

Industry, Academia and the Public: a University Perspective by a Music Technologist

Carola Boehm
Contemporary Arts, Manchester Metropolitan University, UK
C.Boehm@mmu.ac.uk

What kind of partnerships are best placed to drive innovations? Considering the continual appetite for new products and services within our knowledge economy, how can we ensure that the most novel and significant research can be applied in and exploited for the market?

For academics and creative practitioners in the creative sector, where subject matter often straddles both science and art, technology and creative practice, often involving both commercial and social enterprise, there are questions about how to best to support partnership projects and how to improve the flow from a research stage to the application of these new insights into an external sector. What makes the consideration of knowledge production in this area even more difficult is that within UK academia, there still seems to be an encultured difference between 'research' and 'enterprise'.

Universities may express their intention and policy of treating research and enterprise as a continuum, but just a brief look at career development opportunities within UK institutions demonstrates a strong preference for basic research over enterprise. This represents a distinct disincentive for a large part of academia to engage more directly with industrial partners and/or communities representing end-users. This prioritization of basic research over applied research, or what has been termed as a prioritization of 'Mode 1' research over 'Mode 2 and 3' research, has the potential of slowing the knowledge exchange between academia and industry.

Similarly, disincentive models exist in the area of social enterprise, often falling into the category of community engagement, widening participation and/or the 'civic duties' of a university. Many of these terms emphasize the perspective of the educating institution; they are university-centric and are conceptualized as activities that flow within and out of academia.

It is this – an increasing number of academics and professionals would argue – which is problematic for forming partnerships that are impactful in allowing research and new knowledge to add significant value both to the sector and to society. The difficulty in bringing an idea to the final market stage is perceived to be normal. The external sector thus often perceives universities as too slow to support innovation. The supporting structures and incentive models within academia often support the production of journal papers, but the journey from transferring this knowledge to developing a prototype, securing patents, developing market plans, designing for mass production and finally delivering a commercial product is so difficult that too many academics are opting for the traditional publish-a-paper route.

This situation does not need to be this way, and various voices from different sectors suggest that universities need to change the way in which they contextualize, value, incentivize and support research in order for the development of innovation and its application in society to happen much more instantaneously. Authors relevant for this debate are Etzkowitz [1], Carayannis and Campbell [2], Gibbons [3], Watson [4] and Boehm [5, 6] among others, but there is also a wider relevant debate about the role of universities today, including contributors such as Collini [7], Barnett [8, 9], Graham [10] and Williams [11].

The progressive terms relevant for this debate are 'triple and quadruple helixes', 'Open Innovation 2.0' and 'Mode 3 research'. Their related challenges can be overcome more easily by having the right academia–business–government partnerships from the outset of a project, with a more collective co-production and collaborative experience of both basic research and development, as well as application, commercialization and subsequent marketization. With the new UK government-driven impact agendas for Higher Education, these issues are timely and relevant to a consideration of the role that universities play in society today.

(594 words)

Biography

Carola Boehm is Associate Dean and Head of Contemporary Arts at the Cheshire Campus of Manchester Metropolitan University. She holds degrees in music, computer science and electrical engineering. She has held positions at the University of Glasgow, the University of Mainz, the Conservatory of Music Hanover and Den Haag,

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