Knowledge Mobilization Strategies: 
A Qualitative Study

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Research background

The main purpose of conducting research at universities and research institutions is to transfer research findings to other communities and give them application. No developmental progress in society can be expected if the rich knowledge produced by academia is confined to scientific databases and not properly transferred to different parts of society. Knowledge mobilization (KMb) is a phenomenon proposed for this purpose to link research theories to

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application and transfer scientific results beyond academia, to help practitioners, policy makers, and even the public make knowledge-informed professional and public decisions (Malik, 2020). This phenomenon is a set of complex, interlocking processes facilitating “the reciprocal and complementary flow and uptake of research knowledge” (SSHRC, 2019), involving different actors from and beyond academia. KMb with the goal of linking research to policy and practice, is the new generation of knowledge translation or knowledge transfer, but it has subtle differences with the old K* movements. While knowledge translation is more dedicated to the field of medical sciences (Wensing & Grol, 2019), KMb has been defined to be applicable to a wide range of disciplines. Knowledge transfer is also different from mobilization in the context that it merely aims to transfer knowledge and reach the final user, and it may not necessarily pay attention that the knowledge is used in practice or made any changes. But KMb is proposed as the most comprehensive approach in this area, using appropriate actions and strategies to facilitate the knowledge transition and ensure sustainability of the societal change.

Limited application of research in practice has been reported in previous studies (Malik, 2020). Several case studies in evidence-based disciplines such as health sciences and education highlight KMb’s positive contribution towards filling the gap between research and practice, while they also acknowledge difficulties arise in KMb implementation (La Velle & Flores, 2018; Cooper, Klinger, & McAdie, 2017). Universities as the largest knowledge producers could play a key role in the KMb process (Read et al., 2013; Sá, Li & Faubert, 2011), but they seem to perform weakly in practicing KMb (Malik, 2020; Levin, 2012).

This study mainly aims to identify and investigate KMb strategies through reviewing previous literature and also by interviewing research institutions that are active in doing research and may be practicing KMb. Through this mixed method, strategies that have been missed or overlooked will be identified and introduced to the organizations, researchers and those involved in the field of knowledge transfer and mobilization.

Methodology and analysis

To extract KMb strategies from previous studies, a review of relevant literature was conducted. In addition to that, a case study approach was taken into account to identify KMb efforts in a number of Iranian research institutions. A sample of research institutions located in Shiraz, Iran was chosen to run interviews and identify KMb strategies used in such institutions. There were
a total of 102 research centers affiliated to both medical and non-medical universities in Shiraz out of which, a purposive sample of 60 centers were interviewed.

Forty-seven strategies were extracted from previous literature and thirty-two strategies were identified through interviewing research institutions. Strategies obtained from the first and second parts of the research were then integrated, overlapping strategies were removed and fifty-three strategies were obtained eventually.

Results

A framework was designed based on the similarity found between the strategies, comprising two main categories and five sub-categories, as can be seen in Table 1:

Table 1: Framework of knowledge mobilization strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main category</th>
<th>Sub-category</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation in knowledge development</td>
<td>Knowledge support and development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>development strategies</td>
<td>Collaborative efforts in developing knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge dissemination and accessibility</td>
<td>Knowledge accessibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strategies</td>
<td>Knowledge informing and education</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Knowledge application</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Through interviewing research institutions, barriers and limitations that institutions encounter in planning KMb were pointed out by the interviewees, including: lack of motivation and an incentive system for KMb, international collaboration barriers, challenges of organizing conferences, lack of staff focusing on scientific communication, filtering policies for using international social media in the country, and so on.

Implementing KMb strategies helps grow knowledge and empower people to apply knowledge to their real-life problems. The findings of this study are informative for managers, practitioners and policy makers in the field of research evaluation and knowledge application and will help them develop necessary infrastructure and facilities for mobilizing knowledge in research organizations.
References


