



## **ENQUIRY VISITS:**

### **BRINGING INNOVATION AND CHANGE BACK HOME THROUGH KNOWLEDGE SHARING**

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#### **Aims of this paper and questions for Consortium Steering Group members**

The aim of this paper is to facilitate Consortium input into the process of planning the Enquiry Visits agreed as part of the Centre for Policing Research and Learning's PKF funding.

On reading this paper, Consortium representatives are asked to consider the following questions in preparation for a discussion at the next Consortium meeting on Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> April, 2016. You may find it useful to talk to colleagues in order to bring ideas to the Consortium meeting.

1. What areas of good practice or innovation would your police force be interested in learning more about?
2. Are there any changes you are considering to your organization's practices for which you would benefit from the expertise of another organization? What are these areas of change or innovation?
3. What organizations or types of organization do you have in mind to visit and to learn from?
4. If you were to host an enquiry visit, what areas of good practice, expertise or innovation could you offer to other forces to learn from?

#### **Context and purpose**

The Centre for Policing Research and Learning at The Open University is committed, through its Police Knowledge Fund grant, to six enquiry visits.

This document sets out the purposes and approach of enquiry visits, so that the Consortium can start planning and undertaking these.

Enquiry visits have been used in local government and in the prison service in various ways. Peer review is used in a range of organizations to help improvements

through external challenge. Enquiry visits are particularly focused on what the visitor organization learns and uses.

Enquiry visits are designed to create and share knowledge about evidence-based practice by bringing together two types of policing practitioner along with academics. Each visit would involve practitioners who have pioneered or who work with an interesting or exemplary practice on a particular policing issues along with practitioners who wish to adopt or adapt that practice in their own organization. The academics engage in the visit by challenging the visit to be questioning and to draw out key learning.

### **How enquiry visits work and what benefits they create**

A lead academic, with advice from partners, sets up and orchestrates each enquiry visit.

The enquiry visits, lasting in most cases one day, may be to other police organizations, or they may be to organizations in other parts of the public service, or in the private or voluntary sectors.

The exemplary or interesting practice may occur at one or both of two levels:

- The practice itself (e.g. a new way of tackling wellbeing in the workplace; an improved custody procedure)
- How the organizational change or innovation was implemented (e.g. mobilising support, dealing with opposition, overcoming early mistakes)

A visit (rather than a talk or a presentation) can be valuable to both host and visitor.

- For the host, research shows that receiving visitors who ask questions can help the host organization to articulate and reflect on what is distinctive and useful to other organizations about what they are doing (Hartley and Rashman, 2007). Visitors create a mirror for the organization, enabling it to see itself more clearly (Nicolini et al, 2011). This might be particularly valuable to any change champions or evidence-based champions in the host organization.
- For the visitor, having a close-up view of the innovation or high quality improvement and being able to talk to pioneers or implementers can produce useful ideas and experiences to take home. A visit enables the acquiring of tacit knowledge – knowledge which can be hard to articulate but which is highly valuable if change is to be successful (Nonaka, 1995; Hartley and Rashman, 2007). Sharing experiences, seeing operations in practice and hearing about the highs and lows of bringing about the change can help visitors to plan their own improvements with a greater realism of the barriers to be overcome and the opportunities to be realised. Again, this may be of particular interest to change champions or evidence-based champions. Enhancing skills in bringing about change is a valuable part of enquiry visits.

## **Change and innovation through enquiry visits**

An enquiry visit aims to not only collect but also use new ideas in the home organization so attention to “re-entry” is also important. Research tells us that using exemplary practice from elsewhere is only rarely “copy and paste” but is more likely to involve adaptation to local circumstances (local culture, local communities, local resourcing; local other procedures which may be disrupted with the new idea) (Hartley and Benington, 2006). So, thinking about “adapt not adopt” is often important. The academics will work with the visitors as they work out what is feasible to introduce in their own organization and what needs adapting and how. This will take place after the enquiry visit itself.

Enquiry visits may be concerned with:

- Learning how to *improve* existing policies, practices or procedures (Example: Calderdale Council visited Blackburn with Darwen Council when it wanted to learn how to improve its schools)
- Learning how to *innovate* in policies, practices or procedures (Example: Doctors at Great Ormond St Hospital visited Formula One racing to adapt concepts in the racing car pit-stop to the transfer of patients from the operating theatre to intensive care).

So, the host organization may be similar or quite dissimilar in its sector or work. The key issue is how can learning be taken and applied from that host organization.

## **A framework of knowledge creation and transfer in organizational settings**

Research with all English local government over a decade has summarised how learning and knowledge about exemplary or innovative practices are shared. This is explained in a framework (Hartley and Rashman, 2007; Rashman et al, 2009), and a diagram of this is shown in Appendix 3. There are three key elements:

1. The qualities of the host organization which enable it to recognise, articulate and share its exemplary or innovative practice
2. The qualities of the visitor organization which enable it to recognise, adapt and use knowledge from a different context and organization
3. The enabling processes of trust, respect for diversity and challenge which enable the organizations to share ideas and knowledge (including tacit knowledge)

These are embedded in a policy context of the Consortium which encourages sharing and learning between Consortium partners.

## **Appreciative but challenging enquiry**

In these days of rigorous inspections accompanied by media scrutiny, it can be easy for public servants to fall into the trap of thinking that any visit must uncover problems and difficulties for the host organization and that it is not really as good as it claims to be. This may or may not be true. However, if the visitor organization is

to maximise learning and ideas to take back home, a different approach will be helpful.

This is an approach based on “appreciative enquiry”. Instead of being based on a deficiency model of organizations (what is the problem, what is the gap, where are things going wrong), appreciative enquiry is based on asking questions about what is working well (what is working well here, what enabled this to happen, why is this successful here, what did this person add to make this work, etc). (Cooperrider et al, 2008; Lewis et al, 2008), It directs attention to what can be achieved, and it is valuable in situations where knowledge will be adapted from one situation to another.

Appreciative enquiry does not avoid asking difficult questions but it starts with the assumption of learning about novel situations. Team preparation will include practicing appreciative enquiry skills. These are valuable skills for any change agent, whether engaged in an enquiry visit or not.

## **STEPS TO UNDERTAKE ENQUIRY VISITS**

### **Phase 1: Preparation**

#### ***Step 1: Identify relevant organizations willing to be host organizations***

Are there Consortium police organizations which are willing to act as hosts for a day-long visit from other police organizations? They will have exemplary or innovative practice in a particular area of policing or the management of police organizations. It will require thinking through what visitors might want to learn, ensuring the right experts are available in their organization, but they will gain from the experience of having visitors on their patch for a day who are asking appreciative and challenging questions. Research shows that hosts learn at least as much as visitors from enquiry visits (Hartley and Rashman, 2007).

Are there other police organizations which the Consortium would like to visit because they have strong or emerging reputations in relation to a particular practice? The host does not need to be a member of the Consortium.

Are there other public organizations which have strong or emerging practices on a theme or topic of interest to the Consortium. For example, is there a local authority which has pioneered relevant approaches to child sexual exploitation, or which is seen as highly competent in OD? What about visiting the Royal Free hospital to see its approach to “best possible value” in healthcare?

Are there private or voluntary sector organizations where pioneering new practices could lead to innovations within policing. For example, what about looking at EasyJet’s approach to staff wellbeing? Or Google’s approach to learning from social media?

A list of suggestions from an earlier Consortium workshop is given in Appendix 3.

### ***Step 2: Identify the visiting team***

A visiting team might be as small as six people or up to 20 people. (Larger might be possible with extra planning.) The visitors are drawn from Consortium partners and the OU. The police visitors should have expertise in the area in question; and of sufficient stature in their organization to be able to bring about some degree of change in their own organization (e.g. in a team, in a section, in a whole organization). Change champions or evidence-based champions might find an enquiry visit valuable. One or two academics with an interest in the focus of the particular enquiry visit will join the team.

Research shows that it helps change back home where there are at least two people from the same organization as visitors.

### ***Step 3: Visitors identify the questions they wish to explore on the visit***

This work is done in preparation for the visit. It may involve some initial research in one's own organization (how do we tackle this issue at the moment, what are the gaps in our knowledge or understanding; what do we want to find out from the visit; who are the key stakeholders for this issue in my own organization and what do they want me to find out). The lead academic will prompt potentially relevant questions.

Ideally, the team of visitors will meet for half a day prior to the visit to review relevant questions and explore approach (learn more about appreciative enquiry). We recognise that time may be a problem and can look for alternative ways to achieve this if time pressures are problematic, but would emphasise the value of meeting prior to the visit.

The team will also consider how best to note its experiences – both what has been found in the host organization, but also what ideas or reflections it sparks off about the home organization.

### ***Step 4: The host organization prepares its day event***

This should be as practical as possible – not “death by powerpoint”. Opportunities for the visitors to see practical arrangements, to visit localities (if relevant), to talk with a variety of stakeholders; to examine documentation. Each of these may help with understanding the progress as well as outcomes of the enquiry focus. Opportunities for informal discussion and one-to-one talking between host and visitor can be encouraged. The lead academic will help the host organization to set out its plan for the day to share its learning with the visitors.

### ***Phase 2: The enquiry visit***

#### ***Step 5: The enquiry visit***

This is likely to be a single day. This brings together the visitors and the hosts to explore, talk about and see the organizational or policing practices at the heart of the enquiry visit.

### **Phase 3: Debriefing and learning**

#### ***Step 6: Visitors “meet” to reflect on their experience of the enquiry visit***

This should take place within a couple of weeks while ideas are still fresh for the visitors. Ideally, this will be a change and innovation workshop, at which the visitors will both reflect on their experiences and what they learnt from the enquiry visit, using “surprise and sense-making” (Louis, 1980) to understand the similarities and differences between their own organization and the one visited. Being aware of underlying similarities as well as surface differences will enhance the ability to adapt ideas to a new context. The team will reflect on ideas and practices which they think will be beneficial for their own organization and they will develop initial plans about how such change or innovation may be taken forward.

Where there are at least two people from the same organization, this will help the learning and enactment processes back in the home organization.

#### ***Step 7: Review of progress towards the enactment of change***

Each visitor will be asked by the lead academic to take stock of what they have been able to achieve in a certain period after the visit (e.g. six weeks?). A shared website space will be set up (in the member part of the Centre website or equivalent) for all the visitors to access and share ideas about steps they are taking to bring about change, or opportunities and barriers they experience in doing this. In this way the visit fosters learning and action not only about the focal practice, but also about ways to mobilise and sustain change.

#### ***Step 8: Capturing learning and change in a short report (optional)***

The lead academic, (along with other volunteers from the hosts and the visitors if they wish), will write a short report on the enquiry visit if acceptable to all concerned, drawing out key themes on the exemplary or promising practice and what has been learnt about adopting and adapting this practice for other settings. A version naming the organizations will be given to Consortium members for private use. If a public document was desired, the organizations can be anonymised. In this way, learning can be spread more widely.

## References

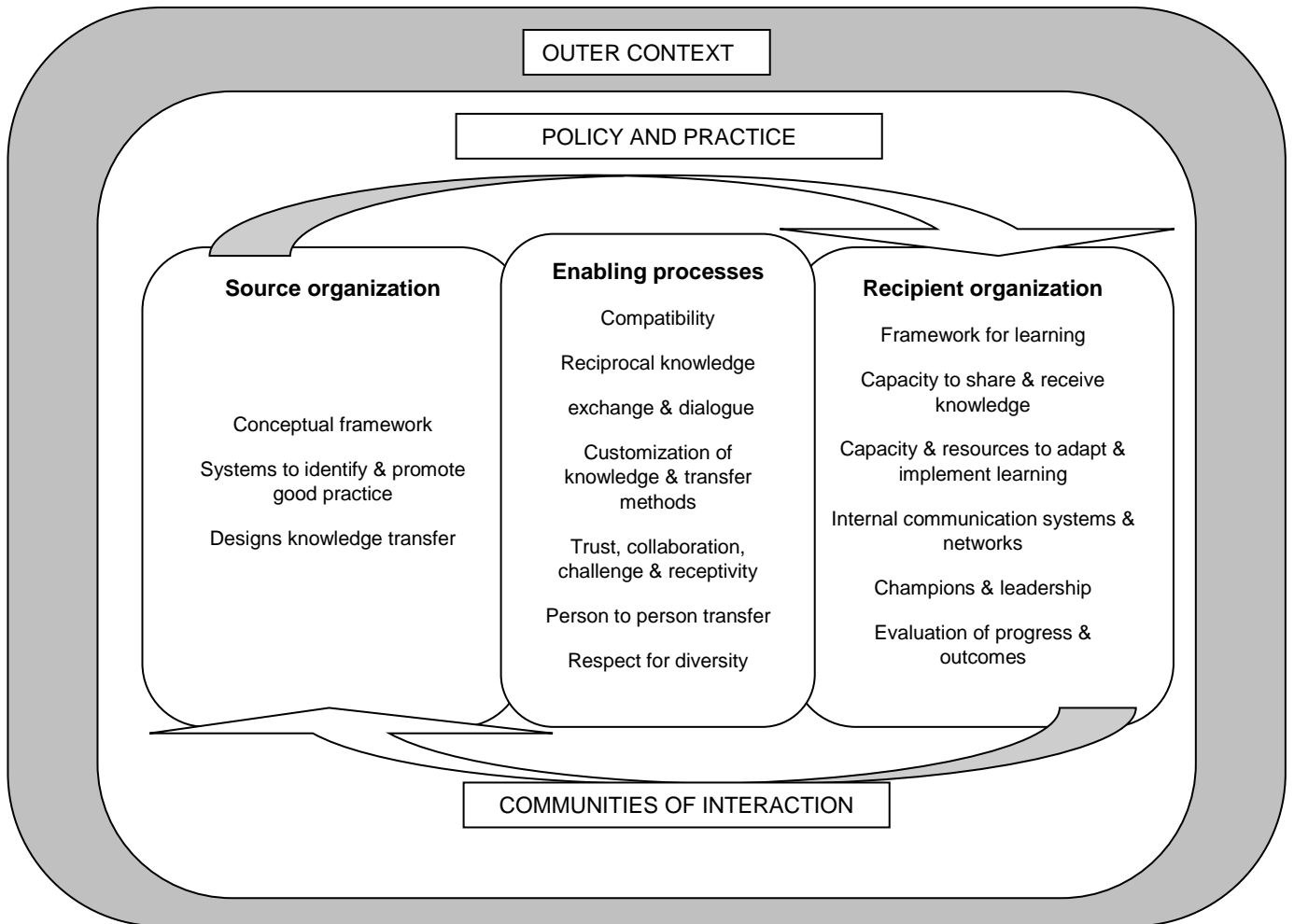
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## APPENDIX 1: EXTRACT FROM THE POLICE KNOWLEDGE FUND GRANT APPLICATION

**Enquiry visits** Enquiry visits have been pioneered in local government and the prison service (Hartley, 2010) and “sharing promising practice” visits have been evaluated in a national inter-organisational learning scheme in local public services (Hartley and Rashman, 2007) and they have been found to be productive in embedding change and innovation. The Centre will arrange enquiry visits between police forces or other organisations where there are exemplary or promising practices relevant to key strategic issues of national interest. For example, an enquiry visit on promising or innovative approaches to child sexual exploitation or domestic violence would provide an opportunity to explore both the innovation and how it was embedded in the organization, with sharing of ideas about how to adopt or adapt the idea to fit the visitor’s organization. Enquiry visits are carefully prepared to ensure that visitors (police and academics together) have undertaken preparation and have clear questions for the visit. It uses a model of inter-organisational learning and impact developed from research by Hartley and Rashman (2007). The visitors act as appreciative enquirers in the host organisation, and draw out both the successes and the difficulties experienced in creating and embedding change. The debriefing is also an important part of the enquiry visit, where the home visitors spend time reflecting on what has been learnt, what can be adopted but also importantly what has to be adapted for a different context and culture. This is an important part of the approach because visitors can become discouraged about what they can achieve, but visiting with others helps to maintain confidence and motivation to achieve change. The hosts also tend to find the visit useful in helping them to articulate and explore the “theory of change” they may implicitly have been working with. There will be electronic or phone follow-up by the OU organiser six weeks after the visit to help embed learning and reinforce commitments to action post-visit. A report on themes and processes of enquiry visits as a means to mobilise change will be written in an accessible style.



APPENDIX 2: A FRAMEWORK FOR KNOWLEDGE CREATION AND TRANSFER  
 (adapted from Hartley and Rashman, 2007)



## APPENDIX 3:

### SUGGESTED ORGANIZATIONS AND TOPICS FOR ENQUIRY VISITS: CONSORTIUM WORKSHOP September 2015 (NB: early days of Centre)

Fit with research e.g. who uses social media well

Policing policy and strategy priorities e.g. look a migration

Hard to find examples

Look outside policing e.g. Google, Microsoft, LAS

National or international - NZP & VicPol

Child sexual exploitation e.g. UN in Montenegro, USA

Home office – visit them

UNESCO Paris

Telecoms organisations

Other universities

Military organisations and GCHQ and RUSI

Big data and policing informatics

Cloud computing

Barnardos

Doing more for less

Human trafficking

Vodafone (how use estates)

Behavioural insights team (info for leads)

LGA

Influential parts of private sectors

CSE, vulnerability, demand, efficiencies/costs