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Employer-supported volunteering: Understanding the role of the broker in cross-sector collaboration

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What prompted my interest?


- Growing interest in employer supported volunteering (ESV) at a practitioner level
- Detailed examination of ESV is limited (Muthuri et al 2009; Morgan & Burchell 2010)
- Acknowledgement of brokers in cross-sector collaborations, often in context of global strategic partnerships (eg see Stadler & Probst, 2012)
- Few studies have elaborated on the role of brokers in developing nascent business non-profit collaborations through ESV at the local level

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Research question

What roles do brokers perform in employee volunteering collaborations?

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Research setting

- Exemplar case study - Time and Talents for Westminster (TTW)
- Not-for-profit partnership involving private, public and voluntary sector organisations
- Membership model
- Focus on innovative sustained collaborations; skill-sharing; meeting locally identified community needs

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Time & Talents for Westminster Partnership...



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Data collection & analysis

- 30 semi-structured interviews with Volunteer Centre Westminster staff & a sample of TTW business, community & government partners.
- Interview data supplemented with secondary materials made available by VCW & partner organisations detailing relationships & specific projects
- Coding schema

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Typology of broker roles

- Broker as connector
- Broker as go-between
- Broker as learning facilitator

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Broker as connector...


- Facilitate links, Articulate needs, Initiate dialogues, Provide legitimacy for collaboration
- *We know that for things to work properly you need to have a middle person who knows exactly what is going on in the local community. And although we could approach schools and charities ourselves, sometimes it is much more beneficial to have a brokering organisation who could guide us on what would be a good fit (Employer 2).*
- *It's about facilitating the space for opportunities to be seen. Once they get into a conversation they are able to say, "Hey we can help you with that, we've got fantastic skills, resources on that side of things and a few hours from some of our staff would make a huge amount of difference for your organisation" (Volunteer Centre Westminster 3).*

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Broker as go-between...

Address equity issues Motivate & engage



Build trusting relationships Help define shared goals

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Broker as go-between

- *They don't take sides. "I don't feel like they're there just to promote the charitable side of things, they definitely understand the business difficulties (Employer 8).*
- *They ended up being a bit like the second arm of our organisation, they understood what we were trying to do, they got us so well... they could go away and talk about us as confident as anyone else...at one point I actually felt they were part of my team (Community 5).*
- *We're trying to set expectations on the corporate side and the charity side, trying to get them to listen and learn from each other, to be a kind of funnel. So they can ask us questions that they sometimes can't ask the charity, so we're kind of this mutable in-between person (Volunteer Centre Westminster 4).*

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Broker as learning facilitator

Leading and learning together

Community building seminar

Social media workshop



Press Working Group



Employability Think Tank

Building Partnerships



Managing change through volunteering

The art of networking

Cross Government Workshop



Leadership workshop

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Broker as learning facilitator...


- Generate & disseminate expert knowledge; Facilitate information exchange; Elicit/ combine ideas; Build links with other knowledge providers
- *So, the four year partnership with X [business partner] came about because I attended a Time and Talents meeting and X and I got chatting and then it roller coasted from there really. That's how that relationship started (Community 1).*
- *They bought together some cross-government meetings which were enormously valuable - we had a really frank discussion about what the blockages are in our departments. I got a number of tips from other government departments. They're very neutral brokers which is an unusual place for a very small voluntary organisation to be (Employer 1).*

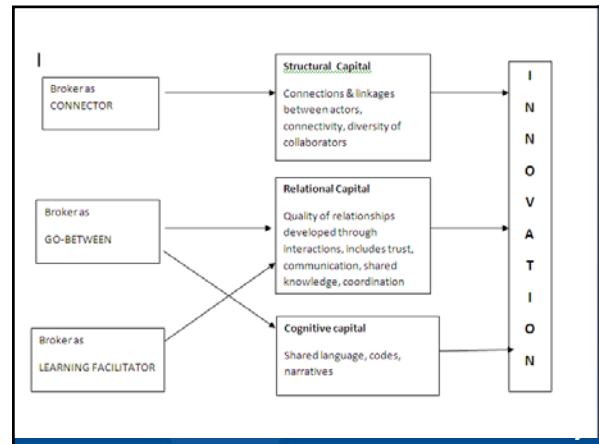
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Social capital

- This typology relates well to 3 facets or strands of social capital – structural, relational & cognitive capital (Nahapiet & Ghosal 1998).
- The 3 dimensions of social capital are highly interdependent & difficult to separate in practice (Nahapiet & Ghosal 1998)





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Wrapping up

Brokering work is multi-faceted, often hidden

Brokers

- create an enabling environment for collaboration and innovation
- build bridges between groups; strengthen ties within groups (bridging and bonding social capital, Adler & Kwon 2002)
- can improve the efficiency & effectiveness of EV collaborations
- can push employee volunteering collaborations to be more innovative

