Research Manifesto Guidance & Template

UKPRP CoP Network Development Theme

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Purpose of this document

The intended purpose of this document is to summarise the content of the research manifestos provided by the four original networks of the UKPRP CoP. It is not intended to critique or rank them, but will aim to provide suitable guidance for new networks joining the CoP and help in the initial period of their formation.

The document 'UKPRP Impact and Evaluation Framework' (2018) establishes how networks are to be monitored. It states that in the first year, networks should publish a manifesto of research or risk being terminated. This highlights the importance of this guidance document and the need for Networks to establish their intended research direction. One of the key elements when drafting the manifesto is that it is co-produced with stakeholders and network members.

An important consideration when constructing any informative piece of work is to determine the intended audience. The target audience for this document is producers of research manifestos, mostly likely to be new and existing Networks (definition below). However, the original Networks were less clear on who would read their manifestos when they were first constructed in October 2020. This may be one of the reasons why the 4 manifestos produced were rather varied and differed in structure and content. This document intends to identify commonalities and discrepancies within the 4 original research manifestos, how it might be best to structure a research manifesto and what to include. The aim is not to engender conformity or rigidity but rather to provide a broad structure and guidance to produce a document that may be a relatively new experience for some researchers. To that end, there is also a template attached to this document to help guide new and existing Networks to construct their own research manifesto.

This document is structured as follows. First, there is a section defining key terminology and providing background to the 4 UKPRP Networks. The document is then structured around each respective section of the Research Manifesto covering: background, about this research manifesto, future research, key stakeholders, progress to date and next steps. This step-by-step guide is followed by brief reflection on what constitutes a good research manifesto by identifying points of good practice.

Key Terminology

UK Prevention Research Partnership (UKPRP)

An alliance of research funders has agreed to commit over £50 million to support research into the primary prevention of non-communicable diseases (NCDs). The vision is to generate new insights into actionable, sustainable and cost-effective ways of preventing NCDs that will improve population health and reduce health inequalities in the UK. The research will address the 'upstream' determinants of NCDs and be co-produced with users (e.g. policy makers, practitioners, health providers, the third sector, the public etc.).

UKPRP Community of Practice

The aim of the researcher-led Community of Practice is to co-develop practice, current thinking, and supporting resources in areas of shared interest in order to enhance the effectiveness and societal impact of both UKPRP-funded and wider prevention research. The CoP will improve ways of working, generate learning and support impact on prevention research, policy and practice beyond that which could be achieved by each funded group acting alone.

UKPRP Networks

It is vitally important to establish from the outset that networks are not research projects. Networks are new interdisciplinary communities of researchers and users formed around a broad non-communicable disease (NCD) primary prevention research challenge and support networking activity. Networks support and sustain interactions between diverse disciplines and users to exchange expertise, scientific insights and capability as the network generates a shared vision around its chosen NCD prevention challenge.

The UKPRP website states that the funding provided is not for primary research. Instead, this is the key facet of a UKPRP Consortium.

Research Manifesto

Manifestos are most associated with political parties and indeed the Oxford English Dictionary notes this in the definition of 'manifesto' – "a written statement in which a group of people explain their beliefs and aims, especially one published by a political party to say what they will do if they win an election". While the term 'research manifesto' is perhaps less well-known amongst academic researchers, the basic principle is much the same – a document explaining a group's current position, vision, and objectives. In this sense, the research manifesto has similarities to a research agenda, a research programme, or research framework.

The 4 original UKPRP Networks

GENIUS - Generating Excellent Nutrition In UK Schools

The GENIUS Network seeks to identify opportunities for intervention and innovation in the UK School Food System.

MatCHNet - Maternal and Child Health Network

MatCHNet aims to harness cross-country administrative data to evaluate national policy impacts on maternal, infant and child health and health inequalities.

PETRA - Prevention of Disease Using Trade Agreements

The PETRA network aims to explore the relationships between trade policy and NCDs, focussing mainly on tobacco, alcohol and ultra-processed foods to determine how trade could improve health.

PHASE - The Population Health Agent based Simulation nEtwork

The PHASE network focuses on the application and use of agent-based models among researchers and decision makers in order develop insights on the interdependent and interacting processes that result in non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and health inequalities.

Research Manifesto Sections

Background

In this section, Networks are expected to describe their vision, structure, funding period and identify any issues they've had in establishing the Network (E.g. Covid-19, recruitment issues and delayed funding). A comparison of the Networks indicates a varying focus on these areas. For example, MatCHNet explained that Covid-19 had severely affected the early stages of their development and that they plan on refining their manifesto once their stakeholders are able to resume their usual activity. Similarly, PETRA described how they were unable to gather the appropriate information from their intended stakeholders due to the pandemic.

PHASE opted for perhaps a more typical 'background' section by first describing when the network was established and where it fits in with the UKPRP's funding initiatives. It also states their vision and aim in this section. Later on, PHASE explains the disruption caused by Covid-19 and that the Network was actually suspended for 3 months during the summer of 2020.

GENIUS's 'Scene setting' section consists of a 2-page literature review and rational for their topic area of UK school food. Covid-19 is identified as having made facilitating meaningful interactions between stakeholders more challenging and acknowledge that because of this the work of the network is at an early stage. This section of the manifesto lays out their research themes as they were in their funding application followed by how these have been slightly modified due to the impact of the pandemic.

Reflections

It was necessary for the original networks to lay out how the pandemic had affected their initial development and identified how their plan had perhaps changed due to the impact of Covid-19. Obviously, it is hoped that new Networks will not have to face anything like the disruption caused by a global pandemic, but it could be a good idea for new networks to identify issues they have had during their initial start-up period. This may lead to discussions with other networks/consortia/stakeholders/funders about how to problem solve and best deal with certain situations if or when they were to arise again.

Recommendations

- Identify challenges in setting up the Network to discuss with the Community of Practice

About this research manifesto

This section should aim to identify the Network's purpose and what it hopes to achieve. This is also where a summary of what is to come in the following sections could appear and any clarification on language and terms used within the document. The original Networks took different paths in this section as MatCHNet outlined their Network's 3 main aims and what they hope to accomplish. PETRA don't clarify their aims in this section but instead explain that they are still in their initial stages of development. They go on to say that their research manifesto will lay out the topics that potentially merit further investigation for their ability to impact NCDs, but stress that these are early observations based on the work they have done to that point. PHASE identify that there has been disruption to their intended process, but are the only network to state that they plan to continually update their manifesto as they progress through their initial funding period. The GENIUS network's research manifesto is structured very differently from the other 3 and so didn't include a section on this.

Reflections

PETRA included a definitions section which could be a good addition to any research manifesto. This is particularly the case if, like PETRA, the topic area is very broad or covers complex spaces.

Recommendations

- It has not been evaluated or discussed if networks are to produce an updated version of their manifesto. However it may be a good idea in order to not lose track of what they set out to accomplish and can be one of a number of ways to assess the progress that's been made.

Future Research

It is expected that in this section Networks identify their research gap and clearly set out the key themes they are going to explore throughout their funding period. For example MatCHNet approached this section by providing a description of the research gap they are targeting. They also included a schematic which shows a visual representation of how the various policy intervention points, stakeholders, policy departments and longitudinal data sources interact with each other. Their section flows straight into identifying key challenges that they must overcome and identify specific research questions. Each challenge identified has at least 3 research question attached to it.

PETRA's research manifesto has a similar title for this section (Early observations on future R&D topics) and does have a lot of commonalities with MatCHNet's. Key topics are outlined followed by potential research questions to be investigated. PETRA go one step further by providing a rational for these questions.

PHASE have called this section 'Motivation and Key Challenges'. Here they described the rational for their Network and identified the research gap. PHASE do go into a lot more detail than MatCHNet & PETRA however, by sighting various literature and generally taking a more detailed approach to their rational. PHASE layout their 5 workstreams which do have some similarities with MatCHNet and PETRA in that they identify areas of interest/key topics but PHASE do not go into as much detail on this part nor do they identify research questions from these topics.

GENIUS's section on future research describes how they have 5 research themes and intend to stick by these but, as a consequence of the pandemic, have to prioritise some more than others.

Reflections

As long as the research gap and research questions are identified and link well with the key themes / workstreams this section doesn't have to be very long. There may be a temptation to include literature review type content here but in the interest of keeping the page limit to a minimum it's not required.

Recommendations

- Identifying the key topics and subsequent research questions are crucial in a new Network's research manifesto. These should link in well with the overall aims and create a coherent picture as to what the Network is going to be doing moving forward.

Stakeholders

This section could be really valuable to other CoP members as well as to the Network themselves. Ideally Networks will identify what stakeholders they are already working with and ones they would like to work with in the future. Again, the original networks approached this differently as MatCHNet have included a separate section specifically on their stakeholders; identifying how important they are for their cross-national and cross-departmental topic area. PHASE have a small section on

stakeholders, identifying four key groups and highlighting that they will pay particular attention to engaging with these. A lot of GENIUS's objectives involve working closely with their stakeholders and they too have a small section expanding on who these are. MatCHNet and PHASE point to utilising connections with the other UKPRP networks and consortia, with PHASE identifying that they have already made links with SPECTRUM and with SIPHER.

Reflections
A section on identifying stakeholders would be useful to have for all new Networks as it will force them to think about what links they have already made and who else they would like to be involved with.

Recommendations
- This would also be a good place to include a section on how a new Network believe they could work with other UKPRP Networks and Consortia.

Progress to date
Networks provided varying amounts of detail about the progress they've made, but as PHASE point out, this is perhaps content for the annual report. The research manifesto is about moving forward and what the Network hopes to achieve. At the time of writing their research manifestos there is a good chance that new Networks will not have achieved a significant amount anyway.

Reflections

A section on how the research manifesto was co-produced with stakeholders and network members will show how the manifesto evolved from the initial plans to this version.

Recommendations

- Include consultation and co-production processes.

Next Steps
The final section should look to reaffirm the Network's vision as well as identify the ensuing path the network is planning on taking. PETRA's final section highlights that they are planning on producing a full research manifesto once they are more informed about their research questions and appropriate consultation in the form of a sandpit. GENIUS end with a conclusion section in which they summaries their aims. MatCHNet explain how they plan to overcome the challenges they identified earlier in the document. For PHASE this section is a much more detailed account of what the network are planning to do moving forward.

Reflections
The method for bringing the research manifesto to a close varied across the 4 networks but reiterating the vision and aims of the network would reinforce the purpose of the manifesto.

Recommendations
- This would also be a good section to state the immediate next steps for the Network, or any upcoming conferences, sandpits, workshops or other significant events that lead to achieving the Network's aims.

Manifesto must haves
- Clearly state the Network's vision/aims
- Identify the research gap

- Identify the key themes with appropriate research questions
- Identify how the Networks strategy/plan/workstreams will lay the ground work for addressing the research questions and possibly acquire funding.
- Identify the stakeholders that are key to the Network's success.
- Describe the co-production or consultation process

Research Manifesto Template

Contents

1. BACKGROUND

Describe the Network; its vision, structure, funding period and identify any issues they've had in establishing the Network (E.g. Covid-19, recruitment issues and delayed funding). The research manifesto should be approximately 4-7 pages in length.

About this research manifesto
This section should include:

- *The purpose of the network and a detailed description of what it hopes to achieve*
- *Any definitions that are key to the understanding of the topic area*
- *A summary of what is to come in the following sections*

2. FUTURE RESEARCH

This section should include:

- *The research gap as well as the key themes to be explored*
- *The strategy/plan/workstreams that will answer the research questions*

Example adapted from MatCHNet's Research Manifesto:

Key Theme 1*: To identify priority national policies across the 4 UK nations that affect maternal and child health.*

First, there is a need to comprehensively map the multiple interventions, across multiple policy domains, that can affect maternal and child health. The figure illustrates the range of Government departments that create and implement such policies. Subsequently, there is a need to prioritise these national policy interventions and their contexts for evaluation. The possibilities could be overwhelming. Accordingly, we will be seeking multiple perspectives from policy makers, service providers and users, and researchers as to what are the burning questions. However, options will be constrained by the extent to which questions are evaluable. The prioritisation process will thus be iterative, in order to account for the need for comparable data resources in multiple settings, similar measures within those data resources, and measurable variation in specific policies or contextual factors.

Research Questions

RQ1: What are the key social, economic or environmental policies most likely to impact on maternal health, birth outcomes, or child health up to school age, that are amenable to change?

RQ2: How are the key policies (defined by RQ1) situated within the wider policy system within and between countries? How do these policies vary over time?

RQ3: What are the possible relationships between policy context, intervention mechanism and outcomes, and are they likely to be similar in comparator settings?

3. STAKEHOLDERS

Current stakeholders
Identifying current stakeholders and outlining their expected role/contribution

Potential stakeholders

Identify potential stakeholders and where they would fit/contribute to the Network's aims and/or processes

4. NEXT STEPS

Clarify the Network's vision and describe the upcoming plan for the Network. This may include conferences, sandpits, workshops or other significant events that lead to achieving the Network's aims.