

Analyzing and Reporting eLearning in Europe – the project ARIEL

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Who is ARIEL?

- ARIEL was an international joint project (“observatory” type) in 2004 and 2005, funded by the EU in the context of the “eLearning initiative”.
- ARIEL stands for “Analyzing and Reporting the Implementation of Electronic Learning in Europe”.
- Five university and research institution partners in ARIEL:
 - University Győr (Hungary)
 - University Limerick (Ireland)
 - VEB Consult Firenze (Italy)
 - University Craiova (Romania)
 - Institute Work and Technology in Gelsenkirchen (Germany)



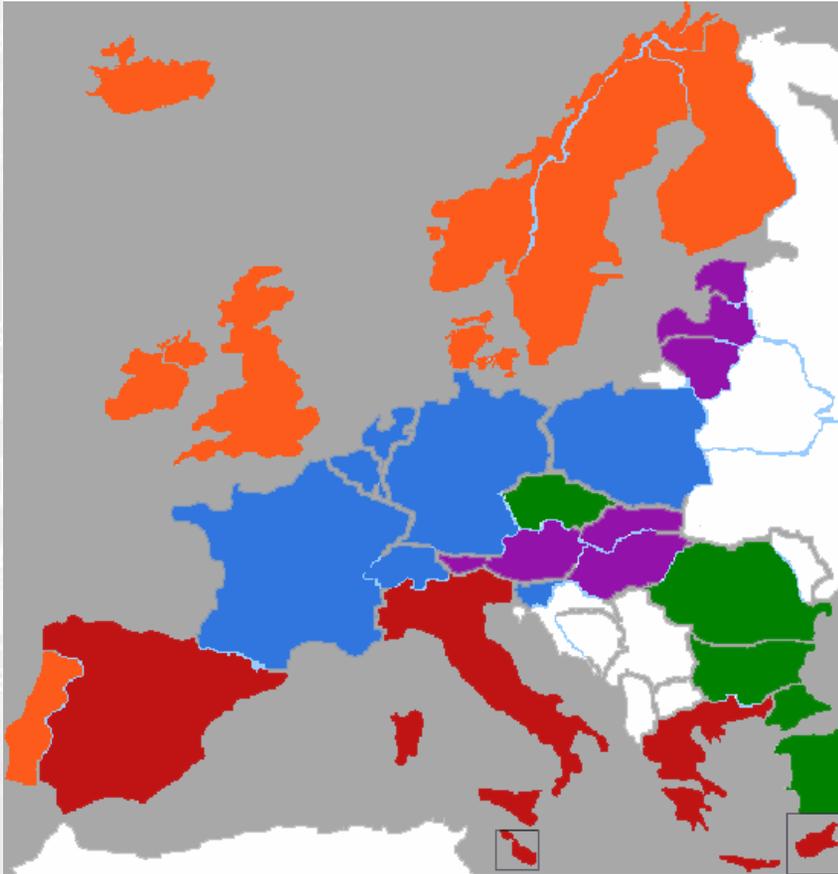
What did ARIEL do?

- ARIEL analyzed the supply of e-learning for small and medium-sized enterprises:
 - Focussing on training that improves the **competitiveness of SMEs** in the European market (knowledge and skills).
 - **Assessing the results** achieved by previous EU funded projects in the sector of computer-assisted learning for SMEs
 - Analyzing fields of application and demand factors leading to **ideas about the future development of eLearning** in Europe (four alternative scenarios)

Need of Kingdom Activities

- Analysing E-Learning projects funded by the EU according to www.elearningeuropa.info
 - in 2004: 842 projects
 - in 2008: 1493 projects
- Expert workshops, interviews all over Europe, including Hungary and Romania
- In order to downsize the task and to create observable populations, ARIEL set up five “Kingdoms”.

“Kingdoms” of ARIEL



- Ireland
- Italy
- Hungary
- Romania
- Germany

Expert teams

- E.g. the German expert team – similar procedures in other “Kingdoms”
- Workshops at IAT in Gelsenkirchen
 - ...plus additional interviews at international conferences and trade fairs
 - ...plus additional telephone interviews
- The German expert team consisted of...
 - Software Developers
 - Consultants
 - Heads of the Pedagogical Units at E-Learning Providers
 - Heads of Departments at Chambers of Commerce
 - Heads of Departments of Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training
 - Professors at Universities

Future Developments – The Scenarios

- Rationale for the second project year:
 - to predict the roads leading to the success of e-learning in SMEs
 - to develop valid prognoses for the development of e-learning in SMEs
- Scenarios as the method of choice
 - although scenarios are no prognoses
 - nor do they provide prognoses
 - they are enabling a broader view of what might happen to e-learning in SMEs within the next years

Basic Descriptors and Major Factors

- Scenario development
 - does not start with outlining and story telling
 - but with identifying major factors of influence for the problem in focus
 - so-called “descriptors”
 - developing future scenarios using the scenario development method described by Ogilvy and Schwartz in 1998
- ARIEL’s descriptor clusters
 - vocational system
 - cost-incentive structure
 - technology
 - content
 - business
 - plus: unknown factors

The ARIEL Scenarios (1)

- Final steps to ARIEL's scenarios
 - Elimination process with descriptor clusters and descriptors during various expert workshops in all "Kingdoms"
 - Building a "skeleton" from two descriptors
 - that had high impact
 - but for which future developments seemed to be most uncertain.
 - Descriptor 1:
Vocational education and training system
 - with values "high" or "low"
 - including public investment in the vocational education system and peoples trust in its effectiveness.
 - Descriptor 2:
Economic development
 - with values "boom" or "depression"

The ARIEL Scenarios (2)

Booming Economy

Productive Destruction

A world in which economic success is decoupled from investments 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. E-Learning 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 reduction of investments in VET by the public sector and companies. E-Learning is used for product support and private qualification.

Stagnation

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

Depressed Economy

Results from the SMEs' Point of View (1)

- The supply of e-learning for SME is poor, in spite of the fact that many projects claim to develop solutions specifically for these enterprises.
- Projects do not end up in sustainable marketable products.
- E-Learning suppliers find it difficult to sell their services / products to SMEs.
- Learning based on the blending of face-to-face with online training, of formal and informal learning is more acceptable among SMEs than online-training alone.

Results from the SMEs' Point of View (2)

- SMEs are interested in e-learning as a function of product / service / support.
- SMEs in the new member states and in the candidate countries are interested in acquiring knowledge about the regulations and rules in the EU in order to have better opportunities to survive in the common market.
- SMEs profit particularly from a public knowledge infrastructure (schools, universities, business schools).

Results from the consultants' Point of View: The E-Learning Mismatches

- Some lessons learned, especially from discussions with managers of SMEs
- When trying to establish e-learning projects with SMEs, be prepared to meet some e-learning mismatches

The E-Learning Mismatches (1)

- All SMEs are different...
- Managements of SMEs have little interest in vocational training, because...
 - It makes employees more expensive
 - Employees will accumulate crucial knowledge
 - Knowledge is lost when employees are fired
 - So better invest in more sophisticated technology
 - Banks will not accept knowledge as securities

The E-Learning Mismatches (2)

- There is little enthusiasm for vocational training on both sides, employers and employees
 - Vocational training has only little space and even less time resources in nowadays SMEs
 - ...especially while fighting against low wages in Eastern Europe and Asia

The E-Learning Mismatches (3)

- Terms like “E-Learning” or “SME” are regarded
 - as “artificial” or
 - “scientific” or
 - “theoretical” terms
- They do not fit
 - to terms used in SMEs
 - the way SMEs think about the rest of the world
- Legal definitions for SMEs (e.g. set up by EC) do not help

The E-Learning Mismatches (4)

- SMEs wish to see their point-of-view and their needs to be regarded as important
 - Statements as “...all SMEs have little knowledge in management economics...” do not help
- Qualification and vocational training are no permanent tasks for SMEs
 - There is no department for enterprise wide qualification
 - There is no one being responsible for monitoring or controlling of qualifications

Concerning the Scenarios...

- All SMEs are different...
 - ...therefore one scenario might become true for one part of the industry
 - ...while another scenario happens to another
- More or less on the way to “Stagnation”
- With tendencies to “Productive Destruction”
- Hoping to avoid “Downward Spiral”
- No real interest in “Common Upturn”

So... – No Chance For E-Learning...?

- There is a huge marketing problem
- There have to be a more sophisticated differentiations
- “Just-In-Time” concepts for vocational training needed
 - Ask SMEs about their most annoying problems, about their next most vital challenges
 - If vocational training is a part of the replying concepts, then there might be a place for e-learning
- SMEs have neither time nor money to do long-time strategic qualification planning
 - So they will not spend their resources for solutions to challenges which are invisible to them

References

- Leaflet “Analysing and Reporting on the Implementation of Electronic Learning in Europe”
www.ariel-eu.net/downloads/leaflet_de.pdf
- Beer, D. / Busse, Th. / Hamburg, I. / Mill, U. / Paul, H. (ed.) (2006): E-learning in European SMEs – observations, analysis and forecasting. Proceedings of the ARIEL final conference, 08.11.2005, Münster: Waxmann.
- ARIEL’s Homepage: www.ariel-eu.net

Thank you very much for your attention!

