

STUDENT INNOVATION CAMPS: DOES A BUSINESS BENEFIT FROM PARTICIPATING?

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Student innovation camps have become a popular format for teaching innovation- and entrepreneurship at higher educations in Denmark. At many of these camps businesses are invited to present their current challenges as real life cases for the students.

Research shows that students develop innovation competences and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) through innovation- and entrepreneurship education (Moberg, 2014; Darsøe, 2011). However, there is only limited knowledge on the perceived benefits of business participating in the camps. Research have also shown that business in general benefit from cooperating and participating in networks with knowledge institutions and science partners (Pittaway et al., 2004; Knudsen, 2007). However, the potential benefits of University-Industry cooperation are not yet unfolded even though possible benefits may be new complementary knowledge and the development of new products (Kaufmann & Tödting, 2000; Nielsen, 2012; Ranga & Etzkowich, 2013).

Studies investigating benefits from University-Industry collaboration found that business gain access to new knowledge, and resources such as instruments (Santorió et al.; 2000), gain valuable learning through the integration of academic theory with industrial practice (Slotte and Tynj, 2003). But also found that businesses collaboration with higher education institutions also acts as a reputational device (Santorió et al.; 2000) that increases the attractiveness of firms as employers (Hicks, 1995).

There seems only to exist sporadic research about how business may benefit from collaborating with students from higher educations on finding innovative solutions for their current challenges during innovation camps. It is challenging to measure the performance of innovation camps. The output is often intangible and hence difficult measure directly. The focus of the innovation camps is on generating ideas that are relatively far from commercialization, which makes the value of the innovation camp output difficult to assess.

Even so the output of innovation camps is likely to be twofold. For instance, while business search for new solutions through innovation camps (business oriented), business will also seek to benefit from access to the wider pool of basic knowledge and access to talented graduates (relationship oriented) (Perkmann et al., 2011). Noticeable, benefits from the innovation camps may be realized only over the long term. Hence, any measure must take account of multiple outputs.

Our research question is as follows:

- *What benefits does a business experience from participating in student innovation camps at higher educations?*

The objective is to investigate the relationship between the businesses expectations and involvement in innovation camps versus the business and relationship oriented value and outcome.

The research question is explored through on-going of partner perspectives at two Danish Business Academies (Business Academy Southwest and Zealand Institute of Business and Technology). The unit of analysis are the business involved in innovation camps. The innovation camps have a duration of one to five days. In total 20 – 150 students from different study programs teachers and employees from the business participated in the innovation camps. In our study, we have conducted 7 interviews with employees at business that have participated in innovation camps during 2015 and 2016 at Business Academy South West and Zealand Institute of Business and Technology. Data was collected using a fully structured protocol, containing around 140 questions requiring short and semi short written answers. The protocol was predetermined with a list of questions but also with a degree of built-in flexibility of open-ended questions. The interview focused on various elements such as the focus of the innovation camp, the role of the business (such as degree of involvement), the expectations of the business, and the perceived benefits. This study is a pilot study, which will lead to a larger quantitative survey that can be used for further data collection.

Based, on this case study evidence, we analyse the innovation camps across the different levels of performance. We examine how different levels of performance relate to different levels of involvement and expectations. Early results show that performance of the 7 innovation camps examined seems associated with the expectations for collaboration. Most of the business expected the students to develop concrete ideas and gain interdisciplinary benefits for this process. As expected the results also show that the business received new ideas. But the findings also show that the business (even though it was not expected) find innovation camps as valuable context for enhancing business's reputation, and that they consider themselves as valuable contributors and output for the innovation camp. In the long run, the results show that the business are not able to implement the ideas from the innovation camps. In the long-term perspective, commercialization from the innovation camps seems associated with the exploration and testing of new business areas. Following the view of the business, the long-term benefits are mostly earned by the higher education institutions in terms of "co-development" of students.

The business start with an innovation camp having expectation regarding the development and implementation of new ideas, but find that the results are of different value than expected in terms of exploring new business areas in a student context. The value and benefits are mostly achieved by the higher education institutions.

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