

The insertion counsellor profile

The project

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The consortium



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The project

Work-based insertion allows low-skilled adults who are far from employment to return to work through specific insertion contracts. In these structures, they receive tailored support at their workstation.

The people who supervise them - **the insertion counsellors** - draw on a wealth of experience and resources to meet a multi-dimensional challenge: training and technical supervision on the one hand, psychosocial support and vocational guidance on the other. Whether they are social workers or technical supervisors, the precise profile of these support staff varies from one structure to another, as do their roles and missions.

The ACTION project aims to improve support for people in insertion by developing training and work-based insertion methods as an innovative and practical response to the needs of these people and to contemporary socioeconomic issues.

In short, ACTION supports the work of insertion counsellors by:

- Harmonising and formalising support for the target group
- *Pedagogising* the approach, equipping teams with the right tools
- Providing recommendations for support towards sustainable employment

To achieve this, the project brings together 6 partners from 3 European countries, all active in the field of the social economy and work-based insertion. The consortium has worked together to develop four complementary resources:

1. The **Profile of the insertion counsellor**, to clarify the role and enhance the practices of support teams.
2. The **Guide for the insertion pathway**, which sets out the key elements for the pathway and provides ideas and inspiration to implement them.
3. The **Insertion worker logbook**, a practical tool for monitoring and documenting the worker's progress.
4. The **toolbox for job coaching**, to improve support towards sustainable employment.

Sectorial contexts

ACTION is concerned with support for workers on insertion schemes, who are employed and supported by structures for insertion through economic activity. The aim of this introductory section is to define the framework for this resource, by placing its content in the precise regulatory context in which the project partners have operated and implemented the project.

Work-based insertion

The profile of the insertion counsellor is part of the specific context of insertion structures that receive and support adults with few qualifications who are (very) far from employment, with a variety of profiles: incomplete schooling, psychosocial problems and insecurity, health problems or even disabilities, intermittent career path, etc. These people are employed in insertion structures under special employment contracts, called insertion contracts. These people are employed by insertion structures under special employment contracts, known as insertion contracts.

ACTION is interested in work-based insertion structures that focus on the **transition to sustainable employment**. Insertion contracts are limited in time and aim to get people back on their feet and on the road to sustainable insertion into the mainstream labour market. The insertion contract is therefore seen as a transition to traditional, permanent employment.

These particular systems combine different dimensions:

- **Integration**, which takes place **via and towards employment**, with the aim of sustainable socio-professional integration. This insertion involves joint work between different stakeholders: insertion counsellors (whether they have a psychosocial or technical profile), prescribers and social workers, public employment agencies and institutions, etc. in the service of individualised support. The worker is then welcomed in his or her entirety, and the support provided will help to resolve the obstacles to employment encountered by the individual: health, money and debt, housing, mobility, childcare, addiction, etc.
- **The economic activity**, which **is a support for insertion**, a vector to get the person back in the saddle to move towards sustainable employment. This implies that the activity performed may not be directly linked to the worker's career plan, and may act as a sort of orientation device, helping to build a long-term plan. This does not mean that it is an occupational activity: it is a real economic activity, with objectives in terms of the skills to acquire at the workstation and the requirements in terms of performance and production.
- Work-based insertion structures are part of **the social and solidarity economy**, contributing to the socio-economic development of their area by meeting needs that are not met or not covered by the traditional private economy. The economic model is a hybrid one: on the one hand, there is the actual production of goods and services for customers; on the other, there is public funding, in the form of subsidies, employment subsidies or other forms of support for the support and insertion work.

Regulations in force

In each partner country - and sometimes specifically for a region or sector - support for target groups is regulated, in whole or in part, by a legal reference framework.

In the European Union, insertion through economic activity is part of the social economy sector, within which various private and public initiatives and schemes coexist. Insertion therefore takes many different forms, depending on local policies, stakeholders, existing structures and tools, etc. To better understand the context of this document, here are a few contextual elements for the partner organisations involved in the ACTION project:

In France, Ateliers et Chantiers d'Insertion (ACI) provide support and employment for vulnerable adults. Along with the intermediary association, the insertion company and the temporary work-based insertion company, ACIs are part of the **structures for insertion through economic activity (SIAE)**.

Article L5132-15 of the French Labour Code defines the following missions for ACIs:

- Welcoming, recruiting and putting to work unemployed people experiencing particular social and professional difficulties;
- Organise the monitoring, support, technical supervision and training of their workers with a view to facilitating their social insertion and seeking the conditions for sustainable professional integration.

The purpose of an ACI is to recruit, support, supervise and train people experiencing social and professional difficulties, with a view to facilitating their return to employment. ACIs can therefore enter fixed-term insertion contracts with vulnerable unemployed people. These contracts range from a minimum of 4 months to a maximum of 2 years (with exceptions). The worker's weekly working time may not be less than 20 hours, except where the contract provides for this to take account of the particularly serious difficulties faced by the person concerned. It may vary over the period covered by the contract, but may not exceed 35 hours. Workers receive hourly pay at least equal to the legal minimum wage in France.

The creation of an ACI requires the signing of an official agreement with the State, which entitles the company to subsidies to enable it to conduct its missions. The recruitment of people on insertion schemes entitles the company, up to the contractual ceiling, to financial aid comprising a fixed part and a variable part, which depends on the characteristics of the workers recruited, the insertion measures and resources implemented and the results at the end of the scheme.

As work-based insertion structures, the marketing of goods and services produced within the framework of the IFA is possible when it contributes to the implementation and development of socio-professional insertion activities for the beneficiaries. However, the revenue from this marketing may only cover a maximum of 30% of the costs associated with these activities. In addition, the goods and services produced most often meet collective needs that are not otherwise satisfied.

As indicated below, people who are unemployed and experiencing social and professional difficulties can be taken on by the ACI as part of a pathway to employment. These socio-professional difficulties are criteria for access to the scheme, and are justified in particular by an administrative status, i.e.:

- be in receipt of minimum social benefits and social assistance,
- be a long-term jobseeker,

- be a young person under the age of 26 in serious difficulty,
- be a recognised disabled worker

At present, there are no regulations governing the supervision of these groups. However, it is necessary to comply with the requirement relating to technical supervision: 1 technical supervisor may supervise a maximum of 12 workers.

Before drawing up their official agreement with the State, the ACI must indicate the means envisaged by the structure to meet the objective of receiving, supporting and moving workers towards employment. A negotiated annual agreement sets out the objectives in terms of the target groups to reach and the number of "positive exits" (into employment or training).

In Italy, the project focused on **consortia of social co-operatives**, entities in the tertiary sector, which came into being in the 1990s with the aim of bringing together co-operatives and integrating them in an entrepreneurial manner, benefiting from the advantages and economies of scale associated with a large-scale enterprise while allowing each individual social co-operative to remain viable and independent. At national level, there are two related laws governing the employment of vulnerable people: Law 68/99 and article 4 of Law 381/1991.

In Law 381 of 8 November 1991: *Discipline of social cooperatives*, article 1.1 stipulates that "*the purpose of social cooperatives is to pursue the general interest of the community in the human promotion and social insertion of citizens through:*

- *management of social, health and education services*
- *the exercise of various activities - agricultural, industrial, commercial or service - aimed at employing disadvantaged people*".

Regarding Type B cooperatives, art. 4§2 of the Act stipulates that "*the disadvantaged persons concerned (...) must represent at least thirty per cent of the cooperative's workers and, taking into account their subjective status, must be members of the cooperative*".

The aim of Law 68/99: *Standards for the right to work of people with disabilities* is to "*promote the inclusion and insertion of people with disabilities in the world of work, through support services and targeted placement*". Targeted employment takes the form of a series of technical and support tools that make it possible to correctly assess the work capabilities of people with disabilities and place them in the appropriate job, through job analysis, forms of support, positive discrimination actions, etc. (article 2). As a result, there are obligations in terms of the recruitment and insertion of these people into the labour market. More specifically, public and private employers are required to employ disabled workers in the following proportions (article 3, paragraph 1):

- 7% of workers, if they employ more than 50 workers
- 2 workers, if they employ between 36 and 50 workers
- 1 worker, if they have between 15 and 35 workers

The role of the regions is crucial in this scheme, as places for social consultation between the social partners and the employers' association, representatives of social cooperatives, associations representing disabled people and their families, and other third sector bodies.

With regard to the target group for work-based insertion schemes, according to art. 4 of Law 381/1991, "disadvantaged persons" are people with physical, mental and sensory disabilities, former patients of psychiatric institutions, people undergoing psychiatric treatment, drug addicts, alcoholics, minors of working age with family problems and convicts admitted to alternative measures to imprisonment. The status of disadvantaged person must be proven by documents issued by the public administration.

Current legal definitions only partially cover real situations of vulnerability. There is therefore a "grey zone" of precarious groups who, for several reasons, do not fall into the official categories of disadvantage but are at real risk of exclusion from the labour market because of their precariousness. This is the case, for example, of people in social distress, low-skilled adults, people experiencing professional de-skilling or demotion, intermittent professional careers, people with poor social skills, people suffering from unrecognised psychological disorders, illiterates, migrants, etc.

Apart from this, there are no official procedures or guides organising the day-to-day activities of social cooperatives with people in work-based insertion. Many cooperatives develop internal procedures or working methods, which can be certified by a certifying body. Italian law does not provide for financial support for the presence of tutors or coaches within insertion structures. However, social enterprises do employ "placement agents", or support staff, to conduct this specific task. With the exception of a few local initiatives, which have provided specific contributions for the recruitment of "internal tutors", this function is often paid for out of the margins that the company manages to generate from its commercial activity, which makes the presence of this figure problematic in times of economic crisis.

Finally, in **Belgium**, the project did not focus on a particular sector or type of structure, but rather on a **specific system of insertion contracts**. The "**Article 60**" scheme is one of the few existing schemes for insertion employment. Contracts under "Article 60" are a special type of insertion contract under which a person receiving the social insertion income, or equivalent social assistance, can benefit from a special placement measure. This contract (as well as its other form, "article 61") is set out in articles 60§7 and 61 of the Organic Law of 8 July 1976 relating to the Centres Publics d'Action Sociale (CPAS). In the Walloon Region, this is supplemented by the Decree of 29 April 2024 relating to the subsidy of CPASs in the context of the employment of their beneficiaries and the related implementing decree, which set out the contours and practical implementation of this scheme within the region's CPASs.

This contract is one of the forms of assistance that the CPAS can offer its users as part of its insertion mission. This provision allows a CPAS to take on the role employer for beneficiaries of the right to social integration, in order to offer them work experience and enable them gain full entitlement to other benefits. The duration of the contract thus corresponds to the number of working days required to regain entitlement to unemployment benefit, to leave the scope of social assistance (maximum two years).

These contracts are offered by the CPAS to their users and concluded directly between the PCSW and the beneficiary. The PCSW can then make the insertion worker available to other employers, known as "users" (public/local administration, associations, social enterprises, etc.). The legal employer remains the CPAS, which manages the salary, insurance, contracts, etc., while the user becomes responsible for the workplace. The CPAS signs an agreement with the user, which sets out the framework for the provision of services (tasks entrusted, working hours, supervision, planned assessments, etc.)

The people targeted by this scheme can have a wide range of profiles, as the criteria for access to these contracts are essentially administrative. To be eligible, people must simultaneously meet the following conditions:

- Receive the social insertion income or equivalent financial social assistance;
- Be legally resident in the country;
- Not be entitled to full unemployment benefit.

Social economy organisations are key partners in the provision of workers under Article 60, as they are considered to be appropriate host organisations due to their experience and ability to support vulnerable groups.

The regulations lay down certain specific provisions for the vocational support of article 60 workers: establishment of a skills assessment and a vocational project, and an action plan for sustainable insertion into employment. As the PCSW remains the direct employer, it retains control over and responsibility for this support. However, it may be delegated, in whole or in part, to the user when the latter is a social economy structure. In all cases, the user is required, among other things, to appoint an internal tutor responsible for supervising and supporting the worker, to draw up a job description, to release the worker for training and to discuss the worker's situation with the PCSW.

In practice, the form of this support will depend on the internal arrangements of each host structure, its habits and internal procedures, the situation and needs of the individual, etc. In addition, each structure is likely to be subject to its own sectoral regulations, which may influence the supervision and support of the workers being taken on (profile and qualifications of the people employed, etc.).

Supporting workers on insertion schemes

Support for workers on insertion schemes is an essential part of the work-based insertion process. This support covers a wide range of issues, with the aim of hooking people into the insertion scheme and keeping them there, by providing them with support to deal with the psycho-socio-economic problems they encounter daily.

This support combines both "technical" aspects (skills acquisition, training, job coaching, etc.) and "social" aspects (individual interviews, psychosocial support and anamnesis, job search support, etc.). This work is carried out by permanent staff responsible for supervision, known as **insertion counsellors** under the ACTION project. These support staff have a variety of profiles and occupy equally diverse positions within the insertion structures. Insertion counsellor, social workers, technical coordinators, trainers, heads of service or guidance officers share responsibility for support and use a variety of techniques and work practices in this area, sometimes without any clear guidelines for the organisation of this support.

Often, however, this support is co-ordinated in an informal way, and the support staff navigate between the information they gather from beneficiaries and the contributions and communications of their colleagues, to provide the best possible support to the target audiences.

If the insertion process is to be a success, it is important that this support is as clear, appropriate and effective as possible. It is therefore necessary to specify the objectives of this support, by clarifying what comes under this cross-cutting mission, and therefore the activities implemented by insertion counsellors, as well as their field of action.

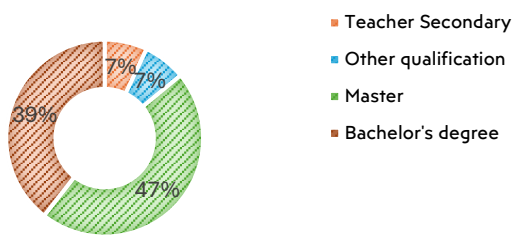
Thanks to the pooling of various realities in the field, ACTION has produced this "**Profile of the insertion counsellor**". This resource identifies the roles, missions and skills required for the job. It is intended to serve as a reference for all field workers who support the public, so that they can better envisage their responsibilities and organise their day-to-day work, by clarifying and harmonising their working practices. In addition, the profile will enable support workers to think more carefully about their professional stance and the scope of their actions. For employers in the socio-professional insertion sector, it could also be useful in the context of recruitment and management of functions of this type (profiles and job descriptions, coordination, common language, etc.)

Creating the profile

In order to develop the profile of the insertion counsellor, the ACTION consortium carried out research among the project's direct target group, field workers involved in supporting people in integration. This research included a questionnaire and individual interviews. The questionnaire served as the basis for drawing up the profile and highlighting the key support activities. The interviews were used to expand on the answers given in the questionnaire, to gain a better understanding of the role, missions and tasks of 'insertion counsellors'.

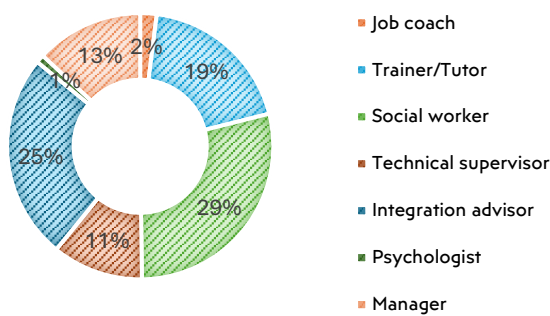
To understand the complexity of the support role, it is interesting to examine the profiles of the people who responded to the questionnaire, to understand the diversity of profiles working in the supervision and support of the public:

Respondents' qualifications



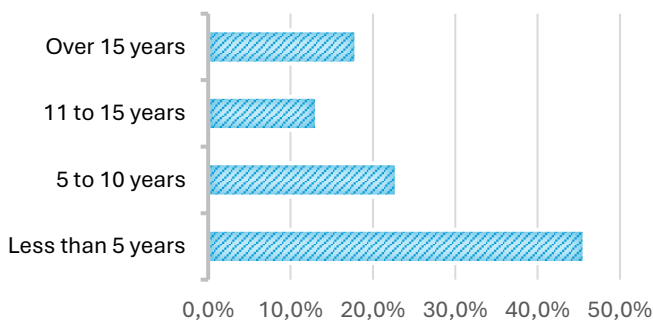
86% of respondents indicated that they had a university degree (39.4% a bachelor's degree and 46.5% a master's degree).

Position held



Most of the respondents were insertion advisers, followed by tutors - trainers - educators, then coordinators, social workers, technical supervisors and referents, job coaches and psychologists.

Experience



Most respondents have been with their current organisation for less than five years (45.7%), between 5 and 10 years (22.9%), more than 15 years (18%) and between 11 and 15 years (13.2%).

The questionnaire highlighted that support is an ongoing process, a cross-disciplinary activity, and not a defined task. It is conducted by several workers with different professional profiles who cooperate with each other, as a team, and devote themselves to the beneficiaries to support them not only on a professional level but also on more personal issues (health, housing, digital, public services, etc.). Furthermore, as explained in the sector contextualisation, respondents confirmed that there is sometimes no homogeneous framework governing support actions and the functions and professions involved. This resource therefore provides a relevant guide for organising support activities and actions.

Insertion counsellor

Roles & Missions

Here are the missions and related tasks involved in supporting workers in integration, made up of 8 activities to be carried out:

1. Recruiting and guiding candidates

Support workers organise and/or participate in the recruitment of workers on insertion schemes. This involves :

- **Organise information and welcome sessions**
- **Conduct selection and motivation interviews**

Counsellors can facilitate the process by preparing a summary of the organisation's needs and the selection criteria for the posts to be filled, to establish a single set of basic questions for all candidates: previous career and experience, the candidate's motivations, interest in the organisation's sector, projects, etc.

2. Welcoming the worker into the organisation

The induction process largely determines the quality of the relationship that is established between the newcomer and his or her supervisors, especially as this is often the person's first work experience, or a new professional experience after a long period of inactivity.

To do this, accompanying persons must :

- **Sign employment contracts and framework documents**
- **Provide key information about your organisation**
- **Explain the work to be carried out and present the workstation**
- **Draw up an initial skills assessment**

Welcoming a newcomer to the organisation is a crucial first step, which can sometimes determine their entire career within the organisation. It is therefore important to prepare the induction properly. This can be done by organising induction days, welcome kits or start-up packs, preparing the workstation and technical sheets, clarifying the job profile and tasks, and by preparing the first skills assessments to be carried out, in order to assess the worker's abilities and skills and thus be able to provide them with suitable work and support.

3. Monitoring the psychosocial situation of workers

This follow-up is at the heart of insertion support. One of the main activities of insertion counsellor, particularly those with a "social profile" (insertion advisers, social assistants, etc.), is to provide individualised psychosocial support to workers. They do this by :

- **Conducting regular one-to-one interviews**
- **Organising workshops and group activities**
- **Helping to remove barriers to employment and solve day-to-day problems**
- **Referring to partners, if necessary, depending on the problems encountered (health, housing, food, trade unions, etc.).**

Psychosocial support is part of the overall support provided by insertion structures. It is generally both formal (during individual interviews, for example) and informal (in the workplace, during a discussion during a break, on the way to a work site, etc.).

Its aim is to strengthen people's capacity for self-analysis, by developing a dialogue with the worker, listening to him or her and **creating a relationship of trust** that will enable the worker to share his or her questions and needs, at all levels (about his or her work, with peers and the team, or about his or her personal life).

4. Supporting workers in acquiring technical skills at their workstation

During the insertion process, another support activity consists of **using the service provision as an educational tool**, with a view to helping workers acquire a degree of autonomy in their work, by learning the profession and the appropriate gestures. Like psychosocial support, the training aspect of the insertion programme is at the heart of the scheme. The counsellor must :

- **Adapt workstations and work pace to the worker's profile**
- **Ensure and monitor the training of workers throughout their career and support them in the event of difficulties**
- **Ensure compliance with safety regulations and good working conditions**
- **Organising team dynamics to optimise productivity**
- **Continuously check compliance with instructions, the quality of the work and its conformity with the requested specifications/tasks**
- **Listen to training needs, shortcomings and problems encountered in the performance of work, etc.**

In this case, the "technical" profiles (trainer, technical supervisor, site manager, etc.) are at the forefront of this activity. As part of a pathway to insertion through economic activity, they need to adopt a **specific teaching attitude** that enables them to pass on skills while carrying out practical work with real production requirements. While the production of goods and services is the day-to-day priority, the **real cross-cutting priority is the acquisition of skills by the worker**. This involves taking the time to explain, particularly technical vocabulary, checking understanding by asking questions, facilitating memorisation by activating different memories (auditory, visual, emotional, etc.), making links between tasks and knowledge, and summarising information at the end of the task or day.

Questioning encourages the worker to reflect and reinforces learning. It is therefore important to ask the worker about the process and the tools used, and about what they have retained from the activity once it is over, as well as encouraging them to suggest other ways of organising their work and to listen to their suggestions, advice and comments, as they may sometimes rightly question certain habits.

5. Contributing to the development and implementation of a career plan

This activity covers two essential aspects. On the one hand, the support worker plays a key role in the gradual assessment of what has been learned. Their relationship with the insertion worker gives them real legitimacy to assess the quality of their work, their progress, their behaviour, their compliance with instructions, etc. The assessment provides useful information both for the worker (to help them progress) and for the company. The assessment provides useful information for both the worker (to help him or her progress) and the support worker (to monitor the progress of the insertion programme and adjust the training programme).

The support staff also help to define each worker's career plan. This project is the situation they wish to achieve - bringing together their immediate and future aspirations and personal expectations - but also the skills and progress to be made, which will enable them to design a training pathway that is useful and consistent with this project. The career plan is therefore both a synthesis of motivations and personal skills, and an evolving construction enriched by each new experience.

To cover both bases, accompanying persons must :

- **Carry out regular assessments**
- **Conduct regular one-to-one interviews focusing on the development of career plans**
- **Manage workers in the field, taking account of their career plans**
- **Organise actions to make job hunting easier (writing applications, interview exercises, etc.)**
- **Establish the worker's training path (objectives, skills to be acquired, etc.)**

The aim is to identify all the work situations and training opportunities that will enable the worker to acquire the skills needed to realise his or her career plan. The progression of the pathway must be logical and consistent over time, always returning to the worker's profile, needs and learning pace. The idea is to involve the worker as much as possible in the experience of his career path and project by giving him, for example, a roadmap, indicating the skills to be acquired and the objectives set for him to achieve his goals.

6. Coordinating support for insertion workers

Another key role that insertion counsellor can play is that of centralising information and actions. As part of their work, they coordinate all the actions around beneficiaries, and must :

- **Know your support obligations**
- **Train, guide and inform colleagues**
- **Implement support procedures and resources**
- **Organise team coordination meetings**

The complementary roles of the social workers and the technical supervisors are very important for the smooth running of the support, as they must exchange and manage a large amount of information about the workers they support on a daily basis. They can also sometimes intervene in each other's "zone". For example, when a social worker visits the site to provide information to the workers, or when the supervisor takes part in an assessment interview.

Coordination between these players can be facilitated by strong interpersonal and communication skills, as well as a good understanding of each other's work.

In some structures and organisations, the social worker may have training or technical experience in the company's sector of activity and/or in-depth knowledge and understanding of production requirements. Conversely, it is important for technical supervisors to have some knowledge of social work or, in particular, of support services.

7. Developing and maintaining a network of relevant partners

Partnership capital is also a key element for insertion counsellor, and to this end, they must strive to :

- **Mapping local partners**
- **Contact the partners concerned and establish links with them**
- **Raising awareness among partners**

The partnership network is indeed important for all aspects of the work: with employers and businesses to facilitate the transition to employment, or with social services to redirect the needs and questions of workers, etc. The ability to remove social and professional obstacles can be greatly facilitated by the density of the structure's network.

8. Raising awareness of the challenges of socio-professional integration

Finally, through their work, insertion counsellors also play an awareness-raising role, both inside and outside their structure. They ensure that :

- **Raising awareness and mobilising colleagues to support workers on insertion programmes**
- **Raise awareness among partners and bodies responsible for employment, training and social action of the issues involved in supporting the public**

Attitudes of the insertion counsellor

Certain behaviours and specific attitudes are necessary for successful support. Here are the most important, as listed by the professionals interviewed:

<p>Communicate</p> <p>Active listening Adapting your communication to the person you are talking to Empathy Ethics and professional conduct</p>	<p>Believing in each person's abilities</p> <p>Patience Empathy Consideration Ability to assess the person's behaviour, not the person themselves Respecting people's autonomy</p>
<p>Developing relationships based on trust</p> <p>Empathy Observation skills Emotional intelligence Tolerance and non-judgement Active listening Ethics and professional conduct</p>	<p>Local networking (partners, associations, employers, etc.)</p> <p>Interpersonal skills Innovation Open-mindedness Organisational analysis Active communication</p>
<p>Team spirit</p> <p>Communication Interpersonal skills Collaboration</p>	<p>Adapting</p> <p>Flexibility Availability Organisation Creativity Ability to challenge oneself</p>

Challenges and needs

As mentioned above, the job of job coach is a multi-faceted one, occupied by people from a variety of professions and backgrounds. However, in all cases or specific contexts, the insertion counsellor we interviewed agreed on **the issues and challenges inherent in their role as advisers**.

In fact, most support staff agree that **time and economic pressure** are the two main concerns in their work, which makes it difficult to provide optimum support. It is difficult to strike a balance between the practical work involved in meeting economic/commercial needs and individual support. It is complicated to be present and attentive to all the beneficiaries, and to make time for each of them, when you're under economic pressure.

Still linked to economic pressure and time constraints, the very essence of work-based insertion is a constraint, due to its **organisational and logistical aspects**. It can be tricky to take a worker aside for an individual interview or to carry out a particular procedure or support when the workers are scattered across external sites, busy working in the kitchen or on a production line.

In addition, one can often get "frustrated" by the high degree of fragility and precariousness of the target group, which must meet many other needs before thinking about finding a job and is sometimes not very receptive to the help provided or even ends up giving up and dropping out before the end of the insertion contract.

These are inherent constraints to insertion schemes, which are beyond our reach and control. **However, among the more concrete needs expressed, a series of measures can be put in place to respond to the other challenges encountered. These measures could optimise work by formalising certain aspects of support:**

- **Training in team and group management:** Insertion counsellors are often professionals in their field (technical trainer, social worker, etc.). They initially have specific training and/or professional experience and then find themselves having to take on team management roles. However, few of them are trained adequately in the management and supervision of groups and in the professional posture that this entails. The organisation of ongoing training in team and group management could therefore be an interesting way of strengthening the skills, and the work, of insertion counsellors.
- **Training in support and supervision for vulnerable and precarious groups:** Many counsellors talk about the problems they encounter when they deal with issues for which they are not sufficiently equipped. This is particularly the case with mental health issues and addictions, which can be common among the target group. Because support workers are at a loss, beneficiaries sometimes drop out because the support framework is not adapted to their needs. Resources that enable teams to manage these kinds of social problems would therefore be an advantage for all stakeholders.

Two good practices to learn from

Some social insertion organisations are developing specific practices to adapt to the needs of their beneficiaries, balancing social support with technical supervision. For inspiration, here are two examples from Italy:

The case manager, from the IT2 cooperative

It2¹, short for *Impresa Transizione 2*, is a social cooperative based in Bologna, founded as a transition company to facilitate the inclusion of disadvantaged people. The cooperative aims to implement initiatives to integrate socially marginalised or disadvantaged people (such as working-age minors with family problems, (ex-)prisoners, former drug addicts, disabled people, etc.) into the world of work and society, by seeking and obtaining employment opportunities in the best economic, social and professional conditions. It2 organises projects to help people make the transition to work, such as socio-professional insertion services, internships, guidance workshops, etc.

It2 employs 73 workers in a range of services and activities: catering, cleaning services, workshops, social housing, support and training, community education, etc.

Cleaning services are one of It2's main work-based activity. Within this framework, the cooperative has recently hired a **"case manager"** to accompany and support the cooperative's workers in insertion who have a recognised disability or serious vulnerabilities. The case manager function is specific to this cooperative, and is seen as a cross-cutting function, helping to reduce the gap between social and production issues. The case manager **acts as an interface between the various stakeholders**, halfway between psychosocial support and technical supervision. This formula works all the better because the person who was hired for this position is herself halfway between a social profile (social work) and a technical profile (experience in the cooperative's sector of activity). **The cornerstone of the support provided to the workers**, the case manager currently on duty combines her initial training in psychology with previous professional experience in the cleaning sector.

The case manager is therefore the person who coordinates and brings together the cooperative's various support and supervisory staff according to the needs encountered by the workers, by linking the various elements and aspects of the support provided to the beneficiaries.

The case manager's main skills and tasks are as follows:

- **Providing support on psychosocial issues, and supporting educational, training and technical staff**, both formally (at staff meetings, scheduled appraisals and interviews, etc.) and more informally (informal discussions, exchanges at workstations and work sites, etc.).
- **Knowing how to carry out specific activities linked to the cooperative's economic activity**, for example the room cleaning service. This enables the case manager to help and support the workers in insertion in their daily tasks and missions, or to lend them a hand when needed.
- **Networking, creating and maintaining contacts with partners and companies in the region**, in order to develop the cooperative's activities as well as sustainable employment opportunities for workers. The knowledge and experience of the tasks carried out by the workers and the work

¹ <http://www.it2.it/chi-siamo/>

contexts in the cleaning sector make it possible in particular to develop a common language with the professional partners.

So what role does the case manager play in the operation of the cooperative? Her work begins just after the orientation and advice phase, when the worker is hired by the cooperative. Her work begins by matching the skills identified in the individual with the needs of the cooperative and the jobs to be filled. The case manager is then at the centre of the support work, at every stage of the insertion process. In particular, she maintains contact with all the key vocational coaching players (company contact person, vocational training providers, other social enterprises) with a view to future insertion into sustainable employment. The case manager carries out participative observations on sites and workstations, acting to prevent future exclusion from the labour market. She also keeps herself informed and is trained in employment policies and professional insertion tools.

The unit manager and working synergies: the example of Ceff

CEFF Francesco Bandini² is a social cooperative based in Faenza, offering disabled and disadvantaged people personalised education, psychosocial rehabilitation, care, support in acquiring social skills, autonomy support and training services, based on a bio-psycho-social approach. The hallmark of Ceff has always been the involvement of families in the projects of disabled people, hence its full name of "Faentine families educational cooperative"³.

The services provided in the cooperative (part A) include a 'socio-occupational' centre for adults with intellectual, mental and autistic disabilities, and an integrated workshop (social workshop with mechanical assembly work) to which has been added a vocational occupation centre for similar beneficiaries, but with a higher level of functioning and intellectual ability. In this "Social Workshop", the two parts of the cooperative (A and B) are integrated, and the beneficiaries work side by side with educational staff, able-bodied operators and disadvantaged operators.

Services linked to vocational insertion and training (part B) are implemented in real production situations (in the civil and industrial cleaning, digital printing, social workshop, digital control and horticulture operational units). The methodology applied involves working with a network of health, social and local partners to ensure comprehensive, personalised support.

At Ceff, the **Operational Unit Manager**, a supervisory and management operator, coordinates production within his or her unit, **working in synergy** with the **Human Resources Manager and the Careers Manager** - in charge of assessment and psychosocial contact. The decision to invest in this last function, an innovative profile, was taken a few years ago in order to improve the cooperative's support practices and make the overall operation more fluid.

Like the case manager at the *It2* cooperative, the position of **Business Unit Manager** at Ceff is also an **interdisciplinary profile**. The person currently occupying this position is a psychologist by training, with many years' experiences in the social cooperative sector. The main impact of hiring this profile on improving processes has been the constant collaboration with the human resources manager and the managers of the cooperative's production sectors. The type of support and guidance she provides is mainly

² <https://www.ceff.it/>

³ From Faenza, the town where the cooperative was founded and is located.

technical, although over the years she has built up the role according to her own profile and skills, to also carry out training and support assignments in the field. She originally graduated from secondary school as a "social services technician", specialising in animation.

In an interview conducted as part of ACTION's activities, she described herself as follows: *"I started at CEFF as an apprentice and, over the years, I've worked in different areas of the cooperative, as a maintenance worker, in the mechanical workshop with assembly tasks, in the environment sector, in the press centre, to finally arrive at my current job. Today, I am responsible for coordinating and scheduling the print centre and cleaning service, as well as managing the administrative functions. I'm also in charge of quality control, customer relations, scheduling, personnel management in conjunction with Human Resources and the deputy head of the production unit, support and initial training for new workers, product ordering and purchasing, management of product deliveries, induction and monitoring of new recruits, as well as training for workers in conjunction with the course manager."*

Even though social support is not her primary mission, it is a cross-cutting aspect of her work: *"I play a support role for most of my working time"*. I change 'hats' frequently between production and support, requiring a great deal of organisation and good priority management.

However, as at It2, thanks to this **hybrid function combining support and production**, support for workers in insertion can be flexible, depending on the objectives of the project and the abilities of each individual.

The key elements of this function are as follows:

- Structure and limits of the relationship with the target group
- Empathy, observation and active listening
- Effective communication, establishing and maintaining a relationship of trust with colleagues, in order to act effectively as a team
- Constant contact with the Pathway Manager (who coordinates the workers' insertion pathways) and with the network of local partners.
- Organisation of regular meetings or supervision within the business unit
- Appropriate pace of intervention and a shared strategic vision
- Good organisational and activity planning skills

Practices to avoid

Providing support can be a challenging task, and mistakes can be common. Here are some examples of bad experiences or practices to avoid:

- 1. Being too controlling and not respecting the worker's autonomy:** The relationship between the worker and the support worker is an unstable balance. The diversity of the profiles supported and the problems encountered can lead to frustration. For example, when a situation is too complex or takes too long to sort out, or when the person goes against the advice they have been given, and so on. The role of the support worker requires constant work on his or her posture, particularly to avoid lapsing into control. It is counter-productive to want to control everything the support worker does and decide for them, rather than encouraging them to take their own actions and make their own decisions.
Furthermore, imposing one's point of view, opinions and ideas without taking into account the opinion of the worker concerned does not respect the person's autonomy, which is not consistent with the emancipatory objective of the insertion process.
In addition, care must always be taken not to make demands that are too high in relation to the worker, and to remember that each person is different and that the objectives must be adapted to the profile of each worker (skills and aptitudes, needs, projects, etc.).
- 2. Being over-protective** can have the opposite effect to what we are looking for, which is the worker's autonomy. Insertion counsellor must therefore refrain from conducting tasks on behalf of others and let the person do things for themselves.
Paternalistic or charitable attitudes are therefore to avoid, as the person being supported must be allowed to cope with the difficulties. Generally speaking, and particularly in social work, the aim of empowering workers and making them independent must not be lost. Care must therefore be taken to allow the person to take steps on their own, rather than doing them for them.
- 3. Not having (enough) boundaries:** while it is important to work with consideration and kindness, you must not overstep the boundaries of your work by, for example, establishing clear ethical rules. Boundaries can be difficult to maintain in a support role, but they are necessary. Insertion counsellor should not be too confidential, so as not to interfere in their personal lives.
The support worker must ensure that he stays within his role, does not exceed the limits and boundaries of the professional relationship and does not go beyond his remit.
- 4. Confusion of roles:** Each insertion counsellor must be aware of his or her tasks and responsibilities, and know where they end and when to hand over to a colleague. When the technical supervisor assumes the role of social support and tries to resolve a psychosocial problem on his or her own, without informing the social adviser, this can lead to a confusion of roles and a loss of information.
- 5. Lack of communication:** technical supervisors are often the first to become aware of a problem or difficulty experienced by a worker, because they witness it on site, during informal discussions on the way to work or during a break, for example. Sometimes they let problems linger too long and only inform the social adviser when the situation worsens and gets out of hand. The same applies when a social worker is aware of a difficulty or a personal problem encountered by a worker but does not inform the technical supervisors (even though the problem may lead to difficulties in

concentrating on a task, or behavioural problems. The technical supervisor may then be too harsh or too demanding of the worker, without knowing that he or she is facing personal difficulties. Both these situations can lead to crises or drop-outs, which could have been avoided by communicating and sharing information with colleagues to find solutions together.

- 6. Rushing:** as previously stated, lack of time is an eternal challenge in our organisations, and sometimes the desire to save time can be detrimental to the worker or the organisation. For example, when a worker comes to the end of his or her career with an organisation, it can be tempting to stop providing regular feedback and assessments, or providing close support tailored to the worker's needs, because he or she will soon be leaving. However, it is important to prepare workers properly for their departure and to keep them in touch with reality so that they can progress in their careers once they have left our structures.

The same is true at the start of the programme, when a worker is taken on and then integrated too quickly, without having sufficiently checked or assessed his or her motivation, skills and project. Such haste can be detrimental to both parties (the worker and the organisation), as the person may not be the right fit for the organisation and vice versa.

The specific nature of technical supervisors

As mentioned above, when it comes to support in the work-based insertion sector, there are generally two distinct profiles: on the one hand, socio-professional or psychosocial support staff, and on the other, technical support staff.

For technical supervisors, the challenge of providing support is particularly difficult. Of course, everything said in this document applies equally to technical supervisors, and the information has been gathered from technical and social supervisory professionals. However, as they have special needs, here is some specific information about them, to help you better understand their tasks and mission.

The challenge of technical support in a context of insertion

Technical supervisors have a difficult role to play, firstly because they have a *technical* role linked to their organisation's commercial/production activity. They are technicians, trainers, and must ensure that production targets are met, so that the "business runs smoothly". This makes it difficult for them to strike the right balance between economic objectives and social purpose. **Many of the supervisors interviewed** as part of the ACTION project **described themselves as "balancing acts"**, often having to deal with the economic imperatives imposed on them while supervising people on insertion programmes.

The technical supervisor must continually reconcile two contradictory requirements:

- The work to be carried out must be modelled on the requirements of traditional employers, to enable workers to come to terms with the realities of the world of work, which they will have to face later.
- Work-based insertion programmes are specific and transitional, aimed at specific groups who are not (yet) ready to enter the conventional labour market (and to cope with its pace and demands).

It is therefore important to remind them that **the production activity is only ever a support, a tool for the insertion of the people supported**. Production is not an end in itself, but a vehicle for integration, training and emancipation. It is therefore important to involve the technical supervisors in the support process, so that they define and understand the social objective they are pursuing.

Technical supervisors are often first and foremost professionals in their field, through their initial training and/or previous professional experience. There are many former restaurateurs, cooks, electromechanics, horticulturists, etc. who have been converted into supervisors or trainers in work-based insertion and training schemes. For many of them, this professional reconversion took place without them necessarily having received prior training in supervision, leadership, didactics, pedagogy, group management and even less in social work. The support aspect of their work is therefore not generally obvious to them - unlike their psychosocial support colleagues. Their employers therefore need to ensure that these supervisors receive ongoing training, so that they can familiarise themselves with the social aspects of their work: the professional stance, support for vulnerable groups, the goal of emancipation, and so on.

Roles and tasks of the technical supervisor

The technical supervisor plays a key role in the success of the insertion process for workers on insertion programmes. They supervise disadvantaged people during on-the-job activities. They ensure that activities run smoothly, organise work, manage staff, teach and pass on technical skills.

So, on a day-to-day basis, the technical supervisor juggles several roles and adopts a particular professional stance. **The job of technical supervisor is not a juxtaposition or a repeated alternation of similar jobs and functions** (trainer, technician, worker, supervisor, etc.). **Rather, it is a specific profession in its own right**, covering several others and combining them to form the particular function of technical supervisor.

This implies a specific profile for the technical supervisor, with his or her own posture and roles, as presented below, based on a summary of the interviews conducted as part of ACTION and additional resources.

Being a production manager

Sometimes, the technical supervisor is a **production manager and has to manage his team/department** to achieve production targets. They need to know how to wear the "hat of authority", accept themselves and be accepted in this supervisory role.

This involves :

- Organise sites/services/workstations (quotes and canvassing, schedules, resources required, etc.) and ensure they are carried out (correctly) ;
- Ensuring compliance with health, safety and ergonomic standards (well-being at work);
- Set up management tools to monitor production ;
- Reporting to line management on the progress and completion of production, as well as any problems encountered.

Being a team coordinator

In other cases, they are **coordinators and team leaders, acting as an intermediary** between management, social support staff and the team of insertion workers they lead. He supervises and leads his team.

His work must therefore focus on team management, setting objectives (career path, production, learning objectives, etc.), while knowing how to get the team to achieve them. They also need to think about the type of people management they want to implement and the tools and methods they are going to use to achieve it, i.e. building and developing their team, identifying skills and training needs and gaps, and preventing and managing conflict situations.

This involves :

- Identifying human resources needs, with a view to recruiting and/or integrating new recruits ;
- Welcoming and integrating new workers into the team ;
- Leading, motivating and regulating a team of insertion workers, establishing a relationship of authority ;
- Ensure compliance with current procedures and regulations ;

- Communicating objectives (including production objectives), both collective and individual.

Supporting and interfacing

As a team leader, he or she acts as a **watchdog in terms of psychosocial support and guidance**. Being on the front line with workers on a daily basis, they can directly and quickly identify, or spot, problems encountered by workers undergoing integration.

In this sense, they play an **interface role and must coordinate with their colleagues** to ensure the overall monitoring of workers: transmission and transfer of information, collaboration, coordination of actions, etc.

This means :

- Understand each other's field of action and expertise ;
- Identify the difficulties and obstacles encountered by workers, identify and recognise (non-)expressed difficulties ;
- Sharing with colleagues responsible for psychosocial support all useful information gathered or observed on worksites/workstations ;
- Play an active role in internal collaboration and coordination (meetings, assessments, interviews, etc.);
- Know the limits of your role and professional ethics (discretion, confidentiality, etc.).

Being a trainer

Finally, he is also an **educator and trainer** and must help workers acquire the skills they need to become skilled workers and find sustainable employment.

To do this, it must :

- Play the role of knowledge broker, teaching the knowledge, skills and know-how associated with the profession, using teaching methods to this end ;
- Assess the skills gaps and training needs of workers on insertion programmes, based on production and individual career plans and objectives ;
- Use teaching tools and resources (skills repositories, assessment tools, technical aids, etc.) ;
- Evaluate workers and encourage them to assess themselves and reflect on their progress and skills;
- Implement professional development programmes by organising training opportunities.



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