

Background

C-Tech Innovation Ltd is a highly successful research, technology and innovation organisation, with clients across the globe in many different sectors. Enthios' relationship with C-Tech began in 2003. We worked in partnership with them on a major project where they were one of the lead contractors on the NWDA's '*Knowledge to Innovate*' (K2i) programme (which had the prime intention to further develop innovation throughout North West SMEs). Although we are an independent company, we are well versed in operating as partners, as in this case. The K2i programme ran for 3 years and we provided training within it in the areas of innovation (both open and closed), sales development, coaching and leadership through the K2i initiative. This type of long term relationship is very indicative of the way we work.

The challenge

As part of the K2i programme we designed and delivered numerous open programmes. A typical outcome from these open sessions was that individual SMEs would request follow-on training, which was more specifically targeted towards their own needs.

A good example of this was an engineering company that specialised in 'bespoke' solutions for clients. They were known as being very creative and the culture of the organisation was that they enjoyed taking on challenging work that other firms might turn down. The problem they faced was that they were inundated with ideas from their own development team and also with requests from customers. They needed some process for evaluating these ideas and identifying those that they could turn to commercial advantage. In short, they wanted to channel their creativity into commercial advantage.

What we did

We proposed using a 'stage-gate' process to help them address the issue above. We then devised and ran a one-day workshop four times to involve thirty-six staff identified by the CEO. Each group was organised so that its members came from across all functions. The training had the following objectives:

- to build commitment to implementing a stage-gate process in the company
- to create a simple stage-gate process for deciding whether or not to proceed with potential opportunities and innovations

Once the process we introduced had identified whether or not to proceed with a job, 'quick wins' and 'definite no's' needed to be highlighted early in the process. It was fundamental to the company that:

- the process would clearly identify and specify customer requirements
- any stage-gate process introduced would help allocate limited resources effectively

The CEO was more concerned with getting something up and running than waiting for the 'perfect' stage-gate process to be created. Emphasis was, therefore, on practical application rather than a process which covered every possible situation. (The potential cost of this approach was that there may be a proportion of missed opportunities or 'false positives', but it

was more important that the company moved quickly, while maximising their chances of capitalising on commercially viable ideas).

The results

- most of the opportunities (approx. 80%) that were fed into the process were customer-driven and communicated to the company via the sales team
- the remaining 20% of opportunities were internally driven through R&D
- the stage-gate process proved itself capable of assessing both types of opportunity
- by-products of the workshop were that it promoted cross-functional working and also encouraged the sharing of expertise, experience and knowledge

The process also proved itself valuable in maintaining motivation amongst staff. In the past, if an idea wasn't adopted, this sometimes resulted in reluctance to put forward further proposals. Once the stage-gate process was introduced, people could see the reasons why a particular idea might not be immediately pursued due to a variety of objective factors such as; quality, cost or the environment, which made the decision easier to accept.

C-Tech were pleased that Enthios helped them meet their delivery targets in what was a high profile government run scheme for the NWDA. They particularly valued the way Enthios were able to help make technical information simple.

Here's what they said ...

Justin Wrench of C-Tech said, *'Enthios are extremely complementary - they add gloss and professionalism to our expert services and workshops. They help to bring material to life, which can make all the difference when you are trying to implement a project or change in a client organisation'*.

'We worked with Enthios Training & Development in the introduction of Innovation and Creativity throughout the North West, to leaders of SMEs and their organisations. This involves all areas of product, process and people and the ability to make innovation an integral part of the day to day running of their businesses. Other areas have also included the delivery of sales training, project management and one to one coaching as the need arose from the initial contact. What we have in Enthios is an organisation that has been key in developing the content and strategy of the initial roll-out of this major project and they have helped us to explore the more creative aspects of Innovation. We wouldn't hesitate to recommend them as a training provider'.

Ged Barlow, Managing Director - C-Tech Innovation Ltd.