

NETGROW

Enhancing the innovativeness of food SMEs through the management of strategic network behaviour and network learning performance

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Methodology-evaluation tool

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Dissemination Level		
PU	Public	x
PP	Restricted to other programme participants (including the Commission Services)	
RE	Restricted to a group specified by the consortium (including the Commission Services)	
CO	Confidential, only for members of the consortium (including the Commission Services)	

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Executive Summary

This document constitutes Deliverable D1.3a which states the Report on ex ante evaluation of multidisciplinary research methods. It is the first of the three 1.3 deliverables. It will be extended by exploring and, if reliable indicators can be found, by collecting output and impact indicators reflecting the broader socio-economic impact.

At each project meeting all project partners will be asked to fill out a short questionnaire, thus providing the necessary insights for evaluating progress and enabling steering during the process. The intermediary results will be presented on each Project Management Team meeting (D1.3b). Furthermore, a final methodology evaluation report will be made which will serve as input for an evaluation meeting (D1.3c).

1. Introduction

Following the DOW a tool will be developed by FV and IFAU for ex-ante and ex-post evaluation of multidisciplinary research methods. It utilizes the tacit knowledge of participants that come from diverse backgrounds and links their insights at the project level. In order to evaluate the chances of NetGrow ex-ante and in order to have a baseline for further methodology evaluation, an internal survey covering all project partners has been conducted right at the beginning of the project, using the occasion of the Kick off meeting in Gent (7-9 July). As stated in the DOW, this first part of the tool makes use of the tacit knowledge from the participants to evaluate ex-ante the multidisciplinary research methods.

The data collected with the ex-ante questionnaire will help to decide which actions to take in case that in future problems would occur in the project collaboration. The data collected gives us a first insight into existing relations between project partners, possible external contacts they could provide as well as insights in their perception of the project progress, their ambitions and will help us therefore in case of problem analysis and the preparation of respective solutions to bring NetGrow back on the right track.

This report provides the results of the ex ante evaluation.

2. Methodology

For the ex-ante measurement a questionnaire was developed in collaboration with IFAU and UGENT (see appendix) and distributed immediately after the Kick off meeting via e-mail. The response rate was 100 %.

The questionnaire was distributed at the end of the Kick off meeting also in a hard copy version and explained to the consortium. It contains 11 open questions with absolutely no restriction in the answering possibilities. This was done in order to pay respect to the expertise of the project partners and to make full use of their knowledge. The ex-ante questionnaire asks for the reasons to enter the NetGrow project as well as for where partners expect to contribute, what to learn based on earlier experience and what they see as critical success factors in the project. Further there is a question with a given answering scheme asking for their level of expertise and another targeting at their contacts and network activities existing so far. At the end of the ex-ante questionnaire respondents are supposed to judge probabilities of the project success and to evaluate the kick off meeting itself. The answers were collected in hard copy but also by e-mail. After we received the answered questionnaires from all our project partners a qualitative analysis was conducted. The results are presented in the next sections, following the structure of the questionnaire.

3. Results

3.1. Reasons to enter the project

“The specific interest in network learning and SME networks”[SFIN] together with the “interest in developing tools for the business community” [LAS] were for most of our partners the main drivers to join the NetGrow consortium. Partners share a big enthusiasm and appreciation for each other straight after a challenging and tiring meeting (“good international consortium with potential future collaboration” [SFIN] “the project partners are the best at this topic in the EU” [DE]). Partners appreciate the involvement of research institutes and network organizations from different European countries and with Hungary also the participation of a new EU member state. UNIBO points further at the importance of complementarities that partners provide with their diverse backgrounds.

3.2. Contributions to the project

In the DOW (p. 65f) the complementarities within the consortium are already discussed and presented in an overview in table 5 (p. 65). Starting with this table as an input the ex-ante questionnaire assessed more in depth the level of expertise that partners have in certain knowledge fields/ methods to be applied in the project in different work packages.

For all of the stated knowledge fields NetGrow has at least one partner that scores a 6 or higher which creates a comfortable situation as we could here always rely on project internal consultancy. All partners state further to have worked with SMEs already to different extents. In Table 1 the level of expertise per partner is indicated. This will give the project partners in addition to the DOW an overview who posses which level of expertise and states therefore a collaboration tool and a good basis for later problem analysis in case of collaboration problems.

Table 1: Expertise per partner (to be updated during the project)

Methodology/ Knowledge field	UGent	TEAG	FV	DE	SFIN	IFAU	UNIBO	LAS	UBO
Web-based surveys	high expertise	expertise	expertise			expertise	expertise	expertise	expertise
Network analysis	expertise	expertise	lower expertise			no expertise	expertise	high expertise	expertise
Business tool development	lower expertise	expertise	expertise			lower expertise		expertise	high expertise
Company training	high expertise	high expertise	expertise			high expertise		expertise	high expertise
Innovation management and entrepreneurship	high expertise	expertise	high expertise		expertise	high expertise	expertise	expertise	expertise
Network theory	expertise	expertise	expertise		expertise	expertise		high expertise	expertise

3.3. Critical success factors

The ex-ante questionnaire gave the project partners the opportunity to indicate which are the most important factors determining the project success from their point of view. Ranking the factors the

intact working relationship between project partners takes the lead followed by the necessity to coordinate the planned surveys within WP3-6 in order to achieve an optimal contribution from the companies. Other stated factors are the clear definition and understanding of key concepts [UBO], not to lose focus [IFAU], the willingness to share knowledge [FV] and last but not least to find attention for our project work from the company side [TEAG]. Besides the critical success factors the Learning Points stated below deserve extra attention.

3.4. Learning Points

UGent suggests to “monitor the enthusiasm for the subject and to assure output for all partners” as well as “to put emphasis on good and immediate communication”, a view that is shared by UBO. UNIBO states the WP leader’s role to integrate the work packages and to allow synergies right from the beginning of the project.

3.5. Related projects during NetGrow execution

A range of related projects was indicated by the project partners. At the moment a document is prepared that collects all kind of interesting contacts/ projects that NetGrow should connect to.

Table 2: related projects (to be updated during the project)

Partner	What kind of regional and/or national projects are you planning to conduct related to the NetGrow project?
UGent	- Netwerken als katalysator voor innovatie in de Land- en Tuinbouwsector - TRANSPARENCY - SALSA
TEAG	
FV	
DE	
SFIN	
IFAU	
UNIBO	- CAP-IRE - SPARD
LAS	
UBO	- Sustainability for food SMEs, Transparent_Food

3.6. Prior Experience with NetGrow partners

Most of the project partners knew each other before the start of the project from conferences or other project collaborations. Debrecen University is rather new to most of the consortium members but had close contacts with UGENT before. Also SFIN had lately no common projects with one of the other partner organizations.

3.7. Satisfaction with Kick off meeting

The kick off meeting was judged overall very positively. Partners were satisfied with the content and scheduling.

3.8. Probability of NetGrow success

The project chances to become a success can be stated to be rather high, an appraisal that was shared by all project partners by judging the chances of NetGrow to fulfill all its objectives to be on average 84%, to help SMEs to improve their innovation capabilities to be 60%, to help EU policy makers to formulate appropriate policies to be 68 % (while the score was only 57.5 % when it comes to policies on the national and regional level).

4. Conclusions

The evaluation of the results helped to get a first impression of the chances to achieve the project objectives and where special attention will be required in order to make NetGrow a success. The results of the ex-ante questionnaire suggest no need of redirecting action yet but they will be used as valuable input for further internal evaluations during the project.

Overall the chances to achieve the project objectives are perceived to be rather high. Still the discrepancy between the believe of the consortium to be able to fulfill all its objectives (84%) and their lower perception of the chances to help SMEs (60%), EU policy makers (68%) and especially national/ regional policy makers (57.5%) has to be faced. It is clear that the last few issues deserve special attention during the project, in particular the approach towards SMEs and national and regional policy makers.

In the coming project months it will be worked on the strategies how to get SMEs best involved in the NetGrow project. Only if SMEs see an extra value in their NetGrow participation there will be a willingness from their side to take part in the surveys and later to give feedback on the business tools that are developed for them.

Concerning the chances to help policy makers the D8.1 Promotion and Dissemination Plan contains strategies to identify the respective policy makers on EU, national and regional level. It takes into account the difficulties of a complex structure of national and regional entities and will be used to get policy makers involved to guaranty the optimal use of NetGrow findings.

Appendix

Ex-ante questionnaire

NetGrow Kick off meeting

Name participants:

Organization:

Reasons to enter the NetGrow project

- What were the main reasons for your organisation to participate in the NetGrow project?

- What were the main reasons you think that Ghent invited your organisation to enter the NetGrow project?

- What are the most interesting aspects for your organisation of the NetGrow project and what are the most challenging ones?

- What are your expectations how your organization will benefit from the NetGrow project?

Contributions to the NetGrow project

- What are the major capabilities that your organization will bring to the NetGrow project?
 - E.g. do you have special experience with conducting research and/or extension with SMEs?

 - If so, how many years, how many SMEs, what kind of SMEs, what kind of research and/or extension?

 - In the NetGrow project addresses different knowledge fields and a number of different methodologies will be used. Special courses for the NetGrow PhDs are foreseen. In which of the knowledge fields and methodologies mentioned below do you have (extensive) expertise? Please use a 7-point scale in which 1 = no expertise and 7 = world expert

a. <i>Web-based surveys</i>	
b. <i>Network analysis</i>	
c. <i>Business tool development</i>	
d. <i>Company training</i>	
e. <i>Innovation management and entrepreneurship theory</i>	
f. <i>Network theory</i>	
f. <i>Other, namely</i>	

Critical success/failure factors for the NetGrow project

- What are the critical success and failure factors for the NetGrow project?

- What are the critical success and failure factors for the contribution of your organization to the NetGrow project?

Related projects during NetGrow execution

- What kind of regional and/or national projects are you planning to conduct related to the NetGrow project?

Prior experience with NetGrow partners

Number of joint projects, duration and frequency of face-to-face and or video conference meetings with the NetGrow partners in the last 3 years prior to the start of the NetGrow project.

	Number of projects	Kind of projects: e.g. EU	Budget	Duration from to ...	Frequency of face-to-face / video conference meetings
UGENT					
TEAG					
FV					
DE					
SFIN					
IFAU					
UNIBO					
LAS					
UBO					

- Experiences with the individual partners in these projects.

UGENT	
TEAG	
FV	
DE	
SFIN	
IFAU	
UNIBO	
LAS	
UBO	

Learning

- Are there important learning points based on your experience in these earlier projects and/or other projects that can be used for organizing the NetGrow project?

Probability of NetGrow success

- What is the probability that the NetGrow project will fulfill all its objectives?%
- What is the probability that the NetGrow project will fulfill all your organization's objectives?%
- What is the probability that the NetGrow results will improve the open innovation capabilities of SMEs? %
- What is the probability that the NetGrow results will help EU policy makers to formulate policies to improve the open innovation capabilities of SMEs?%
- What is the probability that the NetGrow results will help regional and national policy makers in your country to formulate policies to improve the open innovation capabilities of SMEs?%
- Suggestions to improve the probability of NetGrow success

Satisfaction with Kick off meeting

- I am satisfied with the content of the Kick off meeting: Not at all = 1; Totally satisfied = 7
- I am satisfied with the scheduling of the Kick off meeting: Not at all = 1; Totally satisfied = 7
- Suggestions for improvement of coming meetings

Other suggestions etc.