

**Potential of Van de Ven's (2007) concept of Engaged Scholarship to enhance the sustainability and appropriateness of Management Consultancy and University Knowledge Exchange Projects recommendations to challenge the widespread hype of newness (Smil, 2022).**

**Developmental Paper**

**British Academy of Management Conference**

**University of Sussex 2023**

**Authors**

## Abstract

This paper will outline some emerging thoughts on the potential applicability of Van de Ven's Engaged Scholarship concept in consultancy and knowledge exchange projects. To structure this paper the questions posed at an event titled "Putting Engaged Scholarship to Work: Projects, Partners and Progress" hosted by Ram (2019 cited by Kapasi) at Aston University will be summarised.

The original definition of Engaged Scholarship offered by Van de Ven (2007) is that it is

“a participative form of research for obtaining the advice and perspectives of key stakeholders (researchers, users, clients, sponsors, and practitioners) to understand a complex social problem”

The commentary will be illustrated by some wider evidence drawn from industry analysis, professional bodies and academic research on Organisational Transformation and Digital Transformation Projects. These sources are frequently conducted independently where concentration on individual technical, and often siloed, aspects of consultancy and knowledge exchange project recommendations do not address the necessary breadth of understanding to improve the sustainability of such projects and therefore challenge the hype (Smil, 2022) that is associated with complex and expensive societal challenge of the typically high failure rates of Organisational Transformation and Digital Transformation investments.

It is proposed by Neal et al (2023) that role frequently referred to as “Brokers, intermediaries, and boundary spanners (BIBS)” can offer a

“... bridge (to) research and policy or practice and can elevate the role of evidence in decision making” (op cit).

### 1. “Putting Engaged Scholarship to Work: Projects, Partners and Progress”

The core questions from the above event led by Ram (2019, cited by Kapasi) are listed with some expansion of the questions the speakers included to illustrate their views.

1. Why are we here? *“We need to ask big questions about why we are researchers and what we are seeking to achieve by being part of the academy?” Ram*
2. What questions are we asking? What conversations are we having? Hart stated *“As academics we need to inspect our dominant conversations and engage in critical / engaged scholarship...”*
3. How do we do it? Considerations of ontology. Rouse posed the question *“What do we (academics) need in order to participate in engaged scholarship?”*
4. How do we do it? The act(s) of engaged scholarship. King called for *“... an awareness of the need for mutually beneficial gains, power dynamics, language used and need to nurture relationships.”*
5. Critical inspection of engaged scholarship concept and researcher reflexivity. Kapasi noted that *“... the meaning(s) of engaged scholarship is shaped by a myriad of, sometimes, conflicting factors ...”*

## 2. Review of Brokers, Intermediaries, and Boundary Spanners (BIBS)

The concepts of Brokers, Intermediaries, and Boundary Spanners (Neal et al, 2023) have been extensively researched independently and in combination by a variety of scholars from different perspectives. Neal et al (op cit) work reports on the findings of analysing 185 conceptual and review papers written in English are outline in detail on the table below.

BIBS' strategies, skills, and expected outcomes (Neal et al, 2023)



In terms of their overall findings, these highlight the range of challenges and popularity of facilitating relationships and disseminating evidence are the most common responsibilities of BIBs.

“BIBS strategies are key for tackling large-scale societal challenges such as climate change, income inequality, racial justice, and the fight against COVID-19. In each case, the magnitude of these challenges necessitates interdisciplinary collaboration within the scientific community as well as bidirectional communication with stakeholders. Positive outcomes will depend on BIBS working with knowledge producers to tackle issues of critical importance and facilitating informed decision making for the common good.” (Neal et al, 2023)

They also claim a need to support informed decision supporting a point raised by Smil (2022) and Tidd and Bessant (2021), have made when highlighting the widespread ‘hype’ that surrounds much of media and social media coverage of new inventions and scientific research in certain fields such as medicine and innovation. As Smil comments in his recent book *Invention and Innovation: A Brief History of Hype and Failure*, he offers

“a modest reminder of the world as it is, not the world of exaggerated claims or, even worse, the imaginary world of indefensible fantasies,”

Smil (op cit) offers three types of failed inventions that attracted widespread interest of academics, industry, governments and wider society.

- **unfulfilled promises**, which arrived with great expectations, but ended up being so harmful they were banned (e.g. DDT and chlorofluorocarbons)
- **disappointments** which initially seemed poised to dominate their markets, only to disappear (e.g. supersonic aircraft)
- **eventual rejections** or would be ‘game changers’ won’t arrive any time soon (e.g. high-speed travel in a vacuum and generating electricity through nuclear fusion)

### 3. Archives of Evidence on Organisational Change and Digital Transformation Projects from industry and academic sources.

This content is unconsciously drawn from a wide range of sources including academic books and journals, influential professional organisations in the areas of management and digital technology and well established consultancies with a track record of collaborating with a variety of partners.

| Evidence from Organisational Change Details in Appendix | Evidence from Digital Transformation Details in Appendix |
|---------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| Burnes (2017)                                           | Standish Group (2022)                                    |
| Prosci (2023)                                           | AIIM (2014, 2022)                                        |
| CMI (2022)                                              | R Gordon (2016)                                          |
| CIPD (2022)                                             | Mancini (2021)                                           |
| Seddon (2022)                                           | Prosci (2023)                                            |

#### 4. Future Work

This will test the appropriateness of the concept of ‘engaged scholarship’ by applying it in the areas of Organisational Change and Digital Transformation based on the archival sources already identified. Although as Smil (2023) states

“... the sobering conclusion that the future will likely look like the past: full of failures. This is a solid corrective to the notion that human inventiveness can tackle any challenge”.

#### Archival Sources and References

Association of Intelligent Information Management Date Visited 10/03/2023  
<https://www.aim.org>

Burnes (2017). Managing Change, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. Harlow : Pearson Education Limited.

Chartered Management Institute (2023) Date visited 10/03/2023  
[https://www.managers.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/CHK-040-Implementing\\_an\\_effective\\_change\\_programme.pdf](https://www.managers.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/CHK-040-Implementing_an_effective_change_programme.pdf)

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2023) Date Visited 10/03/2023  
<https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/strategy/change/management-factsheet>

Gordon., R. J., (2016). The Rise and Fall of American Growth: the U.S. standard of living since the Civil War. Princeton, New Jersey. Princeton University Press.  
Date Visited 10/03/2023  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/robert\\_gordon\\_the\\_death\\_of\\_innovation\\_the\\_end\\_of\\_growth](https://www.ted.com/talks/robert_gordon_the_death_of_innovation_the_end_of_growth)

Kapasi, I., (2019). Engaged scholarship: a means to engagement and impact. Leeds: Centre for Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Studies, University of Leeds.

Mancini, J., (2021) Date Visited 10/03/2023  
<https://www.mermerlin.com/blog/m365-governance-and-information-chaos>

Neal, J. W., et al. (2023). "Understanding brokers, intermediaries, and boundary spanners: a multi-sectoral review of strategies, skills, and outcomes." Evidence & Policy 19(1): 95-115.

Prosci - Organisational Change Date Visited 10/03/2023  
<https://www.prosci.com/blog/three-reasons-enterprise-change-management-efforts-fail>

Prosci - Digital Transformation Date Visited 10/03/2023

<https://www.prosci.com/blog/7-real-reasons-why-tech-projects-fail>

Standish Group (2023) Date Visited 10/03/2023

<https://www.standishgroup.com>

Tidd, J., and Bessant, J., (2021). Managing Innovation. London, Wiley Publishers.

Van de Ven, A. H. (2007). Engaged scholarship: A guide for organizational and social research: A guide for organizational and social research. Oxford : Oxford University Press, c2007.

Vanguard Consulting (2023) Date Visited 10/03/2023

<https://beyondcommandandcontrol.com/what-can-we-learn-from-programmes-of-change/>

Smil.V. (2023) Invention and Innovation: A Brief History of Hype and Failure  
Cambridge, MA, USA. MIT Press