

# **Put more wood behind the counselling-arrow**

## **Organisational and personal aspects in career development**

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## The organisational setting

*Five Steps Up* gives you a practical tool that you can use whenever you need to or want to coach a VPL process or to counsel. *Five Steps Up* is designed for organizations (incl. companies / institutes) who face HR issues in their work with organisations: what steps to take and how to make sure that you're not missing important aspects of the process? This chapter shows you how to get started with .

### *Five Steps Up.*

Five steps up is based on competencies, their values and their development. Competences can be as they are described in qualifications for certain professions, but is also can be the valuation of key competences as described by the European Commission. These competencies also include learning-to-learn, social and civic competences, initiative and sense of entrepreneurship and cultural awareness and expression.

In the first part of this chapter the process of Career guidance / Validating Prior Learning (VPL) is explained and described. Career guidance / VPL is a process of five phases and 10 steps. In this part all the phases and their interlinked steps are explained in terms of actions needed to be taken by an organisation that wants to excel in offering Career guidance and VPL as a tool for access to its learning programs and qualifications on the one hand and tailoring these programs to the individual needs and personal characteristics of the client on the other hand.

The second part offers the 'five steps up' for organisation and clients to fill in when developing and applying career guidance / VPL within their context and objectives and for developing and implementing career guidance / VPL within the organisations' programs. The target group for this program is organisation-staff members that work as HRM/HRD-staff, intake-officers, , managers, counsellors, curriculum-developers, assessors and trainer.

## 1. What is VPL?

VPL in general consists of five phases: commitment and awareness of the value of one's (development) competencies, recognition of personal competencies, valuation and/or validation of these competencies, (advice on the) development of one's competencies and finally structurally embedding this competence-based development process into a personal or organisation steered and owned policy (Duvekot 2005). Together these five phases constitute the VPL-process:

### ***Phase 1: Commitment and awareness***

An individual has to be aware of his/her own problems, needs and competencies; of the value, he/she is giving him/herself to these competencies and the value it has for others in certain contexts at certain moments. Being able to keep up your competencies in a 'made-to-measure way' is vital for this understanding. A competence is actually to know how to act in a certain way. Whether someone is competent becomes clear from his or her actions. Society has a major interest in capitalising on this, whether through formal learning pathways in the school system during certain periods in life or through Non-formal and informal pathways in other periods.

For organisations, it is vital to understand that investing in people means investing in the goals of the own organisation. This awareness should culminate in setting specific targets for the investment in individuals and the support the organisation can give to this *human resource development*.

This phase consists of two steps: raising awareness and setting the targets for VPL and counselling in general within the specific context. This phase is the real critical success factor for VPL and career guidance since if an organisation doesn't experience the necessity to think or rethink its mission and connect the results of this to the need to strengthen or even start up a pro-active form of human resource management. In general, this phase takes as much time as the other four phases together!

### ***Phase 2: Recognition***

Identifying or listing competencies is usually done with the help of a portfolio and with doing so, using different instruments, make the person more aware of their competences and understand how they have and can be developed and how they have and can be used for better employability, self-esteem, career management and VPL.

Apart from a description of work experience and diplomas, the portfolio is filled with other evidence of competencies acquired. Statements from employers, professional products, references, papers or photos undeniably show the existence of certain competencies. The evidence can be aimed at the profession or position the VPL procedure is developed for. In other cases it can be an 'open' portfolio or a complete overview. Evidence is sometimes aimed at validation, in other cases at personal profiling. The participant compiles the portfolio him/herself, with or without help.

This phase is made up of a preparatory and a retrospective step. The preparation aims at articulating the actual need for competencies in the organisation in the different function-profiles. In the retrospective step, the involved individuals fill in their portfolios and acquire the necessary proof of their learning in the (recent) past.

### ***Phase 3: the validation or assessment of competencies***

Then the content of the portfolio is valued or assessed, when necessary, followed by an extra formal assessment. This usually takes place by means of a criterion based interview, STAR(RT) exercises and by observation during work or. Assessors compare the competencies of an individual with the standard for valuing, that has been set in the given context and the opportunities for optimal utilisation. That standard will be used to measure the qualities of the participant. His/her learning

path can differ, but the results, the learning outcomes count. This second step results in either a validation on an organisation, sector or national level in the form of certificates, diplomas or career moves, or in a validation in the form of an advice on career-opportunities.

This phase needs different steps:

- Setting the standard of the specific VPL-process. It can in principal be any standard that meets the needs of the individual and/or the organisation, e.g. a national or sectorial qualification-standard or an internal standard. Together with the standard a choice can be made of the way the assessment will take place;
- The validation itself, being the assessment of the portfolio and valuing it with correspondence to the given standard and targets of the organisation;
- The validation of the learning evidence within the given standard.

After this phase, the retrospective part of the VPL-process is concluded. The next phases concentrate on the prospective power of VPL.

#### ***Phase 4: the development plan***

This phase of career guidance or VPL process aims at the development of the individual by turning the validation and/or advice into a personal action/development plan. On the basis of the valued competencies and clarity about the missing competencies or available strong competencies, a personal development plan is made up. This plan is about learning activities that will be done in formal or non-formal learning environments, in work situations, during a change of position, by offering coaching or by creating an environment in which informal learning is stimulated.

This phase has two steps. First, a match should be made between the individual's development plan and the goals of the organisation. This match could be made by simply stating that any kind of individual learning is also for the benefit of the organisation. Mostly, however, the match will be agreed upon by making the personal development plan a formal part of the broader organisation plan.

Secondly, the actual learning or development of the individual will be started up. In this step, the individual learns/develops his or herself on a 'made-to-measure basis', which means learning/developing irrespective and independent of form, time, place and environment.

#### ***Phase 5: structural implementation of VPL***

The last phase of the career guidance / VPL process focuses at the structural implementation in a personal strategy for updating the portfolio, further development or in the human resource management (HRM) of an organisation. The results of a pilot have to be evaluated in order to show the way the implementation can take place on a 'made-to-measure basis'. A organisation should be able to use VPL structurally for the specific goals that had been set in the pilot. Any new goals should also be added easily to this new policy. The same goes for the reciprocity of setting learning goals by the individual him/herself in the dynamic learning society.

Career guidance and VPL offers a personal development-strategy in which the organisation-context are crucial for keeping up with the speed of competence-development in the society. On the individual level this calls for filling in the five phases of the career guidance / VPL process in ten steps. The steps to be taken for the organisation are shown in the figure below, including the relevant questions in each step.

## 'Career Guidance and VPL in the Organisation: the process in 10 steps

Phase	Step by step	What to do?	Why?	Internal input	External services
I. Commitment	<b>1. awareness</b> <i>What kind of organisation is this &amp; do we want to invest in human capital?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vision of "the glass is half full": focusing on all kinds of learning</li> <li>responsibilities of organisation</li> <li>mission</li> </ul>	Creating a vision of organisation targets and opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Giving space to 'future-watching' on levels of management and work floor</li> <li>Using social events of the organisation</li> <li>Getting knowledge on formal, non-formal and informal learning, incl. summative and formative goals</li> </ul>	<p>All stakeholders organise information campaigns on the topic of pro's and con's of lifelong learning within any given organisation;</p> <p>On macro-level they also offer an analysis of society and its development &amp; trends, including demonstrating why and how organisations should/could react (or better 'pro-act')</p> <p>- stakeholders formulate general principles for VPL concerning: quality, access and transparency</p>
	<b>2. starting up &amp; setting targets</b> <i>What are the aims of the organisation? &amp; What are the needs of the organisation in relation to the aims?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inventory</li> <li>Swot-analysis</li> </ul>	Making the vision concrete	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Description of context organisation, ambitions and opportunities</li> <li>Identifying the leaders/pioneers</li> </ul>	Advice on existing public/private services available for VPL and counselling-aspirations of organisations
		Organisation Development Plan, incl. planning and budget	Demand articulation organisation level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Setting the goals for an internal VPL-process</li> <li>Putting together an internal VPL-team</li> <li>Organising an informative meeting for all</li> </ul>	<p>Information on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>how to do this</li> <li>supply of external services</li> <li>available financial back-up</li> <li>ownership of the counselling and VPL</li> </ul>
II. Recognition	<b>3. preparation:</b> determination organisation profile <i>How is the organisation going to determine the need for half-filled glasses?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Function profiles</li> <li>Portfolio format</li> </ul>	Demand articulation individual level + instrumentation of one's half-filled glass	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Making up your mind concerning 'language'</li> <li>Description of function profiles</li> <li>Competence catalogue</li> <li>Setting the portfolio</li> <li>Setting the budget (time and money)</li> <li>Intake of candidates</li> </ul>	<p>Information on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>how to do this</li> <li>generic list of competences and counselling aims</li> <li>information on portfolio formats</li> </ul>

	<b>4. retrospective, connecting to the organisation profile</b>  <i>How to demonstrate the individual profile or the state of the art of one's half-filled glass?</i>	Filling in portfolios by candidates Quicksan Interview	Working on the individual contribution to oneself and the organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• guidance of candidates</li> <li>• quick scan or self-assessment</li> <li>• formats for eligible proof/evidence</li> <li>• setting up a portfolio-databank, including access to a 2-yearly update (voucher)</li> <li>• examples and role models</li> </ul>	Information on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• how to do this</li> <li>• examples</li> <li>• usable standards and assessment tools</li> <li>• quality assurance</li> </ul>
<b>III. Validation</b>  <i>(Step 7 refers specific to VPL / formal accreditation of competences, although VPL can refer to less formal standards / steps in career)</i>	<b>5. setting the standard</b>  <i>How to match individual profiles to organisation profiles?</i>	Choosing the assessment-method	Making a choice is part of the 'made-to-measure' approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• setting the actual standard according to the goals</li> <li>• self-assessment</li> <li>• assessment-protocol</li> <li>• showing perspectives (summative/formative)</li> </ul>	Information on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• how to do this</li> <li>• access to assessment facilities</li> <li>• external assessors</li> </ul>
	<b>6. valuation</b>  <i>valuating the half-filled glasses</i>	Assessment: A. Formal/summative (assessor/accreditation)  B. Informal/formative (HRD/training)	Finding out personal abilities and ambitions, within the organisation context Setting formative goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• organising assessment</li> <li>• internal assessment</li> <li>• filling in formative perspective(s)</li> </ul>	Information on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• how to do this</li> <li>• external assessment</li> <li>• advice on recognition / certification</li> <li>• 2nd opinion facility</li> <li>• right to appeal</li> </ul>
	<b>7. validation Online in case of VPL</b>  <i>validating the half-filled glasses</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Certification (summative goals)</li> <li>• Personal advice on development</li> </ul>	Capitalising on personal abilities and ambitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• organising summative perspectives &amp; filling in internal summative goals</li> <li>• portfolio's taken up in portfolio-databank for 2-yearly update</li> </ul>	Information on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• how to do this</li> <li>• filling in external summative goals</li> <li>• advice on personal development plans (PDP)</li> <li>• mutual recognition (crossing borders of sectors/regions)</li> </ul>
<b>IV. Development</b>	<b>8. prospective: connecting the individual to the organisation's future</b>  <i>How to make up a personal development plan (PDP)?</i>	Formulation of PDP	Organising 'learning/developing made-to-measure'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• matching PDP with Organisation Plan</li> <li>• proposal for financing PDP</li> <li>• contract with public/private services</li> <li>• guidance</li> <li>• information on individual rights &amp; duties</li> </ul>	Information on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• how to match</li> <li>• how to finance</li> <li>• how to guide</li> <li>• sectoral/national rights &amp; duties</li> </ul>
	<b>9. working on PDP's</b>  <i>individual action: developing/learning made to measure</i>	Learning/developing made to measure	People learn and develop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• making sure services offer 'made-to-measure'</li> <li>• individual guidance</li> <li>• quality-control by VPL-team</li> </ul>	Information on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• how to do this</li> <li>• quality-assurance</li> </ul>

<b>V. Implementa- tion / empowerment</b>	<b>10. structural implementation &amp; empowerment</b>  <i>How did it go?</i>  <i>If ok, how to embed VPL structural in the organisation policy (training/personnel- policy)</i>	Evaluation of the pilot	Making a decision on structural embedding VPL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• evaluation form for candidates</li> <li>• VPL-team advises organisation on future use of VPL</li> </ul>	Information on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• how to do this</li> </ul>
		Embedding the results in HRM	Structural embedding VPL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VPL embedded in HRM</li> <li>• Knowledge how to use (demand-steered) public/private services</li> <li>• Vouchers for 2-yearly update of portfolios</li> <li>• PDP replaces 'classical' personnel-cycle</li> <li>• VPL also sets the norm for customer-oriented guidance</li> </ul>	Information on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• how to continue this with flanking public/private services</li> <li>• using national portfolio-databank</li> </ul>

## 2. What does *Five Steps Up* do?

*Five Steps Up* shows you the steps you need to take to embed VPL procedures in the policy of the organisation, and design your VPL procedures, start them and run them. *Five Steps Up* takes you step-by-step through the process you need to follow to make the right decisions in the VPL process.

### How to use *Five Steps Up*?

When you follow *Five Steps Up* from start to finish, the result is an overview of the complete and ideal picture of how VPL procedures can function optimally in your organisation. But as a professional, you know that the real world is far from ideal, and the only certainty is uncertainty. In the course of your discussions you have no doubt discovered that the will to apply career guidance and VPL procedures differs among companies and among clients. One organisation may have a very specific need for career development and VPL to address, while the next may be just starting to develop their learn about VPL. Some clients may have very outspoken ideas about their careers, while others take things as they come. As a professional, it is your job to make an assessment of the next step the client or the organisation needs to make into the world of career guidance VPL. But whatever step that is, you can always take time to recall the steps so far (whether for yourself, or, if necessary, for your discussion partner), which together make up the solid foundation that the next step can be built on. This is what makes *Five Steps Up* a tool that you can tailor to your own needs. And, paradoxically, the better you get with using the tools, the less you need it. In a way, *Five Steps Up* is a process that is designed to phase itself out.

### Stay practical!

The five steps of *Five Steps Up* are set up in sequence, that is, in an order that goes “from point A to point B.” But be sure you adjust to the real-world situation in your work, and apply the steps in a different order if you need to. As you go through all the questions on the cards, it may seem like a career guidance or VPL process is designed to produce a mountain of paperwork and a vast and complicated checklist for every step of the way. Be aware of this, and try to avoid it, because piles and piles of paperwork can be off-putting and have a demotivational effect. Use *Five Steps Up* as a road map for your discussion, not as a fixed script!

You will find that for many of the issues addressed in *Five Steps Up*, smaller companies in particular do not have everything set out “perfectly” on paper. A lot of knowledge is in the boss’s head or if not in his then one of his client’s. This is why we recommend that you don’t show the cards to your discussion partner too quickly; that could create the wrong impression, and ultimately work against you. Go with the knowledge and ideas of the people in the company, even those not on paper, and use the cards as a checklist. In essence, be as flexible with this tool as you are with your discussion partner.



## Five Steps Up ..... in your organisation!

### Step 1: The Climate

**Key question:**

**Is the organisation sufficiently aware of the essential nature of learning within the organisation?**

**Is there enough of a basis to start working with validation of previously acquired competencies?**

- Does the board and management endorse the importance of learning and training for the achievement of the organisation objectives? Is there regular communication on this issue?
- Is there an education/training policy for all staff? Check whether:
  - a vision of learning and training has been formulated;
  - learning and training is embedded in the staff policy;
  - learning and training is directly linked with the organisation's market strategy.
- Does the company inform all personnel about the different possibilities of Work-)life Guidance and VPL and has been clearly stated what the costs in time and money and the benefits for the employee as well as for the employer are?
- Is the staff encouraged to develop in the direction the organisation desires? Check whether:
  - a clear course has been set out/is being followed, and whether there are plans available for the coming years;
  - the demand for staff, for today and in the future, is formulated in terms of competencies and levels;
  - the staff are offered access to "learning" with the support of the organisation.
- Is there a clear vision of the certification of staff within the organisation, and is there sufficient insight into the procedures and options to certify or qualify?
- Does the organisation use certification to increase the deployability of the staff?
- Does the employer makes a contract with the employee, clearly stating what is expected from both employer as employee, what will happen / who will have access with the outcome / information/ data during and after the intervention, ethical issues like respect, attitude, etc.

### Step 2: The Focus

**Key question:**

**Is there a sufficient view, among both the organisation and the staff, of the competencies to be developed in relation to the objectives those competencies are intended to help reach?**

**Is there sufficient insight into the costs involved in learning and training?**

- Has the organisation mapped out some or all of the following elements? Check whether:
  - the organisation has mapped out the desired competencies for the achievement of the business goals;
  - the organisation has a picture of the potential of the active staff in relation to the business goals;
  - the organisation has an insight into the costs involved in certifying and training/retraining staff.
- Has an analysis been made in response to the question of how much board and management wish to invest (time/money) into the upgrading/certification of the competencies of the staff?

- Does the labour organisation have a plan for specifying the organisation vision for staff, both in terms of content and method (communication)?

### Step 3: The Preparations

#### Key question:

**Are sufficient preparations being made for the launch of (Work-)life Guidance and/or VPL processes in the organisation?**

- Does the organisation have profiles available for every qualification? Does each profile also give an indication of the roles that the qualification-holder fills?
- Are the goals that the organisation wishes to achieve with VPL set out on paper, and are they accessible to all staff?
- Are there tools available that staff can use to map out their own experiences and expertise by means of documentary evidence (portfolio)? Are there people in the organisation who know the ways to collect documentary evidence for the portfolio, and can they get these methods across to others?
- Is there a view of the options for external support for the engagement of tools, advising and financing?
- Can the same be said for the options for certification and upgrading?
- Are the supervisors willing to work with the portfolio? Do they know which people can function as role models for the organisation?
- Does the organisation know how many people, and which, it wants to start a further guidance and/or VPL process with?

### Step 4: The validation procedure

#### Key question:

**Is the procedure sufficiently clear to everyone involved?**

**Have the standards for validation been properly communicated to every the staff involved?**

- Is the organisation capable of determining at the outset whether a person already meets the set requirements? What external requirements are used in making this determination?
- Has the organisation set a protocol for the validation of portfolios, and does it communicate this protocol clearly to the staff? Does it also indicate the external parties the organisation works with?
- Does the organisation clearly establish which persons are involved in this procedure and what their roles are?
- Does the organisation make sure that all people involved are adequately facilitated in performing their role and task in (Work-)life Guidance and VPL procedures? Check whether:
  - the organisation holds development meetings with the staff;
  - the organisation can coach staff in portfolio-making;
  - the organisation is capable of evaluating documentary evidence.
- Does the organisation identify which trainings and other development opportunities are available within and/or outside the organisation?

### Step 5: The Feedback and look ahead

**Key question:**

**Has the application of VPL processes resulted in the desired effects for the whole organisation?**

**Should goals and tools be adjusted for future processes?**

**Is there a view to the potential for using VPL in the future?**

- Do people within the organisation evaluate whether the upgrading/certification process has contributed to the achievement of the organisation goals? What is the ultimate return in relation to the desired return?
- Do people in the organisation evaluate with the persons involved what the results of the process have been for the clients and the organisation?
- Are people in the organisation communicating to the persons not directly involved what the results of the process have been for the client subjects and the organisation?
- Are the process and the results officially documented in the POP?
- Is the cooperation with any external parties documented?
- Has the organisation gained insight in to potential for (Work-)life Guidance and VPL procedures in the future?
- Is the process of (Work)life Guidance and/or VPL clearly finalised, both parties informed, documents or given back to the owner, or stored in a safe place (agreed by the owner) or destroyed.

## Five Steps Up ..... for the client

### The client

#### Step 1: The Climate

##### Key question:

**Is the client sufficiently aware of the essential nature of learning within the organisation?**

**Is there enough of a basis among co-workers and elsewhere in the organisation to start working with validation of previously acquired competencies?**

- Does the client have a perspective on its own role and relevance of qualifications on the labour market?  
Check whether:
  - he can indicate why the opportunity for lifelong learning is important to him;
  - he can indicate why learning within this organisation is important;
  - he can indicate why learning is important for his client career;
  - he can indicate why collecting documentary evidence of what he can do is important from a career perspective.
- Is the client's social environment one that is receptive to learning?
- Is the client prepared to invest in himself?
- Does the organisation encourage on-going development on the part of its client?
- Is the client capable of reflecting on its own career and planning its next moves? Is it clear within the organisation who the client can turn to regarding these issues?

### The client

#### Step 2: The Focus

##### Key question:

**Does the client have a sufficient view of the competencies to be developed in relation to the objectives those competencies are intended to help reach, both for the organisation and the client himself?**

**Does the client have a good insight into the costs involved learning and training?**

- Does the client have tools available to help him gain insight into his own competencies?
- Does the client have insight into the commitment (time/financial) involved in upgrading/certifying his competencies? Can he get this information relatively easily?
- Does the client have attractive prospects in mind that he wishes to achieve with his efforts?

### The client

#### Step 3: The Preparations

##### Key question:

**Are sufficient preparations being made for the launch of VPL processes in the organisation?**

- Does the client know his job profile, and does he know the documents that describe the goals the organisation wishes to achieve using VPL processes?
- Does the client know how to work with a portfolio, does he understand its purpose and does he endorse the usefulness of a portfolio? Does he also know who to go to for advice?

- Can the client express whether he wants to participate in a VPL process and why?

**The client****Step 4: The validation procedure****Key question:**

**Is the procedure sufficiently clear to the client?**

**Have the standards for validation been properly communicated to every client involved?**

- Does every client know the requirements he has to meet? Is the communication on the requirements clear and transparent?
- Is the client aware of each step in the validation procedure?
- Is the client willing to pursue the required and requested supplemental education called for as a result of the validation?

**The client****Step 5: The Feedback and look ahead****Key question:**

**Did the completion of the VPL process have the desired effect?**

**Should goals and tools be adjusted for future processes?**

**Is there a view to the potential for using VPL in the future?**

- Is the client in a qualification to evaluate whether he has achieved his objectives with the process?
- Does the client have an insight into potential for VPL procedures in the future?
- Does the client have a clear understanding of the management and maintenance of the portfolio?