



DEVELOPMENT OF A "FRONT-LINE" ADVICE - GUIDANCE - COUNSELLING SCHEME FOR SMEs' EMPLOYEES

Taking into account the long working experience with the investors and based on the knowledge of the Romanian business environment, the **National Council of Small and Medium Sized Private Enterprise in Romania (CNIPMMR)** – by the Projects Department, developed for 30 months (June 2004 - November 2006), the project " *SME COUNSELLING – development of a "front-line" advice guidance counselling scheme for SME's employees*", pilot project financed by Leonardo da Vinci programme.

As one of the CNIPMMR's missions is to provide specialized services allowing the improvement of the small and medium sized enterprises in Romania, the objective of this project is to develop and implement the social competences of the top or middle management, the human resources advisors, marketing, area managers from the SMEs with activities of production, services, retail or distribution trade, advisors, entrepreneurs, specialized staff in financial field, employees.

Because the concept of the development and implementation of the social competences is a new concept both in Romania and in Italia, Holland, Portugal and Poland, countries of the European Union partners to this project, the aimed **general objectives** were:

- To provide to the SMEs with a full inventory concerning the best practices in the management and production field, to support the implementation process of TQM (Total Quality Management) in the companies.
- To create a SME manager's profile having knowledge of the benefits of TQM implementation, the necessary of professional training.
- To increase the degree of consciousness of the learning culture within the own organizations, for the development of the abilities and the leaders' commitment, for the continuous improvement and the continuous learning, as essential requirements for a successful use of the principles related to EFQM Quality Model.

Likewise, the objective of this project is to **encourage the competitiveness and innovation in the SMEs** by providing the SME's managers with **methods and instruments for a long-lasting development, information, strategies and innovative working methods** in order to promote a methodological approach for the analysis of the matters towards which it is not possible to follow the new challenges and requirements of the organizations environment. The process of the ideas engendering, taking into account the requirements of the long-lasting development, has been concretized within the project by the concept of **continuous training**, representing an indispensable instrument for the employees' improvement and for:

- *Development of the enterprise capabilities of the SME's staff in order to adapt to the globalized markets and for the Romania integration to EU.*
- *Improvement of the SMEs economic and technical performances by increasing the staff's formation degree.*
- *Increase of the number of successful investors.*

Other **objectives** to be implemented by the project referred to:

- The Managers – the "first line" advisors – persons within the SMEs, requiring the extension, improvement and update of the initial vocational formation. The qualification of



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the "first line" advisors must be carried out by taking into account the entire range of opportunities offered by the formal, non-formal and informal learning.

- The profile of "learning facilitator", situated at the interface of the SME's employees, professional advisors and organizations.
- Social and educational aspects on which the managers must focus, when the new technologies require high qualifications.
- Improvement of the new management, training and counselling techniques. The managers must be able to provide information, pieces of advice and counselling about the continuous learning and to act as learning provider at the workplace or learning brokers.

The **results** of the project were materialized by the main tangible results (*national analysis reports carried out in Romania, Italia, Holland, Portugal and Poland for the identification of the long-lasting training needs, as well as the identification of the best methods for the application of the formation methods, the training of two trainers in each country participating at the course of "train for trainers, national experimental course for the improvement of the managers' social competences, organized in each of the 5 participating countries, translations into the participating countries languages and in English of the "Manual for the development of a guiding, counselling and information methodology for the SMEs' employees"*), as well as by intangible results reflected by the national and international partnerships between the companies and the local communities, which could allow the development of the social competences concept.

In the European Union, and, for some time, in Romania too, there have been many companies dealing with the social and environmental aspects and considering that the activities of guiding and counselling help to increase the degree of consciousness of the learning culture within the organization, the development of the abilities and the leaders' commitment with respect to the improvement of the company's performances and, implicitly, the increase of its profit.

The aimed effects and impact of the project on the SMEs' activity refer more than to the satisfaction of the legal requirements concerning the activities of employees' training, creation of the learning culture, working conditions, relationships manager-employer, with direct impact on the companies' productivity and competitiveness.

The short term impact of the Sme Counselling project consisted in direct testing by the group of the participants beneficiaries of the normal sessions of the training modules preparation, for the improvement of the managerial techniques range, as: *the Project Management, the Financial Management, the Management of the Manufacturing Processes, the Creative Issue of the Problems, Social Responsibility, Communication, TQM, Time Management, Environmental Management, Development of the Employees' Competences, Organizational Culture*. The theoretic concepts and the presentation techniques of the course were developed by Romanian specialists, together with partners from Italy, Holland, Portugal and Poland and can be accessed at the project Website: www.smeskills.com

The services of professional training developed by CNIPMMR within the project consist in a range of formation modules, authorized by the National Council of Adults' Professional



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Formation (CNFPA), which allows issuing diplomas/certificates recognized by the Ministry of Labour, Social Solidarity and Family and by the Ministry of Education and Research. The offer of authorized courses consists of: *Projects Management, Management for SMEs, (course consisting of 7 specializing modules, in: Efficacy and Management of Investments, Supply Manager, Financial Management for managers in the non-financial fields, Management in the Manufacturing Process, Change Management, Risk Management, Management of the Enterprise Resources), Negotiation – techniques and procedures, Managerial and Organizational Communication, Solution of the problems by TRIZ methodology.*

At middle term, the project impact can be visible at the level of target sectors and groups by the changes suggested in the occupational and certifying standards related to the vocational and educational formation programme.

As the change and innovation represent the key of the industrial competitiveness, the sustainable development and the social development based on the development of new technologies, the project SME Counselling proves to be an instrument useful to the small and medium sized enterprises for a better knowledge of the business environment, the requirements of the European Union, providing practical solutions for a long-lasting and equitable worldwide development.