not an educational or especially adult educational one. This is reflected in the way the employer thinks about qualifying his employees. It is not the importance of learning as a value in itself that is of interest to the company, not the employability developed through learning, but the expected benefits. Learning is useful from the company's point of view when the learner changes his or her working habits and improvements become visible in their performance. It is often not easy for guidance practitioners, who think and act as educators, to understand, accept and respect this entrepreneur's perspective.

In the perspective of the employer, it is the central task of career guidance, to ensure throughout the whole TRIAS process that the opportunities for the company's development, which arise from qualification and training, become transparent. The guidance practitioners can also ensure that the implementation of training activities like proposal preparation, realizations and evaluation are being professionally followed.

Taking over the employers’ perspective also means that you adapt your approach in order to stress topics and challenges relevant to entrepreneurs, and not focus on political problems. So when talking to employer representatives (management or HR manager), it is advisable not to use terminology normally used in policy-making or academic contexts. The terminology used should always link and relate to tasks and challenges in the company’s context.

*Here is an example: Instead of talking of workplace-oriented basic education, one could refer to staff development of low-qualified (e.g. for increasing productivity, decreasing sick leave rates etc.)*

In order to get an insight into the employers’ perspectives, it is helpful to start to work with the basic business data. This data also can be used as starting point for identifying learning and development needs of the individual company. (see Worksheet 2 – Analysis of the company structure: basic data)
**Why is it so important to talk to the employer?**

The manager or the staff manager is the key person when it comes to qualifying of the unskilled in the company. Without his active support workplace learning cannot succeed.

It has proven particularly viable for all further steps in the guidance process that the management level is actively involved from an early stage of the guidance intervention on and that personnel development for unskilled labour is an important management issue. Usually it is not enough, if the employer signals its willingness to support training efforts for the low-qualified. The employer must proactively promote the project and convince the immediate superiors of the need for qualification activities.

If the employer is behind the idea of an intelligent human resource management, which includes the development of the employability of low-skilled workers, an important prerequisite for the development of a training programme and its implementation is created.

Experience shows that to work with and discuss the corporate structure, even when using checklists and templates, the practitioners require certain sensitivity. Guidance practitioners would do well to respond to reservations, bias but also scepticism and doubts about the reasonability of the guidance intervention.

**Dialogical interviewing as a consulting principle**

Guidance practitioners and management have their own, different perspectives and attitudes on the subject of staff development for low-skilled and the need and usefulness of career management and training for these workers. This provides particular challenges for the discussions, for which the principle of dialogical conversation has been proven successful.

Talks and discussions following the principle of dialogue try to avoid:

- questioning of the employer,
- concentrating on factual knowledge about the company,
- missionizing.

The dialogue is based on a common process of understanding and negotiation. This is essential if we want to succeed in offering guidance interventions. A successful dialogue with the employer is the foundation for further interventions.
In following the principles of dialog, the interview partners – despite different experiences and perspectives:

• seek to promote mutual understanding,
• and negotiate with the aim of an agreement,
• which allows the pursuit of common goals
• and which clarifies the next steps to achieve the objectives.

For the dialogue to work, the guidance practitioner has to prove:

• **Readiness to change perspective:**
  Try to look at the interview from the perspective of the employer: What needs to be understood? At what points concerns emerge? Are they justified? How? What is the employer proud of? It’s important to show interest in the employer’s perspective on the company, its history, its development, its future. Take previous experiences with qualification and training seriously.

• **Communication partner on equal terms:**
  Contribute your knowledge, experiences and beliefs. Make your own perspectives and positions clear and transparent. Bring concisely your own arguments, perspectives and experiences concerning personnel management, human resources development, for the benefit of guidance and training for low-skilled. Be careful in promising and raising expectations you might not fulfil.

• **Clear and precise language:**
  Use explicit, clear, and precise words. Avoid long explanations. Find a good balance between an operationally compatible and an authentic language.

• **Respect views and opinions of the entrepreneur:**
  Do not use forms of defence, blame, degradation or criticism. Respect past experience and judgements as you expect it for yourself. It is the only way that a constructive spirit and trusting working relationship can be established.

• **Listen carefully:**
  Listen carefully; show that you are listening with mimic expression or by ensuring if you have properly understood. Pay attention that you use your communicative repertoire in asking and requesting information, and use various formulations.

• **Good questioning:**
  Use open impulse questions. Ask for more details if some interesting aspects arise.
Questions, feedback, comparisons, observations that initiate a dialogue

"You mentioned that the company experiences changes. What were the major changes in your company during the last years?"

"The production processes are quite complex. Which parts are most challenging for your staff?"

"Has the increasingly demanding attitude of customers also changed the requirements for your sales staff?"

The first informational talks – a strategy to win them over

It is all about building trust!

The efforts of persuasion - it needs a good strategy

The first informational talks can be considered rather a sales pitch than a consultation. The objective is to come to terms with the company contacted and to conclude an agreement or a contract, so that the actual guidance intervention can be started. So one part of this talk will be to inform the company about the offer and assess their needs, but also negotiate if and how to further proceed.

For these talks, it is generally important to allow for a change of perspective, to see the offer from the perspective of the employer and to emphasise the concrete benefit for the company in your argument. It is beneficial to focus on the general attitude of your dialogue partner and how it changes when reacting to your offer. The next steps of concretising and formalising the offer can be implemented only after your contact person has been convinced! (See also Chapter 2 for advice on general benefits of participating in your offered guidance activities.)

Experience shows that the best starting point is the identification of major challenges the company has to tackle. Guidance practitioners can use this initial assessment to elaborate solutions together with the employer. This means that the whole process is about the diagnosis of a certain challenge in a company, and some aspects of this challenge might be related to objectives of education or labour market policies.

Guidance practitioners should recall that it is not to be taken granted especially in smaller and medium-sized enterprises to be accepted as dialogue partner by the com-
pany on sensitive topics like the development of the company and the training needs of their (low-qualified) staff.

4 steps to get the employer’s attention and increase their interest

(1) Assessing the present situation
Figure out what the main challenges are that the company has to deal with at the moment. What minor or major changes has the company faced in recent years?

As already mentioned above, in the initial discussions with the entrepreneur or staff manager, the guidance practitioner should collect as much information as possible on the structure of the company, the personnel situation and the company-relevant business areas.

Worksheet 6 “Working with the employer. Challenges, perspectives & strategies” provides you with an example how to identify and rate the strengths and weaknesses of the enterprise.

(2) Uncovering the needs of the employer (see also 4.1.3 Interviews with the company)
Experience shows that arguments will not convince the employer to participate if the person himself does not realise that there are unsolved challenges to tackle or that there is some need for improvement. It is of great importance that you do not interrupt the employer expressing his or her needs and problems, even if they do not directly relate to the services you can offer. To gain trust and in further consequence to get in a position to implement your own suggested solution, it is of uttermost importance to acknowledge the relevance of the companies challenges.

The task of the guidance practitioner will be to identify if any of the changes and challenges the company has to deal with have an effect on the skills and competence requirements of the staff and possibly result in learning needs.

(3) Presenting adequate proposals and services and (4) Outlining benefits and arguments to participate (see also 4.1.4 proposals and services offered to the company)
Clearly point out that you use the information attained for developing a guidance offer directly targeted at the individual company. If applicable you can also propose additional activities (e.g. the involvement of a consultant). Depending on subsequent agreements you can present your offer in written or oral form.
Now reflect

What can you do to build up a relationship of trust with the employer or staff manager? How do you notice that you achieved this confidential basis? What would be common pitfalls in talking with the employer? What should definitely be avoided?

What to talk with the company management – Assessing the current situation and deriving competence needs

From the perspective of the company, the actual benefit is at the heart of dealing with the guidance offer. Guidance practitioners have to support the employer to realise that human resources development is highly related to the general development of the company.

Opportunities for starting to discuss the staff development needs are mainly recent and urgent problems and changes. Development of the company can be manifold: the need to reorganise certain processes, digitalisation, strategic development, staff shortages and / or other company changes. Even if by introducing the career guidance offer you cannot relate to all these development needs, knowing as much as possible about the development needs of the company will help you to link these need to the area of human resources development and qualification.

What causes competence development and training needs?

- New competence requirements for employees arise from current and strategic development requirements of the company. Even for low-qualified, new skill requirements due to changes in tasks and task profiles may arise.
- The company will additionally experiences training needs if existing competence requirements are not adequately met by the employees or because know-how has to be continually expanded or renewed in a certain field of activities.

Qualification requirements are visible when...

- complaints increase
- the error or the rejection rate increases,
- inflexibility occurs
- work equipment is inefficiently used,
- employee satisfaction declines,
• deadlines can’t be met,
• revenues decline,
• working atmosphere deteriorates,
• staff turnover increases,
• sick leaves increase.

**SMEs: intuition instead of planning**

It is important to take into account a specificity of SMEs: rather than strategic planning, the interest of company management is to achieve operational results. This can be an advantage!

"Planning should not replace intuition and improvisation, but support it. Planning must make this intuitive and improvised approach more systematic, targeted, methodical. But it might jeopardise the whole activities to confront a person with a method that dissuades him to act in his natural way to think, solve problems and to cope with life. So planning must be tailored to the people and to the personality types with their different ways of thinking "(Kirsch, 1983, cited by Weingartner, 1995, found in: Qualifizierungsleitfaden Lernende Region Modul A, p. 11)

**How to get employers to target low qualified and unskilled labour – the importance of social and personal competences of low qualified staff**

As the TRIAS approach takes low qualified and unskilled labour into the focus, you might need to convince the employer to include these target groups into the TRIAS intervention or even align the activities according to their needs.

Again, it is not very useful to work with standardised arguments, which can be handed over to the employer. A standardised list of arguments will in most cases contribute little to convince companies to participate. To have some arguments in mind will support the guidance practitioners in the first talks. However, from the TRIAS perspective we propose to seek the dialog and discuss this question in a direct conversation. While doing so the focus should be on these described target groups. That’s easier said than done as these groups are rarely subject of the HRD development and there is not much awareness for the training needs of this groups on a general level.

Two possible scenarios for discussing the importance of social and personal competences of low qualified with the employer:

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Proposals and services offered to the company

What can TRIAS guidance offer to the company?

The employer is going to want to know in every detail, which services are provided in the TRIAS offer:

- Inform about the goals, intentions and possibilities of career guidance
- Raise awareness of human resources development, especially for low-qualified people, as an important corporate strategy
- Analysis of the company situation and its strategic objectives focussing on training and qualification requirements
- Identification of and reaching out to employees for career guidance
- Analysis of requirements for human resources development, especially for low-qualified
- Supporting decisions regarding further measures of human resources development, in particular with regard to training
- Supporting the implementation of training activities including the necessary clarifications and contracting.
- Accompanying the employees throughout the learning process
- Monitoring the training process and ensuring the quality of the training
- Creating prerequisites for learning transfer
- Evaluation of the training

„If you as employer consider, what you particularly value with your employees... Is it more based on their professional expertise or other personal factors? It’s always also the human side, which plays a large role. The human side is reflected in the soft skills the employee has. If you think about unskilled labour in your company, where do you perceive needs to further develop this “human side”?

"If I review your remarks on the changes in your company in recent years, I notice that next to increased professional qualification requirements like…. something stings out: The requirements to communicate, to collaborate – with colleagues, clients, superiors – seemed to have increased. This is a development, which also puts personal and social skill into focus. How do you assess this development for your workplaces in general and for your low qualified staff in particular?“
• Joint feedback process with entrepreneurs, employees and trainers

**How does TRIAS career guidance support the employees? The employer will want to know.**

The employer should be informed about contents and topics of the intervention as well as about the methods and tools of career guidance, for example, how the guidance offer for employees is designed. This includes negotiating, when, where, how it can and should be organized, as well as other agreements like confidentiality. (see also Chapter 1 & Chapter 3)

**Attention: To work with the company does not mean to consult the company**

The initial talks will inform the employer about the service of TRIAS guidance in the workplace and will try to find and produce a match between corporate objectives, perspectives and approaches and the objectives of the TRIAS offer. In these talks the guidance practitioner will most probably addresses business challenges and their solutions. He will also- together with the employer – deduce how the TRIAS offer and therewith career guidance can have a positive effect on these challenges. Therewith these first interviews might have a consultancy character. However, guidance practitioners should not directly use words like consultation, because the intentions of TRIAS are different. The role of the TRIAS career guidance is defined primarily in relation to the employees.

**The possibility to include trainers already in the first talks**

And as a brief prelude to later remarks, the question is if and when to include possible trainers for e.g. in-house trainings in the talks with the company. This mainly depends on the specific project. If one of the main objectives of the project is to implement training activities, it might make sense to include trainers from the beginning of the joint negotiations. It also depends on when the activities of the involved guidance practitioner are considered completed. The tasks of the TRIAS guidance practitioner might also include accompanying the employees in the learning process, monitoring the quality and supporting the company in transferring the learning results. These issues need to be clarified in advance, to avoid irritation between the different persons involved.
Analysis of competence requirements of low-skilled workplaces and resulting consequences

We suggest three different points for analysis which will support guidance practitioners in better understanding the company, its competence and training needs as well as workplaces which will most benefit from a guidance intervention.

- Identifying and understanding the company’s approach to education and training
- Job maps as an instrument for identifying and accessing the target groups
- Competence analysis from the perspective of the employer

Identify and understand the company’s approach to education and training

If guidance practitioners talk to employers, they should try to learn about the current approach to (continuing) vocational education and training in the company (see also Worksheet 7: working with the employer. Approach of the company to education and training). If the practitioners realizes that CVET only has a marginal role in the company, the effort to convince the company to participate in the TRIAS intervention, will be much higher than if the company is very active in CVET. If the company does not engage in training activities, it might make sense to discuss the main reasons for this abstinence. However, the dialog partners should not get into the position of justifying the company’s abstinence from training. If the need for lifelong learning is frequently brought up, there might be the risk that the employer reacts in a defensive way, which might not increase his determination to participate in the TRIAS intervention.

In smaller enterprises (with less than fifty employees) differentiated strategies for the further development of the company are rarely to be found. They also lack the skills for strategic planning and for a state of the art human resources management and also the necessary resources to implement a better system. A difficult task for guidance practitioners. They might need the expertise of other experts like business consultants to implement adequate human resource management in a company setting.

Job maps as a possible instrument of identification and access to target group

The „Job-Map“ (“Arbeitsplatzlandkarte”) is a simple analytical tool to identify specific jobs within a company which feature defined characteristics. Since the guidance offer of the TRIAS project especially targets low-qualified people, the selected jobs entail “learning risks” as defined analytical feature. This means that people working in these jobs have very little learning benefits while performing the tasks related to these jobs.
When performing this analytical exercise, the guidance practitioner will have to team up with someone from the HRD department or the management of the company. Ideally, a workers’ representative would also be involved.

The process of implementing this analytical tool is a quite simple one:

**First,** you identify all different jobs which exist in the given company and gather them on a pin board. Taken a hotel as an example, you will pin up receptionist, cook, breakfast waiter, floor personnel, house technician, dishwasher, chief of service, staff manager, bar waiter etc.

**Second,** you identify which of these jobs entail “learning risks”. Keeping with the hotel example, this could be the case for the floor personnel, the bar waiter or the person only washing dishes in the kitchen.

**Third,** you try to come up with some company-internal solutions for the challenges identified. For example, the breakfast waiter could accompany the chief of service during his working day to get trained to be able to fill in for the chief of service when he or she is on vacation. Another example would be to enrich the job of dishwashing by other assisting roles in the kitchen so that the person washing dishes could become a cook in the long run.
**Competence analysis from the perspective of the employer**

The following paragraphs focus on competence assessment from the perspective of the employer. The TRIAS approach which integrates employee and employer perspectives provides the benefit of being able to cross over and combine individual and company-related results in the analysis.

In this analysis phase the direct superiors of selected employees should be involved as well. They can usually better assess the skills and competence development demands of employees than the general management because they daily experience the employees at the workplace accomplishing their tasks. The result of this analysis phase as well as the results from the individual guidance intervention can be integrated later on. These integrated results can be used to derive recommendations for learning and training activities.

**Identifying and assessing competences, deriving qualification needs**

Before deriving qualification needs, we suggest to assess the available skills and competences of selected employees and not to start with lacking skills. There are different instruments that can be applied (comp. Grote, et al., edts. 2012), of which some will be presented here. Which one to choose mainly depends on the specific requirement structure of the jobs and should be selected in agreement with the human resources manager or the general manager.

**Competence assessment according to workflows and job requirements**

Tools for competence assessment can also be developed on the basis of specific job requirements, for example for activities in a goods receiving department (s. Fig. 1).

![Radar chart for assessing job requirements in goods receiving department](image)

**Figure 1: Radar chart for assessing job requirements in goods receiving department**
The competence raster is a tool which can be completed by the supervisor as well as by the individual employees. The competence areas, which appear weak in the assessment, give hint to qualification requirements. These results can be integrated into recommendations on possible training objectives and contents later on. The results of the competence raster can be also evaluated already together with a trainer.

**Competence Assessment in Service oriented Companies**

Soft skills, especially for low-qualified workers, gain importance in all areas of work. On the one hand a service-oriented thinking becomes more important in the industrial sector. But especially companies, in which the low-skilled have frequent customer contacts such as hotels, restaurants or in cleaning firms, depend on soft skills of their workforce. Therefore, it may be appropriate to identify and assess soft skills among employees. Again, it absolutely makes sense to compare the external assessment by the supervisor with the self-assessment of employees.

![Radar chart for competence assessment of handling sales orders](image)

*Figure 2: Radar chart for competence assessment of handling sales orders*

Depending on the context, a rather reduced chart can be used (Fig. 2) or a more detailed version (Fig. 3). In the first talks with the company, the practitioners should figure out, if the company already uses a competences management system, which results can be used for the TRIAS intervention.
4.2. Phase 4: From the analysis phase to further training activities

The outcome of the TRIAS intervention can be manifold. Employees taking up the guidance offer might have reached conclusions on their individual goals with regard to their personal development and/or their professional career development (inside or outside the given company). Furthermore, they might have got a clue about the competences demanded to support their desired developments. Companies might have gained insight into the competences, training needs as well as internal career aspirations of their (low qualified) staff.

At company level, bringing these two perspectives together can ideally nurture two follow up processes:

- At the one hand, companies might think about strategies on boosting on the job learning in the company. E.g. by implementing job-rotation, job-enrichment, learning-tandems etc..
- At the other hand, companies might invest in tailor might training offers for their low qualified employees (and might also seek for public funding of these offers).

In chapter 4, we will focus on tailor made training offers as follow up process of the guidance intervention and will show, what role guidance practitioners could possibly
take over in this process. This means that the guidance practitioners will remain present in the company setting after the interventions with the company and the employees in order to enable the further implementation of learning and training activities and to act as an intermediary between the various actors, and to be available for both companies and employees as a contact person in challenging situations.

In this chapter you will find explanations to the following counselling steps:

- Generate results of analysis and communicate with the company
- Derive consequences for concrete action
- Plan qualification and education programs
- Select and brief suitable providers
- Support the development of employees
- Ensuring the learning transfer
- Evaluate changes and benefits
- Public relation

What is the role of TRIAS guidance practitioners in this phase of the process? How can the TRIAS guidance practitioner support the employer and employee in the further process?

- supporting decisions in terms of further personnel development measures, particularly with regard to training
- support in planning and implementing a training program
- accompanying and supporting the learning process
- ensuring the quality of the training
- creating conditions for learning transfer
- evaluating the trainings
• joint evaluation with entrepreneurs, employees and trainers

Analyzing, summarizing, communicating and deriving consequences

How to continue working with the collected findings and transfer them in training activities? This depends on different factors like the company size, the company’s previous approach to training activities and your own capabilities. The results can be processed, e.g. in these three different ways:

• For a large and medium-sized company, the results can be transferred to educational plans ...
• for a small and medium-sized company, the results can be used to design tailor-made continuing education, training, or even additional guidance offers ...
• In a small company, the results can be explained to the employer in informal discussions by the guidance practitioner (e.g. How to proceed?)

Concrete planning of a training offer

Select suitable providers for continuing education

After completing the assessment of the needs of employer and employees (see chapter 3 and chapter 4.1) and compiling training plans, the next step for a TRIAS guidance practitioner can be the selection of suitable trainers, teachers or coaches. There might be only a few freelancers in this sector. Many of the professionals in the field are employed in continuing education institutions. Thus, it is worth taking a closer look at the local and regional network of in-company training providers. In most European countries, there are a number of databases in the network, in which potential providers list their seminar topics, formats, target groups, prices, and so on. Many of these databases make it possible to filter according to specific search criteria.

Reflection

What training databases do you know for your city / region? What are the criteria you are looking for?

In Worksheet 8 “Selection criteria for providers”, you will find selection criteria to support you in identifying an adequate training provider and will guide you in talking and selecting appropriate trainers.
Accompany the contracting between provider and employer

If a provider is chosen, the next task is to get the provider and company representative together to reach a contractual agreement. In Worksheet 9 “Check-up Tender Preparation” you will find some guidelines what to consider for such agreements.

Before the training start it is important for the trainer to know the conditions of participation for the employees. The trainer should, therefore, be informed about the agreement on objectives which the company (Worksheet 10).

As one of the tasks of the TRIAS guidance practitioner to take care of the evaluation and verification of the successful learning transfer to the company, it is advisable to remain in contact with the trainer during the training, in order to be able to intervene in time if it can be estimated that the competence development or training objective might not be reached. This especially applies when the company assesses the success of the whole intervention by the success of the training programs.

Good to know: There are many variants

The TRIAS contract does not always include the responsibility for supporting the company in the implementation of training programs and in the further process. It might be the case that the guidance practitioner has to transfer the elaborated results to the trainer, who continues the work on an individual level. The trainer then is responsible for the design, implementation and evaluation of the training. There exist quite mixed forms. However, we recommend that you take over responsibility for the performance of the TRIAS process!

Learning process support as a task of guidance counselling?

In the TRIAS process, we recommend that the guidance counsellor takes optional responsibility as:

• Contact person promoting and supporting learning for employees in trainings and further educations
• Communication partner for the training provider
• Communication partner for the trainer and the employer to enable and secure the learning transfer
• Giving feedback to all parties involved

Why is that important to us?

• The guidance practitioner remains responsible for the high quality of the TRIAS approach and ensures that this quality is maintained throughout the process.
The guidance practitioner remains as a contact person of trust for the employees and carries out the necessary role of an intermediate.

The guidance practitioner keeps an eye on the motivation of the employees.

The guidance practitioner ensures the work and workplace orientation of the learning and teaching activities, which e.g. means the training activities meet the identified requirements of the workplace.

**What are the risks and side effects?**

- Through unclear responsibilities conflicts with the trainers might occur. The trainer might feel under pressure by being observed and monitored and/or that he is not considered sufficiently competent.
- Confusion in the company, who is responsible for what (guidance practitioner, trainer)

**Excursus: Supporting learning processes**

When the first milestones are achieved and there finally is an actual learning offer for low-skilled people in the company, guidance practitioners often pass the responsibility for successful learning to the trainers, which are the experts for good teaching.

In practice, however, it shows that in training programs for low-qualified subsequent problems might arise. It can be an additional task for the TRIAS guidance practitioner to tackle these problems. Irregular attendance in the training program, drop-outs and lacking motivation can frustrate all parties involved. The employer’s presumptions of the lacking training potential of low-qualified employees seem to be confirmed. The learners themselves re-experience their negative learning experiences and their fear of failure. Trainer blame themselves, doubt their didactic-methodological competences and tend to concentrate their training activities on groups who are used to learn and to participate in training activities; The guidance practitioner are worried that the employer don’t take them serious anymore and that they doubt their competences and their arguments.

In order to avoid such experiences, it is necessary to take a closer look at the learning requirements of the target group. In the best case this happens already before the implementation of the training program. Thus target group oriented requirements can be derived for the following training program. This includes getting an insight into previous learning experiences of low-qualified persons. The vast majority of low-skilled people link learning with experience of failure rather than success. For example Some look back to unsuccessful school experiences. Some of them might have dropped out from previous professional training. They experience high mental barriers
toward engaging in a training program. Because of these previous learning experiences, they are more likely to fail or develop strategies to avoid learning experiences to avoid further frustrating and frightening learning experience.

For trainers and guidance experiences, it is important to be aware of these target group specific requirements for training and learning. This will also help not to interpret the arising problems as reluctance to learn or lack of motivation, but e.g. as fear of failure.

An adult oriented didactics must not - especially not in these groups - focus on the teaching of the subject matter alone. It is a combination of the "inherent logic of the subject with the psychological logic of learners and the logic of application in practice" (Siebert, 2012 p 271). A focus on the teaching of the subject matter only ignores the constructivist insight that adults are uneducable but capable of learning (see Siebert, 2015).

It is particularly important in working with low-qualified people to create "forms of work and communication within which the actual learning interests of those concerned can be systematically expressed and taken into account" (Holzkamp, 1996, p. 24). Participant orientation before content orientation is the central didactic principle, which should drive the work of the trainer. This primary principle comprises following sub-principles:

- Participation orientation,
- biography orientation,
- competence orientation,
- reflection orientation,
- process orientation.

This might be easy to read, but in practice it is quite demanding for trainers and practitioners involved.

In their previous learning biographies, the learners have not often experienced that teachers showed interest in their needs and interests. In traditional classes, learners are treated as a kind of shopping cart, which must be filled with knowledge. For this reason, the learners have to learn to articulate their needs and to make use of opportunities for participation. This can only be achieved if the learners do not primarily experience themselves as deficient but are also aware about their competences acquired on an informal basis. The reflection of one's own learning, i.e. the "ability to review the own personal attitudes and expectations, to know better about one's own learning interests, and to make decisions on this basis" (Klein, Reutter, Zisenis, 2016, p. 195)
has to be learned as ability. A paradox is often seen in practice: although the own learning experience at school was rather negative, school also shapes the idea of adult learners how to be taught. The teacher instructs and the learner performs. This is linked to consumerism ("teach-me-something-culture"), which delegates the responsibility for successful learning to the teachers. Changing this attitude requires time and the experience that a different kind of learning does not necessarily mean stress but also enrichment of the learning experience. For trainers, this means that they have to plan time resources for reflection and interest orientation and to take account of space for metacommunicative processes.

For trainers and guidance practitioners, who might take over the role of supporters of the trainers, the importance of participant orientation as a didactic principle represents a challenge of its own. Participant orientation means to give up the strict orientation on a curriculum. The trainer must be able to develop adequate tasks according to the learning requirements of the learner, to use participant-appropriate methods and to work in a process-oriented manner so that individual needs and interests can be taken into account. In vocational education and training with low-qualified persons, this is all the more likely to be the case as the content of continuing education is oriented towards the actual work requirements. This also entails an opportunity that the learner experiences learning as an enrichment. If the learner experiences that he can transfer what he has recently learned into his daily work routines and therewith improves his performance at work, the benefit participating in learning activities and training becomes clear in a very practical way. If the learner experiences learning in the adult age as useful, the dogma of lifelong learning is filled with life, even for the low qualified. As the requirements for the work dynamically changes, only those low-skilled workers will be able to contribute to their employability, who are willing and able to continue learning. This requires positive experiences in adult learning.

Some trainers and practitioners might perceive these professional competence requirements as too excessive. Also the trainers will need to improve their professionalism by engaging in further education and training. Trying out new ways of teaching can greatly contribute to success. Learners, who experience their engagement in training activities as useful for their work, will greatly appreciate their trainers and will be satisfied. It’s a great success if the trainer can contribute to a change in the learning motivation: from the learner, who only learn to avoid sanctions, to the learner, who learns because he perceives the benefit of it. (see Holzkamp, 1996)

It is necessary that the trainer and the guidance practitioner collaborate to tackle this challenge. The guidance practitioner has to take over responsibility for the learning process. Participant orientation as a didactic principle is demanding, but without alternative!
Securing the learning transfer of the training and evaluating the training process

Learning must be useful.
Learning has to result in tangible changes in the workplace.

Companies (and employees) are not much interested, what knowledge and skills were imparted in a qualification. For them it is important to recognize the extent to which the qualification has improved the work performance. An evaluation of the qualification thus primarily serves to concentrate on observable changes in the work action.

Who evaluates? Who reviews the transfer into work performance?

For participants, who are less accustomed to express themselves in writing, it is advisable to evaluate the training in personal discussion on the extent to which they experience an increase in competences, which has an positive impact on meeting their work-related requirements. It’s recommended that the guidance practitioner carries out the discussion, since it can be difficult for the trained employee if he has to discuss the training with the trainer himself. If the expectations of the training program are not met, the participant acknowledges that in front of the trainer. Particularly in smaller groups, the participants develop personal relationships with the trainers, which the employees do not want to damage.

In any case, the results of the conversation should be jointly discussed by the guidance practitioner and the trainer. Thus the trainer has the opportunity to validate his own approach towards the specific training and, if necessary, to modify it.

However, if it is criticised that the participant cannot appropriately apply the learned, it might have different causes. If, for example, supervisors do not trust the trained employee to take on new tasks, in which the learned could be used, the participants lack the opportunity to prove the newly gained competences. It may also happen that the trained person is still too insecure or too afraid to apply the learned. Both causes are only partly in the responsibility of the trainer. Most certainly, the training should also strengthen self-esteem and self-assurance of the trained person in the sense of empowerment. Additionally, the superiors should be involved in the training to that extent that they know about the expected increase in competence of the trained employee.

The evaluation and the verification of the learning transfer should not only include the trained person. It is also a good idea to ask the trainer about his assessment and to
inquire how far he facilitated – already during the training – the transfer of the learned knowledge into the work life.

The immediate supervisors play a central role in the evaluation and the verification of the learning transfer. They are close to the work routines of the trained staff and can therefore better recognize and appreciate acquired competence than staff managers, who often do not exactly know the concrete work flows. At this point of talking about training success, not only the increase in occupational competences should be considered, but also the practitioner should make sure that the possible behavioural changes like the expansion of soft skills or the "self" abilities are properly perceived. The personal benefit of the training for the direct supervisor also should be addressed or identified. If this is not properly stressed, the supervisors may lack the necessary support for the training participants and therewith the requirements for success deteriorate.

In smaller enterprises, it has proven useful to carry out a small final conference on the topic of "evaluation and learning transfer", in which the training participants, the supervisors, the staff manager as well as the trainer and guidance practitioner, discuss the results of the activity. Such conferences often provide an opportunity to also discuss further training needs. These conferences therewith represent a particularly effective form of acquisition.

**Now reflect**

*How do you ensure that the trainer is also informed about the evaluation and transfer results?*

*How do you react to the entrepreneur when the employee evaluates qualification as a false investment?*

**Public relations after successful completion**

When the TRIAS guidance intervention including training activities is successfully completed, the employer should be reminded of the possibility of using the success as a chance for PR. The training of low-skilled staff only plays a marginal role in professional training. Companies, which engage in it, can be considered innovators. Small press reports (company letters, chamber news, branch pages, regional newspapers, as well as up-to-date announcements on the company’s homepage or in the social networks, among others) serve both the image building of the company as well as the TRIAS guidance practitioner. In small companies, the competence to compile such press articles might be lacking. The guidance practitioner can offer to support the public relation work. That can imply to provide the employer with some text modules and ask him to revise or elaborate them. Successful examples of training low-qualified staff deserve to be given wider public exposure.
References Chapter 4


Lernende Region – Netzwerk Köln e.V. (Hrsg.) (2014): Strukturentwicklung und Professionalisierung für die Qualifizierungsberatung in kleinen und mittleren Unternehmen.

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Annex – Worksheets

Chapter 2 – Worksheets
- Worksheet 1: Acquisition goals – reflections on the action plan
- Worksheet 2: Analysis of the company structure: basic data

Chapter 3 – Worksheets
- Worksheet 3: Method for Career Guidance – Positive Uncertainty
- Worksheet 4: Protocol of an individual guidance talk

Chapter 4 – Worksheets
- Worksheet 5: How to prevent a successful intervention – Bad practice
- Worksheet 6: Working with the employer. Challenges, perspectives & strategies
- Worksheet 7: Working with the employer. Approach of the company to education and training
- Worksheet 8: Selection criteria for providers
- Worksheet 9: Check-up Tender Preparation
- Worksheet 10: Commitment/Agreement on objectives
Worksheet 1: Acquisition goals – reflective questions on the action plan

- How many companies do we have to reach according to our project work plan? How many informational talks are to take place? How many guidance interventions? How many individual employees are to be reached by guidance activities? What is the timeframe?
- In case of team work: How many contacts will the individual practitioner take over? How do you coordinate the team work?
- How many E-Mail will I prepare and send to >> gate keepers, >> multipliers, >> directly to the company? Which response rates do I expect?
- How many fairs and events can I visit? How many talks or presentations will be possible there?
- How many phone calls do I plan to make in a certain time frame?
- How many contacts do I need to establish to achieve a first informational talk (key people, multipliers, company representatives)
- How many calls do I need in average to reach the appropriate contact person in the company?
- How many personal talks (first talk, continuing informational talks) do I have to offer to a company representative to get the final consent including contract etc.?
Worksheet 2: Analysis of the company structure: basic data

Already before the first contact, e.g. a quick research in the Web can give you information on the company to want to contact. Showing later on in the talk that you have done your homework and are well prepared can give you a competitive edge. You can use following template to prepare for the contact.

**Basics:**

- Company name incl. legal form: __________________
- Locations of the company incl. selected location to work with
- Sector/branch and key product(s)/service(s)

**Business area, fields of activity:**

- Business area
- History of the company
- Fields of activities within the company
- Fields of activity for unskilled labour
- Other important information

**Staff structure:**

- Number of staff:
• Number of staff at selected location:

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Structure of company (Organigramm):

• Levels in hierarchy:

• Positions at the different levels:

• HRD responsibilities:

• Work organisation: e.g. shift operations

• Works council:

• Other relevant information:


Positive Uncertainty is a philosophy for making decisions when you don’t know what the future will be, which is all the time. It may sound a little strange to you. That’s because it is strange. Actually it is paradoxical. Being uncertain and positive is what we are saying is what you need to be a successful decision maker.

Positive Uncertainty starts with two attitudes. First, you need to accept the uncertainty of the future because the future is real and inevitable. No one has been to your future. There are no advance scouts, guides or road maps. Second, you need to be positive about this uncertainty because it is better than certainty. If the future were certain or even predictable, the only choice is to prepare for it. By being uncertain you allow yourself to be a proactive instead of reactive decision maker. These two attitudes are the cornerstones of Positive Uncertainty, but there’s more to it than that.

Decision making is using what you know and believe to decide what to do to get what you want. What you want, know, believe and do are the four core factors involved in every decision. But what you do doesn’t always get you what you want. And sometimes when you do get what you want you find out it isn’t what you wanted after all. That’s the uncertainty in all decision making.

Traditional decision making models provide rational strategies to reduce uncertainty. And these strategies don’t include personal beliefs. Decision making using Positive Uncertainty involves multiple decision strategies – rational, intuitive, traditional and creative – to sometimes reduce uncertainty and to always deal with it.

We’ve expanded these four factors – want, know, believe and do – into four paradoxical principles. These four principles are paradoxical because they are contradictory statements which may nevertheless be true. Each principle embraces conventional decision making wisdom and contradicts it. It’s not an either-or approach to decision making but a both-and-more.

1. Be focused and flexible about what you want

Traditional decision theory stresses being focused on your future goals. This strategy is not obsolete but incomplete. Being focused helps you attain goals. It keeps you from getting distracted easily, but can prevent you from discovering new goals.
Become flexible with what you want by asking yourself the following questions:

- What else could I do? What other possible actions are there? What other choices or options for what I could do?
- What else could happen? What other possible outcomes might occur? What are the possible results or consequences of what could happen?

Use your goals to guide you not govern you.

2. **Be aware and wary about what you know**

Information is the hallmark of decision making. When making a decision we are told to get the facts because collecting information will reduce uncertainty. However, very often...

- The information you have is not what you want
- The information you want is not what you need
- The information you need is not available

Being aware and wary about what you know helps you to assess what is known and appreciate what is unknown. The hallmark of this principle is to be open-minded. That means to:

- Look for “mis-information,” missing information and out-of-date information
- Use both fact and intuition when deciding

To be aware and wary is to use your whole brain – the rational, factual side and the intuitive, imaginative side. Knowing and not knowing are both important for creative decision makers.

3. **Be realistic and optimistic about what you believe**

What you believe has always been seen as one of the most important factors in what you decide but seldom the most important factor in traditional decision making strategies. What you believe determines what you see – and do.

To be realistic is not to be totally objective. There is no such thing. Reality is not only what is “out there.” It is also in the mind’s eye of the beholder. The optimistic part of this principle (the non-traditional part) helps you notice how beliefs can be prophecy. Optimism leads to proactive behavior.

What you believe may be the most significant factor in creative decision making. Therefore be sure your beliefs are a bridge not a barrier when making decisions.
4. Be practical and magical about what you do to decide
This principle is about your decision rules, methods and your strategy for deciding. Do you know what your decision making strategies are? Most people don’t know how they decide.
To be practical and magical is to be whole brained and bodied. You use both your head and heart when deciding.

Start by becoming aware of your decision strategies. Avoid rigid decision rules. Rules are for guidance not obedience. Make up your mind creatively. Every decision is different, every strategy should be different. Become a versatile, creative decision maker.’
Worksheet 4: Protocol of an individual guidance talk

Date/Time: __________________________
Name of employee: ______
Name of company: ______
Current fields of activity/position: ______
Education: ______

Current Challenges at the workplace__________
__________

Are there any new challenges? Which? ____________________________

What goes smoothly?
____________________________________________________
____________________________________________________

Where do you face difficulties?
____________________________________________________

Personal Matters: What is to improve?
__________
__________

How can it be achieved?
__________
__________

What we decided on:
__________

How satisfied were you with the guidance session?
Not at all 😞
Not very 😞
somewhat 😞�
very much 😞��
Worksheet 5: How to prevent a successful intervention.

Bad practice

- **You should already show in the initial discussion that you consider the current practice of human resource development to be inadequate.** In doing so, you demonstrate to the employer, on the one hand, that his work is not ideal, but that you can save him. To address the employer’s alleged or actual deficits, is a safe way to make sure that there is no follow-up.

- **Already clarify at the first talk that you consider this talk a service that you want to have appropriately remunerated.** This will give the impression that you are primarily concerned about making money; which is clearly a way which does not lead to continuing talks.

- **In the first meeting, hand a prepared contract over to the employer and urge him to sign it immediately.** This again gives the employer the impression that you are primarily concerned with money, as the exact qualification requirements are not yet identified.

- **When choosing a trainer, make sure that you choose the most cost-effective provider.** You may be able to earn some points with the employer, but in practice the quality of the trainer is more crucial for success. The cheapest trainers are not always the best trainers.

- **Consider your intervention as completed when the trainer starts his work. Delegate the responsibility for the success to the trainer.** This will be less expensive for the employer. But if problems occur in the training, you will not be able to intervene. Which will subsequently result in you no longer being requested for supporting this company.

- **Do not demand the evaluation of the training and avoid final talks to assess the benefits. In your opinion, the transfer of what has been learned into daily work flows is the responsibility of the employee who has been trained.** This reduces the costs, but at the same time proves that you are not interested in successful learning processes. As a result, you will not receive any future requests for collaboration by this company anymore.
Worksheet 6: Working with the employer. Challenges, perspectives & strategies

You can use these guidelines to start a talk on your offer and possible benefits for the specific company. These questions on the other hand will also support you to get to know the company and to identify, in which areas and field of activities the company might have skill needs or which changes may lead to skill needs.

This worksheet allows for a further deepening of the first results, which were elaborated based on the worksheet „Analysis of the company structure: basic data“.

To identify the skills need of the company, the task is now to have a closer look:

- What are the biggest market successes of the company?
- Where does the company see the best future market opportunities?
- In which field of the company does the company face major changes in the next month to years?

What is your company really good at? For which field of activities in your company would you award yourself a price or would you win in a competition?

Process | project management and controlling | customer satisfaction | staff satisfaction | quality | gains in customers | increase in sales

The company currently generates the greatest profit in the following products and services:

1. ...
2. ....
3. ....
4. ...

What challenges (internal and external developments) does the company currently face?

How will the market develop in the next month, years? How does the company adapt to these developments? What are the goals for the next few years?
These products and services are the most promising for the market in the coming years:

1. ...
2. ....
3. ....
4. ...

What concrete changes do you expect in the near future?

Organisational structure of the company
Work flows
New technologies, digitalisation
Developing
Buying, applying
Reacting to developments on the market
Accessing new customer groups
New offers for regular customers
Developing innovation
New regulations
Introducing new provisions
Optimising cost management
Introducing controlling
Improving the controlling process

The most important changes (concretise)

1.
2.
3.

Looking at low qualified employees and unskilled labour: Are they affected by the changes?

How do you involve your employees (especially your low qualified staff) in the expected changes? How do you prepare them for the changes and support them in tackling these changes? How important are the competences of the employees for achieving the objectives of the company?
Have you noticed an increase of problems and weak spots? Or do you think they will increase? Do you link these problems with your low-qualified staff or unskilled labour?

Work flow | Project Management | Problems in project management | customer complaints | loss of customers | staff related concerns like an increase in sick leave | quality problems | increase of the error rate | unrealized profit

What competence development requirements can be derived from the most important changes and possible problems for the low-qualified staff?

**Professional competences** (E.g new product knowledge, production knowledge, digital competencies, basic competences, English ...)

**Social competences** (E.g. team work, oral, written communication and cooperation with customers and colleagues)

**Personal competences** (E.g. good appearance, dealing with stress situations...)

**Methods competence** (E.g., communication with customers or colleagues, project management, learning skills, health-promoting behavior ...)

| Products, fields of activities | Specific information | How is your unskilled staff involved? | Which fields of competences are concerned (skills needs)? | How important is it to solve this problem?  
1: very important  
2: important  
3: not important |
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Further comments:
First steps to start with:

1. ...
2. ...
3. ...
Worksheet 7: Working with the employer. Approach of the company to training

Helpful questions to assess the approach of the company with workbased training

Responsibilities:

• Who in the company is responsible for human resource development?

• Who is responsible for what exactly?

State & present implementation of further training and personnel development:

• Have the employees participated at continuous education and training?

If so:

• How many employees participate in trainings? How often do employees take part (time spent per employee)?

• Who participated in training? (Qualified staff, master craftsmen, management, administration, low qualified staff, unskilled labour)

• Who does not participate in further education? Why not? What are the differences in the willingness to participate (by age, education, gender, etc.)?

[Who could be therewith target group of a TRIAS intervention?]

In particular focus on low-qualified employees and unskilled labour:

• What were the contents of the training courses? (Such as technical competences, IT competences, user competences, method competencies, communicative competencies, planning competencies)

• Are there compulsory trainings? Have the team leaders assigned their staff to participate at trainings? Have the employees participated on their own initiative?

• Who financed the training? (Company / employees themselves, mixed financing)

• Is the time spent in trainings as a whole or in part (in per cent) within working hours or in the leisure time?
A company that is clearly active in trainings, the following questions can also be asked:

- How are the competence profiles of the employees currently documented?
- How are the staff development requirements of the company determined?
- What tools for staff development are already being implemented?
- How is the budget for trainings calculated?
- Does the company use public funds? If so, to which extent?
- Are the training courses focusing on specific groups of employees? Does the company have any special training activities for special target groups such as low-qualified, women, older workers? Did it work?
- What kind of activities took place? (For example at the workplace, internal seminars, external seminars, e-learning, conferences, trade fairs, etc.)
Worksheet 8: Selection criteria for providers\(^3\)

The right selection of the provider is a central success factor for training planning. That is, inter alia, which provider is particularly indicated in the respective qualification field. Also relevant is the complete performance of the provider, the quality of the organization, the quality of its personnel, the constancy and continuity as a provider, its flexibility against customer claims and the like.

Criteria which are important for the selection are, inter alia, the following:

**Content-related criteria:**
- Does the provider have a proven access to the industry?
- Does he have competence in the specific subject area?
- Is he able to carry out company-specific events?
- Does he have experience, or is he a "new" provider?
- Is the provider known to work methodically flexibly?
- Is the provider contentual "innovative"?

**Organisational criteria:**
- Is the provider certified (quality of the organization)?
- Does the provider have a corresponding corporate structure and size, which enables good performance?
- Is it flexible in time?
- Can it react to "new needs" emerging in the activity?
- How does the provider deal with the customer's wishes as a whole?

**Further criteria:**
- Does the provider have a positive image?
- Is the provider cost-effective / does it raise reasonable prices?
- How does the provider present itself in the market?
- If the provider is deemed to be "discreet", that is, can you rely on the fact that it does not carry company-relevant information to the outside, to the detriment of the requesting company?
- How appealing is the communication culture of the provider in the course of the contract negotiations / planning?

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Worksheet 9: Check-up Tender Preparation

| Training format (single or group training) |  |
| Developmental needs of participants |  |
| Training targets | Training contents |
| Trainer |  |
| Training scope |  |
| Start and end of training |  |
| Training mode (how often / within or outside working time) |  |
| Training place(s) |  |
| PC-Equipment |  |
| Quality assurance |  |
| Design of the closure |  |
| Investment / costs |  |
| Accounting / financial reporting |  |
| Offer confirmation |  |
| Contact person in the company |  |

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Worksheet 10: Agreement on objectives

The following employee:

....................................................................................................................
will take part in the training/event

....................................................................................................................
of the training provider:

....................................................................................................................
in the time period from............................... to .........................................

The company encourages participation to achieve the following objectives:

1. ..................................................

2. ..................................................

3. ..................................................

The employee is exempted □ not exempted □

The operation takes the fees: Yes □ No □
The operation takes the travel expenses: Yes □ No □
The operation takes the examination fees: Yes □ No □
The employee documents the attendance of the event for the employer: Yes □ No □
There will be a final and transfer talk: Yes □ No □
Participation is included in the personnel records: Yes □ No □

Further agreements:

....................................................................................................................

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