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Abstract

This paper is the result of an international teleconference on **Service Brokerage** and the questions which arose about various issues. Brokerage is a process which sees parties either buying or selling services having been brought together through a broker. The author is mindful of the emphasis on services and that better brokerage systems would have a vision beyond service provision. The paper gives examples of brokerage in different countries and Australian states, showing the differences as well as the common threads. The principles of empowerment, individuality and outcomes are explored, and concerns such as brokerage being merely a response to an inadequate service system are raised. **Keyword: Individualisation**

Paper by *Richard Bruggemann* for the
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Service Brokerage - Another Magic Bullet

Is brokerage a new system for ensuring that people have choice or is it a response to inadequacies in existing systems? Will it be an efficient mechanism for putting people in touch with services, or will it be yet another layer of co-ordination and bureaucracy? Is the "broker" really just an empowered case manager? Does brokerage have an undue emphasis on services, when more localised community development approaches might be more successful? These issues were recently pursued in an international teleconference and the questions, if not the answers, will be pursued in this paper.

When beginning this paper on service brokerage, I thought that a dictionary might offer a succinct definition of the term brokerage, a term relatively new within human services. It was interesting that no definition was offered other than that brokerage was the role of a broker, or the fee charged by a broker. More illuminating was the definition of a broker. The Concise Oxford Dictionary describes the broker as a middle man in bargains, whilst the Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary gives some alternatives such as one who acts as an intermediary, an agent who arranges marriages, an agent who negotiates contracts of purchase and sale, for example of real estate, commodities or securities.

How did these terms, which seem to have so little in common with the work in which we are involved, become such an important part of the language of human service systems?

It is important to look at some of the elements of brokerage, a process which sees parties either buying or selling services, being brought together through a person called a broker. The first significant element is that the broker brings together people who might otherwise remain in ignorance of each other and their needs. It is also obvious that in many transactions there is an imbalance of power or information, for example when we are buying insurance, our knowledge and capacity for informed decision making are often considerably less than that of the agencies from whom we will be purchasing. A broker can give added power to us in that transaction, ensuring that our interests are met and in fact, brokers make much of the fact that they are working for you.

It is essential to look at these power relationships because that has certainly been one of the key attributes of brokerage systems throughout the world.

If there has been any problem with the word brokerage it has been that it has been used in many different ways. It has meant a range of things from very formal programs, such as have been developed in Canada and New Zealand, to very informal arrangements of empowered case work such as occurs in California where the system has many similarities to brokerage.

It is worthwhile looking at some of the systems around the world operating under the name of brokerage. Some of this information came from an international teleconference, held on July 18th this year to pursue issues of brokerage. This teleconference which was sponsored by the IDSC of South Australia, had participants from four countries and most Australian states.

The Canadian brokerage model seeks to provide the services that people need through two main strategies.

1. The development of a circle of support, or network, which is to assist the person to understand issues and to take some of the decisions that might previously have been made by other people.
2. The employment of a person (broker) whose job it is

to facilitate the establishment of this personal network or circle for the client, provide information and negotiate with the various service providers when the decisions about the service needs have been made.

The New Zealand model further develops the inter-relationship between two components, individualised funding and independent planning around the individual. It is the interdependent operation of these two components which empowers the individual and his or her personal network by assisting them to make informed decisions about need of services.

In Australia some brokerage services have reflected those of Canada and New Zealand whilst others have been little more than the application of funds to the specific needs of individual clients.

However, no matter how the various systems are defined, there are some key elements common to all brokerage systems around the world.

Firstly there is a recognition of the depowering process that has occurred in the lives of people with intellectual disability and a determination to enable people to regain some control over their lives. As described by Nancy Marlett, Director of Dinsdale Centre for Employers, Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, it is an ability to say "This is my life, I want a say". We would all be aware that the process of having a say has not always come easily to people with intellectual disability. It has been their lot to have other people speak for them. This has often been parents, and more recently, service providers. This has often seen services developed which sometimes suit the needs of service providers more than individuals. Industrial and organisation issues such as rostering, meal breaks, and service conditions have often had been given greater importance than the need of the individual.

The second common thread in all brokerage systems is the need to engage people as individuals. Again, this has been an area where people with intellectual disability have been poorly served. In the past people with intellectual disability have been seen as a homogeneous group and we have applied homogeneous (or institutional) solutions. Institutions are, after all, not the buildings that the word conjures up. Institutions are first and foremost a state of mind that sees us make decisions to treat a group of individuals, not as individuals, but as a group. Often such picturesque phrases as economy of scale are used as a tool to justify a khaki coloured service that in fact meets the needs of very few on the constituent group. Some of the worst institutionalisation programs, incidentally, occur in community settings where, just as much as in residential facilities, we make decisions that treat people as a homogeneous group. The ability to resist group decisions (and even ideological solutions) in favour of individual solutions is a key skill all service providers will have to develop.

The third principle that permeates thinking on service brokerage is that the decisions about what services are needed are kept separate to the service delivery process. This is where the contracting or brokering takes place. Although there are many good reasons for this separation, most importantly it offers a very good service safeguard which does not exist in the traditional service where case management, decisions about the individual and service provision all occur in the same agency. All too often service agency priorities take dominance over those of individuals who can become captives of the care system.

The fourth common thread is that there should be no formula solutions, (for example a fixed amount of money made available for a client) but that the needs of individuals should drive the quantity as well as the type of service made available.

The fifth common element is that all have an emphasis on outcomes for the clients. Again this is an area where people with intellectual disability have been severely disadvantaged. Often we have concentrated on the inputs and often lived in the fantasy world of wish fulfilment. We have seen people with disabilities sit in a back room of a TAFE college watching videos and have claimed this to be an integration success, when the actual outcome for the individual client may have been nothing. We really need to question what have been the outcomes for the individual rather than whether some ideological imperative has been served.

Although there are a number of similarities in what might come under the umbrella of brokerage services there is equally considerable confusion about how the word brokerage is both used and applied.

The system which has been developed in Canada sees the broker providing a technical, mediating support service, acting on the agenda of the person served, under his or her direction at all times, its primary objective being to enable the person to become a full participant in the community.

The broker acts as a catalyst, stimulating the community to respond to the needs of the individual, getting involved in community development to enable it to be more responsive to individual needs, assisting individuals and their networks to work through various social systems and to capably use funding allocations. (This sounds incidentally very much like the role of a case worker being developed by the Intellectually Disabled Services Council of South Australia.)

One of the concerns that I have is that brokerage may be a response to a service system that is inadequate and requires considerable reform.

Let me give an example. In South Australia we were constantly hearing that parents were having difficulty finding their way through the maze of the service system. In the Southern Metropolitan region of Adelaide the IDSC piloted a Key Worker Program. Key Workers would be drawn, on a voluntary basis, from the staff of a number of service provision organisations, with a mandate to work very closely with families to assist them to access the service system.

It has been immensely successful and families report how good it has been to have a worker who is focussed on them and their family, is knowledgeable and powerful, and is able to get things happening for them. Because of the self-selection of key workers the pilot program attracted people who were enthusiastic to work in that way, which families found very supportive.

The basic question of course, and one that I would address to brokerage systems is "isn't that the way that all of workers should be operating". Therefore to develop a key worker system may, in fact, be just a "fix-up" of an existing system that may require considerable structural reform. In the same way I wonder whether some brokerage systems are, in some instances, not just mechanisms to repair an existing system.

Nancy Marlett has asserted that service brokerage is not another system, rather it is a missing link. I would like to suggest that in systems where the main services have been institutionally based that such a link may be necessary, in fact essential. In most of the states in Australia where there is a commitment on the part of the State Government agencies to provide a case work service and to have a service development mandate, such a link may not be missing. In other words, emerging systems may have built into them mechanisms that make this linking process unnecessary.

However where the major service systems are institutionally based, it will be as Jo Dickie has indicated, a case of shifting where the power lies, not just getting more money. Money is already being spent on people with disabilities and achieving this shift in focus of power may be the real problem. Again this implies that some substantial reforms need to be made to service systems if they are going to be effective at the level of clients.

Let me outline what I believe are some of the difficulties with brokerage systems as I currently understand them.

Firstly, there is an emphasis on service. We have had within the area of intellectual disability, I believe, an undue emphasis on the need for services. There is no doubt that services will continue to be the key part of the lives of people with intellectual disability. However, I think that they have often subsumed other approaches which build on a person's strength, rather than always concentrating on their weaknesses. I would refer people to the article "Hey Joe" in a recent edition of Link Magazine, where the solution for a man depended, not on constantly throwing services at him, but rather on finding out what his gift was and how it could be used and built on. The better brokerage systems do, I believe, have a vision beyond service provision - however, I am mindful that many of them are called service brokerage systems - the name implying the emphasis on service.

There is a realisation that not all of the things that are important to you and I are service orientated. They are rather about the things that we value - our homes, our possessions, our relationships, our jobs, our

accomplishments, our contributions. Services are only important to us when they are needed by us. When our tooth hurts, nothing is more important than dental services. When our tooth ceases to hurt, dentists are the last thing that we think about.

If brokerage systems do not ensure that people with intellectual disability have real access into the non-service parts of our community, then we will be missing a vital opportunity to empower people and provide real participation.

The second concern that I have about brokerage systems, is that flexibility and choice can often be described in terms of the number of alternative services from which the individual can choose. However, this often does not mean the choice of the best service, but rather the choice of the least unsatisfactory service. We have called this process of offering organisational alternatives service flexibility, but I believe that is not necessarily flexibility. I would like to contend that for you and I, flexibility occurs at a personal level. You and I do not have to make choices about which agency or organisation will meet our most basic needs. In fact, most of the choices that we make about things that happen in our lives could be summed up in words like, who, how, when and where. For people with disabilities however, flexibility often means choosing between agency A, B, C & D and trying to find the one whose rules and regulations least inhibit their capacity to get what they want from the service system.

Thirdly, one of the guiding principles around the world is that services should be provided to people with intellectual disability as far as possible in the same way that they are for other people. We have seen over the last few years, the substantial move of children into ordinary schools, and the services of a range of other Government departments and non-government organisations made available to them.

When these agencies see that there can be dollars attached to disabled people, it sometimes engenders the view that they will only provide services if those dollars come with people. Therefore the ability that the person with an intellectual disability might have to access those services is abrogated or watered down by the agency seeing an opportunity to get dollars to provide the service that should be provided as a matter of right. We need to make sure that brokerage does not inhibit the trend that we have been trying to implement to use mainstream services in a way that least separates the individual from the rest of the community.

Fourthly, it seems that in some instances we have set up fairly complex bureaucracies to deal with the requirements of individuals. As indicated before, one of the questions that needs to be asked is "Is brokerage a new system, is it a link in a system or is it an alternative system?". If we look at it as being something in addition then there is no doubt that it may be a costly additional piece of additional bureaucracy. Can we always assume that, because the services brokered for are individualised and personalised, they will be provided in a way which is cost efficient? Governments are increasingly going to be concerned about those questions and it may be that the infrastructure for brokerage could become more costly than some of the services provided.

Although I did not promise answers in this paper, I think I would be getting off a little lightly if I did not look at some model for the future. Let us consider Joe Citizen. He is a young man with a moderate intellectual disability who has lived with his mum and dad and who has suffered many of the historical injustices meted out to people with intellectual disability. He has gone to a special school where there were limited opportunities to mix with other people of his own age. This separation spilled over into out-of-school activities where he was not able to share the fun and experiences of other kids. He missed opportunities to go on canoeing trips with other kids and learning, as we all learn, through contact with peers. Like many other people with intellectual disability, he has become isolated (not only has he become isolated, but his family have become isolated as well).

He is now about to leave the special school system, without many skills, a limited personal network and fairly bleak prospects. Many of the choices that he might have made have been made by his parents and consequently he lacks confidence.

What are some of the things that might occur in the life of this 20 year old person that could ensure that his future is happier and more fulfilled than it currently looks like being. If I can remember the things that I wanted as a 20 year old it would include acceptance by my peers, a girlfriend, the prospect of a job, the prospect of owning my own home and some possessions, that I would be seen as a useful citizen, that I

would have opportunities to contribute to my community, that I could develop a range of interests with other people my own age, that I would have further opportunities to learn things, that I would have security in my life, and that I could continue to have a relationship with my mum and dad and family, but not that they would necessarily have the same responsibility for me that they had when I was a child.

The first thing we might notice is that few of these relate to services. Most of the people with intellectual disability whom I have met do not define their needs in service types rather they approximate fairly closely to the list of any other young person and we need to rise above our perspective of service providers to look at ways we build on Joe's strengths and assist him to develop the sustaining network which, whether we consciously recognise it or not, nurtures each of us and keeps us out of the clutches of services (there is not to my knowledge any human service providing happiness.) That springs from we ourselves and our nurturing network.

Joe now comes to the Intellectual Disability Services Office about some of these things. It would seem to me that when we first engage Joe, the first thing that we must do is to recognise his uniqueness, of which his disability is an integral part, although we may well wish to dwell on his abilities rather than his disabilities. However, fantasy making about his disability will hinder rather than help in our quest to treat him as an individual. We need to respond to him about the things that will be important to him and where he is not able easily to communicate that we should be looking for ways he can be supported to make the decisions that are important in his life.

The person who meets Joe from our Intellectual Disability Agency needs to have a range of skills at their disposal. Firstly, they need to know the service system well because some of Joe's needs may be met simply by a referral to an agency that provides a certain service. However, if loneliness were one of Joe's concerns then the case worker may require some community development skills, perhaps to work with a local youth group so that Joe could be drawn into their activities and to widen his circle of friends and acquaintances.

The third thing that may be required is some special support from the case worker to meet some of Joe's more immediate needs. This may be some counselling skill which is supportive of the relationships being developed between Joe and the case worker.

Fourthly, when there is a need for some specific service for Joe, rather than looking at the least unsuitable service, why don't we enable Joe and his network to describe what it is that he needs in terms of what he wants, how he would like it provided by whom, where, when and how he would like it provided.

A tailor-made service, unique to Joe and his unique needs could be defined and arrangements made whereby we can contract with an agency to provide exactly that tailor-made service. It is an important safeguard for this service provision to be separate to the process of decision making. This would enable maximum flexibility at an individual level. We would not be trying to fit Joe into an agency which says "we don't provide services on a Saturday morning", or an agency which says "our rules do not allow for a care worker to provide medication". All of Joe's requirements could be written into a requisition that we could place on a contracting agency to fulfil and purchase with money earmarked for Joe. Such an agency would have virtually no rules about the provision of its service, in fact its only rule being to meet the unique needs of individuals as they present.

When we look at what brokerage agencies have done, we see they have gone a fair distance down the track. However flexibility is often seen as choices about which agencies might serve, rather than looking at how we can actually make the things that Joe Citizen wants, happen in the way that he wants them to happen. We need to see the role of the case worker have within it a brokerage capacity and in fact whether they are using the tools of referral or community development, their entire role will be one of brokering (in the sense of redressing the imbalance of power) on behalf of the client. In the end I am not sure that the case worker that I am envisaging is terribly different to the Canadian and New Zealand brokers. The main thing however is that we are providing services in a way that meets the unique needs of our unique and individual clients. Further, as for all of us we must ensure that we enable, through a community development approach, our clients to escape what is too often the tyranny of the service system, which can too easily entrap and make dependent those whom it would serve.

Is service brokerage a magic bullet? Let me have a little money each way.

Yes, it will be a magic bullet if we expect brokerage *per se* to cure all the ills of the service system. Methodologies, technologies and systems do not themselves offer the hope of acceptance and participation.

It will not be a magic bullet if we recognise it for what it is - a system that can better deliver the service goods in a way which empowers clients, gives them real flexibility and responds to the limitation of services.

If brokerage can do that then we will see people with intellectual disability getting what we all want - the opportunity to enjoy the experience of being human - the highs, the lows, the successes, the failures and most importantly, communion with our fellows.

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