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**Family skills as a potential source of innovative  
human resources development  
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The image shows the cover of a brochure for 'Skills analysis'. The cover is white with a blue dashed line on the left edge. It features a large, light blue graphic of three curved lines on the left side. The text 'Skills analysis' is written vertically in blue. To the right, there is a circular logo with three colored lines (yellow, green, blue) passing through it. Below the logo, the text 'Skills analysis' is written in blue. Underneath, it says 'An instrument for self-assessment and career development for' followed by a list of three bullet points: 'working parents', 'those interested in further education', and 'women returning to work'. A horizontal blue line is at the bottom of the text area.

**Skills analysis**

**Skills analysis**

An instrument for self-assessment  
and career development for

- ◆ working parents
- ◆ those interested in further education
- ◆ women returning to work

The project "skills analysis" is funded by the EU Commission's programme "Gender equality" and the German Ministry of Family, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth. Project partners are KAB Süddeutschland e.V. (Christine Nussart – Project Management), Deutsches Jugendinstitut e.V. (Annemarie Gerzer-Sass, Wolfgang Erler, Jürgen Sass) and our cooperation partners in the Netherlands "De Jong & Van Doome-Huiskes en Partners" (Wilma Henderikse) and Great Britain "Fair-Play Consortium" (Liz Bavidge). The project is scheduled to run from June 1999 to June 2001. In its preliminary phase (until June 2000), the project aimed at developing methods for identifying and validating family skills suitable for application in the field. The result, i.e. the skills balance, was presented at an international workshop in Brussels in September 2000, and will now be reviewed for suitability and, if necessary, improved in joint collaboration with 15 selected companies, follow-up training institutions and, on an individual level, with users. After project completion, the skills balance will be made accessible to the interested parties amongst the general public.

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# **Family skills as a potential source of innovative human resources development**

This paper introduces the "skills balance" tool, which was developed within the scope of a research project. With the help of this tool, the project aims to utilise family-related qualification potentials for the purposes of corporate human resources development. To this end, family work and informal skills gained outside the workplace need to be recognised within the corporate context. The skills balance thus provides corporate human resources development with a tool enabling recognition of employee skills, especially those acquired in family life, and exploiting the competencies potential associated therewith. In this way, the skills balance is embedded in the discussion surrounding the goal of finding better ways of combining family life and parental employment and is seen as a building-block helping to achieve a fairer distribution of family-related tasks and employment between the genders.

## **1. Family: one of different ways of life – but a learning place of inestimable value**

Although living in a family is only one of a number of different forms of cohabitation, it will, however, continue to exist in many changing forms and guises: the nuclear family to the same extent as the unmarried couple with children, the single parent with child(ren) or the newly built family practising social parenthood (step families, adopted families and many different forms of foster/care families). "It is no longer possible to assume, query or definitely say what family, marriage, parentage, sexuality, eroticism and love are, mean, should or might be; they vary in terms of contents, exclusions, norms, morals, and possibilities and must be deciphered, negotiated, coordinated and justified in all details regarding how, what, why or why not." (Beck/Beck-Gernsheim 1990). Accordingly, in the year 2000, the concept of family is no simple programme. When it comes to the learning of skills, however, it is an effective one. In light of the above, family life deserves closer scrutiny to ascertain the skills acquired within the scope of tasks performed within the family and the way in which these skills can be utilised for a person's own work-related situation and further development.

The main justification for the above is that conventional technical and professional qualifications are becoming outdated at an increasingly fast pace due to new working-world structures resulting from technological and organisational changes. In the wake of this

process, supra-professional qualifications – key-qualifications or lifelong learning – and social skills are gaining increasingly in importance. And this trend is not limited to the requirements of high profile jobs. Informal processes and places of learning are thus increasingly moving to the centre of interest, as far as the theory and practice of skills development are concerned.

The family, as one of the key areas of life outside the workplace, including the experiences and activities associated therewith is, however, only just beginning to be recognised as a place where skills are learned that can be exploited by companies. So far, this area of life has tended to be viewed rather as the source of performance deficits and skills loss. Family work, however, actually teaches us work-relevant skills, regardless of whether we acquire such skills parallel to gainful employment or during a family phase. These skills are mainly those of women/mothers, which is why the transfer of qualifications acquired in family life has been limited to traditional female, i.e. domestic, educational and social fields of work, so far.

Partnership-oriented fathers actively participating in everyday family life and child raising possess these family-related skills, too. Research into how family skills can be transferred to the world of work should therefore not focus on mothers alone but also include fathers. This is especially true, given the fact that conventional male-female roles are changing, mainly and especially as a consequence of the transformation of the working world. A brief digression therefore follows, in which these interactions are outlined

## **2. The changes in the role played by family cannot be understood in isolation from the transitions in the working world**

Generally, industrialised societies have resolved the conflicting demands of family life and work by a functional division of labour between men and women, as observed throughout all social strata. The intergender contract based on this division of labour brought great instabilities in its wake, involving, as it did, inequality of the contractual partners, economic dependencies and the lack of visibility as well as social marginality of the female component of the gender-based division of labour. The American anthropologist James Scott calls this principle functional transparency. In the private sphere, in particular, this principle was enforced by linking it with certain values, e.g. the key value that maternal child raising is superior to all other forms of upbringing. Within a single generation, however, structural

changes in the national economy have led to a decline in the share of industrial jobs from 50 to 33 per cent, enabling an expansiory growth of the service sector and the development of the high-tech labour market (Bertram 1997). The principle of functional transparency, characterised by fixed time schemas, lifelong employment possibilities with one and the same employer and a clear division between male-female roles, is only found to a limited extent in these new sectors. This transition is distinguished not only by more flexible working hours, shorter periods of employment and patchwork biographies but also by a growing interest in highly-qualified women.

This trend goes hand in hand with two key sociopolitical issues: how are equal opportunities to be achieved between the genders and how can they be reconciled with beneficial development opportunities for children at the same time? These questions can only be answered if the problem of combining a family with employment, still generally seen by politics, business, the media and the general public as part of social policy for women, is understood as a joint task aiming at enabling active maternal and paternal parenthood in spite of increasingly flexible and mobile workplaces.

### **3. Combining job and family is not a women's-policy topic but one that concerns mothers and fathers**

The topic of combining work and family should thus not remain a women's-policy subject and can only be achieved successfully, if a fairer male-female division of family work is possible in the crucial family phases. To achieve a fairer male-female division of labour, the true nature of "family work" must be investigated. Does the latter merely produce the famous "black hole", referred to by many employers as "lost time" – which is accepted in our culture, albeit only just, in the case of women – or will an approach in which family-related skills are recognised by companies and the general public enable us to achieve closer links between family life and work, two hitherto separate areas? This would be urgently necessary, since the period of life between the ages of 25 and 40, i.e. the years during which families are established and expanded, is also the period when companies require an especially large degree of flexibility and mobility as well as increased commitment to the job. Currently, this conflict of interests results either in partnership conflicts, the majority of which are resolved by women struggling to balance work and family life on their own by accepting high stress

levels, or in deliberate childlessness. The "divorce peak", occurring when children are aged between three and four years, and the high level of childlessness among women with university education are two indications of this conflict of interests (Bien 1996). This trend is further intensified by the fact that the traditional "three-phase model" (employment, non-employment for a lengthy period after childbirth, resumption of employment at a later stage) is becoming less and less relevant, as demonstrated by a comparative study conducted in 1977 and 1985, which investigated the working life of women (Engelbrecht 1987). Apart from the above, it has become evident that the "three-phase model" is preferred most by the group with the lowest educational qualifications and that the higher the qualifications, the shorter the break in working life, even within the scope of parental leave.

The fact that women now have better access to higher education has also proved to be an element affecting their plans for their future life: the higher a woman's education, the later in life she will marry and bear children and the more frequently she will wish to have a shorter break in her working life or to work and have a family at the same time (Tölke 1991, Bien 1996, Seidenspinner et al. 1996). Our system of values has changed, not least due to the women's liberation movement. The family is no longer the sole point of reference in a woman's life; instead, her job has now become equally important (Erler et al. 1988, Seidenspinner et al. 1996).

The question of combining work with family life is thus not only a matter of underlying conditions such as more flexible working hours and requirement-oriented child care offers but also, and first and foremost, a matter of how the male role can be detached from its unilateral functional definition as the main provider and "worker". This cannot be achieved merely through a "process of re-education" alone but will necessitate a cultural change which must also be supported to a large extent by companies. All recent studies give testimony to the desire to be able to be "more of a father". Achievement of this goal, however, soon encounters obstacles: financial reasons are cited in this context and above all non-acceptance by employers, e.g. when fathers wish to take part of parental leave (Vaskovica/Rost 1999). Satisfaction with their roles on the part of both parents, however, has an especially crucial influence on the atmosphere in the family and thereby on children's positive development. A US study reveals that in cases involving couples with two working partners, a more family-friendly employment culture enables a happier partnership, reduces stress and thus contributes to a positive climate in the family (Fulgini et al. 1995), thus demonstrating empirically that

satisfaction with the workplace situation influences family relations, especially the way parents deal with their children, to a greater extent than has been assumed so far. Vice versa, however, a positive family climate also enriches employee motivation and the workplace climate (Crockenberg/Litmann 1991, Paulson/Koman 1990, Fuligini et al. 1995).

So far, measures taken by companies addressing the question of how to establish a balance between family life and work have been aimed at women or mothers. To date, the significance for corporate policy of family-friendly offers tailored to fathers has not, or has only just been recognised or made the subject of discussion (Busch 1997). Admittedly, scientific studies repeatedly draw attention to the significance and responsibility of fathers for families (Fthenakis/Griebel 1993, Seehausen 1995) and call for a family policy that includes mothers and fathers to an equal extent (Wingen 1991). Now, however, questions are being raised that go further than this, e.g. how additional skills gained through family-related tasks can be utilised at the workplace and what, apart from support for women, must be included in what is referred to as a "family-friendly corporate policy".

Approaches such as the "work and family" audit attempt to introduce in a comprehensive and systematic manner the topic of balancing work and family life as an important area of corporate responsibility for the first time. Crucial in this respect is the fact that an awareness process has been triggered among the participating companies in which "family life" is no longer regarded as the goal of individual or concomitant corporate social measures but understood as an integral part of corporate responsibilities and strategies. Even if this process is still in its infancy, it nevertheless implies a change of paradigm in corporate policy; so far, the latter has been oriented to the market and in-company performance criteria and has failed, or almost completely failed, to include the family as a resource and innovation potential (Sass 2000).

To support this change of paradigm, the research project "Family skills as a potential source of innovative human resources development" endeavours to provide a tool according to which the time taken off to bring up the kids and for family work is no longer regarded as "lost time" as far as one's career path is concerned but as time in which additional qualifications are obtained.

#### **4. Enhanced skills through family work – an attempt at re-evaluation**

The trend and transition in the working world is accompanied by a re-assessment of learning. Lifelong learning is the magic formula that will allow successful transition to the knowledge-based economy and society. The EU Commission defines lifelong learning as "all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence" (EU Commission 2000). In this context, informal learning places move to the centre of attention in an addition to formal learning places such as educational and training institutions. Admittedly, the family is mentioned, along with leisure time and communities, as an informal place of learning, but no further reference is made to it subsequently. Since the learning and practising of social skills, however, are associated with informal places of learning, and more recent studies have confirmed that over 70% of social skills are acquired outside institutionalised places of learning (Livingstone 1998), failure to increase the focus on families is a shortcoming.

The project "Family skills as a potential source of innovative human resources development" attempts to remedy this shortcoming. The project aims at recording and evaluating the social skills gained through family work with the help of a newly developed tool, the skills balance, and then making these skills utilisable by companies. In recent years, strategies and procedures for imparting and validating social skills have become increasingly decisive in personnel selection – even if only for executives – and furnish evidence of the interest in social skills (cf. Erler/Nußhart 2000). In light of the above, the skills balance raises the question of how experiences gained within the scope of family work and the skills acquired thereby can be recognised as a potential, so that they can be exploited for one's own career path, how skills acquired in the family can be transferred to the workplace and how private and public-sector employers can be convinced that they are squandering crucial skills potential if they fail to include the skills training that mothers and fathers undergo in the family setting in their corporate qualification and knowledge management system.

One characteristic feature of the family as a place of learning is that learning does not occur in an organised form but in the form of 'learning by doing'. This type of learning can also be regarded as action-oriented learning, since personal and knowledge development are based on active responses to a live learning culture. The direct, personal, and responsible nature of the

family setting and the emotional aspects mean that the family, as a learning place, has a stronger and frequently also more sustainable effect on skills development than many formal learning processes. However, for these skills acquired outside school, the problem arises of how to transfer them to the working world. Most people are unaware of what they have learned outside school and vocational training, above all in the family, and of all the things they can do. The low level of public and corporate acceptance of these skills makes it difficult or impossible to bring them into play at the workplace, thus preventing their recognition. This holds true, despite the fact that many of these skills are applied as a matter of course in everyday work.

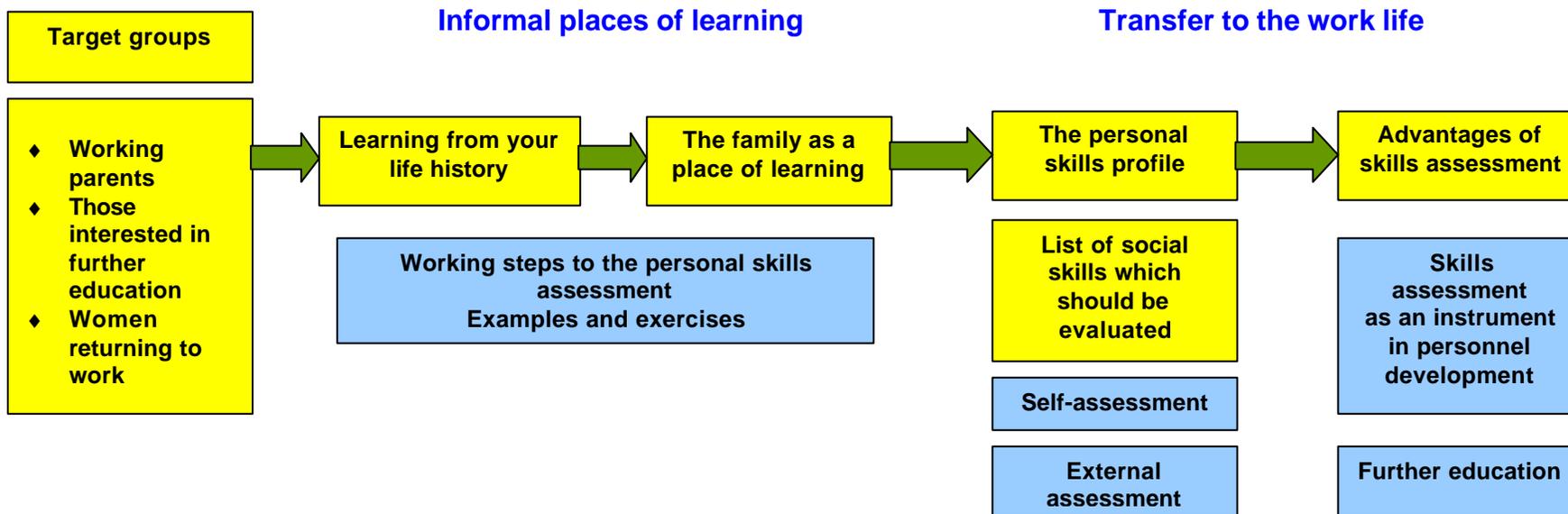
## **5. The skills balance: individual recording and evaluation of social skills**

The skills balance (see Fig. 1) comprises four sections and commences with the topic: "Life history as learning history". In this context, people are encouraged, with the help of a mindmap, to retrospectively recognise and ascertain the most important fields of learning and experience outside formal areas of learning, such as schools, training and vocation, in their own biographies and the key influences, events and topics that set the course for their personal development e.g. activities in sports clubs, amongst friends etc., allowing them to acquire certain skills and continuing to be of importance for them today. Via this biographic approach, the family, as a field of experience, is introduced by means of several exercises and people are asked to describe effects of family experience and learning on their own person. The whole range of coping skills that are needed or must be mobilised to solve everyday problems is presented using an everyday example, i.e. a child that suddenly falls ill (see Fig. 2). This example also serves to demonstrate that reacting to different requirements, in different situations and with various persons does not only enrich existing skills by adding new experiences but also helps to acquire new skills.

Taking the example of "self-assertion", we further demonstrate that this skill is trained or newly acquired both in the family and at the workplace through very different role requirements, in various situations and contexts. As far as self-assertion is concerned, there is indeed a connection between dealing with one's son playschool teacher for example, and dealing with one's supervisor at work.

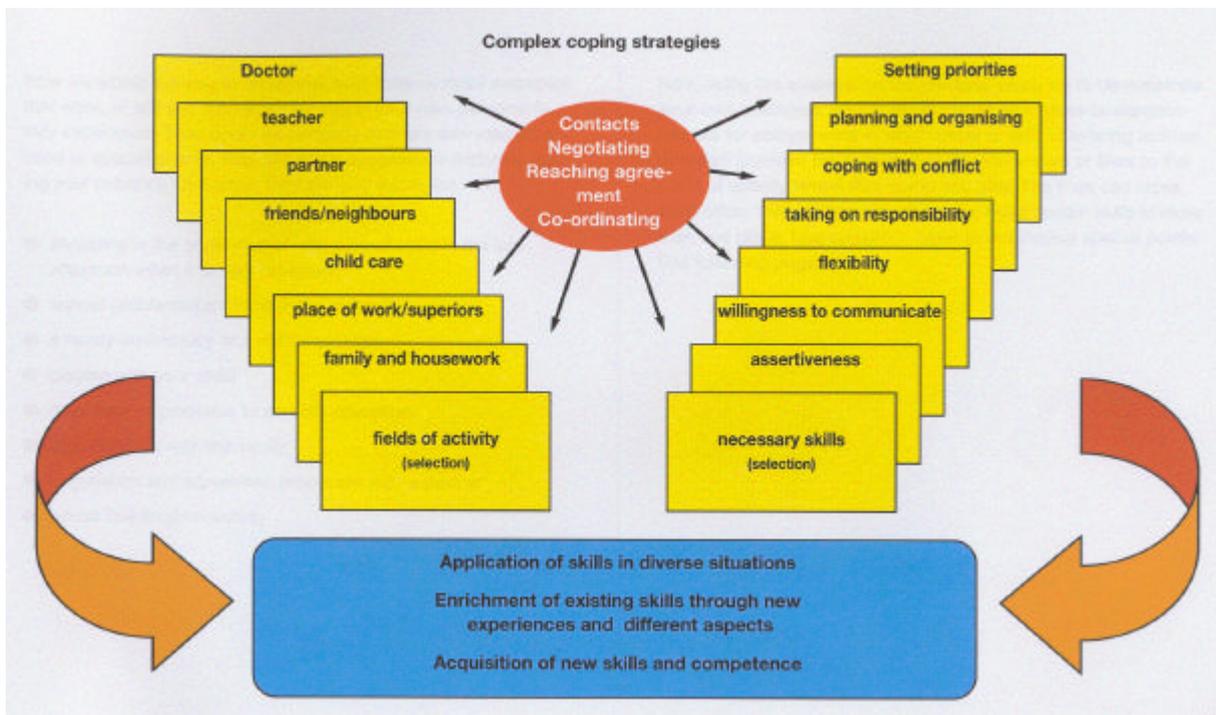
This and similar examples are intended to illustrate the fact that skills acquired in the family can indeed be transferred to the work situation, even if certain modifications may sometimes be required.

Fig. 1: The Structure of the Skills Analysis



In light of the above, the skills balance must be viewed as a process-oriented instrument encouraging people to become aware of their own skills and regard them as their personal "capital" capable of being used on many occasions.

**Fig. 2: Skills development using illness of a child**



As already mentioned above, the skills balance aims at drawing up individual or personal skills profiles. For this purpose, it offers a catalog of different skills areas or individual skills that can be used for self-assessment purposes. The skills area "flexibility and mobility", for example, allows us to assess whether we "adjust our objectives and ideas to new situations and altered circumstances", "recognise and accept our own interests and needs" and "are open to new tasks and challenges". Assessment takes place according to a scale ranging from "excellent", "good", "adequate" to "almost non-existent". Assessment by another person, be it a colleague, a supervisor etc. may help review and objectivise the skills profile and replace measurement. This "dialogue-type" assessment is being increasingly used in place of the required measurement, as indicated by the small number of empirical studies conducted on this topic. Use of skills profile depends on personal interests and the current situation: be it at the workplace, for professional re-orientation, after a family phase, for planning follow-up training or simply to check up on where one currently stands in terms of skills development.

## Use of the skills balance in companies

### Corporate requirement profile (example)

Characteristics	Ranking	T a r g e t			
		Very important	Impor- tant	Less im- portant	Not very important
A. Specialised knowledge					
B. Supraprofessional skills					
Reliable execution and completion of tasks			X		
Approaching other people and establishing contacts		X			
Contributing one's own interest, strengths to the team		X			
Willingness to compromise in favour of team-friendly solutions		X			
Ability to cope with various requirements simultaneously			X		
Being open to new tasks and challenges			X		
Being prepared to take on tasks and responsibility for others		X			

### Personal skills profile (example)

Characteristics	Ranking	P e r f o r m a n c e			
		Excellent	Good	Adequate	Almost non-exist.
A. Specialised knowledge					
B. Supraprofessional skills					
Reliable execution and completion of tasks		Y			
Approaching other people and establishing contacts			Y		
Contributing one's own interest, strengths to the team				Y	
Willingness to compromise in favour of team-friendly solutions		Y			
Ability to cope with various requirements simultaneously			Y		
Being open to new tasks and challenges		Y			
Being prepared to take on tasks and responsibility for others		Y			

### Comparison of corporate requirements and personal profile

Characteristics	T a r g e t / p e r f o r m a n c e c o m p a r i s o n				
	Ranking	Very important	Impor- tant	Less im- portant	Not very important
Evaluation: Corporate requirements	→	Very important	Impor- tant	Less im- portant	Not very important
Evaluation: personal competencies profile	→	Excellent	Good	Adequate	Almost non-exist.
A. Specialised knowledge					
B. Supraprofessional skills					
Reliable execution and completion of tasks		Y	X		
Approaching other people and establishing contacts		X	Y		
Contributing one's own interest, strengths to the team		X		Y	
Willingness to compromise in favour of team-friendly solutions		XY			
Ability to cope with various requirements simultaneously			XY		
Being open to new tasks and challenges		Y			
Being prepared to take on tasks and responsibility for others		XY	X		

Since the skills profile is not a general "psychology test" but aims at developing a basis for professional human-resources development, the skills balance must also be incorporated in personnel work. To this end, an "Information brochure for persons in charge of human-resources (HR) development" has been prepared, which provides information and tips on how to use the skills balance. Depending on already existing corporate HR-development tools, the skills balance can be used as a basis for personnel interviews, re-engineering measures for corporate reasons or decision making within the scope of team-development processes. However, this necessitates estimation and (at least rough) definition of the share of social skills needed in line with the corporate requirement profile. By comparing the corporate requirement profile with the personal skills profile, supervisors or persons in charge of human resources can review whether an employee is suitable for the job in question (partly suitable or not really suitable etc.) and find out where additional qualifications might be needed. Admittedly, this approach leaves aside questions relating to technical knowledge, which continue to be highly significant for all job-related tasks. It is, however, up to the individual company to decide how to link the skills balance with the tools demonstrating technical qualifications.

## **6. Vision for the next decade: family-raising activities - a tangible competitive edge**

So far, the upgrading of family work has been regarded as a family-policy topic and has seldom been seen against the background of equal opportunities for women at workplaces. Given this situation, the skills balance may help to stop family work from being seen more or less solely as the responsibility of women and encourage men to gain more skills in this field. Currently, it could provide women with a comparative competitive edge over men, since it is they who have so far assumed responsibility for the family and this fact should be turned to advantage.

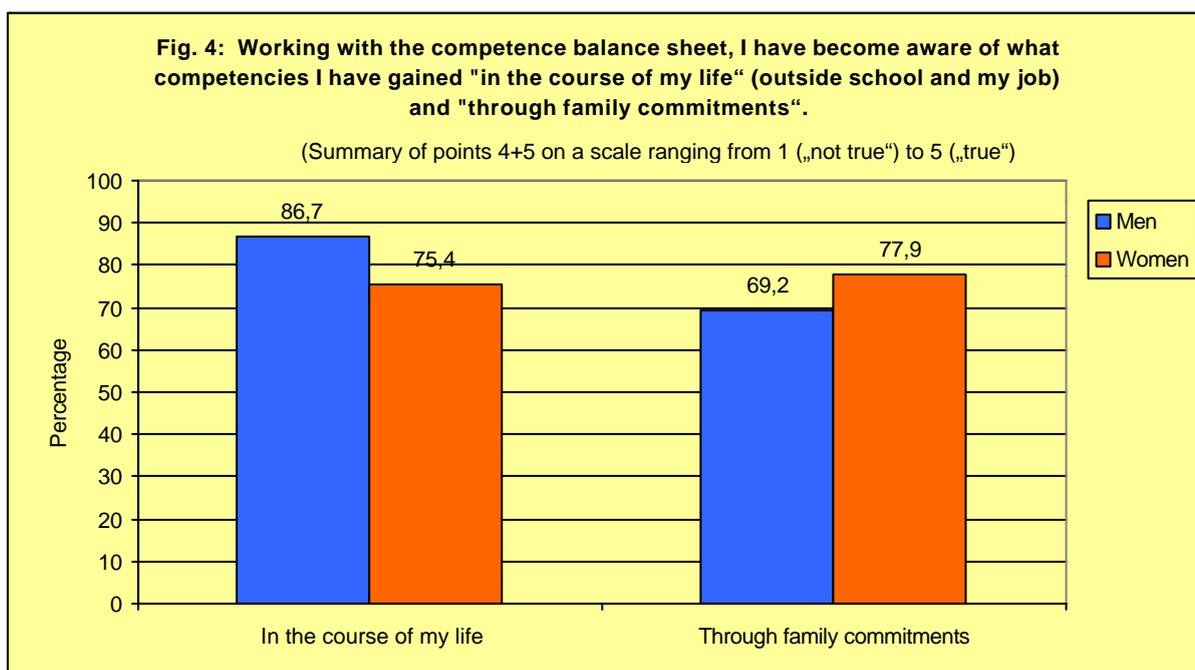
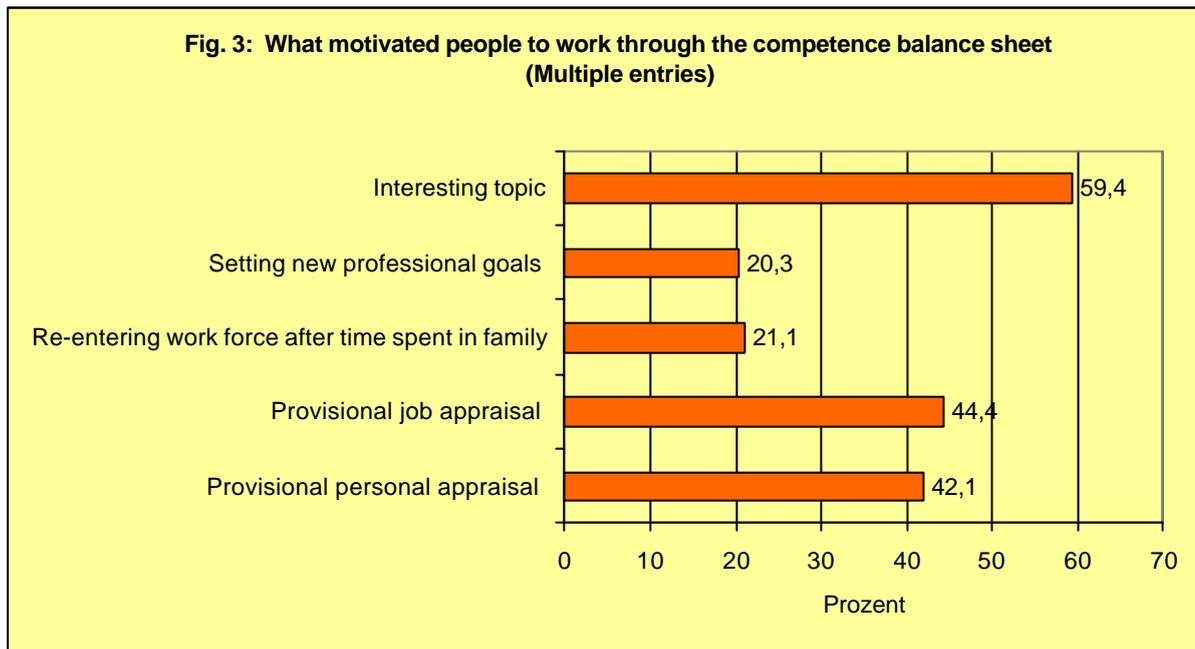
If the skills balance succeeds in proving that family work opens up additional qualification potentials for the workplace and the labour market, - and what is more, does so even free of charge for employers - this is a matter that concerns not only social policy but first and foremost the world of business. Not only would this enable corporate modernisation strategies to be linked with equal opportunity perspectives, both at the workplace and in society, for men and women involved in family raising activities, but it would also allow for parental-

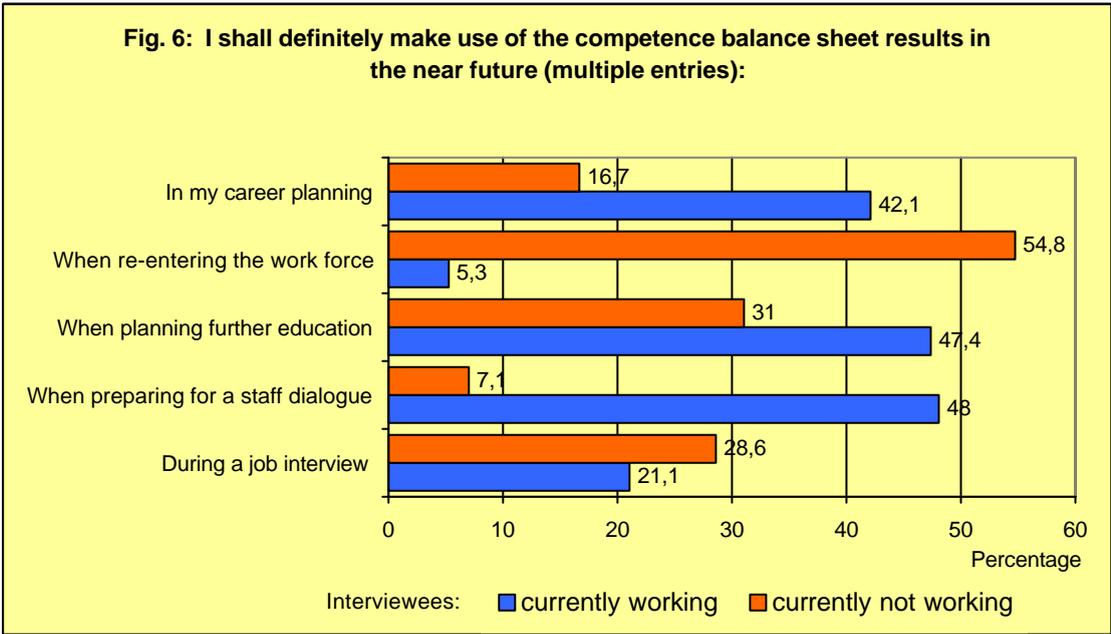
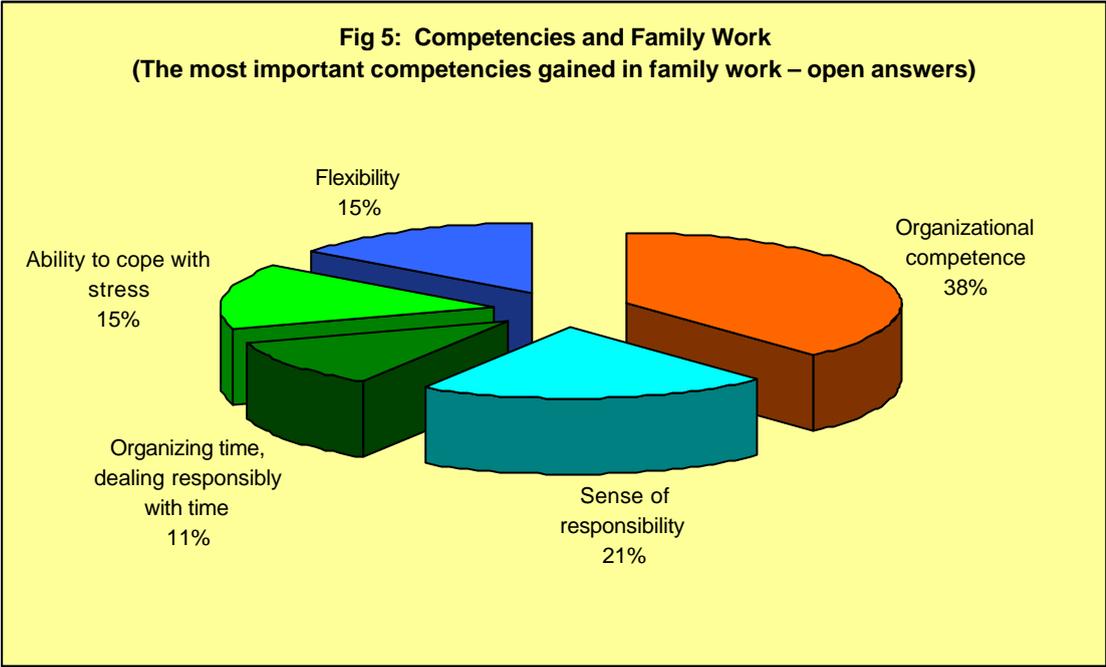
leave-related career breaks and phases of family-related part-time work as training periods in the professional biography and thus make them more valuable in economic terms. This would probably also enhance acceptance of employees who wish to combine family life *and* work by the general public and companies. Last but not least, it would help considerably to do away with the currently predominant cultural paradigm according to which singles – constantly available and employable – are seen as ideal employees. Unfortunately, corporate expectations in terms of work-related mobility and biography-related flexibility still stand in the way of parenthood or a responsible life with children. This conflict becomes evident in the deficits addressed as "structural neglect of families" by the 5<sup>th</sup> family report of the German government. Whether Germany will survive as an industrial location will also be determined by the extent to which current indifference towards the role played by families in human potential safeguarding can be overcome. To ensure economic value-added, we will have to establish a balance between human and fixed capital (Federal Ministry of Family and Senior Citizens 1994).

## **7. Some results of the pilot study**

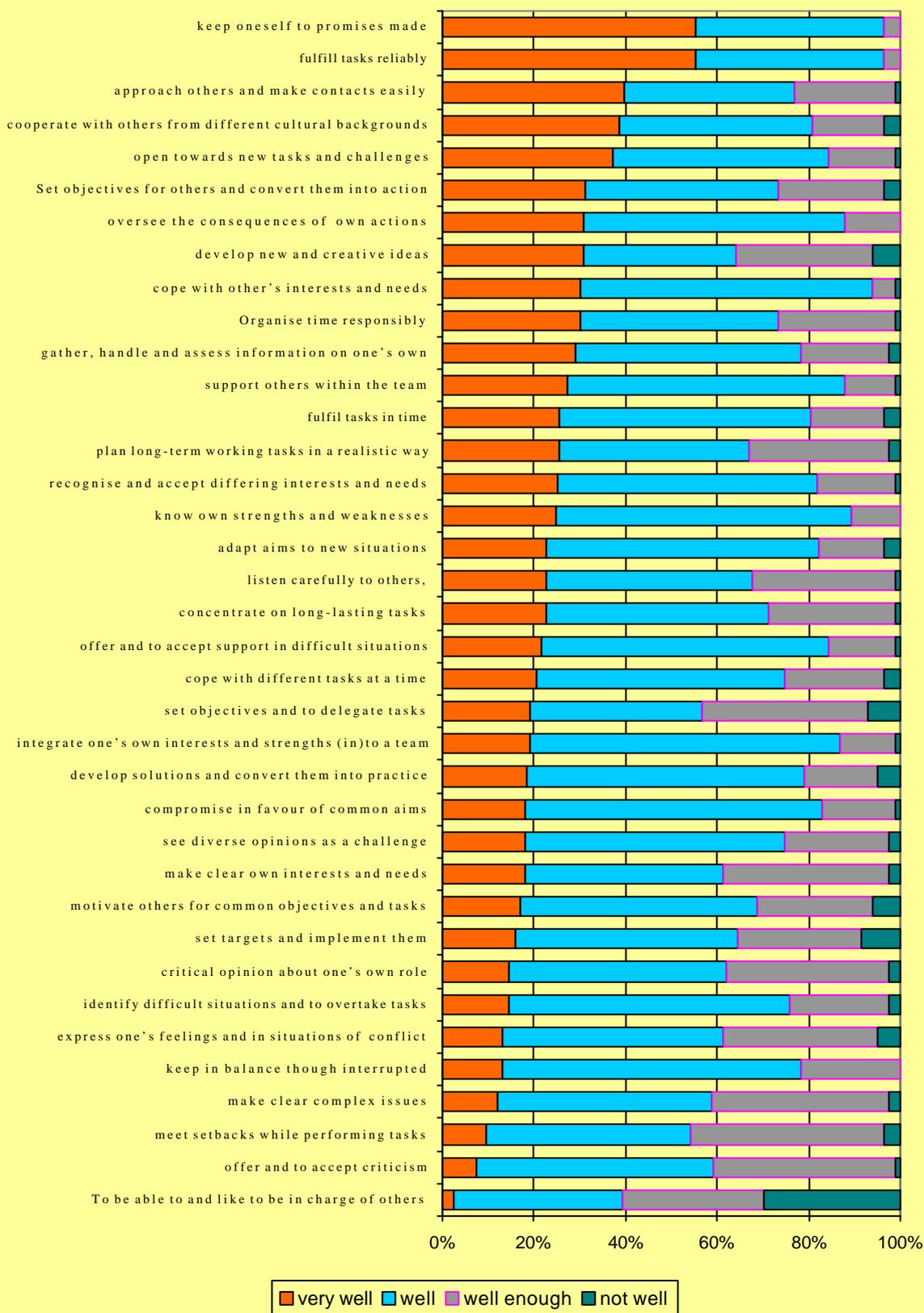
- ◆ The results shown below are based on a written survey among employees who worked through the competence balance sheet, which was one element in the test phase of the project „Family Competencies as a Potential for Innovative Personnel Policies“. The results on hand refer only to the German survey. Partial results of similar surveys done in the Netherlands and the UK can be found in the conference documents.
- ◆ The survey was done voluntarily and anonymously. A total of 182 persons from companies, the private and public service sectors and institutions of further education was interviewed. The evaluation results are not representative, but they do reflect a number of trends and, in some statements, reveal first points of emphasis (Fig. 3 thru 6).
- ◆ Of the 182 people interviewed, 18 are men and 124 women. Most of them (82%) have children, i.e. 27% one child, 53% two children and 20% three or more children. The average age of the youngest child is 7.

- ◆ Along with the survey results, figures 7 and 8 also show self-assessment results derived from the competence balance sheet. Forty-four given categories or competencies are involved here which were evaluated by the interviewees according to their level of ability (Fig. 7). Simultaneously, interviewees were expected to estimate if respective competencies had been recently acquired, developed further or had not been influenced by family commitments (Fig. 8). A detailed version of categories can be found in figure 9.

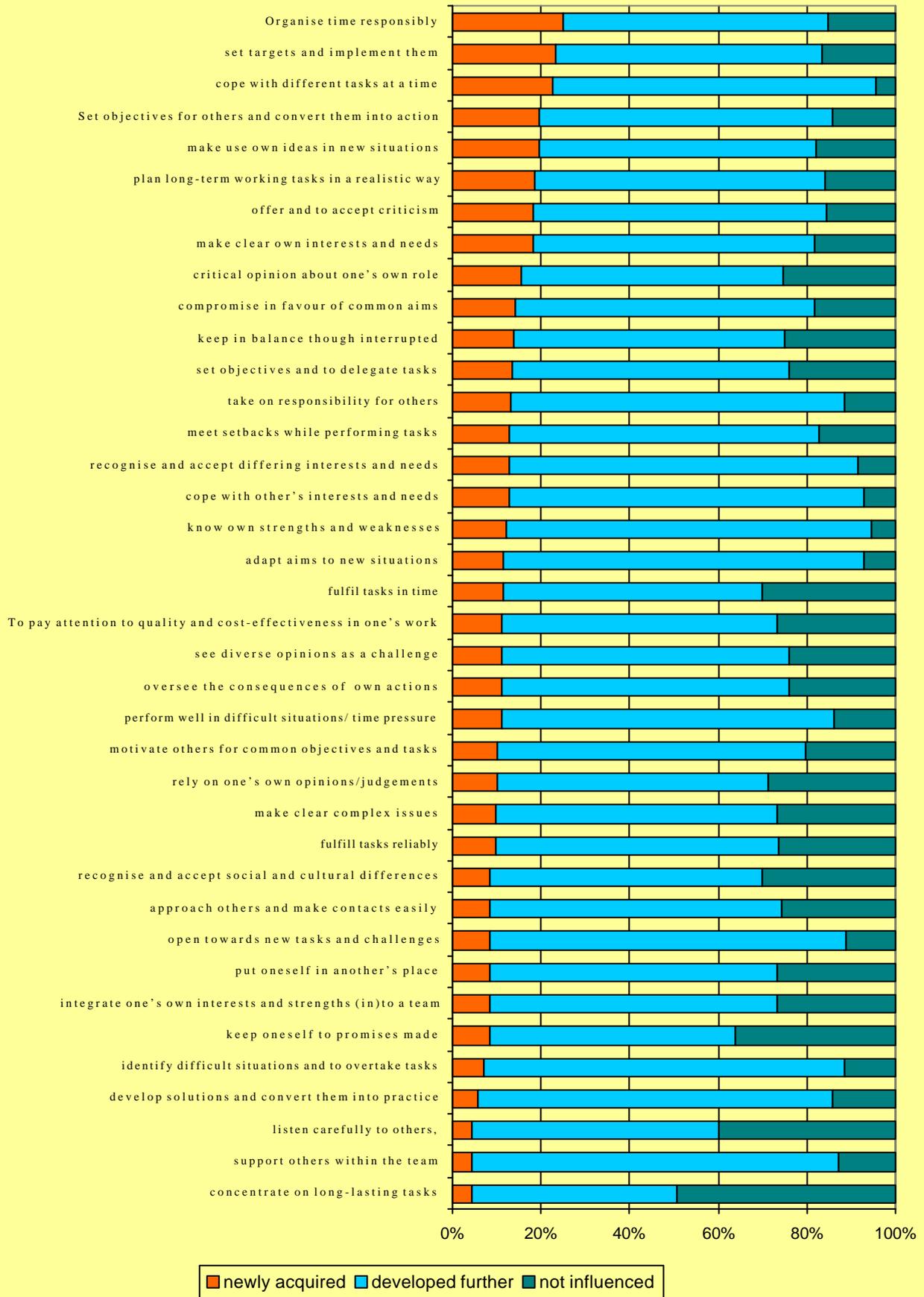




**Fig. 7: Competence profile – Self-assessment "Level of Ability" with regard to the following competencies:**



**Fig. 8: Competencies gained through family commitments**



**Fig. 9: The personal competence profile – self-assessment<sup>1</sup>**

Field of competence/skill	Competence/Skill	Skill profile= Degree of you competence				In my family activity These skills were...		
		I can do this...				Newly acquired	Developed further	Not influenced
		Very well	well	Well enough	Not well			
	<i>Please tick whatever refers to you</i>							
<b>Selforganisation/ Selfmanagement</b>	1.To know/be aware of one's own strengths and weaknesses							
	2. To be able to set targets and bring them to operation							
	3. To be able to make clear one's own interests, desires and needs							
	4. To be able to spend and organize time in a targeted and responsible way							
	5.To be able to make use of ideas and competencies in new and unfamiliar situations							
<b>Sense of responsibility</b>	6. To be able to oversee the consequences of one's behaviour							
	7. To be able to reliably fulfill tasks one is responsible for							
	8. To keep oneself to promises made							
<b>Resilience/ability to cope with stress</b>	9. To be able to perform well in difficult situations and under time pressure							
	10. To be able to concentrate on tasks, also when they are long-lasting							
	11 To be able to meet setbacks while performing tasks							
	12 To be able to keep in balance, even when one has to cope with work interruptions							
<b>Communication skills</b>	13. To be able to approach others and to make contacts easily							
	14 To be able to listen carefully to others, even for extended periods of time							
	15. To be able to make clear complex issues in a calm and precise way							
	16. be able to have a critical opinion about one's own role in a discussion							
	17. To be able to cope with with other people's interests and needs							
<b>Cooperation skills</b>	18 To be able to express one's opinion and personal feelings and interests even in situations of conflict							
	19. To be able to rely on one's own opinions/judgements and to defend them against controversial positions							
	20 To be able to offer and to accept criticism							
	21. To be able to offer and to accept support in difficult situations							
<b>Team-working skills</b>	22. To be able to add and integrate one's own interests and strengths (in)to a team							
	23. To be able to see diverse opinions as a challenge and stimulus							

<sup>1</sup> The competence profil (categories) addressed above has been improved after the pilot study

	24. Willingness to compromise in favour of common aims							
	25. To be able to support others within the team with respect to optimise common results							
<b>Intercultural Skills</b>	26. To be able to recognise social and cultural differences and to accept them							
	27. To be able to cooperate with people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds							
	28. To be able to put yourself in another's place even when they are much different from you							
<b>Flexibility/mobility</b>	29. To be able to adapt aims and ideas to new situations and changing demands							
	30. To be able to cope with different tasks at a time							
	31. To be able to recognise and accept differing interests and needs							
	32. To be open towards new tasks and challenges							
<b>Planning and organizing skills</b>	33. To be able set objectives for oneself and for others and to convert them into points of action							
	34. To be able to plan long-term working tasks in a realistic way							
	35. To be able to fulfil tasks in time							
	36. To be able to gather, handle and assess information on one's own							
<b>Creative problem solving skills</b>	37. To be able to identify difficult situations and to overtake tasks							
	38. To be able to develop new and creative ideas							
	39. To be able to develop solutions and to convert them into practice							
<b>Leadership skills</b>	40. Willingness to take on responsibility and tasks also for others							
	41. To be able to set objectives and to delegate tasks							
	42. To be able to motivate others for common objectives and tasks							
	43. To be able to and like to be in charge of others							
	44. To pay attention to quality and cost-effectiveness in one's work							

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