

Emergence of informal leaders in an inter-organizational network

Melanie Kan
Faculty of Engineering
University of Technology, Sydney
PO Box 123, Broadway
NSW 2007, Australia
E-mail: melanie.kan@uts.edu.au

Ellen Baker
School of Management
University of Technology, Sydney
PO Box 123, Broadway
NSW 2007, Australia
E-mail: ellen.baker@uts.edu.au

Stephen Teo
School of Management
University of Technology, Sydney
PO Box 123, Broadway
NSW 2007, Australia
E-mail: stephen.teo@uts.edu.au

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SUMMARY

This paper describes a case study of a pilot program designed to enhance the performance of client-service sites in an inter-organizational non-profit employment services network. Employment consultants from 11 sites received training based on coaching techniques to enable them to provide a more client-focused and labor-intensive type of assistance to long-term and disabled unemployed clients. The program did improve job-placement performance but unexpected consequences also occurred. The employment consultants exhibited leadership behaviors within their local sites and initiated collaboration to influence the performance of colleagues at other sites within their network organization. The relevance of coaching principles as a method for developing informal leaders within network organizations is discussed.

ABSTRACT

This paper describes a case study of a pilot program designed to enhance the performance of client-service sites in an inter-organizational non-profit employment services network. Employment consultants from 11 sites received training based on coaching techniques to enable them to provide a more client-focused and labor-intensive type of assistance to long-term and disabled unemployed clients. The program did improve job-placement performance but unexpected consequences also occurred. The employment consultants exhibited leadership behaviors within their local sites and initiated collaboration to influence the performance of colleagues at other sites within their network organization. The relevance of coaching principles as a method for developing informal leaders within network organizations is discussed.

INTRODUCTION

There has been renewed interest in how leadership occurs in new organizational forms. Gordon (2002) argues that the overlap between power and leadership needs to be our focus, particularly because of the increasing use of dispersed leadership strategies. From a very different perspective, Avery (2004) points out that there is an increasing use of organic and networked forms of organization that new forms of leadership are likely to be needed within these organizations and that little is yet understood about these new forms of leadership.

This study began as an examination of organizational-change efforts within one of these new organizational forms and what emerged were further insights into the new forms of leadership that are occurring and how they might be nurtured and developed. Specifically, this paper reports on an investigation of a pilot program called Intensive Case Management (ICM) within an employment services network (Employment Services Corp or ESC)¹. The program was aimed at improving local-site performance through applying coaching-based principles to support the highly disadvantaged, long-term unemployed into job-placement.

The nature of nonprofit employment services

Employment services in Australia have had to improve their strategies for job placement and client support as well as turn to new and innovative practices within an increasingly competitive environment. Within the last decade, employment services have been privatized leading to rapid changes in the management of employment services, making them more competitive, and more accountable for client outcomes (Dockery & Stromback 2001). Organizations within the employment services sector have had to focus on improving their performance while remaining compliant to federal policies to ensure their survival (Burtless 2002).

Non-profit organizations were uniquely positioned to take up the bulk of the privatized employment services due to their close community links and their underlying core values of serving their communities. A strong community focus and tradition of collaboration with other community based organizations might be expected to provide an ideal privatised alternative to the formerly government-run employment services. In reality, these non-profit organizations have tended to struggle to reconcile their non-profit orientation with an increasing push to conform to government regulations and performance requirements.

Emergence of informal leaders in an inter-organizational network

Employment Services Corp, like other non-profit organizations, has prioritized meeting federal performance targets in order to successfully tender for government contracts. A second and equally important priority has been the commitment to a wider agenda of strengthening local communities through job generation, economic development and community development. Commitment to community and supporting the disadvantaged remain an integral part of the non-profit employment services culture yet tends to be overlooked in terms of official performance criteria by current federal policies.

Non-profit organizations, particularly those dealing with 'vulnerable populations' have traditionally tried to work together (Provan, Milward & Isett 2002). Yet, collaborations that focus around social issues are noted to be particularly challenging, partly because of the ambiguity surrounding the nature of the social issues (Eden & Huxham 2001). Many challenges of collaborations have been identified, for example, 'collaborative inertia', in which the outputs from collaborative arrangements are negligible or extremely slow (Huxham 2003), the effects of leaders communicating across distance (Howell, Neufeld & Avolio 2005), and issues of trust across collaborating organizations (Snively & Tracy 2002).

Employment Services Corp

ESC is a network comprising 68 independent member organizations linked together for the purpose of jointly bidding for government contracts. ESC Head Office administers the contracts and coordinates the associated work activities. Established nine years ago, it provides employment, training and related services across Australia. It has 160 different locations in urban, regional and rural areas. This study is limited to those 12 local sites participating in the Intensive Case Management (ICM) pilot program.

ESC's business model involves subcontracting the delivery of services to locally based member organizations within the network. The programs run by ESC are under contract to a Federal or State government authority, and are won through a competitive tendering process. The Head Office views the work for each contract as being carried out at the local-site level. These local sites, being part of another organization such as a charity, a religious organization, a local council, an independent or non-profit organization, may be influenced by philosophies and procedures which stem from the parent member organizations. Each local site is accountable to the government department, to ESC Head Office, and to the CEO of their parent member organization. Leaders across all levels of the network must negotiate complex processes and structures. In addition, local sites have relationships with various community organizations and additional governmental departments which site leaders need to manage.

Local-site performance is measured through job placement and the length of time the client remains employed. Local sites are given a star rating from 'one star', low performing to 'five star' highest performing, according to their job placement record. Local sites with two stars or less are at risk of being closed down. Other performance measures include meeting and exceeding the running costs of the local site were also being incorporated into the measurement model.

Inter-organizational networks typically have a complex structure that does not fit with the traditional, hierarchical, single-leader driven model of an organization. Avolio, Zhu, Koh and Bhatia (2004) found that, at senior levels, leaders who empowered workers could have an indirect positive effect on levels of organizational commitment. Avolio and his colleagues

Emergence of informal leaders in an inter-organizational network

speculated that within organizations that had less hierarchical structures, lower level managers might also be able to have the discretion to empower followers.

Collaboration across the ESC network

An earlier study of the ESC network was conducted during the first year of organizational-change efforts in 2004/5 and the aim of the change program was to improve the performance of the network as a whole and in particular the network's low-performing sites. To achieve this goal, Head Office tried to increase the collaboration and knowledge-sharing among sites. It also tried to improve communication between sites and develop a sense of belonging to the same organization. We reported on this first year of attempted change in an earlier paper (M. Kan, Baker & Teo 2006). This work involved an in-depth study that identified the factors affecting local-site performance and critically examined the collaboration initiatives that were being undertaken.

As reported in our earlier paper, site culture was influenced by its location, local community, parent-member organization, job seeker base, and resource level. Resource level in turn influenced how much the site's employees collaborated with each other and with other sites. Site leadership, in particular the local-site manager, was acknowledged by respondents from all levels, as the critical factor influencing site culture and performance. Site managers needed to be able to juggle two perspectives: that involving day-to-day activities and encouraging participatory leadership, and that involving negotiations for resources and approvals and collaborating with other sites and organizations. ESC Head Office leadership involved two approaches to improving site performance, dealing with each site separately, and providing technological and organizational initiatives to support collaborative activities.

Intensive Case Management (ICM)

Current low unemployment in Australia means that an increasing proportion of job seekers are more highly disadvantaged and potentially less able or less willing to work. This meant that employment service organisations needed to develop new ways to create revenue. Through ICM, ESC focused on supporting the long term unemployed to work. Within the government contract structures, employment service organizations could gain more revenue by supporting and placing these clients. Historically, the long term unemployed were the most challenging to place in jobs and so required a different approach compared to other clients. The programs involved much greater resources being given to support each unemployed person. Thus a new kind of program was now being developed that would still be in compliance with the authority's rules.

From ESC's perspective it could enable improved performance and concomitantly uphold the guiding principles of the nonprofit, community-based employment services sector. It also allowed ESC to address the problems of burn-out and high-turnover amongst its employment consultant staff, as well as the previously latent clash of values between compliance to the government authority's rules and the service orientation of many of ESC's employees. The following description was compiled through a combination of interviews and unpublished ESC documents.

The ICM pilot program was one in which specially trained consultants worked with a smaller caseload, ideally 15-25 highly disadvantaged, long term unemployed job seekers. The small caseload (employment consultants can typically have a caseload of 100 job seekers) ensured that consultants could spend increased time with job seekers. Guiding principles of ICM are: Consultant/job seeker relationship is a partnership; Consultant should always

believe in the job seeker; Consultant should never give up on job seekers; Consultant should always be positive towards the job seeker; Job seeker should always be supported to make the changes needed to engage in employment.

The training program consisted of a number of intense training events starting with a three day introduction. Two further face-to-face training sessions with the ICM consultant group were held two months apart. Between the first and second training all ICM sites were visited by the ICM Program Manager. During these site visits ICM consultants were provided with further support and guidance on how to construct an appropriate caseload and delivery method. The ICM Program Manager conducted separate meetings with site managers to help resolve concerns. 168 job seekers were supported by ICM consultant trainees over the four months of training. Many of the job seekers had been unemployed for more than two years, and some for more than five years.

The aims of this case study were to (1) identify the effects of the ICM program on performance within individual employment services sites and across the network and (2) identify the ways in which the ICM consultants worked within their sites.

METHODS

This study of the ESC network was conducted using an emergent framework that draws on grounded theory approaches to data collection and analysis. It is important to note that there are some key differences to the full grounded theory approach as described by Glaser (e.g., Glaser (1978; 1992)). This project was not conducted to develop a substantive theory but to describe and categorize the emerging themes.

The study was completed over one year with the bulk of data collection occurring at three months and nine months to gauge changes over time. Specifically, data collection included 14 semi-structured recorded interviews with ICM consultants representing nine out of the eleven employment sites participating in the program, two interviews with an ICM trainer, 4 informal interviews with senior staff at ESC, document analysis of ICM training material and organizational ICM reports, observations over two training sessions (four days). Interview questions were typically broad and open ended. Questions would initially focus on respondents' perceptions of their site, and then the broader network. As respondents raised issues, more detailed questions would be asked to elicit more information about the topics the respondent raised.

Specific methods drawn on to conduct this research included observations, document analysis, recorded and unrecorded interviews. In order to conduct a rigorous analysis, Glaser's incident-to-incident, constant-comparison approach was used. Descriptive concepts to incidents were also compared. This ensured that the themes emerging from the data remained grounded in that data, thus ensuring fit and relevance. 'Fit' refers to the close applicability of the data to the categories. Two other properties of fit are refit and emergent fit. Glaser (1978) explained that categories emerge so fast that one must constantly refit them to the data as the research proceeds. The 'relevance' of the theory, or in this case, descriptive categories, is concerned with the social or practice world and persons in that world, on which the theory or category is based. Interview data storage, analysis and retrieval was assisted by the Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing, Searching and Theorising (NUD*IST Vivo or NVivo), a computer software package designed by Qualitative Research and Solutions (Fraser 1999). It was designed specifically to support the analysis of unstructured data.

An emergent approach to the case study allowed for understanding of the issues from the perspective of the participants, that is the participants' perceptions and concerns as they emerge, rather than their voice being refocused through the lens of some existing theory or framework. Findings could, however, guide the use of existing theories and frameworks in future investigations.

FINDINGS

The key findings suggest that the ICM focus on service provision rather than compliance to policies and procedures generated a significant change in job seeker and ICM consultant attitude and outcomes. The performance (in terms of job placements) of ICM consultants was substantially improved when compared with similar programs. Interviews with consultants suggested that within the first few months they were achieving job placements at a higher rate than other programs for the long-term unemployed. Initial reports by ESC suggest that within two months of the ICM consultants beginning training, 47% percent of ICM job seekers were placed into employment within 90 days. This compares favorably to the Intensive Assistance program that placed 22% of job seekers over the same 90 day period.

Three themes highlighted the changes that the ICM program brought to the sites. These themes were 'compliance versus service', 'reframing attitudes', 'leadership by ICM trainees'. The first two themes developed and extended from initial findings (M. Kan, Baker & Teo 2006). Notably within this paper, the themes have undergone further development through ongoing data collection and analysis as the project followed the development of ICM.

Compliance versus service – The often conflicting priorities of meeting performance measures and serving the community were repeatedly mentioned by respondents throughout the research. This theme describes the move by ICM consultants back to the culture of service.

The development of the training program content was largely driven by one founding ICM consultant who had a background in counseling and coaching. Besides the previously described principles of ICM, she noted that unlike other programs there was no time limit placed on interactions within ICM. This meant that consultants were available for job seekers on an ongoing basis for extra meetings and for continued support (post-employment) beyond the policy requirements. Respondents emphasized their focus on service rather than compliance, "...it's the time, the above and beyond that makes the difference, that makes the clients see things differently".

Focusing on service provision rather than compliance proved to be a major shift in thinking for the consultants interviewed and for participating site managers. An ICM consultant explained, "The second key benefit is the sense of humanity and integrity of service. Too often employment services have a tendency of reducing people to meaningless numbers and case files". Changes in service provision appeared to be more in line with the stated organizational commitments of community service provision than the previous focus on meeting government performance criteria.

A compliance focused approach toward job seekers was described by respondents as alienating for the job seekers. In fact, it often resulted in their noncompliance. Initial findings suggest that interview attendance rates of the ICM job seekers (66%) were almost double that

Emergence of informal leaders in an inter-organizational network

of another program for long-term unemployed, Customized Assistance (37%). So, client attendance targets appeared to be significantly improved.

While the consultant-job seeker relationship was not compliance driven, it is important to note that consultants were given extra training to ensure compliance to federal policies and procedures. A senior manager from ESC noted that, “ICM isn’t compliance driven but we are, in fact, compliant. We have to be. But being compliant doesn’t mean we can’t do what we’re doing. Nothing in the policies prevents us from working in this way”. The predominantly reported positive change in ICM trainee attitude towards the core values of the ESC network was considered a major effect of ICM training.

A reported limitation to the ability of the ICM consultant to become more service focused was the degree of support from the site manager. In two cases, it was reported that the site manager was skeptical about the program and did not release the resources necessary for the ICM consultant to provide the level of service the ICM program required. The result of these cases was that the ICM consultant did not implement the program fully. Finally these consultants pulled out of the program. Thus, support within the employment sites was observed to be essential for the success of the program.

The site manager was considered a crucial figure in determining whether a site would attempt to collaborate or attempt to change. Poor resourcing from upper levels in the network could force the site manager to spend more time on site problems rather than strategic activities –such as implementing ICM. A site manager’s ability to negotiate was also seen to be a factor, particularly when site managers needed to negotiate resources and approvals across several hierarchical levels. An ICM trainer suggested that this problem be addressed by providing further training in ICM and ongoing support for the site manager as well as for the ICM consultant.

Reframing attitudes –The previously stated changes in service provision versus compliance were concomitant to changes in personal attitudes of the consultants. The main reframing of attitude appeared to occur at both a professional and personal level. Not only was the job seeker reported to become more positive towards job seeking and his/ her relationship with the consultant, but the consultant respondents remarked about changes in themselves and the way they worked.

Consultant –Change in attitude towards job seekers was reported by all ICM trainee respondents to be more positive. A representative response is, “It changed my whole attitude and that’s pretty amazing. I got back to work and everyone saw the change in me... I’ve always had a positive attitude, but now I really trying to bring it out and instill it into the job seeker and its working great”. Consultants commented on the benefits of being able to spend more time with job seekers to understand their barriers in order to prepare them for sustainable work. Thus, ICM training was seen to positively influence consultant attitude and allowed the consultant to “be my authentic own person...and allow my clients to do the same”. Similarly, another consultant mentioned “I am now studying a professional counseling course leading, and for leading me in this direction I am most grateful”. Another respondent described, “...the satisfaction of knowing you have helped someone”.

Another interesting finding of this case study, that demonstrated the potential community benefits, is what one respondent described as a ‘ripple effect’. The benefits of ICM were considered by several respondents to filter down into the community “You make

Emergence of informal leaders in an inter-organizational network

one person feel better about them self, and if they are in a family unit then the family feels better about themselves too”.

Job seeker –Similarly, job seeker attitudes were noted by consultants to be changed. Job seeker changes were often seen in situations other than the employment site settings. ICM consultants would often take their job seekers to organizations with them or meet in a less formal setting than the employment site. One ICM consultant explained, “The job seekers are much friendlier, easier to deal with, they open up and tell you things they wouldn’t have told you before, sometimes when we are driving, or having a cup of coffee”.

Informal leadership by ICM trainees – Our findings indicate that the ICM program encouraged the emergence of the employment consultants that participated in ICM as informal leaders. ICM consultants described changes that occurred in their local sites. Informal training of other employment consultants was reported, as ICM consultants shared their knowledge with colleagues at their sites. One respondent noted, “I can’t wait for the time when ICM is across the board. I know that employment consultants would like the freedom to work the way I work”. Such comments suggest that ICM could provide a platform for improved collaboration and support across the network. Such flexibility appeared to be possible through the underlying principles of community focus and increased knowledge of federal policies, as one respondent explained, “[The program] gives you and the job seeker the flexibility to do things that once upon a time were a restriction”. Thus, ICM consultant decision making and autonomy were seen to increase.

An ICM trainer mentioned that at sites in which the site manager actively supported the ICM program through positive comments and resources there was a “cultural change at the site...that shouldn’t be segregated to ICM...its something they [other consultants] could all benefit from”.

Ongoing training for ICM consultants was also mentioned by respondents and by an ICM trainer as an area that was currently limited within the ICM program. Monthly teleconferences organized by the ESC network headquarters and consultant-initiated phone calls among the ICM cohort were the only support and knowledge-sharing activities occurring within the network. The ICM consultants mentioned increased support from Head Office, “... feeling like you’re not alone, there is nothing worse than feeling unsupported”. Furthermore, support between the ICM consultants meant that networking increased between the sites that participated in the pilot program. Another respondent said, “The networking definitely wouldn’t have happened without the training”. ICM consultants were supported by Head Office to regularly teleconference with each other.

DISCUSSION

The main implication of this research was the potential for ICM training to build leadership behaviors in ICM consultants that were congruent with the priorities of improved network performance, increased collaboration and also maintaining community service focus. In terms of performance improvement, it should be noted that the performance of a site was now being measured by different criteria in the special programs such as ICM than it was during the first year of organizational-change efforts. Thus, ‘performance’ had been redefined. The increased collaboration noted for the ICM trainees over what had been happening during the first year was also likely to have been influenced by the structure of the ICM training program, which brought consultants from different sites together under the program’s umbrella and provided a reason for them to interact and share information with one

another that had not been there for sites in the first year. So, due to this program, some of the previous year's goals were being achieved. In addition, the problems which had been ignored during that first year – burnout, high turnover, the clash of values between service and compliance – were being addressed as a by-product of the new program.

Our findings also indicate that participation in the ICM program encouraged the employment consultants to behave like informal leaders. Informal leadership behaviors by ICM consultants potentially support the transfer of ICM knowledge and techniques to fellow employment consultants.

The content of the ICM training program followed similar principles to coaching psychology principles. A more detailed description of and implications of informal leadership and coaching psychology, related to the ESC network, will now be provided.

Towards informal leadership across the network: Implications for leadership research and practice

Besides improved performance through improved job placement rates and improved job seeker relations, ICM training also appeared to enhance ICM consultants' support and facilitation behavior towards colleagues. The reported effects of support and facilitation could be seen to reflect leadership behavior. We adopt the following definition of leadership as a process in which a person exhibits characteristic behaviors and interactions to affect others in a group to produce a change through a series of actions (Kan 2002).

Neubert (1999) considered leadership to extend beyond the formally designated leader and included anyone taking a leadership role that could potentially hold great influence over others in a team. Avolio and Kahai (2003) also argued that leadership occurring at lower organizational levels could create networks that cross traditional and organizational boundaries.

An important aspect of leadership displayed by ICM consultants was its apparent informal nature, that is, ICM consultants were not assigned formal leadership roles within their organizations. The idea of leadership across different organizational levels has emanated from a growing understanding that traditional 'command and control' structures were not meeting the competitive demands of an increasingly competitive environment. Thus, in the 1990's employee empowerment became recognised as a strategy for addressing the increasingly complex and competitive environmental pressures (Hill & Huq 2004). Empowerment of workers led to the increasing delegation of decision making authority to lower levels within organizations (Dicke 2004).

Informal leadership was found to have a positive relationship with team members' perceptions of cohesiveness and female informal leaders were found to positively impact supervisor ratings of team performance suggesting that informal leadership could be usefully supported by organizations in the future to enhance team performance (Neubert 1999). Schmid (2006) reported that perceived autonomy among community service organization program directors correlated positively with their perceived impact on decision making and program implementation. One study supporting this observation found that informal leaders influenced group efficacy early on in a group's life in goal setting and decision-making (Pescosolido 2001). Pescosolido further hypothesised that a group could choose an informal leader based on the preconceptions of each individual's goals and expectations of the group.

The role and development of informal leadership in the non-profit community sector has important implications and future potential for supporting community organizations to provide services desperately needed by so many members of society. The literature on informal leadership is limited although such leadership throughout lower levels in organizations (also described as street-level leadership) is increasingly recognised as a common occurrence among front-line workers (Dicke 2004). Street-level leadership may be particularly important in situations in which clients need to believe that workers hold the key to their wellbeing (Lipsky 1980). The final example is that ICM consultants worked more independently and closely with clients than other employment consultants. Some of this discretionary power was derived from more detailed knowledge of billing structures for client related expenses. This knowledge was gained through the ICM training.

ICM training appeared to increase the amount of networking between ICM consultants and their colleagues. Huxham (2003) noted the need for leaders to continually nurture in order to achieve effective collaborative outcomes. The skills learned on the ICM training program appeared to also be used by the ICM consultants to support and develop their colleagues' efforts. Supporting colleagues to improve their performance through teaching and applying ICM techniques within the workplace was seen as a potential avenue for extending and developing the program across the network. Given the cultural and individual changes reported by site manager and consultant respondents it appears cultural changes had indeed taken place within ICM sites at which the site manager supported the ICM program.

Coaching as a strategy for improving leadership and collaboration and performance across the network

The similarities of evidence based coaching psychology techniques to ICM were not explicitly mentioned by the trainer respondent but became apparent through observations and interviews. Many elements of ICM reflect core coaching principles. For example, a definition of coaching derived from following sources: ICF (2006), Grant (2001), Stober and Parry (2005), "Coaching is a collaborative effort between the client [job seeker] and the coach in which the coach systematically empowers the client [job seeker] to generate solutions and strategies towards goals the client [job seeker] wants to achieve through self-directed learning and personal growth".

Work outcomes for job seekers were to be sustainable and therefore needed to be congruent with the job-seekers' values, interests and goals. These points relate to goal setting theories such as the self-concordance model described by Sheldon (2002). If a goal, such as becoming employed, is more closely aligned with the job seeker's underlying values and interests, they are more likely to achieve the goals and sustain them. Achieving such goals could also lead to improved wellbeing.

Employment consultant's well-being was possibly also improved. While respondents did not directly mention the term 'well-being' previously mentioned answers including, "satisfaction of knowing you helped someone", and following ambitions and interests such as completing extra training lend support for increased consultant wellbeing; this is a particularly important occurrence in an industry that has been found to have high rates of psychological distress and emotional exhaustion, leading to burnout (Patton & Goddard 2003). Burnout, a cause for staff turnover, creates a cycle of further change and instability.

Coaching psychology offers a solution-focused behavioural science foundation for developing flexible and effective performance-enhancing strategies, and provides a psycho-

educational framework to help individuals develop resilience and deal with stress and burnout (Gyllensten & Palmer 2005).

Given that high performance in organizations is dependant on both effective governing rules and positive relations between individuals (Fredrickson & Losada 2005), it is important to address the earlier raised priorities of network performance and community focus. ICM has potential to be used to build performance strategies are felt to be owned and co-created by local members, whilst ensuring alignment and congruence with the broader network's governance procedures, overall performance goals and ICT.

Training in coaching psychology techniques has been shown to enhance behavioral flexibility and self-regulation (Grant 2003). Thus, the ICM program was seen to improve performance across the network through improved job seeker outcomes and also showed potential for ICM based coaching techniques to be incorporated into leadership development across the network, leadership development that supports both improved performance and a community focus.

Limitations and recommendations

Initial results of the ICM program appear to be very promising in delivering both better services to job seekers and improving performance and collaboration across the network. While a detailed analysis of numbers of job placements and attendance rates over time can only be conducted when critical time periods are reached, initial figures provide support the initial effectiveness of the program. Qualitative results are also promising with consultants reporting positive changes in themselves, colleagues and job seekers.

An important caveat to these findings and the following discussion is that informal leadership emerged as a theme within the case study. The focus on informal leadership was made possible through the use of grounded theory methods that allow for emergence of themes. So, informal leadership through a training program that used coaching techniques became a central phenomenon that appeared to affect their understanding of and use of revised government performance criteria and also to enhance the community service focus at ICM sites.

A further caveat is that interviews were only conducted with those who participated in the ICM training program. As the program and our study of it continues, we plan to provide triangulation for these interviews by interviewing others who can provide the perspective from other vantage points in at the sites and within the network.

Further research directly investigating the relationship between informal leadership processes and organizational performance could provide important understandings and implications for the use of programs using coaching psychology techniques within community organizations. In particular, more targeted studies are needed to examine the role of coaching techniques in the development of informal leaders.

This project offers considerable scope for further research and theory development. Leadership within sites and collaboration across sites was found to be occurring in this study. Further investigations of leadership across the network could incorporate extant literature, theories and measures of leadership to compare and contrast qualitative findings. Leadership across geographically remote sites investigating aspects such as psychological empowerment as in Avolio et al (2004) could provide insights into the effects of coaching techniques.

Ongoing training which allows for experiential development through professional support and networking systems has been deemed essential in order to ensure such leaders remain motivated and engaged so that they can be sensitive to the conflicting values and systems within which they work. If such leadership is not nurtured, such leaders may become burned out creating a vicious cycle leading to a leadership vacuum (Dicke 2004).

Further investigation into informal leaders could include survey data exploring followers' attitudes towards informal leadership and further comparison with organizational performance data. This research focused on the role of the ICM consultant as s/he took on an informal leadership role. The role of the follower, particularly the empowerment of the follower (other employment consultants) could be further investigated to understand the leader-follower dynamics within an informal leadership situation.

CONCLUSIONS

In summary, coaching techniques and training have provided some surprising and unexpected outcomes for this non-profit employment network. The first aim of the project was to identify the effects of the ICM program on performance within individual employment services sites and across the network. The major effects included improved performance measures through job placements of the long term unemployed.

The second aim to identify the ways in which the ICM consultants worked within their sites found that changes in ICM consultant behaviors could lend some support to the proposition that coaching training affects leadership behaviors. Informal leadership, in particular, was found to positively affect the site culture aligning it more closely with the community based values of the non profit sector while concomitantly supporting federal performance requirements. The broader context for this study also provides a useful opportunity to consider alternative forms of leadership that are emerging within inter-organizational networks.

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Emergence of informal leaders in an inter-organizational network

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