

Report of From Brussels with love: cross-domain cooperation in development *huddle* (KM4Dev 2009)

Dates: 6-7 October 2009, Brussels, Belgium

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Background

This huddle is the second in a series of workshops looking at cooperation between the domains of practice, policy and research. Cooperation across the different domains of academia, practice and policy can contribute to comprehending the complexity of development and intervening effectively. Academic knowledge, for instance, offers a broader conceptual understanding of the issues at hand. Practitioners' knowledge and experiences can provide new insights into which concrete initiatives best contribute to or fail in development practice. However, cooperation across domains is also challenging: it is not natural or easy.

From love declarations to relationships

All huddle participants are actively involved in a wide variety of cross-domain activities, either bridging from the different domains or as intermediaries. All share the conviction that cross-domain cooperation adds value *and* that it is difficult to foster structural relationships. So, we decided to take a closer look at this landscape to better understand and foster these relationships.

Landscape

We used a mapping exercise to get a better insight into the relationships between the different domains. Through peer assists, we specifically discussed the role of bridgers/intermediaries. The mapping resulted in multiple maps, which showed that:

- each of the domains were quite far apart, but have overlaps in specific fields
- the domains are not at all homogenous and the links between them may be more or less fluid
- it is important to include the private sector as a domain
- we should not forget the power dimensions in partnerships
- there are differences between domains in terms of relevance of knowledge, incentive system, culture
- within domains, a culture of learning and sharing is often too limited to allow for wider learning and sharing

Findings

- A knowledge landscapes/knowledge cultures (system-wide) approach is important to understand knowledge structures and take us outside our organisational and domain-related focus. To change the current system we need sectoral, organisational and individual change.

- Leadership is important: we as knowledge managers need to exercise leadership to take these issues forward and persuade others (including management) to take a system-wide rather than organisational focus.
- Translators/intermediaries/activists (individuals) are needed to create spaces where knowledge sharing across domains takes place.
- The incentives system needs to be changed. Joint efforts are needed to change the incentive system.
- Change needs to occur at all levels: sectoral, organisational and individual. Power pervades this debate.

Love handles: from reflection to action

We used peer assists to delve into more specific discussions.

Intermediaries/Infomediaries

Issue: What's the role of intermediaries in cross-domain cooperation how can we foster these bridgers.

- Translators/intermediaries/activists (individuals) – these can sometimes be consultants - and info- and knowledge-mediaries (institutions) are needed to build knowledge sharing.
- The role of the infomediaries is to create spaces where sharing takes place.
- Infomediaries have a number of roles: state of the art knowledge; repackaging/formats; multi- and trans- domain knowledge, detachment of outcome and process; finances.

KM4D Journal

Issue: How to involve academics in the journal to make it truly cross-domain?

How to get academics interested?

- Looking for senior people above the academic rat race
- Hold a KM4D workshop at a large academic KM conference to develop critical mass and personal connections
- Interviews with Stiglitz/Sen
- Making contact with Universities in the South who are starting to cover this field
- Ask academics to be Guest Editors
- Do a short analysis of which academics are publishing in the KM4D field in academia
- Ask Kenneth King to do an update of his book for publication in the journal
- Consider using 'cross-fire' between an academic and practitioner to be published
- The whole thing remains a balancing act: ISI rating would attract academics but the journal is predominantly focused on practice
- Make use of networks of people involved in the huddle: UNU academics, ILO, ISS, Europe Aid, NEPAD, AMCOW

New insights

- There is a need to experiment more in this area
- The role of industry/big business in this process. The private sector is an important development actor – and is often encouraged by government and seen as fashionable – but their role can be problematic. How to share knowledge without misuse? The private sector – and we mean big business here – is particularly active in the ICT sector.
- There is a need to build more on existing knowledge. What do we already know? Bibliographies make a contribution to this (taking stock)
- Power pervades this debate.

Ideas

- Who reviews who? Why not let academics, practitioners and policymakers review each others' work.
- What are the links between the system? Social network analysis could reveal this as we need to know more BUT we know enough to take some sort of action
- Theory of change mapping might be useful
- Open knowledge business offers a new model

People

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