D.T3.1.3

Set of tools for strategy implementation

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Main author	Steffi Groth, Marco Drews
Contributors	Steffi Groth, Marco Drews (ATI erc gGmbH)
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Table of contents

1 Executive Summary

This paper deals with the elaboration of network tools for strategy implementation. The document presents developed and proved tools for efficient cooperation and communication in the smart specialization network. The tools help members to engage intensively in exchange of knowledge and competencies as well as to inform each other on new developments, planned activities and successful actions. They help new members to orientate, decide about their membership and find quick access to the ROs network.

2 Introduction

The importance of creating cross-national networks between business entities, public administration, scientific and research institutions is growing steadily. Such networks help to merge ideas, exchange information and knowledge as well as boost establishing cooperation methods between the stakeholders of RIS ecosystems.

In the following report, we propose a set of tools that facilitates the implementation of the strategy of a network of regional branch observatories (ROs).

The network is intended to be an approach to connect Central Europe by reducing regional disparities and closing gaps between the Regional Innovation Strategies (RIS) and real needs of end-users of smart specializations and new technologies. The tools are primarily aiming at exploiting all possibilities to come into contact with the ROs and to generate interactions and knowledge exchange within the framework of the strategy objectives – to build and grow a sustainable ROs' network. The described toolbox will be a useful vehicle to increase the synergy effects and range of regional branch observatories. Therefore, all network partners should keep their motivation high to continuously try to convince customers from the concept of ROs network, or at least suggest it as a possible alternative.

The toolbox consists of independent pillars, through which future and current members, as well as interested parties, can gain quick and easy access to the required data and information. Also, target groups get the awareness of regional structures and strategies, offered services and potential partners for initializing new

projects and cooperation of science and economy across borders. In this way, the toolbox supports innovation-driven development and growth in the regions and sets the framework for the emergence of a self-sustaining innovation network in Central Europe.

The proposed tools are dynamic by nature and adjusted by a lively exchange in the future. The set of tools will serve as adaptable elements because of the feedback from users and practitioners generated during the implementation of the project and beyond; leading to their sustainability. Any suggestions and proposals for improvement of the tools can be delivered at meetings, workshops, face-to-face communication or via e-mail. This is even more important to increase the suitability of the tools for strategy implementation. Besides, the tools are practical means to strive reactions of local and national authorities to support the concept of monitoring technology trends and market developments in the field of smart specialization. The following tools are offered to contribute to the implementation of an ROs' network strategy: standard tools, cooperation platform, competence map, electronic newsletters, participation in thematic events, benchlearning and marketing, internal audits and an action plan.

3 Tools

3.1 Network website and cooperation platform

These both tools are effective ways and methods for connecting people and business partners, promoting and launching new products, offer services and strengthen collaborations as well as attracting the interest of target groups.

3.1.1 Network website

The internet is now the primary portal through which people, companies and institutions communicate, learn, work and present themselves. The purpose of a website is to give a group-specific presentation of the network/project and its services on the Internet to create contact possibilities and thus attracting new members. The target group for the website, in this case, are both: the RIS managers in the regions as well as other regional branch observatories and business promotors.

The publicly available section deals in particular with the presentation and publicity of network activities and the awakening of interest among the target group to participate in the active exchange. Network members are also entitled to the internal area of the website – the communication platform.

3.1.2 Structure and content of the platform

A user-friendly and customizable platform could be an effective tool to develop and share best practices as well as attract and gain new network members. It should provide and put together the main contents, activities, results and outputs of project work and aim at facilitating the initiation of concrete follow-up projects. Besides, technology profiles and competence information on all the involved stakeholders as well as reports on events (e.g. study visits, workshops) should be presented via the platform. Divided into various categories and themes, one platform category could be strongly focused on innovation trends and technology processes related to the project and smart specialization. Also, the platform could facilitate the communication to target groups as well as accelerate finding project partners and attracting new members to the network. The platform should offer a depository of knowledge, competencies and business contacts for all users and thus, highlight the synergies of a network of ROs. Using this infrastructure and services will be free of charge and accessible to all end-users, only membership and involvement to the intended network activities should be required. In particular, the ongoing involvement of all members and associated stakeholders will be crucial for the creation and maintenance of a high-quality cooperation platform. In sum, the potential to create a well-functioning and sustainable network of regional branch observatories of smart specializations, monitoring technology trends and market developments, will be enhanced by providing an elaborated platform.

3.2 Competence map

The map of regional branch observatories (ROs) and facilitators of intelligent markets provides an overview of the main actors, promotors and institutions monitoring technology trends and market developments in the area of smart specializations and RIS in Central Europe.

This tool will enable ROs and all the intelligent market stakeholders to aggregate information on new technologies and smart specializations as well as to monitor RIS in all regions involved in the programme.

The benchmarking tool has been created to offer the possibility of 1) identifying the needs of SMEs (demand-side overlayer) and 2) maximizing the learning effect (bench learning) in RIS ecosystems. The competence map as a visual feature combines thematic and territorial dimensions of the project goals, as it will provide reports and findings for each sector of smart specializations and each region. It provides a valuable resource for the first approach to potential new network members and serves future candidates as a guideline for their implementation to the network. Beyond this, the map offers cross-sectoral and cross-regional benchmarks analysis enabling all the stakeholders to define the potential for interregional exchange of knowledge and to establish cross-border business activities.

Regional observatories (business support organizations) in intelligent markets of Central Europe benefit from the competence map and its demand overlayer utilizing learning on the real needs of business and looking for possibilities to find other regional branch observatories to discuss their success stories or to start collaboration. Also, the policy-makers can benefit from the demand-side overlayer as they can identify the niche and existing problems with access to current and future services/datasets needed by the business.

Also, market structures, as well as professional expertise and services corresponding to existing market niches and actual needs of end-users, will be bundled. The competence map aims to make contact initiation more efficient through the possibility to search in different categories like country, type of organization (university, public institution, research institute, company or facilitator), offered services and main objectives (company size and geographical orientation) in the directory.

3.3 Electronic newsletter

Email newsletters are one of the most powerful digital marketing tools available to boost our business. They allow us to communicate in a personalized way with our

partners, clients and members and deliver the right message at the right time. They can promote events and campaigns, build and tighten community among a membership base, encourage our partners to act or offer useful advice and hints. Potential target groups for the prospective SMART_watch network can be identified in each region and country if the project partners update and share their contacts that they have developed and maintained during previous cross-border activities. A unified database of such contacts could offer a valuable basis for approaching potential candidates by referring to previously successfully implemented projects. An electronic newsletter has a much higher engagement rate and drives more conversions than social media. It can be stated to all target audience at regional, national as well as Central European level. To keep the newsletters appealing to all target groups, contents should be related to the project progress, meet the interests of the target audience and prospective candidates as well as focus on the benefits and synergies of collaboration.

3.4 Thematic events

(e.g. workshops, study visits, trade exhibitions, round tables): During the last decade the number of transnational collaborations and actions have increased significantly. These activities inspire and connect people and regions for common causes and needs. Project and business partners implement and participate in thematic events to deepen the exchange of experience, share good practice and different points of view as well as address potential customers/new network members. Therefore, involving in workshops, study visits, trade exhibitions and related events can be a rewarding experience and an important learning tool – not only for participants but also or the organisers. They offer a direct way for an organization or project team to boost motivation, solve thematic problems, tap into methods, become more international as well as raise its profile in the community and demonstrate its achievements to target groups and partners. Beyond this, thematic events are an effective tool for establishing cross-border cooperation schemes and networks, for learning about examples of good practice in other regions and countries as well as delivering territorial cohesion. All project partners should organize and participate

in thematic events during the whole duration of the project with the following objectives: attract the project to potential ROs and new target groups, make the project as much visible as possible to the public, exchange and discuss experiences, benefits and synergies, weaknesses and outputs. As part of thematic events and campaigns provide face-to-face communication and informal meetings opportunities to get in touch with the target audience (ROs) and potential network members. These activities help to build up trust and a sense of community, to spread information and understand objections, as well as keeping the target group involved and interested in the progress of the project.

3.5 Benchlearning

Benchlearning is not just a tool about comparing performance figures, it goes way beyond that by trying to initiate a dialogue with partners and institutions that provide examples of best practice. Benchlearning aims to learn from the knowledge and experience of others and then objectively analyse one's activities and assess the means of action, methods and results used. Besides, benchlearning also involves establishing partnerships that enable all partners to learn from each other and improve their performance. In practice, regarding the SMART_watch project, each region already collects a wealth of data on technology trends and market developments but does not necessarily evaluate them carefully or has no facilities or methods for effective monitoring and analysis. However, there may already run national or international projects that deal with similar challenges and questions. Thus, there may already exist a certain pool of experience of successful practices that can be used for project improvement. Benchlearning is a tool in which the participants learning from each other, identify similarities and differences to a given topic or challenge finding out best practices. 1) The method seems to be particularly suitable for the project because the topic of SMART_watch is highly relevant – a so-called "hot topic". 2) The topic is still poorly researched. 3) Various business venture and previous projects, within or outside the technology sector, have already developed solutions and achieved results in practice (e.g. success stories of cross-border technology projects). Therefore, benchlearning would be a structured tool

for quickly developing successful practices on specific research issues as well as communicating them vividly to partners and associated stakeholders. Benchlearning methods are generally practice-oriented, based on practical experience and have proven their worth in continuous day-to-day work. Finally, the findings of bench learning activities should be summarised and published in a learning report – both a public version and a more detailed one for the participants.

3.6 Internal audits

The term “audit” comes from the Latin of “audire” and means “listen”. Audit refers to the evaluation of processes and activities or an internal control system (ICS). The audit is about compliance with defined requirements or standards. In our case, the audits are intended to provide information on the fields of activity, achievements and competencies of the respective network partners.

The audits are used to record the respective service offerings and strengths of the partners. They answer the questions ensuring that no important data is forgotten to present. The audit serves as a stable basis of the competence map of the network. It will directly benefit from the audit methodology and guidelines developed under the framework of SMART_watch project in 2018. Potential new members can decide based on the competence map and its features whether the network can bring any added value to them and whether they want to actively participate.

To apply for membership, they present in an audit their business, qualifications and achievements, which serve as a solid basis for decision-making. Based on the audits, the network manager can decide on the suitability and qualification of membership, since all relevant information has been requested by the audit.

3.7 Marketing activities

The objective of the marketing activities is to raise awareness of science and business to the offerings of the network. An essential part of the marketing strategy is to develop SMART_watch as a brand for smart specialization in Central Europe. Another important goal that the members of the network should tackle is to attract additional members from other regions to broaden the basis for an exchange of

experience and knowledge. To achieve this, the members seek contact with other networks dealing with similar or the same issues and interested in an expanded exchange.

3.8 Action plan

An action plan sets out the need for action, sets out the objectives to be achieved, prioritises them or sets priorities, and bundles existing or new measures to achieve them. It is used to plan, coordinate and control all network actions with the proviso to achieve the best for your all network members.

The action plan drawn up by the network consortium will include fields of activities aiming to promote the transnational collaboration of science and businesses in the monitored region and beyond. It is drawn up and approved annually on the occasion of the General Assembly of the network. The plan includes all activities to which the fellow members want to devote themselves together. Possible contents may include:

- the content design of the network's website or changes
- the planning of joint events
- the joint presentation of the network at events and trade fairs
- the agreement to implement study visits
- the agreement on general meetings

and more points. The action plan serves as a basis for members to work together on network activities.

3.9 Standard tools

- **Phone** (sometimes a direct phone call helps clarify things rather than a long email),
- **Communication via E-mail** (short way for dissemination of written information in short time),
- **Free messaging systems** like www.skype.com (to chat, make online calls and hold video conferences), all network members are asked to provide SKYPE details or install Skype in case they are not using it yet, Skype will be one of the major distant communication means,
- **Online meetings** (for discuss topics in a larger group e.g. working group),

- **Joint calendars** like www.calendar.yahoo.com (to create to-do lists, schedule events and send reminders),
- **Intranet/Extranet** accessible via the programme website (requiring login and password).
- **Face-to-Face communication**

Face-to-face communication is very powerful. You can communicate verbally with the words you speak as well as non-verbally through body language. It also allows you to get immediate feedback from the receiver so you can adjust how you are delivering your message if necessary. Some examples of face-to-face communication include informal hallway chats, project meetings, annual performance reviews.

- **Written communication**

Although most of us consider ourselves honest and ethical, we are all human and can forget things we have said or misunderstand things we have heard. One of the major benefits of written communication is that it can be used to document what has been said or agreed to. It also can be used to clarify ideas to avoid misunderstandings. Some examples of written communication include letters, email, contracts, sms, reports and intranet content.

- **Social Media communication**

Social media has become a very common form of communication. It allows for real-time feedback with a written record of what has been communicated. What makes social media so powerful for project work is the way it enables team collaboration. Examples of social media communication include instant messaging, Microsoft Sharepoint, Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. Many of the web-based project management tools are also considered to be social media tools since they enable better collaboration.

- **Slack as an alternative network tool**

Slack is a team-promoting and free-of-charge tool for effective communication and strategy implementation. Slack serves as a smart alternative to e-mails, making it easy to follow conversations or find important information in an easily searchable archive. Instead of a crowded inbox, conversations in Slack take place in special areas called channels. In these organized areas, all activities related to a project,

topic or team will be done. In opposite to e-mails, Slack lets you choose which conversations are most relevant and which ones can wait.

We are well aware that when it comes to choosing the most appropriate tool of project communication the list does not end here. In our digital age, the way we communicate is ever-changing. There are countless effective online communication and collaboration tools.

4 Conclusion

Effective communication between project partners across different locations and hours can be challenging, but it can be done efficiently. You just need to start exploring the different tools and technology available and decide on which is right for your project. Please keep in mind, you do not need to settle for one tool. Start by choosing an instrument that can become the base (one-stop-shop) for your communication needs. For example, many projects and organisations implement an intranet platform for their internal communication needs as it enables project partners to set up workspaces and work packages, find detailed project data including areas of expertise, deliver news and personalised information to different partners and network members, set up security permissions to ensure the right information is read by project partners with the right access levels and more. Then, you integrate other communication tools into your base platform such as Skype, Facebook, YouTube and so on. This enables projects and organisations to offer a centralised communication and information ecosystem for their members.

In a final analysis, a “one-stop-shop” that your team and stakeholders can access is key, because a transparent workflow ensures that each team member and stakeholder know where the project stands. It streamlines information to reduce unnecessary questions and email threads and facilitates task management by providing visibility to all stakeholders.

The base platform and communication tools should be validated, adjusted and constantly updated by network members. Within the framework of cooperation, further tools will be developed and used and will raise communication opportunities to the next level.