

## Pilot Center for the Virtual Management Consultancy School for Small and Medium Enterprises – SVCM - IMM

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*The aim of the paper is to present the Virtual Management Consultancy School for small and medium enterprises - as an original system, designed to provide the continuous training of the small and medium enterprise (SME) personnel by means of virtual links between the University and the business environment of Romania and worldwide.*

*Under the provisions of the legislative framework in Romania and considering the present-day and future trends of the national economy, orientated by the EU, the setting up of the Pilot Center meets the Romanian education reform requirements, in keeping with the current concerns of the EU universities meant to expand distance learning by means of modern computer technology means, i. e. the Internet.*

*The current program shall bring its contribution to the development of many of today's enterprises, unto the enterprise model of the future, i. e. **the knowledge-based enterprise**. The program is extremely important for education, scientific research and economic development of our country, reflected in the program objectives and expected results. Its contents opens new perspectives on ways of approaching economic management in Romania, under the pressure exerted by newly emerging labour forms and activities in the information society.*

*The experience gained through this program shall be extended to an increasing number of economic agents who, taking 'real-time' advantage of continuous training programs under the higher education auspices, shall opt for this type of professional training.*

**Keywords:** management, consultancy, virtual, e-learning, SME.

**The National Development Plan (NDP) 2007-2013**, approved by the Government of Romania on Dec. 22<sup>nd</sup> 2005 (The Government of Romania- Ministry of Public Finance, 2005) sets as **national top priority** *the increase of economic competitiveness and the knowledge-based economic development*, mainly based on the promotion of research and innovation, on improved cooperation in the DCI area among universities, R&D institutes and industry. Another **priority** refers to *Human resources development, promotion of occupation and social inclusion as well as strengthening of the administrative capability*. The specific objectives are: development of initial and continuous education; provision of high-quality and relevant educational offers for the labour market; development of the human resources in the education field; designing flexible and personalized learning and job prospects by providing integrated in-

formation, guidance and counseling services; facilitation of youth insertion on the labor market by promoting education and occupation partnerships and the development of transition programs from school to the workplace; launching continuous and specific professional development programs designed to develop the skills and abilities required by the labor market; and promotion of entrepreneurial spirit and culture.

The Virtual Management Consultancy School for small and medium enterprises (SVCM-IMM) is an original system, designed to provide the continuous training of the SME personnel by means of virtual links between the University and the business environment.

The target groups shall consist in entrepreneurs and firm managers, engineers, economists and other professionals involved in setting up SMEs, diagnostic analyses, feasibility

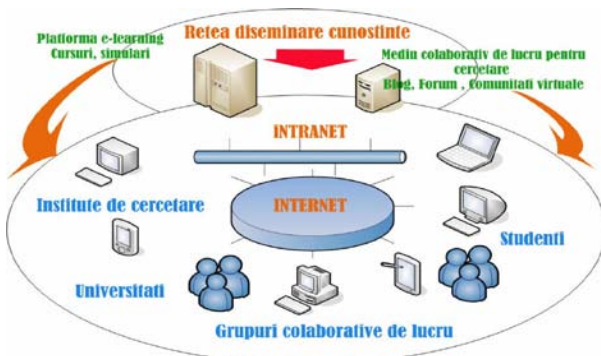
studies, business plans, marketing programs, as well as economic-financial analyses.

The program meets the Romanian education reform requirements, in keeping with the current concerns of the EU universities meant to expand advanced distance learning by means of modern computer technology means, i. e. the Internet.

The project team consists in both highly experienced teaching staff, and younger ones, able to gain further experience and provide the SME personnel with training in managerial, marketing and other related areas, that will later ensure the latter the competitive advantage in their business domain.

The current program shall bring its contribution to the development of many of today's enterprises, unto the enterprise model of the future, i.e. **the knowledge-based enterprise**. The program has therefore many-fold importance for education, scientific research and economic development of our country, reflected in the program objectives and expected results. The program contents opens new perspectives on ways of approaching economic management in Romania, under the pressure exerted by newly emerging labor forms and activities in the information society.

The experience gained through this program shall be extended to an increasing number of economic agents who, taking 'real-time' advantage of continuous training programs under the higher education auspices, shall opt for this type of professional training.



Romania is among the countries in which young people are very poorly represented in the business area; giving higher chances to the youth and providing opportunities for

them to use their skills for the benefit of their country must be viewed as a potentially very rewarding investment.

Over 50 percent of the SMEs interviewed admitted being concerned with the implementation of innovative elements in the product/service structure, in the tools and machines area, or in the company management. One can observe there is very low preoccupation (below 1 %) for building their own computer technology system. This approach is a characteristic of the overall Romanian business environment, which avoids big costs, choosing big earnings instead. Conservatism could be viewed as a positive aspect insofar as the chances for constant economic growth are concerned, but could be harmful for the management of change.

#### **Structure of the working population, given the professional status, in 2005<sup>1</sup>**

In trimester III of 2007, the rate of employed people in the working period (15-64 years of age) was 60,5%, and the rate of unemployment BM was 6,0%.<sup>2</sup>

**The prime objective** of the Program is to increase SME competitiveness, by setting up and encouraging partnership between the University and the business environment, based on the IT and Communications support and facilities.

At present, SMEs are in the forefront of Romania's economic development, by being the most dynamic economic factor, whose evolution is nevertheless and in most cases dependent upon an empiric kind of management, according to which science is substituted by willingness, by the entrepreneurs' intuition and/or innate abilities. More often than not the entrepreneurs are one and the same as the managers of these SMEs.

This level as well as the organization and management pattern is far from the **knowledge-based enterprise** model, successfully promoted by the prosperous current economy of the developed countries. The knowledge-

<sup>1</sup> Institute of National Statistics, *Statistic 2006, Cap 3. Labour market*

<sup>2</sup> Institute of National Statistics *Unemployment in the trimester III 2007*, Nr. 2 January 2008, Statistic Research on the labour in households (AMIGO)

based enterprise is small-sized; its main traits are: competitive advantage based on knowledge, high creativity, flexibility and dynam-

ic, as well as high learning capability, along with the ability to implement recent knowledge and by this to add value.

Professional Status	Employed population size (thousands of persons)
Employee	5921
Employer	154
Self-employed	1795
Working without salary in a family company	1267
Member of an agricultural company	10
Total	9147

It is mainly for these reasons that a Virtual Management Consultancy School for small and medium enterprises will assist the development of such type of enterprises, by this contributing to the latter's gaining long-term competitive advantage on both the internal and international market.

**The scope of the project** is to develop eLearning-type systems and services, aimed at disseminating knowledge both within the formal and informal framework, in order to increase the level of competence and knowledge with different socio-professional categories.

For managers it has become imperative that they be aware of the possible developments of the processes they manage, that they be able to anticipate the internal and external market trends, and that they adapt their strategies and policies to the societal requirements. The managers' role is to create an environment in which change is perceived as an opportunity, not as a threat.

Due to the current ever increasing demand for the decision-makers to be informed, it is imperative that the fundamentals of the decision-making processes become the responsibility of a knowledge-based, and not just information-based, infrastructure.

The current proposal encompasses research results from at least two distinct areas: IT & Communications and management. The combination of the two will result in solutions for both the education and human resources areas.

The Virtual Management Consultancy School for small and medium enterprises is an original continuous system for the SME personnel, by which virtual links between the

academic and business environments shall be set up. The main characteristics of the Virtual Management Consultancy School for small and medium enterprises are as follows:

- Encouragement of both the individual intellectual effort and team-work for the continuous training required by competent consultancy standards;
- Promotion of scientific research and professional development links with the SME business environment;
- Accomplishment of detailed theoretical approach and practical application in the computer-assisted management area;
- Involvement and enhancement of the professional-scientific resources as well as the teaching staff's creativity through cooperation and competition;
- Contribution to gapping the shortage of knowledge and abilities in designing, monitoring and implementing the SME restructuring and development with both national and international funding;
- Promotion of efficient professional development methods and techniques of the SME personnel on a permanent basis, in management and related domains (i.e., marketing, administration, human resources, etc.).

At the world-wide level, one can observe that there is a multitude of e-learning and web-based solutions in the field of entrepreneurial education. Certainly, these cannot be presented here in detail. Here are two examples: 1. *Stanford Technology Ventures Program (STVP) - Educators Corner*, an on-line archive with free access on educational resources in the entrepreneurial field, both for teachers and students. The mission of the project is to support and encourage faculties

from all over the world that teach entrepreneurial skills to future scientists and engineers, and also those that teach management and other scientific domain. The portal is developed by a very dynamic team of educators, entrepreneurs, engineers and designers, staff of Stanford Technology Ventures Program (STVP)<sup>3</sup>; 2. *The Office of Entrepreneurial Education*, established in 2002 as a branch of the Center for development of medium business plans in the state of New York. The office works with governmental organisations to create entrepreneurial education programmes designed for the New York education network and is financed by the U.S. Small Business Administration. One of the programmes set up by this center is designed for retired military personnel, *EntreSkills for Veterans (Entrepreneurial Skills for Veterans)*, designed for ex-military people. By means of this free web-based interactive programme they want to value the skills acquired throughout the army career in order to make the retired military entrepreneurs.

The project under discussion is based on pluridisciplinary research (i.e., management, marketing, education, computer science) meant to provide educational solutions and services in support of managers or other personnel categories.

Through its objectives as well as expected results, the project shall essentially contribute to the development of knowledge in the SME management-related domain.

The virtual education system is in itself an innovative concept, comprising eLearning applied psycho-pedagogy elements, cascading information and knowledge wherever and whenever necessary in keeping with the personal educational requirements. At the same time, this concept shall bring to the forefront a new perspective on education systems in the knowledge-based society, in which the core element is man along with his needs and expectations, and not the person who conveys information.

Moreover, the Virtual Management Consul-

tancy School for small and medium enterprises Program is of utmost importance due to its contribution to the Romanian higher education and scientific research development, in the sense that:

- it allows for the complementary training of the teaching staff in the new management, marketing and computer science areas;
- it provides for the non-institutional organizational framework allowing for the continuous improvement of intra-university cooperation forms;
- it initiates and promotes new teaching/learning techniques, i.e., information-based ones, by combining the classical "classroom-type" technique with the computer-assisted, distance learning one;
- it ensures competitive, European and worldwide-standard training, which provides the teaching staff with unlimited access to the scientific information exchange;
- it provides possibilities to carry out scientific research programs focused on the managerial improvement of SMEs.

The general objective of the program is to set up a pilot information center, which represents a virtual school for the continuous training of the SME personnel, in the area of management, marketing, computer science, business administration and other related areas.

The specific objectives are as follows:

- to run training and refreshment courses for the SME personnel, for the purpose of making the latter better adaptable to the ever-changing demands of the labor market;
- to prepare an elite teaching and research pool fully capable of participating in actions required by the economic reform and meeting the EU demands;
- to guide the professional development process towards the activities and domains where different analysis processes have revealed difficulties which impede upon carrying out Romania's long-lasting strategic development objectives, especially as far as the viable restructuring solutions for our country's business environment are concerned;
- to implement the world experience in organizing distance learning;

<sup>3</sup> <http://edcorner.stanford.edu>

- to increase scientific excellence and visibility of the consortium by disseminating the scientific results through sessions and/or participation in national and international technical-scientific events (e.g. designing posters, scientific articles and papers, setting up and updating web pages, presentation CDs, etc.), as well as through organizing its own scientific events;
- to develop and foster inter-university scientific relationships.

Beneficiaries of the project belong to different institutions: the academic environment, especially students from faculties that have programs on political and security studies, military science and intelligence, and sociology; research organisms and institutions in the targeted field; the personnel of ministries and organizations with responsibilities in the national security area; the Ministry of Education for the civic education in schools.

Starting from the 4th stage of the project, a campaign meant to promote the educational service shall be launched and opened gradually; it will offer the first on-line courses beginning with 2009, thus allowing access to the knowledge portal.

The research results shall be permanently published on a web page which shall have become operational by the end of stage 1.

We have identified three annual scientific conferences relevant for the eLearning field in Romania – one is organized by the Project Manager (E-learning and Educational Software) and has international recognition, whereas the others are conferences on management and education matters.

At the international level, we shall consider publishing papers in the volumes of prominent conferences.

On the other hand, all accomplishments shall be disseminated among the working groups for Advanced Distributed Learning within NATO and the P4P Consortium and shall be published through the external partners' portals and web pages.

It is our intention to publish at least three volumes with the most relevant accomplishments in the fields of management, education and eLearning, and, at the end of stage 5, we

shall release a book which shall emphasize the best practices and case studies.

Dissemination and turning into account refers mainly to:

- Publishing research and application results in specialized magazines and journals;
- Publishing course books, as well as a glossary of project management;
- Organizing both national and international workshops and conferences on the project topic;
- Disseminating results by means of web pages and partners' web sites;
- Disseminating knowledge within project management training programs, in which project partners are involved.

The program has an utmost social and economic impact, insofar as:

- It opens new perspectives to approach SMEs in our country, within the general computer-assisted development of society, so that the former become genuine knowledge-based enterprises;
- Knowledge presupposes information, and an efficient manager must be well-informed, able to perceive in real time the sense and nature of change, and to re-orientate both himself and the enterprise at the faintest sign given by the market, but not in any manner;
- The information society of the future cannot be conceived if generalized computer literacy has not been achieved in each and every activity;
- The Virtual Management Consultancy School for small and medium enterprises Program shall train the teaching staff who is supposed to have a major contribution to the development of different socio-professional categories unto the multiple application of computer science and technology to many areas, among which the continuous training in the virtual environment.

## References

- 1.\*\*\* - Institute of National Statistics, Statistic 2006, Cap 3. Labor market;
- 2.\*\*\* - Institute of National Statistics *Unemployment in the trimester III 2007*, Nr. 2 January 2008, Statistic Research on the labor in households (AMIGO);

3.\*\*\* - <http://edcorner.stanford.edu>