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Service-level provision guide: soft skills

NCP GUIDE

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Content

Introduction

NCPs are ambassadors for Horizon Europe according to Minimum standards and Guiding principles for setting up systems of National Contact Points under Horizon Europe. NCPs core functions are: Informing and awareness raising; Assisting, advising and training; Signposting and cooperation. The qualitative performance of the mentioned functions requires the possession of specific qualities, among which soft skills are of crucial.

This guide consists of Introduction and four different sections and has been based on the results of the questionnaire and our own experience. The Introduction provides few definitions of soft skills and lists their types. The following parts of the guide address a different soft skill that are the most important in each NCP's daily work:

➔ Public speaking

➔ E-mail writing

➔ Team Working

➔ Time Management.

As mentioned above, the analysis of soft skills starts with their definition. A selection of soft skills definitions is presented below:

→ Soft skills are your superpower. They are now emerging as critical because they make you more adaptive and resilient in a radically changing world. Soft skills enable you to navigate. They are the key to getting jobs, being promoted and developing successful careers;

→ Soft skills are the personal character traits or qualities each of us has. They make us who we are, generally encompassing our attitudes, habits and how we interact with other people. They refer to abilities that make people better employees and open doors for many opportunities;

→ Soft or social skills are those personal values and interpersonal skills that determine a person's ability to work well with others in a team. Soft skills are needed to deal with the external world and to work in a collaborative manner with one's colleagues;

→ Soft skills is the term used for those skills that are not technical. These are the skills that define your relationships with other people, or how you approach life and work.

A large number of soft skills are known today (Figure 1). However, a different set of soft skills is required for a specific type/nature of work, especially for NCP.

Communication Skills   **Team Working Skills**   **Leadership Skills**   **Problem Solving Skills**   **Time Management**

Critical Thinking   **Decision Making**   **Self-motivation**   **Empathy**   **Work Ethic**

[1] Rajinda Jayasinghe, Soft skills are your superpower, https://www.unicef.org/rosa/stories/soft-skills-are-your-superpower Horizon Europe thematic area, which aims to implement concrete measures to support Widening participation and strengthening the ERA (European Research Area) through variety of financial mechanisms

[2] Soft skills 1 st edition©2017 Manmohan Joshi & book.com, http://worldwideuniversity.org/library/bookboon/soft-skills.pdf

[3] Soft Skills For Effective Communication, https://ncert.nic.in/textbook/pdf/kect108.pdf

[4] What are Soft Skills? https://www.skillsyouneed.com/general/soft-skills.html

[5] This section of the guide was written using Arina Nikitina, Successful Public Speaking: https://gtu.ge/Agro-Lib/successful-public-speaking.pdf

[6] Presentations made for scientists, entrepreneurs, representatives of ministries or other public institutions should differ.

Public speaking skills

One of NCP's responsibilities is informing stakeholders, providing knowledge, and the latest news. Therefore training, webinars, briefings etc. are essential part of NCP's work. During such events, the ability to speak in public and make quality presentations is underestimated. For this reason, this part will provide techniques, advices and tips on public speaking skills.

Before you start preparing your speech, you need to do your "homework". In order to make your speech both interesting and memorable, it is important to consider three key elements:

➡ **The audience** – WHO is the speech written for? Knowing your audience: number, age, gender, professional background and interests will give you valuable ideas on what to talk about and how to find the right angle for the speech that is both original and easy for your listeners to understand.

➡ **The purpose** – WHAT is the main objective of the speech? Identifying the main objective of the speech helps to choose the best presentation style. Try to answer for the following questions: Why are you speaking? Is your goal to encourage participation in Horizon Europe? To educate/give latest news? Or perhaps the opposite - to get some information/feedback? Maybe to change old beliefs about participation in European Union programmes?

➡ **The modalities of the speech** – HOW will the speech be presented? There are some organizational details of the speech that need to be decided: Whether or not your speech includes showing any videos or slide shows? Will it be recorded? Will it be online or onsite? Do you want to leave time for Q&A session at the end of your speech? Will you invite other speakers?

To a large extent, success of the speech depends on how well the presenter follows the Three P's rule (Figure 2).

Preparation · Practice · Performance

The first element of the Three P's rule is a SMART Speech Preparation formula, which allows any speaker to make great presentation:

→ **Select your material** – gather as much information as it is possible about the topic of your speech;

→ **Map out an outline** – it allows you to organize ideas, highlight the major points and bring together the elements of the speech in a logical sequence. The basic speech outline template contains 5 main elements:

→ **Introduction** – is the opening part of your presentation where you state your core message, list key points that you would like to talk about in your speech, or name a problem that needs to be solved. Well written introduction answers two questions: what is in it for your listeners and why should they care?

→ **Body of the speech** – makes up around 70-80% of your speech. It contains the detailed explanation of the key points stated in the introduction, links various concepts together;

→ **Conclusion** – summarizes the core message of the presentation, recaps the main points and states the main speech idea. Conclusion should take only 5% (maximum 10%) of your speech and should end on a strong note;

→ **Attention grabber** – is an unusual statement, a question, a gesture, a story or a long pause that is intended to start the presentation, to "grab" the audience's attention;

→ **Call-to-action** – is the closing part of the speech that leaves the audience with something to think about or empowers them to take specific action.

→ **Add humour and personality** - let your personality, opinions and even sense of humour shine through your speech;

→ **Revise your speech** – very good idea is to create a written draft of your speech. You do not have to write the whole speech, but definitely include the paragraphs that you do not want to forget or rephrase. After you have finished the draft of your speech, think of how it can be improved:

→ **Consider making your sentences shorter,** especially the ones with emotional content ("If not now-when?", "If not us – who?", "Yes, we can")

→ **Repeat the key idea over and over again** throughout your presentation. It helps your listeners to remember it;

→ **Include questions**, phrases that allow you to interact with your audience and establish emotional connection with them.

→ **Tie loose ends together** – make sure that you start and end your speech with a strong statement, that your introduction is consistent with your conclusion.

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[7] Don't make a "Thank you for your attention" slide at the end. Of course, verbally thank your audience.
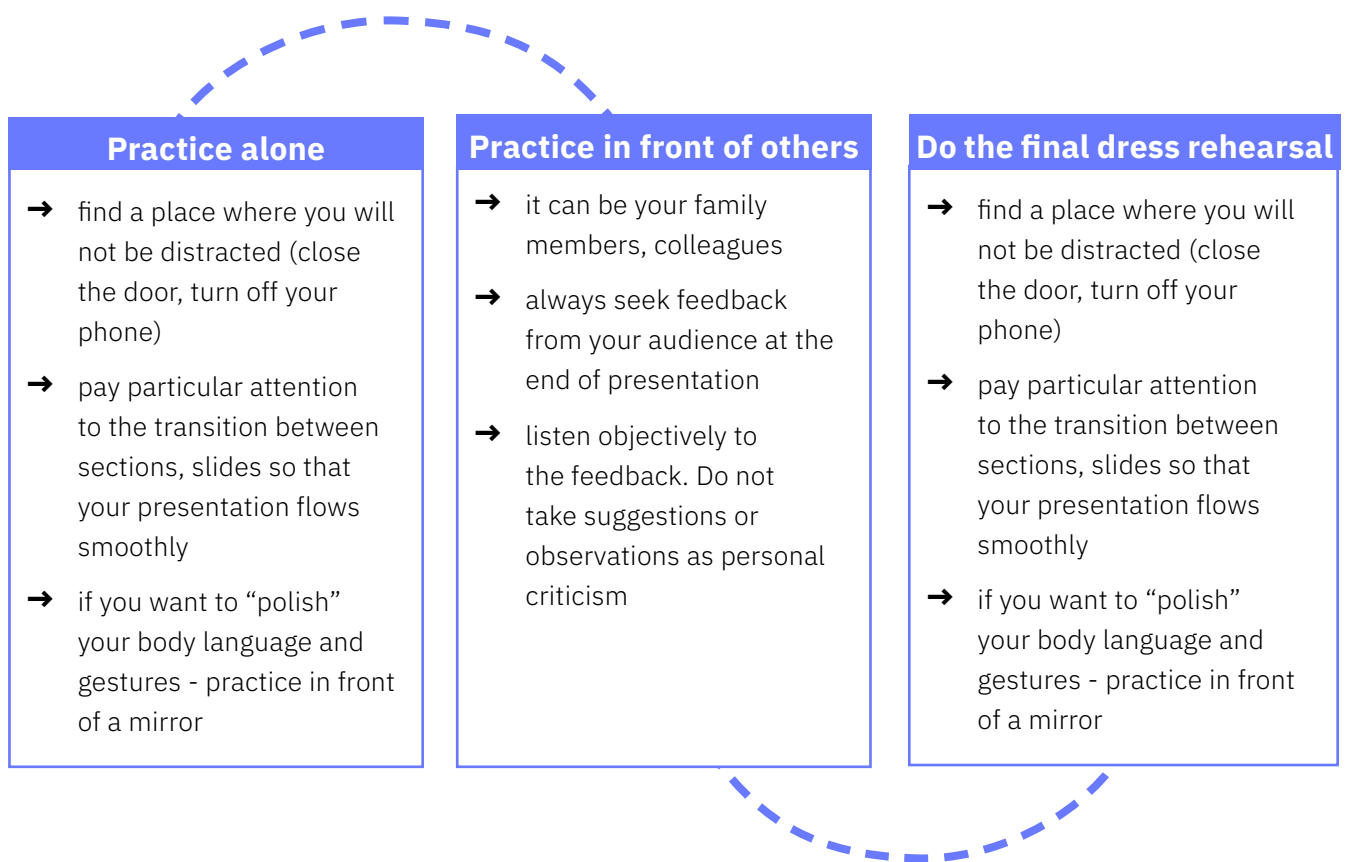
[8] Make sure it does not sound like an essay or a detailed description of a scientific experiment.

[9] One of the most common questions formula is asking "Who has ever been/felt/did…, raise your hand!"

The second P is in Three P's formula is Practice. Public speaking, just as any other skill, requires constant practice in order to be improved. The more you talk in public, the more you train your mind and body to recognize speaking as a familiar and safe situation, the more confident you will be. Before practicing your speech, it is good idea to prepare "cue" cards or cheat sheets that you will use during the presentation. The "cue" cards may contain: key words, transition phrases, statistic data that you want to share with your audience.

There are three types of practice: alone, in front of other people and final dress rehearsal (Figure 3).

The last but not least Three P's element is Performance. Be optimist and believe that your presentation will go wonderfully. Think of unexpected and challenging questions that you could be asked during your presentation. Also, consider what could go wrong and try to find effective solutions to either prevent or resolve it.

Practice alone

➜ find a place where you will not be distracted (close the door, turn off your phone)

➜ pay particular attention to the transition between sections, slides so that your presentation flows smoothly

➜ if you want to "polish" your body language and gestures - practice in front of a mirror

Practice in front of others

➜ it can be your family members, colleagues

➜ always seek feedback from your audience at the end of presentation

➜ listen objectively to the feedback. Do not take suggestions or observations as personal criticism

Do the final dress rehearsal

➜ find a place where you will not be distracted (close the door, turn off your phone)

➜ pay particular attention to the transition between sections, slides so that your presentation flows smoothly

➜ if you want to "polish" your body language and gestures - practice in front of a mirror

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Here are some useful tips when giving a speech:

➜ greet your audience with smile even if the topic of your speech is a serious one;

➜ do not introduce your presentation with "just

real quick", "briefly" or similar words. The message that your audience receives is: "this isn't really important";

➜ make yourself be heard – speak to the person sitting farthest away from you so that your speech can be easily heard by everyone in the room;

➜ face your audience – in delivering your speech look at and speak to your audience;

➜ do not diminish or underestimate your audience – it is not a good idea to use phrases

like "this is probably new to you" or "you probably don't know what this means";

→ claim attention – the attention span of an average person lasts about 5-10 minutes. It is the task of the speaker to keep the listeners focused on the presentation (below you will find advice on storytelling, body language, voice, pauses)

→ Finish on time – people rarely want to listen to someone, who talks longer than was expected.

In the table below, you can find some more advices, which can help you to prepare a great speech.

Voice

→ Talking at fast pace (speed) makes it challenging for the listeners to keep up with the speaker and follow the speaker's train of thought;

→ Speaking at a slow pace leaves your audience too much time to process your message and their thoughts will soon start to wander off to other topics;

→ On average the appropriate pace of the speech is around 1 000 word per 7 minutes (around 140-150 words per minute);

→ Research shows that low-pitch speaking voices are preferable to the listeners as they are associated with authority, credibility, strength and self-confidence;

→ Variation of voice during a presentation is the easiest way to: avoid monotony and hold the audience's interest; make certain words and ideas stand out; add colour and excitement to the speech;

→ Varying the loudness of a voice during presentation can be very effective in stressing an important point and make people lean forward to hear what is being said.

Body language

Numerous psychological findings show that non-verbal communication and especially body language accounts for as much as 55% of the message received by the audience.

First of all, you should keep your posture relaxed and upright. Do not lean or grip the lectern and avoid shifting your weight from one foot to another as it can be distracting. If you speak from behind a lectern, it is a good idea to step away occasionally. Movement in the direction of your listeners is a sign of trust and openness.
Be careful of using hand gestures that reveal anxiety such as clenching your hands together, clutching notes, fiddling your clothing or hiding your hands in pockets. Even if you are nervous, practice speaking with your arms relaxed at your sides as it helps to convey your calm attitude, sincerity and openness.
When it comes to establishing a connection with your audience and winning their admiration, there is nothing more effective than a genuine smile. As a speaker, you should be the first one to demonstrate your sympathy and interest in your audience and the best way to do it is by smiling and looking at your listeners as you talk.

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[10] To clarify potential questions, a "Questions for Speakers" section can be included in the form for event registration. This way you will be able to prepare in advance, direct your presentation to topics of interest to your audience and, of course, reduce your stress.

[11] E.g.: always have a backup copy of your presentation. Also, ask for copies of other participants' presentations - in case you are the organizer of the event. So that you can share the presentation in case of technical problems. A very good solution to reduce the risk of technical problems (in the case of an online event) is to organize, for example, the day before or an hour before the event, an online preparatory meeting and allow all presenters to make their presentations available, check the microphone, etc.

The power of pause:

→ Public speaking is not just about talking in public, it is also about listening to your audience. Pauses are used for underline the last thing that was said, to give time for the listeners to absorb the information etc. Most pauses used during public speaking can be divided in following categories:

→ Short pauses (0,5 – 2 seconds) – mainly used for separating thoughts, emphasizing the last word;

→ pontaneity pauses – used when the speaker is searching for the right word or pretending to reflect on something. Spontaneity pauses can be planned, because they make speech look more natural and less rehearsed;

→ Long pauses - used to revitalize forces, increase audience concentration.

Storytelling

Everyone loves to listen to stories. However, many of the speakers avoid storytelling in their presentation, believing that they have to keep their speech formal. This is one of the main reasons they often fail to grab their audience's attention and establish an atmosphere of trust and respect with their listeners. Professional public speakers use storytelling in their presentations with the aim to: relieve tension; make important points of the presentation memorable; establish connection with the audience; encourage thinking etc. The best stories to use in your public speech may involve true facts from your professional life and experience (mistakes & challenges); success stories from famous people's biographies.

In conclusion, it should also be noted that it is common practice after trainings/seminars/workshops, etc. to send an email thanking participants for their participation, attaching materials and a short survey with a few questions. Participants' comments and observations are worth their weight in gold - with their help, you can improve your skills in making public speeches.

[10] From ministries, higher education institutions, research centres, etc.

E-mail writing skills

An essential part of everyday NCP work is writing and/or responding to e-mails. For this reason it is very important to know the e-mail writing etiquette to establish and maintain good relations (with stakeholders; colleagues of other public institutions as domestic as well as foreign), create an image of yourself as an NCP, but also of the entire institution you represent. In this part of the guide, we will focus only on formal correspondence: present sender and receiver perspectives and the most important tips for writing e-mails.

The analysis of e-mail writing skill let's begin by emphasizing a very important point: the sender and receiver see things from drastically different points of views (Figure 4).

With such different perspectives, it is no wonder that recipients get the kinds of e-mails they receive, and that senders wonder why their e-mails are not getting a response. The first advice we want to give in this guide is: consider your reader when you write. After you have written an important document, take off your head and put on the head of the reader.

Ask yourself:

➜   Is your message clear and concise?

➜   Is there anything that could be misinterpreted?

➜   Have you beaten about the bush instead of getting to the point?

➜   Does your e-mail convey a good impression?

➜   Is the language appropriate considering your status and the reader's?

➜   Have you used words you would use if you were speaking to the reader?

Writing effective e-mails is a skill that can be learned. In the table below, we have listed the most important email writing tips.

The sender

➜   Spends a long time crafting the 'perfect' (-ly long) e-mail

➜   Believes that their request is original, unique, and special and that they are first to ask for such favours

➜   Cannot imagine why anyone would turn them away

➜   Wants to tell the whole story, explained from every angle, so that the listener can understand their point of view

The receiver

➜   Gets a lot of emails

➜   May receive comments regularly, if they are a public figure

➜   Regularly gets asked a standard set of questions and favours

➜   Does not have a lot of free time

Tip	Description	Examples
Subject Line – like newspaper headlines	→ Should offer the purpose of the email, but it should also be brief. Of course, this doesn't mean that the subject line should consist of a single word. In this case they are not informative and don't give the reader an idea of how important your message is.	✘ Invitation ✚ Invitation to NCP_WIDERA.NET Event in Warsaw, 5-7.09.2022 ✘ Budget ✚ Budget Revision Request
On-site (face-to-face)	→ Choosing a greeting may appear to be an easy task, but you have to choose the appropriate level of formality. Emailing a colleague with whom you are friends is different from emailing your supervisor or European Commission officer.	✚ Dear [Name] ✘ Hi/Hello [Name]
Hybrid	→ Write in a natural way, not in a false, fake way that takes too much effort and sounds insincere. When you do this, you will put your personality and individuality into your message. This will help you to develop great relationships.	✘ Please furnish me with this information at your soonest. ✚ Please let me have this information soon. ✘ Kindly revert to me asap. ✚ I hope to hear from you soon.
	→ Remember the KISS principle: Keep It Short and Simple → This means instead of long or complex words, use short ones. KISS also means using one word instead of long phrases where appropriate. People today have many documents to read. They are too busy to try to decipher long-winded sentences full of long words and redundant phrases.	→ Replace: require → need visualize → see purchase → buy terminate → end commence → start I should be glad if you would → please We would like to ask you to → please At the present moment in time → now In the very near future → soon
	→ Active voice is more alive and personalised, clear, transparent and easy to understand, with its focus on active verbs. The personal context makes it more positive and interesting.	✘ The cause of the ensuing situation has been investigated. ✚ I have looked into the issue. ✘ Arrangements have been made to repeat any necessary documents by post immediately. ✘ I made arrangements and documents were sent to you by post today.

Tip	Description	Examples
Show empathy and your smile	→ Messages written in stiff, wooden language containing pure facts will do little to create bonds or build relationships. Take time to put some thought and show some feelings in your emails.	✖ Invitation ✚ Invitation to NCP_WIDERA.NET Event in Warsaw, 5-7.09.2022 ✖ Budget ✚ Budget Revision Request
Use positive words to get positive results	→ Presenting yourself as an optimist is a well-proven strategy of success.	✖ If you do not return your form before 10 October, it will be too late for you to attend the event. ✚ Please return your form before 2 August to register for this conference.
Use lists and bullets	→ Bulleted and numbered lists help you to: → focus your reader's attention on key points → simplify the skimming process for busy readers → enhance visual appeal	✖ We would like the event to address the essence of Horizon Europe, with an emphasis on the participation statistics of widening countries, the possibilities of increasing their participation in HE, as well as the financial and legal aspects. ✚ We would like the event to cover: Horizon Europe general overview widening countries participation statistics possibilities for increasing the participation of widening countries financial and legal aspects.
Use verbs not nouns	→ Nominalisations (instead of using a verb, e.g. to disseminate, the writers use the noun, dissemination) appear all over our writing. It makes sentences longer, your writing less lively, less human, and more bureaucratic.	✖ I will help you with the dissemination of the information. ✚ I will help to disseminate the information. ✖ In recognition of the necessity of better staff training, the company made a decision on the recruitment of a Training Director. ✚ The company recognised that it needed better staff training, so they decided to recruit a Training Director.

Tip	Description	Examples
Keep active	➜ Active voice is more alive and personalised, clear, transparent and easy to understand, with its focus on active verbs. The personal context makes it more positive and interesting.	✖ The cause of the ensuing situation has been investigated. ✚ I have looked into the issue. ✖ Arrangements have been made to repeat any necessary documents by post immediately. ✚ I made arrangements and documents were sent to you by post today.
Touch up your email tone	➜ Always consider these four important factors and adopt an appropriate tone that reflects: ➜ your status ➜ the reader's status ➜ your relationship with the reader ➜ the content of the message ➜ Never ignore the need to use an appropriate tone, or your message could sound aggressive, rude, sarcastic, condescending or even offensive.	✖ We cannot do anything about your problem. ✚ I am very sorry that I cannot help. Please contact Mr. X from Department Y (Tel. No. :....)
Sign-off	➜ Your closing is extremely important because it lets the reader knows who is contacting them. Make sure you include all relevant details: full name, professional title, name of institution/company, phone number, and social media info	

Shirley Taylor, 25 Success Strategies to Supercharge your Email and Business Writing Skills, https://www.studocu.com/row/document/hunan-university-of-commerce/business-administration/25-success-strategies-email-business-writing-shirley-taylor/7577638

And one last tip for email writing skills: always re-read and check for spelling and grammar errors before sending. Good relations with stakeholders and reputation are cornerstones of NCP's work, so create them and strengthen with the help off e-mail writing etiquette.

Team working skills

Another very important soft skill in NCP work is team working - a feature that is used every day and without which it is impossible for the NCP team to work effectively. The review of a given soft skill will begin by defining "team working" followed by characterizing the roles in the team and finally providing tips for improving team working skills.

There are many definitions of "team working" in the literature, a few are presented below:

"a cooperative process that allows ordinary people to achieve extraordinary results" (Scarnati);

"the process of people actively working together to achieve a common goal" (Schermerhorn & Wright);

�juː that in teams, which consists of "two or more individuals, everyone has specified roles interacting adaptively, interdependently, and dynamically" (Salas, Sims, and Burke);

➔ that team is composed of "a small number of people with complementary skills" (Katzenbach and Smith);

➔ that team is "a group of people who perform interdependent tasks to work toward accomplishing a common mission or specific objective".

"an essential part of workplace success. Like a basketball team working together to set up the perfect shot, every team member has a specific role to play in accomplishing tasks on the job. Although it may seem as if one player scored the basket, that basket was made possible by many people's planning, coordination, and cooperation to get that player the ball".

In all the definitions presented above, one of the most important aspect that appears is the common goal that the team is aiming for. The definitions of "team" are also very similar, however, they emphasize several following points:

➔ In the aforementioned definitions, one very important point is emphasized - the roles played by individuals. Therefore, the next step in this guide is the characteristics of the roles in the team as it is very important to understand who plays what role in order to increase the efficiency of NCP work. For this purpose, it has been selected Meredith Belbin's team role model. Table below describes all the roles by the given model.

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[13] Pina Tarricone, Joe Luca, Successful teamwork: A case study, Edith Cowan University, Perth, Australia, https://ro.ecu.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=5007&context=ecuworks

[14] A. M. Clark, L. Martins-Crane, M. Zhan, J. T. Dellinger, Teamwork: An Open Access Practical Guide, Mavs Open Press Arlington, https://uta.pressbooks.pub/teamworkstudent/

[15] Skills to Pay the Bills, https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/odep/topics/youth/softskills/teamwork.pdf

Belbin's team roles

Shaper

This role requires a serious-minded, prudent approach with a built-in immunity from being over-enthusiastic. High critical-thinking ability is also a requirement for this role as well as an ability to consider all factors.

Role in a team:

➜ analysing problems and evaluating ideas and suggestions, weighing the pros and cons of different options. This can slow down decision-making.

Implementer

The Implementer role provides the team with a person who always has an eye on the practical aspects of any decision. Executing this role requires practical common sense and a good deal of self-control, discipline, and an ability to tackle problems in a systematic fashion. On a wider front, this role requires high levels of reliability and a capacity for applied action. Individuals who execute this role effectively can be seen to lack spontaneity and show signs of rigidity.

Role in a team:

➜ necessary to keep the team focused on what needs to be done. An aptitude for establishing project plans and anticipating barriers that need to be addressed is required.

Shaper

The Shaper role is associated with high levels of motivation, a lot of energy and a strong need for achievement. If obstacles arise, this role is required to find a way around them.

Role in a team:

➜ to drive forward progress. As the name implies, this contribution shapes group discussion or activities.

Plant

Innovators and inventors that can be highly creative. They provide the seeds and ideas from which major developments spring. Usually, they prefer to operate by themselves at some distance from the other members of the team. Plants tend to be introverted and react strongly to criticism and praise. They are independent, clever, and original, but as mentioned, they may be weak in communicating with other people. Most Plants also don't pay much attention to practical issues like feasibility or deadlines.

Role in a team:

➜ to generate new proposals and to solve complex problems. The Plant role is often needed in the initial stages of a project or when a project is failing to progress.

Monitor Evaluator

This role requires a serious-minded, prudent approach with a built-in immunity from being over-enthusiastic. High critical-thinking ability is also a requirement for this role as well as an ability to consider all factors.

Role in a team:

➜ analysing problems and evaluating ideas and suggestions, weighing the pros and cons of different options. This can slow down decision-making.

Specialist

Acquire technical skills and specialized knowledge. Their priorities focus on maintaining professional standards and on furthering and defending their own field. Eventually, they become an expert by sheer commitment along a narrow front. Specialists command support because they know more about their subject than anyone else and can usually be called upon to make decisions based on in-depth experience. While they show great pride in their own subject, they may lack interest in other people's subjects.

Role in a team:

➜ provides the rare skill or knowledge that is key to fixing the problem being addressed

Completer Finisher

This role requires a serious-minded, prudent approach with a built-in immunity from being over-enthusiastic. High critical-thinking ability is also a requirement for this role as well as an ability to consider all factors.

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Completer Finisher

This role represents people who have a great capacity for follow-through and attention to detail. Individuals who excel at this role may be motivated by internal anxiety and are not often keen on delegating, preferring to tackle all tasks themselves. In management, they excel by the high standards to which they aspire and by their concern for precision, attention to detail, and follow-through.

Role in a team:

➜ This role is essential when there are tasks that demand close concentration and a high degree of accuracy. Having this role filled effectively will enable the team to execute plans to the tiniest detail, meeting high standards of performance at every step.

Resource Investigator

This role brings a lot of energy to the team. Those that execute this role well are often enthusiastic, extroverted, and quick to act. They are good at communicating with people both inside and outside the company/organisation. They just naturally foster connections with lots of people, and will use those connections to help identify solutions to problems and to draw in expertise when the team needs it. Although not necessarily a great source of original ideas, bringing to the team other people's ideas and developing them is the function they fulfil. As the name suggests, they are skilled at finding out what is available and bringing it back to the team.

Role in a team:

➜ exploring and reporting back on ideas, developments or resources outside the team.

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Completer Finisher

This role is characterized by a great capacity for flexibility and for adapting to different situations and people. Being perceptive and diplomatic are attributes that are required to fulfil this role. Good listening skills are important as is the ability to work with sensitivity with others on the team. Team Workers are concerned that the team works well as a unit. They will always be looking for ways to smooth over tense situations while making sure that all viewpoints are acknowledged. Very often Team Workers feel a discomfort with conflict

Role in a team:

➔ to prevent interpersonal problems from festering within a team and thus allowing all team members to contribute effectively.

Completer Finisher

Teams need individuals who are quick to spot individuals' talents and to use them in the pursuit of group objectives. Those that do a good job at the Coordinator role are well placed when put in charge of a team of people with diverse skills and personal characteristics. Their motto might well be "consultation with control" and they usually believe in tackling problems calmly. Mature, trusting and confident, they delegate readily.

Role in a team:

➔ tto motivate others to work towards shared goals. While not necessarily the cleverest members of a team, Coordinators have a broad outlook and generally command respect.

The presented model shows how many and how varied are the roles in the team. It is very important to know who in your

NCP's team plays what role, as this will enable to increase its effectiveness.

Concluding the analysis of Team working skills, the following tips for improving team working are provided:

Set out your team's mission and purpose

For a team to work, everybody needs to understand and buy into the shared mission and then put it above his or her own individual goals. It is recommended getting teams on board with this by asking to consider, Why is your working together, as a team, more valuable than just the sum of your individual efforts? Setting targets for individuals is still important, but for maximizing teamwork success, everybody needs to commit to a common goal.

Be clear about roles

Team members should be clear about their roles and responsibilities, and everyone needs to understand, and feel confident about, the particular strengths they bring to the team. Team size and structure are important: It's not good relying on a few key personalities. If a team is too small, you won't have the right mix of skills, thinking styles and behaviors. On the other hand, if a team is too big, people can get lazy and more prone to groupthink. Diversity is vital in team, so try to get a mix of ages, socio-economic backgrounds, ethnicities and genders. The diverse teams can offer greater innovation and creativity, and a competitive advantage.

Give constructive feedback

Teams will grow and develop much faster when given constructive feedback than when left to wonder how they're doing, or only being criticized.

Communicate effectively

Thanks to the recent explosion in remote working, communication has never been as important as a team working skill. Famous teams from bands to sports teams credit good communication for building a sense of camaraderie. According to Mike Schoultz: "The manner of communication — how freely and frequently team members communicate – determines the effectiveness of the team."

Recognize and reward teamwork

It's crucial teams know when they're doing well. You can recognize good performance with extrinsic rewards – like a bonus – and intrinsic – like praise from senior leaders. If you make it clear the rewards are for the whole team, this will reinforce the sense of team cohesion.

Encourage openness and trust

Trust is the vital ingredient in team success. Without it, your teams won't communicate effectively and solve problems together. Trust will begin to build when you encourage people to speak freely without fear of a snarky or angry response. You'll also find the insights and creativity starting to flow, as people are less afraid of speaking up.

Manage conflict

All teams experience conflict from time to time. The key to success is the way it's managed and resolved. Again, you can lead by example here by promptly and empathetically dealing with conflict as it arises.

Make sure everyone's accountable

Accountability relates back to having clearly defined roles and knowing the part you play in the team's success or failure.

Time management skills

NCP work requires very good time management, otherwise you will constantly miss your duties and the amount of work will overwhelm you. There is a saying: It is not time which needs to be managed - it is ourselves.

It illustrates very well that the problem is within ourselves. In this part of the guide, we will present some techniques to help you with good time management in each working day as an NCP (Figure 5).

To-Do Lists	Urgent/important matrix	Managing interruptions

Figure 5. Time management technique

Table 4. Activity Log				
Date/Time	Activity Description	Duration	How I feel?	Value (High, Medium, Low, None)

Figure 5. This section of the guide was written based on three sources: Time Management Toolkit, Published by Mind Tools Limited 2009-2011, https://www2.howard.edu/sites/default/files/TimeManagementToolkit. pdf; Time Management. 10 Strategies for Better Time Management, Published by the University of Georgia in cooperation with Fort Valley State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and counties of the state, 2020, https://www.fcs.uga.edu/docs/Time_Management_update_8.20_C_1042_3_.PDF; Time Management, Baker University, https://www.bakeru.edu/images/pdf/BL_undergrad/Leadersource/Time_Management.pdf

However, before you start using any time management technique, you should do an Activity Log which will help you to analyse how you actually spend your time. With an Active Log, you will be able to:

→ identify your most time-consuming tasks and determine whether you are investing your time in the most important activities;

→ identify and eliminate time-wasting or low-yield jobs;

→ be more realistic in planning and estimating how much time is available for activities (because you will have a good sense of the time required for routine tasks);

→ know changes in your energy, alertness and effectiveness throughout the day, so that you can carry out your most important tasks at the right time.

→ You should use an Active Log for at least a few days to get reliable results. Below you can find an example of an Activity Log table (Table 4).

Once you analysed yourself, you can start applying time management techniques.

→ The first and simplest method of time management is TO-DO LIST. To-Do Lists are prioritized lists of all of the tasks that you need to carry out. They list everything that you have to do, with the most important tasks at the top of the list, and the least important tasks at the bottom.
By keeping a To-Do List, you make sure that you capture all of the tasks you have to complete in one place. This is essential if you're not going to forget things.
In addition, by prioritizing work, you plan the order in which you'll do things, so you can tell what needs your immediate attention, and what you can quietly forget about until much, much later. This is essential if you're going to beat work overload.
https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/worksheetsindex.htm

A second, more advanced time management technique is URGENT/IMPORTANT MATRIX - a powerful way of thinking about priorities.
Using it helps you overcome the natural tendency to focus on urgent activities, so that you can keep clear enough time to focus on what's really important. Managing time effectively, and achieving the things that you want to achieve, means spending your time on things that are important and not just urgent.
To do this, and to minimize the stress of having too many tight deadlines, you need to understand this distinction:

→ Important activities have an outcome that leads to the achievement of your goals.

→ Urgent activities demand immediate attention, and are often associated with the achievement of someone else's goals.

The steps below help you use the matrix to prioritize your activities:

→ list all the activities and projects you have to do (make To-do List);

→ assign importance to each of the activities – you can do this on, say, a scale of 1 to 5: remember, this is a measure of how important the activity is in helping you meet your goals and objectives. Try not to think about urgency at this stage, as this helps get to the true importance;

→ evaluate the urgency of each activity;

→ schedule your priorities according to two criteria: importance and urgency (Figure 6).

Covey and Merrill (1994) categorize activities into four quadrants in their Time Management Matrix:
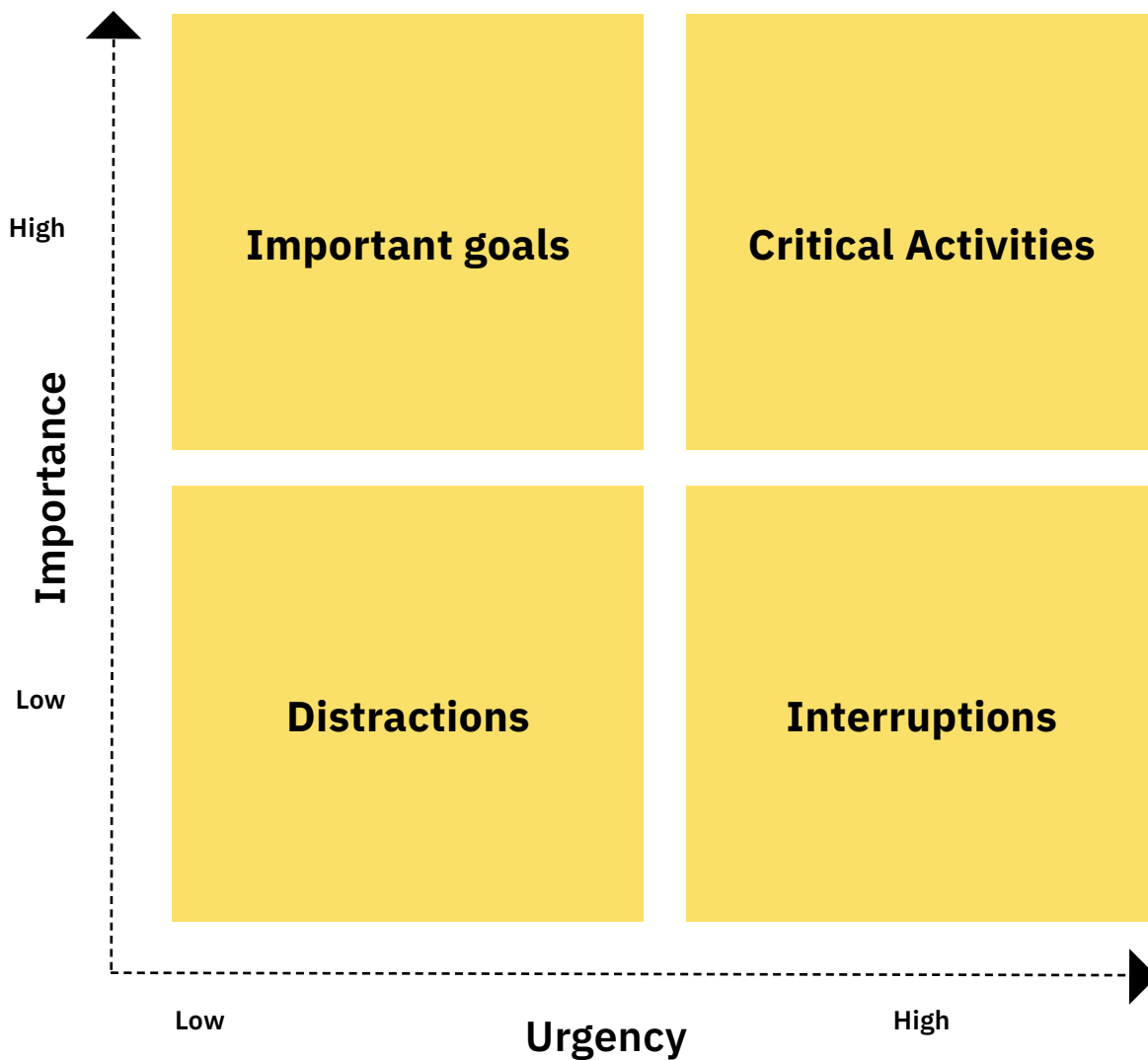
Urgent and Important - Do these tasks as soon as possible. There are two distinct types of urgent and important activities: ones that you could not foresee, and others that you have left to the last minute. You can avoid the latter by planning ahead and avoiding procrastination. Issues and crises, on the other hand, cannot always be foreseen or avoided. Here, the best approach is to leave some time in your schedule to handle unexpected issues and unplanned important activities.

Not Urgent, but Important - Make sure that you have plenty of time to do these things properly. These are the activities that help you achieve your personal and professional goals, and complete important work.

Urgent and Not Important - activities that stop you achieving your goals, and prevent you from completing your work. Ask yourself whether these tasks can be rescheduled, or whether someone else could do them. A common source of such interruptions is from other people in your office. Sometimes it's appropriate to say "No" to people, or encourage them to solve the problem themselves.

Not Urgent and Not Important - these activities are just a distraction, and should be avoided if possible. Some can simply be ignored. Others are activities that other people may want you to do, but they do not contribute to your own desired outcomes. Again, say "No" politely and firmly if you can.

The Urgent/Important Matrix helps you look at your task list, and quickly identify the activities you should focus on. Experts agree that the most important tasks usually aren't the most urgent tasks. However, we tend to let the urgent tasks dominate our lives. The method described above will help you avoid such mistakes.

Interrupters Log				
Person	**Date/Time**	**Description of Interruption**	**Is it valid**	**Is it urgent**

Keep an Interrupters Log (Table 6). This is a simple record of the interruptions you experience during the workday as an NCP. Keep your Interrupters Log with you every day for at least a week, recording every interruption you experience, and marking down the person interrupting you; what the interruption is; whether it was valid; and whether it was urgent (or whether someone could have waited until a better time).

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[23] An example is the organization of events, following the official announcement of calls for proposals by the European Commission.

Analyse and Conquer Interruptions - once you have recorded the interruptions for a week, analyse the information. Which interruptions are valid and which are not? You need to deal with the valid interruptions. As for the interruptions that are not valid, you must find a way to block these out in the future. Look at how urgent the interruptions were, and whether they could have been pre-empted. You can pre-empt many interruptions by holding routine meetings with people. However, some interruptions are both urgent and valid. You need to be interrupted, and you need to deal with the situation. From your Interrupters Log, you'll see how much time is taken up by these urgent, valid interruptions. Block this time into your schedule as "contingency time".

Learn to Say "No" - It's often acceptable to say "no" to requests or tasks if you are busy when someone else can handle it, if it is not an important task, or if it can be done later. When this is the case, saying "no" in a courteous and sincere way, followed by a short explanation is the best course of action to take: "I am working against a very tight deadline on an important project right now so, I am sorry, but I cannot help".

"Available" and "Unavailable" Time - Simple yet effective: let people know when you are available and when you are not.

Make sure that people know that during your "unavailable time", they should only interrupt you if they have to.

"Invitation Only" Time - Schedule regular check-in times for the individuals you talk to most often. Ask these people to keep a running list of things that they need to discuss, so you can cover all the points at one time. Moreover, force yourself to do the same.

Switch off the pop-up and dodge the ding-dong - Most email programs have an alert facility that means we are interrupted regularly by a little bell or a beep, or just a pop-up appearing at the corner of our screens. These interruptions can interfere with your planned work and add frustration and stress to your workload. Consider switching off your email alert for a certain time.

Finally, we want to give you some more tips:

Take breaks - To work for long periods can decrease energy, as well as increase stress, tension, and boredom.

Avoid clutter - In most cases; clutter can hinder concentration and cause frustration and tension. When you find your desk becoming chaotic, take time to organize.

Avoid perfectionism - There is a difference between striving for excellence and for perfection; the first being attainable, gratifying and healthy, while the second is often unattainable, frustrating, and neurotic.

Don't procrastinate - People put off tasks for a variety of reasons (the task seems overwhelming or unpleasant). To help stop procrastination, consider "eating the big frog first." A quote commonly attributed to Mark Twain says, "If it's your job to eat a frog today, it's best to do it first thing in the morning. And if it's your job to eat two frogs, it's best to eat the big frog first." Unpleasant tasks we procrastinate completing are "big frogs." Complete these tasks as your first action of the day to get them out of the way. Another option is to "snowball" your tasks by breaking them down into smaller segments, completing preparatory tasks, and eventually completing the larger task at hand.

Delegate - Learn to delegate the challenging and rewarding tasks.

Avoid Multi-tasking - Psychological studies have shown that multi-tasking does not save time. You lose time when switching from one task to another, resulting in a loss of productivity (Rubinsteim, Meyer, and Evans, 2001). Routine multi-tasking may lead to difficulty in concentrating and maintaining focus. Do your best to focus on just one task at a time by keeping your area clear of distractions.

NCP's work is very diverse and requires a combination of many soft skills. Remember – your soft skills are your superpower.

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