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The joint unwavering commitment to the regional innovation and growth in the region of Twente have enabled the University of Twente to become a world-class entrepreneurial university in the past few decades, and deservedly crowned as the number one in the Valorization University Awards in 2015 held in Amsterdam. The university facilitated in the region an average annual production of 100 start-ups, which to date have created 20,000 jobs, and launched 1,000 spin-offs, a sum that accounts for 10% of the fastest growing high-tech companies in the Benelux countries.

Both universities have embraced entrepreneurship as the way forward. Through Designlabs, FabLabs, and integration of business in the curriculum students become equipped with an entrepreneurial mindset and work with business on a frequent basis. This has already led to a wide number of student start-ups, amongst which Booking.com, Takeaway.com or more recently SciSports. With the support of Novel-T, the innovation and acceleration arm of the regional stakeholders, SciSports has just received a €1.8m investment to expand its business and make the next step.

The strong relationships in the region are key to its success. Rather than looking at cooperating with multinationals, the UT has focused its efforts on its neighbors and on some occasions, spin-offs. Its science park hosts a wide range of businesses (e.g. DEMCON) and research facilities that collaborate with the university. MESA+, its 1.25m² high tech nanolab has resulted in a number of spin-offs by researchers which are hosted in the High Tech Factory, a commercial UT nanolab that currently hosts over 20 companies. To facilitate these steps, the UT also hosts and supports several venture capital firms such as Cottonwood, Twente Technology Fund and the Dutch Student Investment Fund.

This unique ecosystem has allowed for intellectual capital generation, launching platforms to find its application in practice, and orchestrating a regional ecosystem to anchor the practices into the fabric of society. By our definition, this leveraged role of the universities has become increasingly important, particularly across Europe, not only in fostering economic growth and job creation, but also stimulating the platforms for art, culture, and creativity.

However, change does not happen overnight. The University of Twente has propelled the economic and social transformation process in Twente region in slow, but steady steps. Although the role of government should not be undervalued in this, to a large extent the institutional innovation strategy has been shaped by its leadership, and through their human resource strategy, by its staff. This is what makes it so difficult for universities to make the leap from their current way of going about things to becoming more entrepreneurial and innovative. The University of Twente has gone through a long but stable process of embedding its organization with an entrepreneurial culture. Through hiring staff with the right mindset, and enabling them to practice entrepreneurship in their daily work the university has a greater impact on its students and regional society.

HOW DO WE REVITALIZE A REGION AFTER A MAJOR INDUSTRY PULLS OUT?

What does it take to revitalize a region after a major industry sector pulls out? Although the answer depends on the context, the region of Twente, a rural area situated in the eastern part of the Netherlands has shown how it is done. Through an entrepreneurial spirit, a strong regional network and having embedded knowledge institutions into its region it has regenerated itself.

Following the collapse of the textile industry in the 1950s, unemployment rates spiked and infrastructures remained unused. The region of Twente was in a desperate need for new impetus. Starting its education life in 1961 as a technical university, the University of Twente (UT) turned out to be a central part of the answer to the region’s issues.

The university has, through a strong entrepreneurial institutional culture, its human resource strategy and strong regional network, helped its region back on its feet. However, whilst the university was a driving factor, it certainly was not developing the region alone with an essential factor being the regional networks and their willingness to engage with UT. The buy-in of local SMEs, regional government and the Saxion University of Applied Sciences were also key drivers behind regional innovation and growth.

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The Siemens’ Center of Knowledge Interchange (CKI) programme is an exemplar case for how external collaboration with university can be undertaken strategically.

Whilst most of the internal research at Siemens is focused on more immediate needs (or the business of today) like many large multinationals, Siemens engages with universities to investigate the business of tomorrow (or the day after tomorrow). Like Siemens, companies worldwide have woken up to the fact that the days of ‘closed innovation’ chains (without external input) are long gone. To generate high quality future-oriented innovations businesses nowadays are increasingly looking externally, in the form of open-innovation, specifically to collaboration with academia.

All too often companies approach cooperation with HEIs in an ad hoc and unsystematic manner. However, by carefully considering the relationship structure and strategy for building and maintaining cooperation, companies can obtain better results and create more successful results from their innovation efforts. In a practical sense then, the question arises: How can companies avoid sporadic, piecemeal approaches to cooperation and build relations with universities in a strategic thoughtful way?

The case of Siemens’ Center of Knowledge Interchange (CKI) programme is an exemplar case for how external collaboration with university can be undertaken strategically. The programme is operated by its University Relations (UR) Unit within Siemens and these external university relations are managed by Natascha Eckert, Director of University relations at Siemens, and the head of Siemens’ University Relations (UR) Unit.

University-business cooperation facilitated by Siemens (Germany and Europe’s largest industrial conglomerate with a strong international presence) has a long history of providing benefits for both companies and universities. Siemens has collaborated for decades with numerous HEIs and research centres around the world within the scope of its open innovation strategy which fosters company’s long term success and strengthens its innovative power.

The UR unit is the company’s special internal department exclusively devoted to management and coordination of the conglomerate’s cooperation activities with diverse HEIs worldwide. To make these activities more effective and fruitful, almost 20 years ago Siemens decided to work in a more strategic and closer way only with certain carefully selected strategic university partners and to invest in research cooperation with them in areas that are key for the company. Hence for the last 15 years, Siemens’ UR Unit has been actively operating the CKI programme – the company’s long term strategic approach to university-business cooperation. The CKI programme ultimately aims at developing long-lasting strategic collaboration with renowned HEIs worldwide in two main for Siemens UBC areas, the joint R&D and talent acquisition.

Today, the company focuses their cooperation on nine reliable and trustful university partners in Germany, Austria, Denmark, China and the United States, selected based on positive history of cooperation with Siemens and proximity to its operations. Another success factor guaranteeing sustainable progress of and continued benefits from the CKI programme are the inter-organisational intermediaries, which are strategically allocated on both the company’s side and within CKI universities. They provide Siemens with quite unique direct access to universities, their research, academic staff and young talents.

Whilst playing a role of mediators facilitating relationships between two organisations, intermediaries are tasked with an ultimate responsibility in bilateral UBC development and management for HR acquisition and joint R&D. These actors do not participate in research activities, but play a crucial role in bridging two parties to achieve following goals, including:

- increasing research cooperation with HEIs in general,
- concentrating and increasing joint R&D at the selected CKI universities and
- aligning research and innovation activities with talent acquisition and employer branding.

The Siemens’ Center of Knowledge Interchange (CKI) programme is an exemplar case for how external collaboration with university can be undertaken strategically.
Arguably, university-business cooperation (UBC) has emerged as one of the main tools for effective knowledge transfer across research and business sectors. The collaboration between academia and industry focuses on practice-based research and the dissemination of research results to the industry, while benefiting both partners, fostering innovation and boosting regional development.

The study on ‘State of European University-Business Cooperation’ commissioned by the European Commission undertaken between September and December 2016 sought to explore this topic further by posing the question ‘Who initiates university-business cooperation? to both academics and businesses alike.

European academics say that they see themselves as the main initiator of UBC

The study revealed that European academics believe that they are usually responsible for starting cooperation activities. Academics believe that the most common way to start cooperation with business is through their own initiative or through the initiative of a colleague, whilst the least likely commencement point for cooperation was through current students. Internal intermediaries, university management, business, alumni, external intermediaries and government were approximately equally likely to initiate cooperation.

The majority of European businesses state that their organisation is the main initiator of UBC

In contrast to European academics, the participating business people perceive their own organisation to be detrimental for the initiation of university-business collaboration. According to businesspeople from over 30 countries, the rank their own organisations as the driving forces for cooperation with a higher education institution, far more than university alumni working at their businesses, who just sometimes establish collaboration with academia.

Initiating cooperation between university academics and businesses requires individuals and groups to identify potential partners and engage in initial contact, before identifying whether and how the potential collaboration could work. Rather than individually driven direct advances of either side, individuals commonly meet potential partners in open forums, including workshops and industry conferences, networking sessions or other social functions (Plewa et al., 2013). Referrals from colleagues are also ways in which initial contact is made, further demonstrating the importance of a social and professional network for the initial introductory phase.

What appears paramount is the personal connection or the chemistry between individuals seeking and assessing opportunities for working together. As people identify each other, develop joint opportunities and create the foundations for the collaboration to happen, it is the melting pots that bring diverse people together and enable such chemistry to happen.

How does cooperation commence?

European academics see themselves as the main initiator of UBC

Who is responsible for initiating university-business collaboration and how does it start?

The wide range of initiators suggests there are actually multiple initiators of UBC with academics, business and alumni leading actors in commencing cooperation activities

The lack of recognition of intermediaries by business particularly highlights either the potential for intermediaries to improve in this area, or given that UBC is driven by people and relationships (Davey et al. 2011), that intermediaries could take the role of supporting relationships as much as any introductory role they might have.

Key Insights and the Growing Importance of Intermediaries

Given that these results are perceptions of the respective stakeholders, the reality may differ. Nevertheless, agencies looking to support cooperation can take away the following insights:

• If this is indeed true that academic and businesses are commencing their own cooperation, then the role of intermediaries could be to get around the academics and businesses to support them in their endeavors (e.g. help them to reduce bureaucracy associated with cooperation)

• The wide range of initiators suggests there are actually multiple initiators of UBC with academics, business and alumni leading actors in commencing cooperation activities

• The lack of recognition of intermediaries by business particularly highlights either the potential for intermediaries to improve in this area, or given that UBC is driven by people and relationships (Davey et al. 2011), that intermediaries could take the role of supporting relationships as much as any introductory role they might have.
CLEAR THE PATH FOR COOPERATING WITH UNIVERSITIES
OVERCOMING THE TOP THREE BARRIERS

Author
Mihai Melonari

For business, cooperating with universities can be a frustrating process and be a struggle to achieve their desired outcomes.

The potential to access ground-breaking new research conducted, and technologies developed by the universities can be enticing, the ability to utilise student talent, and even access the opportunity to work with the next generation entering the workforce can provide companies with an advantage over competitors. So with these sort of benefits on offer, what's stopping them?

The largest study on university-business cooperation, currently being undertaken by the Science-to-Business Marketing Research Centre (www.science-marketing.com) and partners for the European Commission, gives us a deep dive analysis on the main barriers for businesses to collaborate with HEIs.

Cultural and "soft-landing" barriers are the biggest barriers to European business not cooperating with universities.

Firstly, a review of those businesses that are not cooperating with universities gives us an insight into the barriers faced by all businesses in their cooperation with universities generally. As the graphic shows, the top three barriers perceived by SMEs and large enterprises are derived from different motivations and in not having an obvious and appropriate contact with whom to commence collaboration ("soft-landing" barriers).

This barrier raises the issue that enterprises wanting to cooperate with universities need to better understand the missions of universities, the importance of these missions and how these can be indeed compatible with the missions of businesses.

The second and third barriers for SMEs (and the 2nd barrier for large enterprises) relate to initiating cooperation, which has been previously discussed in our blog series, and shows the importance of not only establishing relevant points of contact for academics and businesses, but also points of contact that deeply understand the nature of the other. Barriers to cooperation are perceived much lower for those already cooperating. When we compare the differences in the barriers nominated by European businesses already cooperating with universities, and those who are not (previous graphic), we can see a subtle, but highly illuminating difference.

Firstly, and most obviously, the barrier of finding the right contact in the university is no longer a major barrier for those already cooperating. Alternatively, looking at companies that are cooperating with businesses, it is evident that the perceived relevance of barriers is lower. For example, the top three barriers for those SMEs and large corporations not cooperating with universities were all around 7 (6.8 – 7.2), whereas the top three barriers for those SMEs and large corporations already cooperating with universities hover around 6 on the 10-point scale (5.7 – 6.1).

This highlights a substantial difference in perception between these two cohorts. The results suggest that cooperating with universities may not be so difficult after all, and that part of getting the two to collaborate is to get past the perceived barriers (and then nominating an appropriate contact partner).

Nevertheless, barriers do indeed exist and can be addressed. Among the top barriers perceived by SMEs and large enterprises is the one related to motivations for collaboration. Furthermore, both types of enterprises experience additionally a lack of external financial resources (and then nominating an appropriate contact partner).

To educate on the need for greater self-reflection by European business, or policy-makers to educate on the need for greater understanding on both sides of the equation. After all, cooperation and relationships are a two-sided affair.

Scale 1 = “Not at all relevant” to 10 = “Extremely relevant”

**TAKE AWAYS**

The main takeaways in respect to barriers are:

1. Universities and enterprises perceive each other’s motivations differently, which can make joint efforts difficult to initiate.
2. Enterprises already cooperating with universities perceive barriers to be substantially less relevant.
3. The difference in perceived barriers between SMEs and large enterprises are not significant. This implies a similar approach taken by universities in initiating collaboration with enterprises.
The changing role of HEIs globally is challenging universities to translate their research efforts into innovation and marketable technologies. The efficiency, productivity, and success of such processes, however, largely depend on a complex number of interconnected factors. These factors include the quality and skill set of the staff, the product-market fit, and possessing sufficient financial resources to support transfer activities. However, for those institutions who manage to solve this intricate equation there can be a high pay-off and the establishment a sustainable loop of innovation.

Since 1964, Yissum, the research development company of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (HUJ), has been one of the key dominators in the tech transfer game. Though its world-renowned inventions have been making an impact on human lives across the world much longer than we realize—from the cherry tomatoes on your grocery list to the automated on-board driver assistant system ‘MobileEye’ in your car as well as the FDA Approved treatment medications: for ovarian cancer ‘Doxil’, chemotherapy ‘Erbitux’, and Alzheimer’s disease ‘Exelon’.

Yissum not only has helped its researchers to start more than 110 spin-off companies, of which some are currently valued over $10b on the stock exchange, but also facilitated the registration of 9,300 patents that cover more than 2,600 inventions, and licensed 880 innovations. Not surprisingly, this exceptional track record has attracted the attention of a number of industry giants, including Intel, Google, Philips, Coca Cola, Roche, GM, and P&G, for the establishment of long-term research collaborations.
COLLABORATION BETWEEN UNIVERSITIES AND BUSINESS: THERE IS A LARGER ECOSYSTEM TO CONSIDER

Author
Arno Meerman

From the 6th to 7th of April, 2017 the European Commission’s DG Education and Culture organised the 7th University-Business Forum. Together with my colleagues Todd Davey and Victoria Galan Muros we presented and discussed the outcomes of the largest study on the State of University-Business Cooperation (UBC) in Europe. With more than 300 participants from all across Europe it was interesting to see how we’re all alike on many aspects, although sometimes still fail to see the bigger picture.

The discussion amongst the participants resulted in the following key insights:

Valorisation’ is an under-developed activity in comparison to university-business cooperation in the fields of education and research. Valorisation refers to the direct outputs of a university in the form of commercialisation of R&D, student entrepreneurship and academic entrepreneurship. The number of start-ups coming out of universities still only represents a small portion of the activities universities undertake with their external environment. Concepts such as TeamAcademy are an excellent way in addressing the potential shortage on entrepreneurial skills, and taking away the risk aversiveness that Wolfgang Herrmann was referring to. In total 43% of the TeamAcademy students become entrepreneurs, and 98% are employed after completing their studies.

The various stakeholders involved (i.e. Higher Education Management, Academics, Business) have different motivations when it comes to undertaking university-business cooperation. With the higher education managers being concerned with funding, the academics about their research and business about acquiring new knowledge and technologies to stay at the innovation forefront. One needs to bring these motives together and create a common understanding to ensure successful UBC.

More and better understanding is needed to successfully collaborate. Universities need to make a professionalisation shift when it comes to university-business cooperation. Just as Siemens has their CKI program to strategically manage relationships with universities, universities need strategic programs to manage their relationships with business. Relationships are key, it is all about people...

Proximity matters – your collaboration partner is sitting right around the corner. In order to collaborate you need to develop (1) trust, (2) mutual commitment and (3) have a shared goal. This is developed when you establish a personal relationships with your business partners and very difficult to do when you’re sitting hundreds of kilometres apart. As an example, Siemens only encloses universities in their CKI program when there is a R&D facility of theirs nearby. Another example presented during the forum was Dairy Crest and Harper Adam’s university, who are based in the same region. This has even led to Dairy Crest establishing an Innovation Centre on the Campus of Harper Adam’s, to be even closer to the knowledge.

We need to be educating our students with the appropriate skills – We need to find new ways to educate students but also our employees.

The approach of concepts such as TeamAcademy are very much needed in today’s world, and have been yielding success for more than 20 years. Siemens even indicated that the skills being developed at TeamAcademy are exactly those that Siemens is aiming to develop amongst its employees.

WHAT IS NEXT?

There is a whole ecosystem to consider

We need to start looking at the bigger picture and understand that undertaking fragmented university-business cooperation activities is not the way to success. There is too big of a split in the universities in the various activities they undertake with business. It is time to start considering the entire university-business cooperation ecosystem and move towards an overall university-wide approach for collaborating with business. Not through technology transfer offices, but with relationship managers.
MIT REAP

MIT REAP

MIT REAP

Author
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MIT REAP

MIT’s entrepreneurial spirit has transformed the university into the powerhouse of the New England economy.

During the past decades we have witnessed numerous regions across the world grappling with the challenges to shift from old industrial economies to regional innovation-driven models to sustain their economic growth, and stay competitive in a global marketplace. Despite the many strategies implemented and investments made, the efforts of regions to make the leap only rarely turned into success. Exceptions to the rule and world-known examples such as Silicon Valley, Singapore, and Tel Aviv have come through as major innovation and entrepreneurship hubs, while others continue facing disappointment due to their lack of understanding of the regional ecosystem.

Another example is the Boston region which has nailed the transition towards an innovation-driven ecosystem. Acting as a powerhouse of the New England economy with its 25,000 spin-outs worth of nearly $2t – a record that has built up over the past 100 years – MIT is the default address of regions who are embarking on their transformation process. Their capstone global initiative, Regional Entrepreneurship Acceleration Program (MIT REAP) offers a two-year program during which it empowers regional stakeholders – representatives from government, corporate, academia, risk capital and the entrepreneurial community – to trigger an Innovation Driven Entrepreneurship Ecosystem-led growth.

For many of their participating regions the MIT REAP evidence-based approach has drawn a clear picture of the components of success. From Southwest Norway who are looking for ways to reconfigure its economy that is heavily dependent on the oil and ocean business, to Iceland and Nova Scotia whose economies have long been dominated by natural resources, and Scotland with aspirations to internationalize its local SMEs, their core ingredients for change have been the same: cooperation of key regional actors with expertise, a well-defined regional strategy, and foundational institutions enabling innovative and entrepreneurial capacity development.

So far the MIT REAP has offered real-world solutions to 28 regions to help them develop the building blocks necessary to create an ecosystem favorable to innovative initiatives. The “cohort” system – a group of six to eight regions who participate in the program during the same period – has provided the opportunity to reflect and learn from each other beyond the program content. Though it is still early to discuss overall impact, the initial results of the program have already become visible in the form of new initiatives in the regions represented by the first two ‘alumni’ cohorts.
WHICH ARE THE FACTORS THAT MOTIVATE YOUR ACADEMICS TO COOPERATE?

Motivations predict behaviour and the motivations for university-business cooperation have been a much-discussed topic in practical and policy forums worldwide as well as in scientific literature. The questions so often asked include ‘how can we encourage academic and business people to cooperate more?’ and ‘what motivates the different stakeholders to cooperate?’ With often vastly differing opinions expressed.

Some important insights into academics’ motivations for cooperation are provided in the recently completed State of European University-Business Cooperation (www.ub-cooperation.eu), executed for the European Commission. A specific question about motivation was posed to both academic who do cooperate, and those who do not cooperate with business and the results were highly enlightening.

Academics who do cooperate with business:

1. not only have significantly higher motivation for cooperation with business (on a 10-point scale),
2. but they also nominate entirely different motivations for cooperating that academics who had no cooperation (who were thus ‘theorising’ about why they might cooperate).

Upon closer examination, European academics who do cooperate, nominate their first two motivators as personal ones, related to their research, and the third to contribute to society. Contrary to academicians who do not cooperate perceive the top motivations for cooperation to relate to themselves or their research (one of the primary factors in academic career progression), but with potential benefits for other stakeholders (graduates, the university and society). So how can this help us to encourage academics to cooperate?

Greater recognition of how cooperation with business provides research insights and outcomes

Regarding the research motivation of collaborators, when academics engage with business in joint research or undertake research focused on solving complex and multidisciplinary industry problems, this frequently occurs at the edges of different disciplines. The ‘unlikely’ mix of disciplines is exactly where innovation occurs, and therefore it is highly likely that the research results are novel in some way. With more innovative research, there is increasing evidence that shows how university-business cooperation result in a higher number of academic publications, which are also of higher quality, creating superior and more authoritative research performance measured through journal citation rates and citation lifetime.

However, these potential benefits are unknown to most academics, who might still not see a clear purpose for cooperating. Aligned with the results of previous research by Tartari and Breschi (2012), the results highlight that the ‘expected benefits from collaboration are not clearly perceived by all researchers’ and that ‘academics who are not already involved in industry collaborations fail to recognize the potential opportunities of engaging with industry’ (p. 1139).

Promote the potential benefits to academic research from cooperation

Effectively, the results suggest that HEI management and knowledge transfer professionals need to emphasise and educate about the benefits that can come from collaboration with industry. Knowledge transfer professionals should also guide academics in the process of finding the appropriate industry contacts and deciphering how academics can gain new insights that makes their research more innovative and successful as well as defining some concrete research outcomes for the academic from the collaboration. Generally, the focus should be on ensuring that the academics feel that they receive some personal benefits that motivate them to cooperate. How to ensure these outcomes is a topic for another blog post in a few weeks!

In Europe, the State of European University-Business Cooperation study shows that academic motivations for cooperation with business are related to research insights and its practical application, but each country, region and individual HEI could be different.
What differentiates the Simon Fraser University (SFU), from other universities in Canada and worldwide?

This was exactly the question Prof. Andrew Petter asked himself and the university board when he became the university's president in 2010. He aimed to identify and determine the future course of SFU by answering this essential question.

Seven years later, the university has metamorphosed into Canada’s ‘engaged university’, attributing the term ‘engagement’ in every core function of the higher education institution (HEI). Their vision “To be the leading engaged university defined by its dynamic integration of innovative education, cutting-edge research and far-reaching community engagement” governs every strategic and operational decision.

The effort put into this development over the past years has been paying off for SFU. As of spring 2016, an external survey revealed that opinions of SFU’s reputation in general has shown some very positive results compared to the previous year. The perception of the university’s trustworthiness and approachability has improved by 12% (62% versus 50% in 2015) and 11% (63% versus 52% in 2015). Also, SFU is increasingly being recognised as innovative (63% in 2016 versus 52% in 2015).

Furthermore, SFU’s engagement efforts have a positive impact on re-