



Ulisse  
Soft Skills for Employability

EXERCISES FOR  
IMPROVING *WILLINGNESS*  
*TO LEARN*



## INTRODUCTION

The following exercises are proposed to improve the soft skill “Willingness to Learn”, which, according to the definition of the ULISSE project, means: Ability to learn from daily experiences and mistakes; proactivity in the search for continuous improvement; continuously update in the field of knowledge.

The exercises proposed are Word clouds, Live Polls, Self evaluation questionnaire and one called Give a little, Take a little.

### 1. Word clouds

*Word clouds are graphical representations of word frequency that give greater prominence to words that appear more frequently in a source text. You can generate word clouds using a free digital tool, i.e. mentimeter.*

*This activity is very helpful when you want to know what the audience thinks about a specific topic. It consists in asking the audience to choose one or more word as a synonymous of the defined topic. We recommend to use this tool at the beginning of the workshop before giving a formal definition of the topic to be discussed, and see how the students/participants describe it, what they already know about it. In this way a discussion can be generated by analyzing the prominence of the words most chosen by the audience.*

*The required amount of time to dedicate to this activity is at least 5 minutes.*

#### 1.1. Steps of the exercise

- 1. **Setup a word cloud**, before the workshop, creating a free account on mentimeter or similar tool*
- 2. **Share the link and the code** with the audience so that they can join the website on their smartphones*
- 2. **Explain the topic** and ask to write one or more words associated with it*
- 3. **Comment on the results**: the cloud will represent the most prominent words given by the audience so you can comment on these results.*

#### 1.2. Tools and resource

- *Mobile phone and WIFI*

#### 1.3. Suggestions for the trainers

*The teacher should be able to engage the audience when commenting the results.*

## 1.4. References

[www.mentimeter.com](http://www.mentimeter.com)

## 2. Live Polls

*The use of live polls during a workshop is the ideal way for engaging audiences of all sizes. Live polls, Q&A and open responses help you listen to your audience and enable everyone to contribute using their smartphones.*

*It is recommended to do this activity throughout the workshop to keep attention high.*

### 2.1. Steps of the activity

- 1. **Setup a Poll**, before the workshop, creating a free account on mentimeter or similar tool*
- 2. **Share the link and the code** with the audience so that they can join the website on their smartphones and give their answers*
- 3. **Comment on the results**: the application will show the answers on the and the audience can comment on these results.*

### 2.2. Tools and resources

- *Mobile phone and WIFI*

### 2.3. Suggestions for the trainers

- *The teacher should be able to engage the audience when commenting the results.*

### 2.4. References

- [www.mentimeter.com](http://www.mentimeter.com)

### 3. Self-evaluation questionnaire based on “Bring It On Life! A willingness to learn challenge”

*The purpose of this exercise is to help the participants to see if there is a pattern in the way they approach new things and to reflect on their fear of failure.*

*The questionnaire consists of 6 multiple-choice questions/scenarios with 4 possible answers.*

*For each question/scenario, each student should choose the answer that is closest to what she/he would do in that situation.*

#### 3.1. Tools and Resources

##### **Bring It On Life!** **A willingness to learn challenge**

*Everyone feels nervous when faced with new challenges, whether it’s your first day on the job or your first kiss; learning new skills (like learning to drive) or leaving school; or standing up to give a speech in front of a group.*

*It might be the first time you have to take a leadership role, like captain of the football team or leader at a youth group, or perhaps the first time you made pizza without any help to guide you.*

*What attitude do you have when you face a challenge or new opportunity? Do you see these as a chance to learn and get ahead in life — or do you shy away, thinking there’s a risk you’ll fail?*

*Below are a few questions to help you see if there’s a pattern in the way you approach new things. Choose the answer that is closest to what you would do in that situation.*

##### **Questions**

**Q1: Your mates are going to a rafting course. They’d like you to go with them, but you’ve never done it before and feel nervous about it. What do you do?**

- a) Go and give it a try. What’s the harm?
- b) Tell them you’ll go even though you haven’t done it before, so you’d like their help and understanding.
- c) Go with your mates, but make up an excuse about why you can’t do rafting once you get there.
- d) Make up an excuse and not go so your mates can’t see how nervous you are.

**Q2: You have been asked to coach one of the junior football teams. You have played football for years but have never done any coaching. What do you do?**

- a) Say yes and dive right in; you will learn as you go!
- b) Say you will do it if the head coach will mentor you.
- c) Put it off, saying you'll be ready next year.
- d) Say 'no thanks' because you don't think you have the skills to do the job.

**Q3: Your boss has asked you to strip wallpaper before a wall can be plastered and repainted. You have never stripped wallpaper before. What do you do?**

- a) Tell your boss that you don't know how but are keen to learn if he can show you how to do it.
- b) Say yes, then watch what the others are doing so you can copy them.
- c) Find a mate at work who knows how to do it and swap jobs with them.
- d) Make up an excuse why you can't do it so your boss can't criticise you.

**Q4: You have just started working in a bar. You get good feedbacks on your coffees; the boss and the customers seem to like you. How do you feel about this?**

- a) Happy that you are making a good start but keen to do even better.
- b) Pleased that at least there are no problems and that everyone is happy.
- c) Suspicious that everyone is just being nice because you're new.
- d) Wondering how long it can last before you make your first screw up.

**Q5: Your girl/boyfriend tells you could have made more of an effort when you met her/his parents to talk to them instead of being so silent. You respond by:**

- a) Saying that you understand and asking for tips on things to talk about.
- b) Saying that you did your best and will try to make more of an effort next time.
- c) Ignoring them and changing the subject.
- d) Getting angry at their criticism and refusing to go next time.

**Q6: The boss gives you feedback that you need to be more friendly and helpful to the customers. You:**

- a) Thank him for the feedback and ask for tips on how to do this better.
- b) Watch how your colleagues speak with customers and do what they do.
- c) Say that you are being friendly to most customers, but some are just annoying and ask too many questions.
- d) Say that you don't appreciate being picked on, especially given how you are selling more product than anyone else in the shop.

## Results

*Now take a few moments to look back over your answers. Do you notice any patterns in the way you responded to these questions?*

### ***If you answered with mostly As and Bs***

*You usually show a willingness to learn when you face challenges and opportunities. You know that the only way to develop any skill is to try something new — because growth only happens outside of your comfort zone.*

*You are not afraid to ask for support when you need it, and you pay attention to what other people who already have these skills are doing so that you can learn from them.*

*You also accept all feedback because you know skills take time and practice to master and everyone has to start somewhere. You understand making mistakes or not doing things perfectly is part of the process of developing a skill. You know that it's your courage to try new things, and the effort you put in, that will show your boss that you're committed to the job.*

### ***If you answered with mostly Cs and Ds***

*You're interested in opportunities to learn and develop; you might just lack the confidence to try something new and be worried that people will judge you if you don't get it right the first time.*

*All people, even successful people, have a voice inside their head telling them they can't or shouldn't try something new in case they make a fool of themselves. But these people know that we aren't born with skills; we have to develop them.*

*We all had to learn how to walk, talk, sing, dance, do a haka or play an instrument. This is the same at work. We have to develop the skills we need to do the job, and the trick is to turn down the volume on that voice so it's not so loud.*

*Next time you hear it, remind yourself that you have learned thousands of skills already, so you do have what it takes to nail it. And when someone chooses you to take on a new challenge or opportunity, remember that they've chosen you for a good reason. Whatever happens, it's the courage and commitment you show every day that shows your boss you're a good employee.*

### ***Some tips to remember when you're doing something new:***

- *Ask questions, look for advice and analyze opinions*
- *Read memories and life stories of successful people to learn from their experience*
- *Don't be afraid of failures – make them a boost, incentive and motivation to learn further*
- *Surround yourself with educated and inspiring people who will help you to acquire new knowledge*
- *Avoid pride, arrogance and I-know-it-all syndrome to continue self-development*
- *Keep your eyes on the prize. This will help motivate you.*

- *Make a start and keep moving forward. Eventually you'll get it done.*
- *Be aware of any feelings that come up and let them float past. You control your feelings – they don't control you.*
- *Ask for help if you need to. Trust that you will be able to get help if you need it.*
- *Remind yourself that you can do this! Be strong! Back yourself!*

## 3.2. References

“How to show willingness to learn” Karlton Laing <https://cometauckland.org.nz/resources/how-to-show-willingness-to-learn>

Self-evaluation questionnaire based on “Bring It On Life! A willingness to learn challenge” available on <https://cometauckland.org.nz/assets/files/Bring-It-On-Life-a-willingness-to-learn-challenge.pdf>

## 4. Give a little, Take a little

*The purpose of this exercise is to lead the participants to individually reflect on and to enunciate which competences or skills they would like to acquire, but also to reflect on their own competences and to enunciate what they would be willing to teach others. At the end, there could and should be (whenever possible) an exchange amongst the participants: when a participant detects a need that s/he can tackle, then s/he may volunteer to do so.*

*By doing this exercise, participants will have to reflect on their own competences and mentally explore the point to which they may be able to transfer them on to others. The same applies to the competences they don't have but would like to acquire; in this case, they will have to demonstrate some availability to accept a transfer of knowledge from someone else.*

*The time needed for this exercise may vary widely, depending on the level of interaction amongst participants, but it should not take longer than 20 minutes.*

### 4.1. Stages of the Exercise

1. *Hand out 2 post-its or cards to each participant, preferably of different colours.*
2. *Provide the participants with some time to reflect on their own competences (1 to 2 minutes). Each participant should write down on a post-it / card 1 competence that they feel they can transfer on to / teach others. On another post-it / card, they should write down 1 competence that they lack and would like to learn.*
3. *Participants should display their post-its / cards on a (vertical or horizontal) surface: on one side, they should place the competences they would be willing to teach, and on the other side they should place the competences they would like to learn.*



may be replaced by digital resources that perform the same task, such as text boxes or dialogue boxes.

*The on-line exercise may take a little longer.*

### 4.3. Tips for the trainers / teachers

*The Trainer/Facilitator should have in mind that the result will depend on the group's dynamics. Different groups and groups with a different number of participants may behave and/or interact in very distinct manners.*

*It is possible that during the analysis of the competences, participants don't show a lot of enthusiasm, so it is up to the Trainer/Facilitator to foster the group to point out the competences they would like to acquire.*

*The Trainer/Facilitator may try to foster the interaction amongst those who can teach a competence and those who wish to learn it, leading both parties to agree upon a moment for that transfer of knowledge to take place. The Trainer/Facilitator may ask for evidences of such encounter to be sent, but it should always be stressed that they are not forced to do so.*

*The process may be concluded by a group discussion to try to assess a match between the participants' expectations and their conclusions.*

### 4.4. References

Amabile, T. M., Hill, K. G., Hennessey, B. A., & Tighe, E. M. (1994). The work preference inventory: Assessing intrinsic and extrinsic motivational orientations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 66, 950-967. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.66.5.950

Courtney, S. (1992). *Why adults learn: Towards a theory of participation in adult education*. London, United Kingdom: Routledge.

Dweck, C. S. (1986). Motivational processes affecting learning. *The American Psychologist*, 41, 1040-1048. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.41.10.1040

Field, J. (2000). *Lifelong learning and the new educational order*. London, United Kingdom: Trentham Books.

Gorges, J., & Kandler, C. (2012). Adults' learning motivation: Expectancy of success, value, and the role of affective memories. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 22, 610-617. doi:10.1016/j.lindif.2011.09.016

Gorges, J., Kandler, C., & Bohner, G. (2012). Internationalization at home: Using learning motivation to predict students' attitudes toward teaching in a foreign language. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 53, 107-116. doi:10.1016/j.ijer.2012.03.001

- Jochems, W. (1991). Effects of learning and teaching in a foreign language. *European Journal of Engineering Education*, 16,309-316. doi:10.1080/03043799108939537
- Jopt, U. (1978). Fragebogen zur Erfassung des Selbstkonzepts eigener Fähigkeiten für Mathematik [Self-concept of mathematical abilities questionnaire]. Bochum, Germany: Kamp.
- Knapper, C., & Cropley, A. (2000). *Lifelong learning in higher education* (3rd ed.). London, United Kingdom: Routledge.
- Knowles, M. S., Holton, E. F., & Swanson, R. A. (2005). *The adult learner: The definitive classic in adult education and human resource development*. Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Elsevier.
- Krapp, A. (1999). Interest, motivation and learning: An educational-psychological perspective. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, 14, 23-40. doi:10.1007/BF03173109.
- Krapp, A. (2000b). Individuelle Interessen als Bedingung lebenslangen Lernens [Individual interest as a prerequisite for lifelong learning]. In F. Achtenhagen & W. Lempert (Eds.), *Lebenslanges Lernen im Beruf: Seine Grundlegung im Lebens- und Jugendalter: Psychologische Theorie, Empirie und Therapie* [Lifelong learning with regard to one's profession: Its foundation in adolescence] (Vol. 3, pp. 54-75). Opladen, Germany: Leske + Budrich.
- Krapp, A. (2005). Basic needs and the development of interest and intrinsic motivational orientations. *Learning and Instruction*, 15, 381-395. doi:10.1016/j.learninstruc.2005.07.007
- OECD [Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development]. (2005). *Promoting adult learning: Education and training policy*. Retrieved from [http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/promoting-adult-learning\\_9789264010932-en](http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/promoting-adult-learning_9789264010932-en)
- Renninger, K. A., Hidi, S., & Krapp, A. (Eds.). (1992). *The role of interest in learning and development*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Schaeper, H. (2008). Lernen von anderen Ländern? Internationale Perspektiven zur Teilnahme an Hochschulweiterbildung [Learning from other countries? International perspectives on participation in higher further education]. REPORT. *Zeitschrift für Weiterbildungsforschung*, 1, 19-29. <http://d-nb.info/1014037425/34#page=19>
- Schwinger, M., & Stiensmeier-Pelster, J. (2010). Zusammenhänge zwischen Self-Handicapping, Lernverhalten und Leistung in der Schule [The Relationship between self-handicapping, learning behavior and achievement in school]. *Unterrichtswissenschaft*, 38, 266-283. <http://www.juventa.de/#>
- Steinmayr, R., & Spinath, B. (2009). The importance of motivation as a predictor of school achievement. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 19, 80-90. doi:10.1016/j.lindif.2008.05.004