

Developing a strategic roadmap to establish long-term partnerships

'Exploring ways to establish strategic alliances for the Fraunhofer Project Centre in Twente to gain recognition by the industry in the North Netherlands as an expert in agile manufacturing'

The Fraunhofer Project Centre in Twente (FPC for short) is a new non-profit research centre established in 2017 by the Fraunhofer Gesellschaft, the University of Twente and Saxion University of Applied Sciences. The Fraunhofer Gesellschaft is the largest non-profit research organization of Europe. The centre in Twente was the first Fraunhofer establishment in the Netherlands. Fraunhofer centres and institutes acquire research projects directly from the industry, arrange for funding from either the government or from the concerning industry company and execute the projects with scientific researchers. Therefore, Fraunhofer is an influential organization with much expertise and experience. However, the new centre needs to acquire and execute sufficient projects within five years time in order to become a full-fledged independent Fraunhofer institute. To speed up this process and to create awareness of the centre's expertise to the Dutch Industry, the project centre likes to enact collaborations with industry and/or research organizations. However, many research-industry collaboration request large investments and resources, which are difficult to come by.

Therefore, the research question was formulated as 'How can FPC form strategic alliances with industry to position itself as an expert in agile manufacturing, starting with consortia in the north of the Netherlands'. A strategic alliance is an arrangement between two companies that have decided to share resources to undertake a specific, mutually beneficial project (Strategic Alliance, 2018).

To answer this question, it was first explored which collaborations and ventures the centre already tried to establish with multiple interviews. After that, different types of partnership strategies were investigated by using scenario's and sources to evaluate if a strategic alliance is the most logical partnership the centre could establish at this point and to explore other collaborations. Finally, an overall strategy was created that would enable the centre to establish a durable partnership and to give advice on how to organize such a partnership.

The final strategy includes a strategy to develop an innovation network rather than a strategic alliance. An innovation network is defined by all forms of organizations that serve the exchange of knowledge and resources and help bring about innovation in products, processes and services by forming stable relationships with different players (training and research institutions, political players, start-ups and others) in order to gain competition advantages jointly and in a cooperative way (Rycroft, 2003) An innovation network allows the centre to start a collaboration without the need of a large investment or physical resources. Next to formulating the type of partnership, also a digital tool was designed to support this partnership. This tool was called a digital platform, which is concept for a collaborative software or application that is helps the project centre communicate and collaborate effectively with their potential partners. This digital platform concept consists of a storage system that allows researchers of the Fraunhofer Project Centre to structure research projects and affectively re-use knowledge and research. It includes a Virtual Dashboard which contains virtual and augmented technology applications and software that can be used by the centre to create simulations and test production elements which eliminates the need for any physical production elements to accomplish this. Moreover, the digital platform has a couple of complementary promotional and communicative tools like a calendar and a visualized network application. To enable the development of this tool, an additional strategy

was developed, namely the creation of Fraunhofer's Excellent Student Team or FEST. This team will be able to help in the creation of the digital platform, which would eliminate large costs and re-enforce FPC's workforce.

To communicate the developed overall strategy, work packages, a design brief and a strategy roadmap were created.

These visual representations will help the centre to communicate this overall idea for a collaboration strategy to potential partners and guide FPC to successfully establish and maintain this long-term partnership.

However, the concept is deliberately kept general to enable FPC to detail and adjust it to any future scenario. Therefore, it is recommended to FPC to take inspiration from the developed strategy, but to mould it to their liking.

Strategic Alliance. (2018, July 1). Retrieved from Investopedia:

<https://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/strategicalliance.asp>

Rycroft. (2003). *What are Innovation Networks?* Retrieved from Innosupport:

<http://www.innosupport.net/index.php?id=2330>