



RESPONSIBLE MED

Component 4: Pilot: Common Methodology and Tool

Action: Pilot Action Report

Appendix H

(to the Common methodology and tool document)

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1. Introduction

The Responsible Med project developed a methodology for assessing the impact of SME CSR actions on their competitiveness, from which a tool to implement this methodology is derived. According to the project proposal the tool was used in a pilot action across the six countries and nine partners of the project. This appendix aims at describing the process followed for the pilot testing of the tool and the consequent evaluation of the tool performance.

Section 2 provides a description of the methodological process followed for performing the pilot action and describes the main stages and activities implemented. Section 3 describes the evaluation considerations and summarises the dimensions used in the evaluation. Section 4 presents the main results of the validation of the Pilot testing of the tool.

2. Methodological process for pilot action

The internal validation of the tool was performed by the project partners and the results were used to generate improvements to the tool. After the production of the public version of the tool, the external validation was performed by SMEs. Every partner generated a report for their regional evaluation following a predetermined structure. The methodological process followed, originally presented in Apospori et al. (2012a), is illustrated in Figure 1. Each of the steps for the validation process was described and scheduled and followed up especially by the lead partner with regular communication. The main activities performed are briefly summarised in the following sections.

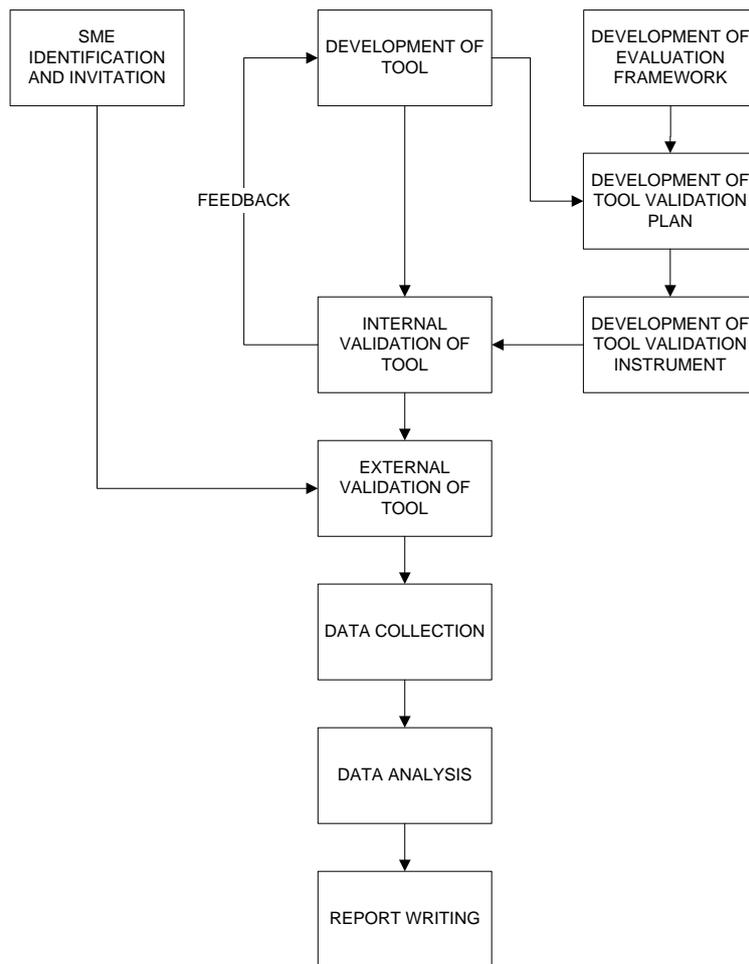


Figure 1. Methodological process for tool validation

2.1. Design of the validation questionnaire

To carry out the validation of the Responsible Med tool, a questionnaire was designed to measure the main attributes of an ICT-based tool to assess the impact of CSR actions on competitiveness and the related functionalities implemented in the tool.

The questionnaire was validated internally by all partners using experts on CSR. The results informed the generation of the final version of the validation questionnaire. Most of the partners validated the questionnaires in their local languages.

2.2. Internal validation of the tool

The internal validation of the Responsible Med tool was carried out by each partner individually, by means of a sufficient number of internal users. The validation was structured based on the same dimensions used in the validation questionnaire, covering the ease of the tool, the simplicity of the input dialogs, the tool interface and the clarity of the content of the items asked.

2.3. Tool improvement

The feedback from the internal validation generated a number of improvements to the tool that were ranked into three categories of importance: i) necessary to implement, ii) desirable to implement, and iii) welcome but not necessary to implement. The necessary improvements and some desirable aspects were implemented in the tool before the external validation by SMEs.

2.4. External validation of the tool

Each partner identified and surveyed SMEs to use the tool and answer the validation questionnaire. SMEs included – but were not limited to – those SMEs participating in the regional surveys that were already familiar with the objectives of the Responsible MED project. The target number of SMEs was 12 per partner.

The external validation combined the use of group workshops with the use of individual tests of the tool by SMEs. Each partner decided the best option to organize their external validation. Generally, the workshops were meant to be a presentation and introduction to the tool in order to later organise individual meetings for testing the tool and finally obtaining the completed validation questionnaire from SMEs.

2.5. Pilot action reporting

The results of the pilot testing of the tool were systematically reported by each partner in a written report, following a pre-defined structure and were discussed during a project meeting. The results of the validation questionnaires were collected and aggregated. A detailed report on the overall results of the validation is presented in Apospori et al. (2012c).

3. Evaluation questionnaire: methodological considerations and indicators

The evaluation of the tool has been formalised with an evaluation questionnaire designed to gauge the acceptance of an ICT tool (Apospori et al., 2012b). According to Davis (1989) there are two major determinants of user acceptance, namely *perceived usefulness* (defined as “the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance his or her performance”) and *perceived ease of use* (defined as “the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would be free of effort”). Within the framework of Responsible MED, the two dimensions are customised to reflect the evaluation of the tool as follows:

- Perceived usefulness refers to the degree to which the Responsible MED tool can support and improve the decision-making process of SMEs with regards to the selection and assessment of the impact of SME CSR actions on competitiveness.
- Perceived ease of use refers to the degree to which the use of the Responsible MED tool facilitates (in terms of effort reduction) the selection and assessment of the impact of SME CSR actions on competitiveness.

These two dimensions are applied to the three main functionalities of the tool, namely CSR maturity check and personalised actions for CSR strategy (Stages 1 and 2 of the Methodology), ex-ante evaluation of the perceived impact of CSR actions on competitiveness (Stage 3), and ex-post evaluation of the impact of CSR actions on competitiveness (Stage 4). The detailed validation questionnaire defined is available in Apospori et al. (2012b). The main sections of the questionnaire are: i) Section A, comprising company demographics and respondent details; ii) Section B, measuring the perceived usefulness of the each of the three above mentioned functionalities of the tool, and iii) Section C, gauging the perceived ease of use of the three functionalities, and iv) Section D, assessing the user acceptance of the tool. The indicators in sections B to D were measured on an ordinal 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Neither agree nor disagree, (4) Agree and (5) Strongly agree).

4. Pilot action and validation results

The main results of the pilot action and validation are presented in this section. A complete version of these results is reported in Apospori et al. (2012c).

The total number of companies testing the tool and completing the validation was 108 at the overall project level. The average number of employees for these companies was 30 and the average turnover was 6,750,000 Euro. Only 25% of the companies had previously performed a CSR maturity check, 5% had carried out an ex-ante simulation and 7% had previously performed ex-post performance assessments. As for respondents profile, they had on average a moderate level of CSR experience (3.06 on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = very low to 5 = very high). The main descriptive statistics of the companies by region are presented in Table 1.

Partner	Region	Country	Companies surveyed	Average size (SMEs only)	Average size (all companies)	Average turnover (SMEs only)	Average turnover (all companies)
ADRAL Development Agency	Alentejo	Portugal	12	42	42	1,360,000	1,360,000
Athens University of Economics and Business - RC	Attica	Greece	12	81	174	12,760,909	53,364,167
Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Marseille	PACA	France	9	45	45	17,250,000	17,250,000
Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Terrassa	Catalonia	Spain	10	42	442	6,187,800	132,991,886
Cyprus University of Technology	Cyprus	Cyprus	12	104	229	16,733,333	46,050,000
Region of Thessaly	Thessaly	Greece	12	7	7	3,895,000	3,895,000
Region of Tuscany	Toscana	Italy	12	53	53	N/A	N/A
Region of Umbria	Umbria	Italy	9	42	42	3,638,573	3,638,573
University of Girona	Catalonia	Spain	20	47	127	8,390,000	31,992,308
Total			108				

Table 1. Main descriptive statistics of the companies surveyed

The validity of the first functionality, CSR maturity check and personalised actions for CSR strategy (Stages 1 and 2 of the Methodology) was assessed gathering the degree of agreement with its usefulness and ease of use, using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree / 5 = strongly agree). The median and mode results for all dimensions are 4, which indicate the respondents' agreement with the usefulness and ease of use of this functionality. The best average result was for the ease of learning this how to use this functionality and the lowest value was for the relevance of the questions. The detailed results are illustrated in Figures 2 and 3.

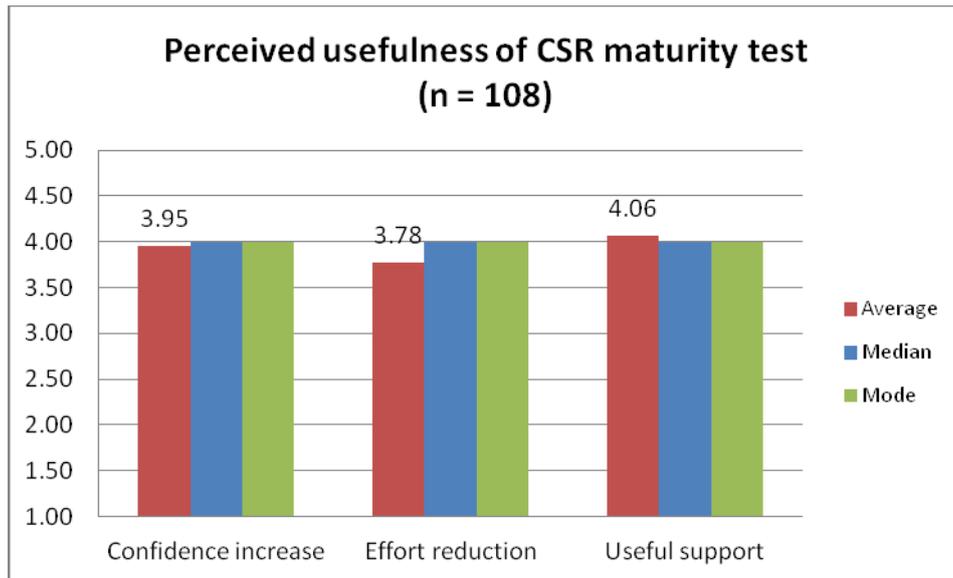


Figure 2: Perceived usefulness of the CSR maturity check

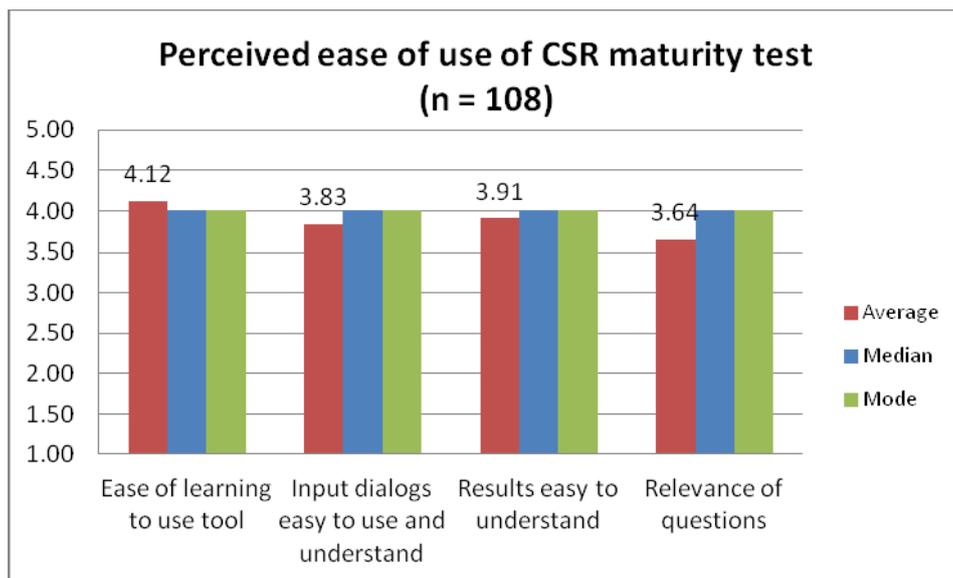


Figure 3: Perceived ease of use of the CSR maturity check

The validation results for the second functionality of the tool, the ex-ante evaluation of the impact of CSR actions on competitiveness (Stage 3 of the Methodology) show median and modes of 4 for all dimensions of perceived usefulness and ease of use (1 = strongly disagree / 5 = strongly agree). This indicates the agreement of respondents with the usefulness and ease of use of this functionality. The highest valuation is for the useful support for performing a competitiveness-cost analysis of CSR actions. The lowest score is for the effort reduction that it offers. The detailed results are illustrated in Figures 4 and 5.

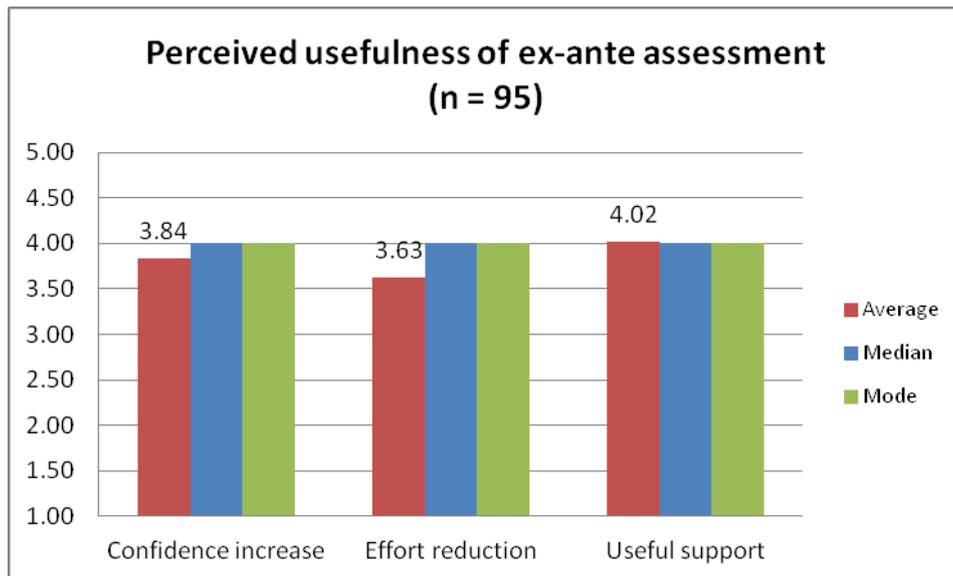


Figure 4: Perceived usefulness of the ex-ante evaluation of the impact of CSR actions on competitiveness

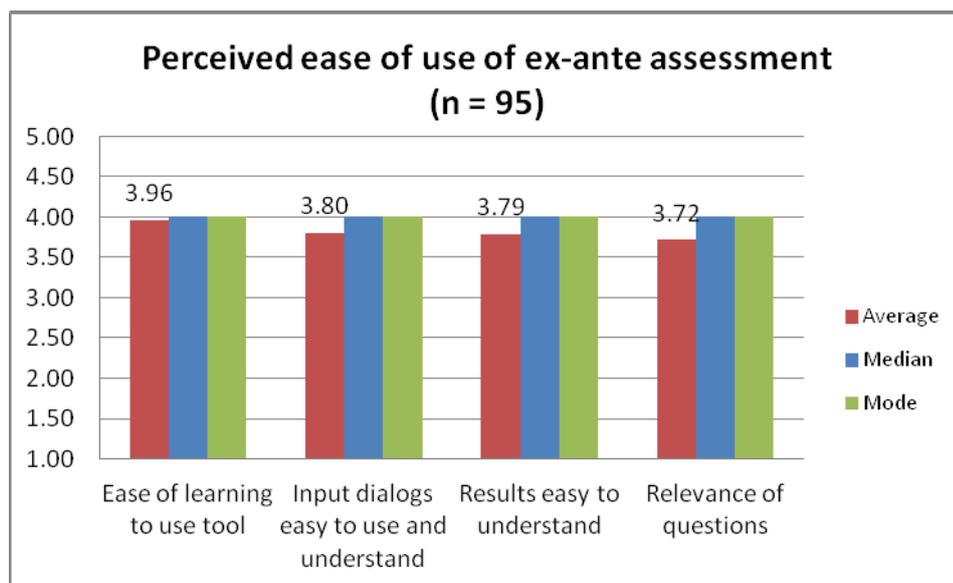


Figure 5: Perceived ease of use of the ex-ante evaluation of the impact of CSR actions on competitiveness

The validation results for the third functionality of the tool, the ex-post evaluation of the impact of CSR actions on competitiveness (Stage 4 of the Methodology) presented medians and modes of 4 except in the case of effort reduction produced by using this functionality, with a median of 3.50, and relevance of the questions, with a median of 3 (1 = strongly disagree / 5 = strongly agree). Although the average results for this functionality are lower than for the previous ones, they are significantly greater than 3, which indicates more agreement than disagreement with the usefulness and ease of use of this functionality. The detailed results are illustrated in Figures 6 and 7.

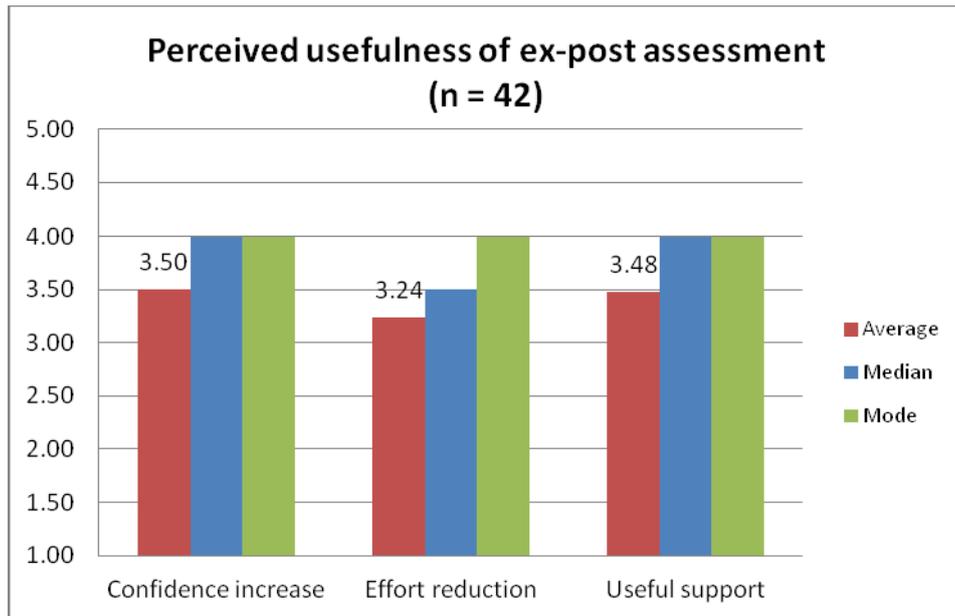


Figure 6: Perceived usefulness the ex-post evaluation of the impact of CSR actions on competitiveness

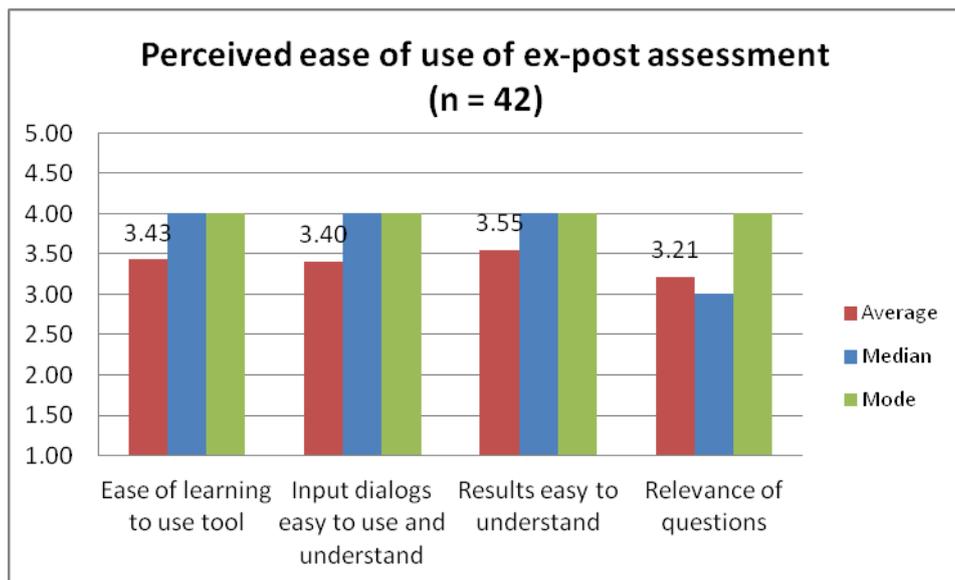


Figure 7: Perceived ease of use of the ex-post evaluation of the impact of CSR actions on competitiveness

Finally, the validation questionnaire also gathered the overall acceptance of the Responsible Med tool. As Figure 8 illustrates, the average answer to the questions “When the tool is available, I will recommend it to my company”, and “When the tool is available, I will use it” is 3.94 (1 = strongly disagree / 5 = strongly agree). These results can be interpreted as a relatively high acceptance of the tool.

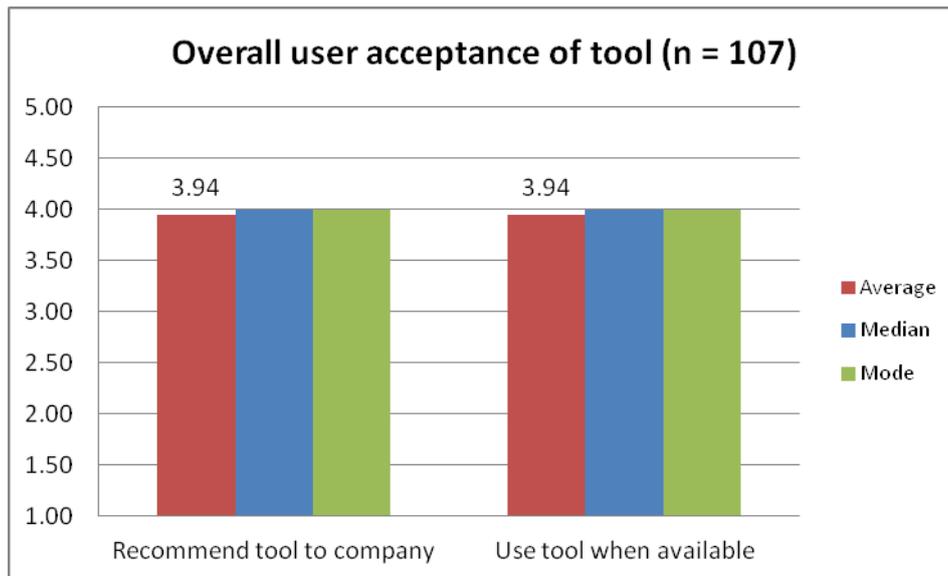


Figure 8. Overall user acceptance of the tool

5. Concluding remarks and suggestions for tool improvement

The overall results of the validation show that there is a high agreement with the usefulness and ease of use of the CSR maturity test and the ex-ante assessment of candidate CSR actions, and a moderate to high agreement on the usefulness and ease of use of the ex-post assessment of implemented CSR actions.

The validation questionnaire also gathered the opinion of respondents on the importance of quality of decisions over the effort required to reach them. This question is relevant as the Responsible Med tool aims at increasing the quality of decisions with the use of a tool, although the tool has a certain level of sophistication, which requires an initial effort to get acquainted with the tool. The result was that companies stated that both aspects were of high importance and that quality of decisions was of a slightly higher importance. This result can be read in terms of the added value of a tool which helps improving the quality of decisions.

The process of validation allowed for the discussion of the tool and the recommendation of improvements. The main suggestions were to enhance the user-friendliness of the tool, by enriching instructions, developing a FAQ section and a promotion brochure, revising the glossary and user's guide, rewording contents and improving software design and compatibility. Another relevant request was to customise better the report that respondents obtain after finalising the CSR maturity check.

References

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