



InnoWork

MODULE 9: DESIGNING AN ORGANIZATION INNOVATION PLAN

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I. Module information

Learning objectives	<p>As a result of engaging with the materials in this module, learners are intended to achieve the following learning outcomes:</p> <p>Knowledge: to understand the process of developing an organizational innovation plan as a five step model; the concept of innovation as a systematic process.</p> <p>Skills: improve skills for leading others, namely skills for supporting change and skills for motivating and supporting colleagues, in particular by organizing work on the design and implementation of an organizational innovation plan in a SME; ability to translate innovation problems into a structured plan.</p> <p>Competences: improve competences for fostering quality, fostering teamwork, empowering others, managing change and performance, building collaborative relationships, forward thinking, strategic thinking and reflective thinking, creative problem solving, initiative and fostering innovation.</p>
Time schedule	<p>Time necessary for:</p> <p>Learning content (self-study): 2 hours</p> <p>Self-test questions: 5 minutes</p> <p>Case studies: 60 minutes</p>
Structure	<p><i>The module is structured as follows:</i></p> <p>Part 1 – Model for an innovation plan for SMEs</p> <p>Part 2 – Critical success factors in the Model</p> <p><i>Case studies are provided on the InnoWork website.</i></p>

II. Learning content

Introduction

Successful businesses not only respond to their current customer or organizational needs, but often anticipate future trends and develop an idea, product or service that allows them to meet this future demand rapidly and effectively. Innovation will help you stay ahead of your competition as markets, technologies or trends shift. Innovation is not only about designing a new product or service to sell, but can also focus on existing business processes and practices to improve efficiency, find new customers, cut down on waste and increase profits. Constantly innovating and improving business practices is also likely to help you attract better staff members and retain more of your existing staff – something which is crucial to the long-term condition and performance of your business.

A strategy is a deliberate plan of action and the leadership capability to see the plan through to execution. An innovation strategy is similar to a roadmap in that it outlines where an enterprise is to go, and organizes the resources to get there. However, there may be no perfect map and the measuring devices may not be as accurate. A competitor may change the whole landscape before we reach goals, thus, you should include organizational innovation strategy as a key part of your overall business plan.

But if you want to maximize creativity of the ideas you develop and ensure the best ideas are implemented, you need an innovation plan!

This module provides hands-on ideas for developing a comprehensive innovation plan. It presents the planning process in steps that can be followed when designing an innovation plan for your organization.

The reading materials in this module also touch upon the issue of open innovation and how it could be employed by small and medium sized enterprises.

The suggested questions will help you reflect on the innovation process in your company and on designing an appropriate innovation plan for it.

Designing an innovation plan

Innovation can be a systematic process within existing SMEs, meaning that managers can directly and positively influence innovation, creating the right conditions for the competitiveness and effectiveness of their organizations. Simply, managers can sustain innovation by treating people with respect, asking for their ideas, and letting them implement their own ideas. Management's job then is to help people grow and not to control them and look for ways to get rid of them. This is the approach we advocate in this module.

There are at least two dimensions to move innovation forward: (1) Increasing an individual's ability to innovate and (2) improving the organizational environment to foster innovative behaviours that accelerate innovation.

Simply writing innovation into a mission statement or declaring that a company will become innovative isn't going to produce innovation!

Model for an SMEs innovation plan

Previous modules presented and discussed a variety of models for innovation that take place, in various phases or steps.

Here we detail a model, adapted from the work of Sousa et al (2010; 2014; 2015), following the Basadur (1997; 2002; 2004) approach. This model has been developed and improved through the research and intervention work carried out by Prof. Sousa and his team under APGICO¹, the Portuguese Association of Creativity and Innovation.

It has been identified as a model that is easy for SMEs to adopt. The innovation plan can be structured in five main steps (see Figure 9.1.), starting by setting the objective, then selecting the proper team, providing the conditions for innovation and later on checking the progress and results.

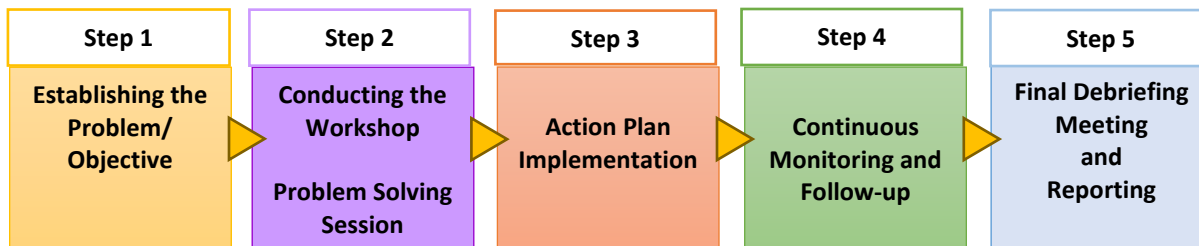


Fig.9.1.: Model for an Innovation Plan for SMEs -Adapted from Sousa et al (2010; 2014; 2015)

Let's now detail its different steps:

Step 1 – Establishing the Problem / Objective

The first step, (which assumes that there will be an intervention made by an external team of facilitators, from here on called *Facilitating team*), requires a crucial preparatory activity to be carried out in order to determine the objective of the intervention.

Do note, however, that as the organization adopts a true innovation culture and implements procedures conducive to innovation, **this process can be adapted easily by top managers to be developed internally, without resorting to external facilitators/consultants, which is often very expensive!**

¹The mission of the Portuguese Association of Creativity and Innovation - APGICO is to develop, spread and promote the knowledge and experiences in the area of creativity and innovation management in organisations, helping to create conditions for the competitiveness of companies and effectiveness in organisations. <http://www.apgico.pt/index.php?!=en>

➡ The “pre-consult”

The “pre-consult” is a preparatory activity, lasting for about two hours, in which top managers of the SME are interviewed by the *facilitating team* in order to determine the objective of the intervention, as well as defining further conditions for its implementation. It consists of:

- Initial presentation of the *facilitating team* well as the work to be carried out - explanation of the aims, method and structure of the intervention;
- “Mapping” of the objectives, i.e. the design of a strategic map of objectives and its implications, so that a coherent picture of the organization’s aims appears before the managers;
- Choice of objective for the intervention from the list produced as a result of the mapping;
- Selection of the *project team*, in accordance with the terms given further down in this module;
- Setting of possible dates for the initial Workshop session, so that the top managers and the *facilitating team* may work together;
- Administrative arrangements of the venue and materials;
- Identification of the existence of HR policies that may hinder teamwork and make it difficult to provide the necessary trust climate for organizational innovation (e.g. incentives and performance awards systems that encourage mostly individual competition; autocratic or centralized leadership style; etc.)

➡ “Mapping” the objectives

After the acceptance by the top management of the intervention, during the pre-consult a broad objective should be defined. In the process, a list of problems is elaborated and each one of the managers makes two choices, mapping the problems with interactions, accordingly. The Problems are accompanied with “*Why to solve it?*” statements above and “*What does the problem prevent?*” statements below (see Fig. 9.2).

Example:

Problem: How to turn the SME into a sustainable enterprise?

What does the problem prevent? To know better our various types of clients; to further diversify our offer; to have a clear competitive advantage.

Why to solve it? To create more jobs; to increase our results

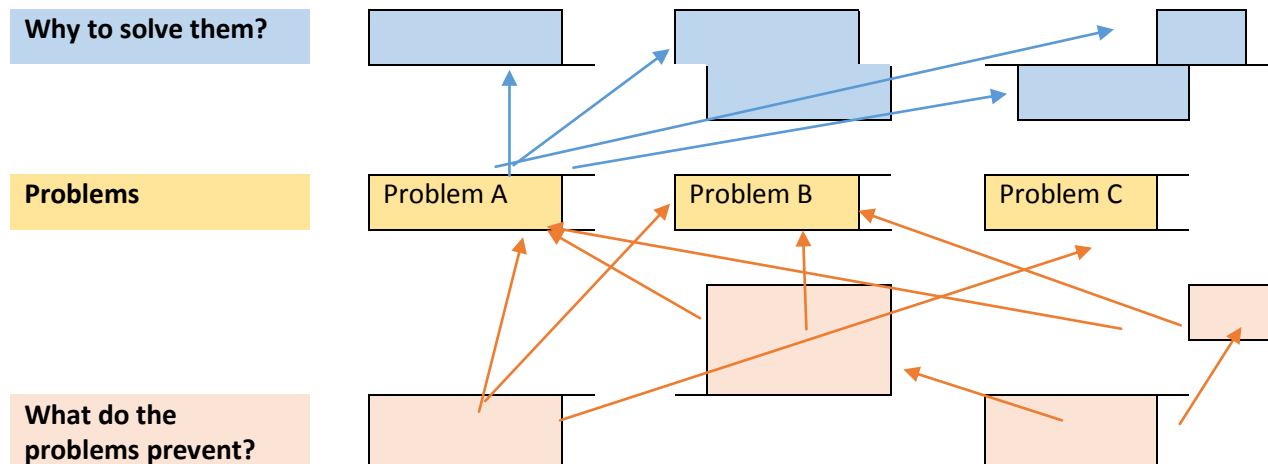


Fig.9.2: Mapping the objectives and its implications

At the end, one broad problem is selected, covering several of the concerns addressed, in dialogue among all participants. This is settled as the first priority and the main objective for the intervention that will later be communicated to the company's collaborators.

Do not forget that the client of this type of work is always the SME top management / administration and they should establish the priority and the main objective for the innovation plan!

Example of a broad objective:

How to get more clients into the tourist routes of the company?

Questions for reflection

Identify the broader problem that should be solved in your company, following the above described approach.
Why it is important for your SME to overcome that problem?
How would you define the related broad objective to achieve, in a short and clear statement?

At the end of this preparatory activity, top managers will have at their disposal the InnoWork modules, resource based documentation to help them to reflect on the innovation plan for their companies and the various steps, resources and strategies necessary to go through its effective implementation.

➡ *Setting up the project team*

After being clear on the methodology of the innovation supporting intervention in the SME, during the pre-consult or immediately afterwards the top managers should identify the team members, from here on referred to as *the project team*. The *project team* will attend the workshop and will implement the plan for innovation developed there. It can consist of all the collaborators, as is frequently the case in

microenterprises, or representative mixed groups of the various units / departments. The attendance of external guests should also be considered. As underlined in preceding modules, it is advisable to engage, whenever possible, people from outside your company in the innovation process.

“Creating linkages”, as Open Innovation can be called, enables SMEs to learn, grow and gain from collaboration. However, the benefits of Open Innovation do not materialise automatically. Innovative firms have to learn new skills, procedures and routines to develop the full ‘real option’ potential of open innovation practices!

Thus, the *Project Team* should be formed with:

- **Collaborators** from the different units/departments of the SME, not just those who are specialists in tasks related with the team’s objective, but gathering diversity of knowledge and creative capabilities, and
- **External guests** whenever possible, preferably representing the whole chain of suppliers-products/services-clients of the SME and others who could somehow be related with the main problem to be addressed.

The composition of the *project team* is critical. During project implementation, diversity of knowledge, background and interests, commitment and learning capability, will be key prerequisites for team innovation and success.

As to the **number of members** to involve in the *project team*, it is often suggested that small groups of 8 to 12 people are most effective and allow for good dynamics and full-fledged participation by all members. But, this limited number can on the other hand be a limitation because innovation and group diversity are correlated positively. It may thus be important that more people participate. A solution may be to work with larger groups while keeping the small group rationale, i.e. by splitting up the large group into smaller subgroups (8 to 10 members each) and ensuring that the groups work under a method that can make coordination easier. Also, those **who can block the group’s decision**, support it or be affected by it, must be represented.

The top administration/management must always participate in the decision making process, but its task should be to make choices among group proposals, instead of suggesting solutions; here, top administration/management is crucial for definition of objectives, resource allocation and results control, but not for finding solutions and implementing decisions!

And don’t forget, that above all, every group member must be willing to participate in the project on a volunteer basis.

Questions for reflection

Think about the broad objective that you defined previously for your SME.
Whom would you like to invite to the workshop and help find solutions to the problem behind it? Think of company collaborators, but also customers and experts.

➡ *Detecting the perception of the collaborators over the objective/challenge*

Another relevant preparatory activity is to become aware of the perceptions of the SME collaborators regarding the main objective/challenge established by the top management. This information can be of great value to the *facilitating team* for planning and smooth implementation of the work during the workshop.

The *facilitating team* can organize open individual interviews with 4 or 5 collaborators, selected among those appointed by the top managers for the *project team* and from different units/departments of the company.

Open-ended interview questions:

Taking into consideration the objective/challenge established by the Top Management of the company, please answer openly to the following questions: (the respondents' identification won't be included in the results).

- 1) Do you think that your company has been innovating? How?
- 2) What has been achieved?
- 3) What do you know about this challenge proposed by the top management?
- 4) What are your expectations for the workshop (problem solving session) in which you will participate?

The *facilitating team* will register the answers in a matrix table (Fig.9.3) that will support its subsequent thematic analysis.

It is advisable to perform an **inductive thematic analysis**², based on the actual answers/data received, extracting the **themes (patterns)** from the answers given. This approach is comprehensive and particularly useful when little or nothing is known about the problem/challenge under study, as will be the case of the *facilitating team*.

Finally, ask to SME collaborators to provide positive successful organisational stories³ to the facilitating team, highlighting when people in the organisation have done fine work. It should include the specific situation faced and strategies followed to tackle the challenge and the results delivered.

² http://resourcecentre.foodrisc.org/qualitative-analysis_187.html

³ See <http://www.thepositiveencourager.global/using-success-stories-to-achieve-ongoing-success/>

Problem/Challenge: XXXXXXXXX						
Collaborators	Name	Name	Name	Name	Name	Emerging themes (inductive thematic analysis)
Questions						
1)						
2)						
3)						
4)						

Figure 9.3.: Matrix table of the open-ended answers given by the collaborators & themes

The results achieved (themes) will help the preparation of the Workshop (Problem Solving Session) for creative resolution of the challenge identified and for building up the innovation plan.

➡ Work conditions

Apart from team composition and existing perceptions, other facets that can be regarded as important to team work and output are: working venue, session management and facilitation and administrative requirements.

Besides silence, comfort and work-free constraints (no one should come in or out because of work related emergencies), if the working place has some symbolic value, i.e. if it represents something important to people, it may have a positive influence on participants' attitude, especially if it makes people closer to real world problems (e.g. facilities related to social-based organizations). No matter the importance and difficulty of the problem to be solved, anything that might remind people of the existence of far more important real world problems helps in creating open-mindedness and an attitude favouring tolerance.

You need a room where you can organise subgroups of 8 to 10 people around flipcharts. Ensure that space is sufficient for the number of participants attending. The "banquet" layout is the most suitable one (Fig. 9.4).

It is important that the room has natural daylight and ideally no external distractions exist, such as construction or refurbishment work nearby. The venue should include the following equipment:

Free 'host' internet access, video and projector, flipcharts (one for each group / facilitator) and pad, notepad, pens, markers, colour stickers and cards, tape as standard.

Air conditioning is important in the summer and availability of drinking water is necessary at any time.

Session management has to do with the way the session time-frame is structured and optimised. Indeed, time is one of most important resources in problem solving, and balance between effort and output must be in constant equilibrium. Punctuality, breaks and session structure must be handled with care, as results

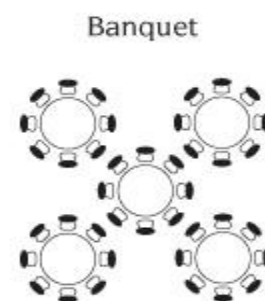


Figure 9.4: The banquet layout

depend much on the collective effort that the team makes, which cannot be maintained continuously at its peak.

The catering service during breaks is a particularly important administrative requirement. Food and beverages with good quality and taste remind people of the importance of focusing on positive attitude, and respecting each other.

🔄 *Establishing the Programme for the Workshop: Problem solving session*

When the previous components are in place, it is possible to elaborate the Programme for the Workshop and send it out in an appealing format to all the participants, one week prior to its implementation.

The Programme should contain:

Workshop title; Objective of the session; venue; date; schedule; agenda; facilitating team, short notice about the InnoWork Project (if applicable)

Example:

Workshop: 'Building the XXXXXXXX (name of the SME) Innovation Action Plan'

This workshop is intended to generate business development projects that may impact on business results. 20 employees of the company will participate, organised in groups according to the specified schedule.

Objective of the session:

Define challenges and actions intended to involve the whole company in answering the question:

How to get more clients into the tourist routes of the company?

VENUE. XXXXXXXXXXXXX

Date ____/____/____

Schedule: ____:____ to ____:____

AGENDA

Typically the agenda for the workshop (4 hours long) will be:

Timetable	Title	What is it about?
30 min	Welcoming Organization of the groups Communication of the objective Mutual Presentation Methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcoming and random distribution of the participants into subgroups (8-10 members each) • Communication of the objective of the session by the Top management of the SME • Brief presentation of all participants (<i>facilitating</i> and <i>project</i> teams) - Collecting expectations for the workshop session. • Communication of the methodology and the work programme of the Workshop – problem solving session
1 hour	Major challenge definition Sharing results with the plenary	<p>The <i>project team</i> will work separately in subgroups (8-10 members) in order to list the major obstacles for reaching the objective and choose 1/2 obstacles to work on.</p> <p>Sharing results with the plenary by way of presentations by subgroups' spokespersons</p>
20 min	Break Establishing the collective challenge	During the break, the top management choose one or more obstacle that they really wants to see solved – collective challenge
1h 40 min	Action Plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explanation by the top management of the choice of collective challenge made • Definition of the tasks/projects required for solve the challenge by the subgroups, setting of implementation deadlines and Plenary sharing; • Reorganization of the participants into new subgroups, according to the tasks/projects they want to work on, • Definition of the action plans by subgroups (tasks, how, who and when) and plenary sharing • Appointment of a coordinator for each subgroup and a general coordinator of the Innovation Plan (all the action plans) • Establishment of a communication team, dates for follow-up and final plenary meetings (after the deadline for the accomplishment of all the tasks planned)
30 min	Debriefing	The participants will share what they have experienced and learned during the session and discuss any expected results from the project.
Closing		

Figure 9.5: Agenda type for the Workshop

FACILITATING TEAM:

It is desirable to have 1 facilitator for each 8 to 10 participants. The name, short CV and contact of each facilitator should be available in the Programme

InnoWork Project:

A short presentation about the InnoWork Project and website (if appropriate). For instance:

The project “**Towards a More Innovative Workplace**” (**InnoWork**) under **the ERASMUS+ Programme** aims at creating a more innovation-friendly environment for EU micro, small and medium-sized enterprises and increasing their business adaptability by providing the necessary training support.

This intervention is inspired and founded on the approach and learning resources developed therein. Further details at: <http://www.innowork-project.eu/>

Step 2 – Conducting the workshop: a problem solving session

In step 2, an initial workshop should take place, aimed at building an Innovation Plan for the particular SME. A specific method of creative problem-solving should be used to draw up Action Plans that will include all participants.

Working-method

The facilitators will use a problem solving method called “*Problemaction*”, developed by APGICO. This method allows in a short time, 4-hour session or less, to establish an action plan and reflect on its implementation - different steps and goals, management control measures, acceptance and communication tasks.

This approach provides for an initial structuring of the *project team* during the listing of problems/obstacles included in the objective, followed by bonding among members during the convergent phase of problem definition. Then comes another structuring step - action planning - where team creativity expresses itself during the “how to” develop each planned task, including its acceptance by external people and factors.

The cycle of diverge-converge is still maintained during both steps:

In the first step, the project team enumerates all possible obstacles/problems that may occur when trying to reach the objective. Question: “Given the knowledge you have of the company, what are the obstacles to achieving this objective? Following this, the team selects a final problem definition to work with, described by a question beginning by “What are the steps necessary to?”

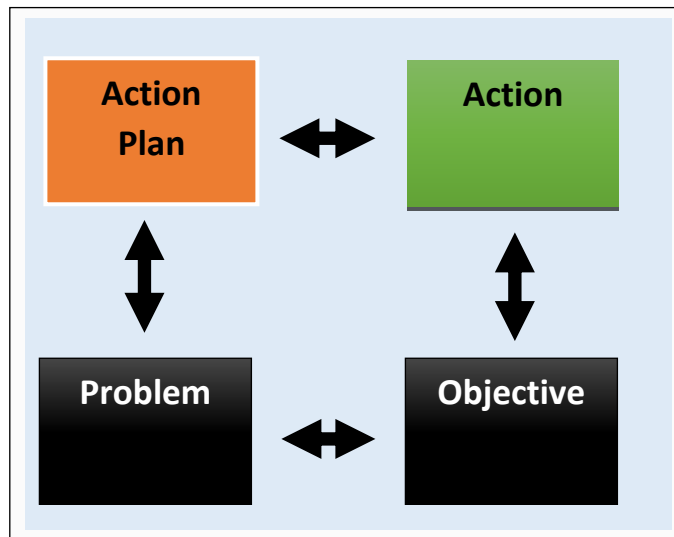


Figure 9.6.: The Problemaction method

In the next step - action planning- the top managers are always present and can assist in building the action plan. The team starts by enumerating all possible actions (tasks) needed to solve the chosen problem and communicated by the management; then puts them by order of execution and, for each task, the “how to” is defined (including the tasks derived from the acceptance plan for the task at hand, if appropriate). Each task is attributed to a sub-group, which defines:

- the exact deadline;
- the coordinator and person or the body responsible for evaluating the quality of task accomplishment (if relevant);
- the management control measures that will be associated with the task, especially the financial ones.

Let us detail now a lit bit more the **different moments** of the four-hour problem solving session:

- a) Welcoming and random distribution** of the participants into subgroups.

Imagine you have 24 participants in total and decided to form three subgroups identified as G1, G2 and G3, each with 8 members. Prepare in advance 24 small sheets of paper, writing 8 times 1, and the same for 2 and 3.

When participants arrive at the session, welcome them individually and give one of those small cards (Fig.9.7).



Figure 9.7.: Random distribution by individual cards delivery

Attention: Make sure you have given cards for different groups to people who come together to the session!

- b) Presentation** by the top management of the objective of the session - challenge to be addressed, followed by a short introduction of the *facilitating team* and the work to be developed and purposes to be achieved

The challenge established by the top management should be well visible and easily readable by any of the participants in the session! Top management leaves the room as soon as the presentation ends!

c) Work in subgroups starts with facilitators placing the following question to their subgroups:

Question: given the knowledge you have of the company, what are the obstacles to achieving this objective/challenge?

Obstacles are listed by each of the facilitators in their flipcharts. At the end, participants mark the two most important obstacles with colour stickers. In dialogue with the group, the facilitator leads the group to converge on the three most important obstacles, which must be regarded as realistic and feasible by the participants (reality check).

The top management doesn't participate in this step of the session.

d) Sharing (plenary): the spokesperson selected by each subgroup reports to the plenary on the obstacles identified.

Break: during the break, top managers come in again and choose one or more obstacles that they really want to see solved.

e) Action Plan (top managers are always present and can assist in building the action plan). This moment opens with the top managers explaining the choices made during the break.

This is followed by the reorganization of the participants into new subgroups, according to the obstacle they want to work on (if there is only one obstacle/problem, all work on this problem, while maintaining each subgroup with 8/10 members; if there are two problems, participants are split over the two, keeping the subgroups on each of the problem with 8/10 members and so on).

Next, the tasks to be performed to solve the problem are listed - definition of challenges, by subgroups, in answer to the question:

Question: "what are the tasks/steps needed to...?"

The suggested tasks are discussed and only those regarded as feasible and worth supporting by all participants are registered on the flipchart.

The tasks are then sorted in logical and chronological order of their accomplishment and prepared into action plan (project) by subgroup: tasks, how, who and when (Fig.9.8.).

TASK	HOW	WHO	WHEN	QUALITY STANDARD
1.				
2.				
3.				
...				
4. Monitoring	Indicator measured after project			

Figure 9.8.: Action Plan by subgroup template

The Action Plan developed by each subgroup includes: the tasks to be executed ordered by chronological sequence; ways to execute each task; deadline for task accomplishment; someone outside the group to evaluate the standard achieved. Additionally, management control measures can be settled in order to evaluate and focus the group on the defined obstacle/problem.

f) Coordination: Appointment of a coordinator for each subgroup. Among those, a general coordinator will be then chosen by the top management, someone who presents a good balance between project team members support and management requirements. The coordinator's tasks are aimed at facilitating the project's accomplishment. The general coordinator is responsible for monitoring the Innovation Plan accomplishment as well as preparing interim reports (if due) and the final debriefing meeting;

g) Communication team appointed for internal dissemination of the work in progress - and the means to be used (e.g. internal newsletter; closed group in Facebook, LinkedIn, Wiggio). Permanent communication must be maintained, so that every member of the *project team* knows what is being done without the need for further meetings. The project must be known both within and outside the organization, so that each task's implications for external members might appear easier to handle (to reduce the "not invented here" syndrome⁴), and group members feel accountable to a wider audience. This will be easier if the project team includes outside guests, as suggested previously in the discussion on how to set up the project team.

h) Establish dates for **follow-up meetings** - one or two for projects that last 2 or 3 months.

i) Schedule a day for a **final plenary debriefing meeting** with the involvement of all the participants and teams, after the deadline for the accomplishment of all the tasks.

j) Evaluation of the session by the participants.

⁴ <https://www.techopedia.com/definition/3848/not-invented-here-syndrome-nihs>

Definition - What does Not Invented Here Syndrome (NIHS mean?)

Not invented here syndrome (NIHS) is a mindset or corporate culture that favours internally-developed products over externally-developed products, even when the external solution is superior.

NIHS is frequently used in the context of software development, where a programmer will overlook all the attributes of an existing solution simply because it wasn't produced in-house.

Step 3 – Action plan implementation

During the implementation (action), participants will have at their disposal the InnoWork modules, resource base documentation to help them to overcome any difficulties which they encounter while carrying out their action. The Project team will work as a true learning circle, learning by doing, in view of progressing in completing their action plan and successfully carrying out the tasks assigned therein.

Coordinators of the different subgroups of the project team should encourage and facilitate the progress of work and strive to meet the deadlines.

The communication team tasked with dissemination of the work in progress should do their best to keep everyone informed about what is going on and the achievements reached. Simultaneously, this can motivate people and boost project implementation.

Step 4 – Continuous monitoring and follow-up

The Problemaction method reinforces task accomplishment through the follow-up procedures of interim one-to two-hour meetings, scheduled before the project deadline and aimed at co-ordinating team performance, developing team commitment, and redefining the problem and the action planning. This way the *project team* learns more about the initial objective and develops creative ways to achieve it by balancing problem definition with task implementation, learning by doing in a sort of trial and error approach.

Even though any project team is supposed to follow a similar process, the *problemaction method* allows for a better balance between structure, planning, improvisation, knowledge management and organizational commitment. Here the problem solving process loses importance to the development of the project, as it is during the action step that real problems are solved and creative solutions may arise.

Now, when the Innovation Plan has entered its implementation phase, the SME management structure should assess the progress made on the implementation of the Innovation Plan (i.e. monitoring), as well as its impact on achieving the established goal, objectives and targets (i.e. evaluation). Monitoring and evaluation is an essential tool to assess how well the proposed Plan is working. It is a crucial aspect of the implementation phase.

Step 5 – Final debriefing meeting and reporting

At the end, after the deadlines for the accomplishment of all the tasks, a one-day final plenary debriefing meeting should be scheduled for presentation of the results. All participants and teams should be involved. The meeting, organised by the general coordinator, should reflect all the work done, in terms of: (1) task accomplishment evaluation; (2) management control, measurement of the performance; (3) main innovations and competitive advantages attained; (4) project re-definition for the next period; (5) session-evaluation by the participants.

This step is focused on reporting in detail all the work done and results achieved. It can be split into two chapters:

1. From preparatory activities to the end of the workshop and the adoption of the action plan for innovation;
2. Implementation, follow-up and impact.

The report should include as annexes all the forms and templates used, as well as evidence of the work carried out and results achieved.

Questions for reflection

Think about the 5-step model that you just read about. Can you mentally visualise its application in your SME?
Is there any step that has been less clear to you?
If so, re-read the above information, before continuing with the module.

Critical success factors in the model

Critical success factors (CSF) are those aspects that should be guaranteed to go well in order to ensure the innovation plan success for the SME. They represent those premises of the model that must be given special and continual attention to bring about high performance. CSFs include issues vital to an organization's innovative operating activities and to its future success. They are summarized in the figure below (Fig.9.9.).

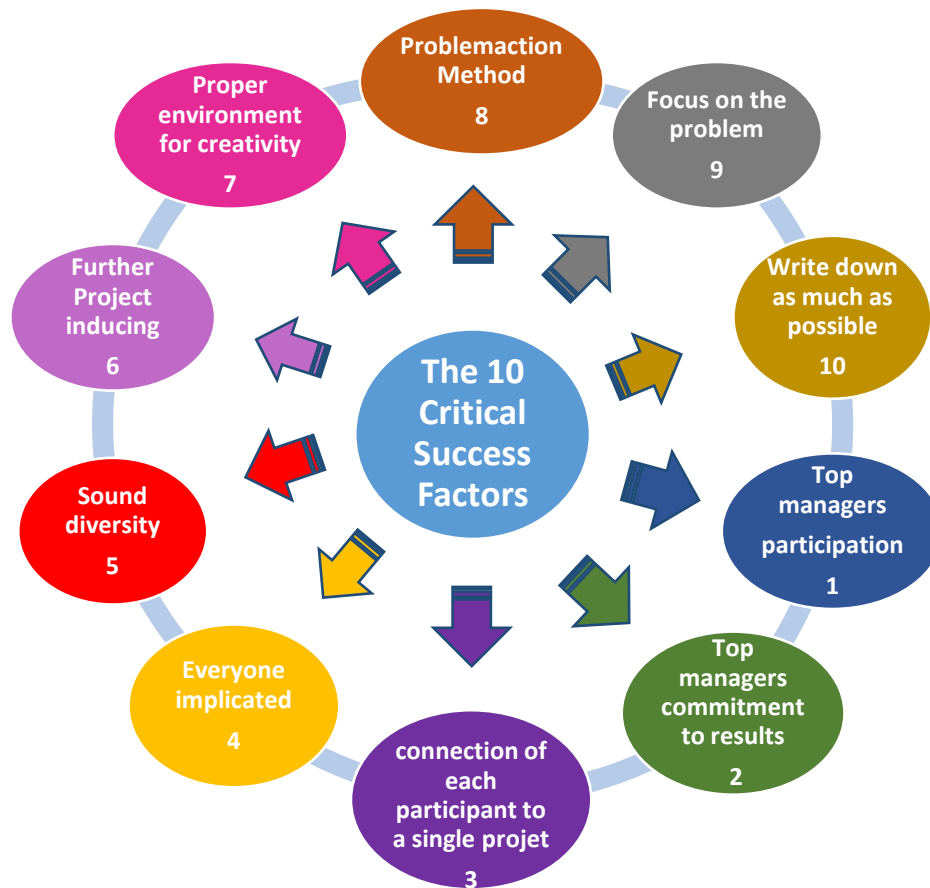


Figure 9.9.: The 10 critical success factors in the model

To really achieve change in a SME you need to meet a number of conditions, as follows:

1) Get top managers to attend the workshop: To promote organizational innovation, managers should set a general orientation to innovation, agree with the solutions proposed, allocate the necessary resources to the project teams and measure the results. In addition, they should be involved in the innovation projects from the very beginning, so that they feel the projects as their own, agree with the defined problems and the suggested solutions, and remain connected to the project's implementation via the coordination team;

2) Get top managers to commit to achieving specific results afterwards: It is not enough to produce great ideas for innovation or to list possible solutions to many problems. It is necessary to implement them! Having an idea that works is much more difficult than having a bright idea, because the path between the idea and the corresponding original and profitable innovation is very hard. Real innovation comes from solving many problems during project implementation, which requires persistence, imagination and knowledge and, above all, team and management support. It is the management that, by defining what is important and what is not important in the SME, may provide the necessary climate for team work. But this definition must be made on the basis of facts and not on a personal opinion basis. That is why managers must commit to results and not just to ideas;

3) Get everyone to work on a single project, which should be completed within the session: Concentration is mandatory for solving a problem. A group (just like a person) cannot perform a complex task without devoting attention to it. Everyone in the room must participate and stay connected to a single project, irrespective of their responsibilities or diversity of knowledge. So, the purpose of the session can only be fulfilled by participating. On the other hand, if the session takes such a long time that people have to leave and come back again, chances that the majority will show up are very small. That is why the project must be completed within the same session;

4) Get the majority to become involved in the project's execution and progress: Everyone who attends the session must leave with a task that will maintain their connection to the project. Even though the ones who bear the main responsibility for carrying out the project will be those with the most difficult tasks, there is no reason why the rest of the participants cannot stay connected. Some will complain of lack of time, but even the busiest manager can find time to talk to someone in order to have a certain task completed or, at least, act as an external consultant for certain tasks;

5) Achieve a sound diversity of specialists, so that innovation could result from the interaction of different knowledge bases and creativity capabilities: The “secret” to innovation lies in the mix of knowledge that may be put together to achieve a specific end. If these knowledge bases are too far apart, like raising ducks and geolocation programming for android Apps, for example, and a communication line cannot be established and understood by both sides, the experience might be frustrating. But, on the other hand, if such a line is found, the resulting concept might be really innovative (e.g. a digital map of duck variety within a territory, which can make business more profitable). That is why a problem solving method is necessary. As a basic principle, all those who can block, support or be affected by a decision, should take part in it; if not everyone, at least a representative. It is desirable to ensure the contribution of supplier-company-client. The variety of contributions is very important, the size of the group should also be considered. Even though the ideal group is somewhere between 8 and 10 team members, the circumstances might call for larger groups, as long as there a possibility of finding skilled facilitators for each small group;

6) Create a project that may induce other projects: Frequently an initial project aims at increasing internal efficiency, followed by further projects more focused on external effectiveness. If the first project is successful, companies are likely to suggest a second and a third, so that the system becomes absorbed into the organization and creates a culture where innovation and change is a normal activity – the ultimate purpose of any organizational innovation initiative. Also, from the first project, other projects may derive, in a sort of snowball effect, as a single project team is not enough to make the necessary changes and needs to expand to further teams.

7) Create the proper environment in order to establish the best conditions for creative work: Trying to concentrate while being constantly interrupted is almost impossible. That is why it is often better to move away from company facilities, where managers can easily fall into the “emergency trap”, than to stay inside the company and risk the team stability. The best possible working conditions should be created for the group of people in order to allow them to focus on solving a problem that require all of their attention. Also,

the place where the meeting takes place must have some symbolic meaning, to remind team members that there are more important things than company problems (e.g. a social care centre). And last, but not least, the catering must be, whenever possible, simple but of high quality, so that people may find pleasure in chatting and appreciate the good things of life;

8) Use a group method that may get work done in a very short time but, even so, increase the commitment towards the project and initiate creative development, in terms of divergent thinking. This was detailed previously when defining the “Problemaction” method;

9) Stay focused on the problem defined throughout project implementation: As the action plan lists tasks to be executed by different sub-teams, it is easy for people to concentrate on the tasks and forget the problem that they are trying to solve, thus wasting efforts to do something to an extent that makes the initial problem irrelevant;

10) Write down as much as possible about all the steps carried out to execute the project, so that tacit knowledge may become explicit for other people in future projects. Make the final report as detailed as possible to support future interventions for innovation into SMEs.

Questions for reflection

What will be the main obstacles to face when you start the process leading to the design of an innovation plan for your SME?
Do you think it is possible to control the 10 critical success factors in that process?
Who will support you?

You can find out ideas and inspiration for your innovation intervention by exploring the Case studies on the InnoWork website: <http://innowork-project.eu/index.php?t=165>

Organisation	Country	Objective of the intervention:
Association for Vocational Training and Development of Montijo	Portugal	Designing a strategy for permanent regional visibility
ST “Meksiko-PE-Petar Yordanov”	Bulgaria	Sustainable work system of the three beauty salons and creating personnel to gain coiffeur competitions
“Rosela” JSC	Lithuania	Create innovative smart ring design - product design, according to the company's desire to develop innovative products, and the newly created product is oriented to a selected target market.
“Delektre” Ltd.	Finland	Growing independent and motivated employees, who lead themselves
“Insight Technical Solutions”	United Kingdom	Expanding the business services

III. Conclusion

This module is structured in two parts: the model for an innovation plan for SMEs into five steps and the critical success factors in the model that should be guaranteed to ensure its successful implementation. Each of the five steps is described in a way that can support the implementation of practices in companies leading to innovation and a culture of innovation.

IV. Self-test questions

Question 1: Which can boost innovation in the SMEs?

- ☐ Writing innovation into a mission statement
- ☐ Creation of the right conditions for innovation by the managers
- ☐ Declaration that the company will become innovative
- ☐ Encouraging collaborators to propose and implement their own ideas to solve company's problems
- ☐ An innovation plan accomplished quickly in a single phase

Question 2: The pre-consult is a preparatory activity where:

- ☐ The facilitating team is interviewed by the top management of the SME
- ☐ Top managers choose the objective for the intervention from a list elaborated on the basis of a strategic map of objectives
- ☐ An initial presentation of the facilitating team as well as the work to be carried out takes place
- ☐ The date for the final plenary debriefing meeting is agreed upon
- ☐ The problemaction method is used

Question 3: The project team should be formed by:

- ☐ Internal collaborators of the SMEs only
- ☐ Collaborators should be obliged to participate, even if they do not wish to
- ☐ Groups as large as possible
- ☐ Collaborators and external guests
- ☐ Those who cannot block the group's decision

Question 4: The most suitable layout for the workshop room is:

- ☐ U-shaped
- ☐ Theatre
- ☐ boardroom
- ☐ Classroom
- ☐ The banquet layout

Question 5: The Action Plan to be carried out by subgroups, includes:

- ☐ The tasks to be executed, ordered by chronological sequence

- ☐ Ways to execute each task
- ☐ Deadline for task accomplishment
- ☐ External evaluation of the standard achieved
- ☐ Additional management control measures

Correct answers:

Question 1: 2 and 4

Question 2: 2 and 3

Question 3: 4

Question 4: 5

Question 5: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

V. Glossary

Action Plan	The tasks to be executed by the subgroups, ordered by chronological sequence; ways to execute each task; deadline for task accomplishment; someone outside the group to evaluate the standard achieved. Additionally, management control measures can be planned in order to evaluate and focus the group on the defined obstacle/problem.
Critical success factors	Critical success factors (CSF) are those aspects that should be guaranteed to go well in order to ensure the innovation plan success. They represent those premises of the model that must be given special and continuous attention to bring about high performance.
Facilitating team	Team composed by external facilitators with expertise on innovation planning for companies.
Inductive Thematic Analysis	Little or no predetermined theory, structure or framework is used to analyse data; instead, the actual data itself is used to derive the structure of analysis. In this approach the themes are strongly linked to the data since they emerge from it. This approach is comprehensive and therefore time-consuming and is particularly useful when little or nothing is known about the event or topic under study http://resourcecentre.foodrisc.org/qualitative-analysis_187.html
Innovation Plan	Innovation planning means thinking about and organising the activities required to achieve your desired innovation objectives. It can be designed into five main steps: Step 1: Establishing the problem/objective; Step 2: Conducting the Workshop; Step 3: Action Plan Implementation; Step 4: Continuous Monitoring and Follow-up; Step 5: Final Debriefing Meeting and Reporting
“Not invented here” syndrome	‘Not invented here’ syndrome (NIHS) is a mindset or corporate culture that favours internally developed products over externally developed products, even when the external solution is superior. NIHS is frequently used in the context of software development, where a programmer will

	<p>overlook all the attributes of an existing solution simply because it wasn't produced in-house.</p> <p>https://www.techopedia.com/definition/3848/not-invented-here-syndrome-nihs</p>
Open innovation	<p>Open innovation is the action of involving in the innovation process people from outside the company, the systematic encouragement and exploration of a wide range of internal and external sources for innovative opportunities, the integration of this exploration with firm capabilities and resources, and the exploitation of these opportunities through multiple channels.</p> <p>West, J.; Gallagher, S. (2006). "Challenges of open innovation: The paradox of firm investment in open-source software". <i>R and D Management</i> 36 (3): 319</p>
Problemaction method	<p>The facilitators will use a problem solving method called "<i>Problemaction</i>" during the workshop. This method allows in a short time – a four-hour session or less – to establish an action plan and reflect on its implementation: different steps and goals, management control measures, acceptance and communication tasks</p>
Project team	<p>Team composed by the SME collaborators and external guests that will attend the workshop-problem solving session, and will implement the plan for innovation which is developed there</p>

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