

Transnational Research and Audit Report with National Reports



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1. INTRODUCTION

ME2ME focuses on the design and development of a bespoke learning environment for micro-enterprise owners. As the project is endeavouring to develop tools and resources to meet the needs of vocational education and training (VET) providers and micro-enterprises in different countries, research is conducted with VET providers and business owners to:

1. Identify key learning needs of VET professionals to be included in the continuing professional development (CPD) curriculum to support them to work with micro-enterprises through non-traditional learning platforms;
2. Identify the skills needed to help VET professionals produce media-rich mini-learning-format learning resources;
3. Identify the induction to pedagogy needs of micro-enterprise owners to ensure that they can participate fully in the micro-enterprise to micro-enterprise learning networks;
4. Identify key learning areas to be addressed in the mini-learning format training resources to be developed as prototypes and the most appropriate media formats to use in producing the media-rich resources.

A comprehensive research phase is a key activity at the beginning of ME2ME project and consists of two parts: research to collect an opinion of VET professionals and audit of micro-enterprise owners.

The audit is set to identify the available skills and knowledge within the local business community that might be made available to other micro-enterprise owners through the peer-to-peer learning networks. The objectives of the audit were as follows:

1. To identify specific skill assets within the micro-enterprise community that could be used to support the development of the sector as a whole in each local context through the proposed peer-to-peer learning networks;
2. To understand the learning needs and learning preferences of microenterprise owners especially focusing on the type of learning they prefer and the most favoured learning platforms and environments for the proposed peer-to-peer learning;
3. To identify areas where there are gaps in current VET provision that the ME2ME project could address.

As follows, the aim of the research phase was to identify the state of the art where VET providers and microenterprise owners are concerned specifically in relation to the key themes of the ME2ME project which are:

1. The availability of in-service training to build the capacity of VET providers to support entrepreneurship or business development training;
2. The current relationship between VET providers and the microenterprise business community;
3. The scope of business to business networking in each country.

The following document is a summary of both, audit and research reports. The study was conducted in 8 countries – Poland, Lithuania, United Kingdom, Hungary, Romania, Ireland, Czech Republic and Finland. The findings in each country are triangulated resulting in this summary report.

2. TRANSNATIONAL AUDIT AND RESEARCH REPORTS

2.1. TRANSNATIONAL AUDIT REPORT

2.1.1. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

As was stated in the application, ME2ME proposes an innovative approach to help foster learning in the micro-enterprise sector by encouraging micro-enterprise owners to engage in a peer learning network where business owners can share knowledge and skills to support their business objectives. It draws on the principles of asset-based community development and brings this philosophy into a business and vocational education environment. We believe that placing business owners in the vanguard of learning within the micro-enterprise sector will have a considerable long-term impact on the businesses and the staff who work there. This is why their needs and skills need to be thoroughly studied.

In ME2ME audit it was possible to use any or all of the following approaches:

- Organizing focus groups with small numbers of micro-enterprise owners
- Conducting one-to-one interviews either face-to-face or by telephone
- Circulating a questionnaire to selected respondents

The questionnaire was created by Kaunas Science and Technology Park and consisted of 20 questions. It was divided into 4 question groups:

- I. General Demographics
- II. Development of Business Management Skills
- III. Needs and Preferences for Business Management Training
- IV. Readiness and Preferences for Peer-to-Peer Learning

It was assured that the questionnaire was clear to the respondent and easy to fill. In the beginning of a questionnaire the project was described also indicating the aim of a research. Participants had been given contact information to reach experts from Kaunas Science and Technology Park if any questions occur.

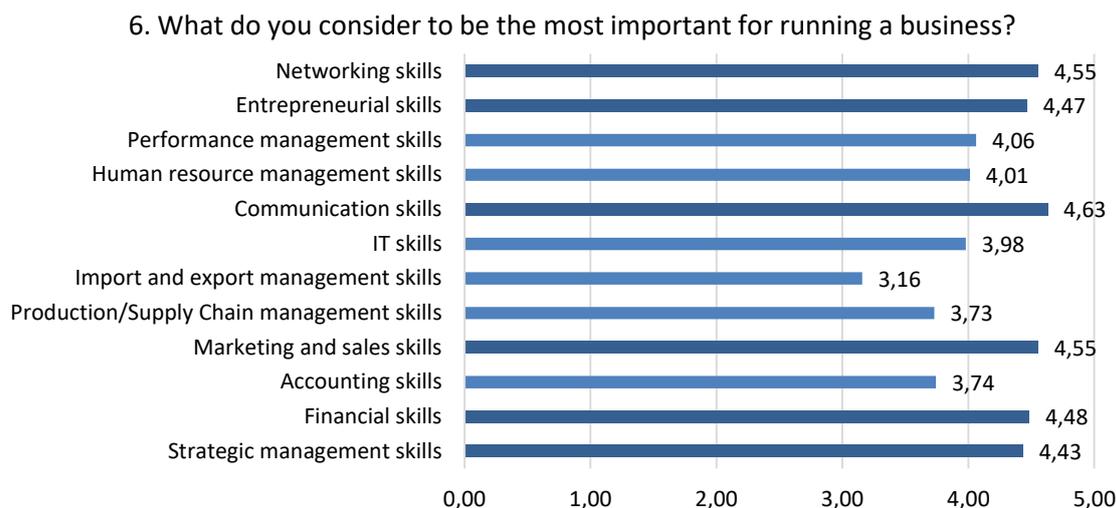
To get the most reliable and valid data different question types and scales in the questionnaire was used: different 5-point Likert scales, two-point questions, matrix question, ranking question, open questions, single and multiple choice questions. We also asked participants for general suggestions considering our project, their interest to participate in further project activities or receive information related to the project.

The sample in total included 160 respondents from micro-enterprises established in 8 countries – Poland, Lithuania, United Kingdom, Hungary, Romania, Ireland, Czech Republic and Finland. Large part from all respondents were the owners of those micro-enterprises by themselves, which were different in size, but most of them employing maximum 9 people.

Development of Business Management Skills

The second part of the questionnaire was aimed at identifying skills that are the most important for developing a successful business according to the respondents – entrepreneurs themselves, the skills they already possess and are willing to share with other micro-enterprise owners, the importance of business training to obtaining these skills and the barriers they face to attend training.

Question 6 – What do you consider the most important skills for running a successful business?



The most important skills for running a successful business were evaluated on the scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is not important at all and 5 – very important. According to entrepreneurs very important skills are: communication (4.63/5.0), networking and marketing and sales (4.55/5.0), financial (4.48/5.0), entrepreneurial (4.47/5.0) and strategic management skills (4.43/5.0). As important ones are also considered performance management (4.06/5.0), human resource management (4.01/5.0) and IT skills (3.98/5.0).

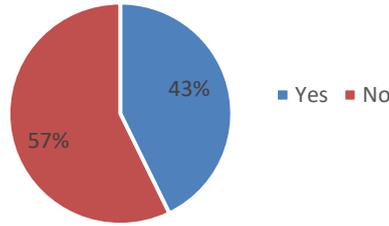
Other very important skills pointed out by entrepreneurs include *learning, innovation management, project management, languages, cultural understanding, cooperation, patience, flexibility, team leading, self-management, skills in mathematics, law and psychology, as well as field-related skills.*

It is important to underline, that most of the skills from the list were considered to be important for successful business by the respondents with an exception on imports and exports management skills evaluated the lowest (3.16/5.0).

Question 7 – Have you attended any business management training in the past 3 years?

Out of 160 respondents only 43% attended business management training in the past 3 years, meaning the dataset represents the opinion of entrepreneurs who are attending the training and the ones who do not.

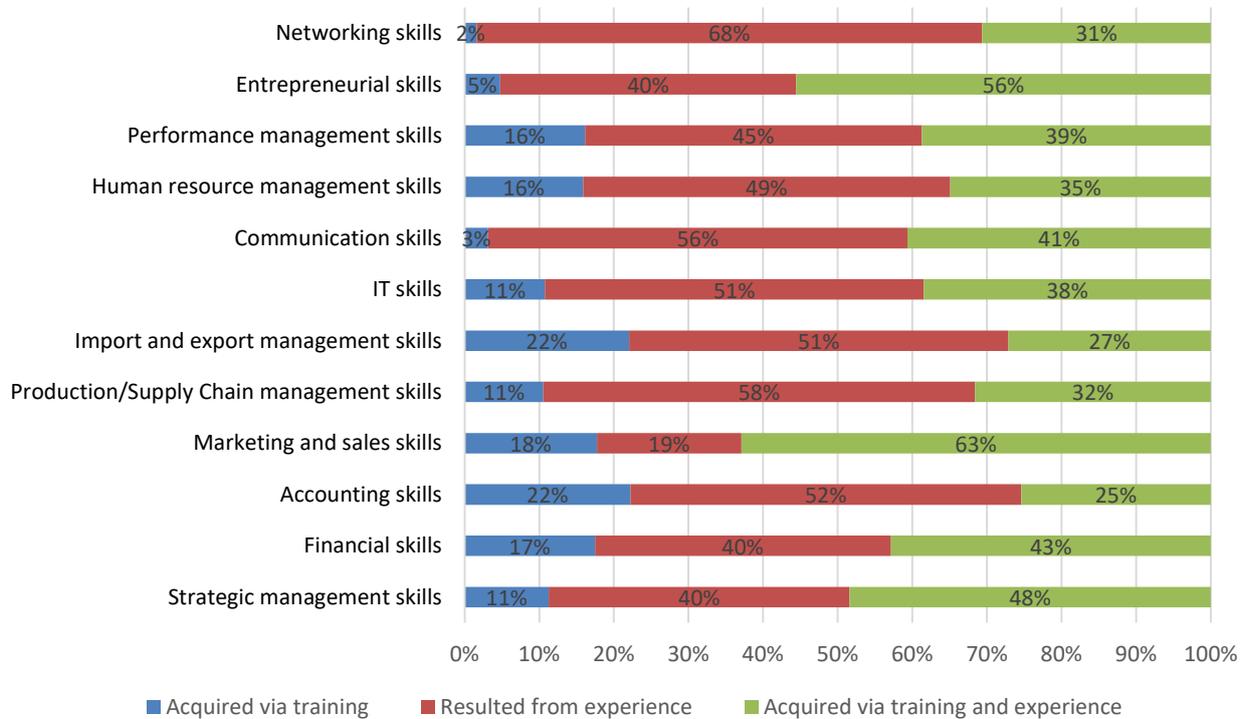
7. Have you attended any business management training in the past 3 years?



Question 8 – Which skills from the list result from training and which ones from experience?

Entrepreneurs were asked to indicate if the skills they have resulted via training, experience or via training and experience combined together. Out of the list of skills that entrepreneurs considered to be important for development of successful business, networking and communication mainly resulted from experience; with very few respondents indicating those skills could be acquired only via training. While entrepreneurial and marketing and sales skills are acquired via training and experience altogether and strategic management knowledge – via experience or experience and training combined. Based on the responses the other skills resulting from the experience include production/supply chain and import and export management, accounting, whereas performance and human resource management, IT and financial skills result from the combination of training and experience or experience. This data indicates which skills entrepreneurs consider to get via business management training and which via experience.

8. Which skills from the list result from training and which ones from experience?

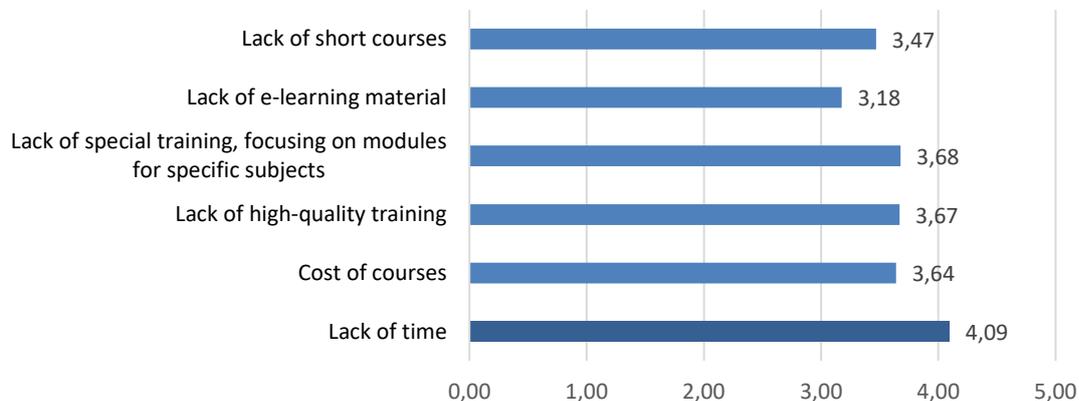


Question 9 – What barriers do you face to attend business management training?

The barriers entrepreneurs face in attending business management training were evaluated on the scale of 1 to 5, enabling to identify the most common barriers the respondents face. Lack of time was stressed as the most common barrier (4.09/5.0). The other barriers to consider are: lack of special training, focusing on modules for specific subjects (3.68/5.0), lack of high-quality training (3.67/5.0), cost of courses (3.64/5.0) and the lack of short courses (3.47/5.0). Whereas indifferent evaluation by entrepreneurs was given to and the lack of e-learning material (3.18/5.0), with some of them feeling this shortage and others not thinking it is a barrier.

Entrepreneurs also pointed out *lack of professionals, who can train, lack of local courses, limited places in the trainings, a number of courses already attended, too many courses offered or on the contrary – no courses offered* as barriers to attend the business management training. Some of them also mentioned they *lack motivation or doubt they need training since they felt having enough knowledge*.

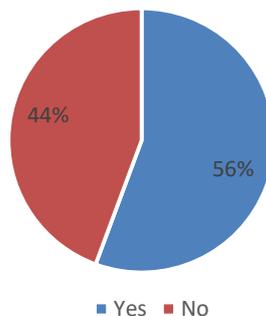
9. What barriers do you face to attend business management training?



Question 10 – Do you share knowledge and information within any business network?

Considering the inclusion in knowledge networks, 56% of entrepreneurs stated they do share knowledge and experience within a certain business network. Therefore not all respondents tend to belong to networks to share knowledge, practices and experience.

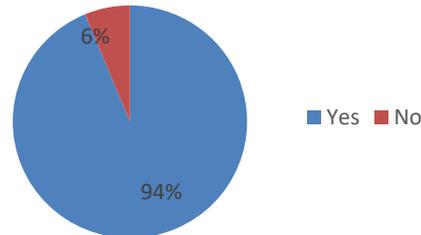
10. Do you share knowledge and information within any business network?



Question 11 – Do you think that some of the skills you have developed might be useful to other micro enterprise owners?

Most of the respondents (94%) think their knowledge and skills developed while creating business might be useful to other micro-enterprise owners.

11. Do you think some of your skills might be useful to other micro enterprise owners?



Needs and Preferences for Business Management Training

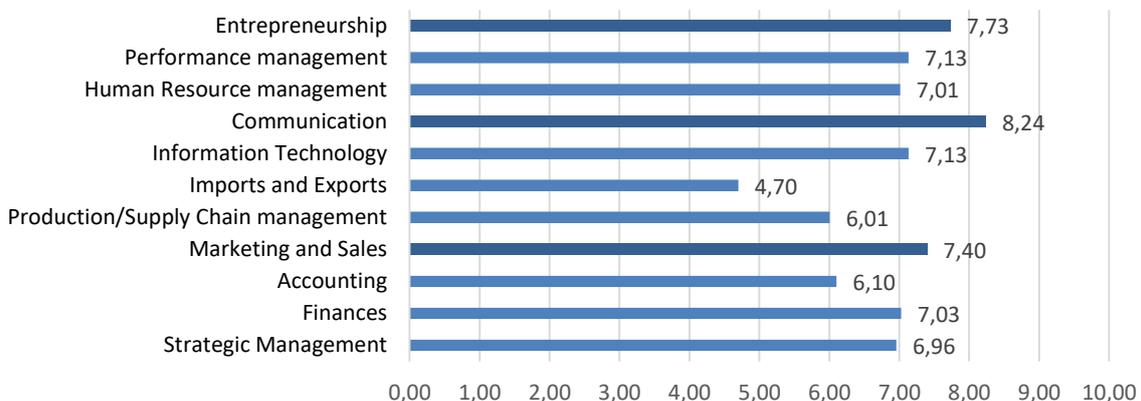
The third part of a questionnaire was aimed at revealing the demand for business management training and the attitude towards new resources for being developed: entrepreneurs were asked to assess their knowledge in certain business areas, identify the learning content they would like to receive in training and how much time they are willing to dedicate to this.

Question 12 – How would you assess your knowledge of the following business areas?

Entrepreneurs evaluated their knowledge in certain business areas on the scale from 1 to 10. The best rated fields include communication (8.24/10.0), entrepreneurship (7.73/10.0), marketing and sales (7.4/10.0), performance management and IT (7.13/10.0). Slightly lower evaluation was given to the finances (7.03/10.0), HR management (7.01/10.0) and strategic management (6.96/10.0).

It is important to underline that entrepreneurs are rather optimistic in their self-evaluation. However, respondents evaluated their knowledge in import and export management, production/supply chain management and accounting the lowest compared with other fields.

12. How would you assess your knowledge of the following business areas on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is very weak and 10 is very knowledgeable?



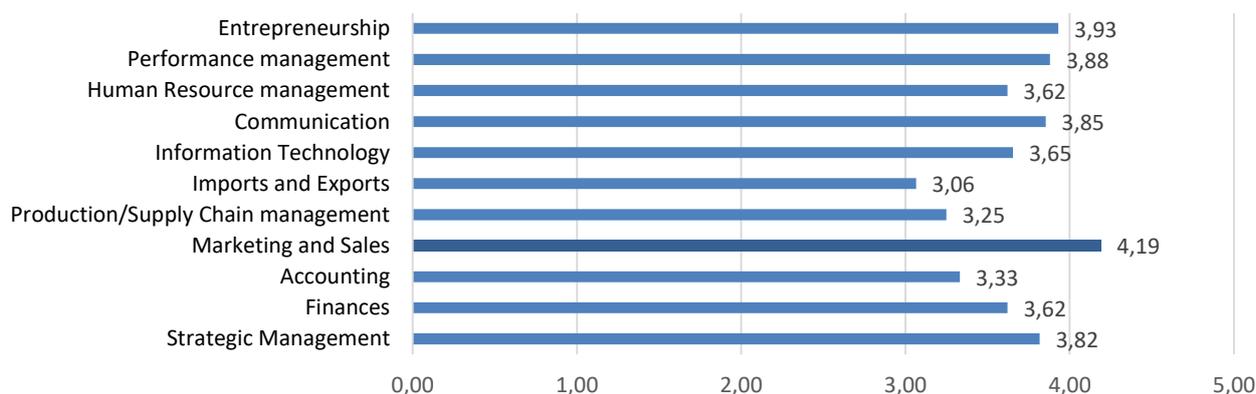
Question 13 – What learning content would you like to receive if new training resources were being developed?

On the scale of 1-5, entrepreneurs evaluated the content they would like to receive in new resources. The content rated the highest is marketing (4.19/5.0), entrepreneurship (3.93/5.0), communication (3.85/5.0) performance (3.88/5.0), and strategic management (3.82/5.0). The respondents would also like to add IT (3.65/5.0), HR management and finances (3.62/5.0).

Knowledge in imports/exports, production/supply management and accounting received the lowest evaluations by interviewees when rating their own knowledge, but they still do not think there would be a reason to acquire such skills through training. However, entrepreneurs would still prefer to learn those topics in business management training in which they feel having the strongest knowledge.

Additionally, micro-enterprise owners would prefer to receive trainings on such topics as *management of innovation projects, sustainable innovation development, business management, networking, problem solving, conflict management, negotiation, self-management, branding through social media*. These responses indicate management of different business areas as well as marketing and sales issues are those topics that entrepreneurs would like to focus.

13. What content would you like to receive if new resources were being developed?



Question 14 – How would you like to access these new training resources?

Considering the form of this new training respondents would prefer online courses (63%), workshops (62%) or peer-to-peer learning (61%). Around half of the respondents (52%) would like podcasts or interactive learning methods, while 38% said they would like to analyse case studies.

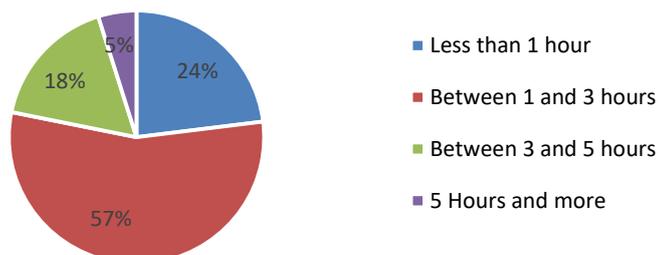
14. How would you like to access these new training resources



Question 15 – How much time would you be willing to commit to training on a weekly basis?

57% of all respondents would prefer the course would take between 1 and 3 hours each week, 18% would be willing to attend longer courses of 3 to 5 hours and 24% – less than 1 hour. Only 5% of all respondents would prefer the course to take 5 hours or more per week and this echoes previous responses on the barriers entrepreneurs are facing to attend business management training – the lack of time was one of the main issues preventing from attending such courses.

15. How much time would you be willing to commit to training on a weekly basis?



Readiness and preferences for peer-to-peer learning

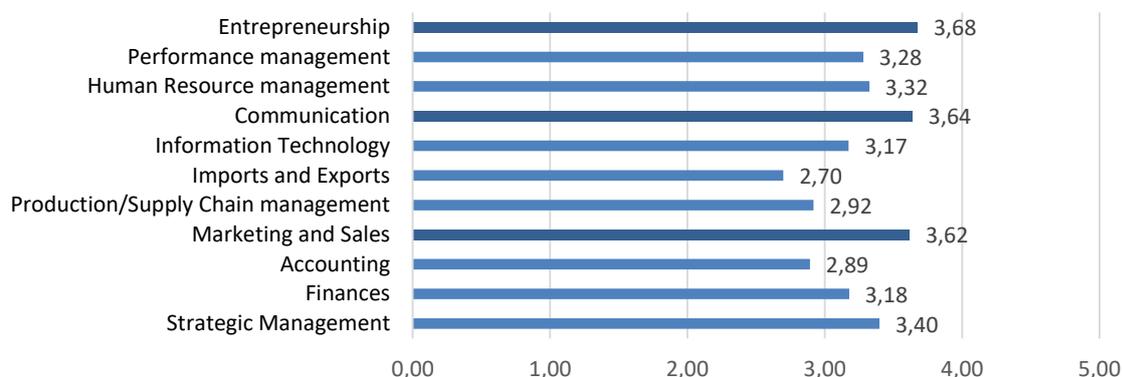
The fourth part of a questionnaire was meant to evaluate the potential of peer-to-peer learning. The opinion of entrepreneurs was asked on specific expertise that would be of most relevance and importance for them to receive from other micro enterprise owners and the knowledge they would be willing to share. Respondents also identified the most effective approaches for engaging in peer-to-peer learning.

Question 16 – What specific knowledge/skills/expertise you would be willing to share with other micro enterprise owners in peer-to-peer learning?

On the scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 – strongly agree, entrepreneurs rated the specific expertise which they would be willing to share with other micro-enterprise owners through peer-to-peer learning. Even being involved in business networks for knowledge and experience sharing, entrepreneurs were not keen on providing knowledge to their colleagues - micro-enterprise owners. Respondents were more willing to share their expertise in entrepreneurship (3.68/5.0), communication (3.64/5.0), marketing and sales (3.62/5.0) and strategic management (3.40/5.0), and less on human resource management (2.32/5.0), performance management (3.28/5.0), finances (3.18/5.0) and IT (3.17/5.0), also were rather negative for such fields as production/supply chain management (2.92/5.0), accounting (2.89/5.0) and imports and exports (2.70/5.0).

Overall, respondents were more willing to share their expertise through peer-to-peer learning in those topics, in which they self-evaluated their knowledge the highest. Entrepreneurs also listed *leadership, field-related skills, sustainable business, research, time management and planning, self-management* as topics they would like to discuss with other micro-enterprise owners.

16. What specific knowledge/skills/expertise you would be willing to share with other micro enterprise owners in peer-to-peer learning?

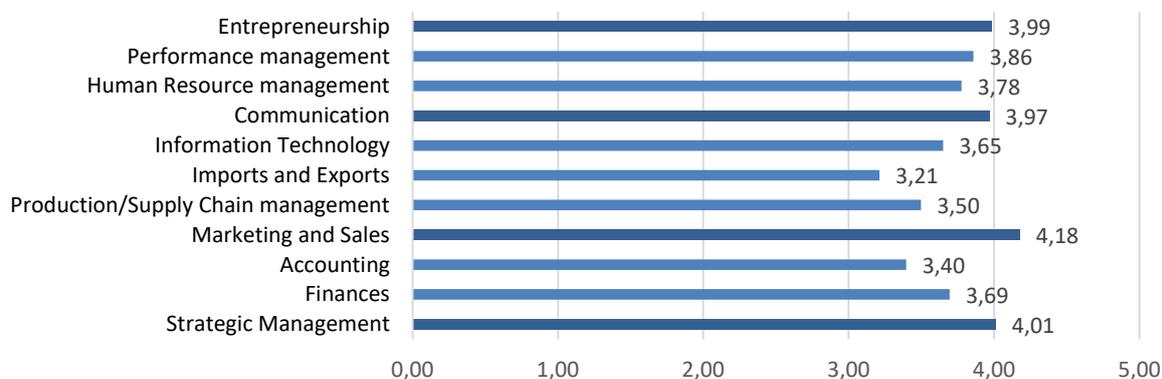


Question 17 – What specific knowledge/skills/expertise would be of most relevance and importance for you to receive from other micro enterprise owners?

On the scale of 1 to 5, entrepreneurs rated the specific expertise which would be the most important for them to receive from other micro-enterprise owners through peer-to-peer learning. Interestingly, being involved in business networks and listing a number of skills that can be acquired via experience, entrepreneurs are keener on receiving knowledge from their colleagues than sharing it from their own side. Respondents were willing to learn marketing and sales (4.18/5.0), strategic management (4.01/5.0), entrepreneurship (3.99/5.0) and communication (3.86/5.0), and were less positive towards performance management (3.86/5.0), HR management (3.78/5.0), finances (3.69/5.0), IT (3.65/5.0), production/supply chain management (3.5/5.0) or imports and exports (3.4/5.0). The topic they want to discuss the least from all in the list is accounting (3.21/5.0).

Respondents also listed *management of innovation projects, decision making, good practices, failure stories and practices with client service, time management, field-related skills, specific pieces of advices, stories about milestones, self-management* as topics they would like to discuss with other micro-enterprise owners and thus learn from their experience.

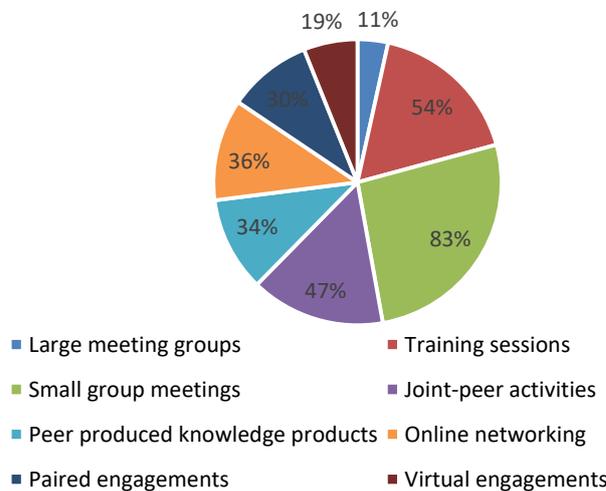
17. What knowledge/skills/expertise would be of most relevance and importance for you to receive from other micro enterprise owners in peer-to-peer learning?



Question 18 – What are your preferred approaches to engage in peer-to-peer learning?

From the list of approaches entrepreneurs evaluated the most effective in peer-to-peer learning to their opinion. 83% of respondents chose small group meetings, 54% – training sessions, 47% - joint-peer activities as ones of the most effective for this kind of training according to their opinion. Some of the approaches received a lower appreciation from entrepreneurs to be used in peer-to-peer learning, such as online networking, chosen by 36% from all respondents, peer produced knowledge products, preferred by 34%, and paired engagements, chosen by 30% from all respondents. Virtual engagements or large meeting groups were chosen by 19% and 11% from all respondents respectively, indicating peer-to-peer learning tends to take approaches involving only small groups of people that meet physically. Respondents also listed *mobile devices* for the engagement in peer-to-peer learning, what reflects the overall trend in growing engagement with mobile devices we see nowadays.

18. What are your preferred approaches to engage in peer-to-peer learning?



Question 19 and 20 – Comments and interest in the project

Comments on the project revealed the importance of *video training sessions*, which respondents referred as *most suitable* for their company. Considering the knowledge and skills, some respondents expressed the need to receive help in pointing out the areas they need to receive knowledge in. Some of them felt not confident or in need to prove their success before sharing their experience with others. The importance of subjects on entrepreneur’s self-management was highly stressed pointing out that most of the courses and activities fall into the category of hard skills or doing business and frequently ignoring the role of business owner managing his time and self. 67 participants were interested in the results of ME2ME project and left their email addresses.

2.1.3. SUMMARY OF THE AUDIT REPORT

Development of Business Management Skills

It is important to underline, that all of the skills from the list were considered to be important for successful business by the respondents. According to entrepreneurs from 8 countries very important skills are: communication, networking, marketing and sales, financial, entrepreneurial, strategic management skills. Other very important skills include performance and human resource management, IT skills. Import and export management skills were evaluated as of the lowest importance from all the skills from the list.

The data indicates which skills, out of the list of skills that entrepreneurs considered to be important for development of successful business, entrepreneurs acquire via business management training and which via experience. None of the skills is understood to be acquired mainly through training, while the skills that entrepreneurs consider to acquire via experience is the area where peer-to-peer learning between micro-enterprise owners could focus. Those skills include networking, communication, accounting, production/supply chain and import and export management. The development of other skills that according to the respondents, usually require not only experience, but also training could be included into peer-to-peer learning topics as well. Those skills are as follows: entrepreneurship, management of performance, human resources and strategy, IT, marketing and sales, and finances.

The main barrier entrepreneurs face when deciding to attend the business management training is a lack of time, but the lack of high-quality training or a special training, focusing on modules for specific subjects, cost of courses and the lack of short courses sometimes prevent from attending training as well. As a result, less than a half of the respondents attended business management training in the past 3 years and only slightly more than a half of them tend to belong to networks to share knowledge, practices and experience. However, most of the respondents think their knowledge and skills developed while creating business might be useful to other micro-enterprise owners.

Needs and Preferences for Business Management Training

According to entrepreneurs the fields they are the most knowledgeable include communication, entrepreneurship, marketing and sales, performance management and IT. It is important to underline that the same knowledge skills which entrepreneurs consider to be stronger in their self-evaluation are also considered of a higher importance in successful business development. Respectively, skills in imports and exports received the lowest evaluations by micro-enterprise representatives when rating their own knowledge and thus was considered of lowest importance from all the skills from the list to the development of business. Still, this is not a learning content respondents would like to receive in training resources. Entrepreneurs would still prefer to learn those topics in business management training in which they feel having the strongest knowledge. That includes marketing and sales, entrepreneurship, management of performance, human resources or strategy, communication, IT and finances.

Entrepreneurs are flexible considering the form of the new training, whether it will be in a format of a workshop, case study, online course, of peer to peer learning, video or podcast, or interactive learning. Still, online courses or workshops are the most preferable formats for business management training. Respondents prefer the course would take between 1 and 3 hours each week, with very few willing to

devote more than 5 hours per week. These preferences align with the lack of time stressed as one of the main barriers preventing from attending business management training.

Readiness and preferences for peer-to-peer learning

Entrepreneurs have positive attitude toward peer-to-peer learning among micro-enterprise owners when it means receiving the knowledge from other peers, however, they are more indifferent when it comes to sharing their own expertise. Respondents were more willing to share their expertise in those topics, in which they self-evaluated their knowledge the highest (entrepreneurship, communication, marketing and sales, strategic management). Interestingly, entrepreneurs were tending not to receive the knowledge from peers in those topics as well, indicating that there are certain areas on which they would like to focus, whether it is sharing or receiving the experience in peer-to-peer learning.

From the list of approaches entrepreneurs chose small group meetings, training sessions and joint-peer activities as ones of the most effective for peer-to-peer training. Large meeting groups or virtual engagements were chosen by very few respondents indicating entrepreneurs are thinking of peer-to-peer learning as a small group of people that meets training sessions and engages in joint-peer activities physically and much less frequently - virtually.

General summary

Throughout all the questionnaire entrepreneurs tend to exclude particular skills which are of higher demand than others from the list to be taught through business management training or discussed in peer-to-peer learning with other micro-enterprise owners. Those are very same skills entrepreneurs consider to be more knowledgeable about and also considered of a higher importance in successful business development. Even being knowledgeable in those fields entrepreneurs would still prefer to include this content to their trainings if new resources are developed. These areas include communication, entrepreneurship, marketing and sales, management of performance, human resources and strategy, finances and IT. Throughout all the questionnaire import and export or production/supply chain management and accounting were considered of a lower importance when compared with other fields. Even though entrepreneurs do not feel knowledgeable in these areas, they do not want to include those topics in business training or discuss them with peers, other micro-enterprise owners, nor do they think of those being important areas for successful business development.

2.2. TRANSNATIONAL RESEARCH REPORT

2.2.1. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

The aim of the research report is to identify the state of the art where VET providers are concerned specifically in relation to the key themes of the ME2ME. The VET providers were thoroughly asked about their current relationships with business community, their experiences with business management training and their approach towards peer-to-peer learning. That's why the ME2ME research phase is highly comprehensive since the two main target groups are asked to share their opinions and both of them are compared and equally valued.

In ME2ME research it was possible to use any or all of the following approaches:

- Organising focus groups with small numbers of VET providers
- Conducting one-to-one interviews either face-to-face or by telephone
- Circulating a questionnaire to selected respondents

For the majority of partners the preferred methodology was to create an online questionnaire and send it to the VET providers/business trainers among the organizations' stakeholders. The process was sometimes facilitated with phone calls and face-to-face interviews.

The questionnaire consisted of 20 questions. They were divided into 4 chapters:

- V. General Demographics
- VI. Provision of Business Management Skills
- VII. Demand for Business Management Training
- VIII. Potential of Peer-to-Peer Learning

The template for the questionnaire was prepared by the leading partner INNEO before conducting the research. The template was reviewed and agreed upon by all partners. To get the most applicative data different research methods were used in the questionnaire: Likert scales, single and multiple choice questions and ranking questions as well as questions which needs answer in a short text format. The descriptive statistics results are presented as Frequencies, Mean values and Graphics. The participants were also asked about for general suggestions considering our project.

Since there are 9 partners in ME2ME project, the questionnaires were performed in local languages. The general research template was translated into each partners' language and the national results were translated back to English afterwards.

Besides the questionnaire results, there is also a brief theoretical part in each National Research, which was based on the desk-based research performed before the project start. The desk-based research consisted of the summary of the current law concerning VET provision. It was also based on other reports, statistics and articles. Obtaining the theoretical knowledge helped interpret the data from questionnaire in the most reliable way possible.

155 people in total took part in the ME2ME research phase in all the partners' countries. The participants were education providers: VET state school employees, their managers and the owners and employees of private business training institution.

2.2.2. RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE:

General Demographics

Questions 1-5 - summary

The following report will be focused on the working preferences and opinions of the VET specialists. The profiles of the respondents varied significantly depending on the country, so the report will just very generally summarise these information. The results of the general questions are as follows:

- The questionnaires were filled by 155 respondents
- The sectors and main activities of VET institutions were very diversified
- The average number of employees was 19, the average year of establishment – 1992
- 22% of the respondents were the owners of their institutions
- 92% of them have provided business management training in the past 3 years

Provision of Business Management Skills

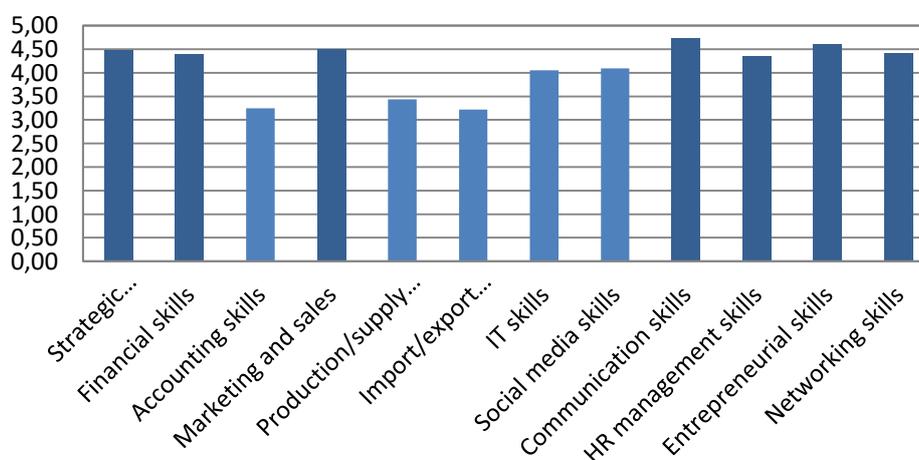
Question 6 - What do you consider to be the most important for running a successful business?

Being an entrepreneur is a multidisciplinary profession so it's not surprising that all of the qualities were considered relevant by our respondents. All of the answers were ranked higher than "neutral".

There were three groups of skills that were considered crucial: general management (strategic management, entrepreneurship), money (financial skills, marketing and sales) and people (communication, HR and networking). These answers are indisputable since being an entrepreneur requires a strategic approach, is aimed at making profit and always involves working with others.

The least valued skills were production/supply and import/export management (since they are sector-related) as well as accounting and IT (these are the skills that are easily outsourced).

6. What do you consider to be the most important skills for running a successful business?

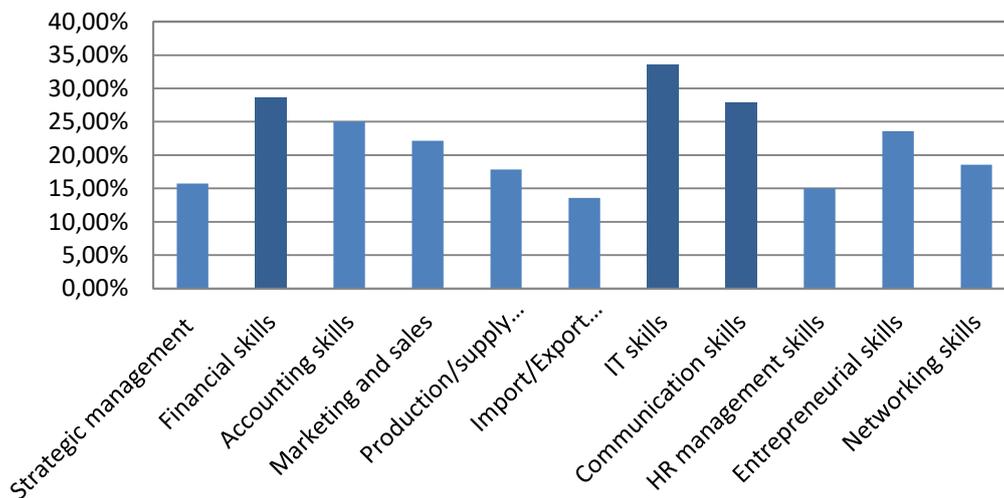


Other skills considered vital were: *strategic thinking, time and process management, conflict management, leadership, generating ideas, critical thinking, change and innovation management.*

Question 7 - Which skills from the list are included in the courses taught in your institution?

Most of the VET institutions that took part in our survey conduct the courses that include IT skills (33%), financial skills (28%) and communication (27%). The rest of the skills are taught quite rarely (15-25%) and the least popular ones are import/export management and strategic management.

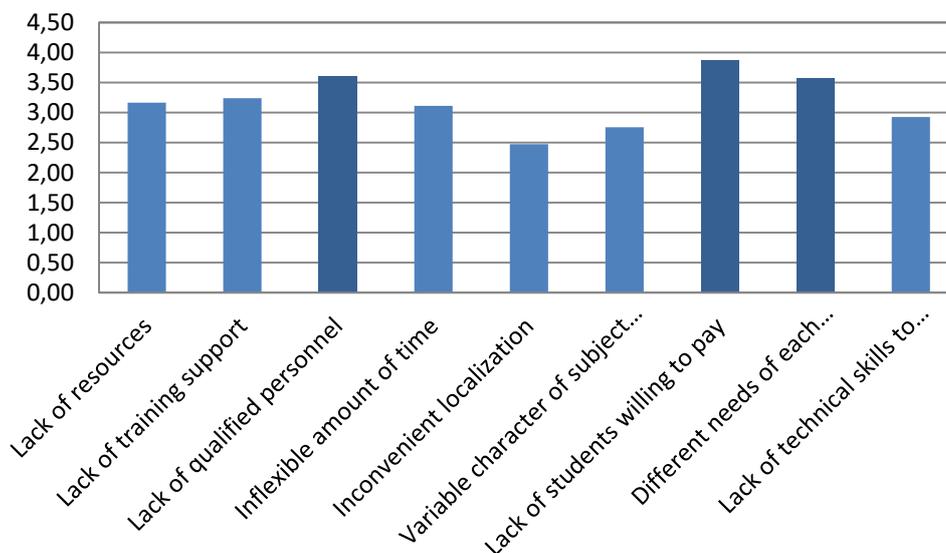
7. Which skills from the list are included in the training courses taught in your institution?



Question 10 - What barriers do your VET unit face to provide business management training?

The barriers were comparable in most of the countries that took part in the research. The most popular answers were: lack of students willing to pay (3.8/5), lack of qualified personnel (3.55/5) and different needs of each student (3.55/5). The least problematic aspect was an inconvenient localization (2.5/5).

10. What barriers do your VET unit face to provide business management training?

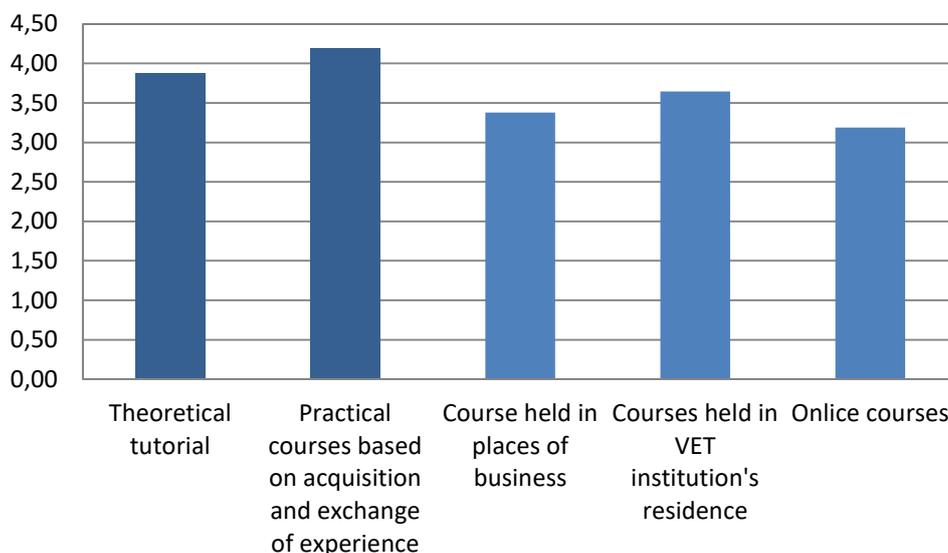


Question 11 - What form does the training provided by your institution take?

Most of the training provided by the VET institutions has a form of theoretical tutorial (3.85/5) and a practical course (4.1/5). Since there were a huge variety of the institutions taking part in the survey, the courses are held both: in the place of business and in the VET institutions' residences.

The percentage of online courses provision was also relatively high (3.2/5), comparing to other forms. In this case, however, the answers were significantly different in each partner country, depending on the national tendencies.

11. What form does the training provided by your institution take?

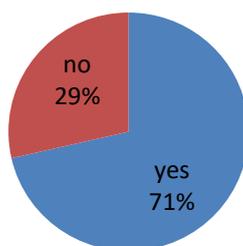


Other forms of training indicated by our respondents were: *individual courses, simulations, counselling, didactical games and practical projects.*

Question 12 - Do you share knowledge and experience within any education providers' network?

71% of the respondents share their experience and knowledge in the education providers' network.

12. Do you share knowledge and experience within any education providers network?



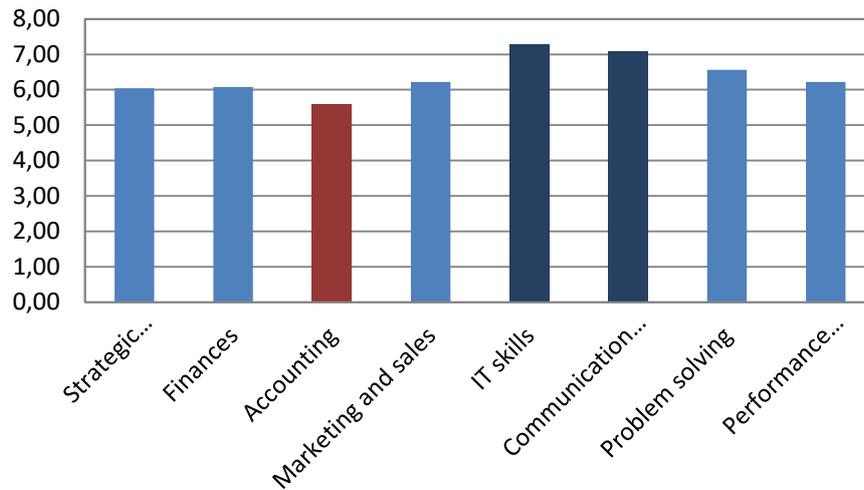
Demand for Business Management Training

Question 13 – How would you assess the knowledge of your students about the following areas?

Since the most frequently taught skills were IT and communication, they are also the ones that the students have the biggest knowledge of (more than 7/10), according to the interviewees.

The least known subject is an accounting, but its assessment is still relatively high (5.5/10).

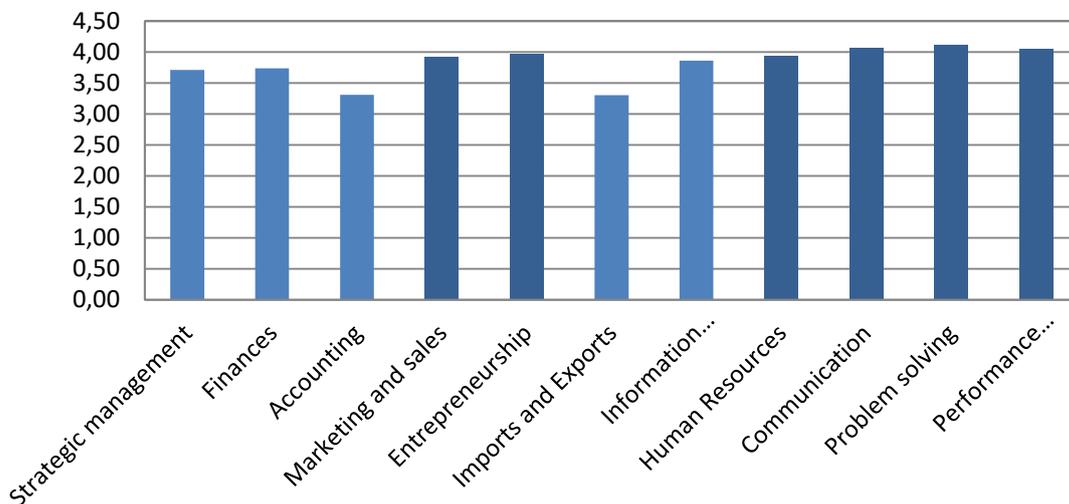
13. How would you assess the knowledge of your students about the following areas?



Question 14 – What learning content would you like to expand or add to your training offer if the new training resources were being developed?

It can be said that most of the interviewees were interested in adding most of the content to their training offer. The most popular answers (graded approximately 4/5) were: Problem solving, Communication, Performance management, HR, Entrepreneurship and Marketing and Sales.

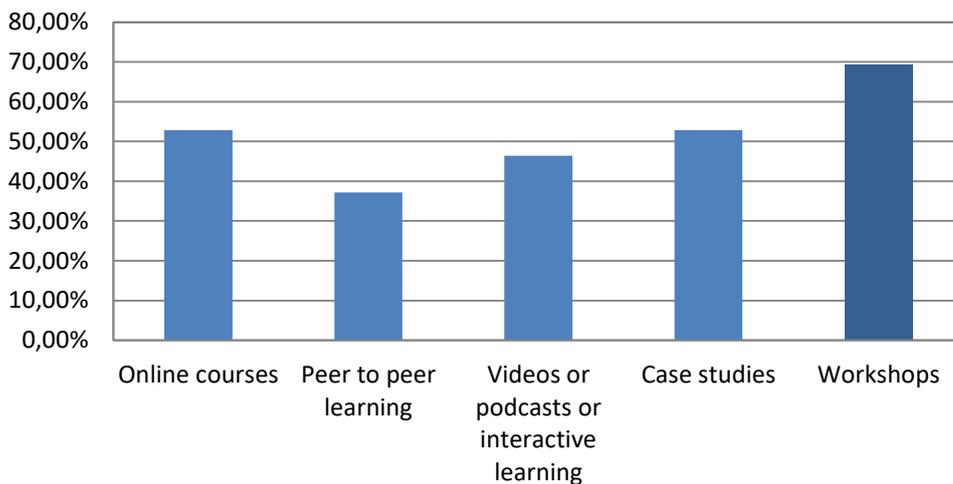
14. What learning content would you like to expand/add to your training offer if the new training resources were developed?



Question 15 – How would you like to provide these new training resources?

VET specialists feel the most comfortable with delivering the new resources in the form of workshops (68% of the respondents). Approximately 50% of the interviewees also prefer the form of case studies and online courses. Peer to peer learning was rated the least popular method. However, 38% is still a significant result taking into account the poor knowledge of the method in some countries.

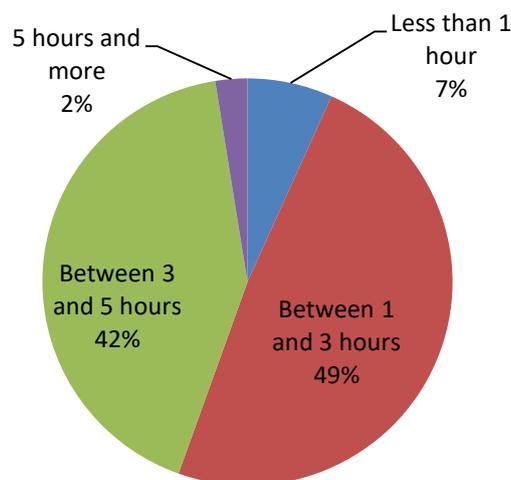
15. How would you like to provide new training resources?



Question 16 – How much time do you think the course should take each week to be manageable for education provider?

The respondents have strong preferences towards the duration of the course on a weekly basis: 49% of them would like the classes to last 1-3 hours, and the other 42% choose the 3-5 hours answer. VET specialists don't like extremes when it comes to their methodology; only 7% choose the "less than 1 hour" answer and 2% prefer the course duration longer than 5 hours.

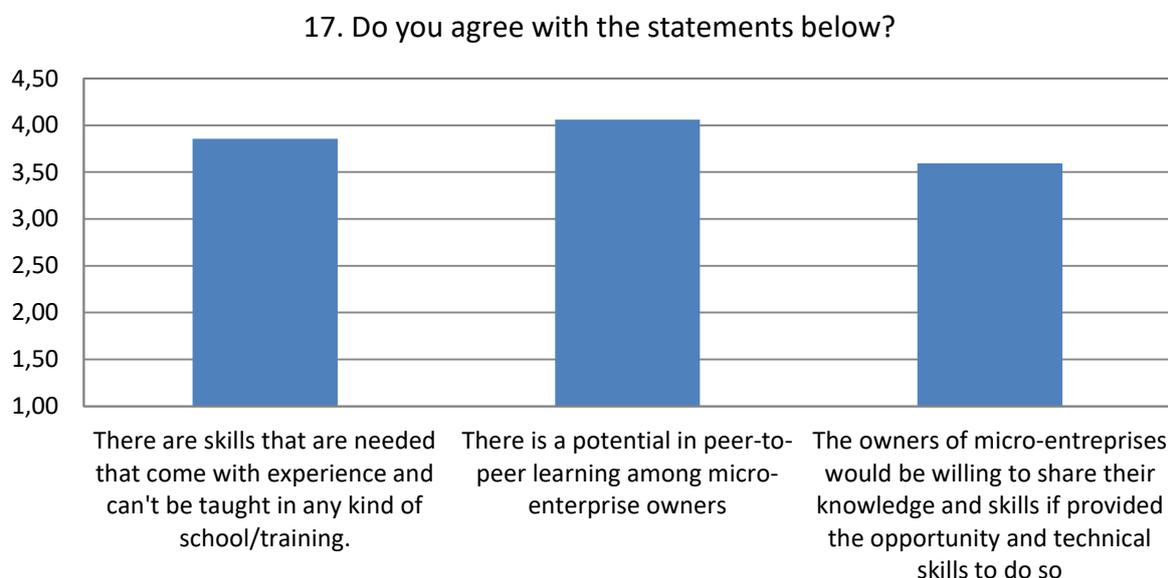
16. How much time the course should take?



Potential of Peer-to-Peer Learning

Question 17 – Do you agree with the statements below?

VET specialists were asked to rate in the scale 1-5 how much they agree with the following sentences. The results are presented on the graph below:



The results of this question are optimistic from the ME2ME project point of view. The majority of the respondents believe that there is a potential in peer-to-peer learning among business owners (4.5/5). Moreover, they know that some skills can't be taught in any form of training (3.85/5), that's why it's so important for entrepreneurs to share their experiences.

The VET trainers were slightly less optimistic regarding the willingness of SMEs owners to share their knowledge with other entrepreneurs (3.6/5). This is a reasonable concern, since the concept of peer-to-peer learning is relatively new in some countries. And new ideas involving big groups of people are usually met with concerns and need time to let people get familiar with it.

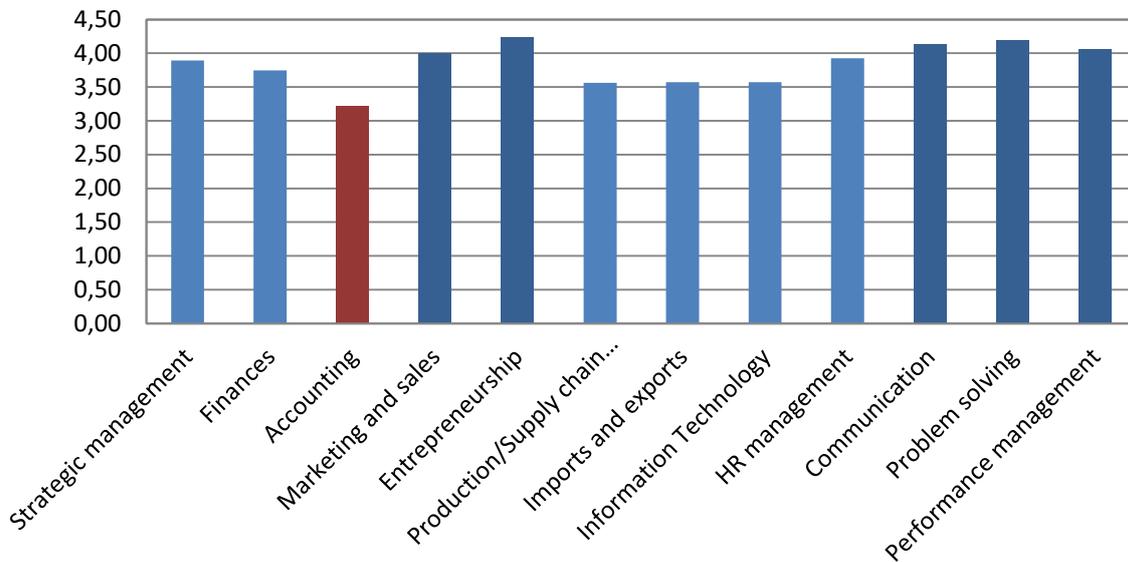
Question 18 – What specific knowledge/skills/expertise would be the most important and effective for students to receive from other micro enterprise owners in peer-to-peer learning?

According to our respondents almost all of the following skills would be valuable to be taught using peer-to-peer learning – all were valued more than 3.5/5. Only accounting was rated 3.2/5.

The most needed skills for this method were: entrepreneurship (4.25/5), problem solving (4.2/5), communication (4.1/5) and performance management (4.05/5). These are “soft skills” or the abilities that usually come with the experience.

The interviewees pointed out also other aspects that should be taught in peer-to-peer learning: *sharing stories, experiences, mistakes, life lessons; networking, motivation, recruitment techniques, attracting new customers, generating ideas and social media marketing.*

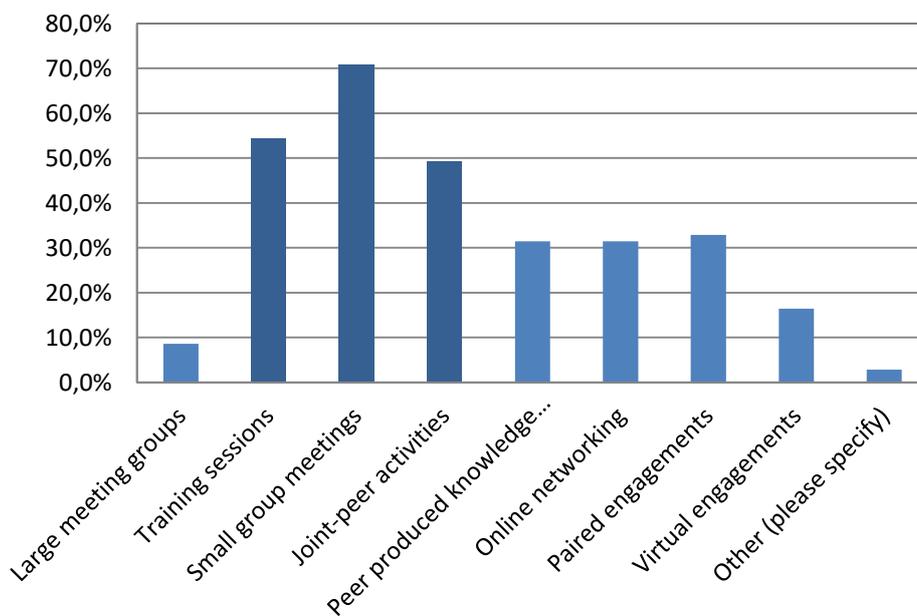
18. Which specific skill would be the most important and effective for students to receive in peer-to-peer learning?



Question 19 – What approaches would be the most effective in peer-to-peer learning?

There were three methods that our interviewees considered to be the most promising for peer-to-peer learning: small group meetings (71%), training sessions (54%) and joint-peer activities (49%). The least popular approaches were large meeting groups (8%) and virtual engagements (16%).

19. What approaches would be the most effective in peer-to-peer learning?



2.2.3. SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH REPORT

Provision of Business Management Skills

The purpose of this chapter was getting to know the views of VET specialists about the skills needed to have a business and comparing it to the skills that are available or common in the training institutions. The main results of this part are as follows:

- Our respondents considered almost all of the skills listed in the questionnaire important or very important for conducting a business (all were ranked more than 3/5). The most valued skills were: strategic management, entrepreneurship, financial skills, marketing and sales, communication, networking and HR management.
- Since a significant group among the institutions were schools, the training already available consists mainly of IT, communication and financial skills.
- As we can see, very generally speaking, **the available training doesn't really match with the skills needed on the market.**

Demand for Business Management Training

The main goal of this part was to study the current skills of our respondents' students and the interest of trainers to expand their offer. The trainers were also asked about their preferences towards providing the new learning content.

The first conclusion from this part is that students' knowledge was well-rated in IT and communication, which were listed as the skills most frequently taught at the VET institutions. The lowest rated knowledge was in the fields of accounting, finances and strategic management.

Trainers would like to expand their current range of training provision in many fields. The most popular choices were problem solving, communication, performance management, HR, entrepreneurship and marketing and sales, which are mostly strategic or interpersonal abilities.

Potential of Peer-to-Peer Learning

The questions asked in the previous chapter pointed out that the respondents prefer workshops, case-studies and online learning methods. The peer-to-peer learning was the best rated answer – 38% of the trainers were in favour of that solution.

However, in the next question the interviewees strongly agreed, that some skills come with experience, therefore peer-to-peer learning (meaning: sharing experiences among entrepreneurs) has real potential. This might mean that trainers might not always understand the term “peer-to-peer learning” and they have no practice using it and they just appreciate the idea when it's explained to them. They especially valued the method when it comes to fields like: entrepreneurship, problem solving, communication and performance management, which are the abilities that usually come with the experience.

General summary

The first conclusion after interpreting the data was that some of the skills were repeatedly ranked high, regardless the question. The following skills are generally considered crucial for running a business and needed in the training provision:

- Entrepreneurship
- Communication
- Marketing
- Problem solving
- HR management
- Performance management

The least valued abilities were: import/export management and production/supply chain management, therefore these skills should not be considered while creating new training resources. Accountancy and IT were also not well valued in terms of creating new materials, probably because of the fact that they are sector-related or can be easily outsourced.

When it comes to training preferences of VET specialists, there are several qualities that are the most desired in the training provision:

- The training should take approximately 3 hours a week
- It should take a form of practical workshops, combined with case studies and online resources
- In peer-to-peer learning the preferred methods would be small group meetings, training sessions and joint-peer activities

Another conclusion concerns the problems that VET providers face in business training provision. The three most rated issues were:

- Lack of students willing to pay
- Lack of qualified staff
- Different needs of each student

The last important conclusion at the end of the report is **the fact that ME2ME project was designed to address all that problems**. The training content will be developed, the staff will have proper materials to learn how to create new resources and the training will take a form of mini-learning resources, which is one of the most flexible methods to obtain new skills.

3. SUMMARY OF THE TRANSNATIONAL AUDIT AND RESEARCH REPORTS

Since the summaries of both: Research and Audit Reports have already been made in this document, the last part of the analysis will be **the comparison between micro-enterprise owners and VET providers**, taking into account their experiences, preferences and expectation towards business management training and peer-to-peer learning.

The biggest **similarities** in both groups are related to the skills in general. Both VET trainers and entrepreneurs stated in their answers that:

- The most important skills for running a successful business are: entrepreneurship, communication, marketing and sales, strategic thinking and networking.
- Micro-enterprise owners are interested in obtaining training in the same fields that VET providers are interested in training provision: problem solving, communication, performance management, HR management, entrepreneurship and marketing and sales. The only difference is that marketing skill is significantly more important to entrepreneurs than it is to trainers.
- The skills that will be most effectively taught in peer-to-peer learning are: communication, marketing and entrepreneurship.
- The most wanted approaches in peer-to-peer learning are: small group meetings, training sessions and joint-peer activities

In some aspects opinions of both groups have varied significantly and they were usually related to the learning preferences. The most visible **differences** were:

- The biggest barrier in attending more business management training for entrepreneurs is lack of time. On the contrary, the biggest obstacles for trainers are lack of students willing to pay for the course and lack of qualified staff.
- Following the previous conclusion, micro-enterprise owners are able to spend less time on training than the VET trainers. The first group strongly prefers the 1-3 hours period and the trainers were more convinced to 3-5 hours.
- Both groups rated well online courses and workshops as the preferred methods of providing and receiving training, but the entrepreneurs were significantly more convinced to online methods (which might also be connected with their accessibility).
- More VET providers (71%) than the entrepreneurs (56%) share their knowledge in sector-related networks.

We believe that ME2ME project's research phase will strongly influence the next outputs and overall evaluation of the project. That's why we've presented the very comprehensive approach, to study the needs of most important target groups and compare their results. The primary project goal is to create bespoke and relevant training resources and bring those groups more closely together.

4. NATIONAL RESULTS

4.1. POLAND

4.1.1. NATIONAL AUDIT REPORT

INTRODUCTION

A comprehensive research phase was a key activity at the beginning of ME2ME project. Intellectual Output 1 consists of two parts: research among VET professionals and audit among the members of local business community. The following document is a summary of that audit.

The aim of the audit was:

- To identify specific skill assets within the micro-enterprise community that could be used to support the development of the sector as a whole in each local context through the proposed peer-to-peer learning networks
- To understand the learning needs and learning preferences of microenterprise owners especially focusing on the type of learning they prefer and the most favoured learning platforms and environments for the proposed peer-to-peer learning
- To identify areas where there are gaps in current VET provision that the ME2ME project could address

In summary, a primary goal of the comprehensive audit was to identify the available skills and knowledge within the local business community that might be made available to other micro-enterprise owners through the peer-to-peer learning networks.

As was stated in the application, ME2ME proposes an innovative approach to help foster learning in the micro-enterprise sector by encouraging micro-enterprise owners to engage in a peer learning network where business owners can share knowledge and skills to support their business objectives. It draws on the principles of asset-based community development and brings this philosophy into a business and vocational education environment.

We believe that placing business owners in the vanguard of learning within the micro-enterprise sector will have a considerable long-term impact on the businesses and the staff who work there. That is the reason why their needs and skills needed to be thoroughly studied.

METHODOLOGY

In ME2ME audit it was possible to use any or all of the following approaches:

- Organising focus groups with small numbers of microenterprise owners
- Conducting one-to-one interviews either face-to-face or by telephone
- Circulating a questionnaire to selected respondents

In case of INNEO the best methodology was to create Google Questionnaire and send it among the SMEs from the region that cooperate with our organization. These companies are often based outside Rzeszów and their owners are usually the people who are constantly engaged with their multiple responsibilities. From our experience we know that online methods are the most suitable for all participants.

The questionnaire, delivered by Lithuanian partner, consisted of 20 questions. They were divided into 4 chapters:

- IX. General Demographics
- X. Development of Business Management Skills
- XI. Needs and Preferences for Business Management Training
- XII. Readiness and Preferences for Peer-to-Peer Learning

The questionnaires were clear and easy to fill. The participants had direct contact with our specialists and they were reassured to get help if any questions occur. The duration of the survey depended on the needs and preferences of each participant. None of them has given us any negative feedback about this methodology.

To get the most applicative data we used different research methods in the questionnaire: Likert scales, single and multiple choice questions and ranking questions as well as questions which needs answer in a short text format. We also asked participants for general suggestions considering our project.

In Poland, 20 people in total took part in the ME2ME audit phase. They were small business owners, leaders and managers. Their organizations were small and micro – 19 out of 20 organizations had less than 10 employees.

The participants were recruited mostly among our stakeholders and personal and professional networks of our specialists. They were also asked to forward the questionnaires to others who met the profile and were interested in the project.

RESULTS OF THE AUDIT QUESTIONNAIRE:

General Demographics

Questions 1-5 - summary

The purpose of questions 1-5 were to get to know our target group and learn about their business. The results of those questions are as follows:

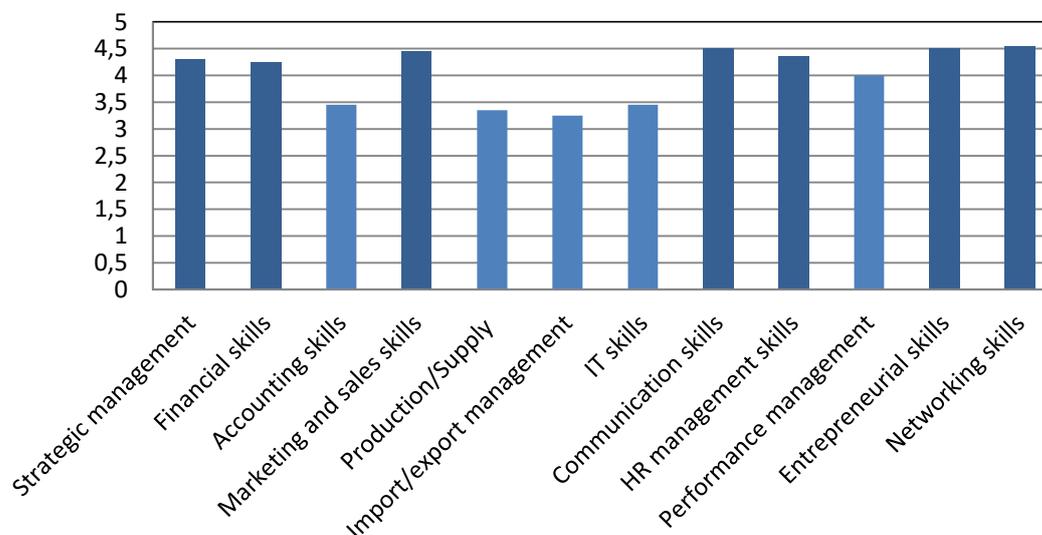
- The most popular products/services of our interviewees were: graphic design/web design/photography (30%), education (20%), trade (15%) and health/sports (15%).
- The most popular sectors were: services (35%), private sector (30%) and trade (15%). The answers are not coherent because of different understanding of the question.
- The companies have different amount of employees, but most of them (19 out of 20) falls into the category of micro-enterprises. The most popular answers were: one employee (35%), two employees (25%) and three employees (20%).
- Only one business was set up before 2000, and another one was started in the period 2000-2010. The rest (18 out of 20 – 90%) are relatively new. The most popular years were: 2014 (30%), 2015 (15%), 2011 and 2013 (10% each)
- 90% of interviewees are the owners of their businesses.

Development of Business Management Skills

The purpose of the second subchapter of the questionnaire was to find the skills that the entrepreneurs consider the most important for running a business. Also, it was important to collect the data about the skills they already poses and the importance of business training to obtaining these skills.

Question 6 – What is the most important skills for running a successful business?

6. What do you consider to be the most important skills for running a successful business?



The most relevant skills to running the successful business - according to Polish interviewees - were: networking skills (4.55/5), entrepreneurial skills (4.5/5), communication skills (4.5/5) and marketing and sales (4.45/5).

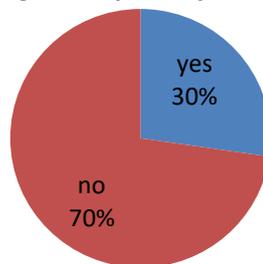
Other abilities suggested by participants were: maths, psychology, cooperation, patience, good manners and high-level field-related skills.

Question 7 – Have you attended any business management training in the past 3 years?

Only 30% of Polish interviewees have attended any business management training in the recent past.

Business training is a very unusual solution in Poland – it is used by big corporations, but small entrepreneurs are in most cases self-taught men.

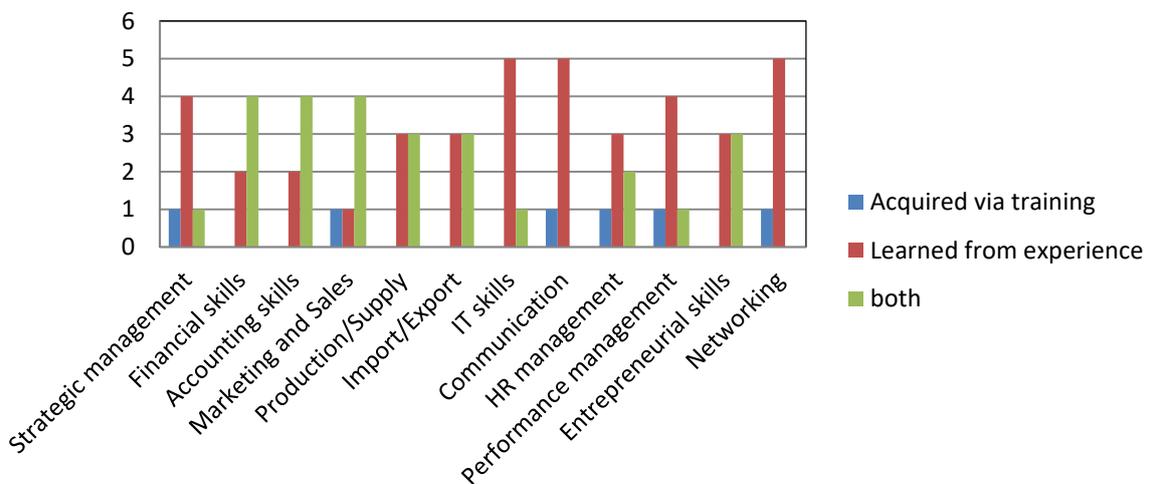
7. Have you attended any business management training in the past 3 years?



Question 8 – Which skills result from training you completed and which ones from experience?

Even participants who were involved in a business training, point out that their skills are mostly the results of their own experiences. Sometimes they also give credit to the training, but not solely.

8. Which skills from the list result from training you completed and which ones from experience?



Question 9 – What barriers do you face to attend business management training??

As a barrier to attending business management training, the most popular answers were: lack of time (4.15/5) and cost of courses (4/5). However, all of the answers were relatively high. The least popular was “lack of training material”, but Polish people are generally not very convinced to online learning tools.

9. What barriers do you face to attend business management training?



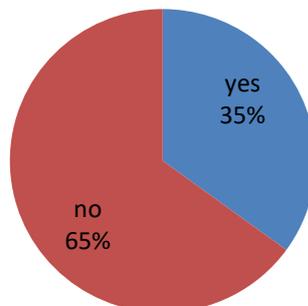
Participants suggested also answers like:

- *I have no need for training (20%)*
- *I have a very irregular lifestyle*
- *I don't believe anyone will tell me about my business more than I've already learnt*
- *I've already accomplished all the necessary training*

Question 10 – Do you share knowledge and information within any business network that you belong in?

Only 35% of the respondents share their knowledge within any business network. Business networks for small enterprises' owners are not even remotely as popular as e.g. trade unions.

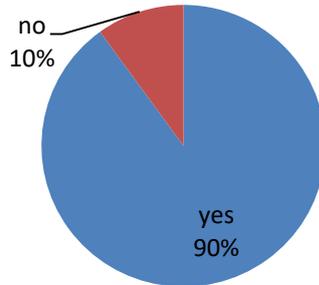
10. Do you share knowledge and information within any business network?



Question 11 – Do you think that some of the skills you have developed might be useful to other micro enterprise owners?

Entrepreneurs feel quite confident about their own abilities. 90% of them stated that they have skills that might be useful for others.

11. Do you think some of your skills might be useful to other SMEs owners?



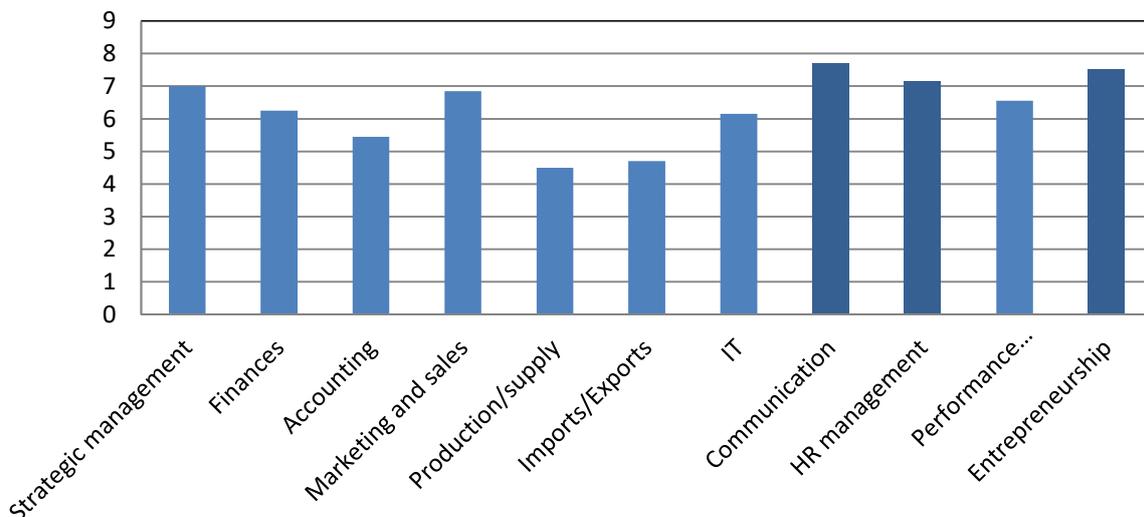
Needs and Preferences for Business Management Training

Question 12 – How would you assess your knowledge of the following business areas?

The participants feel the most confident about their communication skills (7.7/10), entrepreneurial skills (7.5/10), HR management (7.15/10), strategic management (7/10) and marketing and sales skills (6.85/10).

They don't feel confident about their production/supply and import/export skills. However, it might be because of the profile of their activities. They might simply not need those skills. Also accountancy is not their main strength, but this activity is often outsourced to accountancy offices.

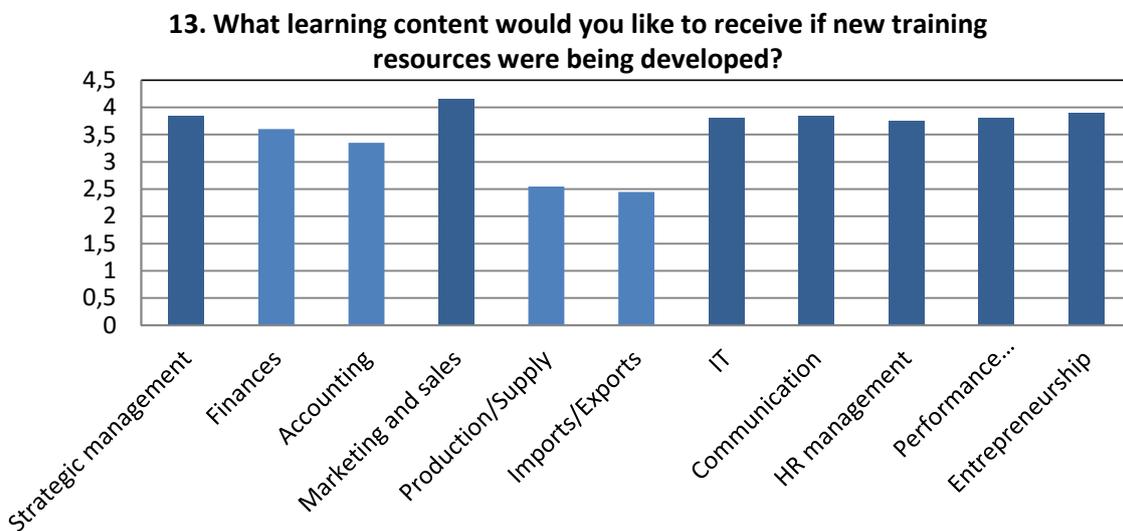
12. How would you assess your knowledge of the following business areas?



Question 13 – What learning content would you like to receive if new training resources were being developed?

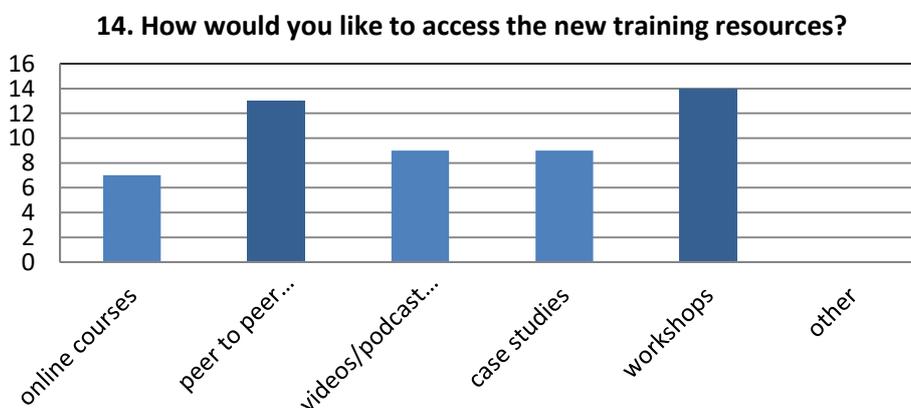
There are many fields that our participants would be interested to learn. The most popular (almost to the same extent) are: marketing and sales (4.15/5), entrepreneurship (3.9/5), communication (3.85/5), strategic management (3.85/5), IT (3.8/5), performance management (3.8/5) and HR management (3.75/5). What is interesting, some fields match the areas pointed out in question 12. This means that the interviewees feel strong about marketing, HR and communication, but they would like to be even better at it.

Also other learning content were suggested: problem solving, networking, negotiations and crisis management.



Question 14 – How would you like to access these new training resources?

The most preferred ways of learning are: workshops (14/20) and peer-to-peer learning (13/20). The least popular (but still 35%) were online courses. Polish education system is known to be very demanding, but traditional - many people are not used to the new tools yet.

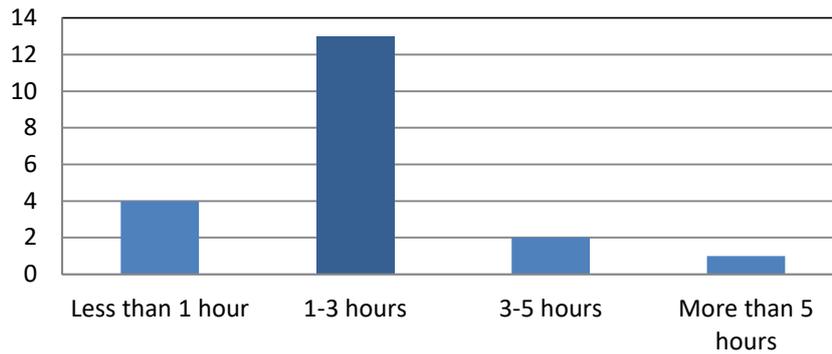


Question 15 – How much time would you be willing to commit to training on a weekly basis?

Most of the entrepreneurs (65%) are willing to commit 1-3 hours weekly.

Less than 1 hour for most of the participants didn't seem enough to facilitate an effective learning process. And only one person was able to spend more than 5 hours on the new training. It seems that the period of 1-3 hours is the perfect balance.

15. How much time would you be willing to commit to training on a weekly basis?

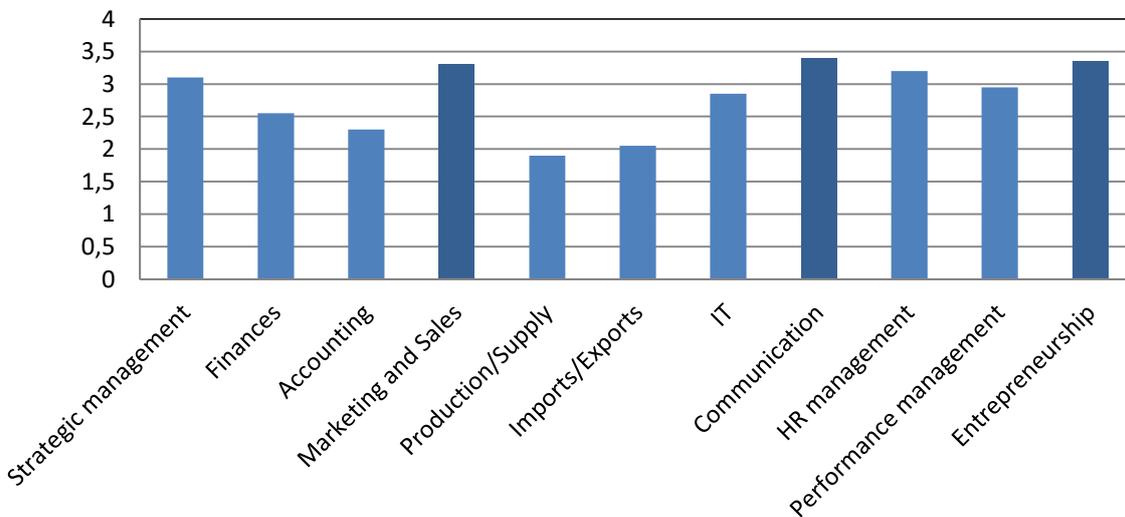


Readiness and preferences for peer-to-peer learning

Question 16 – What specific knowledge/skills/expertise you would be willing to share with other micro enterprise owners?

Participants were willing to share their knowledge in communication (3.4/5), marketing and sales (3.3/5) and entrepreneurship (3.35/5). They also suggested other areas: planning/time management (10%), field-related skills (15%), positive attitude and research.

16. What specific knowledge/skills/expertise you would be willing to share with other micro enterprise owners?



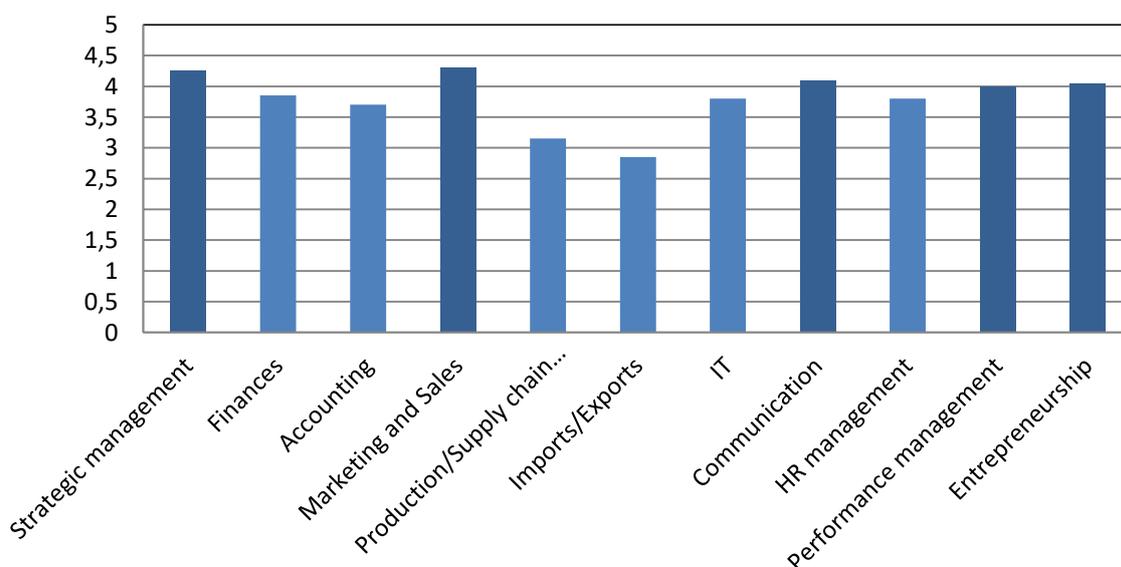
Question 17 – What specific knowledge/skills/expertise would be of most relevance and importance for you to receive from other micro enterprise owners?

The interviewees are more willing to learn than to teach. Their preferable skills to learn are: marketing and sales (4.3/5), strategic management (4.25/5), communication (4.1/5), entrepreneurship (4.05/5) and performance management (4/5).

What is interesting – their choices overlap the answers from question 16. They seem confident enough to teach others those fields, but still want to learn about it. This might indicate that entrepreneurs consider those areas really significant for running a successful business.

There were also other suggestions for the skills they want to receive in peer-to-peer learning: time management and field-related skills. What is useful – a lot of interviewees (25%) pointed out that **they would like to hear real stories from running the business: failures, milestones, experiences.**

17. What specific knowledge/skills/expertise would be of most relevance and importance for you to receive from other micro enterprise owners?

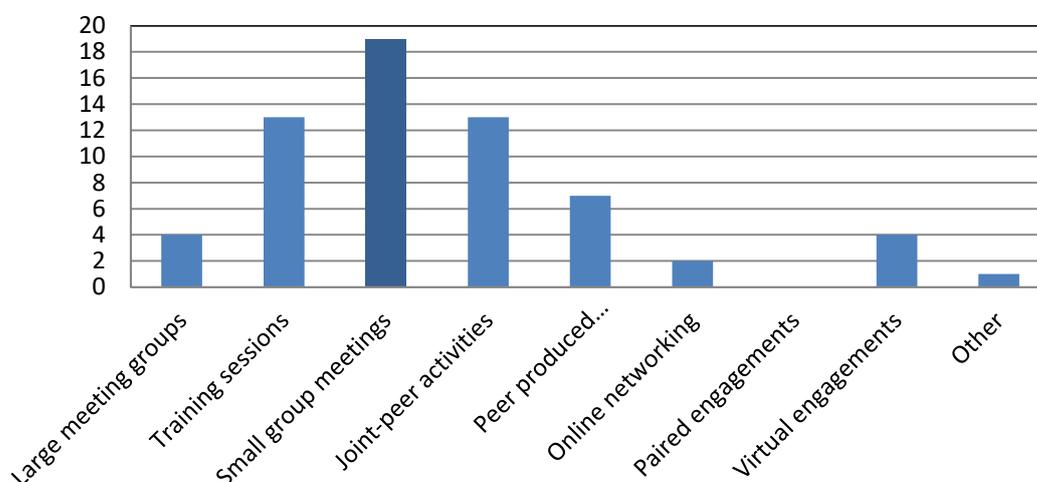


Question 18 – What are your preferred approaches to engage in peer-to-peer learning?

While engaging in peer-to-peer learning, entrepreneurs would prefer to arrange it in the form of small group meetings (95%), training sessions (65%) and joint-peer activities (65%).

The interest in online learning methods was very low. Additionally, no one was interested in paired engagements, which is again connected to the Polish education system.

18. What are your preferred approaches to engage in peer-to-peer learning?



Question 19 and 20 – Comments and interest in the project

There were no comments on the project. 10 participants were interested in the results of ME2ME project and left their email addresses.

SUMMARY

Entrepreneurs' supply and demand for skills

What was striking while conducting the audit was the fact that there were four main skills that were repeatedly pointed in all of the questions:

- Marketing and Sales
- Communication
- Entrepreneurship
- Strategic management

The respondents chose those skills as **the most important** for running a business, as the fields that **they feel the most confident with** and also as areas **they would like to provide and achieve training**. The reason for this is that these skills are considered generally crucial, and even if most of the entrepreneurs already have big knowledge in those areas, they still think they need more.

Also, what might be interesting, almost all of the skills were chosen as heavily important for running a successful business. This is not surprising – conducting a business is one of the most multidisciplinary activities in human professional life, and our interviewees were aware of this fact.

The only areas that are considered less important are: accountancy, import/export management, production/supply chain management and IT. This is due to the fact that these areas are not important in all of the sectors or can be easily outsourced.

Learning preferences

The average entrepreneur from our audit is a quite closed self-learner. Majority of the interviewees have no business training and don't share experiences in any kind of organization.

There are two most popular excuses for not taking part in business training: **lack of time and money**. Some of the micro enterprise owners also don't believe they need any training or they doubt its quality and usefulness.

What is crucial in Polish context is the fact that Polish people in general are **reluctant to online learning methods**. This is thanks to the very traditional, demanding, class-focused educational system. People have a very strict vision of how the learning process should look like and not many of them take advantage of new, online opportunities. Nonetheless, this trend is decreasing each year and each delivery of good quality material is contributing to that change.

Peer-to-peer learning potential

Despite the fact that peer-to-peer learning is a quite new term in Poland the interviewees pointed it out as the second most preferable method of receiving new training resources. This proves that they are not used to it yet, but they appreciate the idea.

It is also noticeable that entrepreneurs are much more likely to obtain knowledge using new methods than to provide learning content themselves. This might mean that they don't feel confident about their skills, or they simply don't want to share it.

According to our questionnaire **the perfect learning process** for Polish entrepreneur consists of:

- Relatively small time consumption (but big enough to make the process effective). The most preferred duration of the course is 1-3 hours per week.
- "Live" delivery method. Our interviewees chose two preferable methods: workshops and peer-to-peer learning. They value direct contact with the teacher/mentor - online resources were much less popular.
- Meetings in small groups

General summary

While being used to traditional, strict learning methods, Polish people might have difficulties with or be reluctant to peer-to-peer learning method, especially the online version of it. However, this should not stop us from bringing innovation to the educational system. Entrepreneurs are considered the most innovative and flexible group of citizens so they might be the perfect environment to introduce ME2ME up-to-date methodology.

The general conclusions after performing audit among small business owners are quite optimistic. People are looking for low-cost, good quality, flexible and bespoke learning opportunities. And this is what ME2ME project is going to deliver.

4.1.2. NATIONAL RESEARCH REPORT

INTRODUCTION

A comprehensive research phase was a key activity at the beginning of ME2ME project. Intellectual Output 1 consists of two parts: audit among the members of local business community and research among VET professionals. The following document is a summary of that research.

The aim of the research was:

- To identify key learning needs of VET professionals to be included in the proposed CPD curriculum to support them to work with micro-enterprises through;
- To identify the skills needed to help VET professionals produce media-rich mini-learning-format learning resources;
- To identify the current relationship between VET providers and the microenterprise business community;

To fully understand the meaning of the following results the short overview of VET services available in Poland in relation to microenterprises must have been conducted.

VET services in Poland

Education in Poland is compulsory up to the age of 18. However, VET graduates are usually 19-20 years old and more. There is also free vocational education provision for adult students with no age limits.

The scheme of VET provision in Poland:

School system:

- three-year basic vocational programmes (zasadnicze szkoły zawodowe) enable students to pass the state examination and attain a vocational qualifications diploma.
- four-year vocational upper secondary programmes (technika); enable students to achieve the same qualifications as the previous school, but it also gives a chance to pass general education upper secondary exam and continue to further, high education
- up to 2.5-year post-secondary programmes (szkoły policealne) for adult students who have completed upper secondary education. It allows graduates to pass the state examination and attain a vocational qualifications diploma. This is the most popular solution in case of adult students

Out-of-school system:

- vocational qualifications courses based on the curricula for a qualification in a given occupation. It allows graduates to pass the state examination and attain a vocational qualifications diploma.
- vocational skills courses based on the core curriculum for vocational education
- general skills courses based on a selected part of the curriculum for general education.
- a theoretical education for juvenile employees.

In years 2012-2014 costs of VET in Poland equalled approximately 1,8 billion Euro. **96% of the provision was funded by the State.** There was also some support from European Social Fund, but it only helped increase the quality of training on a limited basis.

Despite the fact that vocational education is free and easily accessible in Poland, there is a gap in the system. The Polish Employers Association declared, that 75% entrepreneurs in the country declare huge difficulties in finding employers who would fit their needs. There is also disconnection when it comes to social, “soft” skills. VET schools don’t even cover the basics of these aspects that for employers are almost as important as technical skills.

Circumstances important for SMEs

The role of the sector of SMEs cannot be overestimated in regard to its contribution to economy and they should have a strong voice in the discussion concerning VET education. Not only SMEs are driving force for improvement in variety of economic and political grounds but also they play important role in context of different social environments. SMEs generate employment, technological development, stimulate innovation and creativity, support socio-economic changes and create the opportunity for effective competition in the market.

The importance of SMEs in the economy of Poland increases gradually year by year. The sector of SMEs largely contributes to the transition of all Polish industries. In the grounds of its constant development the national economy is becoming more and more competitive and dynamic. **More enterprises are created every year, and their participation in national GDP growth increase respectively, and according to the latest available data exceeded 50%.**

According to Annual Report considering sector of SMEs in Poland, held by Polish Agency for Enterprise Development (Polska Agencja Rozwoju Przedsiębiorczości) in 2017, **in Poland there are more than 1,9 mln enterprises, and micro, small and medium companies constitute 99,8% of them. In a relation to this, the SMEs sector is a workplace for 69% of employees in enterprises.** Moreover, the tendency to create new companies is persistent, and therefore it should be an important indication for entrepreneurship and innovation policy because in the modern economy, young and smaller companies are usually the real source of significant innovations.

Despite these undeniable benefits, SMEs face a lot of barriers in development, connected both with their character and environments. One of the obstacles is deficit of proper VET training, which may effect in failure of many small businesses. That’s why the approach used in ME2ME project has a chance to be highly effective. It takes into account both – the needs of entrepreneurs and the possibilities of VET providers.

METHODOLOGY

In ME2ME research it was possible to use any or all of the following approaches:

- Organizing focus groups with small numbers of VET providers
- Conducting one-to-one interviews either face-to-face or by telephone
- Circulating a questionnaire to selected respondents

In case of INNEO the best methodology was to create Google Questionnaire and send it among the VET providers from the region that cooperate with our organization. These organizations are often based outside Rzeszów. From our experience we know that online methods are the most suitable for all participants.

The questionnaire consisted of 20 questions. They were divided into 4 chapters:

- XIII. General Demographics
- XIV. Provision of Business Management Skills
- XV. Demand for Business Management Training
- XVI. Potential of Peer-to-Peer Learning

The questionnaires were clear and easy to fill. The participants had direct contact with our specialists and they were reassured to get help if any questions occur. The duration of the survey depended on the needs and preferences of each participant. None of them has given us any negative feedback about this methodology.

To get the most applicative data we used different research methods in the questionnaire: Likert scales, single and multiple choice questions and ranking questions as well as questions which needs answer in a short text format. We also asked participants for general suggestions considering our project.

In Poland, 20 people in total took part in the ME2ME research phase. They were education providers: VET state school employees, their managers and the owners and employees of private business training institution.

The participants were recruited mostly among our stakeholders and personal and professional networks of our specialists. They were also asked to forward the questionnaires to others who met the profile and were interested in the project.

Besides the questionnaire there was also a need to use the desk-based methodology while writing this report: analysing the current law concerning VET provision, other reports, statistics and articles. Obtaining the theoretical knowledge helped interpret the data from questionnaire in the most reliable way possible.

RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE:

Questions 1-5 - summary

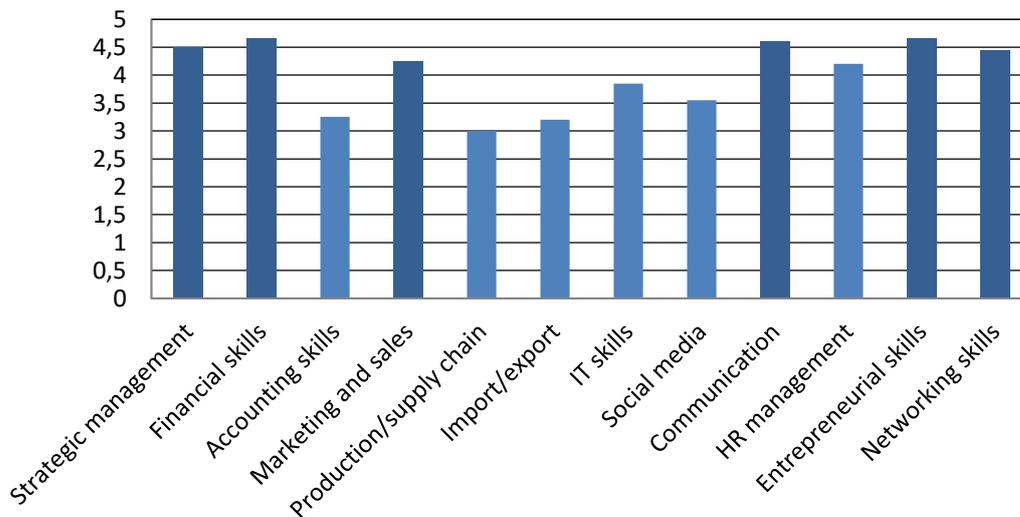
The results of the general questions are as follows:

- Most of our specialists work in the state secondary and post-secondary VET school (55%). The rest of the group consisted of members of private business training companies (45%).
- 50% of interviewees work in a small company (less than 10 people). The number of teachers in the rest of the answers were relatively big – mostly 20-40 people (state schools).
- Most of the organizations were set up between 2000 and 2010 (40%) and after 2010 (30%).
- 70% of the interviewees were not the owners of their organizations.
- 12 respondents (60%) have provided a business management training in the last 3 years.

Question 6 - What do you consider to be the most important for running a successful business?

There were many skills pointed as the most important for running a successful business: Financial skills (4.6/5), Entrepreneurial skills (4.6/5) and Communication (4.55/5). Also Strategic management, Marketing and Sales and Networking skills were considered vital.

6. What do you consider to be the most important skills for running a successful business?



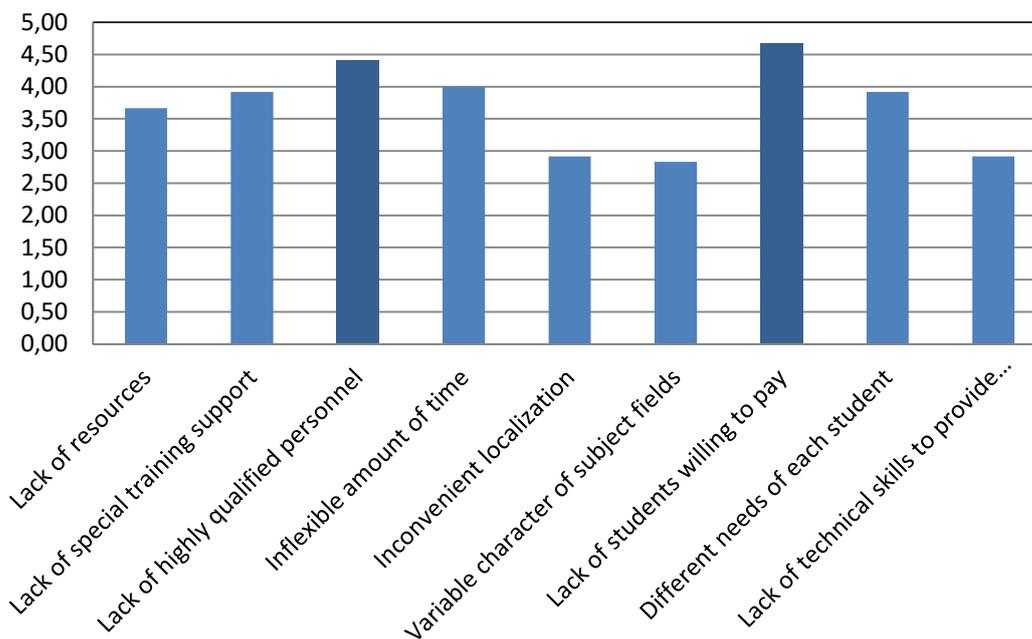
Question 7 - Which skills from the list are included in the courses taught in your institution?

Most of our interviewees admitted that in their organization they put a lot of emphasis on IT (90%) and entrepreneurial skills (80%). Also financial skills (65%), accounting (65%), HR management (65%) and communication (60%) were relatively high in the rank.

Question 10 - What barriers do your VET unit face to provide business management training?

Our interviewees admitted that the two most urgent problems with providing business management training are: lack of staff (4.4/5) and lack of students willing to pay for the course (4.6/5).

10. What barriers do you face to provide business training?



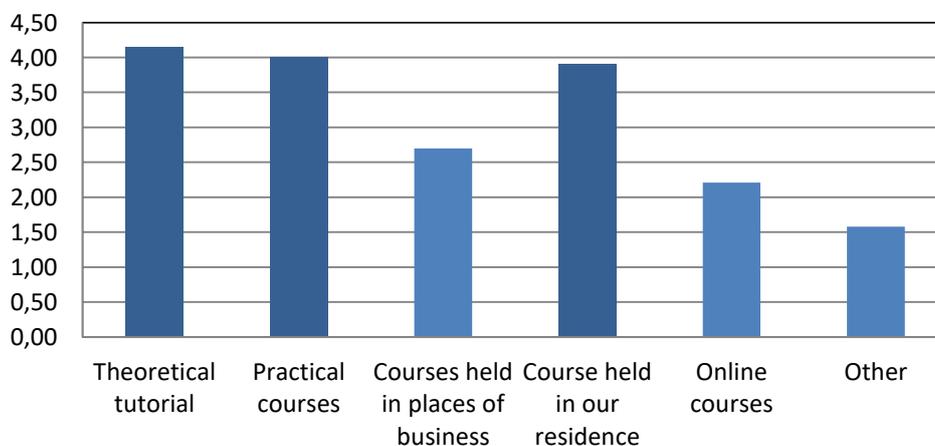
Other problems that VET providers face which were not included in the question are:

- *Reluctant students*
- *Students being forced by their employees*
- *Lack of students' motivation*
- *Students thinking that they don't need more knowledge*

Question 11 - What form does the training provided by your institution take?

Most of the training takes form of both: theoretical tutorial and practical courses. They are usually held in the organizations' residences.

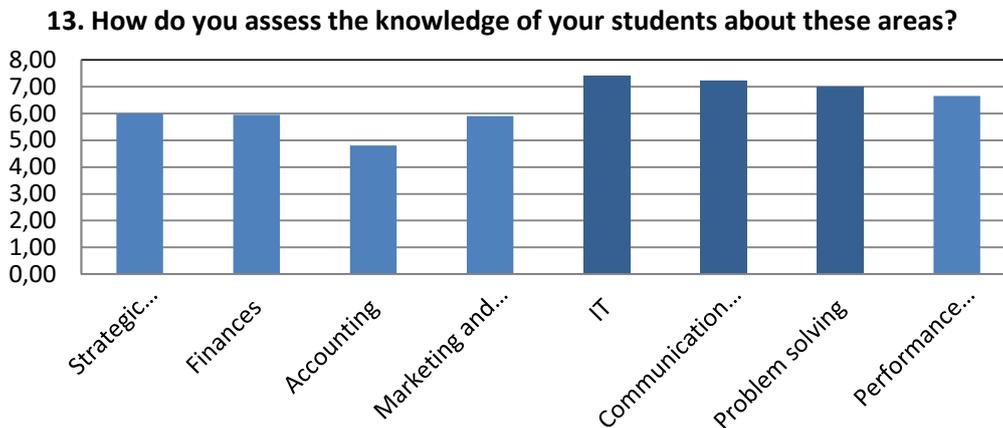
11. What form does the training provided by your institution take?



Question 12 - Do you share knowledge and experience within any education providers' network?

Since teachers in Poland usually belong to some organizations, more of them (14 people – 70%) share their knowledge and experiences than SMEs owners (35%).

Question 13 – How would you assess the knowledge of your students about the following areas?

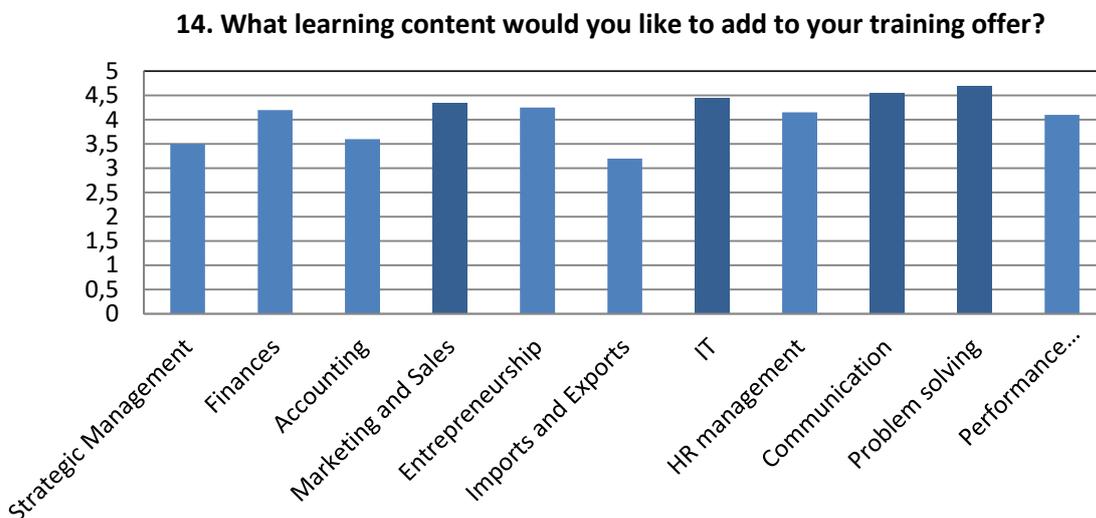


The students are considered to have the best knowledge about: IT (7.4/10), Communication (7.1/10) and problem solving (7/10).

Question 14 – What learning content would you like to expand or add to your training offer if the new training resources were being developed?

Despite the fact that IT, communication and problem solving were the most advanced skills of the students, most of the trainers would like to improve them and add them to their offer. The only new area was Marketing and Sales (4.35/5).

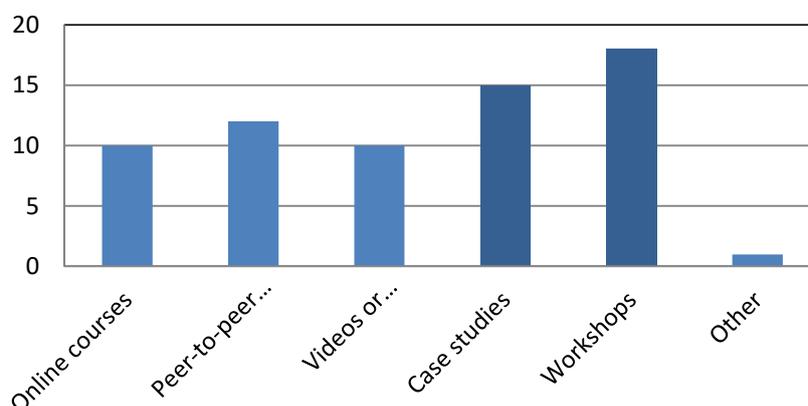
It might be also said that teachers are generally open to new material and would like to expand their offer in many different directions (none of the skills were valued less than 3/5).



Question 15 – How would you like to provide these new training resources?

The preferable method of delivering new resources would be workshops (90%) and case studies (80%). Trainers are, however, more open to online learning than SMEs owners (50%), and less sure about peer-to-peer learning (60%).

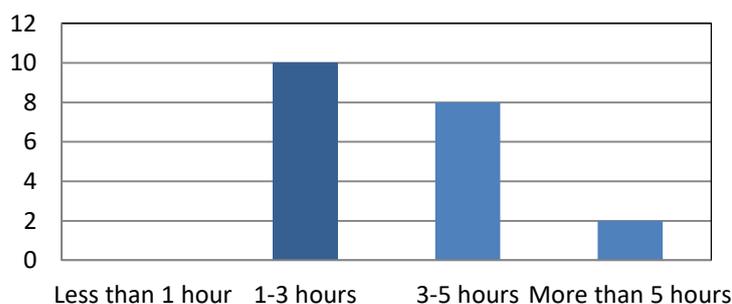
15. How would you like to provide these new training resources?



Question 16 – How much time do you think the course should take each week to be manageable for education provider?

Most of the educators chose the answer “1-3 hours” (50%). Some of them (40%) preferred 3-5 hours period. This makes an interesting difference between the preferences of teachers and their learners – almost none of the SMEs owners chose this answer.

16. How much time do you think the course should take each week?



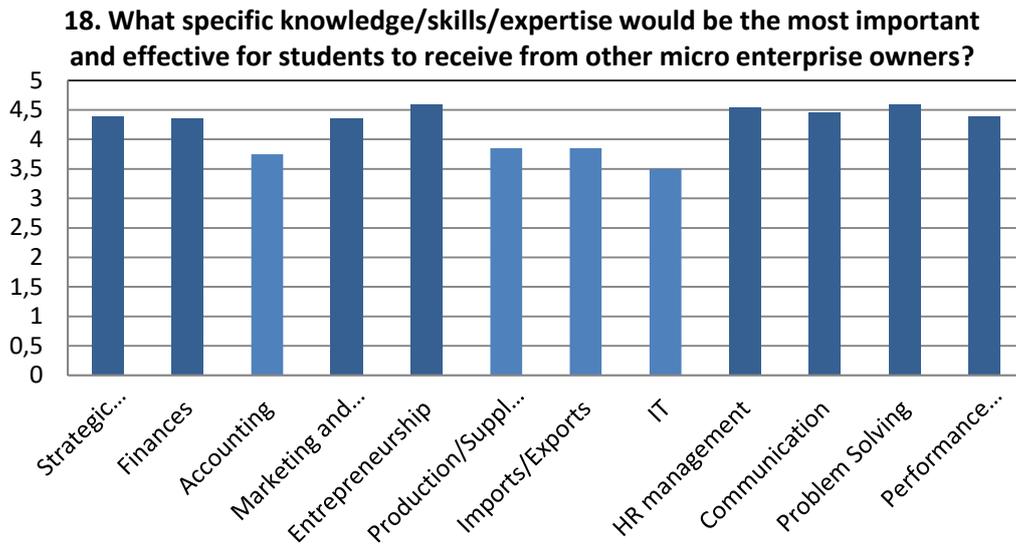
Question 17 – Do you agree with the statements below?

- *There are skills that are needed to become a successful entrepreneur that come with experience and can't be taught in any kind of school/training* – 3,7/5 participants
- *There is a potential in peer-to-peer learning among micro-enterprise owners.* – 4,3/5 participants
- *The owners of micro-enterprises would be willing to share their knowledge and skills if provided the opportunity and technical skills to do so.* - 3,4/5 participants

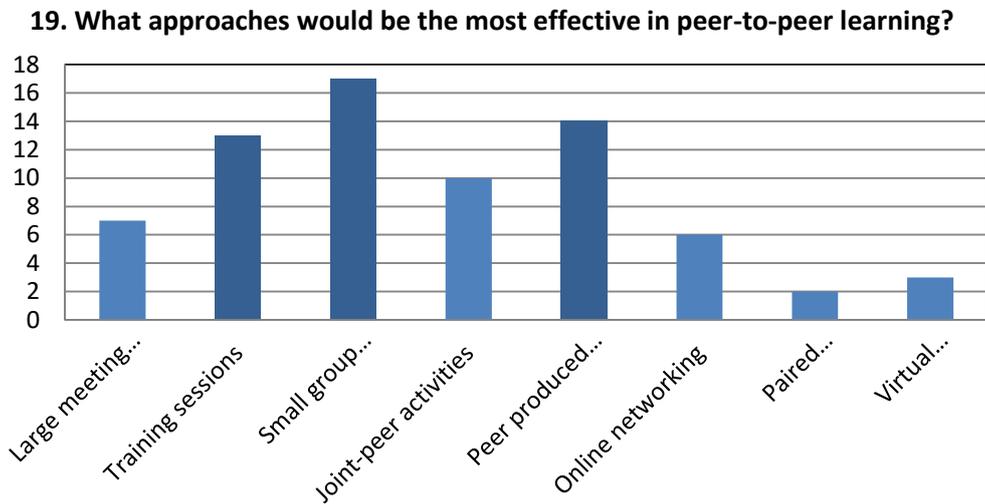
It is obvious that learners have some doubts about the participation of the SMEs owners – the method is not widely used in Poland. However, it is great that they see the potential in peer-to-peer learning and have an open mind towards it.

Question 18 – What specific knowledge/skills/expertise would be the most important and effective for students to receive from other micro enterprise owners in peer-to-peer learning?

It is difficult to point out the most important skill – the answers were very similar. Educators think that it would be best to learn many of those fields: problem solving, HR management, Entrepreneurship, Communication or Performance management. Only IT, Import/Export, Production/Supply management and Accounting were not that popular (but still with a good score).



Question 19 – What approaches would be the most effective in peer-to-peer learning?



When it comes to learning approach, learners (as well as SMEs owners from the audit) prefer small group meetings (85%). Other preferred options are peer-produced knowledge products (70%) and training sessions (65%). The respondents had no preferences for paired and virtual engagements.

SUMMARY

The general results of the first part of the research, concerning the skills important, included and desired by the educators, the results are as following:

- The most important skills for running a successful business are: Financial skills, Entrepreneurial skills and Communication.
- Skills the most frequently included in existing courses are: IT, Entrepreneurial skills and Communication.
- The students are considered to have the biggest knowledge about: IT, Communication and Problem solving.
- Trainer would like to add to their training offer: IT, Communication, Marketing and sales and Problem solving.

There is a set of 5 skills that are repeated in all of the questions. It might seem illogical, but they are just considered the most crucial of all the answers. That means that – according to the educators – students might have big knowledge in those areas, but they should make it even more advanced, because it will help them run a successful business.

When it comes to the existing and preferred training methods, our results indicate that:

- Usual courses take form of both: theoretical tutorial and practical courses taking place in the education organizations' residences.
- The preferred method for educators would be workshops and case studies. Half of them would also want to try online learning.
- The perfect amount of time for a course is 1-3 hours a week, sometimes even more.
- The most urgent problems with providing new business management training are: lack of qualified staff and lack of students willing to pay for the course.

Educators seemed less convinced to peer-to-peer learning than the entrepreneurs from the audit. However, they are often teachers of state schools and they are not used to innovative methods. They doubted that the SMEs owners will not want to participate in the process. We also believe that some of the interviewees might have felt endangered with the new idea that might change the role of the teacher in the learning process.

On the other hand the educators admitted that peer-to-peer learning might have a potential. They know that the real entrepreneurs have the best knowledge to teach: Problem solving, HR management, Entrepreneurship, Communication or Performance management.

It is important to say that Polish education system is strict, but really old-fashioned and reluctant to innovation. However, the educators were generally careful with new ideas, but they are open-minded enough to recognize the fact that learning from real experiences is the most effective.

4.2. IRELAND

4.2.1. NATIONAL AUDIT REPORT

INTRODUCTION

Overview of the Micro-enterprise Sector in Ireland

National policy in Ireland aims to foster growth in the SME sector and so in September 2014, the Irish Government published a 'National Policy Statement for Entrepreneurship in Ireland'. In this statement, they committed to improving entrepreneurship education, business support, support for innovation, increased access to finance, better opportunities for business networking and access to markets for Irish SMEs. It is desired that by implementing policies in these six key areas, the number of start-ups in Ireland will increase by 25% by 2019, with 3,000 more start-ups per annum; the survival rate for the first five years will increase by 25%, 1,800 more businesses surviving per annum and that the capacity of start-ups to grow to scale will also improve nationally by 25% in the next five years.

Research published by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) in 2016 estimated that there were over 238,000 private sector enterprises in Ireland in 2014, with over 1.3 million working in those businesses. Of this, small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) accounted for 99.8% of the total enterprise population for 2014; and they also accounted for nearly 69% of total persons engaged in employment. Based on this research, we also learn that active micro enterprises number 219,674 in Ireland in 2014, accounting for 92.3% of all enterprises in Ireland. However, they accounted for just 28% of persons engaged, despite the fact that they had the highest number of enterprises.

Previous research from the CSO, published in 2014, measures the impact of the SME sector on the Irish economy in Gross Value Added (GVA). Using GVA, the SME sector in 2011 accounted for 46.0% of GVA, 50.1% of turnover and 68.6% of all persons employed in Ireland. Updated in 2016, we learn that in 2014, micro enterprises contributed 24.3% of total GVA. When we combine small and medium enterprises, we see that they generated the remaining 25% of Gross Value Added meaning that in total SMEs accounted for just under half (49.3%) of all Gross Value Added in the Business Economy in 2014. The remaining 50.7% was contributed by large enterprises (with more than 100 employees). The GVA of the SME sector generated a total of €41.4 billion, with 39.7% of this GVA attributed to Irish owned enterprises; however the report by the CSO also highlights that while SMEs in Ireland employ almost 7 out of every 10 employed persons, they account for less than half of the national GVA, at only 46.0%; by 2014, the share of GVA contributed by SMEs rose to 50.3%.

In 2014 in Ireland, 16,257 new enterprises were established. This represented an increase of nearly 18% on figures from 2013, with 19,159 working in these businesses. The number of new businesses in construction increased from 2,473 in 2013 to 3,526 in 2014. However, there was a 30.8% decrease in the number of new enterprises in the Mining and Quarrying sector between 2013 and 2014. In total, all SMEs in Ireland can be categorised into five main sectors; Industry, Services, Distribution, Financial & Insurance and Construction. Of these, Services is the most popular sector for SMEs in Ireland, with 47.7% of all SMEs operating in the Services sector. This is followed by Distribution (22.7%), Construction (19.5%), Industry (7.3%) and Financial & Insurance (2.9%).

Laws and Regulations for MEOs

A report by the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) states that Ireland has an environment which fosters the growth of SMEs, in that it has relatively straightforward procedures for setting up a business. For

example, in Ireland, it only takes two weeks to establish a new business instead of 20 days which is the EU average; and the cost of setting up a business is 0.3% of per capita income, as opposed to the average in EU-28 of 7%. In relation to company structures, a company can either be a 'sole trader', a 'partnership' or a 'limited company'. The type of company that is established has an impact on the legal and tax regulations that company will be subject to. For example, how a business is taxed depends on whether it is incorporated as a company. If it is a company then it is liable for corporation tax. If a business is not incorporated then the entrepreneurs is considered to be a 'sole trader' and will pay tax under the self-assessment system, as a self-employed individual.

In relation to national incentives for new enterprises; newly-established companies may qualify for tax relief of the first 3 years of corporation tax, and if this relief is unused in the first 3 years, it may be carried forward to subsequent years under the Finance Act, 2013 (cro.ie).

Accessing Finance in Ireland

Despite the relatively direct process for establishing a business in Ireland, one of the main difficulties facing new SMEs in Ireland is access to finance. There persists to be a lack of knowledge in Ireland's SME sector regarding alternative funding, with 94% of all lending to SMEs facilitated through loans and overdrafts from Banks, and 60% of all SMEs in Ireland relying on a bank overdraft or credit card in the first six months of 2014. This dependency on banks needs to be reduced in order to provide a more stable financial environment for SMEs to thrive and in more recent times, business advisors and information providers have made efforts to steer MEOs towards more short-term and sustainable sources of finance. For example, in 2016, Inter Trade Ireland began to advocate that MEOs consider accessing finance from alternative sources. These include asset financing (leasing and hire purchase of equipment), peer-to-peer lending (a non-bank loan given by private funders for an agreed term and interest) and equity financing (exchanging shares in a company for cash and expertise from an investor). Inter Trade Ireland and other national business support agencies have also become advocates of government grants and schemes which are designed to support the established, growth and diversification of SMEs in Ireland. One example of a government grant which is available to SMEs who are looking to diversify to other markets is the Trading Online Voucher Scheme. Under this scheme vouchers of up to €2,500 are made available to businesses who demonstrate that they have a credible plan for trading online.

METHODOLOGY AND PROFILE OF MICRO-ENTERPRISES

To implement the audit framework in Ireland, FIPL made contact with local businesses and conducted the audit in one-to-one face-to-face interviews with local micro-enterprises. Where, due to a lack of available time, the manager or owner of the micro-enterprise was unable to meet in person, the audit questionnaire was produced as an online survey through Survey Monkey and distributed by email to these individuals. In total, 16 of the audit questionnaires were completed face-to-face with the remaining 5 questionnaires completed online.

RESULTS OF THE AUDIT CONDUCTED WITH MICRO-ENTERPRISE OWNERS AND MANAGERS

General Demographics

In total 21 micro-enterprise owners and managers conducted this skills audit in support of the ME2ME project. These micro-enterprises were spread across a range of economic sectors which included hospitality; retail; advertising; technology; food; health; not-for-profit; online trend forecast; security; performance arts and the creative sector; entertainment; film and TV and team building & events.

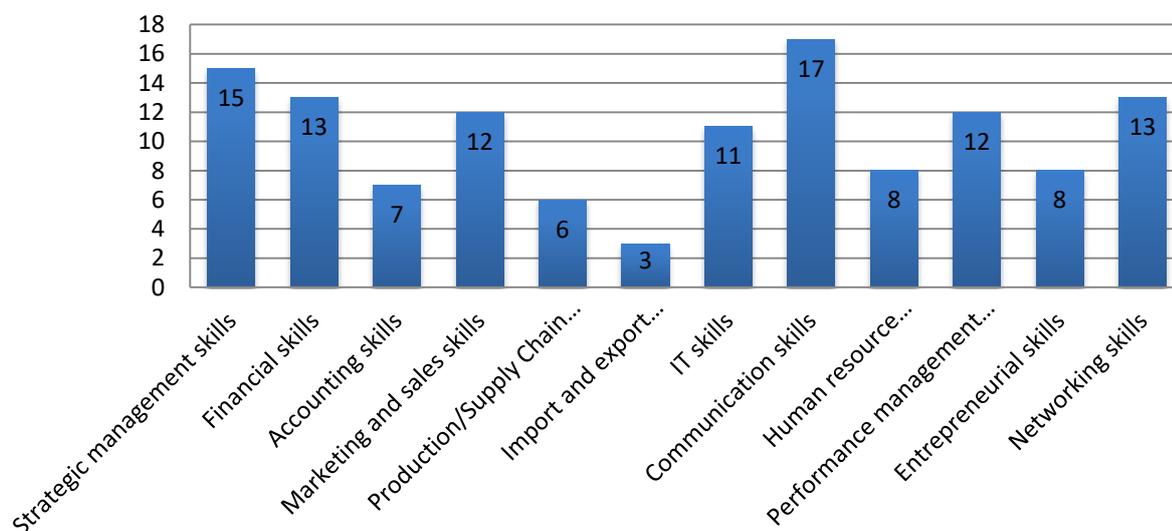
The main activities undertaken by micro-enterprises included: casting agency; catering; mobile advertising; freelance forecast editor; musician; restaurant coffee roasters; print, design & stationary; selling label machines and label products; locksmith; managing a coffee shop, pizzeria & wine bar; selling nutritional supplements; managing a guesthouse; multimedia production; film production; running a community-based training centre; a research centre; offering a fast-food delivery service; sound technology and managing an 'escape room' attraction.

These micro-enterprises had between 1 and 60 employees and ranged from well-established enterprises to more recent start-ups; with 2 enterprises established in the 1980s, 1 in the 1990s, 4 in the 2000s and the remaining 14 enterprises established between 2011 and 2017. Of the 21 owners and managers who completed the audit for their micro-enterprises, 15 were the enterprise owners and the remaining 6 were not.

Development of Business Management Skills

Next, micro-enterprise owners (MEOs) professionals were asked to identify which skills from the provided list they would consider to be the most important skills for running a successful business. The following table provides an overview of the responses where a rating of 'Very Important' was allocated by the MEOs to the specific skill mentioned.

Skills rated as 'Very Important' for Running a Successful Business



From a review of the responses to this question, the MEOs who took part in the audit rated ‘Communication Skills’, ‘Strategic Management Skills’, ‘Financial Skills’, ‘Networking Skills’, ‘Marketing and Sales Skills’ and ‘Performance Management Skills’ as the most important skills for an MEO to have to run a successful business. The skills which were rated to be the least important include ‘Import and export management skills’ and ‘Production/Supply Chain management skills’.

When asked if they had attended business management training in the past 3 years, 15 out of the 21 respondents answered ‘no’ that they had not attended business management training in this period, the remaining 6 MEOs stated that they had, but they did not provide details on the topic of this training.

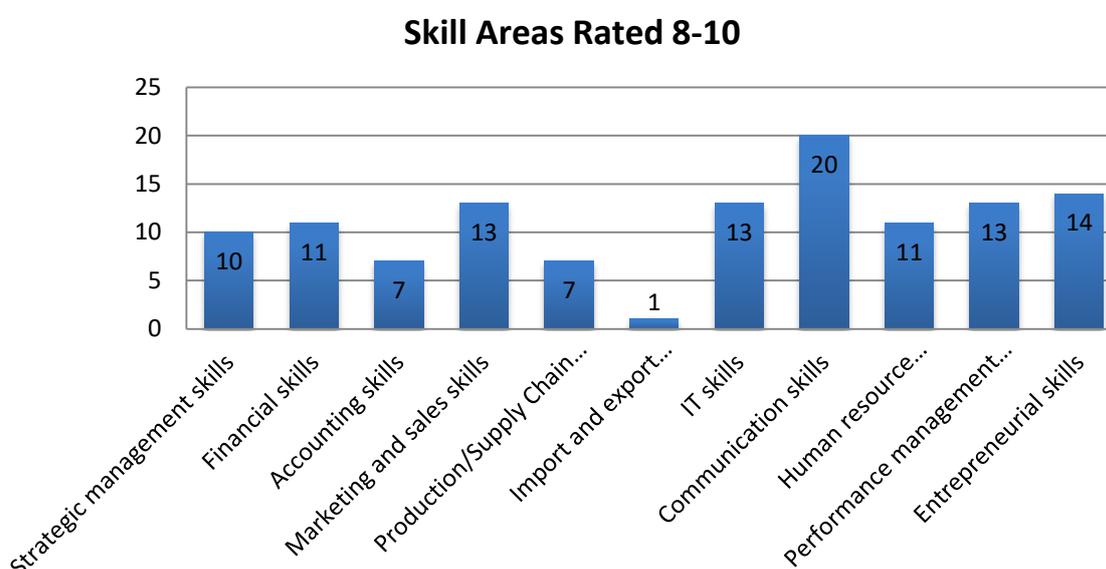
When asked to reflect on the barriers that they faced which prevented them from attending business management training, MEOs provided the following answers:

	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
Lack of time	11	6	1	3
Cost of courses	7	5	5	0
Lack of high-quality training	1	9	1	0
Lack of special training, focusing on modules for specific subjects	3	10	2	0
Lack of e-learning material	3	5	6	0
Lack of short courses	6	6	2	0

From this table, we can see that MEOs stated that the greatest barrier to their participation in business management training was a lack of time, this was followed by the cost associated with attending the course and the lack of suitable short courses available to them.

When asked if they share knowledge and information within any business networks that they are a member of, 12 MEOs answered 'yes' that they do share knowledge and information with businesses through networks, and 9 answered that they do not. However, when asked if they think that some of the skills they have developed might be useful to other micro enterprise owners, 18 out of the 21 MEOs answered 'yes' that they thought they had developed skills that could be useful for other MEOs if shared.

Next, MEOs were asked to assess their knowledge of a range of business areas on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is very weak and 10 is very knowledgeable. The following chart presents an overview of the skills where MEOs rated themselves as being most knowledgeable; which these skills being rated between 8 and 10 as follows:



From this list, we see that the area where MEOs who completed the ME2ME Audit in Ireland felt they were most competent was Communication Skills, with 20 out of the 21 MEOs who completed the survey rating their skill level between 8 and 10 in this area. This was followed by Entrepreneurship (14), Performance Management (13), Marketing and Sales (13) and Information Technology (13). These are the five primary skill areas where MEOs felt that they were most knowledgeable.

Needs and Preferences for Business Management Training

Next, MEOs were asked about their own training needs and preferences. They were first asked what topics they would be interested in completing training on if new training resources were to be developed. MEOs were provided with a list of topics and asked to select those which they were most interested in.

From the provided list, the following table has been prepared which shows the subjects and the MEOs of the audit group of 21 who showed an interest in completing training in this area.

Skill Area	No. of MEOs Interested in Training
Strategic management	17
Finance	11
Accounting	10
Marketing and sales	14
Production/Supply Chain management	9
Import and export management	6
Information Technology	13
Communication	11
Human resource management	9
Performance management	12
Entrepreneurship	13

From a review of this list, we can see that the areas where MEOs are most interested in receiving additional training in include strategic management, marketing and sales, IT, entrepreneurship and performance management.

Next MEOs were asked how they would like to access these new training resources that are being developed. From the provided list of learning formats, the most popular methodologies for training included online courses (15), videos, podcasts and interactive learning (11) and workshops (10). Less popular formats for training included peer-to-peer learning (8) and case studies (3).

When asked how much time they would be willing to commit to training on a weekly basis, the MEOs showed a strong preference for attending training for between 1 and 3 hours per week with 14 MEOs choosing this duration for training, this was followed by spending less than 1 hour on training (5) and more than 5 hours on training (2). None of the MEOs who took part in the audit process showed an interest in attending training for between 3 and 5 hours per week.

Readiness and Preferences for Peer-to-Peer Learning

In the next section of this audit of local MEOs, we aimed to ascertain the level of interest among MEOs of engaging in peer learning with other MEOs, and to determine the skills that they would be willing to share with their peers through these learning partnerships. We also aimed to identify the parameters for potential peer learning partnerships by assessing the preferences of MEOs towards peer learning.

As such, MEOs were asked to identify the specific knowledge, skills and expertise that they would be willing to share with other micro enterprise owners through peer-to-peer learning, from a provided list of areas related to business management training. The following table presents a list of these skill areas, and an aggregate total of all MEOs who expressed a willingness to share skills with other MEOs in these areas.

Skill Area	No. of MEOs Interested in Training
Strategic management	10
Finance	12
Accounting	11
Marketing and sales	10
Production/Supply Chain management	4
Import and export management	4
Information Technology	12
Communication	15
Human resource management	9
Performance management	8
Entrepreneurship	15

From a review of the responses to this question, we can see that the areas where MEOs would be most willing to share their knowledge, skills and expertise with other MEOs through peer-learning partnerships include communication, entrepreneurship, information technology, finance and accounting. In the majority of instances, these are also the areas where MEO have previously rated themselves as being most knowledgeable.

Next, MEOs were asked to determine their preferred approaches to engage in peer-to-peer learning from a provided list of potential activities. From this list, the most popular activities where MEOs would like to engage in peer learning with other MEOs included small group meetings (13), online networking (11) and training sessions (10). Other less popular formats for peer learning included paired engagements (7), joint-peer activities (6), peer produced knowledge products (5), virtual engagements (5) and large meeting groups (1).

Lastly, MEOs were asked if they would like to make any additional comments to which the following comments and suggestions were provided:

- There is a lack of adequate funding for small enterprises;
- Running a guesthouse is often a lonely business;
- There is a lack of adequate childcare is a barrier to learning and entrepreneurship.

When asked if they would be interested in further cooperation with the “ME2ME” project including piloting the training course which will be developed and/or receiving further information on its outcomes, 17 MEOs answered that ‘no’ they would not like to stay involved in the project and 4 MEOs answered that they would be interested in further cooperation with the project. For these MEOs, their contact details have been retained and FIPL will ensure to keep these MEOs updated on the progress of the project.

SUMMARY

In 2016, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) conducted research into the business sector in Ireland. From the research report they published based on this study, they determined that active micro enterprises numbered 219,674 in Ireland in 2014, accounting for 92.3% of all enterprises in Ireland. However, despite the fact that they had the highest number of enterprises, micro-enterprises, with typically between 1 and 10 employees, accounted for just 28% of persons engaged in employment in Ireland in this year. In we are to use Gross Value Added (GVA) to measure the impact of micro-enterprises on the Irish economy, and from a review of the relevant literature, we learn that in 2014, micro enterprises contributed 24.3% of total GVA. When we combine small and medium enterprises, we see that they generated the remaining 25% of Gross Value Added meaning that in total SMEs accounted for just under half (49.3%) of all Gross Value Added in the Business Economy in 2014. This data communicates the significance of this sector to the Irish economy.

The reason for Ireland’s proportionately high number of micro-enterprises and SMEs, can be in-part explained when we review the findings of a report by the Enterprise Europe Network that was published in 2011. This report states that Ireland has an environment which fosters the growth of SMEs, in that it has relatively straightforward procedures in place for setting up a business. The result of Ireland’s favourable environment for SMEs is apparent when we consider that in 2014 in Ireland, 16,257 new enterprises were established. When we consider that 19,159 individuals are counted as working in these businesses; we can deduce that the majority, if not all, of these new enterprises established in Ireland in this year were micro-enterprises. With the continued growth in this economic sector, the need to address the training needs of micro-enterprise owners and managers through bespoke and innovative training practices is a pertinent one.

In reference to the audit conducted with MEOs in Ireland, in total 21 MEOs were engaged through face-to-face and online skills audits. The findings from these audits have yielded interesting results which will inform the development of the learning content for the ME2ME project. Of relevance to the development of the ME2ME outputs are the findings which pertain mostly to the MEOs readiness and preferences for peer learning. When, during the course of conducting their skills audit, MEOs were asked to identify the specific knowledge, skills and expertise that they would be willing to share with other micro enterprise owners through peer-to-peer learning, MEOs mentioned that they would be

most willing to share their knowledge, skills and expertise with other MEOs in the areas of communication, entrepreneurship, information technology, finance and accounting. In the majority of instances, these are also the areas where MEO had previously rated themselves as being most knowledgeable in. When asked to determine their preferred approaches to engage in peer-to-peer learning, the most popular activities chosen by MEOs included small group meetings, online networking and training sessions. From this we can deduce that MEOs are most supportive of peer learning conducted through small face-to-face engagements, supported by online learning. ME2ME partners should bear these preferences in mind when developing the peer-learning elements of the project.

4.2.2. NATIONAL RESEARCH REPORT

INTRODUCTION

Overview of VET in Ireland

Vocational Education and Training in Ireland is coordinated nationally by Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI), which has regional and local offices. Before the ETBI was formed in 2013 during public sector reforms, VET in Ireland was managed regionally and locally by Vocational Education Committees (VECs) and the Irish National Training and Employment Authority (FÁS) coordinated some vocational training at a national level with local implementation through its 16 training centres. With the signing of the Further Education and Training Act in 2013, the 33 VECs located nationwide were amalgamated with 16 FÁS training centres, and these bodies were replaced by the 16 regional 'Education and Training Boards' (ETBs) which now provide training locally in all previous VEC and FÁS training centres.

In relation to business education delivered at VET level, SME-specific education and training opportunities are limited. Instead, national policy focuses on cultivating entrepreneurial competences in primary and secondary students through project work, or at tertiary level through initiatives such as the ACE Initiative which targets students and graduates from five universities and colleges nationally (National Council for Graduate Entrepreneurship, 2009); but with no reference to vocational education and training (Dept. Jobs, Enterprise & Innovation, 2014, p. 22). 'Start-your own-business' courses are widely offered by Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) nationwide, and local Post-Leaving Certificate training providers and Education and Training Boards also offer vocational education in subjects such as business studies, offered at QQI Level 5; book-keeping and payroll, marketing and communications and IT for businesses as basic courses for adult learners with an interest in finding employment in a business, but with very few training opportunities for new SMEs.

Since the reform of this education sector, the Department of Education and Skills have published the 'Further Education and Training Strategy 2014–2019' for Ireland to guide the development of delivery of the VET sector in Ireland during this period. The focus of this Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy is to develop the following skills in VET learners:

- Skills as a resource for economic growth;
- Skills as drivers of employment growth;
- Skills as drivers of productivity increase;
- Skills and 'smartening' of the economy;
- Skills as a driver of social inclusion and social mobility;
- Skills as an insulator from unemployment.

For the purpose of this research report, we will focus on how the Irish Government plan to develop the 'skills as drivers of employment growth'. This strategy outlines a plan for the ETBs to continue delivering Business Appraisal and Start-Your-Own-Business training programmes to ensure that potential entrepreneurs are given the opportunity to develop the skills they need to establish. The strategy also mentions that further work should be undertaken to foster stronger links with enterprise support agencies, to provide more tailored VET programmes for SMEs. At present, the LEOs offer a training programme specifically targeted at the needs of micro-enterprise owners, entitled Accelerate Management Development Programme. This programme can be completed over a period of 6 to 9 months, and consists of 6 modules delivered in 7 interactive workshops and 6 mentoring sessions. This programme aims to train business owners to make their businesses more efficient and effective

(localenterprise.ie). Regional LEOs also offer other SME-specific programmes, for example the PLATO programme which offers new businesses in County Dublin the opportunity to learn and be mentored by larger ‘parent companies’; the Hi-Start Business Programme offered in counties Dublin and Wicklow, which aims to attract ambitious micro-enterprise owners to grow their business in the early stages of their development and sector-specific programmes such as the Food Academy Training Programme, a two month programme aimed at learners who wish to grow a small enterprise in the food and drink production sector. Despite these innovative regional and sector-specific programmes run by LEOs, there is no national coordination or framework of these initiatives, and so the provision of VET in relation to micro-enterprises in Ireland is sporadic at best.

In January 2016, the Department of Education and Skills launched the National Skills Strategy which outlines the education and training priorities for Ireland until 2025. While this Strategy references the need to ensure the provision of training to support employment in the key market sectors of IT, pharmaceuticals, health sciences, wholesale, retail and industry; it does little to include specific supports which are to be provided for Ireland’s SMEs. Despite the fact that this Strategy highlights the need to support Ireland’s entrepreneurs, who number 323,000 or 16% of all those in employment in Ireland, it does not set specific goals or targets for ensuring this support is provided (Dept. of Education, 2016, p. 23). Instead this Strategy references the Action Plan for Jobs, a policy document launched by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation in 2012, where supports to SMEs are provided for. This document reinforces the points of the afore-mentioned strategies that there is a need to support the development of business education in Ireland. The specific strategies which this policy plans to tackle from 2017 onwards include the following:

- Responding to Brexit;
- Driving enterprise growth;
- Delivering skills for a growing economy;
- Promoting innovation;
- Stimulating regional growth;
- Enhancing competitiveness;
- Addressing new labour market challenges; and
- Strengthening clusters and realising enterprise opportunities.

However, when the actions with these objectives are reviewed, the majority of the initiatives are aimed at up-skilling the workforce, skills development for sustainable growth, ensuring VET and higher education respond to the needs of the labour market, developing apprenticeship schemes and ensuring NEETs and early-school leavers are re-engaged in education and training programmes. It does little to address the training needs of SMEs. Instead, this strategy outlines the auxiliary supports which should be implemented to support the SME sector; these largely include financial supports, policy reforms to make it easier for SMEs to do business and to encourage innovation in SMEs through research and development grants, for example. Where peer learning and knowledge sharing are mentioned for SMEs, this is confined to the IT industry, and it is to facilitate greater innovation by fostering links between businesses and research centres. As such, little in any of these national policies responds directly to the education and training needs of micro-enterprises and SMEs in Ireland, or encouraged business owners to engage in peer learning and networking.

METHODOLOGY

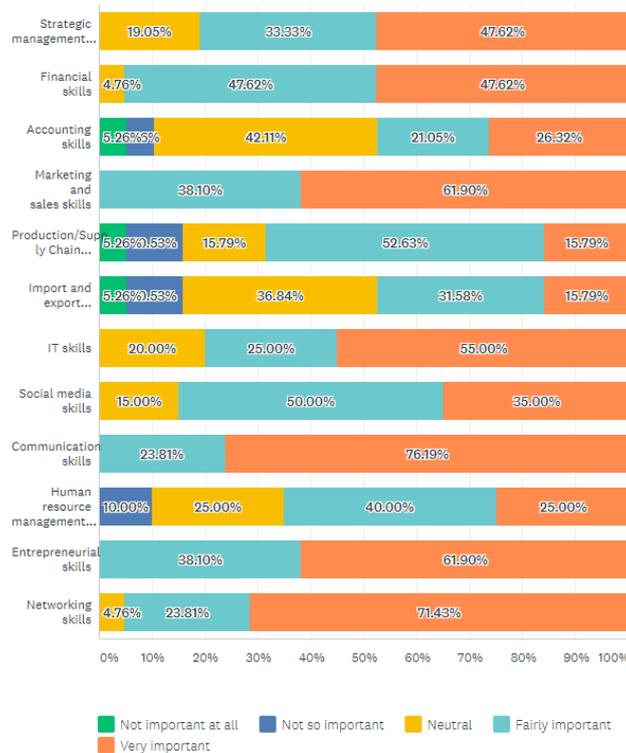
To implement the research framework in Ireland, FIPL transferred the research questions for VET professionals to an online questionnaire and distributed it to our network of contacts through Survey Monkey. Individuals engaged in this research process came from a variety of education and training institutions. Of the 21 responses to the questionnaire, 9 were from private training centres which provide education and/or mentoring supports to the micro enterprise sector; 8 worked in business support agencies that also have a role in providing education and training programmes for micro-enterprises and the remaining 4 respondents were from regional Education and Training Boards.

The questions asked in this questionnaire were uniform across the consortium, and pertained to the questions outlined in the research framework. A summary of these responses is contained in the following report.

RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE WITH VET

General Information

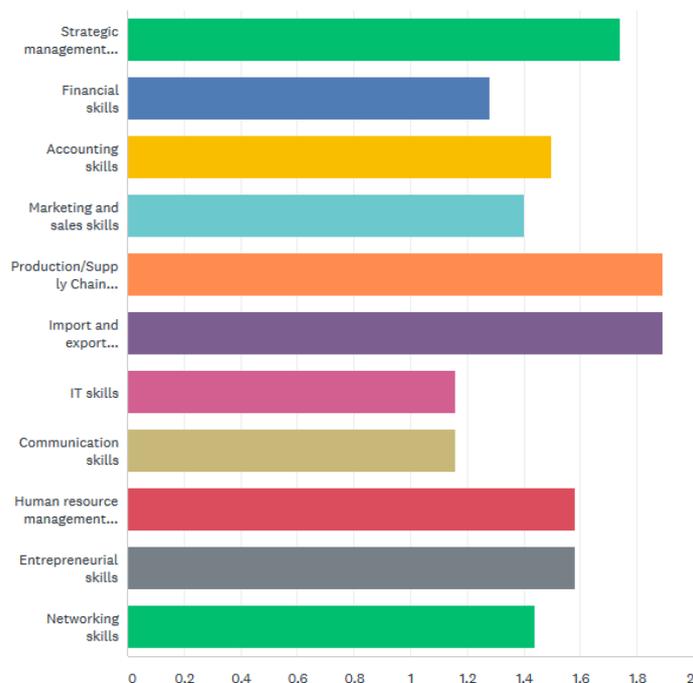
When asked what they considered to be the most important skills for running a successful business, all 21 respondents answered this question and rated Networking Skills (71.43% - very important) and Communication Skills (76.19% - very important) as the two most important skills for running a successful business.



These were followed by Marketing and Sales Skills (61.90% - very important), Entrepreneurial Skills (61.90% - very important) and IT skills (55% - very important) as the 5 most important skills for running a successful business.

Provision of Business Management Skills

Next, VET professionals were asked to identify which skills from the provided list are included in the training courses taught in their institution. The following table provides an overview of the responses.



From this list, we can see that Production/Supply Chain Management (88.89%), Import and Export Management Skills (88.89%) and Strategic Management (73.68%) were the most common topics not included in training programmes. In contrast, the topics most frequently included in training programmes are IT Skills (84.21%), Communication Skills (84.21%) and Financial Skills (72.22%).

When asked if their VET institutions had provided business management training in the past 3 years, there was an even split between respondents, where 11 respondents (52.38%) said they had provided this training in the last 3 years, and 10 (47.62%) said they had not. While this response rate seems quite low for VET providers delivering this type of training; perhaps the phrasing of the question was misleading, as some VET organisations do not provide 'business management' training specifically but may provide training to the business community. From the profile of the VET organisations who completed this research questionnaire, we can estimate that the majority of VET providers engaged in this research delivers training and supports to the business community.

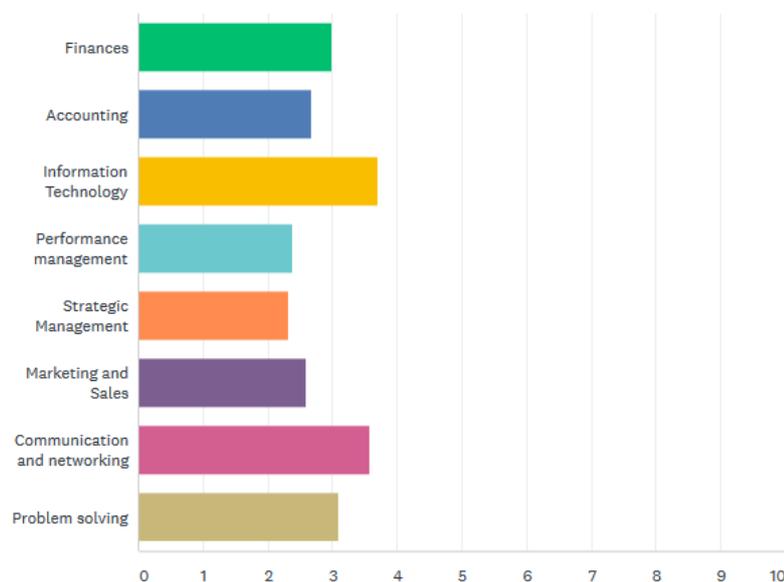
Next, research participants were asked what barriers their VET institution faces in providing business management training; to which the following barriers were highlighted as being the most common based on their weighted average score: lack of highly qualified training personnel (3.70), lack of special training support (3.61), inflexible amount of time (3.53) and lack of students willing to pay for the course (3.50).

When asked what format of training they use to deliver training to businesses, VET professionals surveyed answered that they used the following methodologies:

- a) Practical courses based on acquisition and exchange of experience was the most popular choice with a weighted average score of 4.35;
- b) Courses held in VET institution's residence was the next most popular method of providing business training with a weighted average score of 4.15;
- c) Theoretical tutorial was next with a weighted score of 4.10;
- d) Online classes was next with a score of 3.20 weighted average;
- e) And lastly, 'Courses held in places of business' was the least common format for providing training to the business community among research respondents with a weighted average score of 2.85.

Next VET professionals were asked if they share knowledge and experiences with other education providers or through education networks they are a member of; to which 13 (61.9% of all responses) answered that they do share knowledge and experience with their peers and 8 (38.1% of all responses) answered that they do not share knowledge and experience with peers.

VET professionals were then asked to assess their students' knowledge of various topics from a provided list. Feedback from trainers to this question highlighted that without conducting a specific training needs analysis exercise with the individual learners, it was very difficult to estimate their level of knowledge and competence in these areas. Therefore research respondents noted in the comments section that they found this question difficult to answer. The findings from this question are therefore, quite vague; with the majority of respondents estimating their students' knowledge as being in the middle of the rating scale.



For example, if we focus on all responses which were allocated a mid-scale score by VET professionals, we see that the out of the 21 respondents to this question, all skills were given a mid-scale score by the following number of respondents: Finances (15); Accounting (14); Information Technology (16); Performance Management (16); Strategic Management (17); Marketing and Sales (15); Communication and Networking (16); Problem Solving (19). This graph presents the responses to this question.

Demand for Business Management Training

When asked to reflect on the learning content they would like to expand or add to their training offer, the following responses were collected. Topics have been ranked as per their weighted average score:

- Communication (4.16)
- Problem solving (4.00)
- Finances (3.95)
- Entrepreneurship (3.90)
- Information Technology (3.82)
- Marketing and Sales (3.80)
- Performance Management (3.74)
- Strategic Management (3.70)
- Accounting (3.53)
- Human Resource Management (3.47)
- Importing and Exporting (3.11)

This is a pertinent question in influencing the topic of the training resources to be developed by the ME2ME project. Based on the findings from Ireland, the top 3 most relevant topics to be included in the ME2ME education materials include Communication, Problem Solving and Finance.

When asked in what format the VET professionals would like to provide these new training resources, the most popular formats included Workshops (38.1% of all respondents); Online courses (33.33%); Videos or podcasts or interactive learning (23.81%) and Peer to peer learning (4.76%). None of the 21 respondents mentioned that they would like the training to be delivered through case studies; and two suggested that training should be delivered through 'supported online environments' and through 'blended learning supported through face-to-face workshops'.

In relation to the timing of the training, the majority of respondents, 61.9%, stated that they would like to spend between 1 and 3 hours delivering this training every week and this would be the 'most manageable' amount of time for them. 19.05% stated that they would prefer to dedicate between 3 and 5 hours to training, 14.29% said they would deliver this training over 5 hours or more per week and only 4.76% of 1 respondent said they would only like to dedicate less than 1 hour to delivering this training every week.

Potential of Peer-to-Peer Learning

Next, to inform the development of the peer-learning framework for the ME2ME project, VET professionals were asked to review a provided list of skills and to rank which specific knowledge, skill and expertise would be the most important and effective for students to receive from other micro enterprise owners in peer-to-peer learning.

From this exercise, VET professionals evaluated the following skills as being the most suitable for peer-learning activities (this ranking is based on the weighted average score attributed to each skill):

Ranking*	Skills	Weighted Average
1.	Entrepreneurship	4.20
2.	Marketing and Sales	4.05
3.	Communication	4.05
4.	Problem Solving	4.00
5.	Strategic Management	3.94
6.	Finances	3.82
7.	Information Technology	3.64
8.	Human Resource Management	3.38
9.	Performance Management	3.33
10.	Imports and Exports	3.31
11.	Production/Supply Chain Management	3.21
12.	Accounting	3.14

** This ranking is based on the weighted average score attributed to each skill*

When asked what approaches they would recommend as being most effective in engaging local businesses in peer-to-peer learning, the following methods were most popular: Small group meetings (42.11% of respondents chose this as the most appropriate method); Training sessions (36.84%); Joint-peer activities (10.53%); Paired engagements (5.26%) and Large meeting groups (5.26%). One respondent also suggested that the peer-learning activities should be organised as meetings combined with learning input and then opportunities for peer exchanges and networking.

SUMMARY

Vocational Education and Training in Ireland is delivered nationwide through by the 16 regional Education and Training Boards. In relation to business education delivered at VET level, public sector training providers and Education and Training Boards offer vocational programmes in subjects such as business studies, offered at QQI Level 5 (EQF level 4) as well as a range of non-accredited courses in book-keeping and payroll, marketing and communications and IT for businesses. These are basic courses for adult learners with an interest in finding employment in a business, but from a review of current programmes provided through the ETBS, there are very few training opportunities for new SMEs. SME-specific education and training opportunities are limited; with 'Start-your own-business' courses widely offered by Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) nationwide, and sector-specific training and mentoring initiatives offered by regional LEOs depending on the needs of their local business communities but with little in the way of a national programme of supports, training or education programmes for SMEs. While the Irish Government have launched various education, training and labour market policies in the previous years, targeted at up-skilling the Irish workforce and preparing for the 'smart economy', these policies fail to include specific initiatives for Ireland's SMEs or to enhance the training and education supports to this pivotal sector of the Irish economy. These findings reinforce the point that there is a real need for targeted training materials for SMEs in Ireland; as proposed by the ME2ME project.

In reference to the field-research conducted with VET professionals in Ireland, in total 21 research participants were engaged through online questionnaires. The findings from these questionnaires have yielded interesting results which will inform the development of the learning content for the ME2ME project. From a review of the feedback collated through these research tasks, we have learned that in Ireland, the topics in which VET educators would be most interested in receiving additional learning materials include Communication, Problem-solving, Finance, Entrepreneurship and Information Technology.

When developing training materials in these areas, ME2ME project partners should also bear in mind that VET professionals would be most interested in delivering this learning content through workshops, online courses, supported online environments and through blended learning (online with support from face-to-face workshops). Based on the research findings from Ireland, we would recommend that developing learning content as a series of interactive workshops, supported by e-learning modules and online self-directed learning materials is the most appropriate format of training for VET professionals in Ireland. In developing learning content in this format, the preference in Ireland is to deliver workshops of between 1 and 3 hours per week; supported by additional learning which learners can complete online or through group-work outside of the classroom.

If peer learning is to be fostered between micro-enterprises and learners from the business community, VET professionals in Ireland recommend that this peer learning is facilitated through the following formats: training sessions, small group meeting and joint-peer activities; as well as through organising meetings combined with learning input and then opportunities for peer exchanges and networking. These recommendations should be considered when the peer learning framework for the ME2ME project is being developed.

4.3. HUNGARY

4.3.1. NATIONAL AUDIT REPORT

INTRODUCTION

The comprehensive audit is the base of the ME2ME project to identify the available skills and knowledge within the local businesses and VET trainers. This following paper is the results of the research among local business community.

The objectives of the audit are as follows:

4. To identify specific skill assets within the micro-enterprise community that could be used to support the development of the sector as a whole in each local context through the proposed peer-to-peer learning networks
5. To understand the learning needs and learning preferences of microenterprise owners especially focusing on the type of learning they prefer and the most favored learning platforms and environments for the proposed peer-to-peer learning
6. To identify areas where there are gaps in current VET provision that the ME2ME project could address

Audits was conducted with a minimum of 20 micro-enterprise owners in Hungary by circulating a questionnaire to selected respondents and in their network, also in Pandokrator Ltd.'s contact list.

The primary goal of the comprehensive audit was to identify the skills and knowledge within the business community that might be made available to other micro-enterprise owners through the peer-to-peer learning networks.

We believe, that without a country snapshot, the questionnaire is weightless and the national outcomes can't be comparable. With the knowledge about the Hungarian status and the possibilities of SME's (inc. SOHO), we believe, that the ME2ME project could be an alternative solution to satisfy the Hungarian SME's and the owners' needs of knowledge and skill development.

In Hungary it's very hard to find the right VET trainers, most of the SME's lack of knowledge of the possibilities. Maybe because they don't have spare time, they are focusing on surviving, or lack of workers or they out of inclusion and the digital era.

We accept as true that the ME2ME not only helping the SME's in the development of soft skills but could be the place where business owners can share knowledge and skills to support their business objectives.

METHODOLOGY

In ME2ME audit it was possible to use any or all the following approaches:

- Organizing focus groups with small numbers of microenterprise owners
- Conducting one-to-one interviews either face-to-face or by telephone
- Circulating a questionnaire to selected respondents

In our case the best methodology was to create Google Questionnaire and send it among the SMEs, make it freely fillable and circulating among or network. The questionnaire consisted of 20 questions divided into 4 chapters:

- XVII. General Demographics
- XVIII. Development of Business Management Skills
- XIX. Needs and Preferences for Business Management Training
- XX. Readiness and Preferences for Peer-to-Peer Learning

The questionnaires were clear and easy to fill. To get the most applicative data we used different research methods in the questionnaire: Likert scales, single and multiple-choice questions and ranking questions as well as questions which needs answer in a short text format. We also asked participants for general suggestions considering our project.

In Hungary, 20 SME owners in total took part in the ME2ME business audit.

The Hungarian SME snapshot based on the data of the Hungarian Statistical Office, focusing on the most relevant datasets.

HUNGARIAN SNAPSHOT

Most of the Hungarian Enterprises are SMEs,

- mostly with 1-10 employees.
- they are only giving 20.1% of the net sales
- 36% of the employees employed by SMEs

SMEs have small effect on the Hungarian business performance, but they have a relevant role in the Hungarian employment. Unfortunately, a lot of employer is a forced entrepreneur, because of the Hungarian employment practices or the lack of positions or because the better taxing condition.

Performance of businesses by headcount category (2013-2016)									
Headcount category	Number of businesses pcs	Number of employees, prs	Turnover per employee, thousand forint/prs	Distribution of employees, %	Net sales, in million forint	Distribution of net sales revenue %	Added value (at factor cost), million forint	Distribution of added value (at factor cost), %	Revenue of export sales, milliő forint
year 2013									
0 fő	9 688	—	—	—	172 320	0,2	26 950	0,2	21 259
1 fő	396 442	396 442	12 291	14,9	4 872 863	6,2	1 095 907	7,2	577 505
2-9 fő	177 103	603 327	19 020	22,7	11 475 543	14,6	1 945 403	12,7	1 248 583
10-49 fő	26 363	500 486	26 155	18,8	13 090 122	16,6	2 435 644	16,0	2 250 792
50-249 fő	4 388	437 856	37 064	16,4	16 228 822	20,6	2 851 173	18,7	4 768 584
250 fő és több	850	723 730	45 521	27,2	32 944 750	41,8	6 907 473	45,3	17 266 070
Headcount category total	614 834	2 661 841	29 598	100,0	78 784 420	100,0	15 261 951	100,0	26 132 793
year 2014									
0 fő	2 141	—	—	—	148 278	0,2	57 229	0,3	5 990
1 fő	427 821	427 821	12 217	15,5	5 226 885	6,2	1 118 396	6,6	692 300
2-9 fő	174 528	603 575	20 174	21,9	12 176 462	14,4	2 146 260	12,7	1 261 843
10-49 fő	27 574	521 723	28 841	19,0	15 047 249	17,8	2 788 357	16,6	2 428 168
50-249 fő	4 490	442 866	38 388	16,1	17 000 685	20,1	3 090 687	18,3	5 133 935
250 fő és több	875	755 748	46 261	27,5	34 961 632	41,3	7 646 167	45,4	19 032 427
Headcount category total	637 429	2 751 733	30 730	100,0	84 561 191	100,0	16 847 096	100,0	28 554 663
year 2015									
0 fő	6 508	—	—	—	73 331	0,1	29 563	0,2	489
1 fő	458 010	458 010	12 382	15,7	5 670 878	6,3	1 243 597	6,8	806 346
2-9 fő	175 319	610 277	20 337	20,9	12 411 262	13,8	2 294 559	12,5	1 262 662
10-49 fő	29 308	554 026	28 916	19,0	16 020 472	17,8	3 026 219	16,4	2 588 578
50-249 fő	4 802	473 742	38 022	16,2	18 012 470	20,1	3 341 078	18,1	5 502 900
250 fő és több	920	821 007	45 789	26,1	37 592 160	41,9	8 477 729	46,0	21 158 271
Headcount category total	674 867	2 917 062	30 778	100,0	89 780 593	100,0	18 412 745	100,0	31 319 246
year 2016									
0 fő	5 907	—	—	—	89 401	0,1	30 275	0,2	17 945
1 fő	474 781	474 781	11 351	15,9	5 389 179	6,0	1 248 489	6,6	570 069
2-9 fő	177 206	620 162	20 235	20,7	12 549 075	14,0	2 371 268	12,6	1 201 933
10-49 fő	29 870	565 287	28 898	18,9	16 335 862	18,2	3 172 824	16,8	2 779 184
50-249 fő	4 950	487 312	37 529	16,3	18 288 363	20,4	3 413 800	18,1	5 667 532
250 fő és több	948	844 310	44 055	28,2	37 196 176	41,4	8 607 970	45,7	20 265 735
Headcount category total	693 662	2 991 852	30 931	100,0	89 848 055	100,0	18 844 425	100,0	30 502 398

Registered businesses in Hungary 2014 - 2016

- 113 - LTD
- 114 - PLC
- 117 - Limited partnership
- 228 - Individual company
- 231 - Self-employed

3.2.1.3. A regisztrált gazdasági szervezetek száma – GFO'14 (2014–)

Kód	Gazdálkodási forma	2014	2015	2016
11	Gazdasági társaság	574 194	548 355	527 791
113	Korlátolt felelősségű társaság	412 636	398 161	385 938
114	Részvénytársaság	6 105	6 305	6 518
116	Közkereseti társaság	4 314	3 884	3 540
117	Betéti társaság	151 139	140 005	131 795
12	Szövetkezet	4 249	4 577	4 817
124	Agrárgazdasági szövetkezet	763	686	632
13	Egyéb jogi személyiségű vállalkozás	6 044	6 089	6 172
14	Jogi személyiségű európai gazdasági vállalkozás	30	32	33
1	Jogi személyiségű vállalkozás	584 517	559 053	538 813
21	Jogi személyiség nélküli gazdálkodó szervezet	578	526	466
22	Gazdasági tevékenységet végző jogalany	1 247	1 274	1 306
228	Egyéni cég	548	532	522
21, 22	Jogi személyiség nélküli társas vállalkozás	1 825	1 800	1 772
1, 21, 22	Társas vállalkozás	586 342	560 853	540 585
23	Önálló vállalkozó	1 115 463	1 130 225	1 156 651
231	Egyéni vállalkozó	393 525	400 493	420 671
1, 2	Vállalkozás összesen	1 701 805	1 690 878	1 697 236
3	Költségvetési szervek és költségvetési rend szerint gazdálkodó szervek	12 866	12 757	12 636
5, 6	Nonprofit és egyéb nem nyereségérdekelt szervezet	127 254	128 271	129 609
5	Jogi személyiségű nonprofit szervezet	86 212	85 626	85 820
57	Nonprofit gazdasági társaság	3 758	3 888	3 988
6	Jogi személyiség nélküli nonprofit szervezet	41 042	42 645	43 789
7, 921, 931, 932, 961	Egyéb gazdasági szervezet	5 597	5 798	6 620
	Összesen	1 847 522	1 837 704	1 846 101

Business Performance Indicators Small and Medium Business Category(2013–2016)

SME category	Number of businesses, pcs	Number of employees, prs	Turnover per employee, thousand forint/prs	Distribution of employees, %	Net sales in million forint	Distribution of net sales revenue %	Added value (at factor cost), million forint	Distribution of added value (at factor cost), %	Revenue of export sales, millió forint
year 2013									
0-people micro-enterprises	9 220	–	–	–	15 184	0,0	766	0,0	2 029
1-people micro-enterprises	392 914	392 914	8 005	14,8	3 145 338	4,0	744 804	4,9	158 286
2-9-people micro-enterprises	173 174	584 438	12 329	22,0	7 205 466	9,1	1 539 366	10,1	359 192
Small enterprises	29 197	473 362	22 796	17,8	10 790 992	13,7	2 071 075	13,6	1 321 508
Medium enterprises	4 961	370 187	34 739	13,9	12 859 847	16,3	2 405 628	15,8	3 655 769
non-SME enterprises	5 368	840 940	53 235	31,6	44 767 593	56,8	8 500 312	55,7	20 636 010
Total	614 834	2 661 841	29 598	100,0	78 784 420	100,0	15 261 951	100,0	26 132 793
year 2014									
0-people micro-enterprises	2 083	–	–	–	62 055	0,1	19 023	0,1	2 012
1-people micro-enterprises	424 110	424 110	8 070	15,4	3 422 359	4,0	809 840	4,8	172 500
2-9-people micro-enterprises	170 329	583 478	13 393	21,2	7 814 453	9,2	1 707 924	10,1	358 966
Small enterprises	30 372	494 046	23 901	18,0	11 808 288	14,0	2 343 803	13,9	1 411 877
Medium enterprises	5 041	369 244	35 654	13,4	13 164 862	15,6	2 453 271	14,6	3 501 490
non-SME enterprises	5 514	880 855	54 821	32,0	48 289 173	57,1	9 513 235	56,5	23 107 818
Total	637 429	2 751 733	30 730	100,0	84 561 191	100,0	16 847 096	100,0	28 554 663
year 2015									
0-people micro-enterprises	6 439	–	–	–	43 624	0,0	12 745	0,1	365
1-people micro-enterprises	454 316	454 316	8 235	15,6	3 741 050	4,2	909 274	4,9	171 910
2-9-people micro-enterprises	171 015	589 487	13 913	20,2	8 201 124	9,1	1 826 901	9,9	388 974
Small enterprises	32 157	524 610	24 087	18,0	12 636 019	14,1	2 597 628	14,1	1 492 390
Medium enterprises	5 221	388 394	35 429	13,3	13 760 345	15,3	2 604 002	14,1	3 427 453
non-SME enterprises	5 719	960 275	53 524	32,9	51 398 190	57,2	10 462 195	56,8	25 838 155
Total	674 867	2 917 062	30 778	100,0	89 780 593	100,0	18 412 745	100,0	31 319 246
year 2016									
0-people micro-enterprises	5 846	–	–	–	21 664	0,0	5 810	0,0	1 826
1-people micro-enterprises	471 058	471 058	7 960	15,7	3 749 805	4,2	926 389	4,9	170 770
2-9-people micro-enterprises	172 829	599 095	14 118	20,0	8 457 881	9,4	1 912 680	10,1	392 351
Small enterprises	32 742	535 006	23 988	17,9	12 833 719	14,3	2 713 290	14,4	1 545 500
Medium enterprises	5 223	384 127	33 861	12,8	13 006 864	14,5	2 507 850	13,3	3 185 274
non-SME enterprises	5 964	1 002 566	51 646	33,5	51 778 122	57,6	10 778 406	57,2	25 216 677
Total	693 662	2 991 852	30 031	100,0	89 848 055	100,0	18 844 425	100,0	30 502 388

RESULT OF THE AUDIT QUESTIONNAIRE

General Demographics

Most of the responders working in the service sector, and the company established between 2001 and 2010. As the country snapshot showed, most of them have 2-8 employees and mostly the business owner answered the survey.

They consider to be the most important skills for running a successful business are

- Networking skills
- Strategic management skills
- Communication skills
- Entrepreneurial skills

But only half of the attended any business management training in the past 3 years. They acquired some of their knowledge via training and experience. The most important knowledges are:

- Human resource management skills
- Accounting skills

But some knowledge was resulted from experience:

- Marketing and sales skills
- Import and export management skills
- Financial skills

Most of the Hungarian SMEs are open for business management training, but there are some barriers they face to attend the trainings, e.g. lack of time, cost of the courses or lack of high-quality training.

Half of the sharing their knowledge, but all of them think that some of their skills they have developed might be useful to other micro enterprise owners.

Development of Business Management Skills

Needs and Preferences for Business Management Training

Most of the SMES think that some of their skills they have developed might be useful to other micro enterprise owners. Basically, knowledge which were resulted from experience:

- Communication
- Entrepreneurship
- Marketing and Sales
- Strategic Management

But on the other side they are open to receive the same new learning content training or resources were being developed by other SMEs.

As the results shows, they would like to access these new training resources via online courses or peer to peer learning, but they would be willing to commit max 3 hours to training on a weekly basis.

Readiness and preferences for peer-to-peer learning

There are some specific knowledge/skills/expertise they would be willing to share with other micro enterprise owners in peer-to-peer learning, mainly the same as previously reported. And the same would be the most relevant and important for them to receive from other micro enterprise owners in peer-to-peer learning

- Entrepreneurship
- Communication
- Marketing and Sales
- Strategic Management

There are no preferred approaches them to engage in peer-to-peer learning, they are open for small group meetings, joint-peer activities, online networking or even paired engagements.

SUMMARY

As the results showed the four most important skills are:

- Communication
- Entrepreneurship
- Marketing and Sales
- Strategic Management

It is not a surprise, that these four areas are the ones they would like to receive training and will be able to provide knowledge to other SMEs. We think it's because these are the skills which were mainly resulted from experience. The knowledge which were acquired via trainings were supported by the SME thus could have been a cost for them. The less important areas are the IT skills, performance management skills, human resource management skills, on the one hand these are basic skills or it can be easily supported from outside of the company.

Most of the responders are open for trainings via online courses or peer to peer training but they are available only for a couple of hours weekly. It's because of lack of time and resources.

The survey shows us, that the owners of the SMEs are open for new and innovative solutions to improve their knowledge, so the ME2ME methodology could be one of the best keys to reach the potential SMEs with a cheap, good quality training opportunity.

4.3.2. NATIONAL RESEARCH REPORT

INTRODUCTION

The comprehensive audit is the base of the ME2ME project to identify the available skills and knowledge within the local businesses based on VET trainers view. This following paper is the results of the research among VET trainers.

The objectives of the audit are as follows:

1. The availability of in-service training to build the capacity of VET providers to support entrepreneurship or business development training
2. The current relationship between VET providers and the microenterprise business community
3. The scope of business to business networking in each country

Audits was conducted with 20 VET providers in Hungary by circulating a questionnaire to selected respondents and in their network, also in Pandokrator Ltd.'s contact list.

We believe, that without a country snapshot, the questionnaire is weightless and the national outcomes can't be comparable. With the knowledge about the Hungarian status and the possibilities of VET providers, we believe, that the ME2ME project could be an alternative solution to satisfy the Hungarian SME's and the owners' needs of knowledge and skill development.

In Hungary, it's very hard to find the right VET trainers, most of the SME's lack of knowledge of the possibilities. Maybe because they don't have spare time, they are focusing on surviving, or lack of workers or they out of inclusion and the digital era.

We accept as true that the ME2ME not only helping the VET trainers in the development of soft skills trainings but could be the place where business owners can meet their right VET to develop their skills and improve their knowledge to support their business objectives.

METHODOLOGY

In ME2ME audit it was possible to use any or all the following approaches:

- Organizing focus groups with small numbers of participants
- Conducting one-to-one interviews either face-to-face or by telephone
- Circulating a questionnaire to selected respondents

In our case the best methodology was to create Google Questionnaire and send it among the VET trainers, make it freely fillable and circulating among or network. The questionnaire consisted of 20 questions divided into 4 chapters:

- XXI. General Information
- XXII. Provision of Business Management Skills
- XXIII. Demand for Business Management Training
- XXIV. Potential of Peer-to-Peer Learning

The questionnaires were clear and easy to fill. To get the most applicative data we used different research methods in the questionnaire: Likert scales, single and multiple-choice questions and ranking questions as well as questions which needs answer in a short text format. We also asked participants for general suggestions considering our project.

In Hungary, 20 VET trainers total took part in the ME2ME audit survey.

The Hungarian VET snapshot based on the data of the Hungarian Statistical Office, focusing on the most relevant datasets.

HUNGARIAN SNAPSHOT

Most of the Hungarian Enterprises are SMEs,

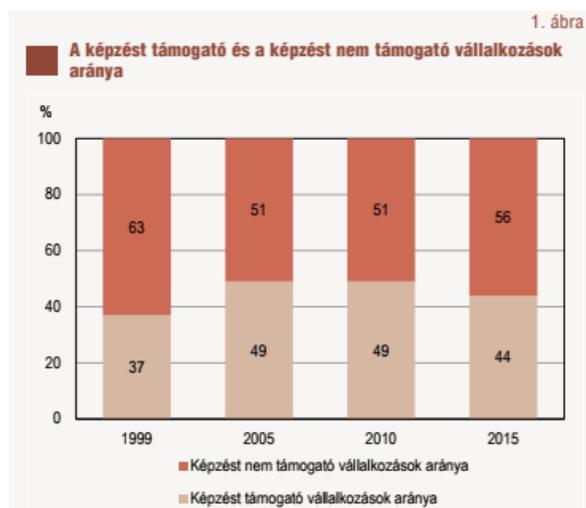
- mostly with 1-10 employees.
- they are only giving 20.1% of the net sales
- 36% of the employees employed by SMEs

Business Performance Indicators Small and Medium Business Category(2013-2016)									
SME category	Number of businesses, pcs	Number of employees, prs	Turnover per employee, thousand forint/prs	Distribution of employees, %	Net sales in million forint	Distribution of net sales revenue %	Added value (at factor cost), million forint	Distribution of added value (at factor cost), %	Revenue of export sales, millió forint
year 2013									
0-people micro-enterprises	9 220	-	-	-	15 184	0,0	766	0,0	2 029
1-people micro-enterprises	392 914	392 914	8 005	14,8	3 145 338	4,0	744 804	4,9	158 286
2-9-people micro-enterprises	173 174	584 438	12 029	22,0	7 205 466	9,1	1 539 368	10,1	359 192
Small enterprises	29 197	473 362	22 796	17,8	10 790 992	13,7	2 071 075	13,6	1 321 508
Medium enterprises	4 961	370 187	34 739	13,9	12 859 847	16,3	2 405 628	15,8	3 655 769
non-SME enterprises	5 368	840 940	53 235	31,6	44 787 593	56,8	8 500 312	55,7	20 636 010
Total	614 634	2 661 841	29 598	100,0	78 784 420	100,0	15 261 951	100,0	26 132 793
year 2014									
0-people micro-enterprises	2 063	-	-	-	62 055	0,1	19 023	0,1	2 012
1-people micro-enterprises	424 110	424 110	8 070	15,4	3 422 359	4,0	809 840	4,8	172 500
2-9-people micro-enterprises	170 329	563 478	13 393	21,2	7 814 453	9,2	1 707 824	10,1	358 995
Small enterprises	30 372	494 046	23 901	18,0	11 609 289	14,0	2 343 803	13,9	1 411 877
Medium enterprises	5 041	369 244	35 654	13,4	13 164 862	15,6	2 453 271	14,6	3 501 490
non-SME enterprises	5 514	880 855	54 621	32,0	48 289 173	57,1	9 513 235	56,5	23 107 818
Total	637 429	2 751 733	30 730	100,0	84 561 191	100,0	16 847 096	100,0	28 554 663
year 2015									
0-people micro-enterprises	6 439	-	-	-	43 824	0,0	12 745	0,1	365
1-people micro-enterprises	454 316	454 316	8 235	15,6	3 741 060	4,2	909 274	4,9	171 910
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Medium enterprises	5 221	388 394	35 429	13,3	13 760 345	15,3	2 604 002	14,1	3 427 453
non-SME enterprises	5 719	860 275	53 524	32,9	51 398 190	57,2	10 462 195	56,8	25 638 155
Total	674 867	2 917 062	30 778	100,0	89 780 593	100,0	18 412 745	100,0	31 319 246
year 2016									
0-people micro-enterprises	5 846	-	-	-	21 664	0,0	5 810	0,0	1 826
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Medium enterprises	5 223	384 127	33 861	12,8	13 006 864	14,5	2 507 850	13,3	3 185 274
non-SME enterprises	5 964	1 002 566	51 646	33,5	51 778 122	57,6	10 778 406	57,2	25 216 677
Total	693 692	2 991 852	30 031	100,0	89 846 055	100,0	18 844 425	100,0	30 592 398

SMEs have small effect on the Hungarian business performance, but they have a relevant role in the Hungarian employment. Unfortunately, a lot of employer is a forced entrepreneur, because of the Hungarian employment practices or the lack of positions or because the better taxing condition.

Unfortunately, in Hungary more than half of the SMEs are not supporting trainings due financial hurdles and/or lack of quality training or just they don't think that they really need trainings, e.g. "I don't need anybody to tell me how to do it, I can do it" -attitude.

Share of the SMEs supporting training (dark brown)/ not supporting (light brown)



In Hungary, the share of the employees who participate on training are very low, (just app. 20%), due to lack of employer trainings, or the SME didn't even realize, that they need to train their employees or the lack of resources or they don't have information on the possibilities of the trainings.

Participation in trainings

- 1.3.2.1: share of the 25-64 population who participate on trainings by regions
- 1.3.2.2.: share of SME who supporting trainings
- 1.3.2.3: share of employees who participate trainings

1.3.2. Egész életen át tartó tanulás (2003–2016)

Mutató/dimenzió	2003	2004	2005	2006 ^a	2007 ^a	2008 ^a	2009 ^a	2010 ^a	2011 ^a	2012 ^a	2013 ^a	2014 ^a	2015 ^a	2016 ^a
Módszertan														
A 25–64 éves népességből oktatásban, képzésben részt vevők aránya a megfelelő korcsoportú népességből azok aránya, akik a felmérést megelőző 4 hétben iskolarendszerű oktatásban, illetve felnőttképzésben részt vettek. A humán tőke, a munkaerő színvonalának változását méri. 2014 decemberétől a Munkaerő-felmérés adatainak teljeskörűsítése a 2011. évi népszámlálás bázisán továbbvezetett népességszámon alapszik. Az összehasonlíthatóság biztosításához a korábbi becsléseket az új súlyszámrendszerrel 2006-ig visszamenően módosítottuk.														
A munkahelyi szakmai képzéseket támogató vállalkozások aránya: a mutató a vizsgálati körbe bevont vállalkozásokból azok aránya, amelyek részben vagy egészben finanszírozták, támogatták alkalmazottaik szakmai képzését. A humán tőke, a munkaerő képzettségi színvonalának változását méri.														
A munkahelyi szakmai képzésekben részt vevők az összes foglalkoztatott százalékában: a mutató a vizsgálati körbe bevont vállalkozások által részben vagy egészben finanszírozott, támogatott képzéseken részt vevők az összes foglalkoztatott százalékában. A humán tőke, a munkaerő képzettségi színvonalának változását méri.														
1.3.2.1. A 25–64 éves népességből oktatásban, képzésben részt vevők aránya, %	4,6	4,4	3,9	4,0	3,9	3,4	3,0	3,0	3,0	2,9	3,2	3,3	7,1	6,3
<i>Régiók szerint</i>														
Közép-Magyarország	6,5	7,3	5,6	5,6	5,7	4,8	4,4	3,7	3,9	3,5	4,5	4,0	9,3	7,9
Közép-Dunántúl	4,5	4,0	3,4	3,9	3,1	2,7	2,1	3,2	2,5	2,6	2,0	2,5	9,4	7,5
Nyugat-Dunántúl	3,5	3,1	2,9	2,8	2,9	2,2	2,2	2,4	3,0	2,6	2,0	1,9	4,7	4,6
Dél-Dunántúl	5,0	3,8	4,0	3,7	3,3	2,7	2,5	2,8	3,1	3,2	2,7	3,5	3,3	4,8
Dunántúl	4,4	3,6	3,4	3,5	3,1	2,5	2,2	2,8	2,8	2,8	2,2	2,6	6,0	5,7
Észak-Magyarország	3,7	3,5	3,1	2,8	2,8	2,6	2,7	2,5	2,4	2,0	2,2	2,9	5,7	4,2
Észak-Alföld	3,3	2,8	3,0	3,6	3,4	3,4	2,8	2,7	2,3	2,9	3,6	4,5	7,1	6,3
Dél-Alföld	3,6	2,9	3,0	3,4	3,3	3,0	2,3	2,5	2,4	2,6	2,8	2,6	6,1	5,9
Alföld és Észak	3,5	3,0	3,0	3,3	3,2	3,0	2,6	2,6	2,4	2,5	2,9	3,4	6,4	5,5
1.3.2.2. A munkahelyi szakmai képzéseket támogató vállalkozások aránya, %	..	..	49	..	..	..	..	49	..	..	..	..	44	..
1.3.2.3. A munkahelyi szakmai képzésekben részt vevők az összes foglalkoztatott százalékában, %	..	..	16	..	..	..	..	19	..	..	..	..	19	..

RESULT OF THE AUDIT QUESTIONNAIRE

Most of the responders working in the higher education sector and the (as we know, that most of the trainings are held by professional trainers, with education diploma), and the trainer institution established more than 10 years ago, typically universities decades ago. Depends on the answers the trainers working in big organizations, sometimes they just add number of the closest colleagues, sometimes the number of the employees of the whole organization.

They consider to be the most important skills for running a successful business are

- Communication skills
- Entrepreneurship
- Strategic planning
- HR Management

But they taught skills are different in the training courses in their institution, like:

- Financial Knowledge
- IT skills
- Entrepreneurship

On the other way, the followings are missing from their repertoire:

- HR Management
- Import and export knowledge
- Networking skill
- Strategic planning

From the survey, we find that the organizations are mainly not providing other training course that they consider important for running successful business. And didn't provided any of them in the last 3 years.

As we saw from the previous SME survey most of the Hungarian SMEs are open for business management training, but there are some barriers they face to attend the trainings, e.g. lack of time, cost of the courses or lack of high-quality training or even training.

There are some barriers what VET trainers face to provide business management training, e.g. Low solvent pupil, lack of Resources, lack of special training grant as the Hungarian institution are under financed.

Basically, the form of training provided by their institution take are theoretical presentations and practical courses, which are based on an exchange of experience (SMEs need practical trainings instead of theoretical presentations!)

The good training materials are worth a lot, that's why institution didn't share their knowledge and experiences within any education providers network that they belong to. Thus, the knowledge centered in only some institution and won't be available to wider audience.

They evaluate their students' knowledge in the following areas: IT, Performance Management, Marketing, Communication and Networking. Just opposite as the SMEs needs. But the VET trainers' special needs, they would like to add other contents to their training offer if the new training resources would be developed, like: Problem solving, Performance Management, Booking, Communication and Networking. They know the basic needs of the SMEs, these are the contents what SMEs need to run s successful business.

The know the SMEs hurdles, e.g. lack of time, so they would like to use different form how they teach them: Case studies, workshops instead of videos, podcasts, online courses or other interactive forms.

They think 3-5 hours per week are well controlled by the instructor, instead of the SMEs max 3 hours. It seems that the weekly 3 hours could be a deal between the trainers and SMEs.

They all support that there are certain skills that are important for an entrepreneur, but cannot be learned from traditional educational framework, small entrepreneurs eager to share their knowledge and experience, they would be given to the possibilities and technical background and there is room between the peer-to-peer learning, small business owners.

About the peer to peer learning the VET trainer think that the following knowledge / skills / experience can be useful and important for small businesses, they could learn from each other in the context of peer-to-peer learning, similar as the SMEs needs.

- Problem solving
- Entrepreneurship
- Communication

SUMMARY

As the results showed the three most important skills VET trainers think are mostly the same what the SMEs thought in the previous survey:

- Problem solving
- Entrepreneurship
- Communication

It Is not a surprise, that these three area are the ones they would like to receive training and will able to provide knowledge to other SMEs. We think it's because these are the skills which were mainly resulted from experience. The knowledge which were acquired via trainings were supported by the SME thus could have been a cost for them. The less important area are the IT skills, performance management skills, human resource management skills, on the one hand these are basic skills or it can be easily supported from outside of the company or the SMEs can hire employees with these specific knowledges.

Most of the responders are open for renew their trainings to solve some problems, like low solvent pupils and lack of resources by providing up-to-date market ready trainings. Most of the training now covering the market needs e.g. financial knowledge, IT skills, but the accounting skills, product-chain management, import and export knowledge are missing.

Their training could meet the needs of SMEs, if they could import some skill related study materials. e.g. networking skills, strategic planning.

The survey show us, that the VET trainers are open for new and innovative solution to improve their teaching knowledge, so the ME2ME methodology could be the one of the best key to reach the potential VET trainers with a cheap, good quality training opportunities.

4.4. ROMANIA

4.4.1. NATIONAL AUDIT REPORT

INTRODUCTION

A comprehensive audit is set to identify the available skills and knowledge within the local business community that might be made available to other micro-enterprise owners through the peer-to-peer learning networks.

The objectives of the audit are as follows:

7. To identify specific skill assets within the micro-enterprise community that could be used to support the development of the sector as a whole in each local context through the proposed peer-to-peer learning networks
8. To understand the learning needs and learning preferences of microenterprise owners especially focusing on the type of learning they prefer and the most favoured learning platforms and environments for the proposed peer-to-peer learning
9. To identify areas where there are gaps in current VET provision that the ME2ME project could address

OVERVIEW OF MICROENTERPRISES IN ROMANIA

According to the Small Business Act report published in 2015, Romania is placed by the European Commission as the leader among the 28 State Members in the field of entrepreneurship, with prospects to increase the number of SMEs with at least 8.5% annually. Also, a series of statistics places Romania above the European average in: the intention to launch an entrepreneurial activity (in 3 years) – 31.7% Romania against 12.1% European average; opportunities to open a business – 49.75% Romania against 47.9% European average; the extent to which the curriculum was useful in developing an entrepreneurial attitude – 73 Romania against 50 European average; entrepreneurship is a career option – 73.64% Romania against 56.9% European average.

With the changes of the Fiscal Code, starting with February 2017, the conditions for the classification of companies in the category of micro-enterprises are: revenues recorded in the previous financial exercise of EUR 500,000 equivalent in lei, as compared to 100,000, tax rate of 1% for those who have at least one employee hired under a labour contract. Those who do not even have an employee apply a 3% tax rate as they did before. There is no reference to the number of employees as stipulated in European legislation.

The White Paper of SMEs in Romania -2016, 14th Edition, research conducted by the National Council of Private Small and Medium Enterprises in Romania - *NCPSMER*, highlighted the economic circumstances and perspectives of Romanian micro-enterprises. According to this research report, currently, the micro-enterprises in Romania produce mainly for the local and national market, the European market having a very small share. Micro-enterprises in Romania consider as key factors of success the opportunities offered by the market for products / services, business relations, qualified and skilled employees, motivated and loyal employees, support services for the management of the enterprise. The difficulties faced by micro-enterprises in Romania are: bureaucracy; excessive taxation; corruption; excessive

controls; unfair competition; decreasing domestic demand; hiring, training and maintaining staff; increasing salary costs; inflation; the competition of imported products; delays in collecting invoices from private firms; poor infrastructure quality; high credit costs; the relative instability of the national currency; difficult access to credit; consultancy and training necessary for the company and employees, knowledge and adoption of the *acquis communautaire*. Micro-enterprises in Romania are not preoccupied with carrying out activities foresight in plans, policies and strategies, and entrepreneurs do not know the notions of economy and organization based on knowledge only in a very small proportion, and they do not turn to external consultants. They especially use self-financing and supplier credit and less bank loans, leasing and non-reimbursable funds. Financing needs are mainly funded by stock and working capital, real estate investments, equipment or technology, employee training.

For vocational training, SMEs in Romania allocate an average percentage of 1.96% of the turnover per firm, a rather unfavourable situation, which shows that Romanian entrepreneurs invest relatively little in human resources training, given that the training of staff is a stringent necessity, a requirement for sustainable development of activities.

Major SME-related objectives are found in the Government's SME Development Strategy for SME sector development up to 2020, aiming to support the extensive and intensive growth of the SME sector, with a focus on increasing the number of active SMEs at local and external markets of interest level;

The activity of entrepreneurs is legally regulated by:

- Decree Law no. 54/1990 on the organization and conduct of the activity of individual entrepreneurs and family associations which is allowed on the basis of the professional attestations of the entrepreneurs for the activities carried out;
- Law no. 26/1990 on the Trade Registry, which regulates the mandatory registration of organizations in which is constituted the private initiative and the regime of names, emblems and firms;
- Law no. 31/1990, which defines and regulates the legal forms of constitution of legal persons carrying out commercial acts in commercial companies. It is essential for setting up and organizing SMEs. It also includes European regulations in the form of Business Companies Directives;
- Law no. 133/1999 on the stimulation of private entrepreneurs for the establishment and development of SMEs that supplement Law 31/1990. This law, together with the implementing rules, states that SME assistance can be provided through institutions, agencies, professional associations that can support the management activity, promoting and financing the activities. SME development programs are funded from the state budget or local budgets and are supervised by the National Agency for Small and Medium Enterprises;
- Law no. 346/2004 on the stimulation of the establishment and development of Small and Medium Enterprises, with subsequent modifications and completions - regulates measures aiming to create a favorable framework for the establishment and development of Small and Medium Enterprises;
- Government Emergency Ordinance no. 44/2008 on the carrying out of economic activities by authorized individuals individual enterprises and family enterprises, as subsequently amended and supplemented;
- Law no. 62/2014 amending the Law on SMEs.

One best practice of cooperation between VET providers and microenterprise owners in Romania is the Program “Start-up Nation Romania”. This is a program adopted by the Romanian Government to stimulate new small and medium-sized enterprises. It is founded by the Government Emergency Ordinance 10/2017 to stimulate the setting up of new small and medium-sized enterprises, which in its art. 1 stipulates that *“Within the Ministry of Business Environment, Commerce and Entrepreneurship is launched the Program for Stimulating the Establishment of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises, hereinafter referred to as “Start-up Nation - Romania”.*

Under the Start-up Nation Romania will be eligible to participate: the companies formed under Law no. 31/1990, the cooperative societies registered under Law no. 1/2005 and the debut (entrant) companies (SRL-D) registered under Government Emergency Ordinance no. 6/2011.

Such an entrepreneurship course delivered in the framework of the „Start-up Nation Romania” Programme is the one provided by Extreme Training (<https://www.traininguri.ro/curs-antreprenoriat-competente-antreprenoriale/>), with the title „Accredited Course of Entrepreneurial competencies”

The course is accredited by the National Authority for Qualifications (ANC), the Ministry of Education and Science (MECS) and the Ministry of Labor, Family, Social Protection and the Elderly (MMFPSPV). With duration of 32 hours, the course will take place in Bucharest, between 9 and 18 April 2018. At the end of the course, those who successfully completed it and passed the exam will receive a Graduation Certificate accredited by ANC. Also, in addition to this professional certificate the beneficiaries will get a Europass Certificate describing the entrepreneurial competencies obtained as a result of completing the course.

METHODOLOGY

In Romania the research was conducted during December 2017, by collecting the data using the Audit Questionnaire developed within the ME2ME project. For the linguistic equivalence insurance the double translation process was conducted, using two independent professional English translators. The respondents were chosen from the professional networking and University partners. The data were collected from a sample consisting of **20 micro-enterprise representatives (95% of the respondents having the ownership status, and only 5% were contractual managers)**. The empirical data were collected by conducting face-to-face interviews and using on-line network (self administrated questionnaire). For measurement purpose, there was used a five point Likert scale, open-ended questions and multiple response questions. The reliability of the Audit Questionnaire for micro-enterprise in Romanian context was assessed for 62 items and Cronbach’s alpha achieved a value of 0.846 that confirmed the internal consistency. The statistical analysis procedures: for statistical analysis purpose the SPSS was used and a uni-variates analysis was conducted. The descriptive statistics results are presented as Frequencies, Mean values and graphics.

RESULTS OF THE AUDIT QUESTIONNAIRE

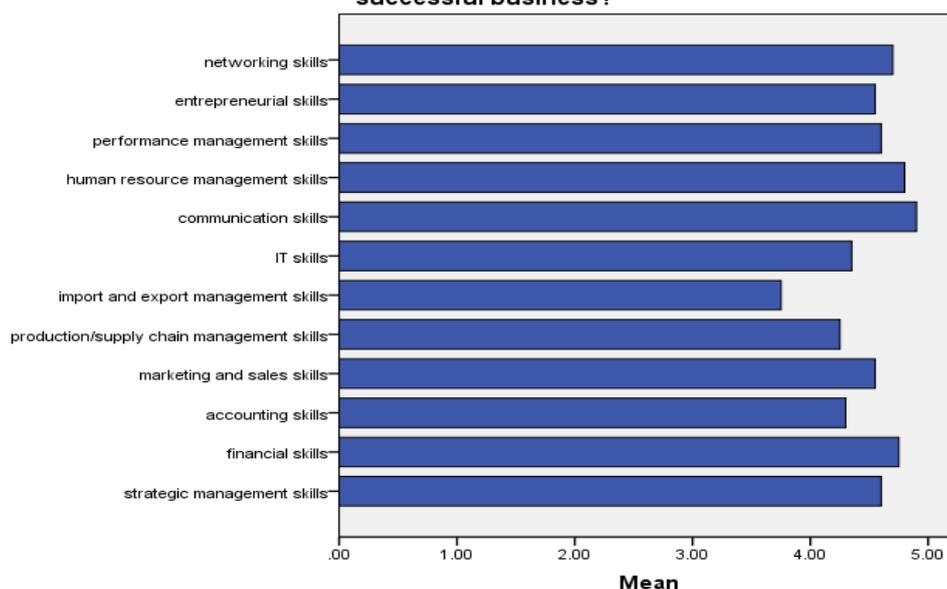
General Demographics

Description of the research sample: the characteristics of the micro-enterprises selected in the research sample were as follows: only 15% were set up before 2000, while most of them started their activity between 2000 and 2017. It should also be mentioned that up to 30% of these microenterprises have been set up over the last three years (2014-2017), which means that these micro-enterprises were quite at the beginning of their activity being into the Start-Up Stage. 50% of the microenterprises have between 2 and 10 employees, while 50% have 1 employee. The companies within the sample were operated within domains like: education and training, medical care services, rentals, catering services, financial audit, accounting consultancy, photographic activities, advertising production, business and management consultancy, art industry, goods trading. Thus, within the sample, micro-enterprises were included with different experience backgrounds for collecting representative data in Romanian contexts. The survey unit was the micro-enterprises representatives, 95% of the entire sample having ownership status, while 5% were contractual managers.

Development of Business Management Skills

Regarding the importance of the different business management skills in the micro-enterprises representatives' perception, in the Romanian contexts, the mean average emphasized the fact that the top 3 skills are: communication skills (M=4.90), human resource management skills (M=4.80), financial skills (M=4.75). On the other hand respondents consider less important the following skills: import and export management skills (M=3.75), production/supply chain management (M=4.25), accounting skills (M=4.30). Still all the assessed business management skills reached mean values over 3 underlining that all these skills are somehow important for a successful business according to respondents' evaluation (see graph. No.1).

Graph. no.1. What do you consider to be the most important skills for running a successful business?

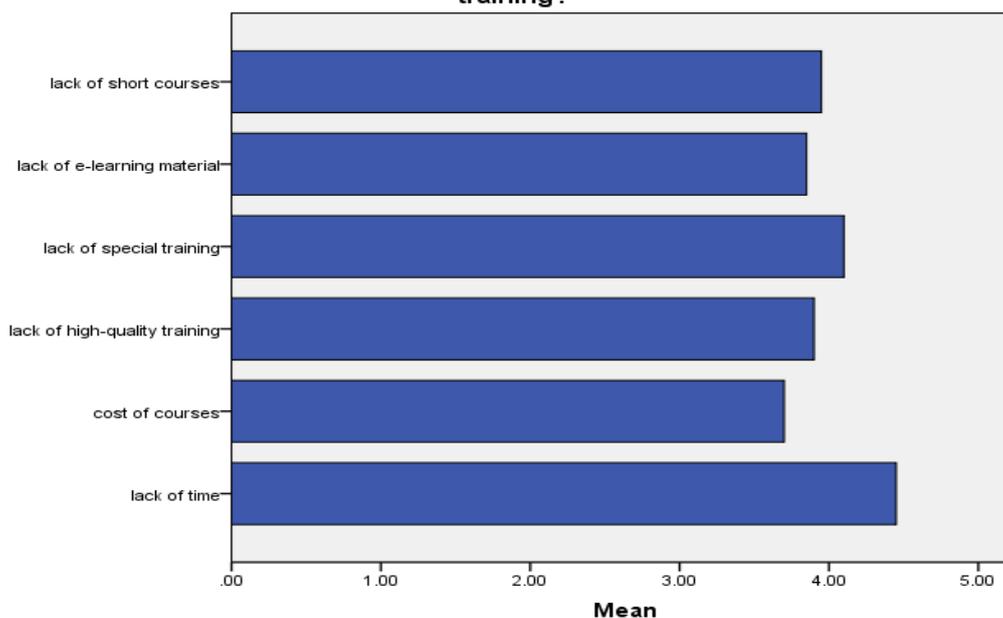


As the results of the research emphasized, in Romanian context, only 40% of the respondents participated in business management training. This participation rate emphasizes the national situation

presented into the Romanian context of the research. On the other hand, according to those that were engaged in such a training programs, not all the business management skills were acquired through training, some of these being the result of the experience or a mixed result. Thus, the acquired skills can be included into the three categories: (1) acquired more through experience than other way – strategic management skills, accounting skills, production/supply chain management skills, the import and export management skills, performance management skills, the entrepreneurial skills, networking skills; (2) acquired through a mixed way basis (experience and training) - financial skills, marketing and sales skills, IT skills, communication skills, human resource management skills.

Regarding the barriers faced by micro-enterprise representatives in order to attend business management training, in Romanian context, the lack of time (M=4.45) was pointed out as the most important inhibiting factor of the attendance. On the other hand, the lack of special training focused on modules for specific subjects (M=4.10), meaning a more focused training offer, was pointed out as an important inhibitor of business management training attendance. Other inhibitor factors were: (1) lack of short courses (M=3.95), lack of high-quality training (M=3.90), lack of e-learning material (3.85). The less important barrier seems to be the cost of courses (M=3.70).

Graph.no.2. What barriers do you face to attend business management training?



Even if 85% of the respondents considered that their skills might be useful to other micro enterprise owners, according to the research results, only 60% of the micro-enterprises representatives shared knowledge and information within their business networks, while 40% sustained that they were not engaged in such a sharing.

The business knowledge self-evaluation process emphasized the following hierarchy: (1) communication knowledge (9.15) human resource management knowledge (8.75), performance management knowledge (8.25), information technology knowledge (8.20), entrepreneurship knowledge (8.05), marketing and sales knowledge (7.85), strategic management knowledge (7.60), finances knowledge (7.30), accounting knowledge (7.15), production/supply chain management knowledge (6.94), imports and exports knowledge (5.52).

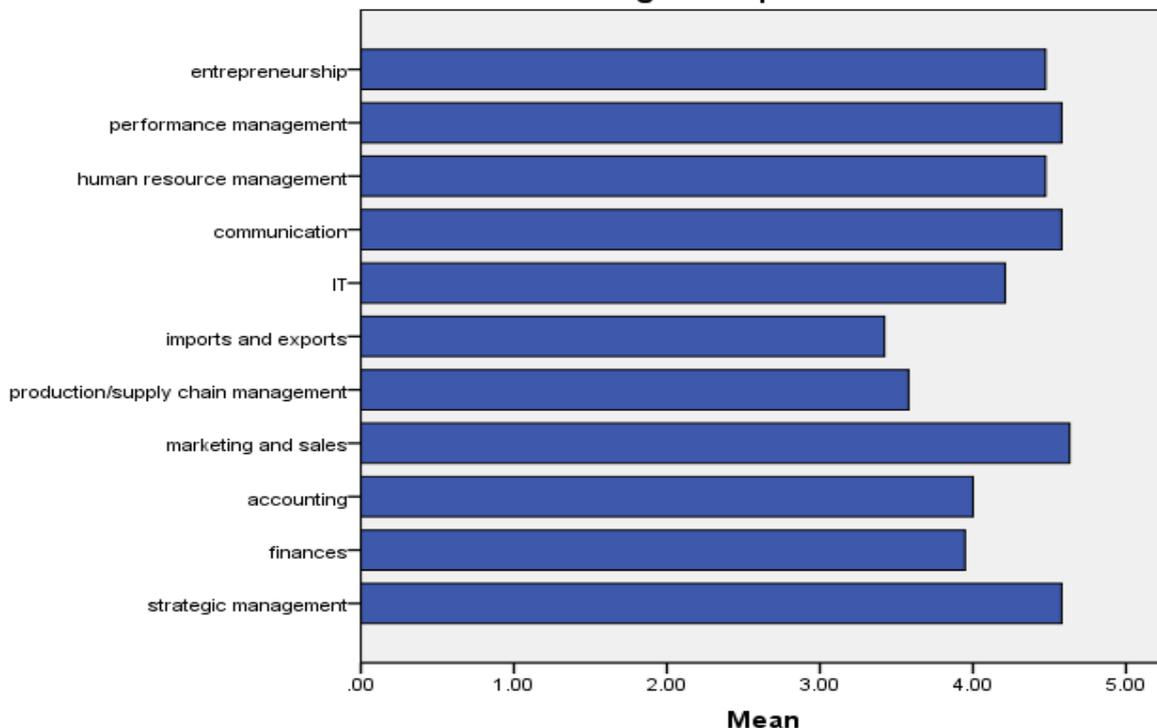
Needs and Preferences for Business Management Training

According to the Audit Questionnaire results, the micro-enterprises’ representatives considerate that in the learning content of a new developed training resources should be included the following modules: (1) marketing and sales (M=4.60), communication (M=4.60), (2) performance management (M=4.57), (3)strategic management (M=4.55), (4) human resource management (M=4.50), (5) entrepreneurship (M=4.45), IT (M=4.25), accounting (M=4.00), finances (M=3.95), production/supply chain management (M=3.60), imports and exports (m=3.45). The demand for business management training in Romania is reflected into the graph. no.3.

The micro-enterprises’ representatives preference for the learning methods in order to access the developed training resources show that a mix of at least three methods will be a success into the Romanian context, as follow: (1) case study (77.8%), (2) peer to peer learning (72.2%), workshops (66.7%). Even if on-line courses have a high fervency (61.1%) however this learning method is on the forth position in the respondents’ preference.

Most of the respondents (60%) were willing to commit to training between 1 and 3 hours per week. Other options were as follow: (1) between 3 and 5 hours (25%), (2) less than 1 hour (10%), (3) 5 hours and more (5%).

Graph.no.3. What learning content would you like to receive if new training resources were being developed?

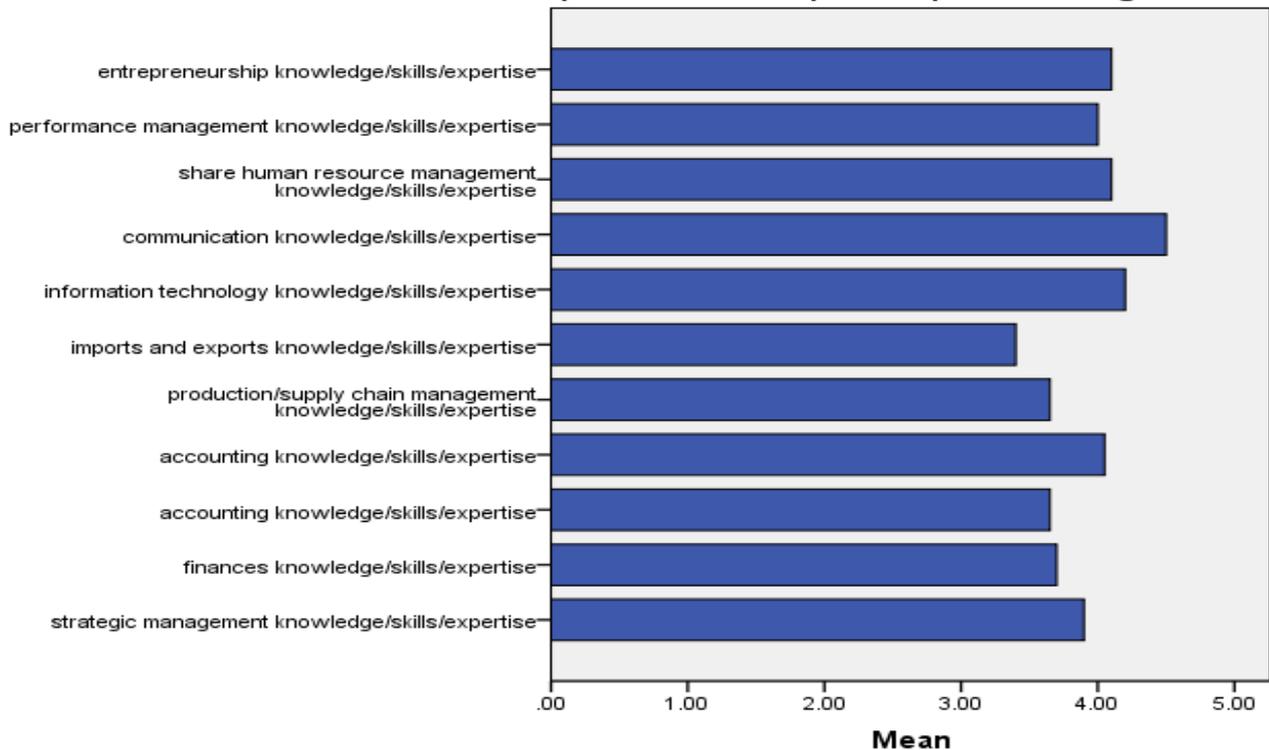


Readiness and Preferences for Peer-to-Peer Learning

Complying with the results of the research, the micro-enterprises' representatives were willing to share specific knowledge/skills/expertise with other micro enterprise owners in peer-to-peer learning most on the following directions: (1) communication (M=4.50), (2) information technology (M=4.20), (3) human resource management (4.10), entrepreneurship (4.10), (4) accounting (4.05), (5) performance management (M=4.00). The smallest mean values were recorded for imports and exports (M=3.40), production/supply chain management (M=3.65), accounting (3.65). Still, one can notice that for all the assessed domains, into the Romanian context, registered mean values were more than three (3) which reflect a relatively high potential of Peer-to-Peer Learning.

Regarding the relevance and importance of the specific knowledge/skills/expertise that can be received from other micro enterprise owners in peer-to-peer learning, the micro-enterprises' representatives pointed out the following domains: (1) performance management (M=4.65), (2) human resource management (M=4.60), (3) communication (M=4.55), entrepreneurship (M=4.55), (4) marketing and sales (5) strategic management (M=4.30), (6) IT (4.25). The smallest mean values were recorded for: (1) imports and exports (M=3.60), (2) finances, (3) production/supply chain (M=3.95), accounting (M=3.95).

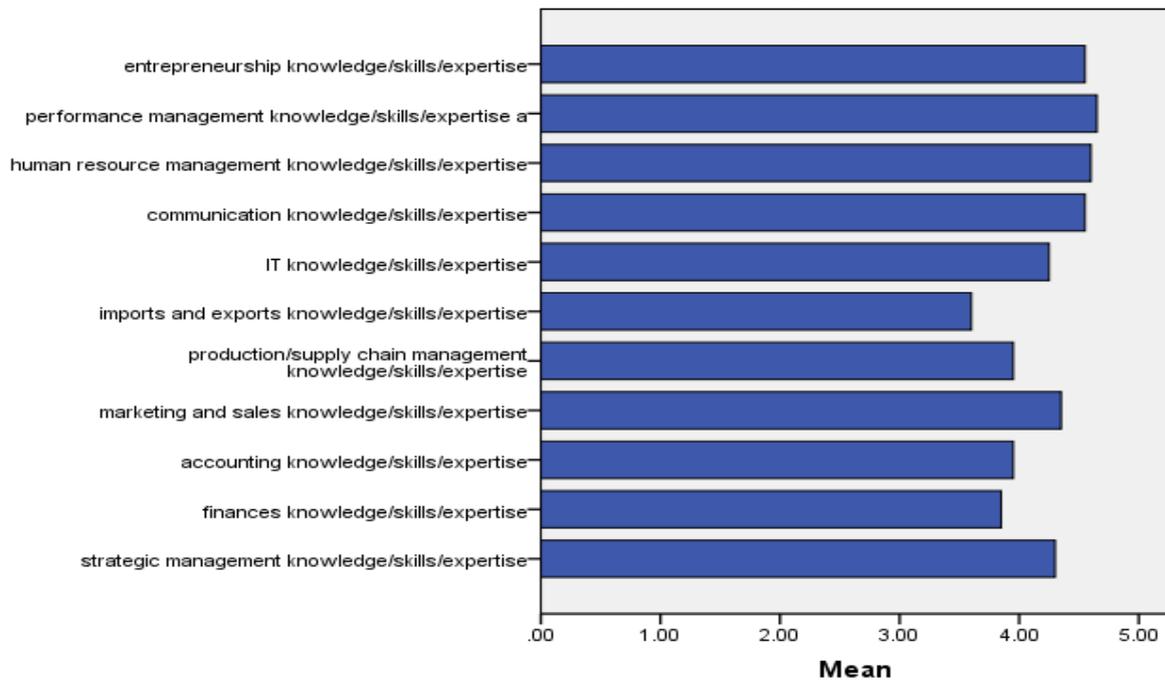
Graph.no.4. What specific knowledge/skills/expertise you would be willing to share with other micro enterprise owners in peer-to-peer learning?



As it can be notice, into the Romanian context the tendency for receiving knowledge/skills/expertise is higher that the tendency towards sharing knowledge/skills/expertise. The highest Potential of Peer-to-Peer learning, bought sides (sharing and receiving) was identify within the following domains: communication, human resource management, entrepreneurship, performance management, information technology

The 3 top peer-to-peer learning approaches according to the micro-enterprises' representatives were accordingly: (1) small group meetings (70%), (2) joint peer activities (60%), (3) training sessions (55%). The least preferred assessed approaches were: (1) virtual engagements (5%), (2) large meeting groups (20%), (3) paired engagements (35%)

Graph.no.5. What specific knowledge/skills/expertise would be of most relevance and importance for you to receive from other micro enterprise owners in peer-to-peer learning?



SUMMARY

In Romania, according to the national research results, running a successful business depends on a certain set of skills, the most important ones into the micro-enterprises representatives' perception being considerate: communication skills, human resource management skills and financial skills. Most of the business management skills were acquired especially through experience or through a mix between experience and training. Only a small part was developed by a consistent training. Thus, experience was very important for strategic management skills, accounting skills, production/supply chain management skills, the import and export management skills, performance management skills, the entrepreneurial skills and networking skills. The ones that were acquired also through training were: financial skills, marketing and sales skills, IT skills, communication skills, human resource management skills. Anyway it should be note that only 60% of the micro-enterprises' representatives argue that participated into a business management training program during the last 3 years. This result reflects the national situation regarding the low human resources skills development investment by micro-enterprises.

When it is about knowledge self-assessment micro-enterprises' representatives appreciated that they had really good knowledge in communication, human resource management, performance management, information technology knowledge, entrepreneurship knowledge and marketing and sales. In all this domains were recorded means values over 8. As it can be notice the skills in most of these domains were developed also through training.

In an as if situation regarding the future development of new training resources, the Romanian micro-enterprises' representatives issued the demand for business management training in which the most important learning contents were: marketing and sales, communication, performance management, strategic management, human resource management, entrepreneurship and IT. Also, it is important to note that most of the research participants opted for more than one method to access the new training resources while the peer to peer learning was on the second position into the hierarchy, after the case study method. This result shows a high potential of Peer-to-Peer Learning. Most of the micro-enterprises' representatives are willing to get involved into the training between 1 and 3 hours per week.

Into the Romanian context the tendency for receiving knowledge/skills/expertise is higher that the tendency towards sharing knowledge/skills/expertise. The highest potential of Peer-to-Peer learning, bought sides (sharing and receiving) was identify within the following domains: communication, human resource management, entrepreneurship, performance management, information technology. The most important peer-to-peer learning approaches into the micro-enterprises' representatives preferences were: small group meetings, joint peer activities, and training sessions.

4.4.2. NATIONAL RESEARCH REPORT

MAIN GOAL OF THE RESEARCH

The scope of the national research actions is to identify the state of the art where VET providers and microenterprise owners are concerned specifically in relation to the key themes of the ME2ME project which are:

1. The availability of in-service training to build the capacity of VET providers to support entrepreneurship or business development training
2. The current relationship between VET providers and the microenterprise business community
3. The scope of business to business networking in each country

INTRODUCTION – ROMANIAN CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

In Romania, vocational training in formal learning contexts is ensured by two complementary systems: the initial vocational training system and the continuous vocational training system. Through initial vocational training, human resources acquire a job-based qualification and then, through continuous professional development, the expansion of career in the course of life, in line with the requirements of the labor market, constantly developing, and with personal aspirations.

The initial vocational training provided through professional and technical education, is governed by the Law of National Education no. 1/2011. Continuous vocational training takes place on two dimensions: a) vocational training through qualification, initiation, training, specialization programs organized by authorized vocational training providers, according to the law and, respectively, on-the-job training, organized by employers for their own staff; b) skills assessment obtained by other means than formal, by assessment centre competences acquired in other ways than formal legally authorized.

Vocational training programs are organized by vocational training providers: occupations, trades, specializations and professions, included in the Occupation Classification from Romania – O.C.R., respectively the Qualifications Nomenclature – Q.N. and for professional skills shared by several occupations (entrepreneurial skills, social and civic competences, language skills).

Vocational training providers may organize vocational training programs with the cumulative fulfilment of four conditions: (1) to provide in the status or, as the case may be, in the authorization for self-employment and training activities (*CAEN code 8559*), (2) to be authorized under the law, (3) to meet the obligations to pay taxes, duties and contributions provided by the law, (4) to pay the authorization fee. Employers can organize training programs for their own employees and can only issue graduation certificates recognized within their respective units. These certificates are nationally recognized only if employers are authorized as training providers. Vocational training providers are registered in the National Registry of Authorized Vocational Training Providers (RNFPFA), which is on the following website: www.anc.edu.ro

The training and evaluation of adult vocational training results are funded from the following sources: employers' own funds; the unemployment insurance budget; sponsorships, donations, attracted external sources; fees from persons participating in vocational training programs.

The legal framework for adult vocational training consists of: (1) Government Ordinance no. 129/2000 regarding the vocational training of adults, republished; (2); 279/2005, on apprenticeship at the workplace, republished; (3) Government Emergency Ordinance no. 49/2014 on the establishment of measures in the field of education, scientific research and for the amendment of some normative acts; (4) National Education Law no. 1/2011, as amended and supplemented, (5) Government Decision no. 918/2013 on the approval of the National Qualifications Framework, as further amended and supplemented, which provides the organization on 8 levels of qualifications of the National Qualifications Framework, and these levels of qualification can be acquired through the formal 20 education and training system in Romania and by recognizing the learning outcomes learned through non-formal and informal learning from the perspective of lifelong learning.

The main Romanian actors in the training system are: (1) *The National Authority for Qualifications* that develops the National Qualifications Framework based on the European Qualifications Framework, manages the National Qualifications Register and the National Register of Adult Vocational Training Providers. This institution coordinates the authorization of providers of continuing vocational training at national level and the activities of the sartorial committees, (2) *The Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of Labor and Social Justice* have responsibilities in the field of lifelong learning as follow: developing national policies and strategies on adult vocational training; the regulation of on-the-job training and apprenticeship training at the workplace; (3) *The National Agency for Employment (NAE)* has as main attributions in the field of lifelong learning, (4) *The National Institute of Statistics* periodically draws up the Survey of vocational training in enterprises (FORPRO), (5) *The National Centre for the Development of Vocational and Technical Education (NCDVTE)* which provides professional coordination and scientific advice for national, regional and local authors and trainers from the vocational and technical education network.

For vocational training, SMEs in Romania allocate an average percentage of 1.96% of the turnover per firm, a rather unfavourable situation, which shows that Romanian entrepreneurs invest relatively little in human resources training, given that the training of staff is a stringent necessity, a requirement for sustainable development of activities. In this context, based on Audit Questionnaire, it was conducted the field research with the purpose to asses different aspect of the micro-enterprises' need and demands concerning education and training.

METHODOLOGY

In Romania the research was conducted during December 2017, by collecting the data using the National Research Report Questionnaire for VET providers developed within the ME2ME project. For the linguistic equivalence insurance the double translation process was conducted, using two independent professional English translators. The respondents were chosen from the professional networking and University partners. The data were collected from a sample consisting of **20 VET providers' representatives (30% of the respondents had the ownership status while 70% were trainers being employed within the VET institutions)**. The empirical data were collected by using on-line network (self administered questionnaire) and by conducting one-to-one interviews by telephone. For measurement purpose, the following were used: a five point Likert scale, open-ended questions and multiple response questions. The reliability of the National Research Report Questionnaire for VET providers, in Romanian context, was assessed for 61 items and Cronbach's alpha achieved a value of 0.764. The statistical analysis procedures: for statistical analysis purpose the SPSS was used and a uni-variates analysis was conducted. The descriptive statistics results are presented as Frequencies, Mean values and Graphics.

RESULTS OF THE AUDIT QUESTIONNAIRE

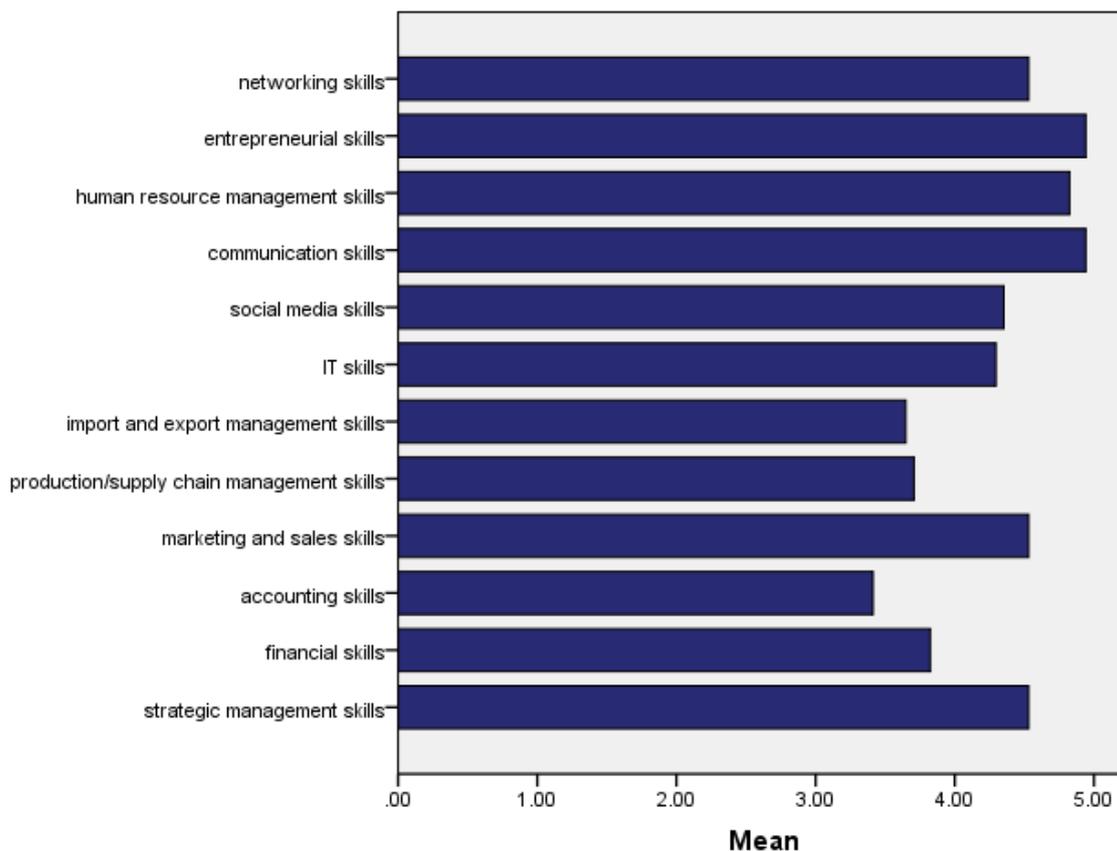
General Information

Description of the research sample: the characteristics of the VET institutions selected in the research sample were as follows: only 15% were set up before 2000, while most of them started their activity after 2000 (5% - 2002, 35% - 2003, 5% - 2007, 5% - 2009, 5% - 2010, 25% - 2011, 5% - 2012). It should also be mentioned all the VET institutions, included within the research sample, have over 5 years of experience, thus neither of these were into the Start-Up Stage. 20% of the vet institutions have 3 educators (trainers), 5% - 4 trainers, 30% - 5 trainers, 10% - 6 trainers, 5% - 8 trainers, 25% - 10 trainers, 5% - 20 trainers. The VET providers within the sample were operated within domains like: communication and linguistic consultancy, vocational training for students and unemployed, skills validation courses, qualification courses, introductory courses, business training etc. Thus, within the sample there were included VET institutions with different experience backgrounds for collecting representative data in Romanian contexts. The survey unit was the VET institutions' representatives, 30% of the respondents had the ownership status while 70% were trainers being employed within the VET institutions.

Provision of Business Management Skills

According to the research results, the importance of the different business management skills in VET representatives' perception, in the Romanian contexts, the top 3 skills are: communication skills (M=4.95), entrepreneurial skills (M=4.94), human resource management skills (M=4.80). On the other hand respondents consider less important the following skills: accounting skills (M=3.38), financial skills (M=3.90), import and export management skills (M=3.64), production/supply chain management (M=3.77). Still all the assessed business management skills reached mean values over 3 underlining that all these skills are somehow important for a successful business according to respondents' evaluation (see Graph. no.1).

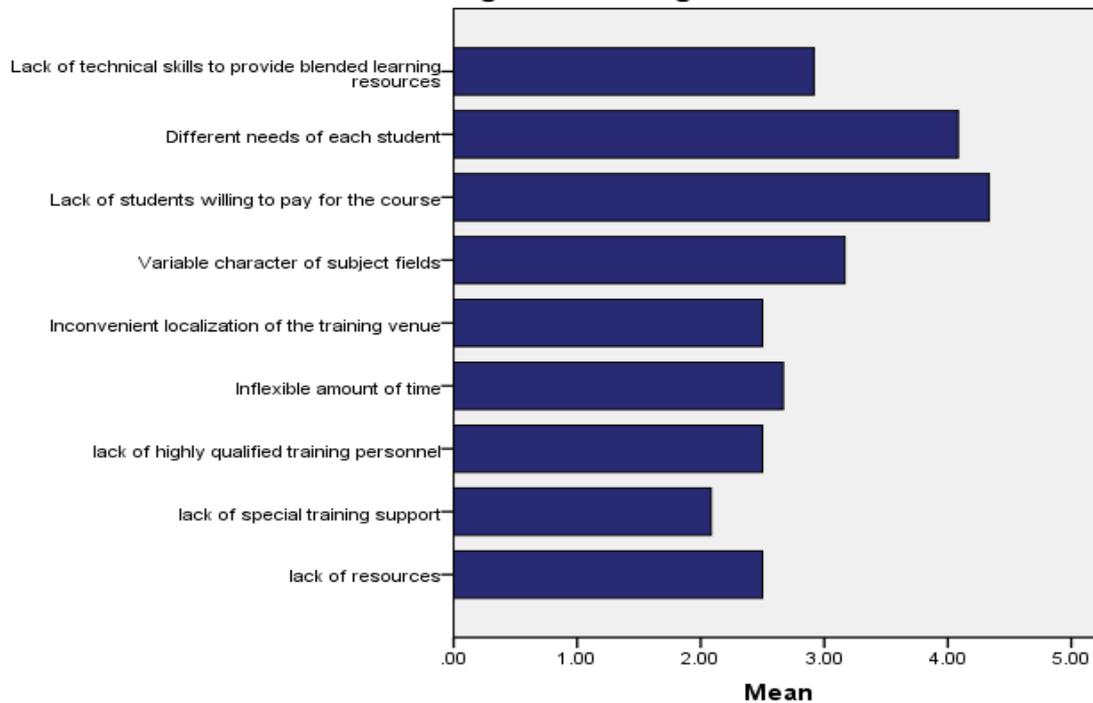
Graph No.1. What do you consider to be the most important skills for running a successful business?



Regarding the skills included in the training courses taught in VET institutions, in Romanian CONTEXT, research results emphasized that most of these have in their training offer programs focused on the development of different business management skills. Still the most common developed skills through the provided VET programs are: (1) communication skills (90%), (2) entrepreneurial skills (80%), strategic management skills (80%) and marketing and sales skills (80%), (3) IT skills (75%), and (4) human resource management skills (70%). The least encountered skills in training programs were: import and export management skills (only in 10% VET institutions), networking skills (only in 15% VET institutions), production/supply chain management skills (only in 35% VET institutions).

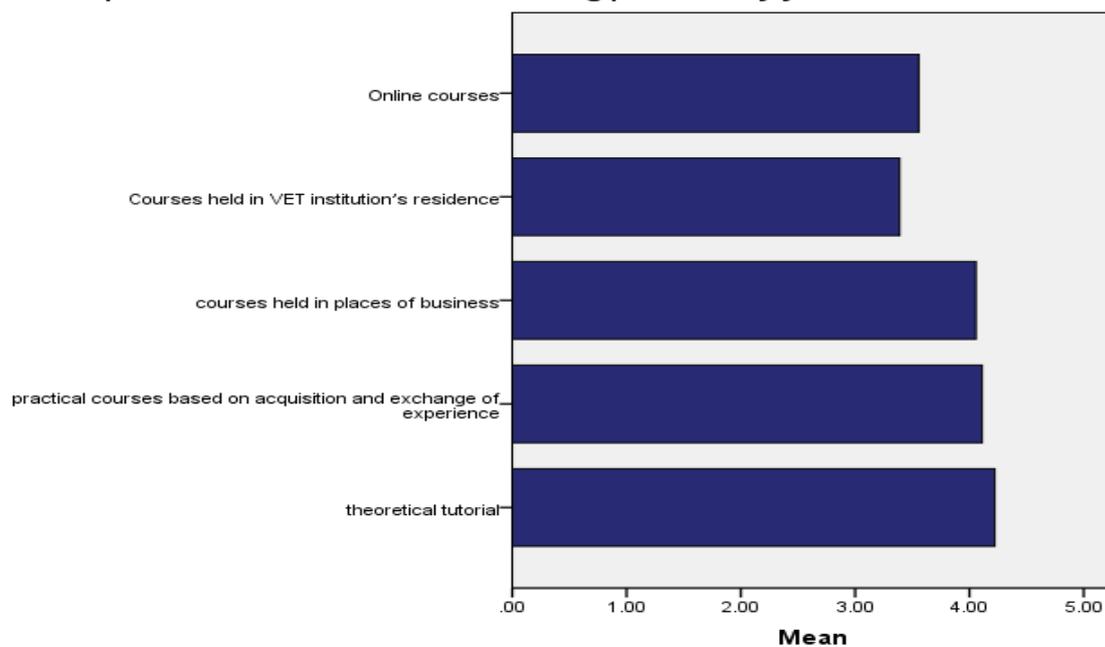
The most important barriers faced by VET to provide business management training are as follow: (1) lack of students willing to pay for the course (M=4.42), (2) different needs of each student (M=4.21), variable character of subject fields (M=3.16), while the other items were assessed only to a smaller extent as barriers faced in providing business management training (see the Graph.no.2).

Graph No.2. What barriers do your VET unit face to provide business management training?



Within the offer of the VET institutions the most common forms of the training are: (1) theoretical tutorial (4.30), (2) courses held in places of business (M=4.15) and practical courses based on acquisition and exchange of experience (M=4.15). The online courses are less used for training delivery (M=3.55).

Graph No.3. What form does the training provided by your institution take?

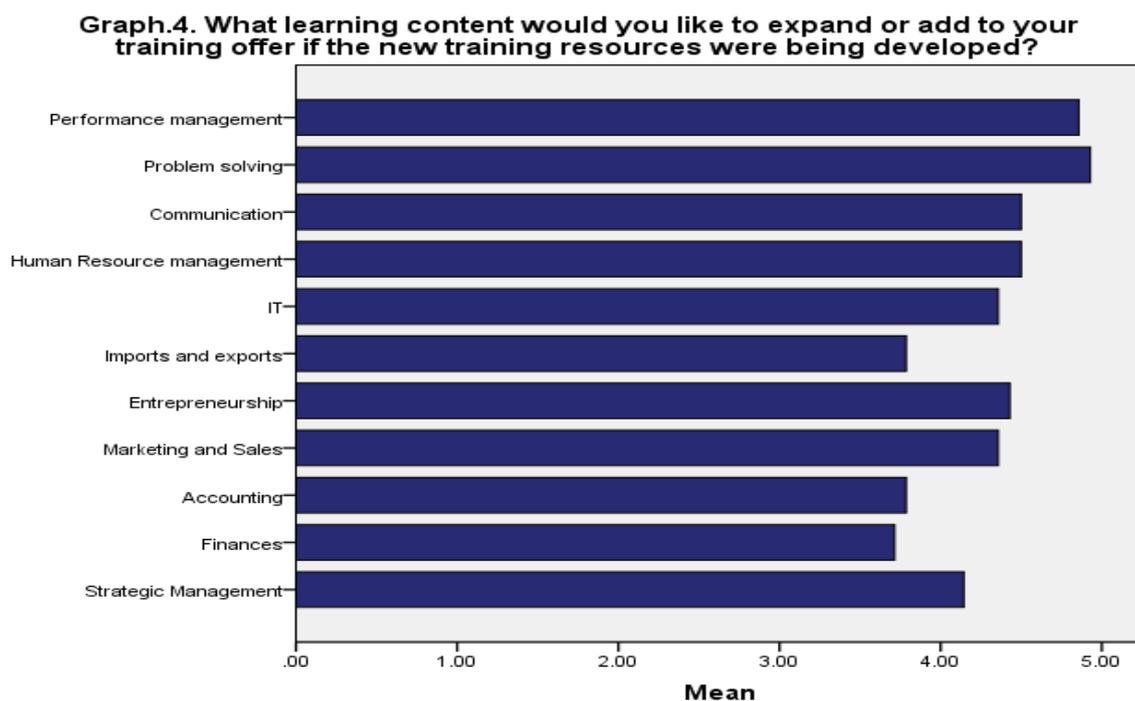


65% of the respondents acknowledge that they share knowledge and experience within different education providers' network that they belong in, while 35% are not engaged in sharing knowledge and experience.

Demand for business management training

The VET institutions' representatives assessed the knowledge of their students as follow: information technology (8.42), communication and networking (8.25), marketing and sales (7.31), strategic management (7.21), problem solving (7.21), performance management (7.15), finance (6.42), accounting (6.15).

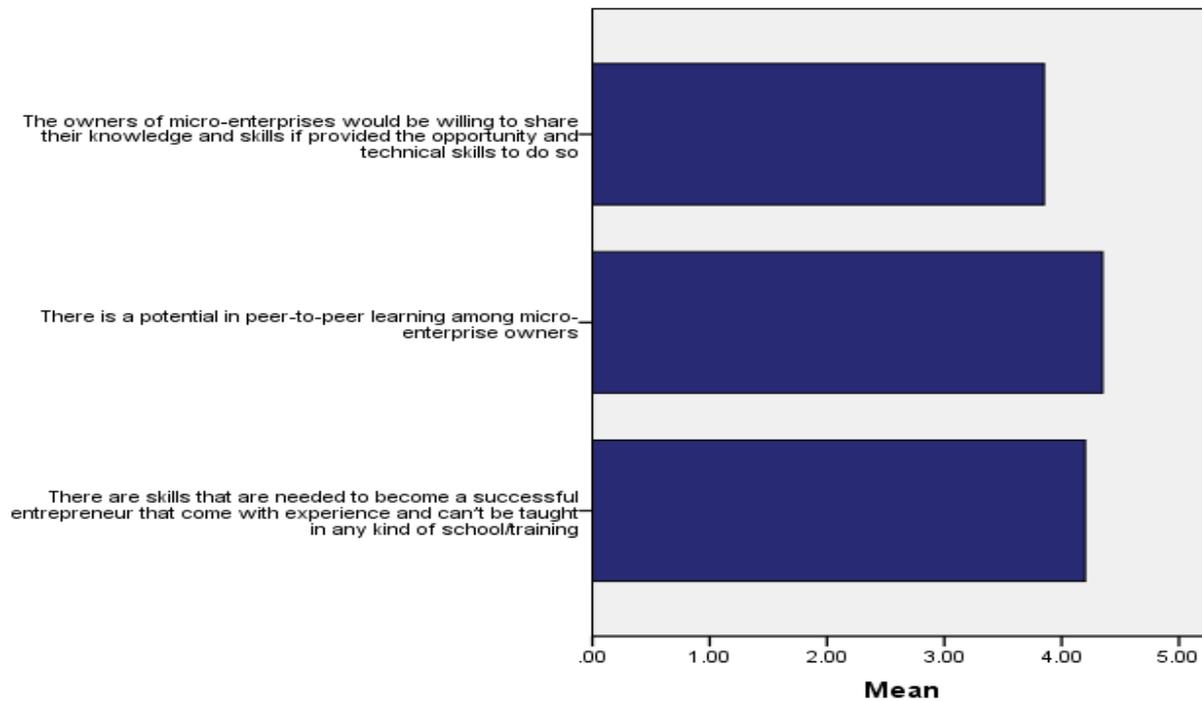
If new training resources will be developed, VET institution' representatives are taking into consideration to expand or add to their training offer the following contents: (1) problem solving (M=4.89), (2) performance management (4.85), (3) communication (M=4.60), (4) human resource management (M=4.55), (5) IT (M=4.45), (6) entrepreneurship (M=4.38), (7) marketing and sales (M=4.36), (8) strategic management (M=4.16), (9) accounting (M=3.72) and finances (M=3.72), (10) imports and exports (M=3.58).



Regarding the learning methods used in order to provide these new training resources, the respondents put a great emphasis on case studies (85%) and workshops (85%). Still, all the assessed methods were taken into consideration: online courses (75%), peer to peer learning (70%), videos podcasts interactive (55%). These results underline the relative high potential of the peer-to-peer learning. Most of the respondents (50%) argued that the training course should take 5 hours and more each week in order to be manageable for education provider.

Potential of peer-to-peer learning

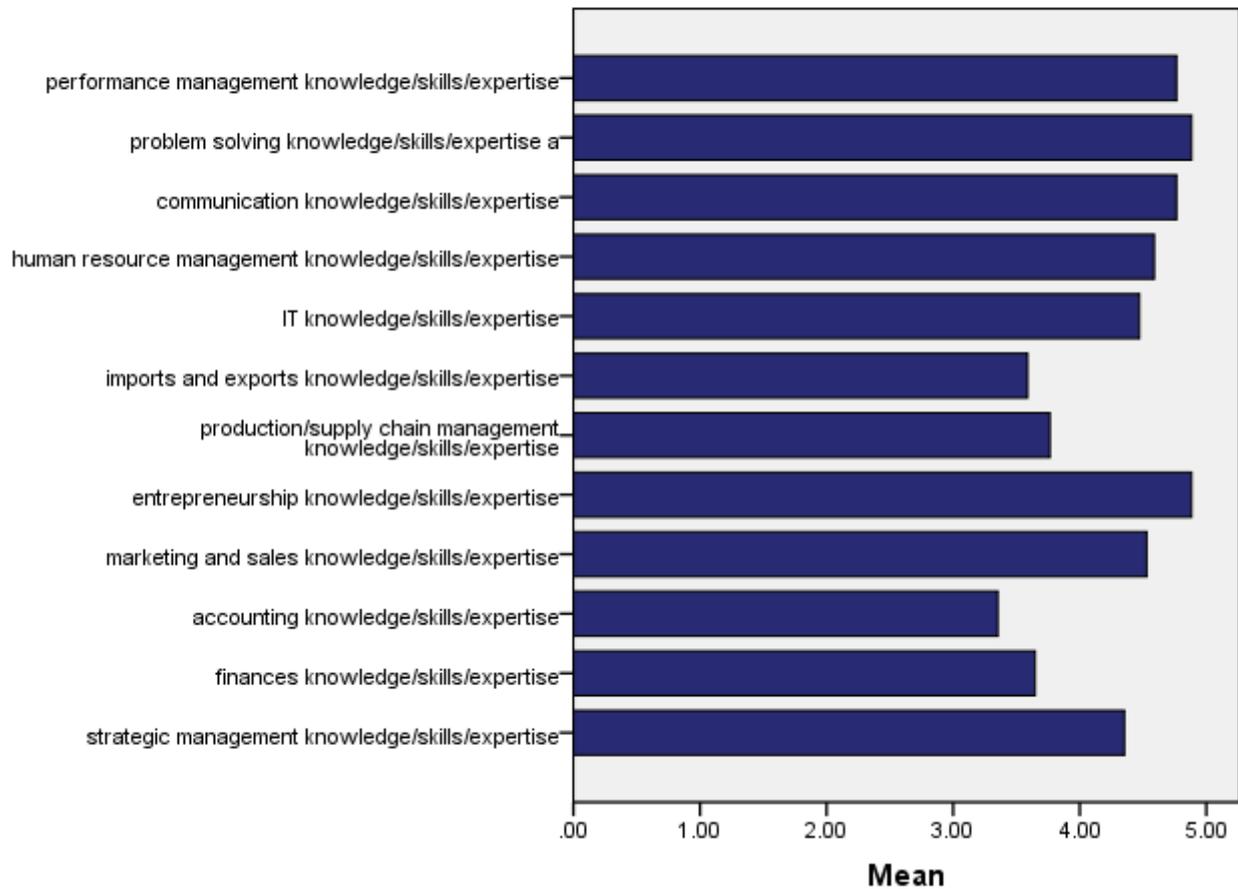
Graph No.5. Do you agree with the statements below?



According to the mean values, the VET institutions representatives consider that there is a high potential in peer-to-peer learning among micro-enterprise owners (M=4.35). Also, they appreciated that there are skills that come with experience and cannot be taught in any kind of school/training for a successful entrepreneur on a high extent (M=4.20). Regarding knowledge and skills sharing between owners of micro-enterprises based on the provided opportunity and technical skills, VET representatives appreciate this aspect on a relatively high extent (M=3.85).

In respondents' perception the specific knowledge/skills/expertise considered the most important and effective for students to receive from other micro enterprise owners in peer-to-peer learning, were: (1) problem solving knowledge/skills/expertise (M=4.89), (2) entrepreneurship knowledge/skills/expertise (M=4.80), communication knowledge/skills/expertise (M=4.80), (3) performance management knowledge/skills/expertise (M=4.78), (4) human resource management knowledge/skills/expertise (M=4.60), (5) IT knowledge/skills/expertise (M=4.47), (6) marketing and sales knowledge/skills/expertise (M=4.40), (7) strategic management knowledge/skills/expertise (M=4.35), (8) production/supply chain management knowledge/skills/expertise (M=3.89), (9) imports and exports knowledge/skills/expertise (M=3.63), (10) finances knowledge/skills/expertise (M=3.60), (11) accounting knowledge/skills/expertise (M=3.40).

Graph No.6. What specific knowledge/skills/expertise would be the most important and effective for students to receive from other micro enterprise owners in peer-to-peer learning?



According to the VET representatives the most effective approaches in peer-to-peer learning were as follow: (1) training sessions (85%) and small group meetings (85%), (2) Online networking (55%), (3) joint peer activities (50%), (4) peer produced knowledge products (40%), (5) virtual engagements (25%), (6) large meeting groups (20%), (7) paired engagements (15%).

SUMMARY

Within Romania, according to the VET providers' representatives, the most important business management skills are: communication skills, entrepreneurial skills and human resource management skills. They considerate less important accounting skills, financial skills, import and export management skills and production/supply chain management. Thus, there are some certain business management skills that are important for both assessed groups – VET providers and micro-enterprise - **communication skills and human resource management skills**. Also, there are certain skills that are less important for both categories - **accounting skills import and export management skills, production/supply chain management**.

Regarding the skills included into the training offer of the Romanian VET providers, as the research results emphasis, the most common skills were: (1) communication skills, (2) entrepreneurial skills, and (3) strategic management skills. The less encountered skills were: import and export management skills, networking skills, production/supply chain management skills, and accounting skills. Thus, there is a certain correlation between the importance degree of the business management skills and these skills inclusion within VET providers offer. Most of the Romanian VET providers' representatives emphasized some certain barriers in providing business management training as lack of students willing to pay for the course and different needs of each student. The most used forms of the training by the VET providers are: courses held in places of business and theoretical tutorials, while the on-line courses are less used for training delivery. On the other group side (micro-enterprise), even if on-line courses had a high fervency, this method was on the forth position in the micro-enterprise representatives' preference. 60% of the VET providers' representatives acknowledge that they share knowledge and experience within different education providers' network.

In a new training resources development scenario, VET institution' representatives considerate the most five important contents in order to be expand or add to their training offer, as follow: problem solving, performance management, human resource management, communication, and IT. Less important were considerate accounting, imports and exports, and finances. From this perspective there is certain gab between the perceptions of the two groups - VET institutions and micro-enterprises. Regarding the learning methods used in order to provide these new training resources, VET respondents put a great emphasis on case studies and workshops. Most of the respondents argued that the training course should take 5 hours and more each week in order to be manageable for education provider.

Romanian VET providers consider that there is a high potential in peer-to-peer learning among micro-enterprise owners and they appreciated that there are certain skills that come with experience and can't be taught in any kind of school/training for a successful entrepreneur. VET providers pointed out the problem solving, the performance management, the entrepreneurship, the communication and the human resource management as the five most important and effective specific knowledge/skills/expertise for students to be received from other micro enterprise owners in peer-to-peer learning. Also, they appreciate training sessions, small group meetings and joint peer activities as the most effective approaches in peer-to-peer learning.

4.5. LITHUANIA

4.5.1. NATIONAL AUDIT REPORT

INTRODUCTION

ME2ME focuses on the design and development of a bespoke learning environment for micro-enterprise owners. As the project is endeavouring to develop tools and resources to meet the needs of vocational education and training (VET) providers and micro-enterprises in different countries, research is conducted with VET providers and business owners to:

5. Identify key learning needs of VET professionals to be included in the continuing professional development (CPD) curriculum to support them to work with micro-enterprises through non-traditional learning platforms;
6. Identify the skills needed to help VET professionals produce media-rich mini-learning-format learning resources;
7. Identify the induction to pedagogy needs of micro-enterprise owners to ensure that they can participate fully in the micro-enterprise to micro-enterprise learning networks;
8. Identify key learning areas to be addressed in the mini-learning format training resources to be developed as prototypes and the most appropriate media formats to use in producing the media-rich resources.

A comprehensive research phase is a key activity at the beginning of ME2ME project and consists of two parts: research to collect an opinion of VET professionals and audit of micro-enterprise owners. The following document is a report of the audit conducted with representatives of micro-enterprises.

The audit is set to identify the available skills and knowledge within the local business community that might be made available to other micro-enterprise owners through the peer-to-peer learning networks. The objectives of the audit are as follows:

10. To identify specific skill assets within the micro-enterprise community that could be used to support the development of the sector as a whole in each local context through the proposed peer-to-peer learning networks;
11. To understand the learning needs and learning preferences of microenterprise owners especially focusing on the type of learning they prefer and the most favoured learning platforms and environments for the proposed peer-to-peer learning;
12. To identify areas where there are gaps in current VET provision that the ME2ME project could address.

ME2ME proposes an innovative approach to help foster learning in the micro-enterprise sector by encouraging micro-enterprise owners to engage in a peer learning network where business owners can share knowledge and skills to support their business objectives. It draws on the principles of asset-based community development and brings this philosophy into a business and vocational education environment. We believe that placing business owners in the vanguard of learning within the micro-enterprise sector will have a considerable long-term impact on the businesses and the staff who work there. This is why their needs and skills needs to be thoroughly studied.

METHODOLOGY

In ME2ME audit it was possible to use any or all of the following approaches:

- Organizing focus groups with small numbers of micro-enterprise owners
- Conducting one-to-one interviews either face-to-face or by telephone
- Circulating a questionnaire to selected respondents

Kaunas Science and Technology Park followed the survey strategy by creating an online questionnaire. The link to the questionnaire was later sent via e-mail targeting micro-enterprise owners in Lithuania and inviting to participate in the survey. The participants were recruited mostly among our stakeholders and personal and professional networks of Kaunas Science and Technology Park experts. The list of possible respondents to whom invitation was sent included those micro-enterprise owners that Kaunas Science and Technology Park hosts in the premises or was cooperating with in various projects and activities. They were also asked to forward the questionnaires to other micro-enterprise owners who met the profile and could be interested in the project.

The questionnaire was created by Kaunas Science and Technology Park and consisted of 20 questions. It was divided into 4 question groups:

- XXV. General Demographics
- XXVI. Development of Business Management Skills
- XXVII. Needs and Preferences for Business Management Training
- XXVIII. Readiness and Preferences for Peer-to-Peer Learning

It was assured that the questionnaire was clear to the respondent and easy to fill. In the beginning of a questionnaire the project was described also indicating the aim of a research. Participants had been given contact information to reach experts from Kaunas Science and Technology Park if any questions occur. The duration of the survey took approximately 10 minutes but varied with each respondent. None of the respondents has given any negative feedback about the methodology or questionnaire itself.

To get the most reliable and valid data different question types and scales in the questionnaire was used: different 5-point Likert scales, two-point questions, matrix question, ranking question, open questions, single and multiple choice questions. We also asked participants for general suggestions considering our project, their interest to participate in further project activities or receive information related to the project.

The sample in total included 20 respondents from micro-enterprises established in Lithuania. Large part from all respondents were the owners of those micro-enterprises by themselves, which were different in size, but employing maximum 9 people, and established in various years, the company established at 2008 being the oldest from the sample. Based on the descriptions provided by the respondents most of these companies were operating in IT sector.

RESULTS OF THE AUDIT QUESTIONNAIRE:

General Demographics

Questions 1-5 - summary

The purpose of questions 1-5 were to get to know our target group and learn about their business. The results of those questions are as follows:

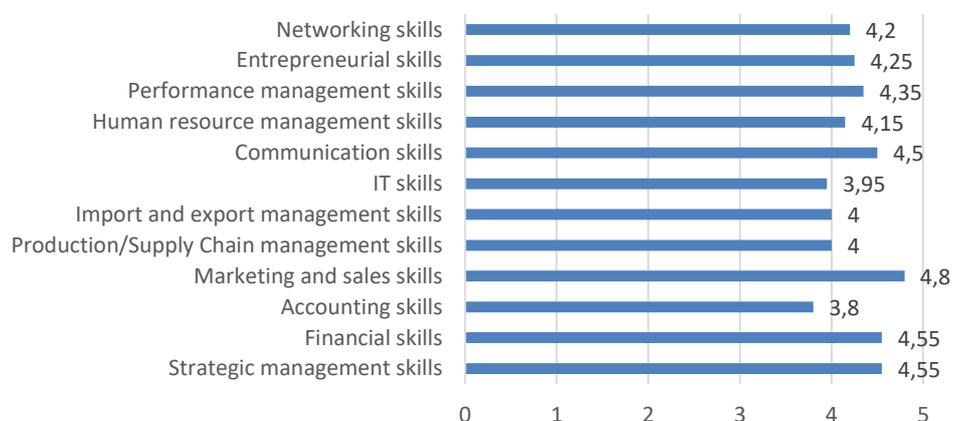
- Activities of micro-enterprises that the respondents represent include: business consulting, programming, development of software, computer games and applications, architecture and design, manufacturing and retail, services for event planning, employment, pest control, beverage development.
- Most of the micro-enterprises (8 from 20) were operating in IT or ICT sector.
- 45% (9) of represented micro-enterprises employed 3 or less employees and the rest 55% (11) - from 4 to 9 employees.
- All of the respondents were representing micro-enterprises established in the last 10 years, meaning that the oldest one from the sample was established at 2008, while the most recent is created already in the first days of 2018.
- 70% (14 respondents) of the respondents were owners of micro-enterprises by themselves.

Development of Business Management Skills

The second part of the questionnaire was aimed at identifying skills that are the most important for developing a successful business according to the point of view of the respondents – entrepreneurs themselves, the skills they already poses and are willing to share with other micro-enterprise owners, the importance of business training to obtaining these skills and the barriers they face to attend training.

Question 6 – What do you consider the most important skills for running a successful business?

6. What do you consider to be the most important skills for running a successful business?



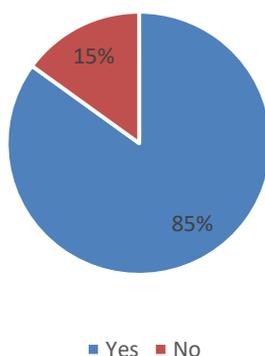
The most important skills for running a successful business were evaluated on the scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is not important at all and 5 – very important. According to Lithuanian entrepreneurs very important skills are: marketing and sales skills (average value 4.8/5.0), financial, strategic management skills

(average evaluation for each is 4.55/5.0), communication skills (4.5/5.0), performance management (4.35/5.0), entrepreneurial (4.25/5.0), networking (4.2/5.0), human resource management (4.15/5.0), import and export management, and production/supply chain management (average evaluation for each is 4.0/5.0) skills. As important ones are considered IT (3.95/5.0) and accounting (3.8/5.0) skills. Other very important skills pointed out by entrepreneurs include *learning*, *innovation management*, *project management* and *wide thinking*. It is important to underline, that all of the skills from the list were considered to be important for successful business by the respondents.

Question 7 – Have you attended any business management training in the past 3 years?

Out of 20 respondents 85% (17 entrepreneurs) attended business management training in the past 3 years. This means the most part of the respondents from the sample is providing the actual experience of micro-enterprise owners with business management training that is provided nowadays in Lithuania.

7. Have you attended any business management training in the past 3 years?

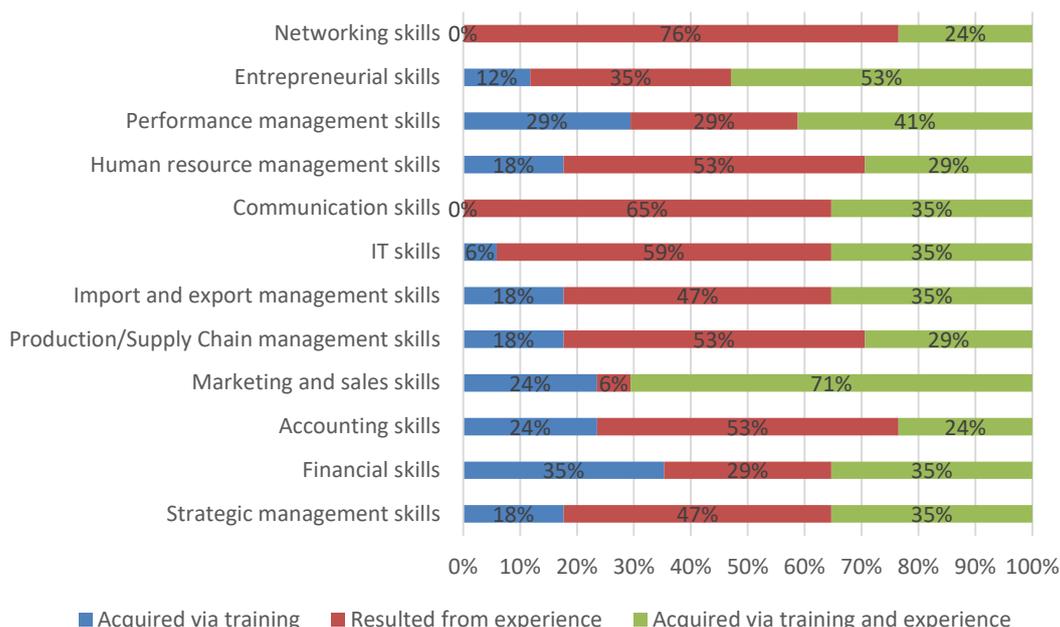


Question 8 – Which skills from the list result from training you completed and which ones from experience?

Entrepreneurs were asked to indicate if the skills they have resulted via training, experience or via training and experience combined together. Out of the list of skills that entrepreneurs considered to be important for development of successful business, networking (76% from all respondents), communication (65%), IT (59%) mainly resulted from experience, with very few respondents indicating those skills could be acquired only via training. Based on the responses, entrepreneurial (53%) and performance management (41%) skills are the ones acquired via experience and training, while human resource management, production/supply chain management or accounting skills are developed more from the experience (53% from all respondents in each) than via training. Import and export skills and strategic management skills are typically gained via experience (47% in each) or experience and training all together (35% for each). Respondents were indifferent while indicating where financial skills are acquired from, meaning the responses for each option were almost equal (35% acquired financial skills via training, 29% - via experience, 35% - via training and experience). Whereas according to the respondents marketing and sales skills result from the combination of training and experience (71%), with only 6% stating those were acquired via experience.

This data indicates which skills entrepreneurs consider to get via business management training and which via experience. Knowledge in entrepreneurship, performance management, communication, marketing and sales, finances is understood to be acquired mainly through training, while the skills that entrepreneurs consider to acquire via experience is the area where peer-to-peer learning between micro-enterprise owners could focus. Those skills include networking, human resource management, communication, IT, import and export management, production/supply chain management, marketing and sales, accounting and strategic management.

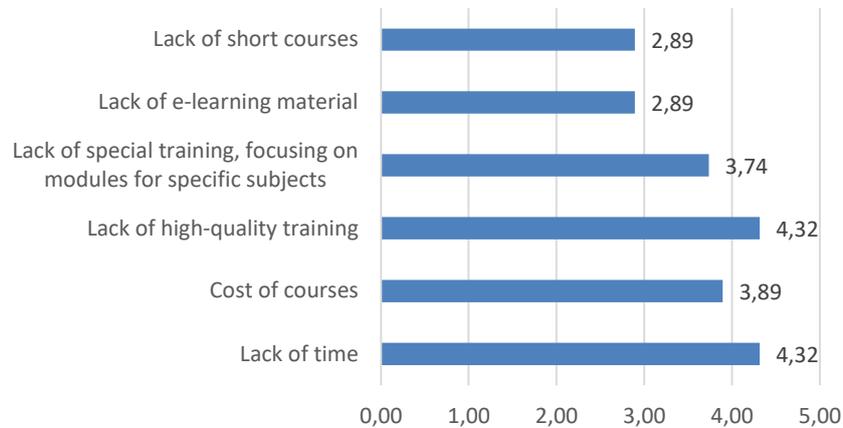
8. Which skills from the list result from training you completed and which ones from experience?



Question 9 – What barriers do you face to attend business management training?

The barriers entrepreneurs face in attending business management training were evaluated on the scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 – strongly agree, enabling to identify the most common barriers the respondents face. Lack of high-quality training and lack of time were stressed as the most common barriers (average value in both 4.32/5.0). The other barriers to consider are cost of courses (3.89/5.0) and lack of special training, focusing on modules for specific subjects (3.74/5.0). Whereas indifferent evaluation by entrepreneurs was given to the lack of short courses and the lack of e-learning material (average value in both 2.89/5.0). The former ones are not considered as barriers attending business management training by the respondents. However, entrepreneurs pointed out *lack of professionals, who can train* as a barrier to attend the proper business management training.

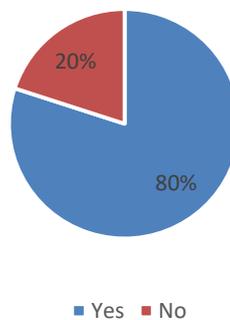
9. What barriers do you face to attend business management training?



Question 10 – Do you share knowledge and information within any business network that you belong in?

Considering the inclusion in knowledge networks, 80% of entrepreneurs (16 respondents) stated they do share knowledge and experience within a certain business network. Therefore respondents tend to belong to networks to share knowledge, practices and experience.

10. Do you share knowledge and information within any business network that you belong in?



Question 11 – Do you think that some of the skills you have developed might be useful to other micro enterprise owners?

Without exceptions all 20 respondents think their knowledge and skills developed while creating business might be useful to other micro-enterprise owners.

Needs and Preferences for Business Management Training

The third part of a questionnaire was aimed at revealing the demand for business management training and the attitude towards new resources for being developed: entrepreneurs were asked to assess their knowledge in certain business areas, identify the learning content they would like to receive in training and how much time they are willing to dedicate to this.

Question 12 – How would you assess your knowledge of the following business areas?

Entrepreneurs evaluated their knowledge in certain business areas on the scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is very weak and 10 is very knowledgeable. The best rated knowledge fields include knowledge in communication (on average evaluated 8.1/10.0), performance management and human resource management (both on average evaluated 7.85/10.0), marketing and sales (7.6/10.0), strategic management (7.55/10.0), entrepreneurship (7.5/10.0), finances (7.45/10.0), IT (7.4/10.0). Slightly lower evaluation was given to the knowledge of production/supply chain management (7.2/10.0), accounting (7.05/10.0), imports and exports (6.9/10.0). It is important to underline that entrepreneurs are rather positivistic in their self-evaluation. However, respondents evaluated their knowledge in import and export management, production/supply chain management and accounting the lowest compared with other fields, and those are the areas underlined as important skills in developing successful business, but again receiving lower evaluations than other skills from the list. Thus the same knowledge skills which entrepreneurs consider to be weaker in their self-evaluation are also considered of a bit lower importance in business development.

12. How would you assess your knowledge of the following business areas on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is very weak and 10 is very knowledgeable?



Question 13 – What learning content would you like to receive if new training resources were being developed?

On the scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 – strongly agree, entrepreneurs evaluated the learning content they would like to receive in training resources. The content rated the highest includes marketing and sales (average evaluation 4.4/5.0), performance management (4.3/5.0), imports and exports, and strategic management (average evaluation in both 4.15/5.0). The respondents would also like to add communication (3.7/5.0), production/supply chain management (3.68/5.0), human resource management and communication (average evaluation of both is 3.6/5.0), entrepreneurship (3.5/5.0) and IT (3.45/5.0). Knowledge in imports and exports, and production/supply chain management received the lowest evaluations by micro-enterprise representatives when rating their own knowledge. While communication, management of performance, human resources and strategy as well as marketing and sales were between the best rated. However, entrepreneurs would still prefer to learn those topics in business management trainings. Respondents were rather indifferent considering to add accounting (3.1/5.0), which is also the skill received the lowest evaluation with regards to importance towards developing successful business in the opinion of entrepreneurs themselves. Additionally, micro-enterprise owners would prefer to receive trainings on such topics as *management of innovation projects*, *sustainable innovation development* and *business management*. These responses indicate management of different business areas are those issues that entrepreneurs would like to focus on.

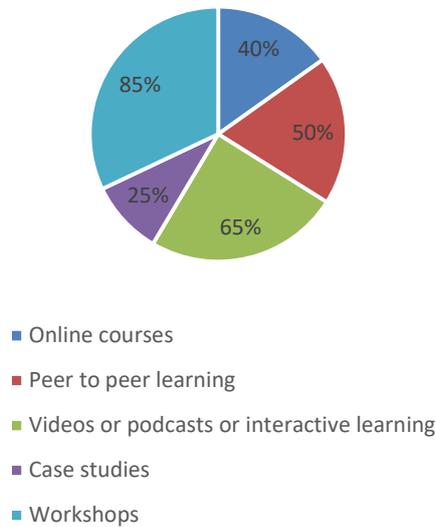
13. What learning content would you like to receive if new training resources were being developed?



Question 14 – How would you like to access these new training resources?

85% of the respondents (17 from all micro-enterprise representatives) would prefer the form of a workshop considering this new training, 65% (13) would like it to be in a form of videos, podcasts or interactive learning methods, and 50% (10) - to receive the training as a peer-to-peer learning. 40% (8) of the respondents would prefer the courses to be held online and only 25% (5) would like to analyse case studies.

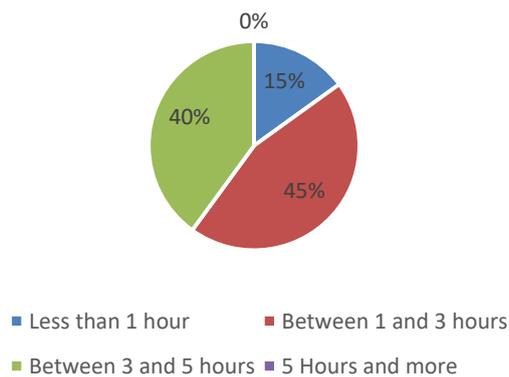
14. How would you like to access these new training resources?



Question 15 – How much time would you be willing to commit to training on a weekly basis?

9 entrepreneurs (45% of all respondents) would prefer the course would take between 1 and 3 hours each week, 8 (40%) would be willing to attend longer courses of 3 to 5 hours and 3 (15%) – less than 1 hour. None of the respondents would prefer the course to take 5 hours or more per week and this echoes previous responses on the barriers entrepreneurs are facing to attend business management training – the lack of time was one of the main issue preventing from attending such courses.

15. How much time would you be willing to commit to training on a weekly basis?



Readiness and preferences for peer-to-peer learning

The fourth part of a questionnaire was meant to evaluate the potential of peer-to-peer learning. The opinion of entrepreneurs was asked on specific expertise that would be of most relevance and importance for them to receive from other micro enterprise owners and the knowledge they would be willing to share. Respondents also identified the most effective approaches for engaging in peer-to-peer learning.

Question 16 – What specific knowledge/skills/expertise you would be willing to share with other micro enterprise owners in peer-to-peer learning?

On the scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 – strongly agree, entrepreneurs rated the specific expertise which they would be willing to share with other micro-enterprise owners through peer-to-peer learning. Even being involved in business networks for knowledge and experience sharing, entrepreneurs were not keen on providing knowledge to their colleagues - micro-enterprise owners. Respondents were more willing to share their expertise in marketing and sales (3.7/5.0), imports and exports (3.45/5.0), entrepreneurship and strategic management (average evaluation for both is 3.4/5.0), production/supply chain management (3.3/5.0), but were indifferent for such fields as performance management, human resource management and IT (average evaluation for all three is 3.2/5.0). Entrepreneurs were not willing to share their expertise in finances (2.95/5.0), communication (2.8/5.0) and accounting (2.75/5.0). Interestingly, in some cases respondents were more willing to share their expertise through peer-to-peer learning in those topics, in which they self-evaluated their knowledge the lowest (such as imports and exports), or on the contrary, tending not to share knowledge in the fields in which they self-evaluated their knowledge with the highest marks compared to other fields (such as communication). Entrepreneurs also listed *leadership* as a topic they would like to discuss with other micro-enterprise owners.

16. What specific knowledge/skills/expertise you would be willing to share with other micro enterprise owners in peer-to-peer learning?



Question 17 – What specific knowledge/skills/expertise would be of most relevance and importance for you to receive from other micro enterprise owners?

On the scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 – strongly agree, entrepreneurs rated the specific expertise which to their opinion would be the most important for them to receive from other micro-enterprise owners through peer-to-peer learning. Interestingly, being involved in business networks and listing a number of skills that can be acquired via experience, entrepreneurs keener on receiving knowledge from their colleagues - micro-enterprise owners than sharing it from their own side. Respondents were willing to learn marketing and sales (4.4/5.0), performance management and strategic management (average evaluation for both is 4.3/5.0), production/supply chain management (4.15/5.0), imports and exports (4.05/5.0), human resource management and finances (average evaluation for both is 3.85/5.0), IT (3.83/5.0), communication (3.65/5.0) and entrepreneurship (3.6/5.0). The topic entrepreneurs want to discuss the least from all in the list is accounting (3.45/5.0). Respondents also listed *management of innovation projects and decision making* as topics they would like to discuss with other micro-enterprise owners and thus learn from their experience.

17. What specific knowledge/skills/expertise would be of most relevance and importance for you to receive from other micro enterprise owners in peer-to-peer learning?

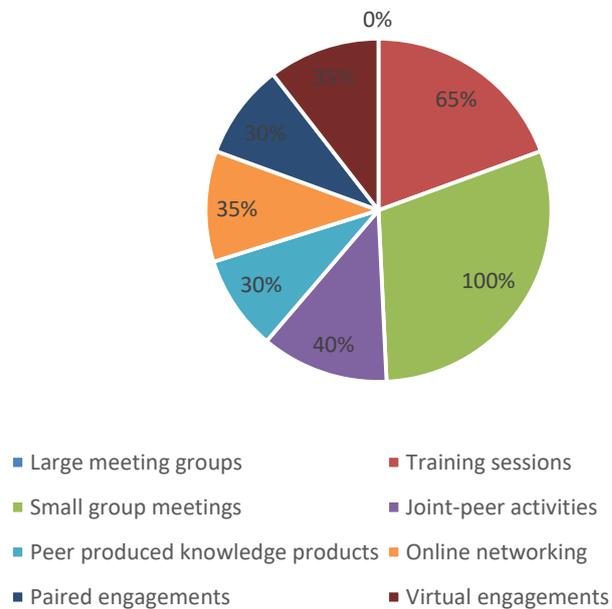


Question 18 – What are your preferred approaches to engage in peer-to-peer learning?

From the list of approaches entrepreneurs evaluated the most effective in peer-to-peer learning to their opinion. 100% of respondents (20 entrepreneurs) chose small group meetings, 65% (13) – training sessions as ones of the most effective for this kind of training. Some of the approaches received a lower appreciation from entrepreneurs to be used in peer-to-peer learning, such as joint-peer activities, chosen by 40% (8) from all respondents, virtual engagements or online networking, preferred by 35% (7), and paired engagements or peer produced knowledge products, chosen by 30% (6) from all respondents. Large meeting groups was chosen by none of the respondents indicating peer-to-peer

learning tends to take approaches involving only small groups of people that meet physically or virtually. Respondents also listed *mobile devices* for the engagement in peer-to-peer learning, what reflects the overall trend in growing engagement with mobile devices we see nowadays.

18. What are your preferred approaches to engage in peer-to-peer learning?



Question 19 and 20 – Comments and interest in the project

Comments on the project revealed the importance of *video training sessions*, which to which respondents referred as *most suitable* for their company. 3 participants were interested in the results of ME2ME project and left their email addresses.

SUMMARY

Development of Business Management Skills

It is important to underline, that all of the skills from the list were considered to be important for successful business by the respondents. According to Lithuanian entrepreneurs very important skills are: marketing and sales, financial, strategic management, communication, performance management, entrepreneurial, networking, human resource management, import and export management, production/supply chain management, IT and accounting skills. Other very important skills pointed out by entrepreneurs include learning, innovation and project management.

The data indicates which skills, out of the list of skills that entrepreneurs considered to be important for development of successful business, entrepreneurs acquire via business management training and which via experience. Knowledge in entrepreneurship, performance management, communication, marketing and sales, finances is acquired mainly through training, while the skills that entrepreneurs consider to acquire via experience is the area where peer-to-peer learning between micro-enterprise owners could focus. Those skills include networking, human resource management, communication, IT, import and export management, production/supply chain management, marketing and sales, accounting and strategic management. The main barriers entrepreneurs face when deciding to attend the business management training are lack of high-quality training and time. However, most of the respondents attended business management training in the past 3 years and tend to belong to networks to share knowledge, practices and experience and think their knowledge and skills developed while creating business might be useful to other micro-enterprise owners.

Needs and Preferences for Business Management Training

According to entrepreneurs the fields they are the most knowledgeable include communication, management of performance, human resources and strategy, marketing and sales, entrepreneurship, finances and IT. It is important to underline that entrepreneurs are rather positivistic in their self-evaluation. However, the same knowledge skills which entrepreneurs consider to be weaker in their self-evaluation are also considered of a bit lower importance in successful business development. Knowledge in imports and exports, and production/supply chain management received the lowest evaluations by micro-enterprise representatives when rating their own knowledge and thus this is a learning content they would like to receive in training resources. However, even if they are knowledgeable in some fields entrepreneurs would still prefer to include this content to their trainings if new resources are developed. Overall the responses indicate management of different business areas (management of production/supply chain, performance, strategy, human resources and innovation projects) are those issues that entrepreneurs would like to focus on.

Entrepreneurs are flexible considering the form of the new training, whether it will be in a format of a workshop, case study, online course, of peer to peer learning, video or podcast, or interactive learning. Even though workshops are the most preferable format for business management training. Respondents prefer the course would take between 1 and 5 hours each week, but none of the respondents would prefer the course to take more than 5 hours per week. These preferences align with the lack of time stressed as one of the main barriers preventing from attending business management training.

Readiness and preferences for peer-to-peer learning

Entrepreneurs have positive attitude toward peer-to-peer learning among micro-enterprise owners when it means receiving the knowledge from other peers, however, they are indifferent when it comes to sharing their own expertise, even being involved in business networks for knowledge and experience sharing. Interestingly, in some cases respondents were more willing to share their expertise in those topics, in which they self-evaluated their knowledge the lowest (e.g. imports and exports), or on the contrary, tending not to share knowledge in the fields in which they self-evaluated their knowledge with the highest marks compared to other fields (e.g. communication).

From the list of approaches entrepreneurs chose small group meetings and training sessions as ones of the most effective for peer-to-peer training. Large meeting groups was chosen by none of the respondents indicating they are thinking of peer-to-peer learning as a small group of people that meets training sessions and engages in joint-peer activities physically and much less frequently - virtually.

General summary

Throughout all the questionnaire entrepreneurs do not tend to exclude particular skills which would be of higher demand than others from the list, or when deciding the most important skills which could be taught through business management training or peer-to-peer learning with other micro-enterprise owners. Skills which entrepreneurs consider to be less knowledgeable about are also considered of a bit lower importance in successful business development. However, even being knowledgeable in some fields entrepreneurs would still prefer to include this content to their trainings if new resources are developed. Overall entrepreneurs would like to strengthen their knowledge in management of different business areas (management of production/supply chain, performance, strategy, human resources and innovation projects). Their preferred format for training are workshops which would take from 1 to 5 hours at a weekly basis.

Considering peer-to-peer learning with other micro-enterprise owners, respondents were indifferent even though being included in business networks already and sharing their experience. The attitude towards peer-to-peer learning was positive when asked what expertise they would like to receive from their colleagues micro-enterprise owners, and less enthusiastic when pointing out the expertise entrepreneurs would like to share with others by themselves. Even though being flexible in different training formats and forms, entrepreneurs do think peer-to-peer learning should rather include small groups of people to engage in training sessions or joint-activities, than being held virtually. This is a very important insight from the shareholders' perspective for the development of peer-to-peer learning activities in Lithuania.

4.5.2. NATIONAL RESEARCH REPORT

INTRODUCTION

ME2ME focuses on the design and development of a bespoke learning environment for micro-enterprise owners. As the project is endeavouring to develop tools and resources to meet the needs of vocational education and training (VET) providers and micro-enterprises in different countries, research is conducted with VET providers and business owners to:

9. Identify key learning needs of VET professionals to be included in the continuing professional development (CPD) curriculum to support them to work with micro-enterprises through non-traditional learning platforms;
10. Identify the skills needed to help VET professionals produce media-rich mini-learning-format learning resources;
11. Identify the induction to pedagogy needs of micro-enterprise owners to ensure that they can participate fully in the micro-enterprise to micro-enterprise learning networks;
12. Identify key learning areas to be addressed in the mini-learning format training resources to be developed as prototypes and the most appropriate media formats to use in producing the media-rich resources.

A comprehensive research phase is a key activity at the beginning of ME2ME project and consists of two parts: research to collect an opinion of VET professionals and audit of micro-enterprise owners. The following document is a summary of the research conducted with VET professionals.

The aim of this research was to identify the state of the art where VET providers and microenterprise owners are concerned specifically in relation to the key themes of the ME2ME project which are:

4. The availability of in-service training to build the capacity of VET providers to support entrepreneurship or business development training;
5. The current relationship between VET providers and the microenterprise business community;
6. The scope of business to business networking in each country.

As was stated in the application, ME2ME proposes an innovative approach to help foster learning in the micro-enterprise sector by encouraging micro-enterprise owners to engage in a peer learning network where business owners can share knowledge and skills to support their business objectives. It draws on the principles of asset-based community development and brings this philosophy into a business and vocational education environment. Project partners will develop a suite of educational resources in an appropriate mini-learning-format to address specific skill deficits within the networks established and will use the ubiquitous social network platforms to deliver learning content that can be further discussed in face-to-face networking sessions. This flipped classroom model will only work if the learning content provided is coherent and appropriate to the needs of the micro-enterprise owner target group. Partners will also provide the necessary CPD resources to support the work of VET professionals in these new environments and an induction to pedagogy training course for micro-enterprise owners to support quality assurance in the peer-to-peer learning environments.

This is why the research including VET professionals is essential to identify topics to be addressed in the modular CPD curriculum for VET professionals to support their integration into the new peer-to-peer learning networks proposed.

Distinctive Features of VET in Lithuania

The Lithuanian education system comprises general education, initial VET at lower, upper and postsecondary levels, continuing VET and higher education (college and university studies)¹. Lithuania unfortunately has one of the lowest lifelong learning indicators in Europe and, despite European and national financial support, participation in adult learning remains low². According to Eurostat, participation in lifelong learning was lower than in the majority of other EU countries (5.8% of adults aged 25-64) and below the EU 2020 benchmark (15%). A large share of the adult population aged 25-64 (26% in 2015) has completed general education programmes instead of VET³. Therefore, increasing access to lifelong learning and VET for adults while also improving their qualification level is a challenging task for the education and training system in Lithuania.

In 2014 Lithuanian Minister for Education and Science approved the action plan for VET development 2014–2016 which identify the areas for VET development and propose a preliminary list of projects of strategic importance for VET development. As it is identified by Kvalifikacijų ir profesinio mokymo plėtros centras (Cedefop ReferNet Lithuania, 2016)¹, the following measures are foreseen in the action plan that will continue until 2022 through projects supported by EU funds and the national budget: optimisation of the network of VET institutions and effective use of infrastructure; optimisation of the supply of VET programmes and improvement of their quality and relevance; improvement of the system for the assessment and recognition of competences; improvement of training of teachers working in VET institutions; improvement of management and training quality in VET; provision of guidance and counselling services. All these measures are also aimed at improving the image of VET as an education sector of high quality in Lithuania. A project to promote the public image of VET and lifelong learning is also foreseen (2017-20)¹.

In addition to formal VET, non-formal VET programmes are also available and their implementation may be set by the organisation that requests training under these programmes or finances any such training¹. This form of VET is usually applied in continuing VET and is aimed for the acquisition of a vocational qualification or individual competences. It is carried out in various approaches: learning at the workplace, attending non-formal training courses, distance learning, etc. Moreover, to support participation in CVET for employers and employees tax incentives, grant schemes, paid and unpaid training leave and payback clauses are applied¹, and Programme for strengthening non-formal adult education and continuing training for 2016-23 was adopted².

It is also important to underline Lithuanian progress strategy 2014-20 has set the goal to strengthen creativity, entrepreneurship and leadership in education. These competences are developed through the subject of fundamentals of business and economics. As it is provided by Kvalifikacijų ir profesinio mokymo plėtros centras (Cedefop ReferNet Lithuania, 2016)⁴, many VET institutions supplement their training programmes with subjects for acquisition of this competence (e.g. practical business training, fundamentals of business management, marketing and management of services, business ethics, fundamentals of accounting), and VET providers by themselves participate in various courses offered by accredited teachers training institutions for their professional development.

¹ Kvalifikacijų ir profesinio mokymo plėtros centras (2016). Vocational education and training in Europe – Lithuania. Cedefop ReferNet VET in Europe reports. http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2016/2016_CR_LT.pdf

² Cedefop (2017). Lithuania - policy actions to strengthen non-formal adult education and continuing training. <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu>

³ Eurostat database. <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>

⁴ Kvalifikacijų ir profesinio mokymo plėtros centras (2016). Key competences in vocational education and training – Lithuania. Cedefop ReferNet thematic perspectives series. http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2016/ReferNet_LT_KC.pdf

METHODOLOGY

Research on VET professionals in ME2ME project was conducted in the following approaches:

- Organizing focus groups with small numbers of microenterprise owners;
- Conducting one-to-one interviews either face-to-face or by telephone;
- Circulating a questionnaire to selected respondents.

Kaunas Science and Technology Park followed the survey strategy by creating an online questionnaire. The link to the questionnaire was later sent via e-mail targeting VET providers in Lithuania and inviting to participate in the survey. The list of possible respondents to whom invitation was sent included those VET providers that Kaunas Science and Technology Park was cooperating with in various projects and activities.

The questionnaire was created by project partner INNEO and consisted of 20 questions. It was divided into 4 question groups:

- XXIX. General Information
- XXX. Provision of Business Management Skills
- XXXI. Demand for Business Management Training
- XXXII. Potential of Peer-to-Peer Learning

It was assured that the questionnaire was clear to the respondent and easy to fill. In the beginning of a questionnaire the project was described also indicating the aim of a research. Participants had been given contact information to reach experts from Kaunas Science and Technology Park if any questions occur. The duration of the survey took approximately 15 minutes but varied with each respondent. None of the respondents has given any negative feedback about the methodology or questionnaire itself.

To get the most reliable and valid data different question types and scales in the questionnaire was used: different 5-point Likert scales, two-point questions, matrix question, ranking question, open questions, single and multiple choice questions. We also asked participants for general suggestions considering our project, their interest to participate in further project activities or receive information related to the project.

The sample included responses of 20 VET providers from Lithuania in total. Respondents were representing private and public institutions, which were different in size and established in various years, meaning older or recently opened bodies. Based on the descriptions provided by the respondents most of these institutions were conducting business management or related trainings. Some of the VET professionals were also owners of VET institutions they represented.

The participants were recruited mostly among our stakeholders and personal and professional networks of Kaunas Science and Technology Park experts. They were also asked to forward the questionnaires to other VET professionals who met the profile and could be interested in the project. Therefore some of the respondents might represent the same institutions.

RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE:

General Information

Questions 1-5 - Summary

The purpose of questions 1-5 were to get to know our target group of VET professionals and learn about the organizations that they affiliate themselves to. The results of those questions are as follows:

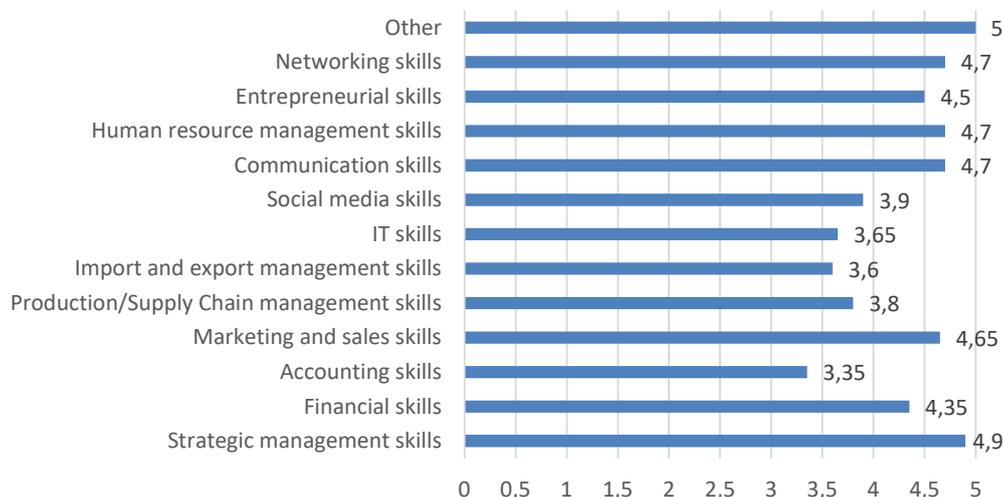
- Trainings provided by VET institutions that the respondents represent include: innovation management, human resource management, communication, technology transfer, entrepreneurship, IT, marketing, sales, strategic management, finances, R&D management, business development, project management, business administration, public management. Some of the respondents pointed out innovative educational methods applied in their institutions and participation in EU funded education/life long learning related projects.
- 30% (6 respondents) of VET professionals represented public and 70% (14 respondents) - private education institutions.
- 65% (13 institutions) of represented institutions consisted of 10 and less educators, 20% (4 institutions) - from 11 to 20, and 10% (2 institutions) - of more than 21 educators.
- 3 respondents (15% of all respondents) were from the institutions established at 1998 and 4 respondents (20%) from the ones established at 2001. Two respondents (each time 10% of all respondents) represented institutions established at 2003, 2007, 2009, 2014 and 2017, while the ones established at 2010, 2012 and 2016 each had 1 respondent (each time 5% of all respondents) representing the institution.
- 40% (8 respondents) of VET professionals were owners of institutions by themselves.

Provision of Business Management Skills

The second part of the questionnaire was aimed at identifying business management skills that are the most important for developing a successful business according to the point of view of the respondents – VET professionals, the skills that are actually being developed through trainings in institutions that respondents represent, the format of those trainings, the barriers VET units face while providing business management training, and their inclusion in knowledge networks.

Question 6 – What do you consider to be the most important skills for running a successful business?

6. What do you consider to be the most important skills for running a successful business?

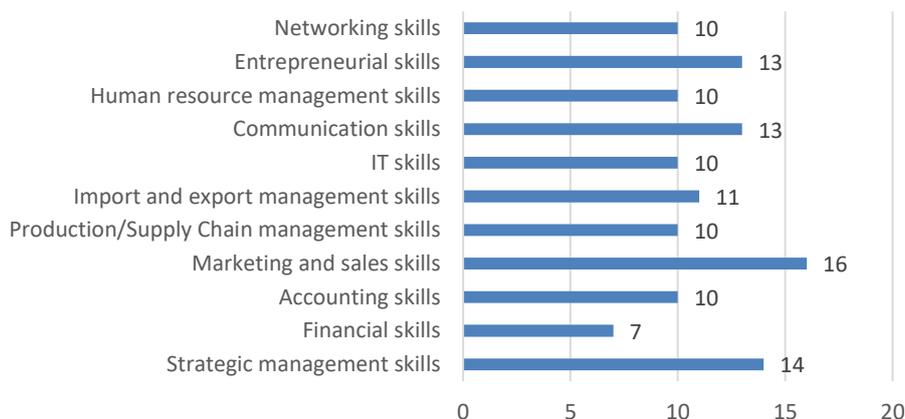


The most important skills for running a successful business were evaluated on the scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is not important at all and 5 – very important. According to Lithuanian VET professionals very important skills are: strategic management skills (average value 4.9/5.0), networking, human resource management and communication skills (average evaluation for each is 4.7/5.0), marketing and sales skills (4.65/5.0), entrepreneurial skills (4.5/5.0), and financial skills (4.35/5.0). As important ones are considered social media skills (3.9/5.0), production/supply chain management (3.8/5.0), IT (3.65/5.0), import and export management (3.6/5.0) and accounting (3.35/5.0) skills. Other very important skills pointed out by VET professionals include *innovation management, common knowledge about the local market, leadership and process management* skills.

Question 7 – Which skills from the list below are included in the training courses taught in your institution?

Out of these very important skills for development of successful business as evaluated by VET professionals, strategic management skills are trained in 14 institutions the respondents represent, networking and human resource management – in 10 institutions, communication – in 13, marketing and sales – in 16, entrepreneurial – in 13, and financial – only in 7 institutions. Evaluated as important skills, IT, production/supply chain management and accounting, are developed through training courses in 10 institutions. While import and export skills are developed in 11 institutions. Therefore financial skills are evaluated as very important for successfully running business, but VET institutions are focusing more on marketing and sales, communication or entrepreneurship, with financial training being not as common in their curriculum.

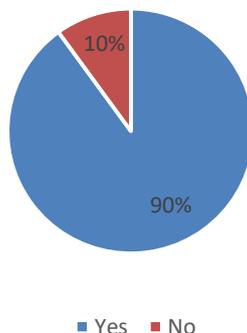
7. Which skills from the list below are included in the training courses taught in your institution?



Question 8 – Have you provided any business management training in the past 3 years?

Out of 20 respondents 90% (19 VET professionals) provided business management training in the past 3 years. This means the most part of the respondents from the sample is providing the actual picture of VET sector that exists nowadays in Lithuania.

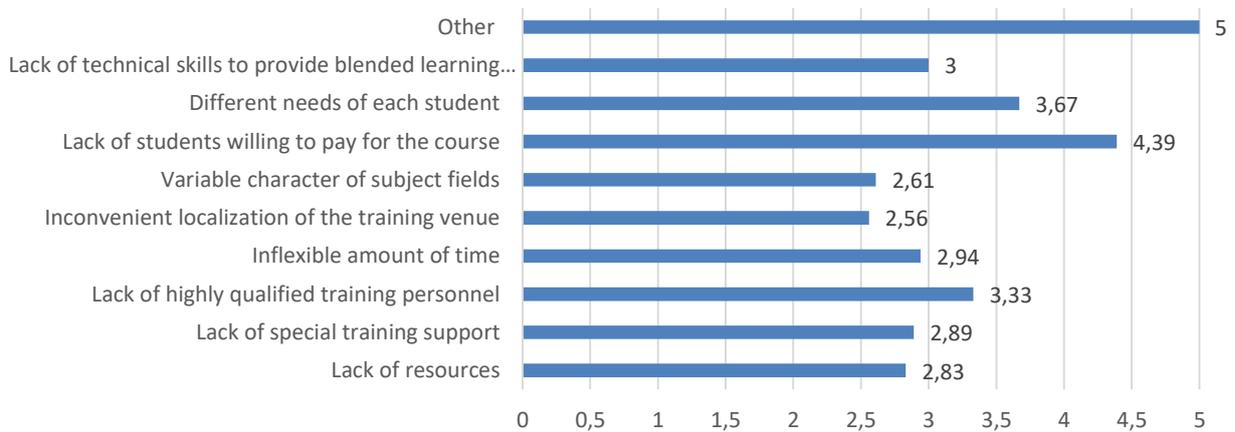
8. Have you provided any business management training in the past 3 years?



Question 9 – What barriers do your VET unit face to provide business management training?

The barriers VET providers face in business management training were evaluated on the scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 – strongly agree, enabling to identify the most common barriers the respondents face. Lack of students willing to pay for the trainings was stressed as the most common barrier (average value 4.39/5.0). The other barriers to consider are different needs of each student (3.67/5.0) or lack of highly qualified training personnel to run the courses (3.33/5.0). Whereas indifferent evaluation by VET professionals was given to lack of technical skills to provide blended learning resources (3.0/5.0), inflexible amount of time (2.94/5.0), lack of special training support (2.89/5.0) or resources (2.83/5.0), variable character of subject fields (2.61/5.0), and inconvenient localization of the training venue (2.56/5.0). The former ones are not considered as barriers for business management training by the respondents. However, VET professionals pointed out *lack of student involvement* as a barrier to provide their services.

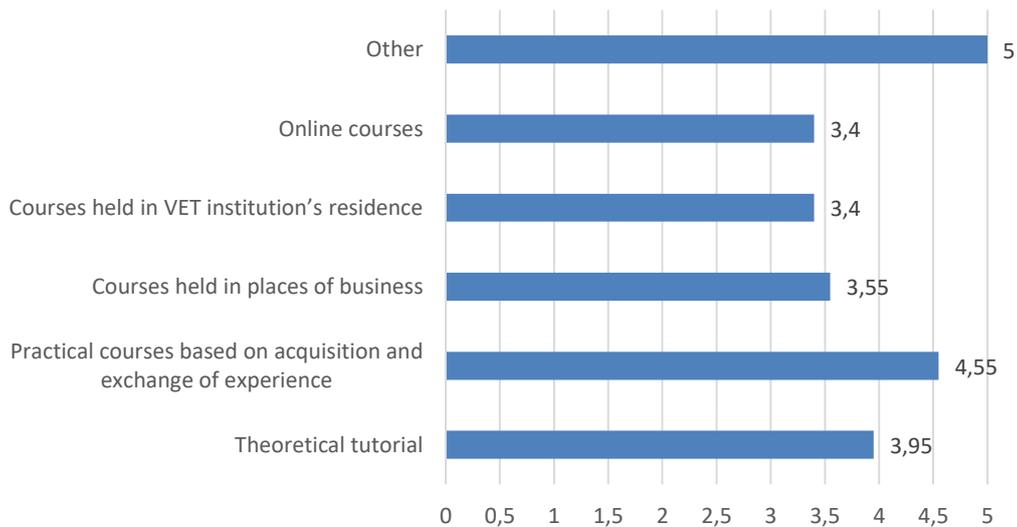
9. What barriers do your VET unit face to provide business management training?



Question 10 – What form does the training provided by your institution take?

The scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 – strongly agree, helped to reveal the format of training provided in VET institutions. The most frequently training is provided through practical courses based on acquisition and exchange of experience (average evaluation 4.55/5.0). Another frequent training form is theoretical tutorial (3.95/5.0). VET professionals also pointed out *sessions with professionals* as other usual formats of training. This question revealed different preferences in terms of a place to provide the training - some trainings are held in places of business (3.55/5.0), some online or in VET institution’s residence (average evaluation for each is (3.4/5.0). Since none of these answers were evaluated highly on average, it is suggested that different institutions tend to choose different places (online, at their own premises or at the premises of business organizations) to provide the training.

10. What form does the training provided by your institution take?



Question 11 – Do you share knowledge and experience within any education providers network that you belong in?

Considering the inclusion in knowledge networks, 85% of VET professionals (13 respondents) stated they do share knowledge and experience within a network of education providers. Therefore respondents tend to belong to networks to share knowledge, practices and experience.

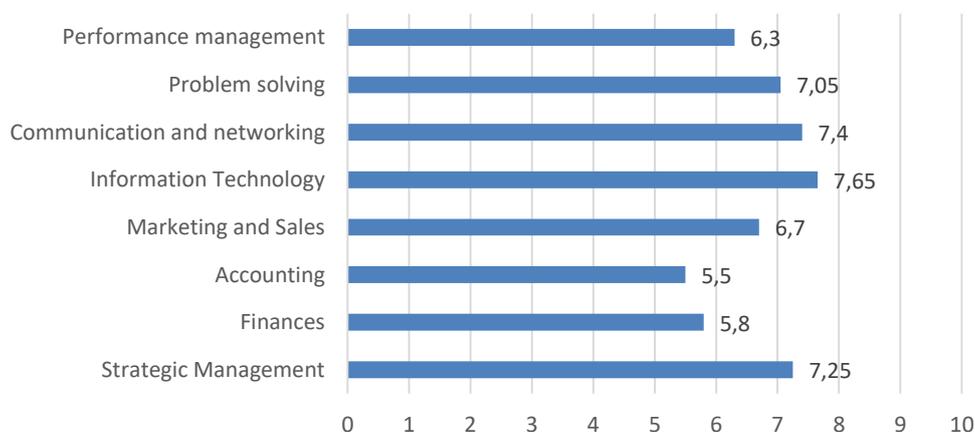
Demand for Business Management Training

The third part of a questionnaire was aimed at revealing the perceived demand for business management training and the attitude towards new resources for being developed: VET professionals were asked to assess the knowledge of their students, identify the learning content they would like to add to their training offer and whether they would like to provide these new training resources, how much time they are willing to dedicate.

Question 12 – How would you assess the knowledge of your students about the following areas on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is very weak and 10 is very knowledgeable?

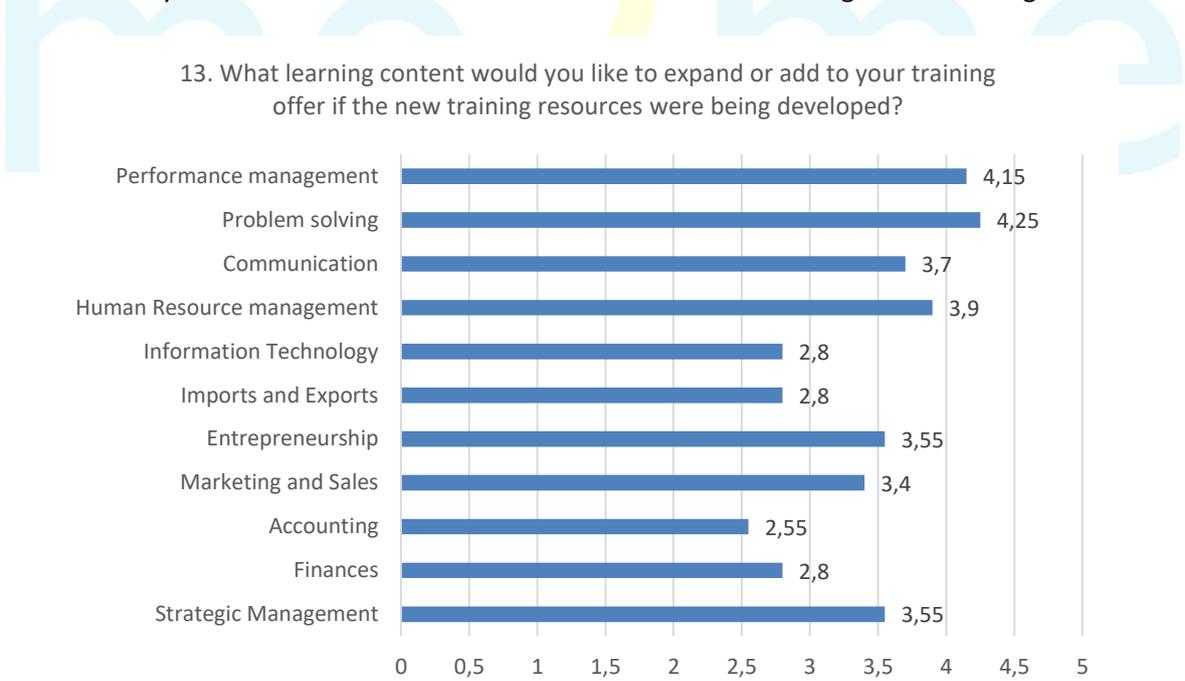
VET professionals evaluated the knowledge of their students on the scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is very weak and 10 is very knowledgeable. The best rated knowledge fields include knowledge in information technology (on average evaluated 7.65/10.0), communication and networking (7.4/10.0), strategic management (7.25/10.0) and problem solving (7.05/10.0). Knowledge in marketing and sales (6.7/10.0) as well as performance management (6.3/10.0) evaluated only slightly more than average on the scale, whereas the knowledge in finances (5.8/10.0) and accounting (5.5/10.0) was rated the lowest. It is important to underline that VET professionals evaluated financial skills as very important for successfully running business, but financial training is not common in the curriculum of their institutions. This could explain the lack of knowledge in finances among the students. Also, students' knowledge in information technologies might be the best rated since IT sector itself is very strong in Lithuania, with a number of highly professional IT engineers in the workforce market.

12. How would you assess the knowledge of your students about the following areas on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is very weak and 10 is very knowledgeable?



Question 13 – What learning content would you like to expand or add to your training offer if the new training resources were being developed?

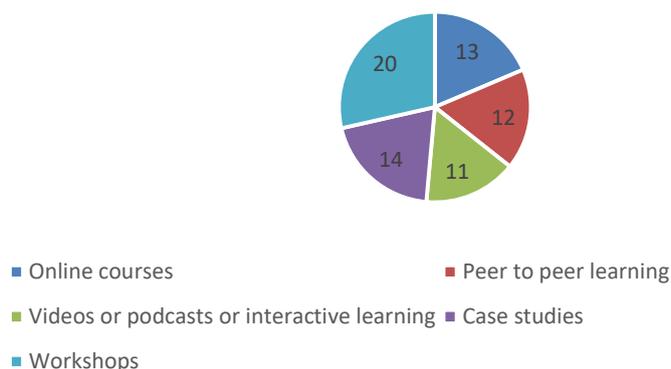
On the scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 – strongly agree, VET professionals evaluated the learning content they would like to add while expanding their training resources. The content rated the highest includes problem solving (average evaluation 4.25/5.0) and performance management (4.15/5.0). Knowledge in problem solving was one of the best rated while knowledge in performance management received an average evaluation by VET professionals when rating their students’ knowledge. However, VET professionals would still prefer to include this content to their trainings. The respondents would also like to add management of human resources (3.9/5.0), communication (3.7/5.0), entrepreneurship and strategic management (average evaluation of both is 3.55/5.0). Some of them would be willing to add marketing and sales to their teaching curricula as well (3.4/5.0). However, VET professionals were rather indifferent considering to add information technology, imports and exports, finances (average evaluation of all three is 2.8/5.0) and accounting (2.55/5.0). It is clear that even considered as highly important for business, the knowledge in finances is not developed in a number of institutions with VET professionals not willing to add this content in their courses, and as a consequence the evaluation of students’ knowledge in finances is rather low. Very similar situation can be seen with courses and knowledge in accounting.



Question 14 – How would you like to provide these new training resources?

All of the respondents would prefer the form of a workshop considering these newly added training resources. 14 VET professionals (70% of all respondents) would use case studies, 13 (65%) would prefer the courses to be held online, 12 (60%) would like to provide the training in a form of peer to peer learning and 11 (55%) would like to use videos and podcasts or interactive learning methods.

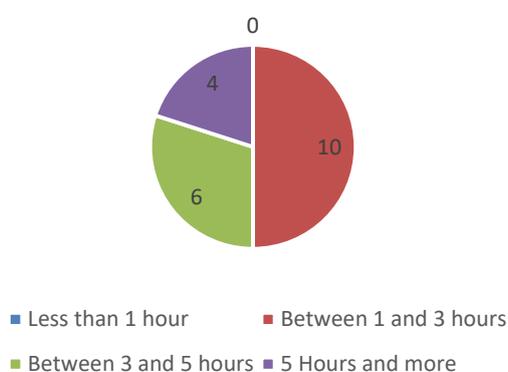
14. How would you like to provide these new training resources?



Question 15 – How much time do you think the course should take each week to be manageable for education provider?

10 VET professionals (50% of all respondents) would prefer the course would take between 1 and 3 hours each week in order for it to be manageable, 6 (30%) would be willing to hold longer courses - between 3 and 5 hours and 4 (20%) – 5 hours and more. None of the respondents would prefer the course to take less than 1 hour per week. It might be influenced by willingness to keep the quality of the course. Also, the lectures are typically combined of at least 2 academic hours in higher education institutions, which might be the reason why shorter trainings are not even considered.

15. How much time do you think the course should take each week to be manageable for education provider?



Potential of Peer-to-Peer Learning

The fourth part of a questionnaire was meant to evaluate the potential of peer-to-peer learning. The opinion of VET professionals was asked on the most important expertise that students would benefit to receive from micro enterprise owners. Respondents also identified the most effective approaches for peer-to-peer learning.

Question 16 – Do you agree with the statements below?

Following the scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 – strongly agree, respondents were asked to evaluate the degree to which they agree with the statements on peer-to-peer learning. 17

VET professionals agree that there are skills that are needed to become a successful entrepreneur that come with experience and can't be taught in any kind of school/training, and only 3 of all respondents did not agree with this statement. 11 respondents agree and 6 strongly agree there is a potential in peer-to-peer learning among micro-enterprise owners, with 3 VET professionals being indifferent about this statement. 10 VET professionals agree and 5 strongly agree that the owners of micro-enterprises would be willing to share their knowledge and skills if provided the opportunity and technical skills to do so, with 5 respondents neither agreeing nor disagreeing with the statement. The answers indicate the positive attitude towards peer-to-peer learning, its potential and the willingness of micro-enterprise owners to share their expertise, however, it also shows there is a belief not all skills can be taught and there are the ones that come only with experience.



Question 17 – What specific knowledge/skills/expertise would be the most important and effective for students to receive from other micro enterprise owners in peer-to-peer learning?

On the scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 – strongly agree, VET professionals evaluated the specific expertise which to their opinion would be the most important for students to receive from other micro enterprise owners through peer-to-peer learning. Most of the fields that were listed were agreed to be important for the students to learn from micro-enterprise owners by the respondents. VET professionals rated performance management (average evaluation 4.55/5.0), problem solving (4.35/5.0), strategic management (4.2/5.0), entrepreneurship, marketing and sales (average evaluation for both is 4.15/5.0), communication (4.0/5.0), production/supply chain management and human resources management (average evaluation for both is 3.95/5.0) as important, while finances (3.75/5.0), imports and exports (3.7/5.0), IT (3.55/5.0) and accounting (3.35/5.0) received lower evaluations.

Retrieved answers show a tendency of VET professionals to focus on problem solving and performance management when deciding the most important skills which could be taught by trainings or peer-to-peer learning with micro-enterprise owners. However, even considered as highly important for business, but not fully covered by institutions of VET education and in terms of knowledge of the students evaluated rather low, finances and accounting are not those expertise

fields respondents were thinking to be important or willing to include them to trainings or peer-to-peer learning.

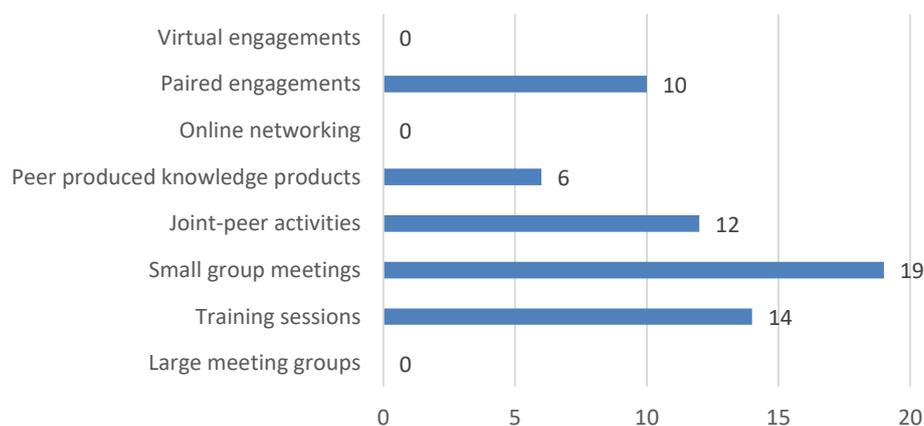
17. What specific knowledge/skills/expertise would be the most important and effective for students to receive from other micro enterprise owners in peer-to-peer learning?



Question 18 – What approaches do you think would be the most effective in peer-to-peer learning?

From the list of approaches VET professionals evaluated the most effective in peer-to-peer learning to their opinion. 95% of respondents (19 VET professionals) chose small group meetings, 70% (14) – training sessions and 60% (12) – joint-peer activities as ones of the most effective for this kind of training. Some of the approaches received a lower appreciation from VET professionals to be used in peer-to-peer learning, such as paired engagements, chosen by 50% of the respondents (10), or peer produced knowledge products, chosen by 30% (6) of VET professionals. Virtual engagements, online networking and large meeting groups was chosen by none of the respondents indicating peer-to-peer learning tends to take approaches involving only small groups of people that meet physically and not virtually.

18. What approaches do you think would be the most effective in peer-to-peer learning?



SUMMARY

Provision of Business Management Skills

It is important to mention that none of the skills included in the questionnaire were rated as non-important for successful business development. According to Lithuanian VET professionals very important skills are: strategic management, networking, human resource management, communication, marketing and sales, entrepreneurial, social media, production/supply chain management, IT, import and export management, and accounting skills. Other skills pointed out by VET professionals include innovation management, common knowledge about the local market, leadership and process management.

Out of these, some skills considered as important are developed through training courses only in half institutions represented by the respondents. Moreover, financial skills are evaluated as very important for successfully running business, but most frequently the focus is put on marketing and sales, communication, strategic management or entrepreneurship, with financial training being not as common in the curriculum of represented institutions. VET institutions prefer practical courses based on acquisition and exchange of experience or theoretical tutorials and have different preferences in terms of a place to provide the training - some trainings are held in places of business, some online or in VET institution's residence. However, the main barrier VET providers face in business management training is a lack of students willing to pay for the trainings.

Demand for Business Management Training

According to VET professionals their students are the most knowledgeable in information technology, communication, networking, strategic management and problem solving, whereas the knowledge in finances and accounting was rated the lowest. It is important to underline that the respondents evaluated financial skills as very important for successfully running business, but financial training is not common in the curriculum of their institutions. This could explain the lack of knowledge in finances among the students. Even if the students possess knowledge in some fields VET professionals would still prefer to include this content to their trainings if new resources are developed. On the other hand, they are not willing to add the content which their students might really need, such as finances or accounting.

Still, the respondents are flexible considering the form of the new training, whether it will be in a format of a workshop, case study, online course, of peer to peer learning, video or podcast, or interactive learning. VET professionals prefer the course would take between 1 and 3 hours each week (in some cases even longer) in order for it to be manageable, but none of the respondents would prefer the course to take less than 1 hour per week. It might be influenced by willingness to keep the quality of the course.

Potential of Peer-to-Peer Learning

VET professionals have positive attitude toward peer-to-peer learning among micro-enterprise owners and believe the same attitude is found from the business owners side as well. However, they do agree there are essential skills that come with experience and can't be taught in any kind of training. From the list of approaches VET professionals evaluated the most effective in peer-to-peer

learning to their opinion virtual engagements, online networking and large meeting groups was chosen by none of the respondents indicating they are thinking of peer-to-peer learning as a small group of people that meets training sessions and engages in joint-peer activities physically and not virtually. When pointing out the specific expertise which to their opinion would be the most important for students to receive from other micro enterprise owners through peer-to-peer learning, VET professionals focus on the same skills underlined in previous answers - performance management, problem solving, strategic management, entrepreneurship, marketing and sales, and communication.

General summary

Throughout all the questionnaire VET professionals tend to stress the importance of several key skills – problem solving, strategic and performance management, entrepreneurship, marketing and sales, and communication, when deciding the most important skills which could be taught by trainings or peer-to-peer learning with micro-enterprise owners. However, even considered as highly important for business, but frequently not included in the programmes of VET education and thus rarely possessed by students as an expertise – knowledge of finances and accounting, is still not considered to be included into future trainings or peer-to-peer learning by VET professionals. The respondents showed a positive attitude towards peer-to-peer learning as a method for micro-enterprise owners to share their knowledge, because they believe some skills cannot be taught by trainings. However, even though being flexible in different training formats and forms, they do think peer-to-peer learning should not be held virtually, but rather include small groups of people to engage in joint-activities and training sessions. This is a very important insight from the shareholders' perspective since peer-to-peer learning is a new learning method provided by public VET institutions in Lithuania. However, private VET organizations tend to organize meetings, sessions or networking events for business owners.

4.6. UK

4.6.1. NATIONAL AUDIT REPORT

INTRODUCTION

This report summarises the key findings to emerge from empirical research undertaken with a group of micro-businesses in the United Kingdom (UK) as part of the first Intellectual Output of the ME2ME project.

There are five key sections to the report:

- Overall aim and Research approach
- Characteristics of the surveyed businesses
- Development needs of micro-businesses
- Learning and skills development in micro-businesses
- Summary and Initial Implications

Overall Aim and Research Approach

The overall aim of the empirical research was to develop insights into the learning and skills development needs of individuals managing and developing micro-businesses.

In so doing, the research would:

- Identify the specific skills assets within the micro-business community that could be used to support the development of micro-businesses, particularly through peer-to-peer learning networks
- Understand the learning needs and learning preferences of the owner-managers of micro-businesses, with a focus on the type of learning they prefer and the learning platforms and environments used to acquire learning
- Identify gaps in current vocational and education training (VET) provision which could be addressed through the ME2ME project.

To this end, the empirical research engaged with the owner-managers of micro-businesses at different stages of development ranging from businesses which had been trading less than year to those businesses who had been trading for more than 10 years. Participants to be interviewed were identified through two routes:

- Via the networks of the project team from SFEDI with micro-businesses in the UK and those organisations working with micro-businesses
- A snowballing sampling strategy where respondents were asked to identify others who may wish to engage with the empirical research.

Participants were sent the survey developed by Kaunas Science and Technology Park with a covering email explaining the overall aim of the ME2ME project, the purpose of the research and the ways in which the outcomes from the survey would be used to shape further stages of the project.

The experiences of completing the survey were generally positive, although a number of surveyed businesses did raise issues with the clarity and overlap between a couple of questions (e.g. those related to the knowledge of different aspects of business development) and the need for a ‘not-appropriate’ or ‘not applicable’ option in a number of questions. They commented that current and future plans for development of the business did not map onto certain options within the questions (e.g. importing and exporting) and/or certain activities (e.g. accounting) were sub-contracted to others external to the business who had specific expertise. As a result, certain options within the questions were not answered or notes were attached to assist in interpreting the responses.

The comments provided an opportunity for a discussion with the respondents and to further reflect on their experiences, particularly the learning and skills needs of owner-managers of micro businesses, learning preferences and styles and responses required to address their learning and skills development needs.

In total, 18 questionnaires were completed. The outcomes from the empirical research form the basis of the next three sections of the report.

SURVEY RESULTS

Business Characteristics: An Overview

As noted above in Section 1, the first part of the survey explored the characteristics of the surveyed businesses and their owner-managers.

The 18 surveyed businesses offered a diversity of products and services ranging from music business development and project management for creative businesses to pet portraits and guided walking tours. However, the majority of the surveyed businesses offered some sort of service to individual consumers or businesses (see Table 1). This reflects the wider sectoral distribution of micro-businesses in the UK, with approximately two-thirds of the micro-business community operating in the service sector (Rhodes, 2017).

Table 1: Sectoral distribution of the surveyed businesses

Nature of business activity	Frequency
Retail/Personal services	4 (22.2%)
Business services	11 (61.1%)
Digital and creative	1 (5.6%)
Education and training	2 (11.1%)
Total no. of businesses	18 (100%)

In terms of the size of the surveyed businesses, there were a number of businesses who employed one people, whilst there were a group who employed over five employees (see Table 2). The average number of employees amongst the surveyed businesses was four employees. As with the nature of business activity, this reflects the size distribution of the wider micro-business population in the UK (Rhodes, 2017).

Table 2: Size of the surveyed businesses – Number of employees

Number of employees	Frequency
1	5 (27.8%)
2	4 (22.2%)
3	3 (16.7%)
4	0 (0%)
5	2 (11.1%)
6	1 (5.6%)
7	1 (5.6%)
8	0 (0%)
9	1 (5.6%)
10	1 (5.6%)
Total no. of businesses	18 (100%)

The surveyed businesses varied in terms of number of years trading. Whilst one business had started in 1996 and they were currently employing 10 people, another business had started in 2018 and they were employing one member of staff. On average, the surveyed businesses had been trading for seven years. This supports data from other surveys of micro-businesses in terms of evidence of a U-shaped curve with a large number of micro-businesses who have been trading for less than three years and a smaller group of more established micro-businesses which have been trading for 10 or more years (NESTA and Sage, 2017).

Table 3: Date of establishment of the surveyed businesses

Date of establishment	Frequency
1990-2000	3 (16.7%)
2001-2005	1 (5.6%)
2006-2010	2 (11.1%)
2011-2015	8 (44.4%)
2016-2018	4 (22.2%)
Total no. of businesses	18 (100%)

All survey respondents were the owner-manager of their business. This is important in light of research by commentators such as Gibb (1997) and Bridge and O'Neil (2017) which highlight the impact of developing the knowledge and skills of the owner-manager on the development of a micro-business.

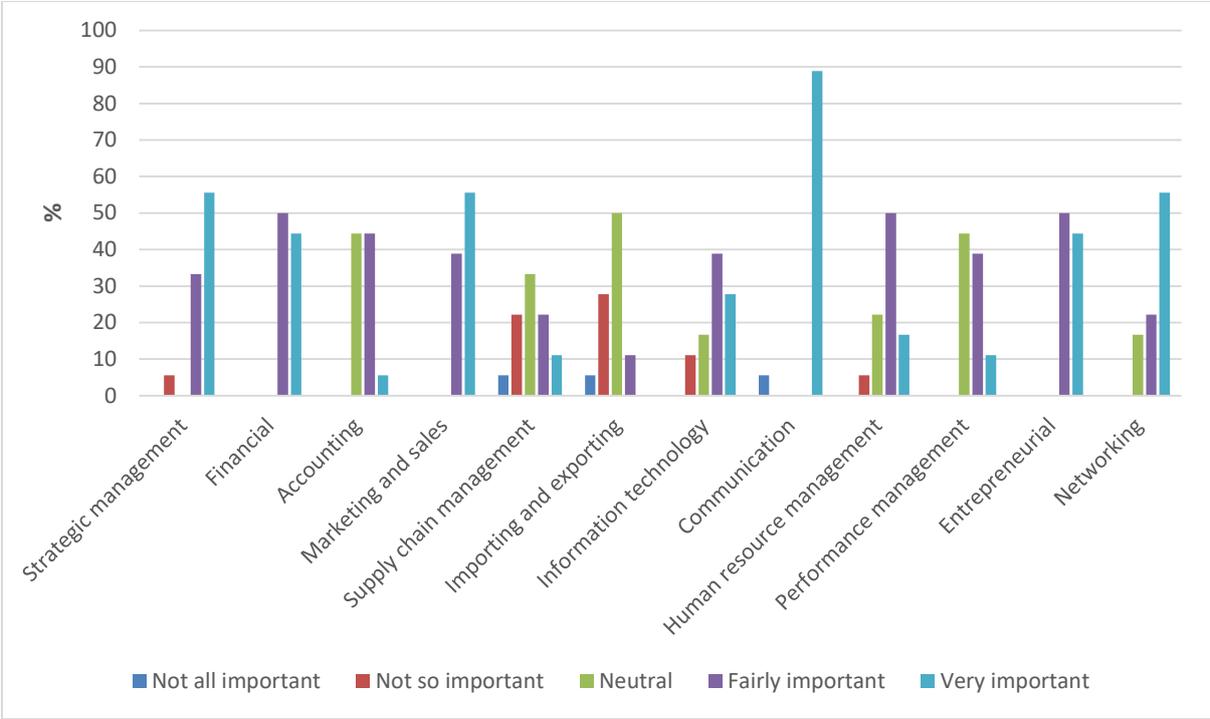
Development needs of micro-businesses

The second section of the survey contained a set of questions related to the knowledge and skills of the owner-manager and the development needs of the business.

In terms of perceptions of the skills required to run a micro-business, Figure 1 highlights that softer skills were perceived as very important by the surveyed owner-managers. This included communication skills, entrepreneurial skills and networking skills. In comparison, more functional skill sets, such as finance, marketing, people management, were rated as fairly to very important.

There were a group of skills which were perceived as neutral to not so important and these included importing/exporting, production and supply chain management and accounting.

Figure 1: Perceptions of the skills required to successfully run a business amongst the surveyed businesses



These perceptions reflect not only the activities of the surveyed businesses but also plans for the near to mid-term development and the associated learning and skills development needs. For example, there is evidence to demonstrate that micro-businesses export less than medium and large businesses and micro-businesses will rely on externals such as bookkeepers and accountants to assist in managing the finances of the business (APPG for Micro-Businesses, 2011). Plans for engagement with (new) market and product development and/or the use of external stakeholders will shape the skills perceived to be important in developing and managing the business.

This raises an issue related to understanding the plans and objectives of owner-managers of micro-businesses when developing the curriculum and peer to peer learning resources

The majority (66 per cent) of the surveyed businesses had attended some form of business and management training in the last three years. The survey highlighted that different types of business and management skill were acquired in different ways. As shown in Figure 2 skills such as supply chain management, importing and exporting and networking were largely acquired through experience or ‘learning by doing’, whilst strategic management skills, performance management and marketing skills were acquired through training and experience.

Figure 2: Acquisition of skills by the surveyed businesses



Therefore, there is evidence to suggest that more functional business skills were acquired through a combination of training and experience, whilst softer skills were acquired through experience.

In terms of the development of peer to peer learning resources as part of the project, this raises an issue about the emphasis placed on learning business development ‘about’, ‘for’ and ‘through’ (QAA, 2018).

Three issues were identified as key barriers to engaging with business and management training: lack of time, lack of high quality provision, lack of specialist provision for micro-businesses (see Table 4).

Table 4: Perceived barriers to engagement with learning and training

Barrier	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Total no. of businesses
Lack of time	0 (0%)	2 (11.1%)	6 (33.3%)	8 (44.4%)	2 (11.1%)	18 (100%)
Cost	0 (0%)	2 (11.1%)	7 (38.9%)	6 (33.3%)	2 (11.1%)	17 (100%)
Lack of high quality training	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	6 (33.3%)	8 (44.4%)	2 (11.1%)	16 (100%)
Lack of special training	0 (0%)	2 (11.1%)	5 (27.8%)	9 (50.0%)	1 (5.6%)	17 (100%)
Lack of e-learning material	0 (0%)	9 (50.0%)	7 (38.9%)	2 (11.1%)	0 (0%)	18 (100%)
Lack of short courses	0 (0%)	5 (27.8%)	6 (33.3%)	5 (27.8%)	2 (11.1%)	18 (100%)

In terms of lack of time, over the last 10 years, a number of surveys have identified lack of time (and cost) as a barrier to micro (and small) businesses to engaging with training (APPG for Micro-

Businesses, 2011). Over and above more effective time management, these surveys that there is little scope for addressing lack of time as a barrier. As such, it is suggested that it may be more of a perceived than real barrier to engagement with business and management training.

Within the context of the project, there is more scope to address issues related to lack of high quality and/or specialist provision. In terms of the latter, research undertaken by SFEDI (2008) highlights that access to specialist learning and skills development provision can be influenced by:

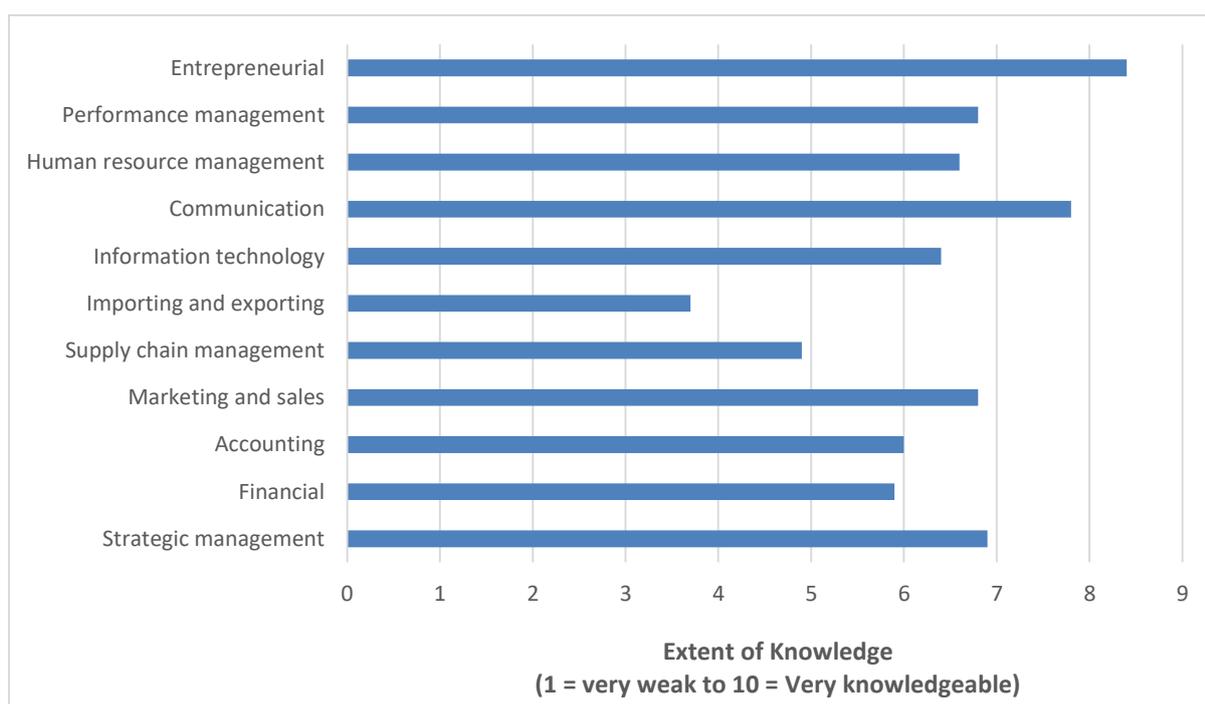
- Size of business – for example, there may be provision for businesses with more than five or ten employees
- Stage of development – for example, within the UK, there is publicly-funded provision for start-ups and growth businesses but not businesses looking to survive or consolidate their current position
- Nature of business activity – for example, it is difficult for micro-businesses in business to consumer (B2C) sectors to access publicly-funded support across the UK
- Nature of business development aspirations – in the UK, there has been a focus over the last five years on providing support to businesses with high-growth potential or ‘scalability’. This has had a particular impact on the ability of micro-businesses with more qualitative growth aspirations to access support.

The majority (66 per cent) of the surveyed businesses identified that they share knowledge and skills with other micro-businesses and all of the surveyed businesses commented that they had abilities and skills which would be of use to other micro-businesses. This provides evidence of the willingness of the surveyed business owner-managers to engage and interact with other micro-business owner-managers.

The research would suggest that there is willingness for micro-businesses to exchange experiences with other micro-businesses which can be used to shape engagement strategies.

The survey provided an opportunity to explore perceptions of strengths and areas for development in knowledge of different areas in managing and developing a micro-business. Figure 3 shows that the surveyed owner-managers had perceived strengths in entrepreneurship, communication and strategic management. In comparison, key areas for development emerged as supply chain management and importing and exporting. As noted above, these areas for development may reflect the nature of business development objectives for the near to mid-term (e.g. an investment in marketing vs. importing and exporting) as well as the nature of the products and services offered by the businesses.

Figure 3: Self-assessment of business knowledge and skills by the surveyed businesses



Learning needs and preferences

The third section of the survey provided an opportunity to reflect on the learning needs, styles and preferences of micro-business owner-managers.

Figure 4 highlights that the surveyed owner-managers have a bundle of learning needs related to: marketing and sales, performance management, entrepreneurship, strategic management and financial management. In comparison, fewer surveyed businesses expressed needs related to supply chain management, importing and exporting, information technology and communication skills.

This pattern of needs mirrors the findings of other surveys of small businesses such as those undertaken by the Enterprise Research Centre (see, for example, ERC, 2016). However, it is important that the needs of each surveyed business were different which will reflect development plans at personal and business level. In addition, discussions with the surveyed businesses identified that the categories of needs could be interpreted in different ways (e.g. finance, performance management and entrepreneurship).

This suggests that the patterns within Figure 4 need to be explored further within the next stage of the project, to ensure that learning materials are developed in response to clearly defined groupings of need.

Figure 4: Learning and skill development needs of the surveyed businesses

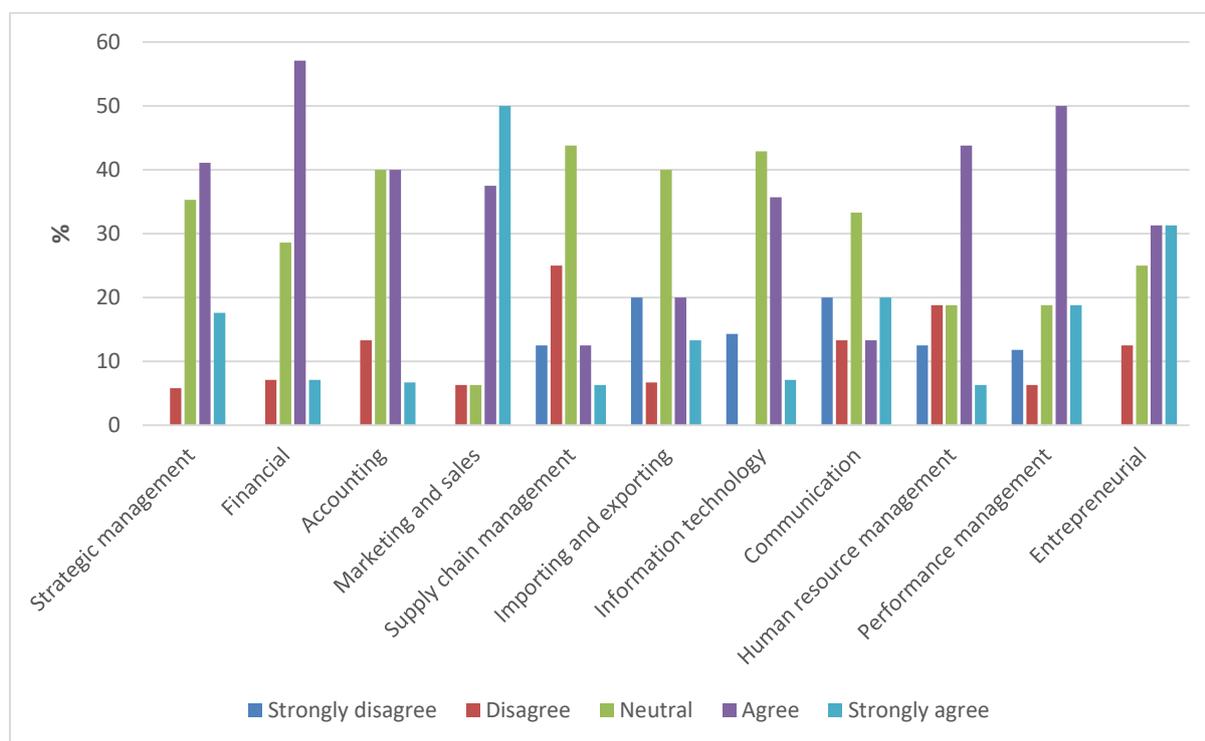


Table 5 highlights that the learning preferences of the surveyed owner-managers. Peer to peer learning and workshops, and to a lesser extent, videos and podcasts were perceived as preferable ways of accessing new learning. Again, this needs further exploration in the development of the learning materials as it is important to achieve alignment between needs, learning outcomes and learning pedagogies and methods of delivery.

Table 5: Learning preferences of the surveyed businesses

Learning preference	Frequency
Online courses	8 (44.4%)
Peer to peer learning	15 (83.3%)
Video podcasts	12 (66.7%)
Case studies	6 (33.3%)
Workshops	14 (77.8%)
Total no. of businesses	18 (100%)

Note:

1. Column totals may not add up to 100 per cent as multiple responses were allowed

The surveyed owner-managers identified a range of preferences for the time they would be willing to invest in their own learning and skills development. The majority (55 per cent) suggested that they would be likely to commit between one and three hours (see Table 6).

Table 6: Time to invest in learning and skills development per week by the surveyed businesses

Time investment (per week)	Frequency
Less than 1 hour	6 (33.3%)
1 to 3 hours	10 (55.6%)
3 to 5 hours	2 (11.1%)
More than 5 hours	1 (5.6%)
Total no. of businesses	18 (100%)

Note:

1. Column totals may not add up to 100 per cent as multiple responses were allowed

The surveyed owner-managers would be willing to exchange experiences with other owner-managers which related to communication, entrepreneurship, marketing and sales and strategic management (Figure 5). In comparison, they would be less willing to exchange experiences related to supply chain management, importing and exporting, information technology and human resource management.

Figure 5: Experiences to be shared with other businesses by the surveyed businesses

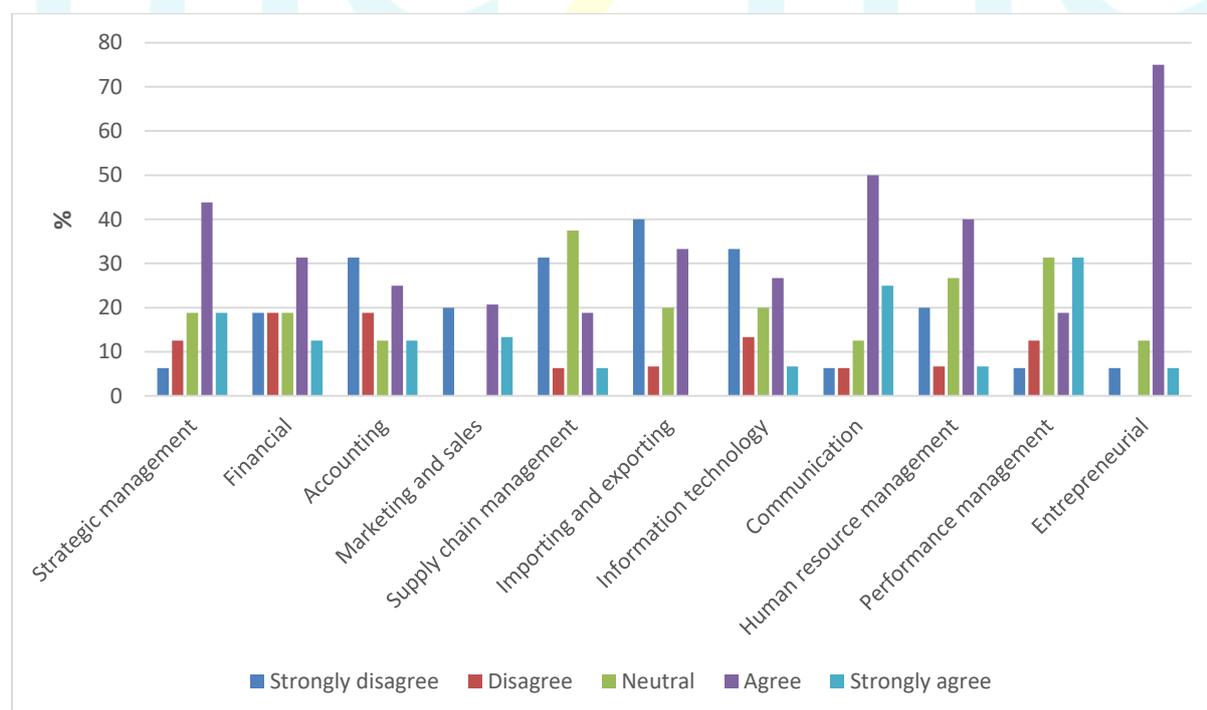
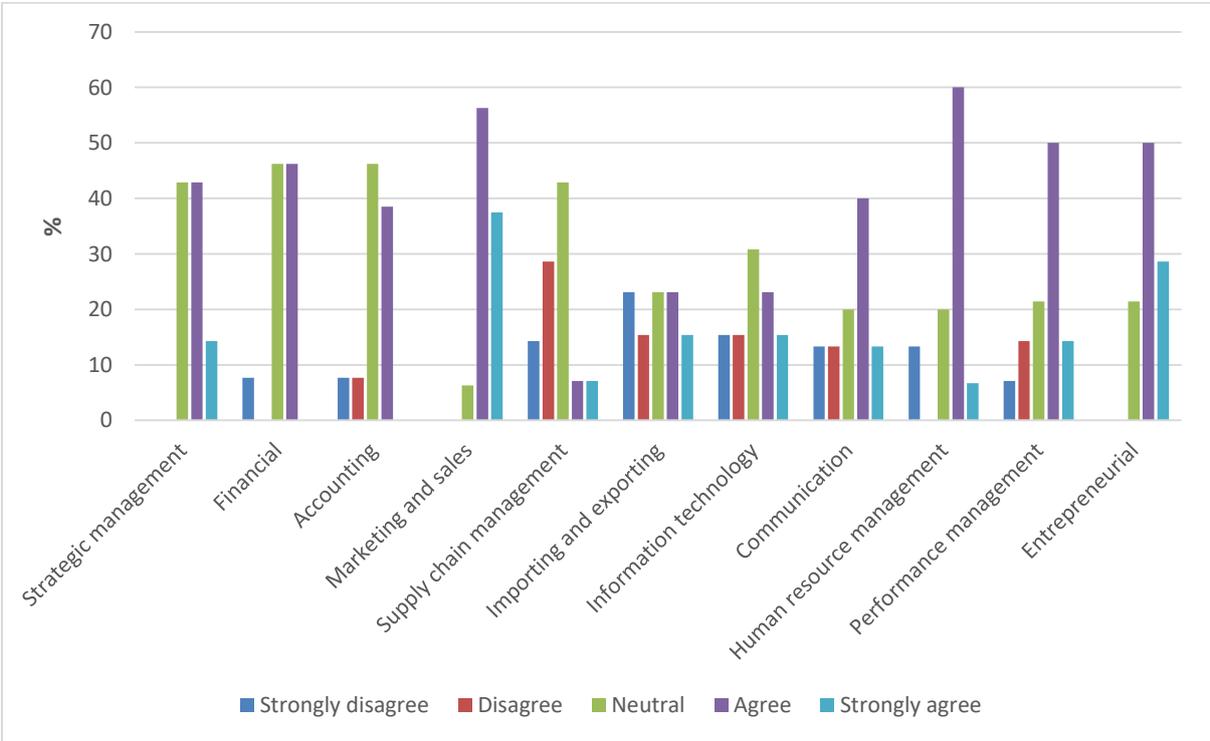


Figure 6 highlights that the owner-managers have three key areas of need to know, in terms of experiences they wish to gain from others: marketing and sales, entrepreneurship and people management. In comparison, there is less interesting in seeking experiences from other owner-managers related to accounting, supply chain management and information technology.

This may reflect not only the perceived appropriate of such knowledge and skills to developing and managing a micro-business but also the methods by which learning and skills are developed. For example, with finances and accounting, there are specific legislative and regulatory requirements which change on a regular basis, due to changes in government policy and business management (NESTA and Sage, 2017). Accordingly, there may be benefits from attending a breakfast seminar which is led by a local accountancy business as they will have specific knowledge and expertise of the topic. In comparison, if an owner-manager wishes to gain insights into what it is like to grow a micro-business, a discussion with another owner-manager who has been through this experience will identify insights and specific areas of learning which are more challenging to deliver within a training workshop, particularly where the trainer has not had an experience of running their own business (Gibb, 1997).

Figure 6: Experiences to be gained from other businesses by the surveyed businesses



This raises an issue of how to ensure that demand-led areas ‘need to know’ underpin the development of the peer to peer learning materials.

In terms of preferred methods for engagement in peer to peer learning activities. Table 7 highlights that the surveyed owner-managers have a preference for small group meetings, training sessions and joint peer to peer activities. Face to face interaction and engagement is important element of all these three methods.

Table 7: Methods of engagement for peer to peer learning

Method of engagement	Frequency
Large group meetings	4 (22.2%)
Training sessions	10 (55.6%)
Small group meetings	18 (100%)
Joint peer activities	10 (55.6%)
Peer product knowledge	7 (38.9%)
Online networking	3 (16.7%)
Paired engagements	6 (33.3%)
Virtual engagements	3 (16.7%)
Total no. of businesses	18 100%

SUMMARY AND INITIAL IMPLICATIONS

A number of implications emerge from the empirical research undertaken to date. These include:

- The need to recognise diversity within the micro-business community. Whilst a number of common themes emerged from the survey, particularly in terms of the development needs of micro-businesses, there were differences between different groups or segments of micro-businesses. The importance of recognising this diversity is highlighted within the wider literature on micro-businesses in the UK. **Implication = importance of developing a customer segmentation framework which highlights the learning and skills development needs of different segments, learning styles, learning platforms and methods used and experiences they wish to exchange with other micro-businesses**
- Enterprising and entrepreneurial skills development. The survey highlighted the importance of developing enterprising and entrepreneurial skills as part of the peer to peer learning materials as well as knowledge and skills related to the development of the business. **Implication = importance of a balance between soft and functional skills development in the peer to peer learning materials and the balance between leaning about, for and through**
- Different methods for different needs. The survey highlighted that learning required to address different business development challenges and opportunities is acquired in different ways. For example, 'softer' skills tend to be acquired through experience and interactions with other owner-managers, whilst functional knowledge tends to be acquired through more formal methods such as workshops and courses. This suggests that different approaches, or methods, to facilitate different groups of learning and skills development need to be developed. **Implication = there is a need to develop learning methodologies which promote learning about, for and through**

4.6.2. NATIONAL RESEARCH REPORT

INTRODUCTION

This report summarises the key findings to emerge from empirical research undertaken with a selection of vocational, education and training professionals (VETs) in the United Kingdom (UK) as part of the first Intellectual Output of the ME2ME project.

There are five key sections to the report:

- Overall aim and Research approach
- Characteristics of the surveyed VETs
- Development needs of VETs
- Learning and skills development of VETs
- Summary and Initial Implications.

Overall aim and research approach

The overall aim of the empirical research was to develop insights into the perceptions of VETs into the learning and skills needs of micro-businesses and the ways learning could be supported in thjos businesses.

In so doing, the research would:

- Profile the surveyed VET professionals including the demand for business management training
- Identify the key learning needs of VET professionals to be included in the proposed CPD curriculum to support them to work with micro-enterprises through non-traditional learning platforms
- Identify the skills needed to help VET professionals produce media-rich mini-learning format learning resources
- Identify gaps in current vocational and education training (VET) provision which could be addressed through the ME2ME project.

To this end, the empirical research engaged with VET professionals delivering through a wide range of organisations differing in size from small micro enterprises to large educational institutions.

Participants to be interviewed were identified through two routes:

- Via the networks of the project team from SFEDI with VET professionals in the UK and those organisations working with micro-businesses
- A snowballing sampling strategy where respondents were asked to identify others who may wish to engage with the empirical research.

Participants were sent the survey developed by by INNEO and KSTP with a covering email explaining the overall am of the ME2ME project, the purpose of the research and the ways in which the outcomes from the survey would be used to shape further stages of the project.

The experiences of completing the survey were generally positive, although a number of surveyed VETs did raise issues with the clarity in questions (e.g. what is a ‘variable character of subject fields’ and what is a ‘paired engagement’) and the need for a ‘not-appropriate’ or ‘not applicable’ option in a number of questions. Comment was also made regarding some questions with very broad ranges where a narrower range and range descriptions would have been helpful (for example, Q10 with 1-10 range and only two broad definitions provided – very knowledgeable and very weak knowledge).

In addition, further definition for some questions would have removed possible ambiguity in answers and analysis (for example, Q2 Sector: this was left to participants judgement rather than specifying the use of standard industrial classifications).

In total, 15 questionnaires were completed. The outcomes from the empirical research form the basis of the next three sections of the report.

SURVEY RESULTS

VET Provider Characteristics: An Overview

As noted above in Section 1, the first part of the survey explored the characteristics of the VETs.

The 15 surveyed VET professionals offered a diversity of products and services ranging from Higher Education to Leadership & Management Training to Enterprise Support for Young People.

Table 1: Sectoral distribution of the surveyed VETs

Nature of activity	Frequency	Percentage
Education	5	33.33
Business services/Business Support	5	33.33
Creative	2	13.33
Financial Skills	1	6.67
Communication	1	6.67
Not specified	1	6.67
Total no. of VETs	15	(100%)

In terms of the size of the surveyed VET providers, there were a number of businesses and organisations who employed one or two people, whilst the largest employed 10 (see Table 2). However, caution should be exercised here as the questions asks for the number of educators and not the total size of the organisation.

Table 2: Size of the surveyed VET organisations – Number of Educators

Number of Employees	Frequency	Percentage
No response	2	13.33
1	1	6.67
2	6	40.00
3	1	6.67
4	1	6.67
5	1	6.67
6	1	6.67
10	2	13.33
Total no. of VETs Organisations	15	(100%)

The surveyed VET providers varied in terms of number of years trading. Whilst one business had started in 1858 and 1941, another business had started as recently as 2017. Averaging the length of operation would not be appropriate with a small sample and such outliers in terms of age.

Table 3: Date of establishment of the surveyed VET providers

Date of establishment	Frequency	Percentage
1850 - 1970	2	13.33
1971 - 2000	2	13.33
2001-2005	5	33.33
2006-2010	0	0
2011-2015	3	20.00
2016-2018	2	13.33
Total no. of VETs	15	(100%)

Significantly, six (40 per cent) of respondents were the owner of the VET provider, small in terms of size (1-3 employees) and established since the year 2000. These businesses also clearly fall into the definition of a micro-enterprise. An additional benefit of including micro-businesses as respondents to the survey is that they will also have a similar world view to that of the target market for the project.

Provision of business management skills

The second section of the survey contained a set of questions related to the nature of the training and development delivered by the VET provider and views on what providers considered to be important skills in running a business.

In terms of perceptions of the skills required to run a micro-business, the surveyed VET professionals perceived the following in terms of importance based on averaging each skill set scores:

Table 4. Level of perceived importance - Skills to run a micro-business

Level of Importance	Skill
Not at all important	-----
Not so important	Import and Export skills
Neutral	Strategic management, Financial skills, accounting skills, production/supply chain/ IT skills, social media skills, human resource management
Fairly important	Marketing & sales, entrepreneurial skills, networking
Very important	Communication skills

Table 4 highlights that VET professionals perceived that most skills were of neutral (or slightly more than neutral) in importance. Entrepreneurial skills, marketing & sales, networking and communication were perceived as more important. This compares favourably with the perception of business owners taking part in the micro-enterprise survey.

In relation to the skills delivered by VETs within programmes, Table 5 highlights that those perceived to be of importance at least neutral and above (Table 4 above) are delivered on more frequent occasions by VET providers. Further investigation may be needed to ascertain whether VET providers are delivering programme and courses that meet the needs and expectations of micro businesses. Interestingly accounting skills is the least frequent and may reflect that ‘the technical skills’ associated with accounting are often outsourced by micro-enterprises.

Table 5: Frequency of VET professionals delivering listed skills

Skill	Frequency
Accounting skills	4
Import/Export management skills	6
IT skills, networking and entrepreneurial skills	10
Strategic Management, Finance, Marketing & Sales, Communication, Human Resource Management	15

In the last three years 11 (73 per cent) of VET providers had delivered some form of management. For comparison the majority (66 per cent) of the businesses in the micro-enterprise survey had attended some form of business and management in the same period.

Table 6: Perceived barriers faced by VET providers in delivering management training

Level of Agreement	Potential Barrier (average of total responses)
Strongly disagree	Inflexible Amount of Time, Inconvenient Location, Lack of Technical Skills
Disagree	Variable Nature of Subject, Lack of Resources, Lack of Special Training Support, Lack of Highly Qualified Personnel, Different Needs of Students.
Neither agree or disagree	Lack of Students Willing to Pay
Agree	-----
Strongly agree	-----

The survey highlighted that, overall, perhaps VET professionals perceive that the barriers to delivery of programmes are not as constraining as might be thought. It is worth noting that one provider did not respond to this question and another only completed half of the possible responses. Looking at the responses at an individual provider level a lack of willingness (or perhaps ability) to pay was the barrier which scored the most (i.e. 4 and 5 - agree/strongly agree).

Table 7: The form of training provided

Level of Agreement	Form of Training (averaging of total responses)
Strongly disagree	-----
Disagree	Theoretical Training
Neither agree or disagree	Courses Held at VET Premises, Online Courses
Agree	Practical Course and Exchange of Experience, Courses Held At Business Place
Strongly agree	-----

From this we may assume that the preferred method of delivery is likely to be held at the place of business, practical in nature and encouraging the exchange of experience between micro-business owners. On-line programmes and those delivered at VET premises would be the lesser option and theoretical input is the least preferred option. However, this delivery preference may reflect the nature of the providers sampled – mostly small, independent businesses rather than larger educational institutions.

Over 86 per cent of the surveyed professionals said they shared knowledge and experience within provider networks (1 responded 'no' and 1 did not respond). Given the surveyed professionals rated networking as a 'fairly important' skill (see Table 4 above) and that it was 'frequently' delivered as part of programmes (Table 5) this is not surprising. It also suggests that VET professionals are practicing what they teach.

Table 8: Assessment of learner knowledge

Level of Knowledge	Knowledge Areas (averaging of total responses)
1-3	-----
3-5	Strategic Management, Finance, Accounting
5-7	Marketing & Sales, IT, Performance Management, Communication, Networking, Problem Solving
7-9	-----
10	-----

From Table 4 above, we can suggest that accounting skills was perceived as only of neutral importance by VETs and is the least frequently delivered skill.

These results are difficult to interpret as we do not know where the learners are in their programme and/or expectations around the level of knowledge expected on completion. For example, are students assessed as towards more knowledge (5-7 in Table 8) at the end of their programme or at the beginning?

Table 9 (below) indicates that for the majority of providers are neutral about the need to create new learning content. Although a few providers indicated that they would like to expand or create new training resources areas the general conclusion that can be drawn from this is that on the whole providers satisfied with the current content they have and in the areas of Imports/Exports, IT, Human Resource Management they do not see any need to develop new resources.

Table 9: Suggested areas of new learning content

Level of Agreement	Topic (averaging of total responses)
Strongly disagree	-----
Disagree	Imports/Exports, IT, Human Resource Management
Neither agree or disagree	Strategic Management, Finances, Accounting, Marketing & Sales, Entrepreneurship, Communication, Problem Solving, Performance Management
Agree	-----
Strongly agree	-----

Table 10: Suggested areas of development for delivery of learning and skills provision for micro-businesses

Methods of delivery	Frequency	Percentage
Online Courses	11	22.45
Peer to Peer Learning	11	22.45
Videos or Podcasts or Interactive Learning	10	20.41
Case Studies	6	12.24
Workshops	11	22.45
Other	0	0
Total no. of VETs	49	(100%)

Table 10 suggests that a range of delivery methods would be employed with the use of case studies being the least popular. In terms of the possible time per week to deliver training, six professionals (40 per cent) stated between 1-3 hours. Similarly, the majority (55 per cent) of business owners suggested that they would be likely to commit between one and three hours.

The micro-enterprise survey revealed that the learning preferences of the surveyed owner-managers was for peer to peer learning, workshops, and to a lesser extent, videos and podcasts. Again, this needs further exploration in the development of the learning materials as it is important to achieve alignment between providers, business needs, learning outcomes and learning pedagogies and methods of delivery.

Potential of Peer to Peer Learning

Table 11 highlights that the majority of VET professionals consider that there is potential for peer to peer learning among micro-enterprises and that owners would be willing to share if they had the opportunity and skills to do so.

What is somewhat surprising is that providers are divided as to whether entrepreneurship can be taught or is innate (cannot be taught). This is interesting in two ways. Firstly, all the respondents are providers of training and education and for half of them to suggest something cannot be 'taught' seems incongruent with their occupational position. Secondly, this would also suggest that despite decades of research, publication and practice in the area of entrepreneurship education more work is still to be done to persuade VETs professionals that entrepreneurship can be learned.

Table 11: Potential for peer-to-peer learning

Level of Agreement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Total no. of responses
There are skills that are needed to become an entrepreneur that come with experience and cannot be taught	1 (6.67%)	6 (40%)	1 (6.67%)	6 (40%)	1 (6.67%)	15 (100%)
There is potential for peer to peer learning among micro-business owners	0	2 (13.33)	0	7 (46.67)	6 (40%)	15 (100%)
The owners of micro businesses would be willing to share their knowledge and skills if provided with the opportunity and skills	0	1 (6.67%)	2 (13.33)	9 (60%)	3 (20%)	15 (100%)

Table 12 (below) highlights that over 50 per cent of the surveyed VET professionals indicated that small group meetings, joint peer activities and paired engagement were the most effective forms of peer to peer learning.

This may have implications for the project as it would suggest face to face rather than technological solutions are the possible preferred methods of enabling peer to peer learning. This reflects the preferred choices of the surveyed owner managers of micro-businesses. This topic needs further exploration in the development of the learning materials as it is important to achieve alignment between needs, learning outcomes, learning pedagogies and methods of delivery.

Table 12: Knowledge/skills/experience to be delivered through peer-to-peer learning?

Level of Agreement	Topic (averaging of total responses)
Strongly disagree	-----
Disagree	Imports/Exports,
Neither agree or disagree	Finance, Accounting, Production/Supply Chain Management, IT, Human Resource Management,
Agree	Strategic Management, Marketing & Sales, Entrepreneurship, Communication, Problem Solving, Performance Management.
Strongly agree	-----

Table 13: The learning approaches to support in peer to per learning?

Approaches to peer to peer learning	Frequency	Percentage
Large group meetings	4	7.14
Training sessions	7	12.5
Small group meetings	12	21.43
Joint peer activities	10	17.86
Peer produced knowledge products	4	7.14
Online networking	6	10.71
Paired engagements	8	14.29
Virtual engagements	5	8.93
Other	0	0
Total	56	100%

SUMMARY

From the research undertaken a number of tentative conclusions can be drawn with implications for the project.

VET Provider Characteristics

The VET provider sector is extremely diverse in terms of size, age of organisation, customer base and sector. Whilst dominated by larger tertiary educational institutions (Colleges and Universities) this sample demonstrates that there is a significant number of smaller, often privately-owned providers. This diversity will also be reflected in the needs, experience and pre-existing skills of the students/participants/candidates/employees. The implication for the project is that it should consider developing a customer segmentation framework which highlights the differing needs of individuals receiving training and education and similarly with regard to the providers themselves. This may assist in identifying the target market for the CPD requirements and products developed for providers.

Provision of Business Management Skills

The survey suggests that there needs to be a balance between functional (such as finance and people management) and softer skills (such as networking and communication). There appeared, at least from the sample, to be no significant barriers to delivering VET programmes with only the ability or desire to pay for training potentially being an issue. There appears to be some support for the development and use of on-line resources, but this does not negate the use of a wide range of learning approaches.

There are some indications that the purpose of this project is well founded, i.e. support for online resources and delivered within short time frames. An area for possible future investigation would be the perceived level of skill that VET providers have in being able to develop and deliver on-line resources, videos, podcasts and interactive learning. The micro-business survey should be considered alongside the VET survey to assess congruence between what VETs are providing and the perceived needs of micro-enterprises.

Potential for Peer to Peer Learning

There appears to be a recognition by VETs for the potential of peer to peer learning (over 80 per cent of providers agreeing/strongly agreeing). However, half of surveyed VET professionals appear to support the notion that enterprise skills cannot be acquired or taught. In furthering the project this group will potentially prove difficult to convince in terms of the worth of developing and using resources. Marketing messages and dissemination activities from the project will need to be carefully crafted or a decision made *not* to target resisters and concentrate on those who will readily accept and adopt outputs from the project.

4.7. FINLAND

4.7.1. NATIONAL AUDIT REPORT

INTRODUCTION

Conducting audits of the skills of business owners within the micro-enterprise sector represents an innovative approach in Me2Me-project. Placing business owners in the vanguard of learning within the micro-enterprise sector will have a considerable long-term impact on the businesses and the staff who work there.

A comprehensive audit was conducted to:

- identify specific skill assets within the micro-enterprise community that could be used to support the development of the sector as a whole in each local context through the proposed peer-to-peer learning networks
- understand the learning needs and learning preferences of microenterprise owners especially focusing on the type of learning they prefer and the most favourite learning platforms and environments for the proposed peer-to-peer learning
- identify areas where there are gaps in current VET provision that the ME2ME project could address

In summary, a primary goal of the comprehensive audit was to identify the available skills and knowledge within the local business community that might be made available to other micro-enterprise owners through the peer-to-peer learning networks.

As was stated in the application, ME2ME proposes an innovative approach to help foster learning in the micro-enterprise sector by encouraging micro-enterprise owners to engage in a peer learning network where business owners can share knowledge and skills to support their business objectives. It draws on the principles of asset-based community development and brings this philosophy into a business and vocational education environment.

We believe that placing business owners in the vanguard of learning within the micro-enterprise sector will have a considerable long-term impact on the businesses and the staff who work there. That is the reason why their needs and skills needed to be thoroughly studied.

METHODOLOGY

In ME2ME-project the options to carry out the audit were

- Organising focus groups with small numbers of microenterprise owners
- Conducting one-to-one interviews either face-to-face or by telephone
- Circulating a questionnaire to selected respondents

Innoventum created questionnaire in project's Finnish website and sent link to selected respondents and organizations supporting SMEs in hope that in this way to reach more microenterprise owners. Interviews were conducted also by phone and face-to-face.

The questionnaire, delivered by Lithuanian partner, consisted of 20 questions. They were divided into 4 chapters:

- a) General Demographics
- b) Development of Business Management Skills
- c) Needs and Preferences for Business Management Training
- d) Readiness and Preferences for Peer-to-Peer Learning

Many participants felt survey too long and time-consuming. Some of questions were said to be too out of micro-enterprise own daily life.

In the questionnaire different methods was used to collect data: Likert scales, single and multiple choice questions and ranking questions as well as questions which needs answer in a short text format. We also asked participants for general suggestions considering our project.

19 micro-enterprise owners and one employee took part in the ME2ME audit phase. Participants were really the micro-enterprises: in three companies had six as well three companies had four employees. Rest had one or two employees.

The participants were recruited mostly among our stakeholders and personal and professional networks. They were also asked to forward the questionnaires to others who met the profile and were interested in the project. Joensuu Regional Development Company JOSEK Ltd. helped Innoventum to distribute information about aim of project and questionnaire among its network of entrepreneurs.

RESULTS OF THE AUDIT QUESTIONNAIRE:

General Demographics

Questions 1-5 - summary

Questions 1-5 was asked to get to know backgrounds of participants of this questionnaire.

Products and services of interviewees were children's daycare, import of glass containers, diffractive x-ray optics and developing of products and process based on nanolithography, interior design, counselling, coaching services, expert services (2), online marketing (3), website and advertising agency services, exercise services, web applications and it-consulting, health products marketing, service station and restaurant (2), car shop, construction services, programming services.

The most popular sector was trade (8) and services (4). ICT, environmental issues and education had 2 representatives each, research and product development one and building one representative. All function in private sector.

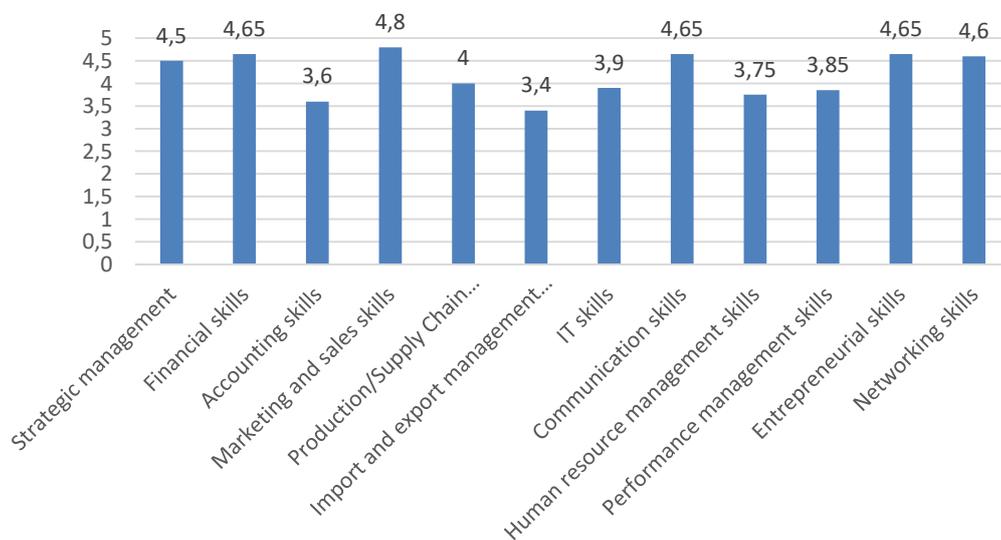
All companies are in category of micro-enterprise. 11 of 20 interviewees told to have only one employee i.e. themselves, three companies had two employees, three had four and the three biggest companies had six employees.

The "oldest" business was established in 1987 and four more were established before 2000. Seven in period 2001-2007 and eight in 2012-2016. 19 of 20 interviewees were owners of their enterprise.

Development of Business Management Skills

The purpose of the second questionnaire was to find out what skills the entrepreneurs consider to be the most important for running a business, what skills they have and the importance of training to obtaining these skills.

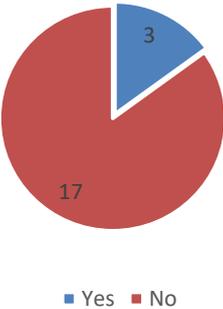
Question 6 – What is the most important skills for running a successful business?



According to this interview, the most relevant skills for running a business are marketing and sales skills, financial skills, communication skills, and entrepreneurial skills.

Other skills mentioned were expertising and key skills for self-management and team-leading.

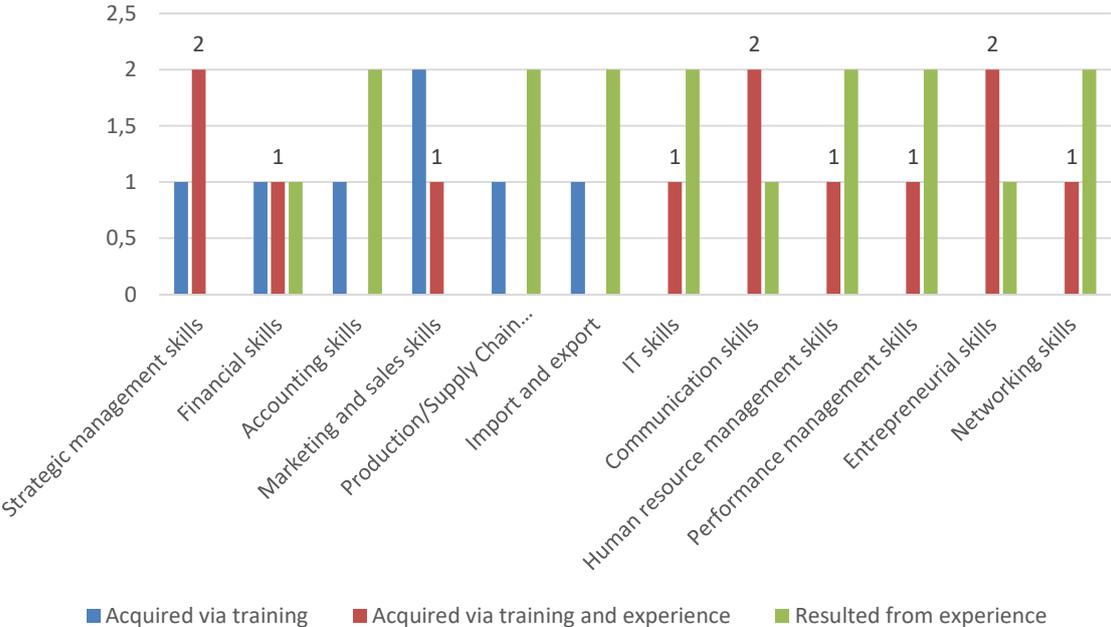
7. Have you attended any business management training in the past 3 years?



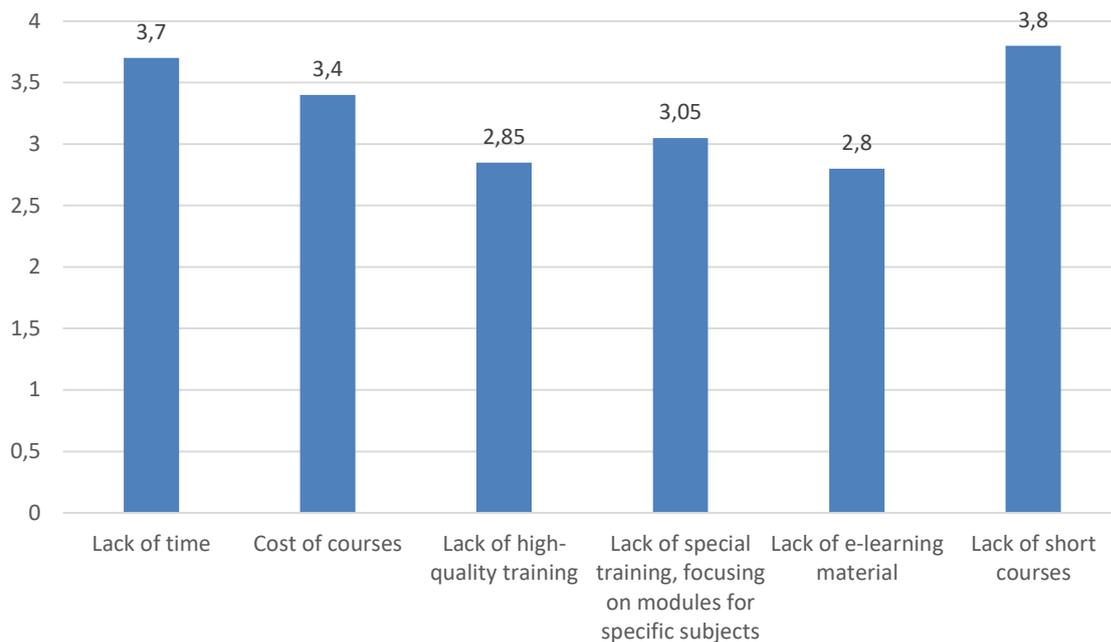
Only three of 20 interviewees told to participate in training in past three years. In answers were that there is no need to participate in training or had participate years ago and didn't see that training wasn't good.

Question 8 – Which skills result from training you completed and which ones from experience?

As seen in the table below interviewees who participated in training told that their skills resulted from experience and via training and experience. Interesting is that marketing and sales skills were acquired via training or via training and experience.



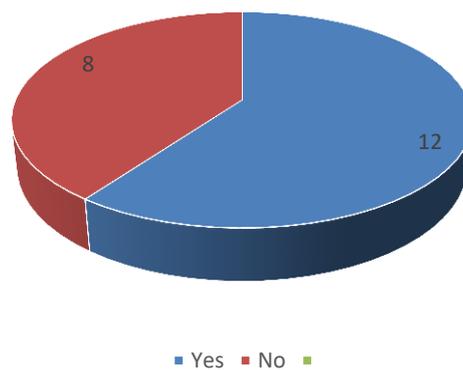
9. What barriers do you face to attend business management training?



The most popular answers about the barriers to attend training were tightened to time: lack of short courses was the most common barrier and the next one was the lack of time. Also cost of courses was mentioned and in Finland short courses targeted to entrepreneurs might be expensive.

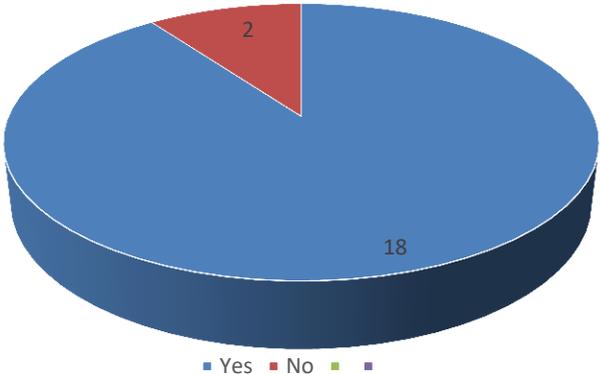
In other barriers was mentioned that it is hard to find suitable trainings.

10. Do you share knowledge and information within any business network that you belong in?



Twelve of 20 interviewees told that they share their knowledge but eight of interviews told that they didn't share their knowledge within any business network.

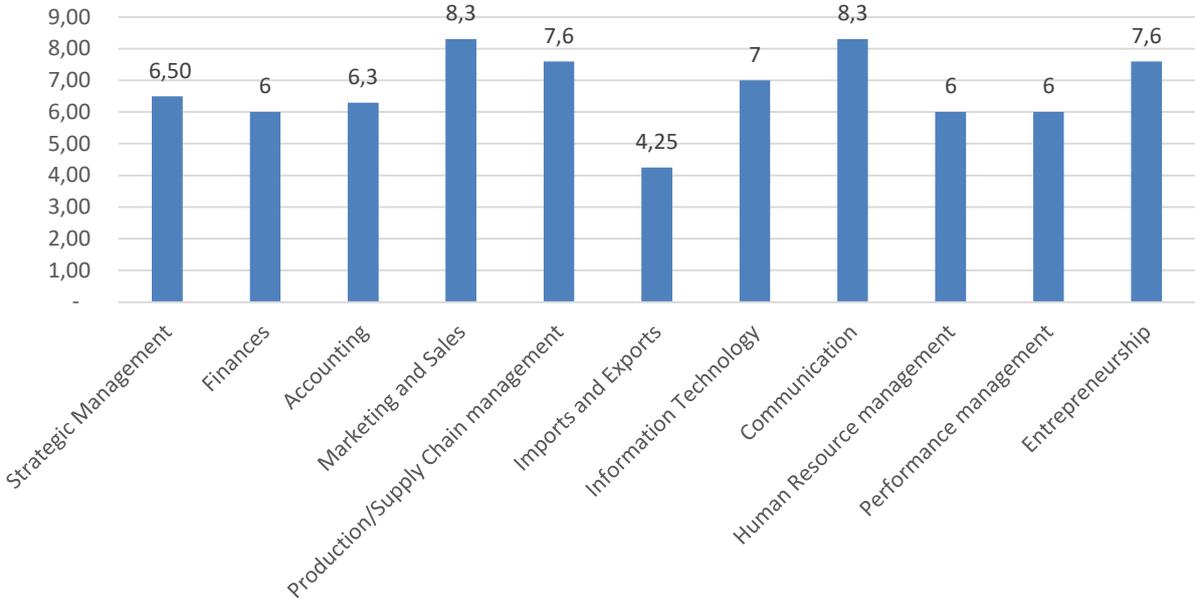
11. Do you think that some of the skills you have developed might be useful to other micro enterprise owners?



Most of entrepreneurs thought that they have skills that might be useful the others. Only two of 20 interviewees told that they don't have.

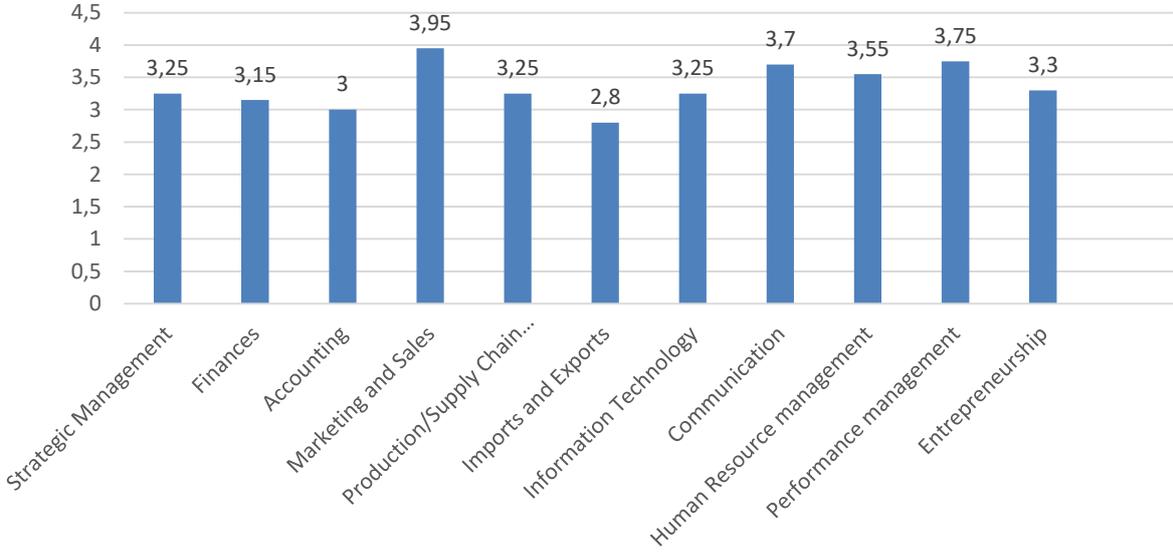
Needs and Preferences for Business Management Training

12. How would you assess your knowledge of the following business areas?



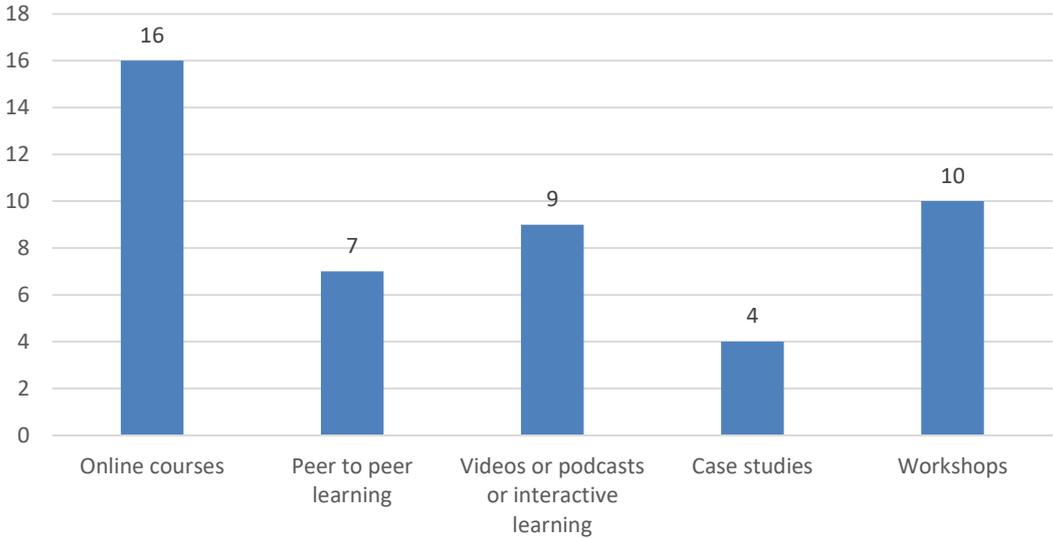
Marketing and sales and communication were the skills interviewees felt to know best. Import and export was lowest but reason for that might be that they don't need this skill in their businesses.

13. What learning content would you like to receive if new training resources were being developed?



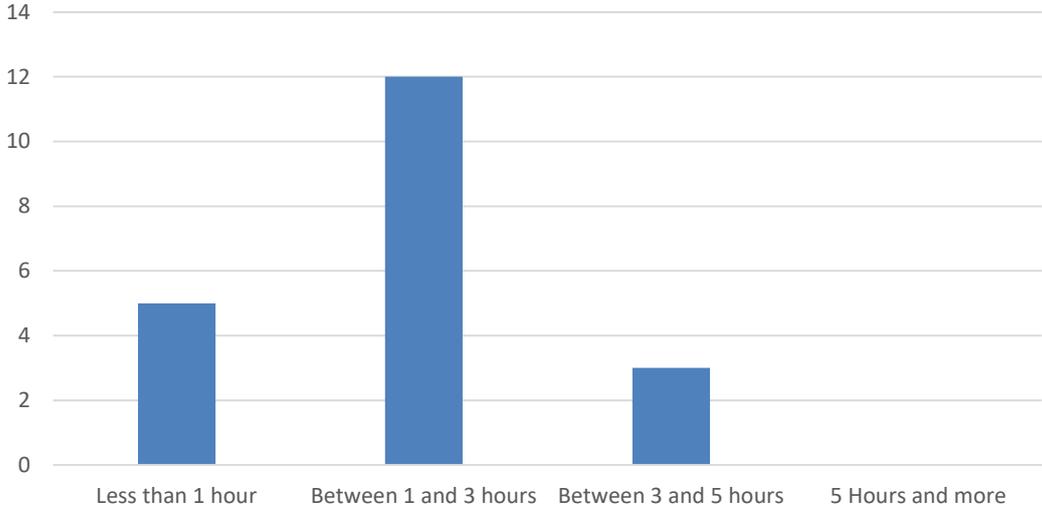
There wasn't only one clear field that participants were interested to learn. The most popular was marketing and sales after that came performance management and communication. Marketing and communication were also the strongest areas of knowledge so interviewees want to develop their skills more. Imports and exports was the lowest but it is because of only couple of our participants practice import. Other subjects mentioned were networking skills, possibilities to networking and branding of own company offered by social media.

14. How would you like to access these new training resources?



Finnish micro-entrepreneurs prefer online courses which is not surprising. It mainly allows the freedom to study whenever you want. Workshops and videos (interactive learning) were next.

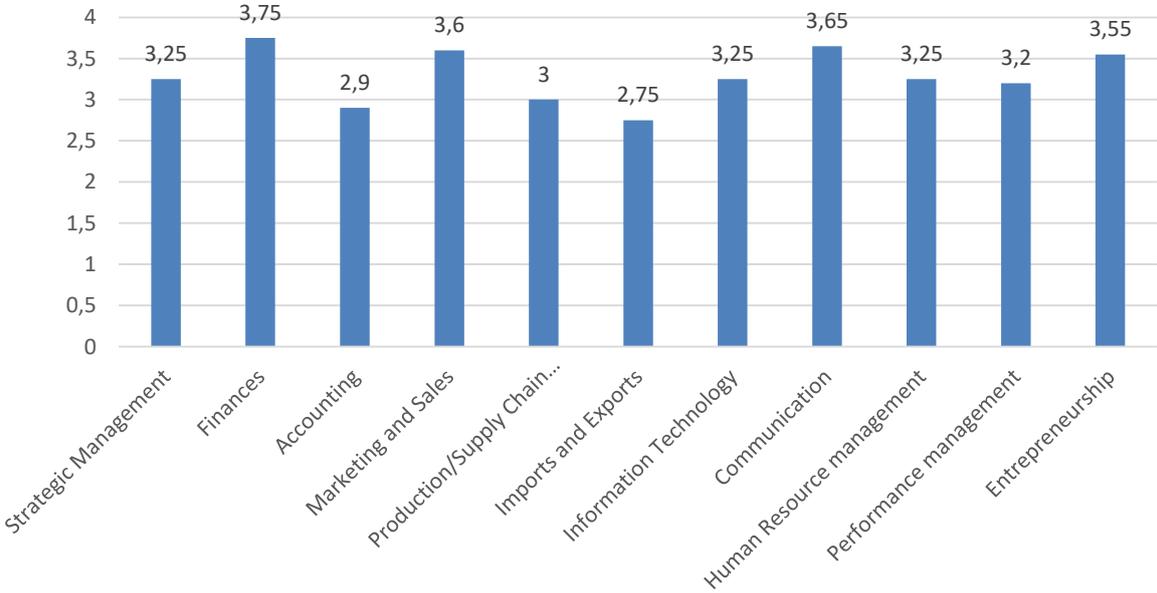
15. How much time would you be willing to commit to training on a weekly basis?



Most of entrepreneurs would be willing to commit 1-3 hours, second was less than one hour. All of interviewees pointed out that training must be under 5 hours.

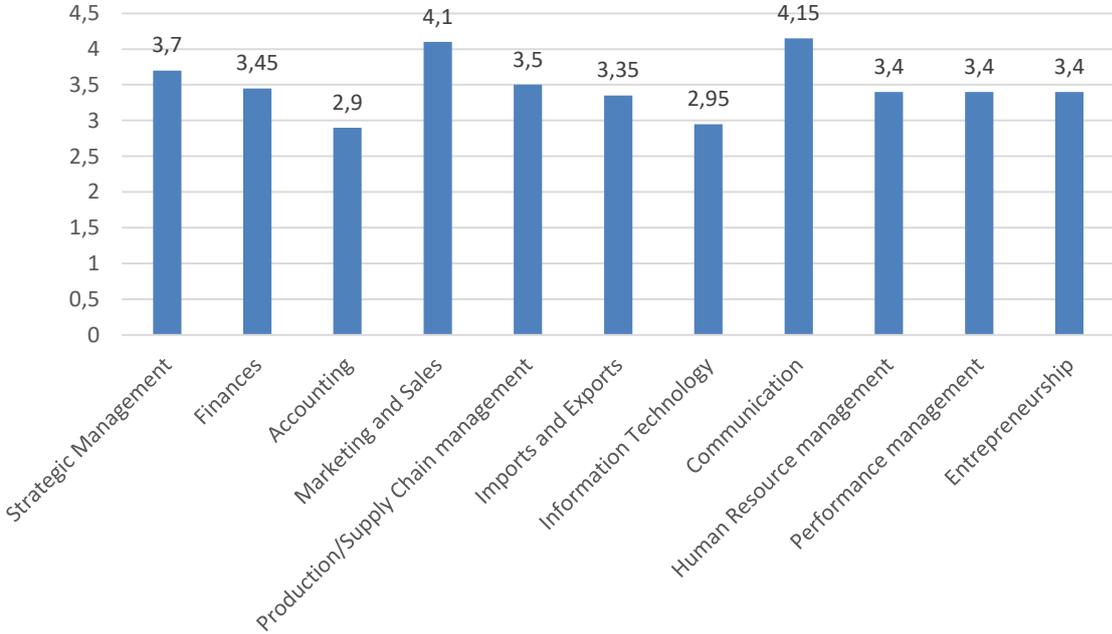
Readiness and preferences for peer-to-peer learning

16. What specific knowledge/skills/expertise you would be willing to share with other micro enterprise owners in peer-to-peer learning?



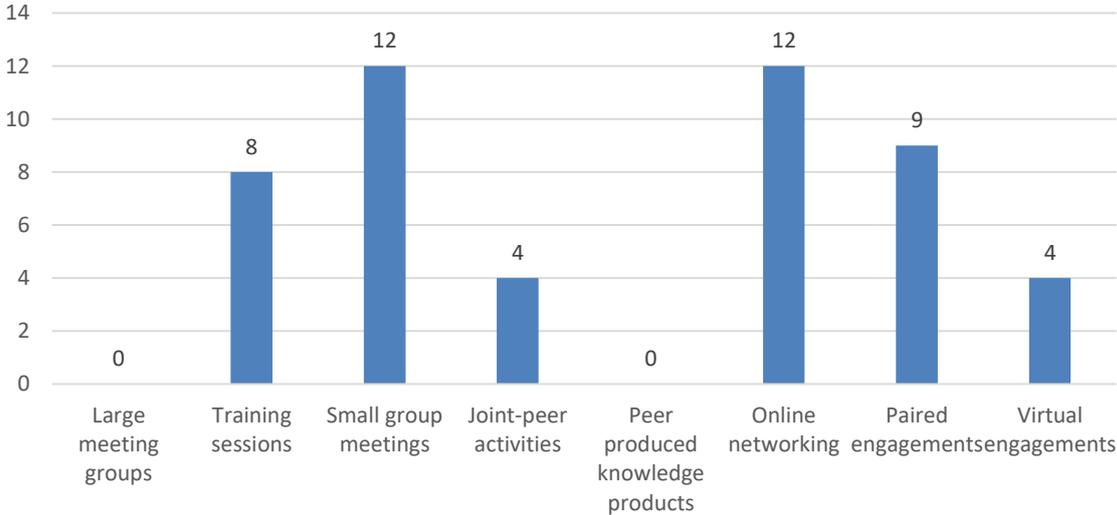
Interviewees were willing to share their knowledge in finances, communication and marketing and sales. Other subjects mentioned was sustainable business.

17. What specific knowledge/skills/expertise would be of most relevance and importance for you to receive from other micro enterprise owners in peer-to-peer learning?



Skills that interviewees would receive from other micro-enterprise owners are communication and marketing and sales. It seems that these two skills are considered very important among entrepreneurs so they want to achieve as much knowledge as possible about them.

18. What are your preferred approaches to engage in peer-to-peer learning?



The preferred approaches to engage peer-to-peer learning were online networking and small group meetings. Also paired engagements was ranked high. Not a single entrepreneur was interested in large group meetings and peer produced knowledge products.

4.7.2. NATIONAL RESEARCH REPORT

INTRODUCTION

A comprehensive research phase was a key activity at the beginning of ME2ME project. Intellectual Output 1 consists of two parts: audit among the members of local business community and research among VET professionals. The following document is a summary of that research.

The aim of the research was:

- To identify key learning needs of VET professionals to be included in the proposed CPD curriculum to support them to work with micro-enterprises through;
- To identify the skills needed to help VET professionals produce media-rich mini-learning-format learning resources;
- To identify the current relationship between VET providers and the microenterprise business community;

Vocational education and work life in close relationship in Finland

In Finland, Vocational education and training (VET) is designed both for young people without upper secondary qualifications and for adults already in work life. VET is organised by different types of education providers: municipalities, joint municipal authorities, the state and the private sector. An authorisation to provide education is required. In the future, education is regulated through a single authorisation license, and education providers will have increased freedom in organising their activities.

There are up to 370 different vocational qualifications available in Finland. In the future, the number of qualifications will decrease, and qualification content will be broadened. This supports designing individual study paths and enables more rapid responses to the changing competence needs in work life. A vocational qualification gives general eligibility for university of applied science and university studies.

The reform of vocational upper secondary education has been one of the Finnish Government's key projects. The reform updated the entire vocational education and training (VET) in 2018. In the future, work life will require new kinds of competencies, while there are fewer financial resources available for education. VET has to respond more swiftly to changes in work life and operating environment and to adapt to individual competence needs.

VET for young people and adults is consolidated, forming a single entity with its own steering and regulation system and financing model.

The former supply-oriented approach is refocused into a demand-driven approach. Education is competence-based and customer-oriented: Each student will be offered the possibility to design an individually appropriate path to finishing an entire qualification or a supplementary skill set. The primary importance is on what the student learns and is able to do.

Digital learning environments and new approaches to pedagogy (e.g. modern simulators) will have a larger role in the future of learning. Learning at the workplace will be increased. A vocational qualification gives general eligibility for university of applied science and university studies.

Relation between vocational education and sme has been tight during last years. Every vocational qualification includes on-the job-learning which means that students some parts of their studies at work place. On-the-job-learning studies are

Circumstances important for SMEs

In 2016, there were 357,000 enterprises operating in Finland. There were 350,000 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) representing 98 per cent of the enterprise stock. The enterprises had a total of 388,000 establishments of which 93 per cent were SMEs' establishments.

The combined gross value of output of establishments was EUR 285 billion. The value of output was EUR nine billion higher than in 2015. SMEs' establishments produced 51 per cent, or EUR 4.7 billion of the total increase in gross value in the whole country. The engines for growth were SME's establishments in construction and service industries.

After deducting production costs (excl. personnel costs) from the gross value of output, the value added of establishments totalled EUR 103 billion. Value added grew by EUR five billion from 2015. Value added grew in all main industries. Most growth was generated in manufacturing and construction, nearly EUR one billion in both industries.

Growth was recorded in almost every region. In Uusimaa, value added increased from EUR 41 billion to close on EUR 44 billion. Uusimaa produced one-half of the whole country's growth.

The share of SMEs in the region's value added varied between 37 and 70 per cent. More than one-half of the region's value added was generated by SMEs in North Karelia, Pohjois-Savo, North Ostrobothnia, Etelä-Savo, Varsinais-Suomi, Kainuu, Åland and South Ostrobothnia.

Measured with the concept full-year employment, the establishments employed 1.4 million persons. The share of total manufacturing of employed persons was 22 per cent, that of construction 11 per cent, trade 16 per cent and services 47 per cent. The share of primary production was four per cent. The establishments of SMEs employed 800,000 persons or 57 per cent of the total personnel of establishments. SMEs are important employers in several regions.

[Official Statistics of Finland (OSF): Regional statistics on entrepreneurial activity [e-publication].
ISSN=2342-6268. 2016. Helsinki: Statistics Finland [referred: 26.2.2018].
Access method: http://www.stat.fi/til/alyr/2016/alyr_2016_2017-12-21_tie_001_en.html)

METHODOLOGY

In ME2ME research it was possible to use any or all of the following approaches:

- Organising focus groups with small numbers of VET providers
- Conducting one-to-one interviews either face-to-face or by telephone
- Circulating a questionnaire to selected respondents

In case of Innoventum the best methodology was circulating but it was carried out by creating online questionnaire which sent to the VET providers in North Karelia region. From our experience we know that online methods are the most suitable for all participants.

The questionnaire consisted of 20 questions. They were divided into 4 chapters:

- I. General Demographics
- II. Provision of Business Management Skills
- III. Demand for Business Management Training
- IV. Potential of Peer-to-Peer Learning

Feedback from questionnaire was not very positive. Educators felt that it took too long to answer to questions even though it was easy to fill. Main reason for negative feedback was that vocational education in Finland is under the very big changes due the reform and all working in that field are stressed and uncertain about future.

To get the most applicative data we used different research methods in the questionnaire: Likert scales, single and multiple choice questions and ranking questions as well as questions which needs answer in a short text format. We also asked participants for general suggestions considering our project.

In Finland, 20 people took part in the ME2ME research phase. They were educators from public VET providers.

The participants were recruited mostly among our stakeholders and personal and professional networks. They were also asked to forward the questionnaires to others who met the profile and were interested in the project.

Besides the questionnaire there was also a need to use the desk-based methodology while writing this report: analysing the current law concerning VET provision, other reports, statistics and articles. Obtaining the theoretical knowledge helped interpret the data from questionnaire in the most reliable way possible.

RESULTS OF THE AUDIT QUESTIONNAIRE:

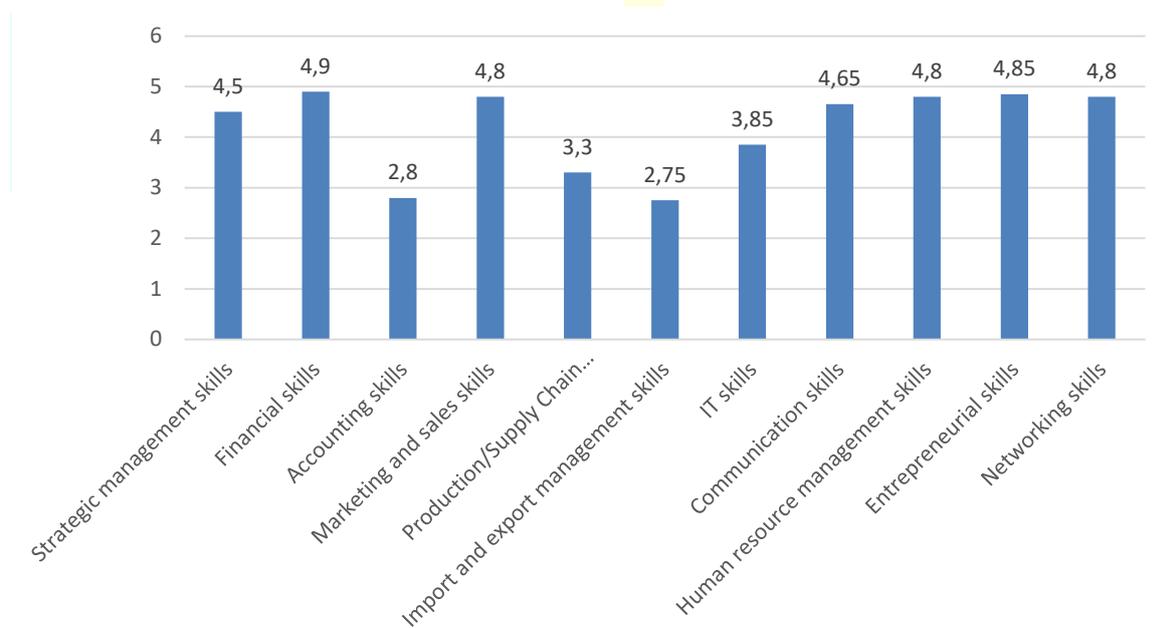
Questions 1-5 - summary

The results of the general questions are as follows:

- Most of our educators work in the secondary VET school (18/20). Two interviewees work in post-secondary level in university of Applied Sciences.
- All interviewees work in main VET organisations in North Karelia region: 18 in Municipal Education and Training Consortium (founded 1970) and two University of applied sciences owned by municipality Of Joensuu (founded 1992)
- Organisations are public.

Question 6 - What do you consider to be the most important for running a successful business?

There were many skills pointed as the most important for running a successful business: Financial skills were the first followed by entrepreneurial skills. Third were human resource management skills, marketing and sales skills and networking skills.



Question 7 - Which skills from the list are included in the courses taught in your institution?

All interviewees answered that skills which are included in the courses taught in their institution were strategic management skills financial skills, accounting skills, marketing and sales skills, Production/Supply Chain management skills, IT skills, communication skills, entrepreneurial skills and networking skills. Two interviewees from University of applied sciences also told import and export management skills included to the curriculum. HR management skills didn't include to curriculum in all cases.

Question 8 - Have your organization provided any other training course that you consider important for running successful business? If yes, please specify.

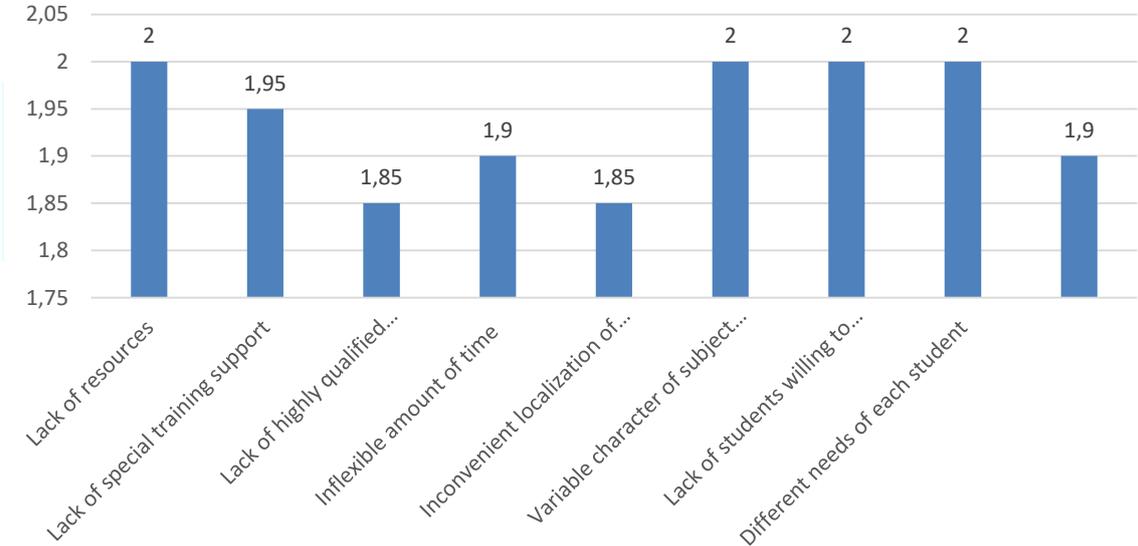
To this question one answer was Business courses and another Young achievement programmes.

Question 9 - Have you provided any business management training in the past 3 years?

13 respondents have provided a business management training in the last 3 years.

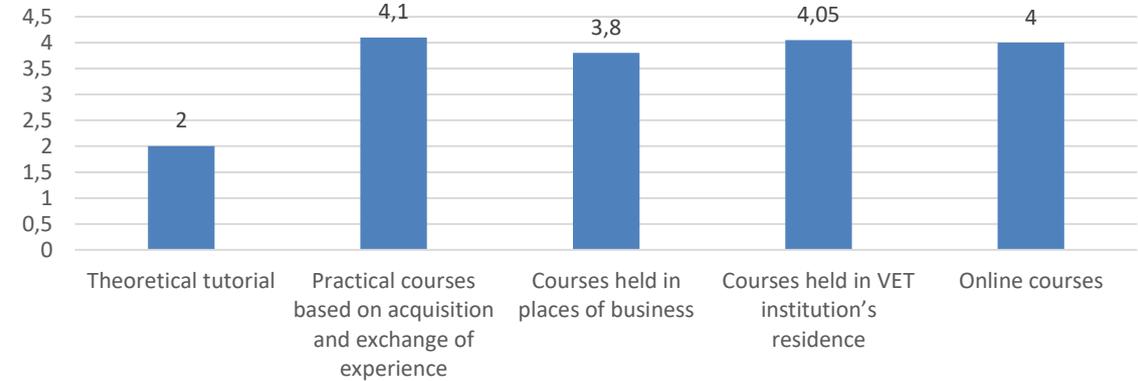
Question 10 - What barriers do your VET unit face to provide business management training?

There was not significant differences when asked about barriers in providing business management training: lack of resources, variable character of subject fields, lack of students willing to pay for the course, different needs of each student all had same level. Explanation of “lack of students willing pay for the course” is that entrepreneurship education is not bought by public employment and business services from VET provider. To the students education is free.



Question 11 - What form does the training provided by your institution take?

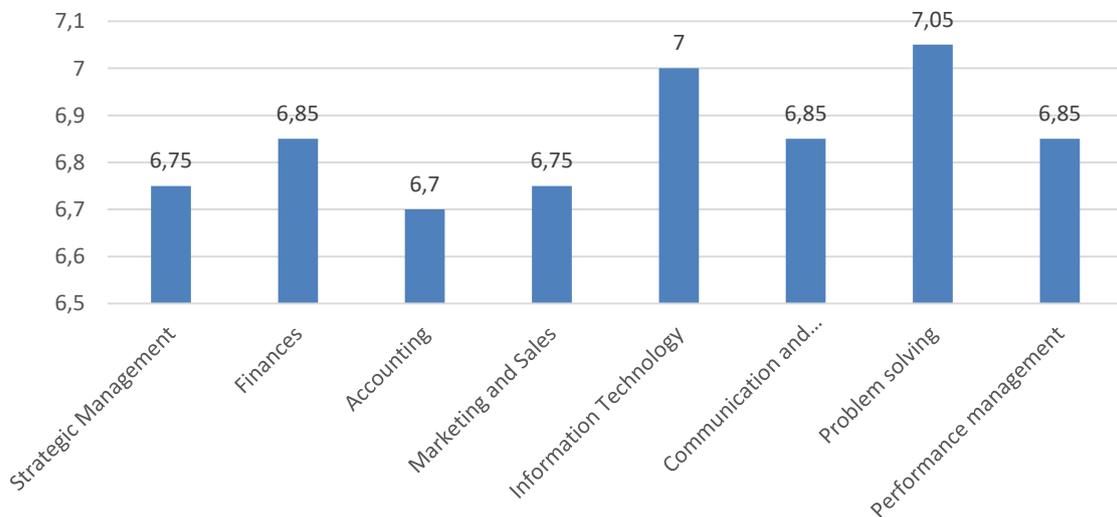
Most of the training takes form of both practical courses. They are usually held in the organizations’ residences but online courses were almost as common.



Question 12 - Do you share knowledge and experience within any education providers' network?

All educators told that their share their knowledge and experience in their networks.

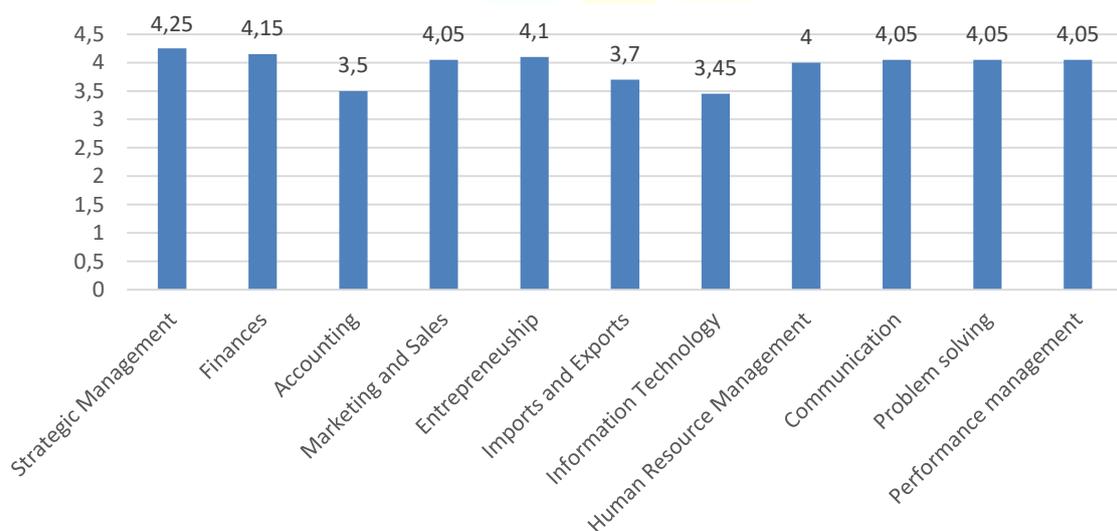
Question 13 – How would you assess the knowledge of your students about the following areas?



The students are considered to have the best knowledge about problem solving and IT.

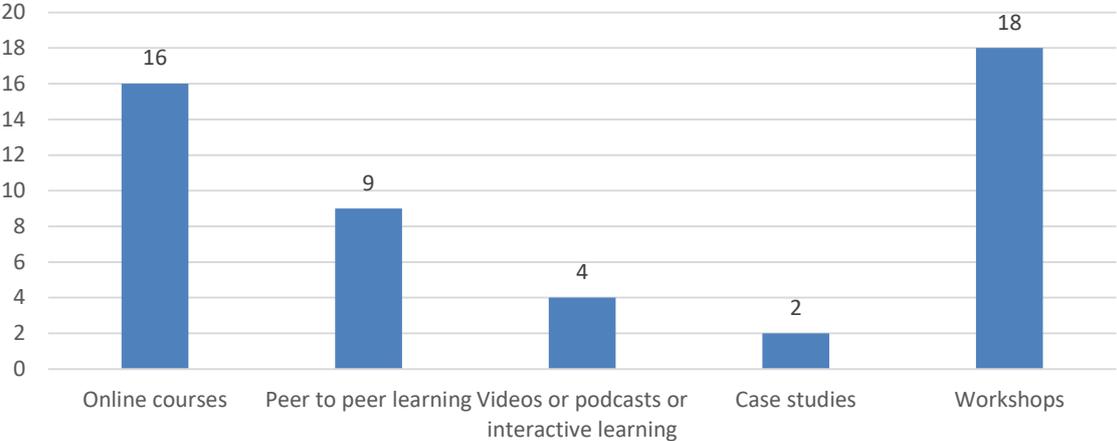
Question 14 – What learning content would you like to expand or add to your training offer if the new training resources were being developed?

Trainers would like to expand strategic management to training most but other skills were not far from that. Only accounting, imports and exports and it were under 4. IT is widely taught so they didn't see reason to expand that more, accounting is more service that is bought from specialised companies and imports and exports concerns only few enterprises so it is not seen so generally important for all.



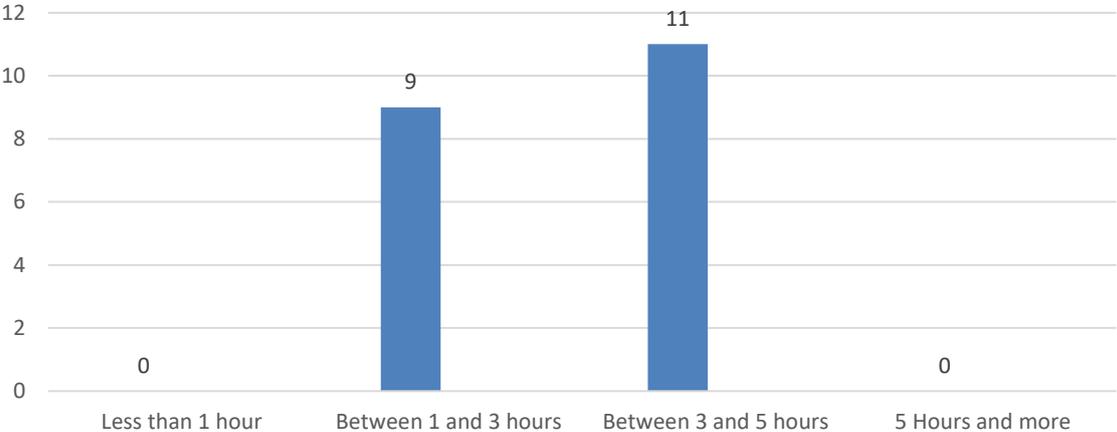
Question 15 – How would you like to provide these new training resources?

The preferable method of delivering new resources would be workshops and online courses. SMEs owners had online courses first and workshops were second. Peer-to-peer learning came third but far from first two methods.



Question 16 – How much time do you think the course should take each week to be manageable for education provider?

From educators 11 chose the answer “3-5 hours” and 9 chose 1-3 hours. The SMEs owners chose 1-3 hours. Nobody chose less than 1 hour and like the SME’s owners nobody wants to use 5 hours.

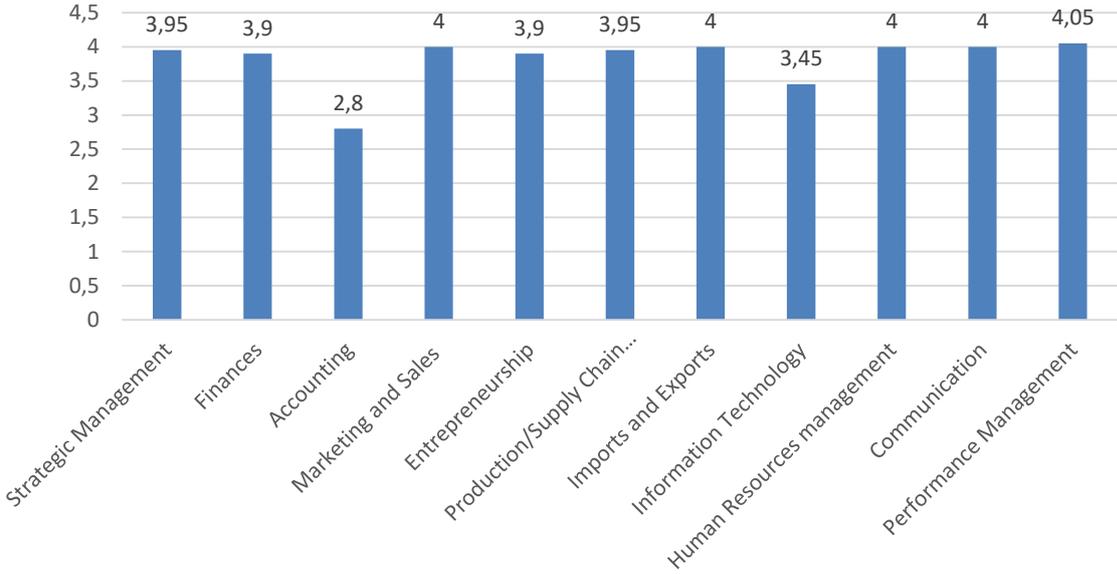


Question 17 – Do you agree with the statements below?

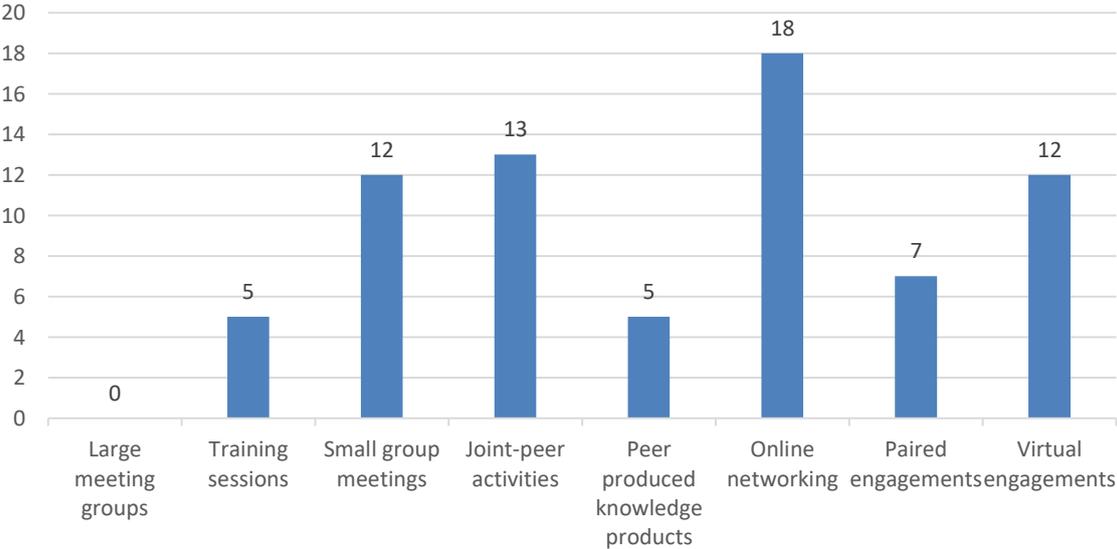
- *There are skills that are needed to become a successful entrepreneur that come with experience and can’t be taught in any kind of school/training* – 19 agreed and 1 strongly agreed
- *There is a potential in peer-to-peer learning among micro-enterprise owners.* – 19 agreed and 1 strongly agreed
- *The owners of micro-enterprises would be willing to share their knowledge and skills if provided the opportunity and technical skills to do so.* 12 educators left this question open, 7 agreed and one disagreed.

Question 18 – What specific knowledge/skills/expertise would be the most important and effective for students to receive from other micro enterprise owners in peer-to-peer learning?

It is difficult to point out the most important skill – the answers were very similar. Educators think that it would be best to learn many of those fields: Performance Management was seen a little bit more important. HR management, Marketing and Sales, imports and exports and communication were seen important to learn from SME owners which have a strong practical knowledge. HR management and imports and exports were also skills that were not included in training.



Question 19 – What approaches would be the most effective in peer-to-peer learning?



When it comes to learning approach, educators prefer online meetings. Other preferred options are joint-peer activities, small group meetings and virtual engagements. No one was interested about large meeting groups.

SUMMARY

The general results of the first part of the research, concerning the skills important, included and desired by the educators, the results are as following:

- The most important skills for running a successful business are: Financial skills, entrepreneurial skills, HR management skills, marketing and sales skills and networking skills
- Skills the less included in existing courses are: Import and export and HR Management.
- The students are considered to have the biggest knowledge about: IT and Problem solving.
- Trainer would like to add to their training offer: strategic management

When it comes to the existing and preferred training methods, our results indicate that:

- Usual courses take form of both: practical courses taking place in the education organizations' residences.
- The preferred method for educators would be workshops and online studies
- The perfect amount of time for a course is 3-5 hours a week, sometimes even more.
- The most urgent problems with providing new business management training are: lack of resources, variable character of subject fields, lack of students willing to pay for the course, different needs of each student.
- The educators know that peer-to-peer learning is important and essential part of student's learning and work life cooperation is written in national curriculum. Educators know that the real entrepreneurs have the best knowledge how skills work in practice.

Finnish education system is modern and very flexible. There is a national curriculum but educators have freedom to build courses and learning as they like and see to be best to students. Role of teacher/educator has changed a lot during last years and now it is more to be a coach instead of traditional teacher. And because the previously achieved knowledge of student has to be recognized, innovative ways to teach skills must have been developed.

4.8. CZECH REPUBLIC

4.8.1. NATIONAL AUDIT REPORT

INTRODUCTION

A comprehensive research phase was a key activity at the beginning of ME2ME project. Intellectual Output 1 consists of two parts: research among VET professionals and audit among the members of local business community. The following document is a summary of members of local business community research.

Research in the Czech Republic was done during period of December 2017 and January 2018 with support of regional chamber of commerce in the Czech Republic and most of SME's involved into research are their members.

In summary, a primary goal of the comprehensive audit was to identify the available skills and knowledge within the local business community that might be made available to other micro-enterprise owners through the peer-to-peer learning networks.

METHODOLOGY

In ME2ME audit it was possible to use any or all of the following approaches:

- Organizing focus groups with small numbers of microenterprise owners
- Conducting one-to-one interviews either face-to-face or by telephone
- Circulating a questionnaire to selected respondents

To organize focus group of the SME's owner was almost impossible due to their time limits. As nowadays are people over disturbed with questionnaires and researches to get proper answers for our research we decide to use one to one interviews. During the period of December 2017 and January 2018 we visited 20 microenterprise owners in order to interview them and fill prepared questionnaires.

The questionnaire consisted of 20 questions. They were divided into 4 chapters:

- V. General Demographics
- VI. Development of Business Management Skills
- VII. Needs and Preferences for Business Management Training
- VIII. Readiness and Preferences for Peer-to-Peer Learning

The questionnaires were clear and easy to fill. Because of one to one interviews we have got some extra comments and we try to reflect them in this report.

RESULTS OF THE AUDIT QUESTIONNAIRE:

General Demographics

Questions 1-5 - summary

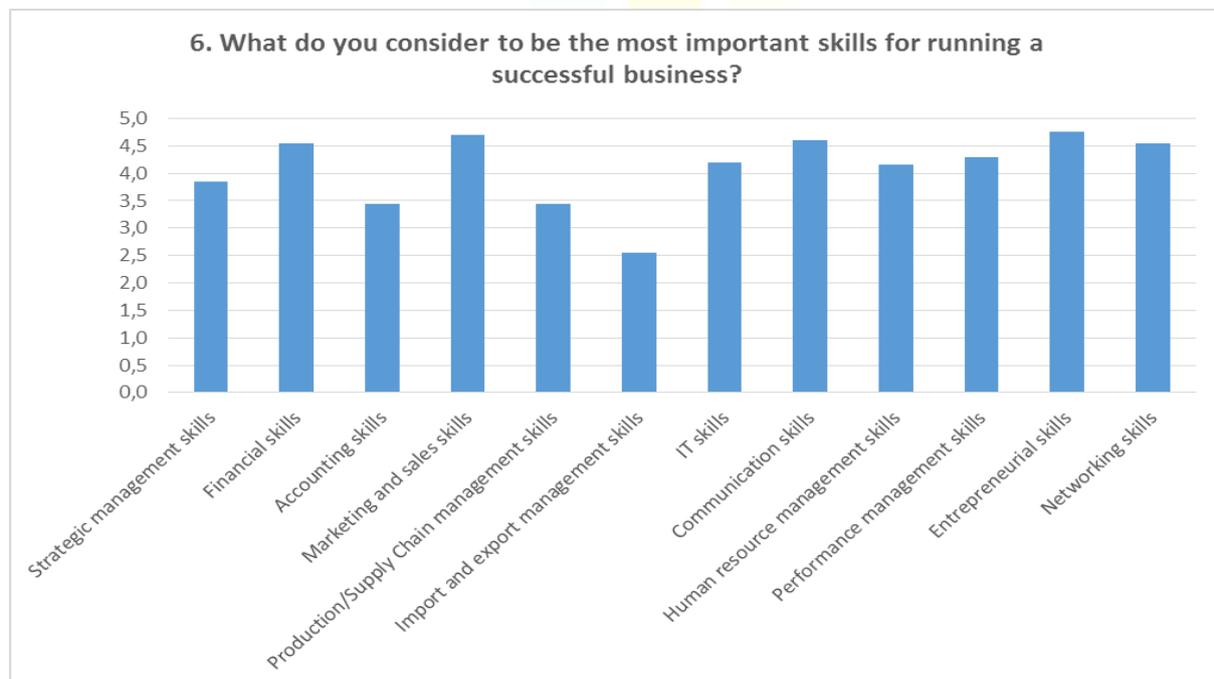
The purpose of questions 1-5 were to get to know our target group and learn about their business. The results of those questions are as follows:

- Our group consisted of many different businesses and there was not major group. The most popular area of our interviewees were: shop or retail (20%).
- As their sectors was marked: services (65%) and private sector (35%). They mentioned only those two maybe because some misunderstanding of the question.
- The companies have different amount of employees, (in average 4,2) all of them falls into the category of micro-enterprises. 20% have more than 5 employees the rest is from 1-4.
- Only one business was set up before 2000, 55% is from period of 2000-2009 and 40% were started after 2010 and are relatively new.
- 100% of interviewees are the owners of their businesses.

Development of Business Management Skills

The purpose of the second subchapter of the questionnaire was to find the skills that the entrepreneurs consider the most important for running a business. Also, it was important to collect the data about the skills they already poses and the importance of business training to obtaining these skills.

Question 6 – What is the most important skills for running a successful business?



The most relevant skills to running the successful business - according to Czech interviewees - were: entrepreneurial skills, marketing and sales, communication skills and networking skills.

Other abilities suggested by participants were: languages and law.

Lowest was rated Import and export management skills. There was a big difference in between businesses which deal with import and export and with those who are local oriented. Second lowest mark received accounting skills. Many of interviewed respondents comment that for accounting they need good accountant and is not necessary to have deep skills in this field.

Question 7 and 8 – Have you attended any business management training in the past 3 years?

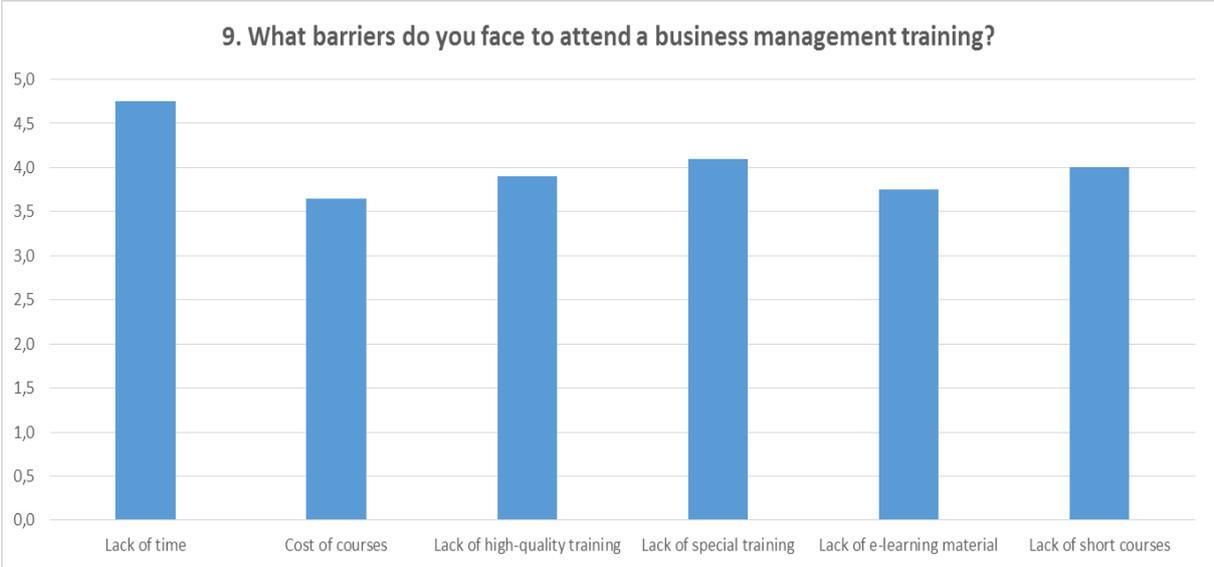
Only 25% of Czech interviewees have attended any business management training in the recent past. Business training is not common for micro enterprises.

Question 8 – Which skills result from training you completed and which ones from experience?

Small business owners almost did not attend any type of training. If they attend most of them were trained in IT. Very few attend strategic planning, communication and accounting.

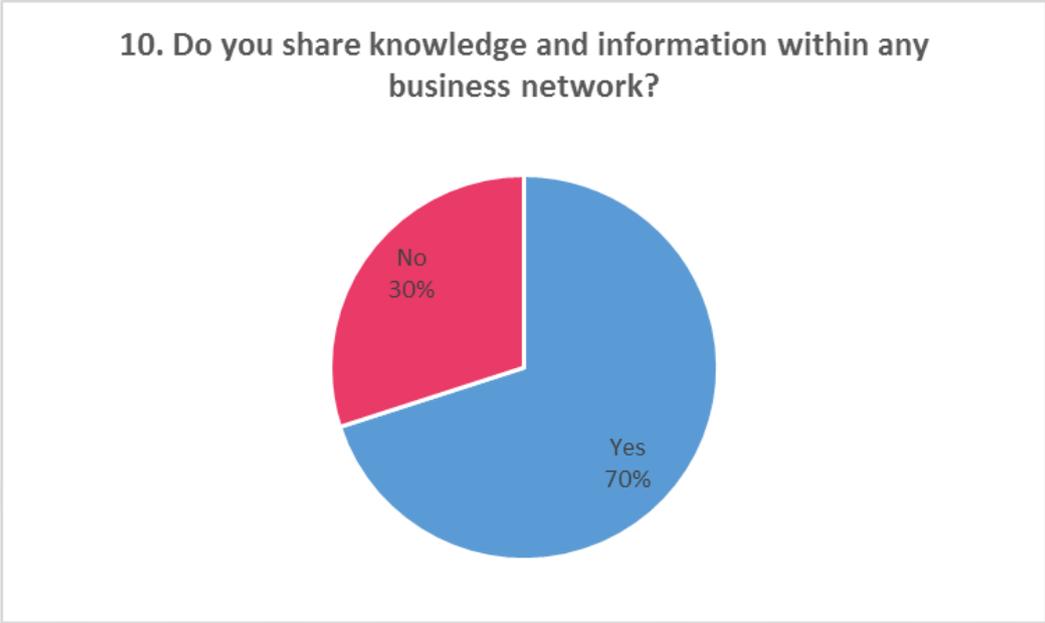
Question 9 – What barriers do you face to attend business management training??

As a barrier to attending business management training, the most popular answers were: lack of time and lack of special training. However, all of the answers were relatively high. The least popular was cost of courses and respondents express willingness to pay the course if it is exactly what they need and reaching their time schedules. As other obstacles were mentioned availability of practical training and lack of motivation to attend other education.



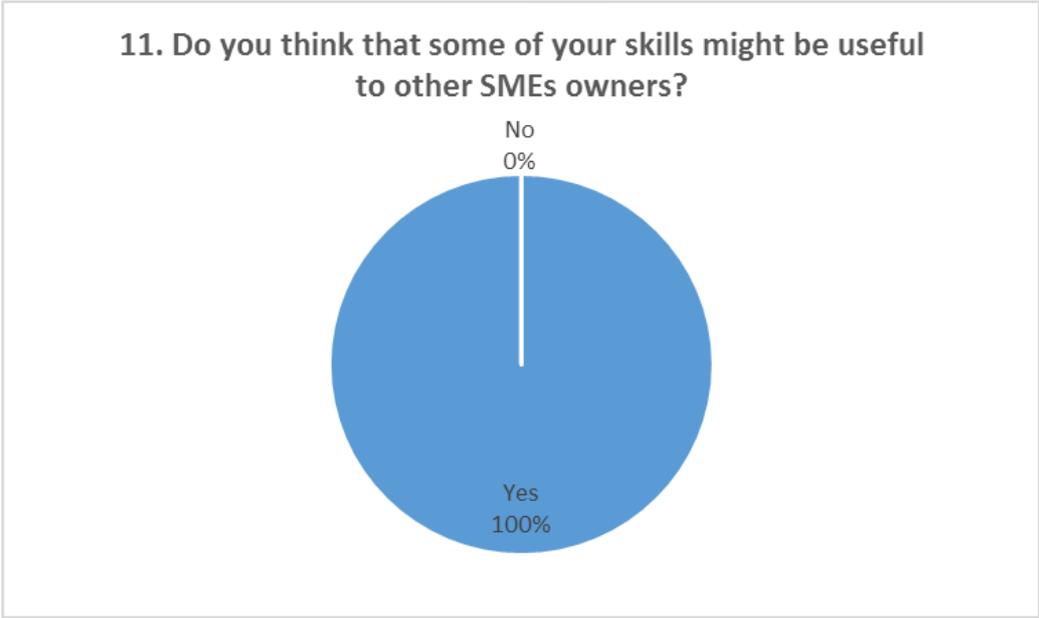
Question 10 – Do you share knowledge and information within any business network that you belong in?

70% of the respondents share their knowledge within any business network. The most popular network is chamber of commerce and local sector alliances.



Question 11 – Do you think that some of the skills you have developed might be useful to other micro enterprise owners?

Entrepreneurs feel quite confident about their own abilities. 100% of them stated that they have skills that might be useful for others. Most of them comment this question and express their deep knowledge in some topics acquired by experience.



Needs and Preferences for Business Management Training

Question 12 – How would you assess your knowledge of the following business areas?

The participants feel the most confident about their financial skills and IT skills followed by communication skills and entrepreneurial skills.

They don't feel confident about their import/export skills but many of them work locally and does not feel any need on this skills. They don't feel confident about strategic management skills which was for us surprise.



Question 13 – What learning content would you like to receive if new training resources were being developed?

There are many fields that our participants would be interested to learn. The most popular are: marketing and sales, entrepreneurship and IT. Interesting is willingness of further education in topics where they feel most comfortable with. Probably showing that those topic are considered as most important for them and they prefer deep knowledge in topic they know rather than learning something new.

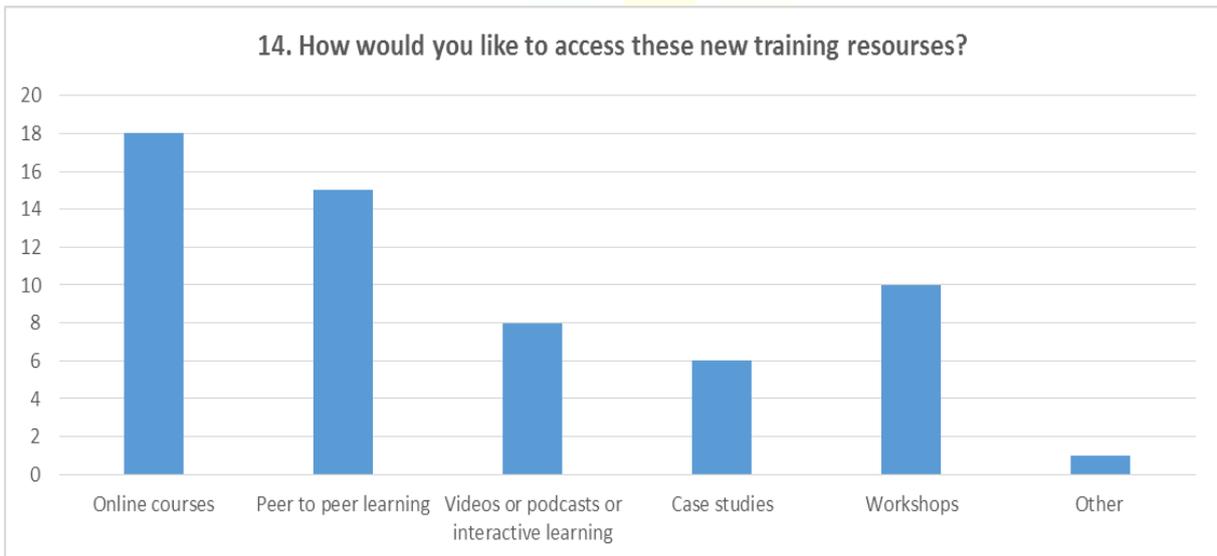


Question 14 – How would you like to access these new training resources?

The most preferred ways of learning are: online resources, peer-to-peer learning and workshops.

Popularity of online sources is done by their strong knowledge of IT and time flexibility of this kind of learning. Many of respondents comment peer to peer training as very interesting because they feel that is very strong to learn from experience of others.

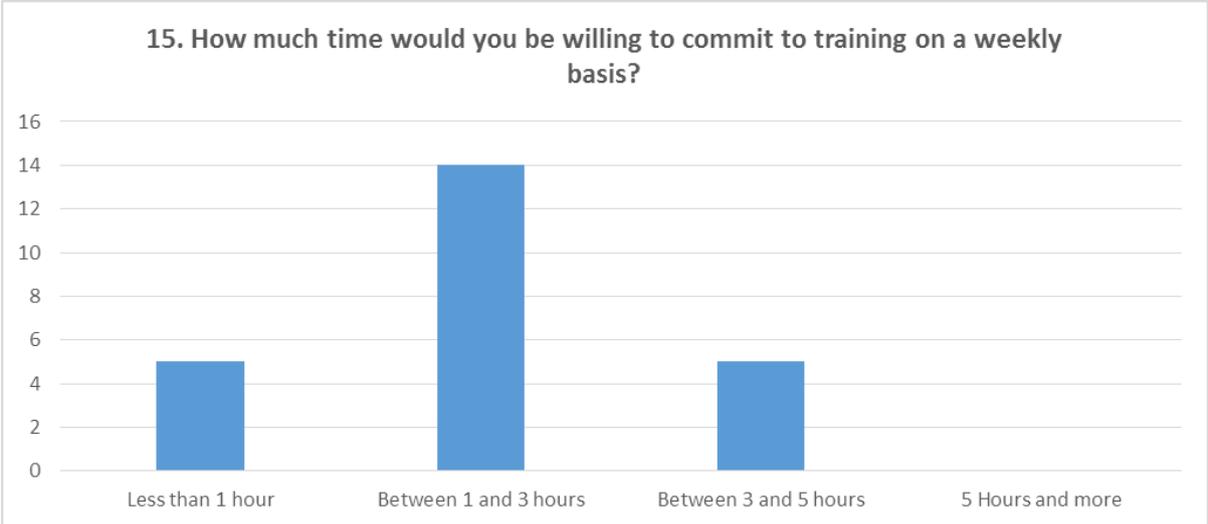
As other was mentioned study visit.



Question 15 – How much time would you be willing to commit to training on a weekly basis?

Most of the entrepreneurs are willing to commit 1-3 hours weekly.

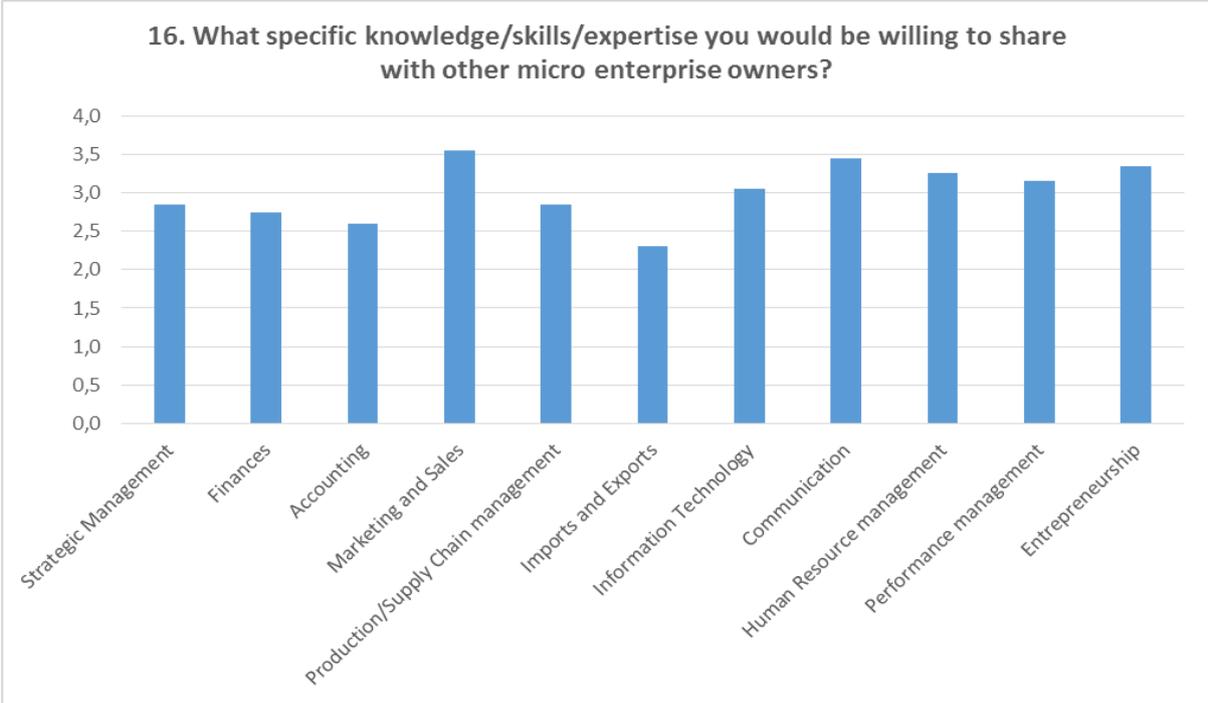
In general this question shows willingness to attend short intensive training rather than long course.



Readiness and preferences for peer-to-peer learning

Question 16 – What specific knowledge/skills/expertise you would be willing to share with other micro enterprise owners?

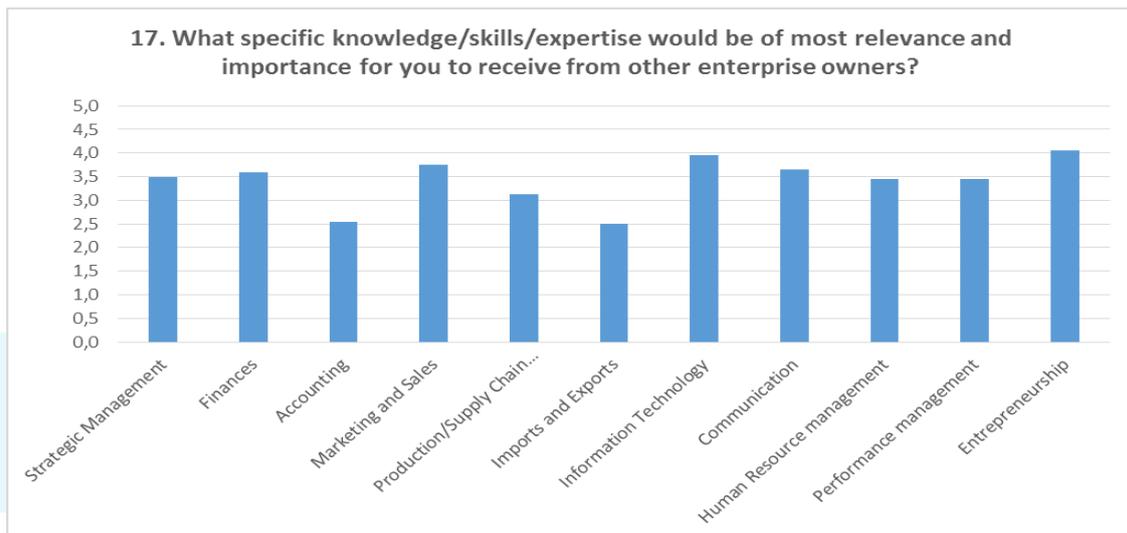
Participants were willing to share their knowledge in marketing and sales, communication and entrepreneurship.



Question 17 – What specific knowledge/skills/expertise would be of most relevance and importance for you to receive from other micro enterprise owners?

Preferable skills of the respondents to learn are: entrepreneurship, IT, marketing and sales, communication and performance management.

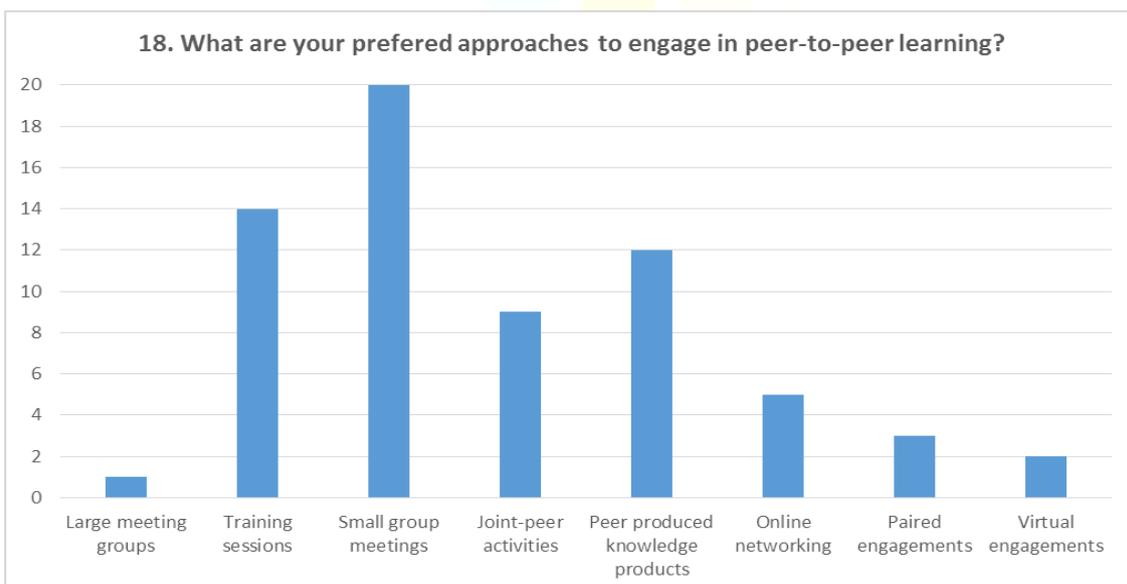
They were very interested in hearing from another micro enterprise how they are dealing with and get some practical ideas for their business. As well to see some tips and tricks from practice of other micro business owners.



Question 18 – What are your preferred approaches to engage in peer-to-peer learning?

While engaging in peer-to-peer learning, entrepreneurs would prefer to arrange it in the form of small group meetings, training sessions and peer produced knowledge products.

The interest in large group meetings was very low.



SUMMARY

Entrepreneurs' supply and demand for skills

The main issues for small businesses in Czech audit were identified as:

- Marketing and Sales
- Communication
- Entrepreneurship
- Financial skills

Those areas were identified as the most important but as well as most known. Respondents express their willing to develop deeper skills in arrears they already know and they consider them as useful rather than learn new things.

The only areas that are considered less important are: accountancy, import/export management. Probably due fact that are not important for all kind of businesses or can be done by hired expert.

Learning preferences

There are two most common obstacles to not attend business training: **lack of time and lack of useful trainings.**

As a learning method is most preferable small groups or good quality of online resource. Training has to be 1-3 hours weekly. Preferred are short sessions focused on concrete useful topic.

Peer-to-peer learning potential

Peer to peer training idea is quite new in Czech environment for business training. Majority of the respondents like the idea to be tough by other micro enterprise owner. For them seems to be very practical and useful.

They are willing as well to share their experience but not sensitive parts of know how.

General summary

Peer to peer learning in small groups and online products and support should be very interesting way for micro enterprises owners' education in the Czech Republic. Such education can be organized in cooperation of education provider with cooperation of chamber of commerce or any network of small businesses. We see a big space to develop and organize peer to peer training in frames of Me2Me project. 65% of respondents are will to cooperate with us on further development of the project as well as interest to cooperation expressed by chamber of commerce in Czech republic.

4.8.2. NATIONAL RESEARCH REPORT

INTRODUCTION

A comprehensive research phase was a key activity at the beginning of ME2ME project. Intellectual Output 1 consists of two parts: research among VET professionals and audit among the members of local business community. The following document is a summary of VET providers and teachers research.

Research in the Czech Republic was done during period of December 2017 and January 2018. Research was done with the group of 20 teachers from 15 VET institutions. 4 NGO's, 2 private education centres and 8 public VET schools from our region. Public VET education providers have long-term tradition. Most of the public VET schools exist for decades. Public VET schools established on 90' obviously were transformed from some previous traditional VET school.

Respondents were teachers of mentioned VET providers. Only in one case of private provider was the interview done with the owner which is as well teacher of some subjects.

Private centres and NGO's have small team of tribal teachers and hiring specialist as teachers just on short time basis for external cooperation on different topics. In case of public schools they habitually have huge amount of teachers.

METHODOLOGY

To organize one big focus group of the VET providers and teachers was difficult and therefore we decided to make personal meetings in order to fill questionnaires. In case of interviewing more people from one school we met them together in a small group.

The questionnaires provided were clear and easy to fill. Because of one to one or small group interviews we have got some extra comments and we reflect them in this report.

RESULTS OF THE AUDIT QUESTIONNAIRE:

General Demographics

Questions 1-5 - summary

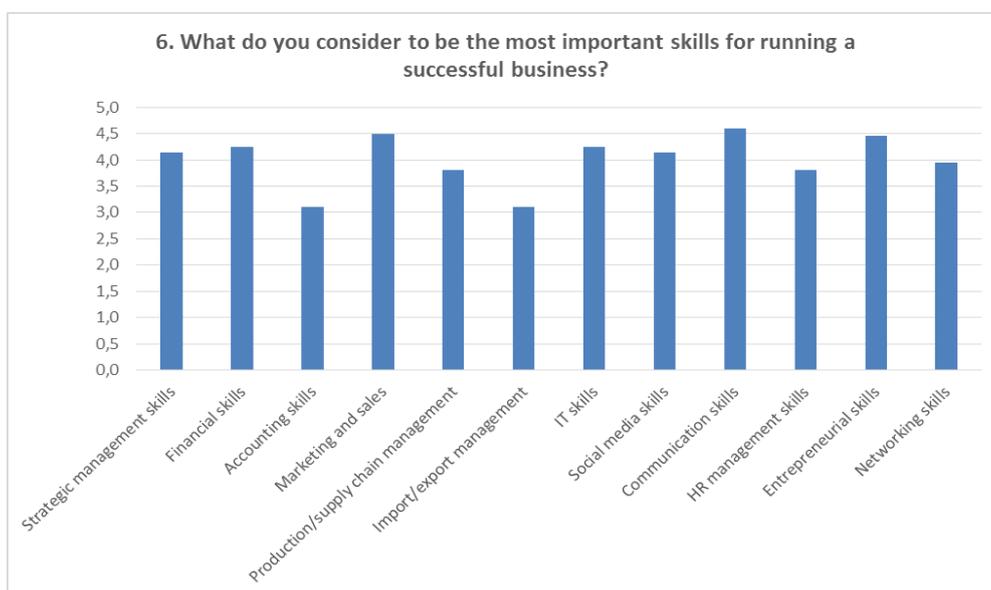
The purpose of questions 1-5 was to get to know our target group of VET providers and teachers. The results of those questions are as follows:

- Our group consisted of different VET teachers. Majority was from public sector 70%.
- The VET providers have different amount of employees, (in average 29) public schools obviously have more staff than NGO's and private VET providers.
- Most of the VET providers are traditional and exist on market for decades.
- Question of ownership was irrelevant because there is no owner in public schools. Only in one case of private education centre one owner was interviewed.

Provision of business management skills

The purpose of the second subchapter of the questionnaire was to find the skills that the VET providers consider as the most important for running a business. Also was important to collect the data about the skills they already poses and the importance of business training to obtain these skills.

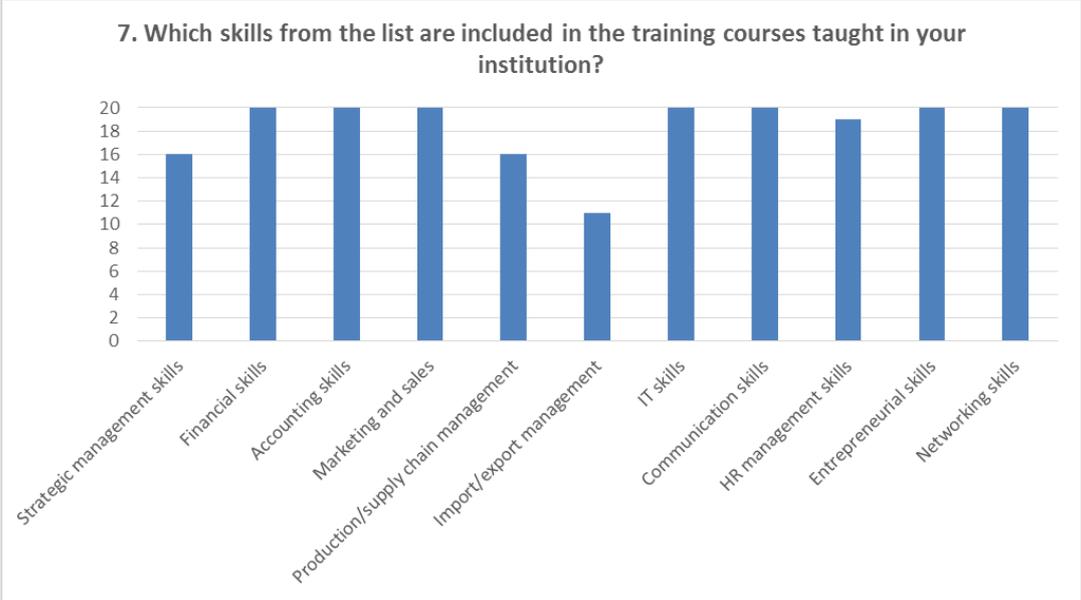
Question 6 – What do you consider to be the most important for running a successful business?



The most relevant skills to running the successful business - according to Czech interviewees with VET providers - were: communication skills, marketing and sales and entrepreneurial skills. This result is similar to micro enterprises owners' research.

Lowest were rated Import and export management skills and accounting skills. VET experts commented those skills as mostly done by some outsourced people. Deeper knowledge for business people is practical but not necessary.

Question 7 – Which skills from the list are included in the training courses taught in your institution?

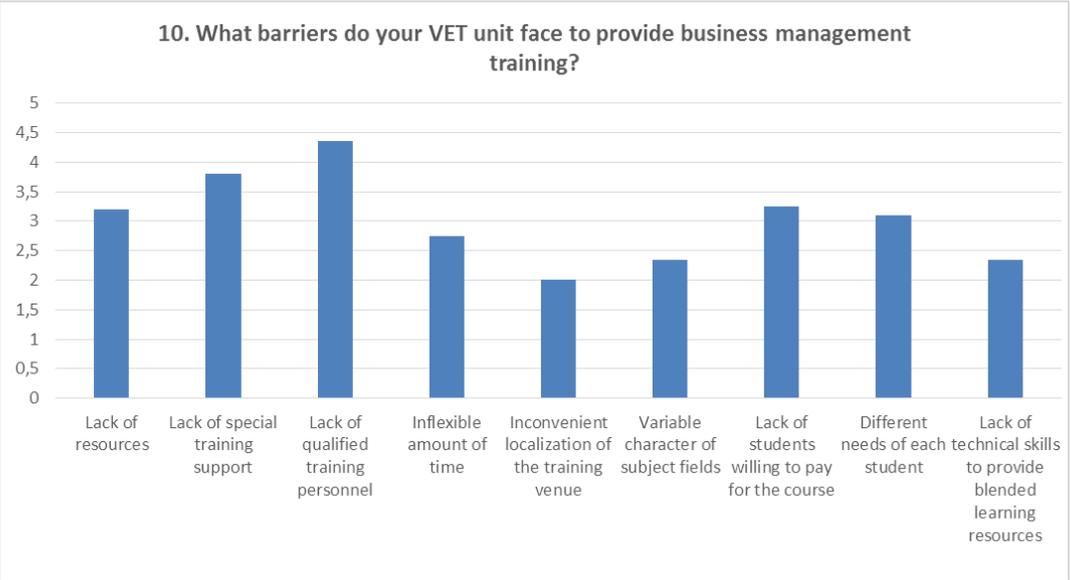


Almost all mentioned skills are taught in VET institutions which attended research. Majority is taught in all of them. Less taught skill is Import/Export management. This skill is mostly acquired via special training courses which are not taught by all VET providers. Production/supply chain management and Strategic management are also not taught in every VET institution.

Question 8. Have you provided any business management training in the past 3 years?

100% of interviewed VET providers provided business management training in the past 3 years.

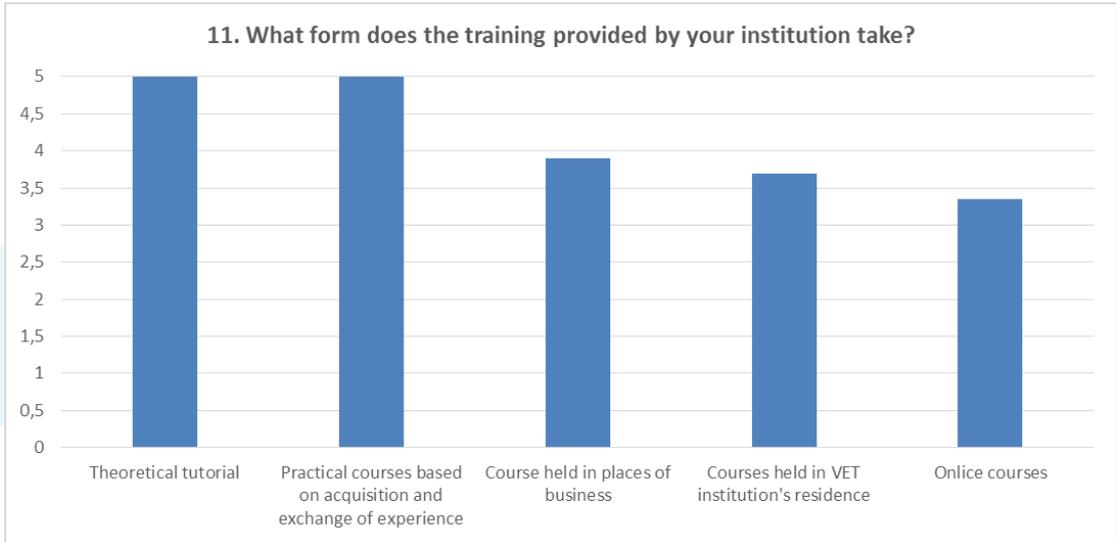
Question 9. – What barriers do your VET unit face to provide business management training?



The most popular answers pointing barriers to provide business management training were: lack of qualified training personnel followed by lack of special training support and lack of resources with lack of students willing to pay for the course. Our notice for Czech Republic is that good training must be practical and lead by professional from practice which is difficult to find because many of them are working in business and not in education.

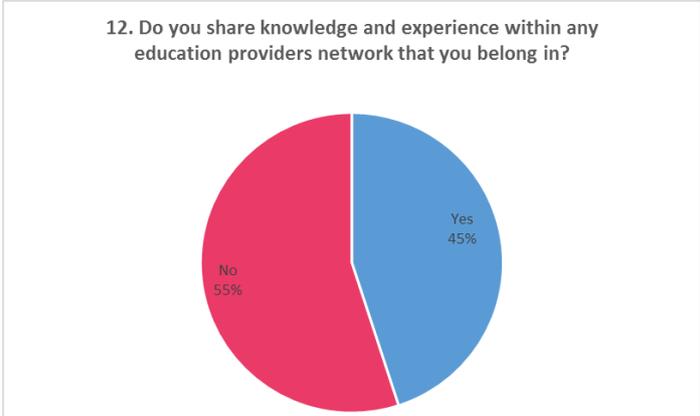
As lowest was marked inconvenient localization of the training venue, probably because all respondents have its own facility for training courses and educational activities and expressed fact saying if the training is attractive and practical localization is not the problem.

Question 10 – What form does the training provided by your institution take?



Theoretical tutorial and practical courses based on acquisition and exchange of experience were the most often marked in questionnaires. The lowest were online resources but except some public schools online resources are used in education and training in the interviewed institutions.

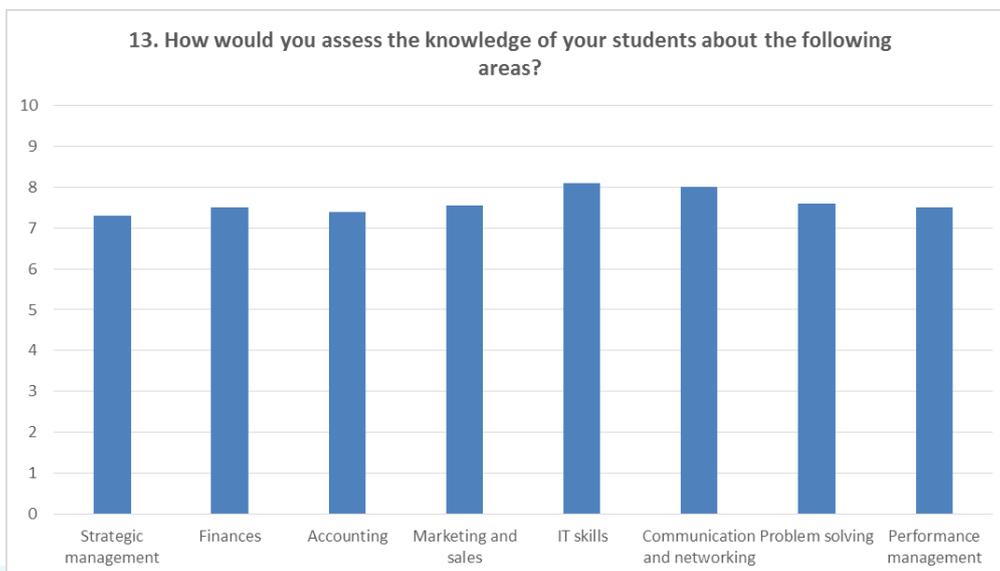
Question 11 – Do you share knowledge and experience within any education providers network that you belong in?



55% respondents marked "NO". Majority of them are not members of such network.

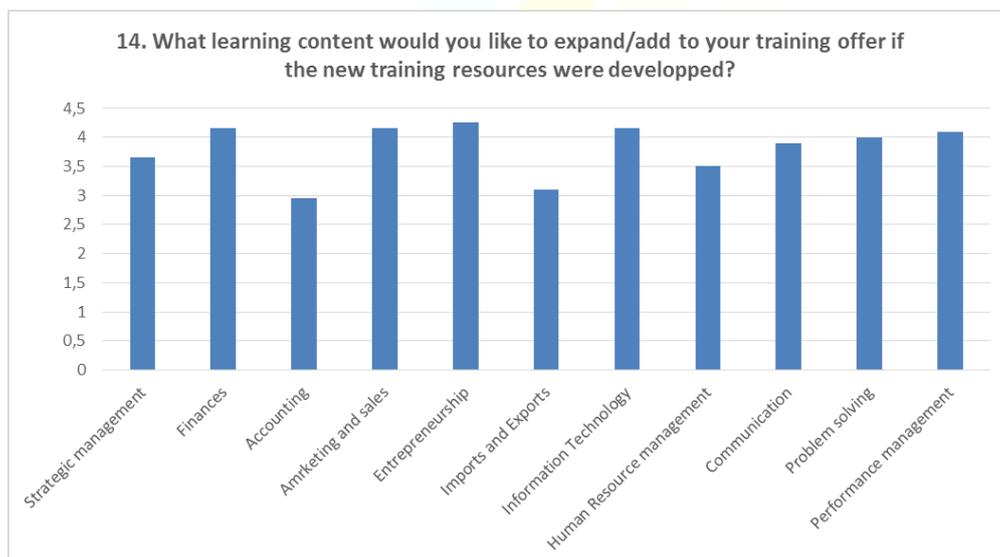
Demand for business management training

Question 12 – How would you assess the knowledge of your students about the following areas?



Knowledge of students was marked in very similar level on all mentioned skills. In average received 8,5 out of 10. The highest was rated IT skills. Students from private institutes were scored higher than students from public providers.

Question 13 – What learning content would you like to expand/add to your training offer if the new training resources were developed?



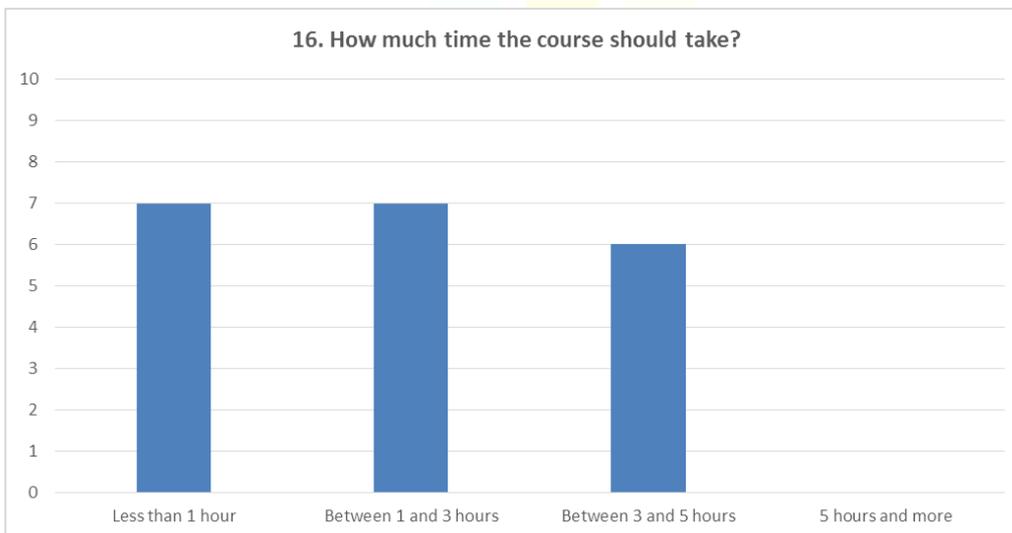
There are many fields that our participants would be interested to expand. The most popular are: entrepreneurship, marketing and sales, IT, finances and performance management. Lowest mark received Imports and exports and Accounting which were considered like covered enough and not that important to be taught.

Question 14 – How would you like to provide new training resources?



The most preferred ways of learning are: Videos or podcasts or interactive learning, case studies and workshops. Peer to peer training was marked as lowest but in group of interviewed business people was on the top. As a reason we see that VET institutions were represented by teachers and they do not provide peer to peer learning. From their point of view of peer to peer learning they are going to be replaced by someone from practice. They selected learning methods which support their way of teaching.

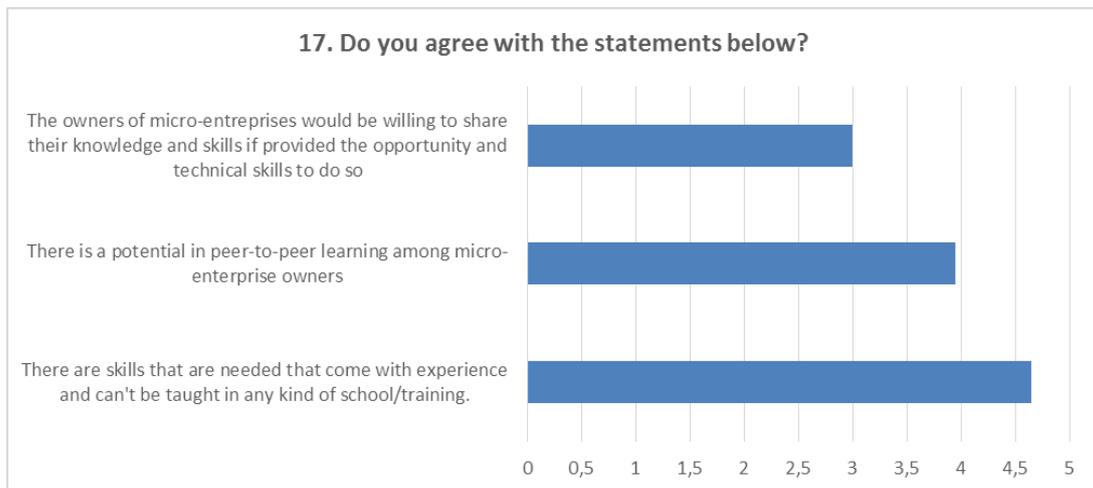
Question 15 – How much time do you think the course should take each week to be manageable for education provider?



Most of the teachers prefer short blocks or single lessons on each topic. This corresponds with traditional way of teaching in Czech VET schools.

Potential of peer-to-peer learning

Question 16 – Do you agree with the statements below?

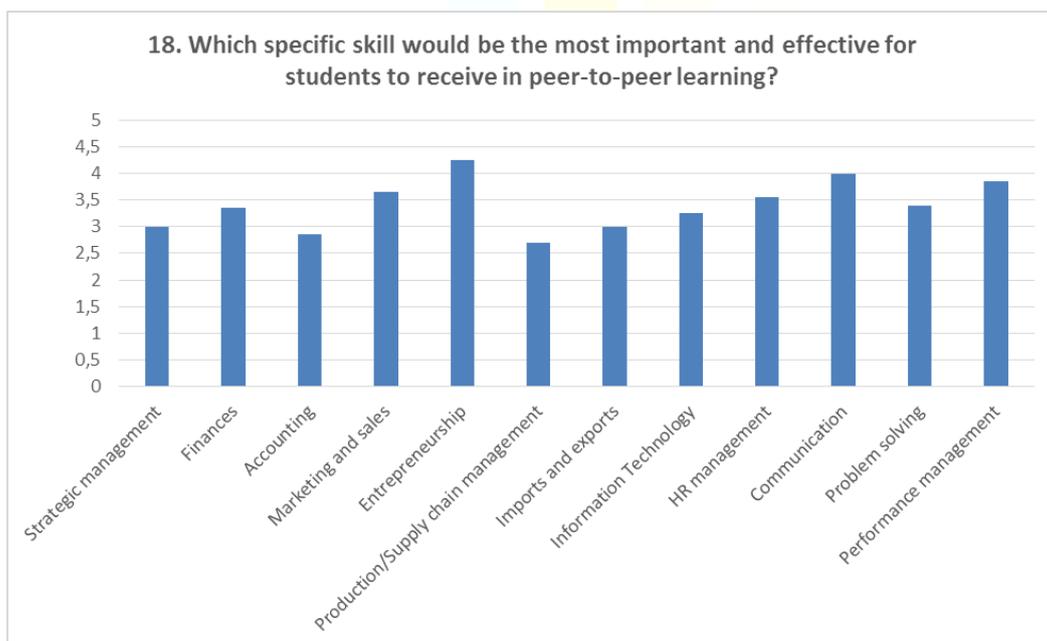


Almost all respondents expressed opinion that there are skills that are needed that come with experience and can't be taught in any kind of school/training.

Majority of VET teachers see a potential in peer-to-peer learning among micro-enterprise owners.

Some doubts appears in willingness of the owners of micro-enterprises to share their knowledge and skills.

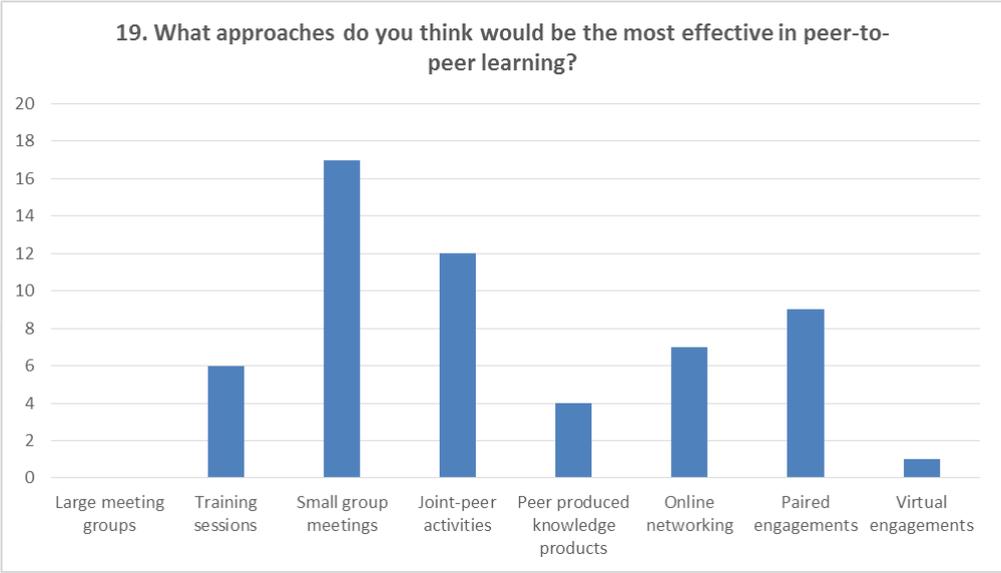
Question 17 – Which specific skill would be the most important and effective for students to receive in peer-to-peer learning?



Preferable skills which would be the most important and effective for students to receive in peer-to-peer learning are: entrepreneurship, communication, performance management and marketing and sales.

Entrepreneurship was marked highest. Teachers commented that supposed to be the core of peer to peer training of people running small business.

Question 18 – What approaches do you think would be the most effective in peer-to-peer learning?



As the most effective approaches selected by Czech VET professionals for peer-to-peer learning are small group meetings, joint peer activities and paired engagements.

No one see potential in large group meetings. Small group meetings were as well the most popular option for SME’s owners.

SUMMARY

Provision of business management skills

The main skills important for running small businesses in the Czech Republic intended by VET providers were identified as:

- Communication
- Marketing and Sales
- Entrepreneurship

Results correspond with the results of SME's owner's research. They identified the same areas as the most important for running business and willingness to improve their knowledge in this areas.

The only areas considered as less important are: accountancy, import/export management again similar to SME's research results.

There are many fields that our participants would be interested to expand. The most popular are: entrepreneurship, marketing and sales, IT, finances and performance management.

Learning preferences

There are four most common obstacles to not provide business training: lack of qualified training personnel followed by lack of special training support and lack of resources with lack of students willing to pay for the course.

The most common form of training provided in the Czech Republic are theoretical tutorials and practical courses based on acquisition and exchange of experience

As the most preferable learning method, selected by VET professionals, is small groups. Training has to be 1-5 hours weekly. Preferred are short sessions focused on concrete useful topic.

Peer-to-peer learning potential

Almost all respondents express that there are skills that are needed that come with an experience and can't be taught in any kind of school or training. Majority of VET teachers see the potential in peer-to-peer learning among micro-enterprise owners but as well on the other hand they did not select it as preferable method for training. This is probably because as teachers they cannot provide peer to peer training because they are teachers and trainers and not entrepreneurs.

Some doubts appear in willingness of the owners of micro-enterprises to share their knowledge because it is sometimes contra productive for them to share know how.

General summary

Peer to peer learning in small groups should be very interesting way for micro enterprises owners' education in the Czech Republic. On the other hand there are obstacles for VET providers to organize

such trainings: lack of qualified training personnel followed by lack of special training support and lack of resources.

From research results we can read that if VET providers will overcome above mentioned obstacles and there will be demand from the target group for such training they are able to organize it. We see a very big potential in framework of the ME2ME project in engagement of needs of SME's owners to VET providers offer. Peer to peer learning is the challenge and implementation of such training should be a tool to reach needs and offers in education market in the Czech Republic.

60% of respondents are will to cooperate with us on further development of the project.

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