Nova project – form for gathering best practices 2021

"A Balancing Act"

"A Balancing Act" (Balansekunst) is a concept developed by VIRKE[1] in Norway to identify, describe and communicate skills acquired in the workplace to working life and to the formal education system. There are no procedures for linking qualifications directly to the NQF. Instead, A Balancing Act provides a method for documenting skills developed through non-formal and informal learning and thus, it serves as a springboard for a fairer validation process. Introducing learning outcomes in the workplace is a key: "The emphasis on learning outcomes and the connection of work-based learning to formal education makes the tool very suitable to get the private sector and enterprises involved – one of the major challenges in the establishment of validation arrangements" (From the jury's justification for awarding The Global VPL Prize 2019 to "A Balancing Act").

What are the core elements and procedure in the Balancing Act model?

The balancing act model is a framework based on the terminology used when describing the skills needed to adequately master a specific role in the workplace. It is referred to as a "balancing act" that occurs in everyday work lives, an act that makes it necessary to continuously develop skills as employees face new tasks and situations, and these situations are often pulling in rather contrasting directions.

The balance model can be applied to all workplace situations. Lifelong learning in the workplace is incredibly dynamic, and the most challenging aspect of developing "A Balancing Act" has been in devising the dynamics for skills development. A skill can be situated across the three dimensions on the model, and the right placement needs to be identified depending on the most important aspect of the "balancing activity" that occurs in that particular role (see the pictures below).

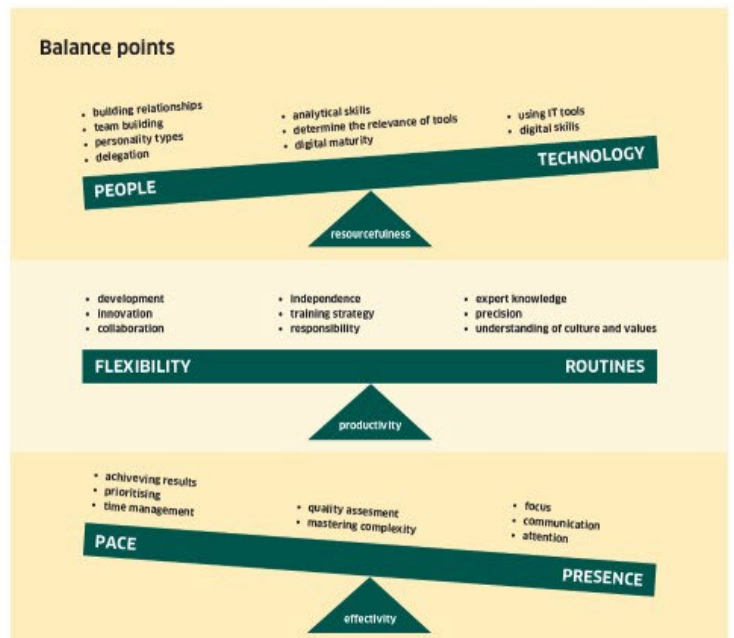[1] Virke - Hovedorganisasjonen for handels- og tjenestenæringen

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The three dimensions of the balancing model

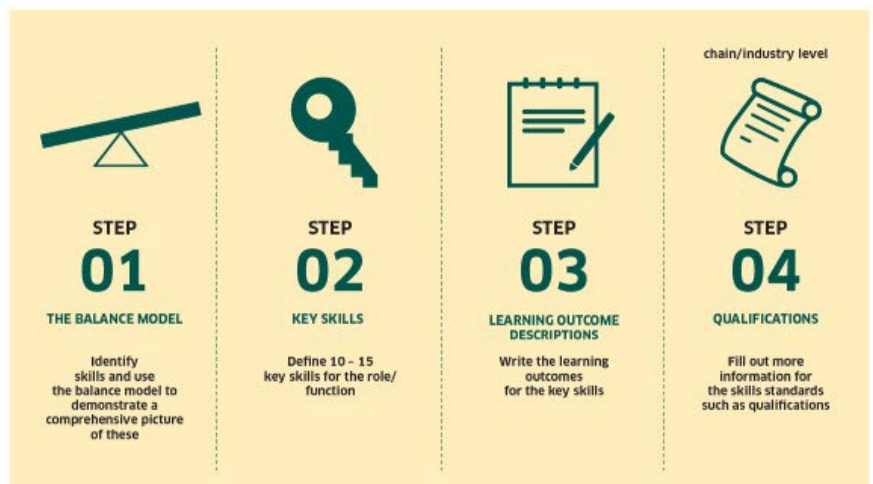**The balance model has
three dimensions:**

**1. Maintaining a relationship with both
people and technology**

**2. Being flexible while also having a good
routine and specialist expertise**

**3. The need to find a balance between pace
and presence, both in one's everyday life and
in the long term**

Balance points

- building relationships
- team building
- personality types
- delegation

- analytical skills
- determine the relevance of tools
- digital maturity

- using IT tools
- digital skills

PEOPLE   **TECHNOLOGY**

resourcefulness

- development
- innovation
- collaboration

- independence
- training strategy
- responsibility

- expert knowledge
- precision
- understanding of culture and values

FLEXIBILITY   **ROUTINES**

productivity

- achieving results
- prioritising
- time management

- quality assessment
- mastering complexity

- focus
- communication
- attention

PACE   **PRESENCE**

effectivity

VÍRKE

The four steps of the balancing model

**"A Balancing Act" is a model and
method to describe skills that are
acquired in the workplace, in
such a way that they can then be
understood by other parts of the
worklife, and in the formal
education system**

chain/industry level

**STEP
01**

THE BALANCE MODEL

Identify
skills and use
the balance model to
demonstrate a
comprehensive picture
of these

**STEP
02**

KEY SKILLS

Define 10 – 15
key skills for the role/
function

**STEP
03**

LEARNING OUTCOME
DESCRIPTIONS

Write the learning
outcomes
for the key skills

**STEP
04**

QUALIFICATIONS

Fill out more
information for
the skills standards
such as qualifications

VÍRKE

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The key skills with the corresponding learning outcomes constitute a skills standard for the specific role or an individual's skills set.

Benefits, sustainability and challenges

"A Balancing Act" provides a **common language** and understanding for the dialogue between employer and employees about skills needed and skills development for any specific role in the company or organisation. Applying the same concept on skills standards in the workplace and for the description of an individual's skills set**, makes the match/mismatch transparent** and facilitates an easy and proper validation of skills for the labour market (all actors). Using skills standards in addition to education standards as a reference for guidance, makes a **more concrete career guidance** directed to prospects in working life.

A pilot project was carried out in 2021/2022 using the concept of "A Balancing Act" to establish an education standard for the stage production industry. It's a collaboration between the relevant social partners and Oslo Higher Vocational College, transforming skills standards for five roles into a formal higher vocational education curriculum.

Every description of skills acquired in the workplace is based on an interview with people talking about their experiences in working the role. The interviews conducted for "A Balancing Act" focus on the mastering of skills, and thus creates a **positive experience for all involved** leading to a heightened level of pride over one's own skills.

The concept **can be applied to all sectors of industry**, private or public. For mainstreaming the concept, we need a more active involvement of the education authorities and the public/private employment services.

The method based on interviews are time-consuming. The interview of 1.5 hour takes place in the interviewees' workplace. The interviewer needs a certain expertise for transforming individuals' narrative into the balance model.

Possibilities further development of the process

The model is now being **digitalized**, enhancing the speed for implementation in all sectors of working life. The pilot project will be followed-up with more examples by applying the concept to development of education standards.

1. Links to more information

https://www.virke.no/Statistikk-Rapporter/a-balancing-act/

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