Impact Culture

Mark S Reed

Fast Track Impact

First published 2022
by Fast Track Impact www.fasttrackimpact.com
St Johns Well, Kinnoir, Huntly, Aberdeenshire AB54 7XT

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

This book should be cited as:
Reed, M.S. (2022). *Impact Culture.* Fast Track Impact.

ISBN: 978-0-9935482-6-0 (pbk)
ISBN: 978-0-9935482-7-7 (ebk)

Design by: Anna Sutherland
Photography by: Joyce Reed

Chapter 14

Finding your impact community

Healthy impact cultures are supported by communities of researchers and stakeholders who trust each other deeply and help each other. This is the third of the four components of a healthy impact culture. So far, you have considered how your impact culture is underpinned by robust, ethical and action-oriented research, and how the culture around you can be shaped by your purpose and priorities, as they interact with the priorities of your colleagues and your wider institutional culture. Now, I invite you to look at your relationships with your colleagues, both in your institutional and disciplinary networks and outside the academy, and consider how you could work together more effectively to achieve impact. A lot of researchers feel overwhelmed by impact, given the magnitude of the tasks that face them and their limited time and capacity. But impact is a team sport, and like any good team sport, it is both easier and more fun when you work together.

There are three elements of community I want to focus on in particular: trust, connection and the role of social norms and power. Taken together, these represent your "social capital", and as the term suggests, such capital can either accumulate or erode, depending on how well you tend it. As you explore these different elements, you will understand how the social capital you hold with your academic and non-academic communities can shape your impact culture. You will consider this primarily in relation to your own relationships, but you can also use the exercise at the end of the chapter with colleagues to better understand the wider community that your group is part of, if you want to start creating new connections between those in your group and across that community with similar interests.

To get started though, I would like you to create a map of the communities you are currently connected to, that are currently facilitating impact, or that might enable you to achieve impact in future.

Your impact community

You are connected to many different, overlapping communities, but for this exercise I invite you to identify your "impact community". For some people this is already a well-developed community of people and organisations you interact with regularly, while for others this is a latent community of people you rarely interact with, but could invest more in to build a stronger impact community around you. For others still, you may discover that there is nobody you currently interact with who could help you develop impact, and you will want to use the exercise to identify a few initial colleagues or organisations you can reach out to.

Your starting point is the purpose forest exercise in the previous chapter. Go back to the work you did there and identify your impact trees (the ones with fruit). You can do the exercise with impact trees from both your professional and personal life, but I will focus primarily on research impact here. If you haven't done the exercise, then ask yourself which parts of your professional identity deliver most benefits to others, or think of a particular change you would like to see in the world, linked to your research.

Now, draw a diagram with three concentric circles. Your institution is in the central ring, where you will consider those you interact with as you generate impact within your institution. In the next ring, write "discipline". This is for your disciplinary networks. Finally, in the outer ring, write "stakeholders and publics". Alternatively, you can download an editable Word template from my website at www.fasttrackimpact.com/impactculture. Now, using this diagram, ask yourself who you currently interact with or could interact (more) with to generate impact. There are a number of ways you can ask this, for example:

- What sort of organisations, groups or members of the public do you think might be interested in some aspect of your research?
- Which non-academic organisations are you already in touch with, who might be interested in your research?
- Who attended your last webinar or did you invite to your last stakeholder or public event?

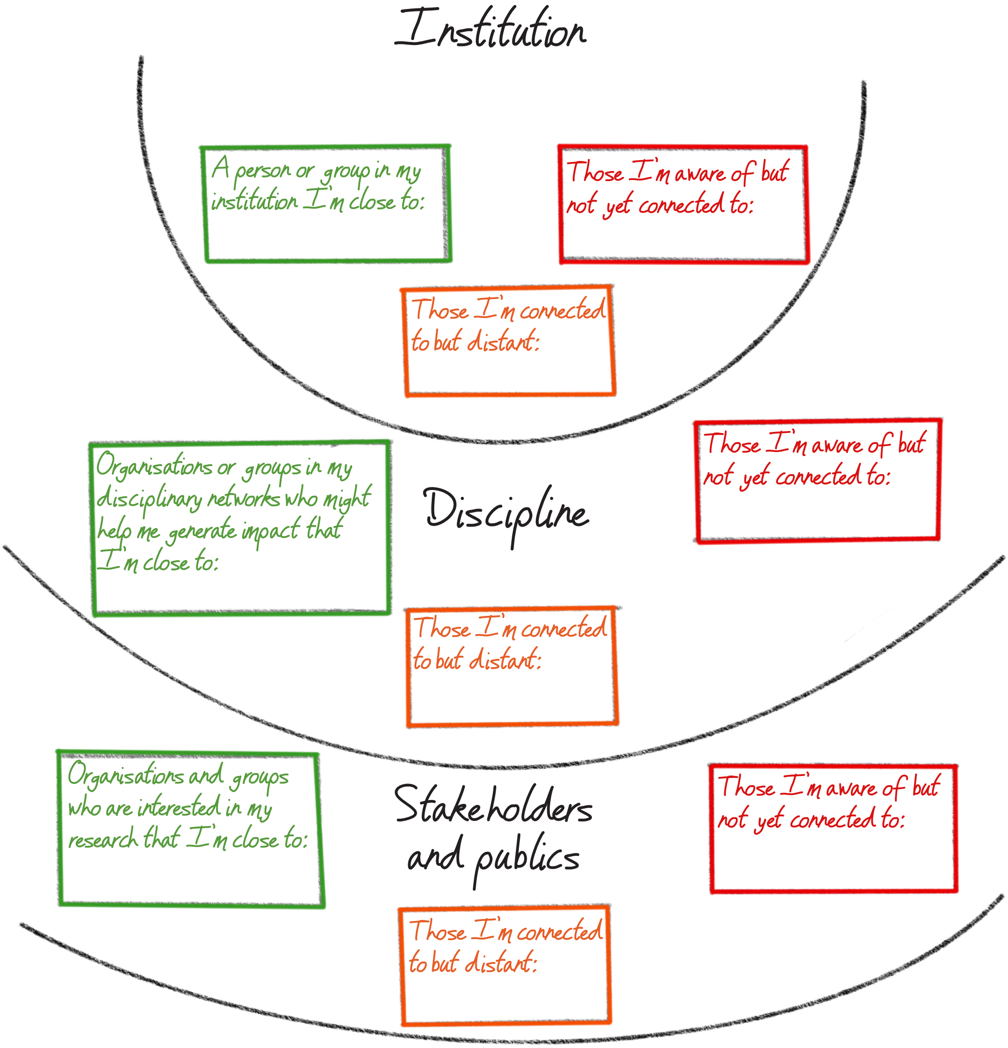
- Who got in touch with you the last time your work appeared in the media?
- Who would you love to know about your work, who you think might have the power or influence to use your research to make a difference?
- Who are the vulnerable or hard-to-reach groups that could benefit most from your work?
- Who could connect you with lots of relevant people and organisations who might benefit from your work? Is there someone in your network who already has the connections you need?
- Can you do a search in your email inbox for key organisations you've identified, to see if you've ever had any communications with them in the past that you might have forgotten about? Can you then reach out to those contacts to start a conversation? Often emails from others in your network appear where those organisations were copied in – can you reach out to the colleague who wrote the email to ask if they can introduce you?
- Can you look through your social media followers to see if anyone from these key organisations already follows you, and initiate a conversation with them on that platform, to start building your social capital more pro-actively with these key groups?

If you can answer at least one of these questions, you should have a few people or organisations in your mind now. The next step is to put pen to paper and place each person, group or organisation in one of the concentric rings in your diagram. Some boundary organisations might straddle a couple of rings, and if so, you can place these on the boundaries between the rings. As you are doing this, consider those you are already connected to, and those you are not connected to yet but would like to connect with. Colour code those you're close to in green, connected but distant from in orange, and not yet connected to in red. Do this for each of the three rings in turn:

1. The inner ring is for people or groups within your own institution. For example, I am connected to a Global Challenges Academy and a Policy Academy at Newcastle University that give me training and contacts in their respective fields, and I have a good working relationship with our School Impact Officer.
2. The middle ring is for your disciplinary networks. For example,

I have strong networks of colleagues working on conservation and impact on Twitter and LinkedIn, and I chair a working group for international peatland researchers. However, I don't regularly interact with other researchers who study impact, so I've started a new monthly reading group to try and build community in this area.

3. The outer ring is for your non-academic partners, stakeholders and/or publics. For example, I'm Research Lead for a conservation charity, work with a UN initiative on peatlands and am engaging heavily with a consortium of Small to Medium Sized Enterprises who are bidding for funding in this space at the moment. I also have strong relationships with universities across the UK, Australia and Europe with whom I do impact training. However, as I move into a new phase with this book, where I'm seeking to change the way universities operate, I'm realising that my networks don't reach into senior management teams, and I'm not sure where to start. I do have one colleague who is working on this agenda already who I think might have some ideas about how to start moving in new circles, so I will see if I can meet up with him to pick his brains.



Now that you've mapped your impact community, you can stand back from it and ask yourself some important questions:

- Is the majority of your impact community connected (green), distant (orange) or not yet connected (red) to you?
- Are those who are distant or not yet connected mainly in one ring or scattered across them all? For example, it is quite common for people to notice that there are fewer green connections as they move outwards from their institution to non-academic partners.

- Looking at the green connections, are there particular biases towards one type of organisation or issue? For example, my impact community is biased towards peatland issues, compared to organisations that could benefit from my research on impact.
- Are there any individuals, groups or organisations that jump out at you as being particularly important, if you want to generate impact from your research? What could you do to strengthen your social capital with these groups?

Building trust around impact

Trust is necessary for research impact because it enables people to cooperate without the need for contracts, non-disclosure agreements and other cumbersome arrangements, reducing complexity and facilitating efficient collaboration. Trust can exist between individuals and between institutions, and to understand trust, it is necessary to look both ways, from the perspective of each party to the relationship. You need a core group of colleagues both inside and outside the academy who you can trust if you are going to be able to build the kind of networks that will give you access to the expertise and opportunities you need to generate impact. However you also need to be perceived as trustworthy by stakeholders, and there is an important difference between how trustworthy you think you are, and how you are perceived.

To explore this more deeply, I want to start by asking you two questions. First, how trustworthy and trusted are you? There is a difference. No matter how trustworthy you may be, people might not trust you. As I have suggested previously, this might be due to perceived conflicts of interest, despite the fact that you know you don't consciously think you would ever allow your research to be influenced by your personal views or affiliations. Moreover, despite being highly trustworthy, you might be distrusted because of your position (e.g. I discovered that people I had considered friends instantly and instinctively distrusted me when I took my first university management position), your gender, skin colour or age (e.g. I am distrusted as "male, pale and stale" by people who assume I will not be aware that I am influenced by my own inevitable privilege or take steps to work against it), or your stance on particular issues (e.g. despite leaning towards socialism in my personal politics, I am regularly attacked by anticapitalist campaigners for running my own company and working with corporates to finance conservation). You have very limited control over how others will perceive you, partly because their attitudes are informed by their own (often subconscious) biases, which have formed through previous experience. If the last few academics a person met were unintelligible and proud, there is a good chance that you will be perceived by that person as irrelevant and elitist. I think I'm trustworthy, but that is not how I am perceived by many.

Even if you think you are trustworthy, it is worth interrogating the basis for this opinion of yourself. How trustworthy are you really? According to the literature, the trustworthiness of an individual depends on six things: how competent, reciprocal, fair, reliable, responsible and dependable are you? I know that I sometimes operate beyond my competencies, fail to reciprocate a good deed, can be thoughtlessly unfair, far from reliable, take on too many responsibilities to manage them all effectively, and I am sometimes far from dependable. Even if I work on my personal trustworthiness, I may not be worthy of trust if I am unable to interrogate the structures of inequality within which we live and work. Just look at the proportion of black, Asian and minority ethnic female professors in the academy and the persistent inequalities experienced by these groups in the UK. There is a whole history of distrust that anyone working within the systems that perpetuate these inequalities needs to take into account. Most of us could do some work on our trustworthiness, if we were honest with ourselves.

Building on this, if you want to retain and build the trust of publics and stakeholders in you and your research, Dr Anabelle Wilson from Flinders University suggested ten strategies in a 2017 article she published in Health Promotion International: be transparent; develop protocols and procedures; build credibility; be proactive; put the public first; collaborate with stakeholders; be consistent; educate stakeholders and the public; build your reputation; and keep your promises. It is possible to trust a researcher or institution on one issue for which they are deemed competent but not on other issues, where they do not have the same track record. However, by following guidelines such as those proposed by Dr Wilson, it may be possible for researchers and their institutions to systematically build trust with publics and key stakeholders over time.

Before moving to my second question, it is worth noting that it is possible to have "too much" trust, when this leads to uncritical adoption of research by decision-makers that may favour the interests of one group over another. For example, policy-maker trust in research has been generally high in the UK during the Covid crisis, with the British Prime Minister describing the Government's approach as "guided by the science". While his Government largely followed advice from its Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE), it was criticised for adopting this group's recommendations uncritically, leading to the establishment of an "Independent SAGE" group of experts who challenged government policy. In contrast, trust between President Trump and his scientific advisors remained low throughout the crisis, with him publicly questioning the trustworthiness of warnings from public health experts.

My second question is, how much do you trust your colleagues, managers and stakeholders? Trust has to work both ways, and in addition to diagnosing issues with the way others trust you, you need to understand who you trust and why – or why not. It is important to realise at this point that you can hold a very different view of an individual and the organisation they work for. You might not trust your university or a particular stakeholder organisation, but you might trust a key individual within that organisation. For example, there aren't many hill farmers or grouse moor owners I know who trust the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), but they all know Pat Thompson, their uplands specialist, and most people trust him, even if they don't trust the organisation he works for. These same people often mistrust the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) for similar reasons, but many of them trust me, despite the fact that I am Research Lead for IUCN's UK Peatland Programme. Even if you are seen as "part of the problem" by your colleagues or stakeholders because of the position you hold or the organisation you work for, it is possible to build interpersonal trust with key individuals, and to work effectively together despite their ongoing distrust of the organisation and people around you.

It is also possible to trust a person or organisation on one issue or competency but not on another. My colleagues have learned that they can trust me to do qualitative research, but not when it comes to numbers. Trust and distrust can coexist. You can trust a person to do one thing but not another, and trust the person while distrusting who they work for. The key is to understand who you trust and why.

Trust is also dynamic – the extent to which I trust someone can change over time. Trust typically forms slowly over many small steps, and so the first step towards building trust with someone is to engage with them: give each other low-risk opportunities to give and take, and see what happens. Once a trusting relationship has been established, we continue to perform acts of trust and trustworthiness in the day-to-day give and take of our relationship. When trust is broken, it often happens in an instant, and can take far longer to rebuild than it took to build in the first place.

Trust is an important precondition for many impacts because we know that people are more likely to act on evidence they receive via trusted individuals and networks, compared to seeing the same evidence in a Google search or directly from a researcher who is not in their network. This effect is more pronounced when there is risk or uncertainty associated with the evidence or the actions being proposed. Knowledge is exchanged more frequently and freely among networks of people who trust each other, while the presence of just one person in the network who is perceived to be untrustworthy can instantly shut down group communication. My colleagues and I published research a few years ago showing that having senior decision-makers in the room (in this case policy-makers) was more likely to deliver decisions that were implemented on the ground, but discussion, learning and trust building was much more significant when these people were not in the room. I was part of an email list that used to provide me and others with a lot of useful information and opportunities for impact, until one day I said something I shouldn't have said. I instantly apologised when I realised I had hit "reply all" but one of the group members complained and after this replied negatively to my contributions, even when I sent them via colleagues to avoid being criticised directly. What had appeared to be a safe space for discussion clearly wasn't, and as a result email traffic on the group reduced significantly over the weeks that followed.

Having said this, as I mentioned earlier, there is also evidence that placing too much trust in researchers can be detrimental to good policy-making when 'blind faith' leads to complacency, favouritism or a lack of objectivity, or prevents people pursuing more innovative ideas. People may believe us because of our credentials as researchers without interrogating our claims. As Professor Trish Greenhalgh once tweeted:

> *"Please don't describe me as a 'Top Oxford Professor'. Assess my claims on their merits, not on the basis of the reputation of the organisation that hires me. Ask if my premises are valid. Ask if my conclusions follow from those premises. Ask if I have looked for, and fully accounted for, evidence that appears to refute the claims I am making. Count the number of peer-reviewed papers I've published on Covid-19. If [I have] few or none, question why I'm bypassing the standard scientific quality control process. If I put out a view that appears wildly at odds with mainstream scientific opinion, ask whether these two views should really 'cancel out' with the truth mid-way between. Ask who funds my platform. Ask whether I've declared my conflicts of interest. Above all, consider whether you would take me as seriously if I was not a 'Top Oxford Professor'".*

It is clear that the person who bears the message may have as much influence over whether the information is trustworthy as the trustworthiness of the information itself. In some cases, rather than accepting the trust that is put in us, perhaps more of us should follow in Trish's footsteps to challenge that unquestioning faith. Healthy impact cultures foster trust, rather than blind faith, and give people sound reason to trust, and so to share, learn and act together.

Impactful connections

Trust and reciprocity go hand in hand. If I trust you, I am more likely to help you, and if you trust me, then you are more likely to return the favour. However, few researchers prioritise building diverse networks of people they can rely upon in a time of need. The vast majority of our efforts to build social capital remain within our institutional and disciplinary networks. We take our colleagues to coffee, try and attend the departmental seminar series when we can, and attend academic conferences. But what if we were to invest even half of that time and effort in building social capital with our non-academic colleagues in policy and practice?

Simply being in the right place at the right time is one of the most important things you can do to increase the likelihood that your research has impact. People often justify not planning for impact by telling me stories of supposedly serendipitous impact that happened by chance, but almost all of them have one thing in common: the researcher was in the right place at the right time. This is easier than ever to do on social media. Branch out from your academic networks and personal interests on your social media platform of choice, and start joining the networks, discussion groups and conversations that your stakeholders are having. If you can, look for industry events, policy networking events and the like (you'll find out about these when you connect to the right social media channels), and prioritise these alongside the academic workshops and meetings you are planning to attend. When you have got something relevant to share, drop an email to key stakeholders and offer a short call if they'd like to find out more. Even better, if you have a strong enough relationship, suggest a coffee and catch up to find out what they've been up to and how you might be able to help. You do things like this with your academic colleagues all the time, so why not invest in the same way with your non-academic colleagues? I'll discuss this further in Chapter 16.

Activities like this can build three types of connection, which can each play a different role in promoting impact:

1. You build "bonding" connections when you invest in relationships with people who are similar to you, typically sharing similar interests and attitudes. While this might typically refer to your institutional and disciplinary networks, it is possible to create bonding capital within diverse communities of interest. For example, some of my closest colleagues who I enjoy working with most on a week-to-week basis are from charities and businesses, but we share similar values and goals, and work together in close-knit teams.
2. You can become a "bridging" connection if you are able to build trusting relationships with key individuals in very different networks who would not normally interact with each other. For example,

I regularly connect people in the UK and Scottish Governments working on similar issues who were not previously aware of each other's work, and can put you in touch with natural and social scientists working in isolation from each other on the issues I'm interested in. You don't have to have a particularly strong relationship for this to work – in fact the evidence suggests that people with so called "weak ties" who sit in these types of position between networks can be crucial for exchanging important new knowledge and evidence.

3. "Linking" or "bracing" connectors create connections between different hierarchical levels within a network, for example between policymakers and farmers, or connecting the postdocs with senior managers so they can make their views heard.

It is not just individuals who can create bridges between networks and links across hierarchies. Boundary organisations can exist within universities to connect communities of people who would otherwise have limited interaction, for example a Policy Academy or Enterprise Hub designed to connect researchers with members of the policy and business communities. Many boundary organisations are external to universities, sitting between researchers and external organisations who might use evidence. For example, I published a paper a couple of years ago about the boundary-spanning role played by the Scottish Government's ClimateXChange Centre, which funds long-term strategic research alongside rapid turnaround "call down" requests for evidence that the Centre puts out to tender across Scotland's universities and research institutes (more on this at the end of the chapter).

If you want to boil this all down to one simple principle, it would be to seek diversity in our social networks. This will not happen automatically, due to the human tendency towards "homophily", where we surround ourselves with people who are similar to ourselves. Investing in relationships with people who are different to you might take more effort, and might not always be comfortable, but it will enable you to reach deep into networks of people who might otherwise never have heard about the evidence you have at your fingertips. And as you add value to them, you will find that others are increasingly willing to help you when you are in need. Healthy impact cultures build diverse, reciprocal connections both within and beyond the academy.

The role of social norms and power

Culture shapes our relationships with each other, influencing our interpersonal relationships and our exchanges with each other and with and between groups in social networks and beyond. One of the main ways this happens is through social norms, which establish expectations within a community or network around modes of interaction and behaviour. Norms around reciprocity have been shown to be important for collaborative work and can help rapidly build trust, increasing the likelihood that members of a community will offer help to each other in the knowledge that others will provide help if and when they need it. However, more negative norms can exist, for example a highly critical group norm may stifle innovation among members who are worried that the group will be quick to judge their actions.

Norms are often shaped (or imposed) by the most powerful members of a group, who may be invested in protecting the status quo that has given them power. Those with power in a group may determine who is included or excluded from a group or its activities, in turn influencing the extent to which others in the group can connect or build trust. Groups with strong power imbalances can make it hard for members to trust each other because trusting someone often means making yourself vulnerable, and such vulnerabilities may be exploited to further entrench power dynamics. Such exploitation of power may lead to imbalances in the level of resources, risks and information that different members of the group are given, further perpetuating the imbalance of power. Where power is used to control information, knowledge exchange can be used to disempower others, restricting who has access to the most valuable knowledge within an "inner circle". However, it may also be used to empower others, where processes are developed to ensure transparent access to information and decision-making processes for all members of a group. Instead of abusing their position of power, it is of course possible for leaders to work against abuses of power and organise groups in ways that flatten power dynamics arising from existing hierarchies and other privileges.

A healthy impact culture is underpinned by social norms that seek to empower the voiceless and marginalised, and enable active participation from across all members of the groups and networks you participate in. This requires deliberate work and effort to understand the causes of marginalisation and how these root causes might be addressed, in order to empower active engagement, rather than just doing better outreach. It also involves looking hard at the reasons why research and researchers are so inaccessible to most stakeholders, beyond just addressing issues of open access to research findings. We may be as hard to reach as some of the stakeholders we classify as "hard to reach". As Dr Emily Burns, Director of the Centre for Public Engagement and Queen Mary University of London put it to me:

> *"The phrase 'hard to reach' suggests that the problem lies with the communities we would like to work with, but more often than not it's universities who are difficult to engage with rather than the other way around. Moving away from this university-centric view, or putting your own context at the centre, is an important step towards co-producing impact."*

This process may in some cases be bruising, and as a result many researchers focus on those who are easier to reach, partly as a protective strategy and partly because the time invested in more receptive audiences is likely to yield more impact. It is important to recognise the vulnerability of researchers and their limited time, enabling those with the time, resources or "calling" to work with certain groups, without putting undue pressure on all researchers to be equally active in their engagement with those groups. As one female business management lecturer I interviewed put it:

> *"I think there are a lot of nuances that have been ignored, wittingly or unwittingly, in pushing impact culture, especially in the UK Higher Education [sector] (tied to political agendas, of course). There is a need to engage in deep reflection on our own identity as academic[s]:*
>
> - *Who are we, what we do, who we seek to "influence"?*
> - *Is one group of people more "worthy" or legitimate to have "impact" on, simply because they are in power? Do we all need to try to be an advisor in SAGE to show our worthiness? Since when it is not enough to be a good educator, to have "impact" on the*

development of our students?
- *If that's the case, what makes your informants to listen to you? Well, Bourdieu has given us answers [a] long time ago: it is your social capital; it is your connection; it is your identity (gender, ethnicity, and race; people do judge you based on how you look); [and] whether there is any shared experience or resonance between you and your informants.*

There is a lot going on in the field. Abuse, harassment... what are you going to do? Do you need your data, need your "impact case", [or] are you able to walk away? Or are you going to suck it up, simply hoping you never see that shithead ever again? It is a human society with a lot of tensions in gender, power, and race, which we do not speak about.

Some people are simply good at doing [this] stuff, others are not. It is important to understand the personal goals, strengths, and social capital of individuals in terms of what they can do, what they want to do, [and] what they feel fulfilled...doing."

Diagnostic questions to understand how community underpins your impact culture

If a healthy impact culture is underpinned by reciprocal communities that trust and empower each other, then how healthy is your impact community? The following questions start close to home with your academic networks, but as you move to the second list of diagnostic questions, which focus on your non-academic networks, the answers can become increasingly uncomfortable.

How would you characterise your academic social capital?

- Are there other researchers you could call if you found yourself in an ethical dilemma or embarrassing accusations had been made against you?
- What is your working relationship with professional services staff like (if you are an academic) and what is your relationship with academics like (if you are a member of professional services staff)?

To what extent are these relationships characterised by mutual respect, or by suspicion and condescension?

- Do you trust that institutional leadership on impact has the interests of you and those you want to serve at heart?
- To what extent do you trust this of your funders, your government and others who expect or reward impact?
- Do interdisciplinary teams treat those generating impact with equal respect or are they seen as an add-on?

Non-academic community:

- How much time do you spend outside project meetings and between projects with non-academic partners?
- Do you return emails, calls and messages on social media from those beyond the academy who engage with your work?
- Do you make unrealistic promises to non-academic project partners and how do you deal with non-delivery?
- Do you tell people you meet at workshops and events that you'll get in touch, but bin their business cards weeks later?

Building social capital at scale

Now you have answered these questions, I'd like you to revisit the impact community map you created at the start of this chapter. You should now have a deeper understanding of the sorts of social capital you need to invest in, and you should have a wider range of ideas at this point for actions that could enable you to build strong social capital in your institution, your disciplinary networks and with non-academic partners. Although the focus has been primarily on what you can do personally to build social capital within your spheres of influence, you might also want to consider at this point what you can do with your colleagues to build stronger social capital.

One approach is to create an impact community map with your group, at whatever scale you are working. Draw the concentric circles on a white board and have three colours of sticky note to denote whether the relationship is close, connected but distant or not yet connected. You may discover that a number of you have connections with the same organisations. If you have connections in the same organisation with different individuals, you might want to introduce everyone to each other to explore the potential for new collaborations or impact. If you share the same connections, you might want to try and coordinate your communication with these individuals across your group to streamline requests and get economies of scale by connecting related pieces of work.

Northumbria University have used data mining approaches to do this. They identified relationships that had been built organically by staff, as a way of identifying potential new partnerships that could be further developed through Memoranda of Understanding at higher levels between institutions that already had multiple real collaborations on the ground. A tool like Elsevier's SciVal can provide this information by analysing non-academic co-author affiliations on recent publications across an institution.

Alternatively, if you notice that you are working with related organisations on linked issues, you might want to create some sort of event, structure or initiative to connect researchers and organisations around key issues. Building on this, here are a few more ideas that might inspire you.

Four ideas to build an impact community

Idea 1: Create a compassion culture

Most of us have at some point experienced empathy and compassion from colleagues when we have reached some kind of crisis in work. Being seen and emotionally held by our colleagues when things are going wrong can enable us to deal more effectively with stressful situations, compared to feeling judged or abandoned by those around us in our time of need. Creating a compassion culture goes beyond being empathic. Empathy feels with the person in need, but compassion compels action to help the person. As Dalai Lama XIV put it:

> *"Compassion is not religious business, it is human business. It is not luxury, it is essential for our own peace and mental stability; it is essential for human survival."*

An unmet need does not just have to be some form of suffering. It could be that you recognise the unmet potential in a colleague and offer to coach them or help them find training opportunities to grow into that part of themselves that you have sensed needs to grow. Research has shown that those who experience compassion at work are more likely to feel emotionally committed to their organisation, demonstrate compassion in turn to others and feel more psychologically connected to their coworkers (see Poorkavoos's 2016 booklet in Further Reading for a brief summary of these studies).

The problem is that it is often hard to experience empathy or compassion for people who we perceive to be very different to us. There is a well-known "empathy bias" where we find it easier to put ourselves in the shoes of people who are similar to us, or who are good communicators, friendly and/or outgoing. The growing pressure that many researchers are under also makes it hard to take the time to notice when colleagues are suffering and makes us more likely to blame others when things go wrong.

To create a compassion culture, we need to start with self-compassion, which is arguably the hardest challenge. Dr Kristin Neff, Associate Professor of Psychology at the University of Texas suggests self-compassion has three components: 1) being kind to yourself when you fail rather than being harshly self-critical; 2) seeing negative experiences as part of the larger experience of what it is to be human, rather than seeing them as only happening to you, or as separating or isolating you from others; and 3) holding painful thoughts and feelings in mindful awareness, at a sufficient emotional distance to avoid over-identifying with them. Dr Neff developed Mindful Self-Compassion, in collaboration with Dr Christopher Germer, as a method for increasing self-compassion; a randomised controlled trial showed that it was associated with decreasing stress, anxiety and depression. Relaxation and meditation techniques are also effective ways of cultivating self-compassion, and structured reflection via cognitive behavioural therapy or reflective journals can help people learn from and positively reframe experiences that would otherwise lead to self-criticism.

From a foundation of self-compassion, it is then possible to build a more compassionate culture in your team or organisation. A good starting point is to assess your current levels of self-compassion, so you can have a professionally facilitated discussion based on your anonymised answers as a team. For example, you might rate yourself on a scale of 1 (never) to 5 (always) for the following questions:

1. Do you notice when colleagues are upset, even when they don't say anything?
2. Do you notice when colleagues need help or support before they ask for it?
3. Do you pick up on how colleagues are feeling when you are around them?
4. Do you think colleagues usually bring problems on themselves?
5. Do you find yourself looking down on other colleagues, or thinking you could do things better than them?
6. Do you think it is unprofessional when colleagues are unable to keep their personal problems out of the workplace?
7. Do you sometimes feel overwhelmed when colleagues tell you about the problems they are facing?
8. Do you find yourself mirroring the emotions of those around you sometimes?
9. When you see a colleague feeling sad, do you instinctively want to reach out to them?
10. When you see a colleague feeling stressed, do you instinctively want to avoid them?
11. Do you think colleagues should learn to self-regulate their emotions and deal more effectively with their own problems?
12. Do you find people are usually good at hiding how they feel, so you are usually surprised when someone tells you how difficult they are finding things?
13. Are you able to retain distance, and not be emotionally affected when people tell you how they are feeling?
14. When you need to raise a difficult issue with a colleague, do you first try and imagine how you would feel if you were in their place?

If you have a compassion culture, you would expect high scores across your group for questions 1-3, 7-9 and 14 and low scores for questions 4-6 and 10-13. If your culture is not compassionate, then you would expect the reverse. A discussion about issues like this takes careful framing and facilitation, especially if you think you have a mix of people with very different perspectives on compassion. This is why I would always recommend having such a discussion with a professional facilitator with clear ground rules to minimise any likelihood of further emotional damage if there are individuals in the group who are far from compassionate. Summarising some of the research on the benefits of compassion in the workplace, as I have done here, is a good way of framing the discussion once you have the survey results. There will be some who believe firmly in “tough love” and the power of fear or shame to drive action. While you are unlikely to change the deeply held values that drive these approaches to interpersonal interaction, through discussion and with support (in word and deed) from leaders, it is possible for such a discussion to create a new and powerful group norm. Over time, such norms become self-reinforcing, creating a new team dynamic and atmosphere, attracting others to the team who share your compassionate approach, increasingly outnumbering those who are uncompassionate.

There are a number of other interventions that have been designed to cultivate compassion in the workplace. Here are four that you might want to try out:

1. A range of training courses have been developed to guide such work, for example Compassion Cultivation Training and Cognitively-Based Compassion Training (see the appendices in Poorkavoos’s booklet in Further Reading for examples of courses and the questionnaire that inspired my questions above). Many of the available courses include meditation practices, both to generate self-compassion and compassion for others. I have found guided meditation particularly useful to find empathy and compassion for those who are hurting me. The last time I encountered workplace bullying, in addition to raising the issue with my manager and following a formal process, I survived that process emotionally by meditating on the person who was bullying me on a daily basis, to find the empathy I needed to combat my anger and the perspective I needed to combat the fear I was feeling every day. Instead of allowing those negative feelings to consume me, I was able to understand why this person was acting the way they were, and have enough compassion for myself to stop beating myself up for feeling so afraid and upset all the time.

2. Some courses on compassion also include experiential learning in which participants experiment with "acts of kindness" towards others. A 2010 study published in the Proceedings of National Academy of Sciences by Professors James Fowler and Nicholas Christakis found that acts of kindness spread from person to person through social networks, creating a ripple effect in which one act of kindness perpetuates other cooperative acts among the recipients of kindness. They showed that this ripple of kindness spread from these recipients to those who they were kind to, then again from these people to their contacts. A single act of kindness to one person leads to three other people deciding to do kind things. But the effect isn't just a trebling of kindness, because the research also showed that the effect lasted over time, with the recipient of each act of kindness continuing to repay that act of kindness to multiple other people in their network over time. Even if you are unable to change the systems that are generating the stress and overload that make it hard to find time to empathise with others or be compassionate, it is possible to start a compassion culture with a single act. So, if you want to try and create a culture of compassion in your organisation you can try this experiment designed by Dr David R. Hamilton. Here are the ground rules in his own words: "1) You must do something different every day. You can do the same thing on two different days if you want, but it only counts the first time. 2) You have to push yourself out of your comfort zone at least once. In other words, you have to do an act of kindness that stretches you a bit. 3) At least one of your acts of kindness must be completely anonymous. No one must know that it was you who did it, or what you did. You can't tell anyone about it."
3. As a leader you might want to cultivate compassion by connecting more deeply with colleagues on a one-to-one basis in order to more effectively empathise with the kinds of challenges faced by your colleagues. This takes time, not only because it needs to be done one-to-one, but because to develop enough trust to actually hear what is really going on, it may require multiple sessions. As a result, many leaders only invest in this sort of strategy with others who are leading beneath them in the hierarchy, but this assumes that these other leaders are actually connected to their colleagues sufficiently to hear what life is like for those at the bottom of the hierarchy. As

a result, you may want to find reasons to reach out to colleagues at different levels in the organisation, for example based on shared research interests, so that you are able to make these deeper connections with people who do not hold leadership positions. Of course, the point of compassion is to act on what you discover as you open those channels of empathy. While you cannot be sure that others will be experiencing similar difficulties, actions based on a deep understanding of a handful of colleagues are more likely to meet the needs of the wider team than actions that are not informed in this way.

4. One final intervention you might want to try is to run a seminar series on lessons from failure. While it is important to share success, and discuss our latest findings, it is also important that we learn from our mistakes and enable others to learn from what went wrong as well as what went right. Of course, at the same time, you are also normalising failure and giving people permission to talk about failure and support each other in this inevitable part of academic life. Fear of failure drives conservative, incremental research, and prevents people taking those calculated risks that are often necessary to achieve major breakthroughs. By not talking about failure, we can inadvertently drive imposter syndrome, because it appears that everyone else succeeds at everything they put their mind to, and you are the only person who ever fails. Talking about failure is likely to be most effective if you start the series by talking to senior members of staff about the deeper reasons for asking them to discuss this, so that those who are revered for their well-known career successes can share the mistakes that paved their pathway to success. This will show that none of us is immune to failure, giving permission to others to share their own stories as the series unfolds. There doesn't have to be a happy and successful ending to each seminar, but it is important to retain a focus on lessons learned, if you want to create a culture in which failure comes to be seen as something people can learn from, rather than something to be avoided or hidden. You may even want to run the series in a more participatory format, giving participants the opportunity to discuss what they learned from the presentation in small groups before running your plenary question-and-answer session.

Idea 2: Experiment with new stakeholder engagement initiatives

The most common engagement mechanism I see at every scale is the stakeholder advisory panel, steering group and non-executive board member. These structures are most commonly seen in research projects, but many departments and centres also engage stakeholders formally in this way too, and can gain invaluable advice that keeps them connected to the needs and challenges beyond the academy. The problem is that these groups are often misused to listen to presentations and read progress reports, or to rubber stamp and legitimise decisions that have already been made by researchers. This is not just ethically questionable; it is a massive wasted opportunity. If stakeholders are engaged in the design of the project, centre or strategy plan they will be advising you on, you are much more likely to deliver relevant research that makes a difference, and they are likely to feel a much stronger sense of ownership over the work you do together. Consider writing a Terms of Reference document with your advisors so everyone knows the role they are playing in the research (you can see an example of this from one of my projects in the resources section of the Fast Track Impact website). Ensure that a key part of writing these terms and of each meeting with advisors is simply listening, not just getting feedback on your work, but seeking to understand the challenges they and others like them are facing, and the challenges and opportunities that they are anticipating, which you might be able to contribute towards. If you want to do truly coproductive research, then you will need to go way beyond a stakeholder advisory group, and I'll come to that later, but for many of us, setting something like this up is a great start.

A number of universities have focussed on developing platforms that enable them to engage with the public at scale, for example running citizen science programmes, such as the Planet Hunters programme run by Yale University with Zooniverse, the University of Reading's Solar Stormwatch, or the Kilonova-catcher programme run by the University of Paris and Paris-Saclay University.

Science Shops started in the Netherlands in the 1970s and are increasingly popular across continental Europe. Science shops are typically organised by universities or non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and are sometimes a collaboration between both types of institution. Whether they are "pop-up" shops or permanent, they provide a space for people to ask questions and bring challenges that the organisation might be able to help solve. Many shops are targeted at specific sectors or issues, and in universities they are often linked to teaching, enabling students to do community-based research as part of their curriculum. Take a look at the Living Knowledge science shop network to learn more about this model.

There are now a number of online platforms creating connections between universities and different sectors. For example, Konfer helps UK small- to medium-sized enterprises connect with university researchers to solve problems or develop new products and services via typically low-value, short-term contracts. The tool is now increasingly being used by charities and governments to access research expertise. Although more reactive, most universities now have external directories of experts. Although typically developed by press offices to enable the media to find experts for interviews, these databases can in theory also be used by non-academic organisations to find experts too.

Many universities encourage their researchers to do secondments with organisations linked to their work, take part in shadowing schemes or take on non-executive directorships. Many also encourage people from NGOs, government and business to work with the university in similar ways, for example via visiting roles. Some, like the University of the West of England Bristol, have established mechanisms to actively promote such opportunities to their own staff and their strategic partners.

Finally, it is important not to forget that the tools of modern marketing can be used to directly connect researchers and stakeholders, allowing two-way conversations to flourish and relationships to grow. As Director of Research Marketing and Communications at the University of Melbourne, Dr Rachel Nowak took a multi-pronged approach to building the university's capacity to use communications and marketing to assist research translation. She encouraged academic researchers to view marketing as an essential tool in the research translation kit, rather than a means to "sell" research – the latter being an outdated connotation that was distasteful to many. She advocated for university communications and marketing to broaden from an activity that was predominantly about recruiting students to one that also worked to enable research translation and partnerships. This meant acknowledging that the return on marketing investment would be different and slower. It also meant recognising that focusing exclusively on research breakthroughs and successes (the sort of thing that makes a good press release) might help build the university's reputation, but would do little to help potential end-users of the research understand how they could partner with the university or benefit from its research. That would require a different type of communication via different channels.

To help this happen, she recruited specialist research writers with a deep knowledge of research and research translation, often including a PhD. They coproduced content with academic researchers that explained how different types of research, approaches and capabilities might be used by people outside of the academy. All content was run through a Flesch Kincaid readability measure (available in Microsoft Word) to ensure "plain language" standards were met – essential for sharing research knowledge with non-academics. To further remove barriers to knowledge sharing, jargon, superfluous words and marketing speak such as "cutting-edge" and "world-leading" were eliminated from research marketing content.

Dr Nowak also advocated for the more extensive use of Business-to-Business marketing or B2B. Traditional consumer marketing is typically aimed at large numbers of people (prospective students, say), where each person is individually responsible for the decision to acquire a product, that person knows roughly what they want, and is selecting from different options in the same category. B2B marketing is more personal and more suitable for a product or service that is highly tailored for an individual customer – such as a research program that is co-designed to address a specific problem. In B2B marketing, decisions to engage typically involve complex decision-making (a committee, for example). It relies on exchange of information to allow customers to work out what they need and how a research activity might benefit them. And it makes use of Customer Relationship Management software, webinars, events, websites, and social media channels such as LinkedIn. If you want more on the role of social marketing, have a look at my impact-driven social media strategy template in the resources section of the Fast Track Impact website.

Idea 3: Create boundary organisations

A growing number of universities are investing in boundary organisations such as policy units and enterprise hubs, which are designed to sit between the university and a particular sector or set of networks to stimulate productive interactions. For example, Griffith University has a Policy Innovation Hub with a podcast offering in-depth political analysis by researchers on the issues of the day, an internship programme and a Regional Innovation Data Lab, to enable citizens, policy-makers, industries and researchers to use and share data on key trends and issues. At Newcastle University, we have a Policy Academy, which also has a training and mentoring function, with an intake of fellows each year who undertake an intensive training programme and visit Parliament.

One role of such organisations is to organise and resource engagement with consultations and inquiries to ensure the voice of the university's researchers is regularly heard. When successful however, they facilitate lasting relationships between members of the research and policy communities. One of the benefits of creating these relationships through a boundary organisation is the ability to sustain engagement between institutions and build trust over time despite the fact that there is often significant staff turnover. Individual researchers can rarely keep pace with the changes in staff in the organisations they work with, but if there is a dedicated team with the ability to remain more consistently engaged, who can connect researchers to the right people, this can be more efficient for both researchers and policymakers.

For large universities, it can be useful to focus on core themes where there is critical mass, so you can build a clear identity and reputation in these areas. For example, the N8 group of universities in the north of England have joined together to create a Food Systems Policy Hub, pooling expertise in an area where they collectively have significant critical mass. There are wider pooling initiatives as well, for example the UK's Universities Policy Engagement Network is a community of UK universities seeking to deliver evidence into policy, offering a dedicated contact point for policymakers, and a collective response to requests for evidence.

As I alluded to earlier, one of the most successful such organisations I've reviewed, in a 2019 paper with Dr Anita Wreford and colleagues, is ClimateXChange, a collaboration between Scottish Government, the research institutes it part-funds and universities across Scotland. There are many reasons why this initiative has been so successful, which you can read about in the paper, but two in particular stand out to me. ClimateXChange pulls research into policy in a targeted way when it is needed rather than pushing research, using rapid response "call down" requests alongside a programme of longer-term, strategic research. It has also created a single point of contact through which universities can engage with the Government, and because ClimateXChange is resourced to play this role, it has been able to invest in building social capital and connections so that it is well known and trusted by the Government, despite the fact that evidence and policy analysts, as well as the politicians they work with, regularly change.

Idea 4: Coproduce events with your non-academic partners

Universities now regularly fund and organise public engagement festivals, fairs and other programmes of events. The best of these are coproduced with their local communities, for example see the analysis my colleagues and I published in Research for All of Queen Mary University of London's Festival of Communities, which they developed in collaboration with local community organisations to build closer ties with the communities located around their campus in Tower Hamlets. The University of Nottingham's Institute for Policy and Engagement runs an annual community event they call Wonder and an annual family event called Science in the Park alongside regular policy briefings and events.

It may be possible to maintain engagement between annual events like this with a monthly seminar series or "science cafe" on an impactful theme, working with stakeholders to propose topics they would like to be covered in future. For example, Professor Sally Shortall from Newcastle University successfully built the Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series with the Northern Ireland Assembly and a collective of Northern Irish universities, before successfully exporting the model to the north of England, where she co-developed a series with local government partners. In each case, members of the devolved or local government set the agenda based on policy needs, and calls for contributions were circulated to academics, who often created policy briefs to accompany their seminar talks. Universities often seek various kinds of partnerships with civic institutions in their local region. For example, Ghent University in Belgium and others focus on building partnerships with schools, museums and science centres, running regular programmes of events in collaboration with each of these groups.

Instead of always seeking new collaborations, you might want to focus on working in new ways with existing partnerships, to identify new research questions and fund projects that could meet partner organisations' needs and challenges. This is often done via Business Development Managers who work as a single point of contact for both organisations. An alternative approach is to run innovation events with different sectors around different themes, typically organised by a relevant centre or interdisciplinary challenge theme in the university who can follow up the ideas generated. One might be for local government on sustainable procurement, while another might be for third sector organisations working on obesity. Over the last few years, I worked with N8 AgriFood, a collaboration between eight universities in the north of England, to design and run many such events. They typically start with presentations on the state of the art from both the academics and the non-academic partners, followed by participatory idea generation and discussion activities, to identify impact goals, work out what knowledge already exists or might be needed, and identify pathways to impact and concrete actions that organisers can follow up.

***

If you want to be part of a healthy impact culture, you need to make time to invest in your academic and non-academic communities. What could you do to make more time for your colleagues, and to give more back to the communities you serve beyond the academy?

- What actions could you take right now?
- What actions could you plan or talk to someone about?

- How could you overcome the barriers that are preventing you from taking these actions?

The third of my four components of a healthy impact culture is community. You have started by considering those in your immediate sphere of influence, and now I hope you have ideas that can build those relationships as well as building wider social capital. Now that you are thinking big, I want to move to the fourth component of a healthy impact culture (the outer circle in my definition in Chapter 2) for the last three chapters of the book, and look at the internal capacity and leadership that are shaping your impact culture. If you are a leader, I invite you to think about the kind of leadership we need to build a healthy impact culture. If you are not a leader and you want stronger leadership for impact, I want to enable you to find the leadership you crave.