Institution: University of Hull

Unit of Assessment: 17 Business and Management Studies

Title of case study: Shaping the Policy and Practice of Employee Volunteering and Social Action

Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2013-2020

Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:

Name(s):	**Role(s) (e.g. job title):**	**Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:**
Professor Joanne Cook Dr Fiona Walkley	Professor Lecturer	Since 2011 Since 2017

Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2015-2020

Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No

1. Summary of the impact

Professor Cook and Dr Walkley's research (with Dr Burchell, University of Sheffield) has shaped policy and practice on employee volunteering and social action at national and local levels by directly shaping policy programmes and through creating new cross-sectoral dialogue and collaboration. These impacts have been created through;

1) Running the government's Enabling Social Action programme which created extensive cross-sectoral dialogue and brought together key stakeholders and policy makers (involving over 1200 organisations).
2) Driving system level changes in local authority policy and practice.
3) Creating new cross-sectoral communities of practice

2. Underpinning research

Within the UK, government policy has in recent years charged individuals and communities to depend less on public services and contribute more in response to the ongoing crisis in public funding. The Kings Fund (2019) predicts a social funding deficit of £1.5bn by 2020 and £6bn by 2030. The Hull research team (with Dr Burchell, University of Sheffield) have been at the forefront of questioning the established belief that increased engagement with volunteering inevitably increases the resources available to civil society, thereby, offsetting the shortfall of available funding. Key findings from this research demonstrated that limited engagement across private and third sectors resulted in significant gaps in understanding (2.1) which led to restricted collaboration (2.2) and ineffective allocations of valuable resources (2.3). The team developed a cross sectoral dialogue methodology to identify key challenges and facilitate policy-makers and practitioners to co-create solutions through working together in the research workshops.

2.1. Volunteering as an Underutilised Resource – 'The Gaps Framework'

Findings from the *Brokering Employee Volunteering* project funded by the ESRC (RG1), highlighted that a failure to create effective cross-sectoral engagement was resulting in significant misunderstanding and misalignment across sectors (R1). This restricted the ability of new employee volunteering resources to achieve their potential and reach the places most in need. The *Gaps Framework* highlighted four gaps: i) skills, whereby the resources offered are not always those that are required, such as more skills-based volunteering; ii) knowledge, where lack of engagement creates misunderstanding highlighting the importance of a shared language and understanding; iii) capacity, volunteering is not free and produces significant costs, such as becoming volunteer-ready, training and increasing volunteer numbers; iv) without sufficient infrastructure, delivering on the potential of volunteering and solving the other gaps will be limited (R1). Cook's long-standing research on cross-sectoral dialogue reveals its centrality to improving collaboration and understanding between the private, public and third sectors (R1, R2, R3 & R4).

2.2. Applying the Gaps Framework Nationally

The research findings received national and regional media coverage, resulting in Cook being invited to partner with the Office for Civil Society in responding to David Cameron's (2015) manifesto commitment on employee volunteering. This collaboration revealed that the four gaps (above) existed nationally and that failure to create cross-sectoral engagement would reduce volunteering resources (R4). Cross-sectoral dialogues identified how to strategically enhance employee volunteering by examining the Gaps Framework across the English regions.

2.3. Volunteering as a Social Action Resource - Extending the Gaps Framework

The *Gaps Framework* was enhanced through the Enabling Social Action Programme (RG2) commissioned by the Office for Civil Society. The research team expanded and applied their cross sectoral dialogue methodology to the broader relationships between local authorities, the third sector and local communities (1200 participants across 100 local authorities and 700 third sector groups); creating a framework for enhancing social action and bringing new resources into communities. The research recommended six strategies for enabling social action (R5).

- i) Enhancing skills and building capacity
- ii) Redesigning funding and commissioning
- iii) Integration across service and policy-making silos
- iv) Sharing power through collaboration
- v) Rethinking approaches to evidencing impact
- vi) Creating shared spaces for cross-sectoral dialogue.

This research has led to the team securing three new research grants (RG 3, 5 & 6).

3. References to the research

1) Cook, J. and Burchell, J. (2018) 'Bridging the Gaps in Employee Volunteering (EV): Why the third sector doesn't always win' Non-Profit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly Vol.47, Issue 1; pp 165-184. DOI: 10.1177/0899764017734649.

2) Burchell, J. and Cook, J. (2013) 'CSR, Co-optation and Resistance: the Emergence of New Agonistic Relations Between Business and Civil Society' Journal of Business Ethics. 115 (4); 741-754. DOI: 10.1007/s10551-013-1830-z.

3) Burchell, J. and Cook, J. (2013) 'Sleeping With the Enemy? Strategic Transformations in Business-NGO Relationships Through Stakeholder Dialogue Journal of Business Ethics. Vol.113 (3); 505-518. DOI: 10.1007/s10551-012-1319-1.

4) Burchell, J., Cook, J. and Orkney, H. (2017) 'Employer Sponsored Volunteering: Realising the potential; the findings of the regional workshop series. Available at: https://doit.life/esa

5) Burchell, J., Cook, J., Walkley, F. and McNeill, J. (2020) Enabling Social Action Programme: Findings and Recommendations Report.

6) MoVE report: Cook, J., Thiery, H. Burchell, J., Walkley, F., Ballantyne, E. and McNeill, J. (2020) Report 1: Lessons from Lockdown, Available at: https://doit.life/channels/11997/move-findings/file/md/139216/report-1-lessons-from-lockdown

The articles are all peer reviewed and in CABS 3 journals which is indicative of the quality.

Research Grants

1) *Cook, J. & Burchell, J.* – ESRC Knowledge Exchange opportunities Grant on 'Brokering Employer Sponsored Volunteering Strategies: Creating effective engagement between employers and third sector organisations' (ES/K005332/1) April 1st 2013-May 31st 2014, £96,000.

2) *Burchell, J., Cook, J. and Walkley, F. - Awarded by the Office for Civil Society* – 'Enabling Social Action'. March 2018 – March 2020, £258,000.

3) *Cook, J., Burchell, J., Walkley, F., Balantine, E. and Nicolova, S.* - 'UKRI Covid 19 Rapid response grant on 'Mobilising Volunteering Effectively (MoVE)' (ES/v004026/1) May 2020 - October 2021, £382,000.

4) *Cook, J. and Walkley, F.* - Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) grant on developing social action, co-production and measurement tools. February 2018-July 2018, £25,000 & March 2019-July 2020, £39,529.

5) *Cook, J., Burchell, J., Twiddy, M., Hulme, C., Wilberforce, M. & Nikolova, S.* - 'Local Area Coordination' funded by the NIHR 2021-2024, £323,272.

6) *Birks, Y., Wilberforce, M., Cook, J. and Burchell, J.* - 'Regional Social Care Network'. NIHR 2021-2025, £1.4 million.

4. Details of the impact

Cook and Walkley's research has significantly impacted policy and practice on employee volunteering and social action. The core to this is the creation of a volunteering infrastructure which clusters around three separate strands of impact.

1. Our research partnership with the Office for Civil Society has shaped how this policy unit utilised cross-sectoral engagement to increase the potential impact of different types of volunteers (S1 & S2).
2. The cross-sectoral dialogue methodology applied to Enabling Social Action has impacted on local authority and voluntary sector collaboration and brought about changes in local policy and practice (S3-S6);
3. The *Gaps Framework* has underpinned changes in how corporate, voluntary and public sector organisations collaborate around volunteering (S7 & S8);

These impacts have been achieved through strategic engagement with the following types of stakeholders:

4.1. Influencing National Policy on Employee Volunteering and Social Action

The research team's partnership with the Office for Civil Society resulted in: enhancing the success of employee volunteering through national policy making (4.1.1), facilitating evidence based policy making and social action volunteering (4.1.2) and influencing national civil society strategy (S2).

4.1.1. Enhancing the success of employee volunteering through national policy making - The research team partnered with the OCS to run 11 workshops, engaging private, public and third sector stakeholders in 'open policy making' using our cross-sectoral dialogue methodology. The Office for Civil Society used these outcomes to develop a strategic policy plan for enhancing the impact of employee volunteering with proposals outlined in Westminster on 20 February 2017. This made a *'significant contribution to our policy development work…* **[The workshops] added immeasurably to our understanding of employee volunteering and are helping to shape our policy options'** (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Policy Officer S1). A subsequent change of Prime Minister and Junior Minister, led to new priorities emerging around social action and created opportunities for the team to shape this related area of policy making (4.1.2).

4.1.2. Facilitating evidence-based policy making on social action volunteering - The success of the employee volunteering partnership resulted in Cook and Walkley being invited to design and implement one of DCMS's flagship social action programmes, Enabling Social Action (2018 - 2020). Programme commissioner (DCMS) stated *"the relationship with Sheffield and Hull has been built from an Employer Supported Volunteering project* [OCS 2016]. *The outcomes were impressive with the levels of complex stakeholder engagement and influence exceeding expectations giving an excellent track record…* **the specialist approach that the universities took added value to activity on wider evaluation of social action and standardisation of measurement. The presence of the partnership brought insight, expertise and opportunity directly into OCS that we would not otherwise have access to"** (S1).

4.1.3. Impact on the UK Government's Civil Society Strategy The UK government's Civil Society Strategy (2018), which sets out the long-term policy vision for how the government works with civil society, cites our role in supporting the co-production of knowledge and cross-sectoral dialogue in social action policy programmes. It links our delivery of the Enabling Social Action programme as key to *'build*[ing] **an evidence base for what works by testing and enabling the development of initiatives that have an impact'** (S2; 31). The strategy states the research supported *'local authority commissioners to co-design and co-deliver services with local people, service users, and civil society organisations'* (S2; 40).

These national level impacts cascade down to local level, where much of the practical implementation occurs. We have been directly involved in cases of application especially at the local level, described below.

4.2 Influencing Public Sector Practice Around Social Action

Through the Enabling Social Action programme we worked in-depth with six local authorities and their third sector partners to embed and evidence social action (S3–S5). Key impacts on operational practice and strategic decision making (in four of these partnerships) are evidenced below.

4.2.1. North Yorkshire County Council (NYCC). The partnership helped transform commissioning practice to strengthen collaboration between the local authority and the voluntary and community sectors. Marie-Ann Jackson, Head of Stronger Communities at NYCC, described the ultimate achievement of the partnership as *"the change to commissioning practices…"* and its ability to **"influence and shape conversations between the Stronger Communities and commissioning teams."** (S3) This led to the co-creation of a Community Support Organisation Model and a new impact evaluation to *"inform the re-commissioning of a range of prevention and well-being contracts, following a place-based, co-production commissioning model"* (S3).

4.2.2. Stevenage Borough Council. The partnership produced local authority-wide impacts, articulated by Assistant Director Robert Gregory as leading to **"a wholescale restructure of neighbourhood-based services across council departments and neighbourhood forums"** (S3). The Council identified that this partnership has; 1) improved reflective practice and 2) developed more collaborative grass roots decision making. The Service Plan states we informed future work: *"allowing further community engagement in decision making on Co-operative Neighbourhood Management expenditure, results and legacy"* (S4; 4). The cross-sectoral dialogue approach created "*a more inclusive and multi-agency approach*" and that *"outcomes and delivery have changed, through joint learning, joint action and honest discussion"* (S5; 13).

4.2.3. Lancashire Constabulary and the County Council. The partnership **"helped Our Lancashire** [community engagement programme] **shape its practice by helping to put in place new measures and web site innovations"** (S3). The co-created impact framework enabled 'Our Lancashire' to evidence the worth of the Community Engagement Officers' role and *"was instrumental in the decision-making process"* to fund six additional posts (S3). Ian Sewart (Manager) states "*Without doubt, the programme added value and positively influenced the development and early success of Our Lancashire*" (S3).

4.2.4. City of York Council (CYC). Joe Micheli (CYC), states how the partnership's dialogue approach helped to *"deepen relationships between public servants, ... the voluntary sector ...and communities, across our wider civil society and ecosystem"* enabling them to *"explore power issues"* (S3). It enabled the council and its partner to review their Local Area Co-ordination and Social Prescribing (health/third sector) programmes. The workshops *"pushed partners to consider how inclusive our approaches were and evidence of genuine co-production"* (S3). This led to the Practitioners Network being given a **"more direct feedback mechanism to city leaders and policy makers helping to inform system change"** (S3).

4.3. Creating Communities of Practice Around Employee Volunteering and Social Action

Both programme of work Employee Volunteering and Enabling Social Action engaged stakeholders from across the sectors in collaborative workshops where they co-created solutions

to support and enhance volunteering. These engagement processes created national and local communities of Practice.

4.3.1. Creating communities of practice on employee volunteering. Numerous initiatives around improving Employee volunteering emerged from these 11 workshops, including; i) redesign of organisational employee volunteering offers to build skills-based volunteering e.g., Department of Work and Pensions (S7). ii) Evidencing the value of employee volunteering, e.g., Portacabin. iii) New collaborations between corporates and third sector organisations. e.g., BT and Doit.life collaborated on a major international digital portal to support employee volunteering which *"optimised the way BT engaged their teams both in the UK and India"* (S7). The Sheffield Business Together Forum was created and used the 'gaps framework' learning to design their model (S8).

4.3.2. Creating communities of practice around social action. This programme created a national cross-sectoral Peer Learning Network of 1200 members (local authority commissioners from 100 different authorities and 700 third sector organisations) to share good practice, champion coproduction and build new social action initiatives. The team partnered with Doit.life to develop a membership platform, who state this enabled them "to connect with and better understand local authorities ... *further shape the Do IT platform...and ultimately, to get more people in communities supporting one another"* (S8).

Network members attributed the following impacts (S6). i) Leveraging and validating social action approaches - *"The ESA programme gives local authority officers permission to go against the grain".* ii) Creating new partnerships - *"Building relationships and making connections with other local authorities for mutual learning has informed new approaches in my local authority".* iii) Applying learning - *"It has reinforced our beliefs around asset based community development and the need for creative and agile partnerships".* iv) Creating space for reflection and sharing learning - *"The ESA network events are an 'excuse' for people to ...come together...to talk through and reflect on what they are doing'.* The network has developed a new role in allowing members to collaborate and share learning during the pandemic (S9).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

S1. Three testimonial letters from OCS Sector support team who partnered in the EV work, the Commissioner for ESA, and the current policy lead for the ESA program, Plus one from the current ESA policy lead.

S2. Government's Civil Society Strategy document citing our research and collaboration. (in chapter one pages 31, 40, 41, and chapter 5 pages 107, 112).

S3. Testimonial letters and Impact reports from Enabling Social Action Partner councils.

S4. Stevenage Borough Council Communities and Neighbourhoods Service Plan, Community Development 2019/2020.

S5. Stevenage Borough Council Draft Community Engagement Framework 2019: https://democracy.stevenage.gov.uk/documents/s18084/Item%207%20-%20Appendix%20A%20-%20DRAFT%20Community%20Engagement%20Framework.pdf

S6. End of Project Impact Evaluation: Data from the programme network on changing practice

S7. Report of how participating organisations used the EV findings and how the regional workshops changed their practice/policy on EV.

S8. Testimonial letters from Sheffield Business Together and Do IT.

S9. Enabling Social Action online portal owned by the research team.