



# Activity Code O3-A1

Research Report (*Executive Summary*)

*Prepared By: CARDET*



SYNERGY

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## Introduction

The primary aim of the SYNERGY project is to develop tools and resources to meet the needs of VET providers and micro-enterprises across Europe. As this is an innovative approach to ensuring that businesses can avail of practical and relevant support from the VET sector, it is necessary that a comprehensive research process was undertaken by the project partners. To ensure that the research conducted by each partner addressed a common set of issues with a defined level of analysis, a common research framework was developed by CARDET. The implementation of this common research framework ensured that the learning tools and resources developed are of relevance to the needs of the VET and SME communities, and that this work is based on current and relevant research. The research framework developed outlines the questions which were addressed by the desk-based research, including the criteria for accessing relevant best practice examples.

The objectives of this research process addressed three areas that are of particular importance to the SYNERGY project:

- Best practice where the provision of VET in-service training is concerned and the issues to be addressed in the proposed in-service training programme to enhance the role of VET providers servicing the micro-enterprise sector;
- The issues to be addressed in the induction to pedagogy training for micro-enterprise owners to facilitate their role in the proposed peer-to-peer learning environment;
- Best practice initiatives that strive to develop partnerships between VET and the business community.

This research has been conducted by the six implementing project partners, with each partner providing an overview of their national context in relation to policies and support infrastructure available for the SME sector, and the current opportunities and discrepancies identified in the VET sector in relation to the provision of training for micro-enterprises. Each partner also researched and profiled two best practice examples. These national research reports were analysed and compiled by CARDET to generate the Executive Summary and the Summary Research Report. This Intellectual Output establishes the state-of-the-art for the thematic areas outlined above, and the summary report comprises the evidence base for future development actions of the SYNERGY project.

This Executive Summary Research Report provides an overview of the 12 best practice examples which were provided by each project partner, an overview of the outcomes of these best practice examples, with a list of recommendations which SYNERGY project partners will use to inform the development work of the project over the coming eighteen months until September 2016.

## Methodology

The research report was developed leveraging a three step approach. Firstly, CARDET developed a research and audit framework that was reviewed and approved by all partners. Secondly, project partners conducted a literature review of available best practice examples and projects in line with the project's themes considering national, European and

international examples. A short-list of cases were reviewed by the collective partnership to ensure minimum quality standards were adhered to; a balance of themes was present; appropriateness of the examples qualified and availability of resources determined. Finally, each project partner evaluated and analysed their identified best practice examples, compiling National Research Reports, which are available on [www.projects synergy.eu](http://www.projects synergy.eu), providing this core data to CARDET allowing for the commissioning of this Executive Summary Research Report. A short visual overview of these steps can be seen in the graphic below:



## Presentation of Best Practice Examples for Cyprus



### Vocational education and training in Europe: Cyprus 2013

**Theme:** Business-to-Business networking or training

*Vocational Education and Training in Europe* aims to provide an overview of the vocational education and training in Cyprus. It places the vocational education and training system in Cyprus in the broader political, social, economic and occupational context. This best practice is an integral part of a series of reports on vocational education and training in European countries, including Iceland and Norway. The reports are updated

yearly and reports from previous years remain publicly available through the database of CEDEFOP VET-Bib. Their goal is to provide operators in Europe with a description of a national system of vocational education and training that will be used in research and policy initiatives, from peer organisations, as examples of good practice and finally, in projects at National and European level.

The methodology used in this best practice includes:

- Long-term employment trends and forecasts in Cyprus
- Annual assessment for identifying skill needs with the contribution of social partners
- Study on identifying needs for green skills, as well as employment and training needs for effective gas management in Cyprus
- Agenda priorities

Findings and recommendations found in this report influence current and future national policy trends, in particular in relation to the career planning and guidance services offered in the field of VET. The employment forecasts of HRDA are an important tool for planning and implementing VET programmes that meet the labour market requirements. In this way, VET policy and programmes remain current and continually address the needs of learners, tutors and employers. To better disseminate this information, HRDA maintains a website with information regarding approved training opportunities; the latest trends in human resources indicators for education, training and employment in Cyprus, the future employment forecasts for the Cypriot labour market and there is also an area on the website where all previous studies and reports are accessible to the public.

The benefits of this best practice example for the SYNERGY project include the following:

- Existing results can be transformed and used for the purposes of project Synergy
- Current tested methodologies can be applied and used in other studies
- An established procedure can be followed that can produce comparable results
- Existing information and resources can be utilised and expanded on
- The analysis of forecast results can be used as a guidance tool

The most useful product from this best practice example for the SYNERGY project is the HRDA's website which contains relevant and current information on education, training and employment needs and trends in Cyprus, dissemination results and practices and the results of previous studies ([www.hrdauth.org.cy](http://www.hrdauth.org.cy)). This website can be used as an information resource for the SYNERGY consortium partners.



### **Development and operation of Offices acting as a liaison between Business/ Industry and the various Universities in the Republic of Cyprus**

**Theme:** Learning Partnerships between VET and Business Community

This best practice example aims to establish a network of Offices for Liaison between the academic and business worlds, so that results of university-based innovation can be used by the Cypriot business community and the employment potential of students

and graduates will be enhanced as a result of their contact with business during their studies. This project has established Offices for Liaison in each of the six universities in the Republic of Cyprus, and encourages the cooperation between the business and academic communities on a variety of topics including, technology transfer; collaboration in research programmes; placement of students in industry and the promotion of innovation in business and universities in Cyprus.

The methodology included in this practice includes:

- Establishing Liaison Offices at each of 6 Universities (3 Private and 3 Public);
- Encouraging communication and interaction between these communities, through: conferences and international events, meetings and workshops, press releases, etc.
- Evaluating the success of exchanges by following up with students on industry placements and business stakeholders placed in universities;
- Implementing identified best practices in the local project framework;
- Integrating changes and ongoing improvements to the project

As a result of this best practice, the 6 Liaison Offices have successfully placed 74 students in businesses; have organised 3 workshops and the project website now hosts profiles of 535 academic staff; 283 enterprise personnel; 111 profiles of businesses and 138 profiles of research labs.

The benefit of this project to the work of the SYNERGY project team is that it acts as a guide to fostering successful networking and cooperation between businesses and academics. The potential of this networking is realised by this project, and as a result of the collaboration between the two communities, this project has collected and registered profiles on their database which ensures relevant changes can be made to VET programmes to better address the needs of the business world. This collaboration has also been effective in increasing the awareness of the supports available to both communities, by both communities and in spreading a culture of entrepreneurship among students and tutors in academia. In this way, this project is a good practice example which the SYNERGY consortium can learn from and build upon in order to ensure the successful implementation of our B2B and VET to SME networking.

The most relevant product which can be used by the SYNERGY project team is the website from this initiative. This website can be used to extract useful information or to identify contacts/businesses/academics interested to contribute ([www.liaisonoffices.ac.cy](http://www.liaisonoffices.ac.cy))

## Presentation of Best Practice Examples for Ireland



mENTERing.eu

**Theme:** In-service VET training to develop or enhance entrepreneurship or business training

The mENTERing project aims to develop the skills and competences of VET tutors who offer business training, so as to improve their mentoring skills and competencies for

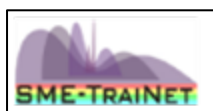


entrepreneurship, and to better support learning in the business community. This project aims to strengthen the link between VET and the business community by supporting the shift towards competence-based education, and the validation of informal and non-formal learning, and by improving VET professionals' capacity to offer mentoring support to businesses.

The methodology used included updating and further developing the MAITRE Manual. Entrepreneurial content has also been added to the manual to address the learning needs of VET tutors, and a blended Train-the-Trainer programme has been developed and implemented in order to facilitate the project aims. As a result of the work of this project team, these resources were piloted with 80 VET professionals, and had a total reach of 2,500 individuals who were informed of or took part in this project.

The mENTERing project is of benefit to SYNERGY as the mENTERing consortium has already developed tools, resources and a blended Train the Trainer programme for VET tutors who wish to enhance their competence in offering business mentoring. These resources are available and free to use, for the SYNERGY project team, when populating the SYNERGY micro-social networks with relevant content. The mENTERing project's Train the Trainer programme similarly aimed to up-skill VET professionals with years of experience in delivering adult education. It is important that the Train the Trainer programme developed by SYNERGY acknowledges the expertise of established VET professionals, and provides them with sufficient support to adapt their teaching style. The Manual developed by the mENTERing consortium is also a useful resource for the partners to study as it is a support document for the VET professionals undertaking the Train the Trainer course. When VET tutors are trained to adopt a new teaching style, they will need these additional resources and support in order to feel secure in their new role in providing business education. As such, the products from the mENTERing project which will be of most use to the SYNERGY team will include the blended Train the Trainer programme, the Mentor's Training Manual e-book and the Administrative Guidelines for Implementing the Train the Trainer Programme.

The mENTERing project also highlights the importance of involving a wide audience in the dissemination of the project. By reaching 2,500 individuals throughout the project, the resources the project adapted and developed were tested with a large audience, and as a result the final version of the results is much better. The project consortium achieved this by organizing round-table events, and distributing copies of project outputs to participants at these events. This approach will be adopted in SYNERGY, and so this best practice provides useful guidance for the partners.



### **SME TraiNet**

**Theme:** Learning Partnerships between VET and Business Community

The SME-TraiNet project aimed to establish a stakeholder network which would work together with SMEs and young businesses to provide targeted, relevant education and training resources to the business community. This project consortium identified the gap in



service and education provision for SMEs, and the stakeholder network aimed to tackle the problem by establishing a dialogue between European young businesses and SMEs operating in the crafts and services sector, and European guidance and VET providers in order to improve the current training and support structures to the target group of young businesses and SMEs. The purpose of the SME-TraiNet project was to conduct research and use the research findings to identify gaps in the provision of support services and training opportunities for businesses and SMEs at risk of failing in the first 5 years of operation.

The SME-TraiNet project aimed to build a stable network between SMEs, young businesses and the VET sector. To do this, the consortium began with a detailed desk-based research process which identified gaps in the provision of support services and training opportunities for businesses and SMEs at risk of failing in the first 5 years of operation. The outcome is that this best practice example produced a large body of research in relation to the type of supports and training programmes which would appeal to business owners and managers and as a result of this process, the consortium produced a research executive summary report which contains valuable insights for the SYNERGY consortium in its identification of the gaps in service and training provision for SMEs and the “inefficiency” of training in this sector. This project consortium also successfully held 20 national & 2 international conferences within the 36 month timeframe. These events were well attended by members of both target groups and the feedback gathered by partners at these events has been summarized into a report which is also available for download from the project website.

Furthermore, the establishment of the network acts a blueprint for the SYNERGY consortium, as it shows the importance of hosting events with both the VET and SME sectors represented, instead of hosting separate events. It is important to have both target groups involved and networking together from the beginning if a lasting network is to be cultivated and developed. When this effort is made, the networks worked actively together to develop a Compendium of Good Practices for business training and supports which is now available for download from the project website and which is a very useful resource for the SYNERGY partners to have access to when designing the induction programme for business owners. This Compendium of Good Practices for providing targeted, relevant SME training opportunities across Europe and the European Research Report, National Workshop Approach and Findings Reports will be beneficial to the development work of the SYNERGY consortium and should be used in planning the induction programmes, mini-learning formats and additional supports for businesses and tutors involved in the SYNERGY project.

### **Presentation of Best Practice Examples for Greece**



**New learning environment for Very Small Enterprises:  
learning, exploring and sharing**

**Theme:** Business-to-Business networking or training

LEXSHA explores a new model of training for Very Small Enterprises, focusing on their own knowledge and developing skills to share this knowledge with their peers. LEXSHA aimed to





create a user-friendly learning environment aimed at fulfilling the training needs of very small businesses (VSE), with emphasis on bite-size modules; the integration of ICT into programme and support delivery and knowledge-sharing and peer-learning among small enterprises.

The methodology used in developing and delivery this programme included:

- Designing and evaluating an innovative sustainable model, supported by an e-platform, on how to identify own competences, produce experienced-based digital content and share knowledge
- Encouraging dissemination through the empowerment of VSE in peer learning
- Integrating the benefits of ICT tools and communication skills in the vocational training system efficiently

The LEXSHA project is a follow up of the BizLearn.Net project. Since the BizLearn.Net project provided training guidelines, and initial testing provided successful proof of concept, the current project LEXSHA is concerned with sustaining a network that will continue to self-generate content; it will expand to more entrepreneurs, will offer more content and be easily accessible by interested parties.

As the project is ongoing, there is currently little information on findings and their implications. However, there is useful information on the BizLearn.Net project website which SYNERGY could utilize such as the Train the Trainer material, participants' testimonials after their experience as well as learning materials and lesson plans developed by entrepreneurs according to the guidelines of the training handbook in the project's testing phase. It is important for SYNERGY to avoid significant overlap with LEXHSA and BizLearn.Net and build upon their findings.

As part of the project development, the LEXSHA project team created a library of resources for VSEs and tutors on the project website and this useful resource can be accessed by the SYNERGY consortium. LEXHSA builds upon the results and conclusions of the BizLearn.Net project (<https://sites.google.com/site/bizlearnproject/>) seeking to implement a new and innovative system to increase the participation of SMEs in lifelong learning opportunities. With an aim to prepare entrepreneurs to be knowledge providers, a curriculum containing six single modules was prepared. The six sessions were built uniformly and include a session plan, a PowerPoint presentation, Trainer's Notes, a Participant's Hand-out for each single session and additionally special activities and/or read more information. These resources will all be of benefit to the SYNERGY project team.



**Theme:** In-service VET training to develop or enhance entrepreneurship or business training

Udemy for Business aimed to provide a cloud based learning portal for businesses whereby public or in-house generated learning material could be accessed by employees anytime anywhere. Udemy for Business gives access to a library with a range of courses for businesses, as well as allowing business the option of developing their own course. Access to online learning is flexible and available at any time and on any device, this gives

businesses control over the delivery of their professional training so that they don't have to take time out of their working week to attend training. This programme also gives businesses control over course content, as well as the size of the courses their employees complete, without risking security, and with the administrative capacity to monitor their employees' progress and to make progression plans for their identified training needs.

As a result of this programmes, over 220 companies rely on Udemy for Business and its learning resources. This level of buy-in to Udemy, presents the SYNERGY consortium with data which can influence the design of the SYNERGY learning resources. In this regard, it is important to consider that 30% of customers access Udemy courses on mobile devices; most users use the resources primarily during the week, between Tuesday and Thursday; there is a spike in the use of the resources between 8.00-9.00am, 11.00am-12.00pm and between 5.00-6.00pm; and regarding the commercial value of these resources, the average cost per learning hour used for Udemy customers is \$6 per learner.

The lessons which the SYNERGY consortium can learn from Udemy is to ensure that the project creates easy-to-use learning formats which delivered in convenient access from any device; tailored or purpose-specific course development; scalable content; continuous skills development; peer-to-peer training; sharing of content; tracking of individuals' progress, etc.

The range of course topics covered is increasing as online learning is currently very popular. SYNERGY could benefit from reviewing the courses' structure, size, multimedia use, difficulty levels system, popularity, ratings and testimonials prior to developing the mini-learning formats for enterprise owners.

## Presentation of Best Practice Examples for Romania



### Innovative Learning Platform for VET

**Theme:** In-service VET training to develop or enhance entrepreneurship or business training

The aim of the project was to share positive experiences and knowledge in the use of Learning Platforms by European Organisations with representatives from the Vocational Education and Training sector. The implementing company, Fast-track to IT (FIT), began this programme by carrying out a survey of education organisations in the EU to determine their needs, experiences and preferences regarding Learning Platforms and Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs). This study also aimed to offer advice and support in selecting an organisation wide VLE solution and to share experiences with the VET sector in Ireland and a wider audience in the EU. This research shows that VLEs will have a significant impact on the process of teaching and learning in the future. By sharing positive experience of the use of VLEs with the VET sector, this project provided VET teachers with a practical tool and materials for continuous development and to re-train to integrate VLEs into their lesson plans and curricula.

This project was chosen as a best practice example for the SYNERGY project, as it shows the importance of integrating VLEs into the curriculum design and delivery processes for SYNERGY. The SYNERGY project team can access to the VLE4VET research reports,

Continuing Professional Development learning materials and modules hosted through Moodle on topics such as basic IT, understanding and using VLEs and integrating VLEs into their lesson plans. These resources could be of use to the SYNERGY project, if business owners and tutors involved in the project require basic IT and VLE training before completing the Induction and Train the Trainer Programmes, respectively.



### **Building Learning Communities: Partnerships, Social Capital and VET Performance**

**Theme:** Learning Partnerships between VET and Business Community

The purpose of this best practice example is to better identify and understand the role of VET and VET partnerships in regional development in Australia. In achieving this aim, the project sought to consider the role of partnerships, social capital and the role of the VET sector in building learning communities. Initially, a qualitative study of 12 case study regions was undertaken. The 12 regions represented the landscape types selected because each exhibited a cross-section of characteristics, such as declining, growing and stagnating economies, as well as differing levels of human capital. These case studies focused on regional projects which were applied and hands-on in nature. The projects had made a visible difference to the economic landscape, often in the development or maintenance of locally needed infrastructure. As a consequence, the study reveals that VET has played a key role in the development of other forms of capital, such as human, environmental, built and social capital.

From this project, there have been key findings, such as the increasing need for a holistic, whole-of-person approach to training rather than a series of disconnected modules, although these individual components could be restructured to form appropriate learning pathways. This kind of training plays crucial roles in building confidence, social connections and connectedness, both for individuals and organisations.

The lesson which the SYNERGY consortium can learn from this project is that the identification of the project target groups' needs is very important for the successful development and implementation of the project. The SYNERGY consortium can also access the 'National Vocational Education and Training Research and Evaluation Programme Report' from the project website to act as a resource when developing the evaluation reporting criteria for the SYNERGY project, curriculum and resources.

### **Presentation of Best Practice Examples for Italy**



#### **ELMA- TP (Europe Local Manufacturers Training Platform)**

**Theme:** Business-to-Business networking or training

The project aimed to create easily accessible and career-wise vocational training and training environments for Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMES) which are based on local production. This ensures that these SMEs will increase their market share and their capacity to enter new markets, and in this way, this project aims to contribute to the

development and competitive power of the companies, the region and the country. As more specific aims, this project also prioritised the following actions;

- To improve the non-technological innovative skills of local producers which will ensure incremental innovation of companies;
- To raise awareness about geographical indication, an important tool for implementing quality policy, and encouraging the production of quality products and stronger brands;
- To update the companies' knowledge regarding legislation, quality standards and EU law to improve the export potential of the company;
- To raise awareness about grants and available supports for SMEs.

To achieve these aims, project partners implemented a series of thematic workshops and seminars, which fostered the increase in innovation in companies, and their ability to dream big and export, while also encouraging them to network with peers. These workshops were structured on contributions delivered by experts on the use of the internet to advertise local and European products. Further to this, the project also used the practices of Career VET (CVET) to better target career-planning and strategy resources to the needs and availability of SMEs.

By contributing to the implementation of the "Principles of the Small Business Act for Europe", this project can be considered a best practice for the development phase of the SYNERGY project. Throughout business-to-business networking and VET training, the ELMA TP project not only improves the entrepreneurial skills of companies' professionals involved but it also creates a stable consortium among European business entrepreneurs, boosting the EU internal market. This is an important lesson to be learned in order to enhance SYNERGY's aim of improving the quality and relevance of VET provision to micro-enterprises. This is a Transfer of Innovation project; as such many of the outputs of this project have already been tested, improved upon and revised from their original versions.

This project can be of relevance to the SYNERGY project team in that it shows the value of promoting regional SMEs commercially by enabling them to enter foreign markets; of facilitating training for SMEs' professionals and entrepreneurs in a way that is flexible and in-keeping with their availability; of addressing local SMEs' lack of competitiveness; of providing SMEs and micro-enterprises with innovative tools for growth and development and of identifying potential areas for business improvement.



### **TIE Living Lab (Technology Innovation Ecosystem Living Lab: An Entrepreneurial-minded Community)**

**Theme:** Learning Partnerships between VET and Business Community

TIE Living Lab aims at operating as a *smart platform* to stimulate technology innovation and innovative entrepreneurship for local development in a global setting. TIE Living Lab acts as a portal that connects civil society, academia, enterprise and governmental institutions, and aims to help entrepreneurs to overcome the risk of failure, and to foster innovation and entrepreneurship. The TIE Living Lab mission is to conceive and promote, in an open and collaborative way, an adaptable ecosystem of actors, stakeholders, resources, actions and

initiatives to support potential entrepreneurs and companies in cultivating innovative ideas and entrepreneurial projects as well as developing entrepreneurial competencies and attitudes. TIE Living Lab is focused on three technological domains in which DHITECH operates: tissue engineering for regenerative medicine; molecular nanotechnologies for environment and health; and ICT for product and service innovation. To implement its initiatives, the TIE Living Lab relies on three main categories of value-generating resources: both entrepreneurial and technical competencies of the TIE Living Lab members and stakeholders (human capital); the networks which originate from the collaboration among talented people and companies, researchers, technologists, investors and public authorities who are already committed to provide feedback and support to high-potential initiatives (social capital); the infrastructures and laboratories of DHITECH partners and stakeholders, including spaces for co-design and co-working (structural capital).

By favouring innovation and idea generation, TIE Living Lab enables the open dialogue among scientists, researchers, companies, entrepreneurs, investors, local authorities, universities and public institutions to jointly conceive, design, and realise innovative solutions and entrepreneurial projects. These outcomes contribute to the diffusion of an entrepreneurial culture and mind-set in the entire region, in order to stimulate economic, social and cultural development. By acting as a bridge that virtually connects civil society, academia, enterprise and governmental institutions, TIE Living Lab positively contributes to the realisation of SYNERGY's aim of creating a sense of community, animating micro-enterprise owners and education service providers to collaborate and work together to find innovative solutions to the problems facing both sectors.

After several meetings and discussions, the TIE Living Lab launched three main initiatives in September 2014; all of which can be used by the SYNERGY project team:

- Open Lab: targets innovative technology-based SMEs, start-ups and entrepreneurs that are motivated and willing to present products, services, research results and prototypes to large communities of companies and institutions potentially interested in a possible adoption, collaboration, and/or market exploitation
- Co-Lab: helps and supports innovative companies and associations in activating and undertaking innovation processes in their work;
- Idea Accelerator: targets young talented people, researchers and entrepreneurs who have innovative ideas and want to transform them into real and ambitious entrepreneurial projects.

These three initiatives were launched through the website [www.tielab.eu](http://www.tielab.eu)

## Presentation of Best Practice Examples for Germany



2 connect Business

**Theme:** Business-to-Business networking or training

'2 connect Business' aimed to provide targeted help for establishing and supporting co-operations between German and Dutch SMEs particularly in the Euregio Rhein-Waal; with an aim to prove that cross-border co-operations in the SME community can help to foster the trading and business activities within a certain region. The project activities targeted the whole SME community, but focused especially on the following sectors: material- and

environment-sciences; green technologies; production technologies and logistics; bio- and medical-technologies; the energy sector, and the creative sector. A core aim was to foster the innovative capacity of businesses in these sectors and to strengthen the regional economy.

The project was delivered through the following targeted actions:

- Individual and free consulting by experts;
- Information and qualification seminars with the opportunity to network;
- An online information-portal with frequent newsletters;
- German entrepreneurs had the opportunity to apply for funding to expand to the Dutch market with their products or services, as long as there are no pre-existing distribution channels before the project commenced.

2 connect Business intensified the co-operation between the SMEs of the Rhein-Waal region and brought major developments to the regions trade cycle. It also highlighted the need to foster cooperation not only between businesses but also between businesses and research institutions. Core to the project delivery was a partnership between experienced and unexperienced businesses when they decided to export across the border to each other's countries. By teaming up with an experienced exporter, typical failures may be avoided and the newcomers are more likely to succeed. The participants highlighted that their new knowledge helped them to establish a sustainable business in the new market.

Participants recommended that fostering networking activities is essential to strengthen trans-border business activities, to focus on the competitiveness of the market and to find new business opportunities. Therefore it is recommended that SYNERGY establish platforms which focus on practical-networking and that the SYNERGY web-platform should not only provide learning resources and opportunities for networking, but it should also provide the latest and most relevant news, sorted by sector or planned activities. SYNERGY partners should also ensure that dissemination activities are targeted to foster the entrepreneurs', business-owners' and entities' interest in networking. It was highlighted that it is not only important to bring enterprises together, but also to foster the collaboration and co-operation between businesses and training providers as well. 2 connect Business stressed, that the seminars and meetings were helpful in particular in this regard; therefore, it is recommended to establish the learning networks not only via an online platform but to build and connect them in real-life as well.



**Soufflearning**

**Theme:** Learning Partnerships between VET and Business Community

Soufflearning aimed to provide on-the-job training and qualifications for small and very small enterprises (VSEs) to help counter the resistance of this sector to undertake VET programmes. SMEs often cannot afford to send their staff to external seminars and when they do, the training content is often irrelevant to the needs of the business. To address these issues, Soufflearning tailors its training offering to the needs of each employee and offers flexible and targeted learning, provided by trainers as part of an in-house training

process. In this model, there is no standardised content or training field, and so the trainers need to have specific skills to provide training which integrates with the work processes of the individual employees. This approach to work-based training provides mini-learning modules focusing on the specific needs, and integrates self-guided learning into the workflow. Furthermore, the training content is immediately applicable to the learner's everyday work.

The methodology of Soufflearning involves in-house training, real-work situations, individual training, motivating learners and guaranteeing long-term impact by covering the learning material and instantly finding an application for it in the workplace so that the learning is remembered. The Soufflearning method was accepted with great interest for the SMEs because of the flexibility, the authentic learning environment and the integration of learning into everyday tasks. The results and effects of this training model also had positive influence on the turnover of the company because the employees were acting more professionally towards the clients and incentives regarding changes in the enterprises' strategy were perceived.

Looking at Soufflearnings' benefits to SYNERGY it is not only about underlining the importance of fostering learning activities in micro-enterprises and developing material fitting the demands of SMEs, but about the need to develop the right learning resources. These learning resources should be relevant to the daily working tasks undertaken by workers and learning outcomes should be easily measurable. The programme also recommends that trainers should be taught how to establish trustworthy relationships with their trainees and how to assess their strength and weaknesses. Thus, the SYNERGY Train the Trainer curriculum should also focus on these aspects. Apart from this curriculum, something like a road-map, guiding the trainers to the assessment process, should be created so that the trainers can be sure they are developing the right material for the businesses. It is also apparent that SMEs need to build networks to share their knowledge as this allows them the opportunity to avoid spending time and money attending irrelevant courses.

In terms of the Soufflearning products that could be used in SYNERGY, the training manual contains useful information for trainers and businesses, an overview of the 20 step work plan, and a blueprint for the electronic diary and so this manual could act as an additional resource for SYNERGY business owners, employees and VET tutors completing the Train the Trainer programme. Soufflearning has also developed evaluation questionnaires in English, German and Italian which could also be used to assess the impact of the SYNERGY approach, and there is a Methodological Manual for Initial Assessment which is a detailed set of guidelines for the trainers to perform the initial assessment of the training.

## **Recommendations of the Research Summary Report**

Based on all the best practice examples identified during the desk-based research phase, the project partners can extrapolate useful recommendations that should be used in during the development phase of the SYNERGY project. A summary of these recommendations is as follows:

### **Online Platform**

- The online platform of SYNERGY project should not only be understood as a database for the mini-learning format resources but as an opportunity to network. The online platform should also be used to share news, information and knowledge.
- A methodology which can reliably capture and assess the training needs of companies should be developed and established. This could be done based on an online-tool, which will guide the user through different steps, assessing their needs, their skills and preferences on the basis of a relatively simple rating process. This information could be analysed by experts in designing bespoke learning content.
- A database of mini-learning format resources that can be used by MEOs and VETs for training should be created.
- It is important to agree before the training implementation how the participants will be contacted, via email or Skype, and how the registration process will be facilitated. The more online the interaction, the better, as the micro-social networks will be online portals and so the use of IT should be encouraged throughout the project.

### **Train the Trainer Programme**

- Guidelines should be set to ensure that all VET tutors taking part in the Train-the-Trainer programme have a minimum of 2 years' experience in teaching in an adult education setting;
- SYNERGY partners need to decide if VET tutors need a pre-requisite standard of business training experience, or if the Train the Trainer curriculum can also include additional modules to train non-business tutors to support the business community.
- The Train the Trainer programme which SYNERGY will develop will need to acknowledge the professional experience of established VET tutors and should support their new role as learning facilitators to the business community, rather than traditional tutors. Therefore SYNERGY needs to provide these tutors will ample learning supports and resources, to ensure they are competent in their new role.

### **Induction Training for MEOs**

- Research indicates that the training programmes for business owners and managers are too generic. Instead SMEs involved in the project identified that they would prefer shorter, modular courses that are available in a blended format or fully online. This should be considered when designing the induction programme.
- Business owners agreed that it would be necessary to set incentives for entrepreneurs and business managers if they are to consider attending external training.

### **B2B Networking and Knowledge Transfer**

- When establishing networks, whether regional or local, we should consider connecting both experienced and less experienced micro-enterprise owners in a mentoring relationship. As such, the more experienced network participants could guide the less experienced and could help them to enter the market and reduce their



risk of failure. This shows that there is a role for entrepreneurial tacit knowledge transfer within SYNERGY.

- Some business owners also identified that they appreciated attending the workshops because they were given the opportunity to network face-to-face with other business owners and VET professionals, and some expressed that this experience of face-to-face networking was also valuable and important to their learning.
- Evidence gathered during the workshop sessions indicates that MEOs could use a VET tutor who could advise them on what is involved in hiring someone. This could assist in developing an ongoing relationship between businesses and the project.

## Conclusion

As previously mentioned, there is a significant gap between vocational education professionals and business owners throughout Europe. The SYNERGY project proposes to close this gap, by instigating this research framework and ensuring that all learning tools and resources developed are of relevance to the needs of the target groups. In collaboration with the project partners, the objectives of this research framework were to identify best practice initiatives to support the development of the in-service training programme, while at the same time identifying any potential issues with the Induction to Pedagogy training programme for MEOs. The consortium achieved these research aims by conducting desk-based research to ascertain the most appropriate implementation strategy for this training. From this point, project partners will work to ensure that all training content and learning resources will be based on the reported needs of VET professionals and micro-enterprise owners since they are the key actors involved in ensuring the success of the SYNERGY micro-social networks. The realisation of these networks should also spell future success across Europe with regard to business-to-business and SME to VET networking, and thus ensuring the continued economic dominance of SMEs across Europe.