

JISC  
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Web 2.0 meets KT  
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**BMC:** This is under the Community of Practice theme, I spoke at a session with Paul (Lowe) and Etienne Wenger and I think I got pulled up there for packing too much into the Community of Practice and the definition, because I think there's quite a bit more going on here: it's not a pure Community of Practice, which may become clear as I speak.

But it is about trying to get a new model of technology transfer, knowledge transfer, and probably more technology transfer - but that's what I do, I am the Director of Commercialisation for the University of Leeds, and so I have an interest in trying to find if this is a more efficient model for getting technology and expertise out of the University and into business and community. And we developed this strapline, 'KT2.0', but the formal title of the project actually is 'Exploiting the Open Innovation Division of Labour Using Social Media' but it's not quite as catchy. (Laughter). And this was a collaborative project with three Universities, so not only is it slightly more complex, it's not really just the internal community of practice, it's very much about trying to externalise what we do with people who have very different skill sets and different professions, but we've also tried to do that with a number of the Universities.

So when we started off, we had a collaboration with the University of Manchester and Sheffield also, potentially some other new collaborations are coming on board. And this is the DNA (referring to slide) that I sort of regard as going into the project, and obviously the Etienne Wenger thing is part of it, but very much more, it's influenced our thinking in terms of this project. I think probably two of the paradigms that have really have influenced what we do, the sort of Open Innovation paradigm, the notion of 'you can't do it all on your own', I will probably speak about this later in the session this afternoon,

the notion that not all the smart people work for you. I suppose in my view, Community of Practice is about sharing tacit knowledge. Sometimes it's just about accessing expertise that other people have and you don't have.

And the other paradigm is the Professor Ron Burt social capital theory, the notion of the more connected you are to people, to a diverse range of people, the brighter you become. And the reason I like that is just because the research is so rigorous in terms of the way he analyses how individuals and organisations perform better the more connected they are. So that's the kind of thinking behind it.

So when I've presented this in the past, the sort of 6, 7 principles that I'm elaborating on, but I'm only going to give you a flavour of the first one for this session, then move on to some lessons learned, some of the things that we think we might have learned from undertaking this.

But the first proposition is that knowledge transfer, or tech transfer, used to be all about getting the best team you could, assembling the best team: it's a complex game, you need people who understand it, legals, corporate legals, IP legals and your corporate finance people, you need people to do business modelling, you need people who understand the technology that you are dealing with, and if you try and assemble a team of people that do that, you can get a very good team but it's going to be a very expensive team, and most of them aren't going to be engaged in all the projects, so it's kind of an expensive model.

So for us, KT2.0 is about assembling the right **network**, and that may involve components of community of practice, but it also involves creating marketplace and various other sort of marketing tools, all very much directed at trying to make it more effective in terms of commercialising our intellectual properties and expertise. And since we've started doing that, and it will become evident that it's been very effective... I'm going to touch, this afternoon, on some of the output that we've had using this sort of approach,

but this notion that you can't employ all the smart people is just generally true, and I'm troubled sometimes that some of the tech transfer organisations that we work with, still think that there isn't anybody outside their boundary who's going to teach them what they could do. And for us it's been quite an important lesson to which learn skill sets that we don't have internally and couldn't put forward.

And that's the importance of the second point, as we edge into the downturn of the economy or budget deficit reductions, the University will get hit fairly hard so the fact that we've created a very small light team that relies on engaging outsource, external players has put us in a , good position for withstanding some of that pressure.

And then the third element of that, which I'm definitely going to elaborate on this afternoon, is the notion of how you motivate them, and we'll come onto one of the lessons learned later, I'll leave that for now... But one of the things we couldn't do in our team is, if we're trying to manage our costs, is to pay people in equity, royalties - it is seen as a bit of a conflict of interest. But what we can do in fact, for a whole series of reasons, it's just been advantageous for us to create this outsourced virtual organisation of people engaging in technology transfer, people that have skill sets that we don't have, people we can stand down when we don't need them, people who have better connectivity to the marketplace, while we are sat behind our desks in the University most of the time, and people who will be incentivised economically on all sorts of models that we can't pay in the University.

So in order to coordinate that we've created a site at Leeds, Leeds Innovation Network. We've built this on a platform called Sossoon which probably most people won't have heard of. It's very much, as Paul described it, a slightly more closed professionalised version of Facebook. The real reason that we went for this particularly tool - it's quite functionally rich actually - and I may go on it in a second if the link works, but it's got some very nice visual matching tag clouds facilities and you can do all sorts of things that Paul was talking about with videos and so on. So we've been growing that platform.

Part of the reason that we grew it was, I don't know if people recognise... Is anybody on this platform, 'Global Innovation Network'? Does anybody do tech transfer? (Laughter). So tech transfer, by that I mean licensing, creating companies, using Universities' intellectual property and expertise to try and create value. And this is very much around it, so it's not a surprise then if people aren't tech transfer professionals, or knowledge transfer if you're not on this, but there are about 4,000 people in this community; this community was going already before we started what we were doing. So if we wanted to get something off the ground at Leeds we might as well join in with what was happening in the professional space already, use the same platform and see if we could link into it and also help build... Originally, the Leeds Innovation Network was a sub-community on this particular site and we migrated it over to our own platform version of that. And Manchester have been playing as well, they have their own version of this. They pumped a lot more money into this, they kind of refined it so that it does more of what they want it to do. Our perspective has very much been about creating an internal community of practice where we can get people who are interested in the enterprise knowledge transfer to work together within the University, but more importantly, to link into people externally, such as the army of individual entrepreneur consultants that we use to engage with particular projects where we need particularly skill sets, we bring them in and they work on projects. And Manchester are much more interested in that internal community of practice and setting technical business challenges that academics work on together.

Sheffield [if I said Leeds it was a slip] didn't get on board, the person we were working with there took voluntary severance, and so that angle didn't happen. We're hoping to work with York... I don't know if there's anybody from York here? They are looking to deploy a similar platform and we're looking into working with them. Partly, the intention is that if we are going through our Rolodex of people that we want to work with, there's sort of a pre-qualification stage, we need to know they are good, we need to know

what they have done, their history, and if we can share data like that with other Universities, it just takes some of the risk out of using externals.

We've also built into that, so the same guy at Manchester, Mark Thompson, is also behind the Knowledge Vine... Any users of Knowledge Vine here? (*Silence*). Okay. Again, that's perhaps not surprising because it's a fairly tech transfer... He described it as a sort of email equivalent of word of mouth; it's a growing international community where people design where you can pose one question and it can only be a question, 'Does somebody know, have any expertise in, for example the application of monoclonal antibodies in...)?' or whatever, and so it's quite an effective tool.

It's been picked up by the Technology Strategy Board and they're rolling that out into their \_connect platform. But I suppose what we wanted to do was to create this community of communities, so that we didn't have our own island where we are trying to busily populate Leeds Innovation Network to the expense of all others. And I've seen some bodies where, I think, 5 to 8 years ago, people were mopping up HEFCE money and creating 'innovation communities', (and if you Google you'll see every University had one) it was almost competitive, everyone was trying to get as many corporates on board as possible. And I think the big step forward in this, it's not quite there yet, is that all of these communities don't see themselves as competitive, they are working together as a sort of constellation of communities. And the more people in Mark's community at Manchester, the better it is for me; we can link in, we've got a single log-in so I can log-in to the Leeds Innovation Network, I can log into the Manchester network and I can log into the Global Innovation Network all using the same log-in. So it's easier.

So everybody's got their own community and they've got the keys to the back door, they can control and use it for what they want, in a slightly different flavour, but it all links in and is not a sort of a competitive rush for members. And it strikes me that this is probably the way that things should move. People are aware, Di touched on this this morning, of the Wellings / Hauser report, where they are looking to save costs by just pulling a load of people together in one sort of physical office to do the technology transfer activity.

So those are the issues about not having the skill-sets that are required and reducing costs and so on. And for me, it just isn't the right way to do it, the notion of, you know, physically trying to collocate everybody together in a networked age when you don't have to do that, and you've still got the problems of scalability, you've still got to employ the people with the right skill sets: it just doesn't make sense to me.

So that's what we're doing; does that kind of make sense to you? Because if there aren't many people doing tech transfer then I just want to make sure that that gets some nods from the tech transfer people. (Laughter).

So some of the lessons learned: I've kind of already touched on this. Don't compete: collaborate. Anybody who's trying to build a community and sees it as a competitive sport, I think is going to go nowhere. These things will only be built on the basis of generosity. The more you can participate in other people's communities and other people's discussions and dialogues... But use that as an opportunity to bring it back to yours later, you'll build your community... And build on existing networks, and the reason that Global Innovation Network was so successful - it's now got about 4,000 people - was because we didn't just build it and hope people would come, it was built on the back of a couple of professional bodies that were already existing, so the Association of the University Research and Industry Links started using this and is using it very actively now. It's one of their primary communication channels. And we supported all of their people in the community to start with, so we had about 1,000 people to make a bit of a party, make something happen, and then the Institute of Knowledge Transfer, which is Russell over in the corner there, also came on board and started using it. So we had a couple of the key professional bodies using it, and that made life a lot easier otherwise I seriously think that we wouldn't have got anything off the ground. And that's, in too many cases, I've been involved in building something in the early days where that 'build it and they will come' mentality... that you just concentrate on the functionality, concentrate on the tools and they'll come in behind you.

Provide really good content, and that obviously is constantly what you are trying to do. For us, it's quite simple; for us it's a kind of mixture of things. One of the key objectives is to advise and inform academics on where they can get their pots of money – proof of concept money - to help them move their ideas along. Obviously that sort of tacit knowledge, sharing of knowledge side of things is quite important, and I might try actually and see if we can just show some of the things that we've tried to deploy on the site.

So this is Leeds Innovation Network 'live' and we have been increasingly trying to use video content, you get one and a half minute video...(Video clip is shown, audio isn't clear ). So these are typically things that confuse academics around intellectual property, it's a complicated space. Rather than, we spend, you know, days in seminars trying to teach people... We try to use this as a way of bringing people up to speed on particular sort of frequently asked questions. (plays video) So that's been quite successful.

But making sure that the information is relevant to people has been quite important to us.

Making it easy to use, some of these platforms are actually not intuitive, and I'm going to come on to some psychological barriers later, so we've also tried to create some tools which just are, again, using Jing, and Paul [points a Paul Grimshaw] over here is the star of this one, he's produced some of these talks, which are just really talking people through some of the features. Again, deploying those on the platforms as little... That's not going to work actually, I'm not going to turn the volume up on this but it's Paul there talking to someone through a particular feature; this feature here, this virtual space which everybody has put their profiles in, it matches people on the basis of what they are interested in. So that's one of the other things that we've done.

But one of the key things that I think is important is that some of these tools won't take unless you really have the business model behind them. There's a

whole series of barriers, and we kind of learned the hard way, that stop people picking these up. And some of them aren't immediately obvious. I think we spent a lot of time on this programme looking at tips and tricks, 'How do you help, how do you make use, how do you improve it?' but what I want us to look at is some barriers from the other way around. I break these down into three areas, and I'm not going to go through all of them in detail but one of them I think is lack of clarity on the goals, sometimes we just, think everything looks like a community of practice and we don't break it down into what we're actually trying to achieve.

Some of the classic red herrings, the sort of things that people fear about social media, people who are less au fait with it, and the fact that it is just hard work, it's a long haul for various and obvious reasons. So first things, you need to be absolutely clear on the purpose of what you are doing, and there are all sorts of different social media tools, and they lend themselves in different ways to different sort of scenarios, particularly different scenarios where you have strong ties and weak ties or no ties at all to people.

So the first thing, you know, what are you trying to do? Are you just trying to improve team collaboration? If so then some Wiki tools that Paul's just been demonstrating, are fantastically useful. If you are trying to create a community of practice, then some of the social network tools obviously come into play. Or are you trying to create the marketplace...? And what we're trying to do is a bit of a mixture of both, in fact we're trying to go beyond that, we're trying to almost create prediction engine as well in a sense that we are trying to share tacit knowledge internally; we're trying to entice new people who would like to work with us, into our space and making connections; and we are also trying to use that as a platform to work out what we should be focusing on.

One of the mantras that I've had is that... two counterintuitive mantras really, just to force this over to my team, that we 'don't do commercialisation', we are a commercialisation team but we don't do commercialisation. The team is too small, if we get bogged down with that then we'll get nowhere. What we're trying to do is create the ecosystem, the environment in which this sort

of activity can take place, and particularly via a virtual community. And pushing it a little bit further, we 'don't make decisions', which again sounds a bit odd. But one of the things I think slows down tech transfer is, you've got too few people trying to take too many ideas to market. You've got to work out what the best ideas are. I'm a big fan of the notion of the wisdom of the crowds and so we're trying to use some of this virtual community to feed in our opportunities and see what generates interest. So instead of trying to pretend that I know what the next big thing is in terms of technology, or some committee inside the University knows what the next big thing is in terms of tech transfer, we feed it into our community.

Are you trying to span domains? This is the social capital notion, that somebody knows something, if something is very obvious in someone else's domain, if you appropriated, took that idea and used it in your domain then you'd look like a bit of a genius, even though it's well known in another domain. There are certain tools that are very good for that, where people have weak ties, and it's also possible to use prediction engines where you have no ties, you don't even need to engage with people you just sort of use polling technologies. Or are you simply just trying to find another channel to broadcast and spam your message out to the world, which is all too often, I think, what social media gets used for, things like Twitter.

So that for me is the key thing, it's trying to work out which of those is yours and what are you trying to do and the tools will flow from that and the strategies will flow from that.

So these are some of the different ... I tried to organise these in terms of collaborative tools, so if you regard that bulls-eye as, you know, the closer, your team in the middle, these are the sorts of tools that you might have to use. I can take Wave off there, that's been killed, but Basecamp, Google Docs. If you are trying to create a community of practice, then these are the sort of tools that Manchester, Leeds and Paul (Lowe are using) and so forth. If it's going beyond the communities of practice, and it's organising a profession, like the Global Innovation Network is, then again, that's a different set of tools than Linked In might be...

One of the things that drives me mad is that reluctance to participate in many different communities, often I see people who say, 'Well I've got something here in Linked In so I don't need to participate in any other community group' and I think that sometimes is missing the point. And then there are domain specific tools, so that, without elaborating on it, that's the kind of key thing, and there are many tech transfer specific tools, work out whether you're trying to organise a very small core of people or whether you're getting further out into those weaker ties, and that will determine the type of approach and sets of tools that you might be able to use.

I'm going to move past the red herrings because I doubt anybody believes any of these, but if anyone does, stick your hands up.

This for me is the real issue. I don't know if people know this quote (by Ralph Waldo Emerson) but if you devise a better technology, people will beat a path to your door. Well the problem is that it's just plain wrong and they don't, and there's lots of evidence to suggest, you know, behavioural economics, that people irrationally over value the tools that they've got. To try and peel people off email for example, which is very effective, possibly one of the easiest ways to create communities, is a very difficult task because it's easy to use and people know how to use it. But even if you'd got a better approach, even if your social media platform is better, people probably won't naturally move towards using it, and that for me is the biggest hurdle; until you crack that, it's very unlikely that you are going to be able to build that community.

The same guy that quote comes from also said, 'The average email user will under-weigh the benefits of collaborative media by a factor of 3', but social media enthusiasts, people who are speaking up here, will also over value the tools that we're using and how much they take us forward. So that already gives you a 9-fold sort of gap, and that's the only way that I can explain what I see as really odd activities. So when we launched the Leeds Innovation Network, for example, somebody had already got a knowledge transfer blog at the University and was a very prolific producer of really good quality

information. The problem was, there were, I think there were 11 people that were on that blog, 6 of whom had left the University and about 3 or 4 of them were people sat at desks around him. He was so kind of used to that particular tool that he wasn't bothered about the fact that he was speaking to a void and that there was another community just over the horizon that had hundreds more people listening in, and greater functionality.

That seems irrational, but actually I think that's just human nature, so I think the key thing for me, the key lesson learnt is that it's a long haul and it won't come easy. You really do have to slog at it, but if you do then it shows, it will show value, but manage the process accordingly.

The other key thing for me is, don't regard this as a bolt-on, and I see this with my team, I'm always coming in with new tools, new and exciting tools that could make us more productive, help us create this virtual environment, an efficient army of people working on my behalf to commercialise the technology of the University of Leeds, but if they see it as just a tool to make connections when they are free from doing their work, they won't use it, it just seems like a little add-on, another responsibility. These people are busy, they work really hard and so you've got to turn it into a tool for your business and that's exactly what we've done. So, a lot of the proof of concept calls that we run, a lot of monitoring reports, I just force them into using this tool, you know, using it as a way of communicating to our army of entrepreneurial consultants out there to select projects, we do it through this tool, so if it comes wired into our business process, then people are forced to use it and then if it's the only way, basically you can overcome that natural reticence around using new tools. Once you do it, people are on board.

So I've seen, for example, I make a call from a little pot of proof of concept money that I've got in my budget and I'll do it through Leeds Innovation Network; the amount of people that log on and start using it and finding the benefits of social media technology is quite amazing, but if we didn't do that, they just wouldn't bother. But if you don't do that, it's just a distraction...

We really have to kind of built it into the way we do business, so the consultants that we use externally, we're creating what I call a 'KT2.0 Bible',

which is basically, you know, how we roll, the way that we work and the kind of strategies that we've got; the dos and don'ts and how you participate and how you get in. All our contracts and templates are all there, we've tried to make them idiot-proof so people can download them themselves and use them without having to bother my team. And one of the things that we've found is that kind of allows us, if we use that consistently, it starts to reduce the transaction cost, because one of the big hurdles that we have on our project is that we are overcoming, we're trying to move out of that corporate hierarchy, which means that we have to deal with people on a one-to-one basis, each person we have to kind of work out what the deal is and if we never template that then we won't get very far. But all that gets loaded onto our social media space and people download it directly. That (slide of old-fashioned payphone) is just to reference that one of the things we are trying to make clear is that we don't like coin-operated consultants, people who come to work with us have to be in for the long haul, to share of equity etc. etc.

Another thing I think is forgotten sometimes is that sometimes you just have to go for the digital switchover; now you've got to be careful with this I think but in the way that the government has decided that analogue TV has had its day and at some point we're going to switch it off and everyone will be going on to digital, I think sometimes we have to do that with some of the social media platforms and some of the collaborative tools. And I kind of hinted at that already. I refuse to coordinate certain things using old technologies and I force the team to 'go digital' where I have the power to do that, and it works very effectively. Obviously you can't do that if you're not in control of a particular business process, but I'd still suggest that people think about that. If you've got the power to build something into your business process and also to turn off alternatives, that will really drive the adoption, it just sometimes need to be forced.

And that's it really. So those lessons learnt from it, you have to, you really do have to build this into your business model. If it's anything more complex than a site to bring people in and share experiences, it really has to be woven

into what you're doing. If you treat it as something as just another tool for communication, and we have plenty of those, I use Twitter, I use many other tools for communication, I get a lot out of that, but I really don't think I can expect my team, force them, to adopt a whole series of different sorts of technology and communication and platforms if it isn't actually integral to the work that they do. And so that, for me, is one of the key lessons.

*(Applause).*

***Ends at 28:45***