

(1) Limitations regarding the work process orientation as referencing criterion

It is widely accepted common sense that the development process of the European Qualification Framework (EQF) has been focussed right from the start on the representation of work processes. Thus work process orientation seems to be the central theme of the EQF as the framework explicitly refers to learning outcomes and therefore to the usability of knowledge, skills and competences in regard of the needs of the world of work. But the practical experience shows certain limitations of the concept of work process orientation. Especially levels 6 to 8 of the EQF are defined in a way which is not exclusively rooted within the paradigm of work process orientation. It rather applies to a institutional differentiation between academic work and other work. The reasons for this conceptualisation are rather to be found in the institutional history of the EQF-development.

Furthermore, the descriptors of the EQF referring to knowledge, skills and competences seem to prominently represent the orientation on work processes on first sight. But their application in practice reveals that those definitions only come into effect in connection with the context of work and therefore with the hierarchical organisation of work. Organisational hierarchies however are not purely defined over the tasks to be fulfilled within one job. So the reference to the organisation of work also abandons from a pure reference to work processes.

Beyond that, the EQF's entitlement to be generally applicable to all kinds of qualifications, sectors and professions leads to the need to stay on a rather abstract level. Thus the descriptors cannot refer to specific work processes as this is only possible for frameworks referring to one specific sector or other smaller units. The abstract character of the EQF results in abstract definitions of work processes. For example professional tasks like personnel management or product innovation (expressed via different aspects of knowledge, skills and competences) can mean very different intents when being applied in different sectors. This again widens the distance between concrete work processes in the world of work and their formulation within the EQF terminology.

Those widely known restrictions of the EQF featuring a practical access to work processes constituted the background of the projects effort to develop a translation tool. It was therefore a major goal of the development of the employability grid to make the implicit work process orientation of the EQF visible. In other words, the function of the employability grid was defined as to make explicit the relationships between work processes and the abilities to carry them out. Of course, an undertaking like that underlies similar demands as the EQF itself.

So according to the EQF, all dimensions of work processes should be considered in this process. As mentioned above, this implies the need to stay on a rather abstract level resulting in the same implications as they were made above for the EQF. On the other hand it opened up the demand of defining a common nucleus which was inherent to all work processes. This nucleus, which was to be called the Core Work Objective, was found in the task "of creating a specific product or delivering a specific service". Consequently, the Core Work Objective is an ambitious attempt to operationalise work processes for a common overall discussion.

A comprehensive approach like the employability grid required in advance a collection and a decent analysis of already existing frameworks in order to develop a functional tool of translation and support. The results of this research and analysis opened a further source for the question of the limitations of work process orientation. The reflections on NQFs under the light of discussion around the employability grid showed rather similar restrictions as they were discussed above concerning the EQF. The abstract character of the EQF is occasionally also mirrored within the concepts of single NQFs, in particular if their development had started alongside with the EQF. The abstract character abandons, as mentioned above, from connecting framework definitions with specific work processes. This gap condensed in the fact that many partners could not identify the aspects of the Core Work Objective – and therefore work processes – within the national NQFs.

As shown above, the discussion concerning the limitations of work process orientation is predominantly based on methodological and practical problems appearing within the project. But beyond that, also a more general

discussion took place referring to the question of the relationship between work and qualifications meant as ability to meet the employers demands. So some general objections against an exclusive view on work via work processes appeared. According to these statements, this orientation on work processes detracts the view from other social aspects, for example from ethical questions.

As a conclusion it can be stated that the limitations of work process orientation as referencing criterion are mainly based on the conception of the EQF and qualification frameworks referring to the EQF. Thus they are connected with the abstract character which those frameworks necessarily have to feature. One of the projects goal was to deliver a concept how to bridge this gap between specific work processes and the actual conceptualisation of the EQF. In this context it turned out to be a practical problem to reference already existing frameworks (SQFs, NQFs) to the new terminology developed within the employability grid. Those methodological problems will have to be solved before being able to apply the employability grid to a wider range of frameworks and therefore to make it a comprehensive tool of translation.

Sources

Gerald Thiel (DEKRA) (2011) Methodological approach for a holistic and functional description of work processes, WP 2, deliverable 4.

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