

Developing competences of micro-entrepreneurs for agility and resilience

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Background

Micro-enterprises (i.e. enterprises with less than 10 employees) form a vast majority of Finnish enterprises with a share of 93% of all companies (Kerttu Saalasti Institute 2021). Due to their nature as being entrepreneur-driven, small in size and possessing limited resources, micro-enterprises often have weaker business capabilities than larger companies (Lin Y-C et al. 2020). This can be reflected in the micro-enterprises' ability to detect and respond to various changes taking place in their business environment. Lately, changes such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine have put an immense strain on micro-enterprises and the entrepreneurs, on whose shoulders the need to cope with various aspects of business management rest on.

Materials and methods

Agile resilience coaching program project funded by the European Social Fund aimed at developing change management capabilities in micro-enterprises. The project was carried out in collaboration of university researchers in the field of micro-enterprise research and industrial engineering and management and regional business service organisations in Northern Ostrobothnia, Finland. Resilience coaching was realised through collaborative development, where competences of micro-entrepreneurs were developed with the aid of a current-state analysis, course provision, participatory workshops, coaching by business service professionals and a plan for change management for the enterprise.

The current-state analysis of participating enterprises was carried out utilising a self-evaluation form constructed in the project. The course provision made available for the micro-entrepreneurs consisted of 27 microcourses (i.e. courses that takes approximately 2 hours to complete) with themes focusing on e.g. business development, productisation and growth, well-being at work and work community skills. The courses could be taken independent of time and place through a digital platform. Workshops were provided for project participants on themes including risk management, video production and well-being at work. Individual coaching meetings with business service professionals included working with themes based on the needs of the individual micro-entrepreneur. The feedback from the participants was gathered throughout the project and utilised by the project team making the process of collaborative development iterative in nature.

Results

A total of 106 enterprises participated in the coaching activities provided by the project. From these enterprises 86 entrepreneurs participated on at least some microcourses. The project resulted in a provision of tools to support change management capabilities of micro-enterprises in the form of a current-state analysis form, microcourses and a fill-in-tool for the construction of strategy for micro-enterprises. These tools can be further utilised by the regional business service organisations in their work with micro-enterprises.

Conclusions

Agile resilience coaching program project aimed to strengthen the ability of micro-enterprises to respond to disruptions and changes in their business environment. Additionally, the program provided new solutions for regional business service organisations to support micro-enterprises in their area.

References

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