

SOUFFLEARNING

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Result 13

FINAL EVALUATION REPORT



Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme

Soufflearning Final Evaluation Report

This evaluation report builds on the interim evaluation report submitted after the first project year. For the evaluation process within this project period evaluation and testing was carried out on different levels and for different products:

1. The offered material
2. The Soufflearning process and the transfer of the methodology
3. The cooperation and communication between partners

1. Offered material

Trainers' manual:

No general modification of the manual was carried out. From the feedback given in the pre-test Soufflearnings it was decided to re-edit the trainers' manual in the second project year. The second edition got a list of necessary skills of trainers, including specific regional aspects and best practice examples of Soufflearnings, and interviews with trainers. The evaluations questionnaires - developed for the process and the transfer of the methodology – are now added to the manual, including guidelines for the use of the questionnaires. Necessary and/or useful links to the website completed the new edition.

Project website:

Mid of June a survey about usability of site appeared online, published in all 5 project languages. A collaboration with work package 5 (Czech partners) focussed on convenient online-evaluation questionnaire tools: All intended questionnaires had been translated and transcribed by netz NRW into the professional oFb-format of SoSciSurvey.de. The partners got the access-links and passwords for using the fully serviceable online-evaluation in their experimentations.

Results: Online-survey about website usability (runtime 15.06.2011 – 30.09.2012)

Mid of June 2011 we installed a website survey for visitors in all 5 project languages. The button to this survey was marked highly visible. The survey got nearly 170 visits, but predominantly by rubbernecks. Only 8 persons fully completed the survey (4x IT, 3x DE, 1x

FR). The survey contained 14 short (multi-) choice questions/specified statements on a scale [-2 ... +2] and some additional free comment fields. See below the results (average grades):

- 50% of the respondents were brought to visit the site by recommendations
- 5 of 8 visited this site first time.
- We got responses from 3 trainers, 2 employees, 1 manager and others.
- Using of the website was evaluated as quite comfortable: mark +0,5
- Web design: +0,6
- Organization of the pages in general: +0,25
- Easiness of information approach: +0,3
- Terminology used in this site was clear: +1,0
- The information provided with this website was clear: +1,1
(one respondent noted, the explanation about Soufflearning in detail would look like hidden)
- News and informations about project's progress had been explored well: +0,5
- Supplemental materials (documents, downloads): useful +0,7
- Content met the expectations: +0,7
- Quality rate of the site all in all: +0,9
- Recommendation: 7 of 8 respondents voted "yes".

The entries on survey spread throughout the runtime, last response on 17.09.2012. The evaluation results ameliorated in 2nd project year due to adjustments, growth of content and site maintenance. By end of project the website will change its appearance from project focus to a methodology site with broader dissemination in view of marketing. Suggestions for re-organizing exist and will be implemented.

The main internet tools for intensely exchange of experiences by professionals and users were scarcely used. Partners were strongly involved in their actual project implementations, not time enough for initiating extensive debates on web. It is possible that for more lively conversation on internet the project should have provided a social media management, which was not planned in the original application/budget.

An in-depth analysis of the website analytics statistics was made. 4.638 visits within 19 months seems not overwhelming, but average time of visit duration (3min 56s), actions on site (3.8), bounce-rate (52%) and notable returning visits (1.399) with more actions (5.5) and a longer duration of the visit (6min 34s) testify rather interested professional visitors.

The website in average had 20 visitors per day, most of them coming from Germany followed by visitors from the Czech Republic and Italy. Also from beyond the project participating countries a large number of visits could be stated: from the United States and Great Britain as main countries. The peak of visits occurred in May 2011, which was the month of training workshops in partner countries and July 2012 which was the month following the final dissemination conference in Germany. Most hits and visits were accounted on entry page, of course, followed by page titles the page introducing the Italian

partner Euroform RFS and the German final dissemination conference site. Next in order of visits were "Newsticker", "Project", "FAQ", "Workshops" and "Experiences".

Newsletter and Overview on funding possibilities have not been evaluated.

2. The Soufflearning process, the transfer of the methodology and the cooperation and communication between partners.

The Soufflearning methodology is implemented in each country now for one and a half year. The final evaluation was conducted in 4 countries through partners' organizations. In the final evaluation we focused on partner's experiences and their observations during the SOUFFLEARNING project. Partners have completed the evaluation by the end of September 2012. Czech partner ALVIT- Innovation and Education evaluated all obtained evaluations.

Method for the final evaluation's data collection

Based on Soufflearning pre-test evaluation "ALVIT – Innovation and Education" decided to use a qualitative evaluation tool for the final evaluation, because testing sample (SME's, employers, employees and trainers) was too small to make any statistically relevant conclusion. For the final evaluation it was decided to use the SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, Threats) as a more suitable methodology to evaluate an implementation in all participating countries (Italy, Czech Republic, France and Germany). The SWOT analysis shows obvious conclusions and the aim of this survey was to obtain partner's opinions and compare their implementation success. For the purposes of the evaluation each partner should focus on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the Soufflearning methodology and its implementation. Therefore an evaluation form was sent to the project partners

SWOT analysis summary

1°) STRENGTHS

Starting with strengths feedback was given on international experiences, the effects and benefits for SMEs and the implementation at the work place. For the project partners it was very valuable to get information and experiences how the Soufflearning methodology works in other countries. This lead to an exchange of experiences, which can improve Soufflearnings.

It was stated that the training method is clearly seducing for employers. The idea behind the training concept was generally well received by SMEs managers and SMEs

organisations. Employers were able to find out about their company's strong and weak points and work with this information hereafter.

At the workplace trainers were enabled to evaluate real work experiences and give the trained employees a personal feedback. General feedback described that the training was perfectly adapted to the routines of the company and is applicable in daily practice. It was described as strength of the methodology that the training is developed and structured according to the company and workers real needs (individual, personal and *face to face* training) and therefore was very comfortable for managers and SME's companies.

The project webpage in the SWOT analysis was described as professional webpage that allowed posting the newest information about the project and its results or changing experiences. The website was explicitly described as useful and that important project documents are easily obtained and downloadable. The multiple languages appearance of the website was declared as one of the strengths of the project.

Trainers in the SWOT analysis were honoured for their training efficiency and their very human and professional attitude to each employee as well as for their impartiality and the ability to assess possibilities of each participant Soufflearning training. It was stated that good trainers recognise what kind of motivation each employee needs (ass support, to understand, to improve self confidence) and also evaluate each situation and help to manage difficult situation

2°) WEAKNESS

Difficulties of contacting managers

As weakness in the transfer of the innovative methodology in the SWOT analysis was mentioned that it was very **difficult to get in touch with a right person** (company manager).

The time required to talk about Soufflearning method and to convince

The inaugural overview on the Soufflearning method took a lot of time to explain properly in detail so that during a first approach the relevant benefits for employers were not clear and it was difficult to persuade them to have a Soufflearning training. Therefore it took more time to explain the special characteristics of Soufflearning compared to other methods (like coaching, In-house-trainings ...). It was also stated that in the beginning there was only a low number of webpage's visitors.

The short time foreseen for the implementation of Soufflearning training

Regarding the training methodology itself it was described as weakness that there was only a short time foreseen for the implementation of a Soufflearning training (for trainers and also for employees) so it was very difficult for trainers to get employee's

trust. It was mentioned that it was very difficult to find the “imaginary border” that describes how far a trainer can go with the Soufflearning training (which is different person to person).

The thin border between personal and professional attitude of the trainer

As another weakness the potential thin border between trainer’s personal and professional attitude was mentioned.

3°) OPPORTUNITIES

But now after the transfer period also opportunities were described by the project partners in their SWOT analysis.

INFORMATION and COMMUNICATION

Regarding information and communication it was described as possible improvements that a shorter introductory presentation about the Soufflearning methodology should be prepared combined with an easier to understand webpage for SMEs – as there might be too much information and so that SMEs can easily get lost in the existing webpage. But introducing the Soufflearning methodology and offering tangible results from our Soufflearning trainings raises the awareness and information towards the importance of Lifelong training.

QUALIFYING THE TRAINING

The transfer of the training methodology led to a specific and qualified team of Soufflearning trainers. Nevertheless it was suggested to have a two day training for trainers – for a better observation and analysis of work. Here some additional tools could be supplied to get a trace of the work activity and of important information for the employee for the feedback talk. It was mentioned as opportunity that the length of Soufflearning training depends on the decision of the Soufflearning trainer and not on any previously given fixed structure. Professional trainers and training organisation benefit from Soufflearnings as they are empowered to develop their skills to adapt their training to the need of the SMEs.

AN OPPORTUNITY TO DEVELOP MORE TRAINING IN THE ENTERPRISES

It was stated that after the implementation of first Soufflearnings it is considered where the Soufflearning could also be a useful method of personalized training (other fields of training). Soufflearning can also be an additional product to an enterprises’ development strategy and help to re-launch and reposition itself on the market through a targeted and effective training. Partner organisations stated that they will develop more SFL trainings within the participant SMEs or with the related organisations and continue to evaluate the effects of the Soufflearning method on the work processes and on the employees’ performances.

4°) THREATS

THE CONCEPT SOUFFLEARNING IS NOT WIDESPREAD

As threats were described that up to now Soufflearning isn't very widespread and needs more time to get well known.

AN UNDERESTIMATE METHOD

In general trainings like Soufflearning are underestimated by the employer's and there probably will be less interest in this method when SMEs will have to pay for the trainings. The fact that it becomes more common and preferred by companies to have only part-time workers with the conclusion that these workers don't need any training. But for companies that are already convinced by the need of training their employees, Soufflearning and its flexibility may be attractive.

A RETURN ON INVESTISSEMENT OF TRAINING TO DEVELOP

It was also observed that companies prefer to invest money into the new material or technology instead of investing in trainings. Therefore it is not easy to persuade a SMEs and its employees to take part in a training. Besides companies usually expect immediately benefits from training what can't be expected from a Soufflearning.

3. The cooperation and communication between partners.

Cooperation and partnership ran satisfying. As in every project reminders were sent when delivery dates got closer.

WEBSITE

The website is important for the cooperation activities of partners and beyond as well as is an essential part of the dissemination strategies towards public areas. The forum element on the website was installed for internal discussions between partners in May 2011. But in daily work it showed yet neither added benefit nor real practicability for our communication culture. Thus the forum was parked stand-by and not even re-activated for discussion in the broader dissemination phase in spring 2012.

CONSORTIUM MEETING AND COMMUNICATION

The consortium meetings and its minutes were very important elements for the cooperation and implementation of the methodology in the partner countries. The minutes with agreements, schedules and deadlines were sent out after the meetings and approved by the partners. Between the meetings email, skype, telepone and telephone conference were used for clarifying detail questions, exchange and coordination.

Conclusions

The Soufflearning method was accepted and met so far with great interest from SMEs in the participating countries. Trainers for the future application of the method were recruited and trained so that a continuous dissemination of the methodology can be expected.

Trainers, employees & companies from all participating countries gave a positive feedback: the concept can be adapted to local and individual needs and requests, it is highly flexible in scheduling and creates positive and attractive training situations. There are no long lasting breaks in regular work flow and every day work. The results and success can already be seen after a short training period. And last but not least the Soufflearnings created self confidence among the employees as they didn't offer ready to use solutions but led to self acquired solutions.

The relaxed atmosphere made the trainings attractive, the employees felt understood and supported in their own contributions. They also expressed a higher motivation to continue with further vocational training. It was stated by the employers that the methodology gave good results within a short time. The employees now act much more professional towards the clients. This also can be understood as a contribution to increase the disposition of company decision makers for further engagement in VET. Soufflearning also gave input to change the sales strategy which led to an increased turnover.

The biggest advantage partners see in having a training at the workplace because this makes the Soufflearning method unique and very flexible. Companies, which collaborated in this project, were very satisfied with the training, because they received benefits such as customer loyalty or returning customers; a new impulse for sales strategies; higher motivated employees, higher turnover etc. The results were obtained by using of the developed and supplied qualitative oriented questionnaires.

Disadvantages of the Soufflearning method were also described. Soufflearning is an absolutely new methodology and demands a different style of training. SMEs in the participating countries are not used to offer training for their employees so it is a very difficult situation for trainers to get trust not only from SME managers but also from employees. Trainer and employees but also trainer and employers have a special relationship of trust (fear to lose the work, passing information), also regulated Soufflearning (ordered by the employer) can lead to disturbance reaction from the employees.

Soufflearning as a method got many supporters, but unfortunately because of the crisis it can be observed that many SMEs have absolutely different priorities than educating their employees and instead prefer to save money for difficult periods.

The partners in the consortium benefited from participating in the project. The developed cooperation led to an intense exchange of experience with the chance to compare different attitudes and finally led to the creation of the partner cooperation network. The practical aspects of the adaptation of the Soufflearning method and its development and being part of an innovative consortium implementing and testing a new training methodology was empowering for the local work.

The project led to best practice examples as a proof that this training works. With the network of the partners who now know about this training method, a very good background with presentable results was created to prove that Soufflearning works in four European countries. Now partners are able to offer printed materials about the project and are able to promote this training methodology in the future.

This method has a lot of opportunities for the future. But first of all it should be better known as opportunity for SMEs and employees. Target audience oriented SME's conferences should be used to promote Soufflearnings. SMEs should realise that they need this specific training to have more professional, skilled and educated employees. It can be questioned if this is a task of VET organisations as part of their marketing strategies or if it better should be supported by policy strategies on regional or national level.