Abstract

Improvement of the innovation infrastructure for SMEs is one of the main political and economical targets in many countries today. A prominent role is played by innovation networks of various kinds and structures and it is important to understand the crucial success factors of such a network in order to improve existing clusters or to set up new, more efficient systems.

In this paper we present our research based on a case study approach on the largest German innovation network, in which we take part ourselves. The network consists of more than 30 partners having provided services for SMEs for over 6 years and covering all aspects of innovation management.

Data from several 100 projects and a customer satisfaction survey have been analysed and show main demands and objectives from SMEs as well as their preferred way of co-operation with external partners. On the other hand, important aspects in delivering high class customer-oriented services are derived from the data and are interpreted, like securing quick response, high quality, real partnering and still a "all-from-one-hand" project for the customer.

Since the analysed innovation network is a very successful network, it can be regarded as a good example for others. This paper will help innovation service networks to set themselves up or improve themselves towards a more successful, customer-oriented alliance by having a better understanding of the crucial factors of efficient and reliable collaborations and helping governmental bodies to take the right approach in supporting these networks and their co-operations with industry. Also from this study, it can be stated that there is a clear demand in industry for comprehensive innovation management providers and that networks combining different partners and different know-how are regarded as suitable and useful partners.