

# **Knowledge Transfer Partnerships in Small Businesses: Drivers and Barriers from the perspective of the Academic**

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# What is a KTP?

- “KTPs *help businesses and organisations to improve their competitiveness and/or productivity through the use of the knowledge, technology and skills that reside within academic institutions*”. “At the same time, Knowledge Transfer Partnerships also help to *increase the business relevance of knowledge base research and teaching*” (KTP, 2009)
- A **Partnership** between a business and an academic institution
- The knowledge sought is embedded into the business from the knowledge base through a **project**, or projects, undertaken by a recently qualified person (known as the **Associate**)
- KTPs can vary in length from 1 to 3 years

## Aim/Key Research Question/Methodology/Methods

- The **aim** of this research was to explore the drivers and barriers for Academics involved in Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs) with small businesses
- The **research question** to be addressed was: *Why do Academics engage in KTPs with Small Businesses?*
- This research adds a **critical perspective** on KTPs with small businesses from the point of view of the Academics
- Multiple case **methodology** (6 cases, 6 Academics): Management interventions
- The firms ranged in size from 8 to 50 employees and were in a wide variety of industry sectors
- **Methods:**
  - action research
  - observation
  - participant observation
  - semi-structured interviews
  - document review
- Pattern-matching (Yin, 1994) was the adopted method for analysis of data

# Key Findings

## Drivers:

- “*Making a difference*” to the firm in terms of jobs, profit and business improvements.
- “*Real world*” applications of management models.
- Production of academic papers.
- Funding for conference attendance.
- Practical examples for use in teaching.
- RAE/REF returnable income.
- The benefits of working in a context of reduced bureaucracy.
- Quick decisions and results were possible.
- Opportunities for the development of staff in the academic team who could then lead other KTPs.

# Key Findings

## Barriers:

- Convincing the owner/manager of the practical benefits of *“theories”*.
- Firms focused on *doing* rather than *measuring*.
- Ensuring that *“Academic Outputs”* were produced as well as outputs for the firm and the associate.
- Working with *“robust”* owner/managers.
- Owner/managers *“moving the goalposts”*.
- Managing the team of academics.
- The difficulties of performing in multiple roles (manager, contributor, supervisor).
- Managing relationships/egos and ensuring *“balance”* in the partnership.

# Conclusions and Implications for Policy and Practice

- The evidence from these six cases suggests that the drivers for academic engagement in KTPs with small businesses are sufficient to make dealing with the barriers worth the effort.
- Implication for practice: value to Academics in using KTPs as an approach for developing their research in a more applied way.
- Implication for Policy: a critical and balanced perspective on the drivers and barriers of KTPs that could be used to help Academics decide on their potential involvement in KTPs with small businesses and to help KTP Advisers in managing KTPs effectively in this environment.

# Recommendations for Future Research

- Research into KTPs in small businesses in other disciplines (not business and management interventions)
- A survey of Academics who had been involved in KTPs with small businesses could be carried out to see if the issues surfaced from this research can be generalised
- The drivers and barriers of KTPs in small businesses from the perspective of Associates and the Funder could be explored