



**LA TROBE**  
UNIVERSITY

LIVING WITH DISABILITY  
RESEARCH CENTRE



## Reviewing the evidence about Frontline Practice Leadership

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# Outline

## Overview of frontline practice leadership

### Review the evidence about

- significance of frontline management and frontline practice leadership to quality in supported accommodation services and staff
- tasks and ways of organising frontline practice leadership
- strength of frontline practice leadership
- challenges of frontline practice leadership

# Significance of frontline management for the quality of services for people with intellectual disabilities

- Early UK services for children with intellectual disabilities identified child v institutionally orientate management practices (King, Raynes & Tizard, 1971)

‘studies point overwhelmingly to the importance of the role of the head of the living unit in setting the pattern [of care ] for the ward or hostel’ (p. 202)

- US Vermont studies – staff and manager competences in group homes (Burchard et al., 1987)

‘manager competence in normalisation practice largest independent predictor of placement satisfaction and community integrative activities of residents’ (Burchard, Pine, Gordon, 1990, p 283)

- Minnesota studies of direct support professionals and frontline supervisors (Hewitt et al. 2004)

‘it is the frontline supervisor who defines the job, provides the training, mediates the stresses, creates the culture, helps people find the personally satisfying rewards of direct support work, and establishes a well-functioning work environment’ (Hewitt & Larson, 2005 p.133).

# Frontline manager – house supervisor - Complex demanding position

## US Job analysis

- 142 competences
- 14 domains - 340 performance indicators
- Enhancing staff relations
- Providing and modelling direct support
- Facilitating and supporting consumer support networks
- Planning and monitoring programs
- Managing personnel
- Leading training and staff development activities
- Promoting public relations
- Maintaining homes, vehicles, and property
- Protecting health and safety
- Managing finances
- Maintaining staff schedules and pay roll
- Coordinating vocational supports
- Coordinating policies, procedures, and rule compliance
- Performing general office work (Hewitt et al., 2004; Larson et al, 2007)

## Victorian refinement of competences

- 141 competences- 11 deleted - 10 added – changed language
- 14 domains
- Enhancing staff relations
- Providing direct support
- Building inclusive communities and supporting residents' networks
- Support planning and monitoring
- Leading training and staff development activities
- Promoting public relations
- Managing personnel
- Maintaining homes, vehicles, and property
- Protecting health and safety
- Managing financial activities
- Rostering and payroll
- Coordinating weekday daytime supports
- Coordinating policies, procedures, and rule compliance
- Office work (Clement & Bigby, 2007, 2012)



Competency domain <sup>a</sup>	Number of competencies (N = 141)	Example competency
1. Enhancing staff relations (3)	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>House supervisors provide formal communication to staff through communication books, memos, and e-mail and by facilitating effective meetings, “handovers,” and purposeful interactions.</li> </ul>
2. Providing direct support (1)	16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>House supervisors communicate effectively with residents using their primary method of communication (e.g., speech, gestures, sign language, communication boards, with the assistance of interpreters).</li> </ul>
3. Building inclusive communities and supporting residents’ networks (7)	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>House supervisors support residents in learning about and participating in adult and community educational opportunities (e.g., gardening, literacy, computer courses).</li> </ul>
4. Support planning and monitoring (4)	18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>House supervisors complete and use formal and informal assessments regarding behaviours, adaptive skills, health, physical development, etc., or assist direct support personnel in this process.</li> </ul>
5. Managing personnel (5)	24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>House supervisors direct staff to confidential counselling (e.g., Employee Assistance Programs [EAP], Critical Incident Stress Management [CISM]) to assist employees to resolve issues.</li> </ul>
6. Leading training and staff development activities (6)	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>House supervisors coordinate and document staff participation and performance in orientation, in-service training and completion of other alternative self-directed learning and development.</li> </ul>
7. Promoting public relations (12)	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>House supervisors accept and mentor students on educational placements at the house.</li> </ul>
8. Maintaining homes, vehicles, and property (14)	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>House supervisors consult with maintenance personnel as needed regarding maintenance issues and get quotes from outside contractors when necessary.</li> </ul>
9. Protecting health and safety (2)	18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>House supervisors ensure that doctors document new medications on the treatment sheet and that these are recorded in the house in accordance with policy and procedures.</li> </ul>
10. Managing financial activities (8)	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>House supervisors manage the Client Expenditure Recording System (CERS) in accordance with policy and procedures (e.g., reconcile monthly ledgers against bank statements, respond to financial audits).</li> </ul>
11. Rostering and payroll (10)	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>House supervisors plan recreational leave (e.g., around holiday periods such as Christmas and New Year) and approve staff leave (e.g., recreational, sick, personal) in accordance with policy and procedures.</li> </ul>
12. Coordinating weekday daytime supports (11)	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>House supervisors monitor residents’ involvement in external activities (e.g., day programs, paid employment, retirement activities) to ensure that a schedule is created that is based on their individual preferences and needs.</li> </ul>
13. Coordinating policies, procedures, and rule compliance (9)	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>House supervisors follow through on reporting procedures as required by DHS policy and state law when there is an incident or allegation of physical and/or sexual assault.</li> </ul>
14. Office work (13)	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>House supervisors read and respond promptly to mail and e-mail.</li> </ul>

# House supervisors – management rather than practice leadership

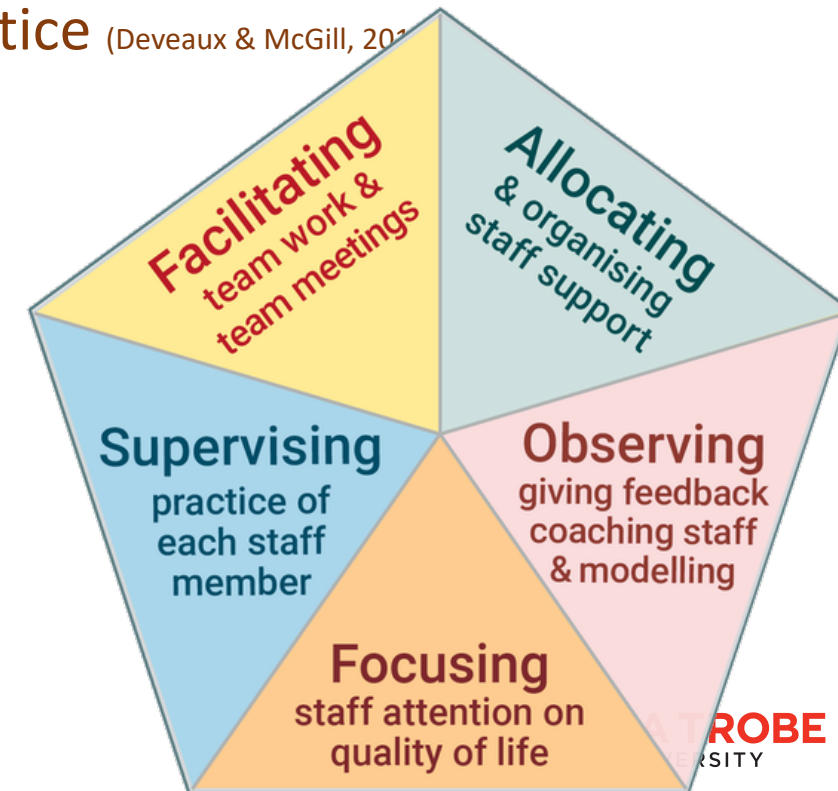
Time log study

Workload out of balance

- Direct support 43% of time
- Very small fraction of competences, tasks and time associated with leading practice
  - facilitating staff meetings (3%)
  - conducting formal supervision (less than 1% ) (Clement & Bigby, 2007)
  - did not work alongside all staff – few opportunities for observation and feedback
  - some staff no guidance
- Staff had variable opportunities for supervision and meeting attendance

# Development of Frontline practice leadership as a subset of frontline management

- Context of understanding factors influencing practice of Active Support and quality outcomes
- Frontline Practice Leadership providing skilled guidance and motivation for staff (Mansell et al. 2004)
- Defined as 5 domains (Mansell et al. 2004)
- Particular style of management aimed at developing staff practice (Deveaux & McGill, 2016)
- More akin to leadership – exercising social influence rather management through monitoring routine procedures and processes (Allen et al, 2009)
- Informal and formal aspects (Deveau & McGill, 2016)



# Significance of frontline practice leadership to service quality

- Proposition that managerial practices that incorporate good practice leadership for staff will lead to better quality of life outcomes (Mansell et al., 2004).
- 2014 review concluded evidence was emerging (Bigby & Beadle-Brown, 2018)
  - Higher levels of Active Support when there are higher levels of practice leadership combined with good management practice using self report measure (Beadle-Brown et al., 2014)
- Progressive finding from longitudinal study of predictors of Active Support using an observational measure have strengthened evidence
  - Significant relationship between higher levels of practice leadership and levels of Active Support (Beadle Brown et al. 2015)
  - Strength of practice leadership at the service level predictor of good Active Support – together with training, confidence in management, design and increase over time – large longitudinal and cross-sectional data sets (Bigby et al., 2019, Bould et al. 2019)



# Significance of frontline practice leadership to staff culture

- Aspects of frontline practice leadership appear important in generating a service culture associated with better outcomes
- Culture in better group homes characterised by strong leadership and shared responsibility among staff for quality of practice (Bigby et al., 2015)
- Group Home Culture Scale – when staff perceive the service culture has effective team leadership there are better outcomes for people supported in terms of engagement (Humphreys et al., 2020)
- Using practice leadership to build capable environments in context of PBS (Hulme et al., 2021)

# Significance of frontline practice leadership to staff

- Practice leadership associated with positive staff experience and greater staff satisfaction in services where people supported have challenging behavior (Deveau & McGill, 2014, 2016a)
- Staff in day services perceive collaborative hands on leadership as key aspect of quality (McEwen et al, 2021)
- Working as a team with clear leadership and guidance important from the perspectives of support workers in group homes (Hutchison & Stenfert Kroese, 2015)

# Organisation of frontline practice leadership

- Traditionally one house supervisor to one service working approx. 40- 50% of time on the direct support roster rest on front line practice leadership
- Different models emerging since 2009
  - admin consolidated - less direct support - greater span on responsibility
  - tasks split between different roles
- Two aspects of organisation of Frontline Practice Leadership predict quality of Active Support
- Close to the frontline
  - Connected to staff and people supported
  - Credibility with staff
  - Incidental as well as formal observing, modelling, coaching, feedback
- Consolidated in one position and aligned with front line management (Bigby et al., 2020)

# Strength of frontline practice leadership

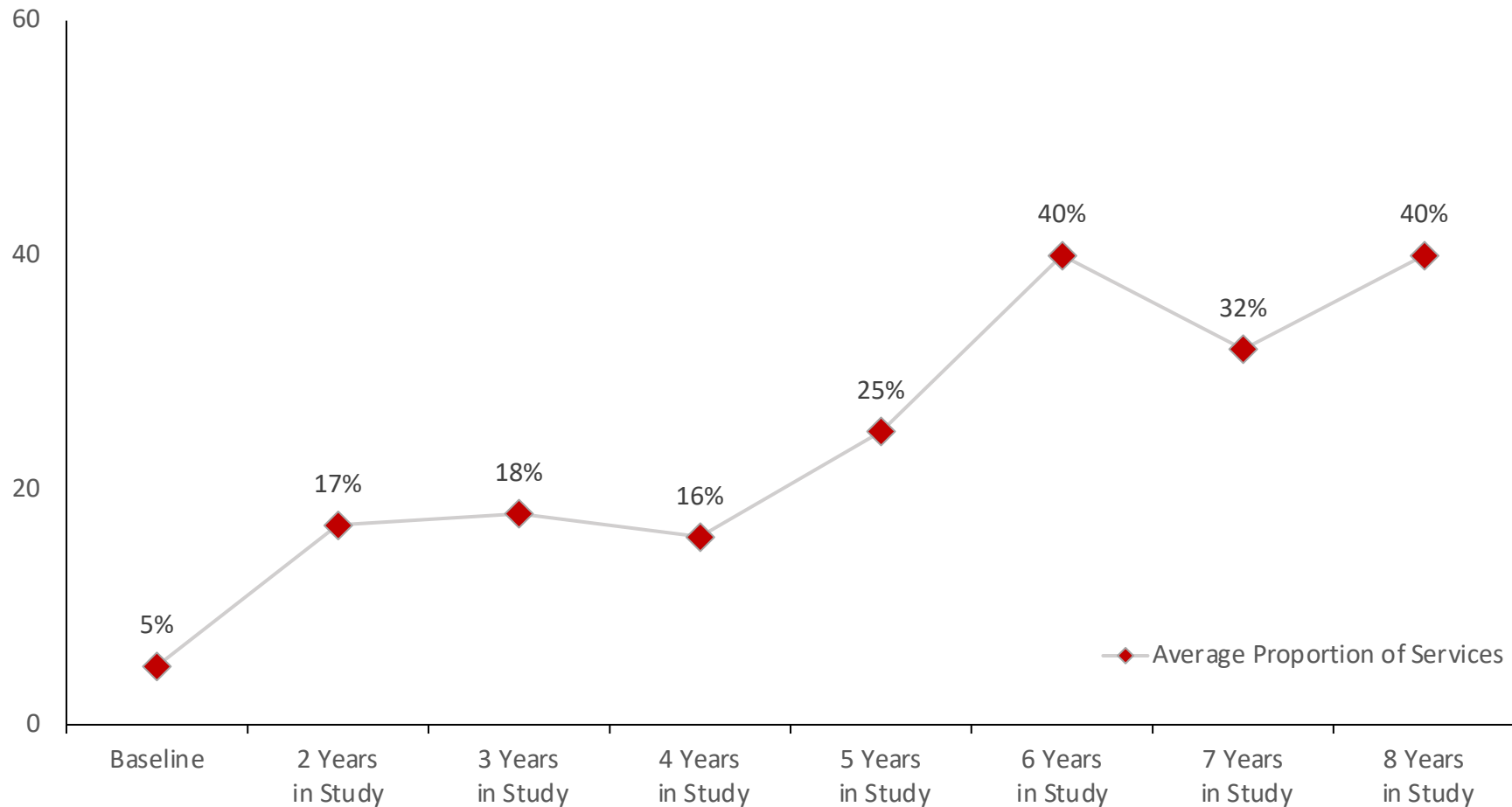
- Australian data suggests relatively weak (but improving) – with strongest domain Team Meetings - weakest Coaching and Supervision (Bigby et al., 2019)
- Few practice leaders have any specific training (Clement & Bigby, 2007, Wooderson et al., 2017)
- UK data
  - Potential for change as part of implementing Active Support (% staff getting feedback almost doubled from 48% (Beadle Brown et al., 2012)
  - But more recent research frontline managers lack time or skill to act as practice leaders (Bradshaw et al., 2018)
- Role challenged as result of austerity measures - less time in services – more services to manager – reducing support from more senior managers (Bradshaw et al., 2018)

# Practice Leadership –average score and proportion good or excellent

	Overall Score	Focus on Quality of Life	Team Meetings	Allocating Staff	Supervision	Coaching Staff
Baseline	2.35 (3%)	2.66 (20%)	2.72 (17%)	2.22 (7%)	2.14 (3%)	1.99 (5%)
2 <sup>nd</sup> Year in Study	2.63 (7%)	2.86 (27%)	2.98 (33%)	2.57 (18%)	2.38 (15%)	2.34 (17%)
3 <sup>rd</sup> Year in Study	2.75 (8%)	2.82 (26%)	3.14 (33%)	2.80 (24%)	2.48 (11%)	2.53 (18%)
4 <sup>th</sup> Year in Study	2.8 (10%)	3.09 (36%)	3.25 (39%)	2.67 (24%)	2.37 (10%)	2.60 (16%)
5 <sup>th</sup> Year in Study	3.00 (14%)	3.04 (29%)	3.53 (47%)	2.84 (27%)	2.88 (27%)	2.73 (25%)
6 <sup>th</sup> Year in Study	3.10 (8%)	3.28 (43%)	3.37 (45%)	3.05 (28%)	2.89 (32%)	3.03 (40%)
7 <sup>th</sup> Year in Study	2.87 (5%)	3.27 (45%)	3.14 (32%)	2.95 (36%)	2.36 (9%)	2.64 (32%)
8 <sup>th</sup> Year in Study	<b>3.37</b> <b>(30%)</b>	<b>3.35</b> <b>(55%)</b>	<b>4.00</b> <b>(60%)</b>	<b>3.45</b> <b>(40%)</b>	<b>2.95</b> <b>(20%)</b>	<b>3.10</b> <b>(40%)</b>



# Average proportion of services receiving good or excellent practice leadership



# Orientation and self perceptions of frontline practice leaders

- Passion and vocation

I don't think there's been a day [in 20 years] that I've been unhappy to go to work. Every shift, if there was one thing that I can make even the smallest difference, that might be assisting someone to have an excellent shower, the best shower, then that's really exciting to me.

- Stamina and flexibility

In this work you're changing your hat all day long.

- Calmness

You need to be very calm, just so you can deal with things as they come up, because there's lots of things that are unpredictable

- Tolerance or liking for a degree of freedom

I've got this great opportunity to be doing it the way I always thought I'd like to be able to do it... I like to make things happen

- Perceptions of a work-life balance

I get job satisfaction. I've got flexible working hours (Clement & Bigby, 2012)

## Self Perceptions of role

- Recognise importance of personal observation and contact with staff (Deveau & McGill, 2016a)

# Obstacles to strong frontline practice leadership – what needs to be addressed

- Knowledge and skills
- Training
- Time and structure
- Funding
- High turnover
- Support from senior leaders

Fontline Practice Leadership Training Resources. <https://www.practiceleadershipresource.com.au/>

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