

RECAP First Annual smE-MPOWER Learning Event 5 – 6 November 2008 @ Fraunhofer IFF, Magdeburg, Germany

smE-MPOWER was finished Nov. 2007 as one of the rare cases in which a European funded support action would yield not only promising results, but continue to operate beyond project end. It was on the background of a year of post-project preparations that Fraunhofer IFF invited decision makers and strategists of SME intermediaries to Magdeburg to together launch a collaborative learning community of cooperation coaches across Europe: the smE-MPOWER Community.

Eleven representatives from nine organisations in eight countries followed the call investing in the long-term vision of building innovation support competence and a strong strategic network of visionary innovation agencies together.



Personal members of the smE-MPOWER Community

The concept of “business innovation” - defined as the creation of substantial new value for customers by change in one or more dimensions of the business system – so central to the quest of empowering SMEs towards collaborative innovation provided the basis for an open and case-based learning exchange about challenges and approaches in innovation support.

Setting up strategic business collaborations is not an easy task, especially if more than two partners are involved. It is cooperation coaches who support the forging of such critical alliances. And it is them who smE-MPOWER aims to equip and qualify for their increasingly important job. A shared reference process – complete with over 100 proven tools and expert contacts is available to the network members under a generous Creative Commons licence. Based on the smE-MPOWER job profile for cooperation coaches dedicated training and qualification measures are currently under development.

Cooperation Coaching Process

date: 21 July 2008
status: shared smE-MPOWER standard

Support Phases: Entry feasibility after Mobilisation Process

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Shared smE-MPOWER Reference Process

Cooperation Coach Job Profile

smE MPOWER
COLLABORATING INTO THE FUTURE

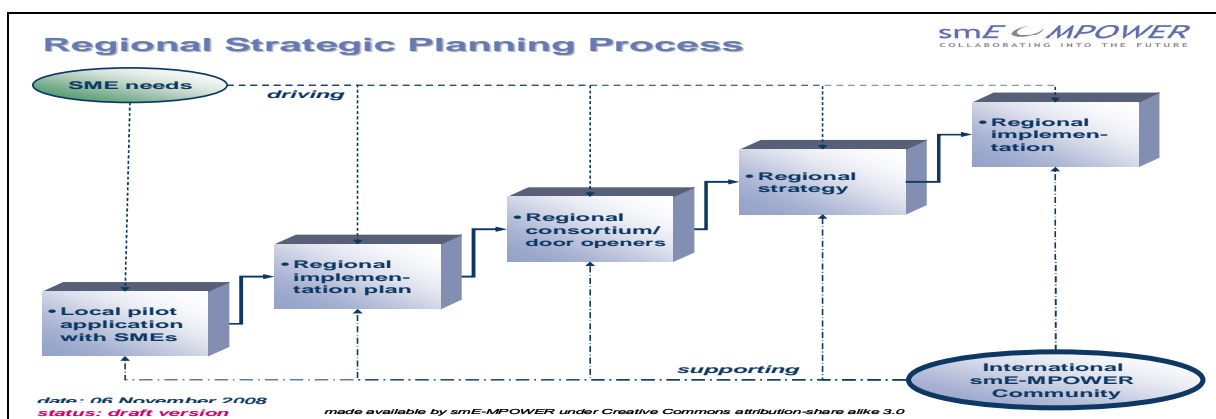
Mission	The smE-MPOWER Cooperation Coach enables and supports SMEs to benefit strategically from participation in RTD project consortia with option towards international cooperation.	
Key activity 1	Priority IV	Raise awareness of partnership in the context of company's business innovation opportunities.
Key activity 2	Priority I	Establish the basis for opening towards strategic partnerships by favouring a common project vision, a coherency of goals, a shareable rough project concept, and by articulating expected benefits and contributions of potential partners. Identify and mobilise core project partners for the Strategic Interest Group.
Key activity 3	Priority II	Facilitate the project engineering process by providing special support for designing the project structure and the project organisation, for clarifying the roles and the budgets of the partners, and for setting the IPR frame in order to strengthen the position of the SME's interests in the consortium.
Key activity 4	Priority III	Guide the SME in contract negotiations (Cooperation Agreement and possible agreements with public co-funding entities) in order to make sure that they will start the project under optimal conditions regarding the project collaboration and the exploitation of the project outcomes.

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Shared smE-MPOWER Job Profile

Switzerland is up to the challenge! After successful pilots on regional level the Swiss federal bureau for knowledge and technology transfer has adopted the smE-MPOWER approach as a strategic pillar in the qualification of listed innovation coaches. An excellent example of strengthening regional innovation strategies through institutional integration of professionalized cooperation coaching.

If regional innovation systems have to be treated as a whole – and that became even clearer when looking at the challenges of implementing smE-MPOWER in a region – communication with the political stakeholder becomes of paramount importance. After gaining insights into the Key Performance Indicator approach used in Switzerland, a great discussion gave birth to the new shared process of **Regional Strategic Planning** helping political decision makers to understand and position smE-MPOWER in their regional framework.



Process of implementing smE-MPOWER in a regional innovation framework

Interest was expressed by several participants in the planned coaching training and accreditation scheme. This will be piloted and rolled out during 2009 and offered together with more opportunities to join the community.