

## Learning for the Digital Age...

The process of digitalisation is driving all areas of industry and commerce and this article will consider the impact on training in the broadest sense. It will consider the strategic focus of this rapid change and use as exemplars, a range of different projects, two of which are funded through the programmes of the European Commission. The EU has published the strategy referred to as *Digital Europe* in 2021 which advocates *'the development of a high-performing digital education ecosystem, by building capacity and understanding of how to exploit the opportunities offered by digital technologies for teaching and learning at all levels and for all sectors'*.



Projects Beyond Borders (PBB) Ltd in the UK have been involved in two European cooperation partnerships which allow organisations to increase the quality and relevance of their activities, to develop and reinforce their networks of partners, and to increase their capacity to operate through exchanging or developing new practices and methods.

The related concept of Digital Social Innovation is also a key driver. This is a type of social and collaborative innovation in which innovators, users and communities collaborate using digital technologies to co-create knowledge and solutions for a wide range of social needs. The DSI Manifesto of 2017, <https://www.dsimanifesto.eu/about/index.html> has begun to answer the question of what is meant by DSI by compiling a succinct list of the core values: These are openness and transparency; democracy and decentralisation; experimentation and adoption of digital skills, multi-disciplinarity and sustainability.

Projects and organisations involved in DSI are still relatively poorly connected to each other. There is a pressing need to grow strong networks within and across countries and regions to boost collaboration and knowledge sharing. Digital technologies and social communities do not seem to naturally link together in strengthening social innovation. Technology is often believed to alienate individuals while social engagement is based on shared knowledge and participatory practices. However, 'digital social innovators' are entrepreneurs, groups, services, and organisations realising social innovation by means of technology tools and developing digital solutions to social challenges. According to Francesca Bria and Fabrizio Sestini writing in the report commissioned by the European Commission, *Growing a digital social innovation ecosystem for Europe in 2020*, the challenge is to exploit the collaborative power of networks (networks of people, of knowledge, and connected things) to harness the collective intelligence of communities in order to tackle social challenges.

PBB is involved in two networked digital projects, both with a social objective. The **Third Way** (T3W) is an Erasmus Plus KA2 project with partners from across Europe that started in 2019. It was developed to improve communication and knowledge sharing between the vocational and higher education sector and social enterprises (the so-called third sector). At the heart of the project proposal is the development of an on-line training pathway for anyone wishing to become a social entrepreneur or work within a social enterprise.



The training devised will be available in digital form via the web site <https://thethirdway.eu>. The project supports the development of new pathways through a process of knowledge sharing and communication. While across Europe more and more young people are turning to social enterprises, the T3W partnership is keen to recognise this and support and inform their choices and lead them towards this 'Third Way' of doing business.

The training programme has been developed after an on-line survey of social enterprises that had 200 plus respondents and involved two face-to-face focus groups. It includes training modules identified by social entrepreneurs, for social entrepreneurs, such as leadership, funding & tendering, online marketing, amongst others. The training pathway is available freely to anyone who wishes to access and register on the above web site.



Another similar European project, **Entre-MWB** focuses on the real and compelling issue of supporting the mental well-being (MWB) of entrepreneurs. Recent research and publications have publicised the relationship

between entrepreneurship and mental illness in a range of forms. This was brought to wider international attention by a range of presentations to the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos in 2019. Entrepreneurs provide economic benefit to any society in which they operate yet little consideration has been given to their mental well-being in an increasingly challenging business environment. According to a study presented at Davos 2019, approximately one half of all entrepreneurs suffer from at least one form of mental health condition during their lifetimes.

The Entre-MWB project partners have undertaken an online survey that received over 300 respondents from European enterprises and online focus groups were held that included 30 participants from different forms of enterprise. Results confirm the need for supportive and informal professional networks; training and awareness-raising materials that deal with time management, financial management and mental health support.

Our challenge as a project team is to truly understand the challenges of entrepreneurs and the drives and values of entrepreneurs that differentiate them from other members of the workforce. All entrepreneurs are different, hence, in order to help them, it is necessary to offer a variety of online tools to meet the different

needs of the entrepreneur. When tools for training are developed, it is necessary to take into consideration elements such as flexibility and 24-7 access. With all kinds of entrepreneurs, with individual needs at different times, the materials that are to be developed would not be a 'one size fits all' solution. The online tools will contain self-help options plus tools for self-diagnosis and support. You can keep up with this project via the web site <https://entremwb.eu/>.

Projects beyond Borders works closely with Businet, a network of over 120 European universities to develop the concept of a **Skills Campus**, with the broad aim of developing the digital skills of educators, including the technical and instructional design skills necessary to produce high-quality forms of online learning. In addition, PBB has created its own learning academy and learning hub which makes available a wide range of online learning for easy and flexible access! The training available includes formal UK qualifications in business, management, and health care, plus a range of professional development options.



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An essential outcome of all these projects is knowledge sharing and the potential for access to a broad range of skills and knowledge linked to digital educational design and innovation. PBB are keen to develop the skills to support green and digital transformations, to foster entrepreneurial and transversal skills, skills for life and the progression towards micro-credentials - all strategic priorities incorporated within the vision of a 'Digital Europe'. We are keen to contact organisations sharing our drive towards digitalisation and digital social innovation. We are contactable via <https://projectsbeyondborders.com>.

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