

National Focus Group Meeting - France

Organized by Brest Chamber of commerce and moderated by UBO

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Overview and List of Participants

3 organizations (2 companies) attended the discussion group:

- Weldom Landerneau (small city near Brest) (20 employees): Weldom is a French do-it-yourself chain gathering stores throughout France, mainly located on the outskirts of towns. The chain is also well established outside mainland France: in Corsica and the overseas departments and territories. Weldom Landerneau is hosting each year one or two apprentices;
- LE SAINT (300 employees at local level, 1800 employees in total). Retailer specialized in distributing fruits and vegetables, seafood, flowers, plants. This group is hosting each year around 59 apprentices;
- The Service départemental d'incendie et de secours (SDIS) provides fire and rescue services in each Department of France, apart from Paris and central Marseille, which have separate military-staffed fire brigades. Departmental Fire and Rescue Services (public administration service) is hosting each year one or two apprentices (2 positions administrative assistant).

The 3 people who attended the meeting had 3 different profiles, with 3 different duties and tasks:

- For le Saint Group, Human resources manager;
- The Service départemental d'incendie et de secours (SDIS) SDIS 29, one head of department, in charge of services delivery and catering;
- Weldom Landerneau, shop manager.

3 partners of the ApprEnt project attended the discussion group:

- Agnès de Cibon, Brest Chamber of commerce's apprenticeship training centre;
- The Apprenticeship training centre (IFAC), a new apprenticeship "campus des métiers" of Brest Chamber of commerce, providing degrees in different fields (food business, bakery, automobile industry, hairstyle, business and management, aesthetic, hotel trade, catering, pharmacy). IFAC is a post-secondary training center offering the technical certificate known as the Brevet de Technicien Supérieur(BTS) and bachelor;
- Marlène André and Yannis Kablan, UBO.

Meeting Agenda

- ApprEnt project presentation and genesis of the project;
- Discussion about apprenticeship (point of views and feedbacks, practices, links and partnerships with training centers).

Introduction

To organize a national focus learning group with representative of companies and organisations with different profiles was very valuable.

Each of their representatives has specific needs and contexts, where procedures to recruitment process and means are not the same.

First we ask them about their points of view and feedbacks on apprenticeship (the strengths, obstacles, and aspects to improve vis-à-vis the apprenticeship schemes). Then we ask them to give their feedbacks on their practices and implementation of apprenticeship. In a third moment, we propose them to explain their relationship and partnership with training centers.

1) Points of view and feedbacks on apprenticeships

A) What are the benefits to recruit an apprentice? What are the strengths of this system?

- Apprenticeship is a way for companies to contribute to Social inclusion;
- Apprenticeship gives the opportunity for people (adults) between 30-40 years old to start a professional repositioning, in a lifelong learning process;
- Apprenticeship improves the employees' autonomy;
- Incentives for mentors;
- Apprenticeship is a means for pre-recruitment;
- At Company Le Saint, 80% of the apprentices will get recruited, after the training.

B) What are the weaknesses and obstacles of this practice/programme?

- It is a way to recruit, but SMEs are not trained enough to organize the recruitment process;
- Contrary to conventional contracts, apprenticeship schemes involve a strong commitment through specific regulatory frameworks. If there are problems or difficulties with the apprentice during apprenticeship, the termination of the contract process is complex and very long;
- Finding the right employee within the company able to take care of and follow-up the apprentices as a mentor. The Service départemental d'incendie et de secours (SDIS) SDIS 29's representative reported to us that he was appointed as mentor by the head of department, while in charge of services delivery and catering, even though the apprentice was enrolled in a training to become assistant. Therefore, an assistant has been taking care of the assistant apprentices within the department;

- Unsuitability of training content. Learning outcomes and skills that do not fit with concrete needs that are changing very fast. ex: apprentices who cannot calculate a markup, even though they are enrolled in business training;
- Difficulties in recruiting for some specific field (e.g. catering profession, metalworking industry, transport industry)
- Inadequate agenda and planning, for instance:
 - Apprenticeship time allocated at the workplace are sometimes not consistent and do not fit the needs of companies;
 - A lot of companies have the greatest workload at the end of the week, during year's end celebrations and at the start of school year in September. They would need more workforce and apprentices during those time periods;
 - Apprentices are not at the workplace for long periods of time, sometimes lasting even two months;
 - Financial incentives depend on the apprentices' age. Companies receive more when recruiting young apprentices, but sometimes older people have more skills for the job;
 - Broad-based trainings are not fitting the needs of companies.

A company underlined that designing a training with a little bit of communication skills, little bit of business skills is not specific enough, to be ready to start working very quickly, especially in a company divided into several departments and units (e.g. Le Saint Company is divided into logistics unit, communication/marketing unit and management & business unit).

Companies have difficulties to identify training matching their needs, because heading of the training are too complex and not clear enough.

Agnes de Cibon, from Sup Ifac, highlighted that broad-based training is relevant because workers must know how to work as project managers and must consider its various aspects throughout the project life.

Furthermore, the education system itself should help broaden the mind and encourage flexible thinking with regards to the unpredictable dynamics of the labour market.

Mentors highlight that it is necessary to better define the learning outcomes and skills expected to be developed throughout the apprenticeship; for example, through a bill of specifications for example.

C) In your opinion, what are the areas for improvement of this system?

- Certainly universities and training center have to be aware of the employment market and companies' needs;
- Making apprenticeships more accessible and simple: making online tools for the apprenticeship follow-up (apprentice induction booklet, follow-up report) available on a platform reachable by the company, by the apprentice, and by the training provider;
- Mentors should be involved in juries within training centres in order to better understand expectations and goals of trainings before recruiting apprentices;
- When there are no possibilities to recruit after the apprenticeship, there is a strong need to develop guidance and support for apprentices to find alternative job opportunities;
- Make sure that the tasks assigned to the apprentice are realistic and achievable. Mentors and training providers must pay attention to the apprentice's workload. The definition of the apprentice's tasks and work is very important;
- Designing training for mentors;
- Easing administrative processes (e.g. contract writing, legal frameworks).

2) Feedbacks on their practices and implementation of apprenticeship?

A) Apprentices recruitment - selection process

- The apprenticeship selection process is the same kind of selection or recruitment process for any kind of employee. But SMEs have difficulties and need support in this process implementation;
- The first selection of resume or CVs is often made by the training provider;
- Selection and interviews are made by the head of the unit, with the support of an employee working in the field of activity of the apprentice;
- The selection process is very different and depends on the size of the company. Big companies may have the department of human resources managing this process while developing recruitment tools (like a 'job description form'). Small businesses such as SMEs do not have enough time and are not prepared for such recruitment processes.

B) Apprentice induction and guidance

- Apprentices induction is the same as for the other employees of the company (visit and introduction to other colleagues);

- Training providers send tools to companies, but people in charge are not always aware that those tools exist;

C) Apprentice assessment

What is assessed?

- Learning outcomes and soft skills - like for other employees;
- It often happens that apprentices have to meet business objectives.

Who is assessing?

- Mentors through debriefs and interviews;
- Both the training centre mentor and company mentor are working together to assess the skills and works of the apprentice;
- Using a common frame of references and vocabularies is important for an efficient follow-up and evaluation;
- The assessment is carried out on a daily basis.

3) **The collaboration with the training center**

- The companies find difficulties in meeting the expectations of the trainings centers;
- Mentors attending the assessment juries for students may be able to better understand the training's goals and expected learning outcomes before recruiting apprentices. Important to try establishing apprenticeships through partnerships as much as possible;
- Pedagogical supervisors may visit the workplace. Such visits can be good opportunities to revitalise the apprenticeship if there is any difficulty (guidance or work issues);
- Appropriate knowledge of the job specificities and company context can be very important for the pedagogical supervisor/training mentor visiting the workplace. In terms of efficiency and utility, for example, using the same vocabulary is necessary in order to assess the same skills.