



Guidance – a way to develop employees and organisations?

SUMMARY REPORT

The Guidance Merger project

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LEONARDO DA VINCI PROGRAMME 2002 - 2006

Foreword

This is the summary report from Leonardo project – GuidanceMerger. It summaries the data in the final, more extensive, report.

The project has been carried out in four countries – United Kingdom, the Czech Republic, Sweden and Italy. It has included the following organisations: CFL (Centre for Flexible Learning), municipality of Söderhamn, NIWL (National Institute for Working Life) and IUC (Industrial development centre) Gnosjö in Sweden; Centrorisorso/ASTER in Italy; Careers Bradford, West Yorkshire IAG, Business Link, Bradford College in the UK; Eurovision Brno in the Czech Republic; EuroWea – a European trade-union organisation. More information is available from the project website is available at: www.guidancemerger.org

The project is based on *interactive* research approach, which means an ambition to make research *with*, not *on* the people involved. The project participants have thus had a role as co-researchers and some of the research money have been use to involve the guidance counsellors in the evaluation process. All of the participants in the project have had an important role in the descriptive and analytical work – from the beginning to the end of the project.

The three of us have had a joint editorial and organising function. Lennart has been responsible for the research project and the evaluation, while Phil and Klas have managed the project. Lennart has written the main part of this report, but Klas and Phil have been helpful in the editorial work and in the final analysis.

We are very grateful to the participants in the project. They have been very interested in trying to understand and explain the guidance procedures in the different countries. A lot of employers and employees have been involved in the different project activities. Some of the participants have had a more active role in the project and in the joint learning procedure:

Francesca Torleone, Ewa Vaclavikova, Magdalena Vecerová, Kent Kling, Bo Willermark, Helen Eidin, Pia Olsson, Michelle Winter, Linda Howell, Alexandra Oldham, Andrew Crabtree, Richard Wensley, Ian Baldwin, Martin Dite and Sture Isaksson.

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Introduction

Guidance Merger is a Leonardo project with an ambition to create innovative methods for guidance for adults in employment.

The Leonardo project begun with 3 main assumptions:

- That guidance can make a major contribution to the development of lifelong learning for those within employment by encouraging them to take up learning opportunities.
- That guidance is not always easily accessible to those in employment – as for example those who are unemployed or those with a low level of education.
- For advice and guidance to make a contribution to the development of lifelong learning within employment, it is essential that advice and guidance is not provided in isolation, but an integrated part of the training and learning at the workplace.

The project aimed to provide methodologies and tools to answer the following questions:

- Is it possible for advice and guidance providers to link with employers? What are the best ways of doing this? How can one create an interest amongst employers for guidance for their employees?
- Is it possible to balance the interests of the employers and the employees in guidance and learning? Isn't there a risk of an instrumental view on learning and a too short sighted perspective if the employers should make these decisions? What about the individual's need for a more general employability?
- What tools should be used by advice and guidance providers to both satisfy the needs of the employers and the employees?
- What different organisations are important to work together to accomplish more effective results in integrating guidance and learning? What kind of networks is needed? How – and by whom – should these networks be organised?
- What kinds of additional competences are required for guidance counsellors working with employers?

Guidance on a national level

The comparison *between* the countries in the project has pointed to important differences in the organisation of the guidance procedure in the different countries. The comparison between the countries points to more similarities than differences:

- the division of guidance organisation according to different target groups (students, unemployed and employees)
- the lack of integration between guidance procedures and the system for life-long learning (training programmes, accreditation, organisational development, SWOT-analysis etc.)
- the supply-based and 'top-down' based strategy used
- the reactive and short-term – rather than a proactive and long-term – use of guidance activities
- the invisibility and vagueness of guidance, both for the employees and the employers – especially the SME:s.

There are also distinct differences *inside* the different countries. These differences make the idea of a simple tool for guidance – which can be applied everywhere – impossibility! Different tools must be used in different contexts and they have to be applied in specific ways. The differences and variations in the context must be made visible, because they are important in creating learning and reflection, which are essential elements in all innovative processes.

The employee perspective

What is a good guidance counselling? What should it look like from an *employee* perspective? We have tried to distil some of the elements in a good guidance practice from the evaluation of the case studies.

1. The employees must trust the guidance counsellor to act in their interest – not in the interest of the employer or the educational provider.
2. The guidance counselling should be not be a voluntary activity.
3. The personal contact with the guidance counsellor should support and motivate the individual for learning – also those individuals that are not interested in undertaking additional training or education from the beginning.
4. The service afforded must be coherent, simple and transparent from the individuals' perspective – from the initial assessment to the final achievement.
5. The service should be free of charge and be carried out at different occasions over time.
6. The guidance should be an integral part of training programmes at the work place.

The employer perspective

Guidance counselling is usually carried out with the individual learner's interest in focus. The individual perspective is part of an ethical consideration that belongs to the professional role of the guidance counsellor. It is easier to stick to ethical rules with the traditional target groups – youths and unemployed. But the situation of guidance counselling is more complicated when employees are concerned. The employers must be involved.

What could a successful guidance procedure look like from an *employer* perspective? It is similar to a good practice for the employees. The first step is the most important one, because the other steps are dependent on the success of the first one – that is to come to an agreement with the employer. We will stress the following points in this first step:

1. The first and most important step is to 'open the door' to the employers world – to create and interest and trust in a more long-term relationship. The first contact is important. The relationship can be established in different ways. However our experience within the project is that one of the most effective methods by which the door can be opened for guidance counsellors is by other organisations in the field of workforce development.
2. The employers must be involved in the planning of the guidance activities from the very beginning. The employer may be afraid of losing the control of the process. This joint action with management must be reconciled with the ethical rules of guidance.
3. The guidance work should be part of an integrated and coherent strategy for guidance, learning and business development. This service includes a system for collecting and analysing employee learner statistics, a need analysis, to inform about the services from different educational providers and agencies (like Business Link, Job Centres etc.), to evaluate the learning processes etc.

It must be clear for the employer how guidance contributes positively to the productivity and profitability of an organisation. The benefits for the employers with guidance and training must be clear from the very beginning. The short-term perspective is important, because a small firm is often working with short-term planning. The idea of lifelong learning is difficult to introduce in such a setting. But guidance counselling could be part of a proactive strategy – instead of a way of managing redundancies or meeting minimum standards.

4. The service should be effective, simple, flexible and accessible for the individual firm. In a small firm you do not have much time for guidance or learning activities. The training must take account of different working arrangements and shift patterns of the organisation. E-learning facilities can be useful for distant learning.
5. A partnership approach can be useful, but often the unions are not represented in small companies. Guidance counsellors should cooperate fully with the trade unions when it is possible (learning representatives and project workers).

A supportive structure for guidance and learning

Guidance cannot be seen as an activity carried out in isolation, as an isolated event, but must instead be seen as an integrated part of learning at the work place – both of a more formal and informal character. The guidance procedure can start with an assessment and accreditation of prior experience and learning, continue with information of different courses, advice of funding possibilities, etc.

One of the most important roles a supportive structure can play for guidance counsellors is actually opening the doors to an employer's premises. Our experience has shown that it is very difficult for guidance counsellors to gain access to employer's premises without assistance from other organisations. Due to the fact that employers do not fully understand what guidance is and the benefits that it can bring, it is difficult for guidance counsellors to persuade employers that guidance can benefit their staff.

The work activities have to be supported on a local, regional and national level. Developmental support must include different levels in order to be effective. The point of departure for cooperation and support is the *regional* level, but the local workplace will be the basis for experimentation and innovation. National and international connections are important in order to affect the framework factors as well as for financing, promulgation, expert support, etc. Creating "vertical" learning processes between actors on the local, regional, national and international level is a necessity to change the structures – rules, regulations, and restrictions – of the two systems. This vertical learning will be a part of *developmental coalitions* to support innovation and a sustainable change process. Creating networks between networks (of learning organizations) as a part of an innovative system is a way of making development and diffusion a simultaneous process. In this way a necessary *critical mass* is organized.

A supportive structure for learning and guidance must include different organisations, projects, and actors on a local and regional level. We will mention the U.K. and Sweden as interesting cases with great potentials in organising a joint effort between the advice and guidance provision and other activities within the field of workforce development. But the strategies for change seem to be different in the two countries. In U.K. the supportive structure seem to be developed 'from above' – that is organised and financed by the state. A lot of investments have been made during the last decade in a supportive structure for adult learning for example such initiatives such as the Investors in People programme, Learn Direct, the Learning and Skills Councils, and Information, Advice and Guidance networks. In Sweden – and also in Italy – the system for adult learning is based on local and regional initiatives and can thus vary in different ways.

The professional role of the guidance counsellor

It is not possible to point down the competence needed for a good guidance procedure in the wider perspective presented here. Instead, it is more fruitful to see this competence as a balance between different ambitions and dilemmas, such as:

- how to combine the interests of the employers and the employees
- how to combine individual learning and guidance with organisational development
- how to combine informal learning at the job with formal education – that is to combine indoor-facilities with out-door opportunities
- how to reconcile the individual's strife for personal development in his/her total life-situation with the skills needed in the company just now
- how to organise a supportive structure in a local and regional context.

To handle these tasks and dilemmas the guidance counsellor must have a qualified training.

The Leonardo project has led to a lot of new questions. What (formal and informal) training has the guidance instructor in different countries? What is considered to be good and bad with this training? What kind of training is needed for the future?

We cannot answer these questions with our project. It is a great challenge for the future to find new ways for training and education of the guidance counsellor. To take part in a project – like GuidanceMerger – is one way to develop a new and broader competence. We hope to be able to continue with development work with some of the participants in the project in the near future.

Some final reflections and conclusions

The evaluation of the Leonardo-project has given us a lot of valuable information that we have tried to analyse.

We have seen how fruitful a combination of guidance and learning can be. The target group for the Leonardo project was the employee and the employers.

We have stressed the interest of the employers in introducing a programme for lifelong learning. The employer perspective is not well developed in guidance counselling. We think it is an important aspect in organising learning at work and using guidance as an instrument in workplace learning. The employers must find it worthwhile to invest in training in a long-term perspective.

We have argued for an extended role of the guidance counsellor. It is a role, which incorporates traditional elements – of putting the individual employee in the center, a professional attitude, and a high ethical morale – with new demands. It is a challenge for the guidance counsellors to take on these new demands – in approaching the employers for a close co-operation and in organising a supportive structure for learning and guidance.

What is needed is a qualified training and education of the guidance counsellors to take on these new demands and challenges. This could be task and the objective for a developmental work in the future. Part of it could be organised as a transnational project. It has been useful for the learning and evaluation in this project to compare the situation in different countries.

We hope that this report and other reports from our project can be used in a dialogue in such developmental work. The target group for the dissemination phase will be guidance counsellors, employers, union representatives, teachers, educational providers etc.



Guidance Merger is a Leonardo project with an ambition to create innovative methods for guidance for adults in employment.

This is the summary report

It summarises the data in a lot of work-reports from the project, but extends the analysis and the conclusions a bit further.

The project has been carried out in four countries – United Kingdom, the Czech Republic, Sweden and Italy. It has included the following organisations: CFL (Centre for Flexible Learning), municipality of Söderhamn, NIWL (National Institute for Working Life) and IUC (Industrial development centre) Gnosjö, in Sweden; ASTER in Italy; Careers Bradford, West Yorkshire IAG, Business Link, Bradford College in the UK; Eurovision Brno in the Czech Republic; EuroWea – a European trade-union organisation.

More information is available from the project website is available at: **www.guidancemerger.org**

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