



Dragon Guild

Intro Memo for Participants

Version 20260608 / Aape Pohjavirta, Co-Founder & CEO

Genesis

Science discovers. Entrepreneurship delivers. There is no other way knowledge becomes life. Today, it fails 98% of the time.

Europe has the science. Europe has the talent. Europe has the capital. What Europe does not have is the Guild that connects them.

35 years on the human side of technology taught me one thing. You cannot fix the European innovation gap one learner at a time. The bottleneck is upstream. The people deploying capital cannot recognise breakthroughs. University innovations do not know how to become companies. Corporate innovation chiefs cannot find the door. Public sector leaders cannot tell which signal to back. Everyone is fluent in their own silo and illiterate in the others.

Nokia did not lose to Apple because Europe lacked engineers. Europe lacked the Guild.

That is what Dragon Guild builds.

Problem

Europe is not short of talent. Not short of science. Not short of capital. The Draghi Report named the diagnosis. Lakestar quantified it. Prosus sharpened it. The structural gap is coordination, courage, and the institutional layer where the four constituencies that make innovation possible actually meet.

The four sit in different rooms, speak different languages, operate on different clocks.

Research commercialisation sits on breakthrough science it cannot translate. Nobel-grade output, US-grade spinouts at one-quarter the rate. The Broken Ray.

Venture capital writes cheques against pattern recognition from a previous cycle. Europe trails the US by 15 to 1 in private AI investment. \$285.9 billion deployed in the US in 2025. ~\$18 billion across the top five European countries combined. The gap is not capital availability. It is decision-quality at the moment of deployment.

Corporate innovation runs intrapreneurship programmes that produce slide decks instead of subsidiaries. The acquisition logic that turns European spinouts into American companies is the same logic that should have kept them European.



Public sector innovation builds approval architectures for technologies that have already moved twice. Europe leads the world at 91% organisational AI usage. It produced zero continent-scale AI companies in 2025.

None of the four can fix the system alone. None has ever been put in the same room, on equal footing, under serious pedagogy, with the explicit job of learning to work across the silos.

That is the Orphan Gap. Business schools teach general management. Accelerators teach Founders. National agencies stop at borders the technology has already crossed. Nobody builds the Guild.

Primary research across the four constituencies confirmed it from the inside. 73% reported an AI and data science skill gap. 43% had no learning strategy at all. 0% had a well-defined one.

The people funding and building Europe's future are too busy to prepare for it. They told us so. Draghi, Lakestar, Prosus, and the Stanford AI Index carry the diagnosis at continental scale. The primary research carries it at eye level.



Solution

Dragon Guild is the Guild that was missing.

We forge the people who make Founders' lives easier, not the Founders themselves.

That is the spine. It is also the moat. Europe has fifteen high-quality Founder-development programmes already. EWOR, FR8, Antler, YC, Entrepreneur First. We do not compete with any of them. We are the missing institution on the other side of the table. The people their graduates need across from them: research commercialisation leaders who translate science into deals, venture capitalists who recognise breakthroughs, corporate innovation chiefs who move strategic capital, public sector leaders who match the speed of the technology.

Four constituencies. One room. Twelve months. That is the product.

Law of attraction, not rigorous selection

We do not select for credentials. We do not filter by the criteria of yesteryear. We attract.

Intelligence provides progress. The futures are created by consciousness. The people who build what does not yet exist are not the people who score highest on the filters built for the world that already exists. They are the ones already trying to escape those filters.

So Dragon Guild does not run an admissions funnel. It builds a room so clear in its purpose that the right people recognise themselves in it and lean in. Intrinsically motivated. Future-literate. Already uncomfortable inside their own silo. The selection is self-selection. The mechanism is attraction.

This is also why the four constituencies do not default to tribal behaviour the moment a Lair ends. We never invited the tribal defaults in. The median tech transfer officer protecting IP metrics, the median VC stripping cap tables, the median corporate chief protecting budget theatre, the median bureaucrat managing political risk: none of them is the target. The target is the minority inside each silo who already see the system and want the room. Attraction selects for the people whose incentives already point across the table.

The courage mechanism

Dragon Guild equips intrinsically motivated people with the skills and the peer group where they dare to fail. Skills alone produce competent operators. Peer groups alone produce comfortable echoes. The combination produces people who make bigger bets and survive the ones that go wrong.

That is why a Cohort 1 participant pays €50K for twelve months. They are buying entry into a room where the cost of being honest is lower than the cost of being wrong.



Four modules

The Human Condition. Adult learning, futures literacy, design thinking, systems thinking. Anchored in Stanford GSE (Dr. Paul Kim), HPI d.school (Prof. Uli Weinberg), the UNESCO Chair (Dr. Markku Wilenius), and Aalto digital systems (Dr. Risto Sarvas).

Deep Tech. AI, quantum, longevity biotech, energy, materials. Not the journalism. The decision-quality fluency. Built across the Fenno-Suiza axis, Dragon Guild's deliberate two-ecosystem foundation, so the room is international from day one.

Sustainability Beyond Green. Climate, resource economics, geopolitical resilience, the energy stack the next thirty years require. Beyond the ESG bureaucracy.

State of the Art Venture. Deal structuring, governance, secondaries, exits, the European-to-US bridge Will Cardwell has spent his career translating.

Architecture

Lair Events. Intensive in-person modules rotating across European cities. Closed rooms, structured pedagogy.

Den Sessions. Biweekly online. Peer-led, faculty-supported.

DGCI. Dragon Guild Collective Intelligence. The AI-powered knowledge engine that captures and compounds what happens inside the Guild, and becomes a living asset every Fellow carries forward.

The total in-person commitment across the twelve-month flagship is roughly 25 days. Less than an executive MBA. Less than most serious executive education. We designed it for people whose constraint is not money but bandwidth. The people we want are not idle. They are spending their scarce hours on low-value coordination: LP updates, portfolio triage, internal fire-fighting. Dragon Guild replaces low-value coordination with the high-value coordination that compounds across the rest of their career.

Cohort 0

Cohort 0 is a four-month compressed founding cohort, running mid-August to mid-December 2026. Sixteen seats, ever, at €20K. It is not a cheaper Cohort 1. It is a different seat: Founding Fellows who sit inside the institution before the institution is finished, and every cohort after them inherits what they built. Full detail in its own section below.

From Cohort 1 onwards: twelve months at €50K. Two cohorts in 2027. Four in 2028.



The Guild That Was Missing

Cohort 0 is the public proof that the Guild exists. A campaign before it is a class.

Sixteen seats. Ever.

Every cohort after Cohort 0 produces Fellows. Only Cohort 0 produces Founding Fellows. Sixteen of them. Ever.

Every cohort after them will look back the way the Royal Society looks back at its founding fellows. A small group who formalised a new way of working together before anyone outside the room understood what they were building. The institution they defined is still defined by them, three and a half centuries on.

You cannot buy your way back into that room. You either were there or you were not.

The triple purpose

Cohort 0 does three jobs at once.

Proof of concept. Validates the cross-ecosystem cohort with real participants from all four constituencies.

Product finalisation. The twelve-month spec for Cohort 1 emerges from running Cohort 0, not from designing it on paper.

Forge creation. Filling Cohort 0 builds the way Dragon Guild reaches every cohort after. Founding Fellows shape the vocabulary, the rituals, and the canon that every Fellow after them inherits.

The lineage in the room

A Founding Fellow sits inside the inheritance of five institutional traditions, brought together for the first time.

Prof. Uli Weinberg. HPI School of Design Thinking. The European tradition that built on Stanford d.school.

Dr. Paul Kim. Stanford Graduate School of Education. How serious adults actually learn.

Dr. Markku Wilenius. UNESCO Chair, Club of Rome. Futures literacy as a discipline.

Will Cardwell. Built bridges between Finnish and American venture capital across decades. Now Professor of Practice at Kenan-Flagler, UNC.

Dr. Risto Sarvas. Aalto. Systems thinking in digital products. The university where Monty Widenius dropped out at 19 to write MySQL.

When you ask what makes this institution serious, this is the answer.



The four silos

Sixteen seats. Four per constituency. Gender balance as a principle. Geographic spread across the Fenno-Suiza axis and beyond.

Research commercialisation leaders. University tech transfer chiefs, research institute commercialisation heads. The Broken Ray, fixed at the source.

Young GPs and venture capital. Emerging fund managers, first-time partners. The next decade of European venture decision-making.

Corporate innovation chiefs. Intrapreneurship, corporate venturing, M&A. The people who can keep European spinouts European.

Public sector innovation. Innovation agency leaders, policy architects. People who build approval architectures at the speed of the technology.

That is the room that was missing.

The timeline

Pipeline locked end of June 2026. Doors close 10 July 2026: seats signed, deposits in, committed.

The programme runs mid-August to mid-December 2026. An opening in August built to be remembered as the moment a new era in Europe began.

Why This Holds Up

Dragon Guild is not a boutique that caps out the moment the founders run out of cities to fly to. It is built to scale like an institution.

Faculty does not travel as a block. No module requires every name in the lineage in every city. Lair Events are taught by rotating faculty and, increasingly, by alumni Fellows who become Module Leads in later cohorts. This is how the Royal Society scaled, and every durable Guild after it: the people forged in the room become the people who forge the next room.

And DGCI compounds. Every cohort deepens the proprietary cross-ecosystem intelligence inside it. Dragon Guild cohorts mix four constituencies on the same questions, in the same room, under trust-based confidentiality. No one else produces those inputs, because no one else runs that room. DGCI knows how German research commercialisation differs from Swedish, how French family offices evaluate deep tech versus Dutch ones, what frameworks work for corporate innovation in manufacturing versus pharma. And it knows more with every cohort. Access is reserved for Fellows, founding members, and sending organisations. It is the asset every Fellow carries out of the room and keeps.

The honest version: the architecture is built, and the corpus begins compounding with Cohort 0. Components have already been deployed at scale with real clients, including Rovio and the City of Helsinki.



Why no incumbent is here

Business schools teach general management. Wrong audience.

Accelerators serve Founders. Wrong side of the table.

National programmes stop at borders the technology has already crossed. Wrong geography.

VC on-the-job learning produces pattern-replicators. Wrong mechanism.

The sharper question is why a well-resourced player has not simply built it. EIT, INSEAD, Kauffman. Each is structurally bound to one corner of the room. EIT operates inside EU-programme mandates. INSEAD sells general management to executives at scale. Kauffman serves venture capital, one silo. None can mix four constituencies under trust-based confidentiality, because each is committed to serving one of them well. The thing that makes Dragon Guild hard to build is the same thing that makes it valuable: it belongs to no existing silo, so no incumbent inside a silo can become it.

The Forge

The Forge is how Dragon Guild reaches the people who belong in the room. It turns the thesis into a pipeline, the pipeline into a cohort, the cohort into the operating rhythm of an institution.

Three keepers

Inbound. Elžbieta Mioldažytė. Category architect. Builds the gravitational field. Essays, hero campaign, visual world, website, press, Cohort 0 protagonist content.

Outbound. Sonja Holm. Owns the target list across the four constituencies, the operator-vouching network at Aalto, KTH, ETH, HPI, and the rhythm of the conversation. The strongest Cohort 0 candidates come from trusted people saying "you should be in this room." Sonja makes that happen.

Closing. Aape. The closing conversations sit with the CEO. The founder being in the room is part of the offer.

The rollout

Dragon Guild goes public on 8 June 2026 with the hero campaign, **The Guild That Was Missing**, and the first city films. From there the conversation widens across the four constituencies until the doors close on 10 July.

If you are reading this before then, you are early. That is the point.



Team and Lineage

Core team

Aape Pohjavirta. Co-Founder and CEO. 35 years on the human side of technology. Nokia, Apple, Facebook, UN Systems. Invented the mobile media app. Built mobile learning products for millions across four continents. Helped grow Slush from the early days. Chairman, Gotland GPE Circuit AB.

Andrew J Scott. Co-Founder. Managing Partner, 7 Percent Ventures. Built and led DragonChasers (200+ GPs and LPs, €50B+ AUM). Twenty years across venture, founder development, and the ICE network.

Elizabeth Saunders. Programme Guardian. Owns the integrity of the Dragon Guild participant experience end-to-end.

Ivana Pesic Forbes. Design and Product Strategy. Builds the visual world of Dragon Guild. Previously HeadAI.

Mateja Kramar. Ecosystem Shaper. IBM. Previously ETH AI Center, PHOENIQS. The Swiss anchor of the Fenno-Suiza axis. Brings ETH-grade research access, IBM scale, and the Kinnernord network.

Saad Saqib. Community Lead. Owns the relational layer of the wider Dragon Guild community.

Forge-keepers for Cohort 0

Elžbieta Mioldažytė. Inbound.

Sonja Holm. Outbound.

Aape Pohjavirta. Closing.

Lineage

Prof. Uli Weinberg. HPI School of Design Thinking, Potsdam.

Dr. Paul Kim. Stanford Graduate School of Education.

Dr. Markku Wilenius. UNESCO Chair, Club of Rome.

Will Cardwell. Professor of Practice, Kenan-Flagler Business School, UNC. Finnish-US venture bridge across decades.

Dr. Risto Sarvas. Aalto. Systems thinking in digital products.



Standing Behind It

Backed by Positron Ventures, a European deep tech venture capital firm, and a group of selected global angel investors, including Stefano Bernardi, Jens Lapinski (Angel Invest), and Jose Marin (FJ Labs).

Co-developed with the venture arm of a European research university.

Built on DragonChasers: 200+ GPs and LPs, €50B+ AUM. The network Dragon Guild grew from.

What the world told us

The Draghi Report named the diagnosis. The Stanford AI Index 2026 made it impossible to deny.

US private AI investment 2025: \$285.9 billion. Top five European countries combined: ~\$18 billion. A ratio of 15 to 1.

Organisational AI usage: Europe 91%, world-leading. Year-on-year growth: Europe 7.2%, US 160.2%.

Europe uses AI more than anyone. Funds it less than almost anyone. Loses the companies it does fund before scale.

Not a capital problem. A Courage Gap.

Why Now

Three windows are open. None stays open for long.

The European window. Europe has stopped arguing about whether the gap exists. The conversation has moved to who builds the missing institutions. The institutions built in the next eighteen months will define the layer European venture, research commercialisation, corporate innovation, and public sector innovation operate inside for the next thirty. Dragon Guild gets to be in the first wave.

The AI window. Either European institutions develop the decision-quality fluency to back AI companies at scale, or European industrial value continues to migrate to the Valley. The window has eighteen months. Possibly twenty-four.

The founding-arbitrage window. The smallest, most specific window. Sixteen Founding Fellows. Ever. The seats that exist between now and 10 July 2026 are seats that will not exist again. The Royal Society is still defined, three and a half centuries on, by the people who walked into the room first. The same arithmetic applies here.



The Fenno-Suiza axis is built. DragonChasers is in the room. The Forge is running. The doors close on 10 July.

Dragon Guild forges the people who make Founders' lives easier, not the Founders themselves.

The Guild that was missing is being built right now. The only question is whether you are in the room.