PROVE

Professionalization of Validation Experts

MANUAL
PROVE – Professionalization of Validation Experts
The PROVE-Competence Model

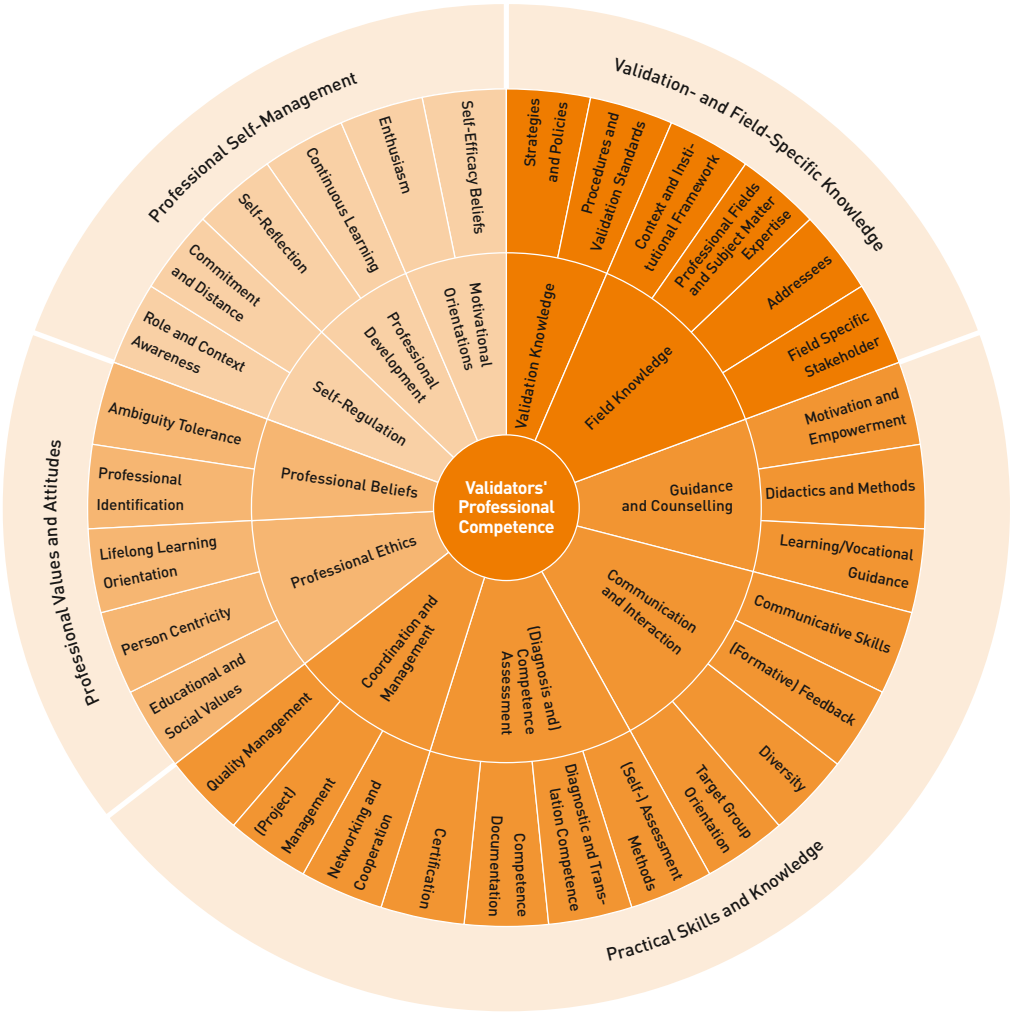

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Table of contents

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PROVE Professionalization of Validation Experts

Introduction

Why a competence model?

Within the European Union, there is a heterogeneous landscape of procedures and approaches for the recognition or validation of informally and non-formally acquired competences, often referred to as validation of prior learning (VPL). At the same time, a CEDEFOP study shows that "Trust in validation largely depends on the work carried out by 'front-line' practitioners and professionals directly involved with validation candidates" (CEDEFOP 2015, p. 32f.). But the process of professionalization of validation is still very much at the beginning. Currently there do not exist European or national standards for validation practitioners.

Developing a competence model shall contribute to the professionalization of validation practitioners by providing a systematization and standardization with regard to the competences necessary for the professional handling of tasks in a subject area is available. The development of such competence models refers to factual requirements for professional action by defining the characteristics, variants and proportions of competences and knowledge stocks as objectivations of professionalism (Nittel, 2000, p. 73ff.). This makes competence models connectable to the contents of qualifications and training courses as well as standards for validation and certification procedures.

In what context did the competence model emerge?

To contribute to the professionalization of validation practitioners in the European Union, ten partner organizations from six European countries worked together in the transnational project PROVE (Professionalization of Validation Experts), funded by the Erasmus+ program of the European Union and lasting from October 2019 until February 2022. Some partner organizations are scientific institutions and others have a wealth of experience in the field of validation themselves.

Project consortium

- Eberhard Karls University of Tübingen
- Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt
- Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
- Austrian Academy of Continuing Education (wba)
- Austrian Institute for Vocational Education Research (öibf)
- Citeforma – Centro de Formacao professional
- Erik Kaemingk CV
- Foundation European Centre Valuation Prior Learning (EC-VPL)
- German Institute for Adult Education (DIE)
- Institut de Recherche et d'Information sur le Volontariat (iriv)

Three products were developed during the collaboration: a Competence Model that provides an overview of key competences of validation personnel, followed by a Self-Evaluation Tool that validation experts can use to reflect on their own competence profile, and finally a Learning Tool Kit, which is a collection of learning materials, with which validation professionals can work independently on the further development of their competences.

This paper focuses on the core product of the project, the PROVE Competence Model and its components, on which the other PROVE products are based.

How the competence model was developed

The challenge in model development consisted against the background of the heterogeneity of procedures, activities and fields of validation within the European Union, which makes it difficult, to define across fields and institutions, which competencies should be taken into account, as well as to be both practice-oriented and scientifically compatible.

In the development of the model, it was important to analyze theoretical basics, to integrate existing standards, and to gather practitioner and expert opinions in order to ensure a continuous feedback process between science and practice. For this purpose, a Design-Based Research approach (Euler, 2014) has been followed, where the responsive involvement of experienced practitioners (science-practice communication) was taken serious in all phases of the multi-step process.

The development process included a desk research

and demand analysis, in which the demands, requirements, scope and conceptual basics were defined. In a next step a competence identification inventory has been developed, that sums up the activities of validation experts with the corresponding knowledge, skills, and attitudes. By means of a deductive and inductive content analyses (Mayring 2015) prototypes of the structure model have been developed and evaluated. Finally, the competence model has been designed and translated in the languages of the partner countries, so that it is available in English, German, Portuguese, Greek, French and Dutch. The model has been tested and evaluated concerning completeness and usability with validation practitioners of all partner countries.

Competence understanding

The competency model is based on a holistic competence understanding. Competences are in this sense the cognitive abilities and skills available to individuals or learnable by them to solve certain problems, as well as the associated motivational, volitional, and social willingness and ability to use problem solutions in variable situations successfully and responsibly (Weinert, 2001, p. 27).

The key elements of this holistic competence concept have been transferred into a concept of professional action competence of teachers (COACTIV) by Baumert and Kunter (2006). They designed a multidimensional model of professional competence, which is connectable to existing psychological and pedagogical theories. Thereafter, professional competence arises from the interplay of

- specific, experience-saturated declarative and procedural knowledge (competencies in the narrow sense: knowledge and skills),
- professional beliefs, subjective theories, normative preferences, and goals,
- motivational orientations and
- skills of professional self-regulation (Baumert & Kunter, 2006, p. 481).

This non-hierarchical model of professional competence is a generic structural model that must be specified for the actions of practitioners but remains valid in its basic structure. In orientation to the German GRETA project for the field of continuing education (see Strauch, Bosche, Lencer, 2021) the mentioned components of professional competence were formed in different competence aspects, subdivided in areas of competence showing different fields of competences, and competence facets as the most detailed partial aspects of competences.

For further details please see: Bader et al. (submitted), Recognizing Lifelong Learning: Developing a Competence Model for Validation Experts in Close Collaboration with Science and Practice. Journal of Adult and Continuing Education; or: https://uni-tuebingen.de/en/174546.

How to understand the competence model

In accordance with the holistic competency model, the present model comprises four so-called competency aspects: (1) validation and field-specific knowledge, (2) practical skills and knowledge, (3) professional values and attitudes and (4) professional self-management. These competence aspects are subdivided in competence areas showing different fields of competences. The competence facets as the most detailed dimension of the competence model displays partial aspects of competences. Thus, the Competence Model gives a very detailed insight into important competences in the field of validation, with which the project tries to contribute to the strengthening of validation systems in Europe in the long run.

The structure model takes also up the common distinction between theoretical formal and practical knowledge. This differentiation takes into account the different characteristics of specialist knowledge on the one hand and practical professional skills and ability on the other hand, which also refers to different methods of verifiability and is therefore required, when the competence model shall also serve as a basis for developing (self) evaluation tools for professionalization.

The competence aspects are explained in more detail in this manual, along with the associated competence areas and facets.

What the competence model can be used for

The PROVE Competence model is a structural model, showing, what validation practitioners need to know and be able to do, in order to act professionally

in typical validation situations. It aims to provide an overview of key competences of validation professionals, to contribute to the state of knowledge about professionalization and competence development in the field of validation and to be applicable to different contexts in the European Member States.

In principle, the model refers to all persons who enable, accompany, carry out or manage validation of informally and non-formally acquired competences of adults through the planning, information, execution and evaluation processes, regardless of the institutional context or form of employment.

However, the competence model does NOT show mandatory standards of competence. This means that not every validation practitioner or person involved in validation activities must necessarily have to demonstrate ALL competencies in order to be considered competent. Which competencies in which areas are expected, which areas and facets of competence are obligatory or facultative, may be subject to subfield-specific conditions.

The PROVE competency model is intended as a reference model and can be used in different ways depending on the context. To give some examples, the competence model may be used as a basis for the development of (self) evaluation tools and learning toolkits for individual competence development, as a reference for the development of (process-specific or general) trainings and seminars for validation practitioners, or for recruitment or job application purposes.

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Competence aspect Validation- and Field-specific Knowledge

COMPETENCE AREA VALIDATION KNOWLEDGE

In the context of social changes, the importance of competence validation has been growing in modern societies during the last decades. The central goal of validation is to support lifelong learning and increase access for learners into workforce and education through appropriate recognition of their non-formal and informal learning (Travers & Harris, 2014, p. 250). The increase of attention on validation and acknowledgement of competences acquired in non-formal and informal settings has resulted in the emergence of political governance instruments on validation, the practical establishment and expansion of validation systems, procedures, instruments, and practices as well as research on the subject. Validation strategies have emerged both on an international, e.g., EU-European level (Council of the EU, 2012; Cedefop, 2015), and on a national level to meet current challenges in education and working environment. Diverse validation offerings for very specific purposes have been developed. To enable, accompany, carry out or manage validation, an understanding of the general conditions as well as the specifics and goals of validation is required. This includes knowledge about validation strategies and policies, different validation systems and approaches as well as actual developments both, on an international and a national level. Furthermore, a profound knowledge about the validation process and its elements as well as the different validation procedures with the related standards, concepts, instruments, methods, and requirements is needed (Cedefop, 2015). An appropriate knowledge of the social and political dimensions of validation is the basis for reflecting on one's own validation activities.

Competence facet Strategies and Policies

The competence facet "Strategies and Policies" comprises knowledge about public strategies and policies as well as policies, laws, and regulations on validation. Validation practitioners are aware of validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL; which is used synonymously with VPL in this manual) as part of a national and international validation strategy and know recent developments in the field in order to relate their own validation activities to societal developments and political steering processes.

The knowledge about different validation systems, approaches, and instruments as well as validation models and typologies, enables the search for and development of appropriate techniques, approaches, and strategies regarding the EU certification approach and instruments. Validation practitioners need to know how to apply this knowledge in a situation-specific way with the aim of stimulating and promoting validation accordingly.

Competence facet Procedures and Validation Standards

Validation professionals need profound knowledge about the validation process including the objectives, purposes, and practice of validation. This also includes knowledge about validation standards, available procedures, concepts, methods, requirements (e.g., temporal and financial expenditure, process, deadlines, available support), costs and funding opportunities. Validation practitioners know how to apply this knowledge in a situation-specific way with the aim of stimulating and promoting validation accordingly.

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COMPETENCE AREA FIELD KNOWLEDGE

The field of validation is characterized by a great heterogeneity in its structure and framework conditions, and it pursues very specific goals in different areas. So, a diverse landscape of different validation offerings has emerged. Validation is performed in different contexts, such as the educational system, vocational sectors and enterprises, labor market and the voluntary sector (Cedefop, 2015, p. 26), each with specific institutional frameworks.

At its most general level, validation serves to make visible and recognize competences for the individual development, the labor market, or the education system. Often it serves to get access to specific professional fields and faculties. For this reason, a profound knowledge and understanding of employment and the labor market is essential, and of career and educational pathways. That includes a knowledge of the structure, standards, conditions, and developments of professional fields of activity. Furthermore, a subject matter expertise and profound knowledge of the related (competence) requirements in certain professions is crucial for competence validation and assessment (Gugitscher & Schmidtke, 2018).

Validation maximizes opportunities for individu-

als and therefore puts the individual in the center (Andersson et al., 2017). To enable and support validation it is important to know about the life and learning situations, the demands and requirements of addressees or beneficiaries (e.g., concerning people with low skills, see Ziegler & Müller-Riedlhuber, 2018). This includes knowledge about the subjective motives, interests, expectations and barriers of various target groups to taking advantage of validation.

To enable access to validation and develop validation procedures for various target groups the coordination of the relevant field specific stakeholders and their demands and requirements is essential. The knowledge of existing national and regional contact points for validation processes and knowing how to mobilize external resources is crucial for stimulating and promoting target group adequate validation (Cedefop, 2015, p. 21).

Competence facet Context and Institutional Framework

This facet considers the different contexts of validation. To support the best use of validation it contains knowledge about validation frameworks and systems as well as knowledge about the(inter-)national educational system, vocational sectors, (issues and opportunities in the) labor market, vocational education and training, and educative policy. Validation practitioners are aware of recent developments and needs in the field and can search for actual and relevant information. They know how to apply this knowledge in a situation-specific way with the aim of stimulating and promoting validation accordingly.

Competence facet Professional Fields and Subject Matter Expertise

A broad knowledge about policies, standards and legal conditions, issues and opportunities in the professional fields and about alternative career or validation opportunities is essential to inform, and support interested parties and candidates best possible. Therefore, also a knowledge of structure and classification of occupational areas is necessary. Furthermore, validation practitioners need an understanding what labor processes entails with its shift towards flexible labor, self-steered working, etc.

To support the identification, development and/or assessment of competences a profound knowledge about the subject matter and requirements in certain professions is necessary, including the knowledge about the underlying set of competences and their assessment indicators.

Validation practitioners have strategic knowledge on how to transfer the EU validation approach and instruments and the concept of evidencing competences with validation outcomes to other domains of life and work and to blend them with other approaches. They are aware of recent developments and needs in the fields and can search for actual and relevant information and to further develop knowledge. This comprises the knowledge how to apply this in a situation-specific way with the aim of stimulating and promoting validation accordingly.

Competence facet Addressees

Competence validation focuses on the person with their unique abilities and potentials. This requires knowledge about the demands and requirements of addressees or beneficiaries; about their subjective motives, interests, expectations, and barriers to taking advantage of validation. Validation professionals are expected to be able to plan validation activities as close as possible to the experience and interests of the addressees and to orient on their specific wishes, needs and expectations. They need to know how to apply the knowledge about the addressees in a situation-specific way with the aim of stimulating and promoting validation accordingly.

Competence facet Field Specific Stakeholder

Validation is usually carried out at the interface of different fields and contexts. To support validation the knowledge about the relevant field specific stakeholders and their demands and requirements is needed. This also comprises the knowledge about contact points that are available in the country for validation processes as well as knowing how to mobilize external resources. Validation practitioners know how to apply this stakeholder related knowledge in a situation-specific way with the aim of stimulating and promoting validation accordingly.

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Competence aspect Practical Skills and knowledge

COMPETENCE AREA GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING

Validation practitioners are repeatedly called upon to advise and accompany candidates or participants during validation procedures. The role of the adviser or guide is vital for starting up the process and keeping motivated and empowered during the process. Travers and Harris (2014) collected a number of aspects of the guide's role that include clarifying the roles and responsibilities of all persons involved in the validation process; specifying tasks and steps and providing the learners with guidance on how to set goals; identifying appropriate career and education pathways; assisting the learner to identify areas of strength and how to use them to the best advantage; identifying barriers for learners and ways to use of overcoming them; supporting the learner in their reflection on and self-assessment of knowledge and learning; assisting the learner to develop, document and prepare evidence that can demonstrate the individual's learning; reflecting on activities to identify further learning needs; helping learners to identify ways to reach their goals and encouraging their confidence to do so; and providing feedback to the learner throughout the process, including post-assessment. In addition, advisers or guiders must function within the context of standards, guidelines and principles – and understand their impact on the role (Travers & Harris, 2014, p. 236).

In addition, transparent guidance builds the link between access management, the compilation of competence portfolios or similar tools of collecting proofs of competences, action plans and specific development steps advised by the guide/counselor. In any given model for validation of learning outcomes, guidance has several functions that include: (1) providing information about the purpose, aims and advantages, principles, concept, and requirements of the validation procedure, (2) raising levels of achievement, (3) measuring this achievement reliably and (4) organizing and guiding the assessment effectively. For these purposes the guide/counselor applies counselling techniques and gives advice on expertise in instruments and methods of evidencing competences in order to support adult learners in preparing themselves for an assessment. The focus of counselling is on issues such as support, motivation and empowerment, exploration, documentation, personal development, making choices and other related issues (Cedefop, 2015, pp. 21–23; Duvekot & Schuur, 2017, pp. 64–70).

Competence facet Motivation and Empowerment

This facet denotes the ability to develop, choose and apply appropriate motivation methods and techniques to empower people during access and throughout the validation process. This requires knowledge about the main principles and the concept of motivation as well as its impact on validation processes.

Competence facet Didactics and Methods

To enable effective learning processes during the validation process according to the requirements and previous knowledge of the participants the ability to plan and design learning and reflection environments is essential. This requires knowledge of how to integrate learning activities into validation offers and to design participant-oriented teaching/learning processes as well as knowledge of how to use the appropriate learning concepts, methods, and media to achieve the desired learning outcomes (competence orientation).

Competence facet Learning/ Vocational Guidance

In order to support the participants in their individual development validation practitioners have to be able to accompany the validation process in an advisory capacity. The individual professional situation and the competences of the participant as well as vocational support and learning needs should be identified and reflected upon together with the participant. The participants should also be supported in the (further) development of their self-learning competence. This requires knowledge about theories and methods for guidance and counselling and about methods that stimulate self-control of the participants. It also requires knowledge of how guidance/counselling can be appropriately integrated into validation services.

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COMPETENCE AREA COMMUNICATION AND INTERACTION

Trust in the validation process is highly dependent on the quality of work validation professionals are showing in the different parts of the validation process, either when being direct or indirect in contact with candidates (Cedefop, 2015). Therefore, people working in validation need a wide variety of competences that not only include hard skills such as validation and field-specific knowledge, but also well-developed social competences (BMBWF, 2018; Cedefop, 2015; Duvekot & Geerts, 2012; Grunnet & Dahler, 2013). Social and personal competences such as communicative and conversational skills are important not only for validation professionals providing guidance and counselling but also for those who work as assessors. Especially since validation professional´s communication and interaction competences have an impact on the ability to reach potential candidates (e.g., through target group orien-

tation) as well as the validity, reliability, and fairness of validation results (Cedefop, 2015; Andersson et al. 2017, p. 13).

Competences in the area of communication and interaction include, besides communicative skills, also knowledge and skills about receiving and giving (formative) feedback, managing diversity and target group orientation. All these competence facets play an important role in every part of the validation process and are not limited to the communication and interaction of validation professionals with validation candidates but also with colleagues, stakeholders and potential target groups. For example, target group orientation refers to the direct work with candidates by adapting the process to the needs of a candidate as well as promoting validation and providing information for potential candidates and stakeholders through public relations activities (BMBWF, 2018).

Competence facet Communicative Skills

Professional communication plays a crucial role in many areas of the work as a validation expert. This involves internal communication with supervisors and colleagues as well as (inter)national interaction with external agents such as field-experts, researchers, employers, or relevant stakeholders. The amount and importance of external communication depends on the role a validation professional holds within the validation process.

Especially in the process of guidance and counselling assessing communicative skills of the validation professional are of high importance for the success of a validation process. In this interaction validation professionals need to be able to moderate and control communication processes with the aim of activating and using the performance potential of the participant(s). This also includes creating a trusting communication atmosphere, active listening, dealing constructively with communication and interaction dynamics, empathic understanding, warmth, respect and positive regard, genuineness, and congruence. Therefore, validation professionals require theoretical and practical knowledge of different communication styles, methods and techniques and how to use them in a situation-specific way.

Competence facet (Formative) Feedback

An important part of the VNFIL process is to provide individual and appropriate feedback for participants during as well as after validating them. This feedback aims to help participants to make a better assessment of their own abilities regarding the necessary requirements/standards of the desired activity. In addition, validation experts need skills to provide feedback for colleagues and stakeholders, which should aim to optimize cooperation and the validation process in general.

Besides giving feedback, being capable of dealing with received feedback in a professional way, is an important quality of people working in validation. This involves feedback from other validation experts and supervisors as well as external people (consultants, stakeholders, etc.) and validation participants.

In general (formative) feedback involved in validation of prior learning (VPL) is essential, due to its possibility to identify new learning fields and to point out development opportunities within participants, validation professionals or the validation process itself. Therefore, validation professionals require theoretical and practical knowledge of evaluation/feedback methods or instruments and how to use them in a situation-specific way.

Competence facet Diversity

Candidates who seek validation of their competences differ regarding their educational background, age, gender, cultural background, religion and worldview, possible disabilities or sexual orientation and iden-

tity. This often goes hand in hand with differences in the respective needs of a candidate and therefore demands high sensitivity and open mindedness by the validation professionals.

Validation professionals should be able to orient their work not only towards content, but also towards different social characteristics of the participants, the respective life situations, individual learning experience and interests of participants. This requires theoretical and practical knowledge about connections between different backgrounds (e.g., educational, religious, age, gender, cultural, validation styles etc.) and related preferences, attitudes, and behaviors in a group, about strategies for diversity management and an openness to other communication styles, techniques, and perspectives.

Competence facet Target Group Orientation

In validation the participant should be in the center of the process (Grunnet & Dahler, 2013). To achieve that, a continuous alignment of all validation activities (planning and implementation) with the needs, expectations, and requirements of (potential) candidates is needed. To design validation processes together with the participant besides high sensitivity and flexibility of validation professional is required.

Besides adopting the process to the needs of a candidate, target group orientation also refers to promoting validation and providing information for potential candidates and stakeholders through public relations activities (BMBWF, 2018).To create effective target group orientation not only within the already existing validation process but also when opening up validation for new addressees and creating target group oriented promotion of validation, professionals should have profound target group specific theoretical and practical knowledge about their needs and how to address them adequately.

Therefore, effective target group orientation requires theoretical and practical knowledge about the target group, about how to transfer methods and techniques to new target groups or validation contexts, and about how to provide information that is clear and comprehensible for all involved people (candidates, assessors, stakeholders).

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COMPETENCE AREA (DIAGNOSIS AND) COMPETENCE ASSESSMENT

Diagnosis and Competence Assessment covers identifying, classifying, evaluating, and documenting skills using various qualitative and/or quantitative methods (Strauch et al., 2008, p. 25). To optimize pedagogical decision, it is relevant to fulfill diagnostic issues appropriate and purposeful. For a successful diagnosis and competence assessment numerous factors play a crucial role. For example, the assessment of skills is not completely unbiased and neutral but is influenced by expectations and preferences of the assessor (Weinert, 2002). Minimizing this is the top priority for the most reliable, valid, and objective validation results possible.

For diagnosis and competence assessment it is important, that validation experts can apply adequate (participant-oriented, context and situation specific, according to the respective purpose) methods and tools; that they are able to translate the abilities of participants into competence terminology and to compare individual's validation outcomes against specific reference points and/or standards. Validation professionals need the ability to design, construct, and evaluate documentation processes, tools, and methods appropriately as well as the ability to certificate the results of the assessment in the form of a qualification, or credits leading to a qualification.

Competence facet (Self-) Assessment Methods

The wide variety of existing instruments for VPL raises the demand on validation professionals in choosing and applying the appropriate methods and tools for assessing competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning. To achieve the most reliable results, assessors have to act participant-oriented, context- and situation-specific, and according to the respective purpose while preparing and performing assessments. The quality of assessment methods is depended on the assessors, which makes their abilities to a key element in quality assurance of validation (Cedefop, 2015).

Validators need to be able to assess participants needs, backgrounds and resources to design a validation process/offer accordingly as well as in order to deliver meaningful results that enable a personal assessment of current situation, an identification of strengths and weaknesses and provide suggestions for further development.

This requires knowledge about (self-)assessment theories and approaches as well as knowledge about various approaches and methods of competence recognition (e.g., interview techniques, observation techniques, material analyses; self-/peer-/third-party-assessment) and its fields, potentials and limits of application. To know that assessment can serve different purposes: for learning, for selecting or for profiling. Also, knowledge of guidelines and principles to guarantee objectivity in execution of identification techniques.

Competence facet Diagnostic and Translation Competence

The ability to translate the abilities of participants into competence terminology and to compare individual's validation outcomes against specific reference points and/or standards is an important part in a validation process. It includes relating the VNFIL standards and assessment criteria to educational standards and real work life situations. This requires strategic knowledge on how to transfer assessment or the validation approach and the relevant instruments to other domains of life and work, to new target groups or validation contexts and to blend them with other approaches.

Competence facet Competence Documentation

Part of the validation process is the documentation and visualization of competences. To document hidden competences validators must be able to choose the right methods and tools for this documentation processes and apply them appropriately (participant-oriented, context and situation specific, according to the respective purpose). The documentation of competences should result in a written (international) accepted document that clearly states the candidate's competences and qualifications. This requires knowledge about accepted documentation formats for the presentation of validation experiences (e.g., EUROPASS), about how to build a portfolio including a CV and a career history of the individual, with documents and/or work samples that attest validation achievements, and knowledge about data protection and security.

Competence facet Certification

Validators need to be able to certify the results of the assessment in the form of a qualification, or credits leading to a qualification, or in another form, as appropriate. This includes the ability to define and apply the right indicators for certification and to couple or integrate the certification as closely as possible with the existing systems and/or the European Qualification Framework (EQF)levels. It is important to obtain accreditation or authorization for certification from the competent authorities in case of legally regulated degrees and to ensure that the certification (document) is recognized by relevant stakeholders.

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COMPETENCE AREA COORDINATION AND MANAGEMENT

Validation professionals are also managers and coordinators in the sense that their duties entail a predisposition (attitude) and joint activity (behavior) –that is, bilateral communication (including negotiation). Coordination and management therefore require not only "hard" skills like knowing how to organize a needs assessment or lead the development of a contingency plan, but also fewer tangible skills. These "soft" skills are essential to leadership, teambuilding, and the creation and maintenance of strong, effective professional relationships. Management in particular refers to the tasks and activities

involved in directing an organization or one of its units: planning, organizing, leading, and controlling. According to Gabelica et al. (2016) management is the process of guiding the development, maintenance, and allocation of resources to realize the objectives of an organization. In short, it appeared that most management theorists regard management as a process. This implies that management can be regarded as the process of planning, organizing, leading, and controlling an organization's human, financial, physical and informational resources in order to realize predetermined organizational objectives in the most efficient manner. Argyris and Schön (1978) emphasize that management must focus on the results and performance of the organization. Indeed, the first task of the management is to define what results and performance are in a given organization (a VPL provider in our context) – and this, as anyone who has worked on it can testify, is in itself one of the most difficult, one of the most controversial, but also one of the most important tasks. It is therefore the specific function of management to organize the resources of the organization for results outside the organization.

To this end knowledge coordination is also of essence as it involves the combination and synchronization of disparate team-member knowledge and expertise (Gibson, 2001) for a high degree of common understanding of the interrelationships between team members' contributions and mutual adjustments of team activities. Knowledge coordination among team members has also been recognized as being important for performance improvement in teams (e.g., Edmondson et al., 2007; Van Den Bossche et al., 2006; Espinosa et al., 2004).

Finally, management also refers to quality as a process and as a set of techniques whose total application results among other dimensions in validation customer satisfaction (Gurtner et al., 2007, p. 151). It focuses on customer satisfaction through managing the total organization to deliver the required quality of products and services to the customers.

Chase et al. (2001, p. 260) argued that the entire organization must excel on all dimensions of products and services that are important to the customer. Quality is therefore regarded as a critical aspect of the management function and cannot entirely be left to operators (Madu, 1998, pp. 3-5). Some significant elements of quality management in our context are:

- the focus of VPL customers,
- the involvement of all employees,
- benchmarking, and
- continuous improvement.

According to Marks and Panzer (2004) quality management requires top management's commitment and includes the total quality of products as well as the total commitment of all the business management processes. Quality management in this sense must be seen as a customer-driven approach to quality.

Competence facet Networking & Cooperation

The ability to cooperate and network with stakeholders, cooperation partners, field experts, teams, and to support relevant networks in order to exchange knowledge and experiences and to ensure the effective use of resources. This requires the ability to be a connector/matchmaker: To attract participants and relevant stakeholders/partners, to help other people act successfully in different networking structures and to integrate networking into training activities and in the collaboration with colleagues and stakeholders. This requires knowledge about requirements, purposes, and benefits of collaborating and networking activities as well as different networking techniques and practice for sharing, learning, advocacy and building contacts. In addition to the above building confidence and trust in network settings is essential to establish integrity, communicate in an assured, open manner, verbally and non-verbally, use non-judgmental language, recognize issues of discrimination, equality and diversity and any perceived power imbalance, defuse unhelpful tension and harnesses constructive tension, is sensitive to team dynamics and manages internal team relationships, and adapt to different individual cultures.

Competence facet (Project) Management

The ability to manage projects, organizations, and interfaces according to the respective objectives requires knowledge about project management approaches, instruments, tools and about project controlling, monitoring and development, about different ideation and prototyping approaches, techniques related to spotting opportunities, creating ideas, working towards a vision, valuing ideas, and checking for sustainability and the ability to apply it in a situation-specific way.

It also includes the ability to implement public relations and marketing activities as well as taking responsibility for the process (the practicalities) that involve adopting a pace which is responsive to the needs of the members, seeking for feedback on processes, facilitating decision-making processes about the order of events consistent with progress, encouraging productive conversation in meetings, keeping stakeholders informed regarding to the work progress, and anticipating and flagging up possible process changes, helping members to use the time productively, managing time well and managing own pace, energy level and emotions.

Competence facet Quality Management

The management and assurance of quality covers ensuring the organizational, assessment and procedural quality in validation (see Quality Model in Nordic countries, Andersson et al., 2017, p. 14). This requires knowledge about quality criteria and quality control regarding the procedure of validation as well as single processes in validation like information, guidance, counselling, competence assessment, documentation and certification, and the ability to operate according to these standards. It also includes knowledge about the different expectations and requirements for validation of different actors as well as the knowledge about the different factors that influence the quality of work in validation. Furthermore, the ability to professionally deal with the two sides of quality in validation – flexibility, individualization and judgement on the one hand and standardization, reliability and measurement on the other hand (Andersson, 2017, p. 10) - is needed. This includes knowledge how to apply quality management by following the quality circle of planning, designing, implementation, evaluation and improving. The ability to identify development areas in the strategic policies and practices and to use the internal management system to improve and further develop the validation process is also part of this competence facet. Furthermore, it includes the (application) knowledge of scientific tools and methods for evaluation and statistical follow-up as well as knowledge about data protection and the ability to apply data protection directives.

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Competence aspect Professional Values and Attitudes

COMPETENCE AREA PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

Validation practitioners work closely with diverse people. In the everyday work of adult education, moral action is omnipresent and manifests itself, among other things, in moral behavior, the transfer of knowledge and the contribution to the moral development of participants (Erpenbeck, 2010). In addition to the ideas about professional quality standards, the focus is also on personal integrity, which is expressed in the conformity of actions with the personal value system. The professional actions of validation practitioners are therefore based on a normative claim, in the sense that they are, oriented towards pedagogical values and norms, obliged to support individuals on their path through life.

Competence facet Educational and Social Values

Pedagogical action is determined by educational and social values, which shape and influence social and pedagogical interaction. The values of individual actors working in education play just as important a role as the differentiated values of organizations or disciplines. Values shape, for example, the profile of associations and institutions, the profile of an educational program and the actions of course leaders and participants (Brandt, 2016). During validation activities, it is important to treat participants with respect and appreciation, to understand their feelings and concerns and to empathize with them. It is necessary to be open to new perspectives and ideas, and to act in a trustworthy and reliable way. This requires a holistic view of people, the perception of the importance of personal responsibility as well as the appreciation of the diversity of individuals (Arnold & Pachner, 2013). Furthermore, it is essential that validation practitioners reflect on their role and professional actions and have an appropriate professional ethical stance.

Competence facet Person Centricity

People have an inherent potential for personal development and constructive shaping of their lives, which can unfold and be realized in person-to-person encounters (Kunze-Pletat, 2019; Tausch, 2018). This requires a holistic orientation towards the participants, the recognition of them as individuals, the appreciation of their resources and learning paths as well as an interest in their individual development by the validation practitioners. Person centricity as a pedagogical concept focuses on the self-determination of the subjects as well as on self-appropriation and self-discovering learning. In this way, the self-development of the individuals should be promoted and a mistrust in one's own person avoided (Kunze-Pletat, 2019; Tausch, 2018).

Competence facet Lifelong Learning Orientation

The competence facet "Lifelong Learning Orientation" is based on the attitude that the whole life is characterized by unconscious and conscious learning (Meueler, 1998, p. 9). Thus, people are constantly learning and developing. The task of validation practitioners is to continuously support this process of learning and to encourage and enable participants to develop their knowledge, values and skills in a self-directed way and to realize themselves.

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COMPETENCE AREA PROFESSIONAL BELIEFS

In the context of the professional competence of validation practitioners, professional values and beliefs play a crucial role, as they have an important influence on the performance of the validation activity. These are subjective ideas and theories (Groeben et al., 1988) that are more or less consciously incorporated into the performance of the professional activity and shape the actions of the practitioner.

According to Pajares (1992), beliefs are subjective explanatory systems that contain subjective evaluations and opinions. They range from attitudes towards oneself, to subjective theories towards others, to attitudes towards one's own discipline (Kunter & Pohlmann, 2009). In relation to validation practitioners, the professional attitude underlying the activity regarding strategies and principles of validation, the image of one's own role and the image of the individual are particularly shaped by these subjective ideas and theories.

Competence facet Professional Identification

The terms professionalism and professionalization have become concepts in pedagogy that stand for competence in individual action (Gieseke, 2018). Professionalism is understood as the ability to design, conceptualize, and evaluate complex teaching and learning requirements at a high theoretical and scientific level and to research them against the background of the respective structural education requirements (Gieseke, 2018). In doing so, it is important to focus on the individual learners and to know the needs and the competences they bring to the table. Professional action is influenced to a large extent by professional identification and commitment with and for one's own activity (Gieseke, 2018).

In the course of developing professional identity, reflection on individual practice experiences and competences plays an important role, as identification with the profession, especially with the professional role, is shaped by subjective ideas and theories that determine the professional actions of individuals (Groeben et al., 1988; Mörth et al., 2018). These are, for example, subjective learning theories and convictions regarding one's own discipline, which determine identification with the individual role and shape professional self-image. During the validation process, this includes, among other things, the appreciation of the validation areas of activity as well as the awareness of their holistic significance, which extends beyond the mere consideration of formal educational areas.

Competence facet Ambiguity Tolerance

Professional action is often accompanied by contradictory demands. According to Helsper (2004), professional pedagogical action is characterized by the contradictory shape of the demands in pedagogical situations, which permanently oppose and change each other. Since validation staff is similar to pedagogical practitioners this is also true for validation practitioner (Gugitscher & Schmidtke, 2018). Each situation is different and requires a professional approach that is adapted to it. This requires the ability and willingness to tolerate ambiguous situations and contradictory behavior and to deal with them professionally, i.e. reflexively, instead of hastily resolving them to one side. This is an important prerequisite for situation-specific action, since validation practitioners cannot escape the contradictions that arise, for example, due to different specifications of the institutions and expectations of the participants, but can only meet them reflexively (Watzlawik et al., 2017; Helsper, 1996). In this context, tolerance of ambiguity, understood as a cross-cutting personality trait, enables a differentiated approach to diverse and often uncertain situations (Friedel & Dalbert, 2003). Since validation practice in the broadest sense can also be understood as a pedagogical activity aimed at learning and further development, tolerance of ambiguity can contribute decisively to its success.

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Competence aspect Professional Self-Management

COMPETENCE AREA SELF-REGULATION

The competence area of self-regulation focuses on the examination of the individual resources of the validation practitioner. The examination of cognitive, motivational, or emotional resources aims at a responsible handling of these and represents an important component of the professional competence of validation practitioners.

Self-regulation is seen as a competence characteristic of psychological functioning that makes it possible to further develop the individual competence profile and to overcome difficulties and barriers through a continuous willingness to make efforts and to reflect (Bandura, 1991; Baumert & Kunter, 2006; Baumert & Kunter, 2011).

Competence facet Role and Context Awareness

Validation practitioners need to develop an awareness of the differentiated expectations and demands that are placed on them from different sides and in different contexts. To do this, it is necessary to critically examine the respective roles to be taken on and the expectations and demands associated with them, as this is the only way to clearly define, fulfil, and productively respond to the boundaries of each role. It is also important to be open to new things and ready for change (Strauch et al., 2019).

Competence facet Commitment and Distance

For the appropriate and balanced use of individual resources, the right level of commitment and distance is important in the daily activities of the validation practitioner. The competence facet includes the ability to find a balanced measure of commitment and detachment in relation to one's own activity to be able to deal responsibly with individual resources and to clearly define individual boundaries. This enables effective professional action in the long run, which supports the professional well-being of the validation practitioner as well as the quality of the validation process.

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COMPETENCE AREA PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional action is not to be regarded as a fixed, unchangeable measure. Competences cannot be understood as static, but they can be acquired, permanently developed, and changed through different learning paths and ways of acquisition. Validation practitioners must continuously develop their competences in order to be and remain professionally capable. On the one hand, it is necessary to reflect on individual knowledge resources and competences in relation to individual learning goals in order to be able to determine the starting point of necessary development efforts. On the other hand, it is necessary to deal with relevant pedagogical concepts and professional topics, as well as to reflect on structural conditions in the course of individual professional development (Wyss, 2008).

Competence facet Self-Reflection

Self-reflection is a conscious process in which a person thinks through and explains their ideas or actions in a way that relates to their real and ideal self-concept. Self-reflection is outcome-oriented when the person develops conclusions for future action or self-reflection (Greif, 2008). This is an important prerequisite for further developing one's own professional behavior and adapting to changing situations. The aim of self-reflection is to evaluate one's own cognitive, emotional and behavioral processes and thinking. It includes a critical reflection about structural conditions such as institutional circumstances as well as the behavior of participants against the background of one's own professional identity. In this way, reflection on the self becomes the guiding criterion for competence development and is considered a prerequisite for situationally appropriate action and reflective ability to act.

Competence facet Continuous Learning

The competence facet continuous learning is characterized by the attitude that people learn and develop throughout their lives, that they learn what they want to learn, and that support can be offered in their self-directed learning. The task of validation practitioners is on the one hand to continuously develop themselves and on the other hand to encourage participants to develop and realize themselves against the background of their individual competence profile. Validation practitioners are therefore continuously and lifelong confronted with individual and participants' learning requirements, that demand alternate action competences, behaviors, and orientations on their behalf (Arnold & Rohs, 2014, p. 21; Süssmuth, 2014, p. 11).

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COMPETENCE AREA MOTIVATIONAL ORIENTATIONS

According to Baumert and Kunter (2011), professional action is largely determined by motivational factors (e.g., self-efficacy beliefs and positive experiences during the performance of an activity). Motivational orientations of validation practitioners are expressed on the one hand in the personal commitment and enthusiasm for their work. On the other hand, self-efficacy beliefs represent an important aspect of motivational orientations. They make it possible to use the necessary competences and means to achieve the goals set in each situation. Both facets of motivational orientation correlate with each other. Thus, experiencing a strong sense of self-efficacy can directly condition personal commitment and enthusiasm for the validation activity (Baumert & Kunter, 2011).

Competence facet Enthusiasm

Enthusiasm as a facet of motivational orientation is shown in the personal commitment and enthusiasm of validation practitioners for their work. Baumert and Kunter see enthusiasm as a personal characteristic and define it as a component of intrinsic motivation (Baumert & Kunter, 2006). Enthusiasm describes the degree of positive emotional experience while performing the validation activity. This includes the enjoyment of the activity and the fact that validation practitioners should act as objectively as possible (free from external pressure or control). It also includes engagement in social developments, openness to digital media and curiosity and enthusiasm for new topics.

Competence facet Self-Efficacy Beliefs

Self-efficacy beliefs are seen as significant for the competence of validation practitioners, as they influence the choice of actions that are carried out in the respective context (Hecht, 2013). Self-efficacy beliefs are expressed in the belief or conviction that one has the necessary skills and resources to carry out actions successfully, even if this involves overcoming challenges (Bandura, 1997; Baumert & Kunter, 2006). Thus, high self-efficacy beliefs stand out as the basis for goal-oriented action even under difficult conditions.

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This manual provides detailed descriptions and definitions of each competence facet of the PROVE competence model to provide basic insight into the associated knowledge, skills, and attitudes of validation personnel.

The project is being coordinated by the Eberhard Karls University of Tübingen as the coordinating institution, in cooperation with partner organizations in Austria, France, Germany, Greece, Portugal and The Netherlands. The project consortium represents a broad spectrum of validation providers, promoters of VPL and research institutes focusing on VPL, professionalization and competence development. The products developed as part of the project and further information are available for free on the PROVE home page: https://uni-tuebingen.de/en/174546

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