

Institution: Nottingham Trent University
Unit of Assessment: C19 Business and Management Studies
Title of case study: Decent Homes: evaluation and information
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Organisations in the social housing sector have a model of how to use information to monitor the outcomes of their activities. Drawing on research which places information in its organisational context, the mechanism of Knowledge Transfer Partnerships has been used to enable Nottingham City Homes to pioneer the evaluation of its activities focusing on a major investment programme called Decent Homes. Cited in Parliamentary debates, not only has the impact shifted the strategic direction of the organisation's activities, but also it has been adopted as a model of best practice for the sector.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Over the past 15 years Mutch has researched the nature and use of information, in particular the identification of contextual factors associated with organisations that can limit the effectiveness of information for managerial decision-making. Drawing on previous commercial experience prior to taking up an academic appointment, Mutch was aware that organisations often made only limited use of the information they generated, particularly that derived from large IT systems. His early research base drew on research in library sciences exploring the competences required to enable users to access information.</p> <p>These ideas were then explored through empirical research carried out at the retail leisure company Whitbread in 1999-2001 as part of an ESRC small award where Mutch was the Principal Investigator. Based on interviews with and observation of public house managers, the research analysed how information was captured and the resulting information flows and uses. The findings marked a shift away from considering effective information use as dependent on staff competences and focused instead on contextual factors - such as culture/history and structural characteristics of the organisations.</p> <p>The theoretical basis of this research was then developed further through engagement with ideas and concepts drawn from <i>critical realism</i>. This helped establish a balance between the facilitating role of information technology and the stress on the creative interpretation of information by people within a social context.</p> <p>Opportunities to explore and test the resulting theoretical developments followed through Mutch's close involvement (as Principal Investigator) in two successive Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) projects, that offered opportunities for practitioner engagement to generate empirical data through the use of action research. The first was with a local business consultancy firm Cooper Parry (2008-10) carried out in collaboration with Tansley who provided expertise in human resource management, the second was carried out with Valero-Silva (also a human resource management specialist) for Nottingham City Homes (2010-12) as part of an evaluation of the implementation of the latter's Secure Warm Modern programme which was itself part the government's Decent Homes social housing refurbishment initiative.</p> <p>The findings of these projects again highlighted the importance of organisational context, including governance issues such as the absence of responsibility, in determining the effective use of information. However the first study also noted that relatively minor changes in form and procedures could have a big impact on the value of information in terms of managerial decision-making. A recurring theme to emerge in the second study at Nottingham City Homes was that there was much value in direct and in-depth information gathering from users (i.e. tenants) to complement and enhance quantitative data. In particular it provided a detailed insight into the more subtle changes resulting from the Secure Warm Modern programme. Hence information about people and communities, rather than merely on properties, was found to be valuable when it came to reviewing the way that housing investment programmes are planned and prioritised. An additional finding was that the reluctance of staff to share information externally meant that the desired social outcomes were not being achieved. The research continues with the results being shared through publications such as Jones, Mutch and Valero-Silva (2013).</p>

Impact case study (REF3b)

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- Mutch, A. 'Information literacy: an exploration', *International Journal of Information Management*, 17(5), 1997, pp.377-386. (Journal ranked as 2* in the 2010 ABS list)
- Mutch, A. 'Critical Realism, managers and information', *British Journal of Management*, 10, 1999, 323-333. (Journal ranked as 4* in the 2010 ABS list)
- Mutch, A. 'Communities of practice and habitus: a critique', *Organization Studies*, 24(3), 2003, 383-401. (Journal ranked as 4* in the 2010 ABS list)
- Mutch, A. *Managing Information and Knowledge in Organizations*, New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Mutch, A. 'Organizational Use of Information and Communication Technology and its Impact on Reflexivity' in Archer, M. (ed) *Conversations about Reflexivity*, London: Routledge, 2010.
- Jones, A, Mutch, A. and Valero-Silva, N. 'Information audit at Nottingham City Homes', *International Journal of Information Management*, 2013. (Journal ranked as 2* in the 2010 ABS list)

Further evidence of the quality of the underpinning research is provided by Mutch's research council grant entitled: *Managerial information use and the value of information literacy* (award R000222881); sponsor: Economic and Social Research Council; duration: 1 Sept 1999 – 29 February 2000; value: £3,499; (note:End of Grant Report categorised as 'good'), and the two Technology Strategy Board sponsored Knowledge Transfer Partnerships awarded to Mutch and Tansley: KTP06255: *CooperParry* (2008-10); value: £120,000; and Mutch and Valero-Silva: KTP007719: *Nottingham City Homes* (2010-12); value: 127,260; both of which were judged as 'very good' by peer reviewers.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Nottingham City Homes took immediate and longer term benefit from the most recent application of Mutch's research. Nottingham City Homes recorded enduring impact in the form of improved working practices (i.e. greatly improved data gathering procedures) and new roles and responsibilities for staff leading to more effective management of resources and improved service delivery, through improved use of information within the organisation.

Following recommendations from the research team, Nottingham City Homes now has a much improved evidence base regarding the impact of its work, especially as it now considers wider social impacts than before. This has led to changes to the Secure Warm Modern programme in the form of the re-allocation of resources. For example, in a change to what was originally planned Nottingham City Homes prioritised implementation of the security part of the Secure Warm Modern programme, involving the fitting of secure doors as well as windows, over the modernisation part which involved fitting new kitchens, because research findings by Mutch and his team provided an evidence base that demonstrated the increased social returns that resulted from so doing. As a result Nottingham City Homes' tenants and the local community gained improved security, health and comfort, and tenants have experienced an improvement in the quality of service.

Nottingham City Homes' ability to demonstrate improved social outcomes by virtue of the greatly improved evidence base it now had its disposal, was also an important factor in the organisation securing the highest level of funding outside London when budgets for the Decent Homes programme were revised in 2012.

Improvements in sharing information with external agencies also resulted in further impact within Nottingham. Locally, the Crime Reduction Partnership benefited from closer working relationships, with Nottingham City Homes enabling them to target the use of police resources and other public services more effectively. What is more, this has acted as a local model for other agencies. For example as a result of the successful outcome of the Knowledge Transfer Partnership, Nottingham City Homes has become a full member of the Strategic Health Board for Nottingham, rekindling a link between housing and health which had become neglected and acting as a model of partnership working that has been adopted in other areas.

Industry recognition

Wider impact has been experienced through the influence of the application of Mutch and Valero-Silva's findings to Nottingham City Homes' Secure Warm Modern programme on national best practice. This has come about via two routes. Firstly through the Home and Communities Agency, the national body that regulates, funds and oversees social housing, and secondly through the auspices of Parliament. In terms of the latter, the MP for Nottingham South, Lilian Greenwood, has been highly supportive of the Nottingham City Homes project and this was reflected in a Parliamentary debate in 2012, when the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Andrew Stunell, stated: "The hon. Lady referred to the study, undertaken by Nottingham City Homes with Nottingham Trent University, of the wider impact of Decent Homes. That study has made a very useful contribution to our knowledge, and ought to be required reading for those who doubt the importance of investing in our social housing stock" (see sources to corroborate 7). In terms of the former, Nottingham City Homes has come to be seen as a frontrunner in the evaluation of major refurbishment programmes like the Secure Warm Modern programme thus impacting on the broader social housing movement in England. This is reflected in the Homes and Communities Agency, adopting the approach taken by Mutch and colleagues as a model of best practice.

Further impact that is both local and national has arisen through another member of the Nottingham City Homes Knowledge Transfer Partnership team, Alice Jones who was the Knowledge Transfer Partnership Associate. She has established a consultancy advising other local authorities about refurbishment programmes for social housing. Utilising the findings from the Knowledge Transfer Partnership project her firm continues to spread best practice in relation to information gathering and programme evaluation.

Another indication of the wider impact of this work is the contribution that it made to Nottingham City Homes winning 'Sustainable Landlord of the Year' at the prestigious UK Housing Awards in May 2013. The "ground-breaking research to show the economic, social, health and environmental impact" (see sources to corroborate 4), to cite the award, was a key part of the case that Nottingham City Homes was able to make and thus pointed the way to others in the sector.

The publication of the results of the project in a variety of trade journals aimed at professionals in the areas of housing, information and energy management, disseminated an approach which combined some practical tools, such as information audit, with sensitivity to the organisational context. Research drawing on some rather abstract concepts was thus translated into effective guidance for practice.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. Final and detailed reports on aspects of Nottingham City Homes KTP at http://www.nottinghamcityhomes.org.uk/improving_your_home/impact_study/default.aspx. [Details of impact at local level, particularly on shift in investment following initial phase of project].
2. Nottingham City Homes, Director of Property Services. [Use of information to change strategic investment decisions; embedding of evaluation in Nottingham City Homes practice; position of Nottingham City Homes as model of best practice and consequences for funding flows].
3. Alice Jones Consulting, Principal. [Provision of and demand for the model of outcomes evaluation in the housing sector as confirmation of impact within the sector].
4. Member of Parliament, Nottingham South. [Confirmation of impact at the level of national policy].
5. Homes and Community Agency, Area Manager.

Impact case study (REF3b)

[Confirmation of interest of Home and Communities Agency, the executive agency with responsibility for oversight of the sector on behalf of the UK government, in using the example of Nottingham City Homes as an illustration of best practice].

6. Jones, A., Mutch, A., Valero-Silva, N. (2011) Exploring information flows at Nottingham City Homes, *Managing Information*, Vol. 18 (9): 42-45.
[Magazine of the Association of Special Libraries and Information Bureaux (ASLIB) circulated to information professionals, hence showing impact on group of practitioners].
7. Hansard, 26 June 2012 at
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmhansrd/cm120626/debtext/120626-0004.htm>
[Impact on national debates and endorsement by junior minister of quality of research].
8. Jones, A., 'Measuring the impact of Secure, Warm, Modern homes in Nottingham', *Energy Action*, (quarterly journal of National Energy Action), 115, July 2012, 20-21.
[Impact on debates amongst practitioners].
9. UK Housing Awards 2013, Sustainable landlord of the year: Winner Nottingham City Homes: Creating secure, warm, modern homes, directly citing Nottingham Trent University and the collaborative research as a key factor:
<http://www.cih.org/resources/PDF/UKHA%202013/Sust%20NottinghamCH.pdf>
[Peer recognition of impact by housing professionals].