

POSITION PAPER : Priorities for better EU & Member States policy-making and support programmes to raise awareness about change of ownership among business owners

Introduction

Transfer of SMEs is a challenge in Europe. According to the EU Commission, 450.000 enterprises, representing 2 million jobs are transferred yearly in Europe. According to Transeo, the EU Association for SME Transfer, one of the biggest challenges towards more successful SME transfers in Europe is to efficiently raise awareness about business transfer among business owners/potential sellers. All European countries face the same difficulties in making business owners really aware of the need to prepare, in time, for the change of ownership, as pointed out by the EU Commission, in its 2006 Communication, in the Small Business Act & its Review, in the Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan and in the "2013 Study on Evaluation of the Implementation of the 2006 Commission Communication on Business Transfers".

In line with the Commission work, Transeo is convinced of the priority of improving awareness among potential sellers, because it is the best way to prepare successful transfers. It is also important to raise awareness about takeover entrepreneurship among potential buyers, it is essential to develop powerful SMEs through innovation, development of new products, new services, new markets. Creation of value after the takeover is a positive result of a well prepared transfer.

Member States are now expected to implement awareness-raising actions based on the good practices observed in other countries. One of the basic activities of Transeo is to identify and to exchange good practices in order to improve SME transfers in Europe. In 2013 and 2014, Transeo Members have worked to identify the recommendations and concrete good practices towards more efficiency in the awareness-raising programmes.

Policy-making priorities to raise awareness more efficiently among business owners

In order to be able to implement efficient awareness-raising actions, there should be first and foremost political will, but also a business transfer-friendly framework into place and the corresponding funding to finance the business transfer policy, support organizations and programmes. Here are the Transeo recommendations regarding policy-making:

- ✓ Coordination of awareness-raising activities of Member States at the EU level
- ✓ EU portal for business transfer for business owners & contact point at Member state level for business owners
- ✓ Finance national and regional communication/awareness-raising campaigns

- ✔ Promote academic research
- ✔ Develop partnerships with the private sector
- ✔ Monitor the progress of the improvement actions taken by Member States
- ✔ Central coordinating organization (regional/national level) : one-stop shops
- ✔ Build a network of recognized professionals in business transfer
- ✔ Trustworthy host organization to coordinate/connect with matching platforms
- ✔ Subsidies to lower the cost of advisory services
- ✔ Label mentor associations to support potential sellers

It is important to note that the Transeo recommendations regarding awareness-raising of business owners should be adapted to the reality of each region/country and tailor-made to the mindset of their business owners. A one-size-fits-all policy within the EU 28 will not work. Indeed, the factors that influence the owner-manager's decision to transfer the company differ from one region to another.

Recommendations to implement efficient awareness-raising actions

In order to propose precise recommendations for the "practices", the awareness-raising process is split into 5 phases: identifying the potential sellers, catching their attention, preparing their mind, preparing their business for sale and getting started.

AWARENESS-RAISING PHASES & RECOMMENDATIONS	
IDENTIFY	Select appropriate potential sellers (business owners) through databases & implement a communication strategy/plan
	Establish partnerships to better reach business owners
CATCH ATTENTION	Define a reference organization (at regional or national level) to coordinate the communication towards business owners
	Establish partnerships, define the relay organizations and partners who will implement the communication plan with the reference organization
	Define the communication strategy, in order to reach your targets
	Define the communication plan and choose the communication tools to be used: website, events (workshops, trainings, roundtables, with peer testimonials, attracting entrepreneurs including potential sellers), documentation (guides, booklets, ...), on-line tools, media, phone calls, meetings, ...
	Define the content of the communication tools
	At national level or regional level, organize communication campaigns to go proactively to entrepreneurs/potential sellers
PREPARE THE MIND	Organize events such as workshops, trainings, roundtables, ...
	Develop on-line self-assessment tools/diagnosis tools
	Promote practical guides on business transfer
	Promote the existing support programmes for business owners interested to deepen the reflection about business transfer
PREPARE BUSINESS FOR SALE	Organize events to provide information
	Encourage business owners to seek information (guides)
	Encourage business owners to analyze their company in the perspective of a transfer to a new owner (diagnostics & support programmes)
GET STARTED	Promote national or regional support programmes
	Organize professional and technical seminars, with success stories, testimonies
	Organize a follow-up of potential sellers

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