

Soft Skills Lab

„During our Summer School we have reserved an afternoon for “Soft Skills”. About 80 international PhD students will participate. We want to introduce the topic to them and make them aware of how important communication and self management competences are for their careers...”

Usually Soft Skills trainings are for groups of up to 12 participants. Large groups – as you typically find them at conferences and retreats – require different methods. We “invented” the Soft Skills Lab as an experimental, highly creative approach that is closely related to the Change Theatre of the Business World

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Together with my partners from the well-established, highly professional Company “VitaminT 4 Change” www.vitamint.com we adapted their key method for large group inventions to fit the particular requirements of young scientists.

Idea and Philosophy

Change Theatre provides the target group with a new perception of their daily life. It holds up a mirror for your participants to observe their own current situation from a bird’s eye view. As the actors act as a proxy for your participants, slipping into their roles and daily situations, discovering behaviour patterns and trying out new ways of handling challenging situations can happen with fun and free of anxieties.

Procedure of the Soft Skills Lab

- 1) **Analysis:** Our actors slip into the roles of the participants “on stage” and portray topics of their daily lives as PhD students. The scenes visualize situations which are frequently seen as difficult and stressful by the participants and have a potential for optimisation. The “audience” takes part in the fine-tuning of the scenarios.
- 2) **Optimization:** The participants form small working groups. Each group brainstorms for options to change the attitude and improve the behaviour of the portrayed characters. Together they develop a coaching guide.
- 3) **Replay:** All participants re-ensemble in the plenum. Each small group presents its coaching guide to our role characters. Then the scenes are replayed using the new ideas thus creating new solutions to old problems.
- 4) **Transfer:** Until now, the actors have acted for the audience, providing them a mirror image of themselves. Now, all participants transfer their realizations into their daily life.

Time and Location:

This method requires 3-4 hours uninterrupted time. The room should be spacious enough to allow enough space in the front for the actors to move and all participants should have a good view, i.e. a large lecture room would be perfect. In addition there should be some space for group work.