Building university-industry partnerships

In Summary

- A classic motivation for academia to collaborate with industry may include enrichment of teaching, access to funding, joint research and development activities, reputation, and internship.
- Conversely, for industry, the motivation may include tapping into a pool of skilled workforce, training of industry employees, access to university facilities, and assigning of research-related activities.
- Despite the many benefits associated with university-industry collaboration, it is important to be cognisant of the possible bottlenecks that may impede the efforts.

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For a long time now, governments around the world have initiated engagements between universities and industry primarily because it is widely believed that such partnerships have the potential to support their economies. However, universities and industry are now beginning to spearhead such initiatives.

In Kenya, universities are beginning to appreciate the need to collaborate with industry. This shift from the traditional environment, which saw universities operate as silos, is fast becoming a thing of the past.
Universities are beginning to realise that if they do not engage with industry, they stand to lose. This has been buoyed by the need for industry-focused research and the growing pressure to produce graduates who are market-ready and well versed with industry challenges right from the time they leave university.

Universities need to engage industry to help them design programmes that are relevant and alive to the needs of industry and society.

Such programmes can only be adopted by universities that not only “listen” and are attentive to the business environment, but also respond to it.

To meet these needs, there is a need for close collaboration between academia and industry. Such collaborations set the stage for both parties to engage in joint activities that should ideally translate into mutual benefit.

Universities are now not only viewed as entities producing graduates for industry, but also providing much-needed knowledge.

Collaboration between universities and industry take different forms and are directed towards realising different objectives.

However, for such collaborations to flourish, they need to be premised on common visions and motivations. A classic motivation for academia to collaborate with industry may include enrichment of teaching, access to funding, joint research and development activities, reputation, and internship.

Conversely, for industry, the motivation may include tapping into a pool of skilled workforce, training of industry employees, access to university facilities, and assigning of research-related activities.

Despite the many benefits associated with university-industry collaboration, it is important to be cognisant of the possible bottlenecks that may impede the efforts.

These include mismatch in expectations, lack of common interests, and lack of opportunities or avenues to engage in dialogue that builds into the identification of needs.

Building such collaborations can be challenging, but the advantages undoubtedly outweigh the risks.

Universities and industry should be at the forefront of championing ties between them. To this end, they need to create an internal culture that is supportive of collaborative engagement and formulation of relevant frameworks to facilitate the building of sustainable partnerships that can not only withstand the test of time but also translate into practical relevance.

Such collaborations have the potential to offer lasting solutions to perennial challenges that the country faces.
The government has an integral role to play in fostering university-industry collaboration. It is also important that national resources are focused on promoting a healthy collaboration between universities and industry.

Further, the government should formulate relevant policies to help influence this collaboration.

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