COOP-IN
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IO1:
APPLIED SOCIAL INNOVATION TRAINING COURSE DEVELOPMENT

NEEDS ANALYSIS
NATIONAL RESEARCH REPORT: IRELAND

PRODUCED BY:
MEATH PARTNERSHIP

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1. INTRODUCTION

What is COOP-IN?

The overall aim of COOP-IN is to raise awareness of the opportunities and challenges in implementing social innovation at work by developing a social innovation training kit including a digital education game, a self-assessment tool and other learning materials.

In so doing, the project will work with vocational education trainers, business support agencies, mentors and coaches and networking organisations to encourage engagement with social innovation and facilitate use of resources to assist small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in moving from idea to action in introducing social innovation.   The project consists of seven partner organisations from the UK, Cyprus, Ireland, Hungary, Portugal and Spain.

Why is COOP-IN needed?

In 1985, Peter Drucker noted that '*Today businesses, especially the large ones, simply will not survive in this period of rapid change and innovation unless they acquire entrepreneurial competence* (Drucker, 1985, p. 132). Thirty years on, many commentators would agree that this quote is still highly relevant today – the only thing that has changed is the rate of change.

This reflects the fundamental shifts which we are witnessing in economies, such as the UK, as a result of the economic recession of 2008/2009, demographic changes, technological developments and socio-cultural shifts. For example, demographic change is leading to greater age and cultural diversity within the workforce of the majority of businesses. For the first time, businesses will have staff from four different generations who have different motivations, values and expectations around working patterns and management and leadership styles. People are having to work longer and cope with personal change, such as ageing, whilst at work rather than during retirement. In turn, this creates a set of different learning and skills development needs and generates the need for innovative responses from businesses themselves, external providers of education and training and governments.

As a result, there is a growing interest in the concept of social innovation. This can be defined as '*new strategies, concepts and ideas that businesses and organisations can introduce to meet the social needs of different internal and external stakeholders*'. However, the available evidence base suggests that there are a number of "need to know's" in navigating the journey from idea to action in implementing social innovations at work.

Why a needs analysis?

COOP-IN will develop a digital education game, a set of learning materials and a self-assessment tool to assist businesses and organisations in introducing and managing social innovations at work. To ensure that these outcomes are demand-led, a needs analysis will be undertaken in each partner country. This report summarises the key outcomes to emerge from the needs analysis undertaken in Ireland.

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2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

To complete the training needs analysis process for the COOP-IN project, Meath Partnership undertook a variety of methods. Firstly, to reach the number of 30 responses, an online survey was designed and widely disseminated to our local members of the Social Enterprise Network and the Elevation Business Network, both of which Meath Partnership coordinates on a local level in County Meath. Through these contacts, Meath Partnership disseminated the questionnaire through email to over 50 local businesses and social enterprises. To encourage our contacts to take part in the training needs analysis, we also undertook a round follow-up calls with these enterprises to explain the aims and objectives of the project to them and to enlist their support with our research. At this point, we understood that the term 'social innovation' was not widely understood among business owners and managers in these networks. When speaking to enterprises which are active in this field of social innovation, even still representatives of these businesses did not classify their business in these terms. As such, there was some reluctance from businesses to participate in this research process as they did not see how their input would yield quality findings that could positively impact the development of the COOP-IN project.

To ensure that we could reach the target number of 30 for this needs analysis exercise, it was decided that we would amend and simplify some of the language in the TNA survey and that instead of conducting this online, we would meet with local businesses face-to-face to promote the project and to invite them to participate in this research. In total, 8 businesses were met on a one-to-one basis and all 8 were supported to completed the needs analysis survey. A further 16 businesses also completed the survey online and some with support through telephone interviews, completed the survey virtually. In total, the COOP-IN training needs analysis was conducted with 24 businesses and social enterprises in County Meath.

These activities were completed in January and February 2018, and the following report presents the key findings from the needs analysis process in Ireland.

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3. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Characteristics of the respondents

Of the 24 businesses and local social enterprises which took part in the COOP-IN TNA process in Ireland, all businesses were operating within County Meath. Due to the nature of the business networks who were approached to take part in this needs analysis exercise, the majority of respondents worked in the areas of food production, food distribution, agri-tourism and eco-tourism. These businesses were all clients of Meath Partnership and work in niche economic sectors which are typically supported through LEADER funding. Other businesses who took part in this survey included local community and sports facilities which have a role in social enterprise through project's they run for local communities. The remaining 9 businesses were active in the hospitality sector (3), business support agency (3), traditional crafts (1) home improvement (1) and dog boarding (1).

The majority of businesses who took part in this needs analysis process were micro-enterprises with 14 out of all 24 (58.3%) employing between 1 and 5 individuals on a full-time basis. 5 businesses (20.8%) had between 11 and 25 employees; 3 businesses (12.5%) had between 26 and 49 employees and the remaining 2 businesses (8.3%) had between 6 and 10 full time employees. None of the businesses who participated in this needs analysis study employed in excess of 50 full-time employees.

When asked to determine the length of time that their business has been in operation; the majority of respondents 15 businesses (62.5%) have been in business for more than 25 years, 6 businesses (25%) have been in business for more between 4 and 10 years and the remaining 3 businesses (12.5%) have been in operation for between 1 and 3 years.

3.2 What is social innovation

In the next part of the training needs analysis, businesses were asked to offer a definition of what they understood by the term 'social innovation'. During the process of conducting this research, we received very limited responses to this question. When we spoke directly with businesses, we learned that they were unsure of what this term meant in relation to business. Some mentioned projects such as the 'Food Cloud' in Ireland; where local food producers, shops and restaurants donate their waste food at the end of each day to a volunteer organisation who then distribute this food to local homeless charities and soup kitchens. This was one example of how these businesses understood the term. Other responses focused on local agri-tourism and eco-tourism businesses which offer walking tours, bicycle hire or use eco-friendly cleaning and sanitary products to guests staying in their accommodation. The thinking behind these examples is that by having a low environmental impact, this contributes to the well-being of all communities and that if enough is invested in this area of tourism, there could be widespread positive impact on the world. However the discrepancies in these responses show a lack of certainty in what is meant by this term. The social enterprises who took part in this needs analysis defined 'social innovation' as any economic activity or community project which has a 'positive social impact' on the community they are working in.

Next respondents were asked to review a list of terms and to select the ones that they thought most related to 'social innovation'. Respondents were asked to select the top 5 terms of the list of 25. Through analysing the responses gathered, we can determine that local businesses determined 'creativity' to be the most appropriate terms associated with 'social innovation'. 15 out of 24 respondents (62.5%) chose 'creativity' as the most appropriate attribute for social innovation. The next most popular was 'sustainability' with 13 out of 24 respondents (54.1%) ranking this as one of the top five terms associated with social innovation. The term 'new networks and relationships' was also chosen by 13 out of 24 respondents (54.1%). This was followed by 'meets a social need', ''develops capabilities and assets' and 'better use of assets and resources'; all of which were chosen as the top 5 terms associated with social innovation by 9 individuals, or 37.5% of respondents.

As such, from an analysis of the responses to this question, we can say that the terms which businesses most associate with social innovation are ranked and follows:
- Creativity
- Sustainability and New networks and relationships
- Meet a social need, Develops capabilities and assets' and 'better use of assets and resources'.

To gain a further insight into local business' understanding of the term 'social innovation', business owners and managers were next asked to review a list of statements and to choose which ones they agreed most with on a scale of 1 to 4 where 1 represented that they 'totally disagreed' with the statement and 4 represents that they 'fully agreed' with the statement. From an analysis of the responses to this question, we can see that the statement which Irish businesses agreed most with is "collaboration increases the potential for social innovation' which received a score of 3 or 4 from 17 out of all 24 businesses (70.8%) who participated in this needs analysis. The next most chosen statement which received a score of 3 or 4 from 16 out of 24 businesses (66%) was: 'there is a distinction between invention and innovation'. The statements which local businesses agreed the least with, where a score of 1 or 2 was attributed to the statement by those who were surveyed include:
- 'social innovations are more effective than economic-driven innovations': 13 businesses or 54.1% of respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed with this statement.
- 'social innovations are just doing the same thing but in a slightly new way': 11 respondents of 48.3% strongly disagreed or disagreed with this statement.
- 'social innovations are developed with and by users': 41.6% or 10 of all businesses who participated in this needs analysis process either strongly disagreed or disagreed with this statement.

3.3 Social innovation in businesses and organisations: Processes and practices
In the next phase of conducting the COOP-IN training needs analysis, business owners and managers were asked to reflect on their own business and to discuss how it is performing in terms of 'social innovation' and what scope they think their business has to further develop in their field of 'social innovation'.

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As part of this section of the needs analysis businesses were first asked to review a list of areas where their business could further develop its capacity for 'social innovation' and to rank on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 represented minimal scope and 4 represents good scope for their business in this field. This list included the following areas where 'social innovation' can be improved:

- New products
- New services
- New business processes
- New markets
- New platforms
- New organisation and legal structures
- New business models.

Business owners and managers evaluated each of these aspects in relation to their own business and those which were determined to have the most scope for enhancing their 'social innovation' included:

- 'New services': this received a score of 3 or 4 from 18 of the 24 businesses who participated or 75% of all respondents. This aspect received a higher weighted average as 10 respondents provided a score of 4 to 'new services', while the remaining 8 respondents provided a score of 3 to this aspect of this business.
- 'New platforms': this also received a score of 3 or 4 from 18 out of the 24 businesses surveyed which also equates to 75% of all responses; however as 13 business rated this aspect as a 3 and only 5 businesses rated it as a 4, this aspect of their business received a lower weighted average than the first.
- 'New business processes': this received a score of 3 or 4 by 15 of the 24 businesses who took part in the needs analysis or 62.5% of all responses.
- 'New business models': this received the next highest score of 3 or 4 with 14 businesses rating this as an area where their company could further develop their 'social innovation'. This totalled 58.3% of all responses.

This list of four aspects were the most popular areas where businesses who took part in the COOP-IN needs analysis felt there was significant scope within their business to develop its 'social innovation'. As such, these should be borne in mind when partners are developing resources and supports for business in relation to 'social innovation'.

Next participants were asked to review the key stages in the 'social innovation process' and to stated which areas their business is most and least effective in managing each stage. Business owners and managers were asked to rank the level of their business' effectiveness on a scale of 1 to 4 where 1 represents that their business is least effective at a given stage in the 'social innovation process' and 4 represents that their business is most effective at that stage in the process. The 'social innovation process' involves the following key stages:

- Prompts (i.e. highlighting the need for social innovation)

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- Proposals (i.e. developing ideas for social innovation)
- Prototyping (i.e. testing of ideas in practice)
- Sustaining (i.e. embedding ideas in practice)
- Scaling (i.e. growing and spreading social innovations)
- Changing (i.e. altering systems and processes with others)

Businesses were invited to review all stages in this process. Some feedback received at this point in the needs analysis was that while business owners and managers felt that their businesses were very competent in managing all stages in this process in the general operation and management of their company; they were unsure of how to rate their business in these key stages relating them to the topic of 'social innovation' as the majority of businesses who were surveyed did not think that see their companies as having a role in this field. Despite this feedback, businesses took part in this exercise and the provided the following rating of their business' performance under each key stage in the 'social innovation process':

- Prompts: 7 out of 24 business (29.1%) rated that their company was 'effective' or 'very effective' in managing this stage in the social innovation process.
- Proposals: 5 business (20.8%) rated their company as 'effective' or 'very effective' in the proposals phase of this process.
- Prototyping: 9 out of 24 businesses (37.5%) stated that their company was 'effective' or 'very effective' at prototyping.
- Sustaining: 8 out of all 24 respondents (33%) rated their business performance as being 'effective' or 'very effective' at this stage of the social innovation process.
- Scaling: 7 business (29.1%) rated their performance at the scaling stage as being 'effective' or 'very effective'.
- Changing: 6 businesses (25%) out of all 24 respondents stated that their business was 'effective' or 'very effective' at changing for social innovation.

As such, from an analysis of the findings to this question, we can deduce that the key stage of the 'social innovation process' where businesses that were surveyed stated that they were least effective was 'Proposals', the second stage in the process. As such, partners should use this information when developing COOP-IN resources to provide additional support to businesses in successfully managing their companies through this phase of the process.

In a follow-up question, businesses were next asked to identify the barriers that impact on their company's ability to implement 'social innovation' from a pre-determined list of barriers. In total, businesses were asked to review a list of 10 barriers and to rate those which had the most impact on their business in relation to implementing 'social innovation'.

Again this rating was conducted on a scale of 1 to 4 where 1 represented no barrier and 4 represented a significant barrier for their business. From the prescribed list of barriers, those which most negatively impacted on local businesses surveyed included:

- 'Access to finance': 87.5% of businesses or 21 out of 24 businesses surveyed stated that access to finance represented a 'significant barrier' to their business implementing 'social innovation' by providing a rating of 3 or 4.
- 'Access to appropriate skills in the business': 83% or 20 out of all 24 businesses surveyed agreed that their business lacked the appropriate skills to implement 'social innovation'.
- 'Lack of external business and skills support': 62.5% or 15 out of 24 businesses surveyed identified a lack of external support as a barrier for their company to implement 'social innovation'.
- 'Time management': 58.3% or 14 businesses who took part in the needs analysis rated 'time management' as a significant barrier to their companies implementing 'social innovation'.
- 'Lack of supportive government regulations and legislation': Lastly, 50% or 12 out of the 24 business surveyed highlighted a lack of supportive government regulation and legislation as a significant barrier to their business adopting 'social innovation'.

All of the barriers identified by our research study group received a ranking of 3 or 4 on the Likert scale provided by a majority of the businesses surveyed.

In the final question in this section, business owners and managers were asked once again to reflect on their business and to estimate how often they review the performance of their business in relation to its 'social innovation process'. To this question, 66% of respondents or 16 out of all businesses surveyed stated that they 'never' review their business' performance in relation to 'social innovation'. As has been previously stated, this high number of businesses who do not review this process is most likely influenced by the fact that many businesses who took part in this survey do not operate within the field of 'social innovation' as part of their business model. A further 4 businesses or 16.6% of survey respondents answered that they review their process on an annual basis. Of the remaining 4 businesses, 2 stated that they review this process on a bi-annual basis, 1 reviewed on a monthly basis and 1 businesses stated that they reviewed this process 'all of the time'.

When asked to provide details of the methods these businesses use in their review process, responses included:
- 'Meeting with board of directors.'
- Reviewing of business targets; however this is not done in a sustainable manner and they are not engrained into our day to day work.'
- 'Search for innovation in actions decided on by the company.'

These were the only responses that were received to this question and they were attained through the face-to-face implementation of this needs analysis survey. From a review of the responses received, and also the number of businesses who skipped this question in the online survey, we can deduce that businesses either did not understand the question accurately or alternatively that they do not implement any such methods to review the performance of their business in relation to 'social innovation'. Therefore, it would be

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useful if the COOP-IN project would address this need in particular, by proposing useful and sustainable methods that businesses could use to assess their performance in this field.

3.4   Social innovation: Learning and skills development

In the final stage of the COOP-IN training needs analysis, businesses were asked specific questions which related to their training needs and preferences on the topic of 'social innovation'. The aim of this section is to extrapolate needs, recommendations and preferences which can be addressed through the COOP-IN learning resources to be developed.

As such, the first question in this section of the training needs analysis asked businesses to review a list of 15 skills and to rate on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 is not important and 4 is very important, the skills and attributes that they think are the most important for managing the social innovation process. At the initial stage of implementing this training needs analysis process in Ireland, this question proved difficult for businesses to answer as they did not fully understand some of the terms that were listed as skills. To overcome this barrier to business' participation in the needs analysis process, some of the terms in this question were replaced. For example, 'guerrilla skills' was replaced with 'creative marketing' and 'efficacy' was replaced with 'self-confidence'. These terms were chosen as replacements as these are how the skills were best interpreted by our research team.

The results that were collated to this question show a lack of certainty among our test group. The majority of the businesses who were surveyed tended to choose a rating of 2 or 3 for all skills, and as such, there were only minimal differences in how each of the 15 skills were rated. The following list provides an overview of how these skills were rated. For the purpose of this question, as no clear and defined results can be extrapolated, the results are presented using a weighted average of the responses for each skill. The results have been arranged so that those skills with the highest weighted average are presented first, as follows:

- 'Perseverance' - score of 3.5 out of 5.
- 'Resilience" - score of 3.38 out of 5.
- 'Creative problem solving' - score of 3.38 out of 5.
- 'Active listening' - score of 3.25 out of 5.
- 'Opportunity recognition' - score of 3.13 out of 5.
- 'Resource leveraging' - score of 3.13 out of 5.
- 'Self-confidence' - score of 3.13 out of 5.
- 'Learning through doing' - score of 3 out of 5.
- 'Creative marketing' - score of 3 out of 5.
- 'Value creation' - score of 3 out fo 5.
- 'Being focused yet adaptable' - score of 2.88 out of 5.
- 'Opportunity assessment' - score of 2.88 out of 5.
- 'Coping with uncertainty and ambiguity' - score of 2.88 out of 5.
- 'Building and maintaining networks' - score of 2.88 out of 5.

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- 'Risk management' - score of 2.75 out of 5.

From a review of the weighted average score provided above, we can see that there were no clear preferences for certain skills, as no skill was rated as being above a weighted average score of 4, and no skill was rated as being below a weighted average score of 2 or less. Our interpretation of these findings is that the topic of 'social innovation' and what skills are required to manage this process are largely unknown among the businesses who were surveyed in Ireland and that further effort is required to disseminate this topic to businesses and to up-skill them to implement this process in their companies.

Next businesses were asked to rate their preferred format of training from a prescribed list of training methods. This rating was conducted on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 represents no interest in the particular training method and 4 represents a strong interest in that method. In response to this question, businesses in Ireland were most interested in the following training formats:
- Experience exchange with other businesses and/or organisations: 79.1% or 19 out of all 24 businesses surveyed expressed a preference (with a rating of 3 or 4) for this training format.
- 'Attending events and seminars': 62.5% or 15 out of all 24 businesses surveyed showed a preference for attending events and seminars to engage in training by rating it a 3 or 4 on the likert scale provided.
- 'Attending face-to-face training courses': 54.1% or 13 businesses stated that they had a preference for attending face-to-face training courses to engage in training.

Of the list of training formats provided in this question, these were the only 3 which received a majority (50% or more) of businesses who stated a preference for this method. COOP-IN project partners should be mindful of these preferences when designing the implementation of learning resources and as such, training implementation in Ireland should comprise short face-to-face training sessions in the format of 'hot topic' seminars which focus on 'social innovation', with an element of networking and skill-swapping built in to each session where businesses can meet together and exchange experiences.

Next businesses were asked review a list of 8 topics that the COOP-IN project team have selected as the most pertinent topics for training on 'social innovation' and to rate these topics on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 represents that businesses feel this topic is 'not important' in such a programme and 4 represents that the topic is 'very important'. Each of the skills were rated, and using the weighted average score for each topic, the following is a list of which skills were deemed to be most important in descending order of preference:
- Creativity - weighted average score of 3.25 out of 5.
- Collaboration management - weighted average of 3.13 out of 5.
- The social economy - weighted average score of 3 out of 5.
- Networks and relationships - weighted average score of 3 out of 5.
- Open innovation (i.e. sharing information with other competitors to develop innovation) - weighted average of 2.88 out of 5.

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- Social entrepreneurship - weighted average score of 2.86 out of 5.
- Diversity management - weighted average score of 2.75 out of 5.
- Social responsibility - weighted average score of 2.63 out of 5.

Finally, when asked if they were aware of the European Innovation Management Standard on Collaboration Management (CEN/TS 16555-5), the overwhelming majority of respondents stated that they had not heard of this European Standard with 95.8% or 23 out of 24 businesses stating that they had not heard of this standard. The one business that had heard of this standard is a local business support agency that operates with European companies which can explain why this business is aware of this standard. The results of this question in particular highlight the need for extensive dissemination of the topic of 'social innovation' among local businesses in Ireland.

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4. SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

In total in Ireland, 24 businesses were engaged to complete the training needs analysis study to inform the future development of the COOP-IN project. These training needs surveys were completed with 24 business owners and/or managers operating in County Meath through face-to-face and telephone interviews and also online through online questionnaires. These businesses worked across a range of industries; but were representative of the business community in County Meath as they were predominately from the most active economic sectors in County Meath, i.e. hospitality, tourism, agriculture and food production and distribution. These activities were completed in January and February 2018.

From our experience of supporting businesses to complete this survey, we can deduce that the topic of 'social innovation' is not very well known among those businesses who participated in this TNA survey. Even for this businesses who work within the remit of 'social innovation' in that they engage in activities which have a positive social outcome or impact, there was little understanding of the terminology used in this survey, the 'social impact process' which was briefly outlined in the survey or the training topics proposed. Additionally, the general feedback from businesses was that this survey was at times complicated and difficult to complete. As such, in order to successfully implement the survey with local businesses in Ireland, additional work was undertaken to support their involvement; such as re-wording some of the survey questions, providing support by completing the survey face-to-face with businesses and undertaking follow-up calls with local enterprises to ensure their participation. The findings from this process have led us to deduce that significant effort is required to disseminate the topic of this project with the local business community in Meath and to make local businesses aware of how they can adapt their business processes to be more socially innovative.

Through the process of conducting this TNA, we have learned that business owners most associate the following terms with their understanding of 'social innovation': creativity; sustainability; new networks and relationships; meet a social need; develops capabilities and assets and better use of assets and resources. From this question, we have learned that when we are disseminating the topic of 'social innovation' to local businesses in Meath, we should centre our dissemination message around these key terms, while also highlighting the benefits to their individual businesses.

Through the findings of the needs analysis, we have also learned that local businesses identify the following aspects of their business as those which are most conducive to adopting 'social innovation' processes: new services; new platforms; new business processes and new business models. As a follow-up to this question, when businesses were asked to rate their business' performance at all key stages of the 'social innovation process' we learned that the key stage of the 'social innovation process' where businesses stated they were least effective was 'Proposals', the second stage in the process. As such, partners should use this information when developing COOP-IN resources to provide additional

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support to businesses in successfully managing their companies through this phase of the process.

In the final stage of the COOP-IN training needs analysis, businesses were asked specific questions which related to their training needs and preferences on the topic of 'social innovation'. The aim of this section is to extrapolate needs, recommendations and preferences which can be addressed through the COOP-IN learning resources to be developed. Firstly, businesses were asked to review a list of 15 skills and to rate on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 is not important and 4 is very important, the skills and attributes that are most important for managing the social innovation process. We see from the results to this question that there was a lack of certainty among businesses as to which skills were most important. This is apparent as the majority of the businesses who were surveyed tended to choose a rating of 2 or 3 for all skills, and as such, there were only minimal differences in how each of the 15 skills were rated. For the purpose of this question, as no clear and defined results can be extrapolated, the results were presented above using a weighted average of the responses for each skill. From this analysis, the top 4 skills which businesses felt were most relevant to managing the 'social innovation process' include: perseverance; resilience; creative problem solving and active listening.

Through this training needs analysis process, we also learned that businesses in Ireland were most interested in the following training formats: experience exchange with other businesses and/or organisations; attending events and seminars and attending face-to-face training courses. As such, training implementation in Ireland should comprise short face-to-face training sessions in the format of 'hot topic' seminars which focus on 'social innovation', with an element of networking and skill-swapping built in to each session where businesses can meet together and exchange experiences.

Lastly, businesses were asked to select what they considered to be the most pertinent topics for training on 'social innovation' from a prescribed list of skills developed by the COOP-IN partners. The aim of this question is to influence the topics to be addressed by the COOP-IN learning materials to be developed. Each of the skills were rated, and those skills which were deemed to be most important in descending order of preference include: creativity, collaboration management; the social economy and networks and relationships.

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REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

As this was a field-research exercise, no references or resources were used to inform this research report.