

How to form the skills of those who form the skills of others?

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Learning at the workplace lies high in the EU policy agenda as a means of ensuring that enterprises have a workforce with up-to-date skills and competences. Given that about one-third of an individual's lifespan is spent in working environments, the workplace is an indispensable component of any lifelong learning strategy.

However, adults mainly learn at their workplace and not through formal learning. All companies organise learning and training of their employees in one way or another. Most of this learning is informal or non-formal ([1]). Workplace learning is by far the main form of skill formation in micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which at the same time train less than their larger counterparts.

Some Member States have invested considerable amounts of EU funding into supporting such learning, including training the so-called 'in-company trainers'. As there is no unified approach defining an 'in-company trainer', it is important to better understand who these trainers are, what their daily routines and learning needs are.

[Cedefop study on 'in-company trainers' in SMEs](#) (2015) surveyed 254 SMEs from eight countries and provides some interesting insights on:

- what 'in-company trainers' are and how many;

There are practically no full-time trainers in SMEs but training others is common practice. Two groups of employees can be defined as 'in-company trainers': a relatively small group for whom training or training-related tasks are a major part of their occupational role (for example, training managers, training specialists, or instructors); and a comparatively larger group of employees who train and support their colleagues on top of their work duties (for example, managers, supervisors, skilled workers). But even each of these groups is extremely diverse.

Some of them provide little training, such as one hour per week, while others spend more than half of their working time to facilitate learning of others. Interestingly, job profiles or titles do not help to identify an 'in-company trainer': providing substantial training may not be reflected in a job profile; while in other cases, training employees is part of the job description which however does not reflect reality.

Cedefop (2015) confirms that employees in micro and small enterprises are more likely to be engaged in training others than those in medium-sized and large enterprises. Paired with OECD's PIACC results, data highlight that at least one out of five employees in SMEs is regularly involved in training and supporting learning of others and one out of 10 employees does so on a daily basis.

The 2015 Cedefop study allows a rough mapping of SMEs in-house trainers' profile: who they are, what motivates them, how they improve their skills:

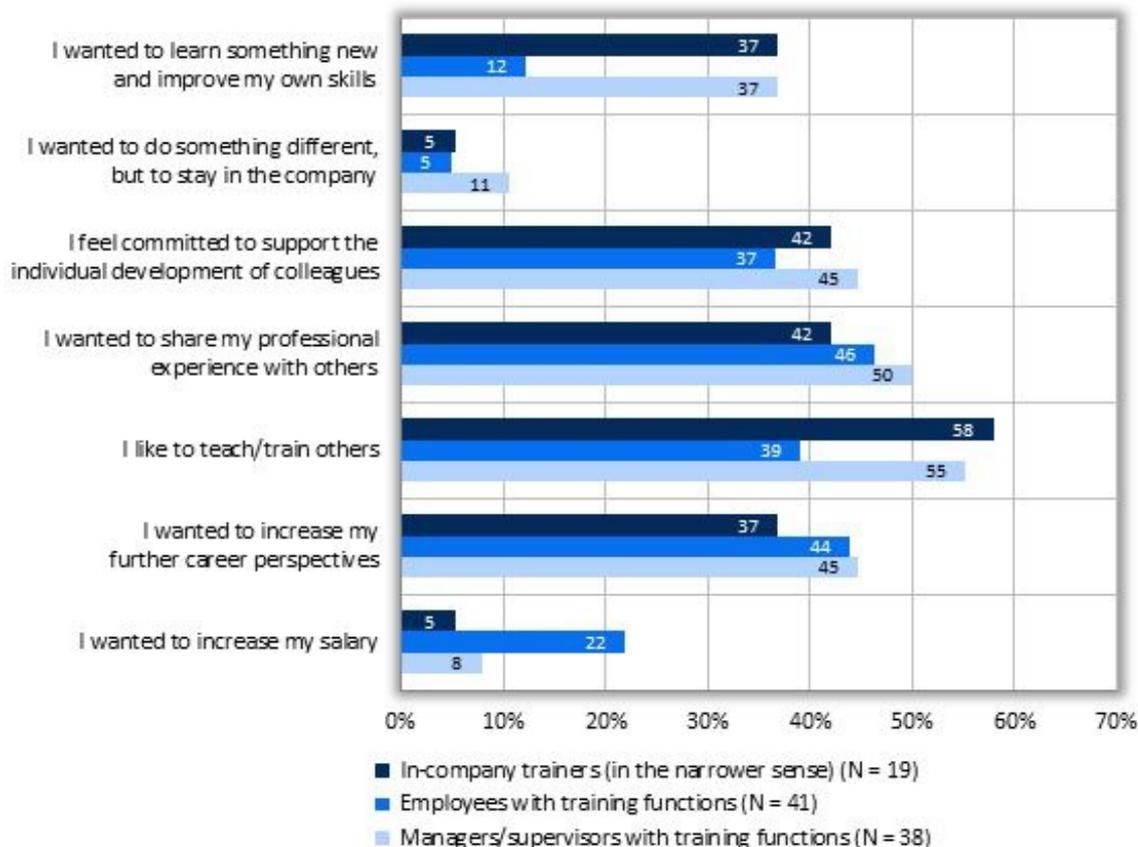
- does their skill level matter?

The higher the skill level (iii) of employees, the higher the likelihood of being engaged in learning facilitation and training: managers or supervisors are more likely to fulfil training functions than skilled workers.

- what motivates their engagement in training others?

Trainers reportedly like their work and one out of five trainers took up training responsibilities on own initiative (Figure 1). For many 'in-company trainers', the most important motivation was their willingness to share knowledge and skills with others. However, they stress the importance of having the (higher) management's support.

Figure 1. Motivation to become a trainer (% of valid cases, multiple answers)



NB: N = 98 Source: Cedefop (2015)

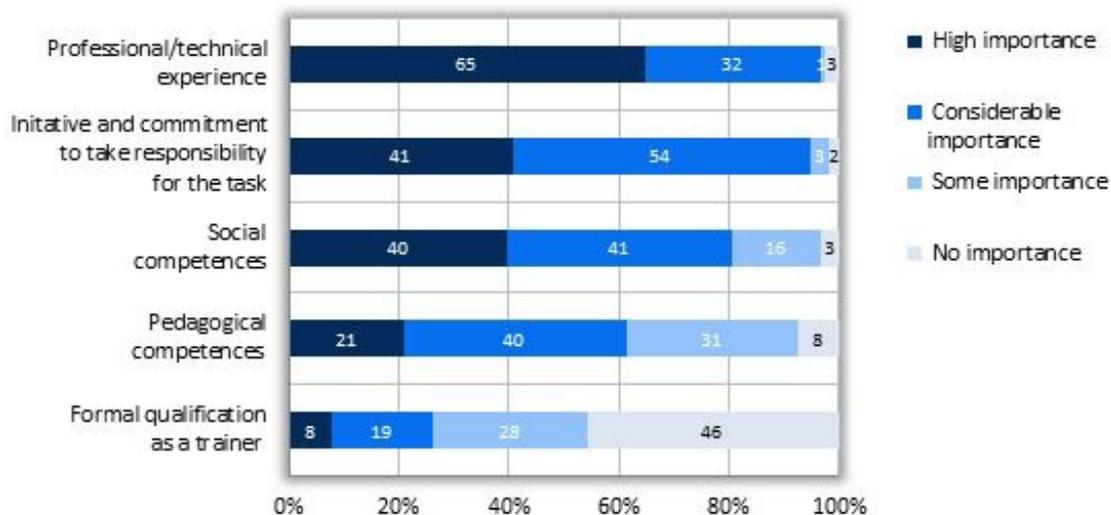
- what their training-related tasks are:

Induction of new employees is a major task of 'in-company trainers'. Trainers also provide feedback and advice or perform one-to-one training or demonstration. Tasks differ by sector as well: for example, assessment of employees' skills and competences is frequent in the hotel and restaurant sector and charring workshops is common to the IT sector.

- what qualifications and competences do in-company trainers have; and how they update them;

According to the Cedefop study, company managers trust employees to take on training tasks and responsibilities, mostly based on their professional and technical experience, rather than their pedagogical skills or formal training qualifications (Figure 2). It is important to note, however, that although training-related certificates are not mandatory, many 'in-company trainers' have acquired one through attending a course.

Figure 2. Importance of in-company trainers' competences by type (employers' view)



NB: N=118-120 Source: Cedefop (2015)

'In-company trainers' have reportedly participated extensively in training during their working lives - so they are experienced learners themselves. With the average working experience of 13 years in the sample, the majority have been in job-related training up to 10 times since the beginning of their careers but only one-third took part in training-related courses. It is also interesting to point to the clear dichotomy between rather *informal activities* embedded in the job (learning from colleagues, supervisors, senior professionals, learning by doing, self-directed learning) and *organised learning activities* (courses, workshops, formal education). Most trainers seem to mainly update their skills through informal learning rather than follow formal training.

So how can policy measures better support 'in-company trainers'?

First and foremost, their potential as multipliers of lifelong learning and contributors to the competitiveness of companies, growth and innovation should be recognised. Second, the diversity of their learning needs and possible learning ways should be acknowledged and taken into account. Third.

...learning needs and possible learning strategies and knowledge and skills are essential, measures that aim to support learning in enterprises might prioritise supporting this group of employees.

Source: Cedefop (2015). *Who trains in small and medium-sized enterprises: characteristics, needs and ways of support*. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop research paper; No 50.

References

[i] Informal learning is learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure and is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support; it may be unintentional from the learner's perspective. Non-formal learning is learning which takes place through planned activities (in terms of learning objectives, learning time) where some form of learning support is present (e.g. student-teacher relationships); it may cover programmes to impart work skills, adult literacy and basic education for early school leavers; very common cases of non-formal learning include in-company training, through which companies update and improve the skills of their workers such as ICT skills, structured on-line learning (e.g. by making use of open educational resources). Source: Council recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning. [Official Journal of the European Union, C 398/1. 22.12.2012.](#)

[ii] In terms of ISCO occupational-skill profiles. ILO (2012) [International Standard Classification of Occupations ISCO-08](#).

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