

Network qualities and workforce implications of cross sector collaboration

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BACKGROUND

Social sector reforms combined with growing complexity of social needs are driving new service designs across sectors. This project examined a developing partnership between a not for profit and utility company. The initiative was designed to provide holistic levels of care and improve the referral pathways and information flow between organisations so that, once a client enters one program or service, they can be referred to other programs and organisations with greater ease than previously possible. This study examined the development of this partnership and workforce capability implications. Future research will examine the impacts for clients.

PARTNERSHIP ANALYSIS

CSI Swinburne conducted a social network analysis of the two partner organisations. In total, 23 participants completed the social network survey. In addition, interviews and focus groups took place with 18 staff across the two organisations. The interviews and focus group discussions were guided around specific topics such as: perceived nature of the relationship and its value; impact of partnership on organisations' service provision; impact on staff morale, knowledge and skills; and challenges with the partnership. The following figure provides results on connections between people giving information.

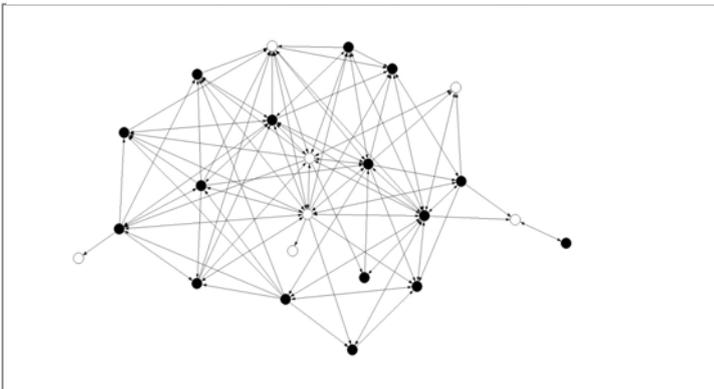


Figure 1. Information Giving Network

PARTNERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS

There was consensus across both organisations about the purpose of the initiative to develop partnerships that pool expertise and resources to address complex and growing community challenges. The results demonstrate a high degree of trust and information sharing between the two organisations, but less evidence of collaborative activity at this stage. The strength of the relationships appeared to be a consequence of the length of time spent working together and the industry partner's appreciation of the specialist contribution of the community sector partner.

ORGANISATIONAL AND WORKFORCE IMPLICATIONS

Shared values around social equity were seen as critical, which marks this as an interesting case study given that the two partners were from different (private) sectors. How this partnership develops further as other partners from utility and financial industries join will be interesting to explore given that they may have differing motivations and values than the original partners to the initiative. The not for profit was undergoing numerous changes to meet the demands of industry partners. This required workforce development and process changes with respect to outputs, communications, and reporting. They were training staff to meet these requirements and also hiring new staff with the requisite skills to meet the needs of the corporate partner. Further research will explore how these changes influence partnership development and client impact.

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