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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A B S T R A C T

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 (Deveau & McGill, 2014). This study aimed to examine additional staff experience factors with a different, larger sample and to partially replicate the findings of (Deveau & McGill, 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 and 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.

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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.

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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 et al., 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 and 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, and 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 et al., 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 et al., 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 and 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 and 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 et al., 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: