



onlinehulp-Vlaanderen

Digital competences for social workers providing blended support and working on digital inclusion

European social work conference

26 april 2024 – hosted by SAM, steunpunt Mens en Samenleving
and Onlinehulp Vlaanderen

The partners



onlinehulp-Vlaanderen



steunpunt mens
en samenleving



with the support of



Vlaanderen
is zorgzaam samenleven

Program

1. A framework outlining the digital competences expected of social workers developed in collaboration with Onlinehulp Vlaanderen
2. Three inspirational examples of initiatives in social work practice aimed at strengthening these competences.
 - Digital skills in social economy across Europe
 - E-inclusion guide for West-Flanders
 - Digital skills for social work professionals in South Africa
3. A panel discussion in which we will explore the significance of digital competences and how the framework can aid in identifying and acquiring these skills.

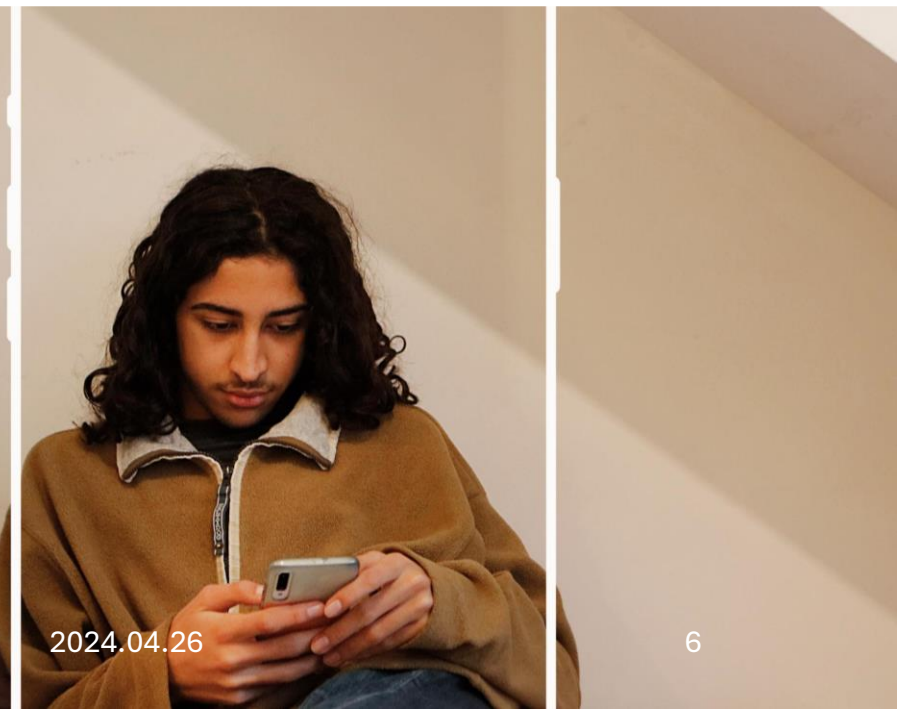
What we hope you will gain from this session

1. Insight into the “digital competences for social workers” framework and into the perspectives of fellow participants regarding the significance of digital competences.
2. Inspiration from concrete projects dedicated to bolstering digital competences.
3. Diverse viewpoints on the challenges associated with digital inclusion, digital or blended social work



A framework for digital competences of social workers

Jana Verplancke – Philippe Bocklandt – 2024.04.26



Introduction

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framework

A framework ... what?

3 focal points & 9 clusters

Alert for the digital gap

Blended help for clients

The organisational level

Relevance of the
framework

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- What are specific competences that social workers **need to work digitally or in a blended manner?**

(1 competence on 1 post-it, please)



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Which digital competence would you personally like to strengthen?

Digital literacy about
tools and platforms

Patience with technology

Know more about privacy
issues online

Technical skills

Knowing what digital
tools are safe to use
(regarding privacy etc)

Technical, privacy,
nearby-distance (where
are boundaries)

AI usage

To work with pkataforms,
digital safety,

Learning more about
digital tools

How motivate clients to
use apps?

Coaching

Being able to contribute
in designing digital tools
in cooperation with users
and developers.

AI

Artificial intelligence

I want to learn the
benefits and challenges
of every social media app

How to interacte, activate
through digital
communication tool

Planning automation

Learn the client

Interpersonal skills

Capacity to transmit the
digital skills

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Which digital competence is most important for a social worker?

Integrity

Understand digital
exclusion

Accessible

Media literacy, knowledge
about privacy, digital
interacriion competences

Making connection with
clients no matter the tool
(f2f, chat, ...)

Open communication
with clients about
working together on a
blended way.

Relationship building in a
digital world - creating
connection with clients

Aanklampend werken

Helping people using
services to use digital
resources more
beneficially, safely and
confidently

Legal aspects, privacy

Being flexibele and
innovative to find the
most suitable digital tools

Excel

Interpersonal skills

Openheid naar het online
leven van cliënten

Choose the best tool for
the people they work with

Why a competence framework?

“A social worker must be able to share data securely”

“A social worker must be able to communicate in a media literate manner”

“A social worker must be able to use communication tools”

“A social worker must be alert of the digital gap”

The media literacy and digital competences expected of a social worker are **often discussed in very general terms.**

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Why a competence framework?

This framework

- aims to contribute **to greater transparency and clarity** so that we can communicate more clearly about expectations and needs relating to digital competences.
- aims to **encourage the development process** and not to describe 'minimum competences'

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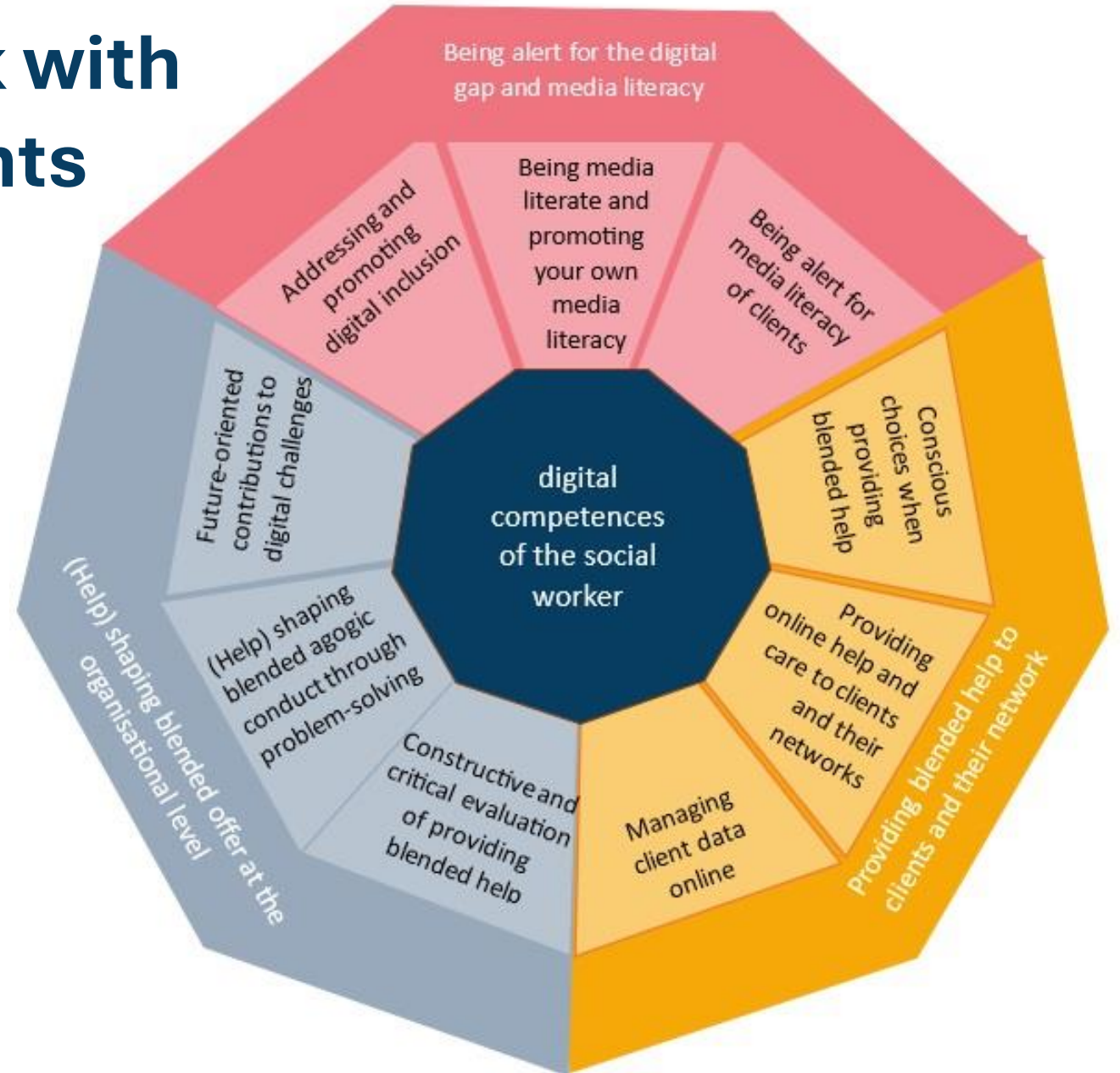
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What?

- **A framework ... a structure**
- Competences to work blended and digitally with the target group.
- **Social workers**
 - Because these competence descriptions are already available for healthcare and educators
 - Because it is a very broad group of employees in social work and (mental) healthcare.
- **Framework in development**
 - Feedbackloops with social work education programs
 - Feedbackloops with organisations of social work

Creation of a Framework for digital competences of social workers

Framework with 3 focal points & 9 clusters



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The frame: 3 focal points

Being alert for the digital gap and media literacy

Providing blended help to
clients and their network

Help shap(ing) a blended offer
at the organisational level

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1st focal point: be alert for the digital gap

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Be alert for the digital gap

1. Strengthening digital inclusion:

- Bridging the digital gap, ensure digital inclusion
- Providing equitable access to technologies, skills, and support, OR referring clients appropriately

2. Being media literate yourself












- Being able to act professionally and securely across digital platforms

3. Being alert for media literacy of clients

- help discuss, promote media literacy among your target group
- competences to detect and strengthen the opportunities for digital communication with the target group

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focus	cluster	competence component	competence	proposal position	own choice
Being alert for the digital gap and media literacy	1. Addressing and promoting digital inclusion	1.1. knowledge	1.1.1. knowing what digital exclusion and digital inclusion mean		
			1.1.2. recognising the digital gap between generations, between people and between professionals and clients		
			1.1.3. knowing the different dimensions of the digital gap at both micro and macro level <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ availability of technology ▪ availability of technical competences ▪ be able to deploy digital tools concerning well-being and health ▪ (consequences of) digitisation of society 		
			1.1.4. knowing the digital needs, requirements and possibilities of specific vulnerable target groups (people in poverty, people with disabilities, etc.)		
			1.1.5. ...		
		1.2. skills	1.2.1. being able to make targeted and warm referrals to organisations that help close the digital gap for clients		
			1.2.2. participating in closing the digital gap by focussing on clients as well as organisational and policy responsibilities	 	
			1.2.3. being able to identify areas of concern on digital inclusion among clients		
			1.2.4. ...		
		1.3. attitudes	1.3.1. focussing on closing the digital gap both among clients and in terms of attention that organisations and policies should pay to it.	 	
			1.3.2. focussing on the digital opportunities and growth possibilities of clients and their environment and not just the barriers		
			1.3.3. ...		

From the perspective of the social worker?

"I think it is important that, as a social worker, I can provide support in all areas of life. You sometimes need digital skills to help clients with their various requests for help"
(R37 –social worker)

"It is essential that they feel safe to dare to ask digital questions," (R18)

"The choice between solving the problem myself as a social worker or refer the client depends on the complexity of the problem, the digital skills of the person involved, and the availability of specialized support."
(R8 - Social Worker)



10 students Social Work of Artevelde



57 interviews with social workers about their perspective on their role in e-inclusion

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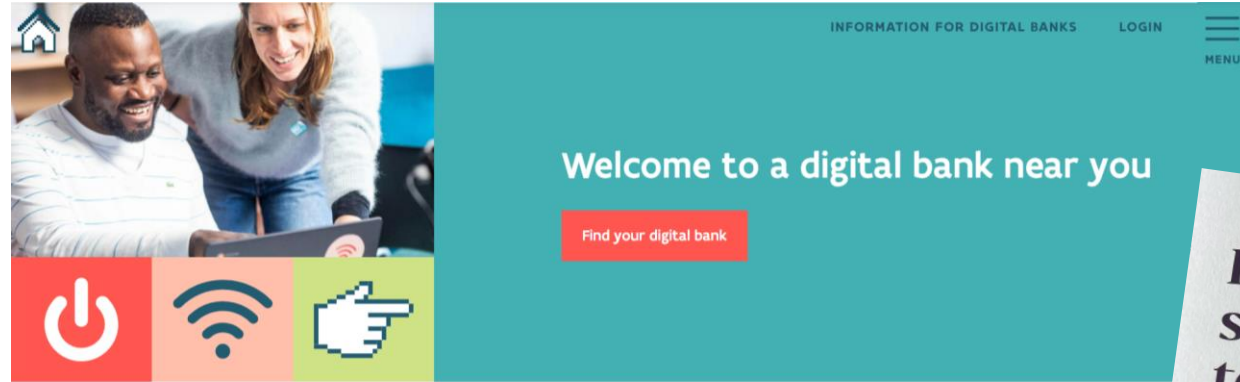
Outro

From the perspective of the social worker?

- Social workers see it as their role to ensure e-inclusion – most respondents
- More than half of the respondents find it their role supporting clients to get digital or empowering them
- Difficult balance between providing support or refer
- Giving digital support = very time-intensive
- For some, not their primary responsibility, but important to be able to refer the clients

Creation of a Framework for digital competences of social workers

Good practice: Digital banks & Digi-helpers



all distances name digibank/digipunt i do...



Remove any sense of shame. For example, tell the digistarter that no one can know everything, that you also need to look things up sometimes, and that everyone has a digital oopsie every now and then.

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Good practice Flanders: Digi-Guide Tool

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The screenshot shows the homepage of the 'digiwijzer' website. At the top left is the 'digiwijzer' logo. The top right navigation bar includes links for 'Digi offer', 'About digital guide', 'News', and a blue 'Contact' button with a search icon. The main heading reads 'digital inclusion in West Flanders' with the subtitle 'portal site for referrals'. Below this is a search bar with the placeholder text 'Type here to search'. A large, colorful graphic on the right side of the page features stylized human figures in blue, orange, and green. At the bottom, there are four filter categories: 'My client wants' (What does your client need help with?), 'How' (How does your client want to be helped?), 'Where' (Where?), and 'When' (When does your client want to receive support?). Each filter has a dropdown arrow. To the right of these filters is a blue 'Show offer' button with a search icon and a link 'Know the filter' below it.

Framework with 3 focal points & 9 clusters

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2nd focal point: Providing blended help to clients

4. Making well-considered choices

- in consultation with the client
- estimate which online tools can be useful
- Knowing the options

5. Providing online help and care to clients and their networks

- Social workers can provide digital information professionally.
- Have online communications skills
- Use apps and websites to optimize the interaction

6. Managing client data online

- Critically reflection on sensitive personal client data.

Good practice: providing blended work



Good practice: providing blended support

Checklist for social professionals and clients

“As a social worker, it is important to be able to consider when is digital contact appropriate?”



READY TO BLEND?!

Is your cliënt ready for blended support?

Checklist for social professionals and clients to work together in a blended manner

Version 18 October 2023

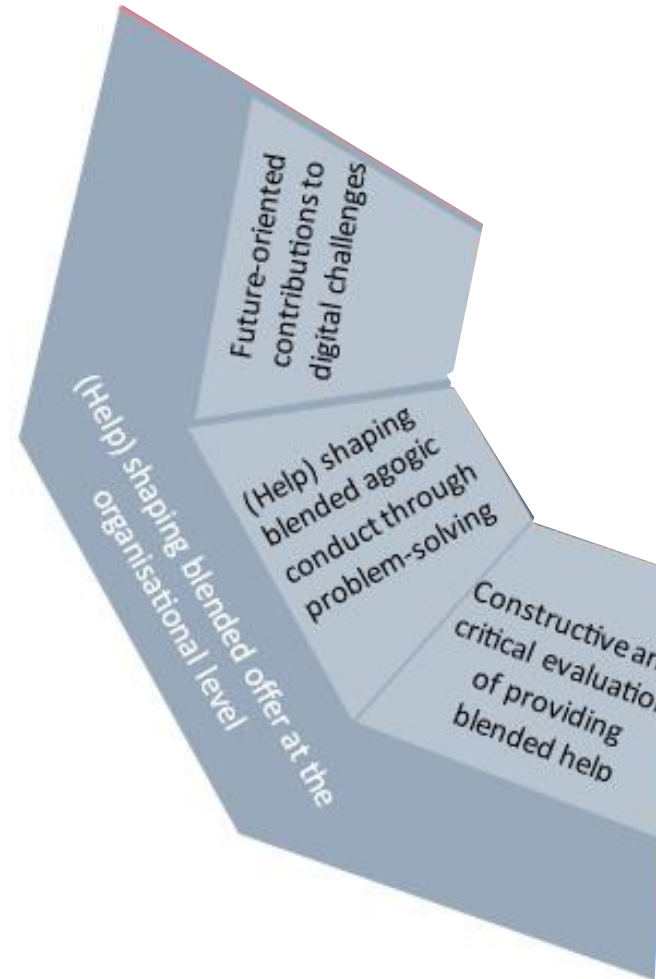
Authors

Jana Verplancke & Philippe Bocklandt

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3rd focal point: Shaping blended offer at organisation level

Be aware of digital challenges all times

- Social workers realise that digital evolution will continue to evolve in society
- They try out the relevant possibilities and continue to reflect positively but critically on the value of these evolutions.

Help shaping blended social work

- Creating a vision of blended work at team and organizational level
- Participate in strengthening employee and client confidence

Constructive and critical evaluation of blended help

- Social workers can monitor the quality of the blended offer from within the organization.

Click, Call AND Connect principle in Flanders

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“The internet – the click – offers many opportunities. BUT difficult for many people.

- Click: important that a digital tool is simple
- Call: being able to call a service for free
- Connect : people must still be able to go somewhere physically without an appointment.”

SAAMO

What do Social Workers say?

“Here in our organization we offer everything complementary, both physically and digitally. We try to be flexible and adapt based on people's needs, without forcing them to go digital” (R3).

“Digital first is very often digital only and that is not OK, because this excludes a lot of people.” (R53).



Research-project Students Social Work '23-'24

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How to decide to implement online help in the organization?

What are the added value elements of online help?

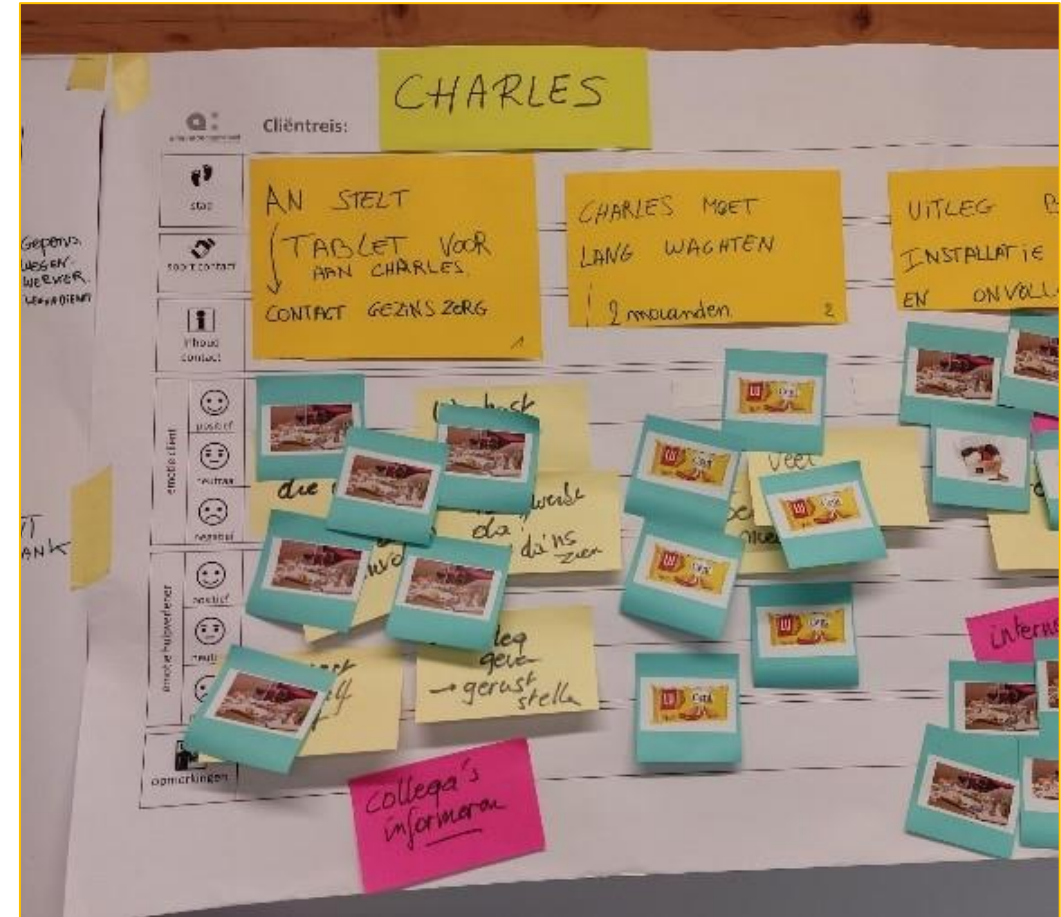
- For the clients and their context
- For the social worker
- For the organization

Search for the sense of urgency / necessity

- Why change?
- What are difficulties in the organization?

Creation of a Framework for digital competences of social workers

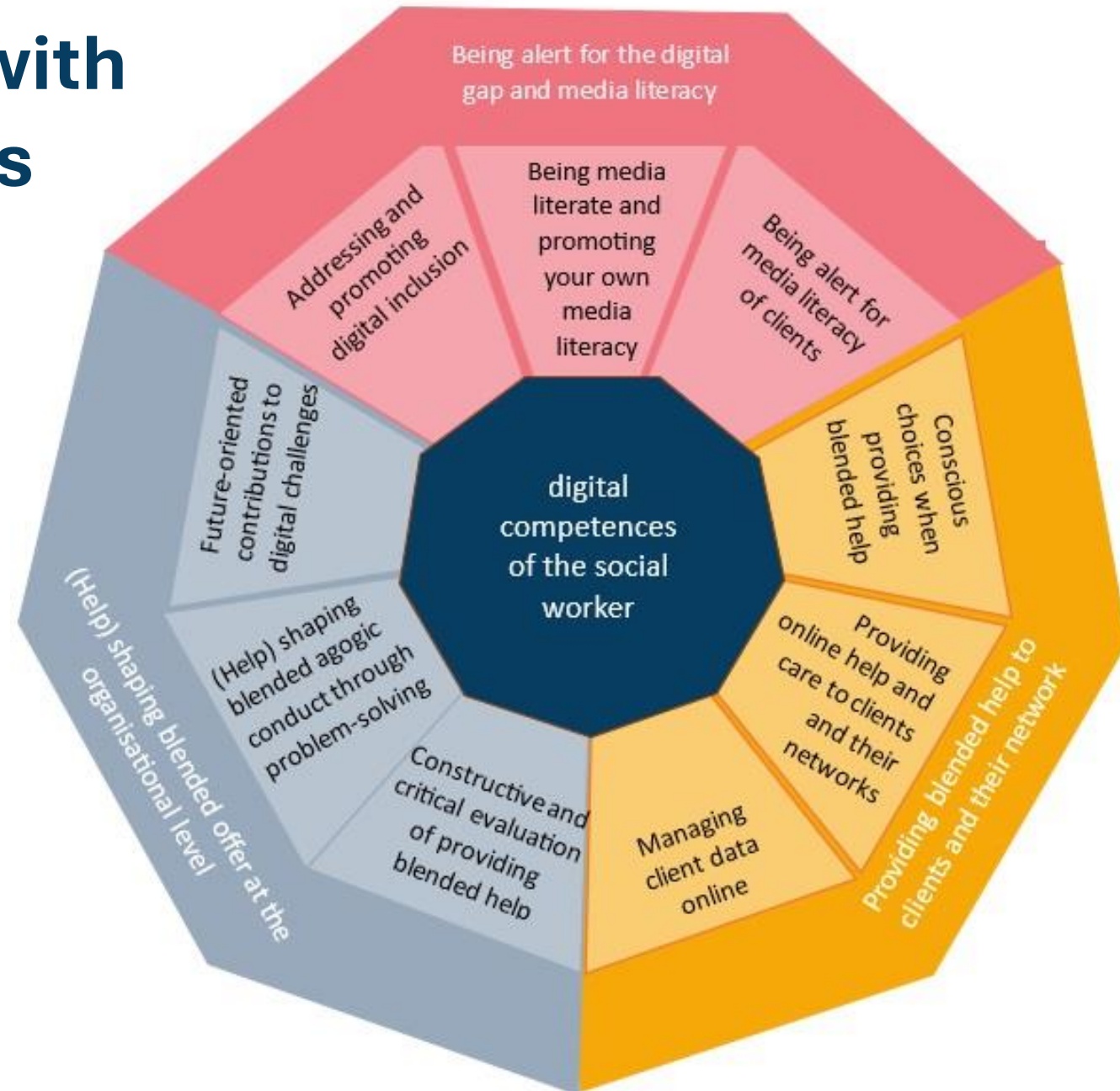
Good practice: Client journeys



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Relevance of the framework

- **Social work organizations**
 - in terms of training offer for employees or recruitment policy
- **Civil Society actors**
 - In terms of their support assignment
- **Government**
 - as a frame of reference for developing policy initiatives
- **Educational programs**
 - as a touchstone for what has already been developed
 - as a framework for designing new training or lifelong learning offer

"We do not receive specific lessons for digital subjects. The staff has to do their own research and sometimes even work at home to learn." (R3)

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Call to action

- Take your post-its
- Put your post-its on the framework/on the clusters
- Per table: Look together at the results of your post-its:
 - What does this say?
 - Does every competence fit in?

Creation of a Framework for digital competences of social workers



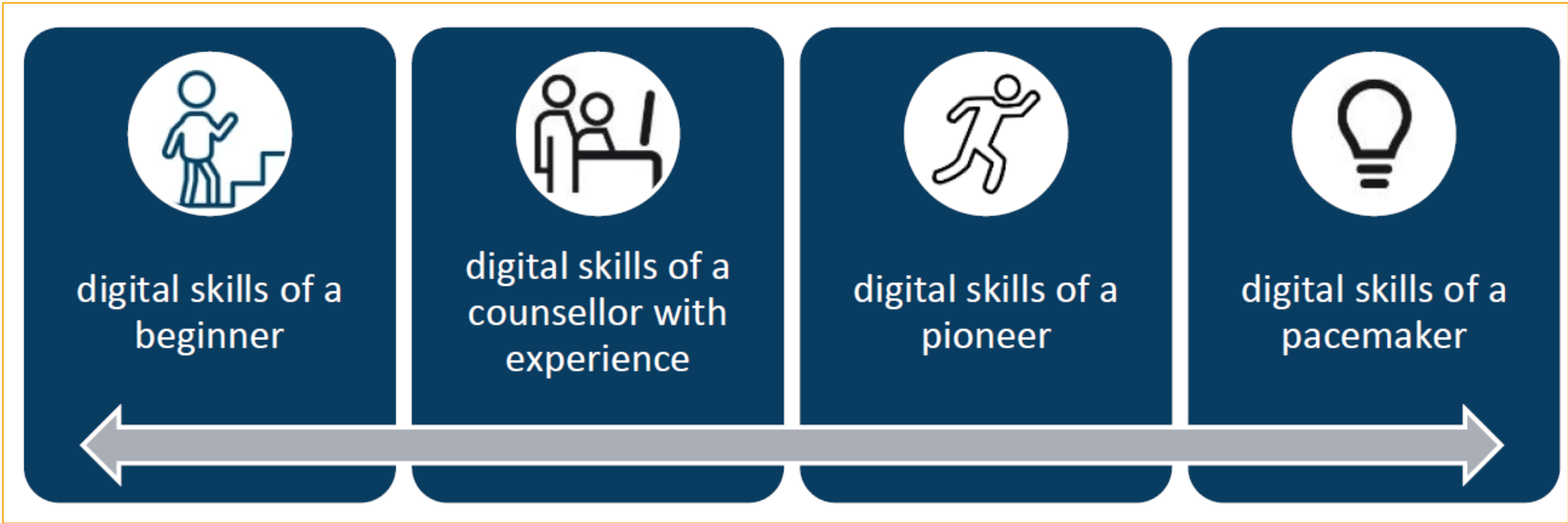
How important are these clusters?



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The framework refined according to the position of the social worker

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The important competence of adaptability

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““Surviving means adapting. Organizations must certainly respond to this. Being able to be flexible in disruptive times. Creativity will be the most important skill for the future. Only by thinking innovatively will digitalization become a springboard to greater prosperity and greater personal well-being.””

Saskia Van Uffelen

More information? Questions?



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<https://onlinehulp-vlaanderen.be/digitale-competenties-sociaal-agogische-professional>



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