Anerkennung informell erworbener Kompetenzen

(Recognition of Informally Acquired Skills)

Information for Potential Project Partners

A project run by

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General Conditions

The AiKo project (AiKo - Anerkennung informell erworbener Kompetenzen – Recognition of Informally Acquired Skills) is a project run by AgenturQ (project management) and funded by the Baden-Württemberg Ministry of Finance and Economics within Allianz für Fachkräfte (Alliance for Skilled Personnel).

Scientific steering of AiKo is by KIT’s (Karlsruhe Institute of Technology) Institute of Vocational and General Education and the Institute of Natural Sciences, Geography and Engineering of Pädagogische Hochschule Heidelberg (Heidelberg University of Education).

In the context of the European Lifelong Learning Initiative, the Committee of Inquiry “Fit for life in the knowledge-based society – vocational schools, training, and further education” established by the Baden-Württemberg Landtag has dealt with, among other things, the question as to how people in Baden-Württemberg can optimally further their professional and personal development and thus contribute above all to preventing skills shortages. In that respect, informal learning increasingly gains in importance and, thus, also the need for documenting or certifying learning achievements (skills) that arise from informal learning. In that way, the results of professional learning can be made visible and job changes and professional career planning can be supported.

Initial Situation

The firms and companies in Germany are confronted increasingly with a great lack of future specialists. One of the ways of solving such so-called “skills shortage” is to qualify the semiskilled and nonskilled employees and further qualify the skilled workers. Such staff often have the required skills and knowledge but do not possess the certificates (skilled-worker or comparable qualifications) needed to occupy the advertised or vacant jobs.

More than other employees, semiskilled and nonskilled personnel are in precarious job situations and more often and for longer periods of time are struck by unemployment. At the same time, they are assigned to the group of personnel that does not participate in or has no access to advanced training. To improve this seemingly hopeless situation, one resorts today to appealing to the social responsibility of companies and creates measures intended to help such staff to e.g., obtain educational qualifications. The measures taken, however, may not be effective when employees are not used to learning or have gained negative learning experiences. Considering the companies’ social responsibility and the threatening shortage of skilled staff that can be employed flexibly, a system that ensures recognition of acquired but not certified knowledge may offer a suitable solution.

Skilled workers, too, often have more knowledge and more skills than is evident from their certificates. They may have had their specific learning careers and may have developed into experts in a certain field without having obtained official records or degrees. It is not rare that the skills of a specific person do not become known before that person leaves the company. In view of a threatening skills shortage, also the potentials of such qualified staff are treasures to be made accessible and utilized.
Transparency, in the above context, increasingly gains in importance. On the one hand, employees want to show, document, and have appreciated their skills and knowledge. On the other hand, companies are interested in fully utilizing the potential of their staff and in binding them for longer periods of time. Although employees and personnel managers are interested in each other, it is as yet difficult to find a joint solution. Employees in Germany so far have no possibility of presenting their knowledge such that personnel managers can recognize their skills and compare them with those of possible competitors. On both sides, however, there is a demand for new ways.

**Project Objectives**

The AiKo project proposes an innovative way of adapting learning habits of skilled, semiskilled, and nonskilled personnel to ensure an improved, more precise certification with regard to the requirements related to existing and potential jobs. Many people without formal educational achievements are assumed to have learned many things and to have developed, trained and educated themselves further as regards the company’s requirements. Such learning is referred to as "learning in the process of work". The respective employees are knowledge carriers and high-potential staff for future companies and as such increasingly are in the center of attention of managers and personnel managers.

AiKo is to provide a tool by means of which specific day-to-day work learning results obtained by the semiskilled and nonskilled staff can be recorded and documented. Besides, the data documented will be standardized such that the personnel managers in companies or in employment agencies are enabled to evaluate the employees’ qualifications and their (possible) suitability for vacant jobs.
In a first step, interviews are carried out with both the employees (job seekers, too) who have acquired informal skills and with their supervisors and the respective personnel managers to specify more precisely the demand for a tool that certifies informally acquired skills. In addition, the representatives of chambers of industry and commerce, other organizations, and employment agencies are interviewed to gain additional information about the significance of recognizing informal skills.

The interviews are intended to determine the areas in which informal skills are achieved and the significance of the non-recognition of such skills to the respective groups of persons. The results are expected to reveal the requirements the tool must meet to be of definitive relevance to the professional experience of all of the respective groups of persons.

Anonymized cases will be construed from the results obtained and will be analyzed in expert seminars. By doing so, a deeper understanding will be gained of informally acquired skills which, in turn, will provide the basis for the tool to be developed.

A tool meeting the demands determined will be developed in a second step. A more precise specification is inferred from existing instruments ensuring recognition of informally acquired skills in other European countries. Besides, the understanding of informally acquired skills is assessed and presented in a well-founded way with regard to the present state of discussions.

Emphasis is placed on developing a tool that is acceptable to and viable for all persons concerned. Our challenge is to establish a balance between the precision of results and their validity on one hand and the manageability of the obtained data on the other hand.

In the first instance, the tool will be conceived as an evaluation sheet which, based on certain tasks from the work process, allows to identify specific skills. The evaluation sheet will reconcile the objective and subjective assessments of the respective skills into a comparable result based on which the skills of the individual can be assessed.

Since, again, it is important to obtain feedbacks from all persons involved, all participants are interviewed by means of questionnaires on their opinions of the evaluation sheet.
The central objective of the project is the participatory development of a functional and user-friendly software-based tool by means of the results obtained in the previous steps. The development, once again, will explicitly consider the requirements of the German Qualifications Framework (Deutscher Qualifikationsrahmen – DQR) to allow for integration in the European Qualifications Framework (EQR) and ensure comparability of the respective skills outside of Germany.

Finally, the developed tool will be tested in practice and be distributed among potential users. To demonstrate the tool’s significance and possibilities, adequate workshops and seminars will be offered to all interested persons.

Role of the Cooperating Firms and Companies

The cooperating firms and companies play important roles in the interviews. The project staff depends on being given access to personnel employed in production, maintenance, and work preparation. Interviews will be made with employees from one (or several) of these three working areas, their immediate supervisors, and the respective human resources staff. It is important to note that the interviews are not meant to spy on any company or on specific data but are intended to identify existing skills that have been learned or acquired informally. The success of the project thus will depend on the learning persons and their working environments. Together with experts from industry and science, similarities that can serve as a basis for comprehensive recognition of the skills will be determined based on the interview results. The companies or their working conditions will not be judged or evaluated.

From the beginning, the companies participating have the possibility of contributing to the process of developing the tool for recognition of informally acquired skills. Feedbacks from persons working in the above different areas are needed as the project progresses. Permanent contact to all participating groups of persons is explicitly provided for within the project schedule.

Already during tool development, participating employees can get acquainted with the tool and, thus, will be able to act as experts once it gets implemented in their company.