



# An evaluative inquiry of university innovation mentor facilitation of service innovation

**John Sparrow , Krystyna Tarkowski and  
Michele Mooney**

# Overview



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# Background



- Evaluations of business support and university-industry knowledge transfer have explored the impact associated with '**advice-based**' support – there are other approaches!
- SMEs may benefit more when resources and knowledge can be brokered **as problems occur** (Perkmann and Walsh, 2007)
- **Coaching and mentoring** have been argued to be effective approaches towards entrepreneur development (Thompson and Downing, 2006)



# Process vs expert consultation

- Schein (2006) advocates:
  - “not **expert** advice but (1) facilitating the **client's own understanding** of his or her own problem and (2) teaming up with the client to **jointly develop a solution** . . . most consultants attempted to recommend expert solutions and most these solutions were not implemented because they **ignored critical factors in the client's situation**” (p294).
- Process consultancy involves:
  - helping clients to **find their own solutions** to their organisational issues
  - work with the dimensions of organisational life that are usually hidden **below the surface**
  - **systemic thinking** to help clients to analyse the different contextual **layers of the organisational system**

# Service innovation and innovativeness



- Service innovation is new or improved:
  - service or good
  - process of production or delivery
  - internal organisation
  - market innovation and external relations

(Vang and Zellner, 2005)
- Dynamic capabilities (Teece et al, 1997)
  - the management capability to effectively coordinate and redeploy internal and external competences

# Learning and change



- Can achieve transformational (rather than incremental) change if:
  - have **potential** and **realised absorptive capacity** (Zahara and George, 2002)
  - at a '**tipping point**' (Bessant et al, 2005)
  - can secure **entrepreneurial and organisational learning** capability (Zhang et al, 2006)

# BCU objective



- BCU wanted to **develop and assess** an approach to **facilitating service innovation** to achieve **impact** and **develop its capability**



# Methodology

- Used **evaluative inquiry** (Preskill and Torres, 1999) to monitor, problematise, reflect and evolve its approach
- Developed means to **recruit 50 academics** from within BCU and **develop them** to work as **Innovation Mentors** (IMs)
- Worked with external 'service design' company (Engine) to develop a **business development process** (Service by Design)
- **Ongoing interaction** process between IMs and central project team to meet '**emergent**' needs



# The Service by Design project



- Worked with IMs to **build trust** between themselves, central team and clients
- Helped IMs think about **facilitation**
- Worked with organisations for between **6 and 12 months**
- Measured **pre- and post- position** in **sample of 12** organisations in **key variables**

# Findings



- Statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) changes were found in the client organisations' pre- and post-practices (paired t-tests)
  - *market responsiveness*
  - *entrepreneurial and organisational learning*
  - *absorptive capacity*
  - *extent engaged in transformational (as opposed to incremental) change*
  - *moved organisations closer to tipping points in operations, formalised systems, finance and strategy*
  - *agility and resilience*

# Conclusions



- An **evaluative inquiry** approach towards **shaping and executing** university-industry KT captures **emergent** issues and is **effective**
- A **process consultation** approach works well with clients and draws upon key **skills of academics** (e.g. **critical enquiry**)
- **Service innovation** is a powerful **catalyst** for **transformational** change in organisations



**BIRMINGHAM**  
City University

**Any questions?**