



Interactive agenda setting in the social sciences

3rd & 4th November 2005,
Cosener's House, Abingdon

Private Sector Research Agendas

This workshop considers processes involved in establishing social research priorities and agendas within the private sector. How do private sector organisations translate their concerns into social science research questions? When, why and how do they acquire social scientific knowledge and what benefits do they expect from interactive engagement with social scientists?

We want to think about how relevance is negotiated and constructed and how academic and non-academic agendas intersect in practice. How do social research questions circulate between business and academia and between the public and the private sector, and what are the channels and routes involved?

Workshop participants include social scientists working within large and complex organisations; consultants who provide social research to a variety of different sorts of corporate clients; academics who routinely engage with business, and people who have expertise in research and science policy.

The workshop is organised around four themes:

- Agenda setting in the private sector

- Mediating between social science and business

- Social research with and for business

- Sites and settings of academic and non-academic interaction

and will be informed by a background paper circulated in advance.

Programme

Thursday 3th November

12.00 – 13.30 Arrive. Lunch at 12.30

13.30 – 15.45 Introduction

Session 1: Agenda setting in the private sector

In this session we hope to compare the ways in which social research agendas are 'set' in private sector organisations, and identify when, how and why different types of social scientific expertise are sought and bought. In-house social researchers are in an especially revealing position, sometimes shaping research priorities, sometimes having to respond. More generally, we are interested in how companies identify and evaluate different sources of social scientific expertise. For example, does reliance on a limited number of experts result in a form of intellectual capture; when do companies shop around for social science; how is social research used and by what criteria is it judged?

Maureen Gardiner, Gardiner Green Ltd
Chris Loxley, Unilever
Sylvie Douzou, EDF

15.45 – 16.00 Tea/Coffee

16.00 – 18.00 **Session 2:** Mediating between social research and business

Social research consultancies are both consumers and producers of knowledge, being located somewhere between academia and the many client organisations they serve. In this session, we focus on how consultants contribute to the evolution of research agendas and how they foster and filter flows of ideas, theories and methodologies.

Again issues of quality and evaluation are important, but again our main focus is on issues of problem formation, agenda setting and the construction of relevance. How do social research consultancies meet the 'needs' of multiple clients with diverse problems, concerns, expectations and priorities? How are these affected by changing fads and fashions?

Carole Lehman, MORI

Building and managing networks of researchers and 'users' is one way of aligning and mediating between many different business needs and social science research agendas. How do such networks facilitate the interactions between researchers and users?

Jean Irvine, Change Management Network

The effective linking of research and business needs is an issue which affects business practitioners, consultants and researchers alike. To conclude the session, and to set the scene for day 2's sessions, we will focus on the perspective of the researcher, and in particular on AIM (Advanced Institute of Management). The AIM initiative is a deliberate attempt to enable effective interaction between the business community and research. How are business needs identified and met? How are their concerns integrated into academic research agendas? What are the key challenges in fitting together business and academic priorities?

Andrew Neely, Deputy Director, AIM

19.00 Evening meal

Friday 4th

From 7.30 Breakfast

09.00 – 11.00 **Session 3:** Social research with and for business

The relationship between business schools and business is interdependent: schools educate new practitioners and 'generate' knowledge through research. On the face of it, management research agendas are unavoidably 'interactive', after all, research subjects (organisations) are also knowledge producers, clients, sponsors and/or beneficiaries. In practice the dynamic day-to-day concerns of business and those of management as an academic discipline do not always mesh. Session three considers initiatives designed to foster the movement of tacit and explicit knowledge between these domains and provides an opportunity to reflect on some of the (creative?) tensions that arise.

Eamonn Molloy, Said Business School, Oxford University
Robin Wensley, Director of the Advanced Institute of Management Research.

11.00 – 11.15 Coffee

11.30 – 13.15 **Session 4:** Sites and settings of academic and non-academic interaction

In the final session we consider different sites and institutional settings in which the research priorities of firms, practitioners, consultants and academics are the subject of explicit negotiation. What is exchanged or changed during such interaction and how do research agendas consequently co-evolve? Specifically, how do the ambitions and agendas of corporate competitiveness relate to those of academic enquiry and how is this relationship played out in different settings?

In thinking about these issues we focus on one especially revealing institutional form: the CASE studentship. CASE (collaborative award in science and engineering) PhD awards bring non-academic agendas and questions of relevance to the heart of academic scholarship. In Gibbons' terms, these studentships represent a curious blend of Mode 1 and Mode 2 forms of knowledge production.

Chris Harty, Loughborough University
Eamonn Molloy, Said Business School, Oxford University

Review and reflection on emerging and surprising issues
All.

13.15

Close.