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The NETPark Innovation Management Academy - a pilot scheme for professional innovation support for high tech growth companies

Parallel Session 6

What are the STPs evolving into?

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The NETPark Innovation Management Academy - a pilot scheme for professional innovation support for high tech growth companies

Executive summary

The Innovation Management Academy (IMA) is a structured innovation support service available to members of NETPark Net which opens up opportunities to partner with other organisations, teaches best practice in innovation management, and ensures companies have the knowledge to manage open innovation effectively. It was implemented because of the maturing of the open innovation concept globally, the opportunities that brings, the high failure rate of products in the marketplace and the lack of innovation support provided by the private sector in NETPark's locality. Run as a pilot for the last 18 months, the IMA has demonstrated NETPark's commitment to being a lens through which companies can access opportunities with support, and positions NETPark at the heart of a broad innovation community across County Durham. NETPark is now developing "IMA 2.0" incorporating lessons learned from the pilot: retain the extremely high quality of the service while being more flexible in implementation.

Introduction

The theme of this session “What are Science and Technology Parks (STPs) evolving into?” is reflected by the conference’s overall title:

“Science and Technology Parks: Serving the Companies and the Innovation Community”

This paper takes that idea as a starting point, examines how the provision of one particular service to its clients, an “innovation academy”, fits this evolution, draws out what lessons have been learned from the pilot scheme, and illustrates how the scheme fits the IASP definition of a science park, i.e. organisations which aim to increase the wealth of its community by promoting the culture of innovation and the competitiveness of its associated businesses and knowledge-based institutions by:

- stimulating and managing the flow of knowledge and technology amongst universities, R&D institutions, companies and markets;
- facilitating the creation and growth of innovation-based companies through incubation and spin-off processes;
- providing other value-added services together with high quality space and facilities.

NETPark - serving the Innovation Community

The North East Technology Park (NETPark) is located in Sedgefield, County Durham in North East England in the UK. The vision is to provide for 90 hectares for the commercialisation of science, engineering and technology R&D. 7 years old, it has a major focus on electronics including nanotechnology, photonics, microsystems, energy, medical technology and printable electronics. It is the location of the UK national flagship for Printable Electronics in addition to providing incubation facilities for new technologies, and the NETPark Research Institute which has world class research groups from Durham University. It is managed by County Durham Development Company on behalf of Durham County Council.

Most importantly, NETPark is part of an integrated County Durham innovation framework which places it at the heart of a cross sector innovation-based community. It was important from the very beginnings of NETPark to drive the innovation ethos beyond the traditional science park boundaries and create of a connected, multi-faceted and ever-evolving innovation community. This community encompasses companies in science, engineering and technology at all sizes and stages of maturity, policy makers, funders, community groups, schools etc all working together for the common goal of economic prosperity.

The start of this community was of course the establishment of NETPark itself but, only 2 years after NETPark opened, the concept paper was written for NETPark Net, the virtual science park which “opened” for business in 2007. NETPark Net collects all the services that a company might get at NETPark (postal address, access to finance and market intelligence, connections to the business support, innovation management, etc) under one brand and charges a small annual membership fee for companies off the park to join. Membership is open to all companies in science, engineering and technology of all sizes and at all stages of maturity. Membership is currently 300, assisting the companies at NETPark by broadening their community and allowing companies who would not necessarily be eligible to locate at NETPark to join an innovation community.

The next element of this community was the creation of Project C (for community, commercialization and collaboration) which is a sustained programme of communications and activities designed to raise aspirations and facilitate a better public understanding of science and innovation. Activities include Science Animators (PhD students at Durham University) in schools, junior incubation programmes, science festivals, commercialization challenges, reciprocal visits, and teams of ambassadors. Since April 2009, Project C programmes have interacted with over 22,000 people in the locality of NETPark. It is essential for NETPark to drive such activity as up to 25,000 job opportunities will be created by the park once the initial 90 ha is fully developed. NETPark has no fences or security barriers and is viewed as a source of pride by its community which is helpful politically and socially.

Now, NETPark is evolving into the heart of a much broader community which embeds the ethos of innovation, not just in the “traditional” sector of high tech companies but across those companies wishing to innovate in services and business models, and also the public and third sectors.

While the concept of innovation can be traced back to the early writings of Joseph Schumpeter (1942) who placed technological change at the heart of economic growth, a wider definition of innovation is now recognised and promoted by firms, institutions and governments around the world to generate jobs and wealth creation, increase productivity and improve living standards. It is understood that if County Durham is to raise its economic performance and compete on a global scale it must embrace the principles, techniques and applications of innovation. Thus an “Innovation Framework” has been adopted by the County Durham Economic Partnership (CDEP) which is the strategic partnership for Regeneration and Economic Development for County Durham. The CDEP has approved a common definition of innovation across all areas of its work: facilities and property, skills and aspirations, enterprise and business support

innovation is the translation of ideas into wealth and prosperity

A powerhouse of the Industrial Revolution, County Durham is once again tapping into a long tradition of innovation with NETPark at the heart of this strategy.

The Innovation Management Academy

The Innovation Management Academy (IMA) is an essential, if experimental, element of the community. Much as NETPark is the central hub and symbol for a much broader innovation ethos, the IMA is a central symbol of the support we offer to that community. It is highly specialist, serves to differentiate NETPark from other business support providers in the locality and keeps us focused on the transformation of ideas into successful products, businesses and jobs.

The context of the IMA

The IMA was born out of an existing realisation that, while there were many good ideas, successful and profitable product launches were few and far between. A quick glance at some frightening statistics illustrates this point:

- 60% of all new product development efforts are scuttled before they reach the market
- 40% that are launched fail to become profitable and are withdrawn
- 75% of all innovation investments are wasted¹

¹Clayton Christensen and Raynor, *The Innovator's Solution* (2003)

Antony Ulwick goes further and estimates that 70% of new products fail in the global marketplace². This must mean that the innovation management process is inefficient or poorly understood.

At a local level, the current economic structure of County Durham faces some significant challenges. Total business stock remains below the national average and GVA per head of population stands at £12,120, approximately 61% of the UK figure. New enterprise rates and unemployment remain below the national average and the County continues to suffer the hallmarks of a low skills equilibrium. In addition, County Durham's dependency on the public sector, accounting for presently one in three jobs, and an under-represented 'knowledge economy', account for significant structural challenges in the County.

County Durham also presents a number of economic opportunities and demonstrates improving economic performance in certain sectors. The County's manufacturing industry accounts for 17% of all jobs, higher than the regional and national average. Total employment has also increased in the leisure & tourism, hotels & restaurant, and niche sectors within digital & creative and financial & business services over the last ten years. Employment in R&D related positions increased by 184% between 2000 and 2006. Further, the County is projected to experience increasing employment and GVA growth in advanced manufacturing, renewable energy, medical technology & printable electronics industries in the future.

The private sector is supported by the County's existing innovation system which includes Durham University (Durham Business & Innovation Services), County Durham Development Company (NETPark, NETPark Net, Strategic Account Management Programme, and Project C outreach programme), and the Centre for Process Innovation's (CPI) Printable Electronics Technology Centre (PETEC), now part of the UK Catapult Centre for High Value Manufacturing.

Despite this growth and the presence of these assets, one of the most telling facts is that there are few innovation management consultancies in North East England - most are clustered around the London/Oxbridge cluster, reflecting the existing low demand for this kind of support. So just as the buildings at NETPark are a deliberate public sector intervention in an area where there was market failure, there was an opportunity to provide some specialist support for companies in the locality that the market was not (yet).

It was also very clear that there were many opportunities for local companies in the global economy to maximise existing and developing Intellectual Property. Multinationals such as P&G, Eli Lilly, GSK and Philips were becoming increasingly sophisticated in seeking external partners to develop ideas into profitable products. Time to market for new products has also accelerated in the last decade - Deloitte quotes a figure of a 28% reduction in R&D cycle times³ - and this is forcing all companies to be more flexible and agile in their product development, seeking partners and ideas outside their own walls rather than relying only on internal resources.

This kind of "open" innovation with different partners, as opposed to the internally controlled "closed" innovation, has been gaining currency for some years. It is debatable how new the idea actually is - companies have, after all, always collaborated on projects without the need to label the process. It is certainly debatable how linear the innovation process ever was - increasingly innovation is understood as a fluid process. Perhaps what has gained ground is the idea that a

²Anthony Ulwick - Author of 'What Customers Want'

³Deloitte/Thomson Reuters, *Is R&D earning its investment?* (2010)

structured approach to such a process and to partnership working can yield better results. There is now a generally accepted definition of open innovation as proposed by Professor Henry Chesbrough of University of California, Berkeley.

“Open Innovation is the use of purposive inflows and outflows of knowledge to accelerate innovation. With knowledge now widely distributed, companies cannot rely entirely on their own research, but should acquire inventions or intellectual property from other companies when it advances the business model.”⁴

While this approach can yield opportunities for SMEs, it can also be challenging for SMEs and multinationals to collaborate productively. Different cultures, different ways of doing things, different priorities can all lead to mismatched partnerships. Multinationals may have the resources to manage structured programmes, so if SMEs can seek initial assistance regarding issues such as assessing the trustworthiness of potential partners and how to participate in widely dispersed development teams, it gives the partnership a better chance of success.

Since 2008, NETPark has been working to embed the ethos and techniques of this kind of open innovation. Initially this was via a soft touch programme of webinars and best practice available on the website, covering topics such as Portfolio Management, Innovation Processes, Intellectual Asset Management, Open Innovation, Metrics and Incentives, Incremental vs Breakthrough Innovation, and Customer Centric Insights. While useful, the passive nature of this information was not widely used so it was decided to experiment with a more structured approach, as the securing of European Regional Development Funding for NETPark Net increased the budget we could allocate to services. This became the Innovation Management Academy.

The objectives of the IMA

The aim of the IMA is to provide a structured innovation management programme for members of NETPark Net for two purposes:

- to enable companies to apply rigour and structure, as is currently common with manufacturing processes, to the management of product iteration and new product introduction. Participants should acquire the knowledge and tools to select profitable product ideas and accelerate time to market.
- to ensure that SMEs are “tooled up” to maximise opportunities with multinationals such as Eli Lilly, P&G and GSK which have active open innovation programmes. The IMA should enable companies to de-risk the collaboration process as far as possible

The most important aspect in the specification of the programme was a clear structure from the beginning to the end of the innovation process which members could access when and where they need to. Topics specified included linear, user and open innovation; technology push and market pull; ideation, portfolio management, technology roadmapping, technology scouting, design, managing collaborations, lean product development, Voice of the Customer, leadership and teams, deployment, and evaluation.

The IMA Deliverer

⁴http://openinnovation.berkeley.edu/what_is_oi.html

The IMA is delivered by Pure Insight, appointed via open tender, under the management of the County Durham Development Company NETPark Net Executive. Pure Insight manages a network of global innovators, experts, authors, and thought-leaders with over 400 members from 14 different countries, across Europe, North America and Asia Pacific. As well as running programmes such as the IMA, Pure Insight facilitates over 400 peer to peer introductions, via events, telephone, email, audio conferences and direct requests from members.

The IMA Participants

Up to 20 companies could participate. No charges were made to participants - it was included as part of the annual membership fees. This decision was taken because of three reasons:

- A generally low awareness of innovation management meant that fees might have been a barrier to participating
- To encourage take up of the IMA in its pilot stage and enable the generation of a robust evidence base for continuing or not.
- Regulations regarding income generation on ERDF-funded projects meant that it would have been overly complicated to manage a fee structure in addition to the membership fees.

All paid up members of NETPark Net were invited to participate in the programme, including all tenants at NETPark. Recruitment was via a series of e-shots direct to the membership and phone calls to members where previous interest had been noted. The opportunity was also taken to use the launch of the IMA to promote NETPark Net as a whole with a press release and use of social media.

Companies were invited to submit expressions of interest via an online registration form which assessed their commitment to the process and appetite to learn how to:

- Access new market sectors and customers
- Generate revenues from new products and business models
- Manage the risk, time and cost of their product development programme
- Reduce the cycle time from opportunity identification to new product or service
- Develop new high value, breakthrough products
- Increase the percentage of successful products

There were 21 applicants and 10 were selected as fitting the profile. Following a diagnostic for each company to assess individual needs, a programme was designed around these themes:

- Managing Relationships
- Platforms and Portfolios
- Ideas and Opportunities
- NPD Management
- Protecting and Partnering
- Working with Suppliers and Buyers

IMA Programme Details

Pure Insight constructed an 18 month programme delivered via a series of webinars, reports, masterclasses, clinics, roundtable discussions and an IMA faculty drawing on global thought-leaders.

There were three modules over the 18 months covering these main topics:

1. Innovation management:

- How to better manage Intellectual Property
- How to partner with other organisations (Open Innovation)
- Incremental vs Breakthrough Product Development

2. Creating and dealing with great ideas ('Fuzzy Front-end')

- Finding the 'uncontested' white spaces
- Idea generation and management techniques
- Identifying 'Hidden Needs'

3. Managing your portfolio of products and services

- Managing technology projects
- Roadmapping, wargaming and scenario planning
- Phase and Gates processes for killing bad projects

Each module was introduced by a day-long intensive seminar or Masterclass. Topics covered included: "Finding new opportunities and backing winning ideas", "Technology strategies and platforms" and "Defining Unmet Needs". Each masterclass was followed by "deep dive" clinics examining different aspects of the module - for example clinics covered detailed subjects such as "Technology Commercialisation & Licensing" and "Capturing IP Value and exploiting your intellectual assets".

Participants were asked to put into practice the learnings from these sessions - each module had a facilitated roundtable discussion where participants would share the results of implementing the ideas learned at the masterclass.

In between the different events, participants had access to webinars with additional information (and also the transcript and recording). Best Practice Innovation Reports were delivered directly to participants and they had 24/7 access to Pure Insight's online library of over 700 interviews, case studies, executiveviews, presentations and articles. An Ask the Expert facility was available to participants with experts fromBooz Allen Hamilton, Stevens Institute of Technology, Lally Business School and Cambridge University.

Participants were also entitled to free places at Pure Insight Masterclasses elsewhere in the UK and Europe.

Lessons learned

The IMA as it stands is currently a pilot scheme made possible by securing European Regional Development Funding (ERDF) for NETPark Net. This funding ends in March 2012 and so, while the programme is still ongoing at time of submission, we have already evaluated it for lessons learned and how to continue the elements that were of most benefit to members.

Recruitment and participation

Recruitment of participants proved harder than expected but fewer companies than expected dropped out over the 18 months.

The IMA was portrayed as an exclusive “members only” Programme, with three criteria to be satisfied. This was a good strategy to quickly identify the most driven companies who were most likely to benefit from the IMA. The message to companies was that it takes time to learn how to do innovative product development properly - it requires as much effort as lean manufacturing with better results from choosing the right product in the first place, and this was a great factor in differentiating NETPark Net from other more generic business support provision. However, the commitment of time for companies was an obstacle to recruitment for some companies - some preferred the flexibility to attend only one or two sessions.

The hardest challenge was mindset - most companies accept the need for lean manufacturing but lean innovation or even a defined process of managing innovation was much harder to accept, perhaps because of North East England’s tradition of a strong manufacturing base. In addition, there was a certain degree of difficulty with perception - some did not want to be perceived as “newbies” to the innovation process, and flexibility from the start about attending some but not all sessions would have overcome this.

The fact that it was free was a mistake as it became a “nice to have” rather than something that required commitment. This is especially true when companies are juggling many different priorities and fire-fighting becomes urgent - all participants acknowledge the necessity of this programme to their future prosperity but this does not always take precedence on the day.⁴ participants dropped out over the course, leading to some redesign “on the fly” and to opening up the masterclasses to any member of NETPark Net.

Another challenge to recruitment was that it was perhaps perceived as overly theoretical and the benefits of each module were not clearly conveyed. Clearer timescales and “takeaways” would have improved recruitment numbers. Big company “flag-wavers” such as P&G should have been recruited at the start rather than near the end as this would have emphasised the market need for SMEs to get up to speed on open innovation.

The attendance at each of the events has been excellent, with each company participating in over 70% of the events, but with notably higher participation at the local Masterclasses. Two places were taken up at the European Masterclasses which perhaps indicates that either companies were happy with the local support received or did not feel it important enough to travel. Use of online resources remains low.

Participant profile

Most organisations who participated in the programme were already well established in the commercialisation of a single product or service when the programme began - only two or three of the participant organisations had any kind of portfolio of products to manage or develop. Perhaps therefore not too surprising that some considered some of the programme content to be very interesting but not relevant to their daily priority. Therefore a challenge for the future IMA will be to keep companies in touch with the learning from the programme as their companies develop.

Participants expertise (and processes) were widely varied: some had almost no formal process (but well established and credible designs) and most had little process and were so busy with day to day activities to consider implementing real and lasting change. The programme did however really open the eyes of participants to the range of activities that, with a little bit of further

investment, could add significant value to their business or actually free up time for more considered development. This is borne out by the feedback received.

Despite considerable efforts none of the participant companies were keen to engage with external experts or organisations, preferring to navigate their own route. This reflects the acknowledged difficulties of SMEs engaging with outside organisations and it also reflects the continuing importance of trust in personal relationships to the innovation process.

The variety of participants was helpful - all had to be involved in new product development but some were from the high tech arena and some were from companies involved in more traditional manufacturing who were looking to improve products or diversify into different markets. This variety of perspectives meant that the roundtable discussions were “safe” for companies to participate in fully and honestly and they were always noted as productive.

Management

Despite contracting the service out, it has been time-intensive to manage and this should not be underestimated. This is not necessarily a negative, more an indication that the primary relationship for participants is with NETPark Net but time should be allowed to manage any future activity.

Perceptions

While the numbers may not have been high, there is no doubt as to the quality. The feedback received has been overwhelmingly positive. Some of the (anonymised) comments are listed below:

“We are very positive about the programme and NETPark has been significant in providing support and project management of our innovations. All of the staff have learnt significant knowledge during this course and welcome any future support. Excellent. Well done to NETPark.”

“I’ve taken part in many management courses over the past 30 years as a member of large organisations. The IMA Programme has updated me with the latest theory and practice in business innovation, and the attendance with other SMEs and their combined and shared experience has been very beneficial.”

“This Programme has been an inspiration in terms of our business focus. We are now spending more time at the front end of the design process. By taking time out of the business and sharing experiences, it provides other perspectives and alternative views. We have used process/ models learnt during the course and implemented in to the business to improve performance. The Programme has been a useful source of information and knowledge for us to use with our own business.”

“a stimulating environment with like-minded innovative people to explore business needs and explore solutions common to our roles and in our businesses. It has broadened my outlook and approach to innovation.”

“By applying the techniques and methodologies, I have learnt on the IMA course, I have been able to fast-track my product to market and take a more structured approach to research and development. I’ve found it very useful and eye-opening.”


“The IMA Programme has been of invaluable assistance. The Programme has enlightened the company to areas such as; IP landscaping, Blue Ocean Thinking; Innovation Strategy. Knowledge gathered is being “bedded” into the companies’ operations and will enable the company not only to sustain current operations, but develop and grow into new markets.”

“The IMA Programme has positively impacted the business in the following ways:-

- *Developing the businesses to have an “innovation culture”*
- *Ways, methods and systems to help with idea generation*
- *Support the business to meet specific needs, in terms of identifying business limitations and providing routes to solutions and ideas.”*

While the sample size is small, some quantitative analysis was carried out and some of the results are listed here:

1. In the last two years Product Development (including the development of new services) has:



Grown in importance to my business: 

Remained static in terms of importance to my business:

Become less important to my business:



If other, please specify:

6. Has the Innovation Management Academy programme had a positive influence on your product development activities?

	Responses
Yes, most definately have been some positive influences: 	4
Can't tell - don't know: 	1
No, no positive influences: <input type="text"/>	0
If other, please specify: <input type="text"/>	0

9. Of the IMA delivery channels, i have found the following useful to my business :

	Very useful	Worthwhile	Didnt attend / use
Initial diagnostic and support resources:	1(16.67%)	5(83.33%)	0(0%)
Roundtable discussion clinics:	5(83.33%)	1(16.67%)	0(0%)
E-Learning (Webinars on specific topics etc):	1(16.67%)	2(33.33%)	3(50%)
IMA 1 Day Masterclass' (Front End of Innovation, Outcome Driven Innovation, Technology Planning):	1(16.67%)	4(66.67%)	1(16.67%)
Connection to external experts:	0(0%)	5(83.33%)	1(16.67%)
Innovation Briefing reports:	0(0%)	6(100%)	0(0%)
Free place(s) on Pure Insight Masterclass':	2(33.33%)	3(50%)	1(16.67%)

10. Do you think that NETPark Net should continue with its focus on helping companies to improve processes around their new product (or service) development efforts?			
		Responses	Percent
Yes - I think that other companies would find this service very useful too:		6	100%
Yes - But in a more intensive programme:		0	0%
Yes - But in a less intensive programme:		1	16.67%
No - It wouldn't really benefit other NETPark Net member companies:		0	0%
If other, please specify:		0	0%

Although it was understood at the start of the process that it might be difficult to recruit the full twenty for such a commitment of time, it was hoped that the eventual participants would be the early adopters, the pioneers, the innovation champions and that is what has happened. One of the crucial elements of any further provision will be linking these champions to the next wave of participants to create a virtuous cycle of learning and inspiration.

The final step will be the “proof of the pudding”; tracking companies who have participated to understand how internal innovation management processes have changed and the impacts of this. This evaluation will start as the IMA winds down.

Recommendations

While we would not necessarily change the IMA structure if we were to run it again, we would tweak certain aspects at the start to assist with recruitment and participation.

A summary of recommendations is included for the design of any similar service:

- The service should be flexible, modular, fee-based and CPD-certified
- Allow enough time to manage the service so it encourages quality of impact for the long term and this data to be captured from the start
- Depending on the economic context of the STP, considerable effort may have to go into promoting the service. Or it may be a useful revenue generator.
- The benefits rather than the content should be the focus - innovation comes complete with its own language which can alienate potential participants
- Recruit a “prime”/OEM or other “anchor” company which has some kind of innovation scouting activity so participants can see real projects and real impacts.
- Ensure that the first cohort is linked into future service delivery.

Next steps

The current IMA ends in March 2012 but sustainability was built into the programme as all materials are retained for future use. We are currently examining three future models:

- IMA Plus - an IMA for the wider business community. The process of bringing an idea to market is the same for a product or a service: the same tools and techniques can be applied
- IMA “as is” - running the same programme for different companies
- IMA “stripped down” - no courses but acquiring and publicising new materials as they are produced.

The considerations for any new model will include flexibility of delivery, using existing practitioners as inspiration, opening up the IMA to greater numbers and charging for participation. Charging members for future sessions on a per event basis will generate more revenue and create more perception of value. A more modular approach may be instituted where participants can design their own course on various topic modules and in a way that suits them. This is not a particularly integrated approach to innovation management, but it certainly is more appealing to companies. CPD accreditation may also encourage participation. We would also look to more actively promote the online resources, from wherever they are sourced, as events in their own right. Lastly, given the emerging County Durham Innovation Framework, we would open up the tools and techniques to a broader range of sectors.

Whichever route is chosen, NETPark Net remains committed to providing innovation management support. We have set a precedent in running the current IMA programme and testimonials from current participants will be incredibly helpful in supporting the next phase of the IMA.

Conclusion

The IMA has been an essential part of NETPark’s support to the wider community and will develop further as the community grows according to the County Durham Innovation Framework. While it is early days to see the impact of the IMA, the testimonials are encouraging given that one of the

priorities of NETPark is to act as a flagship in promoting a culture and ethos of innovation, and to provide valued services which assist companies to be aware of global opportunities and help them take advantage of such opportunities. Or as one service user expresses it, we are “the lens through which opportunities can be accessed with support”.

Lessons learned from the pilot scheme will assist us to refine the IMA into one that retains these benefits and applies them more directly to opportunities with the increasing involvement of Durham University and companies such as P&G.

The evolution of science parks into flagships at the heart of a much wider innovation community is a necessary step in our increasingly connected world. Specific innovation support (and the cost of) may seem like a “nice to have” but it is exactly the role of the STP flagship to lead the way, to take the risk, to provide the support that others do not, recognising that, depending on economic context, it may not happen as quickly as originally estimated. STPs have always been long term projects. If STPs are to ensure that companies they support are as able to compete in the global marketplace as possible, specific innovation support is as necessary as providing buildings.

Contributors and reviewers

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