

## Editorial

This is the second special issue of the *Review* to focus on leadership and management in social work. The first issue concentrated on the impact of managerialism on social work organisations and practice, exploring this from both academic and practice perspectives. Papers highlighted the tensions between management and practice, which result from the introduction of management into social work. Not surprisingly, such tensions are identified as enduring in social work, as in other professions, and are not amenable to 'quick-fix' solutions. As we saw from these papers, dealing with ambiguity, conflicting demands and ideological tensions is a continuing facet of social work, and a continuing theme in the lives of social work managers. The current context for social work practice, organisation and management is no less challenging than it has been for the past two decades and more. Current social work services are subject to several important pressures:

- increasing demand and expectations of services provided;
- further restrictions on resources available and the pressure to work in ever more economical, effective and efficient ways;
- the continuing need for involvement of the users of services in their design, provision and evaluation;
- the need to work across organisational and professional boundaries.

Social work as a profession is not alone in facing such challenges, as professional colleagues in, for example, housing, health and education are well aware. However, due to the enduring tensions within the profession, for example, the care-control dilemma, responding to need or demand, and the relative infancy of the profession compared to some others, the response of social work managers and leaders to this context is particularly important.

The first special issue provided the basis for further discussion and examination, having identified key current themes in relation to social work leadership and management. In this issue we turn to specific themes of development and learning in relation to leadership and management. The papers here provide an exposition and examination of some of the consequences and implications of the themes identified in the first issue but make more explicit the significance of giving attention to advancing the skills, knowledge and expertise of leaders in the sector. The future of public service, including social work, is increasingly uncertain. As a result, the challenges for managers and leaders are particularly acute. As noted, there continues to be a need for the involvement of service users and professional practitioners in the design and delivery of services and, due to the factors already noted, a need for social work managers and practitioners to

be confident, innovative and flexible in dealing with such uncertainty. Learning and adaptation are key to developing the necessary facility to deal with these uncertainties. For this reason, learning and development form the main themes of this edition. Each paper considers the need to highlight and apply learning in order to promote service quality and to maintain social work values, regardless of operational context. However, we must bear in mind, despite our optimistic hopes, that many if not most organisations are particularly inept in learning from experience (Gould, 2000; Senge 2002). Again the papers draw on both practice and academic perspectives. Interestingly, in addition to the principle themes of learning and development, each paper highlights the importance of increased awareness of the need and potential of and for collaborative working as a means of the application of learning.

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In the first paper in this issue, Lambley notes the changes in service provision and the position of managers held responsible for the introduction of a more performance-driven and impersonal culture within social work organisations. She highlights the issue of 'blame' within the social work culture generally and the blame attributed to managers for changes which are not viewed positively by social work practitioners. Rather than reinforce mutual perceptions of social workers and their managers as operating in constant conflict, she highlights the actuality and potentiality of more collaborative relationships between managers and social workers, in some respects as a reaction to the policy imperatives which impose managerial values and practice.

Gray and his colleagues similarly examine the provision of social work services and argue the need to develop a more collaborative culture through recognising communities of practice, rather than viewing social work organisation as being characterised by opposing management and practice sides. Both these papers recognise the external pressures on social work organisations and comment on the resulting performance driven culture which operates to the potential detriment of social work values.

Chalfont and Hafford-Letchfield also develop the theme of culture, in the context of the provision of services to people with dementia. They highlight the current status quo within dementia care and its institutional and institutionalising practices. Their paper welcomes the positive developments in strategic direction for dementia care but notes the difficulty of implementing strategic change in a service which suffers relative neglect in terms of resources and status. In considering how best to develop practice they too argue the need for greater involvement in the design and delivery of services, at all organisational levels and especially argue the need for a 'bottom-up' approach to leadership in dementia care.

The papers by McAllan and McCrae and by Leinster both consider the important issue of the training and development of managers and leaders in social work. It is easy, as Lambley notes, to blame managers for difficulties in the profession but both Leinster and McAllan and McCrae highlight the lack of attention to and opportunities for planned and systematic training and support for the development of the necessary

skills and experience within social work management, drawing on the perceptions of managers themselves. It is often easy to forget that a major challenge for social work managers is to manage a staff of highly trained professional workers (of whose body they are usually a part) when their own experience is relatively less and their opportunities for development and learning are limited.

Overall then, the themes of this issue are primarily those of learning and development in social work management and leadership. These themes are not new given the current emphasis in policy on leadership development and the challenge of developing leadership programmes within the sector (National Skills Academy, not dated) which have yet to become mainstream or attract substantial funding. These principal themes lead to others recurrent in each paper – themes of: culture, of empowerment and involvement, and of collaboration. In our editorial for the first issue, we noted the paucity of published information on management and leadership in social work. We have been heartened by the positive response to the call for papers for these special issues and encouraged by the range of contributors. These indicate, together with submissions which we have been unable to include, that there is much thoughtful reflection taking place with regard to management and leadership in social work and with regard to the specific needs of those working in such crucial roles in the workforce. Furthermore, primary in this reflection is the imperative to address the needs and demands of service users and to maintain and reinforce the values of social work practice.

We hope that the papers which form both volumes of this special edition will stimulate further debate and reflection and help to facilitate the development of more academic and empirical work to inform effective leadership and management practice of the future.

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## **References**

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