

## Article: Case Management and Think First Completion

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**Abstract** This article considers the findings of a small-scale study of the practice of case managers supervising offenders required to attend the Think First Group. It explores the interface between one to one and group-based work within multi-modal programmes of supervision and seeks to identify those practices which support individuals in completing a group.

**Key Words** *case management, programme, probation, Think First, attrition, one to one work, programme team, problem-solving, modelling*

### Introduction

Contributing to the discussion of evidence-based practice and its implementation in England and Wales, Morgan (HMIP, 2002) writes:

The evidence indicates that so-called What Works programmes – generally, at present, cognitive behavioural group work programmes – will not work unless delivered in the context of effective case management based on a full risk and needs assessment which tackles the multiple criminogenic factors.....which characterise most supervised offenders. Offenders' motivation to change has to be identified and nurtured. Participation in programmes has to be encouraged and supported. Their practical and socially excluding problems have to be tackled. (p.8)

These views are echoed in recent research reviews and discussions of practice (Harper and Chitty, 2004; Knott, 2004; NOMS, 2005). Based on a small-scale study of case management practice and probationer completion of an accredited programme, this article seeks to explore the nature of 'effective case management.' In particular it discusses the completion by members of the Think First group and the role of the case manager in preventing attrition.

Firstly, the study is placed in the wider context of the literature concerning the development of evidence-based practice. However, since this literature is broad and a number of helpful overviews and discussions are available (Crow, 2001; Chui and Nellis, 2002; Mair G. 2004; Burnett and Roberts, 2004) attention is confined to the nature of programmes, the dynamics of relationship-based interventions, the non-completion of groups, diversity and case management. Secondly, the methodology of the study is discussed alongside the influence it exerts both on the usefulness and on the limitations of the findings. The findings are then considered under three headings: practices undertaken by the case managers before, during and after offenders under their supervision participated in the Think First group. These findings

are then discussed and the article concludes with a consideration of the implications of the findings for probation practice, management and policy.

## **The practice context**

### *What is a programme?*

Responding to critical accounts of a lack of structure and evidence of effectiveness in probation practice, the 'What Works?' literature has emphasised research-validated, carefully constructed programmes of supervision (Chapman and Hough, 1998; Underdown, 1998). In essence, this study seeks to explore the relationship between the one to one and group elements of such a programme of supervision. However, there can be a lack of clarity in the effective practice literature in the use of the term 'programme' (McGuire, 2005). In particular, this revolves around the status of group programmes and the tendency to use the term programme to mean an accredited group.

In the ongoing 'What Works?' findings there remains a strong emphasis on multi-modal programmes in recognition of the many interrelated factors associated with offending (McGuire, 2002). Chapman and Hough (1998) are clear:

In this Guide the term programme is used to define the whole process of probation supervision of an offender, and not simply a group work programme. A programme is therefore a planned series of interventions over a specified and bounded time period which can be demonstrated to positively change attitudes, beliefs, behaviour and social circumstances. (p.6)

They go on to argue that interventions designed to support 'community reintegration', often delivered by other agencies, are fundamental to long term change and 'should be an essential part of any supervision plan' (p.64). This point about the term programme is stressed since, to borrow Morgan's term, the early implementation of evidence-based practice in England and Wales has been characterised by an element of 'programme fetishism' (HMIP, 2002, p.8). The implication here is that other strands of effective programmes, including case management, have been neglected. In this study the term programme is used in its wider sense and developments in thinking about 'desistance' lend support to this emphasis on breadth in programmes (Bottoms et al 2004; Farrall, 2002; Maruna, 2000; McNeill, 2004; McCullough, 2005).

### *One to One or Relationship-Based Work*

As Burnett (2004) and Burnett and McNeill (2005) have pointed out, some of the earlier 'What Works?' literature appeared to conflate one to one practice – however structured, however grounded in theory and however engaging of probationer participation – with unstructured, expert-led and inconsistent practices grouped, along with custody, as ineffective. This is not to imply that the 'What Works?' literature neglects the importance of the relational context through which interventions are delivered. However, it is to argue that the contribution made to effectiveness by the quality of the offender-practitioner relationship has been insufficiently recognised and articulated. In this context, it is encouraging that contributions evidencing the ways in which relational-aspects of practice contribute to effectiveness (Rex, 1999; Trotter, 1999; Miller and Rollnick, 2002; Harper and Chitty, 2004; NOMS, 2005.) have recently been recognised. This study focuses on the relational aspects of programme delivery seeking to explore not only what case managers do but how they do it.

#### *Think First and Attrition.*

As the generic accredited group for medium risk probationers, Think First has played a central role in the implementation of evidence-based practice in England and Wales. Developed by James McGuire, it comprises 22 sessions with additional pre and post group work. Making use of cognitive behavioural theory and drawing on a substantial history of evaluative research, it presents a sequence of participatory opportunities for members to learn pro-social skills.

There are pragmatic reasons for studying case management and attrition from Think First, and these relate to performance management, targets and funding. However, there are also important practice reasons relating both to public protection and to the nature of effective practice. Although early studies are tentative and as yet inconclusive (Hollin, et al., 2005; Roberts, 2004) there is evidence that those completing Think First (and other accredited groups) re-offend at lower than predicted rates over the subsequent two years. Although it is not certain that group-effect is contributing to this outcome (offender differences such as those in motivation, environmental factors and combinations of these must also be considered) it seems at least likely that it is factor. Those failing to complete tend to re-offend at greater than expected rates. Of particular relevance here is an association between case manager-offender contact and group attendance (Roberts, 2004). Kemshall and Canton (2002) pursue the issue in their report to the NPD (Welsh Division).

Attrition is seen as located in the interactions between offender, service and programme, and consequently solutions must reflect this. (p.4)

With regard to the role of case management they find that:

The level, content and quality of engagement with offenders pre-programme is crucial to attrition. (p.5)

There are, therefore, reasons for believing that completing a group and one to one work combine in some way to contribute to effective practice. The nature of that combination is the subject here.

### *Diversity*

Questions of suitability, diversity and support were raised by case managers involved in this study, especially in relation to gender but also race, age, literacy and ethnicity. There has been considerable comment on diversity and evidence-based practice (McGuire 2002; 2005; Shaw and Hannah-Moffat, 2004; Raynor 2003; Bhui 1999). Endeavours have been made to identify differences in criminogenic needs and learning styles between offenders of different race and gender (Durrance and Williams 2003; Gelsthorpe 2001; Mclvor 2004; Powis and Walmsley 2002; Rungay 2004). Programmes have been developed with minority offender groups in mind (Home Office, 2004). Although there were alternatives to locally-based, generic Think First open to case managers who took part in the study, they were few and not always easily accessible. Therefore, this discussion throws light mostly on how case managers approached diversity when referring probationers to generic groups.

### *Case Management*

The concept of a multi-modal programme delivered over time by a 'team' of professional staff often from more than one agency, implies a co-ordinating figure. This person is responsible for the considerable task of creating the whole programme, sequencing aspects of it, nurturing motivation, referring to various service providers, preparing for different inputs, reducing the impact of obstacles and crises, linking the learning in different aspects of the programme with the probationer's life, integrating the diverse aspects of the programme into a coherent experience and providing a consistent working alliance throughout (Holt. 2000).

Partridge (2004, p.5) found that whatever the model of case management adopted, the priorities were to 'acknowledge offenders' experiences and needs', offer continuity of key supervisor, and combat the experience of fragmentation which can occur in multi-modal programmes. She notes the benefits of a small case management team in offering direct contact and the role of 'flexibility and support' in maximising motivation. Following on from this, the NOMS Offender Management Model (2005, p.6) endorses, following Holt (2000), the key roles of case management in providing 'consistency, continuity, commitment and consolidation'. It acknowledges the emerging evidence to suggest that 'how things are done may be as important as what is done' (NOMS, 2005, p.13). This study approached the role of case management in the terms outlined. Case managers communicated their interpretation of the

role when describing their practice and, having looked briefly at the methodology of the study, this paper will consider what they said.

## **Methodology**

Two questions formed the basis of the study:

1. What practices do case managers carry out when supervising offenders whose orders include a condition to attend the Think First group?
2. Which of these practices seem to support probationers in completing the group work element of their programmes?

In order to find answers to these questions semi-structured interviews were undertaken with eight case managers between October and December 2004. Using the image of a 'time line,' the case managers were asked to describe what they did in supervising probationers at various points in the order, e.g. at initial contact, before the group commenced, etc.. The sample responded to an email request circulated by a probation area serving an urban community. Of the case manager group, six were female and two male. Two of the case managers were black including one male officer. Whilst the majority of those interviewed were within two years of qualification, two were more experienced.

The eight case managers discussed twenty one probationers of whom thirteen had completed Think First and eight had started but dropped out before completion. The imbalance towards completers may be linked to a need to celebrate success in the face of difficulties, although the request for participants may also have been interpreted as primarily seeking to identify practice with those completing. Those discussed were generally no longer under supervision and were selected by case managers for the memorable quality of the work. Interviews were of sixty to ninety minutes duration and were audio recorded. Practices described by case managers were coded and collated in groups under the point on the time line when they were carried out. These practices were then analysed and clusters of related practices identified which might, in the view of the case managers and the researchers, be supportive of group completion.

### *Limitations*

Clearly there are limitations associated with a project of this nature. For example, the small size of the sample precludes generalisation but allows for the raising of possibilities and the stimulation of debate. It is also accepted that many factors other than case manager practices play a part when probationers complete or drop out of groups (Roberts, 2004). The study sought to throw light on just one set of issues amongst a complex and inter-related set of

factors, albeit one which is of particular interest to practitioners and managers. The study focused specifically on Think First, and whilst it might be argued that many of the findings relate to supervision where other accredited groups are concerned, this cannot be safely assumed. It should, finally, be mentioned that the study was completed in a single probation area in an urban setting and practices relating to Think First may necessarily vary in some degree in other probation areas and in more rural settings.

## Findings

Case Managers were asked to describe what they did before, during and after their supervisee attended the Think First group.

### ***Supervision before commencement of Think First***

At the start of supervision, case managers stressed the importance they attached to listening to offenders and seeking an understanding of their worlds:

*I look at the OGRS but if you just go with this you lose the focus – you don't get the level of engagement*

*I can only motivate someone if I can relate to them as a person.*

Many such comments indicated that case managers regarded their engagement with the offender as a person as of key importance to the work of supervision. Consistent with this were remarks concerning support:

*I don't know if this made him want to move on but after this death (of his friend) he was different – settled down at work, found a girlfriend, got on better with his parents, completed Think First. Getting that support – he didn't expect that sort of support.*

*I made it clear that this (support) was related to supporting him and not to addressing the organisation's issues.*

It seems that an effort is made here to communicate an intention to help which is separate from, or over and above, the instrumental goals of the organisation. At the same time as forging this kind of working alliance, case managers also emphasised the importance of role clarification and transparency regarding authority (Trotter, 1999; Cherry, 2005):

*I introduce myself, what I do and who I am.*

*I make sure that the offender is clear about the roles of different staff.*

However, it was noticeable that the use of authority was distinguished from authoritarianism. Whilst committed to transparency regarding the context of compliance and enforcement, case managers tended to suggest that compliance was more likely to be achieved where the benefits of the programme were stressed than where (and this was often considered counter-productive) the sanctions following non-compliance were dwelt on:

*I don't focus on the punishment element. It's already there and that's the negative – I look at the positive, what they're going to take away from it.*

Related to the working alliance were patterns of communication which case managers associated with engagement, learning and completion of Think First. Amongst these were practices related to diversity:

*I raised it with the tutors beforehand so we could put measures in place. I asked him about his reading and writing in relation to Think First ... whether he would prefer to work in a group of 2 or 3 or with a tutor so others wouldn't know. Asked what would make him most comfortable.*

*We explored whether she would prefer to go to the Women's Centre rather than be the sole woman in an all male group. We both went to a planning meeting at the Women's Centre. She found this focussing on her needs helpful especially when I told her that I would speak to programme tutors if any problems arose.*

We were struck by those case managers who, rather than regarding diversity as a potential obstacle to group participation, tended to ask what was required to support that individual's participation.

Case managers stressed the importance of linking the group with the individual's own sense of what was relevant to their lives.

*Time put in setting the scene is crucial – where it's coming from, where it's going, so they won't think it's pointless – they won't want to do it if they think it has no purpose.*

In a slightly different way, some pointed out the potential concrete value of the group to the participant. Others took considerable pains to relate the skills taught in the programme to those aspects of individuals' lives and offending which they themselves had identified as problematic.

*I sell it as a personal development programme – if you were in the private sector... if you had to pay for it on the open market it would cost between £300 and £400.*

There are echoes here of Bottom's discussion of how case manager attitudes contribute to both normative and instrumental compliance (2001). Normative compliance stems from the sense of reciprocal commitment generated in a working relationship. The offender complies out of a sense of obligation with a supervisor, particularly when the latter is experienced as 'legitimate,' genuine and skilled. Instrumental compliance derives more from the offender's sense that it is in his or her interests to cooperate; there is something to be gained. In discussing effective relationship formation and motivation it would be unwise to neglect examples where this seemed not to work. Case Managers described instances where adverse circumstances overrode attempts to engage. One offender completed the group whilst remaining unchanged in attitude and offending behaviour. It would be wrong to imply that case managers can overcome all obstacles through good practice.

Case managers sought to develop habits of attendance through appointments at the same time each week and setting a schedule of appointments well into the future at the outset of supervision. Here the idea of habitual compliance is evoked as routines of attendance and communication are established as familiar parts of the offender's week (Bottoms, 2001):

*I point out the importance of ringing in on time if late and making the rules clear in order to minimise the chances of breach for technicalities.*

However, some case managers found this difficult when offenders were allocated to them long after sentencing and after a period when supervision had been undertaken by a series of 'holding' staff.

Many case managers offered forms of preparation for Think First over and above the set work. One obtained a poster depicting the group schedule so that offenders were aware of the sequence. Others engaged offenders in exercises similar in style to those encountered in the group. These practitioners emphasised the importance of offering forthcoming group members a supportive transition from one to one work to group work and some referred to discussing with individuals the anxieties this transition raised.

*I do work with them more based on motivational interviewing and a motivational balance sheet looking at costs and benefits and introduce Think First material to the issues we're already addressing – to make them feel more comfortable.*

*I used 'Targets for Effective Change' exercises in pre-group work to challenge his driving behaviours and attitudes.*



It was noticeable that some case managers regarded the Think First programme tutors as part of the 'programme team'. They established contact early and were proactive in sustaining ongoing contact often over and above that provided by the regular written sessional reports:

*In the beginning I introduced myself to the group workers by ringing them up and saying, 'Hi, I'm supervising X, pleased to meet you. I'm open to your views and professional judgement'.*

*I value their knowledge greatly and tell them how much I value their support.*

This practice tended to support open and timely communication between the case manager and the programme tutors once the group was in progress. It was sometimes rendered more difficult when case managers and programme tutors were in different buildings. It also seemed that case managers achieved this close communication despite heavy pressures of work. It would certainly have been less time consuming for them to minimise liaison.

Although case managers made efforts prior to the group starting to address individuals' needs this was sometimes experienced as too demanding:

*I was trying to encourage him to do too much, see too many different agencies and it would have been better just to focus on Think First. It's difficult because we have to refer people to basic skills because of targets.*

### **Supervision whilst the group was in progress**

Although prompt and frank in addressing problems with offenders, many case managers were able to construe them as learning opportunities. Rather than dwelling on blame, they used the difficulties as opportunities to model, teach and rehearse problem-solving skills. At the same time, the opportunity was taken to point out the similarities between these programme-related problems and the ones offenders faced in their own lives and which were associated with their offending. Here a case manager describes challenging disruptive behaviour in the group in a specially arranged one to one session:

*As he was always very respectful to me I put it to him, what if we are here talking and ten people come in and start messing around behind me, what do you do, do you join in? He said he would ignore them because it's not respectful. ... He wanted to know why he was being blamed when he wasn't the instigator. So I tried to pull out that he was being held responsible for his own behaviour in encouraging the other person.*

There were other examples of modelling problem-solving skills:

*It was in the evening and a nightmare journey – 2 evenings a week – a lot. I got him to identify the issues that made it difficult for him to go. We went through them together so that I could*

*understand. So rather than dismissing his concerns and rather than laying down the rules, 'you've got to be there 10 minutes early', I listened to what his issues were and we looked at ways of working round them.*

In seeking to resolve difficulties associated with group attendance and conduct case managers were prepared to hold three-way meetings where necessary between offenders, programme tutors and themselves. Communication patterns established earlier within the programme team supported timely communication and responses to developing problems.

*She had reservations about working with an all male group so we had a lot of pre-programme work preparing her. How I addressed it was, 'at any stage if you feel you can't cope come and tell me and the tutors will be informed'. I asked them to not to make an issue of it and not to mollycoddle her. I'd check in with her now and then – it was less of a problem than we thought.*

*There was definitely a sense with him of inferiority, 'I feel a bit stupid' so I showed him the screen from the tutors. No-one here is saying you're stupid, 'he engaged well', 'very good with so and so'. The feedback I've had is that you're doing alright. I printed it out for him to take away with him. He was doing better than he realised.'*

It was noticeable that positive feedback was regarded as important by many case managers. This too was facilitated by a free flow of communication between them and programme tutors:

*If there was something specific on the feedback sheet I would call him and say 'I really like what you contributed there'.*

Case managers tended to create ways of keeping in touch with individuals attending groups whilst not overburdening them with probation appointments. Some individual meetings were held, often on the same day as the group to avoid a separate journey. This was easier when the case manager and the programme tutors shared a building which was by no means always the case. Keeping in touch seemed to have the dual function of expressing both continuing care and continuing surveillance:

*We focused on his experience of the group and his learning on it – 'what are you getting out of it?*

*If you don't get the feedback and you don't mention it to them, how do they know you're monitoring them?*

Case managers highlighted the importance of attending the review and final sessions as an opportunity to model commitment to the programme and to demonstrate a valuing of the offender. However, given competing commitments, good practice was not always possible.

*Having a group work tutor at the 3 way was useful as she could talk about specific sessions and could point out progress.*

*That's what he needed, that recognition. Often the rewards our clients go after are the ones that lead them into trouble.*

### **Supervision after the completion of Think First**

Although not related to programme completion, case managers often placed emphasis on post group work in general and on reinforcement and generalisation in particular.

*I think she missed quite a few concepts – this has been coming out as we've been going through her write up.*

*We noted his strengths and weaknesses and how he had developed – recapped how he felt he wouldn't get through, poor self-image, but that he had got through.*

There was evidence that, when they assessed there to be a need, case managers in the sample continued with supervision after the group had completed rather than thinking of the completion of the group as synonymous with the completion of supervision.

## **Implications for Practice**

The findings give some indications as to the sorts of case management practices which promote compliance and learning and these indications are now explored.

### **Allocation**

What happened between sentencing and the commencement of a group was extremely variable in the examples described by the case managers. In some cases allocation to a case manager was fairly speedy whilst in others a series of different staff supervised on an interim basis prior to allocation. In one case, an offender was 'lost in the system' for four months but went on to complete Think First. Whilst some offenders joined a group quickly, others waited a long time. From the small sample involved here no pattern could emerge regarding optimum times for allocation to a case manager and to a group. However, it might be reasonable to argue from the findings for the prompt allocation of a consistent case manager to support the establishment of relationship, to address potential obstacles and to complete preparation. On the other hand, although the period following sentencing and before a group requirement is commenced is now subject to performance targeting, there is scope to argue that individual readiness may be the key factor and that this may vary between offenders.

### ***The Working Relationship***

The case has recently been made again for the importance to effective practice of the working relationship (Burnett 2004; Harper and Chitty 2004; NOMS 2005). It has been argued that the nature of the working relationship is the important issue for service users over and above methodology (O'Connell 1998). Such findings emphasise the importance of reading records and listening carefully to offenders in order that supervision is experienced as personalised and genuine. Support is regarded as important in the sense of empathetic concern for the individual and action congruent with that concern. Humanistic values and practices inform case managers' thinking here (Rogers 1962; Miller and Rollnick 2002). In relation to the completion of Think First, there appear to be dynamics of motivation and of engagement which are linked with the experience of receiving committed attention (Bottoms 2001). Holt (2000) quotes Intagliata on this point:

*The most influential aspect of the case management process is the quality of the personal commitment that case managers develop towards their clients .... the only service provider concerned with the whole client. (p.17)*

Also integrated into the working relationship were practices responsive to the non-voluntary setting. Case managers gave priority to explaining their role very clearly and to working through the expectations of offenders under supervision. Trotter (1999) and Cherry (2005) discuss this aspect of practice under the term 'role clarification'. Linked with this is the open but not persecutory use of the powers invested in the case manager. Here case managers seem to be achieving genuineness (Rogers, 1961) or legitimacy (Rex, 1999) in the eyes of offenders whilst avoiding the resistance inevitably brought into being by the experience of coercion (Miller and Rollnick, 2002). In the most practical sense case managers pointed out where the boundaries were and worked to establish routines of attendance and communication.

### ***Preparation for the Group***

A key part of preparation for Think First involved the establishment of its relevance to the offender. This was linked with listening to offenders and to understanding 'the reality of the social lives of offenders, and the communities in which they live' (Bottoms, Gelsthorpe and Rex, 2001, p.228). Case managers also made links between patterns of offending behaviour which troubled the offenders themselves and the intention of the group to point out and practice alternatives. It also seems important that case managers see the group as an important part of supervision and are positive about the potential benefits for the individual. Through pro-social modelling (Trotter 1999, Cherry 2005) offenders pick up expectations and attitudes from the cues of others. (see Miller and Rollnick (2002), who describe research regarding the impact of workers' expectations of outcome on actual outcomes in rehabilitative work).

Finally, the findings suggest specific preparation for the group. Case managers supplemented and individualised the preparatory elements of the Think First programme, often assessing a need to accustom participants to the concepts, language and participatory style of the group. Preparation also included listening to offenders' apprehensions and addressing these whilst addressing practical obstacles using a problem-solving approach.

### ***Creating the Programme Team***

The findings underline the importance for group members of the functioning of the programme team. Case managers can be proactive in initiating the flow of communication between themselves and programme tutors which will later be critical to managing difficulties, reinforcing learning and offering the offender an integrated rather than a fragmented experience of supervision. At this point, some obstacles to group participation may be best addressed in three-way meetings. Case managers gave examples of where issues of diversity such as gender and group membership were raised in such meetings and plans developed to combat potential discrimination.

### ***Contact and Communication Whilst the Group is in Progress***

Depending on the level of need assessed, contact was often maintained routinely between case manager and offender whilst the group was in progress. This is congruent with a holistic view of a programme of supervision although there are obvious resource implications which are discussed below. Other contact was more reactive. Communication between programme tutors and the case manager is built into practice via written records sent shortly after the completion of a session. Case managers supplemented this by establishing a routine of speedy telephone contact in case of difficulties. This had the advantage of allowing prompt problem-solving and the potential prevention of drop-out. Case managers described the practice of making contact with offenders following programme tutor feedback as a combination of care and surveillance. Offenders remained visible and important to their supervisors whilst, at the same time, knowing that anti-social behaviour would be challenged. Some case managers also contacted their offenders to acknowledge positive feedback from programme tutors. The need for recognition and reinforcement when learning were mentioned in support of positive feedback. Related to this last point is the importance of case managers attending mid-way and final reviews.

A problem-solving approach, capable of both confronting difficulties frankly and, at the same time, framing them as learning opportunities, characterised some of the best practice at all stages of supervision. Case managers promptly contacted offenders following feedback and often sought to identify how problematic behaviours in the group mirrored those involved in the individuals' offending. By adopting this robust but learning-centred approach the unacceptability of the behaviour was communicated without conveying the sense of something being essentially wrong with the offender. Rather than talking about problem-solving skills in the

abstract, case managers entered into a process of actually solving real problems with their offenders. Learning in this way is more immediate and entails an emotional process which renders it more memorable and transferable. Through attendance at sessions and their approach to problems, case managers model those attitudes and skills taught in the group. In this way learning is taught, demonstrated and reinforced in a coherent way by different members of the programme team.

### ***Reinforcement and generalisation***

In line with learning theory, case managers have the opportunity to reinforce learning after the group by looking with offenders at the programme tutors' report, by revisiting key moments of the group experience and by comparing thoughts and attitudes before and after the experience. In particular, they are well placed to generalise the learning from the group room into the individual's daily life. An important practice skill here was the ability to make links between ongoing issues for the offender and the patterns of thinking and acting presented in the group. As Holt (2000) points out, the remaining parts of the programme of supervision, perhaps associated with social factors, substance misuse issues and community reintegration (McCullough 2005), may offer opportunities to practice new and still unfamiliar cognitive and behavioural skills.

### ***Management and training***

If these understandings of effective programmes and case management are correct, then certain practice imperatives follow. For example, case managers must be resourced sufficiently to be able to carry out the demanding and continuous role described. This becomes an issue of programme integrity related directly to effectiveness. (Kemshall and Canton, 2002; Merrington and Stanley, 2004; Roberts, 2004). High case loads are likely to force practitioners to reduce or abandon offender contact when the group is running and contact requirements thereby met, and to place a low priority on post-group work by which time minimum contact requirements may be monthly. Likewise, if the role of case manager is as skilled as envisaged above, then there is a need for regular supervision. Such supervision should include a focus on crucial practice issues such as the carrying out of one to one work and the support of the programme team.

Training emerges as a priority when the spectrum and quality of skills involved in the achievement of effective practice is considered. The case managers interviewed often described practice which was enriched by a well integrated theoretical understanding. The implication here is that staff supervising individuals at all tiers of risk will require a theoretical and practice training of a quality and duration sufficient to support the development of such skills. Training for probation service officer (PSO) staff should reflect the increasingly important role they play in service delivery.

*There are no known treatment or training materials that will achieve their goals in the absence of trained, committed and adequately resourced staff. (McGuire, 2002, p.22)*

## **Conclusions**

The term case management emerged in probation practice alongside evidence-based practice and has often been associated with distant professional relationships revolving principally around referral and enforcement. It has, perhaps, been perceived as a means of 'de-traditionalising' (Nellis, 2005, p.39) the working relationship. The newer term offender manager has even greater potential for being understood in these ways. A conclusion of this study is that case management, offender management or the relationship-based aspects of practice, whatever they are called, cannot be constructed as impersonal and at the same time as effective.

Despite the under-development of the research-base for interpersonal aspects of effective practice (McGuire, 2002, p.28, points to the comparatively rich research evidence in the associate field of mental health), it would be wrong to suggest that this area is entirely neglected in formulations of evidence-based practice with offenders (Chapman and Hough 1998). The degree of neglect which does exist, however, may well have been amplified in the implementation of evidence-based practice where, as Raynor (2003) suggests, the emphasis was placed on creating the new groupwork provision and prioritising 'a cultural shift in the service' (p.339). Raynor goes on to affirm that 'case management now needs to become a priority' (p.339) and the emerging evaluations of the implementation of evidence-based practice also suggest that relationship-based work plays a significant role in effective practice (Roberts, 2004; Hollin et al, 2005). The widely reported attrition rates from accredited groups indicate, amongst other things, that an element of engagement is missing (Kempshall and Canton, 2002).

Although some retain reservations (Nellis, 2005; Lewis, 2005) a framework may be emerging for effective relationship-based work combining humanistic approaches with those developed more specifically in non-voluntary settings (Rogers, 1961; Miller and Rollnick 2002; Trotter 1999; Burnett 2004; Cherry 2005). This study has sought to identify how case managers use that framework when operating at the interface between two parts of a programme of supervision. On the basis of a small sample it suggests that the case manager is crucial to engagement with the programme and its different elements. If this is the case then 'end-to-end' supervision is to be welcomed alongside the 'human service' spirit of the National Offender Management Model and its emphasis on 'consistency, continuity, commitment and consolidation' in supervision (2005, p.6).

... the evidence upon which we have drawn all concludes that any positive impact which correctional measures can have upon offenders will rely heavily upon the personal relationships they experience with the various staff with whom they interact. (NOMS, 2005. p.6).

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