

Think Link VI
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The Challenges of Transferring Knowledge

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I like the definition in the IDRC document: (Knowledge Translations: Basic Theories, Approaches and Applications, referring to Bernard Choi). It is: “*an ongoing and interactive process and strategy that requires the active and conscious participation of both researchers and researcher-users.*”

I know that you all have direct experience in your own Think Tanks, and Jonathan has given us an excellent overview of the challenge.

I thought the best contribution I could make today would be to talk about the CPRN experience as we lived it for the first 11 years. Certainly, that CPRN model was highly interactive – at every stage of the analysis. Our partners helped us frame the research questions, interpret the results, and disseminate the ideas. It was both a process and a strategy for CPRN, and added value to our research, as I shall explain.

The CPRN model was influenced by three forces:

- The approaches we used at the Economic Council,
- Those that Suzanne Peters, the first Director of the Family Network, who had direct experience with dialogue and with community-oriented research, and
- The changing context of policy research in the 1990s – as governments became more dependent on policy analysis done outside the public service.

The bilateral relationships often involved a financial relationship and that in turn required a contract which supported the exchange of money. But the KT relationship was more informal and involved a much deeper exchange of ideas than specified in the contract.

For some observers, this highly interactive model is seen to create risks to the independence of the research. We dealt with this in two ways: First by retaining the intellectual property rights, which we shared openly with both the researcher and the user. And second, by partnering with multiple organizations, so that no single organization could dictate outcomes. These are the rules of the game which enable the KT collaboration to take place.

The program poses two questions for this session:

1. How do the actors – researchers, decision-makers, professionals, and policy-makers speak to each other?
2. How can we enhance collaboration between sectors, without bureaucratization?

Speaking to each other

There are two dimensions to this aspect. Building the trust. And deepening the dialogue.

Building the trust depends heavily on bilateral conversation which will identify common interest, define the common ground and establish expectations. Then, one has to use the full range of instruments to keep the conversation going – phone, email, briefings, and conferences. Without that initial foundation of trust, however, the partnership is unlikely to be successful.

Deepening the dialogue at CPRN depends mainly on the Workshops and Roundtables organized to move the research forward. Workshops were more technical, using experts to help map the territory and define the research priorities. The Roundtables were held to review progress. The participants in RTs were more diverse, and would include users and researchers but also stakeholders – usually community-based people with experience on the front lines (where appropriate also business and labour). In effect, we were triangulating the issue – researcher, user, and stakeholder.

The defining characteristic about a CPRN RT was that it was about *dialogue*, not about listening to research presentations. The paper is circulated in advance. People are expected to have read and developed a view on the questions set out in the agenda when they arrive. This is rather different from the more academic model of a Roundtable, where most of the time is devoted to presentations.

The whole purpose here is shared learning for every actor in the room. By definition, they will not agree. But through the friction of ideas, the research gets road-tested. Flaws are identified, strengths are emphasized, new perspectives are added. In that sense, then the *interactive KT is creative*. It is a net contributor to the research product. It is a real world form of peer review, though we also did the formal peer review. And the revisions to the draft report can often be extensive.

Enhancing collaboration

Why does collaboration fail?

- Lack of investment in the relationship
- Lack of engagement on ideas
- Turf wars and efforts to control outcomes (the bureaucracy problem).

What enhances collaboration?

- A common goal with well-defined expectations
- Shared learning:
 - Professional development,
 - Going home with a fresh approach to problem-solving,
 - A mini-sabbatical
- Opportunities to make a difference

- Efficient process
- Desire for networking

Consequences of KT

We must acknowledge that there are higher costs, but the payoff from that cost is higher quality research with greater impact on the way people think.

The costs are hard to measure. We budgeted \$30,000, plus or minus, for the out of pocket costs – food, accommodation, travel, logistical arrangements. But there are costs in the use of staff time: Everyone in the organization gets involved on some aspect of the RT – who to invite, how to frame the agenda questions, is the document ready for the test?

And that, finally, is the chief characteristic of good KT. It is embedded in the culture of the organization – from the President to the administrative staff. Without that cultural commitment, it is hard to make KT believable to the users, researchers and stakeholders. And if it is not believable, it is not sustainable.

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