

Workshop

Successful University–Industry Collaboration in Research Projects

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1. Introduction – Who we are

Kaisa Still



Manager, Business Collaboration,
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Passion for catalyzing business and
stakeholder collaboration for impact, by
leveraging background in research and
industry.

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Paavo Kosonen



Development Manager,
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Over the past 25 years, I have actively
facilitated collaboration between universities
and companies, drawing on my professional
experience in both sectors

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1. Introduction – Why?

- Universities in Finland have strategic partnerships with companies and other organizations
 - Bilateral partnership contract/MoU aiming for long-term goal-oriented cooperation mainly with larger organizations
 - Much of the collaboration takes place in multilateral context/with networks
- We have many projects and good practices
 - We lack information about the meaningfulness of the collaboration for companies (references and success stories).
 - “Optimizing collaboration” remains a challenge at universities as well as in companies

61% of innovative Finnish companies saw universities as having some significance for their innovation activities, while only 4.5 percent considered the role of universities to be very significant.

Kuusi. Tero, Ali-Yrkkö, Jyrki, Helanummi-Cole. Heli, Koski, Heli, Kovalainen, Anne, Kässi, Otto, Poutanen Seppo & Valmari, Nelli (9.11.2022) ”Innovaatiot kriisien keskellä: Kasvuhaasteita ja vastauksia”. ETLA Muistio No 116.

57 % of companies wish for better collaboration with universities and research institutes.

Ali-Yrkkö, Jyrki & Pajarinen, Mika (23.10.2023). ”Miten yritysten mielestä Suomeen saataisiin lisää tutkimus- ja kehitystoimintaa”. ETLA Muistio No 126.

1. Objectives today

- Hear insights from company interviews
 - highlight companies' message about meaningful and impactful business-university collaboration
- Share good practices from university point of view
 - What is important at the university at each stage Inspiration -> Ideation -> Implementation -> Impact?
 - How do we at the university ensure that we progress through the stages and guarantee continuity?

Material in English, discussion in Finnish.

Workshop Structure

- 1. Introduction and Objectives
- **2. Interactive Poll via Mobile Devices**
- 3. Key Findings from Company Interviews
- 4. Small Group Discussions
- 5. Key Takeaways & Closing

2. Interactive Poll

1 What's the three biggest challenge for university–industry collaboration at your university?

- A. Finding suitable company partners
- B. Building mutual trust and understanding
- C. Aligning goals and expectations
- D. Limited time and resources to support collaboration
- E. Misalignment of timescales (academia vs. companies)
- F. Intellectual property management and legal issues
- G. Communicating the value and benefits of collaboration
- H. Motivate researchers for industry collaboration
- I. Other (please specify)

2 What benefits of university–industry collaboration do you see?

- You can list multiple words
- (wordcloud)

3 What percentage of your organization's projects involve a corporate or industry partner?

- Approximate 0 – 100%

4 Please share your email address if you wish to receive the results of this workshop

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3. Key Findings from Company Interviews

INTERVIEWEES

- 12 interviews, focus on companies who are active in RDI
 - For example 3 companies spending over 10% of their revenue. (Tekniikka ja Talous article ”tutkimus- ja tuotekehitykseen yli 10 pros liikevaihdosta”)
- Most of the interviewees are more involved in collaboration preparation activities and less so in project implementation phase.
- Both existing customers/partners (10) and companies that are not active customers/partners (2) were interviewed.

HOW WE MADE THE INTERVIEWS

- The interviews were conducted using a list of questions and their visualization – which were shown to the interviewees.
- Both Teams and face-to-face interviews
- Duration of each semi structured interview was 40-60 minutes
- The interviews were made during 1H 2025

3. Key Findings from Company Interviews – Interview questions

Making Industry-University Collaboration More Meaningful and Impactful

Bilateral collaboration: Best practices

- Who is responsible for university collaboration in the company?
- How to identify a university partner?
- Partnership or project-based collaboration?
- What forms of collaboration to use?
- How to use your own resources in collaboration?
- How to monitor progress and provide feedback?
- How to communicate internally and externally about the collaboration?

Meaningful collaboration

Multilateral collaboration: Utilizing networks

- How, when, and why to involve your own networks in university collaboration?
- How, when, and why to utilize university networks?
- How to use your own resources in network activities?
- How do you monitor network-based activities and provide feedback?
- How do you communicate internally and externally about the collaboration?

How to make university collaboration more meaningful for the company?

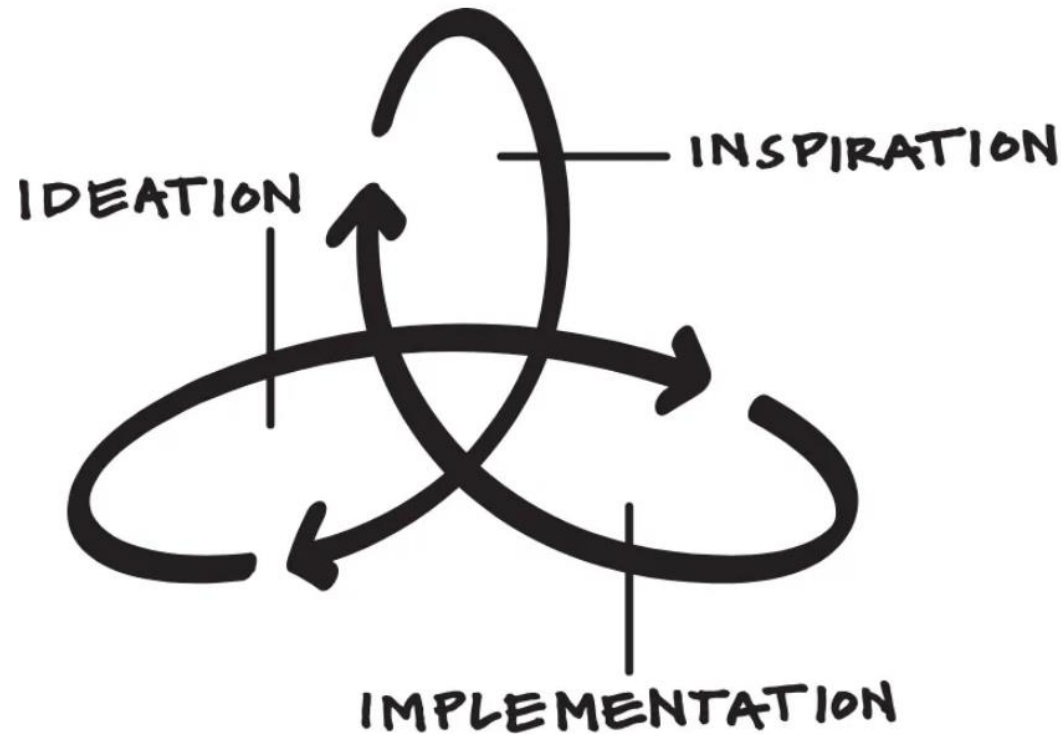
How can we best use busy people's time? How can we get more out of this collaboration than we invest?

- What can the university do to support the company's success through the collaboration?
- What can the company do to enhance the collaboration?
- What can we do together?

3. Which forms of collaboration were mentioned?

- Publicly funded research projects with multiple partners – mentioned by 10 companies
- Contract Research & Analysis services – 3 companies
- Master's / bachelor thesis collaboration – 3 companies
- Trainees – 3 companies Researcher mobility (e.g. PoDoCo or Finnish Research Impact Foundation projects) – 3 companies
- Talent acquisition – 2 companies
- Doctoral thesis collaboration – 1 company

Analysis: using three phases of design thinking– for impact



The 3 core activities of design thinking

IDEO

3i model stands for **Inspiration**, **Ideation**, and **Implementation** proposed by IDEO, which is well-known design firm for practicing design thinking and applying it to solving problems

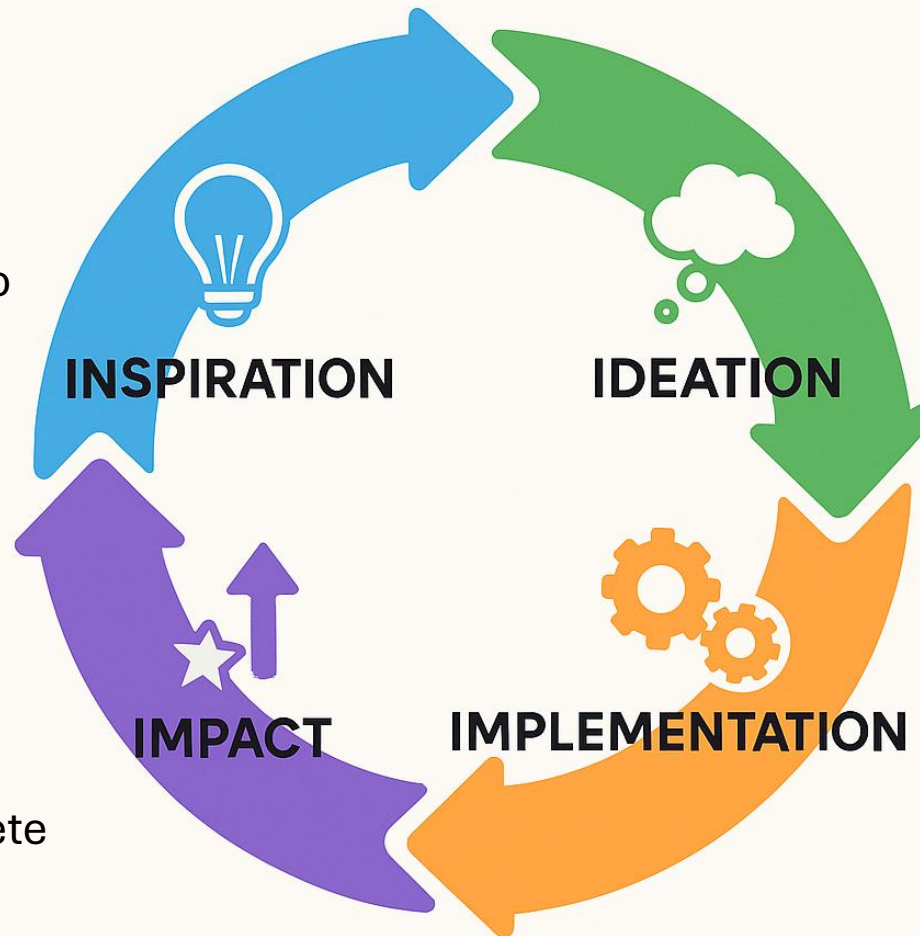
Note: Partnerships vs. project based collaboration– both approaches work!

Selected findings

The importance of the partner selection

Understand that companies do not collaborate unless it is important for them– with business benefits!

Highlight success stories and benefits (also best practices) inside your organization and publicly! Communicate concrete benefits that generate new knowledge and revenue.



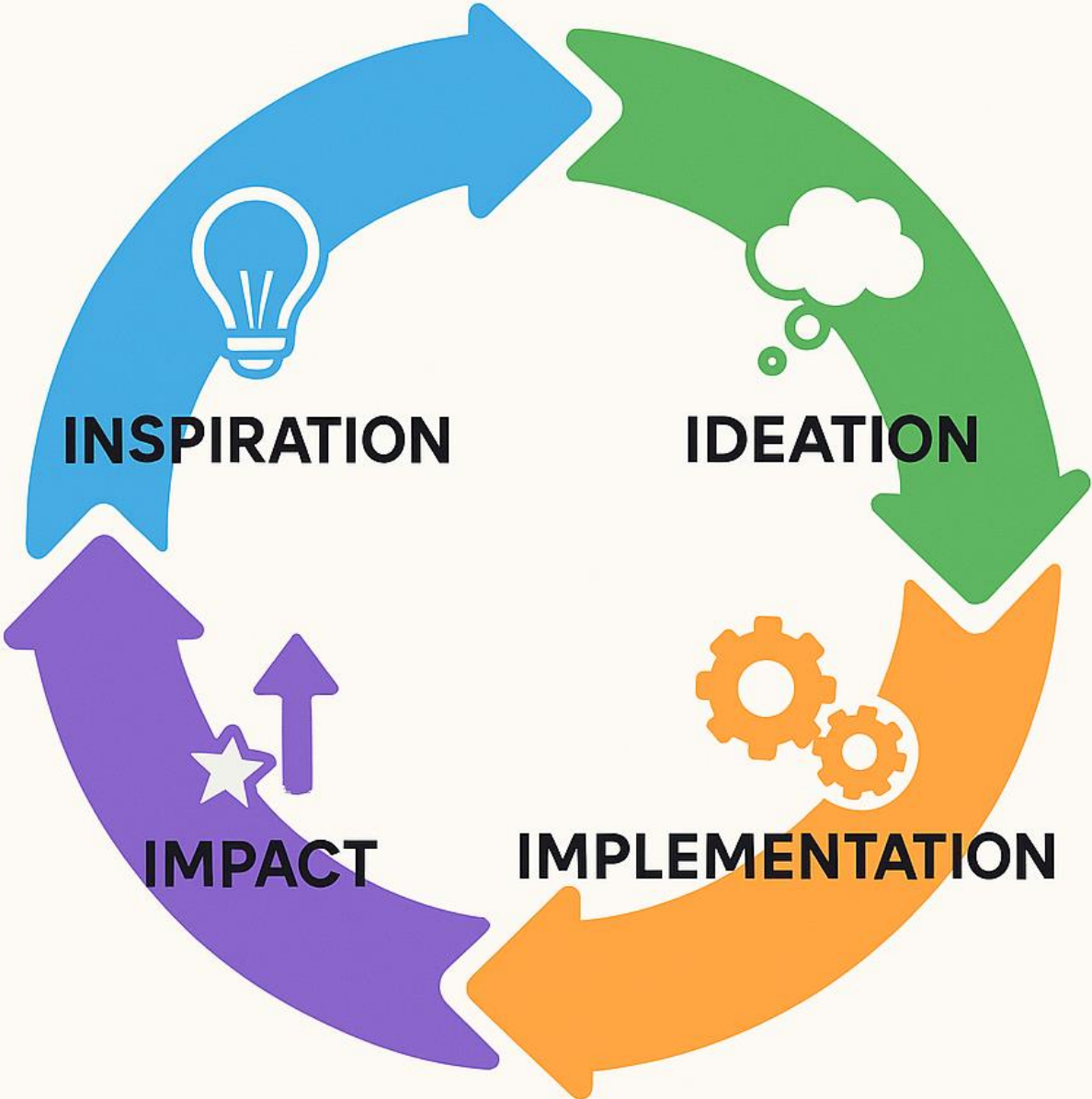
The power of project planning

Genuine human encounters and discussions– not only webinars

Focus on planned R&D collaboration, not on admin

Remove barriers and make processes and templates easy to use.

For group work: What university support can do at each phase– top 3



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4. Small Group Discussions

- Division into 8 groups
 - 1 & 5 Inspiration – 2 & 6 Ideation – 3 & 7 Implementation – 4 & 8 Impact
 - Each group will have a paper with selected comments from companies.
- Question 1: What university support can do?
 - Use yellow post-its to write down your individual comments
 - Discuss in the group and highlight the three most important things by circling them
- Question 2: How do we at the university support can ensure that we progress through the stages (Inspiration, Ideation, Implementation, Impact) and guarantee continuity and feedback loops at different stage
 - Use yellow post-its to write down your individual comments
 - Discuss in the group and highlight the three most important things by circling them
- Question 3: What should NOT be done?
 - Use red post-its and write down most important Don'ts

We will take photos of each group's work and share them with the participants.

5. Key Takeaways & Closing

- The most important point NOT to do by universities from each group.
 - Say it in 20 seconds
- The results from all groups will be shared by email.
- We are working on a report/synthesis of company interviews.
- Thank you!