

# Exploring Firm-Employed PhD Students as a Form of Academic Engagement with Industry

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## **ABSTRACT**

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This PhD dissertation explores firm-employed PhD students as a form of academic engagement with industry. A primary multiple case study of 15 firm-employed PhD student projects and a complementary, minor, cross-sectional study of 136 PhD students in engineering at a university in Sweden are used to analyze the antecedents, engagement processes, and consequences of this form of academic engagement. The findings from this major qualitative study show that institutional and organizational level antecedents contribute to that firm-employed PhD students primarily focus on activities related to academic work at the university, although they are employed at firms during their research education. Furthermore, individuals are primarily motivated by intrinsic rewards to become firm-employed PhD students, and may enter into this form of academic engagement with industry through three different scenarios. During their research education, these firm-employed PhD students act as firms' boundary spanners through direct and indirect pathways to innovation and contribute to firm-related consequences by primarily developing the early stages of the firms' absorptive capacity. With regard to research-related consequences, the descriptive results from the cross-sectional study indicate that firm-employed PhD students achieve research excellence during their education. This PhD dissertation concludes by proposing a revised conceptual framework of the antecedents, engagement processes, and consequences of firm-employed PhD students within the field of engineering in Sweden.

**Keywords:** Academic engagement with industry, university-industry interactions, collaborative research, boundary spanner, absorptive capacity, capabilities, graduate students, PhD students, firm-employed PhD students, dual-affiliated PhD students, industrial PhD students, engineering.

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