

# University-Business Interactions

## The View from an Incubator

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# Outline

1. SJIC's experience *vs* international expectations
2. Cambridge cluster *vs* EU cluster policy
3. Current 'serendipity' approach based on
  1. Frequent personal contacts
  2. Loose institutional frameworks
4. Room for improvement – Hauser Forum
5. But no grand unifying theory

# St John's Innovation Centre



Established by St John's College in 1987 to provide flexible accommodation and business support services to early-stage, knowledge-based companies.

A commercial business, with income paid over to St John's College, University of Cambridge

# Innovation Centre Accommodation

- 53,000 sq ft of lettable space
- Units range from 100-3,500 sq ft in size
- Tenants can grow by taking on more units
  - or moving to larger ones
- Renewable leases (typically 3 years)
  - with only 1 month's notice of termination for small units,
  - 3 months' notice for large ones
- Rates are negotiated individually; 'easy in, easy out' leases
  - Around 60 'actual', 260 'virtual' tenants

The flexibility of the accommodation is one of the main success factors of the centre

# Revealing FAQs

- SJIC visited every week by overseas delegations
- Issues raised always the same:
  - Do you only accept University spin-outs?
  - Are all your tenants from St John's College?
  - How many firms do you start up each year?
  - How much equity do you invest?
  - How soon do you send tenants to the Science Park?
  - How do I join the cluster?
- Cambridge model bottom-up, largely unplanned

# European Cluster Policy

- SJIC engaged in EU incubator/cluster project
  - Difficulty in identifying ‘cluster manager’
  - No formal joining up of institutions, universities
- 2008 EU Cluster Survey:
  - East of England is education (healthcare) cluster
  - Data based on Ipswich, no Cambridge cluster?

“The Cluster Mapping database is built in the intersection of regions and sectors in Europe. By combining the two dimensions of geography and industry we can statistically trace regional agglomerations of employment, defined as statistical regional clusters, across Europe.”

[www.clusterobservatory.eu/index.php?id=44&nid=](http://www.clusterobservatory.eu/index.php?id=44&nid=)

# Working Hypothesis for Status Quo

- Many U-Business interactions ‘unplanned’:
  - do not follow neat sequential patterns
- But serendipity is helped by:
  - frequent personal contacts at influencer level
  - loose institutional frameworks
- Proximity is as important as policy
- Room for improvement:
  - Too many competing ‘co-ordination’ organisations
  - Activity not action, outputs not outcomes
  - No ‘front door’, dealing with universities *insider game*

# Emergence of the Hauser Forum

## Unmet needs caused by lack of:

1. **Integration of activities** to support technology-based innovation and entrepreneurship within Technopole
2. **Systematised access** to University resources
3. **Early stage, at cost space** for University-related start-ups and spin-outs
4. **Facilities supporting interaction** between small and large firms

# Hauser Forum and Current Gaps

- Building as **‘town hall’** for entrepreneurship & innovation
  - Open access to many areas and events by general public
  - ‘The Street’ for both planned and spontaneous activity
  - Move *from* people as main connection (insider game, ‘who you know’) ...
  - *To* location, procedures and processes (inclusivity, open access)
  - Opportunity for spontaneous networking as well as organised programs
- Coordinate ‘traffic’ into and out of Technopole
  - For non-university entities seeking to access CU scientific, technical, managerial and entrepreneurial expertise
  - For CU institutions promoting business opportunities
  - For all in CU seeking signposting to Cambridge-based entrepreneurship and innovation activities

# Functionality vs Elegance

“There is not, and never will be, an economic theory of everything. Physics may, or may not, be different. But the knowledge we can hope to have in economics is piecemeal and provisional, and different theories will illuminate different but particular situations.

“We should observe empirical regularities and – as in other applied subjects such as medicine and engineering – we will often find pragmatic solutions that work even though our understanding of why they work is incomplete.”

*John Kay* - FINANCIAL TIMES 22/04/09

