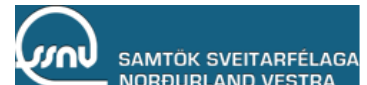




Developed by Dr Niall O’Leary, Head of the
Hincks Centre for Entrepreneurship Excellence at
Munster Technological University.

Created by the partnership of:



Deliverable D3.3.1 Report on demonstrations in each country.

Contact: Enquiries to Niall.Oleary@mtu.ie

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Purpose

These pilot actions as part of work package 3 tested how robust, research-backed methods for supporting business success can be translated into a **practitioner-ready process** that works across sectors, regions, and types of SMEs. The aim was to move beyond ad-hoc business advice and equip advisors with a repeatable way to help clients achieve *success*.

What was tested

Across five sequential pilots in Finland, Ireland, Finland again, Iceland, and Norway, the project tested:

- Whether evidence from large-scale entrepreneurship research could be operationalised into daily advisory practice
- How three core approaches—**Milestone Mapping, Structured Validation, and Proactive Implementation**—perform with real SMEs
- How the methods could be adapted across national contexts while maintaining their effectiveness

Methodology

Each pilot applied and refined the same underlying structure:

1. **Milestone Map** – SMEs were guided to define clear goals, work backwards to identify critical milestones, and visualise causal relationships and assumptions.
2. **Structured Validation** – Key assumptions from the milestone map were systematically tested using appropriate methods (e.g. interviews, pilots), strengthening decision quality beyond typical Lean Start-Up practices.

Delivery evolved iteratively. Early pilots focused on testing and streamlining content. Later pilots emphasised scalability and usability, including a shift from slide-based delivery to a **collaborative MIRO board**, enabling shared visibility, peer learning, and clearer next steps.

Main conclusions

- Advisors can reliably guide diverse SMEs using a **single, structured process** without over-customisation
- Visual milestone mapping significantly improves clients' ability to reason about strategy and assumptions
- More rigorous validation leads to better decisions and fewer wasted resources
- A collaborative, digital format increases engagement, accountability, and peer learning

- The programme consistently attracted a **more gender-balanced applicant pool** than typical SME supports

Joint solutions emerging

The pilots resulted in a **validated, advisor-ready WP3 methodology**, now formalised in this handbook, including:

- A shared framework for delivering **Strategic Clarity** to SMEs
- Practical tools and facilitation guidance for each of the three proven approaches
- A reusable, visual project journey that supports both advisors and clients
- A scalable model that partners can embed into existing business support programmes

Value for end users

For advisors and support organisations: a proven, evidence-based process that works across contexts and reduces uncertainty in client support.

For businesses: a clear understanding of what success looks like, how to achieve it, and what to do next—turning ambition into focused, sustained action.

The progression for the pilots in Work Package 3 Target Circular was incremental and learned from each of the previous pilot. The first such pilot occurred in Finland in the second half of 2023, or period 2 of the project, and used the materials that was developed in the bridging project, SSDM. The second pilot ran in period 3 of the project at the start of 2024, and in addition to the materials in SSDM, included methods from freshly published research and also streamlined the methods from SSDM. There was therefore a divergence in methods developed and used in Finland and in Ireland in period 2 and 3.

In period 4, the methods that were used in Ireland were taken and adapted to the Icelandic context and were implemented broadly unchanged. The fifth pilot in the fifth period of the project occurred in Norway and entailed the partner with an existing program adapting the program from Iceland, which in the end was about 80% from Iceland and about 20% using existing methodologies from Norway.

The final pilot also transitioned from using PowerPoint slides to using a collaborative MIRO board, which turned out to be much more effective and visually appealing, allowing for participants to see how their project is progressing and what they are going to do next, and as well to see what their fellow participants were doing so that they could gain inspiration and offer guidance to each other. This also allowed a bit of friendly competition and was a great benefit to the project overall. As we progressed through the five sequential pilots, each pilot added and informed the development of the materials and resulting in a much more robust validated program by the end of the fifth pilot, which had been tested with SMEs across the NPA. We noted also that the program had a lot more women apply to it than typical in many Norway and Ireland.