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COLLABORATION OF ENTERPRISES IN THE SUPPLY CHAIN: A KEY FOR SUCCESS IN THE CONTEXT OF EUROPEAN UNION

Introduction

History teaches that struggle and competition between two factions achieving the same goal, leads to a negative result for both parties. A hostile climate damage the economy, but also the spirit of managers, hinders business development and economic growth.
This article analyzes some factors that enable businesses - and their Supply Chain – to reach a steady growth «for the benefit of all». The European Union has, among its tasks, created the best conditions for enterprises to operate in collaborative climate or healthy competition. The key for success of European companies is the adoption of Problem Solving Approach, and other modern techniques. This would compensate for the differences and get early results so coveted at the dawn of the EU. Below, in the first paragraph, we will analyze the composition of the European business and the policies adopted by the European Commission to encourage business expansion, opening to the world market, the collaboration among the member countries and stimulate innovation and technological development. The goal is to increase the competitiveness abroad. In the second section we outline the key factors for success of collaborative economy. The third section will be devoted to a brief mention of the role of universities and research institutions in the transmission of skills and knowledge to businesses: the collaborative process can also be promoted by certain entities, that engage in collaborative relationships with businesses, and so can generate new knowledge and spread, creating mutual benefits.

1. The specificities of the European business network

The European business network is characterized by SMEs, particularly micro firms with less than 10 employees; only a residual part is composed by big enterprises.
Table 1 shows the economic importance of SMEs, which employs the largest number of employees, making the prevalence of the added value.

Tab.1 Enterprises, Employment and Gross Added Value of SMEs in the EU-27, 2012

	Micro	Small	Medium	SMEs	Large	Total
Number of Enterprises						
Number	18,783,480	1,349,730	222,628	**20,355,839**	43,454	20,399,291
%	92.1%	6.6%	1.1%	**99.8%**	0.2%	100%
Employment						
Number	37,494,458	26,704,352	22,615,906	**86,814,717**	43,787,013	130,601,730
%	28.7%	20.5%	17.3%	**66.5%**	33.5%	100%
Value Added at Factor Costs						
Million Euros	1,242,724	1,076,388	1,076,270	**3,395,383**	2,495,926,	5,891,309
%	21.1%	18.3%	18.3%	**57.6%**	42.4%	100%

Source: Eurostat, National Statistical Offices, DIW, DIW econ, London Economics.

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According Table 2, situation in Europe is not so far to United States, where SMEs percent (99,9%) is higher than Europe (98,9%). Nevertheless some differences exist in the internal of the aggregate.

Tab.2 European and American enterprises in comparison

	EU 27		U.S.A. (2005)	
Size of enterprises	**Number of enterprises**	**Employment**	**Number of enterprises**	**Employment**
Micro	**18,783,480 (92,1%)**	**37,494,458**	**25,120,009 (95,2%)**	**33,227,410**
Small	**1,349,730 (6,6%)**	**26,704,352**	**629,946 (2,4%)**	**8,453,854**
Medium	**222,628 (1,1%)**	**22,615,906**	**608,182 (2,3%)**	**37,355,380**
SMEs	**20,355,839 (99,8%)**	**86,814,717**	**26,358,137 (99,9%)**	**79,036,644**
Large	**43,454 (0,2%)**	**43,787,013**	**17,477 (0,1%)**	**57,672,418**
Total	**20,399,291 (100%)**	**130,601,730**	**26,375,614 (100%)**	**136,709,071**

Source:reworking our data from Favoretto, Calcagnini, *Lo stato delle piccolo imprese: Italia, Europa e Stati Uniti a confronto,* conferenza internazionale USA-UE-Italia, Università di Urbino "Carlo Bo", Facoltà di Economia, 2008.

The economic and social relevance of SMEs in Europe, and all over the world, motivates the special attention that the European Union is dedicating to this aggregate.

2. The efficiency of supply chains as a key point in the European policies and the 2020 strategy

The European Commission has set up a wide range of initiatives aimed at enhancing SMEs. As it is shown in the chart below, SMEs are subject to a number of limitations and constraints.

In recent years, one of the most pressing problems are administrative and regulatory costs. The weight of these costs depends on reduced size of business; costs weigh up to ten times more on a small business than on a big company. For this reason, the European Commission has set out to implement policies to reduce these costs until 25%, and to implement regulations that are favorable to these companies. Other variables that affect the growth of SMEs, are the accessibility to financing sources, the ability to capture more market share, competent managers and the competition between the companies. If the first factors depend in particular on the business size, in terms of employees and capital, competition regards the economic activities in general. The European Union intends to mitigate the rivalry and promote relationships focusing on collaboration within the same Supply Chain.

There are policies within the EU to encourage the growth of SMEs, by addressing different problems that affect them. Regarding innovation, Europe aims to remove all barriers that hinder development and profitability of innovative companies; funding will also be allocated to support the R&D, through the Program for the Competitiveness and Innovation (CIP). European companies are characterized by a low technological development compared to other international companies: in 2011 total expenditure in R&D of EU 27 was equal to 2.03% of the total GDP; in 2009 this value amounted to 3.36% for Japan and 2.87% for the U.S.A.[6]; as consequence EU implemented some programs in order to encourage innovation, focusing especially on small businesses. Among them, the *Innovation Union* is the program that allows to increase the investment in know-how, improving access to finance for innovation and more efficient use of resources. This initiative aims to boost growth and employment, ensuring Europe's competitiveness[7].

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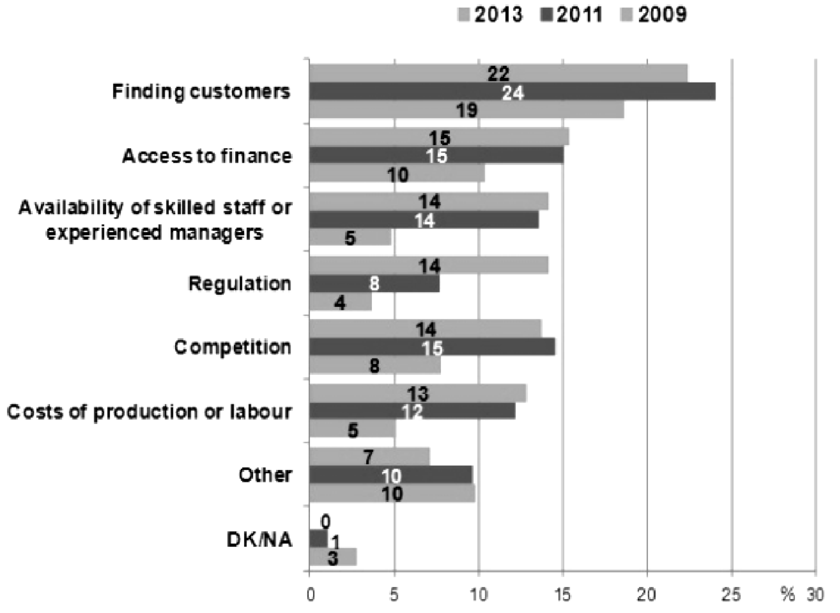
[6] Cfr. http://www.bancaditalia.it/studiricerche/convegni/atti/innovation-in-Italy/Aimone-Gigio-Mancini.pdf
[7] Cfr. ec.europa.eu

Chart n.1 The most pressing problems SMEs reported[8]



Source: European Commission, *Joint Commission/ECB report: Access to finance and finding customers the most pressing problems for SMEs,* Brussels, Memo of 14 November 2013.

The European Commission has also launched the *PRO INNO Europe* initiative, which provides the allocation of funds to support the R&D activities of SMEs. This program intends to measure and compare the innovation performance, to analyze trends of innovation policies at regional and national level, and then to merge data at the international level, provided by the various institutions. Thanks to the start of collaborative processes, it is possible to test and develop new concepts of innovation policy at European level and for each region of the member states. This speeds up the diffusion of new forms of support, more effective[9]. *Take It Up* is an interactive work space, dedicated to innovation services. This offers access to a database, concerning the most efficient tools and services designed to support innovation, and represents an aggregation of professionals who share skills, experiences and challenges, as well as news and the latest knowledge, for helping SMEs to start or increase the R&D. Finally, *EBN* is an organization that brings together more than 200 business and innovation centers (BIC), which aim to support the creation of new businesses and develop the activities of existing SMEs [10]. In Europe, there are ecosystems for innovation (clusters), consisting of groups of SMEs that are mutually reinforcing, that have growth potentials, as well as the opportunity of technological and economic expansion. The Commission is planning a competitive and regulatory review of each of the major value chains, through inspections and evaluations of the cumulative cost adequacy. All member states are invited to implement these initiatives to facilitates SMEs and competitiveness.

The *Small Business Act*, drawn up by the Commission in 2008, is the program supporting European SMEs, in order to assist the strengthening of business and to incentive in undertaking new business and expanding the horizon of the market. The SBA has focused on the importance of reinforcement

[8] The data are displayed in descending order by year.
[9] Cfr. http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/innovation/support/pro-inno/index_en.htm
[10] Cfr. ec.europa.eu

and effectiveness of collaborative networks that present themselves as powerful engines for regional economic development and drivers of innovation; despite the presence of innovative companies, they are not competitive enough on the international market. The exchange of knowledge among policy makers, in the field of collaborative networks, will allow to overcome the problems of fragmentation and to exploit the financial resources more effectively (European Commission, 2008). One of the initiatives to support and encourage SMEs, is the Enterprise Europe Network. Its objectives concern the access to markets, within and outside the EU, and the assistance in applying for funding. Currently, it should allow progress in the process of systematic integration of all European economic activities, so as to achieve the economic unity, in order to strengthen the European single market[11].

Other challenges of European companies regarding the difficult access to raw materials. Raw materials largely influence the international market, especially with regard to the Global Supply Chain . The obstacles are different and involve various steps and actors in the supply chain, especially in the upstream stages of the process. The European Commission has promoted in this direction the initiative «raw materials», with the aim of ensuring a sustainable and equitable access to these resources by European producers and suppliers, so as to improve the conditions for the acquisition and supply and to ensure fair trade of raw materials. The Commission is also seeking to conclude diplomatic agreements in order to ensure sustainable access to these resources. For 2014 are planned programs aimed at promoting technologies that can replace the essential raw materials, so as to bypass the dependence on other countries, greatly enhancing the single internal market, also through European partnerships for innovation and recycling. In recent years it has been concluded a partnership with developing countries, in order to combating poverty and stimulating growth, consistent with the objectives of integral development.

Another problem, which hinders the profitability of European Supply Chains, is caused by energy costs, which are much higher than those of its main competitors (+ 50% than in the U.S.A. and RUSSIA, +20% than CHINA); the differential increases with respect to the gas, four times higher than the U.S.A., Russia, India and +12% than China, although less expensive than in Japan. The main causes are energy taxes. In order to preserve the competitiveness and sustainability of European business, the Europe 2020 strategy provides the climate and energy package, which aims to prevent the re-localization of CO2 emissions and to change the emission trading system (ETS). To break down the costs of energy, the Europe 2020 strategy provides:

- funding to research and innovation in the field of climate and energy;
- the implementation of internal energy market;
- the development of an efficient structure for gas, electricity and transport of key raw materials;
- the prevention of increases in energy prices caused by taxes and other factors, so that it can be ensured cost effectiveness and increase the competitiveness of the European Supply Chain.

In order to strengthen the single internal market and increase the technological evolution, the European Commission requires member states:

- a greater exploitation of the infrastructure and transport, thanks to lightening the customs formalities, to the adoption of the fourth rail package for easier access to the EU market, and the prospect of enforcing obligations inherent the single European sky;
- an acceleration of the development and adoption of clean vehicles, through the provision of minimal infrastructure for alternative fuels, such as electric charging points;
- bring together to uniquely information and communication technologies with logistic networks and energy, in order to identify new opportunities and challenges for the industry and related services;
- liberalize and integrate the internal energy market to knock down costs;
- promote the development of SMEs;

[11] Cfr. ec.europa.eu

- improve internal services market to ensure and enhance the competitiveness of European and Global Supply Chain.

To support long-term competitiveness, the EU member states should address increasingly to foreign markets, and PSV, to reduce the internal costs of supply chain (raw materials and labor), and to the final customer market. The Commission is pursuing negotiations for free trade agreements with key partners and focuses on an increasing of European internationalization, to promote access to world markets. This would allow to gain a significant competitive advantage by comparison to the global competitors (U.S.A., China, Japan ..) ensuring growth of the domestic economy and an increasing input to the development of new technologies in communication and transportation.

The European Union is investing more resources for the mobility of young graduates to facilitate the social, cultural and professional integration of European citizens. This means that Europe must take the road towards a truly integrated, favoring the formation, specialization and the correct placement of human resources in the context of activities in which the resource can better exploit its potential. The goal is to increase the benefits of Supply Chain in terms of efficiency and ability to innovate, to invent and to reinvent. The potential of the workforce employed in the various processes progresses and is transmitted between the various resources, thanks to learning processes (European Commission, Memo of 22 January 2014).

The Europe 2020 Strategy is a ten-year strategic plan, adopted by the Commission, focuses on five main objectives: employment, research and innovation, education, social inclusion and poverty reduction, climate and energy. The objective is combat the economic crisis looming over the European continent, trying to create the conditions for a new model of economic growth and smart sustainable development. The European Commission wants to implement a restructuring plan for education, research and innovation, dedicating them more effective investment by fostering the development of the digital society (technology adoption in the community); EU also wants to increase the competitive level of European industry and encourage their development through renewable energy, consistent with the reduction of CO_2 emissions. The goal of a solidarity growing is essential, as it's based on the fight against unemployment and poverty[12].
However, we must note that the full success of Community strategies can only be achieved if companies will be able to maximize the benefits both as individual production units, either as a co-operative system. It is necessary to stimulate and increase the ability of businesses - especially SMEs - to operate jointly.

3. The success's key factors in Supply Chain

To be efficient a supply chain needs to be built on strong collaborations between companies. After presenting the different collaboration forms between companies, we will focus on the development of new techniques of negociation enabling a real Demand Chain Management. To do so, the buyer in less and less a cost-killer and becomes a real intrapreneur.

3.1 Collaboration forms between companies

It is important to emphasize, both at national and Community level, on the importance of collaboration between businesses, so as to reach agreements on the cost reduction along the supply chain and to achieve greater international competitiveness. In fact, the aggregation among the companies allows to take advantage of any business, to spread the know-how and skills between them. This makes it possible undertake the processes of innovation and technological development, sharing resources and expertise. The types of partnerships, occasional or permanent, which facilitate the collaboration between enterprises, especially SMEs, are:

[12] Cfr. http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_it.htm

- *joint ventures*, for exercising - in form of contractual or corporate - economic activities of common interest to several firms;
- *associations or buying groups,* which consist of agreements between entrepreneurs for the cost reduction on common purchases, leveraging on the purchase quantity;
- *enterprise networks,* are forms of coordination between undertakings which improve the process of innovation and the competitive strength in the market, without sacrificing individual autonomy;
- *manufacturing districts,* are aggregation of SMEs located in a limited area and specialized in certain stages of the production process, combined with each other through economic and social inter-relations;
- *temporary association,* characterized by a temporary arrangement and occasional collaboration between businesses, without this leading to the creating of a joint venture. The companies involved are committed together in the creation of a complex work, costly for each company individually, and that requires the intervention of specialist services of each of the participating companies, sharing costs and profits, without committing further;
- *European economic interest groups:* legal institutions desired by Community legislature, with the aim of encouraging collaboration between economic operators, entrepreneurs and professionals, from the member states[13].

The last type of aggregation is the only regulated at the European level. The EEIG, as the most common forms of association and collaboration, aims to develop the economic activities of the participants, by sharing resources, activities and experiences. The gains eventually realized by the group would be allocated to each member and taxed accordingly. It is also important that the purpose of its formation is attributable to the integration of activities of each component and not to the replacement of the same. An EEIG must consist of at least two entrepreneurs from two different countries among the belonging to the EU[14].

Entrepreneurs and business buyers are called, by their nature, to take decisions under uncertainty conditions, especially when it comes to entering into an agreement. Below, we will illustrate the best techniques to facilitate the success of this essential phase in the business life.

3.2 The development of modern techniques of negotiation: an important aspect of the development of collaborations between clients and suppliers

The negotiation phase is one of the important steps within the Supply Chain. In this moment is decided the fate of the negotiations, which will affect the entire supply relationship. The agreed conditions with an upstream supplier will reverse to the downstream customer. It is for this reason that it is important to give attention to each link in the chain, by coordinating actors and fostering a collaborative climate. Misunderstanding could damage the whole process and all actors. To manage the negotiation phase is necessary that this should be entrusted to capable, dynamic and decisive buyers. It is also useless aground on «hyperbolic» strengths, which would not lead to any positive result. They have to take into account the bargaining power, the interests of both parties, socio-cultural differences, try to find a common meeting point, rather than get stuck on their demands. In the latter case it's would show a win-lose negotiation, characterized by the dominance of one over the other and focused on single-issue variables (exclusively economic) and that typically encourages a climate of hostility. Rather, it is desirable to conclude a win-win negotiation, which involves a favorable outcome for both parties, taking into account multi-issue variables, augmentative, able to stimulate cognitive processes and the establishment of strong relationships. To ensure that the negotiation is conducted in order to obtain a win-win negotiation, they can have recourse to the doctrine of Problem Solving Approach, including modern techniques of negotiation, that enhance the success. This method, which usually covered by in the cross cultural management corporate area, aims to raise awareness among buyers to understand the cultural, social and economic differences

[13] Cfr. http://www.stelviopietrobono.it
[14] Cfr. ec.europa.eu

between the various contractors with whom they can get in touch. This approach encourages a positive outcome of negotiations, as well as the establishment of solid and long-term relationships. In a more general view, the reports based on the Just-In-Time and comakership are preferred, thanks to their ability to respond to business needs, reduce time and cost in the Supply Chain and facilitate collaborative processes for innovation.

The process of adoption of information technology has facilitated the conduct of negotiations at a distance; it's possible conclude agreements without the parties having to travel physically. This factor simplifies the conclusion of agreements with foreign parties, physically distant, by reducing time and cost of negotiation. On the other side, the buyers should be able to develop the negotiation on concordant aspects and use literal clear language, concise and with friendly tone, in order to avoid that the contractors may misunderstand the message, so stimulating an hostility mechanism. If it is true that technology shortens time, it's also true that it creates a physical barrier that cannot benefit from the non-verbal behavior (facial expressions and posture), paraverbal (rhythm and tone of voice) and style of the language used (use metaphors). These factors generally contribute to understand the intention of the negotiating counterpart, favoring, as appropriate, to reach an agreement. For this reason, corporate buyers will face a greater difficulty in undertaking a negotiation via e-mail; it is also true that technological progress now allows they to use some devices and software designed to solve this problem. For example, the allocation of a webcam and Skype software, allows contractors to conduct negotiations as if they were face to face in the same place, solving the problems highlighted before. This verified, the e-procurement is the supply channel currently most widely used. It is able to coordinate the steps of supply chain, which can be constantly monitored by each user, thanks to the development of the Supply Chain Intelligence. This and recent configuration makes it possible to identify the best operating scenario, check the status of orders, tracking goods in a digital and automated distribution network and restore automatically, when they were interrupted. Remarkable are also the advantages in the downstream perspective: increased responsiveness and adaptation to the changes of demand, reduction of lead time and time to market, consolidation of relations thanks to the greater availability of information and the implementation of Sourcing Group Management Process, which will be discussed in the following paragraph.

3.3 The Supply Chain Management developing into Demand Chain Management

Over the years new needs and desires are developed, more and more characteristic, in downstream phase of the supply chain. This has prompted by the change of the production chain process, from a perspective of Supply Chain Management to the Demand Chain Management. This management model has precisely the objective to satisfy at best the specific needs of the end customer, by implementing innovations closer to the wishes of the customer, so that drive the whole process. The demand is configured as a starting point and not the end, as it did in the previous configuration of the supply chain. Companies can thus pursue a policy to produce goods and services that are adapted to the specific requirements of the end consumer, such as *collaborative customization*, where businesses maintain a dialogue with their customers in order to better satisfy its specific needs. In this way, the customer becomes one of the fundamental and unquestionable drivers of innovation (Dominici, 2008). The coordination between market supply and consumers demand is essential, especially in a dynamic environment, where customer expectations are changing significantly. The introduction of information technology has also allowed the removal of geographic and information barriers, facilitating the gathering and dissemination of information. So customers could compare the products offered by the market, as well as shorten the supply chain. One of the recent developments, which show remarkable results thanks to the collaboration, concerns the implementation of Sourcing Group Management Process. This is a global information platform where converge the flow of information, the evaluation and selection methods of suppliers in a specific sector; are also collected relevant data, business strategies, performance, etc.., constantly updated and accessible by all users connected to the same network. This allows to bypass the phase of the evaluation and selection of suppliers and avoid duplication of effort for the retrieval of information already available; leveraging the dissemination of knowledge, the firm can identify and exploit the opportunities offered by a particular market sector or product. Gandolfo Dominici writes: "the tendency to «do at home» is gradually put aside in favor of opening up to collaboration with other actors aimed at speeding up the process of product and production development; the effective and efficient collaboration capacity becomes a critical factor for the success of the company within the network; centralized control of different entities with different information, experiences, goals and decision-making authority is almost impossible. The efficient and effective collaboration has become a key challenge for those organizations that want to develop in increasingly competitive markets" [15]. Information technologies have enabled the development of *Collaborative Product Development* (CPD), which allows the virtual connection of design team and development of innovative ideas, with suppliers and customers. In this way facilitated the collaboration between different organizations and the interaction between different actors in the supply chain and distribution. It's a kind of learning community, where they are established collaborative relationships, with the prospect of sharing information, knowledge and skills; this process also generating new knowledge devoted to invention and innovation, increasing the overall value of the Demand Chain. The internal and external collaboration is critical to provide information, otherwise imperceptible, to create fundamental input to innovation; are also fundamentals the capacity to respond to the market demand changes, the reduction of lead time and the consultation of different sources of information (Dominici, 2008).

3.4 Toward the disparition of the cost-killer buyer and the rise of a real entrepreneur buyer

The modern procurement processes need to be analyzed and solved in terms of Global Supply Chain. They are now rare cases where companies do not involve cross-border situations in the supply chain: upstream for the purchase of materials or components from foreign countries, decentralization of activities, the relocation of production, and downstream for the sale of finished products and services to third countries. The virtual character who takes this configuration of a supply chain requires the ability to manage complex ecosystems by the *leader of the chain*, without assumption of direct control; this allows to not compromise the profitability for the leader himself. The growing needs of customers requiring an open perspective and ready to go in new directions and new sourcing strategies, in line with the volatility of the market demand[16]. The Global Supply Chain has as its ultimate goal to better serve the consumer and at the lowest cost, anywhere in the world this is the place. They are therefore fundamental factors such as time to market, just-in-time purchasing, marketing, supply and sales, stable relationships and aimed at co-innovation processes between provider and enterprise customers, according to the comakership principles.

The latter element is the key to the success of the supply chain. The type of relationships that develop between different actors in the supply chain determine the future conditions for the success or failure of the companies, with which they interact and with whom they are in contact. Focusing on a unified and collaborative vision, rather than competitive, can bring benefits to operators. These allow a greater solidity relational further downstream, to the end consumer who will show his assent through fidelity to that product / service or brand purchased. The ratio of comakership provides for that the supplier may participate in the business opportunities of the client company, with a responsibility to co-producer (comaker); supplier and client company engage in a mutual benefit relationship. This happens thanks to the incentive to co-innovate, achieve higher profit margins downstream, the development of more efficient technologies in production and exchange, and the creation of higher quality products. According to Hugues Poissonnier[17], a very important aspect is attributable to companies further downstream in the supply chain, appearing as buyers of the later stages of the procurement process. Purchasers are potential suppressants of costs for the entire

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[15] Gandolfo Dominici , *Demand Driven Supply Chain e Innovazione: il sistema logistico-produttivo per la soddisfazione dei bisogni del cliente*, Economia e Gestione dell'innovazione nelle PMI, FrancoAngeli, Milano, 2008.

[16] Cfr. http://www.ict4executive.it/executive/approfondimenti/global-supply-chain-serve-un-nuovo-approccio_43672151824.htm

[17] Cfr. H. Poissonnier, in Travaux Scientifiques du Réseau PGV, Conférence internationale de Lisbonne, *L'entrepreneur face aux politiques publiques européennes*, 13-14 septembre 2012.

reference supply chain. This depends on the dynamics of corporate buyers, who purchase products of higher quality, to allows their business to reduce waste and defects in materials and increase production efficiency. This practice encourages upstream supplier to invest in research and development, as well as to improve the quality of the product and its sale. In the face of higher quality, or the inclusion of advanced technological intrinsic components to the product purchased, the downstream firm will be willing to pay more, because this type of purchases will lead to a greater profit from the sale of its final products. The consumer, after verified the higher quality with the same characteristics of other products, will be willing to pay also more. This process then allows to reduce costs by reducing waste and greater efficiency, increase revenues through the application of an higher mark-up. If the R&D of an enterprise is derived, in whole or in large part, on the type of relationship developed with the supplier and on the purchase of materials and innovative components, rather than by internal research and development, then the buyer is also the main carrier of innovation for the enterprise itself (Poissonnier, 2012).

Conclusions

The development process of an entrepreneurial collaborative network, thanks to policies, allows to configure an economic encouraging framework. Collaboration is the key to social and economic integration in the European Union, for the achievement of the single market, still hampered by the different political, cultures, economies that persist within the Community.

Thanks to the Europe 2020 Strategy it’s possible to hope for a community economic consolidation and sustainable economic development of all European countries. The strategy provides the incentive for R&D, which should increase the levels of profitability and global competitiveness. This is the vision of collaboration between the various actors of the Global Supply Chain, extended and contextualized in the perspective of European SMEs. So the contractor reduces costs of the supply chain, working with the supplier in making innovation.

Implementing innovative techniques for understanding the others needs, such as the Problem Solving Approach, becomes a significant competitive advantage for businesses. In fact, thanks to this approach, buyers are able to orient the negotiations towards a win-win agreement, typically beneficial for both retailers. Sometimes it may be advantageous to conclude partnership agreements and not just the supply or sale agreements. There are different forms of collaboration through which entrepreneurs can connect more resources and means to obtain a common benefit. In this case they manage to perceive the importance of taking a view of collaborative between managers.
Research institutions play an important role in the collaborative and innovative process because they are able to get inputs of innovative collaboration. Providing knowledge and advanced technologies to businesses, universities and other research centers can collaborate with businesses, being able to get from these economic resources for this purpose. It generates a virtuous circle that powers progress and the training of human resources, which can be inserted in the future, in the companies that have funded the research. This subject contribute to the growth of European SMEs, whose competition is increasingly based on the provision of advanced technologies, rather than the production of goods in bulk. Is crucial to translate the knowledge transmitted in innovative applications that allow you to find long-term higher profits. From research activities, companies can acquire workforce with high training, skills and expertise that can contribute internally to make processes more efficient and produce products and services at the forefront. Collaboration with these institutions, especially for SMEs, allows them to become or remain competitive on the domestic and international markets[18].

However, it is necessary a cultural and behavioral growth in firms that become increasingly able to use the tools of collaboration. This needs to be contextualized in a logical system and networks, capable of enhancing the basic principles of economies of scope. Educating the human resources to collaboration since the course of study, through specific cognitive and training processes, would

[18] Cfr. http://www.aster.it/tiki-index.php?page=FormeCollaborazione

certainly contribute to the achievement of the collaborative economy, founded on a common development, to the benefit of the whole community.

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ABSTRACT

The attention that companies lend to the competitiveness factor on the market tends to foster a sense of *competitive faith* that leads to a climate of hostility, which hinders the successful outcome of negotiations and it may deteriorate the relationship between the agents of the same supply chain. The Problem Solving Approach and the most modern techniques of negotiation show that it is possible to achieve a progressive reduction of the costs incurred downstream, through processes of integration and collaboration upstream. This can be achieved through the collaboration of all business functions; especially thanks to the dynamism of the buyers that facilitate innovation processes of suppliers, increasing business production efficiency and the quality perceived by end-users. Implementing these collaborative mechanisms at European level can achieve a lot of important results in economic and social growth of enterprises, of the member countries and the entire European Union