

Discovering strengths and improving their visibility: ISOB, a member of SPS represents award-winning competence balancing in a Germany-wide context

REGENSBURG. Decisions regarding careers and occupation are easier to make if there is clarity about where the strengths of the employees lie. The development of competence in practical skills and the education of interdisciplinary skills (such as organisational skills, goal-orientatedness, empathy and flexibility) are not yet well documented.

They are, however, often the basis from which expert qualifications can develop and which enable these to bear fruit.

Competence balancing is a process which brings light to the darker areas of the current know-how, and from which, in particular, entrepreneurs and management teams can benefit. But also when taking over a new position or when returning into employment after parental leave, this tool can be very valuable for managers and employees alike.

In the assessment of German competence balancing processes, this process - developed by Prof. Claas Triebel (Perform+) and represented by the Regensburg company ISOB - was given the seal of excellency. ISOB, a long-standing member of SPS, has long-term expertise in the field of on-the-job training and qualification, this being the case long before awareness of the skills shortage, i.e. before human resource development became a focal point of businesses. For 20 years, Alexander Krauss and his team have been developing new approaches to on-the-job training, working both company-internally and through partnerships with companies.

Discovering and improving visibility of strengths is the aim of these so-called competence balancing processes.

The slightly cumbersome name "competence balancing" describes processes with which people can find out what they know already and which skills they currently possess, in order to make career-related decisions on this basis. This generally happens with the aid of surveys and forms, often accompanied by guidance through consulting, coaching or a seminar. Currently there are not many companies in which the acquisition of skills and knowledge of employees is accurately documented. It is evidently urgently necessary that precise information is gathered about these issues, especially when positions in the company are to be newly allocated, when the internal organisational structure of the company is altered, or in instances where long term career planning is to be carried out, e.g. after parental leave or a sabbatical.

"Each employee enriches their skill base not only in their job, but also in other areas of life, such as family, leisure time and volunteering, often subconsciously, and through this, job related competences (knowledge and skills) are enhanced" according to Alexander Krauss, CEO of ISOB and long-standing member of the Sensor Technology Network. He adds that this is about organisational talent and communications competences, which enable a more constructive interaction between colleagues and bosses, and which facilitate a more unobstructed implementation of key processes in a company.

The Stiftung Warentest recently critically assessed 11 competence balancing processes. The process which gained the most critical acclaim was the one in the Regensburg area, represented by competence-balancing coaches Eva Peltzer-Schmidt and Alexander Krauss.

ISOB – Guidance for innovative projects

Since 1990, the Institute for Socio-Scientific Consultancy: Developing, consulting and evaluating innovative projects (ISOB for short)

has been active in the fields of vocational training learning organisations, organisational development and human resource development. The main areas of expertise of Alexander Krauss (certified Competence Balancing Coach, CEO of the Association for Socio-scientific Consultancy and Research, SoWiBeFo e.V.) are in the fields of quantitative and qualitative evaluation, innovation consulting and process guidance for companies and learning institutes. The Regensburg-based action research institute has been providing guidance to the Sensor Technology Network during conception and implementation of pilot projects and development since the creation of the network, ten years ago. Together with the SPS Network management team, Alexander Krauss and his colleagues at SoWiBeFo implemented two BMBF projects, INNOinSENS and DEMOCLUST, which paved the way for many further actions and measures in the fields of organisational development and human resource development which are now a fixed part of the range of services provided by SPS, and which enabled the Sensor technology network to become well renowned and a unique selling point in the Bavarian cluster.

Krauss adds, "We offer our partners the possibility to think outside the box, by way of interdisciplinary partnerships, to create innovative projects and at the same time, offer the possibility to carry out their projects on a reliable basis". The hallmark of ISOB GmbH is, among other things, its membership in the German Association for Evaluation (DeGEval), which guarantees quality of work meeting the best national and international standards. ISOB has always been focused on development of the innovation management sector, the demographics management and creation and implementation of the German dual system of education, and this is a major factor explaining their engagement with the Sensor Technology Network. "It is here that

we see the chance to contribute to the economy of Regensburg and Bavaria, and build networks with key actors in regional development, partners in science and the practical sector, as well as educational experts. In various partnership constellations, we aim to combine expertise and develop eligible innovative projects". The ISOB team also has renowned expertise on an EU level, and is involved in many projects, amongst others, the ERASMUS+ programme.

ISOB and SPS are involved in the ERASMUS+ projects, ICT and SCIENT, which are well known in the sensor technology network. „SCIENT is a so-called "knowledge alliance" for collaborative work in science and practice. These so-called knowledge alliances are representative of the flagship projects in the ERASMUS+ programme", says Krauss. The project SCIENT, with its focus on promotion of entrepreneurship of MINT graduates was a selected candidate in a group of only 5 chosen projects out of almost 300 entries.

For social scientists, it is always formative to be ahead of the game, with learning in the workplace being the main focus, before the skills shortage made it much more difficult to continue this trend. Long before the topic of skills shortage boosted the necessity of on-the-job learning and long before digitalisation induced the decision that the disintegration of hierarchical structures in businesses was a necessary step, Krauss and his team developed toolboxes for use in businesses, providing a thorough approach to "learning in the workplace". An example of this is the pilot project "Flexible and individual learning paths in human resource development (FILIP)", supervised by the Federal Institute for Vocational Education, which took place 2003-2007. The results have no less relevancy now; in fact, rather the opposite: More thought is currently being given to the discussion about supporting companies in remote regions, and the many unfilled training positions in these regions. "In the pilot project KOMPLAN we were dedicated at a very early stage to the

promotion of training competence of SMEs in structurally weaker regions", Krauss reports. The aim of this was to improve the matching process between career orientation planning and available training positions on a long term basis.

Even before this, ISOB worked together with the FBB (Research Institute for Vocational Education) with groups of employees on research in the field of self-management skills development.

The result was a "navigation system for autodidactical learning for employees, as well as measures which initiate project-orientated learning in the workplace. "In this pilot project, we develop building blocks along with the employees and managers in the co-operating businesses, which can be utilised practically, business-internally, explains Krauss. The focal point is learning through reflection on one's own working processes, and guided self-evaluation of these processes. Reflection is the focal point of competence balancing as a supporting process for companies, aiding career planning of employees.

Careers advice: A valuable addition to the personal biography

The process, developed by Claas Triebel (Perform+), has been tested over 20,000 times in the framework of individual guidance and has been scientifically evaluated, where its effectiveness was proven. For this reason, there is now an additional competence balancing process for various groups of participants, for individual and group guidance, and guidance which can be tailored to a particular company-internal or external situation. There are now more than 150 coaches representing this process in Germany and its neighbouring countries.

Competence balancing: A valuable addition to the personal biography.

"With support from the coach, the employee can identify their competences and evaluate how pronounced the existing competences

are" explains Krauss. In addition to this, colleagues can also be interviewed. It is thus dependent upon experiences, qualifications and occupational activities, as well as leisure time activities, as to which competences are determined. Because of this, the process is open to all types of competences, expert skills as well as interdisciplinary competences.

The quintessence of competence balancing consists most often of four coaching sessions (on a weekly basis), which is offered to individuals or groups, depending on the wishes of the company. The costs of such a coaching, depending upon complexity and setting, are between approximately 600€ and 1500€. In the first two sessions, the focus lies on issues chosen by the participant(s), biography and important learning experiences and tasks carried out by the receiver(s) of the coaching at important times in the participants' occupational and personal history. The third session concludes the skill and work task analysis, on the basis of which the existing competences can be determined. The result of the fourth session is a clearly defined action plan. Between the sessions, the coachee must complete exercises from a work portfolio. A certificate which is presented at the end of the coaching process gives well-founded information about the competences of the employee. The verdict of the Stiftung-Warentest was that this process is "clearly structured".

According to the Stiftung Warentest, the process is "clearly structured" and integrates the user actively in the process of discovery and creation of their competences. From the point of view of the assessor, the written materials can effectively support the user while carrying out self-evaluation and drafting of future career prospects. The guidance, done by coaches and consultants is compulsory, which adds to the advantages. An additional positive side-effect of the process is the "empowerment, which this competence balancing can trigger for users, which is not to be underestimated" according to Krauss.

As a certified coach, he is well aware of the motivational boost which this systematic compilation of skills and knowledge can trigger in employees.

"I can do much more than i thought i could" is a common evaluative statement made by participants, who have gone through the coaching process. Further information about the assessor and the process can be found here (in German): <http://weiterbildungsguide.test.de/infothek/beratung/kompetenzbilanzierung>.

If you have any questions, please contact Alexander Krauss (krauss@isob-regensburg.net).

Further details are available at this link: www.kompetenzenbilanz.de.

