

Staff exchanges underpinning academic / business partnerships – good practice for knowledge and technology transfer

18th March 2014

Context

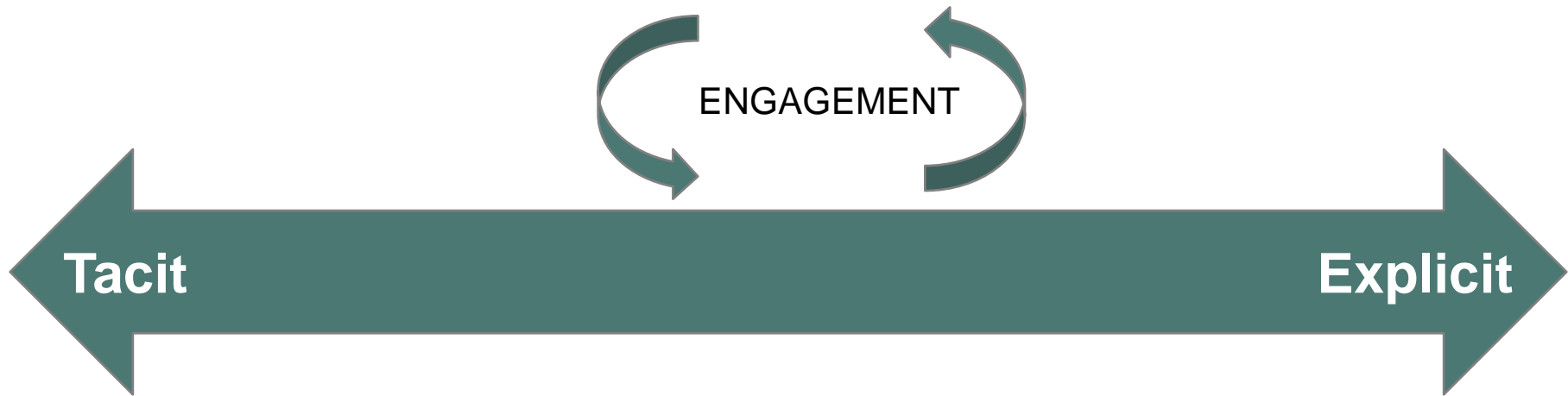
- Impact Acceleration Accounts
- Support for knowledge and technology transfer
 - and especially secondment for KTT
- EPSRC IAA Knowledge Transfer Fellowships
- ... a study of effective practices at Cambridge

- *Some limited evidence from companies seconding between their research units and their business Units*
 - *Many of the same issues*
 - *Difficult to quantify benefits and most don't try*
 - *Business Units find secondment difficult to manage, both culturally and defending value for money*
- *Many of the findings from this work are consistent with good practice in University /Industry relationships in general*

Staff exchanges, secondments and knowledge transfer

- Why?
- How does it work at its best?
- How to make it work?
- The successful secondee
- Blocks and barriers
- Questions?

The spectrum of knowledge exchanged



Technology knowledge and practice
Key issues and priorities
Culture, custom and practice

Documented technology
Documented plans and priorities
Manuals and handbooks

Secondment adds most value in understanding and disseminating the tacit

Staff exchanges – the spectrum and purpose

- Everything from ‘five-year secondment’ – to ‘visit for a few weeks’
- Why?
 - Capability and tacit knowledge
 - Access to non-core skills and facilities
 - Understanding context to better target research
 - Understanding wider applications of capability
 - Problem solutions, explicit knowledge, tools
 - and **serendipity!**

Company laboratory embedded in a university department as a special case

Industry to university

E.g. Johnson Matthey and Chem Eng

Industry to university

Bilateral

*Industry to Academia: e.g. Centre for Smart Infrastructure and Construction
University to Industry: e.g. Rolls Royce*

Bilateral

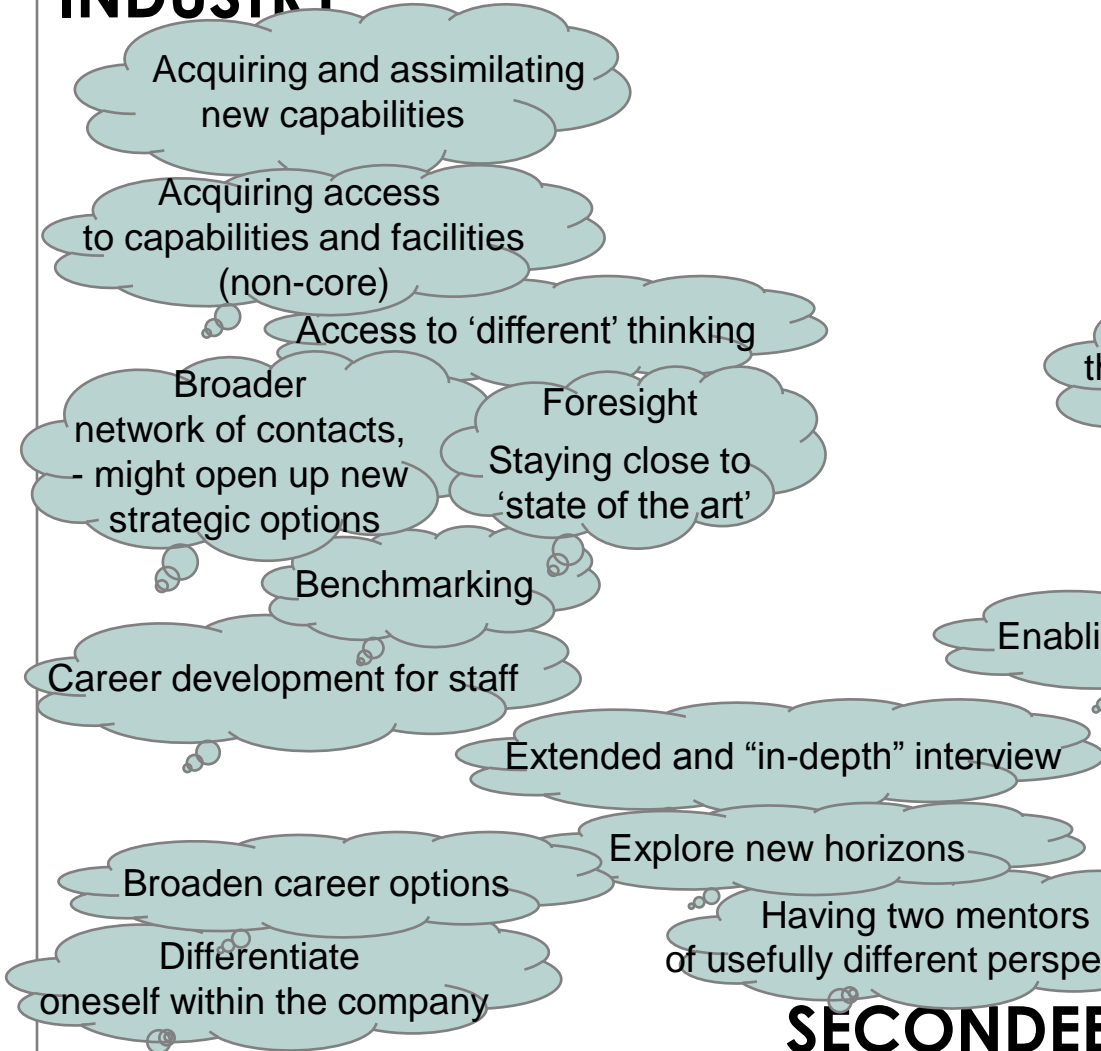
Bilateral

*Explicit example: Low Carbon and Materials Processing Group person seconded to BP
Implicit example: Rolls Royce people working in the Whittle Lab*

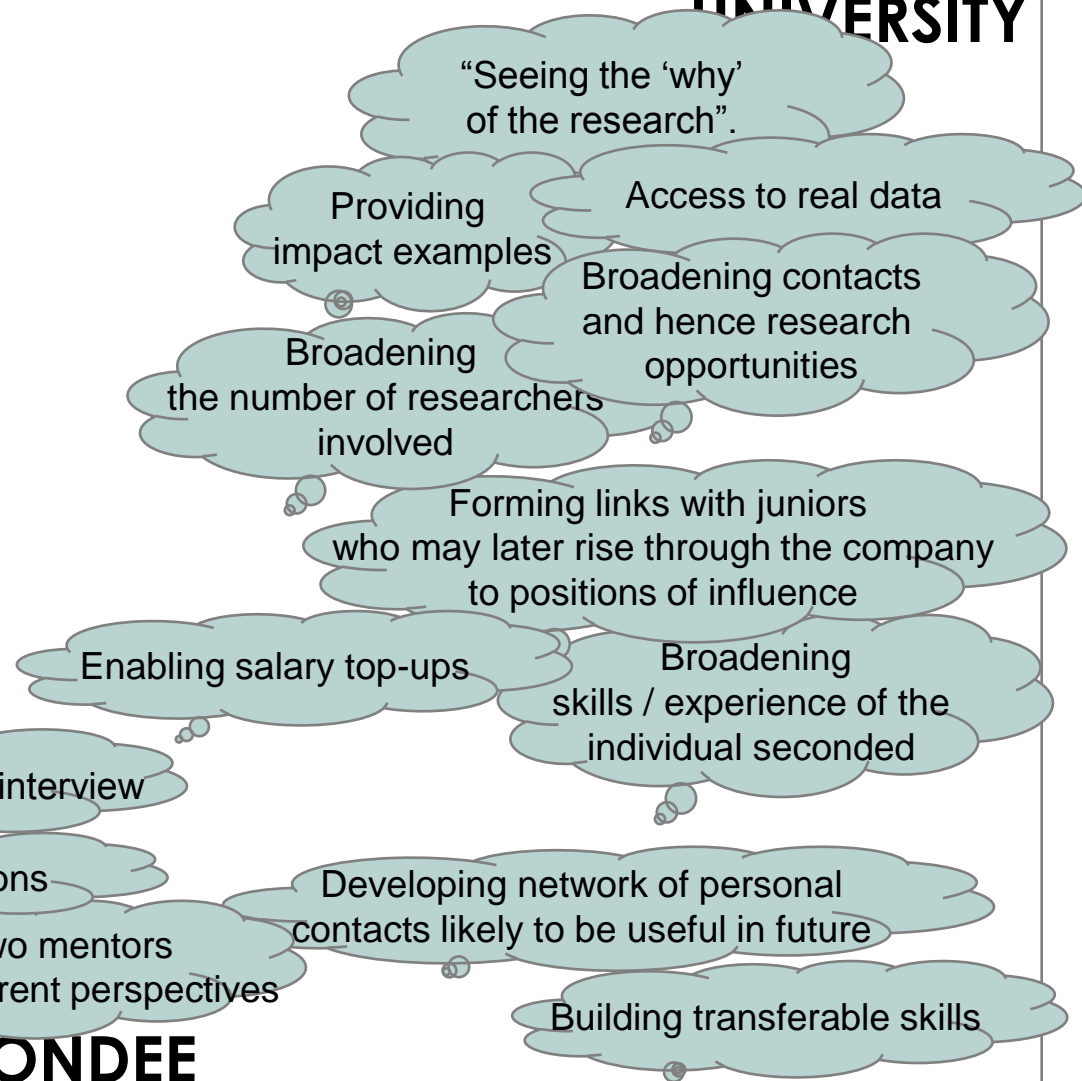
E.g. staff exchanges as an extension of the typical “workshops and meetings” approach – a low risk extension with very high added value

Staff exchanges – WHY?

INDUSTRY

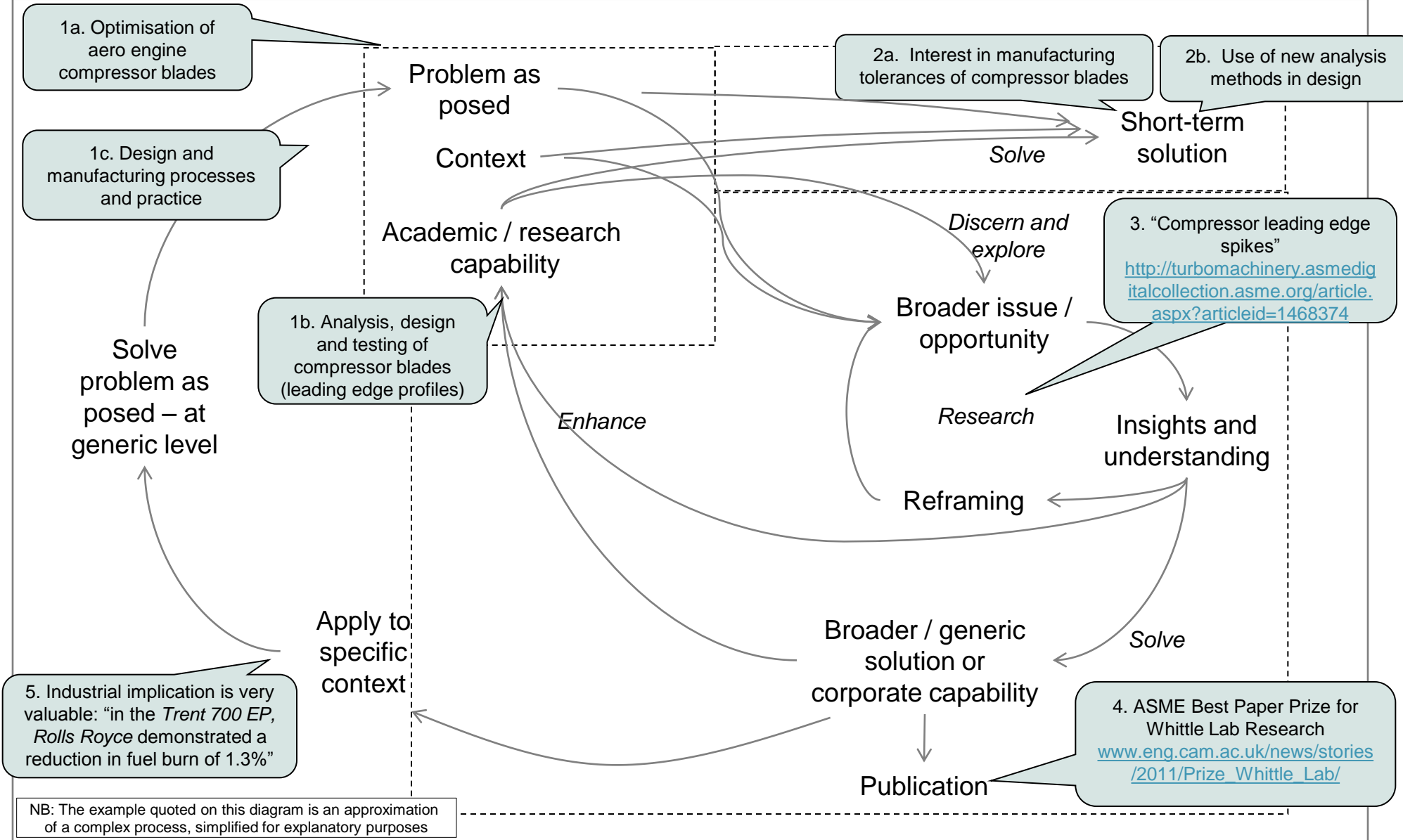


UNIVERSITY



SECONDEE

Understanding context delivers better solutions and better research



Staff exchanges and secondment – keys to success

Strategic orientation, less focus on metrics, able to authorise the 'bit of slack' that enables breakthroughs

Academic seniors can help early-career researchers see the potential value – and provide essential support

Vital to negotiate shared objectives and ensure supportive context – for best outcomes for all

■ Senior championship – both sides

Translation of research to problem.
Finding / pitching the arguments to others

Mentoring
(Ex secondees are good)

Patience

Invest time

■ Skilled 'middle management' – both sides

Governance that matures over time – written and unwritten. Coach secondees if necessary. Use NDAs to provide assurance for both sides. Value of "badges of membership" such as email addresses

Pragmatic support – long/short trade-offs

■ Umbrella governance – present but invisible

Be pragmatic: Do things seem to be going well? Are we getting what we want? Both sides will know.

Beware the short-termism of poorly targeted Management by Objectives!

Safety net / Enabler

■ Clear objectives – but informal metrics

Provide briefings on history, objectives, rules (in practice as well as the written), access to networks, invitations to and introductions in meetings, social support

Value for Money

■ Orientation for secondees

Task provides context and legitimacy, and a minimum deliverable. "Something to do – but not too much"

Speed at minimum risk

■ Defined tasks – but **space for serendipity**

Secondees are likely to be outside the mainstream while they're away – so highlight their successes – create publicity and recognition. Clarify by action that they're valued

Risk management

■ Cultural support

Motivation

Staff exchanges and secondment – the successful secondee

■ Cultural sensitivity

- New environment, new culture, new norms
- Factions: threats and opportunities

■ Tolerance for ambiguity

- Evolving and multiple roles
- Policy decision delays

Need to figure out how to fit in and add value – and it may need to be in new and unexpected ways

Everybody's learning, including the administrators and policy-makers

■ Competence

- To gain acceptance
- To manage the host's risk
- To get the quick wins that gain access to the interesting opportunities

So not too early in a career stage – make sure you know your field enough to be quickly useful

Don't be too narrow – but don't spread yourself too thinly

Staff exchanges – blocks and barriers

■ The time required to do it properly...

- Make it explicit strategy
- Build it into the structure of the relationship
- Build it into careers
- Requires shared values, objectives and trust

} { Takes time
} { Takes effort

■ Safety net: Parallel relationships / channels of communication

} { Takes time
} { Takes effort

■ Bureaucracy

- Legal
- HR
- Financial

Generally they're trying to create a safety net for the problems that are unlikely but high-impact if they occur

Talk to them early enough to allow them to be helpful

Beware cultures that know the cost of everything but may not be able to recognise value

■ Mindset: The tyranny of the timecard and discerning value