

The Role of Universities as Conduits for establishing Key Social Networks

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Background:

- Design-led innovation
- How people and organisations learn
- Identification of characteristics of social networks
- Studies in UK Graphic Design and knitting industries, West Midlands Regional Development Agency
- Managing university/industry projects

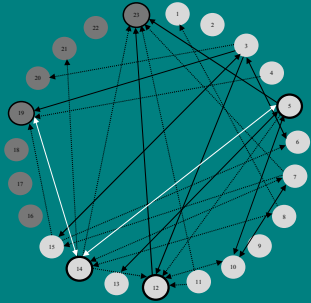
Why Social Networks?

- Previous need for proximity to raw materials, labour or markets
- Now key resource is innovation and ideas
- The social origins of new ideas
- Dissemination of tacit knowledge and values

Healthy social networks

- As many of the actors are linked as possible - *optimum dissemination*
- Reciprocal relationships - *exchange*
- Links to external networks - *innovation introduction*
- Mobility of labour - *transfer of innovation*
- Diversity in members - *range of approaches and knowledge*

Nottingham's Knitters



- Ranging from traditional 'fine and fancy' lacy - hosiery and fabric
- Mainly under 50 employees
- Changes in sourcing strategies of UK retailers
- Issues : Sales leads (perceived), global competition, lack of product development skills and information, lack of resources to bring about change.

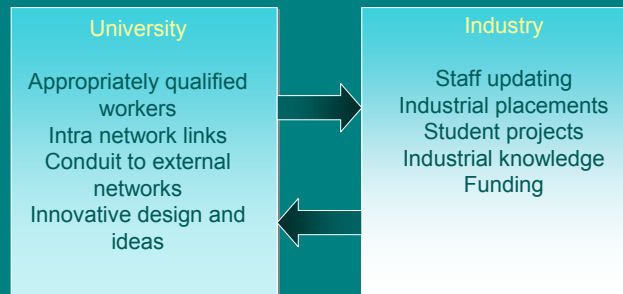
Learning regions

eg Silicon valley

- Strong internal and external networks
- Key professional resources and well educated workforce
- Local research centres
- Strong University/industry links
- Leadership

Role of the University

Reciprocal relationships



UK Examples

- Network building
- Knowledge dissemination
- Staff updating
- New entrepreneurs

Network building

Creative Network - West Midlands

- Based at Staffordshire University
- Local businesses and suppliers
- Leader organisations
- Evening social events
- 'Speed dating' sessions
- Visiting speakers
- Business visits

Knowledge transfer

- Knowledge Transfer partnerships - expansion into design (Department of Trade and Industry)
- Higher Education Innovation Fund - develop structures for exchange (Higher Education Funding Council)
- Design Immersion scheme - innovation audit by professional/student teams (Design Council)

Staff Updating

- Industry/ University exchanges
- Events and workshops
- Value of training schemes?

New entrepreneurs

Proof of Concept

- Based at Bath University/School of Art and Design
- Recent graduates
- Support for product development
- Support for business planning
- Use of School facilities
- Provision of city centre space
- Tap into School and local networks

Summary

- Need for proximity to innovation and ideas
- University as a conduit to internal and external networks
- Collaboration and reciprocity