

AIMday:

A simple concept of promoting collaboration and bringing private and public sector together with academic researchers

Uppsala, Sweden





General Information

Title	AIMday
Pitch	A simple concept of promoting collaboration and bringing private and public sector together with academic researchers
Organisation	Uppsala University
Country	Sweden
Author	Pierre Lindman (Technopolis Group)
Nature of interaction	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Collaboration in R&D <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Commercialisation of R&D results <input type="checkbox"/> Mobility of staff <input type="checkbox"/> Academic entrepreneurship <input type="checkbox"/> Governance <input type="checkbox"/> Lifelong learning <input type="checkbox"/> Joint curriculum design and delivery <input type="checkbox"/> Mobility of students <input type="checkbox"/> Student entrepreneurship <input type="checkbox"/> Shared resources
Supporting mechanism	<input type="checkbox"/> Strategic <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Structural <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Operational <input type="checkbox"/> Policy
Summary	<p>In 2008 the first AIMday was arranged in Uppsala, under the name Materials Day. The focus was to bring together representatives from private and public sector with academic scientists and experts from the university to discuss questions sent in by the representatives. The whole concept of AIMday is very simple. By organising workshops where the motto is “one question, one hour, one group of experts”, AIMday creates a forum for discussion where both representatives from industry and academic scientists can transform their knowledge into something useful. AIMday focuses on creating contacts and collaboration between researchers/scientists and the business and public sector communities at large.</p> <p>Since the start in 2008, AIMday has grown a lot and has been arranged at a variety of HEIs, in Sweden and abroad, and in a broad range of such disciplinary areas as life sciences, material sciences, and the humanities and social sciences.</p>



Introduction & Overview

1. BACKGROUND

In 2008 Ångström Academy, a part of Uppsala University Innovation (UUI), arranged its first AIMday under the name Materials Day, where the focus was to bring together representatives from private and public sector with academic scientists and experts from the university to discuss questions sent in by the representatives. A similar forum for interaction between universities and companies had previously been missing, which was one of the reasons that AIMday was started. The whole concept of AIMday is very simple. By organising workshops where the motto is “one question, one hour, one group of experts”, AIMday creates a forum for discussion where both representatives from industry and academic scientists can transform their knowledge into something useful.

UU Innovation promotes increased utilisation of research and knowledge from Uppsala University. Its mission is to support and inspire students and researchers to commercialise their ideas and results. UUI strengthens students’ and researchers’ cooperation with companies and organisations. UUI represents a door into the university for companies and organisations that want to collaborate in research and innovation.

The purpose and the desired outcome of the discussions taking place during the AIMday events is to bring people and competences together in a way that will lead to further development of the question at hand for discussion, as well to open up new opportunities to collaborate in a rewarding and innovative way. The objective is not to provide answers during an hour-long discussion. As much as a solution or help to find a solution is itself a positive outcome of the discussions, the new gatherings of people and competences that are brought together help identify various ways to further explore the issue, and offer new opportunities for rewarding collaborations.

Since the start in 2008, AIMday has grown substantially and during 2014 over 100 organisations participated in eight different AIMday events. Since then, AIMday has taken place in both the United Kingdom via the University of Edinburgh and in South Africa together with the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. AIMday is also set for a launch in Canada in collaboration with the University of Saskatchewan and the International Minerals Innovative Institute. From the time when the first AIMday Materials took place, AIMday is now being organised in a broad range of such disciplinary areas like life sciences, material sciences, and the humanities and social sciences.

In order to ensure the continued high quality of all AIMday events, Uppsala University has registered AIMday as a trademark.

2. OBJECTIVES AND MOTIVATIONS

The objectives of AIMday are defined as to:

- ▶ create an extensive and rewarding discussion for both researchers from the HEI and representatives from the industry;
- ▶ create contacts and collaboration between researchers/scientists and the business and public sector communities at large;
- ▶ find new and creative ways to find solutions regarding the questions that the companies have sent in;
- ▶ search funding for new collaborative projects between researchers and organisations.

The objectives of AIMday are designed to allow industry to set the agenda of the day and for their questions to be the centre of attention during the hour-long discussion.

3. STAKEHOLDERS

The main stakeholders involved include:

- ▶ HEIs: Acting as organisers during the event, the hosting HEIs get an opportunity to increase the positive impact of their research and secure additional revenue via new investment from industry, typically for new collaboration projects. AIMday allows the HEIs to put their researchers in direct contact with companies and organisations from the private and public sector.
- ▶ Researchers/scientists: AIMday functions as a platform where academics get an opportunity to meet companies and discuss questions of mutual interest for further development. By understanding better what type of knowledge the industry needs, the academics can optimise and evolve their own research area in that direction. In addition, the academics can make important contacts that might lead to co-funding in future projects. Even though AIMday is about having exciting and interesting discussions, it is equally much about establishing new contacts that benefit both the companies and the academic scientists.
- ▶ Organisations from private and public sector: Different companies and organisations submit all questions brought up for discussion during AIMday, and in doing so, they define the meeting agenda. By taking part in the discussions, the companies and organisations get to meet academic scientists who through their expertise can contribute to processes of solving actual issues within the companies. During AIMday, the organisations from the private and public sector get to establish new contacts with academics that might help them, through collaboration and commissioned research, to discover new opportunities for product and service development.



Implementation

4. INPUTS

To organise a functioning and successful AIMday, one of the most important inputs is the stakeholders' commitment and participation. Each stakeholder contributes different inputs that together form what AIMday actually is.

The resources invested by the hosting HEIs include provision of suitable meeting facilities (often located on campus) and ensuring that the questions submitted by the organisations and companies are specific and challenging enough to attract the researchers' interest. Behind and during every AIMday, a large amount of work is done in terms of planning and organising, and the implementation of an AIMday is made possible by the project leader and her/his team and their work effort. The organising HEI is also responsible for the financial aspects of the AIMday. UUI's main financial responsibility is funding pre-studies, intended to facilitate the start of collaborative projects. If HEIs other than Uppsala University wish to arrange an AIMday, UUI mainly acts as a support, providing the HEIs with their experience and input.

The resources put in by the academics mainly involve their time and knowledge. For the academics, it is important that AIMday takes place near their offices so they easily can participate in a few discussions and then go back to their offices to continue their research. The researchers' knowledge is essential during the discussions.

Regarding the organisations, their input consists of the questions they submit, which function as the foundation for the discussions. The difference between the organisations on the one hand, and the other stakeholders on the other, is that input from the former often shows after an AIMday, in terms of funding new collaborative projects with researchers and possibly even offering employment to some of the researchers.

During the early years, Vinnova sometimes co-funded AIMday.

5. ACTIVITIES

Since an AIMday event takes place during one whole day, the activities consist of everything that happens during that day, which includes the discussions where one group of experts discuss a specific question for an hour, while the time between the discussions offers a perfect opportunity for networking and establishing contacts.

The questions are submitted by the participating organisations before the event and are selected by the event organisers based on their level of scientific interest. It is important that the questions are sufficiently precise and challenging enough to attract the attention of researchers.

The number of participants and questions submitted vary considerably depending on the topic that the AIMday focuses on. AIMday Patient Safety that was arranged in 2012 had trouble

finding participants due to the narrow topic. In the end, only five organisations with six representatives and 18 researchers discussed a total of six questions. This can be compared with AIMday Materials, which has been held annually since 2008 with an average of 46.5 representatives from 19 organisations and 83 researchers, discussing an average of 40.6 questions. To maintain a high quality of discussion, UUI has as a policy that at least two of the researchers participating in each discussion should be of a senior level and preferably also well known within their field of research.

The events often take place on campus to enable ease of participation by the researchers, who can then return as they need to their daily assignments. The expectation is that networking will lead to new collaboration, which in turn leads to commercialisation of R&D results.

6. OUTPUTS

Even though AIMday is an event where businesses and public organisations get to discuss actual problems and questions with competent researchers, the answers to these questions and problems are neither the main output nor the main purpose of participation in an event. To get a solution to a posted question is considered a bonus. Rather, the creation of new contacts and knowledge transfer between researchers and businesses/organisations are the most wanted outcome of AIMday. Another desired result of AIMday is that some of the new contacts that the participants establish result in new interesting collaborative projects, be they smaller ones for which funding can be applied for from UUI during the event itself, or larger projects that are launched some time after the event.

AIMday mainly consists of sharing knowledge, so the questions need to be specific enough to challenge the researchers' minds. If the question that is up for discussion is interesting and challenging enough, it forces the researchers to interact with the other researchers and the people representing companies or other organisations that sent in the question at hand.

7. IMPACTS

It is hard to assess the impact of AIMday, considering that much of the work takes place a while after the event. UUI has not found an effective way to follow up on all participants and their relevant activities after a completed AIMday. Given that the purpose with hosting an AIMday event is to make it possible for the participants to establish new contacts that hopefully result in new projects and interesting collaborations, it is difficult to measure the impact in financial terms.

However, the type of impact that UUI can measure relates to the number of companies, organisations and researchers that participate and the number of questions sent in. Such figures indicate how popular the event is; since the start in 2008, AIMday has expanded and has taken place at other HEIs in Sweden and abroad. Between 2008 and 2015 45 AIMday events were organised, with 30 of them co-arranged by UUI. The number of participants differs according

to the subject and the number of organisations submitting questions. The number of applications for funding of pre-studies provides UUI with instant information about the effectiveness of the networking and the discussions.





Support & Influencing factors

8. SUPPORTING MECHANISMS

AIMday is a very direct way to bring together researchers and businesses within the same field of work, therefore the main supporting mechanisms are of an operational nature. Because AIMday is hosted during just one day, it is important that the event is efficient and vigorous, to allow for the time it takes to complete the workshops and be worth the participants' time.

The process of arranging an AIMday can be divided into five steps:

- ▶ Organisations are invited to submit their issues expressed as one or several questions. The organisations need to submit at least one question to be allowed to participate in AIMday.
- ▶ The organisers of the HEI gather all questions and present them to researchers from various disciplines. Then, the researchers decide which questions they are interested in and would like to discuss.
- ▶ The people in charge of organising AIMday make a schedule based on interest and availability of researchers. The purpose with the schedule is to optimise and increase the efficiency of AIMday. The schedule will also ensure a multidisciplinary constellation of each discussion group. If not enough researchers have registered for a certain question, the people in charge will try to find appropriate researchers. If that is not possible, the HEI will inform the organisation that submitted the question that they cannot provide them with the specific competence.
- ▶ Every question is discussed for one hour, and the discussion groups consist of seven to twelve people.
- ▶ A month after each AIMday, the people who were in charge of organising the event follow up on the discussions, and in some cases offers help to get projects and collaborations going.

9. BARRIERS AND DRIVERS

The main driver is that AIMday offers a platform that increases cooperation between organisations and academics. AIMday seeks to encourage organisations and academics to start collaborations in order to commercialise R&D results. Without a forum where scientists and organisations can meet and establish contacts it has proved hard to bring these two groups together.

One of the biggest barriers is for HEIs to organise AIMday within new disciplinary areas, because it requires a lot of work to gain interest from companies and organisations working in that disciplinary area and to motivate the academics to invest some of their time to participate in discussions.

10. FUTURE CHALLENGES

Some of the future challenges of AIMday are to maintain the same initial high standards while expanding into new disciplinary areas, to new HEIs and even to other countries. AIMday has a high reputation amongst HEIs in both Sweden and abroad and that is something UUI wants to protect.

Furthermore, when creating an AIMday within a whole new research field, it is a challenge to find the most suitable researchers to participate and to get companies to understand the benefits of submitting questions and to participate in the workshops.

11. KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

The main factor that have been essential to the success of AIMday is the simple concept that it is built upon, where there is one question to be discussed during one hour together with a group of academics. It is a simple but very efficient way to strengthen the cooperation between businesses and researchers. Due to the simplicity of the concept, it has been possible to arrange AIMday in almost any field, as long the hosting HEI can attract researchers and businesses to the discussions.

Another key factor to the success of AIMday is that the discussions create ideas for new research projects and encourage the businesses and the researchers to cooperate.

Another key factor is the preliminary work done by the organising HEIs. The ability to put together discussion groups with relevant and knowledgeable academics is critical and the selection of specific and challenging questions to capture the interest of the academics.





Further Information

12. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

About a month after each AIMday event, the project leader follows up on the meetings, mainly with the organisations that submitted questions, through telephone interviews, and if necessary, offers assistance to get projects or other forms of collaboration going. However, as much collaboration develops a while after this first month, it is somewhat difficult for AIMday to maintain influence over every new project and collaboration that result from the event.

The only evaluation measure that takes place is a survey at the end of the day, which all participants fill in, both representatives from organisations and researchers. The survey is used at all AIMday events where UUI acts as the main organisers. The short survey consists of nine questions that aim to provide the organisers with the participants' perception of the event.

13. TRANSFERABILITY

As described earlier, AIMday can be organised in almost any research field. Because of the good reputation, it has become relatively easy to convince new HEIs to arrange an AIMday event of their own.

14. AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

AIMday has earned the attention of VINNOVA, mainly by co-funding events and the Swedish Steel Producers' Association, Jernkontoret. It has also been recognised among other HEIs and has increased the reputation of UUI

15. LINKS

AIMday <http://aimday.se/>

16. CONTACT PERSONS



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17. REFERENCES

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