



The power of hindsight: evidence-driven reflections on impactful higher education research

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Difficult things in learning and teaching research

- Having an impact
- Identifying, describing, understanding that impact

“researchers are often hard pressed to come up with coherent accounts of the significance and impact of their work as [is] regularly required in a range of situations” (Kuruvilla, Mays, Pleasant, & Walt, 2006, p. 15)

Overview

- Project summary and definitions
- Impact drivers
- Advice for institutional and national funders
- Advice for applicants and researchers
- Examples of support materials
- Conclusions

Project summary

- A national study of project impacts, leading to:
 - enhanced understanding of the impacts of completed projects
 - a model for conceptualising personal, opportunistic and systemic changes in higher education learning and teaching (IMPEL model)
 - work underway to embed impact principles in future OLT funding rounds
- The study examined 16 completed educational development projects (a stratified random sample, N=63 projects) in terms of reach, change, contributions to knowledge, strategic approaches, and perspectives held by project team members.
- It adapted an approach developed by Ako Aotearoa, the equivalent funding agency in New Zealand
- Projects had been completed for between 6 months and two years and ranged across various topics, including curriculum reform, technology, professional development, student engagement, disciplinary scoping and research supervision

Research approach

- Qualitative interpretivist paradigm - 'reality is constructed by those participating in it' ([Hathaway, 1995, pp. 544-545](#))
- 'partners[hip] with stakeholders' undertaking a shared construction of meaning 'that aims to culminate in consensus on better informed and more sophisticated constructions' ([Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 110](#)).
- Member checking
- Thematic analysis

Definitions

- **Outcomes** are 'changes or benefits resulting from activities and outputs' whereas **outputs** are the tangible deliverables that a project creates from its activities (McLaughlin & Jordan, 1999)
- **Dissemination**: 'the planned process of understanding potential adopters and engaging with them throughout the life of the project, to facilitate commitment to sustained change'. It is a key means by which project impact is achieved. (Gannaway et al, 2011)
- **Impact**: the difference that a project makes in its sphere of influence, both during and after the funding period. Examples include curriculum reform, institutional or national policy changes, new or amended funding commitments, new incentives or expectations that value particular pedagogical approaches and so on.

Impact – practical and moral drivers

- Office for Learning and Teaching concerned about project impact
- Mid-2013 Australian Government Discussion Paper exploring possibilities for a new research assessment exercise proposing a refocussing of attention towards research benefits.
- In New Zealand Ako Aotearoa gather impact data through an in-person conversation process at 6, 12 and 24 months
- UK Research Excellence Framework (REF) includes impact measures (eligibility of SoTL problematic)
- Publicly-funded research to have visible benefits and relevance
- Concern for enriching student and staff experience in higher education
- “an educator can teach with integrity only if an effort is made to examine the impact of his or her work on the students” (Shulman cited in Haigh, 2010)

In the sixteen completed projects...

- EASY TO KNOW: Outputs
- MOSTLY EASY TO KNOW: Changes for project team members (e.g. prestige, promotion, new skills)
- A LITTLE HARDER TO KNOW: Instances of opportunistic uptake
- HARD TO KNOW: Evidence of changes to student learning, either opportunistic or systemic
- HARD TO KNOW: Strategies for embedding initiatives and achieving systemic uptake

...SO...

- Applicants, grant holders and funding bodies can enhance impact in L&T research by attending to the DIFFICULT things in purposeful ways

Advice for funding agencies and institutions

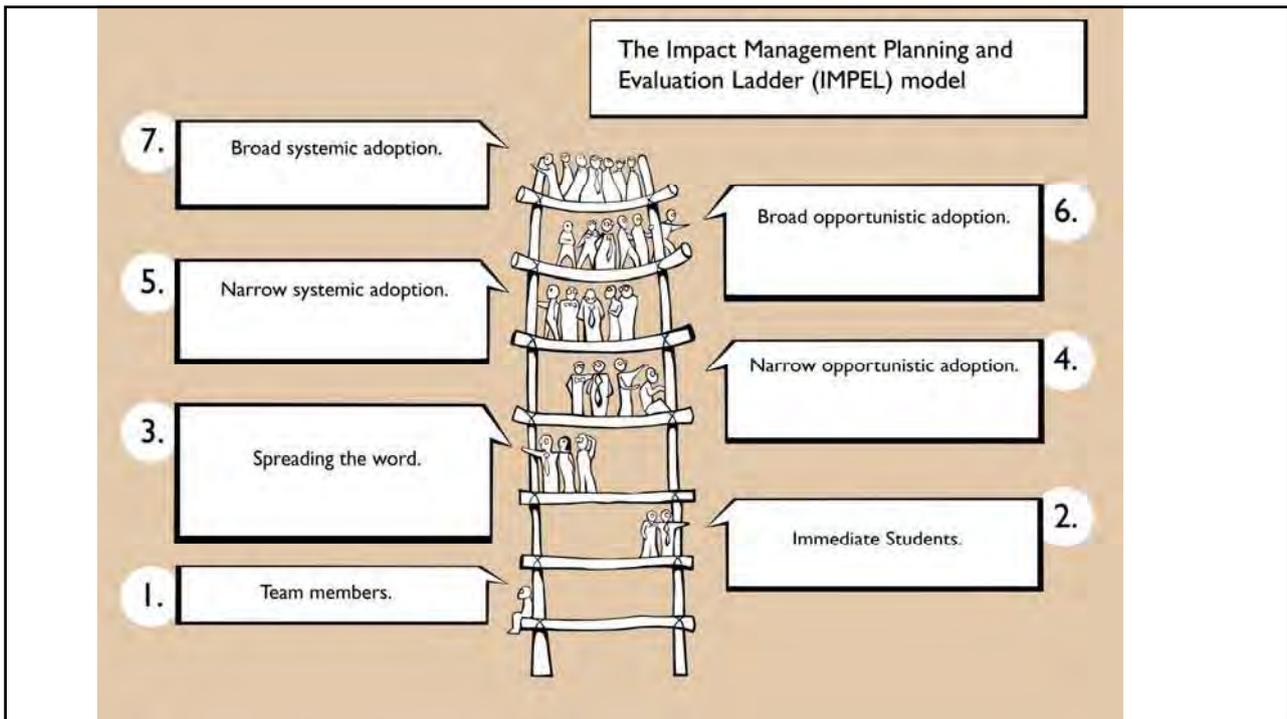
- An impact-focussed culture
- Strategies to know about project impact
 - Require applications outline plans for record keeping and influence analytics
 - Provide web analytics data
 - Tweak project evaluation requirements to prioritise impact
 - Gather information from projects 6, 12 and 24 months post completion - share successes, address challenges, connect synergistic ideas
- Cluster like projects
 - Make deliverables from previous funded project easily accessible and searchable so that new work builds on what has been one before
 - Include the identification of synergies between projects within the terms of reference of grant selection committees
 - Explore options for lodgement of project instruments, data and outputs with a national repository, such as the Australian National Data Service.

Funding agencies (cont.)

- Optimise the likelihood of project teams delivering highly influential projects:
 - Require applicants to articulate anticipated changes at six, twelve and twenty-four months post-project;
 - Ensure funding criteria and advice prioritises impact
 - Refer applicants to relevant resources about impact, translation, dissemination and change and create new materials as needed
 - Require an evaluation of context to prompt applicants to consider the climate of readiness for change;
 - Reflect within the funding body about what is being prioritised in communication and processes regarding grants; and the degree to which completed projects are informing policy (and other) developments.
 - Reiterate impact focus at multiple points throughout the project lifecycle, including requiring that relevant champions/enablers indicate their support
 - Plan for projects to continuing beyond their funding expiration date, because much change happens later on

Advice for grant holders and prospective applicants

- A juggling act of multiple and complex priorities
- Consider from the outset how change will be fostered during and after the project
 - What needs to change? How do you know? Who is interested? Opposed?
 - What will change look like at different timing points? How will these impacts be known, understood and reported?
- Know your project's value and articulate what would be lost if it didn't proceed
- Connect with others doing similar work
- Use literature on translation, transfer, change, impact, dissemination



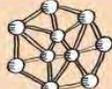
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Knowledge Translation Planning Template©

INSTRUCTIONS: This template was designed to assist with the development of Knowledge Translation (KT) plans for research but can be used to plan for non-research projects. The Knowledge Translation Planning Template is universally applicable to areas beyond health. Begin with box #1 and work through to box #13 to address the essential components of the KT planning process.

(1) Project Partners	(2) Degree of Partner Engagement	(3) Partner(s) Roles	(4) KT Expertise on Team
 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> researchers <input type="checkbox"/> consumers - patients/families <input type="checkbox"/> the public <input type="checkbox"/> decision makers <input type="checkbox"/> private sector/industry <input type="checkbox"/> research funding body <input type="checkbox"/> volunteer health sector/NGO <input type="checkbox"/> practitioners <input type="checkbox"/> other 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> from idea formulation straight through <input type="checkbox"/> after idea formulation & straight through <input type="checkbox"/> at point of dissemination & project end <input type="checkbox"/> beyond the project <p>Consider: Not all partners will be engaged at the same point in time. Some will be collaborators, end users or audiences, or people hired to do specific activities.</p>	 <p><i>(1) What do the partner(s) bring to the project?</i></p> <p><i>(2) How will partner(s) assist with developing, implementing or evaluating the KT plan?</i></p> <p>Action: Capture their specific roles in letters of support to funders, if requested.</p>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> scientist(s) with KT expertise <input type="checkbox"/> consultant with KT expertise <input type="checkbox"/> knowledge broker/specialist <input type="checkbox"/> KT supports within the organization(s) <input type="checkbox"/> KT supports within partner organization(s) <input type="checkbox"/> KT supports hired for specific task(s)

NOTES

In seeking to bring about change, senior management teams and those at policy level are important audiences, but here it is important to convey your message quickly and concisely. Focus upon the key generic details, avoiding overly technical language or jargon, and communicate the **impacts** that have been achieved, the evidence-based benefits of supporting or extending the activity and the real risks of failing to do so. Getting to know your audience and their expectations and interests is therefore vital.

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Conclusions

- A sufficiently strong focus on impact needs to be cultivated by funders and recipients
- Achieving impact is core to the scholarship of teaching and learning
- Resources available to support impact focus

The project made strong recommendations that the Office for Learning and Teaching should embed impact at every stage of the research funding lifecycle and extend reporting periods. Discussions are underway as to enacting this in Australia.

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