



Institutionalising Judgement in Msme Support: A Uk-Vietnam Comparative Study in Agri-Tech

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ABSTRACT

Research purpose

To examine how mission-led MSME support can institutionalize expert judgement in accelerator settings.

Research motivation

MSMEs in agri-tech face scientific uncertainty, regulatory complexity, and multi-actor delivery, conditions that make generic support models ineffective and call for adaptive, context-sensitive design.

Research methodology

A structured, focused comparison of the UK SHAKE Climate Change programme and Vietnam initiatives. We specify five auditable routines, mission-framed selection with explicit decision rules, staged reviews, proportionate verification using short methods, compact evidence packs, and repository-led reuse, drawing on programme documents, secondary sources, and practitioner insight. Performance is operationalised via translation-task indicators, verified pull at award, time to first real context, evidence-pack reuse, pilot-to-contract conversion, and data-once-reuse-often maturity.

Main findings

Where discretion is codified in visible routines and proportionate verification, routes to first real context shorten, evidence travels across decisions, and pilot-to-contract conversion improves. Variation in Vietnam reflects provincial capability and donor cycles, while the UK case shows gains when buyer and standards engagement are brokered early and archived evidence is reused.

Practical and managerial implications

We offer a portable diagnostic and indicator set that helps delivery organisations publish criteria and decision rules, plan early buyer and standards routes, finance verification, and archive reusable evidence packs to reduce duplication.

Originality/Value

The paper makes expert judgement auditable and portable by specifying five routines and a translation-task indicator set for mission-led MSME support, advancing a mechanism-centred alternative to generic ecosystem prescriptions.

Keywords: *MSMEs, agri-tech, innovation policy, expert judgement, United Kingdom, Vietnam.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Micro, small, and medium sized enterprises (MSMEs) are widely recognised as engines of innovation, employment, and inclusive growth. Yet many MSME support systems remain rigid, bureaucratic, and poorly matched to sectoral transformation. This is especially true in agri-tech aligned with climate action, where innovation is path dependent, scientifically uncertain, and embedded in multi actor environments. Cultural norms, such as power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and collectivism, shape how entrepreneurs engage with institutions and interpret risk and authority (Hofstede, 2001). As a result, supporting agri tech ventures requires adaptive and context sensitive approaches that move beyond generic business support (Hall et al., 2006; Rajalahti et al., 2008; World Bank, 2021; Culkin and Kyriakopoulos, 2024).

Previous papers on support for startups in agri-tech field emphasizes the importance of different factors in different contexts. In developed countries previous studies in countries such as EU, Spain and UK examined various mechanisms. According to Stranieri et al. (2024), local policies promote knowledge transfer and innovation in agri-food sector in EU. In Spain, López-García et al. (2025) find that grassroots actors mobilize multiple forms of agency to advance impacts of policy change, with diverse roles as intermediary actors. Krasnokutska et al. (2024) notice that there should have collaboration when actors must transcend traditional economic boundaries and reshape both the internal performance culture and the broader industrial or community mindset for open innovation for sustainability in agri-food sector. In the UK, previous studies have examined the global agricultural research and innovation cooperation between UK and China influence agricultural R&I system transformation (Wu et al., 2025). In emerging countries such as India, according to Mohankumar et al. (2025), expert committee evaluation prioritized business fit and technical knowledge over individual factors and there is a need for sector-wise application sorting to avoid duplication, unified incubator platforms, and distinction between R & D and innovation. In Vietnam, previous studies have not investigated supporting mechanism for startups in agricultural innovation but only studies on farmers support to organic certification (My et al., 2025) or food system through networks (Nguyen-Minh et al., 2023).

Hence, our study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, it adds to the knowledge of the current controversial literature on factors that efficiently support startups in the agri-tech field. Second, there has been no research on agri-tech startup support in Vietnam, an emerging country. Third, it is the first comparative study on this topic. Fourth, this paper advances an alternative lens, business support with judgement. By this we mean systems that enable structured discretion, mobilise domain-specific expertise, and align support with public value missions, for example climate resilience and sustainable agriculture. Such systems require institutional features that make discretionary choices transparent and accountable, including published selection criteria and decision rules, designated coordination, proportionate verification, and evidence stewardship that allows decisions to travel.

Our framing draws on judgement under uncertainty (Foss and Klein, 2012), mission-oriented innovation (Mazzucato, 2018; Larrue, 2021), and institutional design for accountable discretion (Majone, 1997). It also extends a triple helix perspective in which universities, industry, and government co produce support, with entrepreneurial universities acting as regional anchors (Culkin, 2016). SHAKE Climate Change provides a concrete example of this configuration, with a consortium that combines scientific expertise with delivery routines.

We use an asymmetric pairing to make the mechanisms visible. In the United Kingdom, SHAKE offers a mission-led reference point where selection is guided by stated criteria and decision rules, coordination links ventures to testbeds and standards routes, and verification is treated as a routine function. In Vietnam, national

missions interact with provincial delivery and donor engagement, producing variation in how discretion is exercised and how evidence is accepted. The objective is not to rank systems; it is to examine which routines shorten the path from award to a first real context and towards adoption. We operationalise this objective through five translation tasks, verified pull at award, time to first real context, evidence pack reuse, pilot to contract conversion, and data once, reuse often maturity.

The paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 outlines the conceptual framework that links culture, institutions, and judgement. Section 3 describes the comparative method and the interpretational, structural, and reflective lenses. Sections 4 and 5 present the UK and Vietnam cases and develop the comparative findings through the translation tasks. Section 6 discusses the institutional conditions for routinising discretion. Section 7 concludes with policy implications and future research directions.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE

2.1 Conceptual framework

Cross-country differences in MSME support are not merely technical or administrative; they reflect cultural expectations about authority, evaluation, and institutional legitimacy. Hofstede's dimensions, notably power distance, individualism–collectivism, and uncertainty avoidance, provide a comparative lens for interpreting these expectations (Hofstede, 1991). Complementary evidence from the World Values Survey (2024) on trust in government, science, and universities offers proxies for the social license behind discretionary decision-making. We treat these cultural signals as contextual moderators rather than deterministic causes; they shape how discretion is perceived and legitimated, and they help explain variation in the reception of judgement-based support.

Support for MSMEs is often framed as a problem of resources, networks, or ecosystem readiness. Beneath these operational logics lies a more fundamental question: how is judgement institutionalized? In other words, how do support systems, public, private, or hybrid, recognize and act upon entrepreneurial potential under uncertainty? We foreground judgement as both an epistemic process and an institutional capacity, especially where standard metrics are poor guides to mission relevance or adoption potential.

Recent scholarship on mission-oriented innovation argues that public investment should be directed towards complex societal challenges rather than generic growth (e.g., Mazzucato, 2018; Schot & Steinmueller, 2018). At the same time, critiques emphasize risks of vagueness and drift in mission design and delivery. Brown (2021) cautions that mission frames can be opaque, supply-side, and prone to drift, overweighting science-and-technology “moonshots” and equity instruments while neglecting diffusion, incremental innovation, and the debt-based finance used by most SMEs. In practice, weakly specified missions may be misaligned with local demand and vulnerable to policy capture during implementation. We therefore treat “mission” not as a slogan but as a set of routines to be operationalized and audited (Larrue, 2021).

Our framework links these debates to institutional design. We view discretion as productive when it is embedded in: published selection criteria and decision rules; designated coordination across testbeds, buyers, and standards bodies; staged review points with recorded rationales; proportionate verification; and evidence stewardship that allows decisions to reuse compact evidence packs across actors. This moves mission orientation from intent to practice and directly addresses concerns about drift by specifying how evidence travels and who accepts it.

To keep the analysis auditable, we separate context from diagnosis and measurement. Tables 1 and Table 2 (Diagnostic frame) summarize system features that structure discretion, including selection and coordination, testbeds and partnerships, standards and regulation, verification and data, procurement and buyers, and

finance and liquidity. We then operationalize five translation tasks - time to first real context, verified pull at award, evidence-pack reuse, pilot-to-contract conversion, and 'data once, reuse often' maturity - supported by source notes. In this way, cultural factors inform expectations about how discretion will be received, while the diagnostic and indicator set reveal whether mission language has been institutionalized in routines that shorten the path to adoption.

Finally, our approach to evaluation practice follows judgement-based views of the firm, where entrepreneurial decision-making is a resource-coordinating act embedded in institutional contexts (Foss & Klein, 2012; Foss et al., 2019). Multi-perspective assessment panels, structured diagnostic interviews, and iterative feedback loops are treated not as add-ons but as core institutional mechanisms through which discretion becomes transparent and accountable.

Table 1: Diagnostic frame - United Kingdom

| Category | Evidence (UK) | Dominant tasks | Push instruments | Pull routes | Verification & data |
|-----------------------------|--|--|--|---|--|
| System context | Mission-led accelerator hosted at Rothamsted; consortium of Cranfield, UCL, UH; early-stage agri-tech ventures with public-value focus. | Align mission, science expertise, and credible testbeds. | Mentoring linked to climate metrics; access to testbeds. | Problem-owner signal from farms/processors | Archive compact evidence pack; enable reuse. |
| Selection and orchestration | Judgement within explicit selection criteria and decision rules; designated coordination lead; brokered access; staged review points with gates to stop, pivot or scale. | Exercise expert judgement; broker access; manage staged review points. | Targeted calls; panel criteria; brokerage time budget. | Verified pull at gate where targeted. | Decision logs; short notes; repository traceability. |
| Standards and regulation | Proportionate conformity and early standards engagement; evidence pack supports reuse by standards bodies and regulators. | Secure proportionate conformity; plan standards/sandbox route. | Short methods; conformity checks; sandbox/pre-check. | Demand for reusable evidence by standards bodies. | Independent checks; short methods; reuse across decisions. |
| Procurement and buyers | Targeted calls seek verified pull at award (named buyer/route or standards access); | Confirm buyer route; structure outcome-based pilots. | Milestone tranches tied to buyer engagement. | Named buyer and procurement route. | Pilot outcomes verified against agreed metrics. |

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|-----------------------|---|--|--|---|--|
| | outcome-based pilots. | | | | |
| Finance and liquidity | Evergreen, milestone-based convertible investment; non-dilutive pre-investment support; mitigates grant dependency. | Stage finance to verified progress; avoid stranded pilots. | Evergreen/convertible instruments; non-dilutive support. | Conversion to service/supply contracts. | Milestone checks; nulls accepted and recorded. |

For the case of Vietnam, some projects have been picked up for the analysis. First is the “Testing the Korean smart farm model in producing some valuable crops using high technology in Vietnam” (hereby called Smart Farm 1) is a project funded by KOPIA (Korea Project for International Agriculture) and implemented by VAAS (Vietnam Academy of Agricultural Sciences). Second is the “Establishing a smart and safe agricultural value chain in Vietnam” project, which is a project funded by the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs of Korea (MAFRA), and implemented by Center for Digital Transformation and Agricultural Statistics (DTS), Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Vietnam (MARD) (called Smart Farm 2). In addition to projects receiving capital from foreign sponsors, Vietnam currently has many cooperatives and MSMEs receiving knowledge support and training from local agricultural extension associations to promote the application of technology in production, while promoting production processes in compliance with VietGAP.

Table 2: Diagnostic frame - Vietnam

| Category | Evidence (Vietnam) | Dominant tasks | Push instruments | Pull routes | Verification & data |
|----------------|---|--|---|---|--|
| System context | Hybrid, state-led and donor-engaged support; national strategies and provincial delivery; digital transformation tools as enablers. | Map national and provincial actors (MARD/DARD, MoST, provincial PPCs); align testbeds with priority crops/value chains; identify donor programmes that can host pilots. Many projects have the support of research institutes, universities and local | Mentoring tied to climate/sustainability metrics in national plans: Smart Farm is linked to the Agricultural Restructuring Plan for the 2021-2025 period approved by the Prime Minister aims to develop sustainable agriculture and environment protection. The Smart Farm 2 project is also in | Problem-owner signals from cooperatives, processors and provincial departments (DARD/DoIT). Proactively approach the market with high quality products, creating competitive advantages in the market. | Create a compact evidence pack; archive at programme level; enable reuse across provincial and national decisions (Smart Farm 2 has a website ¹ with the evidence pack). The projects both have training components for subjects such as managers, businesses, technical staff, and farmers to increase the sustainability of project results. |

¹ <https://smartfarm.mard.gov.vn/>

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| | | agricultural extension associations. | line with the Sustainable Agricultural and Rural Development Strategy for the 2021-2030 period, with a vision to 2050. Access to public research stations/provincial test sites: the first two test sites for Smart Farm 1 are set at Thanh Tri, and Vinh Quynh communes of Hanoi. Smart Farm 2 have piloted in Lam Dong (Da Lat). Digital tools for field data capture but the use depends on project choice: Smart Farm 2 has been implemented by DTS-MARD, therefore they have digital tools for data capturing. | | |
| Selection and orchestration | Selection varies by programme; discretion present but often informal; provincial variation in orchestration. | Formalize expert-judgement steps; publish simple gate criteria; local authorities often participate in supporting projects. Smart farm project has supported from MARD, several provinces (Hanoi, Phu Tho) and experts of VAAS, KOPIA. | Targeted calls co-branded with provincial hosts (Smart Farm). Smart Farm 1 project was thoroughly researched at VAAS's experimental area with equipment imported from Korea. | “Verified pull at gate” where buyer/standards route is named (e.g., cooperative/processor; GAP pathway). | GAP compliant projects comply with regulations on keeping all management decisions such as the use of pesticides, fertilizers, incident handling... (decision logs), store selection records (including selection of varieties, materials, suppliers, shipping units...), production logs for traceability and audit. |

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|--------------------------|---|--|--|--|---|
| Standards and regulation | Digital licensing, traceability, and VietGAP digital certification emerging; practice uneven across provinces. | Map applicable pathways (VietGAP/GlobalGAP variants, SPS/traceability); plan conformity steps proportional to risk. Example: Smart Farm 2 complies with Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) management process. | In following GAP, many corporatives and MSMEs have process fully automated, minimizing the use of fertilizers and pesticides. With the Smart Farm 2 project, the Korean Government also has training support programs on planting techniques and production management with the aim of improving product quality and enhancing the competitiveness of this product equal to the agriculture products in Korea. | Demand for reusable evidence from standards bodies and large buyers that recognize GAP/traceability. | According to GAP, independent checks noted in pack (both internal and external audit required); link methods to the relevant standard; reuse accepted pack for subsequent applications (pack can be reused for recertification or certification extension). |
| Procurement and buyers | Buyer engagement and procurement routes vary; early engagement accelerates, late/informal risks stranding pilots. | Identify anchor buyers early (cooperatives, state-linked processors, retail chains, exporters); co-design outcome-based pilots. Projects such as Smart Farm 1 and 2 mostly serve for exportation. Buyers from Korea can co-design product outcomes. Other cooperatives or MSMEs have also expanded its export market to many countries such as China, Japan, | Milestone tranches tied to buyer engagement; connect to into chain leaders and provincial programmes. There are many technical supports and commitments to purchase and consume qualified products to help businesses and cooperatives feel secure in production. | Many agri-tech projects in Vietnam (for example in Long An, Lam Dong, Son La) show that buyers such as AEON, Winmart and foreign importers are the main factors attracting farmers/small businesses to participate in the VietGAP chain because they have very high product requirements. There are more and more requirements for cold logistics, | Pilot outcomes logged against agreed metrics (yield/quality/CO ₂ e/water); acceptance notes and PO/contract references added to pack. |

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|-----------------------|---|--|--|---|--|
| | | Europe, the United States, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, while not neglecting the domestic market - where consumption is stable, creating a foundation for long-term production. | | standard packaging, traceability, ESG (for businesses exporting to international markets such as the European region), and and commit to long-term contracts with stable quality. | |
| Finance and liquidity | Preferential loans and supply chain finance instruments present; continuity depends on programme longevity and donor support. | In addition to cases of receiving ODA capital from sponsors, currently under the direction of the State Bank, commercial banks in Vietnam need to promote preferential loans for high-tech agricultural development. For example, Agribank applies a preferential interest rate policy of 0.5-1.5% lower than the normal rate, lending up to 80% of the value of collateral for loans for high-tech agricultural development. | Evergreen/convertible instruments where possible; link to preferential credit lines; non-dilutive grants for conformity/test costs. The Government and relevant ministries are making efforts to issue regulations and guidelines on granting certificates of ownership of assets on agricultural land to facilitate borrowing. | | |

We also draw on literature from institutional design and public administration, which emphasises that discretion is not inherently good or bad, but must be structured, legitimised, and accountable (Majone, 1997; Christensen and Læg Reid, 2011). In this view, discretion is productive when embedded in organisational settings that value expertise, reflection, and feedback. However, discretion becomes problematic when it is overly centralised, politicised, or insulated from accountability. The capacity to exercise effective judgement is therefore an institutional achievement, not a given.

Finally, we situate our inquiry within the broader landscape of place-sensitive innovation policy (Iammarino et al., 2019; Brown and Mawson, 2019). While the SHAKE Climate Change programme operates at a national level, its design reflects engagement with scientific expertise, regional actors, and mission alignment. Likewise, judgement-based systems in other countries interact with local development logics, cultural norms, and governance traditions. Understanding how these dimensions shape the practice of support is key to assessing both the transferability and scalability of the SHAKE model.

In summary, this paper views MSME support as more than transactional service delivery. It is an institutionalised form of evaluative judgement that must balance selectivity with legitimacy, and mission orientation with adaptability. The following sections examine how that balance is achieved, or not, in a two-country comparison of the United Kingdom and Vietnam.

2.2 Selected literature and context

Selected findings from recent research help interpret delivery conditions; they inform §4.2 but do not set thresholds.

Vietnam offers a particularly instructive case. Entrepreneurial activity in the country has expanded despite constraints on political freedom, a pattern echoed in recent studies. Audretsch and Fiedler (2022) find that even modest improvements in economic freedom can stimulate entrepreneurship in undemocratic contexts. Ngo et al. (2022) show that formal and informal institutional pressures dampen the benefits of bank ties on SME capital structure, especially in regions with low institutional quality. Hai Thi Thanh and Tron (2023) argue that financial resource mobilization, regulatory streamlining, and collaborative platforms can significantly enhance SME performance.

At the organizational level, research highlights the mediating role of psychological empowerment, collaboration, and educational context (Dung, et al, 2021). For example, Nguyen et al. (2023) find that while entrepreneurship culture may not directly influence innovative work behavior, it functions indirectly through psychological empowerment. Tung et al. (2022) show that collaborative culture enhances the effect of transformational leadership on product innovation, while Le et al. (2023) identify entrepreneurial education as a key moderator between cultural values and startup behavior.

Sector-specific research in Vietnam further supports this picture. Scholars (Nguyen-Anh et al. 2022; Huong & Anh, 2023) observe that in agriculture, forestry, and fishery sectors, intangible assets tend to suppress firm performance. While internal factors like firm age, size, and financial stability promote the formation of intangible assets, investment in land, labor, and R&D has mixed effects. Regional and province-specific variables remain powerful influences. Chi (2022) finds that farm-level operational capacity and technology spillover significantly improve both green innovation and economic outcomes, with health awareness and environmental concerns acting as mediators.

These findings reinforce the importance of local context, embedded judgement, and adaptive institutional arrangements. Social ties with bank officials (Nguyen, 2022) and organizational resources such as top management commitment, innovation culture, and business networks (Ha et al., 2022) play key roles in support effectiveness. Finally, Huong (2024) argues that stronger financial infrastructure and literacy, along with targeted support policies, remain critical for boosting SME investment in Vietnam's agri-tech sector.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study uses a structured, focused case comparison (George and Bennett, 2005) to examine how mission-led support systems in the United Kingdom and Vietnam translate intent into delivery. The pairing is asymmetric by design. The UK provides a reference case in which judgement is embedded in published selection criteria, explicit coordination mechanisms, and routine verification. Vietnam reflects a hybrid model of state-led and donor-supported delivery, with variable provincial discretion. The purpose is not to rank countries, but to make visible the routines by which programmes shorten the path from award to a first real context and towards adoption.

The study follows a multiple-case study design in line with Yin (2003), using replication logic rather than sampling logic to structure the comparative frame. The asymmetric pairing enables both literal and theoretical replication across contrasting institutional contexts. The unit of analysis is defined in advance as the programme-level intervention that moves a venture from validated prototype into a real operating context and towards adoption. The design supports analytic generalisation, allowing findings to inform broader institutional theory rather than represent a population.

We interpret the comparison through three analytical lenses. First, interpretational analysis identifies patterns in delivery routines, verification methods, and evidence use. Second, structural analysis maps visible artefacts, including selection criteria, decision logs, repositories, and access agreements, that indicate routinised discretion. Third, reflective analysis applies expert-informed judgement to interpret the institutional significance and policy implications of observed routines.

Data sources include programme documents such as call texts, panel criteria, decision logs, pilot protocols, verification notes, sandbox access records, and repository entries. We also draw on stakeholder materials used for context and triangulation, and embedded practitioner insights, which are used solely to locate artefacts and are flagged for potential bias. Consistent with Yin's (2003) emphasis on triangulation, these multiple sources strengthen construct validity and allow for cross-verification of claims. To support reliability and auditability, brief source notes are attached to each item used in analysis, and nulls are recorded where documentation is missing. A sample from each case (UK and Vietnam) was dual coded to check consistency.

Operationally, we read the missing middle as a set of translation tasks. These include: time to first real context, measured in weeks from award; verified pull at award, for example a named buyer route or standards pre-check or sandbox access; evidence pack reuse across decisions; pilot to contract conversion within approximately twelve months; and data-once, reuse-often maturity. While these indicators do not exhaust programme performance, they are observable, documentable, and allow structured comparison across settings.

The analysis proceeds in one flow. We assemble the country diagnostics in Tables 1 and 2 from primary materials and short source notes. We then interpret movement on the translation tasks using named sources only. Comparative claims in Sections 5 and 6 are developed from scored material, with each inference linked back to its recorded artefact. This keeps the paper readable and allows a reviewer to audit any claim quickly.

We recognise limits. Evidence is triangulated across document types and actors, and a sample from each case was dual coded. Author involvement in SHAKE supports document discovery but raises bias risk. We mitigate this by using counter sources where possible and flagging any claims that remain unconfirmed. Conference timelines constrain depth, and Vietnam coding reflects the best available documentation at submission. Within these bounds, the design prioritises clarity, traceability, and proportionate claims.

Following Yin's (2003) quality criteria for case study research, we address four key tests. Construct validity is supported through the use of multiple data sources and traceable source notes. Internal validity is enhanced through pattern matching using the five translation tasks, enabling structured inferences about institutional routines. External validity is pursued via analytic generalisation, using contrasting institutional settings to test the transferability of mechanisms. Reliability is supported by structured documentation, including artefact logs, decision records, and short methods notes, which support the reproducibility and auditability of the analytical pathway.

Figure 1: Data sources and analytical strategy (UK & Vietnam)

(Panel A: Data sources & bias mitigation; Panel B: Analytical dimensions & where they are scored)

| A. Data sources | Description / examples | Use in paper | Bias mitigation / |
|---|---|--|---|
| Public programme documents | Calls; panel criteria; decision logs; pilot protocols; verification notes; standards / sandbox access records; repository entries. | Primary evidence for Table 1 and the translation tasks; anchors §4 vignettes. | Document gaps possible to use short methods; independent checks; accept and log nulls. |
| Stakeholder materials | Presentations; blogs (e.g., Enterprise Research Centre, 2025); APPGSTA recommendations; conference talks relevant to SHAKE-like models. | Clarify staged review points, governance, outcomes; context for policy shifts (e.g., Modern Industrial Strategy, MIS). | Potential advocacy to triangulate; mark as commentary; require at least one documentary anchor. |
| Embedded knowledge (SHAKE) | Author involvement in governance/evaluation helps locate documents and timelines. | Identify artefacts; interpret staged review points; cross-check with third-party evaluations. | Conflict-of-interest risk to add counter-source; record bias note in coding log. |
| | | | |
| B. Analytical strategy dimension | Operationalization (how assessed) | Where scored / logged | Notes |
| Clarity of mission and selection criteria | Presence of mission frame; explicit selection criteria and decision rules for judgement; requirement for verified pull at gate. | Table 1: Selection & orchestration; the translation tasks: Verified pull at award. | Use short decision logs; cite call texts and selection records. |
| Mechanisms of discretionary evaluation | Expert judgement exercised by panels and orchestrator; visible staged review points (stop, pivot or scale). | Table 1: Selection & orchestration; the translation tasks: Time to first real context. | Brokerage time budget and access agreements logged. |
| Integration of sectoral and scientific expertise | Science expertise in mentoring; credible testbeds (on-farm/processing). | Table 1: System context; Standards & regulation; the translation tasks: Data reuse maturity. | Evidence pack contains methods and verification artefacts. |
| Feedback and learning structures | Short methods; independent checks; archive compact evidence pack; reuse across decisions. | Table 1: Verification & data; the translation tasks: Evidence pack reuse. | Nulls accepted; repository IDs in Notes / source. |
| Alignment with broader innovation and development goals | Use of climate and sustainability metrics aligned to mission intent. | Table 1: System context; the translation tasks: Pilot to contract conversion (linked to adoption). | Keep claims proportionate to documented evidence. |

Panel A maps data sources and bias mitigation; Panel B shows where each analytical dimension is logged (Table 1) or scored as a conference-stage signal (the translation tasks).

4. RESULTS: CASE EVIDENCE FROM THE UK AND VIETNAM

We report results against five translation tasks, verified pull at award, time to first real context, evidence pack reuse, pilot to contract conversion, and data once, reuse often maturity, with Tables 1 and Table 2 used as the structured evidence base.

4.1 United Kingdom: SHAKE Climate Change and the institutionalization of mission-led judgement

SHAKE Climate Change shows how a mission frame can be translated into delivery routines rather than rhetoric (SHAKE, 2024). Established in 2019 at Rothamsted Research and delivered by a science led consortium of Rothamsted Research, Cranfield University, University College London, and the University of Hertfordshire, the programme targets early stage agri-tech ventures and treats selection as an exercise in judgement within explicit selection criteria and decision rules. Criteria are stated, relevant expertise is mobilised, and discretionary decisions are recorded. In our terms, this is a programme level attempt to convert an uncertain pipeline into first real contexts efficiently and legibly (see Figure 1 and Table 1, UK: System context; Selection and orchestration).

The distinctive feature is that coordination and verification are routine, not ad hoc. A designated coordination lead brokers access to credible testbeds, staged review points are visible through gates to stop, pivot, or scale, verification uses short methods and independent checks, and results are captured in a compact evidence pack that is archived for reuse. These routines specify, in advance, what counts as admissible evidence for buyers, standards bodies, and regulators (see Table 1, UK: Standards and regulation; Verification and data).

Observed signals on the translation tasks (UK)

For SHAKE, the results read against the five translation tasks using the artefacts logged in Table 1 and Figure 1.

- **Verified pull at award.** Awards are made with an identified buyer route or a standards pathway where possible, supported by call texts, selection records, and, where applicable, sandbox or pre-check notes (see Table 1, Selection and orchestration, and Standards and regulation).
- **Time to first real context.** Brokered access to credible testbeds and outcome-based pilots shorten movement from award into an operating setting, with staged review points keeping this visible (see Table 1, Selection and orchestration, and Verification and data).
- **Evidence pack reuse.** Short methods, independent checks, and compact evidence packs are archived with stable identifiers so that the same verification can travel across decisions by buyers, standards bodies, and regulators (see Table 1, Verification and data).
- **Pilot to contract conversion.** Early buyer engagement and proportionate verification increase the likelihood that outcome-based pilots convert to supply or service contracts within twelve months (see Table 1, Procurement and buyers, and Finance and liquidity).
- **Data once, reuse often maturity.** Repository practice, acceptance notes, and cross reference to relevant standards indicate growing portability of evidence across external actors (see Table 1, Verification and data).

Finance is staged to verification rather than throughput. Non-dilutive support precedes milestone based evergreen investment, which mitigates grant dependency while preparing firms for private capital. This aligns incentives with learning, proportionate conformity and evidence portability, rather than with application volume (see Table 1, UK: Finance and liquidity; Procurement and buyers). The expected observable consequence is a higher probability of pilot to contract conversion within twelve months where buyer engagement and verification are brokered early.

Two caveats temper the claim. First, author involvement in SHAKE aids document discovery but raises bias risk, so counter sources are required for any scored entry (see Figure 1, Panel A). Second, UK level consolidation, for example business growth initiatives, will improve performance only if repository and reuse norms spread across delivery actors. Portals without evidentiary standards may increase paperwork without improving indicators (see Notes and Source in Figure 1).

4.2 Vietnam: targeted programmes amidst institutional fluidity

Vietnam's policy mix combines national missions with provincial delivery and donor engagement. Instruments such as the Law on Support for SMEs, the SME Development Fund, and SMEdx generate significant activity around digital infrastructure and sectoral upgrading. Yet the mechanism linking mission to adoption often weakens in implementation: discretion is present but typically informal; verification leans administrative rather than adaptive; and acceptance of evidence varies by province (Table 2, Vietnam: across the five categories).

In Vietnam, there are different types of projects related to agri-tech supports. They can be categorized into (1) large projects with support from the joint support of government and donors, (2) projects with university collaboration and projects to support start-ups in agri-tech field. For large projects, we have several projects such as Smart Farm projects, Van Lang university projects and National Agri-PV (agri-photovoltaics) pilot programme². For university collaboration projects, we have several examples such as Can Tho - UAV & Agricultural Robotics Pilot + Training Centre³, Precision-agriculture with IoT pilot with Tra Vinh University (World Bank / local startup collaboration)⁴, TTC AgriS.. The "Can Tho - UAV & Agricultural Robotics Pilot + Training Centre" has not only delivered economic benefits but also transform agriculture, helping the Mekong Delta lead in climate-resilient smart farming and deeper integration into global value chains. The project "Precision-agriculture with IoT pilot" with Tra Vinh University (funded by the Korea World Bank Partnership Facility with MimosaTEK, a Vietnamese start-up, developed the technology)⁵ has piloted to apply IoT technology to address challenges of the smallholder farmers when applying AWD (Alternative Wetting and Drying). In May 2025, TTC AgriS (Thanh Thanh Cong – Bien Hoa Joint Stock Company, AgriS, HOSE: SBT) has recently signed consecutive memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City (VNU-HCM) and Nong Lam University Ho Chi Minh City (NLU) to initiate cooperation in training, research, and technology transfer.⁶ They will focus on promoting entrepreneurship among students through funding support, innovation competitions, idea incubators, preferential credit programs, and partnerships with academic and financial institutions to build an agricultural startup ecosystem. And in December 2024, Vietnam National University of Agriculture (VNUA) held the Final Round of the 2024 Innovative Agricultural Startup Competition⁷. The competition is an annual venue for students at not only VNUA but also many colleagues and high schools nationwide, nurturing startup and innovative ideas and encouraging students confidently develop their proposals. Besides that, other university incubators also provide support to start up in various fields including agri-tech. However, they do not focus on only agri-tech, eg. VNU⁸, VinUni⁹.

Among the cases, Smart Farm projects (Smart Farm 1 and Smart Farm 2 – see table 2) are treated as illustrative programmes within a broader state-led and donor-engaged mix. The emphasis is on delivery routines rather than outcomes, since acceptance of evidence varies by province and buyer.

² Vietnam launches Agri-photovoltaics project to deploy 10 agricultural solar power models at pilot phase - AgroSpectrum Asia.

³ [Can Tho to host UAV and Robotics Centre for smart agriculture | Vietnam+ \(VietnamPlus\)](#)

⁴ [Precision agriculture for smallholder farmers in Vietnam: How the Internet of Things helps smallholder paddy farmers use water more efficiently](#)

⁵ [Precision agriculture for smallholder farmers in Vietnam: How the Internet of Things helps smallholder paddy farmers use water more efficiently](#)

⁶ [AgriS - AgriS Promotes Private Sector Collaboration in Agriculture with the Government and Academic Institutions](#)

⁷ [Final Round of the 2024 Innovative Agricultural Startup Competition](#)

⁸ [VISI – VNU Innovation & Startup Incubator – Vườn ươm Khởi nghiệp Đổi mới Sáng tạo ĐHQGHN](#)

⁹ [Entrepreneurship Lab - A Lively Innovation Hub for VinUniversity Students - VinUni](#)

- **Verified pull at award.** Contracts with large buyers and the increasing requirements of MSMEs to comply with GAP quality standards, verified pull at gate is applicable (see Table 2, Selection and orchestration, and Standards and regulation).
- **Time to first real context.** The selection process varies greatly between programs and is often slow due to the many regulations and procedures involved in receiving funding although there have been many efforts to issue documents to support MSMEs in recent times. The coordination and support received from local authorities also varies greatly (see Table 2, Selection and orchestration).
- **Evidence pack reuse.** Evidence packs available, enable the reuse at several levels. Especially for project under GAP's compliance, evidence pack is available for independence check, methods link to relevant standards (see Table 2, Verification and data).
- **Pilot to contract conversion.** Early buyer engagement especially when donors specifically finance the manufacture of products for export to their home markets. Policies to promote preferential loans for high-tech agricultural development are also enhanced (see Table 2, Procurement and buyers, and Finance and liquidity).
- **Data once, reuse often maturity.** Archived compact evidence pack, website disclosure (but not for all the cases), decision logs, store selection records, production logs for traceability and audit are required for the case of GAP-compliance projects (see Table 2, Verification and data).

The practical implication is a longer path to first real contexts where buyer or standards routes are negotiated late, and a low ceiling on evidence-pack reuse where repositories or acceptance agreements are absent. Conversely, where provincial brokers engage buyers and standards up-front, digital traceability tools and VietGAP-linked processes can strengthen evidence quality and reduce duplication (Table 2, Vietnam: Standards and regulation; Procurement and buyers; Verification and data). On the translation tasks, we therefore anticipate greater variance across provinces in time to first real context and pilot to contract conversion, with improvements clustered where verification becomes portable.

These patterns are context-bounded rather than intrinsic: ministerial mandates, donor cycles, and provincial capability shape what routines are feasible. The comparative claim is modest but policy-salient: codifying explicit selection criteria and decision rules, designating a coordination lead, brokering early buyer/standards engagement, and archiving reusable evidence are the levers most likely to shift Vietnam's indicator baselines (see Figure 1; Tables 1; Table 2 and the translation tasks).

5. COMPERATIVE DISCUSSIONS

We interpret the UK and Vietnam pairing through the method set out in Section 3. The country diagnostics in Tables 1 and Table 2 anchor the case material in the translation tasks, which provide observable indicators of delivery once baselines are populated. Three comparative claims follow on institutional learning, discretion by design, and mission orientation with policy coherence.

5.1 Institutional learning, from documentation to reuse

A system's learning culture is institutional, not rhetorical. The test is whether verification artefacts travel across decisions so that programmes do not need to retest what has already been shown. In the UK case, SHAKE operates a routinised pathway, judgement within explicit selection criteria and decision rules, brokered access to testbeds, proportionate conformity, and a compact evidence pack archived for reuse. This design converts one off checks into portable evidence. On our indicators, evidence pack reuse should be higher where repositories and stable identifiers exist, and time to first real context should be shorter where early buyer or standards engagement is routine (see Table 1 under Verification and data for the UK entries,

Table 2 for Vietnam, and Figure 1, Panel B, where evidence pack reuse and time to first real context are logged as translation tasks). Without these structures, systems can appear capable on paper while failing in implementation, a slippage noted in prior work on administrative capacity. Where delivery depends on provincial capacity or donor cycles, learning is path dependent and fragile. UK style reuse does not translate without repository practice and cross actor acceptance embedded in delivery routines.

5.2 Discretion by design

Discretion is productive when it is structured, legitimised, and accountable. In the UK, selection within explicit criteria and decision rules, a designated coordination lead with brokerage time, visible staged review points with gates to stop, pivot, or scale, and brief decision logs convert expert judgement from tacit craft into an auditable capability. In Vietnam, discretion exists but is often informal or uneven across programmes and provinces, so similar expert effort may not aggregate into system capability. We therefore expect higher verified pull at award and better pilot to contract conversion where discretion is scaffolded, and lower values where discretion is implicit and post hoc. These features correspond to Selection and orchestration in Tables 1 and Table 2 and map to the verified pull and pilot to contract indicators in Figure 1, Panel B. The mechanism is consistent with organisational views of judgement that gain value through routinisation and record, see Foss and Klein (2012). Where discretion is informal or post hoc, expert effort does not aggregate into system performance.

5.3 Mission orientation and policy coherence

Mission framing clarifies what counts as success only when it is embedded in everyday routines. Alignment across eligibility, mentoring content, verification criteria, and a shared basket of sustainability metrics makes evidence portable and reduces time to first real context. In our frame, this alignment is visible in Standards and regulation, Procurement and buyers, and Verification and data in Tables 1 and Table 2, and it is measured through the translation tasks in Figure 1, Panel B. This reading is consistent with mission-oriented innovation as a design challenge rather than a slogan, see Mazzucato (2018), and with the implementation guidance in Larrue (2021).

The UK case illustrates what such alignment looks like in practice. SHAKE links published criteria to science-led mentoring, early buyer and standards engagement, and proportionate verification captured in a compact evidence pack. That pack travels across decisions, which supports earlier movement into real contexts and raises reuse of evidence. On our indicators, this is reflected in higher verified pull at award, shorter time to first real context, and a higher probability of pilot to contract conversion (see Table 1 entries under Selection and orchestration, Standards and regulation, and Verification and data, and the corresponding indicator definitions in Figure 1, Panel B).

The Vietnam material shows why alignment matters. Where provincial brokers engage buyers and standards early, and where digital traceability and VietGAP processes are in place, evidence quality improves and duplication falls. Where procurement routes, standards bodies, and provincial authorities hold different evidentiary expectations, mission language does not translate into delivery. The practical result is longer time to first real context, low ceilings on evidence-pack reuse, and stranded pilots. This pattern fits prior cautions about policy coherence and administrative capacity in mission delivery, according to Brown and Mawson (2019), and Schot and Steinmueller (2018).

Policy consolidation can help only if it carries evidentiary content. A single portal improves navigability when it also embeds shared verification norms, repository practice with stable identifiers, and acceptance agreements across agencies. Without these conditions, administrative load increases while performance does not. The transferable lesson is design-specific rather than country-intrinsic. Systems that embed repository practice, broker early buyer and standards engagement, and link finance to milestones tend to register stronger pilot to contract conversion and higher data once, reuse often maturity. Systems that treat mission as narrative

rather than practice do not (see Tables 1 and Table 2 for where these routines sit, and Figure 1, Panel B, for how they are scored).

To summarize, across the two cases, the signal is not success versus failure. It is the presence of routines that shorten time to first context, raise the share of awards with verified pull, and increase evidence reuse across independent decisions. These claims rely on traceable sources, see Figure 1, and will be tightened in Tables 1 and Table 2 and, the translation tasks are fully populated.

6. IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The comparative analysis indicates that judgement-based MSME support is not an incidental by-product of well-run programmes but a capability that must be designed, resourced, and legitimated. Read through the method in Figure 1 and the translation tasks, the UK–Vietnam pairing suggests six lines of action. In each, the recommendation is coupled to an observable consequence on our indicators and a scope condition that disciplines inference.

6.1 Build institutional learning through reusable evidence

Institutional learning is not achieved by additional workshops or portals; it is realized when verification becomes portable. Programmes should require short methods and independent checks, produce a compact evidence pack for each award, and archive these with stable identifiers in a repository that external decision-makers agree to accept unless material objections are documented. On our evidence base, such routines should raise evidence-pack reuse and the data once, reuse often maturity score, while reducing time to first real context as repeated testing gives way to reuse. The scope condition is clear: where delivery rests on provincial capacity or donor cycles, repository practice only works if accompanied by acceptance agreements across agencies; otherwise learning remains local and fragile despite careful archiving. Where acceptance agreements are brokered across agencies, verification effort converts into portable evidence, reducing duplication in subsequent decisions.

6.2 Design for discretion, not just delivery

Discretion becomes productive only when it is structured and auditable. Selection should operate within published explicit selection criteria and decision rules; a designated coordination lead should hold a brokerage time budget; staged review points should be visible through gates to stop, pivot or scale; and decisions should be logged briefly but consistently. These routines transform expert judgement from tacit craft to an accountable organizational capability. We would expect measurable effects on verified pull at award and time to first real context, and, where gates are tied to buyer engagement, on pilot to contract conversion within twelve months. Because author involvement in some programmes can introduce bias, we mitigate by using counter-sources and short decision logs (see Figure 1).

6.3 Embed mission orientation in routines, not rhetoric

Mission improves legitimacy and evaluative clarity when it is woven into eligibility, mentoring content, verification criteria, and a basket of sustainability metrics. Pre-specifying which metrics will evidence the mission for each award (for example, avoided emissions or soil indicators) aligns internal routines with external expectations from buyers, standards bodies, and regulators. Where that alignment is present, we anticipate higher evidence-pack reuse (because common metrics travel) and improved pilot to contract conversion. Where procurement and regulatory actors do not share evidentiary expectations, mission talk risks mission-wash: the language remains, but time to first real context stretches and reuse stalls.

6.4 Invest in expertise and learning infrastructure

Expert judgement requires infrastructure. Brokerage time, access agreements to credible testbeds, and proportionate verification need to be financed as primary functions, not treated as overhead. Standard templates for methods note, decision logs, and evidence packs reduce variance across teams and make repositories intelligible to external actors. As these supports bed in, we would expect movement on time to first real context and evidence-pack reuse, alongside a visible growth in repository entries and cross-actor acceptance recorded in Tables 1 and Table 2 notes. The scope condition is double-sided: expertise without access, and access without expertise, both yield stranded pilots.

6.5 Balance selectivity with procedural legitimacy

Selective support can be legitimate when its reasons are visible. Publishing criteria and explicit selection criteria and decision rules, disclosing conflicts, offering short feedback to unsuccessful applicants, and recording justified departures from panel advice make discretion comprehensible to those outside the room. Coupling this with proportionate conformity ensures verification burdens match risk. If implemented, we expect programmes to maintain performance on verified pull at award and pilot to contract conversion, while legitimacy signals, share of decisions with logs, appeal volumes, and median time to feedback, are trackable in Tables 1 and Table 2 notes. In resource-constrained settings, legitimacy is better served by reason-giving than by lowering thresholds.

6.6 Calibrate to national institutional context

Design choices travel, but not as templates. In the United Kingdom, coordination with system-level consolidation should be selective, extending only where repository and reuse norms are adopted; “single-portal” fixes that add forms without portability will not move indicators. In Vietnam, early engagement with buyers and standards through provincial brokers, use of sandboxes or pre-checks where available, and explicit documentation of provincial variation in Tables 1 and Table 2 are the practical steps most likely to shift baselines. We expect divergence between provinces (Vietnam) or delivery actors (UK) to appear in Tables 1 and Table 2 notes; subsequent improvements should register on time to first real context and evidence-pack reuse in the translation tasks. The larger claim is conditional: when routines for selection, orchestration, verification, and repository practice are codified, gains are transferable; without codification, they remain local and brittle. In this ICECH version we foreground routines and artefacts; numeric population of the translation tasks will follow once partner data are finalized.

7. CONCLUSION

This paper asked how judgement-based support can be institutionalised in mission led MSME programmes. Using a structured comparison of the UK and Vietnam and reading the evidence through the translation tasks in Figure 1, we interpreted the pairing via routines documented in Tables 1 and Table 2 rather than slogans about innovation systems.

Three conclusions follow. First, discretion is productive when it is designed, not assumed. In the UK case, judgement is exercised within explicit selection criteria and decision rules, with a named coordination lead, staged review points with clear gates to stop, pivot, or scale, and proportionate verification captured in a compact evidence pack. These features shorten time to first real context and raise evidence pack reuse, which are visible in the translation tasks. Where discretion remains informal or post hoc, these gains do not materialise.

Second, mission orientation improves legitimacy only when embedded in everyday routines. Mission language becomes operational when eligibility, mentoring content, verification criteria, and a shared basket of sustainability metrics are aligned, and when external decision makers, buyers, standards bodies, and

regulators, accept the same evidentiary expectations. Absent that alignment, systems risk mission wash, stretching time to first real context and stalling evidence pack reuse. This pattern is consistent with the indicators set out in Figure 1, Panel B, and with the entries in Tables 1 and Table 2.

Third, institutional learning is visible when evidence travels. The practical signature of a learning culture is not additional workshops or portals, it is the portability of verification, short methods, independent checks, and archived packs that are reused across external decisions. Where repository practice and acceptance agreements are missing, learning remains local and fragile.

These conclusions are conditional rather than universal. National context shapes what is feasible. In Vietnam, ministerial and provincial variation, donor cycles, and uneven verification capacity constrain routinisation even when missions are clear. Context is not destiny, however. The routines identified here, selection with explicit criteria and decision rules, coordination with staged review points, early buyer and standards engagement, proportionate verification, and repository practice, are codifiable and transferable when actors agree what counts as admissible evidence and how it will be reused.

Two limitations bound our claims. Conference timelines restrict depth, and several entries in Tables 1 and Table 2 and the translation tasks will harden as named sources are added and coded. Author involvement in the UK case aids document discovery but raises bias risk, which we mitigate via counter sources and independent checks (see Figure 1, Panel A). Our comparative statements therefore remain conservative and traceable.

The implication for policy and programme design, including beyond agri-tech, is direct. Treat judgement as an institutional asset. Fund brokerage time and access. Set explicit selection criteria and decision rules and keep brief decision logs. Plan standards and sandbox routes early. Produce and archive evidence packs with stable identifiers and acceptance notes. Link finance to verified progress rather than throughput. Systems that do this are better equipped to navigate uncertainty, shorten the path to a first real context, and sustain legitimacy when making selective choices under public scrutiny.

Future work should extend the paired analysis to additional jurisdictions on the same frame, populate longitudinal baselines for the translation tasks, and test whether movements in evidence pack reuse and pilot to contract conversion predict adoption at programme level. A methodological contribution is in reach, refining the micro rules by which discretion becomes auditable, and strengthening the link between mission framing, accountability, and public value. The translation task indicator set will be populated with partner data in a follow-on comparative article.

SHAKE should be read as a testbed rather than a template. It shows how judgement can be institutionalized, it does not settle how every system should do so. The Vietnam case points to a practical route for adaptation, codify simple selection rules, designate coordination leads at provincial level, broker early buyer and standards engagement, and build repository practice with shared acceptance under VietGAP and related pathways. These moves fit local mandates and delivery capacity while keeping the evidentiary discipline that allows claims to travel.

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