

Knowledge Futures: AI, Technology, and the New Business Paradigm

CALL FOR ABSTRACTS – IFKAD 2025

Special Track n.: 55

Thematic Area: Entrepreneurship and Startups

Open Innovation Pathways: How Start-ups Thrive in Collaborative Ecosystems

Description

As the pace of technological disruption accelerates, start-ups are increasingly recognized as the engines of innovation, driving new solutions, technologies, and business models. Indeed start-ups, despite their limited financial, organizational, and human resources (*Spender et al., 2017*), possess complementary characteristics. They are naturally agile, innovative, and flexible, with an inherent ability to adapt quickly, demonstrating resilience and business agility (*Margherita et al., 2020*).

However, no start-up operates in isolation. To fully harness their potential, start-ups must engage in strategic collaborations within broader innovation ecosystems, comprising established corporations, academic institutions, research bodies, governments, investors, and other key actors. An innovation ecosystem is designed to support the collective value-creating activities carried out by a dynamic network of actors, who integrate their products and services on a shared digital technology platform (*Dedehayir et al., 2018; Jacobides et al., 2018*). These ecosystems enable the flow of ideas, resources, and knowledge, offering start-ups the opportunity to access external expertise, scale their innovations, and overcome limitations in capabilities or market reach. Rothaermel and Boeker (2008) highlight that established firms form alliances with new entrants to better adapt to technological change, while the new entrants benefit from the established players' ability to commercialize emerging technologies. The advantages of being part of an innovation ecosystem become even more apparent when markets undergo rapid changes, especially as large companies often respond more slowly to environmental shifts (*Prashantham and Kumar, 2019*). These collaborative dynamics are becoming increasingly common and represent the "new normal" for competition between companies and startups, particularly after the COVID-19 crisis (*Henderson, 2020*).

As first, this track will explore the central role that open innovation plays in fostering these collaborative networks. In particular, it will examine how start-ups can navigate the complexities of partnering with larger entities while maintaining their agility and creative edge. By entering open innovation frameworks, start-ups benefit from greater access to resources such as R&D facilities, mentorship, funding, and market channels, but they also expose themselves to risks and uncertainties (*Gimenez-Fernandez et al., 2020*), such as

Knowledge Futures: AI, Technology, and the New Business Paradigm

misalignment of objectives, potential exploitation of intellectual property, and the challenge of integrating diverse organizational cultures.

Secondly, a key focus of the track will be the motivations driving these collaborations. What compels start-ups to engage with established corporations or other ecosystem partners? From gaining market validation and credibility to overcoming financial constraints and accelerating product development, the incentives are significant. Start-ups often face challenges such as limited access to the capital, physical assets, capabilities, and technology necessary for growth and expansion, as well as a lack of credibility and visibility in the early stages of development, making it difficult to acquire customers and scale rapidly (*Larkin and O'Halloran, 2018*). These factors drive start-ups to seek collaboration with large corporations within innovation ecosystems. However, these partnerships also expose start-ups to the risk of losing control over their resources, capabilities, and intellectual property due to the power imbalance between them and the larger firms (*Hora et al., 2018*). Similarly, corporations and other established players are increasingly turning to start-ups to introduce new ideas, agility, and access to emerging technologies like artificial intelligence (AI), blockchain, and data-driven innovation. This symbiotic relationship, however, must be carefully managed to avoid pitfalls and maximize mutual benefits.

Through literature reviews, case studies and real-world examples, this track will highlight successful collaboration models that demonstrate the value of co-creation in innovation ecosystems. Specifically, papers examining different approaches, including innovation hubs, incubators, accelerators, and venture capital partnerships, are welcome, providing insights into how these platforms foster successful relationships between start-ups and their partners. Particular attention will be given to understanding how AI and other emerging technologies are transforming the collaboration landscape, enabling more efficient knowledge sharing, rapid prototyping, and faster go-to-market strategies. Moreover, the track will address critical risks and challenges associated with open innovation collaborations. Start-ups often face power imbalances when dealing with large corporations, where negotiations can lead to unequal partnerships or limited control over the direction of joint projects. Intellectual property management, the safeguarding of proprietary knowledge, and balancing openness with strategic secrecy are crucial concerns that need careful navigation. The track will discuss practical strategies for start-ups to protect their innovations while leveraging the benefits of collaboration.

We appreciate papers pertaining, but not limited, to the following topics:

- strategic incentives for start-ups and corporations to collaborate within innovation ecosystems;
- risks associated with open innovation: intellectual property, power dynamics, and organizational alignment;
- case studies of successful start-up-corporate partnerships and the lessons learned;
- the role of AI, data analytics, and other emerging technologies in reshaping collaborative processes;
- the role of digital platforms in enabling innovation ecosystems;
- the impact of innovation ecosystems on the scalability and sustainability of start-up-driven solutions;

Knowledge Futures: AI, Technology, and the New Business Paradigm

- practical tools and frameworks for managing ecosystem relationships and optimizing outcomes;
- navigating regulatory landscapes and institutional frameworks that support or hinder collaborative innovation.
- open innovation and shared ownership models: analysis of new models of shared intellectual property within collaborative ecosystems

By offering a comprehensive view of the benefits and challenges of open innovation, this track will provide participants with actionable insights on how start-ups can effectively collaborate with ecosystem partners to drive meaningful innovation.

Keywords

Innovation Ecosystem, Start-ups, Open Innovation, Risks, Motivations

Organizers

Benedetta Pini, University of Parma, Italy
Barbara Bigliardi, University of Parma, Italy
Alberto Michele Felicetti, University of Calabria, Italy
Salvatore Ammirato, University of Calabria, Italy
Virginia Dolci, University of San Marino, San Marino

[Special Track details published on IFKAD website >>](#)

Guidelines

Researchers wishing to contribute are invited to submit an **EXTENDED ABSTRACT** (in editable format) of **min 500 and max 1000 words** not later than **31 JANUARY 2025**, using the submission procedure available on the website. The abstract should address theoretical background, research objective, methodology, and results in terms of expected contribution to Knowledge Management theory and practice. Authors are required to follow the guidelines for both extended abstracts as well as full papers available on IFKAD site: www.ifkad.org

Important dates

31 January 2025	<i>Extended Abstract submission deadline</i>
24 February 2025	<i>Acceptance notification to authors</i>
20 April 2025	<i>Early-Bird registration cut off</i>
02 May 2025	<i>Full paper submission deadline</i>
31 May 2025	<i>Registration deadline</i>
2-4 July 2025	<i>Conference sessions</i>

For further information

For any information related to the event, please see the event website at www.ifkad.org or contact the conference manager at info@ifkad.org