**Research Impact Bitesize Podcast #2 – transcript**

**Voice, Context, & Power**

**Jayne:** Hello, welcome to the second instalment in the "Research Impact Bitesize” series, our short form training videos where *we* do the reading and the audience gets to do the watching to pick up the key information to help them on their research journey.

We are switching things up for this one aren’t we?

**Emma**: hmhm

**Jayne**: And we are recording in the podcast studio in the creative industries building. We don’t want the audience getting bored of our straight to camera pieces, so we’re going to have a casual chat and let the audience behind the curtain, as they say.

In our first bitesize video we talked about impact types and enablers and we touched on the notion of Power Imbalances in the enablers section. So we are going to explore that further today and take a bit of a dive into a paper that we read recently.

**Emma:** So we read the 2022 paper "Re-thinking Research Impact: Voice, Context, and Power at the Interface of Science Policy and Practice" by Reed and Rudman.

So the paper sets out that the delivery of impactful research in terms of

* sensitivity to the context in which research is conducted and impact is planned for
* who is given a voice in the research and the impact generation, and how diverse those voices are, who gets to decide the representation and
* the management of power relations and dynamics in research process when knowledge is being generated, disseminated and used to create the impact

**Jayne:** So why is this re-framing important and why do we want our researchers to be informed of this at the early stages of impact planning?

**Emma:** well whether a policy or practice leads to beneficial impacts or harm depends largely on the context in which the outcomes are perceived.

**Jayne**: hhm

**Emma**: Current narratives around impact often fail to recognise that there are both winners and losers. This is especially important when potential beneficiaries have historically been marginalised by researchers or those in positions of power such as those with academic privilege.

As an example, wanting to create positive changes for refugee communities without asking refugees what they need, could result in unforeseen outcomes, which may be negative. So researchers aspiring to achieve one impact may discover unexpected alternative benefits or unintended negative consequences.

**Jayne:** You’re right, it is important that research from our university is as inclusive as possible and we achieve impact in the right ways.

So the paper discusses how negative outcomes can be more widespread in countries where research assessment exercises (such as the REF that the UK takes part in) create a conflict of interest for researchers who will be evaluating their own research. Evidence suggests that the process for such evaluations can undermine public trust in researchers as they are acting for the interests of the institution, especially if funding is dependent on this, which in the REF case it is. And also it can impact their career progression opportunities in some instance as well. So Wrexham University supports actually researchers in taking a chance and a lack of demonstrable impact doesn’t have the potentially serious consequences it can have in other institutions

Emma: hmhm

Jayne: sort of publish or perish, and obviously that is very beneficial to our culture and integrity at the university.

**Emma:** Yeah, and we understand that academics might feel pressures from the REF and having to create impact, but we are here to help our researchers.

Jayne: hmhm

Emma: And we want to equip you, our researchers, with knowledge and understanding of exploring your personality and your privilege so you are in a position to question whether they are the right person to research a topic, and hopefully this will reduce the likelihood of adverse impacts occurring.

**Jayne:** yep, sojust a side note before we talk about the three considerations further, the audience may note that we refer to academic and non-academic research partners or interested parties rather than the generic term of “stakeholders”. This is because it’s been rightly highlighted by **Reed et al. in 2009,** in **Who's in and why? A typology of stakeholder analysis methods for natural resource management**, (easy one for me to say!)

Reed says in there that the term ‘stakeholder’ has echoes of colonial practices where settlers became stakeholders as they staked their claim to Indigenous lands. So, as a research office we have made a commitment to swapping out the term stakeholder, haven’t we?

**Emma:** Yep, and I think we’re doing pretty good so far. We are also on the Race Equality Group led by Yasmin Washbrook and Ali Bloomfield, and I did write a blog about the term stakeholder and its historical roots and what you might be able to use instead such as the ones that jayne’s just mentioned.

We want to encourage a culture where research may be led / co-led by academic or nac…

Can’t say non-academic!

\*laughter and cut\*

So we want to encourage a culture where research may be led or co-led by academics or non-academic partners and interested parties have the influence on the research and impacts. So everyone has a say.

**Jayne:** That’s definitely our aim and it’s what we’re trying isn’t it

**Emma:** yes

**Jayne:** making small steps where we can.Ok so let's talk about the importance of context. As we have said, a lack of appreciation for the context in which research is being conducted can lead to negative unintended consequences. Whereas an understanding of context therefore enables researchers to appreciate the perspectives of “beneficiaries”. An understanding of social worlds is also imperative as in turn it supports genuine coproduction of research and impact.

**Emma**: hmhm. Zimmermann et al. (2007) defined five types of context, all of which interact and with the power of magic, these will appear on the screen now.

Both: tada

\*magical sound and graphic\*

**[Image of individuality; activity; location; time; and relations]**

So Bell and Reed (2021) also identified seven contextual factors influencing engagement outcomes and with a snap of the fingers these will appear now!

\*finger snap in sync\*

**[Image of valuing, equality, authenticity, transparency, agency, representation, deliberation]**

**Jayne**: and that actually wasn’t even rehearsed, we’re just in sync.

So, it is essential to engage with the identified actors at an early and throughout the research process, as well as considering who might become disempowered or disadvantaged as a result of the research or at the planned pathway to impact. Researchers are essentially making decisions for people if they don't consult them early on, which is disempowering and this isn’t what we want from our research culture at the university. Bell and Reed have a framework called the “tree of participation”, that can be used to design engagement process with context in mind, so we’d encourage people to go and check that out.

**Emma:** So voice is another crucial element. Who is given voice in any research and impact generation process really matters. Poor representation of beneficiary needs and interests can be a major barrier to impact, leading to these unintended consequences that we’ve mentioned. This is again, particularly problematic when such groups are already marginalized.

**Jayne:** Absolutely, and researchers need to systematically consider the interests, values, knowledges, beliefs, norms, and worldwide views of their partners. Avoiding over-representation of those most easily accessible to researchers is key.

**Emma:** So what are some of the top tips researchers can have in mind?

**Jayne: so we would say**

* Use the resources we have available such as “Interested groups analysis” on our webpages to ensure all voices are fully representeted

**Emma**: representeted? Hehehe new word

**Jayne**: ok, take 17, to ensure all voices are fully represented

* Researchers should be mindful of their own power and privilege in deciding who can, and cannot participate in research and impact process
* Give interested and affected groups the opportunity and capacity to actively engage in the research and/or the impact generation process, so this should give them opportunities as equals, so you can do things such as covering costs, consider timings (so its not impacting childcare arrangement), and adjusting cultural norms
* And then, avoid ‘containment of participation’ where people in power may steer outcomes by forcing methods or tactical alliances for example

**Emma:** Some very good tips there

**Jayne**: why thank you

**Emma**: So we really do want Wrexham University to commit to representing and empowering multiple voices in the research and impact generation process.

Lastly, let's discuss power dynamics. So power can influence decisions, prevent decisions from being made, shape perceptions and preferences. And managing covert power in the research and impact generation process typically requires strategies such as negotiation, adaptation, compromise, and concessions.

**Jayne:** Also researchers and funders should reflect on how they may be able to identify, acknowledge, and redistribute power within their work. This includes giving a voice to marginalised groups whose perspectives should be heard alongside the more formal, codified forms of evidence.

**Emma:** hmhm, and it is essential that we consider how we design an impact process to ensure it adequately accounts for the nuances of context, voice, and power. Coproduction may not be the most appropriate design for every project, nor the most feasible approach to take

**Janye**: that is true

**Emma**: but it is a good one

**Jayne:** The paper details that researchers should be part of a knowledge ecosystem, rather than seeing their evidence as the sun around which other interested parties should gravitate towards and then orbit around – which I’m sure between us, we’ve seen many examples of!

**Emma**: ah yes, many a Copernicus

**Jayne**: and I think this is actually a striking way to contextualise it as well. The traditional hierarchical norms should be disrupted to make room for other voices.

**Emma:** hmhm, so we could go on

**Jayne**: we could

**Emma**: and on, and on, but by sharing these insights as a starting point, we hope to help other researchers become more aware of their research and impact activities and how it can be shaped for better identifying the context for the research, providing others with a voice and by identifying and addressing power dynamics.

So thank you for tuning in to our "Research Impact Bitesize" podcast

**Jayne**: and keep your eyes peeled for the next one

**Emma**: yes, and feel free to talk to us, talk to us about any of this, talk to us about your work, we’re here to help you with your impact planning, with your research process, so please talk to us

**Jayne**: we’re often available in B55, and if we’re not in B55 we’re on Teams and w’re happy to have meetings put in the diary, so give us a shout

**Emma**: yes

**Jayne**: take care

**Emma:** byee