

Leadership in Cultural Knowledge Exchange

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Foreword

Developing Leaders in Cultural Knowledge Exchange is the driving ambition and urge that runs to the heart of our work at NCACE. It is fitting that this desire is reflected in our new publication, **Leadership in Cultural Knowledge Exchange** which features seven insightful and inspiring interviews with Higher Education leaders from academic and professional contexts, all at different points in their career. It has been led by **Dr Rebekka Kill**, working with NCACE to explore the diverse leadership practices and experiences that constitute what we might think of as Cultural Knowledge Exchange.

Our intention is to build on our previous NCACE publication [Narrating Cultural Knowledge](#) (2022) where we first highlighted this vital work and those people whose work it is to make it happen within Higher Education. In both publications Kill has employed the method of loosely structured interviews to allow perspectives and insights to unfold on the nature of leadership within and around the field of Cultural Knowledge Exchange.

As she notes in her Introduction, “all of the interviewees talked about collaboration and relationship building as the key to building external partnerships. They also talked about trust, generosity, stewardship and listening skills as important aspects of this practice.” Strong stewardship has also encouragingly emerged as a vital ingredient in this work indicating the proximities of those enacting and supporting new collaborative practices to current thinking about care in contexts from the individual to the local to the planetary.

Kill also talks about these interviews as a means of discussing ‘how’ leadership in cultural knowledge exchange is both understood and enacted and she identifies three key areas as being critical to success. These are: building empowering and inclusive spaces and contexts for knowledge exchange; having supportive and engaged senior executive teams in place who recognise the value of this work and aren’t afraid to champion it; and teambuilding and supporting others to work on cultural knowledge exchange projects. Throughout the interviews themselves these notions come to the fore in a myriad of ways and although each contributor brings their own unique perspectives, it is compelling to note the many points of commonality that come through these fascinating narratives.

Dr Rowan Bailey (University of Huddersfield) talks compellingly about getting involved in and then co-developing the hugely inspirational [Temporary Contemporary](#) programme (also the subject of a recent NCACE case study) with the then Head of Culture at Kirklees Council alongside artists, researchers, student and wider communities. I was particularly struck by her statement that “Knowledge transfer, in the context of a university setting is quite an explicitly understood thing. But when you say knowledge and cultural exchange, you’re opening yourself up to a bit more of a creative potential.” The importance of language and how it can be used to affect richer outcomes and create new possibilities and imaginaries, is both instructive and valuable to note.

In Kill's interview with **Professor Maria Delgado** and **Professor Bryce Lease (The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London)**, the importance of how collaboration takes place and the various processes needed to support it is brought to the fore. The role of trust is also emphasised, as is the importance of recognising that collaboration is not just about research concern but about the needs of the other partners involved. Delgado reminds us that "You need to acknowledge the "we" and ensure that participation is always recognised equitably and ethically in all the material about that project that goes into the public domain." Lease talks about good leadership and modelling behaviour. "It's not about telling people what to do, it's about providing examples of how to engage in a particular dynamic". He also cites the value of conversation and of inviting people into the institution. "It's important to invite people in.... because it reminds us what the real lived challenges of our partners are. We sometimes think we know this, but we often don't actually know. So, our research and collaboration can actually address current issues in the creative and cultural industries. So, for me, working with SMEs is about leaning into forms of listening, excitement, curiosity, and being led by the challenges that present themselves...".

Listening is spoken about frequently in these interviews as a key part of the skillset of a good leader. **Rupert Lorraine (University of Plymouth)** tells us "Near the top of my list, I would put everything around being able to listen to people. Alongside that, empathy and interpersonal skills. I don't think you can lead without those. And even if you can, any kind of autocratic or dictatorial style of leadership certainly isn't going to get the best results." Indeed it is the notion of Collaborative Leadership that is a consistent trope through the interviews as well as the sense that this might be recognised as an emergent kind of leadership. And it is an idea that many of the interviewees seem to agree with.

In the interview with **Dr Alex Reynolds (University of Southampton)** the notion of borrowing from multiple disciplines and histories is highlighted as an important leadership method and sensibility. "I do think there are a lot of similarities with things like socially engaged practice, social activism, co-curation, co-creation and also in pedagogy. When we start to interrogate this as a participatory methodology and also as a way of doing research that's interesting too. In this kind of collaborative research we can borrow from different histories and disciplines to inform our practice."

Recognition of the relationship of the university to its local context, community and ecosystem is also cited in several of the interviews, and speaking about the evolution of **STEAMHOUSE** at **Birmingham City University**, **Clayton Shaw** tells us "We were able to then demonstrate how this could be part of a much bigger, more strategic alignment with what Birmingham City University was working on. BCU is very much a university for the city. And if we can contribute to developing innovation capacity among businesses then we can become part of the infrastructure and the ecosystem."

Maintaining the focus on external relationships and partnerships, **Prof. Katy Shaw (Northumbria University)** talks compellingly about ways in which partnership working can be deployed to enable and inspire catalytic change within the cultural and creative industries themselves, in this instance, the publishing sector. Shaw tells us "During the first lockdown I convened a new partnership between Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Mirror Group, the New

Statesman, New Writing North and the actor Michael Sheen, who has a foundation and is interested in creative diversity. We co-designed a new intervention to address the challenge called “A Writing Chance”; a year-long industry-focussed writing development programme for working class writers that created a nation-wide competition for entry and went on to produce an award winning BBC Sounds podcast series. This is a key characteristic of my way of working: bringing unlikely allies together around a shared challenge or opportunity to leverage more than we ever could operating alone.”

The ability to bring people together and to create teams is an important skill that is also picked up by **Prof. Jennie Shorley (Manchester Metropolitan University)** who tells us “Some parts of the university are quite risk averse, but you need them on your project. It’s persuasion and negotiation and bringing people around to your point of view and showing them the value proposition and the benefits of what you’re doing. If you’re working with external partners, leadership is about working in a bit more of a business friendly way. And by that I mean working to tight deadlines, timing in general, communication being really important, and trying wherever you can to get rid of the silos situation. For example, we had a stakeholder meeting and a brilliant business alumni said, “I don’t want a Business School. I want a School of Business and Digital Technology. That’s what I need. I don’t care about your departments. I don’t care about your faculty. This does not matter to me, I just know what I need”. So I think leadership in working with external partners is about understanding that and wherever you can, leading the internal partners in a way to not show that wiring.”

What people don’t explicitly refer to but what is quietly manifest throughout these interviews is a remarkably high level of motivation, maturity and confidence in leadership associated with Cultural Knowledge Exchange. They also indicate both an appetite and an aptitude for responsible and ethical cultural collaboration and reveal a set of attitudes that indicate just how much progress has been made in thinking and practice around collaboration.

We are enormously grateful to Dr Kill and the care with which she has attended to this body of work. We hope the interviews will inspire fresh thinking and confidence about undertaking collaboration, whether you are starting out on your own cultural knowledge exchange projects or whether you are supporting the efforts of your institution or others you work with to do so.

Evelyn Wilson,
Co-Director, NCACE and Director, TCCE
April 2024

Introduction

This publication in many ways extends some of the findings and ideas from other publications with NCACE and TCCE; in particular, (Kill, R. 2021) [‘Then a Penny Dropped’: Encountering KE First-Hand’ in Narrating Cultural Knowledge Exchange: Stories and perspectives from Knowledge Exchange professionals working in Higher Education in the UK](#). The main aim of that 2021 publication was to showcase models of good practice in knowledge exchange, exploring the complex landscape of KE through speaking to the people who work in it. The publication highlights some really excellent, highly impactful work.

‘As I had these wonderful conversations with people, I remembered how many people I have worked with who had these kinds of job titles, and I wished I’d asked them more about what they were doing. Then a penny dropped. This is what makes these interviews interesting, in a shorter, more readable or break-sized form, what exactly does a knowledge exchange professional do? What kind of projects are they involved in?’ (Kill, R. 2021)

NCACE has undertaken lots of impactful work with aspiring and future leaders; we were curious to explore both the future of leadership and professional development provision in this area. We have, for several years, wondered if there was a case for a subject specialist programme of leadership development using new creative and KE pathways and ‘navigating a different course’¹

The rationale and purpose of this new publication is to further augment our work in the area of leadership and cultural knowledge exchange. In particular we have aimed to create a piece of work that will have strategic resonance with HE institutions, arts and culture sector organisations, funders and those engaged in policy.

We interviewed a group of leaders from a range of HE contexts; specialist, red brick and post ‘92 institutions. In these interviews, I posed a series of questions to participants around cultural knowledge exchange, public engagement and collaborative leadership. I asked each participant to describe their background, role and context. The main purpose was to explore some of their projects, their narratives and their stories; with a focus on how they operate as leaders within these contexts. This was followed by a discussion about what they consider to be best practice in collaborative leadership or thought leadership; with a focus on innovative and/or successful models of engagement with stakeholders and senior management. Finally we finished our conversations with recommendations of knowledge exchange resources, links and publications.

¹ There is some great existing provision from Clore and PraxisAuril. See also <https://tcce.co.uk/2021/05/27/thinking-about-leadership-now/>

A number of key themes emerged from these conversations. Firstly, all of the interviewees talked about collaboration and relationship building as the key to building external partnerships. They also talked about trust, generosity, stewardship and listening skills as important aspects of this practice. So, up to this point, there were no surprises.

It was when I explored how they built collaborative relationships that it became very interesting. There was a common theme that can be described as ‘contexts for knowledge exchange’: what are the necessary conditions needed for these relationships to form? Several interviewees described making or preparing the space for collaboration, such as creating an environment where external partners might feel comfortable, relaxed, empowered and included, where they feel trusted and able to trust. Crucially a space where there was a level playing field. Dr Rowan Bailey uses a lovely metaphor of “crossing the ring road” to describe this way of building inclusive partnerships between the university and civic organisations or businesses.

The second important theme that comes through these interviews is the presence of a supportive senior executive. This part of the discussion explored what the necessary conditions are for our leaders to be able to function as relationship builders. This can be described as ‘modes of knowledge exchange’. Excellent leadership in cultural KE needs someone at executive level with senior strategic and budgetary responsibility who supports cultural KE leaders with appropriate financial resources for knowledge exchange and also entrusts them to take risks and, potentially, to fail. Creating this type of internal trust-based relationship is quite complex to achieve and often means building confidence, over time, by producing much smaller projects and then scaling up.

So, our leaders in Cultural Knowledge Exchange create spaces, build trusting relationships with external partners and are fully supported by a member of the executive leadership team. But the final element that is essential for successful leadership in KE that supports both modes and contexts of knowledge exchange leadership is teambuilding, and supporting others to work on these projects. So how do these leaders do this, how do our leaders lead?

Towards the end of our discussions I asked the interviewees how they would describe their style of leadership. I was wondering if they were using novel or adapted ways of leading their colleagues or if, perhaps, they might describe their style as collaborative leadership or thought leadership. These final questions produced a really interesting set of responses. Interviewees spoke about dynamic administration, distributed, devolved or delegated leadership, internal consultancy, participatory leadership and about empowering people by using light touch ways of leading. Most of the interviewees talked about values and trust being at the heart of their leadership practices in knowledge exchange. They also saw themselves as part of a new generation of leadership; in contrast to a more hierarchical type of leadership practice. This new type of leadership was described as values-driven, sensitive, kind and empathetic.

When I began these interviews I was initially exploring how leadership functions in the context of cultural knowledge exchange. And now, after all of these wonderful conversations, I’m left thinking about how aspiring leaders can be effectively supported and developed. These interviews function as very important and relevant advice in relation to how to develop the people who currently work in cultural knowledge exchange. The leaders I interviewed were

very specific about the mindset and leadership philosophy that is necessary for a successful cultural knowledge exchange team. They all vividly described building a healthy ecology that includes strong external partnerships within and beyond the HE landscape. One thing that we can be absolutely sure about is that there is currently some excellent practice across the sector. There are some brilliant, high performing knowledge exchange teams that provide a wonderful blueprint for not only knowledge exchange practices, but also the development of future leaders in this area.

Dr Rebekka Kill

April 2024

Dr Rowan Bailey, Director of Enterprise and Knowledge Exchange, University of Huddersfield

Rowan: I've got several roles in the School of Arts and Humanities at the University of Huddersfield. I'm the Director of Knowledge Exchange. A lot of the work that goes on in the School of Arts and Humanities is practice driven. We're in a broad creative and cultural context, so our understanding of knowledge and cultural exchange is shaped by what we do in collaboration with others and particularly from the creative and cultural industry sector. I support partnership opportunities, ways of collaborating either inside the curriculum or as part of research and enterprise opportunities. Essentially that role is about relationship building. My other role is REF Unit 32 Art and Design lead and in that role, I run a research centre called the Centre for Cultural Ecologies in Art, Design and Architecture, and I facilitate all kinds of research and cultural activity. I help support and mentor early career researchers on their journey and mid to senior career researchers in developing their work for REF. But I manage that portfolio and make sure that the investment goes to the right places for the right initiatives for the right reasons. Also, I'm the Chair of the Research Ethics Committee and I'm a Reader in Cultural Theory and Practice.

Rebekka: Can you tell me about some of the projects that you are leading on?

Rowan: I'm going to talk about Temporary Contemporary which is probably one of the first projects that really shifted my work from inside the institution to outside in the public realm, and to doing collaborative work with a local authority. So, somebody in senior management came up to me and said, "Here, have a go at this." The Head of Culture at Kirklees Council had a problem. They had an indoor market, and nobody's coming in. So, the question was, how do you bring culture and vibrancy onto the high street? So we decided to make a white cube art gallery inside the market and to see if we could develop a cultural programme. That was my first example of working in collaboration with an external partner. It really helped me to understand how to work collaboratively. Part of that is a set of really important values about how you work with other people, and how you try to do that in a non-hierarchical way. That was a really successful project; we did about 18 to 25 exhibitions inside the market in this white cube gallery space. And these were all kinds of collaborations with communities but also staff research and student projects. And then we moved out into the piazza area of the market and other empty spaces were then opened up for all kinds of activities. The Temporary Contemporary network opened them up for creative communities to use those spaces. So that was an experience of being embedded in a project and then scaling it up.



Scenes from Cultures of Place – Simon Woolham and Jodie Matthews, Depth/Gauge © Laura Mateescu

Rebekka: You said that you developed a set of values. Can you articulate those values?

Rowan: They're values of relationship building, so true collaborative work has to manage the power relations that are always in flux in these kinds of processes. One of the values is about understanding that any ecology will have imbalances within it. In any stakeholder mix, there are going to be competing interests and those need to be really carefully navigated. I think the voice of experience, or the sharing of experience, is a really good starting point to create a level playing field. It also facilitates collaboration in the sense that there's no one person here in a position of leadership. The question is what are we going to do together, to make something? Even if you are leading on the project, it's a collaborative, or matrix, leadership position.

We used a visual metaphor to describe the context of the Temporary Contemporary collaboration which was about crossing the ring road, because that was the barrier between two very large institutions. You've got a university on one side of the ring road and a local authority on the other. It was a challenge around that threshold and how to cross it.

Knowledge transfer, in the context of a university setting is quite an explicitly understood thing. But when you say knowledge and cultural exchange, you're opening yourself up to a bit more creative potential. So, crossing the threshold, maybe crossing the ring road, is just an attempt to start a conversation. To start something without a fixed endpoint in mind, just an opportunity to participate. And I think we advocated for that from both sides.

Rebekka: That can be quite risky. Do you think leading projects like this has something to do with risk appetite?

Rowan: Yes, and the fear factor is why people feel paralysed. If you want to try something new, to do something innovative that hasn't been done before, it's a huge risk. I think what we were able to do was to challenge that a little bit; by just setting up a really simple pilot case study in the market. But it was its potential to grow in all kinds of directions that had a really radical impact on the university's understanding of its approach to public engagement and the public realm. We're embedded now; everybody knows about Temporary Contemporary. We've managed to secure a good budget from the university to host and run our cultural programme, which is all public realm work, place-based cultural development and knowledge and cultural exchange being embedded in and through arts and humanities practices. I think people understand now that this kind of work has a place within the institution and the organisation. And obviously it has a place within the Knowledge Exchange Framework. So that project has had a radical impact on the institution's understanding of the potential of knowledge and cultural exchange. We were in the right place at the right time. It's taken a while to get there but our existing collaborations have helped us to now leverage support at a regional level.

Rebekka: So, Rowan, in the middle of all of this, how would you describe your leadership role? What kind of leadership does this kind of work need? What kind of leader are you becoming?

Rowan: There's a term used in group analysis called 'dynamic administration'. Dynamic administration is about preparing the space for the condition of opportunity to happen. Preparing the space means making sure the chairs are round in a circle with no gaps and checking if there are refreshments available. I am constantly asking, have I thought about how to make people feel safe and comfortable and at ease in an environment that they might be new to? All of these things are really important in terms of the energy in a space. It's how to cultivate the right kind of energy or to be aware of the tensions that might be at play. Setting the scene is how I understand dynamic administration, making sure that the environment works and that you can hold people in that space. And then you are able to step back and let people do their magic. Because that's what people do. They are really great at doing wonderful, amazing things, and you just need to give them space. So, you've got to cultivate a space or create a space, but you've also got to give space back. I think that's something that I'm learning about now. What it means to be in a leadership position where you have the responsibilities of managing the space, but you've got to give people freedom to have their agency to collaborate.

Rebekka: Would you say that you're talking about a form of collaborative leadership? Would you use that term? And thought leadership, is that a term you might use?

Rowan: I mean, thinking is a process, isn't it? You're managing complexities and entanglements and difficult and liberating relationships. And constantly navigating that. I think there's also something about my approach to leadership that resonates with mindfulness training. For example, starting from a position of being kind and trying not to harm others. Hanging on to those precepts is a really good way to stay grounded. Anchoring yourself, because it's dead easy to get caught up in the energies and be taken away in all kinds of directions. I think there should be more leadership with mindful practice, more loving kindness.

Rebekka: Do you see other people doing good things with leadership and knowledge and cultural exchange? Can you think of other examples outside of your own contacts or people that you've come across? Who is doing good stuff in your eyes?



Scenes from Cultures of Place – Katrina McLaughlin, Melissa Fletcher, Bea Martin,
Looming (De)Vices – [Re]assembled Machines, © Laura Mateescu

Rowan: Rhiannon Jones from Derby who runs Civic Lab and the S.H.E.D Dialogue Project. She's a really interesting enthusiast. I'm always looking for those kinds of affinities with people.

Rebekka: You described her as an enthusiast? What do you think she's doing in terms of leadership? What does the enthusiast leader do?

Rowan: She's bringing the creative and cultural sector into the institution. She's fostering collaborations and exchanges that represent the needs of those sectors, but also facilitating dialogue with those sectors. I think that she's doing some great work around that. There are also some examples coming through UKRI, and the AHRC; all of which are examples of leadership where attempts are being made to break down the barriers between the university academic arena and the place-based contexts of people's lives. I can see leadership there. I think there is leadership in non-academic contexts all the time and I see that at play in the place-based work that I do. So maybe, riffing off your collaborative leadership idea, I think, people are naturally drawn to supporting and signposting; links that work into and out of different kinds of opportunities. So, I think one could say that there's probably that kind of leadership going on all the time, except it's not being labelled as that.

For further information:

[Rowan Bailey – University of Huddersfield Research Portal](#)

[Centre for Cultural Ecologies in Art, Design and Architecture - University of Huddersfield](#)

[NCACE Temporary Contemporary Case Study](#)

[Temporary Contemporary - University of Huddersfield](#)

[Temporary Contemporary: Creating vibrant spaces to support the conditions for creative and cultural activity](#)

[Cultures of Place](#)

[University of Huddersfield](#)

[Rhiannon Jones - Our staff - University of Derby](#)

[Arts and Humanities Research Council \(AHRC\) – UKRI](#)

Professor Maria Delgado, Vice Principal for Research and Knowledge Exchange and Professor Bryce Lease, Head of Knowledge Exchange, The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London

Maria: I'm Maria Delgado, and I'm Vice Principal for Research and Knowledge Exchange at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, which is a small specialist institution. We run a series of programmes which are very much rooted in theatre, performance, design for performance, applied theatre, social theatre, and work with a participatory ethos as well as acting courses. I lead the research and knowledge exchange team within the institution and remain an active researcher working in the area of Spanish and Catalan language, theatre and film, memory and culture and cultures of theatre- and film-making.

Bryce: I'm Bryce Lease. I'm Head of Knowledge Exchange; I've been at Central for a year. I came from Royal Holloway. The shift from a more traditional drama department to a conservatoire has been really exciting. A small specialist institution can be a very empowering environment; I think the research and knowledge exchange cultures are embedded in the institution. During my PhD, knowledge exchange wasn't embedded in the training. It's something that I had to come to as an early career researcher and figure out. Things have changed, I think, now it's very much ingrained in our PhD training programs.

Rebekka: Bryce, how do you define knowledge exchange? What do you think it is?

Bryce: If I have to offer a quick version of it, I usually say it's the cultural, societal and economic benefit of universities outside of the academy.

Rebekka: Great so, Maria, same question.

Maria: I think it's about the collaborations that we build on, the information that we co-create with those outside of the university sector, and that takes multiple shapes and forms.

Rebekka: On that note, Maria, what do you think leadership looks like in knowledge exchange?

Maria: I think a lot of it is about listening. So often with university partners when they're working through opportunities for collaboration it's about their own agenda. We want this, we need this. For me, that feels problematic. If you really want to have a productive knowledge exchange working relationship, it's got to be about listening to what your industry partner, and any and all collaborators need and want. So, I'd always say be patient; trust takes time. You need to be willing to spend time building up the relationship with that collaborator, listening to what they need, what they want, what are their strategic priorities, what infrastructure do they have. The opportunities for collaboration need to come from their needs and priorities as much as those of the university. I often think that one of the things that some universities don't quite get right is they're not able to place themselves in the collaborator's shoes. For me, that is the key.

I think everyone involved ought to spend a day in that working environment with them. That's often not feasible or possible, but you need to create something analogous to that to really understand their needs and working environment. And if you don't take those needs into consideration, the project is unequal. It's about inclusivity.

For me, the single most important thing is the building up of trust and the recognition of the role of the collaborator. In terms of impact case studies, for REF it's all about collaborations but it's a two-way process. You need to acknowledge the "we" and ensure that participation is always recognised equitably and ethically in all the material about that project that goes into the public domain.

Rebekka: So, when the collaboration within the key relationship is absolutely central, what does that mean for leadership? Does this work take a different type of leadership? Are you seeing new and emergent forms of leadership?

Maria: I think it's often about being there to help your colleagues who are developing potential relationships and partnerships. To ask them the kinds of questions that they might not ask themselves. To bring the experience of the work that you've seen or undertaken yourself or help support an understanding of what they're trying to do. To act as a critical friend. I think that the critical friend role is really important within the institution. It's about supporting financially but crucially about creating an infrastructure for supporting projects: a transparent and open system where everybody can apply for funding, laying out the criteria, ensuring that systems and processes are in place so that everybody feels they can do KE. And often, those partnerships, and those systems might not be in place for a whole series of complex reasons. Often research systems might be more developed because they are linked to REF and so linked to very tangible, financial outcomes that come from REF, for example QR funding or other forms of funding for research. So, I would say that the leadership is about putting systems into place, ensuring that there's training in place for those who want to access knowledge exchange opportunities. Then building up a team within the institution and acting as a critical friend where possible, and where appropriate.

Sometimes there are others better placed to act as critical friends, it's about acknowledging and providing the space for that. It's also about building up an infrastructure and supporting a team. It's important to recognise that when you give people the responsibility for covering a particular area, as Bryce does in his role at Central, you need to ensure that they are given the space, time and support to do it. Ensuring that you're aligning responsibility with power to be able to undertake that job is key. I think sometimes people have a lot of responsibility for KE, but they're not given the power to do that work.

And it's key to ensure that there is a budget for the work. You can't say that you value KE and then give it a budget of two pence, or even nothing. You need to think about the message that you're giving out to the institution about what is of value. And the best way to show how you value something is to ensure that there's money to support initiatives. And to ensure that there are people in place to support the staff in this work; to help them navigate a changing KE landscape and shifting terminology, as with the move from Knowledge Transfer to Knowledge Exchange. A lot of people thought Knowledge Transfer was something that happened in the

sciences, unaware of the fact that they'd been doing it for decades and it just hadn't been recognised as such.

Rebekka: What Maria has described to me sounds very much like Democratic leadership, or like servant leadership, if you look at some of the leadership literature. This is also very much driven by collaboration. So, a similar question for you, Bryce, what do you think leadership looks like in KE?

Bryce: I think when people come into a leadership role, it takes time before you realise the difference between someone offering you something and you asking them for something. I know, at the beginning, I wanted to say yes, as often as possible, but I was sometimes confusing those two. I would say if someone offers you something, take them up on it. I think people are really motivated by their own ideas and their own initiatives. On the other hand, if you're asking them to do something themselves, it can be like top-down pressure and can feel like pulling teeth. When people come in with an idea, I always start with, yes, let's see what we can do to make it work. And then I try to find an initiative that it can fit into or a funding source that could support it. Sometimes you can actually fill the most difficult tasks you have with the unexpected offers that you're given.

Rebekka: Do you see examples of good leadership in KE around you? Whether it's in your institution, in other institutions, or people external to the university? Are there any examples of innovative leadership or thought leadership in knowledge exchange that you see as a result of being involved in knowledge exchange activities? Do you think there's anything new coming through; like a new type of leader maybe?

Bryce: I think the best people in knowledge exchange often are SMEs, because they're hungry for an exchange, and they're always open to new ideas. They're curious. One of the initiatives that we've been talking about is that every September we invite a series of partners to come in and describe the challenges that they're facing at the moment. That sparks a certain kind of conversation. I think it's important to invite people in that way because it reminds us what the real lived challenges of our partners are. We sometimes think we know this, but we often don't actually know. So, our research and collaboration can actually address current issues in the creative and cultural industries. So, for me, working with SMEs is about leaning into forms of listening, excitement, curiosity, and being led by the challenges that present themselves rather than a sort of more passive way of looking at culture or just being preoccupied with certain areas of research that happen to interest you at the time.

Rebekka: So would you call this problem based learning that's initiated externally in this context?

Bryce: I also think that this is where we see that good leadership is about modelling behaviour. It's not about telling people what to do, it's about providing examples of how to engage in a particular dynamic: This is how I approach a partner. This is how I approach a certain problem. I think modelling is far more effective than any training that simply explains.

Maria: I agree about SMEs, I think that they're more nimble. They're very open. I would also say I learned a lot from what was happening at the University of Keele because it seemed to me that they were so good at mapping out the potentiality of knowledge exchange relationships and

building the capacity to undertake things. You might think it's a really different kind of institution, with a strong, science driven curriculum and research culture. But the clarity with which they communicated what they were doing was excellent. They put their work out into the public domain and shared it in a way that really shows good practice that can be modelled and drawn on by others.

Rebekka: That sounds very generous as well. Is there something that you're saying there which is about generosity? There's transparency, modelling and so on, but it's also very generous and not guarded.

Maria: Academic institutions are often very guarded. There's a lot of talk about collaboration, but league tables are competitive and the competitive nature of so many funding streams mean that competition drives collaboration. In many ways, the idea of knowledge exchange, challenges that, but often we have to fit into the competitive ethos. And that's where the work of NCACE and the National Centre for Universities and Business has been really important. Getting people to think about what the language of collaboration really means; sharing resources, experiences and best practice. You can't just talk collaboration, you have to do collaboration, and I think we need less talk about collaboration and actually do more collaboration on the ground that will challenge that competitive ethos that so often is built into the DNA of the way in which universities are run.

Rebekka: Do you think that there are role models in knowledge exchange? Who are being transparent and sharing their practice of leadership in knowledge exchange, and is it a practice of leadership that already exists? Or is it something new?

Maria: The Concordat to Support Research Integrity is asking us to do those very things around rigour, honesty, transparency, open communication – and what is communication if not sharing as much as you can share? I think we need to stop pigeonholing things; for example, the principles of The Concordat to Support Research Integrity can be applied beyond research to the knowledge exchange space. The principles are really good and robust. We should be applying them to absolutely everything we do. Whether it's teaching or knowledge exchange, or research.

You can't talk about distributed leadership and then hold power. Power, responsibility, accountability, all three, have to be aligned. We live in a world where rhetoric has taken over so much of what we do. It's not enough to say we will do this; you need to actually do it. Action. When there's good practice, it supports the funding to go further, it means that we can really focus on nurturing those relationships and we can actually draw on resources that will help us do that.

Rebekka: Some people might argue that certain arts and humanities areas have more of a built-in alignment to collaboration. Music and some forms of theatre, for example. Meaning that understanding around idea generation and collaboration, might be better than in some other areas? What else is different in leadership in the arts and humanities?

Bryce: I think that part of leadership is the ability to recognise what motivates other people and how to make them feel rewarded. If you offer someone the wrong reward, not only will they not feel rewarded, they might feel punished. Some people are motivated by public recognition.

Some people are motivated by status. Some people are motivated by money. And other people are motivated by a sense of stability. So if you try, for example, to promote someone quickly who is motivated by a sense of stability, that might feel threatening, whereas actually what they really wanted was public recognition for the fact that they're doing a good job.

It's also rewarding teams of people or recognising teams of people in particular ways, who are differently motivated. In knowledge exchange, we've had projects where people from the medical field get together with our arts and humanities researchers and they have a completely different understanding of the project that they're working on. They also need very different kinds of recognition. This feels like that's something that's specific to KE.

Rebekka: So if you're thinking about reward and recognition, why shouldn't you be able to get a professorship based on your knowledge exchange work? In the same way as you might get one around teaching and scholarly activity rather than research?

Bryce: We looked at this, but we ultimately decided that as a conservatoire KE should be embedded in both our research and scholarship career paths. Everybody should be doing it. It's not a third way. It's essential to both teaching and research, but it needs to be recognised. It cannot be invisible labour. I also think what is tricky is that the REF, and some of the structures around the REF and research funding, make it very visible when people are succeeding in particular ways that you can then put into promotion criteria. In other words, you can see measurable evidence. Sometimes doing that with teaching is not successful, but there are ways of thinking about that in terms of student evaluation, development of new programs and external examining, etc. But with knowledge exchange, I think you can have something that went really well but it's very hard to evidence in terms of promotion criteria. It's difficult to say why that should bring you up from senior lecturer to reader. This is because the concrete outcomes are often with the partner not the researcher.

Rebekka: And do you think that that's something that we'll get our heads around eventually? Or do you think that is just the nature of the beast?

Bryce: I think that this is where colleagues need additional training. To learn how to narrate their key successes and achievements.

Rebekka: Maria, do you have any final thoughts on this?

Maria: I would agree. I think we need to ensure that staff are enabled to tell the story of what the benefits and changes have been. And I think that impact case studies for REF are a really good example of demonstrating benefit and effects in palpable ways that show with quantifiable and qualitative examples how this might be done. I think there's a lot to learn from the evidence that the impact case studies put into the public domain about showing change in action. I do think that knowledge exchange is still often seen as a third way. Some institutions have very developed promotion criteria for knowledge exchange. However, some see it as a kind of optional thing on the side. I see it as integral to the civic university. Knowledge exchange has a role to play in the civic work universities undertake. What does civic work look like? What does that level of collaboration look like? In universities we've had issues around the invisibility of particular kinds of work, including knowledge exchange; for example, in areas where it hasn't been about generating large amounts of money and where the impact may be on quality of life,

for instance, which is much harder to measure and assess. We need to think about ways in which we can better assess those tricky areas. I think that's a work in progress. It's really important that institutions value that kind of work and ensure that there is a visibility given to it. I'd also like to see more research on gendered aspects of particular kinds of work in knowledge exchange. I have seen instances of women academics 'encouraged' to do certain types of knowledge exchange. There's some research to be done around inclusivity (in the widest sense of the word) and knowledge exchange.

There's research to be done in understanding the value of knowledge exchange across its many iterations, so that it's seen as important as other forms of work that make up a balance of responsibilities and duties within an academic job.

For further information:

[The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama: Home \(cssd.ac.uk\)](https://www.cssd.ac.uk)

[Engagement and impact - Keele University](#)

[NCUB - University-business collaboration across the UK](#)

[NCACE - Careful Collaborations: Ethics and Care in Cultural Knowledge Exchange and Trans-Disciplinary Research](#)

Rupert Lorraine, Director of The Arts Institute, University of Plymouth

Rupert: I would describe myself as a complete generalist. I originally studied Marine Sports Technology at Plymouth, a long time ago, and went on to manage a three year Knowledge Transfer Partnerships project after I graduated, which I would say was the best, probably the most pivotal thing I've done in my career. It directly linked everything I learned on my course into the real world, and gave me an amazing opportunity to manage a high-profile project working at that really interesting boundary between the university and industry. There was lots of responsibility but also lots of training, and I gained my MPhil in Engineering. So that really springboarded my career. I always really loved the interplay between the knowledge base, everything that universities represent, and the world of industry, and I thought - that's the kind of space I'd like to work in.

There was another pivotal moment when, as Development and Partnership Manager in Research and Innovation, I transitioned from working with the Faculty of Science and Engineering, to the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Business. It initially felt like a sideways move but, with the benefit of hindsight, genuinely, it was the best thing that could have happened to me. I don't identify as a 'creative', and I sometimes felt like I was speaking a different language to some of the creative practitioners I was starting to work with. Over the last ten years, I've helped academics and creatives advance their practice at the intersection of research, experiential education and Knowledge Exchange, and enable meaningful connections with business, our community and our partners. That's the space I've been playing in.

More recently, I led a strategic review of the Faculty's research, impact, policy, Knowledge Exchange and public engagement infrastructure and operations, to optimise our support for these areas. We looked at those things in the round, and talked to lots of different stakeholders about what was working well and less well. We also took time to think about the strategic landscape we're operating in, and what the affordances might be of putting things together in a different way; unifying what were previously three separate teams operating independently, into something which is much more holistic. It's now one, multi-skilled, multifaceted team, which means that we can work much more in the intersecting spaces; whether that's research-informed teaching, student Knowledge Exchange, or evolving our public programme as a platform for participatory research, a channel for public engagement and a test-bed for new ideas and experimentation. I really enjoyed acting as an 'internal consultant', and running that process, and was then really delighted to be given the opportunity and the responsibility to lead the new team and deliver the vision for change.

Rebekka: What's your job title now? Because this is really variable between institutions.



Plymouth Hoe, © Jay Stone

Rupert: My current job title is Director of The Arts Institute. But it's a bit of a misnomer because 'The Arts Institute' is also one of the three teams, alongside The Bridge and the Faculty's Research and Creative Industries unit, that we're putting together into the new entity. We're going through a new branding and identity piece at the moment to sort this all out!

Rebekka: And are they all from professional services, or are some of them from academic backgrounds?

Rupert: Some of the team are from academic backgrounds, but all the people I manage are on professional services contracts. Part of the philosophy that we've applied to our team is that there shouldn't be a perceived boundary or 'them and us' culture; it's a symbiotic relationship between academics and professionals that makes this work. Our team and the academic colleagues that we collaborate with, are all part of the fabric and ecology of the Faculty.

Rebekka: So how do you function in terms of leadership?

Rupert: On a personal level, I'm completely allergic to that stereotypical old school, top top-down, command and control style of leadership. I like to think about a contemporary management environment; it's about inverting the traditional organisational hierarchy chart; I think the leader's job is fundamentally to support, nurture, encourage and be accountable for the team.

Rebekka: That sounds like servant leadership, where the leader is in service to the team. Or do you think it's more a form of collaborative leadership?

Rupert: I think it's probably collaborative leadership in the sense that we're all in it together and all have important independent roles to play. I do think good leadership is leading from the front, role-modelling behaviours. If you have a structure which is very hierarchical and top-down, then you're massively throttling the bandwidth of your team and what they can achieve. It's limiting the scope of ideas and thinking, and imagination.

What we want is a team that's cognitively diverse and where you're creating an environment where there's psychological safety. A culture where people feel like they're able to shape the way they want to work. I think a key responsibility of the job of leadership is to be clear on where we're heading, to plant the flag in the appropriate place and for the right strategic reasons, and then give people the freedom and the help they need to get us there.

Rebekka: So is that thought leadership?

Rupert: Thought leadership for me is more of a meta-space where we can share insights and learning and hold a conversation at a different level, that goes beyond the day-to-day operations of the team. To give you a concrete example, we recently ran a project about understanding how students engage in the process of Knowledge Exchange, and specifically how they benefit from it, and how to maximise those benefits. One of the outcomes of the project was sharing the learning with the sector. For me, that was the thought leadership bit – the way in which we captured the learning and the insights from that whole experience. Both to elevate our own skill set and knowledge and crucially, I think, to create a space to share those insights with other HEIs and to move our collective wisdom forward. That work has included working with your colleagues in NCACE, talking to senior policymakers and bringing together other leaders, teams and institutions as a peer learning group. For me that's what we mean by thought leadership.

Rebekka: In terms of leadership more broadly. What do you think good practice is in leadership? And in particular, are you seeing new, different or emergent forms of leadership in Knowledge Exchange?

Rupert: I definitely think there are some qualities that are fundamental to good leadership. Near the top of my list, I would put everything around being able to listen to people. Alongside that, empathy and interpersonal skills. I don't think you can lead without those. And even if you can, any kind of autocratic or dictatorial style of leadership certainly isn't going to get the best results. I think there's a whole set of skills around creativity and imagination, and you have to be interested in what you're doing. Also on the strategic side you need to be very curious and prepared to innovate. I think bravery or boldness can be useful, and a willingness to take risks and not be afraid to fail. Another key leadership skill is knowing when to pivot from periods of growth to periods of consolidation. If you keep pushing for continuous growth, you'll end up exhausting people and stressing them out. So, I think alongside ambition and drive, it's also about having the good judgement to recognise that we're all human beings.

It's important to delegate, and to develop staff as leaders in their own right - they should feel mandated and empowered to build collaborations and make decisions with a high degree of ownership and accountability, operating within an effective and well-governed structure.

Our team is good at sharing skills and coaching each other. I want people to learn, to try and fail and then succeed. It's that kind of entrepreneurial mindset rather than an environment where people are scared to fail; I think that's very dangerous.

Rebekka: Are these aspects of good leadership in Knowledge Exchange? Is there anything new or different in this space about the way that leaders are able to operate?

Rupert: The nature of the work that we do in the Knowledge Exchange space naturally lends itself to a different mindset and culture, and it tends to attract certain types of people. It's definitely a space that feels quite different and has a centre of gravity away from that traditional 'ivory tower', rarefied notion of what universities do. If we contrast this with Knowledge Transfer, particularly the models that tended to dominate in the past, and which imply a power imbalance and a direction of travel for the knowledge, KE implies a mutually beneficial, two-way relationship between the university and the outside world. This space attracts individuals who are very good with people, can build strong interpersonal relationships and who have an entrepreneurial mindset. They tend to challenge existing systems, processes and ways of working, and bring fresh perspectives to problem-solving.

Rebekka: So, are you saying that because Knowledge Exchange is already a collaborative model then that makes space for more collaborative leadership styles?

Rupert: I think The Bridge is the best example I can give you. We developed The Bridge as a delivery vehicle for our creative economy projects. We created a team that had a very distinctive approach, and a highly collaborative culture to make sure that people and projects worked together in harmony. So I guess this was the prototype of how to bring to life these ideas around building a more entrepreneurial, more empowering and less hierarchical structure.



The Bridge. © Rupert Lorraine

Rebekka: I am very curious about this. People seem to be saying that contemporary forms of leadership and Knowledge Exchange practices fit together quite neatly. But is it possible that new, novel, interesting or different forms of leadership are emerging?

Rupert: I think so. I would definitely say that's a good thing too. But whilst this is all easy to talk about - the reality is that it's also very, very hard to achieve in practice. At its core, this is all about having a growth mindset, working with great people, and having the determination to succeed.

I agree there is a strong fit between leadership and KE practice. I think to a large extent the role of the KE professional is about negotiating strong alignment between the goals and interests of our academics and our projects on the one hand, and those of our external partners, and the communities and businesses we work with. It sounds cliched but it's about creating a win-win. And that's a very skilful thing to do. Building strong relationships hinges on trust and empathy, and approaching people with intrigue and genuine interest in what they do. It relies heavily on being able to speak the different languages that various stakeholders might use. It requires perseverance to overcome barriers and constraints - timelines, bureaucracy etc. and managing everyone's expectations. And all of that requires a great deal of coordination and collaboration with other people. Anyone who can do all of that is clearly a leader in my eyes.

For further information:

[The Bridge](#)

[Cultivator Creative and Cultural Leadership Development Programme](#)

[iMayflower \(Cultural Development Fund\) and iLEAD](#)

[Engaging Students in Knowledge Exchange](#)

[Live Scribing](#)

[The Arts Institute Public Programme](#)

[Research & Creative Industries Unit](#)

Dr Alex Reynolds, Senior Teaching Fellow in Knowledge Exchange and Enterprise (KEE) Staff Development, University of Southampton

Alex: I'm Alex Reynolds. I work at the University of Southampton as a Senior Teaching Fellow in Knowledge Exchange and Enterprise in the Centre for HE Practice (CHEP). What I do in this role is academic development for staff involved in knowledge exchange. My job's about recognising that knowledge exchange is a developing field and a relatively new area of strategic priority for universities. I find ways to interrogate and support best practice for staff, and sometimes also work with external partners and stakeholders.

In Southampton, we have a strategy called the Triple Helix, which sees research, teaching and knowledge exchange and enterprise as equal partners in good academic practice. With that overarching strategy in place, there's now a strong appetite for building momentum around knowledge exchange and understanding how it fits with research and education. Also how it fits with things like the civic university agenda and the entrepreneurial university. My role is principally to map the field, translate jargon and clear pathways for staff to get involved or to recognise when they're already doing knowledge exchange. It's also a priority partly because knowledge exchange ties in so closely with the impact agenda, and in some ways feels like a pathway to impact in itself.

So my role is as a translator, facilitator and coordinator; someone that's always trying to learn about the field and then share that knowledge. I need to be able to listen to the needs of academic staff, and then support them to unpick and interrogate the challenges they have around knowledge exchange. The other important thing I do is to connect up grassroots activity in the university with the overarching strategic policies and priorities and bring these into discussion. We do that principally through communities of practice we're developing in the university.

Rebekka: Interesting, tell me more about these communities of practice?

Alex: I'm still relatively new, but what is really exciting and interesting is the appetite for development at the university. We launched a new KEE community of practice, not just for academic staff, but also for professional services and technicians: everyone across the board because we recognise that knowledge exchange activities often involve all these roles quite directly. We've now got over 340 members in our network from all faculties and pathways, and new people are joining every day. I organise monthly events and annual seed funding opportunities for the network. I also create self-directed resources and map the diversity of KE activities at the institution, with a focus on impact and evaluation. We aim to provide a sort of

one stop shop to help people understand best practice in Knowledge Exchange, and what's going on in the field.

In terms of developing the community of practice, initially we brought everybody together in a virtual room and asked, "What are your interests in knowledge exchange? What themes would you like to see explored? What bothers you about the field? When and where would you like to meet? What sorts of activities would you like?". For example Ideas Labs, invited talks, workshops or networking events. We analysed all of that information, and cross referenced it with some longer interviews with professorial staff and directors. Then we came up with a program of events and activities which reflected the staff interests but kept enough flex in there that we would be able to change and iterate as we went along.

More recently we have introduced seed funding opportunities which can act as catalysts for new knowledge exchange projects and provide opportunities for experiential learning. We've also now split the community of practice into working groups around member-selected discussion topics, because it's so big, and we want to keep it discursive. It really does feel like a community coalescing around a shared interest in a topic and actively sharing ideas. We're digging into and interrogating some of those themes and questions that staff have, such as reward and recognition. For example, we're thinking about the characteristics of the academic involved in knowledge exchange practices, as opposed to the traditional academic. Asking what are those skill sets and if we can conceptualise them in a prefigured way. And also thinking about questions of EDI in relation to this. We're looking for equity between academics involved in enterprise or knowledge exchange, and academics involved in more traditional research and also equity of opportunity in terms of getting involved in KE.

Rebekka: How does leadership function in your role and context? Both, in terms of you as a leader and the types of leadership you think might be needed for knowledge exchange?

Alex: I definitely think that there is a form of participatory or collaborative leadership at play in this role. It's about understanding the field, the interests of staff and the strategic priorities of the institution well enough that you are able to surface the most urgent questions, tensions and possibilities in the field at any given time. Then it's about creating safe, discursive spaces where those themes or ideas can be interrogated. Leadership can be about curating or framing opportunity spaces scaffolded by seed funding or networking opportunities, where new knowledge exchange projects can be galvanised in line with current sector, institutional or subject based urgencies. In these individual projects, the role of a leader might be in helping to facilitate the development of new projects which function with mutual benefit towards agreed outcomes, and training might revolve around developing skill sets associated with this.

Rebekka: It must be hard when there are 300 people in your community?

Alex: It is challenging to keep a discursive methodology within such a big group. In the KEE Community of Practice, we co-create our programme of activities through workshopping and surveys, but the smaller working groups and seed funding opportunities are where staff can really get to grips with particular questions or challenges they have in relation to KEE. Within project work, we aim to model and scaffold a commons-based approach where the various requirements and forms of expertise within a team are each recognised and factored into project aims.

Rebekka: And where does leadership sit in that? When you're in a project do you feel that you are functionally the leader?

Alex: I see it more like stewardship or facilitation. I like the idea of stewardship. And there's something about that coordination role, where you're pushing forward a shared agenda, in this case, to explore best practice in knowledge exchange, through collaborative work. This is where I come back to the idea of the commons. I think of the commons as a way to interrogate a shared agenda. It's recognising that you all have individual interests and forms of expertise within a collaboration. You also all have aspirations and outcomes that you want to reach, and to work together well these components need to be recognised, valued and negotiated. I do feel that in any of those collaborations, there is a need for somebody to take on responsibility for nudging things forward, coordinating or facilitating, taking the broader view, listening, iterating and creating a framework.

Rebekka: That sounds like leadership to me.

Alex: I think the distinction is that it's not hierarchical. I need to make sure that I hold space for people and I frame workshops that I produce in a way that people can meaningfully contribute, have discussions and try out ideas. Their contribution is essential and without their contribution it doesn't work at all. It's also helpful to articulate the facilitation or framing role as part of the development of roles and responsibilities in a project. It's essential for collaborative work to function, a particular kind of leadership role within a collaborative process. I also see a correlation with a curatorial approach. I'm in an academic development role, which is about coordinating staff members across the university and holding space for them to have discussions around topics that they've told me are of interest to them. They give me the mandate to produce a program which allows them to develop their practice. So my agenda is fulfilled because they're developing their practice. But their agenda is to develop, and I need to show that I've listened to that.

Rebekka: Do you think that this is a different or new type of leadership? A collaborative, commons focused leadership or maybe steward leadership? Is this a way of operating that you see around you in the university or even in museums? Or do you think that perhaps this is a sort of emergent form of leadership practice?

Alex: I think we could find examples of this sort of practice in a lot of spaces. Whether or not it's been formalised or formulated in relation to knowledge exchange. But I do think there are a lot of similarities with things like socially engaged practice, social activism, co-curation, co-creation and also in pedagogy. When we start to interrogate this as a participatory methodology and also as a way of doing research that's interesting too. In this kind of collaborative research we can borrow from different histories and disciplines to inform our practice.

For further information:

[Doctor Alexandra Reynolds | University of Southampton](#)

[Centre for Higher Education Practice | University of Southampton](#)

Clayton Shaw, Head of STEAMhouse (Commercial), Birmingham City University

Clayton: I'm Head of STEAMhouse Commercial and so my role is about leadership and management in particular areas within STEAMhouse. There is an academic element to it. At Birmingham City University we have a whole faculty dedicated to Computing, Engineering and the Built Environment so we've got students and academics that are located here. Then we have our commercial activity: we have a programme of workshops and events for members, we've got various membership offers, innovation services and a digital technology hub. I've been at STEAMhouse since 2017 but not in this exact job role. Initially I came in as a programme manager for the ERDF funded program. Then the STEAMhouse, as we see it now, began through funding from the Arts Council as part of the Creative Local Growth Fund.

The idea behind the funding was that they wanted to have some form of influence over the way that ERDF funding was spent. So they had a pilot initiative and we were lucky to be one of a small number of projects around the country that received some funding to enable it to happen. We were also in partnership with an arts organisation called East Side Projects, which is a visual arts organisation based locally in Birmingham. So they brought the creative network with them, contributed to the programming but also were part of the overall development activity within STEAMhouse. We set up a makerspace environment with loads of high tech equipment and we had a coworking and event space. It was a pilot initiative which enabled us to test whether we could develop innovation capacity among small and medium-sized enterprises. One of the growth sectors in the West Midlands is creative and digital. So we wanted to build on the strengths that we have in the region. We were able to design what STEAMhouse looked like from the perspective of the sector, the community of people using it, and how technicians were able to support and develop their growth. We had to make it a success so that we could demonstrate that it had value and we also had outputs to achieve for our funders as well.

We were able to then demonstrate how this could be part of a much bigger, more strategic alignment with what Birmingham City University was working on. BCU is very much a university for the city. And if we can contribute to developing innovation capacity among businesses then we can become part of the infrastructure and the ecosystem. We managed to get government funding and then developed this building; it's an old bicycle tyre manufacturing factory that was in a dilapidated, burnt out state and we brought it back to life. We've got a makerspace environment, we call it the production space. We've got a studio which is a new addition for creatives. It's a bit like an incubator for the creative sector. And we've got an event space we call the Challenge Lab where we run all sorts of ideation workshops. We do things that bring people together from different sectors to look at societal issues or big sector challenges. And find solutions in a collaborative way. We have office spaces for small business units. We have this new addition called the STEAMhouse Digital Labs which is dedicated to virtual and

augmented reality and digital tech incubator for small businesses. And then we have teaching spaces, we have research units within the university, and other event spaces to enable this. There's almost like a mini ecosystem within STEAMhouse. But we also connect outwardly as well which is how we form part of the broader ecosystem.

Rebekka: Can you tell us more about STEAMhouse?

Clayton: There's a number of us that are championing the creative activities and creative sectors within STEAMhouse, but I'm involved with what we call the studio. We call it the studio but it was originally called the artist studio. We dropped the word artists because it was driving too many false connotations. We had lots of fine artists coming in saying 'well, I wanted my own studio but the studio is a collaborative studio.' We do lots of things in collaboration. So there are these units within a single studio setting where people can work on their own creative areas of work and have access to a production space or technical facilities. We'd been working on setting it up but it was a struggle to get the message out about it; to sell it. We knew that this is the sort of thing that would sell through word of mouth. At one point my colleagues went to a networking event. They were just talking about STEAMhouse but as they talked about it several businesses said that they were very interested in what we were doing and offered to sponsor an artist. We then decided that we'd put an open call application procedure out and then we had 35 applications. We selected one artist and then to the remaining ones we offered a free opportunity. So we've gone from having just one person working in that studio for a number of months to having it full over the next three months. It's a one month free trial and a few might then want to take it on. I'm really hoping that people want to carry on working in that space. I'm constantly driving to ensure that the A part of STEAM remains visible and that the artists and creatives are given an equal presence within the building.

Rebekka: That sounds amazing. And it's something that a lot of universities have aspired to achieve. Why do you think it worked in BCU?

Clayton: That's a good question. We did about 10 to 15 years of research before we even knew we were going to call anything STEAMhouse; so, it predates me. We looked at various examples around Europe, in the States and in Canada. We were trying to work out the component parts that can help develop and drive innovation practices? Universities are just very big beasts, aren't they? I think we were able to demonstrate a lot of the groundwork had already been done. We already knew what those component parts could and should look like. So we were very confident in progressing with something like this. We also have a really great champion in one of our Vice Chancellors.

Rebekka: Quite a few of the people that I've interviewed for this series have said that they've had one senior management team supporter, and just having that person who has that kind of leverage makes the difference between something happening and something not happening.

Clayton: Yes, it's that support at that level. He's been a real champion and also the Director of Research, Innovation, Enterprise and Employability has been really instrumental and is just constantly driving this agenda forward. From a strategic leadership perspective, the university's really got it nailed in terms of how we can take it forward.

Rebekka: I'd like to explore how you operate in terms of your leadership skills within your current role. Tell me how you operate as a leader?

Clayton: It's about trust. I rely on colleagues to take ownership of areas of work and I only step in if things don't go to plan. So it's a delegated style. We set what the objectives are very discursively and I try to give the responsibility to various people. I think we've got a good team so we're able to do that. There are occasions where things go a bit awry, but mostly it works. It's giving people ownership and authority over aspects of work rather than me trying to manage the breadth of it because there's just too much.

Rebekka: Would you describe that as collaborative leadership?

Clayton: More like devolved or delegated.

Rebekka: Do you think you're practising something like thought leadership? For example in relation to the philosophy of the place.

Clayton: I think thought leadership cuts across all of our areas of work, and not just within STEAMhouse, but for BCU in general. We work closely with the BCU marketing team on thought leadership pieces, so that the role of thought leadership doesn't just sit with one person.

Rebekka: Can you see other good models of leadership out there? Where are you seeing leadership thriving and working really well?

Clayton: I often refer to Pervasive Media Studios in Bristol, they've got really good relationships with both the universities down there. I think that the strategic connection and collaboration is really beneficial. They've got a studio area where small businesses create, make and develop new services and products. They've been doing it for years.

For further information:

[Welcome to STEAMhouse! The perfect place for your business to grow!](#)

[Pervasive Media Studio \(watershed.co.uk\)](http://watershed.co.uk)

Professor Katy Shaw, Professor of 21st-century writing and publishing and Director of the UKRI/AHRC Creative Communities programme – Northumbria University

Katy: I'm Katy Shaw and my current role is Professor of Writing and Publishing at Northumbria University in Newcastle in the UK. In my current role I wear several hats. As University Director of cultural partnerships I manage our relationships with a diverse local and national range of organisations like the Baltic gallery, New Writing North and the BFI, as well as developing new strategic partnerships. I oversee the operational design, delivery and evaluation of our cultural partnerships across areas like teaching and learning, research, income and impact. The partnerships play a unique role in research and in enhancing student experience. We want Northumbria students to gain the skills and networks to enter the cultural and creative industries and diversify those industries. By connecting new talent into those industries we can help play an important role in making that change happen. My other role is as Director of the AHRC Arts Humanities Research Council's Creative Communities Program. The UK wide programme is a £1.8 million investment over three years that aims to better understand the role of culture and communities in enhancing opportunity and delivering a levelling up agenda. We're interested in thinking about the way in which culture and communities can help broaden opportunity, equality and inclusivity and how culture can help unlock aligned value in skills, health and civic identity across all four nations.

Rebekka: Next, I want you to tell me about a project that you've been involved in, where we can focus on how you operate as a leader within that project.

Katy: During the first lockdown we published some research that shone a spotlight on the persistent problem of a lack of diversity in the UK publishing industry, both in terms of who gets published and the people who were involved in the publishing process. Unlike some other parts of the UK creative industries, publishing is more white, middle class and predominantly London based. We argued that this was unsustainable and created a narrow market that created risk and lacked resilience. We had a very positive response to the research in terms of policymaking and the industry, but then the pandemic hit, and everything that we said in that research came true: all of the big London headquarters for publishers shut down, and people moved back into their regions. The global publishers realised that there were lots of local stories that they hadn't previously been accessing. Many publishers decided to use lockdown to remodel their businesses and open offices outside of London. We started working with Hachette, the second biggest publisher in the world, to help them open five new offices across



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the UK. That was really interesting because it involved leading a private sector partnership and developing a brand new academic portfolio piece in our MA in Publishing. The MA is unique because it was co-designed, co-produced and is co-delivered hand in hand with Hachette and New Writing North as industry partners. Hachette had expressed a concern that graduates from MA programmes were arriving on their recruitment schemes with a lot of knowledge about publishing history, but little understanding of how the contemporary publishing world operates. To address this, we worked together to design a new MA that gets graduates ready for the industry as it is today and is much more business focused and tech focused. Hachette have since opened offices on campus in Northumbria and recruited more staff to their regional offices, as have New Writing North. By literally working alongside each other we are able to change the direction of travel in the skills pipeline and in R&D. Importantly, we can also create new role models and different jobs in the industry, and make publishing more visible and realisable as a profession for those outside the capital.

Another element of that research was about the underrepresentation of working class writers in British publishing. Again, this was a challenge that necessitated a cross-sector response. During the first lockdown I convened a new partnership between Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Mirror Group, the New Statesman, New Writing North and the actor Michael Sheen, who has a foundation and is interested in creative diversity. We co-designed a new intervention to address the challenge called “A Writing Chance”; a year-long industry-focussed writing development programme for working class writers that created a nation-wide competition for entry and went on to produce an award winning BBC Sounds podcast series. This is a key characteristic of my way of working: bringing unlikely allies together around a shared challenge or opportunity to lever more than we ever could operating alone.

Rebekka: In terms of these two projects, what type of leadership role did you take on?

Katy: The power to convene and catalyse. I often use the analogy of a journey with partnerships. Let’s say a car pulls up and you get in. You know you’re going somewhere amazing, and it’s somewhere you want to go. You’ve still got to trust that person driving the car and have some evidence that they are going to actually take you to that destination, and that it’ll be okay when you get there. Trust is the foundation of effective leadership in partnership working. Especially with disparate groups, as soon as you identify a common challenge, and they trust that you’ve got a history of leading tricky projects and delivering cross-sector

projects, then you're basically being trusted to bring all these superheroes around a table and manage their expectations, requirements and visions. This is why I often say my job is a translator: in partnership working you become hyper aware of how many industries speak in acronyms and operate using systems that do not align. So quite often you spend a lot of time translating across these sectors and untying knots of understanding. It can be messy work, because authentic co-creation is messy. I'm a leader who isn't frightened by the messiness of it and can be flexible. But I guess that ability to work beyond academia is quite vital to that kind of leadership.

Rebekka: We talk about both collaborative leadership, and thought leadership in knowledge exchange. Do you think either of those two terms fit you or fit any of the people you've been working with? Are they terms that you might feel comfortable with, or use?

Katy: I think it's interesting because I've had both terms applied to me by others. My TED talk was cited as an example of thought leadership. But it's also interesting for me as an academic that people are seeing thought leadership coming from things like TED talks, rather than from monographs or journal articles. And in terms of collaborative leadership, yes, I've had that applied to me too but my response to that, is always, what other kind of leadership is there? Because who wants a top down hierarchical leadership? The best leadership is collaborative by nature and convening in practice. The old stereotype of academia as a lone scholar in an ivory tower has never been how I've operated. For our generation of academics, that was never who we were in the first place.

Rebekka: But, there is still some of that autocratic top down leadership in universities. And I wonder if this is the case in publishing too? In that space as a naturally collaborative leader, are you coming up against more alien forms of leadership?

Katy: Yes, definitely. And I think that I think there's a gender aspect to it, even though people don't really like to talk about it. I think that collaborative leadership gets recognised and rewarded far less than that performative, singular leadership. And I think there's no coincidence that you don't see as many female VCs and DVCs because I think we do lead more collaboratively, and we don't always need to take credit for stuff we actually get done. The CEO of one of our partner businesses said "You're like Mary Poppins at the end of the movie: you get the job done then just quietly back out the door when you see that everything's been achieved." And that's a beautiful thing. But that does not happen with a hierarchical leader – someone who is all about me, I am the centre, I am the product, I am the vision. I have experienced that model, it's a toxic context to operate in and does not develop new talent. That model of leadership is also very threatened by collaborative leadership models and will try to dismiss collaborative leadership in terms of its value, and also things like promotion. Professional reward structures don't always recognise collaborative working either. And this is a big bugbear of mine, and I'm pleased that the REF is shifting in terms of this because a lot of promotion and REF was all about the single researcher: what was your output? What was your contribution? There's much less value given to the researcher who leads a team, who silently edits a journal that helps others publish, or convenes learned societies that bring people together. The people who are the culture makers and maintainers are often the silent partners in this piece: they are doing that very, very gentle, strategic, important leadership piece. But the

best leaders are often light touch leaders, not hands off, but sensitive. It's almost like sleight of hand that people just know they're in charge. And they empower the people around them. I would hope that's the kind of leader I am. It's the convening and catalysing effect, rather than necessarily being the name on the output or leading the press release at the end.

Rebekka: But before that, it's opportunity spotting, isn't it? And then there's something about risk appetite and trust. And trust is the difficult bit in partnership building, isn't it?

Katy: It is, but you need a really good VC and university executive team that share a vision for innovation. I've been really lucky -and that's a trust thing too, which is a credit I have built up over time through successful delivery of projects that might otherwise look high risk on paper. For "Writing Chance" I spoke to our DVC initially and told him we'd got the Daily Mirror and the New Statesman and Joseph Rowntree, Michael Sheen and New Writing North on board, and we want to do this national project, and we need your support. We're doing a national talent hunt, and then we're going to have a podcast series on BBC and then we're going to produce some policy that's going to be aimed directly at the government. And for anybody at that level in the university the alarm bells for cost, risk, and remit would be going off all over the place. And we went through all the required thinking but ultimately he and the exec trusted me, and knew I'd delivered on this kind of stuff before and the intervention fits with Northumbria's strategy about equality and diversity, especially on social class and inclusion. So it's about how risk averse your organisation is and how experienced your leaders are in cross-sector collaboration.

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[Full article: A Writing Chance: adjusting the lens on social class and diversity in the UK publishing industry \(tandfonline.com\)](#)

[NWN-Young-Writers-Impact-Report-2019-20.pdf \(newwritingnorth.com\)](#)

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Professor Jennie Shorley, Head of Engaged Scholarship, Head of Accreditations, Impact Lead – Manchester Metropolitan University

Jennie: I work at Manchester Metropolitan University Business School where I'm Head of Engaged Scholarship, Impact and Accreditations so it's an academic role with lots of different parts. I lead our Business School's triple accreditation, I coordinate our impact case studies, write our impact strategy and then the engaged scholarship is a little bit more esoteric. I'm currently PI on an innovative project called the Centre for Digital Innovation and I also teach enterprise. I have a weird portfolio but I'm slowly understanding that it's all brought together by engagement. Engagement with the outside world is a key part of what I do.

Rebekka: That's really interesting, so you have a sort of 50:50 academic-professional services role then?

Jennie: My role is academic, but my leadership is also split. On one side there are professional services people involved but the Innovate Project, for example, is academic leadership. We always need to bring in business school research from the start and work out where it's going in terms of general direction. So it is an academic role in that sense, but it's not your standard research and teaching at all. I'm an odd one out, I'm in a faculty executive group but I also sit in a department for my research and teaching.

Rebekka: How does the leadership side work? Is it matrix leadership?

Jennie: Yeah, quite a lot of it's matrix leadership. For accreditation, it's very matrix leadership. For the Centre for Digital Innovation I've got an academic team.

Rebekka: Can you describe a project, or even a couple of projects, where you're leading it? J

Jennie: The innovation project is a four million pound project and is led by a consortium of us, the University of Manchester, University of Salford and Lancaster University. We're working with small firms, which are very well versed in doing a kind of challenge. It's around using new technologies; it's AI cybersecurity, 3D printing. We will work out what we can do with them, how we can create research with them or other opportunities. And then they'll have a kind of targeted intervention to develop a particular product or service and, and then they'll exit off the program. We hope to do Knowledge Transfer Partnership placements and PhDs. We have a project manager who is excellent and on top of it, so my job is to steer the project in a few different ways. One is with the academic staff from the business school. As this is a collaborative project, and because the direct interventions are from arts or science and engineering, there is a chance that the project could end up just being about science and engineering. So part of my leadership is to ensure that business school concerns and research are uppermost. So, we will work with these businesses on the technical challenges but also on

things like changing business models, organisational behaviour, entrepreneurship, that type of thing as well. And my job is to bring that in, which is an internal leadership role.

The external leadership role is to represent the project in the region: to the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, our stakeholders and to our other partner universities, and, very crucially, nationally. I'm on the board of an organisation called Praxis Auril which is a knowledge exchange organisation for the UK. But that gives me a really useful insight into policy and other key representative organisations. My external leadership is around promoting, evaluating and working out where we fit and also finding further funding opportunities. So it's less hands-on management and pushing the businesses through and more about where it sits in the overall picture.

Rebekka: What kind of leadership practice do you think you have? Would you say that you have a particular type of leadership in KE work or that someone might need a particular type of leadership?

Jennie: It's an interesting question. I think I'm quite female.

Rebekka: What does that mean?

Jennie: Collaborative. I find it uncomfortable to talk about me leading stuff. I have had experience with many leaders who are worried about how good they are at leadership. So they try to suppress the really good people underneath them; they don't let them shine. But actually that isn't a good thing to do morally plus it doesn't actually work. Actually, if the people underneath you are brilliant, that reflects incredibly well on you as a leader. So I would say that I try to give people the opportunity to be able to do stuff and to be visible. For example giving them the opportunity to write thought pieces and thinking about people's personal development and career development. I think in knowledge exchange you can do that if you're lucky enough to have support.

Rebekka: How do you think leadership works in a space that's a mix of academics, professional services and external partners? I mean, how do you do leadership in that space?

Jennie: One part of it is entrepreneurial leadership which I think is important in every aspect of knowledge exchange. Knowledge exchange is something different, there's so much persuasion and negotiation involved. Some parts of the university are quite risk averse, but you need them on your project. It's persuasion and negotiation and bringing people around to your point of view and showing them the value proposition and the benefits of what you're doing. If you're working with external partners, leadership is about working in a bit more of a business friendly way. And by that I mean working to tight deadlines, timing in general, communication being really important, and trying wherever you can to get rid of the silos situation.

For example, we had a stakeholder meeting and a brilliant business alumni said, "I don't want a Business School. I want a School of Business and Digital Technology. That's what I need. I don't care about your departments. I don't care about your faculty. This does not matter to me, I just know what I need". So I think leadership in working with external partners is about understanding that and wherever you can, leading the internal partners in a way to not show that wiring.

Rebekka: It sounds like an act of translation. Do you see it like that?

Jennie: Yes, but I worry a bit about the term translation. It sounds like we're talking completely different languages. But I don't necessarily think it's true that we're coming from completely different cultures. It's really interesting that universities think that the reason that businesses aren't working with us is because we speak different languages. But that's so far down on a business's list of why they're not working with us. For them, the top reason they're not working with us is because of their own resources to be able to find the right people and do it. Translation is definitely a part of it, but I don't think it is the whole story.

Rebekka: Yes, but the way that you described it, it was more like translating it for the academic audience rather than for the business audience.

Jennie: There's an element of that but there's also just really good communication. Making everybody feel quite comfortable and welcomed in that environment is more important.

Rebekka: You mentioned something about risk appetite. Where does that come into play?

Jennie: That's a massive, massive thing. Like I said, by definition, knowledge exchange is something new and something different and hopefully something innovative. And so there is always a risk associated with it. And that could be financial, legal and it could be reputational. Risk acceptance is massively important and not always acknowledged.

Rebekka: What kind of skills do you think you need to do that kind of work?

Jennie: I think that relationship development skills need to be there and also you need to be good at securing funding and writing bids. And, to do that, you need a vision. Then there's relationship development and a project management element to it. And academic skills in terms of understanding research. And negotiation and persuasion are really important skills particularly around pivoting and managing the team.

I'm good at opportunity spotting. I find it difficult sitting here describing my skills to you. It feels so much more amorphous because it is. But actually, if we can work on publicising the new skills, knowledge and behaviours about knowledge exchange it'll become less exclusive. Then, some people who are already doing it might recognise it. We're aiming to professionalise knowledge exchange and give it more of a standing within a university.

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