

Administrative compliance or personal outcomes? Exploring service quality from the perspectives of leaders and frontline staff within disability day service organisations.

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Background

- For over 30 years Australian governments have developed quality standards that disability services are required to comply with in order to receive funding & remain registered to provide services to people with intellectual disabilities.
- Evidence of compliance with standards predominantly determined via ‘audits’ by reviewing organisational policies and procedures.
- Little time is spent exploring the quality of the support people with intellectual disabilities receive (McEwen, Bigby & Douglas, 2014).
- This means that organisations with excellent policies and procedures that provide poor quality support, may still pass audits and organisations with poorly written policies and procedures that provide excellent quality support, may not.

Background

- Organisations interested in monitoring the quality of the support people with intellectual disabilities receive can decide if they want to invest in additional ways of monitoring service quality that go beyond complying with government quality standards or not.
- Whether or not organisations choose to invest in additional ways of monitoring service quality depends on how they perceive it (e.g., whether or not government audits are perceived to be an adequate way to monitor service quality).
- We know little about how staff in disability service organisations perceive service quality, especially in day service contexts where little research has been undertaken on these issues.

Aim & Method

- This research used a constructivist grounded theory methodology to understand the way service quality was perceived by staff within day service organisations.
- This research also explored the way leaders in day service organisations monitored service quality, and what factors they believed influenced good service quality.
- 3 Melbourne based disability service organisations took part in the research
- 17 staff in total including:
 - 9 'front line' staff: 7 Support Workers & 2 Team Leaders
 - 8 Leaders: 2 CEO's, 2 Quality Managers, 2 General Managers & 2 Managers.

Method

- Semi structured interviews were conducted. Interview questions included:
 - What do you perceive service quality to be?
 - How do you know if good service quality has been achieved?
 - What factors influence good service quality?
 - Leaders were also asked how they monitored service quality within their day service organisation.
- Interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed for key themes using line by line coding

Findings: Frontline Staff

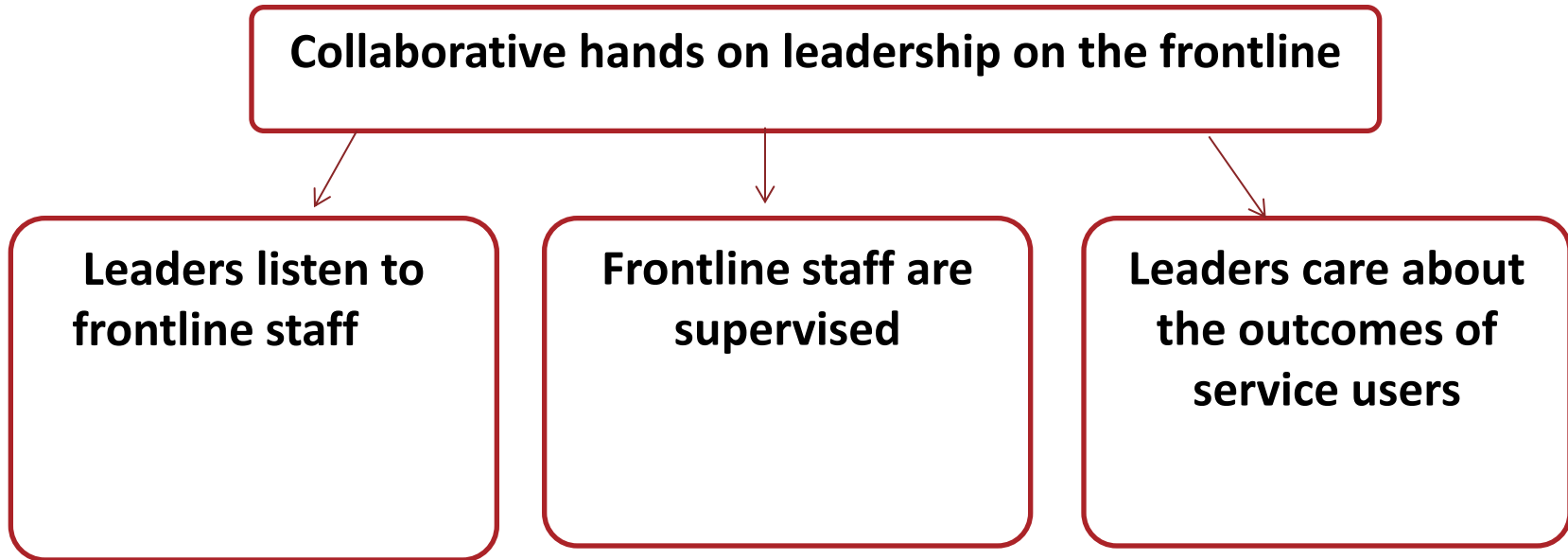
- Frontline day service staff shared similar perceptions about service quality
- Frontline staff's perceptions were shaped from their negative experiences of service quality in the day services they had worked in
- Frontline staff perceived service quality in terms of the support people receive and the ideas and actions that influence it.

Findings: Frontline staff

Findings revealed 5 categories which describe the practices and characteristics staff believed contribute to 'good service quality':

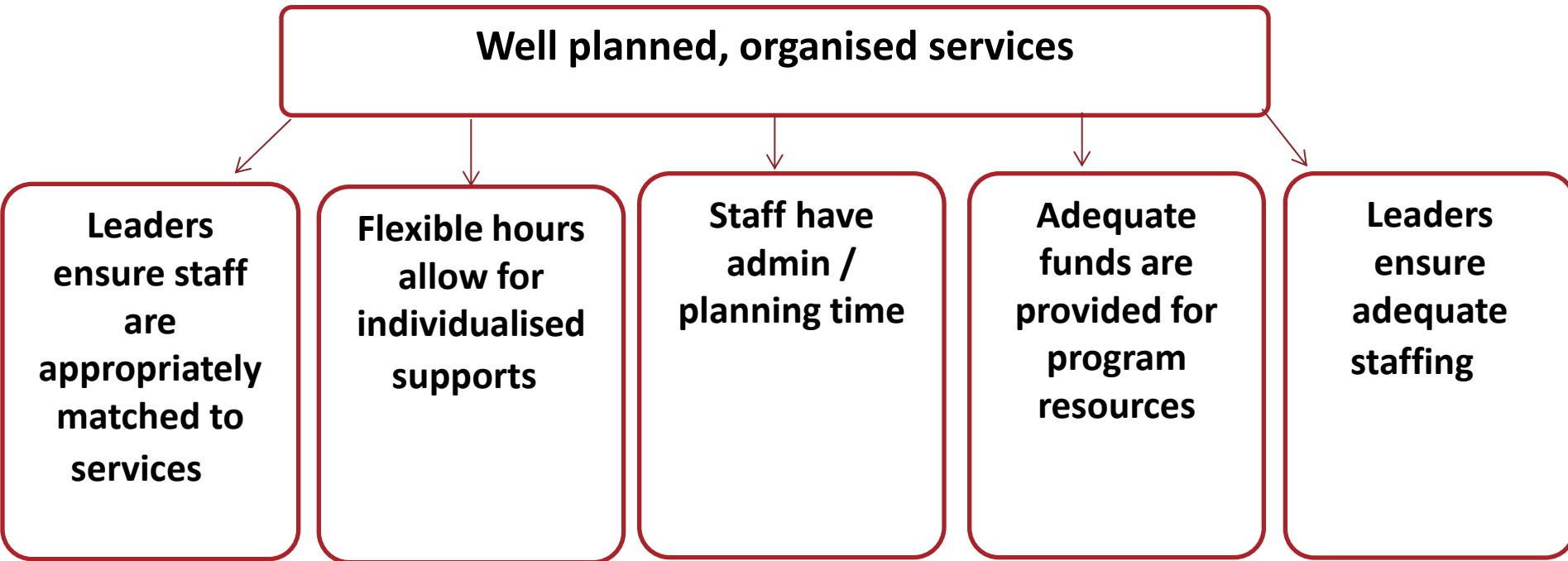
- collaborative hands on leadership
- well-planned services
- respect for people with intellectual disabilities and their carers
- a culture of continuous improvement and;
- the professionalisation of the support worker role.

Findings: Frontline Staff



“A program that’s in the back room, sitting in the back room sitting heavily in their chairs, a lot of staff on their phones, driving around, they’re not quality. So I think that for quality in a centre, I think that the management really need to keep a better eye on staff, everyone needs to be more accountable about what they are doing in programs, I don’t think that’s emphasised enough, personally” – Mary, Support Worker

Findings: Frontline Staff



“There’s some days where in that back room people could just be changing all day and feeding them and that’s it, they don’t have time to do anything else, we’ve got that many clients and so little staff in our service”. – Holly, Team Leader

Findings: Frontline Staff

Staff respect people with disabilities & their carers

Staff recognise & report all acts of abuse & neglect

Staff treat service users as adults & peers

Parent/carer contributions to planning/evaluating services are welcomed

Relationships are prioritised by staff and leaders

People with disabilities are 'co-evaluators of their support'

"Well for me it's more, I suppose it's treating someone how you wish to be treated, you know, if you don't want to be spoken to in a nasty manner, if you don't want to be left in a dirty incontinence aid for 5 hours then yeah, you're not going to do that to anyone else" – Natalie, Support Worker

Findings: Frontline Staff

There is a culture of continuous improvement

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graph TD; A[There is a culture of continuous improvement] --> B[Leaders and staff have a strong understanding of quality & evaluation methods]; A --> C[Collaboration & benchmarking with other services is undertaken]; A --> D[Critical reflection is a part of every day practice];
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Leaders and staff have a strong understanding of quality & evaluation methods

Collaboration & benchmarking with other services is undertaken

Critical reflection is a part of every day practice

Findings: Frontline Staff



“It gets a bit frustrating, you know, you're supposed to be so highly qualified and you don't know what, you know, what the different types of Epilepsy are or different types of Autism, it's just a bit frustrating”. – Mary, Support Worker

Findings: Leaders

- Three central topics were explored with leaders; how leaders perceived service quality, how they monitored service quality and what they thought influenced good service quality in their organisations.
- Findings revealed that leaders held contrasting perceptions about service quality.
- Contrasting perceptions meant that two categories emerged from each of the three topics covered, resulting in six categories in total.

Findings: Leaders

Policies and procedures vs personal outcomes

- Four of the eight leaders perceived service quality to be about system efficiencies and complying with policies, procedures and standards and four perceived it to be about the personal outcomes of service users.

“Service quality is about making sure that we abide by certain standards, have procedures” – Nathan, General Manager

“Making sure that staff and clients are safe, achieving good outcomes. A good outcome, I guess, is people are progressing towards the life they want to lead” – Tanya, General Manager

Findings: Leaders

Secondary evidence to monitor service quality

- Four leaders described methods which involved the collection and analysis of evidence or data. This evidence or data was ‘secondary’ in nature, as it was completed by another person and the leader reviewing it was not present at the time it was created.
- Examples of secondary evidence included records written by staff about service users, complaint, compliment or incident data or internal audit reports.

“The internal audits. All the processes are verified. And of course we’ve got the external audit process that gives us all our advice about what we should or shouldn’t be doing, or what we are doing right” – Elle, Quality Manager

Findings: Leaders

Primary evidence to monitor service quality

- Four leaders described using methods to monitor service quality such as direct observation of the way people were supported by frontline staff, and interviews with service users about the quality of the support they had received.
- This evidence or data was ‘primary’ in nature, as it was collected by the same person who reviewed it and used it to make determinations about service quality.

“Getting into the programs. Going out to the groups. Seeing how the groups are functioning, how things are happening and all that stuff. It’s good to actually see what’s – how’s the program going, and what works with the program, what doesn’t work with the program?” – Priya, Manager.

Findings: Leaders

Indirect & external influences on good service quality

- Four leaders spoke about ‘indirect and external’ factors which they believed directly contributed to good service quality.
- Indirect and external factors were described as an action leaders could perform to improve service quality from outside of the day services they worked for, such as a redesign of the service or staffing structure or a resource they could acquire from an external provider such as staff training.

“Training is very much part of how you instil a quality culture. We did that - came in in October, we had an all-in staff training day based on culture” – Joe, CEO

Findings: Leaders

Direct and internal influences on good service quality

- Four leaders spoke about 'direct and internal' factors which they believed contributed to good service quality.
- These were described as positive characteristics demonstrated by staff in the day services they worked for, such as a commitment to the people they supported and an ability to problem solve.
- Leaders also commented on the connection between good service quality and staff who were happy in their role and with the tasks they performed.

"If you get people of good character with good skills in a proactive environment I think it's hard not to get good support" – Ron, CEO

Findings: Leaders

- Leaders' responses fell into 2 patterns depicting two distinct overarching approaches to service quality among the 8 leaders:
 - An approach focused on process compliance
 - An approach focused on the way service users experience support (Had more experience of frontline service delivery).
- Leaders working in similar positions held opposing views about service quality, some within the same organisation.

Conclusion

- The majority of people interviewed (frontline staff and leaders) perceived service quality to be centred around the support people with intellectual disabilities receive, not paperwork such as policies and procedures.
- Disconnect between the methods used by governments to monitor service quality and the perceptions of people working within day service organisations.
- Government's approach to service quality means that services have little choice but to focus their efforts towards process compliance.
- People with more frontline experience were more likely to perceive service quality to be about monitoring the support people with intellectual disabilities receive.

Conclusion

- The way staff in day services perceived service quality was similar to how staff in accommodation services perceived service quality.
- Further research is needed to identify how both organisational processes and the experience of service users can be adequately monitored in practical ways, to identify both system issues and the quality of the support people with intellectual disabilities receive.

Reference

McEwen, J., Bigby, C., & Douglas, J. (2014). What are Victoria's disability service standards really measuring? *Research and Practice in Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, 1,1 –12. Doi: [org/10.1080/23297018.2014.956385](https://doi.org/10.1080/23297018.2014.956385)



Thank you

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