

INCONEXT

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EXTERNAL Evaluation Plan

Work package: **WP 6**
Evaluation & Quality Assurance

Responsible Subcontractor: **Multidisciplinary European Research
Institute Graz (MERIG)**

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Background

Evaluation processes are getting more important in recent years. This is not only manifested by the growing number of publications about evaluation and quality assurance processes in general but also by the requirement of contractors for the implementation of such mechanisms. Evaluation and quality assurance (QA) can have different characteristics reaching from the formal requirement to be certified according to certain ISO standards to the requirement to commit to more informal quality standards and evaluation processes. In the field of vocational training also certain standards and norms have been introduced like DIN PAS 1032-1¹ or the new ISO/IEC 19796-1 norm.

On a general level for evaluation processes four basic requirements can be outlined²:

- Usefulness: e.g. clearly defined evaluation goals, demands of “users” of evaluation results;
- Feasibility: e.g. realistic planning concerning methods, time, costs; diplomacy in evaluation processes etc.;
- Fairness: e.g. respect of standards of how to deal respectfully and fair with evaluation “objects” and
- Accuracy / Exactness: e.g. production and arrangement of valid results addressing the evaluation questions, aims and targets.

It is a clear requirement of the European Commission that funded projects plan evaluation and quality assurance processes. But it is more than only a requirement: Evaluation processes are important instruments to ensure and improve quality of processes, products and results and should be seen as supporting measure to projects irrespective of evaluation as internal or external process (or both).

According to a suggestion in the Survival Kit for European Project Management³ evaluation processes shall:

- Simplify the consultation process within the project partnership;
- Predict the development of the project and prepare the project team for pressure points in the course of the project life span;
- Assist the project coordinator in quantifying results and relating these to the project objectives;
- Reduce the workload of writing the final or interim report.

¹ DIN Ref. Nr. PAS 1032-1:2004: “Learning, Education and Training focussing on e-learning – Part 1: Reference Model for Quality Management and Quality Assurance – Planning, Development, Realisation and Evaluation of Processes and Offers in Learning, Education and Training.

² Also the German Association for Evaluation (DeGEval) proposes similar standards for evaluation in the publication: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Evaluation e.v. (ed.): Standards für Evaluation; 2008.

³ Bienzle, H. (ed.): A Survival Kit for European Project Management. Advice for Coordinators of Centralised Socrates Projects; 3rd revised edition; 2004.

In that sense evaluation shall provide very practical and direct support for projects. All partners should be involved in evaluation and quality assurance processes and commit to procedures of critical review and improvement.

- *Primacy of practical usefulness of results!*
- *Provision of assistance for practical challenges!*

External evaluation of INCONEXT

Work package 6 of the Leonardo da Vinci Transfer of Innovation Project INCONEXT addresses quality assurance and evaluation. The work package aims at ascertaining the high quality of the work performed in the project. The project progress and results will be evaluated by a multi-level evaluation concept, consisting of internal and external evaluation elements. The aim of external evaluation of the INCONEXT project is to provide feedback to the work package leader, the International School of Law and Business, the project coordinator and partners concerning the evaluation plan, the project progress, the project interim and final results and the communication within the project.

Even if external evaluation will therefore mainly focus on summative components (i.e. the evaluation of outputs and products) it is also important to follow the project processes and to support also the formative internal evaluation and give feedback to the project management and the consortium.

We use “summative evaluation” not as reviewing the project at the end because feedback which is provided only in the last project months (and this is in most cases the time when the final products are available) does not support the project itself (and so is also not effective during the funding period). Feedback at/after the end of projects supports the improvement of the products in future and therefore is valuable. But the main focus on external evaluation of INCONEXT will be deliverables, products and results which are available during the project implementation stage when interventions can be taken.

According to what was outlined above evaluation is seen as support and counselling mechanism which aims at ensuring good cooperation, high quality of outputs, user orientation etc. In general it is the goal to support the internal evaluator, project management and all partners in ensuring good project performance and to outline improvement potentials. The following items outline general aims of external evaluation of the project:

- Provision of feedback to the coordinator and the project partners.
- Outlining improvement potentials concerning processes, products and results and contribute to improvement activities.
- Raise awareness about quality within the project and support of decision making processes within the consortium and support the effectiveness and efficiency of the transnational partnership.
- Contribute to positive public relations and specifically a clear orientation on requirements of the target group / potential users of the project results.
- And last but not least to support the project that it meets its quantitative as well as qualitative objectives.

Evaluation procedures

This section outlines the specific external evaluation and quality assurance procedures planned in INCONEXT by firstly giving an overview about the responsibilities of the parties in general, than providing a short ex-ante evaluation on risks and evaluation challenges in funded projects and a time-plan for the evaluation activities in the remaining project months.

Responsibilities

MERIG is responsible for external evaluation and will cooperate closely with the project partner responsible for internal quality assurance, International School of Law and Business and the contracting body, Kauno regiono smulkių ir vidutinių verslininkų asociacija - KRASME.

MERIG:

- Preparation of the plan for external evaluation.
- Following the project progress by the documentation provided (meeting minutes, internal evaluation results) and by communication with the project manager and discuss interventions if necessary.
- Preparation of evaluation tools (e.g. questionnaires, checklists and guidelines etc.) and application of the tools in evaluating products and results.
- Feedback to the project coordinator, internal quality assurance manager and the partners.

International School of Law and Business (internal quality assurance manager):

- Close cooperation with MERIG and provision of relevant information.

All partners:

- Evaluation processes can only be successful when all partners are cooperating. This includes providing the requested information completely, faithfully and on time.

Ex-Ante-Comments: Project risks and evaluation challenges

There are numerous risks in projects which are at the same place challenges that can be highlighted by evaluation. The following items outline some classes of risks and a short statement on how evaluation can help to find measures to overcome these challenges:

1. Time plans are too ambitious or deadlines are not met

Most partners who are involved in the INCONEXT project have a long experience in planning and carrying out projects on national or/and European level. This experience will help partners to monitor the scheduling of the activities and to respect the intended deadlines. Internal and external evaluation reports as well as management reports will outline when deadlines are not met and the project management is requested to take appropriate measures which can reach from an extension of the deadline to issue a caution.

2. Methodological obstacles

- How to build a network?
- How to add value? (“No reinvention of the wheel”)
- How to be “attractive” for the target group?

In transfer of innovation projects the main methodological obstacles seem not to be related to the production of a good product – because this should already be the basis of the transfer project. Main challenges for this type of projects are related to how to adapt products to meet best the (new) target groups needs, how to improve products, how to disseminate etc. Thereby it is very important to demonstrate the added value of the project in comparison to the existing products which are the origin of the transfer. The methodological problems mentioned above shall be monitored in the constant qualitative evaluation processes. The review of methodological options will be carried out throughout the duration of the project. Any possible problem emerging in this area will be discussed and solved in the framework of the foreseen evaluation and quality assurance processes (internal, external, monitoring and management).

3. Management challenges related to transnational collaboration and internal communication

Even though such problems are normally given, the composition of the transnational partnership, including a variety of different organisations as well as the activities foreseen by the project will contribute to a progressive strengthening of working bonds and communication channels between the partners. The work plan foresees the recourse to all the possible strategies and technological tools aimed at guaranteeing a fluid and constant communication between the partners. Face-to-face meetings, document sharing, discussions and chat sessions on the project platform, e-mailing etc. are possibilities for interaction which can be employed. However, in case that the external project evaluation processes show problems of communication between partners, the project management will be informed and asked to intervene with specific ad hoc countermeasures.

4. Mismatches of results vs. initial objectives are identified

The project work plan and this specific evaluation plan foresee several moments of evaluation of the achieved results in comparison with the stated objectives. This evaluation will take place periodically during partnership meetings (internally) and with additional evaluative tools and methods. This mechanism will allow the project management

and the partners to refine activities and actions in case the obtained results do not correspond to the objectives of the project. The evaluation of the developed materials (internal evaluation, external evaluation, evaluation with experts and target groups) will provide the necessary feedback and will be analysed in order to improve the project results.

5. Challenges related to the dissemination and exploitation of results

To reach the target group and to disseminate the project results successfully is a key issue of projects. The INCONEXT project plan (work programme) gives a good outline of activities and partners seem to be aware about the high importance of this topic.

INCONEXT evaluation time-plan

External evaluation processes in INCONEXT are addressing (1) the elaboration of the evaluation framework (internal and external), (2) the monitoring of progress and processes and (3) evaluation of the main INCONEXT results. The following plan gives an overview about the different evaluation levels, the time scheduling, aims and methods as well as expected outputs. MERIG will plan the different evaluation steps and will develop and distribute the necessary evaluation forms etc. but all partners are committed to provide information and inputs when requested.

All evaluation results will be communicated to the internal quality assurance manager. In addition to informal verbal and e-mail communication an interim and final report about the results of external evaluation will be drafted, which outlines all main evaluation steps and results.

1. Elaboration of the evaluation framework

When	What	Evaluation aims and methods	Expected outputs
PM6	External evaluation framework	Aim: To elaborate external evaluation guidelines, which outlines single steps, which will be implemented within the project run-time. Method: MERIG will prepare the external evaluation plan and sends it to the internal evaluation manager.	External evaluation plan (= this document).
PM6	Internal evaluation framework	Aim: External evaluator provides feedback and contributes to the elaboration of the internal evaluation framework. Method: Internal quality assurance manager drafts the internal evaluation framework. MERIG provides feedback and assists the elaboration of the internal evaluation plan.	Internal evaluation plan.

2. Monitoring of progress and processes

When	What	Evaluation aims and methods	Expected outputs
Ongoing	Deadlines Period under review: (PM1-PM12) (PM13-PM24)	Aim: To provide feedback to the internal quality manager and also to the partners. If deadlines have been met they will be assessed against the initial work-plan and the detailed work plans drafted during the project. Method: Feedback will be provided via informal communication with the project management and the internal evaluator and reported in the interim and final report of external evaluation.	Feedback to the management and contribution to the interim and final report.
PM13 PM24	Interim and final internal evaluation report	Aim: To assist the internal evaluation manager when elaborating the interim and final internal evaluation reports. Method: MERIG will assist ISLB by providing feedback to the elaboration of the interim and final internal evaluation report.	One interim and one final internal evaluation report (result 27 and result 28).
PM13 PM24	Interim and final report of external evaluation	Aim: To summarise all results as well as clear recommendations about possibly necessary measures and steps as well as hints supporting medium to long term project impacts in the interim and final report of external evaluation. Methodology: Summarisation of external evaluation activities, performed within the reporting period. This task will be performed twice - at the interim and final project stage.	The external evaluation results will be summarised in two reports. (October 2011 & September 2012).
PM16	Participation in one partner meeting (Rome 12/2011)	Aim: To learn about the work progress and to provide feedback to the consortium from an external perspective. Method: MERIG will attend one partner meeting and interview consortium members based on an interview guide.	Report summarising the results of the interviews performed at the Rome meeting.

3. Evaluation of the main INCONEXT outputs

When	What	Evaluation aims and methods	Expected outputs
PM23	Impact Study (R5)	Aim: To provide feedback about the quality of the impact study. Method: The external evaluator will give feedback to the internal quality assurance manager and work package leader.	Written feedback based on the product assessment sheet.
PM9	Training needs analysis report (R10)	Aim: To provide feedback about the quality of the training needs analysis report. Method: The external evaluator will give feedback to the internal quality assurance manager and work package leader.	Written feedback based on the product assessment sheet.
PM16	Updated and amended training material (R11)	Aim: To provide feedback about the quality of the updated and amended training material. Method: The external evaluator will give feedback to the internal quality assurance manager and work package leader.	Written feedback based on the product assessment sheet.
PM13	E-learning platform (R13)	Aim: To provide feedback about the quality of the E-learning platform. Method: The external evaluator will give feedback to the internal quality assurance manager and work package leader.	Written feedback based on the product assessment sheet.
PM7	Project website (R19)	Aim: To provide feedback about the quality of the project website. Method: The external evaluator will give feedback to the internal quality assurance manager and work package leader.	Written feedback based on a usability checklist for websites.
PM24	USB stick	Aim: To provide feedback about the quality of the USB stick. Method: The external evaluator will give feedback to the internal quality assurance manager and work package leader.	Written feedback based on the product assessment sheet.
PM24	Project e-book	Aim: To provide feedback about the quality of the project e-book. Method: The external evaluator will give feedback to the internal quality assurance manager and work package leader.	Written feedback based on the product assessment sheet.