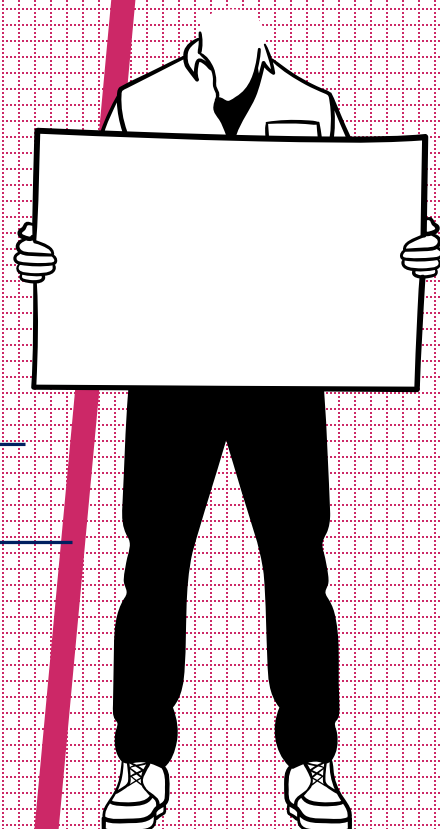
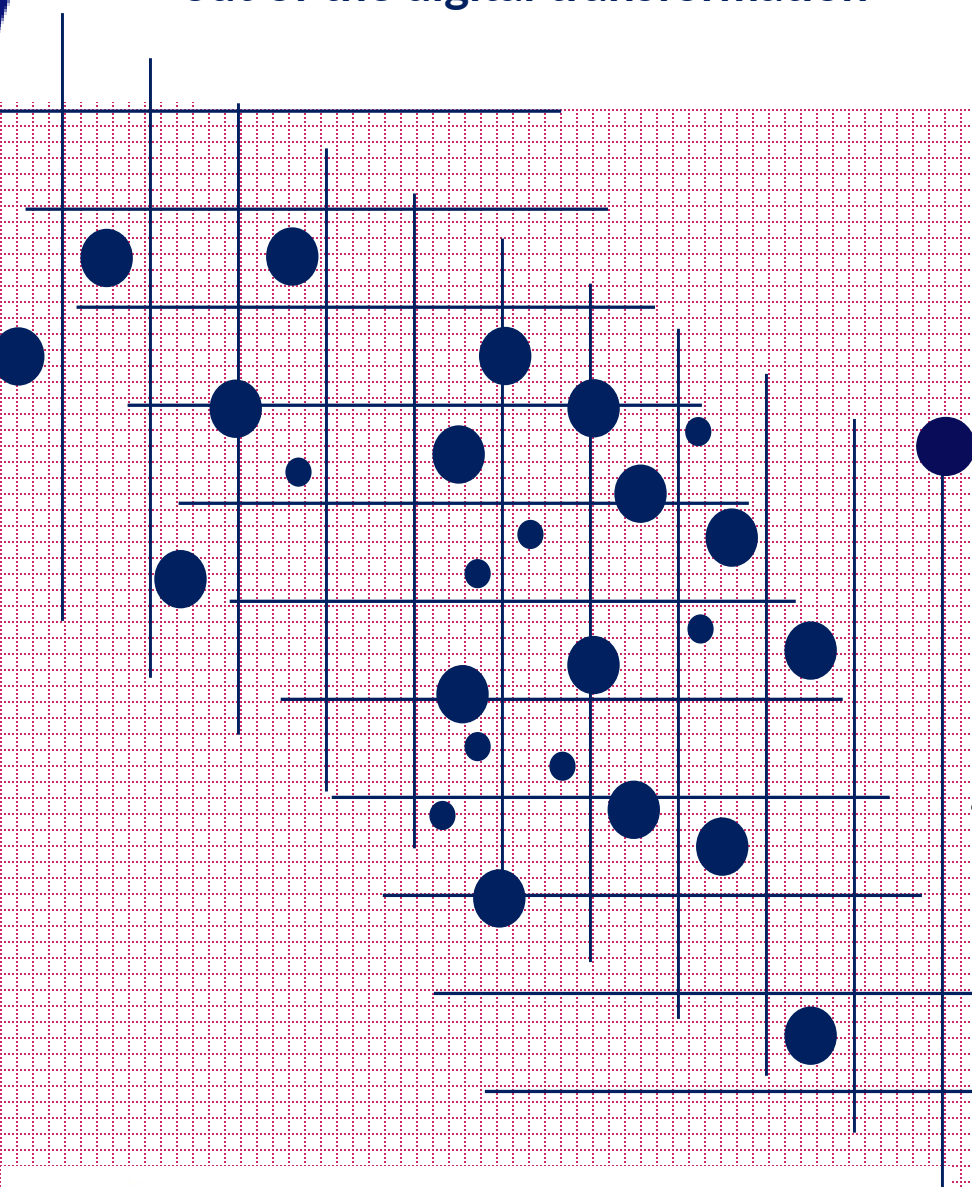


Learning Pathways

Skills for today, skills for the future:
A mini-guide for SMEs to make the best
out of the digital transformation



A contribution to



Co-funded by
the European Union

Introduction

Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) account for 99% of companies in Europe: and they operate in virtually every sector.

But there is hardly a one-size-fits-all approach: some SMEs have more employees, while others are just starting to scale up. Elements like company vision, decision-making processes and internal business culture also come into play. And as new services and products are introduced, traditional roles and responsibilities of employees also change – meaning that managers, executives, and business leaders need to have a clear overview and a proactive approach to fostering future-proof skills.

Designing a way to structure and visualise this process is key. Importantly, the organisational structure of a company also affects its ability (and its potential) to innovate.

In a nutshell: COVID-19 and the digital revolution

Global developments play a role too: the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the digital revolution, prompting companies to move services online, increase their use of digital technologies, and offer more flexibility to employees. The pandemic, coupled with the digital revolution, has transformed the way organisations conduct business and altered the day-to-day work life of employees (from the job they do to the skills they need to perform).

But how does a business prepare for such a drastic change?

And were we ready for it?

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit Europe in 2020, things changed for everyone: overnight. As video calls replaced in-person meetings and workers connected remotely to execute tasks, the response of businesses varied. Some companies embraced this, whereas others had difficulties to adapt to such an abrupt change.

Estimates show that the COVID crisis made the digitalisation of customer interactions leapfrog several years ahead. The companies that responded to this change by creating more digital services and digital product offers also saw a deeper integration of digital technologies within their business models. ¹

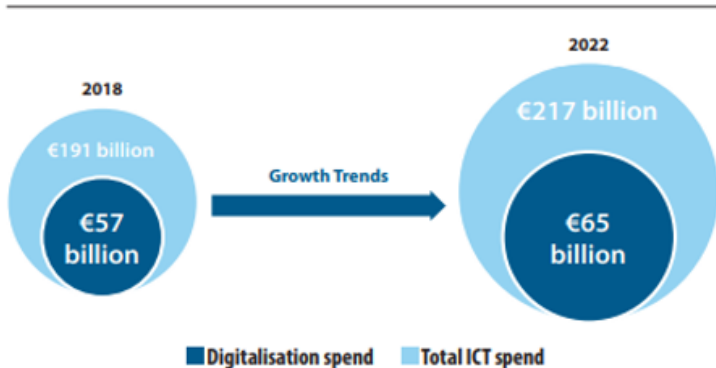


Source: [DESI 2021](#)

McKinsey & Company, 2020. 'How COVID-19 has pushed companies over the technology tipping point – and transformed business forever'. Available at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/strategy-and-corporate-finance/our-insights/how-covid-19-has-pushed-companies-over-the-technology-tipping-point-and-transformed-business-forever>

European SMEs also increased their spending on digitalisation (part of the total spending for ICT), estimated at €57 billion in 2018 to more than €65 billion in 2022.²

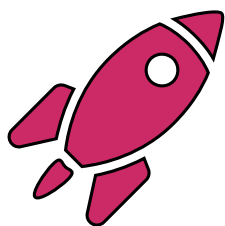
European SMEs' estimated digitalisation spending, EIB



At the same time, many SMEs experienced challenges to cope with the COVID-19 crisis due to financial fragility.

But how can organisations innovate when they are in financially precarious situations?

This is perhaps one of the biggest issues ahead, and studies show that 3 out of 10 SMEs fear that they will need to postpone innovation and growth initiatives.³



And what about digital start-ups?

Digital start-ups are highly innovative organisations, and they usually work with even fewer resources than SMEs. It may be useful then, for SME organisations to learn from the approach digital start-ups have towards innovation. For SME managers and company leaders, this also entails being strategic about human resources: knowing not only how to attract the right talent, but also how to grow the skills of the employees you already have at your disposal.

Many start-ups work with the concept of a **Minimum Viable Product (MVP)**: an approach, where a product is initially launched only with its basic features (i.e. just enough to get the attention of prospective clients). This product is then developed further, but only after getting sufficient feedback from the users, who participated in the pilot stage.

Working with the concept of the Minimum Viable Product is an agile approach, which holds huge potential. It allows us to test a product and refine it before investing a significant amount in features that cannot be changed, it helps us build a more personal relationship with our customers through establishing early feedback loop channels, and it helps us retain a good deal of flexibility. Yet, it is an approach rarely used (or known) by SMEs.

To facilitate the digital transformation of an organisation in a minimal and optimal way and inspired by the agile concept of the Minimum Viable Product (MVP), we will look at the concept of the **Minimum Viable Team (MVT)**, or the smallest team possible needed to achieve your goal. Against this baseline, we will look at the **Minimum Viable Digital Team (MVDT)** and offer a step-by-step guide on how to build the smallest digital team needed to deliver a digital product.

With this learning pathway & business cases, we want to offer support to SMEs so they can respond better to the skills challenges of future and continue to innovate.

2

2. European Investment Bank, 2019. 'Financing the digitalisation of small and medium-sized enterprises. The enabling role of Digital Innovation Hubs. Available at: https://www.eib.org/attachments/thematic/financing_the_digitalisation_of_smes_summary_en.pdf

3. McKinsey & Company, 2020. 'COVID-19 and European small and medium-size enterprises: How they are weathering the storm'. Available at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/covid-19-and-european-small-and-medium-size-enterprises-how-they-are-weathering-the-storm>

1. Key definitions and terms

1.1. Agile thinking & benefits for SMEs

Agile is a project management methodology, which rests on the ability to collect feedback from customers and produce new product versions rapidly. You also need to be able to adapt your business or design plan to best accommodate your clients' needs.

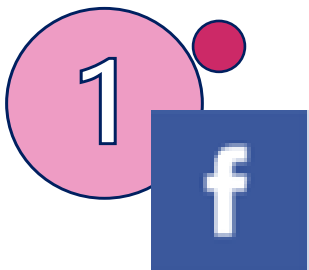
Agile is far from a rigid project management framework though: rather, it's a way of thinking. We think in an agile way when we adapt to changing circumstances without losing our customer base. To think (and work) in an agile way also makes us more resilient and less likely to go out of business in the event of future challenges.

Agile entails breaking up projects in small tasks and structuring those in such a way so as to deliver measurable value to customers and achieve maximum impact from the ground up. This allows us to remain flexible and keep adapting our product offer to match the needs of our clients.

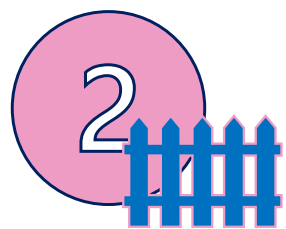
1.2. Minimum Viable Product (MVP)

The Minimum Viable Product (MVP) is a product that is launched (with its essential features) to early-bird customers with the goal of gathering immediate feedback, which is then used to improve the product before it is launched officially to the public. The MVP concept has a key role in agile development since the agile methodology depends on a frequent user feedback loop to inform future product revisions and versions.

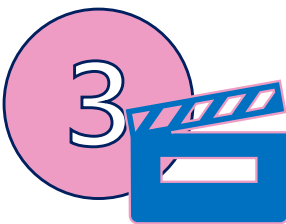
Some Minimum Viable Products we all know...



Little did the world know that Facebook was going to get this far when the start-up kicked off as a social network in Harvard University to connect students studying the same class through messages on virtual walls. The network expanded first to other universities before taking over Silicon Valley, turning into the tech giant valued at around \$125 billion we know today.

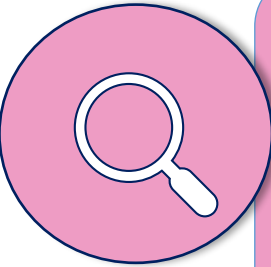


Airbnb kicked off in San Francisco as a solution to an immediate problem: the struggle of the two founders to manage their rent payments. Coming up with the idea to offer part of their apartment to visitors for money, they launched a cheap website and launched a mini-marketing campaign. Airbnb's MVP was several paying guests. The company then grew rapidly, estimated at more than **\$111 billion**.



Dropbox started off as a funny video presentation to explain the concept of file synchronisation, interspersed by jokes of founders Drew Houston and Arash Ferdowsi. The video was a huge success and drove clouds of users to Dropbox, reaching more than 50.000 people overnight.

Uber, Amazon, Zalando to many others - the list goes on and on. The MVP approach has been truly tried and tested, especially by digital start-ups.



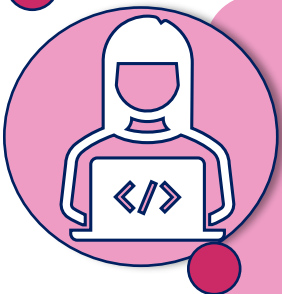
Working with agile concept of the MVP is an approach with enormous potential for SMEs. It reduces costs and optimises resources, allowing organisations to test a product and refine it before investing a significant amount of time and money only to develop features they may wish to change later. This approach also helps to build a more personal relationships with clients and arrive at an informed overview of the most pressing and longer-term needs of our customer base.

1.3. Minimum Viable Team (MVT) & Minimum Viable Digital Team (MVDT)

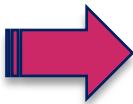


MVT is the smallest team needed to reach your goal – i.e. to build your Minimum Viable Product. MVT is a concept created by research Frank Nouyrigat and Marc Nager, whose goal was to help entrepreneurs get to the minimal team needed to start a company.

From this minimalistic team concept, we reach the MVDT approach – or the minimum number of people needed to launch a digital product.



This is not relevant only in the context of digital start-ups or established SMEs, already ahead with the digital transformation. Many non-tech SMEs and larger businesses are augmenting their brick-and-mortar presence with an online one: whether this is a website, or the digitalisation of one product or service needed to maintain competitive physical services.



Your SME is not very tech-oriented or digitalised, yet you are starting to see the need to make some products or services digital...

Jump to our section for non-tech SMEs to see what skills and roles you need to get on board to form a Minimum Viable Digital Team – and deliver a digital product or enhance your business otherwise.

[Take me there!](#)

2. Building a Minimum Viable Digital Team: a mini-guide

Now that we know what a MVP is, and why this and other agile approaches can benefit SMEs, let's try to build the minimum team we need to make a digital product come to life – from an idea to a market solution. But how do you innovate when you struggle with resources and what are the types of profiles we need to attract as an SME?

From 0 to a digital product: key roles

Let's look at the roles we absolutely need to have to deliver a digital product to the market.



The Builder

Before a digital product to come to life, a good deal of engineering takes place behind the scenes. The first step is building the product itself, and for this we need someone with the right technical skills and knowledge of programming and development. Depending on the type of digital product being built, this 'Builder' can be anything from a software engineer to a web designer engineer (i.e., developers and coders).

Simply building the digital product and putting it out there is not enough. And in fact, most high-quality products share some common characteristics: great and accessible design, functional user or customer experience, and a sound management strategy. This brings us to the next **building block of the MVDT, the role of the 'Customer Experience Expert'**.

This employee is involved from the very start of the process and actively takes part to co-create it. They need to also be an expert in marketing the product: from creating an offer that would add value to their clients to finding the right customer base to outreach to. We can broadly cluster the tasks related to design, product management and marketing under the 'Customer Experience Expert' role.



The Customer Experience Expert

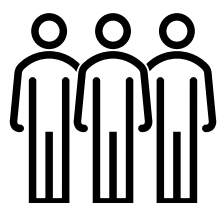
The 'Customer Experience Expert' is someone with a deep understanding of the field and experience in creating easy-to-use products, which deliver results. Someone in this role would have a diverse set of skills such as the ability to conduct efficient user research, the ability to narrow down product requirements, and knowledge of user feedback and user experience testing.



The Outsider's Outreach Employee

We are still in the drafting stages of our digital product, and this means that business development and sales activities often overlap. Tasks of this nature are typically done by the SME owner or director, and the priority here is finding external partners to grow (this can be support with investment, financing, product development, awareness, distribution, etc).

We have now built our Minimum Viable Digital Team (MVDT), which comprises of the 3 most essential roles:



The Builder

The Customer Experience Expert

The Outsider's Outreach Employee

Each SME however is unique: and it is possible for us to combine a different set of profiles to reach this MVDT. For example, a digital product can also be made up of one employee to drive external promotion, and a Builder. Usually the 'outside' person is someone knowledgeable about the industry, and potentially is the person with the idea in the first place.

Sometimes though, this decision also depends on the profiles we find around us: and it is useful to remember that creativity is key to finding the right talent.

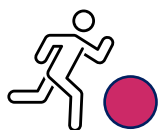
TIP

If your resources are scarce and you don't have 3 people yet, you may wonder what ideal scenario is. In these cases, it is best to have a customer experience expert and a builder. 'Outside interest' tasks can be done by SME owners and leaders, with the help of advisors and investors, experienced in building a company from the bottom-up. What is more, outreach at first can be limited, but strategic nevertheless: an example of good outside outreach can even be an article that gets developed as the product picks up. In the hyper-connected world of today, even the smallest task can do wonders in getting outsiders interested our business goals and give us the visibility we need to break through.

Examples from EU SMEs

Examples of different implementations for the MVDT originate from various SMEs studied. In [SayIT Labs](#), a Belgium-based "spin-off" from the [Vrije Universiteit Brussel](#) and [Interuniversity Microelectronics Center \(imec\)](#), the co-founders, Lukas and Erich, started as a minimal team, sharing the roles of builders among the two of them. They were both experienced engineers and computer scientists. The customer experience expertise came into play through reskilling: one of the co-founders, Erich, undertook a Masters in Communication Disorders, aiming to better understand the challenges of their potential users, who are people with speech disabilities. His studies and clinical experience, but also his communication skills, allowed him to also cover the outsider's outreach role.

In another example (case No. 11), the [Next Solutions start-up creating the OBKO intelligent fintech assistant](#), the main team constitutes of two persons: a domain expert and with strong digital understanding (Giorgos), who brings in a part of the builder experience and the outsider's outreach role, and a customer experience expert (Katerina, customer empathy & product director). The builder role is complemented by outsourced support from an expert development team, which follows the leader builder directions to implement the product.



Want to see more examples of this? Head over to our business cases to find out more!

Branching out: the need for new roles

As tasks and workload increases, we may notice that new responsibilities emerge, and they cannot be covered by the MVDT we have just built. In a normal business process, this is where we perform a gap analysis, i.e. examining the current state of our business and drawing a map of the skills and goals we need to attain to get our business to where we want to see it in the future. But since we are just starting out, we may not have a good overview of everything just yet. The business environment we are in is highly competitive, and due to financial constraints, we may be reluctant to hire another person. So how can we grow and innovate when our resources are still limited?

Outsourcing tasks

Outsourcing business tasks can help SMEs make the best out of the limited resources they have and open the time key employees (our MVDT) need to focus on to improve their business and refine their product. This also means we won't need to invest in an office space or tech equipment just yet. **Notice also that outsourcing some tasks means that this person is not part of the core team.**

We will typically outsource non-core activities and tasks that act as complementary to our business goals and help us manage our increasing workload better – and the person we outsource to will not be part of the core team. There also exist cases where the company is bootstrapped utilizing external builder capacity, gaining time to form its internal development team that will support and evolve the products and services over time. Depending on the type of digital product we offer, we can outsource areas like human resources, finance, and accounting (or book-keeping), data monitoring and analysis, or marketing (SEO, SEM, Social Media outreach, etc).

We are now up to 4 roles:



- The Builder
- The Customer Experience Expert
- The Outsider's Outreach Employee
- Outsourced tasks via external services

Sizing up to offer a better product

Our digital product seems to be quite popular and has found its market 'niche'. Around this time, we need to start thinking about bringing additional people on board to help us manage our product better.

- In the **previous step**, we outsourced certain tasks to make up time for the Outsider's Outreach Expert (usually founder) to focus on optimising the product further. This had a positive impact on business development (building partnerships, securing funding) and now the Customer Experience Specialist (our core MVDT member, responsible for getting our product across) has too much on their hands. In addition, new responsibilities emerge and implementation tasks steadily increase.
- We also want to continue to innovate without compromising on the quality of our product, and still reach more clients. This is when the **'Customer Experience Specialist' role can be broken down into separate functions, allowing the employee part of the core MVDT with the most expertise, focus on more strategic tasks, such as Product Management.**

If an SME wants to cover the gaps that emerged, we can recruit a Marketing Employee to expand our client base. What are the tasks done by marketing? All processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers. *In fact, marketing is not really about selling: it is more about 'finding the right way' to sell something to the right customer or finding the right customer for your product - and both require a deep understanding of the customer/client.*

We may also want to consider hiring a Design Expert to enhance our ability to innovate and improve the user experience of our customers.

- **This brings us to 6 people and we now have a small team to bring a digital product to life.**

- The Builder
- The Outsider's Outreach Employee
- Outsourced tasks via external services
- Marketing Employee
- Design employee
- Product Management Employee

Adding structure: a more strategic approach to skills and roles

Any SME that is now offering digital products wants 2 things: to offer a good product that reaches more clients and helps the company innovate and improve it, and to find and keep employees who share the company vision and remain engaged through challenging periods. Since we brought new people on board at our previous step, now is the time when we need to lay down the foundational elements to ensure our existing employees remain skilled, feel supported and engaged, and want to take our digital product further.

➤ We are now in need of a good recruitment procedure and someone who takes care of new administrative tasks and responsibilities related to **Human Resources** (healthcare benefits, designing an organisational structure for individuals to upskill and progress to higher functions within the company). Since our product is digital, we also cannot risk any negative feedback on the way we run our operations: and outside attention is key for a good recruitment process to take place. And while in the first stages of our product we realised that some HR tasks can be covered by core team members already on board, and others can be outsourced, we now want to hire a **Human Resource Specialist**, who knows the field we work in, and can help us get the right skills and people as new responsibilities emerge.

➤ This brings us up to 7 profiles.

The Builder

The Outsider's Outreach Employee

Outsourced tasks via external services

Marketing Employee

Design employee

Product Management Employee

Human Resource Employee

In the early stages of our start-up, we highlighted the need to build sustainable partnerships and attract outsiders and mentioned that business development and PR tasks often overlap at the start and are usually taken up by the SME owner (the only difference is that one is in charge of negotiating business deals and the other one only on attracting outsiders). **We could even summarise the goal of a general PR department as: "Attracting outsiders and benefiting from their interest = Outsider's outreach"**. Another role that is not essential at the beginning of any tech start-up is sales and business development. Why? Because at the beginning the product is under development and in such early stage the concept of the product may still pivot in a different direction and there is essentially nothing to sell yet, therefore it is difficult to think of sales.

As a next step to grow our business and promote our product, we will hire a **PR Employee**, and a **Business Development Expert**. At the same time, we are probably outsourcing some financial and operational tasks not related to the core business development, like managing payroll, office supplies, benefits, and others).

➤ We are now up to 9 roles.

The Builder / Engineer

Sales Employee

Business Development Employee

Public Relations Employee

Marketing Employee

Design employee

Product Management Employee

Human Resource Employee

Outsourced tasks (financial, operational)

Deep dive: case studies from EU SMEs

The digital innovation landscape may bring the need for a number of idiosyncratic roles, since ground-breaking changes in new domains may affect the development of related products. For example, the international legal and financial landscape related to blockchain is under constant and significant revision until it converges. Such a role of financial and legal consulting with an international viewpoint can be of critical value for the success and scaling of a blockchain-driven products, such as the ones related to the **Not-Fungible Tokens (NFT) economy or Web 3.0 hosting** (cf. the [Unique.Network \(case 8\)](#), the [Block.co \(case 9\)](#) and the [HoloHost \(case 5\) business cases](#)). In such cases, outsourcing can be highly appropriate, since also the related expertise is scarce and recruiting can be a significant challenge.



Other roles that can be outsourced are e.g. those related to cybersecurity (see the [CyberWayFinder business case \(n.4\)](#)). In essence, cybersecurity becomes a basic role related to company resilience, but also to product sustainability. Once again, the related expertise is scarce and outsourcing allows the SME to iteratively build capacity and related expertise, ideally through bringing the outsourced knowhow into the company by upskilling.

At the next stage, we may consider adding an **Operations Employee**, and a **Finance Employee** instead of outsourcing these tasks, which brings us to a team of 10 people.

- The Builder / Engineer
- Sales Employee
- Business Development Employee
- Public Relations Employee
- Marketing Employee
- Design employee
- Product Management Employee
- Human Resource Employee
- Finance Employee
- Operations Employee

To scale up our SME to a tech-company, let's think of those same roles with their responsibilities, but this time we are talking about departments. A Tech company typically needs 10 departments to run well.

- Engineering
- Marketing
- Business Development
- Sales
- Public Relations
- Design
- Product Management
- Human Resources
- Finance
- Operations

Want to know more? Check out the company **3D bear (n.13)** in our business cases and get top-down insight from key department heads.

Minimum Viable Digital Team for a non-tech SME

And what about non-tech SMEs?

These are companies that may not necessarily be thinking about full-on digital transformation per se, but rather need to incorporate digital elements in their products or digitalise some of their services to remain competitive.



Think of a small traditional business like a printing shop, which needs a website to offer digital copies of posters and thereby increase sales. Or maybe a local restaurant or service in need of an online booking system that takes into account the latest government restrictions around COVID. And often, what digitalisation brings is more digitalisation: and we may see the need for more online products or services.

Every non-tech SME can build an MVDT with a couple of simple steps, and this is a good strategy to be ready for future technology developments impacting more traditional sectors.

➤ Think agile!



We recommend you make an assessment of what skills you hold at your disposal: assess your internal resources and identify the skills, roles and profiles that would translate into maximum impact with minimum effort. To do this internal assessment, we recommend you break down the roles you deemed absolutely essential (your Minimum Viable Digital Team, into small tasks (skills and knowledge) like we would do to develop our Minimum Viable Product (MVP).

You may discover existing employees already great at some of these initial tasks – and the upskilling path for those may not come at a large cost for your organisation before it pays off.

How does the MVDT look like for a non-tech organisation? We can refer to virtually any sector here: be it an accounting firm, a GP surgical practice, or a legal firm. Any of these organisations need a technical (internal) support employee (or eventually, team) and an employee who supports with technical (external) support.

Must-have MDVT roles for non-tech SMEs



The Internal Tech Support Professional

The Internal Tech support professional is basically someone who helps employees to have the hardware, software, and configuration needed for them to do their job.

The sector we operate in does not necessarily matter: every organisation will always need well-figured computers, cloud and antivirus software, and account and security management support. Here we can also add tasks such as setting up employee emails, providing server maintenance, or support with installing and running the printers.

Other questions also come into play: what about deciding what platforms and networks we will use, or having to configure VPNs now that everyone is working from home? The responsibilities of this profile have only increased since the start of the pandemic.

The Internal Tech Support Professional with advanced digital skills can handle these tasks. Also, this professional may be able to support to build a security policy for the organisation, bringing the much needed technical perspective.

The External Tech Support Professional

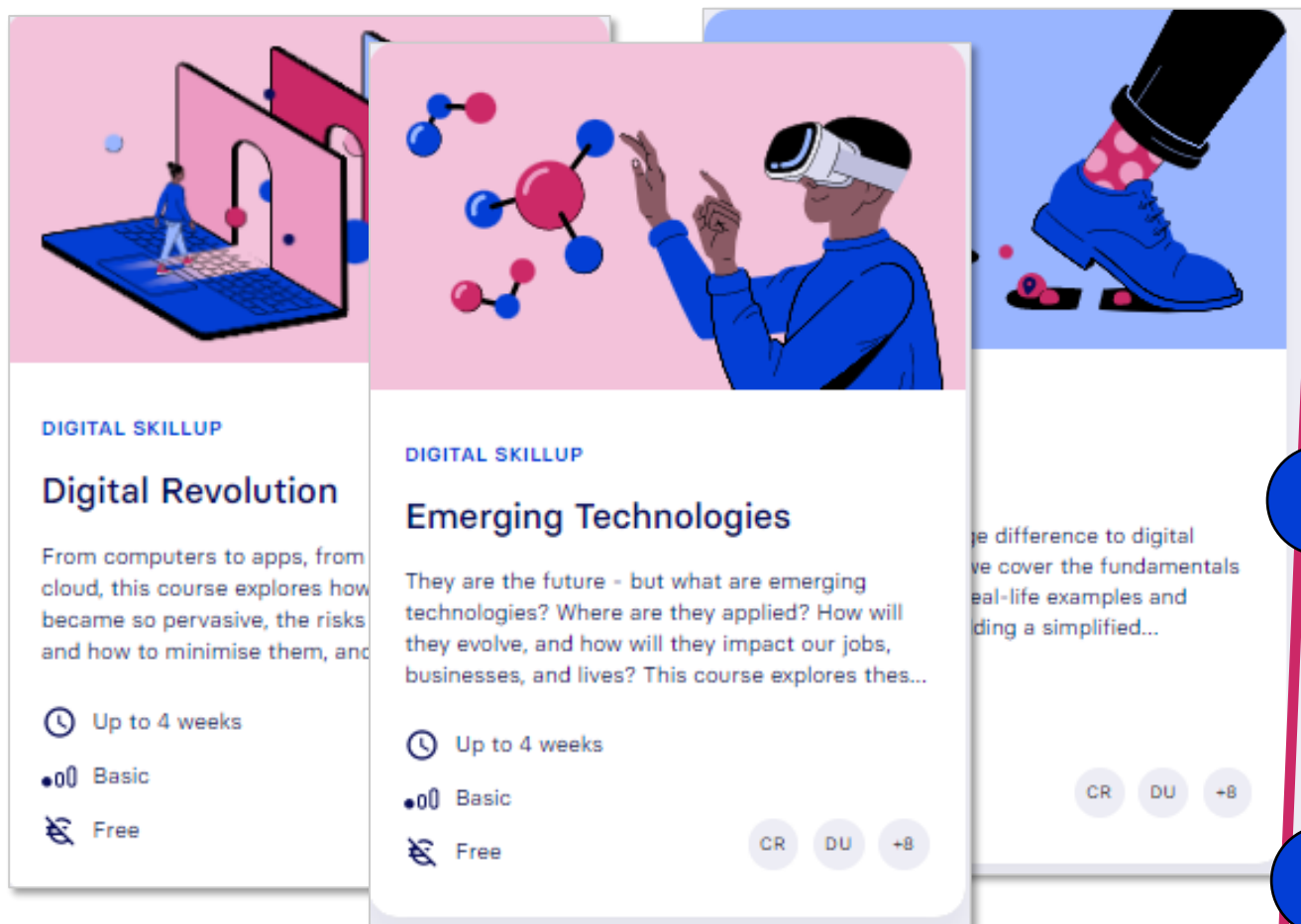
The second essential role is the **External Tech support professional**, and this can be the functional/ business analyst with a strong technical background. Their role is to manage the coordination and communication amongst business and external stakeholders, and service providers we may want to outsource to for additional digital support (website management, hosting, graphic work, social media management, etc).

- The difference between the Internal and External technical role is the target group that they manage, one communicated mostly within the SME, and the other one communicated mostly with outsourcing teams that provide services and products to the SME. For this last role budgeting may be essential and also negotiation skills, and therefore a business/functional tech professional can play an excellent role here. For any non-tech SME that has these roles, we recommend to get a cybersecurity professional or a coder that can support both previous roles.

TIP

Employee upskilling and lifelong learning is key if an SME wants to keep employees engaged and competent and contributes to organisational stability. In times of low business growth when recruitment is cumbersome or hard, the employees already on board may help to fill the gap that opens as new tasks and responsibilities emerge. Investing in skills today brings added value in the future too.

Your first steps to understanding the digital revolution and emerging technologies. Visit: <https://www.digitalskillup.eu/digital-skillup-courses/>

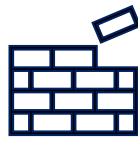


3. Essential roles for a bottom-up digital transformation

“Job titles and descriptions in IT are not standardised. Instead of a software engineer, you may be called a systems/software/database/web programmer, engineer or developer, depending on the system you're developing. Alternatively, the programming language you use may become part of your title, such as Java or C# developer. The work of a software engineer can also form part of a [multimedia programmer role](#).”

The MVDT leaves us with some of the essential roles for start-ups that build digital products, and these are important for the digital transformation. What are the essential skills for each of these roles and other essential roles for the digital transformation? Some roles may have different titles, so it is the skills that we will focus on.

3.1. 'The Builder'



For a digital start-up, the builder is typically a software engineer, a great coder, a person that creates computer software.

| Responsibilities | Essential skills & qualifications |
|--|--|
| <p>The work of the builder has a purely technical side which does not finish just with designing software.</p> <p>Software developers also maintain, evaluate and test software systems. Software optimisation is also an essential part of the job profile. Nevertheless, very often a software engineer also would be asked to consult with clients, security specialists, and other stakeholders.</p> <p>They can even present products to stakeholders and internal customers.</p> | <p>Software engineers are problem-solvers! They design solutions to answer certain needs/problems. This requires not only technical knowledge but also very good communication skills. Notably:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Coding languages like Python, Java, C, C++, or Scala➤ Object-oriented programming➤ Database architecture➤ Agile and Scrum project management➤ Operating systems➤ Cloud computing➤ Version control➤ Design testing and debugging➤ Attention to detail <p>Having studies one of these subjects also helps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Computer science➤ Computer software/computer systems engineering➤ Electronics➤ Information systems➤ Mathematics➤ Physics |

3.2. ‘The Customer Experience Expert’



In the MVDT section, we got to bundle several roles into the essential customer experience expert: marketing, design, product. **The customer expert is someone who understands the client, their needs, what they want, and translates it into a design, a product, and marketing.** This person doesn’t necessarily know how to code, but has a deep understanding of the customer and customer journey. The role has been evolving over the years and it has become an essential a critical one for customer success.

Responsibilities

The core task of a customer experience expert is to map customer profiles and analyse customer journeys in order to ensure a good experience across all processes and tackle gaps/problems– from purchase to product return to customer support. This task requires constant interaction with team across the organisation such as product development, sales, account management, etc. he/she also contributes to a product and brand improvement by bringing in the users’ perspective. The role of a customer experience expert requires people skills, and some of the soft skills listed below.

| | |
|-------------|---|
| Soft skills | Empathy |
| | Excellent communication skills |
| | Assertiveness |
| | Problem-solving and conflict resolution |
| | Good collaboration skills |
| | Project management skills |
| | Being agile and resourceful |
| | Data management and analytics skills |

The entry into this profession is usually a qualification in marketing, communication, advertising, or business management.

However, one can also focus on the skills and not on the right diploma. For example, a phycologist can play this role very well as their understanding of human needs is very high, and moreover, this professional has extended knowledge of statistics that can also evolve in the data science direction.

3.3. ‘The Outsider’s Outreach Employee’

In [our previous chapter](#), this role was a sum of several roles that are in direct contact with outsiders and getting their interest for several goals. Roles such as PR, Business Development, HR, and Sales take care of outsider's outreach.

The outsider’s outreach employee basically takes care of building a good relationship with external stakeholders and clients to increase brand awareness.

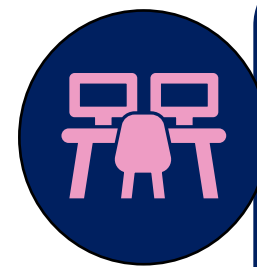
This job profile has rather open access from various education backgrounds. Very often the profile attracts graduates in marketing and communication studies, as well as business/management.

| Responsibilities / Tasks | Essential skills & qualifications |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Develop campaigns and media relation strategies ➤ Liaise with media, develop press & outreach materials (press releases, promotion materials, etc). ➤ Actively explore opportunities for building partnerships and reaching out to new stakeholders. ➤ Establish good internal collaboration flows with other teams (marketing team for instance). ➤ Organise events (open days, conferences) ➤ Track and monitor media coverage and trends development. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent communication skills • Good writing skills • Confidence and taking of initiative • Coping with fast-changing circumstances and managing risks • Organisation skills, time management • The ability to prioritise effectively • Excellent problem-solving skills • Business knowledge |

3.4. Other must-have roles for a non-tech SME

Apart from the MVDT roles that we have explained, some other important roles in organisations are **the helpdesk and infrastructure employee, the business analyst and functional analyst and the designer**. Depending on the goal of your organisation some of these roles can be your actual MVDT. **Let’s dig into the skills and responsibilities this entails.**

● Helpdesk/Infrastructure



In the digital revolution all organisations of any size need technical support. The duties can vary with the size of the organisation and for a start-up this can be outsourced: getting advice to buy a computer, acquisition and installation of software, security settings, cloud tools, antivirus, VPN configuration, network configuration, printer management, etc and any kind of technical support. All employees need support with this and there is typically a single point of contact for technical matters in each organisation, and typically also organised with a ticketing system for first-queued first-served services.

● Responsibilities

A tech support person has a wide variety of responsibilities, whereas the most obvious ones are solving technical issues and installing/configuring hardware and software. It is, however, much more than that. **A tech support person develops procedural documentation (manuals, tutorials) and has a forward-looking role in terms of testing and evaluating new technologies that could be introduces into the organisation.** It is inevitably part of the job to also interact with customers/clients and provide timely support for a problem.

Upskilling from this role can go in the direction of network engineering, or software engineering, or even server configuration and cybersecurity. Upskilling this role can impact positively the whole organisation as this employee can help with operational automation.

Essential skills and qualifications

In addition to the technical know-how that one needs (good idea of how software and operating systems work) the tech support also requires strong customer focus. See the list on the right.

Expertise/knowledge in:

- Business information technology
- Business systems engineering
- Computer networking and hardware
- Computer science
- Computer software development
- Information technology
- Internet engineering
- Software engineering

Proficiency in Windows/Linux/Mac OS

Problem-solving skills

Communication skills

Ability to ask questions and listen

Ability to interact with clients

Capacity to identify a problem and suggest a solution

Collaboration skills and team spirit

Logical thinking and attention to detail

(Digital) Business Analyst

This is an essential role for most SMEs whose goal or product may not be necessarily digital. This person is a great communicator between the business stakeholders and the development team with the support of the functional analyst team member. The business analyst leads a company into the changing business environment by identifying needs and designing solutions to bring about change. The digital business strategist role leads on building the roadmap for a company's digital transformation. Business analysts interact with different teams/departments on daily basis in order to assess business needs and opportunities and design the best strategy to go forward.

Responsibilities

- Analysing business requirements, prioritize requirements from various stakeholders
- Design solutions to optimise processes
- Interact with various teams across the organisation (e.g. development team, management team, etc.), as well as external stakeholders
- Manage projects and monitor progress

Essential skills & qualifications

- Excellent communication skills to be able to explain business requirements to all audiences (stakeholders).
- Business knowledge
- Project management skills
- Problem solving and critical thinking skills
- Budgeting and forecasting skills

Functional Analyst



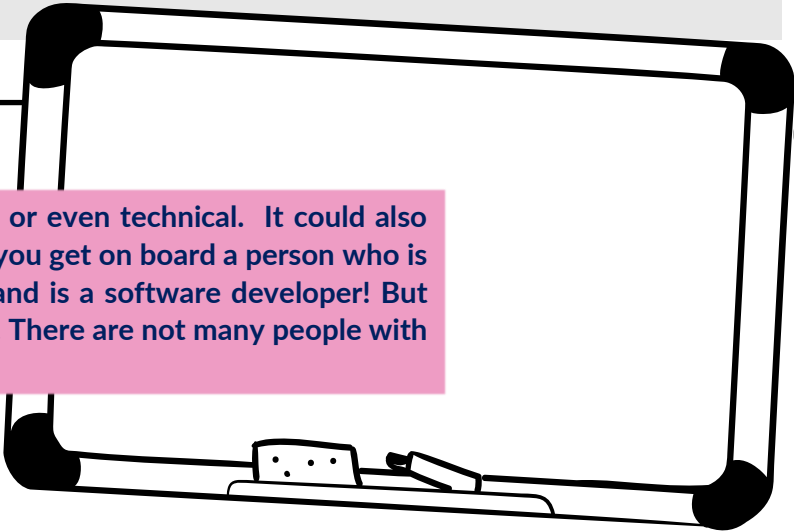
What makes the role of functional analysts different from the business analysts is the specific focus on the technology.

A functional analyst assesses technological solution and how this solution could address a company's business needs. Often, this type of analyst specialises in a certain type of technology. This role can evolve even in the design branch, and support wireframing of digital solutions. Professionals need great communication skills to communicate with stakeholders and also tech and design skills to be able to translated needs and requirements into user stories to be implemented, and to wireframes.

| Responsibilities | Essential skills & qualifications |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Analyse and evaluate existing systems for performance➤ Perform gap analysis and suggest solutions➤ Create plans for change based on analysed requirements➤ Facilitate configuration management➤ Document changes being made and relevant teaching manuals➤ Collaborate with other team members to efficiently implement changes➤ Simulate and test suggestions made for performance➤ Write user manuals and prepare easy to understand documentation➤ Assess, install, and troubleshoot software systems➤ Check functionality of the end product | <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ In-depth knowledge of IT and computer science principles➤ Advanced Excel capabilities and SQL knowledge➤ Knowledge of data warehousing➤ Strong leadership ability and interpersonal skills➤ Analytical and critical thinking➤ Strong written and verbal communication skills➤ Leadership and multitasking skills➤ Ability to use notation (BPMN) and modelling systems (UML) |

The Designer

This role can be very graphical or even technical. It could also be that you are very lucky and you get on board a person who is great at customer experience and is a software developer! But this is very rare, treat it as gold. There are not many people with these skills.



4. Tips and resources for managers & business executives

So far, we explored what it takes to build a minimum viable digital team (MVDT) and what roles and profiles should we focus on 'acquiring' if we want to drive the digital transformation of a company from the bottom-up and deliver a digital product.

At the same time, it is important to note that managers, leaders, business executives and SME directors are all responsible when it comes to upskilling strategies and larger projects around the future of work. We can think of digitalisation as a phenomenon that virtually left no sector untouched: digital skills are now linked to personal development to varying extents in most professions. With COVID-19 accelerating this even further, managers and SME leaders are under increased pressure to **identify the skills they need to foster to remain competitive and build a future-proof upskilling strategy to secure future growth.**

We gathered the tips and resources below to help managers gather skills intelligence and drive the digital transformation of their company by upskilling their staff.



Gather skills intelligence & stay on top of the trends in your sector

This means remaining proactive when it comes to getting information on trends and developments, as well as projections in your sector. Learn all you can about your sector's history and do your research on the future of work too: it is important to invest in skills intelligence and gather the most relevant information you can on where your field is going. This also lets you plan for future events, remove bottlenecks, and anticipate challenges and skills mismatches.



Track skills forecasts and don't forget events and webinars, so you can stay on top of key topics and extract the roles and profiles you need to stimulate business growth.

The resources we have listed below can help managers and business executives stay informed about employment forecasts and digital professions.

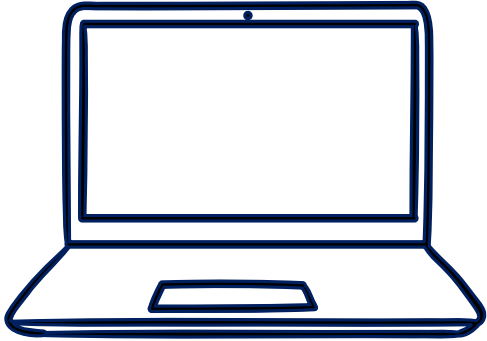
Resources

- The tool [Skills Forecast](#) by Cedefop allows you to visualise cross-country comparisons about employment trends in sectors, occupations and qualifications.
- The OECD's [Employment Outlook](#) and the Global Skills Outlook are two annual reports that offer a snapshot of the skills and employment landscape on a global level, allowing companies to plan better and prepare for difficult scenarios.

2

Invest in training and learning on-site

For SMEs that are just starting to produce digital products, initial training of staff is important. If we talk about areas like manufacturing, the digital product may also involve the use of heavy machinery, and it is important for all employees to know what to do in the event of malfunction or failure.

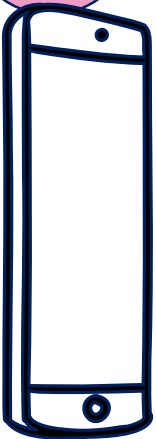


This is where B2B (business to business) training comes in. Trainings and programmes by local companies specialising in human resources can be an ideal way to start thinking about personal and professional development paths within an organisation. Often these solutions are cheaper and can be tailored to fit a company's sector, specific product, and existing skill level. This allows managers and executives to maximise their resources, build personalised learning paths and offer a chance for employees to explore what they like best, and what they are suited to most.

A good tip that won't cost you much is to encourage your employees to upskill and enrol in training programmes to advance their skills. If you run a small construction SME that deals with construction and your employee, responsible for planning has good technical and organisational skills, they can be one training away from starting to run product management in a more digital and strategic way.

3

Consider MOOCs and online courses as a starting point and dive into our business cases



To build learning pathways within your organisation, you may not necessarily know at the very start what skills to invest in, and how digital developments may impact the product you are offering. MOOCs and online courses can be a useful and very cheap tool to get a grasp of different emerging technologies to find out what they can do for your sector.

In need of more inspiration? We got you covered.

- Check out the overview of [our business cases](#) and discover insights from SME experts from all over Europe. We interviewed them, so you do not have to.
- Grab a cup of coffee & dive into the interviews.
- Discover a whole world of free trainings for SMEs and business employees in digital skills in the home for digital skills in Europe: the Digital Skills & Jobs Platform.



**Digital Skills &
Jobs Platform**

<https://digital-skills-jobs.europa.eu/>