

WP3 SME Focus Group Report

REPORT



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Introduction

The SME focus groups were held at each Passport to Trade 2.0 partner countries during the spring 2012. The aim was to have at least three participants in each country which proved to be challenging. In Finland and Germany the target number of participants was not reached. As it was impossible to have enough participants in the focus groups, some of the information has been gathered via personal interviews. Altogether there were 48 participants studied. The participant numbers per partner country are presented in the Table 1.

Table 1 Number of participants in SME focus groups

	Student focus group
Bulgaria	4
Czech	4
Finland	2
Germany	1
Greece	7
Italy	3
Romania	7
UK	20
Altogether	48

The aim of the focus groups were to gather information on good and bad practices in social media etiquette and placement practices and to find some gaps on information available on these topics. The focus group was divided into two parts. The first part focuses on social media usage and etiquette, the second part on placements. This report sums up the main results of the student focus groups.

Part 1: Social media usage and etiquette

What do you think that social media etiquette means?

For some participants, social media etiquette was a new term. However, the workshop participants came up with many good definitions to the concept. Most often the students started to think norms of behaviour and rules on how to act in social media. Some students discussed the privacy issues and raised up the dangers of putting too much personal information out there, which can be misused by any computer savvy persons. Some also thought of issues like name to use e.g. real name, short name, or nickname. Also copyright issues were considered to belong into social media etiquette. The basic rules of good behaviour are also valid on virtual networks.

Differences between the codes of conduct between forums and Facebook were also discussed. They thought that the forums have more often explicit rules; whereas, in Facebook people are mostly reacting only after somebody offends the unwritten rules. But even if the codes of conduct are different, the students thought that one should not give different kind of picture of himself on professional forums than on private ones. Otherwise, in recruiting situations the potential employer will get a confusing picture of the applicant.

Some examples of the usage of social media in business and examples on social media etiquette was broken

The majority of students could not think of the situations where social media etiquette was broken. However, some examples were given:

- Example of two bank in Koblenz who looked into social media before getting a new employee
- Businesses have their own sites in Facebook which represent themselves (marketing method)
- Cyber bullying, where one young student writes something nasty about another student anonymously for everyone to read
- Cloning of other people's details to defraud them
- Companies sharing your personal details with their business partners even though they promise that they will
- Some companies bombarding their registered customers with unwanted products or services
- There are companies who stores your details just by visiting their website
- It sometimes happened on Facebook company pages for example that they delete something when other users wrote bad stuff
- Example: Dirk Nowitzki is working for the Bank Inga Diba and within the TV spot he is getting sausage... on the Facebook page a big discussion between vegetarians and non vegetarians started which was closed after a while by the bank
- People do endless discussion about everything and then chat loud
- A student has been jailed for 'trolling'.

- Employee breaking social media guidelines.

Have you received or been given any guidelines at work, hobbies, studies etc. for social media usage (so called Policies for Social Media Etiquette)?

Some students have been given guidelines on how to use social media at their workplaces. Instructions were given at a bank, at IBM, or at students union. All the examples of social media guidelines were work-related. Some students even stated that they had not received any guidance on private/personal networks.

Have you got any training on these issues? Where from? Would you need some?

Almost none of the participants of the focus groups had got any training on this area. Some were offered but they did not participate the training. Mostly students had learned from friends and school. Most of students expected training to be useful. Some of that they don't need any.

Training needs were stated as follows:

- Especially younger people need training as most post with wrong/no privacy setting so that everybody can see it and the parents haven't seen it at all
- Yes, as in most business (especially IT businesses) there will come points when you have to use social media; here it would be better to not only have one general sentence in the beginning before starting to work, but also a training on how to use it.
- Also at University you will always have contact points with social media so that training is necessary
- Training should probably be connected with other issues like how to use the internet in general
- People have no idea about the consequences because they don't know how to set privacy setting; they don't understand the whole setting (www)
- Hard to define between social media etiquette and handling social media
- Policy should differentiate between what is possible and what do I want for myself/for the organization
- There was also a comment that working with Social Media is something you don't learn with training, but you are growing into it.

What are the main social networks you are using (privately/professionally, in studies)? – For what purpose (privately/professionally, in studies)?

There seems to be differences between countries in most used social networks. Those are

- in Germany

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Google+
- YouTube
- Wikis yes, but not seen as Social Media
- Xing
- No longer used in Germany are
 - Wer-kennt-wen
 - StudiVZ
 - MySpace

All the networks are used for private purposes, nothing really professionally, except Xing is used in business context. There was a small hype when Google+ started, but by now it seems that it is dead again. They never broke the boundaries to get enough users to get attractive to use.

In the Czech Republic social networks used in addition to the global ones are Seznam.cz, Lide.cz, and Libimseti.cz. In Finland people are using also Yammer.

What are the main social networks used by your friends/colleagues?

Facebook, LinkedIn and Youtube is used a lot, but Twitter less and Google+ almost not at all. In the Czech Republic the local networks are used also.

What do you think is an appropriate media for different purposes for private persons and for companies?

The networks that are mostly professional are LinkedIn and Xing. Youtube is in between of professional and private. Many companies now use Youtube to advertise themselves to the general public, there are many examples of small enterprises using Youtube to promote their products, you have people like writers and musicians cutting out publishing houses and record companies by uploading their books and music on Youtube directly to potential customers. Businesses are now turning to all these sites because of the traffic they generate to advertise their goods and services, and some even register and open account for their companies on these sites. I know of a well known luxury hotel chain that has mandated all its managers to open an account with Facebook and react to everything that is written about the hotel either good or bad on the site. They are using the media to show their current and potential customers that they are able to react to every situation. All the local sites are used for all sorts of stuff like, blogging, relationship, buying and selling, etc. Facebook is considered mostly private.

Are there any particular etiquette related differences based on the different Social Network you are part of?

In Google + the people act a little bit differently; their real names are obligatory and thereby people are acting differently, more friendly. Facebook context-dependent and depends on the person. Professional networks like LinkedIn and Xing place more importance to etiquette.

Have you noticed any cultural (country-specific) differences in social media usage and etiquette around the world?

Some of the students have not noticed any differences. Some say that people from the USA seem to be more open than the Europeans. In Germany people are sensible because of the big discussions in media about the privacy rights. Asian people seem more cautious and Europeans more direct. Americans are very open minded, they are nice, but someone often has the feeling that they only play their friendliness. Australians are also more open-minded. Twitter is used mostly in France. In the Eastern Asia some social media sites are banned and the behaviour of the users is more cautious than in Europe.

Part 2: Good practices on placement provisions

What are your experiences on placements for (foreign) students?

The experiences on placements are rather limited among the SMEs that participated in the focus groups. The ones that had employed foreign trainees had positive experiences. The traineeships has varied a lot. The students' educational background and field of study was very versatile. Also there were differences in the duration of the placement; they varied from two weeks up to one year. The placements have been organised either with the help of educational institute or independently.

Those participants who do not have yet experiences on student placements are interested in it (except the respondents from Romania). However, they state the biggest barrier for international placements is a lack of information.

What are the benefits of offering (international) placements?

The SME participants saw benefits in the different cultural background of the international trainees. They consider intercultural learning, improved language skills and new market information as the biggest advantages of international placements. It seemed that many respondents had used trainees to develop their operations in international markets. Usually trainees had been selected from countries that were relevant market areas for the SMEs. With the help of trainees the companies had acquired information on markets and got new contacts. The trainees were considered also as additional workforce as they had real skills that were useful. The trainees had been also able to bring some fresh and innovative ideas and to teach concrete new skills for the company. These included skills related to social media, academic research and language.

What are the challenges related to (international) placements?

Aspects related to the foreign culture were experienced as the challenges by the SMEs. These included language barrier and cultural differences which were visible in ways of behaviour. SMEs mentioned also administrative barriers as challenges. The placements require some paperwork and planning well ahead the actual placement. Sometimes the timing is not the right for the company's needs or the company is not able to find the most suitable trainee in the position in question. It is also time-consuming to organise training and suitable tasks for the trainee. There were also SMEs that did not see any challenges in international placements.

What are SME responsibilities related to (international) placements?

The main responsibility for the host company is to offer suitable tasks for the trainee and arrange a supervisor/tutor for the trainee. The trainee should be seen as a member of the workplace and the same rights and responsibilities apply to him/her as for other employees. The companies may also need to pay a salary for the trainee. Also they need to organise visas, insurances, accommodation etc. if these are needed or at least assist the students in acquiring these. Some respondents emphasised the social element of placements: it is important to make the student feel comfortable and introduce the culture etc. to them. It seemed that the responsibilities of host companies varied depending on the organisation of the placement (i.e. is educational institute involved or not)

Where did you find (or would look for) information on practical issues and potential trainees?

Educational institutes (universities and polytechnics) seem to be the most important source of information. In addition Internet was mentioned several times. The SMEs listed for example the following websites as useful:

- websites of private placement or recruiting companies
- websites of educational institutes
- websites of student organisations
- websites of the government employment sites

Also business partners were mentioned as a source of information. Based on the results in some countries it is difficult to find foreign students for placements. And overall there seem to lack of information on the topic.

Appendix 1 Focus Group Plan

Passport to Trade 2.0 Focus Group Plan

Focus Group: Good practices in social media etiquette and placements provision

Introduction

This focus group is designed to be used with entrepreneurs and students. The aim of the focus group is to explore...

The focus group is part of the WP 3 of the P2T2.0 (Passport to Trade 2.0) project which is funded by the European Union Leonardo da Vinci programme.

The focus group consists of two stages. At the first stage the participants are working in small groups and share their experience of social media etiquette. At the second stage, the focus is on placements. As a result of the focus group...

This plan includes the instructions to organise the focus groups including the timetable and the materials required.

Focus Group Plan

Focus Group: Good practices in social media etiquette and placement practices
<p>Aim of the focus group: To gather information on good and bad practices in social media etiquette and placement practices and to find some gaps on information available on these topics. The focus group is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on social media usage and etiquette, the second part on placements.</p> <p>Participants: SMEs who are interested in European markets and who offer placements and use social media. As it might be challenging to identify SMEs who have offered placements for foreign students, also SMEs who have had native trainees are suitable for this purpose.</p> <p>Students who undertake or are going to undertake mobility for studying/working purposes</p> <p>Number of participants: min. 3 SMEs / min. 5 students</p> <p>Duration: Appr. 1,5 hours</p> <p>Materials needed: paper and pens</p> <p>Method: Group discussions.</p> <p>If there are 6 or more participants in the focus groups, the participants can be split into smaller groups (e.g. 3 persons/group). The participants are advised to discuss the given topics in a group and write down their views. At the end the groups share their ideas to all participants. If there are only few participants, the facilitators should take part in the discussion and take notes of the discussion. The focus groups should be video recorded if possible.</p>
Part 1: Social media usage and etiquette
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Start the workshop with participant introductions, then continue with presenting the P2T2.0 project and the aim of the workshop. 2. Divide the participants into smaller groups (e.g. at least 3 people in one group). 3. Give each group papers, pens and the topics to work on.

- open discussion about 'what do you think that social media etiquette means'
 - cases/examples (private and business context)
 - have you encountered any other situations where you thought that the netiquette was broken by individuals or companies?
4. guidelines for the staff
 5. usage in studying
 6. have you received any guidelines at work, hobbies, studies etc. for social media usage (so called Policies for Social Media Etiquette)?
 7. have you got any training on these issues? Where from? Would you need some?
 8. Main social networks used (privately/professionally, in studies)? – For what purpose (privately/professionally, in studies)? BY you and BY other (what do you think is an appropriate media for each purpose for private persons and for companies)?
 - Facebook
 - MySpace
 - LinkedIn
 - BeboBlogs
 - Wikis
 - Youtube
 - Flickr
 - del.icio.us
 - Microblogging
 - Twitter
 - Tumblr
 - etc
 - What else?
 9. Have you noticed any cultural (country-specific) differences in social media usage and etiquette around the world?
 10. If there is more than one group, please have a concluding discussion where the main ideas of each group are presented.

Part 2: Good practices on placement provisions (STUDENTS)

1. What are the benefits of studying or doing placements abroad?
2. What is the most important information you needed (would need) when planning your stay in another country?
3. Where to find information on:
 - study and workplaces
 - practical issues (the following bullet list is a support list for the focus group leader)

– application process (inc. application letter and CV)

- visa, residence permit
- accommodation
- duration of the practical training
- cost of living
- money & banking
- salary
- travelling arrangements
- insurance
- language skills
- destination country

Part 1: Good practices on placement provisions (SMEs)

1. SMEs experience in offering placements for (foreign) students
 - E.g. number of foreign students employed, duration of practical training offered, types of work offered, students' field of study
 - If no experiences yet, is the company interested in offering placements?
2. What are the benefits of offering (international) placements?
3. What are the challenges related to (international) placements?
4. What are SME responsibilities related to (international) placements?
5. Where to find
 - information on practical issues?
 - students?
 - Student organisations
 - Organisations offering placements (These include e.g.):
 - [AIIESEC \(provides internship placements for higher education students internationally\)](#)
 - [ELSA \(The European Law Students' Association\)](#)
 - [IAAS \(International Association of Agricultural Students\)](#)
 - [IAESTE \(International Association for the Exchange of Students for Technical Experience\)](#)
 - [IAPS \(International Association of Physics Students\)](#)
 - [IFMSA \(International Federation of Medical Students' Association\)](#)
 - [ILSA \(The International Law Students Association\)](#)
 - [IPSF \(International Pharmaceutical Students' Federation\)](#)
 - [Nordjobb \(An exchange program between the Nordic countries\)](#)
 - [Erasmus](#)

6. Is there enough information available on

After the workshop

1. P2T2.0 partners will report the alterations suggested to the skills and competences ladder proposed (including the possible differences between our SCL and the ones developed during the workshop as well as all feedback received to our SCL).
2. Please, drop both the above mentioned outputs to Dropbox and inform Satu and Elisa

when this is done.