

“Exploring the experience of managers working within a ‘psychologically informed’ commissioning relationship”

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Approach of this Project

This project sought to expand knowledge within the high level Offender Personality Disorder Strategy objective of increasing competency and confidence in the Offender Personality Disorder (OPD) workforce, (Benefield & Joseph, 2012).

There is little specific data on the interface between the competence and confidence of managers in the OPD arena and their relationships with their commissioners.

Grounded Theory was the selected research approach because it allows for exploration of new ideas and concepts where new data and phenomenon may emerge, grounded in the data, that allow for new conditions to be considered (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2008).

Aim

To explore the experience of managers in the OPD system who work with commissioners who are using a 'psychologically informed,' approach to commissioning guided by the treatment philosophy of the OPD strategy.

Objectives

- 1) To explore 'psychologically informed commissioning' as a concept;
- 2) To explore the psychological processes between commissioners and providers working in community based offender personality disorder services and what impact this may have on service delivery.

The Project Question

“How do managers working in community services on the Offender Personality Disorder Pathway, describe their experience of the process of being commissioned to provide a service to offenders?”

Rationale for this Project

- ▶ Organisations have a psychological life within their formal structures which influence how they approach their work (Morgan, 2006; Miller & Rice, 1967).
- ▶ Teams have a psychodynamic life which informs how they approach their task and other groups. (Stokes, 1994; Bion, 1962a; Rice & Miller, 1990).
- ▶ Commissioning (and therefore commissioners) are part of the organisational landscape, especially in public services (NOMS Commissioning Support Guidance, 2011).
- ▶ In its purest form, commissioning is an impersonal business process (NOMS Commissioning Support Guidance, 2011). However this process can involve people at all levels of the commissioning process as a positive force (Sanders et al., 2015).
- ▶ The OPD Strategy proposes that working in a psychologically informed way with a challenging client group will promote positive outcomes for those involved (Benefield & Joseph, 2012).
- ▶ Therefore if commissioners adopt a psychologically informed approach, how do OPD managers experience this in their relationships with commissioners, in their feelings of competence and confidence, and containment of OPD services and their teams?

The Participants

5 respondents undertook 1-to-1 semi-structured interviews that allowed participants the opportunity to explore their experience. These people are;

- Community based Probation Service managers who are actively working in the OPD pathway, with a long standing relationship (1 year minimum) with OPD commissioners.
- The respondents manage services commissioned by the interviewer, so a heightened need for reflexivity was required to account for the duality of relationship with respondents.

The background features abstract, overlapping geometric shapes in various shades of green, ranging from light lime to dark forest green. The shapes are primarily triangles and polygons, creating a dynamic, layered effect. The overall composition is clean and modern, with the text centered on a white background.

So what do respondents report the
commissioning experience to be like?

The 6 themes...

Containment - Leadership

‘Power and authority is also really helpful ...it helps to have someone in charge.’ *Participant B, Pg7*

1. Genuine, shared & vested interest knowledge base in the subject matter;
2. Reciprocity/mirroring - got back what they put in and vice versa;
3. Setting and maintenance of clear boundaries and expectations;
4. Provision of structure within the boundary - able to check things out;
5. Occupying both personal and organisational positions of power & authority appropriately, and balancing this with the need of the provider;
6. Helpful to have someone in charge;
7. Contain anxiety and put it in the right place;
8. Consistency (and sometime the lack of it is an issue).

Containment - Manage the System

‘Thank goodness someone is taking care of the big stuff’

1. System navigation;
2. Understanding the home organisation and knowing how to work with(in) it *or* managing the provider organisations behaviour;
3. Backing up providers of a commissioned service *against* their home organisation’s competing agenda’s and priorities - able to launch commissioners at a target;
4. Act as a proxy manager;
5. Finding the right people to do the job in the first place - procurement is a transaction to managing the system;
6. Facilitative of the process of partnership rather than directive - frustrating, but better manages the system & process as don’t take sides;
7. Manage the tension between organisations and/or competing tasks i.e. help manage the fissures of partnership working & helping to step outside of traditional roles;
8. Don’t get lost in process management, but engage with and navigate through existing systems;
9. Strategic overview by linking into National information - link to the big picture;
10. Check & balance

Holding to Account

“I feel as if I've got to succeed in what I'm trying to in trying to deliver.”

Participant A, Pg9

- Something mentioned by all respondents as important to them.
- Structural clarity provided by commissioners on behalf of the system - if you're doing what is measured, you're doing alright, you're contained.

“[The] helpful thing about it is that it's very clear what it is that you have been asked to actually provide...and I think it's very easy to keep focused on what the expectations are if you like, because at the end of the day you've been paid to actually do something.” *Participant C, Pg9*

“Accountability is very much there and obviously the wanting to know what's going on, but not in a way that makes it feel that you're...being hung out to dry.” *Participant D, Pg3*

Autonomy

“I don't like being blocked by a system” *Participant C, Pg12*

1. Self determination:

- Exploration - able to try out different things;
- Able to think and find space to find own way (within boundaries and structures);
- Able to question and review original position to improve.

2. Freedom within a system

- Being released from specified ways of working;
- Being selected as the right person for the job - the ‘expert’
- A degree of choice about reporting - goes beyond simple metrics into what is important.

“You need space to be able to review decisions and re-make your decisions, you need freedom to not be confined to a system or process that you might have started with and be able to implement another one. My view is if you are allowed to do that with something, you'll get a better product at the end of it.” *Participant E, Pg7*

Interpersonal/Commissioning Style

“The interaction with commissioners is done in a much more psychologically minded way.” *Participant D, Pg7*

- Positive - Honest - Relational - Interpersonally Approachable - Collaborative - Open - Accountable - Joined Up Approach - Formal but Informal - Without Fear - Experienced - Awareness of the Subject - Investment & Willingness - Commitment - Passion - Comfortable - Safe - Warm - Professional - Work Things Out Together - Understanding - Accepting - Relaxed - Psychologically Minded - Nice - Engaged - Supportive - Feel Valued - Balanced - Encouraging - Reassuring - A Little Avoidant - Prepared to Engage with Relationship - Alongside - Reciprocal - Present - Absorb Anxiety, Concerns, Difficulties - Consistent

“...being supportive and encouraging, being present, being able to absorb anxieties, concerns, difficulties, that has been very consistent, I think a lot of things I have said come out of being psychologically informed.”

Participant E, Pg6

Understanding the Individual

“They share an interest in us as individuals.” *Participant D, Pg4*

1. Understanding of personal & professional motivation;
2. Taking an interest in the person, not just the task;
3. Familial idea of relationships; possibly commissioners as ‘parents’ to the system and the people within it?;
4. Feeling of being held in mind, of not just being another contract; taking into account that people are invested into these services.

Put it together and what have you
got...?

Contained Autonomy:

The 'Equation' for the Model

Type A Commissioning - Transactional

- ▶ Containment - Leadership
- ▶ Containment - Manage the System
- ▶ Holding to Account

+ Type B Commissioning: Relational

- ▶ Autonomy
- ▶ Interpersonal/
Commissioning Style
- ▶ Understand the Individual

Each is a sufficient condition to commission a service. A combination of the two Types (the more the better) is the optimum position to provide the freedom to think and the authority to act.

So what is “Contained Autonomy?”

“...having the boundaries but not overstepping it to micromanaging, it is being able to have the conversation, explore ideas but not being told this is the way you've got to do it...” *Participant A, Pg7-8*

...Contained Autonomy (cont.)

“So sometimes I want you and your partner to say, “well look this is how we want you to deliver this,” and sometimes you go, “well, you come up with a way to do it,” and I think, “*Grrrr*,” but then I know, I reflect, and I think about all the times that I have been able to come up with a way to do it and grow and evolve and how much I value that and I apply that to what you've said, and I am always able to come up with or come back to you and say, “okay you don't want to be prescriptive and directive, but this is what we're thinking, what do you think about that?” and you'll come back and give a view from that which is really helpful.” *Participant E, Pg11*

It's is also a paradox...

“I get frustrated that there is not [always] a clear direction, but then when, for example, the...commissioners do offer a clear direction, I am usually frustrated that they are, so I recognise within myself what I actually want is for commissioners to offer the exact direction that I want to go in!”

Participant B, Pg3

Contrary Perspective: we don't get it all our own way!

- Commissioning is a flawed model, and not everyone a fan of it. Viewed as one version of a necessary evil - there are other ways of doing business
- Commissioning in a Contained Autonomy Style can create relationships that are just too cosy, and perhaps more can be achieved in edgy relationships? (Does create conditions for splitting, which would be “particularly problematic in a PD Arena.” *Participant B, Pg5*)
- Does this approach actually result in the conditions for an open and honest relationship for healthy conversation? Public service versus self service!
- This style of commissioning may not be applicable outside of the public sector or even the OPD arena

The Theory - Psychologically Informed Commissioning???

- Well, maybe! That's the theory...
- Respondents consistently described the features of a psychologically informed approach but only two described it in terms of an overarching and unified philosophy or approach.
- It bears further exploration, but when you look at the codes that the data suggest you can see that they bear comparison with psychologically informed practice.

Questions (& Answers...hopefully!)

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