

EVALUATING INTERORGANIZATIONAL APPROACHES TO SERVICE DELIVERY: A CASE EXAMPLE OF THE FAMILY VIOLENCE SERVICE PROJECT IN KENT COUNTY, ONTARIO

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Abstract: Program evaluators are well versed on the difficulties and complexities involved in assessing programs in single-human-service organizations. This article describes a model that was effective in evaluating an interorganizational program, the Family Violence Services Project, which was administered collaboratively by two agencies in southwestern Ontario. The model included a sequential planning and implementation process, and much collaboration between the evaluation team, the staff, and administrators of the project. The evaluation strategy was a qualitative-naturalistic one and utilized a conceptual framework derived from the literature on interorganizational relations. The article speaks to a distinct void in the literature on evaluating interorganizational approaches to service delivery.

Résumé: Les évaluateurs de programmes sont bien versés dans les difficultés et les complexités impliqués dans l'évaluation des programmes dans les organisations individuelles. Cet article décrit un modèle qui avait été utilisé effectivement dans l'évaluation d'un programme interorganisationnel, "Le projet des services de violence familiale", qui avait été administré collaborativement par deux agences dans le sud-ouest de l'Ontario. Le modèle a incorporé un plan séquentiel, un processus de mise en oeuvre et beaucoup de collaboration entre l'équipe d'évaluation, le personnel et les administrateurs du projet. La stratégie d'évaluation en était une qualitative-naturalistique et utilisait une charpente conceptuelle dérivée de la littérature sur les relations interorganisationnelles. L'article adresse un vide distinct dans la littérature sur l'évaluation des approches interorganisationnelles aux délivrances de leurs services.

█ In the current economic climate, human-service organizations (HSOs) are consistently being required to examine their service delivery and organizational strategies in order to assess the cost-benefit of their systems. Although the ideas of service coordination and integration have been touted as the wave of future planning for human services, de facto application of these principles is both difficult to find and complex to evaluate. For instance, although recent policy documents from the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services (COMSOC) identify the need to move toward more interagency accountability, the reality is that usually the guidelines for service coordination and evaluation are left to the discretion of individual service providers. Historically, community-based service delivery systems have been fragmented, with no process to ensure that services are comprehensive and compatible with client needs.

The field of domestic violence has received increasing attention during the past two decades as North American feminists and social workers lobbied effectively for policy and legislative changes as well as for increased public awareness about this social phenomenon. Family violence issues, which include child, sexual, elder, and spouse abuse, are known to both the lay and therapeutic communities. A program developed by agencies working jointly to address such domestic violence issues in southwestern Ontario was the Kent County Family Violence Service Project (FVSP).

The foremost characteristic of the FVSP, housed in Chatham, Ontario, is its interorganizational component. Although interorganizational proponents tout the merits of this approach to service delivery, some, like Aiken, Dewar, DiThomaso, Hage and Zeitz (1975), remind us that coordination is an idea that is overworked, underachieved, and seldom defined. For instance, Morrisey, Tausig, and Lindsay (1985) noted that in one form or another, the fragmentation of human services has been attributed to the excessive autonomy of service agencies and their attempts to control definitions of problem statements, intervention strategies, and client disposition. Similarly, Warren (1973) has shown the experience with voluntary coordination mechanisms in the human-service area to be disappointing at best.

Although the most important objective of any coordination effort is improved service to clients, a commitment to this objective will not ensure that coordination is effected. Agencies must also have proof that coordination efforts will not interfere with the core programs and services they already deliver. Further, agencies must be convinced that coordination efforts do not dramatically threaten the continued survival or expansion

of their own organizations. The current appeal of integrated service delivery is obvious to funding bodies as they are forced to make the best use of scarce resources to avoid duplication of service. However, as Goering and Rogers (1986) suggested, it is much easier to define the target population of clients than it is to define which services are to be coordinated.

Currently, it is recognized that HSOs operate under many environmental constraints and that other organizations are among the most important elements in an organization's environment. In the interrelationships between organizations are a series of resource exchanges that can result in either a positive structural change at the community level, or a conflictual mode of interaction that may detract from building the collaborative community necessary for effective service provision (Hasenfeld, 1983). Effective interorganizational collaboration requires, among other things, knowledge of the complexities of political processes. Further, designing optimal conditions for collaboration depends on the ability of the stakeholders involved to engage in a planning process that identifies the unique points of each organization involved, the barriers to cooperation that may impede consensus on collaborative problem solving, and the commitment to work through the difficult conflictual process. Indeed, a well-developed planning process needs to precede any attempt to implement an interagency program, as a lack of acknowledgement by stakeholders that some interdependence exists is a critical barrier to any collaborative effort. For instance, Singh, Tucker, and House (1986) reported that external legitimation is a critical problem for young organizations; however, it appears that as organizations grow older they are likely to develop stronger exchange relationships with other organizations, become part of the power hierarchy in the community, and have their actions endorsed by more powerful stakeholders.

The concept of interorganizational service delivery as an optimum way to deliver services is not disputed by either funding bodies or service providers; it is the lack of implementation strategies that appears problematic. Certainly, the unique nature of each organization and each interagency collaborative effort is a salient factor to consider when examining any interorganizational effort. Specifically, each organization must choose its method of adapting to the needs of the service being provided, whether this adaptation involves structure, function, collaboration, resources, service technology, or ideology. In this context, Hasenfeld (1983) pointed out that such collaborative strategies are not necessarily rational and effective from the client's or consumer's standpoint. Most germane to this particular research study, however, may be Hasenfeld's contention that the network of services is likely to be characterized by redundancy together with major service gaps, limited cooperation, con-

tradictory or inconsistent service delivery patterns, and multiple interorganizational links and contacts, but no overall rational or effective service network.

A basic premise of interorganizational collaboration is that it must be voluntary, even though this is difficult to bring about in the human-service arena. Voluntary collaboration, however, does not preclude the emergence of interorganizational problems. Schopler (1987) indicated that the "length of time needed to resolve formative issues and to develop an operative consensus is directly affected by the group's origin and external requirements" (p. 707). Further, she indicated that members of voluntary groups that shape their own structures are more likely to develop personal ties and spend more time on maintenance and decision making, and thus may be delayed when interpersonal differences arise. Jones (1978), and later Tucker (1981), expressed the opinion that, particularly when group discussions have significant implications for the member's organizations, controversies may be prolonged and heated. Mulford (1984) and Van de Ven and Walker (1984) suggested that there is no "best way" to structure an organization to achieve such effectiveness, as many interorganizational relations consist of formalized, structured arrangements, and other coordination occurs in the form of short-term, ad hoc efforts between pairs of organizations.

The research on interorganizational relations aids in the development of projects such as FVSP, but further research on the specific organizational properties of the agencies involved in the coordination of family violence programs is sorely needed. The notion that the internal structure required to be effective depends on the nature of the organization's environment lends itself ideally to the developmental nature of a community-based family-violence service administrative structure. For it is the day-to-day operations of family violence services on which information can be collected that will guide the development of the evolving service structure. To date, the FVSP has remained remarkably open and flexible in its structure, which has been its hallmark in establishing its identity, its sensitivity to client and community needs, and its organizational survival.

BACKGROUND OF THE PROJECT AND EVALUATION

On July 1, 1988, the Kent County Family Violence Services demonstration project was initiated under the organizational umbrella of a well-established community agency, the Chatham-Kent Women's Centre Inc. The Chatham-Kent Women's Centre entered into a contract with COMSOC

to be accountable for the overall services of the FVSP and the financial reporting of the project for the period July 1, 1988–October 31, 1989. The centre was responsible for the crisis-response/education component, the intake/assessment and referral service, and its portion of the children's groups. Another agency in Chatham, a provider of children's mental-health services, the Lester B. Pearson Centre, co-sponsored the project and was responsible for providing complementary child and family therapy and specialized therapeutic groups for children. In short, the Chatham-Kent Women's Centre entered into a contract to purchase the services of the Lester B. Pearson Centre's two program components.

The purpose of the FVSP was to provide a unified, interagency approach to responding and treating women, children, and men experiencing violence in their lives. The project included: an educational and crisis-response component; individual assessment and referral services for women, children, and men; individual and group counselling for women and children; and family therapy. Individual and group counselling for men and marital counselling were provided through other existing services in the community, on a fee-for-service basis when necessary.

The evaluation of the FVSP focused on assessing the effectiveness of its service delivery to clients in the community and determining the effectiveness of intervention on individual clients and various client systems. As a result, the evaluation assessed the process of interagency collaboration undertaken in delivering the FVSP in this community, and was supposed to provide information for subsequent research and development. It was mandated by the funder, COMSOC. As part of the formally negotiated contract for funding of the demonstration project, COMSOC required an independent evaluation to be carried out that would specifically assess (a) the effectiveness of service delivery, (b) whether the goals and objectives of the project were met, and (c) whether the interagency collaborative model had been successful. Initially conceptualized as the "Trinity Project," which brought together three separate organizations, it became operational as the two-agency project Family Violence Services.

A MODEL FOR EVALUATING INTERORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

The evaluation of the FVSP took place over a one-and-a-half-year period and was completed in May 1989. It was a comprehensive effort that utilized multiple data sources, various designs, qualitative and quantitative approaches, and formative and summative components

(see Figure 1) (Holosko & Dunlop, 1989). As previously indicated, a key component of the evaluation was the assessment of the interorganizational effectiveness of the FVSP, which is presented here. The evaluation design for this particular component is described in Item 5 (Interorganizational Survey Results) of Figure 1.

Figure 1
Overall Evaluation Design of the FVSP in Kent County, Ontario, 1989

Evaluation strategy used	Data sources	Formative/summative	Steps in process	Variables
1. Administrative chronology	1. Project files 2. Project correspondence 3. Project proposals 4. Contracts 5. Media announcements 6. Project consultation reports 7. Task Force on Family Violence research report	Formative	Summarization of nine years of family violence initiatives in Kent County (1979)	1. Chronology of events 2. Historical development of project 3. Policy/procedures 4. Staff/Personnel 5. Financial information 6. Philosophy, goals and objectives 7. Treatment issues
2. Client profile data	1. Client data form (N=39) 2. Client Satisfaction Survey	Formative/summative	1. Development of client data intake form a) Male b) Female c) Children 2. Development of Client Satisfaction Survey 3. Analysis of client data 4. Presentation of Client Satisfaction Survey results	<i>Client Data Sheet</i> 1. Socio-demographic information 2. Family data 3. History of abuse in family of origin 4. History of abuse in present relationship (frequency and severity) 5. Legal system involvement 6. Alcohol and drug involvement

Evaluation strategy used	Data sources	Formative/summative	Steps in process	Variables
3. Intake/assessment data analysis	1. Literature on assessment instruments 2. Client data form 3. Assessment/intake materials 4. Test scores from intake/assessment instruments	Formative/summative	1. Review intake/assessment package 2. Meetings with staff for 3 month period to consult re intake/assessment package & procedures 3. Development of client data intake forms 4. Development of more streamlined intake/assessment package 5. Training for staff use of intake/assessment package 6. Assemble statistical data on clients using client intake forms and standardized instruments of assessment package	Client Satisfaction Survey 1. Outcomes of therapy as perceived by the respondent 2. Respondent's attitude toward therapist 3. Respondent's attitude toward factors affecting outcomes 4. Respondent's attitude toward Family Violence Project in general 1. Client data forms 2. Social support scale 3. Conflict tactics scale 4. Index of spouse abuse 5. Child behavior ratings 6. Self-perception profile (children)

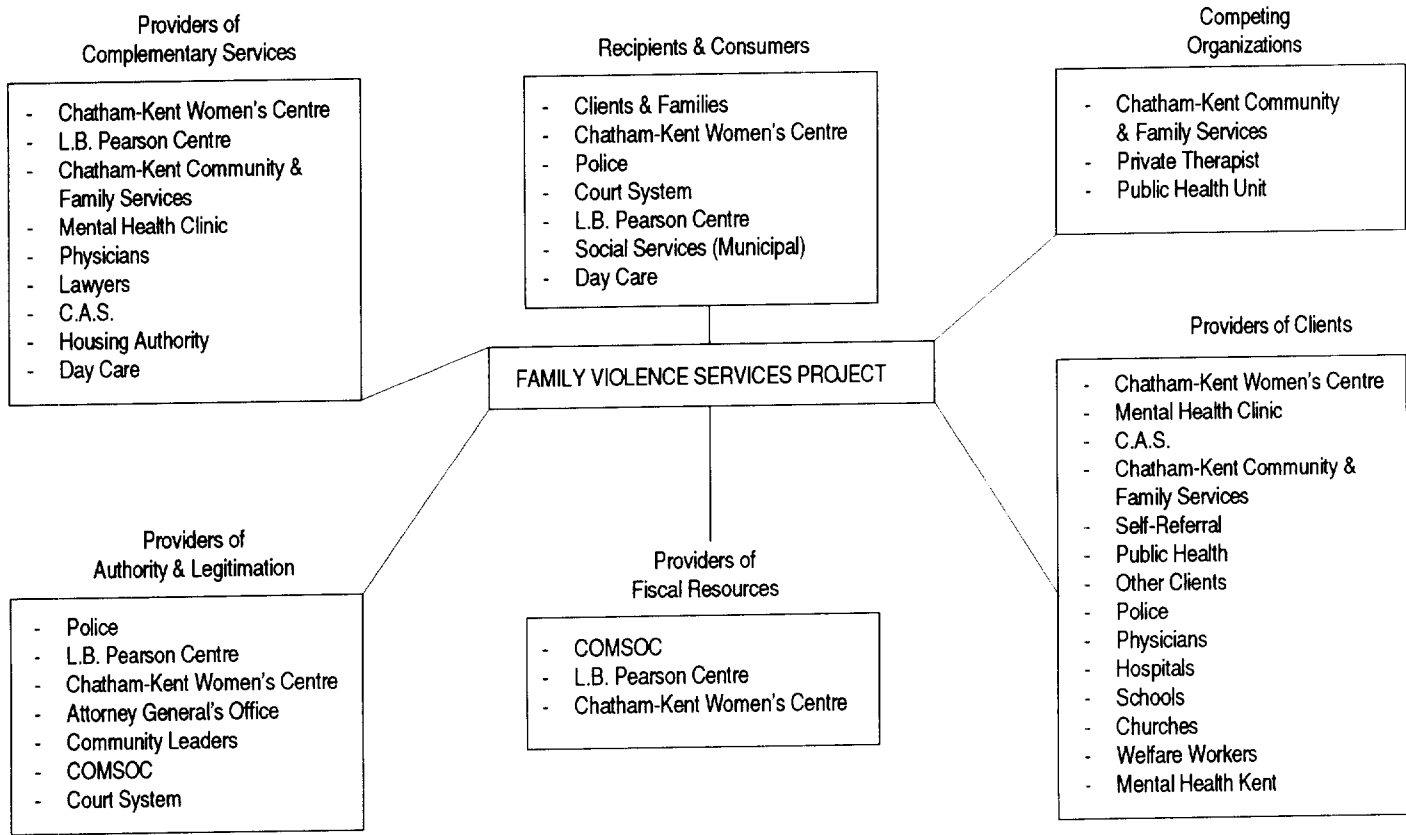
Evaluation strategy used	Data sources	Formative/summative	Steps in process	Variables
4. Treatment process	1. Treatment process 2. Training materials on staff development 3. Interviews with staff 4. Job descriptions of staff 5. Treatment contracts 6. Literature on treatment interventions	Formative	1. Review of current descriptions of treatment methods 2. Literature review regarding treatment interventions 3. Development of a matrix for descriptions 4. Interviews with staff to define treatment interventions using definitive matrix	1. Primary treatment 2. Secondary treatment objectives 3. Indicators 4. Activities 5. Resources 6. Roles 7. Time-frame 8. Appendices a) instruments b) group outlines
5. Inter-organizational survey results	1. Inter-organizational map of task environment of project 2. Inter-organizational survey interviews of key informants (N=23) 3. Literature review of inter-organizational relations	Formative/summative	1. Review of literature on inter-organizational relations identifying framework for analysis 2. Analysis of task environment of Family Violence Project 3. Identification of key informants in each domain of task environment 4. Identification of key variables for development of Inter-organizational Survey Questionnaire 5. Development of Interorganizational Survey Questionnaire 6. Structured face-to-face interviews with key informants	1. <i>Task Environment Domains</i> a) providers of fiscal resources b) providers of legitimation & authority c) providers of clients d) providers of complementary services e) consumers & recipients f) competing organizations 2. <i>Inter-Organizational Variables</i> a) joint activities b) formal agreements c) board members d) operating conflicts

Evaluation strategy used	Data sources	Formative/summative	Steps in process	Variables
			7. Synthesis of data from interorganization interviews	e) domain consensus f) goal similarity g) perception of service utilization
			8. Discussion & conclusions from data collected	h) structural perception i) resource scarcity
			9. Development of recommendations	j) perceived mutual dependence k) frequency of interaction

As one may surmise, the interorganizational reality of service delivery and its subsequent evaluation provided a formidable challenge to both those who administered and delivered the services and those on the evaluation team. Early in the process, the need for a conceptual framework for the evaluation became apparent. The assumption was that such a framework would yield, through much planning and discussion (over time), a set of variables that could then be operationalized for evaluation purposes. The final consideration in this sequence was the methodology (or how to do it). This inductive sequence can be described as: *conceptual framework* —> *variables of study* —> *methodology*. The evolution of this evaluation, therefore, called for the evaluation team to be proactive and interactive in a long-term planning process including the staff and administration of the HSOs involved in the project, and as a result the team was required to exercise much flexibility and openness from project onset to completion. From an evaluation standpoint, the process was a qualitative-naturalistic strategy (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). After a review of the literature on the subject had been conducted, the conceptual paradigm selected, which made the most sense to all parties, was the task-environment schema proposed by Hasenfeld (1983). This is defined as the “set of external groups and organizations useful in controlling access to potential and actual resources for the organization” (Hasenfeld, 1983, p. 61). This framework identified various resource exchange relationships that had an impact on the FVSP in six discrete sectors of the organizational domain or task environment (see Figure 2).

In order to assess the resource-exchange relationships that existed for the project, a set of 17 variables deemed to be useful in analyzing dyadic

Figure 2
The Task Environment of Family Violence Services Project



interorganizational relationships was derived from the literature (see Mulford, 1984). These were information exchange, resource exchange, joint activities, formal agreements, board members, compatibility of operating philosophy, operating conflict, resource scarcity, domain consensus, lack of alternative sources of resources, goal similarity, perceived mutual dependence, asymmetric dependence, frequency of interactions, differences in professionalism, difference in degree of social status, and differences in formalization. Through an extensive planning process with agency staff and administrators from the project, 9 variables from this list were then prioritized as being central to the project's purpose, conceptual framework, and evaluation. A further 2 variables—service utilization and structural perception—were also identified as being important during the planning process and were added to the final list, comprising 11 variables.

All of these variables were then operationalized by staff members and the evaluation team and interspersed into the six sectors of the task environment (as indicated in Figure 2) as follows:

The Task Environment Domains and Variables of Study for the FVSP

1. *Providers of fiscal resources*
 1. Resource scarcity
 2. Formal agreements
 3. Structural perception
2. *Providers of legitimation and authority*
 1. Domain consensus
 2. Board members
 3. Structural perception
3. *Providers of clients*
 1. Service utilization
 2. Perceived mutual dependence
 3. Formal agreements
4. *Providers of complementary services*
 1. Service utilization
 2. Formal agreements
 3. Domain consensus
5. *Recipients and consumers*
 1. Service utilization
 2. Operating conflict
 3. Domain consensus

6. *Competing organizations*
 1. Goal similarity
 2. Frequency of interaction
 3. Joint activities
 4. Operating conflict

As noted above, the 11 variables were not mutually exclusive to the six sectors. Similarly, as noted in Figure 2, the various HSOs in each sector were not mutually exclusive of one another.

The final step, then, involved developing an Interorganizational Survey Questionnaire (IORSQ) in which the 11 variables constituted the basis for the questions asked in the survey (Holosko & Dunlop, 1989). The IORSQ was conducted with a number of key community informants ($N = 23$) in Kent County in each domain represented in Figure 2. These key stakeholders were identified through the planning process and were interviewed by a member of the evaluation team (no fewer than two stakeholders per agency were interviewed, including at least one front-line staff member and one administrator). Further, the perceptions regarding program goals and objectives, activities, and resources were key concepts investigated in the survey. In order to understand how the direct services offered by the FVSP affected other agencies in the community, respondents were also asked to identify which services they had referred to, and were questioned regarding the benefits of these services to their organizations. Further, respondents in the task environment were asked to comment on the organizational aspects of the FVSP by identifying whether they saw the family violence project as a separate entity and as distinct from the two sponsoring organizations. These data were supplemented by a quantitative assessment, a Client Satisfaction Survey (CSS), and by other primary and secondary data sources (see Figure 1).

DISCUSSION

The interorganizational interviews conducted with key informants in Kent County proved to be a valuable source of data. Indeed, respondents were very familiar with the development of the project and were enthusiastic about and interested in providing information for research purposes. In general, respondents perceived that this was in fact a community-based initiative and not just a service provided by two sponsoring organizations. They indicated that the degree of formalization of the project was appropriate for the two particular agencies involved, but also revealed that more formalization would be required if expansion

was ever to be considered. Individuals interviewed were also aware of the philosophical differences among the service providers involved with the project. The majority of respondents did believe, however, that such differences had been resolved and that the on-going conceptualization for the project would include a commitment to developing a more integrated therapy orientation for the long range.

Perhaps the most important finding from these data was the overwhelming support for an expanded domestic response team in Kent County. More specifically, respondents indicated that further integration should be planned that would include men's groups and more liaison with police, hospital emergency rooms, and the court system. Respondents were concerned that the end of the project would result in "the problem" being hidden with families remaining isolated (as they had been before in this community). Although those interviewed clearly stated that the work of their organizations was of primary concern, they were well aware that the client's needs would not be met if funding for the project ceased. Finally, all respondents were prepared to make a commitment to advocate for continuation and expansion of this service in Kent County, as they saw it as needed, meaningful, and credible.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The findings of this evaluation of interorganizational effectiveness are voluminous and are reported elsewhere (Holosko & Dunlop, 1989). Basically, this collaborative effort worked because of a nonintrusive and supportive funding body, the willingness of the administrators of the two host HSOs to make it work, competent staff who showed flexibility in their adaptation and cooperative efforts, and a community commitment to make it work.

The interorganizational evaluation proved successful for a number of similar reasons. First, the evaluation team worked collaboratively with the respective agencies and their staff throughout the duration of the evaluation. Second, sufficient funding for evaluation was allocated early on, and this alleviated the headaches associated with this process, for HSOs that were already stretching their resources to provide services. Third and foremost, the evaluators developed a unique model for evaluating such initiatives, a model that was practical, feasible, and tailored to the realities of these HSOs and this project. The model involved a sequential process such that a conceptual framework gave rise to a set of empirical variables, which were then operationalized in context (both qualitative and quantitative), and subsequently a methodological strategy for implementation was determined.

The conclusions related to the interorganizational survey revealed that the community had a commitment to the ongoing funding and expansion of this project. The evaluation itself produced a total of 23 recommendations regarding the future development of this interagency service provision in this particular community. The members of the research team were convinced that the success of the interorganizational evaluation could be attributed to the developmental approach taken during the planning process and the use of a conceptual model that made sense for this project and to this community. If the field of evaluation is to evolve in this interorganizational area, as it seems to be doing, it may benefit from inclusion of some of these insights. The paucity of information on evaluation planning and processes, as reflected in this article, is quite surprising given their apparent significance to the evaluation outcomes.

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