

Science and Mathematics Education Centre

**Exploring Communication Patterns Within and Across a
School and Associated Agencies to Increase the
Effectiveness of Service to At-Risk Individuals**

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Abstract

The significant standpoint in this study was that schools' key role was to educate and yet this process would be severely impeded when a student receiving the education was at-risk. Agencies external to the school provide support in various forms to these individuals with the view of decreasing their at-risk status, thus providing an environment conducive to learning. Communication was posited to be a fundamental process essential to the provision of support and education to these at-risk individuals. The conceptual framework in this study acknowledged the complexity of school and organisational environments and was founded upon four key theoretical perspectives; organisational communication theory; a psychological orientation provided by Maslow's hierarchy of needs; a social reconstructionist perspective; and constructs underpinning at-risk status causal factors.

This research study sought to identify communication patterns existing within a selected school, and between the school (in this case) and associated agencies that were supporting the at-risk individuals. The results of this study, derived from in-depth interviews and questionnaires with agency personnel and school staff, demonstrated that although formal patterns of communication did exist they were inefficient and cumbersome. Formal patterns of communication were subsidiary to informal networks between colleagues. In this study, the school was frequently excluded from informal and formal agency communication patterns. Intra-agency and intra-school communication patterns were characterised by a top-down orientation with administrators tending to control the flow of information.

A major finding was that there were considerable barriers to developing more effective communication patterns. The greatest impediment to communication was case workers' fear of breaching the *Commonwealth Privacy Act 1988*, even when dealing with such serious issues as children's safety. Other less serious, but still substantial barriers, included agency territorialism, poor marketing of services, and individuals' biases against particular support agencies.

A surprising finding was that case workers' and educators' conceptualisations of the causal factors which contribute to an at-risk status were well aligned. The family factors, which included drug addicted, alcoholic, violent, criminal, disinterested and/or neglectful parents, problematic siblings, and coming from an English-as-a-second-language background were deemed to have the most significant influence towards creating an at-risk status. School-based factors such as stressed, intolerant, inexperienced, and/or non-supportive teachers, an inadequate and/or violent school environment, and a lack of individualised support were deemed to have the least impact on developing an at-risk status.

As a result of this research a model has been proposed which outlines the creation of a State Support Brokerage Authority whose mandate would be to centralise, coordinate, and ensure quality of service to at-risk individuals across the state. This body would utilise a technological solution to enhance and coordinate the communication patterns between all potential stakeholders to facilitate appropriate and timely interventions.

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CHAPTER 1 Introduction

Whenever a child is deliberately injured or killed, there is inevitably great concern in case some important tell-tale sign has been missed. Those who sit in judgement often do so with the great benefit of hindsight. So I readily acknowledge that staff who undertake the work of protecting children and supporting families on behalf of us all deserve both our understanding and our support. It is a job which carries risks, because in every judgement they make, those staff have to balance the rights of a parent with that of the protection of the child I am in no doubt that effective support for children and families cannot be achieved by a single agency acting alone. It depends on a number of agencies working well together Improvements to the way information is exchanged within and between agencies are imperative if children are to be adequately safeguarded.

Lord Laming, (2003, n.p)

Background

This Master's research study focused on phase one of an Australian Research Council (ARC) funded project (see Appendix I). This study was designed to explore the patterns of communication within and across an educational organisation and associated agencies which serviced individuals who were at-risk. The findings of this study informed subsequent phases of the ARC project which proposed a technological solution to increase the levels and effectiveness of the various communication pathways.

Four major theoretical perspectives informed this research. These theories included organisational communication (Schonfelder, 1998), Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Genkins, 1998), the educational literature on students at-risk, and the social reconstructionist perspective (Matsumoto, 2002).

Organisational Communication

Interpreting how organisations support at-risk individuals necessitated an understanding of the communication patterns both within and across them. Organisation communication theories abound in the literature having facets that explained how communication might have actually occurred. One organisational communication theorist, Griffin (2003, p.261), postulated that human relations and the objectives that individuals have determined how an organisation operated and was maintained. He proposed five approaches to his theory using 'who' had control of communication within the organisation as the separating factor. The "Mechanistic

Approach”, for example, was characterised by highly controlled, even dictatorial managerial communication patterns, whereas the “Human Relations Approach” referred to everyone having an equal say, thus equal control (p.261). Personnel having a unified purpose or objective within an organisation determined the communication patterns of the “General Systems Approach”. A subtle difference was exemplified with the “Cultural Approach” where the values, beliefs and knowledge of staff within the organisation determined the communication patterns. The “Political Approach” identified power relationships as the determining factor with both overt and covert communication between individuals being an influence (Griffin, 2003, p.261).

Likert, another organisational communication theorist, expounded the theory that it was not only human relations, but also the processes within the organisation that determined communication patterns (Daniels, Spiker, & Papa, 1997; Likert, 1967). Rather than use the term ‘approach’ to describe each subset of theory he used the term ‘system’. The systems ranged from System 1 - the most restrictive, through to System 4 - the least restrictive. Each system was characterised by differences in management-worker communication, decision-making, information flow, performance goals, and control processes.

All these approaches to understanding the communication patterns in organisations were determined by the way people think, behave, and respond to the establishment, culture and context. The interactions or processes and communication patterns of people thus determined the success and efficiency of the organisation. Patterns that existed within the organisation could be extended to encompass communication between organisations. Any organisation (agency or school) that provided support to at-risk individuals was likely to encompass multiple classifications of organisational communication patterns as described in the theories. This study investigated which approach or system was predominant.

Human Needs

Maslow (cited in Woolfolk, 2004) was a humanistic psychologist who proposed that every person has a hierarchy of needs. These needs were established as a hierarchy from basic to complex and included ...

Physiological: food, drink, shelter, sexual satisfaction and other physical requirements.

Safety: security and protection from physical and emotional harm, as well as assurance that physical needs will continue to be met.

Social: affection, acceptance and friendship.

Esteem: internal esteem factors such as self-respect, autonomy and achievement, and external esteem factors such as status, recognition, and attention.

Intellectual achievement: cognitive processes involving knowledge acquisition, problem solving and critical and creative thinking.

Aesthetic appreciation: becoming aware of and appreciating the beauty of the surrounding world.

Self-actualisation needs: growth, achieving one's potential and self-fulfilment; the drive to become what one is capable of becoming.

According to this theory, if the individual was experiencing some problem at a lower level then movement to a higher level could be impeded. In a school setting, the following scenario was a common occurrence ...

[a] child whose feeling of safety and sense of belonging are threatened by divorce may have little interest in learning to divide fractions. If a school is a fearful, unpredictable place where neither teachers nor students know where they stand, they are likely to be more concerned with security and less with learning or teaching.

(Woolfolk, 2004, p.353)

If individuals were failing to receive the necessities of life, such as food, shelter, safety, and love they would not thrive and develop as other individuals who did receive those necessities. Similarly, not having those necessities would impede their academic progress because individuals could not focus on learning whilst having to concentrate on attaining the physiological and safety needs described by Maslow. The lack of physiological and safety needs were considered risk factors. Barr and Parrett (1995) and Johnson (1997) explained that the concept of risk factors could be divided into three primary areas, namely, student, family and school, enabling observable behaviours to be included within the separate categories of risk. These factors were summarised as ...

Student: substance abuse, sexuality, criminal activity, truancy, lack of motivation, limited English language.

Family: parent and sibling substance abuse, family violence, lack of parental supervision, lack of parent educational support and involvement, parents who speak English as a second language, criminal parental behaviour and having a sibling who has dropped out of school.

School: teacher prejudice and unwillingness to modify curriculum and individualise instruction, limited school resources, lack of appropriate programs, and school violence.

At-risk individuals cannot progress towards 'self-actualisation', as defined by Maslow, without the support of agencies, including schools, providing some form of intervention. For interventions to be most effective, communication within and between agencies is necessary.

The Social Reconstructionist Perspective

One of the aims of schooling was to promote the desire and capacity in young people to make society a better place for all members of the community. Early social reconstructionists' conceptualised making society a better place as an extension of the democratic process, and sought to achieve this better society by teaching a broader curriculum through Social Studies (Riley & Stern, 2002; Stern & Riley, 2001). More recently, the social reconstructionists' perspective has evolved to incorporate a more holistic perspective of education, whereby it is not only Social Studies teachers but everyone in the school that has the responsibility to teach students to adopt more civically responsible attitudes to life. "Schools are institutes that reflect the broader issues of society and, as such, they are held responsible for a tremendous array of social reforms" (Matsumoto, 2002, n.p.).

These four major pivotal theoretical perspectives discussed in this study coalesce in an effort to provide better interventions for at-risk individuals. The social reconstructionist perspective aimed to work toward a better society. At-risk individuals could be taught how to be more responsible citizens together with the knowledge that although problems exist there are solutions. However, if a student does not have the necessities for life they cannot concentrate on their schooling. Ensuring these necessities are not creating an impediment to education requires collaboration between school and external agencies. This collaboration must focus on interventions directed toward the lower needs on Maslow's hierarchy. Greater

communication between agencies and the school would perhaps facilitate interventions that are more effective. At-risk individuals would subsequently take advantage of the educational opportunities. The school staff would be able to concentrate on supporting students' development of self-esteem by providing opportunities for intellectual achievement (higher on Maslow's hierarchy of needs). When these higher needs are promoted there is an increased probability that these previously at-risk individuals would be better members of society with greater life choices available to them (Genkins, 1998). The whole school staff (including teachers, administrators, welfare, and social support staff) would have worked together with a social reconstructionist perspective to guide and facilitate the development of more responsible, productive, and well-adjusted citizens.

Purpose of the Research

This research focused on communication patterns across a school and associated support agencies, such as the Department of Community Development, with the view that formalising the communication patterns would enhance support provided for at-risk individuals. Without effective communication, the ability of support agencies to collaborate in providing services to at-risk individuals may not be as targeted and constructive, hindering the overall success of intervention strategies. Subsequently, this research proposed to; 1) ascertain current communication patterns between the school and support agencies pertaining to at-risk individuals with the view to identifying existing strengths and weaknesses, and 2) investigate teachers' and support agency personnel's perceptions of what constituted being 'at-risk' in order to facilitate shared understandings and frame of reference across stakeholders.

Research Questions

1. What are the patterns of communication within and across a school and associated support agencies that interact and manage at-risk individuals?
 - a. If there are distinct pathways, why is this the case? What determines their existence, success and/or sustainability?
 - b. If there are no distinct pathways, why isn't this occurring? What are the impediments to interagency collaboration?
 - c. Is the data that an educational organisation and associated agencies collect about at-risk individuals shareable? Why?

2. How do the schools and support agency personnel's differing conceptualisations of what constitutes at-risk status influence the communication patterns and the success of interventions?

Significance

This study was designed to facilitate enhanced communication patterns whereby at-risk individuals have increased opportunities for life choices.

This study had significance for:

The education system - The education system has the potential to significantly influence at-risk individuals due to the amount of time that they can spend within this environment;

Agencies who manage at-risk individuals - Agencies, both government and non government, support at-risk individuals by providing intervention strategies and support to schools. Proposing more effective pathways of communication as a result of this research had the capacity to increase the quality of the interventions and educational support provided to at-risk individuals;

Inform subsequent phases of the ARC Smart Communities Project - It assisted in the identification of impediments and the formulation of potential software;

Research community – this research will add to the body of knowledge of communication patterns for support of at-risk individuals.

Research Design

This study had facets of both normative and interpretive paradigms in that it predominantly used in-depth interviews but also utilised a questionnaire with rating type questions. A case study method was selected, with a metropolitan public high school as the case. Gall, Borg and Gall (1996, p. 545) stated that a case study was “the in-depth study of instances of a phenomena in its natural context and from the perspective of the participants involved in the phenomenon”. The main focus of the study was to investigate the communication patterns to and from the school and external agencies related to supporting at-risk individuals. The identification of communication patterns required the interpretation of key informants' perceptions and therefore an interpretive approach was adopted as a basis for this case study (Cohen., Manion, & Morisson, 2000). The questionnaire served to triangulate

respondent’s perceptions of the term ‘at-risk’ with the interview data and definitions in the literature.

Sample

The selected school was in the lowest socio-economic band with significantly high numbers of at-risk individuals within the targeted population, hence there were significantly higher numbers of interactions with external agencies in providing support for these at-risk students. Some teachers had designated pastoral care roles requiring at-risk intervention strategies which included interaction with external support agencies. The design of a qualitative study was “emergent and flexible, responsive to changing conditions of the study in progress” (Merriam, 1998, p. 8). In many cases at-risk individuals had the support of numerous agencies and as a result, the full complement of agencies was not known at the beginning of the study. Snowball sampling was utilised, in that, respondents were encouraged to identify other personnel with whom they communicate about at-risk individuals thereby providing additional insights for the study (Patton, 2000). These other personnel were subsequently contacted and invited to participate in the study. Given that the research was exploring the communication patterns within and between agencies and the school to support at-risk individuals, incorporating the flexibility of including further respondents was a key sampling technique.

Data Analysis Procedures

Interview transcripts were input into NVivo (Qualitative Solutions and Research, 2004) to facilitate the analysis of interview data which resulted in identification of common themes. SPSS statistical software package was used to analyse questionnaire data which then was triangulated with interview data (SPSS, 2004).

Table 1
Research Data Analyses Process

Aims	Research Question	Data Source	Analysis
Communication patterns aiding the support of at-risk individuals	1a 1b 1c	Interview	NVivo
Respondent’s understanding of the term ‘at-risk’	2	Interview Questionnaire	NVivo SPSS

Ethical Issues

This research was concerned with the collection and analysis of responses of people who provide support to at-risk individuals. These respondents included senior administrators, teachers, psychologists, chaplains, police, and case workers. Respondents were contacted by phone to introduce the researcher, to outline the rationale for the research, and were invited to participate. Respondents' consent was obtained, enabling them to be interviewed and data to be analysed. A letter of introduction was supplied which summarised the study, provided assurance of confidentiality and anonymity, and the fact that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Interviews were only recorded with the permission of the respondents. The tapes and interview transcripts were stored at the University, in a locked cupboard. Access to this cupboard was restricted to the researcher and his supervisors. Electronic data was stored on a computer that was password protected. The researcher ensured anonymity with codes such that the responses would not be traceable to the individuals in any document or publication arising from the research.

Summary

This study has been divided into six chapters. The literature review (Chapter 2) focused on four theoretical constructs; organisational communication theory, the psychological domain, namely, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the educational literature on students at-risk, and a social reconstructionist perspective in education. The third Chapter outlines the research design of the study and included the target population, instrumentation that was utilised and research methodology. An interview and questionnaires were used to elicit replies from respondents. The results of the study (Chapter 4) were reported thematically after analysis of the interviews and questionnaires, using NVivo and SPSS respectively. Chapter 5 discussed the results in relation to the literature. The sixth, and final Chapter, outlined a potential model that proposes to address the concerns raised by respondents about current communication patterns. This model postulates a structure and process to enhance communication patterns and was based on 'best practice' as described in the literature.

CHAPTER 2 Literature Review

The Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce ... “saw a particular need to provide better support for young people who are in danger of falling through the gaps in existing support services, or who cannot relate to the help that is being offered. Even more challenging is the need to provide ways to help young people who, for whatever reason, are already adrift from their families, their schools and other support systems, and for whom there is no obvious way forward.

Captain Eldridge (2001, p.2)

Introduction

This Chapter reviews the scholarly literature related to communication patterns occurring within, and external to, a school. The school, as a social institution, was charged with meeting the varied and complex needs of all students, many of whom are individual's at-risk of not completing their education and/or fulfilling their potential to be valuable members of society. Government and non-government agencies, provide targeted support to at-risk individuals aiding them in overcoming potentially detrimental problems. The communication patterns between support agencies and schools related to supporting these at-risk students. The need to identify existing communication patterns was paramount in this research with the ultimate aim of enhancing these patterns with a technological solution thus, perhaps, enhancing the support provided to at-risk individuals.

The four main theoretical constructs identified as critical in this study (refer to Figure 1) were a somewhat eclectic selection and included organisational communication theory, the psychological domain, namely, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the educational literature on students at-risk, and a social reconstructionist perspective in education. These four constructs coalesce when exploring how and why schools, external agencies and stakeholders can collaborate to provide high quality and effective support for at-risk individuals. The literature on organisational communication theory was examined to determine what models and key concepts have been identified in relation to establishing effective communication within the school, and between the school and external agencies/stakeholders. Maslow expounded the principle that explained why students' basic needs had to be accommodated in order for their educational and personal potential to be actuated. If students' basic needs were not met then this generated an at-risk status, which meant

that these individuals were less likely to be educationally and personally successful. The fourth aspect, the social reconstructionist perspective, illuminated a broader view that education processes should develop students who were capable and desirous to create a better world in which the principles of social justice were embedded. Social reconstructionism in schools also translated into providing educational environments that were transforming experiences for all students, including at-risk individuals – frequently perceived to be the discards of society.

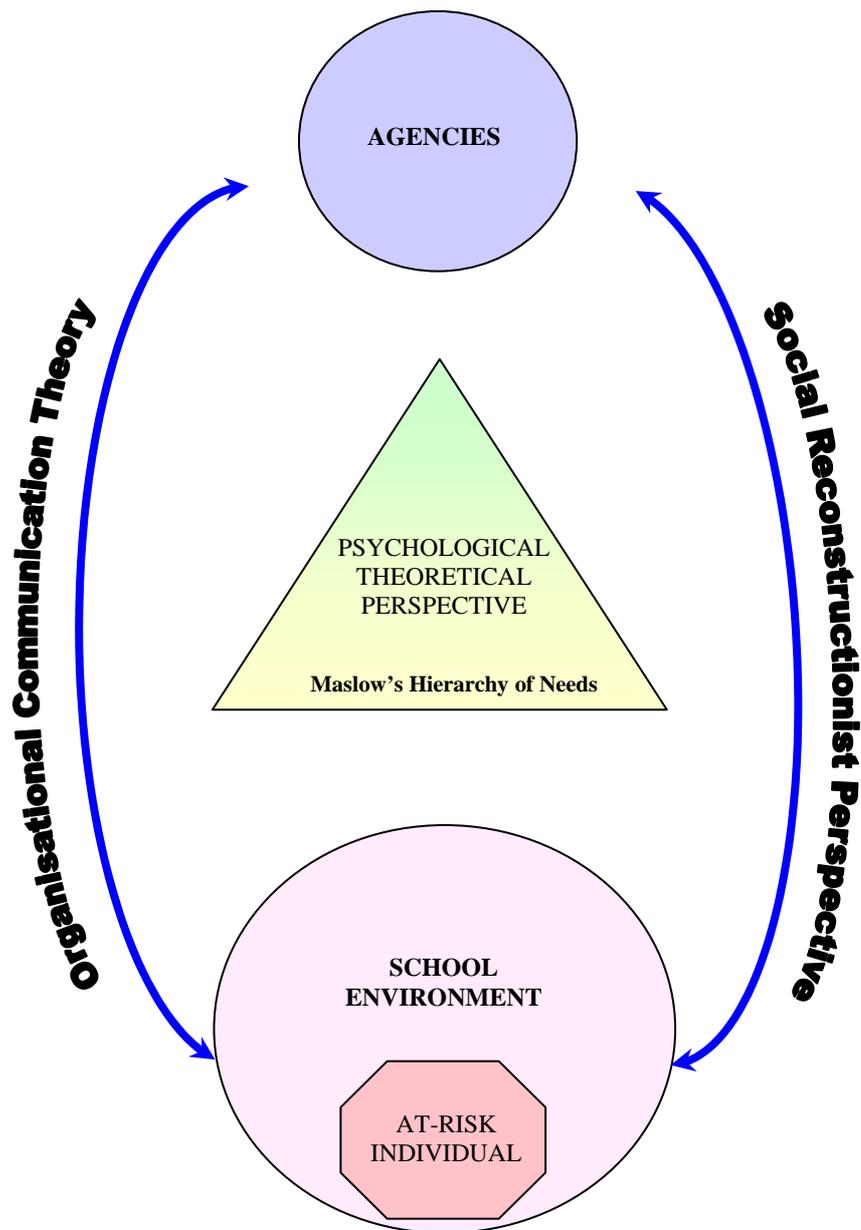


Figure 1: The Theoretical Framework

Although communication patterns were the predominant aspect in this research study - hence, organisational communication theory would normally be the lead-in section – this researcher deemed that the flow was more logical if the sections on Maslow’s theory, social reconstruction and students at-risk were outlined first. This orientation of the sections sought to establish understandings of the context, stakeholders’ perspectives, and the rationale for pro-activity prior to addressing forms and relative effectiveness of communication within organisations.

Sound Education as the Key to Social Reconstruction

Individuals who are failing to receive the necessities of life, such as food, shelter, safety, and love, will not thrive and develop as quickly to those individuals who do receive these necessities. Similarly, not having these necessities will impede academic progress because individuals cannot focus on learning whilst having to concentrate on attaining the physiological and safety needs. Maslow elaborated on these concepts identifying seven levels of human needs as shown in Figure 2: Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

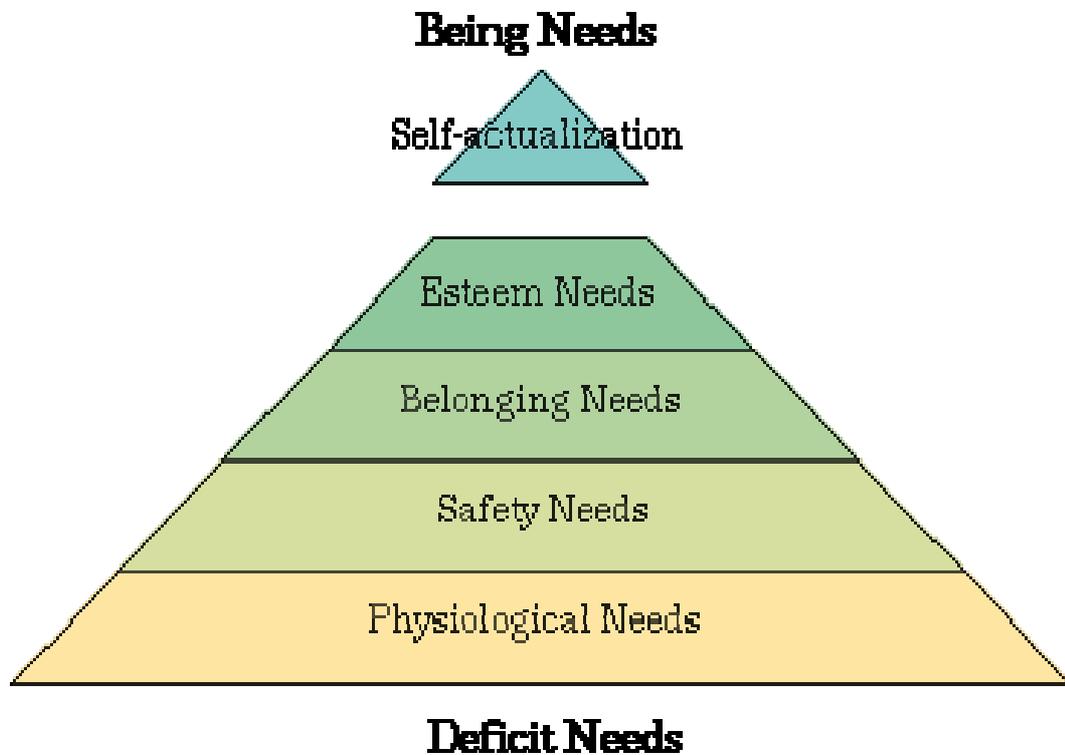


Figure 2: Maslow's hierarchy of needs

Maslow (cited in Woolfolk, 2004) was a humanistic psychologist who proposed that every person has a hierarchy of needs (see Figure 2: Maslow's hierarchy of needs).

Physiological: food, drink, shelter, sexual satisfaction and other physical requirements.

Safety: security and protection from physical and emotional harm, as well as assurance that physical needs will continue to be met.

Social: affection, acceptance and friendship.

Esteem: internal esteem factors such as self-respect, autonomy, and achievement, and external esteem factors such as status, recognition, and attention.

Intellectual achievement: cognitive processes involving knowledge acquisition, problem solving, and critical and creative thinking.

Aesthetic appreciation: becoming aware of and appreciating the beauty of the surrounding world.

Self-actualisation needs: achieving one's potential and self-fulfilment; the drive to become what one is capable of becoming.

Maslow further split this hierarchy of human needs based on two groupings: "deficiency or deficit needs" and "being or growth needs" (Woolfolk, 2004, p.350). The process whereby the needs can be satisfied can differentiate the two levels. The higher level, being needs are satisfied internally, while the lower deficit level needs are predominantly satisfied through external means. Maslow's hierarchy provides a holistic view of an individual and holds that sequential progression occurs from low level needs to those of a higher nature. Critics of Maslow's theory point out, however, that we can move backwards and forwards between levels, motivated by different needs. According to this theory, if the individual is experiencing some problem at the lowest deficiency needs level, movement to a higher level can be impeded. If at some future time a deficiency is detected, the individual will act to remove the deficiency. "According to Maslow, an individual is ready to act upon the growth needs if and only if the deficiency needs are met" (Huitt, 2004, n.p.).

In a school setting the child's needs may not be purely academic. For example, a child whose feeling of safety and sense of belonging are threatened by divorce may have little interest in learning to divide fractions. If a school is a fearful, unpredictable place in which teachers and students don't know where they stand,

both students and teachers are more likely to be concerned with security and less with learning or teaching. Belonging to a social group and maintaining self-esteem within that group for example, are important to students. If doing what the teacher says conflicts with group rules, students may choose to ignore the teacher's wishes or even defy the teacher (Woolfolk, 2004).

Maslow believed that if the environment were suitable people would actualise the potentials they had inherited, taking the potentials from a low level, and enhancing them to move up the hierarchy. One of the aims of schooling is to promote the desire and capacity in young people to make society a better place for all members of the community. Early social reconstructionists perceived 'making society a better place' as an extension of the democratic process and sought to achieve this better society by teaching a broader curriculum through social studies (Riley & Stern, 2002; Stern & Riley, 2001). More recently, the social reconstructionist's perspective has evolved to incorporate a more holistic perspective of education, whereby it is not only Social Studies teachers but everyone in the school that has the responsibility to teach students to adopt more civically responsible attitudes to life. Schools are being held responsible for reforming social problems that exist within society (Matsumoto, 2002).

Teachers cannot fix the problems of society by "teaching better", nor can teachers alone, whether through individual or group efforts, alter the life chances of the children they teach, particularly if the larger issues of structural and institutional racism and inequity are not addressed. However, while teachers cannot substitute for social movements aimed at the transformation of society's fundamental inequities, their work has the potential to contribute to those movements in essential ways.

(Cochran-Smith, 1999, p.116)

Schools are socio-cultural surroundings where teaching and learning potentially occur. Theory and practices of teaching and learning are shaped by dominant cultural assumptions. Both formal knowledge and methods of delivery are influenced by the historical and cultural environment from which they arise (Martin, 1994; O'Loughlin, 1995; Richardson, 1997). Social reconstruction (associated with Vygotsky) emphasises education for social transformation. Individual development derives from interactions in a socio-cultural context; between others and the environment. The

knowledge constructed from this interaction not only affects the individual but also transforms the environment (Richardson, 1997).

The social reconstructionist perspective aims to work toward a better society, meaning that the at-risk individuals within schools should have basic needs provided before academic progress could be made. If schools, in conjunction with external agencies, were to address the lower needs on Maslow's hierarchy, at-risk individuals would benefit. Greater collaboration occurring between the agencies and the school would facilitate more effective interventions, meaning that at risk students were better able to engage with the educational opportunities in the school (Gordon, Hallahan, & Henry, 2002). In turn, the school staff would be better able to support students' development of self-esteem and provide opportunities for facilitation of movement up the pyramid (higher on Maslow's hierarchy of needs). A whole school staff (including teachers, administrators, welfare, and social support staff) would have worked together with a social reconstructionist perspective to guide and facilitate the development of more responsible, productive, and well adjusted citizens. If there is movement up Maslow's hierarchy of needs there is an increased probability that these previously at-risk individuals would be better members of society with greater life choices available to them (Genkins, 1998).

At-Risk Individuals: Problems and Interventions

The need to 'provide an intervention for at-risk youth' has become a popular phrase. Throughout the world, the problems of the at-risk student have been readily acknowledged and many experts from various fields have posed numerous remedies to solve the problems. However, there is "often confusion or disagreement about which children are at risk, why they are at risk, and what can be done to improve their chances for success in school and adult life." (Rossi & Montgomery, 1994, n.p.)

'At-risk' is a relatively new expression in the educational arena. Historically terms such as 'under achiever' or 'low achiever' were used to describe students who had learning difficulties (Smey-Richman, 1988). Expressions such as under achiever and low achiever have lost favour because they do not fully encapsulate the vast range of problems that learners could possibly face and therefore have to overcome. The word 'disadvantaged' was coined for those students who had learning difficulties created

through external factors such as poverty (Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm, 1997). This categorisation was later expanded to mean those who were different from the perceived 'norm' of society (Henderson-Sparks, Paredes, & Gonzalez, 2002). Appearance, language, culture, values, communities, and family structures were all factors that were considered in this 'norm' determination.

Educators frequently use the term 'risk' to express concern about a student's ability to learn and, consequently, the resultant perils of potentially achieving adulthood without the basic pre-requisite skills of numeracy and literacy. Barr and Parrett (1995, p. 3) went further stating that the danger was that these students could enter "adulthood illiterate, dependant upon drugs and alcohol, unemployed or under employed, as a teenage parent, dependant on welfare, or adjudicated by the criminal justice system".

Educational researchers, physicians, and psychologists have recognised that academic capacity was a complex field of study because success or failure cannot necessarily be attributed to a single factor. Therefore, a multiple causation theory has emerged to describe the facets that caused a student to be classified as at-risk. This theory suggested that although some students may be identified as at-risk due to a primary condition, often multiple conditions were in play which combined to create an overall at-risk state (Choate, 1993; Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm, 1997). "Great strides have been made in identifying factors that place whole categories of children at risk [w]e now have proof that disastrous outcomes are more likely when several risk factors interact" (Schorr & Schorr, 1989, in Barr & Parrett, 1995, p.11).

A common characteristic of the at-risk classification were students who were failing to achieve in school at a level commensurate with their age. Warning signs that indicated the student was struggling to cope academically included "poor academic performance", "counterproductive attitudes and behaviour", and "excessive absenteeism" (Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm, 1997).

Risk, cautions Richardson, Casanova, Placier, and Guilfoyle (1989, p.4), was relative because "everyone is at-risk for a condition to some degree or another" so they preferred the terms "risk factors" or "predictors" that were statistically associated

with failing at school or dropping out. Researchers identified at-risk students as a result of school-related behaviours including low grades, absenteeism and suspension. Richardson, et al (1989, p.4) further stated that at-risk youths were shaped by background and personal factors such as “minority status, poverty, and language difference”. Natriello, McDill, and Pallas (1990) interpreted risk factors slightly differently, in referring to race or ethnicity, poverty, poorly educated mothers, single-parent families and limited English proficiency.

Barr and Parrett (1995) and Johnson (1997) further explained that the concept of risk factors could be divided into three significant areas, namely, student, family and school and this enabled observable behaviours to be included within the separate categories of risk. These risk factors were summarised as ...

Student: substance abuse, sexuality, criminal activity, truancy, lack of motivation, limited English language proficiency.

Family: parent and sibling substance abuse, family violence, lack of parental supervision, lack of parent educational support and involvement, parents who spoke English as a second language, criminal parental behaviour and having a sibling who dropped out of school.

School: teacher prejudice and unwillingness to modify curriculum and individualise instruction, limited school resources, lack of appropriate programs, and school violence.

More recently, at-risk students were denoted as having “short attention spans, patterns of behavioural problems, poor self-image, low socio-economic status, language impairment, cultural deprivation, and discipline problems, as well as second language learners, and non-achievers” (Henderson-Sparks, Paredes, & Gonzalez, 2002, p.82). Other researchers included adolescent pregnancy, school failure, early school withdrawal, substance abuse, suicidal behaviour, and incarceration as further indicators of being at-risk (Johnson, 1997).

Potentially the most disturbing characteristic of an at-risk youth was the predisposition to ‘drop out’ of school prior to graduation (Druian & Butler, 1987; Natriello, McDill, & Pallas, 1990; Stephens, 1997). The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001) stated approximately 270,000 teenagers left school in Australia, but

of these, one third (86,000) failed to complete Year 12, the conclusion of secondary education. From this smaller group over 50,000 failed to gain their Year 12 equivalent qualification at any time (Abelson, 2002; McMillan & Marks, 2003). Over the last decade the apparent retention rate from Year 10 to Year 12 decreased from approximately 78% in 1993 to 77% in 2003. The retention rate for males (approximately 72%) was significantly lower than for females (approximately 82%). When probed regarding their rationale for leaving without completing Year 12, 19% of young men indicated dislike of, or lack of success in, school compared with 26% of young women (ABS, 2001). Other factors to which early school leaving have been attributed were:

- low levels of literacy and numeracy, with this being greater for males than females;
- socio-economic background, with youth of unskilled parents with manual jobs more likely to leave in comparison with those whose parents were professionals;
- being indigenous Australians, with some 52% failing to complete Year 12;
- ethnicity, with English speaking background students more likely to leave than their non-English speaking background counterparts;
- locality, with students attending schools in rural and remote areas showing higher rates of early leaving than regional and metropolitan students;
- public versus private schools, with government school students more likely than those in Independent and Catholic systems to be early leavers.

(ABS, 2003a, 2003b; Marks & Flemming, 1999; McMillan & Marks, 2003).

Intervention

Many teachers are cognisant of using social reconstruction processes to assist students helping them become responsible members of society (Zuga, 1992). They particularly concentrated on building students' self-esteem, intellectual achievement, and aesthetic appreciation (all part of Maslow's hierarchy of needs). Educators were also aware that at-risk individuals frequently experienced difficulty moving up the hierarchy without increased levels of support, particularly focused at lower level needs. Schools usually have numerous support personnel who provide additional assistance to at-risk students. In addition to teachers, these personnel included school psychologists, chaplains, nurses, Aboriginal liaison officers, school administrators,

and police officers. A school, as a community of professionals, also works with external stakeholders and agencies to establish intervention programs that promote the attainment of higher goals in Maslow's hierarchy through accommodating lower level needs.

Intervention programs may be defined as addressing mechanisms that were put in place to reduce the impact or exposure to risk, increase self-esteem, and self-efficacy, and open up opportunities. Current trends in the literature revealed a divergence from the single-minded approach of crisis intervention, towards preventative applications. Strategies involving schools, business, social service, and community based organisations have all been proposed and attempted to aid at-risk youth (Rossi & Montgomery, 1994). "Unfortunately, most intervention programs are expensive and demand longer, more intensive efforts if they are to be successful" (Barr & Parrett, 1995, p.47)

Interventions and potential support strategies have included provision of alternative types of services, improving relationships between at-risk youth, family and friends, and other stakeholders, increasing self-esteem, and enhancing preparation for post-school employment (Martin, Tobin, & Sugai, 2002). Manning (1993, p.135) detailed seven essentials that existed in successful intervention programs and encompassed "comprehensive approaches; an emphasis on self-concept; high expectations; improving social skills; teachers and learners agreeing on objectives, methods, and materials; involvement of parents and families; and a recognition of the relationship between motivation and success".

Intervention Programs

The literature search revealed a plethora of different types of intervention programs. The following provided a summary of common themes of intervention pertinent to this study and were subsequently expanded upon. Intervention programs for at-risk youth related to pregnancy; communities taking responsibility for at-risk youth; justice departments rehabilitating, rather than incarcerating. Special education programs included acceleration of students to bring them back to an educational level expected for their age group or 'pull out'/'withdrawal'. These programs enabled teachers to concentrate their efforts on individuals rather than classes of students.

Vocational Education and Training (VET) has also become highly regarded by teaching life and employment skills to youth, enabling them to enter the workforce. Recently a 'Full Services School' model was proposed whereby agencies that have direct influence on at-risk youth were represented within the school itself. Brokering of workplace learning, other types of vocational education and access to support services have been proving advantageous to at-risk youth. In all cases, social reconstruction was at the forefront of these intervention programs, allowing provision of education, and access to support facilities to improve the lives of at-risk people.

Teenage Pregnancy

Teenage pregnancy was rated as a key determinant of at-risk status. "Children having children puts both generations at risk and often leads to poverty, poor health care, truancy, and underemployment" (Stephens, 1997, p.6). Intervention has assumed the form of teaching positive reinforcement to prospective parents to give them the skills involved with good child-rearing practices. Some programs have even gone as far as simulating the stresses of parenthood through the provision of a computerised crying and wetting doll, whereby the student assumed the 'mothering' responsibility for a number of weeks. Many teenagers decided to postpone parenthood as a result of this experience (Stephens, 1997). For others where this program has been too late, school on-site childcare facilities were organised that enabled the mother to attend normal school classes while reassured that her child had appropriate supervision and care.

Justice Department Program

Law enforcement agencies have more frequently been entering into partnership with schools to identify potential crime problems with the purpose of implementing solutions. These problems were not necessarily specifically at-risk youths' problems but were considered more of a general community problem that had to be dealt with by the community as a whole. "[H]omelessness, poverty, lack of positive adult role models, and poor health care may lead to safe shelters, community assistance, mentors, and in-school or community clinics" (Stephens, 1997, p.6).

At-risk youth were more likely to become entangled with the juvenile justice system. No justice department personnel wished to incarcerate youth as an initial form of crime deterrent, instead the juvenile offenders were instructed to make restitution to

the victim, apologise, and subsequently undergo counselling to impress upon them the harm their actions have perpetrated on society. This has been termed the “restorative justice movement” the purpose being to restore the balance of “peace and harmony” to the victim, community, and offender (Stephens, 1997, p.7).

Accelerated and Intensive Education

The Accelerated Schools for Disadvantaged Students program espoused an expectation that the at-risk student would perform at a high level (Manning, 1993). This program overtly acknowledged that these students were not mentally deficient or impaired; rather their previous life experiences negatively influenced what would have been a normal progression and performance within the education system. This program was established to fast-track or speed-up students’ academic development by providing deadlines for when students were anticipated to be performing at a certain grade level. Students within these accelerated schools were offered stimulating programs of instruction that used considerable resources from government and the community (Manning, 1993). The term ‘accelerated’ was used because the at-risk student was expected to learn at a faster rate than more privileged students (Peters, 1994). Rather than accepting mediocrity, programs of this nature were challenging, rigorous, had high expectations, and were relevant to at-risk students. They provided “developmentally appropriate objectives, methods, and materials” (Manning, 1993, p.135).

Removal from class or the ‘pull out’ program has been a well-recognised strategy used with at-risk youth. In these cases, students were removed from class into another that had a lower teacher-student ratio. Educators were able to select appropriate methods and materials for their students, used effective counselling techniques, and identify potentially successful programs. The teacher concentrated on the provision of intensive training in subjects such as reading, writing, and mathematics, and conducted self-esteem activities. One-on-one teaching was highly effective educationally but was not cost effective (Druian & Butler, 1987; Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm, 1997). Successful programs have also ensured that the teacher spent time with community members. In this way, they acquired information about their at-risk students and potential resources and methods that aided them to deliver better learning experiences (MacDonald, Manning, & Leary, 1999). Frequently, at-

risk students exhibited bad feelings toward the school, consequently many pull-out programs removed them from the school altogether. This new environment was not necessarily associated with school but still allowed education to continue benefiting the child.

Vocationally Oriented Training

Australia entered the 1990s with the second lowest proportion of post-compulsory age youth taking part in apprenticeships or vocational education in the member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (ABS, 2003a). This contrasted with the Harvard Educational Review which highlighted “skills and knowledge that will help students to get a job are among the public’s highest priorities for schools” (“Education at a Glance: OECD Indicators,,” 1995, p.519). This low proportion of youth in apprenticeships combined with the public perception that it was a priority area led to the creation of the Vocational Education Training (VET) scheme, a school-industry partnership, where students engaged in structured learning in workplaces. It has been generally agreed that many youth still leave school without sufficient knowledge about employment and associated VET opportunities. Chamberlain and Mackenzie (1998) highlighted the need for improved careers guidance in schools in order to reduce the incidence of at-risk youth. More responsibility has been placed on school teachers to provide careers counselling and yet most early school leavers do not have a suitable understanding of the labour market and VET opportunities (DSF, 2002; Eldridge, 2001).

Brokering

In the report from the *Prime Minister's Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce: Footprints to the Future*, the comment was made that...

[i]f young people are to be assured access to support and services at the appropriate time and place for them then the points of access must be in places that young people gather....before a crisis situation then guidance will most often be required within the school by some informal mentoring and/or brokering that can link the young person to services outside the school.

(Eldridge, 2001, Appendix 1a, p.5)

Brokering involved negotiation of appropriate course and service access for individual young people to meet a specified outcome. “The process involves negotiation with, and advocacy on behalf of, individual young people, and negotiation with service providers Brokering of education, training, health,

welfare accommodation and employment services should begin before a young person leaves school” (Eldridge, 2001, Appendix 1a, p.13). Brokering of workplace learning and other types of vocational education already existed in most schools in Australia prior to 2001, and in some schools brokering for health, welfare, and accommodation also existed. External brokerage agencies, such as Jobs Pathways Programme (JPP) and Australian Student Traineeship Foundation (ASTF) aid youth in the employment field, however, these agencies were over-stretched and could not provide their services to all those who applied. External brokers relied upon school personnel for referrals, for without their aid youth may not know of the agencies’ existence until it was too late (Eldridge, 2001). In many schools, teachers may have taken on the role of broker but without sufficient professional development, time, and resources, their efforts were insufficient to meet the demands. The ASTF considered placing brokers within the school to ensure arrangements for post school education, employment, or other appropriate activity was addressed prior to the youth leaving school. These brokers were referred to as “transition brokers” (Spierings, 2000, p.14).

Mentoring was a planned, intentional, and committed relationship between the adult mentor and a young person. The mentor was able to provide guidance for the development of generic competencies, career prospects, and social skills. Leaders in Kansas City, USA, actively engaged in recruiting 30,000 mentors, one for every at-risk child in the city. Other communities termed this program Big Brothers and Big Sisters (Stephens, 1997). Tasmania’s Department of Education recommended the employment of co-ordinators to identify mentors from community agencies and match them with at-risk youth (Department of Education -Tasmania, 2003). Other agencies offered their mentoring services to schools with the aim of encouraging the at-risk youth to make more appropriate life decisions (Eldridge, 2001). The VET programs, such as structured workplace learning, potentially provided mentoring relationships with youth.

Community-school Partnerships

Communities need to be a part of the school, not the school just being a part of a community. In many communities in the USA, “year round schools” have been created to facilitate more comprehensive education as there exists additional

opportunities for “extracurricular programs, from tutoring and mentoring to family activities and counselling” through this approach (Stephens, 1997, p.6). Many of these schools have been staffed by volunteers and were open for longer hours in order to promote these programs. Individuals may not be able to access mainstream education during normal office hours for a range of different reasons such as caring for younger siblings, working long hours in low paid occupations and/or inability to access expensive childcare. Hence, the longer opening hours and innovative programs increased access and motivation to re-engage with educational opportunities. Barr and Parrett stated “[s]chool-community partnerships have also proven to be extremely beneficial to schools and at-risk youth” (1995, p.174).

Many authors advocated forms of collaboration between schools and community agencies, both government and non-government, that can aid achievement of better outcomes for at-risk youth. “Policymakers and other reformers have become increasingly aware that schools and human services systems serve the same clients and that these clients can be better educated, socialized, and healed if different systems work together” (Franklin & Streeter, 1998, p.67). In many communities, “partnerships between schools and other community organisations and agencies are helping to create supports that enable children and youth to learn and succeed and help families and communities thrive” (Blank & Hanson-Langford, 2000, n.p.).

“Full Service Community Schools”, a term articulated by Dryfoos (1994; 1998; 2002), provided an array of human services at or near the school building and were determined by the school and community members. Typically, these services comprised health, social welfare, mental health and the juvenile justice system, to provide support and assistance to at-risk youth. Collaboration between these agencies, the school and university programs, to holistically address the needs of all students, was deemed essential to ensure the success of this service provision. In many cases within full service community schools, it was not possible to provide all the services that were considered necessary to support the individual because of lack of funding, facilities, transportation and governance. The most needed services, determined by the community, were then introduced into the school but it was not a complete set of resources available to at-risk youth and so the best service provision could not be achieved.

The *National Youth Affairs Research Scheme (NYARS)* report identified a sample of 45 local initiatives across Australia, the main types of which included:

- community-based partial withdrawal (students remain enrolled in school but were transferred temporarily or on a part-time basis to a ‘community setting’);
- school-based partial withdrawal (or a ‘time-out’ program);
- community school separate from the traditional school catering to special needs or behaviours;
- outreach services where specialist services were brought into the school from the community. This was referred to as the “full services school” (Dryfoos, 1994);
- integrated whole school approaches where a different philosophy applied (middle school approach where students have the same teachers through Year 7 to 10, welfare support teams and structured pastoral care programs); and
- event-based activities such as camps and excursions.

(Brooks, Milne, Paterson, Johansson, & Hart, 1997)

Quality Education

From a list of 29 items that together comprised high-quality education (refer to Table 2: Requirements for quality education), Dryfoos (1994) proposed four components from which quality education was provided, namely the school, a combination of school and community, community, and professional support agencies. In the first component, the school would be focusing on exemplary curriculum design and establishing a humanistic environment. This would include individualised instruction, co-operative learning; parental involvement, and healthy school climate. The second component demonstrated linkages between the school and community agencies. Health education, for example, was commenced in school and continued by community agencies. Community agencies encompassed by the third component were responsible for areas such as family planning, mental health services, and recreation. The fourth component referred to specialist education provided by mentoring in areas such as childcare and crisis intervention. Given the extensive nature of the list, it is not reasonable to expect schools alone to carry the full burden for educating youth. Responsibility also rested with the community and government

in general to ensure comprehensive education, sufficient to meet the diverse needs of youth.

The charge to community agencies is to bring into the school: health, mental health, employment services, child care, parent education, case management, recreation, cultural events, welfare, community policing, and whatever else may fit into the picture. The result is a new kind of “seamless” institution, a community-oriented school with a joint governance structure that allows maximum responsiveness to the community, as well as accessibility and continuity for those most in need of services. (Dryfoos, 1994, p.12)

In Australia, the majority of services mentioned by Dryfoos were offered by a variety of government agencies and were fragmented because there was little coordination or communication between the agencies. Agencies tended to be autonomous and cared little for what another body was doing or had achieved with at-risk youth. Information gained by these agencies on at-risk youth was often not shared with other agencies, resulting in duplication of effort (Eldridge, 2001).

Scott (2002) indicated that interaction between education agencies and juvenile correctional facilities needed to improve in order to increase communication and collaboration. Additionally, educators from correctional facilities and other educational institutions should have had access to each other in order to facilitate communication. Integration of government agencies in the form of communication and collaboration was imperative and information held by each agency needed to be mutually available. If agencies had collaborated, any intervention instituted would have been neither duplicated nor compromised by another agency. Barr and Parrett reiterated this thought when they stated “partnerships can provide essential human and fiscal resources necessary for serving at-risk youth” (1995, p.174).

Success of any intervention is generally contingent on cooperation between all stakeholders involved with at-risk youth. Information exchanged and governance have to be integrated and co-ordinated. “The more effectively any particular array of policies, programmes and service elements are co-ordinated and integrated the greater the likelihood of their effectiveness” (Eldridge, 2001, Appendix 1a, p.7). Government agencies need different policies and lines of demarcation when it comes

to providing services for at-risk youth. Disjointed, ad hoc approaches have frequently proved ineffective.

At-risk individuals frequently cannot progress towards 'self-actualisation' as defined by Maslow, without the support of agencies and schools providing some form of intervention. For interventions to be most effective, communication within and between agencies was necessary, and only then can social reconstruction take place, thus potentially improving society (Riley & Stern, 2002).

Organisational Communication

Craig (1999) referred to the study of communication being in a fledgling state. He felt this was due to the diverse nature of possible communication interactions making it a difficult discipline to define with a single, coherent, all encompassing theory. For example, in one study of seven communication theory textbooks, 249 distinct theories were mentioned. Of these only 22% of the theories appeared in more than one of the seven books and 7% were included in more than three books. Craig stated "communication theorists apparently neither agree nor disagree about much of anything" (Craig, 1999, p.119) but qualified this statement when mentioning the multidisciplinary origins from which these theorists derived their conclusions. Similarly, Littlejohn (2002) traced contributions to communication theory from disciplines such as literature, engineering, sociology, psychology and mathematics. It is necessary therefore, to assume that with so many underlying theories of communication it was unlikely that a single, unified, all encompassing theory could be determined to describe communication patterns existing in an organisation (for more information on communication theories refer to Appendix 4) .

Table 2
Requirements for Quality Education

<i>Provided by School</i>	<i>Provided by Schools or Community Agencies</i>	<i>Support Services Provided by Community Agencies</i>	<i>Mentoring</i>
<i>Effective basic skills</i>	<i>Comprehensive health education</i>	<i>Health screening and services</i>	<i>Family welfare services</i>
<i>Individualised instruction</i>	<i>Health promotion</i>	<i>Dental services</i>	<i>Parent education, literacy</i>
<i>Team teaching</i>	<i>Preparation for the world of work (life planning)</i>	<i>Family planning</i>	<i>Child care</i>
<i>Cooperative learning</i>		<i>Individual counselling</i>	<i>Employment training/jobs</i>
<i>School-based management</i>		<i>Substance abuse treatment</i>	<i>Case management</i>
<i>Healthy school climate</i>		<i>Mental health services</i>	<i>Crisis intervention</i>
<i>Alternatives to tracking</i>		<i>Nutrition/weight management</i>	<i>Community policing</i>
<i>Parent involvement</i>		<i>Referral with follow-up</i>	
<i>Effective discipline</i>		<i>Basic services: housing, food, clothes</i>	
		<i>Recreation, sports, culture</i>	

(adapted from Dryfoos, 1994, p.13)

Griffin (2003, p. 261) argued that organisational communication was dependent on institutional objectives and human relations and played a key role in how the organisation operated and was maintained. Five approaches to organisational communication have been identified ...

The Mechanistic Approach – Communication is highly controlled on the basis that it will maximise efficiency. Lines of communication are characterised by vertical downward modes of delivery, typically from management down to the workers.

The Human Relations Approach – Communications networks are open and include horizontal and vertical delivery systems. Communication incorporates a high degree of feedback along all lines of the network.

The General Systems Approach –Emphasis is placed on a holistic approach to achieving a purpose. This approach argues that interconnectivity of people within the organisation is the key to productivity and so is concerned with the way people and operations are linked. Communication networks are open and varied but directed toward goal achievement.

The Cultural Approach – This approach is concerned, not with the physical systems or structures but with the values, beliefs and knowledge of staff within the organisation. It is particularly concerned with what differences between organisations mean to employees.

The Political Approach – This approach seeks to identify the power relationships in organisations and the ideologies inherent within and between organisations. These power relationships influence individuals both overtly and covertly. This approach is used to suggest ways of challenging organisational cultures to improve society.

Likert was a psychologist who explored organisational communication. His work investigated communication as a process in contrast to Griffin's humanistic orientation. Likert introduced a number of levels of managerial communication. His theory identified four systems: exploitative-authoritative (system 1); benevolent-authoritative (system 2); consultative (system 3); and participative (system 4) (Likert, 1967). Table 3 displays these four systems' descriptions and outlines the his conceptualisation of the influence on "trust", "motivation", and "interaction" (Crime and Justice Institute, 2005).

Table 3*Organizational and Performance Characteristics of Different Management Systems*

Organizational and Performance Characteristics of Different Management Systems				
System	Description	Trust	Motivation	Interaction
System 1: Exploitative-Authoritative	Threats from management serve as the motivation to those in the lower levels of the system.	No trust	Fear, threats, punishment	Little interaction, always distrust
System 2: Benevolent-Authoritative	A less tyrannical system than the first, but one in which there is still a significant lack of communication between the lower and upper levels of the system.	Master / Servant	Reward, punishment	Little interaction, always caution
System 3: Consultative	Marked increase in communication between levels from the previous two groups.	Substantial but incomplete trust	Reward, punishment, some involvement	Moderate interaction, some trust
System 4: Participative <i>(This is the system that Likert describes as ideal.)</i>	People on all levels of the system have responsibility and work together to achieve common goals. Value must be placed on each individual and the importance of respect at all levels of the organization.	Complete trust	Goals based on participation and improvements	Extensive interaction, friendly, high trust

(Crime and Justice Institute, 2005)

Likert described a harsh, threatening approach which was characterised by little interaction due a lack of trust between management and lower levels in the system 1. Benevolent-authoritative was slightly less tyrannical with very little communication. Motivation was based on rewards and punishment. As the name suggested “consultative” was characterised by increased levels of communication and trust although these were not as high as in the final systems 4 model “participative”. Likert advocated his System 4 as the “ideal” organisational process, as communication was free flowing in all directions. Decisions made were based on collaborative approaches, and goals were clearly defined. Even though Likert clearly

delineated the patterns of communication within large organisations, Griffin (2003) in contrast, considered communication to be a more complex process which was influenced by a number of factors, namely human, cultural, and political. Identification of communication pattern was difficult according to Griffin, because an organisation may encompass facets of all the approaches mentioned.

Organisational communication was proposed as a fundamental factor in organisational efficiency. Flexible networks allowed multidirectional message flow; accurate information on all work related practices and procedures; trust between management and employee; and democratic participation of everyone were all deemed necessary facets for organisational success. Communication within, and across, organisations could be ambiguous or confusing, referred to as “equivocality of information” (Griffin, 2003, p. 262). “Organisations receive information from multiple sources; they must decode the information and determine whether it is comprehensible, which person or department is most qualified to deal with the information, and whether multiple departments require this information to accomplish their task. Without clarity in these areas, there is information equivocality” (West & Turner, 2000, p.248).

Communication was perceived as being crucial to an organisation’s success. Poor communication in the workplace resulted in wasted time, squandered resources, failure to accomplish goals, and sour relationships, whereas good communication produced mutual understanding, agreement, and action (Sandwith, 1994). Upper echelon managers tended to view communication (macro-communication) with those outside the organisation as more important and challenging than communication (micro-communication) with subordinates (Therkelsen & Fiebich, 2003). Organisations generally had both formal and informal networks of internal communication. Managers needed to be cognisant of these networks to ensure the establishment of an effective level of communication with their employees, and once achieved it had to be maintained. There was a high positive correlation between performance problems and communication problems (Harshman & Harshman, 1999). In a number of large studies employees rated communication as the most important measure of work environment. Open communication was essential in keeping morale high and employees happy (Therkelsen & Fiebich, 2003).

The Corporatisation of Government in Australia

During the 1970s Australian Government began a reformation of the Australian Public Service (APS). The Fraser Liberal-Coalition Government (1975–1983) commissioned the *Reid Review of Commonwealth Administration* with the charge of finding better management tools that would allow better, more effective delivery of services to Australian citizens (Reid, 1982). In the early eighties, the Joint Public Accounts Committee investigated senior civil servants and concluded that there must be a move towards greater professionalism. Managers had risen through the ranks simply because of years of service rather than through competency in their employment. It was recommended that managers needed training and sound skills to progress to higher levels. Subsequently the Hawke Labour Government (1983–1991) implemented a management improvement strategy, with programs of management training and review (Dixon, 1996). The ultimate aim of this reform was to commercialise the Australian Public Service.

Commercialisation of the Australian Public Service involved two sequential processes. The first process involved marketisation; the creation of contestable or competitive markets. This required the division of the agency into sections, namely, the regulatory and the service delivery sections. The regulatory section was to act in a policy advisory capacity and identified markets and charges that gained a monetary return from the service delivery section. This shift to a competitive nature applied pressure on the agency to become more productive, to increase service quality, increase revenue, and reduce costs. The second stage involved establishing processes that facilitated the behaviour of a commercial enterprise (Dixon, Kouzman, & Korac-Kakabadsa, 1996). Goals were needed so that profits and customer service could be maximised. The rules and regulations thus established mirrored the management practices of private enterprise.

By the mid 1980s, these reforms were well established to such an extent that the Australian Public Service (APS) began commercial activities providing goods and services that were traditionally made available at no cost to the consumer. Managers were required to become more performance oriented and prove they were successful business managers. Unfortunately, business rules applied differently in the private sector in comparison to the public sector. Budgetary, regulatory and accountability

practices differed in a similar way to management procedures, because the organisational culture differed (Brianas, 1993). The private organisations were responsible to themselves for all aspects of their corporate identity whereas the public agencies were ultimately accountable to the Government for their direction. A change in Government can change the corporate identity of a public agency and managers needed to be flexible to meet new governmental directions.

During this reformation of the Australian Public Service (APS) there was a gradual shift in accountability from ministerial to civil servant levels. Civil servants gained more autonomy in making managerial decisions, but at the same time, became more accountable for the decisions made. These managers were, however, in an invidious position of having two masters; the Government and the general public. The Government dictated what monies were to be spent and the priorities of spending, while the public wanted sufficient funds to solve problems. This was a paradox whereby “managers [were] expected to meet customer ... needs as well as ensuring that services provide value for money as perceived by parliamentary ... mechanisms” (Dixon, 1996, p.63). “They were expected not only to be prudent with public moneys and keep costs to a minimum, but also to provide quality goods and services at the lowest possible price to a broad range of constituencies. They are expected...to achieve consistency and impartiality by the application of relatively inflexible rules and procedures, under the watchful eye of review agencies ...[and yet] achieve commercial targets through managerial flexibility” (Dixon, Kouzman, & Korac-Kakabadsa, 1996, p.26). Each section manager of the APS was therefore, continually striving to prove that he/she was the most suitable person for the position. Failure meant being replaced by sub-ordinates.

In Western Australia, the Government had more than 750 departments, commissions, ministries, boards, trusts, authorities, offices, committees, and other entities. These Government agencies included over 111,000 employees (Hicks, Langoulant, Shean, & Wauchope, 2001). “Western Australia has an excessive number of overlapping Government agencies. The diverse and fragmented nature of the State’s public sector compromises its ability to deliver services effectively and efficiently. Despite a range of expert and independent reviews, Western Australia’s machinery of Government

has continued to grow in a haphazard fashion, offering no cohesive support for the delivery of Government priorities” (Hicks et al., 2001, p.8).

The proliferation and fragmentation of Government departments was further compounded by the structures existing within the department itself. Classically in organisations, decisions and activities were controlled hierarchically, where top management controlled all processes. Further, employees with similar interests and responsibilities were combined together into groups under a sectional manager. This created a narrow, vertically structured entity within the organisation (Barabba, 1996). In the business literature this was referred to as the “silo effect” (Cote, 2002, p.60). Cote continued, stating, “silos are an offshoot of decentralised management”. Managers, keen to prove their management skills and thus keep their jobs, tended to focus on the agencies’ goals rather than those of the organisation as a whole. Each silo concentrated on its own priorities, reporting to management but not to each other.

Figure 3 displays an example of an organisation-created silo (Barabba, 1996, p. 50). In this case, management breaks the company into three sections: marketing, finance, and manufacturing. Each section is responsible for the success of the company and yet communication barriers exist between each section. Customers dealing with this organisation may have to converse with three people to purchase a single item. The criticism frequently levelled at large organisations is that the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing. In the case of governments, it is that one agency does not know what another is doing.

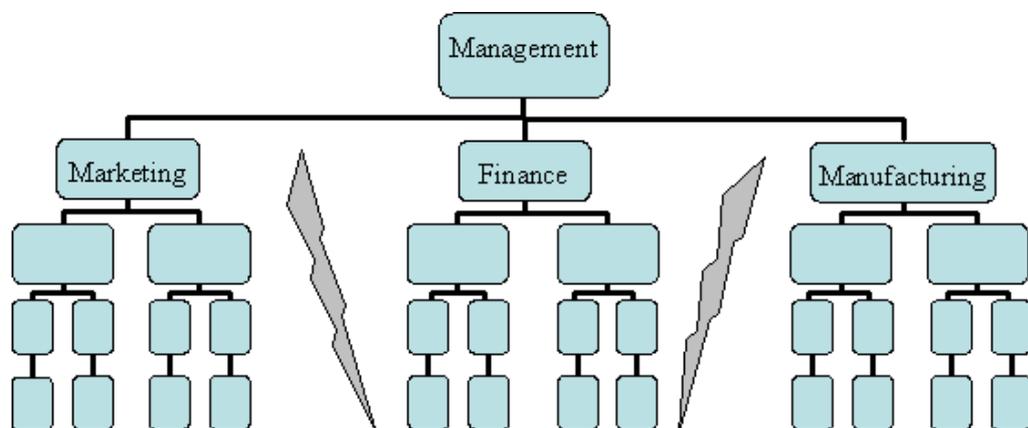


Figure 3: Three functional silos (adapted from Barabba, 1996, p.50)

The example in the previous paragraph has been demonstrated in one of the government departments, the Department of Community Development (DCD), which allocated more than \$50 million in funding for the delivery of services to 462 non-government services (Gordon, Hallahan, & Henry, 2002). Accountability for the spending of this money required reporting to the funding source. Often there was a lack of cooperation, competition, and a breakdown of communication between these agencies. Communication between organisations was diminished because of the competitive nature of applying for funding. Unfortunately, effort toward a particular goal was frequently duplicated between agencies. Silos reduced efficiency and tended to increase expenditure (Cote, 2002).

Communication within the Educational Environment

Organisations are constantly involved with change, both internally and externally, because many issues impact on the performance of the organisation (Kitchen & Daly, 2002). Educational organisations have not been exempt from this change either. The phenomenon of change has become so common that educational literature frequently cites words such as ‘reform’, ‘transformation’, ‘change’, and ‘restructuring’ (Guskey & Peterson, 1996; Hargreaves, 1994; Ingvarson & Loughran, 1992; Joyce, Calhoun, & Wolf, 1993; McElrath, 1988; Moffett, 2000; Schwahn & Spady, 1998). Stones commented on educational reform in the United Kingdom stating, “over the last decade education in the UK has been reformed to death. Politicians ... have changed the face of education out of all recognition” (1992, p.2). He also observed that “teaching is seen by most of the world outside teacher education, and by many within it, as comprising nothing more than the delivery of the curriculum” (Stones, 1992, p.4).

The early 1980s saw an escalation of public criticism of government policy, and the education sector was not immune to changes that were introduced to quell rising public concerns. The Ministry of Education released *Better schools in Western Australia: A programme for improvement* report which outlined the “devolution of administrative responsibility to enable school self-management over a period of five years” (Robertson, 1993, p.124). Schools were organised into smaller, self-managed units that were responsive to the centralised, policy making, corporate head office. The Western Australian Department of Education and Training (WADET) currently

provides comprehensive school education for more than 250,000 students in more than 770 schools spread across Australia's largest state. It utilises a hierarchical management system of three main tiers, namely, Central Office, district offices, and schools. Central Office is the corporate headquarters of the organisation, overseeing and developing the major policies and procedures for the entire department. Western Australia is subdivided into 14 districts that are managed by district offices. Each of these districts comprise numerous schools ranging in number from 23 to 133, with the higher numbers confined to the metropolitan area.

Site-based management was purported to increase student achievement and/or performance and yet there was little evidence to support a positive effect on student learning (Conway & Calzi, 1996; Latham, 1998). From the teacher's perspective, site-based management provided greater involvement in certain kinds of decision-making; giving teachers the power to control their own professional affairs. This then had the advantage of empowering administrators to make decisions enhancing the organisation's goals knowing they had the support of their staff (Conway & Calzi, 1996).

With the shift to autonomy, came the burden of increased accountability. Ball (1993, p.65) indicated this paradoxical position when he reflected "they are to be given greater autonomy within the constraints and pressures of market forces; they are to be able to exercise flexibility in order to be more responsive". Most literature reiterated the increased level of accountability to outside authorities and expected compliance to corporate principles (Angus, 1993; Ball, 1993; Brennan, 1993; Conway & Calzi, 1996; Latham, 1998; Robertson, 1993; Smyth, 1993; Sparkes & Bloomer, 1993; Webber, 1995). School principals found that their autonomy to make decisions was challenged by "centrally made determinations" and the centrally driven policy initiatives, such as "pathways, post-compulsory schooling, national curriculum, and testing and standards" (Robertson, 1993, p.129). Smyth also referred to this paradox noting that the changes toward self-management "appear[ed] to make schools more 'self-determining' and 'self-renewing', with teachers who are more 'autonomous', 'empowered', collaborative', and 'reflective'" (Smyth, 1993, pp.269-270). This independence and professionalism contrasted with the controls being placed upon each school from the centralised authorities. These controls were

imposed by an “elite decision-making group” with little or no input from the teaching community (Smyth, 1993, p.271).

According to Hunt, Tourish and Hargie (2000) there was a vast range of literature in the fields of communication, management and education but very little about communication directly related to educational managers. They appreciated that communication was an essential managerial role and that effective leadership created effective schools. Holloway (2000) made similar comments stating that school leaders need to ensure sufficient time be spent to meet and dialogue with school staff. He maintained that responsibility and power should be dispersed to others within the school community and that school leaders avoid dictating what others should do.

Schools generally engaged in high degrees of communication to maintain essential services within the school. This meant that information was exchanged face-to-face, single person to a group or even collaborative meetings. This required specialist educational communication skills on the part of the school manager. Many of these managers would require training to attain the necessary level of skill (Hargie, Tourish, & Hargie, 1994). Holloway (2000) included decision-making skills, along with communication, as requirements for professional development. Typically, individuals were promoted into the supervisory ranks, initially because of their superior technical or functional capabilities and yet it could not be assumed they were skilled communicators; the opposite assumption was a safer one. Therkelsen and Fiebich stressed an organisation must provide training in effective communication with employees (2003).

In a study conducted with education managers regarding the communication strengths and weaknesses that were exhibited in the workplace, Hunt, Tourish and Hargie (2000) reported a number of findings. Upward, downward, and lateral communications were evident on a daily basis, however, most informants in the study reported it as unsatisfactory. Communication in an upward direction, from teacher to administrators, was the most predominant form of communication cited. Lateral communication primarily occurred informally, although respondents who held senior positions tended to formalise the process when communicating with each other. The most commonly expressed weaknesses in communication were where the

respondent did not have the forum to express an opinion, experienced lack of time, and poor dissemination of information by others. Staff meetings were reported as one of the best ways of discussing issues and resolving problems if the number of staff attending was limited to five or six people. Larger meetings were less productive. The study highlighted twice as many weaknesses in communication as strengths which means improvements in communication in the educational milieu were still needed.

Organisations and Collaboration

Information is a powerful tool, and in the case of at-risk youth, many agencies have information on particular aspects concerning them. A report from the Department of Education in Tasmania related that “[a]ll aspects of young people’s lives are interconnected, and the solutions therefore need to be integrated. A seamless, holistic support network is required” (Department of Education -Tasmania, 2003, p.12).

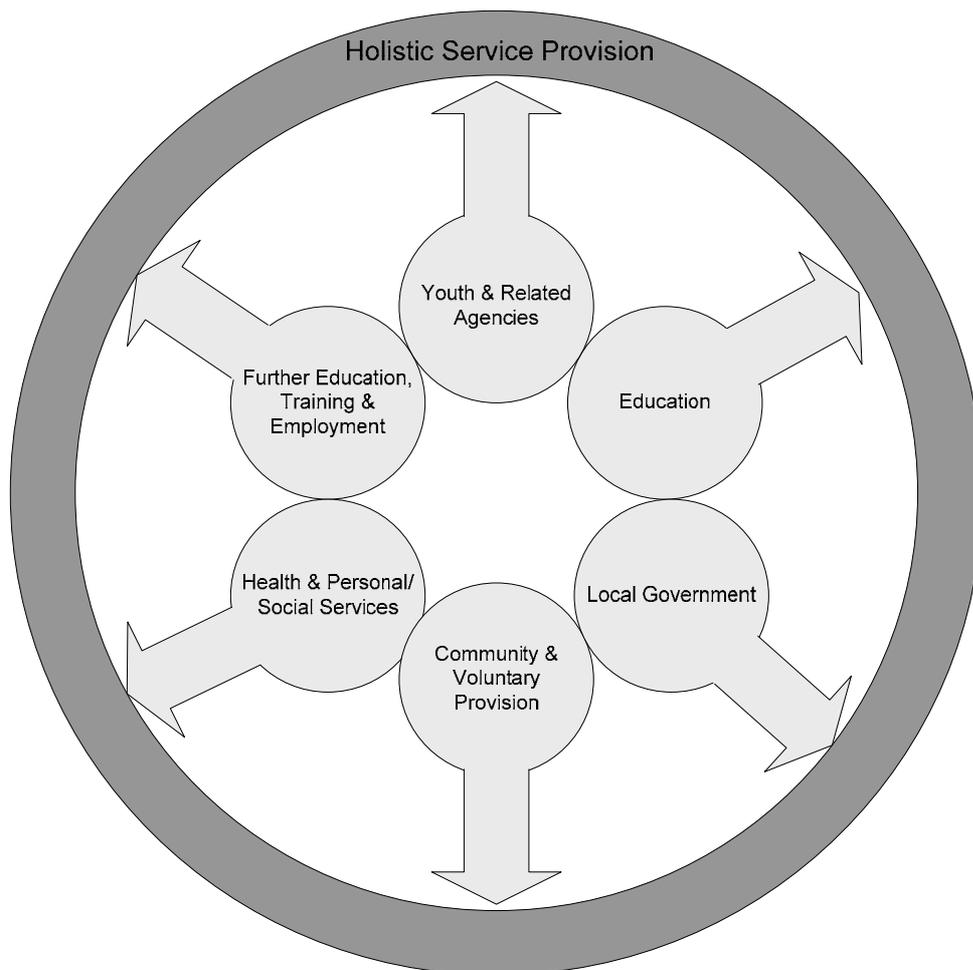


Figure 4: *Holistic view of service provision*
Department of Education - Tasmania, 2003, p.12

Figure 4 displays the holistic view of service provision as endorsed by the Department of Education in Tasmania. In this report, it was identified that currently interventions were initiated by many agencies; however, a lack of information frequently jeopardises the success of these interventions. If personnel in these agencies could source information from a unified computer network that joined intervention stakeholders, and a holistic picture of problems faced by at-risk youth could be developed, then more successful, cost effective interventions could be devised.

Barr and Parrett (1995) extolled this integration and coordination of agencies, organisations, and schools as essential for the welfare of children and youth who were at-risk ...

[b]ecause children with health or family problems are unlikely to perform at their best, schools must help students achieve academically by first ensuring that various community agencies provide children and their families with health care, child services, mental health services, and even such basic needs as food, shelter, and transportation. Since the school is the one community institution that deals with every family with children, the school must take the initiative in helping stimulate and coordinate the many community agencies to assist at-risk children and their families.

(Barr & Parrett, 1995, p.175)

“Joined-up government” was a slogan that originated in the United Kingdom during the 1980s. It referred to “consistency between the organizational arrangements of programs, policies, or agencies which enable[d] them to collaborate” (6, 2004, p.106). Holistic government has been defined as “clear and mutually reinforcing sets of objectives framed in terms of outcomes and then working back from there to identify a set of instruments which will have the same relationship to one another to achieve those outcomes” (6, 2004, p.106).

Table 4: Defining joined-up and holistic government (6, 2004, p.107), was a construction of the differences in thought underpinning terms such as “joined-up government” and “holistic government”. 6 [the author’s name] acknowledged that it was easier to amalgamate government agencies than to commence the lengthy and unwieldy process in order to create a holistic government.

Table 4*Defining Joined-up and Holistic Government (an excerpt from the work of 6)*

Activity	Coordination (Information, Cognition, Decision)	Integration (Execution, Implementation, Practical Action)
Joined-up government	Joined-up coordination (most modest level – e.g., could be consistent with agreement by two agencies to work in separate fields on an understanding of how to limit negative externalities; “what could we be doing together?”)	Joined-up integration (e.g., joint work but focused principally on prevention of negative externalities and of conflict between mission critical programs; “how are we going to work together on this?”)
Holistic government	Holistic Coordination (e.g., understanding of necessity for mutual involvement, but precise action not yet defined: “What policies and systems need to be in place to achieve better health/lower levels of crime?”)	Holistic integration (highest level of holistic governance, building fully seamless programs; “Which agencies need to be doing what together and separately if we are going to lower levels of crime, for example?”)

Information Communication Technology

The 1990s brought the inundation of too much information. The year 2000 marked the end of the Information Age and the beginning of the Knowledge Age. Now, it is about recognizing the need for distilled and analysed information – knowledge.

(Esch, 2002, p.37).

Communication and individual work habits have been revolutionised by networked computer systems. Increased access to information and the ability to share it has been facilitated by the Internet (Sproull & Kiesler, 1991). Esch referred to a different Internet from the original stating “[t]he infrastructure is maturing, and reliability of the Net is increasing. The client-side software or browsers have matured. Content is more standardized and displays more accurately on user machines. A serious new communications platform has been built” (2002, p.32). He went on to highlight the trend toward hardcore business functions moving toward the Internet because of

greater Internet speed, less human energy requirements and perceived greater profitability.

The Internet is changing the way that organisations conduct customer support services. Databases have been assembled to intuitively understand customer questions and deliver a primary solution. Many organisations using this form of information dissemination have realised that sometimes clients are not satisfied with the primary solution so provide call centre personnel to provide one-on-one assistance. Esch referred to this combination of support approach as a “blended solution” (2002, p.36).

“Advances in ... [technology] ... have the potential to provide at-risk learners, their parents, and their teachers the support necessary for increased school success” (Johnson, 1998, p.167) which has a flow-on-effect to the community as students get better education and become more productive members of society. Students can use the technology to gather information from various sources and agencies that will allow them to make educated critical life choices. High-school at-risk youth must be given the opportunity to choose school and job training programs and be intimately involved in planning their future. Adolescent students cannot be arbitrarily assigned into particular programs; rather they must be involved in crucial decisions regarding their lives (Barr & Parrett, 1995; Eldridge, 2001).

Given that technology has provided avenues for better education it was reasonable to surmise that technology could aid in the provision of direct support for at-risk individuals. In many cases, planning for the future for at-risk individuals has required access to support agencies and services. Governments throughout the world have been acknowledging that technology, such as the Internet, was a means of providing better access to this support. Provision of better support mechanisms frequently required intergovernmental collaboration.

In a report from the US General Services Administration (*Achieving success in intergovernmental initiatives, 2004*) leaders from five U.S.A. and Canadian government departments described how intergovernmental coalitions could greatly improve the efficiency and quality of public services using new technologies. To

achieve this efficiency required unprecedented cooperation from state, local, national, international, and private sector organisations. In a similar report (Partnerships for Intergovernmental Innovation Committee, 2004, n.p.) a section on collaboration asserted “an increased understanding of the complexities and nuances of partnership and collaboration must be developed.” In developing this form of collaboration a number of key points were raised. There was a need ...

- to be sensitive to team dynamics across political and jurisdictional boundaries;
- for development of an understanding of the motivation of each of the collaborators;
- for development of good communication within and between collaborators; and
- for continual feedback throughout the collaboration process.

The *Achieving Success in Intergovernmental Initiatives Report* (2004) identified eleven crucial areas for the success of intergovernmental collaboration. These were policy issues, trust, pragmatism, funding, leadership, project management skills, information, infrastructure, e-Governmental guidelines, business needs, and privacy. Privacy invokes many definitions by many people and was summarised as ...

[p]rivacy entails an individual's right to control the collection and use of his or her personal information, even after he or she discloses it to others. When individuals provide information to a doctor, a merchant, or a bank, they expect that those professionals or companies will collect the information they need to deliver a service and use it for that sole purpose.

(Berman & Bruening, 2001, p.308)

Many countries such as Australia, Belgium, Canada, Finland, France, Ireland, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the USA have addressed the issue of privacy and sharing of information, with various outcomes. A number of these countries have legislation covering specific cases of data sharing but not a general rule covering all cases. In some cases, federal laws differed across provinces or regions causing confusion or tension (6, 2004). In Australia, the original data protection legislation did not generally apply to the private sector. An overarching legal framework for privacy (the European Convention on Human Rights and the Data Protection Directive) governed European Union members. Naturally, the USA data protection laws which

govern ICT data were not specifically mentioned in the Constitution, however, more recent specific laws have been formulated concerning government data matching, government codes of practice, and industry self-regulatory codes (The Performance and Innovation Unit Cabinet Office, 2002, Annex B). “At the state level in the United States, children’s services and family or human services comprise one area in which there has been extensive legislative effort to mandate collaboration and the integration of named services and agencies” (6, 2004, p.16).

All the Western countries mentioned in the *Performance and Innovation Unit Cabinet Office Report* were concerned with sharing of data and were using various methods to protect an individual’s right to privacy while providing better public services. ‘Smart identification cards’ containing encrypted individual personal data were utilised in Belgium, Finland, France, and the Netherlands to facilitate the access to various public services. Identification numbers such as Australia’s Tax File Number, Canada’s Social Insurance Number and the US Social Security Number were alternatives to tracking personal data. In the United States of America a set of principles was developed that allowed for fair information practice.

1. An individual must first receive adequate notice about what information is being collected about him/her and how it is to be used.
2. The individual must be able to make choices about the use of information collected about him.
3. The individual must be allowed reasonable access to information maintained about him/her.
4. Information about an individual must be secured, so that its accuracy and integrity is maintained.
5. Collectors of information must be subject to an enforcement mechanism that assures their compliance with fair information practices and provides individuals with a means of recourse when their rights in their data have not been respected.

(Cate, 2005; U.S Department of Health Education and Welfare, 1973)

Undoubtedly, the Internet has made data collection and dissemination much easier and more efficient. Legislation in many countries enables information to be protected from misuse and abuse, however, transmission across the Internet may mean data can be intercepted in countries where lax privacy standards may apply. It was for this

reason that encryption has become important in securing data transmitted across the Internet, thus effecting protection of the privacy of the individual.

Service Provision

Ireland has attempted to provide a better service by developing a model for the electronic delivery of public services, known as the Public Service Broker. This service provided a one-stop-shop enabling a single point of contact for the public service customer. The customers presented their information and provided identification once, and then they were directed to an appropriate support agency. At the federal level, Australia has attempted a similar solution with the advent of Centrelink in 1997 (The Performance and Innovation Unit Cabinet Office, 2002, Annex B). What was unusual about the formation of Centrelink was the approach to integration of support services. It did this “not by bringing together agencies around particular problems, but bringing together activities into a single agency on the basis of their similarity at the level of throughput (e.g., administration of cash benefits)” (6, 2004, p.118). This form of integration was referred to as ‘joined-up government’ but was not the holistic form of integration and coordination being truly sought by governments (6, 2004).

A similar program to the Irish Public Service Broker, called “Strong Families” attempts to solve problems faced by families on a case-by-case basis and is currently being trialled by the Western Australian Government (Markham, 2002). The Strong Families program is based on the “Strengthening Families” strategy developed in New Zealand (Markham, 2002) which recognised the multifaceted problems faced by many families and the fact that one agency alone, could not solve all the problems faced. In the Strong Families program, all agency case workers meet with the family members, at a single location and time to discuss the problems that the family was experiencing and ways in which they collectively can assist. The family must give consent to the process and to information being shared amongst the agencies. The result was a co-ordinated case management plan identifying the role of each agency. Currently, the participating agencies encompassed the Departments of Premier and Cabinet, Community Development, Housing and Works, Justice, Education, Indigenous Affairs and the Police Service (Markham, 2002). This approach took a

more holistic view to the solution of family problems as promoted by the Tasmanian Department of Education (refer to Figure 4).

When it comes to supporting children, England has taken a different, more pro-active approach to service provision. A Green paper *Every child matters: Change for children* (Boateng, 2004) was published for consultation in September 2003. This paper contained a section entitled “Early Intervention and Effective Protection” which referred to ...

- **improving information sharing between agencies.** All local agencies were to have common lists of children in their area. The list displayed each child and the services with whom they had had contact, as well as the contact details of relevant professionals;
- **establishing a common assessment framework** that enabled the early identification of children at-risk;
- **identifying lead professionals to assume responsibility for each case** where multiple agencies had a stake;
- **integrating professionals through multidisciplinary teams** responsible for identifying children at-risk and working with the child and family on the problems experienced.

In order to facilitate the proposed changes, the British Government introduced the *Children Act 2004*, which placed the welfare of children above the concerns engendered by the *Privacy Act* of the UK. As a safeguard a position of Children’s Commissioner would be established, with the person in this role having oversight across the UK and reporting to parliament annually. Prior to the legislation created by the *Children Act 2004*, the Government had directed councils in England to establish databases identifying all local children that lived in their region. The *Children Act 1989* and the *National Health Service Act 1977* determined what could be lodged on this proposed database, which again raised the issue of privacy. Jan Hutchison, Director of Public Health for the Bolton Council, stated “after considering the legal arguments, we decided that we’d prefer to take the tiny risk of a legal challenge over the much greater risk of not sharing information and that hindering child protection” (Batty, 2003, n.p.). The introduction of the *Children Act*

2004 meant that other councils in England do not have to face this ethical dilemma, hence it was anticipated that by the end of 2004 all councils would have completed their database.

The British approach to child welfare appeared to have considerable merit particularly with the concerns that had been emerging in the Australian situation whereby children are ‘falling through the cracks’ due to lack of efficient and effective communication and coordination amongst agencies. In both Britain and Australia, deaths of children have been the drivers for change and the impetus for initiating new ways of coordinating the care of at-risk individuals. This issue was illustrated in the Western Australian *Gordon Inquiry* into the death of a child in an Aboriginal community (Gordon, Hallahan, & Henry, 2002). Gordon found that “the diverse and fragmented nature of the Western Australian public sector compromise[d] its ability to deliver services to the community” (Hicks et al, 2001, in Gordon, Hallahan, & Henry, 2002, p.312). “Although up to thirteen different agencies were involved in providing services to Susan Taylor [the deceased girl] and her family, the D[e]partment C[ommunity] D[e]velopment state[d] they were unaware of ‘all the services being provided by each agency’ and there was a lack of clarity as to a ‘lead coordinating agency’” (DCD Final Submission 22 July 2002: 19, in Gordon et al, 2002, p.343).

Worldwide there is increasing interest in holistic approaches to supporting at-risk individuals, however, 6 [the author’s name] reflected that objectives and outcomes could become disparate ...

[n]o doubt in practice, there will be both more and less coordination and integration than policy makers hope – more, in the sense that much coordination and integration goes on by informal, voluntaristic mutual adjustment by public ..., less, in the sense that the high hopes of policy makers to elicit coordination in the form and of the kind they would like it, in the policy fields that they care about, tend to be dashed, hence their tendency to talk of the ‘scars on their backs’ from conflicts over frustrated initiatives in coordination.

(6, 2004, p.120).

Even though the governments have invested in many programs, initiatives, and departments to administer this support, and policy makers are enthusiastic about

providing better interventions, the fragmented nature of organisational communication acts as a serious impediment to holistic services.

Schools, as recognised “well established social institutions”, are increasingly involved in coordinating interventions with external agencies in order to meet the needs of their students (Jackson, 1993, in Joyce, Calhoun, & Wolf, 1993, p.8). Even though school administrators have been taking an active role in mediating these programs and actions, they too have been caught in the “boundaries” established by these external organisations which have required schools to attempt to “create border crossings” for the sake of their students (6, 2004, p.106). Although schools should be primarily focused on the educational outcomes of their students, over the years, school personnel have recognised that without addressing Maslow’s lower order needs, educational efforts are largely wasted as students are not receptive. Schooling is perceived now as “the laboratory or training ground for preparing a socially active citizenry” (Sleeter & Grant, 1994, in Bondy & McKenzie, 1999, p.132) with the reinvention of the teachers’ role as “to prepare ‘students to take charge of their lives, work collectively with others, and speak out to bring about social change” (Grant & Gomez, 1996, in Bondy & McKenzie, 1999, p.132).

Summary

In this chapter, the literature related to the four components in the Theoretical Framework (refer to Figure 1) has been examined. These four key dimensions encompassed the psychological perspectives in Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, the literature on individuals’ at-risk status, schools as social reconstructionist environments, and lastly, organisational communication theories as they pertain to this research.

At-risk is a highly complex area as demonstrated by the plethora of definitions which abound in this topic. There are as many definitions as there are causal factors. The multitude of problems which potentially lead to an at-risk status makes the provision of support for at-risk individuals extremely difficult. Perhaps the broadest categories of at-risk status as outlined by Barr and Parrett (1995), and Johnson (1997), include the individual themselves, their family, and school environments, all of which were encompassed this study.

Zuga (1992) suggested that education will change individuals making them better members of society. Society then, has endowed this social reconstruction responsibility to schools, or more specifically teachers. These educators are charged with encouraging and supporting **all** students to meet their potential, and from a psychological perspective - move through Maslow's hierarchy of needs towards self-actualisation. Unfortunately, in many cases this progression is hampered by at-risk individual's basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter which naturally take precedence over the need for education (Woolfolk, 2004).

The literature has demonstrated that social welfare environments within Western Australia have not been exempted from current global trends in increasing the holistic nature of services for at-risk individuals (Department of Education - Tasmania, 2003). Numerous Government reform activists have identified that organisational communication was the key to breaking down the barriers agencies and departments have erected (Batty, 2003; Boateng, 2004; Eldridge, 2001; Gordon, Hallahan, & Henry, 2002). These barriers have been criticised for deleteriously influencing coordinated and innovative intervention efforts. When greater coordination and cooperation occurs between agencies, schools and members of the community, interventions have the potential to positively and significantly influence at-risk individuals' lives and educational opportunities.

Chapter 3 Research Design

Overview

This Chapter details the research design and methodology of the study. The instruments used in the study are discussed and the sample and its population described. An account of the procedural stages of the study, such as trial, pilot and interviews are also described. The method of analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data collected in this study follows, with a brief account of the researcher's experience in utilizing NVivo program (Qualitative Solutions and Research, 2004) for analysis of qualitative data.

Research Design

This study bridged the interpretive and normative paradigms although it was largely orientated to the normative as it was exploring the perspectives of school and agency staff supporting at-risk individuals. The research utilised qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Drawing from these two paradigms provided increased opportunities for analysis, resulting in richer insights from the data. The use of a quantitative instrument, previously administered to teachers in Canada (Johnson, 1997), focused on respondents' perception of the causal factor producing an at-risk status enabling some statistical analysis to be conducted. It also enabled the data to be triangulated to confirm the validity of the interview process.

This research was largely qualitative, based on a case study focussing on the communication patterns of a school and agencies supporting at-risk individuals. A qualitative study "is emergent and flexible, responsive to changing conditions of the study in progress" (Merriam, 1998, p.8). Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996, p.545) stated that a case study was "the in-depth study of instances of a phenomena in its natural context and from the perspective of the participants involved in the phenomenon". This case study was an in depth analysis of perspectives of school and agency employees' communication patterns regarding at-risk individuals. At-risk individuals can have the support of various, numerous agencies and as a result the full compliment of agencies was not known at the beginning of the study. Given that an all encompassing communication pattern was the anticipated result of this study, flexibility in recruiting further participant respondents was necessary.

Survey methodology was selected as the most appropriate data collection method. The use of a questionnaire alone was initially considered and discarded because of the depth of answer sought for this study. Interviews were considered to divulge more information than by questionnaire (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). The interviewer was able to pursue a line of thought developed during the conversation that may not have come to light from a questionnaire. The data (i.e. pathways of communication) were not readily identifiable by direct observation and so could only be obtained via the interview process. Typically, understanding and experiences were what was required to develop an overall data flow diagram.

Target Population

SAMPLING LOGIC

Purposeful Sampling

“The purpose in selecting the case, or cases, is to develop a deeper understanding of the phenomena being studied” (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996, p.546). The sample selected in this study had to be limited as the number of support agencies assisting at-risk individuals was relatively large. The managers/case workers within these organisations, therefore, were selected because of direct association with at-risk individuals. These managers/case workers were considered ‘experts’ for the purpose of this study. The school in this study had a disproportionately high number of at-risk individuals which meant it was an ideal site.

Instruments

There were two separate instruments applied in this study; the interview schedule and an attitudinal scale. The interview schedule sought to identify in-depth understandings of respondents both to the meaning of at-risk status and the communication patterns existing in and between the school and supporting agencies. The attitudinal scale sought to quantify the understanding of individual’s at-risk status.

There were four sections of the interview schedule (see Appendix 2):

- Demographic details – Determining the role and responsibility of the participants.
- Exploring at-risk

- defining at-risk from the perception of the respondent,
- how did respondents identify at-risk individuals?
- Exploring at-risk support mechanisms
 - how did respondents support at-risk individuals?
 - respondent's knowledge of other agencies supporting at-risk individuals.
- Methods of data gathering, storage and communication
 - what data was kept on at-risk individuals?
 - was this information sharable?
 - were there barriers to sharing information?

An attitudinal scale was also administered to determine what the respondents regarded as the major causes resulting in an individual attaining an at-risk status. A Likert scale allowed the respondent to rate, from low to high frequency, their perception of the types of issues that create an at-risk status (Isaac & Michael, 1997). The attitudinal scale was derived from a study conducted by Johnson (1997). In this study, 52 of the most commonly reported risk factors were identified from the literature and categorised into five major groupings of risk namely individual, family, school, community and family. In the Johnson study, teachers from 14 low socio-economic high schools were asked to rank risk factors.

Procedure

The research methodology incorporated a number of phases which are outlined below.

Phase One (Interviewer training) The researcher acted as the interviewer collecting data for this study. As this research was part of the Smart Communities Project interviewer training was conducted whereby the researcher administered the interview to a 'volunteer' in the presence of an experienced researcher. A debriefing and reflection session was conducted immediately following this session ensuring the formal interview process presented few problems. The interviewer training and preparation, in combination with a clear and well set out interview schedule served to promote uniformity in data collection (Isaac & Michael, 1997).

Phase Two (Sampling) Contact was made with a group of senior managers explaining why the research study was being undertaken and the potential benefits to be gained from conducting the study. One senior manager acted as a pilot for the questionnaire to verify the questions. Most of the senior managers expressed an interest in participating in the research offering both their own time and that of their staff. This group assisted with the identification of key informants, and informed the remainder of the research. A key informant is “an individual in whom one invests a disproportionate amount of time because that individual appears to be particularly well informed, articulate, approachable, or available” (Wolcott, 1988, in Wiersma, 1991. p.230). Data were collected using interview methodology was derived from a semi-structured interview schedule. Key informants provided further informants for the research process. This is termed snowball (or chain) sampling (Patton, 2000). The identification process of further key informants was in actuality an indication of a communication pattern.

Key informants identified through the interview process were contacted by the interviewer via telephone and subsequently by email. The research was explained to the potential respondent and if a positive response was received an interview time was scheduled. Generally the organisational manager was contacted and permission sought to interview others in the organisation.

The questions asked in the interview were sent to each participant prior to the interview. A complete, current communication pattern was required to enable the proposal of a technological enhancement. Giving the respondents reflection time to revise these patterns, prior to interview, facilitated a more accurate representation of the current communication model.

Phase Three (Data Collection) The interview of key informants. It was anticipated that approximately 50 interviews would be conducted to complete this study. To answer the research questions one-to-one interviews were conducted with both case workers/teachers and senior administrators/managers.

Prior to the interview the respondent(s) were given a consent form. An explanation of the standard consent form as defined by the Human Resource

Ethics Committee (HREC) was given to respondents who were then invited to sign. There was no obligation to be involved with the study.

At the beginning of each interview the respondent was asked to complete an attitudinal scale on their interpretation of reasons leading to an individual's at-risk status. Respondents were given the choice of completing either a paper copy of the attitudinal scale or completing an electronic (MS Excel spreadsheet) copy located on the interviewer's laptop computer. The preferred electronic version enabled data to be input directly into the analysis package SPSS. Any paper copy returns were subsequently transferred to a computer for analysis. It was initially planned to place the attitudinal scale on the World Wide Web (WWW) to be completed by the respondent prior to interview. This method was discarded because of limitations of respondent's available time, lack of access to the WWW and the need to focus the attention of the respondent at the beginning of the interview. It was considered advantageous, at the beginning of the interview, to get the respondent focusing thought on the reasons for the interview rather than on current work problems. The collection of the response could also be guaranteed if it was completed during the interview. Time pressures on the respondent could have meant that completing the scale at any other time was not possible.

To aid analysis of qualitative data the use of a contact summary sheet (Borg & Gall, 1989) completed during the interview was also utilised. This active listening technique meant a complete summary of the interview was completed prior to the conclusion of the interview. Common comments drawn from the summary sheet then prompted searches during interview analysis. All interviews were recorded and fully transcribed for analysis.

Data Processing and Analysis

All interviews were transcribed into a word processed form (MS Word). It was originally anticipated that the transcribed interviews could be organised into various easily retrievable groupings. Yin (1994) called this organised material the "case study database". Patton (2000, pp. 386-387) called it the "case record" and continued that it "... includes all the major information that were used in doing the case analysis ... Information is edited, redundancies are sorted out, parts are fitted

together, and the case record is organized for ready access ... topically". It was discovered that sorting data directly from within MS Word was laborious and time consuming. An attempt at placing data into a database (MS Access) was made in the belief that searching a database structure may have been easier. This also proved not to be the case. Considering the quantity and depth of data collected from interviews a proprietary program NVivo (Qualitative Solutions and Research, 2004) was employed to assist with analysis. This proved to be more accurate and efficient in the development of themes. As with all software packages utilisation required training and practice. The use of NVivo was no exception with considerable time spent learning the nuances of thematic analysis of documents.

The attitudinal scale was analysed using SPSS (2004), a proprietary package that handled coded quantitative data very effectively. Frequency distributions were derived from the data and compared with the Johnson (1997) study. The mean rating of risk for each grouping, that is individual, family, school, community and family, allowed for comparison to be made between both the Johnson study and this Masters research. The highest rating of risk across the categories could also be determined. The ability to compare rankings of managers/senior administrator and case workers/teachers within the Masters study was also made possible utilising SPSS.

Description of the Use of NVivo

Immediately following each interview, recordings were word processed into a format suitable for introduction into the NVivo (Qualitative Solutions and Research Pty Ltd., 2004) which is a qualitative data analysis package. Each interview was given a unique identifier consisting of a respondent code (eg R01, R02, ...); "S" or "A" indicating whether the respondent was located within the school or from a support agency; "A" or "W" to identify if the respondent was in an administrative position or a case worker/teacher worker position; and the final letter code, "M" (male) or "F" (female) indicated gender (see Figure 5).

NVivo supports the use of a hierarchical indexing system called a 'tree'. The arrangement and development of the 'tree' was the researcher's prerogative requiring careful thought and planning in the development of this structure (Richards, 1999). Under this provision, the tree structure was planned and executed. The tree structure

enabled the researcher to clarify thought processes concerning the organisation of the data and set it out into a logical, hierarchical arrangement suitable for further investigation. Each question for each interview was put into a tree node under the heading of question 1, question 2, etc (see Figure 6).

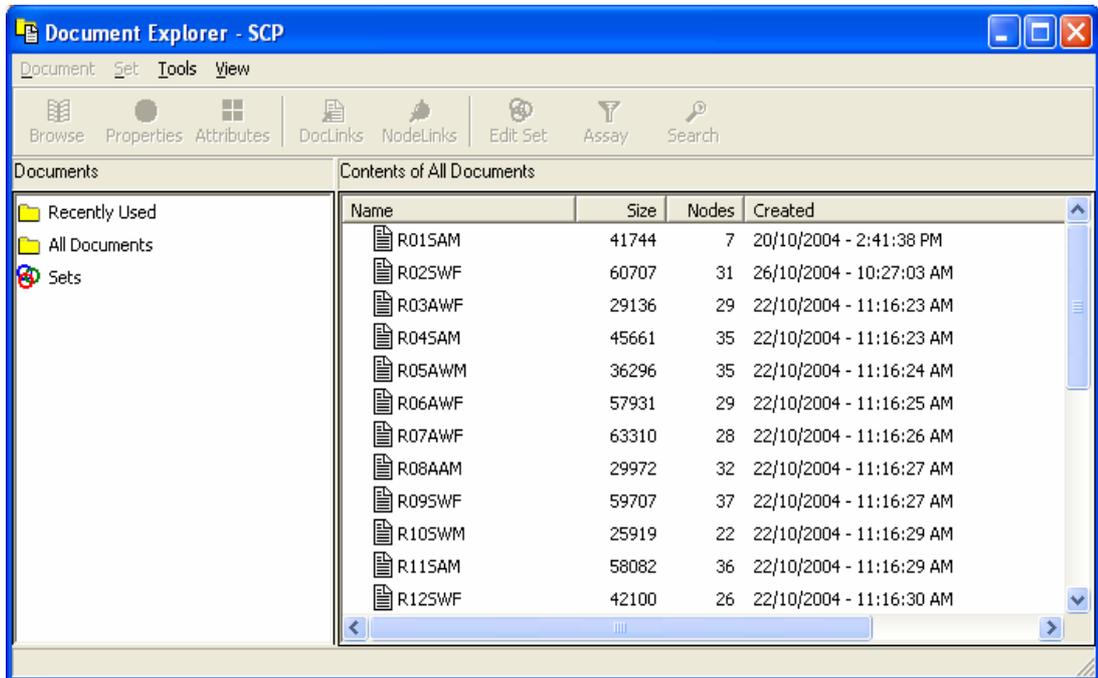


Figure 5: Documents imported into NVivo

Many comments made by respondents during the interview were similar enough to be classified as themes which were further explored during the analysis phase.

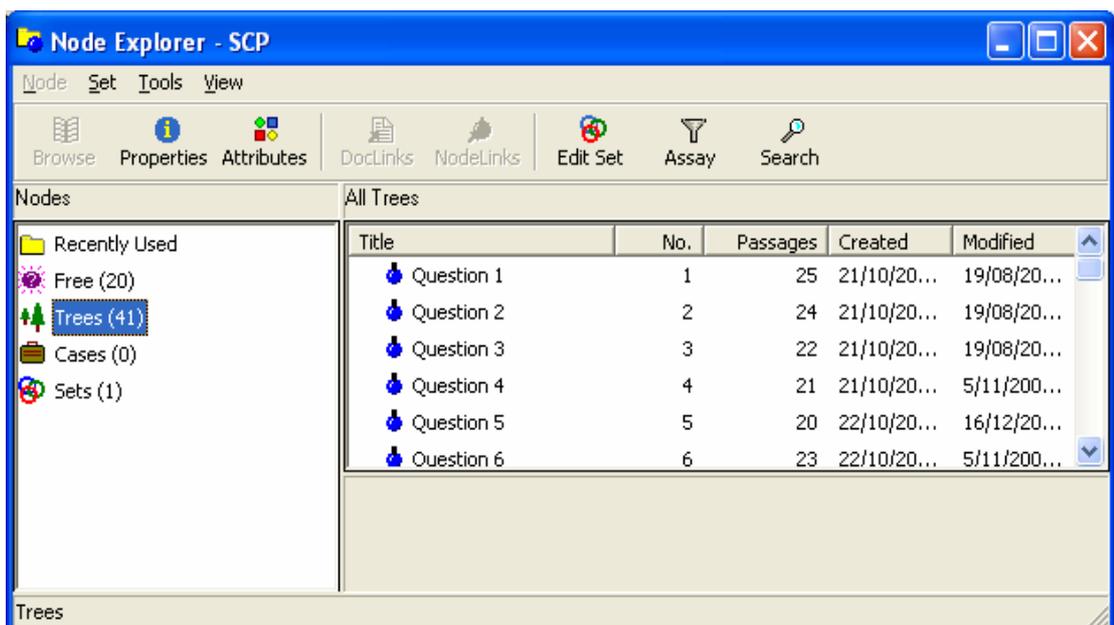


Figure 6: Tree structure

Subsequent keyword searches of transcripts created an additional layer referred to as ‘free nodes’ (see Figure 7). The keywords, for example, used to search for the ‘Privacy’ free node consisted of ‘private’, ‘privacy’ and ‘confidential’. This search resulted in 164 separate references (with the associated contextual paragraph) from 28 respondents. Similarly, 23 respondents referred to ‘low achievement’ across 118 passages. When using NVivo to search for keywords the paragraph containing the words was selected to ensure the context was not lost or meaning distorted. NVivo displayed these paragraphs and the particulars of the location as shown in Appendix 5. The transcript code string at the beginning of each set of comments allowed for frequency statistics to be noted. For example, the free node category ‘Born at risk’ was identified in five transcripts (see Figure 7)

Editing of nodes was possible and was at the discretion of the researcher. For example, in many cases as the researcher was reading a transcript, a section of the text was found to relate directly to a designated node that had not been identified. This was due to the key words not appearing in the text verbatim, however the intent of the respondent’s comment was such that it applied to that node. The new section was subsequently selected and coded to the appropriate node. If the paragraph selected was out of context, it was deleted from the node.

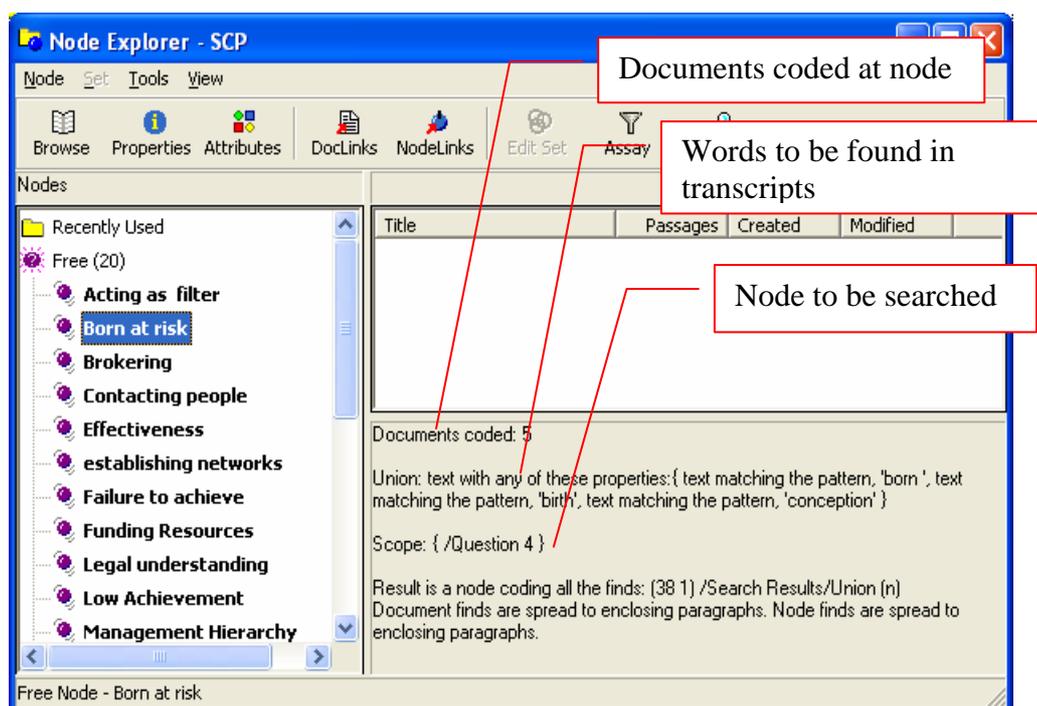


Figure 7: Free nodes

In many cases, themes were identified within a node (question) and thus searches within the node were undertaken. The 'born at risk' node was one such case (see Figure 7) where text matching the pattern 'born', 'birth', and 'conception' were searched for within the 'Question 4' node.

The quotes that appear in the results were selected from the nodes as being representative of other respondent's sentiments. Some direct quotes were utilised to demonstrate a continuum of comments, reactions, and perceptions. When a range was to be demonstrated, comments that again were 'representative' of the end of the scale were selected.

CHAPTER 4 Results

Introduction

This Chapter represents the major findings of the study as they related to the research questions. The data was collected through a series of semi-structured interviews, which were commenced by the administration of a questionnaire. Interviews were conducted with various school and agency personnel who assisted at-risk individuals. Interviews took place between July and December 2004 and conducted at the interviewee's place of employment. The duration of interview ranged from 50 minutes to 2 hours with the average being approximately 70 minutes.

The interviews sought information about the individual's role within their organisation, their perspectives on what communication patterns existed within and across the school/agency, how effective that communication was, what data was collected and stored on at-risk individuals and who had later access to that information. Respondents' perceptions of their organisations' effectiveness in supporting at-risk individuals was explored and they were encouraged to describe what impediments or barriers existed that impeded their effectiveness. Additionally, respondents were asked to provide their own definition of what constituted 'at-risk' status. These personal insights were compared with the questionnaire data that required them to rate a range of potential risk factors as identified in the literature.

Interviews with respondents were fully transcribed and analysed thematically. Themes that emerged related to formal and informal communication patterns that were established; *The Commonwealth Privacy Act, 1988* (Attorney Generals Department, 2004) hindered communication; accountability concerns of management resulted in 'chain-of-command' communication pathways; impediments to successful support included the lack of resources, funding, service quality and marketing, and time. The attitude or motivation of at-risk individuals was also reported as key factors contributing to the success of interventions. The understanding of at-risk status as determined by respondents was uniform across the sample and had no significant impact on communication patterns.

This Chapter reports on the findings that emerged from the interviews and weaves in the data from the questionnaire as it pertains to respondents' perceptions of factors that place individuals into an 'at-risk' category.

Demographics

Twenty eight respondents from eight different organisations, departments and agencies were interviewed with the sample comprising twelve males and sixteen females. The age range of respondents varied but the sample was predominantly representative of the older age ranges with over 60% of the respondents reported their age above forty (refer to Table 5: Age range and gender distribution of the sample).

Table 5
Age Range and Gender Distribution of Sample

Age Range	Frequency	Gender	
20 – 25	1		1F
26 – 30	1	1M	
31 – 35	7	1M	6F
36 – 40	2	1M	1F
41 – 45	5	2M	3F
46 – 50	6	4M	2F
51 – 55	5	3M	2F
56 – 60	1		1F
Total	28	12M	16F

The Sample

The school in this study was selected because of the high proportion of at-risk individuals within the student population. There were nine respondents from the school. These respondents consisted of the Principal and Deputies (n=3) who were senior administrators. Middle level administrators included Year Coordinators (n=2). A classroom Teacher (n=1) was also interviewed. Professional staff associated with the school such as the Psychologist, Nurse, and Chaplain comprised the other school respondents (n=3).

There were 19 respondents in the complement of the sample who were representatives from multiple agencies, both government and non-government. These agencies groups were providing support for at-risk individuals attending the school.

In all cases an attempt was made to interview representatives from different levels of the management hierarchy. This purposeful sampling was successful in the Department of Community Development (managerial level=2, other=2), the Western Australian Police Force (managerial level=1, other=1), Centrelink (managerial level=1, other=1) and the Department of Justice (managerial level=1, other=1). Case workers who were at similar management levels were interviewed in the remaining agencies (n=9).

The School – in this sample was a small government senior high school (~450 students) within a low socio-economic metropolitan area. It services a predominantly multicultural student population and has a larger number of support service personnel to cater to this demographic.

Department of Community Development (DCD) – is a Western Australian Government department with the mandate to improve the social wellbeing of all individuals, families and communities in Western Australia

Western Australian Police Force – is a Western Australian Government department responsible for keeping law and educating people about their association with the law.

Centrelink – is a Federal Government agency involved with the social welfare of the community, catering for basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter. Assistance is also provided for indigenous people, migrants of non-English speaking background, diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and sole parents.

Department of Justice (DoJ) – is a State Government department that manages juvenile offenders. Their mandate is to prevent crime and stop the re-offending behaviour of individuals. The Department of Justice examines criminogenic factors and identifies how they can be addressed to reduce crime rates.

Other Agencies and Departments – included organisations that were involved in supporting at-risk individuals. These included *The Smith Family*, Neighbourhood centres, and Children's Services agencies.

Current Communication Pathways and Patterns

The respondents in agencies and schools indicated there were no distinct and trackable communication patterns existing between any of their organisations. As the interviews progressed, it was revealed that this did not mean that communication patterns were absent; rather it was facilitated on a case-by-case basis with whoever was determined to be the most likely agency to assist. While communication was always described as talking to others to assist, the at-risk people there were differences in the processes of communicating. All the agency personnel (100%) and school staff (100%) indicated that they would 'talk to anyone' given the right circumstances and they frequently did talk to multiple agencies and people in the process of supporting their at-risk clients.

The communication process was classified into two distinct categories namely, formal and informal. Documented paths along which information had to be progressed from one person, department, or organisation, to another exemplified formal communication processes. The processes frequently involved memorandums of agreement and informed consent documents. Informal patterns of communication as the identification suggests, was the sharing of information between organisations or individuals without protocols having been established for the process. In this category, communication was initiated by a case worker on a case-by-case basis whereby he/she contacted a colleague from another agency or organisation if he/she perceived that the colleague had the potential to solve the problem or to provide insight into who may be able to assist in solving the problem or parts of the problem. This form of communication was highly case specific, reliant on personal networks and almost ad hoc.

Formal Communication Processes Between Support Agencies

Formal communication, which sounds very official, was only mentioned by three respondents. Interestingly these three people were managers within their organisations. They reported protocols that existed involving the exchange of information about at-risk individuals between organisations. The organisations encompassed by these protocols were extensive but not all inclusive. These protocols were sometimes referred to as 'memorandums of understanding'. These memoranda sought to formulate and potentially simplify communication pathways across

agencies with the view to better support at-risk individuals. An example of this was identified by a respondent from Centrelink who reported that they had established a memorandum of understanding with Homeswest, the Prisons Department, Immigration Department, and the Tax Department to name a few. This formalised agreement was established between organisations to get a more holistic picture of the client's case to ensure that a case worker instituted the most appropriate action for the client (at-risk individual). In the case of the Department of Education and Training the memorandum of agreement was only in its infancy stage with a few senior officers having drafted an outline.

Perhaps the only other attempt to formalise the communication pathway, other than memoranda of agreement, was to get at-risk individuals to sign an "Informed Consent" or "Disclosure of Information" document. This document, signed by the at-risk individual, gave the case worker permission to divulge information to other case workers, and other organisations in order to open up the lines of communication officially. Case workers typically reported, "before we can pass on any of that information we get our disclosure of information form that we get the young person to sign to say that they are aware of what we are passing on and they are happy for us to pass that on". Once the informed consent document was signed it was up to the case worker to contact other people to further assist the intervention process.

A manager from the Department of Justice questioned the use or legality of an informed consent document stating, "It may be OK but it has never been tested in a court of law". He/she did mention that "it is better to use it than not". An additional issue was raised by a second respondent about the use of these forms when she stated "[i]f a family won't give you permission then it's difficult to work collaboratively because the family won't go down that route." This highlighted the point that if permission is not gained then information cannot be shared, thus perhaps limiting the success of any intervention. A third respondent again alluded to the *Privacy Act* stating, "I don't share any information unless I have that permission from the family". Caution about sharing information, even with the informed consent document, was still advocated by one respondent. "[W]hen the family sign consent I don't see that as a green light to share everything and anything without sort of respecting the fact that the client might not really have considered the entire

implications of what it is that they are consenting to”. A respondent expressed an opposing view when he/she stated, “once we’ve got permission its open slather, we’ll divulge anything to anybody as long as the customer’s happy”. He/she went on further to explain that generally this level of information sharing occurs only when “they’re sitting with us when we do it, we’re quite happy to. Sometimes the other agency won’t talk to us though because they haven’t got the person in front of them so they’ll want something formal”.

The decision to use an informed consent document was made to encourage and simplify the official communication process. In many situations, informed consent documentation had become unwieldy by creating more work for case workers. For example, whilst acknowledging the need for informed consent two respondents expressed concern about the amount of time this involved, pointing out duplication encompassed within this process ... “[as we have] separate forms one for each agency we talk to”. The other respondent spoke of a more streamlined process ... “we’ll list the agencies in which they’re [the at-risk individual] letting us discuss information about them then we’ll send that off to all the relevant agencies”.

An alternative to case workers contacting colleagues in other agencies, thereby initiating the protocol of informed consent forms and the like, was to send the at-risk individuals directly to the other agency for assistance. This referral process or brokerage was described as ... “usually the first thing the family knows about [us – this agency] is because the person who ends up referring them here says to them go and see them, they can help”. An alternative strategy mentioned was “[l]inking them with services, like a mentor, that can help remind them of when their appointments are and can ... assist to get them to those appointments”.

Formal Communication Pathways in the School Situation

A serious concern iterated by staff in the school (n=7) was that information appeared to only flow one-way - from the school to agencies. One respondent stated, “we don’t seem to receive a lot of information back and it’s very, very difficult for us to actually act and to do things”. He/she continued ... “I just need to know what we’re dealing with because it would save so much time and it also would make it a hell of a lot safer for my staff”. All of the school respondents reported that frequently they

found out what support the at-risk individual was receiving directly from the student and not from any communication from the agencies. In many cases, the teachers alerted the external agency to potential problems thus initiated support. A school administrator indicated that behaviour at school often related to situations occurring at home ... “the behaviours are mirrored at home and the parents themselves or the ... carer are screaming out for help and so the first indication I get is when the wheels fall off here” and this was when he/she initiated contact with an appropriate agency.

Four teachers’ reflected that communication within the school operated on a formal basis. They were expected to report to administration via written documentation any concerns regarding at-risk individuals. This documentation, referred to as “managing student behaviour (MSB)” reports, was compiled by administration to identify problematic patterns in student behaviour. Other personnel within the school, namely psychologist and nurse, also mentioned the reports they were expected to compile. These confidential reports were forwarded to the senior psychologist at District Office in the case of the psychologist, and the Health Department in the case of the nurse. Both reported they selectively reported some information to the principal, but only as a courtesy, if they thought it in the best interest of the at-risk individual.

Data Storage

Within each organisation, a formal data storage system allowed for the sharing of information amongst case workers and managers within that organisation. These data were available only within the organisation and were not to be circulated to external personnel or agencies. Usually this was a computer database system that was password protected to prevent unauthorised access, although some organisations kept everything in case files stored in locked cabinets. In some cases, computer database storage had multiple levels of access governed by regulations to ensure that only certain personnel had access to all information stored within the database. Other database systems tracked the user so any inappropriate usage could be monitored. “There’s prohibitions on looking at people[‘s] ... records and ... broadly everything’s available but you should only be looking at it if you have a reason to look at it. And you must be able to defend why you looked at it”. The amount of information stored on each database varied considerably between organisations. In

some organisations, every detail about every case was stored for reference whereas in other organisations only summaries as interpreted and determined by the case worker was stored. Certainly, within the school only summaries were contained within the database because “the amount of data storage needed to keep every detail would be phenomenal”.

Successful Communication Pathways Provide Better Service

Developing relationships and contact with other agencies was considered part of an effective process of assisting at-risk individuals. One case worker stated “education, access to information, developing meaningful links with other groups in the community or other people in the community and sometimes that’s even like trying to foster a personal friendship between one person and another is all part of the job”. Another commented they [the organisation] were “actually moving towards ... building linkages with other agencies because we very much see child protection as a community responsibility and not just the department ... because we can’t do it without the support of ... other agencies”.

Informal Patterns Between Support Agencies

The most common pattern of communication that emerged from this research was informal. All interviewees (N=28) acknowledged the need to communicate with others to facilitate support for at-risk individuals. These interviewees stated that no one person or agency was able to provide the necessary assistance for all at-risk individuals. They reported having communicated with other people - managers, case workers, and/or teachers, with the most obvious form consisting of verbal interaction ... “the only communication is word of mouth or the only communication that **works** is word of mouth”. Confusion was alleviated through verbal communication because any misinterpretation or misunderstandings could be corrected immediately. It was reported that case workers experienced apprehension with committing information to paper for exchange with anyone else... “I don’t give that information out in written form”. Despite the fact that some of the larger organisations had memorandums of understanding these did not extend to the smaller organisations ... “[s]haring the information with small organisations ... is almost non-existent formally but probably quite prevalent informally”.

All respondents (N=28) were aware that the services that they were able to provide were finite and frequently it was necessary to contact others. Eight respondents, for instance, indicated that by contacting others alternative expert assistance could be obtained. This meant there was a need to establish a working relationship with a network of people who could be approached to provide help ... “there are other agencies out there that have much better working relationships ... so if we can work with them to work positively and affect some sort of change with the families then everybody wins”.

Case workers consistently referred to their network of colleagues who were able to assist them with various problems. The establishment and enhancement of these service networks resulted from ad hoc interactions through to formal meetings of introduction. Almost half of the sample (46%) indicated they frequently received calls for assistance relating to multiple problems for an at-risk client. In such cases, they would assist in the area over which they had control. They then facilitated the solving of the rest of the problems by contacting colleagues or others within, or external to, their own organisation who had control over the additional problems identified by the caller. For example, a respondent cited a case where their at-risk client had concerns with obtaining food, shelter and clothing, but the respondent was only responsible for the provision of food. He/she proceeded to contact colleagues who were responsible for supplying or accessing shelter and clothing. A respondent reflected that case worker networks were often personality driven ... “we couldn’t make any progress and we felt very lost and alone because we were unable to have a good relationship with the case worker ... there wasn’t a free and open, frank exchange of information”. Similarly another case worker reflected, “we will share information with the DOJ worker ... because we’re both working with the same kid, we want the same goals for the kid” demonstrating the rapport that some other case workers had developed with their colleagues.

A case worker spoke of the difficulty in establishing and maintaining networks ... “I guess you build [it] up over time but if we’re not paying attention to it then you know maybe we haven’t built up anywhere near enough of a network”. Respondents from DCD (n=3) reported their organisations had recognised the value of these informal networks to the point where they had formally appointed a coordinator to act as

liaison for caseworkers and others. This coordinator's role was to establish linkages with other agencies and personnel that would facilitate communication between the agencies. These coordinators became a valuable resource to case workers as they frequently had more extensive knowledge of who could assist in particular cases.

A recurrent issue identified by over 60% of respondents (n=17) was the need to formalise the information sharing process by having a meeting with the at-risk individual and interested stakeholders. Many acknowledged that this was both time consuming and expensive but the positives resulting from interventions that were more successful outweighed the disadvantages. These discussions ranged from formal meetings conducted by the "Stronger Families Program" to individual meetings managed by staff members within the school. A teacher was adamant about the need for these meetings stating, "all these people who ... hold the confidential information could be forced to sit down and talk about a student to work out an action plan ... sometimes you don't have to say what the confidential information is. If the person of that organisation is here, together with people from the other organisations, we can work out a shared outcome amongst all agencies". A case worker reflected that the information shared not only assisted the at-risk individual, but also potentially benefited the organisation in reducing duplication of effort. He/she observed that meeting about the at-risk individual "add[ed] to our knowledge of that child" while arming them with "a little extra knowledge" about potential interventions.

Professionalism: A Factor in Establishing a Communication Pathway

Eighteen respondents (64%) referred to professionalism as part of the requirements for supporting at-risk individuals. A combination of training, experience, and interpersonal skills were all a necessary part of this professionalism. "Educated judgements" regarding service provision were made based on the case workers best determination of the at-risk individual's situation ... "over time you do get that practised wisdom and experience that does help you make those sorts of judgement calls". The thought was expressed that this experience should assist the at-risk individual ... "you make a judgement and you make sure that you minimise that risk and you help that child. If that means ringing each other up and sharing that information then that's what you do".

Communication with case workers from other organisations was based on the need to provide a more holistic service, not because of rules and protocols. One case worker expounded the viewpoint “I’m not a personal believer in professionals deciding what’s best for families so I wouldn’t like to waive a family’s right to confidentiality just because ... it would be better for them if we did it this way”. Similarly, a teacher stated, “I’m not a trained youth worker, I am a teacher, ... I think most of my judgement calls are right on but there are times where my lack of training, counselling, psychology degree does come into play”.

Communication Impediments

Every respondent (N=28) readily acknowledged problems or impediments were frequently associated with implementing more effective communication patterns even though there was a desire to create them. Respondents identified a number of these impediments referring to the *Privacy Act*, management hierarchy, and filtering of information as key factors.

The identification of communication patterns required the determination of pathways that respondents used for the sharing of information about at-risk individuals. When queried about potential pathways, all respondents (N=28) mentioned privacy as being a significant factor in their determination as to the appropriateness of information exchange. All respondents (N=28) stated that there were restrictions in what information could be shared based on the *Privacy Act*. One respondent, for instance, spoke of the *Act* as the “boundaries in terms of what information could be shared and what shouldn’t be shared”.

Respondents spoke of being wary of divulging information, being apprehensive of prosecution because of breaches to the *Privacy Act* (PA) ... “it [the PA] makes everybody mindful of being very, very careful what they release ... it would be an absolute minefield to open it up and say yes you can release this information”. Approximately a quarter of the sample indicated that there appears to be some confusion about the PA which was illustrated by the comment ... “lack of understanding about how ... and when information can be shared so they [case workers] ... just clam up and say [nothing]”. Others (n=5) were more pragmatic

about the PA believing “when you’re dealing with a child there are no barriers”, hence they did not allow the parameters of the PA to become a barrier to them assisting a child in trouble. They felt that even though the ... “the legislation is so kind of frightening ... commonsense overrides that”.

Although aware of the *Privacy Act* (PA), 32% percent of respondents (n=9) reported not being fully conversant with all particulars covered by it. For example, case workers spoke of their uncertainty of the specific information able to be shared ... “there’s a form at the start ... saying this information will be shared under government legislation” ... “I don’t really know the legislation but it’s like a legal agreement or a legal standing”. In five of the organisations contacted in this study, managers were aware of this general lack of understanding of the *Privacy Act*. The extent of their concerns was evident in that they employed personnel to train others about the ramifications of the *Act* ... “a training arm with our department that we can send volunteers to”, “I had the privacy guy and the freedom of information people speak ... for a couple of hours during [an] induction”.

Organisations appeared to have different interpretations of the *Privacy Act* (PA). Respondents’ spoke of colleagues in other organisations having alternative understandings of the PA applying it in different ways. They stated these colleagues would not share information with certain individuals because of their interpretation of the *Privacy Act*. This led to confusion and frustration when having dealings with others from different organisations. There was a difference between federal and state privacy legislation ... “the [school] psychologist has to report more things than I do [as the school nurse]...because I come under the ... Health Department [and] the Nurses’ Board ... guidelines about confidentiality”.

Management Hierarchy and Communication

All respondents in this Masters research were directly or indirectly answerable to a superior authority. Communication **within** the agencies and the school generally occurred in both directions, whether verbally or in written form. Twelve respondents in the total sample referred to the management hierarchy or “chain-of-command” having an impact on communication pathways. This was even evident to outside personnel, for example, a school senior administrator related how this chain of

command actually reduced the efficiency of establishing a fast track solution with an organisation stating “case workers will [have to] clear it with their manager ... it’s ... very frustrating and very time-consuming”. Similarly, this situation occurred in the school whereby a teacher referred to the need to present information to the principal ... “[t]here’s got to be some form of communication going on there ‘cause you’re responsible to him” before proceeding with a course of action. This chain of command issue appeared to have strong links with the concept of accountability as illustrated by a case worker’s comment ... “basically the end of line responsibility ... my supervisor ... directly supervises what I’m doing with the cases, we have regular reviews to go through how we’re heading with the cases”. Reflecting this same thought but from the manager’s perspective ... “my job is to oversee all that, to ensure ... everybody’s doing their job on a daily basis and I have to monitor their daily performance”. This accountability was progressed one step further by the police respondents who indicated that senior officers controlled the responsibility of releasing information to external agencies about at-risk individuals.

A senior administrator reported that he/she had initiated innovative ways to facilitate the communication process, by bypassing the established management hierarchy within another organisation. He/she obtained the mobile phone number of a manager from a government support organisation in order to go direct to the final decision maker as crises frequently arose in his school that required immediate action ... “[this direct route] saves a lot of time and angst trying to solve a problem ... rather than going through channels such as the reception desk to case worker, who can’t make a decision, through to the manager”.

Whilst acknowledging the need for an accountability mechanism encompassed in hierarchical management, one respondent begrudged the time that could be spent on communication with the highest levels in the hierarchy. He/she pointed out that clients were increasingly aware of their rights to access and communicate with senior officials, often going “straight to the top to the minister” because of the perception of getting better service. This created “three to six hours’ work to do a ‘ministerial” in order to answer the Minister’s query “and that’s three to six hours that we could be spending with [an at-risk individual]”.

Filtering

Another characteristic of the information sharing process which represented an impediment, involved people getting information and selectively releasing segments of it to others. Filtering information was usually limited to personnel in administrative roles. A teacher argued that administrative personnel were impeding information sharing ...“I just get that feeling that they don’t tell you everything that goes on with students”. This was of serious concern as he/she cited a possible scenario of a physically violent student enrolling in the school that would place both staff and students at risk of potential harm. He/she continued relating that if staff is not made aware of this student’s habits they are potentially being placed at-risk themselves. A manager however, took a contrasting view to providing all staff with information about potentially violent or troubled students asserting, “you will never ever convince me that it would be beneficial to tell staff”. A case worker who provided a different insight indicated that the filtering process had to do with power differentials within an organisation ... “I also have a feeling that sometimes people consider that knowledge is power”. Hence, by filtering information these people retained power over colleagues and subordinates.

A teacher highlighted a paradoxical situation of potential impact on at-risk individuals unless information was filtered. The problem arises when support may be denied at-risk individuals if all information pertaining to an individual is released. To illustrate his/her point the teacher cited ... “to get an external agency to take your kids at-risk out [for work experience], you have to supposedly provide them with personal information, but you’re actually not entitled to because that information’s only been provided for the use of the school”.

Conceptualisations of At-risk Status

The interviews commenced with the administration of a questionnaire that was designed to evaluate the respondent’s perceptions of factors that placed individuals at risk. The questionnaire was based on a similar study by Johnson (1997) who studied the experience-based ratings of factors that place students at risk. In Johnson’s study a total of 52 risk factors were identified and broken into five categories; student, family, school, community, and society.

Student-based risk factors included ‘drinks alcohol’, ‘smokes marijuana’, ‘does hard drugs’, ‘sexually active’, ‘truant from school’, ‘does not enjoy school’, ‘English as a second language’, ‘limited language competencies’, and ‘few background experiences’.

Family-based risk factors included having an ‘alcoholic parent’, ‘parent who does drugs’, ‘family violence’, ‘lack of parental supervision’, ‘no parent-teacher interviews’, ‘parent doesn't value education’, ‘English as a second language family’, ‘sibling does drugs’, ‘sibling dropped out of school’, and ‘parent is criminal’.

School-based risk factors related to ‘teacher being under stress’, ‘teacher intolerance to the student’, ‘rigid educational program’, ‘school violence’, ‘large class size’, ‘no special education classes’, ‘having a novice teacher’, ‘no English as Second Language (ESL) program’, ‘limited school resources’, ‘school-gangs’, ‘learning in a dilapidated school building’, and ‘having a non-supportive teacher’.

The fourth category was **community-based risk factors** and included ‘no access to community recreational facilities’, ‘inadequate housing’, ‘no community leadership’, ‘low income neighbourhood’, ‘high community unemployment’, ‘no youth work opportunities’, ‘living in a high crime neighbourhood’, ‘no community health clinics’, ‘street gangs in community’, and ‘no emergency youth shelters’.

The final category of risk, **society**, included ‘being involved with the *Young Offenders Act 1994*’, ‘child/youth social policy’, ‘cultural intolerance’, ‘racism’, ‘social policy for the poor’, ‘services for the disadvantaged’, ‘juvenile crime policy’, ‘public spending priorities’, ‘attitudes toward child/youth’, and ‘public attitude toward the disadvantaged’.

A Likert rating scale ranging from one to six (1 - low individual risk to 5 - high individual risk; 6 - no opinion) was used for each of the five categories mentioned. The frequency of ratings was determined so the average for the risk factor could be calculated. The perceptions of the individual ratings could then be compared from these averages. (Note: In some cases, the respondent expressed no opinion by selecting the ‘no opinion’ option. In such cases, the risk factors were excluded from the mean calculation).

Table 6
Student-based Risk Factors

Student-based risk factors	Mean Rating	Low 1	Frequency of Rating				High 5
			2	3	4		
Drinks alcohol	3.43	2	2	12	6	6	
Smokes marijuana	3.71	0	5	8	5	10	
Does hard drugs	3.96	5	0	2	4	16	
Criminal behaviour	4.11	0	2	7	4	14	
Sexually active	3.14	2	6	10	6	4	
Truant from school	3.89	0	3	8	6	11	
Does not enjoy school	3.07	1	7	12	5	3	
English as Second Language	2.18	8	12	5	1	2	
Limited language competencies	3.39	0	7	10	4	7	
Few background experiences	2.75	2	9	11	6	0	
Exiting school early	3.43	1	4	11	6	6	

A summary of the student-based risk factors is presented in Table 6. Criminal behaviour was rated as the highest risk causing factor (4.11). All other factors were rated highly with the exception of ‘English as a Second Language (ESL)’ rating the lowest slightly above 2. ‘Taking hard drugs’ rated higher than ‘smoking marijuana’. Truancy with a rating of 3.89 was also considered a causal factor.

Table 7
Family-Based Risk Factors

Family-based risk factors	Mean Rating	Low 1	Frequency of Rating				High 5
			2	3	4		
Alcoholic parent	4.36	0	0	4	10	14	
Parent does drugs	4.41	0	1	4	5	17	
Family violence	4.54	0	0	3	7	18	
Lack of parental supervision	4.29	0	0	7	6	15	
No parent-teacher interviews	2.81	1	12	8	1	4	
Parent doesn't value education	3.48	1	4	8	9	5	
English Second Language family	2.11	6	14	6	0	1	
Sibling does drugs	2.96	0	9	10	6	1	
Sibling dropped out of school	2.81	0	11	10	4	1	
Parent is criminal	3.78	0	3	8	8	8	

Table 7 presents a summary of family-based risk factors. ‘Family violence’ (4.54) was the highest rating risk factor from all risk factors considered in the questionnaire while ESL (2.11) was ranked as the lowest. ‘Parents who are taking drugs’, are ‘alcoholics’ and are ‘providing no supervision’ all rated above 4.

Table 8
School-Based Risk Factors

School-based risk factors	Mean Rating	Low 1	Frequency of Rating →				High 5
			2	3	4	5	
Teacher stress	2.75	2	10	10	5	1	
Teacher intolerance	3.32	1	4	10	11	2	
Rigid educational program	2.81	0	12	8	7	0	
School violence	3.68	0	4	5	15	4	
Large class size	2.59	5	5	13	4	0	
No special education	2.65	3	10	6	7	0	
Novice teacher	2.70	3	8	11	4	1	
No ESL program	2.42	6	9	5	6	0	
Limited school resources	2.57	6	5	12	5	0	
School-gangs	3.39	1	5	8	10	4	
Dilapidated school building	2.25	8	10	6	3	1	
Non-supportive teacher	3.46	1	4	9	9	5	

The school-based risk factors category displayed in Table 8 rated ‘school violence’ (3.68) as the key risk factor. ‘Non-supportive teachers’ (3.46), ‘school gangs’ (3.39) and ‘teacher intolerance’ (3.32) also rated highly. Having ‘dilapidated school buildings’ (2.25) was deemed the least important risk causing issue, followed closely by ‘no ESL program’ available (2.42).

Table 9
Community-Based Risk Factors

Community-based risk factors	Mean Rating	Low 1	Frequency of Rating →				High 5
			2	3	4	5	
No recreational facilities	3.00	3	8	6	8	3	
Inadequate housing	3.82	0	5	3	12	8	
No community leadership	3.36	2	5	7	9	5	
Low income neighbourhood	3.07	1	9	9	5	4	
High community unemployment	3.57	0	3	10	11	4	
No youth work opportunities	3.61	0	3	10	10	5	
High crime neighbourhood	4.00	1	1	3	15	8	
No community health clinics	2.85	1	9	11	5	1	
Street gangs in community	3.63	0	5	4	14	4	
No emergency youth shelter	2.96	3	5	9	8	1	

‘High crime’ (4.00) rated the most highly for the community-based risk factor category (Table 9) followed by ‘inadequate housing’ at 3.82. Not having ‘community health clinics’ or ‘emergency youth shelters’ rated low with risk factors of 2.85 and 2.96 respectively. ‘Lack of youth work opportunities’ (3.61) and ‘high community

unemployment’ (3.57) were also deemed by respondents as being significant to the creation of at-risk youth.

Table 10
Society-Based Risk Factors

Society-based risk factors	Mean Rating	Low	Frequency of Rating				Hi
			1	2	3	4	
Young Offenders Act 1994	2.95	3	5	5	4	3	
Child/youth social policy	2.84	3	8	6	6	2	
Cultural intolerance	3.75	0	4	7	9	8	
Racism	4.00	0	0	7	14	7	
Social policy for the poor	3.25	1	3	10	9	1	
Services for the disadvantaged	3.04	2	4	14	5	2	
Juvenile crime policy	2.96	2	5	10	8	0	
Public spending priorities	3.33	1	4	9	11	2	
Attitudes toward child/youth	3.00	4	3	10	7	2	
Attitudes toward disadvantageded	3.31	1	4	10	8	3	

Society-based risk factors (Table 10) have ‘racism’ being the highest risk factor at 4.00. ‘Child/youth social policy’ rated the lowest at 2.84 while ‘juvenile crime policy’ and the ‘*Young Offenders Act 1994*’ both rated next with ratings of 2.96 and 2.95 respectively. ‘Attitudes towards child/youth’ were similarly rated at 3.00.

Table 11
Averages Of Risk Factors

Averages of risk factors	Mean
Student-based	3.37
Family-based	3.60
School-based	2.90
Community-based	3.39
Society-based	3.32

Table 11 displays the average rating for all categories defined as contributing to risk. ‘School-based risk factors’ (2.90) were considered by respondents to be the lowest with ‘family-based’ at 3.60 rating the highest. The other three risk factor categories, ‘student-based’, ‘society-based’, and ‘community-based’ were rated similarly at approximately 3.35.

Understandings of At-risk Status: Influence on Communication Patterns

Table 12

Comparison of Understanding of Average Risk Factors Between School and Agency Personnel

Averages of risk factors	School Personnel	Agency Personnel
Student-based	3.48	3.30
Family-based	3.90	3.39
School-based	2.90	2.90
Community-based	3.43	3.37
Society-based	3.50	3.21

Table 12 shows a comparison of the perspectives of the school and agency personnel on the importance of the various risk factors identified in the Johnson study (1997). School personnel included both teachers and support staff such as psychologist and nurse.

School and agency respondents did not hold significantly different perspectives regarding what risk factors were more important in placing an individual 'at-risk'. Both rated 'family-based' factors as the highest and 'school-based' factors as the lowest. This resulted in both groups having a similar perspective on how to best support at-risk individuals, iterating the formal and informal communication patterns as outlined in the previous sections of the results Chapter.

Understandings of "At-risk"

At the conclusion of the questionnaire administration, the interviews were commenced. Respondents were encouraged to elaborate on their own definition of what constituted at-risk status. Respondents definitions varied considerably and included "for educational reasons, for domestic reasons, problems at home, for drug and alcohol reasons, for truancy reasons", "their position in society is marginalised", they are "open to abuse by others or by themselves", and are "endangered spiritually, physically, intellectually, emotionally, socially". Eight respondents made the most common response stating the individual is "not achieving their potential...for a variety of factors".

Respondents were queried as to when an at-risk status commenced, with six firmly iterating that being at-risk was initiated “at conception” or “birth”. The agency respondents cited examples such as ...

we get concerns or referrals sent to us ... from King Edward [Memorial Women’s Hospital] when the mother hasn’t even given birth yet. But they know that she’s a huge risk factor or the child is a huge risk factor because mum attends the chemical dependency unit...

or “a 13 year old mum who hasn’t got a permanent address ... and who’s got a child”. Similar comments included “children that are born into certain circumstances ... they’re always at-risk from then until they can get themselves out of that situation”. Four respondents expressed the view that events causing risk were not always obvious ... “for a lot it happens gradually, over time they can become more and more at risk but also you can have events that occur that put them immediately at-risk”. A teacher pointed out “they’re born with a difficulty, or an academic learning difficulty could develop over time through the early years of schooling, and if it’s not picked up early then that risk-ness increases”.

All respondents alluded to the difficulty of identifying at-risk individuals ... “there’s no simple measure or test”. Nine respondents from both the school and agencies, referred to tests, questionnaires, and lists that they use to categorise the individual’s at-risk status, “to establish that they meet all the criteria”. Another respondent though indicated that these formal identification methods were less than comprehensive as a tool to identify all at-risk individuals ... “it’s ad hoc, in that it’s identified [at-risk status] by one of the staff **talking** to a person and identifying that there’s risk factors there”. The establishment of relationships with individuals was considered extremely important, with eight respondents referring to the ability to “talk and to listen to them, what they have to say in a non-judgemental environment where they can speak what’s on their mind”. A teacher outlined ... “mentoring sessions [he/she conducted] with them where [the at-risk individuals] address many issues from vocational to home to school to the school yard”.

Support Provision

The finding of this study revealed that the provision of support to at-risk individuals was considerable and varied. Respondents (n=6) detailed specific school-based programs that were tailor-made to particular at-risk individuals such as a “teenage mothers’ program” or an “Aboriginal sport program for both boys and girls”. Another program was described as a “pull-out program for severely alienated individuals ... because a lot of at-risk kids don’t like being enclosed in a classroom either, and need diverse sorts of curriculum”. To facilitate the pull-out program at-risk individuals attended a farm where out of the ordinary skills were taught.

Pastoral care within a school context was mentioned by six respondents (teachers n=4, agency staff n=2) as being critical to effectively supporting at-risk individuals. These respondents believed in a personal approach, “being a friend and being there”. Part of their role was assumed to be talking and counselling as well as “practical pastoral care, like providing food and clothing”. One teacher outlined his/her strategy in assisting at-risk individuals by teaching them to “develop ways of surviving in the workplace”. One pastoral care teacher stated, “they will come and see me every day and we’ll have breakfast or I might give them something for lunch” because they were not getting proper nutrition at home. Programs external to schools were also mentioned. “Christian”, “sporting” and other “private organisations”, operated these. Other organisations assisted in the provision of “accommodation, employment, and domestic violence councillors and ... emergency crisis food”. A respondent was “a trained volunteer who visit[ed] the family weekly and provide[d] them with emotional support, with some practical assistance, help[ed] to build their confidence and self-esteem in a number of different areas”. Some programs focused on providing a more fun environment ... “we take them on camps, we teach bush survival [skills]”.

Success of Support Provided

Every respondent (N=28) expressed approval of the efforts made by their own organisation, however, in most cases this was with the qualification that the support could be better. A number of factors broadly categorised as resources, funding, service quality, and marketing, and time limited success. These issues were directly

related to the agencies' responsibilities and sphere of influence. The last issue was of motivation of the at-risk individual to engage with the support providers.

Resources

The lack of resources was the most commonly reported limitation to the provision of effective services to at-risk individuals. Sixteen respondents specifically identified staff "as a resource" having an influence in service provision ... we have "never got enough specialist staff", with "that knowledge base and experience". Access to "trained volunteers" was also reported as being a limitation to service provision from an organisation that relied heavily on voluntary aid. This was similar in the school situation, as it was not necessarily related to pedagogical matters, rather for what was perceived to be social issues. One teacher commented, "we need to have a fulltime school psych ... [as well as] access to a regular, consistent police officer".

The frequent "turnover of staff" hampered the effectiveness of specific programs designed to assist at-risk individuals ... "a lot of things in schools happen once every year and you want to be able to ring someone up and say this time last year we did such and such ... can we do it again? ... But that doesn't happen because they change personnel frequently".

Funding

Sixty one percent of respondents (n=17) cited funding as a limiting factor in service provision ... "[a]ny sort of funding whatsoever is extremely difficult to access". A respondent related that a lack of funding of his/her program increased at-risk behaviours ... "\$5 [spent on my program] can prevent \$5,000 worth of damage ... bored kids create their own entertainment and most times it's not the appropriate one, it's something that leads to a problem with damage, rejection, imprisonment". A more pragmatic respondent acknowledged that finances were limited hence, he/she referred them to other, better funded, sources of assistance ... "we don't have money ... whereas they've [other organisations] got financial resources ... we can only refer people on to other services".

Service Quality and Marketing

More efficient and effective service quality and the need for better marketing were consistent issues related to the success of support. This involved a range of differing

themes such as respondents' perceptions of the type and quality of service available, as well as the rapport developed through interpersonal communication between respondents and at-risk individuals.

Respondents indicated that there was a vast array of help available to at-risk individuals through various organisations and agencies, however, the problem was...“finding how to access them”. Another issue raised was that although there was a range of services available ... “there’s a fair bit of duplication” whereby frequently other agencies were working on the same case and providing similar or identical services. Another respondent identified that the agency may need to do something about marketing themselves more positively ... “I don’t think we necessarily have a good image ... in the broad community”. He/she also reported that “the process we put people through ... is quite difficult ... not threatening but it’s not user-friendly”.

Although there was considerable assistance available, understanding by all communities of who was eligible, what services were out there, and where to access them was called into question. Responses referring to this phenomenon, included ... “[o]ur concern is that other cultures don’t access our services in the way that other people do because they’re not aware of the services that we have to offer”, “differing mindsets on what at-risk is and the community’s expectations of what we can deliver or what we should be delivering”.

The development of an environment of trust was seen by three respondents to enhance the implementation of successful interventions. The rapport engendered by this environment was essential for ongoing relationships ... “you’ve got to get that rapport ... and that can take a long time, ... we’ve only got to have done something bad to one person ... they know, or to them once, [and you have lost them]”.

Time

Seventeen respondents (61%) referred to time as being a major limiting factor in the delivery of services. They highlighted that personal time was necessary ... “I ... need ... a bit of time to be able to block out certain things”. Others referred to the constraints of only working during secular hours as problems frequently occurred in the evening ... “I know we all knock off at 4:00, 5:00 in the afternoon but the

problem doesn't stop there". Another issue related to time was that delays were experienced in providing assistance because other agencies were overloaded and could not provide documentation for a timely intervention. Interruptions also contributed to the concern about time with a respondent stating "you've got to let other things go in order to drop everything [focussing on the]... immediate need in terms of life and preserving life".

Motivation to Engage with the Support Providers

The motivation of the people seeking assistance was also deemed a limiting factor to service provision. One government agency employee spoke of the "suspicion of what we're trying to do" inhibiting his/her ability to provide a better service. Another respondent reflected on the issue of "cultural appropriateness" stating "many Aboriginal families don't want to access our service because it's not an Aboriginal-focused service". Another indicated that motivation was essential and frequently required the service provider to engage in ... "personal one-on-one coaxing and ... pushing".

It was identified that the success of interventions was the responsibility of both the service provider and the at-risk individuals. For example, "if the person's not motivated it's probably not going to work too well". Another respondent commented that successful interventions required "compliance and co-operation of parents". It was reported that their family situations that necessitated interventions targeted at both them and their parents affected many at-risk children. One respondent illustrated the complexity of these situations ... a "child who has been identified as being at-risk in the worst possible way of various abuses, of perpetrating crime, of being a victim of crime, of self-harm, a young child and he is part of a family dynamic that is so unbelievably complex in relation to all the issues".

Summary

Themes that emerged from this study included two classifications of communication, namely formal and informal. Formal patterns were identified by distinct pathways along which information were progressed. The *Privacy Act* severely curtailed formal communication patterns to such an extent that informal patterns between agencies' personnel became the predominant form. Intra-agency and intra-school communication patterns were characterised by management tending to control the

flow of information in a top down process. Whilst all respondents acknowledged the success of their organisation in the provision of support they commonly reported that a shortage of resources, reduced funding, poor service quality and marketing, and lack of time were all factors that limited this success.

At-risk status was generically reported as failure to achieve one's potential, resulting from multiple causal factors occurring at anytime in the life of the individual. Teachers were more focused toward the educational risk factors but frequently conveyed similar understandings of risk factors as the supporting agencies. Family-based risk factors were rated as the highest cause of at-risk status and school-based factors as the least.

CHAPTER 5 Discussion

Introduction

This research was undertaken to determine the patterns of communication between a school and various agencies that contributed to the successful support of at-risk individuals. This study which explored communication that facilitates the support of at-risk individuals, overtly encompassed four key literature themes. First, organisational communication theory, as it pertained to the school and agencies within this study. Second, the conceptualisations of what factors place individuals at-risk. Third, the psychological principle of Maslow's hierarchy of needs was included as it elaborated those basic requirements for life impact on at-risk individuals' capacity to develop academically and socially. Fourth, the educational theory of social reconstruction as it related to creating environments which promote the development of productive members of society for all students including those at-risk provided the holistic perspective to support mechanisms.

It was assumed that effective communication pathways would be essential to the provision of support for the at-risk. It was initially proposed that communication pathways would be clearly delineated and documented thus allowing an overview map to be developed. Unfortunately, the research found that for a number of reasons, this was not the case. Two categories of communication were identified; formal and informal, with informal being the most predominant. Agency personnel supporting at-risk individuals were all dedicated professionals seeking to ensure their clients obtained the necessary support, even if they (the agency) could not provide it. This was accomplished utilising informal communication pathways, such as word-of-mouth, referrals, and networking, thereby actively brokering assistance from other agencies better suited to the specialised support required.

Although informal patterns were the principal means of communication, impediments were encountered limiting the success of interventions. The *Commonwealth Privacy Act 1988* was the issue most commonly referred to as hampering communication and collaboration between agencies. People were not able to speak freely to others about issues and, as a result, they brokered solutions referring at-risk individuals to other agency personnel. Accountability of staff,

usually to management hierarchy within an agency, was also perceived as an impediment in supporting at-risk individuals. Staff were not free to make a decision without the need to consult with senior administrators.

It had been proposed that differing conceptualisations of what constituted at-risk status would influence the communication patterns, hence the support may also have been affected. The results showed a relatively uniform conceptualisation across the entire sample, and there was a conscientious effort made by all to provide an effective service. Universal consensus was achieved from respondents for the need of a more holistic support system.

Formal Patterns of Communication: Why They Exist and are They Successful?

This section discusses why distinct patterns of communication occur, how successful they are, and the issue of sustainability as outlined in the original research question(s) identified in Chapter 1:

1. *What are the patterns of communication within and across a school and associated support agencies that interact and manage at-risk individuals?*
 - a. *If there are distinct pathways, why is this the case? What determines their existence, success and/or sustainability?*

Considering that Maslow proposed that an individual's basic needs should be met before he/she is able to move up the hierarchy towards self-actualisation, it would appear that basic needs are critical to meeting one's potential. Support agency staff were caring individuals who were genuinely working to make the situation of their at-risk clients better ... "we look at every single avenue that we can. Sometimes we just have to say there is absolutely nothing left to do", "at the end of the day people care about the kids". One of the key foci of these agencies was to provide the basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, and safety with most interventions targeted to these aspects. Conversely, it may have been expected that teachers would be predominantly focused on educational goals (belonging and esteem in Maslow's hierarchy) growing the individual towards self-actualisation. Surprisingly, considerable amounts of teachers' time were spent managing Maslow's lower order needs, physiological and safety. Given that schools are considered social reconstruction institutions, held responsible for reforming the social problems that

exist within society (Matsumoto, 2002), difficulties often arise in attempting to educate at-risk individuals. These individuals must first contend with the more pressing physiological and safety needs before they become receptive to educators. Teachers are performing a social reconstructionist role in attempting to assist these at-risk individuals, first by accommodating their basic needs, and then opening the way for them to assume their role as a better, more able member of society. This issue was encapsulated by the following teacher respondent comments ...

“there are pointers to indicate if they are at-risk ... such as attendance or truancy or suspensions” ... “truancy might be part of the reason why they fail but there is a reason why they are truanting ... when they are not behaving well at school it often turns out to be a manifestation of other problems ... Dad’s just gone to jail ...prostitution, drugs, criminal record ... beating ... no food in the house”.

Distinct Pathways (Formal Patterns)

Distinct or formal patterns of communication did exist within and across a school and associated support agencies, which were interacting and managing at-risk individuals. These formal patterns of communication had been established yet their structures and application were not extensive or comprehensive in agency-to-agency communication. Attempts at formulating communication pathways had been undertaken using Memorandums of Agreement (MoA) and informed consent documents. Memorandums of Agreement described which agencies **had to be** kept informed regarding at-risk individuals and the situations requiring such communication. Although MoAs reportedly existed, they were not generally well known or documented. Obtaining and administering informed consent documents was considered time consuming and inefficient.

Perhaps one of the most successful demonstrations of a formal communication pattern was the “Stronger Families Program” (Markham, 2002). Meetings between the at-risk individual and invited support agencies to discuss the problems being experienced enabled coordinated approaches for intervention to be facilitated. The problem with such an approach is the amount of time and resources necessary to affect a solution for each individual. The numbers of at-risk individuals outweigh the

number of support staff capable of responding in any one organisation. Catering for multi-causal risk factor individuals within the “Stronger Families Program” was extremely efficient in terms of communication between the at-risk individual and multiple agencies. Support efforts were co-ordinated by one agency, thereby reducing duplication of effort. Up-scaling formal communication pathways (as exemplified in the “Stronger Families Program”), requires increased resources in terms of funding, time, and skilled personnel.

Communication Within Agencies

Communication patterns of the organisations, external to the school, contacted within this research study tended toward Likert’s “participative” System 4 (Crime and Justice Institute, 2005; Likert, 1967), with employees being able to exercise self-control and self-direction in the solution of problems. Communication appeared to be free flowing top down and bottom up. Cases were freely discussed with management who act as mentors. Similarly, this was also representative of a combination of Griffin’s “Human Relations” and “General Systems Approach” (2003, p.261) where the values, beliefs, and knowledge of staff combined with interconnectivity of people within the organisation was the key to productivity. Accountability was still a limiting factor within the agency. It appeared that managers still required subordinate staff to consult with them whenever an intervention was planned in order to meet the manager’s accountability. This represented decreased efficiency in providing interventions due to accountability mechanisms.

Communication Within the School

Communication within the school situation appeared to emulate Likert’s “exploitative-authoritative” System 1 Model (Crime and Justice Institute, 2005; Likert, 1967). The System 1 Model identified decision-making as centralised at the management level with communication restricted to specific channels (usually downward from management), and communication patterns characterised by mistrust between management and teacher as illustrated by filtering information, decision-making without consultation, and high levels of accountability. These communication patterns were believed to be a result of negative perceptions held by administrators toward their staff. This was demonstrated by the following statement of a senior administrator within the school ... “you will never ever convince me that it would be beneficial to tell staff [information about violent or troubled students]”.

Boylan's (2002, n.p.) descriptors appeared to be the assumption by these administrators ... that teachers were "basically immature, need direction and control, and [were] incapable of taking responsibility". There was considerable filtering of information within the school situation, with administrators only passing on information gained from external agencies concerning at-risk individuals to teachers when, and if, they felt it necessary regardless of the potential consequences for these staff and the other students. Griffin (2003) identified this as a "Mechanistic Approach", whereby communication was highly controlled on the basis that it would maximise efficiency. Teachers in this study were rarely provided extensive information about at-risk individuals. It appeared that they were considered 'immature' receiving information from specific channels, usually top down. This raised issues within the classroom environment, with at-risk individuals not always responding to interventions because they were applied inappropriately or with poor judgement by the teacher due to the lack of information on these individuals. There were strong expectations that teachers conform to management processes whereby they reported to administration any individuals considered to be demonstrating at-risk behaviours. This endorsed Hunt, Tourish and Hargie's (2000) findings that communication (about at-risk individuals) occurred in an upward direction from teacher to administrators, as the most predominant form of communication in schools and yet management decisions were always top down. This one-way flow of information was outlined by a teacher respondent's comment ... "I also have a feeling that sometimes people consider that knowledge is power ... I just get that feeling that they don't tell you everything that goes on with students".

The author postulated that a lack of free flowing information within the school was a direct result of increased compliance to superior authorities and greater accountability to corporate and community expectations following the reformation of the Australian Public Service (Brennan, 1993; Conway & Calzi, 1996; Latham, 1998; Robertson, 1993; Smyth, 1993; Sparkes & Bloomer, 1993). Administrators within the school were granted more autonomy (Robertson, 1993) but with increased accountability to all stakeholders (Ball, 1993). The school system has been, and still is, extremely hierarchical in nature; demonstrated by teachers being accountable to middle level management, who in turn report to senior administrators. A number of outside sources control senior administrators: first, they are accountable to district

office administrators, who are in turn, directed by central office that is under ministerial influence. Second, school senior administrators are responsible to the school council that includes parents and members of the community. Third, in a philosophical sense they are responsible to society. These multiple levels of accountability have served to inhibit open communication and transparency of practice, as there existed a preoccupation with protecting themselves at each level of the hierarchy.

Communication Between School and Agencies

Public education is a government department with unique perspectives relating to at-risk individuals. These individuals spend a considerable amount of time within the school environment being observed, and potentially mentored, by teachers. The success or not of any intervention established by any support agency is often readily visible to teachers because of time spent in observation, conversation, and negotiation with students and caregivers. Support agencies have to rely on at-risk individuals self-reports regarding the success of the intervention, not on direct observation and other sources of data. Various anecdotes related by teachers about at-risk individuals described their concerns for not only the student, who was at-risk, but also their colleagues and other students not at-risk. For example, one teacher related a traumatic experience of an attempted suicide of a student while on an excursion which was preventable if agencies had notified the school of these potential behaviours. This example illustrated the crucial need for the establishment of formal communication patterns between external support agencies and the school to ensure a better outcome, and to protect teachers and student-peers.

The school participating in this study had a disproportionately high number of at-risk individuals and yet communication between the school and external support agencies was limited. Senior school administrators indicated that information flow tended to be in one direction only - from the school to the external agency, as illustrated by this frustrated teacher's comment ... "we don't seem to receive a lot of information back and it's very difficult for us to act and do things". Any detailed information on an at-risk individual was generally obtained directly from the at-risk individuals themselves or from the result of a critical incident when the external agencies then admitted the school should have been made aware of a potential problem known to

the agency. Given that, individuals spend significant amounts of time at school it was unreasonable that the school should be kept out of the information communication pathway when attempting to develop and establish more tailor-made educational interventions for these at-risk individuals.

The trend for agencies to exclude schools from the information sharing process about at-risk individuals was confirmed in two ministerial inquiries in United Kingdom (Laming, 2003) and Australia (Gordon, Hallahan, & Henry, 2002). This phenomenon in the reports highlighted that the problems experienced in assisting at-risk individuals were not localised issues. Both inquiries were commissioned because of the preventable death of children. The British *Laming Report* (2003) found that Victoria Climbié, a young girl who had only been in England for ten months, was murdered by her Aunt and the Aunt's boyfriend. Six local authorities, four social service agencies, three housing authorities, two child protection, knew her at-risk status teams, police, local church, and hospital **but the education system was not informed**. In Australia, the *Gordon Inquiry* (Gordon, Hallahan, & Henry, 2002) investigated family violence and child abuse after the death of a young Aboriginal girl, Susan Taylor. This inquiry ascertained that although there was a large support network available to at-risk individuals there was little collaboration between these agencies. Although the *Gordon Inquiry* did state the education system was included in the communication pathways, it was unclear whether the school had been encompassed or just the District Office level. The report stated that the Education District had supplied "appropriate educational programs", and yet considering Maslow's hierarchy of needs, it may be conjectured that educational concerns were not high on this student's agenda when she was engulfed in survival needs rather than on the road to "self-actualisation". The *Eldridge Report* (2001, p.1) which investigated "better ways of supporting young people and their families in the changeover from being students at school to having an independent adult life", also identified that agencies frequently did not release relevant information to schools. This lack of communication had, in the worst case scenario the potential to exacerbate further crises, and at the least the capacity to reduce the effectiveness of the social reconstructionist interventions (Stern & Riley, 2001). These interventions were aimed at facilitating students' transition from "being school students to having

a full and independent life in the community” thereby becoming useful members of society (Eldridge, 2001, p.1).

Dryfoos (1994) was a strong advocate of community and professional support agencies aiding schools in the provision of services to all. She proposed a “seamless” institution referred to as a “full service school” whereby support agencies were to be located within the school grounds or very close by, and controlled by a governance structure (p.12). This governance structure would seek to provide a unified approach to service provision so that there was a maximum responsiveness to at-risk individuals or indeed any person’s needs. The Department of Education in Tasmania advocated a similar approach in creating a seamless, holistic support network (Department of Education - Tasmania, 2003). The school in this Masters study was proactive in seeking partnerships with external agencies to the extent that in the following year they were going to offer office space to these agencies. Individuals would then be able to approach the agency directly for assistance without having to travel to offsite agency head offices. It was anticipated that communication between the agency and the school about common concerns could thus be exchanged. Even though this appeared to be a more coordinated approach, it may not be as easy to establish due to competing interests and different reporting structures, as illustrated by the current situation whereby the school nurse reports to the Health Department.

Informal Patterns of Communication

This section outlines informal communication patterns and the impediments to successful interagency collaboration ...

What are the patterns of communication within and across a school and associated support agencies that interact and manage at-risk individuals?

b. If there are no distinct pathways, why isn’t this occurring? What are the impediments to interagency collaboration?

Formal communication was not well established, but the more ubiquitous informal pathways that were well embedded although ad hoc overshadowed this. A key finding of this study was that respondents were generally conscientious professionals committed to making a difference to at-risk individuals. For example this commitment was expressed in different context and illustrating the range of needs that were being provided for such as ...

“being a friend and being there”, “talk and to listen to them, what they have to say in a non-judgemental environment where they can speak what’s on their mind”, “they will come and see me every day and we’ll have breakfast or I might give them something for lunch”, “we take them on camps”, “pull-out programs for severely alienated individuals ... because a lot of at-risk kids don’t like being enclosed in a classroom either, and need diverse sorts of curriculum”, and “you’ve got to let other things go in order to drop everything [focussing on the] ... immediate need in terms of life and preserving life”.

There was a consensus that greater, more effective communication with colleagues within their own organisation and/or with external organisations was imperative.

An apparently contradictory aspect emerged during data analysis in this study that endorsed Kitchen’s (1997, in Kitchen and Daly, 2002) research on employees’ perception of the organisation in which they work. He highlighted that employees will communicate positive and negative messages to others given certain circumstances. The apparent contradiction was evident when respondents in this study naturally defended their work and their organisations’ contributions to at-risk clients, and yet, throughout the interviews they articulated specific aspects of concern with their service provisions, lack of efficiencies, and territorial and organisational silo issues. This silo effect was illustrated by a case worker’s regret about the impediment in place to taking positive actions for a client due to a poor relationship with another case worker ... “we couldn’t make any progress and we felt very lost and alone because we were unable to have a good relationship with the case worker ... there wasn’t a free and open, frank exchange of information”. All of these concerns illustrated the dire need to review and reshape the service provision arrangements for at-risk individuals within the Western Australian community.

Impediments to Efficient Communication Pathways

The Commonwealth Privacy Act 1988

Unfortunately, whilst acknowledging communication between agencies and schools about at-risk individuals was required, actually establishing pathways presents many problems. Perhaps the most confounding reason for lack of distinct pathways for

communication was the multiple and varied applications of the *Commonwealth Privacy Act 1988* (PA). Even though an exact interpretation of the legislation was unknown by respondents, knowledge that the *Act* existed inhibited the exchange of information ... “I don’t really know the legislation but it’s like a legal agreement or a legal standing”, “lack of understanding about ... when information can be shared so they [case workers] ... just clam up and say [nothing]”. This inhibition ultimately undermined the establishment of permanent and defined pathways. With concerns about the PA and the need to raise the level of support provided to at-risk individuals, most respondents resorted to informal exchanges of information in order to circumnavigate the perceived legal issues. These exchanges were predominantly verbal, giving all stakeholders the chance to clarify concerns and remove the “equivocality of information” (Griffin, 2003, p.262). Misinterpretations, misunderstandings, and misinformation associated with incomplete messaging or using the wrong media to transmit the message were also alleviated by the use of verbal communication (Sandwith, 1994). Informal networks with people able to provide assistance in one form or another were established and continued to grow. Unfortunately, these networks were entirely dependent on the personalities of the people within them and their personal relationships. These personal relationship-based networks were apt to collapse if the relationship did not prosper or the individuals involved moved on.

Accountability and Territorial Protectiveness

Another impediment to implementation of successful communication patterns arose because of government reformation, and increased compliance and accountability. The corporatisation of many government agencies created a change in management behaviours. Increased accountability for funding and application of resources were demanded by higher authorities, which resulted in territorial protectiveness and an embedded silo mentality. Although respondents consistently identified information sharing as desirable, there was an undercurrent of disquiet regarding ongoing viability of their agency, and issues of control of cases, services, and interventions.

Another issue that emerged in this study was that of the duplication of interventions by differing agencies for the same individual. With the number of agencies within this sector it was not surprising that unknowing duplication occurred (Gordon,

Hallahan, & Henry, 2002). What was of concern though was that when case workers became aware of the duplication, action was not taken to streamline these services as these interventions had taken on a territorial aspect. This clearly had resource implications and in the current economic environment it was peculiar that this unintentional duplication had not been immediately addressed. A key advantage to developing more effective and efficient communication pathways would be to reduce both inadvertent and territorially orientated duplication.

The Complexities of Brokerage

This study identified a proliferation of agencies supporting at-risk individuals, and yet no one agency was able to cope with all the problems that clients presented. The massive industry related to providing community services endorsed Hicks, Langoulant, Shean, and Wauchope (2001) findings where they identified 750 departments, commissions, ministries, boards, trusts, authorities, offices, committees, and other entities answering directly to the government. In turn Gordon, Hallahan, and Henry (2002) recognised 462 non-government services affiliated with just one of these government departments – Community Development. Understandably, case workers only referred their clients to agencies they knew, and due to the prevailing modus operandi, they frequently only contacted agencies with which they had professional relationships ... “moving towards ... building linkages with other agencies ... because we can’t do it [child protection] without the support of ... other agencies”. As an aid to case workers, who were not familiar with all agencies and their services, the Western Australian Council of Social Services (WACOSS) annually produced a registry of service providers. This volume attempted to list all agencies, their specialisations, and locations, but it was large, hard to navigate, and difficult to maintain, particularly in an ever changing environment. Case workers inability to know of all agencies that can provide assistance has resulted in what Cote (2002, p.60) described as a “silo effect”. This author proposed that this was more of a ‘funnelled silo effect’, as each case worker consistently referred at-risk individuals to their ‘favourite’ external agencies for support, thereby essentially funnelling them into another silo. Considering the number of service provision agencies it was hardly surprising that case workers did funnel their clients into known agencies. Hence, the brokering of support is a highly complex environment involving significant numbers of agencies, departments, and people. Therefore, establishing more systematic

communication patterns and pathways requires an innovative and technology-assisted approach in order to meet all of the competing and divergent demands of the Government and non-government service providers.

Having numerous agencies available to at-risk individuals initially appeared to be a highly advantageous situation for these clients providing them with greater range of services and yet it raised additional issues. One such issue was that this proliferation and lack of coordination in the provision of services allowed greater exploitation of the system by unscrupulous individuals actively seeking duplication of support. This phenomenon had been described as an opposing perspective to a 'one-stop-shop' approach as this would expose such unsavoury behaviour.

Another complexity of brokering support was that of poor public image and marketing of services by some agencies. Apparent mistrust and lack of confidence in the agency led to a failure of some at-risk individuals and cultural groups to avail themselves of the services ... "suspicion of what we are trying to do", "many Aboriginal families don't want to access our service because it is not an Aboriginal-focused service". This mistrust had been exacerbated by the lack of communication between agencies and negative publicity. These issues while not affecting all clients were still impediments to the efficient and effective provision of services.

Data Management

The data management processes and the capacity to share data were explored in this study using the following question ...

What are the patterns of communication within and across a school and associated support agencies that interact and manage at-risk individuals?

c. Is the data that an educational organisation and associated agencies collects about at-risk individuals shareable? Why?

A technological solution was originally proposed as a way of improving the coordination of support, and the opportunities for communication between and within agencies. This would be achieved by establishing a database of service providers and details of at-risk individuals needing assistance. From the findings in this study, it became clear that data management was a highly sensitive issue. Case

workers kept their own files on at-risk clients but were extremely nervous to share any written documentation with anyone else, either inside or external to their agency

...

“I don’t share any information unless I have that permission from the family”, “when the family sign consent I don’t see that as a green light to share everything and anything without of sort of respecting the fact that the client might not really have considered the entire implications of what it is that they are consenting to”.

This was purportedly due to fears of breaching the *Privacy Act*, even though many of them did not have a sound understanding of this legal framework.

It emerged that case workers’ data on at-risk clients was generally stored within individual agencies’ databases, with many of these networks being extensive. Security of data was paramount in all organisations with access to data available to specified people only. For example, the Department of Education and Training of Western Australia (DETTWA) had a network encompassing all 770 schools within the state. These databases were only accessible within each school, and externally, by central office senior administrators that complied with strictures specified by the *Privacy Act*.

Management within agencies frequently used these databases as a measure of accountability of case workers. Accuracy and timeliness of entered data were periodically checked by superordinates against the case workers’ allocated workload. Likewise, this served to meet managers’ accountability as funding was generally allocated according to the number of at-risk individuals listed in the organisation’s database.

Communication Influenced by Conceptualisations of “At-risk”

It was proposed that differing conceptualisations of what factors placed an individual at-risk might have an influence on the establishment of communication pathways and subsequent interventions ...

2. *How do the differing conceptualisations of what constitutes at-risk status influence the communication patterns and the success of interventions?*

Johnson's (1997) study explored teachers' ranking of a list of commonly cited factors that contributed to an at-risk status (refer to Table 6 – 10) . The findings of this study endorsed those of Johnson's research not only with the educators in this study but also the agency personnel. In both studies [this current research and the Johnson (1997) study] family-based risk factors such as 'alcoholic parents', 'family violence', and 'lack of parental supervision' were the most highly rated as significant causal factors (refer to **Error! Reference source not found.**). Similarly, the 'school-based risk factors' were rated the least significant (refer to Table 8). Communication patterns were not influenced because agency personnel and school staff shared a common view of causal risk factors. These were interesting findings considering that when at-risk students attend school they are in that environment for considerable periods. Clearly, the impact of home situations has a greater influence on their behaviours and attitudes than that of the school.

The vision of the administrator in the school where this research was conducted was to encourage at-risk students to stay off the streets and engage in a more positive educative experience. The literature exemplified a number of strategies or programs to cater for different categories of at-risk status, for example, childcare arrangements for single mothers, pull-out/withdrawal for intensive support to fasttrack academic performance, Vocational Education and Training (VET) for workplace preparation, in addition to school partnerships with business for greater employment opportunities. The school had established many of these programs, some of them unique to any school in Western Australia. To illustrate the pro-activity of this school in extending their care for at-risk clientele, it was interesting to note that of Dryfoos' (1994) 29 items for a good education, the school was providing 23 items, to the extent of establishing a school child-care centre to encourage single mothers to continue their education ...

*“this is a school of specialist programs ... XXX Youth Program ...
XXX Childcare Centre ... XXX picks up an array of Commonwealth
and State funds to enable adolescent mothers to drop their babies
into the childcare centre and then come to school”.*

The high number of programs available to at-risk individuals within the school, and indeed the community, was indicative of the professionalism of staff and the entrepreneurship of the administration, catering for a pressing need by the district.

Summary

One of the key findings was that case workers were conscientious and committed people who were providing high levels of support to at-risk individuals. These case workers had established numerous informal communication networks with colleagues in order to service their clientele. Unfortunately, these networks were not as effective, efficient, and sustainable as they could have been if they had been formalised and supported by a systematic mechanism.

In a similar vein, school personnel were conscientious and committed people who were providing high levels of support to at-risk students. The school, as a collective of professionals, was proactive in providing significant numbers of programs to encourage the development and engagement of their at-risk students. Unfortunately, the school was not included in the informal communication networks that agency personnel had established. Hence, frequent crises occurred within the school which may have been preventable, if agencies had perceived the school as another sister organisation encompassed in the communication pathway.

The establishment of effective formal communication pathways appeared to be impeded by fears of breaching the *Commonwealth Privacy Act*. It was ironic that the *Privacy Act*, which was originally drafted to protect the rights of the individual from unwanted invasion, has resulted in placing at-risk members of society at further risk. This has been by restricting the development of an appropriate network designed to provide comprehensive and timely support.

Education is the key to greater opportunities in life and to the creation of a better society. Therefore schools and agencies need to work together to create a synergy whereby at-risk individuals can become responsible for caring for themselves and take up the challenge of becoming valuable citizens. For this scenario to occur agencies and schools must work in concert to meet the varied needs of at-risk individuals – agencies to meet the lower needs on Maslow's hierarchy, and educators supporting these individual's movement through the hierarchy towards self-actualisation.

CHAPTER 6 Conclusion

For most parents, our children are everything to us: our hopes, our ambitions, our future. ... But sadly, some children are not so fortunate. Some children's lives are different Instead of the joy, warmth and security of normal family life, these children's lives are filled with risk, fear, and danger: and ... from the people closest to them For children for whom action by the authorities has reduced the risk they face, we want to go further: we want to maximise the opportunities open to them – to improve their life chances, to change the odds in their favour.... Sadly, nothing can ever absolutely guarantee that no child will ever be at risk again from abuse and violence from within their own family. But we all desperately want to see people, practices and policies in place to make sure that the risk is as small as is humanly possible.

United Kingdom Prime Minister, Tony Blair (Boateng, 2004)

Overview of Key Findings

A key finding of this study was that agency and school staff were caring and conscientious in their efforts to support at-risk individuals. They relied heavily on informal communication networks to broker interventions. Formal communication pathways were found to be developed at the management levels using “Memorandums of Agreement” and “Informed Consent” documentation; however, these were cumbersome and did little to improve service provision. Schools were not included in the communication pathways that agencies utilised. This again contributed to the poor coordination of services, had the potential to exacerbate problems within the school situation due to misunderstandings, and decreased the educational effectiveness of school-based interventions. Even though all stakeholders demonstrated a desire for better services there were fundamental barriers that were actively impeding progress towards a more holistic system. The most significant impediment was the *Commonwealth Privacy Act 1988 (PA)* which had been originally designed to protect individual's rights but was now a very real barrier to the development of a coordinated approach. Other barriers included agency territorialism, poor marketing of services, and individuals' biases against certain support agencies. Even though agencies deliver services to all at-risk individuals, schools are focused on supporting society's most valuable and vulnerable resource for the future – our children and adolescents. Hence, these two organisational systems must work in synchrony to provide an environment whereby these precious minds can be nurtured both physically, psychologically, educationally, and socially.

A humanistic perspective was reiterated by the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC)* when they made the declaration that ... “the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth” (Department of Child Youth and Family, 2005, n.p.). Children were therefore identified as one of the most vulnerable members of society, worthy of especial efforts and treatment. In line with this humanistic perspective and in response to the *Laming Report (2003)*, the British Government enacted a new *Children Act 2004* designed to protect children from preventable injury and death. The *Children Act* essentially circumvented their *Privacy Act (PA)* in cases where the PA impeded positive interventions for children. In Western Australia, even though the *Gordon Inquiry (2002, p.480)* recognised “the need for new child protection legislation” similar changes have not yet occurred. Hence, formal communication pathways for the protection, not only of children, but of all at-risk individuals have not yet been systematically and comprehensively implemented. Changes in both legislative and administrative procedures would be required in order to facilitate these communication pathways.

As a result of this research a model has been developed which portrays a more holistic approach to brokering support for at-risk individuals. This model emerges from many of the recommendations encompassed in the *Gordon Inquiry (2002)* and the *Laming Report (2003)* and is founded upon the premise that at-risk individuals must receive more effective, efficient and sustainable support. It also coalesces the theoretical foundations in this study, namely, exemplary organisational communication (Griffin, 2003); a consistent definition of ‘at-risk’ (Manning & Baruth, 1995); ensuring basic needs are provided to promote and facilitate movement through Maslow’s hierarchy (Woolfolk, 2004); and enabling social reconstruction to evolve for these at-risk members of society (Richardson, 1997).

There are two levels to the model, first, the macro level (see Figure 10: Interstate and potential international linkages) which outlines the coordination and communication pathways at the national level, whereby the State Support Brokerage Authorities would be in communication with their sister state organisations. At this macro level, communication may also occur with international organisations when required. The

second - at a micro level, is within each state (see Figure 8: State Support Brokerage Agency - SSBA). This organisation serves as the key broker of communication and coordination of assistance for all agencies, schools, and associated stakeholders. Figure 9: State Support Brokerage Authority organisational chart outlines the proposed structures and procedures contained within each authority.

The author acknowledges that any model that is designed to display a system runs the risk of over simplification. This is not the intention, rather the author seeks to provide a conceptualisation of a proposed ‘more holistic’ approach to service provision while acknowledging that each organisation is multifaceted, complex with competing agenda, and its own internal communication patterns.

Organisational Operation of the State Support Brokerage Authority

The central aspect of this model would be the establishment of a State Support Brokerage Authority (SSBA). It would be an organisation with representatives from Government, business and industry, and the community, establishing procedures and policy. It would be federally funded with its key role to coordinate interventions provided by ‘expert’ satellite agencies. The SSBA being a central authority, would provide a one-stop-shop for at-risk individuals thereby simplifying their search for assistance. This authority would determine the clients’ risk factors and then broker the development of a support strategy by particular satellite agencies. The SSBA would utilise a consistent and comprehensive definition of ‘at-risk’, informed by the literature on the extensive range of factors contributing to this status (Barr & Parrett, 1995; Henderson-Sparks, Paredes, & Gonzalez, 2002; Johnson, 1997, 1998; Natriello, McDill, & Pallas, 1990). Brokerage would streamline the process, as the SSBA would have more extensive knowledge of associated agencies that would best be able to render immediate assistance to overcome causal factors.

Where at-risk individuals have multiple problems, the State Support Brokerage Authority (SSBA) would coordinate and facilitate a holistic intervention approach developed in collaboration with numerous agencies. A SSBA facilitator, following a similar approach to that of the “Stronger Families Program”, would coordinate meetings of agency case workers. The SSBA would act as a central meeting point for

the agencies and families concerned. Once a strategy had been mapped out, the SSBA would act as the coordinating body ensuring each agency delivered timely services. In the situation where an agency case worker's discussions with an at-risk individual reveal further risk factors than originally assigned to that agency, the case worker would be able to check the SSBA database to ascertain if this factor is being addressed by another agency. If there were no listing, the case worker would advise the SSBA who would then broker further assistance. If there was a record of this factor, the case worker could communicate with those involved in addressing that factor, and keep them informed of the new information supplied by the at-risk individual.

As education has frequently been kept out of the information pathway to the detriment of interventions, it would be prudent to ensure that the school's role in supporting the at-risk is not neglected in this model, particularly as schools are key sites of "social reconstruction" and are charged with this role by governments and society (Richardson, 1997; Zuga, 1992). Hence, it is proposed that each school has an SSBA Coordinator who would be kept informed of any current intervention strategies being established for students in their school. This coordinator does not necessarily need to know precise case details, unless these were likely to affect others in the school and/or the success of the educational interventions. He/she would work in conjunction with support agencies to maximise the education potential of each at-risk individual thereby moving them through Maslow's hierarchy towards self-actualisation (Biehler & Snowman, 1993; Woolfolk, 2004).

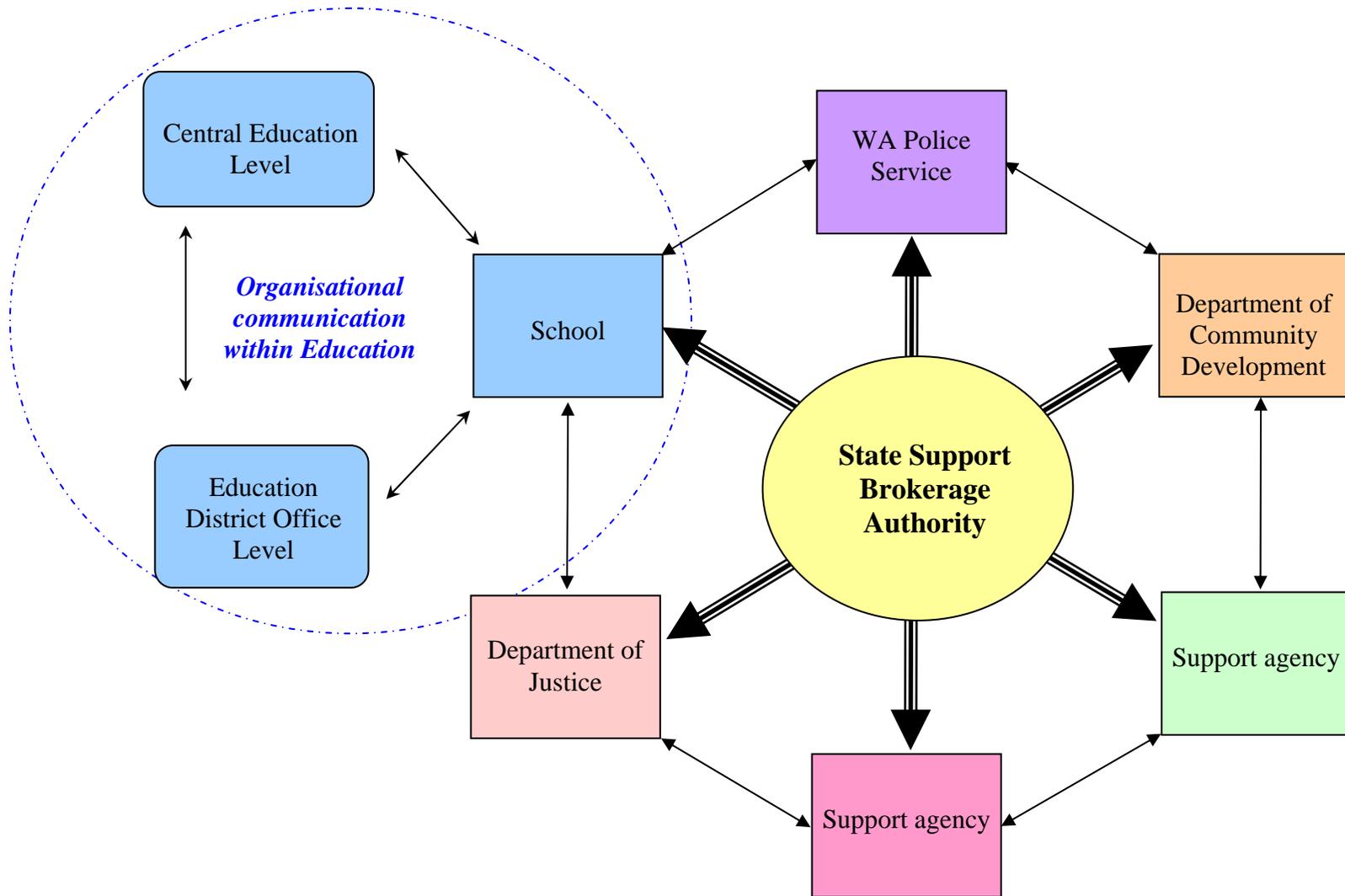


Figure 8: State Support Brokerage Agency

A significant issue currently facing agency case workers is the need to track individuals through a systemic maze. Many individuals, particularly children, are difficult to track due to transient caregivers and name changes. Hence, it is proposed that a means of identifying at-risk individuals would need to be established to ensure efforts by support agencies targeted the correct person. Australia currently identifies its citizens by means of a Tax File Number, unique to each 'taxable' person; however, in the case children use of this number is not viable as they are not yet within the workforce. The Australia Card, similar to the Social Security Number used in the United States of America, may be a solution to recording the identification of all citizens. The prejudice of the Australian public engendered by the concept of the Australia Card would first need to be addressed before a successful tracking process could be established. A potential solution to safeguarding children and youth under the age of 18 could be to assign each individual a unique identification number at birth (potentially an extension of their Medicare Number) to be replaced by their Tax File Number upon attaining employment.

The State Support Brokerage Authority (SSBA) services would have to be technologically assisted. It is recommended that a database would be created and maintained in a central location such as the state capital city. This database would streamline operations by matching and tracking services being provided to individuals. Agencies providing support would be listed in this database enabling the SSBA to distribute individual cases to the nearest available agency thereby ensuring prompt service without overloading case workers. Regional offices of the SSBA in remote areas would also cater to at-risk individuals. Use of mediums such as tele/video conferencing, and other available information communication technology services would maintain their links with the central authority. The use of the Internet for database connectivity would enable mobile case workers the ability to facilitate interventions quickly, accurately, and without duplication.

The literature has identified that interventions are frequently many and varied dependant on the individuals involved. Hence, a coding system would need to be established identifying the type of intervention being provided for the at-risk individual. The State Support Brokerage Authority (SSBA) would assign a database code specifying the type of support that each at-risk individual requires. The SSBA

would then contact an appropriate support agency to assign them the case, matching the code with the support services the agency provides. Each supporting agency would update the central SSBA database when the intervention was successfully concluded. Detailed case notes would remain within the support agency. Therefore the right to privacy for the individual would be maintained through the use of these codes. This centrally controlled coding procedure would prevent duplication of services, as no two support agencies would be assigned the same support code for the one at-risk individual.

It is anticipated that communication patterns in organisations external to the State Support Brokerage Authority (SSBA) would not necessarily change. The education system, for example, (depicted within the dotted blue line in Figure 8) has three major levels in its organisational hierarchy – School, District Office, and Central Office. The School, which has the greatest contact with an at-risk individual, would establish the direct line of communication with the SSBA. District Office and Central Office would only have subsidiary links. A similar pattern of communication would be anticipated in other support agencies.

Operational Recommendations:

Recommendation 1: A State Support Brokerage Authority (SSBA) be established that will centrally control and coordinate interventions for at-risk individuals. The SSBA would act as a one-stop-shop for at-risk individuals and a coordination site for support agencies.

Recommendation 2: Where at-risk individuals have multiple problems, the State Support Brokerage Authority (SSBA) will coordinate and facilitate a holistic intervention approach developed in collaboration with numerous agencies. This will be modelled on the “Stronger Families Program” approach.

Recommendation 3: In the event that the at-risk individual is of school-age schools must be kept informed of any intervention strategies devised by support agencies. The SSBA School Coordinator will liaise with the assigned case

worker in the support agency to maximise the at-risk individual's educational potential.

Recommendation 4: All children under the age of 18 will be provided with a unique identification number in order to track the child, the success of interventions and the support provided.

Recommendation 5: The State Support Brokerage Authority (SSBA) will use a technological solution (database and associated processes) to facilitate streamlining communication pathways, identification of available support, distribution of support and case loads, and tracking of interventions.

Recommendation 6: A coding system be implemented enabling the SSBA to coordinate intervention strategies.

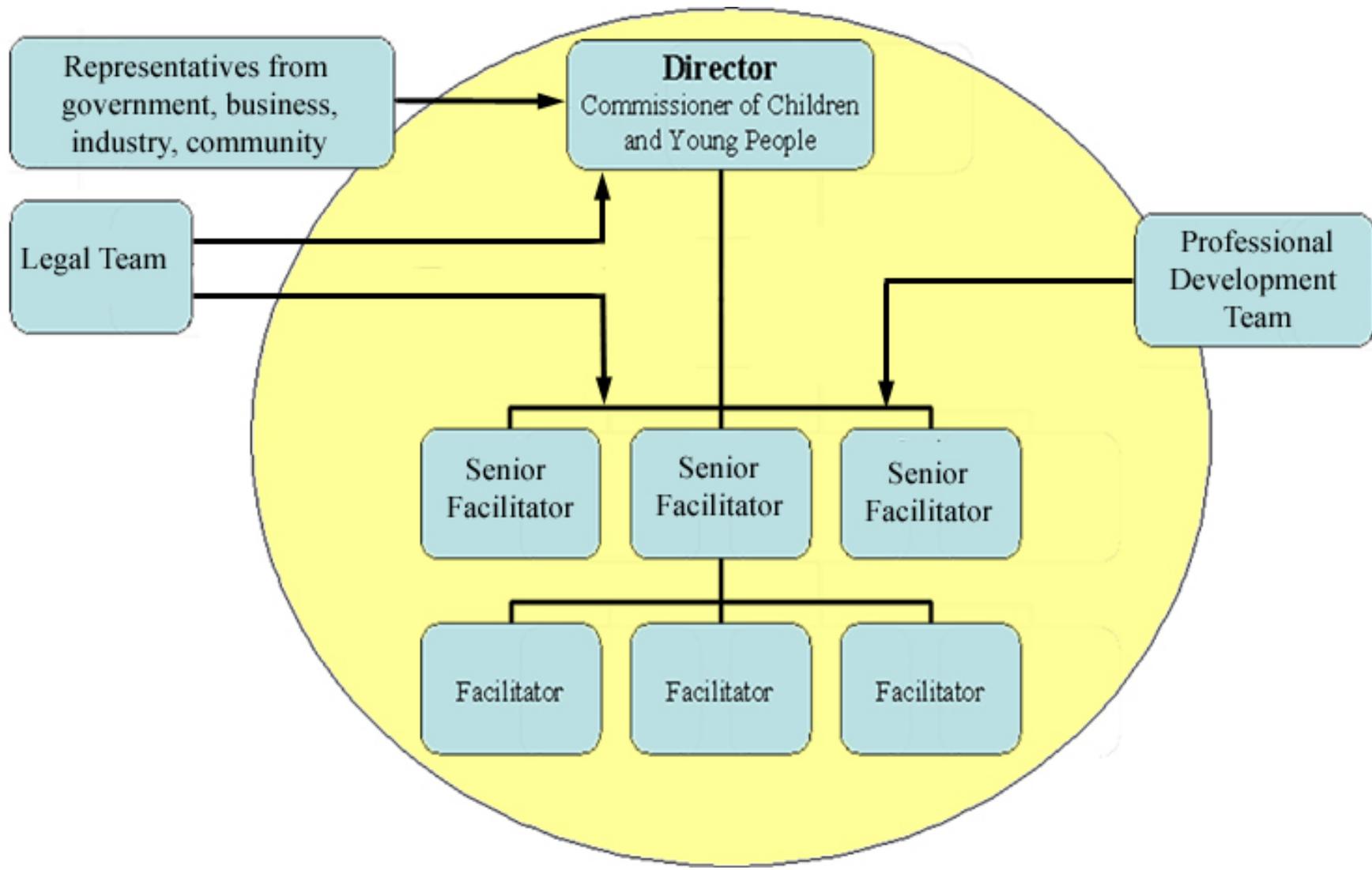


Figure 9: State Support Brokerage Authority organisational chart

Organisational Hierarchy

Commissioner for Children and Young People

In 2004, the Western Australian Select Committee (Scott, Watson, Ford, & Doust, 2004) recommended that the position of Commissioner for Children and Young People be created, consistent with the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. In 2001, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) identified 32 such commissioners or ombudsmen in countries throughout the world. These commissioners are independent of, but report to, their Government on issues to do with the nation's children. An appointed Commissioner would act as the Director of the State Support Brokerage Authority (SSBA) being responsible for governance, policy, and procedure of the SSBA, but without necessarily having direct contact with at-risk individuals.

Facilitators of SSBA

Senior facilitators (see Figure 9) would be case workers who have extensive knowledge of, and experience with, at-risk individuals. They would act as counsellors and mentors to a select number of junior facilitators, thus ensuring case load does not deleteriously impact on these junior facilitators' quality of service to agencies and clients. The Senior Facilitators' key role would be in oversight of cases assigned to Junior Facilitators and in providing professional development to agency personnel. Through the professional development provided by these Senior Facilitators, a uniform understanding of 'at-risk' would ensure equity of service provision by all agencies. This training would also provide opportunities for sharing of information about the SSBA's organisational processes, the organisation's communication pathways; the vision for support of the at-risk, as well as knowledge of the parameters of the *Privacy Act* and other legal issues. Junior Facilitators would be the front line of service provision to the public. They would interview at-risk individuals, document the cases, and broker assistance from relevant support agencies. They would not offer interventions directly but act as a communication conduit and facilitator for support agencies. Junior facilitators would play a key role in establishing and maintaining productive communication pathways described by Griffin (2003, p.260) as a "General Systems Approach". This communication was characterised as a "holistic approach to achieving a purpose ... as the key to

productivity ... [whereby] networks are open and varied but directed towards goal achievement”.

Consultative Groups

Consultative groups would be required to aid in the efficient operation of the SSBA. One group of representatives from business and industry, government, and community consult only with the Commissioner on issues of governance, policy, and procedure. The business and industry representatives, for example, have a unique perspective of employment markets and are able to offer vocational advice in regard to at-risk individuals. This would allow them to approach the consultative situation with potentially different methods of service provision. A legal team would initially be commissioned to review and draft amendments to the *Privacy Act* (PA) and thereafter consult with both the Commissioner and Senior Facilitators on pertinent PA and other legal matters. The final consultative group would be involved in the professional development of SSBA personnel. SSBA personnel will need to be apprised of changes to governance, policy, and procedure resulting from the ongoing consultative process. Professional development would ensure SSBA and other agency personnel receive timely updates in knowledge and training.

Organisational Hierarchy Recommendations:

Recommendation 7: A position of Commissioner for Children and Young People be created (in line with the recommendation of the United Nations). This Commissioner would act as the Director of the State Support Brokerage Authority (SSBA) being responsible for governance, policy and procedure of the SSBA, but without necessarily having direct contact with at-risk individuals.

Recommendation 8: Facilitators identify at-risk status, assign codes, and establish database files for identification and tracking. These facilitators would **only** broker assistance with support agencies and facilitate communication pathways.

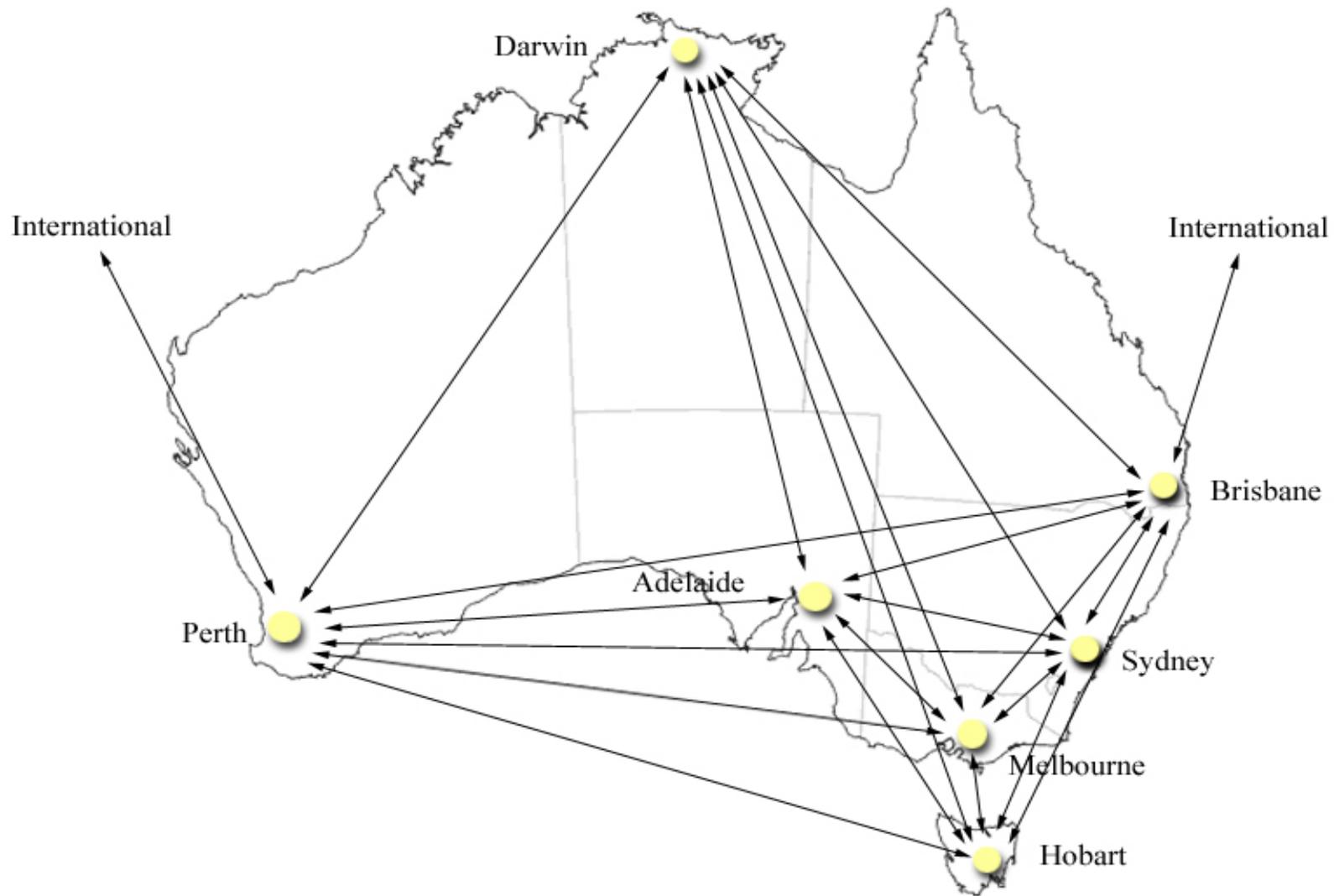


Figure 10: Interstate and potential international linkages

A National System

Figure 10 outlines a state level system that is federally funded. It is anticipated that this model would operate in each state and territory, and all SSBAs would be linked. At-risk individuals would be able to move states without having a designated intervention strategy unduly disrupted.

As each state would have a Commissioner of Children and Young People, these directors would meet regularly with their counterparts, forming a committee that would report on issues related to the at-risk in their communities. This group of commissioners, the Australian Commissioners of Children and Young People Committee (ACCYPC), would have significant lobbying power with both State and Federal Governments. The State Chair of the committee (ACCYPC) would rotate on a yearly basis to ensure fairness of representation of each state's issues. The ACCYPC would meet with other International commissioners and advise the United Nations on Australian activities.

The SSBA system has the potential for collaboration with international partners – allowing intervention strategies and communication pathways to be transferable offshore. This SSBA system mirrors the processes in the *Bolton Report* (Batty, 2003). The governance of the English County of Bolton is trialling a similar strategy to the SSBA facilitated through the use of a database. Ultimately, links could be established between the SSBA in Australia and the English counterpart, but an international collaboration agreement would need to be ratified prior to any information-sharing.

Legal Issues

This study identified considerable barriers to establishing effective communication pathways from fear of prosecution due to potential breaches of the *Privacy Act* (PA). Therefore at the establishment of the SSBA, the Director would need to commission a legal team to review and draft amendments to the *Privacy Act*. These amendments would ensure the rights and needs of children and young people are not deleteriously affected through this legislation. Amendments must reflect the principle that vulnerable, at-risk members of society do have the right to privacy, but not at the cost

of facilitating proactive strategies for support. Case workers must be able to share relevant case information with others involved or associated with supporting the at-risk individual, particularly if this individual has the potential to violate the rights of others.

The legal consultant would also provide advice to the Commissioner thereby assisting in the establishment and interpretation of policy as it relates to the law. Additionally, this legal consultant would be available to advise Senior Facilitators in cases where the legal stance is in question. He/she would be able to provide materials for ongoing professional development training for personnel and case workers within and external to the SSBA.

Any new agency, body, or organisation would be accredited with the State Support Brokerage Authority (SSBA) enabling them to participate in a brokerage process. Accreditation would facilitate control of privacy for at-risk individuals and ensure quality of service.

Recommendations at a National Level:

Recommendation 9: The *Commonwealth Privacy Act 1988* is reviewed with amendments made to ensure the rights and needs of children and young people are not deleteriously affected through this legislation. Amendments must reflect the principle that vulnerable at-risk members of society do have the right to privacy but not at the cost of facilitating proactive strategies for support.

Recommendation 10: Interagency collaboration regarding at-risk individuals is formalised. Case workers are able to seek ‘expert’ assistance from external agencies without fear of prosecution in order to procure the most successful outcome for their clients.

Advantages of the Proposed Model

The advantages of the proposed model are outlined below.

- **Commissioner:** A single advocate for the welfare of children and youth not under the control of bureaucratic decision-making bodies.
- **Centralised coordination:** All interventions would be applied and coordinated from a central authority. It would act as a one-stop-shop where at-risk individuals could seek multiple levels of assistance. This provides a more holistic approach to intervention strategies.
- **Consultative processes:** Representatives from government, industry and the public would provide advice on policy and procedure of the central authority. These representatives would reflect current perceptions of best practice to assist at-risk individuals.
- **Tracking:** At-risk individuals can be “tracked” ensuring that no at-risk individual “falls through the cracks”.
- **Reduced duplication:** At-risk individuals would not receive the same intervention from multiple agencies.
- **Funding allocation:** A global understanding of at-risk status would ensure that problem risk areas could be recognised more rapidly and funded accordingly. Funding of superfluous programs could be identified and rationalised.

Disadvantages of the Proposed Model

The following points are viewed as disadvantages of the proposed model:

- **Threat:** Support agency personnel could perceive a threat to their autonomy by the establishment and accreditation requirements of this new centralised authority. Funding, for example, could be withheld if the perceived need for the agency diminishes;
- **Intellectual jealousy:** Case workers may feel the need to protect themselves by not collaborating with the central authority. This may result in case workers recording less information centrally in an attempt to avoid scrutiny and accountability;
- **Security checks:** Unscrupulous people may try to obtain information from the State Support Brokerage Authority. This would necessitate a

security system and procedures for the information communication technology network;

- **Identification numbers:** Pervasive public opinion on the use of identification numbers in Australian society is negative and would need to be addressed. An information dissemination campaign explaining the value of the identification of children and youth would need to be undertaken.

Limitations of the Study

This study relied on key informants providing contacts in other agencies supporting at-risk individuals. The number of agencies was finite but extremely large thus it was not possible to interview all possible agencies, hence only eight different agencies, departments and associations were represented within the sample. This provided a range of perspectives, however, as only 28 respondents were interviewed these data may not be totally generalisable.

Focussing the respondent's perception on the causes of at-risk by the administration of the attitudinal scale prior to the interview may have influenced their responses in defining at-risk. This was deemed a minor issue considering the attitudinal scale was derived from the most commonly reported risk factors.

A potential perspective in this study was that of the political arena, however, the author was unable to obtain an interview with any relevant Ministers to ascertain the Government stance on these matters. It would also have been useful to determine what progress has been made since the *Gordon Inquiry* in 2002.

Implications for Further Research

The focus on this current study was to establish the communication patterns that exist between agencies supporting at-risk individuals. The responses indicated a more efficient, coordinated system was required. Agencies generally used computers to store information, and yet to increase efficiency in sharing this information some form of linkage between computer systems would be required. There are database management contractors, experienced in linking the databases, available to facilitate the amalgamation of mutually common data. The different types of database

networks and storage facilities would need analysis before a suitable method of linkage could be proposed.

The formation of any new Government Department requires extensive study and comment from associated 'experts'. The formation of the State Support Brokering Authority would not be an exception. The concept of having a Commissioner of Children and Young People, while not unknown elsewhere in the world, would entail both Australian Governmental and Public scrutiny. Research into the legal aspects of establishing this organisation as well as the proposed information communication technology solution is required to progress the SSBA model.

The need to provide an identification and tracking system for at-risk individuals has become apparent from this study though the definitive method in which this is to be accomplished has not been nominated. Prejudices expressed previously by the Australian public toward an Australia Card would make it difficult to introduce this identification and tracking system. The method of marketing this concept of identification to breakdown prejudices is worthy of investigation.

Conclusion

From the school and agency respondents' comments in this study it was clear that effective communication and collaboration between agencies was crucial when it came to providing successful interventions for at-risk individuals. Even though all of the respondents were conscientious and committed people, they indicated current communication patterns were not as efficient as they could have been. Additionally, respondents indicated that the current formal communication patterns were cumbersome and should be more encompassing of all agencies. Intra-agency and intra-school communication patterns were characterised by management tending to control the flow of information in a top down process.

Respondents in the study cited the *Privacy Act* as a significant impediment in their work. Curiously, educators and case workers held similar definitions of the significant causal factors for at-risk even though their roles were quite different. From the findings it was revealed that agencies experienced the "silo effect" (Cote, 2002, p.60) which frequently led to territoriality and unnecessary duplication of

services. Although the agencies and departments frequently maintained communication pathways, the school was usually excluded from these discussions.

Figure 8 is a model developed from the findings of this study, which depicts an overview of the structure and communication pathways involved with the proposed reform of the provision of interventions to at-risk individuals. Its development is to ensure a more effective, holistic and systematic approach to service delivery to at-risk members of the community.

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Appendix I Smart Communities Project

This Masters research is the first phase of a five-phase *Smart Communities Project* funded by an ARC grant undertaken collaboratively by Edith Cowan University and Curtin University of Technology. The project title is '*Smart Communities – Applied Research into Integrated Government Services and Regional Networked Neighbourhoods to Support Children and Young People At-risk*'. The key research question of the Smart Communities Project is 'How can life choices available to at-risk children/youths be enhanced through the integration of technology in government and associated support services thereby facilitating a more effective community networked digital neighbourhood?' In this study the two groupings, at-risk children and youth are referred to as at-risk individuals.

The five phases of the Smart Communities Project encompass:

1. Identifying communication pathways that currently exist within and across support agencies as related to at-risk individuals. A key aspect is establishing what constitutes at-risk status as determined by the agency staff so that a common framework and shared understandings can facilitate common terminology in this project.
2. Developing a governance model and pilot a new media solution.
3. Baseline research into the effectiveness of a new media solution.
4. Evaluate impact of new media - develop, implement and evaluate agency diffusion and innovation of the new media solution.
5. Extend new media solution to provide resources to students – Content Management System (CMS) providing information on individual students to be used by schools, parents and support agencies.

Appendix II Interview Schedule

Interview Questions

Part A: About the interviewee

1. How long have you worked in the current organisation _____
How long in current position _____
2. Highest qualification _____
Field _____
3. Could you please describe your position and its responsibilities?

Gender: *MALE / FEMALE*

Part B: Perception(s) of 'students at risk'

*In this study we group the term children and youths at risk as individuals at risk.
However if your comments only apply to one group please feel free to
indicate that your comments only apply to that group, for example.*

*In this study 'agencies' refer to any organisation both government and non-
government that assist at risk individuals. Eg schools, DCD, Smith family*

4. What does the term 'at-risk' mean to **you**?

5. How do **you** define at risk? (as opposed to the literature and organisational
viewpoint)

6. When do **you** think that individuals become ‘at risk’?

7. a. What criteria does your agency use to identify at risk individuals?

b. In your experience what ways of supporting at risk individuals have you encountered?

8. a. In **your organisation** what are the priority areas of support that you provide to at risk individuals?

b. In your view why are these priority areas so important?

c. What are the limitations your organisation encounters in addressing these priority areas?

9. How effective has **this agency** been in addressing the needs of at risk individuals?

10. What other agencies / individuals / groups assist and support at risk individuals?

11. Do you interact with any of these agencies or groups? **YES / NO**
If yes, Which ones and what for?

If no, Why not?

12. Do you feel that all these different agencies are effective in supporting these at risk individuals? **YES / NO**

If yes, Why?

If no, What reduces their effectiveness?

Part C: Data Gathering & Sharing Of Information

This section is seeking information from three areas.

- a. *Your agencies collection and sharing of information*
- b. *Personal collection and sharing of information*
- c. *Interagency sharing of information*

13. a. What kinds of information does **your agency** collect about at risk individuals?

b. Is this information shareable? **YES / NO**
If yes Why?

If no, Why not?

14. Who has access to the information?

15. What process does the agency have in place to allow the sharing of information **within** your agency?

16. a. What additional kinds of information do **you personally** collect about at risk individuals?

b. Why do **you** collect this information?

c. Is this information shareable? **YES / NO**

If yes Why?

If no, Why not?

17. Do you share the personal information you gather with others within the agency? **YES / NO**

If yes a. How do you do this?

b. Do you share this information across agencies? (If only within SKIP 'c' & 'd' below)

c. How do you do this?

d. In across agency interactions do you mainly interact with your case worker colleagues or with management or both?

If no, Why not?

18. Does your agency have a process in place to facilitate the sharing of information **across** agencies? **YES / NO**

If yes, What is this process?

If no SKIP Question 19, Why do you feel that there is no process? (Are there barriers to the sharing of information?)

19. a. How effective is this sharing process?

b. How can this process be improved?

20. a. Do you believe there are other agencies which have information that may be of benefit to you in helping at risk individuals? **YES / NO**

If yes, _____ who are they?

b. Are there other sources of information pertaining to a particular 'at risk' individual that you would like but are unable to obtain? **YES / NO**

If yes, Why are you unable to obtain it?

What makes this source desirable?

21. a. Can at-risk individuals obtain their personal information from your agency?

YES / NO

If yes, How?

If no, Why not?

- b. Can the care giver / parent obtain personal information about their at risk individual from your agency?

YES / NO

If yes, How?

If no, Why not?

Appendix III Attitudinal Scale

Smart Communities Project

Place a cross (X) in the appropriate box

AGE

20 - 25	
26 - 30	
31 - 35	
36 - 40	
41 - 45	
46 - 50	
51 - 55	
56 - 60	
61 - 65	

GENDER

Male	
Female	

Rating of the Extent to Which Societal Risk Factors Contribute to Student Risk Status

Please rank the following items from high to low by placing a cross (X) in the appropriate box (where "1" is a low contribution factor and "5" is a high contribution factor).

Frequency of rating

1 (Low)	2	3	4	5 (High)	Don't know
---------	---	---	---	----------	------------

Student-based risk factor

Drinks alcohol						
Smokes marijuana						
Does hard drugs						
Criminal behaviour						
Sexually active						
Truant from school						
Does not enjoy school						
English is second language						
Limited language competencies						
Few background experiences						
Exiting school early						
Other						

Rating of the Extent to Which Societal Risk Factors Contribute to Student Risk Status

Please rank the following items from high to low by placing a cross (X) in the appropriate box

(where "1" is a low contribution factor and "5" is a high contribution factor).

Frequency of rating

1 (Low)	2	3	4	5 (High)	Don't know
---------	---	---	---	----------	------------

Family-based risk factor

Alcoholic parent					
Parent does drugs					
Family violence					
Lack of parental supervision					
No parent-teacher interviews					
Parent doesn't value education					
English second language family					
Sibling does drugs					
Sibling dropped out of school					
Parent is criminal					
Other					

School-based risk factor

Teacher stress

Teacher intolerance					
Rigid educational program					
School violence					
Large class size					
No special education					
Novice teacher					
No ESL program					
Limited school resources					
School-gangs					
Dilapidated school building					
Non-supportive teacher					
Other					

Rating of the Extent to Which Societal Risk Factors Contribute to Student Risk Status

Please rank the following items from high to low by placing a cross (X) in the appropriate box

(where "1" is a low contribution factor and "5" is a high contribution factor).

Frequency of rating

1 (Low)	2	3	4	5 (High)	Don't know
---------	---	---	---	----------	------------

Community-based risk factor

No recreational facilities						
Inadequate housing						
No community leadership						
Low income neighbourhood						
High community unemployment						
No youth work opportunities						
High crime neighbourhood						
No community health clinics						
Street gangs in community						
No emergency youth shelter						
Other						

Social risk factor

Young Offenders Act 1994						
Child / youth social policy						
Cultural intolerance						
Racism						
Social policy for the poor						
Services for the disadvantaged						
Juvenile crime policy						
Public spending priorities						
Attitudes toward child / youth						
Attitudes toward disadvantaged						
Other						

Appendix IV Communication Theory

Our society is an organizational society. We are born in organizations, educated in organizations, and most of us spend much of our lives working in organizations... [m]ost of us will die in an organization
(Etzioni, 1964, p.1).

Communication may be viewed as a transmission and reception of information via various means such as speech, signals, writing, or behaviour. Frey, Botan, and Kreps (2000, p. 28), however, stated that it is more than a transmission-reception cycle and defined it as “the processes by which verbal and nonverbal messages are used to create and share meaning.” Communication, therefore, is not only the sharing of information but also requires meaning to be derived from that information exchange.

During the 1900s, three theorists, Frederick Taylor, Henri Fayol and Max Weber, attempted to describe the characteristics of organisations. Each theorist approached the problem from a different perspective and background. Collectively these three theories have become known as the *classical management theory*. These theories emerged as the foundation for contemporary understandings of organisational structure and management.

Taylor’s Scientific Management

An American engineer, Taylor, based his theory on scientific principles. He believed organisations must be structured to maximise efficiency. He summarised his theory using four main ideas.

1. There is only one way to execute a job and this way can be determined through scientific analysis.
2. Personnel must be assigned a selected task according to skill or potential.
3. Payment of workers was on an incentive basis. The more they produced, the more they were paid.
4. Management determined the company direction and workers had to follow that directional plan under the supervision of sub-managers. This meant that a worker might receive direction from multiple sub-managers. He felt that the manager was a specialist in thinking, the worker was there for physical

labour, and the two positions should not be transposed. The worker, for example, would not figure out the best way to do the work but a manager could analyse the task and figure out scientifically the best way to get it done. Taylor believed that lack of efficiency of an organisation arose from the workers not complying with management direction and supervision (Daniels, Spiker, & Papa, 1997).

Fayol's General Management

A French industrialist, Henri Fayol, emphasized the manager and the functions of management proposing fourteen fundamental principles for organisational structure and design. He proposed five functions managers must be able to do, namely plan, organise, command, coordinate, and control. His fourteen principles of management included:

1. **Specialization of labour.** *Specializing encourages continuous improvement in skills and the development of improvements in methods.*
2. **Authority.** *The right to give orders and the power to exact compliance.*
3. **Discipline.** *Clear and fair policies, sanctions applied judiciously.*
4. **Unity of command.** *Each employee has one and only one superior.*
5. **Unity of direction.** *A single mind generates a single plan and all personnel fulfil their part of that plan.*
6. **Subordination of individual interests.** *When at work, organizational pursuits take priority.*
7. **Remuneration.** *Employees receive fair payment for services, not what the company can get away with.*
8. **Centralization.** *Decisions are made from the top.*
9. **Scalar chain (line of authority).** *Formal chain of command running hierarchically from top to bottom of the organization.*
10. **Order.** *All materials and personnel have a prescribed place, and they must remain there.*
11. **Equity.** *Equality of treatment of personnel (but not necessarily identical treatment)*
12. **Personnel tenure.** *Limited turnover of personnel.*
13. **Initiative.** *The ability to conceptualise and execute a plan.*
14. **Esprit de corps.** *Management should seek to promote unity, harmony, and cohesion among personnel*

(Daniels, Spiker, & Papa, 1997, p.23).

Weber's Bureaucratic Theory

Max Weber, a university professor, considered bureaucracy as the most logical and rational structure for large organisations. In a bureaucracy there are laws, procedures, and rules from which authority is derived. Weber classified three types of legitimate social authority:

1. Rational (or rational-legal): based on goals and functions intended to maximise performance, and implemented through a system of rules and procedures.
2. Traditional: leader's authority is accepted as a right of the office or position eg., heads of family businesses.
3. Charismatic: relies on the special personal qualities of an individual.

According to Weber, efficiency in bureaucracies comes from:

- A hierarchical system of authority with technically trained bureaucrats.
- Specialization of labour according to task.
- A complete set of laws, procedures, and rules for the rights, responsibilities, and duties of personnel.
- Procedures for work performance.
- All personnel are treated impersonally.
- Selection and appointment to positions based on technical expertise
- Promotion of personnel based on technical expertise and competence (Daniels, Spiker, & Papa, 1997).

These theories have aspects that resonate with each other but are frequently criticised for failing to take into account human behaviours outside of the expected blind obedience to company dictates. The 1930s, after a series of industrial studies known as the Hawthorne Experiments witnessed a change in the understanding of efficient organisations. The considerable influence employee's attitudes had on efficiency was acknowledged. If an employee, for example, was not happy at work, efficiency was diminished and, until that time, employee work satisfaction and performance was judged purely from an economic standpoint. It was assumed that the employee was simply motivated to produce more to get more pay; however, productivity was found to depend more on working conditions and management attitudes. Communication, particularly positive management response and encouragement, was determined to be a key factor in the working environment. The influence of the peer group also rated highly and so work was now perceived as a group activity (Boylan, 2002). Elton Mayo theorised the need for recognition, security, and sense of belonging was more important in determining a worker's morale and productivity than the physical

conditions under which they worked. The worker became a person whose attitudes and effectiveness were conditioned by social demands from both inside and outside the workplace. Mayo highlighted that managers need to be “friendly in their relationships with workers, listen to worker concerns, and give workers a sense of participation in decisions in order to meet their *social* needs” (Daniels, Spiker, & Papa, 1997, p.32).

McGregor’s Theory X and Theory Y

The theories mentioned thus far refer to organisational structure, whereby communication is a motivational tool, used to control workers and organisational processes. In 1960, Douglas McGregor developed Theory X and Theory Y. As a psychologist, McGregor recognised that organisational operation was dependent upon its manager’s beliefs about human nature and behaviour. McGregor believed that research into motivation and its practical implementation was fundamental to successful management practice. Motivation research was obviously concerned with people and, by association, the communication that was exhibited between them. Theory X proposed a negative perspective on human behaviour assuming “most people are basically immature, need direction and control, and are incapable of taking responsibility. They are viewed as lazy, dislike work and need a mixture of financial inducements and threat of loss of their job to make them work (‘carrot and stick’ mentality)” (Boylan, 2002).

The concepts of human nature and management put forward by Theory X resonated with the classical management theories of Fayol and Taylor, which proposed that personnel were told what to do and when to do it. Conversely, Theory Y was the antithesis of Theory X indicating that people were seeking self-development, self-fulfilment and self-respect, at work as in life in general. Theory Y fitted Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (refer to Figure 2) was modified to:

1. basic physiological needs
2. workplace, family income etc.
3. safety and security needs, including sense of economic security
4. ‘social needs’: acceptance by one’s peers, self-respect, and finally, at the highest level:

5. self-confidence, the giving and receiving of affection 'egotistic needs': self-fulfilment and self-development.

(Boylan, 2002).

Theory Y managers believe that work is as natural as play. Employees do not inherently dislike work, and whether they view it as a source of pleasure or as a punishment depends on the management and the nature of the work. Given appropriate conditions, employees will seek and accept responsibility using their own abilities for creative problem solving. They will exercise self-control and self-direction in achieving objectives to satisfy their own ego and self-actualisation needs. The threat of punishment is not a motivational tool. The intellectual potentials of the average employee were only being partly realised.

Both Griffin and Likert proposed theories of communication that have been expanded upon in the literature review.

Organisational Communication Perspectives

Griffin (2003) highlighted the fact that all the previously mentioned theories expound a mechanistic view of organisations and were based on classical management theories proposed by Weber, Taylor and Fayol. The classical management theories concentrate on "productivity, precision, and efficiency" (Griffin, 2003, p.258). Morgan (1986) used a machine metaphor to describe organisations exemplifying classical management theory. Organisations were likened to finely tuned machines, having interconnected parts that produced products and services. These parts were controlled by managers who used various principles and practices to gain control and compliance of employees (Daniels, Spiker, & Papa, 1997; Littlejohn, 2002). "In classical management theory, workers are seen as cogs in vast machines that function smoothly as long as their range of motion is clearly defined and their actions are lubricated with an adequate hourly wage" (Griffin, 2003, p.258). As with any machine, if a part wore out it could be replaced without seriously affecting the operation of the machine, so too with a worker who could be replaced without affecting the operation of the organisation. Daniels (1997) stated success of the organisation was largely dependent on managers' inherent communication skills; the ability to send and receive messages. The goal was to control communication to

maximise efficiency. “**Communication effectiveness** (bold in original text) involves two conditions: (1) the process of message sending and receiving are accurate and reliable; (2) the message receiver understands and responds to the message in the way that the message sender intends” (Daniels, Spiker, & Papa, 1997, p. 9).

The study of organisations and communication was derived from sociological and anthropological research and commonly utilised the Interpretive Paradigm as a foundation. Organisations were traditionally viewed from two perspectives; a unitary perspective where the organisation was comprised of cooperative systems pursuing common interests and goals; a pluralistic perspective considered the organisation as an array of factionalised groups with assorted purposes and goals (Putnam & Pacanowsky, 1987). Functionalists determined organisations to be “social facts or concrete entities” thus taking the unitary approach to organisational structure (Putnam & Pacanowsky, 1987, p. 36). Conversely, the pluralistic view of organisations taken by interpretivists perceive organisations, not as “monolithic entities”, but as a collection of individuals with differing priorities (ibid, p.37). These individuals negotiated the goals, actions and directions that they, as an organisation whole, adopt but who never lose their individuality. Study of an organisation, from either the unitary or pluralistic perspectives, entailed a concern for the communication that occurred within the organisation and perhaps, to a lesser extent, between organisations.

Organisations are comprised of people, all of whom interact with others both within and outside the organisation. Organisational communication is dependent on the fact that people all interact within certain boundaries; both formal and informal networks of communication. “Interpretivists focus on the subjective, intersubjective, and socially constructed meaning of organizational actors” (Putnam & Pacanowsky, 1987, p. 8). Organisations have been encouraged to pay attention to communication and interpersonal relationships organisational effectiveness is bound to human motivation and the ways people work together productively (Daniels, Spiker, & Papa, 1997).

Organisational Information Theory

The traditional organisational machine perspective has been modified to where it is now likened to an organism. The likeness is drawn from the concept that an organism is born, grows, changes in response to external influences, and eventually dies (Daniels, Spiker, & Papa, 1997). An amendment to this perspective was the homing in on part of the organism, namely the brain, because of an organisation's ability (as a collective of individuals) to process information, conceptualise ideas and therefore plan future events and directions (Littlejohn, 2002). Karl Weick (Daniels, Spiker, & Papa, 1997; Griffin, 2003) believed that organisations, like organisms, must constantly adapt to an ever changing environment in order to survive. Weick's Organisational Information Theory focused on the process rather than the structure. He particularly noted the exchange of information that occurred within an organisation and how individuals took steps to understand the information material. In many cases information within an organisation was ambiguous or confusing, often referred to as "equivocality of information" (Griffin, 2003, p. 262).

Organisational Information Theory included three significant concepts; information environment, information equivocality, and cycles of communication

Information Environment – "is a core concept in understanding how organisations are informed as to how they process information. Everyday, we are faced with thousands of stimuli that we could potentially process and interpret. The availability of all stimuli is considered to be the information environment" (West & Turner, 2000, p.248).

Information Equivocality – "Organisations receive information from multiple sources; they must decode the information and determine whether it is comprehensible, which person or department is most qualified to deal with the information, and whether multiple departments require this information to accomplish their task. Without clarity in these areas, there is information equivocality" (West & Turner, 2000, p.248).

Cycles of Communication – There were three steps to the cycle of communication, namely, act, response, and adjustment. The *act* "refers to the communication behaviours used to indicate one's ambiguity as a result of information that is received. The reaction to the act indicating equivocality of information defines the

concept of *response*. A response of clarifying information is provided because of the act. As a result of the response, the organisation formulates a response in return as a result of any *adjustment* that has been made to the information that was originally received. An adjustment is made to indicate that the information is now understood” (West & Turner, 2000, p.252).

Critical Approach Theory

Stanley Deetz’s Critical Approach Theory (Deetz & Kersten, 1983) regarded language as a critical pathway that determined social reality. In an organisation, the manager controlled meaningful conversation and therefore imposed their understanding of social reality on others. Deetz proposed a democratic approach to corporate decision-making. He suggested that everyone was affected by company policy and, as legitimate stakeholders; they should all have a role in determining that same company policy. This common understanding of company policy assisted the organisation to function more efficiently, however, values held by society such as democracy and freedom of speech, do not exist within an organisation. “Organizational structures are incomplete and filled with contradictions. The quasi-autonomous character of individuals and the stresses of contradiction enable the construction of new social and productive arrangements of the existing structure” (Deetz & Kersten, 1983, p.156). Put simply, people faced with contradictions within the workplace determine their own interpretation of the rules and regulations

Communication and Organisational Hierarchy

Managers must realise “in business, even more than politics, the only constant is change” (Micklethwait, 1999). Organisations have always been preoccupied with change, trying to find ways of benefiting from economic and technological developments. Organisational change is generally orchestrated because of not only industry dynamics but also internal organisational dynamics. External factors include; new technology, customer expectations, competition, quality and standards, government legislation and political values and economic cycles. Internal factors are; management philosophy, organisational structure, and culture (Kitchen & Daly, 2002). Change management, therefore is a necessary part of any organisation if it is to continue to succeed. Managers attuned to change management realise that both external and internal factors must be addressed. Part of addressing the external and internal factors is the need for communication. If pertinent information about the

operational performance and the need for change in an organisation is not communicated to key stakeholders then the success of the organisation could be limited.

Employees are fundamental to any organisation. Kitchen emphasised their importance stating ...

employees are among those groups that are crucial to an organisation. Depending on their perception of the organisation they will communicate positive and negative messages to other important members and coalitions inside and outside the firm as well. These external publics, constituencies or stakeholders may include community members, key influentials, financial groups, politicians, and consumer groups.

(Kitchen, 1997, in Kitchen & Daly, 2002)

If managers lose the confidence of their employees then they “face an uphill battle to correct ... errors and rebuild credibility with the very people who hold the future of the corporation in their grasp” (Agenti, 1998, in Kitchen & Daly, 2002). Schlesinger and Heskett pointed out “customer satisfaction is rooted in employee satisfaction and retention” (1991, p.71).

It was recognised that communication was essential in an organisation but in reality the literature indicated problems still existed in numerous organisations. De Greene (in Harshman & Harshman, 1999) cited several difficulties reflecting communication problems. A list of these problems included: downward, one way communication processes; information suppression; facts mistakenly communicated; and purposeful or accidental distortion. Communication problems have numerous detrimental effects. It provides a constant source of irritation and anger for employees who interpreted the worst case scenario from limited communication. Lack of communication potentially led to a lack of knowledge. Lack of knowledge about customers, for instance, meant that employees did not identify with the consumer, resulting in lowering of commitment to quality and service.

Froman (1961), in a survey of 100 companies determining how much was understood of what top management had to say, reported the following:

- Men at the vice-presidential level understood two thirds of what they heard from the top;

- Men at the general supervisor level got 56%;
- Plant managers got 40%;
- Foreman level men understood 30% of what they heard;
- Men at the production level understood 20%.

In a similar study Harshman and Harshman (1999) found workers at the production level understood as little as 12% of what top management had to tell them. De Greene also highlighted the problem of communication receipt and interpretation (cited in Harshman & Harshman, 1999). He indicated a person may, upon receiving information, misinterpret it because of personal preconceptions. Sandwith (1994) commented that problems involved with communication result from varying perceptions, different experiences, and different priorities. He mused that people often fail to consider anyone's viewpoint except their own, cling to old habits instead of trying something new, and pushed hard to achieve their own goals; all problems impeding good communication.

Communication errors occurred from the framing and transmission of messages. These errors could be as a result of incomplete messaging, or using wrong media to transmit the message (Sandwith, 1994). The quality of message provided impacts on the organisation; management needed credible information passed to employees. Low credibility meant employees eventually stopped listening to information received or that they did not believe what was told to them even when they did listen. Gaps in information were filled in with myth, innuendo and rumour with employees making "worst case" scenarios and acting on those interpretations. The level at which an individual worked in an organisation correlated to how adequate and credible he/she perceived the information received. The managers at the top of the organisation did not interpret the situation the same as their subordinates. Managers who were responsible for information and communication patterns viewed any situation more positively than their counterparts at lower levels. The closer the employee was to the top of the hierarchy the more positively they viewed and understood the information.

Many authors indicated the need to shift from the hierarchical structure of management with its emphasis on one way communication between management

and subordinates (Kane, 1996; Smith, 1990; Wah, 1998). Instead, communication was a fundamental component of the manager's role as was the evaluation of the communication process. To be effective, communications needed to be multi-directional, from management down, from operating levels upwards and from staff-to-staff (Reitzfeld, 1989).

Appendix V Examples of coding of qualitative data

Born at risk node

Document 'R03AWF', 1 passages, 700 characters.

Section 0, Paragraph 82, 700 characters.

R03AWF: When do I think they become at risk? I think that's ... I can't say. When ... it can even ... it can be like if I'm thinking of children that are born into certain circumstances it's from that point onwards, they're always at risk and then until they can get themselves out of that situation if that's going to be possible but I just ... trying to think of it in textbook kind of terms, I suppose it's when ... what they need to be healthy, functioning people is not available to them or they don't know how to access those things like food and medication or they don't know how to positively interact with somebody or they don't know how to seek emotional you know stimulation, things like that.

Document 'R04SAM', 1 passages, 248 characters.

Section 0, Paragraph 62, 248 characters.

R04SAM: But then it could be genetic where they are actually ... they're born with a difficulty or an academic learning difficulty could develop over time through the early years of schooling and if it's not picked up early then that riskness increases.

Document 'R07AWF', 1 passages, 1400 characters.

Section 0, Paragraph 70, 1400 characters.

R07AWF: Well again you know it's interesting working in this field, I feel more strongly about this certainly than I would have as a member of the community say 15 years ago. A child is at risk you know from conception is some situations so it's in a ... a child is at risk when that child's parent or parents or the people around that child don't prioritise their safety and their needs as a fundamental and primary issue and if they're not recognised as a being a child who needs support as opposed to someone who's just appeared in people's lives, yeah, I think ... so that's at one point ... a child can become at risk from them but also in response to changes in circumstances, a child becomes at risk when they move into a mainstream situation like schooling and it becomes apparent that that child's abilities or capacity doesn't fit in with what's required at school, child's at risk in response to you know parents splitting up and a

new parent or someone coming into the family. There's all sorts of ways that a child becomes at risk and it's like building blocks, you know for example a child's parents split up but there's a whole heap of other things around them that keep them safe or there's some continuity maintained that enables them to be safe then the impact of that is going to be significant still but it's not ... the whole building isn't going to come crumbling down necessarily.

Document 'R24AAF', 1 passages, 1051 characters.

Section 0, Paragraph 126, 1051 characters.

R24AAF: When does an individual become at risk? Well again looking ... using that model that I've just described to you, it's not just if there's one or two of those factors in isolation, we look at clusters really so for instance if you've got a very young mum, you could have a 13 year old mum who hasn't got a permanent address, who really like runs away from the department ... we try and work in with them ... who's hanging around with druggies and who's looking at ... well I mean you laugh but this is what we're dealing with ... and who's got a child that's you know a baby, a newborn baby that's traipsing around the place. That's a cluster thing, that would be high risk but if we've got a young mum who's just sort of fairly naïve and you know but is generally fairly compliant with us and will do what we ask and so we say well look you can keep your baby as long as you stay with your mum and dad and if you want to go out with your friends and party leave the child with your mum and dad, you know don't drag this child off to your party ...

Document 'R25AWF', 4 passages, 1800 characters.

Section 0, Paragraph 58, 933 characters.

R25AAF: Yeah, absolutely or ... I mean we get concerns or referrals sent to us like from King Edward whether the mother hasn't even given birth yet but they know that she's a huge risk factor or the child is a huge risk factor because Mum attends the chemical dependency unit and maybe Mum hasn't been compliant in the attending so if she's not attending her appointments, if she's still using and hasn't demonstrated a reduction in substances, if she's rocking up to the appointments with a black eye then that's huge risk so they will make a referral to us and we'll look at all the concerns that they've listed, we'll make a decision as to whether it warrants opening or not particularly if she's got other kids as well in her care. If it's a first-time mum we probably don't open it until she's had the baby but we still take part in working jointly with ... you know a place like King Edward attend their patient challenge meetings?

Section 0, Paragraph 62, 510 characters.

R25AAF: Yeah so basically we will meet with King Edward and look at developing a joint plan together as to how to manage this patient or mother when she

comes into the ... you know, when she comes in to give birth. Sometimes we may need to make a decision as to whether you know the child needs to be apprehended at birth but we would only do that after exhaustive work beforehand in trying to engage Mum and yeah so it really depends like if Mum's already got a history with us, yeah so it can get really complex.

Section 0, Paragraph 66, 335 characters.

R25AAF: Yeah. See and at the moment according to our guidelines we can't raise a child maltreatment allegation on an unborn child even though Mum's injecting herself with substances and the foetus is at risk of all sorts of spina bifida and works you know so we can't ... so that brings up a whole other set of issues for us as well, yeah.