Digi Cards ...

Competence Handbook

DigiCards

A2 – DigiCards Competence Handbook

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Project Consortium

KARBON Consulting GmbH – Austria
https://karbon-consulting.eu/

Lifelong Learning Platform – Belgium
https://www.lllplatform.eu/

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1. Introduction

Career guidance faces new challenges with the digital transformation, especially with the increased use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the introduction of new technologies. Therefore, it is important that educational and career counsellors recognise digitisation as an opportunity, and it is imperative that they are equipped with the necessary tools that includes digital methods for the counseling process. There is still a great need to catch up with the digitisation in the context of educational and career counseling since high-quality guidance in a virtual environment goes beyond the use of a communication platform like Zoom, Skype or MS Teams. If methods are digitally not available, there is a higher risk counselors prefer face-to-face settings and will not take advantage of digital opportunities. At the same time counseling thrives on the relationship between counselor and client. There is also a need to equip counsellors with new skills in the twin transition.

With DigiCards, we have taken up a common method of educational and career counseling to strengthen relationship work in the digital context as well and to carry out skills work in a playful, professional and low-threshold manner.

What are the advantages of using digital version of the competence cards

- Improve counsellor's digital competences
- Improve clients/users' digital competences
- Decrease costs of purchase of material competence cards
- Can be used anywhere if there is internet connection and a computer or mobile device
- It is freely accessible to any counsellors in any organisation, any country and using a common license
- The tool and the cards are inspired by major competence frameworks and tools at international and European levels

The DigiCards Competence Handbook is also intended to provide guidelines as a support for counsellors in using the tool. For this reason, the handbook starts by reiterating the possible uses and added value of working with skills.

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It then highlights relevant aspects that need to be considered during preparation, follow-up and work with digital competence cards, which helps to create a framework that allows the digital competence cards to be used effectively.

Digicards is addressed to:

Counsellors in career guidance centres, universities, schools, public employment services
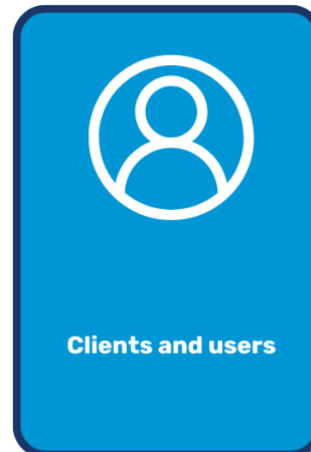
Clients and users

The cards can be used in different contexts and settings: one-to-one sessions, group and workshop sessions but also independently by the clients or users themselves.

Finally, the possibilities and limitations of working with the DigiCards competence cards are summarised.

🔗 Link to the digital competence cards: app.digicardstool.eu

2. About DigiCards

We believe in educational and career counselling that uses digital tools to provide its clients with a counselling process that is sustainable, relationship-oriented and tailored to their needs. Career guidance faces new challenges with the digital transformation, especially with the increased use of AI and new technologies. At the same time counselling thrives on the relationship work between counsellor and client.

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With **DigiCards**, we are enabling the digitalisation of a central method in educational and career counselling – working with competence cards. The projects consist of 3 main activities:

1. The development & technical implementation of digital competency cards.
2. A competency handbook with guidelines and piloting for counsellors on how to access and use the Digicards tool.
3. Networking and exploitation events to promote the exchange of good practice among educational and career counsellors.

In summary, we want to achieve the following project goals with DigiCards:

✓ Design & test user friendly, tailored digital competence cards, which are relevant for labour market, social inclusion & personal development.
✓ Enable career counsellors to use DigiCards in daily work practice.

DigiCards is a Small-Scale-Partnership Project co-financed by the European Union within the framework of Erasmus+. The project period is from 01.01.2024 - 31.12.2024.

3. Digital competence cards as a method in educational and career guidance

Educational and career guidance is used in different settings and for different target groups. Depending on the counseling assignment, framework conditions and capacities, counsellors decide which methods are suitable in the counseling process to best support the user. . In addition to traditional biographical work or test procedures used to assess skills, working with skills is a central component of the repertoire of methods used in educational and career guidance. In practice, there are different approaches to incorporating work with skills into the guidance process. One of these is the use of competence cards to create a competence profile of the person in question.

In principle, a competence card can contain the following aspects:
- Name of the respective competence
- Description
- Corresponding classification when using competence frameworks

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- Scaling of the competence level if required
- Visualisation of the competence using a symbol, pictogram or colors
 Practical examples of how the competence is applicable to real contexts

The presentation of a competence makes it possible to respond to the different needs of people. Competence cards can have many benefits: the use of visuals, the information which is simplified and easy language. It is an inclusive method. For disadvantaged groups, due to language barriers, educational disadvantages, reading difficulties such as dyslexia or difficulties in grasping complex content, the use of competence cards can be a low-threshold and playful approach to one's own competencies to integrate them into the counselling process in a meaningful and effective way.

Competence cards can be used in different phases of educational and career guidance. Depending on the situation and context, counsellors can use them to start a conversation, to identify relevant education, further education or training, to support the preparation of application documents such as CVs and / or letters of motivation or as a general support to the career guidance process. The skills profile obtained forms a helpful basis for the guidance process and, above all, reinforces people in terms of what they are already good at and what they have defined as areas of learning and development potential for themselves. The various possible uses of competence cards also increase flexibility in handling, which allows practitioners to react quickly and easily in certain situations.

Due to the increasing digitalisation, which is also expanding in educational and career guidance, there is a need for increased attention to digitise established methods of educational and career guidance. Methods are like the toolbox of educational and career counselors and, in most cases, the ones designed for the analog setting cannot be adopted unchanged for the digital setting. Therefore, the focus of DigiCards is to provide a digital competence cards tool which meets the high demands of educational and career counselors and works in a practical and low-threshold way from the client's perspective.

The combination of theoretical competence frameworks and practical work with competences was given special consideration in the development of the digital competence cards.

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The Digicards competence cards contain: the name of the selected competence, a description, the respective competence category with a selected color, a maximum of three examples in simple language for a better understanding of what the competence means, a symbol/icon and a link to officially valid competence frameworks. This is intended to increase practical transfer, user-friendliness, flexibility in handling, inclusiveness and low threshold when using the competence cards in the digital setting.
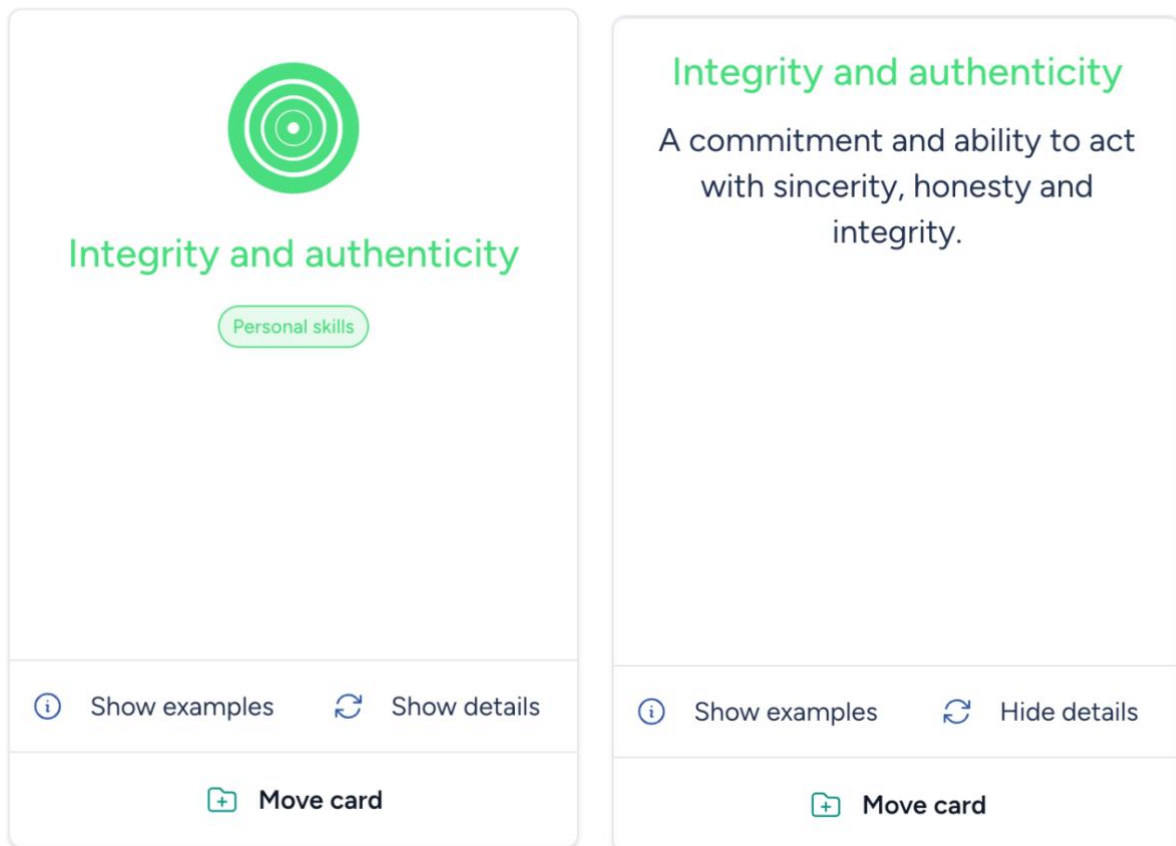
The next section of the handbook refers to the general settings for working with digital competence cards to plan appropriate preparations and find quick and easy solutions when potential technical challenges arise.

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4. General setting for the work with digital competence cards

When working with digital competence cards, we differentiate between two areas that are important to consider. On the one hand, the technical components that must be in place as a prerequisite for the use of digital competence cards and, on the other hand, the interpersonal aspects of communication and collaboration between the counselor and the client.

Device and browser prerequisites

For our DigiCards tool to work, a device with a stable internet connection is mandatory. The tool works with all up-to-date browsers (Google Chrome, Microsoft Edge, Mozilla Firefox, Apple Safari) and also works with tablets and smartphones. For the best user experience a screen of a minimum width of 768 pixels (tablet in portrait mode) is recommended, because then the user can see multiple competence cards at once and has a better overview in general. Also, the drag and drop functionality of the cards works more intuitively on a tablet or desktop computer and therefore, a "move card" function for smartphones was added.

Creation of an account

The tool is free to use for all users and can be used without creating an account. So, a new DigiCards set can be created within just one click. This is especially helpful for clients who usually do not need multiple sets and each set can be viewed and edited anytime if the link is known to the user.

However, some functionalities are exclusively for registered users: password protection of sets, dashboard with the users sets and personal notes for cards and groups.
These are functionalities especially aimed at counselors and professionals, who work with multiple clients and want to keep the sets in their own archive and/or check on the progress. The registration for users is straight forward and fast and easy, because it only requires a name, e-mail address and password. The benefit of creating an account is that the user sees his/her own created sets in a dashboard overview.

Data security when working with DigiCards tool

The DigiCards tool is designed in a way that it avoids the tracking of any user data and creation of any user statistics. This means for career counsellors that only they themselves can enter personal data that will be saved on the server (e.g. the title of DigiCard sets and personal notes).

Our recommendation is to not use personal names or other personal data that could identify the person (e-mail, telephone or address) as the title or in the notes. With this prerequisite there is no way of connecting the rest of the data to a physical person.
A naming convention for all sets can help to identify the single sets and connect them to clients. For example, use the first 2 letters of the first and last name of the client and the date of the first counselling session.

The sets themselves have very long "unguessable" addresses which is already a security feature and makes it almost impossible for a person or bot to access a set without knowing the exact URL. But for maximum security we added a password protection feature which only allows people who have the password for a set to open and edit it.
Since the app, server and database are designed with maximum data security in mind the usage of the tool can be seen as unproblematic.

Should clients nevertheless encounter technical problems, it is important that educational and career counsellors provide first-level support to find solutions together. It is particularly important to support people who are less familiar with digital tools in their problem-solving skills.

In general, when preparing as a consultant, it is important to ensure that the IT device used has sufficient power or is connected to a functioning power source, that the browser used is up to date, that there is sufficient internet speed, and that the IT device has adequate virus protection.

In addition to the technical framework conditions, the attitude of educational and career counselors, their approach and understanding of their role is just as important and decisive as to whether the use of digital competence cards as a method is accepted by clients and

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can be used effectively. Especially for people with less developed digital skills, it is important to signal an attitude of error culture to support playful discovery with the digital competence cards. The so-called 'trial and error' principle promotes independent learning in the use of such tools and generally strengthens the acquisition of digital skills without consciously initiating this. It is also helpful to focus on a resource-oriented view in the approach with the respective individuals. It is particularly recommended that people with a lower self-esteem, who may even have a certain inhibition threshold or barrier in accessing their own skills, are strengthened in their use of digital skills cards and shown how they can navigate easily and intuitively through the multitude of cards.

We see the following aspects as central to the role of educational and career counselors:

- Counselors lead through the process and are a kind of **'guide'** to enable intuitive navigation on the part of the client with digital competence cards.
- Counselors take on a **translator** role to place the selected competences and the examples given in the respective context and in the working and living environment of the clients. The examples that were designed for the DigiCards competence cards were formulated in simple and inclusive language. This should contribute to this transfer work in the respective professional and work context. Competence cards do not replace the translation work of the respective educational and career counselors but support this process.
- Counselors act as **supporters** in the selection of competencies. The individuals themselves are their own experts in terms of the skills they already have or would like to learn. Therefore, counselors accompany people in their decision-making process by consciously asking questions or pointing out possibilities. This is often supported by a systemic approach. It is important that the individuals themselves make choices and decide for or against a competence.

In principle, digital competence cards can be used for counseling in a 1:1 setting or in a group format, for example when conducting workshops. Depending on the objective, group of people and initial situation, it is up to the counselors to decide when and in what format the DigiCards competence cards should be used.

When using the digital competence cards, the technical requirements mentioned in the section above must be met. If this is not the case, it is also possible to integrate the work with

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digital competence cards during the physical consultation appointment, showing and working with them via the consultant's IT device.

Another important aspect is the collaboration between counselors and clients in the digital setting, which cannot be equated with a physical consultation appointment. For many people, online communication is associated with challenges. This can be due to limited sensory perception, for example, as communication is limited to auditory perception and visual sensory perception: or due to a time delay in the exchange or transmission of information due to technical coding and decoding processes. For this reason, it is essential to include more active communication in the digital setting, i.e. to actively obtain feedback and foster more open meta-communication to promote talking about talking. This way, a trusting framework can be created in the digital setting to support the relationship work and allow the work with digital competence cards to be constructive.

5. Approaches how to use digital competence cards from the counsellor's perspective

Once the settings and conditions, technical requirements and preparations have been clarified, educational and career counselors can choose the approach that meets the client's objectives and needs.

The DigiCards competence cards are basically designed in such a way that they can be used for both a results-oriented and a process-oriented approach. At the beginning, it may be helpful to give the person a general overview. This can be, for example, the planned time frame, a brief introduction to the process, expected outcome and clarification of open questions. Based on the concept of the 'Golden Circle', this creates orientation for the person to understand *why* the digital competence cards as a method was chosen, *how* it will be used in the counseling session and *what* will happen with the result, which in turn can lead to more active participation in the process on the part of the client.

The results-oriented approach can be used when the goal is to select specific skills for the preparation of application documents such as CVs and/or motivation letters. In this case, the focus will be on selecting skills that the person already possesses and that match the requirements of a specific job advertisement or the desired job profile. Another example of a

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results-oriented approach can be the selection of those skills that are still lacking for a desired job profile to search for suitable training, further education and training opportunities.

The process-oriented approach can be designed to be an open-end exercise and during the process of educational and career guidance it becomes clear how working with digital competence cards can contribute to the mission and the jointly defined objectives. This approach is often supportive if the person still has little or no idea about possible career options. In practice, this can be used in career guidance, clarification of potential job profiles or generally to create a skills profile.

In general, the DigiCards competence cards were divided into different categories that are relevant across professions and sectors. The categories are based on the competence frameworks for professional competences in addition to the established competence frameworks of the European Commission (LifeComp; GreenComp; EntreComp; DigComp) and current studies on future competences as well as the Inner Development Goals competence framework, which was developed in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The following impulse questions and instructions for working with DigiCards competence cards are based in a modified form that is frequently used in practice by educational and career counselors at bildungsinfo.tirol.
Possibilities:

- Selection of existing skills
- Selection of missing skills (or underdeveloped)

Focus on the selection of existing skills

Objectives

✓ To make both formal and non-formal skills visible in the various categories.
✓ Strengthening the self-esteem of the person

Impulse questions for clients:

- Can you think of situations in which you use this competence?
- How do you or other people recognize that you have this competence?
- Have you already received motivating feedback in relation to this strength?
- What do you really enjoy doing and find easy to implement?

Further supporting questions for the development of existing skills

- Which skills would you like to use in a future career?
- Which ones could you use all day long without getting very tired?
- Which of these skills interests you the most?
- Which are more important to you than others?
- Which ones are very important to you as a person, perhaps that you see as core competencies?
- Which ones come easily to you - which ones do you implement effortlessly?

By consciously asking questions, educational and career counselors encourage individuals to reflect on the areas in which they have experience and the skills they have already acquired in their career, both formally and informally. It may be advisable to guide the person to think about different environments such as work, education, hobbies, family, volunteering or special life outcomes.

In the next step, the transfer work is initiated, as an important part of the competence work and the creation of a competence profile. The aim here is to give concrete examples, situations and experiences to bring often abstract competences or those that are not initially brought into focus closer and to relate them so that the person can also identify with the competence. Educational and career counselors guide this process accordingly to go into depth with the selected competencies and work out how the respective competencies are expressed.

The following questions to the person can be helpful:

- Where do you use this strength? Where have you used it so far?
- How do others see that you have this competence?
- What do others say about you in this context?
- Where does the feeling come from that this competence is more pronounced in you than in others?

- What situations can you handle well thanks to this skill?
- How did this competence develop - what indicated in your childhood/youth that this competence would develop? Or did you acquire this competence rather "suddenly"?
- What is the motive behind this skill? What is important to you that made you act in this way or develop this strength?
- In which professions does this competence fit in the way you live it?
- How would you like to use this competence in the future?

Depending on the objective and intention when working with digital skills with a focus on developing existing skills, it may be important to discuss what happens with the results at the end. This can be further reflection, further homework for the person, or familiarisation with application documents. As counselling processes are highly individual, this also varies from counselling session to counselling session. It is important that it serves the progress of the counselling process, and that the person is consciously given the opportunity to recognise the meaningfulness and benefits of the method.

Focus on the selection of missing skills

Objectives
- ✓ Identification of missing formal and non-formal skills
- ✓ Raising awareness and sensitization of learning fields and development potentials

Impulse questions for customers
- Which skills do you consider relevant for your future professional field that you feel you have not yet acquired to the extent that you would like to?
- Which skills would you like to (further) develop? What would you like to learn?
- Which skills would help you in certain situations that you do not currently possess enough of?
- Which skills would greatly enrich your life?

To put the selected competencies, which are defined as a learning field from the person's perspective, into context, it can be helpful to link the examples given with the competence

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cards with specific situations or experiences. This can underpin the need for development potential and show what is still needed. The person's answer about the availability of the selected competence can follow with a clear 'no' or with a 'don't know', as a lack of competence is often associated with uncertainty or the unknown.

To process the results further in the guidance process, it is again important to relate the defined competencies in the next step. This can provide an indication of the desired occupational profile, initial, further and continuing training or identification of an occupational sector.

The following questions can help:
- Where would you like to/could you use what you have learned?
- How would you like to implement what you have learned?
- Where or how could/would you like to learn this?
- What would change if you had this competence?
- In which professions do the selected skills fit as a learning field?
- How can what you have learned enrich your life?

Finally, it is advisable to discuss the results of the process and when and in what form they will be used. This supports the need to develop the selected skills and also serves the progress of the consultation process.

Another approach to working with digital skills maps can be the exclusion procedure, i.e. selected skills which are not taken into consideration. This may be the case if a career change or retraining is imminent, and those skills are listed that are no longer required or that the person does not wish to acquire.

6. Approaches how to use digital competence cards from a client's perspective

Due to the simple and low-threshold handling, it is also possible for clients to work with the digital competence cards individually. This can take place as part of the counseling process. If it makes sense from the point of view of the respective educational and career counselor, the person can independently work with their own competences in the preparation or follow-

up of personal counseling appointments. It is important that this is discussed in advance and that the task is clear to the person so that the results can flow back into the counseling process.

It is therefore recommended that the user's first contact with the digital competence cards takes place with the support of the counselor for clarification of open questions or ambiguities immediately and to ensure that the person can then use the digital competence cards independently.

The possibilities for independent use from the client's perspective are just as diverse as from the counselor's perspective, i.e. the focus can be on existing and already acquired competences, on missing competences or fields of learning and development potential, as a general invitation to experiment and find out interesting competences or to find better access to competence work. Impulse and reflection questions on strengths and areas of learning can be used in the same way as described in the section above.

Here, educational and career counselors are invited to be creative and adapt the use of the digital competence cards to the needs of the client, depending on the assignment, objectives and initial situation of the person.

7. Opportunities & limitations of digital competence cards

The DigiCards competence cards offer advantages from two perspectives: with the increasing digitalization in educational and career guidance, it is important that educational and career guidance methods are also available in a contemporary and digital form. If we want to successfully manage the digital transformation, it is important that educational and career guidance practitioners also have the necessary tools to be able to work to a high standard in a digital setting. In this respect, digital competence cards not only offer the opportunity to be used as a method, but also support counselors and clients in becoming more adept at using digital tools. This side effect strengthens the digital skills of everyone involved and makes a positive contribution to the digital transformation.

From the perspective of educational and career guidance, digital competence cards can be used in a result- or process-oriented manner, which brings a high degree of flexibility in their application. Furthermore, working with the DigiCards competence cards promotes

awareness-raising among clients regarding competence development and supports the creation of a competence profile, which can be used for the further guidance process. The competence cards in and of themselves have integrated competences from the formal and non-formal qualification sector and therefore pursue a holistic and future-oriented approach. In summary, digital competence cards offer many opportunities and possibilities. It is crucial that users use them appropriately, discover its benefits and gain experience.

Nevertheless, one method in educational and career guidance has its limits. Not every guidance topic is suitable for digital competence cards. It is therefore even more important that educational and career counselors carefully consider which method is suitable for which person, for which assignment, with which objective and at what time.
Furthermore, it is important for us to emphasize that digital competence cards, like any other digital tool, do not replace the relationship work between counsellor and client. The increasing automation of processes and procedures and the increasing use of AI also increases the risk of losing sight of the basis of any educational and career guidance. Educational and career guidance depends on relationship work and will continue to do so. Methods and tools offer successful support but do not replace the valuable work that educational and career counselors do daily.

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