Master Thesis - “Bridging the gap: How large corporations engage with startups” (30 credits/20 weeks –2 students)

About us

GKN Aerospace is the world’s leading multi-technology tier 1 aerospace supplier. With 55 manufacturing locations in 15 countries, we serve over 90% of the world’s aircraft and engine manufacturers. We design and manufacture innovative smart aerospace systems and components. Our technologies are used in aircraft ranging from the most used civil aircraft to the world’s advanced 5th generation fighter aircraft and the Ariane orbital rockets used by ESA.

Project Background

In today’s rapidly evolving business landscape, large corporations face increasing pressure to innovate, adapt, and remain competitive. Traditional R&D models often struggle to keep pace with the agility and creativity of startups, which are typically more risk-tolerant and faster in developing novel solutions. As a result, many large companies are exploring strategic collaborations with startups to access cutting-edge technologies, fresh talent, and disruptive business models.

This thesis aims to explore how large organizations can systematically leverage startups - not just through acquisitions or investments, but via partnerships, incubators, accelerators, and open innovation platforms. The goal is to understand the organizational, cultural, and strategic mechanisms that enable successful collaboration and integration, and to identify best practices that maximize mutual value.

Key questions include:

- What motivates large companies to engage with startups?
- What models of collaboration are most effective?
- What internal structures and processes support successful startup engagement?
- How can large companies avoid common pitfalls in startup collaboration?

This research will contribute to both academic understanding and practical guidance for corporate innovation strategies.

Assignment Description

The student will conduct a mixed-methods study combining literature review, case studies, and survey research. They will explore existing models of corporate-startup collaboration, analyze real-world examples through interviews, and gather broader insights via a survey targeting innovation professionals. Based on the findings, the student will develop a practical framework or set of guidelines for large companies to effectively engage with startups. The final results will be documented in a thesis and presented to academic and industry audiences.

Qualifications

- M.Sc. Student in Industrial Engineering and Management or similar field.

Apply by

Send your resume and coverletter to Isak Larsson & Gustav Bergling

Email: isak.larsson@gknaerospace.com & Gustav.Bergling@gknaerospace.com

Please ensure to include your academic affiliation as part of your cover letter and email!

Interviews will be held continuously and the position could be filled prior to the last application date!

Last date for application: 2025-11-14

Start date: January 2026