

S-cube Futurepositive Scenario Learning Programme



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Module One: Soft Skills Self-Audit

Learning Outcomes

Through this module you will:

- Gain an understanding of soft skills and why they are important in social enterprises.
- Assess your own soft skills.
- Reflect on your soft skills strengths and weaknesses.

What do we mean by Soft Skills and Why Do We Need Them?

Soft skills are commonly known as '*people skills*', and are recognised as personal attributes that enhance people's interaction with each other. Contemporary changes in the organisation of work, i.e. a move away from the traditional model of command and control incorporating vertical structures, to more flatter, horizontal structures demands a focus on higher proficiency of workers in the areas of soft skills. These newer structures, very often include working in teams, having more autonomy in decision making but also higher accountability in terms of effectiveness and efficiencies. These structures are now emerging as a critical feature for organisational success, particularly in the area of business.

In order to operate these newer organisational structures effectively, demands on increased proficiencies are made in areas such as; communication, conflict resolution, negotiation, effective leadership, strategic thinking and team building. These are just some of the soft skills that are needed in a modern business and industry.

It is generally accepted that in the world of work, from employee entry to senior management levels, soft skills can boost the effectiveness of an organisation. They have been recommended by the European Parliament and Council as intrinsic to the development of innovation and as a strong spur to employment growth. Soft skills are being increasingly sought by employers in the work place in addition to qualifications and hard skills. Enhancing the soft skill set of a workforce will undoubtedly lead to increased organisation effectiveness and performance and help to meet the challenges for the organisation in an increasing competitive environment of the global market.

It is also worth remarking here that an important survey undertaken by the Gallup Organisation¹ on behalf of the Directorate-General for Education and Culture of the European Commission which highlighted the increased need in this area. This survey of employers was undertaken across 27 member states of the EU, and across all industries and sectors. In an extensive survey, a total of over 7,000 interviews were undertaken. The results showed that the following were in the top-ranked skills identified by employers as

¹ Gallup Organisation. (2010) *Employers' Perception of Graduates' Employability: Analytical Report*. Flash EB: Series no:304. Gallup

being 'very important' or 'rather important'; team-working skills; ability to adapt and act in new situations; analytical and problem solving skills and communication skills.

Why are Soft Skills Important to Social Enterprises?

Using the *single*, *double* and *triple* bottom lines as hallmarks to distinguish between the traditional corporate business model and the social enterprise, we can clearly see that both models have strong commonalities. The social enterprise, similar to the corporate model has to be competitive and sustainable to succeed. Given the strong social emphasis within a social enterprise, it is evident there is an enhanced closeness of fit between the social enterprise and the development of soft skills. An improved development of soft skills within a social enterprise contributes to human resource employment practices that are aligned to a more socially responsible work environment. It also helps to create and develop a culture of business practice that is socially and corporately responsible which affects all stakeholders and ultimately contributes substantially to the social aims of the social enterprise.

Reflective Practice in Training and Education

In training in the area of Soft Skills, the learner will be asked to reflect on her/his own experience and practice. In so doing, the learner will assess her/his own strengths and weaknesses in the various aspects of professional and personal practices as they pertain to the use of Soft Skills.

The practice of reflection as a technique for aiding and reinforcing learning is a powerful tool in training and education environments. It supports and develops the ability of critical thinking, linking theory to practice and promotes personal and professional growth in the individual. Educationalists and psychologists such as John Dewey², Donald A. Schön³ and others have been writing and talking about reflection in learning since the 1930s. Dewey explained the concept simply when he wrote, "*We don't learn from experience. We learn from reflecting on experience.*"

Reflection is an internal practice conducted by the individual that facilitates exploration and examination of what we are feeling, thinking and learning. It is a process by which we deepen our understanding of our practice and our learning. It is a thoughtful consideration of personal experiences, interpersonal relationships and academic learning.

Through reflection, we challenge our assumptions, ask new questions and try to make sense of our experiences. We become active creators of our own knowledge. We learn to change and improve those practices and behaviours that we consider need changing and improvement, while retaining those that are useful and work well for us.

²Dewey, J. (1933). *How we think: A relation of reflective thinking to the educative process*. Chicago: Henry Regnery.

³ Schön, D. (1983). *The reflective practitioner*. New York, NY: Basic.

Schön, D. (1987). *Educating the reflective practitioner*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.

A Soft Skills Classification

Table 1 below provides an overview of different soft skills and some useful definitions:

<p>1 Effective leadership The ability to motivate people to work effectively towards goals in a collective fashion.</p>	<p>2 Communication Being able to impart information in a clear, precise and unambiguous way.</p>	<p>3 Conflict Resolution The ability to facilitate a process whereby conflict is resolved between parties.</p>
<p>4 Ability to influence The ability to offer reasoned debate on a subject, so as to persuade and gain agreement.</p>	<p>5 Personal effectiveness The ability to consider one's own personal effect on matters and measure effectiveness in that context.</p>	<p>6 Active listening Being able to engage with others in a way that assures them that you are listening and considering what is being said.</p>
<p>7 Creative problem solving Being able to approach problems from a number of perspectives, thus increasing the possibilities of success.</p>	<p>8 Strategic thinking Contextualising thinking into a wider sphere, so all possibilities and outcomes are visible.</p>	<p>9 Decision making Being able to reflect on all implications and considerations and arrive at an informed decision.</p>
<p>10 Team building Being able to generate a positive spirit and attitude amongst workers which incorporates positivity, happiness and positive outcomes for the company</p>	<p>11 Being able to convince The ability to win people over to one's own way of thinking by presenting rational and best ideas that show a better route and outcome to a concept or action.</p>	<p>12 Flexibility Being able to display an understanding that situations can change and consequently plans may have to be re-visited. Rigidity when dealing with human beings can be problematic.</p>
<p>13 Understanding relationships The ability to understand the dynamics between individuals and groups so as to read the 'sub-text' of how people are inter-acting and re-acting</p>	<p>14 Consultation Appreciating the significance in considering people's opinions, particularly when important decisions are to be made.</p>	<p>15 Self awareness The ability to know oneself, both physically and mentally at any given time and the effect that is having on oneself and others.</p>
<p>16 Judgement The ability to consider and comprehend all factors relating to reaching an understanding of a situation.</p>	<p>17 Resilience Being able to '<i>bounce back</i>' and resume effectiveness in the face of a set back or failure.</p>	

ACTIVITY ONE

Consider your own social enterprise or a social enterprise that you know well. With reference to the above table, identify up to five soft skills that are particularly important to this organisation and make a brief note of why.

– Soft Skill One:

– Soft Skill Two:

– Soft Skill Three:

– Soft Skill Four:

– Soft Skill Five:

Next Steps

Through completing this short module, you should now understand what soft skills are and have an appreciation of your own soft skills. In Module Two, you will be able to practice using some key soft skills in an online simulated role play.

Before proceeding, you may wish to deepen your knowledge further by accessing some of the resources below:

- http://www.cipd.co.uk/blogs/cipdbloggers/b/john_mcgurk/archive/2012/08/09/Soft-Skills-Stop-the-Soft-soap.aspx.
- <http://www.personneltoday.com/blogs/press-release-service/2012/10/soft-skills-overtakes-leadership-as-top-1d-priority-claims-survey.html>.
- http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newCDV_34.htm.

Appendix 1: Soft Skills Self-Evaluation

Please read the following definitions of soft skills and rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 is Very Weak and 5 is Very Strong) according to how you perceive yourself against each skill. For each skill, tick one box (refer to Table 1: Soft Skills Classification for a definition of each one of these soft skills).

SKILL	1 Very Weak	2	3	4	5 Very Strong
EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP					
COMMUNICATION					
CONFLICT RESOLUTION					
ABILITY TO INFLUENCE					
PERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS					
ACTIVE LISTENING					
CREATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING					
STRATEGIC THINKING					
DECISION MAKING					
TEAM BUILDING					
BEING ABLE TO CONVINC					
FLEXIBILITY					
UNDERSTANDING RELATIONSHIPS					
CONSULTATION					
SELF AWARENESS					
JUDGEMENT					
RESILIENCE					

Module Two: Active Learning and Reflection through Playing the S-cube Online Role Play

Learning Outcomes

Through this module you will:

- Learn how to use an avatar character within a multi-player online role play.
- Practice using soft skills within the role play scenario.
- Reflect on the use of soft skills within the role play scenario.

Online Learning and Skills Development

Role play simulations have seen growing application in training and education, not least due to its capacity to promote vocational learning. Online learning systems can provide a solid platform upon which role play simulations can be used to promote soft skills development. This type of active learning can provide a valuable tool for training staff in social enterprises and other third sector organisations, many of whom have limited access to training resources and developmental opportunities.

The S-cube Training Software

S-cube is an avatar based role play simulation gaming environment aimed at developing the soft skills of individuals working in and with social enterprises. This training product is instructor led where participants are given characters to play, represented by avatars, and they act out a scenario using an online learning platform which features the opportunity to use and develop soft skills.

The S-Cube software has a number of benefits for users which include:

- The capacity for multiple users to apply soft skills in a real time setting.
- The ability to practice skills remotely and anonymously using avatar characters.
- An innovative learning experience where the learning takes place in a risk free online role play setting – where mistakes can be made with no real world consequences.
- An easy to use interface supported by a player guide and orientation video.

Within the S-cube software you will be playing out a scenario with other players each of which will adopt the role of an avatar based character. Each character will need to achieve certain goals. In order to meet the goals of your character, you will need to give some thought to the type of soft skills required within your role (refer to Module One, Table 1 for an overview of the scope of soft skills). Each character may need to use a different range of soft skills during the course of the role play and part of the challenge for you a participant is to work out which skills will be important for your character.

ACTIVITY ONE

Watch the video through the link below.

<http://www.s-cubeproject.eu/gettingstarted>

This video will

- Guide you through downloading the S-cube software and installation on your computer.
- Provide an overview of the S-cube environment and the software features.
- Help you to get started with operating your avatar character within a role play.

Additional guidance on downloading, installing and operating the software can be sourced in the User's Manual which accompanies the software.

ACTIVITY TWO

After watching the video and reviewing the User's Manual you will be ready to use the S-cube software under the direction of a trained facilitator. Everything you will need to know about your training session will be contained within the S-cube software environment. Your facilitator will be in touch to schedule a time for participating in this multi-player online role play scenario. If you have any queries about the role play session or encounter any problems installing and setting up the software then please communicate with your session facilitator.

After you have completed the online role play exercise, you will be ready to complete the rest of the tasks within this module.

Post-Role Play Reflection

Now that you have participated in the role play scenario you are in a position to reflect upon the experience. Each avatar character in the scenario was set individual goals to achieve within the playing time. In order to achieve these goals, each player needed to employ one or more soft skills at different points in the life of the scenario. Within Activity Three below you will be asked to map these skills across the characters.

ACTIVITY THREE

In the Grid below, indicate with an "X" which character you think needed to use which soft skills in order to achieve their public goals. If you need to remind yourself of all the character's goals then please refer to **Appendix 1: S-cube Futurepositive Scenario**.

	Jane	Ralf	Trevor	Giles	Andy
Effective Leadership					
Communication					
Conflict Resolution					
Ability to Influence					
Personal Effectiveness					
Active Listening					
Creative Problem Solving					
Strategic Thinking					
Decision Making					
Team Building					
Being Able to Convince					
Flexibility					
Understanding Relationships					
Consultation					
Self-Awareness					
Judgement					
Resilience					

Continued overleaf.

ACTIVITY THREE (continued)

Please reflect upon and respond to the following questions:

What challenges did you experience in trying to achieve your goals and how did you use your soft skills to overcome these difficulties?

If you were to participate in the role play again, how might you use your soft skills more effectively?

Did you observe good practice in the use of soft skills amongst other characters? If so, what was it about the characters' soft skills that were so effective?

Appendix 1: S-cube *Futurepositive* Scenario.

S-Cube Scenario: *Futurepositive*

Training Needs Analysis conducted as part of the S-cube project identified that soft skills relating to the following areas were rated as being 'important' or 'very important' by a large proportion of respondents from social enterprises: communication (83.7%), consultation (66.7%), ability to influence (68.1%), and ability to convince (65.8%). However, existing skills in these areas were rated to be low. Therefore, the scenario that has been developed aims to provide an opportunity for participants to develop key communication skills in a social enterprise context. The scenario context is designed to facilitate reflection, discussion and practical application concerning aspects of the 7 step 'Cultivation Cycle' – see <http://www.fundraisingresearch.info/page6.htm>

Context & Playing Instructions:

Futurepositive is a role play scenario that has been developed by partners from across Europe. The purpose of the *Futurepositive* scenario is to provide participants with the opportunity to take part in a role play exercise focused on the use of communication skills, particularly those of persuasion & influence.

The role play scenario concerns a new social enterprise venture called *Futurepositive*. Full details about the scenario & the role play characters can be found on the remaining tabs within this screen. Please spend the next 5 minutes reading this information and familiarising yourself with the scenario. You will receive a message from the tutor when it is time to begin the role play exercise.

Please note that you can recall the Information screen by clicking on the "i" button at any time.

A new social enterprise is being launched in Corfranmouth, a large provincial European city with a population of 500,000. Bradstock, an area to the east of the city, suffers from problems of social and economic deprivation. In addition, crime levels are high and there is a particular problem with youth offending. Many in the local community believe that part of the solution to Bradstock's problems lie in providing opportunities for young people to develop work skills that will enable them to contribute positively to the community, earn an income and gain a sense of purpose and direction. *Futurepositive* is a new social enterprise set up to provide short, paid work placement opportunities for young people living in Bradstock. It targets ex-offenders and young people felt to be at risk of offending. *Futurepositive* also provides free pre-placement training and on-going mentoring, and this aspect of its work is supported by a two year grant from the local authority. However, they recognise the need to avoid over-reliance on public sector funding. Hence, they are seeking the support of local employers to (i) provide paid placement opportunities for young people (and in so doing provide revenue to cover operational costs through placement arrangement fees) and (ii) provide substantial sponsorship beyond the next two years to support pre-placement training.

Futurepositive is holding a launch party and has invited a number of local employers who they think could be good supporters for their organisation. The two Directors of *Futurepositive* (Jane Brown and Ralf Peterson) have opened the event with a formal presentation and for the rest of the evening, there is an opportunity for networking and informal discussions over drinks and canapés.

Characters:

Character	Description	Goals
Jane Brown	<p><i>Public information:</i> Futurepositive Director. Jane is passionate about supporting young people and addressing the social and economic problems of the area. She has a training background and is driven by the social mission of the organisation and has less interest in the ‘business model’ and the money side of the social enterprise.</p> <p><i>Private Information:</i> Jane believes that many of the employment and training problems that young people in Bradstock are facing is due to the excesses of capitalism and the activities of private sector organisations like Rivitco. Jane finds it difficult to get along with corporate people and has been known to get into debates on ideology with such individuals. Jane sometimes worries that Ralf is willing to compromise his principles in order to secure a deal.</p>	<p><i>Public Goals:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get people to support the social mission of Futurepositive • Harness the support of passionate supporters <p><i>Private Goals:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persuade people of the social good of the work placement project • Identify those whose values are aligned to those of <i>Futurepositive</i>
Ralf Peterson	<p><i>Public information:</i> Futurepositive Director. Ralf has a strong focus on the organisation’s business model, and is seeking to place the business on a firm footing. He wants to build up the client base of employers quickly and explore opportunities for longer term sponsorship or partnership.</p> <p><i>Private Information:</i> Ralf has major concerns about the long-term financial sustainability of the organisation, particularly if the local authority stops providing funding. Given the opportunity, he would sign up client employers tonight. Ralf sometimes worries that Jane is so focused on the social mission of the organisation that she neglects the need to ensure that revenue streams are sustained.</p>	<p><i>Public Goals:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get employers to commit to offering placements • Generate fee revenue by harnessing the support of employers most able to provide a high volume of placement opportunities <p><i>Private Goals:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To secure opportunities even if this means compromising on who offers the work placements

<p>Trevor Sparks</p>	<p><i>Public information:</i> Trevor runs a small optometrist firm which employs one other person. He is very passionate about the vision of <i>Futurepositive</i> and his talkative nature means that he would be happy to chat all evening about what could be done to support young people and the area. He is a well-known and liked character in the local business community.</p> <p><i>Private Information:</i> Trevor's business generates just enough revenue to maintain a good income for Trevor and his employee. Whilst he is full of good intentions, he is not in a realistic position to commit financial resources to supporting work placements. He is well placed to broker relationships within the small business community through his links with the local Chamber of Commerce. Trevor is inclined to enter into long monologues about himself, and can take conversations off track.</p>	<p><i>Public Goals:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage in stimulating conversation about the social mission of <i>Futurepositive</i> • Help to support the aims of the social enterprise <p><i>Private Goals:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help to support the aims of the social enterprise but not in a way that involves a financial commitment • Voice his passion for pro-social action in the community so as many people as possible can hear it
<p>Giles Green</p>	<p><i>Public information:</i> Giles is CEO of a major employer in the city, a manufacturing company called Rivitco. He holds a traditional view of business and though he is aware of the importance of social responsibility in business, it is not something that interests him a great deal. Rivitco has recently had some bad PR about its supply chain operations in Vietnam concerning the environmental contamination of a local watercourse. Rivitco were involved in rectifying the problem and made a financial contribution towards the clean-up.</p> <p><i>Private Information:</i> Giles dislikes being given the 'hard sell', but is willing to spend money if he sees a clear benefit to Rivitco. He has the authority to make decisions that could provide a large number of placement opportunities for young people. He is accompanied by Andy Swift, HR manager at Rivitco whose opinion he values. As a consequence of their bad PR in Vietnam, they will consider different ways to improve their corporate social responsibility but only if there are clear organisational benefits. Giles has some pressing business to attend to this evening, and is keen to move on from this</p>	<p><i>Public Goals:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To explore the possible benefits to Rivitco of working with <i>Futurepositive</i> • To show Rivitco's support for pro-social action <p><i>Private Goals:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be seen to be at the event for PR reasons • Go home as soon as possible to get on with some important work

	<p>event after around 30 minutes. Having worked hard to achieve all he has in life with no help from anyone, he is not naturally empathetic towards those who argue for social intervention.</p>	
<p>Andy Swift</p>	<p><i>Public information:</i> Andy is HR Manager at Rivitco and works very closely with Giles in an advisory capacity. He grew up in an area similar to Bradstock, but gained a scholarship for grammar school before going to University and then gaining a graduate position at Rivitco. Andy is quiet and thoughtful.</p> <p><i>Private Information:</i> Andy listens a lot but is not the easiest person to engage in conversation. He is keen to get promotion at Rivitco and wants to do something to make an impression, but doesn't want to risk his reputation for reliability and clear thinking through making a bad recommendation to Giles. He has no decision making authority in relation to resourcing issues but has strong influence over Giles.</p>	<p><i>Public Goals:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To learn about the social and business missions of <i>Futurepositive</i> <p><i>Private Goals:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a good impression on Giles • Listen carefully to sensible proposals • Make recommendations to Giles on the basis of what he hears •

Planning Your Soft Skill Development Priorities

You have now undertaken an assessment of your soft skill development needs. Next, you need to plan for how you will enhance the soft skills where you have identified a shortfall between the skill requirements of your job role and your current capabilities.

ACTIVITY THREE

In the grid below, please list up to five soft skills that you have prioritised for future development. In the middle column, make sure that you identify an action or actions that you will be able to take, e.g. on-the-job, internal or external training participation in order to sufficiently enhance the skill. Finally, in the third column provide an indicative timescale for developing the soft skill.

SOFT SKILL	PROPOSED ACTION FOR SKILL DEVELOPMENT	TIMESCALE FOR DEVELOPMENT

Learning Programme Summary

Thank you for completing the three modules. You should now have:

- A clearer understanding of what soft skills are.
- Recognition of your soft skill strengths and weaknesses.
- An understanding of the soft skill needs of your job.
- The means to formulate a development plan to address your soft skill job needs.

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Appendix 1: Soft Skills Needs Assessment

As in Module One, please read the following definitions of soft skills and on this occasion, please rate the importance of each skill in relation to your job role on a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 is Very Unimportant and 5 is Very Important). For each skill, tick one box in the grid below (refer to Table 1: Soft Skills classification for a definition of each one of these soft skills).

SKILL	1 Very Unimportant	2	3	4	5 Very Important
EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP					
COMMUNICATION					
CONFLICT RESOLUTION					
ABILITY TO INFLUENCE					
PERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS					
ACTIVE LISTENING					
CREATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING					
STRATEGIC THINKING					
DECISION MAKING					
TEAM BUILDING					
BEING ABLE TO CONVINC					
FLEXIBILITY					
UNDERSTANDING RELATIONSHIPS					
CONSULTATION					
SELF AWARENESS					
JUDGEMENT					
RESILIENCE					

Appendix 2: Calculating Soft Skill Development Priorities

Refer back to the scores you have input into the following two tables **Soft Skills Self-Evaluation** (Module One, Appendix One) and **Soft Skill Needs Assessment** (Module Three, Appendix One).

For each of the 17 matching pair of skills, subtract your self-evaluation score from the needs assessment score. The score you arrive at for each subtraction should lie in the range of -4 to +4. Transfer the score into the grid below under the column heading 'SCORE'.

SKILL	SCORE
EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP	
COMMUNICATION	
CONFLICT RESOLUTION	
ABILITY TO INFLUENCE	
PERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS	
ACTIVE LISTENING	
CREATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING	
STRATEGIC THINKING	
DECISION MAKING	
TEAM BUILDING	
BEING ABLE TO CONVINC	
FLEXIBILITY	
UNDERSTANDING RELATIONSHIPS	
CONSULTATION	
SELF AWARENESS	
JUDGEMENT	
RESILIENCE	