

**WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE QUALITATIVE
EVALUATIONS OF THE PUBLIC ASSISTANCE TO SMEs?
*A New but Necessary Practice***

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Current Evaluative Practice

	Number of SMEs Assisted	Increase and Safeguarding of 'Sales'	Increase and Safeguarding of 'Jobs'	Conformity Letter
European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)	✓	✓	✓	
Regional Development Agency Fund (RDAF)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF)	✓			✓

Objectives of the Qualitative Evaluations

- Understand the **complexity of the social realm** that is assisted
- Determine the potential for the **interaction of programmes**
- Determine the **components of the programme** that were (un)successful
- Identify **unintended outcomes**
- Identify good/poor **programme practices**
- Identify **underlying contexts** that influence programme practices

Evaluation Approach

CASE STUDIES OF PROGRAMME ASSISTANCE TO SME INITIATIVES

- **SME:**
Future initiatives, financial conditions, and expertise
- **INITIATIVE:**
Description, the process, barriers and enablers and outcomes
- **SERVICES DELIVERED:**
Description, process and used resources
- **SERVICE OUTCOMES:**
Accepted, used, reversed, appropriate?
- **PROGRAMME ORGANIZATION:**
Delivery history and human resources
- **PROGRAMME:**
Evaluation mechanisms, numerical targets, demand and funding

Evaluation Approach (cont.)

METHODS AND SOURCES OF INFORMATION:

- **INTERVIEWS:**
with SME and programme personnel (programme manager and consultants)
- **OBSERVATION:**
of the use of the information system
- **READING:**
of economic policy documents, manuals for the administration of policies and public funds, programme reports and programme assistance files

Take care with BIASED information in the interviews ...

Evaluation Approach (cont.)

PREPARE YOURSELF BEFORE INTERVIEWS:

- **IN GENERAL:**

Learn about policy systems around the programmes ... programmes' scope of action ... SMEs ... programme assistance files

- **INTERACTION SME PERSONNEL:**

Emphasis more on understanding SME initiatives and improve programme services ... SME could get further support ... talk about SME initiatives

- **INTERACTION WITH PROGRAMME PERSONNEL:**

They knew we did our homework, above all talked with SME personnel

Our Evaluation at a Glance (example)

SME Assisted	Assistance Evaluation
JVentureCo	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Part of the deliverables were not accepted• Part of the deliverables were reversed• Part of the deliverables seem to be inappropriate• Part of the deliverables that were accepted and used could have been done by the SME itself• The services were possibly incomplete• Part of the services were for an initiative that was not implemented• The services did not correspond to the scope of action of the programme• The SME went to bankruptcy

Recommendations for Practice

- Use **targets aligned with innovation**, e.g. number of SMEs that implemented and properly use an information system
- Incorporation of qualitative methodologies when **the areas to be affected by the policies or the policies themselves are unknown**, or when it is required the **participation of different stakeholders**
- Use of a qualitative methodology **similar to the one used in this research** to overcome the sensitivity of the information for the subjects
- Personnel in charge of evaluation should have an **intermediate knowledge of SMEs, business and innovation processes** as well as experience of qualitative interviews

Thank you