

**SELF GUIDED SELF-ASSESSMENT AND IMPROVEMENT OF VOCATIONAL AND CAREER
COUNSELLING SKILLS: NEW STANDARDS AND TOOLS FOR COUNSELLORS DEVELOPED IN
THE LEONARDO DA VINCI PROJECT MEVOC**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The aim of the Leonardo da Vinci project MEVOC² is to develop an international quality assurance programme for vocational and career counsellors. The project products include international competence standards for vocational and career counsellors, a self-assessment tool to be used by vocational and career counsellors in order to evaluate the quality of their counselling skills and competences, and a database which provides useful information regarding how to compensate deficits identified by the self-assessment tool. All project products are available in German, English, Italian, Dutch, Romanian and Polish on the project website www.mevoc.net. The partnership includes 13 active partner institutions from the educational sector from Austria, Germany, UK, Italy, Netherlands, Romania and Poland and several “silent” and supporting partners.

BACKGROUND

Various references like the international CEDEFOP-report “Zusammenfassung und Analyse der Konsultationen der Mitgliedstaaten und EWR-Staaten zum Kommissionsmemorandum über lebenslanges Lernen” (CEDEFOP, 1998), the OECD-report “Career Guidance and Public Policy – Bridging the Gap” (OECD, 2004) or other relevant publications (e.g., Ertelt, 2000; Ertelt and Schulz, 1997; Plant, 2003) criticise the professionalism and the quality of vocational and career guidance, particularly the sector of adult counselling, as relatively low. Moreover, systematic

¹ Zdrahal-Urbaneck, J. & Thum-Kraft, M. (2005). Self Guided Self-Assessment and Improvement of Vocational and Career Counselling Skills: New Standards and Tools for Counsellors Developed in the Leonardo da Vinci Project MEVOC. In H. R. Pinto (Ed.) (2005). Proceedings of the annual AIOSP / IAIEVG conference (Association Internationale d'Orientation Scolaire et Professionnelle), 2005, Lisbon, Portugal. Lisbon: University of Lisbon.

² The project (contract period 2003-2006) was initiated and is coordinated by the Institute for Research on Qualifications and Training of the Austrian Economy (IBW), Vienna, Austria (visit www.ibw.at). The project team contains 13 active partner institutions from Austria, Germany, UK, Netherlands, Italy, Poland and Romania. The project products are available in all project languages.

approaches to quality management are reported to be under-developed, and must be regarded as an area for further development. So far, competence standards for vocational and career counsellors, that the MEVOC project primarily aims to produce, have only rudimentarily been initiated in most European countries. Existing quality standards, like the *Canadian Standards and Guidelines for Career Development Practitioners*³ or the *International Competencies for Educational and Vocational Guidance Practitioners* (AIOSP, 2003⁴), have been taken into consideration when the MEVOC standards were developed.

PROJECT AIMS

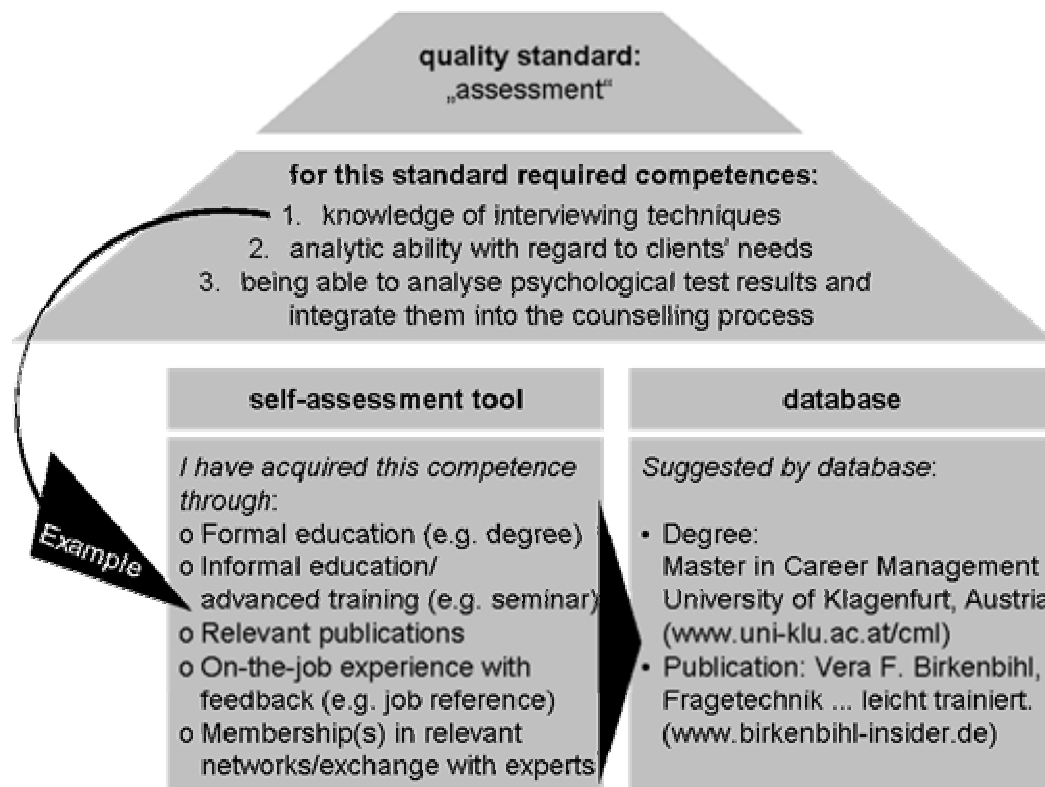
The aim of the Leonardo da Vinci project MEVOC ("Quality Manual for Educational and Vocational Counselling") that was initiated and has been coordinated by the Institute for Research on Qualifications and Training of the Austrian Economy (www.ibw.at), is to develop an international quality assurance programme for vocational and career counsellors. The project products include international quality standards for vocational and career counsellors, a self-assessment tool for the self-guided evaluation of counselling skills and competences, and a database with useful information regarding how to compensate deficits identified by applying the self-assessment tool (figure 1).

The MEVOC competence standards have been developed on the basis of an ex-ante analysis of existing standards conducted in all project partner countries. The **standards** regulate which formally and/or non-formally acquired skills and competences vocational and career guidance practitioners should ideally have. The MEVOC **self-assessment tool** can be applied by vocational and career guidance practitioners in order to evaluate their formally or non-formally acquired counselling skills and competences. In case the self-assessment tool identifies any competence deficits, the user is then referred to the MEVOC **database**. The latter lists specific information on how to acquire knowledge on the lacking standards including formal and further education, publications, seminars or other references.

³ <http://www.career-dev-guidelines.org>

⁴ <http://www.iaevg.org/IAEVG/>

figure 1 outlines in which way the three project products “quality standards”, “self-assessment tool” and “database” are built on each other using category „Assessment“ as an example



MEVOC COMPETENCE STANDARDS FOR VOCATIONAL AND CAREER GUIDANCE COUNSELLORS

The competence standards were developed by the MEVOC expert team in English, German, Italian, Dutch, Romanian and Polish, building on the results of an extensive ex-ante analysis that was conducted during the first project phase. The originally developed MEVOC standards (full version) include seven competence categories, which are “Education and Career“, „Methodology and Tools“, „Counselling Skills“, “Organisational Skills“, “Placement“, “Personality“, and “Information Management“. In order to empirically evaluate and reduce this pool to a number of “core” standards the MEVOC partnership conducted a Delphi expert survey in all project partner countries. The study included 127 experts from the vocational and career guidance sector who replied to a quantitative and qualitative questionnaire in written form. They were asked to indicate whether each individual quality standard was „highly required in practice“, „medium required in practice“ or „not required in practice“ according to their professional experience. Furthermore they were asked to add subjectively missing standards.

The results of the Delphi survey show that some competences that were regarded as highly important by most respondents can usually be acquired during formal education. For example, to learn how to analyse and interpret psychological tests is usually part of a psychology or education science degree, and now also of specific, lately implemented, study programmes for vocational and career counsellors (e.g. Master in Career Management). However, other highly required competences also require experience “on the job” like, for example, knowledge of existing job opportunities and of relevant information sources for finding vacancies, being able to identify clients in difficult situations and being able to refer them to specialists, or knowledge of a client’s needs and opportunities and using this knowledge with regard to the demands of the labour market.

On the basis of the Delphi results the partners identified those standards that were regarded as “highly required” by at least 75% of all respondents and added several other standards that had not reached the 75% benchmark but were still regarded as highly important in practice by the MEVOC expert team. The “reduced” MEVOC standards consist of four competence categories, i.e. “Education and Career”, “Counselling Practice”, “Personality” and “ICT Skills”. These divide into 12 standards that consist of 35 required “core” competences, as available on the project website www.mevoc.net.

SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL AND MEVOC-DATABASE

The self-assessment tool has been developed for the voluntary self-check of counsellors’ vocational and career guidance skills and competences. It has *not* been developed as a tool for the objective selection of counsellors. It builds on the reduced pool of MEVOC standards (35 “core” standards) and identifies whether the individual competences are existent or whether further training is needed. Applying the self-assessment tool, users check whether they have acquired relevant knowledge with regard to each individual of the 35 required competences, optimally choosing at least one of five alternative multiple-choice answers. The answer alternatives include “I have acquired relevant knowledge through formal education” (e.g. university diploma), “I have acquired relevant knowledge through further education” (e.g. seminar), “I have acquired relevant knowledge through self-directed learning” (e.g. relevant publication), “I have acquired relevant knowledge through practical experience in my job in combination with specific feedback that proves this competence” (e.g. written job reference), or “I have acquired relevant knowledge through the membership of a relevant network”. The MEVOC expert team presupposes that respondents reply to the self-assessment questions truthfully as the use of the tool is voluntary and discreet. If deficits with regard to an individual

competence standard are identified, that is when none of the answer alternatives are chosen, the user is transferred to the MEVOC-database in order to receive concrete suggestions on how to compensate these deficits.

The MEVOC-database is a dynamic online tool which builds on the 35 MEVOC core competence standards. It is a data entry mask where every project partner institution has contributed at least five tips for each competence standard. These include the description of formal national and international degrees and advanced training offers, information about seminars, relevant publications, CDs, networks and web-links in German, English, Italian, Dutch, Romanian and Polish. One big advantage of an international database is that the data of the individual project partners is linked and that British, Dutch, Austrian, German, Italian, Romanian and Polish information is available to all international users. Austrian users, for instance, who are interested in studying English publications, or German users who are interested to learn about the Polish and Romanian education system (just to take two examples) can find relevant information on the database. The database already includes numerous data entries; the benchmark is 2500 to 3000 data entries, fully available from autumn 2005.

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