
**EU BUSINESS FOR IT SMES DEVELOPING A NEW E-LEARNING
AND E-MENTORING SOLUTION FOR SMALL AND MEDIUM SIZED
ENTERPRISES IN THE EUROPEAN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
SECTOR IN ORDER TO DEVELOP
THEIR EUROPEAN BUSINESS CULTURE
– ABSTRACT**

Ilaria Mascitti, Federica Funghi (For.Com. Interuniversity Consortium)

The EU BUSINESS for IT SMEs project develops and implements a new e-training programme devoted to European managers and employees working for micro, small and medium sized enterprises in the Information Technology (IT) sector.

The project duration is 2 years, beginning October 2006. The project is funded by the Leonardo da Vinci Programme II.

The primary objective of the project is to develop a new comprehensive e-training method for IT SMEs based on two e-learning courses; one at corporate level and one at project level. In order to promote and increase IT SMEs' ability for innovation and further developments, EU Business for IT SMEs offer an eCourse combined with eMentoring. The project helps to understand the changes occurring in the new business environment in relation with business skills, legal environment, cultural differences, communication, etc.

The project's e-training programme and the complementary e-mentoring service will motivate SMEs from the IT sector to seek possibilities for trans-European business development and a more intensive participation in European and international tenders, projects and joint initiatives.

In particular, the training path proposed is based on a special e-Learning course supported and complemented by an e-Mentoring service where students are provided continuous on-line assistance from experts trained for mentoring. The project offers 5 pilot courses both on project and company/corporate level concerning strategy development, management, finance, e-business, law, and communication fields. The courses will be organised in Hungary, Italy, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, and UK. Before the courses, information days will inform the interested applicants about the on-line materials and administrative issues. The information days will be held in the same countries where the courses will be available. In detail, the courses are available on 2 levels:

“Modules on Project level” that include the following topics: 1. Managing European IT projects, 2. Financial Management of European IT projects, 3. e-business, 4. Law, 5. Communication in IT projects.

“Modules on Corporate level” that include the following topics: 1. European Business culture, 2. IT SME Business strategy development, 3. IT management, 4. European Business environment, e-business, 5. Law, 6. Communication, 7. Change and IT Moreover the companies, 8. Business English for risk management for IT training path includes the following services: e-assistance from tutors, trainers and your personal mentor, e-Tools: forum wiki area and virtual class (chat, video chat, documents sharing), IT News, articles, Guidelines, Technical assistance, Partner search.

The courses are based on video lessons, presentation cards, lecture notes, slides and exercises. Access to the courses is possible in the eCourse Login area through the personalised ID and Password, given to each user.

The presented methodology is built following the analysis of the best practices available in the European VET (Vocational Education and Training) systems and is adapted to the requirements of SMEs in the IT sector. It provides not only assistance to improve managers' business skills but also prepares them to work in a new competitive and multi-cultural environment.

The project targets both IT SMEs and training institutions:

IT SMEs, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises working in the IT sector:

- Managers, Leaders: the main target group consists of leaders and managers of IT SMEs who are willing to acquire the necessary skills and competencies arising from the new EU business environment and e-challenges of the European IT market.
- Workers at IT SMEs: Workers looking to acquire project management skills necessary for IT projects.

Schools/training institutions:

- Trainers and teachers who would implement the training programme in their organisation are also welcome to conclude the training:
- Experts/teachers: teachers experienced in project management and the IT sector are the second target group.

They will be trained to mentor IT SME managers. This new method can be practiced in their everyday educational activities or used in other workplaces.

Students: those students in higher education who plan to work in the IT sector or who are starting their own business.

The long-term goals of the project is to:

- Boost business activities of SMEs in European IT sector;
- Transfer knowledge and skills to other SMEs Europe-wide;
- Providing cost- and time effective training methods independent of time and geographical borders;
- Increase cooperation between IT companies in Europe and worldwide;
- Increase the ability of innovation and research in SMEs;
- Help SMEs join the process of lifelong learning

With the purpose to achieve the project main results the activities are been split in five Work Packages.

Work Package 1: Project Management. This phase will deals with the project coordination, the drawing up of administrative documents that will be produced for national and international bodies, the management of project activities.

Work Package 2: eLearning. The aim of this work package is the realization of e-learning platform for the delivery of the different learning objects product for the implementation of an online training course in the field of cultural management delivered through new information and communication technologies.

Work Package 3: eMentoring. Support the development of an appropriate E-Mentoring/Coaching based solution to support the E-Learning and other aspects of the overall project. The main project results will be the development of E-Mentoring solutions aim at enhancing the E-Learning process: Handbook and e-learning for mentors and mentees on methodology, e-mentoring platform, training for mentors.

Work Package 4: Pilot Courses. The aim of this work package is to ensure the practicability of the curriculum and training materials for a wider audience. This means coordinating and preparing the pilot training methods and tools and delivering pilot courses to the target groups. Also in all participating countries info days will be organised for the target groups on how to use the e- learning programme, and how they can reach the maximum benefit from the training. WP4 will test and validate the courses, hand over a report and moderate a discussion concerning the evaluation of both the WP activities and the feedback gained from the target groups.

Work Package 5: Dissemination. This WP deals with the design and realizing of all activities with the purpose to spread the project mid-term and final results. In particular will be developed a dissemination strategy, a business plan for the future commercialisation of the results, a marketing strategy. Reports, small studies and a property rights agreement will be drawn up among the project

partners that ensure the future sustainability of the project outcomes. The main goal is to plan for the future and think about the post-project era.

Keywords: e-learning, e-mentoring, ict sector, SME's

Author:

Ilaria Mascitti

For.Com. Consorzio Interuniversitario

Italy

E-Mail: progetti@forcom.it