



Collaboration between the Academic World and Industry

By Prof. Dr. Michael Jünger

Prof. Dr. Michael Jünger – a university professor and management consultant sheds light on the importance of collaboration between the academic and the business world.



Prof. Dr. Michael Jünger graduated at the University of Applied Sciences in Augsburg in management and business administration. He started his professional career in the global Inhouse Consulting of the Alfred Kärcher Group in Stuttgart – well known for its yellow high pressure cleaners and other consumer and professional cleaning equipment. He gathered further professional experience on the job with-in an international MBA-program at the School of International Business and Entrepreneurship (SIBE), including a study abroad in China combining industrial experience and a visit at the Tsinghua University Beijing. His PhD-Thesis he developed in the research field of growth management.

In 2005 he got a part of Tefen and quickly advanced to a Tefen manager role in the German core team, also managing the Global Strategy Team whose priority lies within business development. He has contributed significantly to numerous international strategy projects in South America, Europe and Asia. In 2009 Prof. Jünger joined the Ingolstadt University of Applied Sciences as professor for business consulting and management. He focuses primarily on strategic management, growth management and the design of business models and serves as a member of the international Strategic Management Society (SMS). As a competence partner for Business Strategy he is still part of Tefen.

Collaboration between academia and industry

The collaboration between industry and the academic world has always been an important but complex topic. Due to the rapid evolution of the business environment and the vast transformations throughout the academic realm, the subject is now even “hotter” than it has been.

Prof. Jünger explains that “The main benefit for companies from this cooperation is the access to latest research results and innovative new methodologies. It’s a mutual approach – the companies offer business insights and the students contribute proofed methodology and expertise. It is a win-win situation for both parties.”

But since the universities and industrial companies have different business models, some investment needs to be made in converging the two positions before the mutual benefits can be definitely reaped. Universities focus on educating people and in creating new and excel in existing knowledge, while companies concentrate on mastering the challenges of a competitive environment and striving for market success.

Obviously the core interest of both differs. When they collaborate, each party has certain expectations of the other side – the companies expect innovative and state of the art lectures to secure high quality education, valuable knowledge and groundbreaking methodologies, while the universities expect their students to be given business experience e.g. through internships and opportunities to put their skills into practice. The academics also expect to have the opportunity to transfer theoretical ideas into practical projects and to implement research in the real world. Both parties have fundamental points of interest and this is where a win-win situation is achieved by both of them. With students being well educated with new methodologies and the corporate experts transferring these innovations into practical projects which involve the students, we will soon be able to see how the collaboration can bring about mutual advantages.

Companies which do not have a close relationship to the academic community are expected to be slower. They miss out on an early access to the latest research results and methodologies and these companies need more time to put these into practice. By being out of touch with a university, its students and young professionals, they become less attractive as prospective employers and find it often more challenging to recruit graduates and commit them for their first 2-3 professional years. It therefore seems much more effective for a company to have collaboration with the academia than to have not.

The effect of the different cultures

According to Prof. Jünger, the culture of a university has significantly changed over the years.

“Today German universities often have a well-thought corporate mission and are managed accordingly. We should not forget that students have a voice which is taken seriously by universities. Preparation for their future management challenges is most important for them. Strong collaboration with companies through internships or cooperative study programs, guest lecturers which are stated as experts, cooperation in projects between universities and companies or even endowed chairs – this all shows how open the university culture has become.”

Also the role of a professor is changing. In addition to the safeguarding of research and high quality lectures, they also have to act as business orientated coaches and supervisors within cooperative projects today. As part of their education, students develop new solutions for companies and their challenges in the different areas of their organization. Often these projects are semester-long assignments and, different from contract research, mainly without cost for the companies. Students learn how to make their methodologies tangible in real life situations. Stepping beyond a merely theoretical approach, professors need to put across the skills to help their students transfer ideas and strategies into practice.

Differences between sectors

This collaboration can be found throughout the various business sectors.

Prof. Jünger explains: “There is mutual influence between a wide range of academical and industrial fields. One of the crucial factors for collaboration seems to be the location of a university. For example: if a university is located in a strong automotive cluster, there will naturally be more collaboration with automotive companies. Students must be able to conduct a workshop or an interview on site, at the company, or at the campus without high mobility efforts. But the professors, of course, want to provide a broad range of experiences and tie relationships to different industries and company sizes also outside the region of their respective university.”

How consulting companies can benefit from academia

There are two win-win situations for an academically-oriented consulting company: the first one is, by having selected professors as competence partners in their closer network, the consulting company can benefit from knowledge transfer, research results and new methodologies, giving them a competitive advantage in the end. Second, the university and the students benefit from such a collaboration since the output of cooperative projects can boost the practical expert knowledge and the professors’ ability to talk about a treasure trove of experience – and strong business experience is what modern students expect. With a deeper insight into corporate life, case studies and real-life examples, which are of a greater relevance to their students, can be developed.

Examples of academia collaboration at Tefen

Tefen Germany, as an example, has integrated the academia collaboration as a part of its HR-Strategy by having two different levels of intensity:

1. **Internship** – students join Tefen temporarily to get a deeper insight into the management consulting business.
2. **Cooperative study program** – in a cooperative postgraduate program consultants can study in job integrated Master Degree programs, e.g. in International Management.

Prof. Jünger: “Tefen Germany is a prime example for the integration of students into a corporate environment. By giving young consultants the chance to participate in an integrated postgraduate Master program, Tefen secures latest knowledge and modern skill development.”

Recruitment

Most European companies face the challenge of recruiting suitable and highly qualified young professionals for management positions. One of the main reasons for that is the demographic development. To secure expert know-how, companies often have a close collaboration with universities and integrate it, as already seen at Tefen Germany, in different intensities into their HR strategy. Vice versa this results in three different types of students evolving:

1. **“Classical”** students, staying free in their decisions for their internships and temporary engagements during their studies.
2. Students who have **close relationships** or even contractual arrangements with companies right from the beginning of their studies. These companies support the students during the years of study e.g. through mentoring, a base salary, access to personal development, etc. In return the students fulfill its internships and engagements e.g. during summer and winter break, in the company.
3. **“Embedded”** students which work for a company and study in parallel in a job integrated program.

Prof. Jünger: “More and more students prefer to work as a part of a company’s corporate life already from the beginning of their studies than to work in traditionally typical student jobs. The companies provide students with a framework that supports them through mentoring, seminars

and personal development. The companies themselves profit from the long-term commitment students give to them.”

Companies see multiple benefits, if their HR departments cooperate with the academia:

- Access to universities and a long-term relationship with students, right from the beginning of their studies or at least at a very early stage.
- Securing permanent high recruitment potential.
- Since these companies also have a strong presence at universities, this also fosters their employer branding.
- Close relationship with students in a very early stage, they usually run an assessment center to choose the best students.

Benefits for students:

- Students have a deep insight into companies from the beginning of their studies and a good insight into the current challenges and management topics.
- They can align their studies to the real needs of the cooperating company and therefore have a good start into expert job positions.
- “Training on the job” begins at a very early stage.

Prof. Jünger sums up: “The collaboration between universities and industry gets more and more important. The ability to hire well qualified graduates with latest knowledge and core management skills, as well as the trade-off of actual business challenges and academical research and new methodologies, accelerate this topic further. Companies need to view this issue as a key challenge of the future and should integrate it into their HR-Strategy. It’s a win-win situation.”

Prof. Dr. Michael Jünger, Competence Partner, Tefen Germany

