



STAFF TRAINING DEMANDS FOR KNOWLEDGE-INTENSIVE ROAD TRANSPORT MANAGERS

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Key words: *road transport managers, knowledge-intensive SMEs, lifelong learning.*

Abstract: *The paper presents the results of the field research on staff training demands. The survey was implemented within the LLP/LDV project KNOW-IN coordinated by European Business and Innovation Centre (CEEI) of Albacete, Spain. It aimed to explore the state-of-arts of the level of staff education and the existing experience of lifelong learning for road transport managers in the partner countries: Belgium, Bulgaria, Italy, Norway, Spain and the UK. The outcomes helped find out how the SMEs in the sector had been implementing or would implement a strategy to knowledge intensive management. The questionnaire, which was developed especially for that purpose, included questions to explore the current demands of lifelong learning in order to create “ideal road transport managers” capable to apply European requirements and implement successful strategies for competitiveness of their companies on the transport market. Another goal of the field research was to reveal the attitude of road transport companies to staff training on the working place as well as how to encourage the use of innovative learning tools.*

INTRODUCTION

KNOW-IN (For a new generation of smart, sustainable and inclusive European Road Transport Managers) is a project funded by the European Commission’s LLP/Leonardo da Vinci programme (2012-2013). It is coordinated by the Business and Innovation Centre Albacete, Spain with partners from 5 other countries: Belgium – Confederation of Organisations in Road Transport Enforcement (CORTE), Bulgaria – Todor Kableshkov University of Transport (VTU), Italy – 4METX SRL, Norway – European Masters of Skilled Crafts Ltd, UK – Skills for Logistics.

The project objectives are to ensure that road transport managers are able to anticipate the knowledge and skills needed today and in the future, to overcome labour mismatches in the EU freight transport by road sector, to encourage managers in SMEs to promote life-long learning in the workplace, through creation of innovate learning tools, enabling learning to

take place anywhere and at any time. The new EU road transport manager (EU-RTM) should acquire management skills and tools to meet the challenges and be competitive on the transport market.

SURVEY DESIGN AND OBJECTIVES

To achieve the goal of KNOW-IN project, the team needed feedback from the road transport companies and associations on the level of staff knowledge, skills and competences as well as on the needs of lifelong learning. It was done through field research based on a questionnaire developed to identify the main needs and kind of support necessary for sectoral SMEs.

While compiling the set of questions, the partners from Bulgaria (VTU) and Belgium (CORTE) considered different types of respondents (logistics companies, transportation companies, etc.). The survey was intended to investigate staff training demands within the whole range of players in the road transport sector. Its specific aims were:

- to map the existing practices in terms of training of professionals;
- to identify the necessary knowledge, skills and competences;
- to examine the main social and technical skills needed for a “knowledge-intensive road transport manager”;
- to determine how to improve their knowledge, skills and competences.

Another purpose of the survey was to reveal the attitude of companies to staff training on the working place promotion of lifelong learning through innovative learning tools.

It was decided that each partner should obtain 15 questionnaires completed by appropriate respondents. The main ways of surveying were e-mailing and/or using telephone/SKYPE conversations. The partners also agreed to arrange a few face-to-face interviews thus gathering more qualitative feedback and collect suggestions on how to improve knowledge, skills and competences of road transport managers.

The questions were grouped in 11 sections. Nine of them could be defined as basic since they had been designed according to the information expected to acquire following the classification of the knowledge, skills and competences necessary for a KIRM (knowledge-intensive road manager). The first section “Identification” was intended to collect general information about the company (name, size, main field of business, geographical area of operation) and the interviewees (their position and the department they work at) and the last one, called “Additional comments”, gave a possibility for the respondents to express their opinions, recommendations and suggestions.

ANALYSIS OF SURVEY RESULTS

1. Identification: The number of respondents who answered (within the deadline) was 74 (UK-23, IT-18, BG-17, ES-13, NO -3). Most of them work as managers, half being senior managers. The main features of the companies/associations that participated in this survey can be summarized as follows:

- 44,5% of respondents describe their company as road transport companies and 20% are logistics companies;
- more than half of the companies operate within their home country, 28 % in the EU, 14% in other European regions and only a few world-wide;
- 81% are SMEs (employing less than 250 employees) which coincides with the aim to outline a strategy leading to knowledge intensive management of such companies.

2. Administrative/Compliance: Most respondents (84%) think that a Road Transport Manager should have knowledge of fiscal issues, while those who recognize the necessity to communicate in other language than the working one of the company are much less – 57%. Nearly twice as many companies reported that they did not support training in language acquisition compared to those that do (55% companies compared to 32%).

3. Planning Activities: More than half of the respondents are convinced that computer knowledge is of vital necessity including the ability to use Internet, e-mails, Microsoft Office and other applications. The majority (68%) believe that an RTM should acquire knowledge of relevant legislation applicable to the road transport sector. Regulations regarding transport industry and marketing were the top areas to have knowledge of.

4. Dealing with customers: More than 80% (62 respondents) believe that customer service skills were necessary. The most important personal competences, which a road transport worker needs (5 chosen among 17) are to be knowledgeable (61%), adaptable (50%), flexible (47%). Unlike language training, a larger number of companies that participated in the survey reported that they provided customer service training to their staff (Yes – 65%; No -35%). The personal skills necessary for road managers in future can be summarised as follows:

- Readiness for change – adaptability;
- Adaptability/flexibility towards staff;
- Keeping abreast of current legislation;
- Better financial understanding and impacts individuals can make on the bottom line;
- Entrepreneurial and able to motivate people at all levels;
- Keeping customers happy, reliability.

5. Dealing with staff and drivers: 82% considered the ability to cope with stressful situations to be very important. This answer was expected having in mind the dynamic work conditions in the road transport sector. The participants in the survey are convinced that the road transport manager should know the legislation on alcohol and drug abuse and recognise such usage in practice.

6. Vehicle Maintenance: More than 75 % of respondents confirmed that a road transport manager needs good knowledge of the common technical problems appearing in vehicles.

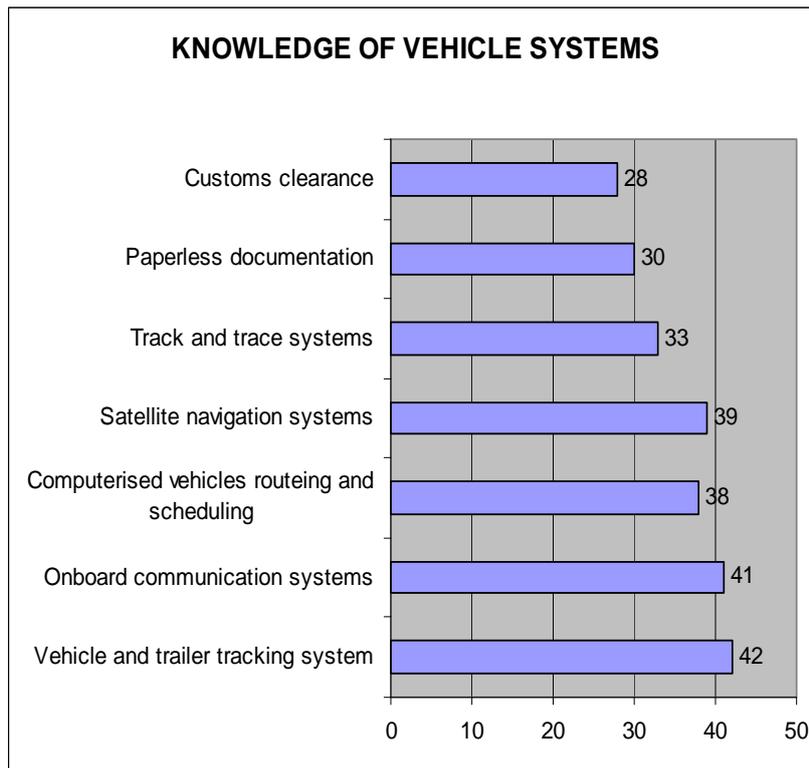


Fig. 1 Knowledge of vehicle systems necessary for RTMs

7. Communication: The communication skills are considered very important to a road transport manager by more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of respondents. However, only half of the companies that completed the questionnaire measure the communication skills of new recruits.

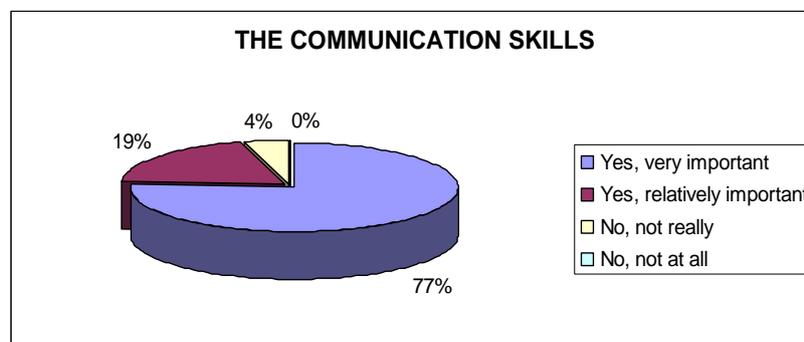


Fig. 2 Necessity of communication skills for RTMs

The analysis of the questionnaire results showed that 70% of the respondents realize the necessity to know the techniques of conflict management (Yes – 72%; No -20%). This answer was not a surprise due to the job nature of the RTM who has to work with people having different interests: staff and drivers on one hand, and customers on the other hand.

8. Personal Skills: The level of education of managers in road transport companies is quite high – 59% of them are holders of higher education degrees, 28% have appropriate vocational training. Most respondents answered that the ideal RTM should be a holder of a university degree with at least 5 years work experience (55%). The work experience should not be necessarily international or from foreign countries (Yes - 52%; No – 50%). However,

practical experience as a driver within the company or another firm is considered as an additional asset for a road transport manager (Yes- 73%; No -18%).

9. Coordination: Training offered by companies is most often of traditional type with a prevailing share of workshops. The forms of training that should be used preferably in future include using ICT technologies, e-learning and m-learning. The highest percentage of people included in training was reported by the respondents from the UK where half of the interviewed companies stated 100 % training for the staff, 1 – 95%, 1 – 80% and 5 – 50%, which outlined a steady policy towards knowledge-intensive management.

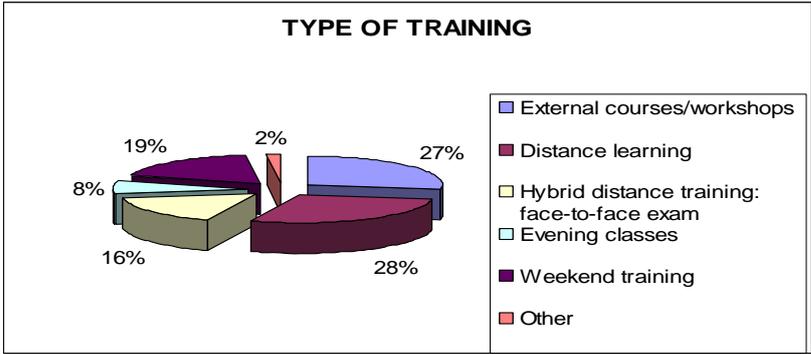


Fig. 3 Type of training most appropriate for RTM

The survey also outlined the areas of knowledge, which are considered to be most important for EU-RTMs: Working with digital tachograph – 66%; Traffic safety – 62%; Professional competence for national road transport – 55%; Health and safety conditions of labour – 48%; Driver certificate of professional competence – 47%; Law carriage contracts – 47%; Logistics – 46%.

The most highly recognised benefits are considered to be training in compliance with the exact purposes of the company, the exchange of experience by working with trained workers and the increase in company’s reputation.

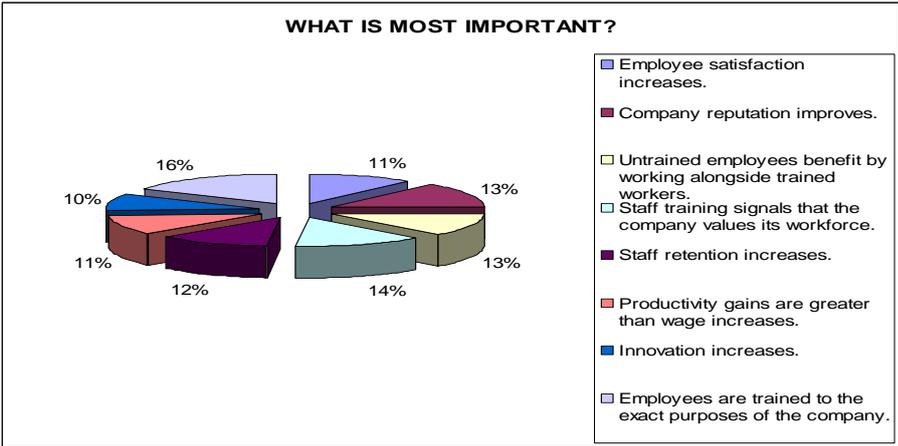


Fig. 4 Benefits provided by training

However, only a few companies provide internship for students (Yes-19; No-53). It might seem discouraging for young people who have chosen the career of the RTM as it is difficult to find a placement in the road transport sector. Although internships are not often available, the number of university graduates expected to be employed within the next year

and in 3 and 5 years is satisfactory. An average of 2 students will be recruited in each company/association, which is satisfactory having in mind that most of them are SMEs.

10. Business Management: The majority of the participants in the survey believe that the road transport manager needs to acquire *only basic knowledge* of market relations and business management. This number is by 70% higher than those who chose simply “Yes”. That should be not evaluated as a lack of ambitions but as a sound realism. What is most often understood under “basic” knowledge is “applied science”, which is enough for the needs of practice. In terms of business management Road Transport Managers need to have competence, adaptability, flexibility, job stress resistance, language skills, fairness. *“The manager must motivate staff to achieve optimal result, organize effective commercial relationships with clients and regulate teamwork”*.

CONCLUSIONS

The information collected from the questionnaires during the field research on road transport staff training demands served as a basis to develop EQF (European Qualification Framework) of the Road Manager for Knowledge-Intensive SMEs in terms of punctual definition of knowledge, skills and competencies necessary to quickly pick up new trends, explore new markets and channels, invest in customer relations; provide attractive working conditions as well as learn conducive environments and organize the logistics of the transport process to become more environmentally friendly.

The results obtained through the questionnaire have been used to detect information about the state-of-the-art and training needs of different European SMEs; identify the new skills necessary for future-proof Road Transport Managers; design and implement at specific initiatives that will stimulate road transport sector SMEs to invest in training; develop a new model of training provision within an overall lifelong learning strategy taking into account the barriers existing among SMEs and micro enterprises.

The summarised information on staff training demands, which is available in all languages of the project consortium members on the KNOW-IN project website, will also help the exchange of good practices, mutual learning and joint activities amongst stakeholders in the partner countries.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors would express their gratitude to the Belgian partner (CORTE) for the help in the questionnaire development and all partners for their analyses and comments on the information acquired during the field research. Although developed within the LLP/LDV project KNOW-IN, this paper reflects the views only of the authors and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use, which may be made of the information contained therein.

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ПОТРЕБНОСТ ОТ ОБУЧЕНИЕ НА МЕНИДЖЪРИТЕ В АВТОМОБИЛНИЯ ТРАНСПОРТ ЗА ИНТЕНЗИВНО ИЗПОЛЗВАНЕ НА ЗНАНИЯ

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Ключови думи: мениджъри в автомобилния транспорт, МСП с интензивно използване на нови знания, учене през целия живот.

Резюме: Докладът представя резултатите от теренното изследване за потребностите от обучение на персонала. Проучването се реализира в рамките на проекта KNOW-IN по програмата „Леонардо да Винчи”, който се координира от Европейския център за бизнес и иновации (СЕЕІ) в Албасете, Испания. Той има за цел да проучи текущото равнище на обучението на персонала и съществуващия опит в ученето през целия живот за мениджърите в автомобилния транспорт в страните-партньори: Белгия, България, Италия, Норвегия, Испания и Обединеното кралство. Резултатите съдействаха да се разбере как малките и средни предприятия в сектора са прилагали или ще прилагат стратегия за управление с интензивно използване на знания. Въпросникът, който бе разработен специално за целта, включва въпроси за изследване на текущите потребности от обучение през целия живот с цел създаване на "идеални мениджъри в автомобилния транспорт", които могат да прилагат европейските изисквания и осъществяват успешни стратегии за конкурентоспособност на предприятията им в транспортния пазар. Друга цел на теренното изследване бе да разкрие отношението на автомобилните компании за обучение на персонала на работното място, както и насърчаването към използване на иновативни инструменти за обучение.