Industry and Innovation

Special Issue Call for Papers

Corporate Startup Collaborations in an Age of Disruption: Looking beyond the Dyad

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Background and Objective

In the face of disruption, large corporations constantly struggle to secure efficiency and long-term sustainability (Andriopoulos & Lewis 2009; Raisch & Birkinshaw 2008). To proactively adapt to disruption, these firms increasingly engage with startups to explore potential futures and identify desirable industry architectures that help ensure their survival (Ahuja & Novelli 2016; Kim & Steensma 2017; Cozzolino et al. 2021). To achieve this, corporates have adopted structures and processes to engage, rather than compete, with entrepreneurial ventures (Bonzom & Netessine 2016; Weiblen & Chesbrough 2015).

Although more classic forms such as corporate venture capital (CVC) units that operate as "windows" into new technologies have been extensively studied (e.g., Benson & Ziedonis 2009; Dushnitsky & Lenox 2005, 2006), reports reveal there is a broad diversity of engagement forms and potential outcomes that are included in the overall corporate - startup collaboration theme (Brigl et al. 2019). The corporate's degree of control and strategic commitment is substantially different whether this collaboration takes place in a corporate venturing, incubation, or accelerator program setting (Weiblen & Chesbrough 2015). Common across these different forms is the collaboration aspect: *"voluntarily helping other partners to achieve common goals or one or more of their private goals"* (Castañer & Oliveira 2020: p. 987). Nevertheless, many unknowns remain as entrepreneurial ecosystems evolve and early-phase startup support systems mature (Autio et al. 2018; Nair et al. 2020).

Also, despite its increasing popularity, recent research has found that these collaborations do not always work as expected, particularly startups demonstrate to be dissatisfied with their interaction with corporates (Sopra Steria 2021; Brigl et al. 2019; Garcia-Herrera & Autio, 2020). While both might share organizational learning as a common goal in the collaboration, what they want to learn about, and how they expect to learn, turn out to be quite different. Startups observe this type of collaboration as an opportunity to gain legitimacy (e.g., Fischer et al. 2017), to secure supplier contracts, and to accelerate their venture emergence (Shankar & Shepherd 2019). At the same time, corporates expect to explore new technologies and business models, while infusing entrepreneurship into their organizations, and enabling strategic renewal and, in doing so, improve their readiness to capture new growth opportunities (Agarwal et al. 2010). Furthermore, the diversity of forms in which these collaborations take shape make it difficult to decipher what makes them more or less successful, or even harmful.

In sum, we argue that the corporate-startup collaboration setting offers a unique opportunity to study the economic performance of non-equal inter-organizational agents beyond alliances and acquisitions as well as to explore the linkages between entrepreneurial processes and innovation outcomes – at the startup, firm, and ecosystem levels – from a diversity of theoretical perspectives.

Research Topics

The purpose of this Special Issue is to invite and collect a series of theoretical and empirical contributions on the focal issue. We invite scholars from diverse disciplines to shed light on the determinants, conditions, dimensions, outcomes, moderating factors, and subtle nuances of corporate-startup collaboration using different theoretical perspectives as well as different methodological strategies. Potential perspectives and subsequent research themes include, but are not limited to:

- Looking at the collaboration (inside the dyad):
    - How do dynamics of knowledge creation, appropriation, and capture unfold? What drives them? How does the inception/origin of the collaboration shape them?
    - How are the diverse interests, timescales, and emerging tensions balanced? What are the mitigation strategies and tactics to overcome such tensions? How do they influence the subsequent activities in the collaboration? What drives escalation/de-escalation of commitment in these asymmetrical collaborations?
- Taking the corporate perspective:
    - What are the motivations behind the adoption of different models for corporate-startup collaborations? Are there observed complementarities/substitution

effects across the different startup engagement models? Are there any differences in how corporates engage with start-ups vs. scaleups? How do these different models address the tensions that emerge between corporates and startups?
    - What strategic choices do corporates make when collaborating with startups? How do corporates organize to engage with startups in these rather lightweight and arms-length forms? How do more inward-looking R&D/innovation functions open up to explore startup venture collaborations? How does the *organizing* of the collaboration create and capture value from the startup? What drives the organizational design choices and collaboration configurations (i.e., internal units vs. intermediary or external organizations, boundary-spanning units)?
    - What explains the diversity of possible corporate outcomes? When are (or not) these collaborations reverting in productive innovations? What other outcomes - tangible and intangible - are valuable in this collaboration context?
- Following the startup perspective:
    - What motivates startups to engage in these collaborations? What antecedents and factors explain these motivations? How does the structure (or absence of it) and modes of collaboration attract similar or different types of new ventures, e.g., *startup vs. scaleup working in B2C vs. B2B contexts*? How do the motivations to collaborate change depending on the startup maturity (i.e., early-stage vs growth-oriented or later stage)?
    - How are these corporate collaborations convergent (or divergent) with the startup's venture emergence, i.e., their entrepreneurial strategy? How do they overlap or complement the startup's market entry or innovation strategy?
    - What are the collaboration outcomes for the startup? How can we measure them? How do these outcomes (positive or successful/negative or failed) influence the startup's further development, identity, legitimacy, pivots, as well as further entrepreneurial innovation collaborations? Is there a dark side of such collaborations, what consequences does it have for the startups? How do managers and policy-makers avoid those dark sides and orchestrate towards more desirable futures?
- Broadening (looking beyond the dyad) to the ecosystem perspective:
    - How do these corporate-startup collaborations shape the emergence, consolidation, or renewal of innovation ecosystems? In what ways do these collaborations nurture entrepreneurial ecosystems? Do they contribute to an increased pace of technology development in the ecosystem? (If so, how?) Do they broaden the technology-market possible combinations, economic complexity, or problems that the ecosystem addresses?

- How do the different modes of corporate- startup collaboration (e.g., individual vs consortium-based accelerator; venture client vs. venture builder; short-term such as hackathon and long-term such as a startup supplier program) between startups and established firms strengthen or complement the more vertical innovation ecosystem dynamics, as well as the more horizontal entrepreneurial ecosystems' logics? How do the actual collaboration outcomes contribute to such dynamics, and how can they be steered over time?

Related Events

The special issue is related, although obviously not exclusively to:

- Track on *Corporate-Startup Collaboration* at the **R&D Management Conference 2021**. (July 8th 4pm)
- Panel Symposium on *Corporate Acceleration, Firm Innovation, and Industrial Change*, at the **2021 AoM Annual Meeting** (August 2nd, 11 am EST**)**
- Symposium on *New Venture, Corporate and Ecosystem Acceleration* at the **Strategic Management Society (SMS)** Annual Conference to be held virtually in October 2021.

Following the first round of reviews we plan to invite authors to participate in a Paper Development Workshop in the spring of 2022 in Bergen, Norway.

Submission Process

Please submit your manuscript through the online submission system of Industry and Innovation (https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/CIAI) by the submission deadline of 30/11/2021. Publication of the Special Issue is expected for 2023.

Paper submissions will undergo rigorous editorial screening and double-blind peer review. The standard requirements of Industry and Innovation for submissions apply. Please consult the journal submission guidelines available at http://www.industryandinnovation.net.

For questions, please contact the corresponding guest editor Ferran Giones (ferran.giones@eni.uni-stuttgart.de).

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