



Solution4Inclusion

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Introduction



I- Introduction

The present document is part of the Solution4Inclusion (S4I) project, funded by the Erasmus+, S4I has the objective of promoting inclusion and integration on disadvantaged groups (e.g., migrants; refugees; Neets) by improving the competences of the staff of organizations that support them by using training tools on Solution focused approach.

The S4I partnership selected the solution focused approach because it is effective, simple, and works like a structure where virtually every goal, context and organization can be accommodated.

The social work profession is defined by the practice that seeks the empowerment and liberation of people coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. However, there is often a gap between this goal and what actually happens in practice. One core principle of social working is *giving voice* to people who are subject to social change (Engen, Nissen & Uggerhøj, 2019). By orienting their professional practice into a reflexive, solution-focused exercise, target-groups will feel like actors of their own change. With this, social workers are creating opportunities for beneficiaries to take part act in setting and reaching their own goals.

Besides this Guidelines, the project is also going to promote a training event on solution focus for professionals that support people from a disadvantage background, in Portugal, during the project, free of charge. If you have interested in having further training, materials, or consultancy, please contact the project partners, [LTI](#) in Finland and [Empoderar](#) in Portugal.



Given these objectives, S4I has the following target groups:

1. Organizations

- Youth centres
- NGOs
- Migrant centres
- Employment centres

2. Workers

- Social workers
- Psychologists
- Mentors
- Coaches

3. Marginalized groups

- NEETs
- Migrants
- Refugees
- Unemployed people



About our organizations:

EMPODERAR- Desenvolvimento Organizacional, Social, Profissional e Pessoal, Lda is an adult training and consulting company, that uses psychological science to promote well-being and effectiveness in society, organizations and individuals. The team of consultants has experience in promoting positive changes in different contexts. Their training in Psychology, with an extensive intervention practice, which combines this knowledge with other areas of expertise, allows them to create effective solutions in various situation.



www.empoderar.eu

Lyhytterapiainstituutti Oy- was founded in 1986 and is the leading company in Finland offering training in solution-focused psychotherapy. The four-year psychotherapy training program is organized in collaboration with East-Finland University. In addition to the long training program, we also offer workshops and shorter trainings in solution-focused therapy and coaching both in Finland and internationally. In the past few years, we have done trainings among other things in Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, Spain, Britain, Brazil, Iceland, Russia, and China.



www.lti.fi/en



Objectives & Expected outcomes



II -Objectives and Expected Outcomes

The present guidelines are intended to introduce you to the solution focused approach, specifically, to give guidelines on how to intervene effectively with the solution focused approach to promote integration.

The solution-focused approach is a **goal-focused, evidence-based** approach, which incorporates positive psychology principles and practices, and which helps clients change by constructing solutions rather than focusing on problems. Solution focus, just as positive psychology, searches, and underlines what is going well, and empowers individuals to continue with what promotes it.

The solution focus approach, when applied effectively, can change the beneficiaries' perspective of their situation, and adopt a more positive and productive view, focused on their goals. With this approach, the professional can guide the beneficiary to have a better idea of their objectives, to recognize their skills and opportunities to reach a desired positive outcome.

To achieve this goal, we are going to describe principles of this approach, describe the steps to follow on an intervention, potential context of utilization, and a full description of an exercise of solution focus approach.

With this said, the following guidelines seek to:





Solution Focused Approach



III – Solution Focused Approach

Introduction

The beginning of the term Solution focused is linked with the start of the Brief Solution focused therapy, created by Steve De Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg on the beginning of 1980.

This psychotherapeutic approach centers their attention in the desired future of the clients, and not in the past. It searches for desired outcomes and empowers clients on achieving them, rather than focusing on problems or the root causes of it.

This type of intervention is not only used in different therapeutical contexts, like in Depression, Anxiety and in trauma, but also in non-therapeutical situations.

Solution focused therapists, Ben Furman and Tapani Ahola, besides the therapeutical intervention, began to apply the same principles on non-therapeutical context. For instance, they developed interventions and training programs for companies and organizations that wanted more efficient and bonded teams, and a specific program for kids- the Kid's skills.

In this document we are addressing the solution focus principles, the description of potential steps of a solution focus approach, and potential context of intervention.

This is not a Psychotherapeutic training document. This is a training document to give guidelines on how to intervene effectively with the solution focused approach, to promote integration.



Principles

This therapeutic approach began empirically, with a language analysis, in the sense that they (De Shazer, Insoo Berg and their team) analyze what types of communication, words and action were seen as helpful on therapy sessions. And keep the more efficient ones, abandoning the others (Lipchik, Derks, LaCourt, and Nunnally, 2012).

The intervention selected has the following principles.

Client centered

- The intervention is focused on the client, with a believe in their own strengths and capabilities of thriving. The role of the professional is to help the client identify their strengths, to create a common goal. The dialogue is cooperative and not instructive, it should not be a prescription of a goal they should aim and orders on exactly what they should do, it is co-created.

Focused on resources

- Through dialogue, the professional invites the client to identify when they did well, or when they did better, and what was their role on doing better. If steps done on the right direction are identified, they should be complimented. This will highlight their skills. Identifying resources also concerns external resources, who or what can help them, who can be their support group.

Motivation and Confidence

- During the description of the client of what when good or better, when steps done on the right direction are identified, they should be complimented. Not only by complimenting, but also by talking and helping the client identify what they did right, helps to promote motivation and confidence on the client. This step is complemented by exploring with the client what positive experiences did they felt during the actions taken.



Goal oriented

- Clients are invited to identify their goals, what they would like to achieve. Questions like – What would be a good result for you? and why? are used. As stated, it is a co-constructed dialogue and not an imposition. The professional can help the client identified more useful or realistic goals, or reframe goals, for instance if the goal does not depend on the client, but should not be a one-way conversation about what your goals should be. By having previously identify resources and building on trust, the achievement of the goal will be perceived has more probable and achievable by the client.

Future oriented

- The intervention not only promotes the identification of the goal, but also invites the client to dream, to think positively on the future, how good will it be to reach that dream. It may seem like a mere imagination exercise, but if we recall that depression and other extreme psychological states incorporates a feel of hopelessness, of not being able to think positively of the future, it gains a different perspective.

Actions

- This approach focuses on setting goals and after helping the client identify what can be done, and organize it into a plan, encourage taking action to achieve them. This zooming on action that can be done, not only empowers client on what they can do, but also helps them improve their control perception, which will lead to an improved motivation and increasing the chances of the client to be involved in the process



Solution focus structure

By following the principles of a solution focus approach, different sequences of steps during an intervention can be followed.

The following steps are a potential structure of an intervention, take into consideration that the intervention has the aim to identify the **resources** of the client, to **co-create a goal** to be reached, identify the **steps** that can be taken to reach it, and to promote the **confidence** and **motivation** of the person/people in front of you.

Give pen and paper or other way to allow people to write and draw during the next activities. Another alternative is if you write for them.

These activities can be done individually or with small groups.





1 - Resources and Goals

Resources

This will be the first step of the intervention, and its purpose is to identify the people's resources, ask the following questions to help the client(s) identify their strong points and past achievements.

First, you will ask participants the following questions:

- What do you like to do?
- In what do people compliment you?
- What activities give you energy?
- What are you most proud of?

Goals

Second, you will ask participants what they would like to change, and what would be a good future result for them?

You should take into consideration some good practices. For example, if the future is mentioned in a negative tone (e.g., "I do not want to feel like this") you should convert it to a more positive tone (e.g., "So, you want to feel better.").

The goals should be co-constructed and not imposed. If the participant has several goals, ask what goal he/she would like to work on first. If there is doubt on what goal to be chosen, help the client identify the dream that can have the biggest impact, to identify the more important and relevant to the person.

After the goal is set, you can invite your participants to dream of a future they will be satisfied with, where the goals were achieved. And you will ask them questions about it. The participant should make a full description of a potential version of this step on the exercise part of this document.

This is an imagination activity. Do not jump to the planning and the concrete steps that need to be done, let the people **DREAM**.

To have more information about the dream, to increase the "reality" of it, do not be shy to use the question "What else?" repeatedly. Until you do not have any more additional information.

Another way to get more information and help the client think in a positive future is to ask something like: What would your family / friends / colleagues notice?

You can also link the resources and positive information that you got on the first part of the exercise to ask the person: "how are those strong points /resources are going to be useful for the achievement of your dream."



2- Supporting network

In this step there will be a bigger focus on the people and resources that can help them.

Ask questions such as: Who can help you achieve your goals? Who will support you?

To identify more useful resources to achieve the person's goals, you can use the question: "Who else?" Try to identify as many resources as possible.

Finally, to clear what resources are beneficial, you can ask: "How?" and "How will each individual and organization help you achieve your goal?"

Let the person explore its network of contacts. Even if the person cannot identify support systems, maybe you can talk about your organization and other available that can help them in achieving their goal.





4 - Confidence Building

In this step you will review everything discussed so far: the dream; the goal; the plan to achieve that goal; the specific steps to be taken; the steps already taken; and the support systems.

After that, you should express faith in the person, by using affirmations such as:

“I think you can do it!”

Your affirmations should be followed by a justification. You can use the strengths and accomplishments identified on the first exercise. Or you can use your thoughts and feelings that were built when working with your client.

It is always better to use a truthful justification, but if you have no idea of a rational justification, you can use some of the following:



“I believe in you.”

“I can see that you’re a person who means what he/she says...”

“The way you talk gives me confidence in you”

“I have a feeling will be successful.”



5- Celebration

In this final step, you and your participant should celebrate the achieving of his/her goal.

In this phase, ask the participant to imagine as if he/she has achieved its goal.

You can then ask the following questions:

“Let’s imagine that you have succeeded. When will you know?”

“Congratulations! How did you do it? Who helped you?”

“And after you know it for sure. How are you going to celebrate? Who, where, when?

Who is going to be invited?”

“How did the people around you reacted?”

You can ask your participant to prepare a speech. Where they talk about this moment, what it means to them; and they should thank the people that helped them, also explaining how they help them.





6- Follow up sessions

On the follow up sessions, focus on what has changed. You can use scaling question (1- to 10). And you can use it per week. And what changed. Compliment every step on the right direction, ask questions about what went right and wrong, and how that person can improve.

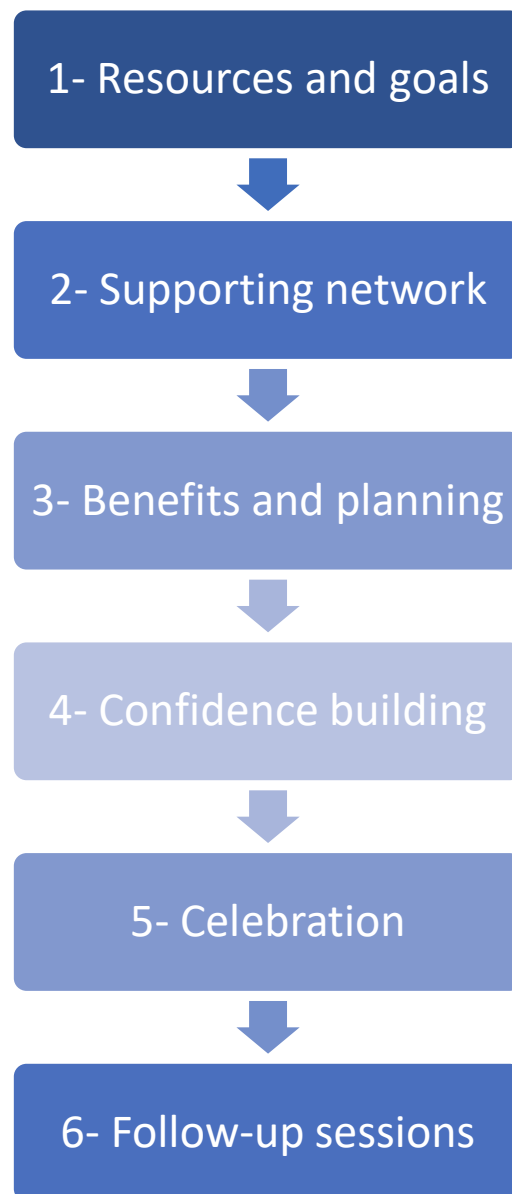


Fig. 1 Solution-Focused structure



Potential target-groups



NEETs

In this context, it makes sense that the dream is related with work, so when you ask for goals and dreams, you are focusing on work related content. But the positive impact of that dream will surpass the work context, and the discussion about it will be important to build motivation. The procedure is very adaptable to this situation, by exploring what are their skills, their previous work and education experiences, their achievements, what they need to do to achieve their goal, and what steps have been taken in the right direction. Helping people that might not be able to dream with a better future can be a game-changer.

Migrants, Refugees and Asylum seekers

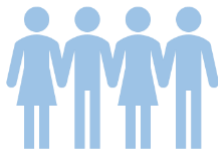
In this context, as in the following one, the intervention should be linked with potential other support systems. It is important that more concrete and essential needs are answered before we ask them to think about the future. If you are hungry, and still are not sure where you are going to sleep today, it is not a priority to think about a longer future. Actions to help them have a place to stay, to understand the language of the new country, if needed, are good complements to this intervention.



Some of these people were subject to traumatic situations, and that should be taken into consideration. Although, there are solution focused approaches to deal with trauma, these guidelines were not created with that goal in mind.

After the basics are met, this type of intervention will be beneficial to help them imagine a better future, and again, identify skills, resources, goals and ways to achieve them.

Homeless



We should take in consideration the same cares stated above. It is important that more concrete and essential needs are answered before we ask them to think about the future. The people should feel as relaxed as possible to be able to benefit from an intervention like this one. This intervention can be used to help the person picture a better future, to understand what steps can be taken, what depends on them, and what good practices and success actions they have already done.



Key words

Solution focus approach- centers their attention in the desired future of the clients, and not in the past. It searches for desired outcomes and empowers clients on achieving them, rather than focusing on problems or the root causes of it.

Goal oriented- this approach is oriented to more useful and realistic goals of the clients. It involves establishing or reframing goals.

Action oriented- This approach focuses on helping the client identify what can be done, and organize it into a plan, encourage taking action to achieve their goals. This zooming on action not only empowers client on what they can do, but also helps them improve their perception of control, which will lead to an improved motivation and increase the chances of the client to be involved in the process.

Focused on Resources- Through dialogue, the professional invites the client to identify when they did well, or when they did better, and what was their role in doing better. If steps done on the right direction are identified, they should be complimented. This highlights their skills. Identifying resources also concerns external resources, who or what can help them, who can be their support group.

Future oriented- The intervention not only promotes the identification of the goal, but also invites the client to dream, to think positively about the future. It may seem like a mere imagination exercise, but if we recall that depression and other extreme psychological states incorporates a feel of hopelessness, of not being able to think positively of the future, it gains a different perspective.

Inclusion- “is the process of improving the terms on which individuals and groups take part in society—improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of those disadvantaged on the basis of their identity” (The World Bank, 2023).



Exercises



IV – Exercises

Foster a Dream - Introduction

This is one example of an exercise. In this exercise you will promote the dream of your client, or a group of clients. The goal is to let the client imagine a desired future. This desired future can vary a lot and can be adapted to different life situations.

By having an idea of what the desired future of a person is, goals can be set. This is the cornerstone of the intervention. Without goals, there are no further steps. With this said, you first need to plan these steps with your client. After that, it is possible to identify what has to be learned, changed and improved.

But there are other positive outcomes of having a dream, one of them was already mentioned in this document, having a positive outlook of the future is the opposite of a feeling of hopelessness. For a healthy mental well-being it is important to have a positive view of the future.

When there are big life obstacles (e.g., losing a loved one; losing a job; being forced to be a refugee or an asylum seeker; being homeless), the existing image of the desired future may be no longer available. It is important to gradually create a new positive alternative for the future.

Preparation

You need a place that is as calm and comfortable as possible for a better dream. This exercise can be used with any person, from any background, as long as it is adapted to the specific situations.

It might help participants to have a sheet of paper and a pen, so they can take notes and/or draw.

The duration can vary on the description of the dream. However, it can normally last about 30 minutes.

Procedure

For one individual.

Allow the participant to dream. Ask him/her to picture a future (e.g., in 6 months; one year; 5 years) where he/she is happy with its own life. Despite the harsh times passed, he/she will be in a point on their life that they'll feel satisfied with themselves. The things and problems that trouble them right now are a thing of the past or are now much better. They are enjoying their life, professionally and/or academically and personally. Give them time to really picture it. Ask them to take a good look around in their dream. Ask them: "Where are you?"; "Where are you working/studying?"; "In what type of organization are you working in?"; "Where are you living in that moment?"; "Describe your average day".



Ask them to describe their dream in the present, with as much detail as they can. “How different will life be from now?”

For a group

You can do the same exercise in a group. Provide the group with the exercise’s instructions, and then listen, or read the dreams of the group participants. But you will need to check the individual dreams, and probably you will also need to individually guide everyone from their dream to their goal.

If your group is a team that works together, and the point is to improve the team’s effectiveness or wellbeing, (e.g., a team for your organization) you may use something like:

“Let’s all picture a future where changes were made on our team for the best, and in six months, we have a follow up meeting where we are happy with the improvements we managed to make in our team. What are we saying to each other? What has changed? How? What remained the same? What steps did we take to achieve this change?”

Next steps

After having a clear idea of the dream, you can start working with your participant(s): what has to happen for that dream to turn into reality? With this question, you and your participant(s) can co-created goals, and steps that need to be taken. After that, you should create a way to identify if the person is moving towards the intended goals.

Possible obstacles and how to overcome it

What if the dream is completely unreal, or if it raises ethical questions?

Evaluating if a dream is realistic can be a difficult task. History is full of cases where individuals achieve what seem unrealistic goals. Nevertheless, some goals can be clearly impossible. If you have big issues with the achievability of that goal, it is recommended that you try to steer the conversation to smaller or simple dreams. You can use something like:

-Do you think that is realistic?;

-That is quite a big dream, it might be hard to achieve it, maybe it is better to start with something smaller, what would be a smaller goal that you need to achieve in order to achieve that bigger dream? If you have smaller, simpler dreams it will be easier to achieve them;

Breaking down the dream into smaller and sequential steps is one of the activities that follows the solution focused intervention. It could also be more beneficial for the participant, since it is easier to see results with smaller dreams.

If the goal raises ethical questions, you can ask what other dreams that person has. You might even explain that the dream raises some questions.

If the dream seems inadequate, you can remind the person that the dream should be related to his/her context (that means, the dream should be related to the focus of your intervention with the participant).



Take in consideration that these “reframing” steps are for cases where ethical problems arise, or unrealistic goals are picked. The principle of client centered, and the co-construction of the dream and sequential goals should be followed, if possible.

What if the dream only concerns the action of others?

If the Dream is very dependent on external actions, it should be rearranged to concern the actions of the self. You should try something like:

- “That is a good / beautiful / noble dream, but it does not depend solely on you. You can keep and nurture that dream, but the dreams where we can work on are the one that depends mainly on your actions. Is with that, that we can work on. Maybe we can focus on the steps that you need to take to be prepared when that opportunity arises. Or maybe you may want to try to focus on a different dream.”

What if the person or group, states that they do not know what their dream is?

This might happen, because the client might not have a clear idea, or even because he/she refuses to have hopes in a bright future to avoid being disappointed.

If you receive the answer “I do not know” to your questions about the future, you should be persistent in a polite way and you can rephrase your questions, For instance:

-Where would you like to be in 1 year from now?

-I do not know.

-It is not easy but think a little bit about it.

Then you can follow up with many different questions about the topic.

- Where would you like to work?

-Or what type of work?

-Where would you like to be?

-What kind of things would make you happier?

You can also rephrase the very first question like:

- Imagine that a year has passed, pick a month and a day, and you are smiling. Why are you smiling? What would be different in the future.

What if the client or the group wants to talk about other things?

The person in front of you may have the need to talk about other things and not about the future. Although you probably will have a limited amount of time, you should allow a time for the person to vent. After that, you can use what was said in a positive way. Something like “I feel lost”, may be transformed into a question like, “So, would you like to have an idea of what you want to do?”, or “where do you want to go?”, or “So, Would you like to feel better?”.



If there is a big resistance in talking about the future, explaining the process, might help. “This may sound strange, but I will ask you to imagine a desired future for you. This will help us work together because we will have an idea of where to go. What do you think?”

What If I’m working with a group and they have different views of the future?

When this happens, it can take quite some time to find a consensual dream. In doing that, you can try to find what is coherent between the different dreams, or if some features can be negotiated to be compatible.

For instance:

“I Think we should have meetings every week so that we can cooperate better” and “I think we have too many meetings and that distracts us from working better”. Between these two, a suggestion of “So you all want to become more efficient in your work?” or “Do both of you want to cooperate better?”

Other option is to work with two different dreams, but all parties should work on what would be satisfactory for them on those different dreams.



Further readings



V-Further readings

We hope that by now, you are familiar with the basic concepts, the ways of intervening and potential contexts of the solution focused approach. To increase your knowledge and effectiveness of the intervention, you can contact the partners of the project [Empoderar](#) and [LTI](#) for more trainings, coaching and additional information. We also leave you with some complimentary readings.

<https://benfurman.com/WP2/>

<https://www.brief.org.uk/resources/brief-practice-notes/reading-guide>

<https://www.youtube.com/c/BenFurmanTV/playlists>

<https://benfurman.com/WP2/books/>

<https://courses.benfurman.com>

The majority of the investigation made, concerning the solution focused approach, was in a therapeutical setting. If you are interested in studies about Solution focused interventions, you can find the following articles:

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VI- Appendices

Tools to support the intervention.

The following tools can support you in using the solution focused approach. We underline that the usage of these instruments, should follow a pedagogical approach that respect the principles described previously in this document, such as: to be Client centered, Goal oriented, Future oriented, focusing on resources, to promote motivation and confidence to act.

To remind you of these principles, you can use the following checklist for yourself.

I am...

- Client centered.
- Goal Oriented
- Future Oriented
- Focusing on the resources
- Promoting Motivation and confidence

The Scale – Using scaling questions (e.g., “How close do you feel you are to your goals?”) you and your client will get an idea of how close you are to your goal. But this is not the only benefit of using a scale. You can also use it to ask the difference between the number immediately bellow, and above the number chosen by the client. Use questions such as: “What did you accomplish or why don’t you feel you are in the number bellow?”; “How would you know that you are on a number above?”. This latter question will also help in highlighting what has been done, and what still needs some progress.

You can also use a written scale to help you.

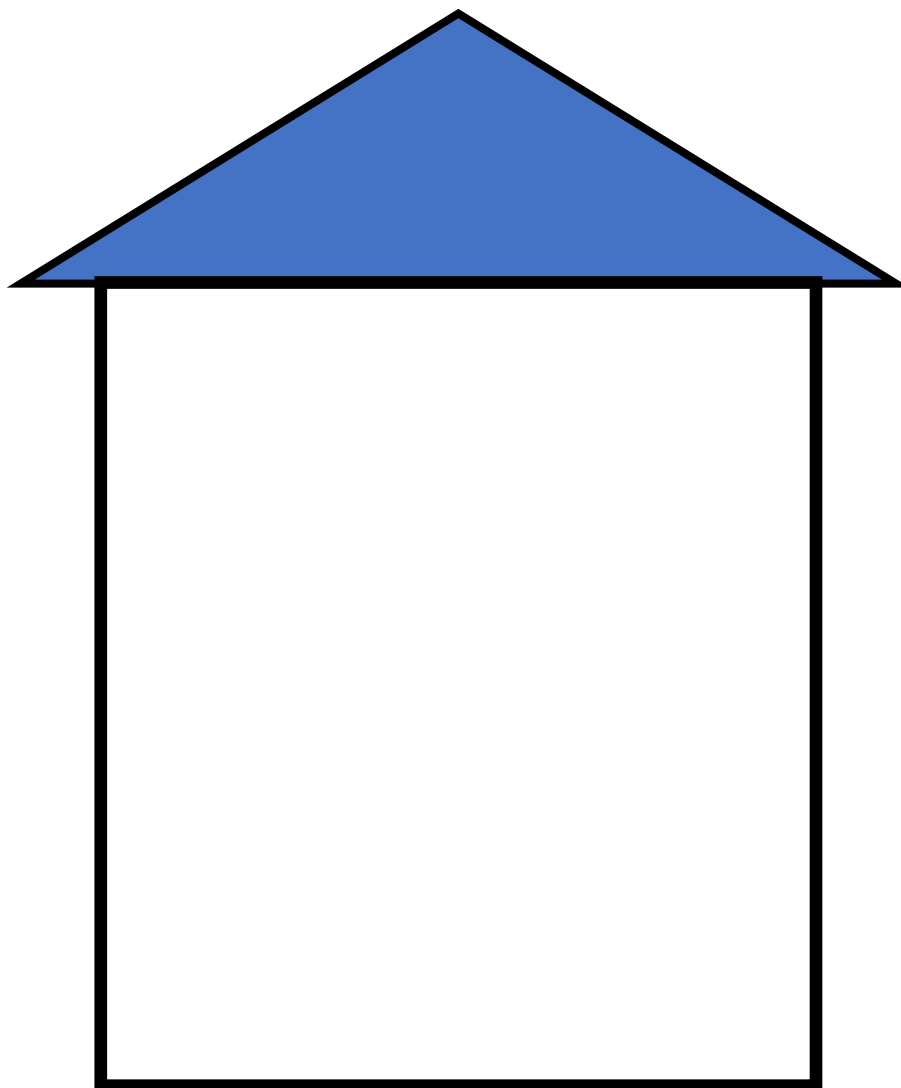
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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Create graphs using the data you collect during the sessions.



Gathering information in houses.

You can sum up information in different ways, such as: in circles, squares, crosses, or houses. Here follows an example of compiling the information in houses, you can, for instance, use something like this, where the strengths of the client would be written, making this the house of strengths:





A guide to a potential accreditation

If you aim to use this material as a part of a training event, consider the potential accreditation of it. There are many credits system, and their goal is to promote transparency, and therefore, comparability, and mobility among different regions and, or education sectors. This facilitates the interconnectivity of learning environment by the accreditation and recognition of skills and qualifications. Besides the different accreditation systems described here, also consider your national options.

2.1 - ECVET - European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training. It was established by the European Union in the context of vocational education and training (VET) programs across different countries.

ECVET allows for the recognition of Vocational Education and Training (VET) qualifications at all levels within the European Qualification Framework, making learners more mobile across various education systems. It facilitates the transfer of qualifications, encompassing learning outcomes achieved in formal, non-formal, and informal contexts, both in the learner's home country and abroad.

The framework is structured based on different units of learning outcomes, making assessment and validation more accessible. Technical specifications and principles are employed while considering national legislation and regulations, to ensure a harmonized approach.

Moreover, ECVET considers individualized learning experiences and stories, including transnational mobility experiences. Its main purpose is to assist VET learners in gathering their assessed learning outcomes, having them recognized, and allowing for the transfer of these outcomes among different systems. Ultimately, this process leads to the attainment of specific qualifications and facilitates lifelong learning opportunities for individuals.

To determine the appropriate ECTS credit points for the training course, a detailed analysis must be conducted. During this process, the estimated duration for each chapter must be assessed, taking into consideration the characteristics of the target group, including the identification of probable limitations, that could mean more time needed.

In the ECVET system, credit points are allocated based on the duration of the course work. Each ECVET credit point is equivalent to 25 to 30 hours of course work as the fundamental calculation basis. This approach offers flexibility, allowing for variations in the actual time required for participants to complete the course while still receiving the same amount of ECVET credits.

By employing this adaptable credit point system, the training course can cater to individual's learning needs and circumstances, enabling all learners to benefit from the appropriate recognition of their achievements regardless of the time it takes them to finish the course. This flexibility promotes a more inclusive and effective learning experience for participants.

2.2 -EQF- European Qualifications Framework: provides a common reference system for qualifications across Europe. It relates different national qualifications frameworks to a common European reference framework, facilitating comparison and understanding of qualifications.



EQF utilizes eight different reference levels, ranging from 1 (lowest) to 8 (highest), to classify qualifications based on the learning outcomes achieved at each level. These learning outcomes describe the knowledge, skills, and competencies individuals gain after completing specific learning inputs or units.

The framework encompasses qualifications from various education, training, and schooling systems, providing a comprehensive overview and summary of qualifications across participating countries. Its primary aim is to facilitate the comparability of qualifications between different European countries and their education systems.

By making qualifications more understandable and comparable, EQF supports lifelong learning and fosters cross-border mobility among European countries. This benefits learners and workers throughout Europe, as it promotes seamless transitions between educational systems and facilitates the recognition of skills and competencies gained in different countries.

To calculate the EQF level you must understand the different levels of reference, and then compare it with the training content. Here are some steps to calculate the EQF level of a qualification.

-Know the EQF Reference Levels: Each level reflects a specific set of learning outcomes and competencies.

-Recognize the Learning Outcomes: Analyse the learning outcomes of the qualification to be assessed. Learning outcomes describe what a learner understands, knows, and can do after completing a learning process.

- Choose the Most Suitable EQF Level: Based on the analysis and comparison, determine the EQF level that best aligns with the learning outcomes of the qualification. Select the level that corresponds most closely to the expected knowledge, skills, and competencies achieved by a learner upon completion of the qualification.

To ensure recognition within the EQF framework and comparability with other qualifications across European countries, document the determined EQF level alongside the qualification.

When necessary, consider referencing the qualification to the relevant national qualifications framework if it exists, as some countries have their own frameworks that align with the EQF.

In conclusion, while calculating the EQF level might require careful evaluation, following these steps and seeking guidance from appropriate authorities or qualification recognition centres can help achieve an accurate and reliable EQF level assignment.

