

**DIRECTORATE GENERAL
FOR EDUCATION AND CULTURE**

E-learning in continuing vocational,
particularly at the workplace,
with emphasis on Small and Medium Enterprises

Copyright European Commission

SUBJECT:

APPENDIX E:

Description of Case studies

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1 DIHK – GERMANY

1.1 THE ORGANISATION

The Association of German Chambers of Industry and Commerce (DIHK) is the central organisation for the 81 German regional Chambers of Commerce and Industry (CCIs or IHK in German).

All the German companies registered in Germany, with the exception of the handicraft businesses, the free professions and the farms, are required by law to join a chamber. Thus, the DIHK speaks for more than three million entrepreneurs.

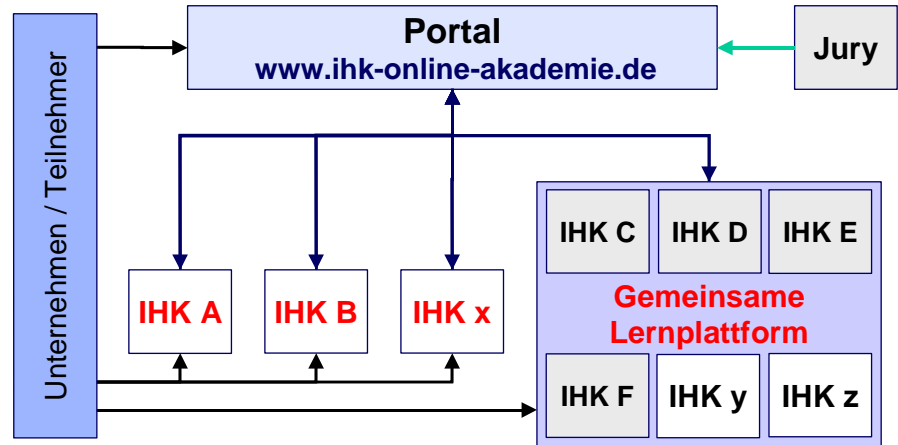
The mission of the DIHK is to work for the interests of the regional economy. The DIHK is financed by the fees paid by its members. It does not receive any public fund.

1.2 THE E-LEARNING ACTIVITIES

One of the activities of the DIHK is the organisation of vocational training. The CCIs started to offer e-learning trainings nearly 10 years ago, at the request of the affiliated companies. It started with CBT's and developed further on with WBT's for four years.

Today, e-learning has been integrated in many certification tracks of the CCIs (blended learning).

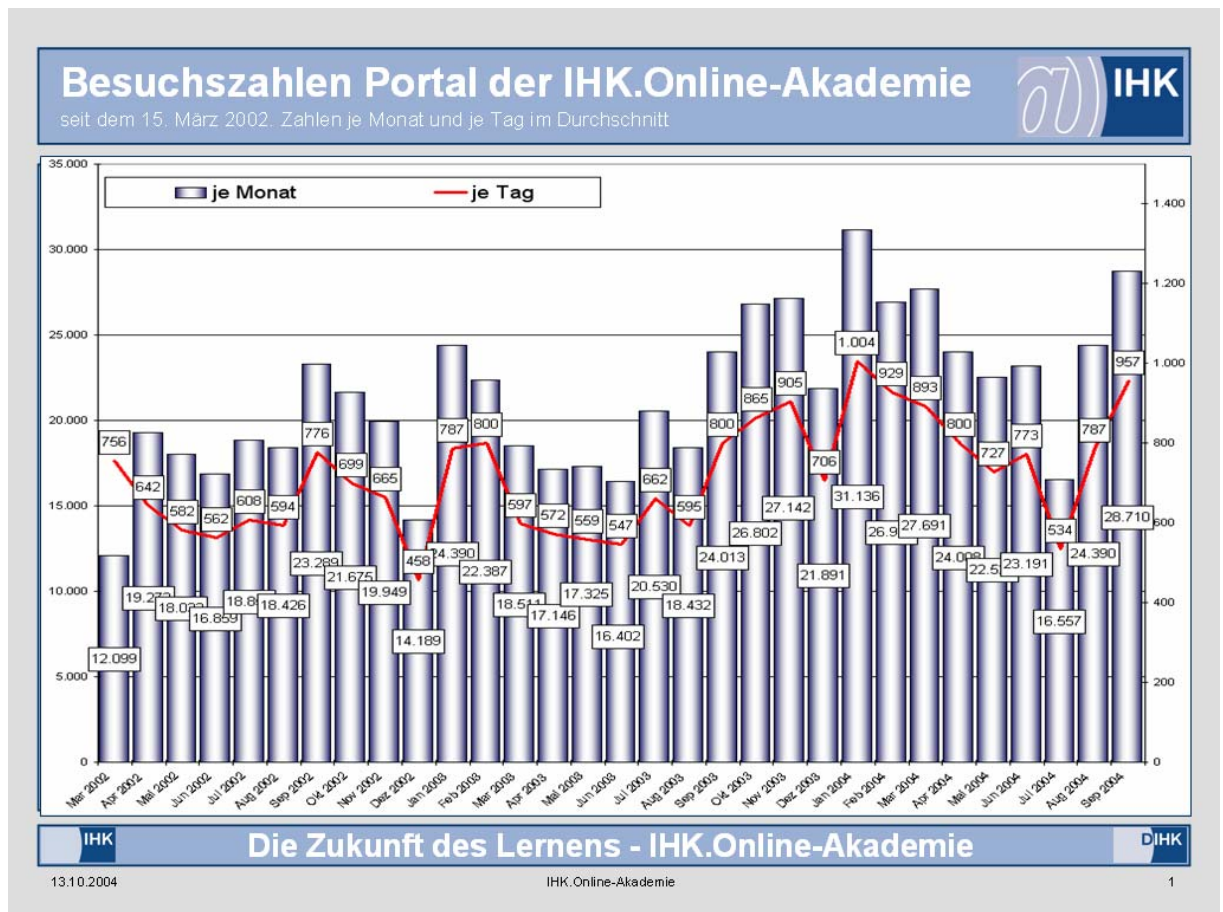
As shown on the chart below, the IHK.Online-Akademie offers a common portal and a common learning platform for all the CCIs. The DIHK provides the portal and the common platform, the coordination and marketing of the IHK.Online-Akademie and the management of some content developments. The DIHK-Bildungs-GmbH produces and/or buys course contents, the CCIs run the courses.



More than 50 CCIs have an e-learning training offer, some decided to develop own platforms and contents besides the common solution of the DIHK, whereas 25 CCIs decided to cooperate. For these CCIs, the IHK.Online-Akademie brings several advantages:

- ▶ A common infrastructure;
- ▶ A centralisation of the administrative processes;
- ▶ A centralisation of the management and development of contents;
- ▶ A central tutoring structure;
- ▶ An exchange of experience and best practices.

The training portal of the IHK.Online-Akademie gives access to general information on the trainings and to the course catalogue of the DIHK and CCIs. The number of visits shows the success of the portal.



In order to access the e-learning platform of the DIHK, users need to have a hardware and network configuration that meets the requirements described on the site under the heading “System Check”. Normally a standard PC with internet access is enough.

Different formulas are offered to the users of the IHK.Online-Akademie:

- ▶ Online web-based organisation;
- ▶ Communities;
- ▶ Forums;
- ▶ Web-based trainings.

Online-WB-Veranstaltung	Communities	Fachforen	Reine WBT-Angebote
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ WBT ▪ Präsenzmaßnahmen ▪ Tutoring ▪ Kommunikation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ bezogen auf Präsenzmaßnahme ▪ Tutoring ▪ Kommunikation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ bundesweite Teilnehmer ▪ Tutoring ▪ Kommunikation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ WBT

Communities are very active: they are usually organised around a given subject and often facilitated by a tutor, though some communities work very well without any tutoring. Some communities organise regular courses, whereas most of them appreciate the ability to share information and get answers to their questions.

Whereas communities are really successful, the number of accesses to pure WBT's is decreasing. Today there are more than 8.000 community users and more than 2.000 participants in e-learning or blended learning courses registered.

The DIHK course catalogue gives access to over 100 courses, grouped in 5 main categories:

- ▶ Management and Skills;
- ▶ IT;
- ▶ Commercial science and law;
- ▶ Techniques and quality;
- ▶ Languages.

The most successful courses are the project management suite, developed by an IHK, BWL Online (basics for business incl. business plan), Office products suite, time management and exam preparation.

The trainings are provided in German. They come from the following sources:

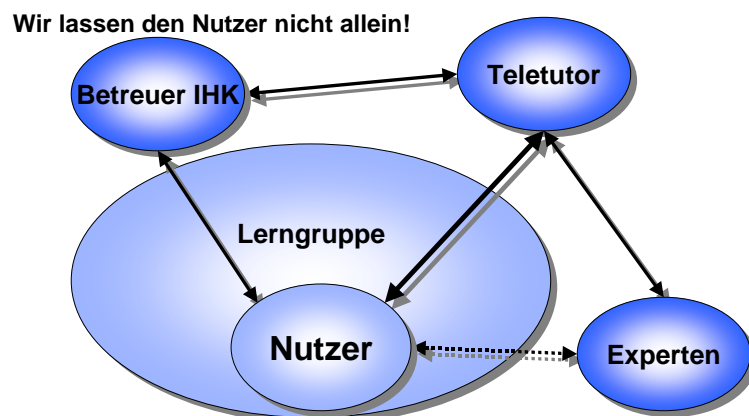
- ▶ Bought off-the-shelf;

- ▶ Developed by the CCIs;
- ▶ Developed by the DIHK-Bildungs-GmbH;
- ▶ Developed by the collaboration of the CCIs with the DIHK-Bildungs-GmbH.

All the trainings provided by the IHK.Online-Akademie need to be certified by the Jury, whereas the trainings sold regionally by the CCIs need not. The Jury is made up of participants from the DIHK-Bildungs-GmbH and from the CCIs. They are either specialised in certifications or in the usage of new media. They have a set of quality criteria for the evaluation of e-learning trainings. The course contents are evaluated by people from the business. Today, there are over 120 certified WBTs.

The user selects the course he wants to attend via the internet portal of the IHK.Online-Akademie. He is automatically transferred to the platform of the CCI who is running that course. The CCIs could select their own platform, so they use a variety of products, most of which are of german origin. One of the most successful products is “CLIX” developed and sold by imc AG, Saarbrücken. Some CCIs use open source solutions.

During the training, the student has access to a tutor. Tutors are usually freelancers.



Today, over 10.000 Users, mainly employees from SMEs, have attended e-learning courses from the IHK.Online-Akademie. They are requested to enter their feedback after attending the courses. Since the learning is organised by the local CCIs, it is not easy to provide an overview of the feedback; but most participants seem to be satisfied. Some of them are really using the advantages of the system and do not want to learn and work without it anymore. Many Companies expect this service as a standard part of the vocational training for their employees. Especially communities are very

well quoted.

The DIHK is very happy of the success of the IHK.Online-Akademie, which they explain by the following factors:

- ▶ Some local CCIs actively promoting the usage of e-learning;
- ▶ Selling of licences to companies rather than to private persons;
- ▶ Integration of e-learning in training tracks (blended learning).

Yet, some barriers still remain:

- ▶ Some technical problems can discourage the users/providers of trainings, e.g. VC usage not as steady as expected;
- ▶ Awareness raising is still a must: clearly state that e-learning is another delivery means for training and will not replace all the other delivery channels.

1.3 THE CLIENTS OF THE ONLINE ACADEMY

The users of the IHK.Online-Akademie are either private users or companies. Private users pay for their own development.

Companies can benefit from different formulas:

- ▶ Licences for a given number of users;
- ▶ Licences for access to the platform during a given period of time.

1.4 E-LEARNING AND SMEs

1.4.1 OVERALL STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS

1. What are the main reasons and barriers preventing wider use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) for learning in Continuing Vocational Education and Training (cVET) in Small and Medium Enterprises? What are the reasons why companies do not implement e-learning?
 - ▶ Internet euphoria is over and it's not easy to sell products related to this;
 - ▶ People do not really know, what e-learning is now, what are the advantages of e-learning and what is not possible with e-learning;
 - ▶ E-learning offers many advantages, but it is not cheaper than normal vocational training;
 - ▶ SMEs often do not have a Human Resources Department;
 - ▶ The implementation of a learning management system is too expensive. SME do need a service provider for the technical and administrative part of e-learning. This is one of the main ideas of www.lhk-online-academie.de.

2. What are the observed strengths and weaknesses of e-learning in the context of cVET?
 - ▶ e-learning is available at every place and every time;
 - ▶ e-learning needs independent learners – the learning behaviour changes from push to pull;
 - ▶ Learners do not have to visit the “real” learning centres but can do a lot of exchanges and learning in the virtual learning centre;
 - ▶ Learners learn to cooperate;
 - ▶ Learners have to work alone;
 - ▶ Some things can't be done in virtual classrooms, as, e.g. the training of social competences, trainings, which require personal involvements like discussions and demonstration lessons;
 - ▶ Price can be prohibitive;
 - ▶ Internet is not always reliable.

1.4.2 EXPECTATIONS

3. What are the main expectations for SMEs in using e-learning? Are these expectations met in reality, and if so to what extent?

Lower costs	–	not always
Less absence at the working place	–	yes, depending on the course up to 100 per cent
Specific company courses	–	yes, this is offered and the demand is increasing
Fast reaction to changing situations	–	yes, but the e-learning providing training centre has to be very active and needs many people

SMEs often just want the course and don't want to invest in the learning management system, e-trainers and e-contents

1.4.3 CONTENT

4. What are the subjects and topics addressed in using e-learning, and which ones should be addressed? Is it possible to identify areas or themes that are particularly appropriate for training via e-learning? Are there areas or themes that are not appropriate for training via e-learning?

- ▶ Management, organisation, business administration, computing and computer applications, balance sheet accounting, technical vocational training.
- ▶ Not appropriate are all the themes, which require personal involvements, e.g. (technical) discussions, demonstration lessons.

5. What sources of e-learning content are being used by SMEs? Are they building custom content? Are they relying on standard e-learning market offerings?

All sources, we build custom content, we buy content, we develop completely new contents and we use standard e-learning market offerings.

1.4.4 AUDIENCE

6. Who is using e-learning in SMEs? Who is the target audience?

IHK.Online-Akademie offers e-learning courses to all the employees in every enterprise, but the main target audience are specialists and executive staff in SMEs.

7. How is e-learning used, how should it be used? Are there important pre-requisites for its use (such as organisational change, trainer/tutor training, high-bandwidth connection, etc)?

- ▶ Most of the participants we had were “normal” people, who had no special training for the usage of e-learning.
- ▶ Changes are mainly organisational: e-learning offers a greater flexibility in time management. The change also affects the relationship between trainer and learner: the learner will take over a part of the trainer’s job and the trainer has to act as a motivator or a coach more and more.

8. When (during working hours/outside working hours) and where (work, home, community facility, etc.) does the e-learning take place?

Our rough estimation: 70 % outside working hours and 70 % at home.

1.4.5 TECHNOLOGY

9. What tools are presently available and utilised in the delivery of e-learning for SMEs (CBT’s, virtual classrooms, WBT’s, Video, simulation, on-line mentors, etc)?

All of the possibilities are offered and used in different combinations (except video). Especially VCs and Communities are booked and used in increasing numbers. Blended learning is starting to become a normal kind of vocational training.

1.4.6 QUALITY AND USER-FRIENDLINESS

10. Is the outcome of e-learning measured? If so, how? Can differences be observed in comparison with traditional methods? Is e-learning efficient, is it effective? How is e-learning perceived (by participants and management)? How is quality measured?

We can see some tendencies: in some courses, which are now offered “normal” and in blended learning, the “blended” results are nearly one grade better. Also, the courses need less time and produce less questions, complaints and dropouts.

But all of this can also be caused by the fact, that eLearners are the more active and independently acting learners.

11. Did SMEs experience problems while setting up an e-learning environment? What type of problems?

With our solution SMEs do not need to set up an e-learning environment. We offer the complete e-learning infrastructure: platform, content, support and administration, trainers and coaches.

12. Are the e-learning tools easy to use? Do they encourage/discourage the learning process?

Whether e-learning tools are easy to use or not depends on the abilities and the willingness of the students. But even the normal users say, that the IHK.Online-Akademie is not complicated to use.

1.4.7 COMPANY CULTURE AND ORGANISATION

13. Is e-learning recognised within the company? Does/can it lead to better qualifications? How does e-learning affect issues such as student assessment and certification?

Yes, it can lead to better qualifications especially in self-organisation, flexibility, teamwork and technical competences.

The recognition within the companies depends on the commitment of the management.

Depending on the subject, the participants get a certificate of attendance, a certificate for passing some kind of test or a diploma like Master CCI.

14. Is e-learning integrated into the working environment and working processes; if so, how?

This depends on the customer.

15. Do SME's offer training or support for the discovery of the e-learning

tools? How did they promote the internal use of e-learning tools?

DIHK provides trainings for the discovery of e-learning. The most companies normally do not promote e-learning.

16. Is e-learning supporting new ways of working such as teleworking, mobile working, etc?

Maybe, we can't answer this question now.

1.4.8 LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

17. Are the e-learning tools available in the desired language?

Yes, but because of our normal target group, German SMEs and their employees, we only offer a German version. The platform is also available in English, French and Spanish. Other languages can be developed – but we would have to pay for it.

Are their structures well suited for the knowledge acquisition? What could better help the learning process?

This depends very much on the learning behaviour of the students.

1.4.9 COST/BENEFIT

18. Is the budget to run e-learning courses more accessible than the budget for classroom-based courses?

- initial costs (purchase of hard/software, learning platform, infrastructure for networking and access to the Internet,...)
- recurrent costs (communication costs, costs for training of staff, development of electronic learning material,...)

No, it is not.

1.4.10 MAIN BENEFITS/ADDED VALUE

19. What are the main benefits/what is the main added value for your company linked to e-learning (better learning results, flexibility, less costs per learner, other...)?

Better learning results, more flexibility, new customer groups, positive recognition and: we have to offer it, a company offering vocational training can't exist without it in the near future.

2 INSTRUX!ON BELGIUM

2.1 THE ORGANISATION

Instruxion¹ is a Brussels based company with national and international customers. Instruxion's core business is the creation, design and development of customised content for e-learning and eMarketing. Instruxion's projects have shown that e-learning and eMarketing projects are most successful when delivered in an attractive, customised and interactive multimedia format.

Instruxion is determined to deliver high-impact e-learning content which addresses clearly defined business goals. The challenges of e-learning are overcome by combining strong content with powerful delivery methods. It is determined to lead the e-learning revolution by applying innovative instructional methods and adapting state-of-the-art multimedia technologies.

The mission of Instruxion is to help organisations (including SMEs) reach their business objectives by providing them with attractive and effective e-learning content, including tailor made content. As long as a company has a target audience and an objective to train/educate that target audience on a certain subject, Instruxion can help them reach that objective through powerful e-learning.

2.2 THE E-LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Instruxion was founded in April 2001 and thus has been providing e-learning trainings for 3 year now.

Instruxion does not create public domain content today. All e-learning content so far was created tailor-made for companies and organisations, and as such became property of these organisations. In the near future, Instruxion-owned content will be created and released for wide audience sales.

All e-learning created by Instruxion is Flash-based and can be viewed using an internet browser such as Internet Explorer.

Instruxion has developed e-learning programs for SMEs throughout Europe,

¹ Website Instruxion: <http://www.instruxion.com>

Middle-East and Africa (EMEA), for companies such as Cisco, Belgacom and Alcatel. The largest audience was reached within the Cisco projects. They had a European target audience of over 50,000 SMEs. The e-learning program started 2,5 years ago and is still being used today. This e-learning program covers 'e-business' training and learns SMEs how to grow towards e-business using the Internet in all aspects of a business. The e-learning program was translated into more than 20 languages and according to Cisco, over 20,000 SMEs throughout EMEA have attended different chapters within the program.

As most of the e-learning programs are tailor-made and handed over to the organisations Instruxion made them for, the feedback cycle is owned by the organisations themselves. They usually provide Instruxion with summarised feedback.

Instruxion only creates 'high-impact' e-learning, which is multimedia-based, animated and always guided by a voice-over. As a result, this e-learning is very attractive and engaging, and as such end-user feedback is usually very positive. This kind of e-learning is also the most expensive form available today (compared to text-based, PowerPoint-style e-learning built with authoring tools), but there is a market for this kind of e-learning. The investment cost is higher for our customers (= companies) compared to traditional e-learning, but the chance of reaching results (for a company to reach business objectives with this kind of e-learning) is also higher.

2.3 E-LEARNING AND SMEs

2.3.1 OVERALL STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS

Background: two year ago Instruxion did a European project with Cisco in which an e-learning course on 'e-business' was offered to SMEs. The course was available in 25 languages. The content was the following:

As an SME you can attain e-business (combination of e-procurement, supply chain management, e-marketing etc.) in 5 steps or phases:

1. 'e-mail': the SME uses e-mail and Internet (as user);
2. 'website': the SME presents itself on the Internet through a website (eventually with a product catalogue);
3. 'e-commerce': the SME offers their products for sale through the website;

4. 'e-business': not only the external but also all internal processes that have to do with the company management are computerised (e.g. an order that comes in goes immediately to the warehouse but also to the financial services of the company);
5. 'ecosystem': extranet, next to the own services the company offers, also other partners are connected with the company (e.g. the suppliers are being informed automatically of the stock). In such an ecosystem the SME can be the partner as well as the 'main' company.

This course was offered to SMEs in East and Western European countries and to SMEs that could be positioned in phase 1 or 2.

Cisco had started this program because they wanted to show that a lot of money could be saved in the different phases (for example by reducing communication processes). A second reason was that they had experienced that a lot of SMEs did not really understand the meaning of 'e-business' and the different elements it comprises.

The experience was that for an SME the step from phase 2 to phase 3 was and is a very big one. (Often they need help of an external parties.) SMEs thus seem to be 'stuck' in phase 1 or 2 for what concerns ICT in general, and consequently also for e-learning in more particular.

Reasons for that are diverse. SMEs have too less time to engage in e-learning. There is also a high threshold for SMEs concerning the investments that are needed to implement e-learning. For e-learning to work in a company it is necessary that the management thinks it is important and makes it a priority. Training in general still seems to be considered as reactive. Before a training is offered, there first has to be a problem (e.g. introduction of a new computer system).

From another project (with CEVORA) the experience also was that a big problem is that there is no training manager in an SME, at the most there is someone who is responsible for training next to his/her other function as for example Human Resource Manager or Office Manager. As just mentioned if training is offered to the employees then it is often reactive.

In an environment where there is no time to look at e-learning and where there is no training manager it is very hard for e-learning to flourish.

SMEs often do not know what e-learning has to offer content wise. When an SME has a training need, they normally try to assess what is available on the market. At that moment they don't (have the money to) experiment and often choose training from a 'reliable' and 'respectable' institution. Unfortunately e-learning companies usually are small and little known. A solution for this might be that the e-learning companies make partnerships with a larger and 'respectable' company in order to gain the confidence of the SMEs.

2.3.2 EXPECTATIONS

E-learning is not high on the priority list of SMEs. They do not have many expectations from e-learning simply because they do not really know what is e-learning all about. If they have expectations at all they are not met.

People 'zap' on the internet from website to website because they have an immediate need for information. At that moment they need 'just-in-time' learning and they need a course presented in 'easily digestible chunks', which are well structured and indexed. (Although it has to be noted that not all e-learning lends itself to be split up in small parts.) SMEs only have time for this kind of learning. A class based course on the other hand often takes too much time. For SMEs it is rather difficult to deal with the absence of employees when they are away for a whole day to follow a course. Another disadvantage of a class based course is that it never perfectly fits the training need and is not really flexible.

2.3.3 CONTENT

The content should be presented just-in-time and in small pieces. It can be discussed how small those pieces should be. The size could be adapted according to the need. The smaller the piece the more difficult it gets to give it an added value.

With respect to content it is somewhat more difficult to offer everything that has to do with 'human interaction' through e-learning. However apart from that almost all topics and subjects are possible for e-learning, although maybe not for the full 100% through e-learning. For example for driving a car you can learn the theory through e-learning and you can do some simulations, but eventually you have to sit and drive a car in reality to really learn it.

The power of e-learning compared to a traditional course is that it can be done at your own speed.

2.3.4 AUDIENCE

Depending on the subject anybody can make up the target audience of e-learning.

A prerequisite for e-learning to be successful is that the management has to believe in it. The most efficient way is when e-learning is integrated into the overall business strategy. Learning and training in general has to be a part of

the mission of the company. E-learning will then follow automatically.

At this moment e-learning has to be done outside the working time and place. The value is often not yet seen. E-learning only has a chance *at* the workplace when it is offered in small pieces and just-in-time.

2.3.5 TECHNOLOGY

Live training on the Internet is only interesting when you have an illustrious speaker that is worth seeing live, for example because of his experience.

Instruxion does not have experience with live training via Virtual Classrooms.

For their courses no extra tools are needed. They are browser based (with some standard plug-ins). Therefore not much problems occur.

2.3.6 QUALITY AND USER-FRIENDLINESS

QUALITY IS OFTEN NOT YET MEASURED. IF IT IS MEASURED IT IS MORE IN A QUANTITATIVE (E.G. HOW MANY PEOPLE FOLLOW THE COURSE?) THEN IN A QUALITATIVE WAY (E.G. ARE THE OBJECTIVES MET?).

IF SMES EXPERIENCE PROBLEMS WHILE SETTING UP AN E-LEARNING ENVIRONMENT THESE ARE MOSTLY OF A TECHNICAL NATURE, FOR EXAMPLE A LACK OF THE NECESSARY ICT INFRASTRUCTURE (E.G. LACK OF SPEAKERS).

The tools encourage the learning process. A study of Elliott Masie says that 70% of the existing e-learning is not used because it is too boring. The philosophy of Instruxion is to make e-learning courses attractive. One does not often leave a classical course because of social pressure, because of the cost,.... It is much easier to 'run away' from an e-learning course. Here once again one can argue that an e-learning course should offer the content in very small parts and the trainee should be able to choose which parts he or she follows.

Another Elliott Masie study says that 98% of the e-learning courses are modelled on a class based course. This does not work. You just cannot 'digitalise' a course but you need to work out another concept.

2.3.7 COMPANY CULTURE AND ORGANISATION

E-learning is not recognised within the company and there is not much belief that it would lead to better qualifications.

No certificate is given for just following an e-learning course (authentication would be needed). A certificate is coupled to a test at the end of the course. Instruxion provides such tests.

E-learning is not integrated into the working environment.

Since the Instruxion courses are browser based it is not really needed for the SMEs to offer training for the use of the tools.

If e-learning is embedded in the normal work processes, the working itself might change. To make teleworking possible, the necessary infrastructure must be available. In SMEs this is still an exception.

2.3.8 LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Cisco courses are available in 25 languages.

For SMEs courses need to be available in the local language. Today a lot of material is only available in English.

E-learning courses consist of small modules and their structure is well suited for knowledge acquisition.

2.3.9 COST/BENEFIT

It is difficult to answer questions on costs and benefits of e-learning because up till now the most projects for SMEs were made available for free by the client.

Initial costs are not much of a problem for SMEs as they probably have the necessary infrastructure for other applications, so no separate investments are needed. Communication costs are part of the general operating costs.

2.3.10 MAIN BENEFITS/ADDED VALUE

E-learning has a lot of potential and has a lot of benefits (e.g. flexibility, less costs,...), but there is still a long way to go. On the other hand there is no basic drawback against e-learning.

3 LEARNDIRECT SCOTLAND & LEARNDIRECT SCOTLAND FOR BUSINESS

3.1 THE ORGANISATION

Scottish University for Industry (SUfi) was established by the Scottish Executive to support economic competitiveness and social inclusion, through lifelong learning, stimulating demand and facilitating ease of access to learning for individuals and businesses. SUfi is a government funded organisation acting as an honest broker on behalf of the learning community in Scotland. Services for individuals are delivered under the learndirect scotland brand and services to businesses are delivered under the learndirect scotland for business brand, these two brands operate under the mantle of Scottish University for Industry. They offer various services, which are as follows:

For Businesses:

- ▶ Dedicated helpline offering signposting and advice on learning opportunities;
- ▶ www.lds4b.com our website offering a gateway to a plethora of advice and opportunities on workforce development as well as access to the Learning Opportunities Database;
- ▶ The Learning Opportunities Database (LOD) a database of over 1800 training providers and over 60,000 courses and learning opportunities in Scotland, expanding on a daily basis;
- ▶ Dedicated team of client facing Geographic Training Partners offering advice guidance and signposting on workforce development and the variety of learning opportunities and initiatives available in local areas. Raising awareness of Online Learning;
- ▶ Dedicated team of Project Training Partners who co-ordinate with Geographic Training Partners and other business support organisations to deliver joint projects both Nationally and on a local basis. Training Access Points (TAPs) and Business Learning Accounts (BLA's) are examples;
- ▶ E-learning – a catalogue of courses is available to companies. The courses are offered in a variety of ways through free voucher offers, dedicated projects (Tourism People), Training Access Points (TAPs) and Learning Bytes delivered through a network of quality branded Learning Centres. Courses are also available to purchase at a subsidised rate.

For Individuals:

- ▶ Dedicated separate individual helpline for advice and guidance on

learning;

- ▶ www.learndirectscotland.com website access to advice and guidance on learning opportunities and portal to the Learning Opportunities Database (as above);
- ▶ Access to a network of over 400 independent learning centres which are quality branded by learndirect Scotland;
- ▶ A variety of local and national projects including Individual Learning Accounts (ILA), The Big Plus and Give it a Go events.

3.2 THE E-LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Learndirect scotland has provided e-learning solutions for over 2 years.

E-learning access is via the learndirect scotland online Learning Management System. All courses are accessed via the web and the learner needs only a PC and an Internet connection. There are minimum technical requirements that must be taken into consideration.

Currently the catalogue of learndirect scotland contains 533 e-learning courses which are accessed via an Online Learning Management System called Skillnet. The catalogue (see section 1.5) can be viewed via <http://show.skillnetonline.com/evaluation> by clicking on 'GO' from the home page. There is no need to register to see the catalogue.

The courses are provided in English, and have been developed by independent training providers, with some development being funded by learndirect scotland.

Company Learners register for courses in one of two ways, either by ordering a number of courses from their local Training Partner, who will then deliver a five minute Induction to each learner or if participating in a TAPs or Learning Bytes project the learner requests courses through SkillNet and is given an "access" code. During the training, the student can have access to tutor support, this is provided by an externally contracted company. When the course is completed, the learner receives an "Online for Success" Completion Certificate.

To date 613 SMEs have taken up e-learning programmes, involving 2,631 learners. Learndirect scotland requests feedback forms from the learners and are currently gathering more. The results of a sample of 183 forms, each equating to one episode of learning are supplied: the questions asked and the percentage for each answer is shown below:

How would you rate the course	Poor / Average	Good / Excellent
	14%	86%
How much do you think the course will improve your performance at work	Not at all / Not much	A little / A lot
	10%	90%
How well did the course suit your level of knowledge	Not at all / Not very well	Quite Well / Very Well
	9%	91%
How much do you feel your level of knowledge has improved as a result of this course	Not at all / Not much	A little / A lot
	9%	91%
How easy to use did you find the online learning system (Skillnet)	Not at all / Not very	Quite / Very
	10%	90%
How user-friendly did you find the course	Not at all / Not very	Quite / Very
	9%	91%
How helpful was the online tutor support	Didn't use	Quite / Very
	76%	24%
How helpful was the technical support	Didn't use	Quite / Very
	76%	24%

In the SME sector, the services, delivered under the learndirect scotland for business brand, aim to stimulate demand for learning within the workplace and to offer training solutions that best fit their needs. Part of this programme involves facilitating e-learning, which will complement other training activity and, hopefully, overcome some of the barriers faced by SMEs. The benefits include:

- ▶ Employees can learn at a time, place and pace to suit them and their work commitments;
- ▶ Staff don't need to go off-site, so there's less down-time and travel costs;
- ▶ Quality on-line support with all courses, to help their staff get the most out of training;
- ▶ Management reports providing progress information;

- ▶ Courses are subsidised, offering a cost-effective solution.

3.3 THE CLIENTS OF LEARNDIRECT SCOTLAND

Learndirect scotland offers a range of workforce development services for private users and for corporate organisations, both in the private and public sectors.

Some case studies from SMEs who have engaged in e-learning projects with them are provided in section 3.6.

3.4 E-LEARNING COURSE CATALOGUE

The catalogue for March 2004 is provided on the CD-ROM.

3.5 E-LEARNING AND SMEs

3.5.1 OVERALL STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS

1. What are the main reasons and barriers preventing wider use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) for learning in Continuing Vocational Education and Training (cVET) in Small and Medium Enterprises? What are the reasons why companies do not implement e-learning?

Main reasons preventing wider use of ICT:

- ▶ Lack of broadband availability
- ▶ Lack of available PCs within the workplace
- ▶ Outdated PCs or software
- ▶ Lack of dedicated communications link
- ▶ Lack of confidence in using ICT applications
- ▶ Lack of awareness of how to implement e-learning

- ▶ Companies policy regarding access to internet.

2. What are the observed strengths and weaknesses of e-learning in the context of cVET?

Main strengths

- ▶ Employees can learn at a time, place and pace to suit them and their work commitments
- ▶ Staff don't need to go off-site, so there's less down-time and travel costs
- ▶ E-learning provides a non-threatening environment for learners who don't respond well to traditional methods
- ▶ More training is undertaken because e-learning offers courses at all levels, but is especially useful for introducing new skills or refreshing existing, but seldom used, skills.
- ▶ Quality on-line support with all courses, to help their staff get the most out of training
- ▶ Management reports providing progress information
- ▶ Courses are subsidised, offering a cost-effective solution

Weaknesses

- ▶ Establishing what level of expertise is required by the learner
- ▶ Lack of discipline - The learner needs to be continually motivated and encouraged to complete the programme.
- ▶ Lack of suitable environment – e-learning is less effective where the learner engages in the course at his normal workstation/desk. The ideal scenario is to create a Learning Area, where learners have more of an opportunity to focus on, and complete, their learning.

3.5.2 EXPECTATIONS

3. What are the main expectations for SMEs in using e-learning? Are these expectations met in reality, and if so to what extent?

Expectations of e-learning are:

- ▶ This will replace the need for 'traditional' training methods – This expectation is RARELY met
- ▶ This will provide flexibility. This expectation is ALWAYS met.
- ▶ This will save us money. This expectation is OFTEN met.
- ▶ This will increase general skills within the workplace. This

expectation is OFTEN met.

- ▶ This will help us to engage learners within the organisation that are hard to reach. This expectation is OFTEN met.

3.5.3 CONTENT

4. What are the subjects and topics addressed in using e-learning, and which ones should be addressed? Is it possible to identify areas or themes that are particularly appropriate for training via e-learning? Are there areas or themes that are not appropriate for training via e-learning?

Subjects and topics are wide-ranging, from ICT training through to personal development and business skills. We find that the subjects deemed most appropriate for the SMEs that we assist are:

- ▶ ICT (Microsoft applications)
- ▶ Customer Care skills
- ▶ Communication Skills (Face to face, writing and telephone)
- ▶ Staff development (Appraisals, team working, managerial)
- ▶ Legislative Skills (Health and Safety, Office legislation)

“Themes that are not appropriate” - this depends of the level of expectation. For example, e-learning is effective in introducing skills that involve interaction with others (e.g. Presentation Skills, Interviewing Skills), however, these subjects are best addressed by face-to-face training methods.

5. What sources of e-learning content are being used by SME's? Are they building custom content? Are they relying on standard e-learning market offerings?

E-learning content is generally sourced from mainstream e-learning providers. For specific sectors, we have helped to create specific content and a copy of these courses is enclosed (Sector Solutions).

3.5.4 AUDIENCE

6. Who is using e-learning in SMEs? Who is the target audience?

The main engagement within SME's comes from administrative staff, line managers and shop floor staff. Target audience is any employee within ANY SME from 1 – 250 employees. Generally, e-learning has been embraced by companies employing between 5 and 50 staff. The sectors that have been most successful are Tourism, Manufacturing and retail, given that e-learning fits well with shift patterns, for example.

7. How is e-learning used, how should it be used? Are there important pre-requisites for its use (such as organisational change, trainer/tutor training, high-bandwidth connection, etc).

SMEs access e-learning via our online Learning Management System. All courses are accessed via the web and are real-time. This allows us to track progress and usage. There are, of course, minimum technical requirements that must be taken into consideration, although all courses run on a normal telephone connection (56k speed). We recommend, however, that ISDN or broadband should be used where possible to maximise the experience. We also find that tutor support is a desirable option to provide the learner with encouragement, and we can provide the learner with this facility, depending on the course subject matter and proficiency of the learner. We find the tutor support is most relevant with ICT courses.

Also of vital importance is the ethos of the management in support, commitment and encouragement to E Learning and the learner.

8. When (during working hours/outside working hours) and where (work, home, community facility, etc.) does the e-learning take place?

All of these. SMEs generally offer time within working hours for learners to engage in e-learning, although some insist that this is done in their own time, either at home or during breaks at work. Often, the employer will supply a PC within the workplace to facilitate this. We also offer learners the option of engaging in e-learning at a learndirect scotland branded learning centre, of which there are 450 across Scotland.

3.5.5 TECHNOLOGY

9. What tools are presently available and utilised in the delivery of e-learning for SME's (CBT's, virtual classrooms, WBT's, Video, simulation, on-line mentors, etc)?

We offer face-to-face e-learning inductions for SMEs (free), along with electronic and paper user guides and e-learning samplers. We also offer CD based courses where connectivity is a problem. We have the facility to set up virtual classrooms, although this is not widely done. Tutor support is available through a third party provider.

3.5.6 QUALITY AND USER-FRIENDLINESS

10. Is the outcome of e-learning measured? If so, how? Can differences be observed in comparison with traditional methods? Is e-learning efficient, is it effective? How is e-learning perceived (by participants and management)? How is quality measured?

We ask SMEs to complete survey forms (as previously mentioned) which are used to determine the effectiveness of the learning. This information will be built in to their ongoing training plan. Using a cross-section of opinion, some of the comments we have noted include:

- ▶ An increase in training undertaken
 - ▶ A positive change in attitude towards training
 - ▶ Renewed enthusiasm for training within the organisation
 - ▶ SMEs are more likely to address training needs identified at appraisals, therefore staff are more motivated.
 - ▶ Increased intellectual capital within the organisation
 - ▶ Increased productivity and competitiveness
11. Did SME's experience problems while setting up an e-learning environment? What type of problems?

Some SMEs experienced the following problems:

- ▶ Their PC wouldn't run the course because the necessary software (e.g. Javascript) wasn't loaded. This would be rectified by our Technical Support Team
- ▶ Their PC was running an old version of Microsoft Office
- ▶ They experienced slow response times due to limited telephone connection

- ▶ They didn't have a PC dedicated to e-learning
- ▶ They didn't consult with the learners to ensure that the courses provided were appropriate to their level of knowledge.

12. Are the e-learning tools easy to use? Do they encourage/discourage the learning process?

Being web-based with no administration required by the SME (we host this service on their behalf), the e-learning tools are designed to be easy to use. Most SMEs find that this method encourages the learning process (75% of our survey felt that the e-learning system was quite or very easy to use, 77% of our survey felt that the courses were quite/very user friendly).

3.5.7 COMPANY CULTURE AND ORGANISATION

13. Is e-learning recognised within the company? Does/can it lead to better qualifications? How does e-learning affect issues such as student assessment and certification?

Learndirect scotland support e-learning as a valuable training resource for SMEs and our own organisation. We are currently undergoing a mapping exercise that will allow us to classify each e-learning course against the national qualifications framework. For SMEs, a certificate of completion is available to all SME learners who complete the modules. At learndirect scotland, we use e-learning to support our own personal development plans.

14. Is e-learning integrated into the working environment and working processes; if so, how?

As mentioned above, we use e-learning to support our own personal development plans. Each member of staff will discuss their learning needs with their line manager and will agree where e-learning will be appropriate. We then record these PDPs electronically within the learning management system and make the catalogue of courses available to the staff member so that the courses can be completed within agreed timescales. We also encourage SMEs to take this approach.

15. Do SME's offer training or support for the discovery of the e-learning tools? How did they promote the internal use of e-learning tools?

SMEs will often appoint a 'Learning Champion' within their organisation. This person will be responsible for stimulating interest, facilitating course choices, arranging induction sessions and, on

occasion, arranging learning seminars. In some cases, they will provide an area, such as a training room, to encourage learners to engage. Learndirect scotland help with this process by conducting learner reviews and certificate presentations.

16. Is e-learning supporting new ways of working such as teleworking, mobile working, etc?

We don't have detailed data on this, although the flexibility of a web-based platform does support remote learning activity, allowing the learner to engage at a time and place suitable to them.

3.5.8 LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

17. Are the e-learning tools available in the desired language?

All of the learning modules we provide are in English, although as we source this from a third-party provider (generally NETg), we can accommodate other languages, as required.

18. Are their structures well suited for the knowledge acquisition? What could better help the learning process?

All courses are designed to ensure that the learning experience is tailored to suit the knowledge of the learner. This will involve three key elements:

1. A pre-assessment to gauge existing level of knowledge (the course will then concentrate on the learning required, rather than go over existing knowledge, although the learner can complete all of the modules if they wish;
2. The learning topics as determined by the pre-assessment;
3. A post-assessment, or test with a score. Most courses have a pass rate set at 80%.

What would be more helpful to the learner is a process that would determine the correct level for the individual before engaging on the course. This could include a structured Training Needs Analysis programme or a more structured approach to developing personal development plans within the organisation.

3.5.9 COST/BENEFIT

19. Is the budget to run e-learning courses more accessible than the budget for classroom-based courses?
- initial costs (purchase of hard/software, learning platform, infrastructure for networking and access to the Internet,...)
 - recurrent costs (communication costs, costs for training of staff, development of electronic learning material,...)

There are minimal costs for SMEs, as learndirect scotland subsidise any setup and course licence costs. There is no need to purchase additional hardware/software as e-learning is delivered via the Internet. Main cost for the SME is additional Internet connection costs, although this is generally absorbed as many SMEs have 'always on' connections. So, SMEs can get much, much more learning for their training budget for those subjects that can be delivered by e-learning, rather than traditional methods.

3.5.10 MAIN BENEFITS/ADDED VALUE

20. What are the main benefits/what is the main added value for your company linked to e-learning (better learning results, flexibility, less costs per learner, other,...)?
- ▶ Employees can learn at a time, place and pace to suit them and their work commitments;
 - ▶ Staff don't need to go off-site, so there's less down-time and travel costs;
 - ▶ Quality on-line support with all courses, to help their staff get the most out of training;
 - ▶ Management reports providing progress information;
 - ▶ Courses are subsidised, offering a cost-effective solution;
 - ▶ More positive attitude to learning;
 - ▶ An increase in training undertaken.

3.6 SME E-LEARNING CASE STUDIES

3.6.1 LODGE AT CARFRAEMILL

The Lodge at Carfraemill in Lauder, Berwickshire, is aiming to enhance its business with the help of an online training initiative tailored specifically to the tourism industry.

Scottish Enterprise Borders and learndirect scotland for business, launched a joint e-learning programme last year, aimed at the region's tourism sector.

The free scheme aimed to help employers in the tourism and travel trades find their way through the maze of online training opportunities, and give them the chance to sample relevant training online for all their employees.

Five tourism-related firms – three hotels – including The Lodge at Carfraemill, a travel agency and a holiday centre – piloted the initiative, which offered managers and staff a highly flexible and cost-effective training mechanism backed up by quality online support.

Staff of The Lodge at Carfraemill decided to improve their computing skills and gain the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) qualification. And as hotels gear up for the start of the tourism season in the Borders, the benefits are becoming clear.

Susan Thorburn of The Lodge at Carfraemill, said: “We have had a high level of business success since taking over seven years ago. However, in the hotel industry you must always maintain high standards with ongoing staff training and development.

“The big attraction of online learning is that the training material is flexible, allowing staff to complete the courses at a time and pace to suit them. It can also allow for seasonal fluctuations - which is absolutely vital for us in the tourism industry.”

Tourism is now one of the most important industries in the Borders. It is estimated to be worth £100m and relies heavily on effective training to ensure visitors to the region are provided with the best possible experience to encourage them to make a return visit.

Olive Richardson, purchase manager at Carfraemill, said: “Three staff including myself embarked on the ECDL course and it has already dramatically improved our confidence working on the PC.”

Olive had been looking to improve her Excel skills for some time and decided to try night school in a bid to learn more about spreadsheets. However, despite attending two sessions, the course didn't cover the specific

elements she wanted to learn.

She said: “The ECDL course is broken down into bite-sized chunks of learning so that you can browse through the material, isolate a particular area of interest and work on the skills that you need immediately. The flexible format of the course really appealed to me and was exactly what I was looking for.

“I wanted to learn more about specific areas in Excel and the ECDL helped me get through it quickly and easily. With the new skills I have learned, I plan to develop an integrated system for this hotel and its sister hotel, which will act as an HR resource so that all staff receive the same information to do their job effectively.”

Olive added: "Given that we are based in a relatively rural part of the Borders, the online training provided us with a flexible way of learning at a time and pace that suited staff. The alternative would have been to attend night school, which is more than half an hour away by car and staff would be tied to a weekly routine.”

Denise Barclay, assistant housekeeper, was asked to produce a training manual for housekeeping staff prior to starting the ECDL course. She said: “I had basic computer skills when I compiled the manual, but it would have been so much easier and certainly quicker if I had my ECDL qualification before starting such a massive task.

”We hope to encourage other members of staff to take up the course now that we are beginning to see the benefits of online learning and the many advantages it brings to a variety of jobs.”

3.6.2 CLASS 1 CONSULTANTS

Class 1 Consultants of Kilmacolm is a company that specialises in assisting organisations to achieve business results through developing their processes, procedures and their people.

Class 1 combines consultancy expertise with practical advice, custom-built training courses and customer-centric professional services. Clients range from local housing authorities to multi-national call centres. Director Brian Hutcheson gained vital experience over his career spanning 24 years with companies like Whitbread, Thomson Travel and BeCogent.

Brian was introduced to learndirect Scotland via Greenock Chamber of Commerce. He said: “At the time, learndirect scotland was offering to source up to five free online courses for Chamber members. I arranged an interview with the local training partner, who carried out a very detailed audit of my company’s needs, before suggesting a number of courses. This was

invaluable, and helped to guide me towards the training I needed.”

Brian has completed two courses - PowerPoint presentations and Project Management - and has found the accessibility of learndirect scotland's courses a real bonus. With his business taking him all over the UK, it is essential that he can operate from wherever he is based.

He said: “The courses sourced by learndirect scotland have benefited both myself and my clients. Business is going 1000 times better than I could have hoped for when I first took the leap of faith to start Class 1.

“I have now incorporated another company, Inspired Training Solutions Ltd, to cope with the growing demand for quality training. We have optimised both websites www.class1consultants.co.uk and www.inspiredtrainingsolutions.co.uk and I will be looking to learndirect scotland to help Inspired Training Solutions develop further. The courses have allowed me to increase my core skills as well as expand the business. Whether it's creating presentations or developing performance management strategies, the courses have benefited all aspects of the business.”

He said “An additional bonus is that, as the courses are online, they can be accessed via my laptop from hotels around the country. It's like having a mobile library to hand.”

3.6.3 OTICON

Employees of Hamilton-based company Oticon completed a range of online courses through learndirect scotland for business, including credit control, writing meeting minutes, essential phone communications skills and customer care.

Oticon manufactures hearing aids for a worldwide market and was recently named European Company of the Year 2003 by the European Business Press Association, a prestigious title previously held by Nokia, BMW and Hugo Boss.

The company has shown commitment to its staff and customers by implementing a range of online training programmes.

Alistair Tait, general manager of Oticon, said: “We are always looking at new and innovative ways to drive the business forward and online learning proved to be an effective method to up-skill our workforce.

“The bite-sized courses provided a productive and enjoyable way for staff to learn new skills within their working environment rather than taking time out to go on a course. I have been encouraged by the positive feedback from

staff would recommend online training to other business as a positive alternative to traditional training methods.”

3.6.4 CAIRNGORM BREWERY

Cairngorm Brewery’s location in the Highlands means that computer links are essential to enable staff to link up with suppliers and customers.

The Aviemore company uses technology as much as possible in order to speed up communication, improve services, and reduce costs and prices. It also means that supplier markets and information that otherwise would not be available is easily accessible.

And to ensure that all the office staff were confident using computers, it was decided to offer them the opportunity to work towards the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL).

Marketing executive Heidi Irvine first heard about the range of training services available from learndirect scotland for business at a seminar held by the local chamber of commerce.

She explained: "I contacted learndirect scotland for business after the meeting to ask about some of the learning opportunities that would be available to us and they sent a representative out to have a chat with us within days."

The office staff started the ECDL course, which has seven modules covering everything from using presentations to how to undertake research on the Internet and design advertising images.

According to Heidi, the course was the ideal starting point to assess the company's strengths and weaknesses. She said: "Online training provides opportunities to businesses that are otherwise unavailable because of time or costs. This has essentially allowed us to gain training cheaper than through other sources. It has also been great having a point of contact who can advise on training suited to our needs.

"When ECDL training is completed I am sure we will all continue to advance to the harder levels in whatever areas we feel would be of benefit. That way everyone can enjoy learning and progress as individuals.

“Online training is fantastic as it allows us to develop our skills as individuals and for the company but at pace which suits ourselves. This flexibility is great for small businesses where there never seems to be enough time.”

Heidi added: "We recently re-branded all our products and email allowed us to continually show customers all over the country each stage of the design process in order to get feedback."

The company is currently developing its website so that it can provide a higher level of service to customers. "Our e-business strategy is really about managing our supply chain as efficiently as possible, trying to distinguish ourselves from our competitors and creating longer lasting, more profitable customer and supplier relationships", said Heidi.

Cairngorm Brewery was established in August 2001 and brews a range of cask conditioned ales and bottled beers. It currently has five bottled products, six permanent cask conditioned ales, together with a range of seasonal ales throughout the year.

3.6.5 CROSS KEYS HOTEL

The Cross Keys Hotel in Kelso is transforming its business with the help of a new training initiative tailored specifically to the tourism industry.

Scottish Enterprise Borders and learndirect scotland for business launched a joint e-learning scheme designed to improve the region's tourism by helping employers find their way through the maze of online training opportunities, and give them the chance to sample relevant training online for all their employees.

Luca Becattelli, proprietor of the Cross Keys Hotel, said: "In our line of work, one of the most important aspects is the quality of service that the client receives. When I heard about the services provided by Scottish Borders Enterprise and learndirect scotland for business, I was very keen for my staff to become trained in certain areas that would improve and compliment the training they already had. Another area of appeal was the fact that all the training could be done in-house, making life much easier for a busy hotelier. I genuinely believe that the scheme will be a great success and I think that in the future online training will overtake conventional methods".

Tourism is now one of the most important industries in the Borders worth in the region of £100m and it relies heavily on effective training to ensure visitors to the region are provided with the best possible experience. There are approximately 1200 tourism businesses employing just over 4000 people or 8% of the total Borders' workforce.

3.6.6 MACPHIE'S OF GLENBERVIE

Britain's leading family-owned food ingredients company was honoured for its trailblazing role in staff training and development.

Macphie's of Glenbervie, near Stonehaven, have been quick to adopt new ways of approaching training and were recently selected to take part in a national pilot scheme to test the benefits of computer-delivered online learning.

Fourteen staff who participated in the pilot programme, developed by national training agency learndirect scotland, were presented with special achievement certificates in a ceremony at Macphie's Stonehaven headquarters.

The company, which employs over 200 people and is on track to turnover £50m by 2005, has long been a firm believer in providing its employees with the best training and self-improvement opportunities.

Macphie's was the first company to take part in the learndirect scotland for business pilot and 14 members of staff have now completed online modules including IT training and softer people skills rather than manufacturing techniques, including appraisal skills, time management and timework.

Donald Pow, Executive Director of learndirect scotland, said: "Macphie's have an outstanding reputation in their sector for their commitment to staff development and quality produce, both of which very much go hand in hand. They therefore stood out to us when we were seeking forward-thinking partners to help trial and develop the new learndirect scotland for business advisory service."

"They were also very open to exploring the potential benefits afforded by new technology, through delivery of online learning, direct into the workplace."

"They are an outstanding example of what is possible when a company is committed to advancing the skills and potential of its staff. It has become an invaluable community asset."

Macphie's Human Resources Director Sylvia Halkerston and her team spent six months working with local learndirect scotland for business Training Partner Susan Rees to develop a series of distance training packages for staff, which would fit round their existing workloads.

Sylvia Halkerston said: "We are very proud of our staff who have been honoured today. The main benefits of this kind of training programme are that it is both accessible and flexible. It opens up the possibilities for a diverse range of training opportunities while reducing the need for staff downtime, away from the workplace.

“Unemployment in our area is around 1.5% which is extremely low compared to other areas.. We also have to compete with the oil and gas industry, which is seen as much more glamorous than food and drink. To ensure we keep high calibre staff we have to provide excellent training and development opportunities and effectively grow our own workforce”

“Employees are encouraged to take control of their own learning, and their families can come along and use the company’s learning facilities as well, so we like to think we’ve developed a very holistic and effective outlook in developing our key resource.”

4 LEVINTELLIGENCE BELGIUM - SWEDEN

4.1 THE ORGANISATION

Levintelligence² works with e-learning and educational multimedia for different organisations in Scandinavia and in the Benelux region.

They acted as consultants on ICT for primary and secondary schools in Sweden from 1995 – 2000. Gradually they realised that their core competence was pedagogy and technology supported learning which they realised was a scarce competence in the commercial e-learning market. Levintelligence sold successfully their consultancy services to companies in the late nineties. However the consultancy market changed drastically and they had to reorient.

After thorough investigations they decided to go into a partnership with SkillSoft to be able to offer good content to the customer.

Today Levintelligence does not only work with SMEs. In fact big companies are much more acceptant to e-learning and are the main customers.

Levintelligence has deep knowledge on what constitutes a good learning environment. The device is "Respect the learner!" This motto affects many aspects of the learning environment; e.g. the interface, navigation and feedback in the e-learning program as well as the conditions an organisation has to provide the learner with such as time, (physical) space, understanding and support, incentives for learning in terms of expectations and rewards.

Levintelligence develops strategies for competence development through blended learning, provides guidance for implementation of e-learning and performs evaluation of e-learning projects within companies. Through the partnership with SkillSoft Levintelligence can offer high quality content in areas that are essential to most organisations.

² Website Levintelligence: <http://www.levintelligence.com>

4.2 THE E-LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Levintelligence has been providing e-learning since 2002.

The catalogue is very extensive with approximately 1000 IT-courses and 1000 Business Skills courses. SkillSoft launches one new course every working day.

Students need a PC, preferably with sound equipment, and Internet connection (56K) to access the courses. Sometimes one has to work a bit with settings on the PC (Java, Flash...).

Today, about a hundred employees from Small and Medium Enterprises have attended their e-learning courses.

From people who attended e-learning sessions feedback is requested. Overall they appreciate the instructional design. The fact that SkillSoft courses are more interactive than most courses on the market is also something that is often mentioned in the feedback.

Users always appreciate the content in the IT courses. In IT the English language is more accepted than in Business Skills. For Business Skills courses the language is a big problem, especially for smaller companies.

4.3 E-LEARNING AND SMEs

4.3.1 OVERALL STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS

A first barrier preventing wider use of e-learning in SMEs is lack of time for the human resource and general management to look into training in general and even more so to look into e-learning. In a small company it is really about making priorities. Daily activities always intervene and it is a problem to consider e-learning. E-learning is not the same as a book where you can look into and decide immediately whether it is something to have or not. It is important for the management to keep in mind that the 'e' is really not that important. Important is the knowledge intake, the learning.

In fact, the problem to start with is that learning in general is not seen as a priority by companies. The smaller the company, the lower the priority.

Why is it that people have so little time? Why is there such pressure on Human Resource Managers? Probably because we have high salaries in the west, we need to perform very efficiently. Everything has to be focused on

the business and there is no time left to look into e-learning.

Secondly e-learning is new and to go for something that might not be working is taking a risk. And why should SMEs take that risk? Staying the way you are is the easiest solution.

An argument also often heard by SMEs (and by large companies) not to engage in e-learning is that they do not feel mature enough.

Yet another barrier for e-learning for every organisation is the myth that the world is ready for self-study. E-learning requires a lot of self-discipline and it's a lonely activity. A long program should not be totally given through e-learning. Probably people also need to learn how to e-learn and should be prepared as lifelong learners.

The same goes for the trainers who should be trained. Trainers, and even the whole organisation, perceive e-learning often as a threat to their position whether in reality they should see it as a big opportunity.

A weakness of e-learning is also the technical issue, and the availability/accessibility of infrastructure to the learner.

Once it is decided in a company to go for e-learning there is again another barrier: the language issue. In Belgium for example one has to provide courses in 2 languages, Dutch and French. There are no SkillSoft courses available in Dutch. Most 'off-the-shelf' courses are in English. With English as a language one can only address a small portion of the employees.

If in a company you leave out those people that don't have access to the right infrastructure and those who have a language problem, how many employees can still be reached? (Remark: it might be the same people who neither have access nor have the required language skills.)

This has also a consequence on the financial level. A course gets relatively more expensive with fewer students. You need a critical number of students (approximately 50 students for SkillSoft). For a bigger company to add another 1000 students is only a marginal cost.

4.3.2 EXPECTATIONS

What kind of change is needed? If everything is going well, then why should there be change? In general the market of e-learning is moving slower than expected. SMEs will only do it when they are forced to. This looks like an overall feeling; no difference is noticed between Sweden and Belgium.

SMEs will have to go for e-learning because of their customers and

suppliers.

Forerunners in implementing e-learning will be the bigger companies. They will make it interesting for the SMEs to follow. SMEs need references, good examples. They leave the risk taking to the bigger companies.

E-learning could not only be used to train the own personnel, it could also be used in the relationship between companies. A possible scenario might be that the big companies provide e-learning for the supply chain. In this case it has to be explored what the gain is for the bigger companies.

Businesses act in short term economy: speed is increasing; companies want a return on investment as soon as possible. Therefore another approach towards e-learning is needed. The training must be there in the process: 'just-in-time' training, including informal training as opposed to the formal training.

Formal learning is everything you learn during the planned courses, including university degrees, or courses your employer gave you. Informal learning is what you learn when talking to other experienced people, or when you have to solve a problem. The big advantage of informal learning is that it starts with a question that is the trigger for the learning. Therefore one is eager to solve the question and is more receptive to learning.

About 70 per cent of the knowledge is gained in companies through informal training. This has influenced the way in which the e-learning courses are presented. E-learning objects have become smaller.

'Referenceware' is an answer to the need for and strong focus on informal learning. Referenceware from Books24x7 is the largest online book resource offering access to thousands of the latest and best business and technology books. Users can search and access a deep and wide collection of unabridged content from the world's leading authorities in business, technology and other fields. By instantly pinpointing critical information for just-enough, just-in-time problem solving and learning, Referenceware helps professionals across all disciplines bridge the gap between what they know and what they need to know to successfully drive corporate initiatives.

Full texts of the books are available as well as expert summaries. Documents are downloadable as pdf or, in some collections, even as sound file.

4.3.3 CONTENT

The SkillSoft Catalogue includes approximately 1000 IT-courses (such as courses on software development, operating systems, internet and network technologies, etc.) and 1000 Business Skills courses (areas covered include management, leadership, personal development, marketing, sales, etc.).

SkillSoft has one portal where all courses are presented in a similar way.

Blended learning can be looked at in different meanings: blended in the sense of a combination of face-to-face learning and e-learning. On the other hand it can also be interpreted as a mix of formal and informal learning. First question should be: “what are we blending?”

4.3.4 AUDIENCE

The target audience in SMEs is in particular the audience who has and the skills and the access to the right infrastructure (cfr. 4.3.1).

E-learning should be used in a blended context (both meanings of blended, cfr. 4.3.3). You have to meet people, you don't study alone.

People need to learn how to e-learn. There are very few technical prerequisites (such as access to infrastructure).

E-learning should be done during the working hours and in company.

Some companies have an e-learning library where you can borrow CD to do it at home. But in Belgium you have the restriction by the unions that training/learning has to be done during working time. The same goes for Sweden although less outspoken.

A room where people can e-learning, without being disturbed, can be a solution. Learning at your desk is very difficult.

4.3.5 TECHNOLOGY

SkillSoft offers CBTs and will also this year introduce Virtual Classrooms, where you can meet your mentors/teachers. It will give the company the possibility to give their blended learning courses through Virtual Classrooms. Virtual Classroom sessions can be recorded in order to use it in

the next training.

Animations, simulations (both in IT and business trainings) are growing more important. Video, the moving picture is out, has often no added value.

4.3.6 QUALITY AND USER-FRIENDLINESS

Satisfaction is measured but this should be done by the organisation itself. SkillSoft does not need to assess the evolution of the students. They do provide the tools for the organisation. But the organisation has to implement/adapt the tool itself. Of course advice on how to do it is given by SkillSoft.

SMEs mainly experience technical problems (for example with the firewall) while setting up an e-learning environment. The budget also poses a problem. The e-learning tools are easy to use, but it of course takes time. (It is part of the skills a student must have.)

4.3.7 COMPANY CULTURE AND ORGANISATION

Cfr. the difference between formal and informal training (4.3.2).

We should take the 'e' out of e-learning and look at e-learning as one of the (many) tools in the toolbox, and not standing alone.

E-learning is integrated into the working environment: 'just-in-time learning', 'process oriented learning'.

To get e-learning work is a lot about marketing. Marketing of e-learning is difficult: 'gossip' proves to be an important tool in this, people talking to one another must be encouraged in this respect. Everyone needs to hear from someone else that already has experience with e-learning "you can do it too". This can be just an advantage for an SME, a small company where people know each other. Important is also to have the support of the highest and closest leaders (and they must not contradict one another).

4.3.8 LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

E-learning courses are not available in the desired language. For example, for Belgium the SkillSoft courses are not available in Dutch. Problem is also that it is not even an advantage in Belgium to have a course available in French. For Sweden there is the same problem that the courses are not available in Swedish. The availability of a UK English version does not always solve the problem.

Too big differences in culture in a course can block people. The issue is not about translation but all about localisation. In an e-learning course the instructor has to find the right examples (adapted to the local market).

There should be cooperation between SMEs and they should customize, rewrite courses. SkillSoft is going that way with the Course Customisation Tool (CCT).

4.3.9 COST/BENEFIT

Companies often don't have the budget available neither for training and learning in general, nor for e-learning, even for cheap courses. The main issue is to try to get money for learning in the first place.

For the organisation it is difficult to measure the return on investment.

4.3.10 MAIN BENEFITS/ADDED VALUE

The first effect that SMEs want from e-learning is to spend less money (and less time away from the job).

In a second phase they want better and more knowledge. With e-learning you can skip what you already know and you can learn it in a better way, because it takes more concentration and it is an active process.

E-learning finally can be a better format for performance enhancement, attitude training. A computer can afford to be 'impolite' (a computer for example can tell the students bluntly and immediately that a certain answer is 'wrong'), can also exaggerate in examples etc.. In real life instructors tend to be more polite/discreet.

5 MICROAREA S.P.A. - ITALY

5.1 THE ORGANISATION

Microarea is a Software House operating in the management area (trading and manufacturing) for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Microarea offers a full range of products and services for business management: Software, technical support and training.

Microarea is close to its customers through a network of:

- ▶ Over 270 authorised resellers throughout Italy;
- ▶ Exclusive national distributors in Europe and USA.

Today, with more than 15,000 customers

5.1.1 MICROAREA E-LEARNING CONTEXT

In 2001, Microarea, Italy leading Business Software developer, has decided to support its customers in a better utilisation of their product suite, by the setup of an **E-learning Centre** to better answer client support and training needs. The software suite of Microarea covers the whole range of business management, from accounting to manufacturing, yet the Microarea's average customer only knows and has used 30% of their potentialities. The best way to help the customer is to offer an education service that is properly targeted and easily accessible

The choice of an e-learning organisation allows to reach a large number of people largely distributed all over Italy as well as abroad.

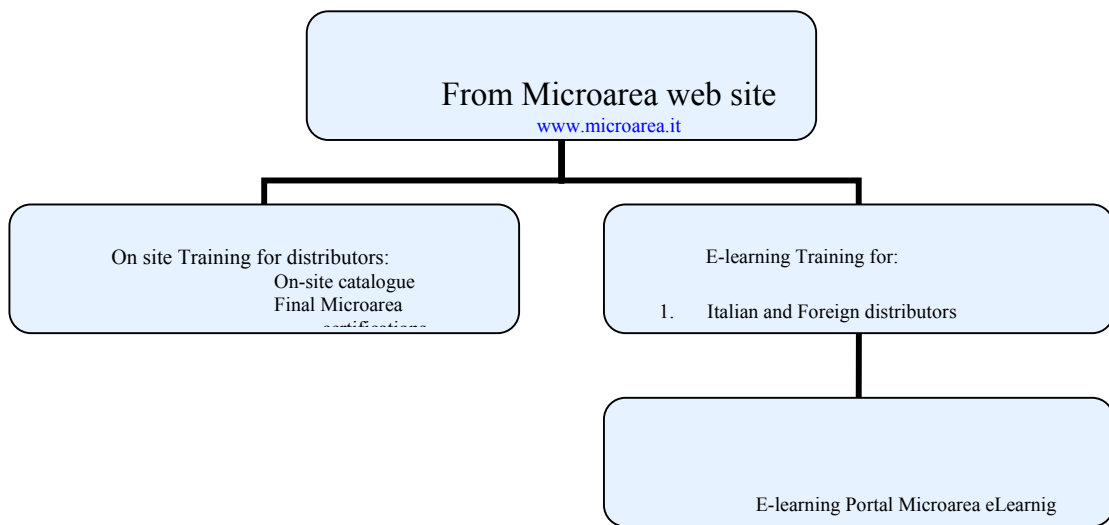
5.1.2 THE PROJECT

Microarea e-learning project has developed as follow:

- ▶ E-learning Pilot project for Italian distributor in 2001;
- ▶ E-learning study of CLMS market;
- ▶ Investment in CLMS platform;
- ▶ Training course for tutors and technicians;

- ▶ Communications and marketing;
- ▶ Producing coursewares with our own resources;
- ▶ Integration of company CRM.

5.1.3 MICROAREA PROPOSAL

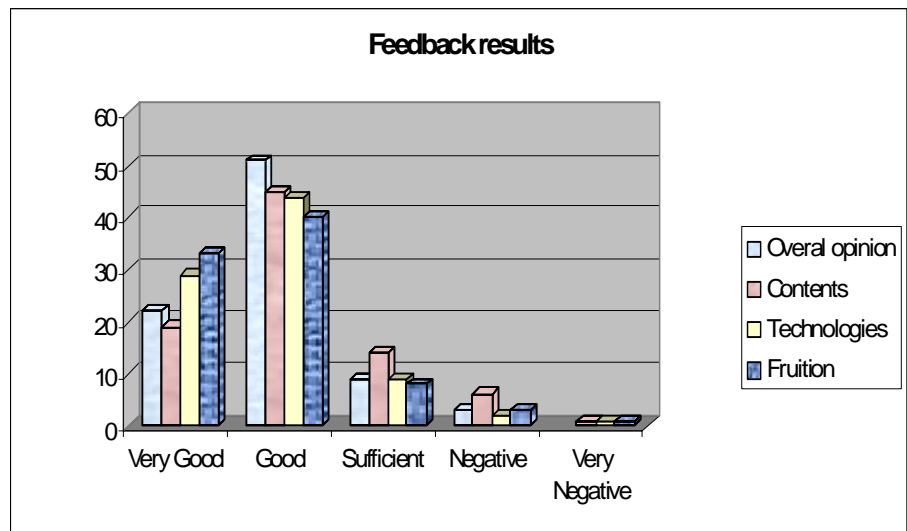


Microarea will realise a complete courseware catalogue by using the "learn eXact" LCMS suite supplied by Giunti Interactive Labs. Today, their course catalogue offers access to 39 courses on the Internet (www.microarea.it Italian version , "Formazione" area , "Microarea e-learning Center")

In order to access the e-learning platform, the equipment required to run the courses is quite standard (640 Kbps internet connection, Video resolutions 1024x768, Internet Explorer 6 sp1, MSJava Virtual Machine (ver.5.0.3810 or up).

5.1.4 RESULTS

Microarea has had around 1000 customers attending their e-learning courses (accounting & logistics topics).



Their feedback is systematically requested and shows that about 80% have a positive opinion on the whole e-learning experience : 73% are positive on the course contents , 86% on the usability and 85% on the technological tools (CLMS and tools used for contents' design).

General Judgement has been a positive experience (first e-learning) and in general Request for printing courseware contents as well extending the fruition period.

5.2 E-LEARNING AND SMEs

5.2.1 OVERALL STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS

1. What are the main reasons and barriers preventing wider use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) for learning in Continuing Vocational Education and Training (cVET) in Small and Medium Enterprises? What are the reasons why companies do not implement e-learning?

As our experience the main reasons and barriers preventing use of an e-learning solution in Italy are:

- ▶ The Bandwidth connection required to attend our e-learning courses is higher than the average used by Italian companies;
- ▶ The company education hasn't been considered yet a capital investment improving business performances;

- ▶ The computing knowledge level is still backward and therefore the companies don't really realise the benefits of online training.
2. What are the observed strengths and weaknesses of e-learning in the context of cVET?

The main strengths are:

- ▶ The opportunity for students to choose the best time to attend the e-learning courses via internet;
- ▶ The possibility for education company to easily update the courseware.

The weaknesses are:

- ▶ The loss of awareness that cVET is an opportunity of professional growth;
- ▶ The lack of investments in this field by SMEs and also the fact they ignore there are public funds.

5.2.2 EXPECTATIONS

3. What are the main expectations for SMEs in using e-learning? Are these expectations met in reality, and if so to what extent?

In our project, the main expectation for SMEs is to have a better knowledge of potentiality of our software products, in order to use them properly and efficiently at work.

The e-learning courseware can satisfy the company needs of choosing the learning time and have a properly targeted and easily accessible tool, and meantime also to save transfer money.

Feedback statistic seems to meet the expectations but the data are not yet complete to give a whole assessment.

5.2.3 CONTENT

4. What are the subjects and topics addressed in using e-learning, and which ones should be addressed? Is it possible to identify areas or themes that are particularly appropriate for training via e-learning? Are there areas or themes that are not appropriate for training via e-learning?

In our education experience some areas of our education courseware can be proposed via e-learning, depending on: themes, complexity of contents, needs to have a tutor in presence.

We have chosen to develop e-learning project of technical contents about our business management software. Our course contents are about the software utilisation not the theory of business management.

The main subject of e-learning courses are Accounting and Logistics.

We decide not to propose via e-learning courseware about our development language of and tools.

5. What sources of e-learning content are being used by SME's? Are they building custom content? Are they relying on standard e-learning market offerings?

Customers bought especially our accounting courses, at present we offer a standard catalogue.

5.2.4 AUDIENCE

6. Who is using e-learning in SMEs? Who is the target audience?

In our project the target are customers' employees which use our software products (accountants, warehouseman, etc.).

7. How is e-learning used , how should it be used? Are there important pre-requisites for its use (such as organisational change, trainer/tutor training, high-bandwidth connection, etc).

Generally students have 30 days to attend the courses, during this period they can choose the e-learning moments. Students should better use the possibility to contact tutors. The most important requisite is the 640 Kbps high-bandwidth connection.

8. When (during working hours/outside working hours) and where (work, home, community facility, etc.) does the e-learning take place?

Our customer generally attends our courses during working hours.

5.2.5 TECHNOLOGY

9. What tools are presently available and utilised in the delivery of e-learning for SME's (CBT's, virtual classrooms, WBT's, Video, simulation, on-line mentors, etc)?

We proposed our e-learning courses in WBT form, simulations, tutor and help desk on-line.

5.2.6 QUALITY AND USER-FRIENDLINESS

10. Is the outcome of e-learning measured? If so, how? Can differences be observed in comparison with traditional methods? Is e-learning efficient, is it effective? How is e-learning perceived (by participants and management)? How is quality measured?

We have measured the outcome as explained in the previous questionnaire.

11. Did SME's experience problems while setting up an e-learning environment? What type of problems?

Yes, the main setting up problems are:

- ▶ Java virtual machine, and
- ▶ Old version of Internet Explorer.

12. Are the e-learning tools easy to use? Do they encourage/discourage the learning process?

The tools are very easy to use, customers don't point out problems.

5.2.7 COMPANY CULTURE AND ORGANISATION

13. Is e-learning recognised within the company? Does/can it lead to better qualifications? How does e-learning affect issues such as student assessment and certification?

14. Is e-learning integrated into the working environment and working processes; if so, how?

The possibility to attend the e-learning courses aids the employees to improve professional performances.

15. Do SME's offer training or support for the discovery of the e-learning tools? How did they promote the internal use of e-learning tools?

16. Is e-learning supporting new ways of working such as teleworking, mobile working, etc?

Not for the moment.

5.2.8 LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

17. Are the e-learning tools available in the desired language?

Nowadays we developed our e-learning courses in Italian and we have been preparing in English.

18. Are their structure well suited for the knowledge acquisition? What could better help the learning process?

5.2.9 COST/BENEFIT

19. Is the budget to run e-learning courses more accessible than the budget for classroom-based courses?

- initial costs (purchase of hard/software, learning platform, infrastructure for networking and access to the Internet,...)
- recurrent costs (communication costs, costs for training of staff, development of electronic learning material,...)

No, Today the e-learning costs are higher than traditional ones.

The initial costs concerned are e-learning marketing study, purchase of learning platform.

Recurrent costs: training course for tutors and technicians,

development of electronic material, costs to fit our CRM to the new e-learning products offered, communications and marketing.

5.2.10 MAIN BENEFITS/ADDED VALUE

20. What are the main benefits/what is the main added value for your company linked to e-learning (better learning results, flexibility, less costs per learner, other,...)?

Lower costs for tutoring and the possibility to reach customers largely and distributed on all over the national territory as well as abroad.

6 SZÁMALK EDUCATION LIMITED COMPANY HUNGARY

6.1 THE ORGANISATION

SZÁMALK Education Limited Company³ is currently the leading training institution in the field of distance education in Hungary and has grown into the biggest private educational institution in Eastern Central Europe.

At present SZÁMALK embraces the most extended area of information technology, economics, managerial and business studies training in Hungary. Education includes a wide scale ranging from two-day seminars through vocational training to college and postgraduate degrees. The courses closely follow the Hungarian laws on (vocational and higher) education; the provided degrees comply with the requirements of the Hungarian National List of Training. Concerning educational methodology, traditional classroom teaching as well as workshops with practicals and modern distance learning techniques including e-learning are offered.

The SZÁMALK Education Philosophy emphasises up-to-date content and methodology, a high level of intellectual and material investment, offering of courses which are closely connected and whereby students have the opportunity to move between the courses, collective use of capacity, degrees accredited by the Hungarian state and also internationally, continuous quality assurance.

The mission is to operate a high quality and internationally renowned educational institute with a wide profile which, due to the commitment to the high quality of teaching content and the careful organisation of the education process, turns out well-educated experts who are able to use their knowledge in the labour market.

In order to implement and protect quality SZÁMALK Education Ltd. pioneered to establish a quality assurance system, being the first to do so in Hungary, and developed it into a quality control system complying with the ISO 9001:2000 standards.

³ Website SZÁMALK (in English) <http://www.szamalk.hu/okk/English/Default.htm>

SZÁMALK Education Ltd. provides education on different levels:

- ▶ An internationally accredited English language and bilingual primary school;
- ▶ Secondary and tertiary level vocational training accredited by the Hungarian state (independent examination right);
- ▶ Accredited tertiary level professional training in a school system;
- ▶ College and postgraduate degrees accredited by the Hungarian state;
- ▶ An internationally accredited college degree in economics and MBA;
- ▶ Product-oriented training for special purposes (accredited examination centre);
- ▶ Adult education, competence courses.

The legal framework of the educational program is the following:

SZÁMALK Education Ltd.

- ▶ Product-oriented training in information technology, official examination centres;
- ▶ School of Economic Studies – University of Hertfordshire (UK) affiliated section;
- ▶ College of Economics – offered jointly by the University of Economic Studies and Public Administration, Budapest and SZÁMALK.

In addition to this there are various foundations and companies originally set up by SZÁMALK Education Ltd. which provide a framework for education: SZÁMALK Vocational School (Secondary and tertiary level vocational training), Dennis Gabor College (IT engineering, IT economist and technical manager degrees), SZÁMALK Open Business School Ltd. (MBA degree), International School of Budapest (International and bilingual primary school), etc.

SZÁMALK Education in figures:

- ▶ 155.000 classes/year;
- ▶ 210 full-time staff;
- ▶ 80 full-time, 400 part-time, 2000 contract teaching staff;
- ▶ 30 kinds of degree/ certificate;
- ▶ 54 classrooms, 4 lecture rooms;
- ▶ 1000 computers;
- ▶ 45 regional centres;
- ▶ 20.000 students/year.

More than half of the SZÁMALK students are under the age of 30. Those

who have just finished secondary school study in order to obtain their first profession and/or college degree, the senior students' aim is to improve their professional skills. The latest target audience is the pupils of our internationally accredited primary school, where the language of education is English.

Breakdown of students according to education level

- ▶ Continuing: 9%
- ▶ Vocational: 7%
- ▶ College: 84%

Breakdown of students according to mode of education

- ▶ Regular: 23%
- ▶ Evening course: 2%
- ▶ Part-time: 12%
- ▶ Distance education: 63%

6.2 THE E-LEARNING ACTIVITIES

SZÁMALK started to offer e-learning courses to SMEs for the following reasons:

- ▶ Increasing demand for this education form in the Hungarian educational market;
- ▶ Growing concern for cost-effectiveness of learning provisions at all levels;
- ▶ Organisation change inside companies;
- ▶ Growth in the ability of companies and employees to adapt rapidly to changes in market conditions and technology.

SZÁMALK has been providing e-learning trainings for six years now.

They have a great number of training courses, some of which (about 30) can be delivered by e-learning. The students can receive the course materials and are in contact with tutors and mentors via the Internet. The ILIAS platform is used for this.

Today, about 200 employees from Small and Medium Enterprises have attended their e-learning courses. From people who attended e-learning sessions feedback is requested. Companies are satisfied with the outcomes of e-learning, but have no plans to expand their e-learning provisions. E-learning is a very accepted training form within the SMEs, mainly because of the time saving benefit. The e-learning form seems also to be an effective one, as students can use interactive elements, receive prompt feedback.

6.3 E-LEARNING AND SMEs

Overall Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

A lot of reasons and barriers preventing wider use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) for learning in Continuing Vocational Education and Training (cVET) in Small and Medium Enterprises and reasons why companies do not implement e-learning can be indicated:

- ▶ Many small business only have limited financial and time resources allocated to staff training;
- ▶ In small and micro enterprises the lack of right speed of Internet connection;
- ▶ The lack of up-to-date computers for every employees;
- ▶ Not up-to-date software (e.g. for the animations);
- ▶ There is but a small palette and choice of professional content.

In the present situation e-learning seems not to be for SMEs in Hungary. On the other hand big companies use e-learning for corporate training quite extensively and reasonably successfully. E-learning has its advantages, cost-effectiveness in the first place. For SMEs this cost-effectiveness just seems to be the most important point and reason why e-learning is not used. Cost-effectiveness is applicable when it is applied on more users. The SMEs are interested in some initiatives, but hesitating. If they pay for an e-learning solution it is always the cheapest one which is not always effective, consequently they are not convinced about the usefulness of e-learning (catch 22).

Reasons why SMEs do not use e-learning can be summed as follows:

Financial reasons

In the financial downturn cutting of costs is the only way of survival for small companies. Education and training is a non-essential factor in the short run plans of a company. Therefore they cut in the first place training costs.

Human resources

The training component of Human Resources in Hungary is still in its initial phase. It is simply not profitable to invest in the workforce on the long run. If the employee is not properly qualified, the employer can find a better one on the market without further investment.

If the company invests time and money in the training of the employees there is always the threat that the employee will be brain-drained by the competitor. The result is they get no training.

Technical hindrances Internet access cost is still extremely high in Hungary. Therefore access of online materials is difficult. Typical example is one company which requested 'printable e-learning' for their training because they couldn't afford constant online connection.

**The employees-
psychological factors** In the last 60 years, Hungary lived in the so-called 'Prussian' education system, which is build on the traditional classroom education, the teacher being an unquestionable authority, and where students initiative and curiosity is considered harmful. The idea of lifelong learning is still not accepted. The paradigm shift is just starting to happen in the perception of learning. People still consider the education procedure of a one-way lecturing from the teacher the student being a passive recipient.

A recent study⁴ points out these psychological reasons:

- ▶ E-learning is considered as an IT project in itself, not as a tool for knowledge Management;
- ▶ The participants have an averse from using this new tool;
- ▶ Lack of interactivity, being only passive users;
- ▶ The management does not use e-learning either, so the employees percept it as an exigency;
- ▶ The management even prohibits online communities as they threaten the authority of the executives;
- ▶ Success factors: when e-learning is part of a bigger restructuring project, e.g. the introduction of SAP in the company, when the essential information could only be acquired through it.

Observed strengths of e-learning in the context of cVET are the digital divide (the gap between those who don't have access to and the capability to use information technology, and those who do) that is expected to diminish. Furthermore the diffusion of new media.

⁴http://www.iqc.hu/downloads/IQC-E-learning_A_tudasmenedzsment_szolgalataban.pdf

6.3.1 EXPECTATIONS

The main expectation for SMEs in using e-learning is an increased integration of formal and informal learning, implying new methods and systems for competence recognition.

Often SMEs also think e-learning is cheap, can reduce costs, and can be done during the 'dead hours' during working hours.

However the expectations of SMEs are often not met in reality.

6.3.2 CONTENT

At the moment subjects and topics on the field of IT and economy are addressed in using e-learning.

Areas or themes that are particularly appropriate for training via e-learning include information technology, economics and business studies.

Areas or themes that are less appropriate are those that need large practical skills.

Learning needs are mainly identified through practical experience. Most of the SMEs do not analyse the market before selecting an e-learning programme.

In most cases SMEs do not develop e-learning material themselves. It is also quite difficult to find good content. And often the choice has to be made between 'bad content for free' versus 'good content for a prohibitive price'.

6.3.3 1.5.4 AUDIENCE

E-learning in SMEs is mainly used by managers and employees of SMEs with basic computer skills and who have an interest in e-learning.

The target audience are managers, decision makers, superiors and other skilled employees mainly from medium sized companies.

The main aim on how e-learning is used is 'learning-by-doing'. Sometimes e-learning has to be combined with face-to-face meetings.

Pre-requisites for its use include previous tutor training and a high-bandwidth connection.

When (during working hours/outside working hours) and where (work, home, community facility, etc.) the e-learning takes place depends on the needs and possibilities of the SMEs. Mainly e-learning takes place at the workplace and in especially equipped rooms in the company. CDs and other materials can be used at home.

6.3.4 TECHNOLOGY

Tools that are presently available and utilised in the delivery of e-learning for SMEs include virtual classrooms, on-line tutors and multimedia CDs.

6.3.5 QUALITY AND USER-FRIENDLINESS

The outcome of e-learning is measured by internal and final tests. SMEs evaluate their e-learning provisions through practical application. Differences in comparison with traditional methods could not be found. The SZÁMALK e-learning courses are effective. The quality is measured by questionnaires (filled out by the participants and SMEs managers) and the results of the tests.

Problems that SMEs often experience while setting up an e-learning environment include an inadequate infrastructure and lack of organisational perspective. Furthermore there are also technical (and financial) problems. There is a need for new software or computers.

The e-learning tools are easy to use for employees with basic computers skills. They encourage the learning process.

6.3.6 COMPANY CULTURE AND ORGANISATION

E-learning is recognised by the companies, but it does not yet lead to better qualifications. The companies recognise the learning independent of the form of education.

E-learning is still in a pilot phase, it is not yet integrated. Integrating e-learning into the working environment is a long term process, for which first

of all the culture of the company has to be changed.

The SMEs organise previous trainings for the employees for the discovery of the e-learning tools.

E-learning is not yet very often supporting new ways of working such as teleworking, mobile working, etc. in Hungary.

6.3.7 LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

E-learning tools are for the moment only available in Hungarian, but SZÁMALK works on the English versions.

The structure is well suited for the knowledge acquisition

6.3.8 COST/BENEFIT

The budget for training is often only spent on traditional, classroom-based courses.

With regard to costs for e-learning for the SMEs, a difference is made between the initial costs (such as the purchase of hard- and software, a learning platform, the infrastructure for networking and access to the Internet,...) on the one hand and the recurrent costs (such as the communication costs, costs for training of staff, development of electronic learning material,...) on the other hand.

Initial costs for e-learning are higher (costs of the infrastructure, development materials). Operational costs for e-learning are less (no need for printed materials, rooms, time saving).

6.3.9 MAIN BENEFITS/ADDED VALUE

The main benefits/main added value for SZÁMALK linked to e-learning is that they could respond to the needs and demand, have shorter cycles of educational productions, and an increased competition on a global scale.