CONCEPT PAPER: HSKT HUBS

DEFINITION, ROLE AND FURTHER ACTIONS

WP3 - Concept

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1.   The concept of HSKT hubs

Futures by Design aims to further the use of digital tools by SMEs in peripheral regions in the North Sea Region. By adopting digital solutions, businesses are expected to improve internal processes as well as their final products. As such, SMEs improve their competitiveness, in turn strengthening the economic structure of the regions involved. This document outlines the set-up of the HSKT hubs, their organization and also their position within the FBD project.

1.1.   What is an HSKT hub?

An HSKT hub offers SMEs an easy assessment of their 'digital awareness' and it proposes steps to optimize the use of digital tools for the benefit of the SMEs. It does so in three ways:

1) An online tool is provided in which SMEs can assess their so-called data-readiness: To what extent are SMEs aware of the options that digital tools can offer to streamline business processes? The tool is interactive in the sense that it gives feedback to the SMEs about their current position (relative to local and international peers). Also, the tool proposes steps to take to improve their data-readiness.

2) The online HSKT hub also includes a repository that allows SMEs to scan databases that may be relevant for their businesses. It may provide information that can be used in digital tools (e.g. weather info), but it may also be used to gain access to information on the state-of-the-art of relevant technologies (patent databases). The website functions as a portal to freely available open access data, it does not store or gather the information itself.

3) In addition to the online presence, HSKT hubs provide professional support in the form of tailor-made trainings, workshops and/or tutoring to the SMEs. These are aimed primarily at steps that SMEs can take to optimize the use of digital tools and data science in their internal processes.

On the back-end of the website, Futures by Design gathers information on the SMEs involved, for example to be able to provide them with feedback on their relative position compared to their peers. Also, this information is needed to monitor outcomes and results.

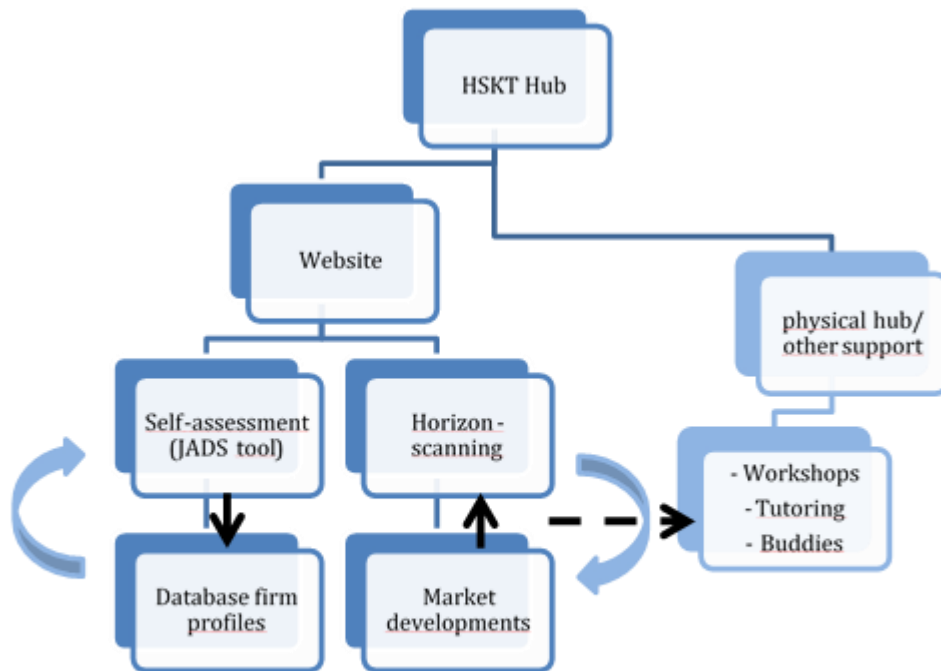Figure 1 visualizes the functions of the HSKT-hub.

Figure 1. Concept of HSKT hubs including all processes and interactions

1.2. Online Presence - data readiness assessment

The primary goal of the online presence of FBD is to provide an easy, freely available platform for SMEs to assess their data readiness. For this a version of the JADS tool 'Data Maturity Quickscan' will be made available on the HSKT website (concept domain is digitize.eu). After the assessment, the website advises on further steps to take, for example by listing local events concerned with digitalization and data science and by providing contact information of the organizations involved. The website is part of the FBD project and it will be available in all FBD-languages (English, Swedish, German, Dutch). It is of course easily opened to SMEs from outside the target area as well, provided they understand the language. A well-working website, in all European languages, is an interesting option to ensure the legacy of the FBD project.

A secondary goal of the website is to gather information from the tool and the SMEs that have filled in the data-readiness assessment tool. The information and the scores on the tool are used to give feedback to the business owners on where there SME ranks relative to other SMEs. For this, the tool is preceded by a short questionnaire asking basic information of the SMEs, including their perceived data-readiness before the test. This can then be used as a benchmark for the result of the actual test. In addition to this, the data-readiness scores as well as the basic firm level information is used to analyze regional and firm differences in terms of data-readiness. Outcomes can inform the partners

involved and regional policies in a more general sense. Also, back-end user information is used to monitor the project outcomes.

1.3.   Online Presence – Dataset repository

Finding the right data to use when implementing data-analysis in day-to-day business decisions can be difficult, particularly as part of the relevant data may be external to the firm. Yet, particularly SMEs that are somewhat further developed in terms of their data-use for business operations may want to access these data for their benefit. For example, the weather may have an influence on sales, so weather forecast data may be used to predict sales. The FDB website is set-up so that it can accommodate an easy access to potentially relevant datasets that are freely available to SMEs.

1.4.   Training and coaching

The online presence of FBD offers the opportunity to reach many SMEs and raise awareness around structured use of data to improve business performance. The website, however, is not suitable to have SMEs engage with the actual nuts and bolts of working with data, not in the least since the digital solution may differ from firm to firm, depending on the data-readiness of the firm as well as the nature and the region of the firm. In addition to the website, FBD provides workshops, trainings and coaching to help SMEs engage with digital solutions. The individual partners will provide the trainings and they tailor the training to the SMEs they are dealing with. The individual results are reported back in the partner meetings of the project so that best-practices can be established. FBD thus does not aim to provide a one-size-fits-all training package.

As part of face-to-face interactions with the business owners, a questionnaire is filled out. Information from the questionnaire is used primarily to monitor results of the project in terms of increased innovation and performance. Also, the information can be used to identify patterns in the data use by business owners.