

Opportunities in HEI / Industry cooperation – the key to continuous improvement

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Abstract

Frulact supplies B2B products and services with excellent quality standards, which aim at meeting and surpassing customers' needs and expectations. For this purpose Frulact invests approximately 2,7% of its turnover back into Research, Development & Innovation (RDI) activities. Frutech is Frulact's dedicated RDI center, opened in January 2012, in Maia, Portugal. This includes lab scale and pilot plant facilities as well as fully equipped Food Microbiology and Physico-chemical Laboratories, a video-conference room, an Auditorium, a Sensory panel room and a Library. Frutech centralises the group's RDI activities and is dedicated to the continuous improvement of Frulact's RDI strategy, aligned with the latest market trends and new technologies.

Frulact cooperates with various High Educational Institutes (HEI) to explore and internally disseminate useful knowledge both in day-to-day activities but mainly cooperating in medium and long-term projects with a certain degree of technological uncertainty. These projects involve confidentiality agreements.

To support and grow its partnership with HEI, Frulact promotes: short and medium term internships, study visits to Frutech, which usually include on site lecturing of classes, study visits to its production units, cooperation in RDI projects funded by the Portuguese government and the European Union, sponsoring of student grants and specific projects and others.

The main challenges found in Industry– HEI cooperation are:

- The alignment of fundamental research oriented activities from HEI with the company's business strategy

- The balance between cost and gain in RDI projects, that is to say the weight of HR resources, equipment, raw material costs used in trials against results which can be replicated and used to support the company's economic growth.

Frulact's cooperation with HEI has allowed:

- During internships, in real-life company environment, the identification of talented students, who possess Frulact's desired professional and personal profiles »» student employment
- The development of RDI projects, supported by the research activities and technical knowledge of lecturers and researchers in their areas of expertise »» useful knowledge which can increase the company's sales turnover
- The identification, investigation and access to the latest developments in processing technology, physicochemical, microbiological, organoleptic and other scientific areas »» continuous improvement
- The promotion of networking with clusters, governmental agencies, training centers, researchers, laboratories and so on »» networking
- The knowledge and participation (sometimes joint-participation) in events such as seminars, conferences, webinars, workshops, and others which are aligned with Frulact's training strategies for its teams »» continuous training