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Developing a CPD Framework in a time of organisational cultural conflict

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Abstract

The need for continual organisational improvement is of critical importance for organisations like that of children's integrated services where there is both a legal and moral authority to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children. However, the implementation of children's integrated services since 2004 has produced a series of challenges in the forms of contextual barriers, changing political climates, organisational change and cultural issues (Robinson et al., 2008). A perennial challenge for children's services has been the ability to meet the CPD needs of the various professions that constitute its workforce without seemingly destabilising the wider organisational norms and beliefs.

This paper specifically focuses on the current development of a CPD framework for an entire children's integrated workforce, and the impact the organisational culture, as well as the professional sub-cultures are having. Reference will be made to members of the workforce being cultural carriers and the role of leaders in relation to organisational change (Schein, 1993 and Lucas and Kline, 2008). In seeking to answer the real world problem of developing a CPD framework for multiple professions within a single organisation, the paper will identify the factors that need to be taken into account.

Keywords: *Continuous Professional Development, children's integrated services; organisational culture, co-ordination, integration*

Introduction

This paper describes an empirical study that is concerned with the development of a CPD framework for a local authority children's integrated service. The study is not solely descriptive but seeks to provide a solution to a real world problem of CPD provision for a workforce that consists of a variety of different professions that include teachers, Nursery Nurses, Social Workers and Educational Psychologists. The study, entitled 'A CPD Model for Integrated Services: From research to practice' began in February 2016 and represents the next phase in

a project that originally began as a Knowledge Exchange between a local authority and The Open University.

This study makes use of a case study approach as it allows a research stratagem to be adopted “*which involves empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence*” (Robson, 1993). This stratagem also affords for a prism effect that illuminates different aspects of the phenomenon (Vallis et al., 2000). The notion of a prism effect stems from the premise that analysis can be undertaken on numerous levels and allows for the portrayal of the phenomena at an inter-related level (Drake, et al., 1998; Eisenhardt, 1989; Luck et al., 2005 and Stake, 1995).

The aim of the study is to develop a CPD framework that will enable the local authority to effectively and coherently manage the competing priorities of registration and ongoing CPD for their workforce. The theoretical perspective of the study is addressed in the research question which is simply, what model of CPD can provide the local authority with a framework to support and develop its workforce?

Children’s integrated services

The emergence of children’s integrated services began as a result of a deliberate policy decision by New Labour to redesign the welfare state, reduce social exclusion and develop a wealth creating economy (Frost and Parton, 2009). Further impetus for integration came with the enquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié. The enquiry by Lord Laming highlighted significant failings on the part of key statutory agencies like the Police, health, and children’s social care to communicate and work together, this resulted in the Green Paper, “Every Child Matters” (Chief Secretary to the Treasury, 2003). Specifically, the Green Paper heralded a refashioning of children’s services by clearly indicating that statutory and voluntary sector agencies had a necessary and important legal duty to prevent the emergence of specific risk factors for children. The Green Paper also brought into sharp focus the need for early intervention into childhood thereby reducing the negative effectives of social exclusion (Frost and Parton, 2009).

As part of solidifying and reinforcing the reform New Labour introduced The Children Act 2004 where the emphasis of the legislation was on promoting and extending partnerships and joint working, as well as improving accountability between a range of key statutory agencies that included health, social care, education and criminal justice (Frost and Parton, 2009). Importantly, this major reform signalled New Labour’s intention to improve the outcomes for *all* children through the delivery of integrated frontline services that would work together. This approach promised the end of multiple assessments, long waiting times and limited access to specialist services (Miller and McNicholl, 2003).

In response to the Children Act 2004 local authorities across England adopted various organisational structures and arrangements that reflected their local context which resulted in mergers between statutory agencies or joint commissioning boards that had oversight of pooled budgets (Miller and McNicholl, 2003). Other measures introduced at the time to promote integrated working were the Integrated Children’s System billed as a conceptual framework and practice tool to improve the outcomes of children in need and their families via common assessment, planning and review. Another measure was the Common Assessment Framework a tool that enabled all members of the children’s workforce to take responsibility for assessing

a child identified as having additional needs, and then acting as the Lead Professional in order to agree and co-ordinate the intervention from various agencies.

Despite all the promises of improved working, the formation and functioning of children's integrated services, according to the literature, have been characterised by four broad problems namely organisational, cultural, professional and contextual (Allnock et al., 2006 and Robinson, et al., 2008). The organisational problems have taken the form of an inability to work to the same strategic objectives because of the pull and push of national and local policy drivers. Other organisational problems include resource availability, budgetary allocations and a lack of strong leadership on the part of senior managers (Robinson et al., 2008). Contextual problems often take the form of ongoing re-organisations, short-term policy developments and financial insecurity (Allnock et al., 2006 and Robinson, et al., 2008). The issues in relation to professionals working on the front line have been documented as differences of opinion in relation to information sharing, varying interpretations of confidentiality and differing explanatory frameworks. For example, Frost and Robinson (2007) when looking at the complexity of multi-disciplinary teams highlighted that social work professionals drew on a causative model, whilst health professionals would draw on a medical model that proved to be challenging when seeking to agree interventions for children and their families. (Leadbetter, et al., 2007 and Frost and Robinson et al., 2007). In terms of cultural difficulties, these are illustrated by professional stereotyping, differing levels of qualification and experience, as well as values which have led to a divergence opinions, as well as a lack of trust and respect between professionals. From the academic literature it would seem that the the four broad problems outlined have impacted upon those in receipt of services. Robinson et al. (2008) point out that the promised improved outcomes for children and their families has been negligible given the debilitating effects of the organisational, workforce, contextual and cultural problems.

Early findings from the study

A stated previously the mixed methods approach adopted is inclusive of semi-structured interviews with service managers and members of the senior management team, as well as a review of documentation from the organisation. The interviews that have taken place thus far have been digitally recorded and analysed thematically. The research team will use this analysis to inform other elements of study including a survey that is to be sent to the workforce, and also questions that will be posed to focus groups consisting of service users and carers. As the study is in its early stages it will not be possible to provide details of the key findings or particulars regarding the CPD framework. However, we are in a position to share details about emerging themes.

Themes arising

An 'us and them' culture

Scholars have presented a number of definitions for organisational culture that have ranged from '*the way we do things around here*' (Lundy and Cowling, 1996) to a combination of language, beliefs, myths, behaviours and norms (Schein, 1993). Panagiotis et al. (2014 p.416) have stated that, '*organisational culture plays an important role in the general functioning of an organisation.*' Robinson et al. (2008) identify that a cultural problem specific to children's integrated services is the dominance of one agency above all the others that results in

dissatisfaction on the part of other agencies. The research team has identified that this is a theme that is commented upon by a number of respondents:

There is a lack of recognition by senior managers of other services....There is also a lack of recognition of other non-qualified staff and there is no clear career developmental pathway. (Respondent A)

A lack of leadership across the piece because as I say, the leadership discussion is about social work. It's not about the 40,000 other children who are not open to social work that are being supported by the integrated workforce. It's all about social work caseloads. (Respondent B)

It could be posited that the dominance of one professional group over another has possibly led to an 'us and them' culture that seems to have permeated all aspects of the organisation including learning and development. Evidence of this was apparent when we asked individual respondents to comment on the CPD available to staff:

No access to CPD for any others than social care. There are no courses offered by the Council that would address the needs of my team, we are not allowed to access external courses....certainly a feeling of they're special, we're not. The irony is that we are providing training to social workers but can't get our own training which is not playing well with my team (Respondent A)

All the talk in the Council is about statutory social work so they're always the priority. Every discussion is about them, their needs, their support. (Respondent B)

The existing culture, according to participants is further reinforced through a senior management team that is mainly dominated by social work professionals:

We only now have a social work lead and they do not understand the needs of education, and so there's a blind spot; even though we have a manager who is trying very hard to get education back up on the platform,agenda. When you're one voice out of five, because there are five principle offers, you're voice won't be easily heard. (Respondent A).

The dominance of senior leaders with a social work background is not the only issue that explains the phenomenon of competing cultures within this the children's integrated service. Respondents pointed out that within a period of eighteen months there had been three different directors and that the senior management team had and continues to be in a state of flux. Lucas and Kline (2008 p.153-154) have explained that where managers develop and maintain an 'us and them' attitude they are in effect reinforcing the cultural boundaries by formulating a sense of 'groupness' that is rigid and impacts the way in which professionals work and learn together. Schein (1993) contends that within any organisation there will be a number of sub-cultures all of which will have their own language and common assumptions. Another way of thinking about these sub-cultures is that each individual within a profession is a cultural carrier taking with them their own deep-seated values and beliefs that are maintained through the ongoing process of human interaction (Martins and Terblanche, 2003 p.65). The organisational culture of this integrated children's service at this stage could be described as the clashing of sub-cultures at numerous levels which makes the overarching tasks of co-ordination and integration extremely difficult to achieve.

Fixed Mental models

Another theme that has appeared at this stage of the research project are the mental models held by different professionals and the way in which they seem to be a barrier to integrated working and learning. Mental models, according to Steiner (1998 p.196), can enable a climate of co-operation which allows for meaningful exchanges of information if workers are flexible and not influenced by deep-rooted negative assumptions. It is evident from the comments made by respondents that for those professions that traditionally sit within education they are conscious of their cultural membership, and are emotionally attached to mental models that protect and value their identity, and which also convey membership and belonging, whilst at the same time highlights differences:

We are trained to a very high level and that level of analytical thinking and sometimes um we, we don't always see that level of training in other professionals. Probably within the local authority we are the most qualified people, um and with that brings a level of arrogance and high expectations. So when we sometimes see lesser qualified people who may not be as good at writing reports because they have not had the formal training to write reports as we have had, we might be a bit disparaging. (Respondent A)

I was told I don't do proper social work and that I had not got any frontline experience. Well for me working with children and families in an education setting is a lot of frontline experience. I wonder if people don't understand the role. (Respondent D)

Schein (1993 p.41) argues that organisations develop various sub-cultures because of the way in which individual groups have different learning assumptions, as well as different notions about reality making it difficult for them to co-ordinate and integrate, as this requires the meshing of sub-cultures. Consequently, it might be difficult for some professions to do this as they may, for the purposes of professional identity, maintain a sense of difference in order to secure their sense of status (Leadbetter et al. (2007).

Discussion

Although we are still in the early stages of our study the research team is of the view that the themes identified will continue to emerge because of the different mental models that are held by various professions that make up the children's integrated service that is the subject of the study. Furthermore, based on the data gathered thus far, it would seem that there may also be a subliminal theme which is that frequent organisational restructuring is in and of itself becoming a culture. Critically, it can be argued that it is these cultural characteristics and mental models that can have an impact on learning within an organisation and they also have significant implications for the CPD framework that will ultimately be devised.

What needs to be taken into account when devising a CPD Framework?

The academic literature in relation to CPD indicates that there are a number of definitions pertaining to its meaning and there are other descriptions of it by various professional bodies (see Friedman and Phillips, 2001). Despite the multiplicity of meanings for CPD this should not detract from the benefit it has to enhance workforce productivity, unless one settles on the notion that Mugisha has, which is that nothing summarises organisational context better than organisational culture, particularly one that is fractured by sub-cultures (Mughisha, 2009 p.52).

It is recognised that before beginning the work of designing a framework it will be essential to bear in mind that CPD is a contested concept (Friedman and Phillips, 2001), and therefore it will be critically important to develop an approach that promotes confidence and provides reassurance not only to professional bodies but also service users (Ahlgren and Tett, 2010). The design of the CPD framework must also take account of the cultural dimensions which are complex, conflictual and include micro-politics (Eraut, 2004). Additionally there needs to be an appreciation that with each professional sub-culture there will be varying definitions of what constitutes CPD which are informed by differences in career stage, preferred learning style and individual ambition (Friedman and Phillips, 2001). Attention will also have to be given to building in enough flexibility to absorb changes in policies, programmes, service delivery and regulatory requirements. Therefore, various facets such as formal and non-formal learning; study leave; ring-fenced time may all need to be used as a means to promote and secure learning and development across the entire organisation (Friedman and Phillips, 2000 and Eraut, 2000). There will also be the need to ensure that the framework devised clearly articulates the purpose of CPD and that there are inherent characteristics of consistency, suitability and self-reflection (Friedman and Phillips, 2000).

Conclusion

In closing, at the heart of the development of a CPD framework will be the assumption that learner identity and workplace culture do interact in a way that either opens or closes down opportunities for learning (Ahlgren and Tett, 2010). Ultimately, the ideal framework should be built on existing knowledge and skills, and also an understanding and appreciation of the various sub-cultures, with a view to achieving a holistic approach that allows individuals to see beyond their role towards joined-up smarter ways of working which are realised through a myriad of formal and non-formal learning opportunities both within and without the organisation (Ahlgren and Tett, 2010).

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