



Collaborative research: the opportunities and challenges of enabling change

Emma Westling, Marta Rychlewski

University of Bradford

Liz Sharp, Richard Ashley, Simon Tait

University of Sheffield



The partnership



Pennine Water Group

- Interdisciplinary water research group - engineers and social scientists
- Universities of Bradford and Sheffield

Dwr Cymru Welsh Water

- Community-owned water company
- Welsh Government responsibility for water





PREPARED partnership approach:

- **Research institutes work in partnership with city utilities**
- **Demand driven project – goal oriented research and demonstration**
- **Strong focus on useful knowledge**

Collaborative research

- **Knowledge co-production for ‘useful research’**
 - **Improved links between science and society**
 - **Involvement of end-users to increase likelihood for research uptake**
 - **Research funding also demands demonstrated usefulness and impact**



- **Shared ideas about useful knowledge**
 - Develop strategies which support climate change adaptation in the water and sanitation sector
- **Individual ideas about useful knowledge**
 - DCWW – outcomes that could be used to help the utility to become more adaptive; outcomes demonstrating success of the PREPARED project
 - PWG – processes and outcomes supporting research activities (e.g. papers)
 - Feelings of having made a difference
 - Demonstrate usefulness of social science research



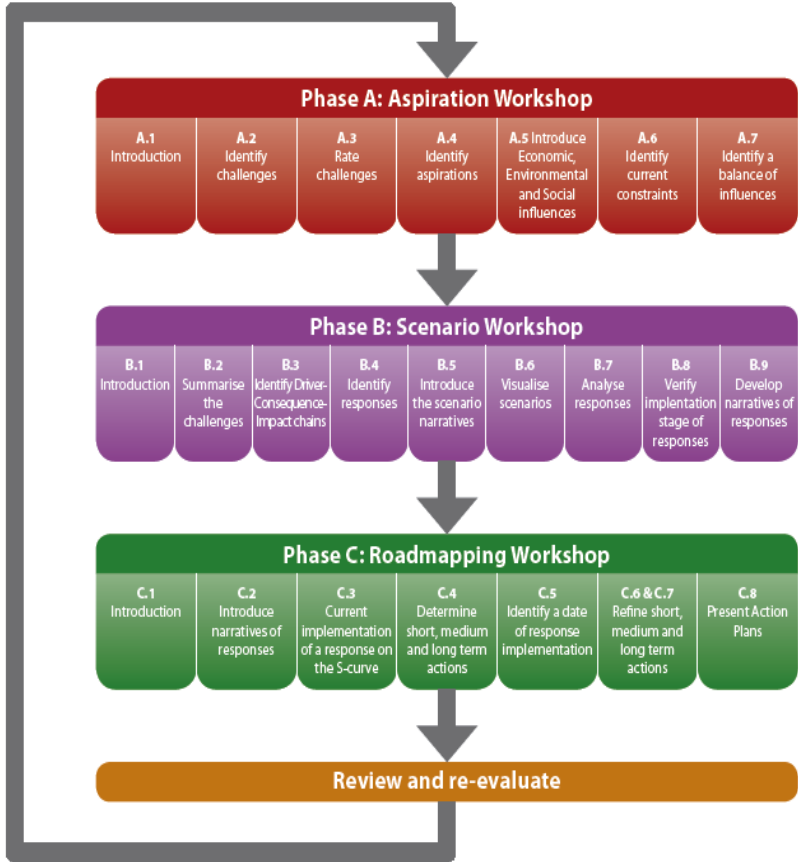
Useful knowledge: the Adaptation Planning Process



Adaptation Planning Process
Key steps for implementing a strategic planning process for institutional adaptation in a water utility

Guidance Manual

MARTA RYCHLEWSKI
EMMA WESTLING
LIZ SHARP
SIMON TAIT
RICHARD ASHLEY





Opportunities of collaborative research to enable change

- **Knowledge Co-production:**
- **Collaboration opened up insider and outsider perspectives on climate change adaptation**
- **Constructive negotiations of problems and processes:**
 - Provided space for challenging taken-for-granted assumptions
 - Valuable and useful outcomes
- **A better understanding of research and practice and the interactions between them**

“The collaborative process was a reality-check in stressing that there are bigger more important things that we need to address”

“You are coming from a completely different view, so you get us thinking in a wider sense”



Challenges of collaborative research to enable change



Prepared
enabling change

- **Disagreement**
 - Important being seen as a united utility
- **Valid knowledge**
 - Thoroughly tested processes
 - Tangible outcomes
- **Fit**
 - More support for outcomes aligning with rather than challenging current activities
- **Integrity**
 - Balancing act between providing something useful and maintaining integrity as a researcher

“I think we’ve treated this project as we’re a client and you’re a contractor”

“We didn’t understand what the discussion of different values would lead to”

“We constantly need to demonstrate value for money invested”

“Trying to understand if what you can offer actually meets what we need is challenging”



Conclusions and Implications



- **‘Useful’ and valid knowledge mean different things to different people – even among people sharing similar ideas and perspectives**
- **Important to explicitly communicate ideas and sometimes conflicting perspectives of useful and valid knowledge to avoid disappointment**
- **Processes of change (including possibilities and aspirations) easier to maintain if there is promise of direct associated action**
- **The time and effort that need to be spent on relationships should not be underestimated**
- **Important to be flexible and open to change and critiques towards your own practice – sometimes important giving up what is seen as ‘useful’ knowledge.**



“You listened to the practitioner and you changed the process to fit with what we asked. I think that’s really good, so you get a product that actually can be used”



What have been the greatest benefits to the research and practice of working in partnerships throughout PREPARED?



What have been the greatest challenges for the research and practice of working in partnerships throughout PREPARED?



What actions or factors enabled (or stopped) your partnership from being successful?



Has the PREPARED project generated useful knowledge? For whom and in what way?