Facilitation as supportive practice in growth-oriented cooperation between Student Entrepreneurs and SMEs anchored in the SPININ-Method

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Abstract
This paper focuses on the impact of facilitation of growth-oriented collaborations between student entrepreneurs and established companies.

The method presented is based on the experience from the SPININ project. The project focuses on creating growth among student entrepreneurs and local SMEs via a facilitated collaboration process of mutual value creation.

The four key principles in the SPININ method are:
(1) Mapping of strength and challenges according to growth
(2) Creating common ground in the matchmaking
(3) The student entrepreneur moving in with the SME
(4) Facilitation of action plans during the period of collaboration (Breindahl and Thrane, 2014).

To support the matchmaking and stimulate value creation SPININ has developed and tested a facilitation approach and tool. The tool serves as visual scaffolding for the matchmaking, framing and developmental process during the collaboration.

The facilitation approach and the SPININ-facilitation tool is designed to enhance self efficacy (Bandura, 1994) and enterprising behaviour (Sarasvathy, 2001 and Kirketerp 2007) - serving as both status on challenges and enablers for growth, summary for the decisions taken in the collaboration, and not least as a co-creation platform for the participants in order to reach their individual growth targets.

The preliminary results in the project provide insights as to how facilitation can support and stimulate the value of the collaboration and help bridging the barriers that typically occur such as different expectations to the process and outcome, time frames, parameters for development, etc. (Breindahl and Thrane, 2014).

Keywords
Facilitation-tools, University-Business collaborations, Supporting growth, Student entrepreneurs, Matchmaking, visual scaffolding, Barriers.

1 Introduction
Growth, innovation and new entrepreneurial enterprices are the key to regional development and growth. It has been recognized that SMEs1 are important actors in creating,
applying and introducing innovation in local economies. However, SMEs are not accessing and benefiting from the knowledge generated at universities to the same extent that larger businesses are. (Laursen, 2004; FI, 2011) (Hansen, 2015). Without a bridging facilitator the number of enterprises engaging in collaborations is limited (RTI, 2008). Getting access to the knowledge and the entrepreneurial mindset that can lead to development and growth is to some SMEs a great challenge. On the other hand, knowledge-based entrepreneurs have a challenge lacking industrial experience. By matching the SME with the student entrepreneur SPININ aim to bridge the gap of experience and knowledge. However the expectations, resources and enterprise-conditions differ to a great extend and barriers for a productive collaboration are multiple.

SPININ has explored how facilitation can help the collaborative process among the student entrepreneurs, and the established companies become growth-oriented, effective and unhindered from the barriers. The facilitation in the SPININ-method is designed to increase the value of the collaboration by creating a secure atmosphere, setting up gates and challenge their conventional thinking and problem-solving thus affecting the outcome positively.

This paper focuses on the impact of facilitation of growth-oriented collaborations between student entrepreneurs and established companies anchored in the SPIN-IN-method.

The method presented in this paper is based on experience from the SPININ-project. SPININ focuses on creating growth among student entrepreneurs and local SMEs via a facilitated collaboration process of mutual value creation.

This paper gives a short introduction to the SPININ-project in which the facilitation method has been developed, followed by a description of the approach towards facilitation in the SPININ-collaboration. The SPININ-facilitation is presented in four steps, followed by a discussion of the findings showing that facilitation is a key factor in creating effective, value creating collaborations between student entrepreneurs and established companies. Finally, recommendations and suggestions will be presented for further action.

2 Facilitation of collaboration between student entrepreneurs and SMEs

2.1 The SPININ-method

The aim of the SpinIN-project is to increase the success rate and create sustainable growth and jobs by matching student entrepreneurs with established companies. A key feature of this matchmaking is that the student entrepreneur is physically located within the office or production facilities of the established company (Breindahl and Thrane, 2014).
The SpinIN project accentuates the growing acknowledgement of universities as important drivers of innovation, job creation, and economic growth regionally and nationally through various university-industry collaborations (Breindahl and Thrane, 2014: 181). The project has developed methods for the collaboration process – thus establishing 21 matches between student entrepreneurs and established companies. Finally, the SPININ-method has been tested and evaluated and has received future funding.

The key principles to make a SPININ-collaboration fruitfull are:

› Mutual contributions
› Trust and security
› Equality
› In-House placement

**Figure 1: The four steps in the SPININ-process (Breindahl et.al. 2014)**

### 2.2 Barriers for collaboration

Matching Student entrepreneurs and SMEs meets some barriers that the facilitator has to address both in the matching and the collaborative process.

Different goals and expectations, different timeframes and lack of funding are well known barriers in collaborations (RTI, 2008).

When developing SPININ we identified other barriers concerning:

› Knowledge transfer across sectors
Collaboration across experience and educational levels

The nature of contributions

Mis-match of expectations in general

Barriers connected respectively to Student entrepreneurs and SMEs

Blindness to knowledge transfer across sectors is common to both SMEs and entrepreneurs. The facilitator must be very explicit in pointing out the possible fields of collaboration and gain. Often the matched parties are surprised by the amount of knowledge and inspiration that can be transferred from complementary theoretical disciplines and industries.

Collaboration can be challenging especially to SMEs with no previous experience with knowledge collaborations or interactions with the educational system. Their concerns consider the academic „interference“ in the company, and the insecurity of having an academic entrepreneur entering their company.

The nature of the contributions from the entrepreneur and the established company differ. The Student entrepreneur contributes with academic skills and entrepreneurial mindset and the SME with production experience, network and industry knowledge.

Having established the match and going into the phase of collaboration, the barriers and challenges change their nature. At this stage a mis-match of expectations often occurs in relation to the time and resources spent in the collaboration, and in addition the accept and understanding of the fact that the mutual contributions might not be able to operationalize to an equally high extent in favour of both parties at the same time, but will match over time.

2.2.1 Barriers in the Established companies

Studies reveal three types of barriers in the SMEs when engaging in collaborations. The first group consists of barriers related to competencies that inhibit their ability to use and implement new knowledge. These are barriers such as lack of ability to qualify ideas and needs, lack of innovative level, lack of academic personnel. The second group of barriers relate to lack of knowledge on research and knowledge institutions and thereby on what the different educations have to offer. The third group of barriers is of strategic nature and relates to their way of conducting business such as a shortsighted focus on income, fear of collaborating with competitors, and insecurity about legal conditions (RTI, 2008). These barriers do not keep the SMEs from engaging in collaborations, but it is important to have matchmakers whom the SMEs trust to bridge these barriers.

2.2.2 Barriers in the student entrepreneurs

Critical barriers for the entrepreneur are distance and time. The student entrepreneur has to attend lectures, and often bike or bus is her/his only mean of transportation – Thus SMEs situated far from the educational institutions struggle attracting the students. Dis-
tance is however only an issue in the beginning of the partnership, and diminishes as the entrepreneur experience the value of being situated in the SME.

2.3 Facilitation approach

Facilitation is considered a key factor in the SPININ-method, moving the collaborating parties effectively and efficiently through the process (Møller, 2014). Facilitation can help the matched parties to a better exploration and operationalization of the potential contributions they bring into the match.

2.3.3 The role of the facilitator

The facilitator is:

“Someone who contributes with structures and processes for interaction so groups may work efficiently and make decisions of high quality. Someone who helps and enables, and whose objective is to help others to achieve exceptional performances.” (Bens, 2007:41). The SPININ-facilitation is designed to support self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994) and entrepreneurial behavior (Sarasvathy, 2001; Kirketerp, 2007).

Our approach to facilitation is appreciative. We frame reflection in our interaction with action (Schön, 1983), and our feedback has an appreciative character. It supports bold actions and a fail-forward culture as entrepreneurial basis for growth and development.

Gregory Bateson writes about coordination of opinion, that any action can only be understood in the context of something else, that every person has his or her individual context, and that the meeting between one or more people requires coordination of opinion and action - which again will require a coordinated understanding of the context for the individual. And this coordination of context takes place through communication (Bateson, 2000). In relation to this the SPININ facilitator contributes with both exploring the parties' respective actions and contexts, and on the basis of these shapes a common opinion

Creating a positive environment and involvement will lead to increased performance, higher income, increased knowledge sharing and collaboration (Møller, 2014). The facilitation is focused on establishing a safe and open space for knowledge sharing. In this connection, it is also important to point out that it is a confidential space, where the insight the parties will gain in each other's companies is not passed on. These aspects are also described in the SPININ-cooperation agreement. Once the formal requirements are in place, the parties are free to collaborate.

2.4 Theoretical background: Effectuation and “Push”

2.4.4 Push

An essential parameter of predicting growth and development is entrepreneurial behaviour and a structured approach to developmental activities (RegLab 2012). A vast amount of the SMEs attending SPININ basically do not possess these characteristics. To
help the attendees cultivate these characteristics we aim to facilitate the match by creating a gentle “push” toward a change of practice. The facilitator must seek to guide the activities and actions in the collaboration towards serial successful experiences as described in the “Push-method” (Kirketerp 2007).

2.4.5 Based on means - Effectuation Logic

The starting point for the effectuation logic is that the individual has been given means and resources. “Who am I?", "What can I do?" and "Who do I know? The objective is thus to a high extent determined by the means, and will most likely change as the available means are changing (Sarasvathy, 2008). Thus, collaboration between an entrepreneur and the SME places both parties in a better position in relation to the means and resources they have access to.

Means and resources are applied according to the 'Crazy quilt' principle, where the focus is on what the process demonstrates, finding business opportunities along this path. (Sarasvathy, 2008). The contributions from the two parties in the SPININ-cooperation will thus have an impact on their individual development.

A prerequisite for entering into partnerships is that you know your personal competencies, strengths and challenges ("Bird in Hand", Sarasvathy, 2008). Through the clarification the facilitator can help the parties to again this overview. The facilitator helps the parties explore the opportunities and affordable loss arising from the specific relationship ("Lemonade Principle”/"affordable loss”, Sarasvathy, 2001a, 2001b, 2008).

2.4.6 Small controlled steps

According to the effectuation logic the future is dynamic; we cannot predict ultimate goals, only sub-goals. On the basis of means rather than targets “small steps with full control” are taken, where you do not plan further ahead than to the next best action ("Pilot in the Plane", Sarasvathy, 2008) by preparing action plans according to the desired vision of growth.

It is through action we gain experience. Positive experiences support the desire of more action, helping to overcome fear of translating ideas into action (Sarasvathy, 2008). Helping the partners to identify and operationalise the successful “small steps” also strengthens their entrepreneurial self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). The facilitator does not follow a pre-ready-made plan, but allows opportunities to grow and acts on them as they arise. This helps the SPININ-participants to focus on maximum motivation and the best business opportunities.

2.4.7 Role models as a mirror

The matched parties will be each other’s real-life role models. Role models can help create a breeding ground for entrepreneurial behavior, since they represent the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1971) and have a high level of reliability.
2.4.8 Comfort zone and recognition

If you compare the push-method with the theory about comfort zone, you could say that the small push brings the entrepreneurs out of their comfort zone, but not all the way into the danger zone; and that the push-method through successful experiences continuously expands the comfort zone (Vygotsky, 1971).

3 Facilitating SPININ

According to the aim of stimulating growth and development in student entrepreneurs and established companies, SPININ seeks out the circumstances that in the most feasible way provide conditions for development, innovation and growth. According to Ruef teams with extensive experience in an industry are less likely to be innovative than those with limited experience, as well as actors embedded in a diverse set of network ties are more likely to be innovative than actors relying on homogenous ties (Ruef, 2002). This provides arguments for the established companies to invite a less experienced entrepreneur to use their facilities and for the matching across experience, educational level, sector, etc. in general.

3.5 Screening and mapping needs and contributions

Facilitation is supported by a number of tools developed for the purpose. In the preliminary phase it aims at a thorough mapping of needs and contributions according to growth targets in the participating partners. The approach is to coach the company to reflect on and formulate their strengths and needs.

The facilitation tool is a “game board” called the “SPININ-wheel” serving as visual scaffolding for the further matchmaking process, providing an overview of the current needs and competencies in the company (Breindahl et.al. 2014).

Initially, the SPININ-wheel is used to identify growth goals and map out strengths and challenges. The goals are set in a visioning process where we ask them to describe the desired future for the company (Bens, 2006). The visioning results in alignment with the goal they work towards and an engagement in the forthcoming developmental process, and it gives a baseline to assessing strengths and challenges. Strengths and challenges are transferred to the focus field on the game board, making it easy to communicate needs and contributions to a future match-partner.

3.5.9 The visual scaffolding and the dialogue

The SPININ-wheel is intended as a visual dialogue tool and documenting scaffolding. The SPININ-wheel maintains the mapping and it provides a positive sense of productivity, overview, and a common picture, etc. (Molly, 2009).
The SPININ-wheel also acts as creative visual scaffolding, and is a common point of reference and everyone will be invited to contribute to the clarification process.

![SPININ-Wheel](image)

*Figure 2: The SPININ-Wheel for mapping strength and challenges regarding Growth. (Breindahl et al. 2014)*

The design of the SPININ-wheel invites you to start the mapping anywhere relevant and thus supports the awareness of the fact that all aspects of business operation and development go hand-in-hand and are interconnected.

It is important that the facilitator supports the company working with their strengths and challenges as they experience them. However, it is, of course, also important that the facilitator’s role is to be inquisitive and curious about the company, thus open-ended questions are important in the process.

The exploration of needs in the mapping helps both entrepreneurs and established companies are aware of crucial themes connected to development and growth, and to qualify their needs. It also helps them realise the benefits in cross-sector and cross experience/educational collaborations, and thereby to start bridging these barriers.
3.6 Establishing the match

“Beginnings are important, as the behavioural pattern and the climate of the group form almost immediately” (Darsø 2001: 320)

Having mapped strengths and needs and found a match-partner on that basis, the actual matchmaking begins. An honest and open matchmaking process focusing on clarifying areas of potential cooperation, framing and matching of expectations is crucial in this phase. Facilitation focuses on establishing a common ground and ties (Ruef, 2002, Darsø 2001) and the facilitation tool is a “Focus-card” (Breindahl et al., 2014).

3.6.10 Facilitation of the match meeting

The agenda for the initial meeting between the parties is for the facilitator to “lead the start-up discussion in which members get to know each other, identify personal skills, set up group norms, clarify roles and responsibilities, reach agreement about how to work as a team, and produce a team charter document” (Bens, 2006: 43)

At this point it is important that the SPININ-participants make a buy-in on the to create a forum for the parties to reach an agreement about how they will relate (Bens, 2006). The expectations of the match parties regarding their benefit from the collaboration should be reconciled at the first meeting. This creates a common ground and a common point of reference or bond to the collaboration (Ruef, 2002). The expectations will change and should be updated on a regular basis as the collaboration is progressing. The conditions of uncertainty in the beginning of the process are eased by the presence of a structured process and a facilitator to lead it (Darsø, 2001). This is the reason why the SPININ facilitator mediates the initial meetings in the collaboration.

Essential outcome of the first match meeting is:

› Potential fields of collaboration have been explored and both parties see and value the contribution from the other part
› The group has made a accept the facilitator
› The personal chemistry among the collaborative partners is good
› Agreement on practical matters such as in house placement, timeframes etc.
› Ready to sign the collaboration contract that legally secures the partners

The match meeting help bridge the barriers of valuing contributions of different nature and for the SMEs to demystify the academic entrepreneur and get an incipient understanding of the value of sparring with a complementary theoretical field.

3.7 Facilitating the match

Once the team has begun its work, the facilitator should focus on activities aimed at maintaining maximum efficiency, such as managing regular meetings, provide a process design, facilitate discussions and feedback loops, and mediate conflicts (Bens, 2006).
Facilitation in this phase focuses on preparing action plans, securing balanced knowledge transference and offers a gate-like opportunity to set deadlines, evaluate and give feedback.

3.7.11 Action plans

Action plans derive from a needs and offers negotiation (Bens 2006) and serve to concretize possibilities and break it up into manageable small steps. The tools used in facilitating the collaboration is the SPININ-fan offering a set of themes connected to growth worth revisiting on a regularly basis in the process, and the SPININ-wheel where focus areas are mapped (Breindahl et.al., 2015).

The approach derives from the “Push” method (Kirketerp, 2007) and helps the collaborating parties gain self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977) and an enterprising behaviour (Sarasvathy, 2001) in developing their companies and create growth.

The collaboration partners discuss their respective current challenges in relation to growth and possible mutual contributions in response to these challenges, and the facilitator guide them in converting the potential mutual contributions into actual action and note this on the action plan.

Facilitation meetings are often “In the Moment Facilitation”, which is characterised by the fact that the meeting takes unexpected turns or new opportunities arise. In addition to this, the meeting facilitation enables an opportunity to discover new common crossroads, for example a joint product or business area, and in this respect the SPININ-wheel acts as a dynamic framework for cocreation.

3.7.12 Debrief and reflection

The repeated sessions of creating action plans during the collaboration include evaluation of previous actions and activities, leading to reflection, self-awareness and the courage to fail and learn from the failures (Kirketerp, 2011). The after-action debriefing (Bens 2006) concerning impact and method is an equally important part of the facilitation-meeting. The typical resistance to this kind of activity is “waste of time” because you lose some spotanity for a short period, when forced to reflect. Never the less, the reflecting on action expliciates and embeds the learnings and experiences (Schöen, 1983). This is where an equal exchange of knowledge and experience takes place.

3.7.13 Operational review and Feedback

The meeting construction with the collaborating partners and a neutral facilitator supports the establishment of an equal and secure environment, thus serving as an operational review (Bens, 2006) to routinely eliminate blocks and barriers. This way the meetings reflect the principle of equality in the match relation, where for example the SPININ-match differs from an ordinary mentor relation. Facilitation meetings can also be interpreted as a coordination of common opinion. The ongoing facilitation of the collaboration helps overcome divergent expectations to time usage, invesments and other essential issues in framing the collaboration. We also experience that the strategic focus
on development, innovation and partnerships is increased as well as the disadvantages between the partners are forestalled.

From experimenting with various intervals, we find that more intensive facilitation during the start-up period ensures that the parties are focusing on the collaboration, that they will get the opportunity to establish stronger ties to each other (Ruef, 2002). Needs for facilitation and the gates that the meeting offers vary videly among the matches, and no fixed intervals can be set. Every 6-8th week seems to fit most participants.

4 Findings

The SPININ-project has recently been evaluated to identify what effect and value the method creates for the participants, and whether the different elements create different effects. The evaluation was conducted as quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. A majority of the participants report development and growth as effects during the project, but at this stage it is not possible to point out the isolated SPININ-effect. 21 matches were established, 73 jobs creatediii and new products, services, concepts, markets and networks have emerged resulting from SPININ, as well as 45% reports of increased turnover (Iris Group, 2015).
In the cases where value creation failed to materialize, the missing value is ascribed to lack of facilitation in the preliminary phases.

4.7.14 Varying needs for facilitation

When collecting data about the effect of facilitation, we deliberately variated the intensity of facilitation. Based on this variance, we have been able to observe that the initial facilitation is of great importance in order to achieve crossing contributions in the collaboration. There is a tendency that the matches, which has not been facilitated, have not really gotten off to a good start, while the matches being facilitated, have achieved a much greater outcome. However, facilitation during the collaboration must be adapted to the individual match and the specific needs.
Table 2: Participants evaluation of the impact and significance of facilitation in the four steps in the SPININ-process (Iris Group, 2015)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Screening</th>
<th>Mapping</th>
<th>Matchmaking</th>
<th>Facilitation of the collaboration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Important to find mature start-ups and established companies willing to spend the time needed and to house the start-up</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Creates a new understanding of the company (Startups)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Form the basis for the match</td>
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<tr>
<td>None of the SMEs would have come up with the ideas (the SPININ-model) on their own</td>
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<tr>
<td>The programme validates the start-ups</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Opens the doors&quot; for collaboration for the entrepreneurs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Open to new kinds of collaborations based on:</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Sectors</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Material/product/process</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Shared values</td>
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<tr>
<td>Varying importance (collaborations based on products vs. strategy)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Necessary for the facilitator to balance structure and free space</td>
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<tr>
<td>Entrepreneurs: When the match is established, the need for facilitation fades</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SME: We benefit from the external progress whip in a busy business-life</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

In general, the participants estimate that the preliminary clarification, defining the framework and the reconciliation of expectations when matches begin, have been important factors, and in some cases essential to the success of the collaboration (Iris Group, 2015). The need for facilitation during the process has been different depending on the character and focus of the relation. For some matches it was a key factor for progress and focus of the collaboration that we have been present, while others to a greater extent have the ability to expand the collaboration.

Generally, the student entrepreneurs express the least need for facilitation in the collaboration phase. Several established enterprises appreciate that an external facilitator has secured that the enterprises have met deadlines, held meetings and regularly examined the need for further collaboration. They emphasize that bustle typically prevents the enterprises from doing it on their own, if the collaboration is not a direct part of the core business of the established enterprise.

A few student entrepreneurs point out that the facilitation has made it legitimate to "disturb" the established enterprise with questions and the desired sparring. (Iris Group, 2015)

The conclusion is that facilitation of the creation of credible relations with obvious collaborative interfaces is more important than facilitation of action plans aduring the collaboration.

4.7.15 Co-housing

The co-housing, which to some participants appeared to be the most prohibiting barrier in engaging in the method, is with no exceptions rated to be the most valuable feature of the method. It does, however demand a thorough facilitation of the partners in order to create the required trust and motivation needed to make the co-housing work.
4.7.16  Fail fast
The enterprises want the facilitators to intervene quickly and stop inefficient matches, as it may be sensitive for the enterprises to finish collaboration themselves. The personal chemistry and sudden variations in the enterprises’ available resources is an important factor in the way the various matches work.

Several of the established companies used the SPININ-project to test new specialist profiles, which they do not have the basis to employ on a regular basis. The collaborations also serve as a “first step” towards further knowledge collaborations (Hansen, 2015).

4.8  Discussion of findings

4.8.17  Benefits and disadvantages using an external facilitator
The majority of the SPININ participants are positive to the nature of the facilitator being an external person. And in practice it seems only possible to meet the criteria of being substantively neutral, have no substantive decision-making authority and be trusted by all group members (Schwartz, 2002) if the facilitator is not a group member. The principles of equality and mutual contributions seem easier to maintain when initiated by a facilitator. To challenge existing habits, thinking, and motivate to reflection also seems more appropriate and doable for an external facilitator.

On the other hand, an internal facilitator is presumably more connected to the development in the firm and thereby more likely to collect and anchor knowledge in the organisation. A SPININ setup with an internal facilitator has not been tested, but in order to create an economically sustainable business model for the SPININ-method, it is worth considering in the future.

Though the facilitator needs to be trained in tools and methods for the specific purpose, additional skills such as process management and process design, conflict management and questioning is useful (Møller, 2014). This limits the possibility to find a facilitator.

Putting an effort in being a developmental facilitator, learning the group solvr substantive problems and to improve its process (Schwartz, 2002) the SPININ-match can eventually become self-facilitating.

4.8.18  Facilitation as a demand or a possibility
Some enterprises state that the facilitation method can become restraining to the collaboration once the relation and the settings of the collaboration has been established. This applies especially to matches that concern specific product development and where the collaboration areas are very evident from the start (Iris Group, 2015). Other enterprises on the other hand point out that matches between knowledge and service enterprises to a greater extent need an external facilitator to secure structure, progress and common focus (Iris Group, 2015). Here the match is typically based on a more diffuse community
around values – rather than on trade similarity or a community around facilities, raw materials, value chain or method.

The match meetings serve as obvious gates in the developmental process. The gates prevent the process from running off track and the parties to use unnecessary resources.

Some of the Student entrepreneurs requested the possibility to work with their match-partner on their own, with no facilitation, and they stated, that they could have done just as well without the ”interference” of a facilitator (Iris Group, 2015). The established companies in these matches expressed great confidence in the facilitator, and one company even stated that the reason the match worked so well, was the framing and not at least the continuous reflection, questioning and preparation initiated by the facilitator. Not to facilitate a match has to be considered carefully taking factors such as maturity, level of concretisation in the collaboration, and the relation among the match partners into consideration.

5 Conclusions and recommendations

Based on our findings we consider facilitation an important driver in growth-oriented collaboration between student entrepreneurs and SMEs. Experience from the SPININ-project shows that using facilitation tools in facilitation has a value-adding effect in all stages of the collaboration.

5.9 Facilitation has a positive effect

The initial mapping of growth targets, strengths and challenges and the reconciliation of expectations for the match is just as crucial to the success of the collaboration as the ongoing facilitation of the collaboration using action plans. We can see that facilitation has a positive effect on clarification of realistic growth targets and on establishing a common ground for collaboration.

Several of the SMEs attending the project did not have any experience of collaborating with entrepreneurs. Therefore, facilitation is crucial first and foremost to create interest in and understanding of a not known collaboration format by clearly describing expected performance and benefit, and by making it both simple and attractive to participate.

5.10 No ”one-size-fits-all” facilitation.

Based on the individual match the facilitator must assess the enterprises’ need for freedom and structure, respectively.

The evaluation points out that the facilitation in general creates the most value in the early stages of the collaboration: the screening of the student entrepreneur, matchmaking and establishment of collaboration areas. A good match is based on the facilitator being able to see collaboration opportunities, which the enterprises may not be aware of themselves (Iris Group, 2015). The most important facilitation service is to help the enterpris-
es break down ambitions and plans into smaller steps that can be implemented in short time, and the gate-like occasions offered in the facilitation sessions serves the important purpose of speeding the process, avoiding misuse of resources and time, and secure a productive climate among the parties.

5.11 Facilitation methods and -tools over industry-knowledge

As SPININ facilitator the need of knowledge on the specific industry is less critical than being trained in the facilitation tools and methods. The skilled facilitator must most importantly be able to lead the process, challenge the participants to prepare action plans according to their desired future and mediate the collaboration in an equal and secure environment.

The findings according to value of the facilitation leads to the conclusion that the initial facilitation of the individual mapping of strengths and needs as well as match-meeting including framing, matching of expectation, exploration of mutual contribution and introduction to action plan, should be insisted upon. Whereas the subsequent facilitation of the collaboration to a greater extend could be up for an individual decision in the match. It would be interesting to test the effect of two matches facilitating each other or facilitation conducted as a network meeting, or any other initiative reducing the cost of facilitation.

5.12 Bridging the barriers

The SPININ-method has proved to bridge the common barriers of lack of ability to qualify ideas and needs, lack of innovative level and of academic personell. The same goes for the barriers connected to lack of knowledge about what the different educations have to offer and the short sighted focus on income. Through the facilitation approach and the supporting tools, the participants were guided to an understanding in these areas. Barriers as the SME lack of a developmental strategy and knowledge anchoring could benefit from a more explicit focus and process from the facilitator. This, however, would require the time to work with the companies individually, which has not been the purpose of SPININ so far.

The method still needs more testing in large enterprises, as the barriers to a fruitful collaboration might have another nature in just large enterprises. There are indications that early startups would benefit from the method as well, which we find worth testing.

5.13 Is SPININ a suitable model for growth to the Danish industry?

Yes, and it is long-term. SPININ is considered a relation and knowledge platform for long-term growth (Iris Group, 2015) and the matches continue the collaboration after the project. The immediate value-creation includes professionalisation of the entrepreneur, new services and products, shorter time-to-market and there are indications that several of the participants will succeed realising the long term benefits from the match.
The SPININ approach and tools have already created awareness and are adapted into regional business development programmes in Denmark and in student incubators at other Danish universities. Furthermore the approach is applied in training courses for facilitators of knowledge collaborations. The SPININ facilitation method and tools have the potential of being adapted in national and international start up and business development programmes. We have requests from inter Scandinavian projects on Entrepreneurial education for PhDs, European Horizon 2020 programmes and programmes under European Culture Capital 2017 in Aarhus, Denmark.

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i Small and Medium-sized Enterprises.
ii Developed by Centre for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, Aarhus University, Denmark (now AU Research and External Relations) http://spin-in.au.dk/
iii 40 amongst the Student entrepreneurs and 33 amongst the established companies during the project-period. The results can not be isolated as an effect of SPININ.