

Guidelines on Peer-Learning

Universität Innsbruck

GUIDELINES ON PEER-LEARNING OUTBOUND ACTIVITY

Universität Innsbruck (UIBK)

BeyondScale - Developing the Organisational Capacity of Higher Education Institutions using the HEInnovate platform to facilitate peer-learning and a pan-European community of practice

Take-aways from peer-learning experiences

Peer-learning is a way for partners to learn from each other effectively. At a time when the university resources are limited and demands upon the staff are increasing, it can be beneficial internal as well as external stakeholders of an HEI to learn from each other.

For peer-learning to take place it is important to know who the “peers or buddies” are. For peer-learning to be achieved within the BeyondScale project a buddy system was created. The buddy system included internal HEI partners for the inbound projects, external for the outbound projects, and a system that involved project partners, associate partners as well as mentors. The internal partners were university management, heads of departments, heads of degree programs, experts in service units, and selected lecturers. On the other side external partners were public sector/policy-oriented organisations along with enterprise support organizations/incubators/start-ups, micro firms and relevant actors in the industry.

The internal HEI partners in the activities – the project team, administrative, academic, and other staff as well as students - benefited from the documentation of the activities of BeyondScale, the capacity building seminars and webinars organized at the higher education institutions. External stakeholders also benefited from the augmented capacity at the higher education institutions they collaborate with.

While COVID-19 made things more complicated, the design of the system allowed all partners to interact on multiple levels and with a variety of partners from the inside and the outside of their network. The result was the co-design and the implementation of inbound and outbound activities.

The following roadmap provides an overview of the peer-learning activities developed during the BeyondScale project. Further information is available at www.beyondscale.eu or you can contact us at: office@wpz-research.com

The BeyondScale roadmap on Peer-Learning included the following steps:

1. Think about what contribution you expect or what you want to learn
2. Think about your own contribution and whether your partner can use this contribution
3. Define together the goals of the exchange
4. Agree on the way of communication
5. Define future meetings or possibilities of exchange
6. Reflect on the value of the exchange
7. Think about further joint activities

An example of a Peer-Learning activity.

HEInnovate dimension: Knowledge Exchange & Collaboration

Description of the activity: The main goals of the UIBK outbound activity was to get an insight about the needs of the NGO / charity / non-profit / social enterprise sector regarding entrepreneurial mindset and innovation. This was achieved through seminars, webinars and workshops as well as development of ideas & impulses how to improve this interaction.

Our participants represented:

- CEOs of Tyrolean NGOs, Social Enterprises and Charity Organizations
- Department Head of a Tyrolean Charity Organization
- Local Department Heads and Area Directors of Austrian NGOs and Social Enterprises

External participants/ partners	Involved in	Contribution	Future (mutual) benefit
BeyondScale Project Partner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint considerations/ reflections concerning the general design of the outbound activities during the draft of our “Institutional Country Notes” in the early phase of the project. • Joint development and elaboration of the questionnaire that we used in the outbound workshop 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration and exchange on the know-how on collaborating with NGOs and Social Enterprises. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better understanding of the discussed topics. • Further dissemination of the results in the local societies
Department Head of a Tyrolean Charity Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outbound workshop interview series 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Valuable information and insights concerning the desires, wishes, “pains” and “gains” of the sector. • The same applies for the barriers in the mutual interaction and cooperation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase of the visibility of UIBK within the sector and improvement of the mutual interaction • Ongoing contacts with the sector and further development of concrete collaborative projects.

Why was peer-learning important for your activity.

- Extensive peer-learning from insiders of this sector was our most obvious starting point for the development of improvements.
- For every topic one can find persons who know more, than oneself. Thus, acquiring experts as “peers” and “buddies” that share their knowledge is always a tremendous benefit – if not even a sine qua non for fruitful further development.

What have you learnt during the peer-learning process of your outbound activity?

- We could gain lots of valuable information and insights concerning the desires, wishes, “pains” and “gains” of the sector. The same applies for the barriers in the mutual interaction and cooperation.
- With some of the interview partners, we could identify concrete plans and even project ideas for future collaboration

Would you recommend the peer-learning buddy system to another HEI and why? What could other HEIs learn from it?

- Yes, because in our times with their exponentially increasing innovation tempo nobody can be an overarching expert – even not in his/her special discipline. Therefore, the dialogue and exchange with other experts/specialists (i.e. peer-Learning) is a sine qua non.

What were the common objectives?

- Intensification and improvement of the interaction and collaboration of UIBK with the sector NGO / Charity / non-profit / Social Enterprise
- Increase of the visibility of UIBK within the sector

What were the outcomes?

- Insight about the needs of the NGO / charity / non-profit / social enterprise sector regarding entrepreneurial mindset and innovation
- Information how to attract entrepreneurial teaching and learning and awareness building for graduates who want to engage in this sector and show the needs of this sector for new employees
- Knowledge exchange about entrepreneurial topics and innovation for NGO / Charity / Social Enterprise sector
- Establishing of better contacts/relationships with this sector
- Critical reflection of our (UIBK) interaction with this sector
- Development of ideas & impulses how to improve this interaction

What were the possible barriers and challenges?

- 9 out of our 10 external interview partners were entirely new contacts, and we initially feared, that the acquisition of our “wish list” of external experts for our project might become quite challenging. We acquired them all via “cold calls”, and it joyfully turned out that we got 10:0 “Yes!”. We assume, that one of the key factors for this result was our careful preparation of these acquisition phone calls along the “Roadmap on Peer-Learning” emphasizing in particular aspect 2. “Think about your own contribution and whether your partner can use this contribution”.

Barriers on the part of UIBK:

- Poor visibility of our Transfer Office in the sector
- Unclear responsibilities at UIBK (=perceived by the sector)
- Cooperation with the sector = not as well established as with STEM-based companies
- Lack of good information material for the sector

Barriers on the part of the external partners (i.e. the non-profit sector):

- Lack of time resources for things besides the daily business
- HEIs don't know enough about the desires of the sector (= perception by the sector)
- Sometimes: political obstacles
- University = still often perceived as "closed system"
- Assumption of practical relevance of offerings from Academia
- Sometimes: threshold fears

What were the possible opportunities?

- The activity provided us an excellent insight about the needs of the local NGO / Charity / Social Enterprise sector, also regarding their employee's qualification needs.
- With all 10 partners we agreed to stay in contact in order to explore possibilities for future cooperation
- Some of them have already articulated concrete project ideas that we will pursue.
- As intended in our Outbound Action Plan, we have already modified the business conditions on our UIBK job portal in favour of the sector: From now on, non-profit organizations may place their employer branding profiles and job ads there free of charge.

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