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Oral Presentations

Crossing Boundaries, Creating Change: A Competence Framework for Bridge-Builders

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Purpose: This study aims to develop a comprehensive competence framework for professionals facilitating cross-sector collaboration, innovation, and systemic change across organisational, disciplinary, and cultural boundaries. It addresses the current gap in clearly defined competences required for effective bridge-building roles in educational and organisational settings.

Methods: The framework builds on established theoretical perspectives including Systems Thinking (Jesiek et al., 2018), Social Capital Theory (Putnam, 2000), and Adaptive Leadership (Heifetz, 1994; Zhang & Guo, 2020, 2021). These perspectives informed the design of focus group sessions conducted with professionals working on complex challenges within innovation hubs and higher education environments. Thematic analysis was applied to distil recurring patterns and critical competences from these conversations.

Results

The findings highlight three interrelated domains of competences essential for bridge-builders:

- **Strategic competences** – such as navigating political dynamics, setting direction, and enabling innovation;
- **Relational competences** – including network-building, stakeholder engagement, and facilitating collaboration;
- **Adaptive competences** – like creative problem-solving, iterative design, and process facilitation.

Practitioners emphasised the importance of context-sensitivity and flexibility, pointing to gaps between theoretical models and lived realities. In particular, adaptive responsiveness and political sensitivity surfaced as core practical competences not always foregrounded in existing frameworks.

Conclusion: By connecting conceptual and empirical insights, this study delivers a robust and practice-informed competence framework for bridge-builders. It offers a foundation for capacity building, assessment, and policy development aimed at strengthening collaborative leadership across boundaries. The framework contributes to meeting today's multidimensional challenges through inclusive and systemic change processes in both educational and societal contexts.

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Keywords: Bridge-building, cross-sector collaboration, competence framework, systemic change, adaptive leadership

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