



Increasing Effectiveness of Publicly Funded
Innovation and Competitiveness Programs
Based on IMP³rove – the European Approach
to Better Innovation Management Support
Services

2015

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1 Introduction

IMP³rove offers Innovation Management support services both for the public as well as for the private sector. The following examples highlight lessons learned and key success factors for publicly funded programs to increase innovation capabilities and competitiveness of small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). They are designed for policy makers, public agencies such as innovation agencies to enhance the impact of their support programs for small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs).

The IMP³rove – European Innovation Management Academy that is emerging from the IMP³rove project - funded by the European Commission - will be the organization that will support policy makers, public institutions and intermediaries in designing the most effective program for innovation capabilities and competitiveness.

For further information please visit: www.improve-innovation.eu or contact:

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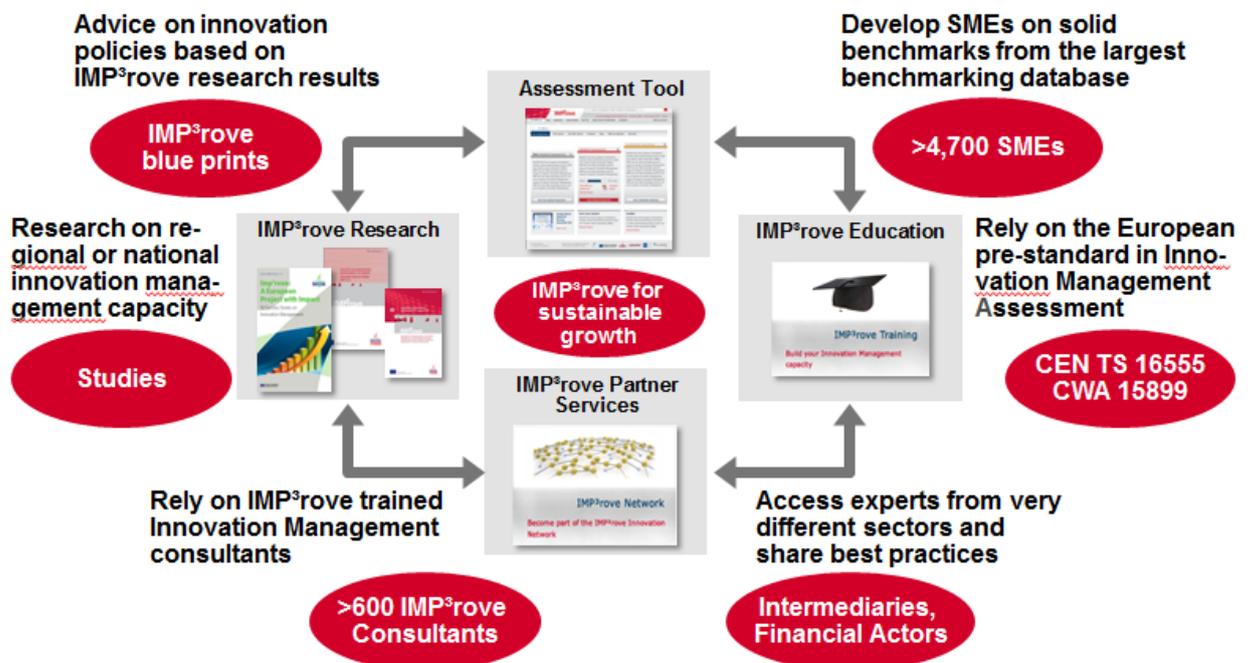
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2 Overview on the IMP³rove Innovation Management Support Services

The IMP³rove Innovation Management support services include the IMP³rove Innovation Management assessment, the IMP³rove Innovation Management education program, the IMP³rove network support services, and the IMP³rove research. These services address the need of different stakeholders in the innovation eco-system and help to develop a common understanding of Innovation Management and how it adds to the competitiveness of organizations, clusters, industries, regions or nations.



Source: IMP³rove – European Innovation Management Academy, 2015

Figure 1: IMP³rove Innovation Management Support Services

The **IMP³rove online assessments** for better Innovation Management performance help enterprises to define areas for improvement of their Innovation Management and take actions to achieve a higher level of Innovation Management performance. It is proven that the competitiveness of enterprises increases with more systematic Innovation Management.

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With the IMP³rove Assessment, evaluating an organization's Innovation Management and sustainability-driven Innovation Management, national or regional authorities dispose of a ready-to-use approach that has been tested with local SMEs and established in many countries across Europe and beyond.

Distribution of completed IMP³rove Assessments by country

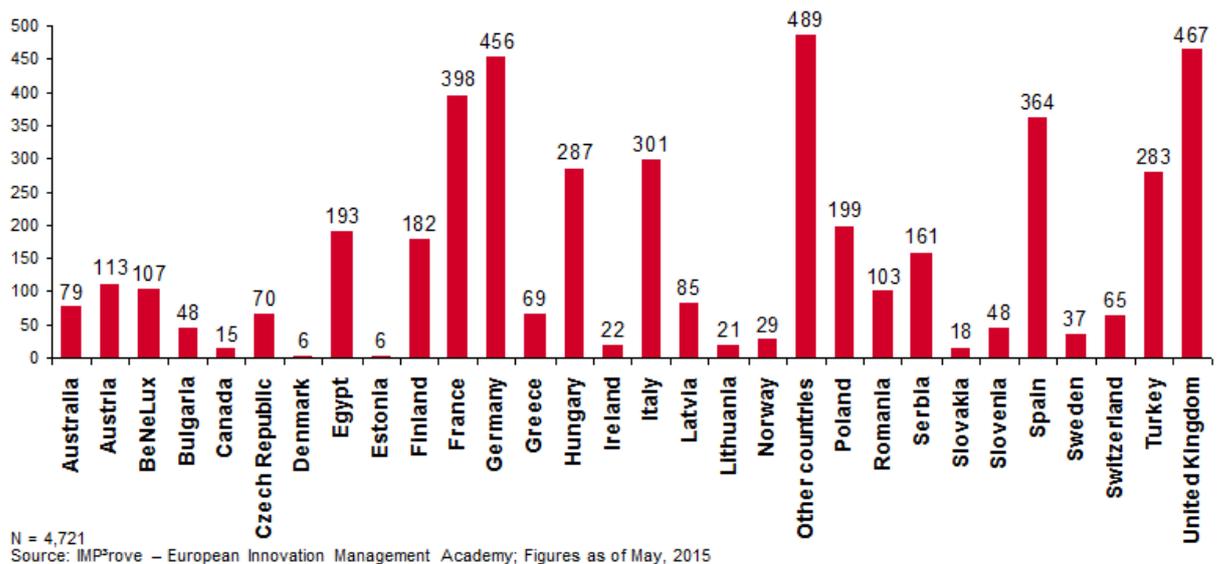
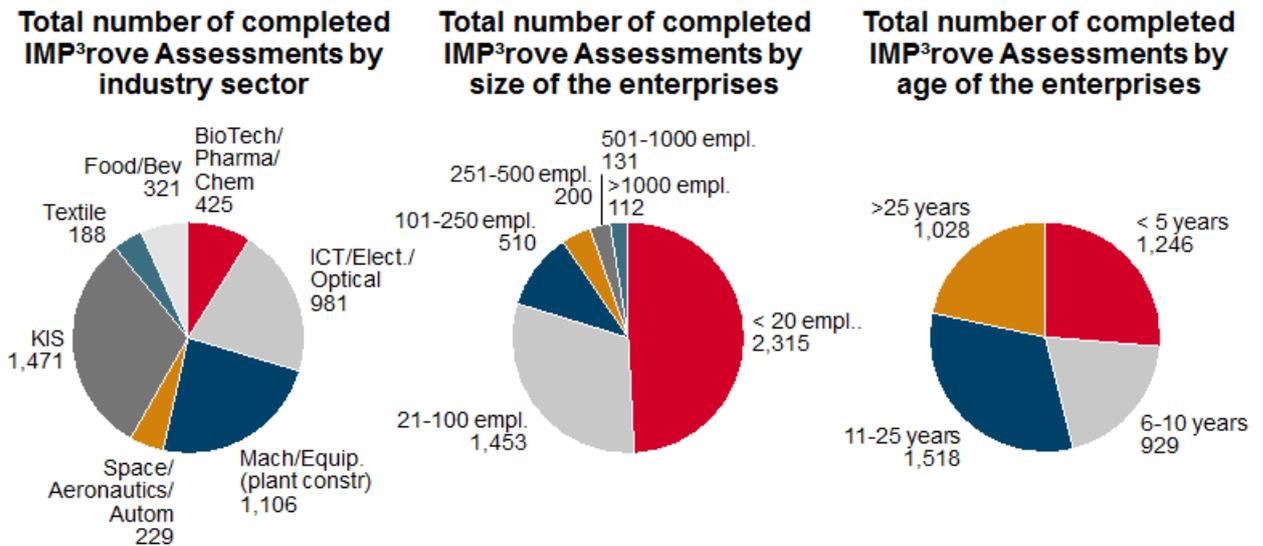


Figure 2: Distribution of completed IMP³rove Assessments by Country; Status May 2015;

The IMP³rove Assessment has been used by enterprises of very different industries, sizes and age.



N = 4,721; KIS = Knowledge intensive services
 Source: IMP³rove – European Innovation Management Academy; Figures as of May, 2015

Figure 3: Distribution of IMP³rove Assessments by Industry Sector, Size and Age; Status May 2015;

The IMP³rove Assessment is part of the European CEN Workshop Agreement 15899 on Innovation Management Assessment. It will be also compliant with the Technical Specification developed at CEN the European Standardisation Agency, (CENT TS 16555).

With this comprehensive benchmarking database on Innovation Management, a solid assessment of small and medium sized enterprises is possible on a sectorial as well as on regional level or by size and age of the companies.

The **IMP³rove education program** is designed for professionals to increase their knowledge and expertise in Innovation Management and Innovation Management support. This education program includes courses on the IMP³rove Approach as well as on Innovation Management and Innovation Management consulting related topics. The certificates for the four different levels of proficiency (IMP³rove Guide, IMP³rove Expert level I, IMP³rove Expert level II, IMP³rove Auditor) are based on formal exams as well as on proven practical experience in Innovation Management support. More than 500 participants have been trained in the IMP³rove Approach as well as in Innovation Management relevant topics.

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Entry level (minimum requirement: higher education allowing access to bachelor studies)	Basic level / Beginners	Intermediary	Professional
Intermediaries (e.g. Members of Technology Transfer Centers, Chambers of Commerce, agencies supporting SMEs)	Focus <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Gain knowledge in IMP³rove approach •Gain training in consulting 	Focus <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Increase knowledge in Innovation Management •Increase consulting skills 	Focus <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Gain advanced knowledge in Innovation Management •Gain advanced consulting skills •Gain knowledge in auditing SMEs in Innovation Management
Consultants (e.g. Supporting SMEs in writing applications for public funding)	Focus <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Gain training in IMP³rove Approach 	Focus <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Increase knowledge on Innovation Management 	Focus <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Expand Innovation Management expertise •Gain knowledge in auditing SMEs in Innovation Management

Figure 4: Overview on the Program of the IMP³rove – European Innovation Management Academy;
Source: IMP³rove Global Coordination Team 2011

The training program is continuously up-dated and expanded. Consultants can reach different IMP³rove certificates to demonstrate their proficiency in Innovation Management support, reaching from “IMP³rove Guide” , to “IMP³rove Expert level I”, IMP³rove Expert level II” and the “IMP³rove Auditor”.

The **IMP³rove Network services** are offered to the IMP³rove network partners globally. These partners include private consultancies as well as Enterprise Europe Network partners, clusters, technology parks, academic institutions etc. In workshops, conferences and webinars important issues are discussed to help improving the support of SMEs in developing their Innovation Management performance.

IMP³rove Research activities are based on the IMP³rove databases and the experience in providing Innovation Management support services to SMEs, support providers, financial actors, academia, and policy makers. The IMP³rove results provide insights in the drivers and barriers of Innovation Management at SMEs. They also show the impact of systematic Innovation Management on the competitiveness of SMEs. Several publications on Innovation Management related topics have been already published.

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Source: IMP³rove – European Innovation Management Academy 2015

Figure 5: IMP³rove Research Results

In the following chapters comprehensive national development programs based on the IMP³rove Approach as well as very specific and highly focused IMP³rove offerings are described meeting the needs and demand of the various stakeholders in the innovation ecosystems. These offerings aim at increasing the impact of support programs designed to enhance the growth and competitiveness of SMEs based on the continuous improvement of their Innovation Management performance.

3 Blue prints for IMP³rove-based Support of Innovation and Competitiveness Programs

The following blue prints for IMP³rove-based support of innovation and competitiveness programs provide an overview of the services that are offered by the IMP³rove – European Innovation Management Academy. They can be customized to the specific needs and demand of the support programs aiming at raising the competitiveness of SMEs and the performance of the various stakeholders in the innovation eco-system.

3.1 Support in the Design of Programs to Raise Competitiveness and Innovation Performance of SMEs

Various programs to raise competitiveness and innovation performance of SMEs have been launched in the past. The impact that they generated has not always fully met the expectations of the initiating organization. A major challenge was the mobilization of SMEs to involve them actively in the program. In addition, the qualification of the service providers was not in line with the program's objectives nor were the performance measures. To avoid that the well-intended program's objectives are not fully met, the IMP³rove – European Innovation Management Academy provides support in the design of programs to raise competitiveness and innovation performance of SMEs. This support can be financed e.g. with funds from structural funds/technical assistance for European policy makers.

3.1.1 The Concept

The support in the design of programs to raise competitiveness and innovation performance of SMEs includes five major steps. The support from IMP³rove can be offered for all or for selected steps.

- ***Facilitating the process of defining the objectives of the planned program:***
Experience shows that the objectives of the planned program have to be discussed among the key stakeholders and agreed. Often they seem to be obvious, however,

when they have to be translated into specific actions and clear key performance indicators different opinions emerge.

- **Assessment of demand for support:** Many support programs have been offered to help SMEs adopting new technologies or collaborating with research institutes. This puts focus on manufacturing companies. However, IMP³rove studies show that innovation capacity of service companies contributes to the competitiveness of a region or a specific industry. Not all of the SMEs that have been involved in support programs have the capabilities to make best use of the new technologies or the results provided by research institutes. Therefore, the SMEs' Innovation Management capabilities need to be evaluated as a pre-requisite for the success of the planned program.
- **Evaluation of the qualification of the support providers available:** Based on the experience in training more than 500 innovation support providers in the IMP³rove Approach gave a good overview on the qualification of these support providers to add value to the SMEs' competitiveness and Innovation Management capabilities. IMP³rove certificates might be a first basis for selecting the most suitable organisations. By specifying the required profile in the call for tender or proposal increases the quality of the offers, and minimizes the effort of those who have to evaluate these offers.
- **Design of the program:** During the design phase the IMP³rove support is focusing on the consistency with the defined objectives and key performance indicators. The risks will be assessed that might impede the success of the program. These risks may come from lack of time for mobilizing the beneficiaries, lack of clear communication to the key stakeholders or even lack of attractiveness of the program for SMEs.
- **Support in developing the call for tender or proposal process:** For the public tender or proposal process support is provided in developing the documents describing the technical specifications of the program as well as in communicating the call to reach the best qualified support providers to submit their offers.

3.1.2 Scoping the Program for Competitiveness and Innovation Performance of SMEs

When scoping the program for competitiveness and innovation performance, following key dimensions have to be evaluated:

- Population of SMEs in scope: How many SMEs are in the scope that will benefit from the program; how will they be mobilized in an effective and efficient manner.
- Supporting infrastructure: Is there already an infrastructure in place that can be leveraged to create momentum for the program? If not, are there funds available to initiate the development of such an infrastructure/ innovation eco-system?
- Phases of the program for competitiveness and innovation performance of SMEs: will this program be designed in a pilot and a roll-out phase or will it be designed by industry sector or by regions to be involved? How is the learning experience and risk mitigation integrated in the design of the program?
- Timing and budgeting of the program: To what extent are the project phases designed according to the current level of SMEs' competitiveness and proficiency in Innovation Management, the available infrastructure, and the available resources and budgets? Is there a co-financing expected that might cause delays if not provided on time?
- Sustainability of the achieved results: How will the results be further leveraged and a sustainable impact of the program achieved?

These are key issues that need to be taken into account when scoping a program for innovation and competitiveness of SMEs.

3.1.3 Steps for Preparing the Program Development

When preparing a program for innovation and competitiveness, the authority should have a clear understanding who the key stakeholders are that decide on the overall objective of the program and what their political intention is. The trends and insights on effective innovation and competitiveness programs should be already taken into account during the preparation for the development of the program.

3.1.4 Benefits of the IMP³rove Support in the Design of Programs to Raise Competitiveness and Innovation Performance of SMEs

Support in developing programs to raise competitiveness and innovation performance of SMEs by the IMP³rove – European Innovation Management Academy is geared to increase effectiveness and efficiency both in the preparation of the program as well as in its execution. Policy makers thus will build their programs on state of the art insights and trends in Innovation Management at SMEs, in the Innovation Management support industry and related key players important for an effective innovation eco-system. With the largest database on Innovation Management in SMEs and a wide international network of more than 500 trained Innovation Management support providers and the training curriculum the IMP³rove – European Innovation Management Academy disposes of a comprehensive view on the current markets relevant for innovation and competitiveness programs.

3.2 National IMP³rove Program to Raise Competitiveness and Innovation Performance of SMEs

With the European Structural Funds, national or regional funds, EU Member States dispose of financial resources to improve the competitiveness and innovation of SMEs to foster growth and creation of employment. In other areas of the world similar programs are implemented. As small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) are the backbone of the competitiveness, a national or regional program to raise the innovation performance of SMEs is often required. To be successful for the SMEs as final beneficiary it also has to include intermediaries, consultants, financial actors supporting SMEs and policy makers in

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their innovation efforts. Such a comprehensive support program could be designed in following modules:

A. Diagnostic phase: Assessment of the Innovation Management capabilities in SMEs and of the Innovation Management consulting performance.

B. Assistance phase: Support in the design and in the implementation of programs to improve SMEs' Innovation Management capabilities and the regions' competitiveness.

C. Evaluation phase: Evaluating the impact of the implemented program to raise the innovation performance of SMEs.

The modules can be implemented independently or in combination addressing different stakeholders as required. All or several modules could be part of a national development program depending on the needs and the objectives of the intervention.

3.2.1 Diagnostic phase: Assessment of the Innovation Management Capabilities in the Region

The assessment of the Innovation Management capabilities includes the SMEs, the innovation support providers such as consultants, cluster managers, chambers of commerce, as well as policy makers, academia and financial actors.

SMEs' Innovation Management capabilities will be assessed based on the IMP³rove Assessment. It gives the SMEs a detailed report on their Innovation Management capabilities in comparison with the growth champions and the average. This benchmarking allows the comparison on a national as well as on an international basis, within sectors and across industry sectors - based on the largest and most up-to-date database on Innovation Management with more than 3000 SMEs. For maximum impact, the IMP³rove online assessment will be made available in local language. Currently following languages are already established: Czech, English, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Polish and Spanish.

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Support providers such as consultants, cluster managers or responsible actors at chambers of commerce can assist the SMEs in completing their IMP³rove Assessment. They will be trained in the IMP³rove Approach and in Innovation Management specific topics as needed.

Furthermore, policy-making, financial investments and academic programs in the region will be analyzed to what degree they are geared to innovation and effective Innovation Management support.

Tangible Results from the Diagnostic Phase:

- Overview on the SMEs' Innovation Management performance compared to other regions, countries or sectors. Identification of 'Innovation Management champions' in the region;
- Innovation Management assessment report for each individual SME
- Trained Innovation Management support providers
- Study on the regions' proficiency in Innovation Management as driver for competitiveness

3.2.2 Assistance Phase: Support in the Design and Implementation of Programs to Improve the Regions' Competitiveness and Innovation Capabilities

Based on the existing assessments and the results of the diagnostic phase, an action plan will be developed to mobilize all key stakeholders and enhance the proficiency in innovation and Innovation Management as a key driver for competitiveness. Such an action plan includes qualification programs, innovation support schemes and the communication and promotion of the actions.

Qualification of SMEs and consultancies will be provided based on the curriculum of the IMP³rove - European Innovation Management Academy. SME workshops will be part of the action plan to increase their awareness and capabilities in Innovation Management and to foster the interaction e.g. with financial investors, clusters and academic institutions. In addition, the action plan will include the further development of voucher schemes and innovation policies as well as recommendations for academia to better address Innovation

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Management topics in their programs. Integral part of the action plan is the promotion and communication of activities to disseminate the program within the various stakeholder groups.

During the implementation, the SMEs' Innovation Management capabilities will be assessed and further developed to increase their competitiveness. This will be supported by training programs for SME managers, and the support service providers. The implementation will be monitored, and – where needed – further actions will be developed to achieve the defined results and impact.

Tangible Results from the Assistance Phase:

- Agreed action plan with clear roles, responsibilities, timelines, deliverables and milestones
- Mobilization of the responsible parties to implement the action plan
- Increased proficiency in Innovation Management in the regions as basis for strong competitiveness

3.2.3 Evaluation Phase: Evaluating the Impact of the Implemented Program to Raise the Innovation Performance and Competitiveness of SMEs

The evaluation of Innovation Management capabilities in the region will be executed in two dimensions: the firm level and the infrastructural level. It will be based on the defined key performance indicators. These should include the profitable growth of the SMEs that are part of the program in comparison to their peers in other regions or countries. The evaluation of the regional “infrastructure” for Innovation Management will assess the integration of all stakeholders focusing on Innovation Management: SMEs, support providers, investors, policy makers and academia. An Innovation Management Award can be part of the evaluation to present the Excellence in Innovation Management either on firm level and/or within a network of different stakeholders.

Tangible Results from the Evaluation Phase:

- Report on the Innovation Management capabilities in the regions on firm level and on infrastructural level

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- Insights in the strengths and weaknesses of the regions' innovation capabilities and competitiveness
- Insights on the further development needs of the regions to increase their competitiveness and proposed measures

3.2.4 The Steps to Initiate a Customized Regional Program to Raise the Innovation Performance of SMEs

Ideally the national ministry responsible for the structural funds for competitiveness and innovation takes the lead. It should involve regional stakeholders, in particular clusters, and the management agencies for the structural funds already in the design of the proposal. The IMP³rove – European Innovation Management Academy that has emerged from the IMP³rove project (an initiative of the European Commission, DG Enterprise and Industry) should be involved in the formulation of programs for some or all of the above described phases. It will then also mobilize the IMP³rove network partners in the relevant regions to support the program.

3.2.5 The Benefits of the National Program to Raise Competitiveness and Innovation Performance of SMEs

With the IMP³rove-based national program to raise the competitiveness and innovation performance of SMEs, the impact of the structural or national funds on the performance and competitiveness of SMEs will be high. Such a program offers

- Well-defined targets and objectives in line with the objectives of the government
- Close monitoring of the program's success and immediate counter measures as required
- Immediate knowledge transfer to local stakeholders in Innovation Management and Innovation Management support based on the internationally acknowledge IMP³rove Approach
- Increased Innovation Management performance of SMEs and innovation eco-systems in the different regions

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- Increased competitiveness on a sustainable basis beyond the phase of the publicly funded program

3.3 IMP³rove Assessment

SMEs need to improve their Innovation Management performance to maintain and improve their competitiveness. Therefore they first need to understand what their current business performance in relation to their competitors is and what they need to improve regarding their Innovation Management capabilities. With the IMP³rove Assessment a proven and effective approach is available.

3.3.1 The IMP³rove Assessment – the Concept

The IMP³rove Assessment is provided online as self-assessment or with assistance of a trained IMP³rove Consultant (www.improve-innovation.eu). The assisted mode is strongly recommended as it generates higher impact on the SMEs. Feedback from SMEs confirm this.

A well-structured questionnaire helps the SME to learn what the key dimensions of Innovation Management are that it needs to address. The IMP³rove Benchmarking Report then compares the SME with the Growth Champion and the average in the various dimensions of Innovation Management. This benchmarking reveals the areas where improvement is most urgent. A trained IMP³rove Consultant can help the SME to derive conclusions from the detailed benchmarks and prioritize the measures for improvement so that the SME will sustainably improve its Innovation Management performance and its competitiveness.

SMEs that would like to have more detailed benchmarks can also complete the IMP³rove “Root/Cause” analysis and the IMP³rove Sustainability-Driven Innovation Management Assessment.

The IMP³rove Benchmarking report allows for better comparability of the SMEs’ Innovation Management performance and competitiveness as it builds on an external benchmarking and not just on an individual internal audit.

3.3.2 Defining the Need for IMP³rove Assessments

There is a strong need for assessing the Innovation Management performance of SMEs prior to any support service. Most of the SMEs have no or very limited knowledge about their Innovation Management performance. Transparency on the strengths and weaknesses in the various dimensions of Innovation Management is the key to design the most effective support measures. This helps to demonstrate the current best practice and how to reach it.

3.3.3 Scoping the Demand for the IMP³rove Assessments at SMEs

There are still too many old and small companies in Europe that need to grow in a profitable manner to remain competitive. Therefore, policy makers designing support programs for innovation and competitiveness should not only take a look at start-up companies, but also at established small companies that have the potential and the ambition to grow. Experience shows that at least 10% of the SME population can be addressed. The effort to mobilize these SMEs is significant. Again experience shows that 2 man days should be calculated for a successful recruiting of an SME. This is based on experience from programs that are voluntary and did not put pressure on the SMEs.

3.3.4 Steps to Introduce the IMP³rove Assessment

Since the IMP³rove Assessment is available online, policy makers only have to inform the SMEs about the need to provide the IMP³rove Benchmarking report. They have to specify whether they expect the IMP³rove Benchmarking report based on a self-assessment or based on an assisted assessment. It is highly recommended to request the assisted IMP³rove Assessment. This provides higher data quality as well as better education of SMEs and support providers in Innovation Management. In most of the European countries there are already trained IMP³rove consultants. Training programs can be scheduled where additional support providers need to be trained to help SMEs in completing the IMP³rove Assessment. The IMP³rove training program has already reached consultants outside Europe, in Latin America, Australia, Middle East etc.

Policy makers should also specify against which benchmarking sample the SMEs should compare themselves. It is recommended to request the comparison within the own industry

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and the own size class and with all countries. This will provide an international view on the SMEs' performance.

3.3.5 The Benefits of the IMP³rove Assessment

With the IMP³rove Assessment the SMEs gain insights in their competitiveness, in the areas that they need to improve. Since the IMP³rove Assessment is designed for regular evaluation of the own Innovation Management performance, Innovation Management becomes an integral part of the SMEs' management activities. SMEs also can invite their suppliers to perform the IMP³rove Assessments. This will have an impact on the competitiveness of the value chain the SME is integrated in. SMEs that performed the IMP³rove Assessment can use the IMP³rove Benchmarking report to prove their competitiveness to customers, financial investors or to public agencies offering programs for competitiveness and innovation. There have been already publicly funded programs where the IMP³rove Benchmarking report was an important part of the application for these public funds (see also section 4).

With the IMP³rove Benchmarking Report, public authorities have additional insights in the innovation and competitiveness performance of SMEs that are applying for funds. Depending on the objectives of their program they can select the right SMEs on a broader data basis.

3.4 IMP³rove Award

In Europe, many innovation agencies, chambers of commerce, clusters and other intermediaries supporting SMEs are seeking effective new service offerings to improve the competitiveness and innovation capabilities of their client SMEs. As a new service, the IMP³rove Award has been developed that can be easily adopted in a country, a region, or a cluster. The concept of the IMP³rove Award, its benefits and how to initiate an IMP³rove Award on a national or local basis are described in the following.

3.4.1 The IMP³rove Award – the Concept

As a first step for the IMP³rove Award the criteria in which the participating companies are evaluated should be defined. Further, the categories in which the award will be granted need to be agreed upon. They can reflect the dimensions of Innovation Management: innovation strategy, innovation culture and organization, innovation life-cycle process, innovation enabling factors. Categories can also be represented by the highest growth rate resulting from innovation: growth in number of employees, growth in revenue or in profit, or by the age or the size of the companies in scope.

The IMP³rove Award combines online benchmarking of the SMEs' Innovation Management capabilities with on-site visits and an Award Ceremony for the winner(s) of the IMP³rove Award.

Online benchmarking: The SMEs will access the IMP³rove Assessment via the IMP³rove online platform www.improve-innovation.eu. Once the SME has completed the IMP³rove Assessment, they can request the IMP³rove Benchmarking report. This report already provides detailed feedback on the SMEs Innovation Management performance in relation to the average and the top 10% of the companies in the benchmarking sample.

The completion of the online IMP³rove Assessment can be assisted by trained IMP³rove consultants (recommended). They are trained in the IMP³rove Approach and have successfully completed the IMP³rove process with at least one SME. The IMP³rove consultant can support the SME either in a face-to-face session and/ or via telephone when questions come up. The assisted mode ensures higher data quality and consistency of the benchmarking.

Once the period for the IMP³rove Award competition has expired, the IMP³rove - European Innovation Management Academy will analyze the IMP³rove database and provide a ranking of the contest participants.

On-site visits: The SMEs that achieved the highest scores will be selected for the on-site visits. During those visits the Innovation Management activities of the SME will be verified. The team that will conduct these on-site visits should consist of members of the local

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agency, of an IMP³rove Expert and a representative of the IMP³rove - European Innovation Management Academy (the latter to ensure consistent quality of the IMP³rove Award).

IMP³rove Award Ceremony: For the nomination for the IMP³rove Award a local jury should be established that represents prestigious organizations and institutions relevant in the area of innovation and for SMEs. For example, the jury could be composed of a representative of the ministry responsible for the development of SMEs, or the ministry for research and development, the national financial institution funding SMEs, a representative from academia who is perceived as the thought-leader in Innovation Management, a representative of a financial actor active in financing SMEs, a representative of a national or regional media partner and a representative of the IMP³rove – European Innovation Management Academy to provide the international dimension.

The jury will select the winner or winners. They will receive their award during the IMP³rove Award ceremony. This award ceremony should be organized under the patronage of the authority responsible for the development of SMEs. The IMP³rove Award should consist of a trophy, a certificate, and the prize.

The Award ceremony itself should include the opening speech of the official representing the patronage, a speech of the CEO of the local organizing agency on the lessons learned from the IMP³rove contest as well as short speeches of the winner(s) on what they did well that they were elected as winners and what impact that had on their competitiveness and business performance.

3.4.2 The Steps to Initiate the IMP³rove Award

First of all the objective of such an IMP³rove Award should be clarified. Then the key partners and their role need to be identified. The promotion of such an award requires strong marketing and PR support, ideally with a strong media partner. The roadmap that needs to be developed for the IMP³rove Award should allow for sufficient time to recruit the SMEs for the IMP³rove Award. The Award Ceremony should give the winning SMEs the recognition within their markets. Often these are very local or regional and less international. It is essential to plan for an annual IMP³rove Award so that it becomes an established event in the calendar of SMEs, innovation support providers, financial investors and the public sector.

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Similar to the IMP³rove Award other specific offerings can be integrated in innovation and competitiveness programs.

3.4.3 The Benefits of the IMP³rove Award

The IMP³rove Award as designed above will

- Increase the awareness of Innovation Management within SMEs
- Provide the organizing agency with an additional attractive service offering
- Provide insights on the barriers and drivers of Innovation Management in the domestic SME population for better local/national policies on innovation and competitiveness
- Increase the visibility of the parties involved as active players in support of Innovation Management activities
- Provide the option of several winners: national winner, international champion etc.
- Ensure effective allocation of structural funds or other public funding programs
- Build on a well-tested approach that is established in all major European countries and beyond

3.5 IMP³rove Education Program for Proficient Innovation Management Support

In many EU Member States and regions the proficiency in Innovation Management and Innovation Management support can be and has to be further improved to achieve more impact of the support programs than in the past. Therefore, the IMP³rove – European Innovation Management Academy has developed a training and certification program that can be integrated into national or regional programs.

3.5.1 Assessing the Need for Higher Proficiency in Innovation Management

Policy makers who would like to ensure that SMEs are supported by highly proficient Innovation Management support providers can request the IMP³rove certificate on the level of IMP³rove Guide, IMP³rove Expert level I (basic level), IMP³rove Expert level II

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(intermediary level), IMP³rove Auditor (professional level). These certificates are issued based on the proven practical experience and the knowledge in Innovation Management and Innovation Management consulting.

If the innovation and competitiveness program includes consulting services then IMP³rove Expert level I should be the minimum. This ensures that the consultant has demonstrated his knowledge in Innovation Management as well as in Innovation Management consulting.

The minimum training program for IMP³rove Expert level I is the

- “Introduction to the IMP³rove Approach” (2 day training course) to gain a solid understanding of the IMP³rove Approach and the Innovation Management Assessment.
- “Introduction to Innovation Management Consulting I” (2 day training course) as many support service providers, even those who have been working with SMEs for many years have major difficulties to focus on the value added of their support services.
- Practical experience in supporting the SMEs demonstrated by at least 4 assisted IMP³rove assessments including the feedback workshops that results in a roadmap for improving the SMEs Innovation Management.
- Successful completion of the IMP³rove exam for the IMP³rove Expert level I. This is a 4 hour written exam plus an oral presentation on Innovation Management designed for SMEs plus a case study based on the experience with SMEs that applied the IMP³rove Approach.

3.5.2 Scoping the Need for Training in Innovation Management

If the aim is international competitiveness based on high Innovation Management performance, then there should be sufficient trained IMP³rove consultants available to support the local SMEs. Experience shows that an experienced consultant can on average support approximately 10 - 12 SMEs per annum. This includes an Innovation Management Assessment as well as 10 days of consulting support. Therefore programs that aim at effective support of SMEs should have in place a sufficiently large network of highly qualified

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Innovation Management support providers. This network itself will contribute to the development of an active innovation eco-system.

3.5.3 Steps to Launch an IMP³rove Training Program

Prior to the launch of the IMP³rove-based training program, the objectives, budget and time frame have to be defined. Based on this information the individual education program can be defined. It will combine theory and practical application of the approach.

The recruiting of the participants can be done by the authority or via public announcement.

To ensure sustainability of the measures, the training participants should be obliged to leverage the newly acquired knowledge and further develop it for the benefit of the local SMEs.

3.5.4 Benefits from Trained Innovation Management Consultants

By developing a network of qualified Innovation Management support providers the impact of the public support program is significantly increased. Furthermore, involving experienced trained consultants in public programs also develops the local service sector where jobs are maintained and additional ones are created. Training former managers of SMEs as consultants has been an effective approach. These consultants know what the key issues of SME managers are, and they enjoy a higher level of acceptance than those consultants that have never had practical experience in an SME environment. This also helps to keep experienced elderly members of the workforce in employment.

At the same time the network of IMP³rove trained Innovation Management support providers serves as a platform to further develop the innovation eco-system, maintain the awareness and knowledge on Innovation Management as key driver for competitiveness. A key benefit here is the common language and understanding of Innovation Management based on the IMP³rove Approach, and the Innovation Management support that builds on value-creation and impact.

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3.6 Creating the IMP³rove Powered Innovation Eco-System

Long-term impact of publicly funded programs on innovation and competitiveness will increase if there is a well-established innovation eco-system in place that will maintain momentum in the development of SMEs. To further develop regional or national innovation eco-systems, IMP³rove provides support services that focus on networking within different stakeholder groups as SMEs, consultants, innovation agencies, intermediaries, financial actors, academia, and policy makers.

3.6.1 The Concept of an IMP³rove Powered Innovation Eco-System

The IMP³rove powered innovation eco-system builds a network of different stakeholders active in Innovation Management based on a common internationally proven approach. Key principles are creating value based on Innovation Management, establishing sustainable Innovation Management support, and continuously measuring the impact of the innovation eco-system on the innovation and competitiveness performance of the involved SMEs. The concept includes the transition to a sustainable innovation eco-system.

Regular events such as IMP³rove Roundtables, IMP³rove Symposia, and IMP³rove Workshops and Webinars will bring together very different stakeholder groups and present new insights not only from IMP³rove Research, best practices of SMEs in Innovation Management, but also from external Innovation Management experts to increase the proficiency of service providers, policy makers, financial actors as well as the innovation performance and competitiveness of SMEs.

At the same time the need and demand of SMEs on Innovation Management support and innovation related issues will be assessed and measures developed to best address these needs within the innovation eco-system. This may include the development of an Innovation Management education program at the local academic institutions, best practice visits at SMEs or benchmarking studies comparing the Innovation Management performance of clusters or industry sectors from different countries.

Due to the fact that IMP³rove has already established a wide international network experts on specific areas can be easily recruited to provide the necessary initial support and also to establish international connectivity of local innovation eco-systems.

3.6.2 Assessing the Need for Establishing the IMP³rove Powered Innovation Eco-System

Lack of integration of SMEs, intermediaries, support providers, financial actors and academic institutions, indicates the need for establishing an innovation eco-system. The frequency and intensity of collaboration between SMEs, clusters, universities, financial actors, policy makers and media to promote innovation and competitiveness should be at least on a level that momentum is created to involve more and more SMEs in joint activities on improving their Innovation Management performance on a sustainable basis. Experience shows that one-time interaction of SMEs with the other stakeholders is not sufficient. Therefore, regular networking and collaboration activities should be in place with a clear target on tangible results for the SMEs. These results could include SMEs hiring a university graduate as Innovation Management assistant or participating in the IMP³rove Award.

3.6.3 Scoping the Need for Networking Support to Establish an Effective Innovation Eco-System

Defining the centers of “gravity” provides the number of locations where networking activities should take place. The frequency, intensity and scope of the networking activities have to be defined based on the existing activities. If there is already an academic institution that offers education and research on Innovation Management then this could build the basis to establish innovative online and off-line activities to further develop the local innovation eco-system with high involvement of SMEs. Alternatively, clusters, chambers of commerce, financial actors, trade associations or value chains will be leveraged to build the platform for the innovation eco-system. Experience shows that the continuity of these activities is essential to have a long-term impact.

3.6.4 Steps for Developing an IMP³rove-powered Innovation Eco-system

First of all the objective of the IMP³rove powered innovation eco-system has to be defined and agreed. Tangible and measurable targets have to be set in order to measure the impact of the innovation eco-system. Such targets should include the number of SMEs involved, the growth rate of these SMEs in terms of employment, internationalization etc. Then the key stakeholders that should play an active role in the innovation eco-system need to be

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identified and mobilized. Their specific role and tasks have to be clarified as well as the way how they can interact in the most effective manner that there is momentum for further developing the knowledge on Innovation Management and competitiveness especially at SMEs. Finally the impact of the innovation eco-system has to be measured and where necessary counter measures implemented.

3.6.5 Benefits of an IMP³rove powered Innovation Eco-System

The key benefit of a well-functioning IMP³rove powered innovation eco-system is its momentum in actively involving SMEs in Innovation Management issues as source for competitiveness. With an IMP³rove powered innovation eco-system a common language for all stakeholders is given as well as the focus on value-creation and impact for each of the members in the eco-system. Alignment of activities of the various stakeholder groups will result in demand driven support such as local education programs for SME staff in Innovation Management, academic research driven by SME and their development issues, support services from intermediaries, consultants, clusters and innovation agencies that create value and sustainable growth for SMEs.

3.7 IMP³rove – Workshops for SMEs

All innovation support programs addressing SMEs face one common challenge: How to reach the SMEs. Often the topic “Innovation Management” or even “Innovation” seems less relevant to SME managers compared to the basic day-to-day operations.

3.7.1 Workshops for SMEs – the Concept

IMP³rove has already accessed more than 3000 SMEs across Europe and beyond. A key differentiator here is that IMP³rove builds on impact and value for the SME. The SME manager is concerned about the competitiveness of his company. Therefore, IMP³rove shows how he can secure his company’s future by creating transparency on his Innovation Management activities and results. Case examples, best practices and access to the Innovation Management benchmarking with the SMEs’ competitors are just some of the topics customized to the needs of SMEs.

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These topics will be underlined with testimonials from highly innovative SMEs that demonstrate the full benefit of IMP³rove services such as the IMP³rove Assessment as basis for a systematic improvement program for the SME's competitiveness.

IMP³rove – SME Workshops are offered in various modes:

- Presentation on: Introduction to Innovation Management as key driver for competitiveness
- Presentation on: Introduction to Innovation Management as key driver for competitiveness plus the benefits of an IMP³rove Assessment
- Introduction to the IMP³rove Approach
- Introduction to the IMP³rove Approach and first steps to start the IMP³rove Assessment
- Presentation on the results from the IMP³rove Assessment and afterwards individual feedback based on the IMP³rove Benchmarking Report

Highly qualified IMP³rove Consultants will provide insights on results from projects where the Innovation Management performance of an SME has been improved.

Other set-ups for the IMP³rove – SME Workshops are offered based on the specific requirements of the institution organizing this event.

3.7.2 Co-sponsoring of the IMP³rove – SME Workshops

These SME workshops can be co-sponsored by local intermediaries, such as innovation agencies, development agencies, cluster managers, technology park managers, trade associations, industry confederations, chambers of commerce or financial actors.

3.7.3 Integration of the IMP³rove - SME Workshops in other IMP³rove offerings

The IMP³rove SME workshops can be offered in combination with various other offerings of IMP³rove such as:

- IMP³rove – Assessment
- IMP³rove - Audits

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- IMP³rove Award
- IMP³rove – Innovation Support Infrastructure Development
- IMP³rove – Voucher Schemes

The main purpose of the IMP³rove - SME workshops is to gain access to SMEs and to convince them of the importance of Innovation Management for their own competitive performance.

3.7.4 Assessing the Need for IMP³rove – SME Workshops

Too many old and rather small companies are a first indicator for low Innovation Management performance and competitiveness of the SME population in a specific region or country or in a specific industry sector. SMEs complaining about the competitive pressure from international competition are another indicator as well as the decline in tax revenues. Here IMP³rove - SME workshops can contribute to create awareness for the urgency and for measures to respond to the decline and to the competitive pressure.

3.7.5 Scoping the Need for SME Workshops

Depending on the budget and urgency, the number and frequency of SME workshops can be defined. To allow for high involvement of the SMEs participating in the IMP³rove-SME workshops there should be about 30 SMEs per workshop. The demand from SMEs will be higher if there is a clear benefit linked to the participation in the workshop. Therefore, the SMEs will get insights in their competitors' activities and performance. As a follow-up activity support during the IMP³rove Assessment can be provided.

3.7.6 Steps for Preparing IMP³rove-SME Workshops

First, the organizing agency should clarify the objectives of the IMP³rove-SME workshop before involving other organizations that SMEs trust and before inviting SMEs at all. The benefits for the SMEs should be clearly stated as well as the expected contribution and active involvement of the SMEs and potential other stakeholders. An outlook on the follow-up activities should be provided to put the IMP³rove-SME workshop into perspective as one activity in the context of a well-designed program.

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These workshops need to be organized in close collaboration with institutions that have excellent access to SMEs. They need to communicate the benefits of these workshops to SMEs and create the demand from the SMEs. The aim should be a series of workshops in a defined region or a series of workshops in several regions to create the critical mass.

3.7.7 The Benefits of the IMP³rove – SME Workshops

The IMP³rove – SME Workshops offer

- SMEs a learning experience how to increase their own competitiveness
- SMEs networking opportunities with other SME managers who have benefitted from the IMP³rove approach
- Innovation support providers access to SMEs based on a proven European Approach
- National and regional agencies the European view on Innovation Management and its impact on competitiveness
- National and regional agencies an approach to increase the proficiency in Innovation Management at SMEs
- Intermediaries such as cluster managers the possibility to offer additional services and insights
- Reference to a proven European approach as basis for establishing a national or regional “standard” approach
- The basis for further developing the competitiveness of the national or regional economy

3.8 IMP³rove Webinars for Virtual Workshops and Conferences

With modern technology virtual workshops and conferences on Innovation Management have been successfully implemented by IMP³rove for awareness creation, education, and networking.

3.8.1 IMP³rove Webinars – the Concept

IMP³rove webinars are usually planned as a series of events to achieve the objectives defined and support the networking and interaction between the stakeholder groups. They are a supporting means to stay connected without the effort of travel time and cost. Webinars can never replace the benefits of face-to-face meetings. Training via webinars proved to be ineffective for the IMP³rove training program. However, IMP³rove webinars increase efficiency in sharing knowledge in clearly defined topics, networking, continuity of relationships and involvement of different stakeholders.

3.8.2 Assessing the Need for IMP³rove Webinars

Disperse stakeholder groups that have not yet collaborated sufficiently on Innovation Management related topics or Innovation Management topics that have not yet been well understood by defined target groups are indicators for the need of IMP³rove Webinars. Furthermore, lack of awareness of Innovation Management as important issue, lack of knowledge in Innovation Management topics in general or lack of coordination between the players in the innovation eco-system as well as limited travel budgets and time are all obstacles that IMP³rove webinars might bridge in a very valuable way.

3.8.3 Scoping the Frequency and Target Groups of IMP³rove Webinars

IMP³rove experience shows that the webinars should maintain continuity of the information flow and exclusivity that the participants see a value in being member of this community. Therefore, the number of participants should be limited according to the purpose of a webinar. If the objective is pure dissemination of information than the number of participants can be higher. Usually the purpose of a webinar includes the interaction among the participants, and then the number should correspond with the intensity of interaction. 60 participants are perceived as maximum when there is a defined small group of presenters that interact while the others listen.

The frequency of webinars should secure continuity in the interaction of the participants. Depending on the aim of the program IMP³rove webinars can be scheduled to bridge the gap between face-to-face meetings, or allow for coordination on short term in urgent matters

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or provide progress report on large programs that require significant coordination within the various parties.

IMP³rove webinars are an excellent means to connect members of different target groups, e.g. representatives of clusters with consultants, development agencies, financial actors etc. – often on an international scale.

3.8.4 Steps for Preparing IMP³rove Webinars

The organizing authority should clarify the objectives and target groups of the IMP³rove Webinars, and how they will create value for the participants. The invitation to the IMP³rove Webinars including the agenda and the technical details to connect successfully need to be provided in due time. Technical support for participants who have difficulties to connect should be provided prior to the IMP³rove Webinar.

3.8.5 Benefits of IMP³rove Webinars

IMP³rove Webinars build on the common IMP³rove approach to Innovation Management support. They create awareness and a common understanding of defined topics. They also increase connectivity within the participants and secure continuity of interaction within a defined group of Innovation Management professionals. IMP³rove Webinars focus on tangible results and are based on long-term experience with this medium both for rather small groups as well as for webinars with a large international community. Based on this experience IMP³rove provides recommendations on the timing, frequency, design and content of the webinars.

3.9 Innovation Management Support Services along the Value Chain

Given the fact that SMEs are difficult to mobilize IMP³rove has identified three drivers that motivate SMEs to participate in innovation and competitiveness programs:

- Public funding, which is the least sustainable
- Financing

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- Customer demand, which has the highest impact.

Building on the fact that SMEs tend to listen to their customers, IMP³rove has developed the Supplier Innovation Management Assessment approach.

3.9.1 Innovation Management Support Services along the Value Chain – the Concept

Companies that are operating in the business-to-business sector highly depend on their business customers' demand. Even well-managed companies state that they do not know enough about their customers' specific needs and vice versa the customers do not know enough about their suppliers' innovation capacity. Therefore, the concept of Innovation Management along the value chain has been developed by IMP³rove. This includes the IMP³rove Innovation Management assessment for the SME and then rolls it out to the SME's suppliers who often also are SMEs. Bringing customer and supplier together and discussing the various dimensions of the "A.T. Kearney House of Innovation", that is the basis of the IMP³rove Assessment, reveals completely new perspectives for the suppliers and the customers how to better align their innovation activities for mutual benefit.

The supplier can integrate challenges that the customer is facing into his own innovation life-cycle process and turn the challenge into ideas that become part of his idea funnel. In return, the customer gains much better understanding on which areas the suppliers are currently putting their innovation focus on.

For national and regional policy makers this approach is most effective to increase the innovation and competitiveness in the geographic area they are responsible for. It is also very cost effective, as the public funding is provided to those SMEs that see the need for improving their Innovation Management due to the expectations and pressure from their customers. This approach can be implemented along the entire value chain where the SMEs are operating in.

3.9.2 Assessing the Need for Innovation Management Support along the Value Chain

Based in the IMP³rove experience there is hardly any value chain where there is no need to provide support in improving and aligning the Innovation Management. Therefore it is essential to identify those value chains where the urgency is especially high. At the same time the interest of at least one key player in the value chain needs to be very high to improve their Innovation Management performance in order to meet explicit customer demand.

Depending on the scope of the public program, the need for support might be limited to the value chains within a cluster or in the other extreme to global value chain in which the regional or national SMEs are embedded.

3.9.3 Scoping the Support in Innovation Management Support along the Value Chain

The public support should concentrate on the awareness creation and communication of the benefits resulting from the alignment of the SME's own Innovation Management with their customers' demand and with their own suppliers. These awareness creation activities can take place by presenting successful pilots. Public funding should focus less on financing the consultants helping the SME to improve their Innovation Management performance. The resources here should come from increased sales. The customer will intensify their relationship with the SME once their needs have been better addressed by the supplier.

Usually there are larger and smaller companies involved in the value chain. Public support still can be limited to SMEs while larger companies in the value chain are expected to be able to take measures for improving their Innovation Management at their own expense. The SMEs in the value chain will get qualified support by trained Innovation Management consultants to further develop their Innovation Management and better integrate it with their customers and their suppliers. This support can be co-funded by the public program in the sense of developing case examples to mobilize SMEs in the region.

3.9.4 Steps to Initiate Innovation Management Improvement along the Value Chain

Key players should be identified that show an interest in improving their supplier Innovation Management. These companies should gain an understanding of their own Innovation Management performance by completing the IMP³rove Assessment in the first place before they ask their suppliers to provide an IMP³rove Benchmarking report based on an assisted IMP³rove Assessment.

Trained IMP³rove Consultants should be prepared to assist the suppliers in performing the assisted IMP³rove Assessment.

3.9.5 Benefits from Innovation Management Support along the Value Chain

Innovation Management support along the value chain increase not only the innovation performance and competitiveness of individual enterprises, but of interlinked companies. The “domino effect” will create a push and a pull demand for better Innovation Management and better Innovation Management support. This in turn will improve the sustainability of the regional or even national economy.

The dynamics of this approach is demand driven and less driven by public funding where beneficiaries often don't see an actual demand for themselves. This increases the likelihood that companies will embed Innovation Management improvements into their regular management activities on a sustainable basis and not just because there is publicly funded support.

3.10 IMP³rove Research on Demand

Insights on the Innovation Management performance of SMEs from specific industries, specific age or size classes as well as from specific countries or regions can be provided if a statistical relevant number of these SMEs have completed the IMP³rove Assessment. Research results on the performance of these SMEs in the various dimensions of Innovation Management are presented on demand. In addition, impact of Innovation Management support in Europe can be assessed based on the IMP³rove experience in establishing an

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international network of Innovation Management support providers for SMEs. Examples of IMP³rove research results are provided on the IMP³rove platform www.improve-innovation.eu.

3.10.1 Assessing the Need for Research on SMEs' Innovation Management Performance

To customize the support program for SMEs a better understanding of the barriers and drivers of Innovation Management and competitiveness is recommended. A hypotheses-driven approach will lead to the key questions that the IMP³rove “research on demand” should address. This could be a specific issue such as internationalization or design management as driver for innovation and competitiveness or the comparison of an SME population in one country with that of another country. With several thousand data sets, the IMP³rove database disposes of the largest international database on Innovation Management at SMEs.

3.10.2 Scoping the Focus of the IMP³rove Research on Demand

Together with the representatives of the IMP³rove - European Innovation Management Academy the focus of the IMP³rove Research activities as well as the level of detail will be defined. It will also be defined whether there is already a sufficient number of valid data sets available in the IMP³rove Benchmarking database. If not, then the recruiting of SMEs in this area is recommended prior to the research activities.

3.10.3 Steps to IMP³rove Research on Demand

Usually there is an initial key question related to Innovation Management and competitiveness that needs an answer. The better this question is defined the more specific the IMP³rove Research can be designed. The team of the IMP³rove – European Innovation Management Academy will help in defining the key questions and the underlying hypotheses that need to be addressed by the IMP³rove Research results.

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3.10.4 Benefits of IMP³rove Research on Demand

IMP³rove Research studies provide up-to-date insights on Innovation Management performance and activities of SMEs. The IMP³rove studies have further developed the knowledge on drivers and barriers of Innovation Management at SMEs. These studies can also provide insights on the effectiveness and efficiency of innovation support measures in order to derive conclusions and recommendations for increasing the effectiveness of future support programs. The insight that some years ago many policies focused on the front end of the innovation process neglecting the focus on results from Innovation Management led to the refinement of support programs. Now they are putting a stronger focus on measuring the increase of competitiveness of SMEs from those support programs.

4 Examples for IMP³rove-based Innovation and Competitiveness Programs

IMP³rove-based innovation and competitiveness programs have been established in different ways and intensity across Europe and beyond. In the following some examples are described in more detail.



Source: IMP³rove, 2011; www.improve-innovation.eu; IMP³rove is a registered trademark; KIS = Knowledge intensive services

Figure 6: Examples of IMP³rove-based Innovation and Competitiveness Programs

In **UK, *Scottish Enterprise*** – a support service provider for SMEs and member of Enterprise Europe Network – has 15 trained IMP³rove Guides since 2011. They support SMEs in improving their Innovation Management performance and competitiveness. Scottish Enterprise linked with other EU funded programs such as Eco-IP to gain access to SMEs via clusters in the area. With the IMP³rove Assessment areas for improving the SMEs’ competitiveness can be identified and systematically developed.

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In ***Serbia, the Enterprise and Innovation Project***¹, which was part of Serbia's process of application for EU membership in 2009, had three main elements: development of expertise in the Ministry of Economy and Regional Development, development of innovation policies and assistance to 150 enterprises. To assist in all these elements the project team chose to use the IMP³rove assessment and methodology.

The project aimed to make available assistance in developing businesses to 150 companies. The IMP³rove Assessment was used as a selection tool to target that assistance to the companies that could make best use of it. This did not mean that the most innovative companies were supported, but that the assistance that was available could be targeted at the companies, which would make best use of it.

At the beginning, there was doubt that a tool developed in the European Union and predominantly in Western Europe, to the old member states, would be applicable to an economy in transition. This doubt could only be resolved by testing the assessment in Serbia. However, the fact that it had been used in Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary did tell in its favor.

The most supportive institution was the Serbian export promotion agency. They had contact with many Serbian firms with views to the outer side of the country. They made available their database of companies and assisted in the promotion of improving to those companies.

The first step was to train Serbian experts in the use of the IMP³rove Assessment. It enabled the Serbian experts, who could go to companies, to help with the IMP³rove Assessment, and then deliver support to the SMEs in the next stage. However, the training did take some time. There had to be a formal training, and then a set of pilot assessments conducted jointly with an accredited EU expert.

A surprise was the high response rate from Serbian enterprises. About one of three of the enterprises approached wanted to undertake the assessment. This was for a variety of reasons. In some cases, the potential for gaining assistance from the state was important; in

¹ Executed by Carl James, IMP³rove Guide who also provided the lessons learned that are included here

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others, the prestige of an EU approved tool was convincing; for some others there was a genuine interest in gaining an insight into improving their performance.

One of the problems which resulted from the high response rate was the limited capacity to service all the companies. It was therefore necessary to stagger contracts with the companies and to recruit more experts to service them.

An analysis of the responses of the Serbian companies showed a similar profile to that of EU companies. Their main difference lay in the results aspect, where the hurdles faced by Serbian companies in exporting were significant. Reporting the profiles back to Serbian companies and demonstrating their similarities with companies in the EU was encouraging.

The profiles of the companies are also being fed into the Ministry of Economy and regional development and may be useful in formulating priorities for the implementation of the law on innovation.

IMP³rove is being used as a tool for assessing companies and as an instrument for embedding knowledge and expertise on innovation in the business support infrastructure in Serbia. It was also a small element in assisting Serbia in its trajectory for membership of the European Union.

In **France, the national innovation agency, OSEO** supported the KIS-PIMS program with an innovation voucher. This voucher enabled selected SMEs to buy consulting services in order to strengthen the business plan for their innovation. Within this program about 25 French SMEs were supported during the IMP³rove Assessment to identify and address their needs for more systematic Innovation Management performance. KIS-PIMS aimed at designing and implementing new funding schemes for innovative service companies, with a focus on SMEs, belonging to clusters located in France, Austria and Finland.

In **Germany, the support program “go-inno” launched by the Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology** is a voucher program that aims at a systematic preparation of an innovation project at an SME. This includes the analysis of national and international market potential, search for suitable cooperation partners for SMEs especially from academia as well as support during the implementation. Accredited support providers also include trained IMP³rove Guides. They supported the SMEs in innovation audits based on

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the IMP³rove Assessment as it also provides a comparison with the national and international competitors of the SME.

In **Hungary, the National Development Agency** has implemented an innovation and competitiveness program for SMEs. Vouchers are provided to SMEs for support based on a scoring model. A score of 100 has to be reached to be eligible for this voucher program. By submitting a validated IMP³rove benchmarking report 20 out of 100 scores can be achieved. This puts the IMP³rove Assessment in a very prominent position.

For the National Development Agency also the qualification of the support providers is essential. Therefore, they intend to launch a training program for this target group. The aim is to have 200 local IMP³rove Consultants trained at least on Expert level I available to assist the SMEs in the IMP³rove Assessment and during the improvement phase when the identified gaps have to be filled.

In **Egypt, ITIDA the Information Technology Industry Development Agency** decided in 2009 to use the IMP³rove Assessment to select the best small and medium sized IT companies for a special support program. Staff members of ITIDA were trained in the IMP³rove Approach to support the SMEs. The agency then also organized breakfast meetings where they addressed key issues for the various dimensions of Innovation Management that are covered in the IMP³rove Assessment. Thus they increased the knowledge about Innovation Management at SMEs and at the same time gained insights in the Innovation Management performance and competitiveness of SMEs in the IT sector.

In **Australia, the Queensland University of Technology (QUT), School of Design, in Brisbane** decided to collaborate with the Queensland Manufacturing Institute (QMI) to help SMEs improve their competitiveness. More than 10 staff members of the QMI are trained IMP³rove Guides. With financial support of the national government SMEs are assisted during the IMP³rove Assessment and then also during the phase of improvement of their competitiveness. For the QUT the results from the IMP³rove Assessments build the basis for further research on Innovation and Innovation Management related issues. By joining forces between an academic institution and an agency with access to SMEs an innovation ecosystem is developed based on IMP³rove as a common approach. This helps to align the activities of the different players and allows for effective learning in the area of Innovation Management.

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5 Contact Details

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