

## **The crucial role of a “business manager” for both SMEs participation in clustering systems and taking up of innovation**

*Giuseppe Taddei: CIDA\* - Consigliere CNEL And Cinzia Giachetti: CIDA\**

With a rapidly changing global market place, increased competition and the number of obstacles facing small and medium enterprises trying to survive in these conditions, the role of experienced “business managers” in SMEs could provide a real contribution to improving competitiveness and development in the European Union. Availability of qualified human resources are essential for the development of business plan, adoption of innovation and interaction with the regional, national and international environment of the innovation process as well as for the interactive participation in the emerging “cluster” systems.

SMEs often suffer of their dimensional structure as well as of their limited capability in investment for innovation management. In this scenario it is crucial to create intermediaries or consultants of small companies able to interact with the members of the “cluster”, with local policy makers and representatives of both academic and industrial environment.

In some European regions have been recognised that to improve competitiveness of SMEs the first step is to create conditions to provide information and assistance to those companies that require technology innovation. In fact many regional programs invested resources to create instruments to train and inform the personnel working in SMEs on Technology transfer and related issues. This has a dual benefit, offering an essential and additional qualification to an individual to improve employment chances and enriches the organisation within which the individual is working. It is not always possible for SMEs to find the financial resources to invest in this type of training particularly within their geographical territory, while the acquisition of a “business manager” could be a solution to solve the obstacle of management of external relationships, innovative business plans implementation with an international vision.

In the last 10 years many clustering initiatives have been created to improve innovation processes as well as to overcome the following common difficulties of SMEs:

- Rapid change of the market and new competitors with innovative products;
- Maintaining leaderships in the market;
- Lack of a leader product in the market;
- Decrease of turnover and profits;
- Difficulties in internationalization of the company
- Decrease of personnel due to reduction of business; ;

\* *CIDA - Confederazione Italiana Dirigenti di Azienda e Alte Professionalità*

- Difficulties in identifying the real needs to formulate technology requests;
- Difficulties in interaction with qualified universities to acquire research results and innovative solutions.

These difficulties are the real obstacles to improve innovation and competitiveness of SMEs and are mainly due to:

- Lack of adequate human resources to be allocated full time to manage innovation process;
- Lack of time to identify external solution to acquire new technologies, while it is necessary to reduce drastically “time to market” to maintain competitiveness of new products;
- Lack of adequate financial resources to invest in innovation.

From the academic point of view, researches have their research program and often they try to transfer research results or technology using “technology push” methodology, but they are not able to solve the single requests of companies in terms of technology needs. In fact researchers try to transfer solutions that are part of their research program even if the solutions are not in line with the real requests of the companies.

The initiatives of “clustering SMES” are mainly addressed to solve these problems and in this scenario is particularly important the role of a “business manager”.

In Italy there is a proposal elaborated by CIDA with the main aim to create a new professional figure denominated ” BUSINESS INNOVATION MANAGER” ( BIM ). This new professional figure could be available for SMEs for a temporary contract in order to realize innovative business plan and to assist companies in the evolution of the innovation process. The new BIM are people coming from managers database, where only selected and trained people, with specific skills in management, organization and technology, are included.

The Business Innovation Managers could be the core persons of the companies included in the “clusters” with the main aim from one side to identify and elaborate a business plan base on the real needs of SMEs and from the other side to identify and monitor the better solutions of technology offers. For this reason the BIM must be very well integrated in the local networks dedicated to business and innovation assistance.

The BIM could also represent the right link between SMES and Academic world as well as Public Authorities.

This initiative is in an experimental phase in the north of Italy, in close collaboration with Federmanager (the Italian Association of Industrial Managers) of Milan.