

Bridging the Gap

Nicholas O'Regan, Bristol Business
School, UK

Tim Hughes, Bristol Business School, UK

Glenn Parry, Bristol Business School, UK

Can academia alone bridge the Gap?

- No...
- Why? too much focus on analytics and problem finding rather than problem solving and implementation
- management is taught as a science rather than rooted in action
- The greater the gap the less likely it can be bridged by academia alone

But Academia can narrow the Gap – with some help

- Collaboration/co production of knowledge between academia and practitioners is the way
- managers and organizations to be more closely involved in the framing of the research and its active dissemination
- **How? Brokers!**

Theory is one thing

Practitioners need contribution to application
But tensions and trust are issues [from both
academic and practitioner sides]

These can be bridged by **brokers**

But tensions exist...

	Academics	Practitioners
Power, hierarchy/politics	hierarchy of knowledge academic language current academics areas of interest	Agendas Silos of power
Culture	long time frames emphasises rigour	little time/inclination to reflect time pressures simple solutions
Motivation	Research evaluation funding	task profit/performance
Focus of attention	theory and process	task and process

In Practice...

- Limited academic/business engagement
[limited to internships and a few big research projects]
- Awareness – few look to universities or know where to go/how to access
- Value – priorities/timescales may hinder
- Challenges- IP issues, bureaucracy, lead times, information access [poor web sites]

Routes to engagement ..Brokers have a limited role

Awareness/accessibility

clearer positioning of university offering
better marketing/**communication to users**
facilitate greater accessibility

Value

academic mindset – change
academic reward/training

Effective project working

speed up application processes

But Brokers can help...

Sharing is hard if the knowledge is complex

Need to

- Understand the stakeholders
- Create the right conditions
- Considers the 'soft' factors/motivations
- Have the right communication

But it is doable...with the help of **brokers**

Routes to engagement- Formal/Informal

The challenge for universities is the breadth and complexity of what they do

Courses and programmes — touch point but not systematic

Research — action research can be ok but other research questionable

Publications — very limited impact

Conferences- very limited practitioner involvement

Knowledge networks- can be an effective mechanism

Academic consultancy- can be effective but agenda set by client and only academics with a significant industry knowledge are involved

Brokers – Professional Bodies

Professional regulation – opportunity but differs by academic discipline

Ways in which Professional Bodies can enhance academic/practitioner knowledge Exchange

Licence to practice	participate in UG/PG courses continuing CPD
Research direction	funding/commissioning research setting research agenda
Forum for academics and practitioners	local national e.g research funding committees
Research opportunities	access to members for data collection outlets for dissemination

But is potential fulfilled? And contribution to research is limited

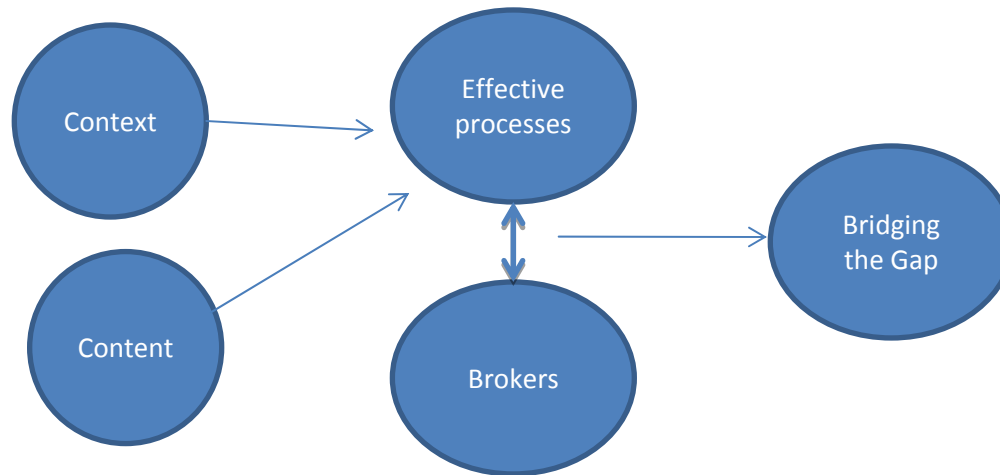
Brokers - other

Networks (formal and informal)

Industry and sectoral networks

Networks on Specific issue

A Model for Effective Collaboration



Context:

- academics need to find opportunities to work in the context of practice
- placement opportunities with industry and other organisations.
- BUT practitioners must be willing to involve academics more closely.

Content: Academic research rarely reaches practice [format, language used, relevance]

Effective processes: relationships need to be proactively developed and managed. How do we see our business communities and how do we reach out to them? Translate academic articles? Knowledge broking?

Brokers – facilitation role

Summary

Brokers can...

- give congruence between research conducted by academics and that used by practitioners.
- facilitate ways by which the degree of congruence can be enhanced
- provide clarity on how organisations might or should access academia.
- Facilitate the credibility of academia in contributing to practitioner related issues by effective processes to manage the context and content