Progress report of FOCUS GROUP 4 on Better Local Development Strategies (LDS)

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Extended Leader subcommittee meeting Brussels, 23rd November 2011

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Mandate of the Focus Group

European Network for Rural Development

Objectives

- to advise the MS (the current and next programming period);
- to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the LEADER approach.

Operational objectives

- to identify the critical requirements in the design of the Local Development Strategies (LDSs);
- to collect tools and good practices used at LAG level ensuring an efficient implementation of the LDSs.

Co-chairs of the Focus Group

Organisation of the Work Plan

The work of the FG is planned in **2 Phases:**

- Both include an elaboration of a questionnaire and desk research.

- Phase 1 and 2 progress report/outcomes to be presented to Leader subcommitees (LsC) in November 2011 and May 2012.

Organisation of the Work Plan

Phase 1: July to December 2011

"Elaboration of the Local Development Strategy"

Phase 2: December 2011 to June 2012

"Implementation, and Monitoring & Evaluation of the strategies".

PHASE 1 - Work done so far

- **15th June 2011:** 1st preparatory meeting of the Co-chairs in Finland (together with DG AGRI, Expert, CP)

- **7th September 2011:** 1st web-conference of the group

- **Early September 2011:** Circulate Q1 to target groups

- **30th September 2011:** Collecting feedbacks on Q1

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PHASE 1 - Work done so far

- **18-19 October 2011:** 1st face-to-face meeting - Lisbon

- **23 November 2011:** Progress report of the 1st Questionnaires presented to the LsC

LAG Survey Findings

Strategy preparation

- Earliest start 2004, latest 2010

- Typically late 2005/early 2006

- But time and resource issues and delays

- Need for clearer guidance

- Capacity building and LAG continuity

- Maintaining momentum and enthusiasm

Guidance

- **87%** of the LAGs **received guidance, instruction** or other form(s) of direction relating to the **elaboration of LDS**

- **67% -** Had a single application period for the strategy submission

Supporting the process, Training

- **58%** - Some form of training or briefing was provided for LAGs on a collective basis;

- Most common direct support available to individual LAGs was: '**consultancy**' and '**LAG staff resources**'

Strategy scope and definition

- **73%** of the LAGs had a **large or total autonomy to define their area**;

- **72%** of the LAGs had **autonomy to choose their strategic themes;**
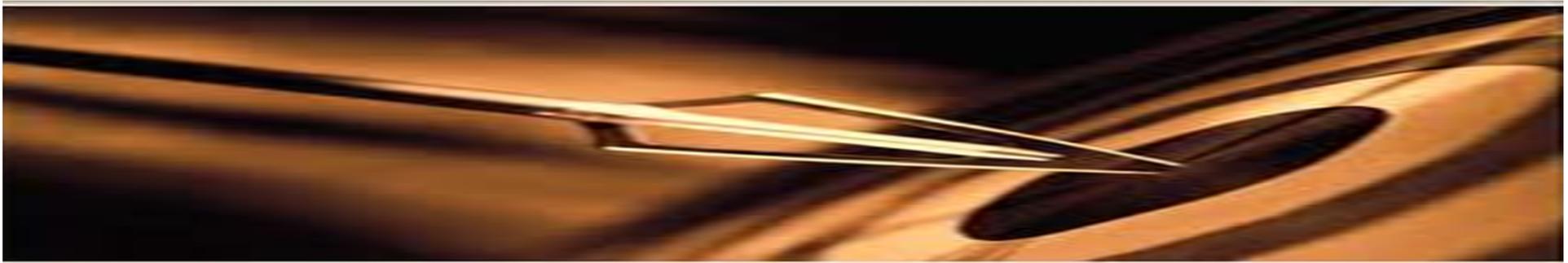
Budgets and priorities

- **58%** - an indicative budget figure was provided.

- **73% -** development of the strategy was driven **largely or totally** by the development priorities of the area rather than by financial considerations as a bid for LAG funding;

Types of involvement

- Local community groups, individuals and staff of local authorities were the **most involved** in taking the formal lead of the development process;

- Participative and public meetings were the methods **most frequently** used.

Content and selection

- **Most essential elements of the LDS :**

Area covered; Territorial SWOT analysis; Intervention logic; Evidence of the community engagement and consultation process; Clear evidence of the Leader features

- **Most essential elements of the action plan:**

LAG structure/composition of partnership; Implementation plan; Financial plan; LAG decision making structures, roles and procedures; LAG functions and operational procedures.
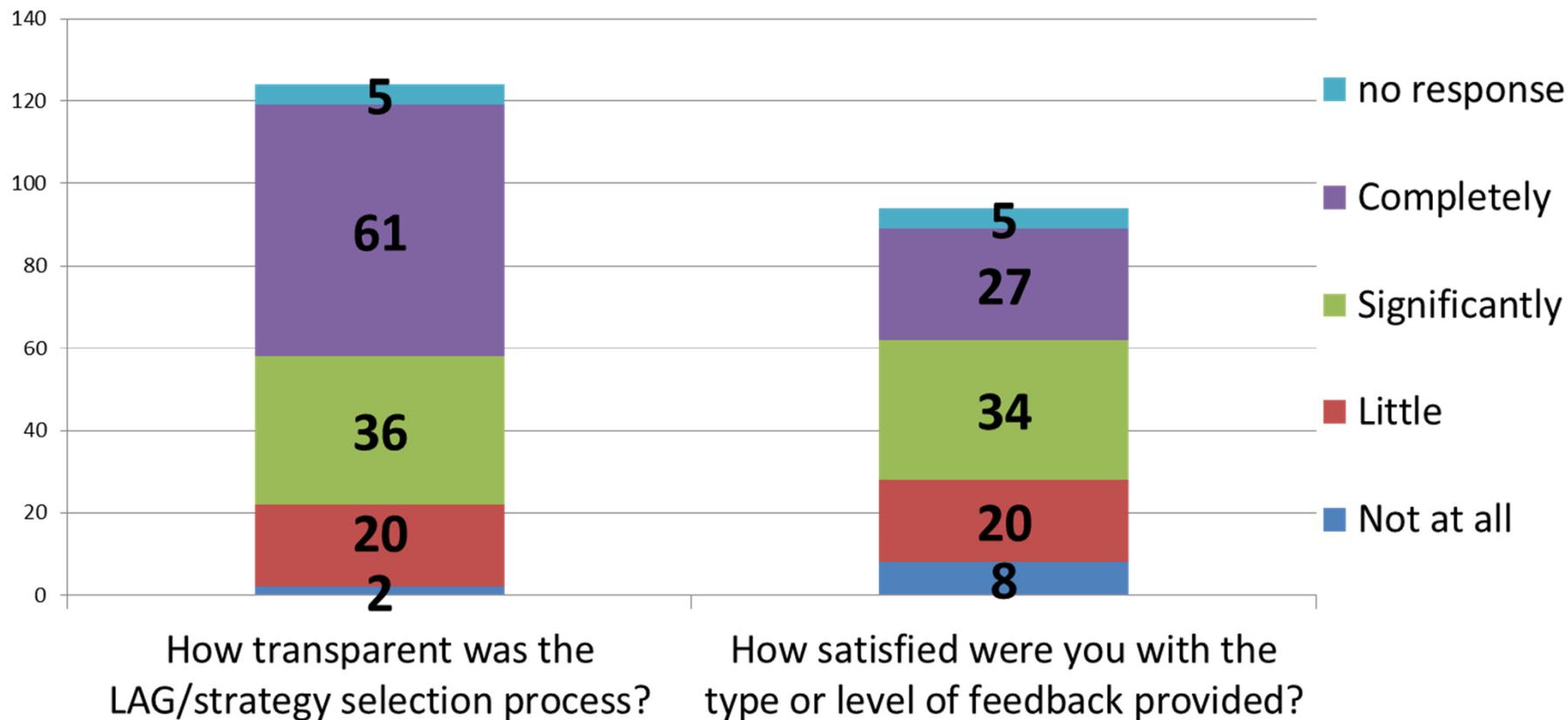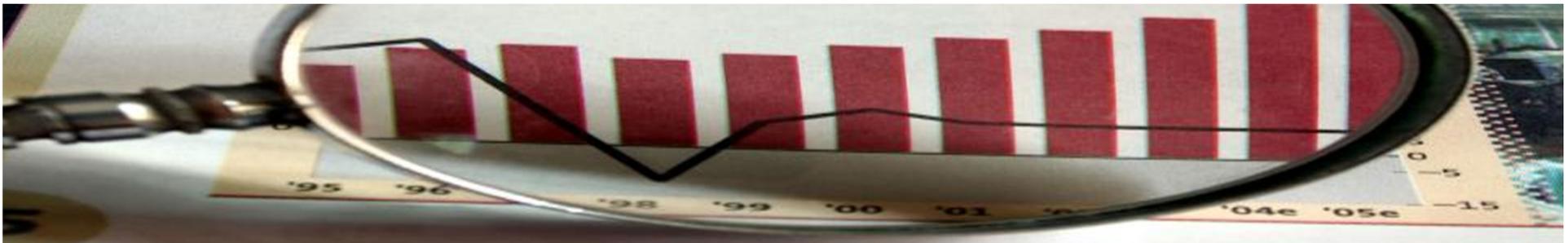
Monitoring and evaluation

- **72%** of LAGs actively monitor their performance against the delivery of the strategy;

- **70%** of LAGs are able to revise the LDS during the programming period;

- **49%** of LAGs are expected to undertake self evaluation.

MA Survey Findings

Guidance

- LAGs received guidance, instruction or other forms of direction – ranges from poor to excellent, from narrow technical nature to wider and more comprehensive including content and method;

- Wider more complete approaches used multiple methods;

- Knowledge transfer is the essential in multi-level governance.

Training

- Very variable but 80% provided;

- Content varied – the best training used practical / iterative approaches;

- In some cases involved experienced LAGs in mentoring;

- Knowledge transfer within programmes less good that it could/should be.

Strategy preparation

- Wide range of start dates;

- Programmes need to be connected;

- Most common: open call for LDS submission;

- Time allowed for LDS submission varied widely, impacted by:

  - New LEADER territory;

  - Recently established LAG;

  - Implementing legislation delays.

- Important to match the different LAG capabilities, time and approach – iterative approach works well.

Strategy submission

- Single or multiple rounds
  - Multiple rounds: resubmissions; lack of familiarity with LEADER approach; large number of LAGs

- Single or multiple stages - Expression of Interest (EoI) with pre-selection (minority -7); other form of pre-selection (minority – 3)
  - strategic priorities
  - delivery capability
  - methodology
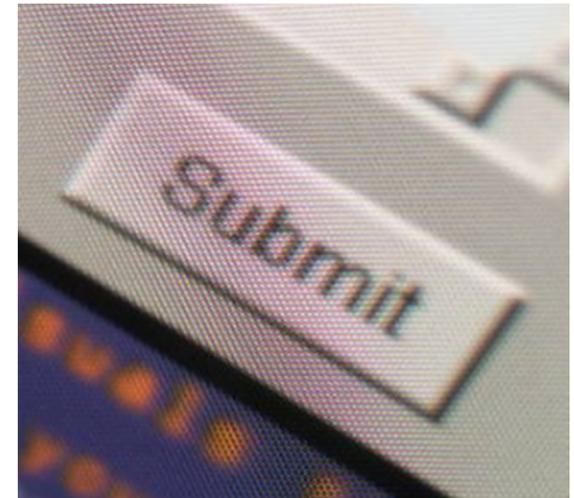
LAG autonomy to define area and themes

Areas:

- LAGs free within given parameters
- High level of success in area definition
- Problems mentioned: lack of critical mass, lack of coherence, external influences

Themes: - More freedom

- 80% free to choose within set of parameters, such as: National and regional RDP and other programmes
- **Indicative Budget** – provided by 60% of the MAs - quality and realism of LDS proposals

Development support

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- Most commonly available:

  - Consultancy

  - LAG staff resources

  - MA Technical Assistance

- LAGs have different needs;

- LAG, MA and partner involvement is critical and an important resource e.g. training and mentoring;

- Little differentiation in support for old and new LAGs

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Strategy and action plan format and content

- MAs specify a format for the LDS - many variations;
- **<u>Strategy priorities:</u>** Area definition, LEADER features and SWOT
- **Gaps**: indicators, targets, SMART objectives, learning from past, innovation-lacks coherence, clarity, consistency.

- **<u>Action Plan priorities:</u>** Specification of main actions, LAG structure, Financial plan
- **Gaps:** training plan was not considered essential

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Strategy selection

- Selection is normally by a committee (members with different backgrounds)

  → Approach not consistent, therefore guidance would be useful.

- Community validation an important selection criterion;

- Transparency of process thought to be adequate;

- Feedback on the submissions was a success;

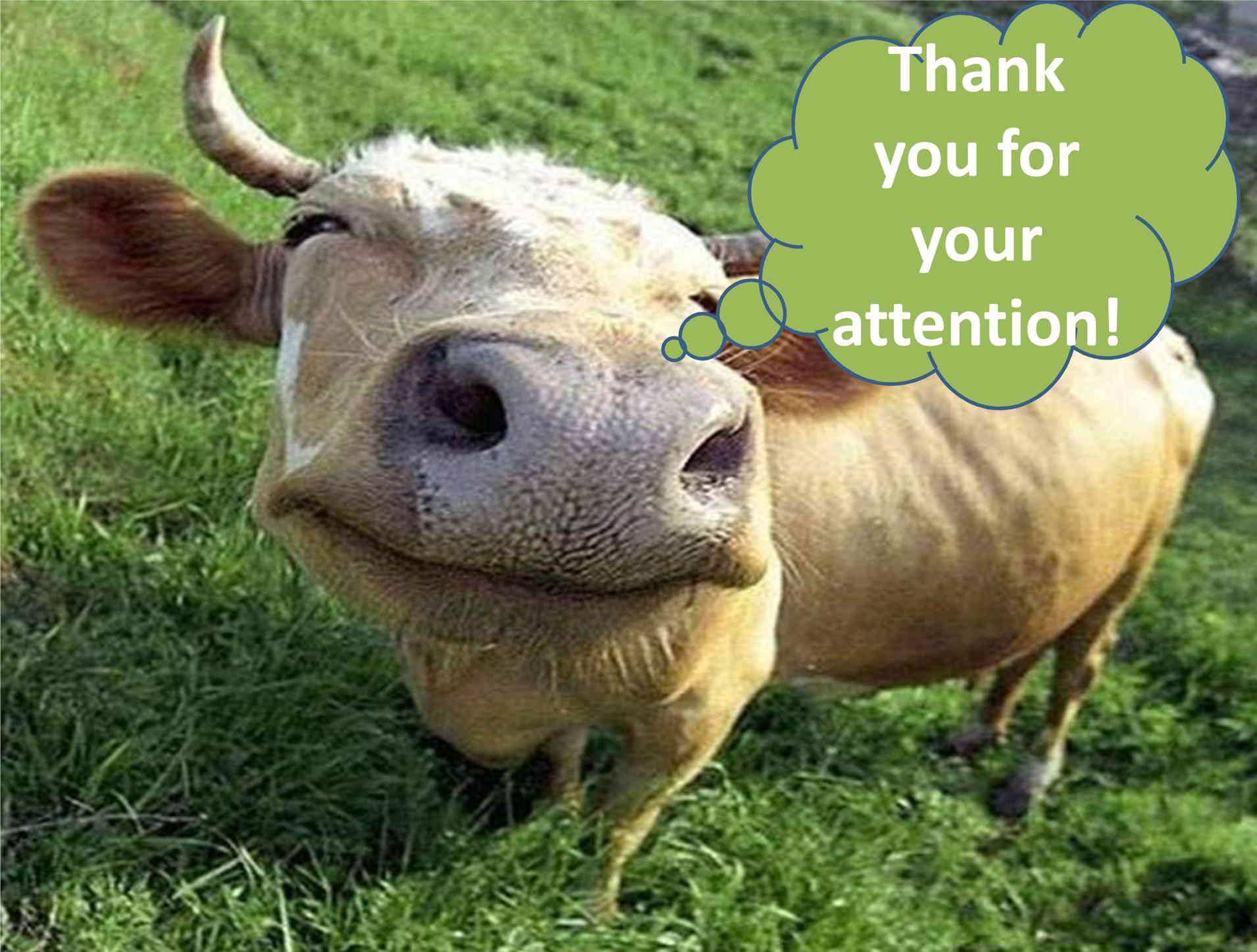- Feedback can contribute to improvement (good multi-level governance practice).

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Monitoring and evaluation

Informative nature for later FG4 work

• 60% of MAs expect LAGs to self-evaluate;

• 60% could not provide specific guidelines;

• Self-evaluation was not mandatory;

• Use of LAG progress reports differentiated:
    - Some are CMEF indicator based
    - Some feed into Annual Progress Report

• Most LAGs can review strategies - wide variations in **scope** (from finances to objectives), **how it is done** and its **frequency** (once or multi annual)