

COLLABORATE TO INNOVATE (C2i)

The University of Liverpool Management School & Agile Business Solutions

The Collaborate to Innovate (C2i) Project is a novel partnership that has been formed between the University of Liverpool Management School and Agile Business Solutions in order to provide assistance to SMEs in the North West region.

The basic premise of the C2i Project is that the process of innovation is not solely performed internally within an SME, but is best performed in a co-operative mode with other external organisations. The primary activities associated with C2i are based on this premise and will provide eligible NW SMEs with the mentoring and organisational support to engage in collaborative alliances and the technical support to develop collaborative ICT platforms in order to facilitate both product and process-related initiatives and innovations. C2i will develop networks of within-sector and cross-sector, high-growth industrial NW SMEs and will facilitate the design and implementation of productive collaborative projects within and across these networks. This will be done with a view to increase competitive advantage through improved performance.

Many SMEs have insufficient resources and expertise to innovate beyond repeating previous, short-term successes. The nature of innovation is increasingly recognised as a collaborative one and new innovations that lead to step changes in performance increasingly require that SMEs co-operate and share their ideas.

C2i concerns the facilitation of collaboration within the horizontal and vertical networks of customers, suppliers, competitors and the supporting agencies of NW SMEs. In simple terms, inter-organisational collaboration can be classified as vertical or horizontal. Vertical collaboration is concerned with partnerships formed along a linear, upstream-downstream supply chain. Conventional customer-supplier relationships are vertical in nature.

Horizontal collaboration is a growing trend in contemporary supply chain design. It concerns collaboration between



organisational entities providing the same or similar service. Horizontal collaboration can be “co-opetitive” – collaboration between competitors.

The primary activities associated with C2i will be to provide eligible NW SMEs with the mentoring and organisational support to engage in collaborative alliances and the technical support to develop collaborative ICT platforms. Specific SME applications will concern:

- customer relationship management,
- supplier relationship management,
- collaborative planning & scheduling,
- collaborative product design,
- collaborative manufacturing,
- shared services, and
- aggregated procurement.

Collaborative practices concerning supplier relationship management (SRM) and customer relationship management (CRM) are necessary in order to improve managerial capability and support the sustainability of the new and/or enhanced collaborative alliances. The implementation of these applications will allow participating SMEs to overcome a lack of internal capabilities and expertise, to share scarce resources, to dramatically improve productivity and to reduce risk.

Sixty-four eligible companies will be targeted for intensive support and their

selection will be based on the most beneficial impact to the North West – potential jobs created / safeguarded, new business opportunities and strategic development of NW manufacturing capability. Intensively supported SMEs will be assessed based on their strategic alignment to the high-growth engineering networks, operational / financial performance and business culture and drive for change. Opportunities for reduced-carbon enhancing initiatives will also be explored. 40% of the companies will be based in Merseyside and the remaining 60% will be evenly spread across Cheshire, Cumbria, Lancashire and Manchester.

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