

## **Adapting Knowledge Transfer Strategies to Fit the Academic**

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**Summary:** *The author reflects on levels of organisational identity and recommends a focus on academic identity within third stream, academic enterprise and knowledge transfer strategies.*

As a Business Development Manager based within a faculty of a large University, I am positioned directly between the strategies, management and reporting of knowledge transfer and Third Stream and the operational and development aspects of engaging academics and organisations with knowledge transfer and Third Stream projects. As such I am in an interesting position, able to reflect on the perspectives and conflicts between senior manager's "Third Stream Strategies" and the drivers and interests of my colleagues within the academic community.

The strategic initiatives of university senior management teams are driven by government and funding. They are designed to meet increasing demands for knowledge transfer and third stream activities and steer the university towards these new goals. Current measurements of this work tend towards the financial and entrepreneurial and are mapped to targets, definitions and outputs within government funding initiatives such as the Higher Education Innovation Fund. These measures are essential for monitoring and a key requirement for funds such as this, but these targets and strategies are effectively relayed directly to the academic community and have a significant impact on the perceived identity of the university, by academic staff.

These new missions, metrics and definitions of third stream initiatives result in messages which form a changing identity for a university, challenging widely held notions of a universities identity by the academics. If the university wants the academics to embrace this changing mission of a university (and undertake knowledge transfer and third stream activities), managers must understand the academics perception of the new university identity, in relation to how the academic perceives him or herself. This is referred to as the level of organisational identity and a "Strong organisational identification may translate into desirable outcomes" [1].

Recent research I completed in 2010 undertook a small study of the levels of organisational identity within academic staff [2]. Initially evaluating the academics definitions of academic enterprise and third stream, it was found that their definition is formed almost entirely from an individual and academic perspective, not from documentation or strategies available within the institution. Overall there was a low

level of Organisational Identity found, i.e. the academics perception of themselves did not align with their perception of the university. Key elements motivating the academics included teaching, research, knowledge exchange, community (local), learner obligations and their career choice in becoming an academic. These were also found to be the main defining motivators for engagement with academic enterprise and third stream, not the organisations strategies or targets. Aspects of income generation or financial metrics, within operational documentation, are viewed as organisational drivers and their importance in defining and engaging with third stream and academic enterprise was viewed as secondary. The notion that knowledge transfer or academic enterprise was a separate “third” activity was dismissed, as the academics perceived knowledge transfer activities as a part of their teaching or research. This harks back to the prior name for KTP the Teaching Companies Scheme.

So what can be drawn from this? Any good manager understands his colleagues’ drivers, preferences and motivations and will adapt their messages to fit with differing groups and individuals. This though is currently undertaken in an ad hoc manner. A more deliberate and strategic approach to this could be to recommend that knowledge transfer managers utilise the individuals’ academic identity as a drivers for engagement, developing an engagement strategy that complements and is formed from the embedded identity of the academics. Engagement of the academic teams in third stream strategy development and realigning the strategic metrics to be based on academic drivers, complementing the financial drivers, would support engagement and increase activity, the final outcome would, we hope, be increased third stream activity.

In speculating on an approach for this recommendation, university managers could undertake a subject group based approach to understanding the academics’ perspectives, priorities and drivers. Types of third stream activity could be more formally matched to these groups and the complementary benefits of these third stream activities highlighted to the group, on their terms. This will involve a redefinition of some types of third stream activity and work to remove the separate status third stream activity has, embedding it back into the core roles of teaching and research.

#### Reference

[1] DUTTON, J. E., et al., 1994. Organizational Images and Member Identification. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 39 (2) pp. 239-263.

[2] BROWN, T. A., 2010. Organisational identification of academic staff and its relationship to the third stream. Unpublished MSc. dissertation, Manchester Metropolitan University.

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