SELF-EVALUATION WORKBOOK FOR LOCAL ACTION GROUPS

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FOREWORD

Regional development programmes introduced project activities as a key development tool in the mid-1990s. Thousands of development projects, financed via different programmes, are currently in progress in Finland. The quality, impacts and effectiveness of these development projects are subject to intensive debate, and the need to evaluate programme activities and projects has become increasingly urgent.

Evaluation at programme level is carried out on the basis of programme-related legislation, while the evaluation of projects is voluntary and is based on good practice. Programmes and projects, which have previously been evaluated by external parties, are now increasingly being evaluated by people who are themselves involved in the activities in question. Self-evaluation refers to the planned collection and analysis of information on selected themes and matters and the drawing of conclusions in order to support the monitoring of project activities.

This self-evaluation guide is designed for use by Local Action Groups as a workbook and background material when they draw up self-evaluation plans and evaluate their activities. The guide includes basic information on and theoretical background to the evaluation of projects and the evaluation logic. In the workbook section, attention is paid to the matters to be considered in the self-evaluation process. A collection of useful self-assessment tools is also included in this guide.

This self-evaluation guide was drawn up as support material for the evaluation training seminars that I have organised. This material is being continually developed as an Internet-based version (www.lande2000.fi). I would like to thank everyone who has been involved in this process. I would especially like to thank Maisa (from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry), who supported and inspired me in this challenging work.

Kajaani, 3 April 2003

Heimo Keränen

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1 SELF-EVALUATION IN GENERAL

1.1 Programmes and projects – the operating environment for evaluations

Project activities became a key regional development tool for Finnish regional planners when regional policy programmes were introduced in Finland in 1994 and when Finland joined the EU at the beginning of 1995. The nature of the regional planning system changed dramatically: from then on, almost anyone has been able to contribute to regional development and to influence regional decision-making processes by participating in project activities. This practice will continue at least until the end of 2006 on the basis of the current programme-based action model. Programming and related project activities are also important aspects of the work of Local Action Groups, which is financed from the national POMO programme and Objective 1 and ALMA programmes, as well as the Leader+ community initiative. The extensive rural development work, which is carried out within these programmes, has also created a need for self-evaluation. This publication aims to support self-evaluation work by presenting a self-evaluation model and providing a workbook (see also Keränen 2001).

1.2 The objects of evaluation are always related to projects or project cycle management

A project refers to a unique group of activities carried out by a specific organisation in order to achieve a specified objective. The extent, quality and schedule of the project activities and the related costs are pre-determined. A regional development project refers to a project that is launched to carry out programme-based development work, for example a programme of a Local Action Group. Figure 1 below shows the structure of a project and the parts of the project that can be evaluated:
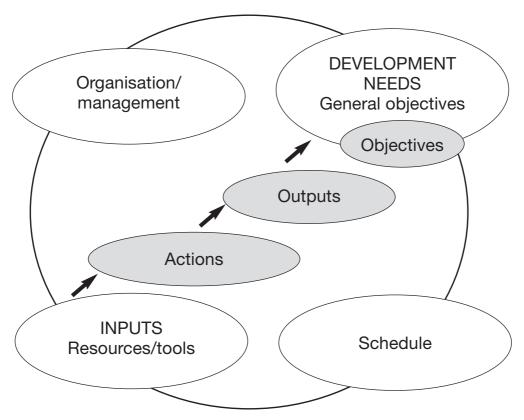

Figure 1. Project scheme and the process from inputs to objectives: all parts of the project and their relationships can be evaluated.

1. Development needs and objectives and their interconnection;
2. The structure of the organisation and management during the project or programme process;
3. Resources/inputs;
4. Actions taken, outputs and their impacts (on the target group);
5. Schedule.

In practice, a programme is divided into dozens, or sometimes even thousands, of projects. The interface between a programme and a project, which partly helps in implementing the programme, also includes factors that can be evaluated. This interface is shown in different phases of the project cycle. A project cycle refers to the way in which projects are planned so that they meet the programme's objectives. In a development model based on programming, programmes are implemented in a continual process that consists of projects. This process is called a project cycle. A project cycle can be described as a sequence of **programming**, its **financing** and the **impacts** that are to be made. This sequence is, in practice, implemented by carrying out projects. Therefore, the impacts of an entire programme are achieved by implementing individual projects. All individual projects go through the following phases of the project cycle:

1. Idea generation phase, during which the project idea is adjusted to the objectives of the Local Action Group's programme.
2. Project planning, carried out mainly by the applicant.
3. Preliminary evaluation, carried out by the financier and the administrators of the programme.
4. Financing decision, made by the chief financier (on the basis of the Local Action Group's proposal).
5. Implementation and monitoring, carried out by the party implementing the project (usually the applicant).
6. Evaluation of the implementation process, its effectiveness and/or impacts, which can be carried out by the applicant (self-evaluation), the financier, an external party or all of these together.
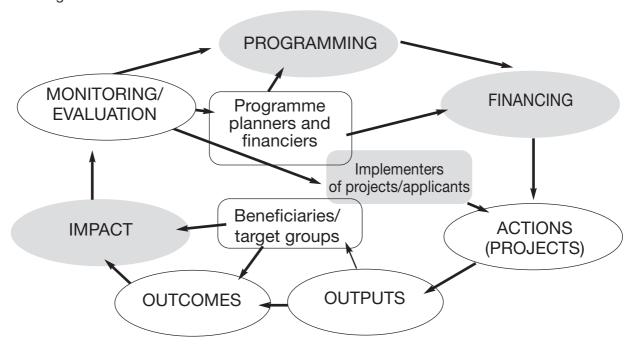

Bild 2. Relationerna mellan programarbetet, dess resurser och påverkan samt olika organens roller inom projektcykeln

2 THE THEORY OF PROJECT EVALUATION

2.1 What is evaluation

The term 'evaluation' has been defined in a number of ways, each of which emphasises different aspects of evaluation. The following are some definitions of 'evaluation' in accordance with the EU's programme evaluation guides (e.g. European Commission 1999):

- *"A critical, independent review of the objectives and the means of achieving them."*
- *"A study of whether or not the legal, administrative and economic methods used in a programme or project have made it possible to produce the intended effects and to achieve the objectives that have been set for the programme or project."*
- *"A process the objective of which is to determine, as systematically and objectively as possible, the appropriateness, efficiency and impact of each action with relation to its objectives."*
- *"The systematic application of the measures taken during a social study to the assessment of conceptualisation, design, implementation and the use of public programmes."*
- *"Independent, objective examination of the background, objectives, outcomes, activities and means used in order to learn a lesson from matters that may be applicable in a wider context."*
- *"The assessment of public interventions on the basis of their outcomes, impacts and needs."*
- *"The assessment of the significance of a project or programme."*

The methodologies of evaluation research have mainly been developed in the 1960s and 1970s, although their origins have been traced to the early 20th century. In the beginning, evaluation methods were used as planning and cost-accounting tools. Operations analysis and cost-benefit analysis were integral parts of the programme budgeting system and comprehensive planning, which were introduced in the 1960s. Today, the evaluator plays a versatile role in programming. An external, independent researcher and evaluator has turned into an active developer of operations. **Interim evaluation plays a particularly strong role as a supporter of operations in programme-based development**.

Evaluation research is always tied to the situation. The local operating environment must always be taken into account when operations are evaluated. In practice, this means that a separate evaluation setting must be created for each programme or project. The construction of an evaluation model should be based on a comprehensive view of the evaluation target. Successful evaluation requires careful planning, the management of evaluation methods and data collection techniques, the utilisation of several evaluation perspectives, a user-driven approach and clear reporting.

2.2 Evaluation is based on a general evaluation framework

The common programme theory forms the theoretical evaluation framework; the theory can be divided into a programme process and a theory of impacts. From the perspective of a project, this division can be understood so that an individual project and the activities performed during the project form a system of their own, a project process that leads to different outputs, outcomes and impacts.

When projects are implemented and evaluated, it is important that we are able to identify the **operating environment of a programme and an individual project**. An operating environment refers to the economic and social region or framework in which the project is implemented. It can be assumed that the designers and implementers of an individual project are able to

understand and foresee, for example, the future development of their own field of activity and to design the project accordingly from the beginning. However, the situation is more problematic when more than one project is carried out at the same time in the same region, perhaps even for the same target group.

The theoretic perspective on project evaluation can be specified using a programme-based evaluation framework. When a programme or project is evaluated, the following aspects are usually considered (Figure 3):

- **Relevance:** How significant are the programme's objectives with relation to the development needs of the target region and the selected focus areas at local, national and EU level?
- **Efficiency:** How efficiently, in economic terms, do the inputs yield outputs and outcomes?
- **Effectiveness:** How well do the programme's impacts fulfil the special and general objectives that were set for the programme?
- **Utility:** How well do the programme's impacts fulfil the target group's development needs?
- **Sustainability:** How sustainable are the programme's positive impacts when the programme ends?
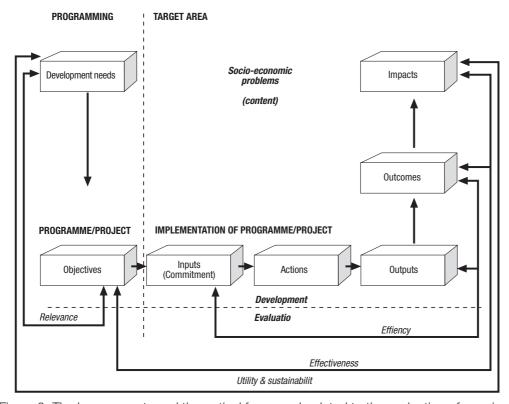
Figure 3. The key concepts and theoretical framework related to the evaluation of a regional development project or programme (Nagarajan et al. 1997).

The evaluators of a project or programme usually work to establish two facts: will (or did) the planned action help to achieve the objectives that were set previously, and what kind of processes and methods are (or were) used to achieve the objectives?

Evaluation research can be defined as the systematic collection, analysis and interpretation of information on the implementation (process), outcomes and impacts of programmes or projects **from selected perspectives**, so that those interested in the programme or project in question can assess **selected aspects** of its implementation and impacts. According to the current paradigm (the paradigm of selection) of evaluation research, different methods (e.g. quantitative or qualitative) can be applied to different situations (e.g. Keränen 2001).

According to Keränen (2001), the objective of evaluation, as part of programme-based development work, is the internal development of project work and the collection of feedback that can be used in programming and future projects. A key characteristic of this project cycle is a learning process in which the development organisation (or network) continually develops its own activities on the basis of experience obtained (cf. evaluation connected to decision-making). The learning process improves the quality of project activities, cycle after cycle. Information and experience cannot accumulate in this manner, for example, if the development organisation and personnel keep changing.

Interim evaluation has a clearly special objective in programme and project activities: **Evaluation helps to implement the programme and the projects that are part of the programme so that their objectives can be achieved**. Evaluation is carried out also to provide more information, experience and insight that can be utilised when the programme or project in question is implemented. Therefore, evaluation is a **tool** that can be used to both direct the activities of a programme or project and increase their efficiency. Evaluation should be considered as an indispensable part of a programme or project. The following three aspects must almost always be considered in the evaluation process:
1. Objectives and the extent to which they meet the development needs;
2. The quality, efficiency and control of project implementation and the way they are monitored (including indicators);
3. The outcomes of the programme or project and their impacts on the target group.

One of the most important development objectives of the monitoring and evaluation of regional-development projects is their increased effectiveness. Impacts refer to the permanent or long-term changes that are in accordance with the project's development objectives. However, projects have certain "input impacts" even before the long-term impacts are discernible. The input impacts are due to the use of resources (inputs) in the project and the direct effects of the launching and carrying out of the project. Projects can also have side effects, either favourable, if they support the achievement of objectives, or detrimental (Keränen 2001).

2.3 The evaluation type is selected in accordance with the project phase: preliminary, interim or post-evaluation

There are usually three types of evaluation: preliminary, interim and post-evaluation. Different types of evaluation have clearly different objectives, so that they are not mutually exclusive and do not replace each other. The connection between the phasing of a project and of its evaluation (evaluation types) can be simplified so that the roles of preliminary, interim and post-evaluation are clarified (Figure 4).
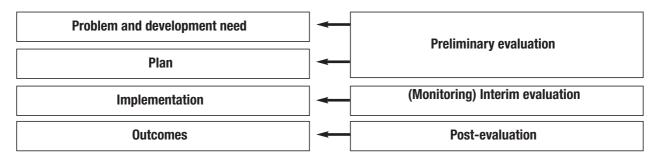

Figure 4. Interrelations between project implementation and evaluation (Keränen 1999:13).

The quality and effectiveness of a project can be evaluated **beforehand, during its implementation, and afterwards**. The expected effectiveness of a project is always evaluated beforehand, in the project design phase, and the results of this evaluation are directly used in the design analyses. Design analyses are carried out, for example, to assess development problems and bottleneck factors, and the objective of preliminary evaluation is to select the development objective so that the project has maximum impact on development. Interim evaluation is carried out, and activities are monitored, in the project implementation phase, while post-evaluation takes place when the project has ended. Local Action Groups usually evaluate their own activities when the project is being implemented in order to support the monitoring of the project.

The key objective of **interim evaluation** is to help control project activities. Interim evaluation should be integrated into the work of the steering group and the project team. Interim evaluation provides information on whether the project progresses as planned and whether the project's objectives can be achieved.

Therefore, the project's decision-making bodies and management must have access to the results of the interim evaluation at least when decisions on future activities are to be made. In large projects, at least, interim evaluation should be considered as a **process** during which the evaluator provides expert assistance and support to the project when the project is in progress. In small projects, interim evaluation can be carried out, for example, as a one-off cross-sectional study.

The most important objective of interim evaluation is to provide the implementers of the project and those responsible for the project with information on the project's progress in both relative and absolute terms. Recommendations on necessary changes can be given on the basis of interim evaluation. This opportunity to receive feedback should be considered in the project design phase, for example so that interim evaluation is scheduled as one action to be taken during the project.

It should be noted that any evaluation carried out during a project can provide only a preliminary assessment of the project's permanent or long-term impacts. At best, interim evaluation can help to correct previous estimates on the basis of additional information and experience. The immediate outcomes of a project as such should not be directly interpreted as permanent or long-term impacts, partly because not all results are sustainable in the long term. Projects often have clear positive outcomes that may become less evident or even disappear when the project ends. Therefore, rather than aiming at quick impacts, the implementers of projects should work to guarantee that development continues when the project ends and, if possible, that the project produces a snowball effect.

Post-evaluation refers to the evaluation of the project when all the actions have been taken, usually some time after the project. A separate study can be conducted to evaluate the impacts of the project. The purpose for which the information obtained during the evaluation is to be used in future development work determines the type of evaluation method to be used. Post-evaluation is mainly carried out to gain a critical general view of the role that the project has in a certain development sector or environment. The results of post-evaluation can be used in the planning of a possible follow-up project. Post-evaluation should usually not be carried out by those involved in the project.

2.4 Self-evaluation or external independent evaluation?

Projects (or, in the case of interim evaluation, project processes) can be evaluated in two main ways: either by an external party or as part of the project implementation and monitoring pro-

cess. Evaluation can, therefore, be divided into external evaluation and internal evaluation, or self-evaluation. In self-evaluation, attention is not paid to the independence of evaluation; instead, the perspective from which the self-evaluation is carried out, the methods used in the self-evaluation and the systematic use of evaluation data are the main considerations.

External evaluators are expected to provide comprehensive and critical information on the project. Therefore, external evaluators are usually not connected to the project that they are to evaluate and are independent of the party that commissioned the evaluation.

 The following requirements should be laid down as a minimum for external evaluation (e.g. Keränen 2001):
● Evaluation generates information at specified intervals; the evaluator may be available as an expert also between the times when the results are reported.
● The issues or themes to be evaluated are determined in the assignment and should not be changed during the evaluation, at least not considerably.
● Evaluation is usually based on quantifiable material (material generated when project activities are monitored, as well as material acquired by the evaluator).
● Evaluation compares the project with the operating environment; external evaluation should provide a comprehensive picture of the situation, at least in some phase of the project.
● Commonly used evaluation techniques are mainly applied, so that comparisons can be made.

In practice, self-evaluation can be backed up or complemented by evaluating also specified project sections. These partial evaluations are purchased externally.

2.5 The evaluation targets and viewpoint determine how the results can be utilised

Evaluations can be divided also on the basis of their targets. For example, an entire project is a typical evaluation target. In this case, a total comprehensive evaluation weighed in a specified manner can also be carried out.

A total evaluation refers, in practice, to the evaluation of all parts and dimensions of a programme or project. Total evaluation is the most extensive and the least accurate form of evaluation. Although the evaluation task should always be defined before the evaluation is carried out, a total evaluation usually covers certain "obligatory" items (objectives at different levels) and special themes, depending on how they are recorded in the project plan.

A partial evaluation of a project can be carried out if a total evaluation is not required for some reason. Partial evaluation and total evaluation can also complement each other, and they can even be carried out at the same time. Examples of the most typical targets of partial evaluation include:
● relevance; the setting of objectives with relation to development needs;

● administration and finances; implementation;

● outputs and outcomes;

● effectiveness.

A thematic evaluation can be targeted, for example, at a special project section or task included in the project plan. Projects that are co-financed by the EU must always address certain special themes, which must be taken into account in project activities. Examples of such themes include environmental considerations and equality.

2.6 A systematic approach guarantees the quality of evaluation

Attention should always be paid to the quality of evaluation irrespective of who carries out the evaluation and what kind of evaluation is carried out. The following common evaluation standards should be used to guarantee a high quality and the evaluability of the evaluation (meta-evaluation):

● *Usability*. The evaluations should be usable, i.e. they should fulfil the needs of each user group to receive information and should be carried out so that the probability of using evaluation research in future increases.

● *Feasibility*. The evaluations should be realistic, reasonable, diplomatic and concise.

● *Ethical acceptability*. The evaluations should be carried out in accordance with the law and taking into account ethical considerations and the well-being of both those who participate in the evaluation and those whom the results will affect.

● *Accuracy*. The evaluation should provide technically valid information on the factors that determine the significance or results or the target programme.

3 THE FORMULATION OF QUESTIONS AND THE SELF-EVALUATION PROCESS

3.1 The perspective and the target must be selected first

A self-evaluation can be **formative** by nature, in which case it focuses on the activity process. The most important question to be asked is: What happens when the process is in progress? This kind of self-evaluation requires qualitative information, so that interviews and observations are the most common ways of collecting data. This perspective is typical of an interim evaluation.

Self-evaluations can also be **summative**, in which case they focus on the outcomes and impacts, and quantitative information is mainly used. The question to be asked in a summative self-evaluation is: What kind of outputs, outcomes and impacts are produced? This approach is typically used in post-evaluations. Post-evaluation often resembles conventional (evaluation) research in terms of the methodology used.

In practice, self-evaluations (particularly interim evaluations) are usually an intermediate form of these two self-evaluation types, so that the basic question to be answered during the self-evaluation could be as follows:

● **How can activities be improved or made more efficient, or how can they yield better impacts?**

3.2 An evaluation process can be divided into four phases

The self-evaluation framework, which helps to outline the self-evaluation plan and the evaluation process, can be divided into the following phases (Figure 4):

Phase 1: The **problems** to be evaluated are identified and the **purpose of the evaluation** determined. At the same time, the **perspective** (process, outcome or both) of the evaluation is decided.

Phase 2: The concrete questions to be addressed are identified and formulated.

Phase 3: The evaluation methods that are available and compatible with the questions identified above are selected, as is the strategy for collecting any additional information that may be required.

Phase 4: The methods for analysing and drawing conclusions are selected.
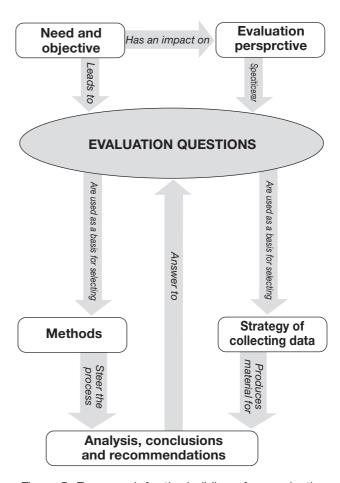
Figure 5. Framework for the building of an evaluation status as a concept map (cf. Robson 2000:123).

From the perspective of Local Action Groups, the above process can also progress in phases (Figure 5) as follows:

1. The Local Action Group or the project group identifies the need to evaluate something, makes the decision to start the evaluation process, and selects self-evaluation as the evaluation method.
2. The Local Action Group draws up the evaluation questions and draws up a preliminary plan to resolve them (for example, on the basis of the model presented in Section 4 of this workbook).
3. The data required for the evaluation are collected.
4. The data are analysed and conclusions drawn by answering the evaluation questions.
5. Activities are changed as required.
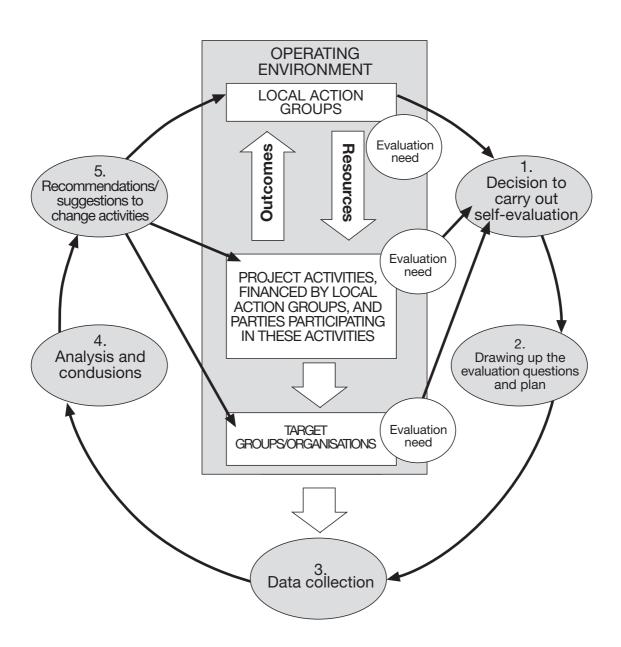
Figure 6. Self-evaluation cycle and evaluation statuses.

4 SELF-EVALUATION MODEL

A self-evaluation consists of four successive phases, each of which can be re-checked and specified during the process.

1.
SELECT THE EVALUATION STATUS
AND FORMULATE THE EVALUATION QUESTIONS
Determine the perspective and target of evaluation and the evaluation questions, draw up a preliminary evaluation plan.

2.
COLLECT EVALUATION MATERIAL, CARRY OUT OBSERVATIONS
Acquire material for evaluation as efficiently and effectively as possible. The evaluators' own material based on observations brings added value to the evaluation.

3.
ANALYSE THE MATERIAL
Pay equal attention to all the aspects that the material reveals.

4.
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
Answer the evaluation questions that were brought up during phase 1 on the basis of the material, analyses and other expertise that is available.

Note. The next four sections (Sections 4.1 to 4.4) of this book present the evaluation phases in a workbook-like manner. The sections can be photocopied, for example for use by the evaluation group.

4.1 Determining the evaluation status and formulating the evaluation questions

The objective is to

1. dentify and determine the idea, objective, utilities and perspectives of the evaluation as well as the relationship between evaluation and monitoring (i.e. answer the question: why do we evaluate?);

2. identify and determine the main evaluation targets (i.e. answer the question: what do we evaluate?);

3. identify and formulate the concrete evaluation questions that have to be answered and determine the criteria according to which they are addressed.

The following questions related to the planning and preparation of evaluation will help to formulate the evaluation questions:

1. What is the purpose or objective and extent of the evaluation?
2. What is the evaluation perspective (evaluation of the process or outcomes or a combination of both)?
3. What kind of matters should be evaluated (administration, finances, efficiency of operations; equality, environmental considerations; interesting phenomena or questions, defects, deviations from plans; factors that promote or hamper processes; success stories, failures...)?
4. What exactly are the questions the evaluation should answer (see Figures 1, 2 and 3)?
   – Are the objectives realistic and based on correct facts (problems, challenges, needs)?
   – What mechanisms promote or hamper project work or programming?
   – Are the activities of different parties efficient or do they promote the achievement of impacts?
   – How should things be (difference between reality and the target situation)?
5. How will the standards related to the quality of evaluation be taken into account (usability, feasibility, ethical acceptability, accuracy)?
6. How will the evaluation results be used?
   – Amendment proposals and recommendations (evaluation can fulfil the technical role of a consultant)?
   – Generation of new information and understanding (evaluation can fulfil the conceptualising role of a researcher)?
   – Generation of an independent opinion (evaluation can fulfil the independent role of a judge)?

The toolkit below includes a list of different evaluation methods and tools that can be used. The methods written in boldface can best be applied to the determination of the evaluation status and the formulation of the evaluation questions, while those written in italics can also be used.

Tool kit	Appendix no	Applicability
SWOT analysis	**1**	**Commonly used, easy**
Logical framework approach	**2**	**Versatile, fairly difficult**
Assessment table	3	Easily applicable to meet different needs
Mind map	*4*	Easy, can also be drawn up alone
Types of data collection and questions	5	Generally applicable
The OPERA method	*6*	Efficient, requires a skilled leader
Focus group	*7*	Fairly difficult, requires a skilled leader
Expert panel	8	Difficult, requires a lot of resources
Benchmarking	9	Requires a lot of effort
Brainstorming and the CONCERT method	*10*	Easily applicable

The first phase progresses as follows:

1) Nominate a small workgroup (4 to 6 people) to draw up the self-evaluation plan.
2) Identify the main evaluation needs, determine the perspective and extent of evaluation (including the methods, schedule and all the resources required for evaluation).
3) Select and determine the targets of self-evaluation.
4) Select the main evaluation questions, which can be determined (also by a larger group) on the basis of a SWOT analysis, the logical framework approach, assessment table or checklist, or possibly some other common groupwork method (see the attached toolkit for suitable tools).

The evaluation planning process should at least generate the **evaluation questions,** which must also be specified, for example as follows: Will co-operation with other projects that serve the same target group be efficient, or can results be achieved efficiently otherwise? **The first phase should produce the following outputs without which the project can be neither planned further nor implemented:**
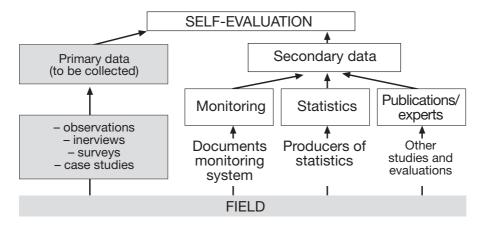
1) Evaluation perspective and the themes or items to be evaluated	
2) Evaluation questions which the evaluation should answer	
3) Indicators and criteria for the evaluation questions, with which the status of the object and the change can be assessed.	

(Appendices 4, 9 and 10 are based on the following source: http://WWW.redcross.fi/osku/tyokalut/).

4.2 Collection of evaluation material

The objective is to

- identify all available material that can be used to answer the evaluation questions (e.g. material based on monitoring, statistics and other studies and evaluations; see Figure below);

- clarify the kind of data that must be collected (on the basis of the evaluation questions);

- estimate the reasonable extent of data collection, taking into account the resources that are available.

Questions related to the collection of material and observations:

1. Who will participate in the evaluation (e.g. the target groups of projects; project personnel and the steering group; the Local Action Group and its bodies; financiers and other co-operation partners)?
2. How will the points of view of different participants be considered in the evaluation (motivation and role)?
3. What qualitative and quantitative materials are available or can be collected?
4. What indicators and methods can be used in the collection of data that is relevant to the evaluation question?
5. How can the different partners benefit from participating in the evaluation process? What problems can they face in the process?

What ethical problems can arise during the collection of data (consent, privacy, confidentiality)?

The methods written in **boldface** are best applicable to the data collection phase, while those written in italics can also be used.

Toolkit	Appendix no.	Applicability
SWOT analysis	1	Commonly used, easy
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Brainstorming and the CONCERT method	10	Easily applicable

Phases according to which material is collected:

1) Check the project's own material (e.g. material based on monitoring), estimate its applicability.
2) Check other material that is available (plans, previous evaluations of a similar type, studies related to the theme in question), estimate its applicability.
3) Determine the evaluation questions so that the need to collect additional data can be determined and specified and the data collected. Examples of methods that can be applied to this phase include the mind map and the relevance tree (see Appendix 4). Methods that can be used in data collection include (to a realistic extent) the systematic analysis of monitoring documents, discussions, observations, surveys and interviews.
4) Select the target groups from which data are to be collected.
5) Identify and solve all ethical problems that may be related to data collection.
6) Inform the target groups from which data are to be collected of the purpose of data collection, the rules and the ethical principles according to which the data will be used (confidentiality). Collect the data.

Output required for the analysis phase:

1) Identification of all applicable **material that is already available**: collection of analyses, for example from monitoring material and statistical data as well as different publications (e.g. other evaluations).	
2) **Material to be collected:** plan for the collection of material based on observations (voice recordings, videos...); interview models for individual and group interviews (structured); questionnaires and the strategy for their distribution and collection.	
3) Determine the **schedule**, nominate the **persons responsible** for collecting the material.	

4.3 Analysing the material

The objective is to

● analyse the material (compile summaries) so that it can be interpreted and correlations revealed.

Preparatory questions related to the analysis:
1. What tools and expertise can be used to process quantitative material?
2. How will qualitative material be processed?
3. How will the material be summarised and the observations (preliminary results) presented?
4. To whom will the results of the analysis be presented and who will draw up conclusions and give recommendations on the basis of the analyses?
5. Who will carry out this work phase or will this work be outsourced to an external expert?
6. What is the realistic schedule for the analysis?
7. Will the preliminary results and materials be in the public domain or be confidential and to what extent?

In addition to the tools listed in the toolkit below, written either in **boldface** or in italics, the following tools can be used to analyse the data:

● spreadsheet software (e.g. Excel) and special software based on statistical analysis methods (e.g. SPSS)

● the description and analysis of qualitative material (e.g. coarse classification of observations into different themes separate for each evaluation question).

Toolkit	Appendix no.	Applicability
SWOT analysis	1	Commonly used, easy
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Benchmarking	9	Requires a lot of effort
Brainstorming and the CONCERT method	10	Easily applicable

Phases according to which analysis is carried out:

1) Edit (e.g. by coding) both the quantitative and qualitative data so that they can be easily understood and processed.
2) Represent the basic data that were collected and are related to the evaluation questions in a comprehensive manner.
3) Select the most interesting facts from the material, summarise them and represent them in an easily understood manner.
4) Present
    – an overview of the material;
    – various interesting, "surprising" findings;
    – correlations and causal relations.

The following output is required for the work to continue:

1) A comprehensive, systematic **analysis of the collected data** and their content in a form that can be easily understood.	
2) The most important results/findings presented in an easily understood manner, e.g. clear figures, tables or classifications.	

4.4 Conclusions and recommendations

The objective is to

- answer the evaluation questions that were brought up in the first phase;
- interpret the material and its relationship to the reality that it describes (e.g. the project's operating environment) as objectively as possible;
- summarise the key conclusions so that concrete **recommendations** can be made in order to improve the project, programme or processes;
- **conceptualise** the findings that have been revealed and that have become readily understandable during the evaluation process so that lessons can be learned from the evaluation.

Questions that can help to draw up conclusions and make recommendations:
1. In what forum and by whom will the results of the analysis be discussed and the conclusions and recommendations made?
2. What work methods will be used in this last phase of the evaluation process?
3. The following basic alternatives can be used:
4. Someone is nominated to prepare a presentation that is discussed, at least, by a group of experts.
5. A special expert panel is nominated (see Appendix 8) for this job.
6. How will the recommendations be put into practice?
7. How will the results, conclusions and recommendations be communicated internally and externally?
8. How can it be guaranteed that lessons will be learned from the evaluation process?

The toolkit below includes a list of the evaluation methods described in the appendices. The methods written in **boldface** are best applicable to the last evaluation phase, while those written in italics can also be used.

Toolkit	Appendix no.	Applicability
SWOT analysis	1	Commonly used, easy
Logical framework approach	*2*	*Versatile, fairly difficult*
Assessment table	3	Easily applicable to meet different needs
Mind map	4	Easy, can also be drawn up alone
Types of data collection and questions	5	Generally applicable
The OPERA method	6	Efficient, requires a skilled leader
Focus group	*7*	*Fairly difficult, requires a skilled leader*
Expert panel	**8**	**Difficult, requires a lot of resources**
Benchmarking	**9**	**Requires a lot of effort**
Brainstorming and the CONCERT method	10	Easily applicable

Phases according to which conclusions and recommendations are made:

1) Select the appropriate working method that suits the nature of the evaluation, draw up a meeting or action programme for the final phase.
2) Nominate an evaluation group (e.g. a steering group, expert panel, possible benchmarks, etc.) or an individual expert to make the conclusions.
3) Make conclusions on the outputs of the previous phases and answer the evaluation questions that were asked when the process started.
4) Formulate realistic recommendations with the implementer of the programme or project. Raise other lessons learned from the evaluation, if necessary.
5) Present the results of the evaluation in an appropriate form to the selected target groups.

Outputs that make the evaluation relevant and useful: :

1) Conclusions and their reasoning Recommendations and instructions for their implementation	
2) Other lessons learned (e.g. findings that may have an effect on people's attitudes) and new evaluation needs and questions that were identified during the process.	

5 CONCLUSION

The role of evaluations will increase in all sectors of society and particularly in all development sectors in the future because of a reduction in the hierarchical control of operations and increased networking. The need for evaluations, as presented in this document, will be increased also because programme-based work and development are on the increase and projects have become increasingly common.

In programming and project activities, evaluations are used to support operations, i.e. monitoring and management, or to improve the way projects are carried out. The primary objective of evaluations is often to identify technical ways in which operations can be improved quickly. However, evaluation also enhances understanding and familiarity with different projects, their effects and interaction mechanisms. Therefore, it can be claimed that self-evaluation is a cost-efficient, quick way of improving the quality of operations.

This self-evaluation model will be developed and updated as an Internet version. All comments and development suggestions are welcome; please send them directly to me (heimo.keranen@oulu.fi). This material is freely available at www.lande2000.fi. For additional material concerning this theme, visit the following Internet address:

- http://www.kake.oulu.fi/henkilot/keranhe.htm

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SWOT ANALYSIS (COMBINED WITH INTEREST-GROUP ANALYSIS

The SWOT analysis is a strategic analysis that can efficiently be used simultaneously with the interest-group analysis. A SWOT analysis is usually used as a tool for development and evaluation work, for example in the evaluation of the current state and activities of a target group or a group of players. The acronym SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats, which form the sections of a four-cell grid. The idea is to start by filling those sections in a creative manner. Critical discussion of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats is allowed in the next phase, in which selections are made and further strategic actions agreed upon. The members of a group can each fill in the cells of the four-cell grid on their own, for example, after which the results are discussed in the group and a single common opinion is agreed upon. The analysis can be carried out also in pairs. The interest groups that are affected by the evaluation or development work should be analysed before the SWOT analysis is carried out.

INTEREST-GROUP ANALYSIS
(Identify the groups of players and the target groups that are the most relevant for the purposes of the evaluation.)

 –
 –
 –
 –
 –
 –

SWOT ANALYSIS
(Use brainstorming to generate as many ideas as possible for the following four-cell grid.)

Strengths (which can be built on)	**Weaknesses** (which must immediately be corrected)
– – – – –	– – – – – –
Opportunities (which can be benefited from in the future)	**Threats** (which must be considered when planning future actions))

LOGICAL FRAMEWORK APPROACH

The evaluation of the different parts of a project will be easier if a logical framework of the finished evaluation plan is drawn up. The framework helps to check the links between objectives and the quantifiability of the objectives and to identify possible risks. The logical framework approach is an efficient method of identifying the objectives of a project and the methods with which they can be achieved, as well as the links between objectives and methods. This makes it possible to link a project logically to a more extensive context (programme) via general objectives. A project plan that has been prepared logically is an entity in which

● *certain **resources** are indispensable and justified in order to be able to carry out certain tasks;*

● *the implementation of these **measures** yields certain outputs;*

LINK TO THE PROGRAMME'S OBJECTIVES			
GENERAL OBJECTIVES	Impact indicators	Sources of information and the methods with which the impacts are checked	
SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES	Outcome indicators	Sources of information and the methods with which the outcomes are checked	Assumed links between the specific and general objectives
OUTPUTS	Output indicators	Sources of information and the methods with which the outputs are checked	Assumed links between output and specific objectives
ACTIONS	Inputs, or the required human and physical resources	Costs	Assumed links between actions and outputs

the outputs contribute to the achievement of the project's special objective when outcomes are achieved. The project's specific objective supports the general objective, which is linked to the programme's objectives, i.e. the target impacts of the programme.

ASSESSMENT TABLE

| No	Evaluation status	Question	Conclusion / evaluation question
1	Need → Objective	Appropriateness: do the objectives meet the needs?	
2	Objective → Resources	Sufficiency: can the objectives be achieved using the specified resources?	
3	Resources → Actions → Outputs	Efficiency and smoothness of activities: are the activities of high quality and efficient?	
4	Objective → Output → Outcome → Impact	Outcomes and effectiveness: does the output yield the required outcomes and impacts?	
5	Objective → Actions and policies	Compatibility: is the strategy correct?	
6	Impact → Need	Utility: is the need fulfilled or the problem solved?	

MIND MAP
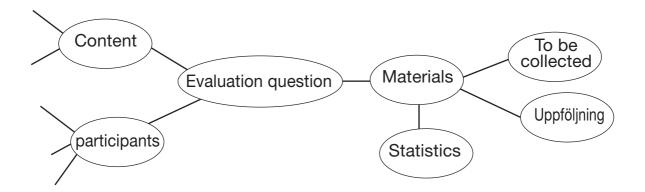
The association map, or mind map, is an efficient tool that can be used almost whenever activities have to be planned. The mind map is a good starting point particularly for small groups, for example when there is a need to discuss a matter or problem extensively or when a matter is raised for the first time. The construction of a mind map does not take long, but it quickly produces an easily understandable overview of the thoughts, emotions and associations that are related to the theme in question. The mind map can be used as a tool for the planning of an evaluation or for idea generation. Mind maps can be constructed alone, in pairs or in small groups.

The materials required for constructing a mind map include a flip chart, paper or a throwaway sheet (used as a large worksheet) and felt-tip pens of different colours. You can also draw up the worksheet with a computer (using special mind-mapping software).

A mind map can be further edited into a concept map or a relevance tree, in which extensive concepts are specified and logically divided into sub-concepts so that the theme discussed is presented in a structured manner.

How to create a mind map:
1. Define the subject clearly.
2. Write down the main idea, or the theme, in the centre of the paper and draw a circle around it.
3. Ask the group members to generate ideas that the main word brings to their mind, and write down the words, associations and ideas around the main word on the paper. Ask everyone to think creatively. You may want to record different groupings of ideas with a different colour for the sake of clarity. Continue to generate associations in a creative atmosphere as long as new ideas emerge. Note! Do not judge or hold back ideas!
4. Stop recording when the group is no longer able to generate new ideas or insights.
5. Complete the work by assessing the output and select the issues that will be processed further.

TYPES OF DATA COLLECTION AND QUESTIONS

Interviews (individual and/or group interviews) and surveys carried out with questionnaires are the basic tools used to collect data. Interviews can be either unstructured or structured, while surveys are usually structured. Questions can be open-ended (e.g. suggestions) or closed (e.g. multiple-choice questions). The general criterion for including a question in an interview or questionnaire is that the question must help to elicit answers to the evaluation question (see Robson 2000).

1) Questions that specify background information on the respondent:
   – Basic information covering demographic data, e.g. age, socio-economic status, family size, education, ethnic group;
   – Special information that may be relevant to the evaluation.

   Only include the information that is relevant to the evaluation questions. Consider whether to include other questions that may be of importance. The questions must not be confusing or concern matters that are too personal.
   Applicability: This information may be applicable to all evaluations, i.e. to the evaluation of needs, processes, impacts and efficiency.

2) Questions that specify the way in which a programme, project or process is implemented in reality:
   – Evaluation of the implementation of a programme or project and of the possible differences between plans and realised activities.
   Applicability: This information is mainly applicable to the evaluation of processes but may also be useful in other types of evaluation.

3) Questions that specify customer satisfaction:
   – Evaluation of perceived changes from the customers' perspective;
   – Evaluation of the extent to which the customers' needs were fulfilled.
   Applicability: This information helps to evaluate impacts (together with other, more objective indicators) and needs but may be useful in many kinds of evaluation.

4) Questions that specify how the programme, project or activity could be improved:
   Applicability: This information is applicable to all evaluations*.*

Examples of different types of questions:
1   (quantity): Proportion of the project that has been implemented to date: _____ (% of total financing used).
2   (open-ended): Can you mention a few concrete outcomes that the project has yielded to date?
3   (opinion): To what extent have the following aspects hampered the carrying out of your project?
   1=not at all, 2=to a slight extent, 3=I don't know, 4=to a moderate extent, 5=to a great extent.

	1	2	3	4	5
Not "speaking the same language" as the financier					
Poor communication within the project					
The steering group plays a primarily formal role					

THE OPERA METHOD

The OPERA is a workgroup method developed by Innotiimi Oy. This paper presents one application of this approach, which can be used to process a subject matter and examine it from different points of view. This method is particularly applicable to problem-solving and to the elimination of alternatives and solution models during the work process.
The materials required for the OPERA method include an OPERA Workboard, paper and felt-tip pens of different colours. A flip chart and self-adhesive notepaper can be used instead of an OPERA Workboard. This work method requires a skilled leader and an inspiring environment in which the workgroup can work without interruptions.

The phases of the OPERA method
1. The problem or subject matter that is to be processed is defined.
2. At first the members of the group work on their own, writing down 5 to 10 ideas or suggestions concerning the given topic. Each idea or suggestion should be written on a separate piece of paper.
3. The workgroup is divided into pairs, which compare their suggestions and select four that they consider to be the best.
4. All pairs present their best suggestions briefly to the other group members, and the suggestions are posted in groups on a wall. The suggestions are not discussed with the group in this phase.
5. The pairs then discuss the suggestions of the entire group and select four suggestions that they consider to be the best. Each pair marks their favourites with a pen.
6. The suggestions that gained the most votes are processed further, while the other papers are removed from the wall (but are kept for possible future reference).
7. The shortlisted suggestions are grouped by theme and discussed with the entire group. Another vote is conducted if the number of suggestions must be reduced.
8. The groups of suggestions, which are presented on a flip chart or wall, are processed further by discussion. A concrete action plan is drawn up, and a new OPERA cycle is carried out, if necessary. (The OPERA approach can optimally be applied three times: first to identify the problem, then to generate alternatives, and finally to produce solutions.)

A	B	C	D	E

FOCUS GROUPS

The focus group approach is, in practice, an inexpensive data acquisition method, a semi-structured interview, which is very useful in group work. It generates qualitative information.

The focus group approach is applicable to the following tasks (Robson 2000):
1) Acquisition of general background information on a specified issue;
2. Formulation of research hypotheses so that they can be examined and tested using quantitative methods;
3. Generation of new ideas and creative conceptions;
4. Identification of the problems related to a new programme, service or product;
5. Specification of products, programmes, services, institutions or other phenomena (which may make it easier to draw up questionnaires or use interviews or other research methods used in quantitative studies);
6. Interpretation of quantitative results that have been obtained previously.

The leader of the focus group is often called the facilitator. His or her task is to steer the group's conversation. Half a dozen issues are selected and transformed into questions. The focus group usually consists of 8 to 12 members, and the group meeting typically lasts 1.5 to 2 hours.

Group interviews bring an additional benefit, because interaction between group members helps to generate new ideas and suggestions. In practice, the quality of information generated by a focus group depends mainly on the skills of the group leader. When leading conversation, he or she should exert discreet control and encourage all group members to participate in the conversation without making the conversation seem artificial. There is the risk that one or two group members dominate the conversation so that more reserved members feel that they cannot speak freely. This may distort the interpretation of the results of this approach.

The main benefit of the collection of data from a group, rather than relying on individual interviews, is that the group method is quick and inexpensive. Its weaknesses are related to the way in which interviewees are selected for the group, as an appropriate sample is commonly used. The results obtained can be generalised only to a limited extent, because they depend on the interaction between the group members and the leader. Therefore, groups that are very similar may generate very different answers to the same questions. The use of the focus group approach is nevertheless recommended in self-evaluations.

EXPERT PANEL

The use of an expert panel is a highly applicable, quick and relatively inexpensive work method in evaluations, particularly when conclusions and recommendations are made. An expert panel should consist of **independent** experts from different fields who specialise in various sectors of the evaluation. The objective of an expert panel is usually to quickly achieve a common view of the conclusions and recommendations to be made on the basis of the material that is available and the analyses of this material. Although expert panels can also be used to identify and formulate evaluation questions (e.g. to target and formulate evaluation questions), they are most efficient when applied to the evaluation of preliminary results.

How to use an expert panel:
1. Make a list of all possible experts that are available.

2. Select 6 to 12 experts from different fields. They participate in the panel only as experts, i.e. not as representatives of different background organisations.

3. Prepare the material and agenda for the panel.

4. The panel meets 3 to 6 times (chaired by the commissioner of the work, for example). Field visits or additional collection of data may take place between meetings.

5. The views of the panel are presented in the form of a report, which specifies the most important conclusions and recommendations.

BENCHMARKING

Benchmarking refers to a way of developing operations by comparing the practices of your own organisation to those of another organisation that functions better. This is not a radically new method, because people have always modelled and compared their actions with those of others. The idea is simply to identify new ideas and to learn from other people and organisations in order to develop your own operations.

However, for benchmarking to be efficient, it must be more systematic than the simple comparison and exchange of experiences. In benchmarking, the first step is to thoroughly analyse your own practices before comparing them with those of others.

Phases of benchmarking

1. **Describe the current state of affairs**
   – Define the area that requires development.
   – Nominate a small benchmarking group.
   – Define the objectives and schedule of the development project.
   – Define the process or problem that is to be developed.

2. **Exchange experiences with the benchmark organisation**
   – Identify possible benchmarks and select the target.
   – Prepare your questions and plan the visit.
   – Visit the benchmark organisation.
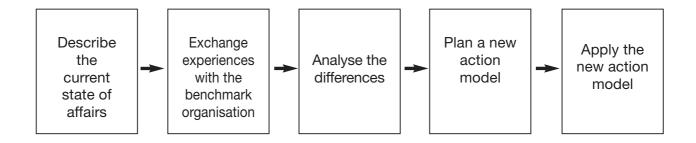
3. **Analyse the differences**
   – Collect and analyse the data and materials that were acquired.
   – Draw up a proposal for a new practice or a solution to the specified problem.
   – Record the results of the analysis and the development proposals.

4. **Plan a new action model**
   – Set new objectives on the basis of the information that was obtained.
   – Draw up an action plan that will make it possible to achieve the objective or to solve the problem.

5. **Apply the new action model**
   – Carry out the development plan.
   – Document and evaluate the results.

Describe the current state of affairs	→	Exchange experiences with the benchmark organisation	→	Analyse the differences	→	Plan a new action model	→	Apply the new action model

BRAINSTORMING AND THE CONCERT METHOD

Brainstorming and the Concert method are creative methods that are often applied in different situations. They are most efficient when the group in question is used to working together and there is a relaxed atmosphere. The objective of these methods is first to generate as many ideas as possible and then to assess them.

Materials used for these methods include a flip chart, paper or a throw-away sheet (for use as a large worksheet) and felt-tip pens of different colours. The meeting should be conducted in a quiet, inspiring location.

Phases of a brainstorming session:

Preparation
1. Select the issue that is to be developed.
2. Nominate a leader and someone to record the ideas. Agree upon the maximum time for idea generation (e.g. 15 min) and the objective of the session.
3. Agree upon the rules of brainstorming. Examples of typical principles that are usually agreed upon: Be as creative as possible. All ideas are permitted and welcome. All ideas are good! No criticising in the idea generation phase. Ideas are assessed and discussed only after the idea generation phase.

Idea generation
4. Everyone is asked to think of a few ideas on their own (e.g. for 5 min) and to write them down on a piece of paper. After that, everyone shares their ideas with the rest of the group, and the ideas are recorded on a flip chart. The ideas are not commented on in this phase, but the participants are free to develop the ideas presented by others further – this is even recommended. When no more ideas are generated, this phase ends.

Further actions
5. The leader or the recorder reads out the ideas that were recorded. The participants can briefly discuss the ideas so that everyone understands them.
5. The group then discusses the ideas in more detail and selects the most viable ideas. A vote can be carried out, if necessary, to rate the ideas.
5. The ideas that received the highest rates or the most support are selected for further processing. Finally, the group agrees upon further actions to be taken and the way in which the ideas are to be implemented and responsibilities divided.

The CONCERT method is an idea-generation and problem-solving tool that resembles the brainstorming method. The CONCERT method (unofficial translation of the original Finnish-language name Tuumatalkoot) is developed by Innotiimi Oy. It consists of the following phases: define the subject / everyone thinks of ideas related to the subject for a while on their own / everyone writes down their ideas or suggestions on large pieces of paper that have been posted on the walls (no discussion in this phase) / the ideas or solutions are assessed when ideas are no longer generated / the participants mark the ideas or suggestions that they consider to be good with plus signs (participants can mark a maximum of three ideas of their own – no discussion at this point) / the ideas that received the most pluses are discussed briefly / participants work independently again and number the three best ideas or suggestions with numbers from 1 to 3 / the group then records 2 to 5 ideas or suggestions that received the most votes on a separate piece of flip paper for further processing / the group is divided into pairs, and the pairs assess the positive and negative sides of the best ideas for 10 minutes / the pairs share their views with the others / finally the most viable idea is selected, for example, by voting. The group then proceeds to discuss practical actions that should be taken.