Relationship-based Management in Social Work: Where have all the feelings gone?

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March 2013
What is it like being a manager?

Front line managers are in the unenviable position of having to find a way of responding to the ostensibly rational demands of the performance-driven agenda determined by senior managers within their organisation, whilst being directly exposed to the emotionally charged experiences that practitioners present to them from the front line of practice (Ruch, 2012).
tick this box if you dislike having to tick boxes...
Characteristics of the climate

• Certain
• Simple
• Risk-free and averse
• Doing
• Cognitive
• Objective
• Rational
• Outcome-driven
• Techno-bureaucratic competence
• Evidence-based practice
• Inter-professional

☞ Uncertain
☞ Complex
☞ Risk-ridden and tolerant
☞ Being
☞ Affective
☞ Subjective
☞ Irrational
☞ Relationship-based
☞ Emotionally intelligent competence
☞ Practice-informed evid.
☞ Uni-professional
ANXIETY
Social systems as defences against anxiety

- Audit
- IT systems
- Surveillance
- Performance indicators
- Case management supervision
- NPM
- Module vignette
How do you become a reflective manager?

Diverse sorts of managers and leaders:
• Distributive leader
• Citizen leader

(Western, 2000)

BUT what a reflective manager and leader needs to do is acknowledge feelings and offer...
How do you become a reflective manager and offer containment?

- Accurately defining the ‘primary task’
- Challenging omnipotence
- Acknowledging dependency
Vignettes

• Anti-task and on task behaviours

• Splitting and projection
Reflective Management Strategies

• Hardness and softness (Foster, forthcoming)

• Maternal, paternal and holistic containment (Western, 2000 and Ruch, 2007)

• Process management (Lawlor, forthcoming)

• The Mirror Method (Yliruka and Karvinen-Niinikoski, forthcoming)

• The Tango! (Lobatto, forthcoming)
Hardness and softness
Offering containment

Emotional ‘feeling’ containment

Epistemological ‘knowing’ containment

Organisational ‘doing’ containment

Holistic containment through reflective supervision
Continuum of Styles

Process Style
Non-directive
Centred on the other person

Expert Style
Directive
Centred on self

Use of other’s Experience and Knowledge
Use of own Specialised Experience and Knowledge

Suspended attention to the content
Listens
Reflects
Clarifies
Challenges & probes
Interprets
Gathers data
Diagnoses
Adds new data
Identifies options
Proposes criteria
Rejects
Plans implementation
Implements
A Reflective Model of Supervision: Core Principles

- Supervision is a ‘learning process’
- Driven by experiences of learner not knowledge of supervisor
- Supervisor as co-explorer and facilitator
- Supervisor provides space and context for learning
- Solutions are discovered and owned not ‘taught’
- A lifelong learning process
- Adult learning theory and reflective practice
The Argentine Tango

• The music - the social and political context

• The dance partners - the leader and the follower

• A mutual presence – connection and responsiveness
A reflective organisation would recognise the importance of learning from experience (Cooper and Lousada, 2005; Rustin and Bradley, 2008) and understand how, through attending to the mirroring processes that operate in interpersonal interactions, experiential/affective and intellectual/cognitive learning can take place simultaneously. In so doing, it would encourage what Morrison (2001, p.69) refers to as a ‘collaborative’ as opposed to a ‘compromised organisational environment’ (Ruch, G. 2012 Where Have All the Feelings Gone? Developing Reflective and Relationship-Based Management in Child-Care Social Work, British Journal of Social Work, 42, 7, 1315-1332).