

Ad multos annos: to the next 50 years

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Experience has shown that translating the knowledge generated by basic research into practice is by no means an easy task. For this reason, it is all the more important to have efficient, continuous innovation chains that bridge the gap between business and basic research. In this situation, it is quite often necessary to engage with questions raised by applied research in order to prepare ideas for implementation. Functional innovation chains are of particular, even fundamental importance, particularly in Germany with its outstanding basic research and globally competitive economy.

Basic research has one goal: to make crucial discoveries and advance human knowledge. Its value comes from its exploration of the unknown, and its significance in practice is often not immediately recognizable. During the 20 years or more of research history that led to the discovery of genome editing systems such as CRISPR-Cas, it would have never been possible to “ask for” the invention of an easy to use and precise gene editing tool. Over the course of many years, during a process of free, unplanned interaction between numerous scientific stakeholders, a large body of seemingly “useless knowledge”, relating for example to unusual, repetitive DNA sequences and an exciting type of immune system in bacteria was generated – until finally a “eureka” moment occurred and the scientists reached an understanding of individual gene editing mechanisms. Today, the resulting technology has not only revolutionized genetic re-

search, but also opened up new treatment options in the field of medicine along with many other applications.

This example not only shows the value of basic research but also illustrates how important it is to be able to digest and question the opportunities that arise from basic research findings, also in terms of possible applications. It also displays the courage to enter into dialog with scientists who have basic research in their sights and applications or applied research in mind. Here, Max Planck Innovation (MI) plays an essential role, not only formally as a technology transfer organization, but also as an institution that is changing perspectives in basic research.

MI understands the excellent basic research conducted independently by the Max Planck Institutes and can apply it at the right time in a way that is solution-oriented and “driven by the product”. The organization is therefore an important bridge builder between science, business, and society. As reflected by its collaboration with Boehringer Ingelheim, MI is open to new models of cooperation between research facilities and start-ups, SMEs and larger companies, for example in certain areas of indication where the goal is to identify and optimize novel, therapeutically effective substances and develop them to the stage of validated leads that are effective in in-vivo model systems. Joint efforts are also being made to establish spin-offs from Max Planck Institutes. The Boehringer Ingelheim Venture Fund is

involved in the early rounds of financing for such spin-offs. This is in keeping with Boehringer Ingelheim’s strategy of investing in groundbreaking biotechnology companies that focus on therapeutic products and create innovations in biomedical research.

The professional work of Max Planck Innovation is making a highly favorable impression in this respect. As a rule, the quality of the patents is exceptionally high. In their capacity as competent contacts, the staff at MI understand the needs of both company founders and investors while ensuring that the MPG is involved as needed. As negotiating partners, they are tough but invariably fair, with sound judgment and consideration for all those involved. In terms of content and processes, MI is also more than competitive when compared with international transfer offices. As the central point of contact, MI brings together the creativity and pioneering spirit of scientists and start-up founders and the expertise of the business world with the aim of finding new solutions to the challenges facing society. In this way, it encourages us to try out more new things, leave the well-trodden paths and take more risks in Germany. We will need Max Planck Innovation for another 50 years at least.