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Professional identity in children and young people's workforce

Original Citation

Professional Identity in Children & Young People's Workforce

A Small-Scale Research Study

Ceri Daniels & Sam McMahon (2010)

Context

- The researchers develop and teach on a range of professional courses designed for the children and youth workforce

- Idea for project came from student experiences shared in class and consultancy work with local authorities and the voluntary sector

Context

- Emerging issues from workforce policy & legislative changes (e.g. ECM and Children Act, 2004) emphasis on multi-agency & multi-professional working

- Significant structural reorganisation of Children's Services

- Exploring participants personal interpretations of how professional identity could influence or be affected and shaped by integrated working

Methodology

- Small scale - 6 front line workers and 15 managers

- A phenomenological approach based upon 'lived experiences' (Nicholson et al 2000)

- Methods included : Reflective Journals 'day in life of…' and Focus Groups

Data Analysis

- Multi-Professional Working 'Concept Framework' Anning (2006) Helped to provide initial structure to the emerging themes:

- Structural, Ideological, Procedural & Inter-Professional Dilemmas

  - Structural: coping with systems/management change
  - Ideological: sharing and redistributing knowledge skills and beliefs
  - Procedural: participation and reification in delivering services
  - Inter-professional dimensions : Learning through role changes

- Team or Individual concerns within these (McKimm et al, 2009, Model of Professional Identity)

Appendix 1

- McKimm et al, 2009
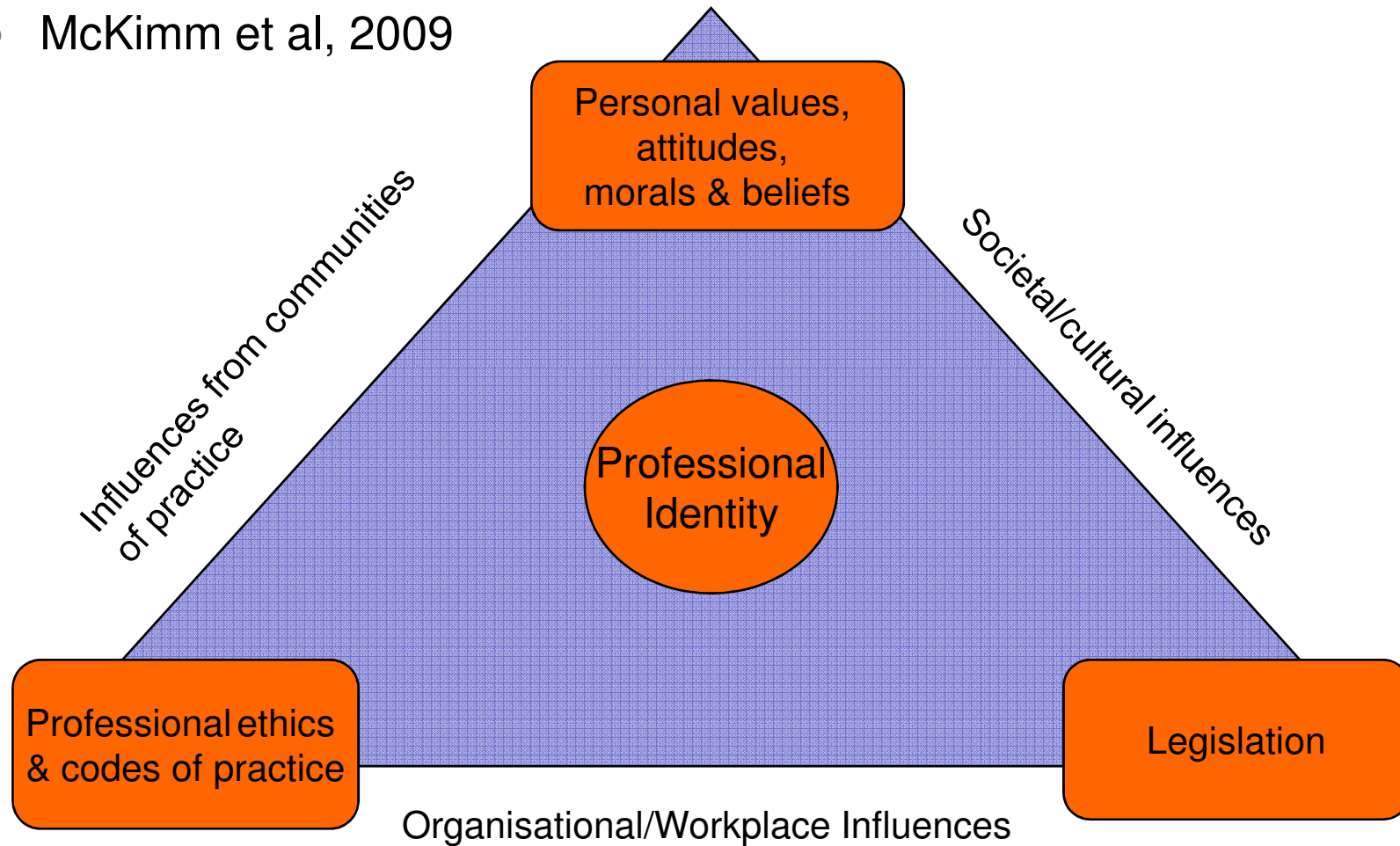
Initial Findings: Front Line Staff

- Very focused on client. Often anchored professional identity to these interactions

- Recognition & value from close colleagues – 'ego' bound up in how other practitioners perceived them

- Most saw management as '*problem*' or '*barrier*', rather than support

- Believed managers don't understand complexities & demands of different roles – sometimes poor deployment

Front Line Staff

- Pay & conditions important. '*Loyalty*' to staff key issue in Journals (but context of Single Status)

- Feel unsettled by constant change

- Little focus on wider early intervention & prevention agenda

- Professional Cultures 'colliding' but generally positive

- Partnerships with parents very strong feature

Initial Findings: Managers

- Key focus on supporting early intervention & prevention agenda (*Bigger Picture*)

- Ego & Power– how role, authority & own professional knowledge is perceived

- Authority – commissioning of services & staff

- Staff Morale - constant struggle

- Reported difficulties recruiting competent, experienced staff

Managers

- Does co-location need a rethink?

- Cross-agency partnership working focus (rather than individual work)

- Need for more shared training to enhance practice

- Importance of developing leadership capacity

- Destabilisation of disciplines & practice – painful but better for service delivery

Overview of Findings

- Front line staff depend on relationships with client group and other colleagues, rather than managers for their professional identity

- Managers' professional identity linked to strategic vision and 'power' in structure - less dependent on relationships

Overview of Findings

- Both groups focussed on inter agency working and felt this was positive

- Pace of change- unsettling for front line staff but more than this, managers moving at a different 'faster' pace. For example, re-thinking co-location

- Therefore lived experiences or context experienced at different times

Some implications for Professional Identity?

- Professional identity socially constructed: crucially dependent on context

- Important to understand context - this may be experienced very differently. Consider staff deployment example:

➢ Managers 'resigned' to recruiting and deploying people that may not be suitable due to time pressures and a pool of 'weak candidates'

➢ Front line staff perceive this as managers not understanding what the 'job' really entails

Implications Cont.

- Experience of context has a strong emotional dimension - linked to professional identity. Consider issue of Single Status Pay:

  - Front line staff experienced this as 'betrayal' by their managers. Real anger and upset expressed

  - Managers felt they were really 'fighting' for their staff (knew often 'unseen')

Implications Cont….

- Evidence of some cultural consensus and shared discourse about daily work experiences - can lead to strong Communities of Practice (Wenger, 1998). Consider where many front-line workers 'anchored' their sense of professional identity:

  - ➤ Participants reported high levels of effective communication & commitment to joint problem solving in their day-to-day experiences which '*validated*' their role/expert contribution

The 'Ego' Dilemma?

- Building on Anning et al's (2006) work, there is perhaps a fifth, distinct element in considering multi-professional teams & Professional Identity: the 'Ego' Dilemma

- Professional identity is formed at the junction where structural factors & 'self conceptualisation of the role' (Brott & Kajs, 2001) meet. This appeared to be concerned with 'ego' – how the self is seen

- Findings highlighted where managers and front line workers 'located' themselves (Bourdieu) and the importance of social & personal biography (Atkinson, 2004). Needs to take account of cultural factors.

Next Steps

- As providers we need to build understanding of the differences, possibilities and tensions multi-professional working can hold and encourage some shared effort to interpret and support this in a meaningful way

- Further research required into impact of the emotional experience of context & self-conceptualisation of roles & professional identity

- Context may change (pace or 'priorities' may be different for managers and front line staff), but emotional legacy remains