

EDITORIAL



Historically, and by its nature, the aerospace and defence industry has always been strongly orientated towards a global market. This tendency, as well as the industry's ability to absorb technological innovation from an extremely broad range of sources, might suggest that

localisation of its production sites is of little importance.

However, the sector is in fact highly concentrated in a relatively limited number of geographical areas, and systems are also emerging for the development of aerospace activities with the close involvement of local universities, businesses and institutions, committed to cultivating synergistically the capacity existing in these specific areas and creating a presence on the global market. When the particular features of individual areas have a decisive, positive effect on the competitiveness of the sector (the 'technology districts', for example), it is interesting to look closely at what is offered by local public and private bodies by way of support and organisation. The chances of success are in fact governed, not only by the quality of individual companies or centres of research, but also by 'system competitiveness' and the effectiveness of institutional action to support the networks of large companies and SMEs.

When we talk about SMEs, we often focus on the first two elements of the description (small and medium-sized) and discuss whether size is an advantage or a limitation, when we would also be wise to consider the 'enterprise' component. To create an 'enterprise', it is necessary to have long-term goals and to make determined efforts to achieve them. Unfortunately, in Italy it is too often the case that entrepreneurs commit themselves boldly enough to ambitious projects, but then, faced with very tough external circumstances (fiscal pressure, inefficient administration, overwhelming red tape), give up too early, when

sufficient return has been made to repay the initial investment, and without giving the new business time to grow. The government has to come up with targeted policies to foster the growth of SMEs as part of broader measures to help these businesses.

Clearly, this does not mean that business people should not be shouldering any of the risk themselves: every adventure involves risk, and an entrepreneur has to be able to anticipate it, assess its possible impact and be prepared to implement the necessary countermeasures.

However, risk has to be proportionate to the strength of those who are facing it. The development of Italian SMEs, therefore, particularly in the high-tech sectors, requires more structured and efficient relationships between the various entities operating in the same supply chain.

SMEs may struggle to invest in R&D without compromising their operating results, but can make a valid contribution to excellence by teaming up with major industrial companies, at the same time participating in technology innovation processes that enhance their competitiveness. The potential gains from propagating the benefits of research from major businesses to SMEs are enormous: Finmeccanica, for example, which has more than 70,000 employees, is responsible for generating nearly four times this number of indirect jobs at several thousand SMEs.

However, to improve collaboration between large and small businesses, the big companies must try harder to explain the mechanisms and features of the market - particularly the international market - to their suppliers, so that SMEs have a better understanding of how and where to invest, as well as increased awareness of risk and how to deal with it.

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