



Lifelong
Learning
Programme



PROJECT NUMBER: DE/11/LLP-LDV/TOI/147 420

HLS - Healthy learning in SMEs **Regional report on the healthy learning environment within** **SMEs –Turkey¹**

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Abstract

This reports aims to analyze the current situation in Turkey regarding the SMEs learning environment and their tendencies for building a healthy learning environment. The first part analyses the situation of the SMEs by using the desktop data; former studies conducted by the government agencies and the universities. The study is mostly based on the TurkStat's survey on the continuous in-house training of Turkish SMEs. Besides the SME side policies and legal framework has been analyzed as well. In Turkey various governmental agencies supply supports to the SME's to finance the training procurements. The activities of the major SME support agency are analyzed in detail. The legal framework guiding the operation of SMEs does not include obligatory trainings other than work safety. Various studies are analyzed to describe the regional workplace culture in Turkey, which is mostly defined as "paternalistic". The field survey conducted in Ankara region with the enterprises operating in service sector indicated that the higher level of knowledge and technology involved in business created the higher tendency of enterprises towards establishing healthy learning environment.

¹ This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication [communication] reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

1) INTRODUCTION TO THE REGIONAL SITUATION

a. Current Trend of internal training in SME's

Employee training is considered to be an important management task in raising the skills and competencies of the human resources of companies to the required quality levels. For individual employees, this type of training is an opportunity to raise their value in the labour market and to serve their career interests. From a lifelong learning perspective, employee training is one of the cornerstones to raise the quality of human resources in a country.

Although there are plenty of opportunities and supports designed for SMEs in Turkey from the perspective of increasing their competitiveness, not much is known about the extent of employee training in Turkey.

The most recent and comprehensive study conducted in Turkey is Continuing Vocational Training Survey in Enterprises 2007 which was carried out by Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat) and which was published in 2009. This survey covers the enterprises with 10 or more persons employed. Therefore, it does not give indicators on micro sized SMEs. However, it is not possible to find that recent data on training in SMEs employing less than 10 persons.

Table 1.1. Enterprises applying continuous in-house training (CIT) as percentage of total (2007)

Enterprise size group	Provision of CIT		Type of CIT	
	Enterprises not providing CIT (%)	Enterprises providing CIT (%)	Enterprises providing CIT courses (%)	Enterprises providing other forms of CIT (%)
Total	68,0	32,0	17,1	23,7
10-49	70,6	29,4	14,7	21,7
50-249	59,7	40,3	23,7	30,0
250+	53,4	46,6	35,6	34,2

We assume that the enterprises employing 249 or less employees reflect SME characteristics from the viewpoint of employee trainings and identify them as SMEs.

Unfortunately, 68 percent majority of the Turkish companies have not provided training for their employees in 2007. The percentage of the enterprises providing continuous in-house training changes according to its size. Larger enterprises tend to involve more trainings than smaller ones. While 29,4 percent of the enterprises employing between 10-49 personnel are providing in-house trainings, 46,6 percent of the enterprises employing more than 250 personnel are providing in-house trainings.

The tendencies of enterprises show differences according to the sectors they are operating in. The enterprises operating in the textile and construction fields have a tendency to organize CIT less with a percentage around 20 percent. On the other hand, the enterprises operating in sale and maintenance of motor vehicles and manufacture of

transport equipments organize CIT more with a percentage over 55 percent. Textile and construction sectors in Turkey are the most traditional sectors where there are plenty of SMEs. On the other hand, transport equipment sector is a new manufacturing field which has been developed after 1970's. There are transnational companies in manufacturing. Although there are many SMEs operating in component manufacturing and sale and maintenance, they have to obey the minimum standards imposed by the manufacturers even in training of personnel.

The SMEs which preferred CIT in the form of external or internal courses which are clearly separated from the active workplace and take place in locations specially assigned for learning, a class room or training centre and exhibit a high degree of organization by a trainer or a training institution, are less than the enterprises which preferred other forms of external or internal CIT such as on the job training, job-rotations, study visits, quality circles, self-directed learning and attendance to conferences, fairs and seminars (without certificate).

Among the other forms of CIT, the guided on the job training is the most preferred one by all enterprises with a percentage of 18,2 percent. Conferences, workshops, lectures and seminars come second with 9,3 percent. Most of the SMEs owners thought that the existing skills and competences of the persons employed correspond to the then-current needs of their enterprises. They also declared that the preferred strategy for them was to recruit individuals with the required skills and competences. The next reason of not organizing CIT is the high workload and limited available time of employees. The rest of the reasons declared is the lack of suitable courses and the high costs of courses in the market.

The majority of enterprises prefer internal courses than external ones. The SMEs with employees between 10 and 49 preferred internal courses almost three times more than external courses. The SMEs with employees between 50 and 249 preferred internal courses 2 times more than external ones.

Very limited SMEs have an individual training plan. Among all enterprises which employ 10-49 persons, only 7,7 percent have training plans. Additionally, there exists SMEs which did not provide training, despite having training plans. Among enterprises having training plans, 5,2 percent have provided CIT courses. These figures are 17,5 and 14,0 percent for the enterprises employing between 50 - 249 employees.

The difference between the SME scaled enterprises and the enterprises employing more than 250 persons is remarkable. The number of enterprises with a training plan was doubled as the size goes up.

Table 1.2. Enterprises with a written training plan

Enterprise size group	Enterprises with a written training plan (%)	Enterprises providing CIT with a written training plan (%)	Enterprises providing other forms of CIT with a written training plan (%)
Total	10,3	7,6	7,2
10-49	7,7	5,2	5,2
50-249	17,5	14,0	12,9
250+	31,9	28,0	22,8

The enterprises which allocate budget for training is even less. Only 6,6 percent of the small enterprises have allocated budget for trainings. Among them 5,6 percent organized CIT trainings, and 3,7 percent provided other forms of trainings

Table 1.3. Enterprises with a training budget

Enterprise size group	Enterprises with a training budget (%)	Enterprises providing CIT with a training budget (%)	Enterprises providing other forms of CIT with a training budget (%)
Total	8,8	7,5	5,4
10-49	6,6	5,6	3,7
50-249	14,1	11,8	9,4
250+	29,4	26,3	20,5

Another interesting data is the percentage of employees in all enterprises participating in CIT courses. These figures are a better indicator displaying the intensity of the training and the distribution of the trainings in working life. Although the percentages of SMEs providing CIT is around 30 and 40 percent, the percentage of employees participating in these courses is much lower, around 8 percent.

The difference between the women and men in the workforce can be observed on the Table below. In SMEs employing between 10 and 49 persons, the participation rate of women to CITs are half of the participation rate of men. This gap has not arisen in the larger scaled companies. On the contrary, women are more advantageous in large companies. Mainly in the service sector, consisting of hotels and restaurants, post and telecommunications, financial intermediation, women's participation to trainings are higher than men. There are 2 sectors contradicting with such trend. One is the mining and the other is the manufacturing of machinery and equipment where, women's participation rate to CITs is higher than men.

Table 1.4. Percentage of Employees participating in CIT

Enterprise size group	Participants to CIT courses		
	Total (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
Total	13,0	13,0	13,1
10-49	8,4	8,8	4,0
50-249	8,3	8,4	7,9
250+	18,0	17,9	18,7

Most participants of the trainings organized by SMEs were below 55 years old. The participation rate decreased after 55 years old. Lifelong learning culture is higher in large enterprises than the SMEs.

Table 1.5. Percentage of employees participating in CIT

Enterprise size group	Participants to CIT courses			
	Total (%)	Age under 25 (%)	Age between 25-54 (%)	Age over 55 (%)
Total	13,0	10,6	13,8	8,7
10-49	8,4	8,5	8,4	2,4
50-249	8,3	7,9	8,5	4,6
250+	18,0	13,4	19,3	13,6

Another indicator of the intensity of the activities of in-house training would be measured by the extent of such trainings' cost in the total labour cost. These figures are given in the Table below. The figure for enterprises with 10-49 employees have a figure of 11,8 percent, which is considerably high compared with the total labour cost. This displays that organizing in-house trainings brings a greater burden to small scaled enterprises. This percentage decreased as the size of the company increases. The mid-sized enterprises spend almost half of this percentage, which is 5,3 percent, while, large enterprises spend 3,7 percent of the total labour cost to training activities.

Table 1.6. Cost of CIT courses

Enterprise size group	Cost of CIT courses as a percentage of labour costs (all enterprises) (%)	Cost of CIT courses as a percentage of labour costs (for enterprises providing CIT courses) (%)
Total	1,9	4,6
10-49	2,0	11,8
50-249	1,7	5,3
250+	1,9	3,7

b. The regional and local bodies in charge of supporting training services for SMEs.

In Turkey the major bodies supporting training services are:

- Turkey's Small and Medium Enterprises Development Organization (KOSGEB)
- Ministry of Economy
- Turkish Labour Agency
- Regional Development Agencies (RDAs)
- Ministry of Science, Industry and Technology, General Directorate of Efficiency.

KOSGEB is the major public institution which deals with the development and support of SMEs. Their mission is to increase the share of SMEs in economic and social development by offering service and support and to increase the competitiveness of SMEs and the culture of entrepreneurship. The scope of its supports has a wide spectrum, covering almost all activities of an SME during its business life. KOSGEB implements its support schemes through its service units established throughout Turkey. There are 73 Enterprise Development Centres, 26 Technology Development Centres, 33 virtual incubators and 101 Synergy Centres established by KOSGEB. KOSGEB also participates in six consortia of the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) and acts as the leader in five of them (EEN is coordinated by the Ministry of Science, Industry and Technology, there are seven EEN consortia established in Turkey. KOSGEB also undertakes general coordination and acts as a contact point for the Ministry for the Turkish consortia).

The Ministry of Economy's training support is limited with internationalization and export promotion. The Turkish Labour Agency supports vocational and entrepreneurship training and focuses on improvement of the professional skills. Turkey is divided in 26 NUTS II regions and there is an RDA in every region.

The RDA's use the allocations from the central budget of the government, but they are operating independently, with the contribution of the regional governments, municipalities and stakeholders. The RDA's support the training services organized by the regional NGO's, business representation and employer organizations with a widespread scope covering almost all activities of the SME's.

The Ministry of Science, Industry and Technology (MSIT) General Directorate of Efficiency is a government agency which was operating as an institute of efficiency enhancements.

The above institutions are supporting the trainings of the private suppliers except the MSIT which employs trainers and expert to serve the SME's.

c. The regional and local initiatives implemented to promote in-house training activities and the results reached.

KOSGEB supports the SMEs with various which can be used as overall supports and project based measures The overall supports of KOSGEB accumulates to 210.000 TL (85.000.-€) per SME for three years. The supports cover a portion of the service costs

incurred by the SME's for the training they receive from the authorized institutions. The percentage of the payment made by KOSGEB differs in accordance with the geographic location of the SMEs, where the underdeveloped regions benefit with higher contributions from KOSGEB. By this means KOSGEB supports the training need of SMEs up to 10.000 TL, which are provided to the KOSGEB's database registered SMEs in terms of general management, marketing, production, human resource and financial management, computer and IT technologies, energy, new techniques and technologies, innovation, vocational and technical developments, CE sign, and other qualification standards and certifications and environment internal or external in-house trainings. In order to obtain this support, the companies have to get the relevant service from certified training institutions, such as; universities, the units of the universities which are established to give training to the enterprises, the public institutions or their units which established for the purpose of training, Turkish Accreditation Agency, or private training institutions or associations or foundations certified according to Law of Private Training Institutions Nr 5580.

The recent statistics show that the fund allocated has accumulated to 16 M € for all programs from which a total amount of 410.000 € was granted to 147 SMEs as a consultancy and training support at the year 2010. In 2009 these amounts were 415.000 € for 100 SMEs. KOSGEB is continuously simplifying the procedures to benefit from the grants. As a result of this strategy, the total of the financial supports to SMEs have increased to 25,5 M € for the first six months of 2011 and 12.600 SME's benefited from the applied support measures. The details of the 2011 figures are not published as of the date of this document.

As stated above, the Ministry of Economy supplies supports for the internationalization of the companies. In the year 2009 the Ministry of Economy has supported 43 training programs. The number of SMEs which benefited from the above mentioned trainings are not announced.

The study about the Continuing Vocational Training Survey in Enterprises 2007 indicated that, in overall, SMEs mostly received training from private training institutions. The percentage of hours of training received from private institutions is 60 percent of the total hours received by small scaled SMEs. This figure is 34,3 percent for SMEs which are employing between 50 and 249 persons. Other training providers follow private providers. The percentage of hours of training received from private institutions is 13,6 percent of the total hours received by small scaled SMEs. This figure is 20,1 percent for SMEs which are employing between 50 and 249 persons. The next training providers for SMEs are the employers' associations and chambers.

d. The National/Regional Legislation regulating the delivery of in-house training activities for SMEs.

The Turkish regulations about the in-house training activities are limited with the obligations of the labour law, where the employees at the heavy and dangerous workplaces are obliged to be trained periodically and certified by the authorized institutions defined with the Private and Vocational Education Law. The content of the trainings is mostly about the health and safety regulations where some additional professional capacity building has been provided as well.

The Private and Vocational Education Law defines the physical conditions and managerial aspects and certification procedures of the private vocational schools, institutions and courses. The content and quality standards of the trainings are described by other regulations and by-legislation.

Since the SME support organizations finance the SMEs in-house training activities from 50 % up to 80 % of the total cost, their regulations are influencing the vocational training environment in Turkey. The support regulations and procedures of KOSGEB envisage to only provide support for the trainings of the government and foundation owned universities and the training institutions authorized with the above mentioned Private and Vocational Education Law. Although this condition limits the ability of SMEs to choose among various suppliers of training, it helps the development of the private vocational education market.

2) THE REGIONAL WORKPLACE CULTURE

According to KOSGEB, 98,5 percent of the enterprises in Turkey are SMEs. There are many surveys conducted recently in Turkey, which set forth the workplace culture. Most of the results indicate that the workplace culture of the SMEs are highly traditional, if they are not operating in one of the high technology or service fields in which they face high competition or located at one of the developed regions of Turkey such as Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir. The reason behind this might be the education level of the owners and managers of enterprises, and also because of the education level of the employees, employed as a requirement of the technology used in the enterprise.

In a survey which studies management and organizational weaknesses as barriers of business growth among the flour producers in Nevsehir, found that the companies were all family businesses and the owners were also managers of the enterprises². Both the employers and employees were not very capable, there were limited functions of management in the enterprises and marketing was perceived as the most important function which had to be carried by the employer. It was observed that the owner and family members had influences on all the decisions taken and the owner-managers were unwilling to delegate their authorities.

It was observed in the same study that the owner-managers usually learned their job from the first generation or by their past and mostly professional experience in the same field of operation, mostly in the form of learning by doing and they did not have professional management education. Because of the lack of professional management, conservative behaviours were dominant and the management was not de-centralized. There were few attempts toward employee training; thus the unskilled workers were trained by the owner-managers on the job.

As it is mentioned in the above chapter, Turkish SMEs accept the importance of continuous training. However, the managers neither show enough effort to create a proper learning environment for the employees nor provide enough in-house training.

² OZGENER, S. (2003), Management and Organization Problems in the SMEs on growth process: An Example of Nevsehir Flour Producers, *Erciyes University Department of Economics and Administrative Sciences Magazine*, Vol: 20, January-June 2003, p. 137-161.

A study which was conducted in Bozuyuk; a town where there exist enterprises operating in manufacture of non-metallic mineral products, evaluates the periodical training cases of the small and medium sized enterprises³. 103 SMEs in the Bozuyuk region have been considered. While the majority of enterprises accepted the importance of continuous training, only 17 percent of the SMEs declared that they organized continuous training activities lasting for more than 5 years. The percentage of the SMEs which have not organized any training activities is 39 percent. According to the survey, the factors which affect continuous training decisions are to obtain an increase the productiveness, to obtain an increase in the performance of workers and the cost of training. The decision of continuous training is mainly taken by the owners and managers and engineers have less influence on such decision.

Another survey conducted in Kutahya among ceramic tiles producers, which is a highly traditional sector, has reached the same findings with the above two cases⁴. The owner-managers did not give enough effort in recruitments; recruitments were based on the references of friends and family members. Therefore, the survey concluded that there was not much importance attributed to education.

According to the survey, in industrial enterprises, the relationship between the founder of the enterprise and the employees are more direct and based on trust, thus are more personal. The reason behind such relationship can be explained in the family or relative connections. As a natural result, despite the low salary level, the employees are content with their jobs and alienation is at the lowest level. Additionally, even in negative conditions, SMEs do not wish to lose their employees who have learned and developed in the job through doing the job.

A SME owner-manager in Turkey benefits from pervasive cultural features such as collectivism and traditional management practices like paternalism while managing the company. Nalan and Unsal Yetim (2006)⁵ studied the relationship between socio-cultural characteristics of entrepreneurs and employee satisfaction with work conditions in different sectors of SMEs in the city of Mersin, Turkey. They concluded that the national and regional cultural values such as individualism, collectivism, paternalism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance are the main factors leading to congruence between entrepreneurs managerial goals and workers' expectations in SMEs.

According to them, the characteristics of SME entrepreneurs in Turkey are reflected in their employment orientations and their relations with employees. Therefore, individualism, collectivism, paternalism, power distance and other socio-cultural variables which may characterize entrepreneurs should be treated within the context of real work situations like recruitment, reward allocations, etc.

³ SENNEL, Salim (2010), The Need of Constant Training in SMEs: The Case Study in Bozuyuk, *The Journal of International Social Research*, Vol.:3, Issue:12, Summer 2010.

⁴ Gumustekin, G.E. (2005), Management and Organizational Problems of Family Businesses as SMEs: A Case Study in the Ceramic Sector in Kutahya, *C.Ü. İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Dergisi*, Cilt 6, Sayı 1, 2005, pp.71-92.

⁵ YETİM, N. And U. (2006), The Cultural Orientation of Entrepreneurs and Employees' Job Satisfaction: The Turkish SMEs Case, *Social Indicators Research* (2006), Vol.77, p.257-286.

Turkish entrepreneurs display highly paternalistic⁶ tendencies. Since Turkish entrepreneurs consider themselves responsible for “providing the workers’ bread” they also take supporting roles in their workers’ special situations like marriage ceremonies, male children’s circumcision, sickness, etc. Such supportive and protective attitudes can increase the respectability of an entrepreneur in his region of business. A supportive and protecting entrepreneur also has an increased chance of becoming the sole authoritative voice that ensures the harmony in the workplaces. It is observed that the preference of increased support from the employer causes the workers to avoid conflicts and lean towards collectivistic tendencies that increase the group harmony.

Higher paternalistic tendencies of SME owners of Turkey do not result in lower power-distance in the SME culture. However, SME owners display higher power-distance tendencies and execute their own decisions as “the person who speaks last” and usually avoid referring to the opinions of their employees. These tendencies are advantageous for preventing conflicts but establish a centralized management approach in the workplace.

The study of Nalan and Unsal Yetim has revealed that workers’ job satisfaction is highly influenced by the owners’ socio-cultural orientations. Owners’ paternalistic tendencies and workers’ expectations toward a paternalistic supervision are compatible and that determines the overall job satisfaction. This compatibility between workers’ expectations and owners’ behaviour may imply that paternalism is a characteristic that workers have come to expect to see in their employers’ behaviour.

In a socio-economic environment lacking satisfactory social security and strong workers’ organizations and in a face of a chronic unemployment problem, workers come to expect a supportive attitude from their employer and the paternalistic owner becomes the most important factor in workers’ job satisfaction.

The second important factor that determines the workers’ satisfaction is collectivism, which signifies the values of social life, such as emphasis in consideration of group relationships, loyalty to group norms and solidarity. Workers want to enjoy the satisfaction resulting from continuity of group relationships and living together in order to feel full satisfaction from work. For example, being of the same ethnic origin, sharing the same religious beliefs lead to an increased harmony between workers.

The third important factor that determines job satisfaction is that the workers feel themselves comfortable under a stable and centralized power structure. The superiority of the owner in decision-making fulfils workers’ expectations in the workplace.

⁶ Paternalistic form leadership is essentially dictatorial; however, decisions take into account the best interests of the employees as well as the business. Communication is again generally downward, but feedback to the management is encouraged to maintain morale. This style can be highly advantageous when it engenders loyalty from the employees, leading to a lower labor turnover, thanks to the emphasis on social needs. On the other hand for an autocratic management style the lack of worker motivation can be typical if no loyal connection is established between the manager and the people who are managed. It shares disadvantages with an autocratic style, such as employees becoming dependent on the leader.

3) RELEVANCE OF HEALTHY LEARNING ENVIRONMENT IN THE PLANNING OF IN-HOUSE TRAINING ACTIVITIES IN SMES

Various studies indicates that there is a powerful link between the industry in which the SMEs are operating and the extend of using technology and the learning environment.

The SME's operating in service sectors like consulting and software development offer more healthy learning environment to their employees, compared to the companies with low technology manufacturing ones.

A study of H.Çirpan⁷ defines the learning environment at organizations as a working environment without any barrier to learn and supports both individual and organizational learning. Çirpan defines the components of the healthy working environment as;

- Management style
- System approach
- Toleration of the mistakes
- Autonomy and responsibility
- Team work
- Award systems
- Guidance and support

This can only be achieved by using professional management tool and techniques. Considering this fact the policy makers are promoting the SME owners and manager for better management using the consulting services.

According to his study "knowledge employees" at the workplaces with a supportive learning environment, consider "the opportunity for learning" prior to the "income" as a work satisfaction criteria.

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) often face problems that is uncommon to the larger companies and multi-national corporations. These problems are various and include; lack of financial resources, lack of human resources, lack of marketing abilities, lack of formal procedure and discipline, insufficient management skill, etc. Beside all of these issues, we can say that they also face insufficient in-house training. As a result of these problems the SME's lose their competitiveness against the global suppliers.

Most of the SMEs in Turkey are family businesses. Therefore, the majority of managers and workers are from the family, close relatives or their social circle. This is an advantage for some companies if the family members are well educated and if they seize the company. Sometimes this is a disadvantage, because the family force under qualified members to work for the company just because of they are family members or close family friends. In this case even training would not be a solution.

However, we can say that whenever the size of the enterprises small the quality of relations would increase and it could be possible to create a more reliable environment from the point of social relations. Since the procedures of hiring and firing are easier in

⁷ Active January February 2001 Issue

SMEs than larger enterprises, the owners or managers would be able to set up a group of staff who gets along with them better in time.

The Turkish SME's faced the first wave of heavy competition with the global market during the period of the custom union with EU. Various SME's are affected deeply with the decrease of the custom duties and import costs. The Turkish Government applied measures parallel to the Lisbon Strategy to support the SME's struggle to survive. After the revision of the "Lisbon Strategy" and its replacement by the "Europe 2020 Growth Strategy" the Turkish strategies are revised parallel to the new plan. The revised "Turkish SME Strategy and Implementation Plan" defines "developing the management capabilities" and "institutionalization of the SMEs" as a strategic core area. The plan indicates the actions to be taken as well and "enhancing the in house training" and "supporting the employment of qualified labour" are counted as the major measures to be applied for 2011-2013 period. According to the preliminary data supplied by KOSGEB the trend for using the SME training supports is positive and each year more SME's are benefiting from the financial supports.

4) FEEDBACK PROVIDED BY SMEs

The 8 enterprises in our sample are all in the service sector and are located in the Ankara region. Our findings are in line with the trends and findings that are explained above. It has been explained in the first chapter that the financial, consultancy and tourism sectors are among the sectors which are most inclined to continuous in-house training. In line with this, our sample also displays that these sectors have a healthier learning environment, as opposed to the manufacturing and construction sectors, in which a healthy learning environment has a lower trend.

In these sectors, inner company relations, including the relationship between the managers and employers are more interactive and towards the creation of a healthy learning environment and the workplace culture facilitates training.

5) CONCLUSIONS

An average Turkish SME give limited importance on training and skills development. The supports are not reaching the SME's and various budgets of the supporting institutions are not used. Major obstacles of developing healthy learning environment are

- The family and owner dominated management style of the SME's
- Lack of awareness rising programs and success stories,
- Insufficient capacity of the training institutions,
- Lack of legal environment to push the SME's to facilitate in-house training

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