A vision for social work leadership: Critical conceptual elements

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Content of presentation

Social work leadership in the context of:
- Ecological systems thinking
- People: creating culture
- Ethics, expressed through:
  - Authenticity, servant leadership, spirituality, personal and professional integrity
- Indigenous thinking and complex adaptive approaches
- Tensions between ethics, organisational imperatives and the worker
Ecological systems thinking applied to social work leadership: Four strands

- **Leadership** as people-related: Creating culture
- **Management** as related to ‘things:’ e.g. organisational structure

Leadership in the context of
- Welfare policy
- International business
- Public sector management
- New public management

Emergent research-based model of New Zealand social work leadership

Leadership in the context of
- Social work ethics, identity and standards
  - IFSW/IASSW
  - USA/UK/Australia/ Aotearoa NZ

Leadership in the context of
- Indigenous leadership thinking
- Connections with biological complexity thinking
Leadership and systems thinking

Systems thinking needs ‘systemic questions’
(Attwood, Pedler, Pritchard, & Wilkinson, 2003)

- ‘How can I best use my position to assist us all to make sense of what is going on, so that together we can contribute to sustainable change?’

- ‘How do I lead this organisation [or team] so that we can make the best possible contribution to the improvement and wellbeing of those we serve?’

Questions not prescriptions are needed: but what questions?
Leadership as socially constructed by problem definition: Creating culture

- ‘Problems, problems, problems’ (Grint, 2005)
- Leadership actions as socially constructed by the problems and challenges that organisations face.
- ‘Tame’ problems are management issues
- ‘Wicked’ problems are leadership issues
- ‘Critical’ problems are command issues
Grint (2005) Problems, power and authority

Increasing uncertainty about problem-solving

Wicked

Tame

Critical

Coercion
Hard power

Command
Provide answers

Management
Organise processes

Leadership
Ask questions

Increasing requirement for collaborative resolution

Normative
Soft power

Calculative
Leadership and social work ethics, standards and identity

- ‘Norms of right action, good qualities of character and values ... enacted by social workers in their work.’ (Banks, 2008)

- ‘Personal integrity, professional integrity and the integrity of the helping professions’ (Appleton, 2010)

- Ethical considerations and leadership: qualities such as authenticity, ethical values and servant leadership express ethical leadership (Greenleaf, 1977; Liden et al., 2008; Luthans & Avolio, 2003)

Peter Drucker said of Greenleaf: ‘The wisest man I ever met’
Leadership, ethics and indigenous leadership approaches

The literature identifies indigenous leadership as collective, organic, holistic and spiritual (Calliou, 2005; Durie, 1998; Ivory, 2008)

New Zealand context: Tipu Ake collective leadership as filtering agent for new ideas (Te Whaiti Nui-A-Toi, 2001)
Tensions between ethics, organisational imperatives and the worker

- Ethics and indigenous thinking vis-à-vis efficiency, performance and practice standardisation
- Managerial agenda meets professional ethics and the exercise of leadership
- A sense of powerlessness as ‘power-over’ leadership replaces ‘power-with’ leadership (Follett, 1995)
- Organisational demands for data may undercut ethics as underpinning everyday practice (ANZASW, 2008)
Tensions between ethics, organisational imperatives and the worker

- Are ethics a debating point or an integrative force for practice?
- Gray (2010) graphically depicts current social work practice as struggling to integrate those professional values in the context of powerful organisational ‘prescriptive’ imperatives
- How might we address these tensions?
- Pauline Leonard (2009) offers an integrative statement
Pauline Leonard’s (2008, p.253, 255) ‘journey’ towards integrating personal and professional authenticity captures and connects essential ethical properties with a vision of social justice:

’As a human being, I am responsible to the community for the creation of a just, caring, equitable, democratic society. Any aspects of my professional identity must be congruent with this aspect of my being ... I believe I tell the truth, as I know it, in striving for authenticity. Becoming authentic is a process, a journey, not an end in itself; it ... requires a continual examination of one’s multiple identities within the context of the communities in which one lives, works and interacts (italics added).’
References


References


