

UNIVERSITY-BUSINESS RESEARCH COLLABORATION: Towards a happy marriage


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A marriage against nature!?

- University-Business research collaboration is fundamentally a marriage against nature
 - Business want short term results and to appropriate the profits
 - Universities and their researchers are basically curiosity driven and consider their discoveries as a public good (this is their main reward)
- However,
 - it is a public responsibility for universities to transfer knowledge
 - a commercial necessity for business to remain competitive!
- Therefore, why and how is it possible that university-business research collaboration is presently intensifying all over the world?

I shall convey two sets of messages

- University-business research collaboration is becoming a must for both partners!
- The marriage can be happy provided that, like an “ordinary marriage”, University-Business research collaboration is carefully prepared!
- Remark: University-Public Sector research collaboration, as well as knowledge transfer to the Public Sector, should not be neglected, but it raises partially other issues

An aerial photograph of a snow-covered mountain peak, likely Mount Everest, with a vertical line above it. The text is overlaid on the image.

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U-B research collaboration is necessary because.....

- Globalization as well as scientific and technological progress are hardening the climate of competition for business as well as universities. Both have to
 - React and adapt faster
 - Be more cost-effective (business margin are very tight and university funding of research is hard)
- Paradoxically, the climate of intense competition calls for a narrower collaboration between business, universities as well as between business and universities

- The advance from basic research to development is changing radically: move from a **sequential** to an **“interactive”** model
- Most research results (or their spin-offs) are eventually appropriated by business. Two new tendencies might be dangerous for universities :
 - Business is now sometimes at the forefront of scientific discoveries (in particular in the life science, ...)
 - Business, by contracting out research to university laboratories, is influencing their choice of research objects and wish to appropriate the results (non disclosure – delayed publications)

- The cost of doing research (basic and applied) is increasing constantly within universities and business.
 - This is due to:
 - The cost of increasingly sophisticated equipments
 - The premium to attract and install top researchers
 - The penetration of sophisticated equipments in disciplines which were traditionally using paper and pencil
 - Therefore, both are
 - searching to reach a critical mass
 - outsourcing part of the (research) activities they are less good at (mainly business towards universities)



II

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U-B research collaboration can and should be a Win-Win situation!

- Business
 - gain access to the knowledge frontier and to the network of (top) scientists
 - can outsource research activities for which they have a comparative disadvantage
- Universities and their laboratories
 - receive funding to employ additional researchers and buy scientific equipments
 - may hope to gain a permanent source of additional funding in commercializing their intellectual property (patents and licenses)
 - may gain access to original statistical information and to sophisticated equipments they cannot afford (for ex. pharma.)

However, U-B research collaboration can turn to a nightmare for both sides!

- Strong disagreement may crop up in defining the ownership of the intellectual property (prior and newly gained) and turn into a “bloody” legal dispute
- Business may be upset if the contracted research doesn’t bring the expected results
- Universities may...
 - be upset if their IP doesn’t produce as much additional funds as expected or “dreamed”,
 - observe that some of their best research teams are involved in “second class” research and/or do not contribute anymore to the reputation of the institution within university circles (rankings)
 - suffer from the penetration into some spheres of the academia of a mercantilist spirit and observe increasing tensions between those “who have access” and those “who have not” to “juicy” contracts

The **first** important condition is that both partners are seriously **willing to understand** the other and, not only accept that **it is as it is**, but is convinced that it is this difference which makes the Win-Win situation!

- There is no unique solution to make it a reality as it depends
 - on the size (SME or multinational corporation) and type of business
 - and the type of university (regional-international) and how it is run (traditional or entrepreneurial)
- The extreme threats are:
 - **entrepreneurs** who consider researchers as “soft dreamers” and/or as a “separate race living in their ivory tower”, and
 - **university leaders** who associate business and money with the “devil”

The **second** important condition is that both partners are ready to **trust** the other and that the relation is **lasting!**

- Detailed contracts that need months to draft have proved to be a “costly” illusion (to draft it and later if there is a dispute)
- There is no future to U-B collaboration if
 - the partners don’t trust one another to decide about a fair way to share the benefits of a successful collaboration,
 - the adventure is continuously started with new partners (good partnership requires stability)

A European initiative

- ***Responsible Partnering; Joining Forces in a World of Innovation***, *A guide to Better Practices for Collaborative Research and Knowledge Transfer between Science and Industry*
http://www.eirma.org/f3/local_links.php?action=jump&id=796

Drafted early 2005 by

- EUA, The European University Association
- ProTon Europe, a pan-European network of Knowledge Transfer Offices
- EARTO, The European Association of Research and Technology Organizations
- EIRMA, The European Research Management Association

Some of the key words of “responsible partnering” are:

- Identifying the right partner(s)
- Aligning interests
- Treating collaboration strategically
- Organizing for lasting relationships
- Establishing clear intent (description of the collaboration)
- Achieving effective intellectual property protection
- Finding a fair compromise re. publications and confidentiality

A North-Atlantic initiative (think-tank)

The Glion colloquium

- Hirsch and Weber, 2002, *As the Walls of Academia are Tumbling down*, Economica, Paris
- Weber and Duderstadt, forthcoming, *University and business working together for a better society* (provisory title), Economica, Paris
- See www.glion.org

An aerial photograph of a snow-covered mountain peak, likely Mount Everest, with the word "Conclusion" overlaid in a large, blue, sans-serif font in the center of the image.

Conclusion

Basically four messages

- Why U-B research collaboration?
 - The rapidly changing environment is exercising a strong pressure in favor of this collaboration
 - It is a Win Win situation for both partners
- How should U-B research collaboration be handled?
 - Both partners are willing to understand one another
 - Both partners trust one another and develop a stable relationship

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

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