

# SOFT SKILLS 2.0

## METHODS FOR THE PLACEMENT & ASSESSMENT OF SOFT SKILLS IN WBL SITUATIONS



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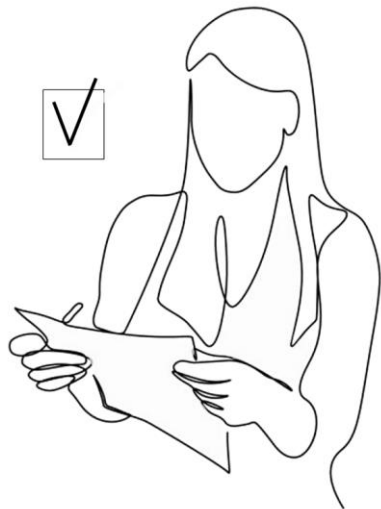
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## **SOFT SKILLS 2.0**

### **METHODS FOR THE PLACEMENT & ASSESSMENT OF SOFT SKILLS IN WBL SITUATIONS**



## PREAMBLE

This protocol aims at **facilitating the placement and assessment of soft skills in the work-based learning process** which was developed in the framework of the Erasmus+ project Soft skills 2.0.

Based on the experience and the productions of the Soft skills project, European partners decided to work on the integration of soft skills into the human resource management process and soft skills learning and value in the work place. The placement and assessment protocol is an **essential resource for trainers, technical supervisors, tutors and assessors evaluating a trainee's soft skills level in a work-based learning context**.

It describes the **steps of the work-based learning process** developed in the Soft skills 2.0 project, the **preconditions for assessing soft skills** in this setting and the **tools developed for the individual steps of the work-based learning process**.

It also presents an **overview of the placement process** that is necessary to define the starting point of the learning pathway of participants who want to improve their soft skills in a work-based learning environment.

The initial "Soft Skills" project, funded by Erasmus+, **laid the foundation for an innovative approach in integrating soft skills within professional development** by developing a comprehensive **European reference catalogue**. This catalogue has played a key role in accurately mapping the soft skills essential for high professional performance and successful integration into the workplace.

Relying on the revised Bloom's taxonomy, this project **strategically categorised soft skills into four distinct levels of acquisition**, thus establishing a progressive, evolutionary, and well-structured learning process. This hierarchy enabled the design of adaptive training pathways, guiding trainees from initial understanding to the mastery and autonomous application of these skills in various professional contexts.

This rich methodological framework has directly **influenced the design and implementation of strategies for positioning and assessment in work-based learning (WBL)** in the course of the Soft skills 2.0 project, meticulously aligning learning objectives with the concrete and dynamic demands of specific professions. It facilitated a **smooth transition between the theoretical acquisition of soft skills and their practical application**, enhancing the pedagogical effectiveness and professional relevance of the training offered.



### Additional resources

In addition to this document, several other materials have been created by European partners thanks to the Soft skills 2.0 project, co-funded by the European Union.

In order to support a common European human resources process that includes soft skills, the European partners have developed a guide and another protocol for human resources managers, trainers, technical supervisors, tutors and assessors:

- The guide **“Soft skills in a corporate culture”** aims to propose a complete human resource management process including soft skills and work-based learning programmes for the training of soft skills.

This guide analyses the requirement and takes stock of the specificities in the partner countries and possible transferability, both in terms of work-based learning in and human resource management process.

- The protocol **“Soft skills at the heart of Human Resources”** aims to attract the interest of human resources actors thanks to the tools developed, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, to integrate soft skills into the recruitment process and human resource management methods.
- The **“Work-Based Learning Memo”** aims to provide an overview of the seven step WBL process developed by the Soft skills 2.0 project partners and a collection of tools that can be used in the different steps of this process.

**Comentado [PS1]:** Short description of the WBL Memo added

In order to have a common work-based learning soft skills programme, European partners also developed different pedagogical tools:

- The **“Training programme for human resource managers”** is an introduction of how soft skills can be integrated in a common management process. The aim is to help human resource staff to make use of the soft skills process and tools from drafting a job description and job advertisement and the selection of a candidate over the onboarding and employment to the offboarding.
- The training programme for trainers **“Training of soft skills in a work situation”** allows trainers, tutors and assessors to discover and practice the work-based learning method developed in the project “Soft skills 2.0”. The issue, here is to understand how to teach soft skills in a work-based situation and to learn how to use the pedagogical tools.

All materials can be accessed for free on the project website: [www.softskills-project.eu](http://www.softskills-project.eu)



## ZERO BARRIER©

ZERO BARRIER© is a **digital platform** designed to enhance the professional paths of people with low qualifications or disabilities, aiding their integration into the workforce. Developed in collaboration with professionals in the field of job integration, it specifically meets the needs of job insertion organisations, organisations supporting persons with disabilities, and companies committed to inclusion. The platform is the result of a joint effort between field workers and a team of educational engineers and developers, all dedicated to improving job access and quality for vulnerable populations. User feedback drives the continuous development of the tool, ensuring that the solutions remain relevant and effective in addressing the challenges of professional inclusion.

### Features and goals of ZERO BARRIER©:

The main mission of ZERO BARRIER© is to facilitate the professional integration of individuals by **tracking, assessing and validation learners' progress** in the development of a comprehensive set of skills suited to today's job market demands.

ZERO BARRIER© offers access to a **wide range of professional fields** and currently includes 66 job frameworks. This extensive coverage allows users to plan career paths and trainings in sectors that match their interests and abilities, thereby increasing their chances of professional success.

The platform provides comprehensive **monitoring for the assessment of all aspects of an individual's development, from technical skills to social and personal skills**. This integrated monitoring is crucial to provide each user with tailored support focused on achieving their professional goals.

In today's professional context, soft skills are increasingly important. Therefore, ZERO BARRIER© **incorporates the catalogue of soft skills** developed during the Erasmus+ project Soft skills. These skills are essential for successfully navigating various professional environments and are highly valued in the job market.



## The work-based learning process

### A. Work-based learning vs. classroom learning

There are many different methods and ways to teach people new skills and competences. In-classroom teaching, digital training and work-based learning are a few of the most commonly used training methods. In the course of the first “Soft skills” Erasmus+ project the project partners have developed a training kit and method for in-classroom teaching and training of soft skills. In the course of the Erasmus+ project “Soft Skills 2.0” **a work-based learning process** was developed.

First of all, it is important to be well acquainted with **the terminology of work-based learning**. According to the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training work-based learning is defined as the “acquisition of knowledge and skills through carrying out – and reflecting on – tasks in a vocational context, either at the workplace (such as alternance training) or in a VET institution.” (*Cedefop, 2011*)

In our case WBL takes place in **a professional adult learning CVET setting** (continuous vocational education and training) **at a training centre and/or at the workplace**. This definition is used throughout the whole “Soft skills 2.0” project.

When using more traditional teaching methods such as in-classroom teaching, the teaching of soft skills is often rather difficult. Teaching with a theoretical approach to the subject which demands little engagement of the trainees is not always effective. **For training soft skills, work-based learning is a fruitful method** and has numerous advantages, both for the trainee and the company in which work-based learning is done. It offers a way for learners to effectively connect education and the workplace and merge theory with practice. Trainees get the opportunity to participate in real problem-solving and acquiring knowledge in an authentic professional context. Employers can **ensure that their staff acquire exactly those (soft) skills required** for their specific activities and tasks.

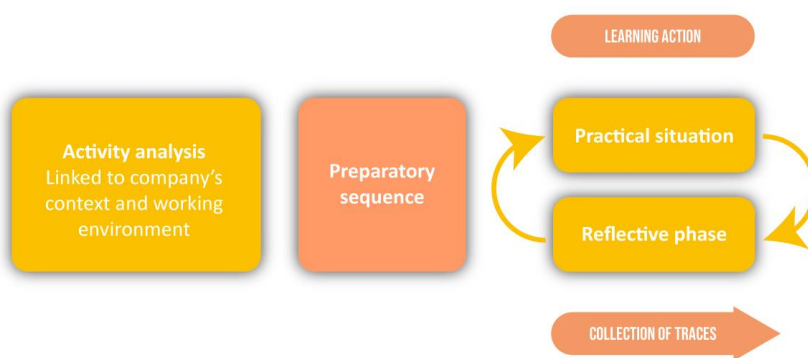




## B. The work-based learning process developed in the Soft skills 2.0 project

Before discussing the tools for assessing soft skills in work-based learning situations, **the work-based learning process during which the assessment takes place**, and which was developed in the Soft skills 2.0 project, is described.

The “Soft skills 2.0 WBL process” **can be used as a guideline for any work-based training programme**. It consists of three phases which consist of seven steps:



### Phase 1

#### Step 1: The identification of soft skills in link with a work activity

The starting point for any work-based training is the analysis of the workplace and of the specific job the training will take place in. Its main aim is **identify all the needed soft skills and competences** that could and/or should be trained. This analysis is done by people who have experience in the field and therefore know the job's tasks and activities well enough and are familiar with the work environment.

The analysis can be done **based on the European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET)**. This job reference framework was developed for the evaluation of the degree of professional skills and competences required for each task of a job (so called occupational standards).

To assess soft skills in relation to a specific profession, it is important to **identify which soft skills and what level of soft skill is expected for the main activities** of this job. In the project, workplace analyses were developed for **seven occupational standards**:

- Cleaning operative
- Welder boilermaker
- Green area maintenance operator



- Seller / restocker
- Help cooker
- Biotechnology assistant
- After-school facilitator / animator and canteen assistant

However, the method is notably not limited to these job profiles.

The **method of how to link a profession to soft skills**, which allows to assess the soft skills identified as relevant for the occupational standard and to compare the expected level with the real level of the trainee, is described in the *European catalogue of soft skills references* which was developed in the first Soft skills project.

## Phase 2

### Step 2: The positioning of participants

Prior to the WBL itself, **an initial assessment of the level of mastery of one or more Soft Skills is recommended**. This preparatory step in order to establish the status quo can be done by observation or in an interview as well as by a self-assessment. The indicators and criteria for this assessment are based on the workplace analysis and job reference framework. The positioning is described in more detail in the following section.

### Step 3: The development of an individual learning path

The development of an **individual learning pathway is based on the results of the positioning**. The design of the itinerary should include a gradual increase in the difficulty of the activities and can address several Soft Skills at the same time. Its recommended not exceed three Soft Skills at once.

It is important to **define the learning objectives according to the level of Soft Skills required** and develop the personalised and **progressive pathway** in dialogue with the participants prior to the WBL activities. This transparency ensures that the employees understand and share the expectations and it promotes their commitment to the learning process.

### Step 4: The preparation of the learning activity

After knowing exactly what (soft) skills are required for a specific activity of a specific professional standard and have to be trained, the preparation of the training situation can begin. When preparing a training situation in the work environment it is important to keep in mind that **an everyday work situation is not necessarily a learning situation**:

- For the trainees to learn from it, the situation needs to allow them to apply the skills they are trying to learn.
- Additionally, the situation should **confront the trainees with a challenge** which demands to **find a solution using the trained soft skill**.



- Reflection upon the training further enhances the learning experience.

To ensure that all these criteria are met it is necessary to **thoroughly prepare the training situation** beforehand.

The preparation should follow **a specific sequence**: Firstly, **identify the specific work situation** the training should take place for, including its main missions and tasks and the targeted skills. Secondly, the **goals of the training** should be defined **and explained to the participants**. Lastly, the **logistics of the situation** need to be taken care of and the **training situation needs to be set up**.

Once the preparation is done, **the third phase, the work-based learning activity itself**, can begin. Work-based learning is understood as **a succession of practical training situations and reflective phases**.

### Phase 3

#### Step 5: The practical situation

The WBL situation depends on the previously defined goals and skills. It should not be a simulation or a role play but should instead be **as close to the everyday work situation and environment as possible**. The training situation **cannot take place in a strictly economically productive context and not at the same pace** as a natural work situation. It is necessary to relax the requirements for the production and/or service provision.

This approach allows participants to directly apply the soft skill in a specific context. The aim is to ground soft skills in learner's everyday work activities. **Incorporating challenges** in the scenarios enhances the learning experience and fosters learner engagement.

#### Step 6: The reflection sequences

Once the practical situation is finished, the next step is the reflection. Reflecting on the situation allows the trainees

- to look at the situation from a more objective perspective,
- to think about the way they acted in the course of the situation and
- to assess the solution they found.

This **self-reflection** is done individually by the trainee with the goal to **autonomously find a solution for the problem posed in the training without the trainer's/assessor's help**. The trainer/assessor can help verbalise certain things if there are difficulties but is otherwise instructed not to intervene. As long as the trainee is not able to come up with a solution for the problem the training sequence should be repeated with slight modifications.

The **results of the reflections are collected** and can be used to visualise the progress of a trainee and to **create a portfolio of good practice examples** how to solve specific tasks.

#### Step 7: The assessment of acquired skills



The last step of the WBL process is the **assessment of acquired soft skills** on the basis of the **learning outcomes** and **criteria** defined in the **work place analysis** and the **individualised learning paths**. This step is described in more detailed in the section “Positioning and Assessment”.



## Preconditions for the assessment of soft skills in the WBL process

### A. Assumptions regarding the assessment of soft skills

**Soft skills** are resources that people **acquire and develop throughout their lives in different contexts** (formative, professional or personal). These abilities are often established in action and are – beside professional skills – important factors to carry out a function or an activity properly.

The interest of highlighting soft skills is their **transferability**: a person with attested soft skills will be able to **use them in various jobs and situations**, as opposed to the technical skills needed for specific jobs or in specific fields. That's why **soft skills are key to facilitate the life's professional changes and increase the employability** of people.

In the first Soft skills project, **six assumptions about the training and acquisition of soft skills** have been developed. These assumptions also guide the work-based learning process developed in the Soft skills 2.0 project and this placement and assessment protocol:

**First assumption:** Similar to technical skills, **soft skills can be assessed and developed**.

**Second assumption:** Soft skills training aims at **adaptive behavioural change**.

- An individual learns and assimilates through interaction in the course of a longer, complex and progressive process.
- Learning objectives can be classified according to the fact that an individual first needs to understand in order to be able to apply before analysing and transmitting.

**Third assumption:** As the soft skills acquisition process is progressive, it needs a **continuous assessment**: it is the repetition of its use in various situation AND over time that validates the acquisition of a skill. It is therefore necessary to **mix formative and summative** assessment.

**Fourth assumption:** The soft skill assessment has to be done in a **real situation or professional (work-based learning) context**.

**Fifth assumption:** When setting up a professional situation, the number of soft skills to be assessed should be **limited to a maximum of three**. Indeed, the learner must not be lost and destabilised.

**Sixth assumption:** Soft skills can be mobilized and developed in **work and life situations**.



## B. The role of the assessor

During work-based learning situations and assessment, **trainers, technical supervisors, tutors** take the **role of a facilitator** and **an assessor**:

### Create a climate of trust

- consider that errors are formative and allows progress and do not focus on failures.
- use positive feedback.
- take the time to reassure and accompany the trainee.
- remind the trainee that only one person will follow the assessment.

### Listen and show empathy

- explain that the important thing is not to validate everything but to try.
- enhance achievements and progress rather than shortcomings and mistakes.
- listen to the trainee.
- know how to stay in the background.

### Make sure that the instructions and the teaching scenario are understood

- make things explicit.
- explain in several ways and reformulate.
- simplify and illustrate.
- give examples.

### Consider adjustments to the schedule within the initially planned pathway

- adapt to the person's difficulties in assessing soft skills and not peripheral skills (e.g. illiterate person, person with a disability, etc.).
- take into account the differences of the trainees and understand that learning and assessment can be stressful and destabilizing for some people.
- individualise the assessment process by taking into account the person's placement.

### Understand assessment as a holistic process and take into account the effects of stress

- tell the trainee at the outset how long the assessment is expected to take.
- take into account that soft skills may be revealed at the end of the assessment process
- are tolerant of errors, hesitations, and stress-related gaps.
- focus on the approach, strategy, process and not on results.



### Question themselves

- reflect on and question their own practice.
- are aware of the subjective nature of an assessment and try to minimise it.

### Adopt an ethical and non-judgmental attitude

- base assessments on objective and fair observations of the trainees.
- do not let emotions interfere with the assessment.



### C. Observation to assess soft skills in a work-based learning situation

**Observing trainees** and collecting useful information and evidence directly in a work situation is an **effective way to assess soft skills**. Observation is the act of seeing, of careful considering, measuring and noting in order to certify or not the mastery of a level of a certain soft skill in a specific activity. It is important to keep in mind that a soft skill itself is not visible. Only its **results are visible by observing the behaviour** of the person that is assessed.

Therefore, **observable behaviours** defined in reference frameworks are key tools for the assessment by observation. They allow to **observe and measure** actions performed by a trainee. Observable behaviours are called “observable” because **it is about what we see or hear** (descriptive behaviour), and they are **measurable** because they **can be defined and described**: the trainer, technical supervisor, tutor or assessor can spot the behaviour when it occurs including when the behaviour begins, ends and how often it occurs.

The job-specific observable behaviours can be found in the seven **occupational standards**:

- Cleaning operative
- Welder boilermaker
- Green area maintenance operator
- Seller / restocker
- Help cooker
- Biotechnology assistant
- After-school facilitator / animator and canteen assistant

In the course of the workplace analysis for these six professions, the occupational standards were **enhanced with soft skills** that are considered **necessary for the different main activities**, their required **levels** and the **respective observable behaviours** that were developed in the Soft skills 2.0 project.





## Positioning and Assessment

For maximum effectiveness of work-based learning, it's recommended to include an initial assessment in the WBL process. **Positioning** enables the learning path to be tailored to the specific needs of each working learner. Understanding the starting point of the participants helps trainers and tutors to tailor content and duration of the WBL process to optimise training effectiveness and ensure a personalised learning experience that is well aligned with the Soft Skills that have to be acquired in the workplace.

**Positioning** allows for a thorough **identification** of the **level of soft skills** that a **person immediately deploys to meet the demands of a work situation**. Knowing the learner's starting level in these areas is essential for structuring the work-based learning effectively, focusing on developing the soft skills which are necessary for a successful and sustainable integration into the world of work.

In the Soft skills 2.0 project, the identification of the levels is based on the following taxonomy:

- **Level 1:** The working learner understands and remembers the key principle of the respective Soft Skills.
- **Level 2:** The working learner applies the key principles of the Soft Skills in easy situations in his/her daily work.
- **Level 3:** The working learner solves complex situations in his/her work by analysing and evaluating them (potential problems, resources to be used).
- **Level 4:** The working learner puts things into perspective, taking ethical criteria into account. The working learner cross-references information and uses Soft Skills in an innovative way to create added value.

Levels 3 and 4 will not always be observed because they are not necessarily required in some jobs (which does not mean that the working learner does not have them).

Although not mandatory, initial positioning of the employee followed by feedback is strongly recommended. This enables the employees to become aware of their level of Soft Skills, and the trainers to create individualised instead of standardised learning paths.

### Positioning methodology:

- **Use evaluations that focus on observable behaviours** related to the actual work situation. The soft skills and their levels are assessed in practical situations.
- **Encourage the learner to conduct a self-assessment** of their soft skills, thus offering an internal perspective on their perception of their non-technical skills. This **contributes to an increased self-awareness of their own strengths and areas for improvement**.
- Integrating feedback from different people, such as colleagues, managers or tutors, is essential to get a complete picture of the learner's soft skills. **This multi-dimensional approach not only enriches the assessment process**, but also clarifies expectations and



facilitates mutual understanding by providing different perspectives on the learner's skills. This enables more accurate assessment and targeted development of the necessary soft skills.

- **Analyse the results of the evaluations to identify the gaps between the person's current soft skills and the skills required for the position.** This allows for the determination of priority areas for the development of soft skills.
- Based on this thorough analysis and together with the learning worker, **develop a personalized WBL plan that specifically targets the soft skills to be developed.** This plan should be flexible and adaptable, taking into account the learner's progress over time.

### Self-assessment in the reflection phase

The reflection phase is an integral part of the WBL process. During this phase, working learners are encouraged to **reflect on their actions in WBL scenarios** and **become aware of how they are applying Soft Skills in professional contexts**. Although it is a phase in the WBL process that is not directly related to assessment, the **reflection on and the self-assessment of the learning progress is an important factor when it comes to deciding on the future learning path** by identifying which learning objectives have already been reached and where there are still areas for improvement.

Depending on the results of this "interim evaluations" in the reflection phase the trainers decide whether / how often the learning experience in work-related scenarios is repeated to develop and the respective soft skills and levels.

#### Methodology:

- Guide the working learners' in analysing their actions in the scenario and support their reflection with **open-ended questions**.
- **Focus on the "how"** rather than the "why". By explaining how they reacted and performed the tasks working learners become aware of their soft skills and learning progress.

### Assessment

Assessment occurs at the end of a WBL process as a **summative assessment of objective and measurable criteria**. It is an individual process that requires preparation by both the trainer / assessor and the working learner. The assessment takes place in a **particular testing scenario within a standardised setting, clearly defined and communicated framework conditions** (date, time, duration, soft skills to be assessed, ...) and **specific tools for measuring** the respective Soft Skill and level.



When acquired soft skills are assessed against predefined criteria and **indicators a certificate can be issued if desired**. Certificates are not mandatory but can be seen as an **opportunity to gain a recognition for Soft Skills**, which usually are not validated in the same way as hard skills. Due to the transferability of Soft Skills, a certificate can in any case enrich the CV of applicants and employees.

**Methodology:**

- For the observation phase for the assessment, **follow pre-defined settings** (regarding date and time, soft skill level, work context, ...). The timing and level of detail of assessment vary according to the organisation's preferences.
- **Inform** the participants **about the settings and about the option to repeat the assessment** if necessary.
- **Base the assessment on work-based learning situations and indicators known by the working learner.**
- **Use specific indicators** for accurate assessment and to ensure objectivity of the assessors.
- **The assessment of level 1 might be challenging in a work situation** since the cognitive aspects concerning understanding and remembering are difficult to observe.

On the basis of the assessment results, guidance may include suggestions for further improvement, planning of further training of the same or other soft skills, or the update of portfolios and CVs for job applications.



## Tools for the positioning and assessment of soft skills in a work-based learning situation

Based on the steps of the previously introduced work-based learning process, the project partners created different tools for the positioning and assessment of soft skills in a WBL context.

In the following section the tools and their application are described. The **templates for the tools are included in the WBL MEMO or can be downloaded from the project website.**

**Comentado [PS2]:** We will have to make sure that this is true 😊

### A. Tool used in the workplace analysis

#### Table for the work-place analysis

The table is based on the European credit system for vocational education and training created by the European Union (ECVET). The project partners decided to expand the existing system by adding columns for soft skills and their required level. Additionally, the table provides the definition and observable behaviour for each chosen soft skill.

This table has to be completed by someone who knows the job very well.

#### Goals:

1. The purpose of this table is to exactly define the skills necessary for doing a certain job and get an overview of all the needed competences, technical and personal alike.
2. The table should act as a base for all following steps. Depending on what skills were identified as most important the training situation is constructed accordingly.

#### Steps:

1. Fill out the required activities and technical skills and competences and required knowledge.
2. Choose a maximum of three soft skills per Unit of Learning Outcome - the definition of this specific soft skill will automatically appear next to it.
3. Define the required level for the soft skill - the definition of said level and its observable behaviour will also automatically appear in the table.

**Time needed:** 20-30 minutes (for already existing occupational standards)

ZERO BARRIER© simplifies the process of analysing work activities, which is essential for developing real-world training programs (WBL):

- **Customised frameworks creation:** ZERO BARRIER© allows trainers and organizations to create frameworks that accurately reflect the real tasks of jobs. This tool helps to identify the key skills needed for each profession, including behavioural skills, allowing



for the design of specific training tailored to learners' needs. For example, it can combine skills from different roles in a hybrid position, like a production operator who also handles order preparation.

- **Importance of behavioural skills:** Both technical skills and soft skills are essential in the professional world. ZERO BARRIER© incorporates these two types of skills into the activity analysis, helping to define the required level for each behavioural and technical skill needed for a job.
- **Tracking learners' progress:** The customized framework with clearly defined skills allows for tracking progress and adjusting the training according to the real needs and skill development of the learner. This helps to better target additional training needed to meet job requirements.
- **Flexibility of frameworks:** Frameworks can be adjusted based on changes in professions and industry needs, allowing trainers to stay up-to-date with professional practices.

ZERO BARRIER© facilitates the setup of professional training that meets the actual needs of current and future jobs, providing a tool that helps **map out the skills needed for various job positions**. This allows trainers to effectively and specifically prepare learners, addressing both technical skills and soft skills needed to succeed in their professional careers.

This comprehensive method fully integrates all aspects of professional training, ensuring that each training path is well-aligned with the professional and personal goals of learners and organizations.

#### B. Tool used for the preparation of the WBL situation

##### Table for the preparation for the practical situation

When preparing a WBL situation it is necessary to base it on specific objectives, activities and learning outcomes. The tool to define all these criteria is a table in which trainers/assessors can identify the practical situation, define the goals of the WBL situation and plan the practical situation with regard to the problem / challenge to be addressed and the necessary logistic organisation.

##### Goal:

1. The goal is a well-prepared training situation that targets the selected skills and meets the expected objectives.

##### Steps:

1. Determine the practical situation by choosing an activity from the work-place analysis table and identifying the targeted soft skills.
2. Define the goals of the work-based learning session.



3. Prepare the logistics of the training situation.

**Time needed:** 30-40 minutes

**ZERO BARRIER© facilitates the implementation of work-based scenarios focused on soft skills training.** The platform relies on a structured and detailed approach, as previously described, for the preparation and execution of real-life training activities, allowing users to maximize educational effectiveness and meet the specific needs of each learner.

By integrating key elements necessary for structuring a scenario:

- The precise definition of the date and times,
- The choice of trainer,
- The determination of the location,
- The description of the context in which the scenario takes place,
- The identification of the solicited competency,
- The know-how, theoretical knowledge, and soft skills to be mobilized.

In the context of soft skills training in a work-based situation, it is important to emphasize that when an activity is considered successful or a competency is considered acquired, it confirms that all knowledge, know-how, and soft skills have been correctly mobilized. Conversely, if the activity is not successful or the competency is considered not acquired, it is necessary to conduct an analysis to identify which elements may be missing and/or not mastered. These elements can then be identified and capitalized in ZERO BARRIER© and can be subject to a new scenario. In this way, ZERO BARRIER© acts as a facilitator in the design of work-based scenarios, specially adapted to soft skills training.

### C. Tools used in the course of the learning activity

For the **reflection phase of the learning activity** three different tools for the assessment of trainees were created, two of which are for the trainer and one for the trainee.

After completing the forms, the trainer/assessor and the trainee exchange their point of view on the results of the self-assessment and assessment and discuss the next steps – e.g. whether it is necessary to repeat the WBL situation or the trainee can move on to the next one.

#### Sel-reflection questionnaire for the trainee

##### Goals:

1. The questions of this questionnaire are supposed to encourage the trainee to thoroughly think about the previous situation and reflect on their decision.
2. The reflection about the actions during the situation and found solutions will increase the trainee engagement and therefore the learning outcome.
3. Through answering those questions, the trainee should be able to find a solution to the problem if they have not during the training situation. This should be done



instinctively or by drawing from previous experiences or theoretical knowledge by the trainee alone.

**Steps:**

1. Fill in the subject of the session, date and name.
2. Read and answer the questions carefully. What exactly happened during the session should be described, the trainee's actions and reactions should be analysed and the trainee should try to find a solution for the posed problem, if they have not already. Finally, the trainee should find ways one could transfer the solution to other professional situations. Attention: The trainer is in no way allowed to provide a solution for the problem.
3. Hand in the paper to the assessor.

**Time needed:** 15-20 minutes

The reflexive approach encourages learners to draw on their previous experiences and knowledge to solve problems. This method promotes the **active reuse of lessons learned** during training.

ZERO BARRIER© enhances the reflexivity phase of learning activities with features designed to support both trainers and learners. The tool provides **separate assessment options for the trainer and self-assessment for the learner**, which facilitates mutual understanding and constructive dialogue about the learning process.

After learners complete the forms, trainers have immediate access to this data. This simplifies discussions about the results and helps plan the next steps in the learning journey, whether it involves repeating an activity to strengthen skills or moving on to new challenges.

Acknowledging that reflexivity is a crucial but not innate skill, ZERO BARRIER© offers **various reflexivity prompts to help participants develop this ability**. These prompts guide learners in analysing and becoming aware of their actions. By asking strategic questions, the tool helps learners reflect on their experiences, identify lessons learned, and consider improvements.

ZERO BARRIER© provides a clear and structured view of the various training stages, making it easier to access past experiences and support skill integration. This helps learners better understand the areas of competence they have mastered and those that need more attention, enabling them to proactively manage their professional development.

**Questionnaire for the assessor**

**Goal:**



1. The goal is to be able to analyse what happened during the practice situation like the trainee actions and reactions better and also encourage the trainer to pay close attention and reflect on the situation to maybe give feedback afterwards.

**Steps:**

1. Fill in the subject of the session, date and name.
2. Read and answer the questions. The trainee procedure should be described as well as what went well and what didn't, their decision and its effects.

**Time needed:** 10-15 minutes

For each scenario managed through ZERO BARRIER©, trainers have a structured system for recording important information, which enhances the learning experience.

- Trainers detail the context in which the scenario takes place, including specific circumstances, the work environment, and other relevant factors that frame the activity.
- The skills and activities targeted by the scenario are clearly identified. ZERO BARRIER© allows a direct link between these skills and the appropriate frameworks — whether they are professional, customized, or activity-based — available on the platform, ensuring a match between educational objectives and the real demands of the workplace.
- The platform also allows for precise definition of the knowledge (theoretical knowledge), skills (technical abilities), and soft skills (behavioural competencies) required for the activity. This focuses attention on the crucial elements of learning and aligns practical exercises with overall training objectives.
- After the scenario, the trainer compiles observations, progress, challenges faced, and any other relevant feedback, thus enriching the training assessment.

This method structures the learning process, facilitating targeted evaluation and development of key skills, and ensures comprehensive monitoring that aligns practical activities with strategic educational goals.

**Checklist for the reflective phase (used by trainers/assessors)**

**Goal:**

1. This checklist is meant to help to decide whether the training should be continued or not.

**Steps:**

1. Fill in the subject of the session, date and name.





2. Fill in the checklist.
3. Decide if the trainees came up with a solution, if it was suitable for the situation, and if they can come up with ways to use the trained skill in another situation. Based on the answers of the checklist, determine if the training situation should be done again.

**Time needed:** 5-10 minutes

**ZERO BARRIER© incorporates formative assessment throughout the work-based learning process, considering it essential for guiding professional development.** This ongoing assessment monitors learners' progress, celebrates their achievements, and identifies challenges to overcome. The system automatically adjusts training programs based on the skills that need improvement, offering targeted additional training.

Constructive feedback from formative assessments is crucial for motivating learners. It highlights their progress and points out areas needing more attention. **ZERO BARRIER© sets clear, intermediate goals, helping learners see their progression and focus on upcoming steps.** This automated management of training needs creates a continuous improvement cycle, ensuring training meets the demands of the job market and the specific needs of each learner.

#### Collection of solutions and transferability

By collecting the results of the trainees going through work-based learning situations a portfolio of good practice examples can be created and the progress trainees have made over a longer work-based learning process can be made visible.

#### Goals:

1. The collection of multiple solutions for the training situations and their transferability to other situations.
2. Track progress

#### Steps:

1. Fill in the subject of the session, date and name.
2. Fill in the table with the answers the trainees gave on their questionnaires.

**Time needed:** 5-10 minutes

ZERO BARRIER© allows learners to **edit and keep numerous documents from their training journey.** Learners can generate detailed documents including:

- A complete document of the training journey: This document outlines all the steps of the training, providing a comprehensive overview of the learner's pathway.



- Evaluation results: ZERO BARRIER© allows learners to compile and access the results of their evaluations throughout their training, offering a precise insight into their progress and skills acquired.
- Training certificates: Learners can obtain certificates that certify their participation and success in various components of the training, which is crucial for professional recognition.
- Skills portfolios: An essential tool that compiles skills and qualifications acquired, enabling learners to present their skill development in an organized and professional manner to potential employers.

These documents are an essential resource for learners. They not only allow **tracking of personal progression and consolidation of developed skills** but also enable **structured and effective presentation of qualifications** when seeking employment or aiming for professional advancements. This comprehensive folder facilitates the demonstration of their development and professional commitment, thereby increasing their career opportunities.



## The placement of (future) employees regarding their soft skills

In order to develop the specific work-based learning process described above and the **training pathway to reach their learning objectives**, it is necessary to **know the starting point of the participants regarding the required soft skills**.

The **placement process** to find out which of the soft skills required for a certain profession (future) employees already have or need to develop further is **embedded in different stages of the European human resource management process** developed in the Soft skills 2.0 project.



- When creating **job descriptions** and publishing **job advertisements** employers / HR managers define the **soft skills expected for the respective position**.
- During the **selection phase**, candidates are **assessed on the basis of** their **applications** and their **performance in interviews** and sometimes in **skills assessments or aptitude tests**. Usually, soft skills are assessed by observation.
- In the **probation period**, candidates are **observed by superiors and colleagues**.
- In the daily work life of employees, **different interview formats like regular appraisal interviews** are used to **evaluate** (among others) **the employees' soft skills**, **identify their training needs** in this respect and **discuss their career plans** within the organisation.

More **details on this process** can be found in the guide **“Soft skills at the heart of Human Resources”**.

In any case, the placement should be the **synthesis of the observations** by employers, supervisors, trainers or tutors **and the self-assessment** of the employee / trainee which can be developed in a discussion, in which they exchange their perspectives and jointly reach an agreement on the status quo and the learning objectives.

Tools to use in these steps are:

- the table for the workplace analysis
- the placement grids developed in the first Soft skills project
- the Wheels developed in the first Soft skills project
- ZERO BARRIER and Happ'In Co



## WBL as a crucial element of internships

**Work-based learning** does not only apply for employees in companies **but also for trainees in training centres or insertion programmes**, who do not pass a classical recruiting process but attend a training programme to be prepared for a job on the first labour market.

### A. Assessing Soft Skills during internships

Internships or immersion periods in companies are crucial for evaluating the practical application of soft skills in different contexts. These periods allow checking the integration of behavioural skills in a real professional environment and collecting precise feedback from company mentors on how effectively trainees mobilize these skills in a different setting.

Here's how to proceed for an effective evaluation:


- **Selection of Skills to Assess: Before the internship starts, it's essential for the company mentor to know the specific soft skills to observe.** These skills should be chosen based on their relevance to the responsibilities of the position the trainee holds. This step requires close coordination between the trainer and the company mentor.
- **Defining Observable Elements: In collaboration with the trainer and the host company, observable behaviours that illustrate the use of targeted soft skills are defined.** This includes identifying clear and relevant criteria that will be used to assess the trainee. These behaviours should be measurable and directly related to the trainee's tasks, allowing for objective observation and assessment of skills in action.
- **Evaluation Process by the Mentor: The mentor monitors and evaluates the application of soft skills in the context of the trainee's normal professional activities.** This evaluation uses established criteria to provide a detailed analysis of the trainee's performance. The mentor not only notes the presence of behavioural skills but also how the trainee adapts them to the specific challenges of the position. The results of this evaluation determine if further training is needed and help plan the next steps in the trainee's professional development.

Together, these steps enhance the learning process by adapting it to the real demands of the professional environment. They also **promote constructive dialogue between trainers, company mentors, and trainees**, which is crucial for successful and sustainable professional integration. This dynamic process ensures that trainees can not only apply but also adapt their behavioural skills to various work environments, increasing their chances of professional success.


Happ'In Co© is an extension of ZERO BARRIER©, designed to enhance the experience of professional internships, immersions, and integration periods. It allows for **real-time tracking of professional integration pathways** and provides immediate responsiveness to adjust necessary support to prevent potential disruptions in the integration process.



- Questionnaires developed by Happ'In Co© assess integration within companies by capturing the experiences and satisfaction of trainees and their mentors. This dual evaluation facilitates constructive dialogue and helps align expectations with actual experiences, which is crucial for long-term integration success.
- Happ'In Co© uses an automatic alert system to inform mentors of critical moments requiring swift intervention. This enables effective management of challenges faced by the trainee or mentor and prevents breaks in the integration process.
- Happ'In Co© focuses on developing and valuing essential soft skills such as communication, problem-solving, adaptability, and teamwork. Evaluating these skills ensures that trainees meet the requirements of their positions while promoting their professional success and personal fulfilment. This reduces the risk of failure and strengthens their sense of belonging to the company.



## Internship monitoring



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## Conclusion

~~To conclude,~~ This document highlights the importance of positioning and assessment methods for ~~soft-Soft skills-Skills~~ within the context of work-based learning. Thanks to the advances of the Soft Skills 2.0 project, we have not only enriched our understanding of ~~soft Soft skills-Skills~~ in real professional contexts but also improved their structured integration into the demands of ~~organisations and~~ the job market ~~in general~~, making learning more relevant and immediately applicable.

The ~~work-based learning~~ methodology developed in this framework is distinguished by an approach that categorizes soft skills into different levels of acquisition (based on Bloom's taxonomy). ~~This methodological framework and~~ facilitates a progressive and adaptive ~~learning-WBL~~ process. ~~Learners-In seven steps, learners~~ are guided from the initial stage of understanding to mastery and autonomous application of skills. ~~thus, Key elements to ensuring an effective transition between theoretical acquisition and practical application of soft skills ensure this progression tailored to the needs of the learners are the positioning and~~

~~This method also emphasizes the importance of~~ continuous formative assessment, which regularly verifies skill acquisition through real applications, thus adjusting the learning pathway according to the specific needs of each learner.

The outcomes of the Soft Skills 2.0 project demonstrate how ~~professional trainingwork-based learning~~ can be enhanced by integrating soft skills. ~~These methods, by~~ By promoting better adaptation of professional pathways to the current dynamics of the job market ~~in which Soft Skills are more and mor in demand, these methods~~ offer a model for future initiatives in the field of ~~continuous vocational education and training (CVET)professional training~~. We hope that these approaches will continue to be widely adopted and adapted, thereby enriching professional development opportunities across Europe.

This document highlights the importance of **positioning and assessment methods for Soft Skills** within the **context of work-based learning**. Thanks to the advances of the Soft Skills 2.0 project, we have not only enriched our understanding of Soft Skills in real professional contexts but also improved their **structured integration** into the demands of organisations and the job market in general, **making learning more relevant and immediately applicable**.

The **work-based learning methodology** developed in this framework is distinguished by an approach that **categorises soft skills into different levels of acquisition** (based on Bloom's taxonomy) and facilitates **a progressive and adaptive WBL process**. In seven steps, learners are guided from the initial stage of understanding to mastery and autonomous application of skills. Key elements to ensure this **progression tailored to the needs of the learners** are the **positioning and continuous formative assessment**, which regularly verifies skill acquisition through real applications, thus adjusting the learning pathway according to the specific needs of each learner.

The outcomes of the Soft skills 2.0 project demonstrate **how work-based learning can be enhanced by integrating soft skills**. By promoting better adaptation of professional pathways to the current dynamics of the job market in which Soft Skills are more and mor in demand,

**Comentado [PS3]:** Copy of the above text without the changes and with some bold text elements so it is easier to read 😊

**Comentado [PS4]:** General question whether we want to follow the same way of spelling Soft Skills (with two capitla S) in the whole English document ...



these methods offer a model for future initiatives **in the field of continuous vocational education and training (CVET)**. We hope that these approaches will continue to be widely adopted and adapted, thereby enriching professional development opportunities across Europe.



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