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**Frontline Practice Leadership:  
What it is and how to do it**

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# Why Practice Leadership?

- Active Support is a model of practice for staff to support people with intellectual disabilities to engage in meaningful activities and relationships (Mansell & Beadle-Brown, 2012).
- Research has shown that when Active Support has been implemented, residents have increased engagement in meaningful activities and relationships (Flynn et al., 2018).
- However, research has also shown that there can be challenges and variability in the implementation of Active Support in services (Bigby et al; 2017; Mansell & Beadle-Brown, 2012).
- A key area of research has involved identifying the factors that contribute to the implementation active support (Bigby & Beadle-Brown, 2018).
- Mansell et. al. (2004) suggested that practice leadership by frontline supervisors could be critical to the implementation of active support.

# What is Frontline Practice Leadership?

It is the *set of tasks* that are critical to ensuring good quality support for people with intellectual disabilities supported by a service.

**(a) Focussing on quality of life outcomes:** ensuring the primary focus of the service is the quality of life of the people supported and how well staff support this.

**(b) Allocating and organising staff:** to deliver support when and how the people supported need and want it.

**(c) Observing, giving feedback, modelling and coaching:** to improve the quality of support staff provide by observing how they work, providing feedback, modelling good practice, and providing coaching.

**(d) Individual staff supervision:** reviewing the quality of support provided by individual staff in regular one-to-one supervision and finding ways to help them improve.

**(e) Team meetings:** reviewing how well the staff team is supporting people to experience good quality of life in regular team meetings.

# Longitudinal Study into Embedding Active Support

*What are the factors that contribute to implementing and embedding Active Support in Organisations?*

- Study commenced in 2013.
- Six years of data collection.

## Participants

- Up to 15 Australian disability organisations.
- Staff and residents of supported accommodation services (mostly group homes).

## Measures

- **Observed measure of frontline practice leadership:** interviews, observations and review of paperwork.
- **Measure of Engagement in Meaningful Activities and Relationships:** 2hr observations in services.
- **Active Support Measure:** observational measure of the quality of active support.

## Findings

Using multilevel modelling, the results showed that:

- Practice leadership predicts the quality of Active Support.
  - When the quality of Practice Leadership is higher, the quality of Active Support is higher.
- The quality of Active Support predicts residents' levels of engagement.
  - When the quality of Active Support is higher, residents are more engaged in meaningful activities and relationships.

(Adaptive behaviour also found to be predictors of these outcome variables)

Bigby et al., 2019; Bould et al., 2019; Humphreys, 2018.

## Findings

Examining 4 years of data from six organisations, Bigby et al. 2017 found that:

- The quality of Practice Leadership was, on average, weak (2) to mixed (3).
- In some services Practice Leadership was excellent (5).
- Highest scores found for the task of team meetings.
- Lowest scores found for the tasks of coaching and supervision.

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Mean = 2.53	2.85	2.41	2.52
Range = 1 – 4	1 – 4	1 – 5	1 – 5

# How do we do Frontline Practice Leadership?

## Questions from frontline supervisors:

- What should I be looking for when I observe staff?
- How do I provide staff with feedback about their practice?
- How do I develop shift plans? What information should I include?
- How can I regularly have supervision with staff?
- How do I support staff to reflect on their practice?
- How can I generate input and discussion in team meetings?

## Focussing on quality of life outcomes

- Frontline Practice Leaders must understand and be committed to the goal of improving the quality of life of the people they support.
- They must inspire support workers to be committed to the quality of life of the people they support.
- They have to develop supporter workers' skills that will enhance the quality of life of the people they support.



## Key points

- There are 8 domains of quality of life. E.g., interpersonal relations, emotional well-being, physical well-being, social inclusion, self determination.
- What a good quality of life looks like will be different for each individual.
- You need to know a person well to really understand what a good quality of life looks like for them.
- Engagement underpins quality of life. Active Support influences engagement.
- *Staff support matters to the lives of people with intellectual disabilities.*
- When performing the other 4 tasks of practice leadership, focus on quality of life and quality of support.

## Allocating and organising staff

- A key task of Front-line Practice Leadership is to organise and support staff to work individually and as a team.
- Staff need to know what to do when on shift and how to do it.
- This will contribute to support being provided when and how each person supported wants and needs it.
- It will also help to establish consistency across staff in the way they work and provide support.

## Shift plans - organising what staff will do each shift

- Shift plans capture information about the regular activities and patterns of behaviour that occur in a service on a daily and weekly basis.
- For instance, what the people in a service do in the mornings and evenings each day of the week.
- Shift plans help staff to prioritise and plan what they need to do when they are on shift.

## Problems when there are no shift plans

- There is likely to be inconsistency across staff and shifts. Each shift could be very different for the residents depending on who is working.
- Staff support may be guided by their own preferences or values.
- Staff may not be sharing information about how best to organise a shift and provide support.
- New staff will have to learn for themselves how to work in the service and provide support.

## A shift plan should

- Provide information about the sequence of events that is likely to happen.
- Focus on the people you support more than staff tasks – be person centred.

*E.g., 7am Jo makes her breakfast. Jo will choose her breakfast – present her with options. Jo makes her breakfast with verbal instructions from staff.*

- Provide information about the support needs of each person for regular activities.
- The challenge lies in designing and using plans flexibly, allowing for spontaneity and responsiveness.

## Observing, giving feedback, modelling and coaching staff

- One purpose of Frontline Practice Leadership is to ensure staff provide good Active Support so that the people they support experience good quality of life.
- Front-line Practice Leaders need to identify and reinforce good practice, help staff reflect on their own practice and support them to improve.

*How do you identify good practice and support staff to improve?*

# Observation

- It is one of the most effective ways of identifying good practice and areas for staff to improve.
- To provide good feedback to staff, you need to know how well they are performing.
- Frontline Practice Leaders should regularly observe staff in a variety of situations, both in the home and community.

	What to Focus On When Observing
<b>A specific staff member</b>	What are they doing? Are they being attentive to the person/people they support? What are they saying? What type of assistance are they providing and to whom?
<b>Preparation</b>	Did the staff member/s prepare for and think about the support they are providing? Is the activity prepared so that it is performed smoothly in the right sequence, or is it stop and start with moments of the person waiting and being disengaged?
<b>The person being supported</b>	What are they doing? Are they engaged in a meaningful activity or social interaction? How much? How are they responding to communication and assistance from the staff member? Do they understand and know what is expected of them or is being offered? Did they exercise choice in terms of the activity, whether they participated, and when? Did they receive the right level of assistance? Were they treated with respect and dignity? What was the activity like for them?
<b>The other people you support who are in the same place</b>	What are the other people you support doing? Are they engaged in meaningful activities and social interactions?
<b>The team</b>	What are the other team members doing? How well are the staff coordinating their support to all the people they are supporting?
<b>Other people involved in the interaction</b>	Are there other people involved in the interaction with the staff member and person they are supporting, such as a shop assistant? How are they reacting?



## Providing Feedback

<b>Find out the support worker's perception</b>	Start with an open-ended question, "How do you think that went?" Or "What was that like for you?" and "How did that feel to you?"
<b>Start with the positives</b>	Find something positive to say before focusing on problems. What did the support worker do well?
<b>Be specific</b>	Use examples of what you observed and what people said or did. E.g., "I thought you did (X) very well" and "When you did (X), I observed the person you supported was doing (Y)". Avoid general statements, such as just saying 'you did a great job today'.
<b>Use the language of Active Support</b>	Staff should be familiar with the 4 Essentials and using this language to provide feedback reinforces consistent expectations about the support they provide.
<b>Encourage reflection</b>	Ask open questions that help the support worker to reflect on their practice. "What were the advantages and disadvantages of doing that?" "How do you think the person you supported responded to that approach?" "What might you do differently next time?"
<b>Be constructive</b>	Give staff ideas and concrete examples about how to do things differently.
<b>Be timely</b>	Give feedback as close to the event as possible.

## Individual staff supervision

- Supervision is a key way of guiding and improving staff practice.
- It provides an opportunity for the Front-line Practice Leader and a support worker to have a deep and focused discussion together.
- Supervision can take different forms.

# Types of supervision

		Formal	
Planned		Supervision is planned in advanced and occurs on a regular basis. The discussion follows a structured agenda.	Supervision occurs on an ad-hoc basis. The discussion follows a structured agenda.
		Supervision is planned in advanced and occurs on a regular basis. The discussion does not follow a structured agenda; it is flexible.	Supervision occurs on an ad-hoc basis. The discussion does not follow a structured agenda; it is flexible.
		Informal	
		Unplanned	

## A Supervisor on Supervision

*“It’s a good opportunity to say, ‘**This is what’s working well, this is what you’re doing well**’. I try and do it once a month and I try not to make it too formal because it scares the crap out of people. I think they’re getting to a place where they value it and **it’s getting people comfortable talking. That’s a bit of a skill**, to get people to the point where they can sit down and say, ‘Oh yes, I was doing this, but I didn’t like doing that’.*

***You’ve got to get them to where you can have those real conversations.** It’s not just you are sitting there telling people a list of jobs they’ve got to do for the next month. It’s more about how you’re going with this, to move it to that point.”*

## Asking questions

- Carefully consider how questions are phrased so that they elicit information and generate discussion, rather than put people on the defensive.
- Open-ended questions are useful because they invite the support worker to speak and encourage reflection. These are phrases that begin with 'how' or 'what'.
- Be careful with 'why' questions as they can often imply blame.
- Avoid relying on closed questions that elicit yes/no responses because they tend not encourage elaboration.

# Listening

- **Active** – giving your full attention to the staff member you are with at that moment, interpreting what they are saying and checking that you have understood.
- **Open** – having a ‘not knowing stance’ or an ‘open mind’ that suspends any preconceptions or judgement. Being open lets the staff member fully work through an idea, explore an issue thoroughly, or explain a problem.

# Reflective Practice

- One of the purposes of supervision is to facilitate the support worker's reflective practice.
- Reflective practice involves the support worker critically thinking about their own experiences of providing support.
- The supervisor needs to ask questions which will encourage the support worker to engage in reflective practice.
  - E.g., What have you learnt from this experience?
  - What worked well?
  - What challenges did you experience?
- By engaging in reflective practice, support workers can enhance their self awareness, capacity to problem solve and identify ways they can improve their practice.

## Teams and Team Meetings

- Frontline staff in disability services typically work in teams.
- For there to be a sense of teamwork, staff need to communicate, interact and think together.
- Meetings provide a means to do these things and are important for team functioning.



## Purpose of team meetings

- Discuss the quality of life of each person supported: how is their quality of life? And identify ways it could be improved, and the support required.
- Provide an opportunity for staff to develop their skills in Active Support
  - share examples of good practice, discuss new ideas, reflect on the consistency of the support they provide to each person they work with, hone practice skills, problem solve and communicate or receive important information.

## Tips for team meetings

- Review and discuss one dimension of quality of life in relation to each person supported.
- Review and discuss the quality of life for one person for each of the 8 domains. In other meetings, focus on the other people supported.
- Have brainstorming sessions to identify ways that the quality of life of each person could be improved and the support needed.
- Review and discuss one of the 4 Essentials of Active Support and how it can be used with each person you support.
- Provide the team with feedback on team performance based on the information you have gathered through observations, coaching and supervision.

# The Five Tasks of Practice Leadership

