

# MEASURING SOCIAL IMPACT



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# Introduction

Social impact is illusive, partly because it does not lend itself readily to a monetary analysis, is qualitative rather than quantitative, long term rather than short term, diffuse and multi layered rather than specific and focussed, and probably means different things in different contexts. This paper provides an empirical approach to measuring social impact within a single large Australian organisation, Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA).



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# Existing Measures Inadequate

- Micro level, eg SROI monetarized value, ignores “non measurable”, spillover effects, limited to single program
- Macro level, eg OECD better life initiative, broad brush, misses third sector contribution
- Meso level, eg social capital measure, still limited, sporadic application, social impact more than social capital??

# Surf Life Saving Australia: An Australian Icon

- SLSA is a large volunteer based third sector organization.
- In 2010/11 membership of 158 806 participants (SLSA, 2011),
- 57% males and 43% females (SLSA, 2009).
- Despite general national decline in (ABS, 2007) membership at SLSA has experienced steady growth.
- A commissioned economic benefit analysis found extensive contribution of SLSA but could not determine social contribution (Allen, 2005)



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# Study Aims and Outcomes

| Aims   | Outcomes  |
|--|---|
| Identify activities contributing towards SLSA's social benefit | Indicators of social contribution of SLSA in the Australian community     |
| Determine SLSA's indicators of social contribution             |   |
| Develop SLSA-specific tool(s) to measure those indicators      | Survey tool for measuring generic social impact in volunteer organization |
| Apply those tools within SLSA                                  | Analysis of data and report   |

# Research Design

- The research was carried out in two stages.
- The first stage a grounded theory approach to capture member perceptions of the social contribution of SLSA activities.
- Data was collected from eight focus groups with key SLSA staff, board members and 'toes in the sand' volunteers across four states in Australia (a total of 61 participants).

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# Key Nvivo Nodes

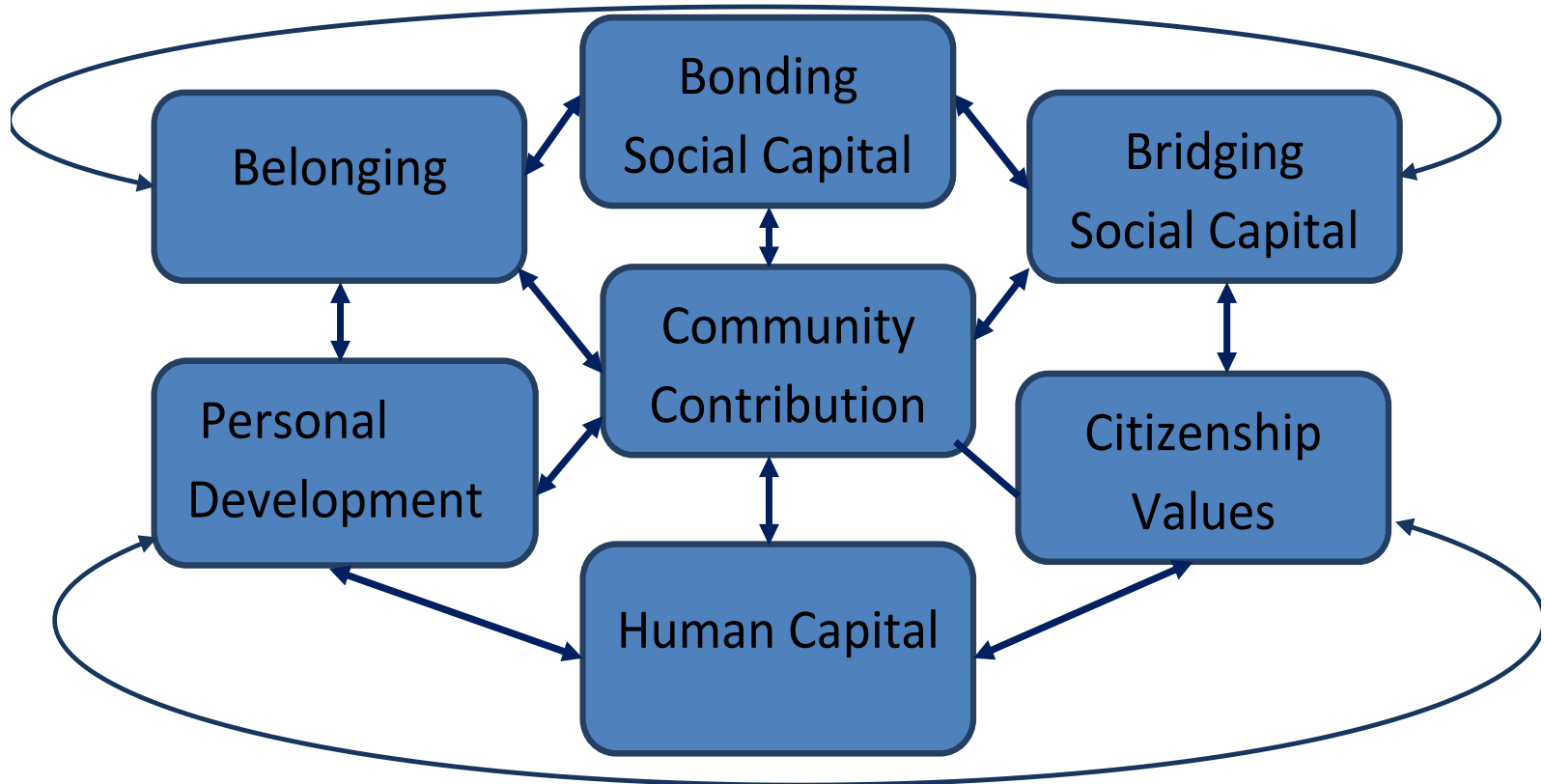
- a family orientated and supportive organizational culture (engagement of whole family over life-span)
- the personal development of members which flow on to the wider community (eg social values)
  - generic skill development among members of direct applicability to wider community (eg leadership skills)
- public education programs for the wider community (e.g. water safety)
- mutual assistance with other organisations (eg emergency assistance, facilities available for wider community (eg community meetings))
- formal programs for disadvantaged groups (eg indigenous, migrants).



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Figure 1: Modelling social impact





# The Survey Tool

- Stage two of the study consisted of a survey designed to test the theoretical model
- 76 scale items
- Demographics including diversity items
- 1 open ended question
- The survey was created as an on-line document using Qualtrics software
- By December, 2011 a total of 3,011 records were received of which approximately 2,800 were ultimately useable
- Responses were received from all geographical regions, roughly proportional to their membership. Gender proportional (63% male)
- somewhat biased in terms of older members and longer membership



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# Analysis of data

- The resulting data was analysed using Statistica.
- A Varimax, normalized factor analysis identified clusters of loadings forming oblique factors for hierarchical analysis. Subsequently, these oblique factors were further analysed to identify a set of secondary, orthogonal factors
- Finally, the eight factors (based on positive items) plus three citizenship values factors were analysed using structural equation modelling

# Factors

Ao : Organisational Activity

Bo : Welcoming Organisation

Ci : Belonging

Do : Organisational social and citizenship values

Ei : Individual social and citizenship values

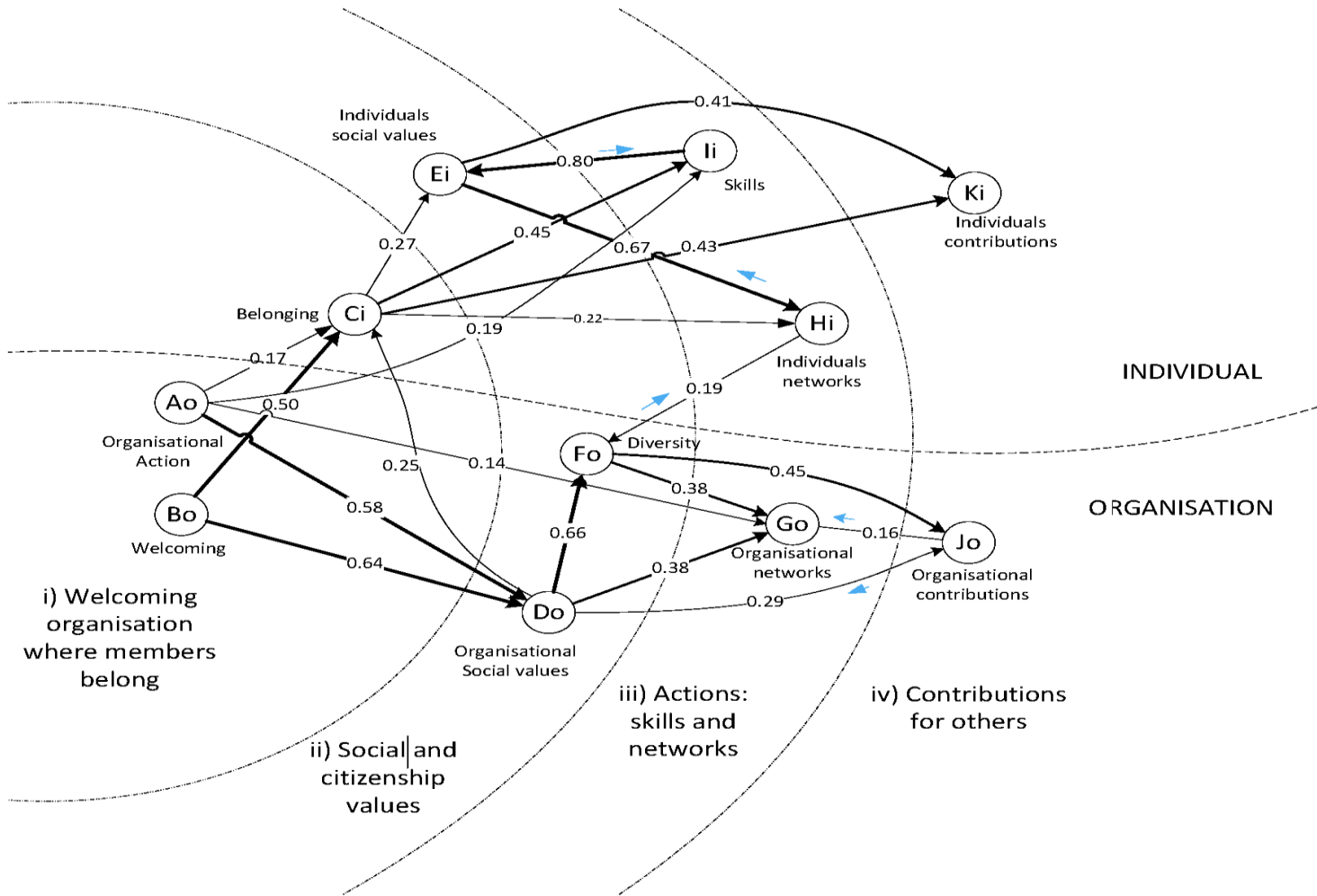
Go : Connected with other organisations

Hi : Individuals networks

Ii : Skills

Jo : Organisation contribute to others

Ki : Individuals contribute to others



# Discussion: several patterns

- First, organisation is having an enormous, but complex social impact on its members and on the wider community.
- Personal belonging important for the individual, leading to other personal outcomes, notably individual level skills and networks and a wider contribution to society.
- Factors divide into organisational factors on the one hand and individual factors on the other

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. Both Organisational action and providing a welcoming environment for members has a profound effect on the development of social and citizenship values at the organisational level. These social values expressed at the organisational level then have a major impact on the development of organisational networks, on levels of (ethnic) diversity welcomed, and ultimately on the capacity of the organisation to contribute as an organisation to the wider community.



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- The results of this study provide a useful approach to the wider measurement of social impact.
- we have clearly demonstrated the broader social impact that a large community based organisation has on its members and on the wider community in which it is embedded.
- That includes a measure of social capital both bonding social capital (belonging) and in terms of bridging (wider networks).
- This measure captures some of the spill-over effects of what is essentially a surf life saving, sport and recreation orientated organisation, whose immediate mission is to save lives by improving water safety.
- But also the organisation generates a much broader sense of social connectedness and civic mindedness.
- It also generates significant increases in human capital, in particular the skills required, not only for saving lives, but also for working in a team situation and developing leadership skills.
- social impacts appear to operate much like the ripple effect of a stone dropped in a pond. From a core central state of belonging, other impacts develop in consecutive rings of wider social impact moving from the immediate club to the wider community.



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# A message for other organisations??

- It seems that “charity begins at home”, that is that a strong welcoming culture within the organisation is the essential precursor to wider social impact, both for the individual and for the organisation itself.



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# Thank you!



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