

WLP - Case story 6 – United Kingdom

Transition from *active piloting* to *promoting knowledge transfer* on workplace learning

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*Case stories for the Leonardo da Vinci project
Work & Learning Partners
Bremen 30.9.2006*

Contents

Introductory remarks

[Section 1:](#) The pilot case on quality development
across the supply chain

[Section 2:](#) Measures to promote knowledge transfer
via career services

...

[Concluding remarks](#)

Introductory remarks

The 'case stories' consist of a series of presentations that have been prepared for the Leonardo da Vinci project 'Workplace learning partnerships (WLP)'. This presentation focuses on the cases that have been analysed by the research partners of the WLP project in the United Kingdom (mainly in England).

With their contributions to the WLP project the research partners from the UK have drawn attention to the following issues:

1. The role of *quality development measures* across a supply chain in improving workplace learning and cooperation between enterprises and training providers;
2. The role of *career services* (for adults) in promoting knowledge transfer on workplace learning and in *shaping related web resources*.

The first section characterises an early pilot case as an industry-driven cooperation arrangement in which public training providers have been involved as supporting agencies. The second section analyses the prospects for promoting knowledge transfer after a unique cooperation case. The approach that is presented links this issue to the parallel project on developing the career services as support agencies for promoting workplace learning.

[Move to next section...](#)
[Back to the contents...](#)

WLP - Case story 6 - UK - Section 1

In the country reports for the WLP project the UK research partners have presented insights into an earlier pilot project that focused on knowledge processes and learning in supply chains (the KLASS project). For the WLP project the key point of interest was, how the quality development measures (across a supply chain) could contribute to workplace learning and to partnership development.

From this perspective the UK research partners have provided extensive background information on changes in the automotive sector and on the use of networked learning approaches in promoting quality development in industry-driven initiatives. For the joint discussion of WLP project the key issues that have been raised are the following:

- Characterisation of *quality development initiatives* as specific *research & development partnerships* that contribute to the *quality of workplace learning*;
- Characterisation of the role of peer review visits, workshops and of specific assignments for the developmental approach,
- Characterisation of the role of public training provisions (and of their assessment procedures) for the recognition of the learning results of the participants.

These issues are presented briefly in the following commentary spaces. The second section will shift the emphasis from this domain specific pilot project to a follow-up activity that tries to support knowledge transfer on workplace learning across different industrial sectors.

Section 1.0.

[Move to next section...](#)
[Back to the contents...](#)

WLP - Case story 6 - UK - Section 1

Commentary space 1

The original pilot project was promoted by manufacturing and distributing companies, a college, several universities and sectoral stakeholder organisations that provided active support for the project. The key objectives were to

- clarify and meet organisational and inter-organisational learning needs across multi-company and multi-stage product supply systems and
- identify and utilise an appropriate mix of distance learning facilities that were suitable for individual learners, SMEs and project learning networks.

The project developed two types of learning networks which were designed for different target groups. The “type 1” networks involved key actors for implementing the necessary changes at the shop floor whilst the “type 2” networks were aimed at senior managers of SMEs to ensure the continuity of such quality development measures after the end of the funded project period.

Commentary space 1

[Starting point](#)

[Key measures](#)

[Specific issues](#)

Section 1.1.

[Move to next section...](#)

[Back to the contents...](#)

WLP - Case story 6 - UK - Section 1

Commentary space 2

The **type 1 networks** provided a training course on *Stimulating competitiveness in supply chains* for the ‘**change agents**’ that the companies had nominated. The courses consisted of intensive workshops at one of the companies and of four weeks’ intervals between the workshops. During the intervals participants were working with assignments and sharing information with their tutors and other participants. The aim was to promote learning and knowledge transfer across the companies.

The **type 2 networks** for the managers of SMEs were set off by a diagnostic workshop that helped the participants to identify learning needs in their companies. This was followed by a series of half a day’s workshops to match the needs and to facilitate contacts between companies that were taking joint measures on the basis of needs analyses. The measures from in-company training visits of external consultants to creation of joint learning centres.

Commentary space 2

[Starting point](#)

[Key measures](#)

[Specific issues](#)

Section 1.2.

[Move to next section...](#)

[Back to the contents...](#)

WLP - Case story 6 - UK - Section 1

Commentary space 3

Regarding the impact of the projects and the benefits for the participating companies and individuals it is worthwhile to not the following aspects:

- The universities and colleges had made arrangements for the recognition of the learning of the 'change agents' as competence units for National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) or as credit points the Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS) in higher education.
- The training included the use of learners' portfolios that helped the participants to reflect upon their learning in the workshops, learning across the companies and learning in their own company (and upon the facilitating role of the group work).
- The assignments, the use of portfolios and the concluding workshops could provide evidence on the learning progress of individual learners and of improvements in the participating companies.
- The project provided a high level of support for organisational and individual learning. However, this support was provided as facilitation for quality development and process improvement in the companies. Therefore, the participants were actively involved and did not adopt a consumerist attitude vis-à-vis their learning assignments.

Starting point

Key measures

Commentary space 3

Specific issues

Section 1.3.

[Move to next section...](#)
[Back to the contents...](#)

WLP - Case story 6 - UK - Section 2

The KLASS project provided a very specific case of industrial quality development initiatives with an intensive use of networking, peer review visits and related training measures. Therefore, at the end of the project it was difficult to see, what kind of follow-up activities could promote knowledge transfer on workplace learning and on partnership development.

In this respect a parallel project on the development of career services for adult learners provided a basis for certain follow-up measures:

- Firstly, the reorganisation of career services led to new needs to support the learning opportunities and knowledge resources of the career service professionals.
- Secondly, the intermediate position of career services between *job-seekers, enterprises, training providers and qualification frameworks (and awarding bodies)* provides specific challenges for processing information from different sources.
- Thirdly, the working context of career service professionals (as solitary advisers for manifold clientele) provides specific challenges for reflecting upon the existing information bases and on the information that arises from the discussion with the immediate users and with secondary clients of the career services.

Section 2.0.

[Move to next section...](#)
[Back to the contents...](#)

WLP - Case story 6 - UK - Section 2

Commentary space 1

The starting point for the piloting with transfer measures promoted by career services is the collaboration between

- a) public policy measures to develop career services for adult workforce – supported by employer-led *Sectoral Skills Councils (SSCs)* and their cooperation activities **and**
 - b) emergence of university-supported initiatives to promote the *continuing professional development* of the employees of career services (with a focus on workplace learning).
- In this context – and linked to the development of the National Guidance Research Forum – the UK research partners got the task to develop a *module on Labour Market Information (LMI)* that could be used by SSCs and by the career service professionals – either as support for self-organised learning or for targeted learning activities.

Commentary space 1

Starting point

Key measures

Specific issues

Section 2.1.

[Move to next section...](#)

[Back to the contents...](#)

WLP - Case story 6 - UK - Section 2

Commentary space 2

The development of the LMI module has been undertaken by a team that combines expertise in career guidance, training activities, assessment and educational technology. The content areas to be covered are the following:

- The role of Labour Market Information in the current career guidance services,
 - Key issues on changing labour markets and on the implications for career services,
 - Locating and selecting sources of Labour Market Information (navigation and exploration),
 - Learning from practice (by using case studies) and developing frameworks for practice in order to make the contribution of career services for the Labour Market Information pools,
 - Implementing good practice and sharing information on related guidelines and measures.
- Altogether, the development of the module was based on the principle of *developing* training and learning *services for the users, with the users and by the users*.

Commentary space 2

Starting point

Key measures

Specific issues

Section 2.2.

[Move to next section ...](#)

[Back to the contents ...](#)

WLP - Case story 6 - UK - Section 2

Commentary space 3

The development of the module was closely linked to the needs of the users to have an easy access to information and to work with the information. At the same time there was a need to consider the time limits for using the information services alongside the work. In this respect there were specific requirements for presenting the information and for enabling the users to work with the information. Therefore, the module provided easily usable chunks of information (with links to original documents and further sources) and blogging facilities for presenting commentaries and related information. Thus, the module was at the same time developed as a common pool of knowledge resources and as personal learning spaces that served the individual users' needs to work selectively with the chunks of information that were relevant for their current cases.

Commentary space 3

[Starting point](#)

[Key measures](#)

[Specific issues](#)

Section 2.3.

[Move to next section ...](#)
[Back to the contents ...](#)

Concluding remarks

The contributions of the UK research partners to the WLP project differed to some extent from the other cases and from the related piloting measures. The main differences can be characterised in the following way:

- Whilst the project design of the WLP project was mainly addressing the development of workplace learning in the context of initial vocational training or continuing vocational training (involving VET colleges or CVT providers), the UK pilot case was related to university-supported initiative to promote learning in organisations and supply chains.
- Whilst the WLP project design was emphasising the prospect of rotating trainees across different learning venues, the UK pilot case was based on the learning networks of 'change agents' and senior managers of companies.
- Whilst the WLP project design was looking for ways to promote competence accumulation and recognition of learning outcomes among trainees and skilled workers, the UK pilot case linked these issues to the learning of advanced practitioners (nominated as 'change agents').
- Whilst the WLP project was exploring the possibility to develop web-base support facilities for workplace learning, the related measures in the UK were linked to the development of career services and to the working and learning contexts of career guidance professionals.

Yet, given these differences, it is essential to note the progress that was reported by UK partners in the shaping of industrial learning networks (across companies) and in the involving career service professionals to develop their personal learning spaces.

[Back to the contents ...](#)