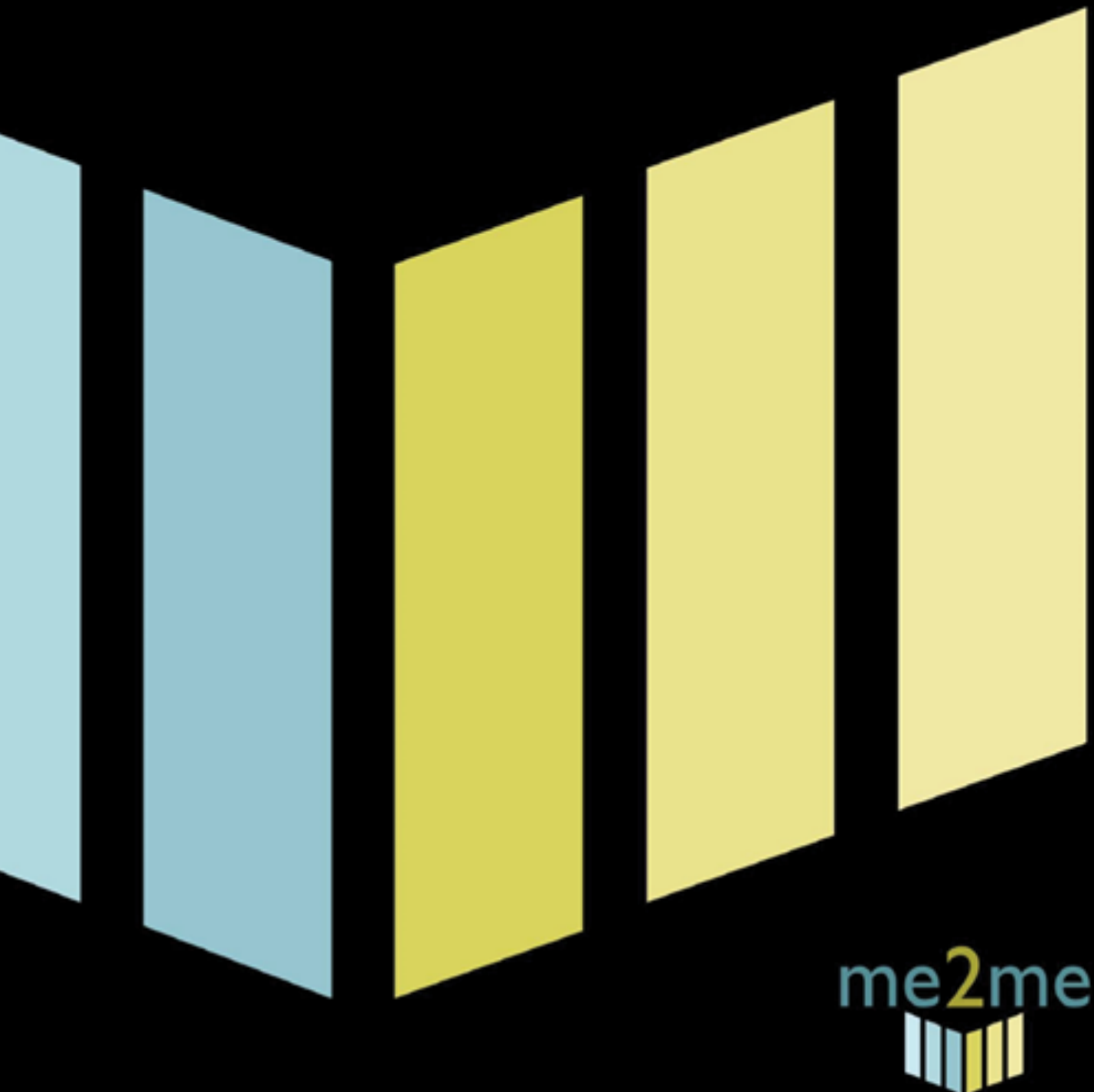


CPD Curriculum Resources for VET Professionals





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Handbook

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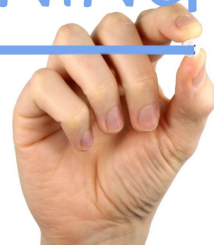
Developed by the Me2Me Project Consortium

2019

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MODULE 1

THE ME2ME CURRICULUM – WHAT IS IT AND HOW TO USE IT?

DELIVERY METHOD OF THE MODULE: 5H, FACE-TO-FACE LEARNING

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

- ✓ DEFINING OF THE ME2ME CURRICULUM.
- ✓ HAVING KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE LEARNING OUTCOMES OF EACH MODULE.
- ✓ EXPLAINING HOW CAN BE USED THE ME2ME CURRICULUM FOR TRAINING AND EDUCATION.
- ✓ INSTRUCT TRAINEES USING ME2ME CURRICULUM.
- ✓ BEING ABLE TO EVALUATE ME2ME CURRICULUM USE.

Introduction

This module aims to support VET professionals to use Me2Me Curriculum for training and education. The ME2ME Curriculum places a significant emphasis on underpinning the reputation, professionalism and standing of VET professionals especially where working in on-line, where interactive environments are concerned.

Thus, the module will address the following questions:

- ✓ What are the scope and objectives of Me2Me Curriculum?
- ✓ What is the content of the Curriculum and how was it developed?
- ✓ How to use ME2ME curriculum as learning tool in training and education?

Module Overview

The scope of the ME2ME Curriculum is to support VET professionals working with micro-enterprises but also to support VET professionals to work in non-conventional environments.

The Me2ME Curriculum was developed based on the empirical findings produced during the research phase of the project reflected by TRANSNATIONAL AUDIT AND RESEARCH REPORTS. The data was collected with the help of the 8 partner countries – Poland, Lithuania, The United Kingdom, Hungary, Romania, Ireland, The Czech Republic and Finland. Based on the transnational empirical findings, the most important skills for running a successful business were identified, for both targeted groups: VET professionals working with micro-enterprises and representatives of micro-enterprises. Thus, the **design - development - testing process** responds to the learning needs identified in the

research phase and by regular peer reviews conducted with the local stakeholder forums.

The CPD Curriculum has **9 modules**, as it follows: 1 module regarding the media production, 1 module for underpinning the reputation and professionalism of the VET professionals, 1 module for the pedagogical issues/framework and 6 modules regarding theoretical elements of the curriculum (skills for running a business). CPD Curriculum content is:

- ✓ **M1: The ME2ME Curriculum – WHAT is it and HOW to use it?**
- ✓ **M2: WHAT is Peer-to-Peer Learning?**
- ✓ **M3: HOW to produce the media-rich, mini-learning-format resource**
- ✓ **M4: Entrepreneurship and strategic management**
- ✓ **M5: Marketing and Sales**
- ✓ **M6: Finance and business performance assessment**
- ✓ **M7: People - the core asset of the business**
- ✓ **M8: External communication and networking in businesses**
- ✓ **M9: Problem solving in businesses – CASE STUDY**

The CPD Curriculum comprises **100 hours of training** made up of **35 hours of face-to-face instruction** focusing on the modules to support the development of media-rich mini-learning-format resources and **65 hours of self directed on-line learning** addressing the more pedagogical and theoretical elements of the curriculum. The 65 hours of self directed on-line learning will not require any tutor/trainer, because in the CPD Curriculum we will provide links for the existing resources and materials and explanations on how to use them.

Business owners are always complaining that course lengths are too long; that the information they require is buried in a full curriculum; that learning materials are not accessible or presented in lay-man's language. Developing the media production skills of VET professionals to enable them produce high quality, engaging, bite-sized mini-learning-format resources that are media rich and accessible on a wide range of fixed and mobile platforms represents a significant innovation. The VET professionals will develop media-rich mini-learning-format resources addressed to specific skill needs in the SME sector, in order to help in making the VET more responsive to the business needs.

The indicative content

The ME2ME Curriculum – WHAT is it and HOW to use it?

This module will support the VET professionals to understand, use and evaluate the usage of Me2Me2 CPD Curriculum. Within this module the following will be approached: (1) The ME2ME curriculum – Scope, objectives and principles, (2)

The content of ME2ME curriculum, (3) Using the ME2ME curriculum as learning tool in training and education of the VET professionals.

WHAT is Peer-to-Peer Learning?

This module will allow the VET professionals to acquire the skills needed to facilitate peer-to-peer learning networks for the micro-enterprise owners. In this respect, during this module, the learners will be trained about the following: (1) Getting peers to engage fully into the process, (2) Introduction to Peer-to-Peer Learning – definition and content, (3) Peer-to-Peer learning strategy, (4) Models of peer-to-peer learning, (5) Learning tools used in Peer-to-Peer Learning.

HOW to produce the media-rich, mini-learning-format resource

The module will support the development of VET professional skills regarding producing the media-rich mini-learning-format resources addressed to micro-enterprise owners. Within this module, the following topics will be approached: (1) Introduction to Mini-Learning and Adult Learning Theory, (2) Training Needs of Micro-enterprise Owners, (3) Developing Content for a Mini-Learning Format Resource, (4) Producing Mini-Learning Format Resources, (5) Presenting Mini-Learning Format Resources, (6) Evaluation and Assessment for Mini-Learning Format Resources.

Entrepreneurship and strategic management

This module will provide skills for running a business. Within the module the learners will approach the following topics: (1) Opportunities and challenges of entrepreneurship, (2) Opportunity recognition, business idea and feasibility, (3) Customer Segmentation, Value Proposition and Business Model Canvas, (4) Building the business plan, (5) The business life cycle and business development strategies matrix, (6) Business strategy and strategic planning process.

Marketing and Sales

This module will allow learners to acquire business related skills regarding marketing and sale by approaching topics as follow: (1) Introduction to marketing, (2) New trends and developments in marketing, (3) The marketing environment components and scanning process, (4) Market analysis, (5) Selecting customers segments and marketing strategy development process, (6) Usage of online marketing tools to strengthen brand image and sales, (7) The sales process. An overview of sales management tools.

Finance and business performance assessment

The module will enable micro-enterprises owners to reflect on how to review the financial needs of the business as well as how to effectively plan and manage finances, identify and use different indicators of business performance analysis. Within this module, the following will be approached: (1) The importance of

managing money, (2) Strategies for managing the money, (3) Managing the money – Money in and money out, (4) Options for financing the development of a micro-enterprise, (5) Monitoring the financial performance of a micro-enterprise, (6) Understanding business performance – Beyond the money.

People - the core asset of the business

This module will enhance the skills regarding HR management of the business. Within this module the following topics will be presented: (1) What is HR?, (2) What is internal communication?, (3) People in business, (4) HR tools, (5) Communication tools (in case of internal communication), (6) Leader communication, (7) Compensation system, (8) Remuneration and retention.

External communication and networking in businesses

Business communication and business networking are both recognized as being very important for business success. Thus, during this module learners will approach topics as follow: (1) Networking in business – stakeholders approach, (2) Integrated communication using different techniques and communication channels, (3) Eexternal communication process as face to face learning, (4) Evaluation of communication channels effectiveness

Problem solving in businesses – CASE STUDY

The problem solving skills within the business context are very important for entrepreneurs. During this module the following topics will be presented: (1) General introductions, (2) Structured and unstructured business problems, (3) Solving unstructured business problems, (4) Creative problem solving tools, (5) Case study

To learn more about Me2Me CPD Curriculum visit the **Me2Me e-learning platform**: <https://me2meproject.eu/en/learn/>



MODULE 2

WHAT IS PEER-TO-PEER LEARNING?

DELIVERY METHOD OF THE MODULE: 12H BLENDED LEARNING (3H FACE-TO-FACE / 9H ON-LINE)

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

- ✓ HAVING KNOWLEDGE OF THE PEER-TO-PEER LEARNING STRATEGIES.
- ✓ UNDERSTANDING THE MODEL OF PEER-TO-PEER LEARNING.
- ✓ EXPLAINING HOW CAN BE USED DIFFERENT MODELS OF PEER-TO-PEER LEARNING.
- ✓ INSTRUCT TRAINEES USING PEER-TO-PEER LEARNING MODELS.
- ✓ BEING ABLE TO EVALUATE MODELS OF PEER-TO-PEER LEARNING USAGE.

Introduction

This module is aiming to support micro-enterprise owners and VET professional to develop the peer-to-peer learning networks. Thus, the purpose is developing learning networks in real and virtual environments where micro-enterprise owners can share their knowledge and skills with other business owners supported by VET professionals.

So, the module will address the following questions:

- ✓ What is peer-to-peer learning?
- ✓ What are the Peer-to-Peer Learning strategies?
- ✓ How different models of peer-to-peer learning can be used?
- ✓ How models of peer-to-peer learning usage can be evaluated?

Module Overview

The scope of this module is to provide to business owners and to VET professionals a consistent support in understanding peer-to-peer learning strategies and tools in order to facilitate, but also to enhance the peer-to-peer learning networks.

What is peer-to-peer learning?

Within the *Share to Know: Furthering peer-to-peer and collaborative learning methods* (2017) it was provided the following definition of peer-to-peer learning:

“An interactive exchange that takes place at ‘eye level’ (or ‘eye-to-eye’), which is based on trust in the knowledge and experiences of all involved parties. It is a connotative type of learning that consciously uses the social process to increase learning success, and is based on the needs of the learner.”

Thus, it should be noted that first of all peer-to-peer learning is about interaction and exchanging between people (networking members). Thus, the participants are socially and professionally engaged in an exchanging process that enhances the educational experience rather than distracting or detracting from it. The social interaction between participants increases the relevance and effectiveness of the educational content, and also makes the process more empowering (*Share to Know: Furthering peer-to-peer and collaborative learning methods*, 2017). Also, Andrews M. and Manning N. (2016) sustained that this kind of learning involves individuals exchanging knowledge and experience with each other, and diffusing this learning back to their organisations to ensure an impact at a large scale.

Peer-to-peer learning is often supported by IT tools. Web 2.0 tools such as blogs allow evaluations and comments and are highly suited for peer review (Chang et al., 2008).

According to Milošević D. et al. (2002) peer-to-peer networks are networks in which peers cooperate to perform a critical function in a decentralized manner. All peers are both **consumers and providers** of resources and **can access each other directly** without intermediary peers.

Collaboration in virtual learning communities characterizes itself by heavily relying on interaction among the collaborators (Edwards, 2002; Biström, 2005). According to Yang, S. J. H. (2006) the collaborators can be instructors and learners, the interaction can be resources discovery, access, and sharing, as well as group communication and discussion, or simply any collaboration which has occurred among the instructors and learners.

Also, it is important to note that the collaboration facilitated by **peer-to-peer networks** should be enacted inside and outside of classrooms without limitation of space and time, as Yang, S. J. H. (2006) emphasis. Thus, the peer-to-peer learning can be within classroom but also within online platforms; and it can be stated that peer-to-peer networks has no geographic boundary. Anyway, many times, peer-to-peer collaboration takes place in nonconventional learning environments.

The peer-to peer learning process: about strategies and tools

How to make peer learning a success?

- ✓ **Through social learning encouragement** – social learning includes learning that happens when people observe, imitate and interact with each other. This learning method is largely informal and can be applied using digital tools that help employees to see what they do and learn from others.
- ✓ **Let learners Drive Learning** - Offering the learners more freedom on the learning process, they become more stimulated to take advantage from their preparation, and more courage to do more.
- ✓ **Mix Things Up** - encouraging variety in terms of people, topics, working environment, tools. By combining groups that do not work together and by organizing seminars followed by brainstorming and using a variety of video, audio, text, interactive webinars can disseminate information, experiences.

Peer-to-peer tools

There are many different approaches and tools that can be used in peer-to-peer learning process as follow:

- ✓ small group meetings,
- ✓ training sessions,
- ✓ joint-peer activities
- ✓ online networking,
- ✓ peer produced knowledge products,
- ✓ paired engagements,
- ✓ virtual engagements,
- ✓ large meeting groups,
- ✓ mobile devices,
- ✓ expert group peer review,
- ✓ telecommunication engagements,
- ✓ multi-peer reflection,
- ✓ expert group peer review

Andrews M. and Manning N. (2016) presented **challenges of peer-to-peer learning**:

THE PEERS: It is important to identifying 'the right' peers to engage with/involve in process. Also, it is very important to manage differences among peers (personalities, cultures, behavior, experience etc.).

INVOLVEMENT INTO THE PEER-TO-PEER LEARNING PROCESS

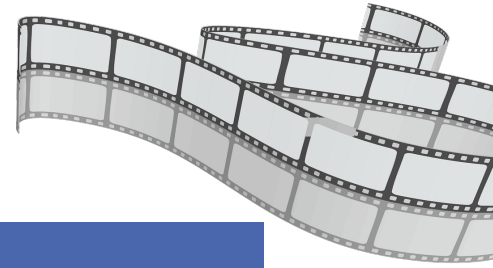
Building trust among peers is very important. Also, the equal willingness to learn among learners is important. Using the most appropriate tools will influence the success of peer-to-peer learning process.

LOGISTICS OF PEER INTERACTION

The success of peer-to-peer learning is determined by the logistics used for sharing and exchange. Thus, it is important that peers to have enough **time** to engage with other peers at face-to-face meeting but also in online meetings. Also the **materials/ equipment required** are important in supporting the process. The appropriate **venues** for face-to-face peer engagement, but also the appropriate online environments for non-face-to-face peer engagement have a great impact over the peer learning process.

To learn more about Peer-to-Peer Learning visit **the Me2Me e-learning platform:** <https://me2meproject.eu/en/learn/>





MODULE 3

HOW TO PRODUCE MEDIA-REACH, MINI-LEARNING FORMAT RESOURCES?

DELIVERY METHOD OF THE MODULE: 35H BLENDED LEARNING (27H FACE-TO-FACE/ 8H ONLINE)

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

- ✓ DEFINE MINI-LEARNING AND MICRO-LEARNING
- ✓ DEVELOP LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR MINI-LEARNING RESOURCES
- ✓ UNDERSTAND WHAT MEDIA-RICH, MINI-LEARNING FORMAT RESOURCES ARE AND WHY THEY ARE RELEVANT TO MICRO-ENTERPRISES
- ✓ CONDUCT A TRAINING NEEDS ANALYSIS EXERCISE TO INFORM THE DEVELOPMENT OF MINI-LEARNING FORMAT RESOURCES
- ✓ DEVELOP A LESSON PLAN FOR A MINI-LEARNING FORMAT RESOURCE.
- ✓ PRODUCE A MEDIA-RICH, MINI-LEARNING FORMAT RESOURCE FOR MICRO-ENTERPRISES.
- ✓ DEVELOP AN ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK FOR THEIR MINI-LEARNING FORMAT RESOURCE.

Module Overview

Internet provided people with unlimited online learning solutions, methods and tools that allow education to be facilitated from virtually anywhere. There are different approaches to education process in e-learning. Among them there are **mini-learning** and **micro-learning**. These are emergent learning strategies known for quickly closing skill and knowledge gaps. In other words, they are all about **providing e-learning in small doses, as tiny parts of training material** that the student is able to comprehend in a short time. Among the examples of mini-learning and micro-learning practices there could be mentioned: watching short instructional videos on YouTube, flashcard learning or solving training quizzes. Students learn more (and retain the knowledge better) when they study in short focused bursts than when they're forced to sit through long classes. This makes mini-learning and micro-learning effective tools of time-saving knowledge and competence transmission. The Me2Me project proposes the use of mini-learning-format resources as the tools of mini- and micro-learning addressed to entrepreneurs.

Adult education in e-learning

The teacher of adults has a different job and faces different expectations and challenges from the one who teaches children. Adults learn best when learning is focuses on them, not on the teacher. The adult education process concentrates more on helping them to learn, and it is called **andragogy**.

Maturity of the students, results in their unique characteristics that influence the role and the position of the teacher in adult-education. Adult learners are generally autonomic and goal oriented. They appreciate, when they are provided options and choice concerning the learning content or style. Very often, they have specific aims that they want to obtain in their education. They prefer to partake in learning activities that lead directly to achieving them. If they feel that their expectations aren't met, their engagement level can drop drastically. Adults are also very practical and prefer to learn through experience. They want personal relevance in learning, that's why they expect to learn practical knowledge and skills.

One of the pioneers in the study of adult learning, Malcolm Knowles, indicated five principles that help the teacher to reach best results in adult education:

- Adult learners should have clear understanding of the purpose of learning;
- Adult learners should have the freedom to choose the way and the pace of learning;
- Teacher should escape from the school-like education and allow adults to learn through their experience;
- Teacher should listen to adult students, stay flexible and open;
- Teacher should create supporting and encouraging atmosphere of learning.

The mini- and micro-learning models of educations perfectly respond to the needs of adult education.

Mini-learning-format resources

Interactive media-reach training resources are all kinds of technology based audio-visual mini-learning materials produced in order to transmit small portions of knowledge or information. They are designed for learners who are time-limited and need to gain knowledge or competences in brief time-bound sessions.

Training Needs Analysis is a structured process for identifying gaps in employee training and related training needs. Training Needs Analysis is an

important step in the production of learning resources as it provides a creator with insight on the skill and knowledge expectations of the learners. The Training Needs Analysis usually takes a structure of a survey-based research that is addressed to potential learners. The research questionnaire's first aim is to determine the skills and knowledge required for specific roles that learners play in the work environment.

Another important element of e-learning resources is creating **learning outcomes**. Their role is to support learners in understanding the purpose of the presented material.

Preparing mini-learning resources involves following specific **structure** that allows ensuring the quality. The Me2Me project recommends the structure of mini-learning format resource that is adequate to all types of interactive learning resources, independently from its actual format like video, audio, worksheets, etc. The structure involves four phases:

- Phase 1 (Input time: 1 minute): Introduction and Aims
- Phase 2 (Input time: 3 – 5 minutes): Key Learning Content
- Phase 3 (Input time: 1 – 2 minutes): Reflection and Transfer
- Phase 4 (Input time: 1 minute): Assessment and Outlook

The **total length** of the audio/video resource shouldn't be longer than 10 minutes (optimal length is 5-8 minutes). The production of the resource requires creating the script for the content of the resource. The scripts in total should be kept between 450 and 700 words. As these are short resources, it is important that the scripts contain only relevant and accurate information.

Mini-learning resources can have different digital forms. The Me2Me project proposes two types of audio-visual training resources that respond well to the needs of self-determined and self-paced learning through video and/or voice-led presentations. These mini-learning resources are video scribe and voice-over avatar presentations.

The last phase of mini-learning-format resources production is **evaluation**. One of the approaches to evaluate mini-learning resources is Kirkpatrick's Four-Level Training Evaluation Model. This strategy allows for objective analysis of all aspect and the final impact of the training including four levels – reaction, learning, behaviour and results.

To learn in more details about mini-learning-format resources production **visit the Me2Me e-learning platform:** <https://me2meproject.eu/en/learn/> You will

find there all the necessary tools and information in order to produce the mini-learning-format resources yourself.





MODULE 4

ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

DELIVERY METHOD OF THE MODULE: 8H, ON-LINE LEARNING

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

- ✓ HAVE THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE ENTREPRENEURIAL PROCESS AND ENTREPRENEURS' PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS.
- ✓ UNDERSTAND THE BUSINESS LIFE CYCLE.
- ✓ ASSESS DIFFERENT OPPORTUNITIES TO START NEW BUSINESS.
- ✓ HAVE KNOWLEDGE OF VALUE PROPOSITION AND HOW TO DEVELOP VALUE THROUGH RELATIONSHIP WITH STAKEHOLDERS GROUPS (CUSTOMERS, SUPPLIERS, INTERMEDIARIES, AND OTHER CATEGORY).
- ✓ PUT THE BUSINESS IDEA INTO AN EFFICIENT BUSINESS MODEL CANVAS AND BUSINESS PLAN.
- ✓ IDENTIFY THE KEY PARTNERS AND KEY RESOURCES OF THE BUSINESS.
- ✓ UNDERSTAND THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS.
- ✓ DRAFT THE BUSINESS STRATEGY.

Module Overview

Entrepreneurship is the act of creating a business or businesses while building and scaling it to generate a profit. However, as a basic entrepreneurship definition, it's a bit limiting. The more modern entrepreneurship definition is also about transforming the world by solving big problems. Like initiating social change, creating an innovative product or presenting a new life-changing solution. In addition, they need to create an environment for innovation within organizations. Innovative systems, tools, and thinking are crucial for organizational health and future viability. Innovation leadership has two components – an innovative approach to leadership and leadership for innovation.

Opportunity recognition are ways in which entrepreneurs identify potential ways towards identifying new business based on the opportunities that they identify. Through opportunity recognition, entrepreneurs should be able to identify new and better ways of providing products and services that meet customer expectations and also identify new business opportunities. There are also many different types of business opportunities including distributor deals,

supply deals, franchise ownership, website acquisitions, and more. Understanding which type of opportunity you're looking for and having a few goals in mind is crucial and will help determine which factors make it good opportunity. It's important to look critically at your business idea when determining if it is worth investing your time and money. A feasibility study covering a particular aspect of business can help to reveal if your idea has a good chance of success. Your feasibility study should include an assessment of the Market, Commercial feasibility and other considerations.

Business Model Canvas is a strategic management and lean startup template for developing new or documenting existing business models. It is a visual chart with elements describing a firm's or product's value proposition, infrastructure, customers, and finances. It assists firms in aligning their activities by illustrating potential trade-offs. You can use the canvas to describe, design, challenge, and pivot your business model. It works in conjunction with the Value Proposition Canvas and other strategic management and execution tools and processes. And once you understand your business model infrastructure but also have an idea of its' cost structure. So with the business model canvas you can now map out an entire business model in one image. This works for start-up entrepreneurs just as well as for senior executives.

A business plan is a comprehensive, clear structured document that describes what the company aims and how it intends to achieve its' goals. A business plan is a synthesis of various technological and financial documents, analysis and calculations that underpin business idea and company strategy. It is a convenient and widespread form of introduction to a project in which is proposed to participate or it is proposed to be funded.

The business life cycle is the progression of a business and its' phases over time, and is most commonly divided into five stages: launch, growth, shake-out, maturity, and decline. The cycle is shown on a graph with the horizontal axis as time, and the vertical axis as euros or various financial metrics. Three financial metrics will be used to describe the status of each business life cycle phase - sales, profit, and cash flow.

Correct strategic management is an issue of great importance for a company. A set of guidelines will help you to employ correct strategic management and make the right strategic choices. In the process of **strategic choice** you must consider the following questions. First, which of these options are built upon organisational strengths, help you overcome weaknesses and take advantage of opportunities, while minimising or circumventing the threats your business faces? This question is known as the search for strategic fit or suitability of the strategy. However, it is important to take other issues into account, e.g. to what extent could a chosen strategy be put into effect? Could the estimated financial resources increase? Will sufficient stock be made available at the right time and

in the right place? Are there enough staff with the requisite skills? Even if these criteria can be met, would the choice be acceptable to the stakeholders? When selecting a strategy keep in mind that there is more than one strategy that you can choose. There is not a “right” or a “wrong” choice, because choices always contain different threats and weaknesses.

Two of the essential decisions that a firm has to make are related to its position within the industry either by opting for low cost or differentiation, and how broad or narrow a market segment should be. Porter produced a matrix using cost advantage, differentiation advantage and a broad or narrow focus to classify a set of generic strategies that the firm can pursue to generate and maintain a competitive advantage. By applying those strengths in either a broad or narrow scope, the **three generic strategies** include: cost leadership, differentiation and focus. These strategies can be applied in most cases at the SME level. They are called *generic strategies* because they are neither firm nor industry dependent.

Nevertheless, a single generic strategy is not always the best answer since the customers for a product frequently look at various aspects, for instance a mix of quality, style, utility, and price. Additionally, there is contemporary evidence of firms practising a “hybrid strategy” (low cost and differentiation strategy) with success, doing even better than the ones adopting one generic strategy and resulting in sustainable competitive advantage. Porter revised his preliminary view and accepted that hybrid business strategies could exist.

There is no clear definition of strategy and it is very likely that it will never be found, as in practice, strategy and action plans are often intertwined and they therefore influence each other constantly. When you think about **formulating a strategy**, there are many things you have to take into account. The environment is changing all the time, so you have to reflect, if your company is able to cope with such environmental changes. As a result of such changes, your organisational strengths may change over time. Hence you should consider whether a current strength will continue to be a strength in different circumstances. Furthermore you have to consider your company stakeholders, as they always have their own goals in mind. Knowing these goals will help you understand their behavioural patterns and their impact with regards to present and future conditions. Taking these factors into account will help you to develop your own business strategy and this is where you have to employ your strategic management skills. **Strategic management** is a structured method to develop, execute and evaluate your strategy. There are three important elements in strategic management that can help your company operate effectively. These three elements are: **Strategic Analysis, Strategic Choice and Strategy implementation**. The final step, strategy implementation is defined as the way in which you will translate your strategy into actions. Strategic implementation requires careful planning and proper deployment of your company’s resources,

Careful handling of possible changes in your organisation structure and effective change management.

To learn more about Entrepreneurship and Strategic Management please visit the Me2Me e-learning platform: <https://me2meproject.eu/en/learn/>





MODULE 5

MARKETING AND SALES

DELIVERY METHOD OF THE MODULE: 8H, ON-LINE LEARNING

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

- ✓ APPLY KEY CONCEPTS OF MARKETING AND SALES.
- ✓ APPLY DIFFERENT ONLINE MARKETING TOOLS
- ✓ UNDERSTAND MARKETING ENVIRONMENT COMPONENTS.
- ✓ UNDERSTAND USAGE OF DIFFERENT TOOLS FOR SCANNING THE MARKETING ENVIRONMENT.
- ✓ PROVIDE BASIC MARKETING RESEARCH
- ✓ DRAFT A WRITTEN SALES PLANS AND A PROFESSIONAL INTERACTIVE ORAL SALES

Introduction:

Whether you're selling goods or services, you need to learn to sell. Get sales and marketing basics for small businesses, including tutorials, best practices, public relations, pricing, and market research. A business, aims to understand the needs and wants of a customer. It executes the marketing strategy according to market research beginning from product conception to sales. By focusing on the needs and wants of a target market, a company can deliver more value than its competitors. Marketing is a process to communicate the value of products and services to customers. It is also the activity associated with buying and selling of a product or service and includes advertising, selling, and delivery to target customers. The marketing concept is the strategy that firms adopt to satisfy customers' needs, increase sales, maximize profit and beat competition in the market.

In so doing, the module will address the following questions:

What is the marketing in small business?

What are new trends and developments in marketing and sales?

What are the marketing environment components?

What is the marketing scanning process?

How to prepare market analysis?

How to select customers segments and how to developed good marketing strategy?

How to use online marketing tools?

How to manage sales process of your small business?

Module Overview

Hepalova, (2018) note that marketing of future comes from the fact that mobile devices (smartphones, tablets and even watches) become the center of marketing. The rapid evolution of devices and free access to the Internet from any place are the main factors influencing the formation of marketing trends of the future.

In early 2015, mobile traffic bypassed the computer traffic. It led many companies to take a different look at brand promotion in the network. Today, online stores have not only a mobile version of their site but also offer applications for smartphones, so that users can quickly make purchases.

43% of brands actively conduct their communities in social networks, 59% keep in touch with customers through microblogging (Twitter) and Instagram. More than half of the companies (53%) pay for advertising in social media, and 25% use advertising in applications.

Among the trends of Internet marketing at the moment there is a trend of increasing the functionality of social networks. 60% of users of online resources learn the news from social networks. By increasing internal functionality,

networks tend to focus the user's attention on themselves. In addition, social networks continue to displace the usual search engines, because here a person can find out immediately the feedback of other users about the product or service.

Pahwa, (2018) note that the marketing activities of the business are affected by several internal and external factors. While some of the factors are in the control of the business, most of these are not and the business has to adapt itself to avoid being affected by changes in these factors. These external and internal factors group together to form a marketing environment in which the business operates.

A key part of any business plan is the market analysis. In this section needs to demonstrate both your expertise in your particular market and the attractiveness of the market from a financial standpoint. This article first look at what we mean exactly by market analysis before looking at how to make a good one for your business plan. Doing a market analysis might sound overly daunting and formal, but don't be dissuaded. It's actually really important, and it's not all that complex. Understanding your customers is the key to success for any business. If you don't have a deep understanding of who your customers are, you'll have trouble developing products that truly fit their needs, and you'll struggle to develop a successful marketing strategy. This is where a market analysis comes in.

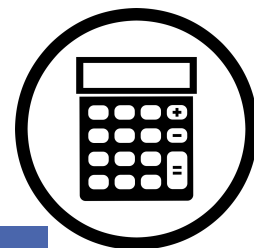
From a high-level, the goal of a marketing strategy is to identify a target market and develop a marketing mix that will appeal to those potential customers. Decisions regarding the ideal marketing mix can be organized in terms of Promotion, Product, and Price. However, the goal is not to just come up with a particular strategy, but rather to focus on providing value to your key market segments. It is helpful to view marketing strategy planning as a process of segmenting markets, targeting specific customers, and working to effectively position your offering among the competition. This section of module will outline how to effectively segment, target, and position, your product or service.

We're in a whole new era. Gone are the days when you could afford to ignore the internet. If you want to achieve success, regardless of your industry, it's imperative to have a sound online marketing plan in place from day one – a strategy that leverages the power of social media, uses search engine optimization to drive traffic, and makes good use of the media marketing advancements that are out there. In this part of the module we are going to outline 10 online marketing tools that you need when starting a business.

8 hours of your time spent in this module can completely change your business. We hope it is worthy to invest your time.

This module will unpack a range of issues relating to understanding the marketing and the abilities and skills required to manage marketing and sales of a micro-enterprises.

To learn more about marketing and sales assessment **visit the Me2Me e-learning platform:** <https://me2meproject.eu/en/learn/>



MODULE 6

FINANCE AND BUSINESS PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

DELIVERY METHOD OF THE MODULE: 8H, ON-LINE LEARNING

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

- ✓ DESCRIBE THE IMPORTANCE OF MANAGING MONEY IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MICRO-ENTERPRISE
- ✓ DEFINE THE DIFFERENT OPTIONS FOR FINANCING THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MICRO-ENTERPRISE
- ✓ ASSESS THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF DIFFERENT SOURCES OF MONEY 'IN' AND MONEY 'OUT' IN MANAGING AND DEVELOPING A MICRO-ENTERPRISE
- ✓ IDENTIFY THE DIFFERENT STRATEGIES WHICH CAN BE USED TO FINANCE THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MICRO-ENTERPRISE
- ✓ IDENTIFY THE KEY INDICATORS WHICH CAN BE USED TO MONITOR THE FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE OF A MICRO-ENTERPRISE
- ✓ DEMONSTRATE HOW TO MONITOR THE FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE OF A MICRO-ENTERPRISE
- ✓ DEFINE NON-FINANCIAL MEASURES OF BUSINESS PERFORMANCE FOR A MICRO-ENTERPRISE.

Introduction

The overall aim of this module is to review the processes and practices involved in managing the finances of a micro-enterprise. The module will consider this from two perspectives: day-to-day running of the business and the strategic development of the business. In so doing, the module will address the following questions:

- What are the key financial needs and requirements of a micro-enterprise?
- What are the key sources of finance that can be used in managing and developing a micro-enterprise?
- What processes and practices can be used to manage the finances of a micro-enterprise?
- How can the financial performance of a micro-enterprise be reviewed?
- How can the performance of a micro-enterprise be assessed, particularly in terms of its impact on internal and external stakeholders?

Therefore, the module will enable owner-managers of micro-enterprises to reflect on how to review the financial needs of the business as well as how to:

- Effectively plan and manage finances in the business
- Identify and use different indicators of business performance.

Module Overview

Osterwalder and Pigneur (2010) note that in developing a business it is important to be clear about the business model in terms of:

- The value proposition – the value of the business in addressing the problems and needs of the customer(s)
- Key activities – the activities which are required to deliver the value proposition
- Key partners – the stakeholders who are required to develop and deliver the value proposition
- Key resources – the assets required to offer and deliver the value proposition
- Customer segments – the groups of customers to be targeted by the business
- Customer relationships – the type of relationships which need to be established with each customer segment
- Channels – the value proposition is delivered to customers through communication, distribution and sales channels.

In addition, Osterwalder and Pigneur (2010) note that it is important to have clarity around cost structures and revenue streams for the business. Cost structures, or ‘money out’ of the business, relate to the costs incurred in the delivery of the value proposition to the customer and will include salaries, payments to suppliers, equipment charges, rents and rates, utility charges, marketing and branding costs. Income, or ‘money into’ the business, results from successfully offering value propositions to the customer.

These building blocks of the business model can be used to demonstrate the logic of how a micro-enterprise generates income and they map on to the four main aspects of a business – customers, the offer (or value proposition), the infrastructure and financial viability (Gibb and Scott, 1985; Bridge and O’Neil, 2012).

A set of factors will shape the financial viability of a micro-enterprise. These include:

- Calculating what needs to be charged for the service or product offering

- Understanding what finance is needed to operate the business and how to justify that to others, both within (e.g. other Directors or business partners) and external (e.g. sources of finance) to the business
- Understanding the cost structure of the business and the ways in which costs can be effectively managed
- Planning the cashflow of the business.

Jarvis and Schizas (2012) note that whilst these may appear to be relatively straightforward tasks to be undertaken, many people running their businesses lack the understanding and/or skills to manage the finances effectively. This reflects a combination of issues related to:

- The motivations and drivers to managing a business (e.g. the desire to pursue a passion as opposed to being a manager and leader)
- A fear of figures and numbers
- The technicality of some of the concepts, indicators and forms associated with managing finances (Burns, 2010).

Whilst there are bookkeepers, accountants and other organisations providing financial advice and guidance, these can be costly to access and/or they can reinforce some of the challenges associated with managing finances. Similarly, there is a range of software packages that can be used to manage the finances of the business, but an understanding of numbers and the key financial indicators is required to interpret the information generated from the software.

For managers in businesses with limited experience of managing finances, Mazzarol (2014) notes that it is easy to make snap judgements about the information presented in financial statements. In some cases, owner-managers may make these judgements after only a cursory glance at the numbers and the calculation of a few profit measures. These gaps in understanding of how to manage finances, and the associated skills, may impact upon the sustainability of the business in the near to mid-term. As Mazzarol (2014) reflects:

Firms in their early years from start-up will often experience a lack of working capital particularly if growth is strong. The efficient management of cash flow and working capital are therefore critical to survival. They also help to boost profitability and this can in turn facilitate growth. Owner-managers who are experiencing growth or financial stress need to seek outsider assistance. However, they also need to invest in learning more about financial management and systems they require to effectively operate their business.

Being able to manage finances of a business is not about becoming an accountant. It is about being curious and following up patterns in the figures.

For example, within a financial statement, there may be an unusual number or trend. It is important to investigate this number or trend further and ask questions such as:

- Is it really a trend or is it a result of some change in accounting procedures in the business?
- When did this condition start?
- What is causing it?
- Is the condition unique to the business or is it happening to other micro-enterprises as well?

Approximately 60 per cent of small businesses across the European Union do not make it to their fifth year of trading and the key reason for this is because the business runs out of money. Whilst the business balance sheet might identify that it is profitable for the business to trade, there is simply not enough money in the bank to meet day to day obligations. Therefore, it is important that those running micro-enterprises have a sound grasp of managing the money within the business. This means understanding and managing the money generated within the business through customer sales and also understanding how to access money generated externally that could support the business develop and grow. Whilst there are a number of sources of generating external revenue through accessing finance from financial institutions and public bodies, micro-enterprises repeatedly do state that access to finance is one of the main barrier they face, both at start-up and in trying to reach sustainability.

This module will unpack a range of issues relating to understanding the numbers and the abilities and skills required to manage and review finances and performance of a micro-enterprises.

To learn more about finance and business performance assessment **visit the Me2Me e-learning platform:** <https://me2meproject.eu/en/learn/>

Key Words:

Finance, Banking facilities, Income, Expenditure, Cashflow, Profit and Loss



MODULE 7

PEOPLE - THE CORE ASSET OF THE BUSINESS

DELIVERY METHOD OF THE MODULE: 8H, ON-LINE LEARNING

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

- ✓ EXPLAINING THE IMPORTANCE OF PEOPLE IN BUSINESS AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT.
- ✓ BEING ABLE TO APPLY THE CURRENT PRACTICES OF SELECTING AND RETAINING THE EMPLOYEES.
- ✓ UNDERSTANDING THE USAGE OF MOTIVATION METHODS AND PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT TOOLS.
- ✓ EXPLAINING THE ISSUES INVOLVED IN ESTABLISHING COMPENSATION SYSTEMS.
- ✓ UNDERSTANDING OF THE INTERNAL COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION NEEDS IN RELATION TO THE EMPLOYEES
- ✓ COMMUNICATING THE MANAGEMENT DECISIONS VIA WRITTEN MEMOS, REVISING EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK POLICY, AND ORAL PRESENTATIONS.

Activity 1: People in business

Simon Sinek, a renowned marketing consultant, motivational speaker, and best-selling author has said that “Customers will never love a company until the employees love it first”. This means that employees have to go way beyond punching the time clock and picking up a paycheck. They need to bring the passion to serving the customer, and they need to be empowered to do what’s right on the customer’s behalf.

Who are the people in your business? Identify them and their importance and responsibilities within the company. Every company is different, you should find yourself the best fitting structure and people.

Do you have the right team in place? This can be one of the most difficult conversations to have with any business owner. Many will have built up their businesses with a core of key individuals, who are often not just colleagues but friends – and often family members. There is tremendous loyalty both ways, and in the case of family members there are strong emotional connections. Facing the possibility that one or more of their team does not have the skills or profile to be part of the new structure can be incredibly challenging and takes courage to address – but ultimately, your business depends upon you making the right decision. If not, you will not achieve your ambition. Change is not easy.

Activity 2: What is HR?

The process of hiring and developing employees so that they become more valuable to the organization.

Human Resource Management includes conducting job analyses, planning personnel needs, recruiting the right people for the job, orienting and training, managing wages and salaries, providing benefits and incentives, evaluating performance, resolving disputes, and communicating with all employees at all levels. Examples of core qualities of HR management are extensive knowledge of the industry, leadership, and effective negotiation skills. Formerly called personnel management.

HRM glossary (see in MLFR)

Activity 3: HR Tools

They are staffing, employee compensation and benefits, and defining/designing work. All core HR processes fall within these three fields, including hiring, termination, payroll, time tracking, training, retention, compensation and more.

Examples for HR tools: Gusto Software, Zoho, Trello, Bamboo HR, Slack, Timetastic, Greenhouse, Skillsoft, Google Suite, 360-Feedback, TinyPulse, LinkedIn, Namely HR, Tallyfy, Harver, Jobvite, Better Team, Zenefits, StaffSquared, Bonus.ly, Trakstar, nGUVU, etc.

Activity 4: What is internal communication

Internal communication, often perceived as a synonym for intra-organizational communication, is quite often equated with employee communication. There is a dire need to define or redefine the boundaries of an organization, which will also perhaps redefine the parameters of internal communication. That apart, internal communication should motivate employees and thus create value for the company. The process of writing for the in-house employee publication. Today the information manager is more of a mediator between the management and workers, as well as being an internal coach for management. Aligning the goals of individual employees to organizational goals is also seen as a task for internal communication. Such alignment helps organizations build strong cultures. Internal communication is the aspiration (starting from the vision and proceeding to policy and mission statement and eventually to strategy) of achieving a systematic analysis and distribution of information at all strata simultaneously coordinated in the most efficient way possible.

Corporate communications is a management function that offers a framework and vocabulary for the effective coordination of all means of communications

with the overall purpose of establishing and maintaining favourable reputations with stakeholder groups upon which the organization is dependent.

Activity 5: Communication Tools (in case of internal communication)

How well a message is communicated is as important as the message itself. When it comes to internal communications, this certainly holds true. Company culture can give your organization a major strategic advantage in these changing times. What your culture consists of – goals, values, and practices – must be effectively transmitted for employees to understand and act upon it. Therefore, it's essential to focus not just on what you're communicating but also how you're communicating it.

Use the tools which are the best fit for your company:

Face-to-face – not face-to-face

Online – Offline

Synchronous – Asynchronous

Written – Spoken

One-way – Bilateral

Examples for tools: video, intranet, mobile apps, screensavers, comms management (like Trello, Basecamp), forums, surveys, gamification, blogs, podcasts, collaboration (like Slack, HipChat), digital signage, internal newsletters, social media (like Facebook Workplace).

Activity 6: Leader Communication

Leadership demands the ability to set goals, compose visions, prioritise strategy, and uncover company value. All of which must take place within an environment which is open to change, organisational process, and subject to the vagaries of emergent events.

The leader may be embedded in the firm behind the scenes in an important nurturing capacity, or equally appear prominent in response to crisis management.

Special attention is paid to language, the ability to persuade, cajole as well as befriend and support company employees, including supporters in the wider public arena.

There are four widely accepted leadership styles. They are:

Dictatorial Style

Authoritative Style

Consultative Style

Participative Team Style

Your leader communication should reflect to the chosen leadership style. Find the effective tools for leader communication in the style you are using as a leader.

Activity 7: Compensation System

The term “compensation” refers to the combination of wages, salaries and benefits an employee receives in exchange for work. Compensation may include hourly wages or an annual salary, plus bonus payments, incentives and benefits, such as group health care coverage, short-term disability insurance and contributions to a retirement savings account. A total compensation package can have several components. An “employee compensation system” collectively refers to all the components in addition to the manner in which the compensation is paid and for what purpose employees receive case bonuses, salary increases and incentives.

Ensuring that salaries are competitive is a major benefit of compensation management systems. Compensation data that's in tune with the market gives hiring managers critical data they need when making an offer to a candidate. This applies as well to raises and bonuses to the incumbent workforce. Employees today have opportunities to find out about their peers' salaries and benefits. A good compensation management system is alert to the market, and this can help motivate employees and reduce turnover.

Compensation management requires use of external data. Managers gather salary market data by industry, company size, job role and geography. They can use government data, information from publicly available sites that gather user reported salary data, as well as purchase data from third-party firms that conduct ongoing surveys of salary and benefits.

Activity 8: Recruitment and Retention

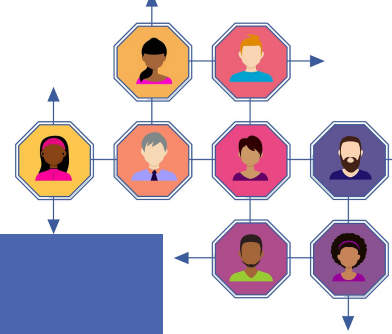
An employee engagement-based strategy develops a strong sense of connection between the employee and the company, making them feel good about their work, empowered in their position, and excited for the future of the business. There are a myriad of tactics and ideas for improving employee engagement – involving everything from employee compliment boxes to free lunches to fun team-building exercises.

A strategy of improved work-life balance seeks to help employees manage their lives outside of work. A work-life balance can cover things from maternity leave

and sick days to providing a free laundry service to help your employees cut down on chore time at home. If your business is struggling with employee burnout, this is an excellent opportunity to get creative.

Succeeding in your employee retention efforts requires you to think about things from the team's point of view. All employees are different, of course, and each has unique desires and goals. But it's a safe bet to assume that all of them want to know they are being paid at or above market rates and have good benefits. They want to feel that they are appreciated by their employer and treated fairly. They want to be challenged and excited by the job they're asked to do.





MODULE 8

EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION AND NETWORKING IN BUSINESSES

DELIVERY METHOD OF THE MODULE: 8H, ON-LINE LEARNING

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

- ✓ HAVING KNOWLEDGE OF KEY ASPECTS OF BUSINESS NETWORKING AND EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION.
- ✓ BEING ABLE TO IDENTIFY THE EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS.
- ✓ BEING ABLE TO MANAGE BUSINESS NETWORKS.
- ✓ UNDERSTANDING THE USE OF EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION CHANNELS IN RELATION TO EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS.
- ✓ BEING ABLE TO MANAGE THE ON-LINE COMMUNICATION TOOLS.
- ✓ BE ABLE TO EXPLAIN THE BASIC UNDERSTANDING OF THE MANAGEMENT ASPECTS OF BUSINESS DATA COMMUNICATIONS AND NETWORKING.
- ✓ BE ABLE TO ANALYSE AND EVALUATE THE IMPACT OF EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION.
- ✓ UNDERSTANDING THE KEY ISSUES INVOLVED IN CONTROLLING AN ORGANIZATION'S INFORMATION AND IMAGE

Introduction to the module

This module is aiming to support micro-enterprise owners and VET professionals to develop external communication and networking. It will address the questions like

- What are the aspects of business networking and external communication?
- How to identify the the external staleholders
- How to manage business networks
- How to manage on-line communication tools
- How to use external communication channels
- How to evaluate the impact of external communication

Networking in business

Networking in business is a valuable and effective way to learn from the others, expand your knowledge, achieve more capacity, get new clients and tell others about you and your business.

The network does not come by itself. Its creation and development require motivation and willingness to cooperate. Every entrepreneur has networked somehow. It is cooperation with suppliers, subcontractors or other entrepreneurs.

Networks are a particularly important tool for self-employed people and micro-enterprises.

Benefits of networking are

- New contacts and referrals
- Visibility
- Staying current
- Problem solving
- Sharing knowledge and experience

Integrated communication using different techniques and communication channels and internal communication

According to Ryan Potvin (<http://printtek.com/the-4-cs-of-integrated-communication/>) effectively integrated communication requires four elements: messages must be

- coherent
- consistent
- continuous
- complementary

By using the 4 C's of integrated marketing communication businesses can ensure that their messages are all working together to convert prospects into customers. When communication is effective, customers **gain** interest and start paying attention.

The first step to integrate communication is to identify existing channels and get the understanding of the strengths and features of channels available.

All communication that occur inside the organisation is internal communications and it must be taking consideration when planning of integrated communication strategy.

When creating an integrated communication strategy next questions have to be asked:

- To whom are we communicating now?
- What are we communicating?
- What channels are we using?
- What is working or not working?

External Communication Process

External communication and networking are very important part of business. Target of external communication is spread information about business to customers, potential customers, stakeholders and public. Active external communication helps to build trust between the organization and its stakeholders. And at the same time by external communication you create a public image of your company which matters when building networks.

External communication

- is information that company distributes to the public
- promotes the company and help increase sales
- is an important part of marketing

Organizations must strike the right balance in using all the tools at their disposal to create a positive corporate image.

Every company needs a social media presence. This is more than just throwing up a Facebook or LinkedIn page or sending out self-promoting Tweets on occasion. Social

media allows for targeted groups and interaction. Channels of communication are many:

- Social media channels
- Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn
- other smaller or more niche social networking platforms
- Email newsletters
- Website & Blog
- Paper magazine or newsletter

First impressions do matter and today's consumers won't hesitate to move on if they can't find what they are looking for fast or if they don't like what they find. Your website may be the first impression a potential customer has with your organization. Your website should be dynamic, contain updated industry news or company information, and include any relevant content feeds or blogs.

Evaluation of communication channels effectiveness

An effective communicator gets his point across while maintaining a productive relationship with the other party. This is extremely important if you plan to run a small business. The way you communicate with your customers, employees and other stakeholders can have a significant effect on your company's overall success. Keep a few key concepts in mind as you measure whether you're communicating effectively. Evaluate how your business currently reaches out to its stakeholders. Ask yourself:

- What communication tools are we using?
- What messages are we sharing?
- How effective are these communications?

Use the audit as an opportunity to engage stakeholders directly. They can be asked how they feel about your company's messages, and what goals are the most important to them.

You can also conduct more general research into your industry sector and use these insights to design your plan.

A Key Performance Indicator (KPI) is a measurable value that demonstrates how effectively a company is achieving key business objectives.

Tracking progress not only justifies all of your work to others but it also helps keep you motivated and focused on strategic goals.



MODULE 9

PROBLEM SOLVING IN BUSINESS – CASE STUDY

DELIVERY METHOD OF THE MODULE: 8H, ON-LINE LEARNING

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

- ✓ UNDERSTAND THE DEFINITION AND NATURE OF A PROBLEM IN BUSINESS.
- ✓ DEFINE DIFFERENT TYPES OF PROBLEMS IN BUSINESS – STRUCTURED AND UNSTRUCTURED.
- ✓ UNDERSTAND BASIC APPROACHES TO SUCCESSFULLY MANAGE AND SOLVE PROBLEMS IN BUSINESS.
- ✓ CRITICALLY SYNTHESIZE AND ANALYSE INFORMATION FOR PROBLEM SOLVING IN BUSINESS SITUATIONS.
- ✓ UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE OF CONVERGENT AND DIVERGENT THINKING IN LOOKING FOR PROBLEM SOLUTIONS.
- ✓ UNDERSTAND DIFFERENT PROBLEM SOLVING METHODOLOGY.
- ✓ UNDERSTAND VARIOUS TOOLS FOR PROBLEMS IDENTIFICATION AND ALTERNATIVES GENERATION.
- ✓ USE PROBLEM SOLVING TOOLS FOR DECISIONMAKING AND SOLUTION EVALUATION.
- ✓ UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE OF CASE STUDY METHOD IN ADULT LEARNING.
- ✓ UNDERSTAND HOW TO CREATE CASE STUDY.
- ✓ UNDERSTAND HOW TO EVALUATE PROBLEM SOLUTIONS.

Module Overview

From start-ups to SME to multinational corporations, every business faces problems. Not only managers but every member of the organisation deals with problems in their everyday work. Their problem-solving skills may decide on the state of current affairs on the most basic levels of the company. The business environment in recent times underwent a revolutionary transformation from a predictable and easy to control to unpredictable, complex and ever-changing. In such conditions, high problem solving competences has become one of the most crucial and valuable qualities for entrepreneurs. **Problem is defined as a perceived gap between the existing and desired state of affairs.** It can be also considered as a deviation from a norm or standard. There are different types

of problems. Considering the complexity of the problematic situation and the level of difficulty to find the solution, there are structured and unstructured problems.

Solving unstructured business problems

A successful problem management requires from an entrepreneur to work through a number of steps before they are able to solve the problem:

- Define a problem,
- Analyse a problem,
- Look for possible solutions,
- Choose and implement the solution.

The first phase of an unstructured problem solving involves two aspects: identifying a problem and defining it. Although, the first element may appear as an obvious statement, some entrepreneurs face a lot of difficulties with recognising problems at their early stage. Once a problem has been identified the next step is to define it. A proper definition of a problem leads to its better understanding and in a result to selecting the most suitable solution.

The next step in the process of solving unstructured business problem is its analysis. Problem analysis process involves a set of analytical tasks that aim at examining an unbalance situation in order to provide better insight and help to find the best available solution. The core goal of unstructured business problem analysis is gathering information. Different tools can be used in order to facilitate the analysis in the problem solving process in business environment. Among them there are:

- **Pareto analysis**

This tool can serve as a great starting point that provides an early insight into problem's causes and effects with no need for intense or complex analysis. **The Pareto analysis is also referred to as the 80:20 rule, as it states that 80% of effects or consequences are the result of only 20% of causes.** According to the Pareto rule, identifying and resolving 20% issues in the business can lead to an 80% advantage in the overall performance. This tool targets a limited selection of problems which have a significant effect on the organisation, by identifying repeated problem patterns that interfere with the work progress. The most crucial part of this analysis is to clearly identify those 20% causes and to focus all the efforts on eliminating them.

▪ Plan-Do-Check-Act Cycle

This tool involves four steps: identifying the problem and its causes (plan), implementing the improvement and testing (do), checking the progress (check) and standardising the solution or repeating the cycle for new solution (act). This tool can be applied to all sorts of problems in any organization.

Case study

One of the most effective problem solving tools that can be successfully used in adult education in business environment is case study. **Case studies are documented studies of a specific real-life situation or imagined scenario, used as a training tool.** The usual concept of the case study in business is to present problems and challenges faced by an organization. Students need to use their analytical skills in order to select available information and figure out the most effective solution. Case studies may come in many formats, from a simple open-ended question to a scenario-based description of a situation with accompanying data to analyse.

The process of creating a case study may be complex and time-consuming as a lot of efforts needs to be done in order to ensure that presented business problem have been properly investigated and examined. Otherwise, a student will not be able to identify it and propose the solutions, which is a core goal of this creative problem solving tool.

The case study creation process involves two stages – preparation combined with understanding of the case study, and writing it down. To facilitate this process, teachers should follow this scheme:

- Determine the case study goal
- Pick the case study subject
- Conduct analysis on the subject
- Undercover possible solutions
- Write down the case study

One of the most important aspects in applying the case study method in adult training is **evaluation process**. Since this tool can be used in teaching of both, course content as well as entrepreneurial skills these different aspects should be assessed separately.

To learn in more details about various creative problem solving techniques and creating of case study for the purposes of adult education **visit the Me2Me e-learning platform:** <https://me2meproject.eu/en/learn/>





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