

A Balancing Act

Describing skills acquired in the workplace - how and why



VÍRKE

Tel.: +47 22 54 17 00
Adr.: Henrik Ibsens gate 90, 0255 Oslo
Web: www.virke.no

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A Balancing Act

Describing skills acquired in the workplace - how and why

“We know that the skills we acquire through the workplace, whether those are developed through our own experiences, our interactions with others or through internal training, are integral to properly mastering one’s job. It is high time that we open the black box, and reveal this so-called ‘tacit knowledge’. ‘A Balancing Act’ is a model that has specifically been developed in the workplace, to enable everyone with the tools they need to describe their own skills, such that they can then be understood by others.

This report serves as an important step toward getting both the authorities and politicians on board, and as a way to collaborate with employers and employees so that we can collectively reach a proper valuation of all skills that are so vital to the workplace.”

Ivar Horneland Kristensen, Managing Director of Virke



Target groups

Employers/employees: First and foremost, we hope that the report as a whole, and the description of the 'A Balancing Act' concept, will both inspire and motivate employers and employees alike in their shared efforts in developing workplace skills. To strengthen their faith and pride in the skills they cultivate. Our trials of the concept have revealed that there is a widespread misconception held by many in the workplace: that they are not actively developing skills, purely because they are not doing so through the education system. Rather, they simply try to find ways in their everyday lives in which they can learn the skills they need in order to do what is required of them, so they can perform their jobs to the best of their abilities.

If more people were inspired to use this tool, it could help in introducing a more strategic way of developing one's skills as they work. The notion of skills development into the everyday working lives of both employers and employees, as well as a shared language that could further enable them to discuss skills more easily, could generate motivation to invest more in workplace skills. Which, of course, makes it easier to use both the time and resources on skills development efforts.

The authorities/politicians (responsible for skills and education): To understand the value of the skills that are acquired through the workplace. Be inspired to think in different ways about education, skills, and lifelong learning.

Our hope is that the relevant authorities and politicians will trust in what the jury for the VPL Prize recognised about this concept. 'A Balancing Act' is a unique concept that can be used for integrating the workplace into the system dedicated to the validation of prior learning, and to build a bridge between academia and the workplace.

Skills mediators in careers counselling/adult education/training providers may also be inspired to use this tool as a way of forming the basis for their guidance and offers.

Through this report then, we hope that these target groups are left with the overall impression that the implementation of this concept is achievable. We aim to motivate them to use this tool, and that they can recognise the added value to:

- Boost the position of the workplace as a learning arena
- Strengthen one's own industry
- Improve the dialogue about skills in one's own business
- Be valued as an individual with many diverse skills

However, this report is not a scientific publication. There is little use of footnotes and references, and we have not given any scientific evidence to support our statements. Furthermore, we have not included researchers as one of our primary target groups, but we do hope that there will be a heightened interest in researching 'A Balancing Act', both in theory and practice.

The jury's justification for awarding The Global VPL Prize 2019 to 'A Balancing Act'

The emphasis on learning outcomes and the connection of work-based learning to formal education makes the tool very suitable to get the private sector and enterprises involved – one of the major challenges in the establishment of validation arrangements.

The tool is an excellent example on how to create the bridges between labour market and the education and training using validation. In addition, it has a lot of potential for improving social dialogue on strategic development of skills.

The 'balancing act' is well suited to be integrated and use in the larger context of career guidance by making skills development and acquirement in the workplace more transparent, having, thus enormous potential to spread validation practices in different contexts.

In the described product, the involvement of companies and trade unions as well as the piloting of the tool in three large retail chains makes the product fit for purpose, while making the method easy to use and valuable. Although small in scale and developed for one sector at the moment, it has a lot of potential to be used in other sectors for which development work has already started.

Box 6.4 A Balancing Act

The report **A Balancing Act** has been written by the employer federation Virke, in collaboration with the retail industry, represented by IKEA, Meny and Kiwi, NHO, LO and YS, with financial support from the Ministry of Education and Research.

Virke states that 'the project's main task is to develop a model and method to describe skills that are acquired in the workplace, in such a way that they can then be understood by other parts of the workplace, and in the formal education system.' This model aims to describe the skills that have been cultivated through one's work by using terms extracted from the education system, such as 'learning outcome description' and 'qualification'. The project aims to provide an opportunity to document what kinds of skills people acquire through their daily work lives and through their training in the workplace. One of the key objectives is to improve mobility in the workplace. The evaluation of the project concluded that the chains who participated reacted positively to the concept's ability to highlight the skills required to work in the retail industry, and how the model clarified the skills needs and the scope of internal training. The evaluation also pointed out that there is a need for further testing on a wider scale before it is possible to successfully articulate the value of the model, for both the workplace and the individual. **A Balancing Act** had the honour of receiving The VPL Biennial's Global Prize for Validation of Prior Learning.

Sources: Jensen & Lidahl 2018, Skjerve & Simeou 2018

International and national interest

'Although small in scale and developed for one sector at the moment, it has a lot of potential to be used in other sectors for which development work has already started.'

These were the concluding remarks from the jury's justification for awarding 'A Balancing Act' The Global VPL Prize 2019¹ for the best product in the global market for the validation of prior learning. Their full commentary can be read in a separate box. It is exactly this 'potential' that our new report focusses on.

The international prize was awarded to 'A Balancing Act' on the basis of our previous report 'A Balancing Act - Describing skills acquired in the workplace.'² The Government has also referenced 'A Balancing Act' in its White Paper on Lifelong Learning, which was introduced in April 2020. In the chapter detailing models that can be used to document skills, they stated:

'It is up to the working community itself if it wants to introduce a shared standards for how skills should be described or tested. The Government does not want to implement schemes that may be seen as bureaucratic or controlling. Thus, workplace industries must take the initiative to test out existing or new models themselves, so that they are able to document the skills

that have been cultivated through one's work, and the Government shall in turn consider what methods would then be most appropriate in aiding such projects. The Government shall also support an evaluation of any testing required for the 'A Balancing Act' model on a larger scale, if this is required.'³

New trials have been referred to in both the international jury's justification for awarding 'A Balancing Act' the prize for the best product 'that make[s] learning outcomes visible or help[s] assess them'⁴, as well as in the Government's mentioning of 'A Balancing Act' in the White Paper on Lifelong Learning. We have received many requests to test out the concept, and this report serves a presentation of five of these trials across various different industries, with all of the trials taking place after the concept was officially launched, in the spring of 2018. The new case studies that we have documented here have been chosen specifically as they provide a variety of different examples, demonstrating both the experiences and knowledge that have been gained by using the concept. An important aspect for three of the trials was to ensure that we provided training on how to use the concept further, so that the client could then go on to implement 'A Balancing Act' by themselves.

¹ The prize was awarded at the 3rd VPL Biennale, 7th-8th May 2019, Berlin. The Biennale was organised by Bertelsmann Stiftung in Germany, in collaboration with the following partners:

- European Commission
- UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning
- Cedefop (European Centre for the development of Vocational Training)
- European Network Validation of Prior Learning
- Lifelong Learning Platform (European Civil Society for Education)
- Nordic Network for Adult Learning
- ETF (European Training Foundation)
- SAQA (South-African Qualifications Authority)
- EPALE (Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe)

² Skjerve & Simeou 2018 <https://www.virke.no/politiske-saker/kompetanse-og-utdanning/balansekunst/>

³ White Paper. St. 14 2019–2020 Kompetansereformen – Lære hele livet [Skills Reform - Learn for life] (page 79) <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/meld.-st.-14-20192020/id2698284/>

⁴ One of the jury's criteria for the assessment of best product

The Report:

The first section shall reflect on the learning points and challenges that have been observed throughout the trials.

The second section shall present the tool 'A Balancing Act'; a model for describing skills, and a method of communicating skills externally

The third section then provides a detailed presentation of the five case studies

The fourth section shall provide a conclusion, including both a summary and recommendations; how can the current platform of knowledge and overall challenges documented through the trials of 'A Balancing Act' be used to improve efforts surrounding skills development in the workplace, and to strengthen skills policies in general?

Brief introduction to the case studies

The trials presented here provide a basis for understanding not only how, but why we should be describing the skills that are acquired through the workplace. Three of the trials focus on skills standards for different industries; in retail, healthcare, and education. One trial aids in formulating the descriptions of an individual's skill set, in addition to establishing the workplace skills standards as a reference for the validation of prior learning. The final case study mainly focussed on finding a way to describe the skills that are acquired through a specific function in the workplace.

Case study: Retail

This trial was carried out in the retail industry, in which the model and method were further developed.

Three chains took part (KIWI, Meny and IKEA) with a skills standard formulated for each of the chains⁵: for the shop manager at KIWI, for the manager/retailer at Meny, and for the shopkeeper at IKEA. Certain cultural differences are reflected in the concepts that were used to refer to their own skills; however, many of the key skills and learning outcome descriptions turned out to be shared skills that all three possessed. As a result, Virke decided that these three separate standards should be combined into one unified skills standard for the role of 'shop manager'.

A unified skills standard can stimulate a heightened level of mobility, and therefore make for an easier recruiting process. This can then also help in highlighting the distinctive characteristics for each chain, those that separate them from each other.

The case study also showed little of the 'lock-in effect' within the retail industry, which then highlights and facilitates the opportunities for increased mobility into other areas of the job market.

By creating a skills standard for the shops' employees, one of the things we learned was how training that specifically corresponds with a certain career, such as a job working in retail, may eventually take shape.

Case study: Oslo Voksenopplæring

The results of this study at the Oslo Adult Education Service are presented through the description of refugees' individual skill sets, specifically based on their former work experience. The evidence from this trial showed that the skills they have developed through work are often considered to have little relevance in regard to the qualifications they can document.



⁵ Attached as 2- 4 in the 'A Balancing Act' report of 2018

A description of their skills provides more relevant information for the employer, than simply providing information that describes their type of workplace. For example, someone that worked in a 'bakery' was actually responsible for the accounting, 'hairstylist' actually meant nails and make-up services, a 'shop employee' was responsible for dealing with product placement and innovation of the shop's interior design, and someone with 'construction site' listed didn't have anything to do with construction.

Rather, a description of their skills could grant refugees an entry into the workplace without having additional formal education. Indeed, it was exactly this that many of them were looking for, in light of their motivation and living situations.

Case study: Nursing home network

A network of nursing home managers invited us to test out the concept in a kind of workplace that has a completely different tradition and way of thinking about both recruiting and skills development, in comparison to the retail industry. The healthcare sector has close links to the formal education system, not only when it comes to the basic education required for working in that sector, but in regard to further training too.

However, documentation regarding the skills that are cultivated once actually participating in the workplace are lacking to the exact same extent as those that are undocumented in retail.

Case study: Elverum Folkehøgskole

We were invited to interview the teaching staff employed at this folk high school, to work on establishing either the descriptions of individual's skill sets, or on a skills standard that applied to all teachers.

We opted for the skills standards option, but chose to still include examples of how one can progress from having these shared skills standards for a role, to then being able to formulate the descriptions of an individual's own skill set.

An underlying theme for this case study in particular proved to be that of whether 'A Balancing Act', which has thus far only been intended for use in the workplace, could actually be used to establish a language for discussing and describing skills that would also be suitable in educational settings?

Case study: Mestertillitsvalgt LO

Through this trial, we were able to test out our concept on a specific function in the workplace, namely that of being a trade union representative. 'A Balancing Act' could potentially be applicable for other functions too, such as that of a health and safety representative, for example.

This case study provides an example of valuing the skills that have been acquired through the performance of a particular function in the workplace. Many of those who have worked as full-time trade union representatives have reported that they've been unable to perform their former roles in the workplace, as the required skills for those jobs are constantly changing. They have, instead, cultivated their skills in other areas.

This project thus showed that it is in fact possible to document particular skills required to be a trade union representative, and as a result can make this a more attractive function to undertake.



Learning points and challenges that have been raised through the trials

For this section, I have chosen to reflect on the trials by adopting the use of three Norwegian aphorisms⁶. The focus in this part is mainly on the challenges we face in the future development of a skills policy, and the same aphorisms shall be mentioned again in the conclusion, where the suggestions to tackle these challenges shall be proposed.

‘No one listens to what you’re saying unless they think they’ve already thought of something similar themselves’

Main challenge: The field surrounding skills policies is still considered to be in its early days and still not developed enough.

‘He was so unassuming that he would end up falling behind even when he was walking by himself’

Main challenge: A lack of understanding and confidence of the value of learning in the workplace - even within the workplace.

‘They talked past each other their entire lives, but still managed to feel as if they’d been hit’

Main challenge: Difficult to strengthen the role of learning in the workplace, whilst simultaneously trying to actively ensure a certain quality of formal education, to create a win-win situation, with improved interaction and synergy.

1. ‘No one listens to what you’re saying unless they think they’ve already thought of something similar themselves’⁷

We observed a remarkable difference in the response to ‘A Balancing Act’ when we presented it to two different target groups: between those who operate within the workplace and the authorities/politicians. For the workplace, this concept was seen as immediately applicable to a number of the issues that they face on a regular basis, and it thus demonstrated that there was a widespread recognition that the concept mirrored ideas that the recipients had already thought of themselves. For those who tend to believe that more formal education is the answer to the current needs surrounding skills development, it has proved to be much more of a challenge for them to understand what ‘A Balancing Act’ may contribute. Our concept of ‘A Balancing Act’ is based on a logic of skills development that doesn’t seem to fit in or affect the thinking or assessing of educational policies. As a result, any conversation about skills in the workplace quickly turns into a discussion of the need for more education, the dimensioning of education, and the relevance of work within the

educational system and the like. It seems as if one of the core challenges then, is that we collectively lack a language and a proficiency to talk about skills. Which also applies to the workplace.

Ownership of learning

Having the ability to control your own learning is a key factor in being able to successfully develop a culture for lifelong learning in society. Having ownership of your own skills precedes the ability to take ownership of your own learning. The interviews demonstrated that, in a practical sense, all participants lacked the training to be able to describe their own skills. None of them had been challenged on this, or experienced any curiosity about it. And this likely has something to do with the fact that ‘no one listens to what you’re saying unless they think they’ve already thought of something similar themselves’. If you’ve previously tried talking about your own skills, you may not have been heard. Even those who work in recruiting often lack the training to talk about skills. They have mastered a strong dialogue around education, work tasks and personal qualities, but not for skills. Because of this, they also don’t hear what is being said about skills that have been acquired through the experience of actually performing a role. They just don’t have any frame of reference for these. Conversations about skills therefore end up referring back to another, limited frame of reference, dependent on education, courses, work tasks, careers and titles.

A knowledge-based skills policy

In its third and most recent report, the government-appointed Norwegian Committee on Skill Needs⁸ provided an overview of ‘knowledge gaps’, as is, those important areas within the skills policy in which there is simply a lack of fundamental knowledge. Several of these revolve around learning in the workplace.

⁶ Nils-Fredrik Nielsen: Tristesser i utvalg I-IV (Aschehoug 1993-1999)

⁷ Nils-Fredrik Nielsen: Tristesser i utvalg - II (Aschehoug 1994)

⁸ <https://kompetansebehovsutvalget.no/>

Box 1.1 Knowledge gap⁹

After nearly three years' of work in this field, KBU have identified a number of gaps in knowledge relating to the statistics and analyses that limit the understanding of topics related to future skills needs. The list of these knowledge gaps is complex and diverse, but is certainly not exhaustive either. Some of these gaps in knowledge are far more pressing to fill than others.

We know very little of the effects of digital learning tools in the education system, for example. There is no doubt that the need for more digital skills among pupils is not only pressing, but is continuously growing. Yet, there is still little insight into how digital learning tools can best be used in teaching, in order to achieve better learning outcomes.

The use of digital resources in teaching is growing rapidly in both the workplace and in higher education. Indeed, there is little knowledge regarding whether technological platforms result in other kinds of learning outcomes than more traditional courses and forms of teaching do, or even if they can give greater flexibility regarding where, when and how that teaching takes place.

A common insight into how teachers can work on social and emotional skills in school is also missing.

There is a lack of empirical studies that have mapped out the skills changes following the green shift in Norway too.

The lack of information regarding the education and former qualifications of many immigrants who achieved these abroad makes it impossible to establish a comprehensive mapping of skills in the job market. The reason behind this is that there has been no information recorded about the immigrants' education in light of their establishment in Norway. Adding to this, we also know very little about the people who leave Norway to work outside of the country's borders, and thus what skills they take with them.

There is a lot of national and international research dedicated to adult learning, but there are no adequate registration statistics for other kinds of skills outside of formal education. Participation in courses and training remains unregistered, for example. More complete registration statistics would make it possible to combine objective information about participation in informal learning, with research focussing on gathering more subjective experiences and perspectives about participating in learning activities, both in the public and private sector.

The statistics for employment following upper secondary school education is not available in Statistic Norway's StatBank. This makes it difficult to work out which careers and industries students have gone into after their education and upon entering the workforce.

There is a need for more knowledge in regard to how learning actually takes place in different parts of the workplace, for example between the public and private sector, and between low-skill and high-skill jobs.

Only a few impact studies, focussing on adult learning in the workplace, have been carried out through publicly-funded programmes, such as Kompetansepluss (SkillsPlus). More generally though, there is little knowledge surrounding the effects that learning achieves in different groups and in different types of learning activities.

And there is minimum systematic insight into the relevance of the workplace in vocational colleges. The sector is extremely diverse, and is composed of schools with differing purposes and thematic facilities. The Ministry of Education and Research have begun research focussing on candidates, specifically directed at vocational college candidates, which should provide more information about this topic.

There is little insight into the differences in quality across elements of practice in higher education too, nor in courses that have compulsory practical elements.

There is a need for more knowledge about the future of skills needs in the healthcare and care services, especially in light of questions surrounding effective and adequate problem solving. With the current organisation, the development of this demographic will lead to an increase in the need for labour and specific skills that may be challenging to find.

⁹ Page 18 'Fremtidige kompetansebehov III - Læring og kompetanse i alle ledd' [Future Skills Needs III - Learning and skills at all stages] NOU 2020: 2

The answer to these issues about the lack of knowledge in these areas is not just to carry out more research. Knowledge provides a better understanding, but understanding requires more than just knowledge.

'A Balancing Act' documents the acquisition of skills in the workplace, from an inside perspective, focussing on the people who build and own the skills in question, those who have the skills that are being assessed. We are used to perceiving knowledge as something dependent on an outside-viewpoint, because from within, experience is purely subjective. Yet, to understand the outcomes of learning in the workplace, we must look within.

Use of concepts

Language and concepts are crucial factors in establishing a shared understanding. We have a long-standing tradition of talking about workplace training in light of what it isn't, namely, 'non-formal'. 'A Balancing Act' provides a simple framework that enables the discussion of what workplace learning really entails. We move away from describing skills as 'non-formal', and towards the use of a terminology that everyone in the workplace can recognise in themselves: Technology - People, Flexibility - Routines, Pace - Presence. This way, the concept isn't just 'something they've already thought of themselves', but is something that they actually experience as a concrete reality in their daily working lives.

Thus far, we have not received any feedback that the model or method used for the concept 'A Balancing Act' needs to be changed in any way. This means that when the participants have understood the basis of the concept, they have heard something 'similar to something they've already thought of themselves', which then gives them with that inspiration, ownership and motivation to continue to use the concept.

Any scepticism and opposition to the concept may originate from a competitive perspective, potentially from those who

have invested in another tool of which they feel is in competition with 'A Balancing Act', or from people who see the appreciation of learning in the workplace as a threat to the hegemony that they believe the formal education system must retain.

2. 'He was so unassuming that he would end up falling behind even when he was walking by himself'¹⁰

There are many discussions and statements surrounding the importance of learning in the workplace. In regard to the skills policy, one of its integral tasks is to inspire learning, no matter where that learning takes place. We have three important arenas for learning: The education system, the workplace, and society.

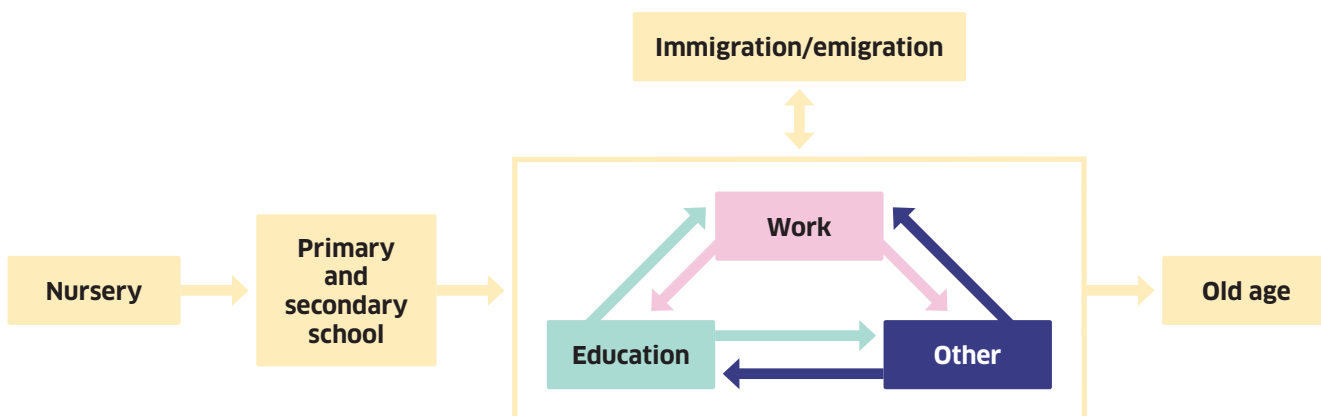
In practice, however, we clearly have a long way to go before we see an acceptance of all three learning arenas as equal. It's tempting to quote another of Niels-Fredrik Nilsen's aphorisms:

'He was always considered third among his equals'¹¹

A few examples from the case studies illustrate this point:

- All of the department managers in the nursing homes first felt that they had to explain what formal qualifications they held, before they could then try to describe the skills they used in the everyday work lives. This is entirely understandable, considering the fact that the healthcare sector is made up of workplaces and roles which are the most closely linked to education, and thus many believe that education is the 'correct' skill to present first.
- Many of the smaller retail chains, however, did not believe they were relevant when discussing 'skills development', as they don't engage with formal education. Both management and the employees try to perform the job to the best of their abilities, and do not have the time to complete further education.

The skills system through which the individual moves



Simplified version of Figure 1.1. in the Norwegian Committee on Skill Needs' 3rd report on future skills needs: NOU 2020: 2 Fremtidige kompetansebehov III. Læring og kompetanse i alle ledd [2 Future skills needs III. Learning and skills at all stages] (page 20).

¹⁰ Nils-Fredrik Nilsen: Tristesser i utvalg (Aschehoug 1993)

¹¹ Ibid.

In both examples, skills are automatically associated with education, and skills development still equates to more formal education. The learning that takes place in the workplace 'simply happens', and is likely pushed to the bottom of the list of policy priorities anyway.

When one sees it in this way, it takes a long time to be able to transform those ingrained beliefs. We're used to hearing that learning in the workplace is 'non-formal', which is often also used interchangeably with 'informal' learning. Just like how 'skills' and 'education' are often used as synonyms too.

It must therefore be a shared goal to use concepts such as 'highly skilled' when discussing the key skills required for a role that one currently does or shall eventually do. Of course, for some roles, a certain amount of formal education may be required to achieve the necessarily high level of skills. However, the workplace should also focus more on the learning outcome descriptions for those qualifications. There are too many examples of times when we employ someone with a master's degree just because they have spent more time in education than someone with a bachelor's degree, which only goes to show that we believe that the former automatically has a higher skill set. In the workplace then, we also uphold that belief that a high level of education = highly skilled.

Our trials have proved how necessary it is for the social partners, businesses and employees to gain more self-confidence in their crucial roles in cultivating the skills of the entire population. The workplace in general must become significantly better at not only understanding but communicating its strengths and uniqueness as an arena of learning.

Proxy

The term 'skill' is used in innumerable different contexts, yet, unfortunately, it is rarely one's 'skill' that is actually being referred to. We are all masters of deploying a proxy because we just don't have the training to talk about skills, and in some cases, it's not even a skill that we're trying to talk about.

It is therefore crucial that we reflect on the consequences that may arise from our consistent use of a proxy, which could be one's personal qualities, tasks, qualifications, titles or profession, instead of just presenting our skills.

Definition of 'proxy'

A proxy is something that acts instead of, on behalf of, with the authority of, or as a representative of. In technical and scientific terminology, the term is used to describe an observable or measurable quantity that can be substituted in order to give information about, or a measure of, another quantity (for which there is no data). (Store Norske Leksikon)

Indirect measure or sign that approximates or represents a phenomenon in the absence of a direct measure or sign. Also called indirect indicator. (BusinessDictionary)

Personal qualities and skills

There is a widespread use of showcasing one's personal qualities as a form of proxy when attempting to outline one's skills. The concept 'A Balancing Act' explicitly focusses on skills, and it is useful to be aware of this distinction between skills and personal qualities for a variety of reasons. There can be a lot of blurred overlapping between the two, and we do not think it is particularly appropriate to be too dogmatic in looking for an exact distinction when using 'A Balancing Act'. Rather, it is best to be pragmatic, so as to not lose focus on its core aim, in its efforts to help you: Become better at describing skills.

Example: There is a difference in looking for someone 'cheerful' versus someone who 'can provide good customer service'. The latter is included in the skills set for shop employees. Yet it is often the former that we hear about and observe in the recruitment process for a new shop employee. The problem here is that it is absolutely possible for someone to have a friendly demeanour while still providing terrible customer service. On the other hand, it is just as bad that a person who offers excellent customer service can often be disregarded for the job, if whoever is carrying out the recruitment process feels as if they don't have an outwardly cheerful personality.

The thought process behind this is clearly that if the salesperson dealing with the customer has a friendly demeanour, this then establishes a pleasant shopping situation, and the customer leaves satisfied. So instead of measuring the employee's level of 'customer service', the measure of their 'demeanour' becomes the 'proxy'.

Emphasising personal qualities rather than skills in the description of skills required to master a role only serves to build on the notion that skills are not a necessary element of the work, especially in this sector of the job market. If the impression is given that only one's personal qualities are required for a role, it makes it even more difficult for people currently working in those positions to not only communicate, but be proud of the skills they absolutely do need to master their role.

Personal qualities can also be worked on of course, for example, one's physical strength, but the starting point for everyone would range tremendously, and it must be scrutinised as to how important such a trait really is for the mastering of a role.

An example from the music industry:

To be a good bass singer is a skill. And someone who sings bass can train in order to master a higher range of tones in their vocal register. However, no matter how much he trains, he will never sound like a tenor. If the task requires you to stage a tenor aria, then you must find a tenor, regardless of how skilled the bass singer is. Not everyone has the ability to master all tasks, regardless of how much they train for it. If the task you are seeking to fill requires someone with a beautiful singing voice, and you post a job vacancy that requests someone with a deep voice, but who is also charming and has a twinkle in their eye - then you might end up with someone with a horrendous singing voice, but just so happens to have the personal qualities you were searching for. So what's the most important thing to ask for?

Personal qualities are something you can strengthen or tone down. We tend to measure personal qualities on a spectrum, with the opposing qualities on either end (see the example from the OECD in a separate box). The measuring of qualities can therefore be thought of as normative. Some qualities are, by definition, the best, and as a result, their counterparts are seen as negative.

One specific example that carries major consequences when recruiting in the workplace, is the often unison valuation of extroverted personal qualities. This means that those with more introverted qualities are not evaluated according to their skills; instead, they have to first learn how to be more extroverted before they are even seen as relevant to employers. We must therefore ask this question: What roles exist in the workplace in which being an extrovert is actually necessary for mastering the job?

Skills are something you can cultivate and develop. The same skill can be measured on differing levels, which we would then consider as a progressive measurement.

Skills can contribute to a desired reinforcement or reducing of a personal quality when it applies to a specific function required

to perform a job, and it is here that we see the interplay between skills and personal qualities.

A distinction between skills and qualities also produces consequences for the contents and aims of training programmes, in a recruiting situation, and for the inclusion in the workplace.

Some employers might say: ‘You can develop skills, but you can’t do anything with qualities.’ There is an element of truth in this, but this still must be nuanced and problematised.

Instead of measuring how good the potential employee would be at dealing with customers, their personality is measured instead. We request one’s personal qualities, when we are really seeking their skills. A proxy that we hope is both favourable and fitting. However, personal qualities are probably being used as a proxy for skills, due to the fact that these are easier to discuss, and something that everyone understands. And whoever is carrying out the recruitment process isn’t likely going to have the time to spend finding these concepts that are applicable to the skills requirements.

Example from the OECD study on social and emotional skills, including a mixture of qualities and skills.¹²

‘Big five’ domains	Skills	Description	Behavioural examples
OPEN-MINDEDNESS (Openness to experience)	CURIOSITY	Interest in ideas and love of learning, understanding and intellectual exploration; an inquisitive mind-set.	Likes to read books, to travel to new destinations. Opposite: dislikes change, is not interested in exploring new products.
	TOLERANCE	Is open to different points of view, values diversity, is appreciative of foreign people and cultures.	Has friends from different backgrounds. Opposite: dislikes foreigners or people from different backgrounds.
	CREATIVITY	Generating novel ways to do or think about things through exploring, learning from failure, insight and vision.	Has original insights, creates valued art works Opposite: acts conventionally, not interested in arts.

(page 43 – 45)

Instead of measuring how good the potential employee would be at dealing with customers, their personality is measured instead.

¹² Miloš Kankaraš and Javier Suarez-Alvarez: ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK OF THE OECD STUDY ON SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILLS (2019) OECD Education Working Paper No. 207



Tasks and skills

It's considerably easier to describe the task itself, than the skills required to complete it.

Example: 'Responsible for purchasing' is a task expected for a particular role.

The skills required to carry out this task as a shop manager are:

- Ability to master IT-tools
- Knowledge of local conditions
- Analytical skills
- Knowledge of products/stock

We lack the language and concepts outside of the subject area/ fields of study/education, which means that descriptions for job vacancies and recruitment interviews often end up being reduced down to a list of tasks, qualifications and personal qualities. We think it would be a huge step forward if job descriptions and interviews in the future could focus on the key skills that are crucial for mastering the job, cf. the skills standard required for the role.

3. 'They talked past each other their entire lives, but still managed to feel as if they've been hit'¹³

It has proved quite the challenge to boost the role of learning in the workplace, without it being received as a depreciation of formal education. The motive behind 'A Balancing Act' is to create a heightened understanding of the skills that are acquired in the workplace. An increased awareness of these skills has an obvious intrinsic value. It would provide a better utilisation of the skills that the individual already possesses, as well as those that exist in their specific workplace and in society as a whole. It will also contribute to having better quality recruitment processes and career counselling, and increase the opportunities for inclusion and integration in the workplace.

At the same time, however, we must also ensure that we have a strong education system, and work together to strengthen the educational institutions that are so integral as an arena of learning for everyone. There's often this false sense of competition between the learning that occurs in the workplace and learning that takes place in the education system, which is unfortunate considering that we are basically trying to achieve the goal, of supplying the best possible synergy and co-operation.

¹³ Nils-Fredrik Nielsen: Tristesser i utvalg I (Aschehoug 1993)

A policy that can boost formal education at the same time as raising the status of learning in the workplace? A Winnie-the-Pooh of skills policy, if you will. Is this even possible?

The Government's skills reform 'Lære hele livet' [Learn for life] is a powerful initiative focussed on developing workplace-oriented courses. Yet, in the enthusiasm to achieve this, it seems to have conjured this image that the formal education system is the only answer to accomplish all the changes that need to take place in skill needs, and to realise lifelong learning. The part in which the discussion surrounding how workplace-driven skills development is completely necessary for businesses and individuals to ensure they have 'the right skills for the right time', seems to have been lost in the communication.

The Government's skills policy may therefore reinforce the idea that, for someone to learn throughout their life, they must pursue further education, rather than their providing of a better understanding of the different roles that both education and learning in the workplace offer.

When used in concrete roles in the workplace, our 'A Balancing Act' model demonstrates that formal education is entirely necessary for the first job. The balance point 'Routines' shows, among other things, the requirements for the specific, specialist skills that are necessary to master the role. It is, first and foremost, this skills that academia must work more towards, to help their students transition into the workplace in the smoothest way possible, and it is this balance point that shows which roles would actually be realistic, when leaving education and entering the workplace.

Progression and levels

Through our work on 'A Balancing Act', questions have frequently arisen regarding levels and progression in considering the skills that are developed in the workplace. This is clearly an area where it is easy to talk past each other.

The workplace and education system have two different logics in place for skills development:

- In academia, skills are developed in the subject or field of study through 'the subject's core qualities' as a premise or the governing element
- In the workplace, skills are developed through a certain role or a function, with the mastering of specific tasks seen as the premise or governing element

Skills development can be seen as a building process, laying one stone on top of another. In academia, through subjects and wider fields of study. In the workplace, through the performance of the job. The logic behind this building process differs, however. You

can clearly hear the difference when people talk about learning through the education system, compared to learning on the job.

How can we describe and document the way in which someone has built up a higher skill level than others in the workplace? A shared reference for skills or skills standards, that could signal the skill level, does not currently exist in this context. It is certainly a challenge then, that the way in which the education system builds up one's subject-specific progression, and that the system as a whole shares a common framework of levels for the ranking of qualifications, is actually lacking in the workplace, with no corresponding standards and frameworks for measuring the progression of one's work skills. In formal education, we can understand a lot about the candidate's potential skills by looking at the documentation that outlines their skill level, as defined by the number of years they have spent in academia, and which professional pathway the candidate pursued through education. In the workplace, this progression is not developed in the same way. You can be qualified to fill a management role that has numerous significant responsibilities, after only a few years' experience in the workplace, regardless of the level of academic qualifications you hold. We also tend to find that a skills hierarchy doesn't actually follow the organisation's hierarchy. When we consider certain specific skills in the workplace, we often see that particular skills are required at a higher level lower down in the organisation's hierarchy.

Example: Customer service in the retail industry is more demanding for the shop employee than for the shop manager. And the shop manager is reliant on the customer-facing employees to perform this task to a high level.

Character

From the formal education system, we are used to 'the subject's core character' guiding one's specialist progression, as well as the description of educational standards for different levels. In the workplace, a similar line of thinking would suggest that it is the 'role's character' that guides the development of skills. The 'balancing act' is learned in the workplace: The importance of experience when considering skills development relies, primarily, on providing a heightened understanding of the role's character, so that one can go on to master the relationship between the balance points that are required for that role, in such a way that the balancing act continuously improves.

Without a shared reference for the different skills levels, the description of what the skill actually entails becomes all the more vital. It must be precise and as clear as possible. The balance model's three dimensions and dynamics can contribute to this. In addition, we must point out two areas that could be used to inform both progression and level: Responsibility and leadership (see separate box)

Defining fixed levels for a skill that is intended to have the same validity for varying roles in the workplace will lead to a norm for progression that reduces or removes the ownership of developing one's skills, and increases the danger of making the individual's skills progression less efficient or productive. A generic and standardised description of skill levels then have an impact on the value of transference. However, it could also provide guidelines so that skills development that does take

'For tomorrow belongs to the people who prepare for it today'

place in the workplace is characterised by a more generic skills development framework, one that follows a different logic than just the mastering of specific roles. 'A Balancing Act' serves as an answer to these issues, for whether skills that have been built up in one specific role can only be used in that role, or whether those skills can be documented, and thus be considered as transferable, applicable to mastering other roles.

This actualises the question regarding the relationship between ownership and mastery. It can be difficult to talk about a feeling of achievement or the mastering of something as an individual and communicating that externally, e.g. in a discussion between employer and employee. Research shows that there is often a striking difference of opinion between employers and employees regarding the degree of mastery that exists in a role. This could easily be turned into a discussion of feelings and assumptions, based on a selective range of situations and examples. And such discussions most likely take place with the use of proxies, where one's level of education and qualifications are used as a reference. Using the tool 'A Balancing Act' thus provides more opportunities to have concrete conversations about the mastery

of skills, which not only safeguard's the individual's ownership of their own skills and mastery, but also makes it possible for the employer to be specific about the skills that are actually needed to carry out a particular role.

Adding to this, we must also improve how to talk about ownership in light of the concept of 'workplace relevance'. Institutions of higher education often talk about the relevance of academia when discussing the future of skill needs in the workplace, while businesses themselves are usually aware of the current needs, and use these as a starting point to define 'relevance'. This results in them talking past each other, as they use different time frames as a basis for 'relevance'. Some development occurs through 'disruption', making development impossible to predetermine; yet, most skills development that occurs in the workplace, usually occurs by cultivating the skills an employee already has and uses. Perhaps we could use an African proverb as a shared platform: 'For tomorrow belongs to the people who prepare for it today.' What can be learned by linking skill needs that exist in the present to those in the future, and which arena of learning would most suitable for specific skill needs?

Responsibility and leadership

We have not found a skills hierarchy in the workplace that corroborates with an organisation's hierarchy. However, in one area, we do see a clear connection, and that is in being able to master responsibility. It is a progression in the area of responsibility, and what it means to take responsibility. Every role takes on its own character, when we look at the needs connected to responsibility. In order to be able to describe progression in an area of responsibility, two different elements must be considered:

Responsibility in the form of a decision-making authority that is integral to the role, and responsibility in the form of the complexity that must be mastered.

The greater the scope and influence that those decisions have, the higher the decision responsibility of the role.

The complexity refers to the breadth of knowledge/experience that must be performed in the role, and then what the consequences may be if the individual does not take responsibility for the overall complexity of the tasks that are vital to carrying out the role. The greater the scope and consequences, the more complex the job is.

Leadership is an area where we find a hierarchical pattern, and where the different levels have clear requirements for certain skills. Leadership is about to be able to be a leader for others, as well as an ability to lead oneself.

Example: 'Leadership skills' in the retail industry

- A shop employee must have the skills to lead themselves: In taking decisions that apply to one's own choice of action, priorities, and interactions with others.
- A supervisor must be able to lead the employees.
- A manager must have the skills to lead the supervisors.
- A CEO/Managing director must be able to lead the entire business.

This top management role includes, first and foremost, the responsibility for strategic leadership, but also the ultimate responsibility for operative management. Main responsibility for operative management, however, often lies on the level beneath the CEO. Some responsibility for strategic management can also be found in this role. Further down in the hierarchy, leadership becomes gradually more oriented about operations, and without the responsibility for the strategic running of the business.

The hierarchy of responsibility is clear, but it is not as easy to specifically describe a skills hierarchy that follows the levels that are usually associated with leadership.

Dynamism

Does the balancing act model become more challenging when one climbs the organisation's hierarchy? Not necessarily, but the consequences of not mastering the balancing act could be greater.

Progression may take the form of someone making the process more demanding for themselves, by consciously moving further toward each of the balance points, stretching the balance dimensions, and making each central point heavier, so that the contrasting skills become more difficult to balance.

'A Balancing Act' is measured through the mastering of tasks. Ensuring this mastery is the skill's contribution to the better use of resources, greater productivity and heightened efficiency.

This effect is difficult to measure directly, because there are several other factors that impact resource use, productivity and efficiency. It is indeed demanding to prove and perhaps impossible to demonstrate how much of an impact skills development has on resource use, productivity and efficiency. However, it is at least possible to show that it certainly does have a positive effect, both on the bottom line and by comparing with the alternative, that of not providing any skills development. But we must also be aware that skills development could have a negative effect, if the skills that are being developed aren't relevant, and can't be applied to achieve a heightened mastery of the necessary tasks that are required to perform that role.

Research uses the level of education one has acquired as a way of understanding the skills someone has in the workplace, instead of looking at the skills that have actually been cultivated in the workplace itself. And it is normal to use the logic from education system, with normative level descriptions to describe development and progression, e.g. 'Competency frameworks: core competencies & soft skills.'¹⁴ Skills are situated within a framework in which the progression of a particular skill has been standardised in advance.

Yet, the formulation of levels related to the mastering of a skill must retain the dynamic element that already exists in workplace skills development, and which follows the relevant development for tasks and requirements needed in practice.

Dynamism is absolutely crucial in the development of workplace skills, and serves as a fundamental element in our logic. Because of this, the most challenging aspect of developing 'A Balancing Act' has been the devising of the dynamics for skills development. As a result, the skills standards are seen as the foundation of which each business can adjust to meet their reality, while also providing something fixed and recognisable, so that none of the businesses then have to spend their time attempting to identify and describe those skills.

A Balancing Act demonstrates the value of education in the mastering of workplace tasks, in addition to why formal education is never solely sufficient in mastering these tasks.

'Every time he baked, he would always bake different buns'¹⁵

In the logic of the education system, this would be frustrating. In the workplace, however, this is entirely necessary. While the result is always buns, the constant change of requirements means that the buns have to be different - every single time. Here then, we are able to describe the skill you need to bake buns, while not introduce a fixed standard that describes what the best buns should look like.

'You can make Beethoven jazz, but you can't make jazz Beethoven'¹⁶

Let's say that education is like Beethoven, and learning in the workplace is like jazz. We want to make jazz from Beethoven, that is, we want to further develop the values of education in the learning that occurs in the workplace. This is something we have a lot of experience with. But we can also see that a lot of energy is used up in trying to make jazz sound classical. In Norway, for instance, the system of validation of prior learning has been designed this way. 'A Balancing Act' aims to help make 'the value of jazz' more visible, on the same level as one sees 'the value of Beethoven'.

¹⁴ <https://www.randstad.co.uk/market-insights/attracting-recruiting-talent/competency-frameworks-core-competencies-soft-skills/>

¹⁵ Nils-Fredrik Nielsen: Tristesser i utvalg III (Aschehoug 1995)

¹⁶ 'De beste av Storm P.' (A/S Hjemmet Bokforlag 1974)

Presentation of the tool

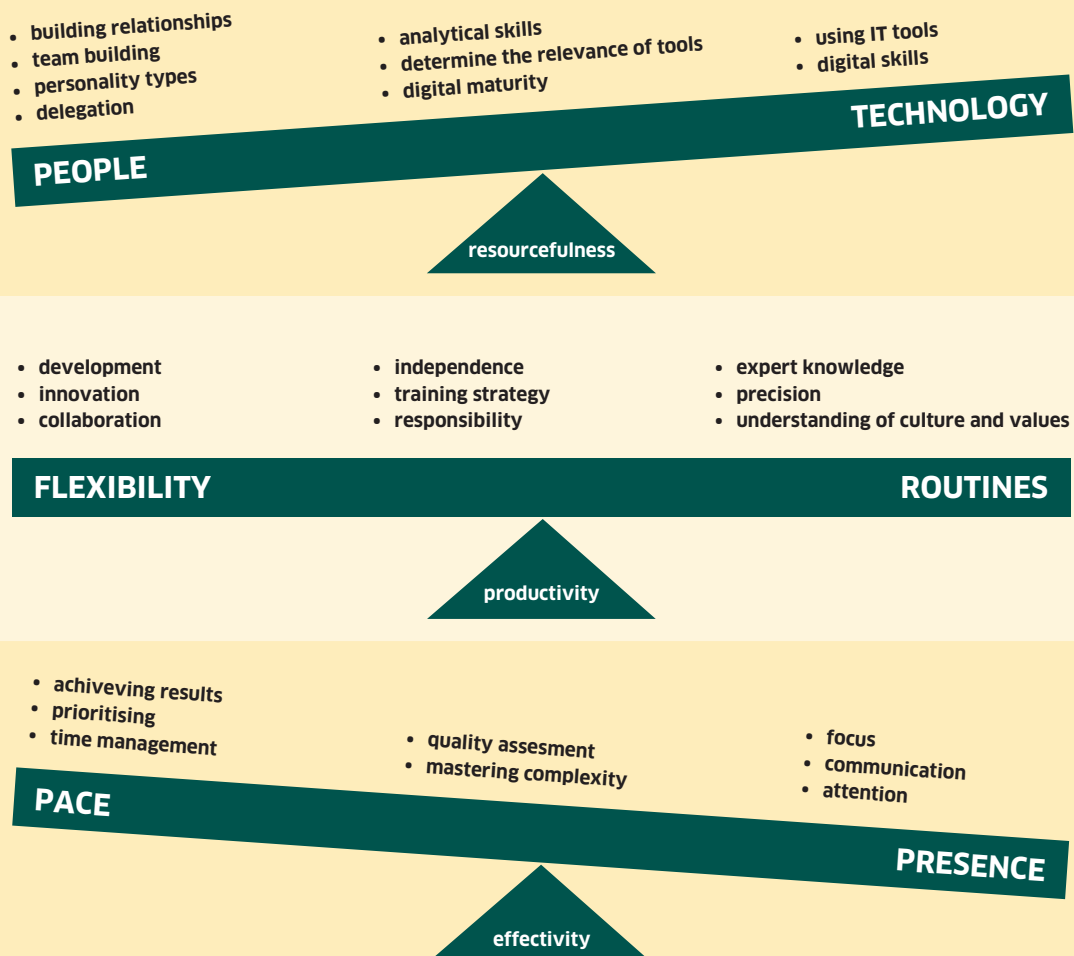
‘A Balancing Act’

The report ‘A Balancing Act - Describing skills acquired in the workplace’ was published in 2018 as a part of the Norwegian National Skills Policy Strategy 2017–2021. The background behind the project lies in the shared aim of the Ministry of Research and Education and the social partners to work on establishing better systems to document and utilise skills acquired in the workplace. Together with the retail chains Kiwi, Meny and IKEA, the authors have developed a model to describe the skills that are cultivated in the workplace, both through internal training and work experience, and a method for communicating these skills outside of the learning environment, for example, to other sectors of the workplace, or to the formal education system. The concept provides the opportunity to

create a skills standard for the workplace, that can go on to be used as a reference for the validation of prior learning, similarly to how educational standards are used in the formal education system. This same concept is also used to create the descriptions of an individuals’ skills set.

For this new, expanded version of ‘A Balancing Act’, it is necessary for us to provide a short introduction for both the model and the methodology, for those who may be unfamiliar with the concept as was outlined in the first report.

Balance points



The balance model and balance points

The balance model has been developed as a way to identify and describe the skills that have been cultivated through internal training and work experience, skills which have not been documented. The model is based on the description of the skills that the person in a specific role or function in the workplace has confirmed that they need in order to master the role or function in an adequate way. They mention a kind of balancing act that occurs in their every day work lives, an act that makes it necessary for them to continuously develop new skills as they come across new tasks and situations, and these skills can oftentimes be at odds with each other, branching off in varying different directions. Lifelong learning in the workplace is incredibly dynamic, which only makes it all the more difficult to understand and describe the benefits of learning. It was therefore necessary to establish an entirely new model that could better express the way in which skills are acquired, and to agree upon terms surrounding skills that can be used to talk about them in the workplace.

All roles and functions within the workplace require these 'balancing artists', those who can master their roles proficiently. This act revolves around having the adequate skills in each of the six balance points, while also having the skills to find the ideal balance between those points.

The balance model has three dimensions:

- 1. Maintaining a relationship with both people and technology
- 2. Being flexible while also having a good routine and specialist expertise.
- 3. The need to find a balance between pace and presence, both in one's everyday life and in the long term.

All of the skills that are used in the workplace can be situated on the balance model. A skill can be situated across several different places on the model, so one must choose the right placement depending on the most important aspect of the 'balancing act' that occurs in that particular role or function.

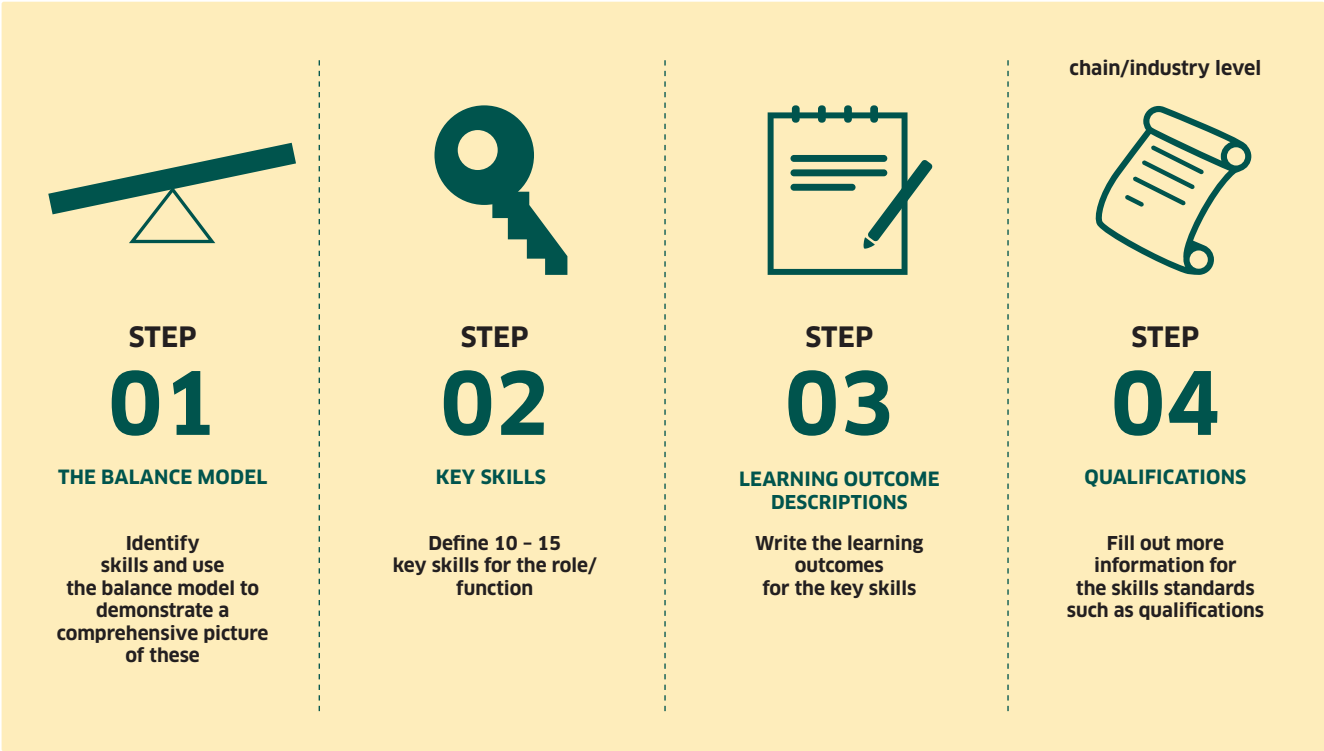
The model aids in understanding the connection between skills and: resource use; productivity; and efficiency. An imbalance signifies a less competent mastering of the role, and thus in practice, negatively affects the resource use, productivity and efficiency of that role or function.

It is equally important though, that the model allows for the opportunity to understand and discuss how the individual's acquiring of the right skills can contribute in a tangible way to the business's resource use, productivity and efficiency. This provides a better valuation of the skills that are actually found within that business, and as a result, a more strategic way to develop skills, for both the business and for the individual.

In the first report, we focussed more on explaining our choices behind the model's balance points and balance dimensions. In this report, we present more concrete uses of the concept.

The method

Our method grew from first looking at the internal process that generates all of the relevant skills required to perform a role or function, to then explaining what the most important skills are, such that others who are unfamiliar with the specific role or function can understand the skills set that are required to master the job.



Step one

If you want to understand the necessary skills required for a role or function within the workplace, the best method for doing so would be to talk to the people who have experience in working the job. These conversations present, together with the written descriptions if they are already available, an overview of all the relevant skills needed in practice to actually perform the role/function. These skills can be placed on the balance model. The same skill can potentially be situated in various places on the model, depending on how important it is in light of that specific role/function. Some skills are so crucial to one's ability to master a role that they are relevant to all of the balance points. That skill must then be nuanced and divided, so that it is visible within several of the balance dimensions/points.

The interview situation

The interviews conducted for 'A Balancing Act' focus on the mastering of skills. It would appear that most people are used to interviews that concentrate on what they can't do, a gap in their skill set, and what they want to go on to do, their dreams, etc. The type of conversation that 'A Balancing Act' creates is a new and positive experience for all involved, which leads to a heightened level of pride over one's own skills.

The interviews take place in the interviewer's workplace. It is vital to have a framework for the interview, that specifically allows for the greatest amount of attention to be given to the tasks and skills in the daily work environment. The goal of the interview is to provide a realistic description of the skill needs required for the role, and how one performs it.

The interviewee should not prepare for the interview. This is to avoid any leading. It is natural to believe that the interviewer may want the interviewee to come up with something that are

predefined and 'correct'. And this is why it must be emphasised that it should be the person's own narrative, formulations, use of terms and emphases that should be the core of the interview. The balance model should not be introduced here, but it is a good idea to keep the model in mind during the interview.

Regarding the interview itself, it is vital to be aware of the following:

- Do not spend time on any education, courses etc. that have already been documented
- The difference between personal qualities and skills
- Looking beyond the description of the tasks and to clarify what it is that is actually required to perform the tasks

It is important to have confidence in the skills standard, and the descriptions of the individual's skill set. The interviewer is responsible for contextualising the skills in a realistic and concrete way. For example, this can be achieved by asking further questions such as 'how did you do that', 'what exactly did you do', 'how did you learn that', and so on.

Get as clear a picture as possible of the level, scope, responsibility, complexity and duration.

It is difficult to listen to what is actually being said. The interviewer will, naturally, have a prior framework and mindset based on their own previous experiences and knowledge, and it is a challenge to avoid using this as an explicit reference for the interview. One must therefore try not to categorise what is being said too early in the conversation. Rather, one must try to understand in what way and why whoever is being interviewed is actually talking about that specific skill.

The process of situating the skills mentioned within the balance model is done once the interview is complete.



The interview can then be supplemented with the relevant written material, the job description, the job vacancy posting etc. However, the written material cannot replace the interview, as:

- The use of terms will be different, and the material will generally include a mixture of skills, personal qualities and tasks
- The emphases on how skills relate to each other won't be clear, and neither will the connection between them

which are difficult for others to understand. The purpose of 'A Balancing Act' is not just to help make it possible to describe skills that are acquired in the workplace, but to make those descriptions understandable outside of the arena in which that learning has taken place. The next stage in the method therefore focusses on narrowing down the range of skills that have been assessed as key skills required for that role/function, to about 10-15. These will be the skills that need to be communicated externally, and they will provide a much clearer overview of the skills set that were most important to that role or function.

Step two

The description that emerges from the first step can be comprehensive, while also including concepts that are used internally,

Key skills - from different skills standards

People		Technology
Relationship building	Analytical skills	Use of IT-tools
Team building	Assess the relevancy of tools	Digital skills
Culture building	Digital experience	IT-literacy
Personality types	Confident on programs	Knowledge of technology
Delegation	Communication channels	
Involvement		
Guidance		
Skills development (for others)		
Mastering stress		
Forms of communication		
Teamwork		

Key skills - from different skills standards

Pace		Presence
Ability to implement	Quality assessment	Concentration
Prioritisation	Mastering complexity	Communication
Timing	Guidance	Attentiveness
Goal-oriented management	Process management	Customer service
Meeting routines	Process dynamism	Being visible
Self-confidence	Multitasking	Observation
Decision-making ability	Solution-oriented	Self-awareness
	Result-oriented	Accessibility

Key skills - from different skills standards

Flexibility		Routines
Skills development (for the individual themselves)	Independence	Base level specialisation
Willingness to learn	Responsibility	Healthcare expertise
Innovative thinking	Ability to manage oneself and their own development	Shifts
Creativity	Improvement efforts	Law and regulation
Forms of co-operation	Efficiency in staffing	Economic understanding
Ethics	Strategic understanding	Norwegian
Experiential learning	Strategic training	Knowledge of management
	Customer service	HR-management
	Rhythm (in the process)	Supervision and overview
	Information retrieval	Training
	Process planning	Understanding of cultures and values
	Developmental work	Loyalty to concepts and values
	Critical perspective	Ethics
	Awareness of the role	Precision
	Network building	Knowledge of the material
		Use of tools
		Understanding of construction
		Quality assurance

Step three

There must be a concrete explanation of what these key skills entail. This can be achieved by using learning outcome descriptions. The concept 'A Balancing Act' has introduced learning outcome descriptions into the workplace. The aim is for the skills that are acquired in the workplace to be understood outside of where the learning has taken place, especially for the formal education system. All formal education that has to be understood in the workplace, is expressed through learning outcome descriptions. This is why we have chosen to use these too, the other way around. We believe that a widespread use of learning outcome descriptions, in different parts of the workplace, will then help to improve opportunities for mobility between sectors, for integration and inclusion within the workplace, and to further contribute to more systematic and strategic measures of developing skills, both for the business and for the individual.

The first three steps in the concept 'A Balancing Act' can also be used to describe an individual's skills that have not been documented. This requires the use of the same model and method, but the aim of each interview would be to end up with a description for the individual themselves, meaning that all the descriptions will be different.

Step four

The final stage focusses on establishing qualifications for the workplace, in the same way that the formal education system has qualifications. This can be done by setting the same requirements for what is necessary to call something a qualification, regardless of where that learning has taken place. It is first of all vital to be able to clearly describe the mechanisms that must be in place for the quality assurance of the teaching itself, and of the descriptions of the learning outcomes.

It is important to emphasise here that the skills standards that emerge as a result of the method's first three steps can be used as both a reference for the validation of prior learning and as a way of communicating about skills. The purpose of having this fourth step then, is to formalise training that has the capacity and stability that makes it suitable to receive the status of a qualification.

Proposed criteria for a qualification

Title	Description The title should make it possible to differentiate the qualification from other qualifications, and should be identical to what is included in the documentation. Avoid confusion.	Example Specifically applies to providers who award multiple qualifications.
Owner/approval body	Whoever is responsible for information about the qualification and the quality of the offer, including updates.	National group of companies, organisation, international body, industry division etc.
Provider	Who is providing and carrying out the training? If this is not the owner, the relationship to the owner must be stated.	NGO's, consultants, software providers etc.
Learning outcome description	Shall describe what the candidate knows, understands and is capable of doing after they have carried out the training. Descriptions of knowledge, abilities and general skills, either in three separate columns or in one open body of text.	
Quality assurance	Who carries out the quality assurance and how is this done?	The quality of the teaching, and how this is organised. Updating of the content. Achievement of the learning outcomes
Field of study	If the qualification can relate to several subject areas, it is the owner of the qualification who must decide which field of study is most relevant	One must agree on which classification to be used nationally, for example, either ISCED FoET2013 or NUS2000
Purpose	In what ways does the qualification apply to the workplace or to society?	Aim towards a specific career or job function. Life skills, taking part in society
Duration/point	Estimated/standard time, poss. use of the credit system	Academic credits etc.
Documentation	Report, certificate, diploma or similar.	
Form of assessment	Written, oral, digital, examiner (external or internal)	
Organising	Full-time or part-time, campus-based or online	
Form of teaching	Partly practice-based, in the workplace, school, individually and in groups	
Language of instruction	If all or some of the teaching shall be conducted in a language other than Norwegian	
Admission	Requirements for prior education (either necessary or desired). Validation of prior learning. Training related to the employment contract.	
Expiry date	If validity is time-limited, and the renewal is required within a specific period of time	
Horizontal/vertical way forward	Qualifying for admission to other training/education. Possibilities for supplementation and/or specialisation.	
Co-operative partners	Formal co-operation for training	Regulated through written agreements
More information	URL	



Detailed presentation of the trials

We have gathered together the experiences documented from the development and implementation of 'A Balancing Act', through the following five case studies:

1. **Retail** - development of the concept, potential for a new industry standard, career path and learning path
2. **Adult education** - testing the concept for descriptions of individuals' skill sets
3. **Nursing home/Healthcare** - testing the concept in an industry that is closely connected to formal education
4. **Folk high school** - testing the concept in relation to the skills standard for a specific role, as well as descriptions for the individuals' skill sets who work in the role. Additionally, this study considered whether it was possible to use the concept to formulate descriptions of the pupils' learning outcomes
5. **Trade union representative** - testing the concept to establish a description of a function within the workplace

In our presentation of the case studies, we will concentrate on step 2 and 3 of the methodology. We will show in detail how the interviews determine the key skills, and how these skills can then be communicated, with the use of learning outcome descriptions, such that they can be understood by other areas of the workplace, and in the formal education system.

Learning outcome descriptions

Through these case studies, we aim to create an understanding of the challenges around reducing this diversity of internal and relevant skills goals, into just a few learning outcome descriptions that can be communicated externally. The art of simplification is demanding, and has no single solution. However, by presenting the material in such a way as we have in this part of the report, we hope to clarify the difference between how internal goals for training and skills development should be formulated, and how to go on to formulate the learning outcome descriptions for external use.

It should also be clear that the formulation of learning outcome descriptions for the workplace will be different to those currently considered to be the norm, that is, the descriptions provided by the formal education system. These learning outcome descriptions don't just contribute to explaining WHAT benefits the training should provide, but also WHY it is important to build these skills.

Dynamism

It is important to allow the role itself to guide where that particular skill belongs across the balance dimensions. In the traditional process of mapping out skills, the nature of the skills are often defined beforehand, and then working out just how relevant the skill is for the individual. In 'A Balancing Act', this

process is reversed. First, the skill can be defined by asking the question: What is it that makes this a key skill for this exact role? This makes the content of the skill required for this particular role clear and easily placable within the model. One can then see that the key skills can apply to several balance points and dimensions.

At the same time as maintaining the necessary dynamism, the key skills function as a signal for the potential mobility that exists in the workplace, by using the ability to apply one's skills in other roles. The same key skills exist in numerous different roles, and the skill can thus be placed in various places across the balance model. The key skills provide information about the possibility to use those particular skills in other roles. The learning outcome descriptions describe specific skills needs required for each role.

Example of the key skill 'guidance':

We uncovered 'guidance' as one of the key skills required for a shop manager, a nursing home department manager, and for a teacher at a folk high school. This means that, in light of the mobility between those roles, you could use that particular skill that you have acquired in another role. But which 'guidance skill' one has developed depends on the skills that are required for that role.

Shop manager - guidance as a key skill under 'Presence'

Learning outcome description: 'Can assess who is in need of guidance and in which situations it is important for the manager to be present. Can provide proper guidance to all by working together, alongside employees in various situations, and can facilitate good dialogue.'

Comments: For a shop manager, 'training' is a key skill listed under 'People'. In this learning outcome description, there is also an element of guidance, without it actually being the main focus. 'Guidance' is then placed as one of the key skills in the 'Pace - Presence' dimension, as an essential aspect of 'guidance' is connected to efficiency in the performance of the role as a shop employee. It is therefore important that the shop manager can demonstrate to their employees how things should be done in a productive way.

Nursing home department manager - 'Guidance' as a key skill under 'People'

Description of why 'guidance' is a key skill: 'Guidance' covers different types of activities; systematic individual guidance, training/guidance in groups, and in ad hoc teaching situations.

Learning outcome description: 'Be a competent and versatile guide, with the ability to adapt guidance to different situations and to specific requirements.'

Comments: For a nursing home department manager, 'guidance' also relates to the key skill of 'healthcare expertise', which belongs under 'Routines'. Guidance is closely tied to their employees' mastering of the profession, i.e. their healthcare skills. As a result, the department manager must also have that necessary healthcare expertise too, to be able to guide them in an appropriate way.

Comments:
For a folk high school teacher, the key aspect of 'guidance' is intrinsically connected to human development. In addition to the description of the skill that is cultivated through performing the role, many of the employees documented having formal education/training in guidance.

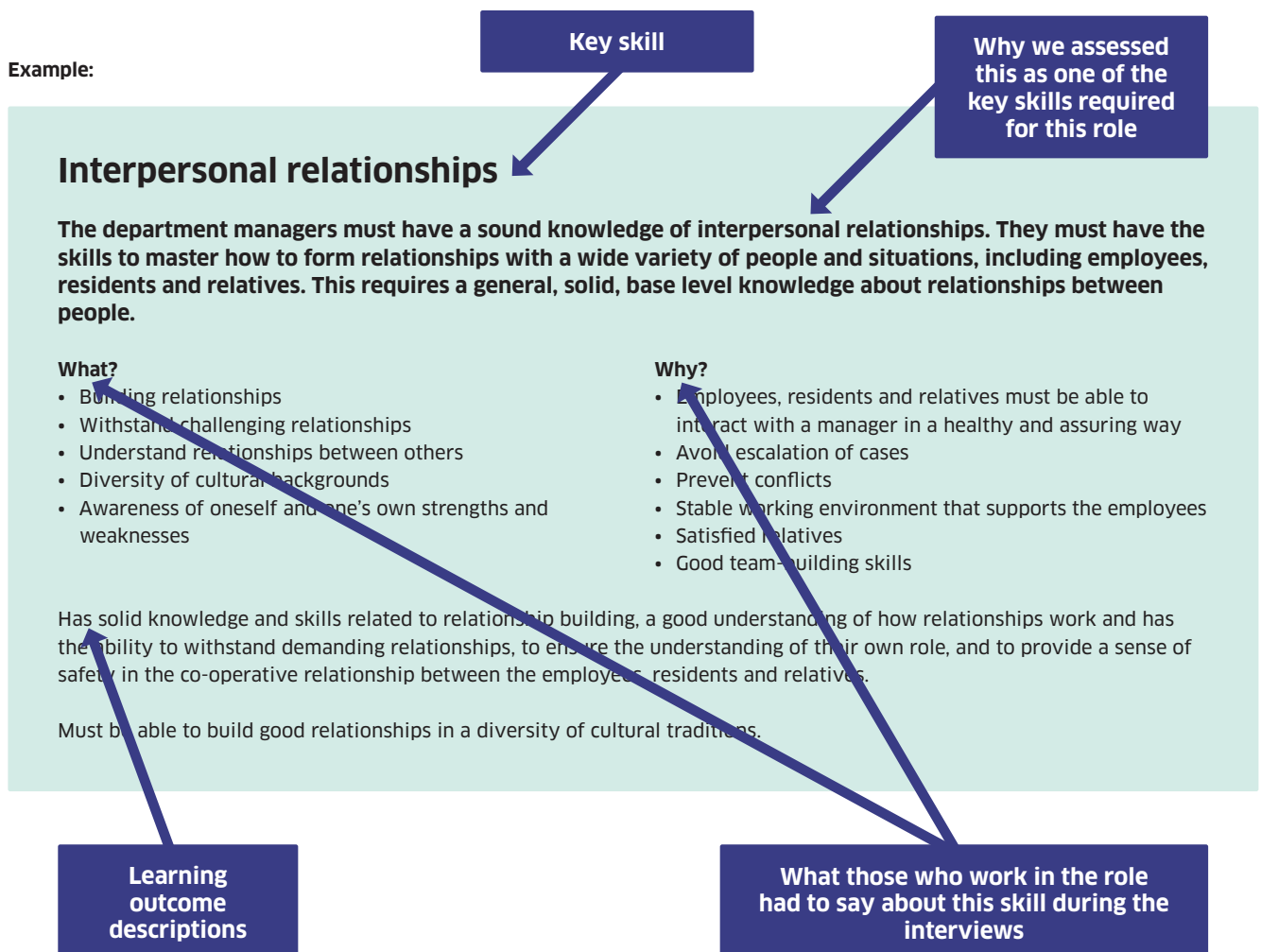
Teacher at a folk high school - 'Guidance' as a key skill under 'People'

An important goal for the folk high school is to ensure that all pupils are given a feeling of achievement, both academically and personally. To succeed in this, it is necessary to have both a knowledge of guidance, and the skills to enable others to make positive choices for themselves.

Learning outcome description: 'Have a sound knowledge of methods for guidance, and the skills to help others, by utilising their dialogue to help others master both academic and personal situations.'

Detailed descriptions of the keyskills

The material is presented in an order corresponding to the three balance dimensions, with the key skills described in detail. Below 'the key skill', there will be an introduction that explains why this is considered a key skill. Following on from that will be a presentation of what the participants told us themselves about the skill, and why it was important. Finally, the learning outcome descriptions for the skill will be outlined. The description of the key skill as formulated into a learning outcome must be able to function externally, while the discussion of the details 'What?' and 'Why?' are also important for the internal dialogue.



Case study 1: Retail

This case study is a combination of

- the continuation and amalgamation of the 3 skills standards - that have been presented in the report 'A Balancing Act' (2018) - into a general skills standard for the role of shop manager
- the development of a skills standard for the shop employees as part of the project carried out with Oslo Voksenopplæring

A few introductory considerations

The concept 'A Balancing Act' was originally developed through the project 'Prior learning in the retail industry'. Internal training has long been considered an important tradition in the retail industry, yet there has not been nearly as much attention paid to the very skills that are being acquired. This broader trial focussing explicitly on the retail industry has therefore been dedicated to making skills standards more visible.

Skills standards in the retail industry

In our report 'A Balancing Act', we presented the different skills standards needed for the 3 roles that had been chosen in collaboration with the chains KIWI, Meny and IKEA. All of the chains chose to use an operative management role to test the concept, such as the 'shop manager' in KIWI, the 'manager' in Meny and the 'shop keeper' in IKEA. For more detailed information about this:

<https://www.virke.no/politiske-saker/kompetanse-og-utdanning/balansekunst/>

Following the publication of the report in 2018, Virke has since worked on creating a synergy between the three skills standards, in order to establish a general industry standard for shop managers.

We planned to conduct further interviews in 2020, in collabora-

tion with more shop managers from different types of shops, to see whether the standards that were established in the first round apply throughout the retail trade. The first three interviews were carried out before the lockdown of March 12th, and the project will recommence as soon as it is possible to do so.

The purpose of making a general standard for the role of 'shop manager' was so that we could establish the foundations for a common qualification (see step 4 in the 'A Balancing Act' methodology) which could be used and trusted across the entire industry. This would then serve as an example of a qualification that meets the skills needs of an existing role within the workplace.

In the formal education system, it is a challenge in that even qualifications aimed at certain professions and industries do not actually meet the skills needs required for the roles.

One example can be seen in the vocational qualification for 'sales employee'. All of the competence objectives for this course are relevant to the workplace. However, some of the objectives are relevant for the role of shop manager, while some are more relevant to the shop employees. And most of the objectives aren't actually aimed at either of these roles specifically, but for roles that can be found in other areas of the workplace.

In the visualisation of the skills standard, the key skills are shown in different colours:

People – Technology is green, Flexibility – Routines is yellow, Pace – Presence is pink.

Skills standard - shop manager

Building teams

Analytical skills

Training

Sales channels

IT-literacy

People and Technology

- Can assess their employees strengths and weaknesses, taking into account their preferences and potential for further development, and carry out strong development and training processes for both the individual and for the shop/department
- Is aware of their responsibility to motivate their employees to participate in further training, can follow up on this skills development, and ensure that their new skills can be used in their daily work
- Can build good teams, ensure that they work as intended, and can develop better and new ways of solving tasks
- Has a solid, professional understanding of sales through different channels in order to secure customer loyalty, good customer service and positive sales and purchasing experiences
- Has a knowledge of which IT-tools are relevant for the individual employee and how they are used
- Has an analytical understanding of all the relevant data, and can compile these to make solid decisions
- Has an in-depth knowledge of computer programs in both theory and practice

Improvement efforts

Sales expertise

Economic understanding

HR management

Flexibility and Routines

- Can identify and assess all of areas in which there could be improvements, make plans to undertake this, communicate these to the employees, and then follow up on this systematically
- Understand which decisions require loyalty, and which decisions can be taken themselves, in order to ensure high productivity levels and the understanding and use of the opportunities for action they have available to them in regard to innovative thinking
- Has a basic understanding of the connection between decisions made on a daily basis and their economic consequences
- Can create strong and relevant sales goals, follow them up, and maintain focus on these goals in the long term
- Is aware of the importance of their position as a role model and how they should live up to the principles expected of management, and to ethical guidelines
- Has a basic insight into the shop's competition both within the industry and locally, and can initiate measures for better positioning and increased market share
- Is confident regarding regulations and methods for recruitment, delegation, HSE, termination of employment, information, feedback and other relevant areas that are key to strong management
- Master staffing management, such that the shop has the appropriate staff working with the right skills at the right time to meet the customer and the flow of goods
- Have an independent overview of the stock, concepts and suppliers in order to ensure a holistic understanding of the choice of goods and so that the shop is adapted to the customer base
- Know which key figures are used to follow up on finances and profitability, and can then analyse these as a base for making good decisions
- Can use accounting, key figures and knowledge of local conditions to plan initiatives, campaigns and seasons for both the short and long term

Guidance

Customer service

Mastering complexity

Timing

Pace and Presence

- Has the ability to master the great complexity that exists in the relationship between people and tasks, in such a way that the highest priorities are achieved and that the work is carried out to a high quality and efficiency
- Can assess and plan for the correct use of time according to the specific goals and, through this, act as a good role model
- Can assess who is in need of guidance and in which situations it is important for the manager to be present. Can provide good guidance to all by working together alongside the employees in various situations, and facilitate good dialogue.
- Is conscious of their own service behaviour, has the knowledge and skills to generate exceptional customer experiences and can give constructive feedback to the employees in light of their own customer service

Skills standard - shop employee for KIWI

Customer relations

Mastering stress

Use of technology

People and Technology

- Has an understanding of different types of people and can interact with everyone in a respectful manner
- Can perform their job in a professional manner, when faced with stressed customers and pressure as a result of high expectations
- Can use the PC for training and the relevant technology in the shop and in the warehouse

Willingness to learn

Independence

Norwegian

Loyalty

Overview

Precision

Flexibility and Routines

- Can solve tasks in accordance to their training and are able to learn from their own experiences
- Can take responsibility so that the customers have a positive shopping experience, and the shop and storage room are kept in order, as well as for their pre-assigned responsibilities
- Can solve tasks by themselves and is aware of when they must ask for help from colleagues
- Can give feedback and communicate in a clear and positive manner, in order to contribute to a healthy culture and to ensure great teamwork across the entire shop
- Can follow the work instructions, adapt to set tasks and take new information into account
- Is loyal to the routines and in the scope for action that applies to the job
- Understands the importance of precision in their work and how to train themselves to be better
- Can see the shop as a unit, and what needs to be done at any given time
- Can speak and understand Norwegian in interactions with the customers
- Can read various types of information and can write messages in Norwegian

Timing

Customer service

Multitasking

Pace and Presence

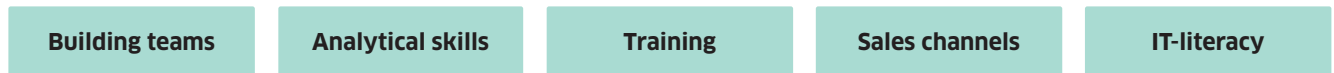
- Has control of the task list and order of its elements within a given time frame
- Can differentiate between tasks that must be done and tasks that can be done, and can prioritise correctly
- Can work in a structured and efficient way on a number of tasks at the same time, and be confident in their prioritising within their own area of responsibility
- Understands the meaning of service, and of being accessible
- Understands the importance of contacting customers in a polite manner, and for preventing negative incidents such as theft and unwanted people in the shop

By aligning the key skills required for both the shop manager and the shop employees and looking at them side by side, we can gain a better understanding of the learning path that is required for career progression within the retail industry. We

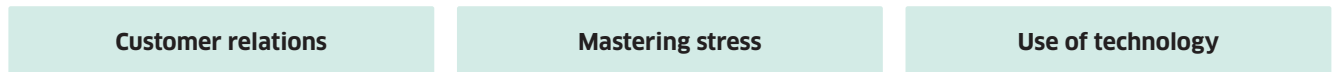
also found it interesting that the same key skills are evident regardless of what level you find yourself at within the organisation's hierarchy.

Key skills: Shop manager vs. Shop employee

Shop manager:



Shop employee:



Shop manager:



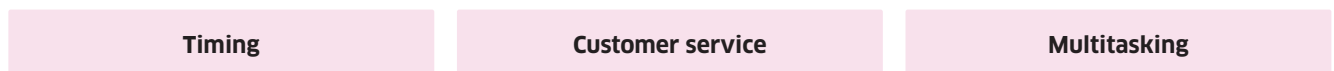
Shop employee:



Shop manager:



Shop manager:



Learning outcome descriptions - progression and nuancing

Overview → Perspective

- Can see the shop as a unit, and what needs to be done at any given time (shop employee)
- Has an independent overview of the stock, concepts and suppliers in order to ensure a holistic understanding of the choice of goods and so that the shop is adapted to the customer base (shop manager)

Shop manager; nuancing of skills for 'sales'

- Has a sound understanding of sales through different channels in order to secure customer loyalty, good customer service and positive sales and purchasing experiences (balancing people and technology)
- Can create strong and relevant sales goals, follow them up, and maintain focus on these goals in the long term (routines)
- Is conscious of their own service behaviour, has the knowledge and skills to create positive experiences for the customer and can give constructive feedback to the employees in light of their own customer service (presence)

Comparison of the learning outcome descriptions

We chose to use place to show that the roles one initially believes will develop a lot of very specific skills, actually have the most in common. This then gives us some perspective regarding the 'lock-in mechanism', which is often attributed as a negative aspect of learning in the workplace.

Below you can find a systemised presentation of the learning outcome descriptions for the three managerial roles at Kiwi, Meny and IKEA. It is evident that the majority of the descriptions are shared among all three roles, and that several of them are just variants of the same skill, only they've been expressed in slightly different ways. At the same time though, we can clearly see that what really separates the skills development for each chain, and what gives each individual chain its own specific character.

NB: The skills standards that are provided in this example were drawn up in 2017. In considering one's development of skills in the workplace, the contents of these standards will also naturally transform in light of the situation we find ourselves in today.

People and Technology

Shared learning outcomes for all three chains:

- Can assess their employees' strengths and weaknesses, taking into consideration their preferences and potential for development, and can implement good development and training processes, for both the individual and for the shop/department
- Has an awareness of their own responsibility to motivate their employees to undertake further training, follow up on their skills development and ensure that their new skills can be used in their daily work lives
- Has a solid, professional understanding of sales through different channels in order to ensure customer loyalty, good customer service and positive experiences in sales and purchasing
- Has a knowledge of which IT-tools are relevant for the individual employee and how they are used
- Has an analytical understanding of all the relevant data, and can compile these to make solid decisions
- Has an in-depth knowledge of computer programs in both theory and practice; Meny og Kiwi: purchasing, flow of goods, wastage, food safety, standards, training, intranet and reporting tools
- IKEA: sales, HR and finance

Variations of the same type of skill:

Meny:

- Has a good knowledge of different personality types and how that affects teamwork and problem solving

Kiwi:

- Has a good understanding of people and can clearly communicate instructions and expectations to the employees in an understandable way

IKEA:

- Has sound knowledge of the diversity of personality types and can consciously use the value of diversity in recruitment and team building

Shared by Meny and IKEA:

- Can build good teams, ensure that they work as intended, and can develop better and new ways of solving tasks

Kiwi had a slightly different way of wording this:

- Can build strong teams and a good working culture, to ensure that everyone feels like they are involved and can thus contribute to solving tasks in an even better way

Shared by Kiwi and IKEA:

- Has a good understanding of how and why a manager delegates tasks and makes sure that the employees have the correct skills to take responsibility for those delegated tasks

Specifically for Kiwi:

- Has a basic knowledge of the importance of using new technology, in order to continuously operate the shop in the best possible way

Specifically for IKEA:

- Can build good relations with both employees and co-operative partners

Flexibility and routines

Shared learning outcome descriptions for all three chains:

- Has a basic understanding of the connection between decisions made on a daily basis and their economic consequences
- Can identify and assess all of areas in which there could be improvements, make plans to undertake this, communicate these to the employees, and then follow up on this systematically
- Can create strong and relevant sales goals, follow them up, and maintain focus on these goals in the long term
- Master staffing management, such that the shop has the appropriate staff working with the right skills at the right time to meet the customer and the flow of goods
- Know which key figures are used to follow up on finances and profitability, and can then analyse these as a base for making good decisions
- Can use accounting, key figures and knowledge of local conditions to plan initiatives, campaigns and seasons for both the short and long term

Shared by Meny and Kiwi:

- Understand which decisions require loyalty, and which decisions can be taken themselves, in order to ensure high productivity levels and the understanding and use of the opportunities for action they have available to them in regard to innovative thinking
- Has an independent overview of the stock, concepts and suppliers in order to ensure that the shop is adapted to the customer base.

IKEA had the same skills, but with a different motive:

- Has an independent overview of the stock, ideas and suppliers in order to have a holistic understanding of the range of products

Shared by Meny and IKEA:

- Is confident regarding regulations and methods for recruitment, delegation, HSE, termination of employment, information, feedback and other relevant areas that are key to strong management

Kiwi was almost identical, but with its own introduction:

- Can take overall responsibility for personnel, and is confident regarding regulations and methods for recruitment, delegation, HSE, termination of employment, information, feedback and other relevant areas that are key for strong management

Shared by Meny and Kiwi:

- Has the ability to present financial figures to the employees in a practical way, and can create a connection and commitment between the results and the measures that are then implemented

IKEA had almost the exact same phrasing

- Has the ability to present commercial data to the employees in a practical way, and can create a connection and commitment between the results and the measures that are then implemented

The same skills area, with a slightly different formulation:**Meny:**

- Can take responsibility for one's own development as manager, and knows how they can improve their own management practices through the use of feedback, finding discussion partners and supervisors, participating in management networks, as well as taking part in various management training and development initiatives

IKEA:

- Can take responsibility for one's own development as manager, and knows how they can improve their own management practices through the use of feedback, discussion partners and supervisors, participation in professional networks and in various management training and development initiatives

Meny:

- Has a basic understanding of the importance of innovation in both services and products, and can realise new ideas within the scope for action that they have available to them

IKEA:

- Has a basic understanding of the importance of innovation in both services and products, and can realise new ideas within their own area of responsibility

Kiwi:

- Has consistent knowledge of innovation in both services and products, and can realise new ideas by themselves within the scope for action that they have available to them

Specific to Meny:

- Can assess which skills development the employees must gain in relation to their role and delegate tasks in such a way that all tasks which need to be completed are carried out, and that the goals that have been set are achieved
- Can involve the employees and introduce initiatives in order to increase sales and lower costs

Specific to Kiwi:

- Can independently take responsibility for initiating their own development as manager and continuously assess which skills development the employees must gain in relation to their role and in regard to their career progression
- Can initiate and manage the budget according to sales, salaries, operations and investments

Specific to IKEA:

- Can evaluate and plan for the correct use of their own and other people's time, according to the goals that have been set
- Can implement an overall business plan and can make a further plan of action that ensures the department's contributions to a high level of goal achievement

Pace and presence**Shared learning outcome descriptions for all three chains:**

- Can assess who is in need of guidance and in which situations it is important for the manager to be present. Can provide positive guidance to all by working together alongside the employees in various situations, and can facilitate good dialogue
- Is conscious of their own service behaviour, has the knowledge and skills to generate exceptional customer experiences and can give constructive feedback to the employees in light of their own customer service
- Has the ability to master the great complexity that exists in the relationship between people and tasks, in such a way that the highest priorities are achieved and that the work is carried out to a high quality and efficiency

Shared by Meny and Kiwi, but with the use of different concepts:

- Can assess and plan for the correct use of time according to the specific goals and, through this, appear as a good role model (Meny) / example (Kiwi)

Shared by Meny and IKEA:

- Is aware of the importance of their position as a role model and how they should live up to the principles expected of management, and to ethical guidelines

Kiwi had almost the same formulation:

- Is aware of the importance of their position as an example and how they should live up to the behaviours expected of management, and to ethical guidelines

The same skills area, with slightly different formulations:

Meny:

- Has a basic insight into the shop's competition both within the industry and locally, and can initiate measures for better positioning and increased market share

Kiwi:

- Has a basic insight into the shop's local competition, and can initiate measures for better positioning and increased market share

IKEA:

- Has a sound knowledge of the shop's regional competition and can initiate measures for better positioning and increased market share

Case study 2: Oslo Voksenopplæring

Client: Oslo Voksenopplæring

Project manager: Selma Heilmann,
Oslo Voksenopplæring Rosenhof

External manager: Tormod Skjerve

Presentation 'A Balancing Act' December 2018

10 interviews February 2019

Final meeting June 2019

A few introductory considerations

In our first report, in which we introduced 'A Balancing Act', we only touched upon the fact that the concept can be used to formulate the descriptions of an individual's skill set, without giving any concrete examples. It was therefore vital that we trial this aspect, to demonstrate how to establish the descriptions of an individual's skills, as well as how the skills standards can be used in the workplace, as a reference for valuation.

Many people find that they receive a significant amount of language training by simply doing their jobs, and it is a political aim to be able to integrate refugees and immigrants into the workplace in a swift and positive way.

Purpose and organisation of the project in the first phase

Objective:

- Help employers to be clearer in regard to the requirements needed to enter into the workplace (the balance model).
- Describe skills and formulate a skills standard for shop employees as well as their own individual skills standards. Test these with the participants from Rosenhof/Skullerud VO [adult education centres] in order to see whether they work as a method for describing one's individual skills.
- Finally, test the model with NAV (The Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration) and see whether it is applicable.

Two paths:

- Facilitate entry into the workplace via the standard established for a shop employee (Team 1)
- Test the model without referring to any specific workplace, but describe the skills that the candidate holds as accurately as possible, and how those could be used to integrate them into the workplace (not normative, but understanding is the goal here). Connect this to transferrable skills. How to make yourself relevant to other industries? (Team 2)

Team 1: Aimed at the role of shop employee. Test out the skills standard formulated for shop employees on the students in the retail industry class at Rosenhof VO (or other relevant courses at Skullerud VO).

Team 2: Create a description of an individual's skill set, independent of the skills standards for a specific workplace/industry.

Each team consisted of 5 employees from Oslo VO + the project manager. Team 1 was made up of participants from Oslo VO Rosenhof and Oslo VO Skullerud. Team 2 was made up of participants from Oslo VO Servicekontoret Helsfyr, Oslo VO Rosenhof and Oslo VO Skullerud. All in all, 8 employees were involved + the project manager.

As an expert in the 'A Balancing Act' concept, Virke's senior adviser operated as an external manager for this project, and led all of the interviews with someone from each team, so that everyone had the opportunity to participate in an interview. After the external manager had completed all 10 interviews, the participants from each team split into pairs, with each pair then conducting their own interviews, followed by proposals for a description of the other's individual skills set. These were discussed collectively as a team afterwards.

The interviews

The candidates who were chosen to be interviewed were in the middle category in regard to their level of language and integration. All have participated in language practice in Norwegian through their workplace. The candidates were given the option to have an interpreter present during the interview, with half of them taking up the offer. The experience in using interpreters here was somewhat mixed. For some, this was obviously a necessary addition to be able to understand the purpose of the interview, and in their ability to fully discuss their experiences in the workplace. Other interviews would probably provide even more information, through an unstructured conversation without the use of an interpreter. This was generally the case with the candidates who chose to do the interview without an interpreter. It was demanding for some, and it was not always clear whether the interviewee had a sufficient understanding of the concepts that were being used.

The interviews focussed on the descriptions the candidates provided of their previous work experience and their current work, in their home countries, during the process of travelling to Norway, and then once they were in Norway. Their access to experience varied greatly, which was reflected in the descriptions of their individual skill sets. One interesting feature was that their work experiences often occurred in areas of the workplace that have little or no connection to their documented, formal education.

All of the interviewees received the descriptions of their individual skill sets, all of which were based on the same template. The key skills were aimed at potential employers, so that they would be able to quickly grasp a comprehensive understanding of the totality and connections between the skills that he/she has mastered through their work. The learning outcome descriptions were deliberately formulated as short and simple concepts, so that the interviewees could understand the contents too.

Descriptions of the individual's skills set

Specialist management	Can create strong relationships with their employees and take responsibility for professional guidance
PC-use	Has an adequate command of all the relevant online training programs
Independence	Has an excellent ability in coming up with new solutions and for planning within the limitations of their own scope for action
Willingness to learn	Can learn quickly and transfer their own learning into their performance of the job, and in new areas of responsibility
Overview	Can see the entirety of the shop and contributes in all areas
Shoe production	Has a significant amount of experience and understanding in all aspects of shoe production
Perseverance	Can manage manual routine work over a long period of time, even that which requires physical strength
Customer service	Has the ability to work quickly and satisfy the customers' varying requests



Descriptions for an individual's skills set, in reference to the skills standards for a shop employee

Shop employee key skills	Individual key skills			
Customer relations		Interpersonal relationships	Interpersonal relationships	Interpersonal relationships
Mastering stress				
Using technology	PC use	PC use	PC use	PC use
	Specialist management			
Independence	Independence	Independence		Independence
Willingness to learn	Willingness to learn	Willingness to learn	Willingness to learn	Willingness to learn
Loyalty				
Overview	Overview			Overview
Precision		Precision		
	Shoe production	Electrical Confectionary work	Cleaning Agriculture	Numeracy Design Healthcare assistance
Customer service	Customer service	Customer service		Customer service
Timing		Timing		
Multitasking				
	Perseverance		Perseverance	

More on the skills standards for shop employees in case study 1
RETAIL.

When we compare the learning outcome descriptions for the individual key skills alongside the existing descriptions of the skills standards, we can see even more clearly the degree to which individual skills correspond to the skills requirements for the role. Through the individual descriptions, we also noticed a difference in the depth and breadth that exists within that skill, which then has significant added value, such as when recruiting, for example.

The skills marked in pink signify the skills of the individual, but which are not included as required skills in the skills standard that we have used here as a reference.

Shop employee in KIWI

Customer relations

Mastering stress

Use of technology

People and Technology

- Has an understanding of different types of people and can interact with everyone in a respectful manner
- Can perform their job in a professional manner, when faced with stressed customers and pressure as a result of high expectations
- Can use the PC for necessary training programs

Willingness to learn

Independence

Norwegian

Loyalty

Overview

Precision

Flexibility and Routines

- Can solve tasks in accordance to their training and are able to learn from their own experiences
- Can take responsibility so that the customers have a positive shopping experience, and the shop and storage room are kept in order, as well as for their pre-assigned responsibilities
- Can solve tasks by themselves and is aware of when they must ask for help from colleagues
- Can give feedback and communicate in a clear and positive manner, in order to contribute to a healthy culture and to ensure great teamwork across the entire shop
- Can follow the work instructions, adapt to set tasks and take new information into account
- Is loyal to the routines and in the scope for action that applies to the job
- Understands the importance of precision in their work and how to train themselves to be better
- Can see the shop as a unit, and what needs to be done at any given time
- Can speak and understand Norwegian in interactions with the customers
- Can read various types of information and can write messages in Norwegian

Timing

Customer service

Multitasking

Pace and Presence

- Has control of the task list and order of its elements within a given time frame
- Can differentiate between tasks that must be done and tasks that can be done, and can prioritise correctly
- Can work in a structured and efficient way on a number of tasks at the same time, and be confident in their prioritising within their own area of responsibility
- Understands the meaning of service, and of being accessible
- Understands the importance of contacting customers in a polite manner, and for preventing negative incidents such as theft and unwanted people in the shop

Case study 3: Nursing home/Healthcare

Client: Network in Virke for the general managers of 12 nursing homes

Presentation of 'A Balancing Act' November 2018

Interviews with 6 department managers of 3 nursing homes December 2018 The skills standards based on written materials (job descriptions, job vacancy posting etc.) are included in addition to the interviews.

Presentation of skills standards January 2019

more interesting was how their own priorities were largely influenced by the skills of the assistant department manager, and how this role functioned within the department. Previous work experience and higher education also had a relatively large impact on the department managers' emphasises on tasks and the use of time. For the work in establishing a shared skills standard then, it was integral that we concentrated on which skills proved to be the shared core skills involved in carrying out the role of a department manager, why these are important, and in making sure these don't become normative in regard to how the skills are acquired or how the role should be performed.

A few introductory considerations

The healthcare sector is strongly characterised by formal skills, and it is striking that all of the interviewees in this project found it natural to start by telling us about their formal qualifications and level of higher education they had achieved. If we look at the key skills, we can pinpoint examples of skills that are directly rooted in formal skills, for example 'healthcare expertise', as well as skills that supplement the formal training, such as 'guidance' and 'knowledge of the laws and regulations'. However, we also noticed that, even though people who work in the healthcare sector are able to document a number of their skills, most of their key skills are actually still undocumented, specifically those which have mainly been cultivated through the workplace, e.g. 'meeting routines', 'case management', 'economic understanding', 'culture building'.

Middle management role

The department manager role is a typical middle management role. It was therefore particularly interesting that none of our participants spoke about the pressure that so many middle managers seem to experience. They felt that their roles functioned as a natural part of the system in a whole, maintaining a positive place in the organisation's hierarchy. Even when asked this through direct questions, none of them expressed any feeling of pressure between senior management and the employees. As a result, the key skills for a department manager at a nursing home will not necessarily demonstrate the explicit skill of mastering the pressures one usually experiences in the role as middle manager. This may be down to the fact that the private nursing homes we worked with for this project are particularly well-organised, and that the skills required to master the pressure usually associated with a middle-management role may be considered more relevant by a department manager in a different nursing home. So we may still find this in other areas of the workplace.

Respect for differences

Those who were interviewed represented a variety of different personality types. It was fascinating to see how one's personality affects their performance of the role. However, what was even

Shared reference points

A shared structure exists across the department managers' daily work lives:

- Responsible for staff - the profession - finance
- Acting, first and foremost, in consideration of the employees, residents/patients and relatives
- Working at the PC, holding meetings and doing rounds

The skills standard describes this daily routine and the skills that are vital in mastering the scope for action in which they operate within and the requirements to function within this structure, in addition to the department manager being able to act in accordance with both the expectations and opportunities outside the following core elements: Other staff members, the authorities, the network, etc.

Step 1: The balance model. Identify the skills and use the balance model to map out a comprehensive outline of them

The oral and written material will then be systematised and situated across the 6 points of the balance model, followed by the process of placing them in the balance between these points. All in all, around 260 skills were extracted.

As a background for understanding step 2, it is of relevance to mention that around 50% of the bullet points from these interviews all related to flexibility and routines and the balance between these, around 35% to people and technology and how to find the balance between them, and about 15% to pace and presence, and how they balance these in their daily lives.

There is a lot of blurred overlapping between the balance points, and the placement of skills across these is then based on how exactly the department managers spoke about the various tasks and skills. The figures, however, do not point to how important the skills are. Rather, they provide an idea of what the department managers consider to be of the utmost importance in their own ability to carry out their role.

Step 2: Key skills. Define 10 - 15 key skills required for the role

The work involved in identifying the key skills consisted of searching for the connections, overlaps, and generic levels etc. in the overall list of all 260 skills. This is done by going back to the interviews and seeing what the department managers themselves explicitly emphasised when they spoke about the various skills. The last step here is to decide which skills best describe

the balancing act that the department managers must master, and then look at which of the other skills would then need to be included in the description of the key skills as well.

For a management role, it may be appropriate to search for which key skills contribute the most to their strong leadership practices, and which provide the foundation for management/administration.

Management and leadership

Leadership

- **People**
 - Interpersonal relationships
 - Culture building
 - Guidance
- **Flexibility**
 - Improvement efforts
 - Ethics
- **Presence**
 - Communication
 - Mastering complexity

Management

- **Technology**
 - ICT-literacy
- **Routines**
 - Healthcare expertise
 - Economic understanding
 - Knowledge of laws and regulations
 - Shifts
- **Pace**
 - Process management
 - Meeting routines

Interpersonal relationships

The department managers must have a sound knowledge of interpersonal relationships. They must have the skills to master how to form relationships with a wide variety of people and situations, including employees, residents and relatives. This requires a general, solid, base level knowledge about relationships between people.

What?

- Building relationships
- Withstand challenging relationships
- Understand relationships between others
- Diversity of cultural backgrounds
- Awareness of oneself and one's own strengths and weaknesses

Why?

- Employees, residents and relatives must be able to interact with a manager in a sound and assuring way
- Avoid escalation of cases
- Prevent conflicts
- Stable working environment that supports the employees
- Satisfied relatives
- Good team-building skills

Has solid knowledge and skills related to relationship building, a good understanding of how relationships work and has the ability to withstand demanding relationships, to ensure the understanding of their own role, and to provide a sense of safety in the co-operative relationship between the employees, residents and relatives.

Must be able to build good relationships in a diversity of cultural traditions.

Culture building

Another angle is to emphasise culture building. The department manager must be involved in building a culture of trust and a positive willingness/ability to co-operate.

What?

- Point out a direction
- Spur motivation and a job satisfaction
- Create the right attitudes
- Clarify values
- Build a good team

Why?

- Create the necessary trust, safety and well-being
- Dependent on the feeling of being part of a team within the department
- Create shared attitudes
- Build loyalty

Have the ability to create shared attitudes and have an understanding of the base values, priorities and forms of co-operation, and ensure a foundation of trust and safety through the entire organisation.

Can build a strong team that functions well together in order to solve tasks in the best possible manner.

Guidance

'Guidance' covers different types of activities; systematic individual guidance, instruction/guidance in groups, ad hoc teaching situations.

What?

- Different types of guidance situations
- Transferrable skills in a broad sense = knowledge, proficiencies and attitudes
- The workplace as an arena of learning

Why?

- Meeting individual needs for skills
- Ensuring quality in performance of the job/services
- Creating a feeling of achievement
- Paying attention to the employees; 'see and be seen'

Be a competent and versatile guide, with the ability to adapt that guidance to different situations and to specific requirements.

ICT-literacy

There are many tasks at work that rely on the mastering of computer programs. The skills of the department manager must provide a foundation for their own use of these, but also as a base to guide others in their correct usage. It is crucial to focus on the understanding of ICT, as we find an important connection between the use of ICT and pace within the department. This is the aspect that revolves around people.

What?

- Computer programs - content, purpose, users
- Analytical ability - understanding data
- Confidence in using new computer programs and technological solutions

Why?

- A form of work that all members of staff must use
- To be able to make good decisions
- Supervising so that the programs are not only used but used correctly
- Quality assurance

Be confident in the purpose and area of use for all the relevant data programs in consideration of patients, staff, finances, quality and communications, ensuring the correct use of the programs and to be able to analyse the data as a base for decision-making.

Has the ability and willingness to try out new computer programs and technological solutions, and build a sense of assurance in the use of these within the department.

Improvement efforts

The department manager is responsible for a role that requires continuous activity in the thinking through and testing out of new solutions regarding structures, procedures and routines, based on reflection over their experiences. The ability to learn from one's own experiences is central.

What?

- Learning by experience
- Understand what must be changed in the current situation in order to enact any improvements
- Take responsibility for highlighting the need for change across the entire org.
- Culture for suggesting improvements
- Mistake management
- Gain new knowledge

Why?

- (High) quality of services within the given scope for action
- Maintain purposeful structures and routines consistently
- Mindful employees
- Patient safety

Understand the connections between the quality of services and the way in which the work has been organised, and can make decisions that result in improvements for the organisation.

Can gain new and relevant knowledge, and can involve the employees in this in order to ensure purposeful structures and routines.

Healthcare expertise

Both through the basic education required for the job, and through further professional skills development. Assurance in their role as the department manager at the nursing home requires fundamental healthcare expertise, which one continues to build through the professional development that occurs by performing the role.

What?

- Formal documentation; bachelor's degree + further education
- or vocational qualification as a healthcare worker
- 'Expertise' = high-level of specialist skills which are relevant to the job

Why?

- To be able to guide all the relevant occupational groups
- Ensuring patient safety
- Quality of services
- Communicate with external healthcare services

Have up-to-date knowledge and relevant healthcare expertise in order to ensure the quality of services and patient safety, as well as to provide strong, healthcare guidance to all the relevant occupational groups.

Shifts

There are many different perspectives and tasks involved in the concept of 'shifts', and 'shift skills' is therefore an essential part of the department manager's workday.

What?

- Organise basic shifts
- Special periods
- Staffing norms
- Professionally sound staffing decisions
- Planning of working hours

Why?

- Responsibility for the right skills at the right time
- Connection between the organisation of work, resource use and job satisfaction
- Protect the employees' rights and working environment
- Daily professional reliability

Knowledge of staffing plan, shift work, planning of working hours and the skills of the individual employees.

Can ensure professional reliability in the staffing organised for work each day.

Knowledge of laws and regulations

A lot of responsibility lies in the role of the department manager, in their ability to handle legalities correctly, and to avoid situations where laws and regulations are not being followed.

What?

- Overview of relevant laws/regulations Confident in their own understanding of the contents and the practical consequences

Why?

- Necessary safety for employees, residents and relatives
- Respect
- Prevention of mistakes, supervisory matters

Understand the contents and consequences related to all laws and regulations that apply to their own area of responsibility, and can ensure that all employees carry out their roles in line with the relevant, legal directives and applicable quality verifications.

Economic understanding

This requires a sound understanding of finances, as the department manager must be able to utilise their own room for action (and know the limitations!) and make sure that the entire department understands the connection between use of resources and economics.

What?

- Budget
- Accounting
- Cost factors

Why?

- Confidence in the limitations and scope for action
- Prioritise correctly
- Understand the consequences

Has a sufficient understanding of budgeting and accounting, in order to correctly prioritise within their own room for action, and to create a shared understanding among their employees, in the connection between activities in their daily work lives and the financial consequences.

Ethics

The need for a knowledge of ethics, ethical understanding and acts rooted in a maturity of their ethics-based skills.

What?

- Knowledge of ethics as a discipline
- Relevant ethical dilemmas
- Recognition of ethical dilemmas
- Organised use of ethical reflection regarding the employees, residents and relatives

Why?

- Respect for others and for themselves
- A tool for conscious attitudes and actions, based on both reflection and discussion

Has a fundamental knowledge of ethics and ethical reflection, and can take responsibility for the services being provided, in respect to the individual's human dignity.

Process management

The level of a department manager's process management skills seem to have a major affect on the department's ability to implement as well as its use of time. This applies to several different areas (use of electronic tools, implementation of shifts, focus on priorities, skills development etc.)

What?

- Knowledge of all parties, their inclusion, and processes and results
- Understanding of one's own role

Why?

- Strong connection between processes, resource use and result, between decisions and implementation, involvement and ownership.

Has the knowledge and understanding to manage processes within different areas, such as ICT-use, skills development, improvement efforts and conflict handling, involving all relevant participants in an appropriate manner and making the necessary decisions to achieve optimal results.

Communication

The department manager is entirely dependent on their ability to ensure good communication with significantly different recipients. This requires a solid grasp of different forms of communication and the purpose of communication, in contrast to other types of relations between people (information, guidance, conversation etc.)

What?

- Awareness of the character of the communication
- Specialist knowledge
- Awareness of their own communication methods/abilities
- Own ability to formulate
- Ability to listen
- Reflection

Why?

- Crucial to interaction, trust and respect
- Ensures the shared understanding and basis for further action and reflection

Has a knowledge and understanding of different forms of communicating and receiving messages. Is aware of their own communication skills and abilities to listen, to be able to create a shared basis for further action and thinking.

Meeting routines

When it concerns the balance between pace and presence, 'meeting routines' proves to be essential. This takes into consideration the frequency and implementation of, as well as their own contribution to, meetings.

What?

- Awareness of different types of meetings, and the timing, participants, duration and content
- Responsibility for who is involved as well as the results
- Meeting culture

Why?

- Timing
- Prioritisation
- Base and forms of interaction

Can take responsibility for the planning and conducting of meetings, such that this becomes a result-oriented form of work that provides the necessary contributions to the quality of services and to positive culture building.

Mastering great complexity

This is a skill that is expected of department managers from the first day, and from many stakeholders.

What?

- Range of the types of tasks
- Responsibility for holistic thinking and prioritising
- Expectations of involvement on both the individual-level and detail-level
- Analysing situations and making plans

Why?

- Must be able to deal with the imbalance between expectations and resources in a constructive way
- Must be able to find the right balance between their own areas of interest and other areas which are of equal importance
- Good workflow and healthy working environment

Must have a strong ability to analyse situations and plan ahead to be able to prioritise correctly and make decisions in one's daily work life, which are characterised by the pressure of high expectations and the responsibility for a diversity of people and tasks.

**Interpersonal
relationships**

Culture building

Guidance

ICT-literacy

People and Technology

- Has solid knowledge and skills related to relationship building, a good understanding of how relationships work and has the ability to withstand demanding relationships, to ensure the understanding of their own role, and to provide a sense of safety in the co-operative relationship between the employees, residents and relatives
- Must be able to build good relationships in a diversity of cultural traditions
- Has the ability to create shared attitudes and has an understanding of the base values, priorities and forms of co-operation, and ensure a foundation of trust and safety through the entire organisation
- Can build a good team that functions well together in order to solve tasks in the best possible manner
- Be a competent and versatile guide, with the ability to adapt that guidance to different situations and to specific requirements
- Be confident in the purpose and area of use for all the relevant data programs in consideration of patients, staff, finance, quality and communications, ensuring the correct use of the programs and to be able to analyse the data as a base for decision-making
- Has the ability and willingness to try out new computer programs and technological solutions, and create a sense of assurance in the use of these within the department

**Healthcare
expertise**

Ethics

**Law and
regulation**

**Improvement
efforts**

Shifts

Flexibility and Routines

- Understand the connections between the quality of services and the way in which the work has been organised, and can make decisions that result in improvements for the organisation
- Can gain new and relevant knowledge, and can involve employees in order to ensure purposeful structures and routines
- Have up-to-date knowledge and relevant healthcare expertise in order to ensure the quality of services and patient safety, as well as to provide strong, healthcare guidance to all the relevant occupational groups
- Has a sufficient understanding of budgeting and accounting, in order to correctly prioritise within their own room for action, and to create a shared understanding among their employees, in the connection between activities in their average workday and the financial consequences
- Understand the contents and consequences of all the laws and regulations that apply to their own area of responsibility, and can ensure that all employees carry out their roles in line with the relevant, legal decisions and applicable quality verifications
- Knowledge of the staffing plans, shift work, planning for work hours and the skills of individual employees
- Can ensure professional reliability in the staffing organised for work each day
- Has a fundamental knowledge of ethics and ethical reflection, and can take responsibility for the services being provided, in respect to the individual's human dignity

Process management

Communication

Meeting routines

**Mastering great
complexity**

Pace and Presence

- Has the knowledge and understanding to manage processes in different areas, such as in ICT-use, skills development, improvement efforts
- and conflict handling, involving all the relevant participants in a suitable manner, and making the necessary decisions to achieve optimal results
- Can take responsibility for the planning and conducting of meetings, such that this becomes a result-oriented form of work that provides the necessary contributions to the quality of services and positive culture building
- Has a knowledge and understanding of different forms of communicating and receiving messages.
- Is aware of their own communication skills and abilities to listen, to be able to create a shared basis for further action and thinking
- Must have a strong ability to analyse situations and plan ahead to be able to prioritise correctly and make decisions in one's daily work life, which are characterised by the pressure of high expectations and the responsibility for a diversity of people and tasks

Case study 4: Elverum Folkehøgskole

Client: Elverum Folkehøgskole

Presentation of 'A Balancing Act' January 2020

10 interviews March 2020

Presentation of skills standards May 2020

one of the interviewees so that he could understand and use the concept and then go on to create skills descriptions for the rest of the staff members at the school.

Description of the pupils' learning outcomes

One future pathway for this project may also be to assess whether 'A Balancing Act' is a concept that could be used as an appropriate method to document the pupils' learning outcomes at the folk high school. Traditional forms of assessment provide little room for documenting the characteristics of the folk high school's learning arena and for the school's statutory main function: 'The purpose of a folk high school is to promote people's general education and knowledge' (Act relating to folk high schools §1).

The project at Elverum Folkehøgskole will also be considered for use as a pilot project, in taking the concept of 'A Balancing Act' to potentially be used as a tool that can be implemented in all folk high schools.

A few introductory considerations

The folk high school trial had several purposes. The management and teaching staff requested the interviews in order to get to grips with the concept and to clarify their own skills. The question of whether the interviews would be used for descriptions of the individual skill sets or to establish a skills standard was left open. The results of the interview were given in the form of a skills standard for the role of teacher at the folk high school, alongside instructions regarding how they could be used and also expanded upon to formulate the descriptions of individual skill sets. The headmaster specifically wanted to be

Background information

- Based on 10 interviews, 1.5 hours each
- Focus of the interviews revolved around the skills that the individuals have acquired in the role they perform at Elverum Folkehøgskole
- C. 270 total unique skills registered
- The concept 'A Balancing Act' was developed as a way to describe the skills that are cultivated in the workplace, of which are undocumented. As a result, education, courses and previous working conditions, which are easy to document, are not usually made so explicitly visible in the presentation

Key skills

People - Technology

- Relationship building
- Teamwork
- Guidance
- Communication

Flexibility - Routines

- Self-development
- Creativity
- Project management
- Expertise

Pace - Presence

- Result-oriented
- Process management
- Accessibility

Relationship building

A folk high school teacher must be able to make sure that all those around them feel seen. They must be able to build relationships with a wide variety of people and in varying situations, based on their genuine interest in people. It is integral that their relationship building creates a feeling of safety and trust.

What?

- Cares and shows their interest
- Types of people
- Acknowledges the individual
- Acknowledges all pupils in the group
- Elevate people
- Empathy
- Respect and tolerance
- Professionalism
- Spar with emotions

Why?

- Generate a feeling of safety and trust
- Creating a safe space for dialogue
- Individuals should feel that they are seen
- Mastering of relations in various situations

Can build healthy relationships in a wide variety of situations and with a variety of people, in order to create the safety and trust that is integral for the school to achieve its goals and fulfil its purpose.

Guidance

An important goal for the folk high school is to ensure that all pupils are given a feeling of achievement, both academically and personally. To succeed in this, it is necessary to have both a knowledge of guidance, and the skills to enable others to make positive choices for themselves.

What?

- Dialogue
- Give feedback
- Converse without teaching
- Asking good questions
- Be clear
- Empathy
- Make demands
- Motivating
- Praise
- Give advice
- Set boundaries

- Self-awareness
- Understanding of situations
- Meeting the pupils where they are

Why?

- Enable others to make choices
- Be able to act on a realistic understanding of the reality
- Boost someone's self-confidence through a feeling of achievement
- Encourage a mastering of both the subject area and personal matters

Have a sound knowledge of methods for guidance, and the skills to help others, by utilising their dialogue to help others master both academic and personal situations

Teamwork

It is not enough to just have these places to meet, to talk together as well as co-ordinate. In carrying out this job, there is a collective responsibility for ensuring that the entire process and their results are as high a quality is possible.

What?

- Ability to co-operate
- Working in a team
- Diverse thinking
- Planning together
- Be supportive
- Facilitate
- Involves
- Create joy
- Division of responsibilities
- Loyalty
- See something in its entirety and the connections within
- Acknowledge everyone
- Co-operative partner
- Work together
- Bridge-building

- Groupwork
- Working in a team
- Bring together strong groups with a purpose
- Work culture
- Give advice
- Active participation

Why?

- Feeling of community
- Do good for others
- Utilise differences in a positive manner
- Generate a better result
- Master groupwork projects
- Must be able to change the working day
- Ethical challenges
- Can manage routine work

Can take responsibility for good, holistic solutions and for creating a positive climate for co-operation. Has an understanding of how to use differences in a positive way, and can both involve and construct teams in order to achieve the best possible process and result.

Communication

Communication is demanding in a teaching situation, as one must facilitate an open dialogue, while also making clear demands from the same target group. It's also crucial that one can provide precise information for different target groups, in such a way that communication is certain.

What?

- Writing
- Social media
- Word choice/use of words
- Marketing
- Clarity
- Choice of the correct channels
- Can see where the pupils are
- Orderliness

- Predictability
- Home page
- Computer support
- Intermediation

Why?

- Representing the school externally
- Internal information requirements

Can choose an appropriate channel for communication, both internally and externally, and for different target groups, with adapted forms of information. Has the ability to construct messages precisely, both in writing and verbally.

Self-development

A teacher working at a folk high school must always be prepared to learn new things. The role requires continuous professional and personal development, as one must be able to provide relevant responses on a vast range of personal and subject-specific requirements and requests.

What?

- Push themselves
- Do things to the best of their ability
- Change plans
- Experiential learning
- Try new things
- Invest in new things
- Life skills

- Self-awareness
- Understand their own method of operation

Why?

- Connection between the opportunities for mastery and a feeling of achievement, both for other's and oneself.
- Vast scope for action, without fixed curricula
- Use one's own prior experiences

Has a solid ability to develop their own professional and personal skills, through the continuous interaction with others' requirements and requests. Observe the connection between one's own mastery and others' opportunities for gaining a feeling of achievement.

Creativity

Necessary to have knowledge about creativity and can build both their own and others' creative skills. Facilitating creative processes is central to a folk high school, and gives the pupils the satisfaction of having solved an important task.

What?

- Trying new things
- Coming up with new ideas
- Finding new ways to achieve the goal
- Appreciating different qualities
- Making something new
- Creative
- Searching for new things
- Playing

- Solving all types of problems
- Solution-oriented
- Changing plans
- Life skills
- Composing

Why?

- Show the value in creativity
- Create a learning arena for creative solutions

Has good knowledge of creativity, and the ability to create processes that can bring about new solutions and that open up new ways of achieving a valuable result.

Project management

A significant amount of teaching is organised through projects. The teacher is responsible for the entire process, from the gathering of information, the planning and implementation to the evaluation. These could be extensive projects, involving numerous people that last for a significant period of time, which may also include a number of major risk factors.

What?

- Quality assurance
- Finance
- Evaluation
- Motivation
- Organisation
- Practical approach
- Apply practical knowledge
- Project implementation
- Fundraising
- Assessment of consequences/results
- Strategic thinking
- Logistics
- Groupwork projects
- Learning arena for trying new things
- Has an overview

- Solution-oriented
- Supervises
- Structuring
- Creates predictability
- Planning
- Sets the room for action/limits
- Making decisions
- Own assessments

Why?

- Quality assurance process and learning outcomes
- Responsibility for all individuals involved
- Trips
- Themes
- Shared plans for the whole school

Can manage and carry out quality assurance for extensive projects that have numerous risk factors. Has significant experience in making decisions and choosing the correct actions, even in demanding situations.

Expertise

Folk high schools provide an in-depth study of specific subjects, as well as subjects that can be used as a tool to achieve other goals, such as successful teamwork and a feeling of achievement. To succeed in this, it requires a significant understanding of the subject's breadth, depth and a holistic understanding.

What?

- Education
- Intermediation methods
- Pedagogy
- Working outside of the plan
- Adapt tasks to the correct level
- Adapting
- Using different forms of teaching
- Applying practical knowledge
- Visualising
- Meeting the pupils where they are
- Making teaching plans
- Applying research

- Relaying the subject material
- Evaluating
- Thoroughness
- Instructing through routines
- Financial understanding/accounting/budgeting
- Intermediation methods

Why?

- High quality learning arena
- Understanding of practical knowledge
- Provide opportunity to master the subject
- Confidence in the subject

Has the professional depth and breadth to take independent responsibility for setting goals and for choosing the form of teaching that would provide the individual pupil both a mastery of the subject and a progression within it.

Has an understanding of how to integrate and combine theoretical and practical knowledge within their specialist work.

Result-oriented

In an organisation that has the level of freedom that a folk high school has, it is important to have the ability to set goals and define the desired result. In aligning the results, there is also a responsibility to contribute so that others achieve their desired results too.

What?

- Reality orientation
- Implementing ideas
- Action-oriented
- Timing
- Ability to implement
- Getting to the point
- Provide reasoning
- Sort things out
- Work towards results
- Prioritise
- Solution-oriented
- Discussing

- Intermediation
- Communication
- Training/practicing
- Take responsibility
- Give concrete help

Why?

- Meet expectations
- Can talk about the purpose of processes and decisions
- Generate a feeling of safety and trust
- Demonstrate the quality of the work

Can prioritise as is necessary and make decisions that reach the desired result. Can involve and arrange in consideration of others so that they can achieve their goals and demonstrate positive results.

Process management

Folk high school teachers must take responsibility for different types of processes. This can be about one or several people, about spontaneous or planned initiatives. Necessary to have the self-confidence to be able to deal with others, ensuring respect and tolerance is maintained through the processes.

What?

- Finding the right pace
- Solution-oriented
- Creating a learning environment
- Life skills
- Give things a bit more time
- Clarity
- Balance requests and the results
- Mastering chaotic situations
- Making decisions
- Being a role model
- Observing the pupils' situation and acting accordingly
- Rationalising and normalising
- Practical solutions

- Creating engagement
- Perseverance
- Dialogue
- Facilitating discussions
- Facilitating good questions
- Asking good questions
- Assessing the situation
- Strategic thinking
- Self-confidence

Why?

- A lot is solved through co-operating with others
- Must be able to take responsibility in unstructured situations
- Choosing the right pace

Can manage processes at the right pace and with respect and tolerance for all who are involved, such that positive solutions can be achieved together.

Accessibility

Important to take responsibility in order to create a safe space for dialogue. The role requires not only presence in the physical space, but also an openness and responsiveness to what others wish to address and convey.

What?

- Capable of dealing with a variety of tasks
- Tackle things head on
- Openness
- Facilitate
- Active listening
- Conversing
- Take responsibility for situations
- Give feedback
- Balance work and family
- Guidance
- Get involved

- Look after
- Acknowledges the individual
- Give advice
- Create a sense of assurance
- Focus on those who are around them
- Small talk
- Social pedagogy work

Why?

- Meet needs when perceived as important
- Show a genuine interest through conversations
- Lay the groundwork for security and trust

Understand the significance of being present, in being present physically, and having the ability to give full attention and empathise with the situations other people are facing.

Can create a sense of assurance by dealing with things directly and taking care of the individual's needs so that they feel seen, heard and understood.

Learning outcome descriptions

- Can build healthy relationships in a wide variety of situations and with a variety of people, in order to create the safety and trust that is integral for the school to achieve its goals and fulfil its purpose
- Have a sound knowledge of methods of guidance, and the skills to help others through their own dialogue to master both academic and personal situations in their lives
- Can take responsibility for good, holistic solutions and for creating a positive climate for co-operation. Has an understanding of how to use differences in a positive way, and can both involve and construct teams in order to achieve the best possible process and result
- Can choose an appropriate channel for communication, both internally and externally, and for different target groups, with adapted forms of information. Has the ability to construct messages precisely, both in writing and verbally
- Has a solid ability to develop their own professional and personal skills, through the continuous interaction with others' requirements and requests. Observe the connection between one's own mastery and others' opportunities for gaining a feeling of achievement
- Has good knowledge of creativity, and the ability to create processes that can bring about new solutions and that open up new ways of achieving a valuable result
- Can manage and carry out quality assurance for extensive projects that have numerous risk factors. Has significant experience in making decisions and choosing the correct actions, even in demanding situations
- Has the professional depth and breadth to take independent responsibility for setting goals and for choosing the form of teaching that would provide the individual pupil both a mastery of the subject and a progression within it. Has an understanding of how to integrate and combine theoretical and practical knowledge within their specialist work
- Can prioritise as is necessary and make decisions that reach the desired result. Can involve and arrange in consideration of others so that they can achieve their goals and demonstrate positive results
- Can manage processes at the right pace and with respect and tolerance for all who are involved, such that positive solutions can be achieved together
- Understand the significance of being available, in being available physically, and having the ability to give full attention and empathise with the situations other people are facing. Can create a sense of assurance by dealing with things directly and taking care of the individual's needs so that they feel seen, heard and understood

Situating the individual's skills on the balance model - in addition to the generic standard (e.g.)

People - Technology

- Computer support
- Web-design
- InDesign
- Empathy
- Team-building
- Forms of teaching/learning arenas

Flexibility - Routines

- Outdoor life
- Reflection
- Preventative work (intoxication, abuse)
- Planning/preparation
- Quality assurance
- Supervision
- Crafts (subjects/techniques that are not documented through education, courses etc.)
- Administration
- Economic management
- AML
- Language
- Solution-oriented
- Trip management
- Campaigns
- Applying research
- Environment/climate
- Logistics

Pace - Presence

- Solution-oriented
- Mastering diverse tasks

Individual additions to the generic learning outcome descriptions (e.g.)

- Can manage processes at the right pace and with respect and tolerance for all who are involved, such that positive solutions can be achieved together.
- Has good skills in facilitating and leading both debates and conversations, so that all participants are involved in a positive manner, and so that there is progress and development.
- Has good knowledge of creativity, and the ability to create processes that can bring about new solutions and that open up new ways of achieving a valuable result
- Has a strong ability and willingness to think through and test out new ideas by themselves, and are able to evaluate the consequences of new measures on a wider scale
- Can manage and carry out quality assurance for extensive projects that have numerous risk factors. Has significant experience in making decisions and choosing the correct actions, even in demanding situations
- Can take responsibility for planning, implementing and evaluating travel itineraries such that the participants' safety and learning outcomes are ensured

Case study 5: Mestertillitsvalgt LO

Client: LO

Project manager: Gro Svennebye

External manager: Tormod Skjerve

Presentation of 'A Balancing Act' on several occasions throughout 2019.

19 interviews with trade union representatives from 15 different associations from October-November 2019

Presentation of the skills reference December 2019

2. It should be possible to use the skills reference as a way of communicating externally the skills that the trade union representative has acquired through the performance of that role, for both general information purposes and for the valuation of the role when job seeking. For external communication, the key skills and learning outcome descriptions are combined.

By using the 'A Balancing Act' methodology, the skills required to fill the role of a trade union representative emerge and are thus defined in such a way that brings to light just how complex the job is. Both the model and method appear to be suitable for describing the different types of skills that are considered necessary by the union representatives themselves, in what they believe to be the required core skills, and how they have then had to balance these to be able to carry out their role in an adequate way.

The methodology in the balance model is one of the key aspects that contributes to this heightened awareness and pride that is demonstrated by the people currently in that role. At the start of the project, several of the participating trade union representatives initially expressed how difficult it was to verbalise their own skills. Yet, through these conversations, they became a lot more aware of their own skills/mastery of the function. The method of the balance model functions in such a way that it creates this positive process, and is in itself a source for generating more self-awareness, pride and a feeling of achievement.

In order to understand more about how the information extracted from the interviews is transformed into the key skills and learning outcome descriptions, we have provided a list of several skills for this case study, all of which the trade union representatives highlighted as crucial to be able to perform their role, rather than those that are only evident through the key skills. These tables also show how the skills are situated across the balance model, as a background for the emphases that the interviewees insisted on themselves in the interviews. The majority of the skills can also be found as elements within the descriptions of their key skills, or in the learning outcome descriptions.

Out of the overall skills, the majority were placed into the flexibility - routines balance dimension. However, it was interesting to see that the rest were split equally between the pace - presence dimension and the people - technology dimension.

A few introductory considerations

The concept 'A Balancing Act' can be used to formulate a skills standard for roles in the workplace as well as for descriptions of an individual's skill set. However, it can also be used to describe the skills that are cultivated through a particular responsibility one has in a specific function in the workplace. In this trial, we have looked at the function of a 'trade union representative', with the idea that the concept can also be used in a similar way for 'health and safety representatives', 'team managers', 'coordinators', and any other functions that include a scope and responsibility that develops a certain skills set that need to be described.

In 'A Balancing Act', it is not important to differentiate between a function and a role, instead, it is more important to demonstrate the relevancy of the concept. In the following paragraphs, the role of 'trade union representative' shall be discussed, in addition to a description of the skills required, as has been done for the other trials.

LO (The Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions) chose to use the designation 'skills reference' rather than 'skills standard' to present the results from the interviews.

Skills reference for a trade union representative

Through the use of the 'A Balancing Act' model and method, 13 key skills were extracted for the role of a trade union representative.

The key skills and relevant learning outcome descriptions were combined to create the skills reference. The skills reference holds two different purposes:

1. It should be able to be used internally to discuss and assess the trade union representative's training and skills needs. Based on the skills reference, it should be possible to talk about each skill, discuss their placement along the balance model and/or discuss the detailed descriptions of the key skills and learning outcome descriptions.

People		Technology
Form of communication	Communication channels	PC-use
Building relationships	Social media	Office-software
Coping with loneliness	Information dissemination	Building communication platforms
Motivating	Can clarify the work	
Training (of others)		
Delegating		
Knowledge of people		
Guidance		
Creating arenas for co-operation		
Reality-oriented members		
Dealing with difficult conversations		
Compliance		
Involvement		
Following-up		
Being a team-leader		

Building relationships

Trade union representatives are entirely dependent on having a good relationship with their own members as well as their trade union, with the management in the business/corporation/municipality, and with other union representatives. A particular characteristic of these relationships is that the union representative is not able to choose themselves who they form these relationships with. Relationship building is therefore demanding, unpredictable and an ongoing process.

What?

- Ability to build relationships
- Withstand challenging relationships
- Understand relationships between others
- Mastering of diversity
- Great variety in personal qualities
- Conflict handling
- Awareness of oneself, one's own strengths and weaknesses
- Compliance

Why?

- Members, management and other relevant parties must be able to interact with the union representative in a clear and assuring way
- Avoid escalation of cases
- Prevent conflicts
- Stable working environment that supports the employees
- Receiving information early
- Prioritise well

Has a solid knowledge and the skills to build relationships, as well as a good understanding of relationships. Has the capability to withstand demanding relationships, and contribute to good conflict handling processes.

Can use relationships to ensure the understanding of their own role, the necessary flow of information, and can contribute to positive collaborative relationships in the business and in other arenas of co-operation.

Forms of communication

The union representative must be able to vary their form of communication and choose the form that is most appropriate for achieving the desired goal, in both the short and long term. Closely related to processes and relationships.

What?

- Knowledge of people
- Clarity
- Writing
- Ability to formulate
- Conversations
- Formal and informal style
- Adaptation and influence
- Visibility

Why?

- Form is crucial to process
- Important factor in relationships
- Provides assurance and seriousness
- Gains an understanding of their own work

Can adapt the form of communication for purpose, clarity and the target group.

Communication channels

Union representatives are dependent on having clear communication with their members. They must make conscious choices based on a responsiveness and understanding of their members' requirements and requests. Choosing the correct channel is also related to one's preference for the form of communication.

What?

- In-person meetings
- Social media
- PC and email
- Telephone and SMS

Why?

- Ensuring the flow of information
- Being accessible
- Involvement
- Anchoring among the members

Can choose a purposeful channel for communication and information dissemination, in order to ensure the desired involvement and embedding members in the work of the trade union.

Flexibility		Routines
Own development	Recruitment	Laws and regulations
Experiential learning	Arranging meetings for members	Agreements and settlements
New case areas	Developmental work	Labour law
Find new solutions	Understanding/awareness of the role	Knowledge of the procedures
Trial and error	Network building	Economic understanding
Co-operation in different contexts	Gain knowledge from others	Membership securement
Create a shared understanding between members	Assess the severity of cases	Ability to write/formulate
Mobilise members	Analysing complex cases	Precision/thoroughness
Taking initiatives	Process planning	Structure/systematic/orderliness
Take things as they come/improvise	Critical perspective	Organisational theory/knowledge
	Application of laws and systems of contracts	Policy development
	Interpreting laws and systems of contracts	Negotiations techniques
	Media management	Overview
	Conflict handling	Confidentiality
		Specialist argumentation

Experiential learning

Union representatives emphasise the need to be able to learn from their own experiences. The reasoning for this is that a lot of the necessary skills that one needs to have in order to carry out this job cannot be learned by attending a course. Their own experiences are the primary source for their decision making in their work as a trade union representative. Practice-based knowledge is a crucial part of their knowledge base.

What?

- Decisions based on valuation
- Identifying learning points
- Awareness of their own practice
- Listening to the reactions of others
- Exchanging experiences with others
- Using their scope for action
- Trial and error

Why?

- Practice is often the only source of knowledge
- Serves as the foundation for improvement work, time management, prioritising and decision making.

Has a significant ability to learn from their own and from others' experiences, for an enhanced mastery and confidence in performing that role. Can apply practical knowledge to improve processes, decisions and time management.

Developmental work

Union representatives must master different types of developmental work. Self-development is the most important aspect for a trade union representative. However, for the lead union representative, it is also important to ensure that other union representatives also have access to training and self-development. Skills in the development work of specialist-policies is also an significant part of the role.

What?

- Updating of laws and systems of contracts
- Gain knowledge from others
- Training others
- Specialist-political work
- New solutions
- Better argumentation

Why?

- Knowledge of laws and systems of contracts is fundamental
- Does not have experience in all areas of work themselves
- The opportunity to delegate tasks to other union representatives
- Strengthen working conditions for members
- Make improvements

Can ensure necessary self-development and participate in relevant developmental work that strengthens their mastery of how the role is performed, but which also generates improvements for the business.

Critical perspective

The union representative receives a large amount of information and enquiries that require critical skills to assess. This critical perspectives must be focussed on information that comes both from the management and from its own members.

What?

- Economic understanding
- Interpretation and applications of laws and systems of contracts
- Consequential cases
- Understanding of the reality
- Reality orientation and guidance for members

Why?

- Taking responsibility for the understanding of reality
- Ensuring the best possible basis for decisions
- Ability to prioritise correctly
- Choosing the correct procedures

Is able to make critical assessments to ensure that the best possible, realistic and relevant understanding of reality is used as a basis for their own, for their members' and for the management's initiatives and decisions, and to decide on the correct prioritising of cases and procedures.

Awareness of the role

Mastering the role of a trade union representative is challenging. This revolves around the ability to cultivate a strong understanding of the role, to be clear and to create a sense of assurance in the role across various situations, and to shape the role in such a way that it is successful in its own specific context. The role shall function within both formal and informal situations.

What?

To be both a trade union representative and employee/colleague

The role in relation to:

- management
- health and safety representatives
- other union representatives on different levels
- the business's HR department
- the trade union's board of directors
- private life

Why?

- Identify and use the scope for action available to them
- Prioritise correctly
- Create a sense of assurance for others as well as for themselves through their performance of the role
- Can differentiate between formal and informal situations
- Determines the appropriate degree of secondment

Is confident in their own role in regard to formal and informal situations, and has a good understanding of the scope for action in which the role can function within and use, in order to generate the best possible results.

Laws and systems of contracts

Through these elements, one can pinpoint the fundamental, specialist skill one needs to be able to master the work of a trade union representative. This skill relies on both the basic knowledge surrounding the content of all relevant laws/regulations/agreements, but also on the application and interpretation of these laws and systems of contracts.

What?

- Working Environment Act
- Public Administration Act
- Regulations
- Basic agreement
- Labour agreements
- Settlements
- Special agreements
- Labour law

Why?

- The basics needed to perform the role
- The framework for the role's scope for action
- The reference for specialist-political work

Has a solid expertise of laws and regulations, agreements, settlements that regulate the workplace, and can use their own experiences to apply and interpret the laws and systems of contracts.

Can ensure that the most relevant legal foundation is used as a basis for the assessment of concrete cases, and can seek help from others when it is necessary.

Network building

The union representative must have a strong network for both personal and professional conversations. They must master a great deal of loneliness within the role, and deal with a lot of confidential information of which they really would rather not have knowledge of. It is also crucial that they have a network of people around them who they can ask for advice regarding cases which are either new or are particularly demanding.

What?

- Other union representatives
- Trade union management
- Cases one does not have experience with
- Legal questions
- Discussing political cases
- Procedural questions
- The personal burden of cases regarding personnel

Why?

- Requires concrete advice and guidance
- Is a part of something larger than their own context
- Assured in their decisions
- To not feel alone with the responsibility of other people's fate
- To be refreshed and inspired
- A need for debate partners

Can establish relevant networks and use these to make the correct, professional decisions, and to generate a mastery of the personal decisions one must take when handling the responsibility of other people's working conditions, and for dealing with confidential information.

Pace		Presence
Meeting routines	Generating a shared understanding	Listening
Prioritising	Timing	Accessibility
Ability to implement	Solution-oriented	Seeking out members/union representatives
Making decisions	Result-oriented	Maintaining one's priorities over time
Self-confidence/confident in themselves	Process dynamism	Conversing
Impatience	Be clear	Patience
Prevention	Presenting demands	Visibility
	Ability to formulate	Being a good conversational partner
	Building alliances	

Solution-oriented

This revolves around one's ability to involve themselves in processes where the best solution is not given in advance. With this, the focus is not on winning over the opposition, but on being constructive, and finding good solutions for the members, as well as solutions that work for the management and the business too.

What?

- Understanding their scope for action
- Processing skills
- Communication
- Flexibility
- Exchanging ideas
- Self-confidence
- Holistic thinking
- Overview
- Analysing complex cases
- Taking initiatives

Why?

- Must be able to contribute to the solution of cases without having the answers
- Maintaining the perspective of the members in new case areas and in demanding processes

Can actively contribute to the process of finding good solutions based on a holistic assessment, analytical skills and a sound knowledge of the field.

Result-oriented

There is an expectation that the union representative shall create concrete results for their members, and that they shall ensure a clarification of their work both internally and externally as the union representative. Important to plan a process that leads to a result, as well as those that require a long period of time.

What?

- Measurable results
- Intermediation
- Clarification
- Processing
- Prioritisation
- Ability to implement
- Alliance building
- Negotiations techniques

Why?

- Grounds for the union representative's function
- Generate concrete improvements for their own members
- Recruit new members

Can implement processes that bring about concrete results, and clarify this work in a clear manner both internally and externally.

Accessibility

Union representatives have described an expectation for them to be available 24/7. They have their own good reasons to be as accessible as possible too, both for their members and for management.

What?

- Open office door
- Makes their contact information easily accessible
- Seeks out members
- Co-operates with management
- Confidentiality
- Listening

Why?

- Foundation of trust
- Receives information early regarding cases and challenges
- Contributes to the installing of cases
- Be a conversation partner on the members' premisses

Has the ability to generate a feeling of accessibility and openness, and to master a great variety of professional and personal conversations.

Process implementation

A union representative's skills in dealing with the dynamism of processes has a huge effect on their power to implement and on their use of time in the negotiations and solutions of cases for their members.

What?

- Knowledge of all parties, their inclusion, and processes and results
- Knowledge/understanding of the organisation
- Understanding of one's own role
- Installing of solution proposals
- Timing
- Meeting routines
- Improvisation

Why?

- Strong connection between process - resource use - the result, as well as between one's understanding of the role and their decision making

Has the knowledge and understanding to constructively contribute to all phases of the processes, to be involved and to interact with the relevant parties in a good manner, and to take the necessary decisions at the correct time.

Key skills

Building relationships

Forms of communication

Communication channels

Experiential learning

Awareness of the role

Critical perspective

Network building

Developmental work

Laws and systems of contracts

Solution-oriented

Result-oriented

Process implementation

Accessibility

Learning outcome descriptions

People - Technology

- Has a solid knowledge and the skills to build relationships, as well as a good understanding of relationships. Has the capability to withstand demanding relationships, and contribute to good conflict handling processes.
- Can use relationships to ensure the understanding of their own role, the necessary flow of information, and can contribute to positive, collaborative relationships in the business and in other arenas of co-operation.
- Can adapt the form of communication for purpose, clarity and the target group.
- Can choose a purposeful channel for communication and information dissemination, in order to ensure the desired involvement and embedding members in the work of the trade union.

Flexibility - Routines

- Has a significant ability to learn from their own and from others' experiences, for an enhanced mastery and confidence in performing that role. Can apply practical knowledge to improve processes, decisions and time management.
- Has a solid expertise of laws and regulations, agreements, and settlements that regulate the workplace, and can use their own experiences to apply and interpret the laws and systems of contracts.
- Can ensure that the most relevant legal foundation is used as a basis for the assessment of concrete cases, and can seek help from others when necessary.
- Is confident in their own role within formal and informal situations, and has a good understanding of the scope for action in which the role can function within and use, in order to create the best possible results.
- Is able to make critical assessments to ensure that the best possible, realistic and relevant understanding of reality is used as a basis for their own, for their members' and for the management's initiatives and decisions, and to decide on the correct prioritising of cases and procedures.
- Can establish relevant networks and use these to make the correct, professional decisions, and to generate a mastery of the personal decisions one must take when handling the responsibility of other people's working conditions, and for dealing with confidential information.
- Can ensure necessary self-development and participate in relevant developmental work that strengthens their mastery of how the role is performed, but which also generates improvements for the business.

Pace - Presence

- Can actively contribute to the process of finding good solutions based on a holistic assessment, analytical skills and a sound knowledge of the field.
- Can implement processes that generate concrete results, and clarify this work in a good manner both internally and externally.
- Has the knowledge and understanding to constructively contribute to all phases of the processes, to be involved and to interact with the relevant parties in a good manner, and to take the necessary decisions at the correct time.
- Has the ability to generate a feeling of accessibility and openness, and to master a great variety of professional and personal conversations.

The way forward - conclusions and recommendations

‘A Balancing Act’ - contributes to the skills policy and to lifelong learning

Generates a heightened understanding of skills - the utilisation of skills - the development of skills
‘The right skills in the right place at the right time’

- **Validation of prior learning;** can be achieved in the workplace by using the language and logic of the workplace
- **Mobility;** can communicate all skills that are acquired through work in the form of key skills and learning outcome descriptions
- **Integration;** all are able to describe the skills they have attained through previous work, in the same language and in the same way as the skills requirements for different roles are described
- **Transference and co-operation between education - the workplace;** the workplace can clearly describe the skills needs that apply to a specific role, and one can thus compare the learning outcome descriptions from academia as well as for roles in the workplace
- **Career counselling;** can use the skills standards as a reference for guidance, and the balance model to describe the individual's skill set

The concept ‘A Balancing Act’ is a tool that holds the potential to strengthen skills policies within various important areas. The trials that have been documented in this report were chosen to demonstrate how ‘A Balancing Act’ can contribute to new opportunities for: the validation of prior learning; mobility and integration into the workplace; the transference between education and work; and career counselling.

To achieve this goal, it requires significant co-operation, conscious decision making, patience and innovation. The purpose of this part of the report is to outline concrete measures in as much detail as possible, specifically for the situation we find ourselves in today, in order to be able to realise these benefits to the widest extent possible. The starting point will be to look at the overall challenges that were explored in the first section, and then how we could respond to them.

1. ‘No one listens to what you’re saying unless they think they’ve already thought of something similar themselves’

Main consideration: There must be a strong objective in place to encourage the use of ‘A Balancing Act’ as a concept across workplace industries.

The role of the authorities / Tripartite co-operation

One of the objectives of the Norwegian National Skills Policy Strategy 2017–2021 is to work on improving the ways in which we document and utilise the skills that are acquired in the workplace. The concept ‘A Balancing Act’ serves as an answer to

this challenge. However, it also requires continuation of the project with the active involvement from the authorities, so that skills can be valued properly. When ‘A Balancing Act’ was in development, our mandate was that the model must function as a way to document skills that are acquired in the workplace, such that they can then be understood by other industries throughout the workplace, as well as the formal education system. The methodology used in ‘A Balancing Act’ meets this objective, which means that the challenge now is to move the focus further on from the understanding of skills, to their valuation.

The valuation of skills and qualifications is based on trust. We can understand what has been described, without trusting that the reality is exactly as has been laid out. ‘We won’t believe it until we’ve seen it.’

‘A Balancing Act’ is first and foremost formulated on the basis of what has been communicated by the person who is describing how they perform their role in the workplace; what tasks they carry out, how they have carried them out, what they required in order to perform those specific tasks, and where they learned the necessary skills to have mastered that task in a competent way. The advantage of using these conversation as a foundation for the standards, is that their narrative is genuine. Their references throughout the entire conversation are grounded in their experiences of performing tasks, their own understanding of how they have mastered the role they work in, and the roles they have had throughout their time in the workplace. The question to ask from here is then whether someone who has not been involved in the interview process can trust what has been described. Can we trust the descriptions of the individual's skill set? Do the people who are actually employed in that specific

role really have the skills that have been described through the skills standard?

In order to create that crucial confidence in the methodology, we believe there are two paths that need to be followed:

1. The concept must be used across workplace industries to such an extent that enough people are familiar with what 'A Balancing Act' is, how the model and methodology are used, and what results it can give. The experiences so far have been that those who are involved in formulating the skills standards and the descriptions of an individual's skill set are then able to understand how they participate in this 'balancing act', in addition to understanding the descriptions that are established as a result of using the concept. By creating that intrinsic confidence in what they have helped create, it is easier for them to understand and evaluate other people's use of 'A Balancing Act'. It is therefore integral to first talk about an implementation of the concept in a wider range of areas within the workplace, as a foundation for creating a confidence in the skills standards and descriptions that are a result of using 'A Balancing Act'.
2. In one way or another, there must be a system in place for an external evaluation, and a way for the authorities to get involved. This could happen, for example, through the establishing of an 'approval scheme of non-formal training.'

Going forward, the work on 'A Balancing Act' must be carried out in closer and more collaborative co-operation between workplace industries and the authorities. Workplace industries must take

responsibility for this, but should also demand contributions from the authorities. This is not an unreasonable request. In the skills policy, we have two important arenas of learning that can aid in building skills and providing opportunities for lifelong learning; namely, the formal education system, and the workplace. Workplace industries use a large number of resources alongside the educational institutions, and contribute to the quality of the formal education system. This participation is a long-standing tradition that has been taken for granted. The authorities should feel the same obligation to spend resources on learning in the workplace, and contribute just as actively to strengthening this arena of learning.

The relevance of work in academia

Increasing the relevance of the workplace in academia has been high up on the political agenda. It has proven to be demanding, yet necessary, through these discussions to define the term 'workplace' in a more purposeful way. If we take into account how companies recruit and further develop the skills of their employees, we can roughly divide the job market into three parts; the regulated, the open and the internal.

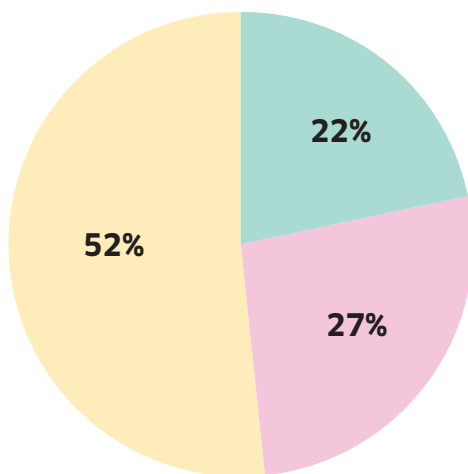
By using the skills standards in the workplace, and looking specifically at the skills needs for the balance point 'Routine', we can take into consideration different types of education, and their various roles in contributing to giving their students the 'right skills for the right time' when they enter the workplace. For this then, a differentiation must exist in how workplace relevance should be thought of in different forms of education.



Three different types of job market¹⁷

	Sum	Percentage
The regulated job market	566 616	20 %
The internal job market	700 515	25 %
The open job market	1 355 888	48 %
No category	71 556	2 %
Remaining number of employees (AKU/Labour force survey)	176 316	5 %
Total number of employees in Norway	2 827 000	100 %

	Sum	Percentage
The regulated job market	566 616	22 %
The internal job market	700 515	27 %
The open job market	1 355 888	52 %
Total for the three job markets	2 623 019	100 %



■ The internal job market ■ Open market ■ The regulated

The regulated job market carries out their recruitment process by publishing the requirements of a specific standard of education that is used to define whether someone can perform the role in question. This education standard must meet the skills requirements that belong to 'Routines' in the skills standard. However, also in the regulated job market, there is a prerequisite that the skills gained from the formal education have to be developed further through experiential learning, by actually performing the role, and that those skills are specialised for that particular role.

The open job market recruits their employees by using their level of formal education as a reference for defining the skills requirements for the role in question; for example, it may require someone with 'higher education'. There can, however, be a great deal of flexibility here, regarding which subjects or areas

of study are relevant in light of these qualifications. There is also more flexibility in this job market than there is in the regulated market, in regard to which providers one makes use of for extra and further education.

The internal job market recruits for specific roles, but the skills requirements are not defined by using formal education as a reference. This means that, in this market, more weight is given to the previous development of skills than one's documented education, in comparison to the two other types of job market. We can also see here that it is of the utmost importance to be able to describe one's routine related skills that are clearly considered necessary to master the role. Further skills development primarily takes place through internal training, either through systematically completing 'centralised training' or by taking part in a short, relevant course when the need arises.

It is worth noting that in all three job markets, a significant amount of necessary learning takes place through simply performing the role, and through one's own initiatives, which are not documented, but can be described through the use of 'A Balancing Act'.

The connection between the skills standard and formal qualifications in the three different types of job market:

The regulated market: The skills standards are met through specific, defined qualifications from the education system.

The open market: The skills standards are met by several qualifications in various different fields of study that must be at the same level according to the education system.

The internal market: The skills standard is met by prior learning, which in principle includes all formal qualifications.

¹⁷ Data for the job markets referred to here are mainly taken from Table 11658 in Statistic Norway's 2019 StatBank. Compiled by Virke.

This short review demonstrates the benefits that the broader implementation of 'A Balancing Act' across the workplace could have for everyone involved, and thus how to take this work further in the form of organised tripartite co-operation.

2. 'He was so unassuming that he would end up falling behind even when he was walking by himself'

Main consideration: Establish and cultivate a 'Workplace Skills Centre'

It is important to ensure a solid footing in order to make visible and improve the role of the workplace as a central and equally valuable part of the national strategy for lifelong learning, and for establishing a more comprehensive skills policy. To do so, we must develop an independent body that understands and can see to the needs of workplace skills developments, on the basis of the workplace's own premises.

The Workplace Skills Centre

The concept 'A Balancing Act' is just one of several tools available through the skills policy. While it can be used to complement the other available tools, it does still require more co-ordination. We need to set up a structure, so that 'A Balancing Act' can continue to be used in a natural and appropriate way, and so that the concept can contribute to creating that synergy with the accompanying tools.

We therefore believe that having an independent body that can work on these aspects of the spectrum of skills policy, in which the workplace has been given responsibility, is something that must be established in order for the national skills policy strategy to truly succeed. This body would operate to co-ordinate the various interests in the workplace, take into consideration the experiences of workplace-driven skills development, and to transfer these back into policy development. The concept 'A Balancing Act' should be rooted in such a body, in which the workplace is responsible and sets the premises.

Other areas of responsibility that should be attributed to 'The Workplace Skills Centre':

AN APPROVAL SCHEME for learning outside of the formal education system. Meaning, learning that is not governed by an Education Act or is part of a qualification that is run/awarded by the formal education system.

The first step in the process of setting up an approval scheme should be to carry out a consequence analysis of establishing such a scheme, and of the different types of approval schemes available:

- Who is responsible for approval; ownership, judicial questions, etc.
- The scope; a broad or narrow scheme, a comprehensive or simple approval process, etc.
- The level of interaction with the formal education system; the use of a qualifications framework, shared or individual quality criteria, etc.

What could be the purpose of an approval scheme?

- Exercising rights: Student loan financing, admission basis for further education and training
- Creating trust: Placement in NQF, validation of prior learning, creating mobility within the workplace, more defined and improved learning paths
- Providing visibility: Marketing, competitive edge, volume/increase the market

Responsibility for the approval scheme within the tripartite co-operation model:

1. Framing, regulations, set of rules - responsibility of the authorities in co-operation with the industries.
2. Operationalisation, questions of interpretation - responsibility of the industries in co-operation with the authorities.

VALIDATION OF PRIOR LEARNING - within the workplace and aimed at the education system

A system for validating prior learning has four stages: Identify - document - value - certificate. 'A Balancing Act' has been developed for use during the first two stages, and must be worked on further to aid in a valuation and certification process in the workplace, and towards the education system.

Examples of relevant questions:

- Which rights are exercised through certification?
- In a framework based on levels, will all qualifications at a certain level provide a basis for or aid in qualifying for admission to the next level?
- What does 'level' mean if the reference is broader than that used for formal education? Such as with Ireland's different types of qualifications based on scope and purpose, and not based on the learning arena, for example.
- What should be the references for levels for non-formal qualifications?

Tripartite and bipartite co-operation

Develop appropriate forms of co-operation in the measuring of skills, specifically through bipartite co-operation, for example by making these official through systems of agreements, and in the building of tripartite co-operation between workplace industries and the authorities.

In order to build a bridge between bipartite activities and the tripartite co-operation, it may be a good idea if the secretariat of the Norwegian Committee on Skills Needs (KBU), which is now part of Skills Norway, could also work alongside those from the Workplace Skills Centre. That way, the workplace-regulated skills centre could contribute directly (on an equal footing as the government-driven directorate) to the work carried out at KBU, and further utilise the discussions within KBU in its own work.

In the collective wage negotiations of autumn 2020, skills emerged as a particularly important topic, and a shared effort for implementing 'A Balancing Act' was agreed upon, both in the co-operation between Virke and Handel og Kontor (the Norwegian Union of Commerce and Office Employees), and between Virke

and Fellesforbundet (the United Federation of Trade Unions).

Virke and Handel og Kontor have agreed to establish a Retail and Service Industry Skills Centre. This centre will be built up gradually, with the idea that it could be expanded alongside other parties, to eventually become the Workplace Skills Centre.

Virke and Fellesforbundet have agreed to set up a Skills Committee which will, among other things, discuss how future efforts around workplace skills can best be organised, for example through a Wholesalers' Skills Centre.

Handel og Kontor and Virke have also established a project financed through OU-resources: 'Changes to skills in the retail trade.'

Through this project, we aim to be able to:

- Provide a more concrete specification of what changes in skills needs we envisage happening in specific retail related roles; for the shop employees, middle managers and shop manager
- Establish a common language for the manager and employees to be able to discuss their skills needs and skills development
- Help the shops/chains to improve and create a sense of assurance so that they can have the right skills at the right time to be able to meet those changes that will occur within the retail industry

The project started in February 2020. The descriptions of the expected skills changes will be based primarily on the 50 or so interviews across four chains within the retail industry.

3. 'They talked past each other their entire lives, but still managed to feel as if they'd been hit'

Main consideration: A shared understanding and use of the learning outcome descriptions in both the workplace and education system.

We must do away with the idea that learning through formal education and learning through the workplace are in competition, and instead, strive to give positive attention to both simultaneously. That doesn't mean boosting one while depreciating the other, rather, it's more along the lines of aiming to create a win-win situation. In the concept 'A Balancing Act', we believe it is the learning outcome descriptions that are the key to communication, that enable us to converse with each other about skills in a way that is understandable for everyone. The learning outcome descriptions are, in our opinion, the most important element in providing that bridge between the demanders and providers of skills.

A strong dialogue requires that we share a platform of knowledge, and that we are able to understand the nuances within it. At the same time though, it would be desirable if a clarification of learning in the workplace, through the use of the learning outcome descriptions and other similar tools, could then influence the formal education system too.

Working group for the learning outcome descriptions

We propose that the Ministry of Education and Research set up a working group as part of the Norwegian National Skills Policy Strategy, with the task of reaching a unified understanding and use of the learning outcome descriptions in both the workplace and in the education system. The working group should consist of representatives from the authorities, the workplace industries, and the academic institutions.

Their work should then provide the basis for understanding and valuating learning, by using the learning outcome descriptions. It should also work towards the development of a common platform of knowledge, such that the relevant concepts can be understood in the same way by all involved, for example the intended and the achieved learning outcomes, learning outcomes and learning objectives.

'A Balancing Act' in education

Efforts should be initiated to test out how skills standards from the workplace can be used as a basis for education. A survey must be carried out first, to determine the connection between the skills standards and education standards aimed at the same roles that already exist in the workplace. Vocational colleges are already interested in using 'A Balancing Act' to develop offers of education in new areas of the workplace.

'Every time he baked, he would always bake different buns' - and that's totally fine!

'Bun baking' in the workplace is not pre-defined, standardised, or worded particularly well into clear levels that actually follow the organisation's hierarchy. It is an art that is so dynamic that it is difficult to describe within a simple framework, without destroying its dynamism. If the buns look exactly the same every time, then there is very little development taking place. The concept 'A Balancing Act' has been proven to work, both as a way to retain that internal dynamic, and as a way of creating an external understanding of what this really involves. It is a challenge to cater to this urge and need for predictability, while also truly valuing the diversity. In other words, to 'let a thousand flowers bloom,' while still being able to describe this process of 'blossoming' within a simple and understandable framework.

Conclusion

The concept 'A Balancing Act' contributes to the individual's understanding of what skills are, and provides them with the ability to communicate these skills, in such a way that others can value them. This then allows for an opportunity for the better utilisation of the population's skills, as well as a more strategic development of skills for both businesses and the individual.

'A Balancing Act' can also provide a decisive contribution to the overall skills policy. By describing the skills that are cultivated through the workplace, and documenting them in such a way that all who are involved across the workplace can relate to, and of which the formal education system could also understand and value, we would be in a place to form a comprehensive skills policy. We 'learn for life' in various different learning arenas,

from school, to work, to society as a whole, and it is the sum of these different forms of learning that provide us with skills. The skills policy must therefore also ensure the integration and strengthening of all learning arenas, in order to create a strong, holistic policy for utilising and developing skills. An overall understanding of skills would also make career counselling better equipped for enabling heightened transference across the learning arenas, based on a realistic understanding of the current situation and what the specific individual would be capable of mastering. The skills we use are cultivated in one way or another, that is, as a result of learning processes. These are often through distinctly different processes that occur within many different arenas.

By writing this report, we hope that employers and employees alike find inspiration, and have more confidence in the skills development that they participate in the workplace.

We also hope that they can utilise this tool, create a strong dialogue and establish more strategic skills development within their business. As a result, it should be more motivating and easier to use both time and resources on skills development.

This report is also grounded in the desire for the authorities and politicians who are engaged in skills and education, to gain a more concrete understanding of skills acquisition in the workplace, so that they can contribute more political tools to aid in the better valuation of these skills. However, this requires the ability to move outside of one's comfort zone. They should therefore trust the jury of The Global VPL Prize: 'A Balancing Act' is a unique concept in its integration of the workplace into the system of validation of prior learning¹⁸, and in its ability to build a bridge between academia and the workplace.

Finally, we hope that this report can also inspire each and every one of us to see ourselves as 'balancing artists', and to be proud of what we achieve.

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¹⁸ cf. page 81. 'The system' consists of the phases: Identify, document, value, certificate





Tel.: +47 22 54 17 00
Adr.: Henrik Ibsens gate 90, 0255 Oslo
Web: www.virke.no