

# Employers Guide to Developing & Assessing Skills

*Why Recruiting International  
Erasmus+ Graduates matters*

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Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union

**Title: Employers Guide to Developing & Assessing Skills**

*Subtitle: Why Recruiting International Erasmus+ Graduates matters*

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Last updated 10<sup>th</sup> May, 2022

Published by: ErasmusJobs project consortium on <https://erasmusjobs.org>

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Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
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This project has been funded with the support from the European Commission.  
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# Introduction to the Employers Guide to Developing & Assessing Skills

The ErasmusJobs project aims at helping to match transferable skills that students have learnt through the Erasmus programme or as officers of their local Erasmus Student Network, with the requirements employers look for when they hire young graduates.

The Comprehensive Competence Profile (IO1) looked at what are the transversal competences that employers need, what are the transversal competences which Erasmus+ students have and what are the transversal competences which universities develop.

A skills mapping was developed to facilitate dialogue between the various stakeholders.

To further look at what transferable skills employers value, a workshop for employers ('Training for Employers') was then put together as part of the 'Training Toolkit. Its starting point was the skills mapping from the Comprehensive Competence profile. During this workshop employers interviewed students on the skills they most valued. All students interviewed had taken part in a mobility programme abroad, and were interviewed to provide examples of activities they had undertaken which demonstrated the skills sought.

The outcome of the workshop, a '**Skills Assessment & Competency Framework**', provides a methodology for employers, and a valuable assessment guide, as well as a useful self-assessment and skills development guide for Erasmus+ alumni, to reflect and build on the learning from their mobility experience prior to engaging with a potential employer.

The authors of the guide also drew on their almost 20 years of experience working in close cooperation with major industrial companies and their HR managers on the development of key skills needed inside their companies. They also brought their experience of having worked with more than 750 students, including more than 100 Erasmus+ students, since 2015 through the EILL's Ent-Ex programme, helping them self-assess and develop some of the key skills wanted by employers.

Sharing this experience, the section dedicated to '**Skills & their development**' offers useful considerations for employers when planning the development of their young graduates. This section can also be usefully read by Erasmus+ students to help them to better understand how they can further develop their skills.

Finally, a '**Career development tips**' section highlights companies' career planning, how these can contribute to attract young graduates and provides useful tips to Erasmus+ students to help them select companies which will support their personal development.

This guide is an industry-recognized skill development approach illustrated with those skills which are most sought by employers, and which are expected to be demonstrated by Erasmus+ alumni and other students when engaging with a potential employer.

# 1 Skills & their Development

## 1.1.1 What are Skills?

It is important to first have a common understanding of what a skill is in this context before demonstrating how one can be developed.

Our definition of a skill is 'an ability that may be developed and used at will in a timely manner'. An employer seeks candidates who can already demonstrate, or who show potential to develop, a range of skills which they require in their organisation. These will differ between organisations but the [employers' survey](#) done as part of this project, and workshop outlined below, have produced this framework of skills which are widely recognised as being amongst the most frequently sought after.

Employers are able to assess a candidate's academic skills ('hard' skills) from their degree certificate, the establishment from which it came, the curriculum followed, and grade achieved. Other non-academic skills are less easy to assess, just as they are not always easy to develop or demonstrate to a potential employer.

An easy example of a non-academic skill is the ability to play the piano. Most of us can readily differentiate those who play poorly (have barely developed the skill) and those who have mastered the skill and play 'well'.

Even if we didn't hear them play, a skilled musician might help us assess their level of skill by giving examples of concerts in which they have played, and sizes of audiences, whether or not people valued them by paying for a ticket to hear them. Or they could show certificates awarded to them by a more experienced practitioner, recognised by a well known conservatoire and qualified to assess the level of competence when hearing them play. If we had all this evidence we would have confidence that the musician could play at the level required by our band or orchestra.

Some skills, such as effective team-working, cultural awareness, thinking critically or creatively, are not always recognised as skills. If they are, they are referred to as 'soft skills' implying there is a fuzziness to them, that they are not an exact science, or that perhaps they are simply attributes with which people are born, and therefore which cannot be developed.

But these personal capabilities which enable someone to interact effectively with other people to achieve a desired purpose, though termed 'soft' skills should not be confused with 'simple' or 'easy'. They are not always present, or used, in a large proportion of the population, and so those who do have and know how to use these skills, even when under pressure from other influences, an uncertain or overly-complex task, or a shortage of time, are more sought after by employers than those who do not.

These 'soft' skills are highly valued and are certainly transferable, but they are also often complex with many components, which means that taken together these may be hard to assess and may be difficult to measure.

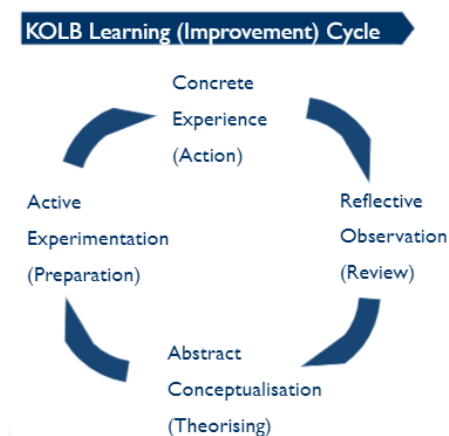
But just as a violinist must be able to break down and perfect their bowing technique, fingering technique, playing soft, hard, slowly, quietly, staccato... etc., and must be able to combine all these elements of their skill at will when needed, so soft skills are made up of components, all able to be practised and developed independently, and then called on to be used, often in combination with other elements, to achieve the desired effect when required.

And like a musician's complex combination of skills, with an appropriate approach these 'soft' skills can also be learned.

## 1.2 How do people learn and develop skills?

### 1.2.1 Learning through Practice and Review (Kolb)

Kolb's experiential learning theory (ELT), developed and first published by David A. Kolb in 1984 suggests that learning takes place when a person has an experience, then reflects upon it which leads to an analysis and formation of abstract concepts and generalisations which are then used in experimentation to test the hypothesis.



[Figure 1 - Kolb Learning Cycle]

Effective learning is seen when a person progresses through a cycle of four stages:

1. **Concrete Experience** - a new experience or situation is encountered, or a reinterpretation of existing experience.
2. **Reflective Observation of the New Experience** - of particular importance are any inconsistencies between experience and understanding.

3. **Abstract Conceptualization** reflection gives rise to a new idea, or a modification of an existing abstract concept (the person has learned from their experience).
4. **Active Experimentation** - the learner applies their idea(s) to the world around them to see what happens.

Kolb views learning as an integrated process with each stage being mutually supportive of and feeding into the next.

A skilful musician, who can seemingly effortlessly play a most complicated concert piece, almost certainly began by repeatedly practising single note scales. Each note played, correctly or not, provided evidence for review allowing the musician to repeat or to change his next attempt. A teacher might provide feedback to help avoid mistakes or repeat successes. The student will progress to simple combinations of notes until, after many cycles of repetition and review, these can be performed effortlessly and they can move onto gradually more complicated pieces.

We say somebody has a talent if they are more readily able to master a particular skill than others, seemingly without effort. What we mean is that they have an ability to repeat cycles of do, observe, understand, repeat / correct fewer times than others for the same improved result.

In the same way, expertise in applying 'soft' skills can be developed through practice, usually deliberate, though not always consciously. And just as a novice pianist will not become a good concert pianist simply by sitting in front of a concert piano, so simply exposing someone to a situation where soft skills are required does not make them acquire these skills (at least, not in any way which an employer would value). Similarly some people have a talent for certain soft skills and develop them more quickly than others.

### **1.2.2 *Stages in Skill Development***

In most cases the first step to develop a skill is to actually recognise it; to become aware that this personal attribute is more prevalent in some people than others. For those who become interested in developing a skill, they then begin to see around them that some demonstrate the skill more often or more effectively than others, and that even these people may not demonstrate it all of the time.

They then can take the trouble to understand the skill, how there are several elements to it, all of which can be isolated, observed in others, and practised by oneself until it can be demonstrated at will and at the appropriate time.

Skill development is deliberate, not linear and normally requires significant repetition and review. Effective skill development is underpinned by Awareness, Interest, Knowledge and Understanding. It may be developed into expertise.



By using a grid, we can plot our skill development progress and more easily see the best next steps.


[Figure 2 - EIL Skills Development Generic Grid]

## Skill Development Generic Grid

- Lower entries in each column and moving to the right-hand columns indicates increasing development.
- The grid is used to determine where an individual is in developing a particular skill.
- It is then possible to see the best next step needed to develop the skill.
- This is only a guide, as individuals will develop their skill differently.

Awareness	Interest (Aims)	Knowledge (Information)	Understanding	Skill (Action)
I am aware of the ability/behaviour.	I want to develop this skill. I can see the benefit to me.	I have information from: observation, reading, being told, listening etc.	I am able to put my knowledge into context.	I am, at times, able to perform the skill.
I see that it can be improved.	I see other people demonstrating the skill and want to copy them, or improve.	I realise that a certain behaviour is a skill.	I am able to discuss the behaviour, its effect.	I become more effective when using the skill.
I see that there are variations that will be more or less appropriate in different circumstances.	I become interested in what makes one person able to perform the behaviour more effectively than others.	I recognise that some people regularly perform the behaviour more effectively than others	I understand the causes of levels of effective performance.	When I use the skill, I achieve the desired outcome.
	I have a desire to experiment in order to improve.	I know the components of the skill.	I understand when I am practicing, especially something new.	I am able to repeat the skill at will, in a timely manner.
	I would like to find different ways to use this skill	I know how the components can be put together.	I am able to describe when a variation of the skill would be appropriate.	I am able to apply variations of the skill as appropriate to different situations.
		I have ideas of things to practice.		I am able to help others to develop and improve their performance of this skill.
		I know what needs to be done to improve.		

↓  
Improvement next steps



John Doerr, EIL (2020)

The novice begins top left, and the skilled practitioner has moved diagonally towards bottom right.

### 1.2.3 From Generic to Specific Skill Grids - the Competency Framework

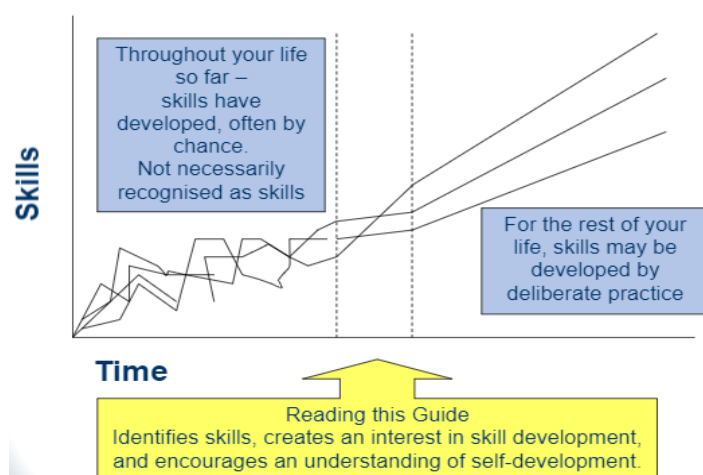
Using much the same principle, and much of the same language as for the generic grid, a specific skill development grid can be developed and can be used to assess a learner's progress in acquiring a particular skill. It again shows increasing skill development moving down each column and moving from left to right between the columns.

For an employer's organisation it can be helpful to create such a skill development grid for all of the skills needed in the organisation, with levels of attainment required by different role holders at different levels in the organisation. Often organisations add role-related context to the behaviours required and describe these as 'competences' but the "assess, understand, practice, review, development" cycle remains unchanged.

As well as being a tool against which required behaviours (skill levels) can be assessed, such a 'competency framework' can also be used to determine, in discussion between employee and supervisor, the next steps required for the individual to develop a particular skill (or competency).

All individuals develop differently, and any competency framework is only a guide, but anyone wanting to develop a skill can self-assess against a specific skill grid, and can readily see the next steps (move down and to the right) to develop themselves further. For young graduates, or job seekers in particular, a competency framework can help them understand what skills they have as well as what they should improve.

Often the recognition that skills can be developed is the awareness needed to create an interest in developing skills further. In selecting the first skills to develop, and in identifying a skills model of behaviours to self-assess against in order to determine which new behaviours to practice, allows skills to be developed deliberately.



- Any skill takes time to develop, and to become expert, a lot more time than simply reading this Guide.

- But if a Guide can create real interest and introduce appropriate tools or concepts, then readers have a greater chance of becoming skillful or even experts in the future, with practice.

[Figure 3 - EILL Skill Development Schematic]

### 1.2.4 Observation, Feedback and Practice

Student life gives plenty of opportunities for social gatherings as well as informal and formal meetings (of committees or societies, but also to plan the next weekend's excursion with friends) where a student can practice 'soft' skills. Self-assessment of your behaviour during such a gathering can be done through your own observations but this is difficult.

It can often be helpful to ask a friend or colleague who you know will be participating in your next interaction to observe a certain behaviour during the meeting. In this way their feedback can help you to assess where you are (and where you need to try next) in order to further develop the chosen skill.

## 2 Employers Workshop on Skill Assessment and Competency Framework

In October 2021, as part of its contribution to the ErasmusJobs project, the European Institute for Industrial Leadership (EIL) organised an interactive two day workshop which brought together ‘employers’ (experienced line and senior HR managers) and students having experienced a mobility programme. After initial exposure to Word Model Scoring, and examples of its use in developing characteristic- and behaviour-assessment grids in several industrial and professional contexts, the ‘employers’ (85%) were coached to interview the students (15%) to identify the skills they had developed during their Erasmus+ experience and other extra-curricular student experience (e.g. as officers of their student organisations).

All students interviewed had been for several months abroad on an Erasmus+ or a other mobility programme. They were interviewed to provide examples of activities they had undertaken which demonstrated the skills sought.

The aim of the workshop was for employers to develop a usable competency framework which could help employers facilitate assessment of skills in future interviews, as well as to help students / alumni to self-assess and prepare themselves for job interviews.

The 31 participants produced an output of the interviews and the various group discussions, and generated characteristics for each level of competency, going from a basic level of mastery of a set of skills to what could be defined as an expert level of mastery of these skills. The grids generated by each working group were then analysed and collated together into a single framework per competency / skill.

The output, a set of skills matrices, provides a comprehensive structure describing different competencies with their specific set of behavioural indicators and measurement criteria - a Competency Framework.

### 2.1 Workshop Output on employer’s needs

Earlier in the project a literature study through desk Research and common skills gained through E+ mobility concluded that students gained a series of skills from their mobility experience, and the Employers survey identified, relative to one another, how highly these were valued by employers (see the ErasmusJobs **‘Comprehensive Competence Profile’**). The competency framework in the ‘Employers’ Workshop’ was developed by a narrower set of employers who identified a set of skills which they valued. Each is a snapshot in time. Neither study should be considered exhaustive or conclusive. Both should be read by employers and students and taken as a useful guide to assess / self-assess skills.

The workshop also discovered that when faced with the inevitable comparison of interviewees, that they were differentiated by some additional considerations which were not covered by the ErasmusJobs report on the [‘Skills Labour Market needs’](#) and the [Profile](#). These additional skills & attributes have therefore been incorporated in the Competency Framework below, in addition to those which came out of the **‘Comprehensive Competence Profile’**.

## 2.2 An illustrative Competency Framework

Interviews and group discussions in the Employers' Workshop identified a set of skills and described characteristics for each, together with context in which the skills might be demonstrated. Each resulting 'competency' grid goes from a basic level to mastery of the skill. The views from different interviews and workshop teams were then analysed, normalised and collated into individual skill-specific grids.

- They first provide a **definition of the skill** and the context in which it was illustrated by the students' experience.
- They show in word model form, the **progressive steps towards mastering** different elements of each skill from **Aware**, through **Familiar, Skilled** and **Expert**.
- They also provide an example of a behaviour which demonstrates that the **skill is not evident**.
- They then provide an **example question or two which employers might use** to encourage an interviewee to describe an experience where they may have demonstrated the particular skill.

The skills presented are not a definitive set of skills but are a reasonable suite of core skills which most employers would find highly valuable. They are all 'transferable' skills, which is to say that if demonstrated in one set of circumstances (e.g. as experienced in a student's own Erasmus+ experience) could then be transferred to a different set of circumstances likely to be experienced in a company workplace.

When looking to recruit young graduates, it was the workshop participants' view that HR Managers would be looking for candidates to demonstrate a skill at least at the 'Familiar' level. A high potential candidate might be able to demonstrate situations (e.g. whilst organising a major event or conference as an officer of their student association) where they exhibited a skill at 'Expert' level.

It was also stressed that employers hire not only on proven capabilities, but also very much on potential. Being able to show willingness to develop their skills, to continue to grow and learn, will help candidates show their potential.

(Each guide below should be read moving diagonally towards the bottom right.)

# Adaptability & Flexibility

## Definition

Adaptability is the ability to recognise and respond positively to the changing environment by creating new opportunities for change.

Flexibility is the ability to deal effectively with changing priorities & unpredictable conditions.

The ability to:

- Respond positively & quickly to changing circumstances
- Deal effectively with changing priorities & unpredictable conditions

	Aware	Familiar	Skilled	Expert
Able to evaluate situations and adapt accordingly	Aware that there are different environments / cultures.	Recognises they must adapt their behaviours to changes in a work environment (tasks, schedules, etc). Open to cultural, personal and age differences.	Adapts own behaviours to different groups (professionally, nationality, style of leadership, etc) Actively seeks a 'common language' between people.	Adapts to different groups (professionally, nationality, style of leadership, etc) and steers group processes and behaviours to optimise contributions and effectiveness.
	Prioritises activities in order to complete a planned task.	Chooses between conflicting priorities in order to complete several parallel tasks.	Able to make progress in an environment with multiple / simultaneous priorities and activities.	Deals effectively with unpredictable changes.  Anticipates requirements, multi tasks and manages own & others' priorities in complex situations.
Open to challenges / Curious to learn new things	Find themselves in situations where they need to adapt.	Put themselves into situations where they need to adapt.	Is open to challenges and knows how to "panic control", is able to adapt and reflect.	Actively seeks to step out of their comfort zone in order to experience new things.

**To avoid:** Closed minded. Inability to question themselves and to try and find common grounds.

**Types of questions Employers might ask to try and identify where the candidate stands in this continuum:**

- Give an example of a challenging situation you have experienced, particularly one which changed from when you originally started, and tell us how you adapted to it.
- Give an example of how you reacted to a change in your environment.

# Intercultural Communication Skills

## Definition

Ability to share information in an effective and collaborative manner. Ability to effectively transfer thoughts and express ideas orally or verbally in individual or group situations.

The ability to:

- Structure their communication according to the situation, audience and objective & deliver a clear and transparent message.
- Actively listen to others and welcome feedback in order to promote information-sharing and active collaboration.
- Adapt their communication style to help understanding, and enhance the impact of the message

**Communication is one of the transversal skills needed in order to effectively demonstrate all of the other skills.**

	Aware	Familiar	Skilled	Expert
Communicates according to audiences / Adapts message to various stakeholders	Recognises there are cultural differences; speaks slowly and clearly and is attentive to the words they use.	Carefully prepares their communications. Communicates with respect for those they speak with and for conventions of politeness.	Able to understand cultural differences and able to readily adapt their message to the audience (experience / culture / skill level of the audience etc).	Able to spontaneously adjust messages (what) & communication style (how) to diverse audiences, based on non verbal signs from the audience; fully engages people whatever their opinion or position.
	Favours positive ways of speaking to share a clear message.	Able to illustrate their points with concrete examples.	Able to communicate a clear, transparent, structured, positive message.	Able to master various forms of communication and adapt to difficult audiences, especially in crisis situations.
	Looks for confirmation that communication has been received.	Happy to receive feedback on their communication.	Actively seeks feedback on their communications and incorporates this in subsequent communications.	Reads multiple sources of feedback during and after any communication and adapts accordingly.

	May raise their voice or otherwise exhibit an emotional response, particularly when their opinion is not accepted or not understood.	Does not display their emotions when communicating even when misunderstood or when their opinion is not accepted.	Able to master their emotions even when communicating in a stressful or conflict situation.	Able to display and generate an appropriate emotional response to reinforce communication and to help with understanding in all situations.
Listening skills	Listens in order to identify the first opportunity to express their own opinions.	Listens attentively; is able to process information.	Listens actively.	Able to create an environment that favours listening and communication.
	Recognises others may not have understood.	Does not hesitate to ask questions to check understanding of the audience.	Makes sure they understand others' views by reformulating and checking for possible misunderstandings .	Integrates other people's points of view in own communications and observes feedback to make sure everyone is aligned
<p><b>To avoid:</b> Poor listening skills; inability to adapt their style to different people; "teaching" or "lecturing " style, 'talks down' to their listeners; unprepared, does not know what to say in front of an audience.</p>				
<p><b>Types of questions Employers might ask to try and identify where the candidate stands in this continuum:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Please tell us about a situation where you have had to communicate to a large group of people.</li> <li>- What was your purpose? Tell us what preparation you did before your communication.</li> </ul>				

# Creative Problem Solving

## Definition

Ability to address problems or opportunities or manage the situation at hand by drawing on one's knowledge and experience base, and calling on other references and resources as necessary.

The ability to:

- Take a proactive approach
- Take initiative & know when to ask for help
- Develop a strategy to resolve a problem
- Demonstrate calmness in front of problems

	Aware	Familiar	Skilled	Expert
Ability to analyse a situation, identify and describe the problem	Recognises that a problem exists and that someone should do something to resolve the problem.	Recognises the problem and its possible causes, can identify a possible solution and the resources required.	Recognises the problem and its likely causes, can identify several possible solutions and the resources required for each and can select the best option to meet the defined aims.	Recognises a variety of problems from several co-dependent causes, can identify multiple possible solutions and the resources required for each and can select the best options to meet the aims of multiple stakeholders.



Problem solving approach - efficiency and effectiveness	Tries various changes until achieving the desired effect.	Solves single, relatively simple problems by applying appropriate tools and experience.	Solves complicated problems by breaking them down into manageable parts in a systematic, detailed way.	Solves multiple complicated problems with multiple interdependent causes by breaking down into a series of manageable parts, understanding dependencies and managing programmes of parallel projects to take an idea from concept to delivery.
	Sees the problem and focuses on its causes	Focuses on resolving and preventing recurrence of the causes	Focuses on the solution, does not get distracted by causes	Looks for several possible solutions rather than dwell on problems
Creativity - Ability to develop new approaches / alternative solutions if the situation requires	Recognises that there are different opinions but sticks with what is familiar.	Recognises that new information may be needed and researches for it.	Seeks advice / help from others when faced with a problem.	Uses his network to ensure the problem is shared widely and is always in dialogue with potential solution-providers
		Aware of several tools / approaches to generate new ideas.	Able to apply several tools / approaches as appropriate to generate new ideas.	Effectively applies a variety of tools / approaches as appropriate to generate new ideas.
	Maintains and defends own solution as being 'the right one', dismisses alternatives.	Able to adapt own solutions to take account of different options identified in research or proposed by others.	Able to see different options, when everyone is thinking in the same direction (being able to think outside the box).	Recognised as a problem solver "go to" person; shares expertise & coaches others to solve their own problems (even outside of their own domain /

				subject matter expertise).
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**To avoid:** Does not seek advice when faced with a problem; focus on efficient resolution of own problem without concern for impact on others

**Types of questions Employers might ask to try and identify where the candidate stands in this continuum:**

- Tell us about a significant problem, or problems, which you have faced? and what did you do to overcome this situation?
- Describe a situation when you were faced with a problem you could not solve. What did you do?

# Proactivity

## Definition

Proactivity or proactive behaviour, also 'taking the initiative', is that which tries to anticipate problems or solve small problems before they become bigger problems. Proactive behaviour involves acting in advance, taking control of a situation and making early changes, rather than waiting to be asked, or waiting for something to happen. Proactive behaviour is especially valued when preventing an avoidable undesirable situation from occurring.

	Aware	Familiar	Skilled	Expert
Taking initiatives / acting or reacting to a situation	<p>Listens to task briefing. Asks 'how' questions. Completes task to supervisor's instructions. Brings problems to the supervisor to agree solutions. Can be held accountable for complying with supervisors instructions.</p>	<p>Listens to task briefing. Asks 'by when' questions. Identifies steps to complete task to supervisor's standards and timescale. Brings problems to supervisor to agree schedule impact. Can be held accountable for what was planned and for solutions once agreed.</p>	<p>Listens to task briefing. Asks 'why' questions. Identifies plans to achieve supervisor's purpose. Presents options to solve problems which might impact ability to deliver purpose within timescale. Advises supervisor of progress. Comfortable being held accountable for completing what they have proposed, delivering what was promised.</p>	<p>Understands aims of supervisor and identifies tasks and plans to meet these aims without requiring a briefing. Identifies and selects options which will avoid foreseeable problems. Advises supervisor of achievements. Holds themselves accountable for taking initiatives through to the end / delivering their own expectations.</p>
Planning and scheduling	<p>Aware of the need for a plan to provide reminders to stay on the task or on the schedule.</p>	<p>Is able to follow the plan outlined for them and respect the schedule.</p>	<p>Is able to develop a plan, focusing on the required output and schedule, with a focus to meet the aims set for them.</p>	<p>Is able to set aims in line with the long term organisation's strategy; plan and define a schedule in order to meet the set of aims.</p>

	Is able to estimate an approximate timescale in which the plan should be completed if there are no surprises.	Is able to forecast the duration of most activities in the plan and to arrange these in priority order such that the task is completed on time, assuming there are no unforeseen events.	Is able to plan and schedule all activities to complete a task in an appropriate timescale. Factors in a contingency to allow mitigation of foreseeable risks and allows a 'buffer' time for unforeseen events.	Is able to comprehensively plan and schedule in advance; builds appropriate contingencies anticipating difficulties, and plans to take measures to avoid problems from occurring, or to mitigate them.
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**To avoid:** Unable to provide examples of achievements which they have led. Only doing what they have been asked to do, not showing that they have taken responsibility for their own actions.

**Types of questions Employers might ask to try and identify where the candidate stands in this continuum:**

- Please tell us about a project you took on on your own initiative. What did you do? What problem did your project solve?

# Willingness & ability to learn from their experience

## Definition

Also described by our workshop participants as a 'growth mindset' this is a willingness to learn more, seek and leverage resources in order to grow in yourself and your career. People who demonstrate a willingness to learn are usually looking to gain knowledge and develop skills to improve their work performance with every new task, and are often seeking new and more complicated tasks in order to develop further.

	Aware	Familiar	Skilled	Expert
Openness to new experiences	Is aware that new experiences offer opportunities but prefers known, routine activities.	Open to new experiences.	Seeks out new experiences as learning opportunities.	Shows curiosity. Actively looks for experiences and sees every activity as an opportunity to enhance their skills or knowledge.
Aptitude for self-development / awareness of Improvement opportunity	Appears to have a fair appreciation of their own strengths and weaknesses.	Knows their own strengths and weaknesses and believes these can be improved.	Works to develop their own strengths and weaknesses and can demonstrate how these have improved.	Continuously works to develop their own strengths and weaknesses.
Extent to which learning is a deliberate action	Knows that some people continue to make the same mistakes whereas other people appear to make mistakes only once or twice and then change to avoid repeating mistakes.	Knows when things have gone wrong; finds out the cause and changes approach or behaviours to avoid repeating in similar circumstances.	Reviews all major activities or events and identifies what went well in order to repeat the causes and what difficulties or mistakes were made and plans to avoid these.	Constantly reviews all activities to identify, successes, difficulties and their causes in order to develop continuous improvement plans.

**To avoid:** resenting feedback; showing no interest in gaining new knowledge or learning from (own/others') experience.

**Types of questions Employers might ask to try and identify where the candidate stands in this continuum:**

- What is the most important, or most useful (non-academic) skill you have learned alongside your studies? How did you learn this? Did you set out to learn this deliberately or was it something which just happened?

# Intrinsic Motivation

## Definition

Refers to a person's desire to do the best possible job or to exert the maximum effort to perform an assigned task. The motivation is 'intrinsic' when the incentive for engaging in a behaviour or completing a task is performing the task itself to the best of their ability; this is as opposed to an 'extrinsic' motivation where the incentive will be an external reward.

	Aware	Familiar	Skilled	Expert
	Is aware that some tasks are interesting and others not. Chooses to perform well on those which interest them.	Is able to identify his personal needs or motivations. Understands what there is to be gained for one-self by completing the task well.	Demonstrates the drive to use their own motivation and to achieve a the best outcome they can deliver.	Demonstrates the drive to use own and others' motivation and to achieve a the best outcome the team can deliver.
		Has a positive attitude. Shows interest in the task or project.	Is happy to take on more responsibility.	Is engaged in his/her work because it makes a difference.

**To avoid:** Few or no questions asked about aims in a project; production of hasty work with little attention to detail editing; etc...

## Types of questions Employers might ask to try and identify where the candidate stands in this continuum:

- Please give me an example of a task or project you've completed where you've been very pleased with the results?
- Can you explain what it was about this task which provided you with the motivation to complete it?

# Project Management & Leadership

## Definition

Whilst familiarity with the 'hard' skills of project management (planning, scheduling, budgeting, resourcing, coordinating activities and reporting) are important they are not addressed in this competency.

Here Leadership skills refers to the 'soft' skills required to organise and motivate other people (the project team) to complete a series of tasks, often within a certain time frame in order to reach a common goal. Typically demonstrated by students / job-seekers in a project environment where they may or may not have been tasked with the role and authority of the 'Project Manager', but also in a line management position in e.g. a student society.

People with leadership skills are usually able to develop a long term view or strategy and a plan to help the organisation realise this.

	Aware	Familiar	Skilled	Expert
Creating common shared aims	Knows that the project team needs to all work towards the same aims.	Ensures all team members are aware of the project aims.	Helps team members to agree a set of common aims.	Encourages team to identify both common and misaligned aims, to discuss these and agree which the team will address and how the unaddressed aims will be tackled.
Defining activities to reach the aims	Knows that all tasks must have an owner, and that the tasks should be divided throughout the team so that everyone has a chance to complete within time.	Clearly defines for each team member their roles, tasks, and how these fit together in the plan.	Involves team members in agreeing roles and tasks and in preparing a plan which they can all agree.	Encourages team members to define and take responsibility for packages of work with which they are comfortable and can deliver to an agreed plan.
Causing others to complete the defined activities	Gives instructions and deadlines to team, and regularly checks progress.	Agrees outcomes and milestones with team, encourages periodic progress reports and provides recognition for meeting milestones.	Uses plan to monitor progress, uses regular updates / review meetings to recognise and reward progress and to motivate team.	Walks the talk - recognises the contributions of all team members towards the overall aims, and provides confidence to the team that the plan will be achieved. Comfortable with suggesting the direction to take; taking



				responsibility for the team and outcome(s).
Keeping the team and other stakeholders informed of progress	Is able to provide an update on the project when asked.	Provides required progress reports. Ensures team provide their contributions in a timely manner.	Provides regular project updates tailored to the needs of both internal (team) and for external stakeholders.	Champions the project in all communications both with team and with any external stakeholders, mentioning progress, highlighting successes, and benefits.
<p><b>To avoid:</b> Waits for others to make decisions and provide direction; unable to plan or coordinate others or to understand the bigger picture; poor communicator; does not take responsibility.</p>				
<p><b>Types of questions Employers might ask to try and identify where the candidate stands in this continuum:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tell us about one of the projects which you have led? Provide an example of an event you have organised ? What was your role? How did you get other people to achieve what was needed?</li> </ul>				

# 4 Career Development tips & companies' attractiveness

## 4.1 Values – filters on your Opportunities

Assuming a student takes an interest, assess themselves objectively and develop skills which employers will value, they will be looking to enter the job market. In order to do 'meaningful work' a young graduate will have to make a choice: in which sector, and for which employer within that sector do you want to work?

How do to make sure they will be doing really meaningful work? One way of thinking about this is to consider their own values. We are used to companies expressing their values in order to create an image to the outside world – how the world sees them. Most of us also have a set of values as a consequence of our upbringing, education, friends, peers and influences which have shaped our lives.

Personal values not only present an image of the person to the world (assuming they demonstrate their values in their everyday behaviours), they are also your own measure against which they evaluate whether the person is prepared to do the work which might be required of them by their prospective employer.

Personal values can act as a series of filters for eliminating career options which are unacceptable to the person. Often we do this unconsciously ('I wouldn't want to work for an arms company', or 'I wouldn't want to work for a company which was discriminatory', or 'I wouldn't work for that company, they are known for employing child labour').

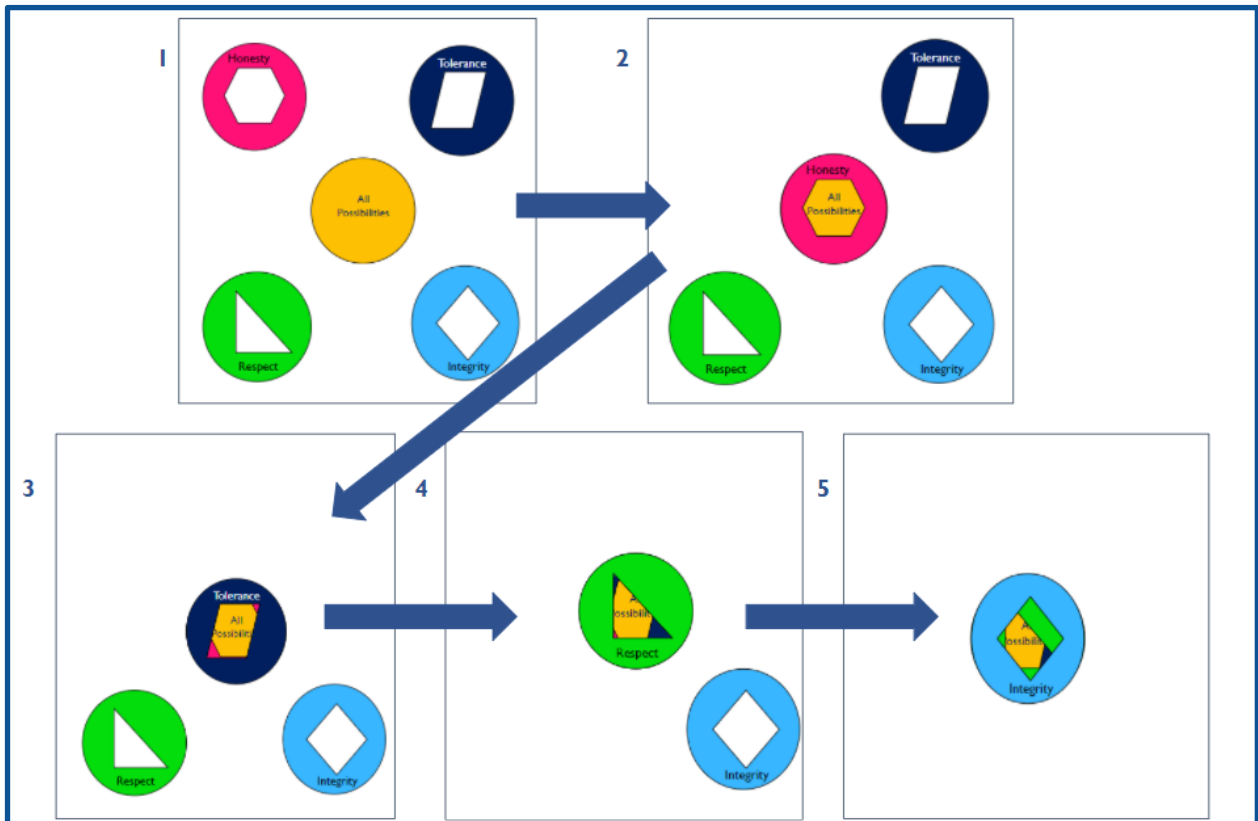
A useful job-seeking practice is to make this choice deliberately. First write down the values which really matter to you, the ones which, if a company is known to breach these, would cause you a conflict.

Then taking one of your values at a time, identify the companies which you know are definitely not compliant with your value. Identify whether other companies in the same sector are also not compliant (the non-compliance is sector-wide) - if so, discount the whole sector.

If there are other companies in the same sector which are definitely not in breach of your values, 'white-list' these and look for others whose corporate message is similar. In the diagram below, if the gold disc represents the whole range of possible employer options, the successive application of each of your values 'filters out' several of your options, reducing the available options to only those employers which comply.

If you identify a company which is perceived to be a very popular employer yet it fails your own 'values as filters' test it is time to ask yourself a very important question - would I be prepared to work for a company which does not meet my own values?

For a satisfying career, the answer to this is usually 'no'.



[Figure 4 - EILL Values as Filters]

## 4.2 Job-Seekers Choices

One definition of career development is ‘the planned acquisition and performance of successive jobs and other activities such that an individual develops to maximise their personal potential, and is sufficiently rewarded to satisfy their aspirations’. In recent years job-seekers have shown increasing interest in a third purpose - ‘..... And makes a positive contribution to society’ (which they may have partly answered by applying their values as filters as described above).

Whereas previous generations of students looked for security, a job for life, and their career paths determined by their company, today’s students are influenced by the flexibility of the ‘Gig economy’. They look for a variety of experiences, some part-time, some full-time, combined with travel opportunities, the desire to do meaningful work, to have real responsibility early, to achieve a good work-life balance, and their career choices are complicated by the considerations of dual careers and parental leave.

In order to make the most of their capability, increasingly students must manage their own careers, with the probability of several changes of employer. And when they do so they should consider whether the change will meet their intended purpose. The following might help with both their initial and future employer choices.

These consideration should also be helpful to companies interested in attracting talents.

## 4.2.1 Key questions job seekers ask of companies

What should job seekers know about how companies manage talent before they join them?

We looked at four core aspects of talent management and developed a series of questions which we posed to students looking for jobs. We then asked employers to ask themselves whether they would be able to answer these same questions for talent applying to join their own organisations.

This guide will not provide all the answers – it is intended to stimulate thinking from both sides before the recruitment process begins. An interview is a two-way experience, and job seekers should also use it as a chance to ask questions.

### 4.2.1.1 Organisation Design

Questions you should be able to answer about the organisation and the role you are offered:

- Can I explain it to my peers? (And if I can, am I satisfied that it will be sufficiently impressive?)
- What will I learn in this job?
- What sort of role would people who'd done this job normally move on to?

Types of questions you might want to ask the company in order to determine the above:

- Can you please explain to me how the Organisation works?
- Would my role be a core or supporting role?
- What do people usually do next after this role?
- How would my role / function add value to the business?
- Do I understand this job? (Do you understand this job?)
- Why do you think I can do this job? (Ask yourself, how big the stretch from your current experience is.)
- What will I learn if I do this job?

### 4.2.1.2 Talent Management

Talent Management<sup>1</sup> is 'the recruitment, development, promotion and retention of people planned and aligned with an organisation's current and future business goals'. In order to understand how the company manages its talents you might want to ask:

- Could you please tell me about the organisation's talent management processes?

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<sup>1</sup> \*Talent Management processes should differentiate between performance and potential, identify people with potential and ensure they receive appropriate development at the 'right time' to maximise their potential.

- Can you please tell me how I would progress in this organisation?
- How are people assessed across the organisation? \*
- Are there common standards?
- Would I have a mentor?
- How does your mentoring programme work?

#### 4.2.1.3 Performance vs Potential

Many students report their concern for being ‘just a number’ or ‘lost’ in a large company. Usually when we dig deeper it is clear that the real concern is that they do a good job, and are kept in place doing a good job, whilst their boss takes the credit; that they might not get noticed, or promoted, for their good performance.

Most good employers recognise this possibility and alongside processes to recognise an individual’s good performance, they would also have a process to identify the potential of talented individuals, and a system, usually including the appointment of a mentor, to ensure that they get the right experiences to develop their potential and don’t get ‘lost’ or ‘stuck’ performing well for just one boss at a level beneath their capability.

In order to assess whether a potential employer would help you to make the most of your capability and reach your real potential, you should identify whether the company will help you to develop yourself, find out what career development opportunities are possible in this company, and make sure you will get 10 years’ experience and not 10 x 1 years’ experience.

Types of questions you might want to ask in a job interview to determine the above:

- What development opportunities are given?
- Can I see how I might develop and progress?
- What is the balance between formal training and learning on the job?
- Would I have a mentor?

## 5 In Closing

An employer seeks candidates who can already demonstrate, or who show potential to develop, a range of transferable 'soft' skills which they require in their organisation. They are looking for young people who will make a difference.

Students having experienced a mobility programme - and students who have been involved actively in their Erasmus+ or as officers (at national or international level) - will most likely have developed such skills. We have seen how these can be broken down into various elements and improved through repeated cycles of 'practice & review'.

When looking to recruit young graduates, HR Managers seek candidates who demonstrate skills at least at the 'Familiar' level. A high potential candidate might be able to provide examples (e.g. whilst organising a major event or conference as an officer of the Erasmus Student Network) where they have exhibited a skill at 'Expert' level.

The Illustrative Competency Framework in this guide also provides a reference and a target against which students can observe themselves and plan to improve. The guide can also be useful to help students to self-assess and prepare themselves for job interviews.

Most of those going on a mobility programme without further involvement in their Erasmus chapter will most likely be at the entry-level of the skills continuum, with skills to be developed further. Those who, enthused by their Erasmus experience, choose instead to 'give something back', for example, volunteering in their local chapter to host other visiting Erasmus students, or by getting involved as officers of ESN at national or European level, will 'learn by doing' (particularly by practising & reviewing) and would further develop their skills to levels more highly valued by prospective employers.

It was also stressed that employers hire not only on proven capabilities, but also very much on potential. Being able to provide evidence that they have deliberately undertaken to develop their skills, will help candidates demonstrate their potential.

## References

[Employers' Survey](#) or [Skills Labour Market needs'](#) ([European Institute for Industrial Leadership](#))

Employers Workshop 'Skill Assessment and Competency Framework', organised by the EIL on 18 & 19 October 2021 ([European Institute for Industrial Leadership](#))

[Literature Study Through Desk Research](#) ([Universidad de Alcalá](#))

[Common skills gained through E+ mobility](#) ([Masaryk University](#), [Universidad de Alcalá](#), [Université de Mons](#), [Università degli Studi di Roma 'Tor Vergata'](#))

[Competence Booklet](#) ([Expertise in Labour Mobility](#))

Figure 4: EIL's 'Values as Filters' ® ([European Institute for Industrial Leadership](#))