

Special Issue Call for Papers
Learning in SMEs in a time of Volatility and Disruption
Submission Deadline 31st January 2025

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Although generating over 50% of employment and approximately 50% of turnover globally, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) continue to face challenges regarding disruption, continuity and reinvention. Learning, particularly in volatile times, is increasingly important in enabling SMEs to overcome such challenges (Li, Ghosh, and Nachmias, 2020). However, learning in SMEs is much more complex than in larger organisations due to factors such as lack of homogeneity, restricted resources and varying objectives (Nolan, Garavan and Lynch, 2020). Knowledge and empirical evidence concerning the nature of learning and how, where and when it occurs in SMEs remains scant, especially with respect to learning in times of disruption. This Special Issue (SI) will address this gap. Specifically, building on the UFHRD 2024 Learning in SMEs conference stream, the proposed SI will advance the conceptual understanding and increase empirical evidence concerning learning in SMEs in times of disruption and volatility and so will be of interest to both academics and practitioners.

This SI is unique in two important ways: Firstly, to date there has only been one SI on the topic of Learning in SMEs (HRDI 2019, guest-edited by this SI's co-guest-editor Short, initially with the late Professor David Gray). However, since then learning in SMEs has been affected by a variety of events including (but not limited to) the global COVID-19 pandemic, Brexit, increased digitalisation, e-learning, AI and global political changes. These topics have elicited much scholarly interest since the 2019 SI which suggests that another SI is much needed. The proposed SI seeks to build on the 2019 one considering all developments since then.

Secondly, scholars agree that employee learning in SMEs is a neglected area of research (Nolan & Garavan, 2016; Short & Gray, 2018). There is an increasingly urgent need for a more contextualised approach to exploring the issues arising from this (Coetzer et al., 2019).

Learning helps organisational agility in dynamic environments as well as facilitating the development of employee expertise and adaptability (Bednall & Sanders, 2017).

Yet, gaps remain in existing literature concerning learning in SMEs which need to be addressed. These include that prevailing wisdom continues to view learning in SMEs as either a scaled down version of that observed in larger firms, or as largely informal in nature.

However, several studies have challenged such notions by suggesting that learning is ubiquitous occurring through ongoing and day-to-day activities within SMEs and that SMEs use novel approaches to incorporate formal and informal learning to meet their unique needs (Coetzer et al., 2020).

Also, the great changes in the global environment, both recent and expected, have been little explored in the context of learning in SMEs. Therefore, there is an urgent need to research the under-explored impact of these on individual and organisational-wide learning within SMEs.

We invite conceptual, empirical, and methodological papers from a wide expanse of contexts and epistemologies. Contributions may address the following themes and topics. Themes outside of those suggested (but which still focus on Learning in SMEs in a time of Volatility and Disruption) are also welcome and will be considered by the editors.

List of Topic Areas

- What does learning (formal and informal) look like in different types of SMEs (including family businesses, Micro-enterprises and entrepreneurial ventures) in a time of volatility and disruption.
- How does technology, digitalisation and Artificial Intelligence (AI) affect learning in SMEs.
- How does learning in SMEs translate to innovation and competitiveness.
- Employee learning in SMEs, rather than the emphasis on owner-managers in the majority of previous literature regarding learning in SMEs (although papers exploring the role of owner/managers in either enabling or hindering learning in SMEs are still welcomed).
- The effects of Working From Home and other post-pandemic trends on learning in SMEs.

Submissions Information

Manuscripts must be original, unpublished works not concurrently under review for publication at another outlet.

Submissions can be made using ScholarOne Manuscripts. Registration and access are available [here](#). All submissions must be prepared according to the Author Guidelines available [here](#).

When submitting your manuscript, please ensure you select this special issue from the relevant drop-down menu on page four of the submission process.

Initial queries can be directed to the Guest Editors, Dr Heather Short, heatherjbshort@gmail.com Prof Maura Sheehan maura.sheehan@napier.co.uk or Dr Corina Sheerin corina.sheerin@ncirl.ie

Key Deadlines

Opening date for manuscripts submissions: 01/07/2024

Closing date for manuscripts submission: 31/01/2025