

How to Organize Continuous Workplace Learning in Clinical Practice?

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Workplace learning is high on the agenda of Ministers of Education and Employment. Worldwide, the ultimate goal is to educate competent professionals who are fit for practice. That is why, a few decades ago, competency-based education has been introduced. Competency-based or outcome-based education has encouraged a more sophisticated perspective on student progress and student monitoring in view of supporting the attainment of exit outcomes [1]. The benefits of a more seamless continuum of education from undergraduate through postgraduate education to continuing professional development have been widely accepted [2]. But, in practice, the implementation of such a continuum has proved elusive and difficult to achieve [1]. The question mainly pertained on how workplace learning is to be organized to foster continuous competency development? The answer to this research question can be found in a recently finalized doctoral research programmer 'Integrating workplace learning, assessment and supervision in health care education' [3].

Reviews of the relevant workplace literature and empirical research in the context of undergraduate midwifery education (Belgium) resulted in the design of a holistic and competency-based model offering the possibility to facilitate continuous learning at the workplace. We have shown that it is possible to integrate the numerous components of workplace learning into an evidence-based and feasible workplace learning model: the 'Integrated learning Assessment and Supervision Competency Model' [1]. Integration, collaboration and continuity are the cornerstones of this workplace learning model. The results make clear that promoting continuous competency development requires (1) an integration of competencies, (2) learning (reflection and feedback on performance and on competency development), (3) assessment (self-, formative and summative assessment), and (4) supervision (observers, learning guides and assessment committee). This results in a model with a programmatic view on the workplace learning curriculum and a focus on critical conditions to support continuous learning. The latter was found to be needed because respondents noted important barriers while implementing the model. They stated that successful implementation rely on the extent to which essential conditions are met. The model has important implications for the design of the workplace learning programme. The latter needs to be revised in such a way that (1) a formative reflection and feedback continuum is established, (2) active involvement in learning and supervision is encouraged, and (3) collaboration in learning is facilitated. Our empirical research findings suggest the resulting formative learning is valuable and affects the results of summative assessment. A twofold assessment strategy (assessment of single competencies and holistic judgment of professional competence) creates an assessment continuum at the workplace.

The following graphical representation shows how the interplay of the above mentioned components results in a lifelong learning journey in the workplace [4] (Figure 1).

To conclude, this Integrated Learning Assessment and Supervision Competency model, also called Embo's continuous workplace learning model, provides new perspectives on continuous and competency-based workplace learning. At this moment, the generalizability is explored by implementing this model in twelve midwifery schools and one speech pathology school in Flanders. The author's project this model contributes to the competence future in health care education and practice.

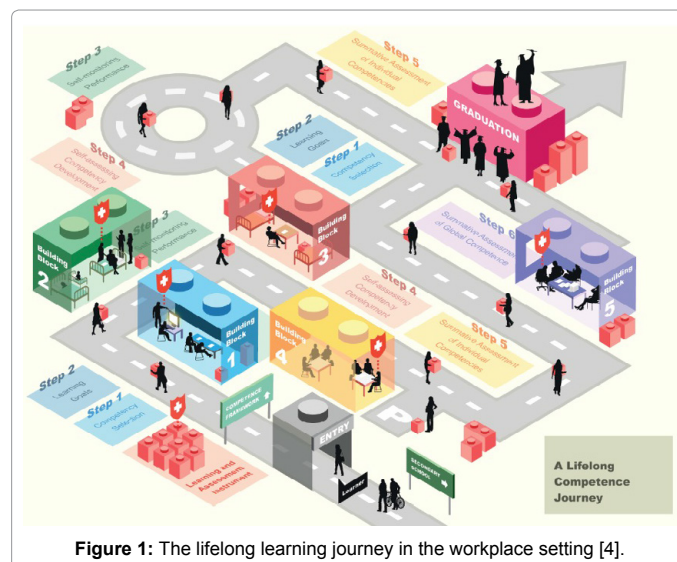


Figure 1: The lifelong learning journey in the workplace setting [4].

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