

WBL-PRO Professional Peer Network: The team talks with the professionals – Stefan Kalpachev, Varna, Bulgaria

Today we are very happy to present to you **Stefan Kalpachev** from Varna, Bulgaria. Stefan is the Manager of the scientific project Comparative analysis of private sector employees' professional interests. He is also part of the team who created UEBN at the University of Economics - Varna, <http://uebn.ue-varna.bg/bg/>.



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.

According to me the advantages of work-based learning are in several directions:

1. It supports acquisition of skills which cannot be acquired in the sphere of formal education.
2. Creates professional contacts in the sphere potentially desirable for the professional realization of the learner.
3. Due to the interaction with concrete working environment and groups of people with similar personalities the students/pupils enhance their awareness about their own preferences, reactions and emotions towards the given environment and people as well as the usual career models of growth. This circumstance improves students'/pupils' skills to orient themselves in the available career information which often confuses them due to its structure. As a whole all these significantly improve their career planning skills and goals' setting.
4. Enriches students'/pupils' experience which can be used in application documents and during job interviews.
5. Enhances their self-confidence, decreases their negative self-talking and improves their self-presentation in job searching situations.

6. Last but not least work-based learning enhances the readiness for educational material acquisition when students/pupils see the implementation of the knowledge in the real working environment.

2. Please share with us what the main challenges with respect to work-based learning are.

As an academic mentor and responsible for the practical education at my Department I must draw the attention to 4 aspects:

1. Positive behavior and discipline of the learner at the workplace.
2. Readiness on behalf of the company to accept and train learners.
3. Synchrony between school and training institution.
4. Documentation and legislation which regulates work-based learning.

According to me and related to those aspects the challenges are in the following directions:

1. A large number of learners do not act responsibly at their workplaces.
2. There is no understanding in many of the companies that when real work is assigned to students/pupils they are much more motivated to continue their development and thus to contribute not only to their own development but also to the one of the company. Often accepting learners is a fixed idea due to which documentation at high management is elaborated but the real implementers do not possess the required competences and motivation to train other people.
3. If learners conduct useful work for the company they should receive remuneration which faces legal obstacles in our country.
4. The synchrony between the educational institution and the training institutions depends on the teachers as well as on the readiness of the concrete mentors to accept innovation in their spheres. Often teachers and mentors use different terminology which often is due to the fact that the mentor has self-educated him/herself at the workplace during the public conditions changes during the last 20 years.

3. Please describe any solutions with respect to challenges and/or weaknesses related to work-based learning.

In regard with the learners readiness I think it mostly depends on their upbringing as well as the introduction of Career Days at primary school level.

Implementation of specific trainings for mentors on behalf of the companies which can be conducted by the educational institutions. These trainings should provide possibilities for opinion exchange among the mentors.

Legal regulation of the remuneration or the lack of it in internships which should be lower than the official minimal salary in the country. Different approaches to inform companies about policies and practices in regulation of internship programs.

Defining procedures for creation of programs for work-based learning no matter of it is dual education or internship program.

4. 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?

a/ Soft skills - empathy, advising, adaptivity. In accordance with the work character - team work, problem solving, critical thinking, etc. According to me these specific skills are improved as a result of the professionals' experience and strive for perfection although their basic level can be developed in trainings. I think that self-improvement and elimination of burnout signals should be object of opinion exchange among the professionals with their peers who can share their leading practices.

b/ Professional skills and knowledge in the learning area which are developed through trainings and of course through experience in the given sphere.

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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