



“The EDGE Innovation Network”

The Los Angeles Chapter July 2014 Meeting

Presentation by

Bob Kirch, Fort Bliss EDGE Center Director

(Standing in for EDGE Innovation Network Director, Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Pete Palmer)

Article by

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Collaboration. What a concept.

In today’s ever expanding global market, competition is keener than ever. Opportunities that were once available no longer exist but for the larger and stronger of organizations. To gain access to markets basically controlled by the “800 pound gorillas” it may require companies of smaller stature to shift their marketing paradigms.

Dictionary.com offers these definitions of “collaboration:” a) to work, one with another; cooperate and b) to cooperate, usually willingly, with an enemy nation. Obviously definition b) and its reference to “enemy nations” takes the notion of collaboration to the extreme, but it does serve to make a point. Working together with competitors that share common interests and purpose, and with the ability to pool resources, opens up doors that were otherwise impenetrable to achieve results otherwise unattainable.

The EDGE Innovation Network (EDGE), conceived 10 years ago and underwritten by General Dynamics (GD), is a forum for collaboration, an open community where industry, academia, non-profit and government organizations can pool resources to rapidly deliver new technologies and innovative capabilities to warfighters, homeland security professionals and first responders. Its open and free membership encourages participation. From a very humble beginning, today EDGE counts 500 members, with a focus on the smaller to mid-sized companies which cannot typically gain audience in front of GD customers, like the Army.

The process developed by GD through the EDGE Network involves collaboration with the users of the evolving products and solutions early in the design stage. As explained by Bob Kirch, EDGE Center Director, the methodology consists of purposeful steps intended to gather vital feedback from those who will be using the equipment, the soldiers themselves. Who better to consult than those in the “trenches” when duty calls?

Bob shared with the group some of the processes used within EDGE to reduce cost, weight and/or completion time so that a fighter plane, for instance, is built smaller, faster and cheaper. He explained that there is a constant battle to “declutter.” If space can be freed up for other vital functions or just for comfort, then it is space worth having. The key is to get the soldiers involved very early on in the process.

Before and after pictures (see below) of a cockpit were shared during the presentation. You know that old saying that “a picture’s worth a thousand words.” Seeing these two photos just confirmed that adage. Bob described various methods through the EDGE Network used to achieve the improvements as reflected by the two pictures –

- As mentioned above, collect feedback early on in the process. It is common to build equipment to spec and then let the soldiers have at it before releasing the official RFP.
- Fix. Test. Fix. This is what Bob referred to as a “hyper cycle.” Don’t build soup-to-nuts before being soldier-tested. Design incrementally to afford as much opportunity to modify prudently and cost effectively.
- Described as one of the process keys, and referred to as “Human Design Center”, equipment is tested by those who have no idea how it is supposed to perform. Makes sense, as the users/testers begin with no expectations to cloud their perspective.

The EDGE offers significant benefits to government and end users based on three key tenets: end user involvement, honest brokerage and its human-centered design process. EDGE customers and end users provide continuous feedback and thought leadership in shaping existing and future requirements and assisting with product improvements. Focused collaboration among a broad network of EDGE members and [EDGE Innovation Network](#) centers leads to rapid development of new technologies and innovative capabilities.

EDGE’s bottom line is a best value approach to getting new capabilities and technologies into the hand of users and operators quickly at a reduced cost and with the lowest risk possible.

Before



After





Lee Schwartz, former CEO and President of manufacturing and distribution companies, is principal of the Schwartz Profitability Group (SPG) that, for over 13 years, has uncorked the operational bottlenecks of manufacturing and distribution companies, boosting their bottom line results. Lee's clients range from smaller family run companies to Fortune 500 firms, including those in aerospace and defense. His work helps his clients find solutions related to process improvement, supply chain management, inventory control, workflow design, and operational performance. Results consistently include cost reduction, improved efficiencies and increased profitability.

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