

The intersection of academia and industry: Avoiding pitfalls and navigating successful partnerships

Author: Safrit, Lynne Scott

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Abstract: This dissertation focused on characteristics of successful academic-industry partnerships, barriers causing them to fail, and the development of better strategies for collaborative opportunities and initiatives. Fifty-seven key informant interviews identified 12 barriers to successful partnerships: 1. Intellectual property rights 2. Meeting agreed upon timetables, accountability and reliability issues. 3. Cultural differences. 4. Poorly trained technology transfer offices. 5. Lack of clearly defined goals and objectives. 6. Overhead rates. 7. Publication rights. 8. Change in personnel. 9. Changing priorities. 10. Internal issues. 11. Confidentiality issues. 12. Threat to academic freedom.

Fifteen characteristics of successful partnerships were identified: 1. Long term partnership relationships. 2. Trust. 3. Clear alignment of goals and mission. 4. Win-win situation. 5. Communication. 6. Interpersonal relationship/prior relationship with partner. 7. Reputation and expertise. 8. Ability to resolve problems at the onset. 9. Flexibility. 10. Manager who keeps the project on track. 11. Well-trained tech transfer office. 12. Internal champion. 13. Support from the top. 14. Interdisciplinarity. 15. Physical proximity.

Several fundamental qualities were found to be essential for successful partnerships: 1. Trust. 2. The ability to form interpersonal relationships. 3. The ability to align goals and objectives. 4. The presence of strong communication skills. 5. The ability to look at the relationship as a true partnership.

Solutions to the identified barriers include improved communication and trust in the partnership effort, a convergent vision, improved reporting structures, measureable goals and clearly defined objectives, the building of interpersonal relationships and strategic partnership opportunities, the ability to articulate vision and work through the plan of action, higher levels of trust in the partnership endeavor, and an undisputable acceptance of the academic mission.

An integrated set of policies is required to confront the complex exchange between academia and industry, addressing education, research, development, recruitment, potential employment and job creation. These policies must strike a delicate balance between entrepreneurship and autonomy of research and innovation that give rise to novel discovery and commercialization of new industry. Further research is needed to clarify actual mechanisms necessary for a more comprehensive, intersectoral policy development approach incorporating institutional and organizational efforts toward long-term partnerships.

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Advisor: Paul, John E.

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