



**i-COACH**  
INNOVATIVE TOOLBOX FOR  
INTERNSHIP IMPLEMENTATION



Co-funded by  
the European Union



# i-Coach Skill Set Report

WHAT MAKES A QUALITY INTERNSHIP  
EXPERIENCE



The following report has been developed as part of the "*i-Coach: Innovative Toolbox for Internship Implementation*" project, funded by the Erasmus+ Program of the EU.

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### **Contact information**

Name: Caterina Carroli

Organisation: ECOLE - Enti Confindustriali Lombardi Per L'education - Societa' Consortile A R.L., Milan, Italy

Email: caterina.carroli@consorzioecole.it

Name: Ayri Memishev

Organisation: Business Innovation Centre Innobridge, Ruse, Bulgaria

Email: amemishev@rcci.bg

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# About i-Coach



The *Innovative toolbox for internship implementation* or i-Coach, is an international project funded by the Erasmus + program of the EU. It is led by Business Innovation Centre Innobridge - Ruse, Bulgaria and implemented in partnership with 6 organizations from 5 European countries:

- Belgian-Italian Chamber of Commerce, Belgium
- ECOLE VET Center, Italy
- A&A Emphasys, Cyprus
- FEUZ, Spain
- Politeknika Txorierri, Spain
- Northeast Regional Development Agency (NERDA), Romania

According to the European Council Recommendation on the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships (2018 / C153 / 01), one of the criteria for working and learning conditions is “pedagogical support”, according to which “in-company trainers should be designated and tasked to cooperate closely with vocational education and training institutions and teachers to provide guidance to apprentices”. In addition, according to the same recommendation “teachers, trainers and mentors, especially in micro-, small and medium-sized companies, should be supported to update their skills, knowledge and competences in order to train apprentices according to the latest teaching and training methods and labour market need”. Therefore, the goal of the i-Coach partnership is to create a new professional occupation: the **i-Coach expert**, meant to take on the role of creating and leading internship programs in an organization. Companies often do not have experience in conducting an internship program, as it is possible that there is no dedicated employee to take responsibility for creating such a program. In other cases, it is simply not entirely clear what competencies they should have or what the correct understanding of mentoring and their role is. The latter is the reason behind this study report.

# Planned activities

A brief summary of the results planned to be achieved via the i-Coach project



## The i-Coach Expert

One of the primary goals of the project, is to create a new professional occupation: the i-Coach expert, meant to take on the role of creating and leading WBL an organization.



## The Training Toolbox

A training course that will equip potential end users with the necessary knowledge, skills and competences required to create and manage an WBL program.



## Training Platform

Creating a dedicated online learning environment, which will make the uptake of the i-Coach Skill Set easier, flexible and enjoyable.



## A Collaboration Blueprint

A document that will act as a plan and guideline for all relevant stakeholders interested in WBL collaboration and implementation .

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# I. Introduction

## Activities and methodology of the study

In order to establish a solid common ground to build the i-Coach Expert's skill set profile and discover the exact attributes of its characteristics, the project has a dedicated scheme of action starting with Project Result N.1 (PR1). It includes a mapping process, during which the partnership explored all relevant factors which led to the creation of the i-Coach Expert's profile i.e. what characteristics, knowledge, skills and competences should the i-Coach expert possess. The target groups and stakeholders directly involved in PR1 are:



### ACTIVITIES REALISED

#### **A.1 NEEDS ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK (February 2022 - April 2022)**

- A.1.1 WBL KNOWLEDGE GAP (M1- M3: February 2022 – March 2022)
- A.1.2 FOCUS GROUPS (M2-M4: March 2022 – April 2022)

The partnership investigated which are the obstacles related to national legislations which hinder or accelerate work-based learning (WBL) practices. Each partner was responsible to:

- explore the existing national frameworks in the field of WBL in their respective country;
- identify 4 case studies considered as best practices in the area of internship implementation;

This activity allowed to:

- help even out the "Internship implementation Literacy" levels via an international comparison;
- highlight the characteristics that are specifically of interest for the project;
- underline the basic WBL skills to become part of the i-Coach Expert's Profile;
- suggest specific areas for improvement;

## A.2 ELABORATION OF NATIONAL REPORTS (April 2022 – May 2022)

Each partner developed a national report depicting the current situation in terms of WBL in Bulgaria, Belgium, Cyprus, Italy, Spain and Romania. The six national reports, together with results obtained from R1/A1.1 and A1.2 provided the data needed to build the characteristics of the i-Coach Expert.

## A.3 ELABORATION OF THE i-Coach Skill Set Report (June 2022 – July 2022)

ECOLE collected all findings and developed the i-Coach Skill Set Report, which includes the following sections:



## METHODOLOGY

In order to assure comparative and homogeneous results ECOLE developed research templates and guidelines for developing case studies and deeper investigation on the relevant issues via focus groups. In particular, in connection to Work-Based Learning Knowledge Gap, the partnership have performed the following research activities:

## DESK RESEARCH: WBL STATE OF THE ART & EVOLUTION IN NATIONAL CONTEXT

<p><b>MAPPING REGULATORY REFERENCES IN THE WBL FIELD</b></p>	<p>1. Representation of the phenomena on the national context:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Origins and historical evolution</li> <li>• Which is the debate about the WBL field in the national context? How much are the policy makers/national authorities pushing towards this form in the national context? (e.g., in some countries prevails a more academic- theoretical education);</li> <li>• Which are the drivers behind the phenomenon? Why would companies and schools be interested in WBL?</li> <li>• Future steps /perspective for the next futures;</li> </ul> <p>2. Snapshot of the formal possible solutions to implement the WBL: what formulas are possible to adopt it?</p>
<p><b>MAPPING THE TYPES OF ENTITIES WHICH ARE INVOLVED IN THE PROCESS WBL</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institutional actors e.g. VET providers – (schools, universities), companies, associations representing companies - chambers of commerce;</li> <li>• Network analysis: key relations among the different actors of the WBL system;</li> </ul>
<p><b>DURATION AND ARTICULATION</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Defining the temporal collocation: at which point in the educational path does WBL fit in?</li> <li>• How long is the pathway? What is the alternation between the educational and the working path?</li> </ul>
<p><b>THE OPERATIONAL ACTORS INVOLVED</b></p>	<p>Mapping the roles key actors involved at operational level (professor, student, tutor, HR, etc.) play.</p>
<p><b>FACILITATING AND HINDERING ELEMENTS OF THE PROCESS</b></p>	<p>Analysis of strengths and weaknesses of WBL, to be understood through secondary data: previous research and studies that have made evaluations/impact assessments of WBL experiences.</p>

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## FOCUS GROUPS

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### AIMS

- To receive first-hand feedback on WBL existing experiences, processes, possible evolution and needs for improvement
  - To engage relevant stakeholders from the very beginning of the project.
  - To integrate and complete data collected through the desk analysis
- 

## FIELD RESEARCH

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### PROCESS

- Overall mapping of subjects managing /participating in WBL activities: training provider (schools, vocational training institutes, universities), chambers of commerce, employers' associations, local governments;
  - Contacting the identified organizations: presentation of the project and request for a possible involvement. Even if the companies represent the final target, it is advisable not to contact them directly because it looks much more complex;
  - Screening and selection of relevant CASE STUDIES (4 relevant best practices in national context). Variables considered in the selection process:
    - *Territorial representativeness (covering different areas of the national context);*
    - *Sectoral representativeness (covering different industries)*
    - *'WBL typology' representativeness (at least 2/3 different types)*
  - Identification of 4 relevant best practices of WBL in existing organizations;
- 

### TOOLS

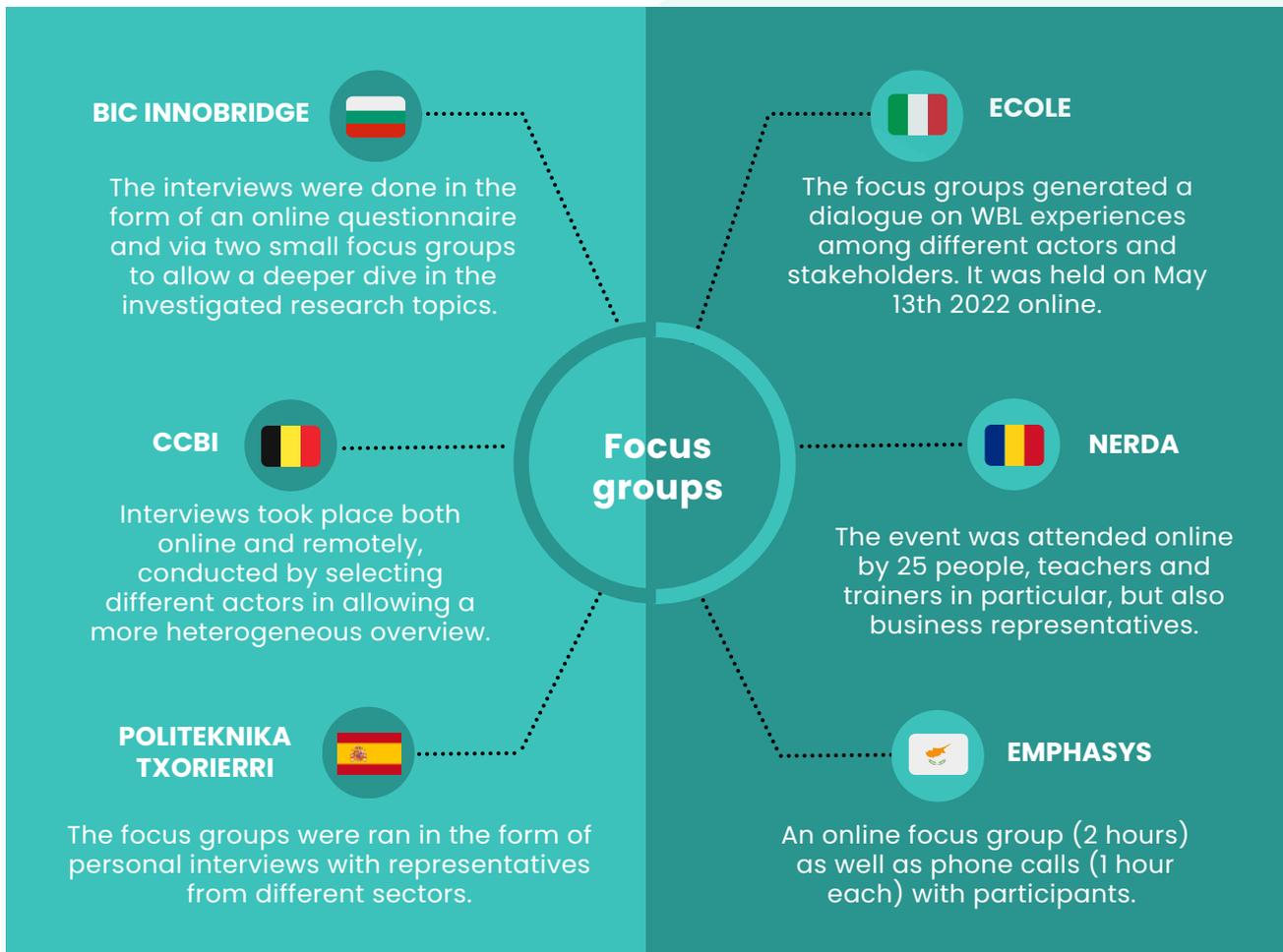
- In-depth interviews with significant actors involved in WBL (company and training institutions): tutor/coach, entrepreneur, HR persons and students (optional);
  - Indicative duration of 45 minutes per person;
  - Standardized grid based on open questions;
-

**INTERVIEW GRID: KEY TOPICS TO BE INVESTIGATED AND STRUCTURE OF THE CASE STUDIES**

<p><b>GENERAL OVERVIEW</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Company description and background;</li> <li>• Type of WBL implemented;</li> <li>• Reasons behind the launch of the WBL experience;</li> <li>• Structure and description of the experience (articulation, duration, job function of the student...)</li> </ul>
<p><b>POINT OF VIEW OF THE ACTORS:</b> INVESTIGATING AND PROBING THE KEY DRIVERS AND THE KEY OBSTACLES OF THE WBL EXPERIENCE</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The point of view of the company: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Whether the company believes it has the skills to manage WBL or whether it needs support to train the coach/staff</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>2. The point of view of the tutor/coach? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What skills does he/she think to have leveraged on in the activity of WBL?</i></li> <li>• <i>What could he/she have done better?</i></li> <li>• <i>Does he/she need training support? In what?</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>3. The point of view of the professor/training provider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What are the key factors for a good WBL experience?</i></li> <li>• <i>What are the key competences a tutor/coach should master?</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>4. The point of view of the student <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What skills does he/she think the tutor coach demonstrated?</i></li> <li>• <i>What does he/she think could have been done better?</i></li> <li>• <i>Personal evaluation of the experience?</i></li> </ul> </li> </ol>
<p><b>LESSONS LEARNED FROM THIS SPECIFIC CASE/EXPERIENCE</b></p>	<p>A summary of findings per each interview.</p>

## FOCUS GROUPS APPROACH AND IMPLEMENTATION

The general methodology adopted different approaches on a national level for each partner to conduct the research on the respective focus groups:



### Summary of the focus group activities:



Focus groups



People involved



Case studies



National Reports

### Key Discussion Points

1. Based on your direct experience, what is your point of view about the phenomenon of WBL?
2. In your opinion, which are its current strengths and weaknesses (compared to normative framework, process articulation, resources and skills of actors involved, reputation and communication)?
3. What attitudes, skills and knowledge should the coach/tutor possess?
4. What is the potential added value that the good functioning of the WBL can bring?
5. What are the possible lines of intervention for improving WBL in future perspective (in terms of responsibility the different institutional actors: training institutions, companies, public administration)?
6. In your view, what might be some topics to be addressed and on which to focus attention in the training path of coaches/tutors in the context of WBL?

**Table 1. Focus groups and case studies analyzed by each partner.**

PARTNER	FOCUS GROUPS	CASE STUDIES
<p><b>BIC INNOBRIDGE</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 Students/Interns;</li> <li>• 1 Traineeship managers;</li> <li>• 1 expert from the Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry;</li> <li>• 1 expert from the Ruse Chamber of Commerce and Industry;</li> <li>• 1 expert from the Bulgarian-Romanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Centre for Career Development – University of Ruse “Angel Kanchev”;</li> <li>• Municipality of Ruse;</li> <li>• Raiffeisen Bulgaria;</li> </ul>
<p><b>EMPHASYS</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4 VET providers [project managers];</li> <li>• 1 HR Manager;</li> <li>• 2 HE professors;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PwC Cyprus;</li> <li>• Ministry of Foreign Affairs;</li> <li>• C.A. PAPAELLINAS Group;</li> <li>• G.A.P VASSILOPOULOS;</li> </ul>
<p><b>FEUZ &amp; TXORIERRI</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4 HR Managers</li> <li>• 3 University traineeship managers;</li> <li>• 1 Intermediary company administration;</li> <li>• 2 VET traineeship coordinators;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ESS Group;</li> <li>• IKEA NORTE SL;</li> <li>• ASOCIACIÓN TIERRAS DE IRANZU;</li> <li>• FORGING STEEL PRODUCT, SL;</li> </ul>
<p><b>ECOLE</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 VET traineeship coordinators;</li> <li>• 2 HR managers;</li> <li>• 2 project managers of the Education sector of Assolombarda (Industrial Association of Milan area);</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PwC– PricewaterhouseCoopers;</li> <li>• Snam;</li> <li>• Lechler;</li> <li>• Castel Srl;</li> </ul>
<p><b>CCBI</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 HR officers;</li> <li>• 3 Project managers;</li> <li>• 2 Trainees;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• COOPÉRATION BANCAIRE POUR L'EUROPE – GEIE;</li> <li>• Belgian Italian Chamber of Commerce;</li> <li>• CEPESS;</li> </ul>
<p><b>NERDA</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10 VET trainers from the Neamt Didactic House;</li> <li>• 13 teachers from the Neamt Didactic House;</li> <li>• 2 entrepreneurs who have links with the internships;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Grigore Moisil" Technological High School – Buzau;</li> <li>• Heidelberg Cement;</li> <li>• Bosch Romania;</li> <li>• Chamber of Deputies – Romanian Parliament;</li> </ul>

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# II. Institutional context of WBL

## Key findings and challenges

### KEY FINDINGS

Even though WBL developed with different features in each partner country according to its specific historical, cultural, social and economic context, it is possible to detect a common shift towards a 'dual educational system' model where WBL plays an increasing role in the learning process of young students (higher number of schools and students involved, growing interest from the labour market, more sophisticated processes and tools, etc.). Nonetheless, the level of maturity of the WBL system – and in a broader perspective of the overall process of transition from education to work – remains partially different.

One of the key reasons why countries are running at different speeds is related to the degree of evolution of the existing normative framework. The presence of an updated law governing the WBL system represents a crucial factor for its success, effectiveness and development. That's why most of the countries have been investing a lot in the last twenty years in the modernization of their normative framework, and the only one lacking a dedicated law to WBL (Cyprus) considers this step as a key prerequisite.

From a practical point of view, the presence of a normative framework governing WBL offers a sound basis ensuring clarity and formalization of the following aspects: roles and responsibilities, operative process and procedures, format for school-company partnership, duration, tax implications, link to a 'credit system', etc.

The actors involved in the WBL system are very similar across countries from a substantial point of view, even if different formal labels and names are used. On the institutional side, we have Ministries (Economics, Labor, Education, etc.), Employers Associations, Chambers of Commerce and National Agencies; at the operative level, we find school headmaster and tutors, teachers, HR department representative and company tutors.

The analysis conducted at the institutional level highlighted some key challenges that the partner countries should consider in their future investment on the development of WBL in the light of improving the quality of the transition from education to labour market and structurally reinforcing the partnership between schools and companies.

## KEY CHALLENGES

**1. The presence of a 'separatist paradigm'** considering school and work, theory and action, 'mind' and 'body' as completely detached dimensions, with the consequence of making quite difficult to have an effective communication, coordination and collaboration between the two worlds when asked to manage together the WBL experience of the student in terms of design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

**2. The tendency to see WBL merely as a work experience**, where students are required to apply what they have learned elsewhere (at school), often missing or underestimating the 'learning' potential of the experience itself they have inside a real organization. This point brings relevant implications both on the design of WBL, from a pedagogical perspective, and on the skill set of the company tutor.

**3. A cultural bias** is present in most societies considering high schools as superior to VET institutions given that they prepare for intellectual jobs that are more respected and desirable for students and their families. The implication is a need to work on these 'weak reputation' of the schools that are more centred on WBL in the eyes of policymakers, investors, teachers, school headmasters and overall public opinion.

**4. The urgent need to improve the competencies** of both school and company tutors, who represent the key actors of the WBL system being involved in guiding the students in their professional and personal growth.

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# III. Benefits generated by WBL experiences

## WBL highlights for beneficiaries

Evidences collected on the field highlight that the key beneficiaries of WBL experiences are **students** and **companies**. Here follows a summary of the main benefits each of these two actors can get from participating in a WBL project.

### WHY SHOULD STUDENTS PARTICIPATE IN WBL

Through our research we've identified the following six major reasons of why students should get involved in WBL and internship in particular: Orientation, Self-awareness, Complimentary skills, Preparation for work, Career opportunity and Networking.

#### Orientation

Via WBL, students can understand the real motivation and interest for an industry, a type of company, or a specific job and answer the question *"Is it the right one for me?"*.

01



02

#### Self-awareness

It is a field test of personal attitude and competencies, becoming aware of their own strengths and areas of improvement from a personal and professional point of view.



## Complementary skills

Developing a set of social skills (e.g., teamwork, communication, negotiation, etc.) that integrate the technical knowledge provided by the educational path at school.

03



04

## Preparation for work

Acquiring some basic knowledge, experience and know-how necessary for entering the labor market (employability).



05

## Career opportunity

Having the chance to meet a potential employer, find a job and start their professional career.



06

## Networking

Building personal links with members of a professional community, a point extremely relevant in future perspective (e.g. labor market transitions, knowledge sharing, business partnership, etc.)



### WHY SHOULD COMPANIES PARTICIPATE IN WBL

We've identified the following five major reasons and benefits of companies getting involved in WBL practices and especially providing internship opportunities of their own: Innovation, Talent acquisition, Reputation, Anticipated socialization and Generational replacement.

01

## Innovation

Having access to new ideas, 'fresh' points of view (not conditioned by organizational culture and ingrained habits) and unconventional approaches, thus stimulating a process of continuous change inside the organization.



02

## Talent acquisition

Enhancing the attraction and recruitment of young people on the labor market, at the same time saving the costs of external recruitment and reducing the possibility of errors in the selection process.



03

## Reputation

Building a strong 'employer brand' on the labor market, as a company taking care of young people education and future employment, and committed to the social and economic growth of its territory and community.



04

## Anticipated socialization

Take advantage of the WBL experience to engage young students in the organizational culture, shape their behaviors according to the key company values and have them ready and loyal for potential formal recruitment.



05

## Generational replacement

Leveraging on WBL as a privileged moment not only to find new young employees, but also to work on formal knowledge transfer and tacit knowledge sharing by senior workers involved as WBL mentors/coaches.



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# IV. WBL at stake

## Obstacles and areas for improvement

Both case studies and focus groups were extremely helpful for identifying the weaknesses of WBL today and the obstacles preventing the full development of its potential. Here follows a summary of the key issues emerged:

### OBSTACLES

- An **excessive bureaucratic and administrative burden** which sounds particularly heavy for companies who often operates under strong time pressure and with under-sized staff;
- Sometimes **schools are perceived as a bit self-referential**, not able to give companies the expected support or to timely address problems;
- At the same time, **companies in some cases are reluctant to be involved** or propose WBL experience not interesting for the student's learning process;
- Both schools and companies sometimes suffers from a **lack of resources** (people, time, competences) to appropriately follow and support WBL projects;
- An overall **difficulty of communication** between the educational system and the world of work, who seem to have different languages, priorities and mindset;
- As already mentioned, some countries experience the **absence or the weakness of the legal and institutional framework of WBL**;
- Sometimes a **limited knowledge and preparation of school-teachers** about business, labor market and company dynamics which in the end prevent the development of an effective WBL project.

Concerning the future areas of improvement for WBL, data collected on the field help to define some guidelines potentially useful beyond any country-specific situation.

## AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT

**1. Invest in strengthening the link between schools and companies**, giving a sounder structure and more continuity to their partnership. This effort has some implications: overcoming the traditional separation of the two worlds by increasing the quality and the frequency of communication; sharing experiences to favor mutual contamination; developing the habit of working together; improving teachers' knowledge about business and companies; raising the awareness of company manager/tutor about the 'learning dimension' of WBL (students are not there just to execute tasks).

**2. Favor the evolution of the group of actors of WBL into a real 'network' and 'community'** at least at local level (schools, companies, employers' associations, public bodies, etc.). On one hand, this means investing in clarifying roles and responsibilities, enhancing cooperation on the basis of shared processes and procedures, and defining clear coordination mechanisms. On the other hand, it is crucial to develop a common understanding of the value of WBL, sharing its mission, making everyone fully involved, and promoting the WBL awareness truism i.e. WBL success is possible only when the quality of relations among the network is high and the responsibility about the student's experience is felt and shared by every actor.

**3. Design and implement a marketing and communication strategy able to promote the opportunity of WBL** among the different stakeholders, including students and their families. It is crucial to work on the 'branding' of WBL making it known and appealing through the description of the benefits it brings at many different levels; probably different campaigns are needed for each specific target. Digital media and social networks represent an amazing opportunity to effectively work on the communication process.

**4. Improve the WBL process at an operational level** by investing in:

- co-design sessions between school and company tutors;
- coherence of the educational project and the work activities of the student;
- dedicated planning characterized by clarity, quality and engaging content;
- presence of a 'process owner' (e.g., 'teacher-methodologist', 'coordinator', etc.) responsible for integrating actors and activities following a 'case management' approach i.e. the i-Coach expert;
- practical tools for effectively monitoring the WBL experience in terms of student professional progresses and personal growth, ensuring a continuous and timely feedback by the school and company tutors.

**5. Develop a sound and complete set of competencies for school and company tutors**, which constitutes a key requirement for any WBL project.

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# V. The i-Coach expert in practice

## KEY SKILLS AND COMPETENCES TO BE ACQUIRED BY THE i-COACH EXPERT

One of the key points discussed during both the case studies and the focus groups was the 'competence set' needed by the company tutor/coach/mentor to effectively perform their job of guiding and supporting the student during the WBL experience. As a matter of fact, they play a key role at many different levels:

- Providing the students with the operative and practical information about the activities they are expected to realise;
- Guiding the students' learning process supporting them in actively reflecting about the work experience they are making and drawing useful 'lessons' for the future;
- Delivering continuous feedback to these young colleagues both in a professional and personal development perspective;
- Inspiring the WBL participants with passion and enthusiasm about becoming part of a professional community and learning a specific job;
- Transferring to the student the importance of taking care of their life-long learning process as a source of future employability.

For all these reasons, if company coaches are not carefully prepared and competent the risk is that the young students involved in WBL will miss a relevant opportunity for their personal growth and professional development.

In order to define such 'competence-set' all the information present in the national reports were firstly gathered together. Then a process of 'logical grouping' was realised, putting together similar concepts, even if formally described in a different way. The third and final step consisted in identifying a clear model for producing an overall categorisation of all these key concepts.

The following table (Table 2), illustrates the ideal profile of the i-Coach Expert, using a categorization widely consolidated in the international scientific literature to describe competences: knowledge, skill, and attitude (KSAs).

According to this model it is possible to organically describe the professional profile needed to competently cover a specific organizational position and effectively perform the related job. From an operative point of view, it offers the opportunity to describe the i-Coach Expert's professional profile along three different dimensions:

### **KNOWLEDGE**

It is the condition of being aware of something as facts or concepts. It consists in the cognitive processing of information. It includes recall, recognition, understanding, and evaluation of facts, patterns, and concepts.

### **SKILLS**

They relate to ability to practically perform an activity or task. It includes physical movement, coordination, dexterity, and the application of knowledge in a concrete and social setting.

### **ATTITUDE**

It is a way of thinking and feeling about someone or something. It includes a way a person may deal with things emotionally, and it is often reflected in a person's behaviour. A person's attitude can significantly affect feelings, values, appreciation, and motivation towards something (people, situations).

Moreover, an effort has been done to rank the different items composing this competence set according to data collected on the field. On the one hand, concepts that were recurring across the different national reports were evaluated as more important; on the other hand, concepts that were highlighted in different section of a single national report, corresponding to different sources of information (secondary data, focus groups, case studies), were equally considered as more important. Finally, a very simple and intuitive code based on colours was used to describe the different level of importance of each single item: **red** (crucial), **blue** (average relevance), **orange** (nice to have).

This ranking can be very useful to support the process of designing training programs for potential and experienced WBL coaches. As a matter of fact, it allows to identify priorities and accordingly structure modular learning paths, where participants can incrementally develop their competences and fine tune their preparation as i-coach expert. The simple pattern below shows the conceptual model behind and offers at the same time practical guidelines for training designers and organizers.

The core competences (red section) represent the heart of the profession of a WBL coach, something people willing to commit themselves in doing this job can hardly miss. Representing the starting point of a professional development

process, training activities should firstly focus on these competences to put the building blocks in place.

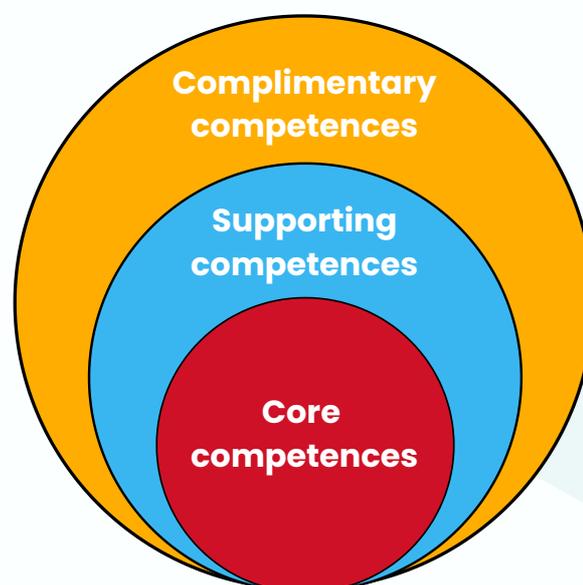
The supporting competences (blue section) constitute the second step for future i-coach experts. Once acquired the basics, they can focus on specific competences that are extremely useful to broaden their perspective, empower their action and fully deploy their professional potential. So, after completing the first sessions on the core competences, training designers' attention should be moved to them.

The complementing competences (orange section) can be considered as the final step, relevant to furtherly elevate the professional level and effectiveness of a WBL coach, even though not strictly essential. Acquiring them the i-coach expert can turn herself into an 'expert' and probably be ready to train other colleagues to become coaches. That's why these competences should be considered as the last step also in training design.

Overall, training specialist should keep this model in mind when making each of their macro and micro design choices:

- Primary needs to be addressed according to the target.
- Learning goals.
- Specific content and their articulation.
- Time allocation to different sessions.
- Methods.
- Materials.
- Location and setting.
- Trainers' profile.

*Figure 1. From theoretical model to practical guidelines for training design.*



Before illustrating in detail the i-Coach expert's competence set, one last preliminary consideration. Becoming and working as a coach for a student is not an easy job, is not for everyone and it requires a specific preparation that cannot be limited to highly specialized technical knowledge, but it also includes a wide range of soft skills and personal attitudes. Hence the crucial importance of designing and delivering ad hoc training programs to prepare the coaches and providing better chances of a satisfying and successful experience for every stakeholder.

Table 2. The ideal i-Coach competence set

KNOWLEDGE	SKILLS	ATTITUDES
<b>Updated technical knowledge (job/industry specific)</b>	<b>Communication and active listening</b>	<b>Empathy, Human touch, Emotional intelligence</b>
Pedagogy, learning processes, teaching principles	<b>Guidance and support</b>	<b>Patience</b>
<b>Digital marketing</b>	<b>Organization and time management</b>	<b>Enthusiasm, passion, positiveness</b>
	Observation, potential identification & development	Error management (learning vs blaming/punishing)
	Motivation, encouragement and challenge of learner	Adaptability, flexibility
	Building trust	"Pass on" & "Leave a legacy" attitude

KNOWLEDGE	SKILLS	ATTITUDES
	Promoting autonomy	Availability
	Teamworking	Open mind

The **first column** of the competence set model refers to knowledge and includes the following areas of expertise.

#### ❖ **Technical knowledge**

It represents the core of each job that is supposed to be taught through WBL, and it's strictly related to the peculiarities of the industry, the company, the operational processes involved, and the technologies used. It is made not only of the formal knowledge owned by the coach but also of his/her experience on the field (i.e., tacit knowledge). Finally, it represents a key asset for the coach to offer to the young learner a 'model' of doing that specific job. It is a kind of a pre-requirement: coaches are not to be trained on it, but just made aware of their formal and tacit body of knowledge.

#### ❖ **Pedagogy, learning processes, teaching principles**

Very often the role of WBL coach is given to one of the best employees from a technical point of view, i.e., people who are very good at doing a specific job. Nonetheless, teaching someone else to do the same is a completely different issue and other competences are at play. Mastering some basic knowledge on the psychological and relational dynamics implied by a learning process, how to engage a young learner in the process of professional growth and, in practical terms, how to design effective training activities on the field turn out to be what makes the difference between a great technician/manager and an effective WBL coach.

#### ❖ **Social media**

An organic profile of the coach is completed also by some notions on social media, especially those most popular among the new generations. It might help on two different levels: on the one hand, understanding and speaking their language, a way to be perceived closer to them, their life and their social and cultural world, overcoming somehow the generational gap; while on the

other hand, offering a practical and efficient tool to communicate and share information and ideas with them when needed.

The **second column** of the competence set model refers to skills and includes the following areas of practical ability and capacity.

#### ❖ **Communication and active listening**

It's a crucial skill to develop a sound relation with the young learner, through clear assignment, continuous information, and precise indication of the reasons why behind each choice. At the same time through listening it is possible to collect feedback from the student, timely intercept problems, doubts, and expectations. From a strictly didactical point of view, it helps to avoid assuming the posture and style of a traditional 'frontal' teacher in favor of that of an 'interactive coach' able to define tasks and learning goal according also to the student's needs.

#### ❖ **Guidance and support**

Entering a WBL experience for a young person determines a significant emotional challenge as well. Dealing with adults, being responsible for a task or an output, running the risks of failing, experiencing own lack of competence, putting oneself into discussion: all these dynamics are on the table. The ability of the coach in guiding the student in this difficult process, offering continuous support and someone to be followed (as a 'guiding star'), represents a key element for a successful experience.

#### ❖ **Organization and time management**

As a matter of fact, the WBL experience is like a 'small project' and in this perspective it requires the coach to master some basic project management skills. First, it's a matter of clearly identifying and planning with a schedule the tasks to be accomplished by the learner. Second, it is important to define specific moments for coordinating with him/her, controlling, and supervising the activities realized (meeting, online call, etc.). Finally, the time spent supporting the student during the WBL experience calls for an optimization of the coach own agenda through appropriate time management.

#### ❖ **Observation, potential identification & development**

When a coach decides to cooperate with a young student in a WBL experience he/she must be ready to invest a big amount of time, effort, and energies. It is required to be fully focused on the relationship with the other person, spending many hours working side by side, observing the student's performances, behaviours, and reactions day by day. If endowed with the appropriate skills, the coach has the possibility to identify the potential of the young colleagues (What are they good at? What are their best attitudes?) and carefully cultivate that talent step by step, like a gardener with a plant.

### ❖ **Motivation, encouragement, and challenge of learner**

Going through a WBL experience require the learners to be helped in discovering new motivational drivers (Why am I here? Do I like what I'm doing? Is it useful for my future?) different from the ones related to a pure study experience. It is crucial for the coach to support the students in deeply reflecting about their motivations and favouring the shift from extrinsic drivers (grades, parents' reactions, etc.) to intrinsic ones. Sometimes it is also necessary to challenge the learners pushing them out of their comfort zone and encouraging them to explore new roads and possibilities.

### ❖ **Building trust**

Trust is a crucial asset to build and develop any kind of social relationship. In the case of a pedagogical relation where so many things are at stake e.g. self-image, motivation, commitment, accountability, mutual esteem, self-confidence, etc. - it plays a particularly critical role. This means that especially in the first phases, when coach and trainee are getting to know each other and gaining familiarity, it is important not to be focused only on technical problems and tasks to be performed. A reasonable amount of time instead must be devoted to build mutual trust and respect, clarifying the 'rules of the relational game'.

### ❖ **Promoting autonomy**

One possible and typical risk in a pedagogical relation consists in generating a situation of dependence of the learner from the teacher. It can maybe work at the beginning when the students are not competent at all and need a lot of support; but then, as they consolidate specific knowledge and skills it becomes necessary to promote their autonomy in performing tasks. Only in this way they can really flourish and grow as persons. If the supervision remains too strict along time, the learner will never be self-confident enough to 'leave' the safe harbour represented by the teacher.

### ❖ **Teamworking**

Today, almost every activity inside an organization cannot be realised adopting the 'lone wolf' approach. In the case of WBL it's the same. Besides the relation with the learner, the coach is supposed effectively manage in a cooperative way a complex set of relationships, both inside and outside the company: HR department, own's boss, colleagues of other related functions, schoolteacher, school coordinator, etc. Assuming the approach of a 'case manager' able to generate integration, collaboration and synergies across different actors, departments and organization can make the difference.

The **third column** of the competence set model refers to attitudes and includes the following qualities and personal traits.

### ❖ **Empathy, human touch, and emotional intelligence**

It represents a key asset to be able to establish a trustworthy and reliable relationship with the learner, a sort of relational channel through which the coach can transfer all his/her knowledge and job experiences. Being highly expert from a technical point of view is not enough in a WBL project. As a matter of fact, an effective coach should be able to understand the other person's feelings and to manage his/her own emotions when dealing with the students; talking not only to their brain but also to their guts and heart.

### ❖ **Patience**

A WBL project is not just work, but most of all an educational experience where the coach is supposed to lead the students respecting their rhythm and timing. It means that very often it is important to give inputs, advice, feedback and then patiently wait for the learner to go through their individual process of individual and professional growth. If the coach runs too fast expecting immediate results (and the learners start to feel this pressure) the consequence might be a psychological block in the learning process of the students.

### ❖ **Enthusiasm, passion, and positiveness**

One of the key requirements for being a 'good teacher' is a strong passion for what you do. Being able to combine technical expertise about the content of your work with enthusiasm for your job makes a huge difference. When a young student can see a glint in the coach's eyes the overall educational experience will be reinforced and strong motivational drivers towards learning will be activated. Students understand that what they are going to learn through the WBL experience can potentially make them satisfied, motivated and enthusiastic as the coach.

### ❖ **Error management**

One critical aspect in managing the educational relationship with the students concerns how to react in case they make errors while performing the working activities. It might be quite common given that especially at the beginning they lack any practical experience and probably have only some theoretical notions about the job. It is crucial for the coach to approach 'mistakes' as learning opportunities focussing the discussion with the students on the reasons behind the error and on what can be improved or done differently for the future. Any punitive or blaming behaviour will not be useful and could produce the risk to block any explorative, experimental, and independent attitude in the learners.

### ❖ **Adaptability and flexibility**

Even though the definition of a clear plan (objectives, activities, articulation, monitoring, etc.) among the school and the company, for each WBL experience, is a key factor and preliminary step, during its implementation a significant amount of flexibility must be ensured by the coach. As a matter of

fact, it allows adaptation to the peculiar characteristics of the learner, to changes in organizational priorities and processes; it permits to be agile in catching emerging opportunities for enriching the experience and to overcome obstacles and constraints compared to the initial plan.

#### ❖ **“Pass on” and “Leave a legacy” attitude**

Persons involved as coaches in a WBL project should be willing to share their knowledge and know-how with someone else. Not only concerning their formal competences but also considering something even more precious, i.e., the experience, the tricks of the trade, the wisdom and intuition that only many years spent doing something can bring. If they can envisage the young student, they are coaching, as a sort of potential ‘professional heir’ they will be ready to generously share all these experiences and transfer their legacy of formal and ‘tacit’ knowledge.

#### ❖ **Availability**

One possible obstacle between the coach and student can be represented by the different age, seniority, and personal maturity. What is just a natural difference - related to biological data and cultural factors - might turn into a dangerous barrier in relational and communication dynamics. The coach should be aware of those differences and avoid any kind of prejudice (e.g., young people are not keen to make sacrifices, they spend too much time on social networks, etc.), remaining always open and available to the students for what they are. At the same time, keeping from time-to-time informal behaviours might encourage the learner to get closer.

#### ❖ **Open mind**

Meeting young people during the participation in a WBL project can represent an opportunity for both the coach and the company. Quite often newcomers to the organization are able to bring fresh ideas and innovative perspectives on long-time established routines, offering the possibility to see things differently. All this can happen only if the coach is ready to accept different points of view, sometimes maybe naïve or difficult to implement, at least at first glance. Certainly, the use of new media and digital tools can constitute an interesting space for such dynamics considering that today the learners mostly are “digital natives”.

The content presented here was discussed in depth among the partners both in presence and through online meetings and exchanges. This process of progressive fine tuning allowed to highlight two further points:

- The Job Profile of the i-coach expert.
- The Training Priorities for the preparation of the i-coach expert.

## THE I-COACH EXPERT JOB PROFILE

The results collected from the field allowed to define (a non-exhaustive) job profile of an effective i-Coach expert. In particular, he or she need to be able to:

1

### MENTOR AND COACH

Developing the initial reception of the apprentice in the company (guide on what the first steps are in the first month of working). Accompanying and motivating the apprentice to learn. Identify and communicate regular goals to the trainee.

2

### ASSESS SKILLS

Identify the learner's previous knowledge and experiences Evaluate the trainee learning process in the company Implement specific evaluation tools.

3

### CO-DESIGN THE CONTENTS OF THE INTERNSHIP

Participate in the drafting of the projects by defining the training content and the activities that will then be carried out.

4

### IDENTIFY THE POTENTIAL OF THE INTERN

The ability to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the intern.

5

### ASSIGN TASKS

Identify tasks, prioritize, allocate time to different activities, know which activities to assign to whom.

6

### DELEGATE

Assess the degree of student autonomy, lead them to gradual autonomy and delegate the tasks the trainee is able to perform.

7

### INTEGRATE IN COMPANY VALUES AND CULTURE

Integrate the trainee in the working team and to make them feel a proper element of it. Be aware of HR market demand conditions (opportunity for good realisation, good pay, promotion and career development).

Inspiration for the above basic outline of the i-Coach Expert's job profile, is derived especially from our research activities and received feedback. In particular supported by the following statements:

- *“My tutor was always there to explain what my tasks were and if I needed help, I knew I could count on him”.*
- *“I would have needed training support in the early stage of my career, in particular in the identification of the tasks to assign to the intern”.*
- *“It is very important to know how to prioritise activities and to know the amount and type of work to give to each person”.*
- *“The youth/student must be constantly supported and led toward gradual autonomy in his or her own work activities, all while considering the formative part of his or her journey as the protagonist”.*

In summary, the competencies on which the effective conduct of overall aspect of the internship activities are based on:

1. Competencies in the area of **development of educational content**;
2. Competencies in the area of **teaching approaches**;
3. Competencies in the **evaluation and monitoring** of training effectiveness;
4. Competencies in **training delivery modes** (e.g. traditional classroom vs virtual classroom vs gaming etc).

## **THE TRAINING PRIORITIES FOR THE PREPARATION OF THE i-COACH EXPERT**

The second relevant output is constituted by the definition of the key priorities for designing and delivering an effective training programme aimed at organically preparing i-Coach experts ready to be involved in WBL experiences. According to the identified priorities each single partner will develop a specific session of the training providing macro and micro design documents and materials.

Here follow the six priorities which largely refer to the set of competences described in detail above:

- Pedagogy, teaching principles, learning processes – ECOLE
- Communication and active listening – NERDA
- Organization and time management – FEUZ
- Motivating and encouraging interns – TXORIERRI
- Emotional intelligence – CCBI
- Internship promotion (social media and other marketing tools) – EMPHASYS

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# VI. Conclusions

## KEY POINTS TO BE CONSIDERED IN THE DEFINITION OF WBL POLICIES

This cross-analysis of the National Reports produced by each partner allowed to capture some key points to be considered in the definition and promotion of policies related to WBL development.

1

WBL is a key resource for managing the effective transition from education to labor market, able to generate multiple benefits for a plurality of stakeholders.

2

WBL can represent a fundamental step in professional preparation of young students but also in their growth as responsible adults combining technical knowledge with social skills

3

Developing a proper normative framework (and lobbying for its continuous improvement) and overcoming specific cultural bias are crucial prerequisites of a healthy and effective WBL system.

4

The key obstacles to WBL are mainly bureaucracy, communication gap and weak coordination between school and work, lack of competences by the key actors

5

The key areas of improvement for the future are strengthening the link between schools and companies, evolving the actors of WBL into a real 'network'/'community', a marketing and communication strategy, the improvement of WBL in its operational functioning.

6

It is crucial to invest in the accurate selection and training of the company coaches according to the 'competencies model' (knowledge, skill and attitudes) developed on the base of the research data

7

The model is based on the idea of attributing a specific weight and value to different competences according to the fact that they are 'core', 'supporting' or 'complementing'.

8

The competences model, also thanks to this internal ranking of different items, can work as useful guidelines for i-coach experts' recruitment and training.

9

Training programmes for future i-coach experts can be developed according to the six learning priorities identified through the research process (desk, focus groups and case studies).

10

A clear and articulated 'job profile' of the ideal i-coach expert is provided, again leveraging on the data collected during the research; this job profile constitutes a useful operative tool for recruiting and developing i-coach experts.

# Executive Summary

## Introduction

The “i-Coach- Innovative Toolbox for Internship Implementation” project aims at providing SMEs with the competences needed to support the implementation of successful internship programmes via innovative training programs and methodology.

In order to achieve these purposes, the project envisages the creation of a new professional profile, i.e. the i-Coach expert and the promotion of an innovative approach to update the target groups' mentality and skills in managing work-based learning (WBL) experiences.

The Project Result 1 (Design of the i-coach Expert Skill Set Profile) explored all the relevant factors which will lead to the successful creation of the i-Coach Expert's Profile i.e. what characteristics, knowledge, skills and competences should the i-Coach Expert possess.

Coordinated by the Italian partner Ecole and realised through the involvement and contribution of the all partnership, this it represents the foundation and starting point for coherently conceiving and delivering the other phases' outputs.

## Objectives

The Project Result 1 aimed at investigating all the relevant factors (economic, social, cultural and pedagogical) to be taken into account in defining a clear framework for the creation a the I-Coach Expert's Profile. The analysis conducted in each of the partner countries tried to catch the key opportunities and obstacles related to the development of WBL initiatives. The operational objectives of this phase were:

- Identifying the specific characteristics in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes that compose a sound i-Coach expert professional and personal profile;
- Describing the main processes and activities included in an ideal i-coach expert job profile;



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## Methodology

In the first stage, parallel researches were conducted in each of the partner country, according to the following methodological design:

1. **DESK RESEARCH:** based on secondary data, a snapshot of the WBL phenomenon was outlined (regulatory and socio-economic context, drivers beyond, stakeholder perspective and strategies, main formats for implementation);
2. **FOCUS GROUPS:** they involved both companies and training institutions with the aim of discussing the key factors supporting and hindering WBL experiences, besides the key skill of the coach were explored;
3. **CASE STUDIES:** in each country four case studies were collected to analyse concrete experiences of WBL with a special focus on benefits for the different actors (company, school, student) and on the coach profile.

The final output of this research process was a final national report for each country.

The second stage consisted of a transversal analysis aimed at finding the key common elements among the different country with the aim of producing a general model on the role and competences of the i-coach expert. The key results are described below.

## Benefits generated by WBL experience

The WBL experience results into a 'win-win' game, where both students and companies (with their coaches) are getting extremely relevant benefits.

### STUDENTS

- Job orientation;

Self-awareness of their own strengths and areas of improvement from a personal and professional point of view;



# Executive Summary

- Development of complementary skills (social and technical skills);
- Preparation for work;
- Career opportunity;
- Networking with members of a professional community;

## COMPANIES

- Innovation;
- Enhancing the attraction and recruitment process of young people on the labor market,
- Reputation in its territory and community;
- Shaping their behaviours according to the key values of the company;
- Formal knowledge transfer and tacit knowledge sharing by senior workers involved as WBL mentor/coach.

## The i-Coach Expert's Profile

As a first step towards the creation of the i-Coach's 'competence-set', the partnership analysed the information present in the national reports. Then, a process of 'logical grouping' was realised, putting together similar concepts, even if formally described in a different way. The third and final step consisted in identifying a clear model for producing an overall categorisation of all these key concepts.

## THE COMPETENCES

Three main dimensions have been identified to define the i-Coach Expert's profile: *knowledge, skill, and attitude*. Within these three macro-dimensions have been a set of competences that can be grouped as:

- **core competences:** the heart of the profession of a WBL coach, the starting point of a professional development process, training activities should firstly focus on these competences to put the building



# Executive Summary

blocks in place (eg., technical knowledge, active listening, guidance and support, emotional intelligence, passion);

- **supporting competences:** aimed at broadening their perspective, empower their action and fully deploy their professional potential (eg., teaching principles, potential identification, building trust, error management);
- **complementing competences:** relevant to furtherly elevate the professional level and effectiveness of a WBL coach, even though not strictly essential (e.g., social media, teamworking, open mind).

## THE JOB PROFILE

The results collected from the field allowed to define the job profile of an effective i-Coach expert. In particular, they should be able to:

- Mentor and coach;
- Assess skills;
- Co-design the contents of the internship;
- Identify potential of the trainee;
- Assign and delegate tasks;
- Integrate the trainee in company values and culture;

This simple job profile can support the recruitment and the development of highly effective and performing coaches.

## Conclusions

The work-based learning experience should implement an effective transition from education to labour market and a professional preparation of young students through the development of a transnational normative framework. The i-Coach expert represents a figure that, thanks to a set of competences, can support this transition process. The research process and guidelines allow to clearly define the i-Coach profile in the recruitment and training process.



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The model is based on the idea of attributing a specific weight and value to different competences according to the fact that they are 'core', 'supporting' or 'complementing'.

It finally indicates the key areas of learning to be addressed in the preparation of i-coach experts:

- Pedagogy, teaching principles, learning processes;
- Communication and active listening;
- Organization and time management;
- Motivating and encouraging interns;
- Emotional intelligence; Internship promotion (social media and other marketing tools).



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# OUR TEAM

## Project Coordinator:

### **Bulgaria: Business Innovation Centre Innobridge, Ruse**

Mr. Milen Dobrev  
Ms. Irena Ivanova  
Mr. Ayri Memishev

## The project partners:

### **Belgium: Belgian-Italian Chamber of Commerce, Brussels**

Ms. Erica Giovanetto  
Mr. Giorgio Emiliano Pinna

### **Cyprus: A & A Emphasys Centre, Nicosia**

Ms. Panayiota Sofokleous  
Ms. Chrystalla Thrasyvoulou

### **Italy: ECOLE Vocational Training Center, Milano**

Ms. Caterina Carroli  
Ms. Jessica Messina  
Mr. Gianluca Vincis

### **Romania: Northeast Regional Development Agency (NERDA), Piatra Neamt**

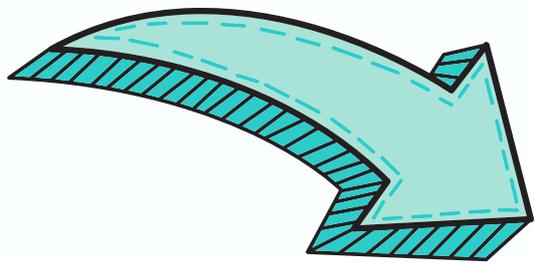
Mr. Mihai Parfeni  
Mr. Mihai Mitrea

### **Spain: Business Foundation of the University of Zaragoza (FEUZ), Zaragoza and Politeknika Txorierri, Derio**

Ms. Isabel Nuez  
Ms. Sheila Larrabaster

# GET INVOLVED

Interested in collaborating or simply learn more about the i-Coach project? Let's get in touch!



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## The i-Coach partnership:

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Belgo-Italiana