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Citation for published version

Deveau, R. and McGill, P. (2016) Impact of practice leadership management style on staff experience in services for people with intellectual disability and challenging behaviour: a further examination and partial replication. Research in Developmental Disabilities, 56 . pp. 160-164. ISSN 0891-4222.

DOI

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ridd.2016.05.020

Link to record in KAR

http://kar.kent.ac.uk/59329/

Document Version

Author's Accepted Manuscript

Impact of practice leadership management style on staff experience in services for people with intellectual disability and challenging behaviour: a further examination and partial replication

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Abstract

Background and Aims

Practice leadership (PL) style of frontline management has been shown to be associated with better experiences for staff working with people who may exhibit challenging behaviours (Anonymous, 2014). This study aimed to examine additional staff experience factors with a different, larger sample and to partially replicate the findings of (Anonymous, 2014).

Methods

This study was a survey of staff self-reported data collected as part of a larger study. Information was collected on PL and staff experiences of: stress, turnover, job satisfaction and positive work experiences.

Results and Conclusions

The results broadly supported Deveau & McGill (2014) and demonstrated an association between PL and greater job satisfaction and positive experiences for staff. Results on staff turnover were inconsistent. The positive impact of PL on staff experience was further supported by this study. Suggestions are made for further research.

Implications

These findings suggest further research is needed to examine the potential of interventions in frontline management/leadership practice to improve staff experience of working in challenging environments.

What this paper adds. Firstly, to the somewhat limited research literature on management/leadership in intellectual and developmental disabilities. Secondly, contributes additional evidence that a PL style of frontline management has beneficial effects upon frontline staff's experience of working in challenging environments i.e. suggests a new intervention in an important area of policy and practice. Thirdly, suggests that the IDD sector needs to place more emphasis upon frontline management development and practice.

Keywords: leadership, management, staff stress, challenging behaviour, intellectual disabilities

1. Introduction

Research focussed upon the experiences of staff who work with people who have intellectual disabilities and behaviour that may be described as challenging has generally demonstrated negative staff experiences e.g. stress, difficult emotional experiences and high turnover (Hatton, C., Emerson, E., Rivers, M., Mason, L., Mason, H., Swarbrick, R., Kiernan, C., Reeves, D. & Alborz, A.., 1999; Bromley & Emerson, 1995; Hastings, 2002). The receipt of social support from colleagues, especially the frontline manager, is important in ameliorating stress (Hatton et al., 1999; Rose, Horne, Rose & Hastings, 2004). Subsequently, attention has been drawn to the potential for positive staff experiences being associated with working with people with ID (Hastings, 2010; Lunsky, Hastings, Hensel, Arenovich & Dewa, 2014). Deveau & McGill (2014) suggested that the style of frontline management is also important i.e. whether managers use a practice leadership (PL) approach to coach, mentor and support improved staff performance. Practice leadership, as a style of management, was originally suggested as an important factor determining the quality and sustainability of support for people with ID, who exhibit behaviours described as challenging, by Mansell, Hughes & McGill (1994). Subsequently, research has explored the role and impact of the first-line manager directly responsible for the practice of staff supporting people with ID. One strand of this research examined the overall role and required competencies for frontline managers/supervisors in the USA and Australia (Hewitt,

Larson, Lakin, Sauer, O'Nell, & Sedlezky, 2004; Clement & Bigby, 2012). The 142 competencies defined describe a complex role e.g. including financial and buildings management. Practice leadership, refers to a more focussed aspect of the frontline managers role, specifically how they work with direct support staff to support better service user engagement in meaningful activities and relationships, whilst managing challenging behaviours. In this context, providing a PL style of management involves: focussing upon the quality of life of service users and how well staff support this, allocating and organising staff to deliver support when and how service users need and want it, coaching staff to deliver better support by spending time with them providing feedback and modelling good practice and reviewing the quality of support for service users to engage in meaningful activities and relationships, with individual staff in regular supervision and with staff teams in regular team meetings (Mansell & Beadle –Brown, 2012; Beadle-Brown, Mansell, Ashman, Ockenden, Iles & Whelton, 2014). The development of a quantitative measure of PL was subsequently used to examine the implementation of Active Support (Beadle-Brown et al., 2014) and to examine the relationships between PL and staff experiences when working in challenging environments (Deveau & McGill, 2014). Deveau & McGill (2014) showed that PL was associated with greater positive experiences for staff e.g. lower stress and burnout and better teamwork. This study aimed to further examine PL and its associations with improved staff experience through employing a different, larger sample with additional and alternative measures; to partially replicate the findings from Deveau & McGill ((2014) (the earlier study)). For example, the earlier study did not specifically measure job satisfaction, this study employed two measures of job satisfaction.

2. Method

This study used data from a staff self-report questionnaire gathered as part of McGill et al. (2016), a study examining the prevention of challenging behaviour in residential, adult social care settings. Ethical approval was given by the Social Care Research Ethics Committee and funding from the NIHR School for Social Care Research.

2.1 Setting

Data was collected from 2012 to 2014 in 24 residential settings provided by a large not-for-profit provider of social care services to people with learning disabilities and autism in England and Wales. Settings supported 1-8 adults with intellectual disability, at least one of whom in each setting had a recent history of displaying significant challenging behaviours.

2.2 Participants

Data were gathered from staff at two time points. Two hundred and thirty eight respondents (response rate of 95%) in late 2012/early 2013 and 94 respondents (response rate 82%) in early 2014. Only respondents completing the PL measure were included.

2.3 Measures

Information about staff sample characteristics and experiences came from the *Staff Experiences and Satisfaction Questionnaire* (SESQ) (Beadle-Brown, Mansell, Ashman, Ockenden, Iles & Whelton, 2014) which includes the PL measure.

The PL measure has 19 items examining staff reports of: the frequency, content of, and satisfaction with individual supervision and team meetings. Being observed by their manager working with service users and given feedback, coaching, correction and advice on problem solving regarding their practice (details in Deveau & McGill, 2014). The PL has a

maximum score of 64. The internal consistency and test-retest reliability of the PL measure has been reported as acceptable (Mansell, Beadle-Brown, Whelton, Beckett & Hutchinson, 2008; Beadle-Brown et al., 2014; Deveau & McGill, 2014).

Other measures employed in this study (as alternative, additional or the same measures as used in the earlier study) are grouped, as in the earlier study, to examine staff experiences of:

- Stress

    The *Malaise Inventory* (Rutter, M., Tizard, J., & Whitmore, K. 1970), has 24 items, each item (an emotional or physical/psychosomatic symptom) is answered 'yes' or 'no' with 'yes' answers being added to obtain the total score, giving a maximum score of 24 with higher scores indicating greater stress (an alternative measure of stress). The full scale Malaise Inventory has been reported as having validity and acceptable internal consistency (Rodgers, Pickles, Power, Collishaw & Maughan, 1999 ; Mansell et al., 2008).

- Staff turnover

    Length of current employment, a single item 5 point scale, from 'Less than 6 months' to 'More than 10 years' giving a maximum score 5 and higher scores indicating longer time working in current service (used in both studies).

    Expectation of leaving current employment within the next twelve months, a single item 5 point scale, from 'Very likely' to 'Very unlikely' giving a maximum

score of 5 and higher scores indicating greater likelihood of leaving (used in both studies).

- Positive work experiences

  Overall satisfaction, a single item 5 point scale, from 'Very dissatisfied' to 'Very satisfied' giving a maximum score of 5 and higher scores representing higher satisfaction (an additional measure).

  *The Dyer and Hoffenberg scale (*Dyer, J., & Hoffenberg, M. *1975)* of job satisfaction, with additional items, gathers information on e.g. attitudes to supervision/management, variety of and actual tasks undertaken and working conditions. Items are scored on a 5 point scale giving a maximum of 120 with higher scores representing higher levels of job satisfaction (an additional measure). The Dyer and Hoffenberg scale of job satisfaction has been reported as having acceptable test-retest reliability and internal consistency (Mansell et al., 2008).

  The teamwork measure, six items from the SESQ gathers information on team functioning e.g. how well team members work together, trust each other and support each other. Items are scored on a 5 point scale giving a maximum of 30 with lower scores indicating better teamwork (used in both studies). The teamwork measure has been reported as having acceptable test-retest reliability and internal consistency (Mansell et al., 2008).

Trust in manager, four items from the Freeman Management scale (Freeman, M. unpublished thesis, cited in Carpenter, Ring, Sangster, Cambridge & Hatzidimitriadou, 2000) gathers information on trust relationships e.g. 'Do you think your manager trusts you?' and 'How much can you trust your manager?'. Items are scored on a 5 point scale giving a maximum of 20 with lower scores indicating greater trust (an additional measure). Internal consistency for the full Freeman Management scale is reported as acceptable (Mansell et al., 2008).

2.4 Data analysis

Data was entered into SPSS version 22 and non-parametric statistics used in the following analyses:

PL total score was correlated with measures of staff stress, turnover, positive work experiences, length of time working in ID, days absent and age.

PL top/bottom halves (split at the median 39) were tested for differences with gender and having professional qualifications using Chi Square.

3. Results

3.1 participants

The average age of the (332) respondents was 38.7 years and 31% were male. The largest ethnic groups were White (70.5%), Black/Black British (20 %) and Asian/Asian British (5.3%). The majority were employed as support workers (89.5 %), the remainder had various managerial designations. Average length of working in the current service was 3.3 years and

time working in intellectual disability (ID) 5.9 years. 64.4 % were employed fulltime and 58.5 % had a professional qualification.

3.2 PL

This sample (n=332) had a mean PL score of 38.6 (SD 9.8). PL was negatively correlated with length of time working in ID (Rho -.171 p<.01 (n=319) i.e. staff with less experience scored their manager higher on PL. No significant relationships with PL were demonstrated for having a professional qualification, gender or age. Of these, only age showed a significant (negative) correlation to PL in the earlier study.

3.3 PL and associations

Table 1 Correlations between staff experience measures and PL total score for this study and the same measures or alternatives used in Deveau & McGill (2014)

	This study			Deveau & McGill, 2014	
	Measure	N (mean, SD)	Rho (p)	Measure	Rho (p)
Stress	Malaise inventory	317 (3.8, SD 3.9)	-.200 (p<.01)	Burnout e.g. Emotional exhaustion	-.174 (p<.05)
				Cultural 'fit' e.g. Tolerant/staff oriented	-.386 (p<.001)
Staff turnover	Length current employment	316 (2.7, SD 1.0)	-.084 (ns)	Length current employment	-.199 (p<.05)
	Likelihood of leaving	329 (2.7, SD 1.3)	-.361 (p<.01)	Likelihood of leaving	.150 (ns)
Positive work experiences	Teamwork	326 (12.6, SD 4.5)	-.279 (p<.01)	Teamwork	-.284 (p<.001)
	Dyer/Hoffenburg scale	301 (91.1, SD 15.5)	.574 (p<.01)	Personal accomplishment	.226 (p<.01)
	Overall satisfaction	285 (3.8, SD 1.0)	.410 (p<.01)	Positive work contributions	.141 (ns)
	Trust in manager	331 (6.7, SD 2.4)	-.555 (p<.01)	Not measured	N/A

Note 1 all effect sizes are small to moderate

Note 2 Different sized n are noted due to missing data

Table 1 shows the correlations between PL and staff experience in category groups of:

stress, turnover and positive work experiences for this study and Deveau & McGill (2014).

The same measures of staff turnover were included in both studies and show inconsistent

results both within and between studies. The earlier study showed PL was associated with

staff having a shorter length of time in their current post and no significant association was

shown for this study. In this study PL was associated with staff being less likely to leave and

in the earlier study no significant association was shown. The SESQ Teamwork measure was

included in both studies and both showed PL is associated with better teamwork. The

additional measures of job satisfaction used in this study both show PL is associated with

greater job satisfaction. Staff experience of stress employed an alternative measure in this

study, the Malaise Inventory, see discussion. Both the earlier and this study showed PL is

associated with staff experiencing lower stress.

4. Discussion

4.1 Limitations

This study suffers the general limitations of correlation research in determining the direction

or presence of causality between the selected variables. This study was conducted in a

single organisation; which may have limited the variability of responses. The results for staff

turnover are inconsistent both within and between the studies. This may indicate the

measures used miss important reasons for staff turnover and a need for more direct measures that reflect changing experiences. Relating staff self-report measures to real experience and perhaps, more importantly, relating staff experiences to those of the people they support remain important research goals, and highlight significant limitations of this study.

4.2 Implications

In summary, the results of this study broadly support Deveau & McGill (2014). PL is associated with staff experiences of lower stress and greater positive experiences in teamwork, job satisfaction and trust in manager. That similar results are obtained from different samples with only partially overlapping measures increases confidence in the robustness of these relationships. For example, the Malaise Inventory includes somatic symptoms; whereas Emotional Exhaustion and Cultural Fit focus upon the cognitive aspects of anxiety and stress. Therefore, examining the results from both measures suggests PL has a more extensive relationship with staff experience of stress and anxiety. In addition, the two job satisfaction measures accesses a further specific relationship between PL and staff experiences. Likewise, the different nature of samples suggests the relationship between PL and staff experiences is found in a variety of contexts. The earlier study comprised a staff sample from 21 services (five organisations) where the frontline manager self-selected to join the study after showing an initial interest in PL. In contrast the staff sample for this study was from a single organisation where staff were enabled and encouraged to participate, as part of a large scale research project. These different sample characteristics is illustrated in the response rates of 45.3% in the earlier study and 95% & 82% in this study. It is likely that the distribution of PL scores reflects these different sample characteristics;

being somewhat higher at 67.8% of the PL total score in the earlier study and 60.3% of the PL total score in this study. It may be that participants in lower response rate samples are more motivated to answer surveys and give more favourable responses. Therefore, variability in PL is potentially related to a variety of sample characteristics e.g. settings, response rates and age. Further research is needed to explore such sample characteristics and PL to suggest robust relationships.

Both studies rely upon self-report data collected at a single point that may not reflect variability over time. In addition, other variables may 'contaminate' self-reported experiences. For example, in this study younger staff reported higher PL and in the earlier study both younger and less experienced staff reported higher PL. This may reflect general aspects associated with youth or that they have greater need for PL. Wider measures of PL have been developed including observation, interview and documentary evidence (Beadle-Brown, Bigby & Bould, 2015) which will enable comparisons of self-report with wider evidence of actual manager practice. Other research suggested by this study includes: a focus upon the inconsistent findings on staff turnover suggest linking PL style of management (with implied high expectations of staff performance and values) with staff turnover, using more direct and potentially longitudinal methods.

In conclusion this study demonstrates further evidence that a PL management style promotes positive staff experiences when working in challenging environments.

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