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FOSTERING INNOVATION: EXPLORING THE SYNERGIES BETWEEN SPACE STARTUPS AND
UNIVERSITY INCUBATORS IN THE SPACE ECONOMY

Abstract

The burgeoning space industry, marked by its relentless pursuit of innovation and expansive business opportunities, presents fertile ground for entrepreneurial ventures. Amidst this backdrop, startups are at the forefront of pioneering technologies and services in an arena where the stakes—and potential rewards—are immense. However, navigating such a complex landscape demands more than just groundbreaking ideas; it requires strategic support mechanisms to overcome inherent hurdles such as technological uncertainties, regulatory landscapes, and the substantial capital investments needed. As a response, space startups are increasingly turning to University incubators for support, as they offer not just domain expertise but also valuable networking opportunities with businesses and other third parties. Furthermore, university incubators have a strong focus on technological transfer, facilitating the integration of cutting-edge innovations into the space industry. However, the full extent of the benefits derived from such partnerships, as well as the strategies employed, remains largely unexplored.

Our study addresses this gap by examining the reciprocal advantages and dynamics between space startups and university incubators. Through a rigorous mixed-methods approach that combines in-depth interviews with comprehensive data analysis, we investigate the strategies and outcomes of such partnerships. Our findings reveal that, by providing access to advanced facilities, expert mentorship, and a rich RD environment, university incubators can significantly enhance startups' resilience and growth. Concurrently, universities benefit from heightened industry relevance, broader research opportunities, and the cultivation of ecosystems that promote knowledge exchange and skill enhancement.

Our research offers strategic insights for space startups, university incubators, and policymakers, delineating effective collaboration models. The implications of our findings contribute to the discourse on entrepreneurial innovation, public-private partnerships, and the development of a sustainable space economy. Highlighting the significance of collaborative innovation, our research provides valuable perspectives on the future of the space industry and the role of academic research in navigating high-risk sectors.