

Document name: Management and managerialism pp153-156
Document date: 2009
Copyright information: Proprietary and used under licence
OpenLearn course: Supporting and developing resilience in social work
OpenLearn url: <http://www.open.edu/openlearn/health-sports-psychology/supporting-and-developing-resilience-social-work/content-section-0>



Manager and managerialism

Malcolm Payne

Payne, M. (2009) 'Management and managerialism'. in Adams, R., Dominelli, L., and Payne, M. (eds) *Practising Social Work in a Complex World*, London, Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 153-156.

older people, having had a good life, are less important than children or, being slow and frail, are irritating. So, she may benefit from an organisation that has inculcated among its staff a business-derived ‘customer care’ approach, which would overcome some of the ill effects of these exclusionary attitudes. A worker’s official and legal authority in some aspects of social work does not prevent them being open to influence and a client’s direction and self-determination in many other aspects of the worker–client relationship and in their lives. The fact that Maria must assess Mrs McLeod for services, in a way that is partly legally defined, does not prevent her from respecting and responding to Mrs McLeod’s preferences and attitudes.

Obviously, clients are ‘users’ of services, as Mrs McLeod is, and the role of the social worker is sometimes in relation to services. However, social work also develops positive helping relationships with clients; they do not just ‘use services’. We saw that Mrs McLeod would benefit from a conception of social work like this. Carers have also become more important in social work thinking. An important social movement emphasises the role that carers play in providing for social need in all societies. Legislation and official guidance have sought to give them rights to contribute to assessments of services appropriate to the person they care for and to have their own position assessed (CSCI, 2006). However, looking at their position critically, their whole being should not be defined by the caring role; they are themselves citizens and members of wider communities. Therefore, they have a political role in social provision that transcends the limited role of ‘carer’.

The language we use about the people we serve implies the approach we take to the management of our service, our political conception of its nature and our attitude to the people involved. Whether it is oppressive and regulatory or enhancing and empowering is disclosed by the language of our management approach. We can use this language to understand the nuances of people’s perception of their position and our role. This is also true of our colleagues. Thus, an emphasis on ‘businessology’ discloses a managerialist assumption about the appropriate way of managing an organisation. Similarly, a language of health (‘patient’) or education (‘student/pupil’) might disclose a medical or educational model of clients’ needs.

Organisational structure and culture

Much management thinking concerns how the organisation is structured (the traditional focus) and its culture and style (a more modern focus). This aspect of management is about accountability. When we think about structure, we are asking ourselves: ‘How do I understand how I fit into this collection of people?’ When we think about culture, we are asking: ‘In what historical and social traditions do I relate to these people and how do they relate to me?’ In a cultural view, our work is not bounded by the organisation. Instead:

- It relates to clients.
- It derives from social interactions and policies.

- It interacts with others' activities in our multiprofessional and community networks.

Traditionally, we ask these questions about the organisation internally. In recent years, however, management has also been concerned to see how these issues affect the organisation's relationship with people outside the organisation. This concern is both with 'partnerships' with other organisations involved in the network of activities, and with 'customer care', that is, how the organisation responds to the people it serves. Clear and positive relationships with customers and 'suppliers', such as people who refer clients to us, ease the work of an organisation, provided they are pursued genuinely, rather than as a veneer of responsiveness – Lymbery and Millward pursue this approach in Chapter 13.

'New public management' emerged in the 1990s. It is a managerialist conception of management within the public sector, treating the public organisation as the organiser, enabler and promoter of services, rather than always being the direct provider (Clarke et al., 2000; Askeland and Payne, 2008). It seeks to disperse power over service decisions, replacing it with public control over the resources that pay for the services rather than the services themselves. This control is exercised through setting targets and performance indicators to achieve compliance with policy objectives. Sometimes central government sets the targets and indicators mainly for local government, but the same conception informs contracts where local public authorities commission voluntary and private organisations to provide services.

This is important for social work management because social workers have become the assessors for new public management service provision. Their major relationship with the public is on behalf of managerialist approaches to their role and practice. However, it is possible to see organisations in a different way, so that while managerialism exerts surveillance and control, it also supports variety and alternatives. Rather than seeing the organisation as a machine, in which accountabilities are structured in linear ways, we can see organisations as systems of interacting groups, with many different cultures, relationships and influences (Bilson and Ross, 1999).

Newman (1996) suggests that organisational culture is not always (or perhaps never) an integrated whole, closed to outsiders and outside influences and consensual in its decision-making. Culture may be a site of contested values, practices and symbols. It may be analysed and changed. A concern of modern management practice is to focus change where there are contested values and practices. In Mrs McLeod's case, the central conflict between the managerialist care management objectives of her managers and the practice possibilities open to Maria is a site of contested values and practices between the open possibilities of social work and the closed assumptions of centralised managerialism. However, within managerialism, there are also elements in tension. Identifying and presenting Mrs McLeod's needs effectively within the organisation offers opportunities for Maria to build on the importance of clients' views in the managerial model of organisational practice.

Seeing organisations more flexibly, so that models of influence are possible that provide alternative sources of power for workers, clients and carers, can help workers to find ways to gain leverage on behalf of clients. This is the aim of the personalisation

policy, which has developed from the development of direct payments and independent budgeting approaches to care management in adult social care (see Adams et al., 2009a, Ch. 24). Instead of the care manager assessing clients and carers and organising services for them, a partnership between client, carer and care manager creates a shared plan, which is costed. Services are then organised by the client or carer, perhaps aided by a user-led agency. The practitioner becomes an advocate, supporter and facilitator in 'self-directed care'. The objective is to encourage the interplay of influence.

The personalisation policy thus recognises that organisations are not monolithic – having a single, powerful centre – but contain contending cultures, a variety of centres of influence, and opportunities for external influence to move them. This offers a focus for critical thinking about organisations. Thinking critically leads on to finding alternative modes and sites of action within and outside the organisation. Thus, again, we may see the same management approaches as containing control and opportunities for creativity on behalf of clients.

Work, management and social divisions

It may seem obvious that management is about work, but sometimes this is not considered. Everything about management connects with being in work. As soon as activities are carried out in an organisation, more than one person must be involved, because organisations are by definition a collectivity of people. Organisations require division of labour, responsibility and accountability among the people who work in the organisation. It also means that the people in the organisation must devise ways of ensuring that the organisation works together in some way.

The first point is that management takes place in relation to employment. Personal management involves organising our lives to report for work on time, wearing appropriate clothing, being efficient in keeping appointments with clients and using our skills to answer the telephone or emails appropriately. Organisational management lays certain responsibilities on the organisation and us. Among implied conditions of employment contracts in the UK are that we must cooperate with our colleagues, obey reasonable instructions and work as required. The organisation has a responsibility for organising and planning the work appropriately and protecting our health and safety while we are doing it. Buildings must be planned and laid out, heated and lit, furnished and equipped. Salaries and wages must be paid.

The second point is that work carries obligations, because we are paid and therefore are accountable to those who pay us for the work we do. This may involve doing things we do not want to do. It may also require us to account for our time to others, through the hierarchical system of an organisation.

The third point is that employment has social and psychological consequences. It provides personal support and validation and structures our time. Being part of important social structures, employment can also reflect and incorporate power relations and social divisions within wider society. Thus, many organisations face problems in offer-

ing equal opportunities for employment and advancement to employees. Employing organisations may be just as oppressive as other social structures within the societies in which we live, because they take their form and practices from other social structures and must interact with them. Women workers, workers from minority ethnic groups and disabled workers are disadvantaged in employment and so less able to use their shared experience with clients as part of their practice (White, 1995).

Conclusion

Management is a practice, just as social work is a practice. Flowing from this point, critical thinking in management is just as relevant to management practice as to social work practice. Critical practice requires understanding context: the social structures and relationships within which the practice takes place. It also requires understanding meanings: what we mean by management and its different elements and how other people's meanings interact with our own. Does 'managing' mean 'coping' to Mrs McLeod, 'taking hold' to Maria's manager, 'taking forward' to Maria? How do these different meanings matter to the others? What do we do about them?

The succeeding chapters in this part take this forward. They examine some important aspects of personal management and organisational management, the context in which they arise and how they may be carried out. Each in its own way raises questions about how aspects of management may be understood in different ways. In doing so, they put forward their own positions about the aspect considered. However, there are always opportunities for the reader to examine critically the material presented, using the principle of this chapter, that management practice always incorporates both control and freedom. For example, many chapters focus on finding ways of increasing freedom from the constraint of conventional assumptions about their topic.

Inevitably, in the complexity of the tasks undertaken in modern organisations, professions and communities, different aspects of management will be contested. The accountability to her employer in her work role may constrain or liberate Maria's accountability to Mrs McLeod and her family and community as a citizen and human being, and her accountability to the values of a profession that requires critical and creative practice. Management means taking hold, taking on and taking forward those contests, those accountabilities.