Perspectives of academic social scientists on the benefits and impact of knowledge co-production: Australian findings

Dr Adrian Cherney
Professor Brian Head
Professor Paul Boreham
The University of Queensland

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Use of Social Science Research

• EBPP movement – relevance of academic social research gained attention.

• Body of research from Europe, America and Canada focused on understanding the impact of social science research on policy and practice (e.g. Nutley, Landry, Weiss).

• Academics frequently argue that policy-makers ignore the research they produce, while policy-makers argue that often academic research is irrelevant to their needs.
Knowledge co-production widespread

- High number of collaborative research partnerships between academics and external agencies.

- Major emphasis on knowledge co-production (mode 2 knowledge).

- Literature indicates that such engagement not without its problems / challenges / costs.

- Understanding co-production central to gauging social research impact.
Three central questions:

- In what ways is social science research currently used within policy contexts?
- What conditions and circumstances support and hinder the use of social science research?
- Are there models for enhancing the policy-relevance and utilisation of social research knowledge?

We define “research” deliberately broadly, because one aim is to understand the relative authority accorded to different types of social research by policy-makers.
Nine Linkage Partners

- Productivity Commission
- Australian Bureau of Statistics
- Queensland Health
- Queensland Communities
- Queensland Dept of Employment
- Queensland Dept of Premier and Cabinet
- Victorian Dept of Planning and Community Development
- Victorian Dept of Education & Early Childhood Devt.
- Victorian Dept of Human Services
- Plus 12 other state and federal collaborating organisations across four jurisdictions.
ARC Linkage Project phases

- Phase 1: A targeted survey of Australian social scientists.
- Phase 2: A targeted survey of policy personnel.
- Phase 3: Follow up interviews with a selection of academic respondents.
- Phase 4: In-depth interviews with policy personnel.
Academic survey

• Aims of the academic survey were to capture the attitudes, perceptions and experience of academic researchers concerning:

1: The ways in which their research has been, or could be used.
2: Benefits & problems of research collaborations with external agencies.
3: Barriers to uptake.
4: Investment in activities that increase uptake.
Academic survey methodology

• Survey was piloted on ASSA Fellows in September/October 2010.

• Distributed to approximately 500 Fellows - 81 surveys completed.

• Established a database of about 1950 Australian social science academics - recipients of ARC Discovery and Linkage grants between 2001 and 2010.

• First wave of academic survey sent to approximately 950 academics in early November, 2010. Second wave sent in early February 2011.

• The survey closed in May 2011. A total of 612 completed surveys were received.

• Combined with the results from the ASSA pilot, the final total is 693 responses.
Academic reward systems do not adequately recognise dissemination.

Academic requirement to publish.

There are high costs in translating results.

Policy-makers and practitioners lack expertise.

Networks and partnerships undermined by turnovers.

Insufficient forums and networks.

Lack of expertise in how to apply the results.

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Insufficient forums and networks.

Lack of expertise in how to apply the results.
Opportunities for research to have impact on policy and practice

- Use data otherwise difficult to access
- Increase industry contacts
- Pragmatic and realistic in relation to research outcomes
- Industry contacts helped develop future research projects
- More satisfying than 'blue sky' research
- Publish in a broad range of publication outlets
- Generate extra income for work unit
- Career advancement
- Opportunities to commercialise research outcomes
- Benefits of research partnerships with government, industry or community sectors-

Strongly agree/Agree
Problems with carrying out research with government, industry or community sectors—Strongly agree/Agree

- Uncomfortable working on projects carried out in collaboration
- Too much pressure to meet deadlines
- Overemphasis on applied outcomes
- Industry partners place too much emphasis on specific deliverables
- Pressure to produce favourable results
- Pressure from work unit to undertake contract research to meet...
- Lose ownership of intellectual property
- Delays that impede ability to publish results in a timely manner
- Inadequate university resources to support research partnerships
- Confidentiality requirements often restrictive
- External partners do not appreciate the full costs of research
- The ethics process - time consuming and cumbersome
- The complexity of contractual arrangements can lead to delays
- Different research orientations
- Time in coordinating the work between different partners
What characteristics of social research do end-users prioritise - High priority/Moderate priority

- The research adds to theoretical knowledge
- Findings support a position already held by the end-user
- Research offers new ways of thinking about an issue
- Findings can be generalised
- Statistical analysis is of high quality
- Recommendations are politically feasible
- Research findings are unbiased
- Recommendations are economically feasible
- Scientific quality of the research is high
- Reputation of the researcher
- Findings are available at a time when decisions need to...
- Research reports provide brief summaries of key findings
- Findings have direct implications for policy and practice
- Findings are written in a clear style for end-users

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%
I transmit my research results to end-users
My research reports have been read and understood by end-users
My work has been cited in reports and strategies by end-users
Efforts were made to adopt the results of my research by end-users
My research results have influenced the choices and decisions of end-users
My research has been applied by end-users
My work has been cited in reports published by parliamentary committees

RU ladder comprises 6 stages -- transmission, cognition, reference, effort, influence, application.

Parliamentary committee question not part of the RU ladder.
Climbing the RU ladder

Echelons of the ladder of knowledge utilization

- Pass
- Fail
### Passing or Failing RU ladder – what makes a difference? (preliminary findings)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Stage 1: Transmission</th>
<th>Stage 6: Application</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>Fail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of cases that pass or fail each stage of the knowledge utilization ladder</td>
<td>482</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>693</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of grants (count)</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>2.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of internal funding (% V. Important/Important)</td>
<td>49.03</td>
<td>64.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of other funding (mean score 1-5)</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>2.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of use (quantitative) (% Always/Usually)</td>
<td>54.77</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of use (qualitative) (% Always/Usually)</td>
<td>65.35</td>
<td>46.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of use (mixed methods) (% Always/Usually)</td>
<td>56.85</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extent that research is directed towards policy makers (% Always/Usually)</td>
<td>62.03</td>
<td>26.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linkage (mean score 1-5)</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>2.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptation (mean score 1-5)</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>2.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of informal contacts (mean score 1-5)</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>2.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of seminar participation (mean score 1-5)</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>2.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of sending reports to community/private/public (mean score 1-5)</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>2.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of publication of articles(% V. Important/Important)</td>
<td>92.53</td>
<td>93.71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Justify or legitimise choices already made by policy-makers and practitioners

Influenced decisions on the allocation of resources to policies and programs

Put new issues on the public and political agenda

Alter or transform how policy-makers and practitioners think about and understand issues or choices

Shape and inform the design and implementation of policies and programs
Key issues (1)

• Institutional and professional cultures at work – creates dissonance between producers and end-users.

• Linkage and exchange factors important to knowledge transfer.

• Perceived lack of end-user organisational skills/capacity an issue – this though may also be about the lack of organisational processes that facilitate uptake.
Key issue (2)

• Knowledge co-production accrues benefits to academic participants – enhancing networks of application / influence.

• Knowledge co-production has costs that can deter investment in dissemination, translation and relationship building.

• Various types of impact reported - reflects findings from previous studies and where academics make the most efforts.
Conclusion

• Need to understand research uptake in the context of knowledge co-production.

• Linear, science push models of research production and use inadequate.

• Costs and incentives important in relation to investment in knowledge translation - relates to institutional and professional cultures (important for understanding research use).

• Subsequent phases - e.g. what factors determine / inhibit policy uptake of social research, what type of evidence is used, what do policy-makers think of academic social research, knowledge brokering, organisational skills & capacity.