

Shapeshifters, Lifestylers and Refugees

The many selves of Knowledge Transfer (KT) staff

Introduction

Whereas Greenhalgh (2010) called for 'a time to problematize and critically question our understanding of knowledge', this research focuses on the 'who' is involved with the KT process rather than the 'what' is being transferred. It explores identity construction amongst KT staff through understanding the motivations and drivers which attract individuals to work in this arena, and how the relationship between the individual and the institution influences, shapes and personalises their KT practices.

Two assumptions underpin this research:

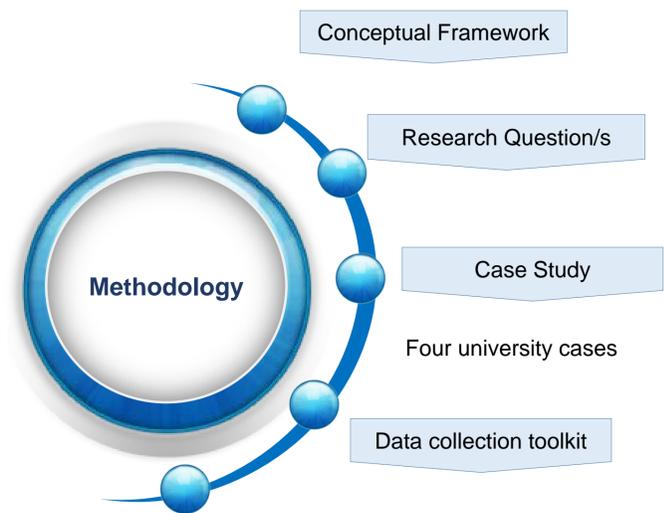
1. knowledge is a commodity with intrinsic market value (social, economic, political, reputational)
2. there exists a group of non-academic staff in HE whose primary role it is to lead, and coordinate the transfer of knowledge from universities to business that will contribute to social and economic prosperity

Research question

How do KT staff construct their identities in an arena which is evolving and subject to strategic re-alignment?

Objectives

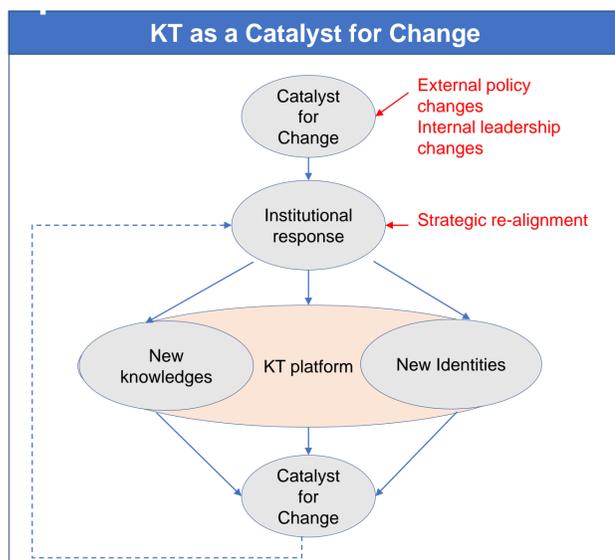
1. To identify the factors which influence identity construction amongst KT staff;
2. To explore KT staffs' understanding of their roles, and whether these understandings are in line with those of the institution;
3. To ascertain how identities are expressed in the KT process; and
4. To consider how KT staff might be distinguished from other groups of HE staff. Specifically, what if anything, makes them distinctly different and is this difference recognised by the individual and the institution?



32 x (1-1.5hr) Interviews

Document analysis
Perception mapping

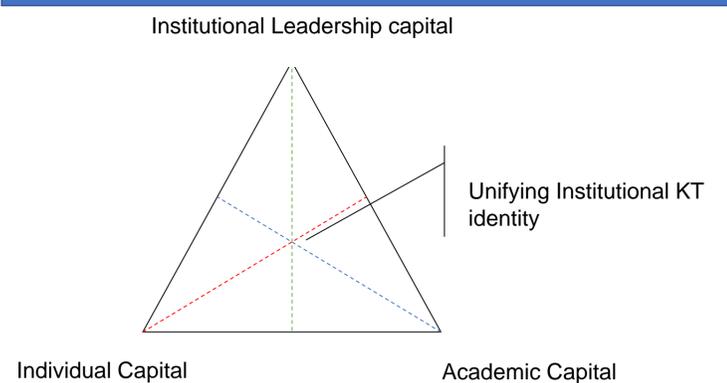
Key Themes



1 Cycles of change
The case study universities provided access to four distinctly different types of KT environments, there were similarities as well as differences. All of the universities had first-hand experience of the evolving nature of KT.

This is evidenced by the cycles of change which emerged from analysis of the multiple iterations of business plans which each university produced in response to changing policies. These plans were used to set and refine the strategic direction of the institutions' KT agendas.

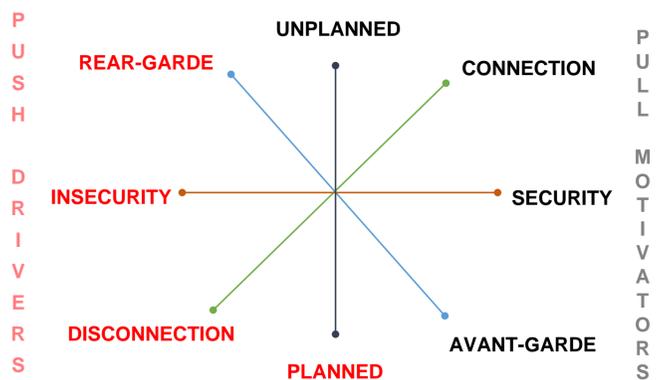
2 Capital Congruence and Unified Identities



Capital and Identity

Identity is the point at which individuals' fields, habitus and capital converge. It is dynamic, absorptive and reflective of the circumstances that an individual finds themselves in at any given time. Whilst Bourdieu's (1985) theories provide some insight into how an individual's capital informs their position within the social and economic structure within which they function, they do not readily explain the influence of external capital (both from the institution and other collectives) on identity construction amongst KT staff within this study. This appears to be influenced by tensions caused by mis(recognition) of the individuals' capital value by the academy, and mis(recognition) of the institution's capital vacuum (that is gaps in knowledge, expertise and skills) by the individual. However, the findings suggest that when capital congruence occurs, a collective unifying understanding of what KT is (and is not) for the institution will emerge.

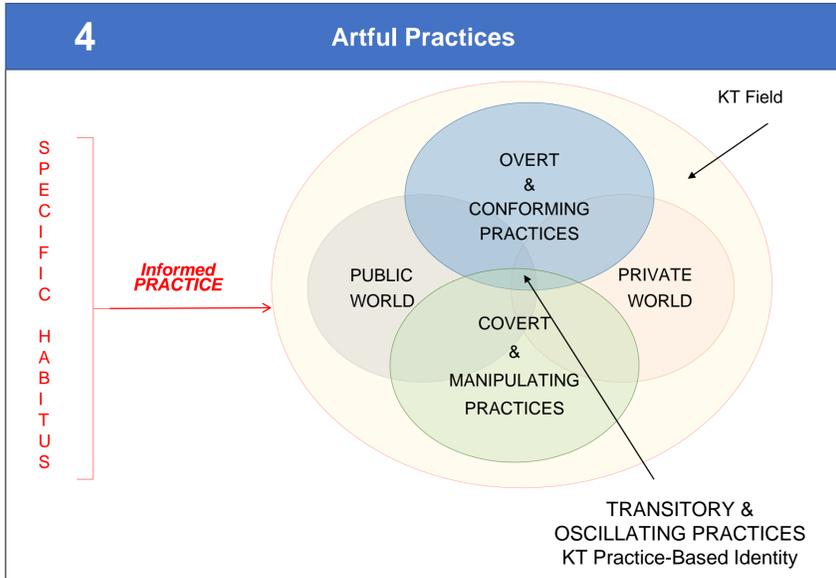
3 Push and Pull Motivators



Typecasting KT Staff

Home-Grown	Type A: KT staff who appear to enter the HE KT arena through administration services route such as professional services. Type B: Academic staff who enter the KT field as the result of a decision to change direction or to develop skills which they believe will enhance their academic career prospects.
Shapeshifters	KT staff who are the product of a hybrid career. That is, someone who has left academia and worked in industry and/or the National Health Service and has decided to return to academia in a KT role
Refugees	Staff who appear to be the product of economic recessions and contraction within the private sector.
Do-Gooders	Staff that are primarily driven by philanthropic motives and choose to work in KT as a means to giving something back
Lifestylers	Closely aligned to Do-Gooders in that salary and remuneration does not appear high on their list of priorities.

The value of this rudimentary typology is that it provides an indication of the type of individuals that might be attracted to a KT role, the relative strengths and weaknesses of their career capital and where the institution may need to provide additional support and guidance to help them be successful in their KT roles. For example, when applied to the study, it appeared that 37.5% of the interviewees could be categorised as Home-Grown staff, of which, 75% were Type A staff with limited or no experience of business or commercial activities.



The Practice of KT

Given the plurality and boundary spanning nature of KT practices, it is not possible to identify an optimal distinctive identity. It is, however, possible to suggest that KT staff have a shifting practice-based identity which is constantly (re)forming as boundary hopping and the colonisation of activities through ring-fencing occurs. Artful practices take place in the KT field which is understood to be the **socially constructed area where the game of KT is played** which has rules, regulations and practices informed by both the individual and the collective. Specific habitus informs practice and includes those dispositions and understandings which are **acquired through career and employment** experiences. The **public world is the public identity** of the individual whereas the private world contains the invisible **private identity of the individual**. Finally, **overt, covert and transitory practices are strategic and tactical ways of working**. These are deployed either singularly or in combinations across contested, shared and owned spaces and inform the construction and re-construction of a KT practice-based identity.



Contested Space & Practice	Shared Space & Practice	Owned Space & Practice
ACADEMIC Teaching Research	ACADEMIC Product Development	KT Commercialisation & Exploitation
ADMINISTRATION Research Management	ADMINISTRATION Process Management	