

CCI FACTORY

Regional Test Case Documentation

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Reporting Period 5



PP8, Stebo



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0. Abstract

Today there are only few examples of cooperation between CCI and industry in Limburg. Cooperation is mostly project based (short-term) and set up with experienced CCI. Newcomers are not yet fully equipped to link-up with industry as a customer. As an answer to this need Stebo has developed a series of mentorship workshops offering starters the opportunity to develop a professional and feasible business plan. Newcomers now feel empowered to offer their services to companies, backed-up by an experienced mentor.

1. Introduction

Starting point of the regional test case 'CCI Factory' is the low number of initiatives in the province of Limburg where traditional companies and CCI join forces. Innovation processes are mostly taken place in R&D departments of producing companies, not using the potential of CCI for cross-innovation. Creative entrepreneurs only sporadically find their way to larger companies to offer their services. On the one hand this is due to the rather 'closed network' of companies, on the other to the fact that companies and CCI have (too) different business models. For the former revenue is the main goal, for the latter the design process is the main priority.

All these elements are putting a break on cooperation between CCI and producing companies, leading to a low rate of cross-innovation and therefore missed opportunities for regional development.

2. Objective

With this regional test case we would like to break down the walls between CCI and companies 1) by offering CCI starters a series of workshops on how to set up a business plan for approaching companies and 2) by offering them a mentor: an experienced entrepreneur who advises them on how to work for/with producing companies.

Starting CCI are the main beneficiaries of the test case as they will be equipped with a proper business model and more self-confidence to link up with industry as a customer. Producing companies will benefit from the availability of a larger and professionalized CCI sector able to guide them through the innovation and transition process they are currently facing (especially after the COVID-19 pandemic).

The action specifically targets CCI which is quite novel in the region, considering the fact that up till today there were only generic coaching trajectories available which are open to entrepreneurs from all economic sectors. The workshop series and the choice of mentor were adapted to and based on the language, needs and potential of CCI. The action's objective was to set up a stronger and empowered pool of CCI, and to establish and promote CCI as an economic branch in itself.

3. Applied approach

During several group and bilateral meetings, stakeholders, focus group members and CCI pinpointed the need for a closer cooperation between industry and CCI. They saw the format of the mentorship workshop series as a way to move from the mostly short term project-based cooperation towards a sustainable and long-term link between the two parties. Due to this clear opinion and believe in the action, it was easy to find suitable partners for shaping our 'CCI Factory'. A peering process with the InduCCI partners has supported us in making the concept grow into an idea and eventually into the actual test case implementation.

We found a partner in VAKLab (Bokrijk), an expertise centre for CCI entrepreneurship (they have a large network of CCI starters and provided the participants for the workshop series). Along the way we connected with the Flanders District of Creativity (Flanders DC) as a co-host of the workshops and made contact with Studio Segers (a collective of CCI working for industrial companies in Belgium and abroad) as they fitted the profile of an experienced mentor we had set up beforehand. The Studio members were willing to take up the mentorship role.

Once this partnership was set up the format of the workshops was adapted to the needs of starting CCI, and the registration process for the workshop series was started. The workshops were open to all interested parties without restriction.

In a next step we implemented two workshop series.

After the implementation of the second workshop series (for a new group of starters) we evaluated if and how this test case could be translated into a permanent offer continuing after the project's end.

4. Results

The key product of the regional test case is a tested methodology and storyboard for a series of entrepreneurial workshops. The series targets starting CCI intending to work for or cooperate with producing companies:

- Workshops 1-4: hands-on tips and tricks on business modelling and financial aspects, focussing specifically on industry as a costumer. Collecting input from newcomers: what questions do they have? Combined with first brainstorm on these questions (peer-learning).
- Workshop 5: experienced CCI answers the questions collected during workshops 1-4. Combined with inspirational lecture on his own experiences on working with and for companies.
- Workshop 6: experienced CCI and newcomers visit company which the mentor CCI works for. Newcomers are as such introduced in the network, and in the mindset/goals of industrial companies.

The workshops are hosted by a Stebo coach, providing the necessary (one-to-one) guidance on financial aspects and feasibility of the participants' business plan. As part of the offer,

we open the way to a network of experienced CCI providing tips and tricks as well as pointing out pitfalls on how to link-up with industry as a customer.

We implemented two of these workshop series. The first series (2019-2020) was an 'experiment' case allowing us to further shape and complete our concept and action plan, and to further define the mentor role. The second workshop series (2020-2021) has led to the creation of a permanent offer which stays available after the project end.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions most workshops were offered digitally. Workshop 6 was a physical study visit to Studio Segers and could therefore only be organized in September 2021. But it was open for participants of both the first and second workshop series.

In total 22 newcomers participated. Several participants started as self-employed in their main profession and secondary profession. One participant has already hired its first employee (www.zida.be). Other participants have made the first contacts to cooperate with production companies (www.kristybujanic.com, www.bloevaneekhout.com, Bea Crèvecoeur).

5. Goal Achievement and Lessons Learned

Participating CCI newcomers have mentioned to be better equipped (both practically and mentally) and more confident to offer services to and/or negotiate with the rather closed company network. The business plans they developed now answer to both their and the companies' wishes: written in the financial language of operating industry, yet sustaining the authenticity of their CCI product/identity.

Experienced CCI are more aware of their mentor role and are inspired to continue it in the future.

Stebo has taken the opportunity to set up a close cooperation with CCI organizations such as VAKLab, Flanders DC and experienced CCI. As a result we are now fully 'equipped' to offer customized coaching for CCI newcomers and can contribute to the empowerment of this sector in our region.

We do feel that companies need to become more open-minded towards the added value of CCI in the production processes (especially after the COVID-19 pandemic). This is a dynamic which cannot be set up only by Stebo and its supporting stakeholders, but needs to be activated by policy platforms as well (such as POM Limburg, the regional development company). We strongly recommend other organizations willing to set up a similar action, to link up with the policy makers (as we did during the InduCCI project).

6. Outlook, Sustainability and Transferability

The test case was a success, so it is the intention to create a permanent offer after the InduCCI project ends.

Stebo has set up an agreement with VAKLab on continuing the CCI factory 1x/year after the project end (next one is planned for Spring 2022). We will also use the format and adapt it further to reach other target groups and sectors where there is still a distance towards entrepreneurship (e.g. local tourism and heritage).

The CCI factory is taken up as a best practice in the action plan of the Stebo policy brochure which was adopted by POM Limburg (Regional Development Company).

The offer can serve as an inspiration for other industrial regions, a.o. others in regions where many CCI are active. It can even serve as a blueprint for coaching organizations internationally. It builds on questions and needs that are also living in the minds of CCI and companies of Central European peri-urban regions (as we have learned from exchanging with our InduCCI partners).

7. Annexes

7.1 Relevant links

<https://stebo.be/start-meets-vaklab/> (info on workshop series, including registration link) (Dutch language)

<https://stebo.be/particulieren/ondernemen/start-je-eigen-zaak/start/> (information on Stebo offer Start!) (Dutch language)

<https://www.flandersdc.be/nl> (Official website Flanders DC) (Dutch language)

<https://www.studiosegers.be/nl> (Official website Studio Segers) (Dutch language)

7.2 Pictures





