

KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER PARTNERSHIPS

CASE STUDY:

Jay Dhillon | Churchill Controls Ltd



About Me:

I gained a BTEC in IT and then I completed an under graduate degree in Computer Science at the University of Reading, during which time I developed a keen interest in programming and software.



Project duration: 24 Months

End date: 31/07/2018

How did you initially hear about the opportunity of becoming a KTP Associate?

I looked on the University of Reading's Job Portal and found the KTP Associate position advertised. I was slightly reserved about applying as I wasn't sure that I had the right experience or expertise, but I discussed the opportunity with my project supervisor who gave me the confidence and encouraged me to apply.

Please could you give a short description of the project from your perspective?

Churchill sell units that are used to monitor water reservoirs and water sites. These units primarily use radio which means there are practicality limitations because of frequency distance and someone physically having to go on site. What they want to do is update their systems and modernise their way of working by implementing the use of the internet. They need someone to develop new products which are internet enabled and that can be accessed remotely in order to remain in practice as well as keeping up with the competition, which is what I've been brought in to do.

How did you find the support once the partnership began?

It was incredible! The project was extremely daunting at the beginning; there's so much information to take on board with the KTP, but to have the support from both the University and the company eased the entire process. The company isn't always going to know the semantics of the KTP, and the University aren't always going to know the semantics of the company and what they're doing, so to have both available to help me whenever I needed it with whatever area I needed help in meant I could always find the relevant level of assistance.

How has the triangular relationship between the business, the University, and yourself resulted in being a key factor in your development?

It's helped me learn to take control. Initially there were various meetings set up and run by Churchill or the University, but as I began to develop and gain confidence, I could take control of the meetings and be a real driving force for the project. Additionally, in terms of the development of my technical ability, whenever someone at Churchill didn't have the answer I needed, then the Knowledge Transfer Centre would always either answer my query for me or find the right direction to point me in.

What impact have you seen so far on the company as a direct result of your role as the KTP Associate?

The exciting part of my project so far is that I'm showing people features of the products we're developing that they simply didn't know existed. Helping build a focus on where we're going, how we're going to get there, and the different things I'm able to

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showcase on the way is already creating an excitable impact even at the early stages of my particular project.

Are there any other factors which have aided your successful undertaking of this Associate position?

The compulsory KTP residential modules are excellent; you get to network with other Associates who are at the exact same stage, in the exact same position as you, which means you're able to ascertain a quick understanding that you're not the only one who may be feeling a bit overwhelmed. Knowing that you're not the anomaly helps build confidence about the work you're doing and that it's perfectly normal to feel a bit daunted at the early stages of a KTP when you're beginning to pull the various project, company, academic and Associate aspects together. It's important to retain that network of Associates as I often ask them for advice of just an update on how they're getting on.

What do you see as being the key successes to the project?

It will hugely benefit the company; not only in terms of revenue but also work efficiency by implementing a new, innovative, and modern form of technology into the business. Also, shared learning is a really key element to the project. I am continuing to learn every day, as are Churchill and the Academic Supervisor. As we all learn together, we develop together, and that in turn helps the project and the product evolve in a successful way.

You have been given £2k each year to spend on your own personal career development; how have you utilised this so far and do you have any further plans on how this can benefit you?

There are a lot of free modules available to me which I'm taking advantage of right now, and I do plan to book myself onto a project management course which will come out of my training budget. As the project progresses I plan to hold discussions with the KTC and Churchill to see what courses or training would be best for me to enrol on depending on what will best benefit both the project itself and my personal development at that time. I would like to use the training budget to learn a language as it will benefit my personal development and help me in the future, I'm also exploring other areas which will have a direct benefit to both the project and myself.

Please could you describe the other benefits of becoming an Associate?

My own personal career development is a huge benefit. The KTP has really helped with my all-round growth; both on the technical side in terms of the software I'm working with, but also in terms of my confidence building and how I'm now comfortable communicating with all levels in a strong and poised manner which I certainly couldn't do before I became an Associate. You don't necessarily notice how you've evolved at the time, but can retrospectively look at a meeting or phone call and realise that the way you dealt with it was so different to how you would have done in the same situation a year ago, in a positive way.

How do you think being employed under the partnership would differ from a standard post-graduate employment?

The KTP revolves around development; it's very clear from the offset what you're there to do and how you're going to be supported, and because of that you can foresee that when the partnership concludes, you as an individual will have a lot more to offer. The partnership factor is also key, providing you with a company expert, and academic expert, the support of the business or your supervisor, and that of the KTC. Additionally, there's a lot more responsibility; as it's my project and I'm managing it, I'm able to develop in the ways that I would like to and am trusted to steer the project in the right direction. I was able to direct the project down the software route whilst still progressing with project management, but a standard post-graduate position would most likely only let you advance with one or the other, and as a result I don't just have to take software or computer training; I can go on business and management training too. To get to the end of a KTP with experience in project management and software development gives me such a broader portfolio and is immensely valuable for my career.

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Have you faced any challenges as an Associate so far? And if so what have you, the company, or UoR done to help you overcome these to ensure continued success within the KTP project?

The hardware was an immediate challenge as I didn't yet possess the knowledge to completely understand the terminology that the other members of staff were using. As a result of this, the communication in the very early stages was quite poor as their understanding of what I did and my understanding of what they did simply wasn't syncing. Following advice from the KTC, I initiated a meeting to discuss my concerns; I was honest and open and in turn, the company responded in the same way to me, which was by far the best thing I could have done. We now have frequent meetings and ensure we're taking the time to speak to one another and talk through what we're working on in a way that everyone else understands. Once we cracked the communication issue we have been able to effectively move forwards as a project team.

Would you recommend KTP to other graduates? If so, why?

Definitely! The biggest part of the KTP is the development side; if there's a position being advertised in your field then apply as you will have all the support you need available to you and the various parties of the partnership will work tirelessly to ensure you're developing the best way you can. In terms of the training and qualifications, there are so many courses available for an Associate to utilise and gain from in various fields, so you have a clear view of your path and how you can really capitalise on the whole experience.

And finally, what one piece of advice would you give to a graduate considering KTP?

My biggest piece of advice that I could give would be to relax. As in any role, the first few months consist of understanding and learning large amounts of information from the University and the company, but the support from both will help you through. Relax, trust that you're not on your own, learn, and enjoy!