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ET2020:

Vocational identity development as remaining major challenge

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Entwicklungen und Herausforderungen zwischen supranationalen Strategien und nationalen Traditionen.

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Abstract

Dieser Beitrag geht der Frage nach, inwieweit es der EU gelungen ist, die Bürger in den Mittelpunkt des ET2020-Prozesses zu stellen. Er zeigt, dass die berufliche Identitätsentwicklung der Bürger unabhängig von nationalen Traditionen zu wenig Berücksichtigung findet. Zunächst wird die theoretische Relevanz beruflicher Identität für die ET2020-Ziele herausgearbeitet. Am Beispiel der deutschen Berufsbildung wird exemplarisch gezeigt, welche Chancen und Grenzen nationale Traditionen für die Förderung beruflicher Identitätsentwicklung haben können. Anhand exemplarischer Fallstudien aus der dualen Ausbildung im Einzelhandel zeigt die Verfasserin, dass Auszubildende weitgehend auf sich allein gestellt bleiben. Anschließend verweist sie auf Studien, die darauf hindeuten, dass die Vernachlässigung beruflicher Identitätsarbeit in europäischen Bildungs- und Beschäftigungssystemen weit verbreitet ist. Abschließend skizziert die Autorin Empfehlungen für identitätsförderliche berufliche Curricula, welche sie im Rahmen ihres Promotionsvorhabens erarbeitet hat.

English abstract

This paper examines if the EU has succeeded to put the citizens at the centre of the ET2020-process. It shows that vocational identity development is neglected irrespectively of national traditions. Firstly, the author will show the theoretical relevance of identity work for the ET2020-goals. With the example of the German VET system she illustrates how national traditions can promote or inhibit vocational identity development. By means of exemplary case studies in retail dual track initial VET the author shows that apprentices are mostly left to fend for themselves. She will draw on studies which indicate that the negligence of vocational identity development is a wide-spread phenomenon in EU education and public employment systems. Finally, the author will draft recommendations for VET curricula supporting vocational identity development which she elaborated within the framework of her doctoral thesis.

Schlüsselwörter: lifelong learning, vocational identity, employability, flexicurity, VET curricula

bwp@-Format: DISKUSSIONSBEITRÄGE

1 ET 2020: a citizen-centered approach?

Since the EU Summit in Lisbon the European Union is explicitly aspiring to become the “*most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion*” (European Council 2000). In order to streamline national efforts of member states, the European Council (2009) has agreed upon a common framework for European cooperation in the field of education and training (ET 2020). Since then, significant institutional arrangements have been implemented such as national qualification frameworks for mutual recognition of qualifications (cf. European Parliament and Council 2017), a guidance policy network (cf. ELGPN 2015), agreements on key competences (cf. European Council 2018) and benchmarks (cf. European Commission 2019).

This issue of *bwp@-online* analyzes how national traditions interfere with supranational policies in the process of building a European area of vocational education and training. However, this focus blends out supranational aspects which may also impede this process. With the example of German VET this paper will show that Germany’s national traditions in fact obstruct the implementation of EU policies in VET curricula to some extent. However, this paper will also identify an inhibiting factor that seems to be a general issue in all European countries: the negligence of individuals’ vocational identity development.

The Council acknowledges that “*people are Europe's main asset and should be the focal point of the Union's policies*” (cf. European Council 2000, 6). *Lifelong learning* is considered to be a prerequisite for employability and social inclusion. In 2001, the Commission published the results of an EU-wide consultation process. The overall goal is to “*empower citizens to move freely between learning settings, jobs, regions and countries, making the most of their knowledge and competences, and to meet the goals and ambitions of the European Union and the candidate countries to be more prosperous, inclusive, tolerant and democratic.*” (European Commission 2001, 3) The consultation highlighted that *lifelong learning* comprises the whole spectrum of formal, non-formal and informal learning and should not only consider employment-related aspects, but also active citizenship, personal fulfilment and social inclusion. (cf. *ibid.* 3) Thus, *lifelong learning* is explicitly meant to foster citizens’ employability *and* identity simultaneously. However, there is an area of conflict between employability and vocational identity, as demands of competitive markets may restrict the scope for personal development. The EU therefore designed a so-called *flexicurity policy* (cf. European Commission 2007) in order to ensure that both aspects of *lifelong learning* are realized concurrently.

But did the EU succeed to put the citizens at the centre of the process? Have institutional arrangements resulted in improving conditions for personal development? The interim evaluation stated that effectiveness and added value of ET 2020 need improvement: “*...the ability of outputs to influence people and feed into policy reduces quickly beyond the individuals themselves who take part in ET 2020.*” (Ecorys 2014, VII)

This paper will not only illustrate this phenomenon using the example of German VET, but it will also present evidence which indicates that the resulting *negligence of learners’ voca-*

tional identity development seems to be a European rather than a national drawback. In a first step, it will be argued that Germany does not sufficiently tap the potential of its tradition of occupation-based VET (*Berufe*) and its dual track VET system. Although these features are favorable prerequisites to foster vocational identity and employability as mutual intensifiers, factors will be presented that contribute to exclude VET students' personal matters: the tradition of occupations (*Beruf*) as *social* vocational identity, VET stakeholders' professional self-concept and the specific comprehension of *action based learning* in German VET. The example of the VET curriculum for the retail sector in Hamburg will illustrate why the concept for identity development fails to take effect in practice. In a second step, evidence will be provided that indicates that *negligence of vocational identity development* is not only a drawback of German VET, but also a wide-spread phenomenon in European national labour and education policies. Latest revision of EU key competences (cf. European Council 2018; European Commission 2018) acknowledges the need to promote identity-related competences and to support teachers with adequate didactic strategies. The author will contribute to bridge this gap with insights from her own research. She will suggest an *ideal model of vocational identity* as overall learning outcome and *didactic principles for identity development* in VET curricula. These are meant to enable learners to shape their work biographies in a self-conscious way using challenges and transitions as learning opportunity. The author developed these principles by means of case studies with apprentices in the retail business during her doctoral studies (cf. Thole 2020). The author will start her argument by presenting her theoretical concept of *identity work* and *identity-related competences*.

2 Citizens' vocational identity development as a key to EU's competitiveness

Citizens' deliberate identity work is indispensable because globalization and rapidly changing markets offer not only opportunities but also threats and ambiguities. While market conditions demand flexibility and efficiency, people have a need for security and personal development. In order to find a sustainable place in society and be able to act in a goal-orientated way, people have to find a balance between personal needs and societal demands as a perfect fit is out of reach (cf. Mead 1934/1967; Krappmann 1975). For this purpose, individuals reflect continuously on societal demands and internalize them if they fit their self-concept.

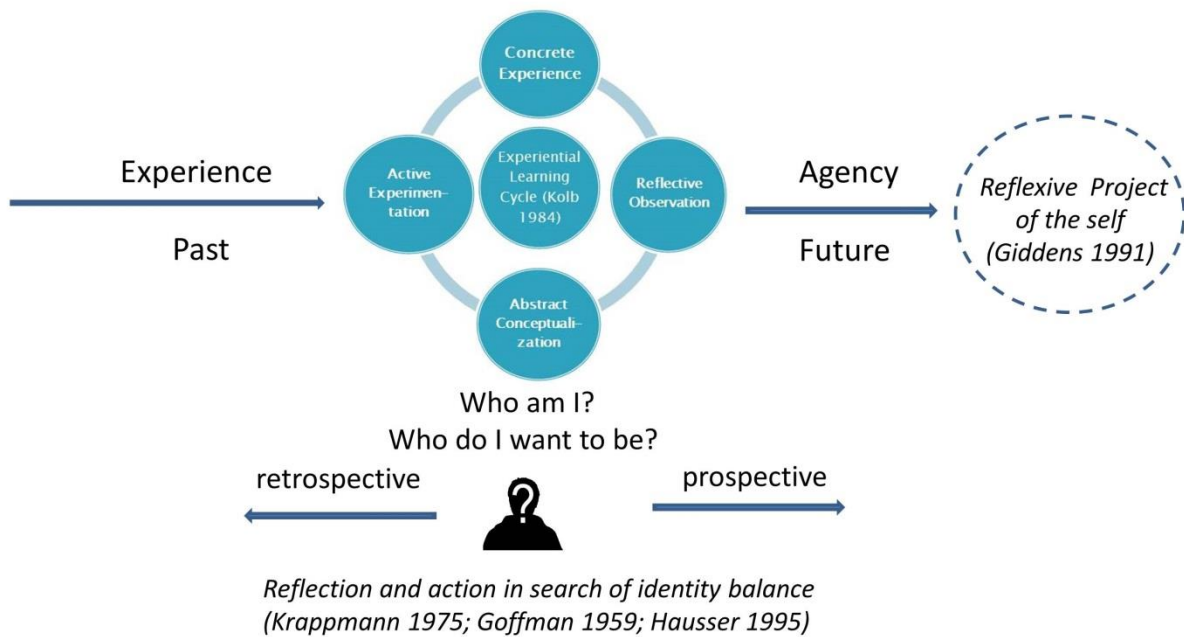


Figure 1: The reflective process of identity work

Figure 1 visualizes this process: in a *retrospective* way, individuals evaluate their previous experience in order to find out, who they are and what they want to be (cf. Hausser 1995; Giddens 1991). This serves to project their current self-concept in a *prospective* way into the future in order to make up goals for their personal development (cf. Giddens 1991; Mollenhauer 1983/2014). This is the *diachronic* aspect of identity work. During a present situation of action the reflective activity follows the typical stages of an experiential learning cycle (cf. Kolb 1984): concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation (see centre of figure 1). This is the *synchronic* aspect of identity work.

The resulting abstract concept is what we call *identity* and determines how we act. As far as it relates to work biographies it constitutes the person's *vocational identity*. Vocational identity is a decisive part of our overall identity because professional prospects determine the income, status and social setting of a person. In this paper, the described reflective activity is called *identity work*. All people shape their identity more or less consciously as identity work satisfies an anthropological need for coherence, continuity and meaning (cf. Keupp et al. 2013; Erikson 1966; Giddens 1991). The necessity to work on one's identity is imposed when the disparities between personal aspirations and social demands rise. In the working environment, this is especially the case during transitions in work biographies (cf. Busshoff 2001) or when employees face conflicts at their workplace (cf. Krappmann 1975; Goffman 1959). In complex and rapidly changing job markets individuals' vocational identities are challenged regularly.

However, this does not only represent a threat, but also an opportunity for personal development and enlargement of individual's scope of action (cf. Holzkamp 1995; Giddens 1991; Cedefop 2014). There is extensive scientific evidence, that employees' successful identity work establishes a win-win-situation between economic requirements and personal aspirations. Numerous studies in the service sector show that employees' identification with their

job has favorable effects on their job satisfaction, commitment, customer satisfaction and economic results (cf. Nerdinger 2011; Ashforth/Harrison/Corley 2008; Heskett et al. 1994). It can therefore be stated that citizens' successful identity work is a prerequisite for achieving the EU's long-term strategic goals: making lifelong learning and mobility a reality; improving the quality and efficiency of education and training; promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship; enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship.

The EU aims to tap this potential with its flexicurity policy. The term *flexicurity* reflects the idea that the required flexibility and security can reinforce each other by improving the adaptability of employees and enterprises. The approach strives for *employability* rather than job security and aims at supporting people to cope with transitions in their work lives. The means are

- flexible contractual arrangements between companies and employees that facilitate transitions,
- lifelong learning arrangements to improve employees' skills relevant for employability,
- unemployment benefits and other forms of social security that offer financial security during transitions,
- while at the same time stimulating people to find employment.

In Germany, the labour market has been fundamentally reformed following these principles (*Gesetze für moderne Dienstleistungen am Arbeitsmarkt Hartz I-IV 2002/2003*).

At a first glance, the flexicurity policy seems to be the institutional answer to the requirement of citizens' vocational identity development. In chapter 4 empirical evidence will be presented that indicates that this is not the case. In fact, there are slight but important differences between the concepts. While *flexicurity* focuses job markets' current demands for skills irrespective of individual profiles, individuals' vocational identity starts from personal aspirations and prerequisites and aims to ensure not only employability, but also personal fulfilment. *Nobody else but the person concerned can make sure that his or her individual aspirations are taken into account irrespective of the quality of institutional support*. The ability to claim this is part of identity work and requires a complex set of competences.

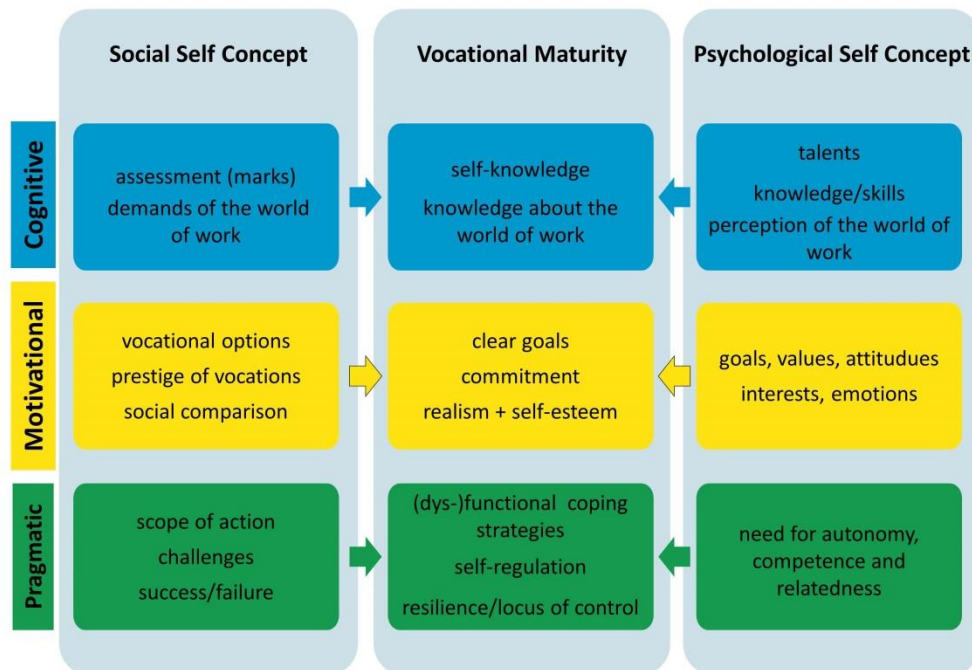


Figure 2: Career management skills for vocational identity development (cf. Thole 2020; Hausser 1995; Mead 1934/1967)

Figure 2 visualizes this process: During career transitions individuals have to mediate between the social concept which aims to meet and internalize societal demands (left column) and the inner personal self-concept which comprises the person's interests, values and aspirations (right column). In order to achieve personal fulfilment individuals strive to reconcile both parts of the self-concept. For this purpose, cognitive, motivational and action-orientated career management skills are required (see middle column) (cf. Thompson et al. 1981; Buss-hoff 2001; Driesel-Lange et al. 2010). The cognitive dimension comprises self-knowledge and knowledge about the world of work, the motivational dimension involves goal-setting, realism and self-esteem while the action-orientated dimension includes self-regulation, resilience and coping strategies. Such career management skills are the major citizen-related outcome sought for by the *European Lifelong Guidance Network* (cf. ELGPN 2015). In addition, the individual needs a set of general social competences such as role distance, self-presentation, ambiguity tolerance and empathy (cf. Krappmann 1975; Goffman 1959) in order to remain true to oneself and get the counterparts' acceptance. The latest revision of EU key competences for lifelong learning (cf. European Council 2018) revealed, that the competences related to identity work need more attention. In the description of the new key competences *Personal, social and Learning Competence, Civic Competence, Entrepreneurship Competence* and *Cultural awareness and expression competence* the Commission staff exactly describes what is needed for identity work, however without explicitly relating to the underlying theoretical concept of *identity* (cf. European Commission 2018). These key competences also include transversal aspects such as sustainability, values, cultural diversity, creativity and innovation. On the contrary, the *European Qualifications Framework* (EQF) does **not** imply competences related to identity work, as it is **not** a competence framework for

personal development and curriculum design. As its purpose is to assess qualifications for mutual recognition and mobility in the EU it refers to societal demands only.

The following chapter will line out to what extent German VET traditions are favorable or detrimental for vocational identity development. It will illustrate the findings with the example of VET schools in Hamburg that have tried to consider key competences for identity development during their curriculum design and implementation for the retail sector.

3 The German VET system: opportunities and limitations for vocational identity development

3.1 Favorable and detrimental features of the German VET system

German VET has a good international reputation. Its expertise deriving from the dual track VET system is in great demand as work-based learning is considered to be a key to improve VET quality (cf. BIBB 2019; European Council 2020, 6). The structure of the dual track VET system also offers favorable conditions for learners' personal development and thus identity work. Students have two locations for learning: their workplace and a VET school. VET curricula and apprenticeship directives are aligned. This offers the opportunity to deepen the understanding of workplace experience at VET school. Fuller/Unwin (2003) studied the learning environment in the *British Modern apprenticeship programme*. They found the following criteria that promote high quality so-called expansive learning:

- a supportive practice of community,
- various opportunities to gather experience,
- a wide competence profile,
- recognized certification of the apprenticeship,
- time beyond the workplace for reflection and learning at school.

This is in line with Bronfenbrenner's assumptions on favourable conditions for human development (1979). He presumed that the compatibility of different levels of living environments (personal micro-level, institutional meso-level and societal macro-level) as well as frequent role changes and social support were beneficial for personal development. While Fuller/Unwin complain that these learning conditions are rarely found in British companies, they are safeguarded and favored by institutional arrangements in the German dual track VET system (cf. Thole 2015).

The German VET system and learners' vocational identity development is also affected by the fact that the German labour market is based on occupations (so-called *Berufe*). *Berufe* constitute a standardized bundle of qualifications and skills stipulated in binding apprenticeship directives (so-called *Ausbildungsordnungen*). Social partners agree on the scope of these occupation profiles in a process coordinated by the *Federal Institute for VET (BIBB)* (cf. Bretschneider/Schwarz 2015; BIBB 2017). As a result, *Berufe* are recognized by all relevant stakeholders and initial VET certificates are the basis for employability and mobility in the job market. Apart from this societal function of occupations, they also constitute a *social*

vocational identity for the VET certificate holders as they become part of a community of practice holding a recognized place in society and their qualification profile and experience become part of their self-concept (cf. Kell 2015; Beck/Brater 1977). In this respect, a *Beruf* does not only ensure employability, but also offers perspectives for personal fulfilment in the sense of the notion of *Bildung*. Humboldt's (1792/1960) description of the process of *Bildung* coincides with the notion of *identity work* in the preceding chapter. The core idea is that individuals should tap into their full potential for personal development not only to their own, but also society's benefit. Therefore, *identity* and *Bildung* can be regarded as synonyms (cf. Hansmann/Marotzki 1988; Hoffmann/Bleiber 1997; Krappmann 1980). The outlines of the *Conference of Ministers of Education* (KMK 2011) for VET curricula explicitly claim to provide *Bildung* and not only qualifications. Therefore, initial VET aims to provide a wide range of competences which enable learners to cope with various (also unknown future) tasks. As a result, the connotation of the German term *Kompetenz* is not identical to the European use of the term *competence*. While the latter refers to the proven ability to perform certain tasks the German term *Kompetenz* refers to a person's overall potential to cope with upcoming demands (cf. Sloane/Dilger 2005). Due to the German notion of *Bildung*, the structure of the German qualification framework (DQR) deviates explicitly from the EQF by emphasizing personal competence. Finally, it can be concluded that the concept of *Beruf* considers employability and the development of vocational identity to be mutual intensifiers.

However, there is evidence that the favorable conditions in the German VET system are not automatically applied to the advantage of students' identity development (cf. Beicht et al. 2009). Several reasons explain this outcome.

First of all, the concept of *Beruf* is standardized while job profiles tend to become more and more discontinuous and individualized. As a result, the *Beruf* does not take into account the *individual* circumstances and self-concepts. On the contrary, the idea that a person's job should fit his or her *personal* identity is common in the Anglo-Saxon world as there are no pre-set standardized occupations (cf. Brown/Kirpal et al. 2007; Billett/Somerville 2004; Savickas 1985; Gini 1998; Ashforth/Harrison/Corley 2008). It is also an assumption of well-established career choice theories (cf. Holland 1985; Super 1994). Gini (1998, 714) states:

We need work, and as adults we find identity and are identified by the work we do. If this is true then we must be very careful about what we choose to do for a living, for what we do is what we'll become.

However, the widespread recognition of standardized VET certificates in the German VET system suggests that learners need not shape and update their individual vocational identity in a continuous way. In fact, an identity based on a vocation is more flexible than an identity based on belonging to a single company (cf. Ashforth/Harrison/Corley 2008). However, there is a *tradition of stable career and security-oriented work biographies* that may impair employees' flexibility (cf. Witzel/Kühn 1999; Pongratz/Voss 2004). Several studies show that employees with discontinuous work biographies develop valuable competencies during their job transitions (cf. Fischer/Witzel 2008; Klatt/Nölle 2006; Kehl/Kunzendorf 2006; Raeder/Grote 2007). However, their flexibility is not necessarily appreciated or supported by HRM

and security orientated employees often have better career perspectives (cf. Grote/Raeder 2003). As a result, qualification profiles tend to be tailor-made for a single company and employees' employability in case of redundancy is likely to be impaired (cf. Pongratz/Voss 2004; Kehl/Kunzendorf 2006; Kirpal/Brown/M'Hamed Dif 2007).

Furthermore, the concept of *Berufe* has also coined German VET scholars' and practitioners' professional self-concept. Due to the claim of *Bildung*, many German VET scholars are critical of the concept of *employability* (cf. Alheit 2009; Rothe 2009; Kraus 2001; Dietsche/Meyer 2004; Büchter 2019). Therefore, they are reluctant to involve in the ET2020 discourse. Thus, their potential stimuli from the German point of view are missing at European level. Vice versa, ET 2020 goals are not adequately taken into account for curriculum development (cf. Weber/Achtenhagen 2014). In addition, VET actors tend to specialize in vocational orientation, initial VET or further education and there is little cooperation among these disciplines. As a consequence, the lifelong dimension of vocational identity development is faded out. Vocational orientation (*Berufsorientierung*) during school-to-work transition focuses career choice for initial VET rather than the development of career management skills needed to cope with subsequent transitions during the work biography (cf. Büchter/Kremer/Zoyke 2014). Consequently, vocational orientation does not continue during initial VET (cf. Meyer 2014) although dropout rates are high in some sectors and about 40% of all VET students go through a professional reorientation after initial VET (cf. Uhly 2015; Hall 2015). Ahrens/Spöttl (2012) criticize that biography-based methodology is not sufficiently applied in order to shed light on the problems and motives of disadvantaged VET students. Promising results of a pilot project supporting apprentices in initial VET to shape their work biographies have not been noticed nor did they lead to changes in VET practice (cf. Munz et al. 2003). Also, the research programme on lifelong learning suggested by Achtenhagen/Lempert (2000) was not implemented due to a lack of funding.

Last but not least, the special understanding of *action-based learning* in German VET tends to exclude subjective aspects of professional agency (cf. Backes-Haase/Klinkisch 2015; Dörig 2003). German VET curricula are based on ideal types of business processes (so-called *Lernfelder*) such as purchasing, selling, accounting etc. As a consequence, the individual way of coping with a task and apprentices' *real* experience at the workplace are not systematically dealt with (cf. Böhle et al. 2011). Notably, the interrelations between individual features and the work environment, biographical experience and aspirations of the learners and the relevance of social interaction for identity development are neglected by the *Lernfeld* principle (cf. Thole 2020).

3.2 Vocational identity development in the retail VET curriculum in Hamburg

However – due to the claim of *Bildung* – VET schools have the mandate to include these aspects into their VET curricula (cf. KMK 2011) but doing this demands a lot of time and expertise. In Hamburg, VET schools responsible for the retail sector cooperated with the VET department of *Universität Hamburg* in order to design a curriculum that includes identity-related aspects (cf. Tramm/Hofmeister/Derner 2009). Vocational competence is modeled by the following competence dimensions (see table 1):

1. functional knowledge derived from business administration and economics
2. general learning and working techniques
3. systemic knowledge
4. social competences for communication and cooperation
5. subjective meaning of the occupation (*Beruflichkeit* = Occupationalism).

The competence dimension *Beruflichkeit* which focuses vocational identity development is composed of four sub-dimensions:

- a) Vocational identity and role
- b) Career development
- c) Business ethics
- d) Health

Vocational identity and role consist of shaping a professional self-concept which reconciles the professional role with the personal self-concept by interpreting the role in an individual way (*role distance*) (cf. Krappmann 1975, 133ff.; Goffman 1959). This helps to cope with future situations in an authentic and reliable way. This sub-dimension represents the *synchronic* aspect of identity work (cf. chapter 2) together with the sub-dimensions *Business ethics* and *Health*. The latter consists of self-care at the workplace in order to prevent physical and mental illness. *Business ethics* implies to develop a moral point of view and the ability to take into account the perspective of others in order to assess situations which is a prerequisite for appropriate action. *Career development* refers to the *diachronic* aspect of identity work and aims to identify realistic and motivating goals for professional development which fit personal aspirations and prerequisites.

The core idea of the curriculum matrix is to develop the required competences in a spiral curriculum across the learning fields. The structure of the competence dimensions was a common denominator of established competence structures in the KMK outlines, workplace demands and VET practitioners' experience. The key competences recommended by the EU (2006) are implied, but they were not explicitly helpful for setting up a competence structure for the specific purpose.

The concept is illustrated with the example of learning field 2 which is called "*Customer-orientated sales conversation*" (KMK 2004). Selling as the core competence of retailers and shop assistants is highly relevant for the formation of vocational identity. The KMK outlines of the learning field state that apprentices need social competences, product and commercial knowledge to measure up with customers' and employer's expectations. These aspects are covered by the first four competence dimensions. The school-specific curriculum added subjective implications which are comprised in the four sub-dimensions of the competence dimension *Occupationalism*, e.g.

- the person's way of selling should be authentic and in line with the seller's personal values (*vocational identity and role*);

- the acquired competences play a major role in the person's job profile (*career development*);
- the ethical point of view of the seller will influence his moral judgment of conflicts (*business ethics*);
- the seller must cope with stress in order to meet selling objectives and customer demands (*health prevention*).

By doing this, the competence dimension *Occupationalism* is meant to assign subjective meanings to the objective topics of the other competence dimensions which together form the vocational identity.

Table 1: The Learning field-competence-matrix of the retail VET curriculum in Hamburg

	Occupationalism				Communication + cooperation	Learning techniques	Systemic knowledge	Functional knowledge
	Vocational identity and role	Career development	Business ethics	Health prevention				
Learning field 1								
Learning field 2: Customer-orientated sales conversation	concept of selling	career paths based on selling	dealing with conflicts	coping with stress	ambiguity - tolerance self presentation empathy role distance			
Learning field 3								
....								
Learning field 14								

3.3 Case studies reveal a negligence of vocational identity development in VET practice

In order to find out, if the described curriculum concept really supports VET students in shaping their vocational identity, the author carried out fourteen longitudinal case studies. Apprentices with heterogeneous features (gender, employer size, migrant status, retail sector) have been interviewed during the second half of their first and second year. They had to report about their biography, occupational goals and experienced conflicts at the workplace. In addition, they were asked if learning settings at the VET school were helpful to cope with the demands at the workplace. The interviews were analyzed using and triangulating various approaches (amongst others Witzel/Kühn1999; Kutscha/Besener/Debie 2009; Flick 2009). The author could draw on two previous studies based on qualitative narratives with VET students in the retail sector in North-Rhine-Westphalia (Kutscha/Besener/Debie 2009) and Switzerland (Dümmler/Caprani/Felder 2017). Both studies demonstrated four major challenges that apprentices face:

1. *Identification*: A majority of apprentices has to identify with retail as a second or even last choice as they have failed to put their preferred career choice into practice.
2. *Shaping*: Apprentices have to balance private life with unattractive work conditions.

3. *Competence*: Apprentices are either expected to show competence like experienced staff and/or lack opportunities for competence development.
4. *Recognition*: Apprentices struggle for recognition by customers, supervisors and society.

These problems were also found in the interviews carried out by the author. Only three out of fourteen respondents wanted to stay in the retail sector in the long run. For ten of them an apprenticeship in the retail sector was a compromise or second choice in the first place. Ten out of fourteen interviewees were frightened to make mistakes as they perceived their work environment as intolerant. Another ten apprentices reported low self-esteem in their role as retail apprentice. Twelve respondents had difficulties balancing working hours and leisure time. On the whole, the apprentices reflected on four crucial questions:

- Do I want to stay in this occupation? (*Identification*)
- Am I seen as a fully-fledged member of staff? (*Competence*)
- Will I be offered a permanent employment after the apprenticeship? (*Recognition*)
- What will be the next career step after the apprenticeship? (*Shaping*).

The author considers these universal challenges to be developmental tasks of initial VET in the sense of Havighurst (1974). He assumes that

“.. a developmental task is midway between an individual need and a societal demand. (Havighurst 1974, VI, 2). A developmental task is a task which arises at or about a certain period in the life of the individual, successful achievement of which leads to his happiness and to success with later task, while failure leads to unhappiness in the individual, disapproval by the society, and difficulty with later tasks.” (Havighurst 1974, 2)

It was striking that the sub-dimensions of *Occupationalism* theoretically covered the challenges faced by the apprentices. But due to the specific interpretation of action orientation focusing *modeled* situations (cf. chapter 3.1) the *real* personal concerns of the learners were ignored in VET *practice*. In order to substantiate this, some examples will be presented¹:

Lack of identification with the occupation:

Alienation from the seller's role: Due to her product expertise customers and colleagues appreciate Lara for her high-quality advice. She considers herself to be an advisor rather than a vendor:

[...] if you overwhelm a customer with product knowledge, he won't buy anything at the end. This does not promote sales and I am not a seller boosting sales. I want to inform. (Lara Ib, 29-30, Thole 2020)

This is an issue of the sub-dimension *Vocational identity and role* and the learning field *Customer-orientated sales conversation*. However, due to the customer-orientated focus product know-how is not explicitly mentioned and devaluated.

¹ The names are anonymized. Translated from German by the author.

Two-bosses-dilemma: Markus receives a refusal because during a role play in the job interview he has recommended a customer to get his product repaired for little money instead of buying a new one:

At the end they said: If everybody would act this way, retail business would not exist any more, what I found quite naughty, because I knew, that the customer would come back and buy a mobile [...] Yes. And then I knew I did not want to work for that company. (Markus Ib, 26, Thole 2020)

This is an issue of *Business ethics*. The curriculum assumes that Markus' employer shares a customer-orientated point of view, but this is not the case and taken into account.

Inadequate competence demands:

Lack of learning opportunities: Ahmet has to do a lot of tidying at a filling station and has only little contact with customers. He is aware, that he needs more demanding tasks for his qualification, but does not dare to address his supervisor as he is still in trial period:

Recently she came in and asked me to take over the cash point [...] which is a little paradoxical as I am always cleaning something. I never get the opportunity to learn how the cash point works. (Ahmet I 193, Thole 2020)

The sub-dimension *Vocational identity and role* refers to the tasks he is supposed to do, but not to the tasks he is actually performing. There is no support to improve his situation.

Burnout due to excessive demands: At the end of his trial period his supervisor tells Markus that his sales statistics are not sufficient. Consequently, he intensifies his sales activities and advances to become the bestselling apprentice. Shortly ahead of his first exam he collapses and has to undergo a psychiatric treatment at hospital as he is suicidal. After returning from hospital he accepts his supervisor's proposal to resign without notice. As a result, he is not entitled to unemployment benefits.

I do not want to stay in this company. [...] I know that there are no perspectives for the future unless I am a high achiever like now and I would have to continue to work my ass off. (Markus Ib, 34, Thole 2020)

The sub-dimension *Health* implies to learn strategies to cope with stress, but there is no support in case the learner fails to do so.

Intolerance towards mistakes: Kostas' supervisor accuses him of damaging precious goods. He asserts his innocence but his boss does not believe him:

He was hopping mad. He hasn't talked to me for three days. No „Good morning“, no „How are you?“ [...] After some time he came back and my experienced colleague stated that it was not my fault. (Kostas Ib, 14, Thole 2020)

The learning fields model an idealistic way of doing things right. There is no approach to learn from mistakes.

Difficulties to shape one's work biography

Lack of perspectives: Nils has opted for a supplemental qualification as service salesperson. But management decides to reorganize all sales counters to self-service without any notice. He is shocked:

The managers withdraw the vocation, I have chosen! (Nils II, 12, Thole 2020)

Cul-de-sac with respect to further education: Hendrik has opted for an extra entrance qualification for an advanced technical college. He takes extra lessons in the evenings. However, his employer refuses a third year of apprenticeship which is a prerequisite to get the extra qualification. On the contrary, he is offered a part-time job as vendor with managerial responsibility.

I really ask myself, when did they shit you into the brain? Because when supervisors from other branches of the company tell me: Oh my God, why did you not get it, they go in circles and ask desperately: Why? A grade point average of 2,0 (good) seems to be bad. (Hendrik II, 26)

The challenges faced by Nils and Hendrik are an issue of the sub-dimension *Career development*. However, the curriculum only provides knowledge about potential career prospects to support goal-setting, but no support for achieving these goals.

Struggle for recognition:

Many apprentices suffer from the low prestige of the retail occupations or even perceive it as stigma:

That is clear, nobody wants to work at a filling station by choice, if you haven't made any major mistakes in your life. (Ahmet II, 58, Thole 2020)

People think: She is young, why does she not go to higher education, why does she do an apprenticeship [...] in the retail sector? Something must have gone wrong. (Sophie II, 72-74, Thole 2020)

Predominately costumers just label you as vendors who want to sell something. (Lara Ib, 44, Thole 2020)

And when I talk to customers, I sometimes feel they don't take me seriously [...] and at some point I think: Are they kidding me? (Nils II, 126, Thole 2020)

A lack of recognition is an issue of the sub-dimension *Vocational identity and role*, but the learning-field *Customer-orientated sales conversation* assumes that meeting customers' demands automatically leads to recognition and self-confidence. Consequently, there is no support for the dilemma of doing a good job without recognition.

The interviews show that crucial individual challenges do not systematically come up at VET school although the formal curriculum claims to comprise identity-related aspects. In VET, learners are informed about career paths in retail, but they do not learn, how to cope with the fact, that they feel unhappy in their job. They learn about apprentices' rights according to labour law, but they do not learn how to argue with a supervisor to enforce them. They get positive feedback if they meet the exam requirements, but they are not taught how to claim

recognition. On the whole, vocational identity development is widely neglected in VET practice despite promising concepts. In this respect, the presented VET curriculum fails to foster essential learning outcomes for lifelong learning. These insights derive from a small educational context and are not representative. Therefore, the following chapter will present more encompassing studies about lifelong learning culture in Germany and Europe.

4 Negligence of vocational identity development: a supranational societal phenomenon?

The *Bertelsmann Foundation* developed an index to measure lifelong learning in European countries. It results from measurable statistic indicators from general education, VET, societal cohesion and private activities (cf. Hoskins/Cartwright/Schoof 2011). According to the ELLI-index Germany's lifelong learning culture is only mediocre (see figure 3). Adult participation in learning (% of the population aged 25 to 64 in formal and non-formal education during the last four weeks) is below average (Germany 8,1%; EU 11,9%). This is also the case for informal learning (% of population aged 25 to 64 during last 12 months) (Germany 43,5%; EU 59,9%). This is at least partially due to the fact that Germany's further education policy ignores evidence about citizens' lifelong learning behavior. Although it is known that absence from formal education is often due to a lack of professional prospects and private duties (cf. Cedefop 2015; Eurostat 2017; Walter/Müller 2014) Germany's further education policy ignores these barriers and relies on financial incentives and educational advertising only (BMBF 2008). In addition, it does not tap the potential of workplace learning. There is evidence that it can stimulate the development of vocational identity and competences especially of low-skilled workers whose employability is at risk (cf. Billett/Somerville; Billett 2007; Baethge et al. 2004, Cedefop 2016; Nerdinger 2011). However, low-skilled employees are often occupied in a less stimulating way – thus being in a deadlock (cf. Lotter 2015; Billett 2001; Behringer/Schönfeld 2014).

To make matters worse, *Labour Agency* is often obstructing reasonable career transitions although studies show that finding a vocational identity is extremely important for the people concerned (cf. Faulstich 2015; Faulstich/Bracker 2014; Law/Meijers/Wijers 2002; Hendrich 2005). This was not only found in the author's case studies and the ERASMUS project *Youth in transition* (the author and University Hamburg were involved as quality assurance) (cf. Lamscheck-Nielsen 2020; <https://youth-it.cool/>) but is also reported by scholars studying further education of unemployed people (cf. Hendrich 2005; Hendrich/Bolder 2002). This phenomenon is also found at European level. Despite numerous support structures the emphasis of *Public Employment Services* (PES) is to cease unemployment as quickly as possible as a result of a bureaucratic culture and neo-liberal thinking emphasizing the principle of self-responsibility. The result is a schism between available institutional support structures and a lack of support perceived (cf. Sultana/Watts 2006; Cort/Thomsen 2013; Plant/Thomsen 2012; Mik-Meyer 2017; Lamscheck-Nielsen 2020). A *Cedefop* study (2014) shows how demanding career transitions are. At the same time they are also a valuable occasion for learning. In addition, support is not only required for career transitions, but also for the present workplace as employees frequently have to adapt to flexibility and mobility demands. A qualitative study

carried out by Kirpal/Brown/M'Hamed Dif (2007) in the metal-, telecommunications and health sector in France, Germany and the UK showed that many employees felt overburdened and were frustrated or disenchanted. Only a minority showed a flexible vocational identity. At these points, the flexicurity policy demonstrably fails to support people's prospects for development.

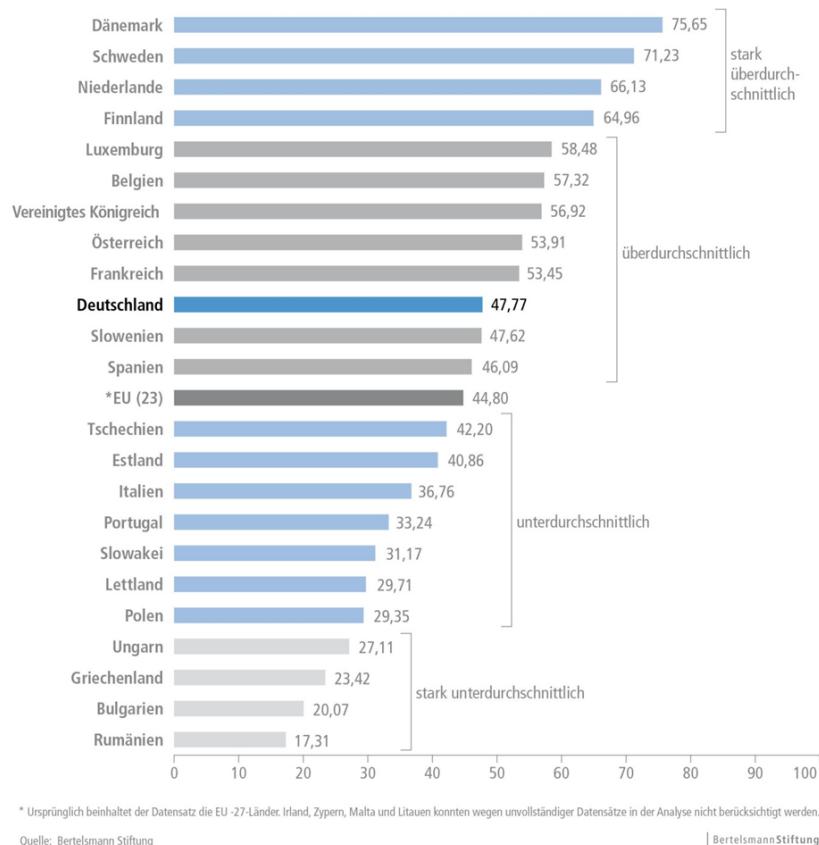


Figure 3: European Lifelong Learning Index (cf. Hoskins/Cartwright/Schoof 2011)

In this respect, it is important to note that having a good lifelong learning culture according to the ELLI-index does not automatically mean that citizens' vocational identity development is adequately supported. Denmark's *Golden Triangle Policy* is supposed to be a best practice example for lifelong learning as Danish employees change their jobs very often compared to other countries, but they feel nevertheless secure, as unemployment rates are very low (cf. European Commission 2007, top of the list in figure 3). However, Cort/Thomsen (2014) show by means of narratives that – due to a lack of support and social control – transitions can often not be used as learning opportunities.

In fact, various EU studies indicate that it is a major unsolved challenge to put the citizens into the centre of the process of ET 2020. Before the Commission's memorandum on lifelong learning in 2001, the European Commission (1995) had emphasized individuals' responsibility to maintain their employability in a knowledge-based society. The new focus of the memorandum (cf. chapter 1) was a result of a consultation that showed that this approach was not appropriate to reduce social inequalities. A *Cedefop* study (2016) on further education of low-skilled employees carried out in seven EU countries revealed drawbacks similar to Germany.

Also, the revision of the key competences in 2018 was a result of a consultation that showed that more identity-related personal competences need to be developed in general and vocational education (cf. European Commission 2018). It also showed a need to support teachers in doing this and to develop adequate didactic strategies. Therefore, the following chapter will present didactic principles which the author developed in her research context. They refer to the universal, abstract concept of *identity* as presented in chapter 2 and are therefore also applicable in other educational contexts.

5 Didactic principles for identity development in VET curricula

In chapter 2, relevant competences for identity work have already been mentioned. Most of them are covered by the new EU key competences (European Council 2018; European Commission 2018). In order to develop these competences, learning opportunities, reflection and feedback need to be organized (cf. Mead 1934/1967). As this type of support is often lacking at the workplace or in public guidance it is crucial that the prerequisites for identity work are trained in VET (cf. Duemmler/Caprani/Felder 2017).

As the required set of competences is very complex it is helpful to formulate *an ideal model of vocational identity* which serves as general learning outcome and orientation for VET curricula. For Germany this means that in light of an individualization of work biographies the concept of *Beruf* needs to be modernized for pedagogic means in order to include *individual* aspects of vocational identity. In German VET pedagogy, different models of modern vocational identity (*Moderne Beruflichkeit*) have already been discussed. An ideal model is also needed because social scientists (cf. Voss/Pongratz 1998) have empirically described a prominent model of modern vocational identity of self-entrepreneurial employees (*Arbeitskraftunternehmer*) that is not in line with identity-related needs and the claim of *Bildung* (cf. Thole 2020). It is a survival strategy of employees who market their manpower depending on changing demands of the labour market. However, Voss/Weiss (2013) found out that this strategy may be closely linked to burnout. Without a specific model of desirable vocational identity, the *Arbeitskraftunternehmer* may be accidentally applied in a normative way for VET purposes which is already the case (cf. Voss 2007).

For VET pedagogy purposes, the author has opted for Bories' *individualized professionalism* (2013). It is an empirically observed career strategy that aims to maintain and enhance job satisfaction and individual freedom of action by means of an individualized high quality job profile that serves as reflexive project for the future (cf. Giddens 1991; Mollenhauer 2014/1983). It assumes that the complexity in the world of labour and growing competition in globalized markets increase employers' needs for specialized job profiles. While for *Arbeitskraftunternehmer* demands of the labour market are the main reference point, *individualized professionalism* emanates from the individual talents, desires and aims of the respective person. The concept aims for win-win-relationships with future employers who have a specific interest in the job profile of the person. As manpower entrepreneurs face fierce competition in the job market, their action will be regulated by self-interest. By contrast, *individualized professionalism* requires mutual respect, responsibility, sustainability and consent

– thus supporting the vision of social inclusion and citizenship of the European Union (cf. European Commission 2001).

In addition, the author has identified the following criteria concerning *learning process and situations, learning outcome and content, learning environment* and *identity-related competences* that VET curricula should meet if they are to foster identity development (see table 2): *Biographical work* serves to take learners' prior experience and their subsequent aspirations into account in order to find out to what extent learning matters have a subjective meaning for the learners. Using *critical incidents* as learning situations means to choose the learner's experience as a starting point (other than the abstract business processes suggested by the *Lernfeld* principle). *Social competencies* are already taught as part of vocational competence in the service sector, but their relevance for identity development is not yet an issue. *Expansive learning* means that learners do not only meet third party's demands, but also set individual goals that can enlarge their scope for action in line with their personal aspirations (cf. Holzberg 1995). As a result, the *curriculum needs to be more flexible* in terms of chronological order and scope of content. A *culture of recognition* has to be ensured to facilitate the required learning processes (for more details cf. Thole 2020).

Table 2: Criteria for identity-supportive VET curricula

Learning process and situation	Learning outcome and content	Learning environment	Identity-related competences
Biographical reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Status Quo at the beginning • Individual goals • Subjective relevance of learning matters • Transition after initial VET 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stimuli for reflection • Documentation, e.g. portfolio • Mentoring/ Coaching • Confidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structured reflection on vocational self-concept
Critical incidents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying relevant learning matters • New creative approaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No imbalance of power • Confidence • Scopes of action • Covering all living environments (not only vocational) • Heterogeneity of group members • Learner's perspective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-awareness • Knowledge about the world of work • Own moral point of view • Structured reflection • Problem solving, creativity • Self-efficacy • Resilience • Social competencies
Experiential Learning Cycle (Kolb 1984)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structured reflection • Self-concept • Adaptation of personal goals • Documentation of the process • Trial and error 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback • Scopes for action • Stimuli for reflection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-knowledge • Structured reflection • Self-esteem • Goal setting • Agency • Knowledge about the world of work
Individual expansive learning goals (Holzberg 1995)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pushbacks • Challenges • Reflexive vocational project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentoring/ Coaching • Social interaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-reflection • Realism • Self-efficacy
Identity-relevant social competencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-construction of mutual social perspectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social interaction • Reflection/ feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-presentation • Role distance • Ambiguity tolerance • Empathy • Emotional competence • Moral arguing • Communicative skills
Curriculum as flexible structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocational aspects • Insecurity, ambiguity tolerance • Identity-relevant matters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chronological flexibility • Openness for other matters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocational competence • Identity-relevant competencies • Dealing with insecurity and ambiguity
Culture of recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-image against others' perception • Personal values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protected room • Rules • Feedback • Mutual recognition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tolerance/fairness • Social responsibility

Finally, the author will illustrate how the concept of *developmental tasks* (cf. chapter 3) can be used to support biographical work and setting of reasonable individual goals. It must be emphasized that despite the universal developmental tasks found in the narratives the individual situations are very idiosyncratic. In addition, there are interrelations between the

developmental tasks. For instance, professional competence fosters identification with the occupation and leads to recognition by others. Below, these interdependencies are visualized with the model of *Theme centered interaction* by Ruth Cohn (1975) (see figures 4-6). The core idea is that the demands of the occupation (IT), expectations by others (WE) and own aspirations (I) need to be balanced within the scope of action allowed by the respective environment (GLOBE). Three developmental tasks can be located at the sides of the triangle (cf. Lotz 2012): *identification* concerns the relation of the individual and his or her occupation, *recognition* addresses the relation between the person and his or her social environment (low side of the triangle). *Competence* comprises the demands others and the occupation make on the individual (right side of the triangle). Furthermore, *shaping* means that the GLOBE is not only a given restriction, but also a result of human action that may be influenced intentionally. For this purpose, individuals need a vision of their future vocational identity (cf. Giddens 1991). The following three examples demonstrate how the core developmental tasks of individual learners can be identified.

Ciara: Search for oneself

During the first interview, Ciara feels alienated. During the transition from school to work a counsellor advised her to apply for an apprenticeship in the retail sector as she had no career projects of her own. At her workplace, she feels uncomfortable but is unable to tell the reasons. At the point of time of the second interview she has dismissed the apprenticeship and found a training place as a nursery nurse starting three months later. However, she does not receive unemployment benefits unless she is willing to accept another part-time job for the meantime. The feedback of colleagues had helped her to find out what she wants. She states:

It was not the right occupation for me. [...] I knew it from the very beginning, that business is not the right thing for me. But somehow I wound up there. (Ciara II, 7)

Her main development task is the lack of a self-concept and consequently a vocational vision. She needs to get to know herself in order design a suitable career path. For this purpose, she is dependent on feedback by others. At the VET school and in her family this was not available, but fortunately at her workplace.

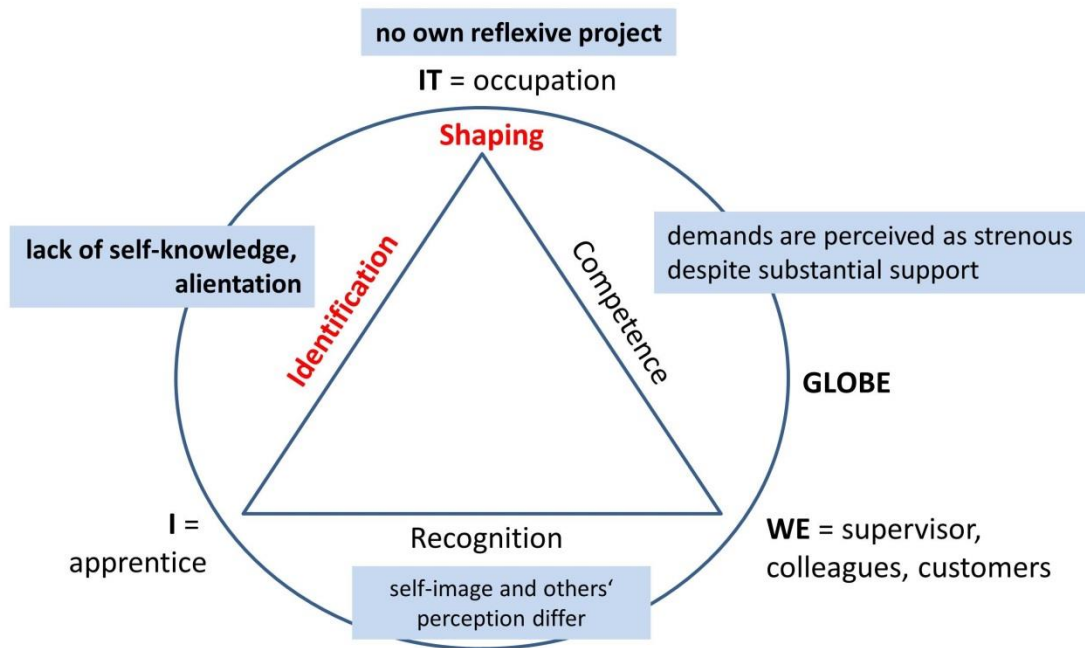


Figure 4: Ciara's developmental tasks

Ahmet's struggle for recognition

Ahmet has been on welfare before starting the apprenticeship. Now, he has less money than before as he has to support his mother. Nevertheless, he continues his apprenticeship despite inadequate tasks (cf. chapter 3) as he considers the VET certificate as a means to enter into further and higher education. At the time of the second interview, he has nearly finished his second year and is preparing for his exam. For this purpose, he has taken sick leave as his employer is demanding overtime due to a shortage of staff. Ahmet's main concern during his apprenticeship is his *struggle for recognition* with his supervisor. As she does not change her mind, Ahmet starts to shape his workplace in line with his personal goals using institutional opportunities like sick leave. His example shows that dissatisfaction of employees leads directly to a poor economic outcome.

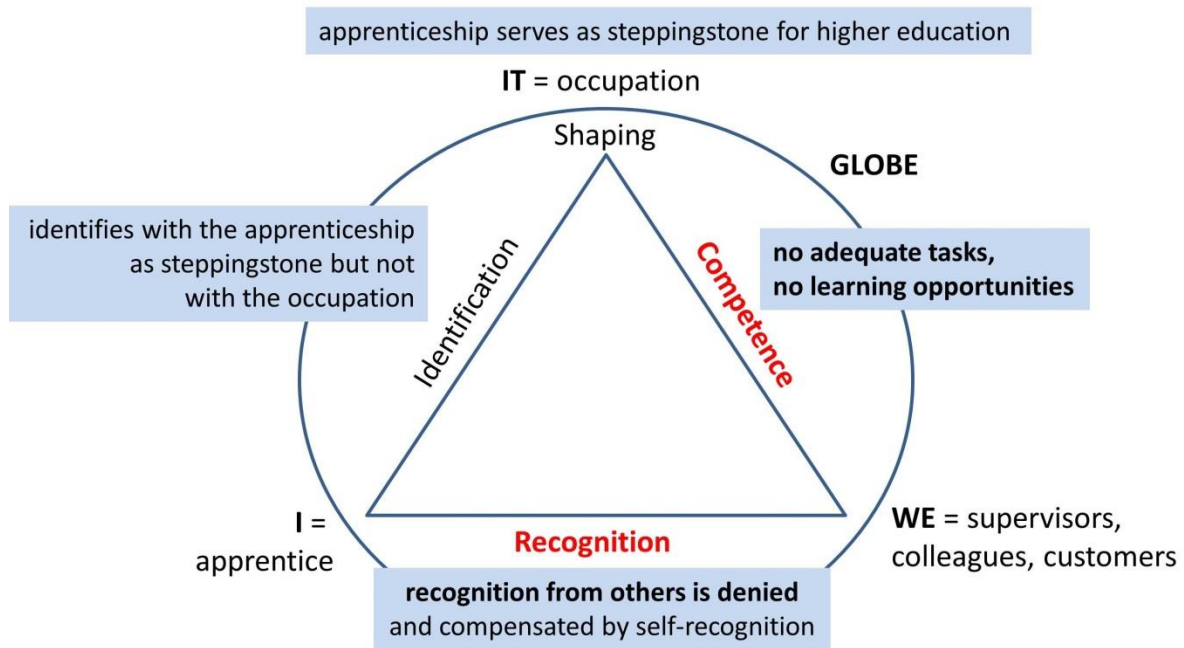


Figure 5: Ahmet's developmental tasks

Markus' lack of self-care

Markus' burnout (cf. chapter 3) is not only due to obsessive demands of his supervisor, but also to a lack of self-care and his striving for excellence. His biography shows that he has previously experienced similar crises after showing an extraordinary performance. His dismissal without notice was overhasty and disadvantageous. He should have looked for advice before taking his decision. His main developmental task is to claim recognition without asking too much of himself. At the point of time of his collapse, he was not informed about available institutional support but managed at least to organize psychotherapeutic support for the future.

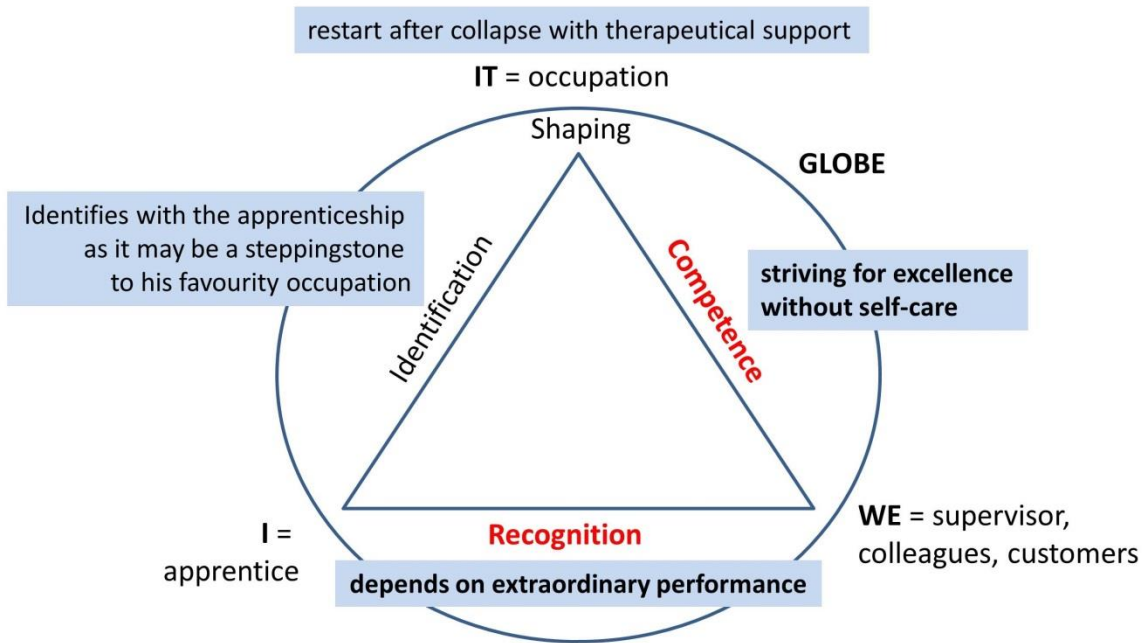


Figure 6: Markus' developmental tasks

6 Final remarks

Existing and own research shows that institutional arrangements made to stimulate vocational identity development at macro- or meso-level do not reach the addressees nor meet their real problems at the micro-level (cf. Bronfenbrenner 1979). For the individuals concerned lifelong learning only makes sense as part of their vocational identity work. If institutional arrangements are to take effect, the stakeholders at the micro-level such as VET teachers, VET students and counsellors have to be directly involved. Therefore, pilot projects supporting students and training VET teachers simultaneously – like the one carried out at by Munz et al. (2003) – are the most promising way to achieve a quick and direct impact. As a part of design based research pilot projects would contribute to immediate improvements at VET schools and serve to gather and distribute findings of general pedagogic interest. As lifelong learning is a continuous process that does not stop and restart when an individual changes from one environment to another, it would be ideal if the recommended projects were carried out in an integrated and cooperative approach by vocational orientation and preparation, initial VET and further education stakeholders. But at least, such projects would have to integrate biographical reflection in order to enable students to establish connections between the different stages of the educational biography. As national strengths and weaknesses concerning lifelong learning are different, this is an opportunity to learn from each other in multinational projects that could be funded by ERASMUS.

It is obvious that VET teachers need to be qualified for this type of accompaniment of identity development as it differs from the traditional way of instruction in VET. VET teacher training is already a priority of the European ET2020 strategy (cf. European Council 2009). In Hamburg, many VET teachers already receive a training as learners' coach (cf. Hardeland 2015;

Duresso-Faber/Tiedemann 2018). Coaching covers many of the requirements lined out in this paper. Therefore, the existing coaching training and practice may be a starting point for identity development in VET. However, coaching practice in Hamburg is restricted to matters related to the current VET curriculum and does not systematically include identity-relevant matters.

Currently, the initiatives suggested in this paper are likely to be impaired by the Corona-pandemic. Therefore, it has to be emphasized that young peoples' identity work is already being widely influenced via the use of social media (cf. Döring 2010; Hoffmann 2011). Therefore, intentional support of identity work can also be provided by digital media.

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