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## FACULTY OF BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT

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## INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT

ÚSTAV MANAGEMENTU

# PROPOSAL FOR A NETWORKING PLATFORM FOR START UP COMPANIES USING LEAN CANVAS PRINCIPLES AND THE CONCEPT OF MINIMUM VIABLE PRODUCT CONCEPT

NÁVRH NETWORKINGOVÉ PLATFORMY PRO ZAČÍNÁJÍCÍ FIRMY VYUŽÍVAJÍCÍ PRINCIPY LEAN CANVAS  
A KONCEPCI MINIMÁLNÍHO ŽIVOTASCHOPNÉHO PRODUKTU

**BACHELOR'S THESIS**

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

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# Assignment Bachelor's Thesis

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Pursuant to Act no. 111/1998 Coll. concerning universities as amended and to the BUT Study Rules, the degree programme supervisor has assigned to you a Bachelor's Thesis entitled:

## **Proposal for a networking platform for start up companies using lean canvas principles and the concept of minimum viable product concept**

### **Characteristics of thesis dilemmas:**

Introduction  
Goals of thesis and methods  
Theoretical review of problem  
Analysis of contemporary situation  
Proposal of solution  
Conclusion  
References  
Appendixes

### **Objectives which should be achieve:**

The main objective of the thesis is to design a framework for the development of an online networking platform for the development of student start up companies in a university environment. The aim of the theoretical part is to define a framework of theoretical background for the field of student start up companies and their networking support. The aim of the analytical part is to evaluate the current state of networking support for student start up companies and to identify key starting points for their development within the selected university. The aim of the design part is to create a framework for the development of an online networking platform for student start up companies, including recommendations for implementation and an assessment of the conditions and benefits of implementation.

### **Basic sources of information:**

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George, G., & Bock, A. J. (2011). The business model in practice and its implications for entrepreneurship research. Entrepreneurship theory and practice, 35(1), 83-111.

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Dean

## **Abstrakt**

Bakalárska práca sa zameriava na strategický rozvoj start-upovej networkingovej platformy na pôde univerzity. Práca nachádza podmienky rozvoja networkingovej platformy pre študentov a akademických pracovníkov VUT v Brne s podnikateľským myslením. Hlavným cieľom platformy je prepojiť študentov a akademických pracovníkov z rôznych fakúlt a zapojiť ich do tvorby nových start-upových tímov a projektov. Cieľom tejto práce je nájsť správne aspekty networkingovej platformy, ktoré musia byť začlenené do tejto študentskej platformy, a vytvoriť MVP (minimal viable product). Na dosiahnutie predpokladaného cieľa sa použilo niekoľko teoretických modelov a metód, aby sa pokryl čo najpresnejší strategický plan rozvoja tejto platformy.

**Kľúčové slová:** platforma, sieť, výskum, študenti, projekty, MVP, podnikanie.

## **Abstract**

This bachelor's thesis focuses on strategic development of start-up networking platform on the university grounds. The thesis finds the key of development of the networking platform for students and academic staff of Brno University of Technology with an entrepreneurial mindset. The main goal of the platform is to connect students and academic staff from different faculties to engage in creating new start-up teams and projects. Objective of this thesis is to find the right aspects of the networking process that has to be incorporated into this student networking platform and create an MVP (minimal viable product). To reach the estimated goal, several theoretical models and methods were used to cover as precise a strategic plan for the development of the platform as possible.

## **Kľúčové slová**

Platforma, sieť, výskum, študenti, projekty, MVP, podnikanie, start-up, lean canvas

## **Keywords**

platform, networking, research, students, projects, MVP, entrepreneurship, start-up, lean canvas

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**Affidavit**

I declare that the present bachelor project is an original work that I have written myself. I declare that the citations of the sources used are complete, that I have not infringed upon any copyright (pursuant to Act. no 121/2000 Coll.).

Brno dated 13th May 2024

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Michal Varga  
author's signature

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## **Introduction**

We are currently living in the period of time, when the professional market is dealing with overpopulation of absolvents from higher educational institutions, who after graduating do not have any professional experience in the market while entering. Nowadays, the current recruitment market has no other opportunity than sending people with higher education to employment offices.

Furthermore, thus this market anomaly university's rate of employability of their absolvents are starting to decline. In that matter, may be observed the fact, that the higher educational institutions are also losing hundreds of new potential students every academic year.

Therefore, universities and other higher educational institutions are trying to develop innovative educational systems to attract new applicants. Educational institutions all around the world are trying to differentiate from others with their own unique approach to the system of teaching and learning. Most of the institutions are focusing on developing one and the same educational trait – practice.

In these days, the experience is becoming more valuable than the university degree and universities know it as well. Higher education institutions must adopt to the new requirements from potential incoming applicants redefine their educational systems with the focus on experience of their students.

This bachelor thesis evaluates opportunity to launch networking platform with focus on entrepreneurial approach at higher education institution. The goal of the platform is to provide online networking between students and academic staff from different educational environments in belief of development of an entrepreneurial ecosystem at the Brno University of Technology.

## **Goals and Methodology**

The main purpose of this bachelor thesis is to create a useful proposal for start-up networking platform for universities focusing on the concepts of lean canvas and minimum viable product. In that matter, it is crucial to define the tasks of each of the three parts.

### **Theoretical part**

The aim of the theoretical part is to define the framework of theoretical background for the area of student start-up companies and their networking support.

### **Analytical part**

The aim of the analytical part is to evaluate the current state of networking support for student start-ups and to identify key starting points for their development within the selected university.

### **Proposal part**

The aim of the design part is to create a framework for the development of an online networking platform for student start-up companies, including recommendations for implementation and an assessment of the conditions and benefits of implementation.

### **Problem Definition**

At the Brno University of Technology (BUT) there is no networking platform or co-working space where the students from different faculties would meet and share their knowledge. This university is focused on technological curriculums where its students are tackling the most actual problems in this field. Graduates of BUT have the opportunity to be employed in various industries such as manufacturing, IT, management or even art.

Even though, there is a great potential in the students of BUT and their responsibilities there is no interconnection between them outside of their faculties. The lack of networking between students is causing strong competition and comparison between the faculties and no co-working.

## **Area of interest**

In this part the key areas of interest for this thesis are identified. These areas will help to identify the key aspect of the platform development to reach the goal. Each key area is supported by supporting questions, which helps to understand the area little bit more.

### Project development process

- What are the best frameworks for describing project development process?
- What are the phases of project development?

### Development plan of Brno University of Technology related to support of entrepreneurship

- What is the strategy set by the rector of BUT for 2024?
- What are the BUT's main priorities related to development of its institutions?
- Does BUT have an intention to support an entrepreneurial community at its grounds?

### Requirements and needs of the platform's potential users

- What are the requirements of students of BUT?
- What are the requirements of students with established start-ups?
- What are the requirements of academic staff who work at BUT?

### Form of implementation

- What are the features for implementation into the platform?
- Which channel would suit the best for the development of the platform?
- What would the platform solve apart of pure networking?

## **Methodology**

For the purposes of this bachelor thesis it is important to list picked methodology based on the questions above. It is essential to carefully pick methods that will be elaborated through the analytical part of the thesis right to the proposal part.

For the analytical part were chosen three forms of research:

- Focus group
- Quantitative survey
- Interviews

These research methods will help with evaluating the needs and requirements of potential users, that the platform must contain. Through this research methods will be elaborated the problem validation and also the best possible channel for such solution.

During the proposal part will be used two concepts to identify best possible solution for the design of the platform by using two concepts:

- Minimum Viable Product
- Lean Canvas model

All the findings and gathered data will be elaborated through these two concepts mentioned above for the completion of the proposal part and finalisation of this bachelor thesis.

# **1 Theoretical part**

In this section is locating definition of the important terms and attributes and models that are closely interconnected with the topic of this thesis for the support to achieve its goals. Primary focus of this part will be connection, communication and creating of the minimal viable product, which will be elaborated in the other two parts of this bachelor thesis.

## **1.1 Definition of an ideation**

To begin with an idea. An idea is defined as: “Suggestion or plan for doing something.” (Cambridge University Press, n.d.) Upon this activity the process of developing an idea is called, in shortened way, ideation. This process reflects knowledge from the past and present of the person who is having the ideas, called an ideator.

### **Development of an idea**

During the process of idea development the ideator is coming with possible solutions and concepts, which would solve the defined problem or gap in the market. However, idea development is process that is measured in stages. During these stages the ideator is validating the idea and defining its role for the problem that is solving. There are four phases of an idea development – preparation phase, incubation phase, illumination phase and verification phase (Stillman, 2014).

#### **Preparation phase**

This phase is the first stage of an idea development process, where the ideator comes up with solution and implicates concepts of visualising and researching the idea. During this phase the ideator may use techniques such as mind mapping or brainstorming. These techniques are crucial for creating a visual representation of the concept or idea that is being created and therefore could be better understood by others (Stillman, 2014).

#### **Incubation phase**

This phase is called an incubation phase, in the matter of time and growth. In this early ideation stage the ideator needs to create a plan of the solution. During this phase of an idea development process there is a need to determine the best possible implementation for the idea to become a reality (Stillman, 2014).

#### **Illumination phase**

Illumination stage of an idea development process is the most critical phase of them all. Therefore, in this phase the ideator needs to think about the idea in two ways “Why would this idea would

not be used by target audience?” and “Why this idea would not be developed?”. When these two questions are answered and passed, the ideator may begin with setting a goal that is dedicated from the answers of the two implementation questions (Stillman, 2014).

### **Verification phase**

The creative thinking and designing is almost at the end in this last stage of an idea development. From this phase on the ideator is implementing and developing the idea into a real project, by using all the data researched in the previous phases. In this stage the ideator is testing the idea and eliminating its weaknesses. The best verification is by getting a feedbacks from target audience to pinpoint their needs (Stillman, 2014).

## **1.2 Design thinking**

Design thinking is a problem solving methodology that helps the ideator to understand the costumers needs by implementing ideators creativity and experimenting. During design thinking there are three pillars that need to be present and collaborate to define the goals of the project that is being designed. These three pillars are the ideators, stakeholders and the target audience. This collaboration may bring a successful design model results in the manner of exploring and defining the problems together and coming up with solutions to these problems. Nevertheless, the title of the model can be defining “design thinking” the main focus of the method is not to bring up the most eye-watering design, but to come up with the best possible solution that fulfils needs of the end-users and target audience, to become a successful project. (Dunne, D. and Martin, R., 2006)

The design thinking can be leveraged or measured in five phases. These five stages are made out of empathizing phase, defining phase, ideating phase, prototyping phase and the fifth phase is testing. All five steps are closely connected with each other in defining procedure. The process is following these steps (Murtell, 2021).

### **Empathize**

In this phase it is essential to define all the potential customer needs and behaviour that can significantly influence the project. The goal of this design thinking stage is to get under the skin of the target audience and understand them (Murtell, 2021).

### **Define**

When all the needs of an end-user are understood, then there is a second phase of the design thinking and that is defining. In this stage the results from the first empathizing stage need to be valued and defined to come up with the best possible solutions for the target audience and their

problems (Murtell, 2021). In this stage may be also used business models (lean canvas, business model canvas) to give a direction the design thinking, however it is important to have in mind the business model is does not have to be always recipe for success. (Fuller, Morgan, 2010)

### **Ideate**

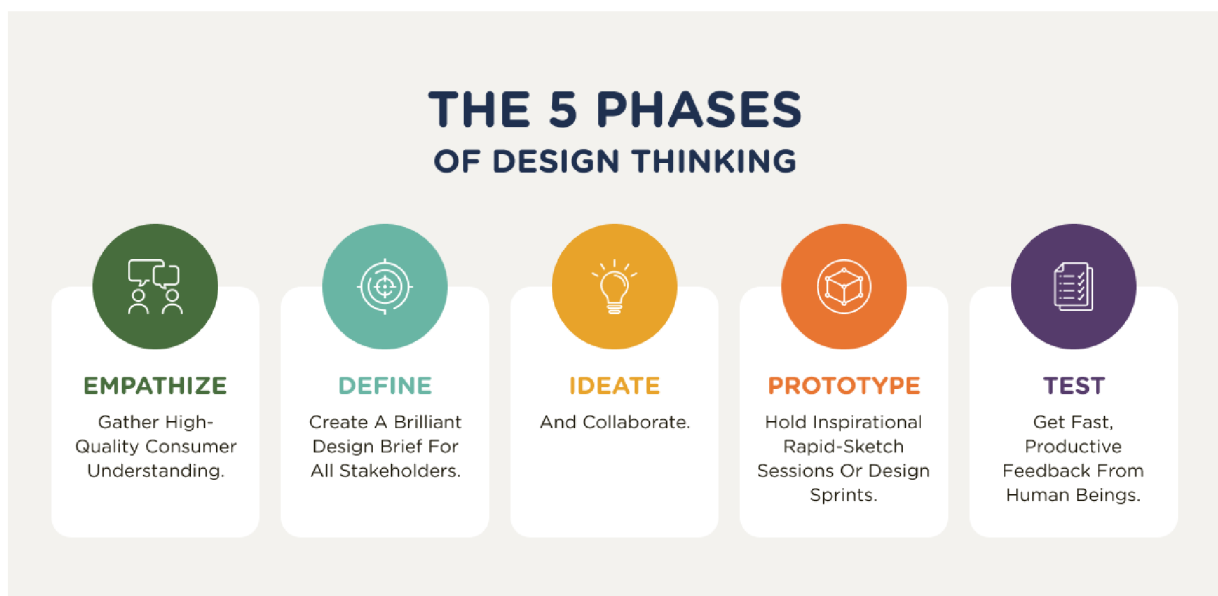
After having the potential costumer problems and needs defined than there is the phase of ideating and creating a unique solution that would solve the defined needs of the costumers. In this phase the creativity comes in the way. For this stage it is highly recommended to use brainstorming or mind-mapping as a useful methods to describe the idea creation (Murtell, 2021).

### **Prototype**

Prototyping is the fourth stage of the design thinking process. Prototyping can be easily translated as experimentation with your latest knowledge and researches. This phase is about creating multiple functional designs and figuring out the best possible version for the end-user (Murtell, 2021).

### **Test**

Testing is the final phase of the design thinking process. Where the prototype comes to the confrontation with end-users and is being thoroughly tested. In this phase it is crucial to receive a constructive feedbacks from the testers to identify its weaknesses and potential for the improvements (Murtell, 2021).



*Figure 1 The five phases of design thinking (Murtell, 2021)*



Furthermore, per McKinsey & Company (2023), this process can be described in only two key steps for the design thinking process. First step is to fully understand the behaviour of the potential costumers and their needs. It is also important to determine the future needs of the costumers, to fulfil their needs for the time that will come and sustain the profits for the future. The second step is made of testing or concepting, where the ideator starts with blank paper and pen and scathes possible concepts and outcomes. It is important to receive a feedback and adjust the concept for the needs of end-users from the given feedback.

### **1.3 Minimal Viable product**

Minimal viable product is a type of a product that is includes minimum features and only the ones that are the most required for the customer satisfaction and function ability. This product can be than distributed to early-stage customers, which enables them to generate constructive feedback to the product while development is still in the process. MVP is a highly recommended form of methodology to be used due to its functionality for allowing the project team to test their hypothesis on real customers. During this process the team is enabled to gather all the data and behavioural patterns of the end-user which is highly valuable data. By implementing MVP methodology and focusing on delivering only essential features while spending time on development. This methodology minimizes time and resources spent and leaves time for teams to acknowledge the data and feedbacks gained during the process, after which the team may improve their product, strategy or approach. By applying MVP in the early stage of execution, the project team is lowering the risk of working on something that customers do not want and would have time to spent time more wisely for building successful product tailor made for current needs of target audience (Moogk, 2012).

### **1.4 Lean Canvas**

The Lean Canvas model was developed by Ash Maurya (2010), who got inspired by Business model canvas created by Alexander Osterwalder and Yves Pigneur (2005). The Lean Canvas was developed as a strategic tool made for entrepreneurs to define their project key aspects. There are nine key aspects that are defined during the process of filling up the lean canvas model. These nine aspects are problem, solution, key metrics, unique value proposition, unfair advantage, channels, customer segments, cost structure and revenue streams. Per George and Bock (2011) linking the

data to business models (such as lean canvas model) could be beneficial to determine strategy of the business.

Each of these aspects are defining and clarifying the project’s understanding of the market positioning. By filling up all the key elements of the project in the lean canvas model, it helps the project teams to determine their weaknesses (Ries, 2011).

Lean canvas model helps entrepreneurs to think about their projects critically to find the best possible solution and answer for the key elements of the lean canvas model and to achieve success and sustainable growth of the project and team (Maurya, 2022).



*Figure 2 Lean canvas model (Riable, 2020)*

## 1.5 Project life cycle

The term project is defined per Cambridge Dictionary as a “Piece of planned work or an activity that is finished over a period of time and intended to achieve a particular purpose”. (Cambridge University Press, n.d.) From this definition it can be determined that term project stands for an operation that solves specific problem, need or gap in the potential opportunity.

The project life cycle is described by Bruke (2013) as a form of description for the phases of a project to have an easier look into the process of project development. The project life cycle

scheme helps to divide the project into number of phases presented along the project timeline. Most projects pass through project lifecycle, which is presented into four phases that describe the current stage of the project. The four phases of project life cycle cover feasibility phase, definition phase, execution phase and the fourth commissioning and handover phase.

### **Feasibility phase**

In this first phase the project is to confirm the usage of the project if it is feasible to implement on the market. During this phase the project's goals are being determined also with the budget, management of the project, communication strategy used and involvement with the end-users (Bruke, 2013). To define the key aspects of feasibility phase there is a tool model to be used for project teams. This tool is called lean canvas model.

### **Definition phase**

During this stage of project life cycle it is crucial to set up the steps, milestones, budgets and goals of the project that need to be achieved for the project to be successful. This phase covers the risk estimation and establishing change processes. The goal of this stage is to define the future structure and steps of the project team and begin with work (Bruke, 2013).

### **Execution phase**

As the title of this stage suggests in this phase the real-time work on the project comes to the cycle. All the knowledge, resources and plans created and gained during the previous two phases of the project life cycle. During the execution phase the project team may start with developing so-called MVP version of the project which stands for minimal viable product (Bruke, 2013).

### **Commissioning and handover phase**

Also called a closing phase is a stage of the project life cycle where the product or service is finished and is being re-established for the new legal entity or being sold to the new owners. During this stage the project team may acknowledge their past and activities that were successfully managed and activities that were not as successful. This can be processed by retrospectively considering the points of improvement and creating an impact report. This report is a tool to measure the success or impact of the project on the market (Bruke, 2013).

### **1.5.1 Start-up**

When the project is being established in its early stages and delivers unique product or services to the market it is called a start-up. The goal of start-ups is often to provide its costumers special product, which is not on the market, yet and tends to be revolutionary (Birley, 1996).

It is also possible to define start-ups as a young companies that have innovation in the boold and tend to aim and create entirely new market categories of products or services. Almost every of the worldwide known technological companies began as a start-up, as an example Facebook, YouTube, Beyond Meat, etc. (Baldrige, 2022).

Mainly start-ups does not distinguish from the form of work from other companies. What makes them different from the other companies on the market is the way of their growth. In regular businesses the firm tries to expand ideally double continuously in some timeframe. However, start-ups aims for growth in their own way by developing products and delivering them in the unique way that would be just theirs.

Another differentiation between a regular business and start-up company is the speed and growth which helps them to shock the market and claim new users. Start-ups are building on their ideas very quickly by using the obtained data from feedbacks and constantly improving the product to differentiate from the competition on the market. In that matter, most of the start-ups use the method of minimal viable product, by which they value their product through early costumers (Baldrige, 2022).

Nevertheless, there is also a large number of start-ups that launched as a rocket, however were not as successful and crashed in its early stages. All the passion, energy and vision that people in the start-up teams bring with them and to the costumers is very energetic, but it is not enough sufficient to secure a success for the start-up company. Nowadays, everything changes very fast and start-ups tend to focus on the problem that they were dealing during the ideation phase. However, the needs and problems of the target audience has changed through the process of developing a solution for the past problems. Per Ries (2011) start-ups work with too much uncertainty and the world becomes more uncertain, it gets harder and harder to predict the future of the market and costumer needs.

### **1.5.2 Spin-off**

The projects or companies called spin-offs often share the similar values as it is with start-ups. This form of company entity is also called spin-out or starburst. They bring the new energy, mindset and way of working on a problem to the collective and influence it. However, there is a major difference between a sturt-up and spin-off. The spin-offs are companies that are created under some already established company, called a parent company. In that matter, spin-offs have shareholders right from the beginning and it is established for some certain purpose. Spin-offs are

separated from the parent companies mainly in believe, that this branch or department of the company would be more successful under separate name to distinguish among others and not be connected with the parent company on the first sight. This structure allows the spin-off to be almost entirely autonomous and form their own separate management structures, name, policies, but still sharing the know-how, facilities, resources and providing support in financial and technological manner with the parent company. Which could be a great advantage in comparison with start-ups (Ndonzuau, 2002).

However, there is a downside and risks that may harm spin-offs, as well. Due to its separation from the parent company which is mostly strong player on the market. The spin-offs tend to be very vulnerable as far as they are very similar with start-ups they may sky rocket on the beginning of separation with an advantage of being daughter company of some big corporate, however if the product or fit does not fulfil the needs of customers and does not fit in shareholders investment portfolio. The price of shares tend to fall down drastically and potentially can harm the parent company as well, with a bad reputation (Escobar, Saigol 2022).

### **1.5.3 Firm**

According to Mráz (2001), definition of firm may be described as one of the main economical subjects, which is being economically independent established as legal entity that is carrying out entrepreneurial activities on a capital market. The firm transforms the economical inputs into the products or services. In the most cases, the main goal of the firm is to maximalise the profit, as well as decreasing the costs and increasing the turnover of capital in the firm.

## **1.6 Networking and its phases**

According to Meyer-Miner (2022) there are three phases of networking that are describing the process of successful connection between two people who share their knowledge and skills between each other. These three phases are structured in the order as exposure, immersion and the last and the most important one – connecting.

### **Exposure**

Exposure is the first phase in networking structure. This steps require the networker to examine the environment in which the networking is about to begin and start collecting the information from others to begin this phase (Meyer-Miner, 2022).

## **Immersion**

After the collection of an important data from the person that is being interviewed comes the second step of the networking, which is immersion. This stage covers the deep dive into the usage and involvement with the information that has been collected in the previous step. In this phase it is important to showcase the connection between the people who are being networked by pinpointing similar habits, interests or own personal incidents that could be somehow similar to others and attract them with the story (Meyer-Miner, 2022).

## **Connecting**

The final and the most crucial part of networking phases is the connection itself. The whole goal of networking is to come to this stage. To strengthen the connection it is important to also show the similarities between the people, while speaking to enhance bonding and connection (Meyer-Miner, 2022).

### **1.6.1 Social media**

Social media are nowadays the strongest tools used for communication, ideology sharing and personal life knowledge. These platforms are widely used by all age groups and ethnic groups all around the world (University Canada West, n.d.).

According to the Cambridge dictionary the definition of the social media is worded as “Websites and computer programs that allow people to communicate and share information on the internet using a computer or mobile phone.” (Cambridge University Press, n.d.) Also could be connected from any other electronic device which is connected to the internet.

Bring of social media delivered human kind an opportunity to be interconnected with anyone all around the world in one specific time. Also the social media took on itself the representation of a brands and advertisements as far as people fulfil more time on social media as it was in the past (Maryville University, 2020).

## **1.7 Community**

Community may be related the centre of human kind, that it is a characteristic that shapes people as a whole. According to Chavis and Lee (2015), community is not just a physical characteristic, but it is shaped by both emotions and connections between individuals. Species such as homo sapiens, prefer to maintain in communities and groups to fulfil their shared requirements and needs. The key aspects of being part of a community for its members are safety, trust and the feeling that the individual is belonging somewhere. Also there is a deep need of taking care of one

another. Members of a community share their values and believes both individually and collectively. This creates the ability for the members to impact people from around and their surroundings, as well as other member of the community (Chavis and Lee, 2015).

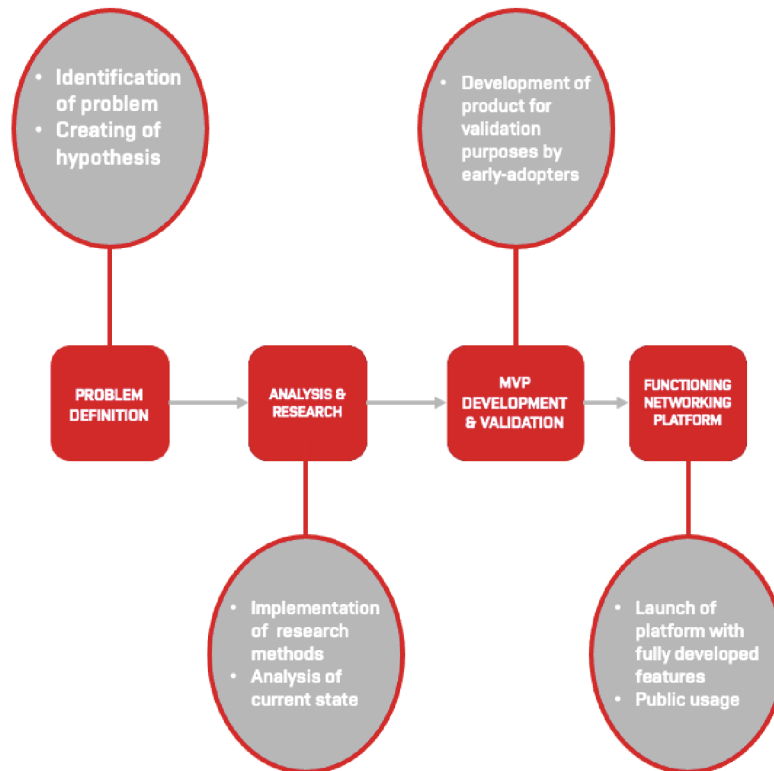
### **1.7.1 Communication**

According to Kendre (2021), communication is the core of every company and organization in the world. Results of an effective communication are hiding behind every success. Communication may be divided into two categories which differs upon the purpose of the communication. The two groups are organizational communication, which has significant importance in terms of managerial abilities to be responsible for the run of the company. Communication shares a vital role of being a tool for sharing ideas, inspirations, points or even disagreements. Another key aspect of success for the company is the requirement of good communication for the development of relationships within the company. Communication's vital role during the professional aspects of life is the enhancement of the efficiency at the workplace. The second group of communication importance in life is the ability to express and give an opinion and also develop relationships between one another (Kendre, 2021).

### **1.8 Theoretical Assessment**

The theoretical part of this thesis focused on delivering a theoretical overview of the project development. The goal of this part is to understand the key aspects of development for stat-up networking platform, which will be concluded in the third part of this thesis.

This section of the theoretical part of the thesis will showcase the development framework, based on the theoretical overviews from the previous sections. The framework describes phases of start-up networking development process in four phases of the inspired by the design thinking process.



*Figure 3 Phases of platform development (Own processing)*

### **Problem definition**

For the define phase I implemented problem definition phase, where I identify a problem that currently occurs and start with research preparation, which would help to validate the hypothesis based on the problem definition.

### **Analysis and research**

Instead of an ideation phase in the networking platform’s development framework is figuring analysis, where the research comes to a place by which the researcher can confirm that other people are facing the same problem and there is a hole in the market.



### **Development and validation**

Third phase continues with development of minimal viable product, where development of a platform comes to place. In this phase the platform should contain only the basic features, which the platform and its users require.

### **Platform's launch**

Finally, at the ending of an development phases is fully functioning start-up networking platform, which has been through validation process and now is opened to public with fully developed features.

The identification of these four phases of platform development helps to define the next steps for the platform. The framework works as a road map of project for the easy determination of current phase of the platform during processing of this thesis.

## **2 Analytical part**

For the beginning of the analytical part it is important to showcase the idea on which there will be the minimal viable product concept based. To start off by pinpointing the principals and goals of the idea for the future and its prosperity to become a running project.

### **2.1 Strategic intent of Brno University of Technology for 2024**

Since 2017 BUT is publishing its “Implementation plan for the strategic intent of Educational and creative activities of the Brno University of Technology for the year (number of year published)” on annual basis. This document states the university’s vision and goals that shall be achieved in the upcoming year. The actions and goals are made upon the published set of priority objectives by the Ministry of education, youth and sports in Czech Republic. Prior to 2017 BUT was realising only long term visions of the university, which were predicted to be done in the timeframe of four years (Janiček, 2024).

According to Implementation plan for strategic intent of BUT for year 2024 (Janiček, 2024), the document was created upon the priority objectives of the MEYS 2021+, which are the objectives set by the ministry from 2021 and upcoming years. The ministry set seven objectives that are their main priorities from 2021 upwards (Ministry of education youth and sports, 2020).

#### **2.1.1 Priority objectives of Ministry of education, youth and sport**

For the best analytical purpose of this thesis I chose only the relevant objectives and topics from the implementation plan of BUT for 2024. To begin with the priority objectives of MEYS 2021+ there are seven prior objectives, however only two objectives are related to this thesis, which are the priority objectives one and four. The chosen objectives are related to the problem defined in this thesis introduction and they define the need of creating an entrepreneurial environment at the higher education institutions. This system would be beneficial for students to learn how to self-realise themselves. The objectives also persuade these institutions to use their research capacities effectively with students in cooperation.

#### **Priority objective 1**

According to the Strategic intent of the MEYS for higher education for the period from 2021, the priority objective number one is developing competencies directly relevant for life and work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This means that the MEYS wants absolvents of the higher education to be prepared

for their professional life not just by the theoretical studies but also practically. So, the absolvents would know how to work with the information, think critically, have ethical base, sharing knowledge. In the words of MEYS its focus is on “Competencies such as the ability to analyse problems and derive possible solutions, cooperate effectively, communicate constructively in business, personal and civic settings, make effective use of new technologies, being open to new stimuli and changes, flexibility and a healthy and environmentally sustainable lifestyle play a fundamental role for graduates’ successful career and quality of life.” (Ministry of education youth and sports, 2020). Furthermore, MEYS’s vision is to come up with a right balance between theoretical knowledge and social development of their absolvents. As they describe in their strategic intent plan “The big challenge for higher education is to strike the right balance between two principles – training practical skills that can be applied in practice immediately after completion of study on the one hand, and developing more general intellectual and social competencies to enable graduates to respond to new situations in the labour market and in society in the future on the other hand.” (Ministry of education youth and sports, 2020).

#### **Priority objective 4**

As the priority objective four is figuring the urge of MEYS to higher education institutions to enhance their strategic management and use capacities made for research and development effectively. In this matter, MEYS sets a goal for the higher education institutions to enhance and use their potential and effectively manage out the work for self-realisation for the student in their professional research premises. Per MEYS, “It is taking a scientific approach to the world around us that defines a university environment regardless of whether it is used in particular degree programmes for training excellent future scientists and innovators, or thousands of specialists for various sectors of our economy. The scientific view of the world is a tool of rational progress, and the task of higher education institutions is to pass this approach on to as large a proportion of the population as possible and develop it further.” (Ministry of education youth and sports, 2020). It is crucial for students to be able to use their theoretical knowledge in the practical way and get the touch or at least visual tase of the processes. In addition, MEYS supports the meaning of the student contribution in the practical research by describing benefits of this process to the students by defining: “As with other transferable competencies, the scientific way of working also needs to be developed using specific examples and applied in practical settings; it is not possible to acquire

this merely through theoretical studies. This is the reason why research, as well as other creative activities, must be conducted at higher education institutions in close ties with education, allowing the academic staff to use examples of their own research activities during lessons, whether it is done passively with demonstrations of their scientific work, or actively by involving students in research, in particular in doctoral degree programmes.” (Ministry of education youth and sports, 2020)

### **2.1.2 Vision of Brno University of Technology for 2024**

Vision of BUT is described in the Implementation plan for the strategic intent of Educational and creative activities of the Brno University of Technology for the year 2024 (Janiček, 2024). This document is formed into four parts where each part is defining one of the principles upon which BUT is built. These four principles are teaching and education, research and creative activities, service to society and the fourth one is governance and institutional decision-making. From each section, excluding the fourth one due to its irrelevance to the topic of the thesis, I have chosen parts of the BUT’s vision that are associated with creating an entrepreneurial ecosystem at the grounds of BUT.

#### **Teaching and education**

In this first section of the four principles of the university, BUT describes its approach and vision of educational development at BUT. The goal is to create a tight bond between teaching and researching and benefit from BUT’s technological knowledge to fulfil its potential.

Under the section teaching and education BUT emphasizes its approach to support their students and staff. According to an implementation plan of BUT for 2024 point 1.5.2, the university is working on development of academic and professional consultancy, which would be reachable for students of BUT if needed. This service would help students and academic staff to guide them while uncertain about the future or present situation at the university.

The second point from the teaching and education section is to enhance the mobility of staff and student of BUT. The university wants to focus and support more mobility and scholarship programmes, which also covers the support of student events and competitions at the university, as it is written in the point 1.12.1.

The third and crucial point for running a entrepreneurial ecosystem at the university is the support of the institution. In part 1.15 BUT explains its vision in supporting the establishment of start-up and spin-off projects. BUT listed three goals in this section. The first is to offer the help projects

teams in the form of legal, administrative or commercial support, which would help in the process of establishment of the company. The other one is to support start-up and spin-off initiatives at the university to help student network, raise awareness about such possibility, consult the projects or use the opportunity to work systematically at your project with BUT student or academic staff. Lastly, the students of BUT shall use the opportunity to use the services of South Moravian Innovation Centre (JIC) as a part of project development.

According to point 1.16 in an implementation plan of BUT to support an education and teaching principles at the university is by establishing an innovation and entrepreneurial ecosystem called ContriBUTE (described in section 2.3.1 of this thesis). The main purpose of this ecosystem would be to use the potential of BUT students by networking them between faculties of BUT and establishing free subject in winter semester 2024/2025 that will promote entrepreneurial areas such as transfer of knowledge, investor presentation, creating of business, etc. This subject would help students to understand the process of company establishment and have a broad overview of this procedure to encourage them to do so if they have an idea or want to work with other BUT team on some certain project.

Per point 1.17 BUT focuses on support for student activities, teams and associations. In this matter BUT wants to support the team development and also give a helping hand with the financial support to the associations, which would contribute to the BUT community and improve the student life at the university.

(Janíček, 2024)

### **Research, development, transfer, artistic and other creative activities**

Research and creative activities is the second of four principals of BUT listed in the implementation plan for 2024. The main focus of this pillar is meaningful usage of BUT's research capacities and use it as a competitive advantage. Moreover, the vision is to use these premises and know-how and actively and transfer it into business practice in form of projects.

In section 2.5 BUT aims to increase efficiency and relevance within the support of project activities. The goal is to form a Directive that would take care of projects and implementation of them at the university. And to create a new concept to improve methodological support by provisions for international projects, which would be managed by BUT Project Support Department. According to point 2.5.3 it is important that by the end of 2024 at least one phase of

the implementation process that covers reporting and recording of BUT projects on BUT IS platform would be done.

Another goal of BUT, according to section 2.7, within the research development principle is to further develop infrastructure for the research, artistic and creative activities. This covers proceeding with a deep analysis of needs and possibilities which would uncover the crucial points for BUT, which has to be developed to enhance research, artistic and creative activities at this educational institution. Moreover, it is important that the sole projects would be incorporated into this process of development.

Transfer of knowledge is a cornerstone for BUT, for that reason the vision of non-economic and economic knowledge transfer between BUT and third-party corporations is highlighted in the section 2.8.1. The strategy is to initiate long-term cooperation with companies based on the objectives listed below:

- effectiveness of the cooperation between two sides
- active involvement within the transfer by creating capacity and ensuring funding for the activities
- creating space for BUT absolvents to become perspective employees
- make the most of BUT's capacity to carry out interdisciplinary projects
- lead projects while keeping in line with business principles

Per section 2.9 BUT focuses also on building the resources and skills needed for organizational changes and ensuring to be legally recognized. The university also set strategic goals in industries of interest for BUT faculties and institutes, promoting collaboration. Additionally, BUT seeks the ways to involve the Faculty of Business and Management in commercialization process. Determining the commercial value of intellectual property and research outcomes will be a priority, as well as providing marketing support.

In the last section, 2.11, of research and creative activities development BUT mentions their aim to strengthen collaboration between BUT faculties, university institutes, and the BUT Rector's Office. This includes maintaining a comprehensive database of intellectual property and research outcomes. While the university plans to expand the team at the BUT Department of Knowledge Transfer, defining their roles and skills. Additionally, BUT aims to integrate the knowledge transfer website into the BUT website, enhancing its design and keeping its content up to date.

(Janíček, 2024)

## **Service to society**

The service to society is a third principle for Brno University of Technology and represents the utilization of the university's technological capabilities to endorse social and cultural objectives, sustainable development, environmental preservation, and enhancing quality of life. The goal of this principle is to enhance and act as a socially responsible entity, which serves as an impartial and non-political source of knowledge for its community. Furthermore, BUT wants to collaborate with regional and municipal authorities, contributing to the knowledge and socio-cultural character of the region.

According to the section 3.5 BUT is planning develop a communication platform for graduates. This platform would serve as a bridge between graduates and BUT to create a alumni community of BUT, which would be reachable by this platform. The university has plan to initiate testing and launching of the first version of the portal, and aiming to have the full version of the platform done by the end of 2024. At the same time, BUT begins to assemble a segmented database of graduates through and optimize the portal's content based on analytical data and the specific requirements of BUT and its faculties and institutes.

(Janíček, 2024)

## **2.2 Present state at Brno University of Technology**

Currently, on the university grounds of BUT there is a new initiative of creating an entrepreneurial ecosystem at Brno University of Technology of which creator and main ideators and guarantors are doc. Ing. Robert Zich Ph.D and doc. Ing. Vít Chlebovský, PhD. This ecosystem is called ContriBUTe. The main initiative of this system is to help students to guide through entrepreneurial processes, programmes and showcase the opportunity to work on own projects at the university, while still studying at BUT.

### **2.2.1 ContriBUTe**

As far as the name of this system suggests the goal of this platform is to make students and academic staff of BUT to cooperate together and contribute to the BUT community with their ideas, projects, researches and know-how. The founders of this system believe that students and academic staff of BUT have a great potential in the field of project and start-up development. Students and academic staff of BUT have a competition advantage in two spheres among other universities, which are the research resources and premises that BUT offers to its students and academic staff and the intellectual capacity in the field of technology, which is still the most break-

through field in the start-up community. The mission of an entrepreneurial ecosystem ContriBUTE is to inspire students and help them network with people from the other faculties of BUT and to establish permanent cooperation between the faculties to share know-how, within BUT as a whole. Nevertheless, yet there is no online networking platform, where the students would have the opportunity to interact together and connect. For that reason, there is a plan of developing an online networking platform for start-ups which would run at Brno University of Technology. However, this ecosystem covers the procedure of guiding students of BUT from ideation process to company establishment. The procedure under the ContriBUTE system is distributed into six programmes – VUT Idea, VUT Toolbox, VUT Start, VUT Networking, VUT Maker Space and Transfer of knowledge. These programmes provide a walkthrough for ambitious students with passion and drive for entrepreneurship, through all the aspects of business development (Brno University of Technology, 2024).

#### **VUT Idea**

Idea creation programme where students and academic staff have the opportunity to sign in for professional creative workshops or even plan consultancy meetings with mentors and entrepreneurs to help guide through this process (Brno University of Technology, 2024).

#### **VUT Toolbox**

This programme gives the opportunity to look into the important aspects of establishing a business, such as follows: brand design, management, economics of the company or business law (Brno University of Technology, 2024).

#### **VUT Start**

Within this programme the university gives helping hand to the running teams and projects who want to accelerate or officially establish projects by offering individual consultations with mentors (Brno University of Technology, 2024).

#### **VUT Networking**

Goal of this initiative is to connect like-minded students and academic staff to network and create an entrepreneurial community on the grounds of BUT. This community should be enhanced by inspirational events and discussions to share know-how. Yet, an online platform is being worked on (Brno University of Technology, 2024).

#### **VUT Maker Space**



Showcasing the BUT premises that can be used by project teams to test and innovate their ideas right from the beginning and secure the advantage upon the competitors ((Brno University of Technology, 2024).

### **Transfer znalostí**

In direct translation to English “Transfer of knowledge” is a program that aims to help projects with patents and licences, interconnect international science teams, or help with research funding (Brno University of Technology, 2024).

### **2.2.2 BUT Student Entrepreneurship Award**

It is an entrepreneurial competition, which is organized in cooperation with BUT and South Moravian Innovation Centre (2.3.4). This competition spreads across the university as a whole and currently runs at BUT for its fifth year. The main targets of the competition are student teams and individuals who have a running projects or an idea which is has potential to be further developed during the competition. The teams are competing to raise money for their projects, while every year BUT supports the project in the amount of one million Czech crowns in total. This competition takes place from September until February every year and is formed in three rounds. First round is based on submitting a filled up form of questions about your project or idea for better description of the business and story behind. The form is build up upon three questions about an idea behind and handing in a video in the maximum length of ninety seconds where you describe the idea as a whole and determine the phase of project lifecycle in which the project currently is. Than other seven question about a business plan of the project, four question about the finances of the project, five question about your team you are working with on the project and lastly to describe the plan of the project, which spans on eight questions.

After successful enrolment there is a second round, which consists of in person five minute presentation in front of the committee, where you thoroughly present your idea and how would the funding from BUT would help your project with further development.

To the third and final round, are selected only ten project teams, who received 25,000 CZK after succeeding in the second round. In this round project teams present to the committee how efficiently did they used the money from the BUT funding for the project development and how big was the progress between second round in October and the final round presentation which takes place in February.

After the presentations of ten teams committee selects the winning team and award the ranking of the teams. Finally, the teams will receive funds from BUT, where the amount of money received depends on ranking and individual consideration of the committee.

(Brno University of Technology, 2024)

### **2.2.3 Rozvoj a realizace podnikatelského nápadu**

“Rozvoj a realizace podnikatelského nápadu” represents a voluntary lecture, which is available to students all across BUT and is worth four credits. Programme guarantor is doc. Ing. Vít Chlebovský, PhD, who offers its students a broad introduction to an entrepreneurial experience as far as the title of lecture suggests “Rozvoj a realizace podnikatelského nápadu” in the direct translation to English means “Business idea development and realisation”. The goal of this lecture, which focuses on student’s practice, is to develop an entrepreneurial mindset upon the BUT students and learn the whole process of how to develop a project in the right manners and calculate all the business aspects that come with entrepreneurship. The practicality of this lecture is based on the output that it seeks from the students. The output is based on implementation of self-created business plan to their own projects. The focus of this lecture is on team development and interactive learning with involvement of the mentors and practitioners from the field. The final output is supported by the lecture’s curriculum, which covers idea development, market verification of the commercial potential of an idea, business model creation, financial management of the project, enhancement of presentation skills, determination of financial sources for the project, implementation of business plan and introduction to the legal aspects of an entrepreneurship.

This lecture is also a key aspect for successful development of ContriBUTe ecosystem at the university. Students, who choose this lecture get to taste and touch of the entrepreneurial processes and learn how to work in teams, think creatively and critically assess risks in the meantime. The initiative by doc. Ing. Vít Chlebovský, PhD to form lecture, which creates space for students to get in touch with business creation, is very beneficial for ContriBUTe because groups people with drive and passion to start-up their project and create a priceless community, which is crucial for the expenditure of an entrepreneurial ecosystem across the university.

(Brno University of Technology, 2024)

#### **2.2.4 South Moravian Innovation Centre**

JIC is a shortened title for Jihomoravské inovační centrum, which translates to English as South Moravian Innovation Centre. This centre was founded by six entities in 2003 by South Moravian region, Brno municipality, Masaryk University, Brno University of Technology, Mendel University and University of Veterinary Sciences Brno. The main goal for creation for this institution was to support entrepreneurial and other business activities in the South Moravian region. (Businessinfo.cz, 2020)

Currently, JIC work closely in cooperation with institutions of higher education based in Brno, where this centre focuses on development and support of student projects based in South Moravian region. This institution helps the project teams with consulting their dilemma about further idea development, marketing ensuring funds for their project, provides mentoring and office premises required for the establishment of the company or consultancy services (South Moravian Innovation Centre, n.d.).

However, from my personal experience with JIC, while I was working on project Turnin (2.3.5) and asked JIC for help and consultancy. Nevertheless, we did not receive respond until we physically had to come to the JIC headquarters at Technological Park Brno. From my own perspective JIC did not have an interest to support or help with our project because they did not see money behind it so it was a waste of their time spent on us.

#### **2.2.5 Turnin**

Turnin was a student-led project, which I was a part of, formed by group of six undergraduate students, who during the project development studied ESD undergraduate programme at BUT Faculty of Business and Management.

The mission of this project was to create an online networking environment for students who want to work on entrepreneurial projects during their studies at BUT. From the beginning of our undergraduate study we have identified one crucial unused potential of BUT students, which was lack of networking between students from different faculties. In Turnin we believed that students of BUT have a great potential in the field of project development with their technological background. We identified this unrealized opportunity upon ourselves, when we had an ideas and did not know who to go to support us with their technological knowledge and experience, such as coders, engineers, architects, etc.

Upon this stimulus we have started with different type of researches across the university if there is such a platform or tool, where we would be able to communicate and offer our skillset or ideas to others to find new colleagues to the project teams. Nevertheless, there was no such platform so we started with research to find out if there is a demand form students for such a tool (2.4). The answer was, yes.

Based on the demand we started to work on platform, which would connect people within the whole university. As far as the innovation and programming of a new application would be very expansive and we had to create something that would work from the very moment of the development. We have chosen to run our platform on application called Discord. Based on our research we have found it is a most commonly used platform for communication, which would also satisfy our needs, among all students of BUT.

The platform had a solid beginning and worked very efficiently for our validation of concept. This platform was created on Discord and served us as minimum viable product and we were able to connect our own podcast media to it and new features which made the platform more vital. Unfortunately, the enthusiasm from the beginning of our six student team was gone too early and the activity on the platform without our administration went abruptly to zero.

Nowadays, the platform is inactive on Discord, and worked as a community hub where people can meet, video call, share their skills and field in which they study, present their ideas, read about new entrepreneurial competitions, meetings and conferences they shall attend and more.

### **2.3 Entrepreneurial networking platforms on other universities**

Since, BUT is interested in developing an entrepreneurial ecosystem at its institutions, according to the implementation plan for 2024, it is not a brand new innovative idea that does not work anywhere else. Modern educational trends pushes higher education institutions to let their students self-realise by their own by creating them environment where they are able to do so. Different universities and programmes have different approaches to a development of such environment. In that matter, I have chosen four different approaches by domestic and foreign educational institutions. Goal of this part of analyses is to identify strengths and weaknesses of each system at chosen institutions, that would help to determine the best possible solution for the proposal part of this thesis.

### **2.3.1 Masaryk University**

Masaryk University, shortened MUNI, is with ten faculties and 30,500 students the largest higher educational institution in South Moravia. Similarly to BUT, Masaryk University works in cooperation with South Moravian Innovation Centre to support demand for the entrepreneurship at the university (Masaryk University, 2024).

The entrepreneurship at this university is supported by various initiatives, such as: university wide courses focused on business development, workshops, conferences with field experts, networking meetings, mentoring and an entrepreneurial competition. Masaryk University obtained a domain “podnikavost.muni.cz” which is under the auspices of MUNI Technology Transfer Office. Under this domain students and employees of MUNI may find the overview of the initiative to support entrepreneurial projects at their university. The title of this initiative is called “Start Your Business” and consists of entrepreneurial counselling centre, Start Your Business competition, courses for entrepreneurial development and newsletter portal where useful information about successful projects and upcoming business oriented events (Masaryk University, 2024).

Entrepreneurial counselling centre of MUNI is a place to contact when its students need an advice in legal aspects, funding, development of an idea or just looking for right course in the field of entrepreneurship. When looking for such consultancy students are required to fill up a simple form where they writes name, contact details and describes their problem and reason for the need of consultancy (Masaryk University, 2024).

podnikavost.muni.cz

**Fill out the following form to sign up for an individual personal consultation with our experts.**

**Personal ID (UČO)**

**Name (required)**

**Surname (required)**

**E-mail (required)**

**Your text (required)**

**I am**  
 MUNI student  
 MUNI employee  
 other

**Preferred date for counseling (required)**

**How does it work?**

1. Fill in the form  
-
2. We will find the best consultant for you  
-
3. We will contact you to arrange a personal consultation  
-
4. Please prepare as much information about your idea or task as possible - to make the most out of it  
-
5. Consultation in progress  
-
6. Satisfied student  
-

*Figure 4 Sign-up form for mentoring reservation (Masaryk University, 2024)*

Furthermore, not only students may use this service provided by MUNI Technology transfer office but also MUNI employees, who seek help in this specific field. After filling in the form, the entrepreneurial counselling centre will pick the expert for consultation, who would be the best fit to help with the certain problem described in the form.

Start Your Business competition was established at Masaryk University in 2021 and encourages students of MUNI to validate, value and test their ideas during the competition timespan. This competition is organised in cooperation with South Moravian Innovation Centre and works on very similar basis as “Pojd’ podnikat!” at BUT (2.3.2). The competition is formed to three rounds. Students may enrol the competition by filling in the form with the description of an idea, which is same as the form at BUT entrepreneurial competition. Teams and ideas that proceed to the second round will present a short presentation in front of expert committee and the top ten teams will than proceed to the finals and earn 10,000 CZK. In the third round the committee will choose the ideas

and projects that were developed through the competition the most and used the funds from second round most wisely. The committee than splits the amount of 600,000 CZK among the teams that made it to the finals. (Masaryk University, 2024).

Newsletter portal third and final feature of MUNI’s entrepreneurial development initiative is the newsletter on their web page “podnikavost.muni.cz”. On the newsletter page MUNI presents its latest available courses related to business development, where the university offers to its students thirty courses from different faculties. Every MUNI student, employee and public person has an opportunity to subscribe for a MUNI Start Your Business Newsletter by filling up a simple form and sharing contact detail and an e-mail address. Each of the course is focused on some field of business. For example, Faculty of law is offering course “Contracting in International Trade”, Faculty of informatics offers “Innovation and entrepreneurship” and Faculty of sports is offering “Business in Sport”. MUNI uses its potential to offer every student some aspects of business that defines each faculty and these faculties contribute to an entrepreneurial community of MUNI its knowledge and skills. In the newsletter of MUNI students may also find part of the portal called Success stories. This portal introduces students and MUNI employees projects that were established at MUNI and were participating in the in the Start Your Business competition. This feature gives students and academic staff of MUNI to be inspired by previous projects by reading their success story and gives an opportunity to be reached out more easily by others, in the matter of networking. (Masaryk University, 2024).

*Table 1: Strengths and weaknesses of entrepreneurial networking platform at Masaryk University*

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Separate domain connected to the university’s main page, just for entrepreneurial content</li> <li>- Simple form for reaching out for consultancy</li> <li>- Entrepreneurial competition organized by university</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The redirection link from the main page on the webpage “podnikavost.muni.cz” is not trackable, very hard to find on the main page</li> <li>- The MUNI Start Your Business web page is not fully translated to English</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Faculties offers various courses from their field related to business</li> <li>- Project success stories are highlighted to be easily found on web page</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No communication platform or other online networking medium for students and academic staff of MUNI</li> </ul>
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*(Source: Own processing)*

**2.3.2 CEMS**

CEMS is master programme, which globally alliances world’s leading business schools with most recognized companies and shapes future leaders. CEMS programme was founded in 1988 as a cooperation between HEC Paris, ESADE, University of Cologne and Bocconi University. The goal of the programme is to become recognised global community that delivers the world’s best and responsible future leaders. Currently, CEMS programme partnerships thirty-three higher education institutions all around the world (CEMS, 2024).

As far as CEMS is a graduate higher education programme, in CEMS they realised that to create a community it is important to stay in touch with the students who already graduated the programme and had been through the system. The alumni students than may be an inspiration for the future candidates for the programme and CEMS have the opportunity to refer to the students who took it to the most prestigious positions in global companies as an inspiration how far can a student of CEMS take it within and after the study. Besides of taking care of an alumni community, the main priority for CEMS is to gain professional and international experience for at least one of four semester of the study. The goal is to culturally and intellectually network students within the partner higher education institutions all around the world. The synergy in the cooperation between universities, companies and alumni community is cornerstone for the establishment of prestigious and ambitious community of graduates such as CEMS is (CEMS, 2024).

Partnerships between universities is very important for healthy run of this programme. Students of CEMS are required to be sent to a partner university institution during their first or second semester based on their preferences. This partnership unlock students to enhance to community outside of



their home university and network with students from different cultural and intellectual background.

To deliver top class leaders of the future, CEMS closely cooperates with global companies which give the opportunity students to get in touch with the professional experience within the graduate study while working on real tasks set by the chosen company. In this case all three sides benefit from this situation. Programme itself receives money from the company, which gave its task to the students. The graduate students get the opportunity to critically self-realise themselves and use their unique skillset while working on real projects and maybe secure the opportunity to find a job straight after the study. Lastly, the companies have the opportunity to have a different approach to the task from the students and have the position to pick the best students for becoming an employee after the studies.

Being in touch with students who has already graduated is a significant part for sustainable community creation. After more than thirty-five years from the programme establishment, CEMS has formed alumni community which contributes to the community of present CEMS student ever since graduating and leaving CEMS. The alumni students simply want to give back what they received from the programme and hold online and in-person conferences on some certain topic all around the world. Each of the thirty-three universities forms CEMS club in which students may network and travel to visit and share the knowledge with other CEMS clubs around the world, to support the community (CEMS, 2024).

To take care of such a community and stay in touch with all present and graduated students CEMS programme has developed a unique platform just for the student of this programme. Through this platform students may get in touch with career centre which helps students with guiding through the professional life and finding the best job offer fit. It is an platform for announcements and showcasing upcoming networking events that takes place on some partnership university in online and in-person form.

From my personal view, the real deal breaker is the collaboration between the CEMS and portal called JobTeaser. This is a recruitment portal, where CEMS had developed their own section just for their students and may follow offers made just for them. CEMS's career centre empowered by JobTeaser offers students of CEMS to have the opportunity to follow panel meetings and

conferences hosted by former students of CEMS, who currently sit on high managerial positions in well-known corporations. Also students have the opportunity to follow and sign-up for workshops or courses introduced by companies such as LVMH, Bain & Company or Airbus. Furthermore, the CEMS Career centre offers you unique job opportunities made by the companies in cooperation with CEMS. Students have the opportunity to modify their requirements of the job position at this platform and afterwards receive notifications about a job fit on their e-mail account. (JobTeaser, 2024)

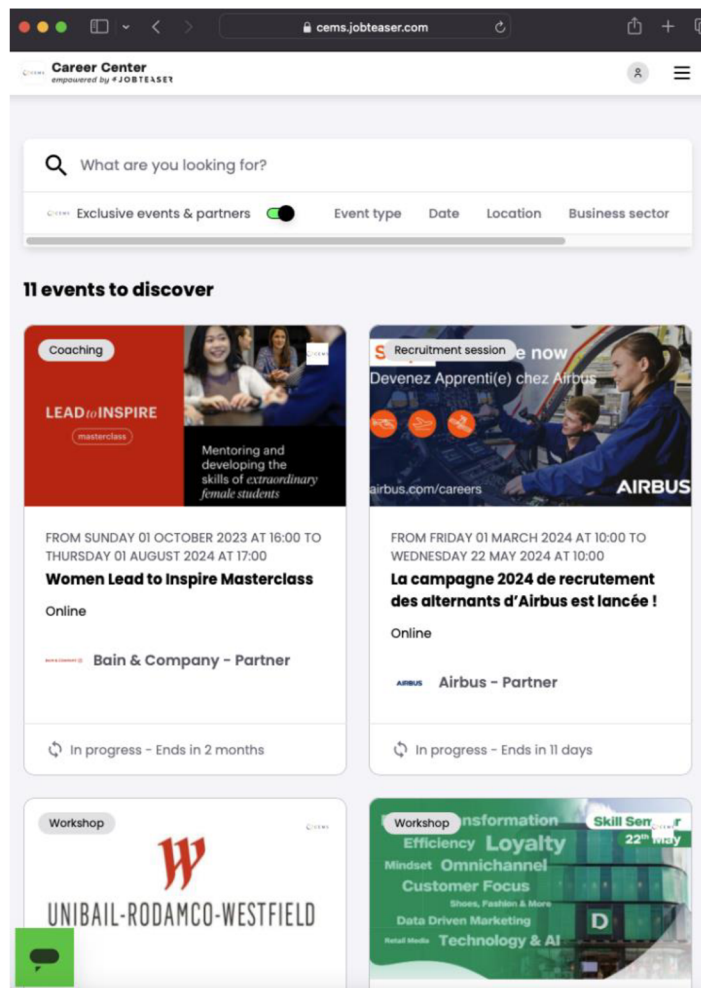


Figure 5: Landing page of CEMS Career Center (JobTeaser, 2024)

Moreover, this platform offers CEMS Insights, which is a newsletter which consists of the newest business news from the world as well as news from the CEMS conferences or individual CEMS clubs. This platform gives students the feeling of uniqueness and sets them right in the middle of the community by giving an opportunity to be one of few with access to special offers from multinational cooperation. Moreover, students than have the urge to contribute the community even after the studies to give back what they have gained and be an active part in the CEMS ecosystem.

*Table 2: Strengths and weaknesses of entrepreneurial networking platform at CEMS*

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Emphasis on community building</li> <li>- Strong support of the community by alumni students</li> <li>- Partnerships with other universities</li> <li>- Close cooperation with multinational companies</li> <li>- Made-to-measure platform for courses, conferences, workshops, job offers and insights under one solution</li> <li>- Offers just for students of the program (feeling of uniqueness)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No online networking platform for students</li> <li>- Low presentation opportunity for student’s success stories</li> </ul>

*(Source: Own processing)*

### **2.3.3 Massachusetts Institute of Technology**

Massachusetts Institute of Technology, shortened MIT, is ranked by QS World University Rankings for 2024 as the best university in the world (QS Topuniversities, 2024). Due to its ranking and reputation MIT is taken as an role model in the field of education among other educational institutions.

MIT offers networking which is beneficial for the development of an entrepreneurial community at its institutions. The best university of 2024 had established Martin Trust Center for MIT

Entrepreneurship. This institution helps ambitious students to meet in one physical workspace, which is available to MIT students 24/7. The premises give an opportunity for the students to have a workspace, where teams may ideate, meet and network together in one office space. For networking purposes it is very important to have a shared safe space where you can physically come for an advice and meet with the mentors. Such premises may significantly enhance entrepreneurial community development at the university, in the matter of creatin a hub for the community. Martin Trust Center offers students in its premises services as Entrepreneurs-in-Residence and “MIT delta v” accelerator. (MIT, n.d.)

Entrepreneurs-in-Residence is the cornerstone of the Martin Trust Centre, it is a service where in field business leaders help mentor students by giving personal advises on startup life. Students may request for the mentoring by filling up the form and scheduling a meeting or just running to Martin Trust Center. This service helps students to settle down their problems easily and quickly in one workspace. The portal also contains the full list of mentors, coaches and experts who are available in case of looking for an advise (MIT, n.d.). This simple feature helps users of Martin Trust Center to read through the expertise of the available mentors and contact them directly.

Another perspective to how to effectively use the premises for networking and innovation at the university is by forming an entrepreneurial accelerator during summer period – MIT delta v accelerator. Since June to the begining of academic year in September teams of MIT students co-work together in the Martin Trust Center. Teams go through whole ideation and business processes within three months of summer period. This approach enables students to effectively network and share their unique skillsets while contributing to their projects by own knowledge base. During the process teams will get the opportunity to be mentored and have one on one coaching sessions with the professionals from the project field. Also during the three month accelerating hackathon the students will get in touch with guest panel meetings, seminars and network building during the summer where experts will help students understand the entrepreneurial frameworks and create new bonds with people from the field. After the three month summer delta v accelerator students teams have the opportunity to take a one step further and during the first months of the academic year apply for the fundraising, where the teams get an opportunity to pitch their projects to potential investors (MIT, n.d.)

In my personal opinion, available premises are the most important aspect of forming a community at university and networking. People naturally look for safe spaces where they would have the opportunity to network with others with similar interests. Where is space than there can be done networking initiatives such as hackathons, conferences, job fairs, or other activities related to networking and community development.

*Table 3: Strengths and weaknesses of entrepreneurial networking platform at MIT*

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Premises available for students 24/7</li> <li>- Easier mentoring and coaching</li> <li>- Community space for innovators</li> <li>- Creating entrepreneurial activities to support the community and network within the premises</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mentors must be present in the centre</li> <li>- Premises are more costly than online platform (energy and cleaning costs)</li> </ul>

*(Source: Own processing)*

## **2.4 Communication channels used for networking at Brno University of Technology**

When establishing and creating an entrepreneurial networking platform for university, it is important to choose the best possible medium that would hold this platform. The medium for networking has three requirements, needs to be well known by students, simple to use on any electronic device and contain features made for community development. After identifying the most popular and used mediums during the focus group session, I have chosen for this analysis only the platforms that were mentioned as popular medium and meet my three requirements.

### **2.4.1 Facebook**

Facebook is a social media with the most users in the world, where it monthly connects more than three billion users under one platform from all around the world. That means almost thirty-seven percent of the world's population is using Facebook on monthly basis (Oladipo, 2024).

Based on the results from the focus group Facebook is the most used social media platform among all students. Which approves the information about Facebook being the largest networking platform. However, it is not the most preferred platform anymore. Students who attended focus group session had admitted that they still use Facebook as a platform, nevertheless just its chatting section in the form of Messenger application.

Students of BUT are not going through Facebook posts on the main portal, due to the fact that it looks like mess and nowadays contains large amounts of false information. In that matter, it would be non-efficient if the community blogs or posts would be created on this platform due to potential inactivity from the students.

### **2.4.2 Discord**

Platform Discord is currently ranking on the eighteenth place among the world's most used platforms on monthly basis, with more than 150 million monthly users. Discord was formed as platform made for gamers, so it contains many high-quality features for easy communication between users in the real time. It is user-friendly platforms where each user is able to create own server, which is fully customizable and works on computers as well as through the mobile app. Nowadays, not just gamers use these features of Discord but also universities, businesses or other communities. (Oladipo, 2024)

Per my research, students of BUT are used to work on Discord platform and work with Discord on everyday basis, mostly the computer science and engineering students. Students of BUT use this platform for both personal and educational purposes, where they use this platform for easier online cooperation while working on group projects or other team based assessments. Therefore, it is positive that students already use and are familiar with the features that this platform offers.

Nevertheless, after the validation of using Discord as a minimum viable product for the project Turnin, students who were not familiar with Discord were not encouraged enough to create a new profile on other social media platform. However, that could have been caused by the low encouragement from the platform activity and propagation of the Turnin Discord, which did not push the students to log in to Turnin networking server.

### **2.4.3 Slack**

Slack is an communication and collaboration platform developed by multinational cooperation Salesforce. It is a platform that provides an opportunity to easily connect software the user is already using with this platform and simply collaborate with the team through this platform. Slack is also connecting users of this platform all around the world and helps with easily reach out to others. This platform relates to be user-friendly and helps teams with productivity and collaboration. Slack offers computer and mobile app solution (Smith, 2024).

Per focus group evaluation with BUT students, mostly students just heard about slack but have never worked with this platform before. In that matter, it would be risky to start minimal viable product on this platform due to low natural involvement of students within this platform.

## **2.5 Evaluation of interest in entrepreneurship of BUT students**

The next part of analytical part is the mapping of the interest for the start-up networking platform at BUT. As well as conducting research to identify needs and requirements with the potential users of the start-up networking platform. This research was conducted through quantitative research, focus group research and leading of interviews.

### **2.5.1 Interest of Brno University of Technology students in entrepreneurial projects**

In autumn 2023, a in person quantitative study was conducted to gather data from students in front of their respective faculties. To map trends and assess the willingness of Brno University of Technology students to engage in or initiate their own projects, a descriptive survey was chosen as the most appropriate method to ensure accurate data. This research aimed to provide a broad overview of whether BUT students face common challenges such as a shortage of entrepreneurial support networks to nurture their ambitions and ideas, as well as a lack of collaboration between faculties. Data collection took place over four days, with each day focusing on a different faculty. (Varga, 2023)

The survey was only collected in person.

The survey was created upon the collected almost three-hundred answers from students of ten different faculties, who had five questions to answer and also asked for contact details to be reached after the survey.

1. At which faculty are you currently studying?
2. Are you interested in innovative projects (e.g. start-ups, research, events)?
3. Would you be interested in being part of an innovative/start-up project?
4. Would you like to join the start-up community?
5. Would you like to join a team or do you already have your own idea and would like to build your own team?

The answers in numbers and graphs:

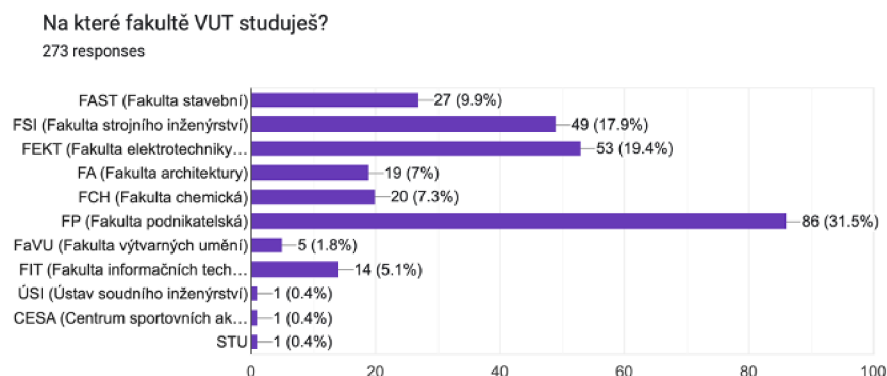


Figure 6 Results of the question: Which faculty do you study at?

Legend: FAST (Faculty of Civil Engineering BUT), FSI (Faculty of Mechanical Engineering BUT), FA (Faculty of Architecture), FCH (Faculty of Chemistry BUT), FP (Faculty of Business and Management), FaVU (Faculty of Fine Arts BUT), FIT (Faculty of Information Technology), ÚSI (Institute of Forensic Engineering), CESA (Centre of Sport Activities)

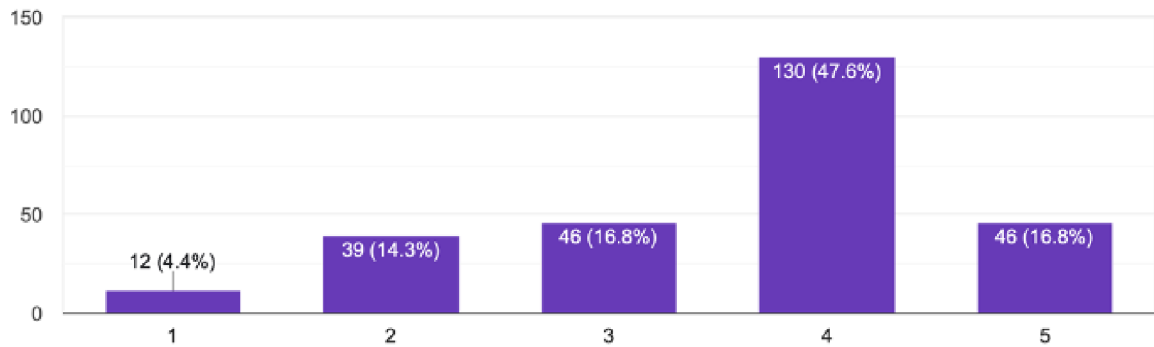
Source:

Internal research



### Zajímají tě inovativní projekty (např. start-upy, výzkumy, eventy)?

273 responses



*Figure 7 Results of the question: Are you interested in innovative projects?*

*Answers: 1 - not at all 5 - yes, very much*

*(Source: Internal research)*

This graph depicts the interest of the students of BUT in innovative projects, where almost two thirds 64,4% of respondents are interested or very interested in this field. This scathes the possible interest of such innovative programmes and lectures would be very popular if offered by the university. These results show that there is a huge perspective in focusing on innovative sectors, start-ups and other relatively new projects to future students.

Měl/a bys zájem se stát součástí inovativního/start-upového projektu?

273 responses

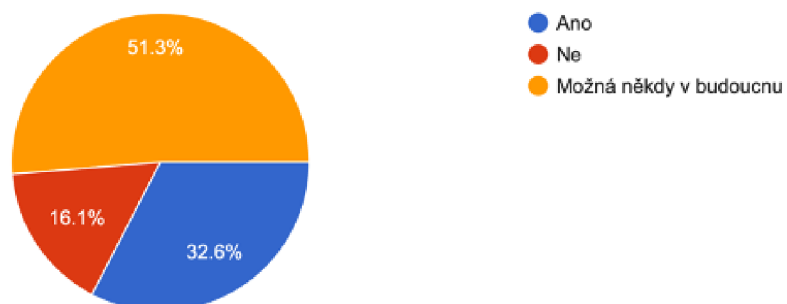


Figure 8 Results of the question: Are you interested in being part of an innovative startup/project?

Answers: Blue - Yes, Red - No, Orange - Maybe sometime in the future

Source: Internal research

Připojil/a by ses ke komunitě start-upistů?

273 responses

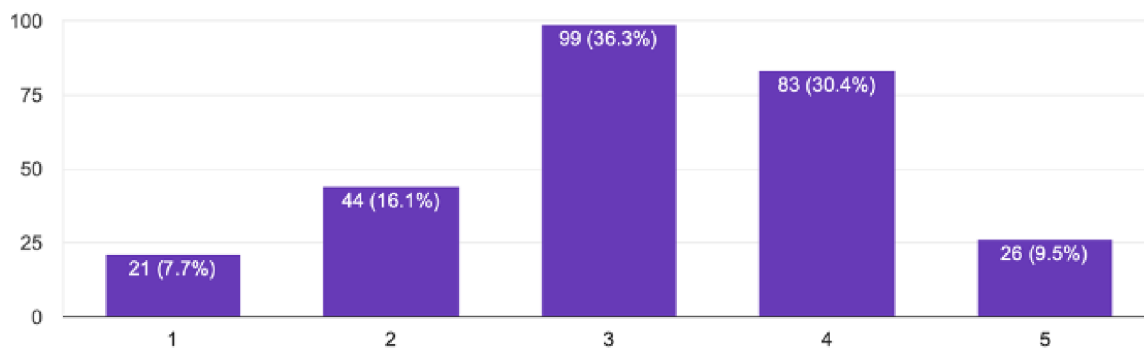


Figure 9 Results of the question: Would you join the community of start-upists?

Answers: 1 - not at all 5 - yes, very much

Source: Internal research

Almost one third of the respondents would like to contribute to the entrepreneurial community of Brno University of Technology by joining some start-up or other innovative project while continuing their study at BUT. It is just a half of people who are interested in the innovative projects, however, taking into consideration that yet at some faculties it is difficult to work on entrepreneurial projects in the parallel with the study, due to difficulty and the aspect of time consuming by their studies at BUT. Nevertheless, only 16.1% of the respondents were solely against being a part of any start-up or other innovative project during their studies. This results open the doors for a perspective that if students would have the opportunity to be part of an entrepreneurial community and would have spare time to work on their own projects. In the meantime 39,9% of respondents were keen or very keen to join an start-up community at BUT, with the opportunity to network and learn insights from the field of ideation and establishing the project and afterwards the establishment of the legal entity.

Chtěl/a by ses připojit k nějakému týmu nebo už máš vlastní nápad a chtěl/a bys budovat svůj vlastní tým?

273 responses

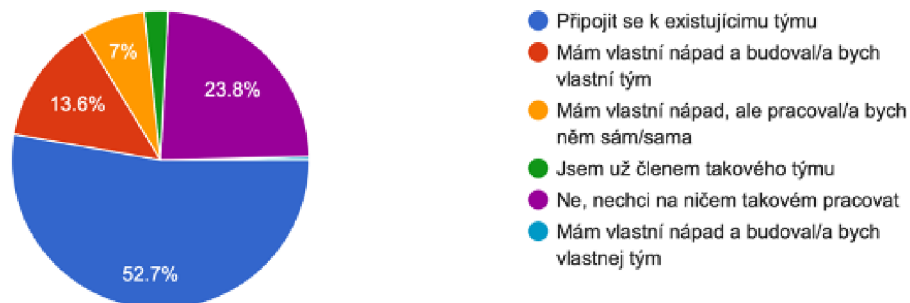


Figure 10 Results of the question: Would you like to join team project or do you have your own idea and you are looking to build your own team?

Figure 10. Results of the question: Would you like to join team project or do you have your own idea and you are looking to build your own team?

Answers: Blue - I would like to join existing team, Red - I have my own idea to develop own team, Orange - I have my own idea, but I prefer to work alone, Purple - No, I have no interest to work in such a project, Green - I am already part of such a team

Source: Internal research

By using the quantitative research method in the form of in person collected survey this process was concluded as successful. The results supported the hypothesis of the need of student to have time for entrepreneurial self-realisation due to the fact that there is a lack of cooperation between faculties and students who are eager to work on their projects.

(Varga, 2023)

### **2.5.2 Problem validation**

For the focus group research, two groups were formed, each consisting of four participants. The students were selected from different faculties for the research purposes, to understand perspectives of students from all educational environments and gain a broader overview of their communication channels and other trends in their academic lives. Each focus group session lasted about an hour. After all participants signed an agreement allowing the session to be recorded, two audio recordings were created, one for each session. These research sessions occurred on December 8th, 2023, at the Faculty of Business and Management in Brno. The research schedule was divided into 5 to 20-minute blocks, for both sessions. List of research questions:

1. Introduction of the research - 5 min
2. Icebreaking activities (What is your name? How are you? How was your day? Where do you study?) - 10 min
3. Introducing the problem to participants and asking if they have any entrepreneurial networking platform at their faculty – 10 min
4. Discussion about the networking platforms they use – 10 min
5. How can university support students who wants to self-realise themselves?
6. Discussion about possible solutions – 20 min
7. Conclusion. - 5 min

End of the session.

After the focus group session the recordings were examined and evaluated in the form of a summary. The key points from the focus evaluation are described in the table number 4. (Varga, 2023)

Table 4 Evaluation of focus group

Interesting points	Recommendations
Preferring e-mail communication as networking platform	One platform for all the information about entrepreneurship events
Free credits for participating in the BUT Student Entrepreneurship award competition	Discord is the most preferred platform for engineering and IT students
University should give students more time for self-realisation	Organise meetings with representatives of all faculties and discuss about entrepreneurship at BUT
Participants were shocked that they could self-realise in entrepreneurial way at BUT	No need for communication in the networking platform, just to present yourself and share a contact
	Mentoring would be useful

(Source: Own processing)

### 2.5.3 Requirements of academic workers at BUT for start-up networking platform

This research is concerned with analysing the needs and requirements for the networking platform proposal by academic staff of BUT and the main initiators of creating the ContriBUTE entrepreneurial ecosystem at the university. The main goal of this research is to identify the requirements for the start-up networking platform by three respondents, who are responsible for the development of ContriBUTE entrepreneurial ecosystem at BUT, to cover their requirements in the proposal part of this thesis. Respondents:

- doc. Ing. Robert Zich, Ph.D
- doc. Ing. Vít Chlebovský, PhD
- Ing. Viktor Fiala

After the analysis I will be able to pick the requirements and cover them into the minimum viable product of the platform in the proposal part to fit the needs of the founders of this ecosystem.

For the analysis I have chosen a qualitative approach, by leading a debate about the specific requirements on 25<sup>th</sup> of April 2024 during ContriBUTE meeting at Technological Park in Brno, Czech Republic. Afterwards, I had to proceed one more meeting with Ing. Viktor Fiala, with whom we arranged an online meeting on Microsoft Teams on 2<sup>nd</sup> of May 2024 to get precise vision of his requirements for the networking platform.

My goal was to get as much creative and out of the box ideas and requirements for the platform so I did not want to influence the recipients answers by giving my personal suggestions or vision. In that matter I have formed the main interview question as follows: What are your requirements for start-up networking platform, that should cover the online phase of an entrepreneurial ecosystem ContriBUTE at Brno University of Technology?

The answers from the discussion are analysed in the form of table, where I pinpoint the common topics all three respondents mentioned as a key factors for the networking platform. Each of the respondents had a different approach to these key aspects, therefore each perspective is described in the table number 5 and table number 6.

<b>Main requirements</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Description of their approach</b>
Transfer of knowledge	R1	Channel where students would be able to share their knowledge and skills and offer others their capabilities in vision of joining project team
	R2	Sharing successful as well as unsuccessful stories of projects through this platform, by which other users of the portal may be inspired
	R3	Channel in form of job portal, where project teams can present their ideas and seek for other students to join
Mentoring and courses	R1	Promote entrepreneurial courses and lectures through this platform
	R2	Form an online panel discussions or round tables through this platform with a guest expert from certain field on which the theme of the discussion would be, where students have an opportunity to interact and give questions  Also creation of alumni community would enhance the process of student networking, people from alumni community should actively participate in panel discussions and contribute to the BUT ecosystem
	R3	BUT mentors should have a separate section in this platform, that would work as advise desk for project teams

*Table 5 Key requirements from the interviews with academic staff of BUT – Part 1*

Information portal	R1	Channel from which students would receive notifications about the newest activities, courses, conferences and other info related to ContriBUTe
	R2	A calendar of upcoming events happening at BUT related to entrepreneurship or business development
	R3	Channel with useful frameworks and guidelines to help with project development

*Table 6 Key requirements from the interviews with academic staff of BUT – Part 2*

#### **2.5.4 Requirements of students with established projects from BUT**

This part of the analytical assessment recognises the requirements of students who has started a project at BUT. In this section I identify aspects, which the start-up networking platform must contain to ensure student user-base on the portal. For this part of analysis I have chosen the qualitative approach in form od individual interviews with three co-founders of start-ups formed at BUT. While two of the three projects had won the Pojd' podnikat! competition. These projects are still successfully running their businesses and heading forward to become serious players in the market. The respondents for this analysis are:

- Ing. Ondřej Venclík
- Ing. Lukáš Jablončík
- Bc. Šimon Lipták

The goal of this part of an analysis is to evaluate needs and requirements of student project teams among the start-up networking platform to ensure their activity on the platform by adjusting the proposal of the networking platform to their needs.

I arranged an interview with each respondent individually and proceeded the interview through Google Meets from 18.4.2024-24.4.2024.

Similarly, as it was with the interviewing founders of ContriBUTe ecosystem, I formed the main question for project co-founders as: What are your requirements for the sturt-up networking platform for BUT in terms of your project development?



Responses are described in the one major table as far as each respondent mentioned different requirements and needs of their projects from the platform. In that matter, I list the different needs and approaches within the table number 4.

*Table 7 Key requirements from the interviews with co-founders of start-up projects from BUT*

<b>Requirement</b>	<b>Description of the approach</b>
Connecting faculties within BUT	Organising online meetings where a representatives of each faculty would be represented and would be involved in the networking process
List of available laboratories and workspaces	Channel with a list of available laboratories and workspaces for BUT entrepreneurs, across BUT
Online networking	Sharing offers to work with project teams or present yourself when to be contacted by a project team
VUT App	Have the networking platform on the VUT app
Member background	Each member should have highlighted skills and educational background right on the beginning while entering the platform
List of BUT projects	Section with a list of BUT projects with a contact to be easily reachable
List of BUT experts from field	Section with the experts and mentors to be easily reachable with highlighted expertise

*(Source: Own processing)*

## **2.6 Assessment of the analytical part**

The goal of an analytical part of this thesis was met by identifying the current state of an entrepreneurial networking at the university. In the analytical part I focused for gathering data from students, academic staff and the running BUT start-up co-founders and evaluate their needs.

Firstly, the analysis of the BUT's Implementation plan for the strategic intent of Educational and creative activities of the Brno University of Technology for the year 2024 (Janíček, 2024) is planning to put a significant effort into development of ContriBUTE programme. The aim of this programme develops safe entrepreneurial environment for students, who seek for self-realisation during their studies. For these ambitious students and academic staff ContriBUTE is currently offering lectures and courses related to business and project development as well as opportunity to validate an idea or project through the BUT Student Entrepreneurship award. This competition was developed through cooperation between South Moravian Innovation Centre and BUT, where students may validate and fundraise their project or ideas.

Second of all from the analytical part, there are similar initiatives at the higher educational institution, from which BUT may take an inspiration. Each of the analysed institutions offered unique proposition that BUT may adopt. For example:

- Format of signing up for mentoring at Masaryk University
- Create partnerships with regional and multinational companies and offer panel discussions, meetings or workshops for students and academic staff to be involved in processes as in CEMS
- Creating strong alumni community which would help with community development of the university as it works at CEMS
- Creating common workspaces as community hubs for like-minded students and enabling networking and develop a entrepreneurship centre similar to one on MIT

Lastly, I would like to conclude the evaluation of the requirements of students and academic staff from the interviews and researches. The researches approved the hypothesis, that an entrepreneurial networking platform is wanted by the students. People of BUT are looking for a platform that would help them with recruitment of new colleagues for the projects, get inspired

and have all the information about entrepreneurial related events, courses, stories and activities on one place. The platform would create an opportunity for both BUT student and academic staff, from which to projects of BUT could benefit.

However, it is important to also identify potential risks and opportunities of the start-up networking platform. This final analysis would help with identifying the right approach for the third part of the thesis which is the proposal part. In table 8 is locating the description of potential benefits and zhread of the entrepreneurial platform for BUT.

*Table 8 Analysis of Opportunities and Threads relating to start-up networking platform*

<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Threads</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Connecting faculties of BUT</li> <li>- Networking students and academic staff within the university to develop deeper knowledge transfer</li> <li>- All information about entrepreneurial topics in one place</li> <li>- Developing creative community with ability of thinking critically</li> <li>- Fulfil technological potential of BUT by implementing the knowledge into real projects</li> <li>- Using laboratories, workspaces and professional facilities of BUT for testing and validation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students of BUT do not have often time to spare within their study</li> <li>- Not enough of content to actively administrate the platform</li> <li>- Faculties not allowing to use professional premisses to students</li> <li>- Low interest in entrepreneurial development from BUT staff</li> </ul>

*(Source: Own processing)*

### **3 Proposal part**

In this last part of the thesis, where the theory and analytics comes to conclusion and the gathered data will be taken into development of framework for the start-up networking platform at BUT. The aim of this part of the thesis is to evaluate the data from the researches by using lean canvas as strategic management template. The goal is to incorporate the recommendations and requirements of students and academic staff of BUT into the proposal of start-up networking platform in the format of minimum viable product.

#### **3.1 Definition of key aspects for the start-up networking platform**

Firstly, it is important to set a key characteristics of the platform that would figure as the pillars, based on the data gathered during an analytical part. After defining the key aspects, from which the platform must be build, than the development and implementation part of this proposal may begin.

##### **Networking**

As the title of this thesis suggests the first priority and purpose of this platform is networking, respectively connecting students and academic staff of BUT within each other and stop separating them within the faculty. The platform should make the process of networking between the faculties easier and group people with similar mindset on one common virtual space.

##### **Transfer of knowledge**

Another key aspect of the platform can be dedicated from the data collected during quantitative research. It is visible that students are willing to work on an entrepreneurial projects and form a teams. In that manner, it is crucial that one of the pillars would be transfer of knowledge, moreover the opportunity for the students and academic staff of BUT to share their skillset and offer a helping hand to others who seek help from someone with knowledge and experience from the field.

##### **Informatisation**

As far as the ContriBUTE ecosystem, is being built at higher education institution the platform must fulfil also educational purposes and present students opportunities to develop their business skills in the form of courses, lectures or conferences, which students may attend. This key aspect

also consists of promoting entrepreneurial competitions run by the university and also presenting running projects started at BUT, which can figure as a major inspiration for the next BUT entrepreneurs.

## **Community**

Initiative ContriBUTE is working on creating a sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystem at Brno University of Technology, where students and academic staff may self-realise themselves by working alone or with the teams on their projects. When there is plan to build an ecosystem for entrepreneurial students it is important to firstly develop an environment where student would have the opportunity to create, test and success. And an environment is built by the strong community, which is the other key aspect for the platform to create active innovative community at BUT. The establishment of community of people with entrepreneurial mindset would also ensure the activity on the platform, because the platform would figure as online community hub.

## **3.2 Strategic plan**

Before development of the platform it is important to define the development framework by visually describing the connections and meaning between each category. Nevertheless, before the definition of the framework it is important to identify the strategic aspects of the platform. For identifying the best possible approach for development of the start-up networking platform, for the university, I have chosen a lean canvas model. By filling up all nine elements of the business behind the platform it will help with identifying possible procedure with creating a platform's development framework.

<b>PROBLEM</b> <small>List your top 1-3 problems.</small>	<b>SOLUTION</b> <small>Outline a possible solution for each problem.</small>	<b>UNIQUE VALUE PROPOSITION</b> <small>Simple, clear, compelling message that states why you are different and worth paying attention.</small>	<b>UNFAIR ADVANTAGE</b> <small>Something that cannot easily be bought or copied.</small>	<b>CUSTOMER SEGMENTS</b> <small>List your target customers and users.</small>
	<b>KEY METRICS</b> <small>List the key numbers that tell you how your business is doing.</small>		<b>CHANNELS</b> <small>List your path to customers (direct or outbound).</small>	
<b>EXISTING ALTERNATIVES</b> <small>List how these problems are solved today.</small>	<b>HIGH-LEVEL CONCEPT</b> <small>List your "It's a X analogy" e.g. YouTube = Flickr for videos.</small>			<b>EARLY ADOPTERS</b> <small>List the characteristics of your ideal customers.</small>
<b>COST STRUCTURE</b> <small>List your fixed and variable costs.</small>		<b>REVENUE STREAMS</b> <small>List your sources of revenue.</small>		

Figure 11 Lean canvas model (Source: Riabie, 2020)

### 3.2.1 Problem

There is lack of networking of students and academic staff of BUT between the individual faculties. Which also contributes to an unrealized potential in supporting students and academic staff with their self-realisation in the field of entrepreneurship, within the studies. Lack of space for students and academic staff of BUT, where they would be to present their idea or project for seeking new experienced members to a team from the university and also other way around.

There is no informational portal, which would give people from BUT the overview of an entrepreneurial opportunities at the university, such as: courses, competitions, mentoring, conferences or even laboratories and workspaces. The university's professional facilities are not used to its full potential by not offering the availability of these premises to students from whole university for testing and prototyping their projects.

### 3.2.2 Customer segments

The potential customers/users of start-up networking portal for the BUT would be primarily:

- Ambitious students who want to work on their or someone else's project within their studies and network
- BUT staff with an idea, project or willingness to help other projects
- People of BUT who wants to find information about upcoming BUT's business events and opportunities that the university offers
- Mentors, coaches and people with expertise who want to help BUT projects with development

### **3.2.3 Revenue streams**

Financial support from:

- Brno University of Technology
- Ministry of education, youth and sport
- Partnership cooperation
- South Moravian Innovation Centre

### **3.2.4 Solution**

To solve the defined problem, the solution would be an establishment of a start-up networking platform that would be connected to the BUT's main web page to be easily reachable. This portal would provide networking between people of BUT by offering their skills and presenting ideas/projects. And also give an overview information what is going on at the university in terms of entrepreneurship:

- The support provided by BUT
- Opportunities at BUT in terms of workspaces, lectures, funding, mentoring, etc.

### **3.2.5 Unique Value Proposition**

Platform, where entrepreneurs of BUT can easily reach out to other like-minded people and network. Have an general overview of what is going on at the university in terms of entrepreneurial support and development.

### **3.2.6 Effective channels**

Before being an user: word of mouth, promotion by BUT messages on the BUT app, posters at faculties, promotion on the main webpage of BUT

During using the platform: Discord

After leaving platform: notifications from the platform about the newest events, projects, offers, etc.

### **3.2.7 Key metrics**

- At least one active administrator of the platform
- At least 100 active users
- 15 active projects

### **3.2.8 Cost structure**

On the beginning for the development of platform and validation of its MVP. The cost is zero, thus the network would be on Discord and yet would not need subscribed content.

However, there will need to be an administrator that takes care of the platform who involves and develops the community. This person would most likely should be paid to ensure the motivation. Maximum of 10,000 CZK a month, preferably it should be a BUT student.

### **3.2.9 Unfair Advantage**

This start-up networking platform would be part of ContriBUTe ecosystem, which comes under the knowledge transfer office, which is part of rectorate. In that matter, the platform would be supported by the Brno University of Technology as a whole.

## **3.3 Development of start-up networking platform for BUT**

The development framework of start-up networking platform must describe the function of the platform and showcase the process of development. For this solution I have created two frameworks that describes to connection functionality of the platform. The second framework describes the four phases of the platform's development process.



### 3.3.1 Connectivity framework

In the figure 12 the framework describes the connection between the community of users, entrepreneurs and project teams. All these users are represented by one institution - Brno University of Technology. Under this educational institution every potential user of the platform is working or studying at one of eight faculties or one of three university institutes. Therefore, the potential users of the platform are presented by a great technological knowledge, which could be beneficial for the university as a great promotion. As well as, the university as a great institution has the ability to support users of the platform by funding.

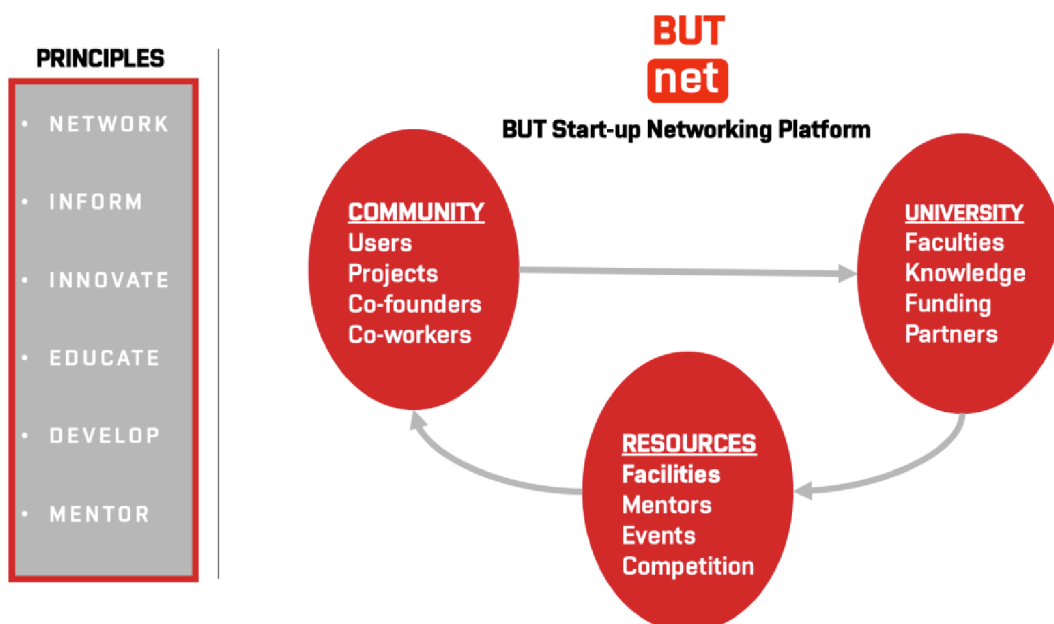


Figure 12 Description of connectivity between platform's subjects (Source: own processing)

On the other hand university, besides the knowledge power and funding, may support its students and academic staff in the field of entrepreneurial development by providing its professional laboratories and workspaces, from which BUT's entrepreneurs could benefit by using them for testing, validating and community hubs.

To finalise the figure 12, users of the BUT networking platform offers to the university its project and ideas, which the university may use for its promotion and partnerships. In return the educational institution provides these people a support in the matter of professional advice,

equipment, spaces, inspirational and educational events and a chance to validate an idea through university competition. That forms a fully networked entrepreneurial community at the university grounds.

### 3.4 Analysis implementation

For the implementation part of gathered data from the analytical part, covers the list of recommendations for the development of the platform. This section also contain the evaluation of the benefits that the implementation bring to the platform, which is evaluated in the form of minimum viable product based on my inactive project platform – Turnin server.

#### 3.4.1 List of recommendations

From the gathered data during the second part of this thesis I created a list of recommendations for a platform implementation based on the requirements by students, project teams and academic staff of the platform (table 5, table 6 and table 7). The list consists of the evaluated answers and aspects that the platform should contain. Afterwards, if eligible for the further implementation of the recommendations into a MVP for the early-adopters of the platform is evaluated in the “MVP Feature” column in table number 6.

*Table 9 List of recommendations towards start-up networking platform with MVP evaluation of applicable features*

<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>MVP Feature</b>
Create a category for the upcoming events, competitions and meetings	YES
Use the BUT app as the platform holder	NO
Channel for presenting offers to work in project teams	YES
Create event calendar with an upcoming events	YES
List of BUT projects	YES
List of entrepreneurial lectures and courses at BUT	YES

List of available premises at BUT for student project teams	YES
Bring partnership companies of BUT to the platform for job offers	NO
Share success and unsuccess stories of student project teams	YES
Create platform where the users can get notification from new updates	YES
List of BUT experts and mentors to be easily reached out	YES
Share news of project achievements for inspiration	YES

*(Source: Own processing)*

### **3.4.2 Implementation into platform development**

For the implementation of the eligible recommendations into a minimum viable product form I have chosen to use template of my inactive server on Discord - Turnin (2.3.5). After an evaluation of the requirements and needs into a list of recommendations I have evaluated that the best channel to build start-up networking platform is Discord. Based on its functionality on the computers and mobile devices, user-friendly experience and the fact that students of BUT are more familiar with Discord rather than Slack.

By taking the proposal part one step further and implement the gathered data into the MVP platform format, I want to deliver usable product ready for the validation by the early-adopters. In the next figures I showcase my proposal for the start-up networking platform. All visuals in the figures work as demo and are fictional for the showcasing purposes. For purposes of the proposal part of this thesis I named the platform “BUT net”.



*Figure 13 Logo of start-up networking platform – only for purposes of this thesis*

*(Source: own processing)*

Figure 14. is showcasing the landing page of the BUT net, which can be accessed by users through an invitation link. Every new user of the platform shall choose its role, which depend on the field, that the user is currently studying or has an expertise in. By choosing the role the user will automatically receive a notification if there is a request for such specialization in the project section of the portal.

On the left side of the networking platform there are listed five important sections of BUT net and seven categories below these sections. The sections are related to the knowledge transfer and offers easy access to the portals with project offers, position offers, project news, notification centre and redirection link to the ContriBUTe main web page.

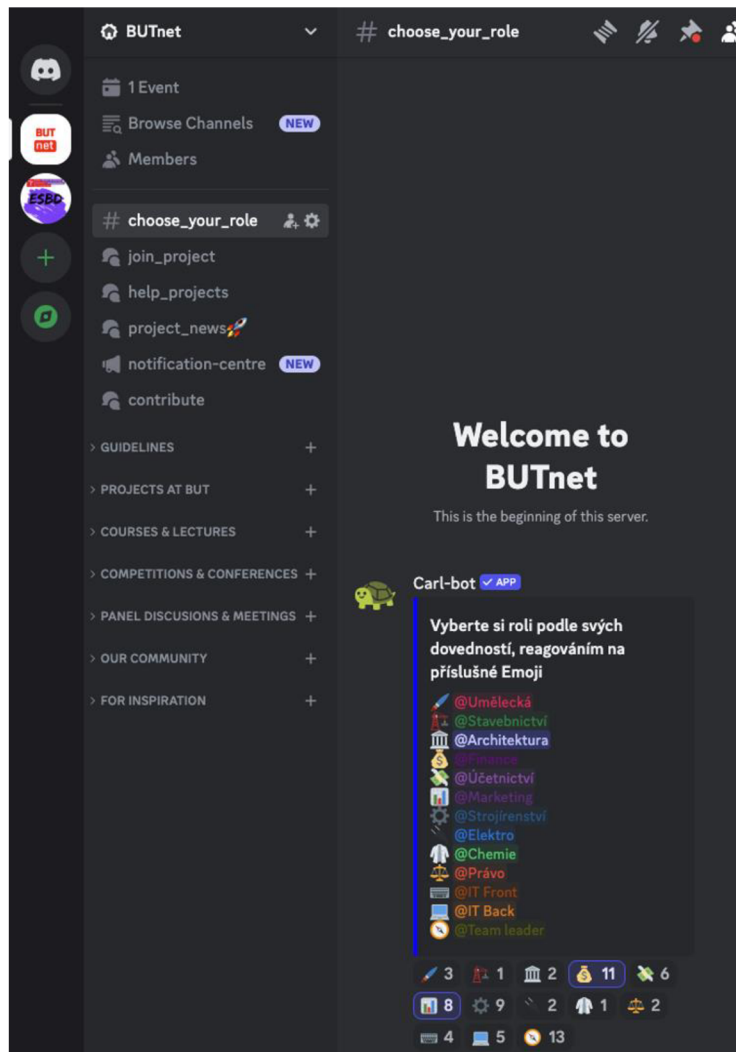


Figure 14 BUT net landing page (Source: own processing)

## Event calendar

In the BUT net's header on the left, is an event calendar, which shows the amount of upcoming entrepreneurial events that could enrich users of the platform. This feature help users easily track the events that are happening in the closest time period. The event calendar shows you exact time, date and address of the nearest meetings, conferences or other related events. By clicking on the calendar sign the user will get all the needed information with the description of the events. Users

of the BUT net may also check the rate of interested people from the platform who are planning to attend the event.

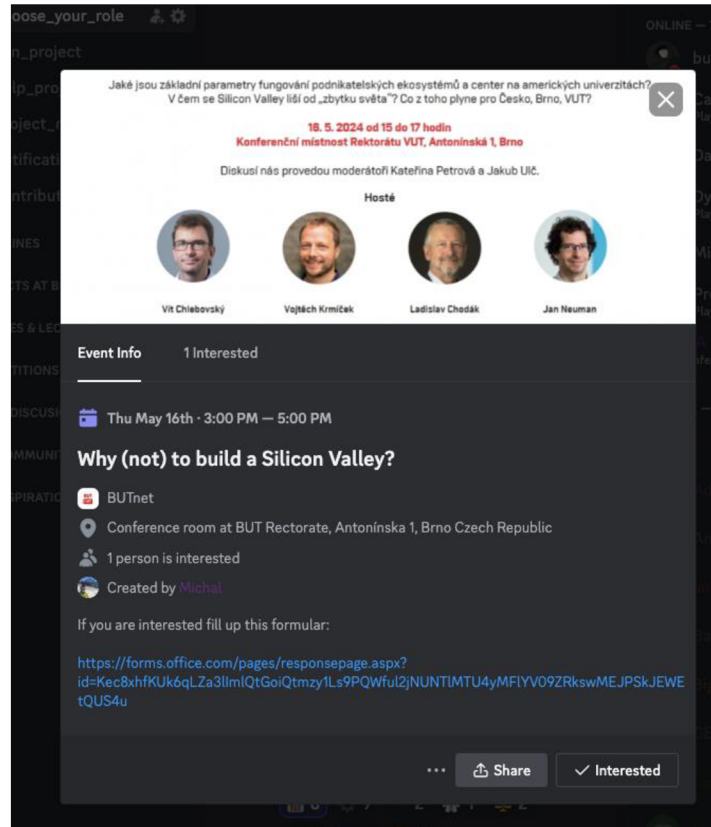


Figure 15 BUT net event calendar (Source: own processing)

### Transfer of knowledge section

This part of the platform consists of five sections that contributes to the development of the knowledge transfer within BUT. If the platform's user has an idea or project, for which is seeking colleagues to form an entrepreneurial team, there is section join\_project.

The join\_project section allows users who has ideas or business projects to share their offer on the BUT net platform and find the right people for their project. Every user of BUT net is able to share an idea or project post in this section. The person who offers free positions in the project team shortly describe how their business works, the position or field of expertise they require from the applicants. It is important to also highlight the roles of the required positions, so the eligible candidates would receive a notification about such offer. After clicking on this section projects list

up in the gallery view through which the user may scroll up and down. When the right project is picked, user clicks on the offer and is able to directly contact the poster of this offer by direct message or comment section under the post.

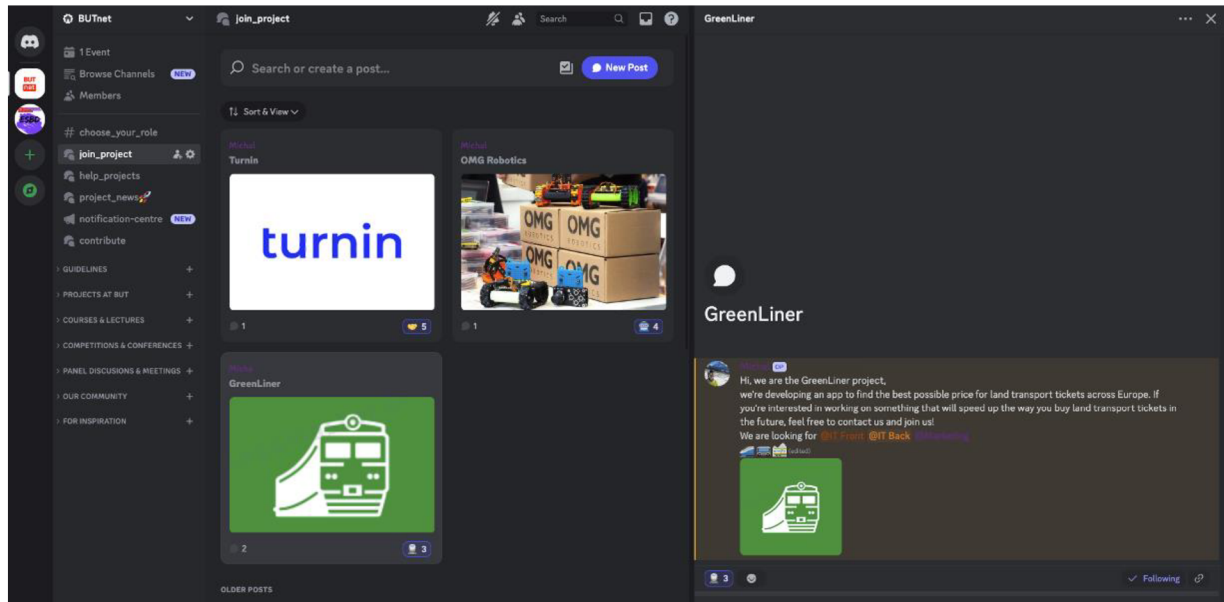


Figure 16 join\_project section in BUT net (Source: own processing)

The help\_projects section is section for users who offers their time, skills and knowledge base to help other project teams with the development. The vision I that the users would be able to list themselves a profile in this very section and draw their abilities and expertise in the post to be easily reachable for the teams or ideators.

Notification-centre is a place where the most important platform related topics and information will be shared. This is also for discussions and proposals of the BUT net users, of how to develop and enhance the platform. Users may also contact administrator of the platform with innovative ideas of how to develop the platform.

Contribute, this section is figuring in this section, to have easy access to the main web page where the users may find out more general information about the ecosystem and BUT's plan of entrepreneurial development at the university.

Project\_news section was developed in demand of sharing project's success stories for the inspirational purposes of the platform. In this section the only the administrator of the platform or

the verified project users with editorial rights may post in this section. Administrators role is to find and share achievements by the BUT's project and start-up teams. This section contains of short stories in the form of blogs, where users may find an inspiration and also directly contact the member of team in case of any questions, offer or just plain networking.

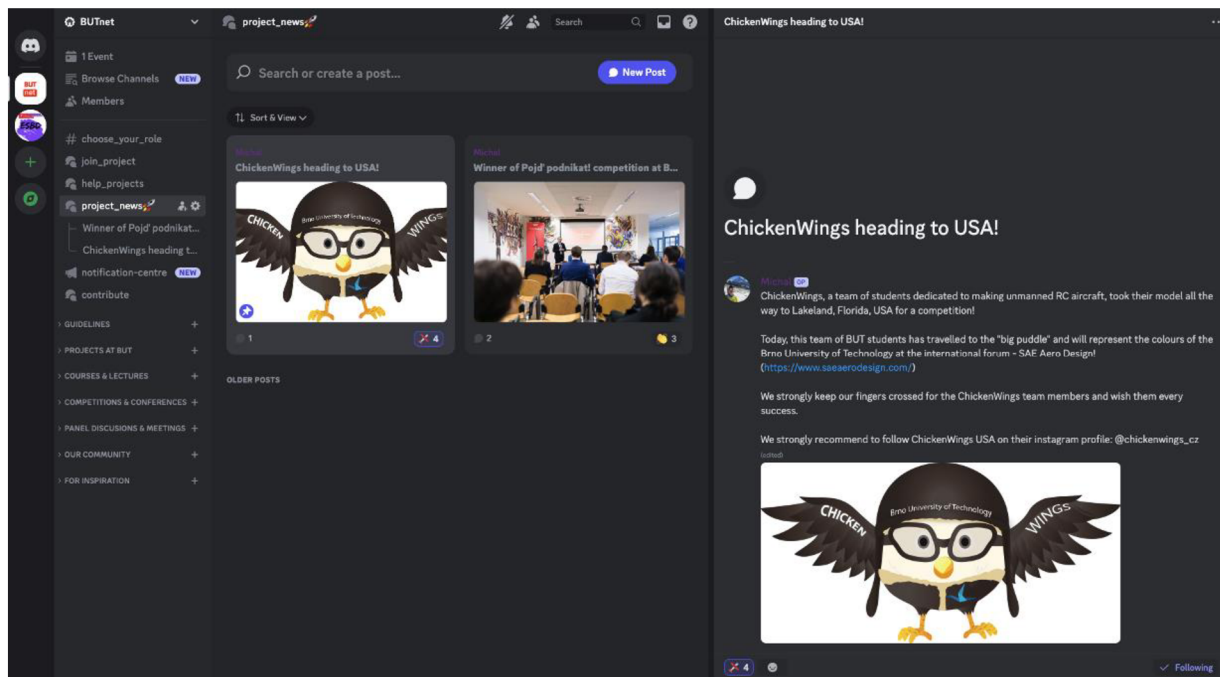


Figure 17 BUT net project\_news (Source: own processing)

## Other categories

On the left side of the BUT net platform users may find seven categories under which are hiding other useful informational channels. To goal of this categories is to fulfil the requirements and the needs of the founders and potential users of this platform. Each category defines one of the key aspects of networking platform by sharing information about the entrepreneurial community of BUT.

The categories are set for the BUT net's users to easily find information about the recent situation of an entrepreneurial development at BUT. Information that may users find in these categories:

- List of running projects at BUT



- List of opened entrepreneurial related courses and lectures at the university
- Overview of entrepreneurial competitions and conferences
- List of upcoming panel discussions with experts and meeting schedule
- Information about BUT entrepreneurial community
- List of mentors and coaches available for consultations
- List of available workspaces and laboratory premises for testing and team-work provided by BUT
- Channel for presentation of an alumni community of BUT
- Inspirational content that can help users of the platform with project development such as: lean canvas, marketing tools, legal news or podcast
- Blog of successful and also unsuccessful stories of project teams, for other users to know what to do in certain situations and what to avoid

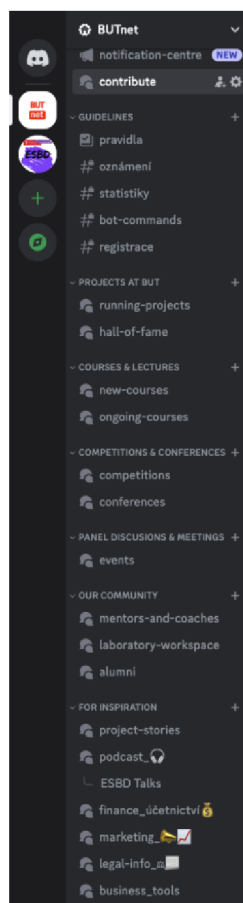


Figure 18 List of categories and sub-categories of BUT net (Source: own processing)

### **3.5 Conditions for launching networking platform**

As far as there is an visualisation and a minimum viable product it is important that the platform in this format is properly tested and validated by early-adopters. However, in this section I would list three conditions and recommendations under which the platform can be successfully launched. These conditions and recommendations are based on my research from the analytical part and personal experience with failed networking platform project – Turnin.

#### **3.5.1 Forming community**

ContriBUTE, under which the start-up networking platform for BUT would figure, is a project with a great potential and the networking platform would help to develop this project further across the faculties of BUT. Nevertheless, it is very important to form a community of few tenths of people who strongly believe in this initiative and fully support it. The community should contain academic staff, managerial staff of BUT and its faculties (preferably at least one representative of each faculty) and also regular students. While forming the community it is important that each member has same or at least very similar vision of the approach. The community should be formed during regular formal and informal meetings were people can settle down their ideas of improving the ecosystem. After having the hard base of the community established it is crucial that the community does not stop expanding and still is organising events and meetings with a public from BUT.

#### **3.5.2 Promotion**

As far as the entrepreneurial ecosystem of BUT is being in the development process, slowly students and BUT staff is getting in touch with term – ContriBUTE. In this matter it would be very beneficial for the entrepreneurial ecosystem to be known before right from its beginning. ContriBUTE is doing great job with promoting itself through discussions and round table meetings, where people of BUT can experience ContriBUTE and understand it more. My recommendation would be to incorporate students to the process of promoting the system by spreading word of mouth, QR codes to access simple overview of ContriBUTE's mission and vision. As well as spreading posters around all faculties of BUT. Where the posters contain the mission of ContriBUTE in small amount of words (approx. 3 words). The goal of this type of promotion is not to gain spontaneous activity from the promotion, but to achieve state of being recognized,

when needed. Also gaining attention of BUT staff and students can be valuable for the system in the future.

### **3.5.3 Content**

In terms of networking platform development, the part and parcel of its success is the content on the platform. It is crucial to fill the portal with a quality content before promotion to the public. The platform and its content should catch the users on the first sight, so the user understands what to expect from the platform and understands its purpose. The content can be produced artificially at the beginning, just for the visual representation that the platform looks active and users are getting involved. This action also enables first users to use the full potential of the platform and contribute to it by taking an inspiration from the previous posts at the platform.

### **3.5.4 Benefits of launching networking platform**

The main benefit of launching a networking platform is the approach to connectivity between the users of the platform, who can be coming from completely different educational and social environments. Despite these two people are from different environments the start-up networking platform give an opportunity to these people to meet and cooperate together, in the matter of connecting people with similar interests and entrepreneurial mindset.

By grouping people with similar interests and set-ups, they most likely get along together and start cooperating. This cooperation can result in either friendship, idea, running project, sturt-up or an established company. From all this results can BUT as an educational institution benefit, when providing reasonable support. The result of cooperation depends on the dedication of the individuals and their teams, which as a networking platform creator I cannot influence.

However, I can influence the looming entrepreneurial community which is currently being shaped at BUT by providing them safe online hub with efficient information, tools and opportunity to network. This platform will be a perfect space to have an online solution for the community to be informed and in the picture of an entrepreneurial development at Brno University of Technology.

Nevertheless, at the end of the day it is community that shapes individuals and helps the overall development of the system. As mentioned in the previous sections in the part 3.5, there is still lot of work to be managed and done before a successful launch of the BUT net.

### **3.6 Evaluation of the proposal part**

The goal of the proposal part of this thesis was to elaborate a framework for the development of a start-up networking platform. While this part should also include implementation recommendations and evaluating conditions and benefits of the implementations.

In conclusion, the goal of the proposal part of the thesis was achieved, by developing a networking platform development framework as well as the visual and practical representation of my proposal for the start-up networking platform for BUT.

The platform's key aspects were defined by representatives of ContriBUTe, co-founders of projects established at BUT and ordinary students with an interest in entrepreneurship. By analysing requirements and needs of the respondents among the platform and evaluating the answers into a table of recommendations, afterwards.

For the implementation part, the evaluated recommendations were put into minimal viable product format. Where are the requirements and the needs of platform's potential costumers visually represented in the Discord server. The platform was built on bases of my failed project of creating networking platform – Turnin.

In the last part of the proposal are listed conditions and recommendations for successful launch of the start-up networking platform, based on my previous experience with project Turnin and evaluated data from the respondents.

In the conclusion, proposal of creating a start-up networking platform development framework was met and the framework is based on the Discord server under title - BUT net.

## **Conclusion of the Thesis**

This bachelor's thesis is focused on development of proposal for a start-up networking platform which would contribute to the development of an entrepreneurial community at Brno University of Technology.

The first part of the thesis is focusing on providing necessary theoretical background to understand key aspects of project development processes and phases for further identification of needs of project teams. As an output of this part is figuring platform development framework, which helps with determination of the platform's current phase.

In the analytical part are descriptions of proceeded researches and analyses to determine the perfect solution for the design part. The goal of an analytical part was to determine the key aspects and features, that the platform must contain to satisfy the potential users. At the beginning of an analytical part is elaborated implementation plan of Brno University of Technology for the year 2024, and also the objectives for development of higher education institutions set by the Ministry of education, youth and sports from 2021. Afterwards, the analysis contains the evaluation of current state of an entrepreneurial ecosystem at Brno University of Technology followed by the analysis of similar initiatives at other institutions. Moreover analysing the best possible solution for the platform creation. From this point the analyses turn to a research in form of focus group and quantitative research where the needs and problems of students at Brno University of Technology were taken into consideration. Followed by the interview with the three biggest contributors to development of an entrepreneurial ecosystem at the university – ContriBUTE. During the interviews where evaluated the key requirements by the founders of ContriBUTE towards the platform. Furthermore, students who established their start-ups at Brno University of Technology were also interviewed and their needs evaluated for the proposal part.

The last part consists of evaluation nine key metrics of the lean canvas model, followed by evaluation of the most needed functions for the start-up networking platform based on the requirements by the respondents in the analytical part. This part also contains a framework which describes the purpose and connectivity within the platform's users and institutions. In the end of

the design part of the thesis is full proposal for the networking platform in the minimal viable product concept form, based on my failed project – Turnin.

To add to the proposal part of this thesis, I strongly believe that this proposal will be helpful as a validation tool for people in charge of the ContriBUTe – entrepreneurial ecosystem at Brno University of Technology. Hope this work contributes to the development of the ecosystem and soon there will be a fully developed entrepreneurial community with perfect-featured, fully-functional networking platform calling Brno University of Technology its home.

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