ABSTRACT:

Over the past fifteen years or more, the Tasmanian Health and Human Services sector has seen a number of attempts to move towards consultative policy making between government and non-government sectors. Aims of eventual partnership style arrangements have also been identified in this area (Alessandrini and Ryan, 1988; Ryan, 1999). The experiences identified within this sector are used as a means of exploring the mechanisms available for actors and non-government organisations to participate in the policy process. In doing so this paper considers whether bureaucratic traditions are inherently resistant to ‘consultative changes’. Significantly, this paper bridges the gap between the breadth of literature in this field and the limited applied investigation of these issues. The policy process in this sector indicates significant challenges and inconsistencies. Policy making has become multifaceted. Higher levels of trust and reciprocity are identified between staff in both government and community sectors. Despite this, external influences (political change and departmental organisation) produce obstacles to policy making and drive inconsistency in policy approaches. More significantly perhaps, commitment to the process of consultation is also questioned, with consultation often emphasized more ‘in spirit’. Overall, there are notable barriers to policy making observed by both sectors. This research illustrates lessons for policy that are not only applicable to Tasmania. With governance increasingly viewed as a ‘balancing act’ between government and community sectors, this paper points to significant findings regarding the process of consultation.
INTRODUCTION:

The responsibility for the administration and implementation of government decisions in the federal arena has traditionally been held by the Australian Public Service. Since the 1980s significant transformations have occurred in part as a result of managerial style reforms. These reforms of the public sector have been given comprehensive coverage within the current public administration literature. Reforms cannot be contained to just this area. The administration of government across the past decade or more is demonstrative of a shift towards collaborative approaches; approaches encouraging partnership between government and community sectors. Significantly, this has led to an increased role and responsibility for non-government organisations. Public administration has moved beyond mere bureaucratic approaches, with other organisations engaged in public activities and the delivery of public services (Davis, 1993; Denhardt and Derdhardt, 2000; Bevir, 2009).

Current trends in public administration demonstrate more collaboration between government and non-government organisations. Moreover, increased importance has been placed on the need for consultation within public policy. These trends are well discussed in current policy literature, and indeed consultation and public policy appears ‘in vogue’ in current literature. It is clear that the non-government sector has moved beyond merely issue raising and activism, to a role involving more collaboration with government and policy makers (Simmons, 1998; Holliday, 2000; Sullivan and Skelcher, 2003).

These current trends within policy literature are discussed in this paper and applied to the case of Tasmania. Research within this paper indicates that, over the past decade or more, the Tasmanian Health and Community sector has attempted to move towards consultative policy making between government and non-government sectors. Aims of eventual partnership style arrangements have also been identified in this area (Alessandrini and Ryan, 1998; Ryan, 1999). Thus, in many respects Tasmania fits within national (and international) trends in this field. This is particularly evident when examining the ‘Changing Relationships’ project which ushered in a number of changes to the ‘business’ between government and non-government sectors. Changing Relationships was a process aimed at creating better communication between the two sectors, with an eventual aim of enhancing partnership arrangements (Office for the Community Sector, 2008; DHHS, 2004). This project – and subsequent partnership processes – forms the focus of this paper. The paper examines the
changing relationship between government and non-government sectors in Tasmania and presents some preliminary research findings in this area.

In presenting this research, the paper has been clearly divided into four key areas. Firstly, the approach and methodology employed in this article are briefly outlined, providing insight into the research methodology and framework of this project. The paper then moves to a succinct discussion of the literature on public administration, linking some of the key reforms in this area to a perceived rise in participation within policy making. Given that the paper focuses on the state of Tasmania - a state often excluded from the scope of existing policy literature - a brief overview of the process towards partnership is provided. This section of the paper enables analysis of the Tasmanian case to be placed in a broader context. The crux of this paper, however, is to present new research. Supporting this research agenda, the final section of this article provides findings in the case of Tasmania that illustrate a number of significant challenges faced within the state - challenges that have wider applications and implications in this field.

**APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY**

This paper purposefully administers mixed research methods involving a combination of semi-structured interviewing and secondary analysis. A qualitative research approach was taken, with in-depth interviews sourced from ten key informants. These key informants were selected from both government and non-government sectors, with an equal balance maintained between the sectors. Key informants interviewed were selected for their expertise and experience in this field, with the vast majority having more than a decade of work experience in the Tasmanian health sector.

To complement the qualitative interviews undertaken for this project, secondary analysis was also employed. This approach facilitated an analysis of existing information and the compilation of existing research (Babbie, 1999). To incorporate secondary analysis into this thesis, a number of primary sources were dissected, largely as a means of enhancing the existing literature reviewed for this article.

In conducting said research, this paper employed multiple research methods under an interpretive approach, derived largely from the research of Bevir and Rhodes in this field (Bevir and Rhodes, 2003; Bevir and Rhodes, 1995). Encompassed within the non-positivist
perspective, this approach strongly emphasises the importance and value of understanding beliefs, ideas and values. It seeks to interpret meanings. The emphasis given to primary, qualitative research places value on others’ interpretation, understanding and reaction to changes to the policy consultation process within Tasmania (Resnick 1996; Radnor, 2002). This then forms part of this paper’s own interpretation and understanding of said changes.

LITERATURE: PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN AUSTRALIA AND TASMANIA

Bureaucratic Tradition in Australia

Typically, public administration has been delivered via the Australian Public Service which theoretically acts as an apolitical service, working on an impartial basis regardless of the government of the day. In addition to providing impartial advice, the APS was designed to implement all political and policy decisions. In line with the impartiality mantra, these services and advice were to be of a continuing high standard. Policy implementation and policy support were to be continuous. Overall, we can see the traditional role of the public service was designed with a focus on providing impartial advice to the government of the day, regardless of political persuasion (Australian Government, 2009; Singleton et al 2009; Colebatch and Lamour, 1993).

The public service has undergone significant change, arguably as a result of criticisms levelled at the institution during the 1970s. Such criticisms triggered the Coombs Royal Commission into the Australian Public service. The Coombs Royal Commission was a catalyst for change, as part of a wide range of reforms aimed at opening up and democratising public administration in Australia. The literature indicates a twofold agenda behind the enquiry: to respond to increasing public anger towards a seemingly unresponsive and unaccountable public service, and frustration within the government (arguably) regarding the difficulties encountered with the public service in implementing its social and financial reform agenda. This commission can be identified as one of the most significant reviews in Australia’s public administration history, signalling a change in the philosophy and approach within the public service (O’Neill and Moore, 2005; Orchard, 1998; Dixon et al, 1996).
New Public Management

The public service cannot be considered a rigid bureaucratic institution, particularly when considering the broader literature on changes to public sector management and the major reforms of the 1980s. Critiques relating to rigid red tape, and process-driven bureaucracy gave rise to a series of reforms (Considine and Lewis, 2003; Pusey, 1991). Some of the broad themes in this area of the literature encompass ideas embodied under a dominant neoliberal ideology in Australia (particularly in the 1980s). This agenda generally argues for government to offer minimal or ‘core’ services with the market determining the remainder of services offered. This perspective suggests that the private sector better delivers non-essential services, and stresses the need for open market tendering and offering the best value for money services (Pusey, 1991; Bell, 1997; Alessandrini and Ryan, 1998).

Alongside economic reforms of the 1980s came a number of reforms directed at the public service bureaucracy, commonly identified as New Public Management (NPM). This strategy encompassed a broad set of reforms aimed at re-adapting the public service, transforming bureaucrats into ‘managers’, and providing a way of professionalising public servants. There was a simultaneous focus on the better management of human resources, improved service delivery, ongoing monitoring and evaluation of services, and creating more flexibility within the public service. Overall, the theme of the NPM strategy for efficiency, effectiveness and performance of services and service delivery strongly emerges in the current field of literature (Kain et al, 2001; National Competition Policy, 2001; Marsh and Spies Butcher, 2009).

Consultative Policy Making

The emergence of NPM style reforms in the 1980s paved the way for a growing trend of incorporating consultation into the policy process, facilitating a shift towards more collaborative governing. The breadth of literature on consultation generally sees these ideas of participatory governance emerging in the 1960s and 1970s as a reaction against ‘big government’ and the influences of big business and corporations, denoting an apparent distrust in government and the decision making process. This literature indicates that people became cynical about the governing process and frustrated about the inability to ‘have a say’ in decision-making. Thus, this process was viewed as inadequate. The need for participation
and engagement largely emerges from this view that governing needs to engage more with citizens beyond election day, and increase trust between the two areas (Stewart, 2009; Edwards, 2008).

Literature examining participatory governance also accounts for its rise by arguing that it provides a way of tackling ‘wicked’ problems. With policy making becoming increasingly complex, government agencies seek perspectives from actors on a range of issues, and networks are increasingly used to provide policy expertise, feedback and service delivery. There is a growth in the two-way flow of information between the two sectors. Policy processes are often too complex to be limited to government resolution (Edwards, 2008; Putland, Baum et al, 1997; OECD, 2001).

One of the earlier understandings of consultation in governing can be found in literature on citizen engagement. This paper particularly refers to Arnstein’s ladder of citizen engagement. Arnstein’s work highlights some of the tensions within consultative governance – that consultation can lead to different outcomes and solutions, and that not all consultation proves to be useful or effective. This is relevant when considering issues like ‘information sharing’ that involve a one way relationship between government and community sectors, where information is given without participation or feedback (Arnstein, 1969).

From an examination of a breadth of academic literature, this paper broadly conceptualises consultative mechanisms as a means of involving citizens in the governing and policy process (Stewart, 2009; Pateman, 1970). Collaborative policy making therefore has the ability to move beyond mere education or information-sharing levels. It can imply a two-way relationship between government and non-government sectors, providing a means for discussion and debate. This can move into partnership arrangements between both sectors where power can be redistributed between government and citizens; giving stakeholders a responsibility for policy outcomes and providing mechanisms for shared planning and decision making. Thus, there appears to be a shift from this role to a more collaborative relationship, and a move toward participatory governance or an enabling role between the two sectors (Ansell and Gash, 2007; Edwards, 2008).

Literature on policy networks also enhances the ideas surrounding more collaborative relationship between government and non-government organisations. Policy networks are often used as a tool of analysis, but can also be identified as style of governance - a linkage of actors exchanging information, resources and policy expertise (Thompson and Pforr, 2005).
Networks show how government and external stakeholders can relate with government and non-government sectors increasingly dependent on each other, particularly in terms of the sharing of resources and expertise (Borzel, 1997).

Policy networks can “constitute arenas for non-strategic communicative action providing solutions for collective action problems and accounting for more efficient and legitimate policy making” (Borzel, 1997: 1). Policy network literature highlights the constant interaction between actors in the third sector and the different relationships between the two. Arguably they “reduce policy conflict and make it possible to depoliticise issues” (Hill, 2005, 70). Importantly, policy networks show a changed relationship in how government interacts with individuals, communities and organizations. Informal relationships between the two sectors are rising, with policy making becoming less formal, and increasingly based on collaboration (Thompson and Pforr, 2005).

In more recent years we can see evidence of the public sector moving beyond a steadfast bureaucracy or even a merely ‘managerial’ state. From the literature reviewed, Australia has moved in some sectors beyond these spheres of government. Overall, there is arguably growing interaction between the government and community sectors. Emerging modes of interaction range from formal partnerships to improved and increased consultation mechanisms and informal practices that arguably reflect increasing interdependency and collaboration.

Tasmania in Context

We can see a clear shift within the public policy paradigm; one increasingly emphasising partnerships and participation. This shifting policy paradigm is evident in the case of Tasmania, a State that in many respects seemed to follow a number of these wider trends. In the context of this paper, significant reform in Tasmania began prior to the mid 1990s. Before this time, the Health and Community sector was arguably operating in an ‘ad hoc’ manner. The needs of communities were often determined by the non-government sector - often in isolation and with limited resources. Some may have developed networks to target certain groups, but there was little in the way of collaboration as a whole. There were no consistent policy processes, especially for funding (with criteria for funding submissions changing continually) (O’Day, 1999).
In 1996 the Hon Peter McKay MLC, the then Minister for the Department of Community and Health Services (DCHS) initiated a strategy that became known as ‘Changing Relationships’. Changing Relationships was a process aimed at commencing a new partnership; to smooth the progress of communication between government (and government agencies) and community services. It outlined a new strategy for consultation within policy making that was to occur between government, government agencies and the non-government sector.

The launch of this project - and subsequent partnership processes – brought forward changes to the relationship between government and non-government sectors. It outlined a new strategy for consultation within policy making that was to occur between government, government agencies and the non-government sector, one that provided for greater policy participation (O’Day, 1999). Simultaneously, Changing Relationships articulated a desire for market notions of efficiency and effectiveness, and a preference for policy making that is more effectively engaged with the community - representing a more clearly defined partnership between the government and community sector (Office for the Community Sector, 2008; Department of Health and Human Services, 2004). The findings of this paper’s research explore the ongoing relationship between the two sectors and the challenges faced for policy making not only in Tasmania, but more broadly.

PRELIMINARY RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Preliminary findings illustrate a number of significant issues in policy making, shedding light on the mechanisms of consultation and the barriers identified as facing policy making in the State. This section of the article divides the research findings into four key areas: ‘Perspectives on the Health and Community Services Sector’, ‘Consultation and Policy Making’, ‘Influences on Policy Making’ and ‘Leadership’. These were key threads that emerged within research that provide areas of significant discussion.

Perspectives on the Health and Community Services Sector

Given the minimal research into the Tasmanian sector, key informants interviewed for this paper were able to illuminate a number of the issues and challenges faced within the health
and human services sector. These informants also illustrated how partnerships and consultative policy arrangements emerged in Tasmania.

Prior the introduction of partnership projects like Changing Relationships, a number of key informants observed a number of inconsistencies within the Health and Community sector. One informant argued that the

“...Department was a very confused mixture of area and state-wide responsibilities, there was little consistency across the State” (Key informant, Government sector)

Similarly another key informant argued that the sector was run in a largely incompetent way with a myriad of different service agreements, little indexation of costs and programs operating with little transparency or effectiveness:

“...There were arbitrary processes for allocating funding. Rather than transparent, rational sorts of approaches there were a plethora of different kinds of service agreement formats, so the two organizations providing identical services in different regions were likely depending on when they started to do so, have very different service agreements. There was no appropriate indexation of costs so that organisations were basically being impoverished by continuing to provide the same services” (Key informant, Non-Government sector)

Tasmania was identified as lacking a coherent approach to policy making. This perspective was supported by the introduction of the Changing Relationships project, which specifically focused on developing collaboration and ‘partnership’ arrangements between the DHHS and the non-government sector. All key informants identified a shift in the policy approach in Tasmania. Yet there were divergent explanations and understandings of this shift. One key informant argued that this was inspired by the success of partnership arrangements in other areas:

“... the experiences that have occurred in certainly Montreal and Oregon who were the leading exponents of this, was that if you engaged communities over a long time in decision making about setting priorities for what gets funded and what doesn’t, they were likely to make better decisions that were going to be less controversial than others” (Key Informant, Non-Government sector)
This informant argued that international trends, coupled with national reform like the National Competition Policy, led to a review of the Department and issues facing the sector. They also suggested that this research and subsequent reviews informed a changed policy direction.

Not all informants, however, recorded a positive perspective on the partnerships process. One informant particularly stressed that this project was not about partnership. They suggested that Changing Relationships was introduced as a way of fixing problems between the sectors:

“... the non-government sector was very irritating. We were constantly in the media and we were clearly unhappy and would constantly say to Ministers that something had to be done to keep us happy.” (Key informant, Non-Government sector)

They argued that the Changing Relationships process was initiated less out of a desire to move towards a partnership arrangement, but more about a means to remedy public policy processes and workings in a Department that were fundamentally untenable.

**Consultation and Policy Making**

Whilst informants identified different understandings of how partnerships processes emerged, interview data increasingly illustrated that Tasmania’s health sector experienced more measures towards consultation. Initial findings suggest that Tasmania has moved into a new dimension of governing processes. This was particularly apparent in the high levels of trust and reciprocity between policy makers in both sectors. Policy discussions (often with mid level policy staff) moved fluidly between formal and non formal interactions. Due to the multifaceted nature of dialogue, staff in both sectors found an increased understanding and awareness of their roles. One informant commented that this ‘face to face’ interaction significantly improved dialogue between the two sectors.

“....so when you are face to face with them you get more of a sense of what they need as organisations, and I think we can communicate more effectively what we need. ...” (Key informant, Government sector)

Trust built within the sector and the multifaceted nature of the relationships of staff members served to improve relationships as a whole.
Whilst personal relationships were improved in this sector, many informants were still critical as to whether the aims of Changing Relationships and subsequent partnerships projects were realised:

“....by and large consultation in terms of a partnership was a bit of a furphy. Despite some good intentions, Changing Relationships really wasn’t about consultation. At least not really, not really about equal power and give and take on both sides” (Key informant, Non-Government sector)

One of the other key barriers identified in this research was that consultation in policy making was perceived very differently across the two sectors. Government employees were more likely to identify with typical ‘top down’ styles of consultation (Sabatier, 1986), such as information sessions and advertising in local media. One informant from the government sector commented that their general approaches to consultation would usually involve forums and information sessions:

“...generally, we might do something like a forum; it might involve meeting with some people in the community, some NGOs from larger organisations like. And it usually is in the form of a forum so they can ask questions and stuff and we get to provide them with some information and they can yeah ask questions. We do quite a few of these kinds of things ....” (Key informant, Government sector)

Another government informant added that submissions from non-government organisations and individuals were relied upon:

“...We rely a lot on submissions, written submissions, which essentially means that almost anyone can really write in and comment on some proposal or developments in the department. Then it really becomes up to us to sort these different submissions out and decide what advice or what opinions to take into account... ” (Key informant, Government sector)

However, key informants from the non-government sector argued that these approaches were not indicative of a truly consultative approach to policy making. One respondent neatly summarised many of the comments heard from informants in this sector:
“…Our ideal is to go over there is to talk to people and hear their story. To get back what their experience is like. So for example, we did research on poverty and just going up to people and talking about what their life is like. When we do research on industry development we start talking to organisations about what issues they face, what their needs are in terms of improving management and governance and whether some of those needs are or can be met by a service like ours. So we tend to do fairly grassroots, bottom up consultation” (Key informant, Non-Government sector)

This informant argued that government largely ran ‘information sessions’. They furthered that this was problematic for the non-government sector, particularly for smaller organisations:

“…..A number of things I've been involved in where government have done consultation. What they have done is run an information session and they present a whole lot of information. And often it’s new. Some of the examples can be quite challenging. And in that environment it’s difficult for people to give critical feedback. You’re on their turf and using their language and vernacular.” (Key informant, Non-Government sector)

There were clearly different understandings of what consultation embodied between informants in government and non-government sectors.

**Influences on Policy Making**

There were a number of key influences on policy making identified in this research. Government sector interviews identified a number of internal issues that they perceived as constraints on their work with the community sector. One of the more significant findings was the impact of organisational memory. Key informants indicated that such changes varied from widespread, whole of government changes to reorganisation of specific units and taskforces. It was identified that such changes had a clear effect with an impact that was twofold: firstly, that it provided for ‘dropping’ of initiatives and projects and, secondly, that it created gaps within the departmental memory. The later proved to be an area of significant concern for some key informants. They articulated fears that within these reorganisations, memory of particular projects, initiatives and discussions was often lost as staff moved around. This had a number of ‘flow on’ effects, including ‘rehashing’ of past policy projects
without staff realising that similar projects may have been attempted by former staff members in particular areas:

“we are limited in terms of what we can do – and we probably don’t evaluate policies and projects very much – we are rushed to get to implementing something or like just finishing a project and then there might be a restructure or changes in priorities. So we often end up revisiting stuff that might of happened five years ago…” (Key informant, Government sector)

Government informants also expressed fears that lack of organisation memory had a significant effect on their relationship with the non-government sector. They perceived a frustration from the community sector that policy discussions between both sectors was fruitless when policy projects and proposals would be lost in the next reorganisation.

Key informants in the non-government sector also faced their own barriers to policy making. One of the key influences was the tension between providing feedback and advice to government and relying on funding from government for their organisation:

“…it’s definitely harder for grassroots and small organisation. It is harder for them to offer critical ideas to government and they really rely on peak bodies to help deliver policy…” (Key informant, Non-Government sector)

This sentiment was echoed by a number of key informants in the non-government sector. There was a perceived power imbalance in place which impacted strongly on their interactions with government.

This power imbalance was not only felt between the two different sectors, but within the non-government sector as a whole. Informants illustrated that the role for peak bodies and high profile organisations differs greatly from smaller organisations whom were more reliant on government for funding. As one informant observed:

“...(large organisations) really run their own race. They don’t need a sector body in order to get access to a minister or in order do developmental stuff, capacity building stuff within their own staff so in that sense they would go off and do their own things. If they wanted to change a policy they have their own mechanisms for getting the ear of the policy maker…” (Key informant, Non-Government sector)
Non government sector informants across the board also illustrated that Changing Relationships impacted on their work environment in more ways than simply affecting dialogue between the sectors. Informants illustrated that this project also steadily increased outsourcing of services. Whilst many informants in this sector noted some benefits from this process, they all recognised that outsourcing dramatically changed their way of operations. As an informant commented:

“…Because of outsourcing, NGOs have had to change the way we operate. So we (have) to be more businesslike. When I came to this organisation ten years ago you could see the difference between corporate and an NGO in terms of quality, processes, financial management y’know a whole bunch of, bunch of things. And over the last ten years because of the outsourcing and the larger size of our organizations we’ve had to operate in a business sense.” (Key informant, Non-Government sector)

Whilst professionalization of the community sector was expected as a result of outsourcing, informants illustrated that government did not want to fund the impact of these changes. One informant summarised:

“…..The difficulty is that governments don’t want to pay for it through their contracts. So they’re looking at driving our administrative costs down.” (Key informant, Non-Government sector)

Increased administrative paperwork was also noted across a vast majority of community organisations:

“…..reporting requirements and paperwork, just the burden of paperwork. Particularly with smaller organisations you’ve got a coordinator often, without much management training running their organisation dealing with service delivery issues and sometimes having a role themselves in delivering services.” (Key informant, Non-Government sector)

As this informant identified, a lack of support for administrative costs meant that organisations did not have the ability to provide staff training or to equip staff with the capacity to adapt to these changes. Similarly, the ability of non-government organisations to provide advice and research on key issues in the sector was also diminished.
Leadership

One of the issues that consistently emerged was the importance of leadership, both politically and more broadly within the health and community sector. Informants argued strongly that leadership and vision within the sector overwhelmingly determined the approach of the Health Department, particularly in terms of how the government and community sectors would interact with each other.

A number of key informants identified that moves to ‘engage’ with the non-government sector were driven at the Ministerial level. One key informant particularly articulated a fear that an absence political leadership would wind back any efforts made to work in tandem with the community sector, suggesting that much of the ‘good work’ within the Health sector would be undone. They emphasised strongly that leadership at this level was the only factor in driving reforms.

Furthermore, key informants illustrated that leaders in this sector seemed to lack a clear vision or framework for the health sector:

“….we are in this hotly contentious sector, where I think our leaders are too scared to put a foot wrong or end up on the front page of the Mercury (Hobart paper). And I think it’s that fear that means that we just don’t have this clear plan”(Key informant, Government sector)

Concerns over an absence of leadership or commitment at a political level were clearly felt. One informant keenly observed changes felt in the sector when Ministerial leadership changed. They commented that Changing Relationships reforms largely failed after a change in leader at the top tier of government:

“(this Minister) was much less interested in those relationships generally. They put a lot less time and effort into attending the agency sector forums and other respects encouraging senior managers to do so. So we saw a change not just from a ministerial level but also from a secretarial level in the department. Basically a withdrawal. Not an opposition but just beastly careless in that sense. They just didn’t
see the importance of it. It wasn’t a priority…” (Key informant, Non-Government sector)

Thus, leadership inside the Department at a senior bureaucratic level was also identified as important. One informant noted that when heads of agency did not value input and collaboration with the community sector, resources (both material and non material) would be redirected. This was seen as particularly problematic where changes in staff in the top tiers of the DHHS were consistent. With an absence of stability at this level long term strategic planning was identified as problematic, as one informant argued:

“…..at a Departmental level there isn’t that kind of leadership, and there often aren’t people that have a good concept of the community sector. Now you do of course get these really clued up people, but they move on. It’s just continuous, the changes, which makes planning hard” (Key informant, Government sector)

Leadership in the sector was not directed solely at the political and government levels. Similar concerns over lack of leadership and vision from the non-government sector were also raised. One informant argued that organisations in this sector focused largely on day to day issues and that broader, long term planning was not developed:

“...leadership in the non-government sectors was not well developed. Not a particularly unified sector - often one literally competing with itself, organizations competing with each other. And that makes it very difficult for the organizations to - if you like - to kind of suit up and go into battle on a particularly important issue for the government; there’s just not enough trust in the sector itself to generate the conditions when they can act in a unified way.” (Key informant, Non-Government sector)

Significant concerns were raised by key informants over the lack of a cohesive plan for the Tasmanian health and community sector.
CONCLUSION

There are a number of conclusions that can be drawn initially from the research conducted. Firstly, this research indicates that policy making is increasingly multifaceted. This is perhaps one area in which Tasmania maintains an advantage. The small scale of the State potentially allows for higher levels of closeness between workers and relationships that operate on a number of different levels. Thus far into the project, it would appear that size is an advantage for the Tasmanian health sector in building relationships between the two sectors and allowing for adequate degrees of trust and reciprocity to emerge.

Whilst trust and reciprocity was perceived as being high in the sector, the original aims of partnership outlined in Changing Relationships largely appear to have fallen short. Informants all perceived constant barriers to policy making. Some of the key constraints identified within the research indicate that leadership within the Department and Ministerial leadership have a heavy weighting on how policy makers ‘engage’ with external stakeholders. Informants noted that the degree of emphasis placed on the importance of consultation or partnership between the sectors by senior staff or the Minister’s office, has an enormous bearing on the ability of policy makers to improve or implement policy decisions. Similarly, the ability of the non-government actors to drive reforms and issues was also identified as a major problem.

Long term planning from the non-government sector appears intrinsically linked to the outsourcing and contracting out of services. These processes were introduced through the “Changing Relationships” project as a way of tackling some of the issues facing the health and community sectors. However, in providing professionalism in the non-government sector, organisations are increasingly preoccupied with ‘bread and butter’ issues with no real funding for research and planning in this field. The gap between smaller organisations and peak bodies seems to be more apparent in this context.

For informants within the government sector, the challenges to policy making were quite different. These informants spoke of the continuous organisation and reorganisation of the public service. This provided for the abandonment of specific projects and initiatives. Projects would be ‘dropped’, then ‘rehashed’ years later and past problems would often be repeated. For internal staff the inability to follow through with a project was frustrating. Departmental restructures also show a lack of organisational memory and little commitment to retaining information or making information on past initiatives accessible to staff.
The partnership project “Changing Relationships” spearheaded a number of changes in the health sector. It was a project that in many respects showcased Tasmania as an innovator, and as one of the first States in Australia to start moving towards a partnerships project. However this leadership appears to be short lived. ‘Changing Relationships’ certainly appears to have started a process towards partnership, and informants undoubtedly identified a better working relationship between the two sectors. Network-style arrangements are growing significantly, with an emphasis on policy making that is increasingly based on collaboration. Policy making has arguably also become multifaceted with higher levels of trust and reciprocity identified between staff in both government and community sectors. Despite this claim, frictions between the key influences on policy making identified in this research continue produce obstacles to policy making and drive inconsistency in policy approaches. These factors also have hindered the original formal aims of partnership between the two sectors. Tasmania no longer leads the partnership charge in Australia with commitment to this process seemingly occurring ‘in spirit’ rather than in practice. Overall, there are notable barriers to policy making observed by both sectors.

Whilst shining some light into an important dimension in Tasmanian policy making, this research illustrates significance far beyond state lines. Undoubtedly, the public policy sphere today emphasises concepts like partnerships and community participation. The policy process is now seen in many respects as a ‘balancing act’ of government and community sector interests. Therefore, the initial findings of this research indicate significance and should be of interest for future research in this policy area. The lessons in the case of Tasmania are applicable on a broader scale, as the challenges faced in this arena are not exclusive to this state.
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