Workplace identities when working in partnerships

Place of work: Criminal Justice Team Leader Glasgow

<u>Why might workplace identities feel threatened by partnership working, and how should a manager or leader respond?</u>

<u>Introduction</u>

I start this assignment by firstly examining workplace identity and what this means. I then discuss this within the context of how workplace identify may feel threatened by partnership working. Finally I then identify the ways a leader may respond to address these challenges and promote positive partnership working with both other agencies and within a team. Within this I bring in examples of my own experiences and potential challenges of establishing a new team.

<u>Workplace identity</u>

As cited in Lomax (2013), The Kings Fund, identifies that having an understanding of peoples workplace attachments and identifications is essential in achieving an effective working environment. This of course fits neatly into the importance of team awareness as discussed in the ' the four building blocks of a fully rounded caring manager' (MacKian, Russell & McCalla, 2013, p. 7).

Working for a number of years in the criminal justice setting and in partnership with a number of agencies such as the police, Scottish Prison Service, Assist and voluntary agencies, I resonated with Lomax's (2013) explanation of how workplace identity is formed. And can identify how individuals from differing professions gain a sense of workplace identity

through a process of training and workplace culture. You have your own regulations and professional bodies.

Interestingly I can identify through my own observations (and as highlighted by Lomax, 2013) that professions such as the police and social work tend to adopt their organisations values and norms. With this evident in the language, clothing and certain behaviours of people working within these organisations. For example, go to a joint training event or formal meeting with the police and social work, and the difference in clothing (formal and work casual) is very evident.

Workplace identity is grounded in social identity theory. That along with shared values, beliefs and norms of the organisation you are working within, you also gain a sense of security and feel part of the larger profession; you gain a sense of comfort and comradery. As cited in Lomax (2013) this can provide an important source of support for professionals, while without this can be linked to high levels of stress and anxiety (Haslam and van Dick, 2010). Important for me to consider managing within the growing culture of agile, lone and home working.

As a leader I need to consider how my workers own values come in to play in the process of workplace identities. As people bring their own mixture of social identifications such as background, gender and class, and these actively shape workplace identities.

As cited in Lomax (2013), research indicates that successful organisations select their staff who fit their values (Northouse, 2010). I can identify having

been involved recently in recruitment it is apparent we selected based on the values of the organisation and the vison of the team.

Partnership working

Lomax (2013) describes partnership working, as working jointly where there is a shared commitment, an interest in positive outcomes, and a desire to overcome the inflexibilities of boundaries (p. 193). Essentially it is a team of professionals representing different professions, sectors, levels of seniority and expertise.

The reasons for partnership working makes sense and in many areas a statutory requirement. The Community Justice (Scotland) Act 2016, places a duty on agencies such as the police, local authorities and third sector, to plan and deliver services together and empower people in the community to contribute to plans and actions. With some cases, for example MAPPA cases, partnership working essential in the service delivery of ensuring public protection.

Whatever section of criminal justice I have worked in, it is evident, as cited in Charlesworth (2013) and highlighted by Findley (2012, p. 195), we would be limited in what we can offer and doing a disservice to service users if we did not have partners. With enquiry cases, for example, when there have been domestic homicides (Scottish Government, 2016) identifying ineffective partnership working as a key contributing factor to lack of protection for the victim.

As cited in Charlesworth (2013), Hudson's (1989) steps towards partnership working and matrix provide a framework to identify how partnerships are functioning. As a leader starting up a new team my vision would be to be at the collaboration stage (where there are high levels of trust, common interests, joint planning and service delivery). However I am aware that the process of getting to this stage and managing tensions within workplace identities and new partnerships will be challenging.

As highlighted by Charlesworth (2013), I need to consider degrees of partnership in terms of the depth and breadth of the relationship and equally it is important to be mindful and clear about what and who is required (Glasby et al, 2011). For example, what organisations need to be engaged at different parts of a process. This is reliant on me identifying when collaboration is required and acting strategically. By ensuring, for example, when I am chairing a MARAC (multi agency risk assessment conference) that core required agencies are in attendance and non-core agencies present only when required.

Charlesworth (2013, p. 196) lists the benefits of successful partnership working in decision making. I agree, that whether you are working with a man on order with alcohol issues, or a high risk offender, partnership working does generally make a positive difference to service users.

Threats to workplace identity in partnership working

Partnership working should be part of the way you approach your day job. We all have a common goal (best service delivery) that we should appreciate differences in expertise and status.

However power relationships within partnerships can be difficult to manage and this is linked to workplace identity. Voluntary agencies can present as if they have a lower status than the police or criminal justice social work. This is compounded by the use of technical language and jargon in meetings. Which, can be exclusive, for the service user and the voluntary agency who may be supporting the service user and representing their views.

Having attended police or health led meetings, and the only social work professional in attendance, I myself have felt excluded in the partnership process. This highlighting issues around status and communication problems. I left some meetings feeling that the partnership was tokenistic.

Charlesworth (2013) highlights the importance of parties having an equal voice, being responsive to sharing power, operating on an equal footing. Clarke et al's research, cited in Charlesworth (2013), explored service users experiences of the relationships between power and knowledge and being involved in decision making around public services. With tension and power and hierarchy common issues.

However I have an appreciation that 3 rd sector agencies are powerful and key. Working with addiction recovery services in Glasgow, I fully appreciate the power volunteers have in not only having contact with service users and expressing their views, but empowering service users to contribute to plans and service delivery (with people with lived experiences shaping services). In reference to service users, as Charlesworth (2013) states, *' without them there would be no service in the first place'* (p. 190).

Recently along with informing changes in Glasgow's approach to domestic violence intervention, I represented the views of men who had completed the CHANGE (group work domestic violence programme) and their journey of change to an audience of Sheriffs, Solicitors and Social Work. With the purpose of giving the man a voice and creating an understanding of why this work is undertaken, the role of social work and why partnership is essential. Supporting the process of starting to build new partnerships.

In terms of issues to consider in partnership working and workplace identities, Charlesworth (2013) highlights the Research by the Institute for Voluntary Action Research Group. They found a lack of understanding about why professionals are expected to work with each other. In terms of the four building blocks of a fully rounded caring manager' (MacKian, Russell & McCalla, 2013, p. 7) this suggests that goal and contextual awareness were absent.

As cited in Simons and Lomax (2013) Max Landsbergs description of the core of leadership, is the ability to *' create vision, inspiration and momentum in a group of people'* (p. 61). Vison involves having clear goal and contextual awareness and supporting your team and partnerships, to understand what is the vison and what is expected in their day to day job and why.

Conflict in partnership working

With differing professions come differing key performance indicators that may create or force differing priorities. Recently I was involved in a conflict in relation to a hospital discharge and a homeless service user with complex needs. This required skilful negotiation, understanding and bringing back to

our shared vision. Creating a positive partnership working between health and social work.

Conflict can arise over differing beliefs of good practice. Tensions are constant in the joint management of sex offenders with the police and social work. As cited in Lomax (2013), Davis (2000) highlights that rather than based on sameness, we should welcome and value differences in understanding and value different perspectives. Janss (2012) argues that conflict can be a good thing as it brings about change and a motivating factor. This is crucial in all areas of social work but especially in public protection. With this diversity of police, addictions, health, housing, advocacy services all bringing their unique perspective and understanding and expertise to the table in managing risk robustly.

As cited by Lomax (2013) *" affirmations, acknowledgement, and recognition are important, but it is the questions and challenges that arise from differences that are vital. A diverse group can arrive at a place no individual and no like-minded group would have reached"* (Davis 2000).

As a manager I need to think carefully about what conflicting identities mean. As a leader, it will be important for me to facilitate the team's development from the very beginning. Considering that people who fear change, feel threats to their workplace identity particularly threatening.

How I would respond as a manager and leader

Leadership approaches

As it will be important for me from the beginning stages of the development of the team to facilitate the team's development and partnerships over time, my approach is crucial.

Lomax (2013) makes reference to Obholzer's suggestions of having a psychologically informed approach to leadership. A key element will be for me to recognise the psychological processes which underpin relationships between managers and staff and consider how my responses can either to helpful or unhelpful to workplace identification. I have experienced a workplace where middle managers opinions and suggestions were not valued, and I experienced how it corroded confidence and most likely people's sense of professional identity.

In TMA 2 I considered managing and implementing change. As cited in Lomax (2013), Czarniawska (2000) highlights that within the change process, the importance of creating a space to listen to staff. That by talking with staff about their values and beliefs, you gain an understanding of workplace identities from which you are in a stronger position to manage change.

It is important for me to be successful in creating this type of open environment and appreciate the identities of my staff and understand the culture of their organisation (for example ASSIST). As cited in Lomax (2013) this approach supports high quality care (Lynch, 2011) and health system innovation (Hendy and Barlow, 2012).

I drew inspiration from Lomax's (2013) proposed style of authentic leadership and the individual values diagram (George, 2003). This approach supports positive workplace identities. It priorities person centred care and

relationships. It is in line with a values-based approach to leadership, by being present, observing and listening. Essentially being emotionally intelligent and available. By embracing and developing this approach in my leadership style, I will enhance by personal awareness, team awareness and contextual awareness.

Having worked in various projects in which I have been listened to, it is evident that leaders who are prepared to listen actively, can achieve a more effective workplace, as staff have a sense of purpose and find value in their work.

Ten- step delegation tool

Being at the early stage of a new team forming, I am thinking about the needs of the team within the four building blocks of a fully rounded caring manager. Within this considering what role individual members play in team processes and starting to identify who is good at planning, networking, and who will fulfils the different roles.

By using the ten-step delegation tool I can use the safeguards this model provides to ensure the right person is delegated an appropriate task and supported. This is a fair and proactive approach to allocating work within a team. Knowing from practice the importance of allocating fairly, I can also identify the benefits of using allocation purposefully in developing staff. I can also use this tool when chairing meetings with varying partners or as part of negotiating.

Tuckman's framework of group development

Being involved in team formation, I will be managing the team through different stages of team development. I found it useful to consider, as cited in Charlesworth (2013), Tuckmans framework of group development. That being the forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning stages of team development. This will be a useful model to reflect on why my team may be working a certain way, at a particular time and the development of partnerships.

Though I do need to take a critical approach to applying this model, as I recognise that not all stages are always experienced.

For me this model highlights the importance of goal awareness and supporting the team through this process to function effectively.

Open space meetings

As detailed by Charlesworth (2013), Harrison Owen's use of an open space meetings supports different workplace identities and partnership working by encouraging a different way of thinking as team. In starting up a new team and supporting its development, I can identify the benefits of applying this approach within some team meetings and will seek to incorporate this within the team.

My role as a leader is to support individual staff to feel they are contributing and they are worthwhile and valued. By using this approach I will be encouraging working towards a shared vision. This is bringing out the best in people and inspiring people and encouraging them to inspire each other.

Stakeholder mapping

Teams and partnerships need to be able to communicate if they are to achieve the end goal and develop trust. It is important for me to proactively create opportunities for the team to work cohesively and be active in sustaining cohesion. This is a programme of work ongoing currently with joint training taking place on a regular basis. Building trust is crucial in achieving successful partnerships.

Having considered the stakeholder mapping tool (Mackin and Simmons, 2013), I believe this will support me to identify who is important to develop relationships with and support me to maximise my use of time.

Conclusion

By examining workplace identities, partnership working including threats and challenges to workplace identities within partnership working, I was able to not only reflect and learn from my own past experiences, but consider this within the challenges of setting up a new team and new partnerships.

Importantly I identified leadership approaches that will be important for me to aim to adopt in their ethos, and in answering this question I pin pointed some useful tools that will support me in the process of aiming to be a fully rounded caring manager. A manager who strives to be available, present, emotionally intelligent and considers her approach within the context of having personal awareness, contextual awareness, team awareness and goal awareness.

As quoted by Aristotle (384-322 BC) *' The Whole is greater than the sum of parts'* i. e. to deliver the best and safest service, working as a team and in partnership is essential.

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