

Innovation and Technology

This white paper was formed from a Quad City area leadership group focusing on globalization in the Midwest region. Our group studied how innovation and technology helps transform and grow business opportunities both globally and regionally. The Midwest has fallen behind in the global economy compared to other regions in the United States. This has created a sense of urgency for change as the small towns in the Midwest are shrinking and the major cities of the area are staying neutral even though there is an inward movement from rural areas and with immigrants to maintain the current population.

Our group conducted a case study of the Institute of Physical Research and Technology (IPRT) at Iowa State University. IPRT provides company's technical and economic assistance to help boost their sales and make them more efficient. IPRT has research and development departments comprised of engineers and scientists dedicated to technical assistance. Their economic impact is around 13.9 million dollars per year through retained and increased sales, cost savings and investments. IPRT has provided assistance to several Quad City area businesses that have gone global such as John Deere, Grain Processing Corporation, Hansaloy Industries and Sears Manufacturing. These companies are manufacturing and farm based similar to ones discussed in Longworth's book 'Caught in the Middle'. There are many examples of how IPRT has helped companies out of a complicated technical issue that saved jobs and increased production both at home and globally. The Quad Cities was a hub for the industrial revolution along the railroads and has contributed to the global economy in the past and they are slowly working to try and get back to that stage.

Innovation and Technology is vital component to businesses' global competitiveness and growth. As stated above the IPRT helps with these goals, but lacks marketing. Most people or businesses in the Quad Cities do not know who the IPRT is or what they do. There is little or no cooperation over state lines between universities and colleges that offer similar services. Institutions may provide the technical training but does not adequately address global innovative solutions. With the millions worth of technology that some of the schools have they don't advertise it to other colleges for use or so that colleges can send each other referrals. Something so simple never seemed so far away as if there were a great wall along the Mississippi River.

Large Universities starting with the IPRT at Iowa State need to start dialogue with other large universities such as University of Illinois and other Big Ten schools to establish a group similar to IPRT to work in the Midwest region as a whole. Leaders from political parties need to organize groups to raise awareness to this issue and show a sense of urgency. Once formed these groups need to track progress and not let the issue die. Some progress is being made with a meeting the IPRT is forming on May 7th to invite manufacturing businesses from the Iowa side of the Quad Cities to discuss their services. The problem once again is they are inviting only Iowa businesses and not looking at the region as a whole and inviting businesses on the Illinois side. They haven't realized that for some Illinois Manufacturers that most of their products could be delivered mostly to help people in the state of Iowa and vice versa. When you think of our area on a global mindset we are all friends and neighbors. When you look at it from a national level we are close to each other and consider ourselves friendly neighbors. The problem is when

we get so small minded that we think of the place as an area competing for the same customers, which is exactly the opposite of what we should be doing. Unity needs to start with urgency in movement towards a better and more cooperative global Midwest.

The solution seems so simple but why hasn't it been done? The truth is that they are funded by the state of Iowa and feel they need to serve the Iowa businesses first. The University of Illinois needs a program to help out with manufacturers as well. Then after formally establishing 2 different large universities they can compare and share their technology and innovative solutions. Together working as a Midwest powerhouse and not just two universities they can accomplish each other as the experts from the Midwest that can help the whole country. This brings brand equity to both schools and puts the region on a fast track to a more successful global presence.

In conclusion, working together as a region to promote innovation and technology will develop the entrepreneurial spirit necessary for the Quad Cities and the Midwest to be globally competitive. Raising awareness by creating a sense of urgency, education, economic impact, and political cooperation does this.

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