From Technology Transfer to Universities for a Modern Renaissance (UMR)

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Introduction

As all members of Institute of Knowledge Transfer so well know, society now expects the Universities it funds, to work with citizens and communities to enable them to flourish. And, at this very moment, they also now further believe this should occur quickly and through the creation of improvements to a knowledge economy that has huge economic, social and environmental problems; I am sure the IKT is poised to respond to the fact that many now see universities as central to the development of truly forward looking and workable processes. In my time as PVC for Academic Enterprise at Salford University, I believe I was able to show leadership to enable it to become more highly engaged with business and the community than ever before, preparing itself to cope well with the current crisis and beyond. Indeed, as David Lamy (2010), previous Minister for Higher Education, recently reported, Salford is now seen to be one of two 'intensively entrepreneurial universities in the UK ……that are strong and flexible enough to enter into income-generating partnerships with others to weather the debt crisis'. Indeed through the leadership of its new Vice Chancellor, Martin Hall (2010), Salford new increasingly sees itself fully as an 'enterprising University which transforms individuals and communities through excellent teaching, research, innovation and engagement'.

So, as I reflect on the last decade of my academic Knowledge Transfer developments in such an enterprising university, what could I reflect on to the benefit to colleagues in the IKT. To begin with, I still recognize that in order to understand the complexities, uncertainties and often 'wickedness' of difficult problems, academics still need to retreat to their 'ivory towers' and develop 'private frames of reference' for some part of their lives to enable theory building, experimentation and high level discussion. However, now, more than ever before and just as importantly, they need, some would say are being demanded, to use their deep and rigorously acquired understandings creatively for the common good. So, they must learn to act further by developing new ways of working, new modes of conversation and improved knowledge sharing that truly enables them to make a real difference in the real world with external colleagues from business, industry, the civil and voluntary services and the community.

As a result of the increased pressure on Universities in this arena, all are now reaching out to their partners more than ever before, often in interesting and novel ways, in an attempt to play what they each see as their role in coping with today's global crises, major societal challenges and to help citizens. At least on paper, they are becoming more enterprising and deeply engaging with such communities:

- Enterprising in the way they **develop leading edge opportunities,** with high academic values – becoming involved in solving real world issues and problems
- Engaging with Strategic Partners who bring their own expertise and imagination to **co-create** with them > universities and their partners realise they can't do it separately if they want to develop innovations fit for the Knowledge Economy

However, despite all these initiatives, as the British Government's recent Innovation and Productivity Report (2009) revealed, the objectives of Industry and Academia are still often distinctly different. What industry and the community want from academia are 'ideas and talent, rather than a cheap way of outsourcing R&D activities'. Academics, on the other hand, still tend to pursue objectives from their own discipline with their studies 'underpinned by research-oriented rationales, rather than by the desire to commercialise technology' or create impact or improvement to the real world.

In the past, industry/community often saw academics talking another language. The IKT, amongst others, has begun to help develop a new conversation be
tween universities and both business and the community and I hope my own efforts have helped benefit that discourse as I now hope to show.
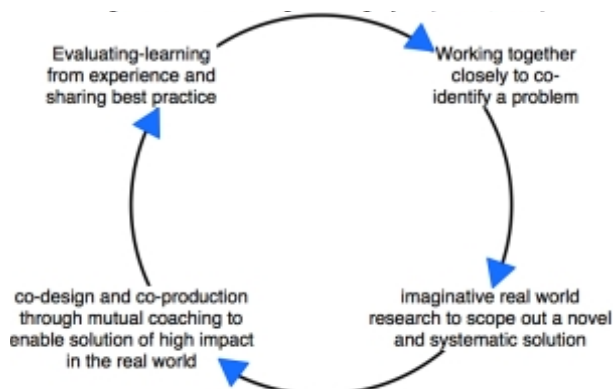
The Salford, EUA & UPBEAT Approaches

The culmination of my period at Salford saw my attempts to lead, and more particularly share ideas virtuously with, two rich consortia of universities in an attempt to gain a global understanding of how Universities could make greater impact with business and the community:

- In the first, known as UPBEAT, or the University Partnership for Benchmarking Enterprise and Associated Technologies, each of 25 British and ten other European worked under significant funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England, the Council for Industry and Higher Education and the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council. They undertook five case studies of their successful university outreach using a simple, but effective, approach, using a standard observational template, developed during the project's pilot phase. The UPBEAT tool, written up in detail at www.upbeat.eu.com, can be used to identify a range of activities and their outcomes across 4 key skill themes for academic enterprise: **solution enabling, individual talent, partnering and new business enabling skill**. This tool can be used to evaluate success, but more importantly to drive for continuous improvement in all university outreach.
- In the second, working under the auspices of the European Universities Association, a consortium of seven universities of like mind explored their own creative ways of achieving success in their relationships with local

businesses and communities. With a greater focus towards creativity and innovation they catalogued what worked best in 50 case studies of outreach practices using the previously mentioned benchmarking tool – see EUA study described fully as part of my URL at www.ae.salford.ac.uk/ james-powell/.

Taken together, from some 200 cases studies of successful university outreach activity, it was clear that all universities, in both consortia, seemed to work extremely closely with societal partners and in much closer relationships than through traditional technology transfer. In aggregate, the cases suggested a common approach for successful university engagement with partners. These universities all seemed to engender deep and maturing conversations with their partners which followed a 'virtuous knowledge sharing' cycle shown in Figure 1. Holistic and co-creating team-working seemed to work well when they followed this cycle with their external partners. But, for this cycle to work, academics and their external team partners have to collaborate to define a worthy problem – worthy of the combined effort of all partners - and find an imaginative solution through real world and practice based research. The team of academics and the wider partnership would then work together to implement the solution in the real world – mutually coaching each other to success. To achieve this, team members need to step outside of their specific project and think reflectively

Evaluating-learning from experience and sharing best practice

Working together closely to co-identify a problem

co-design and co-production through mutual coaching to enable solution of high impact in the real world

imaginative real world research to scope out a novel and systematic solution

Fig.1 Virtuous Knowledge Sharing Cycle (Powell, 2008)

about whether all their aims and objectives have been met. So an approach which started as a simple attempt to chart best practices as Salford, led to parallel and complementary attempts to capture best practices across a further forty European universities. The aggregated cases also revealed a surprisingly common set of detailed findings, even with respect to the actions required to improve academics co-creation with society. In the cited papers by Powell (2009, 2010) papers in the references these are described in detail along with case examples such as: the development of 'Community led Affordable Housing'; 'Reuters in the Community' (Peoples' Voice Media); Contraception – the Board Game; new health brokers for the community (Unlimited Potential); Digital City – all rigorously reported as case

studies and fully accessible.

Towards a University for a Modern Renaissance

When the EUA Consortia wrote up its findings, it coined a name for those universities of like mind that sought to '**co-identify real problems worth of collective solution, the co-creation of solutions systemically fit-for-purpose in the global knowledge economy, the co-production of those solutions and their stage management into the real world, and further in ensuring the continuous improvement of all such solution to reach more people with more constructive effect'.** It called them '**Universities for a Modern Renaissance (UMR)**'. They believed that a systemically innovative approach to university engagement with society was going to be a requirement for the future, one step further than most were adopting in their engagements at the moment. They also believed that Universities would need continually to seek creative ways of co-creative team-working with business, industry, the civil and voluntary services and the community. The PASCAL International Observatory also recently recognised the power of the notion of 'Universities for a Modern Renaissance (UMR)', and especially how its principles are reflected its comprehensive PURE benchmarking explorations with city regions across the world. It is also looking to improve its understanding of what works well for its university members and how universities can play an even fuller role in supporting the global knowledge economy. PASCAL's Board recently therefore decided to embrace the future-searching, innovation-centred and co-design-based stance embedded deeply in UMR and has adopted its principles as its own key driver for constructive university change for the future.

PASCAL's Advisory Board has set up a working party to scope out the basic principles of UMR more precisely and to hone its existing benchmarking tools to help Universities, and their academics, to co-deliver workable solutions with their external partners in local cities and regions. The following four key factors should give the IKT reader a sense of what PASCAL believe universities will need to be bear in mind when developing an approach such as UMR: 1) forming meaningful, wealth creating, sustainable and socially inclusive partnerships between academic on the one hand and industry, business, the civil and voluntary services and the community on the other; 2) enabling the co-identification of 'real problems for solutions', increasingly fit for purpose for the knowledge economy from as broad a range of stakeholders as is possible; 3) searching for academic opportunities beyond means currently employed with business and community to the highest academic standards and for the mutual benefit of the university and its external partners; and 4) unlocking the talents of diverse groups of citizens working together with their university partners in co-creation, co-design and co-production. A fuller description will shortly be offered on the PASCAL PURE web site – www.pascal-pure.com. PASCAL is now in its consultation phase with respect to its development of the concept of Universities for a Modern Renaissance and would welcome thoughts from any interested parties.

Conclusions

My journey in developing outreach, or what I call Higher Academic Enterprise, at the University of Salford has been exciting and rewarding. It has moved beyond simple technology transfer, through knowledge transfer and knowledge exchange to 'virtuous knowledge sharing' and the development of a project management tool which drives improved qualities and levels of creative University outreach known as UPBEAT; I am now developing the tool to specifically help improve the quality of Knowledge Transfer Partnership schemes. My own knowledge sharing with a consortium of like minded Universities and senior academics has led me to believe there is a more innovative way of universities co-creating with their external partners. The UMR approach seems to provide a new, successful and sustainable opportunity for universities to engage more powerfully with society and, with the evidence of over 200 successful cases, shows how some are already practicing its principles in a piecemeal way. In short in a 'University for Modern Renaissance', enterprising academics:

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Look where every one is looking
See what no one else can see
Do what no one else can do
uniquely by
Co-identifying worthy problems
Co-designing their systemic solution
Co-producing sustainable outputs and outcomes
which are fit-for-purpose for
All in the knowledge Economy
Enabling socially inclusive Wealth Creation
And the highest impact for real improvement

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IKT and the Way Forward

The UMR project is a global attempt to go beyond simply reaching out to society. It is proposing new ways of working and improved processes for the co-identification of problems felt worthy by society, and co-creation and co-design of sustainable solutions fit for the knowledge economy. The PASCAL International Observatory is interested in working with any organization that has a 'coincidence of purpose' with this forward looking approach. I would particularly like to get into 'virtuous knowledge sharing' and a maturing conversation with anyone from IKT of like mind, especially if they are constructively critical, and look forward to any responses to this short paper.

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