

» Using Knowledge Brokers

“BROKERING INVOLVES A RANGE OF DIFFERENT PRACTICES: THE IDENTIFICATION AND LOCALIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE, THE REDISTRIBUTION AND DISSEMINATION OF KNOWLEDGE, AND THE RESCALING AND TRANSFORMATION OF THIS KNOWLEDGE. BROKERING KNOWLEDGE THUS MEANS FAR MORE THAN SIMPLY MOVING KNOWLEDGE—IT ALSO MEANS TRANSFORMING KNOWLEDGE”

(MEYER, 2010)

The ISSUES Project

WHY?

Knowledge brokers are necessary, or at least desirable because of the well publicised gap between research and end-user communities. The *two communities* theory outlined by Caplan can be addressed by a third agent, one which is located between the two communities (academics and end-users) and influences the flow of information between them (Caplan, 1979). This position is filled by knowledge brokers, and they perform three roles in achieving this task; “knowledge managers, linking agents and capacity builders” (Przybycien et al., 2010).

Such agents are knowledge managers in that they collate knowledge from a range of sources and present it concisely as accessible information; they are linking agents in that they bridge the gap between academia and industry and/or government; and they are capacity builders in that they improve researchers’ and end-users’ abilities to be effective producers and receivers of knowledge respectively. Increasingly, knowledge brokers in universities are recruited from industry so they can understand the needs and drivers of both sides.

In practical terms this involves a number of different tasks and as a result knowledge brokers are a heterogeneous group. For instance brokerage facilities linked to universities are often focussed on pushing researchers’ work on to a receptive audience, whereas members of the Europe-wide *Science Shop* network take local authorities and practitioners as clients, and direct them to the appropriate research for their needs.

Engagement with knowledge brokers can have obvious short to medium term benefits for researchers. They can target audiences that might be beyond the reach of a researcher’s knowledge and contact base, and having one’s research presented to a particular audience can bring about benefits in terms of career prospects, finances and personal satisfaction.

Knowledge brokering should be a two way process, and there may also be less obvious but longer term benefits. In an article about the role of knowledge brokers in policy making, Holmes and Clark suggest that as well as presenting research to end users, knowledge brokers are also involved in “facilitating the development of researchable questions to meet the needs of policy makers and communicating them to researchers” (Holmes and Clark, 2008). In this way, engagement with knowledge brokers can bring about two advantages to researchers; in the short term it can increase the likelihood of research being utilised in society, and in the longer term it can help to devise a research direction that can yield relevant and usable outputs.



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EPSRC

Engineering and Physical Sciences
Research Council

HOW?

There are increasing opportunities for researchers, practitioners and policy-makers to engage with knowledge brokers. One important opportunity comes through initiatives run by UK Research Councils. RCUK oversees its own brokering service, the Local Authorities and Research Councils Initiative (LARCI). As the name suggests, this is primarily aimed at bridging the gap between academia and local government. Its strategy is largely based on encouraging local authorities to approach them and then directing them to relevant outputs or commissioning small research projects, but it also offers pro-active opportunities for researchers through participating in consultations, peer reviews and advisory boards. Many of the individual research councils including EPSRC, ESRC, NERC and STFC also employ dedicated knowledge exchange professionals that offer various brokerage services to researchers seeking end-users and vice versa. The Technology Strategy Board oversees a number of *Knowledge Transfer Networks*, which act as a broker inasmuch as they offer a platform for academics to present their research to a potentially wide audience.

In addition, universities often have technology transfer offices; these normally offer a number of brokering services as well as advice on intellectual property, commercialisation, spin offs, and so on.

REFERENCES

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- MEYER, M. (2010) The Rise of the Knowledge Broker. *Science Communication*, 32, 118-127.
- PRZYBYCIEN, K., BECKMANN, K., PRATT, K., COOPER, A. & CRISHNA, N. (2010) The ISSUES Project: An Example of Knowledge Brokering at the Research Programme Level. *2nd International Conference on Innovation through Knowledge Transfer: InnovationKT2010*. Coventry, UK.

RESOURCES

Details of the knowledge transfer and brokering activities of UK research councils:

Engineering and Physical Science Research Council (EPSRC):

tinyurl.com/658dhuy

Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC): tinyurl.com/63dfwfs

Natural Environment Research Council: tinyurl.com/67sn4vd

Science and Technologies Facilities Council (STFC):

www.stfc.ac.uk/19384.aspx

LARCI: tinyurl.com/69zal3d

Science Shop: www.scienceshops.org

Knowledge Transfer Networks: ktn.innovateuk.org

Brave New City: tinyurl.com/5rfcpcg

» Stories from SUE

The SUE programme encompasses a consortium dedicated to knowledge exchange, ISSUES. Part of its remit is to promote the research outputs from SUE, so that they can make an impact on policy makers and practitioners. In this way, they act as a knowledge broker, in that they take responsibility for bridging the gap between research and practice.

Brokering has taken a number of different forms throughout the ISSUES project. They have operated as a *many-to-many* broker, in that they have brought the findings of a number of the SUE consortia before a wider audience. These have involved events where researchers and end-users have been brought together. One example is their *Brave New City* event, where panellists were challenged to present their findings in an innovative and accessible way. Practitioners and policy-makers were invited and encouraged to take part with the aim of fostering connections between individuals and making end-users more aware of the work being done throughout the SUE programme. They have also engaged in more output focussed brokerage activities by attaining publicity for SUE project outputs in trade journals and even national newspapers.

The transfer of knowledge from research projects into the industrial and policy arenas is a typical benefit of having a group with a mandate to familiarise themselves with the research being done, and the capability and responsibility to reach out to a wider set of interests.