

BeyndScale

Workshop User Story



Workshop Organizer - **University of Ruse
"Angel Kanchev", Bulgaria**



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Type of Activity - **Outbound Workshop**



University of Ruse
"Angel Kanchev"



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

How to read the document

This document represents the series of workshop user stories within the BeyondScale project. These stories are based on the combination of the HEInnovate dimensions and the Value Proposition Canvas, and they depict the experiences of the partner higher education institutions. To understand the concept of the workshop, we provide a **glossary** below:

- **The Aim:** BeyondScale is one of the Forward-looking projects to create a pan-European community of practice, that will share, and document emerging good practices based on the outcomes of the individual and collaborative activities of the participants. Within the BeyondScale project, the HEInnovate tool is deployed beyond its self-assessment capacity.
- **Inbound & Outbound activities:** The HEInnovate dimensions are used to drive entrepreneurial and innovative change across a range of inbound and outbound education and engagement activities in higher education institutions (HEIs) with relevant stakeholders. From the BeyondScale perspective, the inbound activity serves to support HEI's institutional development process and organizational capacity; therefore, it targets internal stakeholders (administrative staff, academics, researchers, students). As for the outbound activity, it aims at strengthening HEI's wider regional and societal engagement, thus it targets external stakeholders (students, employers, social enterprises, business, NGOs).
- **The Value Proposition Workshop:** In order to have a structured workshop format, the Value Proposition Design approach was adopted and the BeyondScale team came up with the new format which incorporates the specific HEInnovate dimensions and the Value Proposition canvas. The Value proposition canvas is a tool that helps to understand the inbound and outbound stakeholders, and to target their needs better, which leads to optimized value creation.
- **Buddy System:** One of the main assets of the BeyondScale project is the Buddy System, in which partners engage in a peer-learning, exchanging experiences, and discussing plans. Our partner higher education institutions have been organized as a buddy team throughout the project based on similar challenges, interests, and the HEInnovate dimensions.

Abstract

The reality in the 21st century has put Higher Education Institutions in a different environment. Their expenses increased faster than the state funding allocated for their support. The commercialization of academic knowledge has become one of the instruments for supporting academic research. The HEInnovate (<https://heinnovate.eu/en>) tool of the European Commission has provided some recommendations on how to encourage the responsiveness of higher education institutions to the needs of business and the outside world in general. The University of Ruse "Angel Kanchev", Bulgaria, has organised a seminar to create awareness among the firms in its region for the potential of knowledge interactions between the university and the region. The seminar was inspired by the HEInnovate tool and was organised as part of the university's involvement in the BeyondScale project. We believe the workshop results have been very useful for our university and the experience could be useful for in other academic communities as well in their search for opportunities to establish fruitful collaboration with companies. Therefore, the purpose of this document is to describe some of the key steps in the preparation and execution of this workshop.

Key words: HEInnovate, university-business collaboration, Ruse University, Redco Ltd.

The Activity

A workshop was organised by the University of Ruse to see how the university could collaborate better with local industry partners in applied research projects in the field of knowledge transfer. In this activity we focused on the HEInnovate dimension of "Knowledge exchange and collaboration". The HEInnovate self-reflection statements give a quite good understanding about the key issues to consider when encouraging the responsiveness of the University of Ruse to the needs of business and the outside world in general.

Because of the COVID-19 the workshop was held online and facilitated in one of the digital rooms of Ruse University "Angel Kanchev".

The main objectives of this outbound workshop were to create and test a special event in a digital environment to identify and further discuss the expectations and experiences of the stakeholders interested in research-based knowledge exchanges between Ruse University and the business sector.

Running the workshop also was expected to deliver insights and awareness of the models for knowledge exchange that may be used by other researchers who plan to deepen their collaboration with companies.

The Workshop

The workshop focused on the HEInnovate dimension of "Knowledge exchange and collaboration", because the University of Ruse sees an increasing need for interaction between academics and business. As a side effect, running the workshop in an online environment also allowed Ruse University to assess itself on the HEInnovate dimension of "Digital transformation and Capability". The workshop affirmed that the University of Ruse "Angel Kanchev" has the capacity to make progress in terms of digital transformation.

All participants reacted in a positive way to the event, helping us to achieve a high level of trust among the people involved. These included

- the manager of a company
- the Head of a Scientific laboratory at the Machine Building faculty
- a Scientist at the Machine Building faculty
- the Rector
- the Vice Rector in Research
- the Director of the Scientific and Research Center
- the Vice Rector in Development Coordination and Continuing Education
- the Head of the Entrepreneurship Center

On the basis of the outcome of the self-assessment statements included in the HEInnovate tool the stakeholders in the workshop started to develop a shared action plan. This was done in the shape of a value proposition. Furthermore, the workshop helped the stakeholders establish good relations, laying the basis for fruitful university-business relations in the future. The HEInnovate tool and the value canvas helped ensure there was a clear structure to the workshop that could facilitate the participants in developing a shared action plan.

The clear templates developed by the BeyondScale project partners proved to be very good guiding lights on how to prepare, organise, conduct and reflect on the workshop activity and its outcome.

Preparing the workshop

The preparation of this workshop was discussed within the BeyondScale consortium, that provided the template of the value proposition canvas, as well as the workshop format. Thus, all project partners were “buddies” for the University of Ruse.

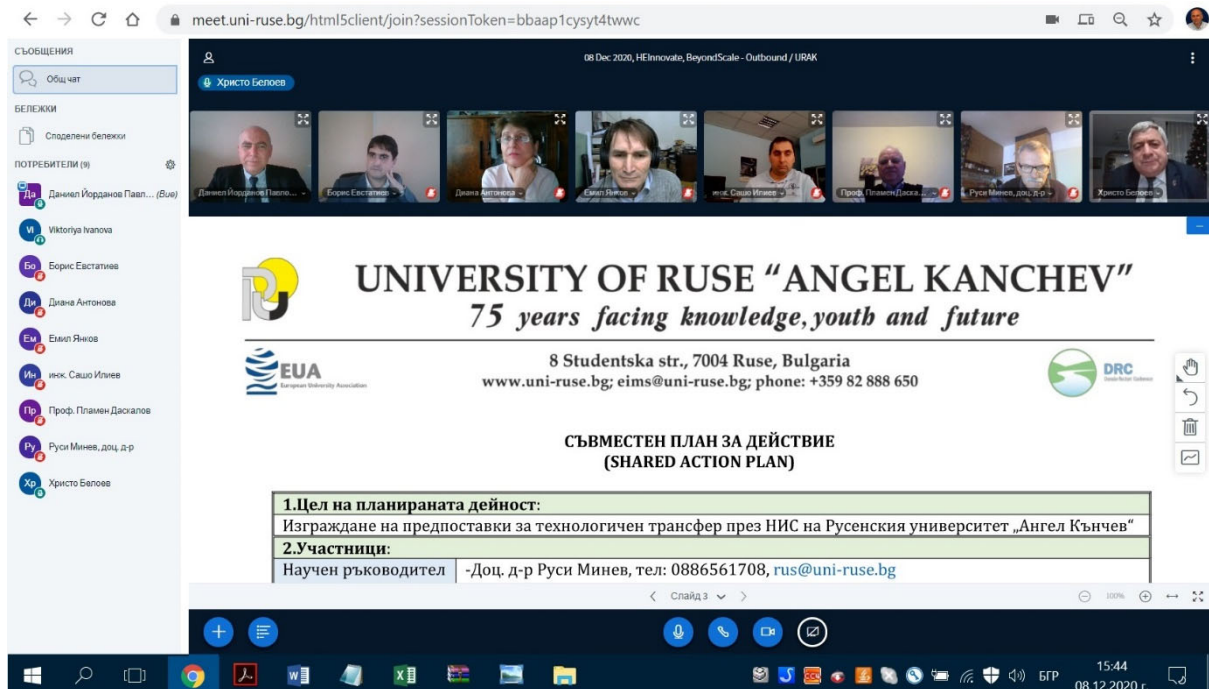
The invited stakeholders already had been part of earlier knowledge exchange (i.e. outbound) activities of the university. The Rectorate encouraged Ruse’s Director of the Research and Development Center to contact some of the well-established scientists from the Machine building faculty.

The lead scientists were asked if their business partners would be interested to participate in the workshop. The business representative invited was a graduate of the University of Ruse “Angel Kanchev”.

The HEInnovate statements were included in a pre-workshop questionnaire that was sent out under the auspices of the Rectorate. All 91 academics at the university of Ruse “Angel Kanchev” with managerial positions (Rector level, Faculty level, Department level, Directors of units) answered the statements on all of the eight HEInnovate dimensions three months before this workshop (in September 2020). Thus, the academic participants were well informed about the general logic of HEInnovate tool.

The questionnaire highlighted that, in particular, collaboration with the business sector is a very important issue for Ruse’s knowledge transfer ambitions. As a result, the Rectorate selected the dimension of “Knowledge exchange and collaboration” to be taken up further.

Conducting the workshop



meet.uni-ruse.bg/html5client/join?sessionToken=bbaap1cysyt4twwc

08 Дек 2020, HEInnovate, BeyondScale - Outbound / URAR

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СЪВМЕСТЕН ПЛАН ЗА ДЕЙСТВИЕ
(SHARED ACTION PLAN)

1.Цел на планираната дейност:
Изграждане на предпоставки за технологичен трансфер през НИС на Русенския университет „Ангел Кънчев“

2.Участници:
Научен ръководител -Доц. д-р Руси Минев, тел: 0886561708, rus@uni-ruse.bg

The **workshop agenda** included the following topics:

- Official opening, by the Rector of the University
- Short summary of the survey at the University of Ruse under HEInnovate statements in 2020 within the BeyondScale project.
- Presentation of the scientific capacity for knowledge exchange and collaboration of a research team.
- Presentation of the company and the need for knowledge exchange and collaboration from the research communities to the firm and Discussion of a statement from HEInnovate.eu.
- Presentation of the Scientific and Research Center for legalization of the knowledge transfer.
- Discussion of opportunities for knowledge exchange and collaboration. Identification of mutual interests and benefits for the participants.
- General presentation of the shared action plan structure as an instrument of HEInnovate - "How to write a shared action plan (value proposition)".
- Design of the Shared action plan by the key participants.
- Engagements of the Rector about the execution of the Shared action plan.
- Official closing of the seminar.

Important factors for the success of the workshop were:

- A moderator with knowledge about the workshop and the HEInnovate concept.
- University-business cooperation as an important element in the university's strategy and promoted by its rectorate.

The main outcomes of this workshop are the following:

- First, the HEInnovate tool gave structure and forced attendees to concentrate on particular issues.
- Second, the involvement of the university's leadership underscored the importance of the workshop topic.
- Third, for the academics this workshop gave them an opportunity to share their experience and expertise and put forward their demands to the rectorate for appropriate support in terms of the technical infrastructure of their laboratories in order to work on the commercial application of their research on the market.
- Fourth, for the business representative the workshop was an opportunity to talk with the Rectorate about the strategic (and sometimes confidential) aspects of intellectual property and its development. Ultimately, for the business the gains of collaboration lie in improving the competitiveness of the business.
- Fifth, all workshop participants confirmed that the event can serve as a good model to use in other scientific fields in Ruse University – extending to the relevant companies in the Danube region.

Reflecting

The value proposition canvas with its gains, pains, gain creators and pain relievers, played an important role.

Most importantly, it made clear what the **expected benefits** for the involved parties were: The main expected benefits for Ruse University are: improved facilities in the scientific laboratories; increased expertise of the scientific team; publications in proper scientific forums. For the firm, the expected benefits are improved company competitiveness and increased expertise of the employees.

The **gain creators for Ruse University** were:

- First, good experiences in Ruse's previous business-university collaborations and its public-private partnerships with local and international entrepreneurs.
- Second, the improvements in facilities and scientific laboratories that come with some of the collaborations with companies. Previously, Ruse collaborated with Siemens, Claas, Tessy, etc. and this has had a positive influence on the related scientific laboratories. Modern equipment was installed thanks to the financial and technical support of the companies.
- Third. The aim of many academics is to increase the expertise of their scientific teams. Earlier, researchers from Ruse University already participated in a variety of knowledge exchange activities and they experienced that it had improved their research competences.
- Fourth. An opportunity to prepare high-quality publications in proper scientific forums, given that researchers are evaluated based on their publications in journals with high impact factor. The preparation of articles based on collaborations or access to a company's facilities may produce scientific solutions for academically interesting problems.

For the **company, the gain creators** were:

- First, to improve the firm's competitiveness in the technological field. The global economy is very competitive and requires state-of-the-art technology. Therefore, a technology-based company might want to have a fruitful collaboration with scientists.
- Second, the collaboration between Ruse University and the firm in question created an opportunity for the firm to improve the expertise of its employees thanks to the interactions with leading researchers. Therefore, the company is well informed about new technological trends in their specific production lines.

There were some **pains for the HEI**: Professors usually communicate in a one-directional way with their audience (students, business, external stakeholders). However, in a workshop setting a dialogue can be facilitated to reach mutual understanding.

The **firms had some pains**, too: Businessmen need quick solutions, and they are not ready to wait for a long time for the scientific answer to their problem. Time is money, and therefore the managers often have to prioritise business over science. In addition, not every company is willing to give a scientific team full access to its facilities. Each company would like to protect its secrets.

Lessons learned from the workshop experience

The basic principle applied to the workshop was “By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail”..

Therefore, the Ruse team invested many hours in preliminary meetings with the involved stakeholders to discuss opportunities and strengths both at the business and the academic side.

It helped that there already was a high degree of trust between the manager and the scientific team, thanks to earlier joint research work.

The Rectorate expressed a high commitment to business-university collaborations and knowledge exchange.

The discussion around the HEInnovate statements in the dimension “Knowledge exchange and collaboration“ confirmed the willingness of the stakeholders to work together and gave a clear structure and fundament to the discussion in the workshop.

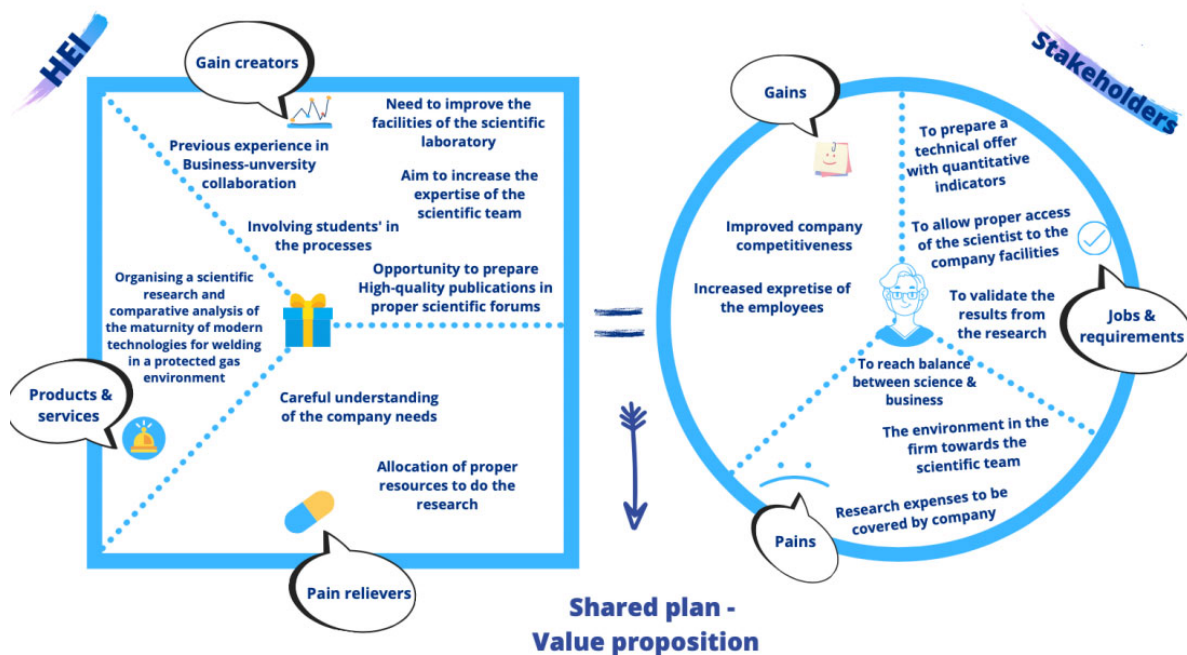
The limited number of workshop participants allowed each of them to play a clear role and have a meaningful contribution.

The support from the BeyondScale partners was useful in preparations. This support could perhaps be designed as a manual for the preparation of an outbound workshop around the HEInnovate tool and the value proposition canvas. However, every country (even each university) has its specifics.

Therefore, this manual should be stated in general terms in order to also be useful for other HEIs.

Also, the participants of such seminars should be limited only to those, who have real interests for success – Manager of the firm; Rector body, scientific team, university administrative units to facilitate the knowledge exchange.

There were some changes. The original idea was to prepare an action plan and a value proposition within the workshop. But the manager and the research team asked to deliver this document after the workshop, on the base of careful analyses.



Conclusion

We consider the HEInnovate platform very useful, because it shows to the users some of the areas for improvement in higher education. All academics at the three management levels (rector, dean, department leaders) might want to address all eight dimensions and answer all statements. In the case of Ruse University, the participation of managerial positions at top, middle and low level of management illustrated that the topics addressed were seen as important.

The Business Canvas that was used in the workshop can facilitate the running of the workshop. The different elements of the Canvas quite clearly explain what to focus on in a seminar like this.

The same format for an outbound workshop can be used by other research teams too, because it could facilitate a discussion between academia and the business world. However, to encourage change in the academic community one may need to run these workshops on a more frequent basis and create the platforms and internal regulations that are required to do this.

Disclaimer:

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