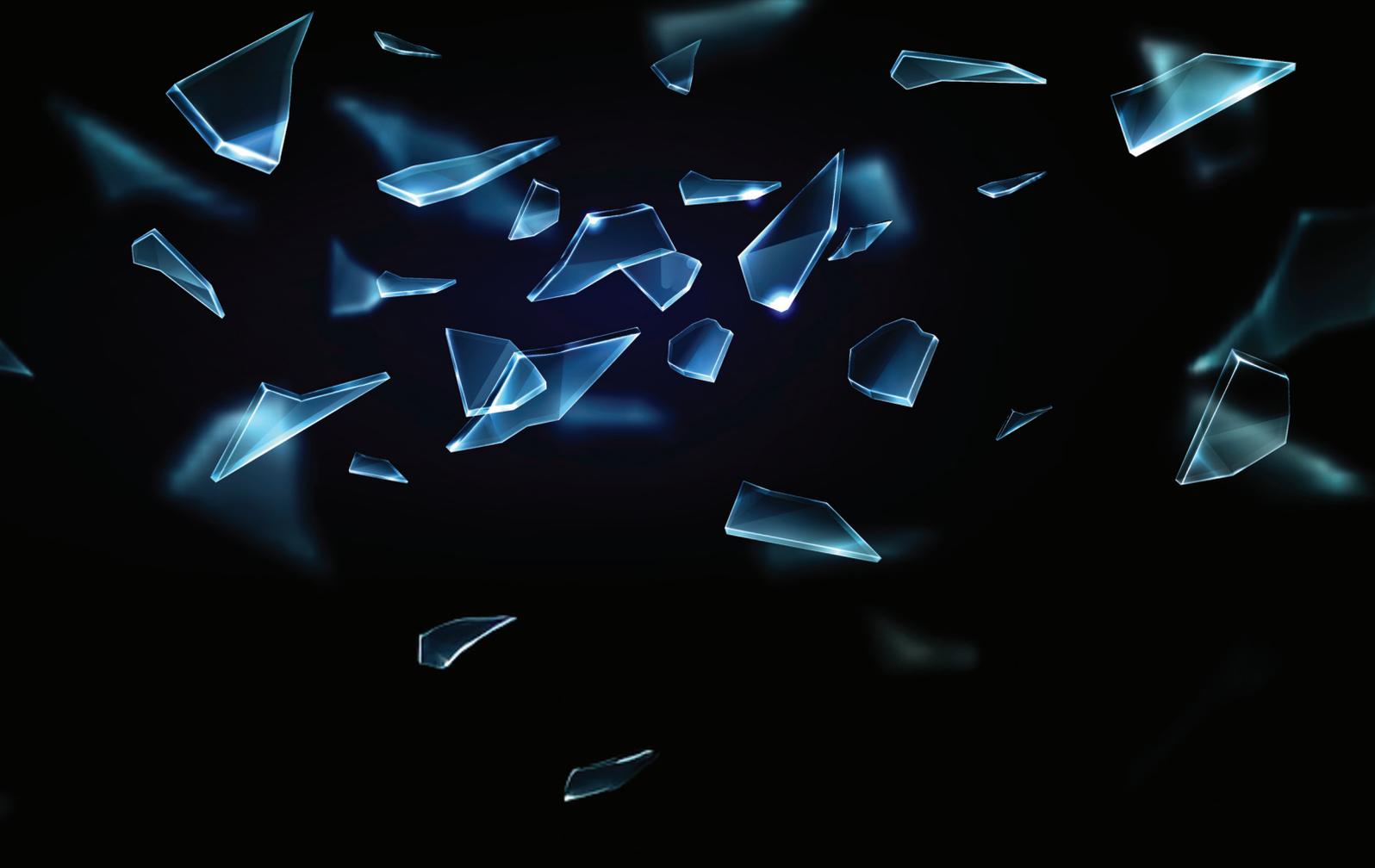# How to communicate effectively in fragmented environments

: phillipsgroup

Working in fragmented environments is complex and challenging; it is not something that can be overcome quickly or easily. In this article you will learn how to identify fragmentation within healthcare, understand its consequences, and be given the tools to reduce its impact through communication.

What is fragmentation?

Australia's healthcare landscape is frequently described as fragmented in terms of systems and responsibilities. Programs are underway at macro and micro levels to reduce the impacts of fragmented systems, boost and improve productivity, cost, and efficiency, to create seamless services and programs. Ultimately, this will lead to better health outcomes for Australians—from scientific advances, reviews, and reforms to empowering health consumers.

Fragmented systems include the collection of disparate processes, technologies, and legislations. These fragments can arise from differing digital systems, regulatory environments, and internal practices that can hinder effective communication and engagement.

In healthcare, fragmentation is unique. It stems from the complex interactions of diverse stakeholders alongside regulatory requirements, rapid advances in technology, rising healthcare costs, and the critical nature of patient care.

At Phillips Group, we have found that fragmentation is a well-recognised and understood experience. Organisations work complicitly within systemic fragmentation. However, overall, there is a genuine desire and willingness in the sector to collaborate and make improvements. Progress is slow, but moving in a forward trajectory.

What are the consequences of fragmentation?

Fragmentation's consequences include a lack of collaboration, duplication, resource ineffectiveness, patient disempowerment, increased errors, higher costs, and difficulty measuring outcomes. Understanding fragmentation and its causes has many facets, and it helps to design and deliver communication and engagement strategies that meet the needs of all stakeholders involved.

Diverse stakeholders

Context

Healthcare involves many stakeholders, including hospitals, medical practice clinics, insurance companies, regulatory agencies, and patients. Each group operates under different objectives, regulations, and systems.

Consequence

This diversity can lead to misalignment in goals and expectations.

Collaboration among diverse professionals

Context

Healthcare often requires collaboration among diverse professionals - physicians, nurses, social workers, GPs and more. Each discipline may have its own workflows and priorities.

Consequence

This fragmentation can complicate interdisciplinary teamwork, making it harder to coordinate care and share insights.

Shared responsibility

Context

Fragmentation often results in a culture of shared responsibility that can be unclear and ineffective.

Consequence

When accountability is dispersed across multiple organisations, it can lead to a lack of ownership over outcomes. Stakeholders may be unsure who is responsible for what, leading to finger-pointing rather than proactive problem-solving.

Communication breakdowns

Context

These are commonplace in fragmented environments. If information is siloed within individual departments or organisations it becomes challenging to share insights and foster collaboration.

Consequence

Important updates can be lost, misunderstandings can occur, and decision-making can slow down, all of which can ultimately impact the quality of service.

Rapid advances in technology

Context

The rapid pace of technological advancement in healthcare adds another layer of complexity. While new digital health tools and platforms can enhance communication, they can also exacerbate fragmentation if not integrated effectively

Consequence

The rise of telehealth, wearable devices, & health apps can create additional data silos & communication challenges require strategies to ensure all technology works effectively & seamlessly.

Critical nature of patient care

Context

In healthcare, the stakes are particularly high. Delays in information sharing or miscommunication among providers can have severe consequences for patient outcomes.

Consequence

This urgency requires not only efficient systems but also reliable protocols for sharing critical information efficiently.

Regulatory requirements

Context

In Australia, the healthcare sector is heavily regulated. The healthcare sector is one of the most heavily regulated industries with stringent requirements from professional licensing to equipment standards and clinical guidelines. Each regulatory body may impose specific requirements related to these.

Consequence

Navigating this regulatory landscape can create significant barriers to collaboration, as organisations must ensure compliance while attempting to share data or work together on initiatives.

How you can reduce the impacts of fragmentation

While communication alone cannot fix fragmentation in the health sector, it can help to reduce confusion and support consumers and industry to navigate through it.

Organisations can adopt strategic communication and engagement approaches that prioritise clarity, collaboration, and accountability, both internally within the organisation and with consumers.

Below is a best practice checklist to consider and help manage communication in fragmented environments. Pulse check – ensuring effective communication in fragmented environments.

Establish clear communication channels, processes and protocols

Context: Implementing a strategic communication plan builds consistency in messaging and information sharing. In fragmented environments, stakeholders look for transparency and reliability in the information they receive and how they receive it.

Following protocols, aligning communication channels and content creates comfort in a changing environment.

Tactic

Do you have a communication plan?	*Do you have guidelines to streamline content production and distribution?*	*Do your external communication channels present a consistent message?*

Build strong relationships

Context: Regular meetings, joint initiatives, and networking opportunities can help establish trust and rapport among stakeholders, making it easier to share information and coordinate efforts. In time-poor schedules with competing priorities, it can be easy to postpone and reschedule meetings, and while this is sometimes necessary, maintaining these important connection points is vital.

Tactic

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Do you have an effective internal communication plan?	*Do you provide opportunities for regular engagement among internal teams?*

Embed two-way engagement approaches

Context: Two-way communication can involve conversing, giving advice, answering and asking questions or negotiating terms. Established and consistent communication approaches enable conversations to flow, avoid information-sharing to 'dry up', and ensure stakeholders know and understand upcoming changes.

Tactic

Do you have established channels for two-way communication channels?
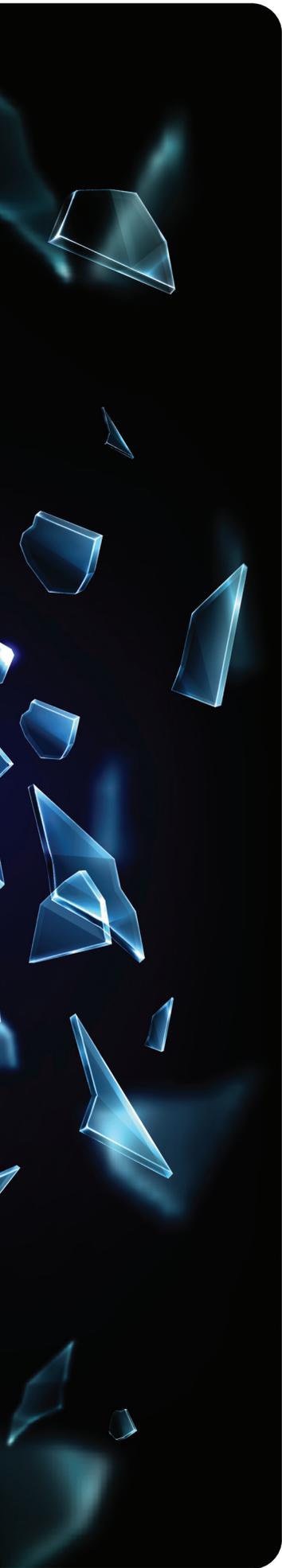
Create a common vision

Context: Aligning stakeholders on a shared vision can help to reduce the impacts of fragmentation. Facilitating workshops or collaborative sessions can help identify common goals and establish a sense of collective ownership. This process fosters alignment and encourages collaboration, ensuring everyone works toward the same objectives.

A strong and consistent narrative developed and agreed can help stakeholders work together and within different disciplines towards a shared goal.

Reinforcing a vision and goals, taking time to celebrate success and achievements, acknowledging challenges, and reviewing progress provides the ongoing motivation and commitment required.

Tactic

Do you have a forum for collaboration?	*Is your corporate narrative well-known & understood among employees?*	*Do you celebrate achievements as an organisation?*	*Do you have a forum to measure employee attitudes & provide opportunities for feedback?*

Promote a culture of accountability

Context: The fast-paced and evolving nature of the health industry can see shifts and adjustments to goals, workloads and priorities. It's important these are communicated, and individuals understand their role. Regular check-ins and progress updates can reinforce a strong and open culture.

Tactic

Do you have a plan for communicating change within your organisation?	*Do you communicate regularly with stakeholders whether you have updates or not?*

Leverage senior leadership team

Context: Leadership communication is how leaders inform and inspire others, from giving instructions and feedback to moving through change programs. Leading by example and engaging regularly builds confidence in stakeholders.

Tactic

Are your executive leaders visible to employees?	*Do they engage consistently with employees?*

At Phillips Group, we understand the complexities organisations in fragmented environments face. We have extensive experience supporting organisations in effectively leveraging and optimising opportunities and combating challenges through best-practice communication and engagement approaches.

If you have gaps in your communication and engagement approaches, we can provide support.

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