Promoting entrepreneurship through University-Industry cooperation

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Abstract

Entrepreneurship has been considered, by different academics and policy makers, as a mean to foster economic development and job creation, but also as an ability to promote a more dynamic, creative, innovative, competitive and sustainable society.

Overcoming difficulties in the development of academic entrepreneurship are included in the required objectives of bridging the gap between research and innovation in Europe and, thus, is a challenge for universities. The prevailing forces have led these institutions to develop a "third mission", the facilitation of technology transfer and activity in an entrepreneurial paradigm. In food science and technology, this issue could be argued to be more relevant as most businesses are small and medium companies, and there is evidence that effective university-industry collaboration needs "well-equipped" firms. Entrepreneurship can be considered as the process of creating new companies but also as the process of new business development in an existing organizational context. It has also been considered by academia as a useful technology transfer tool.

A case study was designed to describe and develop the relation and practices between a learning approach in a food science and technology educational program and a related business incubator.

The learning process benefited from the adoption of a structured framework methodology that led ideas and teams to business model generation and client development, in parallel, when possible, with an agile product/service development.

Although academic entrepreneurship engagement could be improved, this case study demonstrated that stronger skills development was needed to enable students and young researchers to be more aware of business development fundamentals and also of softskills, like wikiskills, and therefore contribute to the valorisation of individual knowledge assets. It was noted that the timing and format for involvement of companies in new business projects varied with their nature and maturity. The kind of exposure should as adequate to each contextual condition but it would be expected to promote not only a better incorporation of business needs but also a better awareness from the industry side, including the identification of the first potential clients for the knowledge produced by students and young researchers, time reduction to market, and to create much better conditions to support decisions about IP protection. This kind of formal approach could build the basis for a closer and earlier articulation between university and industry in educational and training programs.