Transnational Research and Audit Report

me2me

Contents:

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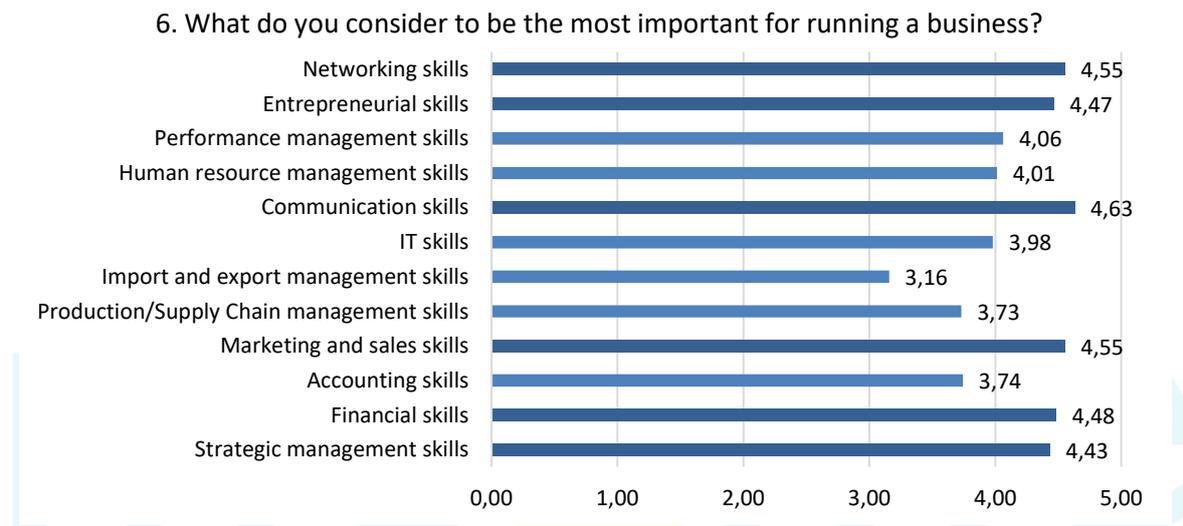
The sample in total included 160 respondents from micro-enterprises established in 8 countries – Poland, Lithuania, United Kingdom, Hungary, Romania, Ireland, Czech Republic and Finland. Large part from all respondents were the owners of those micro-enterprises by themselves, which were different in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

2.1.2. 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 the respondents' micro-enterprises varied and are represented in a picture below (the size of the word is set by the number of times the activity was mentioned).

- Sectors in which micro-enterprises are operating included services, education, retail, health, ICT, tourism, hospitality, entertainment and others, and are represented in a picture below (the size of the word is set by the number of times the activity was mentioned).

- 61% of represented micro-enterprises employed 3 or less employees.
- Respondents were representing SMEs established in the last 30 years, with the oldest established at 1987, while the most recent has been created already in the first days of 2018.
- 86% 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 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 for running a business?

Skill	Score
Networking skills	4,55
Entrepreneurial skills	4,47
Performance management skills	4,06
Human resource management skills	4,01
Communication skills	4,63
IT skills	3,98
Import and export management skills	3,16
Production/Supply Chain management skills	3,73
Marketing and sales skills	4,55
Accounting skills	3,74
Financial skills	4,48
Strategic management skills	4,43

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).
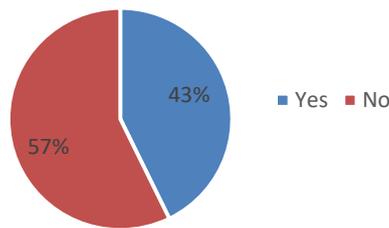
Other very important skills pointed out by entrepreneurs include *learning, innovation management, project management*, *languages*, *cultural understanding*, *cooperation*, *patience*, *flexibility*, *team leading*, *self-management*, skills in *mathematics*, *law* and *psychology*, as well as *field-related 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.
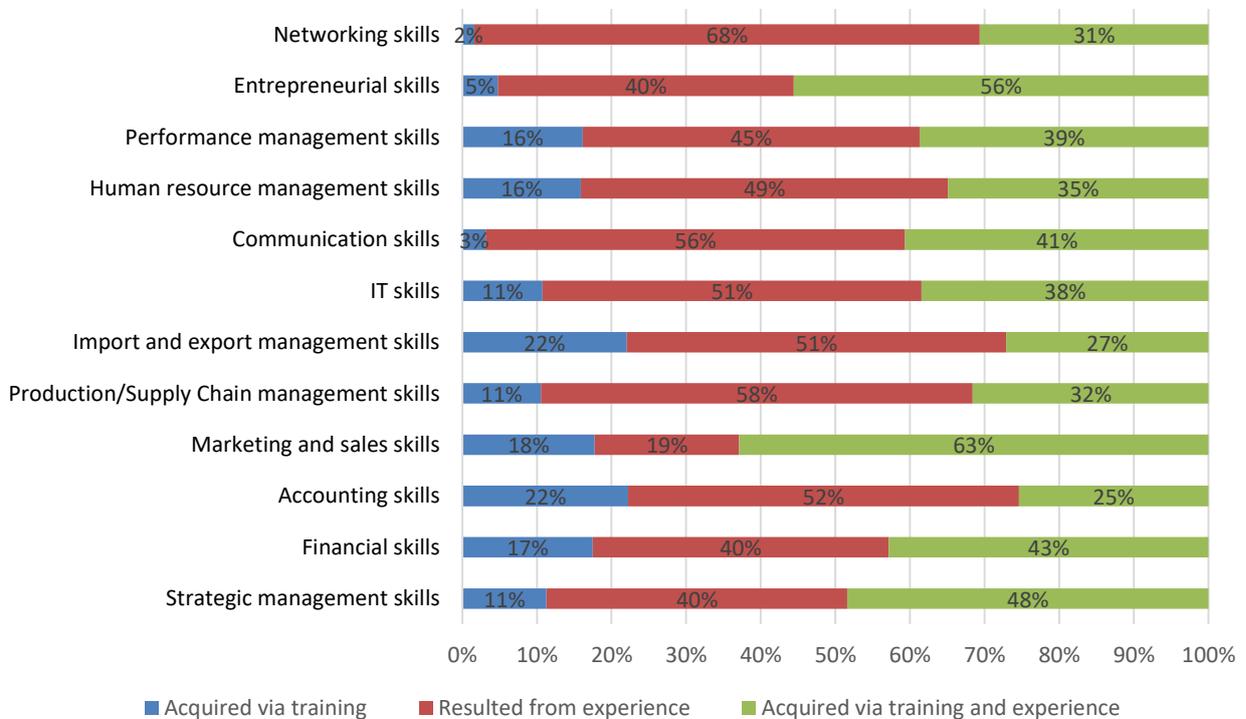
7. Have you attended any business management training in the past 3 years?

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.
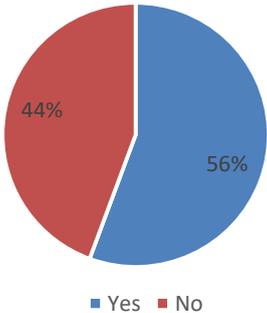
Entrepreneurs also pointed out *lack of professionals, who can train*, *lack of local courses*, *limited places in the trainings, a number of courses already attended, too many courses offered* or on the contrary – *no courses offered* as barriers to attend the business management training. Some of them 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?

Barrier	Score
Lack of short courses	3,47
Lack of e-learning material	3,18
Lack of special training, focusing on modules for specific subjects	3,68
Lack of high-quality training	3,67
Cost of courses	3,64
Lack of time	4,09

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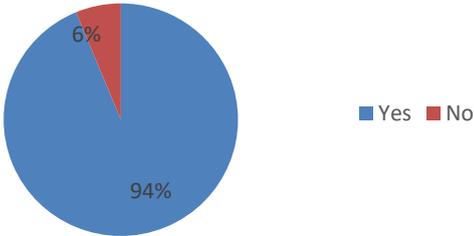
10. Do you share knowledge and information within any business network?

44%

56%

■ Yes ■ No

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?

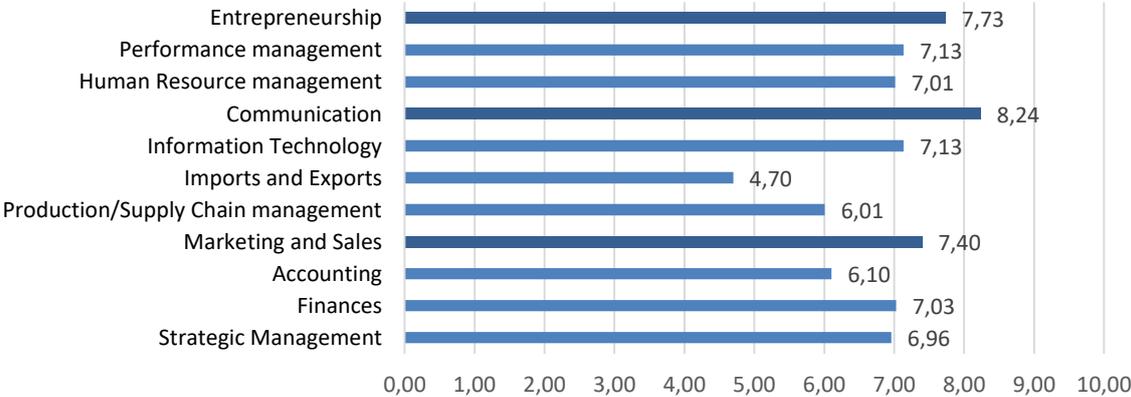**Needs and Preferences for Business Management Training**

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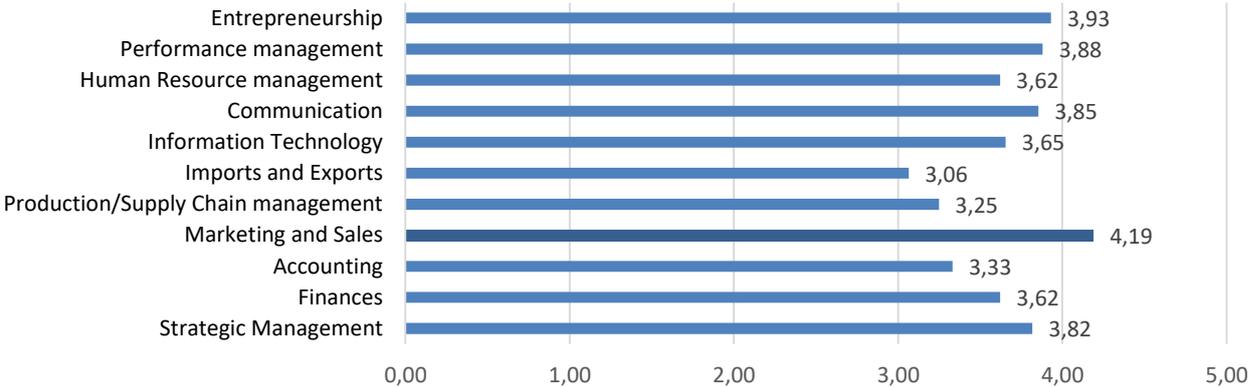
Question 13 – What learning content would you like to receive if new training resources were being developed?

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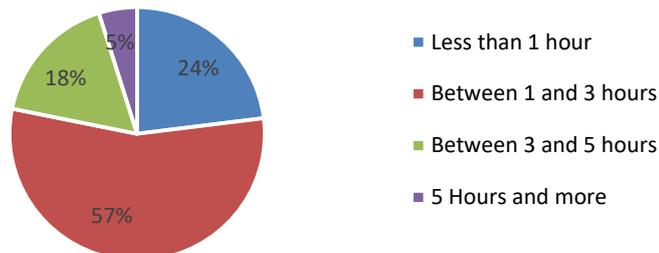
14. How would you like to access these new training resources

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?

- Less than 1 hour
- Between 1 and 3 hours
- Between 3 and 5 hours
- 5 Hours and more

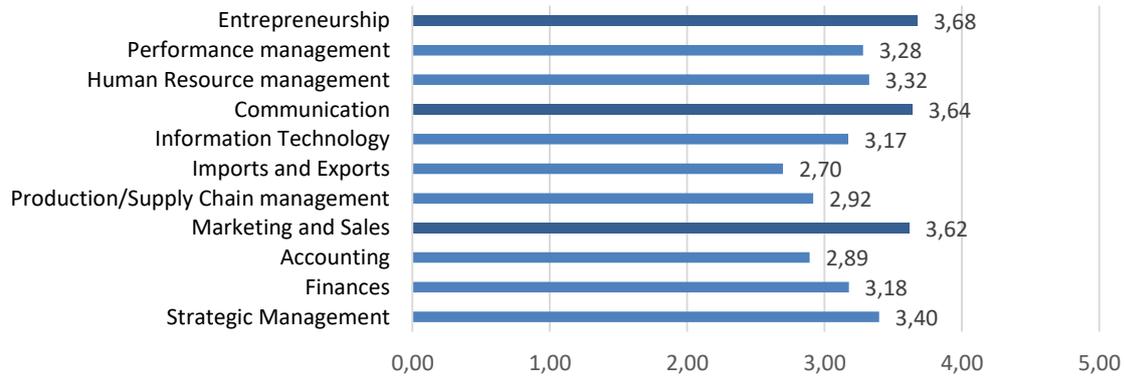## **Readiness and preferences for peer-to-peer learning**

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 (4.32/5.0), 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?
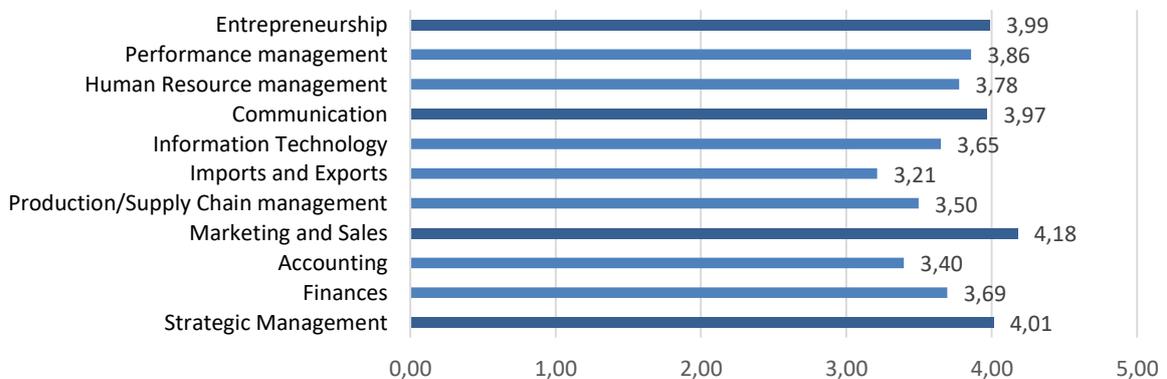
Category	Value
Entrepreneurship	3,68
Performance management	3,28
Human Resource management	3,32
Communication	3,64
Information Technology	3,17
Imports and Exports	2,70
Production/Supply Chain management	2,92
Marketing and Sales	3,62
Accounting	2,89
Finances	3,18
Strategic Management	3,40

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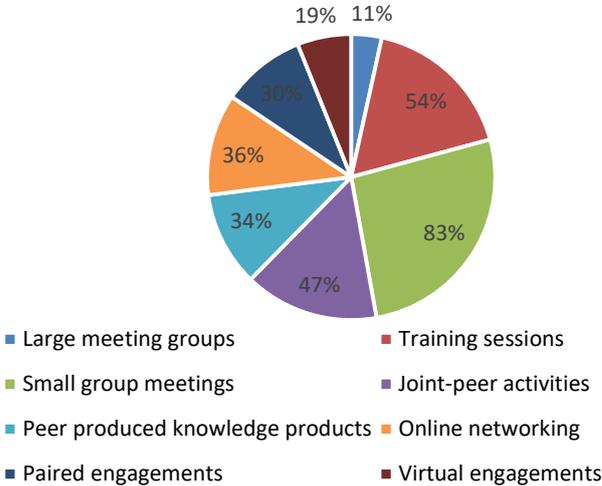
17. What knowledge/skills/expertise would be of most relevance and importance for you to receive from other micro enterprise owners in peer-to-peer learning?

Category	Value
Entrepreneurship	3,99
Performance management	3,86
Human Resource management	3,78
Communication	3,97
Information Technology	3,65
Imports and Exports	3,21
Production/Supply Chain management	3,50
Marketing and Sales	4,18
Accounting	3,40
Finances	3,69
Strategic Management	4,01

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?

- Large meeting groups
- Training sessions
- Small group meetings
- Joint-peer activities
- Peer produced knowledge products
- Online networking
- Paired engagements
- Virtual engagements

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

<u>Development of Business Management Skills</u>

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.

<u>Needs and Preferences for Business Management Training</u>

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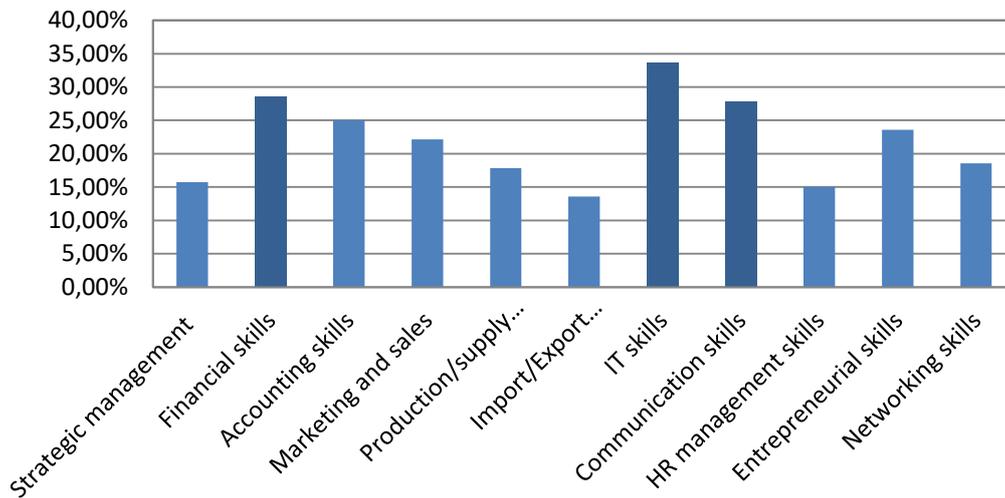
Other skills considered vital were: *strategic thinking, time and process management, conflict management, leadership, generating ideas, critical thinking, change* and *innovation management.*

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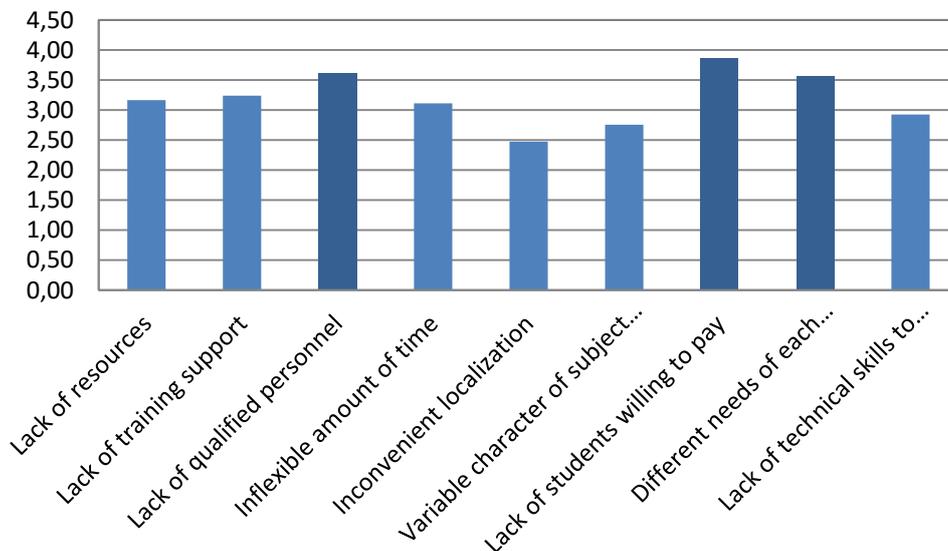
7. Which skills from the list are included in the training courses taught in your institution?

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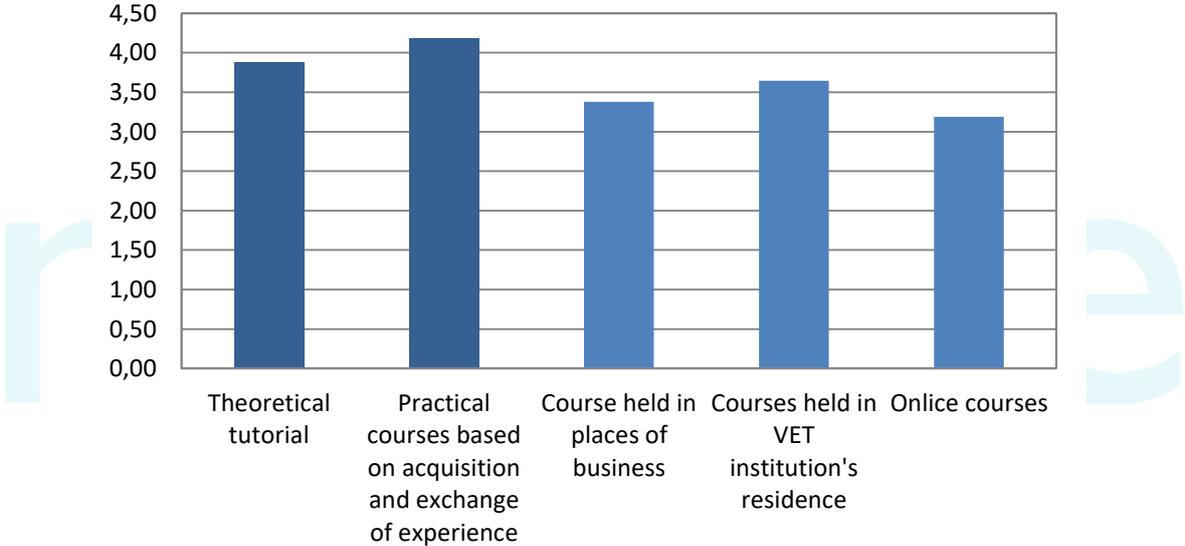
Question 11 - What form does the training provided by your institution take?

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?
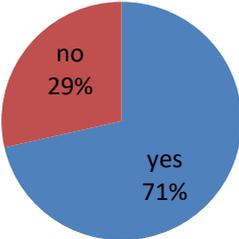

Other forms of training indicated by our respondents were: *individual courses, simulations, counselling, didactical games* and *practical projects.*

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.

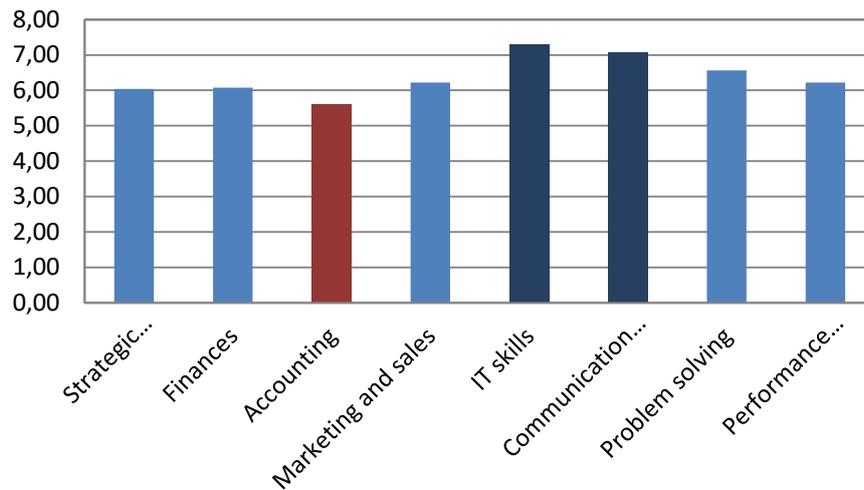12. Do you share knowledge and experience within any education providers network?

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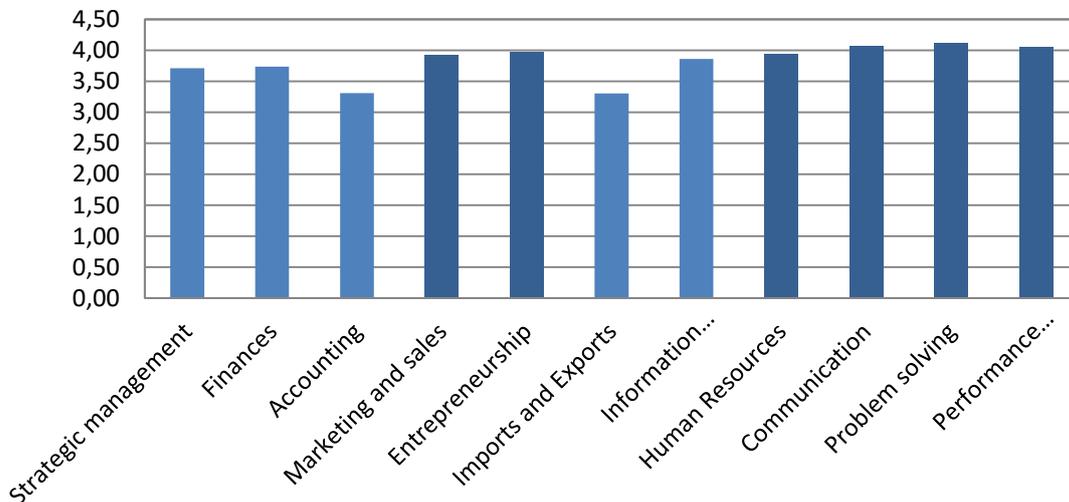
13. How would you assess the knowledge of your students about the following areas?

Bar chart showing assessment values (0,00–8,00) for: Strategic... (~6.0), Finances (~6.1), Accounting (~5.6, red bar), Marketing and sales (~6.2), IT skills (~7.3), Communication... (~7.1), Problem solving (~6.6), Performance... (~6.2)

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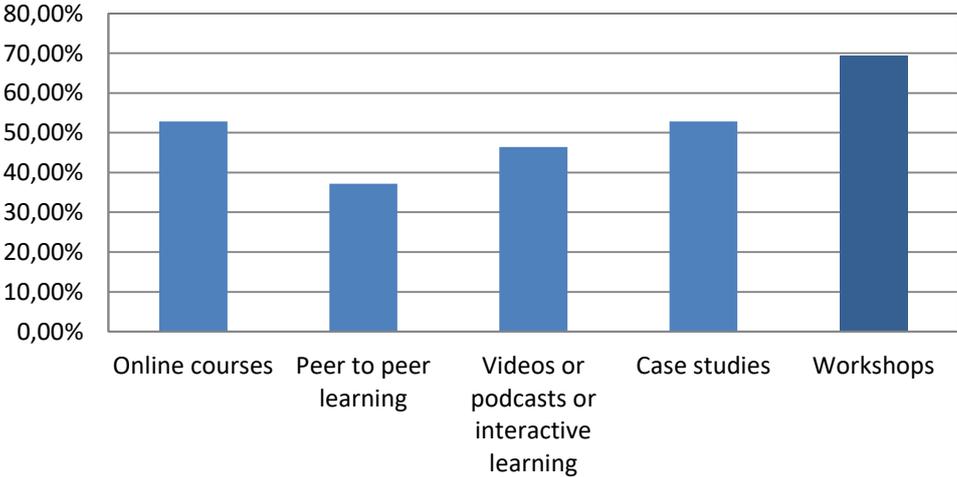
14. What learning content would you like to expand/add to your training offer if the new training resources were developped?

Bar chart showing values (0,00–4,50) for: Strategic management (~3.7), Finances (~3.7), Accounting (~3.3), Marketing and sales (~3.9), Entrepreneurship (~4.0), Imports and Exports (~3.3), Information... (~3.8), Human Resources (~3.9), Communication (~4.1), Problem solving (~4.1), Performance... (~4.0)

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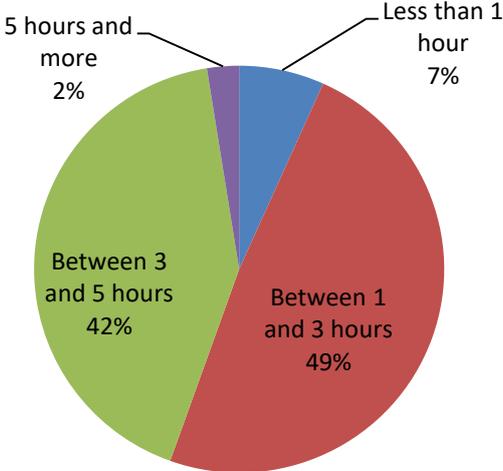
15. How would you like to provide new training resources?

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.
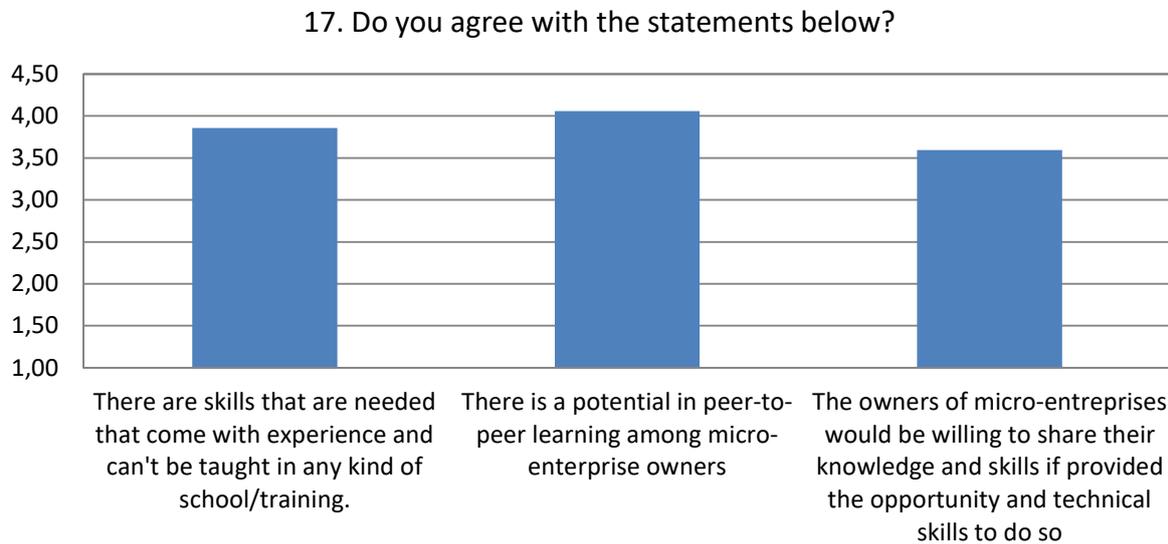
16. How much time the course should take?

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:

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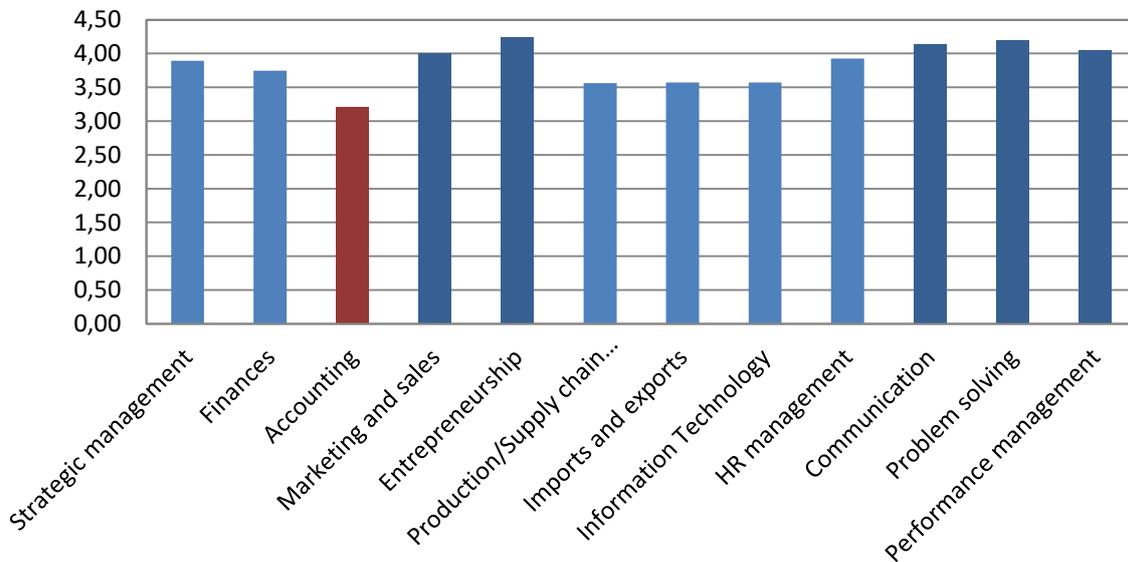
Question 18 – What specific knowledge/skills/expertise would be the most important and effective for students to receive from other micro enterprise owners in peer-to-peer learning?

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 leaning: *sharing stories, experiences, mistakes, life lessons; networking, motivation, recruitment techniques, attracting new customers, generating ideas* and *social media marketing.*
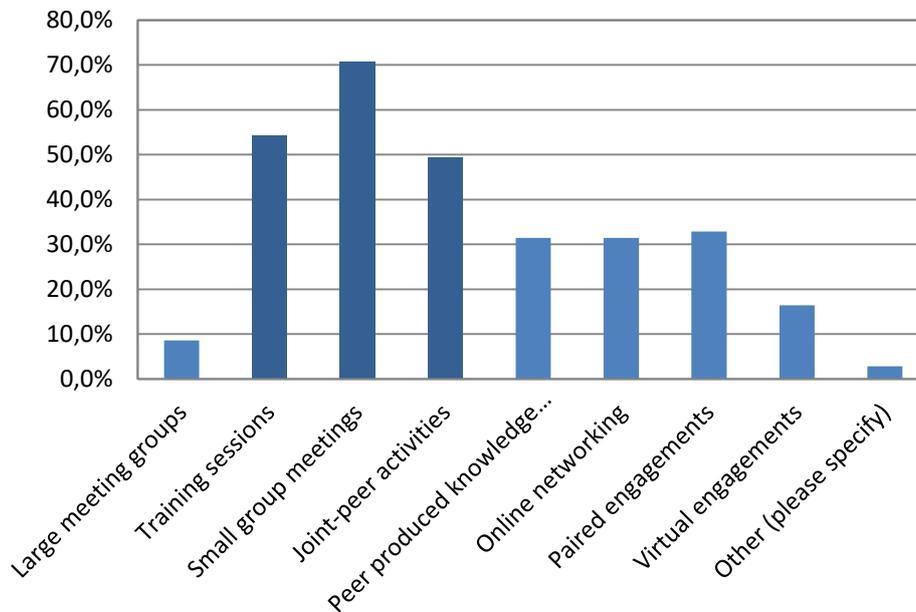
18. Which specific skill would be the most imprtant and effective for students to receive in peer-to-peer learning?

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.

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