

Guest Editorial

Reshaping leadership and management: The emperor's new clothes?

Most of us are familiar with the globally iconic tale of the 'Emperor's New Clothes'; a tale of two weavers who promise an emperor a new suit of clothes, said to be invisible to those unfit for their position. The honest response of a child from the crowd however innocently reveals that the Emperor parading before his subjects in his new 'suit of clothes', is in fact not wearing anything. This tale reminds us of the challenges we have face daily to stay with the courage of our convictions. Sight becomes insight, and in turn prompts action. This folklore tale, we suggest resonates with many contemporary issues within social work management. Neoliberalism and new public management has continued to have an immense impact on the trajectory of social work as a profession and the role of leaders and managers within this (Lawler, 2000; Harris, 2003; Dustin, 2007). The development of managerialism and the introduction of management techniques are seen to present innovations in social work and social care organisations. However, the extent to which these constitute comprehensive innovations might be debated. Important inter-personal skills which form a key element of professional social work practice, might be found in some areas of effective management. Other initiatives might indeed be seen as innovatory. We need to be able to reflect critically on developments in management and leadership to be able to decide the extent we are witness to 'Emperor's New Clothes' or to genuine change, a distinct and material, so to speak, set of clothes.

The papers in this special edition, spread over two issues, attempt to examine developments by exploring a range of experiences and perspectives – both academic and practice-based, of leadership and management roles and functions in social work. Our call for papers has led to responses from as far afield as New Zealand and South Africa whose contributions call for more liberating and affirming social work services, at variance, however, with traditional critiques and rhetoric on their management. Research and debate in the area of social work management and leadership is still in its infancy and our intention in the call for papers was to stimulate an increase in confidence both of the leadership and capability of managers in the sector and of the profession's ability to describe and analyse its own experience in these areas. Leaders and managers play a challenging role in developing organisational culture and their voices are crucial to establishing a more critical and realistic dialogue between practitioners and academics and between practice professionals and their managers. This special edition is also

timely in that we are also witnessing an attempt to provide more recognised professional pathways to foster better leadership within workforce development initiatives.

So the enthusiastic response to our call for papers for this special edition of *Social Work & Social Sciences Review* on Leadership and Management allows us to publish two issues. In our first issue, there is an examination of the impact of neoliberalism on social work services from different parts of the world. These illustrate how the introduction of management and market influences, together with the trend for globalisation have radically changed the face of state social work, its role and core functions, the nature of its institutions and the multi-faceted and complex influence of the state in care. This has necessarily involved a highlight on management roles and management activity through which a number of uncomfortable tensions are seen to have emerged between professions and managers. The second issue focuses on a broader range of topics associated with leadership and management development. It will illustrate recent initiatives which have contributed towards our understanding of how we might foster a greater degree of ownership of professional services by managers and their impact on the people they manage.

In the first paper of this first issue, writing from her professional experiences as a social worker, manager, policy officer and more recently as an academic researcher, Petrie examines the current challenges and possible future strategies for managers of services to 'children in need' following changes in organisational structures and culture brought about by increasing marketisation. She charts the gradual preoccupation of social work managers with meeting contractual targets and the performance of services for 'children in need' within a market paradigm. This, she claims has shifted social work away from its traditional educative, supportive and advocacy functions. Comparative deficits in the well-being of children in the UK with other European peers and more recent attention and level of criticism of managers following high profile enquiries in the UK, have placed enormous pressures on managers of children's services. She analyses, for example, the dichotomies arising from government policy imperatives. These appear, on the one hand, to call for more holistic and community based outcomes but on the other, through the promotion performance management mechanisms, fragment elements of service provision leading to piecemeal responses, as for example, in the recent reconfiguration and distribution of services to children. In short Petrie argues that 'children in need' have become mere commodities to be exchanged for payment between needs assessors and welfare providers mediated by short-term contracts which emphasises the burden of costly support rather than any social assets. Her article calls for the reversing of such fragmented management of assessment, commissioning and provision within children's services. Unless managers can harness a more coherent response built on a wealth of evidence which runs contrary to what we know about children and their experiences and lives in a way that reinstates meaningful relationships.

In the paper from New Zealand, Webster explores the values, place and function of social care leadership and management and bravely advocates for the potential to integrate good or high performance within a managerialist environment. This highlights

social work values in the interaction between managers and staff, where social work managerial philosophy determines organisational design and thus influences practice. Webster draws on the organic qualities of both indigenous approaches from Maori 'social work models of practice - a very refreshing approach. He also draws extensively on critical social work literature, the realities of new public management, traditional scientific management theory and cultural theories to illustrate the polarized discourse and subsequent tensions between everyday social work and management practice. Webster's paper ultimately advocates a whole systems development in which an integrated framework can emerge to facilitate an emergent frontline team leadership model. He offers four pathways for creative change. Webster's argument is a complex one in which he does not hesitate to confront the issues.

Both Webster and Engelbrecht remind us that the supervisor-worker relationship is the key encounter where the influence of organisational authority and professional identity collide, collude or connect. Writing from South Africa, Engelbrecht examines an alternative management paradigm for management supervision. Using a vignette from the South African welfare context which developed from the post Apartheid political system in 1994, he suggests that managers employ a strengths-based interpretive framework to support those they supervise. Based on key concepts such as empowerment, partnership, facilitation and participation, a strengths perspective, Engelbrecht argues, offers greater transformative potential within the supervisory relationship. Within the organisational context, a more developmental service delivery model of supervision is promoted, building on the supervisees' strengths, competencies, capacities, capabilities and resilience.

Building on his own research Engelbrecht reveals that traditional functions of supervision are intrinsically based on a traditional problem-oriented paradigm whereas the supervisor needs to adopt a more facilitative role that focuses on focus on talents, skills and competencies. His paper offers us a model embracing five core components which graphically illustrates an interpretive framework which is empirically grounded in a transformational leadership style.

The last paper in this issue of this special edition gives us a glimpse into the challenges faces by more senior managers who are managing from a distance. This is not a voice we are often able to hear. Jones, an experienced director of social services and senior academic, provides us with a number of examples of the importance of delegation and accountability and how being at a distance from the front-line is no longer a defence or a safe position for senior managers when a tragedy occurs or services are seen to be failing. Building on concepts around transactional and transformational leadership we are reminded of the responsibilities of senior managers to be constantly developing a vision for better futures. This is indeed a challenge in today's socio-economic and political environment. Jones' vision of leadership is one in which all those involved within an organisation and its community must be encouraged to exercise choice and control away from a deficit model. Senior leaders have a big role to play in facilitating the rebalancing of power in which all transactions harnesses people's competence, capability

and capacity. Such distributed leadership styles builds on peoples real experiences and rely on local meaning making to shape their own work and processes. Not an easy task to let go in today's risk aversive environment.

We hope you enjoy this first special edition and we are thankful to those leadership and management 'philes' who gave up their valuable time to support us in the peer review and advisory process.

Trish Hafford-Letchfield and John Lawler

Guest Editors

P.Hafford-Letchfield@mdx.ac.uk

J.Lawler@Bradford.ac.uk

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