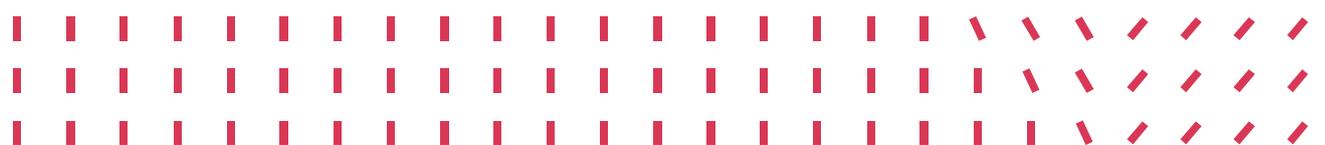


Qualitative study on the perception of Innosuisse's innovation projects by SMEs

Summary of the report for the attention of Innosuisse

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Summary

I Objective and method

The study examined how the number of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) submitting an application for an innovation project to Innosuisse could be increased. By means of 46 qualitative interviews, promoting and inhibiting factors were analysed. SMEs with approved or rejected applications were surveyed, as were companies that had not applied previously. Start-ups were not included as part of the survey.

I Key findings

Awareness and perception: Innosuisse is not well known among SMEs (average score of 3.5 out of 6; or 2.4 among non-customers). Even SMEs that are experienced with respect to funding applications usually only know of one funding instrument. Information is primarily obtained via research partners; the website is hardly used. Innosuisse has a good image among the SMEs surveyed, with the SMEs attesting to Innosuisse's high level of professionalism. In some cases, however, Innosuisse is also perceived as bureaucratic and primarily geared towards large companies.

Innovation projects: Awareness of the support offer is rather low (average value below 4 out of 6). Innosuisse is also said to have a high added value, however. From the perspective of SMEs, Innosuisse's financial resources enable high-risk innovations and alleviate R&D costs. Barriers cited include the high outlay needed to fill in the application, a lack of resources, and dependence on the research partner. Funding conditions and evaluation criteria are considered clear and comprehensible, but cash contributions and own contributions are burdensome for small SMEs.

Innovation behaviour: Innovation is of great strategic importance to the SMEs surveyed (average score of 4.9 out of 6). Incremental innovations dominate, while radical approaches tend to be rather cost and risk-intensive. Especially for the latter, Innosuisse funding can be a decisive factor for implementation. Innovation projects are usually in the mid-six-figure range. Market entry and market implementation after the successful completion of an Innosuisse project are a major challenge for many of the SMEs surveyed (scaling, marketing, funding).

General conditions: Economic developments or difficult conditions, such as the high US tariffs in force when the interviews were conducted, have different effects: For some of the SMEs, difficult conditions provide an

incentive for innovation. For others, they act as a brake, since cost-cutting measures become necessary. Competition is unanimously seen as a driver of innovation.

I Recommendations

Based on our findings, we are making the following recommendations:

- *Recommendation 1:* General awareness of Innosuisse as an institution and of the support offer in particular should be increased. This is especially true for SMEs that engage in incremental innovation and innovation outside of technical and scientific industries. In doing so, more emphasis should be placed on face-to-face communication and communication via corporate networks (associations, interest groups, regional networks).
- *Recommendation 2:* Target group-specific communications are needed in order to increase awareness among SMEs with little engagement in research.
- *Recommendation 3:* The willingness of SMEs to make their projects more visible is to be used for target group-specific communications.
- *Recommendation 4:* Funding conditions and evaluation criteria are to be retained in principle.
- *Recommendation 5:* Specific direct funding should be considered for certain SMEs.
- *Recommendation 6:* The possibility of low-threshold and individual advice for SMEs that are not aware of Innosuisse and its offering at all should be examined. Innovation mentoring can serve as a starting point for this, but should be better publicised.
- *Recommendation 7:* Support from Innosuisse in connection with innovative spin-off companies should be examined more closely.