

Reflections on integrating disciplines in interdisciplinary research

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A ex social science funder's experience

- Natural scientists tend to be more open to interdisciplinary research
- Social scientists can appear difficult or obstructive to natural scientists – but **they don't mean it** (next slide)
- Some social scientists feel 'threatened' by natural scientists
- Those who do interdisciplinary research gain much - both professionally and personally
- By far the larger proportion of interdisciplinary applications and awards I saw had natural science PIs

Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus

Social and natural sciences are fundamentally ontologically different.

Gender difference is characterized by physical difference (by Martians).. Difference is characterized by social construction, effects of culture and time, a product of patriarchy etc... (by Venusians)

Epistemological positivism meets the hermeneutics

Or **laws and determinism** meets **interpretation, seeking of meaning, understanding, context and vocabulary**

Why the difference? What does it mean

- **Why?**
- Social and economic systems are highly complex and exceptionally difficult to experiment on (ethically/within the law at least). **Social science is harder (?)**
- **Meaning...**
- Temporal questions, mixed methods and mixed findings
- Babel fish are essential
- The nature of research products will be complex

Funders' measures that may help

- Reappraise peer review - referees, panels, assessment criteria and expectations
- Funding – recognise interdisciplinary research may take longer and need set up time – the dining club model.
- Take time with new initiatives - scoping first, not national centres
- Be seen to support interdisciplinarity through administrative measures (calls, communications, impact for e.g.)
- Facilitate dialogue between those who have and do and those who haven't and don't - RELU for example

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