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## Working methods and tools for use in a WRC

*Here, we describe working methods and tools that can be used by a WRC. In some cases these have been developed by WRCs while others have been borrowed from other sources and adapted to WRC work. All methods for counselling and development can be used by a WRC as long as the principles – grassroots perspective, empowerment, management by demand and respect for the individual and the individual's needs and wishes – that are fundamental for a WRC are kept in mind. The methods can be freely used and further developed.*

### Counselling

#### Potential for development

Counselling is a useful and effective method for working professionally in a WRC and providing support to members. Counselling helps in orientation, decision making and planning for the future, and focuses on:

- the effective conduct of a supportive relationship
- dialogue
- non-dominant discussion
- change or realignment of behaviour on the basis of a learning process
- a process of clarification of the next steps

Counselling involves working in a structured way, based on a supportive relationship, which makes it possible for women to develop a self-respectful understanding of the actual situation. Counselling helps them to reflect on this situation, find new orientations and proceed to the next steps in a positive way. Based on the conviction that every woman has the capability for development within herself, the task of counselling is to create the right conditions for her to find and activate her potential for development.

The aims of counselling are thus:

- to provide support in arriving at self-respectful understanding

- to help in gaining awareness of what is really important to aim for
- to assist the thought process and reflection on the actual situation
- to provide support in arriving at decisions

#### The use of counselling

A WRC can provide support by counselling women in many different situations, for example when they want to:

- enter or re-enter the labour market
- improve their working position
- start or develop their own business
- start up a women's rural co-operative or improve an existing one

The WRC approach is based on a number of important principles. Every woman is a unique case and the WRC has to fully respect the priorities of the women concerned and their own particular circumstances. The relationship between the women and the advisors/counsellors is equal at all levels. The counselling process is proactive and participatory.

#### Some examples of best practice

##### Employment Service

The Ergani Centre in Thessaloniki, Greece, has an Employment Service. This service ensures the smooth entry or re-entry of women to the labour market. The counselling in this service aims at heightening the women's social skills and professional competences in order to meet the demands of the labour market.

##### Entrepreneurship Service

The Entrepreneurship Service run by Ergani Centre supports candidate entrepreneurs in defining their business idea, in step-by-step guidance on how to establish a company, and in exploring funding opportunities for the future sustainability of the company. This service also supports active businesswomen in identifying and solving problems in their companies and in planning their future development combined with courses on topics such as advertising, marketing and customer relations.

### Company start-up Ready Reference Card

The Regional Resource Centre in Skåne, Sweden has developed a Company start-up Ready Reference Card. The purpose of this card is to help women who are thinking of starting their own companies to evaluate, develop, and, if they so wish, put their ideas into practice. Anybody who is thinking of starting her own company can take part, regardless of how advanced the plans are. There are three levels:

- Should I start my own company? – I have an idea!
- I want to start my own company – is it a viable idea?
- I intend to start my own company – from idea to enterprise

For each of the three levels the Company start-up Ready Reference Card presents a list of which contacts have to be taken and what preparations need to be made in order to advance to the next level. The card also supplies contact information to local networks, organisations and authorities that the prospective entrepreneur may find useful at each level. Women taking part in this scheme receive an introductory consultation which gives them support in placing themselves and their business concept at the right level.

The participants commit to taking part in two individual meetings with personal counselling, at least three group meetings, and after completing the programme to return the card, annotated with information about what they have done, to the Regional Resource Centre for women in Skåne. The project offers the women, free of charge:

- participation in group meetings in a coaching programme with other prospective entrepreneurs
- counselling based on the level of company start-up they are currently at
- guidance from and ongoing contact with the project leader
- participation in inspirational meetings offered in the local area
- visits to local networks, organisations and meetings geared at entrepreneurs

## Mentoring

### *Mentor and mentee*

Mentoring is the conscious matching of two people, where the one is less knowledgeable and experienced and can learn from the other. One person, the mentor, assumes the part of role model with the task of helping the mentee develop personally, develop their company, or develop in their work role. The mentoring programme for people with small businesses fills an important need since small businesses aren't able to benefit from the competence of external experts larger companies have in their boards of directors. Mentoring is a way of creating better conditions for company development and business growth.

A mentoring programme creates networks, spreads knowledge and offers a unique opportunity for an entrepreneur to gain advantage from a more experienced person's expertise and knowledge. When the relationship between mentor and mentee works well, there is a high chance that it will be rewarding and educational for both parties. Depending on wishes, needs and practical circumstances, women or men can be mentors for the women participating in the scheme.

Mentoring is a win-win-activity. It is a human relationship in which partners learn to respect and to appreciate each other. The mentor works voluntarily and is not paid for the commission as mentor. Confidentiality is a very important element in mentoring and has to be agreed on in a written agreement between mentor and mentee.

A mentoring programme includes meetings between mentor and mentee. Most programmes also include common meetings where all the mentees and mentors can make new contacts and learn new things. Mentors and mentees might have different needs, so there could also be separate meetings for mentors and mentees respectively.

## Recruitment and matching

It is essential that the recruitment of participants and matching of mentors and mentees is conducted proficiently to ensure that the mentoring programme is rewarding for the participants. Often the participants are recruited first and then suitable mentors are found based on the mentees' circumstances and wishes. It is important that those who are responsible for the programme put a great deal of care and effort into ensuring that the mentee is provided with a suitable mentor. Introductory training in being a mentor is necessary for those assuming this role. The mentees need information about what a mentoring programme is and what they can expect.

## A successful mentoring programme

A mentoring programme normally runs for one year. During this time the mentee and the mentor meet about once a month for 2–4 hours. The mentee decides the course the discussions take, based on their own needs. They are usually provided with a list of topics that are good to discuss, for example finances, marketing, sales, development or production. The person responsible for the programme maintains ongoing contact with the mentee and mentor and solves any problems that might arise.

### 10 points for a successful mentoring programme

1. Ensure you have an excellent project leader
2. Define goals and target group
3. Market the programme
4. Assign sufficient resources to the recruitment of mentees and mentors and for matching
5. Offer meetings for mentees and mentors to delve further into issues
6. Offer separate meetings for mentees and mentors
7. Offer individual adaptation, not all common meetings need be obligatory for both mentors and mentees
8. Let the mentoring programme run for one year, and conclude with an evaluation one year later
9. Establish a framework for the mentoring programme that can be re-used
10. Maintain enthusiasm and involvement!

## Group mentoring

### Pair mentoring or group mentoring

The traditional way of mentoring is pair mentoring. Another mentoring model is group mentoring. It depends on the needs, demands and qualifications of the potential participants as well as on the entrepreneurial environment and attitudes to entrepreneurship which one to choose.

### Who is group mentoring for?

The potential participants in group mentoring are interested in developing their businesses through networking and practical cooperation. They are open-minded and ready to receive new viewpoints as well as to discuss their own businesses and exchange experiences within the group.

The group mentoring description below is from The FEM Mentoring Manual Guidelines. These Guidelines are based on women entrepreneurs' mentoring experiences in 7 countries during the Interreg IIIB FEM project in 2004-2007. It is based on experiences in both group and pair mentoring. In the FEM project, pair mentoring has been more successful in countries with shorter business traditions. Whereas in those countries with longer business traditions they have succeeded with group mentoring far beyond their expectations.

### Group mentoring

In group mentoring there is a group, usually 4-6 mentees and a mentor. The mentees will be chosen first and then, according to their wishes, the mentor. In group mentoring the role of both the mentor and mentees is different compared to pair mentoring. The mentor guides and facilitates the group in the chosen direction and the mentees act as mentors to each other. The main role in the group lies with the mentees.

Participating in group mentoring can in many ways be more demanding than participating in pair mentoring. The mentees need to believe in themselves and their businesses and to have the courage to share their experiences with others, even though they are in the same situation. However, it can be very rewarding, too. The mentees receive various opinions, suggestions and advice from their fellow mentees who work in the same society and know the business environment inside out.

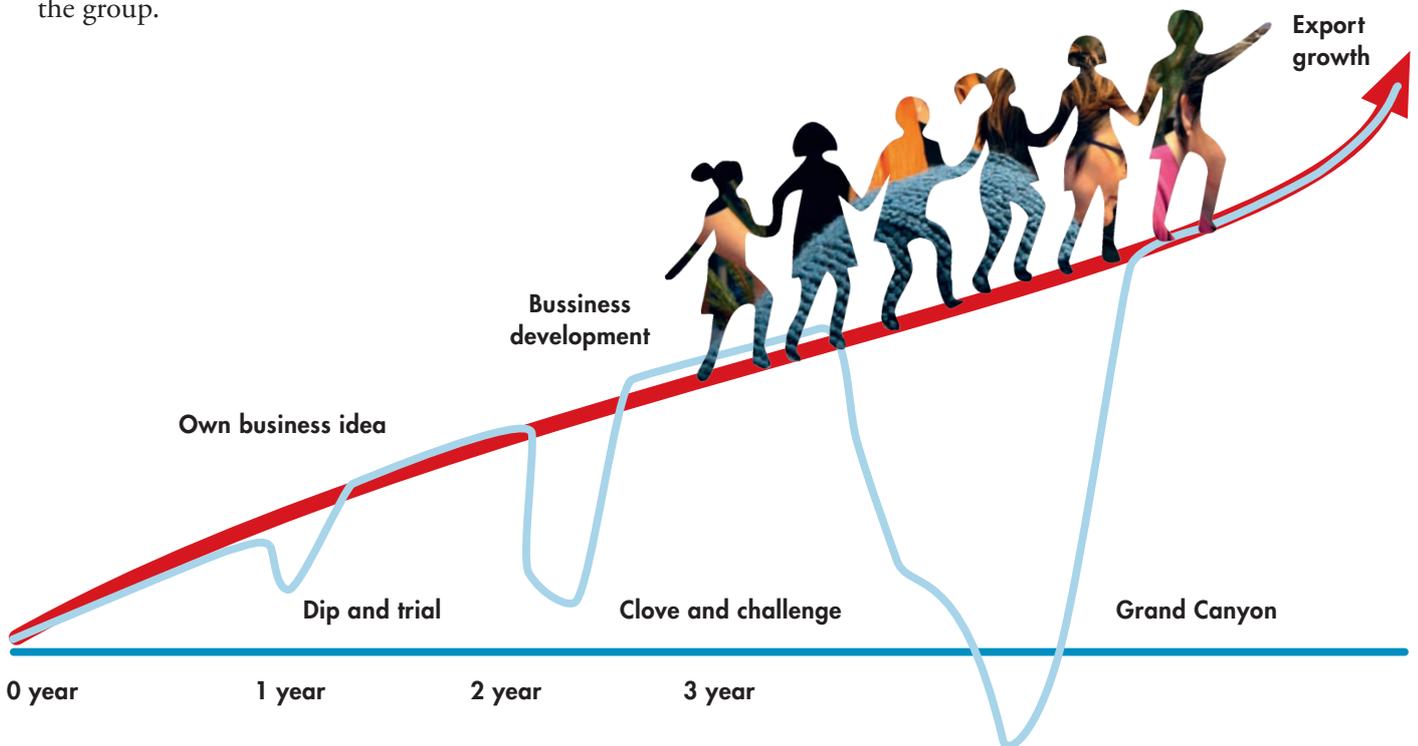
### Benefits of group mentoring

- activates and builds mentees' self-confidence, helping them realise how much they know and can help the others
- all participants gain new experiences and contacts with many people, instead of only one, they also learn practical networking and cooperation skills
- the group becomes a team, when everybody in the group has enough confidence in herself everybody contributes by giving credit to the other participants, their capabilities and achievements
- all participants have a responsibility to give support to the group.

### Limits of group mentoring

- one mentor may not be as good together with the whole group
- the composition of the group can be restricting for the exchange of views if there is not any common factor
- lack of commitment if not all mentees are equally keen and do not participate regularly.

To avoid these limitations or risks the selection of mentor and mentees in the group must be carried out with extreme thoroughness.



## Business Success Team

### The idea of a Business Success Team

A Business Success Team is a new approach in the pattern of contacts and networks. The idea is for businesswomen from different branches to meet regularly to motivate and support each other in the management and development of their own enterprises. The Business Success Team is a group of 4-6 people, who meet regularly every 3-4 weeks to support each other and to help each other achieve their stated goals. This programme usually takes at least 6 months, depending on the composition of the group.

Activities in a Business Success Team focus on improving participants' abilities in starting up and managing a

*Get together is a begin, stay together is the improvement and work together is the success!*  
Henry Ford

business, and on motivating each other and sharing their individual experiences.

### The aims are in particular:

1. to systemise goals (detect and formulate)
2. to maintain the initially high motivation
3. to draw in external suggestions and impulses

The idea of Success Teams comes from the USA, a method invented by Barbara Sher, and Ulrike Bergmann brought this idea to Germany in the 1990s. WRCs in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern have been working with Success Teams since 2000 and this has inspired WRCs in Sweden to start working with the method too.

The idea of Success Teams can be used with various groups of women. Here, we describe how it has been used with women running their own businesses. It can also be used in groups where the participants have other wishes for personal or professional development.

### Results

Women in Success Teams achieve their aims faster and improve their self-discipline and management thanks to the regular meetings and the motivational impact of the group dynamics. Important factors include group pressure on members, the interactive structure of the work challenge and the development of common strategies to achieve aims. The communicative interchange and social support from others working alone, and celebrating achievements together with like-minded people are other positive success factors.

### Requirements

There are various requirements for running a Business Success Team, including readiness to participate in a team with people in a similar situation e.g. entrepreneurs. Each member pursues concrete aims and receives back-up in achieving them, everyone can rely on assistance from the others. Specific collaboration guidelines ensure an efficient approach. The survival and success of the team is dependent on the commitment of the individual members. The members need

1. time, energy, stamina
2. trust in each other
3. a positive attitude
4. discretion
5. honesty in sharing experiences – related to problems and failures as well as successes
6. appreciation of each other
7. respectful communication
8. constructive criticism

### How does it work?

Clearly structured 'rounds of talks' are held, participants taking turns to chair the meeting, a journal is kept, and discussion within the group leads to the establishment of a Business Success Team.

Each meeting lasts 2–3 hours and has three stages or rounds: getting started, back-up and aim.

#### Round 1: Getting started

Every participant reports on the progress of her work since the last meeting, what stated plans she has achieved, what has happened since the last meeting, what she has done, what she has achieved. Which issues has she been successful with?

Talking time is limited to 3 -5 minutes for each participant. The aim of the first round is to assess, schedule the topics of the meeting and practice self-assessment.

#### Round 2: Back-up

The goal of this round is to re-assess together and to find solutions for difficult issues and situations. The method provides a number of questions to guide the discussion:

1. Where have I not progressed?
2. What aspects have I developed?
3. What are the explanations?
4. What ideas and solutions can I contribute to help the other participants?
5. How should I proceed in the future?
6. Which more effective practices can I use?

#### Round 3: Aims

In this round each participant defines her aims ahead of the next meeting. These goals are recorded in the form of a journal, so that it can be checked that the participants work in a goal-orientated manner. Each participant has about two minutes to state her aims, particularly what will be achieved by the next meeting. The targets gain strength by being recorded in a journal, they are more clearly defined and easier to check because of the positive formulation and because a date is given for goal attainment.

## Example of best practice

### Study visit

During the cooperative project between the Regional Resource Centres in Skåne, Sweden and Mecklenburg-Westpomerania, Germany it was realised, that there was a lot of interest in organising an exchange of experiences between businesswomen in both countries. Since 2006 we have arranged 3-day study trips for Swedish and German businesswomen who are interested in cooperation, in March and September. The study trips' theme is a Forum for Bilateral Business and is aimed at women who are already established entrepreneurs and women who are planning to start their own business. Target industries: Tourism, Wellness and Health, Consulting, Fashion and Design and development of regional products.

### New markets and business contacts

The goals of the study visit are:

- to set the stage for new business opportunities to develop
- to create a forum for introducing participants' businesses to each other
- to take advantages of the services and schemes WRCs and networks can offer in supporting female entrepreneurs
- to learn from businesswomen in neighbouring countries and reflect on ones' own business situation
- to focus on the improvement of skills in starting up and managing a business, and to motivate each other and share collective experiences.

Special targets are:

1. to establish business contacts between female entrepreneurs in Mecklenburg- Westpomerania/ Germany and Skåne /Sweden

2. to transfer business ideas and experiences
  - a. in managing entrepreneurial tasks
  - b. in setting up a business successfully
  - c. in development of business cooperation
  - d. in involvement in associations and WRCs
3. to set up new enterprises, new services and new projects for cooperation in future.

### Special focus and networking topics for the businesswomen and WRC staff

The exchange of experiences concentrates on various issues such as:

- the structure of the work in WRCs
- the profile of activities
- the competences of WRC staff
- cooperation amongst associations and networks, e.g. the WRC Christina in Kristianstad, Sweden and Women into Business, Rostock, Germany
- regional lobbying for female entrepreneurs, cooperation with local councils, projects for families, regional and economic development and the supporting structure for female entrepreneurs.

Each participant learns to prepare a presentation of her own business in English and to present her own experiences in starting up and managing an enterprise.

Other topics discussed as a result of our study trips include the transfer of the Business Success Teams method from Mecklenburg- Westpomerania into the profile of the WRCs in Sweden. Another result is a project within the EU Interreg IVA South Baltic programme on Connecting Business Potentials over the borders – Going Abroad together with WRCs and Germany, Sweden and Lithuania.



Swedish National Federation  
of Resource Centres for women



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