



‘We're sat at the table... ...but can we eat?’



Navigating conflict & power when
communities enter research spaces

REN Research Café | Menti poll results



Thanh Uong

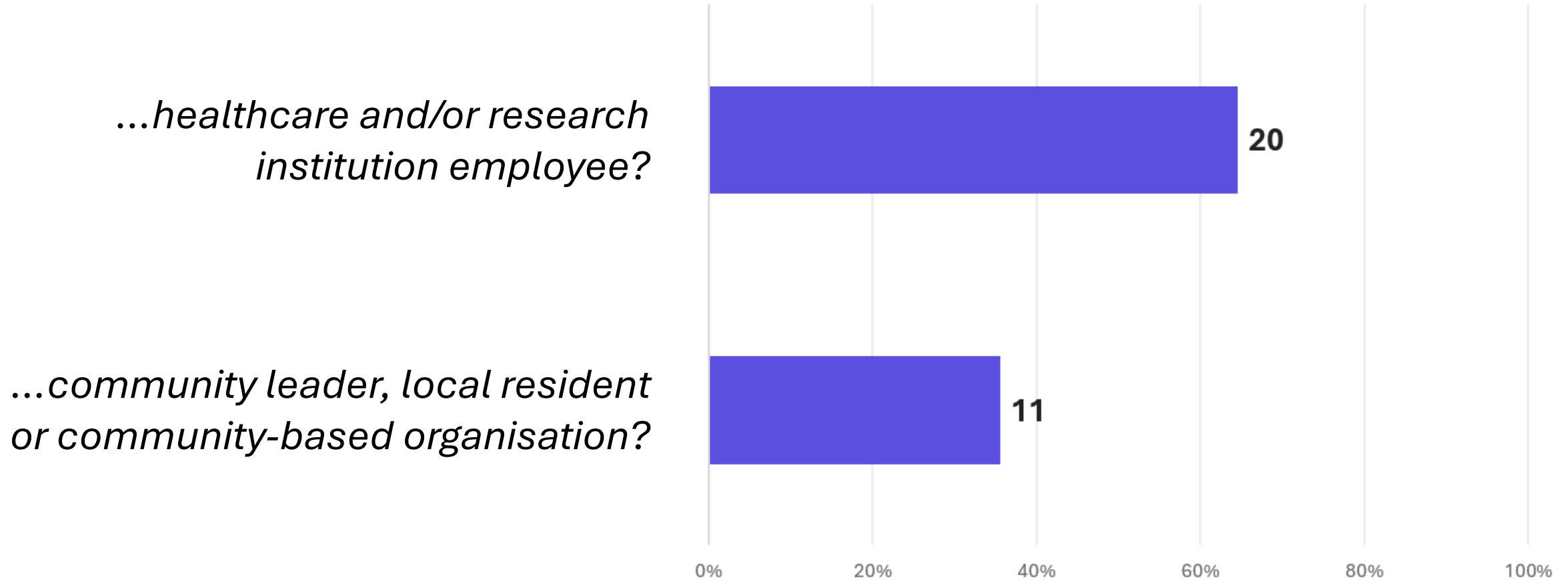
Co-Founder & Director
[Two Mindful Bees Ltd](#)



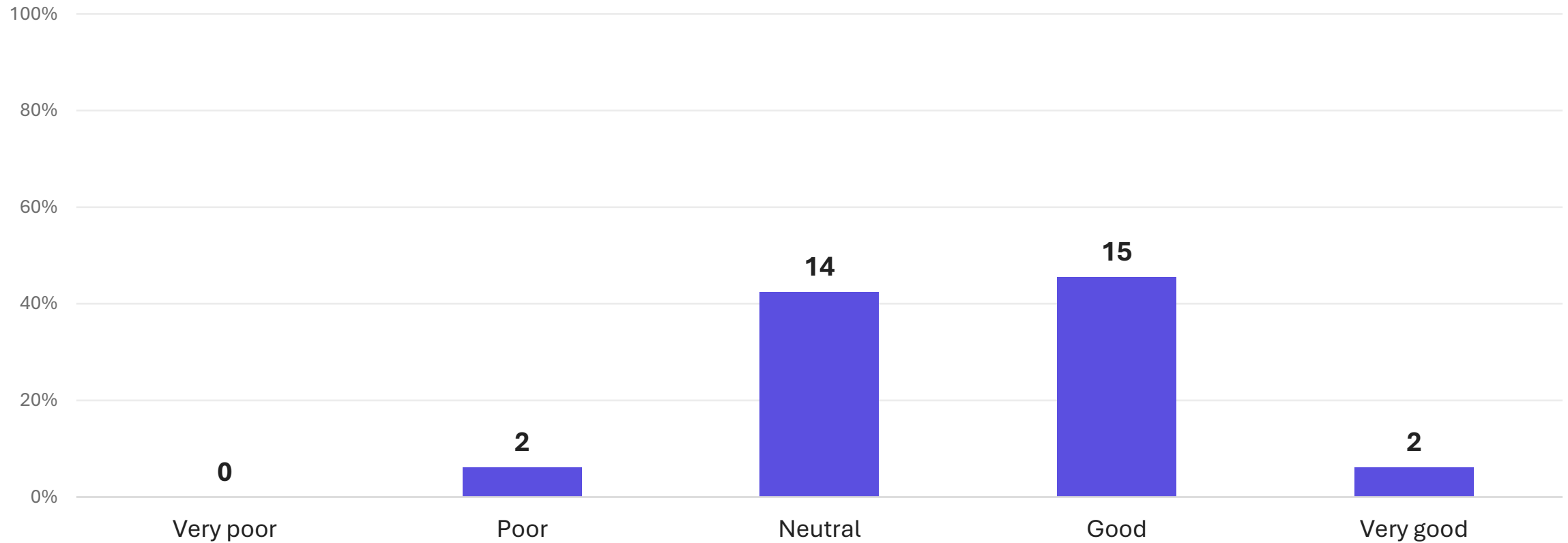
Adam Kamenetzky

Associate Director
[Mabadiliko CIC](#)

Are you answering as...



Overall, what has been your experience of interactions involving communities and research teams?



If you've experienced conflict or power imbalance in these interactions, how has this manifested / how did this make you feel?

- Dismissed
 - Especially across voluntary and the "system" it can feel uneasy and sometimes like the "system" is trying to overstate its capacity for quick change
 - Sorry, no experience of this.
 - Not equitable distribution of funding
 - Extractive and tokenistic practices
 - Dismissed, demoralised, patronised, undermined, closing ranks, gatekeeping
 - Excuses for not listening
 - Trying to combat Medical NHS jargon
 - I often see token patient involvement: patients get a seat in meetings but no say in heavy follow-up schedules or intrusive tests. This power gap makes patients disengage
 - I felt unheard and disadvantaged due to delayed responses, lack of communication, and decisions made without fully considering my circumstances or evidence, causing stress and frustration.
- Invalidated
 - No experience
 - Guiding answers
 - Being asked to compromise
 - This is not something I have directly experienced
 - Patronised
 - Institutional limitations can lead to conflict, lack of transparency can also lead to power imbalance
 - I felt used
 - Question yourself
 - Presenter vs presentee
 - Inability to be able to commit to community asks, lack of transparency about what was in our ability to influence or change, disappointed
 - The hard truths that emerged from the research resulted in attempts to minimise the lived experience feed back, commissioners gave defensive & patronising responses and subsequently diluted the recommendations
- Ineffective and frustrated
 - Shut out
 - When the community clearly state a challenge and the institutions deny this reality
 - Time limits cause conflict because we can't do things as we wish to on all sides
 - Anger at not feeling listened to or understood. Not valuing my knowledge and experience because it was different to theirs
 - No experience
 - Overuse of excluding acronyms and language confuses and disempowers me
 - Service providers being the much larger organisations. You feel very much like the junior partner
 - A bit deflated
 - I feel like these interactions often need 'pre production' to ensure a more equal starting point.

Where these interactions have gone well, what aspects helped to ensure that community voices were heard and acted upon?

- Led by people that actually care, not doing this work to be performative
- A willingness to learn from the community and to really value the community, even if it may prove challenging to statutory organisations
- Having the buy in right from the beginning, collaborative approach, being open & non-judgmental
- Providing foundational knowledge training around 'research' 'public speaking' and other relevant skills
- Understanding this is political work! (underrated!!)
- Members of staff are genuinely committed to including community insights in their work.
- Negative experience, not applicable.
- Continuing communication & collaboration created deeper relationships
- Face to face not remote
- Transparency, proper informed consent, real agency, slow processes

- Community led throughout from inception to dissemination
- Having advocates present who are skilled in negotiating and navigating the dynamics and barriers which are often evident
- Trusted champions or community partners acting as the gatekeepers to ensure genuine partnership before wider involvement
- Created a platform where listening before talking was key and everybody was given a space and encouraged to talk by careful questions and facilitation
- Transparency and equal playing field
- Humanising one another
- Evaluating findings and sharing them
- A written agreement that was co-produced about how we would work together.
- Broadest variety of participants possible
- Respect of all and appropriate to the audience
- Communities involved from the beginning and throughout rather than being an afterthought
- Follow up on actions and be honest about what is not possible

- Having a community partner embedded in the community who had trusting relationships and understood research also as the 'conduit' or broker of trust
- Building trust through community champions and transparency
- Building capacity and capability within the community to lead on projects and have full ownership
- Our experience were validated by all the health professionals in the room
- People with privilege listening to those with less, uplifting those messages to parties who would not ordinarily listen, and bring along/support those with less privilege to share in those spaces
- Some one dedicated to champion and advocate internally with the right people, some given the ability to seek out what needs to change
- When organisations listened respectfully, communicated clearly, responded promptly, and considered community feedback in their decisions, people felt valued, heard, and more willing to engage.

What are the most important principles, values or commitments for equity and power-sharing in community-research partnerships?

- Pedagogical change within academic institutions and long term sustained funding for things communities actually want.
- Cultural humility, genuine respect, a willingness to share power, acknowledge colonial narratives
- that financial resource will be required
- Funding structures that allow for real coproduction from inception
- Building trust, then following through and attempting to act on the wishes of the community
- Respect for all and equity of power
- Close feedback loops with those who have contributed, spending time determining social value, taking active steps to dismantle barriers
- Acknowledging power imbalance and dynamics. Approaching co production from this lens
- Communication, transparency
- Walking in your shoes
- Mutual respect, empowerment, contributions properly valued

- Timelines that match the pace of trust and community engagement.
- Trust, relevancy, report back & share, listening, preparation
- Agreement in ways of working. Clarity about funding. Compassionate teamwork
- Honesty and transparency. State the limitations from the onset.
- Aligning expectations and outcomes
- A truly transparent process.
- Actually caring and not doing it for the sake of doing it
- Genuinely caring
- Equitable decision making infrastructure, timeline determined by community where possible, community bodies with power to veto
- Sufficient resources for community groups
- Early co-design, equal decision-making power, transparent benefit-sharing, and prioritising community needs over academic target

- Active listening and cultural competency
- Recognition that there is more than one type of knowledge in the room. The community brings a different knowledge to an academic researcher
- Bring our humanity into the space not just how professional hat.
- Senior leadership present and engaged in the process, as well as open to put in action the power sharing
- Energy to identify where community can do it themselves
- Respect, transparency, shared decision-making, equal opportunities, timely communication, and genuine inclusion of community voices at every stage are essential to build trust and achieve equitable
- Honesty about what is and is not possible or likely
- Transparency, Data Protection, Honesty
- Professionals bringing their humanity in to the space.