



International Research Society
for Public Management

CO-PRODUCING AN
EVIDENCE-BASED
TOOLKIT FOR FINANCIAL
RESILIENCE:
TRANSLATING IDEAS
ACROSS PRACTITIONER
AND ACADEMIC
COMMUNITIES

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INTRODUCTION

- **Academic-practitioner gap**

“research published in the leading [PA] journals has become further and further removed from the actual problems practising administrators and managers are obliged to deal with every day” (Pollitt, 2017, p. 555)

- **How to bridge the gap?**

- Scholars have emphasised the need to engage in “co-production” among researchers and practitioners.
- the literature on co-production of knowledge in public administration tends to prioritise the involvement of practitioners in *all steps of the research cycle*
- Co-production, however, can be applied to different stages of research - i.e., *the co-dissemination of results:*

“translation of the [research] results into comprehensible and usable information for the different stakeholders” (Mauser et al., 2013, p. 428).



RESEARCH QUESTION

The paper analyses the **translation** and exchange **of ideas** between academics and practitioners, focusing on the **co-dissemination of results** based on the co-production of an evidence-based toolkit for local governments.



THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

- “Ideas left in books left on shelves do not travel” (Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996, p. 23).
- To turn (academic) ideas into action, i.e., to be used by practitioners, depends on an active process of translation in which different actors (both academics and practitioners) edit such ideas to fit their needs (Wedlin and Sahlin, 2017) - which is an issue of co-dissemination (Mauser et al., 2013).
- Importantly, the way in which ideas are “packaged” matters for their increased circulation (Czarniawska and Joerges, 1996).
- Thus, the more the ideas are packaged in a way that fits the routines and practices of the field in which they are being translated, the more is expected they will become popular and used.
- We “packaged” the research on financial resilience into a practical online based toolkit.



M E T H O D O L O G Y

- In this paper, we used an **autoethnography** research philosophy.
- We carefully reflected on a series of academic-practitioner interactions that took place over years of research development, but more specifically focused on the close engagement with practitioners from **December 2020 to August 2022** (when the online based toolkit was developed)
- This paper adopted a qualitative approach using data collected during the engagement of researchers with practitioners to co-produce a toolkit for local governments financial resilience - based on roundtable discussions-, semi-structured interviews, and time-lagged communications.



THE CASE

- The international academic team (many of you are here!) worked to develop research on local government financial resilience, focusing on the roles played by anticipatory capacities, coping capacities, perceptions of vulnerabilities and shocks in shaping it (Barbera et al., 2015, 2017, 2019; Steccolini et al., 2017).
- In 2015, the embryonic plan for translating this research outputs into a practical tool (which could be used by local governments to (i) assess their resilience, in terms of capacities for anticipation and coping, and vulnerability and (ii) build and strengthen such capacities) was proposed and established as part of a practice-oriented report funded by the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA).
- The preliminary version of the toolkit was evidence-based and had been presented during practitioners' conferences, where it raised significant interest among academics and practitioners.
- Following, the research team continued to engage with practitioners in order to co-produce a more advanced, refined and detailed version of the toolkit, adapting it to the specific needs of local governments - which may allow it to be used and diffused in practice.



THE ONLINE FR TOOLKIT



The **toolkit** – what is it?

This toolkit is a set of questions that are categorised into three main financial resilience dimensions (coined by Barbera et al., 2017) to enable users to assess the current financial resilience level of their Local Authorities at the time of use. These organisational dimensions – *perceived vulnerability*, *coping capacities* and *anticipatory capacities* are interrelated and can be combined by LAs.

- **Perceived Vulnerability (PV)**: the LA's level of exposure to uncertain/unforeseen shocks
- **Coping Capacities (CC)**: the LA's ability to adapt to adversity when faced with adversities
- **Anticipatory Capacities (ACs)**: the LA's ability to identify shocks and build capacities to better respond to the adversities from such shocks. We can replace this with events or incidents if this is too technical for the audience (practitioners).

Why is that important?

By reflecting on the capacities and organisational conditions that characterise local authorities in their daily life, it is possible for the toolkit users to identify the strengths and weaknesses that allow their LAs to be more or less prepared for uncertainties/unforeseen events, therefore to be more or less resilient or ... otherwise/differently resilient!

What are the main outputs of the Toolkit?

The toolkit aims to help users reflect on capacities from two perspectives – external (**extra-organisational**) and internal (**intra-organisational**) – since these capacities are often a collective effort from individual departments and the entire LA. The external and internal reports will provide a holistic picture of LA's financial resilience and vulnerability level.



THE ONLINE FR TOOLKIT

THE QUESTIONS ARE GROUPED INTO FOUR (4) DIMENSIONS.

Perceived Vulnerabilities Part 1

How would you rate the following vulnerabilities of your local authority?

[PV1_1] Socio-demographic vulnerabilities (ageing of population, low education, decreasing population) *

1 2 3 4 5

A Major Vulnerability No Vulnerability at All

Coping Capacities Part 1

Please indicate to what extent you agree/disagree to the following statements about your local authority.

[CC1_1] When dealing with unforeseen problems, we quickly deal with internal conflicts *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

Anticipatory Capacities Part 1

Please indicate to what extent you agree/disagree to the following statements about your local authority. **We constantly and reciprocally exchange information...**

[AC1_1] with other local authorities and local public bodies *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

Organisational Performance

How would you rate the corporate performance of your local authority compared to similar authorities in terms of size and type (Unitary, London Boroughs, County District) across all services provided?

[OP1_1] Quality of service delivery *

1 2 3 4 5

Significantly Below Average Significantly Above Average

Toolkit users (UK and non-UK) should now assess their organisation, based on their perception, around main dimensions of **financial resilience**:

- Perceived Vulnerabilities
22 assessment items in total, grouped by:
 - PV related to Infrastructure
 - PV related to Financial Capacity (i)
 - PV related to Financial Capacity (ii)
- Anticipatory capacities
25 assessment items in total, grouped by:
 - External Information Sharing
 - Monitoring External Activities
 - Vulnerability Assessment
 - Situation awareness by politicians
 - Critical thinking
 - Internal Information Sharing
- Coping capacities
33 assessment items in total, grouped by:
 - Rapidity and bricolage
 - Adaptability, Skills and Knowledge
 - Internal Collaboration (with employees)
 - Internal Collaboration (with senior management)
 - External Collaboration (with Central Govt)
- organisational performance (7 assessment items).

THE FR TOOLKIT - EXTERNAL REPORT

Introduction

Perceived Vulnerabilities

Anticipatory Capacities

Coping Capacities

Organisational Performan

RAG Reporting

References

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Perceived Vulnerabilities: **Related to Infrastructure**

Wintoncester

Local Authority	Recommendation	Average
Wintoncester	link	3.28

1 - 1 / 1 < >

Average of All Local Authorities

3.6

Drill down

link	Average
link	3.42
link	3.61
link	4.15

1 - 3 / 3 < >

Local Authorities

4

Legend:

- 1 - A Major Vulnerability
- 3 - A Moderate Vulnerability
- 5 - No Vulnerability at All

Data Last Updated: 17/11/2022 17:50:15 | [Privacy Policy](#)



THE FR TOOLKIT - EXTERNAL REPORT

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Red, Amber, Green Status Reporting

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Local Authority ▾

LA Region: South West (1) ▾

LA Type ▾

Perceived Vulnerabilities - RAG Summary

Local Authority	Related to Infrastructure	Financial Capacity (i)	Financial Capacity (ii)
1. Brackhampton	4.29	3.98	4.19
2. Wellbridge	3.58	3.88	3.38
3. Wintoncester	3.46	3.35	3.44

Anticipatory Capacities - RAG Summary

Local Authority	Information Sharing (External) ▾	Monitoring External Activities	Vulnerability Assessment	Situation awareness and attitudes by politicians	Critical Thinking	Information Sharing (Internal)
1. Brackhampton	3.88	3.88	4.06	3.94	3.65	3.25
2. Wellbridge	2.88	3.38	2.75	3.63	3.3	3.38
3. Wintoncester	2.81	2.31	2.69	3.38	3.8	3.63

Coping Capacities - RAG Summary

Local Authority	Rapidly and Bricolage	Adaptability, Skills and Knowledge	Internal Collaboration (employees)	Internal Collaboration (Senior management)	External Collaboration (with CG)
1. Brackhampton	3.28	3.32	3.42	2.63	2.5
2. Wellbridge	3.25	3.14	3	2.5	3.13
3. Wintoncester	2.81	3.75	3.08	3.25	3.69



THE FR TOOLKIT - INTERNAL REPORT

Anticipatory Capacities

Home - AC

Information Sharing (external)

Monitoring External Activities

Vulnerability Assessment

Politicians' situation awarene...

Critical Thinking

Information Sharing (internal)

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Guidance and recommendations for internal action towards financial resilience

This guidance notes serves to support you in analysing the anticipatory capacities of your local government's departments.

Anticipatory capacities refer to the availability of tools and capabilities that enable local governments to better identify and manage their vulnerabilities and to recognise shocks before they arise, as well as to understand their nature, likelihood, timing, scale and potential impacts. The ability to anticipate varies according to various factors, for example according to the degree to which a critical approach to problems is adopted, and to the awareness and ability to interpret what is happening in the external environment.

It is important to note that crisis and shocks may lead to adverse situations that emerge in specific parts of the local government (e.g., departments). These "*localised*" issues should be resolved as quickly as possible before they have wider effects on the organisation as a whole (Khan et al., 2018).

Thus, it is important to analyse potential weaknesses related to anticipatory capacities that may emerge in specific departments within your local government. The following pages describes each dimension, and provides indicative actions towards the improvement of anticipatory capacities for the organisation as a whole.

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HOW THE CO-PRODUCTION HAPPENED?

Problem identified: Some terminologies used within the contents of the general version that is applicable to most public/private sector organisations (particularly, LGs)

Suggested Solution: It was suggested that more terms be revised to terms that are familiar to users to enable a full patronage of the toolkit.

Problem identified: While the toolkit is undoubtedly useful for LGs, it was quite uncertain for whom the toolkit was made for within LG. The participant cautioned that although most questions within the toolkit could be answered by the Director of Finance (or equivalent), no single individual could provide a true account of all the dimensions without advice from other departments/units.

Suggested Solution: it was suggested that questions are either reviewed to be more specific, or the toolkit be adjusted to allow multiple access within an organisation. Thus, selling it as a 'group tool' rather than an 'individual tool'.

What's your department? *

(select the option that is most similar to the main service offered by your department.)

Escolher ▼



HOW THE CO-PRODUCTION HAPPENED?

Potentially used by different type of LGs

Problem identified: Practitioners always highlights that some councils have different responsibilities in terms of service delivery. To compare local governments (online/open access model) it seems that we can have a general set of items within the dimensions of the toolkit that are applicable to every instance of council.

Suggested Solution: It was suggested to add other items that may be specifically found in one type or other of councils. If this is considered/effectuated

Outcome : We can envisage that in an online version of the toolkit, the user should be able to select in the cover page of the toolkit which type of council s/he works. Thus, based on this initial filter, the next pages of the toolkit will include (a) all general items but also (b) a subset of items that is applicable just to that specific type of council. This means that we can still have comparable data for all councils, but in the end it will also be possible to compare councils by type/specificity.



Local Authority (LA) Selection

Select your LA *

Escolher ▼



HOW THE CO-PRODUCTION HAPPENED?

Summary and other suggestions from practitioners:

- *Need for guidance notes to accompany the toolkit, explaining how to use it.*
- *Probably a video walking through the toolkit*
- Inclusion of the rag rating (as showed)
- Changing wording (as showed)
- User and uses of toolkit (as showed, types of Ia and different users within org.)



TRANSLATING ACADEMIC IDEAS

- Still under development (work in progress),
- By framing the academic-practitioner gap as an issue of “translation”, including we aim to highlight the mechanisms (discursive, operational, and technological) through which we can make the work of PA scholars more useful for practitioners.
- the toolkit may become a legitimate solution to different problems (*logic*) when framed in the right way (*formulation*) and respecting the local settings specific needs (*context*).
- Logic / formulation and context are “translation” mechanisms established by the literature



POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

First, we aim to contribute to the literature on bridging the academic-practitioner gap through co-production of knowledge. Different from extant literature, we focus on the co-dissemination of research results – an area virtually absent from previous writings. By focusing on co-dissemination, we may bring relevant insights to researchers that followed a typical/traditional approach to their research but are willing to improve their communication with the practice / increase the impact of their research.

Second, by shifting the focus from co-productive approaches in research design to an approach related to research dissemination, we provide a plausible solution to the conflicting institutional requirements that are faced by contemporary public administration scholars (i.e., being measured for promotion vs relevance to practice). Incremental change rather than radical change.

Third, we aim to offer a set of practices and mechanisms associated with “the way” of translating academic ideas into the practitioners’ world. This depends on the application of the theoretical framework to the findings (work in progress).

