Knowledge Transfer in Practice

Cathy Fooks

Canadian Policy Research Networks Inc.

www.cprn.org

Points to be covered

- Three historical points in knowledge transfer 1987-2002

  - Evolution
  - Implementation
  - Results

- What next?

Why is knowledge transfer important?

- Policy-oriented or decision-oriented research is different?
- Public money - public benefit
- Improve decision making
- Facilitate relevancy of research

Evolution - late 1980s

- Largely seen as a communication issue - once they know we exist they will listen

- Non-journal product should do the trick

- One time event and "explain" results

Evolution - late 1980s

- Recognition of need for decision maker involvement

- No separate job within organization/no specific skill sets

- Very little resource devoted or expected

Implementation - 1980s

- Working paper/commentary/synthesis

- Mailed product to big list

- Early experimentation with media

Implementation - 1980s

- Events - invite researchers and decision makers

- Appoint senior decision makers to an advisory structure

Results

- One way communication

- Material written by researchers - effective?

- Profile generation but little impact analysis

Results

- No audience segmentation - everything went to everyone - who were "they"?

- Events were good networking opportunities and if topic was of interest, they may have been educative

Results

- Roles and accountabilities of advisory structures were unclear

- Day jobs crowded in

- Divergent views on purpose of research

Evolution - mid 1990s

- Seen as a stakeholder management issue - no surprises

- Simpler, better, communication

- Targeted dissemination strategies (mail in advance of media event)

Evolution - mid 1990s

- Capitalize on media role

- Early involvement of decision makers (not just reporting after the fact) - project committees & Boards

- Fledging jobs - communications skills

Implementation - mid 1990s

- Get out of the building - meet people in government, health care settings etc.

- Presentations at non-academic events

- Much more focus on communication - plain language, short summaries, use of web to access materials

Implementation - mid 1990s

- Media explosion - more health reporters, more info, more talking heads

- Research organizations generating their own releases, press events

- Required media training

Implementation - mid 1990s

- Seeking out decision makers to participate in specific research - identify issues and be part of feedback cycle

- Board structures created - not advice but decision making

Results

- Research transfer became term

- Communication/dissemination/research transfer as part of grant proposals

- Media looked to researchers for general comment beyond specific research

Results

- Real job creation

- Resources devoted to function

- Varying degrees of success with Board

- Still question about impact of research

Evolution - 2002

- Variety of products, outputs tailored to specific audiences coupled with heavy reliance on web-based formats

- Topic is research area in its own right

Evolution - 2002

- Partners in research provide in-kind and cash sponsorships - influence over the whole project

- Public representation on Boards (beyond decision makers)

- Knowledge transfer - beyond specific results

Implementation - 2002

- Communication issues are accepted wisdom

- Career paths for KT - beginning work

- Decision maker involvement in specific projects - in progress

Implementation 2002

- Relationship building - in progress

- Board roles - still unclear

- Demonstrating impact - still unclear

What next?

- Timing - still everything - requires relationships and trust - longevity within policy circles is a problem at senior levels. Need to look at decision cycles and how knowledge transfer can support points in the decision chain.

What Next?

- Broker role in the research and decision making environments yet to be exploited. Requires much more than environmental scanning - connect the dots, match the people, anticipate the needs, make the case.

- What are the training skills?

What next?

- True project partnership - shared stewardship. What does this do to the research process?

- Public interest component of Boards - next governance issue for research and not yet understood.