



## Promoting Women’s Entrepreneurship: An example of a good practice training programme in Switzerland

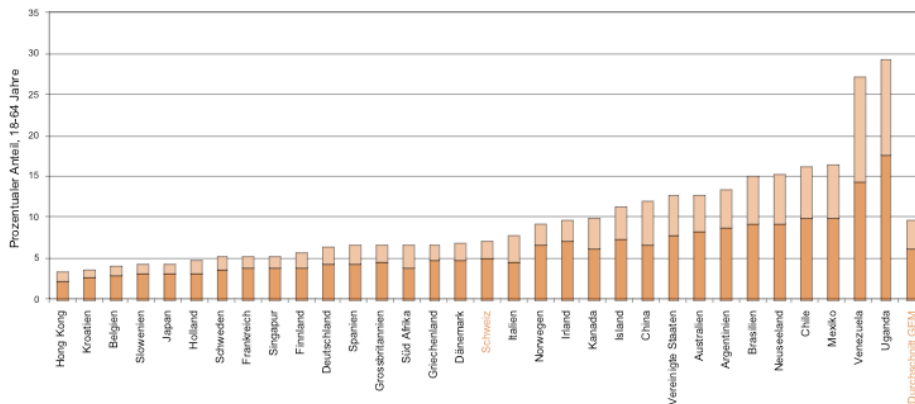
This training concept has been developed by Ms Line Pillet and Ms Prof. Diane Reinhard with the support of Swiss Occidental Leonardo and implemented in the University of Applied Sciences Western Switzerland Arc Neuchâtel.

### FOREWORD

The question of entrepreneurship is mobilizing more and more people and resources in Switzerland. In addition to universities, where the number of entrepreneurship research projects and courses is increasing steadily, the political authorities are also considering fostering entrepreneurship and firm creation as a driver of growth in a Global Economy. In 2004, Government’s recommendations were specifically designed to reinforce the entrepreneurial environment and business culture, in particular through education and training, and to promote the creation and growth of small and medium-sized businesses in Switzerland<sup>1</sup>.

### ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN SWITZERLAND

According to the Switzerland 2003 GEM Report 2, **the average level of Total Entrepreneurial Activity (TEA) in Switzerland rises to 7.4%**. This is quite good compared to other European countries. **However, the percentage of women entrepreneurs is relatively low: only 4.8%**. This is about the half of the percentage of men entrepreneurs (9.4%).



Source: Switzerland 2003 GEM Report

<sup>1</sup> La politique PME – Contribution à la revitalisation, Discours d’ouverture de Monsieur Joseph Deiss, Président de la Confédération, Thoune, 6 mai 2004, Swiss Economic Forum.

<sup>2</sup> The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) research program is an annual assessment of the national level of entrepreneurial activity. Initiated in 1999 with 10 countries, expanded to 21 in the year 2000, with 29 countries in 2001 and 37 countries in 2002, <http://www.gemconsortium.org>.

The first important issue then was to understand the reasons of this low involvement of women in the national level of entrepreneurial activity.

According to scientific researches and surveys<sup>3</sup>, different factors can explain this, such as:

- the lack of information about job opportunities for women
- the lack of role models
- the lack of contacts and access to networks
- the choice of types and business sectors (95% of the new enterprises created by women are small to very small businesses starting with less than 5 employees and most of these micro-businesses are developed in the field of services, social and health).
- the multiple roles women face (work, family)
- the lack of support and child care facilities
- but also subjective perceptions about one's own skills, likelihood of failure, and the existence of opportunities.

In that context, the PREFACE project initiated by the University of Halmstad (Sweden) with the support of the European Commission<sup>4</sup> was an opportunity to share knowledge and experiences with other countries and get inspiration from good practices in order to improve this situation and increase the number of women entrepreneurs in Switzerland. This is what motivated SOL and the University of Applied Sciences Western Switzerland Arc Neuchâtel to join the PREFACE project in November 2002.

## IMPACT OF PREFACE IN SWITZERLAND

In Switzerland, the impact of PREFACE has been quite important. **Five focus groups** (about 50 entrepreneurs, managers, teachers, students, career advisors and representatives of business support organisations) **have been conducted between April and August 2003** in order to analyze the situation of women's entrepreneurship in Switzerland and identify positive and negative factors. The survey showed that one of the major preoccupations of women wanting to set up in business or become independent is how to balance work and family. This balance has a major influence on their behaviour and motivation for entrepreneurship.

Yet, an overview of existing entrepreneurship programmes shows that the main focus is on the development of management abilities and the mastery of strategic and financial planning concepts (hard skills)<sup>5</sup>. Other important issues like personal values and vision, self-awareness, balance, but also the clarification of the personal and professional objectives as well as the art of making connections (also known as soft skills) are not or insufficiently handled. Hence the **need to develop complementary courses based on the real-life experience of women entrepreneurs tackling the reflection on the business project with a reflection on the personal objectives.**

---

<sup>3</sup> Marianne Neuhaus, *Femmes entrepreneurs : un potentiel sous-exploité par l'économie suisse*, La Vie économique, Revue de politique économique, décembre 2003.

<sup>4</sup> PREFACE (PREparing Female students For Academic Entrepreneurship) is a pilot project supported by the European Commission within the framework of the Community Vocational Training Action Programme Leonardo da Vinci, [http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/leonardo/leonardo\\_en.html](http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/leonardo/leonardo_en.html)

<sup>5</sup> An example is the Fast Track for Start-ups Venturelab funded and supported by the Swiss Government, <http://www.venturelab.ch>

The result of this work and reflection is **a holistic training model** based on two innovative courses: module 1 "Clarification of the Personal Project" and module 2 "Business Networking" (3 x 3 training periods each) developed with the support of Swiss Occidental Leonardo, then tested and validated with a group of 8 students (6 female / 2 male) in the University of Applied Sciences Western Switzerland Arc Neuchâtel between February and March 2005.

Both courses are primarily for high-achieving women. But the experience has shown that these issues are relevant to men as well. Expectations have also changed for men. Furthermore, many men today do not support the particular view of masculinity reinforced by organizations. They do not have stay-at-home wives who do all the caregiving. Nor do they want to delegate all caregiving responsibilities to someone else. When we present the themes discussed in these courses to a male audience, the **men comment that they are struggling with similar issues**. The themes presented here are relevant to all women and men who desire to both excel in their chosen careers and to have fulfilling lives outside their work. For that reason, we have decided to open both courses to men as well.

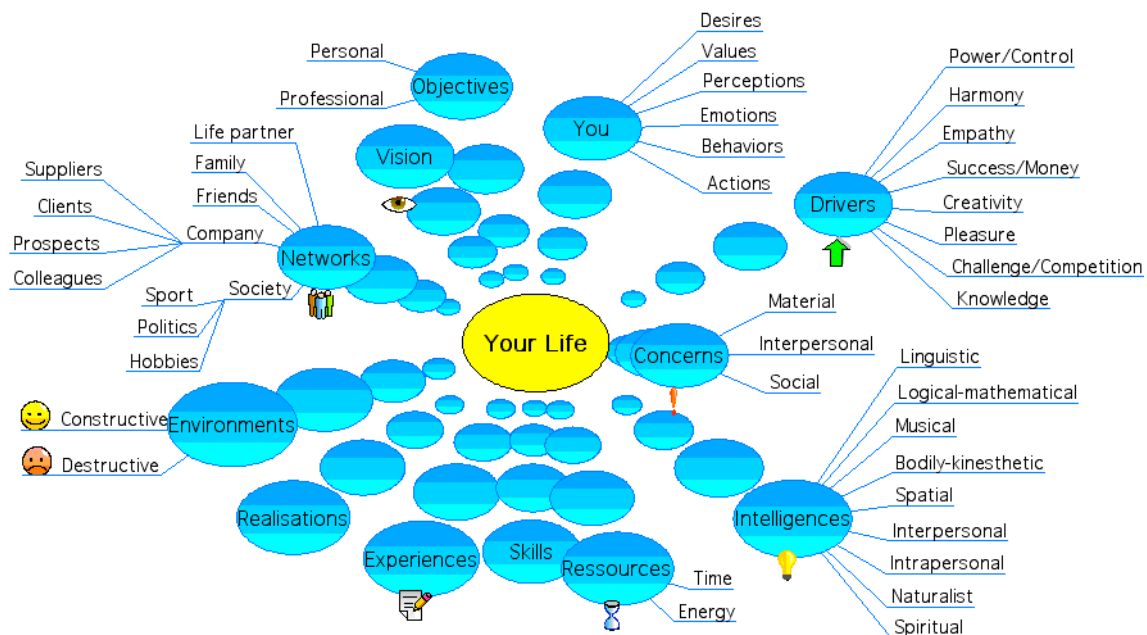
## **MODULE 1: CLARIFICATION OF THE PERSONAL PROJECT**

The module "Clarification of the Personal Project" is about clarifying the personal and professional objectives. Participants are willing to start up their own business, but at which stage of their project are they? Does the business project conflict or fit with the personal situation?

The module is based on our experience in the management of training projects at national, European and international levels. It is based on 4 key elements:

- **Vision:** What are your dreams and passions? How do you want to have impact? Explore your personal vision, stories and daydreams, focus and energy.
- **Values:** What are your core values and priorities?
- **Self-awareness:** Who are you? What are your personal characteristics, learning styles and response to change? What are your strengths / weaknesses? What are your drivers, concerns and intelligences/aptitudes? What are your resources, competencies and achievements? What environment is the most constructive for you?
- **Balance:** What besides work is going on in your life? Consider finances, location, parenting, health and age, impacts of work and personal lives, roles and relationships as elements in your choice.

Overview of module 1 "Clarification of the Personal Project" (mind map):



All these important issues are discussed and developed during the course.

To help participants clarify their personal and professional objectives we use different methods, such as:

- the presentation of effective tools (assessment tools, mind maps, creative thinking, SWOT, WWWWWH, etc.)
- workshop discussions
- discussions with experts and women entrepreneurs (role models).

In the end of the course, participants have a good overview of the different components of their life and can assess if these elements conflict or fit with their business project.

## FEEDBACK OF PARTICIPANTS

The evaluation of the module "Clarification of the Personal Project" is very positive. According to participants, the course is very helpful in visualizing all aspects of one's life, in prioritizing values and understanding personal likes and dislikes. The discussions foster self-awareness of values and priorities, and help assess behaviours, choices and trade-offs. In fact, you are encouraged to take action to align your values with your life, believe in yourself and get support from the others (network).

## **MODULE 2: BUSINESS NETWORKING PROGRAMME**

Our business Networking Programme is based on our experience in teaching networking in our executive MBA for women in the University of Applied Sciences Western Switzerland Arc Neuchâtel.

The first evening is a theoretical introduction.

The second evening is the construction of the personal networks.

In the third evening students attend an important networking event in order to test their aptitude to get new contacts

### **1. THEORETICAL INTRODUCTION**

We currently observe a change of society. We live in the era of knowledge and constant change conduct. Performance of companies and individuals rest on the exchange and collective learning principles.

Added Value is created by:

- The control of information
- The control of knowledge and competences

In this context, we have constructed our own theory based on the paradigm that networks are powerful vectors of information exchange and reinforce the collective and individual learning process, so that

- The ability of networking is one of the important skills a manager should have in this changing environment.

#### **1.1. BUSINESS NETWORKING, DEFINITION AND PRINCIPLES**

Contrary to one's often think, networking is not only an exchange of business cards but must be a practice aimed at acquiring voluntarily and systematically professional contacts satisfying reciprocal needs (Brigitte Cassigneul).

Young people often think that networking is just string pulling, what makes them reluctant to this kind of relations.

Our objective was to show them that networking can be efficient only if constructed on a strong relationship.

##### **The main principles are :**

- share of ideas and information on a free basis
- expression of needs
- multiplier effect, the network of my contacts forms part of my network

##### **Networking is an attitude that need special skills like :**

- being able to express one's needs in an attractive way
- being open to others
- being willing to share and help
- being grateful

## 1.2. WHY USING NETWORKS?

In our over connected world, networks have become essential in all areas of life to manage your career.

### **For business purpose, the main uses are:**

- Collect information
- Find an expert
- Develop one's circle of influence
- Have access to the hidden work market
- Find new customers
- Develop new partnerships

### **One aspect we focus on and we find more important is the individual and collective learning**

- Exchange in order to progress, to adapt to the constant evolution of the environment
- Enrich reciprocally in all dimensions
- Reach work-life-balance

## 1.3. MANAGEMENT OF NETWORKS

Networking is a structured and rigorous method that consist of:

- structuring your address book using a tool such as Outlook
- using your network in expressing one's needs
- extending your network in taking part in events
- taking care of your network and contacts

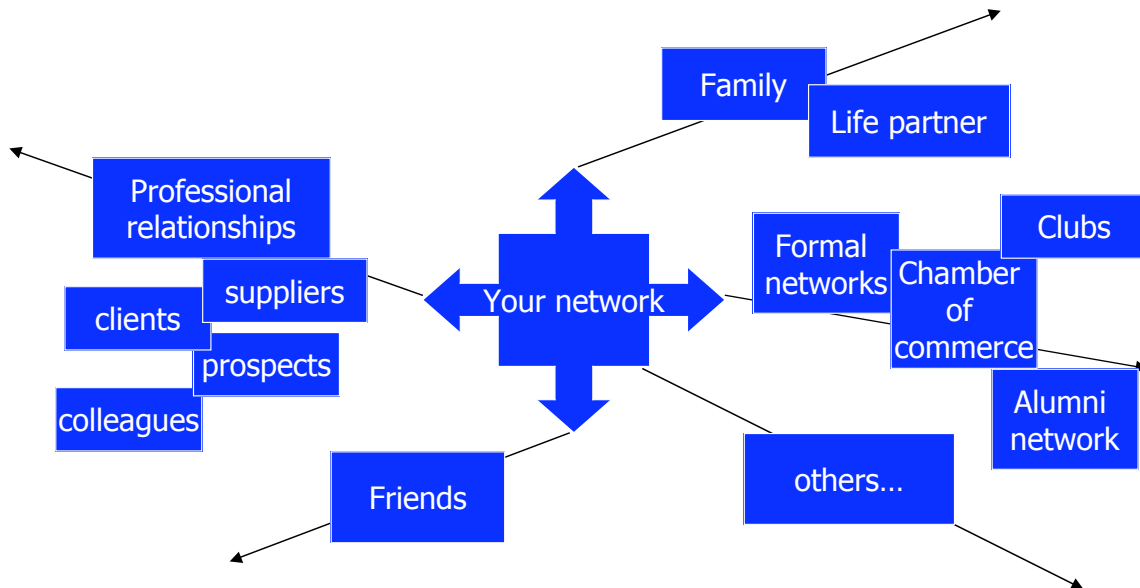
## 2. BUILD A TARGETED AND EFFICIENT PERSONAL NETWORK

The second evening is an approach in three steps that should help participants visualize their main networks, the enrichment they get out of them and how they can organise their networking activities in the future.

### **PROPOSED APPROACH**

- Your current network: personal, leisure, professional, political and other (mindmap)
- Your future network: who should be in your network
  - Comparison with the objectives of the personal project (different mindmaps)
  - Build of your network of tomorrow, fitting to your personal project (mindmap)

## 2.1 YOUR CURRENT NETWORK, WHO IS IN YOUR NETWORK ?



## 2.2 YOUR FUTUR NETWORK, WHO SHOULD BE IN YOUR NETWORK ?

To define who should be in your network and establish your future network you have to go through the following process

- Evaluating the main eras of your personal project
- Comparing the adequacy of your current network with your future competition field and your personal needs
- Complete your current network and create **“your ideal individual balanced network”**

<b>Your mindmaps</b>	<b>Your mindmap</b>	<b>Your ideal network</b>
<b>Personal project</b> Your objectives personal professional  * Your supporting environments * Your dreams concerning work-life balance * Your life partner choice * Your personal and collective enrichment axes *Your talents	<b>Current network</b> <b>Current situation</b> Who do you know ? On whom can you rely ? With whom, when and where do you feel good ?  *Family *Work *Friends *Leisure *Others...	<b>« balanced mindmap»</b> <b>For tomorrow</b> Adequacy between personal projects and networks  Select one’s networks in a strategic way * Formal network to answer your needs * Informal personal networks * solid relationships  <b>For your work-life balance</b> <b>(very individual and various)</b>

### 3. ATTENDING AN IMPORTANT NETWORKING EVENT

During the third evening the students attend an important networking event in order to test their aptitude to get new contacts.

#### 3.1. PREPARATION

You have to prepare your participation to a networking event so that you will get the best use out of it. The questions you have to ask yourself are:

##### Which event

- How do you target your events?
- Which event can answer your needs?
- Registration at the event: "First Tuesday [www.rezonance.ch](http://www.rezonance.ch) "

##### How to come in touch?

- What is your key message, does your message translate your two needs for this evening?
- Present yourself in a memorable way in one sentence / 2 minutes to remain in your interlocutor's memory, use of speed networking (based on the method Lise Cardinal<sup>6</sup>)
- Which information can you exchange?
- Other means: does your business card translate the image you want to translate?

#### 3.2 RESULT OF THE NETWORKING EVENT

After each targeted event, you should evaluate your performance and prepare the next step

- Did you reach your objective, did you find an answer to your questions, did you fulfil your needs?
- Have you got two new "good" contacts?
- Think about introducing these new contacts in your "Outlook" system
- When and how are you going to get in touch again with these persons?

### 4. FEEDBACK OF PARTICIPANTS

The evaluation of the module "Business Networking" is also very good. The course made participants more aware of the network aspects, made them understand its utility and importance. This course should be given in various programmes in the High Schools. It is important to prepare oneself to networking and to get used to take part in events by one's own. Networking in a constructive way is not easy and requires training.

---

<sup>6</sup> Lise Cardinal, Roxane Duhamel, *Réseautage d'affaires : mode de vie*, Les Editions Transcontinental inc. et les Editions de la Fondation de l'entrepreneursip, 2004.

## CONCLUSIONS

### Modules

- Both courses "Clarification of the Personal Project" and "Business Networking" have been evaluated very positively by students. They are considered as important tools to clarify their aptitude to get an entrepreneur.
- The courses might be visited separately, but they are more efficient if visited one after the other in order to get a global proactive attitude to manage the career.
- An additional support may be provided by mentors (female and male).
- A final note. This is not just an issue for individual women or men. Organisations have very high stakes in understanding and advocating new ways of developing high-achieving people. Given the increasing demand for leadership talent today, organisations cannot afford to misunderstand or underestimate the developmental issues facing young talents in leadership roles. Hence the idea to transfer and integrate both courses in the entrepreneurship programme Venturelab.

### Success

- After the course, one of the participants decided to set up her own business.

## DISSEMINATION

In Switzerland, several dissemination activities have been conducted in order to present PREFACE outcomes and results.

Most significant activities are:

- **Closing Conference of the PREFACE Project at the University of Bologna, 9<sup>th</sup> of June 2005.**
- **Market Tuesday @ Université de Neuchâtel, 15<sup>th</sup> of June 2004: "Femmes, Carrière et le Complexe de Cendrillon"** (about 350 participants)
- **Market Tuesday @ HEVs Sierre, 28<sup>th</sup> of September 2004: "Gestion de carrière et marketing de soi: il est temps de s'y mettre!"** (about 200 participants)
- **Market Tuesday @ Université de Neuchâtel, 22<sup>nd</sup> of March 2005: "Les succès des non-scolaires; j'ai réussi dans la vie, pas à l'école"** (about 130 participants)
- **Market Tuesday @ Ecole d'Ingénieurs de Genève, 19<sup>th</sup> of April 2005: "Pourquoi pas moi! L'entrepreneuriat au féminin"** (about 320 participants)<sup>7</sup>.

Other dissemination activities are:

- The publication of three PREFACE Newsletters in French and English<sup>8</sup>
- The publication of several articles in the press or magazines<sup>9</sup>.

---

<sup>7</sup> All events are archived at <http://www.rezonnance.ch/ft/archived>

<sup>8</sup> All Newsletters can be downloaded at <http://www.s-o-l.ch/preface> or on the portal Career-women, <http://www.career-women.ch>

<sup>9</sup> All articles can be downloaded at <http://www.s-o-l.ch/preface>

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

We are deeply grateful to the students of the University of Applied Sciences Western Switzerland Arc Neuchâtel, for their insightful contributions to this training programme. We are also grateful to the members of our focus groups as well as the entrepreneurs, managers, career advisors and representatives of women's associations who supported us during this 3 years project. Last but not least, we would like to thank the State Secretariat for Education and Research (SER) and the University of Applied Sciences Western Switzerland for their financial support. Without this support, this work would not have been possible.

## **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, YOU CAN CONTACT US ANYTIME :**

Line Pillet, Swiss Occidental Leonardo, [line.pillet@s-o-l.ch](mailto:line.pillet@s-o-l.ch)

Diane Reinhard, University of Applied Sciences Western Switzerland Arc Neuchâtel, [diane.reinhard@he-arc.ch](mailto:diane.reinhard@he-arc.ch)