GUIDELINES TO THE 6-STEP PROCESS

I. **THE TOOL'S CHARACTERISTICS (background, conditions, terms, aims)**

II. **GUIDELINES REGARDING THE PROCESS**

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I. THE TOOL'S CHARACTERISTICS (background, conditions, terms, aims)

This document looks closely at the specifics of each step and possible tools that could facilitate the flow of the 6-step Process. Some general comments on the 6-step Process include:

The process builds awareness and capabilities on the side of the intermediary and underlines the importance of non-technological innovations for SMEs. It uses an innovative approach in the counselling process and proposes tools to facilitate it. The process takes into account the specificity of the functioning of the intermediaries, their characteristics and basic areas of activity, but also increases awareness among intermediaries of tools promoting innovation in SMEs. The process has features that are key to stimulating and tightening intermediaries' collaboration with companies:

- Intensification of contact with the intermediary and, through them, with the intermediary and external partners
- Reduction in bureaucracy and replacing it with direct relationship with an intermediary (who takes responsibility for the documentation of the flow and of the effects of the process).

The process should incorporate current best practices – collection and dissemination of best practices – not only as a method of internal improvement of operations, but also as an effective marketing tool for further business development and credibility.

As presented, the process is simple to use. It does not require any particular financial outlays, but rather staff redeployments or changes in staff responsibilities. The process does not require any special procedural changes within the business environment institutions (centers supporting entrepreneurship activity, organizations and associations of entrepreneurs, service companies and financial institutions), only efficient internal communication.

The process obligates the intermediary to apply specific, consistent principles of communication with the owner manager for all institutions, including a guiding principle called "*no wrong door*". That is, an owner manager who applies to an intermediary **will always receive the service (support) they expect**, even in situations where the intermediary lacks the skill necessary to serve a given owner manager. In such situations, the rule is to find skills in the partner centre and provide the service to the client. Customer support, therefore, flows either directly from the intermediary to whom it reports or from the collaborating institution.

An important element, enabling effective implementation of the process so as to become permanent intermediary practice is the **high quality of intermediary preparation** for undertaking such collaboration with the company. This means: high level of psychosocial skills, excellent and up-to-date knowledge of the offerings of business environment institutions in the region (it is important that it is not limited to knowledge of the institution's own offerings); the ability to collaborate with other intermediaries and business environment institutions, and

properly prepared and updated contact databases. In the process, it may be necessary to introduce training to prepare collaborating intermediaries for performing tasks.

It is assumed that the process will be used in full, or in part, by intermediaries from a given region, which will use it in the process of providing its own pro-innovative services. However, in the case of good programme effects, it would be advisable to consider this process on a wider scale, using the synergy effect, involving a larger number of intermediaries from the region in a specific network of intermediaries from different institutions.

The model covers 6 business-related themes, called "steps". However, each interview may vary slightly: proceeding from Steps 1 to 6 in order or, if necessary, varying the order of the steps; the discussion process can be iterative (jumping between the steps). Companies in different lifecycles and from different backgrounds might want to emphasise different steps. The steps of the process include:

1. Introduction
2. Visions
3. Identification of challenges and needs
4. Strategy and action plan
5. Operationalisation
6. Measuring and evaluating outputs

The guidelines, including the specific methods of conduct (practices), questions and advice for each step, are described in the second part of this report.

The process has a logical sequence and helps to keep the focus during the discussion and build a relationship based on clearly defined steps. However, during interviews, the intermediary is able to move freely between the phases in reaction to the natural flow of the conversation. The entire process should be as short and efficient as possible – a total number of three personal meetings/sessions would be ideal. The language used in conversations, as well as in the materials, should be simple and adapted to the needs of micro-owner managers.

II.   GUIDELINE REGARDING THE PROCESS

Step 1: Introduction

This step is aimed at establishing a respectful and trustful relationship. The first contact may result from the owner manager's initiative, but that should not be the rule. Unfortunately, some intermediaries are used to a passive approach when collaborating with owner managers, which discourages potential beneficiaries. Some institutions do not operate on the terms of sale, rather they assume only that the owner manager will come to them to take advantage of their offer. The intermediaries' approach, combined with the lack of information

on the scope of their activities, especially in smaller towns, is an important factor responsible for the owner managers' refusal to use the intermediaries' offer. Some institutions conduct neither marketing activities nor promote companies that managed to achieve something in the field of innovation. However, it is the best practices and success stories that often constitute the most effective form of encouraging owner managers to establish contact with an intermediary.

The intermediary is a critical factor in the success of the process. Choosing the right professional, who has experience and personal qualifications, is a prerequisite for an efficient process. The selection of the intermediary, as well as the ability to create an open and collaborative atmosphere is of the utmost importance. A safe space for discussion has to be created to address any concerns regarding confidentiality when discussing details of the owner manager's business.

It would be worthwhile for the intermediary to obtain preliminary information about the company that is to be contacted. In the steps that follow, the collected data will enable the subject of the meeting, which will correspond to the specifics of the company, to be determined. This procedure significantly simplifies communication, shortening the time spent by the owner manager spends on contact. In addition, many owner managers perceive it as an expression of respect towards them. The quantitative and qualitative data regarding the enterprise can be obtained from: the company's registration documents taken from official registries, the company's website and from other available sources (informers, advertisements, etc.). The list below contains a minimum standard of information that Intermediaries should know before making first contact:

- Company details: full company name, registration number, address, EKD number, legal form, capital, date of registration, basic products/services, number of employees, key achievements, other important information

- Personal details: owner manager name and surname, position

- Contact details: website, e-mail, phone number

The intermediary now has a set of information about the enterprise necessary to make first contact. The intermediary **enters the data into the contact database**. This database can be maintained using, e.g., Google Sheets – a tool provided free of charge by Google. This tool allows you to create databases and statements and supplement them in real time simultaneously by the group of users specified by the author. It may also be the usual CRM system of the intermediary. The entered information is visible to all persons monitoring the work of intermediaries. Data obtained through the form is registered in the database and used to make first contact. They can also be a valuable source of potential clients for subsequent initiatives and projects undertaken by the intermediary.

The intermediary personally makes phone calls to arrange a meeting. The purpose of the process is to build lasting, personal relationships with owner managers, so that the same intermediary accompanies the owner manager from the beginning to the end. It is unacceptable for the intermediary to arrange a meeting via other intermediary employees, e.g., a secretary. The intermediary introduces themselves briefly, the institution they represent and the purpose of the meeting. It is vital that contact takes place with the decision-maker of the enterprise, i.e. the business owner. If the owner manager shows interest, the intermediary sets the date of the meeting. After the conversation, the intermediary sends the company some brief information about the details of the contact with the date and place of the agreed meeting. The intermediary notes the decision of the owner manager in the contact database. The intermediary has to be aware and prepared that only a fraction of the contacts will be successful. **It would be advisable that the meeting takes place on the premises of the company, which saves on the owner manager's time and allows the intermediary to better understand the organisational potential and organisational culture.** If that is not possible, the meeting is held in the intermediary's office. The meeting takes place using to the following outline: short presentation by the intermediary, conversation on the possible process, gathering first substantial information on the company's situation and agreement on the next meeting.

During first contact (while arranging first meeting), it is crucial to ensure that we are dealing with the owner manager of the company who is from our target group (<50 employees, manufacturing sector). Therefore, the intermediary may ask a few specific questions, e.g.:

- How old is the company?
- Are you the sole owner manager of the company? The first one (founder) or second/third generation?
- How many people work in your company?
- What is the main activity of the company?
- What are the main products?
- What were the main changes of the products/activities from the founding of the company?

A clear statement of the purpose of the process should be presented to the owner manager. The owner manager should receive a direct message about the benefits connected to the offer of the institution. Taking the above into account, a presentation tool could be developed in the form of slides and/or video (no longer than 5 minutes). Of course, this is an optional step and depends on the level of familiarity between the intermediary and the owner manager. However, if deployed, it should include:

- Intermediary's profile (1 slide)

- Problems most often indicated by SMEs and proposed example solutions connected to non-technological innovations (1 slide)
- Benefits to SMEs from the process (exciding the investment in time and cost) (1 slide)
- Successful projects the intermediary has worked on, with references and/or testimonials (2 slides)
- An outline of the process – general issues broken down to specific tasks and tailored recommendation (1 slide)
- Intermediary's network capacities to help implement the recommendations (1 slide)
- Overview of required recourses for a similar project in respect to working hours and investment (1 slide).

Track record in the form of case library or videos could help, in terms of showing how many times the institution guided the process with success, also with overview of the intermediaries involved and their skills.

During the first meeting, the degree of openness from the owner manager needs to be established. The intermediary directs the conversation to the areas indicating the possibility of the owner manager joining the process. In addition, the meaning of the phrases used has to be explained, e.g., *"Non-technological innovation is the implementation of a new organisational or marketing methods"*. It would be advisable to explain to the owner manager that very little is truly new in innovation. Too often, it can be difficult to appreciate that most innovations are based on previous advances. Innovations do not have to be new to the world – only to the company. At this step, the intent is to empathically convey the idea of non-technological innovation. The SUCCESs principle might be helpful to conducting storytelling:

- S Simple: *unfortunately, many small business owners are under the misconception that innovation is only reserved for larger companies. Therefore, it is important to explain how simple some organisational/marketing innovations are to introduce.*
- U Unexpected: *small businesses can also introduce innovations that can change entire industries.*
- C Concrete: *give some examples of non-technological innovations, e.g., new way of price management, new database for best practices, etc.*
- C Credible: *e.g., saying for how long this intermediary has worked in this field.*
- E Emotional: *showing interest and commitment.*
- S Stories: *without naming them, give some examples of real improvements (savings in time or money) from other companies.*

Step 1 of the process should be combined with Step 2 – uncovering **visions of the company**, its **core values** and the situation in the company in terms of needing a non-technological innovation counselling process. It could be achieved in one meeting to minimalise the owner manager's cost in time and effort. **It is also important to specify, if possible, how long and**

how expensive, depending on the type of the non-technological innovation to introduce, the implementation process may be.

<div align="center">Step 2: Visions</div>

This step aims to uncover the vision that the owner manager has for the company and the values that guide them. The intermediary's goal is to recognise the situation in the company in terms of needing a non-technological innovation counselling process. It should be performed (if possible) at the same meeting as Step 1.

A positive manner of talking and a natural flow of conversation should be maintained. The intermediary should not interrupt the owner manager, but rather ask follow-up questions to invite the owner manager to reflect on their views. This creates space to uncover opportunities for innovation.

As a warm up, before the conversation about the vision and values of the owner manager, it is worth asking questions about the motive for starting a company (the concept of "*why,* before *what and how*"). Other questions may include: *What changes have taken place in the company over the years? Which company has noted the most important achievements? Have there been any crises?*

To uncover an underlying vision and values, some more general questions could be asked, e.g. to address*:*

- Wants: It is determined by priorities and wishes; what the owner manager or their predecessor (company founder) is/was passionate about or really wanted to engage in.
- Cans: What the company does will depend on what skills/competencies are available, what the company is good at, and what the natural advantages are.
- Shoulds: What creates values and what the company should do is determined by the market or demand.

<div align="center">**Figure 1. Possible areas for uncovering visions**</div>
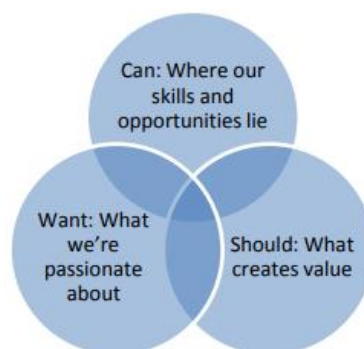
Source: own elaboration

Overlap between all three could indicate natural areas to invest in or pursue. Additionally, the overlap between "can" and "should" could indicate a need to consider changing priorities. The overlap between "want" and "should" could indicate trying to mobilise supplementary resources or recruiting skills that are lacking.

The key element in the process is the intermediary and their personal abilities
The intermediary:

- reaches out to the owner manager in an active way and maintains a close relationship with them
- supports the owner manager in making decisions about implementing innovations
- helps with finding and selecting a partner who will provide an innovative solution
- makes direct contact with owner managers, makes the owner manager aware of their needs, prepares a specific offer and communicates with an appropriate external partner.

An intermediary should, therefore, have experience in collaborating with enterprises and providing services to enterprises, have knowledge on the functioning of innovation support systems and the offerings of institutions supporting non-technological innovation available in the region as well as knowledge of private companies providing new organisational or marketing solutions.

Supportive collaboration in the area of innovation is a complicated and time-consuming process. It demands that intermediaries are able to indicate long-term benefits and overcome mental barriers among owner managers. The role of intermediaries is to create a positive climate around the joint operation of enterprises and intermediaries on the principles of trust and an increase in the conviction of mutual benefits. It should be remembered that the first effects of the intermediary's work might appear after a few months.

The last element in this step should be to agree to maintain contact and continue with the consultation process – at least defining the form and time according to which contact is to be maintained. If possible, the exact time and place for the next meeting is established. **An official agreement, which highlights both the agreement to the process and the next steps, can be signed if that is a procedure for the particular intermediary.** The process must be designed as attractively as can be, but the intermediary needs to be prepared for a company withdrawing during any step.

Step 3: Identification of challenges and needs of the company

This step is dedicated to identifying the challenges and needs of the company in relation to non-technological innovations. The scope of tasks include: **observation and collection of data, analysis with the identification of areas requiring innovation and synthesis of diagnosis of**

prioritised challenges. The results of the analysis should translate into the implementation of changes strengthening the competitive advantage or levelling the distance to competitors.

In contrast to technology consulting services, support in the field of non-technological innovations does not need to involve an industry expert or focus on technical problems. The aim here is to analyse the company in terms of "soft" aspects of functioning, i.e., its organisation, business model, strategy-building policy, approach to innovation, contacts with clients, etc., so it is extremely important to engage in a high quality dialogue with the owner manager.

Identification of challenges and needs should take place during one or (if applicable) two in-depth interviews/dialogues. If the company already has a structured team, then it could be practicable **to interview both the owner manager (first interview) and selected employees (possible second interview).** Such an approach would allow not only becoming familiar with the company's needs but would also provide information to the owner manager on the views of the personnel on the functioning of the company. The second interview would have to be carried out under appropriate procedures that would ensure an adequate level of anonymity of the employees so that they can freely express themselves regarding their needs.

The interview could be semi-structured, based on a prepared scenario. The interview could take place (preferably) during a visit to the headquarters of the company or at the intermediary's premises after arranging the meeting. The visit should last a maximum of two hours. At the end of the interview, the owner manager should appoint a few people who could participate in a possible second interview – people in the company responsible for various issues, i.e., marketing, sales, logistics. The second interview could be held in the form of an interactive workshop in which the previously appointed representatives of the company participate. It could include individual questions based on the scenario but also group heuristic methods of company analysis (e.g., SWOT). The form of conversation is crucial. A gradual uncovering of the important information, through making loops in the conversation is considered a good technique. Additionally, the intermediary should highlight that the purpose of the conversation is to find out where they could help and not to point out mistakes.

Some Intermediaries already provide innovation audits as a service for companies. Some of them use sophisticated tools, such as IMP3rove Innovation Management Assessments, Innovation Health Check or 360degree interviews. It is advisable to continue using this type of innovation audit technique as a step in this process if it is available in the particular institution. However, it whether these solutions address all important issues related to the specificity of non-technological innovations contained in the scenario should be checked.

The scenario should provide support for an intermediary conducting a meeting in a company. A form of interview scenario contains questions asked by the intermediary and supplementary questions to help get the right information.

The scenario should consist of several elements:

1. Introduction and gathering background information on the company.
2. The Spider Web Tool screening the current strategic potential of the company – the result is presented in the form of a graph, where the basis for further discussion are those areas whose operation was rated the lowest and/or has the greatest potential for growth.
3. Opportunity for the owner manager to present their opinion on challenges facing their company and their needs and/or ambitions in the field of innovation.

Ad. 1 Introduction and gathering background information on the company:

- Introducing the intermediary.
- Indication of the meeting's goals and overall goals of the process, e.g., *"Our goal is to support owner managers in implementing non-technological innovations to enhance their performance. This meeting is one of the steps in the process"*.
- Presenting the meaning of the phrases used, which will facilitate further conversation, e.g., *"Non-technological innovation is the implementation of a new organisational or marketing methods. These innovations do not have to be new to the market on which the company operates, but they must, at least, be new to the enterprise itself"*.
- Information about the meeting, determining the end time, ensuring confidentiality.
- Icebreaker/warm up, e.g., "*Before the meeting, I had the opportunity to familiarise myself with your offerings, but can you please tell me, in a few words, what affected the current shape of the company?"*
- Company's business profile – what is the general business model (is it a technology, production, logistics or service company), what place do they see themselves as occupying in the value-added chain). Statistical numbers for the industry are not enough – industries are often identified incorrectly, through the lenses of technology and not their products.
- Main products or services, e.g., "*Please specify no more than 5, depending on the size of the sale". "What features distinguish your products/services?"* Knowledge of the products allows the intermediary to undertake actions related to, e.g., matchmaking with other enterprises (networking). Specific challenges in the development of products enables the level of awareness of managers, at what stage of the lifecycle the product is located, and a comparison of their opinions with the market situation to be determined.
- Industries in which the main recipients of products/services operate. *How does the company acquire customers? Does the company research their needs?* The question

enables the potential interest in customer relationship services or participation in fairs, conferences and trade missions to be determined.

- Competition. *Who is the main competitor of the company? In what respect can it threaten the company the most?* (e.g., price, quality, delivery time, standard of service, newer technologies, design, etc.).

- Sources of financing – the number and structure of financing sources indicates the company's strategy, readiness for rapid development, experience in acquiring financial resources. The financing structure may indicate specific skills of the team and preparation of the company for using financial resources. These grants and subsidies confirm knowledge of the rules for applying for funds, openness to the use of public money.

Ad. 2 The Spider Web Tool[1]

The Spider Web Tool, also known as a radar chart, is a way of comparing multiple quantitative variables. This makes them useful for seeing which variables are scoring high or low within a dataset, making them ideal for displaying performance.
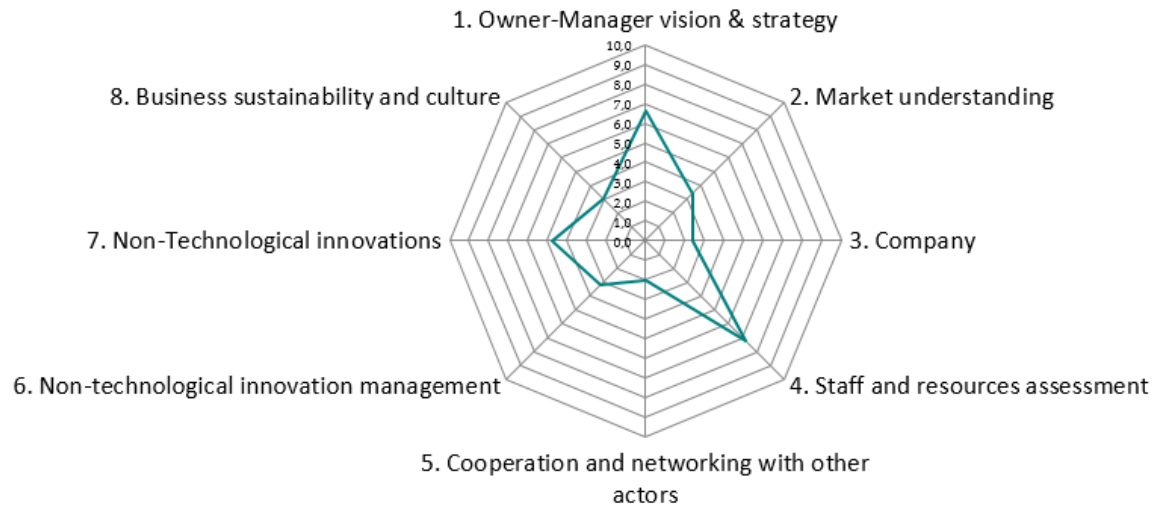
During the interview, the intermediary could read contextual statements from the scenario, describing the functioning of the company in each area. For example, to analyse communication, the intermediary uses the phrase: "In our company, we maintain long-term relationships with clients". The owner manager then answers, on a scale of 1-10, to what extent the statement read is true, where 1 means "strongly disagree" and 10 means "strongly agree". The Spider Web tool consists of 8 dimensions with 4 or 5 questions for each dimension. The weights of questions contributing to the same dimension must be developed.

An example of dimensions and questions are presented below.

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[1] This is a very generic proposal: regarding the specific tool within SNOWMAN project, please refer to the document "Spider Web guidelines and instruction proposal".

Figure 2. Example graph of the Spider Web Tool

1. Owner-Manager vision & strategy
2. Market understanding
3. Company
4. Staff and resources assessment
5. Cooperation and networking with other actors
6. Non-technological innovation management
7. Non-Technological innovations
8. Business sustainability and culture

Source: own elaboration

Ad.3 Opportunity for the owner manager to present their opinion on challenges facing their company and their needs and/or ambitions in the field of innovation. This element of the scenario should be designed so as to give the owner manager time and space to freely speak and formulate expectations not only concerning challenges and problems but also addressing long-term plans and creating positive change for the company. In particular, it would be good to know if the company would like to enhance their performance in one or more indicated main areas of interest:

- increase in revenues and/or employment
- new structure or organisation
- new markets

Or in additional areas of interest:
- stronger relationship with clients
- improvement in the quality of client service
- cost reductions
- improved employee satisfaction and/or reduced rates of employee turnover

This part of the scenario is a continuation of a vision-connected line of questions, initiated in Step 2 of the process. By now, the owner manager has had time to think about long-term plans and their attitude towards company development. Additional questions might be helpful, e.g., *"If you did not have to take any limitations into account, please indicate three things that*

would solve the most important needs of the company". The circumstances of the interview (preferably the owner manager's headquarters) might have an influence on the owner manager's openness and facilitate commitment to the subsequent implementation of recommendations.

The meeting should end with information on when to expect a written document with a summary of the diagnosis and recommendations (the time should not exceed 2 weeks). The form of the next contact should also be agreed (electronic, personal).

The presented draft of the scenario is not a complete set of questions. During the conversation, other issues important for the owner manager may be raised. The role of the scenario is to support the intermediary and to define a list of issues that should be addressed.

Diagnosis

After completing all the mid-steps in identification of challenges, the intermediary prepares a comprehensive diagnosis of prioritised challenges. The diagnosis:

- identifies the most characteristic features of the company
- describes the main goals for enhancing the company's performance
- recognises the most important barriers hindering the given company from implementing
   innovations

The diagnosis then becomes a base for recommendations in strategy and action plan. It is presented to the owner manager as a part of the solution.

Step 4: Strategy and action plan

This step concentrates on indicating goals and an action plan, which include recommended actions and their projected outputs. After the previous meetings, the intermediary prepares an assessment based on the obtained information – the situation of the company in a broader context and company resources. The intermediary defines the most important needs of the company. And then evaluates what support would be the most beneficial for the owner manager, using the intermediary's own knowledge, which can be supplemented with information from external sources (e.g., information on entities offering specific services). An element of this stage may also include the consultation process with other people within the intermediary organisation. It will enable a look at the company's problems from different points of view and to find the optimal solution using broader experience.

The intermediary has to be able to give recommendations in all cases and make an agreement on certain steps with the owner manager. It should be emphasised that implementing non-technological innovation is not a goal in itself. In this context, "successful implementation"

should be understood as a step leading to results in sustainable revenue and increased profits. All aspects of innovation management must, therefore, be subordinate to the main goal of sustainable development and growth of the company. Innovations have to "earn their keep". Simply put, innovations must be able to sustain themselves and return their weighted cost of capital.

In regard to the goals – as a result of implemented recommendations – companies should be able to enhance their performance in one or more indicated main areas of interest:
- increase in revenues and/or employment
- new structure or organisation
- new markets

Subsidiary goals could relate to additional areas of interest:
- stronger relationship with clients
- improvement in the quality of client service
- cost reductions
- improved employee satisfaction and/or reduced rates of employee turnover

The goal of the process should be clear and, when possible, defined with the help of stakeholders.

Well-constructed goals and the following recommendations should be "Double-SMART". The intermediaries constructing the recommendations should ensure that they have the characteristics referred to below. The Double-SMART model is a framework for analysis and review of recommendations to make them more effective.

Specific – Each recommendation should address one specific problem or issue.	**Solution-oriented** – A recommendation proposes credible solutions backed by concrete actions.
Measurable – Each recommendation should be developed so that it can be assessed as to whether or not and to what extent it has been implemented.	**Mindful** – A recommendation should take prioritisations and risks into consideration.
Achievable – The implementation of the recommendation should be possible in practical terms.	**Argued** – A recommendation should be based on high-quality objective evidence and analysis.
Results-oriented – A recommendation identifies the actions required for the desired end-result.	**Responsive** – A recommendation should mitigate an identified problem and not the symptoms of the problem.
Time-bound – A recommendation should include a realistic time-frame for implementation.	**Targeted** – A recommendation should be directed to particular organisations that can practically implement it.

When creating an action plan, the intermediary should pay attention to several important issues:

- Ensuring that the owner manager understands the basic concept of the non-technological innovation service
- Showing the owner manager the relationship between the recommendation and their needs
- Avoiding or reducing barriers hindering owner managers from making decisions on implementation, so they can engage in the implementation of recommendations without any effort on their part
- Developing and maintaining strong relationships with owner managers, providing a context for the design and implementation of recommendations.

There is a whole range of actions and tools that can be applied in drawing up an action plan for implementing non-technological innovations. The following categories of tools can be mentioned:

1. marketing tools
2. organisational tools
3. financial tools
4. business modelling tools
5. service design tools

Marketing, organisational and financial tools are popular services that have been offered by the support institutions for years. Marketing tools include: new/refreshed design of products or services, new concepts for selling, new PR concepts, websites, webinars, YouTube solutions, new price management, new loyalty actions for customers or new branding and trademarks. Organisational tools could include: new business practices, e.g., lean management, quality management, new business organisation, hierarchy structure, workplace organisation, improved external relations. Financial tools may include: DCF, NPV, sensitivity analysis. Many intermediaries are specialised in offering a wide range of support in those areas, therefore, they do not have to be addressed in detail here.

Two business modelling tools have been attracting particular attention lately: Business Model Canvas (BMC) and Lean Canvas (LC). Both tools are similar to each other, although they emphasize slightly different aspects of designing and verifying the effectiveness of actions undertaken. The former can be used both to design new products and services, as well as to verify the effectiveness of the current business model of a company. The latter, in turn, is a methodology of working on completely new ideas for a given entity, deeply rooted in the start-up sector. Another example of a business modelling tool is the Business Innovation Tree (LIC),

where the innovation process is seen as a holistic process with four key vectors (tree branches): offering, process, distribution, customer. It considers three main categories of resources: sources of innovation ideas, internal resources, partnerships and cooperation.

Another valuable tool is the go-to-market strategy. It is a plan of an organisation, utilising both inside and outside resources (e.g., sales force and distributors) to deliver unique value proposition to customers and achieve competitive advantage. The goal of a go-to-market strategy is to enhance the overall customer experience, taking into account various aspects of the value proposition, such as the quality of the product and pricing. Examples of go-to-market strategy actions are:

• Thought leadership	• Demand creation
• Niche saturation	• Affiliate marketing
• Premium placement	• Cult creation
• Free sample	• Limited time offer
• Wave spotting	• Freemium
• Dotting the market	• Predatory model
• Co-branding	• Cashback

Interesting service design tools include: design thinking, business experimentation, agile activities, customer journey, value proposition, empathy mapping of user, storytelling, design criteria, idea, wall of ideas, prototype, validation, experiment and visualisation.
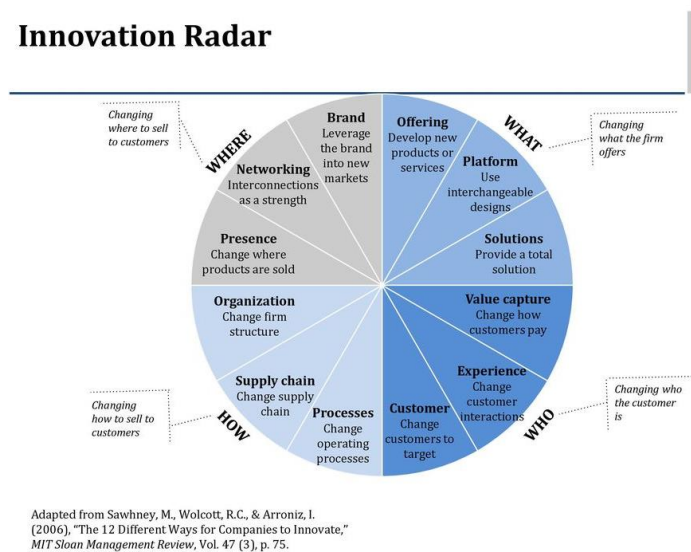
It is worth starting the recommendations list with actions that can be done with minimum cost and effort. Examples could be:

- Subtraction – is particularly useful for simplifying processes and eliminating costs. It is an opportunity to offer something different by simplification. This ideation technique is suitable for re-designing something that already exists and needs to be refreshed.
- Reverse Innovation – this action requires participants to think of the worst experience they could offer customers, which seems to be contradictory to the principle of innovation. However, it offers interesting insights to make things really different and contextually integrated.
- Conceptualisation of ideas – this tool can help companies find relationships between ideas, group them and create concept solutions. It is probably the most challenging task of the process where ideas get integrated into desirable working models. Concept solutions must be seductive and unique.
- Open innovation – identifying potential partners/stakeholders for collaboration, e.g., through industry clusters.

Another interesting tool that could be helpful in drawing up an action plan towards non-technological innovation is the innovation radar. The innovation radar displays the 12 dimensions of business innovation, anchored by the offerings a company creates, the customers it serves, the processes it employs and the points of presence it uses to take its offerings to market.

Figure 3 The innovation radar as an example of a tool for creating an action plan.

Adapted from Sawhney, M., Wolcott, R.C., & Arroniz, I. (2006), "The 12 Different Ways for Companies to Innovate," *MIT Sloan Management Review*, Vol. 47 (3), p. 75.

It should be noted that it is not necessary to create a completely new services portfolio for the necessary recommendations to be implemented. It is enough to start by considering how to join the services already available in order to obtain the anticipated effect. A set of available services should be constructed in such a way that, on the one hand, it is universal and, on the other hand, it corresponds to the needs of a given owner manager. Therefore, once designed, it can be applied to the needs of servicing owner managers, representing various industries and different scopes of needs. In turn, intermediaries can choose from various types of services, which will be most appropriate for the owner manager. Creating a non-technological innovation services portfolio demands that an intermediary be open to collaboration with external experts. There is slim chance of a given intermediary having all possible skills in their repertoire. Therefore, the innovation services are not only the concern of the particular intermediary. At the same time, they will influence the entire innovation ecosystem through the generation of collaborative links between the entities, which create it. A far-reaching effect of such an approach could be the specialisation of intermediaries, leading to a further professionalisation of the whole system.

Strategy and action plan template

The purpose of the template is to provide a standard form and support an intermediary in describing the company's needs and recommendations, indicating potential solutions for implementation. The template can serve as a conclusion to Step 3 and, at the same time, an action plan for Step 4.

The intermediary submits the recommendation to the owner manager in the form agreed during the meeting (electronically or a personal meeting), using for this purpose the strategy and action plan template. The information provided in the template and the owner manager's decision regarding the implementation of the recommendation should be noted by the intermediary in the contact database.

Name of the company:	
Company interested in change in main areas:	
• Increase in revenue and/or employment	Yes / No
• New structure/organisation	Yes / No
• New markets	Yes / No
Additional areas of interest:	
• stronger relationship with clients	Yes / No
• improvement in the quality of client service	Yes / No
• cost reductions	Yes / No
• improved employee satisfaction and/or reduced rates of employee turnover	Yes / No
Problems/needs – Description	
Recommended actions – Description	
• Goal, actions, outcomes	
Recommended partners – Description	
Further activities of the intermediary – Description	
Summary – Description	
Decision of the owner manager regarding the implementation of the recommendation Yes / No	

Based on the strategy and action plan, the intermediary proposes:

a) Arranging contact with intermediary, if the intermediary represented provides the services needed by the company.

b) Arranging contact with an intermediary from a different organisation from the region, a representative of a scientific unit responsible for collaborating with the business sector or commercial partners who have an appropriate offer.

c) Supporting the owner manager in the independent implementation of the recommendation.

If possible, the intermediary organises financial support for the innovation services.

The basic resource necessary to implement the suggested model in an efficient way is properly trained intermediaries. They should have the skills and experience in the field for individual tasks to be implemented professionally in particular steps.

Step 5: Operationalisation

This step is aimed at ensuring that the strategy and action plans are implemented in the SME. As a result of the analysis carried out, the owner manager is provided with a document, containing a summary of the data acquired and recommended actions to be taken. Recommendations should contain not only information on what should be done (as to merits), but also who can support the owner manager in a given action, if external assistance is required. The owner manager can implement recommended actions on their own or with the help of the intermediary. Some tasks could be carried out directly by the intermediary, but also by external experts, when justified. Some owner managers may expect the intermediary to participate in a meeting with a recommended partner. The appropriate number of intermediary working hours should be allocated to this action.

The length of the implementation period should be in accordance with the action plan, but flexibility is needed. Whenever possible, the implementation should be cumulative but, at the same time, appropriately extended, if necessary. A simple Gantt chart in Excel could be used to visualise the process flow and following stages. It is recommended to use widely available (e.g., open source) project management tools suitable for minor projects.

Sustaining contact with the company is necessary. Periodical contacts with the company to monitor the current state of implementation or occurrence of new needs. Sustaining the relationship shows mutual belief in its benefits, mutual trust and a willingness to collaborate. Lack of further contact with the owner manager makes it impossible to monitor the effects of the actions, the benefits that the owner manager gained as a result of the service and the possibility of "boasting" about successes by the intermediary. Due to the limited time available to owner managers, activities aimed at maintaining contact must be properly balanced and planned. Examples of activities that maintain customer contact:

- Follow-up calls and checking if the owner manager is satisfied with the results of the contacts with partners recommended by the intermediary.

- Contacting the owner manager once every three months to ask if there are new needs that the intermediary could help meet, due to the intermediary's current activities and/or resulting contacts.
- Inviting the owner manager to events organised by the intermediary in order to maintain contact, in accordance with the profile of the owner manager's needs obtained during contact. Each contact should be noted by the intermediary in the contact database.

The follow up contact should be in the form of troubleshooting – logical, systematic search for the source of a problem in order to solve it and make the process operational again. Contacting the owner manager should never have the goal of forcing the company into anything or pressurising the company. It is meant to help, not to whip!

It is important that each subsequent stage of the innovation support process ends with an owner manager's decision as to whether or not they intend to continue the implementation process, taking into consideration the right of the owner manager to withdraw at any stage.

Step 6: Measuring and evaluating outputs

The aim of this step is to measure and evaluate the degree and effect of implementation of new non-technological innovation**.** To measure the effect of support, an evaluation tool should be created. It could be used after a certain period (e.g., 6 months) to evaluate:
1. the process of support and the performance of intermediaries
2. the scope and degree of implementation of recommended specific organisational and marketing innovation actions
3. the changes in the owner manager's performance due to implementation of said actions.

The tool should contain an agreed list of measures to evaluate all the above areas.

Ad. 1 The measurement of the process of support and performance of the intermediary is a typical tool used to determine the quality of the process and the level of satisfaction of the enterprise with the support. It should contain questions regarding the level of satisfaction concerning the process of providing support, the extent to which the support was in line with the owner manager's expectations, satisfaction with the recommended actions, etc.

Ad. 2 Measuring the implementation of recommended actions could include types of implemented actions and the degree of implementation, e.g., low, medium, high.

Ad. 3 The changes in the owner manager's performance could be measured by the owner manager's self-assessment of the observed/predicted impact of recommended actions leading to innovation. The self-assessment method is recommended when the measures may be affected by the difficulty of isolating factors determining the owner manager's

implementation of recommendations, a longer period may be needed to observe the effects of activities as well as the diversified initial innovation capacity levels of enterprises. Furthermore, the innovation outcome can strongly depend on the length of the product's lifecycle and, thus, can take on very different values in particular industries. Innovation studies and meta-analysis (e.g., Sidhu et al., 2016) indicate the need to consider the indirect effects of innovation processes, as they can influence the achievement of innovative success long before the tangible, financial effects appear.

The changes in the owner manager's performance could be measured in relation to the indicated main areas of the owner manager's interest, e.g.:
- increase in revenues and/or employment
- new structure/organisation
- new markets

And additional areas:
- stronger relationship with clients
- improvement in the quality of client service
- cost reductions
- improved employee satisfaction and/or reduced rates of employee turnover
- extending the time horizon of planning and perspective thinking
- undertaking collaboration with external partners in implementing innovation

The scale of the owner manager's self-assessment of the observed/predicted impact of recommended actions could be framed on a 1 to 5 scale (1 no impact vs 5 very strong impact).

A tool for monitoring success can be created in the form of a support assessment questionnaire, which can, at the same time, be a tool for assessing the work performed by the intermediary, a tool for assessing the implementation of recommendations and a tool for assessing the observed/expected impact on the owner manager's performance. It should be remembered that some questions may concern the intermediary directly and a survey, in this format, should be sent by the intermediary management team.

> **An assessment and evaluation questionnaire could include the following groups of questions:**
>
> - Are you satisfied with the support provided by the intermediary? (definitely so, rather, hard to say, rather no, no)
> - To what extent has the support offered through the intermediary been in line with your expectations? (on a scale of 1-5 where 1 is unsatisfactory and 5 is highly satisfactory)

- Are you satisfied with the results of the support? (definitely so, rather, hard to say, rather no, no)
- What type of recommended actions were proposed? (enumerative list)
- Which of the recommendations are being/were implemented? (All, part, none)
- To what extent have the recommendations already been implemented? (none, very low, medium, high, very high)
- What is the expected date of implementation of the innovation resulting from the support? six months, another year, ... (please specify when?), the innovation has already been implemented
- What type of changes in the enterprise will the received support lead to? Increase in revenues and/or employment; new product/service; new structure/organisation; new markets?
- What other changes are likely due to the support received? Stronger relationship with clients; improvement in the quality of client service; cost reductions; improved employee satisfaction and/or reduced rates of employee turnover; extending the time horizon of planning and perspective thinking; undertaking collaboration with external partners in implementing innovation?
- When could you meet with an intermediary, so information for a success story could be gathered? Immediately, in couple of weeks, in 3 months, in six months?
- Name of the company completing the survey. Address. First and last name of the contact person, telephone/e-mail.

A follow up meeting should be organised to gather information and material for a success story from the owner manager no later than six months after the survey (a maximum of a year after the recommendation).