



Archimedes

Problem Based learning for SMEs

Newsletter April 2015

What is Archimedes?

The aim of the Archimedes project is to address some of the problems Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs) have with current training. This will be done by developing a solution to develop skills that address their real needs while maximising ROI and minimising time spent away from the workplace.

Problem based learning a feasible option for SMEs?

Our first round of research has been done on informal learning practices in SMEs. To date we have over 200 survey responses and 16 focus group participants. In our research it was found that most SMEs prefer to avail of on the job training.

The main problems with learning is assessing if the learner has acquired skills, and the 'drop off' effect after training has taken place. In addition bridging what is being learned with applying this in practice is a key issue. Companies felt these issues could be alleviated by aligning learning to the real problems SMEs have and instilling a learning culture in the company.

The skills that were key to the company were communication, technical, managerial and problem solving skills. External training courses were the most favoured method of acquiring skills that could not be attained inhouse.

The main areas in which SMEs have challenges are in Finance 88%, Marketing – 88%, Management – 86% and HR – 80% and Services. These challenges are often identified in a strategic review or during performance measurement. The challenges often arise due to external factors and those which are difficult to resolve is often due to circumstances beyond the companies control. In these instances a work around is sought. On discussion with the focus group companies it was identified that the nature of the problems was not of concern, however encouraging employees to take initiative for learning and addressing the challenges in the organisation is required.

ICT is widely used in all SMEs and most employees have access to a computer. ICT is used by several companies for learning purposes the most popular media being the Internet, video and Open Educational Resources.

These initial results have huge implications for PBL in SMEs. PBL aligns learning to real company challenges, bridging what is learned with application. Furthermore it can instill a learning culture in the organisation as the learner is responsible for constructing their own knowledge. Digital learning resources can be used to guide the learner through the PBL process allowing the employee to remain in the workplace during training and access learning material as needed.

We are still conducting research on this area so if you would like to participate please contact us below. Formal reports will be launched on this in May 2015.

ICT platform

IAT in Germany have developed a first draft of the PBL platform which can support sessions for solving real problems of SMEs. The platform serves as a template to guide the learner through the PBL process and allow the transfer of the knowledge acquired in the PBL process within the company. Learning material in the form of videos and a mentor network will be available in June to further support the PBL process. Please see <http://www.archimedes-tiki.eu/tiki-index.php>

Events

Focus groups	Europe	April
Report launch	Website	May
PBL handbook	Romania/Website	June
SME workshop	Romania	June

More information

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