



Soften YOUR Skills

TOOLKIT

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@ZAGREB, CROATIA



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Introduction

This publication is a result of activities implemented during the Soften Your Skills Youth exchange which gathered 25 participants from 5 different countries working on improvement of their soft skills and increasing their chances for employment. The project was organized by the Croatian student-led NGO Ekonomska klinika and it was held in Zagreb, September 27 – October 3.

This publication is addressed to youth workers, educators, coaches or mentors, learners in non-formal education, and anyone interested in developing non-formal activities for the empowerment of soft skills in young people. Everyone is free to use anything from this document for any purpose.

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The main objectives of the project are:

- to improve the level of soft skills among the participants
- to help tackle youth unemployment
- to raise awareness about the challenges of the labor market of the future
- to create an environment conducive to innovation and creativity
- to give the participants a chance to express themselves and their ideas
- to exchange experiences and create networks between youth organizations and young at a European level
- to improve foreign language and intercultural competences
- to promote the Erasmus+ program

Main activities

The aim of all the activities on the project was to teach the participants what soft skills are, how are they useful and how to use them in business and everyday situations. The approach that was taken went through several different topics regarding different soft skills with presentations and workshops in which the participants could practice and develop the skills. The culmination of the project was in the final task of working in teams in the development of the product idea, its pitch presentation, and constructive criticism and comments afterward. The final part of the project was organized in a way that the participants were able to utilize all the skills learned during the previous days and implement them in the best possible way they can while practicing them in a possible business situation.

Topic 1: Business etiquette and business ethics

- **Aim:** Increase the knowledge and usage of good business mannerisms and proper business attire
- **Learning objectives:** Increased understanding of basic manners in the world of business in general, increased understanding of the standards for morally right and wrong conduct in business
- **Theoretical background:** Business etiquette is simply defined as basic manners in the world of business. It is important because **it creates a professional, mutually respectful atmosphere and improves communication**, which helps an office serve as a productive place. People feel better about their jobs when they feel respected, and that translates into better customer relationships as well. Showing good business etiquette can also be helpful in job interviews increasing your chances of getting a job.
Business ethics **enhances the law by outlining acceptable behaviors beyond government control**. Corporations establish business ethics to promote integrity among their employees and gain trust from key stakeholders, such as investors and consumers. It is an important skill for business leaders, it motivates employees to work with integrity and it can improve profitability.

Description:

First the participants were introduced to the topics of business etiquette and business ethics through a theoretical presentation and videos. Then participants were divided into groups and were given different case studies that they had to study together. Each case study had examples of proper and improper examples of business etiquette and business ethics in a workplace. The participants had to work in a team and notice all the right and wrong examples of those practices. After finding them all on they had to discuss why certain practices in the case study were correct and why certain ones were not. After that, they had to answer a few questions as a group. Questions related to business ethics asked the members of the group to solve a certain situation together in the right way and thus correct the solution of the case study. When everyone had finished, each group had to present their case study and their findings to the rest of the participants, and then everyone discussed possible alternative solutions.

Topic 2: Non-verbal communication

- **Aim:** The activity is designed to increase the skills of body expression, improving the ability to know and express the own feelings and to recognize the feelings of others, even without words.

- **Learning outcomes:** Activity-based on body expression and recognizing feelings. This activity helps to improve understanding and acceptance of the other's message in a deeper way.
- **Theoretical background:** Nonverbal communication plays a significant role in our lives, as it can improve a person's ability to relate, engage, and establish meaningful interactions in everyday life. A better understanding of this type of communication may lead people to develop stronger relationships with others and can be helpful during job interviews.

Description:

During this activity, the participants were first informed through a presentation about theoretical information regarding non-verbal communication. While presenting the theoretical part of the presentation the presenter also presented in a specific way. The participants were encouraged to view the presenter and take notice of the techniques used by the presenter that aimed to captivate the attention of the listeners and make the presentation better, more interesting, and interactive. After the presentation, the presenter discussed these techniques with the participants and explained how they worked and how they can be used. Two different tasks then followed the presentation. First, the participants were given non-verbal examples of different feelings and states of mind and they had to guess what they showed. In the second task, the participants were asked to non-verbally express an emotion to others so that most of the participants could guess correctly which emotion they were expressing.

Topic 3: SWOT yourself

- **Aim:** Deeper analysis of oneself strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats
- **Learning outcomes:** Better understanding of oneself and creating of a good roadmap for future steps in life
- **Theoretical background:** SWOT can help a person uncover opportunities that you would not otherwise have spotted, and by understanding personal weaknesses, threats can be managed and eliminated that could otherwise hurt the ability to move forward. If you look at yourself using the SWOT framework you can further develop the specialized talents and abilities you need to advance your career and help you achieve your personal goals.

Description:

The participants were introduced to basic SWOT model logic that is usually used in analyzing companies and the company environment but from a different viewpoint - a personal viewpoint where the object of the analysis is yourself and not a company. It is an exercise in self-introspection to help you understand yourself and prepare for growth. This exercise should be conducted on occasions such as while preparing for a job interview, after college graduation, when deciding on the college degree, during job self-evaluations and when thinking of change. Afterward, each participant got their own paper with a SWOT template in which they had to write their own personal analysis. The template also had questions that helped this introspective process. The example of the template is shown in the photo below and it can be used in workshops regarding personal SWOT analysis. After everybody has finished their analysis several volunteers presented their work and gave their feedback on this exercise.

S (strengths)	W (weaknesses)
What do you do better than anyone else? What unique resources can you draw on? What do other people see as your strengths? Which achievements are you most proud of?	What could you improve? Where do you have fewer resources than others? What other people see as weaknesses? What are your negative work habits?
O (opportunities)	T (threats)
What opportunities are open to you? Is there a need in a company or industry that no one is filling? Do you have a network of strategic contacts to help you? What trends could you take advantage of?	What threats could harm you? What is your competition doing? Could any of your weaknesses lead to threats? Does changing technology threaten your position?

Image 1 Personal SWOT analysis

Topic 4: Negotiating

- **Aim:** Deepen understanding of all the stages of negotiation and exercise implementation of good negotiation practices
- **Learning outcomes:** Learning how to adapt own negotiation style to suit the context of the situation, understanding how to prepare for negotiation in a way that will ensure the best result
- **Theoretical background:** Good negotiations contribute significantly to business success, as they help build better relationships, help deliver lasting, quality solutions — rather than poor short-term solutions that do not satisfy the needs of either party and help you avoid future problems and conflicts. Negotiation skills importance is a crucial aspect specially at workplace.

Description:

First, the participants were introduced to all 5 stages of negotiation, which are preparation, discussion, clarification of goals, negotiation towards a win-win outcome, and agreement or failure to agree. They were given examples of how each stage works and what is best to do in each stage. After the initial informative part, the participants were divided into pairs and were thus ready to play the orange game. One person from each pair had to leave the room while the other person remained. This way first one half of the pair was given certain information (that they are finding a cure for a disease and for it they need a certain part of an orange), afterward, the other half was given different information (the other half also needs a certain different part of an orange). The game then began as pairs had to negotiate the purchase of oranges from a third party and come to a win-win situation. The pairs were also given a template to make the process of negotiation easier. The template is comprised of boxes regarding important questions for the negotiation process. The questions on the template are: 1. my desired outcome, 2. their desired outcome, 3. my key interests, 4. their key interests, 5. my walkaway alternative, 6. their walkaway alternative, 7. my bargaining chips, 8. their bargaining chips, 9. possible solutions and 10. agreement. In the end all of the pairs managed to find the correct solution and negotiated their way into a win-win situation. The process was then evaluated and discussed among all

the participants together and a conclusion was drawn. After the game then came the discussion part of the activity. The participants had to interact with the presenter and give their own opinions, experience and examples creating together a list of several main rules while negotiating (e.g. higher salary in a workplace). The list of main rules was made, once again fully explained and discussed in detail. This way all the participants gave their own contribution and different cultural aspects to the process of negotiation reaching common ground rules for all the different points of view.

Topic 5: Conflict management and constructive criticism

- **Aim:** Increase awareness about different conflict management styles, teach how to give and take constructive criticism
- **Learning outcomes:** Better understanding of different perspectives, better handling of conflicts, building trust, learning a better way of giving opinions
- **Theoretical background:** Managing conflict well can help find creative solutions to internal relationship issues, and can help to prevent environments that breed negativity, stress, demotivation and general employee unrest. Constructive criticism and feedback can help you grow by shedding light and giving you the opportunity for improvement. It increases insight and perspective, creates bonds and cultivates a trustworthy workplace.

Description:

The participants first had a presentation that informed them about conflict management, its styles, and types of conflict to understand the topic better. They were then introduced to steps of conflict resolution and prevention with examples of good ways of dealing with conflict. The participants were then divided into four groups and each group had a case study with follow-up questions. The teams read through the materials, had a discussion, and reached the resolution of their case studies which in the end they shared with the rest of the participants. Every case study was then discussed among all of the participants and conclusions were drawn. The participants were then introduced to the second topic and it is constructive criticism. First, they were given some examples of real-life situations in which they needed to give propositions on how would they give constructive criticism. They also had to explain their reasoning. After going through the examples the participants were thought some easy and utile practices they can use while giving constructive criticism, such as the sandwich method and "me" messages. The examples were then described once more and resolved using proposed methods. Everybody got a chance to voice their own opinion and practice giving constructive criticism.

Topic 6: Creativity, innovation, and teamwork

- **Aim:** Development of organizational, analytical, and time management skills
- **Learning outcomes:** Good time management skills, good teamwork, and division of tasks, good listening skills and a better understanding of brainstorming
- **Theoretical background:** Collaboration within a group can help solve difficult problems. Brainstorming is a good opportunity for the team to exchange ideas and come up with creative ways of doing things. By working together, teams can find the solutions that work best.

Description:

In this activity, the participants were divided into five groups of five people, one from each country. This way the intercultural aspects of working together could also enrich the brainstorming and teamwork processes. After they were divided into teams the participants had to choose one team leader among the group who was then responsible for the division of tasks among the group. The groups had a task

to come up with their product idea that they would have to prepare, research and present in a pitch the following day. During this activity, the participants were encouraged to use all the knowledge acquired during the previous days as they had to work together in a team, brainstorm, negotiate the solution, express their opinions appropriately, give constructive criticism, in some occasions manage conflicts, practice their time management skills and use their personal strengths to seize the opportunities ahead. This activity helped in practicing utilizing learned skills in a simulation of a real-life situation.

Topic 7: Pitch

- **Aim:** Teaching the participants what is a good pitch and how it can be useful in business life
- **Learning outcomes:** Developing time management skills, developing speech skills (being concise and leaving an impact)
- **Theoretical background:** Learning how to properly pitch is one of the most important skills a founder needs to develop. It allows them to find investors, to attract great co-founders, to recruit the best employees, and ultimately to fine-tune their idea. Being persuasive and concise is an important trait in today's work environment and helps find and retain a job.

Description:

During this activity, the groups from the previous day were continuing work on their product idea. First, the presenter who was a person that successfully started a business after a good pitch gave a real-life example of how to make a good pitch and how important it can be for the future of a person's work life. The participants then got a list of guidelines and had a task to continue working in the same teams on their product idea following the guidelines and creating a pitch for their product. The participants had to think of all the aspects of the product, while also creating its visual identity, preparing a PowerPoint presentation, and writing the pitch speech. One person from each team had to pitch the idea within the time limit of 5 minutes to 4 independent jurors who were not participants in the project and who had previous experience in organizing and working on different kinds of projects. The pitch was also presented in front of all the participants and both the jury and the participants could ask questions, give comments, and constructive criticism. The person presenting had to show good time management skills and proper non-verbal communication, its team had an obligation to prepare everything so the work of the whole group could be properly shown. This was also a competition which in the end had a winner comprised of the votes of the jurors and all the participants.

Feedback: While giving feedback on the project the participants mentioned this activity as their favorite one and also the most challenging one, which managed to capture everything learned on the project.

Cultural aspects

Alongside the formal part, the project also focused on cultural and social aspects. In order to get to know each other and connect, the project included many energizers and team-building exercises. On the arrival day of the project, a Welcome evening was organized in a non-formal environment, where the project participants could get to know each other and have fun.

Every day of the project started with a morning energizer. Some of them involved dancing and movement and some of them focused more on participants' unique talents and traits that they shared with each other while getting to know each other better. The first day included two different energizers in which the participants had a better chance to learn each other's names and some common interests. **Pass the ball game** helped participants remember each other's names. In the first round of the game, the participant was supposed to pass the ball to someone and say his/her own name. The round is finished when every participant has said their own name at least twice. In the second round, the participant needs to pass the ball to another participant and say the name of the participant he/she is passing the ball to. This round also lasts until all the names have been said at least twice. **The Spider web game** encouraged participants to share their interests and hobbies and find what they have in common with others. The game is played on a large piece of paper with a circle drawn on it. Every participant needs to write their name along the outer curve of the circle (preferably in a different color). Then the participants stand in a circle and one by one name a particular interest, hobby, or trait they have. All the other participants that share that trait, interest, or hobby go to the paper and connect their name to the name of that first person. In the end, there is a web that connects all the participants with things they have in common showing them how many similarities they share even though they come from different backgrounds. After the energizers, on the first day, the participants were divided into teams and had a **scavenger hunt** around the city, where they had to find things from the list and take a photo with them. This helped them get to know the city better and to discover some of the city's famous features, as well as to connect better and work as a team.



Throughout the whole project, there was also a **Secret friend game** organized in which every participant got his own secret friend and had to keep that secret till the end of the project. The participants were supposed to gift or challenge their secret friends by putting notes and small gifts in the envelope of their secret friend, or by inventing something special for their secret friend while staying anonymous. On the last day of the project, participants had to share with others what their secret friend did for them and then guess who their secret friend was. This game aimed to help the participants connect in a unique way while having fun and getting to know each other better.

There was also a team-building exercise that should be mentioned and its name is the **Building bridges game**. The participants formed groups and tried to make a bridge out of provided materials like paper glasses, tape, straws, etc. Each group had their team leader who split the rest of the group in two and both parts had to work on creating a bridge out of the materials they had on their own. The team leader's job was to coordinate separated parts of the team into making the same kind of a bridge that in the end could be connected in one creation. It was a great way to make everybody work together, better their communication, and spark their creativity for future project tasks when they had to generate and pitch ideas.



Usually, the day finished off with a daily reflection through several methods, such as blobs method, thumbs up and down game, team leader feedback method and etc. This way, the organizers got more input about the good things on the project and things that could be done better or differently. Also at the beginning of the project participants were divided into groups in which they had to create a drawing of a boat with sails and sea under it. In it, they had to represent their expectations, fears, and their contribution to the project. On the last day, the reflection included remembering the things written on the first day and analyzing the situation after all the project activities have finished. This helped the organizers get better feedback regarding the success of the project but also it gave participants a good recap and understanding of the difference the project has made for them. On the last day, the participants also had to give their own feedback on the things they liked and didn't like in the project so the organizers could collect the data and learn how to improve in further projects.

The project also focused on cultural exchange, especially on cultural evenings, when each of the participating countries presented their country, their cuisine, music, and other relevant things.

Results

The results of the project were the developed business ideas that were presented on the last day of the project. But the most important part of that was that they were developed while participants had to practice the use of all the soft skills they learned during the project. We had five competing teams that developed five business ideas and here is a quick recap of the ideas:

1. Yummy box

The idea of the group was to create a box for take-out food that would be from eatable materials and could then be eaten together with the whole meal. This group won the pitch competition as their presentation was informative, interesting and they covered all the needed areas regarding the product so they managed to get the most votes.



2. DGF – Drug Free Glasses

The idea of the group was the creation of glasses for drinks that would change the color of the glass if some kind of drug was present in the drink. The glass would be sold to clubs and bars and would help prevent people from being victims of spiked drinks.



3. Test Me

The group had an idea to create an app that would show its users all the locations and prices of available PCR and antigen COVID-19 tests in their vicinity. It would help solve the problem of finding the cheapest and closest solution and would be great for people who travel to other countries. There were also some marketing opportunities and possibilities to widen the app usage on other kinds of testing.



4. iPass

The idea of the group was the creation of an iPass app that would be available for iPhone users and would help them have on their phone everything they need regarding personal identification. The personal identification documents and information could be saved in an app safely thanks to the NFC technology and would make it easier for the app users to travel and go to places where they need to show their ID.



5. Vend4Yourself

The idea of the group was the creation of vending machines that could be used for distributing food to homeless people. Every person could contribute with their own food putting it in the vending machines so the homeless people could access it freely. The food would be free of charge and would be changed every day. This project focused more on the social component of the society and tried to solve a not profitable but charitable cause. The vending machines would be sold to cities and the cities would then put them in various locations they find important.



For any questions about the project contact ena.cosic@ekonomska-klinika.hr