O3 - GUIDELINES FOR ORGANISATIONS & PRACTITIONERS

DISCUSSION PAPER

Developed for the Erasmus+ project MIRVA: Making Informal Recognition Visible and Actionable
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Output description

O3, Guidelines for Organisations & Practitioners, is responsible for exploring the recognition of learning within education and training providers, with a special focus on how to bridge informal and formal recognition.

This outcome is designed to address adult education providers and training centres and the professionals working there. The objective is to raise their awareness on the different modalities for recognising learning and achievements so they can be translated into some form of recognition by education and training providers, for example to translate informal recognition into formal recognition during a recognition of prior learning process.

Educators and trainers will be actively involved in the design of this output with the support of O7 and the outreach activities. Incidentally, the educators involved in the outcome might also be interested in O2 to establish their own local and global recognition networks.

By making adult learners the source of recognition (of others) the impact on overall provision of recognition can be extremely important, since the more the network offers endorsement and recognition, the more valuable and the more attractive for others it will become (network and scaling effects).

Part of the outcome will be targeted at existing networks, like associations in order to reach the leaders of these networks and invite them to create their own recognition networks and contribute to that of others.

Learn, live, work, recognize

This output is aimed at organizations as contexts where recognition happens - often inadvertently or implicitly.

Organizations can have various degrees of structure, ranging from loose communities to hierarchical companies and including - on the practitioners’ side - small-team cooperations.

If not otherwise specified, the use of the term “organizations” in this output must be considered as including all kinds of organizations, from the most structured to the most loosely connected.

In the context of organizations, activities take place that are constantly activating showing and proving soft and hard skills, trust relations, mutual learning. One of the goals of opening up recognition is to improve how such qualities are highlighted and made available for further display evaluation and recognition.

The aim of this study is to support organizations and organization members in improving the attention provided to recognition processes, acknowledging their value and eventually integrating them in daily activities and in the organization’s processes - both formally and informally.
Organizations can also have various degrees of interest in recognition itself: while for professional training associations recognition can be considered a core activity, for more generally described companies this is not the case. However, we find that recognition processes can be vastly improved in both cases, with some specificities that are the ground reason why a specific paragraph is dedicated to organization having learning and recognizing as core activities.

A number of use cases have been gathered, both through ad hoc interviews and existing documentation, in order to identify how recognition currently happens in organizations and how it could be opened up from the point of view of involved actors. Contexts covered by use cases include traditional learning, adult learning, working environments, communities, social environments: this output will try to show how it is possible and why it is desirable to improve quantity and quality of recognition in each of these contexts, mainly through cultural and mindset changes - and secondarily by introducing tools and technology supporting the desired processes.

Suggested improvements to recognition in organizations will be explicitated in the form of advice following the same dimensions used in the Open Recognition Maturity Matrix, namely:
- Attitudes
- Learning Environment
- Recognition Environment
- Technologies

Learning environment is relevant, even if this output does not mean to directly address issues pertaining teaching and learning, since learning is the most obvious activity that should always lead to recognition - even though it shouldn’t be the only one. Being aware of learning is thus a simple first step towards being aware of deserving recognition and mirroring this awareness into others.

Technologies will only be lightly addressed, as this dimension is directly discussed by O4.
Peer recognition

We consider peer recognition all recognition happening informally on the same level (micro to micro), as described in the Open Recognition Framework. It does not (and often cannot) depend on formal assessments, but it has relevant outputs - such as self-confidence.

Peer recognition in organizations includes:
- asking for help or contribution on a domain leveraging certain knowledge or skills
- assigning a task or a role leveraging certain knowledge or skills
- recognizing a role
- appreciating work, effort, outputs, activities
- demonstrating respect, friendship, love

Peer recognition can generate more peer recognition, and can trigger - and even represent evidence for - more formal recognition at the meso level.

Improving peer recognition in organizations

Improving peer recognition in organizations requires the engagement of 3 different stakeholders (even though such roles may not apply or be usefully distinguishable in every organization): learner peers, teachers / mentors / staff peers, organization leaders.

Improving peer recognition indeed requires engagement from the directly involved persons (i.e. learning peers, including staff engaged in work and lifelong learning), but a lot can and needs to be done by the intermediate and management levels of the organization in order to encourage such attitudes and provide shared functional and approved systems and processes, so to minimize distributed effort in solving the same issue multiple times (e.g. finding the most appropriate tool to recognize a peer) and to better guarantee to all learners and staff the same opportunities in terms of peer recognition.

Peer recognition shows a wide gradient of structure, formality and shareability: from the most fleeting forms, that are only meant for the specific persons involved in that specific moment, to more public expressions that would benefit both the issuer and the receiver if they could be easily impressed on a flexible, content-ful and possibly verifiable communication tool.

Attitudes

- Be aware that a good part of the organization’s value lies in the skills of the individuals belonging to it.
- Consider if peers show skills and values as expected within the organization (or better): give recognition for this.
- Be ready to notice other individuals’ skills and potential contributions – beyond expectations and job descriptions, independently from hierarchical relations.
- Consider if unexpected skills and potentials among members of the organisation could trigger changes in the organization. Follow up on this.
- Consider if peers would benefit from recognition. Consider if the organization would benefit too. Follow up on this.

**Learning Environment**

- Find learning resources and share them with your peers. Try and establish a shared practice where a learning resources knowledge base can be built. Consider accessibility of content when selecting it.
- Initiate a self-directed/autonomous learning path and discuss it with peers, so that it becomes common norm and one of the main drivers for individual and organisational development.
- Consider if your peers might need help while learning. Ask for help yourself while learning. Make it visible and usual.
- When you experience learning peer support, share it and recognize the person providing help.
- Support one another as part of daily life within the organisation.
- Let peer support go beyond the frame of the organization, through learning communities and communities of practice.
- Consider if there is something your organization can do to improve the policies, methods and tools supporting autonomous learning.

**Recognition Environment**

**Partnerships**

Between learning providers and other organisations, employment agency, awarding body, employers, etc.

**Other items**

- Consider previous experiences of your peers when evaluating and recognizing them.
- Ask your peers to bring their previous experiences into the collective learning.
- Make sure that your peers know about your acts of recognition, so that your action can be an example.
- Consider what inspiration you could draw from your peer’s recognition acts.
- Consider if there are recognition leaders outside your organisation that can be brought as example among your peers.
- Consider activating day-by-day practices including recognition, such as periodical meetings or online shared environments specifically addressing (also) recognition.
- Be ready to accept recognition provided by others. When the source of a piece of recognition is unknown, leverage its and your network to evaluate it.

**Technologies**

- Choose the easiest tool to express and share recognition of your peers competencies. As a minimum, the chosen digital tool should be known in the network and allow the expression of the recognition content you would like to express: any social network would probably do.
- Consider introducing recognition technologies that mirror your peers’ practices but provide a more stable and shareable piece of recognition. Improvements include considering how open, verifiable, shareable and secure recognition using a specific tool is.
- Make sure that self-directed learning, peer-learning and peer-support also cover digital literacy and advancements in using digital tools.
- Encourage more techno-literate staff to recommend and review new tools and practices to support peers in their learning and recognition paths.
- Share the lessons learned within the organization from using digital technologies for recognition with the larger community of professionals developing digital technologies.
- Consider if recognition given through a certain tool is re-usable by the recipient, if it is sufficiently contentful, and how secure it will be considered by third-party readers.
- Use recognition technologies provided by the organization, if any.
- Leverage existing recognition to identify colleagues for tasks, teams or support.

**Mentor recognition**

We identify as “mentor recognition” the well-known practice, within a structured organization, to review an employee or collaborator’s performance on behalf of the manager or tutor. This applies with the most predefined structure in companies, where an opening up of recognition would include distributing recognition acts during the year and turning it into a daily practice instead of a formal moment happening at precise and far-away moments in time (such as once a year).

More loosely structured entities experience similar dynamics when a clear distinction in tutors and learners is applicable; for example, a team of practitioners or a peer community will experience this recognition scenario whenever a clear hierarchy (of competencies if not of roles) can be found.

**Improving mentor recognition in organizations**

Mentor recognition is well known and widely experienced. Opening it up includes:
- expanding recognition opportunities: making recognition part of daily activity,
- extending the objects of recognition, so as to consider the widest possible range of activities, competencies and domains (present and past, expected and unexpected, competencies and values, etc),
- improving recognition shareability, so that a recognition piece or act can truly be leveraged by the recipient as a piece of his/her competence wealth.

Actors that need to be engaged to improve top-down recognition in organizations include learners, tutors / teachers and organizations managers.

**Attitudes**

- Be aware that a good part of the organization’s value lies in the skills of the individuals belonging to it.
- Consider if employees and collaborators would benefit from recognition. Consider if the organization would benefit too. Follow up on this.
- Identify people particularly in need for recognition within the organization, e.g. based on role, seniority or psychological traits.
- Consider if employees and collaborators show skills and values as expected by the organization (or better): give recognition for this.
- Be ready to notice employees’ and collaborators’ skills and potential contributions – beyond expectations and job descriptions, independently from hierarchical relations.
- Consider if unexpected skills and potentials among employees and collaborators could trigger changes in the organization. Follow up on this.
- Make sure that people in need of recognition are being heard on an individual basis by individual staff members.
- Make sure that staff members are aware of their obligations and of the recommendations produced by interest groups advocating and advising people in need of recognition.
- The organisation is compliant with recognition laws and regulations (if any) and makes reasonable supplementary adjustments to provide learners with all available recognition, be it formal or not.
- Consider how recognition and learning happen in your organization. Can you use this input to improve the organization? Could this input be useful to a larger community? Could it be useful to regulatory bodies?
- Consider providing your own experts to other organisations requiring support for improving their recognition practices.
- Encourage staff to find and task coworkers based on shared competencies

Learning Environment
- Encourage your employee and collaborators to care for their own learning.
- Encourage your employees and collaborators to support one another in learning and to share learning resources.
- Monitor how self-directed, peer-supported and on the job learning happens. Consider this as a possible trigger for recognition.
- Encourage awareness towards accessibility of learning resources.
- Encourage the selection of learning resources that also provide transparent recognition.
- Consider providing a system where learning resources can be shared.
- Provide learning resources and opportunities coherent with your organization’s goals
- Encourage staff and collaborators in considering what they are learning (and teaching) through their daily activity. Consider setting up specific moments and practices for this.
- Encourage staff and collaborators to ask for recognition of their learning. Consider picking staff members as reference point for this.

Recognition Environment
- Consider giving recognition for side achievements, in addition to main learning goals
- Recognise prior learning and experience of learners.
- Define a recognition policy
- Consider who is going to read the recognition your organization provides
- Consider what your learners will need to do with the recognition your organization provides.
- Be transparent when defining recognition criteria and process: think of learners.
- Be transparent and detailed when filling in contents for recognition pieces: think of readers, consider how you can help them evaluating the recognition you are providing.
- Be open towards accepting recognition provided by other entities. When such entities are unknown, leverage their and your network to form an idea.
- Consider recognising the prior learning and experience of staff and collaborators, and modify individual learning plans accordingly.
- While identifying prior learning and experiences of learners, also focus on the methods and tools that have contributed to past successful learning experiences.
- Make sure that key staff members take leadership in relation to recognition.
- Make sure some staff members are adequately prepared to valorize people particularly in need of recognition.
- Set up a shared well-known system to identify, recognise and let others know about individual skills and potentials. This includes: a vocabulary or taxonomy, recognition tools, and ways to share recognition (given or received).
- Make sure that recognition practice has a defined place in the organization’s life, so that there is a clear known moment way and context where people expect recognition.
- Consider well-known, diffused or encouraged practices and materials when setting up a recognition practice for your organization. Some staff member could be tasked with monitoring recognition inputs and practices.
- Practice lighter forms of recognition outside the expected moments, ideally daily.
- Prepare and distribute guidelines on how to valorize people in need of recognition.
- Consider devoting a specific budget to improve and maintain recognition.
- Consider the opportunity to access external expertise to address recognition issues.
- Make sure that at least some staff members have an expertise in recognition or have direct access to recognition experts, when needed.
- Dedicate resources to develop internal competencies in recognition through training programmes, participation in communities of practice, seminars, etc.

Technologies

- Be aware that digital technologies can play a decisive role in enabling and assisting learning, teaching and recognition.
- Encourage digital literacy of all the staff.
- Provide learning resources and paths for digital literacy, coherent with the staff needs.
- Share the lessons learned from using digital technologies for recognition with the larger community of professionals developing digital technologies.
- Make sure that technical support is readily available to allow accomplishing the staff’s goals.
- Make sure some staff is tasked with watching technology and making recommendations to improve the organization and its processes.
- Create a vocabulary, indexing or taxonomy of existing competencies. Choose a digital technology to make it available and to maintain it. Define how competencies can be added or suggested.
- Select digital tools to give more value and stability to the competency recognition happening within the organization (e.g. open badges). Define the most adequate and useful way of using them and introduce them in the organization with proper training and by inserting them in the organization’s processes and practices.
- Consider defining criteria to distinguish internal competencies and recognition from competencies and recognition that are meant to be shared outside the organization. Identify tools and practices accordingly.
- Design and provide a system for staff to show their competencies and recognition

Recognition as core activity

The case of organizations and practitioners directly addressing the themes of learning teaching and recognizing as their core activity deserves a dedicated analysis. Such are for instance adult learning associations, youth and peer-learning associations, formal learning institutions, professional training institutions, associations working for integration and social support and against unemployment, associations fostering entrepreneurship and self-employment, teachers, consultants, mentors, MOOC providers.

Improving recognition as an organization’s core activity

This case mainly concerns expanding the object of recognition - already core activity of the organization - and paying more attention to the tool used to provide recognition in terms of its shareability, verifiability and long-term availability; it includes considering what recognition will be used for and how it can be leveraged by the recipient as a valuable piece of his/her competency wealth. This case is a particular instance of the top-down recognition case, as distinct roles for teachers or mentors are usually identifiable in entities having learning and recognition as their main focus.

According to the specific nature of the organization, Validation of experience as defined in the REVE framework proposed by the project could also be performed, aligning the recognition tool(s) to an EQF Framework and a traditional degree.

Attitudes

- Consider any accomplishment that learners achieve through your organization’s activities, not only what is directly being taught
- Engage recipients of recognition in key decision making processes
- Consider recommendations produced by interest groups advocating and advising people in need of recognition.
- Be compliant with recognition laws, regulations and recommendations
- Consider how your organization can provide learners with all possible and deserved recognition, be it formal or not.
- Organize learning and recognition activities so that learners will be able to benefit the most from both formal and informal systems.
- Leverage the outcomes of informal recognition and learning to improve formal paths and to provide inputs to regulatory bodies.
- Consider building and maintaining a repository of information on learning and recognition processes.
- Consider sharing your learning and recognition repository with other or similar entities.

Learning Environment
- Make sure that chosen learning resources are accessible.
- Make sure to provide a variety of alternative learning contents, methods and technologies to support the implementation of person-centred development plans.
- Provide a broad, balanced and relevant curriculum which can be easily adapted to take into account the individual needs and interests of adult learners.
- Design, encourage or allow person-centred learning plans.
- Make sure that the content structure and duration of the learning are flexible, monitored and reviewed.
- Support teachers working with people in need of recognition
- Encourage staff to take leadership on special needs issues and to be active beyond the walls of the organization.
- Encourage learners to make autonomous choices regarding their learning goals and learning paths.
- While identifying prior learning and experiences, also focus on the methods and tools that have contributed to past successful learning experiences.
- Encourage peer support.

Recognition Environment
- Consider giving recognition for side achievements, not only for main learning goals
- Recognise prior learning and experience of learners.
- Define a recognition policy
- Consider who is going to read the recognition your organization provides
- Consider what your learners will need to do with the recognition your organization provides
- Be transparent when defining recognition criteria and process: think of learners.
- Be transparent and detailed when filling in contents for recognition pieces: think of readers, consider how you can help them evaluating the recognition you are providing.
- Be open towards accepting recognition provided by other entities. When such entities are unknown, leverage their and your network to form an idea.

Technologies
- Be aware that digital technologies can play a decisive role in enabling and assisting learning and teaching.
- Encourage digital literacy and the use of digital tools to enable old and new practices.
- Encourage staff to exploit the benefits of enabling and assistive technologies. Make sure that the experience gained is shared across the organisation.
- Select digital technologies for recognition that suit the needs of learners and of (future) readers of recognition
- Select digital technologies for recognition capable of carrying the content you deem appropriate and of guaranteeing the security your learners need
Consider functionality in the long term as appropriate to the needs of your learners when selecting technologies for recognition. Remember the openness of technology is a key factor in this.