

Supply Chain Innovation Provides Opportunities for Manufacturing

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Continued innovation and investment in services, products and people could hold the key to business survival in the current global recession. This was the key message at a recent event hosted by the Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET) in partnership with the AEMFC (of WYLLN (West Yorkshire Lifelong Learning Network)). Entitled 'Open Innovation in Global Manufacturing Supply Chains' and held at The George Hotel, Huddersfield, the event attracted over 40 delegates including students, academics and local business people.



The event was based on a recent research project between UK and Japanese experts. Keynote speakers included Mr Alastair McKinna, senior lecturer, The University of Huddersfield and Dr Paul Denton, AEMFC sector officer who carried out the research. The study focused on the difficulties faced by the UK in the 1970s and '80s, during the decline of traditional, large scale manufacturing, including textile, coal and steel industries and the emergence of smaller service-based businesses.

One of the lasting legacies of this shift is the changing skill sets of local people. Over the last decade or so, fewer undergraduates have been studying manufacturing and engineering at degree level, leading to an aging workforce and a growing shortage of skilled employees. While this trend now appears to be changing, as more young people opt for the career-focused degrees associated with engineering and manufacturing, new problems are emerging, as Dr Denton explained: "The smaller, niche engineering and manufacturing companies, now prevalent in the UK, are struggling to compete in a global marketplace. The IET event examined how innovation in all areas of business is vital if UK manufacturing and engineering companies are to become globally competitive.

"By applying open innovation principles to the supply chain – in other words, by looking for inspiration from outside sources and accepting knowledge and information from external partners – we believe that UK businesses can grow together and exploit new technology." One successful example is the West Midlands Collaborative Commerce Marketplace (WMCCM), which enables smaller organisations to join together as a larger, virtual organisation in order to tender for major contracts.



The event received excellent feedback from the delegates for providing clear thinking and a practical, common sense approach to current economic challenges.