Intersectoral collaboration theory as a framework to assist in developing a local government food and nutrition policy

Mathew Dick

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This treatise is submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Public Health, University of Sydney.
Summary

The potential role of local government in NSW to address public health nutrition issues has received encouraging reports. This treatise deals with the question of whether intersectoral collaboration theory is useful to assist development of a relationship with local government to develop food and nutrition policy. Intersectoral collaboration theory describes six conditions necessary for successful action: necessity, opportunity, capacity, relationships, planned action, and sustained outcomes.

The project was a feasibility study carried out in a densely populated and multicultural local government area in Sydney’s southwest during April 1998. Eight Council employees and one elected representative were interviewed using the semi-structured questionnaire to collect a range of opinions and knowledge about Council’s involvement in a food and nutrition policy. Conceptual frameworks for the study included the Ottawa Charter and the food and nutrition system. Theoretical underpinning’s were provided by intersectoral collaboration theory and organisational change theory.

Using intersectoral collaboration theory, analysis of the interviews revealed that participants were very concerned with conditions of necessity, opportunity and capacity to develop food and nutrition policy. Intersectoral collaboration theory correctly predicted that the action proposed would have to assist Council to achieve their core business, gain social and political support and be possible within the current economic environment and level of other resources available.

Participants were not able to identify how a food and nutrition policy would meet these conditions and be feasible within the current capacity of the organisation, and therefore did not become fully engaged in the feasibility study. The health sector needs to develop arguments for local government involvement from their perspective. Organisational change within the health sector is required to develop capacity for intersectoral partnerships, as an effective strategy to address public health nutrition issues.
Acknowledgments

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Members of the working party: Wendy Hodge, Danielle Maloney and Angelo Tsirekas for assistance and guidance with the methodology.

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To all my friends and work colleagues, thank you for continually asking, “how is it going?” It’s nice to know that others recognise the size of and importance of the task being done.

Thanks to Suzanne Gleeson for providing comments on an early version of the coding framework.

Lastly and most importantly I would like to thank my family, Rach and Sam. Thank you for all your support, filling in for me at home, and for putting up with the many hours away and other ways such a task consumes one’s life for a year. It’s now time to move on. I love you both very much.
Author’s contribution

The candidate was employed by the Central Sydney Area Health Service Health Promotion Unit from December 1997 to June 1998 as the project officer for a food and nutrition policy feasibility study. The data used in this treatise was drawn from the feasibility study. The study aims and methodology were determined before the candidate commenced; however he was the primary researcher and consulted with a working party during all aspects of the study. All aspects of this treatise are the work of the candidate.

Permission was received from the Council involved and the Director of the Health Promotion Unit to use the data for this treatise.
# Table of contents

SUMMARY I  
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS II  
AUTHOR’S CONTRIBUTION III  
LIST OF TABLES V  
LIST OF FIGURES V  
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS VI  
INTRODUCTION 1  
THE STUDY AREA 1  
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS FOR THE STUDY 3  
LITERATURE REVIEW 9  
INTERSECTORAL COLLABORATION 9  
ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE THEORIES 19  
RESEARCH QUESTION & STUDY OBJECTIVES 22  
METHODS 23  
DATA COLLECTION 23  
DATA ANALYSIS 29  
RIGOUR 32  
RESULTS 34  
1. Necessity 34  
2. Opportunity 39  
3. Capacity 42  
4. Relationships for Action 44  
5. Implementing Action 46  
DISCUSSION 47  
INTERSECTORAL COLLABORATION THEORY IS A USEFUL APPROACH 47  
DEVELOPING HEALTHY PUBLIC POLICY: A CHALLENGING IMPERATIVE 52  
OPPORTUNITIES 55  
RECOMMENDATIONS 60  
REFERENCES 63  
APPENDICES 68  
APPENDIX 1 – COUNCIL STAFF INTERVIEW SCHEDULE 68  
APPENDIX 2 – ELECTED REPRESENTATIVE AND GENERAL MANAGER INTERVIEW SCHEDULE 72  
APPENDIX 3 – INITIAL CODING FRAMEWORK DEVELOPED 77  
APPENDIX 4 – FINAL CODING FRAMEWORK DEVELOPED 80  
APPENDIX 5 – THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT CONTEXT 84
List of tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Interview Participants</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Council’s Food and Nutrition Activities</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

List of figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>An Integrated Model of the Food and Nutrition System</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Local Government’s Role in the Local Food System</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Strategies Being Implemented in Council to Ensure Effective Interdivisional Collaboration</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Potential Agendas for a Food Policy</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### List of abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALGA</td>
<td>Australian Local Government Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSAHS</td>
<td>Central Sydney Area Health Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>EHO</td>
<td>Environmental Health Officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>HPU</td>
<td>Health Promotion Unit</td>
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<tr>
<td>LGA</td>
<td>Local Government Area</td>
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<tr>
<td>LGSA</td>
<td>Local Government and Shires Association of New South Wales</td>
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<tr>
<td>PHN</td>
<td>Public Health Nutrition</td>
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<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organization</td>
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</tbody>
</table>