



'SMEs are a priority within ADAPT. Emphasis is on the transfer of innovative ideas and good practice. In relation to the themes of the ADAPT conference, further training in SMEs and anticipation, it is essential that SMEs become familiar with the new technologies, innovative methods and adaptation mechanisms implemented in other countries. Also that data is collected on the training practices in other Member States. SMEs have to be encouraged to adopt long-term training policies. The participation of SMEs in training programmes, in particular in management training, has to increase. Training provision has to be adapted in the light of change, and the needs emerging within SMEs.'

Mr. H Papoutsis, Member of the European Commission



'Policies aimed at reducing unemployment must also take into account the work of the future. Active policies are called for to enable the unemployed to re-enter the labour market, and young people to access the job market. These policies must also provide new skills acquisition in new technologies, so the emphasis must be on education, training, retraining and lifelong learning.'

Mr. M. Papaioannou, Greek Minister of Labour and Social Security



ADAPT is part of a comprehensive European Employment strategy. It is helping to combat and prevent unemployment by helping companies to adjust to new conditions, to new levels of technology, to new sorts of skills, to new forms of work organisation.

Allan Larsson, Director-General of DGV, European Commission

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Introduction

ADAPT is the European Union's largest transnational human resource network, and probably the largest created anywhere in the world. Its 1,400 current projects will, at the end of 1997, be joined by a further 1,500 or more. ADAPT is concerned with the impact of industrial change on jobs, especially those which are most vulnerable. For this reason, a high proportion of ADAPT projects are directly focused on the problems, the needs, and the potential of small firms (SMEs).

All Member States see SME policy as being of critical importance, but it has special significance in Greece, where the average company size is the smallest in the European Union.

For this reason, the Greek Ministry of Labour and Social Security and the European Commission agreed to mark the halfway point in ADAPT's life with a major stocktaking conference in Athens on 22/23 May 1997. The joint themes were:

- anticipation of small firms' business and human resource needs;
- training in small firms.

More than **500 delegates** were drawn from European and national policymakers, local, regional and sectoral experts and representatives of social partners. Some **58 ADAPT projects and 6 Objective 4** projects participated either in the six policy and good practice workshops, or in the exhibition, which was designed as a marketplace for ideas and innovations. The conference website was accessed and read by a considerable number of **virtual delegates**.

High level policy speeches launched the discussion of ADAPT's key themes, and set the scene for an intensive examination and exchange of project experience and good practice.

This report, drawing from the full range of the conference's activities and debates, locates ADAPT's experience in the context of the changing labour market in which small companies operate, and identifies key topics and channels through which the experience and products of ADAPT's unique mix of local innovation and transnational networking can be made useful.

Part I of the report illustrates the skills and industrial performance gap which threatens Europe's small firms in the next decade.

The Athens conference marked the point at which the 1,400 projects in the first phase of ADAPT were far enough advanced in their work to be able to debate and communicate real experience. The event concentrated the discussion on two interlinked themes:

- anticipation of small firms' business and human resource needs;
- training in small firms.

Six workshops, addressing specific aspects of these themes, provided the material for the conclusions and action points in Part II of the report.

The examples and illustrations of projects and their work are drawn from the ADAPT and Objective 4 projects which contributed to the workshops, and from the ADAPT projects which took part in the exhibition. A full list of all participating projects is to be found in the annexes.

Summary of action points

Anticipation

Creating good observatories

Observatories of different kinds, and with widely differing remits, are being established throughout the European Union. **ADAPT is the only transnational initiative concerned with this activity. It can play a unique role, disseminating innovative ideas and practice to European programmes and networks, to national and sectoral networks, to Social Partners and training and development bodies.**

SMEs and the products of anticipation

Observatories and other providers of anticipation require a great deal of assistance in tailoring their products to the needs of SMEs. SMEs have much to do to create a culture of anticipation amongst their employees. ADAPT can develop **material for a handbook**, helping observatories identify and meet SME needs. **Project case studies** can underline the strength of the link between a culture of anticipation in an SME and its capacity to innovate.

Training in SMEs

SMEs and learning organisations

The learning organisation is an holistic concept. Experience and innovations from ADAPT projects will be best communicated through **whole-company case studies**, showing SMEs, either through networking, partnerships, or the assistance of training and development bodies, successfully overcoming the disadvantages of small scale, isolation and limited resources, and providing a learning culture for all their employees.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and SME training

SME use of ICTs is often blocked by a mixture of negative culture, insufficient finance, poor information, and inappropriate and inaccessible training. ADAPT project experience will be distilled into **focused case studies of work** with and for SMEs. Many projects will also develop **ICT-based training products**.

SMEs and training providers

The key to improving the relationships between SMEs and training providers is improving the capacity of training bodies both to relate effectively to small firms. ADAPT will therefore target **information, experience and training products developed by projects at the bodies and organisations which train SME trainers. To be of use, this must be demand-led, and based on assessments of the strengths and weaknesses of existing training materials and courses, and on the stated needs of SMEs themselves.**

SME management and change

SME managers frequently lack the knowledge or the techniques to change their own practices. They also lack the tools to gauge and influence progressive change in their own companies. ADAPT can provide **specific management-focused training materials, and model concepts for mentoring and guidance, and benchmarking tools** developed and tested in different Member States.

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The key importance of SMEs in the European labour market

Part I

The challenges to Europe's small firms

The key importance of SMEs in the European labour market

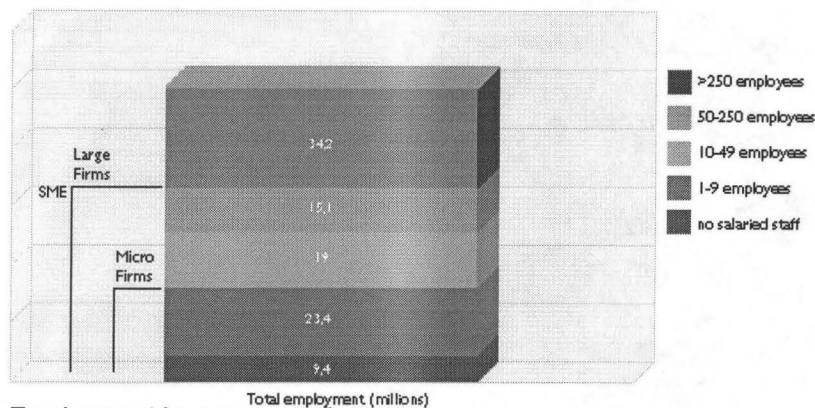


We cannot simply rely on SMEs continuing to be the pacemakers of the European labour market. On the contrary, we must actively promote and encourage SMEs so that they can create increased numbers of stable jobs in the future.

Dr. Eckart Severing, Bavarian Employers' Association

Most EU workers are employed in SMEs

Some 67 million (more than 65%) of the workers in Europe's 15.7 million companies are employed in small or medium-sized firms (SMEs) employing fewer than 250 workers.



Employment by company size
 Source: *les Entreprises en Europe, Quatrième Rapport, Eurostat 1996*

These SMEs make up more than 99% of European firms.

The greatest concentrations of SMEs are in southern Europe

They are prevalent everywhere, but they are more concentrated in southern Europe, where there are fewer large companies, and greater numbers of very small family businesses:

- the southern Member States, Greece, Spain, Portugal and Italy have more than 50 companies per 1,000 of their inhabitants;
- the UK, Belgium, Finland, France, Sweden, Denmark, Germany and Luxembourg have more than 40 companies per 1,000 inhabitants;
- Austria, Netherlands and Ireland have fewer than 30 companies per 1,000 inhabitants.

SMEs create most jobs

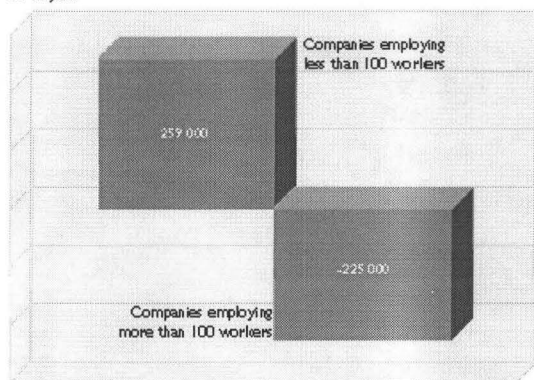
Data for 1996 showed that in countries where SMEs are dominant in the economy,

- they created new jobs by more than twice the EU average rate during the growth period 1988-1992,
- and lost jobs at less than a quarter of the EU average rate during the 1992-1996 recession.

Source: *EIM Small Business Research and Consultancy, Eurostat 1996*

This confirmed the picture of annual job gains and losses between 1988 and 1995.

N° of jobs



Jobs created and lost annually (1988-1995)

Source: data for EU15, plus Norway from the European Observatory for SMEs' Third annual report in 1995

A major skills challenge threatens 46 million employees of European SMEs

Training can no longer be reserved just for the young. We must equip and train the whole of the potential workforce. Allan Larsson, Director-General, DGV, European Commission

The Eurostat Survey on Continuing Vocational Training (1996) shows that:

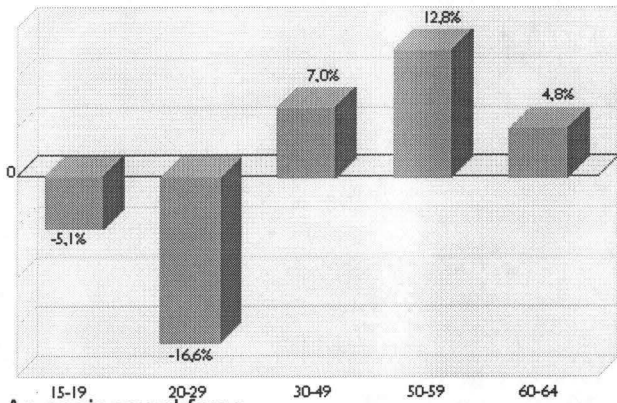
- even excluding very small firms which employ fewer than 10 workers, no more than 40% of SMEs provide in-company or training courses for their workers, or send them to courses in colleges or training institutions; this means that some 670,000, or 60% of SMEs of this size make no formal provision for training; this may affect as many as 14 million European workers.

Eurostat Survey on Continuing Vocational Training: 1996

- It is widely acknowledged that very few of the 14.6 million sole traders, micro family firms, and SMEs with fewer than 10 workers have any access to continuing training. In total they employ some **32.8 million workers.**

An ageing workforce - % change between 1995 and 2005

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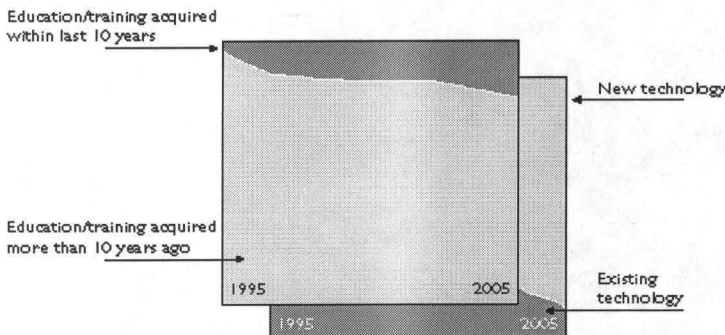
An ageing workforce
Source: Eurostat

This scenario must be seen against the background of a **European workforce** which will **age rapidly** in the next ten years as the structure of the population changes:

The skills gap - an employable workforce

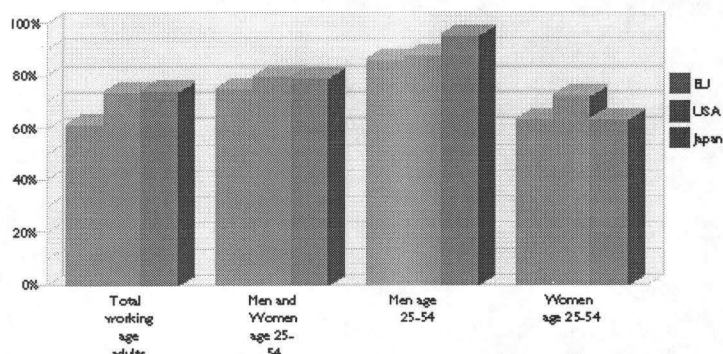
In a recent analysis entitled *The Next Ten Years*, the Director-General of DGV of the European Commission, Allan Larsson, showed how the interaction between the pace of the introduction of new technologies on the one hand, and the impact of an ageing population on the other, threatens a damaging skills gap. By the year 2005:

- **some 80%** of the **technologies** in use will have been **developed** since 1995;
- **as many as 190 million (80%) of European workers** could be unable to use or exploit them fully because their education and initial training will by then be more than ten years old.



Source: *The Next Ten Years* - A. Larsson 1996

This need for increased and better-focused investment in training will be further accentuated if the EU makes further progress towards achieving the employment rates of the US and Japan. This is because such progress will only be made by finding jobs for many of those in the 25-54 age group who are currently either unemployed, or who are not participating in the labour market at all (in the case of many women, especially in the south of Europe).



Employment rates 1995

Source: MISEP Employment Observatory No 56 Winter 1996.
 Participation and Employment Rates in Europe: Convergence or Divergence, by Peter Auer

These figures show that:

- the EU currently provides employment for around 12% fewer of its working age adults than either the USA or Japan;
- and that this gap reflects an EU male employment rate which is 9% less than in Japan, and an employment rate for women which is 9% less than in the USA.

The challenges of providing SME workers with the skills they need, and of ensuring the overall employability of the members of the European workforce at most risk, are intimately linked.



Industrial societies are confronted constantly with accelerating technological changes. But these often fail to lead to the expected increases in productivity. One of the main reasons for this is that insufficient investment has been made in preparing the labour force, or in reorganising production within companies.

Mr. P. Linardos-Rulmond, INE/GSEE, Labour Institute, General Confederation of Greek Workers

10 million SMEs must learn to innovate

All companies face constant demands to meet **ever-changing, and continually-rising technical and quality standards**. SMEs find these demands particularly difficult to meet.

- In no Member State are more than 50% of SMEs involved in either product or process innovation. In some, fewer than 25% of SMEs innovate in terms either of technology or of their industrial processes and work organisation.
- As a result, some 10.2 million European SMEs (65%) are unable to incorporate the latest technology or best

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practice in their working processes and methods.

Europe's smaller companies face perhaps the greatest challenge as they struggle to cope with the development of new technologies and processes.

Allan Larsson, Director-General DGV, European Commission

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Part II

ADAPT and small firms

Anticipation

Anticipating future skills and market changes are key priorities for SMEs if they wish to become and remain competitive. Both ADAPT and Objective 4 of the European Social Fund have as key objectives the development of improved anticipation mechanisms and structures.

Accurate anticipation is much more than simple extrapolation from past trends and statistics. In fact, statistical information plays only a part in the anticipation process. Anticipation is created when statistics are modified or enhanced in the light of specific expertise or practical experience. Good models of anticipation depend on appropriate and practical methods of capitalising on expertise and experience. This means involving both the workers inside companies, and experts from outside.

A 1996 study carried out for Directorate-General V of the European Commission showed why there is much to be done.

- **Only one third of the Member States had well-structured institutional arrangements for anticipating shifts in employment.**
- **Just six Member States had well-structured arrangements for anticipating shifts in**

arrangements for anticipating shifts in vocational qualifications; three had no institutional structure, and others had only partial structures.

- **Co-ordination mechanisms, ensuring the use of anticipation forecasts in initial and continuing vocational training, vocational guidance, and the work of employment agencies, were similarly variable in their status and effectiveness.**
- **Instruments used to detect training needs in individual companies were usually not linked directly to the results of forecasting instruments operating at a macro level.**

Source: Instruments, Tools and Policies to Anticipate the Effects of Industrial Change on Employment and Vocational Qualifications, Instituut voor Toegepaste Sociale Wetenschappen, Nijmegen, and Hoger Instituut voor de Arbeid, Leuven

ADAPT's main priorities are the needs of small companies, and of workers whose careers are threatened or radically changed by the extent of industrial change, and by its speed.

Improvements in anticipation methodology and practice will:

- radically speed-up the capacity of trainers and qualifications bodies to update and focus training;
- enable companies to prepare earlier for the effects of change.

This does not currently happen because:

- current anticipation methodologies lack coherence in their design, and information from them is rarely transferable;
- institutional arrangements in most Member States for anticipating shifts in employment or qualification needs are poorly-structured, and their products are of only limited use in initial and continuing vocational training, vocational guidance, and the work of employment agencies;
- it is generally impossible to link company data on training needs (where it exists) with the results of macro-level forecasting.

The capacity to anticipate future needs, and the capacity to innovate and to manage innovation are closely related to one another.

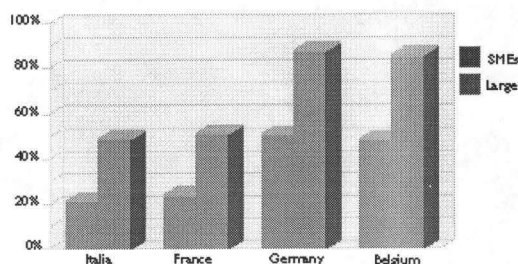
SMEs lag behind in innovation

In terms of both product and process innovation, SMEs' performances appear to vary considerably from Member State to Member State, but in general they innovate at only 40% - 60% of the levels achieved by large companies.

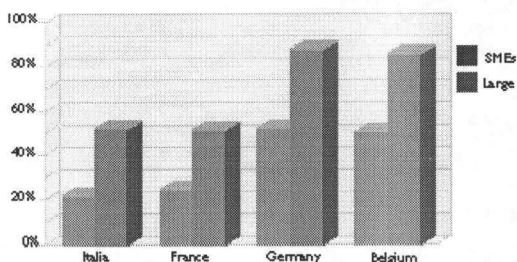


We need to develop the Information Society as a result of innovative thinking... But in this process we need to know more about how to develop new models, methodologies and approaches to the development of human resources in relation to the implementation of ICT, before we conclude that the solutions are requirements for more multimedia software or increased network capacity, or more PCs in the classroom. We need this knowledge not only at a strategic or academic level - but this knowledge should be inherent in the institutional, organisational and operational thinking within SMEs...
Mette Ringsted, Danish Centre for Technology Supported Learning

A report on innovation in seven Member States showed, **the lowest levels in Italy and France and the highest levels in Germany and Belgium:**



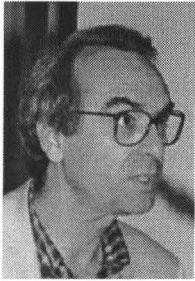
% of companies introducing product innovation
 Source: *Enterprises in Europe, Fourth Report. Eurostat 1996*



% of companies introducing process innovation
 Source: *Enterprises in Europe, Fourth Report. Eurostat 1996*

Since this survey did not include all Member States, it is quite possible that some exceeded these levels of innovation, and that others fell below them.

Creating good observatories



Anticipation is necessary because the context of work is changing. This results in shifts in employment structure between enterprises, and changes in occupational structure within enterprises. These happen because of changes in the demands of consumers, new investment requirements, intensified international competition, new production processes and new forms of work organisation. Information about these provides the basis for good anticipation.
Prof. D. Chassapis, University of Thessaloniki

Many ADAPT projects involve the establishment of observatories which capitalise on the expertise of managers and workers at all levels in both large and small companies, as well as outsiders, including academics, social partners and providers of training and other services.

Three essential qualities seem to be present in the best observatories:

- they are permanent, or at least long-term features of their regional, local or sectoral economies;
- their methodology is transparent, enabling users to see what data has been employed and how it has been collected, and also to see what expert advice has been used to focus it, and how this advice has been selected and obtained;
- they tailor their research and their products to the stated needs of the companies, learning organisations and individuals who are its direct and indirect clients.

Objective 4 Project
Observatoire
CEFORA
Belgium



As a sectoral and joint centre with responsibility for training job seekers and employees, CEFORA has set up a permanent observatory which closely monitors employment trends in a wide range of sectors. It collects both quantitative and qualitative data. For quantitative analyses, it uses source data from social security offices, which process nearly 50% of the data on workers. This enables the observatory to quickly detect new trends and job niches in the various subsectors and subregions. The observatory differs from current national sources by virtue both of the speed with which it processes data, and by virtue of its production of additional qualitative information. Its qualitative analyses measure developments relating to jobs for low-skilled workers. For this, CEFORA uses methods and sources which include the results of annual surveys carried out among employers, others carried out among workers participating in training provided by CEFORA, and studies on jobs and qualifications prepared by specialised researchers. The results of these quantitative and qualitative analyses are used to prepare training courses and measures to promote employment. CEFORA collaborates closely with public training bodies and the educational world both in the collection of data, and in the dissemination of its results.

Conclusions

Creating good observatories

- Observatories must be able to perform three key functions: they must be equipped to collect data, using both quantitative and qualitative approaches; they must be in a position to analyse and interpret it, using appropriate expertise, and ensuring that conclusions drawn from it are exposed to the comments of those with relevant practical experience; and they must have means of communicating it to users according to their needs.
- A great variety of observatories is already in operation - national, regional, local, sectoral, and theme specific (for instance, studying new jobs). Their structure and their working methods are highly diverse, and as yet they have no effective means of communicating and sharing experience and data.

Qualitative deficiencies

- Observation of projects in ADAPT, and of other observatories, leads to the conclusion that most observatories are better equipped to access and process quantitative data than they are to balance it with the qualitative information which is the essential element of good anticipation.
- There is a great deal of scope for improvement in the methodologies which most observatories use, and for practical experience to be exchanged both nationally and transnationally between observatories.

Networking

- Networking for observatories is of key importance. In a European and global market, observatories cannot exist in isolation from each other. Each one needs its own objectives, and can be allowed its own characteristics and specialisms, but will be weakened and its products devalued if it is not in regular and coherent communication with others operating in similar fields of activity.

ADAPT Project
ETTNA
Greece



ETTNA is a special observatory on vocational training using a system designed to identify quality. The observatory's principal instruments are a database containing all the components and indicators of quality in training, a methodology for identifying training needs, a methodology for collecting and interpreting the data and information collected, a database for monitoring and evaluating the progress of trainees, and a European-level vocational training database. This database will contain all the project's development information, and the data and software tools developed with the Portuguese, Finnish, Swedish, UK and Belgian transnational partners.

Action points

- **Observatories of different kinds, and with widely differing remits, are being established throughout the European Union. Many are neither based on shared concepts, nor are they aware of the good and bad experiences of others. ADAPT is the only transnational initiative concerned with this activity. It should play a unique role, disseminating innovative ideas and practice to European programmes and networks, to national and sectoral networks, to Social Partners and training and development bodies.**
- **ADAPT projects could construct a Website to provide the only European networking forum for observatories.**

ADAPT Project

Observatório do Emprego

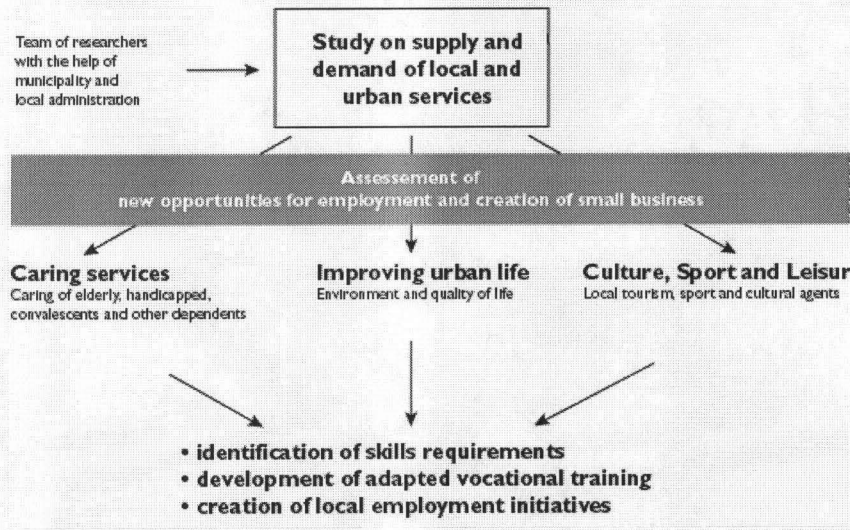
Portugal



The Employment Observatory for Greater Lisbon North has been set up to identify:

- training needs for companies in Amadora, and the metallurgical industry in Greater Lisbon North;
- occupations in decline, and growing occupations;
- new skill requirements in existing occupations;
- new employment opportunities.

Part of the project's work has been to develop a profile of demand for neighbourhood and urban services in Greater Lisbon North. The profile has been structured as follows:



Helping SMEs use the products of anticipation

Anticipation is a necessary element in the employment policies of all Member States because of the need to understand the labour market, and predict its evolution, and the need to understand skill trends and structures resulting from changes in products, technology and forms of work organisation. Successful anticipation requires the existence of education and training institutions capable of responding to changes in the structure of jobs and skills, the existence of bipartite and tripartite partnership in actions to anticipate and react to change, and the existence of institutions capable of incorporating anticipation in other SME policies, and in the management of SMEs themselves.

Mr. P Linardos-Rulmond, INE/GSEE, Labour Institute, General Confederation of Greek Workers

The products of anticipation take many forms. They can include:

- data about local, regional, national or international market conditions and prospects;
- forecasts of sectoral skills needs;
- information about present and future labour supply;
- benchmarking methodologies designed to improve performance;
- manager and trainer-training programmes and products;
- consultancy designed to improve work organisation and performance;
- regular tailor-made forecasts and data;
- material from small firm or other sectoral or specialist networks.

SMEs are in obvious need of such well-directed, appropriately-designed products and services. They are frequently prevented from using them, even where they are available, by:

- poor co-ordination between local labour market and training organisations;
- their own reluctance to invest in innovation;
- their reluctance or inability to invest in training, even where a clear need for it has been identified.

ADAPT Project
ALP
United Kingdom



A framework is being developed to provide managers and workers, mostly drawn directly from manufacturing SMEs, to access and take up open and distance learning methods. The context of the training is one of connected learning centres, and CD-ROM and Internet materials. This extract is from material sent to local SMEs by the local partnership running the project:

Welcome to the ADAPT personal profiling and self-assessment centre... this software is designed to help individuals realise the qualities and attributes that they can bring to their businesses. The focus is on how we react to change, and what prevents us from making decisions or accepting changes... The concept is to be expanded to involve all levels of individual decision-making or change management. To better represent the software, we have created the ADAPT Personal Decision Making and Change Management Multimedia Presentation... a combined project under the banner of Business Link Hertfordshire, involving The Research Initiative and Ground Base Productions, both of which are start-up businesses from Hertfordshire...

Conclusions

User-friendly data

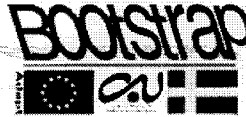
- Anticipation is a valid concept only when the data it produces are both authoritative and well-directed, and are in a form which small companies feel is directly and practically useful to them, and which are accessible and attractive.
- Information and scenarios must be presented from the point of view of small firm SME realities. They exist to make money; they are diverse; they use their own language and jargon; they have their own culture.
- In the main, small firms are unlikely to be able to make use of anticipation material unless they already have some framework for strategic planning, and some experience of how to undertake it. Most need help identifying their needs, and understanding how to deal with changing skill requirements. They will certainly require help if they are to make good use of anticipation material in these processes.

Capacity-building

- All the above points confirm that, alongside the need to make anticipation material relevant and user-friendly, small firms themselves must be

user-friendly, small firms themselves must be prepared and assisted to make good use of it. This means that observatories are unlikely to be able to operate effectively unless parallel efforts are made to ensure the capacity of small firms to use their products. Capacity-building of this type may be undertaken by observatories themselves, or by development agencies, Social Partners, or training providers.

ADAPT Project
BOOTSTRAP
Sweden



The project describes itself:

The BOOTSTRAP project has as its point of departure the experience of several development programmes and projects conducted by the Centre of Working Life Research and Development (CAU) at Halmstad University. The main theme of these experiences is that that SMEs need common development strategies. By this we mean the opportunity for continuous dialogue about their problems and targets, their organisation of development activities and initiatives designed to get momentum into the development process. The organisation of such activities in the form of networks - together with other regional actors like R&D institutions - should result in a sustainable process of development. BOOTSTRAP consists of three networks - a network of SMEs, a network in the public sector, and network of women entrepreneurs.

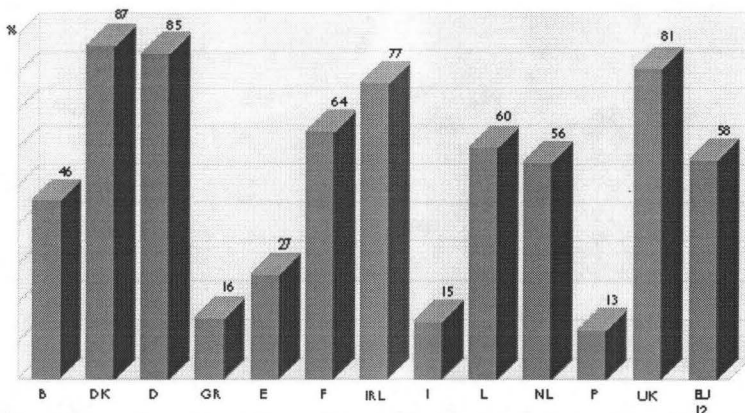
Action points

- **ADAPT project experience could be used to collect examples of anticipation data which has been found by SMEs to be user-friendly and useful. This can be contrasted with examples of other data which SMEs have found difficult to understand or use.**
- **A project working group could develop a handbook of good practice on the presentation of anticipation information to SMEs.**
- **Case studies could be developed from project experience of successful capacity-building by local support bodies and partnerships.**
- **Key targets for information include: national SME policy makers, local and regional development agencies and training organisations, SME employer bodies, and Social Partners.**

Small firms, training and development

SMEs lag behind in skills and training

The first Eurostat Survey on Continuing Vocational Training (CVTS), conducted amongst 50,000 companies in the EU on 1993 figures, showed:



Provision of continual vocational training by companies with more than 12 employees

10 employees (1993)

Source: Eurostat-CVTS, 1994

Notes

¹ Companies in the 10-49 worker category accounted for 81% of the companies surveyed, and 26% of the total workers. Companies in the 500-999, and the 1,000+ worker categories accounted for 0.8% and 0.6% respectively of the companies in the survey, but collectively for 40% of the employees surveyed.

² Sectorally there were big differences with as many as 57% of employees in the financial intermediaries (banking and insurance) sector benefitting from training, but as few as 8% benefitting in textiles clothing and leather, 15% in construction, and 23% in the catering sector.

Many SMEs lack the capacity to develop their personnel

The European Commission's Green Paper *Partnership for a New Organisation of Work* (April 1997) points out that the informal and flexible structures of work organisation commonly used by SMEs have both advantages and disadvantages. Through them, SMEs can avoid many of the problems of rigidity experienced by large companies. On the other hand, small firms commonly lack the internal structures which would allow them to create a capacity for long-term personnel development. This prevents them from adopting new forms of work organisation which might improve their efficiency.



In acknowledging the importance of continuing training, we must improve:

- demand - getting companies to articulate their real needs,
- supply - getting traditional training providers to modernise their ideas,
- the range of products - organising certification, licensing, and copyright,
- our ability to convert good products and ideas to other cultures,
- public policy so as to kick-start a virtuous circle of training providers and companies.

David O'Sullivan, Director, European Social Fund Policy Development

Training within companies - SMEs and the learning organisation

Let us imagine how vocational training could ideally be organised in any medium-sized company... Employees will not only perform tasks planned and checked by others, but will work with a large degree of independence, including recognising their own training needs, and organising their training. Workplaces will be conducive to learning, providing learning media, making it possible to contact outside experts, and integrating learning and working in terms both of time and location. Interpersonal relations and group working will be used as a springboard for continuing training, and exchange of information will break down rigid divisions between working tasks, enabling the firm to react quicker. This ideal model might be called a learning organisation.

Dr. Eckart Severing, Bavarian Employers' Association

The importance of the learning organisation for SMEs

A learning organisation offers its workforce two powerful benefits: the authority and competence to make decisions about work, and the tools to execute it and to evaluate its quality. This approach consigns traditional factory tasks and command-control management systems to the past. The workforce itself becomes the agent of change, implementing and evaluating its own production and work organisation systems within a permanent process of working and learning. It encompasses changes like problem-solving through *project groups*, re-organisation of production through *working groups*, just-in-time manufacturing innovations like production islands, and the creation of *intelligent working places*.

More complex and enriching work encourages individuals to use and improve their skills, the company becomes a social entity and a place for personal development, as well as a place of production. Employees do not act alone, but in groups, promoting the exchange of knowledge. To put the philosophy of the learning organisation into practice, SMEs invariably need a good deal of close co-operation from external training providers, and frequently from other local businesses

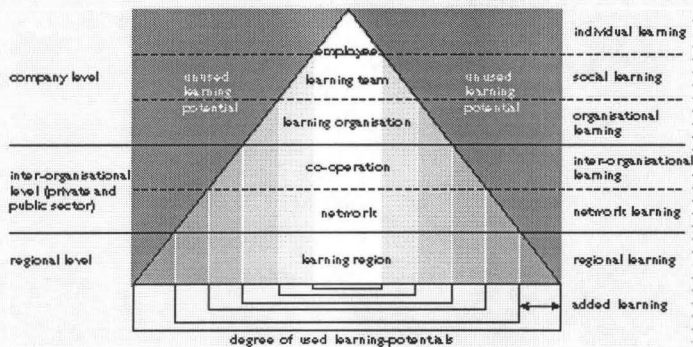
ADAPT Project

Learning Region Graz

Austria



In an area in which nearly 100% of companies are SMEs, the project bases all its activities on the model of the learning pyramid. It operates at **three levels**: the company level, the inter-company level and the regional level. At each level different types of learning may occur (individual, social and organisational learning at the company level, inter-organisational learning and network learning at the inter-organisational level -public and private sector- or regional learning at the regional level).



A single issue or problem may involve work at more than one level. Product innovations, for instance, may be developed by a single company employee, but they may also be the responsibility of a project team. Companies may also choose to develop products through wider co-operation or networks. Throughout these processes companies will be supported by a regional network possibly including national or regional employment bodies, employers' bodies, social partners, training institutions, and consulting companies. In a *learning region*, this network will arrive at a common regional economic development strategy, define common goals.

Conclusions

The culture of learning organisations

- The *learning organisation* is not a prescriptive model. It is about a culture of continuous improvement in companies. It requires a whole company approach, and is only likely to be successful if it builds on company culture. But it must also be completely open to all available local, regional and sectoral assistance.
- The most important factor in business culture is the drive to improve and conserve high levels of competitiveness within a rapidly changing environment. A successful *learning organisation* will always embody a powerful company culture, which is

in itself a factor of key strategic importance affecting success in every aspect of design, production, employee relations and marketing.

- All companies must shift from a culture of traditional training to one of learning. Both practical and theoretical learning must be available at all times to meet the demands of the unexpected, and to underpin the quality objectives which all companies now share, but which many cannot effectively deliver. Conventional approaches cannot fully equip workers for modern market conditions.

The characteristics of a learning organisation

- Training ceases to be merely an option, and becomes a permanent necessity for the achievement of all company objectives and targets.
- Training becomes completely linked with work. It is triggered by the demands of work, and happens increasingly on the job.
- As a result of this close link with processes, training tends to become fragmented, delivered as and when it is needed to achieve specific results.
- Definitions of skills become less generalised, and more focused and precise.
- A *learning organisation* is one that involves its workforce in organised anticipation of its future opportunities and business and learning needs.

Roles change in a *learning organisation*

- Trainers become coaches, facilitating both individual and collective learning. They are key to the successful transfer and exchange of skills, know-how, and technical, organisational, managerial and methodological information.
- Trainers require specific knowledge and teaching skills. Coaches need these, and must also be able to offer diagnostic and enabling skills.

***Learning organisations* require accessible training**

- *Learning organisations* can only flourish if they can acquire the learning materials they need when they need them. Large companies can often create these for themselves. Small companies cannot, and therefore depend to a very great extent on the accessibility of appropriate training from other sources, and on the support of those who can help and supply them.

***Learning organisations* require new forms of**

social partnership

- In large and small firms, the transition to a *learning organisation* requires a transformation of the relationships between employers and their workers and their representatives. The emphasis of this relationship shifts in learning organisations and becomes developmental, based on a mutual desire to improve company performance, individual skills and job satisfaction.

ADAPT Project

EuroVision

Finland



Promoted by the German-Finnish Chamber of Commerce in co-operation with the Vantaa Institute for Continuing Education at the University of Helsinki, EuroVision links SMEs from different sectors, enabling their workers to receive key qualifications and training in the development of change management skills.

For EuroVision, the learning organisation has three elements:

1. the concept of Virtual Company Environment (VC), which enables participating companies to project their development into the future, to develop new ideas, and to plan their staff development;
2. a telematic toolkit, consisting of a network for communication and debate between the participating small firms, a platform for simulated business communication and transactions, and an information system;
3. tailored learning modules, developed on demand for the participating small firms.

Action points

- **ADAPT's specific experience is focused on the transfer of learning organisation culture to SMEs. This will best be communicated through carefully selected and designed case studies.**
- **These case studies could then be shared at EU level with policymakers concerned with SMEs, and with the provision of distance learning, and with the Social Partners.**
- **At Member State level, they should be made available to Social Partners, sectoral bodies, national and regional training and development bodies, and specialist SME researchers and policymakers.**

The impact of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) on small firms and their training

New job opportunities bring new, higher demands for training....the small amount of further training which takes place in SMEs shows that jobs in small companies are not necessarily the most innovative, the most qualified, or the most secure for the future. Sixty percent of companies with fewer than 250 employees have no further training programmes for their employees. This means that the majority of the working population in Europe is being insufficiently prepared, or not prepared at all, for the new demands of training.

Dr. Eckart Severing, Bavarian Employers' Association

The ICT revolution

The rapid technological change of the last 20 years, brought about by the development and the widening application of information and communication technologies (ICTs), has presented companies with entirely new opportunities.

However, the level of usage of ICT application and networks varies greatly between European Union Member States. Even within countries which have high levels of ICT usage, considerable regional and sectoral discrepancies

exist. In general, adoption of ICT applications by SMEs lags behind practice in larger organisations, and their ability to compete is adversely affected as a result.

The effect of ICTs upon organisations can be radical, altering structures as well as relationships within organisations. There is widespread concern that SMEs are ill-equipped to manage these changes, much less marshal their potential for competitive advantage.

The 1990s have seen continued expansion of ICTs into all aspects of our lives and the creation of a global Information Society (IS). The importance of the IS as a positive force for increasing competitiveness, innovation, economic growth and employment growth have been highlighted in the Commission's 1996 Green Paper on the Information Society, People First.

Many projects financed in the first phase of ADAPT are developing and providing information systems to meet SME needs, some setting up business networks using ICTs, and a small number devoted to establishing virtual enterprises networks.

Other ADAPT projects are dealing with ICTs as training tools, examining and exploiting the broad range of learning sources and technical infrastructures available today.

ADAPT Project

Managing change in information delivery mechanism for SMEs

Ireland



The project, run by Forbairt, the Irish development agency, is developing training tools for use in the creation of a specific electronic business information system geared to the needs of SMEs. An extract from the project's Home Page (<http://www.forbairt.ie/irc/>):

The Innovation Relay Centre



The Innovation Relay Centre is part of a network of centres whose goal is to improve the competitiveness of European industry. The Centre provides access to new technology and skills emerging from European Union and national research and technology development programmes. It also helps companies and research centres to apply successfully to European Union programmes in all technology areas under the so-called Framework Programmes on research and technology development.

The Centre is linked to the European Network through the Network's Co-ordination Unit which is based in Luxembourg.

The Relay Centre's activities are focused on actions which support its overall goal of supporting Irish industry's competitive position. The Centre is essentially an information and advisory centre.

The Innovation Relay Centre, in collaboration with Forbairt's Technology Transfer Service, supports the exploitation of successful technology and skills emerging from the European Union's Framework Programmes on research and technology development. The IRC provides information on finding suitable Partners to promote a successful commercial exploitation. Forbairt's Feasibility Grant Scheme is also available to provide financial support in the planning phase of technology exploitation proposals.

The Innovation Relay Centre also looks for opportunities for Irish companies, particularly small and medium-sized companies, through the EU's CORDIS databases on successfully completed technology projects. Preparing a successful technology exploitation strategy requires extensive experience and a range of technical, project, financial and marketing skills. The IRC, in collaboration with the Eductech programme (previously the Industrial Education Programme), regularly prepares training and development events to facilitate the development of the exploitation plan.

Conclusions

SMEs and ICT integration

- The majority of small companies are unable to make good use of ICTs because of:
 - high costs of acquiring and installing ICTs;
 - low levels of confidence in applying and using ICTs;
 - ignorance of ICTs, and low levels of awareness of their potential applications and benefits;
 - the fact that many operate in locations where ICT infrastructure (ISDN and wide band) is weak.
- Where small companies do make use of ICTs, there is often only one experienced person responsible for their use. This limits their use and reduces their cost-effectiveness.
- Since there is no culture of training in most small companies, and no knowledge of how to assess training needs and choose between methodologies, there are no means of extending expertise.
- If training is to reach all employees, human-intensive approaches must be used. These are both time-consuming and expensive.

- Small companies wishing to build their use of ICTs are frequently handicapped by a lack of appropriate performance standards which they can adopt, and a lack of suitable vocational qualifications against which to plan training.
- Most small companies, and many training and business support organisations, have only a poor knowledge of information sources relating to the application and use of ICTs. Their short-term priorities of survival and profit result in them being unwilling to plan far ahead, and reluctant to release staff for training.
- Although it would be in the interests of many small company employees to broaden their own skills in the application and use of ICTs, most are not accustomed to self-organised and self-driven learning, and are unlikely to embark on it.

SMEs and their access to appropriate local help and support

- Many start-up businesses will only be in a position to make extensive use of ICTs (including the Internet) when they are able to acquire more mature interface tools and better-developed search engines.
- Very small companies need to be extremely cautious about changing to ICT use, since any change or modification of working processes or skill use within a very small company affects business performance immediately
- Where common needs exist between companies, and where they do not compete with each other, there is an enormous opportunity for collaboration in the investment of effort in testing and adaptation of materials.

ADAPT Project

DITRIS

Greece



DITRIS is producing a range of interactive multimedia training tools which can be used to encourage small firms to adopt open and distance learning techniques. Quality and quality assurance systems are the main focus of the training programme, which is being formatted in CD-ROM. The three transnational partners in the project, DIMITRA, VDAB (Belgium) and CSEA (Italy) are each working on specific packages. DIMITRA is producing a Quality and Quality Assurance product, VDAB one on Training in the Use of Programmable Logic Controller, and CSEA on The ABC of Computers. These materials are being piloted and evaluated to determine the effectiveness of the delivery method, and the validity of the content and the learning structure.

Action points

- **ADAPT projects provide a basis for further study on the impact of ICT change on the opportunities and threats experienced by small firms in different countries, regions and markets.**
- **ADAPT experience will be represented both in case studies relating to the integration of ICTs into the production and management processes of SMEs, and in successful initiatives to support small firms in defining and satisfying their ICT needs, and in the development of training and other products.**
- **Successfully developed products can be made known and available for demonstration and display at international and national conferences and exhibitions.**

Small firms and training providers

SMEs generally need external services to help them meet the economic and technological challenges of the future. Even though SMEs in many respects experience identical problems in developing their human resources, it is vital that training providers accept that SMEs from different sectors, regions and cultures are frequently widely different from each other.

The co-operation between SMEs and training providers in ADAPT projects has resulted in new training support services for SMEs. A more holistic approach to training provision has taken the form of cross-institutional co-operation, co-operation between SMEs and institutions, or between SMEs and larger enterprises. Not least, the regional approaches have been strongly represented in ADAPT projects, and have resulted in training solutions tailor-made for those who train SME workers.

Mette Ringsted, Danish Centre for Technology Supported Learning

Even where a region can supply training for a full range of occupations, conventional facilities are by no means always designed to meet the specific content, training methods, or training organisation.

As a result, SMEs widely neglect or reject training.

As a result, SMEs widely neglect or reject training.

ADAPT Project

Regiones

Italy



Regiones is an example of a regional network of SMEs, large firms and SME service providers, designed to foster and support SME development as part of a regional development strategy. Human resources development and training for SMEs is provided not by an isolated training institution, but by a network of specialised regional institutions (research institutions, training providers, and consultancies), and through partnerships with large firms able to deliver practical know-how. This use of local networking to foster enterprise modernisation and regional development is innovative, especially in its bottom-up philosophy. It is those from local institutions and specialisms who create partnerships between companies, local consultancies, researchers and regional development agencies. All this creative potential is used to help local SMEs modernise their HRD and organisational development in a holistic way.

Conclusions

Training provider/SME partnerships

- An holistic approach to relationships between training providers and SMEs encourages more detailed and accurate work than traditional approaches. It also provides for a wider range of work, and a continuous development philosophy.
- Training providers need to see their mission as one of combining business development and training services.
- SMEs expectations and the planning of training outcomes need to be clarified at the point of contact. A spectrum of learning approaches is emerging, in which best practice is based on sound theory, but the training providers themselves need to be prepared to use them.
- Both individual trainers and training organisations need to demonstrate the characteristics that give SMEs confidence in their appropriateness and abilities. Gaining this confidence is the cornerstone of a successful relationship.
- Training providers, if they are to respond effectively, need to have co-ordination and support at regional and national levels. They need, in effect, to be parts of networks serving SMEs.
- Funding is a major issue in converting good practice to general provision. Approaches which seem expensive at the point of take-up can represent excellent value for money if appropriately expanded

excellent value for money if appropriately expanded and evaluated. SMEs have to expect to pay.

Projet ADAPT
PLATO
Netherlands



PLATO describes itself:

PLATO is based on a network principle whereby large companies, known as parent-companies, help and support SMEs in their area. Each parent company releases one or two executives on a part time basis as their company's primary representatives, and also allows access by PLATO participants via these group leaders to their full range of management expertise. These group leaders are given careful training in preparation for their role. Janssen Pharmaceuticals, Philips, Gallaher, Johnson & Johnson, Daf Trucks, Hoechst, Nestlé, Hydrauline (Mannesmann Rexroth), and Apple Computers are among the large companies participating in the different PLATO programmes. PLATO participant SMEs have in general completed their first phase of their development, and are facing the challenges and issues associated with company growth and expansion PLATO originated in the Kempen Region of Belgium in 1988 ...other European areas where PLATO has been established since then include six areas in Flanders, six areas in the Netherlands, six areas in Ireland, in Sachsen (Germany), and Århus (Denmark)... In a study of the first 100 SMEs who have completed the programme in Belgium, experience over five years shows that they have grown faster than the national average, and have created an average growth of 16% per annum in employee numbers. Subsequent to the programme's completion, these rates of growth have continued...

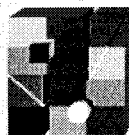
Action points

- **The key to improving the relationships between SMEs and training providers is to improve the capacity of trainers both to relate effectively to small firms, and to deliver the training they need, when they need it.**
- **ADAPT can therefore target information and experience from projects, as well as developed training products, at the bodies and organisations training SME trainers, or, where these do not exist, at training bodies themselves.**
- **This must be demand-led, and must therefore be based on assessments of the strengths and weaknesses of existing training materials and courses, and on the stated needs of SMEs themselves.**

Projet ADAPT

Galileo

France



Galileo is developing and implementing a flexible management training programme, and introducing systematic follow-up activities by training providers. It is enabling SME managers to develop a global vision of their functions and of their companies. Organised through short inter-enterprise seminars, designed to avoid too heavy a demand on managers' time, the project is based on active learning methods. It is designing a quality map, allowing all participants to construct their own training courses covering management roles and objectives, and daily management duties. One of the strong points of the approach is individual monitoring during the three months after the end of the course, designed to evaluate the beneficial effects on the life and work of the whole company.

Small firms and the management of change

The role of SME management

Most SMEs require a revolution in management thinking to enable them to maintain their competitiveness as they adapt continuously to changing economic conditions. Reorganising companies along learning organisation lines demands that managers and entrepreneurs operating in a context of continual change have the ability to play roles distinct from those of autocratic controllers. It leads inevitably to the development of new entrepreneurial and managerial cultures.

To integrate and operate new organisational structures, managers need help to:

- decentralise decision-making, and place wider responsibilities on workers, specifically in relation to quality assurance;
- integrate functions at the workplace, especially bringing together the functions of brain and hand in enlarged and enriched working fields;
- flatten hierarchical structures, bringing in new moderating, coaching and guidance roles for management;
- allow lateral networking, instead of centralised control.

Throughout Europe there is increasing emphasis on the importance of training plans and management development as a means of improving SME training systems. It is equally important to enable SME managers to anticipate change in production and qualification systems, and to develop their own in-house training systems as a means of dealing better with new technology, processes and markets.



European enterprises, and in particular SMEs, operate in a competitive environment which often they are not equipped to respond to. In their effort to adapt to change, they impact on employment and society. Flexibility is what enterprises often demand. However, flexibility need not mean prescribing relations between the employer and the employee. Flexibility should provide opportunities to enterprises, managers and workers to acquire new skills enabling them to enter new markets and sectors. Public administrations must also become flexible in order to provide support to enterprises, and in particular SMEs.
Mr. C. Protopapas, Greek Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Security

Projet ADAPT
QUALYMAN
Spain



Originated by the Department of Trade and Industry of the Xunta (Regional Government) of Galicia, and managed by the Galicia Technology Institute, QUALYMAN helps small firms face up to change by developing participative management systems using quality criteria. What the project says about people in small firms:

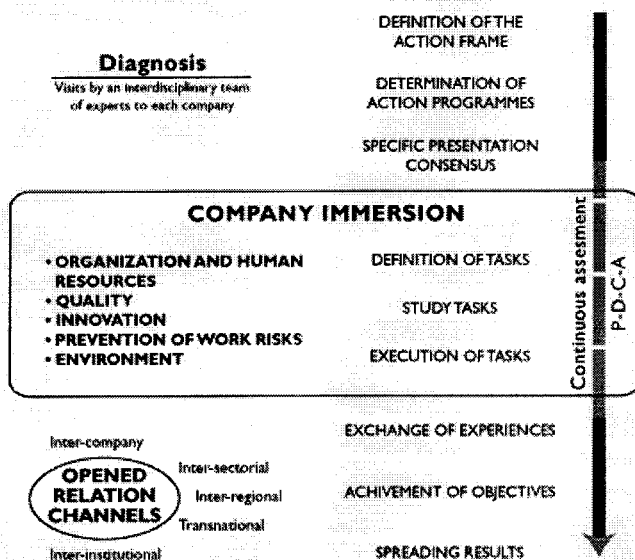
People

Since they are the most valuable asset of any company, the establishment of policies for motivation that are capable of introducing or reinforcing the feeling of pride in a job well done constitute the basis of the programme designed on the subject of **organisation and management of human resources.**

As end-products of the project, the companies participating will have at their disposal the following management tools:

- criteria and procedures for optimising the design of organisational structures and introducing continuous training systems;
- criteria and procedures for improving the planning and improved disposition of staff and for introducing an effective channel for their suggestions and ideas;
- criteria and procedures for establishing motivating and efficient salary structures;
- criteria and procedures enabling companies to improve their definition, design and evaluation of jobs, and their evaluation of job performance;
- management criteria and procedures by objective.

QUALYMAN PHILOSOPHY EXPLANATION



Conclusions

SME managers and training

- Experience shows clearly that managers will only be genuinely involved in training if the senior manager is supportive, if there is proper analysis of needs, and if managers at every level are engaged in understanding and dealing with their problems.
- The most useful and effective management training tools and methods include:
 - questionnaires to measure the effectiveness of training;
 - tutoring and training for new young entrepreneurs;
 - direct involvement of staff in the practical problems of their company;
 - benchmarking and case studies;
 - seminars and round tables.

Benchmarking

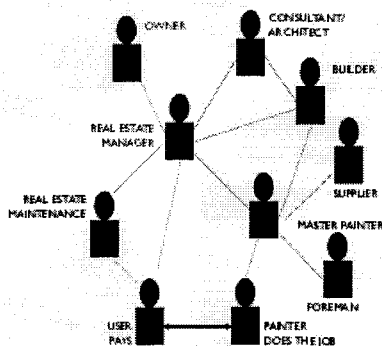
- Benchmarking - a systematic method of learning from the best practice of work processes carried out in the most representative comparable companies and organisations - can be a highly effective means of management training. It cannot, however, be effectively applied in all companies because,
 - its effectiveness depends on it being used in a setting where training is seen as a long-term investment;
 - managers often resist investment in new training, organisational and human resource systems;
 - it is impossible for small companies employing fewer than ten workers to incorporate many of

- fewer than ten workers to incorporate many of these new methods;
- entrepreneurs often deny the need for change.

Projet ADAPT
Institut Européen des Métiers
d'Art
et d'Amélioration du Patrimoine
Sweden



From the project's training materials for SMEs in the house painting and decoration sector:



The customer

The customer orders a job to be done and the supplier does it. In every link in the chain of business there is a customer and a supplier. In a large firm there could be many levels between the person who signs the contract and the one who actually gets the job done. Occasions and reasons that a customer's wishes could be misunderstood or distorted are plentiful. This must be avoided. It is fundamental for a business that the customer be satisfied.

Action points

- **Experience from ADAPT projects can be made available to improve the training of trainers working with SMEs, and to add quality to the materials with which they work.**
- **SME managers frequently lack the knowledge or the techniques to change their own practices. They also lack the tools to gauge and influence progressive change in their own companies. ADAPT can provide specific management-focused training materials, which must be expertly assessed.**
- **It can also provide access to a range of benchmarking tools developed and tested in different Member States.**

Projet ADAPT Eco Management Germany



The project involves training handicrafts SME managers responsible for the implementation of environmental management systems in the EC ECO-Management and Auditing System (EMAS) or in ISO 14001. The integration of multimedia elements into the training course will enable it to be broadened from the focus on specific processes to provide awareness-raising and a range of skills relating to environmental protection. The project's transnational partnership matches the German promoters Westdeutscher Handwerkskammertag (WHKT) with The People's College (UK), Project Centre CESAR at the Copenhagen Business School (Denmark), Aike International Ltd (Finland), and the VDAB (Belgium). It is:

- developing and *implementing* a system for environmental protection;
- evaluating companies' efforts to apply environmental policies and practices;
- disseminating information to the public about environmental policies and initiatives;
- working towards acquiring certification for its entire eco-management system.

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ADAPT

The challenges facing Europe's small firms

Table of contents

Annexes

- Conference programme
- Projects in the Workshops
- Projects in the Exhibition

Conference programme

Thursday 22 May

- 9:00 **Registration and Welcome**
- 10:00 **Opening Plenary Session**
 Mr. K Efstratoglou, Conference President Governor of OAED
 Mr. M Papaioannou, Minister of Labour and Social Security
 Ms. V Papandreou, Minister of Development
 Mr. C Protopapas, Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Security
 Mr. H Papoutsis, European Commissioner
 Mr. A Larsson, Director General of DG V, European Commission
- 11:00 **Introduction of Themes**
 Dr. E Severing, Bavarian Employers Association
 Further Training in SMEs
 Prof. D Chassapis, University of Thessaloniki
 Anticipation
- 11:40 **Opening of Exhibition**
 ADAPT Projects on hand to present their products
- 13:00 **Lunch**
- 14:30 Workshops (Parallel Sessions)
- 18:00 Workshops (session concluded)

Friday 23 May

- 10:00 **Workshops (2nd Parallel Sessions)**
 The previous day's Workshops continue
- 11:30 **Workshops (conclusion)**
 The Workshop participants meet to formulate the conclusions
- 11:30 **Project Exhibition**
 ADAPT Projects present their products
- 12:30 **Lunch**
- 14:00 **Conference Conclusions**
 Ms. M Ringsted, Centre for Technology, Copenhagen
 Mr. P Linardos-Rulmond, INE/GSEE - Labour Institute/General Confederation of Greek Workers
 Mr. D O'Sullivan, Director of DG V, European Commission.
 E Christofilopoulou, Secretary General of the Ministry of

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E Christofilopoulou, Secretary General of the Ministry of
Labour and Social Security

16:00 **End of Conference**

Projects in the Workshops

Workshop N° 1 - Training within Companies - SMEs and the Learning Organisation

D 93

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A 18

The Learning Region Graz

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Atelier 3 - Les relations entre les PME et les organismes de formation

Bfr 17

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Bnl 18

Benchmarking for success

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F 168

GALILEO "Manager stratégique"

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**J100 - Regiones
Réseau Européen
pour la gestion de
l'Innovation**

Ukni 1

Interform - SME

Competitive Challenge

Park

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LTD
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122

Atelier 5 -

L'observatoire performant

Objective 4 - B

Observatoire de
l'emploi de
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DK 2

**Adaptation Of
Engineering
Skills And
Training For
New Services
And Products
In The Health
Sectors**

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S 8

SME - NET

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Objective 4 - S

Public dental care being transformed

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Atelier 2 -

Technologies de l'Information et de la Communication et Formation dans les entreprises

GR 114

DITRIS

Distance Training of
Employees of SMEs
DIMITRA Institute of
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and Development
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VIGILANCE II -

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IRL 1

Managing Change in Information Delivery Mechanisms for

l'Innovation

Economique et

Sociale

Regione Emilia Romagna
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NL 27

PLATO -

Ontwikkeling & verspreiding van een management

begeleidsprogramma voor ondernemers in

het MKB

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Objective 4 - FIN

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**Aider les PME
à utiliser les
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qualifications
dans le
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ADAPT

The challenges facing Europe's small firms

Table of contents

ESF National Administration and National Support Structures

ESF National Administrations and National Support Structures

ESF National Administrations - National Support Structures

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