1ˢᵗ Multiplier Event – 26th March 2015
Paderborn, Germany

Report prepared by University of Paderborn

& Meath Partnership

Project Title: Harnessing the Learning Assets within the SME Business Community

Project Acronym: SYNERGY

Project Number: 2014-1-IE01-KA202_000355

Introduction

On the 26th March 2015, the first Multiplier Event of the SYNERGY project took place in the University of Paderborn. The purpose of this event was to introduce the Synergy project, disseminate the research results and present the future project outputs, currently under development. In total, 50 individuals attended the event. The breakdown of this audience was as follows: local VET students interested in entrepreneurship, business owners, project managers, researchers, policy-makers, local business services and agencies, business development corporations, project partners, and students of the University of Paderborn.

The event was opened by Matthias Teine from the University of Paderborn, who introduced the project partners, gave an overview of the guests speakers and thanked everyone for attending the event. The agenda for the morning was discussed and the purpose of the event detailed.

Overview of the Project

Jennifer Land from Meath Partnership, the project coordinator, gave a short presentation on the SYNERGY project. In her presentation, Jennifer detailed:

> ➢ the rationale behind the project
> ➢ how the consortium was established
> ➢ the target group of the project and how they will be reached by partners
> ➢ the aims and objectives of the project
> ➢ the challenges and opportunities for the project

Key Findings of the Summary Audit Report

Following on from Jennifer's short presentation, Marios Pitsillides from CARDET (Cyprus) and Alexandru Tonghioiu from AOA Arges (Romania) jointly presented the key findings from the Summary Research and Audit Reports. CARDET and AOA Arges were both responsible for overseeing the design, development and implementation of the Research and Audit Frameworks which were completed by all partners in the first 6 months of the project. In their presentations, both the results of the desk-based research and those of the audits conducted with micro-enterprise owners were presented. Key results and findings were outlined, and the subsequent recommendations which will influence future project development work were also given attention in this forum. Marios gave an overview of the research conducted by all implementing partners. The methodology was discussed and the recommendations outlined:

Online Platform
> ➢ develop new learning environments
> ➢ be able to share news, information and knowledge
> ➢ capture, measure and benchmark training needs
> ➢ create database of mini learning programmes
> ➢ establish mechanism to foster knowledge and information exchange

Train the Trainer Programme
> ➢ include additional modules to train non-business tutors to support the business community.
> ➢ acknowledge the professional experience of established VET tutors and support their new role as learning facilitators to the business community

- use knowledge acquisition, based on benchmarking and activity tracking, to provide information about the market, the potential target group and general managerial knowledge
- VET professional trainers and organisations to collaborate closely with chambers of commerce and other institutions in order to support the development of future entrepreneurs

B2B Networking and Knowledge Transfer
- connect both experienced and less experienced MEOs in a mentoring relationship allowing the more experienced network participants to guide the less experienced and help them to enter the market and to reduce risk of failure
- provide MEO's an opportunity to network face-to-face with other business owners and VET professionals
- The content provided within training should be based on authentic problems of MEOs and their employees. Thus, the training gains relevancy for the target group and the learning transfer

Following this, Alex presented the audit findings and gave an overview of the methodology, key findings and the future requirements of MEO's that will shape the next phase of the Synergy work-plan. The key findings were as follows:

- 1 to 3 hours per week was the optimum amount of time that the majority of business owners wished to commit to training
- Priority training themes for successful businesses were identified as Management, Marketing, Communications & Teamwork and Negotiation
- Gaps in currently provision were universally identified by Business Law, Logistics, Supply Chain Management
- MEOs were willing to share information, skills and knowledge with other MEOs (81% on a non-fee basis)
- Online, blended and/or face to face learning was the preference of MEO's
- MEOs stated that they had expertise in the areas of Strategy and Business Growth, Marketing, Communications and Networking and are in a position to share these with VET in order to enhance the relevance of training designed and developed
- Core themes for the learning resources and content development have been identified and outlined by MEOs – therefore we will design for local flexibility and appropriateness
- The preferred format, mode and type of learning resources have been highlighted by the MEOs and they have also stated the barriers that we should avoid if SYNERGY is to be successful

Facilitating Peer Learning – The Pedagogic Strategy
Matthias presented the Pedagogic Strategy which included an overview of the project, the peer learning environment and the rationale behind the pedagogic strategy. Further to this, Matthias then presented the framework that will form the basis of the Induction to Pedagogy courseware. He also outlined the next steps for the project development work. These included:

Induction to Pedagogy
- ➢ Curriculum that addresses the issues outlined in the Pedagogic Strategy.
- ➢ Based on mini-format learning resources.
- ➢ Shall help to safeguard a certain level of quality within the learning environment.

Validation through Local Sub-groups
- ➢ Pedagogic Strategy and Induction to Pedagogy will be discussed.
- ➢ Validate the relevance and practical feasibility.

Creation of Learning Resources
- ➢ By the local sub group for the peer environment.
- ➢ By the partners, comprising the Induction to Pedagogy

After the presentations the group took a short networking coffee break; this break was used by partners to gather feedback from the stakeholders, students and business owners and agencies in attendance, and to further discuss the project. The feedback gathered at this point was very positive.

The second session of the Multiplier Event was a facilitated open discussion on the key aspects of the project; it offered participants an opportunity to engage more fully with the subject of the project, pose questions and to give critical feedback on the project concept and work completed to date.

Roundtable Discussion
The following questions were raised during the roundtable discussion for partner consideration:
1. What is the benefit for trainers/consultants to participate in the project
2. What is the definition of training being used by the project consortium
3. How will we encourage trainers and MEO's to participate
4. How do we ensure the quality of the tools and resources uploaded to the website

This discussion was very fruitful, and the feedback was very constructive in relation to how the project plans to progress.

Closing Words
Jennifer and Matthias thanked everyone for their attendance and contribution to this morning's proceedings, and officially closed the event. A copy of all the presentations and the event report will be available on the project website follwoing the event.

Photographs of the Multiplier Event