

Strategic Alliances Between Irish SMEs & MNCs

Unlocking Knowledge Transfer Webinar Series

September 2021

After a summer break, KTI's *Unlocking Knowledge Transfer* webinar series resumed with a panel discussion on developing strategic alliances between Irish SMEs and MNCs. Moderated by KTI's Siobhan Horan, the panellists explored the benefits of SME-MNC collaborative relationships, some of the fundamental qualities to look out for when developing collaborative relationships, how to engage with a technology centre and various supports available to facilitate SME-MNC collaborative relationships.

Panellists were Elaine Berkery, Director at Eastway Remote Monitoring; Thomas Coleman, Senior Process Engineer at Astellas Ireland; Sarah Hayes, Director at Pharmaceutical Manufacturing Technology Centre (PMTc) and Lorcan Brennan, Senior Scientific Advisor at IDA Ireland.

The discussion kicked off with insights offered by Elaine Berkery (Eastway) and Thomas Coleman (Astellas) on how the collaborative relationship between Eastway & Astellas was facilitated by way of membership with PMTC. Eastway Remote Monitoring is an Irish SME offering industry 4.0 machine monitoring solutions to the Irish & international MNC base. Through their PMTC membership, Eastway took a leap into the research field which enabled them to enter the sphere of research partnerships, particularly through Enterprise Ireland's Innovation Partnership Programme (IPP). Through PMTC's Principal Investigator, Eastway was matched with Astellas based on mutual needs. This was a great fit due to Astellas' need for local expertise in the pharmaceutical industry which matched Eastway's value proposition for MNCs.

Thomas Coleman remarked that benefits of partnering with SMEs as an MNC include the ability to view day-to-day processes in a different and more innovative light, problem-solve complex technical issues more efficiently due to more focused external skillsets and gain access to expertise & resources that are not available in-house for complex projects.

Both Thomas Coleman and Elaine Berkery remark that PMTC played a significant role in facilitating the partnership between Eastway and Astellas. PMTC is an Enterprise Ireland & IDA-funded technology centre in University of Limerick that navigates the academic landscape in addition to interpreting industry need.

When asked about the fundamental qualities to consider when searching for a business partner, Elaine Berkery and Thomas Coleman identified qualities such as trust, respect, open communication and common understanding to be fundamental in any collaboration. In order to align the parties' goals and objectives, honesty and trust is vital and the end goals of both parties have to be clear. Clear communication and visibility between the MNC and SME are also key to the decision-making process and it is an aspect PMTC managed as a three-way conversation between Astellas and Eastway.

SMEs and MNCs can engage with a technology centre, like PMTC, and undergo a consultation with a PI detailing their best options. State supports available to SMEs such as innovation vouchers, feasibility studies and the innovation partnership programme, provide opportunities to carry out collaborative research whilst simultaneously reducing risk and decreases the amount of resource contribution if the project is not large.

Lorcan Brennan, Senior Scientific Advisor at IDA, remarked that multinationals can apply for IDA's can be assessed for the various funding supports available by contacting an IDA executive and

scoping out a project. A proposal must be presented to an independent technical assessor and a score will be given which mandates the level of support required for the project. IDA will seek to bring in expertise to strengthen the project and feasibility studies can also be implemented for the MNC before an R&D project kicks off.

The October 2021 edition of our *Unlocking Knowledge Transfer* webinar series will discuss the topic of digitalisation supports and will feature guest speakers:

- Paul Cummins – Managing Director at Sea Change Ltd
- John Durcan – Senior Digital Transformation Specialist at Enterprise Ireland
- Barry Kennedy – CEO at Irish Manufacturing Research (IMR)
- Edward McDonnell – Centre Director at CeADAR

Click [here](#) to register for our October webinar.