

## Motivation of researchers for collaborating with industry

Arbresha Meha<sup>1,2</sup>, Sabine Einwiller<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Applied Sciences in Ferizaj, Ferizaj, Kosovo. <sup>2</sup>University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria

### Research Domains

Academic practice, work, careers and cultures (AP)

### Abstract

Collaboration initiatives between academia and industry lead to strengthening and expanding applied research to solve real-world problems, improve processes, products and technologies. In this context, the active engagement of researchers/professors to fostering research and initiating collaborations has become essential. This study provides insights into researchers' motives to engage in collaborations with industry gathered from 30 semi-structured interviews with researchers/professors and management working in 10 public universities, and 10 universities of applied sciences in Austria.

The results indicate that researchers'/professors' key motives for collaborating with industry are engagement in applied research and utilizing their knowledge and expertise to solve practical problems. Subsequently, addressing problems through applied research necessitates fundraising to expand the research team. Subject-driven motivation is another important factor that drives researchers to work on applied research projects. Our analysis suggests that researchers/professors act as key players in initiating and implementing collaborations.

*Keywords: motivation, researchers, industry*

### Full paper

#### Introduction

Collaborating with industry in applied research ensures that the findings and innovations resulting from such research are translated into real-world applications (Franco & Haase, 2015). For researchers, it offers possibilities to apply their work in a practical environment, with the possibility to transform research outcomes into tangible products, processes, and technologies, which increases the significance and quality of their research (Abramo et al., 2009; Garcia et al., 2020). For companies collaboration with academia is crucial for the development of technological and innovative capacities of the business sector (Boardman,

2009). Successful collaboration that generates gains for both the researchers and the company in a certain field requires strong motivation and persistent effort from both partners (Rajalo & Vadi, 2021). It necessitates joining forces from both knowledge producers (researchers) and those who supply funding and resources (companies or other agencies) (Figueiredo & Ferreira, 2022). For universities using research funds to hire additional personnel allows researchers to dedicate more time to research and to further enhance the quality and quantity of the research output (van Rijnsoever & Hessels, 2021).

In this study we address the researchers' motives to engage in collaborations with industry. Our research question is: *What motivates researchers for collaborating with industry?*

## **Data and methods**

To answer the research question, an exploratory study was designed using semi-standardized interviews with academic representatives. The questionnaire was organized into two versions to capture the views of management and researchers/professors. Following a grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2015), a theoretical sampling procedure was adopted to produce a sample as diverse as possible by including 10 public universities and 10 universities of applied sciences (UAS). We conducted 30 problem-centered interviews (Witzel & Reiter, 2012) with 17 representatives from management and 13 researchers/professors. The coding and analysis of the transcribed interviews was performed using MAXQDA 2022.

## **Results**

The results indicate (see figure 1) that researchers'/professors' primary motives for collaborating with industry are engagement in applied research and utilizing their knowledge and expertise to solve practical problems. As a researcher highlighted: *"I am motivated by the desire to see the results of our research being applied in the real-world settings, with tangible impact, and used by companies to improve their processes."* Research and knowledge creation, along with their utilization for practical benefits, ensure that the outcomes of research extend beyond academic papers and are translated into tangible impacts.

Working on applied research projects with tangible effects requires researchers/professors to secure sufficient funding, which in turn is used to employ PhD students and postdoctoral researchers. Companies, in addition to providing salaries for personnel, also provide industry equipment, materials and data for research. These resources ensure researchers to have access to the latest data and advanced technologies and methodologies.

Both researchers/professors and companies focus their applied research on specific sectors and disciplines. Such collaborations are mostly initiated by companies when they face a specific problem for which they want to generate an innovative solution. Collaborations in a specific subject are particularly likely in sectors like engineering, medicine, chemistry, pharmacy and IT.

Motivation of researchers/professors is also driven by the goal to support innovation processes which lead to an increase of innovative products. Successful collaboration apart from boosting innovation increases third party funding. Securing and increasing third-party funding that aligns with the university's strategy and goals is another important task for researchers/professors.

Another motive for researchers/professors to collaborate with industry is to fulfill their contribution to the third mission. For researchers reaching out to society and organizations is very important. Hence, participation in outreach activities offers possibilities to promote their research, create networks and raise awareness for the research. For researchers working in UAS, strengthening the industry sector, with a focus on SMEs, is very important. It also enhances possibilities for employment for young researchers and students.



Figure 1. Motivation of researchers for collaborating with companies; the numbers in brackets indicate the frequency of mentions

## Conclusion

Our study showed that researchers/professors employed in public universities and UAS in Austria act as key players in initiating collaborations (Meha & Einwiller, 2024). Their motives to engage in applied research are to utilize their knowledge and expertise to solve practical problems and improve real world situations. Then, addressing problems through applied research necessitates fundraising to expand the research team. Subject-driven motivation is another important factor that drives researchers to work on applied research projects.

Hence, researchers join forces with companies in specific disciplines to provide intelligent and sustainable solutions for the challenges faced.