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Manufacturer survey: Some hope, much room to improve

BY JAMES DORNBROOK | STAFF WRITER

Area manufacturers have plenty of room for improvement when it comes to many key business strategies, particularly globalization and implementing green practices, according to a new survey.

The American Small Manufacturers Coalition survey measured manufacturers' positions on six key next-generation manufacturing strategies: customer-focused innovation, systemic continuous improvement, advanced talent management, global engagement, supply-chain management, and sustainable product

and process development.

"We noticed there is a lot of room for improvement, and we hope to use this survey as a call to action," said Mary Davis, president of Missouri Enterprise.

The survey found that about 37 percent of area manufacturers consider themselves world leaders when it comes to new product development, 2 percentage points higher than the nation. About 34 percent said they consider themselves world leaders for percentage of sales invested in new product development, also 2 points higher than the nation.

On the down side, only 11 percent of

Kansas City manufacturers saw sustainable product and process development as highly important, which is 5 points lower than the national rate. Global engagement was seen as highly important by 21 percent of Kansas City manufacturers, which is 7 points lower than the nation.

Paul Scianna, executive director of industrial study and training group OneKC Wired, said he's not surprised by those results.

"Our manufacturers have always been very innovative and have a reputation for often being first to market," Scianna said. "Also, many local companies are

now following lean principles to make them more efficient on the cost side, but they just haven't taken it to the next level when it comes to sustainability."

Ross Franken, managing director of RSM McGladrey's manufacturing and wholesale team, said that most manufacturers know globalization and sustainable practices are important but that the economy is getting in the way.

An executive summary of the survey results will be available to the public in mid-July from Missouri Enterprise.

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