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**COMPETENCY-BASED TRAINING IN SMEs:
THE ROLE OF E-LEARNING AND E-COMPETENCE**

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Introductive aspects: Training and e-learning in SMEs

➢ **Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs) are »engines of growth« and generate many employment opportunities.**

➢ **In many European countries SMEs have come under severe pressure and are often lack the necessary skills and capabilities to remain competitive on the national/international level.**

➢ **Most European companies consider further training of their staff important but there are a number of obstacles to do it.**

➢ **Computer-based Training (CBT) is used in companies for training of their staff but many training courses are only text-based or PowerPoint presentations.**

➢ **e-learning was seen as one of the prerequisites to achieve the Lis-bon objectives but the expectations of it to improve training for SMEs have been only very partially met.**

In many SMEs there is a low level of motivation for signig up for online courses (www.ebusiness-watch.org). Some reasons:

➢ **learners can not relate the on-line courses offered to their work tasks**

➢ **learners are not allowed to take time out on the job for e-learning**

➢ **there is insufficient support, when users are having difficulties with e-learning platforms and other required technologies.**

Critical factors of e-learning failure in organizations:

➢ **initial design issues,**

➢ **focus on technology and not on instructional design,**

➢ **lack of understanding, that specific e-learning tasks have to correspond to the existing competencies as well as the present and future work tasks of learners,**

➢ **issues of user-friendliness and interactivity,**

➢ **problems with production, distribution, long term management and evaluation of e-learning courses.**

**Many problems about low use of e-learning in SMEs
are based on:**

➢ **misconception or prejudices concerning the educational
process in such companies where not only conventional
methods are used,**

➢ **being afraid of high costs and overhead for
the development and maintenance of e-learning modules,**

➢ **lack of promoting learning conditions and support by the
company management,**

➢ **staff lack of time off for study,**

➢ **no funds in the company to support further training
for staff,**

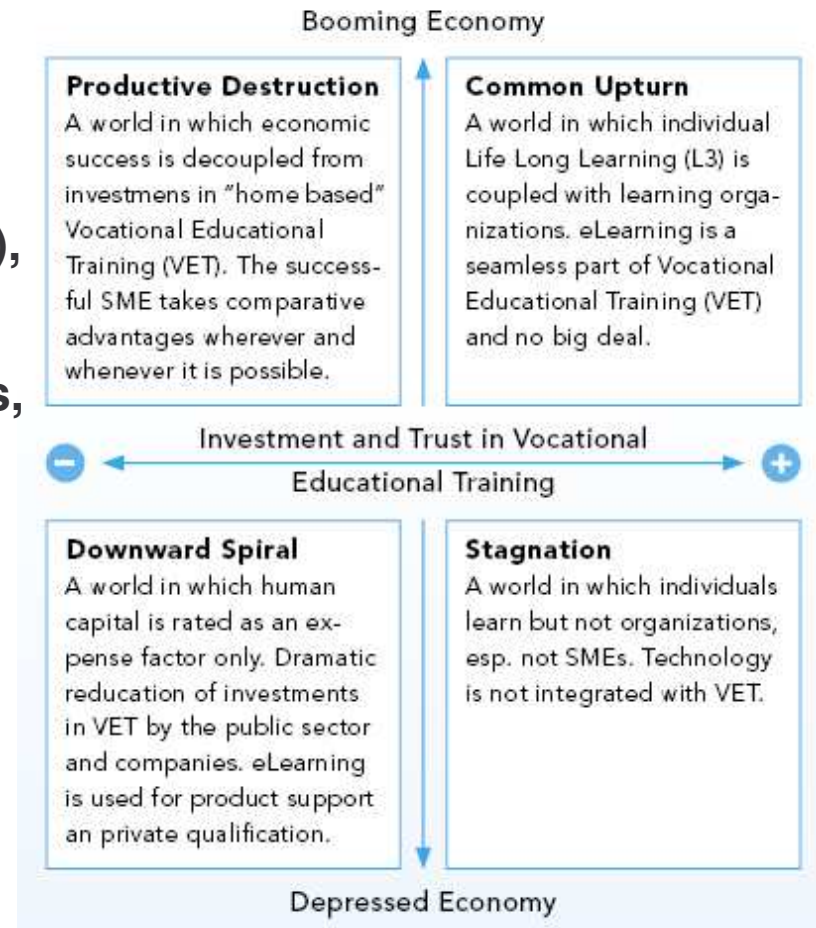➢ **availability only of standard products which
do not support SMEs business.**

Example of e-learning projects aimed at SMEs:

➢ **VIP (Visually Interacting e-learning Platform
http://www.elearningeuropa.info/doc.php
which aims at offering training for developing
competence of SME's managers.**

ARI℮L

ANALYSING AND REPORTING ON THE IMPLEMENTATION
OF ELECTRONIC LEARNING IN EUROPE

ARIEL – Analysing and Reporting the Implementation of Electronic Learning in Europe (www.ariel-eu.net), which investigated e-learning supply for developing competencies of SMEs, particularly e-Competence aiming to improve their work and to support their integration into the European market. e-learning scenarios have been developed to help companies to build their e-Competences

Booming Economy

Productive Destruction
A world in which economic success is decoupled from investmens in "home based" Vocational Educational Training (VET). The successful SME takes comparative advantages wherever and whenever it is possible.

Common Upturn
A world in which individual Life Long Learning (L3) is coupled with learning organizations. eLearning is a seamless part of Vocational Educational Training (VET) and no big deal.

Investment and Trust in Vocational
Educational Training

Downward Spiral
A world in which human capital is rated as an expense factor only. Dramatic reducation of investments in VET by the public sector and companies. eLearning is used for product support an private qualification.

Stagnation
A world in which individuals learn but not organizations, esp. not SMEs. Technology is not integrated with VET.

Depressed Economy

**The results and scenarios developed in ARIEL will be used
within the valorization project SIMPEL (2007) to provide in
cooperation with SMEs and SMEs consultants sustainable
models for development of e-Competence supporting
e-Business and using of e-Learning and corresponding
guidelines for implementing these models.**

www.simpel-net.eu

SMEs need e-Learning approaches:

➢ **combined with conventional,
face to face methods – Blended Learning**

➢ **with a content defined to correspond to
the existing and needed staff competencies
to perform their work tasks' and to the learning
culture of the company,**

➢ **combined with informal learning methods to
support knowledge sharing and creation
of new one.**

Competency-based Training – a Solution for SMEs?

Competency-based Training (CbT) can be characterized as following:

➢ **The CbT should not only identify what employees must know and do to successfully perform on the job, but also assist them in acquiring these skills,**

➢ **It is success-oriented, based on the idea that almost anyone can master almost any task, given quality in-struction and sufficient time.**

➢ **Each module of a CbT should contain specific objectives and standards for successful performance.**

➢ **Learning materials used in a CbT should make clear the competencies (tasks) the learner is to learn and perform, the criteria by which the learner will be evaluated and the conditions under which evaluation will occur.**

➢ **Training activities should be learner-oriented and self-paced whenever possible, because of different indivi-dual learning rates.**

➢ **The new competencies should be gained in small steps and the learners should be provided with enough, reasonable time to master one task before moving on to the next.**

➢ **The learners should be accountable for learning and the acquisition of knowledge, for applying the knowledge learned in the work setting and for demonstrating the ability to perform a specific task on a required level.**

CbT:

➤ **goes far beyond the concept of "blended learning",**

➤ **puts the emphasis on the continuum between competencies which the learners have already mastered and the competencies they want or should acquire.**

➤ **supports e-Competence which implies the competence to use and manage digital technologies and media in a knowledgeable and, if necessary, critical way.**

➤ **Is closely related to the conception of "Competency Management" and the development and use of (e-)portfolios and social software for employees.**

Conclusions

➤ **The conceptions of e-learning especially in the workplace:**

» **put learning, the learner and the notion of collaboration at the centre,**

» **link learning to competencies, competence portfolios and, generally to competence management in the framework of Human Resources and Organizational Development.**

➤ **New developments in software, such as Web 2.0 technologies will support these directions.**

➤ **Comprehensive solutions are re-quired, which involve industrial and trade associations, especially on the branch-level, training providers and experts as well as SMEs.**