

Knowledge mobilisation: new insights for theory and practice

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Knowledge creation, flow and promulgation are enmeshed in complex institutional and organisational arrangements. The concern over the under-use of research given this complexity has led to the development of strategies aimed at mobilising knowledge. [Huw Davies](#) and [Sandra Nutley](#) describe the objectives of a new UK project exploring and linking the theory and practice of knowledge mobilisation.



A new project in the UK is learning from knowledge mobilization (KM) initiatives across the world. A key aim is to look at the thinking that has underpinned developments in the mobilisation of research-based knowledge in health care, social care and education over the past decade.

Knowledge is sticky and needs help across boundaries. It comes in many forms and often resists easy capture and sharing. This has become very clear over the past few decades, as we have struggled to understand why research often fails to have the impacts it might.



Yet, there is a rich tradition of social science to draw on and we have seen an explosion of creative theorising and modelling in response to these challenges. 'Knowing' and 'doing' are meat and drink to the social sciences, central to the study of human activity and organisation, and also central to the concerns of knowledge mobilisation. From this we know that knowledge creation, flow and promulgation are enmeshed in often complex institutional and organisational arrangements. And indeed, across the globe, all kinds of institutional actors have now become concerned about the under-use of research, and have sought to develop innovative knowledge mobilisation strategies that respond more appropriately to the challenges posed by sticky knowledge.

In parallel, many models, theories and frameworks have emerged to describe the knowledge mobilisation challenge. These have been collated, marshalled and synthesised to bring fresh understanding and, crucially, insights for productive action. But it is by no means clear that these theoretical developments are informing practice on the ground. What we seem to have then are many parallel developments in knowledge mobilisation that are only loosely interconnected, and there is plenty of scope for capitalizing on both theoretical richness and practice diversity.

This new project aims to pull these two strands of theory and practice together, and to look more closely at their interconnections and potential for creative cross-influence. The basic questions we'll be asking are both descriptive and analytic, but always with practical application in mind. What knowledge mobilisation strategies have been developed and applied? What models, theories and frameworks underpin these practical initiatives, either explicitly or implicitly? What have we learned through doing all of this? And how can all of these observations and insights be applied to enable better knowledge creation and flow?

The funder is the UK's National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). So the primary arena of application for any insights gained is in health care. We are therefore looking at knowledge mobilisation practices in health and health care around the world. However, we also know that creative practices are developing in other analogous fields, such as social care and education. So the project is also reviewing UK activities in these sectors. Data collection will involve a mix of review work, in-depth interviews, survey work and interactive workshops, aimed at linking the theory and practice of knowledge mobilisation in its contemporary guise.

Our hope is that this systematic analysis of work on the ground, reviewed in the light of contemporary theorising, will provide new insights for both theory and practice. As some wag once said, *'in theory, there's not much difference*

between theory and practice, but in practice, there is'. We plan to open up this space to see what we can learn for knowledge mobilisation in the future.

For more information about the knowledge mobilisation project, see <http://www.ruru.ac.uk/projects.html>

Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the Impact of Social Science blog, nor of the London School of Economics.

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