Knowledge Networks for Innovation: from Theory into Practice, the case for SMEs
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Presentation structure

• Background to the project
• Theoretical background
• Research Approach
• Indicative findings
• Thoughts for the future
Background (1)

Partner match funding

Manufacturing Advisory Service – South West
Innovation: A good idea, that implemented well, improves the bottom line
Theoretical Background

• Small to Medium sized Enterprises
  • A small business is not a little big business (Welsh & White 1981)
  • Resource scarcity & external uncertainty (Ghobadian & Gallear 1997, and Storey 1994)

• Knowledge Exchange
  • Constructivist paradigm
  • Double Loop Learning (Argyis & Schoen, 1977)
  • Absorptive Capacity (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990 and Zahra & George 2002)

• Triple Helix
  • Innovation networks / systems (Etzkowitz 2000)
  • Boundary spanning individuals / activities (Tushman 1977, Hansen 1999)
Absorptive Capacity

Acquisition  Assimilation  Transformation  Exploitation
Role of Awareness

• Precondition to Acquisition
  • [T]here are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns – the ones we don't know we don't know.”
    - Former United States Secretary of Defence, Donald Rumsfeld

• Co-badging with other organisations
• Events
• Newsletters
• Advertising
Research Approach

• Action Research
  • Embedded in the problem domain
  • Action orientated outcomes
  • Social system, rather than technology system
  • Multiple sources of data collection
  • Qualitative & quantitative

• Reflection at meta-level to theory & practice
Indicative findings

• Awareness: important, but perhaps not in the context we originally suspected

• Acquisition: very little appetite for DIY, strong preference for individuals (boundary spanners) that can ‘translate’ between disciplines

• Assimilation: have not seen much evidence of double-loop learning (deep assimilation)
Future directions

• Need to better understand the dimensions of Awareness

• Few quantitative measures of absorptive capacity, none for Awareness

• The use of Absorptive Capacity in designing innovation systems
Thank you
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