'Community Wealth Building' and 'Clever Tendering' for an Inclusive Local Economy

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Abstract

Purpose:

This chapter focuses on policy intervention that has grown in popularity in the UK since the financial crisis of 2008. The focus on inclusive growth and more specifically, community wealth building. The concept has been picked up by institutions and think tanks at multiple scales from the OECD to local government. We aim to address the tensions in community wealth building and in particular how local authorities in the UK are adjusting their procurements strategies to increase the tendering capabilities of SMEs in their political geography.

Design/Method:

We introduce a UK-based study utilising an ESRC-funded case study, desktop research and semistructed interviews to investigate how well the region of Greater Manchester (GM) eco-system was equipped to prepare small firms to learn how to compete for public contracts with evidence applicable to other large-scale tenders.

Findings:

Overall, at the time of writing business support across GM does not create the value proposition of enabling small firms to be capable at tendering and thus undermines community wealth building (CWB) efforts. The advice on offer is sparse; it offers partial or no advice about different capabilities and is often limited to simple guidance stating procurement rules and compliance demands. Information is often abstract and technical support is also fragmented, making it unlikely that small firms will find resources. Advice fails to engage with evidence on how small firms learn and to provide a learning process. In particular, support to raise absorptive capacity and strategic commitment to tendering, build basic tender readiness and to develop and refresh tendering capability are not evident. Training, coaching and peer learning are largely absent.

Originality: UK appears to be an experimental ground for CWB with dedicated think tanks and several examples such as the 'Preston Model'. GM is a suitably sized and comparable region to offer transferable knowledge and indicators to support regions to innovate. We offer a 'Dashboard of Priorities' to enhance business support to SMEs so they can win at tendering, thus strengthening CWB policy and impact. Furthermore, we are adding clarity to a fuzzy definition of CWB and define inclusive procurement. We assist global policy makers to answer the fundamental question; are we doing all that we can with these significant resources to create an economy which truly benefits the people? By examining the ideas of community wealth building and inclusive procurement from a local authority and SME perspective, we can extrapolate finings for international comparison and offer an in-depth look at how the execution of this policy can be strengthened to deliver maximum benefit to their communities. The implication is to focus attention on how institutions (public or private), by way of better execution, can enhance the economic resilience of their own local ecosystems/places.

Key Words: Inclusive growth, SME, community wealth building, tendering, procurement, anchor institutions

Introduction

Localities have long been contested sites in which 'the apparent opposites of enterprise and community, of efficiency and welfare, of economic means and local ends' manifest on a day-to-day basis' (Eisenschitz and Gough, 1993:11). Throughout the last four decades there has been a plethora of politically motivated policy experiments (regionalism, new localism, inclusive growth) which advocate to unleash the latent innovative potential of local economies, increase entrepreneurial activity and ensure new and flexible governance arrangements that serve place better (Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Pike *et al*, 2006; Lee, 2018).

Since the 2007/8 financial crash which nearly saw the end of western capitalism (Jacobs and Mazzucato, 2016), austerity policy has ensued, indicating a significant change in approaches to economic development. This course of action was significantly disrupted by a global health crisis that is COVID19. In the UK, and to a lesser extent Europe, there has also been 4 years of disruption due to BREXIT negotiations resulting in continued issues such as the sausage wars over the Northern Irish sea boarder. Trumpism and the America First campaign has also strengthened public attitudes to support local/national wealth building. This can be seen in the UK as the Conservative Government messaging is to 'level up', in the USA under the Build Back Better: Joe Biden's Jobs and Economic Recovery Plan For Working Families and also taken by the EU as they established the Build Back Better Fund. However, it is widely accepted that not all places are identical, therefore no one ready fix or solution will apply to all localities in all circumstances.

Public Procurement, Anchor Institutions and SMEs

Outsourcing and privatisation have been the hallmark of a capitalist public policy. The aim has been to increase competition and allow the market to have a greater role in public life whilst reducing the reach of the state (Crouch, 2016). The result has, in some countries, been quite the opposite with an economy in which a small number of large firms dominate the procurement process and have positioned themselves so be indispensable to the sector and public service. This has been labelled 'corporate neoliberalism' (Crouch, 2016; Davies, 2017) and works contrary to the classical neoliberal model of free markets. Examples in the UK include Serco, G4S and Carillion; the latter of which collapsed and cause huge delays to critical infrastructure like hospitals and bridges.

Furthermore, the need to address the deficiencies of national governments to deliver meaningful growth and development across local settings has led to an orthodoxy that views the city region as the best conduit to deliver growth and lower inequality. On top of the changes in governance, emphasis on place leadership and the local identity of places, policy ideas around keeping wealth local have re-emerged under a different name and have targeted the soft power of anchor institutions across a particular political geography and their procurement strategies. This has been named 'community wealth building' (Lyons and Wyckoff, 2014; CLES, 2020).

In recent years, community wealth building (CWB) has gained an increased profile as an alternative approach to local economic development, in the UK and internationally. The Centre for Local Economic Strategies' (CLES)¹ has worked with Preston City Council (known as 'The Preston Model'). It has received international media attention and is influencing policy at a local, national and European level. In the UK, this work has inspired the formation of Labour's Community Wealth Building Unit and informed the party's Alternative Models of Ownership policy agenda. 'The Preston' Model' has

¹ CLES is the UK's leading CLES is a UK independent think and do tank realising inclusive economics for people and place. www.cles.org.uk

inspired local authorities across the UK with councils, city regions and devolved nation governments now actively pursuing this approach. Many of these models require a significant change in how local authorities and anchor institutions think and act in all aspects of how they can drive the local economy via a fundamental shift in purchasing behaviour.

A community wealth building approach poses a key question for all local authorities who embark on this policy: are we doing all that we can with these significant resources to create an economy which truly benefits the people?

Community Wealth Building

The concept of 'Inclusive Growth' is concerned with the pace and pattern of growth and has become a new mantra in local economic development. Despite enthusiasm from some policy-makers, others argue it is a buzzword which is changing little. Inclusive Growth is conceptually fuzzy and operationally problematic, has only a limited evidence base, and reflects an overconfidence in local government's ability to create or shape growth. Yet, while imperfect, an Inclusive Growth model is better than one which simply ignores distributional concerns (Lee, 2017). Traditional economic development practice and developer-led regeneration are failing to address the economic challenges of our time (Piketty, 2013; Raworth, 2017). Community wealth building is a people-centred approach to local economic development, which redirects wealth back into the local economy, and places control and benefits into the hands of local people. This approach is rooted in the European Social Democratic tradition, in which the state works to protect public values and achieve good outcomes for citizens. It has also drawn inspiration from community wealth building pioneered by the Democracy Collaborative work in Cleveland, Ohio, and the Mondragon cooperatives of the Basque Country. Community wealth building is a response to the contemporary challenges of austerity, financialisation and automation. It seeks to provide resilience where there is risk and local economic security where there is precarity (Goodwin and Power, 2021).

In our context Community Wealth Building aims to reorganise the local economy to put control back into the hands of the local people and places. At the heart of the approach are five strategies for harnessing existing resources to enable local economies to grow and develop from within.

- 1) Inclusive procurement Inclusive procurement develops dense local supply chains of local enterprises, SMEs, employee-owned businesses, social enterprises, cooperatives and other forms of community owned enterprise. Inclusive procurement is locally enriching because these types of businesses are more likely to support local employment and have greater propensity to retain wealth and surplus locally.
- 2) Fair employment and just labour markets Often the biggest employers in a place, the approach that anchors institutions take to employment can have a defining effect on the employment prospects and incomes of local people. Recruitment from lower income areas, commitment to paying the living wage and building progression routes for workers are all examples of the actions anchor institutions can take to stimulate the local economy and bring social improvements to local communities.
- 3) Socially productive land and assets anchor institutions are often major land holders and can support equitable land development and the development of under-utilised assets for community use.
- 4) Making financial power work for place seeks to increase flows of investment within local economies by harnessing the wealth that exists locally, rather than by seeking to attract

national or international capital. For example, local authority pension funds can be encouraged to redirect investment from global markets to local schemes. Mutually owned banks are supported to grow, and regional banking charged with enabling local economic development are established. All of these are ideally placed to channel investment to local communities while still delivering a steady financial return for investors.

Plural ownership of the local economy - At the heart of community wealth building is the principle that wealth is broadly owned and controlled. Cooperatives, mutually owned businesses, SMEs and municipally owned companies enable the wealth generated in a community to stay in that locality and play a vital role in counteracting the extraction of wealth.

Preston's approach to community wealth building has been widely praised (LGA, 2020). Preston began to use social value in procurement (the act of leveraging additional contractor support into a local economy) after analysis showed that local institutions were only spending 5% of their procurement expenditure in Preston and just 40 per cent in Lancashire. Preston City Council changed their own practices, but as a district council had a relatively limited total spend. So, the council brought together large stakeholders including the Lancashire County Council, Preston College, the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan), Lancashire Constabulary and local education providers.

The council worked to increase the proportion of local spending by these different organisations. The most recent analysis shows that an extra £74 million spend has been retained in Preston and £200 million extra in Lancashire (CLES 2019). Preston has also been working with the European Union's URBACT network to explore inclusive procurement and share good practice across Europe.

Whilst there are multiple avenues to dissect all of the above principles, we are focusing on inclusive procurement, which has become one of the key tenants of CWB policy. When looking at the majority of local authorities in England or devolved administrations like Scotland or the Combined Authorities, they place procurement as the first key principle or are making significant efforts to adjust their procurements strategies and influence anchor institutions to do the same.

Inclusive Procurement (Tendering and the Public Sector)

Governments are increasingly using public procurement as a strategic governance tool for promoting inclusive and sustainable growth while ensuring value for money. Public procurement represents approximately 12% of gross domestic product (GDP) and 29% of total government expenditures in OECD countries; as such, its potential impact on a range of policy objectives is significant. SMEs can play a pivotal role in helping governments ensure that the benefits of globalisation, open markets and digitalisation are broadly shared across societies. SMEs account for more than half of employment globally and, on average, 50% to 60% of national GDP in OECD countries, while being strongly connected to local economies. They are thus significant players in the economy as well as important agents of social cohesion and integration. In the European Union (EU), public procurement represents 13.3% percent of total EU GDP, with public authorities spending some €2 trillion per year during the 2015–2017 period on the purchase of services, works, and supplies (European Commission 2019). Consequently, governments strive to provide supportive business conditions, including in terms of public procurement, that allow SMEs to achieve their growth potential by participating in domestic and global value chain.

Hoekman and Taş (2020) recent study of several EU member states find that better quality procurement regulation is associated with greater SME participation and higher probability that SMEs win contracts. They argue that dividing contracts into smaller lots, a key feature of 2014 EU

procurement regulation reform, bolsters participation by SMEs but only increases the probability of SMEs winning contracts for small value lots (€25,000 or less). Their results suggest governments seeking to enhance participation by SMEs in public procurement without explicitly favouring SMEs can do so by improving the overall quality of procurement processes.

In the UK, tendering is a competitive and specialist form of business exchange. A total of approx. £100bn is spent on procurement via local authorities accounting for 46% of their budget annually (Simmons, 2021). Under regulation, it is necessary to trade with public bodies for contracts above a minimum financial threshold. Tendering describes a set of processes where specifications for public work are encased in a regulatory set of documents, under which potential suppliers can respond through completion of specialised information requests. The UK Government's SME Action Plan (BEIS, 2019) sets out a modern, ambitious strategy that includes an ambition to spend £1 in every £3 of public sector procurement on smaller businesses by 2022. The draft UK Industrial Strategy also included a chapter highlighting this problem and a pledge to award SMEs 33% of public spending by 2022 (UK Government, 2017); this was cut in the final version, perhaps because of uncertainty about how to make tendering more accessible to small firms. This ambition follows a long track record of Governments trying to radically increase spend with small firms and, indeed, reflects an international problem (OECD, 2018). As such we adopt a definition of inclusive procurement as:

'procurement that actively seeks out diverse suppliers and supports their learning, lowers barriers to supply caused by procurement processes and both innovates and creates social value through a diverse supply chain'.

The importance of SMEs as local suppliers for CWB

Socially, SMEs increase the volume and nature of supplier diversity (Baden et al, 2011). Supplier diversity is a market mechanism concerned with equality in procurement and buying services. For tendering to work as a social institution, it must be inclusive of small firms as suppliers to counterbalance market monopoly by a few organisations that can impose limits on procurer choices. The local nature of SMEs offers public purchasers an opportunity to act upon their wider responsibilities to the local economy and to society (Preuss and Walker, 2011). For economic and social reasons, public responsibility towards SME suppliers has been visible for over 20 years and it is an important element of economic policies (Pickernell et al, 2011).

The recent UK National Procurement Policy Statement (NPPS, 2021) has made improving supplier diversity, innovation and resilience a key priority. In practise, this should mean upgrading procurement methods by i) creating a more diverse supply chain to deliver the contract, which will better support start-ups, small and medium-sized businesses and VCSEs in doing business on public sector contracts, and ii) increasing innovation and the use of disruptive technologies and business models throughout the supply chain to encourage the wider adoption of innovation. As Nembhard argues (2014:111) from a northern and central America ethnic-minority context, hiring local people, buying local products, and using local service providers as much as possible re-circulates money around the community, making other community-based activities possible, keeping resources in their community and helping community-level activity and resources to increase in value. Much of the thinking around CWB is born out of innovation in the co-operative movements and trust between community, institutions and organisations.

SME Tendering Capabilities needed to accelerate Community Wealth Building

The management literature tells us that capabilities are a firm's abilities to get particular things done. They are made up through the combination of routines (semi-regular ways of doing operational tasks;

Dosi et al, 2000). A strategic capability such as competitive tendering arises from coordinating a chain of operational capabilities and, so, a wider network of routines. Operational capabilities are refreshed and orientated to changing market conditions through dynamic capabilities. Building on this theory, in-depth research (Turner and Rouse, 2018) and experience of supporting small firms to tender it proposes that competitive tendering is a knowledge-intensive process of developing a complex set of routines that combine in various patterns to build operational capabilities, enabled and renewed by dynamic capabilities, that enable small firms to win a stream of public sector contracts. Clever Tendering is a transformative capability emergence and improvement framework, helping SMEs to build situating and tender production capabilities through entrepreneurial orientation and environmental learning.

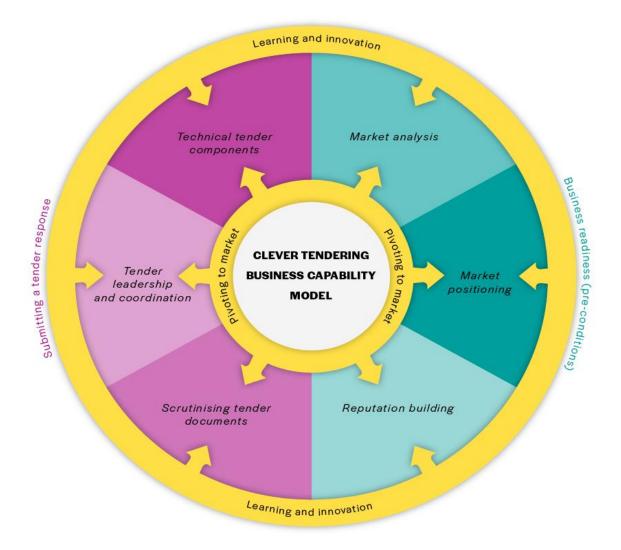


Figure 1: Clever Tendering Business Capability Model (Source: Centre for Tendering, 2020)

Case and Method

The focus of this paper will be on that specific principle of CWB within the geography of Greater Manchester. ESRC funded case research (2020) investigated to what extent a local business support ecosystem could ameliorate the effective exclusion of most SMEs from public sector supply chains or halt their positioning at lowest end of value chains, through targeted SME support. The GM case study

presented marks a turn in the literature to engage scholars in looking at what a business support environment needs to do to accelerate local trading. Supporting small supplier business learning about a specialist form of regulation (tendering) is an antecedent to CWB not yet fully explored. The results shared open up a conversation about two important points; i) just whose problem is diverse supplier capacity building within a region, and ii) what examples of good practice are proposed for making systemic change that drive CWB objectives.

As noted above, there is currently a concerted effort to adjust procurement strategies and in the UK to use CWB as a vehicle to justify the approach. This is evident in Scotland, multiple local authorities across England and as far as the USA (Bronks) and Japan (set asides) (Nembhard, 2014). Notably, the USA, South Korea and Japan, for example, offer more favorable systems for small businesses by using set-aside procurement funds to offer SMEs closed access to lower value contracts (OECD, 2021). Without such set-asides, SME suppliers are placed on a level playing field with larger firms to compete in the same way for public sector contracts

Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) City Region

Greater Manchester consists of 10 local authority districts as illustrated in figure 2. Each of the districts has a unique profile with varying population, wealth inequality and economic structure. Together, the 10 districts form the GMCA with a directly elected City Region Mayor. Greater Manchester is seen having the ideal scale to embed devolution powers and drive policy innovation for development (Deas *et al*, 2021).



Figure 2: Greater Manchester Map (Source: GMCA)

Greater Manchester's scale, its Labour controlled authorities and left leaning political makeup drive the ambition to embark on an inclusive growth strategy of which CWB forms a large part of that process.

Method

In 2020, the Centre for Tendering² completed a project **Enhancing Business Support for SME Tendering: A Dashboard of Priorities for Regions.** It took Greater Manchester as a case study and asked how well the 'enterprise ecosystem' – including business support and procurement teams – enabled small firms to build their tendering capability. It was a searching question and the GM stakeholders impressed us with their openness to our inquiry. The project draws on prior Centre for Tendering research into what SME business practices constitute tendering capability, defined above as Clever Tendering.

Methodologically, the authors applied purposeful sampling to conduct semi-structured interviews, supplemented by a desktop review of business support artefacts and targeted SME training interventions. Secondary documentary source data included national and local procurement policy frameworks and local community wealth building strategies of the 10 local authorities to sense-make the discourses, day to day activities and lived experiences across GM. Authors' practical experience of policy engagement and supporting SMEs in this GM ecosystem are also factored into the paper. Empirical data were matched against literature on community wealth building and requirements of small firms in the procurement process.

Findings of Greater Manchester Eco-system for SME Tendering Capability Support

The Greater Manchester enterprise ecosystem has a multilateral arrangement of business support via a Local Enterprise Partnership-commissioned GM-wide Business Growth Hub (with circa 120 Business Advisers), specialist local authority or community services, membership organisations, universities, science parks and Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE)-specialist support. While there is some cooperation between actors, the reality is that these providers also compete for space in the business support supply chain. Provision or potential for support with tendering also resides in a large base of public procurers including ten local authorities, four universities, 35 Greater Manchester Health and Social Care Partnership organisations, a large housing association sector (coordinated via Greater Manchester Housing Providers), Transport for Greater Manchester and branches of national institutions including the BBC and GCHQ, among others. Four out of ten Greater Manchester Combined Authority areas partner with a private company, Star Procurement, to provide their procurement function.

Despite its scale and strategic priority to drive 'a thriving and productive economy in all parts of Greater Manchester 'and be recognised as one of the best places in the UK to start up, develop and grow a business (GM industrial Strategy, 2017) we found that support to build SME tendering capability is scarce and fragmented, with the exception of a couple of specialist 'beacon' projects.

Noting exceptions of targeted sectoral learning support, results show that overall Greater Manchester lacks a learning support process that enables small firms to be competitive at public sector tendering. Information and advice predominantly emphasises the 'front end' of where to find suitable

² Centre for Tendering is a UK research and knowledge transfer innovation hub with expertise in small business supplier capability and inclusive procurement www.centrefortendering.com

opportunities. As a consequence, there is a lack of explanation of the basic idea that tendering involves a series of capabilities and a learning journey to develop these or support to relate this to developing a specific firm. Help to diagnose learning journey, develops basic tender readiness, hone capabilities and refresh and orientate these as an ongoing process are essentially missing. There are fragmented pieces of dry technical help and very basic technical information on what tendering is, but this does not raise absorptive capacity, motivate strategic commitment or support capability development in customised learning journeys.

The general level of business support does not teach a firm how to critically read a tender specification prior to answering the questions. Of greater concern is that 'how to grow' via serving public markets is not generally embedded or signposted in business incubation and growth programmes. So a chance to develop SME skills for competitive tendering is lost. Furthermore, SME learning is constrained through rigid contractual entry gates where stiff sanctions apply for mis-understanding tender paperwork with a lack of informal safety nets. Opportunities to learn through reflection on tendering experience are largely absent and the skill of orientating goods and services to a specific tender invitation is not taught. In summary, the GM region lacks an adequate business support ecosystem to diagnose SME learning journeys and to customize support for tendering capability.

The implications of these findings for CWB are severe. It has been widely acknowledging that if large scale actors dominate an economic network by squeezing out the number and diversity of small and medium players, the result will be a highly unequal and brittle economy (Raworth, 2017:176; Sensier and Devine, 2020). Whilst CWB is in the spotlight in policy circles at the moment, with new strategies and papers coming through scrutiny and full council meetings, current procurement practice is constraining the ability to full realise an inclusive growth strategy.

Conclusions

In our chapter we have focused on community wealth building and in particular procurement as a central component of the policy. We have argued that the policy direction is clear but it is the implementation of new procurement policy that is deficient. What is being seen in the case of Greater Manchester and other devolved and local authorities, is a targeting of their procurement strategies. So much so that think tanks like CLES and now ESRC are funding research into this area.

Decades of austerity and the standardisation of procurement exercises into ridged frameworks driving best value have left the local government market stuck with large organisations winning the majority of the bids and blocking out SMEs. On the other hand, international policy has failed to recognise that adjusting procurement policy is only one part of a complex puzzle. Part of that implementation should consider how the anchor institutions together support the development of SME capabilities, and change attitudes and models of business support within an ecosystem. Therefore, anchor institutions globally need to be active in that ecosystem and not simply a passive provider of contracts. Whilst many emphasise partnership working this is usually with the winning supplier and thus leaves many SMEs out in the cold under-developed and unpartnered.

Cracking the longstanding SME procurement problem requires the widespread resourcing of evidence-informed and properly evaluated innovations. An enterprise ecosystem needs to know how to support small firms to strategically commit (or not) to tendering, build the capability needed to be tender ready and continuously develop tendering capability through tendering experience. This ecosystem will not only supply information via learning opportunities but enhance social capital: an entrepreneur's ability to get resource – in this case information and sensemaking about tendering out of networks. The support will, therefore, draw them into a relationship with procurers, expert business support providers and peers and encourage information sharing, reflection and mutual

sensemaking. In other words, if an ecosystem is a multi-lateral arrangement of actors and organisations that creates a value proposition then it requires a coordinated infrastructure to ensure that a greater proportion of public sector procurement can be spent on small firms that have capacity to tender, in any place around the world.

Policy recommendations

The evidence base is growing with cases and research forming around this idea but so are all novel policy ideas until they take hold. The operational problem and ability of local government to intervene in markets and shape them is being overcome as their confidence grows. Procurers require provocation to consider the diversity of suppliers and the additional social value and innovation that can arise from a diverse supply chain. The effective exclusion of many diverse suppliers from supply chains, or their positioning at the lowest end of value chains, impedes productivity by:

- 1. Undermining organisational growth and local socio-economic development.
- 2. Inhibiting innovation and competitiveness in supply chains.
- 3. Wasting scarce small/diverse organisational resources in unsuccessful tendering or sitting on a framework without being given opportunities to trade from this position.

To support regions to innovate, we offer a Dashboard of Priorities (Figure 3) to enhance business support to SMEs so they can win at tendering. The Dashboard Indicators serve as good practice indicators to drive CWB across local, regional and global contexts. This is because a productive economy depends on SMEs developing capability to tender for public sector contracts and enterprise ecosystems that support that capability. In the Covid-19 context, enabling small firms to permeate public sector procurement markets — and ensuring that procurement is used to fulfil economic and social goals so we can "build back better" — is an even higher priority. So, whilst governments continue to implement measures aimed at opening up public supply chains, further research is required to determine their scope and impact.

How Can Enterprise Ecosystems Enhance Small Business Capability To Tender For AND INTENSIVELY SIGNPOST RESOURCES **CENTRALISE, CO-ORDINATE** materials that allow a business to invitations and write technical and strategic choice for a business or if tenderers, with the potential to but with low optimism or access to Organise, simplify and connect learning strategically situate itself in a tendering Encourage bold conversations. Ask if contracting and bring innovation in, avoiding this market is sensible. Of more concern are discouraged thrive through public sector public contracts are the right **COMMITMENT IN SMALL DEVELOP STRATEGIC** decipher support to build capability competitive documents environment, **FIRMS** A DASHBOARD OF PRIORITIES FOR REGIONS CREATE LEARNING RESOURCES, NOT INFORMATION Public Sector Contracts? and process requirements to respond to After tender readiness there is a need to Replace dense, technical evergreen resources with practical and interactive tools. Use a micro-learning approach that aligns learning aides to business readiness and encourage storytelling. Help firms learn from and between each other. Open up informal safety nets for everyday problem solving. SUPPORT TENDER READINESS extend and refresh tendering capability THROUGH COACHING AND PEER LEARNING Sociailise knowledge tender invitations m tendering knowledge to work to adapt business operations. Encourage strategic space to make sense of business capability alongside experience (success or failure Enable frontline 'soft' business advice to diagnose where a firm is 'at' to customise business support. University and other SME start up and scale up providers can include a 'Learning to requirements (including tendering pre-Build Tendering Capability' within their Help firms to manage the accumulation **BUILD ABSORPTIVE CAPACITY** DIAGNOSE LEARNING JOURNEYS of external knowledge, to build IN SMALL FIRMS in tendering) conditions) programmes **Figure** 3 **Dashboard** of **Priorities** (Source: Centre for **Tendering**

2020: https://centrefortendering.com/dashboard-of-priorities

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