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SOFT SKILLS FOR ONLINE LEARNING

TRAINER MANUAL



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INTRODUCTION TO THE TOOLKIT

"This Trainer Manual on Soft Skills is developed in the frames of "ProDeCoR: Professional Development as a COVID-19 Response" project funded by International Visegrad Fund in 2020. The project is implemented by Armenian Regional Youth NGO in partnership with Youth Development and Integration Association STRIM (Poland), ReCreativity Social Enterprise (Hungary), and Vice Versa Association (Czech Republic). Toolkit is designed for trainers, youth workers, teachers, employment sector practitioners and other educators that work with young people. It provides objectives and detailed guidelines on how to work with young people in order to build their competences in the post-COVID 19 labour market. The manual covers 6-8 hours of learning activities and additional learning materials provided for follow up/self- learning.

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Team work
Cooperation
Leadership
Communication
EI
Career management

Module: Soft Skills for Online Learning

Session: Introduction to Soft Skills

	Themes	Improving soft skills, Assessment, Monitor
	Goal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ to agree on the common definition of soft skills ▶ to come up with a list of soft skills necessary for online education ▶ to explore tools that develop soft skills
	Objectives	<p>After the session participants will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Identify crucial soft skills necessary for activities carried out within the framework of online education ▶ Develop an idea on how to improve soft skills applying some enhancement tools ▶ Develop analytical approach towards soft skills and evaluate their own skills
	Group size	20-24
	Time required	90 min
	Overview / short description	The activity creates a space to share and discuss ideas regarding soft skills in general, defining them and reflecting on which ones are the most important within online learning context and why. During this activity participants will get familiarized with ways of monitoring and planning the development of soft skills.
	Materials needed	Flip chart, markers, A4 papers, post-its, pens
	Complexity	Beginners
	References	Understanding My Journey Toolkit Link

Session: Introduction to Soft Skills

Introduction and implementation

Time	Steps
10 min	<p>a. Ice breaker: Important skills in our lives. While being asked to single out a skill that they are really good at, the participants share the very first skill that crosses their mind. They then write their answers on the flipchart grouping them into “hard” (practical skills) vs “soft” categories. Having introduced all the answers, start discussing the skills reflected on the flipchart. In case there are more practical skills listed (which is more likely), ask participants why they think it is easier to name a practical skill and why it is harder to evaluate the level of a soft skill? Similarly, if soft skills are predominant in the list, ask participants why they think it is like this. Leave this flipchart in a noticeable place since you will come back to the skills later.</p>
30 min	<p>b. Based on the discussion from the previous exercise, develop a definition of soft skills. Ask participants to individually think about the definition of soft skills and build up a list of the most crucial ones (5 min). Then divide them into groups of four and ask to agree on a common definition and a list (10 min), merge two groups of four resulting in groups of eight and repeat the exercise (10 min). Finally, collect all the definitions and lists from the groups. Put them on a flipchart. Compare the lists provided by the participants with the list generated during the ice breaker activity (soft skills part). Are there skills repeated in both lists?</p>
15 min	<p>c. Discuss which soft skills are crucial in an online learning context and why. Underline that the next sessions will focus on them. The most essential ones to be mentioned are as follows: communication, adaptability, positive attitude, problem solving, teamwork, time management, creativity. Participants can come up with more options.</p>
25 min	<p>d. Ask participants about the methods for attaining and assessing soft skills. Present Understanding My Journey Toolkit as a good practice of developing and evaluating soft skills (Link). UMJ reflects on three levels of obtaining a soft skill: emerging, consolidating, establishing. It works with eight soft skills: positive attitude, communication, adaptability, time and energy management, work ethic, problem solving and analytical thinking, teamwork and leadership. Participants can reflect on their skills and monitor their progress of the development of each skill with the help of practical exercises included in this Toolkit. Provide participants with a handout - “FIRST SKILLS CHECK” (UMJ Toolkit page 12) and ask them to fill it in.</p>

Debriefing and evaluation

- a. Debriefing after the ice-breaker:**
Why are soft skills difficult to measure and evaluate?
What is the importance of soft skills in everyday life?
- b. Debriefing for Activity 2:**
Are you happy with the final definition and the list of soft skills? Why?
Did you have problems in smaller groups with choosing a common definition and skills list?
How did you come to the conclusion?
- c. Debriefing after filling in the Skill Check:**
Was it difficult to evaluate the level of skills using the Skill Check? Was it useful for you?
- d. Final closing and evaluation of the workshop:**
What did you learn?
What was most surprising for you?

Handouts

UMJ Skill Check printed out for each participant

Module: Soft Skills for Online Learning

Session: The Power of Communication

	Themes	communication, non-verbal communication, active listening, online communication
	Goal	To adopt the rules of effective communication
	Objectives	<p>After the session participants will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Identify key aspects of successful communication, non-verbal communication and those of active listening ▶ Explore the benefits of good communication skills in an online environment
	Group size	20-24
	Time required	90 min
	Overview / short description	<p>One of the most dynamic soft skills is communication, which is about how to work and interact with others. It implies the abilities to both transfer and receive the message. Together with active listening, verbal and non-verbal communication are its primary components. It is commonly known that very often many non-verbal elements may go missing, as well as various misunderstandings are more likely to happen during online rather than offline communication. This activity reveals different aspects of communication to develop this skill through a number of practical exercises.</p>
	Materials needed	Flip chart, markers, A4 papers, post-its, pen, pencils, Pictures of different emojis and memes (instead, you can ask participants to show those on their mobile phones).
	Complexity	Beginners - Intermediate
	References	<p>Ready to mediate? Direction: Youth Manual Link Understanding My Journey Toolkit Link</p>

Session: The Power of Communication

Introduction and implementation

Time	Steps
10 min	<p>a. Ask participants to stand in a circle and think about a superpower that they have. Something that they are really good at, not necessarily work-related. Then call for a volunteer to try to represent this superpower without using any words. When someone guesses the superpower shown, the volunteer might share a short story related to it. Then the next person shows his or her superpower (it might be the person who guessed the previous one). End the exercise when there are no more volunteers or in case everyone has already shared their superpowers. The activity will not only demonstrate how many different skills participants have but will also provide a ground for a discussion on communication, in particular its non-verbal aspects.</p>
10 min	<p>b. Discuss a model of communication based on the previous exercise. Explain the elements: Discuss with the whole group what additional noises may appear in online communication. Focus on how to send a message effectively and what to do to properly receive it.</p>
10 min	<p>c. The Art of Good Communication.</p> <p>Divide the participants into two groups. One group will be able to communicate using words and the other - using only pictures. Those should preferably be pictures widely used on the Internet: emojis or memes. Participants who are allowed to communicate using only pictures should be equipped with emojis and memes along with their mobiles for faster communication. Once everyone knows their role, ask participants to mingle. They should approach one another trying to communicate and maintain a conversation. This could be about plans for the evening, literature, values, anything they want! However, participants can use only their designated means of communication. They should try and talk as long as they feel comfortable and interested, then they can change to another person. Give them ten minutes to experience communicating with words vs. pictures.</p>
15 min	<p>d. Discuss in plenary the importance of non-verbal communication. Present its elements: tone of voice, facial expressions, eye-contact, gestures, body posture, physical gestures, touch. Underline that most experts agree that 70 to even 90% of all communication is nonverbal. Refer to the previous exercises (super power and the art of good communication). Brainstorm about non-verbal communication in an online setting.</p>
15 min	<p>e. Divide participants into small groups of 4-5. Provide them with papers and pens. Ask them to prepare a list of 10 DO's and 10 DON'Ts for online communication.</p>
10 min	<p>f. Underline that the ability of active listening is crucial in communication. Present what can be done to be a better listener:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Asking confirmatory questions (such as: 'Do I understand correctly what you said...?' 'So you meant that...?');2. Using your body language (nodding, frowning, showing interest, open position, maintaining eye contact);3. Paraphrasing ('So in other words what you meant is...');4. Asking questions to clarify points or learn details;5. Paying attention;6. Giving feedback,7. Summarizing.
20 min	<p>g. Closing (explained below)</p>

Debriefing and evaluation

- a. Was it easy to show a superpower without using words? Why yes? Why not?
Was it easy to guess a superpower? When was it easy? When was it difficult?
- c. Once participants are back in the circle, ask them about their experience. How was the process of communication? Did they enjoy it? Which parts did they enjoy especially? Was it easy to communicate with people using different "languages"? How did they create the "message" they intended to communicate? Which conversations were more meaningful? Did they feel that the communication helped them create any bonds? When can we experience these two different "languages" of communication? Do they use them? In which context? Do they see the link between this exercise and online communication?
- g. If you have access to a Mentimeter - prepare a short evaluation using this tool. Include the question- "How do you feel after this session?", and use emojis. In case you don't use Mentimeter, ask participants to conclude the workshop with facial expressions and gestures.

Tips for facilitator

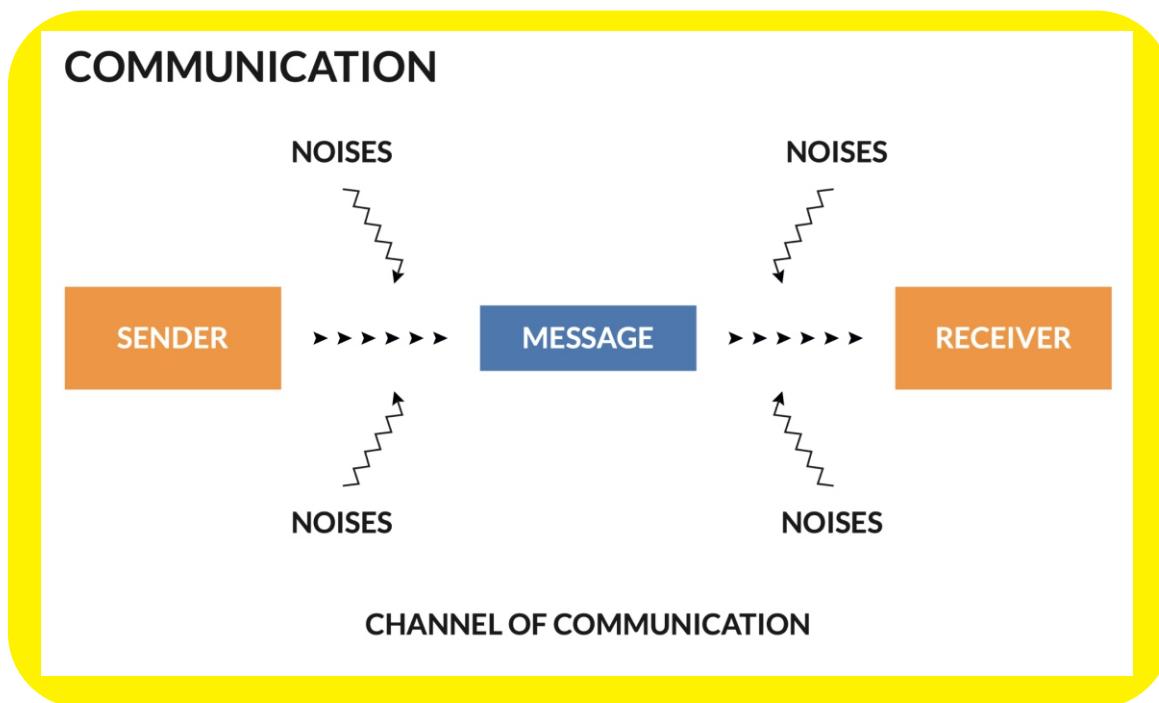
While encouraging all the participants to take part in the activities, make sure you don't force anyone. Some of the participants might be too shy or struggle with finding their superpower particularly in the first activity. Ensure to provide a nice, friendly, safe atmosphere which contributes to the willingness of participants to open up.

Handouts

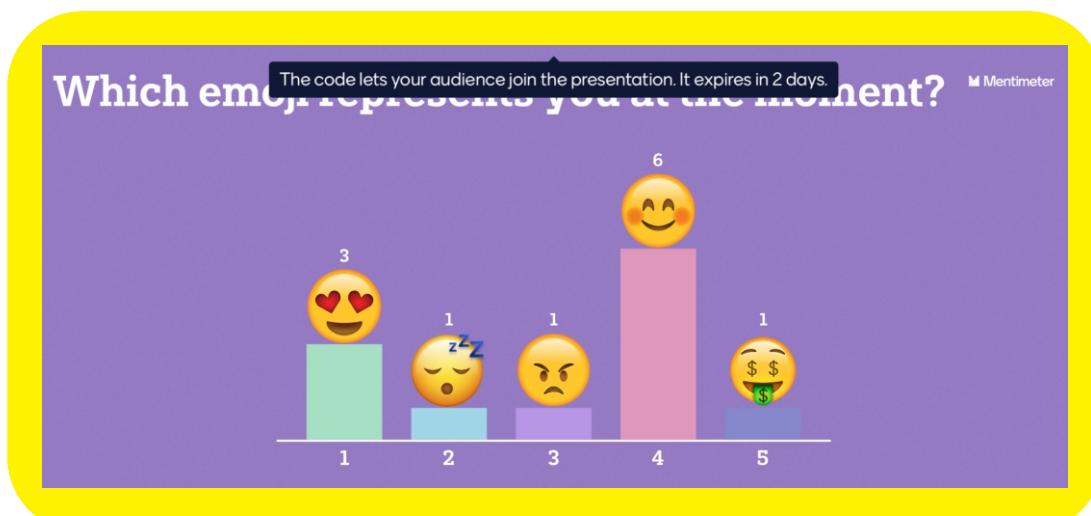
Graph from Ready to Mediate? Direction: Youth! Manual

Handouts

Channel of Communication



An example of emoji evaluation chart from Mentimeter



Module: Soft Skills for Online Learning

Session: Positive Attitude, Motivation, Adaptability

	Themes	communication, non-verbal communication, active listening, online communication
	Goal	To introduce positive attitude, motivation and adaptability as essential skills for online learning
	Objectives	<p>After the session participants will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Acknowledge the importance of positive attitude, motivation and adaptability while online learning ▶ Make a reflection on the level of their own attitude and motivation, and on how both of them affect online learning ▶ Reflect on strategies for dealing with unexpected changes in life ▶ Make their own assessment on positive thinking, motivation and adaptation skills identifying ways of how these skills might be strengthened ▶ Single out a situation or a task in online setting, and use positive thinking skills whilst involved in these activities
	Group size	20-24
	Time required	90 min
	Overview / short description	<p>Motivation, positive attitude, adaptability are other soft skills that are challenging to measure yet necessary especially in the context of online education. Like all the soft skills, they can also be improved and developed. During this workshop, participants will have a chance to reflect and practice.</p>
	Materials needed	<p>Flip chart, markers, A4 papers, post-its, pen, pencils Handouts from Understanding My Journey Toolkit: "10 Actions for a Positive Life", page 24, "10 Actions of an Adaptable and Flexible Life", page 69 jis and memes (instead, you can ask participants to show those on their mobile phones).</p>
	Complexity	Beginners - Intermediate
	References	Understanding My Journey Toolkit Link

Session: Positive Attitude, Motivation, Adaptability

Introduction and implementation

Time	Steps
15 min	<p>a. Welcome participants with the words “I am happy to be here, because... (something positive, something that you like) and if I weren't here I would have... (something unpleasant, negative)”. For example, “I am happy to be here because I like sharing my ideas with others and if I weren't here I would have to clean the windows in my house”. Participants take turns to share why they are glad to be here and what it is they are happy they don't have to do instead. After all the statements have been shared, conclude with the idea that different activities might be either positive or negative for each of us, and they can further motivate us to do or not to do something.</p> <p>Introduce three skills that are going to be tackled during the workshop: positive attitude, motivation and adaptability. Ask participants why they think those skills are important in an online learning environment.</p>
15 min	<p>b. Ask participants whether they think the glass is half empty or half full? Pick up a few answers in plenary to discuss with participants whether our vision of the world determines what is happening around us. Divide participants into groups of 4 or 5. Give them the handout “10 Actions for a Positive Life” and ask to reflect on: 1. Which actions do they practice in everyday life? 2. Which ones are the most challenging and why? 3. Which ones could be easily implemented online? After 10-15 minutes participants share the most surprising insights in a plenary.</p>
15 min	<p>c. Ask participants to go back to their smaller groups and prepare a “Motivational poster for online learning” after hearing all insights. Present posters to everyone. Reflect on their content and discuss what motivates most while online learning.</p>
25 min	<p>d. Tell participants that at this stage of the workshop hopefully they are all motivated and have a positive attitude towards online learning. Ask them to stand up and show “happiness” about their future learning in a non-verbal way. Once they complete this task, they are asked to “show happiness in another way”. Repeat this for a few times (yet stop it in case you notice a protest or signs of unhappiness”). After debriefing, show a short video about adaptability (ENG) and present 10 Actions of an Adaptable and Flexible Life” from UMJ manual. Discuss how they had to adapt to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Link</p>

Debriefing and evaluation

- b.** Ask participants to share the most interesting insights from their discussion in small groups.
- c.** Was it difficult to prepare a motivational poster? Why yes, why not? What is the most difficult part of staying motivated?
- d.** After the exercise ask participants:
How did they feel when they were asked to show happiness in a different way? How did they feel when they had to alter the way of showing happiness for so many times? Did it come naturally or did they have to stop and rethink about it? Were they comfortable with doing this differently from their normal process? What are some things that make people resistant to change?

Handouts

Handouts from Understanding My Journey Toolkit “10 Actions for a Positive Life” page 24, “10 Actions of an Adaptable and Flexible Life”, page 69

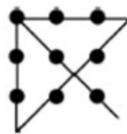
Module: Soft Skills for Online Learning

Session: Problem Solving, Creativity

	Themes	In search of effective solutions: Problem solving and creativity
	Goal	To introduce problem solving and creativity as significant competences for online learning
	Objectives	<p>After the session participants will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Celebrate the gravity of creativity and problem-solving skills in nowadays world ▶ Analyze how they currently solve problems and generate solutions ▶ Practice creative thinking and solve problems with the help of simple exercises ▶ Plot out their own problem solving and creative thinking capacities, and decide how to upgrade them
	Group size	20-24
	Time required	90 min
	Overview / short description	<p>Problem solving and creativity are another set of soft skills with crucial importance not only in the context of online learning but also in general. They are critically appreciated in the labour market. During this workshop, participants will practice these skills and see how they can improve them.</p>
	Materials needed	<p>Flip chart, markers, A4 papers, pen, pencils Handout: 6 Step Problem Solving Method from Understanding My Journey Toolkit page 134-135</p>
	Complexity	Intermediate
	References	Understanding My Journey Toolkit Link

Session: Problem Solving, Creativity

Introduction and implementation

Time	Steps
10 min	<p>a. Play the association game: you say a word and then the person next to you in the circle says another word connected to your word proposed as soon as possible. And the next person will try to come up with a word associated with the one uttered previously. Go clockwise. See how fast and how long you can get as a group. Start with a word connected to the topic of the workshop e.g. creativity, problem, challenge.</p>
10 min	<p>b. Draw at the whiteboard 9 dots in a following way:</p>  <p>Ask participants to think how to connect all of the dots with straight four lines without taking the pen off the paper. Give them post-its and pens and let them try. After a few minutes ask whether there are any volunteers to show the solution to the rest of the group?</p> <p>The solution:</p> 
5 min	<p>c. Show a video: Introduction to creativity and problem solving: ENG Link RUS Link</p>
10 min	<p>d. Remind participants that creativity and problem solving are skills that can be developed through practice and now we will try to do it. Divide the participants into pairs and provide them with pieces of paper and pens. Write a sentence at the flipchart (preferably connected to the online learning) for example: “He logged in and waited” or “She joined an online course”.</p>
15 min	<p>e. Tell the participants that once Einstein mentioned that if he had an hour to solve a problem, he would spend the first fifty-five minutes on looking for the right question and defining this problem. It is also often said that the right question is half the answer. So the task for participants would be to come up with as many questions to the sentence written on the flip chart as possible within 7 minutes. Divide participants into small groups of 4 or 5 and give them flipcharts with markers. Ask them to prepare a guide from A to Z on “How to learn effectively online?” The guide from A to Z consists of creating a list of recommendations following the alphabetical sequence. For example, “A - Adaptability - you should adapt to new online trends, software, timing, etc.”.</p>
10 min	<p>f. Present 6 Step Problem Solving Method from the UMJ Toolkit. Discuss in what situations it might be useful.</p>

Session: Problem Solving, Creativity

Introduction and implementation

- b. Ask participants whether this task was easy/difficult? Why? How did they feel while completing it?

Tell participants that this classic activity which aimed at “awakening” creativity is more than a simple task, it is more about the way the human brain works integrating a holistic perception. Underline that conventional thinking and noticing something “from inside of the frames” is very normal and resulted in by evolution. If participants struggled with this exercise it was absolutely natural. Since it was not because they lacked creativity, but because of the tendency to look for schemes and repetitions.

Creativity and problem solving skills get strengthened with practice and hard work, the more motivated you are, the more ideas you generate.

- c. After the video ask participants the following questions:

What are your thoughts after watching this video?

Did you find out something new?

- d. Ask how many questions pairs managed to write down? Was it a difficult task? One or two pairs of volunteers can share their results. Were questions of other pairs similar? What was surprising about this task? How many questions could you generate if not the time limits?

e. Ask participants to share surprising ideas that popped up while preparing a Guide. How do they feel now?

- g. Summarize the workshop. Ask participants to share whether they had “aha!” moments.

Handouts

6 Step Problem Solving Method from Understanding My Journey Toolkit page 134-135