

Co-location of a multinational company research team in a University Campus

Using co-location to improve collaboration and knowledge sharing between a multinational company with distributed R&D labs and a University

CO-LOCATION



In 2011, CA Technologies (ca.com) established a co-located office at UPC (www.upc.edu), a university specialized in architecture, engineering and technology. Since then, professors, researchers and students have worked jointly with CA research staff in several projects. This relationship continues, and this co-located team participates in many research and innovation activities with UPC, such as collaboration with students, organization of events, joint preparation EU project proposals, etc.

Process Main Stages

STAGE 1 – PREPARING

In the approach stage, management of both the company (CA) and the University (UPC) started conversations to build the long-term collaboration. The University involved its Technology Center (CIT-UPC) to deal with the relationship on the administrative side. The success factor is the willingness to foster a long-term and strong relationship.

STAGE 2 – NEGOTIATION

In the negotiation stage, both CA and UPC involved their legal departments to agree on the terms and conditions of the Master Collaboration Agreement. The success factor in this phase is the negotiation of the intellectual property and exploitation rights from the beginning, setting clear expectations on both sides.

STAGE 3 – IMPLEMENTATION

In the implementation stage, which started after the Master Collaboration Agreement was signed, there were several substages, implemented for each single research project:

- In substage 3.1., the research director of the company co-located team approached CIT-UPC to indicate which research topics were more relevant for the company.
- In substage 3.2., CIT-UPC proposed a research team at UPC with expertise in those topics presented by CA.
- In substage 3.3, the research director of the company co-located team and the research lead of the specific UPC research team agreed on the research topics and the specific projects to be performed.
- In substage 3.4., the specific agreements for those projects were written and signed.
- In substage 3.5., research was performed.
- In substage 3.6., research results were communicated to CA management.

There are some success factors in this stage and substages, such as:

- the ability of the co-located team to understand the company strategy as well as the expertise from the University when defining the areas to explore;
- the ability of the Technology Center to find the proper experts inside the University;
- the ability of the University research team leader to understand the needs and the tempos of the company;
- the motivation of the research teams on both organizations to join efforts, knowledge and expertise;
- the strong background of the research teams on both organizations.

Contact

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Main actors

- CA Technologies
- Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya (UPC)
- Technology Center of the UPC (CIT-UPC)

As a result of the abovementioned project collaborations, other opportunities for collaboration between CA and UPC emerged, many focused in education and training activities addressed to students, but also collaborative projects (EU funded projects, industrial doctorates) and ideas on how to join efforts between Universities and companies to foster excellence in research and innovative ways for collaboration between industry and academia.

Touchpoints & Bottlenecks

TOUCHPOINT 1 – FACE2FACE MEETINGS

Provided that this approach relies on proximity and lack of intermediaries in knowledge transfer, the main touchpoints in this relationship are face-2-face meetings (kick-off, milestones, regular meetings).

TOUCHPOINT 2 – INFORMAL CALLS

Other means of communication are informal calls between the company and the university professors, as well as informal meetings taking place at the University cafeteria or other common areas.

TOUCHPOINT 3 – PITCHES

These documents (the typical pitch deck presented to potential investors) hardly ever convey all the information that the entrepreneurs would like to transmit, nor does it contain all the information that an investor needs to digest in order to shape a good opinion on the fit of the proposed investment in the strategic investment scope of the fund (or the investor itself). Possible a multi-layered and structured approach of slide decks covering various aspects of an investment opportunity could reduce the mismatch between information offered and information sought.

Being the touchpoints face-2-face meetings, the success factors and the barriers are related to communication and personal soft skills.

The success factors rely on the ability of team leaders (both from the University and the company) to effectively communicate the expectations of the collaboration and the specific project, the roles of the team members and to set an environment of trust and collaboration.

The main barriers are also related to personal skills:

- From the company: lack of understanding of the University way of performing research and tempos;
- From the University: lack of understanding of the company strategy, tempos and priorities;
- From both: not being able to effectively communicate the roles and the expectations to the team members, or to set an environment of collaboration.

Success Factors / Barriers

The main success factors of this experience are the motivation and engagement from research teams and building an environment of trust and long-term relationship, as well as setting clear expectations, objectives and ownership of results.

From the company perspective, it is essential to make the process from research to market agile, and to build a strong relationship with the research communities and experts in relevant topics. Detecting and acquiring talent is also a strong reason for companies to co-locate their teams at the university.

From the Technology Center of the University point of view, it is important to exploit the results of its research. As for the University, it is essential to impact the market and society and to expose its research staff and students to the business side of research.

The main barriers are lack of understanding of the expectations and exploitation of the results from both organizations.

Conclusion

Co-location of multinational company research teams in Universities has many advantages that other types of collaboration cannot offer, as it removes physical separation and intermediaries: being at the campus originates informal meetings that lead to new research opportunities, close physical collaboration allows to work through the potential differences (cultural, interests, understanding of the expectations) much more quickly, it creates stronger relationships and it has an appealing international dimension.

DO

- Engage Legal Departments as soon as possible, as they need time to understand the relationship and agree on the legal aspects of the co-location experience.
- Involve a team at the University that has a business mindset, and a team at the company that understands how University research works, as well as the company strategy.
- Find research topics that are aligned both with the University's research interests and the company commercial strategy.
- Work together to attract best students.
- Communicate and train the co-located teams so that they understand the policies related to the process, IP protection and expectations.
- Work on joint events (workshops, presentations) as well as joint research collaborations (project proposals, industrial doctorates, teaching classes).

DON'T

- Base the relationship on a single person at the University and/or the company.
- Appoint a leader of the relationship at the company that does not understand how research is done at the University.
- Appoint a leader of the relationship at the University that does not understand how companies approach research.
- Be inflexible on intellectual property aspects.

