



Skills
skillsfinland

TEAM FINLAND

MENTAL TRAINING WORKBOOK

Juha Minkkinen
Immo Pylvänen
Atte Airaksinen





CONTENTS

Foreword

1.	Developing performance-control	4
1.1.	Principles of performance-control development.....	4
1.2.	Contents of performance-control development.....	5
1.3.	Competitor- and skill-specific analysis in performance-control training	7
1.4.	Drafting a programme for the development of performance-control	9
2.	Development of performance-control in practice	11
2.1.	Programme framework for the development of performance-control	12
2.2.	Self-assessment form – my conduct in difficult and stressful situations.....	16
2.3.	Development of matters related to self-confidence	18
2.4.	Breathing exercises: “it’s a good idea to begin mental training sessions with breathing exercises”	20
2.4.1.	Realisation of relaxation exercises.....	21
2.4.2.	Peace-of-mind and mental imaging exercises	22
2.4.3.	Developing your ability to concentrate	25
2.4.4.	Methods for controlling nervousness.....	26
3.	Concentrating on success	27
4.	Team Finland as a group process	29
4.1.	General information about group processes: group phases	29
4.1.1.	Spontaneously formed groups	30
4.1.2.	Steered group formation.....	30
4.2.	The steered group process in the national team	31
4.3.	Group process: exercises, which can influence the group in different stages of the process	33
4.3.1.	Familiarisation, two exercises	34
4.3.2.	Enhancing group spirit, two exercises.....	35
4.3.3.	Building confidence, one example.....	36
5.	Daybook of performance-control development.....	38
	My action plan for the WorldSkills / EuroSkills / Abilympics Competition	45
	Notes.....	47

This publication was produced as part of Skills Finland’s ESF-funded *Excellence Through Skills Training* project.

Foreword

Mental training involves a constant effort to develop your psychological robustness and the observance of a competition-conducive lifestyle throughout the training period. Mental training as a way of life requires you to pay attention to your general wellbeing; the issues this encompasses include appropriate physical exercise and nutrition as well as ensuring that you get enough sleep and set aside time to recover from exertion. Essential aspects in psychological robustness are the development of stress tolerance and your ability to maintain composure. Your vocational skill level can be very high, but without discipline, a desire to win, self-confidence, motivation and restraint, it is not possible to perform to the standard required of a competitor in the WorldSkills event. In the final analysis, nerve control is the factor that separates winners from the rest of the field during the crucial moments of a competition.

Interaction skills and knowledge of human nature are also important aspects of mental training. A readiness to ask for assistance in situations where your own knowledge base is no longer sufficient is an important interaction skill. One of the key tasks of a trainer is to act as a support pillar for the trainee throughout his or her training period. It is essential that the trainer knows the trainee well and is able to help him or her to make correct solutions and choices. Other important duties of the trainer include the creation of a positive environment and atmosphere for training and competing. The trainer must also be committed and get the trainee to commit to the training process.

However, it is essential to acknowledge that, even when training succeeds perfectly, it is possible for the trainee to face disappointments. Preparing for disappointments and developing an ability to deal with them in a constructive manner is a part of mental training. Humour is an important aspect of mental training and it can also be a great help when dealing with disappointment. During the training process, humour makes it considerably easier to live with performance anxiety and can release the trainee's energy towards training and the demonstrations of skill he or she will perform at the competition itself.

All trainees are individuals and each of them possesses a differing starting level in, for example, self-confidence and interaction skills. Each of them can, however, develop his or her mental capabilities through a variety of exercises. At the national team's training camps, exercises related to performance-control can focus on, for example, tension management, control of performance-related mental imaging, preparations for different scenarios, cooperation with different parties, concentration improvement, competition control maintenance and learning relaxation techniques. It is worthwhile to invest in mental training because it has been demonstrated that good mental training combined with high-standard vocational skills exercises can propel a competitor to the very top.

This workbook was drafted in cooperation with training manager **Immo Pylvänen** and team chaplain **Atte Airaksinen**.

I thank all of the parties that helped in the completion of this workbook. A special thank you for helping with the processing and editing of the text as well as for providing picture material goes to Skills Finland's ESF-project manager **Leena-Maija Talikka** and ESF-project assistant **Annamari Henriksson**.

I hope that this workbook will be of assistance throughout the entire three-step training process – to trainers and trainees alike.



Juha Minkkinen
Psychologist



1. Developing performance-control

1.1. Principles of performance-control development

The purpose of vocational skills training is to develop a competitor's competence and ability to perform tasks both in normal circumstances and in demanding competition environments. Skills training primarily focuses on the development of vocational skills, but appropriately implemented training will also develop many other aspects that are associated with high-quality demonstrations of skill. This workbook will not separately examine matters associated with the development of vocational skills; such issues are dealt with in other Skills Finland publications.

Training can, when necessary, focus on matters such as physical or psychological characteristics that require special attention. The personality of the competitor and the nature of the characteristics being developed define the individual's need for mental training. In addition to physical and motoric factors, the quality of a performance at a vocational skills competition is determined by a wealth of factors in which both the competitor's situation-control skills and the degree to which his or her skills have matured affect the end result.

Mental factors are of decisive importance both during training and in the competition itself. Calculated self-development is required to ensure that the trainee perseveres through training and attains his or her objectives in the competition. When competitors of equal ability meet in competition, the winner will be the one whose situation-control skills have developed further. In order to be successful, you have to learn to act like a winner.

The best way to improve your self-confidence and mental ability as a competitor is to constantly maintain a positive way of thinking that best supports your ability to perform. You can start this by considering development ideas associated with your own performance and by assuming an active stance in furthering these ideas. Negative beliefs and thoughts about your competence affect your persona, preventing you from realising all of the opportunities for a good performance in a competitive situation.

Strong confidence in yourself during competition can't just be "switched on" overnight – this is something that grows gradually as a result of long-term training and the achievement of success. It is good to exploit the successes achieved in training for your growth process – enjoy your victories and acknowledge that you are good at what you do. Correspondingly, it makes sense to deal with poor performances swiftly and not to dwell on them. Top achievers are what they are because they really believe that they are good at what they do. You should develop a positive self-image and focus on moving forward through your personal strengths because self-confidence is important in competition.

1.2. Contents of performance-control development

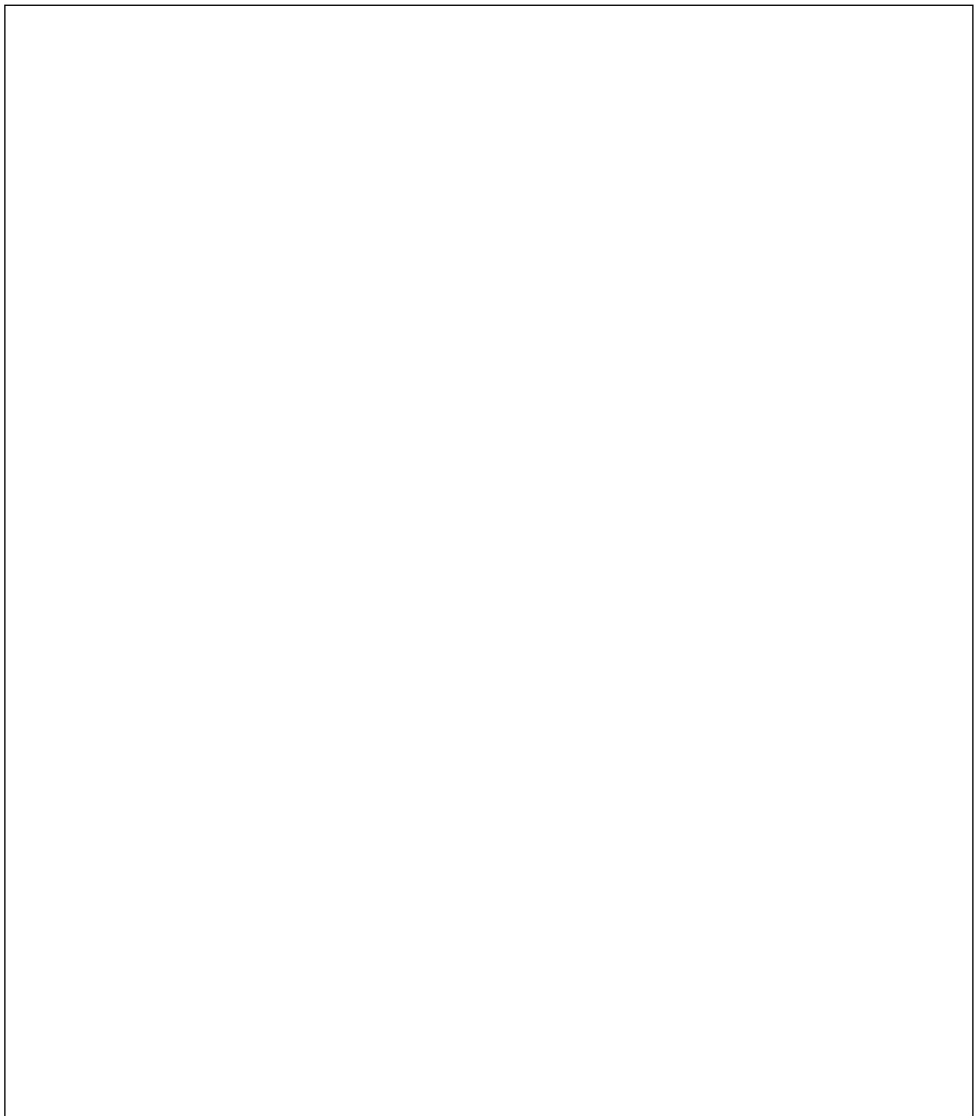
Mental training involves a constant effort to develop your mental robustness and the observance of a competition-conducive lifestyle throughout the training period. General wellbeing establishes a solid foundation for mental training; this is integrally associated with appropriate physical exercise, eating correctly, getting enough sleep and focusing on recovering adequately from exertion. Work, study, home, family, friends and hobbies form a life totality that will empower you to train effectively and achieve success at competitions. This is why you should take care of them constantly.

Next we will look at some topics, which are associated with performance-control and should be considered with regard to the development of a competitor's personal training.

1. The most important goal of training is the comprehensive development of the competitor's personality while safeguarding his or her wellbeing.
2. Reconcile training with your general life situation because this is important for the development of the competitor's performance.
3. Transforming the goals and motivation into everyday action and concretise those activities that support constant development.
4. Enhancing physical operating ability and develop situation-control skills with the aid of, for example, well-balanced and regular relaxation and mental imaging exercises. Exercises related to, among other things, various performance situations and the development of the ability to control them are examples of mental imaging exercises.
5. Enhancing physical operating ability and develop situation-control skills with the aid of, for example, well-balanced and regular relaxation and mental imaging exercises. Exercises related to, among other things, various performance situations and the development of the ability to control them are examples of mental imaging exercises.
6. Competitors can learn how to self-regulate their reactions to stress in competitive situations. Re-analysing past competition situations and shaping your competition control consciously with regard to upcoming competitions establishes a foundation for solid performance-control in stressful situations. Every competition will include surprising situations, which can force plans to be realigned. Self-control and a conscious focus on personal conduct are the factors that separate real winners from other competitors in such situations. Being in control of all actions, one is also capable of adapting them flexibly.
7. The achievement of an automated state (= a well-controlled performance) in competitive situations requires that the perceived challenge be in equilibrium with respect to perceived abilities. If the perceived challenge of an upcoming competition balloons too much in the mind of the competitor and he or she feels insecure about the chances for success or thinks that his or her physical condition might be inadequate, it will be impossible for the competitor to perform to his or her full potential. Competitors can develop their ability to manage stress by clarifying their own actions and by concentrating fully on the tasks currently at hand.
8. Every training programme and individual exercise should include a component that has the aim of developing performance-control. Each exercise also develops the competitor's mental ability, thus establishing the prerequisites for success. It is essential that competitors focus consciously on developing success-related operating models during exercises. Competitors and trainers should engage in constant dialogue on any observations related to these matters.

9. The formulation of systematic mental training programmes requires detailed knowledge of the demands the skill in question places on performance-control. For this reason, it is important to outline the challenges, which are related to mental control. It is a good idea to analyse challenges together with experts because this facilitates their optimal inclusion into the competitor's own training programme.
10. A good, confiding atmosphere during training and preparation for the competition helps to achieve top performances. It is important to analyse as early as possible the demands upcoming competitions will place on the performance ability of competitors. When scheduling the training plan, it is important to take into consideration how to develop performance ability to optimally respond to the demands of upcoming competitions.

CONSIDER: What are the matters presented in the foregoing text and think about the aspects that you should in future pay more attention to with respect to your preparation for upcoming competitions.





1.3. Competitor- and skill-specific analysis in performance-control training

The competitor's professional skill level may be high, but if it is not accompanied by self-confidence, motivation, a commitment to a way of life conducive to the achievement of set goals, discipline, a desire to win and self-restraint, the high-standard performance enabled by this competence will not be realised. Nerve control is the key factor that separates winners from other competitors during the actual period of competition.

The mental requirements associated with different competition disciplines are not the same. Competitors are likewise unique individuals with differing characteristics. Because of these factors, training associated with performance-control is not a uniform segment and the utilisation of a standard set of training elements for each individual's different skill events is not possible. The specific needs of an individual and the nature of his or her skill test projects must be considered and training designed with these unique needs in mind.

The best performances are achieved when:

- the mind is calm
- competitor feels appropriately relaxed physically
- self-confidence is strong
- powerful concentration adds aplomb to the performance
- competitor feels strong and energetic
- feelings of stress are kept in check
- competitor manages to shut the surrounding environment out of the mind
- test projects feel familiar and are perceived as well controlled matters of the vocation

Each skill is associated with certain factors, which must be in equilibrium in order for the competitor to achieve the best possible result. It is important that you learn how to reach this equilibrium in training and in competition. This is possible if the competitor and the trainer are conscious of the characteristic natural performance ability of the competitor. They must also consider the performance level required in the competition when it comes to the totality of the performance. The overall performance in the competition over the separate days of the event must be taken into account. The competitor must be familiar with the technical description of the skill, practice performing past test projects and take advantage of all available knowledge of upcoming test projects.

Analysing the evaluations performed at earlier competitions is essential for the attainment of maximal training effectiveness. The analysis must identify the matters in which success was achieved in the previous training season and those factors that are in need of further development or should be done in a different way.

Analysis of the mental characteristics required for an excellent competition performance is necessary because it facilitates the identification of a competitor's individual development challenges. On the other hand, the personality traits of different competitors, who are successful within the same discipline, can be quite unlike. This makes it impossible to present a portrait of a "winner"; instead, it is the continuous boosting of your own strengths and development of your weaknesses that will enable you to attain the best possible results.

The following can be considered important characteristics and psychological abilities in all competition disciplines

- self-confidence
- perseverance
- responsibility
- relentlessness
- ability to tolerate stress and disappointments
- ability to calm down and relax
- boldness
- ability to surpass yourself in stressful conditions
- ability to concentrate
- creativity

Identifying how these characteristics are weighed in the individual's personality will help the trainer understand how the competitor will react in different performance settings. The trainer should also consider the personality of the competitor when giving feedback and providing instruction. The manner of communication is of substantial significance to the establishment of successful interaction.

CONSIDER: What mental characteristics do you think necessary for success in your own skill? How would you evaluate you own control abilities with respect to these characteristics? How did the cooperation between you and your trainer go?

1.4. Drafting a programme for the development of performance-control

An important part of the development of performance-control is the creation of a progress plan together with the people involved in your training. The following notes the themes, which must be considered in the formulation of a programme.

1. Define training needs associated with performance-control

- At first it is important that the trainer and the competitor discuss about what the competitor knows about mental training and what his or her expectations and experiences of it are
- The competitor's commitment to mental training must be determined in the early phases of training in order to enable long-span thinking.

2. Skill-specific analysis associated with performance-control

- Determine what kinds of demands the competitor's skill poses to performance-control.
- Critical factors for success and controlling feelings of failure during various phases of the performance.

3. Determining and analysing the competitor's performance-control abilities

- Determine and analyse the competitor's performance-control abilities. Use self-assessment-based questionnaire forms, interviews and observations of training and competition situations as aids.
- The trainer and competitor together consider which mental abilities are the most essential for the competitor. After this, the competitor will self-assess his or her own standard with respect to each of these abilities.

4. Individualised specification of the performance-control development programme

- Decide which specific abilities and methods will be taken into use with respect to each individual.

5. Developing performance-control abilities through training

- The performance-control skill training phase is lengthy. The achievement of results calls for systematic and long-term training.
- Performance-control training must be developed into a daily routine, in, for example, the following manner:
 - Internalisation of upcoming training objective ("what will I be doing in the next exercise and what aspects of my performance will it develop?")
 - Establishment of a state of mental preparedness ► concentration ► blocking out any distractions ► a performance that is controlled in all respects
 - Self-evaluation during the exercise ("did I do things just right – should I pay more attention to some aspect?")
 - Post-exercise evaluation of the success of the exercise as a whole
- It is important for the development of the competitor's skills that his or her progress is monitored and evaluated, and the training programme updated according to evolving needs. This is an integral aspect of the trainer's work and the development of mutual cooperation.

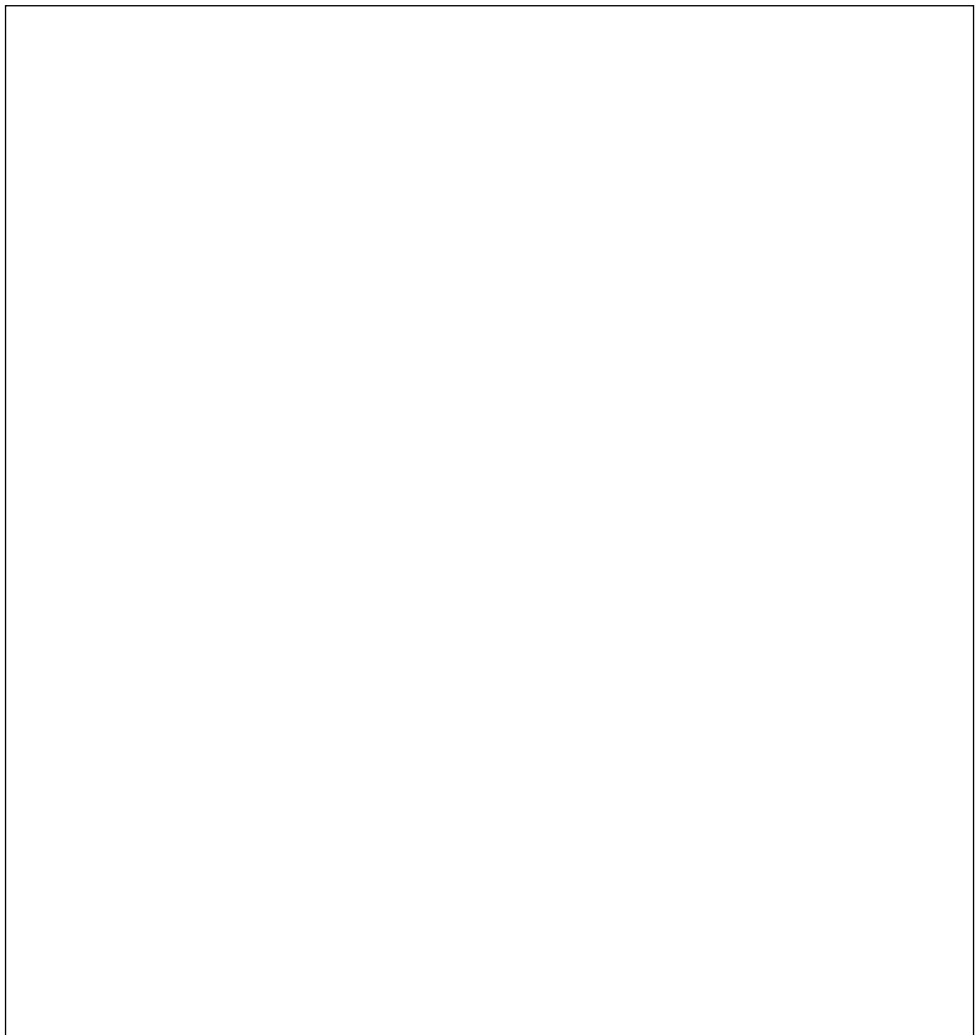
6. Evaluation of the performance-control ability development programme

A long-term post-exercise programme evaluation is carried out to conclude this phase.

The purpose of this final evaluation is to determine:

- how did the competitor feel he or she benefited from the programme?
- which methods were perceived to be the most effective?
- have performance-control abilities improved and does this show in the performance of competition tests?
- which methods did the competitor find easy to implement during training?
- which methods were found hard to implement?

CONSIDER: How, in your opinion, should the abovementioned matters be taken into consideration with respect to the competition situation? How to keep the standard of your performance sufficiently high during competitions that last for many days, taking into consideration also recovery from a day of competition?





2. Development of performance-control in practice

The following describes in the form of a weekly programme the totality of issues associated with the development of performance-control. The weekly programme first establishes the basics of developing performance-control abilities and then focuses on discipline-specific details and activities that best support the characteristics of the competitor in question. The purpose is not for you to follow this weekly programme to the letter, but it is good to pay attention to the subject totalities included in it as well as to apply them in your own training.

The foundation for training is formed by the competitor's active participation and identification of his or her own strengths and development areas. The trainer and other persons, who know the competitor well, will provide assistance in this identification. Different matters and individual abilities will be determined in greater detail as part of the national team's activities. If necessary, the development analysis can be specified also through the means of mental training.

2.1. Programme framework for the development of performance-control

Programme framework for the development of performance-control

WEEK 1 – Start-up phase

It is good for the success of the training project as a whole that the trainee and coach know each other as well as possible. This creates a basis for open discourse during training. The better we know how the other person will react to certain matters and take this into consideration during training, the better the end result will be.

- Together, think about how you can ensure that the best possible interaction is realised during the training process?
- Also think about how you can achieve openness, uphold confidence in one another and ensure honest interaction also during challenging situations?

WEEK 2 – Developing self-confidence

Self-confidence means that you feel certainty and have faith in your own abilities.

Self-confidence is one of the basic factors of our personality and it can be developed through conscious exercises. A starting point in understanding self-confidence is recognising that our thoughts affect our emotions and in this way influence our actions. This is true both with respect to negative, performance-eroding ideas and to positive thoughts that enhance our performance.

- How strong do you feel your self-confidence is with upcoming competitions in mind?
- Strong self-confidence is usually indicated by a positive self-image thoughts that are clearly supportive of success as well as by mental images that promote success.
- Consider the abovementioned matters and think about which of them should be developed from your particular point of view. Discuss these matters with your close ones and your coach.
- Transfer these thoughts into your everyday life and try to act in the manner you hoped for on a daily basis. Conduct your everyday activities observing the idea “day after day and in many different respects, I am capable of constantly developing in the direction I hoped for”.

WEEK 3 – Setting objectives

The setting of objectives is one of the most important tools in mental training. Motivation and appropriately set goals increase the quality of your conduct in training, competition and in life generally.

- Setting sufficiently demanding but realistic goals is important in training
 - what are your primary objectives, what will you need to do to achieve them?
- The achievement of objectives demands time and patience. You will adjust to your goals as long as you don't demand too much of yourself too quickly. Consider whether your daily actions are aligned with your objectives or whether you should perhaps do some things differently?

WEEKS 4–5 – Breathing exercises

When we feel in control of a situation and are filled with self-confidence, our breathing is deep, even and calm. In stressful situations, people begin to breathe shallowly because tension prevents effective breathing. Breathing calmly during training and in competition helps you achieve good results. As competitors gradually become aware of their breathing through exercise and conscious thought, they learn to utilise it to balance their bodies, minds and emotions. This has the aim of developing situation-control abilities during the performance of skill demonstrations at competitions, as it enables the competitor to focus his or her attention to breathing whenever he or she feels a rise in stress level and thus helps bring about a change to the better.

Perform breathing exercises on a daily basis

- Exercise for 15–20 minutes every day for two weeks at a time that is most convenient for you. Some prefer to begin their day with these exercises, while others feel more comfortable performing them in the evening or before going to sleep.
- Repeat the same exercise until you have mastered it and are capable of sensing its effects. Try out all of the exercises described later in this workbook to identify the ones that suit your needs the best.

WEEKS 6–9 – Focus on relaxation training

Stress levels and control over them are central to success in competitive situations. A suitable level of stress improves your performance ability, while too little or too much stress will result in a less-than-optimal performance. Controlling stress before, during and after competitive situations is the goal in these exercises.

There are many relaxation methods and it is up to the individual to select one that suit his or her needs the best. Perform 4-6 exercise sessions each week. Exercise for 15-20 minutes during each session at a time that is most convenient for you.

- Week 6 Tension – relaxation exercises
- Week 7 Peace-of-mind exercises
- Week 8 Relaxation and mental imaging exercises
- Week 9 Perform exercises that the experiences of the previous weeks have shown to be suitable for you, but remember to utilise all methods for now.
- Always begin each training session with a breathing exercise. Learning to know your manner of breathing and the ability to change it from a nervous to a relaxed state is an essential factor in the development of performance-control.
- During training, concentrate on sensing tense and/or relaxed muscles.
- You may record the exercise instructions or use a coach/assistant. You can also utilise tapes of relaxation and mental imaging exercises that are available at libraries, for example.
- Repeat an exercise until you have mastered it and are capable of sensing its effects.



WEEKS 10–11 – Mental imaging exercises that focus on your skill discipline

Performance patterns, i.e. models of completed performances, are imprinted on the brain. The brain cannot always distinguish whether a movement is actually being performed or if it is only being imagined. After all, learning takes place in the brain and not in the muscles. A mental image of a performance forms the basis of learning; without a mental image of the correct performance technique, it is not possible to learn skills. Mental imaging helps trainees internalise the best possible way in which to realise a performance. Mental imaging can be used to train for the performance as a whole or to fine-tune a specific detail. In addition to physical performance, mental imaging exercises are beneficial also in mental training.

- The more vivid and controlled mental images you are able to generate, the greater the benefit you gain from mental imaging exercises – think about aspects, which are central from the point of view of the competition performance, and go over them during training in a relaxed manner.

WEEK 12 – Exercising control over your state of alertness

Excellent performances of skill are often associated with feelings of superb wellbeing, which is related to the perception that your performance is automatic, easy and effortless to realise. In order to reach such a state, you must purge your mind of excessive nervousness and identify a “suitable” level of tension that is characteristic for you as well as find the emotional states, which lend support to your performance. You can program such emotional states to provide support in competitive situations through different methods. The point of departure is the further development of relaxation exercises. Relaxation exercises can help you associate calming down with exhaling or certain mental images.

WEEK 13 – Developing your ability to concentrate

The core of concentration is formed by the ability to focus your attention in different kinds of situations in way that keeps irrelevant internal or external stimuli from distracting it. Concentration-distracting factors include, for example, the audience, other competitors, experts, noise and fatigue. During competition, it is very challenging to focus and maintain your attention solely on matters that are significant from the perspective of your performance. The ability to concentrate on the correct information and block out irrelevant matters is a central ability for anyone wishing to be successful in competition.

- Concentrate on developing your favourite performance-control method on a daily basis.
- Do your exercises at home as well as in other everyday settings. Take advantage of all possible situations in which the opportunity to develop your situation-control ability arises (delivering presentations at school, local radio interviews, workplace meetings, family events – such as giving a speech at your grandfather’s 80th birthday, etc.) Challenge yourself to seek growth constantly.



WEEKS 14–15 – Refresher period

The goal of these weeks is to go over all of the matters that you have practised and to take their effects into consideration. The purpose is to identify your own favourite exercises that are effective for you as an individual. No one improves his or her performance by doing everything; it is instead wise to focus on the factors that suit your needs the best. Focus on performing each exercise with your concentration on the upcoming WorldSkills event and the elements that make up your best performance.

WEEKS 16–18 – Making your favourite programmes a part of the preparation for upcoming competitions

In this period, you should concentrate on establishing a routine in using your favourite exercises and link this with your other final preparations. Think about how you will act during travel to the upcoming event and when getting to know the competition venue as well as of how you will prepare for individual competition days and recover from them. An integral part of the competition totality is communication with various media representatives in both Finnish and English. Accordingly, it is wise to prepare for these matters as well while your training progresses.

Remember that the competition will last for many days and that you will need to maintain your mental preparedness over the entire duration of the event. The upkeep of mental alertness over many days of competition is based on awareness of your own actions, a sensitivity to identify factors that may have a negative impact on your actions as well as on mastery of a set of concrete measures to control such factors.

Together with your coach, think about how you could best incorporate exercises that develop performance-control into your own training. Good and functional cooperation with your coach and other supporters throughout the entire training phase and competition event is the best form of mental training. Constantly strive for open and encouraging feedback and discussions. The coach creates a positive training environment and, through his or her conduct and strong personal commitment, demonstrates persistence to the competitor. The coach also establishes the foundation for continual development.

- Mental training is a learning process that involves the building of operating models for different kinds of situations.
- All of the principles associated with learning apply to it as well.
- Only practice makes perfect.
- Dealing with disappointment is a part of excellence in skills – no one can avoid it. Even if your training constantly goes well, you should think about how to act in various problem situations and learn how to deal with problems in a constructive spirit.

Good planning will get you far – in the words of Abraham Lincoln: *“Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe”.*

2.2. Self-assessment form – my conduct in difficult and stressful situations

There are many different ways in which to act in difficult or stressful situations. Please assess how you typically act or how you feel in difficult/stressful circumstances.

Arviointi				
4 I often				
3 I fairly often				
2 I rarely				
1 I never	1	2	3	4
Actively do something to get over the situation				
Try and do something about the matter				
Do what has to be done, one thing at a time				
Actively try and get in control of the situation				
Drink more alcohol than usual to forget about the situation				
Smoke more than usual to forget about the situation				
Eat more than usual to forget about the situation				
Try to think about an operating model to follow				
Draft action plans				
Carefully consider the best course of action				
Think about how to best overcome the situation				
Focus my attention on working or other compensatory functions in order to push the matter out of my mind				
Go to the cinema or watch TV to think less about the matter				
Fantasise about other matters than this				
Sleep more than usual				
Postpone my other tasks to focus solely on this problem				
Focus on dealing with this problem and, if necessary, can temporarily neglect other matters				
Don't let other thoughts and actions disturb my efforts to deal with this situation				
Give up my efforts to get what I want				
Give up striving for my goals				
Admit to myself that I am not capable of dealing with the matter and stop trying				
Reduce my efforts to overcome the situation				

	1	2	3	4
Force myself to wait for the right time to act				
Do nothing before the situation allows it				
Ensure that I don't make things worse by rushing to act				
Restrain myself to prevent hasty action				
Refuse to believe what has happened				
Pretend that it did not happen				
Act as if it has not happened				
Tell myself that this is not true				
Ask people, who have had similar experiences, what they did in corresponding situations				
Try and ask someone else for advice				
Talk to someone to get more information about the situation				
Talk to a person, who can do something concrete to help in the situation				
Become upset and let my feelings erupt				
Give in to my emotions				
Am extremely anxious and tired, and find myself expressing these feelings quite a lot				
Am easily unnerved and am myself conscious of this characteristic as well				
Tell someone about my feelings				
Try and get emotional support from my friends and relatives				
Talk about my emotions with someone				
Get sympathy and understanding from someone				
Seek help from God or from spiritual matters				
Believe in God				
Try and get consolation from my faith or from spiritual matters				
Pray and/or meditate more than usual				
Look for something good in what has happened				
Try to look at the situation from different viewpoints and to make it appear more positive				
Learn something from this experience as well				
Try and grow as a person thanks to this experience				
Learn to live with the matter				
Accept that it has happened and that I cannot change the situation				
Get used to the idea that it happened				
Accept as real that it happened				

The competitor should fill the above form and, after this, talk with his or her coach about the thoughts it has aroused as well as about ideas for shared follow-up development activities.

2.3 Development of matters related to self-confidence

Understand and accept the connection between thoughts and action. Realistically positive thoughts lead to favourable end results. You will become what you think you will become. The competitor should analyse thoughts that occur in training as well as in competition along this model: "Am I thinking in a way that provides me with the opportunity to achieve my best possible performance at the competition?"

Think about situations where you have succeeded well.

- * How did you prepare?
- * What kinds of feelings did you have during the competition?

The situation and the experiences associated with it.	To what was the success due?
What can I learn from these experiences?	
How do I ensure successful performances in the future?	

What behavioural characteristics (thoughts or actions) do you identify in yourself?

Good self-confidence	Poor self-confidence
You do what you feel is right, even when others criticise or belittle you for it.	You adjust your actions according to the expectations of others.
You are willing to take risks and will work harder to achieve better things.	Stay in your comfort zone, fear failure and avoid taking risks.
You admit your mistakes and are willing to learn from them.	Spend a lot of effort to cover up mistakes and hope that no one will notice.
Expect others to congratulate and praise you for your accomplishments.	Bring up your accomplishments as often as possible and to as many people as possible.
Acknowledge positive feedback with pride; "thank you, I worked hard for this achievement" or "thank you, I'm pleased that you noticed my accomplishment".	You're cavalier about positive feedback; "anyone could have done it" or "it wasn't such a big deal".

Make a commitment to succeed and develop your self-confidence constantly in different kinds of situations.

Make yourself an unbreakable promise to achieve success. Promise yourself that you will take every available opportunity to achieve your objectives. When you make yourself that promise, it is likely that doubts will begin to creep up. Write down these doubts. After this, begin to mentally challenge those doubts in a calm and reasonable manner. If you notice these doubts to be unfounded, then good. If, however, the case involves justified misgivings that present an obstacle to the achievement of your goal, you should set a concrete objective to realise measures, which will facilitate the achievement of a positive end result.

The most important thing is that you make yourself a genuine promise of commitment!

CONSIDER: Think about how you, together with your coach, can tangibly deal with the matters that stand in between you and your goals?

You should also detail the main objectives of training and the measures required to achieve them complete with schedules.

2.4. Breathing exercises: “it’s a good idea to begin mental training sessions with breathing exercises”

Relaxation methods can be divided into two main types: active processes as well as relaxation and suggestion methods.

The familiar expression “so nervous that I forgot to breathe” holds true. Anxiety often begins with your breath becoming shallow, preventing the body from receiving enough oxygen.

Correct breathing is one of the most important factors in good mental and physical functioning. It can help balance emotional reactions and makes it easier to face difficult situations. Accordingly, it is a good idea to practice conscious breathing control.

Advantages of well-controlled breathing:

- brain and muscles get enough oxygen
- activates the peripheral nervous system
- channels metabolic regulation
- directs and calms feelings
- prevents hyperventilation
- better removal of tiring toxins in blood circulation

Breathing is a good tool for exercising control over your internal state. Good breathing technique is also a starting point in mental training. Inhaling is seen as recharging and refreshing, while exhaling is viewed as liberating and relaxing. The following exercises will help you learn good breathing technique. Choose the methods that suit you the best.

Basic breathing exercise

Sit or lie down in a comfortable position.

Lightly exhale, hold your breath and pull your stomach muscles tightly in towards your spine. Let your stomach relax and the diaphragm round out. Repeat 4–6 times.

Two-minute breathing exercise

Sit or lie down in a comfortable position. Loosen any tight clothes.

Adopt a calm, basic breathing manner. Inhale deeply a few times, holding your breath between inhalations. Observe and think about the effects this has on your body. You’ll notice that calming your breath is relaxing, while breathing quickly is activating. Then draw in a few relaxed and long breaths and you’ll notice how your whole body calms down and relaxes. Let this happen and relax.

Now you may close your eyes if you have not already done so. You can once again concentrate on breathing in and out. While inhaling, repeat the words “I am” and while exhaling “fully relaxed”. Do this for a while and relax.

Count to four in your mind, after which you may open your eyes. You are energetic and feel good.

2.4.1 Realisation of relaxation exercises

The removal of stress does not necessarily have a performance-enhancing effect. On the other hand, control over stress does have this impact. People are often too tense, nervous and anxious in competitive situations. The ability to relax helps you focus your mental capabilities to best suit the situation, both in competition as well as in life generally. Relaxation exercises can include simple tension-relaxation methods or suggestion-based methods.

Tension-relaxation exercises

There's a countless amount of relaxation methods. It is a matter of personal preference which of them to use as an aid in preparing for a competition or during performance. A "turnkey" solution that fits all does not exist. It is most important to use a method that feels right for you and boosts your performance. No matter which mental training method you select, its effects will only eventually be felt during the actual performance, no quick, hocus-pocus tricks exist. Through practice, you will develop an ability that can be used when needed, either when preparing for a competition or during the event itself or at any time in your so-called normal life when a need for relaxation or concentration arises.

Relaxation is individual and you will identify the methods that suit your needs the best through experimentation. Where and for what reason you require relaxation are important grounds for this decision. We will begin with active methods and then move on to mental imaging exercises. Tension-relaxation exercises involve the tensing and relaxing of muscles by turns. Humans cannot be bodily tense and relaxed of mind at the same time.

Exercise 1

In pairs or in front of a mirror, tense your face for about five seconds, after which relax your face. Repeat six times.

Exercise 2

Grab your thumb with your other hand and shake.

Exercise 3

Shakes your hands like you are trying to dry them of water.

Exercise 4

Take a curl of hair between your thumb and forefinger, and pull with a little nudge; cover your whole scalp like this.

Bend your head forward and place your spread fingers on the temples. Massage with light circular movements heading towards the top of your head. For the neck, press thumbs above your ears and massage with other fingers progressing from bottom up.

Brain scientists say that physical exercise prior to or during a learning situation enhances performance by activating both brain hemispheres. Wavelike movements as well as movements in which the left and right hemisphere work in turns are the most effective forms of physical exercise.

2.4.2. Peace-of-mind and mental imaging exercises

A positive attitude counts for a lot in mental imaging as well. Focus on achieving your goals in a positive way: “I’ll try to do this as well as possible technically” is a much better objective than “I won’t make any mistakes” because the latter focuses your attention on mistake-associated thoughts. In mental imaging exercises, you should focus your full attention on excellent performances and on the elements of which they consist.

Set measurable targets and focus on them in your mental imaging. By setting measurable targets you make the verification of their attainment possible. When this is so, your thoughts and actions support each other.

Set priorities. If you have several goals, order them according to importance. This helps eradicate the feeling that all your goals are part of a great grey mass and enables you to focus on the most important objectives. Use the power of your imagination to maintain this order of importance and your self-discipline.

Set small interim objectives. Keep them small and attainable. If you set yourself a goal that is too extensive and difficult to perceive, you make it harder for yourself to verify your progress towards the objective. Interim objectives give you more positive experiences and shape thinking towards models that are conducive to success. Interim objectives must be part of a wider goal.

We’ll begin with mental imaging drills that serve as good peace-of-mind exercises.

White clouds

Close your eyes lightly. In your mind, you see the blue sky, in it a small round cumulus cloud. Rise up to the cloud and sense yourself becoming a cloud. You are soft, relaxed and sparse. You become light and scattered. The warm wind flows slowly through you. Your mind is completely calm. You feel good and happy. I will count to two, after which you will open your eyes feeling calm and happy – one, two. Open your eyes.

The cat

Close your eyes. Imagine that you are a sleeping tiger, completely limp and heavy. You wake up. Remember what a cat does when it wakes up. It stretches its right front paw, left front paw, right hind paw, and left hind paw. It stretches really hard. You are now a tiger, many times larger than a cat. You stretch all of your limbs in turn, more forcefully than a cat. You feel relaxed and calm.

Putting yourself in a familiar environment

Close your eyes lightly. Imagine stepping into a familiar workspace. In front of you, you see all of the machines and equipment there. You can sense this familiar environment in full.

- Did you see the old familiar environment?
- Were you in it, or just an “outsider”?
- Did you see colours?
- Did you feel the smell?

Next we will go through two mental imaging exercises that will help us practice boosting our self-confidence and prepare for our competition performance.

Mental imaging exercise: circle of success

Success begins in your mind. The circle of success exercise provides you with an aid for facing your challenges. It is based on neuro-linguistic programming (NLP), and uses NLP techniques that focus on constructing abilities and experiences of success from the positive exposures, which you have accumulated during your life.

Practical realisation:

- ▶ choose a place to stand on the floor – leave plenty of free space in front of you
- ▶ imagine a circle in front of you – determine its size – what material is it made out of – what is its colour
- ▶ inside the circle, imagine a past situation in which you felt like you had succeeded in something
- ▶ for example, you felt that you had done your work really well or like you were appreciated at that moment – it need not be a major event, just a moment, a memory that is meaningful to you
- ▶ think only of yourself, your own feelings
- ▶ imagine yourself inside the circle, in the situation you just selected and empathise with that feeling of success – once you feel this sensation strengthening, step inside the circle – re-live that successful situation and the feelings associated with it – register your emotional state and savour each detail separately – allow the experience to affect you
- ▶ once you are done, feeling good about these memories and sensations, step out of your circle – look at your circle and think about the experience of being in the circle that you created for yourself
- ▶ you can of course remember other experiences of success that you would like to enjoy once again – make room for these as well inside your circle – use the power of your imagination to transfer your pleasant experiences into the circle
- ▶ step inside the circle – welcome and savour your experiences, which are now stronger than ever
- ▶ once you have been sufficiently boosted by joy, step out of the circle
- ▶ examine your circle, to which many positive building blocks for boosting your self-esteem are now anchored
- ▶ give your circle a name, which you can later mention to quickly remind yourself of these pleasant experiences of success
- ▶ step inside your circle again – say the name of your circle – notice how your mind is flooded with sensations – once you feel satisfied and calm, you're ready – step outside your circle whenever you like
- ▶ from now on, you have your own circle of success, a space generated by your imagination that contains an archive of lots of joyful successes
- ▶ look at your circle once again – in your mind, shrink it to the size of a keyring, ring, necklace – and get a material substitute for it – give this substitute the same name as your circle of success
- ▶ this enables you to always carry with you a confidence-boosting circle, which you can step into for replenishing your energy



Mental imaging exercise for preparing for your own competition performance and for improving your situation-control ability during your test project

Preparing yourself for an excellent performance

- breathe deeply and calmly
 - ▶ during exhaling, your muscles will relax and you feel good
 - ▶ count from ten to one at a relaxed pace 10...1
 - ▶ focus on relaxing your mind
 - ▶ imagine yourself in a place where you like to relax – nature, for example
 - ▶ study the location in detail – what kinds of plants grow there?
 - ▶ see water: sea, lake or river
 - ▶ see the sunny sky
 - ▶ see a large, safe tree – go to it – lean against it
 - ▶ hear the sounds of birds – the light rustle of the wind
 - ▶ sense the soil under your feet – feel yourself in your favourite landscape
 - ▶ count downwards again 10...1
 - ▶ you are now even more relaxed...
- Now focus on thinking about matters associated with your competition performance
- ∞ create vivid images of different situations that occur during the performance
 - ∞ imagine yourself realising those situations as vividly as you possibly can
 - ∞ enjoy the feeling of success and take pride in your competence, consciously amplify the feeling “I can do this really well”
 - ∞ transfer your thoughts to the upcoming competition and focus your mental energy towards it, conscious of the fact that you are capable of performing there with the same level of emotion and in the same manner as now, relaxed, no matter what the environmental factors around you are like
 - ∞ enjoy for a little while more and gradually prepare to transfer back to the shade of the tree, feeling ever more relaxed and self-confident
- ▶ experience the warmth and the feeling of a beautiful summer day
 - ▶ now count upwards 1...10 – you feel more refreshed after each number
 - ▶ once you come to 8, begin to stretch yourself, feeling yourself refreshed ... by 9 you are fully conscious of events in the outside world and feel a good-willed desire to act, and by 10 you open your eyes and are ready to take action

2.4.3. Developing your ability to concentrate

It is important to accept the distracting factors of your environment because there will always be some. A focused performance is its own reward. Concentrate on keeping the following thoughts in your mind:

- I know how to do this.
- I can reach the objectives I have set.
- I am myself, and people like me the way that I am.
- I am in control of my own actions irrespective of the situation.
- I learn from my mistakes. They add to my experience, which in turn boosts my competitive ability.

Ability to concentrate and control of breathing

- ▶ sit in a comfortable position
- ▶ close your eyes
- ▶ listen to external sounds – only hear those sounds
- ▶ these sounds lead a life of their own through the entire exercise – they do not bother you, but help you relax even more
- ▶ let your arms stay on the sides of your body – then lightly place them on your stomach, just above the navel as if they were a gentle guard
- ▶ check that there is no tension in your body
- ▶ identify the feelings in your head and neck, arms, body, legs – if they are tense, relax them
- ▶ feel how heavy they are
- ▶ observe your breathing for ten breaths
- ▶ do nothing, just observe your breath, your way of breathing in and out
- ▶ breathe deep – when inhaling, make sure that the breath goes all the way to your stomach
- ▶ when breathing effectively, the hands on top of your stomach will rise because the stomach expands when inhaling
- ▶ exhaling, the stomach contracts and the hands go down
- ▶ breathe deeply ten times, so that you feel the breath all the way to your stomach – evenly and consciously
- ▶ hold your breath in between gasps – count calmly to five – and inhale
- ▶ there's nothing interesting in the world apart from your perfect breathing
- ▶ go back to your usual manner and rhythm of breathing
- ▶ once more gently tense all of the muscles around your body and release the tension with a clear breath out
- ▶ open your eyes – you are facing a fresh beginning

2.4.4. Methods for controlling nervousness

Everyone is nervous in his or her own way. Being nervous is acceptable and it can be useful, as long as you know how to keep it under control. If your nerves get the better of you, you can become nearly paralysed and this will lead to an underwhelming performance.

Purging nervousness with the help of concentration

- ▶ relax with a small breathing session – count to four as you breathe
- ▶ observe the movement of the airflow so closely that you feel like you can see it course through your body – from nose to throat, air pipe, lungs and back
- ▶ breathe four times: count to four and inhale, count to four and exhale
- ▶ make yourself feel good
- ▶ straighten your posture – think about your neck getting longer, as if someone was pulling you up by the hair
- ▶ align your shoulders with your body, don't bunch the forward or pull the back
- ▶ focus your thoughts on your centre of gravity, close to your navel
- ▶ talk soothingly to yourself
- ▶ all will go well – I will succeed
- ▶ I'll enjoy the next challenge and achieve an excellent performance
- ▶ I control the situation – I know how to react appropriately to its different twists and turns
- ▶ enjoy the titillating excitement that will propel you even further than you ever dared to wish



3. Concentrating on success

Mastery is rarely achieved by just being especially talented. In most cases, it stems also from enthusiasm and a confident attitude in your chances of overcoming tight situations. However, it should be borne in mind that the dictionary is the only place where success comes before work.

Have you ever felt anxious about something and noticed that the anxiety eased when you talked about and examined the matter together with someone?

Often our experiences of stress are associated with certain assumptions about some situation. Sometimes these assumptions are correct, but quite often they are not. We are too hard on ourselves or we misinterpret the intentions of other people. Usually this promotes negative thinking.

Becoming conscious of your own thoughts helps you block negative thinking from eroding your performance. Learn to control your actions yourself. You can choose what you do and how you do it.

Learn to create models of thought that boost your self-confidence.

You can always choose how you think and whether or not to be self-confident. If you lose your self-confidence in a competitive situation, this is because you yourself have let it become eroded or have ceased to believe in success.

Summary of developing your own performance	
OWN STRENGTHS	DEVELOPMENT AREAS
POSSIBILITIES	THREATS

Fill in this form and then have a discussion with your trainer about development areas that you have identified together. Agree on follow-up measures and monitoring.



4. The national team as a group process

4.1. General information about group processes: group phases

Humans are social animals and naturally tend to act together with other members of the species. Wherever several people gather, groups immediately begin to form. Studies of group processes have observed that each group formed by humans goes through a set of phases that usually occur in the same sequence. Depending on the source, these phases have been given different names, but there is widespread agreement about their contents. The speed of the process is dependent on many factors: around what matter did the group form, has the group been set clear, externally determined objectives or does the group itself determine its reason for being? The process is also affected by the level of commitment its members show towards the group as well as by its mode of formation: did it form by itself, spontaneously, or is someone steering the process.

The group process begins with the initial stage. People, who do not know each other from before, begin gradually to make contact and get acquainted with one another. Communication is cautious and superficial; people “feel out” their group comrades and attempt to define what kind of people they are dealing with. Little by little, communication between the members of the group grows, progressing from shallow conversation to a deeper and more personal level. People dare to reveal a little more about themselves, and this growing acquaintance leads to increased trust in the other members of the group. A community spirit is created and the set of people are now more than just individuals; a group to which these individuals feel they belong has also come into existence. Satisfaction and enthusiasm colour the group.

As the group spirit grows, the members feel more of a desire to find their own place or role within the group. The increased feeling of familiarity and security also makes it possible to express more negative emotions. Role formation can also lead to the creation of alliances or to power struggles; some members might test their limits within the group. The group will undergo turmoil, which at its worst can lead the group into crisis.

Depending on how crises or more minor conflicts are resolved, the group can either become stagnant or even discover its effective phase. The effective action phase is coloured by consensus, respect, clearly defined roles, effective communication and good morale. These make it easy for the group to realise its goals.

After functioning for a time, each group comes to the end of its journey, undergoing separation and the processing of this phase. The group has fulfilled the goals that were set for it, and its members continue onwards as members of other groups seeking to fulfil fresh objectives.

4.1.1. Spontaneously formed groups

A group process always begins, irrespective of whether or not it is steered. In spontaneously launched group processes, each individual member of the group shoulders responsibility for the formation. Everyone starts to get acquainted with other group members to the extent that their own social abilities allow, each in accordance with his or her own persona. This process is relatively slow, as even the most active and social group members start the familiarisation process slowly, feeling out and observing how the other members react. There is no clear model to follow in getting acquainted, this is also subject to feeling out and gradual experimentation.

More social and somewhat louder group members can easily take control of the situation, while the shyer and quieter ones step back and focus mostly on observing the others. Members of the latter group thus risk feeling like outsiders, or at least they might connect more poorly with the other group members. In any case, shyer group members will take a longer time than the more social individuals to develop a sense of security and get acquainted with the others; this means that, within the group, different members will be in different phases of the group process – some will be in a functioning secure group stage, while others are still searching for their place. The loudest group members might establish a separate core group, a clique, within the forming group that will control the group and can, to some extent, act contrary to the shared objectives of the wider group. Managing possible conflict situations is challenging in spontaneously formed groups.

4.1.2. Steered group formation

In steered group formation, an external party steers individuals to get acquainted with one another. This party has knowledge of the group phases that humans generally go through, and knows how to apply various exercises to steer the familiarisation phase of the group towards the effective action phase. This makes the progress of the process steady and faster than the spontaneous grouping alternative.

Controlled grouping provides the greatest benefit during the familiarisation phase of the group. It is easier for an individual group member to make contact with other group members when this is done following instructions given by an external party. The individual need not feel out the “right way” to approach the others, nor does he or she shoulder the responsibility for the forming of contacts. This gives both the more social and the shyer group members roughly the same opportunity to get acquainted with each other and feel like they belong to the group. All members are more or less in the same stage of the group process and no one is left an outsider. This in part helps prevent the formation of cliques and other core groups. What is more, the external party steering the group formation can, through the choice of exercises, influence the group and prevent the formation of an incipient clique.

The ability to intervene in group problems and possible conflict situations is also more effective in steered-formation groups. Greater group cohesion helps manage situations and an external handler can act as an impartial “referee” when matters are being decided.

A group, whose formation is steered, will progress into the effective action stage faster than a spontaneously formed group and the effective action stage will last longer thanks to this. Furthermore, greater equality and more efficient conflict-resolution abilities will enable the group to exploit its resources more effectively.

4.2. The steered group process in the national team

The national team setting in itself incorporates many factors that promote group formation: the team has a shared goal and objective – international skills competitions. The group gathers for team training camps, where all members participate in the same training. The group wears uniform clothing in the form of the team kit and the representative casual clothing of the Finnish squad, members travel to the country hosting the games together and move about as a group for the duration of the journey. The group represents its home country alongside teams from other nations.

However, it should be noted that there is a limited number of shared team training camps for the group before the trip to the competition. This means that only a fraction of the overall training period is spent training together as a team. If the team members were left to their own devices with respect to getting acquainted, the creation of a team spirit before the start of the competition would be limited, preventing all members from feeling a similar sense of belonging to the team.

Experiencing a sense of belonging to the team, feeling the team spirit, is, however, of foremost importance to the success of the competitor as well as for his or her ability to persevere. Competition performances at the games themselves are of course specific to each individual and skill, but travel, the WorldSkills experience, excitement, stress, success and failure, the challenges of foreign languages and the test projects and tools, the fatigue that creeps up as the competition progress – all of these are shared experiences for team members. This is an experience that even your closest family members or partners will not be able to share, so they will not be capable of fully understanding it. This is why the peer support competitors give each other along the way is a factor that promotes their ability to persevere and fosters success, helping members discharge their nerves after competition days and aiding them on their way to further excellent performances. Such peer support only becomes possible once team members start to know one another and have enough confidence in their team-mates to talk about even more difficult subjects.

For the team managers, a cohesive, well-grouped group is easier to control when travelling together in a strange place, surrounded by a foreign culture. It is easier to diffuse potential conflict situations.

A steered group process helps the team to reach its best operating level quickly and effectively. The steered process also prompts the team members to seek safety and support from their team-mates as well as helps competitors reorient themselves towards normal life after the experience of the competition. The group process is brought to its end in a controlled manner. Once the event has finished, the group will be assembled one more time for debriefing discussions on the experience and the training process as well as to celebrate the team’s success and to set our sights on life after the group.

It should be noted that a steered group process does not rule out the formation of spontaneous groups because, on top of official sessions aimed at promoting grouping and the formation of friendships, team members will of course get to know each other during their free time at team training camps as well as at unofficial meetings between camps. The steered group process supports the spontaneous formation of friendships.

CONSIDER: Reflect the matters presented in the foregoing and think about yourself; what kind of team member are you? What are your strengths and which characteristics do you feel are in need of further development?

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, occupying most of the page below the text. It is intended for the user to write their reflections on the 'CONSIDER' prompt.

4.3. Group process: exercises, which can influence the group in different stages of the process

The range of exercises that affect group dynamics is extensive and there is plenty of literature on the subject. Enclosed are, for the sake of example, just a few exercises that have been used to support the group process of the national team. The *Encounter*, *Flower* and *Movement in space* exercises are borrowed goods and the rest have been developed by team chaplain Atte Airaksinen. A peculiar characteristic of group exercises is their situation-specificness, and, by observing the fundamental idea of one exercise, you can create a wealth of new exercises that help realise the same goals.

The exercise director is aware of the goals he or she has set for the exercises and will take control of the situation so that group members can easily act observing instructions issued by an external party. At the same time, the director will monitor the entire group and will attempt to react if he or she notices the group signalling that the exercise does not, for example, correspond with the group's sense of security at the moment in question. The director will also ensure that each group member is considered sufficiently in the exercises and that no one is left on the sidelines.

4.3.1. Familiarisation, two exercises

The idea of this exercise is to break the initial tension of the people being grouped as well as to offer them a natural way to approach other group members. The aim is to take people's names into use from the very start and to get them to interact on a level that threatens the privacy on no one – the matters they disclose will say something about them, but they are not yet required to open themselves to strangers.

Encounter

- 10–50 people | light level of confidence | duration about 10 min.

The people are told to stand up and start moving about – this already breaks up the static setting of being seated around a table. Moving about doing somewhat strange things relaxes people and helps them forget about being anxious. The director will determine the space in which the people are to move freely, the intention being to mix up possible buddy-pairs. When the director gives the order to halt, group members stop and pick a nearby person who they do not know from before. They greet their pair and introduce themselves, then wait for further instructions.

The director instructs the pairs to tell each other something neutral about themselves. After a brief exchange of thoughts, the people are once again told to get moving, stopped and instructed to pick a new pair for themselves. Again, they introduce themselves and wait for further instructions.

The things they tell each other should be pretty vague:

“What was the first thing you thought about this morning?”

“What's the nicest place you've been to or would like to go to?”

“Tell your pair which fairytale princess you'd like to be?”

“If you had to cook a meal from the ingredients you now have at home, what dish would you make?”

During the final round, you can ask the people to look at their feet and seek out others wearing socks of the same colour as them. They can then tell these others why they picked precisely these socks today. Other items of clothing are also suitable topics of conversation.



Flower

- Max. 10 people/group, unlimited number of groups | light level of confidence
| duration depends on size of group, average about 45 min. (5 min. instructions, 15 min. discussion, 5 min. crafting, 20 min. analysis of the exercise)

The purpose of the exercise is to go through people's names once again, get them to interact amongst themselves as well as to deepen the discussion to a slightly more personal level. The aim is both to underline the unique characteristics of each group member as well as to focus on the common denominator that makes these people a group. Once the exercise has been completed, group members can usually recall not just the name of another person, but also some interesting detail that makes it easier to get further acquainted with that person - "Hey, weren't you the guy who likes fishing?"

Divide the people into groups of about 10 because it is difficult to hold a discussion in a group any larger than this. Each group is given some cardboard, which is cut into the centrepiece of a traditional-looking daisy. In addition, each group member is given an A4 sheet of paper that they'll shape into a petal of their own. The petal is marked with the member's name.

After this, the group should collect items for their flower in such a way that matters, which apply ONLY to the petal's owner and to no one else in the group, are written onto each petal. "I'm the only one who's a vegetarian."

Matters that are shared by ALL group members are collected into the centrepiece. If the group includes just one member, to whom an item does not apply, the item may not be written into the centrepiece.

If the group is slow to warm up to this exercise, you can suggest topics to them. Easy (and not too personal) themes include hobbies, siblings, languages spoken, horoscope signs...

After the discussion, the group glues the petals to the centrepiece. Then, in order to allow the others to participate in their discussion, each group will present its flower to the other groups, going through each member, his or her special characteristics as well as the properties that bind the group together.

After a group presents its work, the other groups can ask follow-up questions about the special characteristics they have just heard: "You play volleyball – how long have you been playing for and what kind of team do you belong to?"



4.3.2. Enhancing group spirit, two exercises

The goal of these exercises is to encourage group members to act together in order to achieve some objective. A clear, externally provided objective, whose attainment requires the participation of all group members and the utilisation of their individual competencies, will solidify the group spirit and bring people closer to each other.

Building together

- 15–20 people divided into three groups | light level of confidence | about 40 min.

The group is tasked with building a sufficiently large Lego set. The group is divided into three sub-groups, each of which is given a section of the building instructions. The parts needed to complete the set are all mixed up in one pile. Underline to the group that, in spite of there being three teams, this is not a competition, but a group exercise. The aim is to build a large totality, working together.

Provide the additional instruction that the building work must be carried out in complete silence. Talking is not allowed; any communication must be non-verbal.

The demand of silence makes the members of the group equal, preventing the loudest members from taking control of the group. Each gives his or her contribution by building or collecting pieces, and really has to concentrate on observing the others' work.

You should select a large building set, which consists of modules that are joined to form a totality in the end. This makes the exercise somewhat analogous with many WorldSkills test projects, in which instructions need to be followed and that consist of modules.

At the end, the exercise is analysed by allowing the participants to discuss how they felt about working in silence.

Competing together

- 15–20 people in total, divided into groups of five | light level of confidence | depending on number of tasks, some 5 min. / task

Divide the group into five-strong teams, which will compete against each other. Five minutes is set aside for the completion of each task, after which the teams will be assigned new competition tasks. The team that collects the most points wins.

The purpose of this exercise is to compete light-heartedly to strengthen the group's sense of affinity, especially within the five-strong teams. The assigned competition tasks are diverse, so that each group member in turn gets to showcase his or her competence. The success of a team counts towards the success of each of its members and no one will have to be alone in defeat or failure.

Different games and playing make for good exercises when boosting group spirit. Spending time together informally is also important.

4.3.3. Building confidence, one example

The purpose of confidence-building exercises is to boost the confidence group members feel towards their comrades. For this reason, such exercises are not assigned to groups that are only starting to get acquainted; they are more appropriate for groups whose affinity has already been primed through familiarisation and the boosting of group spirits.

At the beginning of the confidence-building exercise, it is important that the director underlines the responsibility participants have for one another. Even though the director is telling the group what to do, it is the responsibility of the people performing the exercise to ensure that nothing happens to their fellows.

It is also important to emphasise that it is not obligatory to take part if it would feel unpleasant to do so. This is because the group members may feel differently about the level of security that has been established within the group.

Movement in space

- Depending on the size of the space, 10–20 people | moderate level of confidence | about 5–10 min.

Divide the group into pairs. Each pair is positioned so that one person stands behind the other. The person standing behind places his or her hands on the shoulders of the person in front and keeps them there. The person in front closes his or her eyes. The director puts music on and the pairs begin to move around. The person in front is supposed to just walk, eyes closed, at a pace of his or her choosing, while the person in back is charged with ensuring that the other does not run into obstacles or the other couples moving about in the same space. After a few minutes, the pair switches roles and the other gets to direct while the other walks about.



5. Daybook of performance-control development

Period	Day	Exercise + duration	Feeling before exercise (0–10)	Feeling after exercise (0–10)	Observations, insights, development ideas
1					
2					

Period	Day	Exercise + duration	Feeling before exercise (0–10)	Feeling after exercise (0–10)	Observations, insights, development ideas
3					
4					

Period	Day	Exercise + duration	Feeling before exercise (0–10)	Feeling after exercise (0–10)	Observations, insights, development ideas
5					
6					

Period	Day	Exercise + duration	Feeling before exercise (0–10)	Feeling after exercise (0–10)	Observations, insights, development ideas
7					
8					

Period	Day	Exercise + duration	Feeling before exercise (0-10)	Feeling after exercise (0-10)	Observations, insights, development ideas
9					
10-11					

Period	Day	Exercise + duration	Feeling before exercise (0–10)	Feeling after exercise (0–10)	Observations, insights, development ideas
12–13					
14–15					

Period	Day	Exercise + duration	Feeling before exercise (0–10)	Feeling after exercise (0–10)	Observations, insights, development ideas
16–18					

Realisation of performance-control development:

- Regularity forms the basis of practise.
- Mental training should at first be performed daily for at least three weeks.
- One exercise should last at least 15 minutes.
- Training should take place at a peaceful location that is free of distractions.
- Write down the exercises you perform as well as their effects and the sensations they cause in the notes section of your training plan.
- Only performed exercises enhance your development.

My action plan for the WorldSkills / EuroSkills / Abilympics Competition

(Fill in the parts that are appropriate for your competition and skill)

1. Matters to be considered before the competition

2. Travel, residing in the competitor village

3. Day of preparation at the competition venue

4. Preparation for first day of competition, performance and recovery

5. Preparation for second day of competition, performance and recovery

6. Preparation for third day of competition, performance and recovery

7. Preparation for fourth day of competition, performance and recovery

8. After-assessment of the games

CONSIDER: "winners do the right things"

What is your way of ensuring success?

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the user to write their response to the question above.

Skills Finland is a non-profit organisation promoting excellence in skills in Finland. Skills Finland is supported by the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Finnish National Board of Education, labour market organisations, teacher and student organisations and vocational education and training providers and institutions. Skills Finland was established in 1993.

- Promotes top vocational competence and its appreciation.
- Organises and develops national vocational skills competitions in co-operation with regional training providers.
- Selects and manages the Finnish teams which compete in international skills competitions.
- Organises training for young professionals in the pursuit of excellence in skills.
- Organises training for experts, trainers and specialists in skills competitions.
- Promotes research on excellence in skills.

Excellence in Skills coaching and training system

- Is developed and carried out by Skills Finland in cooperation with vocational education and training providers and business life.
- Helps young people to develop their vocational skills and strengthen their professional pride towards success in the field of their trade.
- Is a three steps process towards excellence in skills:
 - o Basic training phase is executed in groups and it concentrates on vocational basic skills. The best candidates are selected to go on further.
 - o Intensive training phase aims at developing the skills that are required at the international competition. Members of the national team are selected at the end of this phase.
 - o During the national team training phase, the members of the team form a cohesive national team and support each other.

The concept of three steps training system is developed in Finland but it is free to inspire and be used in other countries. This "*Mental Training Workbook*" is a part of the four modules in the three steps process.

Contact Information

Rahakamarinportti 3 B, FI-00240 Helsinki
Tel. +358 9 868 9680, fax +358 9 8689 6818

skills@skillsfinland.fi
www.skillsfinland.fi