Journal of Business Research xxx (2015) xxx–xxx

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Business Research

Adding value to companies' value chain: Role of business schools scholars☆

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 1 February 2015
Received in revised form 1 July 2015
Accepted 1 September 2015
Available online xxxx

Keywords:
Value chain
Business schools scholars
Business models
Expert advice
Companies

ABSTRACT

This article uses data from 807 scholars from 35 Canadian business schools to look into the extent to which faculty members in business schools create value for companies. An overwhelming 74% of business scholars provide value-adding services and expert advice to companies. However, they do so with companies within a 100 km radius and whose activities closely mirror their field of expertise. Only a minority of academics offer customized solutions to companies and develop explicit strategies to compete with consulting firms and other scholars. Furthermore, a sizeable 40% frequently forge close and long lasting ties with companies.

1. Introduction

A company's value chain is part of a larger system that includes the value chains of upstream suppliers and downstream clients. Faculty members of business supply services and expert advice that are part of the former. The study of the linkages between the intramural value creation activities of a company and the services and expert advice from faculty members of business schools is a current issue in business–academia relationship. This study advances knowledge in this area using Porter's generic value chain model (Porter, 1985). Most studies on this issue use the number of technologies commercialized through university technology transfer offices (UTTOs) as the unit of analysis (Agrawal, 2001; Gallego, Rubalcaba, & Suárez, 2013; Landry, Amara, & Ouimet, 2007; Padilla-Meléndez & Garrido-Moreno, 2012). In contrasts, this study adopts a researcher's perspective as a more appropriate unit of analysis by using knowledge that individual researchers transfer to industry. Faculty members of business schools deliver value to companies through the provision of a variety of services and expert advice that do not fall into the mandate of the UTTOs. Consequently, these services are not captured in knowledge transfer data from these offices. Furthermore, in contrast to most prior studies on university knowledge transfer that focus only on data on patents, licensing, number of R&D contracts, and spin-offs (Berbegal-Mirabent, Lafuente, & Solé, 2013; Berbegal-Mirabent, Sánchez García, & Ribeiro-Soriano, 2015; D'Este & Perkmann, 2011; Ogawa & Kajikawa, 2015; Ugo & Ramaciotti, 2014), this study goes further by accounting for 'informal' knowledge transfer activities taking place in networking activities between business faculty members and companies (Crespi, D'Este, Fontana, & Geuna, 2011; Tho & Trang, 2015). Thus, the article contributes to the advancement of knowledge in university research transfer by adopting a more holistic perspective. Mindful of the fact that there is no general theory of knowledge transfer (Landry et al., 2007), this study builds on prior studies to develop an integrative framework of knowledge transfer activities of faculty members in business schools (Phan & Siegel, 2006). The article addresses the following research questions: 1) To what extent do academics in business schools supply value-creating services and expert advice to companies? 2) How do they position themselves on the interdependent elements of a business model? 3) How do faculty members of business schools from different disciplinary backgrounds come to develop differentiated **S** business models of provision of expert advice to companies? 4) What are the implications of the results in regard to the management of business schools as well as the development of public policies supporting knowledge transfer in business schools and value-generating activities of companies' value chain?

The rest of the article is organized as follows: reviews the relevant conceptual issues by integrating into a value chain conceptual framework the transfer of expert advice from faculty members to industry. Section 3 presents the data collection and statistical approaches. Section 4 focuses on the results. Finally, the article concludes by highlighting the major findings of the study, their implications, as well as future research questions.

☆ The authors thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for its financial assistance. The authors thank all the faculty members of Canadian business schools for their participation in our survey.

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http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2015.10.035
0148-2963/

2. Review of conceptual issues

2.1. Integration of knowledge and technology transfer expert advice into a conceptual value chain framework

Most studies on the transfer of academic knowledge to companies focus on university technology transfer offices as intermediation agents between academics and companies (Agrawal, 2001; Brescia, Colombo, & Landoni, 2015; Hewitt-Dundas, 2012; Howells, 2006; Landry, Amara, Cloutier, & Halilem, 2013; McAdam, Miller, McAdam, & Teague, 2012). This study shifts the emphasis from the organizational level to the individual level and adopts the individual faculty member as the unit of analysis. Two arguments justify this choice. First, academics are not required to disclose to their university administrators activities that do not lend themselves to the commercial exploitation. In spite of legal requirements (Amara, Landry, & Halilem, 2013), some authors argue that many academics do not disclose commercial knowledge transfer activities to their university administrators (Hall, Link, John, & Scott, 2003; Siegel, Waldman, & Link, 2003; Thursby & Thursby, 2007). Second, Searle Renault (2006) argues that academics make a variety of key decisions regarding ways to transform their research results and expertise into marketable product innovations. Therefore, understanding how faculty members in business schools make such decisions is critical to shedding some lights on the contribution of university knowledge to the value chains of companies. As Ratten and Yuseno (2006) argue, such relations between universities' UTTOs and companies are the most effective and efficient ways to enhance organizational capabilities as they result in both market-specific and product-specific knowledge creation. In this study, services and expert advice from business schools' scholars to companies are disaggregated and refined so as to better understand how individual academics improve companies' value chain activities using Porter's value chain (Fig. 1). In doing so, the study accounts for the fact that in providing expert advice to companies, faculty members of business schools have to figure out the activities of the companies' value chains to which they can add value. To collect the necessary information on this issue, a survey looking at the provision of expert advice in several areas of the company's value chain took place. The questionnaire focused on primary activities in the form of operations and marketing and sales, support activities such as accounting and finance, and other support activities, namely, HR management and procurement. The methodology section fully describes the survey.

2.2. Linking expert advice to business model elements

A first step in any faculty's willingness to provide expertise to companies relates to the nature of his/her expertise. The next step relates to figuring out how to create value for these companies, what types of companies to reach, how to establish linkages with these companies, what resources and strategies to use to reach these goals, and finally, how to make money. Each of these choices involves different elements of the business model (Baden-Fuller & Haefliger, 2013; Souto, 2015; Zott & Amit, 2009). The study draws on Chesbrough (2007, 2010) approach to the business model concept which provides generic components to analyzing the different sources of value rather than specific sources of value for particular types of companies. However, Rasmussen (2007) and Teece (2010) argue that a business model is not a theory and thus cannot predict academics' choices. Rather, business model helps identify factors that influence faculty members' choices. Therefore, the business model framework in this study integrates six building blocks likely to influence these choices. These are i) customer value proposition, ii) choice of a market segment, iii) revenue generation mechanism, iv) key resources, v) positioning within the value network, and vi) strategies to use in reaching goals.

3. Methodology

3.1. Studied population and data connection

Faculty members of the Canadian business schools are the focus of this study. They were identified using five complementary approaches. First, during the summer of 2009, two research assistants visited the web sites of all Canadian business schools affiliated with the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) to independently identify the list of their faculty members. Secondly, after verification of academic ranks, they excluded lecturers, visiting professors and sessional instructors. This process resulted in a list of 3134 regular faculty members at the rank of assistant, associate, and full professor in 35 business schools. In the third stage, a random sample of 1286 scholars were extracted, using three criteria for representativeness: i) the school, ii) the seniority of the scholar as measured by his/her academic rank, and iii) his/her sub-discipline. Between December 2009 and March 2010, a specialized firm in surveying used a web-based survey in combination with a telephone survey to collect data from these faculty members based on

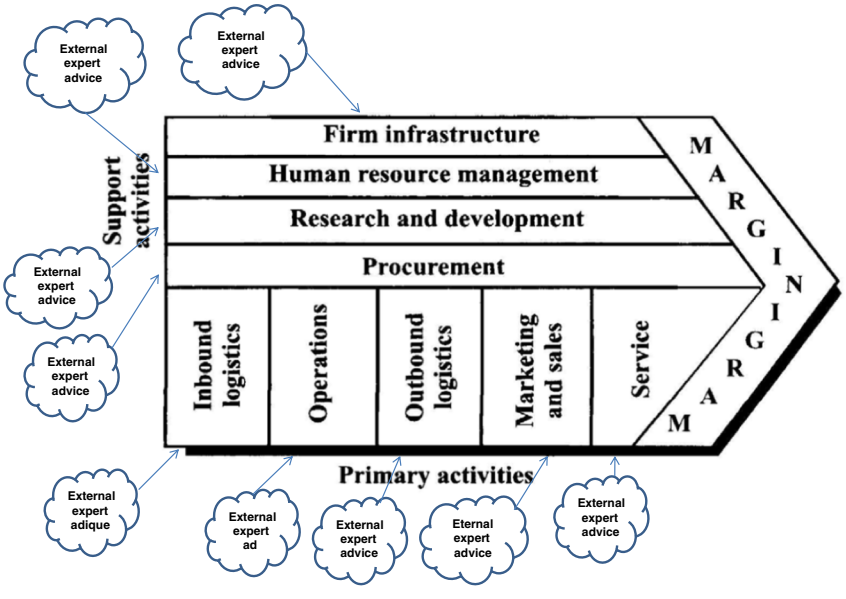

Fig. 1. Potential contribution of faculty members of business schools in the value-adding activities of the value chain of companies.

Please cite this article as: Amara, N., et al., Adding value to companies' value chain: Role of business schools scholars, *Journal of Business Research* (2015), http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2015.10.035