

Polaris Insight



From Kick-Off to Traction:

Polaris Finds Its Rhythm"

Setting the Scene: A Personal Starting Point

On a summer day in Boekelo, Twente, we sat down with Frank Biemans, program director of Polaris. In a renovated farmhouse at the edge of the village—known for its salt, "The Military" and local character—he shared his reflections on the first six months of the program.

The occasion? A major milestone: the submission of our first formal progress report to the Program Office of the NL State.



Frank Biemans at his house in Boekelo

A Striking Image: The Start in the 'Winkel van Sinkel'



Frank doesn't hesitate when asked for a defining moment of the first six months: the Polaris kick-off meeting at the 'Winkel van Sinkel' in Utrecht. "The energy in the room was touchable. With around 60 to 70 researchers, professors and industry partners gathered, it felt like the real beginning. Not only ideas were exchanged, but also PhD proposals were born. It showed the potential of this community."

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Building Momentum: A Program Takes Shape

According to Frank, the real momentum came more recently, when the second series of Activity Plans was launched. "That's when you see the richness of the portfolio and how the projects begin to reinforce each other. Not isolated silos, but interconnected initiatives. That's powerful."

He notes how governance, too, has matured: "The Management Team (MT), Theme Leaders, the Technical Advisory Board (TAR) and Project Leaders have really found their rhythm. We've transitioned from setup to execution."

Strategic Reflections: From Delay to Drive

"Before 1 January, we faced many legal and contractual hurdles. Each issue cost weeks, sometimes months. That was frustrating. But after the formal start, things moved rapidly. We're not deviating from the original plan—just gaining speed."

Frank emphasizes the value of a shared program: "We now have around 20 approved projects. What matters to me is not the individual projects, but how they connect. That's what gives Polaris its strength."

Research & Valorization: Intertwined Priorities

Research is now fully underway. While it's early for tangible breakthroughs, Frank is optimistic: "Take thermal management in RF ICs. If we can crack that, it's a global breakthrough."

On valorization: "There are promising beginnings. Companies like Thales and Philips know how to increase TRL levels. They know the road from lab to application. We need one more application domain besides MRI and radar to diversify. That would enrich both the research and valorization agendas."

Ecosystem: Formalizing Growth

Frank sees growing interest from potential new partners. "Mark van Helvoort is currently working on a framework for how new parties can join—criteria, obligations, and benefits. We're approached weekly. Soon we'll have a formal process."

He emphasizes the distinction from other NGF programs: "Polaris isn't a tender scheme. It's a strategic consortium. Joining means contributing—not just benefiting."

Human Capital: Big Potential, Slow Start

"We're behind on the Human Capital program line, largely because we haven't found the right program manager yet. And because we engineers are not educators."

Frank's vision is clear: "It has to be RF-related. Especially in system design, there's a massive skills gap. That's where we can make a real impact. But we need someone who gets it, and who can drive this long-term."

Community & Culture: Signs of Evolution

Asked what feels different today, Frank reflects: "It's running now. The upcoming Town Hall in September is proof. For the morning sessions, we've invited only technical staff, and already we expect 80+ participants. That tells me people are engaged."



He credits the MT, the TAR, Theme Leaders and Project Leaders: "Everyone pulls their weight. And the TAR's comments have actively improved collaboration between projects."

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The Road Ahead

The next six months will focus on:

- Strengthening research-valorization synergy.
- Formalizing ecosystem entry.
- Gaining traction in Human Capital.
- Stimulating cross-project collaboration.

Frank emphasizes the importance of initiative from both academia and industry: "The good example will inspire more. The better we share what's working, the more others will want to join in."

Why It Matters

When asked what drives him, Frank pauses: "I like leaving something behind. Polaris gives that opportunity. If we do Human Capital right, we'll be remembered for decades."

His message to partners and individuals alike: "If you work together in the spirit of the program, you will get more out of it than you put in. That's the multiplier effect. Whether you're working on RF design, valorization, or training, take the time to connect. That's where the real value lies."

This article is part of the Polaris Insight series. The full MS1 report is available via the shared workspace.