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EDITORIAL

Crafting knowledge exchange in the social science agenda

Jamie P. Halsall[1]* and Jason Powell[2]

1. Introduction

To any social science researcher the term "Knowledge Exchange" is a key buzzword in the academic community and wider society. In an article by Contandriopoulos, Lemire, Denis, and Tremblay (2010, p. 456) it was pointed out that knowledge exchange "rests on an implicit commonsense notion that this 'knowledge' must be evidence based". This evidence based within a social science context, relies upon two strands: theoretical data and empirical data. When examining the notion of Knowledge Exchange it becomes apparent that the concept has deep and meaningful connotations. These connotations have been driven by the involvements of the public and private sectors. Moreover, work carried out by Benneworth and Cunha (2015, p. 509) concludes that higher education institutions' involvement in knowledge exchange "remains dynamic and influenced by universities" own strategic choices and relationships'. Traditionally, universities have had two key missions: to teach undergraduate/postgraduate students and to undertake research. Striukova and Rayna (2015, p. 488) have recently observed that universities now have a third mission, "knowledge exchange", and that knowledge exchange plays a vital "integral part of the mix, without which the other two missions cannot run successfully." Knowledge exchange is also a fundamental feature of "sustainable communities" (Powell, 2013) through the partnerships between HEIs and communities by which they serve. This is a point we will return to.

Over recent years UK research funding councils have encouraged researchers to think about the impact of their research and more importantly the knowledge exchange to wider society. Hence, the aim of this editorial is to give a brief overview of what knowledge exchange is in the social science discipline and to give past social research examples of knowledge exchange occurring in wider society. In essence, the editorial hopes to help early career researchers to understand the great importance of knowledge exchange in the social science discipline. The authors argue that knowledge exchange is a key concept that a researcher must engage with before setting out on a research project, but also knowledge exchange can provide a vital tool in teaching and learning.

2. Defining knowledge exchange

Knowledge exchange is a two-way process where social scientists and individuals or organisations share learning, ideas and experiences. We are committed to knowledge

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Jason L. Powell is a Professor in Social Gerontology and Sociology at the University of Chester. He has published extensively on public policy, aging, governmentality and populational politics. He has written over 400 publications including over 65 academic books and monographs. He is the Editor-in-Chief of *Illness, Crisis & Loss* for Sage and an Associate Editor of *The Canadian Journal of Sociology*. He is a Fellow of The Royal Society for Public Health, Honorary Fellow at University of Liverpool and Honorary Professor at Tasmania University.

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exchange and encouraging collaboration between researchers and business, public and civil society. By creating a dialogue between these communities, knowledge exchange helps research to influence policy and practice. (ERSC, 2016a)

The above quotation is taken from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). The ESRC is a highly respected Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) that conducts UK research and a training organisation that tackles economic and social problems. As the above citation notes, Knowledge Exchange is perceived by the ERCS as a "two-way process" where researchers distribute their "learning, ideas and experiences". Social scientists working with private, public and voluntary sectors is a crucial part of this process. Research carried out by Díez-Vial and Montoro-Sánchez (2014, p. 277) have acknowledged the key to the success of knowledge exchange lies in institutions that are involved in social research to exchange "ideas" and generate knowledge creation within specific "geographical space". As Díez-Vial and Montoro-Sánchez (2014, p. 277) further note "These exchanges take place through frequent interactions … creating external knowledge sources that can be combined with internal knowledge (Arikan, 2009)." To simplify the concept of knowledge exchange the authors have provided a figure and a table to demonstrate the importance of knowledge exchange in the higher education context. Table 1 illustrates the key policy documents that have influenced the knowledge exchange debate in recent years. Figure 1 explains the key features of knowledge exchange within a social science context.

Part of the knowledge exchange process is the emphasis on "outputs". In social science, outputs can be interpreted in different ways. For example, from a social policy context, outputs from research could range from academic blogs, video clips, reports, authored books, edited books and academic papers. From a governmental perspective, an output on a piece of research must be accessible to the general public. Hence, this is measured by "impact" and whether the output is "open access". The ERSC (2016b) considers impact a crucial tool to contribute to wider society and the economy. Furthermore, when a researcher undertakes a piece of research they need to reflect on two key aspects; they must:

(1) Examine who will benefit from their research.
(2) Evaluate how their research could effect change in wider society.

(Adopted from: ERSC, 2016b)

Table 1. Key higher education's reports that emphasise the importance of knowledge exchange		
Authors	**Year**	**Report**
Maria Abreu, Vadim Grinevich, Alan Hughes, Michael Kitson and Philip Ternouth	2008	Universities, business and knowledge exchange
Maria Abreu, Vadim Grinevich, Alan Hughes and Michael Kitson	2009	Knowledge exchange, between academics and the business, public and third sectors
Alan Hughes, Michael Kitson and Jocelyn Probert with Anna Bullock and Isobel Milner	2011	Hidden connections: knowledge exchange between the arts and humanities and the private, public and third sectors
Department for Business, Innovation and Skills	2016	Success as a knowledge economy: Teaching excellence, social mobility and student choice
Lord Nicholas Stern	2016	Building on success and learning from experience: An independent review of the research excellence framework
Anna Bullock and Robert Hughes	2016	Knowledge exchange and the social sciences: A report to ESRC from the centre for business research

Figure 1. The complexities of knowledge exchange.
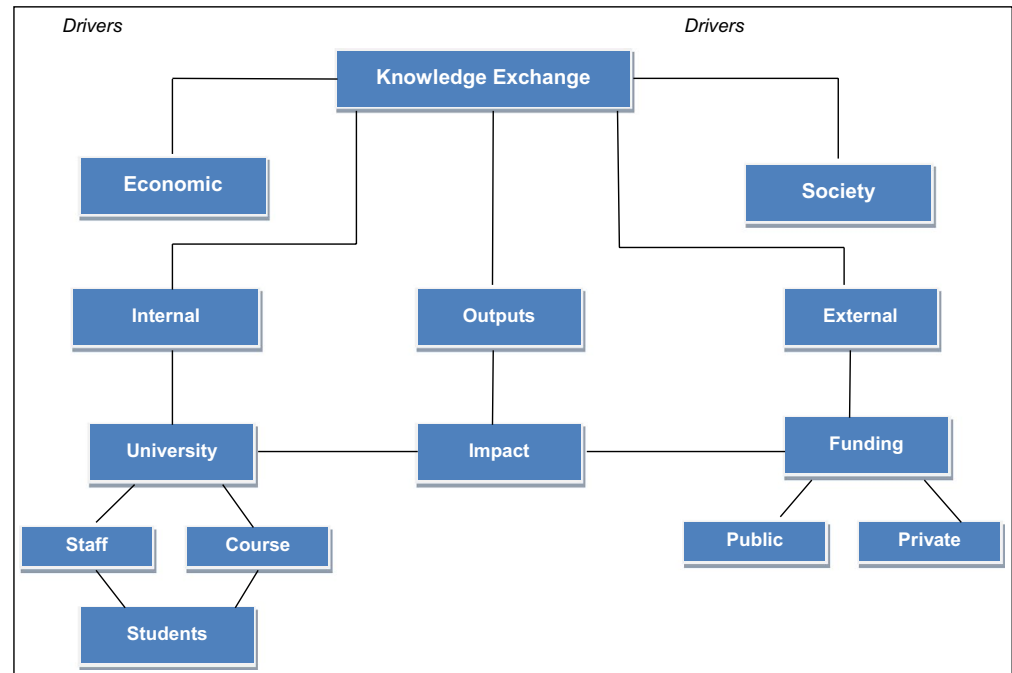
3. Case studies of knowledge exchanges

3.1. Case study one

It is common practise in many higher education institutions that the teaching and learning philosophy is underpinned by research. This method of knowledge exchange in teaching practise will become a popular method as the UK government has introduced the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). This new framework allows the UK to monitor and assess the quality of teaching.

In 2011 Dr Jamie Halsall, along with Dr Tasleem Shakur and Dr Peer Smets, undertook a funded workshop examining "10 years on" from the civil disturbance that took place in Oldham (2001). A number of higher education institutions and statutory/voluntary sector organisations attended this event. The workshop was a one-day event involving a number of speakers who presented their work and a critical dialogue discussion with different agencies. The impact from this event was threefold. Firstly, the local media in the geographical area of Manchester where informed about the event; secondly, a DVD was created and a number of YouTube clips were uploaded to the internet, and thirdly, a series of peer reviewed papers where published in an international journal (Global Built Environment Review, 2014). To make sure the papers were accessible to all in society the organisations ensure that the published work was open access. Overall, the aim of all of these outputs was to inform the general public, exchange ideas with the statutory/voluntary sectors and educate university students (Figure 2).

3.2. Case study two

In 2014, Jason Powell engaged with an international research network of HEIs in China in involving older people in the design and co-production of knowledge of research issues and research questions that follow that impinges on the fortification of "sustainable communities". In terms of building such communities through impactful research, the first rationale is to establish a central point of contact to support the development of sustainable partnerships between health, voluntary,

Figure 2. Examples of knowledge exchange within a higher education context.

community and social care organisations in global arenas such as in China' The research network across China with different HEIs sought to identify opportunities for collaborative work and mutual knowledge exchange with outside agencies representing the interests of older people. The research network in China pro-actively encourages activities such as consultancy, research capability, building network partnerships with providers and research-led diagnostic CPD provision. The objectives of the knowledge exchange in this example would be fourfold:

(1) Advance understanding of how economic, social, historical, cultural, political, environmental and technological changes interact to affect the sustainability of user communities in China for older people.
(2) Promote both inter-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary analysis of the sustainability of these changes for older people.
(3) Provide training and research based solutions for rural and urban communities and external agencies.
(4) Disseminate knowledge to improve understanding and inform feasible changes in policy and community practice in China.

The second rationale is that knowledge exchange would be ideally placed given the vibrancy of China. The opportunity to engage with providers, stakeholders and users to measure issues of social inclusion/exclusion that may manifest was compelling in comparative perspective (Powell, 2014). If an international research network is set up to embed partnerships with the authorities, communities, charities, social enterprises, faith based organisations and the organisations representing user groups in rural and city areas in China, the opportunities for commissioned and contract research, training, diagnostic workshops (e.g. disability and ageism awareness) would be formidable and an opportunity to seize. Globalisation is a key debate (Powell, 2014) but does bring opportunities for collaboration to measure efficacy of socially inclusive practices in local spaces in China.

The third rationale, the research network in China is a pro-active vehicle in strengthening and integrating the strong research themes identified in social change and building its links with other HEIs across China and other international HEIs. How did it do this? Should impact be always at the end of a research project?

Much focus in academic analysis in terms of impact is dissemination (at the end of the research process), which is a mistake when one fully reflects on the whole research process. Impact can be created by "listening events" with key stakeholders that focus on their concerns, their lived realities and their aspirations for an enhanced quality of life.

The network Powell engaged in focused on the rural/urban transformations and legacy for the care of older people. Rather than creating "top down" research questions, in partnership with older people themselves, Powell was able to ground the research project and its detail and impact with the people who it affects the most: older people in rural areas feeling vulnerable in terms of care as family units had mobilized to urban areas.

By listening to the "real experts" (older people themselves), research areas could be built in full consultation with international communities of practice that enhanced real partnerships in research that overcame barriers of "us" and "them" in academic research with communities. At the same time, intervention based research could be put into fruition to enhance the quality of care older people received and address hidden issues such as loneliness and mental health—a scandal in China that has been hidden as a result of rapid urbanization.

3.3. Case study three

Impact does not always have to be demonstrated in international contexts. It can be demonstrated in local contexts. Powell, Mcnamara, and Reith (2009) worked in full consultation with an organisation called Dingle Opportunities in providing training associated with research methods. This helped equip volunteer workers with "research rich" skills that they could impart in their interactions with local communities and with such knowledge help to pass it on to other volunteers and enhance their organisations' ability to evaluate its key concerns with local communities. Impact here is academic in acquisition of research skills but also a focus on organisational change in helping a group change how they research issues associated at the core of their mission statement and communities they serve. The "transfer" of knowledge to "exchange" of knowledge is demonstrated by an upwardly skilled workforce of volunteers competent as researchers in the communities they work in and with on a daily basis.

3.4. Case study four

The final study relates to a national based partnership between St Helens CVS and Jason Powell (2012). Part of the partnership was a difficult research question to be employed and examined: what are the critical success factors that lie behind the infrastructural sustainability of TSOs in England in a climate of limited resources? The partnership was key in identifying partners in the research, and mixed methods over a four-year longitudinal period illustrated the value of the CVS itself as an important and critical success factor that helped perpetuate community, charitable and social enterprises.

Other factors found through thematic analysis focused on leadership, governance, policy and resources, the role of the chief executive officer, partnerships and funding. The findings of the research were rolled out nationwide to other CVS organizations so that they could reflect on the levels of support and impact of that support to TSOs across the country. The project was particularly valuable in illustrating how communities work together despite formidable economic circumstances and how the work of the CVS impacts on the quality of training TSOs receive that transfers from national services to national policies.

4. Conclusion

This editorial has introduced to readers the importance of knowledge exchange to social scientists. We have illuminated how it is a key dimension for research councils and government exercises (REF, 2014) to provide tangible forms of evidence that excellent, impactful research has taken place. Our case studies illustrate personal examples of contexts by which we have situated our work in definitions and practices of knowledge exchange through outputs, research networks, building organizational infrastructure and evaluating organizational infrastructure at local, national and international levels. We hope you have found this initial discussion both stimulating and thought provoking in examining impact in social science research through its reflection of research from yesterday, today and future tomorrows.

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