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The power of collaboration

International collaborative research offers companies opportunities to gain insight into best practices in management first-hand. CMA Canada is supporting such efforts as a participant in the Consortium of Advanced Management — International

By Pat Dowdle, CPA, Todd Scaletta, CMA, and Ashok Vadgama



More and more organizations are discovering how collaboration can boost their profile and add to their knowledge assets. For instance, the C4 project in southwestern Ontario is a good example of collaboration at work. Through it, four large universities signed a memorandum of understanding to collaboratively protect and commercialize technologies developed at each institution (for more information, read "Collaboration for innovation" in the March 2005 issue of *CMA Management*). The pooling of such valuable intellectual talent will no doubt expand the reach of each institution and encourage the exchange of ideas across campuses.

Research and development are ideal places for such collaboration to take place, and CMA Canada has no intention of being left behind this innovative wave. Beyond its own associations with a number of universities across Canada, CMA Canada is now also part of the Process Based Management (PBM) program, which is one of two major programs of the Consortium of Advanced Management — International (CAM-I).

CAM-I is an international consortium of manufacturing and service companies, government organizations, consultancies, and academic and professional bodies that have elected to work cooperatively in a pre-competitive environment to solve management problems and critical business issues that are common to the group. CAM-I was established in 1972 as a global, not-for-profit organization with the mandate to support research and development in areas of strategic importance to industries and government agencies. Besides CMA Canada, other member organizations that participate in CAM-I include Boeing, Grant Thornton, IBM, SAP, SAS, U.S. Air Force, U.S. Coast Guard and U.S. Marines.

CAM-I's participative model produces value for members through:

- Participative research — by working together, the participants understand the journey — the best practice path.
- Targeted intellectual efforts — each program targets results and produces implementable deliverables by members.
- Human networks — participants develop and continue to share, challenge ideas, and learn long beyond the end date of the specific result.

CAM-I is focused on advancing management and technical practices. As a group, CAM-I members work to create implementable solutions that resolve common problems.

The collaborative process

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The primary forum in which collaboration and information sharing among members takes place is the CAM-I quarterly meeting. These meetings allow members to:

- leverage their knowledge through interaction with leading experts in all areas of cost, resource and process management;
- compare their company's practices and performance against those of other world-class competitors; and
- develop implementable solutions that incorporate leading-edge cost, resource and process management methods.

CAM-I has four meetings per year in North America. These three-day meetings enable the participants in each of the programs and interest groups to work on developing leading-edge research, hear presentations by leading experts in all areas of cost, resource and process management, and to develop an invaluable network of professional contacts from industry, consulting and academia.

The first day is a series of interest group meetings for the specialty programs. In addition, training classes (in topics such as introduction to strategic cost management, and target costing) are frequently offered this day.

The second day is split between general sessions, with major presentations to keep members abreast of current industry issues, and continuing the work of the interest groups.

On the third day, interest groups meet to continue their work, identify tasks to be completed before the next meeting, and identify the agenda for the next quarterly meeting.

Between quarterly meetings, interest group members continue the collaborative process from their respective offices, using scheduled follow-up conference calls and Webex-type sessions to expand upon ideas. Members test and validate what is being developed in respective organizations, returning with feedback, which is, of course, a key component of the collaborative process.

The results of CAM-I's collaborative research model are tangible deliverables for members, as well as outputs placed in the public domain. These include numerous books, published articles in peer-reviewed journals, the *CAM-I Glossary of ABM Terms*, workshops and certified training programs in such areas as strategic cost management and target costing.

CAM-I programs

CAM-I has two major ongoing programs. The Cost Management Systems (CMS) program is the authoritative international think tank on organizational cost and resource management practices. The purpose of CMS is to advance organizational cost and resource management practices internationally through collaborative development, standardization and dissemination. Some of the research projects currently part of the CMS program include cost management standards, target costing, performance management, risk management, resource consumption accounting, armed services/public sector cost and performance management, cost of quality, and a conceptual design that integrates these topics.

CMA Canada is a partner in the second program, Process Based Management (PBM). It is the only professional accounting designation currently involved. The PBM Program was launched in conjunction with ATI in November 2004. Process management had been a focus in CMS since 1993, but the increasing importance of a process focus to organizations led to the creation of this new program. The initial focus is on the development of an implementation roadmap to help organizations become process-based.

Collaboration is the key to innovation. We encourage any organization interested in learning more about best practices in Process Based Management, and how to become process-based, to consider the value of such collaboration. To find out more about CAM-I and the PBM Program, visit their website at www.cam-i.org.

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