

## **Transcript for Group A: Participant 2**

**Interviewer:** Good morning [...], hope you're well.

**Interviewee:** I'm good thank you. Happy to be here today

**Interviewer:** Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. I'll jump right to it so we can save time [...] so you're already familiar with the concept of micro-credentials, how they're mostly online instead of in-person. Thinking about that, what are the technological skills you think you'd need to complete a micro-credential course?

**Interviewee:** Would be, I mean the ability to navigate through their smartphone. You can do these courses on a smartphone these days. You can do this on a tablet or laptop or desktop.

**Interviewer:** That's true, you can do it on a range of devices.

**Interviewee:** If you look at these courses, on the exams you just click and answer yes or no and then maybe give a little background. One just needs to be able to use a smart gadget. That's the main thing. There's not much of PowerPoints that you people do PowerPoint presentations and you know, Excel calculations and Excel spreadsheet.

**Interviewer:** So basically like computer literacy skills to be literate, to use a computer or a smartphone.

**Interviewee:** Yeah. Smart gadgets. I mean, these days, anything is a computer. I mean, a cell phone is a computer as well. I mean, the tablet is also a mini computer. So yeah, it is basic computer skills that one needs. Yeah, you'll find people who know how to use tablets and cell phones, but they've never used the computer in their life. But they can achieve exactly the same thing that one does on a laptop or desktop, so to say, computer skills this day. I mean, it's limiting.

**Interviewer:** Interesting, please continue

**Interviewee:** Where people don't get computers, they don't need computers, but they've got the skills. We can use smart gadgets, example you can have your accounting software on your cell phone.

**Interviewer:** I understand your point.

**Interviewee:** You don't need a laptop. You can do quotations everything invoicing credit notes on your cell phone. So can we call that computer skills?

**Interviewer:** Alright, so rather we call them digital literacy skills. OK, that's a very good point. Then how much effort do you think it takes for one to complete like a micro credential program?

**Interviewee:** Effort is mainly determined with how busy one's day is, or how busy one's time is, or how organized the person is depending also on the nature of the business they are running, the location they're running the business. Factors like that, but apart from all these other things that we're talking about now, in terms of effort. I think it takes very little effort.

**Interviewer:** Please elaborate

**Interviewee:** Why I say so is because these micro credentials are very short courses. The content is not quite a lot, there are examinations, you know, like where you need to study, to prepare for the examination. Simple questions that you answer, so the efforts to me will be very minimal.

**Interviewer:** Alright, thank you for that. Then what are the facilitating conditions that will be needed to acquire micro credentials? And by that I mean. Maybe you need obviously time, maybe monetary resources, things like that.

**Interviewee:** So I'd group these into two, things that one can control. Then they need data. Obviously they need smart gadgets they can use to connect to the Internet. Then they need time, but when they come to time. Then we say the person needs to be organized. In such a way that this person is running in business. Remember, the business is already running. And mostly like we say of SME's, they do most of the things themselves. So the person needs to delegate some of the functions they do in the business. Hire people or delegate some functions to other people already in the business so they can free up their time. These things they run for a number of days or number of weeks. And it's not all day long. It's something you can do for an hour or two per day.

So you need to free up your time and then there are things that one cannot control that one needs. Internet connectivity. So we are saying location now matters. Where is the person based? Is the person based in Limpopo, is the person in Johannesburg and Cape Town? Saying if the person is in a place where there's poor Internet connectivity, then they need to for the duration of that training or course, they need to move from that place so they've got access to the course they're doing so they can finish it. What else? I think basically that will be it. But I think one key thing that one needs to have first before they do this micro credential is, knowledge about these micro credential courses. They need to know there is a course like this that helps them to achieve this and to do this thing better and then the rest will follow that.

**Interviewer:** That that's probably like one of the reasons why many people don't do this, like, don't adopt micro credentials, because they don't know about them actually. So now that's a problem, because how do you get them?

**Interviewee:** Which is not a problem. Once you have a problem. Then you find a solution for it. So we are seeing some of these courses. Where do you find them right now? On LinkedIn? Now on LinkedIn, who are the subscribers? It's basically people who are looking for employment. Not SME owners, unless if they have transitioned from being an employee to an SME owner and has already been on LinkedIn. But we know that there's a lot of people on Facebook. Whether they're educated or not, employed or not, looking for work or not, but there are those people on Facebook. So Facebook becomes a very good vehicle to share knowledge of micro credentials. So there is room for people to know about them depending on what content they follow.

But then this is where we have algorithms working these days. Which from the search engines they can pick what people are looking for. And all these people are based on the basic information that you put into the platform whether it's Facebook or whatever platform. Then if you create yourself as a business owner, that alone should be enough to trigger the search engine to send you messages about micro credential courses related to your field. So that works. That's very smart.

They will also have business propellers. There's a lot of them, those people that interact with SME's. The banks, they've got the departments where they interact with, where they apply for loans and things like that. It should be their responsibility. They should make that their responsibility to tell them and to teach them that there are courses like this, like this, like this. Do you have them? Do you have the skills? If you want them, then do the courses any time online and stuff like that. So there are lots of ways of passing this message to the SME's so that they become aware of the support available to them.

**Interviewer:** That's a very good point then how easy or how hard do you think it is to access micro credential programs?

**Interviewee:** It has become very, very easy these days. Very very easy. Like I said earlier on that. You can do this thing on your phone. And finish and complete get your credential or certificate. You can do it on your laptop, iPad and honestly, almost every person who is in business would be expected to have a smartphone. There's a lot of communication going on these days on WhatsApp and these social media platforms because people have smart gadgets, it's very, very easy to access these. It's an assumption that I have.

**Interviewer:** It should be quite easy right, and then how does acquiring micro credentials contribute to an entrepreneur's skills levels?

**Interviewee:** Massively. Massively because for an entrepreneur, the most strange resource is time. Entrepreneurs don't have time to start work. They don't have time to knock off, they just work and work. Right, so but now, while they're busy with their day-to-day running of their businesses. You would find that most of these SME's, they depend on the little knowledge they've had before they started the business, whether

from relatives, from their previous work or from people that are role models in the society, who they look at. But all that knowledge is not in any way good enough to make them a well-developed entrepreneur. Secondly, we know we are living in a digital world now, technologically driven world where you no longer have a person with all the required skills. Hence you find these big businesses, the multinational enterprises, they have departments that are run by experts. And all these experts, they only know, they're only specialized in their department and not in the other. That's why they succeed. Now. You cannot have an owner who is an expert in all the functions needed.

So these micro credentials of course they don't make anyone a specialist, but they give they offer that, what can I say, specific skills and specific knowledge for a specific function. So at the end of the day, a person acquires all these skills to the high level. Skills about that particular function in a business. So you end up knowing a little bit of marketing. You know a little bit about accounting, basics of accounting because remember their system is not going to prepare financial statements that needs to be verified and be published in a local newspaper or anything. It's just accounting for their business, but they need to know how to run a book. What do you call it? A balance sheet? You know, things like that, profit and loss account. So they understand if they're making money or not. So looking at the at the expected outcomes of this micro credentials, the contribution is massive in my opinion. Because you don't expect an SME owner to go get a degree in accounting, a degree in HR and the degree in marketing, a degree in supply chain management, degree in digital marketing or whatever it is, it will take them a life time.

**Interviewer:** That's true. That's such a good point

**Interviewee:** So short specific courses, they make a massive impact which contributes massively to the success of an SME. That's my viewpoint.

**Interviewer:** Thank you for that. And just currently in your organization, in your business, how is training conducted like do you have online training that you do, in person trainings? How are you currently conducting training if you are?

**Interviewee:** Alright, we are a small business, very small business, very small number of employees. But because we have an employee who runs internal sales. And it's a person who doesn't have, who came in without those skills. We had to do our own internal training using our own past experience to train these people how to do the work. We have the person who runs the warehouse. So we have to train the person from our previous experience on how to keep stock and how to manage stock. How to replenish stock. But this is all internal and from this conversation this is where it becomes important for us to be able to learn as well and identify a few micro credentials for the person who runs the warehouse. So they don't get training only from our experience, which is obviously limited. They give a little bit more of the skill they need and then the

salesperson also needs some micro. So yes, we're doing our own training that's the short answer. But we have learned already in this interview that we need to consider micro credentials.

**Interviewer:** Yes, please consider micro credentials. Then if you are to adopt micro credentials or take up a micro credential program, which skills do you aim to improve, you know?

**Interviewee:** OK, some basics of supply chain management. We desperately need that, we will need to improve those skills because our business is run on inventory. So you need someone who knows how to manage inventory. From sourcing, distribution replenishment. Someone who knows what to replenish more than the other. When to replace what? Or to replenish what? When to add what? So you need some skills into managing the movement of your inventory. So that you optimize, so we need to improve such skills and then we need to improve skills in basic financial management because obviously we sell our stock and we make money that money needs to be managed well. We need to manage the money well in running the costs, all the costs involved in the business and also the inventory itself will increase. The stock should reduce the stock. What do we do? What expenses do we need to add or to remove? You know, some basic financial knowledge. We need some sales knowledge and I think that is one we need mostly because we entirely depend on ourselves, so we need to know how to interact with customers. How to identify high potential customers and low potential customers and how to interact with them differently and how to maximize ourselves. We need skills like HR skills, how to manage employees because we have a small number of employees. An employee is an employee and they need to be managed well because the more employees will come, they will learn the organizational culture from the existing employees. For us to establish a good culture, we need good HR skills. So all those are the kind of maybe micro credentials we need.

**Interviewer:** That was very insightful, thank you. How long do you think it usually takes to complete the micro credential? I think this ties back to the one answered before. How much effort will it take?

**Interviewee:** And it also depends, on the course design. They design some that will run for hours, yeah. They design some that run for a few days, some run for a few weeks. You hardly find many that will run for many months. Yeah, it's usually 2 hours, 3 hours, six hours and then you manage your six hours. You can't run six hours nonstop. So you manage it, you give yourself a target. I want to finish this thing in a week or over weekends or whatever it is. So it really goes back to how a person manages their time.

**Interviewer:** Alright, thank you for that, then how do you decide which macro credential to adopt or which macro credential program to take on? What do you look at when you're deciding to do these courses.

**Interviewee:** I think in the 1st place for one to decide as to what credentials one needs or what I think we need to do here is to specify to say an SME owner, we have to decide as to what micro credential is needed for the business. Not for them, for the business. OK. They always want to acquire the skills themselves. Like we said earlier on that the SME owner runs most of the business by themselves. But if we look also at how important succession is for SME's, it means the skills must be spread through the business. So the first consideration. That I would consider myself is who requires what skill in the business. That will make it possible for a few micro credentials to be adopted at the same time by different people.

**Interviewer:** Alright, good point

**Interviewee:** So I think that's one biggest consideration. The owner, if they need some, the other people in the in the business that might need some. Yes. And then the second consideration, would be, who is expected to serve in this business for long? You don't want to obviously spend effort in upskilling somebody that may not last in the business or that is not required to stay long in the business. It has to stay. They still has to be used in the business for a long time. So to me that would be the second project reason. Then the third would be the affordability. If there are fees involved.

But we are looking at SME's and say most of them, if we were to look on ratios, I would say probably roughly speaking more than 50% of SME's are running on survival for survival. They are really not making so much money. They're just surviving from day-to-day. So that bracket of SMEs may not afford that much to invest in these micro credentials now. It means already we are looking at a smaller number of SME's. So affordability already has divided our population. So affordability becomes another factor, and then another factor would be, I would say, I would say the appreciation of the importance of this micro credential for the success of the business. If I don't appreciate that this skill is going to help me to improve the quality of my business and therefore leads to the success of my business, even if it's for free, I may not do it. I don't appreciate its importance. This is very important. Which also means there has to be somebody somewhere who helps them to realize how important these micro credentials are. That will also improve the adoption of those micro credentials. Then, like we said, also besides affordability, we are looking at infrastructure which is beyond the control of the business owner. Do we have it connectivity for them to do this thing online? Or do we have institutions in the area where one can go physically to a physical place, someone to receive the training? Or do we have someone who is mobile. Who goes around training these people? I mean, going to where they are and train them. I think that's some of the factors that I would say.

**Interviewer:** Well said, thank you. Then how do you measure your skills levels ?

**Interviewee:** That's interesting because in established businesses, obviously with a good HR, they've got KPI's and the major peoples KPI's and performance per year and things like that, that's how naturally skills are measured. I mean over time. That's why we've got KPIs reviewed every year. You are trying to see if the skills still relevant over time, and if you're still being good enough. So for one to measure their own skills, obviously, the first thing will be considering how long they have had the skill, but also when we talk about that, we realize that the longer the skill, doesn't necessarily translate to the better the skill.

**Interviewer:** Nice. That's interesting.

**Interviewee:** New skills are coming up and they're always better than the old skills. So time alone is not enough. But of course, it matters that you have already had a skill for a while. But for me, the best way to measure a skill is to measure its results or its impact on the business. It does not help to acquire a skill which does not lead to any improvement in the finances of the business or the quality of the products or the quality of the distribution of the product. So if I were to measure the success of any micro credential skill or any micro credential, I would look at its impact on the business.

**Interviewer:** Well said, thank you. Then how much flexibility do you think our micro credentials allow you in comparison to your traditional university degree?

**Interviewee:** Ah, well, for small businesses, I definitely wouldn't say a formal degree would help them. It's too general. It's too broad. It's not specific enough. So for small businesses, these micro credentials, if you want to learn about one thing today, how to plant seed, you going to learn about planting seed. You come back, you want to learn about how to harvest or how to apply chemicals. I mean, to attack insects and stuff like that. You come and do that. So there's a lot of flexibility that you get from micro credentials than from a formal course. Remember, starting a formal degree course, it will run for three years whether it's still relevant to you or not, you are stuck with it. You need to finish. All right. And then. If you look. At these long term courses, these formal courses, the cost is so high. Now with these short ones, the digital ones that we're talking about, the cost is low. Sometimes the cost is very little next to nothing and you get to choose what to do when. Depending on the demands in your business. So there's so much flexibility with micro credentials, which is good for an SME because they need to manage things as their time allows and as demand arises in the business.

**Interviewer:** That is quite true. Then would you say macro credentials are credible as qualifications acquired from universities?

**Interviewee:** For small businesses in particular. I wouldn't say they are just as credible. I would say they are more credible than degree courses. Why? Because the ones we're talking about now, the short ones for the business, they are specific to the skills which are required to run that particular business of which a degree is general. If I'm running a

construction company, the skills I need are different from someone who is doing embroidery. They are different from someone who is doing confectionery. So if I'm running a small confectionery shop, the skills I need for that particular business. I go and acquire those skills. They are more credible to me for that business than a degree. Which is just general and teaches me about employee behaviour, HR, I mean business management, marketing, which is general skills that are not specific to my industry. So to me it's more credible than a general degree.

**Interviewer:** All right, so we are almost done. Just a few questions left. Do you think macro credentials accurately depict a person's skills? I think it sort of ties to what you were just saying just now.

**Interviewee:** Yeah, I think it's an extension. So I do think so, but now you must remember that your skills levels are defined with regards to your industry or with regards to the nature of your business. It's a speciality that we have done. The only challenge that remains is the day your business is no longer relevant, is no longer making money and you want to move into another business. Your skills are gone and blown up. But that happens to everyone. If you look at people with fitting and turning or mechanical engineering, at some point somewhere everything you see is getting automated. Yeah, all those people, they are just regarded as people who don't have a skill because the skills they have are not applicable anymore. So they have to acquire new skills. Yeah, they need to change. So we live in a changing world, so we need to be prepared to change. But as long as your industry is running, your business is running and you have your skills, all fine.

**Interviewer:** I think I agree with that, moving on, which method of learning would you prefer between game based learning and the traditional learning setting?

**Interviewee:** What is tradition? What do you mean by traditional?

**Interviewer:** I mean, sitting in a classroom you know, or game based learning, which is usually I mean remotely done.

**Interviewee:** Now I think myself, I would prefer traditional, not necessarily physical class. You could be an online. I think this thing depends with age. People's digital skills and you know people's preferences. There's quite a lot of things, people's previous exposures to these things like digital gadgets and stuff like that, people's background, you take a group of people from the villages and people from town. I mean their preferences would differ because I mean gamification will be intimidating to someone who came from the village. Because I mean to learn how to navigate your way through that you know it's quite challenging in the first place and for someone who grew up let's say in town. With all the gadgets they were playing with, they already know how to play a lot of games so their preference would be gamification. So for me it would be

traditional, because I learn faster when I speak to other human beings. But I'm sure for my son he would prefer gamification.

**Interviewer:** It's interesting how you mentioned age because I see the younger people, I think they'll prefer games. It's also easier for them to remember if you play something on the game compared to sitting in the classroom. But like you said, for the older generation might struggle a bit. Moving on, what are some of your business goals and in order to achieve those goals, do you think you will need to improve your entrepreneurial skills?

**Interviewee:** Most definitely. OK, let's do the goals. Every business is run to make money. That's the first basic reason. So obviously our goals are to make more money so that we eventually become financially free. The other goal is the business should live longer than the owners, the current owners, so there should be successors. The business must grow and must diversify. All those things, they need more money, money, money, money, money. So if you need to grow money, you need skills in growing money.

Not necessarily skills to run a business, but skills to grow money. So I believe that we need some micro credentials in teaching us how to invest money. We have made money in the business, but we need to be able to invest. Also, skills to know how to diversify a business and run a diversified business. With them, the weakness with small businesses is you think you are the only person who knows everything. Otherwise, everyone will make mistakes. But we need skills that will train us and teach us, so we can delegate responsibility and authority to other people and run the business, you know, so that we can then diversify. We can then make more money. We can then have successors to the business. We can retire early. Then go to the beach.

**Interviewer:** And I think you already answered the last question I was going to ask, but do you think that micro credentials can be useful in helping you to acquire those skills that you need to achieve your business goals?

**Interviewee:** Most definitely. I support the idea of micro credentials being important for SME's. So most definitely we will need some micro credentials and I believe they will help us to achieve our goals. Because. Like I said, if we were to acquire skills in HR, then we know how to manage people. Then from there we can employ people with different skills, high level skills, more skill than us to run their certain departments. As long as we know how to manage them. Then they manage their work. But for us to get there, we need these skills. Why? There are two reasons. One reason is for you to be able to earn the business well. Second reason is to avoid unnecessary breaking of the law. You might break the law without realizing that you're breaking the law because you deal with people, you might end up in court, then you end up paying people in compensation because you don't know how to manage the people. So we need skills in HR, human resource management. We definitely need that. We probably need some micro

credentials in some commercial law as well if it's there. To understand some laws with regards to contracts, with regards to different types of contracts. You understand because you don't want your business as it grows to run into litigation issues. Then start losing money or end up closing the business. We need some credentials, micro credentials in digitalization, we are at the stage now of 4IR. You don't want to continue running your business the way you've been running it for the past 10 years or 15 years because there's a revolution that's coming. And every revolution will render many businesses irrelevant.

Everyone in business needs to understand the emerging technologies and their impact on the business as well. Otherwise, you'll wake up without a business. And secondly, the skills we acquire can they help you develop another business which is relevant to the emerging customer preferences. So you need skills in all that. So I think my last comment in that question would be that every SME owner or SME manager, they need continuous learning and continuous acquisition of micro credentials so that they are always up to date with what's going on in the business world.

**Interviewer:** I absolutely agree with that. Thank you. That was the last question I had. Any other comments you'd like to make?

**Interviewee:** Yeah, my last comment would be that we are now living in a VUCA world. Have you heard about the VUCA world? I'm sure you know about it. Well, that's punctuated with vulnerability, uncertainty. What are the other two terms? Ambiguity. And what else? I don't remember now, but it's a word for constantly changing. The changes are erratic. If you look at when the pandemic hit the world, every business stopped. Whoever was not prepared to run their business online had to close shop. So the VUCA world we are living in now, the only people who survive are the businesses that are flexible, businesses that can change, with the capacity to change quickly. The businesses that can identify, what they call the weak signals. The signals of change. You must be able to pick the signals of change that there will be a change happening. And you need to align yourself with the change so that when the change eventually establishes itself, you are part of it.

But all those things do not just happen. They happen to those who have these skills. These skills to identify the emerging changes, emerging shifts in business. Also, I mean, for any SME owner, once they remain in business. And for me, someone who doesn't want to remain an SME, but I don't think it's also a goal, a good goal or objective for a small business owner that their business must remain small. I mean, it mustn't remain small. Every SME must grow into an MNE if possible, must grow beyond the borders of its own country. But for that to happen, you need a lot of skills. And the skills are not necessarily from degree courses. So that's my last comment to say things are changing every day and SME's must be aware that your business cannot remain the same. You

cannot expect to run as part of business for the next 50 years. You have to change at some point, in some way things will change.

**Interviewer:** Wow, thank you so so much. I actually learnt a lot from this conversation.