How to make SMEs of the Rail supply industry more resilient and fast-track their innovations

The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the need to fast-track the progress in the technological innovations developed up to date, being the digitalization now the backbone of the industry that is transforming the way we move and produce. Consequently, the organizational culture of the companies - above all SMEs - must be prepared to the digital revolution which will be based on technologies focus on matching the demand to supply more than ever before. Also COVID-19 has represented a 'revolution' requiring the companies to be faster in the delivery of their products and services, and therefore competitive and resilient.

Regarding this situation, the role of Workplace Innovation (WI) as an engine to improve the innovative services and the technological development, as well as to increase the organisational readiness and resiliency will be even more important than it was before, especially among SMEs. What it is true is that learning from forced experimentation and investment in risk-mitigating technologies may help firms become smarter and more flexible. For example, this forced experimentation has led to a better understanding of remote work during the pandemic.

This draws attention on the importance of innovation climate and employees’ commitment for the adoption of WI techniques, aiming at improving staff motivation and working conditions, thereby enhancing labor productivity, organizational performance, innovation capability, reactivity to market change and consequently business competitiveness. As with any emerging opportunity, there is no established path to follow to activate inclusive growth in railway SMEs to uptake WI. According to the European Workplace Innovation Network (EUWIN) initiative, in fact, productivity is on average 20–60% higher in companies implementing the WI method. Our key message is that WI is strongly related to the enhanced levels of employee engagement, innovation, improvement and customer care that build long term competitiveness.
The RailActivation scheme:
*a holistic process from employee to the market*

The RailActivation Pilot Scheme is conceived as an itinerary for companies - especially SMEs - to understand where they stand as for Workplace Innovation (WI). The Scheme is a flexible tool consisting on 3 blocks that the company can select depending on its own level of WI implementation and its improvement needs.

The idea to pilot-test the Scheme is to involve some members of the small team devoted to Workplace Innovation in the companies, if possible, to the Innovation Way Workshops. Once back in the company they will be able to spread the knowledge of the tools and methodologies learned among the other members of the company team but also among colleagues of the company supporting their adoption and increasing the possible impact in terms of workplace innovation.
Dissemination events

Virtual · 29th September 2020
RailActivation Webinar to present the Pilot Scheme.

Virtual · RailLive! 2020 · 1st December 2020
RailActivation virtual roundtable with Workplace Innovation specialists will take place during RailLive! virtual fair, running from 1st to 2nd December 2020.

Berlin (Germany) · InnoTrans 2021 · April 2021
RailActivation INNOVATION WAY WORKSHOP will be organized during InnoTrans, the International Trade Fair for Transport Technology running in Berlin from 27th to 30th April 2021.

The "Innovation Way Methodology" goes virtual
To comply with the health safety rules driven by COVID-19 pandemics and to better reach out target SMEs, the Innovation Way workshops - due to take place in Spain, Italy and Germany - will be delivered in virtual classrooms to the SMEs selected under the Open Call. This will ensure highest prevention and effective results for our SMEs.

Open Call for SMEs closing on September 30th
Following the closure of the Open Call the Evaluators will assess the candidacies against the criteria set in the Call Guidelines. The SMEs finally selected will benefit from innovation support of the value of around €10,000 through specific services and travel vouchers. The SMEs beneficiaries will start an “Open culture transformation process” that will be applied both to organizational and production fields, as well as to design more sustainable and socially responsible business models.

The inspirational tip
HOW TO MAKE BETTER GROUP DECISIONS
When you have a tough business problem to solve, you probably bring it to a group. In order to achieve effective results when asking a team to collectively make decisions — namely, groupthink — there are behavioral science-based tactics to use. First, keep the group as small as possible. Having more voices in the room increases the likelihood that you’ll default to decisions that enforce the status quo. Next, make sure your group is diverse — in every sense of the word — in order to reduce bias. Try appointing a “devil’s advocate,” a person whose job is to test consensus. Watch out for blind trust in experts: While they can help you become more informed, making them part of your decision-making can sway your team’s judgments. So you might invite them to provide their opinion on a clearly defined topic, but position them as informed outsiders. And finally, make sure that the group shares collective responsibility. Everyone should feel accountable for the decision and its outcomes.

Torben Emmerling and Duncan Rooders, Harvard Business Review