Improving Information Sharing for Effective Social Outcomes

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Overview presentation

- Research design
- Background case studies
- Cross-case study findings and analysis
- International developments: information sharing strategies and solutions in the UK, Canada and Australia
- Solutions and Recommendations
Research Design

• **Research objective:**
  To identify opportunities for improved information sharing across the public sector in order to achieve more effective social outcomes, without compromising fundamental rights of individuals (e.g. privacy)

• **Research focus:**
  – Information sharing practices between agencies in areas where public officials are dealing with multiple, fundamental problems from the viewpoint of an individual or family (e.g. unemployment, poor education, health, housing, and crime).
  – Information sharing practices at the interface of various policy domains (e.g. social, economic and justice sector)
  – Involvement of multiple government and other organisations (e.g. MSD, CYF, Police, Probations, Health, Refugees’ organisation, Auckland City Council).
  – Individuals and families at risk
Research Questions

• To what extent and how is personal information of individuals with complex social needs collected, managed, and shared across government and other organisations?

• What are barriers and enablers to cross-government information sharing?

• What are existing strategies and arrangements for enabling cross-government information sharing in other jurisdictions? What can New Zealand learn from other jurisdictions in that respect?

• How, and under what conditions, can cross-government information sharing be improved in order to achieve more effective social outcomes?
Research Design

• ‘Exploration’ phase:
  – 8 case studies in 5 case study areas (70 interviews):
    1. Multicultural Service Centre for Refugees: Wellington
    2. Integrated Service Response: Linwood Service Centre
    3. High Risk / High Profile forums: Hawke’s Bay, Chch
    4. Priority Offenders Initiative: Chch, Papakura
    5. Electronic Monitored Bail (EM Bail): Auckland, Hutt/Wellington

• ‘Solution’ phase:
  – Information sharing developments in the UK, Canada and Australia
  – 3 focus group meetings in Wellington and Chch; feedback sessions

• Project reference group: MSD, MoJ, NZ Police, Corrs, MWA, SSC, Treasury, OPC, and Office of the Ombudsmen

• Data collection: March 2009 – October 2009
1. Multicultural Service Centre for Refugees

- Coalition of refugee communities in Wellington (similar initiative on the West coast)
- Focused on meeting the multiple social needs of migrants including housing, income support, education, language skills development, psychological services, employment, health and welfare
- Involves NGOs, local government, central government and employers
- Health and well-being action strategy. Actions are monitored by more than 20 funding agencies with multiple funding sources
2. Integrated Service Response: Linwood Service Centre (Chch)

- Integrated service centre for individuals and/or families with multiple service needs.
- Participating agencies include Work & Income, Career Services, Housing NZ, Health, Education, NGOs
- The Service Centre is hosted by Work & Income who own the building and office equipment
- Clients are primarily seeking income support or employment services. They undergo a ‘client needs assessment’ using a computer-based screening tool. Where appropriate, the assessment officer requests permission from the client to share their information with other providers, and refers them to either internal or external providers for case management. If the client has very complex problems and requires wrap-around services, a case management meeting is arranged with all providers or a referral is made to a relevant social worker.
3. High Risk / High Profile forums (Hawke’s Bay, Chch)

- Monthly agency planning meetings for the management of high risk offenders once they are back in the community. Involves the agreement of release conditions.
- Involves Corrections (Prisons management, Probation, and Psychological services), Police and community service providers
- Prisoners are identified as high risk (HR) based on a number of identifying flags within the various Corrections databases including psychological and behavioural risk assessments, breaches of prison discipline, length of sentence for violent offending, and child sex offender classifications. HR/HP uses a national database because of the mobility of the prison population.
- Type of information shared can involve offender history, personal details and service needs.
- Eight HR/HP forums that cover the whole of NZ.
- The recent Corrections Amendment Act, 2009 provides for an increase in the amount of information sharing on highest risk offenders about to be released from prison.
4. Priority Offenders Initiative (POI) (Chch, Papakura)

- POI is a multi-agency crime reduction initiative providing wrap-around services to a small group of offenders who are committing a disproportionate amount of crime in their local area.
- POI Information sharing protocol developed in conjunction with the Office of the Privacy Commissioner
- Police ownership and resources drive the process at the local level.
- The individual is initially identified by Police based on their offending history.
- Voluntary participation on part of clients.
- Types of shared information include criminal histories, personal and family circumstances and service needs.
5. EMBail
(Auckland, Hutt/Wellington)

- Ankle bracelet monitoring system for persons awaiting trials to reduce the number of people held in prisons prior to trials taking place.
- NZ Police assess applications for EMBail by individuals awaiting trial. Liaison takes place with Housing NZ, CYF, Health, employers and Work & Income to assess whether person is safe to be released into the community and how the bail conditions will be met.
- Authorisation is given to NZ Police by the applicant to carry out comprehensive checks on the individual to ascertain their suitability for the programme. Police act as the single point of assessment but share and obtain information on the individual from a broad range of agencies and individuals within the community (e.g. family members)
- Types of information shared include offending history, personal details and service needs.
- Approximately 120 people are currently on the programme and it is operating in every Police District in New Zealand.
Cross case study findings - Information needs and requirements

- Information is shared on a ‘need to know’ basis and justified in terms of ensuring that people know enough to do their jobs effectively and safely;
- Information sharing is strongly related to the trust that a person giving the information has in the person receiving the information to treat it professionally and use it judiciously: without that trust, information is not shared;
- Professionals make a distinction between formal or ‘hard’ information (written, exchanged through formal processes, reduced to core facts) and informal or ‘soft’ information (unwritten, exchanged between professionals, acted upon as ‘real information’);
- Professionals relied more heavily on ‘soft’ information (personal & professional safety reasons);
- Frontline officials are constantly making judgments about the validity of information and whether they can use that information officially, or if they can act on it unofficially. They try to protect people but also to provide ‘hard’ information:
  “There is a difference between ‘evidence’ without knowledge, and ‘knowledge’ without evidence about someone’s circumstances. Staff have to make judgments about what can be provided in official documents”
Cross case study findings – Information sharing practices and procedures

- Agencies use different interpretations of ‘valuable’ information and use different information sets according to their core business needs;
- In all cases, signed consent forms are used by professionals as authorization to share information;
- Professionals use abstracted information that can be shared for the purpose of ensuring professional, personal and community safety (“flagging system”);
- The quality of information sharing depends on the quality of relationships between professionals;
- Increased cross-agency information sharing happens in cases where there is high professional trust and a clear commitment to a shared outcome;
- Information sharing protocols are useful, particularly for building relationships and trust and bringing and having the right people around the table;
- Co-location helps (however: ownership of shared information is a problem);
- Clear differences in information sharing practice and procedure between organisations with a Public Safety Mandate vs. Public Service Mandate
The New Zealand legal context: the Privacy Act, 1993

- Information privacy principle 11 (f):
  An agency that holds personal information shall not disclose the information to a person or body or agency unless the agency believes, on reasonable grounds -
  (f) that the disclosure of the information is necessary to prevent or lessen a serious and imminent threat to -
  (i) public health or public safety; or
  (ii) the life or health of the individual concerned or another individual
Cross case study findings – Barriers to information sharing under Public Service Mandate

- “Issues around privacy protection are not emerging in the needs assessment with the client, but in relationships between organisations”;
- There is often no sharing of ‘intelligence’ between agencies as it is often unclear what information can be shared: default position of staff is not to share;
- Staff are overcautious with using the Privacy Act in relationships between organisations. As a result: “the Privacy Act slows down quality services targeted at clients with complex needs and with the right intentions”;
- Lack of or breakdown in communication between agencies focused on their own agenda causes hardship to clients. The specific agenda of the organisation is not meeting the holistic needs of the clients, leading to flow-on complications with other parts of the system;
- (Linwood:) The client controls the information provided to the various partner organisations. For example, the client needs to pass on the referral form to the agency concerned;
- However: “Common sense needs to prevail. If staff break the law they do it for the right reasons”
Cross case study findings
Information gaps, fragmentation, boundaries (1)

- Professionals are sometimes being exposed to danger without their knowledge (e.g. history of assault on female officers)
- Vertical information sharing practices between H/O, local management structures and frontline operators appeared to be weaker than the closer horizontal, inter-agency information sharing practices
- Health information is not shared, but critical information in this area is often required to do a professional job. Staff perceived difficulties in obtaining medical information as an area in which safety issues were most likely to arise
- There are strong boundaries around medical records and child protection records, leading to strict privacy protection of these data sets
- Staff reported that many health practitioners were unwilling or unable to cooperate with other professional organisations (govt & NGOs) citing the Privacy Act as a blanket barrier to information sharing even when there was no sharing of personal details involved
Cross case study findings
Information gaps, fragmentation, boundaries (2)

• Each agency has its own information storing process with database access restricted to agency personnel only. This implies that each agency has fragmented information relating to an individual but also that officials use manual ‘work-around’ techniques to compensate for lack of technical interoperability (e.g. email with sensitive data; duplication of data and data entry processes);
• Technical solutions for improved information sharing are available but unused, due to lack of awareness, lack of knowledge, or a desire to control information sets;
• Some agencies were acting as ‘lead’ agencies with respect to information management, (e.g. agency with physical, financial or technical resources);
• NGOs have substantial technical literacy and support problems:
   “we don’t know what we don’t know. Our hardware systems are aged. We have no funds to hire people with any technical expertise, and we cannot prioritise technical training or systems or hardware upgrades with the limited funding we do have. Unless someone was willing to provide us time and expertise on a voluntary basis we just muddle along doing what we have always done”.

Cross case study findings

Barriers related to legal provisions

- Barriers to information sharing are related to a lack of information about legal provisions.
- Different government agencies had different interpretations of the Privacy Act and how it should be applied.
- There are grey areas wrt information sharing with community-based service providers (e.g. NGOs). For example, govt agencies often have formal protocols but many other organisations assist with practical needs: it is unclear how much can be shared with them, and how the Privacy Act can be interpreted around that. A consent form often overcomes these problems.
- There is awareness that some information could be of use to other agencies, but there is no mandate to pass it on (e.g. post-traumatic stress disorder emerging in class room; Corrections staff aware of system rip-offs around income support).
Cross-agency information sharing - International developments and strategies

Different realities:
- Officials don’t know and don’t trust each other
- Information exchanges between agencies are completely formalised
- Informal relationships between agencies are under-developed or non-existent
- Agencies have strong ownership perceptions of information: default position is not to share information (risk aversion)
- JUG / managing for shared outcomes is much harder compared to NZ
- Privacy Act stands in the way of (effective) information sharing

Different assumptions:
- “information is power”: e.g. more information on individuals leads to better service provision; defensive protection of information assets by agencies
- “integrated information is control”: centralisation as a response to crises (“7/7”)

Strategies focused on promoting (more) information sharing:
- UK: Centralised databases
- Canada: MoUs
- Australia: National Government Information Sharing Strategy, protocols
In general, existing Privacy legislation provides enough room for information sharing arrangements and offers an appropriate ‘default-position’ for NZ government agencies to share information, in line with operational practice. However, there is a clear need for legal ‘back-up’ and support of information sharing in the area of providing social services.

Solutions:

• Create a Code of Practice for Welfare (“disclosure to lessen or prevent a serious threat to an individual’s or public welfare” – Information Privacy Bill 2007, Western Australia)

• Use Information Sharing Protocols focused on managing shared outcomes and building professional trust and relationships (POI as good example).

• In designing Information Sharing Protocols, pay special attention to the interface with health information

• Include NGOs in information sharing protocols
Solutions and Recommendations (2)

Solutions:

• Selection of the right agency representative for participation in an information sharing collaboration is critical. Look for personal qualities (see also EIP JUG project findings);

• Arrange for facilitative leadership in a (horizontal) information sharing arrangement (\textit{primus inter pares} principle). Facilitative leadership could include facilitating agreement on the shared outcome of information sharing, managing issues around ownership of information, or providing a secure shared workspace;

• Explore co-location opportunities for information sharing partners (including NGOs);

Recommendation:

• organise a local team evaluation of the functioning of the information sharing protocol arrangement on an annual basis
Solutions and Recommendations (3)

Solutions:

• Training and education around the boundaries of information sharing under the Privacy Act are required across the Public Sector and NGOs.

• Head Offices involved need to provide explicit, joint guidance on (how to implement) a uniform interpretation of the Privacy Act in a (horizontal) information sharing arrangement.

• Attention needs to be paid to increasing the effectiveness of vertical information sharing between H/O, local management and front-line operators, including an understanding of different information needs at the various levels.

Recommendation:

• Lower the fees for Privacy Act training and education to NGOs.
Solutions and Recommendations (4)

Solutions:
• Provide representatives of participating government agencies and NGOs with access rights to a secure information system.
• Use shared secure workspaces across information sharing collaborators (including NGOs)
• Further invest in technical capability as well as technical literacy across the public sector and NGOs

Recommendation:
• Further explore de-personalised ways of sharing information (e.g. POI)
Further information

The final research report can be downloaded from:

http://e-government.vuw.ac.nz/summary_information_sharing.aspx