Juggling Motherhood & Profession

JU.M.P
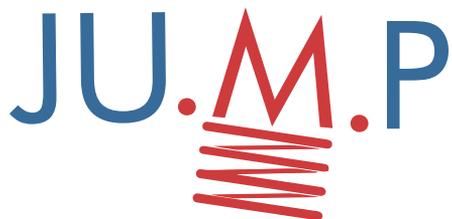
TRAINING COURSE

UNIT 3
DEVELOPMENT
OF SOFT SKILLS

JU.M.P

CONTENTS

1. THE JU.M.P. PROJECT
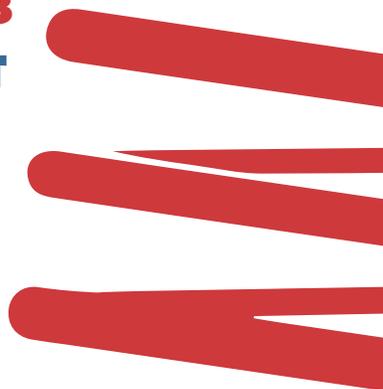
JUMP – Juggling Motherhood and Profession- is a strategic partnership for adult education funded by the Erasmus + Program of the European Union. It is a transnational learning network made up of professionals from the social sector, experts, and university students from Italy, Croatia, Greece, and Spain. The main purpose is to share and experiment innovative practices of social support, coaching, and guidance, thereby providing groups of vulnerable mothers with innovative social support methods adapted to their complex conciliation needs in order to increase their employability.

In addressing requests for help from vulnerable women, social workers face particularly difficult challenges, seeing as they need to:

- Work on women's employability in order to make them able to cope with job demands by offering training, guidance, and coaching services.

- Facilitate the entry or reintegration of women into the labour market.

- Deal with issues related to one's family background and relational inclusion that often constitute a key issue (often implicit) that hinders participation in the labour market.

The JUMP project fits into this context with the aim of:

- Increasing the ability of social professionals to frame the requests for help according to the social, cultural, and relational roots of the beneficiaries.

- Providing social professionals with the tools necessary to comprehend the complexity linked to the reconciliation of family and work, also through an understanding of reconciliation that goes beyond the mere provision of family care services.

- Planning and testing innovative pedagogical methods of orientation and empowerment of women in the JUMP partnership countries (Italy, Croatia, Greece, and Spain) and sharing them outside the working group, to better address the issues related to the reconciliation between work and family, to parenting practices, relational inclusion, and employability.

The innovative training modules designed within the JUMP project are addressed to:

a. Professionals in the social sector (e.g. educators, social workers) who work to facilitate labour market participation of vulnerable social groups.

b. Vulnerable women (e.g. low-income, low-skilled, immigrants, single mothers) with young children who have never entered the labour market, or who are experiencing an interruption of their working career or working in low-skilled and unprotected jobs.

2. A COURSE OF ORIENTATION AND COACHING FOR VULNERABLE WOMEN WITH CARETAKING RESPONSIBILITIES

2.1. REFERENCE CONTEXT

Reconciling responsibilities of caretaking and work is a challenge for women who become mothers in almost all the OECD[1] countries (OECD 2007). In fact, in the distribution of responsibilities within the family, women are in charge much more, compared to men, of the caretaking tasks regarding the care of children, the elderly, and people with disabilities, as well as being responsible for the domestic activities (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1 *Minutes per day spent on work and study activities, and caretaking and domestic activities by gender, the OECD average, and JUMP countries.*
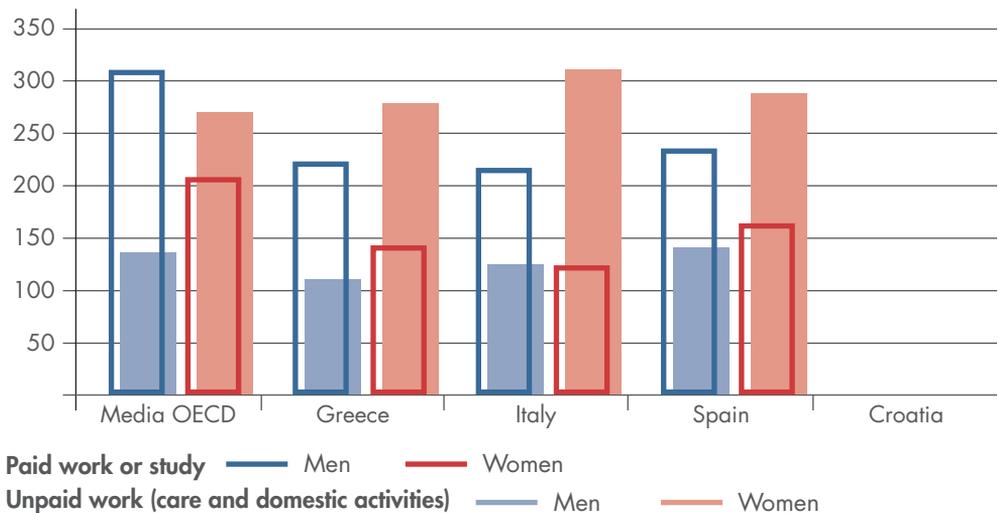
Source: OECD, Time use surveys, latest data available

Women who become mothers have a higher probability of losing their jobs or have a working career negatively conditioned by maternity. Even more so if the woman is not included in the world of work because she has never entered it or has been excluded from it in some way, thus she will find it even more difficult to enter it after motherhood (Fig. 2).

An important aspect to take into account concerns families in which only one of the parents is employed, because they are at greater risk of poverty and child poverty. Poverty in these cases does not depend on the absolute lack of work but on the insufficiency of income with respect to family needs. Furthermore, the situation worsens for immigrant women and single-parent families, as well as for families that have very poor networks of relationships and cannot rely on the help of relatives, friends, or other informal actors (see Output 2 of the JUMP project, available at www.jumpproject.eu/output/). In this context, facilitating women's access to employment leads to an increase in household income, thus reducing their risk of poverty, including that of the children present.

Fig. 2 Unemployed population due to family and caretaking responsibilities, EU average, and JUMP countries in 2017 (% population aged 15-64).
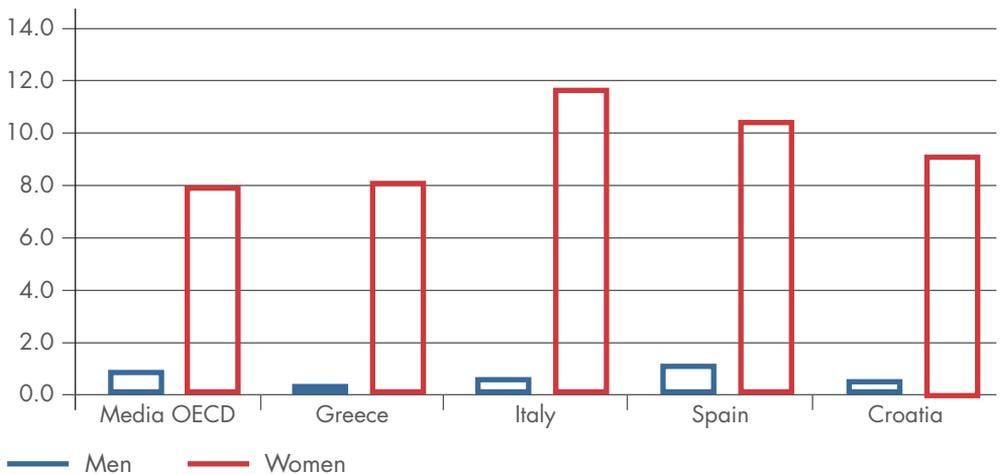
Source: Our elaboration of Eurostat-LFS data

Social workers who work in active labour policies and who intervene on vulnerable people encounter a complexity that makes it difficult to integrate or reintegrate these women into the work market. In fact, the objective is not only to help them find a job, but above all, to find solutions of reconciliation so that the woman can also dedicate some time to work and to the construction of her working career, thus reducing the risk of poverty and social exclusion.

Therefore, it is necessary to experiment new paths to be able, on the one hand, to provide intervention tools useful to operators and to make their intervention more appropriate and effective for complex situations and, on the other, to help women find an opportunity to improve their life situation and that of their family.

The JUMP project proposes contents and methodologies to support both the trainers and those who can use them. In particular, JUMP intends to enrich the instruments of the trainers by taking into consideration aspects considered fundamental for the success of the support paths for vulnerable women, by means of an experiential path of needs analysis, support in improving one's resilience skills, and the formulation of a new planning.

2.2.   THE TRAINING PROPOSAL

From the analysis carried out in the early stages of JUMP and summarized in Outputs 1 and 2 (see www.jumpproject.eu/output/) and from the experiences carried out by the project partners, 4 issues have been identified as fundamental for those who have to offer coaching and orientation activities to vulnerable women with caretaking responsibilities. These issues have been detailed in 4 different booklets for social professionals, with the following titles:

1. Reconciliation and enhancement of proximity networks

2. Complexity of the parental role. Socio-economic background, migration, and multiculturalism

3. Development of Soft Skills

4. Welfare: conciliation policies and instruments

These four focuses are considered fundamental for increasing the empowerment of both the social professionals and the participants involved, for various reasons, summarized below.

1. Centrality of proximity networks: it is necessary to work on the   importance of relationships at different levels, on their recognition, use, and strengthening. Promote opportunities and support the achievement of the participants' autonomy through the construction (and maintenance) of networks. This means increasing their ability to cope with hardships and difficulties, and promoting forms of confrontation, exchange, and active inclusion.

2. Complexity of the parental role: in the word parenting we should find what the society of belonging expects from adults as parents, what is considered essential in supporting their role. The cultural, social, and economic context of reference highly influences the parenting style, also through the transmission of gender stereotypes, thereby creating different roles and rules within that small society called family.

3. The Importance of soft skills: these are "transversal skills", or rather those abilities that bring together personal qualities, attitude in the workplace, and knowledge in the field of interpersonal relationships. Soft skills are becoming increasingly important in the selection process and job placement, sometimes they are preferred to technical skills because they increase the probability of a person's success. It is essential to know how to recognize one's skills and develop them to increase one's level of employability.

4. Relevance of welfare policies: it is necessary to acquire knowledge of public measures and instruments, as well as existing care services that can support reconciliation. It is necessary for the person to be informed of what exists at the level of national policies, territorial services, and legal facilities. Often, if a person does not know about the opportunities, they cannot take advantage of them and, therefore, cannot break the chain of poverty in which they find themselves.

2.3. METHODOLOGY

The definition of "social professionals" used in JUMP brings together a multiplicity of professions that work with vulnerable people, wanting to explicitly recognize the importance of adopting a multidisciplinary perspective on orientation, accompaniment, and social support. Therefore, they fall within the definition of social professionals: social anthropologists, social assistants, counselors, educators, trainers, mediators, guidance counselors, therapists, psychologists, et al. All of them are addressed in the JUMP booklets.

The social professionals have the role of **trainers** when they experiment with the activities proposed in the different booklets. Trainers must have skills in managing a group, and in particular they must know how to govern the dynamics of a heterogeneous group in situations of social and economic hardship.

The training proposal is presented and organized in the 4 booklets for trainers, offering elements to deepen the individual issues (chapter 3) and methods and instruments for implementing and experimenting them through group work (chapter 4), thus creating a flexible modular training path consisting of 5 meetings.

The methodology proposed is participatory and active and is based on the stimulus used by the trainers to bring out the experiences and reflections of the participants, by enhancing them and projecting them in a logic of activation and planning, all in a climate of non-judgmental confrontation and listening.

For the participants, the exclusive model of the individual taking charge is overcome through the group. In fact, activated with this methodology, the group is a dimension that:

- welcomes;
- helps to reduce anxieties and difficulties;
- encourages comparison by establishing a peer to peer relationship of openness and trust that allows the sharing of problematic experiences and the expression of opinions;
- manages any conflicts by returning to the values of knowledge and mutual respect;
- stimulates personal activation;
- helps the broadening of their own representations;

2.4.   CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TRAINING PROPOSAL

The JUMP training course was designed to be a tool to be adapted based on the resources, characteristics, and needs of both the participants and trainers. Therefore, it is a modular path made up of various components in which the order of the discussion of the topics and the use of the tools depend on different variables, including:

- the expected results;
- the characteristics and number of participants;
- the setting (place, time, relational climate, equipment, ...);
- the methodology used.

The topics addressed in the different booklets are connected and related to one another and the training module is designed to be administered in full.

In particular, the topic of parenting appears to be transversal and represents the leitmotif of the path. In fact, this content constitutes a point of reference and returns in the topics addressed in each booklet; this transversality is confirmed by the parental role shared by all the participants. In the experimentation of the training course in the 4 JUMP countries (Output 3; see www.jumpproject.eu/output/), in the sessions, the influence of this topic clearly emerged through the stories of the women/mothers.

However, the topics of the 4 booklets have been constructed in such a way that they can also be proposed exhaustively singularly, in particular as regards the topics: soft skills, welfare, and proximity networks, so that they can be adapted from time to time to the needs and objectives of the trainers and participants.

In summary, it is possible to organize the training course freely, with regard to the treatment of the modules, by following the order considered most appropriate in relation to the different training needs.

2.5. ORGANIZATION OF THE TRAINING ACTIVITIES

In order to better identify the tools and methods to be used during group activities, it is suggested to collect the description of the family and personal situation of each participant through a summary data collection form (family situation, origin, age, work experience, level of literacy and language skills …).

It is possible to schedule an initial interview to get to know the person and their personal and family situation directly and to identify their needs and have a final interview that allows the verification of which objectives have been reached and which ones still have to be supported.

Finally, a follow-up group meeting can be organized (at least one month after the end of the training activities) in order to identify and enhance every form of the participants' activation, thereby, through the example, stimulating the women who are encountering difficulties in the change and bringing further informative contents that are useful for the whole group.

2.6. ROLE OF THE TRAINERS AND CULTURAL MEDIATOR

For the organization and management of the activities, the presence of two trainers is proposed, who can decide how to take action during the activities by taking turns in the presentation of the same and in the management of the classroom, and by observing and monitoring the climate.

Depending on the characteristics of the group, the presence of a person dedicated to mediation can support trainers during the activities, integrating what is proposed and supporting the participants for a better understanding and a more active participation, in a climate of trust and non-judgmental listening.

Where deemed appropriate, the direct testimony of experts can also be proposed, depending on the topics being dealt with.

2.7.   TIPS ON USE OF THE TOOLS

Each booklet contains various operational tools from which it is possible to choose based on the characteristics of the group and the time available.

Each tool, when called for, is identified with a specific icon:

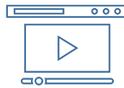|		
Brain storming	Interview	Follow up
Intervention by expert, official, ...	Group work	Questionnaire form
Role playing, simulation	Videos, slides	Visiting a structure, service ...

It is possible to establish the order of presentation of the proposed topics depending on the composition of the classroom and the priorities that arise. Starting from the topics dealt with, it is useful to integrate the instruments with updated materials or relevant to specific situations.

Lastly, it is also possible to carry out an experimentation on mixed groups, thus favoring a comparison in the group between different perceptions and experiences of women and men, sometimes influenced by gender stereotypes.

2.8.   SUMMARY

The experimentation of the training meetings in the 4 JUMP countries confirmed that the choice of the four topics (proximity networks, parental role, soft skills, welfare policies) responds broadly to the objectives of the project. They represent a good formative hypothesis aimed at offering a path of growth and empowerment for vulnerable women with caretaking responsibilities that can be found in different phases of their life cycle, but which have in common the fact of being mothers with young children and/or being a caregiver of elderly and/or disabled family members.

From the feedback received following the experimentation, from both the social professionals and the participants involved, we have highlighted the results illustrated below.

The focus groups carried out with social professionals and the experiments conducted by the trainers highlighted the usefulness of a training course with theoretical contributions and practical exercises that:

- allow to go more in-depth and adaptations;
- leverage the possibility of implementing a change also through mutual learning between the participants and the trainers;
- activate a circular process of exchange and growth;
- enhance group management skills when addressing issues that involve not only thoughts but also strong emotional involvement;
- develop a process of belonging and inclusion towards acting as a community.

For the participants, the added value highlighted regarded:

- having found support and encouragement in a non-judgmental climate, to strengthen one's self-esteem, knowledge, and awareness of value of one's skills, and autonomy;
- having developed proximity both in responding to their own needs and in activating community ties;
- having found stimuli and "fitting" tools, suited to their own characteristics.

The training was carried out in different countries and contexts and this made it possible to insert different ideas and approaches in the methodology, selecting and adapting the tools to the context and expanding the possibility of the results.

In particular, all the project partners considered it effective to deal with the issue of soft skills not only with women who already entered or are in the process of entering the labour market, but also with those who for specific moments in their life or for cultural, family, etc. factors, are (still) far from it.

It has also been proven that this experience, given its modular nature, can also be proposed in training courses that are already structured.

Despite the persistence of difficult conciliation conditions for those who want to enter or re-enter the labor market, it has been observed that the issue of reconciling personal, family, and professional life is not currently considered crucial and of general interest. It is dealt with sporadically, also according to the territorial specificities, and only in some particularly structured and solid productive realities. The struggle that women lead to deal with and overcome discrimination, which places them in situations of isolation and poor recognition of their abilities and potential, is still widespread and rooted precisely because of their "natural" role as the main caregivers.

The JUMP experience offered women a good means to become aware of their own needs and above all, of their resources; in fact, it was found that this framework generated a change of perspective in the participants: from a kind of thinking oriented to "doing", typical of a mother's role, to the awareness of oneself as having transversal skills and potential.

In fact, the training became an opportunity to stop and take time to focus on themselves and look to the future; the learning that resulted has led to an awareness capable of generating and maturing their thinking about planning, whether short or long term.

In some situations, the training path allowed there to be a transition between a situation of complete irreconcilability (for cultural reasons, persistence of gender stereotypes or phases of life or personal motives) to a possible conciliation phase (albeit by accepting laborious activity, which, more than balance, involves a sort of tightrope-walking, or juggling - as the title of the project suggests); when their process of awareness, activation, and autonomy becomes more solid, it will be possible to achieve the desired and more balanced goal suggested by the English term "work life balance".

The training modules were implemented through the collaborative work from four different countries:

Italy is represented by the **Ufficio Pio of the Compagnia di San Paolo** (project coordinator; www.ufficiopio.it) which has a long and deep-rooted tradition of involvement in philanthropic activities and European experience, by the University of Turin-CirsDe (www.cirsde.unito.it/it) with research skills on the issues of female employment and conciliation and **ETA BETA s.c.s.** (www.etabeta.it), a social cooperative for training and job placement, with experience in conciliation issues, which contributed to the design and testing of the tools developed both with social and guidance workers and with vulnerable women.

Croatia is represented by **CESI** (http://cesi.hr), an organization that is expert in the realization of projects related to gender equality and aimed at improving the situation of women in the labour market.

Spain is represented by **Fundacion Senara** (www.fundacionsenara.org) which has contributed to the design and experimentation of tools developed with social workers and with a sample of vulnerable women.

Greece is represented by the **EEO Group** (www.eeogroup.gr) which is active in the implementation of local actions for the social integration of vulnerable groups and **KMOP** (www.kmop.gr) which has contributed to the design of the tools and their experimentation with social workers and vulnerable women.

3. UNIT ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOFT SKILLS

A person's abilities are divided into technical and transversal skills, also known as **hard skills** and **soft skills.**

Hard skills are the skills related to a profession that can be assessed by one's degree of education, language skills, and work experience.

Soft skills are those that bring together personal qualities, one's attitude in the workplace and knowledge in the field of interpersonal relationships (for example, leadership, teamwork, and problem solving).

In general, soft skills are complementary to hard skills, which by definition are easily quantifiable and measurable.

However, in the job market, soft skills are even more in demand, as they allow changes to be dealt with flexibly and encourage collaboration and teamwork, also in a creative and original way, giving each member a sense of belonging to a project.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has insisted on the concept of **life skills** as a set of "personal and relational skills that serve to govern relations with the rest of the world and to deal positively with everyday life". In this perspective, the following are evoked: self-awareness, management of emotions and stress, critical and creative thinking, decision-making, solving problems, effective relationships and communications, and empathy. This study refers to school education, but the perspective concerns the future well-being of the person both as a citizen and as a worker[2].

It is important to know and manage life skills as these play a strategic role in promoting mental well-being, increasing the motivation to manage conflicts, daily problems and challenges, in the workplace and eleswhere, with renewed energy and strategic and positive thinking. Like all skills, soft skills can also be learned and improved by focusing on self analysis and interactions with one another. We are all able to cultivate them and enhance their potential in our professional and personal relationships.

Motherhood and parenthood are excellent training to develop soft skills, if consciously experienced. In fact, these are moments of life that require a restructuring of oneself and one's mental order: from thinking only for oneself and possibly coordinating oneself with

an autonomous companion able to make decisions, one passes to having to make continuous decisions concerning the child.

All this becomes a training ground for developing the ability to analyze contextual information on the one hand, and on the other, to learn to find quick solutions and, over time, increasingly effective ones (knowing how to be, problem solving)[3]. Furthermore, coping with sudden changes leads to a great deal of flexibility in being able to manage the unexpected; to inevitably find oneself in a network of social relations.

Therefore, mothers have an excellent potential for developing their soft skills:

- a reduction of the ego that allows us to know how to listen to the other person and to observe what is around us better;

- the opportunity to be able to recognize complexity, to become less demanding;

- the possibility of putting in place caretaking ability and creating networks through the affiliation to an identity role and to a group in which we recognize ourselves;

- the development of skills and attitudes such as empathy, effective communication, flexibility, and a predisposition for learning.

Participants will be able to experiment in a process of reflection and analysis of their relational, cognitive, realization, and managerial resources and will try to act on the personal components that can be implemented and improved, in order to reduce obstacles to their insertion or reintegration into the labour market.

Therefore, this module aims to provide an experience of knowledge and recognition of at least some of the following skills:

- the ability to identify and analyze one's own needs;

- the ability to analyze one's own problematic situation and find solutions to produce change;

- the ability to be flexible towards change;

- the ability to negotiate and find a new solution or a new observation point;

- the ability to communicate within a context (family, professional, ...);

- the ability of self-determination in a perspective of change;

- the ability to get involved and be self-entrepreneurial.

[3] *Andrea Vitullo, Riccarda Zezza, MAAM. La Maternità è un master (Motherhood is a master), ed. Bur Rizzoli*

To accompany the participants in understanding how to acquire, develop and enhance the aforementioned skills, it is proposed to use a **mapping of skills**.

In fact, skills indicate the ability to use personal knowledge and abilities in a given context (work, study, professional or personal development). The level of skills is expressed in terms of autonomy, effectiveness, and responsibility.

The starting point of the mapping process consists in identifying one's own skill set, divided into cognitive, relational, implementation, and managerial abilities.

COGNITIVE SKILLS

a set of mental processes and activities, such as problem solving, deductive thinking, and the capacity for analysis and synthesis that coordinate our knowledge, or the mental representations of principles, procedures, and theories of a set of specific knowledge able to favor the acquisition of greater adaptive abilities.

RELATIONAL SKILLS
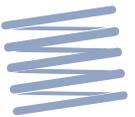
ability to communicate effectively, to establish positive relationships, and to collaborate with different interlocutors, thanks to the understanding of the specific characteristics of others, of the context, and of the relationship in which communication is taking place.

REALIZATION SKILLS

behavioral modalities that characterize the person's predisposition to act in an organizational reality, in order to organize, carry out, and accomplish their activities effectively.

MANAGERIAL SKILLS

ability to interact fluidly with others, acting as a reference point and exerting an influence aimed at achieving specific objectives or effects on the context and on others.

COGNITIVE SKILLS

- Deductive thinking
- Analysis and synthesis
- Awareness
- Continuous learning
- Problem Solving
- Self-confidence
- Systemic vision

RELATIONAL SKILLS

- Management of interpersonal relationships
- Communication
- Cooperation
- Integration
- Teamwork
- Assertiveness
- Negotiation
- Customer orientation

REALIZATION SKILLS

- Flexibility/Adaptability
- Stress management
- Autonomy
- Planning and organization
- Precision
- Attention to detail
- Time management
- Priority management
- Task orientation
- Result orientation
- Information management
- Entrepreneurial/ spirit of initiative
- Proactivity

MANAGERIAL SKILLLS

- Employee management and motivation
- Development of others
- Organizational awareness
- Leadership
- Strategic vision
- Decision making
- Governance
- Planning and monitoring
- Delegation

Once the importance of these skills to reconcile work and private life is understood, it is useful to make a personal balance sheet to identify those that already exist and those that can be developed, made transferable, and therefore valued in different areas and life situations.

The methodological focus is the individual activation starting from a group experience based on reciprocal listening, on getting involved, on the capacity to welcome stimuli and reflections, then reworking them together and making them become subjective enrichment.

Reference is made to **action research**, a methodological approach focused on the activation and direct participation of those involved in the training and learning process through the collaborative definition of goals and strategies to arrive at individual outcomes/responses.

To better identify the work objectives and develop an action plan to achieve them (evaluating and modifying the plan when appropriate), we suggest the **Self-determined Career Development Model** of M. Wehmeye[4]. Created to address people with particular vulnerabilities, it lends itself effectively to being used with a target group living in situations of social and economic hardship. The path of self-orientation, shared planning, and professional decisions related to the changes to be put in place that the person is stimulated to take, is the basis for a reduction in the use of assistance systems. In particular, each participant is invited and helped to describe their current condition, taking into account the family, social and network connections to which they belong. The social professional who leads the meeting has the task of examining the whole picture, by encouraging discussion among the participants, exchanging ideas and experiences and outlining with those interested hypotheses to deal with and solve problems, highlighting possible changes, and concrete and achievable objectives.

Transversely, it is important that there be an action of **Empowerment**[5], conceived to:

1. strengthen the ability to reflect and plan one's own trajectories and to acquire an active role (psychological-individual level);

2. acquire information, knowledge, and methodologies useful for a correct orientation within the territory and its services (organizational level);

3. take concrete action in implementing the project guidelines identified in the previous phase, receiving a constant motivational and supportive stimulus (socio-political and community level).

Lastly, the concepts related to **emotional intelligence**[6] must also be included in the methodological framework, since developing this type of intelligence can be a determining factor in achieving one's personal and professional successes.

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[4] *Salvatore Soresi, Laura Nota & Michael L. Wehmeyer (2011) Community involvement in promoting inclusion, participation and self-determination, International Journal of Inclusive Education, 15:1, 15-28, DOI: 10.1080/13603116.2010.496189*

[5] *Empowerment means a process of social action through which people, organizations and communities acquire competence on their own lives, in order to change their social and political environment to improve equity and quality of life. Zimmerman represents empowerment as a multilevel construct that can be: Psychological-individual; Organizational; Socio-political and community. For more information read Zimmerman, M.A., Empowerment Theory. Psychological, Organizational and Community Levels of Analysis. In Rappaport, J., Seidman, E., Handbook of Community Psychology. New York: Kluwer Academic / Plenum Publishers, 2000*

[6] *The American psychologist Daniel Goleman formulated the construct of Emotional Intelligence, with which he identifies a particular type of intelligence linked to the correct use of emotions. For further information, read Goleman D., Emotional Intelligence, New York, Bantam Books, 1995 (It. Trans. edited by Blum I. and Lotti B., Emotional Intelligence, Milan, Rizzoli, 1996)*

Using emotions intelligently means identifying them, understanding them, and managing them to be able to face life better. For Goleman it is the "*ability to motivate oneself, persist in pursuing an objective despite the frustrations, to control impulses and postpone gratification, to modulate one's moods, avoiding that suffering prevents us from thinking, being empathic, and to hope*". Being emotionally intelligent means knowing how to maintain a balanced relationship between the intrapersonal world and the interpersonal world, it means recognizing oneself in one's own qualities and accepting one's limits, and optimizing one's resources to reach an expected result.

This is why training this ability, also through group activities, can be the key to reinforcing the probability of personal and professional success.

In 1985, Amartya Sen introduced the concept of **capability**, highlighting that the original human potentialities are conditioned in their development by the external reality with which they interact. Capability is a combination of capacities or possibilities of development within the subject and development opportunities offered by the political, social, and economic environment. Therefore, it is important to promote the development of skills and not just knowledge in the training process, by enhancing the concept of capability as both internal and external possibilities to achieve an adequate development of one's capacity to deal with the tasks to be performed in life, in study, and at work[7].

From the aforementioned, it appears that through the *Development of Soft Skills* module the social professionals aim to facilitate the recognition and activation of individual skills in the participants, starting with their daily life, which have an impact on their everyday life (for example, motherhood and parenthood) and employment opportunities (for example, better conditions for access to work; increased adaptability and the updating of knowledge to make them suitable to the needs of the labour market).

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[7] *Pellerey M., (edited by) Soft skill and Professional Orientation, Rome, CNOS-FAP, 2017*

4. OBJECTIVES AND STRUCTURE OF THE UNIT ON SOFT SKILLS

OBJECTIVE

This module aims to encourage participants to reflect on their professional and personal skills. After sharing the meaning of skill (through a more theoretical framework referred to in the previous chapter), it will be important to bring out the personal/transversal skills that, as parents (and mothers in particular[8]), come to be developed and increased exponentially, especially when it comes to relational skills, skills related to difficulty management, work organization[9], and leadership. In particular, participants will learn to recognize their own soft skills and understand how these are transferable from family life to the world of work.

SKILLS/KNOWLEDGE

- Knowledge of the meaning of skill (hard skills and soft skills)
- Knowledge of the soft skills possessed and which can be used in the workplace
- Acquisition of tools to improve soft skills
- Deepening the knowledge of the professional profiles of interest
- Learning to recognize gender stereotypes

VERIFICATION

In order to verify the acquisition and/or improvement of skills/knowledge, it is proposed to organize a follow-up meeting in which to highlight, through the tools already used during the meeting, the level of activation of the single participant.

If all the modules of the meetings of the JUMP path are implemented, a self-assessment questionnaire can be constructed and managed with indication of the achievement of the individual skills expected for each module through a scale of values (e.g. from zero - having learned nothing -, to five - high level of learning -).

[8] *Vitullo A., Zezza R. (2014), MAAM La maternità è un master,(Motherhood is a master) Milan, BUR Rizzoli*
[9] *Naldini M., Saraceno C., (2011), Conciliare famiglia e lavoro. Vecchi e nuovi patti tra sessi e generazioni (Reconciling family and work. Old and new pacts between sexes and generations), Bologna, Il Mulino*

NUMBER OF MEETINGS

This module consists of 2 meetings.

CONTEXT/SPACE

- Large classroom where people can sit in a circle
- Chairs with a folding desk or at a table where one can write
- Space available for group movement activities
- Space for activities in subgroups

RESOURCES

- Internet connection, Computer, Projector
- Flip chart, post-it notes, markers, A3 paper, pens
- Folders
- Any other informational material

ROLE OF THE TRAINERS AND CULTURAL MEDIATOR

The two trainers, based on their respective skills and capabilities, define how to take action and how to act in the presentation of activities and in the management of the classroom.

Initially, one trainer can explain how to do the job to the group and then, together with the second trainer, can go among the participants to collect any requests for clarification or doubts or simply to support the person in carrying out the activity through encouragement and being nearby.

The presence of a specific mediation figure can support the trainers during the activities, by helping the participants have a better understanding and a more active participation in a climate of trust and non-judgmental listening.

GENERAL TIPS

To facilitate group work, it is suggested to collect a description of each participant's family and personal situation through a brief data collection sheet (family situation, origin, age, profession ...).

It is possible to schedule an initial interview to get to know the person directly and their personal and family situation and identifying their needs, and a final interview that will allow to verify which objectives have been achieved and which ones still need to be supported.

Lastly, a follow up group meeting can be organized to identify and exploit every form of the activation of the participants through the examples reported, thereby stimulating those women who encounter greater difficulties in changing, and bringing further informative contents useful for everyone in the group.

FIRST MEETING

Welcoming everyone and getting to know the group and presentation of the course path

Time[10]: 20 minutes

Tools: Use of interactive presentation techniques where all participants are involved and valued

Action 1: What the term "skill" means

Time[10]: 50 minutes

Tools: To facilitate the theoretical presentation of hard skills and soft skills, it is possible to propose theoretical slides that contain definitions and bibliographical references for further study. It might be useful to propose: the definition of hard skills, the definition of soft skills, the sources for learning about skills, the different categories of skills (cognitive, relational, realization, managerial), enriching the presentation with images and examples.

If you wish to go more in-depth into the topic of relational skills and therefore related to communication, it is suggested to prepare theoretical slides showing definitions and bibliographical references.

Subsequently, to make the topic as participatory as possible, the participants' soft skills can be collected on a group poster.

[10] *The times marked are indicative: depending on the number of participants and the degree of involvement, it may be necessary to rebalance the timing of each proposed topic/activity*

Action 2: What the soft skills are for and why you need to train them

Time[10]: 40 minutes

Tools: It is advisable to always check the time available and the type of participants before proposing the viewing of the videos.

Here are some examples of videos with a text in Italian that are useful for learning more about the topic: Presentation video and explanation of the soft skills by Synergie (cartoon images with Italian writing and music)
www.youtube.com/watch?v=6oAsxXxBbtM.

Video with slides on emotional, cognitive, and relational soft skills (extracted from the WHO document WHO/MNH/PSF/93.7A.Rev.2.)
www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ILKDSEL0dA.

Cartoon (only images) that tells about the power of empathy, by Bruno Bozzetto (created for the Empatia Foundation in Milan)
www.youtube.com/watch?v=id3w0IA81cA.

Video on Empathy in English with Spanish subtitles and animated drawings
www.youtube.com/watch?v=E_wezR6o22U.

Video by Victoria Gamboa - "El poder de la empatía" (The power of empathy)
www.youtube.com/watch?v=gHXKitKAT1E.

Break

Time[10]: 20 minutes

Action 3: What soft skills do I have? Which ones need improvement?

Time[10]: 70 minutes

Tools: "Russian Nesting Doll" form to fill out (see section 5 - Work materials).
"Daily Soft Skills" form (see section 5 - Work materials).

FIRST MEETING OPERATIONAL TIPS

Talking about soft skills is not easy, it is necessary to start from the participants' everyday life experiences and allow each person to recognize them. This can be done through the proposed forms or a freely told story. From the stories and the forms, the soft skills emerge by writing them on the group chart or as a work of sharing with everybody, so that they are clear and well identified.

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[10] The times marked are indicative: depending on the number of participants and the degree of involvement, it may be necessary to rebalance the timing of each proposed topic/activity

It is also interesting to focus on the emotional part of the stories and situations, so as to work on the experiences with the method of emotional intelligence: identifying the emotions, understanding them, and managing them to be able to face life better.

Slides as well as videos can be of help to those who lead the activity, either as an initial stimulus or to better focus on terms and meanings. It is necessary to choose which ones to project according to the characteristics of the group.

You can also use the video on the advertising of toys for both girls and boys, which make soft skills emerge by stereotyping them according to the gender www.youtube.com/watch?v=nXE2YcWa5xQ. The video has dialogues in Italian but it could be used equally for other languages because the images are very representative.

Working on relational skills, the activity of identifying one's own communication skills with reference to the basic elements is proposed: fire (skills related to being practical, strong-willed, having good self-esteem, independence ...), earth (skills related to being meticulous, organized, prudent ...), water (skills related to being calm, correct, protective, good listeners ...), air (skills related to being communicative, enthusiastic, spontaneous ...). Each participant has a balloon of each element in different colors at their disposal. They can inflate it proportionally depending on the level they have of that specific skill. The balloons will be arranged in ascending order by each participant and thus comparisons and reflections can be facilitated.

SECOND MEETING

Action 1: Viewing of film on professions and subsequent elaboration by the whole group

Time[11]: 60 minutes

Tools: Documentary movie in Italian "You can't go back home"[12], (by Lara Rongoni, Giangiacomo De Stefano, duration 60 min), "typically male" jobs performed by women (trailer https://vimeo.com/37801989).

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[11] The times marked are indicative: depending on the number of participants and the degree of involvement, it may be necessary to rebalance the timing of each proposed topic/activity

[12] "A casa non si torna" ("You can't go back home") documentary film by Lara Rongoni, Giangiacomo De Stefano - Italia, 2012

This can be an example of interesting video material because it offers concrete testimonies, with a look at stereotypes, difficulties, the subject of professional choice based on personal interests and abilities as well as forced choices.

Action 2: Viewing of the most interesting professional profiles for the participants, in order to verify what soft skills are required

Time[13]: 30 minutes

Tools: Below are proposals of other videos in Italian to deepen or introduce the topic of soft skills in the workplace. It is advisable to look for videos that can include examples, testimonials, and experiences to comment on and reflect on.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=OmgNuXyWGT4
(soft skills in vocational training and work)
(www.youtube.com/watch?v=vGWhL3JS19E
(power of words, dialogues and text in English, with Italian subtitles)
www.youtube.com/watch?v=jKyb0yDJrog
(soft skills in job searching: text and dialogue in Italian)
www.youtube.com/watch?v=vctVGm1-O4Q
(Steve Jobs and group work: translation into Italian)
Working on professional profiles may be useful for having their technical descriptions. In the Italian case, we can refer to:
www.atlantedelleprofessioni.it/
http://fabbisogni.isfol.it/professioni_raggruppamenti
http://professioni.istat.it/cp2011/

Break

Time[13]: 20 minutes

Action 3: Simulations for training to help in selection interviews, as opportunities to bring out one's soft skills (see the suggestions in the following paragraph)

Time[13]: 70 minutes

Tools: To work on the topic of selection interviews, it may be advisable to watch some videos. These videos have male protagonists; if deemed necessary, it is possible to project videos in which the protagonists are women.

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[13] *The times marked are indicative: depending on the number of participants and the degree of involvement, it may be necessary to rebalance the timing of each proposed topic/activity*

The examples can be taken from a film, showing only the parts of interest, as in the following examples:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=1sveCkVpq3o

(taken from the movie "The Pursuit of Happiness"[14] with Will Smith: "There is never a second chance to make a good first impression" .. as Will Smith teaches us in "The Pursuit of Happiness", playing the role of an unfortunate but stubborn job applicant who, with some sincere and intelligent answers, turns his situation around).

www.youtube.com/watch?v=dMp-6uxxFWw

(Taken from the film "Il Ragazzo di Campagna" -"The country boy"[15] - a job interview with Renato Pozzetto - In Italian)

Lastly, the following forms can be used to simulate and practice selection interviews: "Selection Interview" form and "Observation Grid" form.

SECOND MEETING WORK TIPS

The viewing of the documentary film and/or the proposed videos can be used as an opening or in the moment in which the specific topics emerge; it is suggested to always evaluate the listening and reworking abilities of the participants in the activity well.
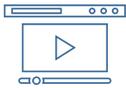
Videos and films can also be viewed not in their entirety.

The simulations of a job interview must be carried out carefully, so as not to become a tool of evaluation or ridicule; it is necessary to clearly specify the objectives and create the appropriate setting, already highlighting the skills of initiative and activation demonstrated in the specific case by the participants who spontaneously volunteer for the simulation.

It is also interesting in this second meeting to focus on the emotional part of the stories and situations, so as to work with the method of emotional intelligence: identifying the emotions, understanding them, and managing them to be able to face life better.

If the work experience and the work sectors of interest are already known, we recommend that you already prepare the job description sheets, to facilitate the work.

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[14] "The Pursuit of Happiness" is a 2006 American biographical drama directed by Gabriele Muccino
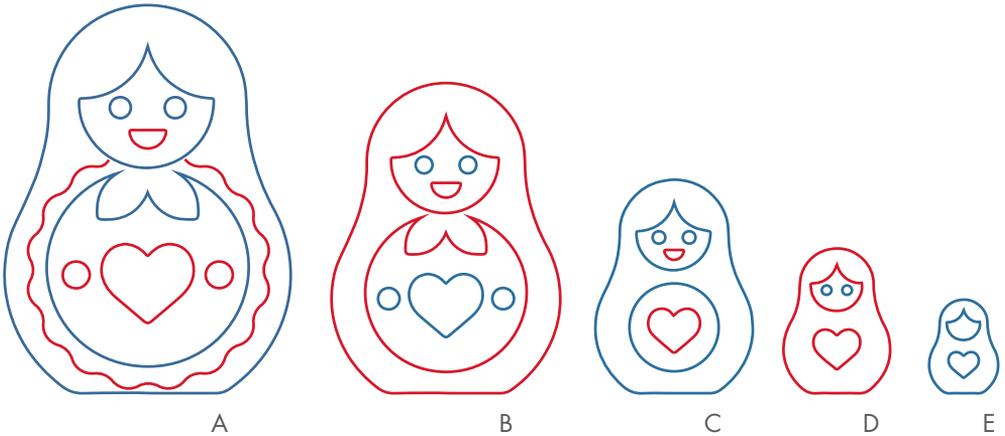[15] "Il ragazzo di campagna" ("The country boy") is a 1984 Italian comedy film directed by Franco Castellano and Giuseppe Moccia

5. WORK MATERIALS

The worksheets explained in this chapter can be found in digital version on the website: www.jumpproject.eu in the DOWNLOAD section

RUSSIAN NESTING DOLLS TO FILL

A   B   C   D   E

USE

The "Russian Nesting Dolls" form" must be filled out individually to bring out the most visible soft skills (largest doll) and the more personal hidden ones (smallest doll). It is suggested to carry out a moment of collecting the individual work with a presentation with everyone, with the use of a chart on which to gather what emerges from the group.

DAILY SOFT SKILLS FORM

A) Define and write about the situation below (i.e. my typical day, the birth of my child, the beginning of school, an extraordinary event: visiting relatives, child sickness ...):

_____

_____

B) Write down all the actions you perform, identifying the resources you use, the network you activate:

Indicate each action in order of its execution	What do you do?	What do others do? Family members, acquaintances, services	What do you use?	Soft skills used
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				

C) Now by looking over the previous scheme, write the type of soft skill you used in the gray column.

UTILIZZO

Pass out a copy of the form to each participant who, starting from **point A)**, will indicate which situation they intend to describe.

In **point B)**, they must describe (in the column "Indicate every action in order of its execution") all the actions that must be taken to manage the identified situation (calling the doctor, calling a friend, going to the appropriate office…). It is necessary to list them all, even those that are implied and automatically produced without thinking about them (dressing children to go out, putting diapers and snacks in your handbag, …).

In the second column ("What do you do?"), for each action listed, it is necessary to indicate with an X if the person is carrying out the activity. Likewise for the column "What do others do? Family members, acquaintances, services", take care to indicate who carries out this particular action (older children, husband, friends, service contact person, …).

In the column "What do you use?" You are asked to indicate what tool is used to carry out the single action indicated (telephone, car, bus, e-mail, kitchen equipment, other tools, …).

At this point, move on to **point C)** which requires a reading of what was written in the previous columns to identify which soft skills the person has implemented.

If charts or slides on the types of soft skills have already been produced in the introduction phase, these can be taken up again to carry out the task of point C). Otherwise, social professionals can pass out the following form on the description of soft skills ("*Examples of soft skills" form*).

This process will make it possible to bring out the soft skills enacted by the individual person linked to their daily activities. In particular, in the case of stay-at-home mothers, it will be interesting to observe the elements that will emerge and give value to them.

This tool can also be verbalized by everyone, using an example of a work activity or a typical day which everyone can refer to and make a contribution to the description.

EXAMPLES OF SOFT SKILLS

COGNITIVE SKILL

Systemic vision. This is the ability to insert events in a context, to establish the nature of their relationships and their interconnections.

Ability in analysis and synthesis. This is the ability to understand the meaning of different information at the same time, put it in order, understand it, and through synthesis, define it according to the criteria and meanings attributed.

Learning on an ongoing basis. This is the ability to recognize one's own gaps and areas for improvement, taking action to increasingly acquire and improve one's knowledge and skills.

Problem solving. This is an approach to work which, by identifying its priorities and criticalities, makes it possible to identify the best possible solutions to problems.

Self-confidence. This is the awareness of one's own value, of one's abilities, and of one's ideas beyond the opinions of others.

RELATIONAL SKILLS

Negotiation ability. This is the ability to manage complex negotiations in order to reach an agreement.

Customer Orientation. This is the ability to satisfy the customer's needs, even when not explicitly expressed, and to predict future ones.

Management of interpersonal relationships. This is the ability to manage the relationship between two or more individuals.

Communication abilities. This is the ability to transmit and share ideas and information in a clear and concise way with all one's interlocutors, to listen to them and deal with them effectively.

Team work. This is the willingness to work and collaborate with others, having the desire to build positive relationships aimed at achieving the assigned task.

REALIZATION SKILL

Flexibillity/Adaptability. This is the ability to adapt to changing work contexts, to be open to new ideas and willing to collaborate with people whose points of view are also different from one's own.

Resistance to stress. This is the ability to react positively to work pressure while maintaining control, remaining focused on priorities and not transferring one's own tension to others.

Autonomy. This is the ability to perform the tasks assigned without the need for constant supervision, by making use of one's own resources.

Ability to plan and organize. This is the ability to accomplish ideas, by identifying objectives and priorities and, taking into account the time available, planning the process and organizing the resources.

Precision/Attention given to details. This is the attitude of being careful, diligent, and attentive to what you are doing, by taking care of the specifics and details for the final result.

Time management. This is the ability that leads to planning how much time to dedicate to specific activities, to increase effectiveness, efficiency and productivity.

Gestione delle priorità. È la capacità di organizzare le attività coerentemente a criteri definiti.

Management of priorities. This is the ability to organize activities coherently with defined criteria.

Achieving goals. This is the commitment, ability, and determination that is put into achieving the assigned objectives and, if possible, overcoming them.

Information management. This is the ability to effectively acquire, organize and reformulate data and knowledge from different sources, towards a defined objective.

Being Entrepreneurial/sense of initiative. This is the ability to develop ideas and to know how to organize them in projects for which realization is pursued, also taking risks in order to succeed.

MANAGERIAL SKILL

Ability to delegate. This is the ability to entrust a task to others, by assessing their abilities and selecting the appropriate task.

Management and motivation of collaborators. This is the ability to manage and organize your team, by supporting, encouraging, and rewarding it.

Development of the others. This is the ability to appreciate, motivate, and evaluate collaborators, by identifying specific development levers that are consistent with the skills possessed and the training needs of each person, thus favoring their professional growth and the involvement of one's collaborators.

Organizational awareness. This is the ability to understand that every project activity, every action, every methodological choice adopted is always regulated by decision-making styles, working methods, information flows, connection procedures, etc. as a "harmonic" and "effective" translation of the plan of activities to be carried out.

Strategic vision. This is the ability to have a general vision of "where we are headed", to see the current situation and the future one to be achieved.

Decision making. This is the ability to independently choose between different alternatives and to make effective final decisions, through the analysis and synthesis of data and information, also in conditions of uncertainty and complexity.

Governance. This is the ability to manage and govern the set of principles, rules and procedures that concern a collective whole (a society, an institution, a collective phenomenon, a family).

Planning and Monitoring. This is the ability to correctly distribute tasks and responsibilities, to establish priorities, to balance results and available resources, to plan work times and actions consistent with the objectives to be achieved, and ensuring constant monitoring.

Leadership. This is the ability to lead a group in a shared direction, with enthusiasm and energy, by stimulating the team's motivation and supporting their professional growth; an ability to assign goals, manage the activities and time for oneself and others; ability to manage group dynamics, also if conflicting.

SELECTION INTERVIEW FORM

Questions to be used as an outline for the selection interview simulations, can be chosen, can be integrated, or the operator can simply use them as inspiration.

PERSONAL QUESTIONS

Tell me about yourself

What are your professional goals?

Tell us what your main flaws and main qualities are

Describe your ideal work day

How long have you been looking for work? Why so long?

What is your ideal job?

What are the occasions when you quarrel with people, and why?

How do you make an important decision?

What do you usually do in the evening? And the weekend?

What TV programs do you watch and why?

What books do you read?

Do you have any hobbies?

If you started over again, what course of studies would you choose?

Why did you accept your last job?

What did you like best and least about your previous job?

Tell me about your worst and best employer…

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PROPOSED JOB

What do you think about this job?

Why did you apply for it?

What do you know about our company?

Explain to me the reasons why we should hire you

What do you think you have that is more than what the other candidates have?

Don't you think you are lacking in experience?

…

This tool can be replaced by asking those present to tell about an interview experience of their own, what questions were asked, what their answers were, and what doubts they had.

OBSERVATION GRID - Candidates for the selection interview

(Soft skill example) **Ability to use the language appropriate to the interlocutor, to the situation ...**	(Soft skill example) **Did they know how to make the most of their presence? Attitude, tone of voice, interest ...)**	(Soft skill example) **Did they show they were motivated, responsible?**	(Soft skill example) **Do they have leadership skills?**	
Participant 1 (write name)				
0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5	
Participant 2 (write name)				
0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5	
Participant 3 (write name)				
0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5	
Participant 4 (write name)				
0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5	
Participant 5 (write name)				
0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5	
Participant 6 (write name)				
0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5	

(Soft skill example) **Do they have the ability to manage the proposed commitment?**	(Soft skill example) **Do they have self-analysis skills?**	(Soft skill example) **Are they able to work to achieve goals?**	(Soft skill example) **Are they capable of handling the unexpected?**
0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5
0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5
0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5
0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5
0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5
0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5	0 1 2 3 4 5

USE

The simulation of the interview can take place in the following way: 3-4 volunteers will be chosen to play the role of the candidates, the other participants will be the observers and use the "*Observation Grid form*" to mark down their observations.

The items on the "*Observation Grid form*" can be modified ad hoc. In turn, the volunteers enter and must undergo the interview supported by one of the social professionals. You can use the "*Selection Interview form*" to have some suggestions for questions, otherwise you can proceed freely.

The goal is to help participants bring out their soft skills, with different approaches.

At the end of the talks, the group should be helped to comment on whether and how soft skills emerged and what can be improved, not only for the people who volunteered for the simulation, but for all the participants.

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