

BUSINESS INNOVATION SYMPOSIUM (E6)

Encouragement of Government Purchasing from Commercial Providers: Models and Examples (1)

Author: Mr. Len van der Wal
TNO, The Netherlands, len.vanderwal@tno.nl

Mr. Cornelis Eldering
European Space Agency (ESA), The Netherlands, niels.eldering@esa.int
Mr. Nico van Putten
Netherlands Space Office (NSO), The Netherlands, n.vanputten@spaceoffice.nl

AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TOWARDS TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER

Abstract

In 2001 the European Space Agency (ESA), the Netherlands Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Netherlands Organisation of applied scientific research (TNO) initiated the Dutch Technology Transfer Programme (DTTP). Since then, ‘technology transfer’ has been a relevant part of Dutch space policy.

The DTTP aimed to promote the transfer of knowledge and technology from the European space industry to Dutch companies outside the space sector. Full and easy access to this knowledge and technology may allow these companies – and small and medium-sized enterprises in particular – to innovate faster and strengthen their competitive power. However, businesses that want to adapt space technology for commercial applications on Earth are taking a certain risk. The DTTP has been able to alleviate this risk by funding part of the costs involved in the initial research phase. This often concerns an exploratory study, in which the technical and/or commercial feasibility of the transfer are assessed.

While the DTTP focuses primarily on existing companies outside the space sector, there is another way to promote technology transfer and economic growth: business incubation. A business incubator intends to promote local entrepreneurship and accelerate the successful development of start-up and early-stage companies. Locating a business incubator close to one of the ESA knowledge centres, it becomes a real accelerator of space technology transfer.

ESA started its first business incubation centre (ESA BIC) at the premises of ESTEC in Noordwijk in 2004. By scouting entrepreneurial talent and screening suitable knowledge and technology from the European space sector, every year a selection of potential start-up companies is made. Once selected, these ‘technostarters’ receive an array of technical and business support services, both in the incubator itself and through its network of contacts.

In The Netherlands, both approaches to space technology transfer have been (and still are) quite successful and, when applied in conjunction, constitute an integrated approach towards technology transfer in general. This will be illustrated and discussed by presenting a number of different ‘business cases’.