



Prototype consultation report.

(Ref: REPORT-BOOST-WP02-1.1-UK-[EN])



Content

Methodology	3
Feedback	3
The Innovative Operational Support Methodology – IOSM	3
The BOOST on-line tools	5
Conclusion	8
Annex 1. Reporting template used by partners	9

Methodology.

This report is the result of consultations carried out in each of the partner countries with those working with or representing small and micro companies – the target groups of the project.

The consultations ranged across Training Organisations, both National and Regional, Representatives of Business Associations – once again some national others more local, Business Advisors, e-learning providers and some individual businesses, the latter being sophisticated and technologically advanced.

National partners were provided with their own urls so they could set up demonstrations appropriate for their target groups, culture and language – the latter linked to demonstration resources.

The consultations involved a review of the Innovative Operational Support Methodology as well as the prototype on-line tools.

A typical consultation took between one and two hours. In some instances, it was recorded so enabling the partner to write up the results without interfering with the discussion and demonstration.

A reporting sheet had been developed by Asset Technology so that partners were able to follow similar lines of investigation and feedback. This is attached as [Annex 1](#).

The number of consultations was relatively small so all the analysis is qualitative.

Feedback

The Innovative Operational Support Methodology – IOSM

1. Focus on Business Critical Needs /Business Goals. The importance of having a positive approach was indicated by some respondents and the use of the term “Business Goals” – “areas of company interest” - was seen as better than “Business Critical Needs”.

It was not clear in most responses, whether the basic concept of this approach to companies would work or not. It seems clear that some respondents thought this would be dependent on the business itself, especially with micros, with many external factors coming into play. Some businesses would be willing to embrace the concepts, others would just prefer a specific training offer.

Another respondent focused on the fact that some businesses are opportunity driven rather than having long-term strategic goals so their needs are very much more short-term and this needs to be borne in mind – probably more in the implementation rather than in the overall development. However, overall the link to business goals was seen as a prerequisite in order to raise interest for the target businesses.

2. There was total agreement that the learning has to be relevant to the business and to ensure the development of employees in supporting the organisational goals. The need for these to be generated quickly with the associated learning achieved in a short timeframe as well was emphasised.

Only one respondent thought this would be difficult. In France, the response of a training organisation indicated that this approach was considered the norm for them.

3. Regarding timeframes, the points made in 2 above are key. The learning must be targeted otherwise companies will not see this as an appropriate investment. A response from Greece, indicated that the learning goals must be SMART – specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound.

It was suggested that a TIMELINE must be added to the tool so that the manager, trainer, employee know and agree on the time period within which the learning / training must be completed.

4. Virtually all respondents rated as “high” the importance of the interaction between business advisors, external trainers and management.

A number of reasons were given for this

- The need for the learning indicators to be adequately described and clearly related to the business goals
- The incapacity of most micro-businesses to have the time or skills to do set up the learning indicators related to the business goals, to determine employee levels and targets, to find resources and to set up the information in the on-line tool
- The adaptation of educational materials to meet the company’s needs. The learning content proposed to workers must be well selected and already known to the advisors / trainers
- Improved interaction improves the design, implementation and monitoring of the learning needs
- Building up a knowledge base from resources identified from within and outside the company could be a real plus.

5. Regarding the learning itself, there were mixed opinions about whether this would be in work time or not, quoting examples of workplaces where this would not be physically possible such as in a slaughterhouse or where productivity might be affected. There were

other issues raised such as the potential difficulties of asking employees to learn at home and company policy on such matters.

6. The engagement messages suggested in the consultation reflected those already in the IOSM document with the possible additions from Germany of :
 - Nurture professional knowledge
 - Improve your competitiveness on the market
 - Support Staff Loyalty
 - Develop commitment for your Business Goals.

The need to keep the messages clear, simple and business focused was emphasised.

The BOOST on-line tools.

1. All respondents with the exception of one person stated that the tools worked well but a number of improvements were suggested. There was also a comment that the widgets are slow to appear on-screen.

Apart from the latter a number of other suggestions were made. These will be covered in the subsequent sections below apart from a general comment about the need to ensure accessibility for people with disabilities such as colour-blindness and the colours used on-screen. How much this project can cope with other disabilities is open to debate.

2. There were a number of suggestions and comments made about the interface generally and in specific the entry pages although some respondents found it difficult to answer in the absence of information as to how it will be customised for different organisations and different employees within organisations. This is interesting in itself because the respondents assume that these things will be present in the final versions.

- Currently the format is simple and this is a positive for the interface. “However, without real content within the system, it is hard to assess what additional functionality there might be in interacting with the content.”
- The interface is user-friendly but could be improved in terms of design. It looks old-fashioned and is very traditional.
- There should be an introductory page(s). A simple one with 5-6 words to grab attention and with a link to a second page with more information. Ideally each company / organisation should have its own url and the interface should be customised with the name of the company / logo.
- There should be differentiated log-ins for each company – manager, trainers / advisers, individual employees.
- There should be Help buttons for different users.

- On the front page, there could be videos of using the tools – (the usefulness of this suggestion might be bandwidth dependent.)
 - In the employee view, the connection between the different widgets is not clear.
 - Once developed and made more sophisticated, then on-line instructions will be needed on each page about where to go next.
3. There was virtually unanimous agreement that viewing rights should be changed.
- There should be an option for the company to decide if the business goals should be visible to all. This will depend on company policy and if management shares goals with employees. One suggestion was that “it could be configurable to whom the Business Goals can be visible especially if some information mentioned in them is confidential for a company.”
 - Virtually all respondents strongly argued that employees should only see their own individual progress towards the achievement of their learning indicators, although it was suggested that anonymous aggregated data presentation might provide incentives. “It is not acceptable to allow junior employees to see all details.”
 - Managers to have access to all data. Trainers /Advisors to have access to data relating to employees under their responsibility. (Currently trainers / advisors do not have this access.)
4. More concern was expressed over the widgets available in each area – Manager, Trainer, Employee. It was thought that the current widgets could remain in the manager’s area but that in many micro businesses, owner-managers would not have the time to adjust levels for employees or even to create learning indicators. “Most of the businesses we have dealt with do not have anyone internally who could do this – learning indicator creation, resource allocation, updating. **All these sections should be in the Trainer’s section.**”

Another key comment was that employees must be able to be able to see their learning indicator information – overview and description. The issue here is that currently the Business Goals, Learning indicators and descriptions are all linked together and visible to anyone with access to the Learning indicators. This needs discussion within the partnership.

One other suggestion by one respondent was that BOOST search should be removed from the employee’s area or made less prominent as suggested resources would need to be identified by the trainer in most instances. The same respondent indicated that the progress display should be the most prominent as that is the focus of the system. However, this respondent has probably missed the significance of the access to on-line resources for learning.

Regarding the latter, this was taken up by another respondent, who wanted it to be made clearer that the employee could be given different options for learning:

- Traditional courses – off-line and on-line
 - On-line access to learning materials for non-formal learning
 - Learning from other in the workplace – for example, workplace coaching, on the job learning.
5. Another point, referred to previously, was that a timeline should be added for example, below the field “priority” in the Business Goals widget – start and end period.
 6. There were some concerns raised about the graphical displays and in particular their ease of use, colours and the capacity of some older and lower skilled workers to understand them. One quote (from Germany) stated “I am not a designer but the graphical display should immediately highlight strengths and weaknesses as well as goals reached and goals yet to achieve”. It would appear that more information needs to be provided to users to ensure that they move the icon over the display to show more information and to click to burrow down into the learning indicators areas. One respondent would like to see the capacity to export information in excel file format or at least csv in addition to those already present.
 7. Very little information / comment was made regarding repositories by most respondents, except for general comments such as the use of software on-line business tutorials, wikis for practical skills. From the Czech Republic, www.wikipedia.cz and www.seznam.cz and from the UK, <http://www.gov.uk/business>.

However, there was a suggestion from Greece that the client should be given the option to upload content (which is currently possible but may not be obvious) as well as considering subscription to external databases that could be linked to the tool.

A UK respondent also indicated that video content would be very useful for just-in-time training providing it was able to be viewed on personal devices brought into the workplace.

The same UK respondent also added the following under Section 14:

“We would argue that once the strategic learning requirements have been developed an LMS (learning management system) with curated content (Open and proprietary) should be considered.

LMS could be deployed to allow individual organizations to deploy their own look and feel. A cloud hosted LMS would be very effective, either Open Source or Proprietary depending upon need and specifications and the overall cost of ownership.

The LMS would offer considerable support in tracking and assignment of learning, ensuring courses are taken and gaps in performance identified and mapped back to the key organizational requirements and competencies.

A well configured LMS would also allow the generation of user generated content as courses, hints and tips, videos etc.,,as well as hosting policy documents for the company.

The LMS would also host bespoke developed content and off the shelf developed content as noted above. A mix of content is usually ideal."

Conclusion.

There is very little to add to the IOSM at this stage but more will come after the piloting no doubt.

Regarding the on-line tools, the technical group will review the comments and feedback to partners on which changes can and will be made and the timescales involved, prior to translation of the tools.



Annex 1. Reporting template used by partners.



BOOST - CONSULTATIONS FEEDBACK

Partner:

Country:

Organisation / Institution:

Contact Person:

Suggested Topics

1. Messages to engage with companies - what would you suggest?

Messages suggested & Comments:

2. Focus on Business Critical Needs / Business Goals in order to generate interest from small and micro-businesses. Will this work? What terminology should be used

(in national language)? How important is it to ensure that learning targets are generated from these Business Critical Needs?

Terminology suggested:

Remarks and Comments:

3. Time frames and time availability for learning by workers. How important is it to ensure that learning is targeted?

Timeframes & Comments:

4. Importance of interaction between business advisors and external trainers and the management:

Small Medium High

Comments:

5. How to provide graphical displays of employee and business progress and their importance.

Comments:

6. Are the on-line tool(s) simple to use?

Yes No

Which ones work well?

Which ones do not work well (if applicable)?

7. What format should the interface have? Suggestions for improvement (if applicable).

Suggestions & Comments:

8. Do you see the learning as potentially being both on-line and off-line using these tools?

both on-line and off-line only on-line only off-line

Comments:

9. Would the tools be accessible to all employees in work time or in non-work time?

Work-time Non-work time Both in work and non-work time

Comments:

10. Are there any issues over who can view Business Goals and individual learning indicators and graphical displays?

Comments:

11. Suggestions as to repositories or other web-based resource catalogues in native languages which offer access to learning materials - bite-size upwards - for micro and small businesses

Suggestions & Comments:

12. Would your networks (Business Networks) and VET providers use it? Would it be appropriate to your clients?

Business Networks:

VET providers:

Clients:

13. Feedback on the areas suggested in the discussion guide for use in interviews with business owners / senior managers.

Feedback & Comments:



14. Other Suggestions and Comments, Reflection from the discussion

Suggestions - Reflection: