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Public sector managers of human services - their challenges and strategies

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ABSTRACT

Middle managers of human services in the public sector have a unique role that allows them to be part of the lives of clients and their families by implementing the strategic vision of political leaders. The expectations of middle managers can be complex and contradictory and therefore challenging. This research identifies the challenges middle managers of human services in the public sector encounter and the strategies that they have developed to deal with these. The support that senior managers in public sector organisations can offer to their middle managers in this process is also discussed.

The study is qualitative and placed in a post-modernist position and social constructive perspective. Data is collected through the use of semi-structured interviews and examined using an interpretative thematic approach.

The analysis identified a range of challenges for middle managers in the public sector and strategies these managers use to deal with them. Interestingly a number of identified challenges are also identified as a strategy depending on the support middle managers receive from the senior managers in their organisation.

The findings identify that a strong strategic vision needs to be in place in public sector organisations to develop clear roles and responsibilities for middle managers with allocated resources. Middle managers need access to training, supervision and networking to deal with additional challenges such as changes in funding and information management.

Recommendations are made to public sector organisations to support the development of effective strategies to deal with the challenges identified by their middle managers. Recommendations are made to middle managers in the public sector to prioritise and advocate for their own needs and requirements as they do for their clients and their staff.

This research will support both senior and middle managers in public sector organisations in finding strategies to support middle managers to fulfil their role effectively.

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