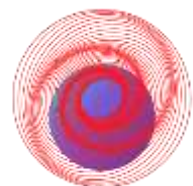# R 1- A 5: DigiEntAid Matrix of Crisis Resilience and Digital Customer Retention Competences

Based on R 1-R 4 - Synthesis

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Contents

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DigiENTAiD
Digital First Aid Kit ENTrepreneur's for
recovering from COVID-19 pandemic

1. Introduction

The paper at hand will report the results of the major step of empirical research within the R 1 of the DigiEntAid project.

We will report the statements of 48 entrepreneurs who were asked in in depth interviews, mostly face to face and in online interview sessions, about the perceived relevant competences that they successfully used during the COVID pandemic and the related economic crisis.

The project is interested in learning which strengths the entrepreneurs think have been critical for their crisis resilience, so that the DigiEntAid training programme can make these teachable.

The paper at hand will report all results, and conclude a long list of competences.

These then will be validated in separate focus groups of stakeholders, which will further prioritise the training needs of the entrepreneurs.

For the convenience of the reader we introduce the paper with a general introduction to the purpose of the project and the R 1 research methodology.

2. Overall Need for and Purpose of Project, purpose of PR 1 Interviews
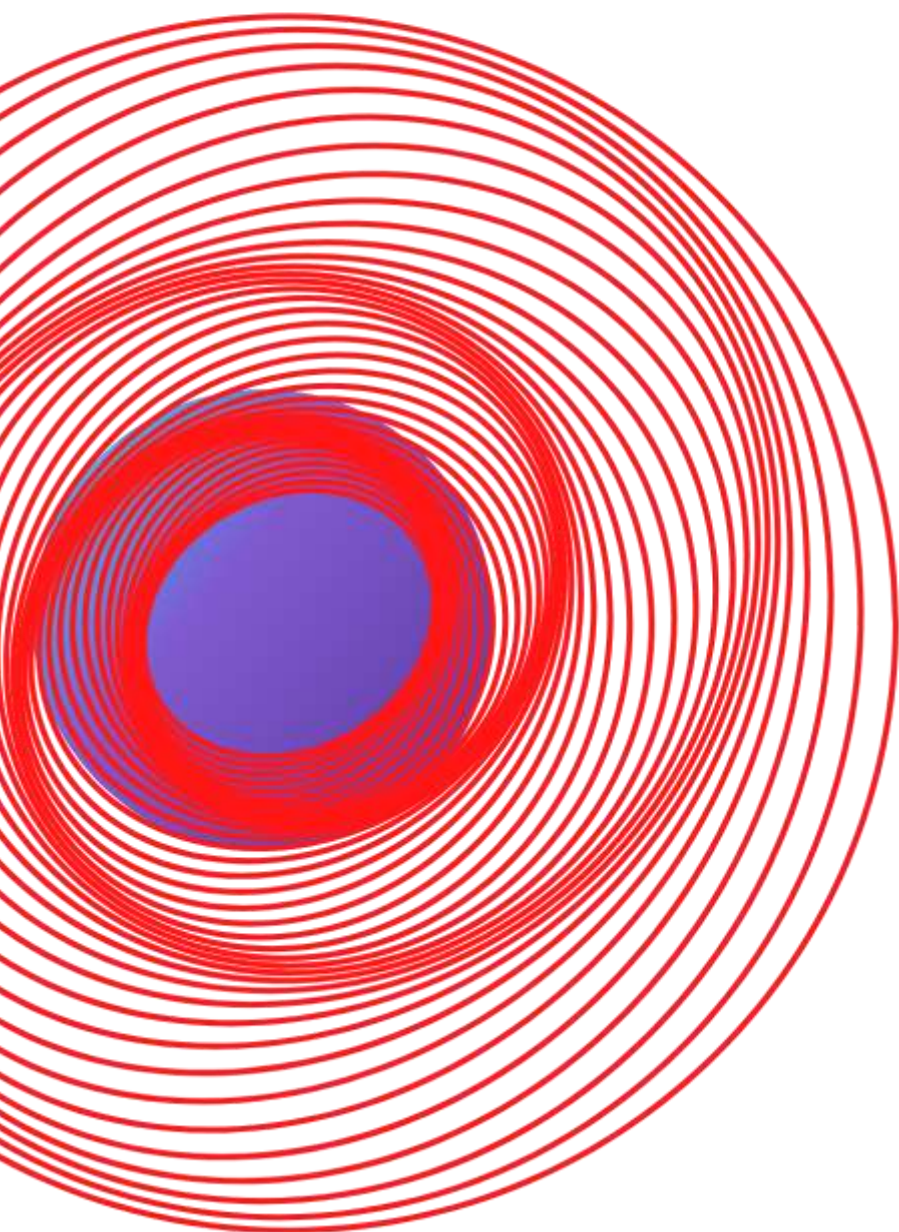
2.1. Purpose of Project

According to the application "the lesson learned from Covid-19 is that the maturity of digitalization strongly depends on the business sector and the firm's value proposition. The smaller the company, the more difficult is the digital transformation.

Not all micro-businesses have the capacity to undertake digital transition. They find it hard to rethink their business model, adopt new digital practices and integrate basic digital processes. The well-known phrase "survival of the fittest" becomes genuine: a changing environment requires adaptation, and within the next years we will face many disruptive changes, like "greenformation". Lock-downs and a rapid decrease in customers even after re-opening businesses have hit retail and tourism, while many of the large, digital retailers have thrived through the crisis.

The reaction of many businesses has been described as "shock and awe", only few of them tried to adapt in a flexible way, e.g. by reaching out to customers through the internet, organizing delivery services or creating associations of businesses for sharing resources for delivery, marketing and payment. Many of these attempts have been incremental and unprofessional.
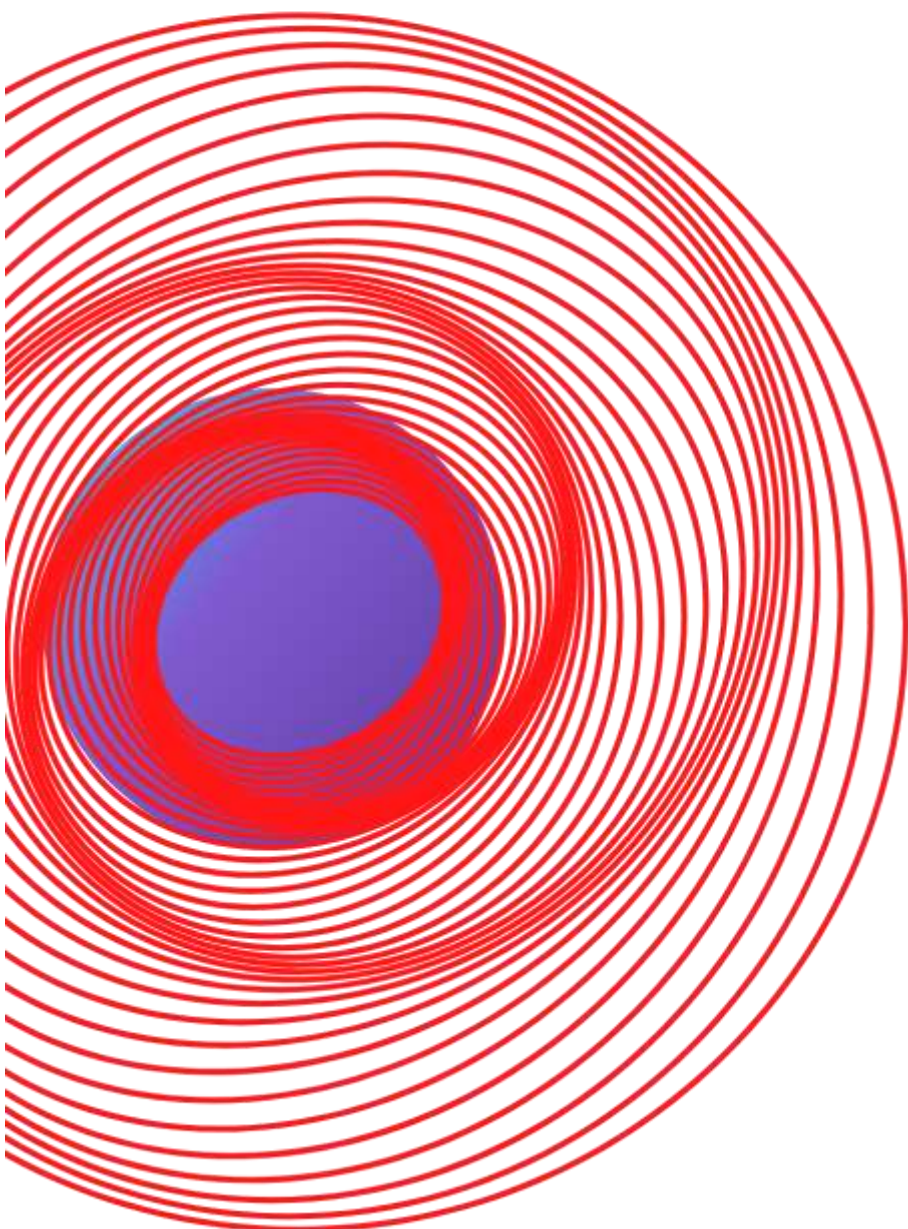
While some businesses managed to cope in innovative ways, many failed, pointing at a deficit in digital readiness in technical skills to plan and implement the use of e commerce platforms, reaching customers through non-traditional media like social media, but also an inability to shift the mindset to a more digital model of finding and serving their customers. While large companies can rely on their own resources to shift their business models to the digital space, small and self employed business owners have to react very quickly to this mortal threat. They need to learn the technical skills and the (self-) management skills for shifting (pivoting) their business to the more robust digital model very quickly and in a very flexible way. Therefore the main need of the target group is quick and effective training on how to digitise their business. They need a "Digital First Aid Kit" which is immediately accessible, delivered through their trusted and reliable support structures while at the same time teaching the vocational skills and competences, but also attitudes for coming out of the crisis stronger, going beyond the emergency reaction and building a new business model that will be more resilient to crises and more successful in the long run." (p. 5)

2.2. Target Groups

The following target groups are defined:

- Small Business Owners
- Small Business support organisations

Digital First Aid Kit ENTrepreneur's for recovering from COVID-19 pandemic

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3. Context, aims and task guidance of PR 1

3.1. General Context

According to the application the overall aim of PR 1 is "to have a dependable guide for developing highly targeted, effective and efficient training material. To use real life best practices to identify core competencies needed by small businesses and self-employed for shifting to a digital business model.

Lessons need to be learned from COVID crisis and key factors of small businesses who survived well.

These lessons must be learned and transferred in an agile and real time way.

There are a number of competencies matrixed on digital competences, entrepreneurial competences and financial literacy of small SME, but these are scattered and not targeted at the real life situation of our very relevant target group.

Therefore a selection and re-synthesizing is required. We capture the key competencies of these successful small businesses and develop a matrix of competences that can be used for training more resilient small businesses and self-employed by any training or consulting organisation or small business association. " (p. 46)

Target Groups of the result include "training developers in VET training providers, business schools, small business organisations, policy makers Innovation and content: The matrix and policy recommendations are highly innovative as they transfer the essence of experiences of successful small businesses during the COVID crisis in to a set of very targeted competencies that such businesses need to shift their business model. The matrix can guide VET training in the area. It is also innovative as it includes/combines experiences of all partner countries Europe wide which were available only nationally"

The application, based on the needs analysis done throughout the application phase, already defines some framework competences, which have to be detailed through the R 1 research phase. These are:

Technical digitalisation competences,

organisational development competences,

self mastery and emotional balance to shift the business model,

social and leadership competences,

digital marketing competences and

networking and business planning.

The result will also develop "Policy recommendations for policy makers and business organisations on how to support and encourage small businesses and retain these while they go digital" as well as "models of support organisations"

The implementation of R 1 will be done in a sequence of individual steps, each depending on the results of the prior one.

Therefore the duration of implementation has to span several months and also this guideline will be developed consecutively and therefore the details of the next step will be updated after the prior step has been completed.

Implementation period: March-July 2022 (extended to Aug 2022)

Result1-A1 Elaborate methodological guide and instruments for data collection (ISOB)

Result1-A2 Qualitative survey on small business response to changes in business management as result of COVID crises (all partners) May 1 – June 30th (results reported here)

Result1-A3 Preliminary matrix of Crisis resilience and digital readiness competences for validation in A 4 (July 15th) (at hand)

Result 1 - A4 (ISOB) Result1-A4 Focus Group/Interviews of 5 SME support professionals/expert in each country (questionnaire: ISOB; impl: all partners) (–July 30th)

Result1-A5 Finalise competences matrix in skill development recommendation report and info graphic format, translation (ISOB) (August 30th)

Outcome: A matrix of very selected and targeted competences which are needed to digitalise small business digital business models. These guide training development in our and other organisations. Policy guidelines for decision makers.

The results will be used in the learning activity described in C1 of the application.

3.3. Task 2: Data Collection and Analysis on National level: Interviews and Focus Groups

Results:

- 10 businesses, 5 experts interviews documented: 75 interviews
- Matrix and interview results validated

Step 1: Interviews

Each partner aimed to involve

10 small businesses (0 – 15 employees, more in exceptional cases)

In in depth qualitative interviews of ca. 0,5 - 1hr duration).

Questions:

Description of the Businesses Interviewed

The business partners interviewed have been asked to describe their main field of business and other characteristics: "what are you doing, why and how?"

The verbal answers have been used to identify the field of operation of the businesses.

As it turned out services in the broadest sense have been the most frequent businesses, followed by retail, consultancy, crafts and education and training (including coaching). Some restaurants and bars have been represented, as well as various others.

The national structure of respondents can be seen in the table below.

The partners were asked to interview businesses below a number of 10 employees and from the verbal answers this seems to have been the case.

In many cases the businesses have been very small companies like solo entrepreneurs and companies up to 3 employees, while others work with a core team and a number of temporary workers.

Business Focus	**Overall**	RO	CY	DE	PT	SI
Services	**11**	5	2		1	3
Retail	**8**	1	2	2	1	2
Consultancy	**7**		2		1	4
Crafts	**7**	3	1	2		1
Education/Training	**6**	1	1	1	2	1
Restaurant/Bar	**4**		2	1	1	

Technology	**2**				2	
Agriculture/Food Production	**1**					1
Health	**1**			1		
Journalism/Content Creation	**1**			1		

A qualitative illustration of the involved companies follows, to give the reader some background on the companies whose practices the project has studied.

Romania

The partner FPIMM has involved a crafts producer of wooden souvenirs and decorations, a carpet laundry that mainly serves individuals based on automated machinery.

Another wood crafts company among the sample is a maker of custom-made furniture, mainly for kitchens, which is mostly custom-made.

A further crafts company is a producer of individual jewellery with semiprecious which includes a small store.

The service companies in the sample include an accounting firm, a car insurance company and a car rental company and an individual passenger transport company.

Retail is represented by a company who sells medical devices to private and state own hospitals .

Education and training is represented by a small language courses for children company whose owner also is a freelance translator.

Most of these companies make a point of interacting with their customers closely face to face. Some, even among the bigger ones, do not even have a web presence, as they feel they have well established customer relations.

Others have a moderate social media presence, mainly on Facebook, as they feel a own well designed website does not provide a good cost benefit relation.

Cyprus

The company sample in Cyprus has been particularly well balanced.

The hospitality sector has been represented by an innovative Artisan Burger Bar and restaurant which also offers street food and is among the larger businesses in the sample.

Another hospitality business interviewed is a Cocktail Bar, which is innovative in terms of working sustainably and with minimal waste. It also promotes local music artists and uses local products.

The crafts sector is represented by a Bakery and sweet catering service. The company works with fresh ingredients and innovative products, incl personalised cakes.

The service companies in the sample include a business consultancy which is focused on helping businesses to grow sustainably and with a just world in mind, a boutique inspection, testing and certification company and an online job-finding platform designed & developed to slash recruitment costs for organizations by seamlessly and efficiently connecting them with talent.

Also a leading organiser of conferences and awards as well as B2B trade publishing has been interviewed.

The education and training businesses include a afternoon study centre for children, which also supports skills such as art, music, and gymnastics

Innovative retail is represented by an online marketplace of alternative lifestyles which presents products made by individual artists, while also a well established Timber, Specialized Building Materials, Ceramics, Sanitary Ware & Parquet business has been included among the interviewed companies.

As far as the companies mention their digital strategy already at this point of the interview they seem to be quite digitally skilled and active on social media or even platform and media creators on their own. The impact of the COVID crisis on their businesses is mentioned in their self-presentation a number of times.

Germany

Also Germany presents a quite well balanced sample of micro companies.

Among these is an example of a modern, social media style content creator who presents travel content on a range of social media.

Hospitality is represented by one of the best known sports pubs in Regensburg, which has been developed over the past 30 years as the to go place for soccer fans right in the heart of the city, which is combined with an appeal by regional beer other than from Bavaria. The >all are welcome< peaceful atmosphere is well appreciated.

Education and training, incl coaching, is represented by a self-employed coach

Crafts companies include a floristry which works on order and has developed new delivery mechanisms during Corona. A pottery, run by a young female master potter is an example of quite a range of similar young new craftspeople who work in the city mostly as one person business, but networked among each other and cooperating in presenting their products.

on the western outskirts of Regensburg's old town since 2012. Alexa's cute pottery is a one-woman operation. From time to time they support interns with their work. Alexa attaches great importance to sustainability: We also use all raw materials that are ""still good"". If not now, then later. We obtain all of our electricity from Naturstrom.

Also the in Germany quite common alternative natural healing methods sector is represented in the sample.

A retail business which is catering mainly to the millions of tourists that visit Regensburg each year is a shop that offers handmade and sustainable food and body care products as well as gift ideas. This includes store in shop areas for additional creative crafts people. During Covid the shop has expanded to online selling of regional high quality food throughout Bavaria.

Finally a quite old and traditional colour, artists supply and home renovation business which has recently been relaunched by a new generation of owners, focusing on competence, friendliness, and creativity, sustainability and ecology is also an inspirational case.

The interviewed companies have modest online activities, present themselves in the usual social media. Many of them report that they have upgraded their online and online retail services during COVID, along with new, other than face to face or shop retail activities.

Portugal

The sample in Portugal includes a number of businesses at the interface of consultancy, coaching, training, education and related services. Among these is a very interesting online marketing coach which is also part of a larger network of entrepreneurial women and has a strong focus on providing online services. She is also a professor of social networks at a senior university.

Another example is a Coach in Neurolinguistic Programmation who works with companies on emotional intelligence and positive psychology, productivity, time management and leadership.

In the sample there is a second example of a Leadership Coaching, Mentoring and Training small business programs, which focuses on sales and productivity training.

An example of a retailer who decided to close its traditionally successful business as a consequence of COVID is a seefood distributer, which has built its business on long standing personal relationships to its customers. The owner felt she was already in retirement age and had no need to shift the business.

Business related hospitality opportunities for micro entrepreneurs are represented by a café serving breakfast and lunch in an office centre in Lisbon. The company is an example of a business that had to be discontinued as it was based on catering to traditional office work, while now most employees work from home.

Portugal is unique in including the science based area in the form of a small entrepreneurs who works with a larger Biotech Laboratory

The Health services sector is also represented by a self employed micro entrepreneur who offers Nutritionist advice, Beauty, cosmetics and personal.

Finally at the interface of technology and retail is a small company that supplies recycled printer and computer consumables 80% B2B to a stable customer base.

The Portuguese sample comprises of a range of interesting examples of almost exclusively online services, as are ever more common in consulting and training, traditional small businesses affected by COVID at a point where they felt they are too old to shift and a number of companies who have found stable customer bases in various ways also during the crisis.

Slovenia

The sample in Slovenia has its focus on consultancy and services.

Also here some companies are at the interface of multiple sectors, as is the case with a distributor of printers and related services

A quite typical small service family business is a cleaning service with a high regard for excellent customer satisfaction and a well-established media presence.

At the interface of service and consultancy are two companies in HR consultancy and translation and language coach services. A tax consultant and accountant adds to this group of service providers, as does a boutique real estate agent.

Producers are represented by a fresh vegetable company, which specialises in producing a speciality which includes the famous Piran made sea salt, which uses various innovative distribution channels.

The crafts sector is represented by a parquet flooring company.

An insight into the challenges of education and training at the interface to sports and recreation is a dance studio, located in the centre of Ljubljana on the one end of the spectrum and a well established business consultancy on the other.

An example of specialised retail is the representative of Japanese bathroom equipment in Slovenia.

Conclusion on sample of respondents

Overall, the partners have involved a various and interesting sample of respondents, which is quite representative of small businesses in the partner countries.

It ranges from self-employed consultants to retail and crafts companies near the top of the range of the1-9 employee selection criterion.

While some have a regular appearance on social media and, particularly some of the consultants and coaches, interact with their customers mostly online, others insist on face to face relationships and have, as far as they present themselves in this initial part of the interview, developed only few initiatives to solve the challenges of COVID through more online customer retention.

3.3.1 Challenges through COVID for micro-businesses

In the next part of the interview the respondents have been asked to talk about their perception of the main challenges they had to face during the COVID crisis. Presumably businesses had to face a break in their interaction with customers face to face, a breakdown of their specific market that in some cases has proved to be permanent. Others saw new opportunities in the changed demands of the customers. What opportunities a business sees will depend to a large degree on its description and definition of the challenge in its own words. Therefore we were interested in a description of the challenge in the businesses own words.

- What have been your main challenges during the COVID crisis?

Challenge	**Overall**	RO	CY	DE	PT	SI
Break of usual sales channels	**11**	3	2	4		2
Low sales	**11**	4	2		4	1
Extra work through changing regulations	**9**	1		2	1	5
Business impossible/stopped	**5**	1	3			1
Train and accustom empl and clients for digital channels	**5**		4		1	
Termination of Contracts	**3**			1		2
Break of supply chains	**3**	2				1
Employees leaving	**3**	1	1	1		
Insufficient skills to move online	**3**		3			
Cash Flow	**2**	1				1
Work-life balance/working at home	**3**			1		2
Insufficient government support	**2**	1		1		
Increased workload	**1**	1				

Overall the break of the usual sales channels has been the greatest challenge for the respondents. Businesses could not work with customers or clients face to face. As many pride themselves with individualised contact and individual service this was hard to replace.

Overlapping, but, as we will see from the direct quotes of the respondents below, not identical challenge was a decrease of sales due to general customer insecurity, changing needs and regulations that prohibited parts of the offers.

Almost as important was the extra work businesses had to input to understanding and following quickly changing health regulations.

5 mention that they had to discontinue their business.

As many were challenged by having to train and motivate their employees to use new digital tools and channels.

Other factors are mentioned only a few times, which is in some cases surprising, as the overload from home office, home schooling and other forms of blurred lines between work and private life have been much discussed.

Also few of the respondents complain about the government support they received.

It is remarkable that already in this question in some countries, most notable in Portugal and Cyprus, the entrepreneurs mentioned also the challenges from positive developments quite frequently.

5 respondents note higher sales and market opportunities, 7 describe that they went online and provided expanding services over the internet. Three respondents note the huge leap in strategy quality, digital strategy and learning in general.

A few quotes to illustrate some of the most frequent challenges follow.

- Break of usual sales channels

"Most of the initial time in the Covid crisis, it was not possible to sell in person because, there were no events, no fairs, ..." (SI 5)

"Live property showings were not allowed, as personal contacts were considered to be dangerous. In our business, people are not prepared to spend a lot of money on something they cannot see in person, so this was our most serious challenge." (SI 18)

", the nature of the job is based on a physical presence (inspections, evaluations, etc) therefore during COVID we faced numerous challenges as per visiting our inspection sites, having meetings with clients, etc." (CY 26)

- Low sales

" the logic of the restaurant (coffee) was to serve the micro companies of the office centre, if they are teleworking there are no clients." (PT 41)

- Extra work through changing regulations

"we had a lot of work regarding the new state regulations (called ""PKP regulations"" - ""anti-Covid regulations""): we had to study them in detail and then explain these almost weekly changing regulations to the clients, but we could not charge it to them because it was not their fault. We worked all day and earned only 40% of our previous revenues." (SI 3)

."The regulations were changing almost daily, so we had to be constantly alert not to miss anything important." (SI 5)

"What was very time-consuming for me, and sometimes annoying, were the many changes to the IfSMV." (DE 37)

- Business impossible/stopped

"we were forced to close both of our businesses down. .... people didn't know us under this label and it was pretty difficult to establish a presence in the scene under these circumstances." (CY 31)

- Train and accustom employees and clients for digital channels

"was forced to close the store for a few months (because of restrictions) and move the business online, something she had not done before the pandemic. The demand for its products has dropped a lot because the social events that boost the demand … have disappeared but she has managed to sell online as much as not to go bankrupt, but she didn't make any profit." (RO 15)

"Our main challenge during COVID crisis was that we had to adjust to a digitalized era. We were looking to make the customers buy our products online without visiting our shop. For bakery and sweet items, this is extremely difficult because you need to make the people who might don't know you, trust your work and order from a site directly." (CY 25)

"…the company was created during the crisis of COVID. Everything had to be established online and in a digital manner. They had to turn to zoom and teams meetings, organize webinars and talk with their customers and employees via these applications." (CY 27)

"The main challenge we faced was that we had to train both employees and customers to go digital and to use software for meetings, communication, and management. Also, the nature of our job demands physical presence a lot of times therefore, we faced a number of difficulties related to the management of the company and especially the employees. Lastly, the fact that a lot of customers and employees struggled to adapt, drove us to organize more online meetings than before. This was extremely time-consuming but helped the organization of the team. However, it is crucial to state that the digitalization of the conferences and the awards led to increased engagement of participants and a significant increase of our audience and network" (CY 29)

"The year 2020 was the adaptation and a period of learning new technologies and changing work and offering the products to customers. It was challenging to develop new training programs, video recording, platforms and other learning." (PT 45)

- Break of supply chains

"Our main challenge during the Covid crisis was having huge problems with the delivery and transport of goods from Asia. Our principal, the Japanese manufacturer …, is located in Asia, and that's why it was extremely difficult to get the spare parts." (SI 20)

".. the Asian producers could no longer cope…" (RO 13)

- Employees leaving

"…the employees were upset when they heard that they would be sent for technical unemployment and left…." (RO 8)

- Insufficient skills to move online

"was extremely difficult for us to promote our marketplace exclusively online. We didn't have particular expertise in social media marketing and this was a great challenge for us" (CY 33)

- New opportunites:

"I'm building up my coaching business via social media…, I believe that you can really find your clients through social media. "(DE 49)

Next to the more or less obvious economic challenges, the respondents talked most vividly and extensively about the various challenges of switching to digital tools in internal communication and sales as their main challenge.

We will see how this played out more closely in the next chapter on the company´s coping strategies.

3.3.2 Micro Business Coping Strategies

The DigiEntAid project aims to build its support strategy not only on theory, but on observing and transferring the positive digital strategies of successful micro companies. Therefore we asked our respondents about their own coping strategies, so that the project interventions can count these in and build on these when planning the intervention.

The respondents were asked "What has been your coping strategy?"

Coping Strategy	Overall	RO	CY	DE	PT	SI
Moving business online	**14**	3	5	1	1	4
Customer retention measures other than digital	**9**	3	2	2	1	1
Find new customers	**8**	1	3	1	1	2
(Temporary) closing of business	**6**		4		2	
Increase own/company digital skills	**5**	1	4			
Form new collaborations	**5**		4	1		
New products	**5**	1	2	1		1
Special arrangements with customers and suppliers (burden sharing)	**4**	2				2
Bigger (social) media presence	**4**		4			
Work-life balance measures	**3**			1	1	1
Work on individual positive attitude	**3**				2	2
Number of strategies mentioned		11	26	7	8	13

In this question it was left to the entrepreneurs own words and thoughts which coping mechanisms they wanted to mention. Those which are mentioned therefore are not a

complete list of what has actually done by the entrepreneurs, but rather a list of what seems to be worth mentioning and/or particularly important to them.

The first thing that is remarkable is the difference in the number of strategy elements that has been mentioned in the interviews. While this for sure also depends on the interviewer behaviour and skill in encouraging such active verbal answering, it may also depend on the degree to which the entrepreneurs have given thought to a conscious and formulated coping strategy.

The respondents in Cyprus have been particularly well able to formulate such strategies. They mentioned 26 strategy elements. Also the entrepreneurs in Slovenia mostly mentioned more than one element, while in Germany there was mostly one element highlighted or the answer remains unclear.

Moving the business online is the main coping strategy in all partner countries. This need for digitalisation is being reinforced by other categories as expanding one's own digital skills

Other mentions are also quite obvious. Some businesses thought it best to temporarily close.

Many mention their effort to retain their customers by not primarily digital means, as phone calls, individual reach-out and others.

Finding new customers is mentioned next frequently.

6 times it was mentioned that entrepreneurs in times of crisis have to work actively on their positive attitude as well as on their work-life balance, which includes coping with the challenges of home office and home schooling.

A national particularity of Cyprus is the frequent mentioning of social media. This is mentioned by almost half of the Cypriot respondents while the entrepreneurs in other countries may have done this as well, but have not highlighted this as prominently as part of their strategy. The importance of this element is also emphasized by some mentions of social media strategy training as part of enhancing ones relevant digital sills.

Again, some statements to illustrate the most relevant coping strategies follow.

- Moving business online

"After the initial shock, we somehow changed some of our business (webinars instead of live training,…)"" (SI 3)

"As our sales in person were no more possible, we had to give more emphasis to our online shop. We updated it, making it more friendly and our internet sales were much higher than before. This saved us in times of Covid crisis." (SI 5)

"Our main coping strategy was that we took a lot of pictures of the apartment/house, but at the same time we also recorded a video with the phone. With the help of a video, it was kind of easier for our clients to see what the real estate they were interested in.." (SI 18)

"…adaptation to the new market conditions, focusing on online sales…" (RO 6)

"She set up her Facebook page and called all her customers to let them know that she had moved online" (RO 15)

"Contributed to articles and interviews on several pages, social media, and discipline-related sites. Online network and PR through sites like Linkedin" (CY 27)

". We took advantage of the social media traffic and we promoted our events online. We used all available advertisements in all of our social media (facebook, instagram, linkedin and youtube) and we paid for google advertisements. Aside from these, as mentioned earlier, we turned all of our internal and external meetings online and we communicated only through digital means such as teams." (CY 29)

"We also established a strong online presence with professional photographs, interesting posts, social media marketing and management. What we specifically tried to do, was to focus on the uniqueness of our products and to emphasize in what was different about our products." (CY 31)

"We developed a more comprehensive website and we used social media marketing to increase our posts' reach and our audience online. Lastly, as mentioned in the previous sector, we used phone communication with our clients." (CY 33)

"Investing in online sales" (PT 46)

- **(Temporary) closing of business**

"age made me think it was the opportunity to close." (DE 43)

"The best strategy was to close down so as not to incur costs." (PT 41)

- **Increase own/company digital skills**

"She started attending a series of online courses, tutorials, seminars (mostly free, live or recorded) on how to make presentations, how to create interesting content." (RO 17)

"Initially, we undertook some available online courses in social media marketing. This helped us to promote the marketplace…" (CY 33)

"It was good that I did my coaching training completely virtually - I was able to expand my digital skills." (DE 49)

- **Form new collaborations**

"Establishment of a collaboration with all the available …platforms in Cyprus" (CY 24)

"-Collaboration with platforms…" (CY 25)

"…expand our network of collaborators and bring in some collaborations with sponsors…" (CY 33)

- New products

"We organized extra activities for the children that included both digital application tools and hands-on projects. We organized along with a psychology expert once every 2 week parental advisory groups in an attempt to support parents, talk about the difficulties they were facing with their children, and to work with them at different levels as families. We organized numerous workshops for the parents on how to use different digital tools in order to help their children." (CY 32)

- Special arrangements with customers and suppliers (burden sharing)

"We managed to arrange with many of our customers that we divided the costs of those recruitments which were later not concluded in solidarity (50% we and 50% the customers)." (SI 3)

"Our products are quite expensive and we didn't want our clients to bear the costs of additional transportation, so we decided to cover the additional costs incurred due to the changed transport by ourselves." (SI 20)

- Bigger (social) media presence

"She set up her Facebook page and called all her customers to let them know that she had moved online" (RO 15)

"Increased social media presence, boosting posts, increased shared posts (specialized personnel)" (CY 24)

- Work-life balance measures

"On a personal level, I tried to go out into nature as much as possible, so that I was not stuck with family members the whole time." (SI 4)

- Work on individual positive attitude

"Stress resilience and accepting the new situation by adapting rather than protesting and denying." (SI 22)

"I was fine. During the entire lockdown phase, I worked as much as never before to get my business through with employees. In spite of this, or precisely because of the quick positive results, I never had a feeling of ""too much" (DE 23)

"Managing emotions and accepting what happens outside of us is one of the most important strategies" (PT 45)

3.3.3 Digitalisation Strategies and Problems

We wanted to know how the small businesses felt about digitalising their business. Do they think they digitalised during the pandemic? Have they been digital even before? What did they do and what problems did they face?

First we asked "Did you try to "digitalise"?

	Overall	RO	CY	DE	PT	SI
Yes	**32**	7	8	5	3	9
No	**8**	2		1	3	2
We were mainly digital before	**8**	1	2	2	2	1

The question had to be interpreted as the companies making substantial progress in digitalisation compared to before the crisis. Two thirds of the respondents say they have digitalised. 16% say they did not digitalise substantially and the same number of respondents say they were digital already before.

We wanted to know what the companies felt went well in their digitalisation (If yes, what went well?)

	Overall	RO	CY	DE	PT	SI
Digital provision of prior analogous services	**18**	3	2	3	2	8
Online customer retention and marketing	**11**	1	5	2	3	
New digital products	**9**	1	4	2	1	1
Digitalised processes other than core services/products	**6**	1	2	1		2
Business not suitable for digitalisation	**4**			1	1	2

There is a remarkably low number of digital strategies implemented that the companies felt were successful.

18 companies were successful in providing services that they provided analogous before in digital format. The selected verbal comments below will illustrate to which services the companies refer.

The third most quoted success strategy was adding new digital services to the old ones. Also here the verbal comments show that there is a certain overlap, as it is hard to distinguish where a service is the same, just provided in digital form and from which point it is a new product.

In second place is digital marketing and customer retention. A high number of businesses report strategies to do this, probably representative of a higher number, as only those were counted who described this activity in their own words.

The same may be the case in the category of digitalisation of processes other than the main product/service provision. There is a high probability that those companies, who reached out to their customers digitally or provided their main service over the internet, also used tools like Zoom to communicate internally.

Some quotes, selected along the criterion of a valid description of what has been done, illustrate some of the above categories.

- Digital provision of prior analogous services

"We managed to implement the process of ordering services and maintaining printer devices online which was a huge success for us." (SI 1)

"Instead of live courses, I also used Zoom for all courses of English, including individual lessons. I think that Zoom courses are just as effective as live ones." (SI 4)

"we digitized the sales through the online store" (RO 6)

"I decided to do online customer service and to develop an online shop based on my merchandise management system. Within 3 days I launched an online shop and then I got the first orders." (DE 10)

"Regardless of the pandemic, I decided at the beginning of 2020 to renew/revise my homepage including the online shop before the first lockdown. By supporting the digital bonus, I made a bigger investment than originally planned and I don't regret this decision for a single second. If I hadn't invested the money and my working hours back then (I work a lot on the website myself), my company might not exist today." (DE 23)

- Online customer retention and marketing

"The owner posted several ads on the company's website for customers and ran paid promotional campaigns on Facebook. It also manages online the relationship with the state institutions." (RO 7)

"She digitized her business trying to post as much material as possible on Facebook: she posted photos, messages and even tried to make live presentations (she says they didn't do very well)." (RO 15)

"our knowledge in social media and google management and advertisement helped a lot and actually it grew our audience, what I mean is that the company became known not only in Cyprus but abroad as well," (CY 27)

"We also established a strong online presence with professional photographs, interesting posts related to our products, social media marketing and management and google advertisements." (CY 31)

- New digital products

"We prepared a new ""HRM academy"" which was partly executed in person and partly through Zoom."" (SI 3)

"One way of successful digitalizing was recording explainer videos which - for instance, helped the client install the spare part by themselves." (SI 20)

"The main gain was related to the opportunity of inviting, at those online events, speakers from abroad," (RO 12)

- Digitalised processes other than core services/products

"During the COVID crisis he was able to work faster and more efficiently because the relationship with institutions and customers became exclusively online …" (RO 9)

"In case of main activity, this has not been digitized, ….Association activity, the events were organised online, through Zoom application." (RO 11)

If yes, what were the problems?

	Overall	RO	CY	DE	PT	SI
High cost of digitalisation/would need additional staff	**8**	6		2		
Insufficient knowledge how to digitise	**6**	2			3	1
Digital processes had high start up costs	**2**			1		1
Bad internet	**2**	1				1
Miss F2F interaction	**2**	1		1		
Customers do not accept digital product	**1**					1
Customers digitally unskilled	**1**		1			
Competition from free similar online services	**1**			1		

There are various problems in digitalising small businesses.

Some of the most cited in public, as bad internet in rural areas, are mentioned in our sample, but only a few times.

The most quoted factor is that digitalisation can be expensive. There has to be an investment in technology/hardware, but also software. Most of all, digitalisation needs specialist and specific knowledge and skills, at times the success is so big that new staff is needed, which is not so readily available.

In most of the mentioned areas there is a dimension that can be changed. This is obvious when companies claim that they have insufficient own skills to digitalise. This can be changed.

Also the start-up/launching costs of technology and general costs of digitalisation can be lower, when skill formation is not by trial and error, but can rely on a good training and support.

Some descriptions of the challenges in the entrepreneurs own words follow.

- High cost of digitalisation/would need additional staff

"The company has not tried to digitize the business more because it does not consider it efficient: in order to digitize the relationship with its customers, they should hire someone to respond to messages on the Internet; for this reason, they do not even compile any database with information about the customer because they do not have time, they do not want to become personal data operators and they do not want to pay the license for the database program or to pay someone to do it. " (RO 7)

"- it is not useful to promote his company more on the Internet because he can not honor more orders than he has now due to lack of staff. The expansion and development of the business is not possible due to the crisis of qualified personnel." (RO 8)

"The problem is that this software would cost somewhere around 35,000 euros and he have to find financial resources to create it." (RO 9)

"The problem is that this software would cost somewhere around 35,000 euros and he have to find financial resources to create it." (RO 13)

"He didn't try to digitalise the company, because he didn't have enough money for it." (RO 35)

- Insufficient knowledge how to digitise

"Maybe we could digitalize more if only we had the knowledge of what and how to do." (SI 21)

"It would be interesting to be more digital, apart from social networks I have little knowledge of technology." (PT 41)

"For me, the use of social networks was my biggest challenge. I'm not very Instagram, for example ..." (PT 47)

"I would like to create a professional blog but I have no skills for it." (PT 42)

- Digital processes had high start-up costs

"But it took me weeks and months to fill the online shop up with pictures and texts - I did not have lockdown, instead, I was working 12-15 hours a day, even on Sundays... Before Covid-19 I did not want to have an online shop. Every small retailer struggles with online trading - I was negatively attached to online retailing, even though, some retailer colleagues and friends have online shops." (DE 10)

- Bad internet

"We had quite some problems with the bad internet connection (during important Zoom calls with clients)." (SI 21)

- Miss F2F interaction

"Our online shop only shows a fraction of our products. We received the information and images from the manufacturer, which also has an online shop. But because colors look different on the internet (every screen shows colors differently), customers want to see the colors themselves. Online doesn't work yet - I pay more every month. Digitization is of little use to me because haptics plays a role." (DE 40)

"I have tried to have direct contact with customers by phone, they miss a more personal treatment, and this should be a learning for all sectors." (PT 43)

- Customers do not accept digital product

"We didn't have problems with the technical part, but people did not accept these classes. " (SI 19)

- Customers digitally unskilled

", customers had various problems, from the internet connection, attention focus to the fact that they did not understand what was being transmitted to them...." (RO 17)

- Competition from free similar online services

"It was difficult in that offers (partly free) often mushroomed via social media, and so my online seminars, which I quickly switched from presence to online (teams), were little used." (DE 37)

3.3.4 Key Competences for Coping with COVID Crisis

We have already seen that small businesses used various startegies to cope with the COVID induced crisis.

As the project seeks to build its training programmes on identified success factors of companies during the crisis, so that these can be spread through training and support, we wanted to know which competences are the most important ones for getting through the crisis, according to the companies themselves.

Each respondent was asked to name up to five key competences in their own words. We asked: "Please name 5 most important key competences (things that you know and are able to do, abilities and attitudes) that you have used in coping with the crisis! Please be concrete and illustrate what each of these competences meant for you in practice!"

Not all of the respondents used the opportunity to name five competences, we counted all that were mentioned in the company's own words. We categorised these, i.e. formed groups of competences along those mentioned and counted the mentions.

	Overall	RO	CY	DE	PT	SI
Flexibility/Adaptability/Creativity	**25**	4	7	5	2	7

Crisis Resilience/Positive Thinking	**19**	4		6	5	4
Customer Relations & Communication	**17**	1	3	1	2	10
General Communication	**16**	5	2	4	2	3
Management Skills	**15**		4		3	8
Financial Planning Skills	**11**	1	2	2		6
Digital/IT Skills	**10**	3	5			2
Leadership	**9**	1	3	1	1	3
Having a Support Network	**8**	1	2	3	1	1
Digital Marketing	**8**		5		1	2
Legal Skills	**5**	1		1		3
Learning Skills	**5**	2		1	1	1
Worklife Balance	**2**				1	1
Foreign Languages	**2**					2
Specific Professionalism	**1**				1	

There is a remarkably low number of competences, that has been mentioned, given the fact that the companies could list up to five.

Only 10 competences have been mentioned 8 times or more. We limit the discussion to these.

It is unsurprising that flexibility, adaptability and creativity are the most mentioned competence. 25 mentions are quite evenly spread among the partner countries.

While this competence is quite general, it is far from being a matter of course. The respondents highlight this competence in the light of the experience of colleagues being unflexible, relying on government aid and sticking to processes and products as they ever were. The category is indicative of a willingness to change and a proven ability and attitude to do so.

This is reinforced by the second most mentioned competence, crisis resilience, which, according to the verbal comments, we have grouped together with showing a positive attitude.

This competence can be interpreted as the individual counterpart to organisational flexibility. The attitude of coping with whatever is thrown at you with a positive and pro-active mindset and the availability to start over even if the regular process cannot be maintained and plans have to be changed, can be regarded as a entrepreneurial key competence. Also the mention of this competence is well spread among the partner countries, except Cyprus, where it is not mentioned at all. However, the "spirit" of the answers from Cyprus mirrors a general attitude that may take this competence for

granted, so that it is not mentioned as a specific competence used in this crisis, but taken as part of the overall entrepreneurial mind-set.

The two most frequently mentioned competences therefore form a first bloc of competences that can be interpreted as the general entrepreneurial mind-set of openness, being keen on taking on challenges, welcoming change and being courageous in the face of difficulties.

The significance of the next group of competences is somewhat more surprising. Also here a "soft" factor is mentioned as key.

"Customer Relations & Communication" and "General Communication" are mentioned 17 an 16 times, well spread among the partners, with the exception of 10 mentions of "Customer Relations" in Slovenia.

The respondents make it very clear that the business of a small business owner is a communication business. Talking to customers, retaining them through good communication in the face of difficulties and adversity, keeping everyone on board, being able to change the mean of communication, from face to face to digital, but also showing commitment and a good emotional relation to customers, suppliers and employees is a key competence that is needed in times of crisis and the small business owners are aware of this.

Leadership, which has 9 mentions and can, at least partly, also count as one of these communicative skills. Many of the respondents in particular mention good communication with employees here.

The more technical competences, as general management, financial planning and IT and general digital skills are being mentioned only as a third bloc. While these are for sure needed, the "soft skills" are clearly considered as more critical.

Some less mentioned competences include "Digital Marketing", "Legal Skills" as understanding and following regulations.

"Building and using a support network" can be counted in with the communicative skills, ability and readiness to learn could be grouped with the resilience and flexibility skills, but got an individual category as it has been specified five times.

It can be concluded that the small businesses counted on their entrepreneurial personality and positive attitude, which expressed itself in good communication with customers and employees.

A support structure and training therefore should build on these critical skill and nurture these strengths in its content and format.

As most statements are in keywords only, we do not illustrate the quantitative analysis by direct quotes.

3.3.5 Political support

As the project will develop training as well as contribute to a general support structure ad also will develop policy recommendations, we were interested in the perspective of the respondents on political support during the crisis and suggestions for improvements here.

We asked "What policies and services could support you most in future crises?"

	Overall	RO	CY	DE	PT	SI
Paid Training	**12**	2	6	1	1	2
Cash Assistance Programmes	**8**	1			1	6
Support for Digital Transformation	**6**		6			
Clear Legal regulations/Communication	**5**	1		1	1	2
Consultancy on available support schemes	**4**		4			
Payroll Assistance	**3**	1				2
Qualified government staff	**1**	1				
Supply of qualified staff	**1**					1
Good Internet	**1**	1				
Lower Taxes for small businesses	**1**	1				
Sustainability Training	**1**		1			
Education on crisis resilience for parents	**1**		1			

The answers here were quiet sparse, which is surprising, given the public debate on government subsidies and malfunctioning public administrations during the crisis in countries like Germany.

Obviously, aid from the government is not the highest priority for the entrepreneurs, who rather look to their own competences.

Three suggestions stand out. Some cash assistance (loans, subsidies) would be welcome. Some entrepreneurs also found the regulations bothersome, unclear and poorly communicated.

Most important are assistance for targeted training, aid for small SME digital transformation and information about aid and funding schemes.

Most of these suggestions have been contributed by Cypriot respondents.

Other suggestions are quite individual needs.

3.3.6 Suggestions for Training Programme Content and Format

While it is the intention of the project to build its intervention on the perceived strength of the entrepreneurs during the crisis, the competences that the entrepreneurs feel they already have, are not necessarily identical with the content they think a training programme should have.

It is important to further nurture the strength, but it is also important to complement these with potentially missing competences. What do the entrepreneurs want to learn? Therefore we asked "What would be the most essential 5 contents?" (of a training programme)?

	Overall	RO	CY	DE	PT	SI
Digital Marketing	**22**	6	2	2	5	7
General Business Digitalisation	**15**	4	5		1	5
Social Media	**10**	1	4	1		4
Personal Mastery	**10**		1	2	3	4
General Communication Skills	**8**	1	3	1	3	
Risk Management and Planning	**7**		5			2
Content Creation (e.g. Video)	**5**	2			1	2
Financial Skills	**4**		1	2	1	
Leadership/Communication with Employees	**4**		2		1	1
Digital Communication	**4**	1	2			1
Training about Support Funds	**4**	3			1	
Change Management	**3**		2		1	
Special Seminars in specific prof Field	**2**		1			1
Entrepreneur Success Stories	**2**				1	1
Agile Mindset	**2**	1	1			
Time Management	**1**					1

Lobbying/How to influence authorities	**1**	1				
Business Intelligence	**1**	1				
Foreign Language	**1**	1				

There is quite a long list of desired content, which we list above for illustration of the diverse needs.

However, there are clearly two favourites among the suggested contents.

One is "Digital Marketing", "General Business Digitalisation" and "Social Media".

Obviously the entrepreneurs feel that the need for good customer relations and retention needs to be bolstered by even better competences in the modern means of such communication. General Social Media skills, specific Digital Marketing skills and general Business Digitalisation are a pressing training need of the entrepreneurs. These mentions are well distributed among the partner countries.

The training programme should have a strong emphasis on these competences. Content creation for such use of social media should be part of the programme.

A second bloc of suggested competences are communication skills. As we have seen, the respondents feel that these have already been a strong factor in crisis survival. However, obviously the entrepreneurs want to hone these skills.

Also factors of personal mastery, as resilience, self-care, good attitude and habits, are also very important. As far as a training programme can "teach" such more long term development, it should. Also the long term support of entrepreneurs should have a strong focus here.

Risk Management and Financial Skills are also mentioned as potential specific content.

Some selected statements of the respondents to illustrate each point follow.

As most statements are in keywords only, we do not illustrate the quantitative analysis by direct quotes.

Next to the content of the training, the partners also have to decide about the format. Therefore we asked "What mode of delivery would be most useful? *Would you prefer on-line or presence or mixed?* Part time over longer period or in a few days?"

	Overall	RO	CY	DE	PT	SI
Online	**15**	1		3	4	7
Face to Face	**16**	8	4		1	3

Hybrid	**11**	1	5		3	2
Compact in a few days	**17**	6	6	1	3	2
Small Units over longer Time	**17**	1	4	1		11
Long Training	**2**	2				

There are two camps of about similar size here. Face to Face and online training are equally popular and a third group of respondents favours a blended/hybrid format.

Obviously the preferences are not equally distributed among the countries. While in most partner countries online or hybrid training stretched over a longer time, is the preference in most countries, a strong group of respondents in Romania would prefer a more traditional face to face training in some days.

3.4. Partner Remarks

Each partner will **add an analysis of the interviews from their perspective**.

- What has been remarkable about the interviews?
- What are the priorities for development in DigiEntAid?
- What are the national "top" priorities of competences?
- What is the preferred mode of delivery?
- Any other observation?

Romania

- **What has been remarkable about the interviews?**

The interviewees from Romania were selected among micro-enterprises and self-employed workers affected by the Covid crisis, 3 of whom were in manufacturing and crafts, 5 in services, 1 in training, 1 in retail.

They had to adapt to the fast challenges implied by the crisis and the associated restrictions, which led to a shrinking market (significant decrease in the number of customers in most of the cases) and a new approach to customer relations, using different strategies to survive.

Adopting these strategies involved using and developing skills related to adaptability to change, learning to learn, creativity, communicating with customers, optimising expenditure etc.

Most of them maintained the relationship with customers using also existing communication channels (phone, email).

Only part of them have started to promote their business online; also the relationship with state institutions and banks had to be managed online.

What are the priorities for development in DigiEntAid?

- Online advertising / promotion
- Logistic management and customer management using specific software application
- ICT project management
- Ability to use online platforms
- Agile mindset
- Facilitating online learning

What are the national "top" priorities of competences?

In Romania, the programmes that finances the development of Human Capital have in view as main priorities for the development of the digital competences:
- use of IT applications to make business more efficient - e.g. CRM (Customer Relationship Manager), RM (Resource Management), ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning), BPM (Business Performance Management), electronic dashboard
- use of Cloud technology and other data and information storage technologies/applications
- managing social communication platforms for professional purposes
- use of online applications and social media networks for marketing and promotional purposes, SEO solution
- developing digital skills specific to e-commerce - e.g. using market store applications, managing company product databases etc.
- developing digital skills specific to mobile applications
- IT/cyber security (regarding document management, applications, payments etc.)

What is the preferred mode of delivery?

Face to face or mixed trainings, short trainings (2-3 days, max.2 hours).

Any other observation?

According to a Technology Director of Delloite Romania, digital transformation is a process that requires a continuous recalibration of both the business, operating and customer interaction models and the competencies held by companies.

For small companies, that intend to digitize their activity, in addition to being aware of all the benefits of digital transformation process, it is also important to understand what degree of digitization is necessary for their business and what steps they need to take in order to achieve their goals in an effective way.

Cyprus

What has been remarkable about the interviews?

The interviews included small businesses from different disciplines and markets. Briefly the companies were related to Services, Retail, Consultancy, Crafts, Education/Training, Hospitality (Restaurant/Bar).

- The companies related to Hospitality Sector had initially significant financial loses because they had to completely close down. However, due to their existing digital knowledge they managed to adapt really quick and proceed to innovative solutions.
- The company related to the Craft Sector again focused mainly in innovative ideas and digitalization in order to cover the initial loses from the situation.
- The education and training related company had to completely close down but survived at a cost. They managed to find solutions through digital education.
- The leading organiser of conferences and awards (Services Sector) was able to adapt quickly to the new reality without significant losses due to digital experience
- The consultant company deals with the new reality home working and had difficulties moving online due to the nature of their job.
- The novel digital platform (Retail) was able to increase their income and audience due to systematic digital marketing strategy application.

Overall, all the businesses interviewed, were related directly to the customers. This, in combination with their already existing basic or advanced knowledge of digital tools, allowed them to cope with the crisis without losing their companies.

What are the priorities for development in DigiEntAid?

Most of the companies recognised the significance of digital marketing tools and training. Every company differs and therefore a dedicated course or training on how to apply the digital marketing strategies to their companies was found to be a significant aspect for the development of DigiEntAid. Aside these, the importance of general company digitalization was highlighted based on the fact that each company differs in nature, structure, customers and workflow and therefore the existence of a manual or training related to the general digitalization of a company in a more targeted manner had been characterised as beneficial. Finally, it became clear that the Risk management, the Agile mindset and the customer communication under these circumstances are crucial aspects in the development in DigiEntAid since these are areas that a lot of companies struggle during COVID-19 crisis.

What are the national "top" priorities of competences?

- Targeted Digital marketing strategies
- Digitalization of companies
- Risk Management and Development of an Agile Mindset
- Effective communication and Digital Communication with both employees and customers

- Emotional intelligence and Stress management for both employees and customers.

What is the preferred mode of delivery?

Most of the people participated in the interviews suggested an either face to face or a hybrid mode of delivery. They also mentioned that they prefer practical and stretched over a longer time seminars.

Any other observation?

Companies interviewed stated clearly that there is an urgent need in digitalization of companies in a more targeted manner. They also underlined the importance in learning digital marketing skills and risk management in order to be better prepared if any similar crisis emerges. The existence of a universal tool that can be applied to the companies (in an online environment) and through which the companies will be able to learn up-to-date techniques, was highlighted as the most important part for them.

Germany

What has been remarkable about the interviews?

The interview inquiries have been met with a good level of interest by the respondents.

All respondents felt that the COVID crisis has been a challenge on many levels, individual resilience, as well as new competences which are needed in a changing working environment, which is more remote and more digital, while also requiring better communication, network building and communication.

What are the priorities for development in DigiEntAid?

Next to technical skills like digital marketing, setting up online shops etc the respondents emphasize the significance of personal mastery.

Crisis resilience, network building and good communication are key success factors that should be focused in the training programme.

What are the national "top" priorities of competences?

See above.

The top priorities are those that also should be focused in the trainings. The respondents feel that while being already critical in coping with the crisis, these should be built even more.

What is the preferred mode of delivery?

The mode of delivery question has answered by only under half of the respondents.

Those who have answered prefer online delivery, partly over a longer time.

Informally it has been discussed that community building with like minded entrepreneurs and change of experiences are important and a format should be chosen that supports such networking.

Any other observation?

The interviews have largely validated the initial hypothesis of the project that entrepreneurs require assistance to cope with the COVID crisis.

However, while we expected a focus on demand for technical skills such as online shops, digital marketing through social media etc, we were surprised by the strong emphasis on personal mastery, communication, work-life balance, communication with customers and employees.

Portugal

What has been remarkable about the interviews?

The range of interviewees was diverse, but it was based on micro-businesses, self-employed and 2 SMEs:

- the 2 micro-businesses in the catering and food area closed down and were poorly digitised or not digitised at all;
- the consultants managed to adapt well to digitisation and teleworking works well;
- the beauty business survived at a cost but managed to find a way through social networks;
- the genetics SME increased profits and work tremendously with the COVID crisis.
- the consumables company, which had two types of clients, only saw its sales drop, but survived;
- The software company have to deal with new reality home working.

In other words, all the businesses that deal directly with customers and direct sales (other than corporate) have suffered widespread or irreversible financial losses; the others have adapted well but have to deal with optimism, home working, motivation.

- **What are the priorities for development in DigiEntAid?**

The health crisis caused by the COVID-19 disease brings with it a deep economic recession that has global characteristics and will deeply hurt our economy and almost all interviewees mentioned the need to define some guiding principles of public policies more directed to micro businesses.

Another issue to be highlighted from the interviews is the repositioning of societies in relation to their mode of organisation, behaviours and lifestyles, which will have to evolve towards a model of fairer model, more mentally healthy growth for companies and workers.

Finally, it can be seen that Covid-19 exposed the weaknesses of many businesses and the lack of capacity we have to anticipate and manage risks.

What are the national "top" priorities of competences?

- Marketing, digital marketing and social networks

- Sales online, sales in times of crisis
- Resilience and organization of time/space
- Effective communication and Digital Communication
- Meditation, Emotional intelligence, Stress, Optimism

What is the preferred mode of delivery?

Between online and mixed, practical and short trainings.

Any other observation?

It is vital to build a new paradigm to identify and manage risks, not only the risk of new pandemics, wars but also other disruptive risks.

The social and mental pillar of organisations and people is very important and was always listed by all interviewees in Portugal.

Also, Covid-19 accelerated the trend towards digital transition, forced companies, workers, to reinvent their work models and systems, making much greater use of telework. In this perspective, the focus on improving the qualifications of the active population is a fundamental pillar for economic recovery (higher digital skills).

Slovenia

3.5. Overall Conclusion of Entrepreneur Interviews and Long-List of Competences

Looking at both lists of competences the comparative table to follow can be created:

Competences used in COVID Crisis		Training Content Suggested by Entrepreneurs	
Flexibility/Adaptability/Creativity	25	Digital Marketing	22
Crisis Resilience/Positive Thinking	19	General Business Digitalisation	15
Customer Relations & Communication	17	Social Media	10
General Communication	16	Personal Mastery	10
Management Skills	15	General Communication Skills	8
Financial Planning Skills	11	Risk Management and Planning	7
Digital/IT Skills	10	Content Creation (e.g. Video)	5
Leadership	9	Financial Skills	4
Having a Support Network	8	Leadership/Communication with Employees	4
Digital Marketing	8	Digital Communication	4
Legal Skills	5	Training about Support Funds	4
Learning Skills	5	Change Management	3

The training programme should rely on a longlist of competences that is a combination of those competences the entrepreneurs feel that they helped them through the crisis and a list that has been suggested by the entrepreneurs as more or less urgent content of a useful training programme.

We find four large blocks of competences:

- Digitalisation (Digital Media, general IT competences, Digital communication with customers and employees)
- Communication (general communication, leadership, customer relations)
- Personal mastery (entrepreneurial attitude, flexibility, learning, work-life balance)
- Technical Management Skills (General Management, Financial skills, Technical Change Management)

	Competences used in COVID Crisis		Training Content Suggested by Entrepreneurs	
Personal Mastery Overall Entrepreneur Score: 76	Flexibility/Adaptability/Creativity Crisis Resilience/Positive Thinking Leadership Having a Support Network Learning Skills	25 19 9 8 5	Personal Mastery	10
Digitalisation Overall Entrepreneur Score: 69	Digital/IT Skills Digital Marketing	10 8	Digital Marketing General Business Digitalisation Social Media Content Creation (e.g. Video) Digital Communication	22 15 10 5 4
Management Overall Entrepreneur Score: 49	Management Skills Financial Planning Skills Legal Skills	15 11 5	Risk Management and Planning Financial Skills Training about Support Funds Change Management	7 4 4 3
Communication Overall Entrepreneur Score: 45	Customer Relations & Communication General Communication	17 16	General Communication Skills Leadership/Communication with Employees	8 4

From the compilation above we can see that the entrepreneurs have a clear view of the relative significance of these areas of competence.

While the absolute values of the scoring should be taken with a grain of salt, as in some cases categories have been more differentiated than others and therefore had the chance of accumulating more "points" than others, it is still reasonable to say that in ordinal order, the entrepreneurs think that the Personal Mastery is the most important area of competence for small entrepreneurs.

Next to that the "new" area of digital competences needs to be strongly built and is inevitable for most businesses.

These digital skills often help to "modernise" skills that are also very dear to the entrepreneurs: their communication abilities with customers, employees, peers and

external partners. Becoming digital does not replace these basic competences, but adds specific means of communication, each with its own skills required.

Equally important are the "hard" management skills that all entrepreneurs need, getting organised, financial literacy, risk assessment and the like.

Based on these assessments we arrive at the following long list/matrix of competences, with competences that duplicate in the left and right column, synthesized.

	Key Entrepreneurial Competences for Crisis Resilience
Personal Mastery	Flexibility/Adaptability/Creativity Crisis Resilience/Positive Thinking Leadership Having a Support Network Learning Skills
Digitalisation	General Digital/IT Skills Digital Marketing Business Digitalisation Social Media Content Creation (e.g. Video) Digital Communication
Management	Management Skills Financial Planning Skills Legal Skills Risk Management and Planning Change Management
Communication	General Communication Customer Relations & Communication Leadership/Communication with Employees

According to the assessment of a group of 48 entrepreneurs from various sectors, owners of small businesses up to 15 employees, these are the competences that got them through the COVID crisis and that they want to hone further. These are the "**Key Entrepreneurial Competences for Crisis Resilience**".

This list of competences will be validated by a group of at least 5 stakeholders, University and Business organisation experts, training providers and other knowledgeable individuals with a lot of experience with the target group which will meet for focus groups in each partner country.

The qualitative questions to be discussed in each group are listed in the methodology paper on R 1.

Core of the focus group meetings will be an assessment of the competences as to the IMPORTANCE of each competence as well as the assessment of current DEVELOPMENT of each competence among the target group.

This will help the partners to further prioritise the attention to be given to each of these contents during the training.

A more detailed description of the methodology can be found in the R 1 methodology paper.

The matrix to be used will be as follows:

"Please rate each of the competences to follow by their IMPORTANCE and DEVELOPMENT among the target group (in general).

Please indicate a value of 1 (not important at all/not developed at all) to 5 (highest importance/fully developed) for each of the competences!"

	Key Competences for Crisis Resilience	IMPORTANCE	CURRENT DEVELOPMENT
Personal Mastery	Flexibility/Adaptability/Creativity		
	Crisis Resilience/Positive Thinking		
	Leadership		
	Having a Support Network		
	Learning Skills		
Digitalisation	General Digital/IT Skills		
	Digital Marketing		
	Business Digitalisation		
	Social Media		
	Content Creation (e.g. Video)		
	Digital Communication		

Management	Management Skills		
	Financial Planning Skills		
	Legal Skills		
	Risk Management and Planning		
	Change Management		
Communication	General Communication		
	Customer Relations & Communication		
	Leadership/Communication with Employees		

4. Task 4
Survey of
Entrepreneurs
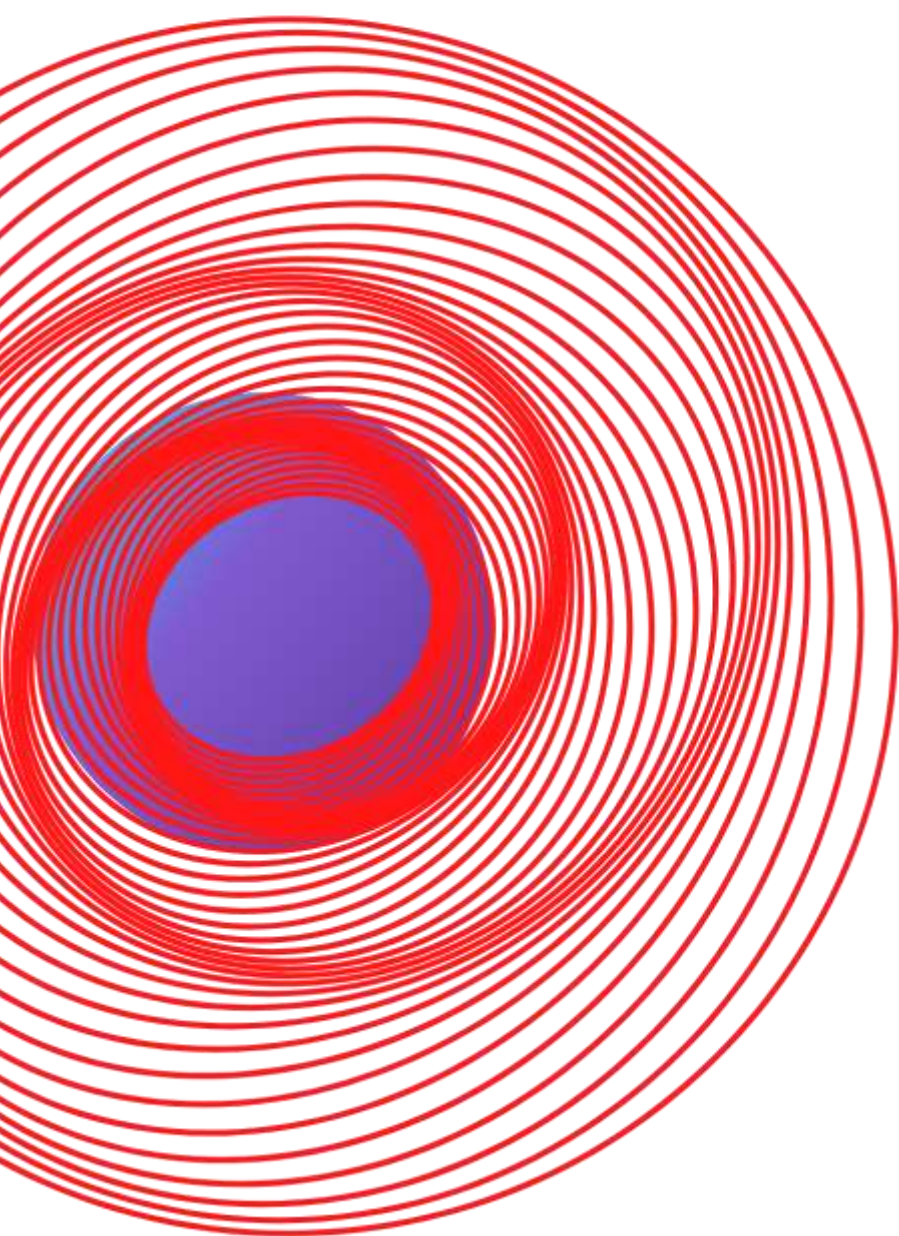
The survey intended to validate the findings of the prior tasks 3.

The main aim was to prioritise the elements of the wider matrix of competences (longlist) which has resulted from the analysis of literature and individual interviews.

The partners have been invited to discuss with a focus group of at least 5 stakeholders that can be expected to be supportive of our aims and purposes, incl organisations by and/or for small businesses.

The participants have been introduced to the results of the entrepreneur survey and resulting long list of competences.

These have been be rated along their importance and current development.

The partners have used an online questionnaire for documenting the discussion.

https://mfdps.1ka.si/DigiEntAid&grupa=16731&survey-1683=a66d85acbf3ecf2f6c79eda4166aac23

I addition the following aspects have been discussed:

- Please comment from your perspective on success factors of those small companies which were successful during the crisis/managed well during the crisis? Please name some good practices, you know of!
- What digital skills are small SME lacking, in particular those that can be useful in the crisis?
- What inhibitors vs digital tools/digital business models do you perceive?
- What support structures (like Chambers of Commerce, Business Networks, Training Providers, but also informal ones....) do small SME need during the crisis and what are proper formats of such support?

All aspects have been covered in a facilitated group discussion either face to face or online.

The aim of this priorisation is to guide the development of the SME training programme in a way that those competences are selected for the training programme that are of the highest priority, while at the same time keeping the volume and scope of the topics actionable.

The methodology follows the principles of Importance-Performance Analysis, as e.g. described by Levenburg and Magal 2004/2005)1.

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[1] Levenburg, Nancy M.; Magal, Simha R.: Applying Importance-Performance Analysis to Evaluate E-Business Strategies among Small Firms, In: e-Service Journal, Volume 3, Number 3, Summer 2004/2005, pp. 29-48. Similar research strategies have been used by Alexander Krauss (ISOB GmbH)

In the first question the respondents have been asked to rate the IMPORTANCE of each of the competences for developing entrepreneurial potential and actual aptitude.

The competences have been rated along a 5 point Likert scale.

In the second question the respondents have been asked to rate the LEVEL OF CURRENT DEVELOPMENT of these competences in the training programme potential candidates.

In a first level of analysis the averages for each competence (IMPORTANCE vs. DEVELOPMENT) will be plotted in a matrix.

The resulting matrix has four sectors.

Ill: Importance/Performance Matrix, Levenburg/Magal, p. 33

Those competences which are rated as low in performance as well as low priority, can be ignored by the training programme.

Those who are well developed but of low importance can also be ignored by the training programme, but it should be recommended that Universities review their own organisational and staff development priorities, as here resources might be misallocated or traditional role models and profiles might be given too high priority.

Where the competences is rated as important and of high importance, these cases should be further inquired regarding how these competences have been formed and

for related topics in the successful Erasmus+ projects YoungLeaders, Artisan, InspireUS and DigiVET, as well as in the needs analysis of various other projects.

keep to be used. These cases might provide good practices of formation of competences that can be used to inform training programmes in less developed competences.

The key field is the field of those competences which are of high importance, but currently not well developed. These competences are those, that the training programme and further research programme should focus on.

It has been agreed by the partners that these should be 10 or less, so that enough resources can be used within the limited resources that are available, to actually contribute to forming these competences.

4.1. Results of Focus Groups

The long list of competences has been validated in a second step by focus group surveys of stakeholders.

The sessions took the form of Zoom group sessions, face to face groups and individual interviews.

In the first part the stakeholders discussed the main qualitative aspect that have been also discussed with the entrepreneurs.

In the second part the stakeholders rated the longlist of competences which resulted from the analysis of the entrepreneur interviews along their relative importance and development.

4.2. Participation

The partners have involved 36 stakeholders to the focus groups (see national reports for list and individual profiles).

Cyprus: 5

Portugal: 6

Slovenia: 9

Germany: 11

Romania: 5

The participation has been balanced between Universities, Business Representatives and other experts.

4.2.1. Qualitative Discussion

The qualitative discussion consisted of three guiding questions.

Each of these are summarised in tabular format below, along with a suggested conclusion. A extensive documentation of each focus group can be found in the file repository of the project.

Please comment from your perspective on success factors of those small companies which were successful during the crisis/managed well during the crisis? Please name some good practices, you know of!

Cyprus	Portugal	Slovenia	Germany	Romania
Characteristics of resilient companies (several mentions): • adaptable and flexible, • digital skills and tools • ability to communicate. • employees trained • Risk management and crisis management • account management	Priorities commonly agreed: • flexibility - smaller structures, it becomes easier to change • open mind and be prepared for change (and this is achieved with continuous training).	n/a see national report	• openness and willingness to change • using social support • Sustainable Business Model. • every possible information on the website, • town centers make inner-city attractive. urban development • become digitally visible. project "Digital	Multiple mentions: • Finding new and innovative offers, like nature spots and nature sports in tourism • good high-speed internet connection for home office • using platforms, like booking platformsin tourism, • adaptability

• Cashflow management			Shopping City Bavaria 2021	• taking 100% responsibility
• Able to pivot			• establishment of a "Stadtlabor" (city laboratory)for urban development	• continuous evaluation of the situation,
• Able to take fast and correct decision				• integrity.
• Knowledge of cloud technology			• we initiated an Old Town delivery service.	• Agile approach of quickly identify the opportunities
• families bonding over their companies			• entrepreneurial attitude that crisis is a positive challenge to develop	• "Moving" activities online
• Mindset of the owner to guide support their employees				• Personalisation of services
• Organization skills			• broad sales structure stationary shops, and online marketplace	• technologies to optimise workflow
• The loyalty of the employees				• communication and HR management:
• Customer communication			• bridging aid and financial assistance.	• training of the human resources,
• Crisis management			• Online booking (Regiondo) went well	• authentic leadership
• Cyber security				

The stakeholders in all countries perceive the entrepreneurial mindset, in particular the mental resilience and agility to pivot and leave traditional business models behind, as the core success factor.

Those businesses were better prepared which already had a broader sales channel structure, good customer and employee communication and adaptable workflows.

Also established small business networks and other support structures have been helpful.

Those businesses were successful, which had a continuous evaluation of their business model already established and which used opportunities for innovation, like innovation hubs .

These results are well aligned with the perceived strengths and success factors that have already been identified by the entrepreneurs themselves.

• What digital skills are small SME lacking, in particular those that can be useful in the crisis?

Cyprus	Portugal	Slovenia	Germany	Romania
• well-being for the people in a digital ability to adapt to changes, • take fast and correct decisions communication between owners and employees	• digital platforms such as Teams, zoomeeting, streamyard, which allows you to hold meetings, for example, with suppliers,	n/a see national report	Multiple mentions: • digital and media skills for online events and online communication • "soft skills" for the digital transformation, openness, teamwork,	Multiple mentions: • digital communication and collaboration, • digital content creation, • safety • online problem solving.

	clients, teams, • Trello, or Todoist, which allow you to organize and plan the work with the whole team, gaining productivity. Technological and digital agility		communication • entrepreneurial agility • English terms are a big problem, therefore, it needs to be low-threshold • lack of basic digital skills, website, online social media. • Many small digitally well positioned, Those that are not, lack digital skills completely	• PC operation, • Zoom, Teams • archiving documents in one place. • digital marketing, • e-commerce platforms • Robotic Process Automation, • processes and apps for collecting the opinion of buyers • cloud-based shareware solutions.
• communication between the SME and the customer networking through digital world. • knowledge in business intelligence • digital marketing and social media utilization • use VPN and/or cloud • effects of long term remote work				

There have been digital pioneers among the small businesses, but many lack basic IT skills like maintaining a website, online shops and in company and company customer communication through Zoom or other communication tools. Also the visibility through social media is a deficit for many.

Some companies would need basic, but also technical digitalisation of business and production technologies.

Some general "soft skills" became more apparent during the crisis, as basic communication skills, to create employee and customer loyality, leadership and

resilience to take the crisis as an opportunity and a generally positive and constructive mindset.

In this sense the "soft skills" are prerequisite for developing and applying the technical "hard skills".

• What inhibitors vs digital tools/digital business models do you perceive?

Cyprus	Portugal	Slovenia	Germany	Romania
Deficiencies (multiple mentions): • leadership skills • risk management • crisis management • communication skills employer-employee. • inability to pursue a positive mindset and team spirit • availability in undertaking digital skills advancement • old business models governed by	• resistance from older generations to embrace technology • in family businesses • lack of preparation in business strategy, • entrepreneurship is also a gap	n/a see national report	• error culture in Germany is very strict, mistakes are punished with the withdrawal of love and acceptance - we need the competencies of dealing with mistakes • do not recognize relevance of social media (visibility)	• limited financial resources • Organisational inertia • Lack of human resources or needing specialization (upskilling/reskilling) • Insufficient time resources • Mindsets at top management and employee level • bureaucratic resistance to change of the state through its representatives (eg. use of digital signature in Romania)

the eldest family members. • Culture of keeping company as it is • software/hard ware • no clear goals and vision			• do not have a technical infrastrutu re • do not know how to build a digital business model. • problems finding IT people • shortage of staff (farms: stupid working hours, earning poorly)	

The partner´s stakeholders overall agree on a number of inhibitors of digitalisation and better crisis reaction. Obviously microbusinesses have limited financial resources. This is reflected in limited access to specialised labour. On the other hand main inhibitors are also subjective, as clinging to old business models and age of decision makers. The latter tend to continue what they always did and are rather retiring than shifting the business.

Former successes inhibit new insights. Also administrative regulations and government aid can be an inhibitor as well as support for change, as sometimes the speed of bureaucracies can be slower than the speed of change in companies.

• What support structures (like Chambers of Commerce, Business Networks, Training Providers, but also informal ones....) do small SME need during the crisis and what are proper formats of such support?

Cyprus	Portugal	Slovenia	Germany	Romania
Several mentions: • support structures cannot help when SMEs owners are not willing to pivot, • SMEs utilized the funded programs provided by the after the training and instalment of equipment, they never used it again. • collaboration between them in the form of a Network, updates regarding funds, training opportunities and personalizati on seminars	• Chambers of Commerce, Business Networking Groups, • Training Centers, • Town Halls, • Schools, • Universities. • must be agile and adapted to the limited time and financial capacity • In Portugal there is still some difficulty in perceiving the added value of associativism, but this mindset has been improving with informal entrepreneur	n/a see national report	• Municipalities including city marketing • local networking was established • design low-threshold offers to implement the change in small • microbusiness es are closely connected with each other. • Chambers are also the support structures for reporting on legal regulations and explain pitfalls • Micro-enterprises need impulses, e.g. in the form of	• organisations of public interest, NGOs, corporations and large companies that can provide support • - Business networks EEN • Technology clusters • Digital Innovation Hubs • public agencies, but also private consulting companies. • non-reimbursable funds, technical unemployme nt, identifying ways for reducing costs,

• existence of a universal, user-friendly database where the people will be able to be informed, receive newsletters and become aware of all the available training opportunities and funds provided • The Business Network in Cyprus • chambers of commerce • Specific trainings should be delivered in a hybrid provide them with the opportunity to meet people in person	ial support networks.		good practices, • information sheets, guidelines, brochures • company consultation hours, dealers can talk to experts from the network • knowledge monitor • online training portal was set up (unfortunately it was not well received) • advisory board of the tourism industry (on Tourism Climate and staff shortage) • existing e-learning platforms, they can learn about digital topics free of charge, including "Creating	identifying new customers, lowering the price of services, reorganizing the workspace, investing in digital technologies. • Online business information portals • Effective associations to defend SMEs rights and interests

			Google MyBusiness accounts, Bing & Co.", "Your own social media presence and website", "Writing SEO texts"	

Also regards support structures the stakeholders mostly agree. Chambers of Industry and commerce are prime support structures, but also new players, such as clusters and small business organisations can play an essential role.

Microbusinesses have specific needs which can necessitate specialist consultancy and also lobbying vs government.

All support needs to be low threshold and easily accessible.

Peer networking and support play an essential role, as many good practices in the various fields of competence exist and can be exchanged quickly and with high credibility.

Training and consultancy providers need to discover this target group and design their services in a ways that they are accessible to businesses with limited time and finances.

Some government and European programmes can also help, but require also specialist consultancy, that needs to be popularised among the microbusinesses.

Conclusion

Overall the stakeholders have confirmed the analysis of strengths and requirements for improvement by the entrepreneurs.

Many of the statements have been based on actual consultancy experiences by the stakeholders with small businesses during the COVID crisis.

A common insight is that technical training will not be enough, but that factors such as

- Personality development

- Developing the entrepreneurial mindset

- Preparedness and ability to communicate authentically and at the same time professionally with customers and employees

Are the prerequisite for developing and using technical skills as IT and digital marketing, digital communication, but also management, business process development and others.

Within the focus groups a reflection of an online questionnaire on the long list of competences that has been derived from the broader interviewing of entrepreneurs followed.

4.2.2. Matrix of Competences

The longlist of competences, that has been developed through the interviews with individual entrepreneurs, has been prioritised by the national focus groups regards the priorities for the training programme.

While the final training programme will consider the full list of competences as these represent the learnings from interviewing the entrepreneurs first-hand, he perspective of the stakeholders will also be important. We will look at the results overall and then have a look at national particularities in perceived training priorities.

4.2.2.1 Matrix of Competences Overall

First we look at the relative position of the aggregate blocs of competences, personal mastery, communication, digitalisation and management.

The first finding is that the importance of the competences overall is considered higher than their actual development.

The average of importance of all of these competences is rated at 4,49.

In contrast their actual development is rated as only 3,339, a gap of over 1,1.

Competence development is necessary, therefore.

The second finding is that overall, in spite of the gap, the development of competencies correlates with their importance. Those which are more important are also more developed.

He most important group of competences, communication is rated at 4,7 along with a reasonable development level of 3,46.

Personal mastery is slightly less important, but quite highly developed (4,44 vs 3,53).

Management is a to be taken for granted competence, close to the average of importance, but development could be better (4,42 vs 3,17).

Digitalisation still comes fourth when it comes to importance, but also the development is weak. (4,27 vs 3, 17).

Communication and Management are those which are below the average important/developed ratio, Personal mastery is slightly better and Digitalisation is considered less important and less developed, which might be interpreted as either

reflecting particularities of small and micro businesses, but also as a lack of awareness, even among the stakeholders.

In any case Personal Mastery and Communication stand out as the prime success factors of small companies.
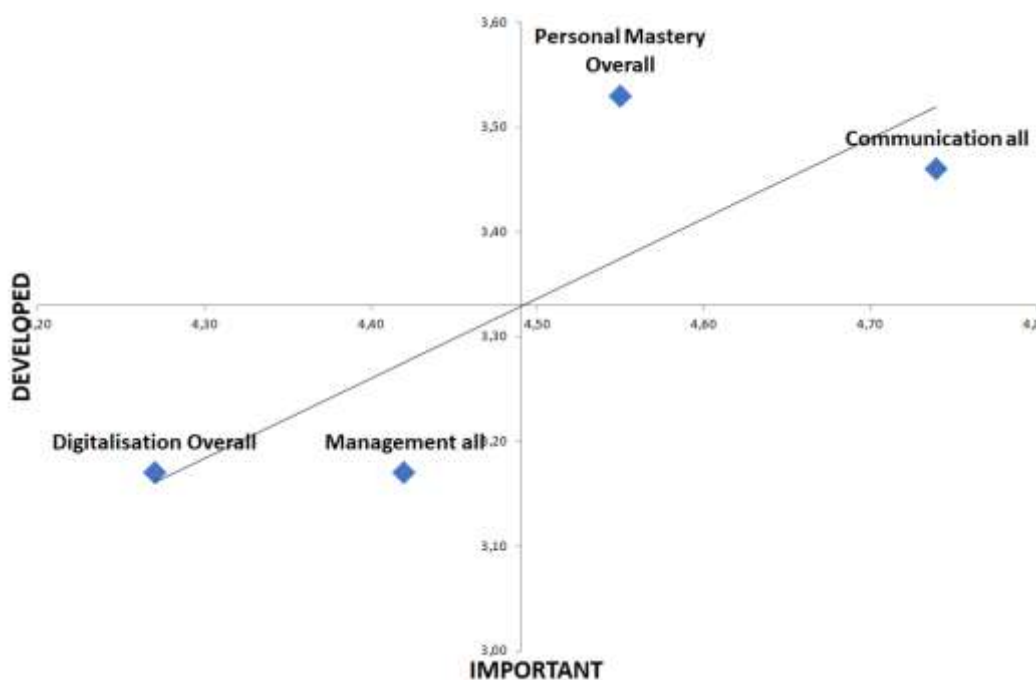
Ill.: Important vs developed overall – blocs of competences

		IMPORTANT	DEVELOPED
Personal Mastery Overall	PM all	**4,55**	**3,53**
Digitalisation Overall	D all	**4,27**	**3,17**
Management all	M all	**4,42**	**3,17**
Communication all	C all	**4,74**	**3,46**
		4,495	3,3325

Tab.: Important vs developed overall – blocs of competences - averages

A look at individual competences, of which the blocs/groups of competences consist, reveals that there is quite some differentiation among the individual competences.

It is remarkable, that only **one individual competence falls into the field above average important/below average developed: Communication with employees (C 3)**.

Most competences line up quite nicely along an important/developed correlation.

Those with a below average gap which are also above average important are General Digital/IT skills (D 1), Customer Relations and Communication (D 2).
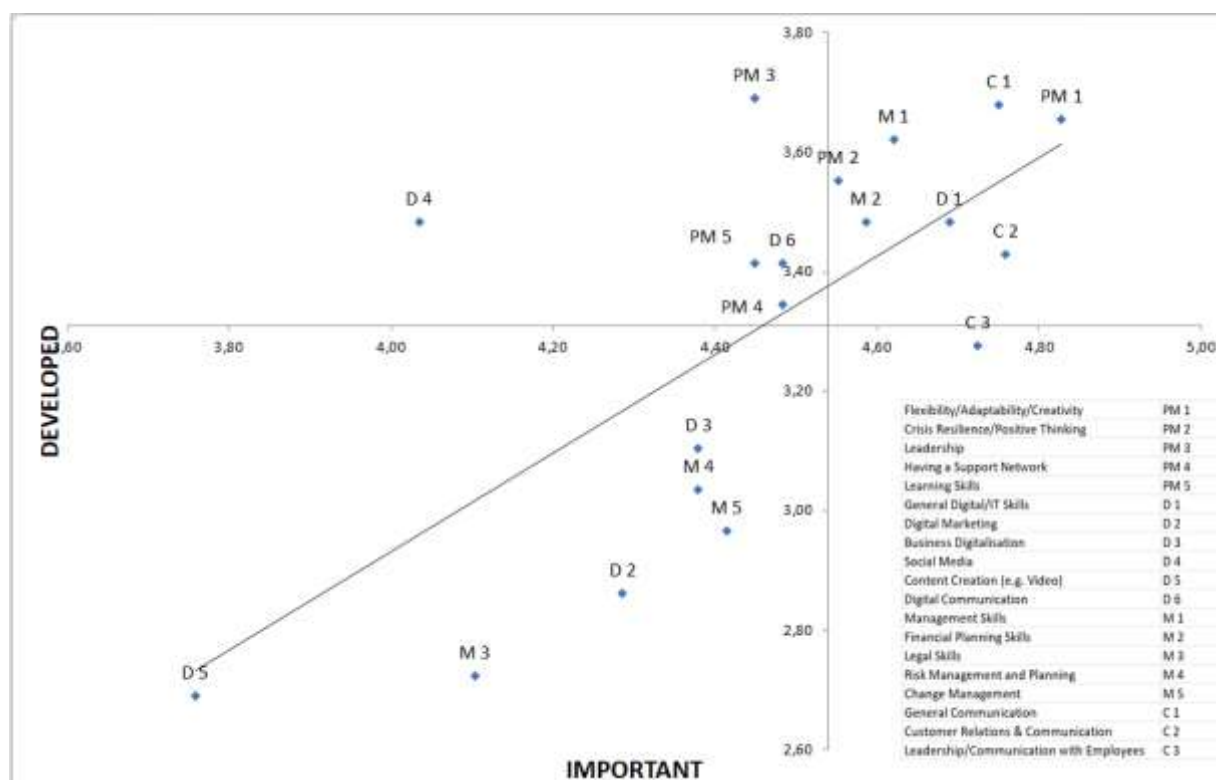
Ill: Important/Developed – Individual Competences

Among those with relatively high importance three stand out:

- Business Digitalisation,

- Risk Management and

- Change Management.

Content Creation is considered least developed, but also least important. Again this is possibly a matter of awareness of potential.

4.2.2.2. Priorities for Development by Country

When looking at the results for the partner countries, we see that different individual competences stand out as having a big gap between importance and development.

While the partner training programme overall should look at a programme that reflects the average need, the programme overall, but also the concrete national versions and implementation should also consider these needs.

Cyprus

In Cyprus Flexibility/Adaptability/Creativity stands out with a gap of -2,0, as do Business Digitalisation and Digital Marketing.

The biggest gaps are perceived in **Change Management and Risk Management** (-2,5).

Customer Relations (-2,0) and Leadership (-2,25) follow.

PERSONAL MASTERY			
Importance	Development level	Difference	
5,00	3,00	-2,00	Flexibility/Adaptability/Creativity
5,00	3,25	-1,75	Crisis Resilience/Positive Thinking
4,75	3,25	-1,50	Leadership
4,75	3,00	-1,75	Having a Support Network
4,50	2,75	-1,75	Learning Skills
4,80	**3,05**	-1,75	AVERAGE
DIGITALISATION			
Importance	Development level		
4,75	3,50	-1,25	General Digital/IT Skills
4,75	2,75	-2,00	Digital Marketing

4,75	2,75	-2,00	Business Digitalisation
4,75	3,25	-1,50	Social Media
4,00	2,50	-1,50	Content Creation (e.g. Video)
4,50	3,00	-1,50	Digital Communication
4,58	**2,96**	-1,63	AVERAGE
MANAGEMENT			
Importance	Development level		
5,00	3,25	-1,75	Management Skills
4,50	3,00	-1,50	Financial Planning Skills
4,00	2,25	-1,75	Legal Skills
4,75	2,50	-2,25	Risk Management and Planning
4,75	2,25	-2,50	Change Management
4,60	**2,65**	-1,95	AVERAGE
COMMUNICATION			
Importance	Development level		
4,75	3,00	-1,75	General Communication
5,00	3,00	-2,00	Customer Relations & Communication
5,00	2,75	-2,25	Leadership/Communication with Employees
4,92	**2,92**	-2,00	AVERAGE

Tab.: Gaps of Development Cyprus

Portugal

In Portugal the gaps are slightly smaller.

Crisis Resilience and Digital Marketing , Legal Skills and Change Mangement (-1,5) stand out.

The communication competences are assessed as quite well aligned.

Portugal			
PERSONAL MASTERY			
Importance	Development level		
5,00	3,50	-1,17	Flexibility/Adaptability/Creativity
4,83	3,67	-1,50	Crisis Resilience/Positive Thinking
4,67	3,50	-1,17	Leadership
4,67	3,67	-0,33	Having a Support Network
4,83	3,50	-0,67	Learning Skills
4,80	3,57	-0,83	AVERAGE
DIGITALISATION			
Importance	Development level		
4,83	3,67	-1,17	General Digital/IT Skills
4,67	3,17	-1,50	Digital Marketing
4,67	3,50	-1,17	Business Digitalisation
4,33	4,00	-0,33	Social Media
4,17	3,50	-0,67	Content Creation (e.g. Video)
4,33	3,50	-0,83	Digital Communication
4,50	3,56	-0,94	AVERAGE
MANAGEMENT			

Importance	Development level		
4,83	3,67	-1,17	Management Skills
4,67	3,33	-1,33	Financial Planning Skills
4,17	2,67	-1,50	Legal Skills
4,33	3,17	-1,17	Risk Management and Planning
4,50	3,00	-1,50	Change Management
4,50	3,17	-1,33	AVERAGE
COMMUNICATION			
Importance	Development level		
4,33	3,67	-0,67	General Communication
4,33	3,67	-0,67	Customer Relations & Communication
4,67	3,83	-0,83	Leadership/Communication with Employees
4,44	3,72	-0,72	AVERAGE

Tab.: Gaps of Development Portugal

Germany

In Germany only **General Digital Skills (-2,0) and Customer Relations (-1,7)** stand out.

Germany			
PERSONAL MASTERY			
Importance	Development level		
4,50	3,50	-1,00	Flexibility/Adaptability/Creativity
4,17	3,83	-0,33	Crisis Resilience/Positive Thinking
3,83	4,00	0,17	Leadership

4,17	2,83	-1,33	Having a Support Network
4,17	3,50	-0,67	Learning Skills
4,17	3,53	-0,63	AVERAGE
DIGITALISATION			
Importance	Development level		
4,50	2,50	-2,00	General Digital/IT Skills
3,80	2,67	-1,13	Digital Marketing
3,67	2,67	-1,00	Business Digitalisation
3,83	3,00	-0,83	Social Media
3,33	2,50	-0,83	Content Creation (e.g. Video)
4,50	3,00	-1,50	Digital Communication
3,94	2,72	-1,22	AVERAGE
MANAGEMENT			
Importance	Development level		
4,00	3,67	-0,33	Management Skills
4,33	3,67	-0,67	Financial Planning Skills
4,00	2,50	-1,50	Legal Skills
4,33	2,83	-1,50	Risk Management and Planning
4,00	2,50	-1,50	Change Management
4,13	3,03	-1,10	AVERAGE
COMMUNICATION			
Importance	Development level		
4,80	3,20	-1,60	General Communication
4,50	2,80	-1,70	Customer Relations & Communication

4,50	3,33	-1,17	Leadership/Communication with Employees
4,60	3,11	-1,49	AVERAGE

Tab.: Gaps of Development Germany

Slovenia

In Slovenia Personal Mastery seems well aligned. In Digitalisation/Digital Marketing has a gap (-1,78), as well as Content Creation (-1,48).

Legal Skills (-1,44) and the communicative skills of **Customer Relations and Leadership** are considered the largest gaps (-1,44, -1,89)

PERSONAL MASTERY			
Importance	Development level		
4,78	3,89	-0,89	Flexibility/Adaptability/Creativity
4,44	3,22	-1,22	Crisis Resilience/Positive Thinking
4,33	3,44	-0,89	Leadership
4,44	3,44	-1,00	Having a Support Network
4,22	3,22	-1,00	Learning Skills
4,44	3,44	-1,00	AVERAGE
DIGITALISATION			
Importance	Development level		
4,67	3,67	-1,00	General Digital/IT Skills
4,11	2,33	-1,78	Digital Marketing
4,44	3,11	-1,33	Business Digitalisation
3,44	3,00	-0,44	Social Media

3,44	2,00	-1,44	Content Creation (e.g. Video)
4,56	3,56	-1,00	Digital Communication
4,11	2,94	-1,17	AVERAGE
MANAGEMENT			
Importance	Development level		
4,67	3,44	-1,22	Management Skills
4,67	3,33	-1,33	Financial Planning Skills
4,00	2,56	-1,44	Legal Skills
4,22	3,11	-1,11	Risk Management and Planning
4,44	3,22	-1,22	Change Management
4,40	3,13	-1,27	AVERAGE
COMMUNICATION			
Importance	Development level		
4,89	3,89	-1,00	General Communication
5,00	3,56	-1,44	Customer Relations & Communication
4,67	2,78	-1,89	Leadership/Communication with Employees
4,85	3,41	-1,44	AVERAGE

Tab.: Gaps of Development Slovenia

Romania

In Romania there are perceived only slight gaps, if one wants to highlight these mild gaps, it would be Business Digitalisation (-1,0), Risk Management (-1,0), Customer Relations (-1,0) and Leadership (-1,0).

PERSONAL MASTERY		

Importance	Development level		
5,00	4,25	-0,75	Flexibility/Adaptability/Creativity
4,50	4,00	-0,50	Crisis Resilience/Positive Thinking
5,00	4,50	-0,50	Leadership
4,50	3,75	-0,75	Having a Support Network
4,75	4,25	-0,50	Learning Skills
4,75	4,15	-0,60	AVERAGE
DIGITALISATION			
Importance	Development level		
4,75	4,25	-0,50	General Digital/IT Skills
4,25	4,00	-0,25	Digital Marketing
4,50	3,50	-1,00	Business Digitalisation
4,50	4,75	0,25	Social Media
4,25	3,50	-0,75	Content Creation (e.g. Video)
4,50	4,00	-0,50	Digital Communication
4,46	4,00	-0,46	AVERAGE
MANAGEMENT			
Importance	Development level		
4,75	4,25	-0,50	Management Skills
4,75	4,25	-0,50	Financial Planning Skills
4,50	4,00	-0,50	Legal Skills
4,50	3,50	-1,00	Risk Management and Planning
4,50	3,75	-0,75	Change Management

4,60	3,95	-0,65	AVERAGE
COMMUNICATION			
Importance	Development level		
5,00	4,50	-0,50	General Communication
5,00	4,00	-1,00	Customer Relations & Communication
5,00	4,00	-1,00	Leadership/Communication with Employees
5,00	4,17	-0,83	AVERAGE

5. Conclusion
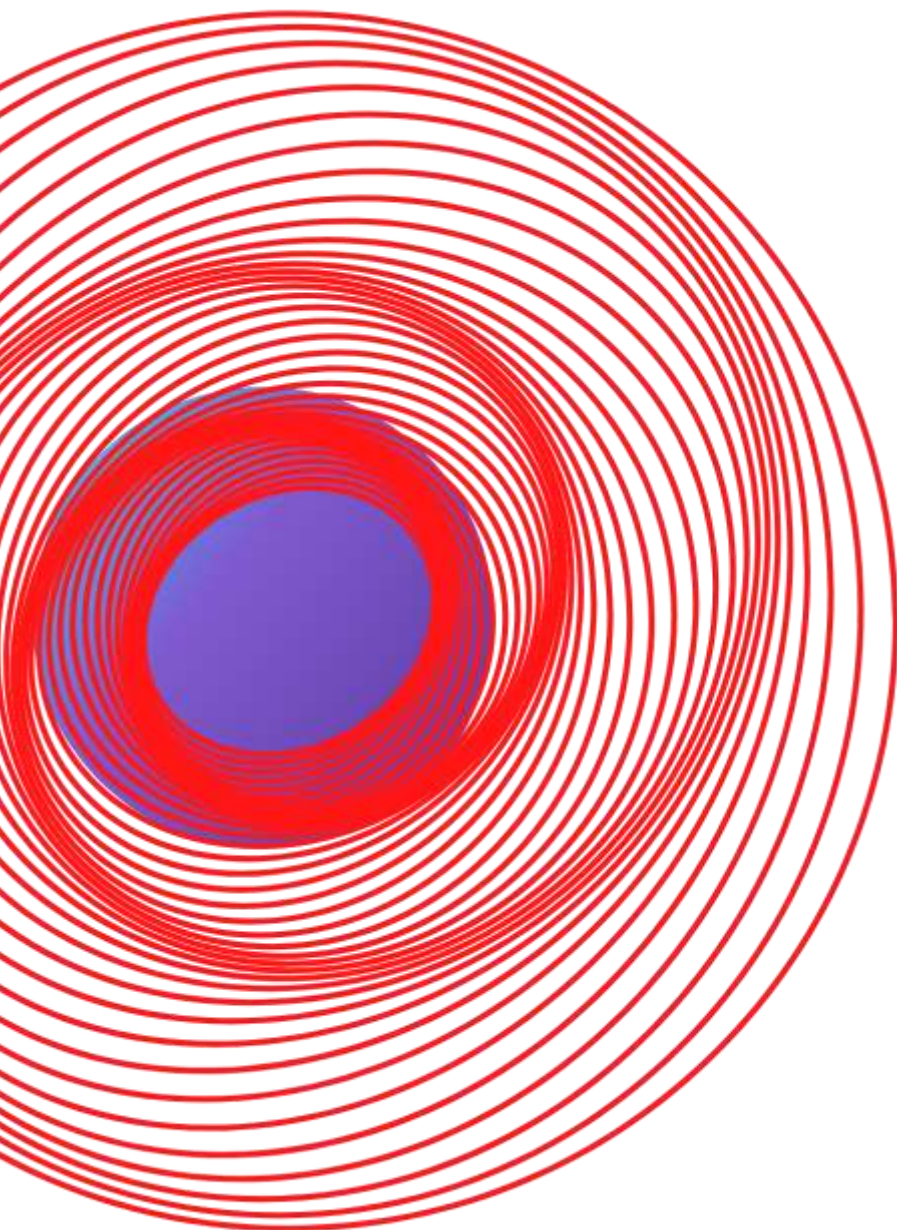
The research based on entrepreneur interviews, qualitative Focus Groups and priorities assessment by Focus Group/Stakeholder Rating has resulted in a viable Matrix of Competences.

Key Entrepreneurial Competences for Crisis Resilience

Personal Mastery

Flexibility/Adaptability/Creativity

Crisis Resilience/Positive Thinking

Leadership

Having a Support Network

Learning Skills

Digitalisation

General Digital/IT Skills

Digital Marketing

Business Digitalisation

Social Media

Content Creation (e.g. Video)

Digital Communication

Management

Management Skills

Financial Planning Skills

Legal Skills

Risk Management and Planning

Change Management

Communication   General Communication

Customer Relations & Communication

Leadership/Communication with Employees

These competences have been developed on the basis of interviews with actua entrepreneurs and have been validated by the qualitative discussions of the Focus Groups, as well as by the quantitative rating of their relative importance and development.

The latter exercise has overall shown that there is a general gap of development vs importance, but in general those competences which are more important are also more developed.
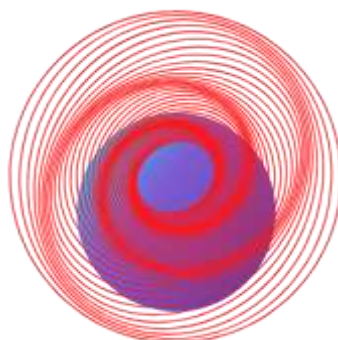
The "soft" competences Communication and Personal Mastery are considered the main success factors, while Digitalisation is a field of development, for which a full awareness of importance needs further promotion.

Management skills are in the middle and are obviously taken for granted.

It is therefore recommended that the training programme should include all of the components of the Matrix.

It should make the key success factors - Communication and Personal Mastery - more teachable and look at outliers like Customer Relations and Leadership/Communication with employees, which have been marked as gap competencies in some partner countries.

In addition to that the training programme should include modular material on technical skills, such as digital customer retention, digital content creation, Business Model Creation and financial skills.

PARTNERSHIP