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Danube Transnational Programme

DA-SPACE



## Output 4.3 Mentoring Scheme

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## Introduction

This document reports the reason to add a mentoring scheme in an open innovation process and the role the mentors got in the DA-SPACE journey. Next to this, best cases and lessons learned from the 7 different Open innovation labs will also be included in this Output.

## What is a mentor and the role

Within DA-SPACE, the **Seekers** – Companies, Public Administration, Universities, Business Support Organizations – define the business challenges to be addressed and exploited in the Open Innovation process. They were actively involved in defining the Challenge, running the activities related to it and acting as **mentors** for the teams of solvers.

The Solvers – students and young talents – which expressed an interest to participate in solving one of the open challenges contributed actively in the lab, working together with other young talents under the facilitation of the Lab manager and supported by experienced **mentors**.

## Mentoring Scheme

Within the lab, a mutual learning-by-doing process was put in place. The young talents worked on real problem learning from the business cases and from experienced employees that acted as mentors. On the other side, the mentors got inspiration by fresh ideas and innovative proposals. In general both players learned how to daily work with co-creation methods (deeply description of the



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Open Innovation Process is present in Output 4.1). For mentoring scheme is to be intend the “take away” the mentors got in collaborating with DA-SPACE.

Once the seekers appointed the mentor, the challenges is defined and a team has been associated to it, the co-creation process as well as the mentoring support started.

In this range of time (in DA-SPACE maximum 5 months), the mentors worked closely with the team of young talents exploring all aspect of their business idea. The interaction between the mentors and the team, most of the time, run via face2face regular meeting or by site visiting at Seeker premises to get to know deeply intern process and colleagues from other department or production lines. On the other side, calls and virtual meeting were also organized to share updates in the timeframe between the regular meetings.



Figure 1 - Mentoring Meeting between SWU (Seekers) and team of young talents - DA-SPACE Germany



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In the learning by doing process, the mentors recur to the co-creation methods from Open Innovation theory. Within the co-creation process, the mentors has been also trained by the lab manager (during the training mentors workshop) learning technics and methods to smoothly run the mentoring scheme, meetings, coordination etc.

In addition to the direct link with young talents and fresh new ideas, the mentors got access to a larger number of stakeholders member of the Open Innovation Lab ecosystem. This was always a clear benefit as some of the seekers were strategically interested in position themselves in the market as innovative company and get to know other actors with the same approach/proposition.

Next to the networking opportunity, the mentors had free access to the Entrepreneurship Training and could propose to the Lab Managers additional and dedicated workshop/training session to support him/herself and his/her team in developing the solution. The call for specific workshop session has not being used frequently as most of the missing competences were covered within the seekers by other mentors´ colleagues from other department.

On the other hand, the participation to the Training increased the competences of employees/mentors from the business sectors with special focus on Entrepreneurship and Open Innovation. This was in some area, such as in Germany, really well appreciated and, especially in the first round, we registered the participation of several seekers team (e.g. Uhlmann Pac-System and SWU - Stadtwerke Ulm/Neu-Ulm GmbH) to different workshops (such as for example Design Thinking and Business model Innovation). It also merged that in some cases, the mentors had a technical background (product manager, production line experts, and engineering) with previous low knowledge of strategy, business and entrepreneurs methods.



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Figure 2 - Mentoring Session @ Uhlmann Pac-System - DA-SPACE Germany

Through DA-SPACE they benefit from a kind of vocational education programme focused on Open Innovation and innovative tools. After the experience within DA-SPACE some mentors integrated innovative tools and entrepreneurship methods in their daily business or introduced the Open Innovation approach to their company's strategy and business proposition. For example a German company involved in the DA-SPACE, introduced Design Thinking and Scrum to their daily work and launched a dedicated Open Innovation Challenge<sup>1</sup> for start-ups and Scale up as follow up of DA-SPACE experience.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://startrampe-uhlmann.de/>



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In conclusion, the Mentoring scheme generated the following benefits:

- Test Open Innovation and co-creation process in a safe environment
- Get access to young talent and fresh ideas
- Learn innovation methods and entrepreneurship tools
- Participation to the Entrepreneurship Training as Vocational Education programme
- Present themselves and the company as talent supporters and local innovators within the regional ecosystem

Even if facing with the common issues, such as “lack of time/availability”, the mentoring scheme was in general welcomed by the seekers as represented a flexible but valuable add-on to the Open Innovation Process.