

WBL-PRO Professional Peer Network: The team talks with the professionals – Nina Dimitrova, Sofia, Bulgaria

Today we are happy to invite you to come to Sofia and meet **Nina Dimitrova**, philologist, PhD. A certified career counselor (GCDF) and a manager of Todor Kableshkov University's Career Development Center. She provides services in the area of career counseling, maintains contacts with employees and organizes trainings for students, technical and corporative presentations, career days and other events. Participant in projects implemented with the financial support of Operational Programmes co-financed by EU funds.



Please find below what she has shared with the WBL-PRO team:

1. Please share with us what the main advantages with respect to work-based learning are:

The lack of qualified workforce in our country due to the demographic crisis, the opportunities to study and work in other European countries, the education with emphasis on theoretical knowledge which most educational institutions provide to their learners together with other reasons lead to the need of elaboration of mechanisms supporting work-based learning. Introducing and implementing of WBL by the employers requires undoubtedly big investments but are significant factors for companies' prosperity and employers' branding in the increasing competitiveness on the labour market.

According to me one of the advantages of work-based learning is that the focus is on the acquisition of specific knowledge and skills required by the respective employer and needed for undertaking certain responsibilities at the workplace. Additionally the WBL effectiveness is bigger because of its implementation in real working environment, its practical orientation and higher motivation and involvement of the other employees in the process.

2. Please share with us what the main challenges with respect to work-based learning are. Please describe any solutions with respect to challenges and/or weaknesses related to work-based learning:

One of the main challenges when implementing work-based learning according to me is the definition of knowledge, skills and competences which the workers/employees should possess for the successful conduction of the current tasks as well as for managing the challenges of the dynamically developing working environment.

Possible solution: Attracting professionals in a certain field as work-based learning experts. They know in detail the working processes and their specifics. Additionally it is needed to follow and be acquainted with the world tendencies in professions and job positions.

Another important challenge is the assessment and analysis of the employees' skills and the identification of the learning needs. The task is very complex having in mind that an employee at a certain workplace can be a representative of four different generations each of which has a different profile: knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, expectations and learning needs.

Possible solution: Implementation of individual approach to representatives of different generations groups and if possible to every employee personally. Ongoing assessment in order to update the available information for the learning needs and the progress evaluation of the workers/employees in the learning process.

Another challenge connected with the previous one can be the search of the most effective work-based learning approach.

Possible solution: Following the identification of group and individual learning needs - organizing trainings and seminars on the most important common topics. If a constant need of acquisition of new qualifications or updating of the existing ones is acknowledged - creation of professional training center in the company's structure. If there is a learning need (and possibility) identified in accordance with the individual profiles of the workers/employees - supporting their participation in qualification courses organized outside the organization, including in the higher education system through payment of fees, providing days off, etc.

Important challenge related again to the previous one is retaining the workers and employees in the organization following the upgrade of their qualification as a result of the work-based learning in order to create capacity and to provide sustainability of the results in a long-term perspective.

Possible solution: Implementation by the employer of mechanisms for recognition of the acquired higher qualification as a result of WBL through a certain certification and connecting the learning outcomes with material incentives and/or providing possibilities for career development.

The manager has a key role in the work-based learning process both for managing the usual work activities and supporting the employees' and workers' development. He/she has to possess a broad complex of knowledge and skills: perfect professional competences in the respective field and will to share his/her experience, excellent leadership skills, communication skills (in particular for providing feedback), specific coaching skills as well as personal qualities and skills, especially skills to establish trust,

emotional intelligence, etc. Thus, finding and retaining the suitable managers is one of the challenges for work-based learning implementation.

Possible solution: Headhunting is not impossible but can be problematic (difficult adaptation, lack of acceptance on behalf of the team, lack of knowledge on the specifics of the work, etc.). Probably the better solution is identify the talents in the organization, investment in their development through providing different trainings and creating preconditions for increasing their motivation.

3. Please share what the most important knowledge, skills and competences for the work-based learning professional are according to you. What kind of trainings are necessary to acquire them?

Work-based learning professional should possess complex knowledge and skills. They have to be aware of the specifics of the business environment and the tendencies in the development of the Professions and job positions. Based on this they have to able to evaluate and analyse the learning needs of the employees and workers and to find and offer effective solutions.

WBL professional should be able to implement individual approach based on the concrete learning needs of everyone so that his/her potential will be fully developed and implemented.

They should know the specifics of the different age groups presented among the employees and workers in the organization, in particular the learning approaches they prefer and that are most effective: learning through experience, acquired through autonomous work tasks conduction, learning from people (mentors, team and department managers, etc.) or formal training (courses, seminars, etc.).

Related to the above mentioned, the WBL professionals should be in a process of a ongoing learning and Improvement themselves in order to keep up to date with the new educational and training technologies and resources (online trainings, gamification, etc.).

Please feel most welcome to like our facebook page and join the linkedin group to get acquainted with many best practices and other useful materials, tools and resources supporting the high quality performance of work-based professionals around Europe and beyond its borders!

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