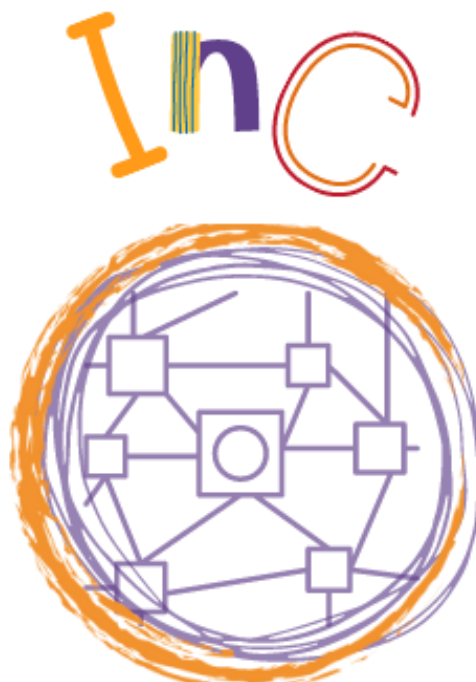




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INNOVATION CULTURE FOR SMEs

Workshop Methodology for Sensitization of SMEs
Regarding Relevance of Engagement in
Innovation and Innovation Culture

Elaborated by ADES, Romania





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1. Context

This Methodology has been elaborated by ADES, from Romania, within InC (Innovation culture for organizational ambidexterity in SMEs) Project. It is co-funded through the Erasmus+ Programme, project number: 2021-1-RO01-KA220-VET-000034674 (<https://inc.erasmus.site/>).

This Methodology will contribute to the sensitization of SMEs regarding relevance of engagement in innovation and innovation culture incorporating the best practices and expert recommendations. It aims at being used by the organisations implementing activities for SMEs.

This Methodology will allow the experts to further present theoretical and practical aspects via the SME support organizations in each country. In this way, they will have a flexible tool that could be easily adapted in the specific local cultures and business environments, depending on the workshops themes of interest, stakeholders, complexity, final aims, etc.

Its final result will consist of the managers' increased awareness and capacity to use workshops as a toolkit for the substantial innovation and development of their businesses, also considering their stakeholders' specificity in an optimum manner.

The Methodology also includes a script for use of organisations implementing activities for SMEs, and represents one of the results of Project Result 1 of InC project, namely “workshops methodology for SME managers”.

This Methodology can also be used by SME managers who want to develop a culture of innovation and involvement of the employees in finding solutions to the problems of the companies.

The examples given in this Methodology are general, but they can be always adapted to the actual situation of the company.



2. Workshops – Means for Promoting and Fostering Innovation

“Learning and innovation go hand in hand. The arrogance of success is to think that what you did yesterday will be sufficient for tomorrow.”

William Pollard (Physicist, 1911-1989)

2.1. General considerations and definitions

The concept of **workshop**¹ can be defined in various ways. From the perspective of the InC project, the following definitions are the most relevant:

- a usually brief intensive **educational** program for a relatively small group of people that focuses especially on ***techniques and skills*** in a particular field²;
- a **period of discussion or practical work** on a particular subject in which a group of people share their ***knowledge or experience***³;
- a **step by step systematized session** that allows a group of people to **make decisions** and **solve problems**, being ***facilitated*** by one person who brings people through individual exercises which are usually chosen by the facilitator; these sessions always have at their end a clear decision taken or a clear problem solved, as well as future steps established; they do not necessarily span for more similar meetings⁴.

¹ For example, the Merriam-Webster dictionary gives the following definitions (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/workshop>):

1. a small establishment where manufacturing or handicrafts are carried on
2. work-room
3. a usually brief intensive educational program for a relatively small group of people that focuses especially on techniques and skills in a particular field

² *Idem.*

³ According to one of the senses in the Collins dictionary (<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/workshop>)

⁴ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q-Y51sXax-M&t=35s&ab_channel=AJ%26Smart



Companies may want to take into consideration organizing a workshop when they need more than a catch-up on how things are going on, and they are actually looking for taking a decision, solving a problem, getting done things that are important for the business.

Workshops can have various durations, depending on the complexity of their goal, from e.g. 15 minutes to several days. They can be planned well in advance or introduced even during a working meeting, when people decide to continue by naming a facilitator to lead them through exercises logically connected among them, leading at the end to a clear, tangible defined outcome.

2. 2. Why organize workshops?

Workshops help changes for good: learning new things, brainstorming, improving relationships, solving problems.

Workshops are effective: they lead to concrete results with a minimum effort on behalf of the team, in a timeframe shorter than in the case of regular meetings, therefore saving time and energy that can be directed towards further goals.

Workshops are flexible: they can be adapted as number of participants, duration, topics, etc., in any field of activity.

Workshops can get the best out of people: being guided by a facilitator reduces to the minimum the eventual frictions, misunderstandings, ineffective communication slots, etc.

Workshops increase harmony: during the guided sessions, common understanding of the matters of interest can be developed among participants.

Workshops provide structure: the facilitator will guide the team towards the anticipated results.

Workshops are revealing: the facilitator makes sure that all participants would speak out, and will put together their results by considering all the points of view expressed during the workshop.

Another way to see the added value of a workshop is comparing it with our usual working meetings. Organized without specific structure and without a defined facilitator, the meetings are most often going on like this:



- Participants bring into discussion their own points of interest (questions, stories, problems, opinions, etc.), not necessarily sticking to a time to speak or to what's relevant and useful for the meeting object.
- Only the opinions of the most daring, extrovert, self-confident, or holding higher positions will be heard; the others will most often prefer to stay silent and listen.
- Even if talking, the discouraged ones will often give up their points, as they feel not considered by the others. No mechanism will be there to make sure that they also express their point of view.
- The discussion gets easily loose as no one follows a specific, common structure.
- Eventual solutions are decided without checking the full, comprehensive understanding of the whole picture.
- The solutions can be loose, unclear, and ineffective – for example, to organize further meetings to discuss over the matters.
- Some participants leave the meeting with bad feelings about the others, and with a decreased confidence that meetings can actually provide solutions.

2.3. What makes workshops successful

First of all, they focus on **extracting the individuals' core ideas**, and not on discussing them loose or extensively, into too many details or getting on debates on the details while the general aim is not clearly defined yet. The focus is on expressing key information and not mix it up with details on how should be done.

This preserves the participants' attention, and tonus, as well as improves their clarity of mind and the capacity to stick to the essential, keeping details on a secondary level.

The facilitator will guide the team towards deciding over the key structure of the desired solution, without losing precious time and energy by mixing this up with organizational details.

E.g., if a business producing sports clothes for children wants to explore whether and how to extend its market to other occasions clothes, they can do it



by a workshop where representatives of key departments will focus on answering questions such as which other types of clothes could they launch and for which age categories. The facilitator will keep the process focused on these core topics, and will not allow the discussions to slip into collateral stories or controversies such as what are other similar companies doing, why shouldn't it be done, or how exactly will they put it into practice – like it could happen during not-structured, not-guided meetings. The participants would therefore focus on several key aspects, conserving their energy and keeping their interest awake.⁵

Secondly, **anonymously transmitted contributions** are most effective, as effects such as assimilating them with not relevant characteristics of who sent them are left aside. This way, the existing or potential frictions or bad chemistry between the participants are kept to a minimum. The contributions are therefore analysed and appreciated rather based on their content than on who issued them.

E.g., a business provides reparation services for home appliances and organizes a workshop to find a solution to assess effectively their clients' satisfaction. The group of participants will include staff working directly with the clients, legal department, management, technical department. Each of these has a well-defined perspective over the topic, but they risk being strongly assimilated by their colleagues, with their background. If expressing their suggestions by hand written anonymous notes, to be further presented and analysed in the group, all of them will have increased chances that their opinions will be analysed in an objective manner, none will feel discouraged to express (like it would have happened in a not-guided regular meeting), no matter which is their position in the company, and all ideas will receive objective feedback, as participants would not be inhibited by, for example, the management position of the issuer of an idea.

Thirdly, a guided process of the workshop **empowers the participants to focus on expressing their ideas**, and not on showing who they are to the others. In regular, not facilitated meetings, the discussions are undermined by

⁵ All the examples given in this Methodology are general, but they can be always adapted to the actual situation of the company or desired innovation topic.



counterproductive group dynamics: some of the participants feel the pressure of looking smarter, more original or creative, more knowledgeable, more powerful than they actually are. Precious ideas may get lost because of not being confident enough to express them, not valuable or useful opinions may be artificially embraced just because their author has a strong position in the group or has insisted until the others give up just to move on.

The workshop guidance and facilitation minimize these risks. The facilitator stimulates the simple expression of the ideas and ensures the equal focus on the content, not on the source person for each idea. An external facilitator can be successfully used for bringing up innovative ideas of the employees of a company.

Being invested from the beginning with the responsibility to guide the process, the facilitator is able to keep this focus with a minimal possibility for any of the participants to take it personally.

For example, a company producing and delivering construction materials is interested in extending its range of products by starting to also importing such materials. A workshop is organized to identify whether to do it or not, and which should be the key development directions. The participants are employees working directly with the clients and the providers, management, accounting, and legal departments, business partners. The intervention of the facilitator will channel the participants on focusing on their ideas without being pressured by the formal positions or daily dynamics with the others. Also they will not feel the pressure to look somebody else than they are, therefore being more productive.

2. 4. The facilitator – the key factor to a successful workshop

The facilitator of the workshop is responsible to establish the structure and the methods of the workshop so that it would reach the desired goals.

Their role is therefore of key importance to the success of the workshop. We may find the suitable person within our organization, or may opt for an external person. Each of these versions is fine, as long as the person fulfils several basic conditions, as further mentioned below.



- ✓ They must be aware, understand and value the logics and the importance of the workshop as an instrument, as well as their role to guide and facilitate the others' contributions.
- ✓ They must have the self-confidence and practical experience necessary to lead the group of participants through the workshop. This involves capacity to understand the others, to identify, prevent and overpass conflictual situations within the group, to act and react promptly to the evolutions of mood and energy of the participants in a constructive manner, to keep the team interested, awake, tonic, and focused on the agreed structure and topics in a firm yet friendly and relaxed manner.
- ✓ They must know where from and how to choose the exercises and practical parts to be used during the workshop, according to the specific situation. Not using practical parts is as counterproductive as using exercises not respecting the participants' limits or the specific of the topic – both will miss the opportunity to get participants involved in the process. By contrary, choosing suitable methods can get from the participants contributions otherwise not accessible.
- ✓ They should be open to use lessons learnt and to apply already existing experience. The DO's and DON'T DO's that they learnt by themselves or can gather from the others increase the effectiveness of their work.

2. 5. The key steps in organizing a workshop

Depending on the complexity of the approached topic, workshops can take from several hours to several days, and the preparation, implementation, and follow up will be adjusted accordingly.

No matter how simple the themes would be, any fruitful workshop must include certain basic stages, presented below into further details.

A. Gathering information

In an ideal case, this step could start immediately after we decide we need or we want a workshop, but before the workshop itself; in most of the cases, the only collection of information happens only in the beginning of the workshop itself; both options are ok, as long as they are finally undertaken properly.



Workshops must start by putting together information from the participants, relevant for the discussed topic. This can refer to existing data, ideas, suggestions, needs or problems in the company, etc.

The facilitator applies the most suitable methods to extract relevant information from the participants, summarise it and present it so that all participants could see it.

When coming to more complex themes, information gathered in the beginning of the workshop can be added to relevant information collected before the workshop, summarised and introduced by the facilitator.

B. Agreeing on the goals

Based on the information gathered at the first step, the team guided by the facilitator agrees on the overall goals of the workshop. They also decide what will and what will not make the object of their workshop, and which will be the detailed steps to reach it: agenda, sub-topics, and methods.

Once being aware of these aspects, time, energy, and focus will be saved while going together on the defined path and only on this one. The eventual tendencies to focus on other matters will be also easily dismantled by simple, punctual reference to the common base agreed in the beginning.

The workshop goals usually appear in a vague form right when we decide to organize the workshop; but the initial form becomes concrete and clear always only after being agreed together with the participants, in the first part of the workshop.

C. Finding solutions

If goals can only be vague before the workshop, even more so are the solutions; they actually represent the big surprise coming out only based on the intense, focused and structured effort guided by the facilitator during the workshop itself.

After putting together the information and commonly agreeing on what we want to get out of it at the end of the workshop, the team can go further and, under the guidance of the facilitator, extract relevant solutions or decisions, as relevant for their common interests agreed in the beginning.



The respective solutions or decisions can be only drafted, based on mentioning their essential elements. The final wording and other similar details can be left for after the workshop itself, to be processed as the group decides.

For complex themes, workshops can also stop at drafting possible alternative solutions, to be decided on after the workshop, as agreed by the group.

D. Engaging with the outcomes and results of the workshop

Similarly to finding solutions, the follow up to put them in practice can only be decided during the workshop, with the contribution of the participants, even if some secondary importance details are sometimes left to be defined only after.

At the end of the workshop, the facilitator ensures that participants are aware and commit to the results obtained by the workshop, and to the further steps commonly agreed to be undertaken after the workshop.

Both, results (solutions, decisions) drafted during the workshop as well as further steps must be clear to all participants, understood in the same way by all of them, and assumed by them according to each role.

Where applicable, follow up steps are also to be decided together at the end of the workshop.

2. 6. Tools in organizing a workshop

Effective workshops are characterised among others by their predominantly practical parts. Each of the 4 main stages of the workshop implementation consists of one or more exercises aiming at extracting information, understanding the gathered information, identifying solutions, and agreeing on follow-up steps, respectively.

A detailed toolbox with concrete recommendations and methods to be used is presented in the **TOOLBOX** material included in the current package.

A practical example showing how a 1-day workshop could be organised is enclosed in the **PRACTICAL EXAMPLE** material included in the current package.

3. Workshop Toolbox

3.1. Getting the idea to organize a workshop

1. Members of the company (staff, management, etc.) **notice** that the company has

- a. a **need**, a **problem**, a challenge that diminishes or put at risk the company performance (staff turn-over, image, profitability, etc.);
- b. an **unexploited opportunity** to increase its performance (though the company does not face any significant problems); the opportunity may be completely just insufficiently unexplored.



Issues could cover matters such as:

- development of new or existent products or services;
- adjustment of company business strategy or elaboration of a new one;
- establish ways to promote the business;
- draft key features of a new initiative or project within the company;
- improve the team functioning;
- exploit a business development opportunity, such as decide to access non-reimbursable funds;
- develop the level of professionalization of staff;
- assess clients' satisfaction as regards the company's products or services;
- choose new premises or rearrange the current company space, etc.

Key questions:

- ✓ *What is bothering the productivity of our company?*
- ✓ *Is there anything more that could be done for our company to do better?*
- ✓ *What is not going well in our company?*



- ✓ *How good is our company doing in terms of staff satisfaction/ clients' satisfaction etc.?*

2. The concerned members **reflect** on the situation and realize that they are in one of the following **situations**:
- a. do not have a clear picture of the existing situation;
 - b. have a picture of the negative elements, but do not know nor the causes or the solutions;
 - c. have a picture of the negative elements, know the causes, but do not know which would be the (most suitable) solutions.

Key questions:

- ✓ *Do we know clearly what is bothering us or what could be done for our company to do better?*
- ✓ *Do we know which are the needs and the problems and their causes?*
- ✓ *Do we know what to do to address the needs, problems, or unexplored opportunities?*

3. The concerned members want to get a **thorough understanding** of both, problems/ needs/ not exploitation of opportunities, and their causes. In order to do this, they need to work with their primary resource: the people in the company.
4. They consider organizing some meetings and discussions, but then they realize that a workshop would save time, energy, resources, and would get them to their points of interest in a really structured and focused manner. Therefore, they decide to organize a workshop.
5. They designate one of them – **an organizer** – to take care of the workshop preparation, implementation and follow up.



3.2. Identify a facilitator

6. The organizer contributes to deciding whether the company could provide for a facilitator from **inside or an external facilitator** must be identified; the facilitator, either internal or external, should be able to:
- be equidistant towards all participants;
 - be objective;
 - not be overwhelmed and inhibited by superiors, management or other coordinating positions attending the workshop;
 - be available;
 - be neutral;
 - be a good communicator;
 - be a good mediator.

Key questions:

- ✓ *Do we have an internal person who could ensure the necessary qualities of a facilitator or do we need an external one?*
- ✓ *In case we need an external facilitator, do we already know a reliable person or should we publish an announcement to find one?*

7. The organizer estimates the **duration** of the facilitator's contribution, calculated in hours or days:
- workshop preparation;
 - workshop delivery;
 - reporting or follow-up contribution.

The final precise duration will be defined together with the facilitator.

8. The organizer **selects the facilitator** and they agree on the expected contribution, price, and any other relevant details.



3.3. Basic information on the company and addressed matter

9. The facilitator together with the organizer starts by gathering some **basic key** information relevant for the concerned need, problem, or opportunity in the context of the company.
10. The facilitator together with the organizer looks into the **internal and external factors**, supporting or discouraging the company in the field of concern: s/he identifies the elements either existing already or which will exist for sure in the near future, possibly grouped into the following 4 categories of a SWOT Analysis (useful especially in the case of more complex workshops):

Elements that can be influenced to a significant extent by the company itself:

Strengths:

Which are the internal positive aspects helping the company to achieve its goals?

Weaknesses:

Which are the internal negative aspects preventing the company from achieving its goals?

Examples:

- Does the company have a clear long-term business development strategy?
- Does the company have a sufficient number of specialists relevant for its fields of activity?
- Do the company human resources include specialists from all fields of expertise relevant for its activity?
- Does the company respect the quality standards applicable to its field of activity, as also justified with corresponding certificates?

Elements that the company cannot influence to a significant extent:

Opportunities:

Which are the external positive aspects helping the company to achieve its goals?

Threats:

Which are the external negative aspects preventing the company from achieving its goals?



Examples:

- Did the authorities/ banks etc. announced/ launched financing opportunities for SMEs in our field/s of activity?
- Does the legislation support SMEs development by decreases of taxes?
- Is there an existing/ ascending need for products/ services/ works on the market like the ones provided by my company?
- Do the competitors of our company on the market still leave room for our products/ services/ works at the standards guaranteed by our company?
- Is the inflation decreasing?
- Is workforce specialised in our fields of activity available on the labour market to a level of qualification corresponding to our standards?

11. Where applicable, the organizer with the eventual support of the facilitator checks the correctness of elements in the table with available, objective, credible **sources of information**.

Key questions:

- ✓ *Where from do we know that the internal and external factors are as we identified them?*

Examples:

- Internal documents (reports, registers, etc.)
- Accounting
- Experts' opinions (lawyers, accountants, HR, sales, etc.)
- Official statistics
- Public authorities issued documents, publications, declarations, etc.

- ✓ *Did we check the credibility, date, objectivity of the sources of information?*

12. The **information** gathered from the company documents, opinions, the organizers' own knowledge, etc. is **structured** so that it would be concrete, coherent, indicating the specific characteristics and dimensions/ quantities of each of the 4 types of factors.



3.4. Identify concrete needs, problems, or opportunities to be addressed by the workshop

13. The organiser with the support of the facilitator identifies as concretely as possible the existing **negative aspects** (needs or problems), or the existing yet unexploited **opportunities** to be addressed by the workshop, by concretely describing their substance, their estimated dimensions, any data or information that can better illustrate or complete the image. In order to do this, they can, depending on the matter:

- collect opinions of colleagues, management, clients, etc.;
- check company related documents;
- ask for the opinion of specialists from departments such as legal, PR, HR, accounting, development, etc.

3.5. Identify stakeholders relevant for the workshop

14. The organizer supported by the facilitator identifies who are the **individuals** and, if the case, the **legal entities** connected to the identified need, problem, or opportunity. This includes all those **who benefit or are disadvantaged**, who can impede, contribute, or influence in other ways the evolution of the concerned matter.

Key questions to be answered with regards to each individual/ legal entity:

- ✓ *Are they affected or affecting the matter envisaged by the workshop? If yes, in a positive or in a negative manner?*
- ✓ *How do they do this concretely?*
- ✓ *How can we involve them so that their influence would help us achieving our workshop goals?*
- ✓ *Would their presence to the workshop be useful to us?*
- ✓ *Would they be interested to attend the workshop?*
- ✓ *Would their participation need any costs (e.g., accommodation, travel, per diem, replacement so that their absence from work would not impede their professional tasks)?*



15. Out of the identified stakeholders, the organizer and the facilitator reflect about whom should and could be **involved in the workshop**, depending on their role, their availability, their capacity to influence the concerned matter.
16. They correlate the possible participants with the **eventual costs** they would involve, such as transportation, accommodation, meals, hours/ days of unavailability to perform their current duties, etc.
17. The organizer, with the support of the facilitator, do their best to **identify participants** who are most relevant for the addressed matters, who generate minimal costs, and who cover the key categories and responsibilities connected to the addressed matter.

3.6. Identify workshop objectives and intended results

18. The organizer and facilitator define concretely **what they want to achieve through the workshop**: analyse certain problems/ needs, inspire staff, explore opportunities, etc.
19. The organizer and the facilitator define what they want to have **after the end of the workshop**: clarified problems, inspired and motivated staff, clarified needs, explored opportunities, etc.
20. The organizer and the facilitator check the **correlation** between the planned results and the original need/ problem/ concerned opportunity which generated the workshop.

3.7. Plan the workshop

21. Being aware of the previous steps, the facilitator and, if desired, the organizer describes the detailed activities for the workshop implementation, as necessary in order to achieve the estimated goals.



22. The facilitator defines the **methods** to realise it, in such a manner that they would be effective towards the goals, friendly and respectful for all participants.
23. The facilitator plans the **resources** necessary for each of the activities, as well as on which responsibilities involves each of the actions.
24. The facilitator and the organizer agree on the **duration, location, and agenda** of the workshop.
25. Once confirmed, they **send the key details** (location, duration, date) to every interested part, followed by a reminder when the workshop is getting closer.
26. They also communicate coordinates where participants may ask for **supplementary information or clarifications** about the workshop.

3.8. Identify resources necessary for the workshop

27. Based on the duration and number of participants, the facilitator identifies the necessary resources and supplies, which will include:

Room for the workshop delivery:

- wide enough to host the participants in the desired format (e.g., U shape tables and chairs, working within groups, etc.) without staying too close into each other;
- no obstacles such as pillars or cables to obstruct or annoy the view of the screen, facilitator, or participants;
- accessible to eventual people with particular physical challenges (such as need to use wheelchairs, overweight, etc.);
- access to equipped and functional restrooms;
- access to smoking place, in case any smokers are in the group;
- possibility to refresh the air (via AC or natural ventilation);



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ no noises from the street, corridors, other working or recreation spaces, etc. ▪ clean, and with access to trash bins; ▪ no discomforting smells (e.g., from kitchens, from production spaces, from badly entertained carpets or curtains, etc.); ▪ well lightened (preferably natural light; at least artificial light, warm and strong enough to stimulate a good mood and tonus).
Furniture:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ functional (no broken chairs or moving tables); ▪ comfortable (allowing to take notes and to sit in a comfortable position); ▪ in a good condition (no broken parts or prominent nails under the table or chair, to damage the clothes or even to hurt the participants).
Connection related resources:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ sockets, cables, portals compatible with the equipment to be used; ▪ cables placed so they do not impede the circulation of participants; ▪ internet connection with accessible passwords; ▪ compatible chargers.
Supplies:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ sticky notes in various shapes and colours, in sufficient quantities for all participants; ▪ markers, thick and functional, coloured enough to be visible from distance, in various colours, and in quantities sufficient to all participants, not only to the facilitator; ▪ flipchart paper in a sufficient quantity for both, facilitator's notes and participants work and exercises; ▪ pens; ▪ A4 paper for participants; ▪ notebooks (1/ participant); ▪ paper adhesive band to stick flipcharts over the walls without damaging them; ▪ clock visible to facilitator.

28. In addition to these, depending on the complexity of the workshop, the following may be also taken into consideration:



Refreshments:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ water, coffee (including decaf), tea, sugar, milk, water, juices – including cups, spoons; ▪ snacks – easy to pick and to eat; salted and sweet.
Meals:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ with/ without meat, vegetarian; ▪ adjusted to the eventual allergies, intolerances, health problems, or religious fasting of participants; ▪ food easy to have in the available space and facilities; ▪ cutlery and vessel; ▪ space and facilities not to mix with the working space as smells, leftovers, etc.
Transport:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ common transportation means for workshops being held in remote spaces (e.g., buses); ▪ information, support in ticketing, reimbursement for car, train, bus, plane, etc.
Accommodation:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ information, support in ticketing, reimbursement for accommodation for workshops being held remotely; ▪ adjusted to participants limits and preferences (e.g., placed in single/ double rooms).

- 29.** Take into consideration specific resources as necessary by the specific of the workshop, such as samples, visuals, equipment, IT applications, etc.

3.9. Identify risks and mitigation measures

- 30.** The facilitator together with the organizer identifies **risks**, i.e. possible factors outside their control, which could affect the workshop implementation in good conditions once they would become real.
- 31.** They also identify any **measures** that could either:
- diminish the probability of the risk to materialise;
 - if materialised, reduce at minimum the negative impact of the risk on the workshop implementation and goals.



Key questions:

- ✓ *Which are the bad things that could happen to affect negatively our workshop, and that we cannot control?*
- ✓ *Is there anything we could do to diminish the probability for the risk to materialize?*
- ✓ *In case one risk gets real, what can we do to reduce its negative effects over the workshop?*

3.10. Implement the workshop – Opening

- 32.** The facilitator and the organizer **verify** before the workshop that all the details are put in place: resources, confirmed participants, necessary arrangements.
- 33.** The facilitator opens the workshop, introduces him/herself, as well as the participants. The facilitator may use an **icebreaker** suitable for all participants, where they could find about each other some things they didn't know before (such as hobbies, personal life aspects, what they like and what they don't, etc.).

Key questions:	
✓ <i>How well do our participants already know each other?</i>	<i>They may have worked together, but they didn't have the chance to chat about private, nice things.</i>
✓ <i>Which are the limits of our participants?</i>	<i>They may have passed through difficult moments in their lives that shouldn't be reminded – avoid questions which may touch people as regards children, family situation, material status, etc.</i> <i>Sometimes participants are reluctant to methods that they consider too energetic, too childish, too ridiculous, etc. – don't push their</i>



	<i>limits and stay on the safe side, if you are not sure of their level of openness and flexibility.</i>
✓ <i>Where do we find icebreakers?</i>	<p><i>Some examples for both, online or face to face activities, could be found here, for example:</i></p> <p>https://www.scienceofpeople.com/meeting-icebreakers/</p> <p>https://www.tinypulse.com/blog/sk-work-icebreaker-games</p> <p>https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/ice-breaker-games</p> <p>https://www.workshopper.com/post/icebreakers-for-meetings-and-workshops</p> <p><i>There is a wide variety of many other examples available on the internet for free.</i></p>

- 34.** Once the participants are more familiarised and relaxed with each other, the facilitator moves to the first substantial step of the workshop, i.e. **gathering information**.

3.11. Implement the workshop – Gathering information

- 35.** This phase aims at **getting** from participants as much as possible information relevant for the workshop topic, and to **present it back** to them so that everybody can easily understand the whole picture, before agreeing together what the focus is going to be.
- 36.** The facilitator will use **interactive methods (exercises)** that can be selected, like in the case of the icebreaker, from a wide variety of choices for both, online or face to face workshops, always keeping in mind the elements presented below.

Key questions:

- ✓ *Is the selected exercise able to gather information, but also stimulate and use inspiration and spontaneity of participants?*



- ✓ *Is the selected exercise able to extract information addressing in depth the matters of concern envisaged by the workshop, i.e. the needs, the problems, and/or the unexploited opportunities we were talking about in the beginning?*
- ✓ *Is the selected exercise able to extract a large volume of rough information from the participants, and is it preventing participants to get blocked into wording and details?*
- ✓ *Is the selected exercise able to end up by a clear, coherent visual, easy to understand representation of the gathered information?*
- ✓ *Does the selected exercise led in such a manner that it prevents focusing on prioritization in this stage?*

- ✓ *Where do we find exercises?*

Some examples for both, online or face to face activities, could be found, for example, here:

<https://www.sessionlab.com/library>

<https://www.workshopper.com/post/workshop-activities-for-getting-started>

<https://www.mischiefmakers.co/facilipedia/categories/workshop-exercices>

There is a wide variety of many other examples available on the internet for free.

3.12. Implement the workshop – Agreeing on the goals

- 37.** After getting the rough information categorized and acknowledged by the participants, the next essential step is to **agree on the concrete goals the workshop should focus on** – one of the most difficult things when more people are gathering together is to decide what to do and what not to do together. So, in this stage the facilitator has to focus on supporting the group selecting, out of the gathered information, which are the issues that they want to focus on and which are the issues that they will let aside, at least for the moment.
- 38.** The facilitator must be ready to **guide the group** so that the most vocal ones would not argue or try to impose their opinions on what should and what shouldn't be done.



- 39.** The facilitator will use **interactive methods (exercises)** that can be selected, like in the case of the icebreaker, from a wide variety of choices for both, online or face to face workshops, always keeping in mind the elements presented below.

Key questions:

- ✓ *Is this stage of the workshop focused on prioritization and selecting what to focus on and what NOT to focus on?*
- ✓ *Is this stage organized in such a way that it would be focused on becoming more specific and clarifying the information gathered previously in the workshop? (a proof for this is also that no new ideas, i.e. not generated in the first phase, are introduced in this stage).*
- ✓ *Did we stick to strictly re-wording the identified issues into opportunity questions?*

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ <i>Where do we find exercises?</i> 	<p><i>Some examples for both, online or face to face activities, could be found, for example, here:</i></p> <p>https://www.sessionlab.com/library</p> <p>https://www.workshopper.com/post/workshop-activities-for-getting-started</p> <p>https://www.mischiefmakers.co/facilipedia/categories/workshop-exercises</p> <p><i>There is a wide variety of many other examples available on the internet for free.</i></p>
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3.13. Implement the workshop – Identifying solutions

- 40.** The facilitator moves now to the next stage: after finding action directions corresponding to the most important issues (needs/ problems/ unexploited opportunities), the facilitator guide the group towards **finding a variety of solutions** to the prioritized items.



- 41.** Once again, the facilitator uses exercises, as these are the most effective method to mobilize the participants and to create room for them to generate their best and most creative ideas.

Key questions:

- ✓ *Does this phase generate a variety of solutions to each of the prioritized needs/ problems/ unexploited opportunities?*
- ✓ *Does this phase include an exercise starting from ideas generated by the group and followed by a prioritization?*
- ✓ *Is this step closed with a shortlist of prioritized solutions for the identified issues, ready to be addressed in the last phase of the process – the engagement to the results of the workshop?*

- ✓ *Where do we find exercises?*

Some examples for both, online or face to face activities, could be found, for example, here:

<https://www.sessionlab.com/library>

<https://www.workshopper.com/post/workshop-activities-for-getting-started>

<https://www.mischiefmakers.co/facilipedia/categories/workshop-exercises>

There is a wide variety of many other examples available on the internet for free.

3.14. Implement the workshop – Engaging to the results

- 42.** The facilitator moves now to the next stage: after finding solutions, the participants must commit to them, in order for the whole workshop to be worthwhile. The facilitator guides the group towards drafting a **plan of action** developing identified solutions, organised in such a manner that it would be easy to follow and to put it in practice.
- 43.** The facilitator gathers all her/ his forces to **keep the participants focused on the topics and the announced way to work** during this



phase, as here is a phase where usually participants feel the need to discuss and to debate.

Key questions:

- ✓ *Does this phase generate clear concrete tangible next steps and expectations?*
- ✓ *Does this step comes up with clear responsible persons for the defined tasks?*

- ✓ *Where do we find exercises?*

Some examples for both, online or face to face activities, could be found, for example, here:

<https://www.sessionlab.com/library>

<https://www.mischiefmakers.co/facilipedia/categories/workshop-exercises>

There is a wide variety of many other examples available on the internet for free.

3.15. Implement the workshop – Breaks

- 44.** The facilitator **must** ensure that **coffee breaks** must be scheduled so that they would not interfere in the middle of a subject or discussion, losing the participants' focus and breaking their awake interest. They should be long enough to allow participants to have a drink, get refreshed, go to the toilet, etc., but not too long, not to have them disconnected from the topic.
- 45.** The **lunch breaks** should be long enough to allow participants eat in a reasonable time and also have 10-15 minutes after. Meanwhile, the break shouldn't be too long either, in order not to lose the connection of participants to the topic.
- 46.** The **punctuality** of the facilitator but also of the coffee and meal provider is therefore essential for the success of the breaks: having them brought too early may end up in having cold products; having them delivered with the delay will shorten the time in which participants should drink and eat, creating discomfort, irritation, and frustrating rush.



3.16. Implement the workshop – Energizers

- 47.** Sometimes during the workshop, especially after the lunch break, the facilitator may opt to use an **energizer** to “wake up” the group to its initial energy and interest, before getting back to work.
- 48.** The facilitator should use **energizers** suitable for all participants, where they could find about each other some things they didn’t know before (such as hobbies, personal life aspects, what they like and what they don’t, etc.).

Key questions:	
✓ How well do our participants already know each other?	<i>They may have worked together, but they didn't have the chance to chat about private, nice things.</i>
✓ Which are the limits of our participants?	<p><i>They may have passed through difficult moments in their lives that shouldn't be reminded – avoid questions which may touch people as regards children, family situation, material status, etc.</i></p> <p><i>Sometimes participants are reluctant to methods that they consider too energetic, too childish, too ridiculous, etc. – don't push their limits and stay on the safe side, if you are not sure of their level of openness and flexibility.</i></p>
✓ Where do we find energizers?	<p><i>Some examples for both, online or face to face activities, could be found here, for example:</i></p> <p>https://www.sessionlab.com/library/energiser https://commonslibrary.org/games-and-energisers/</p> <p><i>There is a wide variety of many other examples available on the internet for free.</i></p>



3.17. Implement the workshop – Closure and follow up

49. The facilitator makes sure that all conclusions and decisions are in of the workshop take a form that can be **further transferred to the organisers** for easy follow up and implementation after the workshop.
50. **Congratulations!** We're done and looking forward to putting into practice what we've achieved!



4. Practical Session Summary and Script

The Power Point Presentation (PPT) which is an annex of this Methodology could be used by the organisations implementing activities for SMEs in order to sensitize the SMEs managers regarding the relevance of engagement in innovation and innovation culture and to present the “Collection of Best Practices Regarding Convincing No/Low Tech SMEs Managers to Implement Innovation Activities and Establish Innovation Culture in SMEs”. The print of the PPT (2 slides per page) should be given as a handout to the participants, during the workshop. A handout with excerpts from the Collection of Best Practices could also be prepared and distributed by the facilitator.

The proposed duration of the Workshop is of 240 min. The duration can be adjusted according to the needs of the participants. The duration of the exercises is the smallest advised, but it can be extended.

No	Activity	Training method	Time
1	Introduction: Trainer’s presentation Participants’ presentation Project presentation	Presentation Icebreaker “Pointless questions”	30’
2	Gathering information	Exercise “Sailboat” Group activity	45’
3	What is so important about innovation? How is innovation useful for our companies?	Presentation Question and answers	10’
4	Agreeing on the goals	Exercise “Sailboat” (cont.)	15’
5	<i>Coffee break</i>	<i>Facilitating conversation</i>	30’



No	Activity	Training method	Time
6	Agreeing on the goals	Exercise “Opportunities Questions”	40’
7	Tools to develop the innovation culture within our SMEs How can we promote innovation to others	Presentation Question and answers	15’
8	Identifying solutions	Exercise “10 for 10”	20’
9	Engaging	Exercise “Action Board” Effort-impact scale	25’
10	Conclusions	Discussions	10’
TOTAL TIME			240’

Content and Method	Timing (')	Materials/ Equipment Required	Ref.
<p><u>Introduction:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Facilitator introduces himself/herself and welcomes participants. ➤ Facilitator invites participants to introduce themselves by the icebreaker named “Pointless questions”, inspired from www.workshopper.com ➤ The facilitator prepared in advance several questions, rather fun. The questions have no relation to the topic of the workshop, but stimulate the relaxed conversation and creative thinking. The questions must be relaxed, not touching sensitive matters (family status, family members, bad memories, laughing at somebody, etc.). There should be questions that everybody can answer (not too specific, not known all relevant to a limited category or number of people – such as certain songs, shows, books, etc.), such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>If you could invite a celebrity for dinner, who would you invite and why?</i> - <i>As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?</i> - <i>What is your favourite breakfast food?</i> - <i>What's one thing we don't know about you?</i> - <i>Are you a cat person or a dog person?</i> 	30'	Laptop, projector, pointer PPT presentation Flipchart Markers Pens and notebooks for participants Best Practices Guide	PPT/S1



Content and Method	Timing (')	Materials/ Equipment Required	Ref.
<p>- <i>Do you prefer to travel or to stay home?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The facilitator asks participants say a number from 1 to 6, in the order in which they are seated. Then the participants spread in 6 pairs, standing so that they could talk to each other without disturbing the others. The facilitator reads first question and gives maximum 2 minutes for each participant to answer the question in their pair. Then they change pairs so that they are with someone different for each question. ➤ The facilitator invites participants to sit down back to their places. ➤ The facilitator presents the objectives and agenda of the workshop ➤ Facilitator presents the project INNOVATION CULTURE FOR SMEs and the guide for best practices. Tell participants that the guide has numerous examples of diverse companies, small and large, that can inspire them. Encourage them to read it. 			PPT/S2 to PPT/S7
<p><u>Gathering information:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Facilitator has to identify which are the main needs and problems to focus on during the workshop. In order to do that, the facilitator launches an exercise named “The Sailboat”, inspired from the www.workshopper.com. The exercise aims at a common level of understanding of the workshop topic by the participants, so that effective solutions could be found later on during the workshop. At the end of the exercise, we will have a list of needs and problems identified as causes to be connected later on with the problem of not having (enough) innovation in the company. ➤ The facilitator draws a sailing boat on a flipchart, including the water line, the anchor, and the sail. ➤ The participants are invited to form 4 groups of 3, seated separately. 	45'	Sticky notes Pens Coloured sticky dots	Projector turned off



Content and Method	Timing (')	Materials/ Equipment Required	Ref.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The facilitator asks the groups to reflect on what's moving forward their company. Each participant is then invited to write (without discussing with the others) 3 things that they feel are moving the company forward, which good things are happening there from their perspective? They will write each thought on a separate sticky note. (5 min.) ➤ The facilitator asks each participant to stick their notes on the sail of the boat from the flipchart, and to read it load in front of the group, without secondary explanations. (10 min.) ➤ Now the facilitator asks the groups to reflect on what's holding back their companies. This time the participants will be announced from the beginning that they will not present at all and their thoughts will be kept anonymous – they will write down as many sticky notes as possible, trying to answer questions such as <i>what holds us back? What impedes our progress? What slows us down? What discourages our company?</i> (10 min.) ➤ The facilitator asks each participant to stick their notes on and around the anchor of the boat from the flipchart, fast and randomly, without discussion. The facilitator removes as quickly as possible the duplicates, if any (5 min.) ➤ The facilitator groups the negative aspects by categories: s/he groups notes that seem to belong to the same type (e.g., “Bad management”, “Low motivation of employees”, “Low performance of products/ services”, etc.), writes down the category on a new sticky note and puts them together aside the boat, in clear groupings. S/he asks the group to name any other categories that they may see (it is not necessary to be excessively rigorous). When enough categories are identified, the team is invited to group all negative aspects under the respective titles, until all are grouped. The aim is just to group them, not to prioritize them. (10 min.) 			



Content and Method	Timing (')	Materials/ Equipment Required	Ref.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The facilitator marks the fact that we have now several categories of clear and categorized needs and problems to consider. 			
<p><u>What is so important about innovation:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The facilitator presents the concept of innovation and its importance. <p><u>How is innovation useful for our companies:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The facilitator presents the utility of innovation for any company. ➤ The participants are encouraged to also consider this information in the coming steps of the workshop. 	10'	PPT presentation Best practices guide	PPT/S8 to PPT/S12 PPT/S13 to PPT/S15
<p><u>Agreeing on the goals:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Based on the information gathered before, the facilitator launches a new exercise, “Dot Voting” (also inspired from www.workshopper.com). ➤ The facilitator asks the participants to reflect on which of the previously identified elements (needs, problems and/ or unexploited opportunities from the sailboat drawing) they would like to focus most, also considering the innovation perspective introduced at the previous session, without talking to each other and being announced from the beginning that this exercise is also an anonymous one. (5 min.) ➤ Each participant receives 8 dots to be applied to what are, in their opinion, the most significant elements holding the team back. The votes go to individual issues, not to categories, and the participants are strongly encouraged to think honestly about what they consider to be the most important ones for their companies. They are allowed to vote on their own sticky notes and they can use more than one vote on the same sticky note. They have to use all their voting dots. They are never allowed to talk to each other about their opinions. (5 min.) 	20'	Coloured sticky dots – 8/person	Projector turned off



Content and Method	Timing (')	Materials/ Equipment Required	Ref.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The facilitator re-orders the sticky notes in the decreasing order of the number of votes in each category. The notes with less than 3 votes are taken apart and not considered further on during the workshop. Participants may be announced that the eliminated issues may make the object of a future workshop. In case there is any company which has no needs selected, and does not find itself in any of the other's needs, they should be allowed to choose 1 of its sticky notes even if the votes are less than 3 (5 min.) ➤ The facilitator closes this exercise making sure that all participants understood the reason and no one is taking personally the fact that one or more of their sticky notes were left aside. (5 min.) 			
<p><u>Coffee break</u></p> <p>The facilitator moves among the participants, discretely stimulating conversations, de-blocking awkward silence moments, or preventing eventual tensions, and kindly bringing them back at the end of the break, to stick to the schedule.</p>	30'		
<p><u>Agreeing on the goals (cont.):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Now, that we have a list of priorities, the facilitator goes further on towards agreeing on the goals, and introduces a new exercise, “Opportunity Question Creation”, in order to transform the priority issues into so called opportunity questions – an intermediate step towards concrete solutions. ➤ The facilitator picks the most voted sticky note – in case there are more notes with the same maximum number of votes, the first one from the left could be a good choice – we want to make some further steps, not find the perfection. ➤ The wording on the note is turned into a question about how we may improve the respective situation. For example, if the note is “Our promotion 	40'	Coloured sticky dots – 8/person	Projector turned off

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Content and Method	Timing (')	Materials/ Equipment Required	Ref.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The facilitator guides the participants through a new exercise, “10 for 10” inspired from http://www.workshopper.com/. ✓ The facilitator asks the participants to think about as many ideas as possible, without minding how good their ideas are – this is very important to strengthen to the participants – to answer the first selected Opportunity Question. Participants must also be aware from the beginning that this phase is an anonymous one, so they shouldn't worry about writing bad ideas. ✓ The facilitator asks that participants, without talking to each other, write their ideas one by one (one idea on one sticky note). A minimum of 15 ideas should be identified for the Opportunity Question by each participant. (5 min.) ✓ The facilitator encourages also the people who look like they are out of ideas, to write even if they don't have new ideas, as something will finally get out from there, eventually. ✓ The facilitator may also decide to play some low music to relax and stimulate participants while thinking. ✓ The facilitator is now moving to ask each member to stop and to choose their 10 favourite ideas from what they written down. The rest of ideas will be thrown out. (1 min.) ✓ The facilitator asks the participants to stick their 10 ideas on an available wall, without trying to categorize or organize them – it is even recommended that they would mix them up on the same surface with the others' ideas. ✓ Now the facilitator removes the duplicates from the wall, without discussing the process, distributes 10 sticky voting dots to each of the participants, and ask them to vote in silence for the ideas that they find most promising, reminding them of the Opportunity Question they focus on. 			



Content and Method	Timing (')	Materials/ Equipment Required	Ref.
<p>Participants are allowed put as many dots as they want on one idea, and they may also vote their own ideas. They cannot ask clarifications on any idea. Participants must use all their 10 dots. The facilitator encourages them to go with their gut feeling rather than reflecting into depth on each idea. (3 min.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The process forces the people to focus on the exposed ideas while voting, and indicates which ideas seem to be preferred by the group. ✓ The facilitator removes the sticky notes with zero votes and throw them out. S/he arranges the remaining sticky notes vertically, in order of votes (most votes of the top). ✓ A maximum of 10 ideas can remain to the end – the facilitator removes the others starting from the bottom. ✓ The facilitator presents the overall picture of the 10 remained ideas, representing the 10 most suitable solutions for the Opportunity Question put into discussion. ✓ Out of these 10, the team will select one that they will commit to test. ➤ The process repeats for each of the envisaged Opportunity Question. 			
<p><u>Engaging:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The facilitator focuses now on the last major step in the workshop – engaging to putting into practice the identified solutions. More concretely, the solutions identified in the previous stage are once again selected, and then organised as a plan of action to be followed after the end of the workshop in order to generate the envisaged changes for good. ➤ Like the whole structure of the workshop, the facilitator organises this last stage also based on an exercise; she selected the one named “Action Board” by using once again the www.workshopper.com resource site. 	25'	<p>Flipchart papers Sticky notes Pen</p>	

Content and Method	Timing (')	Materials/ Equipment Required	Ref.				
<div><div><div>✓ The facilitator draws the effort/ impact scale on a flipchart: the impact is a vertical line, the effort is a horizontal line starting from the same point with the impact line:</div><div><div><div>IMPACT</div><div><table><tr><td>Low effort High impact</td><td>High effort High impact</td></tr><tr><td>Low effort Low impact</td><td>High effort Low impact</td></tr></table></div><div>EFFORT</div></div></div></div><div><div>✓ The facilitator takes the ideas and solutions from previous stages and place them in the scale by following the steps below.</div><div>✓ The facilitator takes the first voted sticky note from the previous phase, places it in front of the scale, in its centre, and ask the participants: “For the challenge we're trying to solve, do we think this solution has higher or lower impact?”. The participants are allowed to answer only by saying “Higher” or “Lower” than the centre point.</div><div>✓ Once agreed on the impact position, the facilitator does the same with the effort position.</div><div>✓ The other sticky notes are then placed by comparison to the first one.</div></div></div>	Low effort High impact	High effort High impact	Low effort Low impact	High effort Low impact			
Low effort High impact	High effort High impact						
Low effort Low impact	High effort Low impact						

Content and Method	Timing (')	Materials/ Equipment Required	Ref.				
<div><div><div>✓ When all sticky notes are on the scale, we have an overall picture of two elements: how impactful considers the team that is each idea; how difficult to implement seems to the team each idea.</div><div>✓ The facilitator reads the scale as follows:</div></div><div><div>IMPACT</div><table><tr><td>DO NOW</td><td>MAKE A PROJECT</td></tr><tr><td>MAKE A TASK</td><td>IGNORE</td></tr></table><div>EFFORT</div></div><div><div>✓ The facilitator transforms the DO NOW area into action directions to be assigned to people back in each company. Directions are then planed as individual drafts – the focus could be on 1-3 such directions, as further described below.</div><div><div>a. The facilitator takes a DO NOW note (closest to the top and closest to the left of the cell).</div><div>b. S/he structures/ creates concrete activities to improve the situation – e.g.:<div><div>- Opportunity Question “How May We improve the promotional campaigns for product x?” – one of its idea sticky notes says:</div><div>- “Hire a high-level specialist with major results in marketing”; for this note, we can provide a</div><div>- 1 week package of actions:</div></div></div></div></div></div>	DO NOW	MAKE A PROJECT	MAKE A TASK	IGNORE			
DO NOW	MAKE A PROJECT						
MAKE A TASK	IGNORE						



Content and Method	Timing (')	Materials/ Equipment Required	Ref.
<p>Choose a product to start with; Look for promotional materials for similar relevant products; Choose the most innovative one; Find out who created it; Contact the person; Reach an agreement”.</p> <p>- establish success criteria: contract signed with marketing specialist working in an innovative manner as compared to what the company used until now (5 min.)</p> <p>✓ After creating several actions like shown above, the facilitator can translate them into a clear document, key for further assigning the tasks to people responsible when going back in the company, by using the IT system popular in the respective company (Microsoft Outlook, Google, etc.). (5 min.)</p> <p>➤ The operation may be repeated according to the available time and number of issues to be addressed during the workshop.</p>			
<p><u>Closure:</u></p> <p>Now we are ready!</p> <p>Conclusions and feedback, including an assessment of the satisfaction of the participants regarding the workshop. The assessment should be prepared by the facilitator prior to the workshop. This can be an online survey (using https://www.mentimeter.com/features/quiz-presentations, https://www.surveymonkey.com/templates/workshop-survey-template/ or any other</p>	10'	Presentation Flipchart	PPT/S26 to PPT/S28



Content and Method	Timing (')	Materials/ Equipment Required	Ref.
online means), a paper survey or an assessment activity. Examples of questions could be found at: https://www.jotform.com/blog/workshop-evaluation-questions/ , https://quenza.com/blog/workshop-feedback-form/ , https://www.surveymshare.com/template/359/Workshop-Evaluation etc. Certificates of Participation could be also handed. Exchange contact coordinates, congratulate each other, and look forward putting into practice what we decided all together! 😊			



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