

ENGAGING SMEs

Barriers and strategies in the engagement of SMEs in support and research projects on energy efficiency

Marta Maia, Axelle Gallerand,
Ivana Rogulj (IEECP)

The engagement of stakeholders in the context of industry has been mostly addressed by research from the business perspective. This work aims to understand how the approaches of projects that support companies with implementing energy efficiency (mis)align with the practices, needs, and ambitions of their counterparts in SMEs.



Barriers to **INTERACTION**

SMEs do not see themselves as important players in the energy transition, therefore they don't show interest in engaging. Additionally, SMEs prefer to collaborate with the usual partners; incapable of starting new interactions, projects struggle to enter that pool of trusted partners.

Barriers to **CO-CREATION**

Projects and SMEs look to co-create diverging types of value. Projects want companies to find value in their offers, but the approach appears to be somewhat tone-deaf: researchers focus on making SMEs see value in their outcomes, instead of focusing on creating the value SMEs are looking for.

Barriers to **ENGAGEMENT**

Seeing direct competitors in the pool of stakeholders drastically increases the transaction costs perceived by SMEs. SMEs also tend to engage more when new regulations come into force - and they expect short-term results, which is not always compatible with projects' long-term work plans.

Strategies for better **INTERACTION**

Chambers and industry associations can be good ambassadors. However, they prevent projects from building their own local networks of “loyal” partners, which would be a better predictor of future successful engagement. Having representatives with practical business experience can also be an advantage.

Strategies for better **CO-CREATION**

Project actors should understand and align their narrative with the general ambitions of the SME segments they seek to engage; they can also find “internal ambassadors” in SMEs who would take on the task of transposing outcomes to their companies’ particular goals.

Strategies for better **ENGAGEMENT**

Support projects must provide comfort for businesses to disclose sensitive data without fearing industrial espionage. Pre-collected and unspecific data could also reduce the perceived transaction cost. Financial awards could also be considered, despite jeopardizing the ethics of collaboration.



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