# Pathway Decision Aid

## Founder Alignment Conversation User Guide

The conversation is complete and this tool aims to help make sense of what you heard. This Pathway Decision Aid walks you through that synthesis in three steps. Start with the working hypothesis in Step 1 before you look at the pattern framework in Step 2. The sequence matters: forming your own read first prevents the pattern table from doing your thinking for you.

Most conversations will produce mixed signals across the five arcs. Your job is not to find the arc with the most green signals; it is to identify which pattern, taken as a whole, best describes this person at this moment. The override flags in Step 2 are the exception, as any one of them should give you pause regardless of what else you observed.

Document the outcome in Step 3 before the conversation fades. The rationale sentence is most important and difficulty here may point to the need for additional synthesis work in Steps 1 and 2 needs another pass.

# Step 1. Working Hypothesis

In 1-2 sentences per anchor, summarize what you observed. Share this with the academic before discussing pathways , let them confirm, correct, or refine.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Identity & Career Orientation** | How does this person relate entrepreneurship to their academic identity and career goals? |
| **Motivation & Durability** | What appears to sustain their interest, especially under uncertainty or delayed payoff? |
| **Capacity & Ownership Reality** | How do time, risk tolerance, and operational responsibility look in practice? |
| **Venture Demands in Context** | What does the technology imply in terms of venture form, scale, and sustained involvement? |

# Step 2. Pattern-Based Screening Framework

Signals are not a score to be counted, so the patterns below help identify which pathway makes sense given the overall picture. Mixed signals are normal; use the bottom table and the override flags to navigate them.

| Signal Area | Spinout (Stage 2) | Licensing / Partnership | Pause with Intent |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Identity** | Entrepreneurship aligns with or expands professional identity | Entrepreneurship threatens academic trajectory or tenure | Interest exists but timing creates identity conflict |
| **Motivation** | Motivated by building customer knowledge, a team, and operational framework | Motivated by impact; company-building is less instrumental | External pressure or unclear why now; motivation may not sustain |
| **Risk & Control** | Comfortable with shared control and manageable downside | Prefers advisory role; financial risk but not reputational (or vice versa) | Risk profile is misaligned or financial situation is precarious |
| **Capacity** | Can commit 20+ hrs/week; realistic about trade-offs | Can commit 5-15 hrs/week; advisor role is viable and welcome | Overcommitted; no plan for what gives if demands increase |
| **Technology Fit** | Technology benefits from startup structure; founder role is central | Technology could scale faster through existing players or licensing | Technology not ready, or team alignment is unresolved |

**Override Flags: Any one of these warrants serious pause or non-spinout consideration, regardless of other positive signals:**

- Entrepreneurship threatens core academic identity
- Capacity assumptions are unrealistic and unacknowledged
- Financial or reputational desperation is driving urgency
- Founding collaborators have divergent, unresolved goals

If signals are mixed, use the table below:

| Observed Pattern | Recommended Pathway |
|---|---|

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|---|---|
| Strong motivation and identity fit, but very limited capacity | **Proceed to Stage 2 to design advisory or part-time role** |
| Person ready, but technology clearly better served by licensing | **Licensing / Partnership** |
| Everything aligned except imminent tenure pressure | **Pause until after tenure decision; set revisit date** |
| Everything aligned but co-inventor status unknown or unresolved | **Initiate co-inventor alignment conversation; revisit before closing Stage 1** |
| Impact-motivated, ambivalent about operations | **Licensing , impact-focus is the real driver** |
| Interested but overwhelmed; needs more development time | **Pause with defined milestones for revisiting** |

# Step 3. Outcome Documentation

Name the pathway clearly and document it here. Invite the academic to review and edit before it is finalized. This is a working decision , not a permanent commitment.

| ☐ **Pathway 1** | ☐ **Pathway 2** | ☐ **Pathway 3** |
|---|---|---|
| **Spinout Company** | **Licensing / Partnership** | **Pause with Intent** |
| Proceed to Stage 2 venture planning | Engage TTO to initiate licensing process | Define revisit conditions and timeline |

| | |
|---|---|
| **One-sentence rationale** | "This pathway was selected because [primary alignment], despite [key trade-off], with [primary risk] being monitored." |
| **Key signals (2-3 most important from the conversation)** | |
| **Conditions for revisiting (if pausing or conditional)** | |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Academic Innovator**<br><br>Signature / Date: | **Facilitator**<br><br>Signature / Date: |

This document reflects a working decision based on current information and alignment. Pathways are revisable as circumstances change.