Finland rediscovers its talent

Strong consumer spending has held up; unemployment has not risen as much as was expected, but the looming skills crisis will impact smaller business and channels before too much longer. Meanwhile there is a healthy games and mobile environment and many developers and ISVs working on apps...

was conducted by technology and innovation consulting firm Spinverse and launched at the CTO Forum in December 2010.

"In addition to increases in headcount, we are very encouraged that over half of the CTOs surveyed plan to increase R&D investment in the next 12 months, and are clearly seeking technology-led growth," commented Pekka Koponen, the CEO of Spinverse.

Half of the CTOs who responded to the survey are responsible for R&D budgets of over one million Euros, and include Finland's largest R&D-investors. These R&D budgets are driving future growth, with 90% of CTOs planning to introduce new products and services in the next year.

The collaborative nature of Finnish innovation was also highlighted by the finding that over 80% of CTOs expect to work with other companies and universities on their R&D activities.

On the question of staffing resources, *IT Europa* spoke to Frank Højgaard, who is Managing Director, Firebrand Nordics. Firebrand Training is a specialist in Accelerated Learning, offering fast training and certification from vendors including: (ISC)2, EC-Council, CompTIA, Oracle and Microsoft. Firebrand's largest businesses are in the UK, DACH and Nordic regions – training a total of 25,000 IT professionals to date. The Nordic arm of Firebrand Training only started up two years ago, and has already become a €3m business.

We asked how he responded to the issue of declining rewards for individuals with the old technical accreditations coupled with pressure on time and fewer people becoming available for training in mature economies? He did not see this as an issue: "Firebrand's rapid growth has been based on the Nordics'

desire for IT certification, and the need to gain it quickly. We're seeing a real hunger for IT training, despite these testing economic times. As the economy begins to grow – and organisations begin to hire – an IT skills shortage is developing. Despite the recession, technology has continued to develop; this means that organisations are now playing catch-up, and ensuring that their employees' skills are up-to-date."

Is the training changing to produce more business process experts rather than tech-based experts which surely takes longer and is more expensive?

"Both are true. It's true that business process experts are becoming more attractive – but more so 'cross-technical experts'. It's now not enough to be an expert in only one field, you also need to understand its integration into related technical areas (e.g. ERP experts also need to be familiar with the technical platform in terms of Enterprise Portal, SQL Server etc)."

"IT in the Nordics is growing the fastest in areas that support GNP growth. Customers investing in IT training predominantly represent manufacturing, pharmaceutical, finance, energy, and public sectors. They are normally looking for skills in project management, service management, ERP, security, networking, SharePoint etc."

"The need for organisations to gain new IT skills

quickly means that Firebrand's Accelerated Learning model works everywhere. We are currently in the process of developing the business in the BeNeLux region, with Australasia and the Middle East on the horizon."

Looking at which areas are most active in the IT sector, it seems that a lot is driven by the smaller ISV and developer, often working on a mobile or graphics platform. 3D Arts Mobile, located in Jyvaskyla, Finland, for example, has been involved with the mobile industry since the first mobile devices offered color screens more than 14 years ago. Since then, the company has successfully developed, globally launched and rolled out many mobile games and applications.

The 3D Arts Mobile catalogue includes titles that are designed with better quality sound and graphics, a key feature that has separated the company apart from others and positioned them as experts in creating a gaming experience. Offscreen Technologies, another small Finnish company specialising in high quality touch-optimized apps for Symbian and Maemo touch devices, is a prolific developer with over 50 apps, games and ebooks on the Ovi Store to date. The response from consumers has been overwhelmingly

Finland: leading distributors

Source: IT Europa report and research (e) estimate €millions

Company	Total staff	2009 sales	2008 sales
Also Nordic Holding	828	632.7	775.1
Tech Data Finland Oy	65	174.0	152.9
Future CAD Oy	53	36.7	41.5
Arrow Finland Oy	62	23.2	36.5
Bruce Campbell Oy	30	14.9	14.6