Public service integration: an exploration of reciprocal interdependence and organisational culture

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PhD study aim and objectives

The aim of this study is to explore reciprocal interdependence and organisational culture within the context of public service integration, whilst learning from three case studies. The study will consider the past and the present from the development of public services in Wales and the Netherlands, in order to draw out themes which challenge and support reciprocal interdependence in future contexts.

Objectives

Consider theoretical, political and social issues that provide a context and rationale for reciprocal interdependence.

Explore public, private and third sector stakeholders' experiences of reciprocal interdependence in the development of public services.

Understand cultural themes and factors (e.g. trust, commitment, power), which challenge and/or support reciprocal interdependence through the perceptions of the stakeholders involved.

Identify stakeholder views that may inform future strategies and practices as regards this way of working.

Research collaboration

This research topic was agreed between Torfaen Local Service Board (multi sector Board with an aim to improve people's lives including a local authority, health, the third [voluntary/Non Government Organisations] sector, police and housing) and the University of South Wales as something that can inform the Board's future strategies and plans.

Reciprocal interdependence is based on the premise that a relationship is mutually beneficial including the sharing of risks (Alter and Hage, 1993).

Some policy makers regard organisational culture as key to achieving successful service integration (Welsh Government, 2011; Department of Health, 2012).

References: Alter, C. and Hage, J. (1993) *Organizations working together.* Sage Publications.
Thompson, J. (2003) *Organizations in action.* Transaction Publishers
Department of Health (2012) *Caring for our future: reforming care and support.* Available at:
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/136422/White-Paper-Caring-for-our-future-reforming-care-and-support-PDF-1580K.pdf (Accessed: 26 June 2014).

Welsh Government (2011) *Sustainable social services for Wales: a framework for action.* [Online]. Available at: http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dhss/publications/110216frameworken.pdf (Accessed: 26 June 2015)

Research method: A multiple case study design has been used. This includes a theoretical framework (Thompson, 1967;Alter and Hage, 1993;Thompson, 2003). Data has been collected from in-depth and semi-structured interviews, documentary analysis, a survey and the observation of meetings within one the case studies, as well as a physical artefact (produced item). Three case study programmes were selected because they provide the opportunity to explore reciprocal interdependence and organisational culture within the context of public service integration.
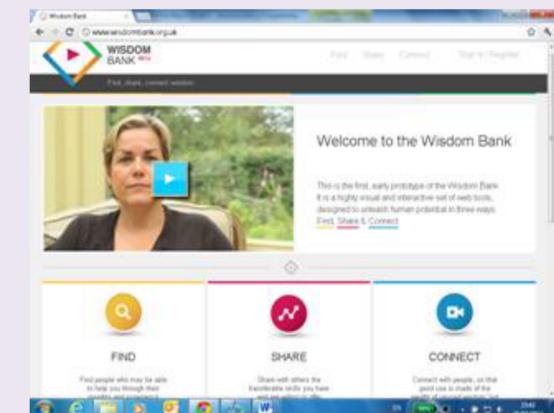

(1) Gwent Frailty Programme
Development of an integrated model of health and social care service delivery
Learning from the past

(2) Verzilvering Programme
Development of an integrated model using digital technology for older people in social settings
Learning from the past

(3) Wisdom, Wealth and Wellbeing programme
Development of integrated model using digital engagement to share experiences
Learning from the present

Results

Five themes emerged from data collection and analysis and these are 'features of public service integration and innovation', 'interdependence', 'reciprocity', 'organisational culture' and 'future public service development'. These themes are discussed in relation to each case study and as part of a cross case analysis

Conclusion

This PhD study concludes that an understanding and implementation of interdependence can facilitate equality and mutual respect between each sector and organisation, based on the realisation that each are needed. This interdependent work enables sectors to pool their unique contributions which are especially critical during these austere times.

Public service integration is strengthened by reciprocal relationships because an understanding of reciprocity between the public, private and third sector requires each sector to understand what they will be expected to give and gain to contribute towards a shared goal.

Reciprocal relationships encourage sectors to engage in up front conversations where all parties are willing to acknowledge differences that may not always sit comfortably with each other. However, these differences have to be understood and negotiated to achieve public service integration. Improved working relationships can support increased efficiencies in the development of public services.

This is as a result of collective commitment to share risks as well as benefits and a mutual respect that values everyone's contribution within and across sectors and organisations.