Innovative Entrepreneurs and Innovation
Support for SMEs: Knowledge Alliance „Human
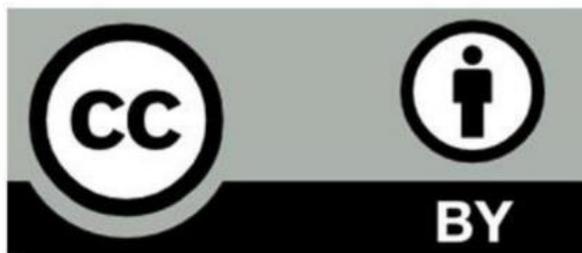Resources and Organizational Development"– KAforHR

Results Work Package 4

Workplace Innovations further training programme

Additional Result: Evaluation Concept and Report

Partners

Baltic Sea Academy (Lead Partner), Germany

Satakunta University of Applied Sciences, Finland

The Baltic Institute of Finland

Tasowheel Group Oy, Finland

POLITECHNIKA GDANSKA, Poland

Pomeranian Chamber of Handicrafts for SMEs, Poland

Hydromechanika Sp. z o.o. Sp. k., Poland

Centre for European and Transition Studies, Latvia

Latvian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Latvia

Latvia Vides Dizains, Latvia

Arbeit und Zukunft e.V., Germany

Languages

English

Content

Summary and Introduction

For SMEs in the Baltic Sea Region to remain competitive in the long term, it is necessary to increase their innovation capacity and reduce the gap between qualification requirements and demands. For this reason, the Knowledge Alliance "Human Resources and Organizational Development", consisting of eleven partners from four countries, relies on increased cooperation between universities and companies in order to realize education and innovation promotion. To reach as many SMEs as possible, chambers strengthen the partnership between universities and companies.

Human capital is the most important resource for strengthening innovation and productivity. Hence, the project focuses on the comprehensive promotion of Workplace Innovations. While there is great need for further development in this area in the countries south of the Baltic Sea, Workplace Innovations are already more advanced in the Scandinavian countries. Therefore, the project involves countries from both regions.

The alliance, which will be extended to 68 partners from 13 countries and permanently continued, focuses on cooperation in two areas. First, the development, testing, and implementation of SME-specific methods, instruments, and projects through R&D work at universities, that create workplace innovations in areas such as employee recruitment, motivation and digitization, a more innovative working environment and more efficient use of human capital. Second, the strengthening of awareness and competences in this new area of innovation promotion for small and medium-sized enterprises in the Baltic Sea Region through qualifications. The project will develop and implement:
a) three comprehensive continuing education programs: "Digitization & Human Capital", " Employees on the way to Co-entrepreneurs" and "Innovation Processes".
b) a dual bachelor's degree course: "Human Resources and Business Administration".

All products and further results will be transferred to 68 actors from 13 countries.

The work to develop the output of Work Package 4 "Further vocational Trainings" was carried out entirely as planned in the project application. Three different training courses were developed, tested, evaluated and implemented:

- Training A Employees on the way to Co-entrepreneurs
- Training B Digitization and Human Capital
- Training C Innovation Process

A concept for quality assurance and evaluation was developed for the three trainings. This concept and a report of the evaluation of the three trainings are listed below as an additional result.

Results Work Package 4

Workplace Innovations further training programme

Evaluation of the continuing education programs

- Evaluation Concept
- Evaluation Reports

Partner

Baltic Sea Academy (Lead Partner), Germany
Satakunta University, Finland
The Baltic Institute of Finland
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Evaluation Concept

Evaluation Reports

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- Training B Digitization and Human Capital
- Training C Innovation Process

All three trainings were practically tested under different national conditions, evaluated, revised on the basis of the evaluation results and finalised. The evaluation concept as well as the evaluation results are listed below.

3 education programmes

Evaluation concept

Introduction

Evaluating training, teaching and learning has been an emerging issue in the 1980's when it was actively researched within several disciplines like education, pedagogics, psychology and organizational sciences. During the 1990's the enthusiasm flagged, but the interest woke up again in parallel with the waves of refugees and immigrants arriving to the Europe. The needs to include newcomers to the hosting society, to teach local culture, habits and language, and to train professional skills to comply with the local requirements have highlighted the importance of developing new teaching and training methods for newcomers and locals alike. These new methods and tools in teaching and training should be compatible with the requirements set by cultural diversity of both the refugees and immigrants, and the societies receiving the incomers. This trend has significantly influenced the development of both, education and evaluation methods and processes, in the past years.

Furthermore, during the past two decades the western countries have met - in addition to enormous flood of settlers - another phenomenon that challenges the education system: The post-war baby boom generation reaches age of retirement. This has two consequences, both requiring the answers from school systems. Firstly, the western countries should have a capability and capacity to educate and train more and more nursing personnel to cover both the vacuum left by those retiring, and to answer to the needs of ageing population. Secondly, these countries should be capable to renew their education systems to be able to satisfy the needs of business, to be able to train skilled labor and to be able to educate more persons that are both capable and willing to create their career as entrepreneurs and to continue the work of retiring entrepreneurs. If this fails, the consequences for European economy might be fatal or even disastrous.

This challenges not only schools and universities or teachers and trainees, but also those developing the courses and teaching and training methods used in the courses. Evaluating the learning of trainees, used methods and the impact of these methods on the learning would help teachers, designers and analysts to improve the methods.

The aims and targets of the evaluation are context dependent issues. Thus, in ideal world, the courses, the methods used in the courses and the means to evaluate the outcome of the course, the learning of trainees and the efficacy and success of the methods should be designed together so that the whole course is seen as main process inside which the training and evaluation are parallel subprocesses. This would be the best way to ensure that exactly those goals set to this unique program are measured during the evaluation. In this case "Train the Trainer" and other education programs have been planned parallel with the planning of the evaluation.

Education Programs

A) The three further vocational training courses (WP4) on the topics of
- Recruiting and binding personnel,
- Digitization and
- Customers and business partners as innovation drivers

for the target groups "Entrepreneurs, managers and specialists in SMEs" to impart skills and abilities in the area of Workplace Innovations. The following should be achieved:

a) Qualification of employees of SMEs to increase their capacities for Workplace Innovations;
b) Development and implementation of Workplace Innovation projects in SMEs;
c) More efficient use of the available human capital in SMEs have been developed to respond the challenges met by those aiming to strengthen the awareness and competences for target-oriented environmental policy and workplace innovations in SMEs via training and consulting the entrepreneurs and personnel of SMEs.

B) Dual bachelor study course on the topic of Business Management and Workplace Innovations in SMEs combined with R&D tasks for SMEs (WP5).

The following should be achieved:

a) High-quality qualification of young entrepreneurs and managers (EQF Level 6);
b) Attraction of much needed junior staff for SMEs;
c) Development of capacities to increase awareness for Workplace Innovations; d) Realization of individual Workplace Innovation projects, which the students carry out as employees of the participating SMEs with the support of professors of the respective university in connection with the dual studies in SMEs.

The target groups of the programs are 1) lecturers and consultants from (or delegated by) chambers, universities, other partners; 2) students in educational institutes, vocational schools and universities (of applied sciences); 3) SMEs, entrepreneurs, managers and specialists in SMEs. The planned duration of course varies depending to the educational level and purposes. Each lesson lasts 45 minutes. Methods used in lessons will be lectures, teaching talks, working in small groups, case studies and examples from real world. Material used during the teaching consists of e.g. information material (basics & backgrounds, thematic introductions etc.), presentations, questionnaires, question guides, checklists, analysis results, good practice examples and so on.

Evaluation of courses including gained results and found problems is essential to be able to develop further the existing training and education programs as well as to consider the experiences gathered from these programs when building new curricula. The evaluation process of each course has been designed hand in hand with the course itself. This concept presents an overview of evaluation process and questionnaire.

When evaluating courses the goals and real results should be compared. This is not always possible or fair and just. The evaluation should be targeted only to such measurable issues on which the designer, teacher, facilitator or student himself has an impact. Evaluating the impacts of training programs against the presented main goals would require large societal researches including the recording of the initial situation before starting the programs and the long-term follow-up research in which the conducted interventions and actions (In this case new forms of training and education) and their impacts on change of variables is followed (Figure 1). The final conclusions can be drawn just after some years or after decades. In this project this is not possible and the whole evaluation process must be rethought and simplified.

The most important variables, on point of view of achieving the goals set, are the motivation of student, the support he gets, the relevance of issues in curricula, the quality material and training and the ability of facilities to support training and learning. Although most of the variables presented above are so called soft variables, which can't be measured directly by targeting the measurement tool to some point or phase in the process, they can be assessed indirectly by assessing the feelings and comments of participants and other stakeholders.
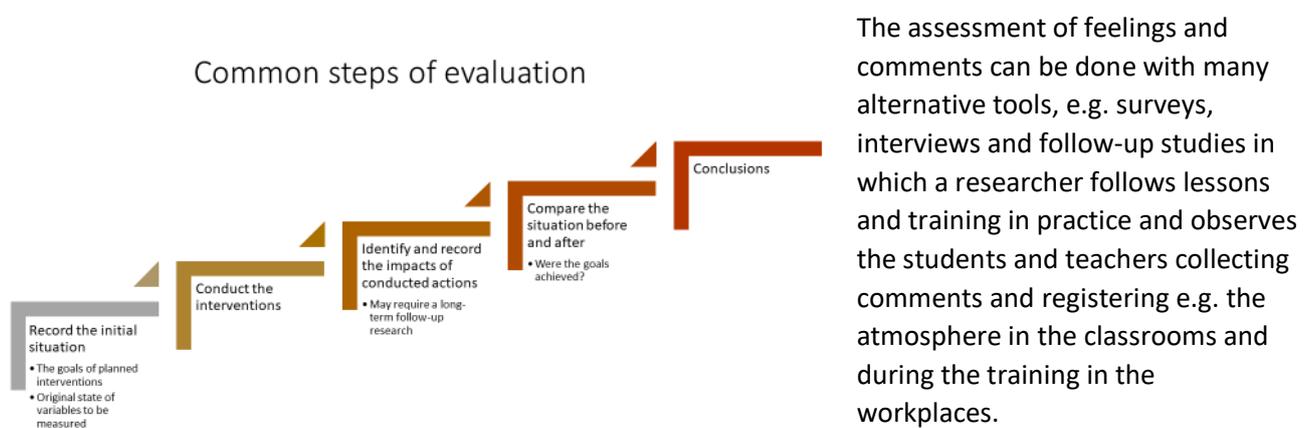
The assessment of feelings and comments can be done with many alternative tools, e.g. surveys, interviews and follow-up studies in which a researcher follows lessons and training in practice and observes the students and teachers collecting comments and registering e.g. the atmosphere in the classrooms and during the training in the workplaces.

In this case the experiences and comments of participants will be surveyed by simple questionnaire

Figure 1: Evaluation process

with questions approaching the common impressions, the applicability of facilities, the relevancy and importance of each issue and the experienced quality of each lesson and material used.

Evaluation concept

The objective of the evaluation is to determine whether the goals of the program will be achieved in the implementations evaluated, and how the program has impact on student's career and opportunities.

The type of the evaluation follows standard course evaluation methods, i.e. formative, process and outcome evaluation, the latter only partial:

- The formative evaluation will provide feedback to the curriculum designers, developers and implementers to ensure that designed and implemented courses really meets the needs of the intended audience, i.e. assure or improve the quality of program. Formative evaluation and analyses will answer to the following questions:

    - Were the goals and objectives suitable for the audience?
    - Were the training methods and course materials appropriate for the audience?
    - Should the program or some part of it be developed further and if, how?
    - Furthermore, formative evaluation also provides information that benefits the development of the program, facilities and timing.

- The process evaluation will provide information concerning the training and lectures, like asked questions and verbal feedbacks.

    - Process evaluation answers the question "What did you do?"
    - It focuses on procedures and actions used to produce results.
    - Process evaluation takes place during the training delivery and at the end of the training.
    - The co-organizer (Responsible for the course)

        - monitors the training,
        - describes the training process as a whole, and
        - records the findings into the written report.

- The outcome evaluation tries to find out how the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of the audience developed. It takes a long time to find out the outcomes of the education and training, so in this stage only the main topics participants are able to do at the end of training, will be assessed.

The evaluation process will be as follows:

1. Semi-structured questionnaires will be created for the participants (Appendix A): If needed, the topics (topic 1, topic 2…) are **renamed to match to the parts of the course**. It is also recommended that co-organizer (Responsible for the course) writes the name of the evaluated course in the beginning of the questionnaire before printing it to make sure that the name is correct.

2. Time for the survey (approx. 15 minutes) will be allocated in the end of the course

3. In the beginning of the course the co-organizer (Responsible for the course) will inform participants about the evaluation and its importance for further development actions

4. The co-organizer (Responsible for the course) distributes the questionnaires to the participants to be filled in before leaving the course. The purposes of the questionnaire and how the data will be used should be explained clearly to the participants. This will help to improve the response rate and encourage them to make comments that can be useful to improve future programs.

5. The participants complete the questionnaires and return them to the co-organizer.

6. The co-organizer collects the questionnaires and deliver them to the evaluator.

7. The evaluator compiles all feedbacks and summarizes written analysis on the evaluations.

The evaluation approach will be based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. The Microsoft Excel package will be used to transcribe the feedbacks and interviews. Open questions will be categorized and qualitative analysis of the groups will be done.

The final evaluation report will discuss the following issues:

- Did the curriculum reach the targets?
- How well was the knowledge creation and sharing realized?
- Did the participants assimilate knowledge and tools?
- Was the venue and equipment appropriate for the training course?
- What kind of further development will be needed, if any?

Schedule of the evaluations

The schedule of the evaluation should be matched to the phases of the curriculum. There is no sense to evaluate the course before the students have a true and fair view of the course, its phases and contents. Thus, the survey will be conducted in the end of the course. A closer schedule of each evaluation will be agreed later.

Appendix A: Questionnaire for participants of the _____ - course

Please circle the scale that applies to your opinion on the following aspects of the training or education you participated.

Scale: 1= Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither disagree or agree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly agree

In common					
The facilitation (location, room etc.) was suitable for training	1	2	3	4	5
The topics and issues were relevant and responded to the goals of training	1	2	3	4	5
The lecturers explained topics of the lessons, additional questions, experiences, and topical issues arisen during the course well	1	2	3	4	5
There were enough time scheduled for each issue.	1	2	3	4	5
I got valuable knowledge from lessons and examples presented by lecturers.	1	2	3	4	5
I believe that can utilize the knowledge gained from lessons in my future career.	1	2	3	4	5
I can utilize the skills trained and knowledge gained in my future career, e.g. when consulting my clients.	1	2	3	4	5
Comments concerning the common issues					

Lessons and Topics						
Topic 1	The presentation was clear and understandable	1	2	3	4	5
	The issues were relevant and topical	1	2	3	4	5
	The information presented were up-to-date	1	2	3	4	5
Topic 2	The presentation was clear and understandable	1	2	3	4	5
	The issues were relevant and topical	1	2	3	4	5
	The information presented were up-to-date	1	2	3	4	5
Topic 3	The presentation was clear and understandable	1	2	3	4	5
	The issues were relevant and topical	1	2	3	4	5
	The information presented were up-to-date	1	2	3	4	5
Topic 4	The presentation was clear and understandable	1	2	3	4	5
	The issues were relevant and topical	1	2	3	4	5
	The information presented were up-to-date	1	2	3	4	5

Topic 5	The presentation was clear and understandable	1	2	3	4	5
	The issues were relevant and topical	1	2	3	4	5
	The information presented were up-to-date	1	2	3	4	5
Topic 6	The presentation was clear and understandable	1	2	3	4	5
	The issues were relevant and topical	1	2	3	4	5
	The information presented were up-to-date	1	2	3	4	5
Topic 7	The presentation was clear and understandable	1	2	3	4	5
	The issues were relevant and topical	1	2	3	4	5
	The information presented were up-to-date	1	2	3	4	5
Topic 8	The presentation was clear and understandable	1	2	3	4	5
	The issues were relevant and topical	1	2	3	4	5
	The information presented were up-to-date	1	2	3	4	5
Topic 9	The presentation was clear and understandable	1	2	3	4	5
	The issues were relevant and topical	1	2	3	4	5
	The information presented were up-to-date	1	2	3	4	5

Free speech

What was good?

What could have been done better? (E.g. was some topic missing or unnecessary)

Would you recommend the course to someone you know? If not, why not?

Was anything missing that you might need in your future profession / occupation / job?

Was the proportion of topics and issues inside each topic suitable or should something be increased / decreased?

Other comments

Thank you for your answer

Evaluation Reports

Training A Employees on the way to Co-Entrepreneurs

Training B Digitalization and Human Capital

Training C Innovation Process

Contents

1. Introduction

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Furthermore, during the past two decades the western countries have met - in addition to enormous flood of settlers - another phenomenon that challenges the education system: The post-war baby boom generation reaches age of retirement. This has two consequences, both requiring the answers from school systems. Firstly, the western countries should have a capability and capacity to educate and train more and more nursing personnel to cover both the vacuum left by those retiring, and to answer to the needs of ageing population. Secondly, these countries should be capable to renew their education systems to be able to satisfy the needs of business, to be able to train skilled labor and to be able to educate more persons that are both capable and willing to create their career as entrepreneurs and to continue the work of retiring entrepreneurs. If this fails, the consequences for European economy might be fatal or even disastrous.

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2. Results of the evaluation Training A Employees on the way to Co-Entrepreneurs

2.1 The facilitations of the training

According to the implementation report, 12 companies applied to participate in the training, of which 8 companies were selected. The training included online workshop (two days), work-learning period of three months, and an online meeting for the presentation of the results of project learning in June 2021. Four of the companies participating the training managed to prepare projects for implementation. Due to the Covid19 pandemic, 4 of the companies postponed the possibility of implementing the ideas.

The aim of the training was to improve the individual efficiency of employees, raise and strengthen professional competences and to enable participants to find and develop innovative work practices.

The lecturers who conducted the workshops were experienced academic lecturers of the Faculty of Management and Economics of the Gdansk University of Technology, specializing, among others, in the field of company management, human capital management and entrepreneurship.

The participants of the training had the opportunity to test various tools that enable the creation and development of ideas and the involvement of employees into brainstorming and implementation of found ideas. The participants shared their doubts concerning, for example, how to learn and increase the involvement of young employees. They were offered various ways to support communication and interactions between generations as well as between different levels of the company structure. The need for communication support between employees in companies emerged during the workshops.

During the work-learning period, an employee of the Pomeranian Chamber of Handicrafts for SME was in regular contact with the companies and was supporting the process of creating the ideas. During several telephone meetings with representatives of companies participating in the workshops, the support person offered support in the further creation of ideas. The help was needed particularly in issues like

1. Identifying the challenges faced by the participants, that can be solved by the methods of work or tools proposed during the workshops
2. Recognizing the state of the company's current activities in the development of organizational culture or human resources.
3. Improving the degree of employee involvement in certain processes, and particularly in involving employees from various departments in solving problems in departments in which they do not work daily.
4. Discussing how to support innovative activities in the company by encouraging employee participation and customer involvement in the creation of the ideas.
5. Identifying specific ideas to be implemented.

2.2 The profile of participants

The companies participated in the training belonged to various industries. They represented companies related to craft. Training participants had vocational or higher education, both men and women aged 30 to 47. The industries included e.g., automotive, carpentry, photovoltaics, metal, and food industries.

2.3 How the training succeeded

According to the participants, the strengths of the training were the topicality and relevancy of the knowledge and inspiring examples, and particularly the practical approach. The facilitations of the classes and the topics of lectures were experienced being suitable for the participants.

As weaknesses of the training the participants had mentioned that it was not always possible to apply the presented solutions, and that some of the companies did not find the practical possibilities to implement the presented solutions in their own companies. Furthermore, certain parts of the given knowledge should be even more detailed.

In the concluding online meeting, there were only two companies that had the opportunity to present the results and to discuss about their projects and their implementation processes.

2.4 Conclusions and recommendations

As a whole, the course seems to be well organized, and participants were satisfied with the facilitations. However, the weaknesses emerged during the course were in line with the experiences gained from the other courses with the same type of implementation (the modified KAIN-model). It is almost impossible for the designer of the curriculum or the facilitator of the course to foresee, what kind of solutions and tools will suit for each participant, if they do not know the companies and participants beforehand. Although it is recommended that a trainer should have wide variety of tools and methods to be presented and applied in the companies, the time available and real business life will set their own limits. It is not possible nor reasonable to use all the time to present many kinds of different tools. Thus, the more recommendable solution to this is to pay more attention to the individual needs of each participant. This would mean, that during the workshop, the common principles of e.g., innovation, problem solving, and brain storming would be dealt. In the beginning of the project learning phase, the individual needs, limits, and possibilities of each participant would be evaluated, and suitable tools presented. This, however, would require more professional lecturers during the work-based learning phase.

3. Results of the evaluation Training B Digitalization and Human Capital

3.1 Participants' ratings

The participant experienced, that topics of the course were relevant and in line with the goals of the training (Figure 1), the lecturers explained the issues well and information given was valuable for him. However, he was quite satisfied with the Moodle platform and his own capability to reserve time enough. However, he was slightly sceptic concerning the benefits the course could provide for his career.

Figure 1 Satisfaction with the common issues of the course

In the free speech comments, the active teachers were appreciated, but the lack of the active participants was mentioned as a negative issue:

1. **What was good?** Teachers were active and brought up various point of views in each topic
2. **What could have been done better?** There should have been more participants
3. **Would you recommend the course to someone you know? If not, why?** Yes, if there were more participants.
4. **Was anything missing that you might need in your future profession / occupation / job?** No Comment.
5. **Was the proportion of topics and issues inside each topic suitable or should something be increased /decreased?** No Comment.
6. **Other comments?** Special thanks to Dr Kari Lilja for good tips concerning the building of ICT - Strategy of company.

The participant seems to be very satisfied with the topics, and only Introduction got slightly worse scores (Figure 2).
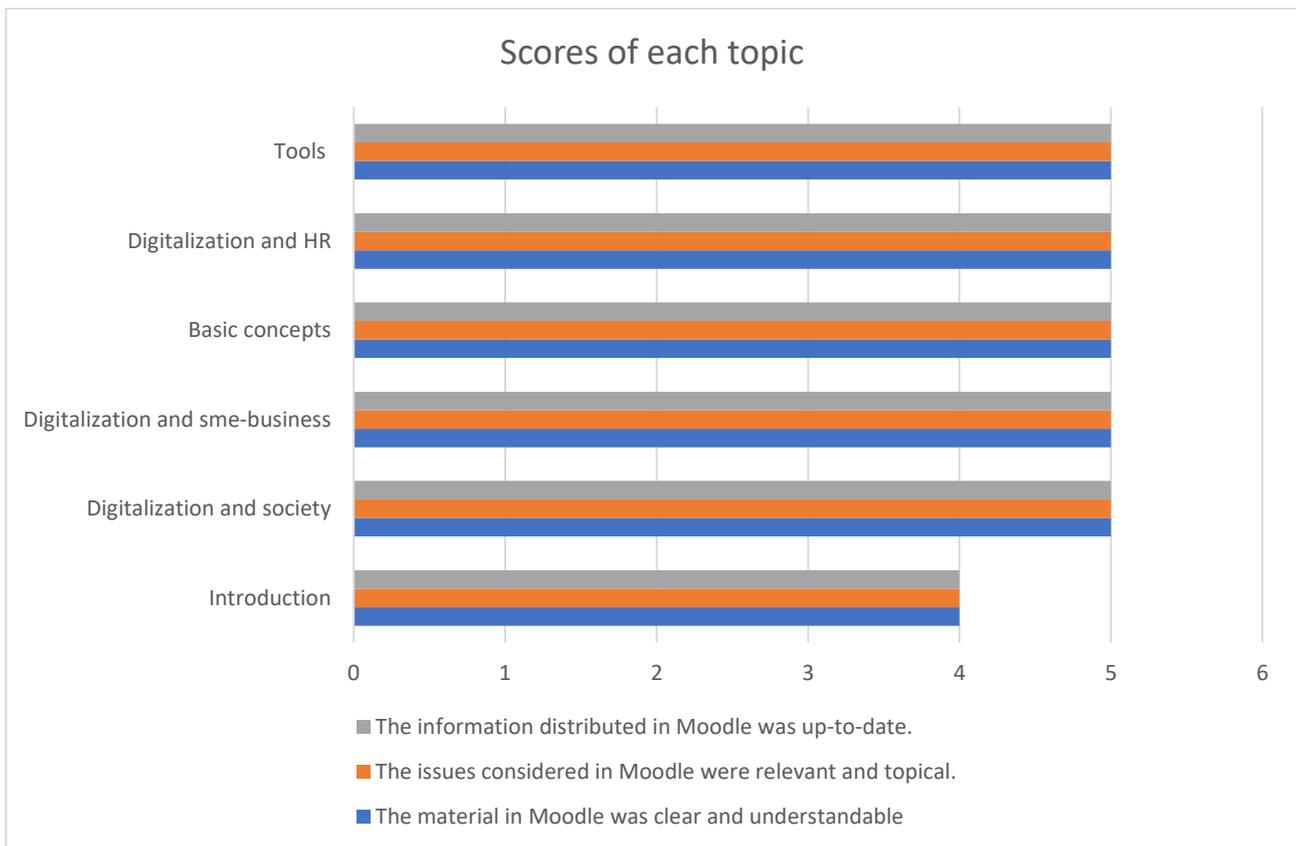
Figure 2: Satisfaction with the topics of the course

3.2 Teachers' feedback

Teachers expected that there would be 8 active students, thus, discussing with only one person without getting any reflection from the others was not the best pedagogic situation, although this active participant was very competent and active, and had challenging questions.

3.3 Conclusions

The Covid19 epidemic forced the partner responsible for the course to redesign the course into online-format. This gave an opportunity to test, how on-line teaching and KAIN- model would work together. It was found out, that even if there is no reason why online-methods would not work with KAIN, the positive impact of team spirit to the learning was not gained. However, this was a very strange situation caused by COVID-19 epidemic and employment situation disturbed by country-wide restrictions. Thus, it is recommended to redesign the online course considering the experiences gained during this course and retest the "Online KAIN-Model". Particularly the support during the practicing period should be partially personal, face to face and on the floor i.e. so called hybrid model should be applied.

Concerning the Moodle learning platform and other technical environments, it would be a could idea to allocate more time for those who have not used system before to get familiar with the system.

4. Results of the evaluation Training C Innovation Process

4.1 Participants' ratings

According to the implementation report, 12 companies participated to the training. According to the graphs provided by Google Forms, each question was answered by 10 respondents. The respond rate was 83 %.

The satisfaction with the information given and the idea exchange during the course was rated between very good and excellence. Average of the ratings in the three questions approaching these issues was close to the 4,5 (Figure 1). The next three questions concerning the average satisfaction with the course, the workplace innovation project and support given by the management of the company to the innovation project gained slightly lower ratings: The average of the ratings was close to the 4. The satisfaction with the support given to implementing of the innovation was lowest out of these 5 issues: The average was 3,5.
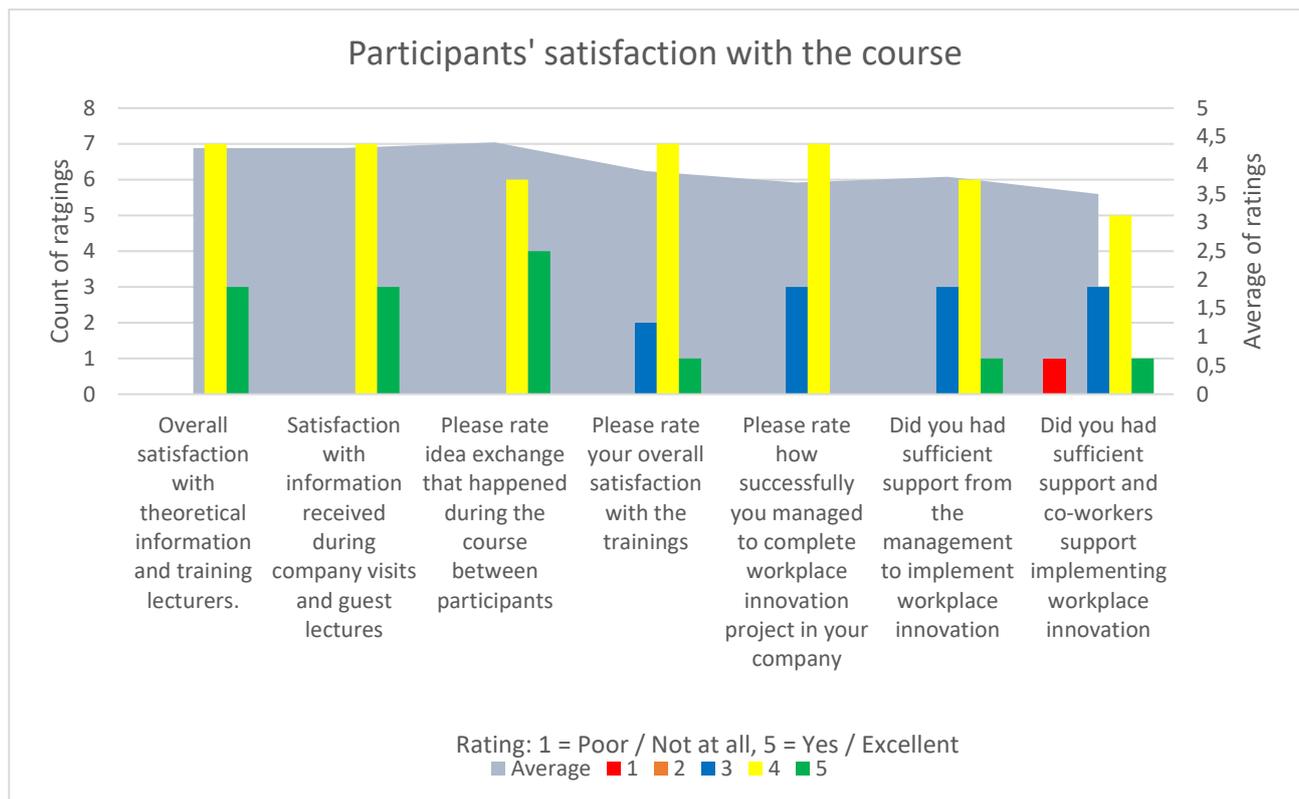

Figure 1: Answers to the questions

4.2 Conclusions and recommendations

As a whole, the course seems to be well organized, and participants were satisfied with the facilitations. However, although the differences were minor, there is one issue, that is worth noticing: Three of four questions having lower ratings, concerned to support in a way or another. Particularly the question 7, "Did you had sufficient support and co-workers support implementing workplace innovation," is remarkable. Unfortunately, this question seems to combine the support given by co-workers to the support given by others (By whom? By managers? By trainers?), thus, although it is evident, that trainees felt that more support would have welcome, it is impossible to have further and closer conclusions concerning this issue.

It is recommended, that in future training programs the need for support should be considered. The importance of innovations should be highlighted in the discussions with management as well as with coworkers, and more resources to support trainees should be allocated to trainers.