

ENTREPRENEURS AND TECHNOLOGY CENTERS, FACTORS OF A FORMULA TO BE CALCULATED

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Draw a technology center on a blank piece of paper. You have a minute. How is the result? Many of you will draw a building, a laboratory, some offices... some, perhaps, will sketch a group of people. The question is not trivial: what exactly is a technology center?

Some of us, who all see it in images, visualize a technological center as a bridge that unites two worlds. On one side, the world of knowledge generation. On the other, the market formed mainly by companies and individuals. The space occupied by the technological center must be between both universes, relying on knowledge transfer tools to unite them. These knowledge transfer tools consist of intellectual property, specialized consultancy, public-private collaboration in R&D projects, human capital or the creation of technology-based companies or spin-offs.

Unfortunately knowledge, for the moment, cannot be bottled. So these transfer formulas are much more sophisticated. The last of them all, the creation of technology-based companies, is perhaps one of the formulas that has been pursued with the greatest zeal and that has surely provided less results on this side of the Atlantic.

Let's review some of the most resounding successes of companies that emerged from the field of American university campuses. Stanford cites, for example, among its most important students the creators of Yahoo, Google, Sun Microsystems, Hewlett-Packard, while MIT highlights companies such as Intel, Texas Instruments, Qualcomm, 3Com... If there is something that the history of all These companies have in common were the extraordinary efforts and vision of the entrepreneurs who participated in their birth. In many of these cases, it is not about companies orchestrated from the management of departments or laboratories, but rather *bottom-up* processes promoted by groups of passionate entrepreneurs.

In Europe, the successes of companies created from the environment of a technology center or university are much more few and the efforts made to boost the number of spin-offs have been largely unsuccessful. Surely the United Kingdom or some Scandinavian countries are the most prominent cases.

Can European technology centers have a real impact on the creation of technology-based companies as happens in certain innovation hubs (MIT, Standford, Berkeley...) in the US? Today, Europe's technology centers accumulate an enormous amount of knowledge and excellence: thousands of technologists and PhDs are involved in ambitious research and development projects, collaborating with the leading companies in European industry. We may think that, with such extraordinary technological capabilities, we could see the emergence of new and promising companies once the foundations for the generation of an entrepreneurial ecosystem have been laid.

It is clear that the land must be fertilized for this to happen: establish the necessary sources of financing, create flexible co-working spaces, make specialized coaching and accompaniment services available. Many of these instruments are already available, it would simply be necessary to integrate them and offer them more directly to the companies that emerged from the technology centers. But once these bases are achieved, we need the seed that makes these companies germinate, an ingredient of spin-offs that is completely essential and we have not resolved here:

entrepreneurs. Hoping that these entrepreneurial capacities arise spontaneously or are born from an R&D department is simply very innocent.

To alleviate this deficiency, technology centers must begin to develop active strategies for attracting and developing entrepreneurs. They must begin to make their pool of knowledge available to entrepreneurs, both internal and external, so that they are the ones who value the knowledge and bring it to the market. Technology centers can establish the right conditions for business incubation and greatly facilitate its birth and development, but they must necessarily incorporate business management and marketing capabilities to exploit their knowledge.

Technology centers should actively incorporate this entrepreneurial component into their dynamics: hiring *in residence* entrepreneurs, establishing co-working spaces in their offices for the generation of companies by both external and internal people, facilitating the intrapreneurship of their technologists and making their knowledge and technology much more accessible for exploitation.

Europe has a very powerful R&D system and an extraordinary capacity to mobilize resources for research and technological development that is not being properly materialized in innovation towards the market. The generation of technology-based companies is undoubtedly one of the best vehicles for mending this gap in the European innovation chain. Uniting technology centers and entrepreneurs in a more active way may mean finally seeing a new generation of innovative European companies emerge to once again lead the global industry.

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