

This is an electronic reprint of the original article. This reprint may differ from the original in pagination and typographic detail.

Please cite the original version: Tossavainen, P. J. (2015) The more the merrier. Promote the high potential in collaborative university-public sector relationships. In L. Gómez Chova, A. López Martínez & I. Candel Torres (Eds.) INTED2015 Proceedings. IATED Academy, 4106-4112.

The more the merrier. Promote the high potential in collaborative university -public sector relationships.

Päivi J. Tossavainen¹

¹*Laurea University of Applied Sciences (FINLAND)*

Abstract

There is a rich research tradition and an ample literature of university – industry (U/I) relationships. Scarce are investigations focusing on university - public sector relationship. Public sector organizations differ significantly from private business firms. Their role in society is often legally defined, state government funded, and politically guided. Their management and organization, performance time-span, effectiveness requirements, conflict of interests, and relationships within the society stand out substantially from those of the private business enterprises. Yet, they also face the need for development and reform. Furthermore, they also are large-scale employers with growing need of the latest knowledge.

This paper focuses on the relationship of a university and a public sector organization. It describes the experiences of Laurea UAS and Tax Administration relationship. Tax revenue is the public sector's most significant source of income. The purpose of this paper is to provide an insight into multifaceted collaborative relationship. The evolutionary perspective in the relationship is taken. The phases of the relationships development are described. The paper aims to investigate the institutionalization path of the relationship and to develop a framework for leveraging the high potential of the collaborative university - public sector relationship. Applying practice-theoretical approach, this paper investigates how the relationships can be transformed from dyadic personal relations to collaborative actions. The goal of this exploratory paper is to advocate university – public sector collaboration.

Keywords: University – public sector relationship; university – industry U/I relationship; collaborative relationship, practice-theoretical approach, experiences, case

1 INTRODUCING THE RELATIONSHIP CONTEXT

Universities reach out the society around them. There is a rich research tradition and an ample literature of **university – industry (U/I) relationships**. The interaction with working life, the activities, the benefits and the barriers, the implications, and the relationships between universities and industry in various disciplines are common (Deschamps, Macedo, & Eve-Levesque, 2013; Harryson, Kliknaité, & Dudkowski, 2007; Jongbloed, Enders, & Salerno, 2008; Walsh, Graber, & Wolfe, 1997). Initiatives for collaboration exist around the world (Britto, Camargo, Kruss, & Albuquerque, 2013; Deschamps et al., 2013). Yet, majority of this literature is focused on a specific interaction between firms and universities. Scarce are investigations focusing on **university - public sector relationships**.

Public sector organizations differ significantly from business organizations. Their role in society is often legally defined, state government funded, and politically guided. Their management and organization structures, performance time-span, effectiveness requirements, conflicts of interests, and relationships within the society stand out substantially from those of the private business enterprises. Yet, the role of these government agencies in societies is significant. With aging population, sustainability issues, high speed of technology development, and constant internet and telecommunication (ICT) provided opportunities; these organizations also face the need for development and reform. Furthermore, they also are large-scale employers with growing need of the latest knowledge. Thus, they are important stakeholder group also for universities.

This paper focuses on the relationship of a university and a public sector organization. It describes the experiences of Laurea University of Applied Sciences (UAS) and the national Tax Administration (TA) relationship. The university (Laurea) point of view is taken.

Laurea is a research-oriented and developmental university of applied sciences that produces new competence. Laurea operates in greater Helsinki region and has some 7800 students and 515 staff

members. Education is provided on B.Sc. and MSc level in various degree programs. The pedagogical model is called Learning by Developing (LbD), which is an innovative operating model based on authenticity, creativity, partnership and experiential approach (Vyakarnam, Illes, Kolmos, & Madritsch, 2008). Regional development is one major task of UAS. Laurea is active in regional development and developing university – industry relationships (Laurea-ammattikorkeakoulu, 2010; Tossavainen 2007; Tossavainen, 2012).

As a public sector organization, Tax Administration (of Finland) collects the majority of Finnish taxes and tax-like charges to enable society to function. Tax revenue is the public sector's most significant source of income. Furthermore, TA provides tax service for businesses, organizations, and individuals. From the service point of view, TA aims to collect the right tax at the right time without the threat of penalty. Yet, Tax Administration and their service can be perceived as old-fashioned, irritating, or punitive.

The purpose of this paper is to provide insights into multifaceted industry – public sector collaborative relationship. The evolutionary perspective in the relationship is taken. The phases of the relationship development are described. The paper aims to investigate the institutionalization path of the relationship and to develop a framework for leveraging the high potential of the collaborative university - public sector relationships. Applying practice-theoretical approach, this paper investigates how the relationship developed from ad hoc actions to collaborative actions. The goal of this exploratory paper is to advocate university – public sector collaboration.

2 SCARCE LITARATURE ON PUBLIC SECTOR RELATIONSHIPS

There is a rich research tradition and an ample literature of university – industry (U/I) relationships: The interaction with working life, the activities, the benefits and the barriers, the outcomes and implications, the drivers for collaboration, the best practices for collaboration, and the relationships between universities and industry in various disciplines are common (Deschamps et al., 2013; Dooley & Kirk, 2007; Harryson et al., 2007; Jongbloed et al., 2008; Pertuze, Calder, Greitzer, & Luca, 2010; Tossavainen 2007; Walsh et al., 1997). Initiatives for collaboration exist around the world (Britto et al., 2013; Deschamps et al., 2013). Literature recognizes, how universities identify their stakeholders (Jongbloed et al., 2008) and their roles (Wagner Mainardes & Alves - Mário Raposo, 2010) in which the focus is on the identification and assessment of stakeholders to determine the stakeholders salience. Yet, majority of this literature is focused on a specific interaction between firms and universities such as the university-industry interface examinations with collaborative research (Dooley & Kirk, 2007). Recent literature tends to suggest business oriented solutions and management tips (see for example (Pertuze et al., 2010) although universities differ from most firms. Moreover, scarce are investigations focusing on university - public sector relationships.

Public sector organizations differ significantly from business organizations. The role of these government agencies in societies is significant and they are large-scale employers with growing need of the latest knowledge and competences. Today, they also face the need for development and reform. There are actions and contacts with working life and also between universities and public sector organizations while regional development is an important part of university.

As part of given task for UAS, the partnership activities center around university include involvement in undergraduate and graduate education programs, interaction with study courses, and partnering in research projects or other collaboration spheres such as LivingLabs (See <http://www.openlivinglabs.eu/>) as beneficial collaborative endeavors. Focusing on the management issue, suggested solutions for collaboration management challenge include: A stakeholder theory approach (Jongbloed et al., 2008) in which the focus is on the identification and assessment of stakeholders to determine the stakeholders salience.

In Europe, the conventional (science) universities aim to work in cooperation with the surrounding society. Science universities may also aim to position themselves within the core of global competition and act as an active interaction node (Markkula & Lappalainen, 2009). However, the universities of applied sciences have from the beginning adopted a more practical approach and educate professionals in response to labor market needs and promote the regional development. Similarly, they research activities are generally geared to the applied research and based on the development needs of the working life through partnering with firms in research projects (Tossavainen 2013). In both cases the collaboration models and processes vary.

3 EXPERIENCES FROM LAUREA UAS AND TAX ADMINISTRATION RELATIONSHIP

This paper focuses on the relationship of a university and a public sector organization. It takes an exploratory approach because of the lack of cases with public sector in literature. Exploratory research follows a qualitative approach to phenomena found in a single case study. The purpose of this paper is to provide insights into multifaceted collaborative relationship. The evolutionary perspective in the relationship is taken. The stages of the relationships development are provided. The paper aims to investigate the institutionalization path of the relationship and to develop a framework for leveraging the high potential of the collaborative university - public sector relationships. Applying practice-theoretical approach, this paper investigates how the relationship was transformed from ad hoc relations to collaborative actions. The goal of this exploratory paper is to advocate university – public sector collaboration.

The evolutionary path of the relationships investigated resembles the generic lifecycle “S-curve” (introduction – growth – maturity – decline). Figure 1 depicts the main evolutionary phases of the collaboration. The first phase started late 2012, when the development manager at the TA became aware of the service design as part of the service development. He actively participated seminars (also at Laurea) to learn more about the topic and how it could be used in developing public service. This phase is called **the Ad hoc phase**. The phase was based on the development manager’s interests, knowledge, and skills. Connections were sought and established through calls and visits.

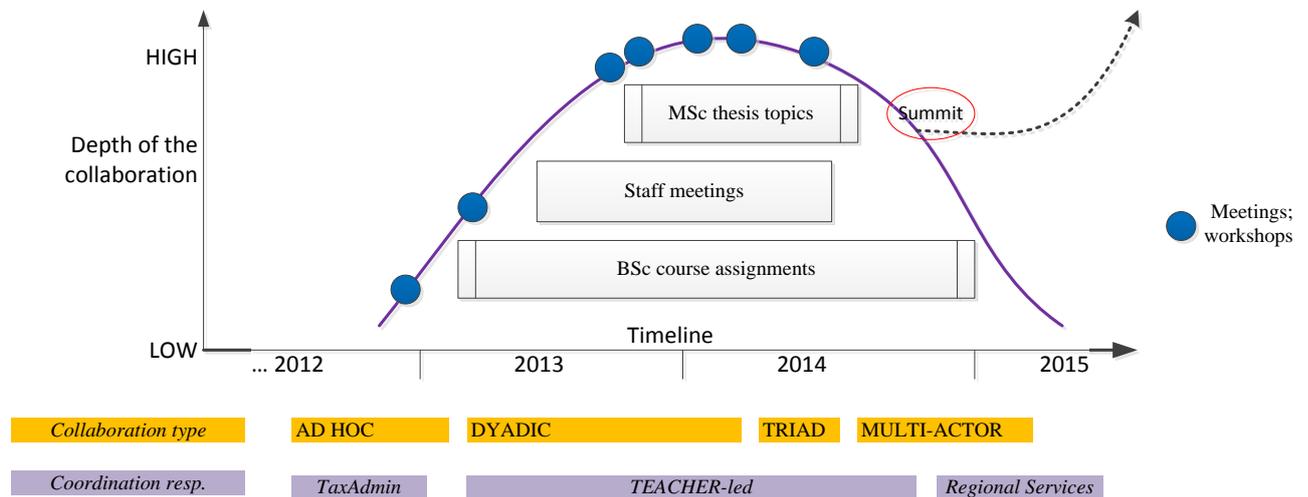


Figure 1. Laurea UAS - Tax Administration evolutionary path

Laurea was approached through participating at Laurea service design seminar. This led to the dialog between the Development manager (TA) and the Unit manager at Laurea. The unit manager is an administrative role and not related to teaching. Relationship activities are not included in teacher’s resource plans. However, the resilience of the development manager at the TA and his participation to a second time at Laurea service design seminar led to the discussion with a teacher. This led to **the dyadic relationships phase** where the collaboration became eminent. This phase can be described as teacher-led dyadic phase, where the teacher was responsible not only the relationship between TA and Laurea but also coordination of activities within Laurea. Needless to say that there were no resources reserved to this kind of work. The teacher saw a lot of opportunities and collaboration potential, and pursued with eagerness to engage other teachers to this relationship. She engaged other teachers, who formed a team around this topic. **This triad phase** included extended relationships among teaching staff and TA experts were achieved through meetings in which both parties presented their concerns service business, processes, and needs for future development. Furthermore, the teachers briefed about the opportunities what the university collaboration can bring into the university – industry collaboration and more specifically to TA. Ideas were discussed, themes were selected, working mode was agreed, the basic principle agreed, and the teachers took the development needs in their study courses. **The multi-actor -phase** refers to the evolutionary phase where TA, teachers and students collaborated in various activities. The next phase in the TA – Laurea

relationship took place when the teacher decided to formally develop the university – public organization relationship. The teacher organized TA - Laurea Summit 2014. The workshop was facilitated to discuss and collaboratively plan the future relationship and coordination mechanism. During the summit, the coordination role was transferred to the Regional Services unit, which is in charge of stakeholder coordination and university relationships. This would release the teacher to focus on collaboration through teaching and research. This phase resembles customer relationship management approach common in business organization management. This key account management system has not realized any activities in past 6 months.

This short description reveals that relationships may start suddenly by active individuals. There are no processes, models, or rules for the relationship; neither are resources. It is the individual interest, need, and confidence that will bring individuals together in the first place. However, the transformation path can be smoothed and expedited. Despite the extensive efforts, the collaborative relationship tends to follow the lifecycle curve: the come out, mature, and die sometimes even without notice. This is likely to happen with this relationship if it's not taken care of. The dyadic phase was the first period which could have ended with declining interest or lack of resources. The triad phase on the other hand is the phase for great success. Multifaceted individual relationships with different types of interaction, cooperation and collaboration on BSc and MSc study unit tasks and thesis work were ongoing.

4 OUTCOMES OF THE INVESTIGATION

The case of university – public organization relationship described earlier show that the collaboration may begin from the individual interests. In this case, clear phases of the relationship construction could be identified. The more people were involved the more challenging the relationship became to a single teacher to coordinate in addition to own primary work. Coordination meetings were needed to divide the tasks and projects among the teachers and TA teams. The challenges found with the relationship were as follows: first, from the TA point of view, it is very difficult to find the relevant contact person at the university. Furthermore, it is very difficult to contact any teaching or research staff directly. Suggested is that there would be an email address and a service telephone number at the web page of the university that would make the initial contacting easier. The universities need to intelligibly – define the processes and service to handle this type of contacting to avoid to waste time and resources in various negotiations or to chase down relevant people. Vice versa the teaching staff find in challenging to locate partners in public or private organizations to suggest collaboration. Hence, the very first step in university – industry relationship would be to ease out the connectivity of parties by providing simple email address and service number. The overview is depicted in figure 2 below.

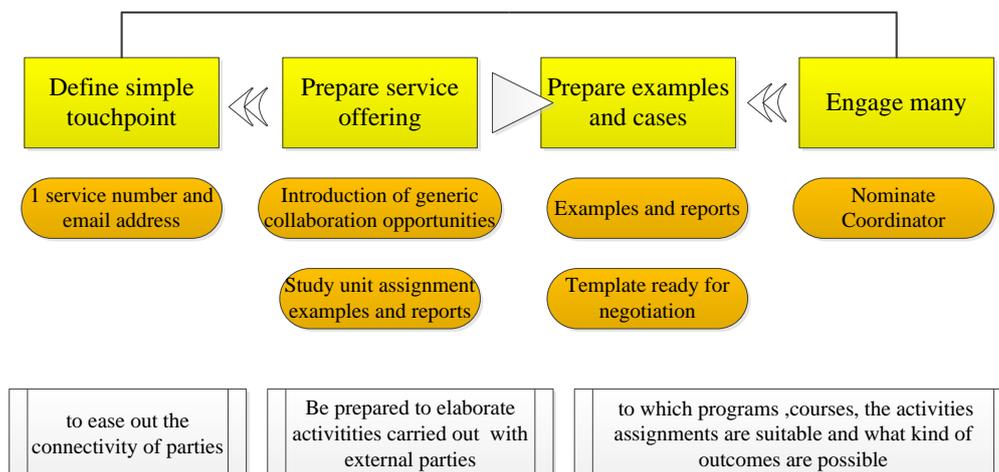


Figure 2. Relationship activities and their linkages

Universities need to be prepared to describe, elaborate and to show examples of the activities done in collaboration with external parties. The very first question from TA was related to what kind of things could be done with university that would benefit the both parties. In case of Laurea, there are several activities where the relationship could be connected to: from the private/ public organization point of view, Laurea can provide opportunities for the industry experts to lecture in various study course.

Further, the business experts can provide sparring for students, learning, experiences, and so forth. Business organization can provide challenges to be solved and development initiatives not only to study units (course assignments) but also to development projects. External parties can provide topics to thesis work and research projects. The outcomes from the two study levels bachelor's and master's levels need to be explained also. Likewise, each private and public organization needs to clear out their needs, practices, and time schedules. In private business organizations the time span is often much shorter than it is with public organizations. The decision making in public organization is different due to the political or legal reasons. However, scheduling of university teaching resembles closely to those of public organization, and thus further promotes the relationship building with public organizations.

From the education point of view, the industry and public organization relationships need to fit with the pedagogical model. In case of Laurea, the pedagogical model of Learning by Developing (LbD) (Kallioinen, 2008; Vyakarnam et al., 2008) supports the teaching, learning, research, and regional activities with external partners. The teaching staff needs to figure out to which programs and to which study units (courses) the activities are suitable and what kind of outcomes are possible. From the beginning more than one teacher should be engaged to the relationship and to build and harness the relationship. Similarly, the main coordinator should be named from the other party also.

From the student point of view, the case outcomes were clear: the students who participated in various collaborative activities learned that public organizations are developed, and the latest knowledge is also sought to develop public service. The students learned that the experts in public organization such as the TA are as enthusiastic in service development as experts in private organizations. Further, they are reachable and they have a high level of competences and skills. The public organization experts are educated and trained, and they follow the research and development. The students also learned that there is a lot of interesting career opportunities in these less known public organizations.

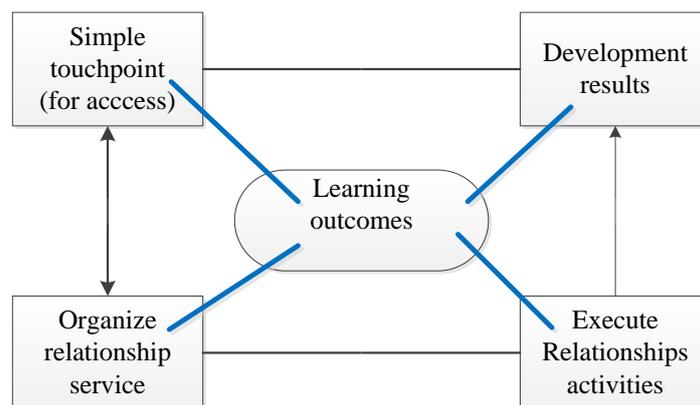


Figure 3. Framework for leveraging the potential

Figure above depict the suggested framework based on the investigation of the case and the institutionalization path of the relationship. The framework constructs main actions for leveraging the high potential of the collaborative university - public sector relationship. It focuses on mutually beneficiary learning outcomes for all parties involved. Through development assignments and through execution of relationship activities learning takes place. This may remain unrealized if there are difficulties for potential partner to even find the suitable contacts. Preparing for relationships means that the relationships service is organized already today.

5 CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

Public sector organizations are excellent partners to universities. Many universities are either public or run as public sector organizations. Public sector organizations differ significantly from private business firms. Their role in society is often legally defined, state government funded, and politically guided. Their management and organization, performance time-span, effectiveness requirements, conflict of

interests, and relationships within the society stand out substantially from those of the private business enterprises. They face the need for development and reform. And they also are large-scale employers with growing need of the latest knowledge. Thus, there are mutually beneficiary opportunities.

The outcomes of this case investigation enables to draw conclusions for improvement of cooperation mechanism of universities with their environment, what in a long-term perspective may result in stronger universities' influence on their environment and their actual impact on innovativeness and competitiveness of the economy. Universities need to consider how to avoid the key account management trap and embrace the multifaceted collaboration. Some recommendations were identified: Parties need to develop together a common understanding for the relationship that aims mutual benefits. Universities need to establish structures to facilitate easy access and be prepared for relationship. Highlight the practical applications of the collaboration from every one's point of view by provided reports, examples, and case descriptions. Develop an interdisciplinary approach to work together internally and externally. Here the teachers' autonomy needs to be understood as imperfect, and encourage self-organizing. Further, develop appropriate organizational arrangements to enhance the collaboration such as resource integrators, resource availability, and access to teaching. Also, develop educational courses for public sector employees. Integration of many counterparts from both parties brought strong commitment and in-depth expertise which benefitted both parties. The more the merrier approach demands for a strong leadership that enables direct interactions without management decisions.

To promote the high potential in collaborative university - public sector relationships requires resources and coordination. Without a clear leadership and direction the relationship may easily fade away or die. Even when transferred to the relationship service unit. To achieve the high potential, meaningful and long-lasting relationships or strategic alliance between the University and the Tax Administration would benefit from including employee education and/ or training programs. TA employees as any employee would require the latest knowledge and expertise; universities could provide customized training program for the public sector organizations. Thus part-time experts/ students would have more interest in developing not only the relationship between the parties but also the organization, processes, and service they both provide. There is a high potential in collaborative University - public sector relationships. More studies should be carried out about the university – public sector relationships, the evolutionary paths, collaborative models, decision making frameworks, to name a few topics.

REFERENCES [Arial, 12-point, bold, left alignment]

- [1] Reference [Arial, 10-point, left alignment, upper and lower case]
- [2] Einstein, A. (1916). General Theory of Relativity. *Annalen der Physik* 49(7), pp. 769-822.