

# Output O4 Further training programme Realisation of customer-centred innovations



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

“The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.”

## Partner

Hanse-Parlament (HP), Germany (Lead Partner)

Hamburgisches WeltWirtschaftsInstitut gemeinnützige GmbH (HWWI), Germany

Dolnośląska Izba Rzemieślnicza we Wrocławiu (DIRW), Poland

Warmińsko-Mazurska Izba Rzemiosła I Przedsiębiorczości (WIRP), Poland

Hanzeatycki Instytut Wspierania Małych i Średnich Przedsiębiorstw (HI), Poland

International Business College (IBC), Danmark

Ipartestületek Országos Szövetsége (IPOSZ), Hungary

Miskolci Egyetem (MU), Hungary

## Language

English

## Content

<b>Summary of the Project and Introduction</b> .....	6
<b>Concept, Curriculum and Teaching materials</b> .....	8
1. Background.....	8
2. Goals, target groups and duration of the further education program.....	10
Course .....	10
Target groups .....	10
Objectives .....	10
Schedule .....	11
Scope of hours .....	11
3. Training Unit A “Methods” .....	13
Content and Schedule .....	13
The role of the trainers.....	17
4. Training Unit B “First Praxis Phase and Learning at the Job” .....	18
Goals and tasks of the self-study-phase.....	18
The role of the trainers/consultants.....	18
5. Training Unit C “Digital Tools” .....	20
6. Training Unit D “Second Praxis Phase and Learning at the Job” .....	23
7. Training Unit E “Development Projects” .....	24

Goals and tasks of the 1,5 days' workshop .....	26
The role of the trainers/consultants.....	26
8. Attachments.....	27
<b>Coaching programme</b> .....	28
1. Training Programme: Knowledge Acquisition according to Individual Needs – KAIN.....	28
1.1 Part 1: Classroom Teaching.....	29
1.2 Part 2: Self-study in own company/organization with the support of trainers.....	30
1.3 Part 3: Individual project presentation and reflection .....	32
1.4 Time-organisational setup and competencies of participants.....	32
1.5 Instructions, requirements and tasks for trainers/consultants.....	33
2. Training and Coaching Process.....	35
2.1 Principles of effective Teaching.....	35
2.11 What makes the training programme successful?.....	35
2.12 Training process.....	35
2.13 Presentation skills.....	38
2.14 Attitude awareness, motivation and engagement.....	39
2.2 Effective Training Techniques.....	41
2.21 Group work and brainstorming .....	41
2.22 Mentoring and coaching.....	41
2.23 Effective questioning and appreciative inquiry .....	43
2.24 Best practices and worst cases in knowledge creation and sharing .....	44
2.25 Creativity and innovations .....	45
2.3 Digital Training and Learning Tools .....	45
2.31 Pedagogy in digital environments .....	46
2.32 Examples of learning platforms and tools .....	46
2.4 Coaching Process.....	48
<b>Examination Regulation and international recognition</b> .....	51
1. Examination Regulation.....	51
2. Evaluation in the Qualification Framework and international recognition.....	54
2.1 Qualifications Framework “Baltic Sea Region” .....	54
2.11 EQF and BSR-QF – an introduction .....	54
2.12 The Baltic Sea Region Qualifications Framework .....	55
2.13 Methodology and Descriptors .....	58
2.2 Structuring and evaluation.....	62
2.21 Introduction .....	62

2.22 Structuring and evaluation of further vocational trainings .....	64
2.23 Internationally recognised educational qualification .....	64
<b>Implementation reports of the trials in different countries .....</b>	<b>65</b>
1. Implementation Report Olztyn, Poland.....	65
1.1 Introduction .....	65
1.2 Admission and organisation of the training .....	65
1.3 Participants profile and organisation of the training.....	66
1.4 Execution of the Training .....	66
1.5 Main Findings and Conclusions.....	67
2. Implementation Report Kolding, Denmark.....	68
2.1 Introduction .....	68
2.2 Admission and organisation of the training .....	69
2.3 Organisation of the implementation .....	69
2.4 Participants profile and organisation of the training.....	70
2.5 Execution of the Training .....	70
2.6 Main Findings and Conclusions .....	70
3. Implementation Report Budapest, Hungary .....	72
3.1 Introduction .....	72
3.2 Period of implementation .....	72
3.3 Special features of the implementation .....	73
3.4 Admission and organisation of the training .....	73
3.5 Organisation of the implementation .....	74
3.6 Execution of the Training .....	76
3.7 Summary assessment of implementation .....	78
4. Implementation Report Wroclaw, Poland.....	80
4.1 Introduction .....	80
4.2 Special features of implementation .....	81
4.3 Organisation of training.....	84
4.4 Organisation of implementation .....	85
4.5 Profile of participants .....	86
4.6 Delivery of training .....	86
4.7 Main findings and conclusions .....	87
4.8 Strengths and advantages of training .....	89
<b>Evaluation Concept.....</b>	<b>91</b>
1. Definition of Training Evaluation.....	91

2. Types of Evaluation.....	92
3. Steps of Training Evaluation.....	93
4. The Concept of Training Evaluation.....	98
4.1. The Aim of the Training Course.....	99
4.2. Evaluation Concept.....	100
<b>Evaluation Report.....</b>	<b>106</b>
1. Introduction.....	106
2. Methodology of Evaluation.....	109
2.1 The Aim of the Study and Evaluation Report.....	111
2.2 Data Sources.....	111
2.3 Execution of the Training.....	116
3. Results and Analysis.....	116
3.1 Traing measure: Warmińsko-Mazurska Izba Rzemiosła i Przedsiębiorczości, Poland (PP4 WIRP).....	117
3.2 Training measure: International Business College, Denmark.....	127
3.3 Training measure: Ipartestületek Országos Szövetsége, Hungary (PP7 IPOSZ).....	132
3.4 Training measure: Dolnośląska Izba Rzemieślnicza we Wrocławiu, Poland (PP9 DIRW).....	149
4. Conclusions and Recommendations.....	160
<b>Online consulting for SMEs in Hungary.....</b>	<b>170</b>
1. Introduction.....	170
2. Period of implementation.....	171
3. Special features of the implementation.....	172
4. Admission and organization.....	172
5. Main Findings and Conclusions.....	175

## Summary of the Project and Introduction

On average, SMEs are less innovative than large companies, as they have limitations due to more limited internal resources (EC, 2019a). Especially in Eastern European countries, SMEs have very low innovation activity and there are large differences between SMEs and large companies. In the field of customer innovation, SMEs find it particularly difficult to innovate. Meeting real customer needs is the core factor for successful innovation management, for generating customer-oriented business ideas and innovative concepts (von Hippel, 2005).

SMEs do not have the time and resources to receive feedback and ideas from their customers. And when they do find the time, it is difficult to process the information and turn it into valuable solutions. A holistic approach to customer-centric innovation is complex and requires changes at all levels of a company. However, digitization and new media are now opening up far-reaching opportunities to make full use of customer-centric innovations in SMEs as well, thus strongly promoting innovative strength and competitiveness (Robra-Bissantz, 2017). These technologies and the opportunities they offer have so far been little known in SMEs and are only used by very few SMEs. They lack information, experience, knowledge and skills on instruments, methods and procedures as well as on the use of digital technologies to acquire, process and realise customer innovations.

Against this background, the project pursues on a broad regional basis the objective of enabling and supporting SMEs to exploit their customer innovation potential and thus to strengthen the productivity and competitiveness of SMEs, to secure existing jobs and to create new ones. The following main activities will be carried out to achieve the objectives.

a) In 13 countries, analysis and comprehensive investigation of best practices on how SMEs generate, process and realise customer-centric innovation approaches and which digital technologies they can use doing so. The best practices obtained will be processed, transferred to SMEs in the context of training and consulting, and supported in their implementation in the companies.

b) Development of a toolbox with instruments, methods and procedures for the realisation of customer innovations in SMEs.

c) Through the development of two specific training and coaching programs, SMEs gain digital skills and are enabled to continuously realise comprehensive customer-centric innovations. The learning takes place mainly at the workplace and at the same time includes individual company development projects, so that digital technologies are already used, and corresponding innovations are realised during the further training.

d) Comprehensive qualification of teachers and consultants of SMEs.

The qualification, consulting and support programs are carried out by chambers, which, as central SME supporters, have direct access to SMEs and, with their

training and technology centres, also have corresponding capacities. However, many teachers and consultants lack the knowledge and skills to qualify and advise SMEs and their staff in the application of digital technologies and in the acquisition, processing and realisation of customer innovations at a high-quality level. Therefore, two specific train the trainer programs for teachers and consultants are being developed, which will be implemented and permanently run by 24 colleges and universities from 9 countries. These programs are:

- a) strengthening and promoting the knowledge and skills of teachers and consultants on digital technologies on the one hand and on the realisation of customer-centric innovations on the other hand.
- b) constantly providing well qualified teachers and consultants on a broad regional basis.

The developed instruments, digital models, educational and support programs will be tested and evaluated under different national conditions in several countries and implemented by all project partners. A continuation of the work after the end of the project with an ongoing implementation of the educational and support programs is secured, including financing.

The project is carried out by eight experienced partners (chambers, other institutions of vocational training and universities) from Denmark, Germany, Poland and Hungary with different levels of development and conditions. The transnational project approach enables learning from each other, identification and transfer of best practices and joint development work.

All results of the project will be transferred to 74 chambers, SME associations and colleges/universities from 13 countries, which will receive implementation advice and will be involved in the project work as associated partners from the beginning.

This Output 4 Further training programme Realisation of customer-centred innovations includes:

- Concept, Curriculum and Teaching materials for SME specific further Training including the integration Best Practices of the use of digital technologies.
- A coaching programme.
- Examination regulation including a procedure for the international recognition of the vocational further training qualification.
- Four reports of the testing of the training programme under different national conditions.
- A concept for quality assurance and testing of the training programme.
- A report with the results of the quality assurance and evaluations.
- A concept and results of innovation support for SMEs carried out in Hungary in connection with the CVET programs.



## Concept, Curriculum and Teaching materials

### 1. Background

In a changing and uncertain world, the alignment of innovation with the current and potential customers' needs is necessary. To meet these challenges and to remain competitive, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) must constantly innovate to add value. In other words, they must design and deploy new product and service offerings that meet the needs of the marketplace. In order to do this, they must become customer driven.

Customer-centric innovation raise a range of critical issues that organizations must consider as they utilize customer innovation. The development of organizational processes around customer innovation demands a new lens through which to assess both innovative processes and organizational mission.

Digitalization represents one of the key challenges of our time and is associated with numerous consequences for today's economic players. In addition to the provision of a suitable infrastructure at the macro level, the use of technology for the implementation of innovative business models, entrepreneurial processes, and the shortened communication channels in the context of digitization poses a challenge for many companies. A growing digitization results in the constant availability of countless pieces of information (data), which must be collected, classified, and used efficiently and in a targeted manner according to individual interests. Furthermore, digitalization is also ensuring that spatial distances lose their relevance, which is rapidly increasing international competitive pressure for SMEs. Regional companies increasingly find themselves in competition with international monopolies, leading to calls for innovation and individualization of products. The ability to incorporate digital tools into daily work means that entrepreneurial innovations are often initiated or implemented with the help of digital technologies.

To connect digital technologies and customer-centric innovation, it can be stated that a globally connected world by digital technologies has changed the role of customers radically over the past decades. Customers have gone from a passive, receiving role to a more active, demanding one in which they are "an active co-designer". Not only does customer-centric innovation improve customer satisfaction, but also it improves the "product quality, reduces risk, and increases market acceptance.

Innovation itself is about collaborative learning and working to create something. To further define the term, customer-centric innovation is part of the open innovation philosophy, meaning that the innovation process happens with input from inside and outside of the company to develop new products or services.

In order to do this properly, the company has to know its customers well and gather as much knowledge on their lives, work processes, value chains and value systems, in other words the culture they are involved in.



Furthermore, customer-oriented innovations increase both customer benefits and customer loyalty. Because customers are actively involved in the design of products and services and have them shaped according to their needs, the likelihood that these customers will remain loyal to the company in the long-term increases. Trust relationships are thus strengthened, and relationships are built.

The vocational further education programme “Realisation of customer-centred Innovations” aims to bring owners, managers and professionals closer to customer-centred innovation, to impart competences and knowledge on the different methods as well as to use digital technologies and tools, and at the same time, during the learning process, to carry out development projects for the realization of customer-centric innovations in the companies involved.

For the SME further education program "Realization of customer-centred innovations" it is planned to design and implement the digital competence training programme according to the KAIN method. This method can be used very flexibly and can be designed according to the respective regional conditions as well as the needs of the participants and the SMEs involved. In any case, at least two two-day workshops with classroom teaching and a longer phase of own learning at the workplace in between should be realised. The implementation of further workshops and further phases of own learning and the realisation of workplace development projects are possible at any time.

During the implementation of the continuing vocational training program, innovation subsidies are to be implemented and tested at the same time. The focus is on the implementation of the innovative development projects. The implementation of the development projects in SMEs takes place in the longer phase(s) of on-the-job learning. This learning process and the implementation of the development projects are intensively accompanied and advised by teachers and consultants from the chambers and colleges/universities that carry out the entire continuing education program.

## 2. Goals, target groups and duration of the further education program

### Course

This course has been designed to fulfil the needs described above. The training, which contains both theoretical lectures, group works, and practical training will be set to EQF- level 5.

### Target groups

The target groups of this training are

- founders,
- owners,
- managers and
- employees

of SME companies.

### Objectives

The learning objectives of this course are set to serve SMEs in customer centred innovations as well as possible. The concrete learning goal is that after attending the course the trainee has at least a sense of what customer centred innovations and use of digital tools can bring to his / her own business.

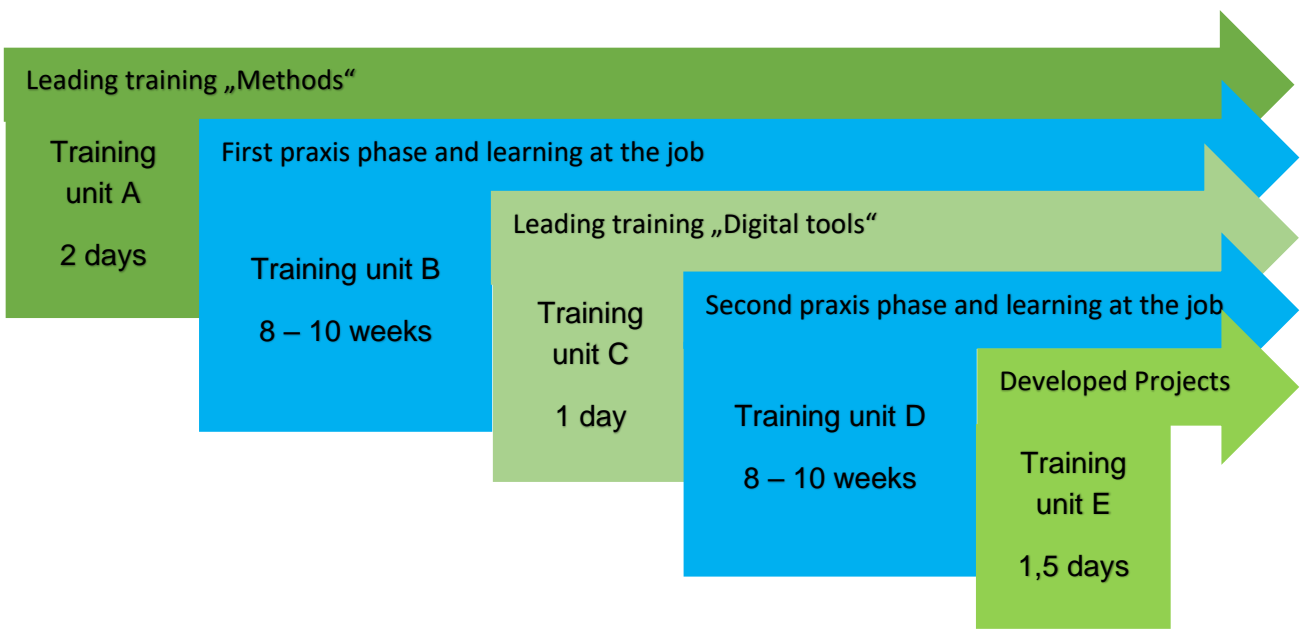
The learning objectives are

- Trainee understands the importance of customer centred innovations and digitalization.
- Trainee knows the contemporary basic concepts of customer centred innovations and of digitalization – the relevance of topics in this area should be ensured before each training.
- Trainee knows the different methods for the realization of customer-centric innovations, they can evaluate, select and apply appropriately.
- Trainees know the various digital technologies and tools for realizing customer-oriented innovations and can select and use them appropriately depending on the task at hand.
- Trainees are able to involve employees and colleagues in the development and learning processes while learning on the job and master the most important presentation techniques.
- Trainees are able to independently develop and implement projects to implement customer-centric innovations.

### Schedule

This course is divided into five parts. The training begins with a 2 days theoretical part, during which the basic issues of each topic will be clarified by presentations and group work. This part will be followed by a first 8 – 10 weeks practice period in the company, in which the participant gets to know the topics of the course from the point of view of this company. During this phase of on-the-job learning, the participant also creates a presentation about the insights and ideas he/she gained during this time in the company and carries out a development project in the company to realize customer-centric innovations. After the first practice period is completed, a seminary of 1 day will be hold. In this seminary the participants acquire skills and knowledge about the various digital technologies and tools. This is followed by a second 8 – 10 weeks practical phase and learning on the job, in which the development project started in the first practical phase is continued and, if possible, a second development project is implemented. The conclusion is a 1.5 days' workshop. Here the trainees will present their development project as well as their findings, discuss their experiences and ideas, and finally, everything will be concluded with a lecture to deepen individual aspects according to the needs of the participants.

A detailed presentation of the KAIN method can be found in Attachment 1 "KAIN Method and Coaching Program" and in Attachment 2 "Power Point KAIN & Coaching".



### Scope of hours

<b>Training unit</b>	<b>Lessons</b>	<b>Hours of self-study</b>	<b>Hours total</b>
A "Methods"	16	34	50
B First praxis phase	50	100	150
C "Digita tools"	8	12	20
D Second praxis phase	50	100	150
E "Projects"	12	13	25
<b>Total</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>259</b>	<b>395</b>

### 3 Training Unit A “Methods”

#### Content and Schedule

Training Unit A Methods: Classroom training, duration 16 hours			
First day			
Module No. & Name	Main content & <i>objectives</i>	Actors	Duration in hours & Remarks
1 Welcome	<p>Welcome, aims and course of the training. Introduction and expectations of the participants.</p> <p><i>Introduction and imparting an overview Getting to know each other</i></p>	Trainer Participants	1,0 h
2 Motivation	<p>Introduction to customer-centric innovation Why these topics are important? The business environment is changing rapidly, and the speed is just increasing Why SMEs need assistance? Why are innovations so important for SMEs? Assessing the innovation strength of SMEs in the EU and different countries. Definition and importance of customer-centred innovation. Impact and use of customer-centred innovation and comparisons of large and small enterprises. Participants' experience reports on customer-centred innovations.</p> <p><i>Promoting motivation to learn Capturing the importance of the topic Conveying background, basics and facts</i></p>	Trainer  Discussion, Change of experience	2,0 h  See Teaching materials 1
3 Examples	<p>Examples of products or services co-created with customers. Good Practices customer-centric products. Good Practices customer-centric services.</p> <p><i>Providing good examples of customer-centred innovation Checking the transferability for realisation in one's own company Gaining ideas and suggestions for own customer-centred innovations</i></p>	Trainer  Discussion, Change of experience, Brain storming	1,5 h  See Teaching materials 2
4 Methods	<p>Different methods to involve customers in innovation processes. The most common method of involving customers. Presentation and consultation of the most important methods, such as conducting interviews, surveys, and questionnaires.</p>	Trainer  Discussion, change of experience, working on	3,5 h  See Teaching materials 3

	<p>Use of the digital communication channels for communicating and collaborating with customers, such as e-mail, social media (Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter, YouTube).          Methods of customer’s involvement in innovation processes.          Methods for engaging consumers in customer-centric innovations.          Methods for engaging consumers in customer-centric innovations by countries.          Employees as scouts for customer-centric innovation.          Use of online advertising (Google ads, Instagram ads), an interactive website, and Q&amp;R.          Use of novel tools such as chatbots, support teams, or gamification tools.          Analog methods of customer-centric innovation: Lead-User Method, Experiments, Living Labs, Customer Group involvement, Outcome based interviews.          Digitalization – new opportunities for customer-centric innovation.          Selection, comprehensive advice and training of particularly suitable methods.          Conclusions and recommendation.</p> <p><i>Getting to know the different methods</i>  <i>Imparting knowledge for analysing the company and assessing the methods for different tasks</i>  <i>Imparting competences and skills for the selection and appropriate use of suitable methods</i></p>	case studies	
End of the first day			
Second day			
5 Difficulties & Benefits	<p>Difficulties in involving customers.          Benefits from customer-centric innovations.          Results of Research and Surveys: Difficulties.          Results of Research and Surveys: Benefits.          Consultation of consequences and proposals for future uses in SMEs.</p> <p><i>Recording the advantages and disadvantages of customer-centric innovations</i>  <i>Imparting knowledge and skills to develop and implement own activities</i></p>	<p>Trainer</p> <p>Discussion, Change of experience, Group work to develop concepts on a case study</p>	<p>1,5 h</p> <p>See Teaching materials 4</p>
6 Best Practices	<p>Best practices from companies in different countries: Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Sweden, UK, USA.          Examples of products or services co-created with customers.          Methods of customer’s involvement in innovation processes.          Digital tools used to support customer centric innovation</p>	<p>Trainer</p> <p>Discussion, in plenum consultations on value and possible uses</p>	<p>1,5 h</p> <p>See Teaching materials 5</p>

	<p>Benefits realized as a result of customer innovation.          Presentation and consultation best practices examples.          Derivation of possible uses for implementations in own company.</p> <p><i>Learning from best practice examples</i>  <i>Acquisition of competencies and skills to analyse best practices and to use them for own applications</i>  <i>Gaining ideas and know-how for the realization of customer-centred innovations</i></p>		
7 Strategies	<p>Development of SME-friendly strategies for the realization of customer-centric innovations.          Selection of suitable methods.          Creation of a realization concept with all steps, procedures, time requirements, etc.          Development of a realization concept using the example of an SME.          Development of a checklist for the realization of customer-centred innovations.</p> <p><i>Acquisition of competences and skills for the analysis of the own company and for the development of a customized strategy and realization concept</i>  <i>Implementation of what has been learned so far into concrete action programs for the own company</i></p>	<p>Trainer:          Moderation and instructions</p> <p>All participants: discussion, consultation and development in group work and evaluation of results in plenary session</p>	1,5 h
8 Development Projects	<p>Each participant creates a development project for his company, which will be realized in part B and part D of the training.          If 2 development projects are created, one can be realized in part B and the other in part D in the company.          Presentation and consultation of the development projects in the plenum          Evaluation of the individual projects and determination of which work, and decisions are still necessary in order to be able to realize the project in the company.          Obligation of each participant to agree on at least one development project with the trainer by 10 days after the training at the latest.</p> <p><i>Implementation of what has been learned in a concrete project for the own company</i>  <i>Development of concrete projects, which will be implemented in the company in the further course of the training</i></p>	<p>Trainer:          Moderation and consultation</p> <p>Each participant development of own concept, consultations and evaluations in plenum, agreements with the trainer</p>	2,0 h



<p>9 Presentations &amp; Participation</p>	<p>Presentations and participations in the context of the implementation of the development projects and the further course of training. Presentation and practice of presentations and various methods and techniques. Forms, methods and procedures for involving employees and colleagues in the development and learning process.</p> <p><i>Acquisition of competencies and skills for making good presentations</i> <i>Getting to know the importance and different ways of involving third parties in the learning processes</i> <i>Creating the conditions to involve as many employees of the company as possible</i></p>	<p>Trainer</p> <p>Joint discussions, consultations and exercises in the plenum</p>	<p>1.0 h</p>
<p>10 Conclusion &amp; Evaluation</p>	<p>Verbal feedbacks on Unit A of the training. Written evaluation of Unit A training. Agreements on further procedure and completion of Unit A of the training.</p> <p><i>Achieve continuous improvement of the training unit A</i> <i>Clarification and binding agreements on the further procedure</i></p>	<p>Trainer</p> <p>All</p>	<p>0,5 h</p>

**End of Training Unit A**

Note 1: Two shorter pauses (with coffee) and one longer pause (lunch) will be held during every day.

Note 2: The material presented above is examples and stimulus, which should be applied and modified according to the country, area, background, level and needs of trainees, and also according to knowledge areas of trainer. The times are suggestions and may vary depending to the weighting of topics.

During this 2-days workshop the participants get to know (usually science-based) models, methods of customer-centred innovation and instruments from project-related research for structuring and solving problems and learn to apply them (mentally). This is intended to create a common conceptual basis for the further procedure in the training.

The models and instruments presented as examples and design recommendations for practical use, ideally form a common framework in which, in particular, the existing experiences of the participants are to be integrated in order to pursue the training objectives. The experience of the participants should serve to supplement or modify the proposals for structuring and solving problems given by the research.

Thus, at an early stage of the training, a necessary adaptation of the proposed models and instruments to the individual needs and characteristics of the participants on site, usually with different frameworks and conditions, should take place.

Before the first workshop, a trainer / consultant designing the course should select and modify the models, instruments and other material applicable to just this country, area, branch and companies in question. The material presented in this curriculum, consisting of best practices and methods applied in companies, serves as a model and stimulus for trainers and participants.

### The role of the trainers

It is a task of the trainers / consultants to take into account the individual needs and particularities of the participants on site in a face-to-face training. This requires a high degree of knowledge and experience with the use of interactive and participant-centred didactic methods on the part of the trainers. A further focus of the first part of the training is to introduce the participants with the planning, implementation and critical evaluation of their own project work they are involved in the second and fourth parts of the training. Thus, another central goal of this part of the training is to give the participants important impulses for the implementation of the presented models and instruments in their own project. The application and implementation of the presented models and instruments by the participants "at home" is, so to speak, the focus of the second part of the training concept.

## 4. Training Unit B “First Praxis Phase and Learning at the Job”

8 - 10 weeks self-study, practice in company and realization of development projects.

If the development projects that each participant will carry out in his or her company have not yet been determined in the first unit of the training, a coordination with the trainer and a reliable decision on the development project should be made in this regard during the first ten days of the practical phase.

### Goals and tasks of the self-study-phase

- Accompaniment and support of change processes in enterprises, from the formulation of objectives, description of measures, conception of implementation to impact analysis by training and process-oriented, if necessary, also technical consulting.
- Application and transfer of knowledge into the individual practice of the participants on site.
- Implementation of the development project in the company.
- Involving as many/all employees of the company as possible in the development and learning process.

In this part, the participants have the task of applying the knowledge acquired in the first training unit and the knowledge of how to shape their own practice in the sense of the training idea in their companies / organizations. For sustainable learning, it is necessary that they plan, implement, evaluate, critically reflect and document their own project or activities to improve a situation on site under their individual framework conditions in the "here and now". The results of these reflections and applications of the acquired knowledge in practice as well as the implemented development project will be presented by each participant in the fifth and last unit of the training program and discussed with all other participants. In preparation for this, participants will receive brief instruction in documentation and presentation techniques in the first unit of the training (see module 9 Presentations & Participation).

This phase with the duration of approx. 8 – 10-weeks is accompanied and supported by professional advice and support given by the trainers / consultants. In principle, the participants should apply and implement the knowledge they have acquired in Part 1 themselves. As a rule, however, advice and support are often required in order to apply the process of adapting the knowledge acquired in Unit 1 of the training appropriately under the real conditions on site and to lead one's own project to success.

### The role of the trainers/consultants

The support given by the trainers can vary from a rather simple general consultation in the sense of passing on relevant information to an intensive accompaniment in the sense of coaching. In individual cases, it is usually necessary to find out, what kind of support it is needed to enable the individual participant to pursue his or her individual project goals.

In this phase, it is quite possible and even usual, that, when applying the models and instruments presented in the first phase in practice, the individual project proceeds differently than initially thought and

planned by the participant. Even in such situations, the trainers of the project team can provide valuable support in pursuing the "actual" project goals.

This second part of the training enables in particular the very welcome didactic aspect of working on concrete improvements in one's own company / at one's own workplace, which is associated with a high motivation to learn. In this learning process, the company management and other employees are usually intensively involved in what is actually done at the workplace, thus achieving joint learning and strong multiplication effects in the training.

Further advantages, i.e. what has been learnt, is directly implemented in everyday business life, or the innovations associated with project work are in the interest of company's management, quickly become visible and motivate managers to promote further training for the workforce and to use it as a strategic instrument of company management. The advantages also respond to the particular needs of small and medium-sized enterprises, which are constantly suffering from a lack of time as the biggest obstacle to training. In common, the KAIN Training Method eliminates absenteeism nearly totally.

More details about the KAIN method and the coaching process can be found in Attachment 1 "KAIN Method and Coaching Program" and in Attachment 2 "Power Point KAIN & Coaching".

## 5. Training Unit C “Digital Tools”

Training Unit C Digital Tools: Classroom training, duration 8 hours			
Module No. & Name	Main content & objectives	Actors	Duration in hours & Remarks
11 Objectives Unit C	Welcome Objectives and Procedure Training Unit C  <i>Introduction and imparting an overview</i>	Trainer	0,25 h
12 Change Experiences	Exchange of experiences of the participants: Looking back, how do you assess training session A today? Have you been able to use what you have learned in your daily work process? How is your development project progressing and does what you have learned help you?  <i>Promoting motivation to learn Sharing experiences and learning from each other</i>	Trainer: Moderation  All	0,75 h
13 SME fair digitization	SME-friendly digitization and coaching processes. SMEs & Crafts and digitization. History of crafts, industry and digitalization. Tool use and digitization. State of digitization in the skilled trades. What digitization does SMEs need? Digitization - organization of adaptation. Digitization in the skilled crafts sector - organization of adaptation. Procedure and possible participants. Study results: Digitalization in the smallest companies. Importance and consequences for the use of digital technologies in customer-centred innovations.  <i>Getting to know the challenges of digitalization for SMEs Acquiring competencies and skills for evaluating and selecting appropriate digital techniques and tools</i>	Trainer   Discussions and consultations	1,0 h   See Teaching Material 6
14 Digitalization	Digitalization of customer-centric innovations in SMEs. Benefits and barriers of using digital tools to integrate customer-centric innovation in SMEs.	Trainer	1,5 h  See Teaching Material 7

	<p>Framework conditions for the implementation of digital customer-centric innovation. Applied info-communication tools and technologies supporting business processes in SMEs.</p> <p>Digital communication channels used for communicating and collaborating with customers.</p>	Discussions and consultations	
15 Toolbox	<p>Digital toolbox for customer-centric innovation in SMEs</p> <p>Digital transformation – new technological trends</p> <p>Digital tools for customer-centric innovation</p> <p>Applied instruments, methods and procedures of customer-centric innovation in SMEs</p> <p>Application notes for digital technologies for the realization of customer-centric innovations.</p> <p>Benefits of the implementation of tools for customer-centric innovation.</p> <p>Obstacles for the implementation of tools for customer-centric innovation.</p> <p>Recommendations for the implementation of customer-centric innovation.</p> <p>Evaluation of the tools in terms of suitability for use in SMEs.</p> <p><i>Get to know digital technologies and tools for the realisation of customer-centred innovations in SMEs</i></p> <p><i>Acquisition of competences and skills for the evaluation, selection and appropriate use of digital technologies and tools for the different issues</i></p>	<p>Trainer</p> <p>All participants: discussion, consultation and group work on the evaluation, selection and use of technologies and tools; evaluation of results and selected tools in plenary session</p>	<p>3,0 h</p> <p>See Teaching Material 8</p>
16 Use tools	<p>Barriers to the introduction of customer-centric innovations supported by digital tools.</p> <p>Selection of suitable digital tools.</p> <p>Creation of a realization concept with all steps, procedures etc.</p> <p>Development of a realization concept using the example of an SME.</p> <p><i>Acquisition of competences and skills for the evaluation, selection and appropriate use of digital technologies and tools for the different issues</i></p> <p><i>Selection of suitable tools for the development projects of the participating SMEs</i></p>	<p>Trainer</p> <p>Discussion, Consulting, short work in small groups</p>	<p>1,0 h</p> <p>See Teaching Material 9</p>
17 Conclusion &	<p>Verbal feedbacks on Unit C of the training.</p> <p>Written evaluation of Unit C training.</p>	Trainer	0,5 h

Evaluation	<p>Agreements on further procedure and completion of Unit C of the training.</p> <p><i>Achieve continuous improvement of the training unit C</i></p> <p><i>Clarification and binding agreements on the further procedure</i></p>	All	
<b>End of Training Unit C</b>			

Note 1: Two shorter pauses (with coffee) and one longer pause (lunch) will be held during the day.

Note 2: The material presented above is examples and stimulus, which should be applied and modified according to the country, area, background, level and needs of trainees, and also according to knowledge areas of trainer. The times are suggestions and may vary depending to the weighting of topics.

During this 1-day workshop the participants get to know (usually science-based) models and digital tools for the realization of customer-centred innovation from project-related research for structuring and solving problems and learn to apply them (mentally). This is intended to create a common conceptual basis for the further procedure in the training.

The models and digital tools presented as examples and design recommendations for practical use, ideally form a common framework in which, in particular, the existing experiences of the participants are to be integrated in order to pursue the training objectives. The experience of the participants should serve to supplement or modify the proposals for structuring and solving problems given by the research.

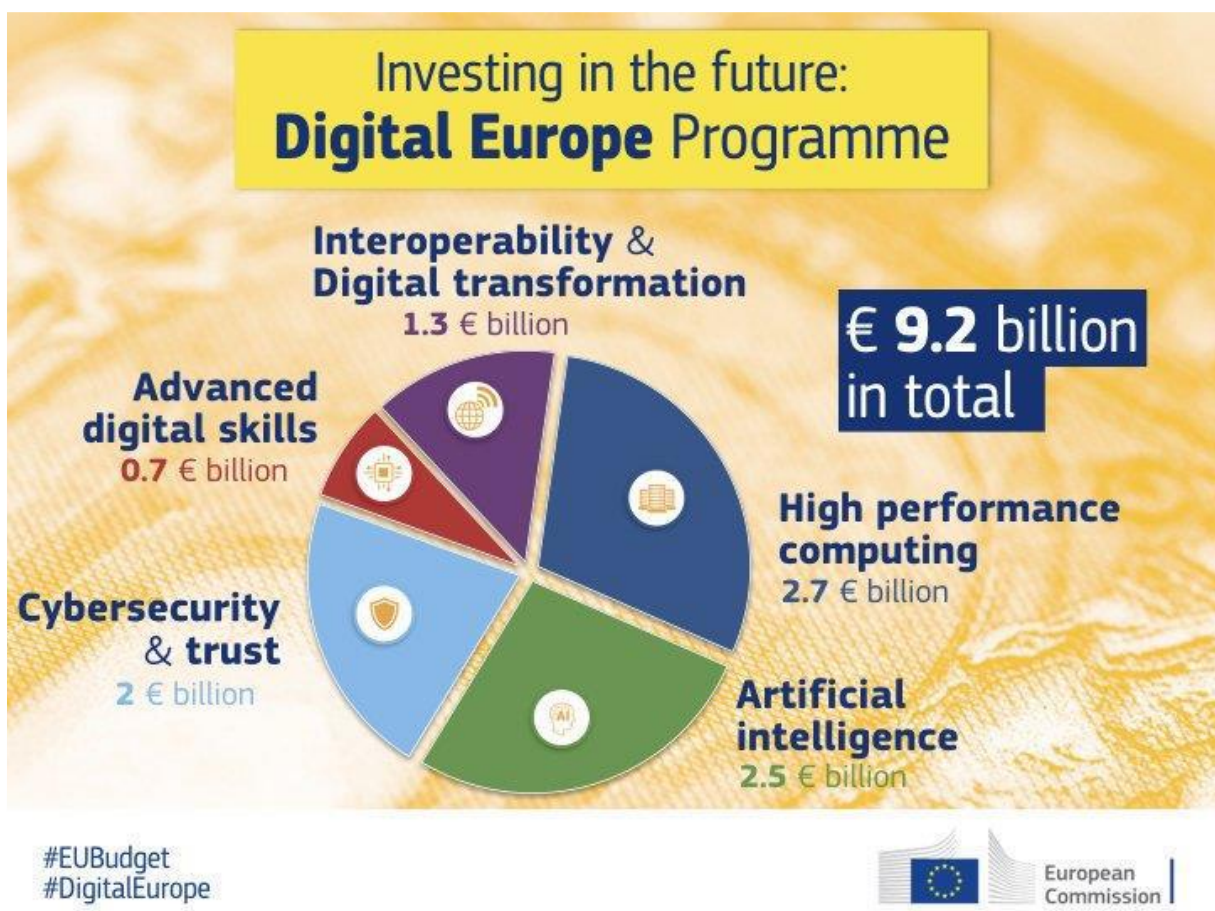
For the role of trainers, see the comments on the first unit of the training program in Chapter 4. Training Unit A "Methods".



## 6. Training Unit D “Second Praxis Phase and Learning at the Job”

The second phase of on-the-job learning again comprises 8 - 10 weeks and basically proceeds in the same way as the first practical phase (see the explanations in chapter 5. Training Unit B “First Praxis Phase and Learning at the Job”).

This phase is particularly concerned with reflecting on the digital tools in practice and applying them when carrying out development projects in the company. The development projects started in the first practical phase can be continued or one/more new development projects with the use of digital tools can be started and implemented in the company.



Source: [https://ec.europa.eu/isa2/news/european-commission-has-announced-investment-%E2%82%AC92-billion-align-next-long-term-eubudget-2021\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/isa2/news/european-commission-has-announced-investment-%E2%82%AC92-billion-align-next-long-term-eubudget-2021_en)

## 7. Training Unit E “Development Projects”

Training Unit E Development Projects: Classroom training, duration 12 hours			
First day			
Module No. & Name	Main content & objectives	Actors	Duration in hours & Remarks
18 Welcome & Objectives Unit E	Welcome. Objectives and Procedure Training Unit C.  <i>Introduction and imparting an overview</i>	Trainer	0,25 h
19 Experiences	Exchange of experiences of the participants: Looking back, how do you assess training session A and C today? Have you been able to use what you have learned in your daily work process? How is your development project progressing and does what you have learned help you?  <i>Promoting motivation to learn            Sharing experiences and learning from each other</i>	Trainer: Moderation  All	0,75 h
20 Refresher courses	Reason for the lack of application of customer-centric innovation. The level of involvement of customers in different types of innovation. Degree of involvement of customers in the product and service innovation phases. Categorizing consumers based on their needs and expertise.  <i>Gain in-depth competences and knowledge on customer-centred innovation in SMEs            Acquiring knowledge for dealing with barriers            Deepening what has been learned so far and gaining confidence to realise customer-centred innovations</i>	Trainer  Discussion and consultation; working in small groups	1,5 h  See Teaching Material 10
21 Development projects A	Presentation by each participant of their development projects that were realised in the company in training units B and D; presentation of the results achieved and future further development and planned new projects.	Trainer: Moderation  Each participant presents his or her project,	5,5 h

	<p>Discussion and deliberation of each presented development project in the plenary.</p> <p><i>Presentation of the results of own work, gaining and getting to know best practices</i></p> <p><i>Exchange of experience and learning from each other</i></p> <p><i>Gaining ideas for future realisations of customer-centred innovations in the own company</i></p> <p><i>Learning from the mistakes and successes of other participants</i></p> <p><i>Gaining confirmation and strengthening motivation for one's own future work</i></p>	<p>which is then discussed and deliberated in the plenary immediately afterwards</p>	
<b>End of first day</b>			
<b>Second day</b>			
22 Development projects B	<p>Presentation by each participant of their development projects that were realised in the company in training units B and D; presentation of the results achieved and future further development and planned new projects.</p> <p>Discussion and deliberation of each presented development project in the plenary.</p> <p><i>Presentation of the results of own work, gaining and getting to know best practices</i></p> <p><i>Exchange of experience and learning from each other</i></p> <p><i>Gaining ideas for future realisations of customer-centred innovations in the own company</i></p> <p><i>Learning from the mistakes and successes of other participants</i></p> <p><i>Gaining confirmation and strengthening motivation for one's own future work</i></p>	<p>Trainer: Moderation</p> <p>Each participant presents his or her project, which is then discussed and deliberated in the plenary immediately afterwards</p>	2,5 h
23 Questions & further procedure	<p>Clarification of questions, deepening's and further procedure.</p> <p>Planning of the participants to continue the work in the company.</p> <p>Arrangements for the further procedure and the continuation of the exchange of experiences among each other.</p> <p><i>Ensuring the continuation of the learning processes and the work in the companies</i></p>	<p>Trainer</p> <p>All</p>	1,0 h
24 Conclusion & Evaluation	<p>Verbal feedbacks on Unit C of the training.</p> <p>Written evaluation of Unit C training.</p>	<p>Trainer</p> <p>All</p>	0,5 h

	<p>Agreements on further procedure and completion of Unit C of the training.</p> <p><i>Achieve continuous improvement of the training unit C and the whole training</i></p> <p><i>Clarification and binding agreements on the further procedure</i></p>		
<b>End of the Training</b>			

Note 1: Two shorter pauses (with coffee) and one longer pause (lunch) will be held during the first day and two shorter pauses (with coffee) during the second day.

Note 2: The material presented above is examples and stimulus, which should be applied and modified according to the country, area, background, level and needs of trainees, and also according to knowledge areas of trainer. The times are suggestions and may vary depending to the weighting of topics.

### Goals and tasks of the 1,5 days' workshop

- Reflect (evaluate) the successes in the dimensions of individual, operational and structural changes and change processes.
- Identify conducive and obstructive conditions of change processes.
- Derive "lessons learned" for further change processes.
- Clarification of questions, deepening of topics according to the needs of the participants and agreements on how to proceed.

In the fifth part of the training programme, the participants present and discuss the experiences and findings from practical phases A and B (see chapters 5. and 7.) as well as their individual projects that they have carried out in the company. Both the participants and the trainers have the special task of reviewing the projects and reflecting on whether or what contribution they make to the sustainable pursuit of the overarching educational idea of strengthening capacities and skills for customer-centred innovation in SMEs. The exchange between the participants can give them very valuable impulses on how to make their own project even more successful. An important goal in this context can also be to show which major obstacles are responsible for "not-yet-successes" in order to work on them in the future.

### The role of the trainers/consultants

- Enable constructive exchange between the participants,
- Focus on the common basis for the pursuit of (general) training objectives, and
- Moderate an instructional discussion on the identification of supportive and obstructive conditions of change processes and present contributions for a possible reduction of resistance in the tracking of individual projects.
- To guide the participants to make plans for the continuation of the learning processes and work in the enterprises and to make as concrete agreements as possible.

## 8. Attachments<sup>1</sup>

Attachment 1 KAIN Method and Coaching Program

Attachment 2 Power Point KAIN & Coaching

Attachment 3 Examination Regulations and international Recognition

Teaching Material 1\_Modul 2 Motivation

Teaching Material 2\_Modul 3 Examples

Teaching Material 3\_Modul 4 Methods

Teaching Material 4\_Modul 5 Difficulties & Benefits

Teaching Material 5\_Modul 6 Best Practices

Teaching Material 6\_Modul 13 SME fair digitization

Teaching Material 7\_Modul 14 Digitalization

Teaching Material 8\_Modul 15 Toolbox

Teaching Material 9\_Modul 16 Use tools

Teaching Material 10\_Modul 20 Refresher Courses

---

<sup>1</sup> The teaching materials are published on the project website <https://ci-smes.eu/>.



## Coaching programme

### 1. Training Programme: Knowledge Acquisition according to Individual Needs – KAIN

A striking obstacle faced by SME is lack of time and permanent overburdening of their owners as well as their impossibility to release employees from work for a longer scope of time to engage them in advanced trainings. There is also particular interest in ensuring that, as far as possible, qualifications offered should match individual skills needs of the employees and, at the same time, address specific SME issues. In response to such demands, a structural concept will be applied in the project, consisting of the following items:

- 2-3 learning phases with classroom teaching, delivered on two days per week, possibly Fridays and Saturdays.
- in between, longer on-the-job teaching periods at the trainees' workplace with simultaneous realisation of innovative development projects in SMEs, covering three to four months.
- Proposal for teaching periods at the trainee's workplace:
  - a) coaching by same trainers that are also delivering classroom teaching,
  - b) optional and customised e-learning options,
  - c) implementation of a specific development project within the company, in the topic area of the respective advanced training, involving as many employees as possible, thus, ensuring joint team learning.

The successfully tested and implemented methodological framework (training method) KAIN

- creates a common knowledge base for participants with different backgrounds in training and consulting processes,
- takes particular account of the individual experience of participants,
- shows possibilities to change/improve the situation of the participants on site for the pursuit of project goals and change measures,
- sharpens the knowledge of possible needs for change,
- enables those involved participants to design the right measures and implement them correctly, and
- combines qualifications with the implementation of innovative development projects in companies.

KAIN describes the tasks of trainers / consultants to carry out qualifications within the framework of continuing vocational training, to accompany the implementation of company-specific development projects and to enable company employees to carry out change processes under the supervision of external consultants.

The qualification and consulting process is composed of three phases:

1. classroom teaching
2. self-study with external support
3. report and reflection.

The implementation of further workshops and further phases of own learning and the realisation of workplace development projects are possible at any time. The overall aim of the training is to ensure that all participants have sufficient information and knowledge on how the basic training idea can be implemented and pursued under the individual (quite different) framework conditions on site. Hopefully they will gain confidence in the feasibility of change processes.

### 1.1 Part 1: Classroom Teaching

Duration: approx. 2 days

Key objective: imparting knowledge - forming a common ground within the group.

This training module basically consists of a 1.5-2-day workshop, during which participants learn about (usually science-based) models and (conceptually) apply instruments of project-related research for structuring and solving problems. This is intended to form a common conceptual ground for further training steps. The presented models and instruments (recommended for practical application) ideally form a common framework, mainly to better integrate existing experience of course participants in pursuing their training goals. The participants' experience may complement or modify the research proposals on structuring and solving problems. Such approach enables a desired (conceptual) adaptation of the proposed models and instruments to the individual participants' needs and specificities (given the diversity of their situations) at an early stage of the training.

Observance of the participants' individual needs and specificities in classroom training requires a high degree of expertise and experience by trainers, including their ability to use interactive and participant-oriented didactic methods.

Another addressed focus in the first part of the training is communicating to the trainees' relevant issues with regard to planning, implementation as well as to (critical) assessment of their own projects that are processed in the second part of the training. Thus, another key objective of this part of the training is to equip the trainee with critical impulses for processing the presented models and instruments in his individual project. In a sense, application and implementation of the presented models and instruments by trainees at their work constitutes the primary focus of the second part of the training concept.

#### Tasks of the trainers/consultants:

This consideration of the individual needs and particularities of the participants on site in a face-to face training requires a high degree of knowledge and experience with the use of interactive and participant-centred didactic methods on the part of the trainers.



A further focus of the first part of the training is to introduce the participants with the planning, implementation and also (critical) evaluation of their own project, which is to be dealt with in the second part of the training. Thus, another central goal of this part of the training is to give the participants important impulses for the implementation of the presented models and instruments in their own project. The application and implementation of the presented models and instruments by the participants "at home" is, so to speak, the focus of the second part of the training concept.

## 1.2 Part 2: Self-study in own company/organization with the support of trainers

Duration approx. 12 – 18 weeks

Key objective: transfer and practical application of acquired knowledge in the trainees` individual job practice; special role of the trainer as consultant and coach.

In the second part of the training, trainees are tasked to apply skills and knowledge acquired in the first part of the training with respect to their individual job practice at their company/organization, in line with the training idea. For a sustainable learning effect, it is crucial that trainees plan, implement, evaluate, document and critically reflect on their own project or their own activities with regard to improving their individual situation, basically under their respective "here-and-now" conditions.

This course phase is accompanied and assisted by trainers and their technical advice and support. Basically, trainees are on their own with respect to applying and implementing knowledge acquired in Part 1. As a rule, however, advice and support are usually required in order to properly enjoy the benefits of adaptive process of newly acquired knowledge from the training Part 1, now under real-life conditions, and to turn the project into success. Support by trainers may vary, from a rather simple general advice in the sense of passing on relevant information up to an in-depth assistance-like coaching. Normally, it is advisable to decide on case-by-case basis which type of support is best suited to enable each trainee achieving individual project goals.

At this stage, it is certainly possible, if not uncommon, that in processing the models and tools presented in Phase 1, the trainees` projects may differ from their initial concepts and plans. In such case, trainers may lend a helping hand in bringing back on track "real" project goals.

The second part of the training has a particularly welcome didactic attribute, allowing for fine-tuning improvements on the job / in one`s own company, thus, ensuring high learning motivation. As a rule, this type of learning, embedded in real job conditions, involves committed personal involvement of company management and other employees, and, by joint team learning, delivers expressive multiplier training effects.

Further advantages are straight implementation of the acquired new knowledge in daily job operations; project-related innovations are in the interest of corporate management; they become quickly tangible, and managers feel encouraged to continue with advanced trainings for their employees, turning them into a strategic instrument of corporate management. Apart from this, this training approach meets particular

needs of SMEs, which biggest barrier to good training is their lack of time. Under KAIN training method, lost working hours and work absences are almost entirely avoided.

In the second part, the participants have the task of applying the knowledge acquired in the first part and the knowledge of how to shape their own practice in the sense of the training idea in their companies/organizations. For a sustainable (learning) effect it is necessary that they plan, implement, evaluate, critically reflect and document their own project or activities to improve a situation on site under their individual framework conditions in the "here and now".

This phase with the duration of approx. 12 – 18-weeks is accompanied and supported by professional advice and support from the trainers/consultants.

If necessary, additional one to two-day workshops with class room teaching can be conducted during Phase 2.

#### Tasks of the trainers/consultants:

At the beginning of the longer phase of learning on the job, the innovative development project to be realized is defined and prepared in the company. The trainer accompanies the work to realize the development project in the company and involves other consultants and experts as needed. The support of the trainers can range from a rather simple general consultation in the sense of passing on relevant information to an intensive accompaniment in the sense of coaching. In individual cases, it is usually necessary to consider what kind of support is needed to enable the individual participant to pursue his or her individual project goals.

In this phase it is quite possible and not uncommon that when applying the models and instruments presented in phase 1 in practice, the individual project proceeds differently than initially thought and planned by the participant. Even in such situations, the trainers of the project team can provide valuable support in pursuing the "actual" project goals.

This second part of the training enables in particular the very welcome didactic aspect of working on concrete improvements in one's own company / at one's own workplace, which is associated with a high motivation to learn. In this learning process, the company management and other employees are usually intensively involved in what is actually done at the workplace, thus achieving joint learning and strong multiplication effects in the training.

Further advantages are that what has been learnt is directly implemented in everyday business life, that the innovations associated with project work are in the interest of company's management, quickly become visible and motivate managers to promote further training for the workforce and to use it as a strategic instrument of company management. It also responds to the particular needs of small and medium-sized enterprises, which are constantly suffering from a lack of time as the biggest obstacle to training. The KAIN Training Method generally almost completely eliminates absenteeism.

### 1.3 Part 3: Individual project presentation and reflection

Duration approx. 1.5 – 2 days

In the third part of the training, experience and insight gained will be presented and exchanged at a joint event, in emphasis on presentation of individual participants' projects. Both, the trainees and the trainers, will be tasked to review and reflect on projects presented by the participants and to analyse answers with respect to a possible contribution to sustainable training target tracking. Moreover, a further key goal may help identifying major barriers to "not-yet-a-success" and fix them in the future.

The exchange of information amongst participants may provide valuable information on how to improve their own projects to be even more successful.

Tasks of the trainers/consultants:

- enable constructive exchange between the participants,
- focus on the common basis for the pursuit of (general) training objectives, and
- moderate an instructional discussion on the identification of supportive, ideas on struggle-free implementation solutions for trainees' projects, and
- obstructive conditions of change processes and present contributions for a possible reduction of resistance in the tracking of individual projects.

Of course, upon completing third part, subsequent longer self-study phase may follow, combined with on-the-job implementation, followed again by classroom-teaching in form of a third workshop, etc.

At the end of the training, all participants should have sufficient information and idea on how to implement and pursue the basic training idea, mostly under different real-life conditions.

### 1.4 Time-organisational setup and competencies of participants

For sure, a truism that in a large-scale transnational project, participants from different countries would never be able to match their time frames to enjoy joint meetings and events. Yet, planning and delivery of training to a specified target group and their participants, requires that

- participants of Part 1 are in, any case, also participating in training Part 3. Where appropriate, couples or small teams should be made available as representatives of a project team with respect to these training parts,
- participants are experienced in presenting content or in using interactive training design methods, or they are trained to meet required demands,
- participants are to a certain degree involved in decision-making or co-determination in their company/organisation with respect to pushing through their projects and receiving appropriate support from senior management.

As a rule, participation in the seminar is subject to a fee.

The offering institutions may attach obligations to the paid course, e.g. that a fee is due for the arrangement of consultancy services and/or a written report on the results of the consultation processes must be provided.

## 1.5 Instructions, requirements and tasks for trainers/consultants

The selection of companies/persons for the training and consultations depends on the interests of the companies. In an active approach, a pre-selection can be made on the basis of individual criteria, e.g. sector, company size, state of technology use, quality of personnel policy, innovation orientation, ..., i.e./with other words the maturity level of the organization.

The size of the group should not exceed more than ten and not be less than three or four companies. Enterprises may be allowed to send more than one person (project group). The total group should not exceed more than fifteen persons.

The persons from the companies should have the right to make decisions or have a say in their organizations in order to be able to decisively advance the pursuit of their individual projects.

The participants should decide at the end of part 1 to carry on with parts 2 and 3. Otherwise resources will be wasted. If there is a fear that problems will arise in part 2, it will be better to do a small project for testing rather than too many or too large projects. And: Even from failed projects something can be learned.

The companies can exchange their ideas and experiences during the development phase, e.g. develop measures together.

### Requirements for trainers/consultants

At various points in the brief description of the training method it became clear that the trainers have a special role to play in the use of this method, which is underlined here again.

In general, the trainers/consultants should have experience in presenting content and using interactive methods to design training.

Against the background of an overview knowledge covering all relevant subject areas the trainers are not only representatives for a variety of project topics and contents, but also –from a didactic-methodical point of view – moderators, learning (process) facilitators, coaches, sometimes co-managers, consultants, and even learners.

In individual cases, they must also decide in what form the involvement of experts and specialists on a (detailed) topic is necessary for highly specialized topics. This requires a good network.

A special challenge for the trainers is when they are in the role of a coach, who may also have to provide individual support for the learning processes of individual participants in the pursuit of a project on site.

Within the framework of a Train the Trainer program for teachers to conduct further training, teachers are familiarized with the KAIN method and taught skills for its application.

The qualification seminar must be advertised and promoted intensively.

- Early and repeated announcement of courses in professional journals, on websites, via newsletters, circulars, etc. are needed.
- Repeated dissemination of information via various media channels – in writing and particularly active in face-to-face meetings, in form of individual consultations, at meetings, trainings, via consultants, etc. should be done.
- Production of posters, hand-outs with invitations to advanced education training courses or related information on counselling events and information placement/introduction in educational establishments, chambers, universities, etc. are additional possibilities.
- Co-operation with local/regional/national institutions, e.g. business and urban development; employers' associations, trade unions, employers' liability etc. may extend the reach of the acquisition.
- If you have an address pool of trainers and consultants: Sending personal invitation letters with indication of date, including a reply sheet by mail and/or by e-mail and possibly repeated telephone follow-up activities to addressed potential participants
- Conducting press conferences/discussions and issuing press releases to achieve publications in the daily press.
- Involvement of relevant multipliers who approach potential participants in person
- Use every opportunity for personal contact to pass on information and to advise potential participants about your measures.

#### Implementation the Training / Organisational Preparation

- Assuring timely and binding reservation of training rooms and securing an adequate equipment.
- Timely recruitment of lecturers and organising a complete teaching timetable for each respective complete advanced training block.
- At least one full-time lecturer shall be active and/or a competent specialist on the respective training topics.
- Timely preparation and provision of documents, materials, etc. for
  - all teachers and staff.
  - all participants.
- Provision in paper form as well as electronically
- The following documents and materials have been designed and are available free of charge: Concept, Curricula and Teaching materials for a SME specific digital competence training programme.

#### Evaluation of Training Seminars

Any training seminar is subject to evaluation in order to identify and implement further developments and improvements in future training programmes.

For this purpose, written and oral interviews with the participants and lecturers shall be conducted.

The concepts, questionnaires, guides etc. developed are free of charge for all and any future use.



## 2. Training and Coaching Process

### 2.1 Principles of effective Teaching<sup>2</sup>

#### 2.11 What makes the training programme successful?

The purpose of the training program is to impart knowledge of principles of effective teaching and effective training techniques and their application in SMEs. Participants may have worked with something like resource efficiency, material efficiency, resource or material saving, environmentally friendly technology before, so they have a solid background on which to build. When is the training successful? To achieve the success criteria the training should have a clear agenda of the topic to be covered, well defined target group, have enough time to the planning, have well defined program specific learning outcomes, have teachers, instructors or presenters who are familiar with the topic, involve participants, have organizational support systems for the very first steps of the training, use quality measurement system (based on evaluations, feed-back analysis), etc. The list is long and demanding and organizing training program may be a real challenge.

One of the key success factors is the trainer, mentor, coach or instructor, no matter which is applicable to the train the trainer sessions. Bwika has identified the following attributes of a good instructor:

- Competence in subject matter
- Mastery of the techniques of instruction and evaluation
- Desire to teach
- Resourcefulness and creativeness
- Attentiveness to trainee needs
- Management techniques in classrooms
- Professional attitude
- Ability to develop good personal relations

#### 2.12 Training process

Training course design and organization includes several phases. The training design models ADDIE consists of five phases, ie. analysis, design, development, implementation and evaluation. Analysis deals with analysis, where the need for the training is studied in detail. In the designing phase the training program is outlined and planned. In the development phase the training is rolled out to the field in the form stipulated in the design phase. The final phase evaluation concludes the process and measures how effective the training program was at achieving its goals. The detailed

---

<sup>2</sup> See Sandelin, Sirpa: PROGRAM FOR TEACHERS TO CONDUCT FURTHER TRAINING, Satakunta University, Pori 2021

information with examples can be found from the page [The ADDIE Model Infographic](https://elearninginfographics.com/the-addie-model-infographic/) <https://elearninginfographics.com/the-addie-model-infographic/>.

Training session should respond to the participants learning styles. In general, there are three types of learners:

- Visual: These learners receive information best through seeing or reading it. This type of learners benefits from written instructions, diagrams, handouts, overheads, videos, and other visual information.
- Oral: Oral learners receive information best when they hear it. They respond best to speakers, audio conferences, discussion groups, etc.
- Kinesthetics: These learners learn by touch and feel. They respond well to demonstrations and in having the chance to practice themselves.

Trainees are individuals. Sometimes trainers may encounter themselves in a demanding position with difficult participants. Table 1. gives some strategies to cope with difficult participants.

Table 1. Ways to survive with difficult participants (Swan and Morgan 1993, cited in Assistive Technology Trainer’s handbook, <https://www.natenetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/at-trainers-handbook.pdf>, p. 86-87)

Behavior	Possible reasons	Strategies for presenters
<b>The aggressor</b>		
Confrontational, challenging and unpredictable. May include direct confrontation or constant “supportive” criticism of present ideas.	Need to win. Desire to be the leader. Need to control the group or the outcome of the training.	Remain calm – do not engage in the confrontation. Ask for explanation and clarification of concerns. Seek feedback from other participants. Redirect the conversation back to content. Model ways to permit differences of opinion to stand. Use humor. Be friendly and relaxed. As a last resort, discuss the behavior in private during a break.
<b>The isolate</b>		
Does not participate or frequently leaves the session for other activities such as phone calls.	Anxious about speaking. Unsure of own knowledge. Unwilling to commit to the work. Insecure about working with others.	Ask questions that require yes, no or very short answers to get things started. Offer activities for pairs or very small groups. Assign each person in the workshop specific task to



	<p>May not want to be in the workshop. May have pressing needs than the content of the training.</p>	<p>be reviewed by the presenter or other participants. Ask questions that are about the isolate's areas of expertise or strengths. Work with the person one-to-one or ask about the reasons for non-participation.</p>
<b>The negative</b>		
<p>Responds negatively to any new idea or task. Refuses to try new ideas or to consider them.</p>	<p>Poor self-concept. Lack of faith in ability to do the work. Has been required to attend the training.</p>	<p>Stay positive. State your perceptions of the situation in positive ways. Do not argue. Do not problem solve for the person. Brainstorm with the large group about ways to address the negative aspects that person identifies. "What would it take..." Ask the group to reserve judgement until the end. Ask what part of the topic could be adopted.</p>
<b>The monopolize</b>		
<p>Talks for long periods. Interrupts others. Repeats concerns frequently. Tries to speak first. Does not listen.</p>	<p>Insecure about participation. Insecure about own knowledge base. Need for attention. Need for approval from the presenter or the group. May be naturally talkative. May desire to be in charge of the outcome.</p>	<p>Odder activities that require turn taking and multiple speakers. Offer activities that require each person to respond or pass. Encourage participants to offer feedback to each other rather than in the large group. Provide a time limit for comments and questions that everyone in the group must abide by.</p>
<b>The expert</b>		
<p>Says that s/he already knows the content. Talks a lot. Volunteers to help the presenter. May offer incorrect facts.</p>	<p>Seeking respect and acknowledgement from other participants. Seeking approval or connection with the presenter.</p>	<p>Ensure opportunities with others. Spend a break or part of a lunch with the person.</p>

## 2.13 Presentation skills

### Lectures

When planning a training session, trainers should pay attention to what trainees remember from it. Estimated learning takes place:

- 10 % of what they read
- 20 % of what they hear
- 30 % of what they see
- 40 - 50 % of what they see and hear
- 50 % of what they discuss
- 70 % of what they experience
- 90 % of what they say as they do

Trainers should engage participants in thinking, questioning, and experiencing themselves. Thus, trainers should not speak all the time alone, because effectiveness of learning decreases very soon, if participants are not integrated in the training.

### Icebreakers

In the beginning of the session, it is important to get participants involved and engaged in an activity that requires them to talk and cooperate with the others. Icebreakers are the simple activities used at the beginning of a session to help participants learn each other's names and/or backgrounds, share their experiences, or introduce the topic of the lecture. The right icebreaker can help to get a positive and enjoyable learning experience for both the trainer and the participants. During the ice-breakers participants should connect with at least one other person. Icebreakers should be topic related and at low risk so that participants would feel comfortable and easy. Time used for icebreakers should not be too long compared to the length of the session.

### Presentations

The presentation (e.g. PowerPoint™ or Prezi (Prezi.com)) is used to support the content of the training and thus it should be clear and easy to read. The presentation is designed to be a visual support for both the trainer and the participants.

- Assistive Technology Trainer's Handbook <https://www.natennetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/at-trainers-handbook.pdf>
- Presentation Skills Training Resources and Articles <http://www.businesstrainingworks.com/training-resources/presentation-skills-articles>  
How to create effective training materials <https://www.hpandt.com/howtocreateeffectivetrainingmanuals.pdf>

## Figures, Tables and Videos

In order to improve the attractiveness of the lecture and the presentation it would be advisable to include figures or tables or videos into the presentation/ the lecture. Figures and tables illustrate the situations well and thus make it easier for the participants to assimilate the gained information. Presentations of success stories and case studies can be also included to this section. Internet and YouTube offer good opportunity for researching suitable videos.

- This toolkit is a training programme which can be delivered by experienced trainers / facilitators, with expert knowledge and skills in facilitating.  
[http://www.knowledge.scot.nhs.uk/media/6866097/trainthetrainers\\_\\_final\\_.pdf](http://www.knowledge.scot.nhs.uk/media/6866097/trainthetrainers__final_.pdf)
- Free training resources <https://www.trainingcoursematerial.com/free-training-resources>

### 2.14 Attitude awareness, motivation and engagement

According to the BJ Fogg Behavior Model, people take action when their motivation and ability to complete a task are both high and there is a triggering element (Figure 1). Behavioral changes will be expected during training if all three elements are present at the same time.

The model highlights three principal elements and their subcomponents:

- Core Motivators (Motivation): pleasure/pain, hope/fear, social acceptance/rejection; sensation, anticipation, belonging
- Simplicity Factors (Ability): time, money, physical effort, brain cycles, social deviance, non-routine
- Triggers: facilitator, spark, signal

In the planning and implementing training sessions trainers have to create and keep the high motivation level, give skills to do things easier, and give something that calls to action. Training should give a positive learning experience and a feeling of a victory.

Attitude can be dealt in different ways during the training. Depending on what type of attitude question we have the solution of influencing into the attitude is somewhat different. Is there a need for attitudinal change, future oriented attitude, more positive attitude or an attitude that can see the comparative advantages? The training course objective should be created in a way that it emphasizes the nature of attitude change. Change should be seen both in participants' own attitude and in the attitude in SMEs to gain comparative advantages. Also, the importance of the concept in a global scale should be emphasized.

Effective training and learning rely on motivation. Trainers face challenges in making the lectures more interesting and motivating. Unfortunately, there is no single answer how to motivate participants. Trainers are advised to accommodate different learning styles, like visual, oral, or kinesthetics, during their training sessions.

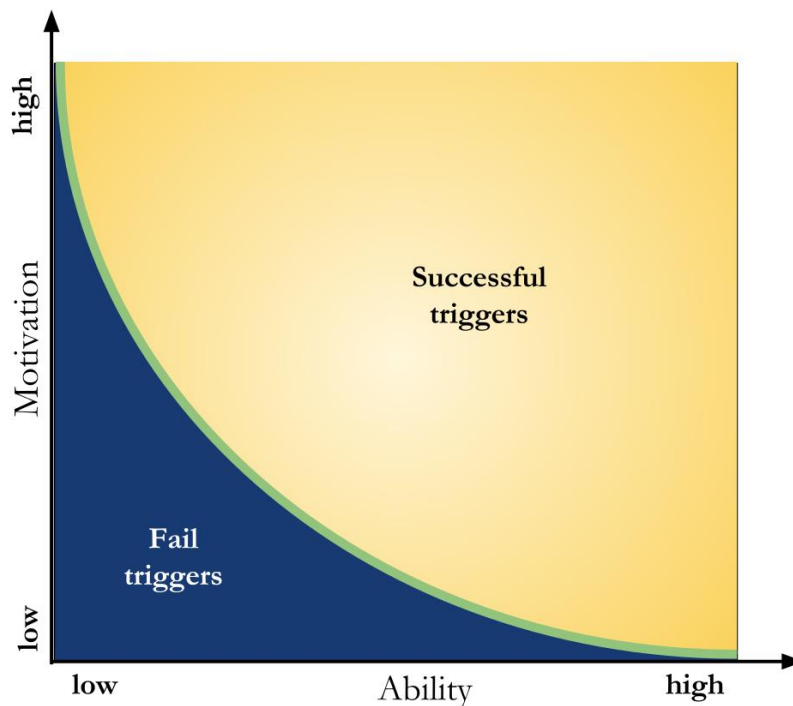


Figure 1. The BJ Fogg Behavior Model (According to Goodmanguy - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=58335488>).

When implementing the Training trainers should consider how they can translate theory into practice. Experimental learning is very powerful when trainers can combine participants' own experiences with the training programme contents.

There are a range of exercises the trainer can effectively use in order to involve in the participants as much as possible to the learning process. The best way for adults to learn is when the new course material is based on their experiences, but when there is also left space for the debate among the participants. Many participants are experienced personnel who have valuable information to contribute. There are varieties of training methods and together they can give the possibility for a multifaceted understanding of the course material.

One way to activate trainees is to include storytelling in the training sessions. Stories may make communication easier and insert personal touches in the sessions. Stories can be used as examples of right and wrong ways to perform tasks or skills. They could be used to activate participants to find different views on the topic. Trainers should also give floor to the participants' own stories.

There are several ways trainers can use to engage your audience throughout the training sessions:

- interesting materials, which will be used after the training, too
- pair or group discussions, involve participants in one way or another
- case studies and examples from real life situations
- role plays are excellent for example in supervisory, mentoring or coaching situations
- demonstrations, videos, material samples, process simulations, etc,

- Training methods: a review and analysis [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/274980945\\_Training\\_Methods\\_A\\_Review\\_and\\_Analysis](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/274980945_Training_Methods_A_Review_and_Analysis)
- The Trainer’s Survival Guide has 25 different activities that make lecture-based programmers more active. They can be used during the training session and they have tips for the trainer to get participants involved. <http://www.leotrainer.com/tactiveteach.pdf>
- 10 Storytelling Tips for Powerful Messages in ONE hour [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/informing/events/2511-virtual/melissa\\_ran-court\\_inio\\_meeting.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/informing/events/2511-virtual/melissa_ran-court_inio_meeting.pdf)

## 2.2 Effective Training Techniques

The second part of this pedagogy deals with mentoring and coaching, spreading best practices, learning from the worst cases, effective questioning and appreciative inquiry, and creativity and innovations. There are several links to different kind of document, reports and videos about how to improve the training sessions.

Learning involves acquiring new knowledge, skills and attitudes that result in change in participants’ ability to do something, i.e. in this Train the Trainer programme the ability to apply effective training methods. The components in learning process include knowledge acquisition, thinking for understanding and doing in practice.

### 2.21 Group work and brainstorming

Group works can be applied in learning if the trainer wants participants to deal about the issue by debating and discussing. Group work in small groups gives all participants the opportunity to participate in the exercises and thus express their ideas. In order to get the best out of the group works would be good to get them goal oriented. The participants should understand the task of the group work at hand, the timeframe and the way of presenting the results.

In brainstorming the trainer asks an open-ended question and the participants come up with as many solutions as possible. The idea of brainstorming is to get participants involved and engaged in the training. Brainstorming should be based on few rules in order to get the best results. Example of the rule could be that there are no stupid or bad ideas.

- Trainer’s Handbook, Assistive Technology Trainer’s handbook <https://www.natenetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/at-trainers-handbook.pdf>
- MindTool Brainstorming <http://www.mindtools.com/brainstm.html>
- 

### 2.22 Mentoring and coaching

The EMCC glossary gives the following definition to coaching and mentoring: “It is a professionally guided process that inspires clients to maximise their personal and professional potential. It is a structured, purposeful and transformational process, helping clients to see and test alternative ways for improvement of competence,

decision making and enhancement of quality of life. Coach and Mentor and client work together in a partnering relationship on strictly confidential terms. In this relationship, clients are experts on the content & decision-making level; the coach & mentor is an expert in professionally guiding the process”.

(<https://emccdrive.emccglobal.org/api/file/download/uKy7MLlofV6NoR4grJpySLZ-NGpbYoGntuZSeu9zf>)

Mentoring can be described as partnership between two people working in a same field or sharing same experiences. A mentor is a person helping the mentee to develop solutions to career related issues. Mentors should be helpful and get the mentee to believe in him/her while boosting his/her confidence. A good mentor also challenges and questions mentee, but in the meantime provides guidance and encouragement. The most important meanings of mentoring are to enable others to become more self-aware, to make them take responsible for their life and to direct their life in the direction they decide.

Coaching focuses on the individual needs of a person and is generally less formal than other kinds of training. A manager, supervisor, or other employees serve usually as the coach. The coach works with the employee being coached when time allows and works with this employee to answer questions, make suggestions, leads to right track, and gives support and feedback. The differences between coaching and mentoring are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Differences between coaching and mentoring (<https://www.usgs.gov/media/files/coaching-vs-mentoring-25-ways-theyre-different>).

<b>Coaching</b>	<b>Mentoring</b>
Task oriented	Relationship oriented
Short term	Long Term
Performance driven	Development driven
Can be done as needed; no design necessary	Program design needed to create effective program
Manager directly involved	Manager involved only indirectly
More easily evaluated and measured for ROI	Less easy to measure for ROI
Reliance on performance management systems, e.g. reviews, 360's etc.	Not dependent upon performance management systems
Feedback by coach to manager about progress in development	No feedback by mentor to manager
Coach paid for services	Mentor receives no compensation
Coach operates independently	Mentors operate with assistance from the Mentoring Program Manager
No training of coaches needed	Mentors and mentees trained



Focus is more on business issues than personal	Focus is on personal and professional development
Lower initial investment cost	Higher initial investment cost (lower over time)
Lends itself to online software	Management of the mentoring program lends itself to software but not the relationship itself
Coaches leave organization when done	Mentors and mentees remain in the organization and can provide ongoing mentoring to others
Done by inside or outside content expert	Mentors are normally within the company
Can be done for remedial purposes	Never remedial
Internal politics not usually affected	Internal politics a consideration in program design
Cultural change may/may not occur	Mentoring is transformational and affects the culture
Diversity may or may not be included	Diversity is a component of mentoring
Coaching done 1-on-1	Mentoring most often is done 1-on-1 but other models may be used as well
Content expertise more important in coaching	Interpersonal skills more important in mentoring
Manager can be coach of own employee	Mentor is outside mentee's direct supervisory line
Coaching is one-directional	Mentoring is bi-directional
Coaching is focused on the business person	Mentoring involves the whole person
Behavioral transformation	Personal transformation

- Information on business mentoring, successful mentorship and the benefits of mentoring can be found from the Website <https://www.micromentor.org/>
- Videos: <http://mentoring-works.com/resources/videos/>

### 2.23 Effective questioning and appreciative inquiry

Learning can be promoted by effective questions. By questions trainers can motivate participants, keep their interest on the key issues, and engage them in the learning process. Questions can also be seen as means of fostering knowledge sharing and creation among participants. Should you be worried if participants do not have



questions? Yes, you should. In the beginning of the session’s trainer should encourage participants to ask questions. There are no silly questions. If there are no questions from the audience, pose them a question. If you do not know the answer, ask help from the participants. Someone from the audience might know the answer. Of course, you can always give links to Internet sites with further information.

In the SMEs problems can be solved by using the 4D-model or 5D-model. The four common phases are:

- Define: you have to know the current situation and it’s positive aspects
- Discovery: analyse what works well currently
- Dream: dream vision of what is the bright future, brainstorm creative and innovative ideas
- Design: build the dream, plan systems, processes, and strategies

The fifth phase in the 5D-model is (Figure 2):

- Deliver, which is the implementation towards the dream.

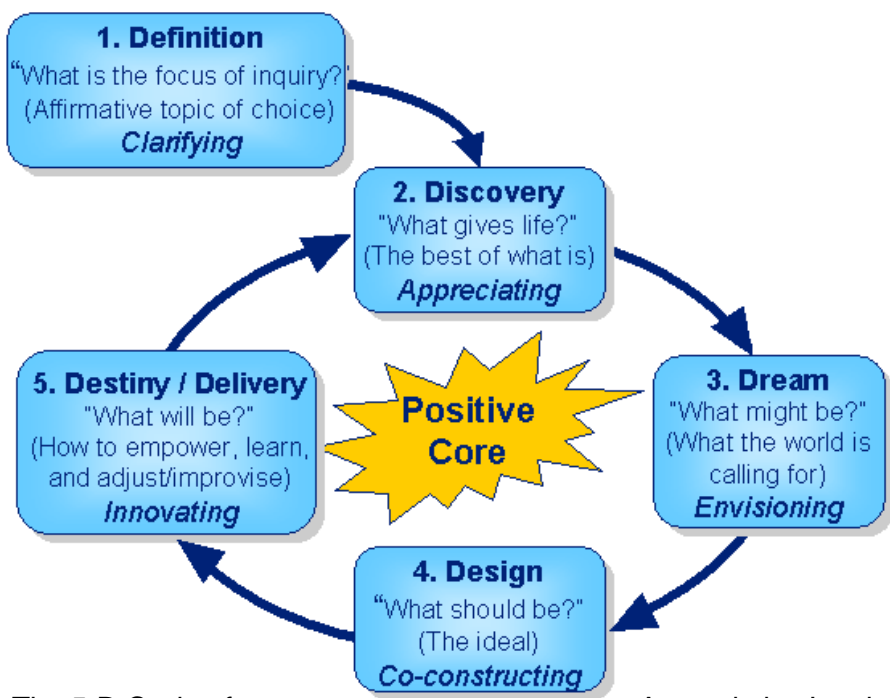


Figure 2. The 5-D Cycle of Appreciative Inquiry  
[http://www.metavolution.com/rsrc/articles/whatis\\_ai.htm](http://www.metavolution.com/rsrc/articles/whatis_ai.htm)

- MindTools Appreciative inquiry [http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMC\\_85.htm](http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMC_85.htm)
- Center for Appreciative Inquiry <http://www.centerforappreciativeinquiry.net/>

### 2.24 Best practices and worst cases in knowledge creation and sharing

Best practices can be defined as “practices that consistently show results superior to those achieved with other means”. (European Commission report on best practices

p.17) Best practice examples can be used as a support and example during the training session. Good examples can be asked from participants.

- Small Business Act - Database of good practices <https://ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-databases/sme-best-practices/SBA/index.cfm?fuseaction=welcome.detail>
- Enterprise Europe Network, Success stories <https://een.ec.europa.eu/success-stories>

Worst cases can be defined as “: involving, projecting, or providing for the worst possible circumstances or outcome of a given situation” (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/worst-case>). During the training session worst cases can be helpful to the participants in order to help their planning of the future expenditure cuts and contingency in their businesses. Unfortunately, examples from the worst cases are not easily found.

Experiences from a real working life and companies should be included in the training programmes. During group activities possible solutions for the acute changes could be developed.

- - Foresight methodology: [https://www.interregeurope.eu/fileadmin/user\\_upload/tx\\_tevprojects/library/file\\_1553867970.pdf](https://www.interregeurope.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/tx_tevprojects/library/file_1553867970.pdf)

## 2.25 Creativity and innovations

Creativity and innovations are closely related to the productivity in SMEs. European Commission promotes innovations in SMEs, like technological breakthroughs, new processes and business models, non-technological innovations and innovations in the services sector. Creativity, use of new knowledge and capturing tacit knowledge will strengthen productivity of SMEs. When knowledge is transferred effectively, new product, process and service innovations have a change to be invented.

- European small business portal has gathered together all the information provided by the EU for SMEs, ranging from practical advice to policy issues. [http://ec.europa.eu/small-business/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/small-business/index_en.htm)
- European Commission, Innovations [http://ec.europa.eu/growth/industry/innovation/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/growth/industry/innovation/index_en.htm)
- MindTools Creativity tools [http://www.mindtools.com/pages/main/newMN\\_CT.htm](http://www.mindtools.com/pages/main/newMN_CT.htm)

## 2.3 Digital Training and Learning Tools

Technology plays a fundamental role in the processes of train the trainer education and learning. Digital training and learning tools can be used in several ways to support the teaching and learning process. The number of digital tools available is huge, so only a couple of the main type of applications will be presented. The role of these tools is to give autonomy to the trainee and encourage trainees to collaborate with other trainees and facilitate communication with the trainer and trainees. Digital tools

can be used in multiple ways via mobile devices. With train the trainer process technology will give much wider ways to conduct training sessions, to be integrated as supplement tools in face-to-face teaching or to support mentoring or coaching process either online or offline.

2.31 Pedagogy in digital environments

When utilizing digital training and learning tools, the pedagogical approach has to be rethought. All three forms of knowledge, i.e. content, pedagogy, and technology, have to be considered simultaneously in unique contexts as shown in Figure 3. Since train the trainer courses differ from the level of trainees, the cultures and lecturers, each course is unique. Traditional training events are unique too, but the complexity of training with digital tools brings more pedagogical challenges. Transition to the use of digital training and learning tools means much more than just transfer of materials and activities to the digital environment.

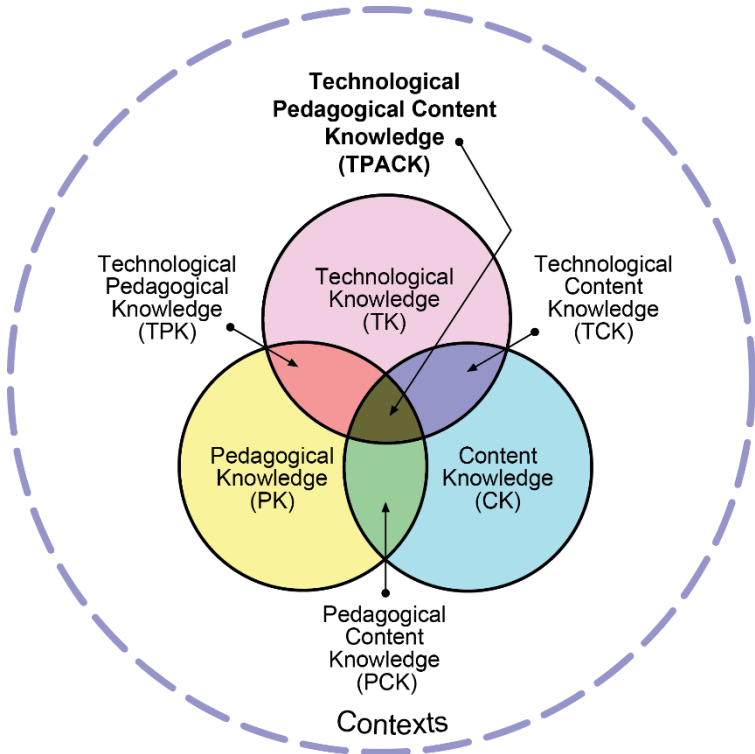


Figure 3. Components of TPACK (© 2012 by tpack.org, <http://tpack.org>).

2.32 Examples of learning platforms and tools

Some of the learning platforms and tools are shortly presented here. Tools enable not only online video meeting, but also managing daily tasks and storing documents in cloud services. Tools work as well as well on mobile devices and desktops or laptops. The following platforms and tools are only examples from different kinds of applications, and freer and fee paid versions and applications are in the Internet.

Moodle is an open-source learning management system (<https://moole.org/?lang=fi>).

The platform works in several languages.

Hubs for meetings and conferencing, chatting and collaborations are i.e. Microsoft Teams (<https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-teams/group-chat-software>) and ZOOM (<https://zoom.us/>).

Collaborative tools offer versatile visualization tools for collaborative knowledge building. Visual thinking tools are applicable in various business and training cases, such as project planning, meeting management, brainstorming, idea management, knowledge management, and note taking. Participants can simultaneously create content and new ideas or create mind maps. Some examples of collaborative tools are Flinga whiteboard (<http://www.nordtouch.fi/>), Miro (<https://miro.com/>) and Padlet (<https://padlet.com>).

Kahoot! is a game-based learning platform for creating, sharing and playing learning games or trivia quizzes (<https://kahoot.com/>).

Online feedback can be collected by many different platforms. E.g. some of the collaborative tools enable anonymous input and can be modified to be used in collecting the feedback. More sophisticated tools, for example Google Forms and Microsoft Forms, enable conducting a survey and importing the results to the Excel or other spreadsheet program to be analysed.

Tools that are particularly designed to collect feedback are for example SurveySparrow (<https://surveysparrow.com/>), GetFeedback (<https://www.getfeedback.com/>) and Gainsight PX (<https://www.gainsight.com/>) that is particularly designed to catch user feedback from digital platforms, applications and services.

Concerning the educational purposes there are several free web tools that can be used to gather feedback from students. Feedback can be both formally and informally. It is also possible to use these tools to poll students about a learning event, assess their level of comprehension, or simply to get to know their opinions about a certain topic. Some of these tools will be listed below:

- Poll Everywhere (<http://www.polleverywhere.com/>)
- Kwiqpoll (<http://kwiqpoll.com/>)
- TodaysMeet (<http://todaysmeet.com/>)
- SimpleMeet Me (<http://www.simplemeet.me/#>)
- Urtack (<https://urtak.com/>)

Each tool has its own properties and particular purpose it has been designed for. Thus, it could be a good idea to get known with several tools before choosing the one to be used just in the case on hands.

- Digital pedagogy <https://www.tuni.fi/tlc/en/planning-and-implementation-of-teaching/digital-pedagogics/>
- Digital pedagogy toolkit <https://www.jisc.ac.uk/full-guide/digital-pedagogy-toolkit#>
- Hybrid pedagogy <https://hybridpedagogy.org/>
- Pedagogics in digital learning <https://unips.fi/pedagogics-in-digital-learning/>
- Automatic feedback in online learning environments: A systematic literature review <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2666920X21000217>

## 2.4 Coaching Process

The entire training from the first approach of the participants to the execution of the test and the end of the training must be accompanied by individual coaching, which is particularly intensive in phase 2 of the training. Within the scope of the coaching, all relevant subject areas must be covered, for example, consultations with the participants and the participating companies, transfer of know-how and information, determination of needs and implementation of follow-up training, referral to experts, organization of information and experience exchange, etc., up to assistance with personal questions or problems.

The words “coaching” and “consultation” are often used interchangeably. However, strictly taken, these concepts imply very different notions. Coaching focuses on a goal-and results-oriented process which helps clients to find their own solutions. It is therefore understood as a method that enables those facing special (often professional) challenges or problems to manage them (largely) independently. Due to this self-understanding, it becomes clear that a coach is not an advisor or consultant answering the questions of the person seeking advice, but a coach enables the client, through certain questions and techniques, to ask the “right” questions and find the answers by him or herself.

The task of consultants or advisers, on the other hand, is to answer specific questions of the person seeking advice as an expert on the topic. Hence, the solution or answer to the question of the advice seeker is given by another person, implying that the person seeking advice does not need to further investigate the issue.

Nevertheless, there are some common characteristics of the two processes:

**Profound expertise and professionalism:** usually acquired through university studies, training and with extensive professional experience

**Reflexivity:** Here understood as a systematic and well-founded thinking about one’s own actions and activities as well as the structures and processes with which one pursues a goal.

**Value orientation and positive image of man** understood here as an appreciation and recognition of the diversity of personalities, a personality’s dynamics and changeability

**Working in and with networks:** as a necessary condition for pursuing goals and increasing professionalism.<sup>3</sup>

As part of the ICLinSMEs project, due to the complexity of challenges and issues faced by participants and SMEs, it can be assumed that there will be no clearly defined border between coaching or counselling support from the coaches/advisors. Both can be appropriate, important and necessary depending on the case. Therefore,

---

<sup>3</sup> Cf. <https://www.unternehmer.de/management-people-skills/128418-die-coaching-serie-teil-i-was-ist-coaching-ueberhaupt> or <https://www.unternehmer.de/management-people-skills/131706-die-coachingserie-teil-ii-wo-liegen-die-grenzen-von-coaching>



consulting or coaching is seen in this context as an interactive process in which both, the strong support of the consultant or coach and active participation of the person seeking advice, is of immense importance for solving the problem at hand.<sup>4</sup> Within the “ICI4SMEs” project, this process should be based on the “Case Management Model” increasingly used in the realm of social work.<sup>5</sup>

Case management is an extremely complex and intensive process carried out together with the advice seeker. It is always on a voluntary basis and requires the consent of the person seeking advice. Cases in which a case management structure is worthwhile are particularly complex problem situations for whose solution a large number of helpers from different areas is required. This also means that multiple coaching sessions will be necessary. Furthermore, setting up case management structures is a time-consuming and labour-intensive process. Therefore, it cannot be expected that the advisors/coaches of the project participants will fully implement this concept. Nevertheless, it should serve as a suggestion for structuring the coaching process.

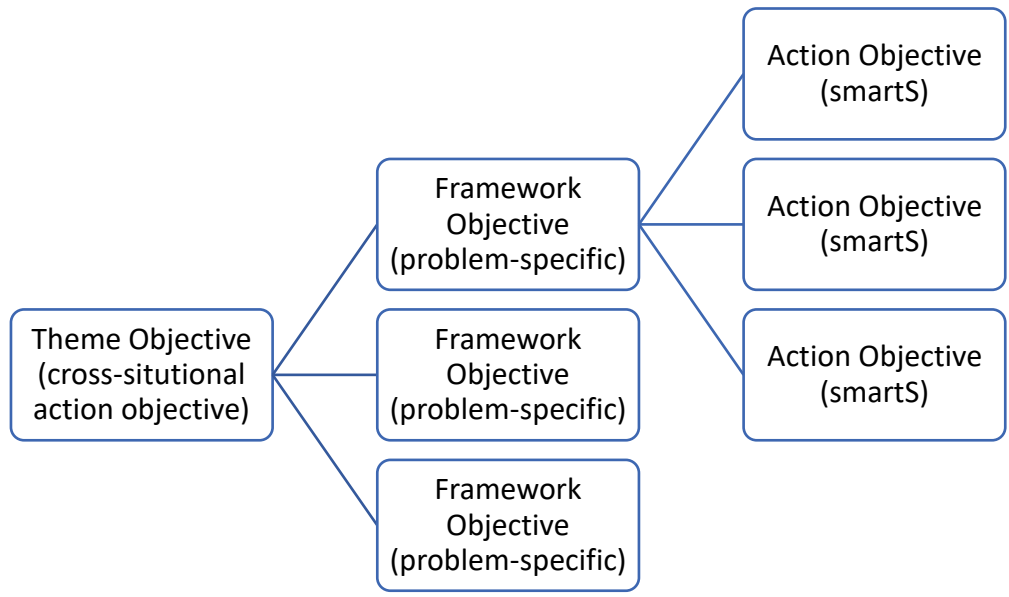
The case management process is divided into two levels: the case level and the (care) systems level. At case level, the case manager focuses on the person seeking advice. First, the case is assessed. In this phase information is collected comprehensively, systematically and without judgement or evaluation. The next step of this phase is a conscious decision which problem should be worked on made jointly by the case manager and the advice seeker. Once this decision has been made, hypotheses are formulated to come up with different explanations for the selected problem. These hypotheses facilitate the formulation of action goals in the next phase. In the case of this project, the selected problem should be the desired self-employment as entrepreneur. Furthermore, it is important to record strengths, competences and resources of the participant to be able to draw on them when solving the selected problem during the coaching process.

In the next phase (planning) an individual support plan is drawn up. Here, a distinction is made between theme, framework and action objectives. It is crucial to adhere to the hierarchy moving from the abstract theme objectives to the concrete action objectives. Theme objectives take interests and hopes into account, they are personal, easy to understand and formulated in a positive way – they reflect the participant’s visions. Framework objectives relate specifically to the guiding problem (i.e. self-employment as entrepreneur) and its explanation hypotheses. They are generally in line with the theme objectives. Lastly, action objectives are formulated to concretely implement the framework objectives. They are incremental and must be manageable for the participant. The so-called smartS criteria (specific, measurable, acceptable/attractive, realistic, timed and strength-oriented)<sup>6</sup> should be taken into account when formulating the action objectives.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Nußbeck, Susanne (2010). Einführung in die Beratungspsychologie (2. Ed.). München: Reinhardt.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Müller, Matthias (2016). Case Management in der Migrationsberatung für erwachsene Zuwanderer (MBE) – Eine Arbeitshilfe (1. Ed.). Berlin: Deutscher paritätischer Wohlfahrtsverband Gesamtverband e.V.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Ehlers, Corinna/Müller, Matthias & Schuster, Frank (2017). Stärkenorientiertes Case Management: Komplexe Fälle in fünf Schritten bearbeiten. Opladen u.a.: Barbara Budrich Verlag.



In the case level's next phase, it is a matter of implementing the defined objectives. In contrast to regular counselling, in case management this phase is more than just a recommendation and placement into assistance services. Here, close accompaniment and, if necessary, support is foreseen. The process is oriented towards the wishes, strengths and resources of the participant to initiate a helping process that is as autonomous as possible (keyword empowerment). If many different institutions work together, so-called case conferences can be of an advantage to make cooperation more effective.

Before ending the case management process as well as already during the implementation phase, the process should be closely monitored and if, necessary, modified by the advisor/coach. The close accompaniment of the change process by the advisor/coach offers the participant additional support.

The end of the process should be active and binding. It contains elements of reflection, evaluation and farewell in which the handling of new situations without the advisor/coach should also be discussed.

The systems level of case management focuses on all the organisations and specialists who are involved in the solution process for those seeking advice. Here it is helpful to fall back on already existing networks of the advisor/coach as well as of the participant.



## Examination Regulation and international recognition

### 1. Examination Regulation

The training program "Realization of customer-centered innovations" can be examined alternatively:

- On the basis of an official examination regulation leading to a state-recognised degree. The following examination regulations fulfil this purpose.
- As an internal audit, which is also carried out on the basis of the following examination regulations but does not lead to a recognised degree. In this case, the participants will receive a certificate and attestation showing the overall examination grade.

Wherever possible, examinations should be based on official examination regulations and training should end with a recognized further vocational training degree. If the necessary legal basis for this does not exist in individual countries and cannot be created during the project period, an internal examination is to be carried out, which is, however, also implemented in accordance with the official examination regulations below and documented in a certificate.

### Official Examination Regulation

#### § 1 Purpose of the examination and designation of the degree

1) The examination is intended to determine whether the candidate possesses the necessary knowledge, skills and experience required in implementing of customer-centered innovations in SMEs.

2) A successful pass in this examination leads to a recognized degree in .....  
(for example, specialist for customer innovation in SMEs).

#### § 2 Requirements

The examination is to admit those who have:

1) Successfully completed vocational training or have at least five years' professional experience

2) Further to Paragraph 1), admission to the examination may also be granted on presentation of certificates or otherwise, as proof that the requisite knowledge, skills and experience have been acquired in previous activities and can justify admission to the examination.

#### § 3 Structure, content and duration of the test

1) Theoretical fundamentals

In the first part of the examination, basic knowledge in the following fields of activity must be demonstrated:

- a) Analysis of the operational framework conditions with regard to the current and future management and realisation of customer-centred innovations.
- b) Submission of economically justified proposals for the realisation of customer-centred innovations.
- c) Activities for the implementation of customer-centred innovation measures in the company.
- d) Checking the suitability, selection and use of digital technologies for the realisation of customer-centred innovations.
- e) Examination of the operational suitability of the innovation measures.
- f) Development of optimisation proposals for the improvement of the innovation measures and the use of digital technologies.

2) Planning, implementation and evaluation of customer-centred innovation measures and use of digital technologies in the company.

In the second part of the examination, the examinee is to demonstrate that he/she is able to plan, implement and evaluate a company-related innovation project. This includes:

- a) the identification of company innovation fields of action in SMEs
- b) planning innovation activities in the company and using digital technologies for this purpose
- c) the presentation of advantages and disadvantages in the implementation of customer-centred innovation activities in the company
- d) the anchoring of digitalisation in the realisation of customer-centred innovation activities in the company as a project
- e) Measures to check the suitability of measures and digital technologies for the acquisition and realisation of customer-centred innovation activities in the company.

3) The third part of the examination is in the form of a project work, which is to be prepared as a written, extra-occupational term paper. The scope start and processing time of the project work is determined by the examination board.

4) The first part of the examination is oral and should not take longer than 30 minutes in total.

5) The second part of the examination is conducted in writing and should not exceed 60 minutes.

6) On the basis of the examination performances in the project work, a technical discussion is to be held in which the candidate is to show that he/she can demonstrate the technical connections underlying the project work, justify the course of the project work and present technical problems associated with the project work and their solutions. The technical discussion should not last longer than 15 minutes.

#### § 4 Consideration of previous examinations

- 1) The examinee can apply for exemption from the examination in individual areas of action, if he/she has passed a previous examination before a competent authority, a public or state accredited educational institution or before a state examination board whose content requirements correspond to the respective fields of activity.
- 2) A complete exemption is not allowed.

#### § 5 Passing the written and oral examinations

- 1) The examination results in the parts stipulated in § 3 must be assessed separately.
- 2) The number of points obtained in the three papers for the oral and written examinations should be summarized into a total score. The final grade is therefore:
  - 15% from the first part of the examination,
  - 25% from the written examination in the second part of the test,
  - 40% of the project work in the third part of the test and
  - 20% of the technical discussion in the third examination.
- 3) The written examination of the second part of the examination must be supplemented by an oral examination if this can be decisive for passing the examination. The oral examination should not last longer than 15 minutes per examination.
- 4) The examination is passed if at least sufficient performance has been achieved in each examination part.
- 5) A certificate is to be issued on passing the examination, which must show the overall examination grade.

#### § 6 Retests

- (1) An examination which was not passed can be repeated twice.
- (2) If the candidate has passed individual sections of the examination but has not performed at least adequately in sections in accordance with §3, the parts successfully passed must not be repeated on further application, provided that the candidate has filed for reassessment within two years from the date of the declared result of the failed examination. The assessment of the examination will be made with regard to this factor.

#### § 7 Application of other provisions

For all craft and non-craft occupations, the respective training examination regulations apply in their currently valid version.

## 2. Evaluation in the Qualification Framework and international recognition

### 2.1 Qualifications Framework “Baltic Sea Region”

A qualifications framework for the Baltic Sea Region was designed under the Project Leonardo “Baltic Education”<sup>7</sup>. By means of the European Credit Transfer System of Vocational Education and Training (ECVET), this “BSR-QF” provided the basis for the evaluation of two craft occupations – “carpenter” and “painter”. ECVET is a system which allows to characterize qualification (knowledge, skills and competence) by transferable and accumulable learning units and to assign credit points to the learning outcomes. The BSR-QF and the applied ECVET process for the two named occupations formed the basis for the evaluation of the advanced training programmes "Realization of customer-centred innovations" developed "Workplace Innovation".

#### 2.11 EQF and BSR-QF – an introduction

The Maastricht Declaration of 2004, the Lisbon Strategy of 2000 as well as several other European Union initiatives, and in this context specifically dedicated funding to raise the geographical and labour market mobility and to promote lifelong learning, will yield increased employment and economic growth across EU countries. Rapid social, technological and economic changes along with an aging society make lifelong learning a necessity. For that reason, education is a major component to meet and to achieve the ambitious Lisbon goals. Hence, the European Commission has induced to develop a European Qualifications Framework and to establish National Qualifications Frameworks (hereinafter: NQF) by 2010. The modelling of National Qualifications Frameworks lies in the competence of national authorities, whereas the EU-Commission has recommended that the EU Member States implement NQFs. The European Qualifications Framework represents a meta-framework and is considered by the European Commission as crucial in meeting European objectives, set out in the Lisbon Strategy.

The main purpose of a qualifications framework is to improve transparency, quality and comparability of professional and academic qualification levels across differing education systems and European countries. The EQF itself does not constitute a formal recognition of occupational qualifications. A special feature of Europe is the enormous diversity of educational systems. A prerequisite to make this specificity an asset is to foster transparency.

Transparency can be considered as a fundamental prerequisite for the recognition of qualifications, and it improves comparability. Better comparability between countries

---

<sup>7</sup> Hanseatic Parliament: Baltic education, Hamburg 2008

is a decisive element to increase labour mobility and to ensure permeability of qualifications, whereby permeability constitutes a prerequisite for lifelong learning.

In the near future, qualifications frameworks must meet these criteria with concrete and well-designed concepts. A qualifications framework is an appropriate tool for the development and for classifying qualifications. The European Qualifications Framework was adopted in November 2007.

Under the project “Baltic Education”, constructive and fruitful discussions at European and national levels should be encouraged by a “Baltic Sea Region Qualifications Framework” (hereinafter: BSR-QF). This BSR-QF should be regarded as a supplement and contribution to the ongoing debate rather than a substitute for the shaping of National Qualifications Frameworks. The project “Baltic Education” has delivered a sizeable contribution to this strategy.

The Baltic Sea Region (BSR) is an area with a considerable number of different countries. These countries share common problems as they endeavour to cope with the same economic and demographic challenges and concerns. It is essential for this region to further develop vocational training, to improve quality and to establish transparency and recognition models. To solve these complex issues, the BSR-QF provides an orientation, allowing for classifications across the whole qualification range and also serving as a common ground for constructive discussions, conceptual considerations and individual progress.

## 2.12 The Baltic Sea Region Qualifications Framework

The BSR-QF comprises eight qualification levels that take into account acquired skills from the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) plus vocational qualifications and competences.

This concept is consistent with the recommendations of the European Commission. Table 1 shows the elaborated proposal for the BSR-QF. The following presents a brief overview of the respective competence levels of the BSR-QF. The following section provides more detailed information on the methodology and descriptors that have been developed and used for the BSR-QF.

### Competence level 1 – Basic education

Skills profiles to be reached at this stage are general basic training skills and they will not be counted to vocational training or academic education. Basic training is a prerequisite to gain access to higher qualification levels. The development of learning skills still requires resolute continued guided support. It is not possible to assign this skills level to a specific domain. Therefore, qualifications in this level are domain-independent.

### Competence level 2 – No vocational training

Level 2 comprises the first level of vocational training (VET area). Qualifications at this stage are not specifically pronounced, since knowledge and skills are at an early stage of evolving. Methods and social skills are not yet domain-specific. 1 to 2-year qualification programmes, training phases and vocational training preparation phases are covered by this stage.

Tab.1: Baltic Sea Region-Qualifications Framework

Level	Education Degree	Framework for Qualification of the VET* area and EHEA**
1	<i>Basic Education</i>	-
2	<i>No Vocational Graduation</i> graduation/training after/for 1-2 years, and work and apprenticeship preparation phase (at the age of 15/16)	First cycle VET area
3	<i>Lower Vocational Graduation</i> certificate of apprenticeship (in 2-4 years), and no/limited professional or experience (certificate of apprenticeship + <5 years of profession experience)	Second cycle VET area
4	<i>Middle Vocational Graduation</i> long profession experience as skilled worker (certificate of apprenticeship + ≥5 years of profession experience); comprehensive further education; “young master craftsman” with no/limited professional experiences (<3 years of profession experience)	Third cycle VET area
5	<i>Upper Vocational Graduation</i> master craftsman with long profession experiences as master (≥3 years); “master craftsman plus”; long profession experiences and further education (certificate of apprenticeship + ≥8 years of profession experience); introductory study period	Fourth cycle VET area and short cycle academic area
6	Bachelor (academic bachelor’s degree) and other similar qualifications and competences	Fifth cycle VET area and first cycle academic area
7	Master (academic master’s degree) and other high qualifications and competences	Sixth cycle VET area and second cycle academic area
8	PhD and other very high qualifications and competences	Seventh cycle VET area and third cycle academic area



### Competence level 3 – Lower vocational training

Level 3 covers complete vocational training from a training period of 2 to 4 years. Access to the competence level of a lower vocational training is possible after completion of a secondary school or after reaching the competence level 2. This involves professional skills, equivalent with an expertise level of an initial vocational training. The graduate has no or limited work experience. Qualifications at this level include a broad general education and an initial job specific expertise. Therefore, only specific parts of a domain will be covered in this qualification level. Completion of the skill level 3 is a precondition for achieving the competence levels 4 and 5.

### Competence level 4 – Intermediate vocational education

Compared to Level 3, this level specifies a higher degree of professional and technical expertise. Vocational training qualifications, extensive advanced training, “Young master craftsman”, and long work experience are covered by this stage. The level in this field is relatively high and all parts of a professional domain are covered. Level 4 qualifications indicate great job specific knowledge and skills. In this level, a person can be regarded as a specialist who has the knowledge and skills to relatively independently solve problems. Finally, achieving level 4 along with extensive advanced training, allows a limited number of candidates with ambitious and superb qualifications to access an academic bachelor level, without having previously obtained a general qualification for university entrance.

### Competence level 5 – Higher vocational education

At this stage, candidates already have a formal vocational qualification as a master craftsman, including follow-up trainings; they have long professional experience and thus a high degree of technical expertise. Each part of a domain is covered at a high level, but without scientific expertise. Knowledge acquired by candidates at this competence level comprise autonomous learning, broad theoretical and practical knowledge. At this relatively high level of competence basic academic studies are touched upon. Completing of the competence level 5 with comprehensive, previous vocational education and further training (e.g. as “Master Craftsman Plus”) gives access to competence level 6, without having a general qualification for university entrance. It is possible to obtain credits for university entrance, based upon previously acquired knowledge (maximum 120 credit points). Nevertheless, persons who seek access to the bachelor level, have to pass an individual interview. Competence level 5 covers the short academic cycle with regard to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). University students with circa 120 credit points are within competence level 5.

8

### Competence level 6 – Bachelor and other comparable education and skills

---

<sup>8</sup> cf. MINISTRY FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND INNOVATION (Eds.) (2005): *A Framework for Qualifications in the European Higher Education Area*. Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks. Copenhagen.

Candidates within this qualification range have already completed the first cycle of the EHR and the 5th level of vocational training. The academic bachelor's degree is obtained by students who usually scored 180-240 credit points<sup>9</sup>. Level 6 qualifications feature advanced theoretical knowledge and skills. This also applies to individuals with completed vocational training and notably domain-oriented knowledge. Precondition for access to the competence level 6 is the general qualification for university entrance or similar sophisticated competences and skills within a domain-specific education. Completing the qualification levels 4 and 5 also opens up access to the competence level 6.

#### Competence level 7 – Master and other higher qualification and skills

Having an outstanding domain-specific knowledge, candidates are at a significantly high level within this stage. They are highly qualified professionals, with advanced training and skills in a most deeply specific domain. Qualifications at this level include self-determined and theoretical learning. The master's degree is one of the conditions for reaching the third level of the academic cycle. Competence Level 7 is the second highest qualification of the EHR and the second highest level of the vocational training cycle.

#### Competence level 8 – PhD and other first-rate qualifications and skills

A PhD title is one of the highest academic degrees and it is the highest level within the EHR system. An academic person at this proficiency level is a professional and expert. Competence level 8 is the highest vocational training cycle to be reached by individuals. These persons have outstanding expertise and intellectual abilities in a most highly specific domain field. Persons at qualification level 8 have leadership skills and experience as well as potential for critical, methodical analyses, assessments and presentations.

### 2.13 Methodology and Descriptors

The proficiency levels measure professional, personal skills, abilities and competences within a specific domain. It is a method to classify and assess qualifications in levels. It is not the acquired diplomas but skills that are subject to assessment in levels. Qualifications are understood as a set of skills. A competence is defined as the ability to meet tough requirements in a specific context. Competent execution or effective actions involve the mobilization of expertise, cognitive and practical skills as well as social and behavioural components such as attitudes, emotions, values and motivations.<sup>10</sup> Skills are more than school and work-related knowledge. It is therefore a

<sup>9</sup> MINISTRY FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND INNOVATION (Eds.) (2005): *A Framework for Qualifications in the European Higher Education Area*. Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks. Copenhagen.

<sup>10</sup> D. S. RYCHEN/L. H. SALGANIK (2003): *Key Competencies for a Successful Life and a Well-Functioning Society*. DeSeCo Project report Summary, OECD, Paris, p. 2

consistent argument that (professional) skills comprehensively include social and personal competence. Skills, as they are set out in the BSR-QF, are not occupation-specific, but they are in fact aggregates.<sup>11</sup> Hence, educational degrees were used in the project to describe, illustrate and classify skills. This increases the legitimacy among stakeholders, builds on familiar ways of thinking and classification patterns and enables easy, transparent and unbureaucratic description and understanding.

Table 2 shows the descriptors for each skills level of the BSR-QF. The descriptors “expertise” and “competence” are equivalent to the descriptors in the EQF.

The Baltic Sea Region Qualifications Framework contributes to the discussion and advisory debate on the development of the National Qualifications Framework. The design is consistent with the structures and methods of the European Commission.<sup>12</sup> This BSR-QF contributes to the fostering of education and the economy of the Baltic States as it presents an instrument to reduce cross-border barriers, which limit the work-related mobility and productivity dependent thereon. Accordingly, the BSR-QF has been accepted by the members of the Hanseatic Parliament in the General Assembly on 8 November 2007 in Vilnius as a substantial support and development tool. In the further work of the present project, the BSR-QF ensures orientation for grading, structuring and evaluation of individual professions.

Tab. 2: Descriptors for competence levels 1-8 (Source: Own research)

Level	Expertise*	(Methodological) Competence*	(Formal) education degree	Framework for Qualification of the VET area and EHEA
	<i>In the BSR-QF, expertise is described as knowledge and skills (equivalent with EQF)</i>	<i>In the BSR-QF, competence describes the degree of responsibility and autonomy</i>	<i>The (Formal) education degree describes the degree which can be reached by an individual</i>	<i>The framework VET area and EHEA is a modified and extended</i>

<sup>11</sup> cf. BUNDESINSTITUT FÜR BERUFSBILDUNG (BIBB) (Eds.) (2005): *Fachlicher Prüfbericht zu den Grundbegriffen und Deskriptoren des Entwurfs für einen Europäischen Qualifikationsrahmen*. Bonn; and Hanf, Georg und Volker Rein (2005): *Towards a National Qualification Framework for Germany*. Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB), Bonn.

<sup>12</sup> cf. EUROPÄISCHE KOMMISSION (EC) (2005): *Towards a European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning*. Commission Staff Working Document, SEC (2005) 957, Brussels; EUROPEAN COMMISSION (EC) (2006): *Implementing the Community Lisbon Programme. Proposal for a recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning*. COM (2006) 479 final, 2006/0163 (COD), Brussels; and Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (Eds.) (2005): *A Framework for Qualifications in the European Higher Education Area*. Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks, Copenhagen.

				<i>EHEA framework</i>
1	Basic general Education; basic skills required to carry out simple tasks	Work under direct supervision in a structured context	–	–
2	Basic factual knowledge of a field of work or study; basic cognitive and practical skills required to use relevant information in order to carry out tasks and to solve routine problems using simple rules and tools	Work under direct supervision in a structured context with some autonomy	graduation/training after/for 1-2 years, and work and apprenticeship preparation phase (at the age of 15/16)	First cycle VET area
3	Knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts, in a domain; a range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information	Take responsibility for completion of tasks in work; adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems	Certificate of apprenticeship (in 2 - 4 years), and no/limited professional or experience (certificate of apprenticeship + < 5 years of profession experience)	Second cycle VET area
4	Factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a domain; a range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solution to specific problems in a domain	Exercise self-management within the guidelines of work contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change supervise the routine work of others, taking some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work activities	Long profession experience as skilled worker (certificate of apprenticeship + ≥ 5 years of profession experience); comprehensive further education; “young master craftsman” with no/limited professional experiences (< 3 years	Third cycle VET area

			of profession experience)	
5	Comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a domain and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge; a comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems	Exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities with unpredictable change; review and develop performance of self and others	Master craftsman with long profession experiences as master ( $\geq 3$ years); “master craftsman plus”; long profession experiences and further education (certificate of apprenticeship + $\geq 8$ years of profession experience); introductory study period	Fourth cycle VET area and short cycle academic area
6	Advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles; advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised domain	manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work or study contexts take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups	Bachelor (academic bachelor’s degree) and other similar qualifications and competences	Fifth cycle VET area and first cycle academic area
7	Highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis for original thinking; critical awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface between different fields; specialised problem-solving skills required in research and or innovation in order to develop new	manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams	Master (academic master’s degree) and other high qualifications and competences	Sixth cycle VET area and second cycle academic area



	knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields			
8	Knowledge at the most advanced frontier of a field of work or study and at the interface between domains; the most advanced and specialised skills and techniques, including synthesis and evaluation, required to solve critical problems in research and or innovation and to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice	demonstrate substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, scholarly and professional integrity and sustained commitment to the development of new ideas or processes at the forefront of work or study contexts including research.	PhD and other very high qualifications and competences	Seventh cycle VET area and third cycle academic area

\* European Commission (EC) (2006): Implementing the Community Lisbon Programme. Proposal for a recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning. COM (2006) 479 final, 2006/0163 (COD), Brussels.

## 2.2 Structuring and evaluation

### 2.21 Introduction

The objective of the Baltic Education Project was to develop, introduce and implement a system for mutual recognition of professional qualifications. This will be achieved by using the European Credit Transfer System of Vocational Education and Training (ECVET).<sup>13</sup> ECVET is a system that enables describing qualifications by transferable and accumulable learning units (in the form of knowledge, skills and competence) and corresponding allocated credit units.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> EUROPEAN COMMISSION (EC) (2006): European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET). A system for the transfer, accumulation and recognition of learning outcomes in Europe. SEC (2006) 1431, Brussels, p. 3

<sup>14</sup> EUROPEAN COMMISSION (EC) (2006): European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET). A system for the transfer, accumulation and recognition of learning outcomes in Europe. SEC (2006) 1431, Brussels, p. 3



ECVET also perfectly complements the European Qualifications Framework.<sup>15</sup> In its guidelines, the European Commission outlined the overall concept as follows:

- a) focus on learning outcomes expressed in terms of knowledge, skills and competence.
- b) based on a process of qualification.
- c) adapted to the demands of lifelong learning and all learning contexts, on an equal footing.
- d) geared towards the mobility of people.<sup>16</sup>

Further ECVET consultation guidelines and regulations specify:

- a) mobility of people undertaking training.
- b) validation of the outcomes of lifelong learning.
- c) transparency of qualifications.
- d) mutual trust and cooperation between vocational training and education providers in Europe.<sup>17</sup>

In a first step, the individual training modules are evaluated according to the principle "25 training hours = 1 credit point". Based on this starting point, in a second step the significance and content of each training module is evaluated by project partners and experts and then the credit points for each module are determined in a group evaluation.

Within the framework of the "Baltic Education" project, a procedure for the mutual international recognition of vocational education and further training qualifications was developed and agreed with all countries bordering the Baltic Sea. Following this agreement, the project developed and agreed a procedure for the recognition of qualifications from all training courses. The following procedure then follows for the international recognition of the degrees of all training courses of the project.

- Lecturers/examiner rates the courses by assigning credit points.
- Mutual recognition of completion in the Baltic Sea countries follows upon fulfilment of the following conditions:
  - a) The final exam was passed.
  - b) The assessment of the course has resulted in at least 80 % of the possible

---

<sup>15</sup> cf. EUROPEAN COMMISSION (EC) (2006): Implementing the Community Lisbon Programme. Proposal for a recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning. COM (2006) 479 final, 2006/0163 (COD), Brussels.

<sup>16</sup> EUROPEAN COMMISSION (EC) (2006): European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET). A system for the transfer, accumulation and recognition of learning outcomes in Europe. SEC (2006) 1431, Brussels, p. 5

<sup>17</sup> EUROPEAN COMMISSION (EC) (2006): European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET). A system for the transfer, accumulation and recognition of learning outcomes in Europe. SEC (2006) 1431, Brussels, p. 35

credit points shown in Tables 3 (20% margin of tolerance).

c) Skills were acquired in all three mandatory modules

- Where they do not yet exist, each of the future participants will receive an EU education passport in which the results are documented.

## 2.22 Structuring and evaluation of further vocational trainings

The training programme comprises three modules, which are classified as mandatory modules, in which knowledge and skills have to be acquired.

With regard to the assignment of the trainings in the BSR-QF, the classification was made competence level 5 “Higher vocational education”, if participants have already acquired appropriate skills by other qualifications and professional activities and if they contribute them to the course.

The assessment in the project for the training led to the following conclusions:

Table 3: Evaluation further vocational trainings by credit points system

Modules of every training	Credit Points
Training unit A: “Methods”	2,0
Training unit B: „First phase of learning at the job”	6,0
Training unit C: „Digital tools”	1,0
Training unit D: „Second phase of learning at the job”	6,0
Training unit E: „Projects”	1,0
Credit Points total for each training	16,0

## 2.23 Internationally recognised educational qualification

Upon completion of the respective training course and the final examination, the participants acquire the recognised professional further training qualification of Specialist for specialist for customer innovation in SMEs.

A vocational further education qualification degree acquired in accordance with the above rules and evidenced by appropriate credentials and certificates is officially recognised in all Baltic Sea countries.

## Implementation reports of the trials in different countries

### 1. Implementation Report Olzтын, Poland<sup>18</sup>

#### 1.1 Introduction

The Warmia and Mazury Chamber of Crafts and Entrepreneurship is an organization of economic self-government of crafts, an association of employers and entrepreneurs and is a form of social dialogue. The purpose and task of the Chamber is to represent the interests of its affiliated members in front of state and local government bodies, provincial, district and local government institutions, to provide them with instructional and advisory assistance, training, and to conduct qualification examinations and supervise the training of juvenile workers.

The amount of money spent on research and development in Poland is growing dynamically. At the end of 2018 and the beginning of 2019, the amount increased by more than 17 percent. Among sectors, entrepreneurs spend the most on innovation - 63 percent of the total investment, followed by the higher education sector (36 percent.) Companies are increasingly undertaking activities aimed at increasing innovation and competitiveness, allocating a number of expenses to this activity.

In order to support the development of innovation in Polish enterprises, we joined the ICIinSMEs (Digital methods, toolbox and trainings for increasing customer innovation in SMEs) project. As part of the project, we conducted a training course on Customer-Focused Innovation at our Chamber, which was included in WP5. The training was aimed at companies in the SME sector. The training was attended by craft entrepreneurs and employees of craft organizations.

We adapted the training to the participants' level of knowledge and in terms of their needs and interests.

#### 1.2 Admission and organisation of the training

Information about the course was sent via email to organizations affiliated with our Chamber of Crafts and cooperating companies, and through them to Craftsmen. Participants who applied for participation were then qualified for the course.

All participants are representatives of Polish SMEs. They are employees/entrepreneurs dealing with the topics of digitization, innovation and customer relations, as the whole project is aimed at introducing digital solutions that will help create innovations with the participation of customers.

Number of participants: 23 people from 20 different companies.

The training was divided into two parts. The first was a training meeting, which took place on September 30, 2022. The next stage was self-study, analysing the situation

---

<sup>18</sup> Compiled by Justyna Kaczorek and Aldona Szajner, Warmia and Mazury Chamber of Craft and Entrepreneurship

in the enterprise and introducing new solutions in companies. During this time, participants had the opportunity to receive individual consultations.

The training was conducted by a specialist in innovation, a lecturer at the Warsaw School of Economics. The lecturer's academic work includes such issues as innovation, competitiveness and internationalization of enterprises; choice of innovation strategy, sustainable innovation, open innovation, innovation alliances; importance of human resources and leadership in the creation of innovative ideas; knowledge management, consumer involvement in the creation of new products. The training was conducted in cooperation with the Chamber's project staff.

### 1.3 Participants profile and organisation of the training

The trainees were 23 people (10 men, 13 women).

All of them are Polish citizens.

Age: from 35 to 70 years old.

Education very diverse from low through high school to university education.

They were representatives of 20 companies from 12 sectors:

- management (managers, office directors) - 6
- car mechanic - 2
- hairdresser - 4
- chimney sweep - 2
- upholsterer – 2
- training/education; auto electromechanics; accounting; vulcanizer; tailor; bioenergo-therapist; builder - 1 person each.

### 1.4 Execution of the Training

The purpose of the training was to introduce entrepreneurs to the topic of innovation from a global perspective, from a customer perspective and from a company perspective.

The training used practical exercises, group work, exchange of experiences and also individual consultations. Many discussions were held. The trainees received answers to their questions and problems they encountered when introducing new solutions in their companies. Participants of the training received teaching materials in the form of 10 Modules included in the Training Program "Implementation of customer-oriented innovations", as well as presentations used during the training.

Consultations after the training were attended by 4 people (hairdresser - 2, management -2). The consultations were held over the phone. The discussions dealt with practical issues regarding the introduction of simple digital solutions for contacting customers to collect feedback.

The training was not concluded with an exam, participants did not receive certificates.

Immediately after the training, evaluation surveys were forwarded by email. Then two months after the training, surveys with open-ended questions were conducted. Some surveys were completed during phone calls, while others were forwarded to the office via email.

The very low knowledge and skills of the participants proved to be a challenge. Many of the participants have been running their companies invariably for many years and modern methods of contacting customers, collecting feedback or the topic of innovation are a problem for them. Younger participants are more open-minded on the topic of innovation, while older participants have trouble keeping up with digital progress.

Both strengths and weaknesses of the training were the wide variety of industries, and therefore different customer experiences and a different range of needs. However, it was also possible to find many common topics and digital solutions that can be applied regardless of the company's profile.

### 1.5 Main Findings and Conclusions

The training expanded the participants' awareness and knowledge of innovation. Unfortunately, this is a very difficult topic for micro and small entrepreneurs, who spend all their time maintaining their businesses and do not have time to train further on the topic or introduce specific solutions. Therefore, they can only afford short, quick training sessions such as those conducted by our Chamber. A good solution would be for an expert to work individually with one enterprise, conduct an analysis, be in the environment of the enterprise in question on a daily basis and then focus on its capabilities, development and involvement of its customers in the creation of innovations.

Participants were very satisfied, from the training they brought not only theoretical knowledge but also practical skills, however, they would like the training to last longer. We plan to continue training in this area.

## 2. Implementation Report Kolding, Denmark<sup>19</sup>

### 2.1 Introduction

This project – Digital Customer Innovation in SMEs, which IBC is a part of. IBC has split the project into two training parts. 1) Learning new competences through Digitalization (Computers) and 2) learning new innovative competences through “face-to-face” in a classroom (LiveLearning).

Regarding digital learning, IBC has more than 600 students/course participants, participating in more than 150 different “online”-courses each year, where the student can increase her/his competences by having digital teaching by instruction teaching through a computer and also have having a physical teacher around. This product, and way to learn, is unique because the student can learn 1:1. Unique because there can be 50+ students in a classroom and all of those 50 can study their own course.

For this ICLinSMEs program IBC has produced 2 digital courses, see link (Log-in code is needed);

- <https://learn.ibc.dk/course/view.php?id=62> Social Media interaction
- <https://learn.ibc.dk/course/view.php?id=63> Online customer service and sales

IBC has more than 20,000 course-participants receiving learning in a classroom. Normally the courses (digital and physical) are small courses, training of micro skills, with EQF-level from 2 to 5 and mostly with a duration between 2-5 days.

Baseline: The digital and innovative competence in Denmark are in general high, measured on individual level and company level. Swiss Management Academy conclude that Denmark is no one in Europe and no three in the world. Therefore, this report is primarily about the experiences and training of the innovative skills.

This training in this project was included in the WP3 package, many thematic elements of this training were developed by IBC – Kolding. Although the training has mainly involved start-up, micro and small businesses, but also suitable for training for larger companies in terms of providing them with digital, innovate and marketing skills.

We organised a training mainly for leaders in SMEs. It was only by coincidence that the most applier were SMEs, so we had to make a 2-days programme best fitted into their needs. Doing so we focused on how to train and raise the skills/competences of Innovation for the participants. Given that an Innovation process is not only thinking of “new products” but also a huge part of (digital) sales- and marketing activities. Not only to the existing and which perhaps is close to the market. But also to raise the opportunities for SME to sell product and services to customers which are longer away and true digital and innovative opportunities.

---

<sup>19</sup> Compiled by Michael Christiansen, International Business College



The two periods (2-days) were in December 2021 and September 2022. Both courses were followed up by a qualitative evaluation/ questionnaire in writing plus a verbally unstructured interview/dialogue, about one month after the course. Here the participants gave constructive feedback on their own innovative skills in their respective companies. (Summary in attachments)

The 2-days course was planned as an “EQF-level 4”.

Unfortunately, many of the participants did not have the time or opportunities afterwards to train, focus or work structured with an innovation processes in their respective SMEs. (Measured one month after the course).

## 2.2 Admission and organisation of the training

All the participants were representative from Danish SMEs and voluntarily chose this course.

All participants are leaders / managers in SMEs in Denmark and the opportunities to develop their own teams. Not only from sales and marketing teams but also teams from production, maintenance, craftsmanship, retail, distribution, stock and development of products.

- o First course 2021; 10 participants
- o Second course 2022; 10 participants

All participants are between 30 and 50 years, 18 male and 2 female.

Our advice and recommended preparation 10-15 hours about “what is Innovation?”. One course is a 2-days of training (7,4 hours a day) + 1-2 months of self-study with recommended minimum 10-15 hours praxis training in innovative processes in their organisations. After one month there were a follow-up-, dialogue- and evaluation stage. Afterwards there was an opportunity for the participants to have an individual coaching/talk – “how they can get help from IBC to start an Innovative process in their own little team”.

## 2.3 Organisation of the implementation

All was carried out by teachers from IBC-Kurser.

All the participants have a background as managers and leaders in SMEs in Denmark with high professional skills in different areas. But when it comes to micro-skills and competences in innovation, innovation of culture and innovative behaviour, the knowledge was very low – in average 2,4 (out of 10) before the course .

IBC always give an opportunity to operate an online counselling / coaching depending on what the needs/challenges are for the participants.

One of the biggest challenges for the participants is the time and the opportunity. Many of the participants are busy managers and often do not have the time or/and

the opportunity to focus on innovation in their companies. Many of those participants are working in daily days operations with personally and teams KPIs where digital innovation unfortunately is not one of them and therefore with low interest / focus.

## 2.4 Participants profile and organisation of the training

Number of participants

- o First course 2021; 10 participants
- o Second course 2022; 10 participants

All participants are between 30 and 50 years, 18 males and 2 females and Danes with low or middle education.

The participants was from many sectors and primarily from SMEs

## 2.5 Execution of the Training

Most of the material was pre prepared from IBC. But the way the teacher designed the program old fashion was with a high energy, many exercises and “old fashion” flip overs (papers) instead of Power Points. A didactic wish was to change the learning environment many times. Therefore, the teacher used the whole building/institution like small/micro rooms, halls, classrooms, open places, meeting places etc.

During the course there was a huge opportunity to have dialogues, reflections and a beautiful space to learn new innovative skills.

A funny course with good and eager to learn participants. Interesting and exceptional good learning environment. Perfect materiel, exercises and presentations. Good food. The participants were “hungry” for more learning, but also realise that they have huge challenges back in their own companies. Because how can they improve those innovative thoughts in their own SMEs and is the company/organization ready to think and act innovative?

The training was perfect, and the participants were satisfied with the course.

The training was too short. Beside this, it could be interesting to have an innovation process only with one company (and their employees) and then some customers (B2B or B2C) to this one company. It could be interesting to see what the output would be.

## 2.6 Main Findings and Conclusions

As mentioned before the training and course were a success. All the participants evaluated themselves to have received, learned and trained their innovative skills and competences.

The strengths were that there were participants from many different companies. But this was also the challenge. My wish is to design a scoop only for one company and their customers to come closer to “digital customer-centric Innovation”.

The training will be continued by IBC for managers and leaders in SMEs.

### 3 Implementation Report Budapest, Hungary<sup>20</sup>

#### 3.1 Introduction

This training was included in the WP5 package, many thematic elements of this training were developed by the Hanse-Parlament, and we tried to take it into account as much as possible when we implemented our training. Although our training has now mainly involved micro and small businesses, this training is also suitable for larger companies in terms of providing them with customer-centered innovations skills with special regard to digital marketing skills.

We organized this training for a very wide circle of entrepreneurs, in which the most diverse professions were present, since this topic affects all professions equally with minor or major differences. The IPOSZ consistently advocated that general knowledge should be combined with the specific needs of different professions., so we had to make a programme best fitted to their needs. Doing so we focused on digitalisation and the fundamental knowledge on marketing. Given that marketing activities are today largely implemented through digital applications, the marketing activities are practically directly relating to the issue of digitization. Customer-centered innovations require even more the acquisition of marketing knowledge and segmentation according to customer needs.

The training also helped us to formulate the directions of a more comprehensive counselling system.

#### 3.2 Period of implementation

The timing of the trainings was adapted to the economic activities of the participants. We held our first two-afternoon long meeting on 26th and 27th of October. During the organization, the demand arose from our members that this whole issue is already important in the dual training, so we held a special training session for vocational school students on 26th of November. Another request arose that not everyone could attend the first two training days in person due to the distance, so they asked us to hold an online training day as well, which took place on December 1. Then the individual coaching period started with the fifteen companies. During the coaching process, the trainers visited all companies in person, as well as consulted with all companies several times online. After the coaching process, we held the first evaluation day in hybrid form on February 1. We held the second evaluation session in person on February 18. On both occasions, the mentored businesses presented their results achieved during coaching. These results are also summarized in a separate report on entrepreneurial progress.

The training fits into the overall adult-education phase of the national system of trainings, but a direct EQF level cannot be classified to it. It is an out-of-school training taken place at and organised by IPOSZ.

---

<sup>20</sup> Compiled by Tamás Rettich, Ipartestületek Országos Szövetsége

This training perfectly explained the basics of customer-centered innovation and the digital solutions that help this approach, which could then be implemented in detail during the coaching process tailored to the company's needs. The training provided knowledge on digitalisation and marketing activities via individual and teamwork. The topics used in the training could be used of course also in the training of enterprises of other sizes. This training is valuable not only for micro-enterprises, but also for medium-sized enterprises. It should be emphasized that the training has elements that can be used to develop certain basic skills among the whole population and thus help to develop a better digitalized relationship between businesses and consumers. The success of this training also proves that there is a significant demand for practice-oriented training.

### 3.3 Special features of the implementation

The main target group of the training was micro-enterprises, as our members mainly come from them. In this period affected by war and high inflation, this entrepreneurial layer is well characterized by the fact that it waits extremely cautiously with regard to all kinds of development.

Micro-enterprises are the biggest laggards when considering the digital foundations of customer-centered innovation.

They mainly operate in a specific business area. But it is also extremely important for them to be able to expand beyond their usual customer base, using the latest technologies.

It is also important to deal with them, because their role is crucial in services, where the biggest workforce problems exist today.

Such short-term courses must be strengthened in adult education. This project is a huge help in making decision-makers aware of the need to finance similar short-term additional training.

Most of the participating companies were otherwise optimistic about their own activities, and the course and coaching strengthened them in this regard.

### 3.4 Admission and organisation of the training

A big advantage of the course was that, although the businesses were small, but they covered a very wide spectrum of the economy, from baker to photographer. This helped to crystallize the general elements of digitalization, which can then be used for a wide variety of professions and of course supplemented with professional specifics. During the selection, we also focused on broadening the range of women's businesses among the participants.

The training was advertised on the IPOSZ' websites. Four participants applied via these advertisements. Direct marketing strategies (phone calls and e-mails and many face-to-face conversations) were used to reach most of the participants. Our 160 trade associations were notified about the planned course, and we also informed our

national branch organizations about the training several times. The other 11 participants were gathered via this way. The participants came from different regions of the country. By the way, this presented us with a difficult task in terms of organizing the events, as well as the trainer in terms of coaching. The participants were mainly from the member companies of the trade associations, but there were several who applied for the advertisement published on the website of the IPOSZ.

1,5 days of personal training. 5 lessons followed by a half-day online training, 3 lessons + 2-3 months of self-study with minimum 10 hours of individual coaching. Individual coaching started with a personal meeting and was supplemented with further personal or online conversations. The final training provided the opportunity to discuss the coaching experiences together with the group members.

### 3.5 Organisation of the implementation

The organization of the implementation was carried out by the staff of the IPOSZ together with the experts of regional and branch member institution of IPOSZ which were involved in the implementation.

The trainer herself came from the University of Miskolc, Tourism and Marketing Department with whom IPOSZ has previously implemented trainings to expand the marketing knowledge of businesses.

Considering the already mentioned difficult circumstances, the large distances, the organization required more time and energy than usually. The organization was also complicated by the fact that we had to carry out extensive background information activities beforehand in order to explain the objectives and essence of the project, since this is considered a new type of activity in the life of most businesses.

We have selected an instructor who is capable of holding similar training in other regions. The selected instructor maintains excellent professional relations with several serious marketing consulting companies. Several experts from consulting companies were involved in certain parts of the training so that the companies participating in the training could gain even broader knowledge of the latest digital methods. All the instructors have appropriate competencies in the fields of marketing, digital communication, business development, business coach and web design.

This part of the project, on the one hand, defined the main digital and partially marketing aspects for the participating businesses and presented them specific implementation methods, based on which they were able to further develop their own business. During the coaching, this activity was further developed into the examination of the specific applicability at each company, and the counselling took place in the local environment. This opportunity for individual coaching tailored to the business has not ended, as companies can still contact the instructor and also the IPOSZ. As the project provided an extra opportunity, IPOSZ has started to operate an online counselling system which is still running within the frame of this project. This online counselling system relies on the experiences gained during the customer-centered innovation



training at many points, although since then its audience now exceeds 100 businesses.

The trainer made notes on each coaching process for each company. See trainer's description on the participants' requirements, possibilities and development, which we attach. As a general comment, it can be stated that for most companies, customer-centric innovation means communicating with customers and adapting products and services to their needs.

Some of the companies regularly attend trainings to learn the tricks of marketing. In these cases, it is often necessary to group the existing marketing tools according to a logical train of thought. When someone is very fixated on one thing, the opinion of an external expert comes in handy, because the company leader him or herself cannot see the forest from the trees.

Companies know their customers, but they often do not take advantage of customer groups (segments). In the context of marketing communications, for example, it pays to create separate content for each segment and treat them separately.

	Name	Sex	Age	Business	Education
1	Vasi Xoda / Gábor Kovács	Male	35	Soda water making	university
2	Hasznosi szóda / Bence Nagy	Male	28	Soda water making	vocational school
3	Szódi bá / Zsuzsanna Bock and György Schweigert	Female and male	45 - 52	Soda water making	university
4	László Szóda / Gábor László	Male	40	Soda water making	university
5	Gondola Cukrászda / Krisztina Garami	Female	40	Confectionery	vocational school
6	Édes Varázs Kft / Tóth János	Male	55	Confectionery	vocational school

7	Stube Étterem / Zsófia Ay	Female	35	Restaurant	university
8	Ma-jordekormix / Bettina Semperger	Female	30	Tiler	vocational school
9	Sebi Klíma / Sebestyén Mihály	Male	40	air conditioning	university
10	Zsolt Lukács	Male	50	Carpenter	vocational school
11	Sinte Trade Ltd. / Kovács Tibor	Male	55	Wholesaler of agricultural machinery	vocational school
12	Csuta and Csuta Ltd. / Csuta Imre	Male	60	Food wholesaler	vocational school
13	Falatka Állateledel / Imre Varga	Male	60	Wholesale of pet food	vocational school
14	Csipetkék / Eszter Drávainé	Female	60	Sewing courses, eco-friendly products	vocational school
15	Fotoker Ltd. / János Juhos	Male	65	Photographer	university

### 3.6 Execution of the Training

We must point out that the training materials prepared by the Hanse Parliament helped us a lot in the designing of the training, the elements of which we took into account in the training in Hungary. We must also note, however, that for the training in Hungary we had to take into account the existing economic environment, the legal regulations and the often-different development level and economic opportunities

exist in Hungary for small businesses. We always do our utmost to ensure that the good practices of other countries could be continuously implemented in Hungary, and we consider this to be a priority task and benefit of the project.

The aim of the project was to investigate how customer-centric innovation prevails in Hungarian small businesses, what patterns can be identified and what is the biggest challenge for entrepreneurs.

The concept of customer-centric innovation is very common, the core of which is that product and service developments are carried out by companies together with customers. The demand for development often comes from customers, and they play an active role throughout the process. Then comes commercialization. The types of innovations that impact customers can include the following: :

1. customer segmentation,
2. customer analysis,
3. communication with customers,
4. customer interactions with the company,
5. product and service development.

Concentrated on individual development, documented both by the participants and by the trainer. The Hungarian education system centrally regulates which documents the official adult education system can issue and which exams are required for this. We ourselves can issue a certificate to the participants about the training we have implemented, which indicates the content of the training, the fact that it was completed and the project in which the training was carried out.

Diploma was not awarded. According to what was written above, all participants received a certificate, a copy of which is attached.

The instructor was in constant contact with the participants during the entire duration of the training. Therefore, she dealt with them along individual themes. She summarized her experiences in notes, which are attached as the Summary of the company training. See trainer's description on the participants' development.

According to our assessment, one of the peculiarities and not a weakness of the training was that it was attended by the smallest enterprises. In this way, we were able to get to know their reactions and test the training at their level of development. It is likely that in companies with more employees, the training could provide many other experiences. We were glad that such small businesses took part in the training, because in Hungary businesses with very few employees make up the largest part of businesses. The use of offline and online digital marketing processes at the same time in the case of such small businesses usually exceeds their financial capabilities, although it is clear that the simultaneous use of both can be really effective. They often do not understand the use of digital tools in a small business. For such digital tasks, they need external service providers who can provide immediate assistance. But short-term, practice-oriented training courses, where small businesses can

improve their digital skills, can help a lot here. Having a young person in the family who can bring these digital skills into the operation of the business can help a lot also. There is still a need for many more similar trainings offering industry-specific solutions in order to convince the masses of micro and small enterprises. For this, it would be very important to start state support programs in this area as well.

### 3.7 Summary assessment of implementation

We have already summarized certain conclusions in the points above. In addition, we must emphasize once again that much more projects, support, information, persuasion and services are needed in order to speed up the catching up of the micro business sector in this area. Our very important comment is that this is extremely necessary, because it is precisely the small businesses that are in direct contact with their consumers and are particularly good at developing their products and services by getting to know the consumer needs obtained offline and online.

The strength of the training, in our opinion, is exactly what we explained earlier, that we managed to attract companies working in the most diverse professions to the training and this helped that the general digital elements could be better defined during the training and coaching process. Another strength of the training was that we were able to do this taking into account the experiences of the international project partners.

For this training and coaching, the instructor basically came from the university and research world. It was a very significant experience for us. Small businesses themselves are rarely able to define their own development directions as accurately as a university lecturer can.

This training was a very good example of how the economic life of small businesses can be significantly helped by receiving guidance from a university-level consultant.

In any case, the practice should continue so that university lecturers can help small businesses with their practical advice. Of course, this also helps the work of the universities, as they receive direct confirmation of the usability of the methods they propose.

During the training, we were able to identify the digital competencies that are still largely missing from the daily operations of small businesses. Based on all these experiences, we were able to start our weekly online consulting system, for which more than 100 businesses have since registered and have been receiving continuous help with digital issues ever since. Of course, we continuously deliver these results to the entire membership of our more than 160 industry associations.

We recommend writing a project that could facilitate the operation of such an online service for organizations like ours. Organizations that include family, micro and small businesses do not have a team of experts that can provide specialized services, so we have to use these experts on a contract basis from outside.

We also recommend thinking in the direction of how the generally proven digital procedures could be effectively supplemented with the special needs of different professional sectors.

The experiences of the companies participating in the training show that what they learned during the training was associated with concrete economic results and an increase in their income. These positive experiences are shared with other businesses, so it is expected that similar courses will be organized even after the project.

What we were able to do in this project was to create the opportunity for our entire base of industry associations to carry out similar training in their own region or profession, and we can also provide specialists and topics for this. The extraordinary advantage of our industry associations is that they usually have the necessary premises and infrastructure for such trainings and their network is nationwide.

## 4. Implementation Report Wrocław, Poland<sup>21</sup>

### 4.1 Introduction

In connection with the implementation by DIR of the project "Increasing Customer Innovation in Small and Medium Enterprises (IClinSMEs)", a meeting of representatives of small and medium enterprises was held on 18.11.2022 at the headquarters of the Lower Silesian Chamber of Crafts in Wrocław at Plac Solny 13. These included the owner of a metal and metal construction company, the owner of a laundry, the owner of a pest extermination company, the owner of a hairdressing salon, a restaurant employee, a watchmaker, a stone products company and even a fashion designer. In total, as many as 16 people took part.

The meeting was chaired by academics Dr Magdalena Ornatowska and Dr Maciej Sygit. Participants were introduced to definitions of innovation and creativity. Methods facilitating creative thinking and problem solving include brainstorming, the 635 method, mind mapping and Ishikawa diagram.

Each participant received worksheets: value proposition and customer segment, business model and empathy map.

The WP5 training was based on the KAIN method on materials prepared largely by Hanse Parliament and applied to the learning phases with on-site training and a self-learning phase with potential support from the trainer.

The KAIN method materials were translated into Polish. Subsequently, training materials tailored to the needs and interests of the trainees were prepared on their basis.

In addition to owners of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, the training on innovation and entrepreneurship was attended by members of the IZBA Board and representatives of the Guilds of Lower Silesia.

Prior to the training, an email with an invitation to participate in the training (flyer) went out to the Guilds affiliated to the Chamber. In addition, the invitation was posted on the Chamber's website and on social media on profiles run by the Chamber. The training, in the form of a workshop, took place on the Chamber's premises, where participants had direct access to presenters, materials and the Internet.

This was followed by consultations (14 times-including seven with the business owner and seven by telephone).

As part of the training, participants contacted the trainers to consolidate the knowledge they had acquired and to implement it directly in their company. On seven occasions the trainers were asked for individual consultations at the participant's workplace or company. Telephone consultations also took place on seven occasions.

COMPANY	BRANCH	CONSULTATION WITH	TELEPHONE CONSULTATION
---------	--------	-------------------	------------------------

<sup>21</sup> Compiled by Magdalena Ornatowska and Anna Capik, Lower Silesian Chamber of Crafts in Wrocław



		THE COMPANY OWNER	
Anna Demediuk GLAMME	health and beauty	2	3
Monika Szymonek Stec " Szymonek Stec Academy"	coaching, competence development	3	2
Aniela Sobierajska EGOLESS PSA,	chemical	2	2
together		<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>

Each time after the training, a link to surveys evaluating the usefulness of the training provided was sent to participants. Another survey was sent 3 months after the courses to evaluate the cooperation to date.

The timing of the consultation between 18.11.2022 and 31.03.2023 was aligned with the economic activity of the participants. The training took the form of a one-day workshop. The training was followed by a period of one-to-one coaching with willing participants. In addition, the trainers were available on the indicated telephone numbers for specialist consultations.

#### 4.2 Special features of implementation

Company: Anna Demediuk GLAMME, health and beauty industry

After the training, the business owner contacted the trainer to arrange a meeting directly on site to discuss the possibility of acquiring new clients. After an initial needs analysis, individual customer acquisition training was conducted using the following techniques and materials: a value proposition sheet and the business owner was asked to analyse her existing materials and all the places that potential customers look at - e.g. website, offers, social media profiles, etc. - and think about what the information there says about her. - and consider what the information contained therein says about her. Ms Anna was asked to answer the following questions herself when analysing her business:

- Is it possible to learn anything specific and unique from them?
- If so, what kind of picture does it build?
- Which side are you showing?
- Does a distinct style, personality, character shine through - something that allows you to stand out?
- Is this the image you want?

- To someone who doesn't know you completely, is this information enough to understand you better?

Then, after about 5 weeks, there was a second consultation with the owner where we considered several things to change: showing my mindset, showing myself what kind of person, I am, attitude, empathy, flexibility.

Ms Ania was given tasks to work through individually:

1. show the way you think - the customer is looking for information about your point of view. Be sure to show what your style is. How do you approach collaboration and why do you think it's the best way over other options?
2. show yourself as a person - you don't have to reveal private details, but it's worth sharing something more personal. It evokes sympathy and gives you character.
3. be positive - no one likes a fake smile straight out of stock, but a sullen frown is not the best business partner either. Your outgoing attitude can't be negative, as this puts people off.
4. train empathy - try to understand the other party's perspective. When entering into a collaboration you have certain expectations, but so does your client. Look for win-win solutions, not just what is most convenient for you. Give more than you take or at least the same amount. Nobody likes a person who thinks they are entitled to everything but gives the minimum from themselves.
5. don't make problems - most clients come to you for solutions, not more problems. I feel that sometimes, in trying to be specialists, we over-complicate things. The typical customer will choose the solution that is simple and easy to understand.
6. ask questions, but don't crush them.

After 3 weeks, the owner called back ze slowly with her team changing her approach to the existing business model and starting to implement a new changed approach to the customer.

Company: Monika Szymonek Stec " Szymonek Stec Academy". Industry coaching, competence development

At the innovation training, Ms Monika introduced herself as a trainer and certified coach with more than 20 years of experience teaching at universities and individual consultations. She came to the training because of the need to adapt her company to the changing needs of the market and her clients. She was also interested in offering her services to trade schools and wanted to find out how to establish relationships and reach out to young people at vocational schools, what they need and what problems they face. In an initial telephone conversation, it was agreed that individual meetings would focus on marketing and promotion, divided into three areas: product development, branding and communication. During the first face-to-face meeting, the owner was asked to define what her brand should be about. Ms Monika replied that she wants her brand to evoke emotions. She wants people to notice it, remember it and like it. We then started to discuss and think how to do this? We started the

consultation by looking at the principle of the so-called Focus Illusion. This principle is simple: the longer something attracts our attention, the more important it seems to us. This effect is what psychologists have called the Focus Illusion. Monika agreed that this principle also works in business, because even if her offer was objectively better, the recipients did not necessarily perceive it as such. We agreed that the product that is better at attracting attention wins: the one that catches the eye quickly and keeps it there for a long time. It was agreed that the brands that are better at grabbing our attention are the ones that win. Monika was given the task for the following weeks to think about how to make potential customers want to pay attention to us. This task consisted of Creating associations (developing a set of elements that are supposed to distinguish you and that will be easily associated with you). The basis, of course, was to be a coherent visual identity, as every good brand must have its own distinct colour scheme, typography, style of photographs and illustrations used. Nevertheless, Ms Monika was also asked to prepare additional elements that could make her stand out, such as

- Sounds, melodies, background music - e.g. the distinctive jingle of her podcast
- Unusual words or phrases, your own hashtag, etc.
- Costume
- Design arrangements for individual consultations
- Fragrance

After about 3 weeks, Monika called back to say that she was working hard on the task and already had some new ideas that she would be implementing, but that she would like additional consultation on marketing and earning. At the second meeting the following issues were discussed: web presence, what distinctive features can we introduce? What distinctive things can we do? The idea is that the more often we see something, the more we like it. We talked about the fact that we prefer things we know well, e.g. a song we've heard 100 times will appeal to us more than one we've heard for the first time. So it's not just the length of attention that matters - as in the Focus Illusion - but also the frequency of contact. We decided that more frequent contact with a brand makes the customer like it more and more. At the very end, two very important things were suggested to Ms Monika from the point of view of creating her own brand: creating a concrete communication plan, as it is worth establishing what, where and when she will publish. The CoSchedule tool was suggested for use as a brand communication planning tool and the use of the Frontify tool to create her own brand book, a so-called Book with guidelines for her brand communication.

The company: Aniela Sobierajska. EGOLESS PSA, chemical industry Purpose: to raise funding for the creation of a start-up.

During the innovation workshop, Ms Aniela Sobierajska introduced herself as a mother raising two young children who wants to set up a start-up for which she needs to raise funding in the personal care industry.

During the telephone conversation, it was agreed that a confidentiality agreement would be signed, and we would start a series of several consultations on the creation of the business model. At the first meeting with Ms Aniela, the assumptions of the business model were discussed and the main principles of creating a so-called Elevator pitch to raise funding from investors were demonstrated. To prepare such a 10-minute pitch, it was recommended to use the LifePlan.com platform, which, based on templates, helps to create both a financial model and a business plan.

Then, after about 8 weeks, a meeting was arranged.

It was agreed that already at this stage it is necessary to organise the work in order to achieve better results in the future. During the second meeting, planning methods, time management and task organisation were discussed. With two young children and limited time, Aniela wanted to learn how to work smarter and more consciously.

### 4.3 Organisation of training

In the area of planning, the most important was the daily preparation of a checklist per task or project.

In the area of focus and concentration, the most important was: getting your task list in order using an app to manage your task list

For our part, we were able to recommend a few programmes that might be useful.

- Notion, which is superbly designed and very flexible.
- Freedcamp - a more powerful group collaboration tool, I use it for larger projects in the company and it works great.
- Asana - a popular and also very good task management programme
- Nozbe - one of the simpler and cool tools that is based on the Getting Thing Done methodology, '

At the end of the second meeting, Ms Aniela was wished every success and perseverance in developing her innovative project and entering the market with it.

A major strength of the trainees was their diversity both in terms of their profession and their expectations of innovation and digitalisation. This was related to the age of the participants and their ease in navigating social media and thus their understanding of the impact of brand building on customer acquisition. When asked how they acquire new customers, the older participants mainly indicated whisper marketing as a tool to expand their customer base.

The younger participants, on the other hand, were open to innovation and participated with great willingness and commitment in all workshop activities.

The training was announced on the website and on social media (Instagram, FB). Information with the invitation was also sent by email. As a result, 16 participants signed up for the first workshop. The trainees came from one region - Lower Silesia.

Training day + 1-2 months of self-study with individual consultations at the participant's workplace or by telephone. The individual consultation started with an in-person meeting and was followed up with further meetings or online discussions. Each time the trainer discussed with willing participants their experiences and needs for further training. A summary of the training is presented in questionnaires from participants and trainers (questionnaires were translated into English and sent to Ms. Monika Zajkowska, in the original and translated version).

#### 4.4 Organisation of implementation

The organisation of the implementation was carried out by DIR staff employed by the project together with the teachers leading the workshop. The trainers leading the workshop were:

1. Mr Maciej Sygit, Ph. Former graduate of the Wrocław University of Technology. Co-author and author of over 50 articles on innovation and business implementation. For over 30 years he has been running his own consulting company, where he provides economic advice. He is the author of 5 national patents and 2 international patents in the field of biotechnology. In addition, he has been substantive manager in more than 10 national and international projects implemented by companies, universities, local government units, hospitals.
2. Ms Magdalena Ornatowska, Ph.D., who has been involved in technology transfer and the organisation of entrepreneurship and innovation classes in university units and private companies for many years.

The trainer took notes on each consultation process.

"The participants in the training represented on the one hand quite different industries and on the other hand had different skills and experience in managing a small company. This, however, did not cause problems with understanding the material, but once we moved on to 'cases', dedicated to certain industry approaches, it became of little interest to some participants.

Observations of participant activity and conversations during breaks show that such courses are very popular. However, it makes sense to divide participants into groups. E.g. hairdressers, beauticians, "claw painting" one group, another group would be bakers, confectioners and small catering, and another group would be the automobile or building industry.

If I had to think about what is the most important thing to do in order to attract new customers nowadays? I think that the most important thing at the moment is for young entrepreneurs: constantly monitoring the market and peeping into the activities of the leaders to search for good marketing and customer service practices." Maciej Sygit

"The most difficult part of the training, in my opinion, was adapting the material to the knowledge level of the participants. This was due to the very different knowledge of techniques for managing one's own company or personnel by the participants. Some

(the younger generation) were up to date and, I would say, even quite familiar with the subject or basic tools, while a fairly large group of people (the older generation) required more time to familiarise themselves with techniques such as brainstorming, mind mapping, Ishikawa's diagram. Nevertheless, these people were very interested and less stressed and withdrawn as the training went on. The project materials developed by the Danish partners (excellent level, by the way), which we translated from English into Polish, were far too advanced for our trainees and we prepared our own materials, which were used during the training. This inevitably points to the geographical sophistication of entrepreneurs in using innovation for customer acquisition."

Magdalena Ornatowska

#### 4.5 Profile of participants

Below is a table of participants broken down by age, gender, education, occupation, country of origin, etc.

L.P.	NAME	SEX	AGE (range)	PROFESSION	COUNTRY OF ORIGIN
1	Szymonek Stec Monika	F	50-60	Coach	Poland
2	Hall Kamil	M	30-40	Fashion designer	Poland
3	Major Jacek	M	40-50	Stonemason	Poland
4	Lobodziec Jan	M	50-60	Stonemason	Poland
5	Zarentowicz Slawomir	M	60-70	Auto Mechanic	Poland
6	Sobierajska Aniela	F	30-40	Entrepreneur	Poland
7	Maciej Hammer	M	40-50	Auto Mechanic	Poland
8	Demediuk Anna	F	40-50	Deratisation company	Poland
9	Palczynska-Czop Beata	F	50-60	Hairdresser	Poland
10	Agnieszka Dowbecka	F	50-60	Hairdresser	Poland
11	Kotowski Bartosz	M	50-60	Entrepreneur	Poland
12	Krawczyk Honorata	F	40-50	Renewable energy	Poland
13	Adamski Stanislaw	M	60-70	Carpenter	Poland
14	Jańczak Beata	F	40-50	Hairdresser	Poland
15	Matczak Grażyna	F	40-50	Cook	Poland
16	Michal Firlej	M	40-50	Stonemason	Poland

#### 4.6 Delivery of training

Although the materials prepared by the Danish and Hungarian partner helped us a lot in designing the training, we had to take into account the existing economic environment, legal regulations and the often different level of development and economic opportunities of Polish small businesses. The participants represented quite different industries on the one hand and had different skills and experience in managing a small



business on the other. This initially caused problems with understanding the material for some. And for the advanced group, the presentation of the material from scratch became uninteresting.

Due to the diversity in the level of knowledge of trainees at DIRW, the final exam did not take place as we focused on tailored consultations for each entrepreneur.

No diploma or certificate has been awarded as we are in the process of consulting individually with willing entrepreneurs.

Based on the completed evaluation forms, it can be concluded that the participants were largely satisfied with the training. The training was assessed as useful, which encouraged them in their further development plans. However, one peculiarity rather than a weakness of the training was that very young ("start-up") as well as experienced companies took part. In this way, we were able to find out their reactions and test the training at different levels of development. The simultaneous use of digital marketing processes as well as tools for the programming and implementation of process innovation for small companies usually exceeds their financial, and personal capacities. According to the participants, many more similar trainings offering industry-specific solutions are still needed to convince the masses of micro entrepreneurs. To this end, it would be very important to launch state support programmes in this area as well or the next joint Erasmus + project.

#### 4.7 Main findings and conclusions

In our opinion, a key aspect of the IClinSME project is its compliance with the implementation of the Fourth Industrial Revolution programme, the so-called Industry 4.0, related to the digitalisation of the economy and innovation, especially in SMEs. The purpose of conducting two training courses (Innovation and Digitisation) was to encourage representatives of SMEs to develop and strengthen innovation, focused on the implementation of product or process innovation and the digitisation and transformation of enterprises towards sustainable development, as well as the internationalisation of enterprises and the increase in human resources competencies (in general, anything that changes business for the better).

Analysing the statements of our participants, it can be concluded that innovation is not often introduced in SMEs because SMEs rely more on informal, and therefore difficult to measure, R&D activities and use external sources of knowledge (consulting services and licences) less frequently than corporations. This phenomenon reflects the lower capacity of SMEs to absorb external knowledge. Nevertheless, enterprises from this sector introduce innovations and use this as an element of gaining and maintaining their position on the market.

Brilliant, motivated and experienced employees are an important link in the organisation's innovation process and an important role in the implementation of innovation in SMEs is played by the organisation's culture.

Employees and managers (owners) of small and medium-sized enterprises should, therefore, be willing, inclined and able to undertake activities as part of the

company's innovation process, which requires their acceptance and involvement. Furthermore, innovation should be embedded in the company's strategy - already at the stage of generating new ideas, the company should have clearly defined goals regarding the business areas or market segments in which it would like to develop by creating innovations. A clear strategy based on reliable information allows innovation activities to be properly targeted and reduces the loss of time and other resources. Therefore, a very important prerequisite for creating successful innovations is continuous market research and collecting customer feedback, as well as gaining knowledge about potential innovations from other external sources.

Implementing innovation in SMEs for some of our participants is not easy because:

- SMEs have very limited resources (including financial);
- they must use their resources properly, as failures can cause problems for the survival of the company;
- are characterised by a low level of professionalism in innovation management;
- are not strategically oriented;
- are often unable to develop an innovation implementation plan due to an excess of daily duties with limited human resources;
- do not have innovation competences within their structures;
- are dependent on the work of individual employees.

Generally speaking, problems with the implementation of innovation in SMEs are often due to the fact that the resources - whether tangible (e.g. machinery, financial resources) or intangible (e.g. employee and owner/manager competencies) that these firms could allocate to the development of innovation - are limited. At the same time, problems with the availability of particular types of resources constrain the innovativeness of these companies in different ways and in different areas:

- marketing. Conquering new markets requires financial resources and knowledge - if a company is unable to obtain these resources for marketing purposes, it cannot enter new markets.
- management - SME owners often do not have adequate managerial training and their management know-how is limited. The lack of such knowledge and skills may result in a lack of innovation, or its incompetent implementation.
- external communication - this in turn is associated with a lack of time and an excessive burden of daily responsibilities, which may result in the non-use of external sources of information and knowledge, e.g. from trade fairs or trade journals.
- highly qualified human resources. Difficulties for SMEs to attract specialists are, among other things, due to the fact that they compete for human resources with large companies, which often offer higher salaries and better general working conditions.

- finance - innovation activities can be costly due to the high failure rate, complexity and non-linearity, and often the significant investment required to carry them out.
- Economies of scale - some activities require large-scale production, which SME companies are unable to offer in order to remain competitive in the market.
- growth - innovation can contribute to rapid growth, which in turn requires financial resources that are difficult for small and medium-sized enterprises to access.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the implementation of innovations in the SME sector is becoming a necessity. The types of introduced solutions or the scale of innovativeness may vary, however, one may risk a thesis that achieving a permanent competitive advantage on the market will not be possible in the future if one is not an innovator in a certain field.

#### 4.8 Strengths and advantages of training

Analysing the statements of trainees, we can conclude that the implementation of each new solution in the enterprise is aimed (in a shorter or longer period) at improving the competitive position of the enterprise and increasing its profitability. When analysing the expected economic benefits resulting from the implementation of innovations, participants pointed to a very wide range of effects. The most important expected benefits in this respect include an increase in the profitability of the enterprise, an increase in revenue and the acquisition of new customers.

In terms of factors located outside the enterprise and at the same time constituting the greatest barriers to the pace of innovation implementation in an SME enterprise, participants indicated bureaucracy. This is also a "traditional" obstacle indicated at the interface between the private and public sectors in Poland. Managers coming from the group of the smallest enterprises, point to problems lying outside the organisation as an obstacle to innovation. In addition to bureaucracy, they indicate e.g. the lack of support from public administration, difficulties in obtaining EU subsidies or unfavourable regulations e.g. the ineligibility of VAT as a cost in EU projects. In addition, participants indicated difficulties in obtaining competent employees.

In summary, companies develop and gain competitive advantages because of their ability to respond to or create customer needs and expectations. This is therefore always done in relation to events taking place in their environment - especially changes on the demand side. Today's customers expect not only innovative products, but also new forms of delivery, an innovative form of communication. Thus, no company wishing to remain on the market in the future can be indifferent to widespread digitalisation.

Indicating more specific areas of influence of technological solutions in the context of competitiveness, participants singled out the possibility of improving the quality of products offered, increasing productivity, or improving the efficiency of resource use. Due to the application of modern technologies, pre-entrepreneurs expect an increase in the profitability of their own operations through increased revenues. These results show the key role that technological solutions can play in competing through

innovation. Business owners and management have a special role in the potential for strategic change. Their knowledge of the potential for technology implementation therefore determines the progress of Polish companies towards digitisation and digitalisation and innovation.

Among the measures taken and planned to be taken for the implementation of innovation and digitalisation tools, investing own resources, raising staff competences through training and hiring new qualified people were mentioned. In the area of plans to raise competencies and hire qualified staff, participants showed a decreasing trend, and the same applies to investing own resources. This indicates an increasing problem of lack of human and financial resources in shaping the level of innovation. In addition, the administration and settlement of projects from Operational Programmes significantly reduces the application for this type of support.

We recommend starting a year-long series of industry-specific training courses with pre- and post-training competency testing. We intend to continue the training in the future.

## Evaluation Concept<sup>22</sup>

### 1. Definition of Training Evaluation

Training is the foundation of a modern organization. Properly selected and carried out, individual team members and the entire organization increase the effectiveness of operations step by step. Nevertheless, a lot depends on the quality of the training itself, so:

- skilful selection of the subject matter to the needs of employees,
- effective teaching methods used to conduct them,
- a well-thought-out training plan tailored to the employee's career path,
- reasonable organization of training in terms of logistics and technology.

And how to assess whether the implemented training solutions are effective? This is what their evaluation is for. It consists in verifying whether the training policy in the company is effective - and therefore whether it allows to achieve the company's development goals.

The evaluation is the final step of the training management cycle (diagram 1). A training management cycle can be divided into three major steps: Step 1: Planning; Step 2: Implementation; and Step 3: Evaluation. The results of the training evaluation are reflected in the next phase of training planning to improve future training programs.

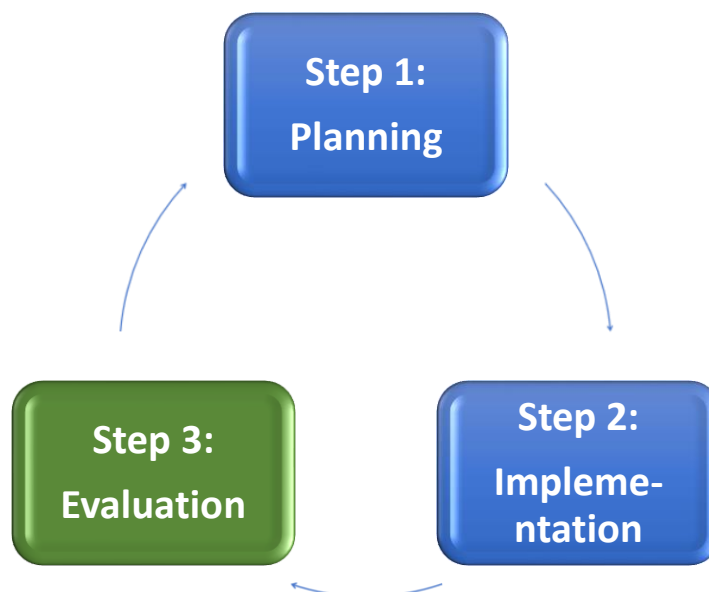


Diagram 1. Training Management Cycle

<sup>22</sup> Compiled by Dr Monika Zajkowska, Hanseatic Institute for Support of SMEs

Evaluation of training is one of the main components of a training programme. It will not only provide the trainer with useful information in order to further improve the training course, but also creates an impression of completeness.

An evaluation is the systematic and objective assessment of an ongoing or completed project, program or policy, its design, implementation and results. The aim is to determine the relevance and fulfilment of objectives, development efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. The program evaluation is the systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics, and outcomes of programs to make judgments about the program, improve program effectiveness, and/or inform decisions about future programming.

Evaluation of courses including gained results and found problems is essential to be able to develop further the existing training programs as well as to consider the experiences gathered from these programs when building new curricula. The evaluation process has been designed hand in hand with the courses themselves. This concept presents an overview of evaluation process and questionnaire.

## 2. Types of Evaluation

There are many different types of evaluations depending on the object being evaluated and the purpose of the evaluation. Perhaps the most important basic distinction in evaluation types is that between formative and summative evaluation. Formative evaluations strengthen or improve the object being evaluated -- they help form it by examining the delivery of the program or technology, the quality of its implementation, and the assessment of the organizational context, personnel, procedures, inputs, and so on. Summative evaluations, in contrast, examine the effects or outcomes of some object -- they summarize it by describing what happens subsequent to delivery of the program or technology; assessing whether the object can be said to have caused the outcome; determining the overall impact of the causal factor beyond only the immediate target outcomes; and estimating the relative costs associated with the object.

Formative evaluation includes several evaluation types:

- needs assessment determines who needs the program, how great the need is, and what might work to meet the need
- evaluability assessment determines whether an evaluation is feasible and how stakeholders can help shape its usefulness
- structured conceptualization helps stakeholders define the program or technology, the target population, and the possible outcomes
- implementation evaluation monitors the fidelity of the program or technology delivery
- process evaluation investigates the process of delivering the program or technology, including alternative delivery procedures



Summative evaluation can also be subdivided:

- outcome evaluations investigate whether the program or technology caused demonstrable effects on specifically defined target outcomes
- impact evaluation is broader and assesses the overall or net effects -- intended or unintended -- of the program or technology as a whole
- cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit analysis address questions of efficiency by standardizing outcomes in terms of their dollar costs and values secondary analysis reexamines existing data to address new questions or use methods not previously employed
- meta-analysis integrates the outcome estimates from multiple studies to arrive at an overall or summary judgement on an evaluation question

### 3. Steps of Training Evaluation

The processes of training evaluation can be divided into five steps: identify purposes of evaluation; select evaluation methods; design evaluation tools, collect data; and analyze and report results.

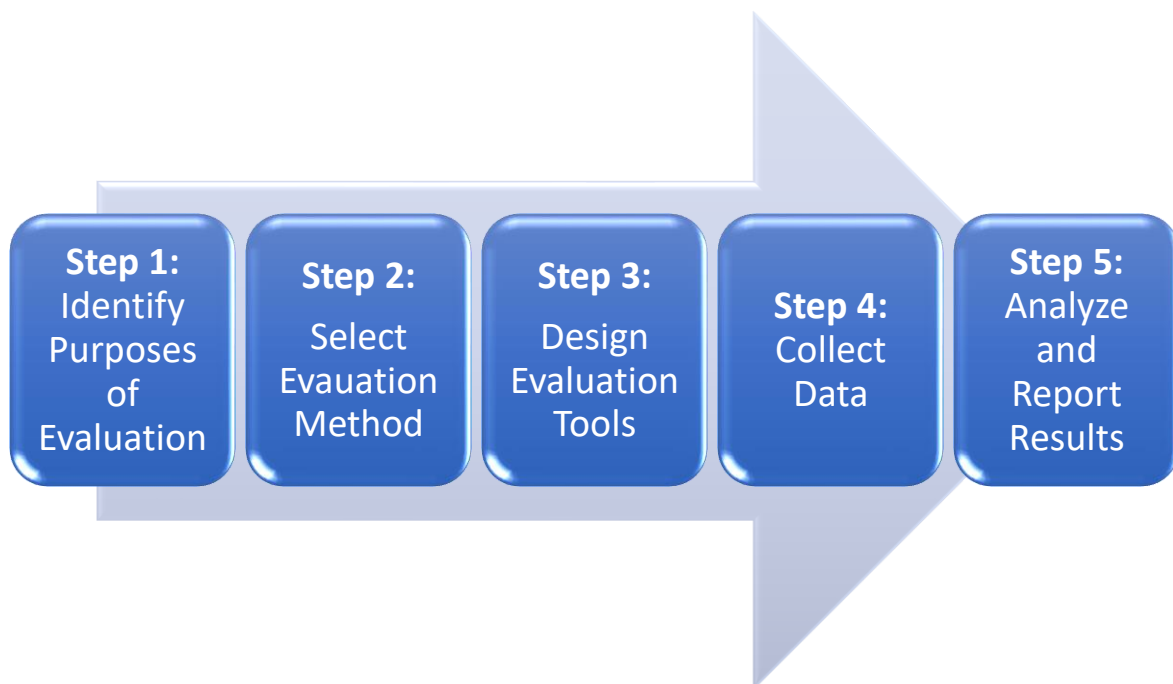


Diagram 2. Steps of training evaluation

#### Step 1: Identify the Purposes of Evaluation

- Before developing evaluation systems, the purposes of evaluation must be determined.

- Why do we want to evaluate training programs?

#### Step 2: Select Evaluation Method

- Kirkpatrick's four levels of evaluating training programs
- Reaction, learning, behavior, and result

#### Step 3: Design Evaluation Tools

- Questionnaire
- Pre/Post Test
- Impact Survey

#### Step 4: Collect Data

- Who, when, how to collect data?

#### Step 5: Analyze and Report Results

- Evaluation data analysis
- Reporting

### STEP 1: IDENTIFY PURPOSES OF EVALUATION

Before developing evaluation systems, the purposes of evaluation must be determined. These will affect the types of data and the data collection methods.

Purposes identified by the GDLA Task Force

The GDLA Task Force has identified the following as the purposes of evaluating training programs planned and implemented by the Task Force for public officials in charge of local administration:

- To determine whether the objectives of the training were achieved.
- To see how the knowledge and skills learned in the training are put into practice.
- To assess the results and impacts of the training programs.
- To assess the effectiveness of the training programs.
- To assess whether the training programs were properly implemented.
- To identify the strengths and weaknesses of the training programs.
- To assess whether the training programs were suitable in terms of the training contents, timing, participants and other aspects.
- To find problems of the training programs and solutions for improvement.

### STEP 2: SELECT EVALUATION METHOD

One of the most commonly used methods for evaluating training programs is the four levels of evaluation by D. L. Kirkpatrick. According to his concept, capacity development is realized by the four sequential steps: Reaction; Learning; Behavior; and Results.

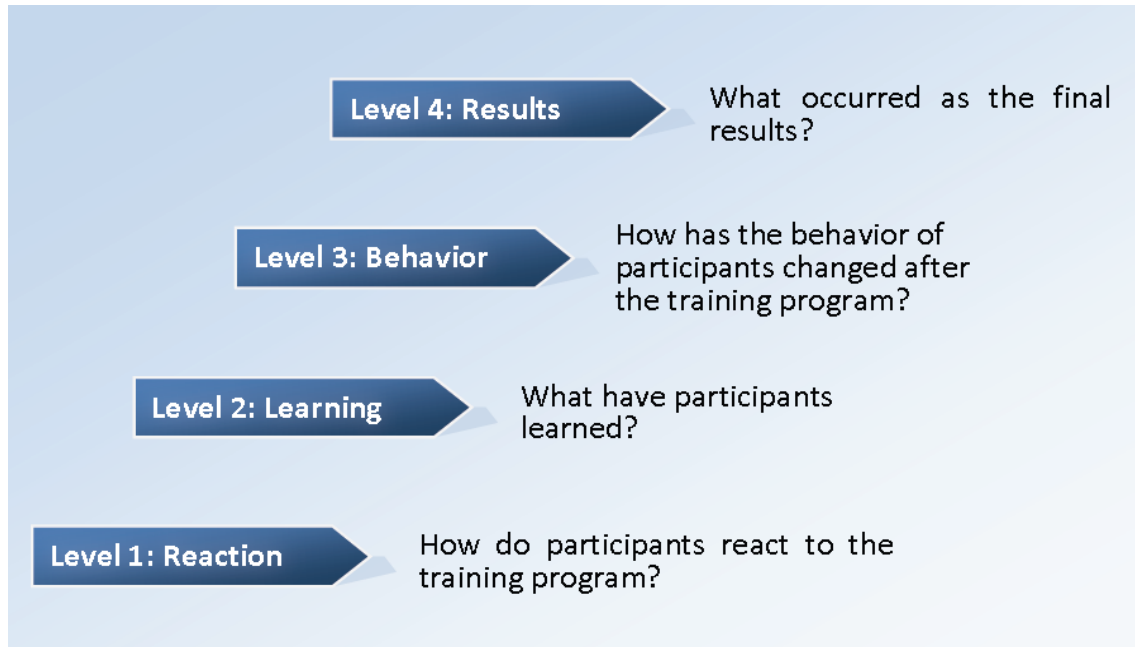


Figure 1. Four levels of evaluation by D. L. Kirkpatrick

### Level 1: Reaction

Evaluation on this level measures how participants react to the training program. It is important to get a positive reaction. Although a positive reaction may not ensure learning, if participants do not react favourably, they probably will not be motivated to learn.

### Level 2: Learning

Evaluation on this level measures the extent to which participants change attitudes, improve knowledge, and/or increase skills as a result of attending the training program. One or more of these changes must take place if a change in behavior is to happen.

### Level 3: Behavior

Evaluation on this level measures the extent to which change in participants' behavior has occurred because of attending the training program. In order for change to take place, four conditions are necessary:

- The person must have a desire to change.
- The person must know what to do and how to do it.
- The person must work in the right climate.
- The person must be rewarded for changing.

### Level 4: Results

Evaluation on this level measures the final results that occurred because the participants attended the training program. Examples of the final results include increased production, improved quality and decreased costs. It is important to recognize that these results are the reason for having some training programs.

When evaluating course, the goals and real results should be compared. This is not always possible or fair and just. The evaluation should be targeted only to such measurable issues on which the designer, teacher, facilitator or student himself has an impact. Evaluating the impacts of training programs against the presented main goals would require large societal researches including the recording of the initial situation before starting the programs and the long-term follow-up research in which the conducted interventions and actions (In this case new forms of training and education) and their impacts on change of variables is followed. The final conclusions can be drawn just after some years or after decades. In this project this is not possible and the whole evaluation process must be rethought and simplified.

The most important variables, on point of view of achieving the goals set, are the motivation of student, the support he gets, the relevance of issues in curricula, the quality material and training and the ability of facilities to support training and learning. Although most of the variables presented above are so called soft variables, which can't be measured directly by targeting the measurement tool to some point or phase in the process, they can be assessed indirectly by assessing the feelings and comments of participants and other stakeholders.

### STEP 3: DESIGN EVALUATION TOOLS

Various evaluation tools can be selected depending on the purposes and methods of evaluation.

- Questionnaires
- Surveys
- Tests
- Interviews
- Focus group discussions
- Observations
- Performance records

For the Train-the-Trainer training evaluation the questionnaire will be used.

The questionnaire is probably the most common form of evaluating training programs. Questionnaires to evaluate the reactions of training participants.

The first step of questionnaire design is to determine the information we would like to know.

The following are some information we wanted to ask participants.

Contents: Was the content appropriate?

Materials: Were the materials useful?

Teaching method: Was the teaching method appropriate?

Trainer/Facilitator: Was the trainer/facilitator effective?

Motivation to learn: Were you motivated to learn the contents?

Program relevance: Was the program relevant to your needs?

Level of understanding: Did you understand the contents?

Time: Was the time and length of program appropriate?

Length: Was the program length appropriate?

Facilities: Were the training facilities appropriate?

Overall evaluation: What is your overall rating of the program?

Planned improvements: How will you apply what you have learned?

The second step in questionnaire design is to select the types of questions. Questions that might be asked in a questionnaire can be classified into two major categories: open-ended and close-ended.

In the questionnaire of Train the Trainer training both categories of questions will be used.

The third step in questionnaire design was to develop the questions based on the types of questions planned and the types of information needed.

The fourth step in questionnaire design was to test the questions. They were tested on a group of people at approximately the same job level as the participants.

The following were some of the points to be checked when pre-testing the questionnaire.

Does he/she understand all the questions?

Does he/she have any difficulty in answering the questions?

Do all close-ended questions have an answer applicable to each respondent?

Are the skip patterns followed correctly?

Does any part of the questionnaire suggest bias on your part?

Does the questionnaire create a positive impression to motivate people to respond?

Based on the result of pretest in Step 4, the questionnaire forms were finalized.

#### STEP 4: COLLECT DATA

To improve the effectiveness of questionnaire data collection were recommended following:

- Keep responses anonymous
- Distribute questionnaire forms in advance
- Explain the purpose of the questionnaire and how the information will be used
- Allow enough time for completing the questionnaire

#### STEP 5: ANALYZE AND REPORT RESULTS

An evaluation of the Train-the-Trainer is essential to identify problems and the quality of the training in order to be able to develop further the existing training programs as well as to consider the experiences gathered from these programs when building new curricula. The evaluation process of each course has been designed hand in hand with the course itself.

Before summarizing and analysing the questionnaire, the data need to be entered into a computer. Many statistical software programs are available for such data. There are many ways to analyse data, but the analysis should be as simple as possible and limited to what is necessary to draw the required conclusions from the data.

The next step is to consider what forms of communication will be most effective to present evaluation findings to the primary users. The following questions may be used as guidance to choose appropriate forms of communication.

- To what extent and in what specific ways is the information relevant to the user's real and compelling problems?
- To what extent is the information practical from the user's perspective?
- To what extent is the information useful and immediately applicable in the user's situation?
- What information will the user consider credible and what reporting practices will support that credibility?

After knowing what kind of information will be relevant and useful to the primary users, the last step in evaluation process is to develop an evaluation report.

## 4. The Concept of Training Evaluation



#### 4.1. The Aim of the Training Course

The vocational further education programme “Realisation of customer-centred Innovations” aims to bring owners, managers and professionals closer to customer-centred innovation, to impart competences and knowledge on the different methods as well as to use digital technologies and tools, and at the same time, during the learning process, to carry out development projects for the realization of customer-centred innovations in the companies involved.

The training course has been designed to fulfil the needs described above. The training, which contains both theoretical lectures, group works, and practical training will be set to EQF- level 5.

#### TARGET GROUPS

The target groups of this training are

- founders,
- owners,
- managers,
- employees and
- company consultants / advisers

of and for SME companies.

#### OBJECTIVES

The learning objectives of this course are set to serve SMEs in customer centred innovations as well as possible. The concrete learning goal is that after attending the course the trainee has at least a sense of what customer centred innovations and use of digital tools can bring to his / her own business.

The learning objectives are:

- The participant understands the importance and benefits of customer centred innovations and digitalization.
- The participant knows the contemporary basic concepts of customer centred innovations and of digitalization – the relevance of topics in this area should be ensured before each training.
- The participant knows the different methods for the realization of customer-centric innovations, they can evaluate, select and apply appropriately.
- The participant knows the various digital technologies and tools for realizing customer-oriented innovations and can select and use them appropriately depending on the task at hand.

- The participants are able to involve employees and colleagues in the development and learning processes while learning on the job and master the most important presentation techniques.
- The participants are able to independently develop and implement projects to implement customer-centric innovations.

## SCHEDULE

This course is divided into five units:

Unit A: Classroom teaching “Methods”

Unit B: First teacher-assisted self-study within the trainees’ company or organisation

Unit C: Classroom teaching “Digital Tools”

Unit D: Second teacher-assisted self-study within the trainees’ company or organisation

Unit E: Classroom teaching “Completion” with individual project presentation and reflection

The training begins with a 2-day theoretical part, during which the basic issues of each topic will be clarified by presentations and group work. This part will be followed by a first 8 – 10 weeks practice period in the company, in which the participant gets to know the topics of the course from the point of view of this company. During this phase of on-the-job learning, the participant also creates a presentation about the insights and ideas he/she gained during this time in the company and carries out a development project in the company to realize customer-centric innovations. After the first practice period is completed, a seminary of 1 day will be hold. In this seminary the participants acquire skills and knowledge about the various digital technologies and tools. This is followed by a second 8 – 10 weeks practical phase and learning on the job, in which the development project started in the first practical phase is continued and, if possible, a second development project is implemented. The conclusion is a 1.5 days’ workshop. Here the trainees will present their development project as well as their findings, discuss their experiences and ideas, and finally, everything will be concluded with a lecture to deepen individual aspects according to the needs of the participants.

A detailed presentation of the KAIN method can be found in Attachment 1 "KAIN Method and Coaching Program" and in Attachment 2 "Power Point KAIN & Coaching".

### 4.2. Evaluation Concept

The objective of the evaluation is to determine whether the goals of the program will be achieved in the implementations evaluated, and how the program has impact on student’s career and opportunities. An evaluation concept consisting of two feedback surveys, one with closed questions and one with open questions.

The evaluation process will be as follows:

1. The participants of the Training will receive an online Semi-structured questionnaire at the end of the training (Appendix A).
2. Time for the survey (approx. 10 minutes) will be allocated in the end of the course.
3. The facilitator of the training informs the participants about the evaluation and its importance for further development actions. The purpose of the questionnaire and how the data will be used should be explained clearly to the participants. This will help to improve the response rate and encourage the participants to make comments that can be useful to improve future programs.
4. The questionnaires are being filled in online and submitted automatically and anonymously to the evaluator of the training.
5. The evaluator analyses all feedback surveys and summarizes them in a written analysis. Based on that, recommendations for the adjustment and future use of the curriculum result.

The evaluation approach will be based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. The Microsoft Excel package will be used to transcribe the feedbacks and interviews. Open questions will be categorized, and qualitative analysis of the groups will be done.

The final evaluation report will discuss the following issues:

- Did the curriculum reach the targets?
- How well was the knowledge creation and sharing realized?
- Did the participants assimilate knowledge and tools?
- Was the venue and equipment appropriate for the training course?
- What kind of further development will be needed, if any?

Schedule of the evaluations

The schedule of the evaluation should be matched to the phases of the curriculum. There is no sense to evaluate the course before the students have a true and fair view of the course, its phases and contents. A closer schedule of each evaluation will be agreed later.

APPENDIX A: Evaluation Questionnaire for Participants of the Training “Customer-centred Innovations”

### **EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE PARTICIPANTS TRAINING „Customer-centred Innovations”**

Dear Participant,

Thank you for taking time to fill out this feedback form on the “Customer-centred Innovations” training, that was developed by .....in ..... on ..... as part

of the Erasmus+ project “ICIinSMEs”. We would like to ask you to evaluate the quality of training by filling in the form and giving potential notes. That can help us to improve the level of training quality. The information that will be given in the research may contribute to increasing the level of effectiveness and attraction of further trainings.

This survey is anonymous and will take approx. 5-10 minutes.

Please circle the scale that applies to your opinion on the following aspects of the education you participated.

Gender	female	
	male	
Age	< 20	
	21 - 50	
	> 51	
The size of the enterprise	micro	
	small	
	medium-sized	
The length of service in the enterprise	under 1 year	
	1 – 2 years	
	over 2 – 5 years	
	over 5 years	
The length of service connected with the topic of the training	under 1 year	
	1 – 2 years	
	over 2 – 5 years	
	over 5 years	

I. THE EVALUATION OF THE TEACHERS AND THE TRAINING ORGANISATION						
THE LEVEL OF SATISFACTION		very good (5)	good (4)	satisfactory (3)	unsatisfactory (2)	bad (1)
1.	the substantive preparation					
2.	the clarity and understandability of the communication					
3.	teaching materials relevance in everyday work					
4.	the accuracy, professionalism and involvement of the answering to the participants' questions					

5.	the ability to attract participants to the topic and engage them to the training					
6.	the level of training programme implementation					
7.	the climate of the training					
8.	the level of communication of the teacher with the group					
9.	the arranging of work and training					
10.	the training background (classroom, tools, etc.)					
<b>II. THE EVALUATION OF THE USEFULNESS OF THE TRAINING FOR THE PARTICIPANT</b>						
<b>THE LEVEL OF SATISFACTION</b>		<b>very good (5)</b>	<b>good (4)</b>	<b>satisfactory (3)</b>	<b>unsatisfactory (2)</b>	<b>bad (1)</b>
1.	Were your expectations fulfilled with the training?					
2.	Did the training help you to improve the abilities in the topic of the training?					
3.	Did the training improve your knowledge within the topic of the training ?					
4.	What is your assessment of the possibility of using acquired knowledge and skills in everyday work?					
5.	What is your assessment of the					

	training programme?					
6.	In your opinion, what kind of changes should be considered in such type of trainings in the future? ..... ..... ..... .....					

**Thank you for your time !**

APPENDIX B: Evaluation Questionnaire for Lecturers of the Training “Customer-centred Innovations”

**EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE FOR LECTURERS TRAINING „Customer-centred Innovations”**

The lecturer should evaluate the course with overall grade (very good, good, satisfactory, unsatisfactory, bad).

THE LEVEL OF SATISFACTION		very good (5)	good (4)	satisfactory (3)	unsatisfactory (2)	bad (1)
1	How do you evaluate the level of the trainees’ knowledge at the beginning of training?					
2	How do you evaluate the level of the trainees’ knowledge at the end of training?					
3	How do you evaluate trainees’ work and learning organization?					
4	How do you evaluate the cooperation with trainees?					
5	How do you evaluate trainees’ engagement?					
6	How do you evaluate trainees’ preparation to work independently?					



	How do you evaluate overall atmosphere of the training?					
6	In your opinion, what kind of changes should be considered in such type of trainings in the future? ..... ..... ..... .....					

**Thank you for your time !**

APPENDIX C: Evaluation Interview for Enterprises involved in the Training “Customer-centred Innovations”

**TRAINING / EDUCATION EVALUATION: FEEDBACK FROM ENTERPRISES AFTER 1-3 MONTHS FROM TRAINING**

The interviewer will ask the following questions from each enterprise’s representant.

1. Usefulness: Was the participation in the training „Digitalization“ useful for your company? Why? Which skills and abilities you improve after participation in the training?
2. Content: Did the training contain issues and topics needed in your business? Was something missing? If, what?
3. Implementation: Have you introduced the solutions proposed during the training to the activities of your company? If not, what were the difficulties?
4. Future activities: What skills, knowledge and resources do you need for your company to implement the solutions presented during the training?
5. Training: What could have been done differently? What should have been done differently? What should not be changed?

**Thank you for your answer!**

## Evaluation Report<sup>23</sup>

### 1. Introduction

ICIlinSMEs - Digital methods, toolbox and trainings for increasing customer innovation in SMEs” (ICIlinSMEs) – is carried out within the Erasmus+ program from 01.09.2020-31.08.2023.

The main aim of the project is to strengthen customer centric innovation in SMEs by increasing their digital competences.

The main assumptions of the project are:

- Customer centric innovation in SMEs, enhances the productivity and competitiveness of SME’s, safeguard existing jobs and creates new ones.
- Digital technologies enable SME’s to implement customer centric innovations faster and better.

In the participating countries Denmark, Germany, Hungary and Poland, the level of knowledge of the concept customer-centric innovation is quite low. Especially in Eastern European countries, SMEs have very low innovation activity and there are large differences between SMEs and large companies. The participation in cooperation with customer is low. In the field of customer innovation, SMEs find it difficult to innovate. Particularly in these countries with the lower level of innovativeness like Hungary and Poland, the relevant skills and competencies must be significantly improved and high-quality achieved.

Moreover, in all the countries participating project countries, the participation in further training the skills and competencies in further training programmes should be strongly improved. While there are solid digitalization training capacities in Denmark, there is inadequate capacity in the other participating countries. Companies have no or little experience with digitalization training.

#### THEORY: GOALS, TARGETS GROUPS AND DURATION of the FURTHER EDUCATION PROGRAM “Customer-centred Innovations”

Training program “Realisation of Customer-centered Innovations” has been designed to bring owners, managers and professionals closer to customer-centred innovation, to impact competences and knowledge on the different consists of a concept, curricula, coaching programme and teaching materials for a longer SME specific programme for digital literacy and qualifications for the successful use of digital technologies in the acquisition, processing and implementation of customer innovation. The advanced training program should consists of the following elements:

---

<sup>23</sup> Compiled by Dr Monika Zajkowska, Hanseatic Institute for Support of SMEs

- a) Several (at least two) blocks of face-to-face teaching in the educational establishment.
- b) Between the face-to-face blocks, longer periods of on-the job learning in the participating SMEs.
- c) Realisation of at least one development project chosen by the SME itself to attract and implement customer innovations. The implementation of the development projects in SMEs carried out with the involvement of other employees of the company who have participated in face-to-face training, with the phases of learning at the workplace. In this way, the different levels of the company and as many employees as possible are involved in the change, learning and implementation processes are integrated.
- d) Program for accompanying coaching by the lecturers who design the classroom teaching and by advisors of the chambers during the phases of learning on workplace and the realization of at least one development project.

The training and coaching programme also includes the teaching and training of digital technologies, which are analysed in Output O1 and developed, see O1, A1 Best Practices in the Use of Digital Technologies and A3 Digital Technologies for the Implementation of Customer Innovations.

Activity A1 based on the results of Output O1 “Best practice customer-centric innovation & digitalization”, development of a concept and drafts for curricula and Teaching materials for SME specific training.

### Course

The vocational further education programme “Realisation of customer-centred Innovations” aims to bring owners, managers and professionals closer to customer-centred innovation, to impart competences and knowledge on the different methods as well as to use digital technologies and tools, and at the same time, during the learning process, to carry out development projects for the realization of customer-centred innovations in the companies involved.

This course has been designed to fulfil the needs described above. The training, which contains both theoretical lectures, group works, and practical training will be set to EQF- level 5.

### Target groups

The target groups of this training are

- founders,
- owners,
- managers and
- employees

of SME companies.

## Objectives

The learning objectives of this course are set to serve SMEs in customer centred innovations as well as possible. The concrete learning goal is that after attending the course the trainee has at least a sense of what customer centred innovations and use of digital tools can bring to his / her own business.

The learning objectives are:

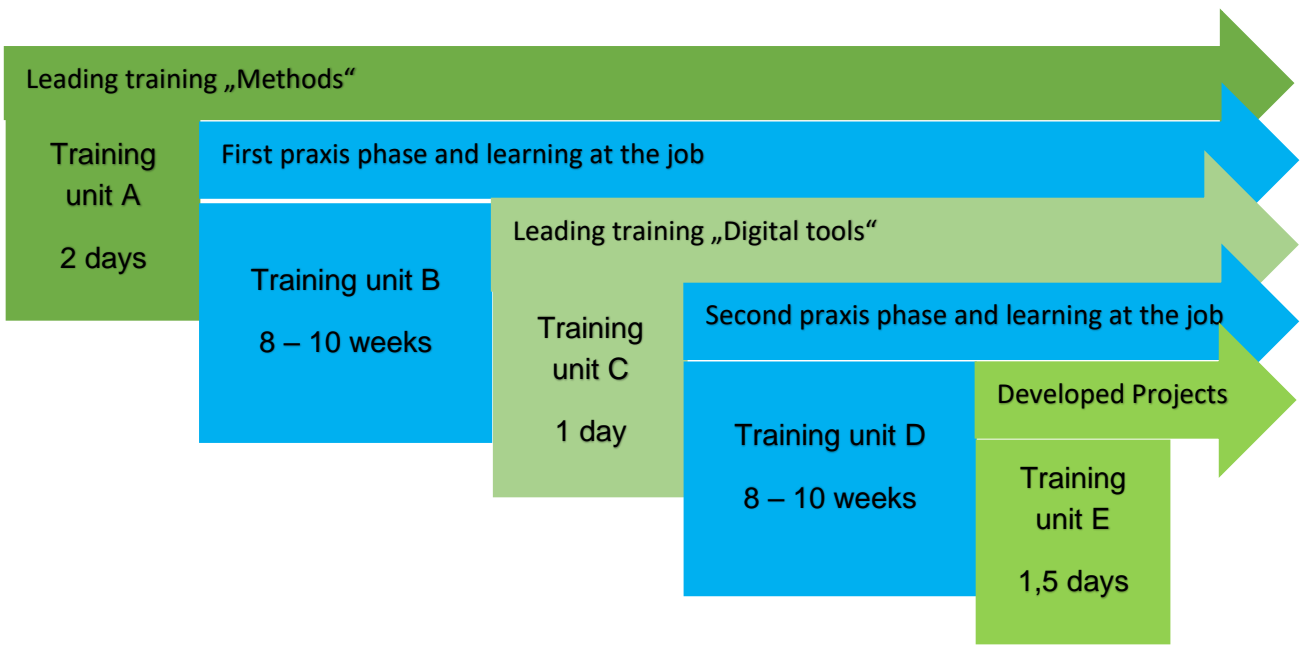
- Trainee understands the importance of customer centred innovations and digitalization.
- Trainee knows the contemporary basic concepts of customer centred innovations and of digitalization – the relevance of topics in this area should be ensured before each training.
- Trainee knows the different methods for the realization of customer-centric innovations, they can evaluate, select and apply appropriately.
- Trainees know the various digital technologies and tools for realizing customer-oriented innovations and can select and use them appropriately depending on the task at hand.
- Trainees are able to involve employees and colleagues in the development and learning processes while learning on the job and master the most important presentation techniques.
- Trainees are able to independently develop and implement projects to implement customer-centric innovations.

## Schedule

This course is divided into five parts. The training begins with a 1-2 days theoretical part, during which the basic issues of each topic will be clarified by presentations and group work. This part will be followed by a first 8 – 10 weeks practice period in the company, in which the participant gets to know the topics of the course from the point of view of this company. During this phase of on-the-job learning, the participant also creates a presentation about the insights and ideas he/she gained during this time in the company and carries out a development project in the company to realize customer-centric innovations. After the first practice period is completed, a seminary of 1 day will be hold. In this seminary the participants acquire skills and knowledge about the various digital technologies and tools. This is followed by a second 8 – 10 weeks practical phase and learning on the job, in which the development project started in the first practical phase is continued and, if possible, a second development project is implemented. The conclusion is a 1.5 days' workshop. Here the trainees will present their development project as well as their findings, discuss their experiences and ideas, and finally, everything will be concluded with a lecture to deepen individual aspects according to the needs of the participants.

A detailed presentation of the KAIN method can be found in Attachment 1 "KAIN

Method and Coaching Program" and in Attachment 2 "Power Point KAIN & Coaching".



Scope of hours

Training unit	Lessons	Hours of self-study	Hours total
A "Methods"	16	34	50
B First praxis phase	50	100	150
C "Digita tools"	8	12	20
D Second praxis phase	50	100	150
E "Projects"	12	13	25
Total	136	259	395

This course is divided into five units:

- Unit A: Classroom teaching "Methods"**
- Unit B: First teacher-assisted self-study within the trainees' company or organisation**
- Unit C: Classroom teaching "Digital Tools"**
- Unit D: Second teacher-assisted self-study within the trainees' company or organisation**
- Unit E: Classroom teaching "Completion" with individual project presentation and reflection**

2.Methodology of Evaluation

The objective of the evaluation is to determine whether the goals of the program will be achieved in the implementations evaluated, and how the program has impact on

student's career and opportunities. **An evaluation concept consisting of two feedback surveys, one with closed questions and one with open questions named:**

- 1) Written survey of all participants at the end of the face-to-face training (Survey of Participants)
- 2) Written survey of all teachers using at the end of the face-to-face training (Survey of Teachers)
- 3) Interview with selected enterprises after 1-3 months from the training (Interview after 1-3 months from the training)

The evaluation process will be as follows:

1. The participants of the Training will receive an online Semi-structured questionnaire at the end of the training (Appendix A).
2. Time for the survey (approx. 10 minutes) will be allocated in the end of the course.
3. The facilitator of the training informs the participants about the evaluation and its importance for further development actions. The purpose of the questionnaire and how the data will be used should be explained clearly to the participants. This will help to improve the response rate and encourage the participants to make comments that can be useful to improve future programs.
4. The questionnaires are being filled in online and submitted automatically and anonymously to the evaluator of the training.
5. The evaluator analyses all feedback surveys and summarizes them in a written analysis. Based on that, recommendations for the adjustment and future use of the curriculum result.
6. Teachers complete a questionnaire for teachers immediately after the training (Appendix B).
7. The interviews 1-3 months after the training are conducted with selected training participants within 3 months after the training (Appendix C).

The evaluation approach will be based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. The Microsoft Excel package will be used to transcribe the feedbacks and interviews. Open questions will be categorized, and qualitative analysis of the groups will be done.

The final evaluation report will discuss the following issues:

- Did the curriculum reach the targets?
- How well was the knowledge creation and sharing realized?
- Did the participants assimilate knowledge and tools?
- Was the venue and equipment appropriate for the training course?
- What kind of further development will be needed, if any?



The schedule of the evaluation should be matched to the phases of the curriculum. There is no sense to evaluate the course before the students have a true and fair view of the course, its phases and contents. A closer schedule of each evaluation will be agreed later.

## 2.1 The Aim of the Study and Evaluation Report

General objectives of the project is to:

- a) Develop, promote and strengthen digital competences in SMEs
- b) To continuously implement fully customer-centred innovation in SMEs, thereby
- c) To strengthen the productivity and competitiveness of SMEs, safeguard existing jobs and create new ones

General objectives set in this way will be achieved through, among others: develop, implement and evaluate further training program “Realisation of Customer-centred Innovations”.

The general aim of the study is to evaluate the effectiveness of training “Realisation of Customer-centred Innovations” realized within the Project “Digital methods, toolbox and trainings for increasing customer innovation in SMEs” (IClinSMEs) carried out in Denmark, Hungary and Poland.

The conclusions of the evaluation research will contribute to improve the quality and especially the effectiveness of training, show the limitations of the training model and indicate the direction for further activities.

## 2.2 Data Sources

Trial of the SME specific training and coaching programme has been carried out under different national conditions in Denmark, Hungary and Poland with at least 15 owners, managers and professionals of at least 10 SMEs each.

The trainings were carried out in Poland, Denmark and Hungary by 4 project partners:

- **Warmińsko-Mazurska Izba Rzemiosła i Przedsiębiorczości (PP4 WIRP), Poland**
- **International Business College (PP6 IBC), Denmark**
- **Ipartestületek Országos Szövetsége (PP7 IPOSZ), Hungary**
- **Dolnośląska Izba Rzemieślnicza we Wrocławiu (PP9 DIRW), Poland**

Table 1. Selection of participants, possible admission requirements

PP4 WIRP	All participants are representatives of Polish SMEs. They are employees/entrepreneurs dealing with the topics of digitization, innovation and customer relations, as the whole project is aimed at
----------	--

	introducing digital solutions that will help create innovations with the participation of customers. Participants who applied for participation were qualified for the course.
PP6 IBC	All the participants were representative from Danish SMEs and voluntarily chose this course.
PP7 IPOSZ	A big advantage of the course was that, although the businesses were small, but they covered a very wide spectrum of the economy, from baker to photographer. This helped to crystallize the general elements of digitalization, which can then be used for a wide variety of professions and of course supplemented with professional specifics. During the selection, we also focused on broadening the range of women's businesses among the participants.
PP9 DIRW	The trainees came from one region – Lower Silesia. These included the owner of a metal and metal construction company, the owner of a laundry, the owner of a pest extermination company, the owner of a hairdressing salon, a restaurant employee, a watchmaker, a stone products company and even a fashion designer.

All partners dedicated the training to the SME sector. The employees/entrepreneurs represented various industries. No additional admission requirements were introduced. Any interested employees/entrepreneurs from SMEs could take part in the training.

Table 2. How were the participants approached and won?

PP4 WIRP	Information about the course was sent via email to organizations affiliated with our Chamber of Crafts and cooperating companies, and through them to Craftsmen.
PP6 IBC	All participants are leaders / managers in SMEs in Denmark and the opportunities to develop their own teams. Not only from sales and marketing teams but also teams from production, maintain, craftsmanship, retail, distribution, stock and development of products.
PP7 IPOSZ	The training was advertised on the IPOSZ' websites. Four participants applied via these advertisements. Direct marketing strategies (phone calls and e-mails and many face-to-face conversations) were used to reach most of the participants. Our 160 trade associations were notified about the planned course, and we also informed our national branch organizations about the training several times. The other 11 participants were gathered via this way. The participants came from different regions of the country. The participants were mainly from the member companies of the trade associations, but there were several who applied for the advertisement published on the website of the IPOSZ.

PP9 DIRW	The training was announced on the website and on social media (Instagram, FB). Information with the invitation was also sent by email.
----------	--

All partners mainly used digital channels to inform potential participants about the training. Most of them used their own website and social media. The training was also informed using traditional communication channels in the field of Direct marketing strategies, such as: phone calls, e-mails and many face-to-face conversations.

Table 3. Number of participants

PP4 WIRP	23 participants from 20 SMEs
PP6 IBC	First course 2021; 10 participants Second course 2022; 10 participants
PP7 IPOSZ	15 participants from at least 10 SMEs
PP9 DIRW	16 participants from at least 10 SMEs

Each partner complied with the condition at least 15 owners, managers and professionals of at least 10 SMEs each.

Table 4. Amount of lessons, amount of self-study learning

PP4 WIRP	The training was divided into two parts. The first was a training meeting, which took place on September 30, 2022. The next stage was self-study, analysing the situation in the enterprise and introducing new solutions in companies. During this time, participants had the opportunity to receive individual consultations.
PP6 IBC	Our advice and recommended preparation 10-15 hours about “what is Innovation?”. One course is a 2-days of training (7,4 hours a day) + 1-2 months of self-study with recommended minimum 10-15 hours praxis training in innovative processes in their organizations. After one month there were a follow-up-, dialogue- and evaluation stage. Afterwards there was an opportunity for the participants to have an individual coaching/talk – “how they can get help from IBC to start an Innovative process in their own little team”
PP7 IPOSZ	1,5 days of personal training. 5 lessons followed by a half-day online training, 3 lessons + 2-3 months of self-study with minimum 10 hours of individual coaching. Individual coaching started with a personal meeting and was supplemented with further personal or online conversations. The final training provided the opportunity to discuss the coaching experiences together with the group members.
PP9 DIRW	Training day + 1-2 months of self-study with individual consultations at the participant's workplace or by telephone. The individual consultation started with an in-person meeting and was followed

	up with further meetings or online discussions. Each time the trainer discussed with willing participants their experiences and needs for further training.
--	---

Project partners divided training into two parts: one of the part was 1-2 days face-to-face training with at least two blocks and longer (1-3 months) periods of on-the-job learning in the participating SMEs. During this time, individual consultations with SMEs were conducted regarding selected projects to acquire and implement customer innovations. The organizers of the training conducted accompanying coaching by the teachers who organise the face-to-face teaching and by advisers from the chamber at the workplace.

Table 5. Organization of the implementation

PP4 WIRP	The organisation of the implementation was carried out by teachers from educational institution and WIRP staff employed by the project.
PP6 IBC	All was carried out by teachers from IBC-Kurser.
PP7 IPOSZ	The organization of the implementation was carried out by the staff of the IPOSZ together with the experts of regional and branch member institution of IPOSZ which were involved in the implementation. The trainer herself came from the University of Miskolc, Tourism and Marketing Department with whom IPOSZ has previously implemented trainings to expand the marketing knowledge of businesses. Considering the already mentioned difficult circumstances, the large distances, the organization required more time and energy than usually. The organization was also complicated by the fact that we had to carry out extensive background information activities beforehand in order to explain the objectives and essence of the project, since this is considered a new type of activity in the life of most businesses.
PP9 DIRW	The organisation of the implementation was carried out by DIR staff employed by the project together with the teachers leading the workshop.

The employees of the chambers as well as teachers and lecturers from educational institutions who had appropriate competences in the field of customer innovations were involved in the organization of the implementation.

Table 6. Brief notes on lecturers, their qualifications and experience

PP4 WIRP	The training was conducted by a specialist in innovation, a lecturer at the Warsaw School of Economics. The lecturer's academic work
----------	--

	includes such issues as innovation, competitiveness and internationalization of enterprises; choice of innovation strategy, sustainable innovation, open innovation, innovation alliances; importance of human resources and leadership in the creation of innovative ideas; knowledge management, consumer involvement in the creation of new products.
PP6 IBC	All the participants have a background as managers and leaders in SMEs in Denmark with high professional skills in different areas. But when it comes to micro-skills and competences in innovation, innovation of culture and innovative behavior, the knowledge was very low – in average 2,4 (out of 10) before the course
PP7 IPOSZ	There were selected an instructor who is capable of holding similar training in other regions. The selected instructor maintains excellent professional relations with several serious marketing consulting companies. Several experts from consulting companies were involved in certain parts of the training so that the companies participating in the training could gain even broader knowledge of the latest digital methods. All the instructors have appropriate competencies in the fields of marketing, digital communication, business development, business coach and web design.
PP9 DIRW	The trainers leading the workshop were: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mr Maciej Sygit, Ph. Former graduate of the Wrocław University of Technology. Co-author and author of over 50 articles on innovation and business implementation. For over 30 years he has been running his own consulting company, where he provides economic advice. He is the author of 5 national patents and 2 international patents in the field of biotechnology. In addition, he has been substantive manager in more than 10 national and international projects implemented by companies, universities, local government units, hospitals.</li> <li>2. Ms Magdalena Ornatowska, Ph.D., who has been involved in technology transfer and the organisation of entrepreneurship and innovation classes in university units and private companies for many years.</li> </ol>

Each of the project partners ensured a high level of competence of the lecturers who conducted the training. The lecturers had sufficient experience to conduct training and consultations for SMEs on the subject of customer innovations.

Table 7. Participants profile and organisation of the training

PP4 WIRP	10 Male, 13 Female aged 35-70 from 20 different enterprises
PP6 IBC	18 Male, 2 Female aged 30-50, from different enterprises
PP7 IPOSZ	11 Male, 5 Female aged 28-65, from 15 different enterprises

PP9 DIRW	8 Male, 8 Female aged 30-70 from 16 different enterprises
----------	---

When it comes to the proportions of participation of women and men in the conducted training, the predominance of men in Denmark (18 to 2) and Hungary (11 to 5) is clearly noticeable. On the other hand, in Polish chambers there is a noticeable balance in the proportion of women and men. The age range of training participants ranges from 28 to 70 years. Sectors of the participating SMEs are differential. No dominant sector was identified in the study.

### 2.3 Execution of the Training

All project partners responsible for trial of the training, applied curriculum and carried out the training. Partners used concept and curriculum and teaching materials for SME prepared by Partner 1 HP (Hanse Parliament) on the base on the results of Output O1 “Best Practice customer-centric innovation and digitization”. In all countries, the training used practical exercises, group work, exchange of experiences and also individual consultations. In Denmark, the emphasis was on the way the teacher designed the program old fashion was with a high energy, many exercises. A didactic wish was to change the learning environment many times. Therefore, the teacher used the whole building/institution like small/micro rooms, halls, classrooms, open places, meeting places etc.

In Hungary and Poland training organizers emphasized, that the materials prepared by the PP 1 (HP) helped a lot in the designing of the training. Both in Poland and in Hungary noted, that there was taken into account the existing economic environment, the legal regulations and the often-different development level and economic opportunities exist in these countries for small business. The participants represented quite different industries on the one hand and had different skills and experience in managing a small business on the other. Participants in Poland received teaching materials in the form of 10 Modules included in the Training Program “Implementation of customer-centered innovations”, as well as presentations used during the training.

By partner PP 4 WIRP consultations after the training were attended by 4 people (hairdresser – 2, management – 2). The consultations were held over the phone. The discussion dealt with practical issues regarding the introduction of simple digital solutions for contacting customers to collect feedback. By Partner PP9 DIRW, after the training some business owner contacted the trainer to arrange a meeting directly on site to discuss the possibility of acquiring new clients.

### 3. Results and Analysis



### 3.1 Training measure: Warmińsko-Mazurska Izba Rzemiosła i Przedsiębiorczości, Poland (PP4 WIRP)

**Training measure:** Further training programme Realisation of customer-centered Innovations

**Test of the training measure:** Warmińsko-Mazurska Izba Rzemiosła i Przedsiębiorczości, Poland (PP4 WIRP)

**Scope of the training:** 1 day face-to-face training

**Conducting training** – 1 teacher

**Data collection:** by PP4 WIRP

#### Survey of Participants

##### The results

**Research tool:** Written survey of all participants at the end of the face-to-face training

**Participants:** 23 people (10 male, 13 female)

**Age:** from 35 to 70 years old

**Count of cases:** 19

They were representatives of 20 enterprises from 12 sectors:

- management (managers, office directors) – 6
- car mechanic – 2
- hairdresser – 4
- chimney sweep – 2
- upholsterer – 2
- training/education; auto electromechanics; accounting, vulcanizer; tailor; bioenergo-therapist; builder – 1 person each.

Table 8 presents the number and gender of participants who took part in the training. The online survey questionnaire was answered immediately after the face-to-face training by 19 respondents; 36,8% percent (7 participants) were male and 63,2% percent (12 participants) were female.

Table 8. Participants by gender

Gender	Number of participants	%
Female	12	63,2%
Male	7	36,8%
Total	19	100%

Table 9 presents the age of participants. Out of all respondents 68,4 percent were age 21-50 (13 participants), 31,6 percent were aged over 51 years old (6 participants).

Table 9. Participants by age

Age	Number of participants	%
< 20	0	0%
21-50	13	68,4%
>51	6	31,6%
Total	19	100%

Table 10 presents the size structure of the company from which the training participant came.

Out of all respondent's 73,7 percent represented micro enterprises (14 participants), 15,8 percent participants came from medium enterprises (3 participants), 10,5 percent represented small enterprises (2 participants).

Table 10. Participants by the size of enterprise

The size of the enterprise	Number of participants	%
micro	14	73,7%
small	2	10,5%
medium	3	15,8%
Total	19	100%

Table 11 presents the length of the company's activity on the market. 89,5 percent of respondents work in enterprises operated longer than 5 years on the market (17 participants), 10,5 percent work in enterprises operated between 2 and 5 years on the market (2 participants).

Table 11. Participants by the length of the company's activity on the market

The length of the company's activity on the market	Number of participants	%
< 1 year	0	0%
1-2 years	0	0%
2-5 years	2	10,5%
>5 years	17	89,5%
Total	19	100%

Respondents were asked a number of questions to determine their satisfaction with the teachers and training organisation (Table 12). The overall results indicate that participants were very satisfied with the organisation of the training. The participants evaluated very good (5.0) the substantive preparation of the teacher for the training. They agreed that the clarity and understandability of the communication were very good (4.94). Trainees were very satisfied with Teaching materials relevance in everyday work (4.94). The accuracy, professionalism and involvement of the answering to the participants' questions were evaluated also on the high level (4.88). The lowest level of satisfaction in this part of the study would be the level of training program implementation (4.77). This may be due to too few hours devoted to the training, which was pointed out by the training participants in additional suggestions. Trainees were extremely satisfied with the atmosphere of the training (5.0). The level of communication of the teacher with the group was also rated at a high level (4.88). Participants evaluated also very high the arranging of work and training (4.94) and the training background (classroom, tools, etc.) (4,94). Total results in this part of the questionnaire (4.92) indicate that participants are very satisfied with the teachers and the training organisation.

Table 12. The evaluation of the teachers and the training organisation (the level of satisfaction).

I part. The evaluation of the teachers and the training organisation (the level of satisfaction)	Level of satisfaction (5-very good, 4-good, 3-satisfactory, 2-unsatisfactory, 1-bad)
The substantive preparation	5.0
The clarity and understandability of the communication	4.94

I part. The evaluation of the teachers and the training organisation (the level of satisfaction)	<b>Level of satisfaction (5-very good, 4-good, 3-satisfactory, 2-unsatisfactory, 1-bad)</b>
Teaching materials relevance in everyday work	4.94
The accuracy, professionalism and involvement of the answering to the participants' questions	4.88
The ability to attract participants to the topic and engage them to the training	4.88
The level of training programme implementation	4.77
The atmosphere of the training	5.0
The level of communication of the teacher with the group	4.88
The arranging of work and training	4.94
The training background (classroom, tools, etc.)	4.94
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.92</b>

Table 13 presents participants' evaluation of the usefulness of the training for participants. The results show that the training fulfilled trainees' expectations (4.83). They agree, that the training improve their abilities in the topic of the training (4.83) and improve their knowledge within the topic of the training (4.94). Furthermore, it was not agreed highly that the training will be useful for trainees in the job. The results show that trainees found it possible to use acquired knowledge and skills in everyday work (4.55), but the answers were not so optimistic in comparison to others. Overall assessment of the training was very good (4.83). The last question was about opinion, what kind of changes should be considered in such type of trainings in the future. In answers there was one opinion, that the training time should be extended, because all the information was interesting and important. Thank you for conducting the training and I am asking for more. It shows, that one day of the training is not enough for participants and is recommended to expand duration of the training in the future.

Tabel 14. The evaluation of the usefulness of the training for the participant

II part. The evaluation of the usefulness of the training for the participant	<b>Level of satisfaction (5-very good, 4-good, 3-satisfactory, 2-unsatisfactory, 1-bad)</b>
Were your expectations fulfilled with the training?	4.83
Did the training help you to improve the abilities in the topic of the training?	4.83
Did the training improve your knowledge within the topic of the training ?	4.94
What is your assessment of the possibility of using acquired knowledge and skills in everyday work?	4.55
What is your assessment of the training program?	4.83
In your opinion, what kind of changes should be considered in such type of trainings in the future?	<i>“In my opinion, the training time should be extended, because all the information was interesting and important. Thank you for conducting the training and I am asking for more :)”</i>
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.77</b>

## Survey of Teachers

### The results

**Count of cases:** 1

**Research tool:** Written survey of all teachers using at the end of the face-to-face training.

Teachers were asked a number of questions to evaluate participants’ knowledge and engagement during the training (table 15). The results indicate that the teacher was not very satisfied with the trainees’ knowledge at the beginning of the training (4.0). On the other hand, the trainer was very satisfied with the level of the trainees’ knowledge at the end of training (5,0). Moreover, she was content with trainees’ work and learning organization (5.0). The cooperation with trainees (5.0), trainees’ engagement (5.0) and trainees’ preparation to work independently (5.0) were evaluated highly by the teacher.

She was very satisfied with the overall atmosphere of the training (5.0). According to the opinion of the teacher, there are any changes they should be considered in such type of trainings in the future.

Table 15. Evaluation questionnaire for teachers

Teacher evaluation of the training	Level of satisfaction (5-very good, 4-good, 3-satisfactory, 2-unsatisfactory, 1-bad)
How do you evaluate the level of the trainees' knowledge at the beginning of training?	4.00
How do you evaluate the level of the trainees' knowledge at the end of training?	5.00
How do you evaluate trainees' work and learning organization?	5.00
How do you evaluate the cooperation with trainees?	5.00
How do you evaluate trainees' engagement?	5.00
How do you evaluate trainees' preparation to work independently?	5.00
How do you evaluate overall atmosphere of the training?	5.00
In your opinion, what kind of changes should be considered in such type of trainings in the future?	<i>"No changes"</i>
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.86</b>

(4,86) in this part of questionnaire indicate that the teacher was very satisfied with the training overall. The satisfaction with the increase in the knowledge of the participants of the training indicates its effective conduct and the effectiveness of the training methods used.

[Interview after 1-3 months form the training](#)

### The results

**Count of cases: 1**



**Research tool:** Interview with selected enterprises after 1-3 months from the training

In order to assess the effectiveness of the training and obtain feedback in the period after 1-3 months from the training, an interview was conducted with selected participants of the training. As part of the study, the usefulness of the training for the company, the content of the training and possible suggestions for the future, implementation and identification of possible barriers that may have appeared at this stage and possible additions of knowledge in order to successfully implement the concept were assessed.

The WIRP project partner conducted 7 interviews from 1-3 months after the end of the training. The questions were open-ended. The structured interview tool was used to conduct the study.

1. Usefulness: Was the participation in the training „Digitalization“ useful for your company? Why? Which skills and abilities you improve after participation in the training?

1/ “Yes.”

2/ *“The training was useful due to the introduction of IT improvements in the functioning of the Guild office: improvement of Google's business card, better virtual advertising of the association. The acquired knowledge about innovations allows for better communication with members of the Guild and persuading them to introduce novelties in their companies.”*

3/ *“The training turned out to be very useful. It showed me how I can encourage customers to provide feedback. I explored the topic of innovation.”*

4/ *“No, because my company is not very innovative.”*

5/ *“The "Customer-Centered Innovation" training was very useful for my company, because it showed me what skills I can use in dealing with customers to provide them with good and professional service.”*

6/ *“The training turned out to be very useful. I learned how important it is to introduce innovations. I exchanged experiences with entrepreneurs from various industries. During the training, there were many interesting discussions about customer needs and how we can reach them.”*

7/ *“We are satisfied with taking part in the training. We have improved our knowledge of innovation and digitization, which are essential in today's market. We learned about many opportunities that we had not heard of before, and*

*they are of great importance, among others with advertising and achieved reach. All doubts were clarified.”*

2. Content: Did the training contain issues and topics needed in your business? Was something missing? If, what?

1/ *“Nothing was missing.”*

2/ *“The training provided all the necessary knowledge.”*

3/ *“Yes, issues related to contact with customers are most useful in my company. There was nothing missing.”*

4/ *“The training was interesting and broadened my knowledge.”*

5/ *“Yes, the training included a lot of topics and issues needed in my company.”*

6/ *“Yes, issues and topics needed in my company were discussed.”*

7/ *“The issues and topics discussed during the training were in line with the needs of our company.”*

3. Implementation: Have you introduced the solutions proposed during the training to the activities of your company? If not, what were the difficulties?

1/ *“Solutions have been introduced.”*

2/ *“All acquired knowledge was put into the activity.”*

3/ *“Not all solutions can be implemented in my company due to the typical service activity and because I run a small plant.”*

4/ *“My company is not very innovative, and the recipients are people who rarely use innovative news.”*

5/ *“Yes, I have implemented personalized services and new technologies that meet the needs of my clients.”*

6/ *“The process of innovating is very difficult, but together with the team we pored over the topic and prepared a roadmap for the future, which assumes collecting feedback from customers and creating personalized services.”*

7/ *“After the training, we introduced and continue to introduce the solutions proposed during the training.”*

4. Future activities: What skills, knowledge and resources do you need for your company to implement the solutions presented during the training?

1/ *“No.”*

2/ *“The solutions have been implemented in the functioning of the office.”*

3/ *“I need more knowledge about new technologies and financial resources to implement innovations.”*

4/ *“Cash injection.”*

5/ *“Ability to quickly adapt to the needs of new customers.”*

6/ *“I need more training in modern digital technologies and information on funds allocated to co-financing innovative activities in companies.”*

7/ *“In the future, our company intends to take advantage of such training opportunities more often, and we also want to involve lower-level employees to take part in the classes to motivate them to develop. We plan to invest in better quality computer equipment.”*

5. Training: What could have been done differently? What should have been done differently? What should not be changed?

1/ *“Everything was ok.”*

2/ *“The conduct, organization and knowledge provided during the training were at the highest level.”*

3/ *“The training could be a bit longer and addressed to participants from one industry, e.g. to hairdressers themselves.”*

4/ *“Everything is ok.”*

5/ *“The training was very satisfactory and there is no need to change.”*

6/ *“In the future, training aimed at entrepreneurs dealing with related professions would be useful.”*

*7/ “The training was professional. The organization of the event, the host, the subject, everything met our expectations. All information was provided in a reliable manner, based on specific examples.”*

The analysis of responses received from enterprises in the period of 1-3 months after the training shows the high effectiveness of the training. The assessment of the **usefulness** of the training for the company's operations was assessed very positively. In particular, attention was paid to the introduction of improvements in the functioning of the company in terms of better communication with customers.

The training showed the company how they can encourage customers to provide feedback. The usefulness of the training was confirmed in the statement that the acquired skills are used in dealing with customers to ensure good and professional service. The respondents also showed that they became interested in the topic of innovation in general and want to deepen their knowledge in this area.

The comments emphasized the importance of introducing innovations in the enterprise. It was recognized that the training was also useful in the context of many interesting discussions on the needs of customers and reaching customers and exchanging this information between the participants of the training. The interlocutors also emphasized the acquired knowledge, which they use in the field of innovation and digitization.

Only one of the respondents had a negative opinion on the usefulness of the training for their business, which was justified by the fact that their company is not very innovative.

In assessing the **content** of the training and possible shortcomings, most of the interlocutors indicated that the issues and topics discussed during the training were in line with the needs of the company. Entrepreneurs indicated that the training was interesting and broadened their knowledge in the subject. None of the participants of the training reported proposals for changes or possible deficiencies in the training.

In the next part of the interview, the question was asked whether the proposed concept had been **implemented** in the company of the training participant. In this regard, opinions were divided. Some of the respondents definitely stated that the learned solutions were implemented in the company's operations. The limitation resulting from the size of the enterprise is noteworthy. Small enterprises emphasized that not all solutions can be implemented in their operations due to the typical service activity and because they run a small plant. Another indicated limitation is the low innovativeness of enterprises. One of the respondents emphasized that his company is not very innovative and the recipients are people who rarely use innovative novelties. Some of the respondents are in the phase of preparing to implement the solution learned during the training. For this purpose, a team was formed to deal with the topic and prepare a plan for future action. In addition, the team has started collecting customer feedback and intends to create personalized services.

The next part of the interview was devoted to **future activities**. The question was what skills, knowledge and resources are needed for companies to implement the solutions presented during the training. Most of the training participants indicated that they needed more knowledge about new technologies and financial resources to implement innovative solutions. Entrepreneurs also expect funds allocated for co-financing innovative activities. Attention was also paid to the ability to quickly adapt to the needs of new customers. In addition, it was indicated that it is necessary to involve employees from lower levels of the organization in this type of training.

The last question in the interview was about **suggestions for changes** and improvements to improve the training in the future. The vast majority of interviewees expressed very positive opinions about the training. It was pointed out that in the future it is worth paying attention to industry diversity and tailoring training to specific industries.

### 3.2 Training measure: International Business College, Denmark

**Training measure:** Further training program Realization of customer-centered Innovations

**Test of the training measure:** International Business School, Denmark (PP6 IBC)

**Scope of the training:** 2 days face-to-face training

**Conducting training** – 1 teacher

**Data collection:** by PP6 IBC

#### Survey of Participants

##### The results

**Research tool:** Follow up after the face-to-face training.

**Participants:** 20 people (18 male, 2 female)

**Age:** from 30 to 50 years old

**Count of cases:**

- First course 2021: 10 participants
- Second course 2022: 10 participants

All participants are leaders / managers in SMEs in Denmark and the opportunities to develop their own teams. Not only from sales and marketing teams but also teams from production, maintain, craftsmanship, retail, distribution, stock and development of products.

Project partner PP6 IBC who organized the training pointed some strengths of the training as seen by the participants: “*The training was perfect, and the participants were satisfied with the course.*” Also according to the opinion of the participants: “one

of the biggest challenges for the participants is the time and the opportunity. Many of the participants are busy managers and often do not have the time or/and the opportunity to focus on innovation in their companies. Many of those participants are working in daily days operations with personally and teams KPIs where digital innovation unfortunately is not one of them and therefore with low interest / focus.

Weaknesses of the training as seen by the participants:

“The training was too short. Beside this, it could be interesting to have an innovation process only with one company (and their employees) and then some customers (B2B or B2C) to this one company. It could be interesting to see what the output would be.”

As mentioned before the training and course were a success. All the participants evaluated themselves to have received, learned and trained their innovative skills and competences.

The strengths were that there were participants from many different companies. But this was also the challenge. My wish is to design a scoop only for one company and their customers to come closer to “digital customer-centric Innovation”.

In addition, the training organizer conducted a study on the increase in knowledge about innovations. Before the training, the participants had to determine their level of knowledge about innovations on a scale from 1 to 10. The average of the submitted declarations was 2.4. Then, after the training, the participants were again asked what level they assessed their level of knowledge about innovations on the same scale. The average level of knowledge indicated was 10. This means that the training was successful. The increase in knowledge is the best measure of training and indicates the high effectiveness of the adopted method of training as well as the methods and training techniques used.

### Follow Up (after one month)

#### Innovation

When you look back at the Innovation course, what is the best learning you take with you (can remember) from the course here 1-2 months later? (Please also write on the back).

Keywords are here: **Brainstorming, thinking out of the box, new opportunities, Innovation model (3xC (Collect, Create, Customize)), Long drink challenge and De Bonos Hats.**

Are the learning points from the module something that you have also applied/implemented yourself?

Keywords are here: **Funny, experiences, different and curious.**



How would you rate yourself and your own innovative competence before vs. after the module?

It has increased. **All 20 participants choose this.**

What extra is needed for you to use the thinking behaviors skills and competences “innovation” in your practice to an even greater extent?

Keywords are here: **time, courage and experience.**

What will it take, which initiatives/measures, for your company to work more with innovation?

Keywords are here: **time and accept from the organizations.**

### Survey of Teachers

#### The results

**Count of cases:** 1

**Research tool:** Written survey of all teachers using at the end of the face-to-face training.

Teachers were asked a number of questions to evaluate participants’ knowledge and engagement during the training (table 16). The results indicate that the teacher was very satisfied with the trainees’ knowledge at the beginning of the training (5.0). On the other hand, the trainer was very satisfied with the level of the trainees’ knowledge at the end of training (5.0). Moreover, she was content with trainees’ work and learning organization (5.0). The cooperation with trainees (5.0), trainees’ engagement (5.0) and trainees’ preparation to work independently (5.0) were evaluated highly by the teacher. She was very satisfied with the overall atmosphere of the training (5.0). According to the opinion of the teacher, there are any changes they should be considered in such type of trainings in the future.

Table 16. Evaluation questionnaire for teachers (PP6 IBC)

Teacher evaluation of the training	Level of satisfaction (5-very good, 4-good, 3-satisfactory, 2-unsatisfactory, 1-bad)
How do you evaluate the level of the trainees’ knowledge at the beginning of training?	5.00
How do you evaluate the level of the trainees’ knowledge at the end of training?	5.00

Teacher evaluation of the training	Level of satisfaction (5-very good, 4-good, 3-satisfactory, 2-unsatisfactory, 1-bad)
How do you evaluate trainees' work and learning organization?	5.00
How do you evaluate the cooperation with trainees?	5.00
How do you evaluate trainees' engagement?	5.00
How do you evaluate trainees' preparation to work independently?	5.00
How do you evaluate overall atmosphere of the training?	5.00
In your opinion, what kind of changes should be considered in such type of trainings in the future?	More time
<b>Total</b>	<b>5.00</b>

Total results (5.00) in this part of questionnaire indicate that the teacher was very satisfied with the training overall. As part of the proposed changes in the training for the future, it was proposed to extend the time during the training, which shows the great interest in the subject of the training.

The training organizer IBC also added other observations and feedback from lecturers in the training summary:

“A funny course with good and eager to learn participants. Interesting and exceptional good learning environment. Perfect materiel, exercises and presentations. Good food. The participants were “hungry” for more learning, but also realize that they have huge challenges back in their own companies. Because how can they improve those innovative thoughts in their own SMEs and is the company/organization ready to think and act innovative?”

the training indicates its effective conduct and the effectiveness of the training methods used.

## Interview after 1-3 months form the training

### The results

**Count of cases:** 1

**Research tool:** Interview with selected enterprises after 1-3 months from the training

1. Usefulness: Was the participation in the training „Digitalization“ useful for your company? Why? Which skills and abilities you improve after participation in the training?

*In general, is it difficult already to express whether it has yielded anything. Measured in terms of the individual innovation skills of those participants, the answer is yes. But transferred to their teams/organizations, the answer is limited.*

*And why; simply because we still did not have the time or/and opportunity to arrange a workshop regarding innovation. (But when the time and opportunity is there, we will).*

*For the persons who participant we are ready to improve an innovation workshop for their colleges/teams.*

2. Content: Did the training contain issues and topics needed in your business? Was something missing? If, what?

*It could of course be more industry oriented, but the basic innovative skills to carry out an innovative process have been acquired.*

*Nothing was missing.*

3. Implementation: Have you introduced the solutions proposed during the training to the activities of your company? If not, what were the difficulties?

*No unfortunately because there was no time and opportunity.*

4. Future activities: What skills, knowledge and resources do you need for your company to implement the solutions presented during the training?

*A great idea will be to arrange together with IBC to managing the process.*

5. Training: What could have been done differently? What should have been done differently? What should not be changed?

*The training could have been longer, but in general everything was good, perfect and not least - funny.*

In order to assess the effectiveness of the training and obtain feedback in the period after 1-3 months from the training, an interview was conducted with selected participants of the training. As part of the study, the usefulness of the training for the company, the content of the training and possible suggestions for the future, implementation and identification of possible barriers that may have appeared at this stage and possible additions of knowledge in order to successfully implement the concept were assessed.

The IBC project partner conducted 2 interviews from 1-3 months after the end of the training. The questions were open-ended. The structured interview tool was used to conduct the study.

The way this "feedback after 3 months" was carried out was through a digital invitation on Facebook or/and by e-mail to an online workshop where we used the software; TEAMS. The participants had after 3 month the opportunity to participate in a semi-structured feedback-meeting on the 2-day innovation course.

Only 2 participants showed up for this digital workshop.

It is considered that two participants are better than none, but that the answers from the participants present were probably of limited validity.

### 3.3 Training measure: Ipartestületek Országos Szövetsége, Hungary (PP7 IPOSZ)

**Training measure:** Further training program Realization of customer-centered Innovations

**Test of the training measure:** Ipartestületek Országos Szövetsége, Hungary (PP7 IPOSZ)

**Scope of the training:** 1,5 day face-to-face training (5 lessons followed by a half-day online training, 3 lessons + 2-3 months of self-study with minimum 10 hours of individual coaching)

**Conducting training** – 1 teacher

**Data collection:** by PP7 IPOSZ

#### Survey of Participants

##### The results

**Research tool:** Written survey of all participants at the end of the face-to-face training

**Participants:** 16 people (11 male, 5 female)

**Age:** from 28 to 65 years old

**Count of cases:** 16

They were representatives of 15 enterprises from at least 10 different enterprises:

- Soda water making
- Confectionery
- Restaurant
- Tiler
- Air conditioning
- Carpenter
- Wholesaler of agricultural machinery
- Food wholesaler
- Wholesale of pet food
- Sewing courses, eco-friendly products
- Photographer

Table 17 presents the number and gender of participants who took part in the training. The online survey questionnaire was answered immediately after the face-to-face training by 15 respondents; 73.3 percent (11 participants) were male, and 26.7 percent (4 participants) were female.

Table 17. Participants by gender

Gender	Number of participants	%
Female	4	26,7%
Male	11	73,3%
Total	15	100%

Table 18 presents the age of participants. Out of all respondents 66.4 percent were age 21-50 (10 participants), 33.3 percent were aged over 51 years old (5 participants).

Table 18. Participants by age

Age	Number of participants	%
< 20	0	0%
21-50	10	66,4%
>51	5	33,3%
Total	15	100%

Table 19 presents the size structure of the company from which the training participant came.

Out of all respondent's 80 percent represented micro enterprises (12 participants), 20 percent participants came from small enterprises (3 participants).

Table 20. Participants by the size of the enterprise

The size of the enterprise	Number of participants	%
micro	12	80%
small	3	20%
medium	0	0%
Total	15	100%

Table 21 presents the length of the company's activity on the market. 66,7 percent of respondents work in enterprises operated longer than 5 years on the market (10 participants), 26,7 percent work in enterprises operated between 2 and 5 years on the market (4 participants), 6,6 percent work in enterprises operated between 1 and 2 years (1 participant).

Table 21. Participants by the length of the company's activity on the market

The length of the company's activity on the market	Number of participants	%
< 1 year	0	0%
1-2 years	1	6,6%



2-5 years	4	26,7%
>5 years	10	66,7%
Total	15	100%

Respondents were asked a number of questions to determine their satisfaction with the teachers and training organisation (Table 22). The overall results indicate that participants were very satisfied with the organisation of the training. The participants evaluated very good (4.87) the substantive preparation of the teacher for the training. They agreed that the clarity and understandability of the communication were very good (4.93). Trainees were very satisfied with teaching materials relevance in everyday work (5.0). The accuracy, professionalism and involvement of the answering to the participants' questions were evaluated also on the high level (5.0). Also, high level of satisfaction in this part of the study is the level of training program implementation (5.0). Trainees were extremely satisfied with the atmosphere of the training (5.0). The level of communication of the teacher with the group was also rated at a high level (5.0). Participants evaluated also very high the arranging of work and training (4.93) and the training background (classroom, tools, etc.) (4.93). Total results in this part of the questionnaire (4.97) indicate that participants are very satisfied with the teachers and the training organisation.

Table 22. The evaluation of the teachers and the training organisation (the level of satisfaction).

I part. The evaluation of the teachers and the training organisation (the level of satisfaction)	Level of satisfaction (5-very good, 4-good, 3-satisfactory, 2-unsatisfactory, 1-bad)
The substantive preparation	4.87
The clarity and understandability of the communication	4.93
Teaching materials relevance in everyday work	5.0
The accuracy, professionalism and involvement of the answering to the participants' questions	5.0
The ability to attract participants to the topic and engage them to the training	5.0
The level of training programme implementation	5.0

I part. The evaluation of the teachers and the training organisation (the level of satisfaction)	Level of satisfaction (5-very good, 4-good, 3-satisfactory, 2-unsatisfactory, 1-bad)
The atmosphere of the training	5.0
The level of communication of the teacher with the group	5.0
The arranging of work and training	4.93
The training background (classroom, tools, etc.)	4.93
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.97</b>

Table 23 presents participants' evaluation of the usefulness of the training for participants. The results show that the training fulfilled trainees' expectations (4.8). They agree that the training improves their abilities in the topic of the training (4.87) and improves their knowledge within the topic of the training (5.0). Furthermore, it was not agreed highly that the training will be useful for trainees in the job. The results show that trainees found it possible to use acquired knowledge and skills in everyday work (5.0). Overall assessment of the training was very good (4.93). The last question was about opinion, what kind of changes should be considered in such type of trainings in the future. In answers there were many opinions, especially about more similar training, which would be needed. Then enterprises would be able to use what they have learned very well and effectively.

Table 23. The evaluation of the usefulness of the training for the participant

II part. The evaluation of the usefulness of the training for the participant	Level of satisfaction (5-very good, 4-good, 3-satisfactory, 2-unsatisfactory, 1-bad)
Were your expectations fulfilled with the training?	4.8
Did the training help you to improve the abilities in the topic of the training?	4.87
Did the training improve your knowledge within the topic of the training?	5.0

<p>II part. The evaluation of the usefulness of the training for the participant</p>	<p><b>Level of satisfaction (5-very good, 4-good, 3-satisfactory, 2-unsatisfactory, 1-bad)</b></p>
<p>What is your assessment of the possibility of using acquired knowledge and skills in everyday work?</p>	<p>5.0</p>
<p>What is your assessment of the training program?</p>	<p>4.93</p>
<p>In your opinion, what kind of changes should be considered in such type of trainings in the future?</p>	<p><i>“I had already thought a lot about how I could develop my business. How can I better reach my target audience? I received a lot of useful advice for this, and I can already see the results. I learned that I need to be in constant communication with my clients. This will require a lot of my energy.”</i></p> <p><i>“I am very curious about the results of the solutions learned in the training. I’m hopeful, but I’d like to see concrete results.”</i></p> <p><i>“Everything was perfect.”</i></p> <p><i>“A lot of similar training would be needed. I will be able to use what I have learned very well and effectively.”</i></p> <p><i>“It would have been great if I could have concentrated on the training the whole time, because the instructor shared a</i></p>

<p>II part. The evaluation of the usefulness of the training for the participant</p>	<p><b>Level of satisfaction (5-very good, 4-good, 3-satisfactory, 2-unsatisfactory, 1-bad)</b></p>
	<p><i>lot of practical knowledge.</i></p> <p><i>Unfortunately, I had to deal with my company's affairs more than once, instead of being able to concentrate on the training. Two of my colleagues were also out due to illness, so I had to work instead of them. But the instructor was very patient and helped me tailor the learned information to my company."</i></p> <p><i>"The training was very good, but I will have to work a lot more to implement all the advice I received."</i></p> <p><i>"It was definitely good to learn completely new knowledge. I am lucky, because at the moment I have continuous orders thanks to customer satisfaction. But if my orders were to decrease in the future, I now know what new methods I can use to acquire new customers."</i></p>

II part. The evaluation of the usefulness of the training for the participant	<b>Level of satisfaction (5-very good, 4-good, 3-satisfactory, 2-unsatisfactory, 1-bad)</b>
	<p><i>“I received very useful advice to implement my old development plans.”</i></p> <p><i>“The entire training was very well structured. I am glad to have participated in the project.”</i></p> <p><i>“We can already see how much benefit and new business the advice we received has brought.”</i></p> <p><i>“The training was very useful. I look forward to the improved economic results.”</i></p>
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.92</b>

Survey of Teachers

The results

Count of cases: 1

**Research tool:** Written survey of all teachers using at the end of the face-to-face training.

Teachers were asked a number of questions to evaluate participants’ knowledge and engagement during the training (table 24). The results indicate that the teacher was not very satisfied with the trainees ‘knowledge at the beginning of the training (3.0). On the other hand, the trainer was very satisfied with the level of the trainees’ knowledge at the end of training (4.0). Moreover, she was content with trainees’ work and learning organization (4.0). The cooperation with trainees (5.0), trainees’ engagement (5.0) and trainees’ preparation to work independently (4.0) were evaluated highly by the teacher. She was very satisfied with the overall atmosphere of the training (5.0). The teacher also noted that the knowledge, skills, abilities, and background of the trainees are very

different. Therefore, something was completely new to one, while it was familiar to another.

Table 24. Evaluation questionnaire for teachers

Teacher evaluation of the training	Level of satisfaction (5-very good, 4-good, 3-satisfactory, 2-unsatisfactory, 1-bad)
How do you evaluate the level of the trainees' knowledge at the beginning of training?	3.00
How do you evaluate the level of the trainees' knowledge at the end of training?	4.00
How do you evaluate trainees' work and learning organization?	4.00
How do you evaluate the cooperation with trainees?	5.00
How do you evaluate trainees' engagement?	5.00
How do you evaluate trainees' preparation to work independently?	4.00
How do you evaluate overall atmosphere of the training?	5.00
In your opinion, what kind of changes should be considered in such type of trainings in the future?	<i>“The knowledge, skills, abilities, and background of the trainees are very different. Therefore, something was completely new to one, while it was familiar to another.”</i>
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.14</b>

Total results (4.14) in this part of questionnaire indicate that the teacher was satisfied with the training overall. The satisfaction with the increase in the knowledge of the participants of the training indicates its effective conduct and the effectiveness of the training methods used (from 3,0 to 4,0). The assessment of knowledge at level 4 indicates the need to deepen knowledge in the subject of the training.



## Interview after 1-3 months form the training

### The results

**Count of cases:** 15

**Research tool:** Interview with selected enterprises after 1-3 months from the training

In order to assess the effectiveness of the training and obtain feedback in the period after 1-3 months from the training, an interview was conducted with selected participants of the training. As part of the study, the usefulness of the training for the company, the content of the training and possible suggestions for the future, implementation and identification of possible barriers that may have appeared at this stage and possible additions of knowledge in order to successfully implement the concept were assessed.

The project partner IPOSZ conducted 15 interviews from 1-3 months after the end of the training. The questions were open-ended. The structured interview tool was used to conduct the study.

### The results

1. Usefulness: Was the participation in the training „Customer-centered Innovations“ useful for your company? Why? Which skills and abilities you improve after participation in the training?

1/ *“The training was very interesting, and it means a great support to understand consumer behaviour better.”*

2/ *“Yes, it was helpful because it provided tangible help that helped me move forward. My communication with customers has improved. I know that how I should approach different target groups.”*

3/ *“Actually, everything was good. I received very strong confirmation and assistance to implement an old business plan. As a simple entrepreneur, even if my products are good and if I have good ideas about where I could sell my products. Something was still missing for successful sales. The advice received during the training proved that often a small thought is missing for success. An external expert's eye will immediately see this small yet necessary step, which I have not noticed for months. The instructor's advice helped a lot.”*

4/ *“I learnt how to segment the market, how to make the targeting, and how I should position the different product categories.”*

5/ *“It was very useful because it showed a new approach to better serve customers, which of course showed up in our revenues. Our customers left satisfied and have come back with confidence since then.”*

6/ *“Our telecommunication skills improved, and it was very important. Our appearance on social media has improved a lot.”*

7/ *“I have learned a lot about the way consumers think about their behaviour. How they think, how they act, and how I can communicate with them more effectively.”*

8/ *“It was useful. The instructor definitely wanted me to do everything via computer, he tried to bring me into the world of the Internet at all costs. He constantly encouraged me to advertise myself online, but today I still have so much work to do, orders keep coming in, so I don't need that yet. I learned a lot.”*

9/ *“I use the various marketing tools braver. I have learned a lot.”*

10/ -

11/ *“It was very helpful. The marketing image and my attitude towards marketing have changed, I consider it much more important than before. Regarding the appearance of the website, I received advice with which I can make my website even more visited.”*

12/ *“Yes, it was very helpful. The methods used in our 25 years of operation have now received scientific confirmation. It is a good feeling to know that we have instinctively followed a workable marketing policy.”*

13/ *“I have started to be more intentional about using the different types of customer-facing innovation tools. How we communicate with our customers is important. I teach my employees the same thing.”*

14/ *“We are new in the market, and marketing has a great importance in this time. I have learned how to combine the different tools and that the simple is the better.”*

15/ *“It was useful. Our perspective has changed a little, broadened.”*

2. Content: Did the training contain issues and topics needed in your business? Was something missing? If, what?

1/ *“The training was actual and relevant. I do not miss anything.”*

2/ *"It was also very well structured in terms of content. It was great that we could cooperate on a personalized basis. It would have been good if the coaching could have lasted longer, an entrepreneur always has new obstacles, and it would be good if I could always get help with them. For a micro company, this would be very good. Facebook's algorithm is also constantly changing, it would be nice if I could follow it with professional support. Even though I have a website and many people say that it should be done one way or another, it would be nice if a professional could tell me what and how to develop."*

3/ *"The training provided useful knowledge that can be applied in the everyday life of my business."*

4/ *"We are in the process of creating our new homepage and the training offers us a new aspect to it."*

5/ *"Even upon his arrival, the trainer was surprisingly well prepared about the company's operational area and the company's profile. After that, based on the conversation, he formulated targeted proposals by learning about new information, problems, successes, communication with customers, and work organization influencing the image of the company, which we have been using with results ever since. We didn't miss anything."*

6/ *"Yes, I need everything I've learned."*

7/ *"Marketing is a big priority in my business. Now I am working on reaching out to more B2B partners. Time, deliberate planning, and a good unique selling proposition are very important."*

8/ -

9/ *"The training contains current and well-defined topics. This is a great help."*

10/ *"I learned a lot about the market and the importance of segmentation. And how to align the 4Ps with segmentation."*

11/ -

12/ -

13/ *"This training was complex. But of course, we can always expand the digital tools. Now, for example, I would like to get to know the advertising platform tik tok better."*

14/ *“No, it was complex.”*

15/ *“For us, the topics of the training and marketing were very good and suited the needs of our company. I don't feel like I missed anything. I received a perfect marketing plan at the end of the training.”*

3. Implementation: Have you introduced the solutions proposed during the training to the activities of your company? If not, what were the difficulties?

1/ *“We start to plan the content marketing. Time is the biggest difficulty. Inflation and price increase in the raw materials and overheads mean a great problem now.”*

2/ *“The truth is that there was an event in which I asked for help. I prepared for this with the help of the instructor. He had tips that helped a lot. For example, what should I do in terms of image and appearance.”*

3/ *“Yes. Our business is food wholesale, We have our own branded products, These products have been on the market since 1991, which means that our products are viable. What I wanted, but somewhere I always ran into walls to get into the wholesale networks as a supplier. For example, the Metro wholesaler had a product similar to ours, but it sold out once, so I immediately tried to contact Metro and present them our products and our modern packaging technique. I wrote to them, but they didn't call me back. I couldn't break into new markets for a long time. The instructor gave me a very practical advice, with which I immediately managed to contact this multi and I was able to present my product to them, and a cooperation with them as a supplier began. I owe all of this to the instructor's fresh, experienced eyes.”*

4/ *“We started to create additional groups (segments) for dog food: hunting dogs, working dogs, small pets (minis), allergic dogs.”*

5/ *“All the solutions proposed to the company proved to be useful. The appearance of the website, information content, customer service, the afterlife of given orders, the further nurturing of existing relationships, the review of the sequence of interdependent work processes, the more reasonable use of the available human capacity, we received positive forward-looking advice everywhere. It is difficult to get rid of previous bad habits, but persistent attention to each other brings success step by step.”*

6/ *“Yes, I have launched thematic campaigns several times.”*

*I used to make all the cakes everyday, but they didn't always sell out. Now I only make certain cakes 1 or 2 times a week, but I announce them in advance on social media.”*

*7/ “Yes, I started to look for a legend about the settlement of the company, to separate the different logos. And now the biggest project is the renewal of the homepage.”*

*8/ “I received a sample quote that would help me present myself better to customers. I will have to slowly enter the digital world.”*

*9/ “I started planning and preparing the different advertising spaces, the thematic leaflet and the content marketing in the Facebook posts.”*

*10/ “We have started planning our homepage, which will be structured as follows: company profile, products and services, references, news, webshop, frequently asked questions (FAQ).”*

*11/ “I received a lot of good, useful advice. I received good advice regarding online media, Facebook, Google ads, and Tik-Tok. We have already implemented these in our ads. We used to have open sales, but as a result of the advice, we now advertise short-term sales.*

*Colour composition, we changed this too, it also affects how popular our service is on online platforms.*

*Since then, we have created a frequently asked questions and answers interface.*

*We give customers the opportunity to rate our service.*

*Since then, we have put photos of our employees on the website, so we create a more personal feeling in our customers.”*

*12/ “We started an advertising newsletter on Facebook. For companies based on address list. We started it in January-February and there is already a lot of positive feedback.”*

*13/ “Yes, we started to plan the product descriptions for the private label products. Product descriptions on the tables in a unified design and according to the picture elements would draw the guests' attention to the parlor favourites, grandmother's pantry and the treasures of the forest.”*

*14/ “Yes, we have started to implement the coupon booklet and the leaflet. But the biggest result is the conscious planning of content marketing. We have also started negotiating with local small businesses to build a strategic collaboration.”*

15/ *"We have implemented and continuously apply almost all the advice and suggestions that we discussed with the instructor, and the suggested ones are already working."*

4. Future activities: What skills, knowledge and resources do you need for your company to implement the solutions presented during the training?

1/ *"I would need a specialist who deals with digital marketing."*

2/ *"I am a digital immigrant and I need an external specialist. A lot of time passes before I write a post. It is very important to improve my communication. My products are good, but I feel that my communication should be improved. How can I reach my target audience outside of the online space? I can't place my ads where my target group goes. I can only reach them online."*

3/ *"Continuous consultation would be a great support."*

4/ -

5/ *"Professional knowledge is needed to act confidently, to get to know the customer's wishes better, to "talk" to the customer, to solve their problems, to draw attention to new products. There are many areas where we received useful advice. Computer knowledge and, in our case, the ability to handle different telephones is an advantage that they cannot get very much in a store that provides a similar service, or they regret the time spent. To move forward, you need a constant curiosity about the latest techniques."*

6/ *"Fortunately, my daughter, due to her age, can help me a lot on various online platforms."*

7/ *"It would be a dream if I could manage my homepage and social media pages on my own."*

8/ *"I have a lot of work; I don't need to advertise. My good work is my advertisement. On the instructor's advice, I started working with a digital designer, because in the future this could also help me to serve my customers better."*

9/ *"I have to think in small terms, and I think I can do that slowly. The biggest problem is the time I have to spend on manufacturing and delivery, and I only have time for marketing in the evenings."*

10/ *"I need a professional to create our website."*



11/ *“Everything is available to implement the proposals. Everything is there, we just have to work on it a lot.”*

12/ *“Additional training, online or offline, would definitely be helpful. It would be especially good if the company's employees could be trained as well.”*

13/ *“Improve the digital marketing skills of my company.”*

14/ *“We are a small one-man business. We can not afford to employ a marketing employee. But that thinking is needed from manufacturing to sales.”*

15/ *“There is none, because we implement every suggestions in 100%.”*

5. Training: What could have been done differently? What should have been done differently? What should not be changed?

1/ *“Nothing.”*

2/ *“It would be nice if it lasted longer, as I wrote above.”*

3/ *“Nothing. It is perfect.”*

4/ -

5/ *“Nothing. We all took advantage of the opportunities available today. This practice should be continued and made available to all businesses.”*

6/ *“Everything was very good; nothing needs to be changed. In fact, I have never been on such a useful course. It would be even more useful if I could find two confectioner colleagues for the long term, because then I would be able to satisfy the customer's needs really well.”*

7/ *“I think the structure of education is good. I would not change anything. From my side, more time and effort would be needed to implement everything.”*

8/ -

9/ *“I would not change anything.”*

10/ *“I like the training and I am waiting for the following.”*

11/ *“I think everything went well from the beginning. Accuracy and attentiveness characterized the entire process.”*

12/ *“I don't think anything needs to be changed. The training was good.”*

13/ *“I think a longer period of collaboration is needed for better results. We have started to implement the proposed tools and we have received good feedback. But after a few months it would be good to continue the marketing consultation.”*

14/ *“A regular, monthly marketing consultation would be a great support.”*

15/ *“I think it was good because it was both personal and online. Everyone could participate, which was important to them.”*

The analysis of responses received from enterprises in the period of 1-3 months after the training shows the high effectiveness of the training. The assessment of the **usefulness** of the training for the company's operations was assessed very positively. In particular, attention was paid to the introduction of improvements in the functioning of the company in terms of better communication with customers.

The training showed the company how they can encourage customers to provide feedback. The usefulness of the training was confirmed in the statement that the acquired skills are used in dealing with customers to ensure good and professional service. The respondents also showed that they became interested in the topic of innovation in general and want to deepen their knowledge in this area.

The comments emphasized the importance of introducing innovations in the enterprise. It was recognized that the training was also useful in the context of many interesting discussions on the needs of customers and reaching customers and exchanging this information between the participants of the training. The interlocutors also emphasized the acquired knowledge, which they use in the field of innovation and digitization.

Only one of the respondents had a negative opinion on the usefulness of the training for their business, which was justified by the fact that their company is not very innovative.

In assessing the **content** of the training and possible shortcomings, most of the interlocutors indicated that the issues and topics discussed during the training were in line with the needs of the company. Entrepreneurs indicated that the training was interesting and broadened their knowledge in the subject. None of the participants of the training reported proposals for changes or possible deficiencies in the training.

In the next part of the interview, the question was asked whether the proposed concept had been **implemented** in the company of the training participant. In this regard,

opinions were divided. Some of the respondents definitely stated that the learned solutions were implemented in the company's operations. The limitation resulting from the size of the enterprise is noteworthy. Small enterprises emphasized that not all solutions can be implemented in their operations due to the typical service activity and because they run a small plant. Another indicated limitation is the low innovativeness of enterprises. One of the respondents emphasized that his company is not very innovative, and the recipients are people who rarely use innovative novelties. Some of the respondents are in the phase of preparing to implement the solution learned during the training. For this purpose, a team was formed to deal with the topic and prepare a plan for future action. In addition, the team has started collecting customer feedback and intends to create personalized services.

The next part of the interview was devoted to **future activities**. The question was what skills, knowledge and resources are needed for companies to implement the solutions presented during the training. Most of the training participants indicated that they needed more knowledge about new technologies and financial resources to implement innovative solutions. Entrepreneurs also expect funds allocated for co-financing innovative activities. Attention was also paid to the ability to quickly adapt to the needs of new customers. In addition, it was indicated that it is necessary to involve employees from lower levels of the organization in this type of training.

The last question in the interview was about **suggestions for changes** and improvements to improve the training in the future. The vast majority of interviewees expressed very positive opinions about the training. It was pointed out that in the future it is worth paying attention to industry diversity and tailoring training to specific industries.

### 3.4 Training measure: Dolnośląska Izba Rzemieśnicza we Wrocławiu, Poland (PP9 DIRW)

**Training measure:** Further training program Realization of customer-centered Innovations

**Test of the training measure:** Dolnośląska Izba Rzemieśnicza we Wrocławiu, Poland (PP9 DIRW)

**Scope of the training:** 1 day face-to-face training

**Conducting training** – 2 teachers

**Data collection:** by PP9 DIRW

#### Survey of Participants

##### The results

**Research tool:** Written survey of all participants at the end of the face-to-face training

**Participants:** 16 people (8 male, 8 female)

**Age:** from 30 to 70 years old

**Count of cases: 16**

They were representatives of different sectors: owner of a metal and metal construction company, the owner of a laundry, the owner of a pest extermination company, the owner of a hairdressing salon, a restaurant employee, a watchmaker, a stone products company and even a fashion designer.

Table 25 presents the number and gender of participants who took part in the training. The online survey questionnaire was answered immediately after the face-to-face training by 16 respondents (13 correctly completed questionnaires were returned); 30,8 percent (4 participants) were male, and 69,2 percent (9 participants) were female.

Table 25. Participants by gender

Gender	Number of participants	%
Female	9	69.2%
Male	4	30.8%
Total	13	100%

Table 26 presents the age of participants. Out of all respondents 46.2 percent were age 21-50 (6 participants), 53,8 percent were aged over 51 years old (7 participants).

Table 26. Participants by age

Age	Number of participants	%
< 20	0	0%
21-50	6	46.2%
>51	7	53.8%
Total	19	100%

Table 27 presents the size structure of the company from which the training participant came.

Out of all respondent's 84.6 percent represented micro enterprises (11 participants), 15,4 percent participants came from small enterprises (2 participants).

Table 27. Participants by the size of the enterprise

The size of the enterprise	Number of participants	%
micro	11	84.6%
small	2	15.4%
medium	0	0%
Total	13	100%

Table 28 presents the length of the company’s activity on the market. 69,2 percent of respondents work in enterprises operated longer than 5 years on the market (9 participants), 15,4 percent work in enterprises operated between 2 and 5 years on the market (2 participants), 7,7 percent work in enterprises operated between 1 and 2 years on the market (1 participant), 7,7 percent work in enterprises operated between under 1 years on the market (1 participant).

Table 28. Participants by the length of the company’s activity on the market

The length of the company’s activity on the market	Number of participants	%
< 1 year	1	7.7%
1-2 years	1	7.7%
2-5 years	2	15.4%
>5 years	9	69.2%
Total	13	100%

Respondents were asked a number of questions to determine their satisfaction with the teachers and training organisation (Table 29). The overall results indicate that participants were very satisfied with the organisation of the training. The participants evaluated good (4.77) the substantive preparation of the teacher for the training. They agreed that the clarity and understandability of the communication were very good (4.62). Trainees were rather satisfied with teaching materials relevance in everyday work (4.38). The accuracy, professionalism and involvement of the answering to the participants’ questions were evaluated also on the high level (4.69). The lowest level of

satisfaction in this part of the study would be the level of training program implementation (4.50). This may be due to too few hours devoted to the training, which was pointed out by the training participants in additional suggestions. Trainees were satisfied with the atmosphere of the training (4.84). The level of communication of the teacher with the group was also rated at a high level (4.84). Participants evaluated also very high the arranging of work and training (4.77) and the training background (classroom, tools, etc.) (4.61). Total results in this part of the questionnaire (4.67) indicate that participants were satisfied with the teachers and the training organisation.

Table 29. The evaluation of the teachers and the training organisation (the level of satisfaction).

I part. The evaluation of the teachers and the training organisation (the level of satisfaction)	<b>Level of satisfaction (5-very good, 4-good, 3-satisfactory, 2-unsatisfactory, 1-bad)</b>
The substantive preparation	4.77
The clarity and understandability of the communication	4.62
Teaching materials relevance in everyday work	4.38
The accuracy, professionalism and involvement of the answering to the participants' questions	4.69
The ability to attract participants to the topic and engage them to the training	4.64
The level of training programme implementation	4.50
The atmosphere of the training	4.84
The level of communication of the teacher with the group	4.84
The arranging of work and training	4.77
The training background (classroom, tools, etc.)	4.61
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.67</b>

Table 30 presents participants' evaluation of the usefulness of the training for participants. The results show that the training fulfilled trainees' expectations to a good



degree (4.23). They agree that the training improve their abilities in the topic of the training (4.23) and improve their knowledge within the topic of the training (4.46). Furthermore, it was not agreed highly that the training will be useful for trainees in the job. The results show that trainees found it possible to use acquired knowledge and skills in everyday work (4.46), but the answers were not so optimistic in comparison to others. Overall assessment of the training was good (4.61). The last question was about opinion, what kind of changes should be considered in such type of trainings in the future. In answers there was one opinion, that the training time should be extended, because all the information was interesting and important. Thank you for conducting the training and I am asking for more. It shows, that one day of the training is not enough for participants and is recommended to expand duration of the training in the future.

Tabel 31. The evaluation of the usefulness of the training for the participant

II part. The evaluation of the usefulness of the training for the participant	<b>Level of satisfaction (5-very good, 4-good, 3-satisfactory, 2-unsatisfactory, 1-bad)</b>
Were your expectations fulfilled with the training?	4.23
Did the training help you to improve the abilities in the topic of the training?	4.23
Did the training improve your knowledge within the topic of the training ?	4.46
What is your assessment of the possibility of using acquired knowledge and skills in everyday work?	4.46
What is your assessment of the training programme?	4.61
In your opinion, what kind of changes should be considered in such type of trainings in the future?	<p><i>“Spread the material out over more hours so that it can be explained in more depth and technically practiced.”</i></p> <p><i>“Larger room, transparent slides.”</i></p> <p><i>“More practice.”</i></p> <p><i>“More specifics”.</i></p>

II part. The evaluation of the usefulness of the training for the participant	<b>Level of satisfaction (5-very good, 4-good, 3-satisfactory, 2-unsatisfactory, 1-bad)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,40</b>

## Survey of Teachers

### The results

**Count of cases: 2**

**Research tool:** Written survey of all teachers using at the end of the face-to-face training.

The organization of the implementation was carried out by DIR staff employed by the project together with the teachers leading the workshop. The trainers leading the workshop were:

1. Mr Maciej Sygit, Ph. Former graduate of the Wrocław University of Technology. Co-author and author of over 50 articles on innovation and business implementation. For over 30 years he has been running his own consulting company, where he provides economic advice. He is the author of 5 national patents and 2 international patents in the field of biotechnology. In addition, he has been substantive manager in more than 10 national and international projects implemented by companies, universities, local government units, hospitals.
2. Ms Magdalena Ornatowska, Ph.D., who has been involved in technology transfer and the organization of entrepreneurship and innovation classes in university units and private companies for many years.

Teachers were asked a number of questions to evaluate participants' knowledge and engagement during the training (table 32). The results indicate that the teacher was rather satisfied with the trainees 'knowledge at the beginning of the training (4,5). On the other hand, the trainer was very satisfied with the level of the trainees' knowledge at the end of training (5,0). Moreover, she was content with trainees' work and learning organization (5,0). The cooperation with trainees (5,0), trainees' engagement (5,0) and trainees' preparation to work independently (5,0) were evaluated highly by the teacher. She was very satisfied with the overall atmosphere of the training (5,0). According to the opinion of the teacher, there are any changes they should be considered in such type of trainings in the future.

Table 32. Evaluation questionnaire for teachers

Teacher evaluation of the training	Level of satisfaction (5-very good, 4-good, 3-satisfactory, 2-unsatisfactory, 1-bad)
How do you evaluate the level of the trainees' knowledge at the beginning of training?	4.50
How do you evaluate the level of the trainees' knowledge at the end of training?	5.00
How do you evaluate trainees' work and learning organization?	5.00
How do you evaluate the cooperation with trainees?	5.00
How do you evaluate trainees' engagement?	5.00
How do you evaluate trainees' preparation to work independently?	5.00
How do you evaluate overall atmosphere of the training?	5.00
In your opinion, what kind of changes should be considered in such type of trainings in the future?	No changes
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,92</b>

Total re-

sults (4,92) in this part of questionnaire indicate that the teacher was very satisfied with the training overall. The satisfaction with the increase in the knowledge of the participants of the training indicates its effective conduct and the effectiveness of the training methods used.

Additionally, the trainers took notes on each consultation process.

Below are the reports of the trainers conducting the training.

"The participants in the training represented on the one hand quite different industries and on the other hand had different skills and experience in managing a small company. This, however, did not cause problems with understanding the material, but once we moved on to 'cases', dedicated to certain industry approaches, it became of little interest to some participants.

Observations of participant activity and conversations during breaks show that such courses are very popular. However, it makes sense to divide participants into groups. E.g. hairdressers, beauticians, "claw painting" one group, another group would be

bakers, confectioners and small catering, and another group would be the automobile or building industry.

If I had to think about what is the most important thing to do in order to attract new customers nowadays? I think that the most important thing at the moment is for young entrepreneurs:

constantly monitoring the market and peeping into the activities of the leaders to search for good marketing and customer service practices." Maciej Sygit

"The most difficult part of the training, in my opinion, was adapting the material to the knowledge level of the participants. This was due to the very different knowledge of techniques for managing one's own company or personnel by the participants. Some (the younger generation) were up to date and, I would say, even quite familiar with the subject or basic tools, while a fairly large group of people (the older generation) required more time to familiarise themselves with techniques such as brainstorming, mind mapping, Ishikawa's digram. Nevertheless, these people were very interested and less stressed and withdrawn as the training went on. The project materials developed by the Danish partners (excellent level, by the way), which we translated from English into Polish, were far too advanced for our trainees and we prepared our own materials, which were used during the training. This inevitably points to the geographical sophistication of entrepreneurs in using innovation for customer acquisition." Magdalena Ornatowska

### Interview after 1-3 months form the training

#### The results

**Count of cases:** 11

**Research tool:** Interview with selected enterprises after 1-3 months from the training

In order to assess the effectiveness of the training and obtain feedback in the period after 1-3 months from the training, an interview was conducted with selected participants of the training. As part of the study, the usefulness of the training for the company, the content of the training and possible suggestions for the future, implementation and identification of possible barriers that may have appeared at this stage and possible additions of knowledge in order to successfully implement the concept were assessed.

The project partner DIRW conducted 11 interviews from 1-3 months after the end of the training. The questions were open-ended. The structured interview tool was used to conduct the study.

#### The results

1. Usefulness: Was the participation in the training „Digitalization“ useful for your company? Why? Which skills and abilities you improve after participation in the training?

1/ “Yes.”

2/ “Yes. I manage the company better.”

3/ “Innovative content.”

4/ “Yes.”

5/ “It was useful, interestingly delivered training. I was most interested in artificial intelligence AI. I will make use of its resources.”

6/ “No, because I have not heard of any innovations needed by my company.”

7/ “Yes, there are differences in the approach to online vs. traditional purchasing, which were discussed at length in the training course.”

8/ “Yes. Capabilities and skills - showcasing the company's existence online.”

9/ “Yes, a broader view of customer needs.”

10/ “Yes.”

11/ “Of course.”

2. Content: Did the training contain issues and topics needed in your business? Was something missing? If, what?

1/ “Yes.”

2/ “Yes. Topics needed.”

3/ “For me it was enough.”

4/ “No.”

5/ “Yes, it contained the necessary issues. Nothing was missing It was substantive. Super.”

6/ “The training was too general.”

7/ “Yes, definitely the content of the training contained the necessary topics.”

8/ “Yes.”

9/ “Yes, very useful.”

10/ “Topics interesting, no time to go in depth.”

11/ -

3. Implementation: Have you introduced the solutions proposed during the training to the activities of your company? If not, what were the difficulties?

1/ "No."

2/ "Yes. Mainly website positioning."

3/ "No difficulties."

4/ "We implement. We build the team."

5/ "Yes, I had no difficulties."

6/ "No, because I had nothing to implement."

7/ "The company is still in the process of building a website. It plans to apply digitization strategies in the next step."

8/ "Yes. A google browser has posted information about the company, also on google maps. The company is developing its profile on FB."

9/ "No, time is needed."

10/ "During."

11/ "We work with our IT specialist."

4. Future activities: What skills, knowledge and resources do you need for your company to implement the solutions presented during the training?

1/ "Not applicable."

2/ "More people understanding innovation and digitalisation."

3/ -

4/ "Facebook, Instagram."

5/ "Implementing and learning new artificial intelligence."

6/ "Specific information on internet positioning e.g.."

7/ "Human resources."

8/ "Management of advertisements and sponsored posts on FB."

9/ "1:1 or more workshop-based training on introducing innovation and digitisation solutions, follow -up."

10/ "During."

11/ "We implement."



5. Training: What could have been done differently? What should have been done differently? What should not be changed?

1/ "No."

2/ "Longer practical exercises were missing."

3/ "For me it was enough."

4/ "Everything is ok."

5/ "The gentleman in charge has extensive knowledge and presented it in an interesting way. I enjoyed it very much, thank you."

6/ -

7/ "I have no comments."

8/ "More practical activities.

More hours of training so that the material is spread over a longer period of time."

9/ "The training was very interesting but would have been more effective if there had been more time for individual trades or companies, more concrete exercises or mentoring."

10/ "More training hours."

11/ "The final survey should be on line."

The analysis of responses received from enterprises in the period of 1-3 months after the training shows the high effectiveness of the training. The assessment of the **usefulness** of the training for the company's operations was assessed very positively. In particular, attention was paid to the introduction of improvements in the functioning of the company in terms of better communication with customers.

The training showed the company how they can encourage customers to provide feedback. The usefulness of the training was confirmed in the statement that the acquired skills are used in dealing with customers to ensure good and professional service. The respondents also showed that they became interested in the topic of innovation in general and want to deepen their knowledge in this area.

The comments emphasized the importance of introducing innovations in the enterprise. It was recognized that the training was also useful in the context of many interesting discussions on the needs of customers and reaching customers and exchanging this information between the participants of the training. The interlocutors also emphasized the acquired knowledge, which they use in the field of innovation and digitization.

Only one of the respondents had a negative opinion on the usefulness of the training for their business, which was justified by the fact that their company is not very innovative.

In assessing the **content** of the training and possible shortcomings, most of the interlocutors indicated that the issues and topics discussed during the training were in line with the needs of the company. Entrepreneurs indicated that the training was interesting and broadened their knowledge in the subject. None of the participants of the training reported proposals for changes or possible deficiencies in the training.

In the next part of the interview, the question was asked whether the proposed concept had been **implemented** in the company of the training participant. In this regard, opinions were divided. Some of the respondents definitely stated that the learned solutions were implemented in the company's operations. The limitation resulting from the size of the enterprise is noteworthy. Small enterprises emphasized that not all solutions can be implemented in their operations due to the typical service activity and because they run a small plant. Another indicated limitation is the low innovativeness of enterprises. One of the respondents emphasized that his company is not very innovative and the recipients are people who rarely use innovative novelties. Some of the respondents are in the phase of preparing to implement the solution learned during the training. For this purpose, a team was formed to deal with the topic and prepare a plan for future action. In addition, the team has started collecting customer feedback and intends to create personalized services.

The next part of the interview was devoted to **future activities**. The question was what skills, knowledge and resources are needed for companies to implement the solutions presented during the training. Most of the training participants indicated that they needed more knowledge about new technologies and financial resources to implement innovative solutions. Entrepreneurs also expect funds allocated for co-financing innovative activities. Attention was also paid to the ability to quickly adapt to the needs of new customers. In addition, it was indicated that it is necessary to involve employees from lower levels of the organization in this type of training.

The last question in the interview was about **suggestions for changes** and improvements to improve the training in the future. The vast majority of interviewees expressed very positive opinions about the training. It was pointed out that in the future it is worth paying attention to industry diversity and tailoring training to specific industries.

#### 4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The conclusions of the evaluation research will contribute to improve the quality and especially the effectiveness of training, show the limitations of the training model and indicate the direction for further activities.

Interpretation of data based on the survey results we can conclude that the final results of the training, by the scope of the evaluation questions, indicate that the trainings were very successful, and teachers and students were totally satisfied with the training program.

All aspects that were evaluated improved after the end of the training and then after 1-3 months from the training. The overall atmosphere was encouraging in all trainings (trainees 4.94, teachers 5.0)<sup>24</sup> for all project partners. In all trainings trainees were satisfied with the training program in all training (4.79). In addition to that, the organization of the training was satisfactory (4,85). Respondents' opinions indicated that the training fulfilled the expectations of the trainees (4.62) and the skills acquired during the training can be useful to trainees' everyday work (4,67). The trainees in every training agreed that the training improved trainees' knowledge within the topic of the training (4,8). The teachers were satisfied with trainees' knowledge at the end of the training (4.75).

In the analysis of the answers obtained, it is worth paying attention to the rather low level of satisfaction regarding the use of the acquired knowledge in everyday work. It can be considered that these were the lowest scores compared to other evaluated aspects. Participants of the training at PP4 WIRP assessed the prospect of using the acquired knowledge in everyday work at the level of 4.55. Similar results at the level of 4.46 were recorded in PP9 DIRW also in Poland in the assessment of the possibility of using acquired knowledge and skills in everyday work. This may be due to other limitations indicated in the study conducted 1-3 months after the training. Only participants from PP7 IPOSZ from Hungary evaluated for 5.0 opportunity for using knowledge from the training. In this case there were also some comments according to future possibility for implementation new solution: *"I am very curious about the results of the solutions learned in the training. I'm hopeful, but I'd like to see concrete results."*

The trainees pointed changes, which should be considered in such type of trainings in the future. The main comments concerned the too short duration of the training: *"In my opinion, the training time should be extended, because all the information was interesting and important. Thank you for conducting the training and I am asking for more:)"* and other comment: *"Spread the material out over more hours so that it can be explained in more depth and technically practiced."*

The trainees expected fast economic results after training: *"The training was very useful. I look forward to the improved economic results."* and other: *"I am very curious about the results of the solutions learned in the training. I'm hopeful, but I'd like to see concrete results."* The teachers were moderately satisfied (4.0) with trainees' knowledge at the beginning of the training, which is actually presumable. Teachers

---

<sup>24</sup> average result calculated on the basis of all trainings

were very satisfied with the close cooperation with trainees (5.0) in the beginning of the training. Although, highlighted the different levels of knowledge: *“The knowledge, skills, abilities, and background of the trainees are very different. Therefore, something was completely new to one, while it was familiar to another.”* All the teachers were convinced that trainees acquired enough knowledge (5.0). The training improved trainees’ ability (total trainees 4.64, in contrast in PP9 – 4.23). This declaration is important taking about practical using of the concept.

**The trainers were contented with the training program in total (4.79), but in contrast in some trainings like in PP4 – 4.83, PP7 – 4.93, PP9 – 4.61. Participants of the training, apart from the indicated comments regarding the extension of the duration of the training, did not indicate any other proposals for changes that should be introduced in the training program in the future.**

The effectiveness of the training was also evaluated in the perspective of 1 - 3 months after the training. This approach was aimed at evaluating the effects of the training, which translated into practical results in the company's operations.

The analysis of responses received from enterprises in the period of 1-3 months after the training shows the high effectiveness of the training. The assessment of the **usefulness** of the training for the company's operations was assessed very positively in every country. In particular, attention was paid to the improvements in the functioning of the company in terms of better cooperation with customers by innovation development. Some statements from the participants in training PP4 stated that: *“The “Customer-Centered Innovation” training was very useful for my company, because it showed me what skills I can use in dealing with customers to provide them with good and professional service.”*

Entrepreneurs emphasized in their statements the need to introduce innovations taking into account the needs of the consumer. This approach ultimately leads to the optimization of the company's innovation strategy, because new solutions are designed to meet the needs of the consumer. Often it is the consumer who initiates the creation of a new solution: *“The training turned out to be very useful. I learned how important it is to introduce innovations. I exchanged experiences with entrepreneurs from various industries. During the training, there were many interesting discussions about customer needs and how we can reach them.”*

The trainee’s declarations were not so optimistic in all countries. Participants from the PP6 IBC partner in Denmark were skeptical about the possibilities of implementation and the usefulness of the training for business. They stated: *“In general, is it difficult already to express whether it has yielded anything. Measured in terms of the individual innovation skills of those participants, the answer is yes. But transferred to their teams/organizations, the answer is limited. And why; simply because we still did not*

*have the time or/and opportunity to arrange a workshop regarding innovation. (But when the time and opportunity is there, we will). For the persons who participant we are ready to improve an innovation workshop for their colleges/teams.”*

More optimistic were participants from Hungary and Poland. By PP6 IPOSZ participants already implemented some ideas they learned during the training: *“Yes, it was helpful because it provided tangible help that helped me move forward. My communication with customers has improved. I know that how I should approach different target groups.”* or *“It was very helpful. The marketing image and my attitude towards marketing have changed, I consider it much more important than before. Regarding the appearance of the website, I received advice with which I can make my website even more visited.”*

Similar opinion has polish enterprises from PP9 DIRW. All answers about usefulness of the training were positive. All interviewees use knowledge and ability form the training in business activity. Some enterprises have chosen topics they were interested in that e.g.: *“It was useful, interestingly delivered training. I was most interested in artificial intelligence AI. I will make use of its resources.”*

The training showed the company how they can encourage customers to provide feedback. The usefulness of the training was confirmed in the statement that the acquired skills are used in dealing with customers to ensure good and professional service. The respondents also showed that they became interested in the topic of innovation in general and want to deepen their knowledge in this area. Participants from PP4 WIRP stated: *“We are satisfied with taking part in the training. We have improved our knowledge of innovation and digitization, which are essential in today's market. We learned about many opportunities that we had not heard of before, and they are of great importance, among others with advertising and achieved reach. All doubts were clarified.”*

The comments emphasized the importance of introducing innovations in the enterprise. It was recognized that the training was also useful in the context of many interesting discussions on the needs of customers and reaching customers and exchanging this information between the participants of the training. The interlocutors also emphasized the acquired knowledge, which they use in the field of innovation and digitization.

Only one of the respondents had a negative opinion on the usefulness of the training for their business, which was justified by the fact that their company is not very innovative.

In assessing the **content** of the training and possible shortcomings, most of the interviewee indicated that the issues and topics discussed during the training were in line with the needs of the company. Entrepreneurs indicated that the training was interesting and broadened their knowledge in the subject. None of the participants of the training reported proposals for changes or possible deficiencies in the training. Participants



from PP4 WIRP for the question, if is something missing, almost all answered: *“There was nothing missing.”*

The same opinion had participants from other project partners. Participants from PP6 IBC pointed that: *“It could of course be more industry oriented, but the basic innovative skills to carry out an innovative process have been acquired.”*

Participants of the Hungarian PP7 IPOSZ training drew attention to the current technological trends and new solutions that can be added to the next editions of the training, e.g. : *“This training was complex. But of course, we can always expand the digital tools. Now, for example, I would like to get to know the advertising platform tik tok better.”*

In the next part of the interview, the question was asked whether the proposed concept had been **implemented** in the company of the training participant. In this regard, opinions were divided. Some of the respondents definitely stated that the learned solutions were implemented in the company's operations, e.g. participants from training realized by PP4 WIRD stated: *“The process of innovating is very difficult, but together with the team we pored over the topic and prepared a roadmap for the future, which assumes collecting feedback from customers and creating personalized services.”* The enterprises from PP7 IPOSZ from Hungary try to implement new solution known from the training, but there is other barriers: *“We start to plan the content marketing. Time is the biggest difficulty. Inflation and price increase in the raw materials and overheads mean a great problem now.”*

Similarly, to Hungarian partner, also polish enterprises try to introduce new solution in their business activity. Participants from PP9 DIRW stated: *“Yes. A google browser has posted information about the company, also on google maps. The company is developing its profile on FB.”*

Less optimistic were participants from PP6 IBC from Denmark and answered for the question about implementation: *“No unfortunately because there was no time and opportunity.”*

The limitation resulting from the size of the enterprise is noteworthy. Small enterprises emphasized that not all solutions can be implemented in their operations due to the typical service activity and because they run a small plant. Another indicated limitation is the low innovativeness of enterprises. One of the respondents emphasized that his company is not very innovative, and the recipients are people who rarely use innovative novelties. Some of the respondents are in the phase of preparing to implement the solution learned during the training. For this purpose, a team was formed to deal with the topic and prepare a plan for future action. In addition, the team has started collecting customer feedback and intends to create personalized services.



The next part of the interview was devoted to **future activities**. The question was what skills, knowledge and resources are needed for companies to implement the solutions presented during the training. Most of the training participants indicated that they needed more knowledge about new technologies and financial resources to implement innovative solutions. Participants from PP4 WIRP stated: *“In the future, our company intends to take advantage of such training opportunities more often, and we also want to involve lower-level employees to take part in the classes to motivate them to develop. We plan to invest in better quality computer equipment.”* Entrepreneurs also expect funds allocated for co-financing innovative activities. Attention was also paid to the ability to quickly adapt to the needs of new customers. In addition, it was indicated that it is necessary to involve employees from lower levels of the organization in this type of training.

The last question in the interview was about **suggestions for changes** and improvements to improve the training in the future. The vast majority of interviewees expressed very positive opinions about the training. It was pointed out that in the future it is worth paying attention to industry diversity and tailoring training to specific industries. The participants of the training in Denmark PP6 IBC pointed that: *“The training could have been longer, but in general everything was good, perfect and not least - funny.”* Generally, opinion about training in every country was very optimistic, e.g. in Hungarian participants from PP7 IPOSZ stated: *“Everything was very good, nothing needs to be changed. In fact, I have never been on such a useful course. It would be even more useful if I could find two confectioner colleagues for the long term, because then I would be able to satisfy the customer’s needs really well.”*

The participants of the training in each country did not report any changes to the substantive scope and program of the training.

Based on respondents’ opinions the „Realisation of Customer-centred Innovations“ curriculum is effective, adaptable and sustainable and it can be implemented whether as a whole or by set of modules. To continue implementing further training program “Realisation of Customer-centred Innovations” curricula in tested countries and chambers/educational institutions and recommend the training and curriculum to other chamber and educational institutions.

There must be kept in mind that the survey results of teachers’ reflect usually only one teacher’s opinions and cannot be taken as a final conclusion.

Current curriculum and training program for “Customer-centred Innovations” training can be used not only nationally but also internationally. Country’s specifications and regulations need to be followed. Into consideration must be taken different demands in regards practical training quality expectations in different countries. The motivation of training the participants in the company is directly related to level of digitalisation in different countries.

Implementing the curriculum entirely will raise the number of true professionals in the field of innovation development. Knowledge-based learning outcomes indicate that a person possess after graduating the training successfully professional job-related knowledge and business and managerial skills for co-creation innovation involving customer for all process from idea to commercialization. This kind of ability is extremely necessary and awaited in building competitiveness and improve innovativeness of the SMEs in the tested countries.

Training process needs to be effective, and the practical tasks should be in accordance with theory. According to the survey results, definitely carry on using not only theoretical but also practical methods. The participants highly evaluated discussions, practical cases and real-life examples as teaching methods.

Definitely must be consider the length of the training and the continuation through coaching of the ideas submitted by the participants of the training.

The results also indicated topics that should be added to the curricula and trainings e.g. artificial intelligence, tik tok abilities. By selecting future training topics, the specificity of the sector and industry in which potential training participants operate should also be taken into account.

Some suggestion for improving effectiveness of the training from this topic gave also project partners. According to the opinion from PP9 DIRW, a key aspect of the ICIinSME project is its compliance with the implementation of the Fourth Industrial Revolution program, the so-called Industry 4.0, related to the digitalization of the economy and innovation, especially in SMEs. The purpose of conducting two training courses (Innovation and Digitization) was to encourage representatives of SMEs to develop and strengthen innovation, focused on the implementation of product or process innovation and the digitization and transformation of enterprises towards sustainable development, as well as the internationalization of enterprises and the increase in human resources competencies (in general, anything that changes business for the better).

Analyzing the statements of training participants, it can be concluded that innovation is not often introduced in SMEs because SMEs rely more on informal, and therefore difficult to measure, R&D activities and use external sources of knowledge (consulting services and licenses) less frequently than corporations. This phenomenon reflects the lower capacity of SMEs to absorb external knowledge. Nevertheless, enterprises from this sector introduce innovations and use this as an element of gaining and maintaining their position on the market.

Brilliant, motivated and experienced employees are an important link in the organization's innovation process and an important role in the implementation of innovation in SMEs is played by the organization's culture.

Employees and managers (owners) of small and medium-sized enterprises should, therefore, be willing, inclined and able to undertake activities as part of the company's innovation process, which requires their acceptance and involvement. Furthermore, innovation should be embedded in the company's strategy - already at the stage of generating new ideas, the company should have clearly defined goals regarding the business areas or market segments in which it would like to develop by creating innovations. A clear strategy based on reliable information allows innovation activities to be properly targeted and reduces the loss of time and other resources. Therefore, a very important prerequisite for creating successful innovations is continuous market research and collecting customer feedback, as well as gaining knowledge about potential innovations from other external sources.

Implementing innovation in SMEs for some of training participants is not easy because:

- SMEs have very limited resources (including financial);
- they must use their resources properly, as failures can cause problems for the survival of the company;
- are characterized by a low level of professionalism in innovation management;
- are not strategically oriented;
- are often unable to develop an innovation implementation plan due to an excess of daily duties with limited human resources;
- do not have innovation competences within their structures;
- are dependent on the work of individual employees.

Generally speaking, problems with the implementation of innovation in SMEs are often due to the fact that the resources - whether tangible (e.g. machinery, financial resources) or intangible (e.g. employee and owner/manager competencies) that these firms could allocate to the development of innovation - are limited. At the same time, problems with the availability of particular types of resources constrain the innovativeness of these companies in different ways and in different areas:

- marketing. Conquering new markets requires financial resources and knowledge - if a company is unable to obtain these resources for marketing purposes, it cannot enter new markets.
- management - SME owners often do not have adequate managerial training and their management know-how is limited. The lack of such knowledge and skills may result in a lack of innovation, or its incompetent implementation.
- external communication - this in turn is associated with a lack of time and an excessive burden of daily responsibilities, which may result in the non-use of external sources of information and knowledge, e.g. from trade fairs or trade journals.

- highly qualified human resources. Difficulties for SMEs to attract specialists are, among other things, due to the fact that they compete for human resources with large companies, which often offer higher salaries and better general working conditions.
- finance - innovation activities can be costly due to the high failure rate, complexity and non-linearity, and often the significant investment required to carry them out.
- Economies of scale - some activities require large-scale production, which SME companies are unable to offer in order to remain competitive in the market.
- growth - innovation can contribute to rapid growth, which in turn requires financial resources that are difficult for small and medium-sized enterprises to access.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the implementation of innovations in the SME sector is becoming a necessity. The types of introduced solutions or the scale of innovativeness may vary, however, one may risk a thesis that achieving a permanent competitive advantage on the market will not be possible in the future if one is not an innovator in a certain field.

Project partner PP7 IPOSZ also *emphasized some observation during the realization of the training named as weaknesses of the training as seen by the participants. In fact, it is not about the weaknesses of the training, but rather about the weaknesses of the SME sector in the implementation of the concept of "Customer-centred Innovation" as well as in building and implementing an innovation strategy in general:*

“According to our assessment, one of the peculiarities and not a weakness of the training was that it was attended by the smallest enterprises. In this way, we were able to get to know their reactions and test the training at their level of development. It is likely that in companies with more employees, the training could provide many other experiences. We were glad that such small businesses took part in the training, because in Hungary businesses with very few employees make up the largest part of businesses. The use of offline and online digital marketing processes at the same time in the case of such small businesses usually exceeds their financial capabilities, although it is clear that the simultaneous use of both can be really effective. They often do not understand the use of digital tools in a small business. For such digital tasks, they need external service providers who can provide immediate assistance. But short-term, practice-oriented training courses, where small businesses can improve their digital skills, can help a lot here. Having a young person in the family who can bring these digital skills into the operation of the business can help a lot also. There is still a need for many more similar trainings offering industry-specific solutions in order to convince the masses of micro and small enterprises. For this, it would be very important to start state support programs in this area as well.”

The quoted observations show, on the one hand, the weaknesses of smaller enterprises, and on the other hand, a certain advantage in flexibility and speed of operation. It can be concluded that the SME sector will still need a lot of educational support, in particular with the fast-paced technological changes.

## Online consulting for SMEs in Hungary<sup>25</sup>

### 1. Introduction

The two training programs of the ICLinSMEs project are linked to innovation support and the implementation of development projects in SMEs during the longer phases of on-the-job learning with accompanying coaching. Linked to this, the Hungarian partner Ipartestületek Országos Szövetsége (IPOSZ) has very successfully developed and regularly implemented regular online guidance for SMEs. This regular online counselling service for SMEs combined with 20-part further training courses was included in the WPs 3 and 5. The thematic elements of this training were developed by the IPOSZ and taken into account the experiences of the previous trainings that IPOSZ implemented in the project, namely WP3 Digitalization training and WP5 Customer-centered innovations training. The regular online counselling service consisted relevant information for micro and small businesses, providing them with up-to-date digital skills. Each counselling day, at first, we held an introductory lecture on a designated digital topic, which was followed by a Questions-Answers session where the participants received answers to their questions. They received individual counselling service from the trainer.

IPOSZ organized this consulting for a wide circle of entrepreneurs, where many different professionals were present, since the investigated topics affect all professions equally with minor or major differences. We named twenty training topics in advance, which we updated even during the implementation period. We focused on useful digital solutions available for free, but we also presented some digital solutions available for payment. Given that many business activities are today largely implemented through digital applications, the improving of digital skills is useful for all entrepreneurs.

The weekly online counselling service covered the following topics:

- Digital options for business operations
- Online customer acquisition
- Website operation, structure, responsive web design
- How do we treat our customers? Customer relationship management systems
- Introducing the free-to-use platform: Google Company Profile (formerly Google My Company) in practice
- Operation and possibilities of the paid Google search advertising campaigns
- Website traffic data. How can we measure visitors?
- Presentation of free-to-use platforms: G-mail, Google calendar
- Introducing the free-to-use platform: Google DRIVE (Sheets, Docs) Online file storage and office applications

---

<sup>25</sup> Compiled by Tamás Rettich, Ipartestületek Országos Szövetsége, Hungary



- Presentation of a free-to-use platform: Google FORM
- E-mail marketing operation, newsletter sending systems. Advantages, possibilities and problems of a newsletter sending system.
- GDPR in the digital space (data protection, imprint, etc.)
- Security awareness, data security
- Search engine optimization
- Paid Google search ads in practice
- Operation of web shops - Rent or develop?
- Landing page anatomy. - What does a well-structured landing page look like?

## 2. Period of implementation

The timing of the regular online counselling system was adapted to the previous two trainings implemented in the project as we wanted to incorporate those experiences into this new online service.

After the necessary preparatory, organizational and advertising steps, we held the first online counselling session on Thursday, February 02, 2023. After that, for 20 weeks, every Thursday from 9 a.m., we held online counselling combined with training. Each time, the service usually lasts two hours. Of course, we generated a separate email address for this service, where the participants could send their questions and where from they received direct answers from the instructor, basically online.

During the implementation, the demand arose from our members that as not everyone could attend the online counselling days in person due to the early morning time, so they asked us to repeat the whole online counselling days and to continue the online counselling system as well. From September 2023, now as a permanent service independently from a project we will continue this service.

Brief explanation of how the training is to be classified in the national system of continuing vocational training, EQF level, significance of usability on the labor market, significance for activities in companies, etc.

The regular online counselling and the related training fits into the overall adult-education phase of the national system of trainings, but a direct EQF level cannot be classified to it. It is an out-of-school training organized by IPOSZ.

This regular online counselling perfectly explained the basics digital solutions that could help the everyday processes of SMEs, tailored to the company's needs. The counselling service combined with training provided knowledge on digitalization and marketing activities via individual and teamwork. The topics used in the training could be used of course also in the training of enterprises of other sizes. This training is valuable not only for micro-enterprises, but also for medium-sized enterprises. It should be emphasized that this service has elements that can be used to develop certain basic digital skills among the whole population and thus help to develop a better digitalized

relationship between businesses and consumers. The success of this training also proves that there is a significant demand for practice-oriented training.

### 3. Special features of the implementation

The main target group of this online service combined with training were micro-enterprises, as our members mainly come from this sector. In this period affected by war and high inflation, this entrepreneurial layer is well characterized by the fact that it waits extremely cautiously with regard to all kinds of development.

Micro-enterprises are the biggest laggards when considering the digital foundations of everyday business operation. Or on the other side: if they manage to modernize their business processes with the digitalization toolkit, then they have the greatest development potential.

This weekly online counselling system was a completely new service of IPOSZ in the field of digitalization. However, it already had precedents in other areas. It is typical for the entire world that the Covid epidemic has transferred a wide range of activities into the online space. This also happened in the world of corporate training and business consulting.

The distinct development and promotion need of SMEs have led IPOSZ to organize a weekly online consultancy specifically in the field of digitalization, where companies can learn week by week about completely new, modern digital solutions that can improve their own business and increase the efficiency of their processes. The micro and small companies mainly operate in a specific business area. But it is extremely important for them to be able to expand beyond their usual customer base, by using the latest digital technologies.

Such short-term courses combined with tailor-made consultation must be strengthened in company further education. This project was a huge help to get decision-makers aware of the need to finance similar short-term additional trainings, online counselling systems.

The range of companies participating in the weekly sessions was constantly changing, but there was a central core that participated in the counselling every week.

### 4. Admission and organization

A big advantage of the regular online counselling service was that, although the majority of the participating companies were small, but they covered a very wide spectrum of the economy, from baker to photographer til virtual assistant. The general elements of digitalization can be used for a wide variety of professions and of course supplemented with professional specifics. During the selection, we also emphasized that both

older and younger people can participate in this course. Everyone can get answers to their questions during the online counselling service.

The regular online counselling service was advertised on many different channels. First of all, we prepared a 25-minute interview on one of the popular television channels with the leading expert of the consultancy, as well as with the owner of a modern small business which already use digital solutions in their daily business life. Secondly, we prepared a half-minute radio advertisement, which was played dozens of times over 3 days on the two most popular radio stations in Hungary. Of course, we also announced the new online service on the IPOSZ website, as well as we informed IPOSZ member organizations by email. Altogether 121 registered participants applied via these advertisements' channels. Direct marketing strategies (phone calls and e-mails and many face-to-face conversations) were also used to reach the participants. Our 160 trade associations were notified about the planned regular online counselling, and we also informed our national branch organizations about it several times. The 121 registered participants came from different regions of the country.

We continuously provided information on the topic of the current week on the IPOSZ website and Facebook page.

At various conferences and industry meetings, we constantly informed business managers and craftsmen that it is worth joining the 20-week counselling series even later.

On the application form, we asked everyone if they had a website or a Facebook page. The answers received show a very interesting reflection on the digital development of Hungarian small businesses.

Of the 121 registered participants, 92 were women and 29 were men. Which means that 76% of registered participants were women.

This is quite an astonishing figure. Today, when digital development is one of the most important indicators of our economic development, we could experience that women entrepreneurs are predominantly more interested in digitalization than male entrepreneurs. This is a special data about micro and small enterprises in Hungary.

This is data that we definitely need to think further.

What could be the reasons of this, what trends does all this show?

The development of the digital skills of businesses is a primary issue in order to increase their competitiveness. These participation figures show that women entrepreneurs will be the shapers of the economic life of the future to a much greater extent than we think today. These data also show that much more attention should be paid to address male entrepreneurs and educate them with modern digital skills.

Each online counselling day started at 9:00 a.m. and dealt with a given digitalization topic each week. The topics of each counselling day were announced in advance. All participants knew exactly which topic they will learn that week.

The instructor at first gave a 45 - 60-minute introductory lecture. Afterwards, the participants could ask their questions about the topic, but of course they could also ask questions during the presentation. This informal consultation lasted 1-1.5 hours each time. It was also possible for the participants to ask their questions by email. We have created a separate email address for this consulting service. The instructor answered these questions by email. And on the next counselling day he presented the answers given to the most important questions to the other participants for education purposes. After the counselling days, the slides of the introductory presentation were sent to the registered participants.

During the 20 educational days, a total of approx. 20 hours of lectures were held. This was followed by about 20-25 hours of counselling in the online group, and a total of approx. 40-45 hours of individual counselling via the designated email address.

On Monday mornings before each counselling day, we sent the current week's topic and the online login password to those who registered.

We then sent this login password to everyone on early Thursday mornings so that everyone could easily find it at 9 a.m., when the counselling started.

The weekly online counselling service started on February 2 and lasted for 20 weeks on the following days with the following topics:

02 February	Digital options for business operations
09 February	Online customer acquisition
16 February	Website operation, structure, responsive web design
23 February	How do we treat our customers? Customer relationship management systems
02 March	Introducing the free-to-use platform: Google Company Profile (formerly Google My Company) in practice
09 March	Operation and possibilities of the paid Google search advertising campaigns
23 March	Website traffic data. How can we measure visitors?
30 March	Presentation of free-to-use platforms: G-mail, Google calendar
06 April	Introducing the free-to-use platform: Google DRIVE (Sheets, Docs) Online file storage and office applications
13 April	Presentation of a free-to-use platform: Google FORM
20 April	E-mail marketing operation, newsletter sending systems. Advantages, possibilities and problems of a newsletter sending system.
27 April	GDPR in the digital space (data protection, imprint, etc.)
04 May	Security awareness, data security
11 May	Search engine optimization
18 May	Paid Google search ads in practice

25 May	Operation of web shops - Rent or develop?
01 June	Landing page anatomy. - What does a well-structured landing page look like?
08 June	Customer acquisition online
15 June	Website operation, structure, responsive web design

Originally, we planned to present a separate topic for each counselling. But in the end, on the last two counselling days, we repeated the two most popular lectures, as this was specifically requested by the participants.

The trainer himself came from the University of Győr, department of IT with whom the local organization of IPOSZ had previously implemented company-oriented trainings to expand the IT and digital knowledge of businesses. This previous relationship guaranteed that the instructor is aware of the digital knowledge, and the needs and possibilities of micro and small businesses.

We have selected an instructor who is capable of holding similar trainings online later, if there is a need for it.

The organization of the implementation was carried out by the staff of IPOSZ together with the experts of regional and branch member institution of IPOSZ which were involved in the implementation.

The experiences of the two trainings implemented in the project and the coaching program that followed them clearly showed that the digital skills of Hungarian micro and small businesses still need to be developed. We also received a clear request from our member companies to help develop their digital skills with targeted, short-term training. Based on the answers received during the counselling days, many businesses were able to start the digital development of their own businesses. They learned new methods how to reach new markets and increase their digital presence.

This opportunity for individual coaching tailored to the business has not ended, as companies can still contact the instructor and also the IPOSZ. The project provided an extra opportunity for IPOSZ to start a new service, an online counselling system. It became clear that businesses need this help. This service must be continued.

## 5. Main Findings and Conclusions

We have already summarized certain conclusions in the points above. In addition, we must emphasize once again that much more projects, support, information, persuasion and services are needed in order to speed up the catching up of the micro business sector in this area. Our very important comment is that this is extremely necessary, because precisely the small businesses that are in direct contact with their consumers

and are particularly good at developing their products and services by getting to know the consumer needs obtained by digital solutions.

The strength of the training, in our opinion, is exactly what we explained earlier, that we managed to attract companies working in the most diverse professions to the training and this helped that the general digital elements could be better defined during the training and counselling process.

For this training and counselling, the instructor basically came from the university and research world. It was a very significant experience for us. Small businesses themselves are rarely able to define their own development directions as accurately as a university lecturer can.

This training was a very good example of how the economic life of small businesses can be significantly helped by receiving guidance from a university-level consultant.

Hints for future use, suggestions for possible improvements or further developments  
 In any case, the practice should continue that university lecturers help small businesses with their practical advice. Of course, this also helps the work of the universities, as they receive direct confirmation of the usability of the methods they propose. During the counselling, we were able to identify the digital competencies that are still largely missing from the daily operations of small businesses. Based on all these experiences, we will be able to continue our weekly online counselling system.

We recommend applying for a project that could facilitate the operation of such online services for organizations like IPOSZ. Organizations that represent family, micro and small businesses do not have a team of experts that can provide specialized services, so we have to use external experts on a contract basis from outside.

We also recommend thinking in the direction of how the generally proven digital procedures could be effectively supplemented with the special needs of different professional sectors.

During the course, there was constant feedback that, on the one hand, this training should be continued, and even more detailed, more practical knowledge should be given to the participating businesses. It was also clearly stated that this 20-week training and counselling must be repeated during the fall.